

Contents: one church. Some assembly required. Batteries not included.

Communiqué

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- Description scrawled on a piece of the dismantled St. Onuphrius Church, labelled and loaded on a truck bound for Hull, Quebec

Hull, Quebec, June 26, 1996 - St. Onuphrius Ukrainian Catholic Church has made a remarkable journey. The small, pioneer-built structure has travelled from a rural community near Smoky Lake, Alberta to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec. There, it has been reconstructed as part of Phase II of the Canada Hall and officially opened to the public today.

The second phase of Canada Hall, to open fully in 1998, will trace the development and settlement of Western and Northern Canada between 1885 and the present. It will complete one of the Museum's most popular attractions, featuring 1,000 years of history.

Dr. George F. MacDonald, Executive Director of the CMC says, "we are tremendously excited to open this new section of Canada Hall today. This is an important stage in the continued expansion of this permanent exhibition area which presents the building of our country.

"The church was chosen to show the importance of the changing role of religion in community life, and its formative influence in the evolution of Western Canada's society and culture."

St. Onuphrius is a small church: just 12 metres x 7 metres (approximately 39 feet x 23 feet) and only 9 metres (29.5 feet) high. It was originally a tiny chapel built by pioneers in 1907. In 1915, several parishioners built the actual church.

It was one of the first churches built under the direction of Father Philip Ruh, a Catholic priest who was also an architect and builder. Father Ruh went on to design more than 30 other Ukrainian churches.

These churches, with their distinctive pear-shaped domes, became as familiar a part of the Western skyline as grain elevators. More than 500 were built in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, as the Ukrainians were one of the main ethnic groups to settle Canada's West. Between 1891 and 1930, 200,000 immigrants travelled to the Prairie provinces. Their communities stretched in an arc between southeastern Manitoba and northwestern Alberta, a distance of about 1,500 kilometres.

The decision to move St. Onuphrius Church to the Museum was made after extensive research and numerous field trips. Steve Prystupa, the Museum's Prairie Historian, was involved in the search for an appropriate church from the beginning.

"I thought St. Onuphrius would be the perfect choice," says Prystupa. "First of all, it was small enough to fit in the Museum. It's also a good example of the blend of Byzantine design, pioneer architecture and Canadian influence."

"The work of prominent church artists of the time is featured in the church's interior. Peter Lipinsky, whose work I've seen in Ukraine, created the painting of St. Onuphrius. Ivan Keywan, who is from Edmonton, did the decorative painting on the church's walls and ceiling."

The entire church was meticulously surveyed before even one board was moved from its place. Three-dimensional computer drawings were created, using measurements taken by lasers. The church was then dismantled. Every board was photographed, marked, catalogued and carefully packed for the trip east.

St. Onuphrius Ukrainian Catholic Church remains a sacred building. A religious ceremony, attended by members of the original parish and members of the local Ukrainian community, was part of today's opening event at the Museum.

One of the parishioners in attendance was Ed Pohranychny. The church was built on his grandfather's land. "My grandfather helped put the dome on St. Onuphrius Church," Pohranychny says. "My parents were married there. I was baptized there. So were my brother and sisters. This church was an important part of our lives."

The parish outgrew the little country church in 1964. But its members did not abandon it: they continued to maintain it in the years that followed. They knew, however, that it was only a matter of time before the harsh prairie winters would claim the building.

Mike Kurylo's grandfather was among those who built the church. Mike and his son, Dave, helped take it apart and prepare it for its journey to Hull. "I miss seeing the church," he says. "Every time I visit the cemetery there, I miss it. But it would have collapsed, eventually. And it's nice to think it's in the Museum and that it will stand forever."

Information (media):

Media Relations Officer: (819) 776-7169

Senior Media Relations Officer: (819) 776-7167

Fax: (819) 776-7187

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