

Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
716 Pacific Avenue



Year Built: 1911

Added to Heritage Register: January 25, 2010

Description:

In spite of the rigidly enforced ‘melting pot’ philosophy towards ethnic minorities that prevailed in the early 1900s, the Ukrainian Orthodox Catholic families of Fort William came together to fund a church which would supply them with a space to meet their spiritual needs and express their cultural and religious identity. On February 24th, 1911, six men who were mostly labourers signed an agreement and received land on which they could construct a church. Construction costs were shouldered by the approximately 300 members of the congregation, and the building was completed by 1912.

The new church, named Orthodox Ukrainian Church, ran into some difficulties in the first years of its existence. The congregation was without a regular priest until 1915, at which time it acquired a succession of Russian Orthodox priests. It wasn’t until 1924 that a Ukrainian priest finally arrived. Finances were also a constant struggle for the working-class congregation and when they were unable to pay taxes in 1915 the property was “encumbered and turned over to Reverend Archbishop Memolonsky of Chicago.”

Further difficult times ensued when, in 1936, a fire nearly destroyed the wooden structure. When faced with the option of restoring the building on its’ original site, or moving the church’s location, the members of the congregation were deeply divided. The younger generation was in favour of a move, although they were outnumbered by the older members when the issue was put to a vote. Construction on the new building was completed in 1937 on the exact location of the original.

At an annual meeting in 1950, church members decided to adopt the name of ‘Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Fort William.’

Architecture:

The church was designed in a style appropriate to the Volyn and Bukovynia regions of the Ukraine. The decorative gold domes which are positioned on top of the church are characteristic of Ukrainian churches of these areas. Orthodox crosses are perched atop the domes. The exterior are further decorated with stained glass windows with simple patterns.

The interior of the church is intriguing and pleasant, especially the numerous painting which adorn the light blue walls. The bells, imported from Galizia have been in the church since shortly after it was built. The two larger ones were bought by the parish while members bought the three smaller ones. Typical of Orthodox churches is the choir loft.

Two monuments adorn the grounds of the church. One is from 1918 and is a donation from Joan Kuryliuk.

The fire of 1936 wreaked extensive damage to the building, especially the roof which had to be entirely rebuilt. Upon reconstruction, the members of the church decided to alter the domes, but essentially left the belfry the same. The walls were at some point covered with imitation brick tar siding, although this was covered up in 1979 with the metal siding that is still there today. The stained glass windows were also added at this time.