

The Meaning of the Holy Ghost Ukranian Church in Whitney Pier.

Peteris Lazovskis

Reference:

Fig: 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 – 28, 30

-Peteris Lazovskis

Fig. 1:

-<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/imagesns/binaries/DHP044335-DEV01514.jpg>

Fig. 2:

-<http://www.mininghistory.ns.ca/cadm001/bulletin14plate14.jpg>

Fig. 3:

-Holy Ghost Church Archives

Fig. 4, 8:

-The Beaton Institute

Fig. 10:

-The Beaton Institute (from original blueprints by Chappell's Ltd.)

Fig. 29:

-Holy Ghost Parish 60th anniversary booklet

Fig. 31:

-Holy Ghost Ukrainian Parish 75th anniversary booklet

The Holy Ghost Brotherhood is a Catholic Orthodox congregation following the Byzantine Rite traditions. Their place of worship is the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Church located on the corner of West St. and Swan St. in Whitney Pier, a community immediately to the east of Sydney. Though only a bridge separates the two neighborhoods, the social differences are striking – Whitney Pier was home to Cape Breton's second largest industry, steel production, for approximately 100 years, fostering a unique demographic. Not only did the jagged skyline of the steel complex and its black smoke characterize 'the Pier' during that time, there was an entirely different cultural puzzle living just a kilometer away from Sydney. The reasoning was that the huge and locally unmet demand for workers caused an influx of immigrants from the West Indies, Europe and the Caribbean at the beginning of the 20th century. By 1920, the largest groups of foreign workers were the Polish community and the Ukrainians.



Fig. 1

Coke Ovens No. 1, Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Works, Sydney Mines, N. S.

Sydney Steel Plant in the early 20th century – main reason for rich cultural mixture in Whitney Pier

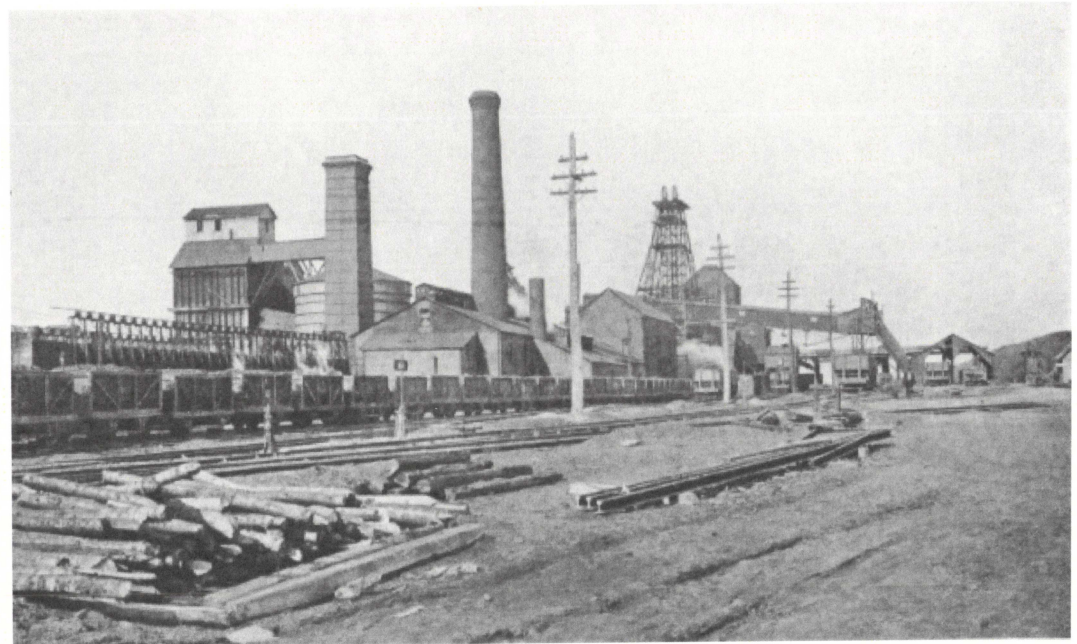


Fig. 2

The church now standing on the corner of West and Swan is a testament to the history of these Ukranian workers symbolizing their struggle during the last century. Overall, three different churches were built on the same spot, the second one being an upgrade and the third a result of a devastating fire in 1933.

Fig. 3

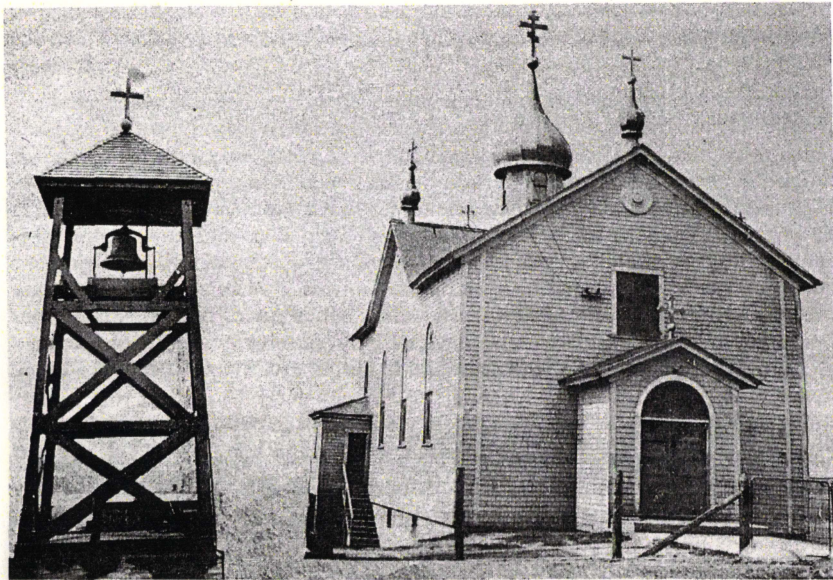


Figure 3. Original Holy Ghost Ruthenian Greek Catholic Church, destroyed by fire in 1933. Photo courtesy of Holy Ghost Church Archives.

The first Holy Ghost Church was actually the second place of meeting, as a house on the same lot was used before the construction of the building above.

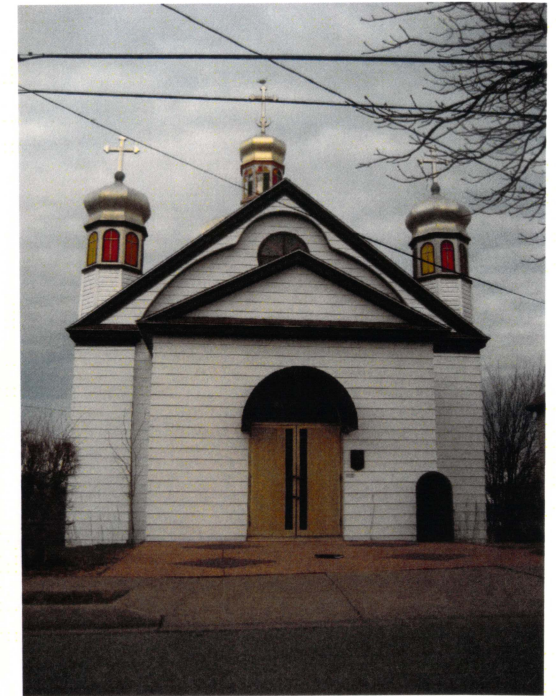
Fig. 4



Figure 4. Holy Ghost Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, before 1978 renovations. Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute.

The final version of the church was renovated in the 1970's, the most significant change being the replacement of the old domes for newer copper (2 small domes) and plastic (large central) domes. Also, new doors were installed.

Fig. 6



With each new structure, more of the Ukrainian culture and religious tradition appeared partly because funds increased as immigration grew, but largely due to the effort of resident priests and the local Ukrainian population. They felt that the church should not only try and imitate as much of the Byzantine Rite tradition as possible in their situation (those extravagances that did exist were as practical as possible to minimize cost) but that it should be attractive and welcoming – a warm symbol in a rather crude environment.

The church is thus a witness to the period of struggle, rise and now recession of Ukrainian culture in the Sydney area. It reflects the aspirations of the community to have an exact a reminder as possible of their heritage as well as a place to celebrate this heritage together. However, the church also reflects the harsh realities of an economically stagnating community with a slowly eroding congregation. It is of enormous cultural value not only to the originally foreign communities, but to the local and now assimilated population, reminding them of the determination and tumultuous history of those who came from overseas to work and eventually form a part of 'the end of the world' (as most Ukrainian immigrants in the first part of the 20th century called the ocean-surrounded and densely forested Cape Breton). Adding to the sense of achievement of these early settlers is the fact that this is the only Ukrainian church east of Montreal.



THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC MEN'S CLUB

For the U.C.M.C. the ten years since the 50th anniversary of the parish brought forward different projects, activities and changes. Although not all of the club's endeavors met with success, the spirit of fellowship and concern for the parish has always been evident among the club members.

Fig. 29: An example of fraternity among the male members of the Ukrainian community in the 1960's. This loyalty to culture kept the parish together and drove the construction and conservation of their church and eventually their parish hall.

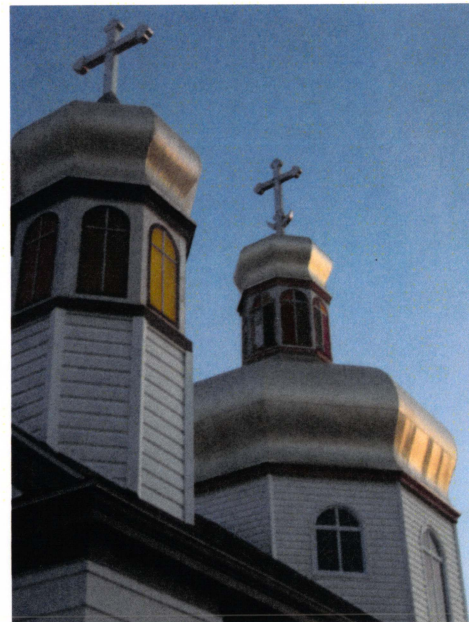


Fig. 30

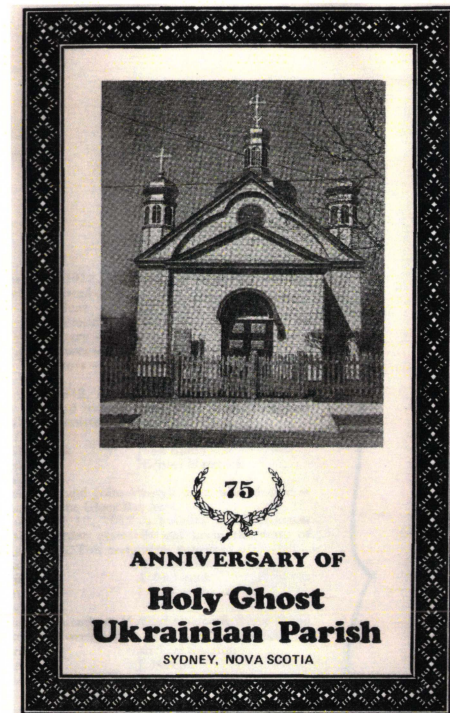


Fig. 31: Pamphlet from celebration of the 75th anniversary of the creation of the parish in July 1987.

Fig. 25



Fig. 28



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 25 & 28:

The rusted base of the bell tower – the bell in the covered box (according to tradition) atop the tower is left silent for fear of the vibrations causing the tower to collapse. There is, instead, a loudspeaker mounted on the tower that projects bell sounds from a system operated by Fr. Dusanowskij (see Fig. 12)

Fig. 26:

The corner of Swan St. and West St. – where an entirely covered bell tower should be, but finances are still being raised.

Fig. 27:

The government of Nova Scotia has recognized the importance of the church building and its accompanying heritage in the role it has played in provincial history.

the church and parish hall remaining as the only gathering places. Resultantly, funds have decreased in the past 10 years, and many parts of the building are in need of repair. Nevertheless the priests are still at the core of all activity at the church and similar to the time at the birth of the community, the current priest Fr. Roman Dusanowskij is relentless when it comes to fund-raising and upkeep of the building. Under his guidance, the previously mentioned octagonal dome in the ceiling of the nave was installed as a permanent solution to the leakage and rotting occurring in the outer dome as well as in the roof structure. With the help of the current congregation, Fr. Dusanowskij has raised funds for the installation of new windows in the upper main dome.

Fig. 21

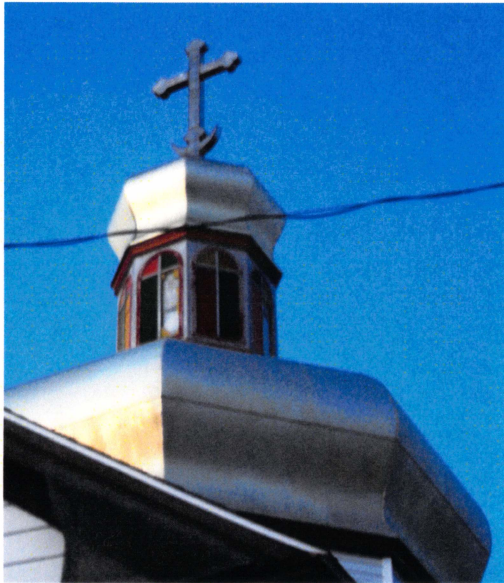


Fig. 22



Fig. 23: Fr. Dusanowskij – the spiritual leader of the Ukrainian community as well as the keeper of the building.



Fig. 24

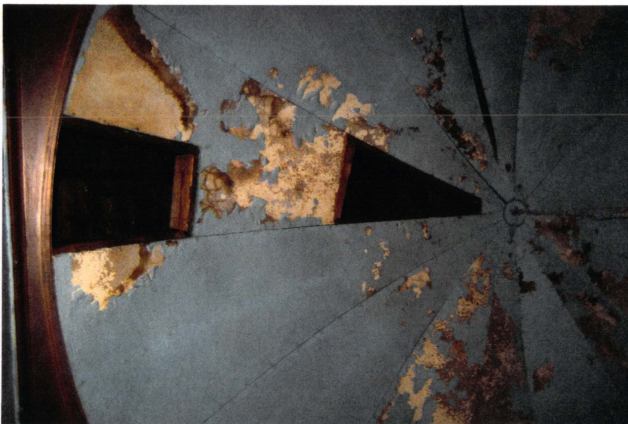


Fig. 21:
Broken windows of
upper main dome.
Fig. 22 & 24:
Rotted inside of dome
due to leakage, as well
as the insulation-clad
exterior of the inner
octagonal 'dome'.

Fig. 18



Fig. 19

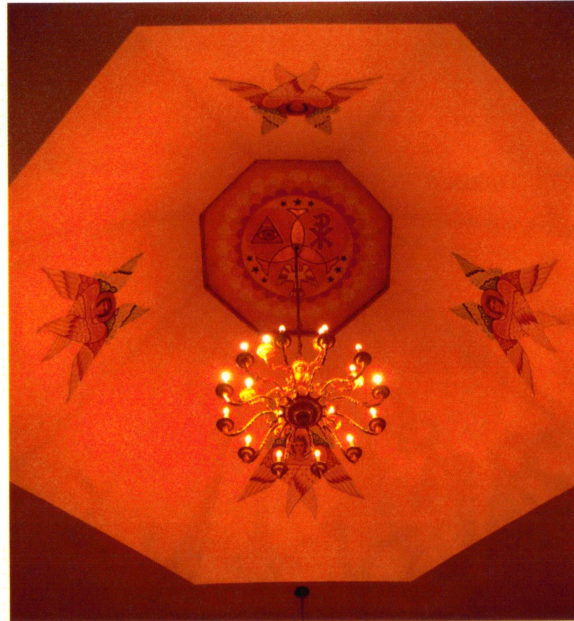
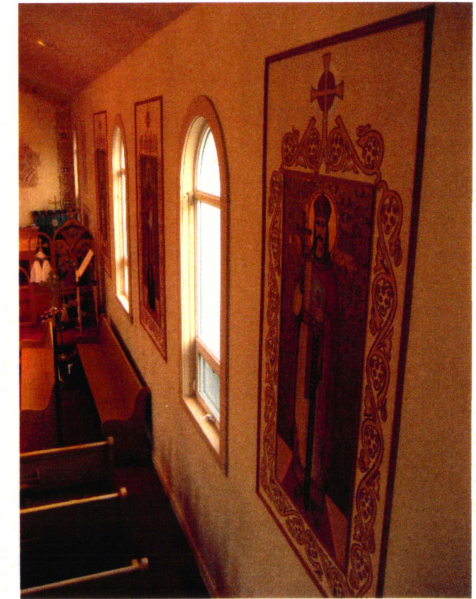


Fig. 20



In addition to the beautiful wall decorations (Fig. 20), the slightly circular ceiling of the nave features an octagonal 'dome' (Fig 18 & 19) which was originally a void opening into the onion shaped outer dome. However, due to rotting and poor insulation, it was closed off and this is the permanent (current) solution.

Initially the Ukrainians encountered discrimination from the local population, often being branded as 'Hunkys' and even being blacklisted during WWI for their association with Austria (Ukrainian territory was under Austrian control at the time, creating suspicion in the locals about the loyalties of Ukrainian and Polish immigrants). This only served to solidify the community, and with each new hurdle facing their parish, the volunteer response was stronger than before. Perhaps it is fitting that without a common cause a group dissipates, as did the fierce loyalty of the Ukrainian parish that held them together in the years of the Great Depression and well into the 1970's. With the closing of the steel plant in the beginning of the 1990's much of the contact between the Ukrainians disappeared, with

In the late 1970's, extensive interior work was begun that lasted into the next decade. A painter was hired for the decoration of the walls and ceiling, which resulted in the most visually attractive feature of the inside – paintings not only of six saints, but also intricate detailing with Ukrainian patterns and symbolic designs on most surfaces. As one enters the nave of the church, it is this that immediately stands out reminding the unaware visitor that this is indeed a distinct cultural shrine. Similar in visual appeal but greater in symbolic importance is the Iconostas wall, an instrumental part in the Catholic Orthodox tradition – separating the sanctuary from the nave. Though it is a small reproduction, covering only about 1/6th of the space that it should be occupying, it is again a sacred, if economically viable, reminder of ancestral culture.



Fig. 16: Entrance into nave through narthex (primary room for sinners and un-christened children)



Fig. 17: Iconostas wall featuring Jesus (right) and Mary (second painting from right) The wall is supposed to split church in two, shielding the sanctuary from sight, however this is expensive and not necessary, according to the current priest, Fr. Roman Dusanowskij. The semicircular outcrop is the Ambon – according to tradition.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Some interesting inconsistencies in traditional design for the sake of practicality and economy:

Fig. 12:

Bell tower adjacent to church is supposed to be removed and on its own pediment, but in this case the building offers support.

Fig. 13:

Octagonal domes instead of circular for ease of construction.

Fig. 14:

Slightly circular rear wall on a rectangular base instead of full semi-circle - for ease of construction. Interesting to note that the orientation of the church is opposite tradition – its entrance is facing east rather than west due to street access.

Fig. 15:

Chimney replaced by efficient oil furnace (silver box for air intake)



Fig. 14

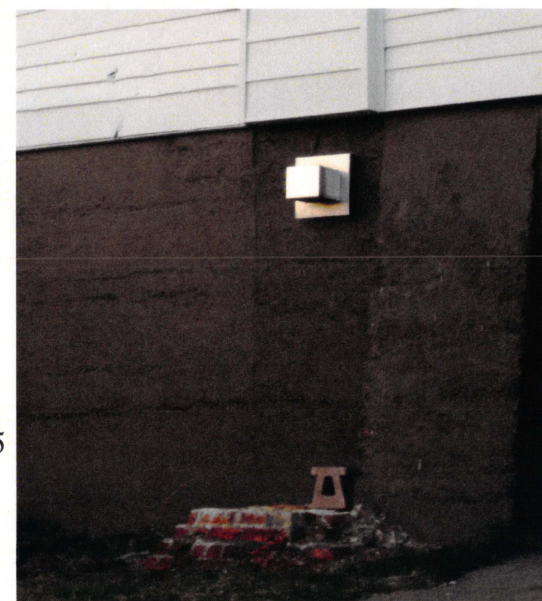


Fig. 15

Thus the first two buildings were planned and built entirely by the hands of the Ukrainians themselves, adding particular value to the church. However, a contractor was hired for the planning of the third and final building, due to sufficient funds and the wish to have a sacred reminder of their cultural distinction being greater than ever – as with passing time, assimilation had begun. The existing building is thus the nearest replica the Ukrainian community in Whitney Pier has achieved of a typical Byzantine Rite house of worship – which is a substantial statement as the typical architecture of such a church requires complex planning involving a semi-circular rear wall, circular domes, a freestanding bell tower, intricate interior decoration and a cruciform layout.

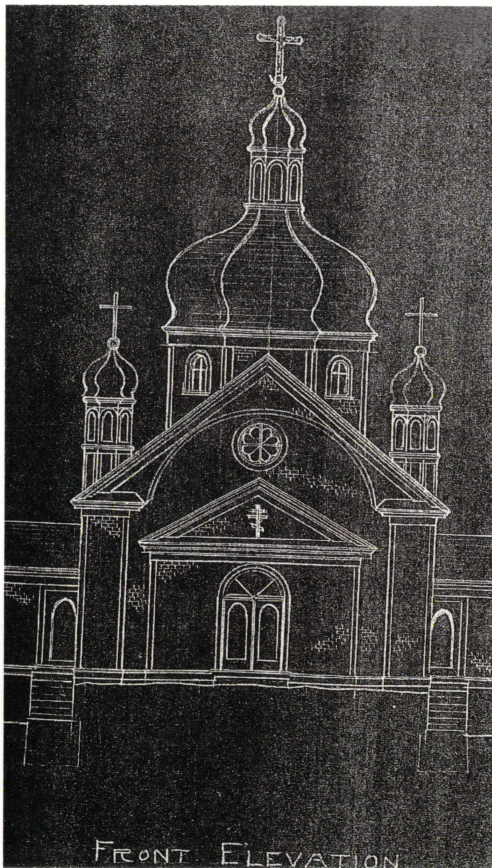


Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Fig. 10:
One of the original
blueprints drafted for the
current church.

Fig. 11:
View from the corner of Swan St. and West St. –
Holy Ghost church, glebe house of the priest,
Ukrainian Parish Hall, also hand-built by the
Ukrainian community (in the 1960's)



Fig. 7

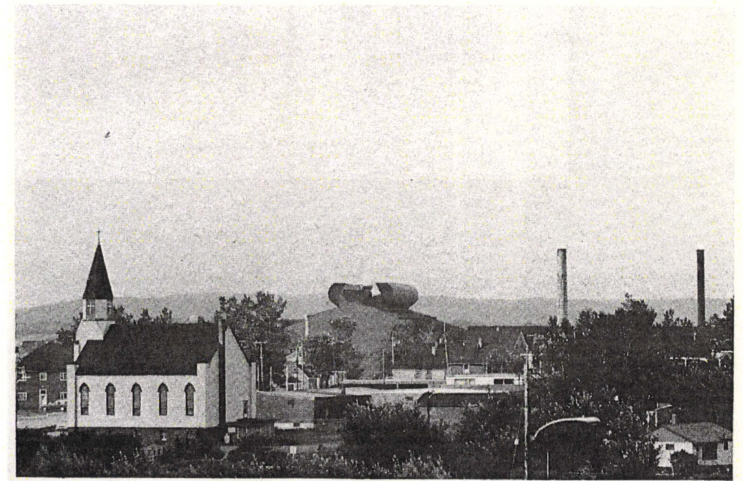


Figure 7. St. Mary's Polish Church. Steel Plant in background. Photo: L. E. B. 1971

Fig. 8

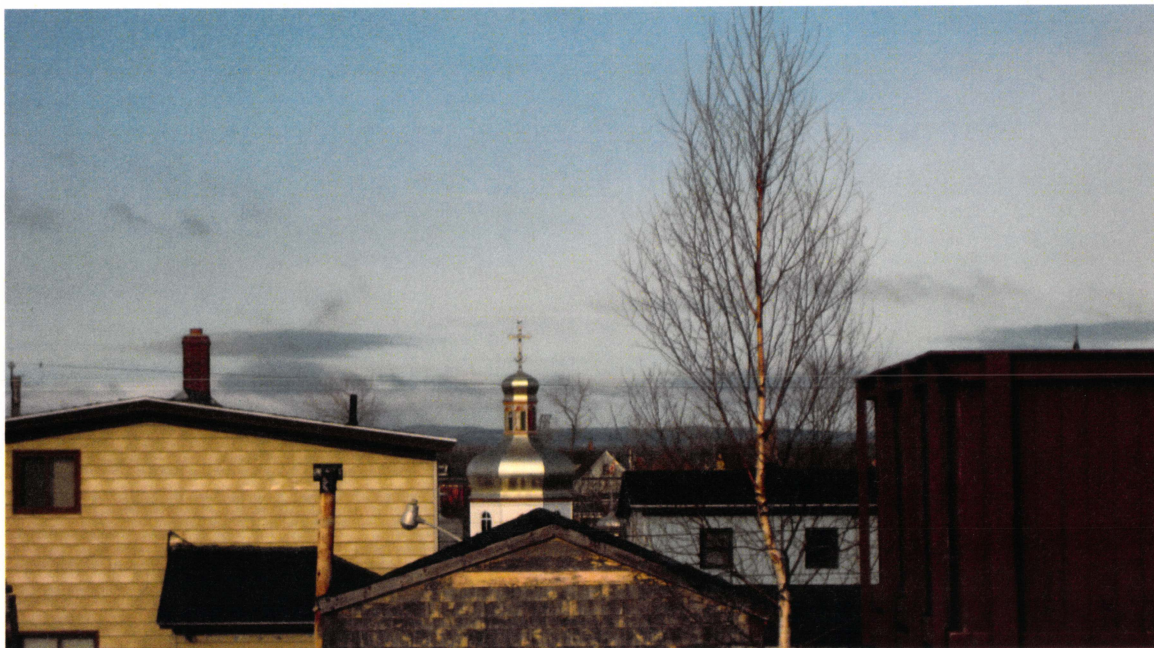


Fig. 9

Warm reminder in a difficult world:

Fig. 8:

Steel Plant overshadowing
'the Pier' and St. Mary's
Polish Church

Fig. 7 & 9:

Views of the church from
different streets in 'the Pier'.