

**UKRAINIAN SETTLERS
IN
SYDNEY**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Ukrainian Immigrants.....1

Interview.....3

EARLY UKRAINIAN IMMIGRANTS

Ukrainian immigrants began coming to Canada in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

In the Ukraine there were many hardships. There were wars, not enough money, not enough food, not many jobs and other problems.

Canada was a young country and had a lot to offer. There was lots of fertile soil for farming, there were a lot of industries which offered jobs and the lifestyle offered freedom.

Most of the Ukrainians that immigrated to Canada took up farming and settled in Western Canada. Most of the Ukrainians that came to Nova Scotia came from Eastern Ukraine, which was heavily industrialized. These people took jobs in the coal mines and steel plant and settled in Cape Breton, especially in Whitney Pier.

In the early 1900's the Sydney Steel Plant had a lot of jobs to offer to the Ukrainian immigrants.

They settled in an area of Whitney Pier which was close to the steel plant so they could walk to work. This area was located within the boundaries of Ferris Street, Victoria Road, and the Subway (now the overpass).

The Ukrainians took their own language, customs and heritage with them and still maintain them today. The Ukrainian community of Whitney Pier was very close knit. Most of the men worked at the steel plant but some opened shoemaker shops , bakeries, and tailor shops and carried on with trades they had learned in the old country. Most families had gardens in the backyard and kept cows and pigs which provided their milk and meat.

INTERVIEW

My Grandmother (Baba) and Grandfather (Geeda) are both Ukrainian. Geeda was born and raised in Whitney Pier while Baba immigrated to Canada when she was 5 years old. The following is an interview I had with her about her life in Whitney Pier.

When did you come to Canada?

I immigrated to Canada in 1930. I came with my mother when I was 5 years old.

Did you land in Sydney?

No, I came by ship to Halifax. The trip was very long and took several weeks.

After we landed in Halifax, we came to Sydney by train.

Why did you come to Sydney?

My father came to Sydney about 3 years before we immigrated. He got a job at the steel plant and then sent for us. It took that long before they would let us immigrate.

What was it like when you came to Whitney Pier?

It was a very difficult time. The depression was on and everyone was poor. My father had a boarding house on Ferris Street and we lived there for a while. We then moved into an apartment on Victoria Road. After a few years we moved into a company house on Bryan Street. My mother stayed in that house until she died.

Most people in the neighbourhood were Ukrainian and Polish. People from the same villages in the old country would stick together and help new people arriving until they got a job and a place to stay. All the people spoke the Ukrainian language. My mother lived here for over forty years and still had very little English when she died.

Everyone who bought a home with a piece of land was very proud of it. We kept our yard very clean. We had a beautiful garden and livestock. It was my job to look after the cow and chickens while my mother looked after the other children and tended the garden.

What is a company house?

Company homes were built by the steel plant and you could buy them. They were built in sections and were usually shared by two families. This house I live in today was once a company house.

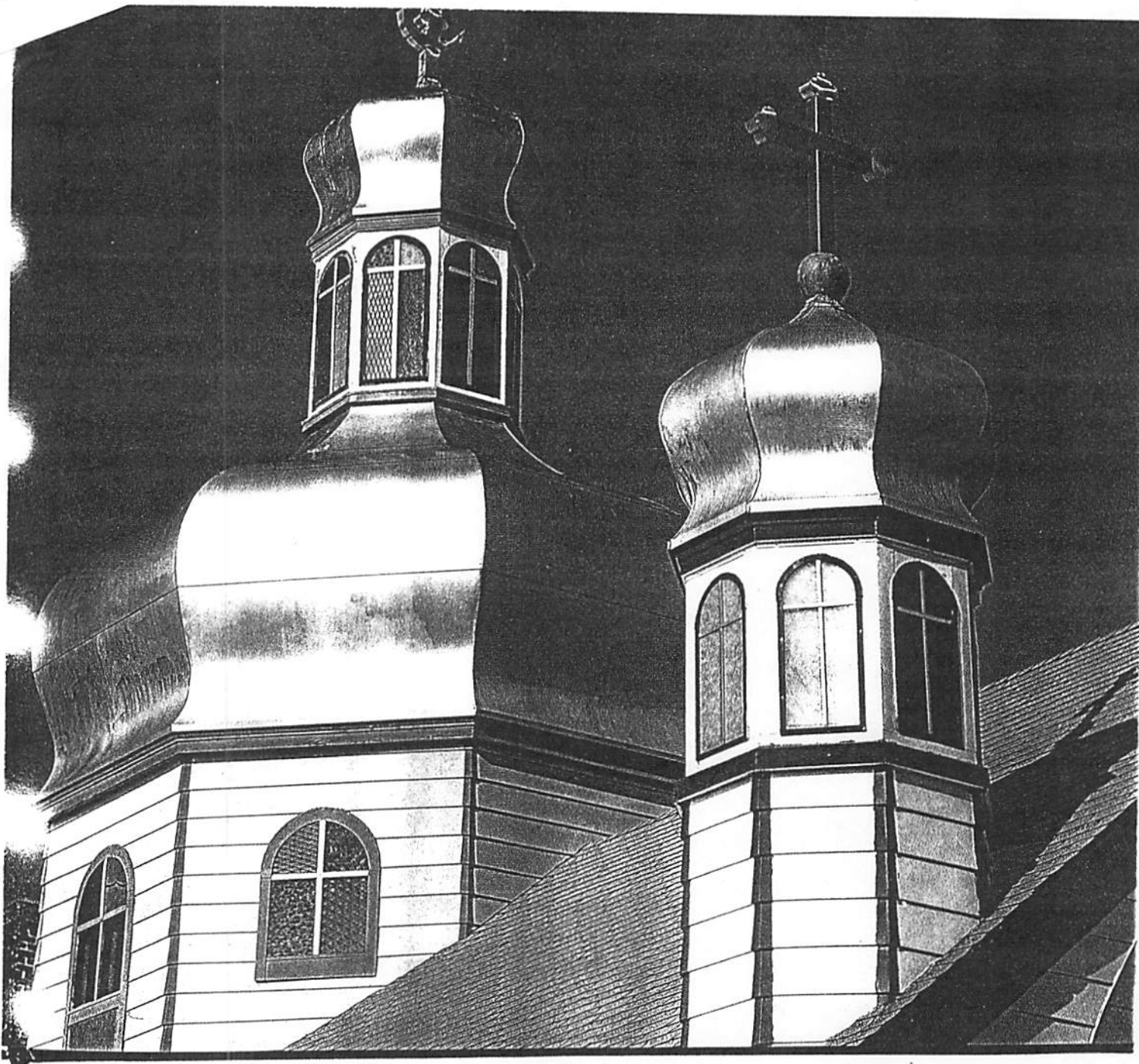
When was the Ukrainian Church built?

I am not sure when the first one was built but I remember that it burned in the 1930's. We went to mass at the Polish Church and then at the Ukrainian Hall. They built a new church on the site where the old one was.

The church was an important part of the community at that time. It brought the people together more. Religious ceremonies at Christmas and Easter really kept our heritage alive.

How has the community changed over the years?

The first thing that was lost was the language. There are very few of us today that speak the Ukrainian language. Most of the other customs did hang on for many years, but because of intermarriages the customs are quickly dying off. It's only the older people that keep them up. The church is still active and there is a Men's Club and a Women's Club. They try to promote the dancing and dress with the children and hopefully it will stay somewhat alive.



**Holy Ghost Ukrainian Church
West Street, Whitney Pier**



"Baba"
Mrs. Catherine Berezuk



Whitney Pier in 1914



Mr. Nathan Lipton
Polish and Ukrainian interpreter hired by Dominion Coal Company