

The only part of Yugoslavia which made gains during the war was Croatia. Under the Nazi protection, it became an independent state which spread over Bosnia and Hercegovina, including Slavonia and Srem to the gates of Belgrade.

Serbian people suffered greatly under the Nazis and in the Independent State of Croatia. Hundreds of thousands perished during the war in German and Croatian concentration camps.

Two factions of Serbian guerrillas fought the Nazis during the war: the Nationalists and the Communists. The Western Allies supported the National Resistance in the beginning. In 1943 they switched their support to the Communists in order to appease Stalin. With their help, Josip Broz Tito established his dictatorial regime in Yugoslavia. Being a Croat himself, he suppressed retaliation against the war criminals in Croatia. The interior borders, established by Tito, were not based along ethnic lines but were designed to undermine the importance of Serbs, the most numerous ethnic groups in the country. Upon Tito's death, the artificially created divisions broke up and war erupted among the various groups.

Serbian people live in Serbia, Montenegro, Dalmacia, Bosnia, Hercegovina, Lika, Kordun, Banija, Kosovo and Macedonia. They speak the Serbian Language, which is a cousin to other Slavic Languages. The Serbian alphabet is called Cyrillic. It was named after Cyrill, a Greek missionary, who, with his brother Methodius, converted Serbs to Christianity during the 9th century. For this occasion, the two brothers made up the Serbian alphabet.

Serbs belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which like the Church of England is a national church, having its own head who is called the Patriarch. The patron saint of the Serbian Church and of the Serbian schools is St. Sava. He was born a prince during the 12th century, but left his father's court to become a monk. Later he established the first Serbian school of higher learning and became the first Serbian Archbishop, helping Serbian people in many ways. After his death he was canonized.

The first large group of Serbian people came to Windsor between 1923 and 1929. They settled in Ford City which at the time was a separate municipality, located east of the town of Walkerville. Windsor Serbs came from several regions of what used to be Yugoslavia - Serbia, Lika, Vojvodina, Montenegro, Kordun, Banija, Bosnia, Dalmacia, Hercegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia.

Serbian Heritage Museum

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Ethnic background of the Windsor Serbs

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Gracanica Orthodox Church was built in 1952. Work on the paintings began in June of 1977. The project was undertaken by Greek artists who worked from designs made in an art studio in Athens, Greece. The paintings, over 200 separate panels and decorative motifs, are in the ecclesiastical Byzantine style, a style long in use in Orthodox Churches. According to the Medieval Architectural style, the Church foundation is in the form of a cross with characteristic cupolas and the elaborate brick work.

The most important icon in the church is the Christ Pantocrator or Christ the Ruler of All which looks down on the entire church from the ceiling of the highest dome. The position is appropriate for, not only does the dome dominate the structure of the church as Christ dominates Christianity, but its nearness to the sky and therefore to Heaven is a reminder that Christ belongs to the celestial, spiritual world. Eight angels are depicted in the drum of the dome. They face forward with wide open eyes.

On the ceiling below the drum of the dome the choirs of angels continue to be represented in the form of a six-winged seraphims. On the northern and southern branches of the cross, also in rondels, are the four Evangelists - St. Matthew, St. Luke, St. Mark and St. John. After the Christ Pantocrator, the next most important icon in the church is the icon of the Virgin Mary, located in the semi-dome of the eastern apse. This icon is called the Mother of God Platytera or "She who is wider than the Heavens". Below the icon of the Mother of God Platytera are the four great Greek Fathers of the Church: St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great and St. Athanasius.

The sanctuary is where the Eucharistic Liturgy is commemorated. Such a liturgical service is depicted in an icon on the north wall of the sanctuary. Across the sanctuary, on the south wall, is an icon of Abraham sacrificing Isaac. This Old Testament story prefigures God's sacrifice of His Only Son. The icon acts as a link between the two Testaments. Further links with the Old Testament are also expressed in the icons of Old Testament prophets arranged on the ceiling of the nave.

Closest to the altar, in the centre of the eastern branch of the cross is the figure of King David, prophet-king and ancestor of Christ. His son, Solomon, is on the south arm of the cross. With Solomon is the Prophet Jeremiah. In the western branch of the cross are the Prophet Isaiah, Prophet Nahum and Prophet Micah. The prophets, Daniel and Ezekiel, are located on the northern branch of the cross.

Further individual icons are devoted to figures from the New Testament. This series consists entirely of Apostles. The best known apostle is St. Peter whose icon has the place of honour close to the altar on the north wall. The rondels closest to the sanctuary in the eastern corners of the nave are occupied by angels.

On the ceiling just to the left of the sanctuary begins the first of the two feast day cycles. The first and longest cycle belongs to the great feast days associated with Christ's earthly ministry. The second cycle is devoted to the feast days associated with the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Annunciation feast day icon begins the cycle devoted to Christ on the northern side of the eastern arm of the cross formed by the nave's ceiling. The Nativity of Christ follows on the eastern side of the northern arm of the cross. In the centre lies Virgin Mary. The Christ Child lies swaddled in a manger just behind her. The stable is in a cave, an eastern tradition which foreshadows the sepulchre Christ will lie in at His death. Opposite the Nativity is the Baptism of Christ. The River Jordan flows down the centre of the icon. In the centre of the river stands Christ which represents total bodily immersion in the water, foreshadowing the total burial at His death.

The feast day cycle continues on the northern side of the west arm of the cross. In the lowest icon of the group of three, Christ is represented performing His first miracle at the Wedding of Cana. Christ's last miracle is on the same level but on the other side of the cross arm. In the Raising of Lazarus, Christ stands in the centre of a scene set outside the city among the hills about the tomb of Lazarus. The feast day cycle continues on the upper levels of the north side of the same arm with the icon of the Transfiguration. The icon to the left portrays the Entry to Jerusalem. On the south side of the cross arm, to the right, is the icon of the Last Supper. The scene on the left presents the event predicted at the meal - the Betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Crucifixion icon follows on the western side of the southern arm of the cross. The opposite icon in the same arm shows the actual redemption of the First Adam. Known as the Anastasis or Christ's Descent into Hades, the scene takes place between Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb. The Pentecost icon follows on the eastern arm of the cross, opposite the Annunciation icon. The twelve apostles are seated in a semi-circle in two groups of six with an empty place in the centre representing the invisible presence of the Word of God. The last icon of this cycle, the Ascension of Christ, spans the entire curved ceiling of the sanctuary. In the centre of the ceiling, completely surrounded by blue sky, sits Christ.