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# VITA

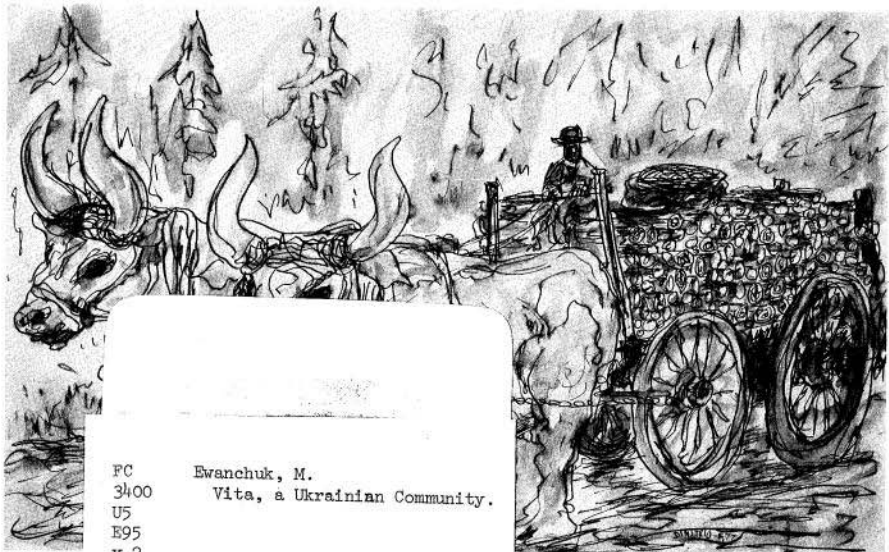


**A UKRAINIAN  
COMMUNITY  
BOOK TWO**

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Ewanchuk, M.  
Vita, a Ukrainian Community.

**TOBA MOSAIC**

VITA  
A Ukrainian Community

Book Two: Making Progress

Michael Ewanchuk



Prepared for MANITOBA MOSAIC, an Ethnic Studies series designed for use in upper elementary grades and first printed for the Boundary School Division No. 16 under the auspices of the Department of Education in Manitoba in 1977.

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Ewanchuk, Michael, 1908-  
Vita

## I. OLESKIW SETTLERS MAKE PROGRESS

"Do not rush at things, Orest", Orysia chided. "You know that the teacher told us to be careful and first get information on the progress the Ukrainian settlers were making during the earlier years in Canada. What progress did they make, Grandpa?"

"I can not only talk about what I have lived through and what I have been told; I also have some material here. If you look at the map of the district, you will notice that the settlers fanned out in three directions from Stuartburn. Some took up land to the south in the area of the present hamlet of Tolstoi, then called Oleskiw. Another group continued to the southeast along the American Boundary and the largest group took up land directly to the east of Stuartburn.

"I have a letter here written by an official of the Austrian government who wanted to know how the settlers were doing on their homesteads. He visited them a year after the first settlers arrived and wrote:

Winnipeg,  
September 5th, 1897

James Thom, Esq.,  
Manager, H. A. Line,  
Montreal

Dear Sir,

I have now returned from a colony called Stuartburn situated 20 miles from Dominion City, where there are 180 . . . families. I find that the people are doing fairly well, all have good houses and gardens, also cattle, with the exception of a few . . . families, who reached the colony



2 - 1. Clearing land in the early days  
(Man. Archives, W.J. Sisler Collection).



2 - 2. Ukrainian woman reaping grain,  
Gardenton, Man. 1905  
(Man. Archives, W. J. Sisler Collection).

this year. Almost all the men are out harvesting and earning from \$20 to \$25 per month and board, some getting \$1.50 a day. I visited all those that can write and do the writing for the others, and explained to them the necessity of their writing home to their friends and relations that this country is good and that there is plenty of room here for more. In answer I was told, that it is their wish to have their friends come out . . . as soon as possible. It is really wonderful what progress these people are making and the fine houses they built with only an axe.

(Ignatius Roth)

Grandfather said, "And a year later the immigration officer wrote this report":

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

65335

Winnipeg, Manitoba  
August 26th, 1898

W. F. McCreary, Esq.  
Commissioner of Immigration,  
Winnipeg

Sir:

In accordance with your instructions, on the 8th of August I proceeded to Stuartburn settlement, and when there I located twenty families on land . . . I have visited one hundred and forty settlers, and I find that the number of acres they have broken are:

Under wheat .....	47 1/2
Under oats .....	24
Under barley .....	30
Rye .....	2 1/2
Under vegetables .....	77
Number of milk cows .....	128
Number of young cattle, working oxen and horses .....	234
Number of poultry .....	1084

These 146 families have cheap, but very comfortable houses. Their building improvements on each place are worth at an average about \$50.00. Plenty of hay put up for their stock. The growing crop is good, and seems well put in, except the potatoes that are poor. Plenty of work to be had in the neighborhood of the settlement, and they ought to be able to make enough to support themselves during the coming winter.

I have the honor to be,  
Sir, Your obedient servant,  
(Sgd) Leon Roy<sup>2</sup>

"Have you any other material?" Orysia inquired.

"Yes, here is something interesting," Grandfather Michael replied: "You know the Government was keeping a close check on the settlers to know whether more should be allowed to come to Canada, often

<sup>1</sup>Public Archives of Canada

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

members of parliament would ask questions. In answer to one such question, by Mr. Cochrane, the Deputy Minister of Immigration, Mr. J. A. Smart, answered him as follows<sup>3</sup>:

Up to the present there is no doubt that the "Ukrainian" has shown himself to be a man who will make a great success of farm work in the Northwest.<sup>3</sup>

And again when questioned about the settlers in Manitoba and how they were helping to develop the country, stated:

I may say that the other day I was on a train in Manitoba with a gentleman from Emerson. There is a colony on land 20 miles east of Emerson in a district which was settled by English people 25 years ago, but many of the farms were abandoned. He told that it was remarkable to see the great difference in the towns of Emerson and Dominion City made by these people. They had added much to the business of these towns.<sup>4</sup>

## GOING TO WORK

As far as finding work during the first years in the colony was concerned, there was some difficulty as the French and Mennonite farms, in particular, hired people on the European system, that is, by the year. Most fathers were unable to be away from their families for such long periods of time, but they did go away from home during the harvest season.

While boys and young men could go away from home and work for a whole year, the parents were not anxious to see the young girls going away from home for that long a period. When the girls worked for the farmers nearby they were able to come home for a day from time to time, but when they went to work in Winnipeg, this was less possible.

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<sup>3</sup>Journal of the House of Commons, Canada 1900. 63 Victoria A 1900, p. 312.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

## II. EARLY FARMING

"From what you have been telling us, Grandfather, about the men going away to work, the women must have been left to carry on much of the farming," Orysia remarked. "The women must also have interesting stories to tell about the progress the Ukrainian settlers made. I am going to speak to Grandmother Maria and have her information included in this report."

Although Grandmother Maria was busy with the housework, she stopped for a while to talk to the children, and Orysia and Orest made careful notes. They prepared the following report from their grandparents' stories:

### First Ukrainian Farmers

The Ukrainian farmers who came to Canada were very careful when preparing for the journey across the ocean. Men brought with them tools and seed grain. The housewives brought tiny bundles of seed: cabbage, carrots, radishes, peas and beans. They also had house plant and flower garden seeds. When spring came they first planted the seeds in tiny boxes and cans for replanting in the garden when it got warmer. Then they started to clear land.

Not having oxen or horses the settlers were not able to plow much land during the first few years. Gardens, however, were dug. Since the soil was sandy, digging and root pulling was less difficult than it was where the soil was heavy. Yet on some homesteads there were too many stones and the children were pressed into service to pick the small ones.

In many cases the farmers co-operated and three or more of them would buy a yoke of oxen. This made it possible for them to plow more land. Like the Canadian farmers who came to Manitoba after 1880, these Ukrainian settlers first cut up the plowed furrows with a hoe, an axe, or a pick axe, and then harrowed the land. Smaller plots were harrowed with home-made rakes, and until they were able to get harrows, the soil was levelled by pulling a tree over the land. The tree was pulled by an ox as few settlers had horses.

### SOWING THE SEED

Sowing was done by hand, that is, the sower filled a bag with grain and then as he walked in a straight line, he broadcast the seed by scattering it in a semicircular arc with each step he took.



## REAPING

When ripe, the grain was cut by hand using either a sickle or a cradle. It was bound into sheaves which were gathered into a stook of fifteen sheaves. This stook was called the "polukipok". Four of these stooks made a unit of 60 sheaves known as a "kopa".



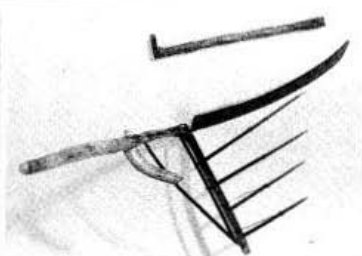
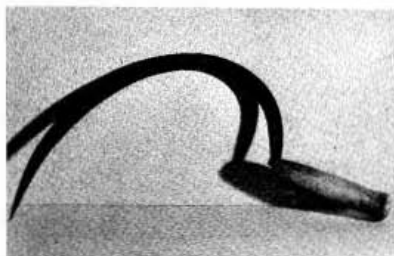
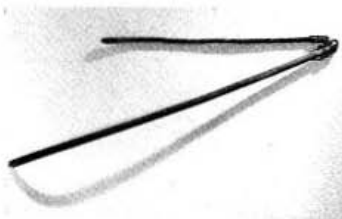
2 - 3. Mr. Fedirchuk of Stuartburn cutting grain with a cradle.

(Man. Archives, W. J. Sisler Collection).



2 - 4. Pioneer Ukrainian woman winnowing grain with a sieve.

(Man. Archives, W. J. Sisler Collection).



2 - 5. Equipment used in the sowing and harvesting grain. Flail, sieve, winnowing receptacle, sickle, cradle.

(M. Ewanchuk, Collection).

Once the grain was threshed with a flail, it was winnowed and placed in bags. The vegetables were dug up and put in a root cellar. The cabbage was made into sauerkraut, dill pickles were prepared for winter storage also as was a small barrel of cottage cheese. With the food all prepared, the farmer's wife felt happier about her food supply than she was the first winter. When snow fell, the new settler did his butchering. Now all they needed was a supply of flour.

During the first winter some men made hand querns. After the first crop of wheat and rye were harvested - and some families were running short of flour - wheat or rye for the baking of bread would be ground on the quern. The buckwheat was also dried and the quern was used for husking it to make buckwheat kernels. The new settlers who had oxen or horses would take their wheat to the mill at Emerson or Steinbach to be milled into flour; however, they had to wait until there was enough snow so that they could travel by sleigh.



2-6a. Ukrainian type stook - *polukipok*.  
(M. Ewanchuk Collection).



2-6. A type of hand quern (*zhorna*)  
used by the Ukrainian settlers.

## THE THRESHING MACHINE

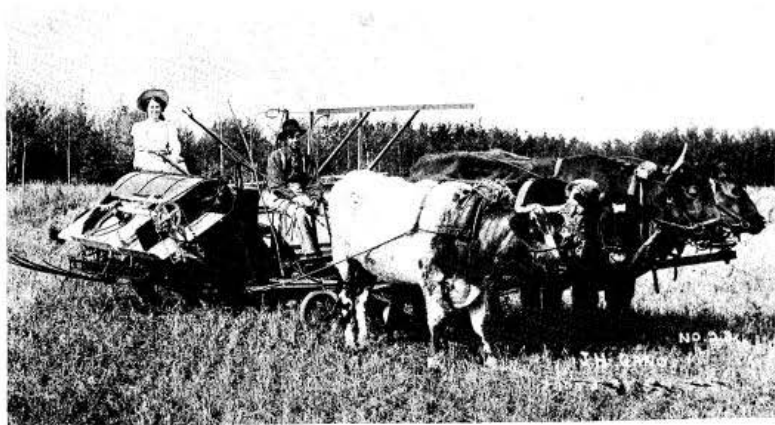
"Grandfather Michael," asked Orest, "the settler could not thresh very much grain with a flail. They really were not making much progress."

"You know, children, that as settlers cleared more land and put it under cultivation they did not depend on hand tools and equipment of that type alone. The first type of large equipment that appeared in the area was the threshing machine. Here is a picture taken in 1904."



2 - 7. *Ukrainian farmers in the Stuartburn area threshing their grain with a threshing machine in 1904.*  
(Public Archives of Canada).

"When the binder was used first, the people did not have horses and the binder was pulled by oxen."



2 - 8. *Showing an Arbakka district farmer cutting his crop with the binder.*  
(Man. Archives, D. Mihaychuk Collection).

### III. THE SHEVCHENKO COMMUNITY

When the first group of settlers selected their homesteads, the farthest farmer was only five miles east from the present village of Stuartburn. By the fall of 1896, as other settlers arrived, the settlement had stretched nearly ten miles east of Stuartburn, and a new centre was formed there. With men like Nicholas Hawryluk providing leadership, the new district was named Shevchenko.



2-9. Stamp of Shevchenko Post Office  
(Spelling of name modified)

(Dr. M. H. Marunchak Collection).

#### SHEVCHENKO POST OFFICE

Since it was too far to walk to Stuartburn where the people got their mail, in time the government approved the formation of the new post office of Shevchenko with Mr. Nicholas Hawryluk becoming its first postmaster. It was situated in the north part of the present village of Vita.

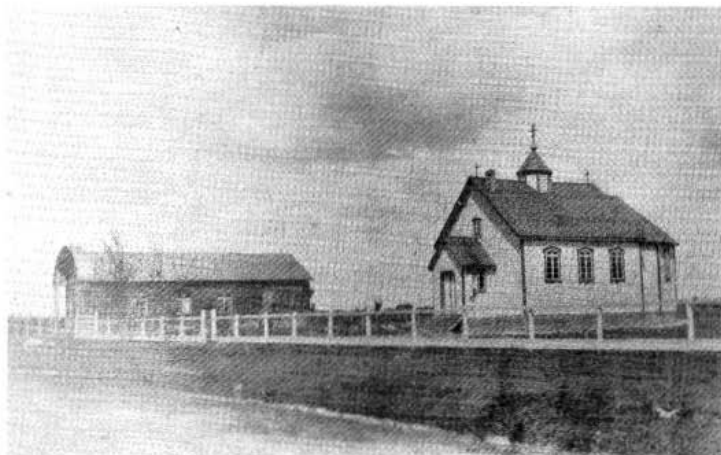
The post office and the coming of the railway seemed to make the Shevchenko district an important centre for the Ukrainian settlers. Before long Mr. Olinek became the first section foreman and local men received fairly permanent employment. The railway made it easier for the settlers to keep in touch with the outside world and news was received as soon as the Winnipeg papers, *The Manitoba Free Press*, *The Winnipeg Tribune* and *The Telegram* arrived. In addition to those, the Ukrainian papers also brought news of particular interest to the settlers. The post office and even the railway freight shed became places where people from different districts could meet and establish closer acquaintance.

Before long, the Shevchenko district began to assume the lead and to form the largest Ukrainian village in south-eastern Manitoba.

## IV. First Churches

Early in the life of the settlement, two churches were built. The first was the St. Michael's church south-west of the present hamlet of Gardenton, and the second one about three miles east of Stuartburn. An independent group also held services in various homes. The third church was erected in the Shevchenko community. It was situated a mile north and a mile west of Vita.

Due to disagreement, the members of the Vita parish divided. The Ukrainian Orthodox group paid the due share to the Ukrainian Catholics and moved the church into the village. The Ukrainian Catholic group built a new church in the north part of the village.



2 - 10. *Original Vita Ukrainian Church after it was moved into the village and the first National Home.* (P. P. Podolsky Collection).

The Roman Catholic group of the community erected its own church west of Vita. Some of the members attending this church were of Polish extraction.

After the arrival of Dr. H. Waldon to take charge of the Vita hospital, a Methodist Church Sunday School was organized and classes were held in the mission hall.

During the early years of the settlement, the Ukrainian Catholic clergy lived in Winnipeg and only visited the settlement a certain number of times a year. In later years, the Ukrainian Orthodox minister, Reverend Peter Sametz lived in Vita where he was also employed as a school teacher.

## V. BUSINESS

The people who settled in the Shevchenko community had long distances to go to get to the nearest store. In November 1896, Hugo Carstens wrote:

The settlers come into Dominion City for their supplies on foot, having no teams, and living about 25 miles away must, of necessity, remain overnight. In the summertime they can sleep outside or in barns, but in wintertime this is not possible . . .

He added:

The health of the settlers is excellent and none had to be vaccinated.

The following are prices for flour and cornmeal quoted me by the two storekeepers of Dominion City:

Agnew & Co. - delivered in the settlement to each individual settler:

flour .....	\$1.15 per sack
corn meal .....	\$1.90 per sack

Markill and Scott

flour .....	\$1.35 per sack
corn meal .....	\$1.65 per sack

Both grades of flour are the same from the Emerson mill.

John C. Ginn and John Ramsey of Stuartburn offer to deliver goods . . . at 15 cents per hundred.

Mr. Wasyl Mihaychuk who grew up in Arbakka recalls that he carried seneca roots for sale in Stuartburn all the way from Arbakka, a distance of some twenty miles. By this time, Mr. Theodosy Wachna was in business. He was the first Ukrainian storekeeper in Stuartburn. After a few years, to meet the most urgent needs of the settlers, small stores were started at Shevchenko. The name of the settlement, however, was changed to Vita.

In Vita, Mr. Werbeniuk started a store which was followed by a co-operative store with Mr. Nazar Bodnarchuk as manager.

Mr. Burdeny was in business, too, and his and the Nazar Bodnarchuk store were destroyed by fire.

In December 1917, Mr. Joseph Kulachkowsky opened a store. The Vita post office was in the rear part of the building.

НАЙБІЛЬША УКРАЇНСЬКА

## Кооперативна Торговля

В МАНІТОБІ

The Vita Trading Co., Ltd.

яна містить ся в двох будинках на ВАЙТА.

В нашій торгівлі є всі товари потрібні так  
фермерам, як і людям по містах.

Масло всілякі гросерії, матерії, одін, обуви,  
кочухи, фарбу, всілякі залізни і кухонні товари,  
— все дістанете у нас так, як в Ітона в Вішні-  
погу, отже не потребуєте аж там за товарами  
вдавати ся, бо дістанете у нас.

Досколичні фермері повинні купувати все у  
нас, до дістануть всі товари, найліпшої якості  
і по вміркованих цінах.

НАШОЮ ЦІЛЮ Є ВДОВОЛИТИ ВСІХІ

The Vita Trading Co., Ltd.

VITA

МАНІТОВА

2 - 11. Advertisement of Vita Trading Company in  
"Ukrainian Voice Almanac".



2 - 12. J. Kulachkowsky General Store  
and residence in Vita (Mrs. P. Smook)



2 - 13. Picklyk's Grocery Store

(D. Mihaychuk Collection).

## VI. SCHOOLS

Before the people in the Vita area could get schools, they first had to organize a municipality. In the meantime a few children attended Stuart-burn school, but only when they could cross the Roseau River, others were taught in groups at home and most children did not get a chance to go to school at all.

The first district to be organized close to the present village of Vita was Svoboda\* (Liberty). The next year, in 1906, the people farther east built the Shevchenko School\*\* and Mr. Joseph Kulachkowsky became its first teacher.

Mrs. D. Yakimischak who grew up in the area says:

The school was on my father's farm. I remember I used to go to play with the children during recess but could not go in because I was only five years old. Often I would go there at noon and wait till the second recess. The teacher did not like to see me waiting outside — and at times I was lonesome and cried — so Mr. George Machula enrolled me as a regular student.

Mr. Onifat Lukianchuk who now lives in Edmonton writes:

The first school I attended was out in the country, about one mile north of the town. In those days, all the children walked to school since there were no busses or vans. In the summer, most of us tried to get to school early in the morning to have more time for playing. Our winters were very cold, many a time children came to school with frozen noses and faces.

Our school was named Shevchenko. It was a one room school, with big double desks for the children, a table and chair for the teacher and a blackboard on the front wall. At the back of the room stood a big wood heater around which we huddled and tried to warm ourselves on the cold days. We sat two to a desk and were supposed to observe complete silence during the study period. No one was allowed to turn around to talk to his or her neighbor.

The First school was replaced by a new school in the village and now only the stump of the flagpole remains to mark the spot.

### LEARNING WAS NOT EASY

The readers used in those days had hard words and children found it difficult to read and to understand the lessons.

"As a beginner," writes Mr. Lukianchuk, "I spent a long time in grade one. The first book I received when I came to school contained

---

\* Svoboda was renamed Beckett

\*\* The name Shevchenko was first spelled "Szewczenko"



such words as conductor, passenger, engineer, Queen Victoria, etc. The harder I tried to memorize words the less I knew. Finally, when the new text books arrived, learning became easy and I began to make reasonable progress."

Drainage and the roads in the area were poor and during the spring months, children had to wade through pools of water to be able to get to school.



2 - 14. *Stump of a flagpole on the school grounds of the first Shevchenko School*  
(M. Ewanchuk Collection).



2 - 15. *The first two room school to be built in the village of Vita retaining the original name and spelling of Szewczenko No. 1388.*



2 - 16. *Country children on their way to school*

(D. Mihaychuk Collection).



2 - 17. Children of Ukrainian settlers and their teacher beside Harazad School\* (D. Mihaychuk Collection).

Before a two room school was built in Vita, pupils who wanted to write their Entrance Examination at the end of grade eight had to go as far as Emerson where there was an examination centre. Among those who went to Emerson was Onifat Lukianchuk:

I wrote my departmental exam in Emerson. While there I saw in one of the stores a fiddle on display — priced at \$5.00. I had always wanted to own a fiddle. Here was my chance. I skimped on my expenses and came back home with the fiddle. Here Mr. D. M. Uhryniuk was giving the students free violin lessons, that is how I got my start in violin playing. Later it made it easier for me to teach a choir.

## A NEW TWO-ROOM SCHOOL

When there were too many children for a one-room school, a new school was built in the village. It had two rooms (Fig. 2-15) and grades four to eight were taught in the senior room.

## HIGH SCHOOL STARTED

Since there was no high school in the village, the children on passing their Grade eight examinations, had to go to Winnipeg to get their high school education, with some even going to Saskatoon. In time a high school room was organized in the United Church Mission Hall. The teachers were English-speaking who assisted Dr. H. Waldon with missionary work. One teacher, it seems, got in a habit of ridiculing Ukrainian traditions and made light of the Ukrainian language. The parents decided to get teachers who would understand the people and have more respect for the feelings of the children. They began to hire teachers with a Ukrainian background.

\* Renamed, Solway

## VII. THE COMMUNITY CENTRE, NARODNY DIM

From the very beginning of the Shevchenko community, the people expressed a desire to have a library centre and a place to meet similar to the Prosvita Society\* they had in the old country. After a few years, they formed a reading circle with each member contributing books from his own collection. At first they met in various homes, borrowed books from the library and discussed matters of importance to the community. When the Shevchenko school was opened, the library was moved into the school building and the small collection of books remained there for several years.

At that time some of the men who were leaders in the community were Nicholas Hawryluk, Joseph Kulachkowsky, W. Podolsky, I. Kolisnyk, and Michael Bodnarchuk. They encouraged the people to organize an amateur club and plays were staged in the Stuartburn Municipal Hall when the building was moved to Vita in 1910. School concerts were given in the schoolhouse.

When Mr. W. J. Jerowsky became the teacher in the Vita community, he provided strong leadership and the people collected \$300 one fall and started to build a large community centre which they called the Ukrainian National Home.

### VITA SETS AN EXAMPLE

Once the Vita Community organized their cultural and social activities in their Narodny Dim, other districts followed their example. In Caliento, Mr. Mallenuk, the local teacher, and his wife became active community workers.



2 - 18. Caliento Amateur Club of 1916 with Mrs. A. Mallenuk as president.

(D. Mihaychuk Collection).

\* A society which organized educational opportunities for adults.



2 - 19. Ukrainian farmers open-air meeting, Arbakka, Manitoba.

(Man. Archives D. M. Collection).

Other districts were experiencing problems for they had not any centre where they could meet.

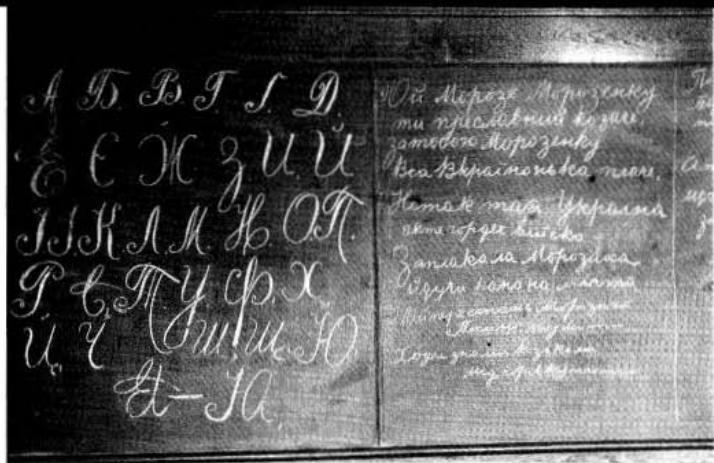
When Mr. Jerowsky moved to teach in Arbakka, he, with the help of Mr. N. Eliuk and other people, built a community centre there.

The Narodny Dim at Vita served its community well, and made life richer and happier. In it the young people found an attractive meeting place for their social activities, acted in plays and took part in concerts. Periodically a distinguished speaker would visit the community and give an informative lecture. It also served as the hub for the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. Mr. C. S. Prodan directed many of his agricultural activities from this community centre which resulted in an improvement in farming in the area.

2 - 20. Showing a group of Vita citizens after a lecture given by Prof. Ivan Boberskyj. The picture was taken by J. M. Mysyk, Sept. 20, 1921.

(Ukrainian Cultural Centre, Oseredok. I Boberskyj Collection).





2 - 21. Showing the Ukrainian alphabet and a song "Oj Moroze Morozenku" written on the chalkboard of the Vita Narodny Dim.

(Oseredok, I. Boberskyj Collection, Circa 1921).

During 1930 and for several years to follow, the building served as a high school classroom. Here, too, Mr. D. Uhryniuk was able to organize a fine choir. The library started early in 1902 was greatly enlarged and the Ukrainian settlers in Vita were considered to be among the better read citizens of Ukrainian extraction. So keen was the interest in reading, that one man who had never attended school mastered the reading skill on his own: He knew the Lord's Prayer and by studying each word in the prayer book learned the letters and soon was able to read, but he never was able to master the art of writing.

The Ukrainian residents in the Vita Community were always anxious that their young people grow up to know Ukrainian traditions, culture and language. They, therefore, used to organize Ukrainian language classes and some of these were held in the Ukrainian National Home.

## SCHOOL CONCERTS

The community centre, "the narodny dim", not only provided the youth with a place to meet, for choir practice, play rehearsals and dances, it was a place that offered something for all. The children remember the centre as the place where each year they had their Christmas concert. They looked forward to the Christmas tree, the coming of Santa Claus and all the carols, and recitations. At first the Christmas program was all in English; however, in order not to repeat the program during Ukrainian Christmas, Ukrainian carols, recitations, drills and Christmas pageants were added. The effort of the teachers and the children to provide this program was very much appreciated by the parents.

## VIII. DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE

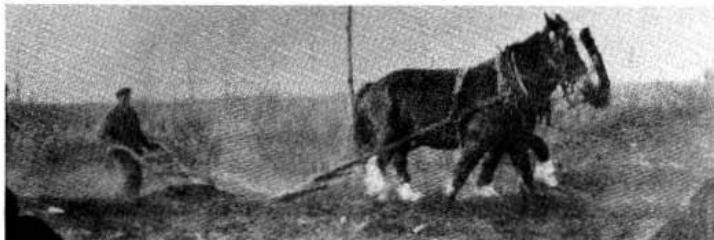
The oxen, though slow, were widely used for farm work. In Figure 2 - 22 we see a farmer cutting hay with a team of oxen.

The oxen were soon replaced by broncos. Some farmers paid as much as \$500 for a team of horses.



2 - 22. Farmer mowing hay

(Shevchenko School Collection).



2 - 23. Farmer breaking land with a team of horses

(Public Archives of Canada)

2 - 24. Cutting grain with a four-horse team in 1918

(D. Mihaychuk Collection).





2 - 25. *Breaking bushland with Mihaychuk's steam engine.*

Those who wanted to make more rapid progress soon began to employ the steam engine for the breaking of land and threshing.

Larger acreage under cultivation made it necessary for the farmers to use seed drills for sowing, binders for reaping the grain and more modern threshing machines for threshing.



2 - 26. *Threshing outfit, Kolisnyk's farm.*

## THE FLOUR MILLS

In order to mill their wheat and rye into flour, the farmers had to take their grain to a mill in Steinbach. This was not difficult during the winter months, but during the other seasons there were no suitable wagon roads. In 1918 a flour mill was needed in Vita and one was built by Wasyl Mihaychuk\* who was assisted by his brother Dmytro. It had a modern feature in it, and that was a plant for generating electricity to provide electrical lights in the mill.

The Mihaychuk mill was located just east of the present location of the Vita creamery. In 1920, Mr. Mihaychuk advertised it as the "Wonder Mill". People from miles around Vita and some from the United States made use of its services. The charge for milling was two bushels for 25 cents. The farmer got the flour and the bran. Only two pounds per bushel was lost due to screening. The Mihaychuk Wonder Mill was destroyed by fire in 1922. A second mill was built in Vita and was operated by Mr. Anton Beyak.



Fig. 2 - 27. Mihaychuk's Wonder Mill in Vita.

## MIXED FARMING

Early in its development Vita became a mixed farming area and farmers engaged in different activities to earn a living.

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Information provided by Mr. Dmytro Mihaychuk.

\* Wasyl Mihaychuk is in his 90th year. He lives in Pontiac, Michigan.



## CORDWOOD

Once the railway line went through Vita, farmers were able to sell cordwood and trade their wood for groceries in the local stores.

At the start the farmers received only about two dollars a cord for seasoned wood. In Winnipeg and St. Boniface poplar cordwood sold for \$4.50 - \$6.00 a cord. The storekeepers not only made a profit on groceries, clothing and hardware, which they sold at a higher price than listed in a catalogue, but also on the sale of wood they took in trade.



2 - 28. Showing how cordwood was piled (A cord measured 8' by 4' by 4' or 128 cubic ft.).



2 - 29. Showing a farmer hauling a cord of wood to Vita

(Shevchenko School Collection).

One man would cut a cord and a half of wood a day. Boys helped their fathers cut and split cordwood on Saturdays. Spruce cordwood was not split. Much later a saw mill was operated in Vita with logs being brought in from the eastern area to be cut into lumber.

2 - 30. Saw mill in operation in Vita

(Mihaychuk Collection).



## WIRE GRASS

Wire grass at one time provided employment to people in the Vita area. This grass grew in the swamps some three miles south of Vita. According to Mr. Wasyl Moroziuk, a Vita pioneer, this grass grew to the height of about three feet and was used for the making of brushes and mats. It had to be cut by means of a scythe or sickle, but this was very slow work. Special reapers were then brought which cut the grass and had special blade attachments to pile it into a swath. The reaper was pulled by horses, but since the muskeg was very soft and spongy, the horses would break through and get mired. The farmers, therefore, used to make ski-like board shoes which were attached to the horses' hoofs and made it possible for them to walk on the muskeg that was at times covered with water.

The grass was given time to dry and then men and women came with rakes, rolled the grass into sheaves and tied them with bands they made from the grass. The sheaves were then carried out to higher ground from where they were hauled to town in hay racks and stored in sheds beside the railway track. These sheds were built by the Oshkosh Grass Company of Minnesota. From these sheds the bundles were loaded on freight cars and shipped to the United States.



2 - 31. Showing Vita men and women working at the harvesting of the wire grass  
(Man. Archives, Sisler Collection).



2 - 32. Men preparing lunch during the haying season  
(J. Jaman Collection).

## DAIRYING

The Vita district has been a very suitable area for dairy farming. There has always been good pasture, plenty of hay and a good supply of

water. Mr. V. S. Prodan of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture assisted the farmers in developing good milch-cow herds.

"I want to add this," said Orest, "and I will put it in quotation marks that Grandfather Michael said: "Mr. Prodan's contribution to the development of agriculture in the Vita area will be hard to match. His approach in dealing with people should be copied."

First cream was collected in creamers set to cool in the wells and churned into butter in dash churns and made into butter prints.

The cream separator, the improved churn and the cream can are indicators of progress.

Cows are still milked by hand, but the milking machine is rapidly taking over.

## VITA CREAMERY

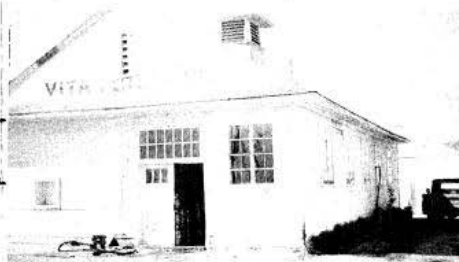
The first creamery was built by the Crescent Creamery Co. It is said that this was done on the suggestion of Mr. C. S. Prodan, representative of the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. D. Uhryniuk became the first manager. It provided work for several men and made it more convenient for people in the district. They could bring their cream to Vita and save on paying freight charges they had to pay when they shipped it to Winnipeg. "It provided the farmers with cash and made them independent," says Mr. D. Uhryniuk, "and they could order some of the things they needed from the mail order catalogue and the local storekeepers had to make their prices more attractive."

Fire destroyed the first building. The second building is still in use.



2-33. C. S. Prodan



2-34. Vita Creamery now belonging to the Vita Co-operative.

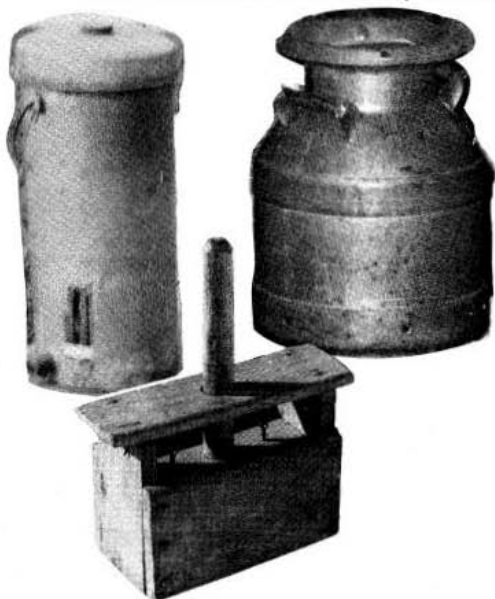


2-35. Vita farmer delivering cream, talking to the manager.

It has been a successful business through the year. In the July 15, 1942 article in the *Free Press Prairie Farmer* we read:

They have been troubled with grass flavors this year . . . The Vita creamery has pride in its reputation. The first prize on print butter at the Canadian National Exhibition at Toronto last September was awarded to Vita.

After Mr. Uhryniuk left the managers and butter-maker have been local men among them Michael Storozuk, John Cesmystruk and John Machula. All three have recently retired.



2 - 30. Type of creamer, cream can, cream separator (Jessop Collection PAM) mould used in the Vita area.  
(M. Ewanchuk Collection)

## ONIONS

With the research carried by C. S. Prodan it was found that the Vita area produced excellent seed onions. These were harvested and sold to the local merchants who shipped them to the MacKenzie Seed Company in Brandon. For some time the Vita Area provided seed onions for nearly all of western Canada.

## IX. UKRAINIAN TRADITIONS

While Grandfather Michael was busy sorting out clippings and old pictures, the twins, Orysia and Orest approached their Grandmother to ask her some questions.

*Orest:* Do tell us Grandmother, all about Ukrainian holidays, cooking, weddings - everything that could be included under, what our teachers call "traditions".

*Grandmother:* That, my children would take a long time and you would have to write a book.

*Orysia:* Then tell us just enough so we would have something more interesting to add to our project.

*Orest:* Children who come from non-Ukrainian homes are interested in these things and they often ask us questions.

*Grandmother:* The first thing I want you to know that Ukrainian traditional holidays are celebrated according to the first Christian calendar, or the old calendar, called the Julian calendar, and New Year during this century falls 14 days later than the Canadian New Year. When your great-grandfather came to Canada, the difference was 13 days.

*Orysia:* The difference seems to increase.

*Grandmother:* Yes, and when you are grown up people during the next century, the difference will be 15 days, and then 16 days.

*Orest:* You mean, Grandmother that if I lived long enough, the Julian New Year would fall on the first of July?

*Grandmother:* Yes, that is so, but you would have to be very old.

*Orysia:* Stop it, Orest and let Grandma tell her story.

### GRANDMOTHER MARIA'S STORY ABOUT UKRAINIAN TRADITIONS

Most Vita citizens of Ukrainian extraction to this day retain many of the traditions their grandparents and parents brought to Canada. These are mainly connected with the celebration of holidays and other festivities. Holidays and observance of certain rituals made it easier for the pioneer people to bear the loneliness of the days on their bush farms.

Each year as the spring season approached, the people looked forward to the celebration of the Easter holidays. Mothers were busy preparing traditional dishes and baking buns and loaves of bread out of white flour - a change from the whole-wheat and dark rye bread. They were cooking hams and making sausages while the girls made Easter eggs. They looked forward to the clergyman's visit to the colony to bless the baskets of Easter delicacies they brought to church. The clergyman who came to Vita would also go to other districts near Vita to ensure that every family had a chance to have blessed food for their Easter breakfast.

The Ukrainian Easter Holidays are celebrated according to the Julian calendar and usually fall later in the year than the Canadian

Easter. When Easter Holidays came later and the weather was warmer, the blessing of the Easter bread was done outdoors.

The children looked forward to Easter as this was the time that their parents presented them with something new, usually articles of spring clothing.



2 - 36. Outdoor blessing of Easter food in the Vita area.



2 - 37. Members of a family visiting the resting place of the departed.

Easter Holidays were very happy days for both old and young. On Easter Monday the people greeted each other with, "Khrystos Voskres", Christ is Risen, and sprinkled a few drops of water on the one they greeted. The church bells would ring all day long and the parents and the children would gather on the church grounds. The parents would visit and discuss important matters while the young folk played games and the girls sang beautiful songs called the "hahilky".

After Easter they celebrated the Pentecost. For this holiday they decorated their homes with greenery and also the church. To celebrate the Day, there usually was a church service with an outdoor procession. The people also visited the cemeteries and the clergyman would read special prayers at the resting place of the departed. Among the settlers who came from the province of Bukovina, there was a practice to bring food and fruit and place it on the plots and then share the food in remembrance of the good life of the departed.

During the late summer when harvesting is about half done the Ukrainian people go to church to thank God for a good harvest. In the Ukraine they used to bring fruit, vegetables, nuts and flowers to have them blessed, but in Vita the women would only bring flowers.

Centuries ago when the Ukrainian people became Christians they combined their harvest festival with Christmas. That is why they bring in a sheaf of wheat or rye into their homes at Christmas. During Advent, the four Sundays before Christmas, the Ukrainians did not have meat dishes and their Christmas Eve dinner had 12 different types of food, but no meat dishes.

*Orysia:* Why do they bring hay and straw into the house? Is that a Ukrainian custom, too?

*Grandmother:* That is done to remind us that the Christchild was born in the manger. Each Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

*Orest:* Ukrainians sing many carols, did you go caroling at Christmas, Grandma?

*Grandmother:* Yes, I did. We enjoyed it. Ukrainians have many beautiful carols. You should learn to sing them.

*Orest:* We sing the "Carol of the Bells" at school.

*Grandmother:* Usually that carol is sung during the holidays celebrating the day Christ was christened in the Jordan River. That holiday comes about the 19th of January by the Gregorian calendar. Until Lent comes the people enjoy themselves. Usually weddings used to take place before the Advent and the Lent. There is also a fine custom among the Ukrainian people to have a party for the child that is being Christened. These parties were attended by members of the family and the Godparents, who brought the child suitable gifts.

In the early days wedding parties lasted two or three days. This was the custom established in the Ukraine. Since there was no Ukrainian clergyman living in the district, young couples often had to plan together to be married when the clergyman would be able to come to the district. It was not unusual for ten or more young couples to be married on the same Sunday, by a visiting Ukrainian clergyman. Wedding parties were held in the homes and music for dancing was provided by the fiddler and his partner who played the cymbalon.

In the early days the bride would wear a traditional Ukrainian wedding dress and a veil with a myrtle wreath. The groom wore a Canadian made suit that was in style at the time. Before long, dressmakers made beautiful white wedding dresses for the brides. Bouquets for the wedding were made by the bridesmaids and the girls in the community.

Now weddings are modern, except that the young like the custom of presentation, some young brides try to keep some of the old wedding customs and recently a young Vita girl who was to be married in Australia asked her mother to send her some myrtle she could carry with her wedding bouquet. The wedding parties are now held more often in the Ukrainian National Home.

In Vita there was a very fine women's organization. The older women met and helped the young girls to learn to cook Ukrainian dishes, make Easter eggs and do fine embroidery. The women liked to wear their colorfully embroidered blouses, and on special occasions, they would all wear their Ukrainian outfits. Their homes, too, had many beautifully finished articles such as cushions, doilies and runners. Both the churches always had fine altar and table covers and various "rushnyky". Fine dresses, good cooking, the love of reading Ukrainian literature and, Ukrainian music, made life happier and richer.



2 - 39. Showing another wedding group in the 1920's.

(J. Jaman Collection).



2 - 40. Two couples after their wedding, 1924.

(J. Jaman Collection).



2 - 42. Young couple dancing a Ukrainian Kolomyjka.



2 - 38. Bride and groom married in Gardenton in 1914.

(J. Jaman Collection).

2 - 41. Two senior Vita women dressed in their traditional dress.





## X. COMMUNITY PROGRESS COMPETITION

The Canadian National Railway sponsored a Community Progress Competition in Western Canada. This project was started by Robert England, a very talented and learned man. The Vita community took part in this competition in 1931 and 1932. The judges made the following notes:

Vita, Manitoba. Excellent improvements on two school grounds. Sixty-five farmers obtained certified seed. Eight bull clubs organized. Four farmers growing registered peas, beans and alfalfa, and four registered wheat. Community recreation ground established. Sheep fair and Poultry field day held. Two Poultry Clubs and Garden Club organized. Much increased interest in poultry as a result of Club work. Improvement particularly noted in housing of poultry. Two poultry club fairs and one Garden Club fair held. Two nutrition classes organized. Baseball Club organized.\*

In 1931 the Vita community came second and received a cash prize from which these donations were made: (1) Vita Hospital, (2) Boys' and Girls' Clubs and (3) toward purchase of land for fair grounds.

In 1932 Vita again came second and the money won was spent for a grandstand at the recreation grounds and the fencing of the property.

The fair grounds were used for the annual physical education competition of schools in the district and also became the playing field for the Vita Baseball Club.

### FIELD DAYS

Year after year the children from the schools in the Vita area used to come to Vita to take part in competitions. There were baseball, basketball, and baseball games. Each school was awarded points for each event won by the children. The school winning the highest number of points was awarded a shield.

### AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS: THE CAR

After twenty-five years of hard labour, the Vita colony showed very fine progress. The people no longer depended on oxen or horses for transportation, they started driving cars.

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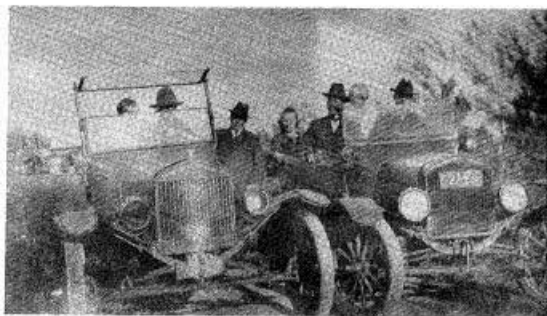
\* THE COLONIZATION OF WESTERN CANADA: A Study of Contemporary Land Settlement (1896 - 1934), Robert England, M.C., M.A., London, c. 1936, p. 175.



2 - 43. Children and teacher of Kupchanko School at the Vita School Field Day.



2 - 44. Vita Baseball Club



2 - 45. Early cars in Vita showing J. Mykytiak, Joseph Kulachkowsky (standing) Luvonty Bodnarchuk and Nazar Bodnarchuk (at the wheel) and his children.

(J. Kulachkowsky Collection).

2 - 46. The Future

(J. Jaman Collection).



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Michael Ewanchuk is a former Inspector of schools who since his retirement has devoted considerable time to historical research and writing about Ukrainian settlements. He was born and raised in Gimli, and on becoming a teacher, during his first year taught in the Beckett (Svoboda) school in the Stuartburn-Vita area. During the war he served as the R.C.A.F. Flight Lieutenant. He holds B.A., B.Ed., and M.Ed. degrees from the University of Manitoba and a Doctor of Laws (Honoris Causa) from the University of Winnipeg. Mr. Ewanchuk has also written:

*A History of the Ukrainian Settlements in the Gimli Area* (in Ukrainian).

*Spruce, Swamp and Stone: A History of the Pioneer Ukrainian Settlements in the Gimli Area* (in English) and

*Pioneer Profiles: Ukrainian Settlers in Manitoba* (at the printers).

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