

Paulencu house makes

By Ed Doering
The Roblin Review

historic move to new site



The Paulencu house is the only known example of Romanian folk house in the province.

The only known surviving Romanian folk-house in Manitoba is getting a new lease on life.

And for Barry Sawchuk, president of the St. Elijah Orthodox Church Museum Club, it's not a moment too soon.

"The house is still in pretty good shape, considering it was built almost a hundred years ago," he explained.

"But it is starting to deteriorate. We had to do something in a hurry if we wanted to preserve it for future generations."

The Paulencu house was built in 1906 by John and Mary Paulencu under the guidance of carpenter Alexie Slusarchuk and was occupied by the Paulencu's and their family of seven until about 1960 when it was vacated permanently.

Three other, nearly identical homes were constructed on adjoining homesteads by relatives and friends but none have survived.

The Paulencu family (widow Dominica Paulencu, two sons John and George and daughter Marina) arrived in Canada in 1899 from Crnogiz, Romania, then a part of Bukovynia, a province of the great Austro-Hungarian empire.

After briefly settling near Wroxtton, SK, the family relocated to Lennard where a small Romanian enclave was developing.

The Paulencu house shares stylistic similarities to houses constructed by Ukrainian immigrants from Bukovynia but is larger and somewhat more ornate.

The house's interior ceiling beams are decorated with hand-carved religious symbols and it has a full second

storey.

"It's a wonderful house," noted Ed Ledohowski, provincial designation officer for Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship's Historic Resources branch.

"What's surprising is that the Paulencu's built quite a fancy home, and in the old country style. Most first homes were little more than shelters - early settlers had to get shelter up fast - it was the second homes that were usually old country style."

Ledohowski added that by the 20's and 30's, ethnic traits were disappearing.

"It's one the nicest examples that's known in the whole province. And it's the only Romanian house we know of," he said. "That's what makes it so important."

About two weeks ago, the house was moved from its original site a half-mile east of the church - on the south

west quarter of 24-23-28W near Lennard - to a newly-purchased one-acre lot adjacent to the St. Elijah Pioneer Church museum, also a designated heritage site.

Sawchuk says once the house is restored, the museum club wants to turn the site into a pioneer homestead.

"We want to present the house in its natural surroundings," he noted, "so we purchased a piece of land from Raymond Lamontagne - he's the one who donated the house.

"We think a lot of people will want to come to see the house and the church, especially if we can recreate a pioneer atmosphere."

"It will be quite an interesting tourist stop," Ledohowski agreed.

"With the Yellowhead highway close, it's a wonderful opportunity for tourism."

Ledohowski says the original attempt to designate the house as a heritage site was made at the same time the pioneer church was designated.

"But they just couldn't get it going at the time. Now there's some new blood in the group, and they seem able, and anxious, to get to work on it.

"We've got a good group of people up there working on this. And that's exactly what you need to get things going."

Sawchuk says interest in the house is growing, especially now that the house has been moved and "you can see it sitting there".

"We're getting a few donations already and we'll be trying to get a fund raising committee going this winter. People who used to live around here are very interested.

"We have to replace the roof, it's all cedar shingles, and some of the logs need replacing. Then we'll have to replaster it inside out - it's going to take a lot of man-hours and quite a bit of money. We're trying to get it designated as a heritage site and if it is, we'll probably qualify for some grants."

Ledohowski noted that the process to have the house designated as a provincial heritage site has begun and that the designation should be a made early next year.

"Then it will be eligible for restoration grants," he said, adding that any government grants have to be matched 50-50 - in the form of "sweat equity" or funding from a non-governmental agency.

"There's a lot of interest from the Thomas Sill Foundation," he noted.

The Foundation, established by a bequeath from a Morden accountant, funds a number of charitable activities.

"The new executive director has a heritage slant, especially rural heritage. So it looks pretty good," Ledohowski added.

Sawchuk says it's going to take a lot work, and a lot of support and cooperation, to restore the Paulencu house.

But to him, whatever it takes is definitely worth it.

"When I'm out working on the field, I always think about the people who used to live on the farms. You think about the family who used to live there, the people who used to live here. Now you can go for miles without seeing a farm home. I sit on the tractor and I think about how it used to be 50, 60 and even a hundred years ago.

"Here we have a chance to preserve some of our history, a chance to remember some of our pioneer families. It's our history, it's our heritage. And if we don't preserve it now, we're losing that heritage.

"Because when it's gone, it's gone forever."



Darlene Polachic photos

Romanian folk-house relocated, newly plastered and ready for whitewash

A ROMANIAN folk-house from the turn of the century is being restored as a museum near Inglis, Man., to pay tribute to the area's strong Romanian heritage. The house was the pioneer home of John and Mary Paulencu, early settlers to the community of nearby Lennard. Four identical dwellings in typical rural Romanian style were built at the same time, but only the Paulencu house has survived.

The Paulencus, along with a number of other Romanian families from the province of Bucovina (then part of the Austrian Empire), arrived in Canada around 1900. Eli Burla and his wife, Zamfira, were part of the group. They spent the first winter at Asessippi, earning \$10 a month taking care of 100 head of cattle. In the spring, Eli set out to look for a homestead in an area that was being opened for settlement to the northeast.

Eli Burla's grandson, Peter Gaber, said that with axe in hand, Eli "blazed his way north through heavily wooded bush. At noon he sat on a log, had dinner, and being tired, he fell asleep. In his dream an old man came and told

New lease on life

By Darlene Polachic

him to go a bit further, mark that place and apply for a homestead. Startled, he awoke — but the dream seemed so real that he followed instructions, homesteaded that place in 1901 and lived there until his death at 73 in 1940."

The Burlas were soon followed to the area by other Romanian settlers. They cultivated the land with oxen and wooden plows, built their houses of earth and straw, and produced their own clothing, soaps, foodstuffs, and tools, exactly as they had done in the old country. With seeds they had brought along, they cultivated vegeta-

bles, medicinal plants, and hemp, from which they made woven, waterproof clothing.

Religion was a fundamental part of life for the Romanian transplants. One of the first things they did was find a piece of high land and erect a cross around which they could gather and pray.

By 1904, the Romanian settlers had built a small church on two acres of land donated by Eli Burla. It was a simple structure with four walls made of logs and earth, and a sod roof atop which was a cross.

In 1908, a more substantial church building was constructed. It was named St. Elie Church after the Prophet Elijah as well as Eli Burla, who had been such an integral part of its organization and construction. The new church was a faithful replica of Romanian Orthodox churches in Bukovina, a simple rectangular shape with a rounded end, interior sculptured rafters, and processional crosses and icons.

Burla's grandsons, Peter and Jim Gaber, remember the church well. Peter vividly remembers the multi-day religious celebrations, particularly the one

at Easter time. "There was even a bonfire outside."

They remember the first time a Romanian bishop came to America and visited St. Elie Church. The young men of the congregation, wearing embroidered white shirts and white woven trousers tucked into high black boots, met the bishop on horseback and serenaded him all the way from Inglis to the church.

In 1952, Peter Gaber supervised the building of the present St. Elie Romanian Orthodox Church. The former building, now known as the oldest standing Romanian Church in Mani-

ing the house. The smoke went into the attic and then out through the air vents." Smoked meats and cheeses were stored in the attic.

"The house was originally made of logs plastered with mud and straw, and then whitewashed," Jim said. A veranda around three sides served as a walkway and kept rain off the whitewash.

When the folk-house was moved to its new location, it received a new foundation and a new floor. The old floor was left behind when the house was moved. "We also had to replace the bottom logs, which were quite rotten, and put on a new roof and shingles."

house will be completely refurbished in typical Romanian style. The wooden beam in the front room with the inscription "built in 1906" will be in evidence, along with the cross that was carved there so long ago for the protection of the house. There will once again be icons — perhaps a crucifix, a statue, or a religious painting — on the wall opposite the front door.

The beds will be as they were when Peter and Jim were children — bed posts with boards, and mattresses filled with hay. Their father used to bring cattails home from the sloughs so the downy seed material could be mixed



Left: Important to the restoration project were Peter and Lena Gaber and Jim Gaber. Right: The Paulencu house shortly after relocation, with a new roof. Note the rounded roof corners, characteristic of rural Romanian architecture.

toba, was declared a historical site and today serves as a museum dedicated to the community's Romanian pioneers.

John and Mary Paulencu's house was moved to the St. Elie Church site four miles north of Inglis in the fall of 1992. Jim Gaber, who grew up in a house identical to the Paulencus', was appointed to head up the restoration project.

"The Paulencu house is considered a folk-house because it is typically Romanian in style and construction," Jim explained. It has the characteristic deep roof sloping on all four sides, with rounded, shingled corners. The roof is equipped with air vents that functioned like a chimney.

"Inside the house, there was a *cuptori* or bake oven made of clay with green stakes curved over and plastered in. The oven was used for baking and for heat-

Keeping the restorations authentic has taken some ingenuity. Jim shakes his head. "Eight carpenters couldn't figure out how to do the curved corners on the roof."

REPLASTERING the walls was another challenge. "First you have to find a suitable clay site and move off the black dirt. You dig up the clay to loosen it, pour in water, and add wheat or oat straw (oat is tougher). Then you roll up your pantlegs, take off your shoes, put on some music, and go to work." Jim invited the church young people to help with this activity.

The clay plaster was applied by hand, and was followed by a finishing plaster of very fine clay and horse manure, then a whitewash of lime and water.

When the restoration is complete, the two large rooms inside the folk-

with the hay.

"Mother used to spin wool from sheep and weave it into blankets for the beds," Jim remembered. "Us kids carded wool all winter long while Mother spun and told us stories of life back in the old country."

The folk-house restoration has been accomplished largely by church volunteers, including young people. "Most of the children are very excited about the project," Peter said. He is pleased about that because, he said, "The Romanian community is petering out. . . . Where once we had over 70 members at church, now we have only 30 to 35. Many of the young people are moving away. But this house, on a provincial historical site, will be here long after we are gone to remind generations to come of their Romanian heritage" ♦

MHC plaque dedicated at the Paulencu farm house

Members and friends of the St. Elijah Pioneer Church Museum got together for a very special celebration Sunday, July 22. The gathering took place for the official unveiling of a Manitoba Heritage Council plaque commemorating the John Paulencu family farmhouse.

The house, which had stood on the Paulencu homestead since 1906, was moved to St. Elijah church grounds in 1992 and has been accurately and lovingly restored by a group of dedicated volunteers headed by museum president Barry Sawchuk.

The plaque, which is written in English, Romanian and French, reads in part as follows:

"This former farmhouse is the last known example of a traditional Romanian style residence in Manitoba. It was constructed in 1906 by John and Mary Paulencu with the assistance of noted local carpenter Alexie Slusarchuyk...

"Together with the now restored St. Elijah Romanian Orthodox Church, the Paulencu house is last known structural vestige of Manitoba's only Romanian pioneer settlement."

Sawchuk says it was an emotional, bittersweet day.

"People worked hard, they gave up their time to come and help, time which meant quite a bit. And it was emotional because it's dedicated to our pioneers. It's the only thing left around here that shows their way of life for our children and our children's children," he said.

"It was a lot of hard work, working with just a few people... during my speech I had a lump in my throat, I cried. I mean over the last eight years we lost five people who started work out there."

Sawchuk says while the restoration work was difficult, all the volunteers were glad to have had a part in it.

"I mean if we didn't do it, it would have been gone forever," he said. "Everyone's glad we did it."

Sawchuk says having the house and the church in the same yard not only adds to the area's other tourist attractions, it also illustrates the pioneer way of life.

"They were hard-working, poor people but the church was number one to them," he noted. "So it's kind of nice to have them in the same yard."

Sawchuk says there is still some work left to do, along with finding items to furnish the house.

"That's going to be hard," he said.



• Platform guests were [L-R] Len Derkach, Russell MLA; Reeve Alvin Zimmer, Shellmouth-Boulton; John Everitt of the MHC; Barry Sawchuk, museum president, Fr. Joseph MacLellan, parish priest; Justine Esplen singing O Canada; and MC Ken Gaber.



• MHC's John Everitt and parishioner Jim Onufrechuk unveil the plaque.



• Fr. MacLellan blesses the plaque.



• The Paulencu family farm house.

CASA GOSPODĂRIEI LUI ION PAULENCU ȘI A FAMILIEI SALE LENNARD

Acasă ca și gospodăria din trecut, este recunoscută ca ultimul model de locuință construită în Manitoba în stil tradițional românesc. A fost construită de către Ion și Maria Paulencu în anul 1906, ajutați de renumitul dulgher din partea locală Alexie Slusarchuyk.

Planul ei își are originea în zona Munților Carpați din estul Europei, cu umbră, ardeaz asemănări cu casele ucrainene, care ar fi planul dreptunghiular de trei încăperi, cu ușă situată la mijloc și acoperișul cu patru versanți. Dar stilul specific românesc, se caracterizează prin realizarea unei construcții mai mari și mai bogat ornamentată. Casa Paulencu este construită din grinzi rotunde, suprapuse, înălțându-se cruci la colțurile casei, încastrate una în alta, iar capetele lor prelungindu-se puțin în afară. În partea de sus a pereților, grinzele se prelungesc treptat în straturi, formând console mari care ajută la susținerea acoperișului larg și acoperișului. Casa Paulencu a supraviețuit aproape în întregime, fiind singura rămasă dintr-o comunitate cu case gospodărești similare, construite de alți membri ai familiei și prieteni pe terenurile de pământ învecinate.

În anul 1992, membrii "Muzeului Bisericii Sântului Ilie a Primilor Locuitori Români", au salvat casa de la o iminentă distrugere și au strălucit-o în apropierea bisericii. Impunând cu Biserica Ortodoxă Română Sântului Ilie, acum restaurată, Casa Paulencu este recunoscută ca ultimul vestigiu de construcție a singurei așezări românești din Manitoba, înălțată de primii români stabiliți pe aceste meleaguri.

• The plaque in Romanian.



• Many Romanian homes featured decoratively carved interior crossbeams.



• The Yachminka Dancers entertained.



• Some of the fine folks who worked on restoring the Paulencu house over the years.

ALL PHOTOS BY BRAD GALATIUK

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*** text from article for printing ***

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TALKTOURISM

Only surviving Romanian folk-house in Manitoba

**ST. ELIJAH (1908)
PIONEER CHURCH MUSEUM COMMITTEE**

CHURCH MUSEUM AND ROMANIAN HOUSE

The St. Elijah (1908) Pioneer Church Museum Committee was created to preserve the heritage of our ancestors.

In 1979 and 1980, an old parish church, that was built in 1908, was restored to its' original condition when it was first used for worship by the pioneers of the community. This restored church is a replica of Romanian Orthodox churches in Bukovyna – a simple rectangular shape with a rounded end, interior sculptured rafters and processional crosses and icons.

A committee was set up to evaluate the condition and possibly move the former John and Mary Paulencu home just north west of the St. Elijah parish. With rumor that the house and yard may be cleared, some hasty decisions had to be made before winter. In the fall of 1992, this Romanian folkhouse was moved onto the St. Elijah Romanian Church grounds to be restored. An acre of land had to be purchased from the adjoining quarter to accommodate another building.

The house was built in 1906 and was still in reasonably good condition. In order for this project to be a success, a lot of hard work and dedication would be re-

quired from the few remaining people of our community. The house is considered a folkhouse because it is typically Romanian in style and construction. It has the characteristic deep roof sloping on all four sides with rounded, shingled corners. The roof is equipped with air vents that functioned like a chimney.

The house was originally made of logs plastered with mud and straw and then whitewashed. A verandah around three sides served as a walkway and kept rain off the whitewash.

When the folkhouse was moved to its new location, it received a new foundation and a new floor. The old floor was left behind when the house was moved. Bottom logs also had to be replaced and a new roof and shingles put on.

Keeping the restorations authentic has taken some ingenuity. Eight carpenters couldn't figure out how to do the curved corners on the roof. Replastering the walls was another challenge. First, a suitable clay site had to be found and the black dirt moved off. The clay is then dug up to loosen it, water poured in and wheat or oats straw (oats is tougher) added. Then you roll up your pantlegs, take off your shoes, put on some music and go to work. The church young people were invited to help with this activity. The clay plaster was applied by hand and was followed by a finishing plaster or very fine clay and horse manure, then a whitewash of lime and water.

When the restoration is complete, the two large rooms inside the folkhouse will be completely refurbished in typical Romanian style. The wooden beam in the front room with the inscription "built in 1906" with

be in evidence, along with the cross that was carved there so long ago for the protection of the house. There

will once again be icons, perhaps a crucifix, a statue, or a religious painting on the wall opposite the front door.

The folkhouse restoration has been accomplished largely by community volunteers including young people. The Romanian community is petering out. Where once we had over 70 members at church now we have only 30 to 35. Many of the young people are moving away. But this house, on a provincial heritage site, will be here long after we are gone to remind generations to come of their Romanian heritage.

Having these two buildings sharing adjacent yards emphasizes the relationship between pioneers and the church. They brought their faith and their way of life to Canada with them.

According to the Department of Culture and Heritage this is the only known surviving Romanian folkhouse in Manitoba.

To date most of the restoration has been completed.

In 2001, we held an official unveiling of a Manitoba Heritage Council plaque commemorating this John Paulencu family folkhouse.

On August 2 & 3, 2003, the St. Elijah Romanian Orthodox Parish will be celebrating their 100th Anniversary.

For more information or to arrange a tour, please contact Barry Sawchuk, Inglis, Manitoba R0J 0X0 2047-564-2228.

Asessippi Parkland Tourism would like to congratulate St. Elijah's Parish on the dedication and hard work to keep this part of the history of the area for future generations.

For more information on Asessippi Parkland Tourism - 204-773-4792 or 204-564-2540.