Onufrey Budnyk (1883 - 1959): a North End Winnipeg Pioneer

by David Bellhouse

The first thing I need to do is to settle on the surname. There are three variant spellings of it: Budnyk, Budnik and Budnick. The first two spellings occur on various documents and directory listings for Onufrey in Canada; Onufrey's son and grandchildren have used Budnick. Budnyk is what appears on Onufrey's birth certificate, Austro-Hungarian passport and apprenticeship papers. I have chosen to use what appears to be the original spelling.

Onufrey Budnyk was born in the village of Ilińce. ¹ If Ilińce still exists today as a separate village, or as a suburb of a larger city, it would now be in Ukraine. At the time of Onufrey Budnyk's birth in 1883, there were different political boundaries. Ilińce was in the administrative district of Sniatyn in Galicia, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Situated on the banks of the Prut River in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, the village was part of the smaller tax district of Zabłotów. ² This district took its name from a village of the same name which is across the river from Ilińce and less than a kilometer away. The village of Zabłotów also housed some government offices including the tax office and the district courthouse, and was the market town for the area.

A snapshot of the sub-district of Zabłotów district and its seventeen villages may be obtained from a census in 1900, just prior to Onufrey Budnyk's emigration from the area. The villages ranged in population from about 440 to 6740. Zabłotów, the village, and Ilińce were the second and third largest villages in the area with populations of 4232 and 3437 inhabitants respectively. Besides being the administrative centre for the area, one other thing that differentiated Zabłotów from the remaining villages was that almost half the inhabitants of Zabłotów were Jewish, while in the remaining villages only six percent of the residents were Jewish. The Jewish population in Ilińce was very small; about 97 percent of the residents of

¹ Variant spellings are Ilynci or Ilyntsi. For this, and other place names, I will use the official Austro-Hungarian spelling which is Polish.

Ilińce were Ukrainian with the remainder divided between Poles and Jews. As the market town, Zabłotów also had the railway station for the area as well as several other amenities. The town boasted a savings and loan bank. There were two lawyers, a notary, two doctors, two midwives, an apothecary and a veterinarian. The village also had two grade schools. In contrast, the village of Ilińce had only one school and no doctors, lawyers or apothecaries. There was also only one midwife to serve the community. The whole of the Zabłotów district was devoted mainly to agriculture and its inhabitants were for the most part peasants. There was only one factory in the whole area, a tobacco factory in the village of Demycze. Being predominantly Ukrainian and following the Greek rite, most villages in the area had a Greek (or Ukrainian) Catholic church in them. Ilińce, with a relatively large Ukrainian population, had both a Greek Catholic parish church and a chapel associated with the church. In Zabłotów there was both a Greek Catholic parish church and a Roman Catholic parish church for the Polish population, as well as a synagogue. In the map below the red line is the railway line and the black lines are the rivers. Hill contours are shown in light brown.



Ilińce, Zabłotów and Environs, 1909

Onufrey Budnyk was the son of Gregory and Helena Budnyk (née Dansyr or Kuszine). Gregory Budnyk was described in Onufrey's birth certificate as living on a farm so that Onufrey's grandparents were probably serfs who were among those emancipated in 1848. Onufrey Budnyk was orphaned at an early age. By the age of twenty he had been apprenticed as a shoemaker to his uncle, Wasyl Budnyk, who was also at the time described as his guardian.

² Variant spellings are Zabolotiw or Zabolotiv

The uncle was a drunk and beat his nephew. Budnyk's apprenticeship papers show that the uncle never recorded any of his work.

Although Onufrey Budnyk's specific reasons for leaving Ukraine to immigrate to Canada are unknown today, a look at the background from which he came may provide some hints. Typically at that time the vast majority of Ukrainians in Galicia were peasants, as was Onufrey's father. The other ethnic groups, Poles and Jews, were much more heavily involved in trade and commerce. By 1900 the rural areas of Galicia had become overpopulated. This can be seen in the census figures for the Zabłotów district. Between 1870 and 1880 the population in the district grew by about ½ percent per year. The annual growth rate increased substantially to 1.2 percent between 1880 and 1900. Following the emancipation of the serfs in the mid-nineteenth century, peasant land holdings began to shrink and many peasants became landless. As noted already there was very little local industry in the Zabłotów district even by 1900 so that employment opportunities for those leaving or forced from the land were limited. This general scenario probably fits Onufrey Budnyk's personal situation very well. His father was a peasant; Onufrey was not. At some time between 1880 and 1900 the family left, or were forced from, the land. Budnyk was apprenticed to his uncle to learn a trade and the relationship between them was a lot less than ideal. Along with many other Ukrainians in Galicia, Onufrey Budnyk was a prime candidate for emigration.

Onufrey Budnyk obtained his passport from the Austro-Hungarian authorities in 1903 and emigrated to Canada by about 1905. During his first winter in Canada he worked in the bush cutting trees, a typical occupation for a new immigrant. He was given room and board, and an ax. At night he slept in unheated quarters. There was frost on the wall and his hair used to stick to the wall when he slept. At the end of the winter, rather than pay, he was literally given the ax. On arriving in Western Canada, Onufrey apparently made no attempt to obtain farmland through homesteading as many other Ukrainian immigrants were doing. His family may have left the land when he was very young and consequently he had no farming experience.

In about 1907³ Budnyk settled in Winnipeg's North End, first on Flora Avenue between McKenzie and Parr. In 1908 he was working as a labourer, then the next year as a teamster. By 1909-10 he had returned to his original profession of shoemaker. From Flora Avenue he moved in 1910 to 594 Selkirk Avenue, at which location he resided for the rest of his life. That year

Budnyk bought the land and building from F.J. Dybak, a bricklayer. Dybak had erected a building valued at \$50; in 1910 the land on which the building stood was valued at \$940. Budnyk made several additions to the building. The first was made shortly after he obtained the property in 1910. Two years later the building on the land was assessed at \$2,200 and the land was valued at \$1,410. In 1920, Budnyk commissioned Winnipeg's first Jewish architect, Max Blankstein to add a second story to the building on the site. This did not happen. Four years later the second story, again designed by Blankstein, was added to the building. In 1928 the building was valued at \$5,900. Blankstein also designed and built for Budnyk a second two-story building to the west of the first. This was in 1929 just prior to the Depression. The initial valuation of this building was \$10,500. The two buildings, with street numbers from 594 to 602 Selkirk Avenue, still stand on the southeast corner of Selkirk and MacGregor in Winnipeg.



The Budnick Buildings, Selkirk and MacGregor, Winnipeg

Budnyk had a good relationship with the Jewish community in Winnipeg. This is exemplified in both his business and personal dealings. Not only was his architect Jewish but his family doctor and the real estate agent that he used were Jewish as well. This is an interesting

³ His first entry in *Henderson's City of Winnipeg Directory* is 1908.

contrast to the area in which he grew up. Zabłotów was the site in 1903 of the only Jewish pogrom to have occurred in Galicia.

The earliest entries in *Henderson's City of Winnipeg Directory* list Budnyk's first name as Frank rather than Onufrey. The English equivalent to Onufrey is Humphrey. Frank was probably an artifact of the Canadian immigration officers who assigned names in a seemingly random fashion to those immigrants who could not speak English.

Soon after he arrived in Canada, Budnyk wrote back to his native land for a wife. His mail order bride was Helena Botulinska (1885 - 1986). She was the daughter of Endro⁴

Botulinski and Franciska Botulinska (née Leschuk⁵). The Botulinskis came from the village of Zabłotów. Like Onufrey and his early years, information about Helena's early years in Zabłotów is very skimpy. She often went on day trips by train from Zabłotów to Kolomea,6 a nearby and much larger town of about 34,000 people, a town with several more amenities than Zabłotów. Sometime before she emigrated, her father died in an accident trying to move a wagon that was stuck in mud. It was her stepfather Petr Ryziuk who brought Helena to Canada in 1906.

The wedding was held in Holy Ghost Independent Greek Church and was officiated by John Bodrug. Although no longer used as a Ukrainian



Onufrey Budnyk, Helena Botulinska and Petr Ryziuk

⁴ or Andrei

⁵ or Lesczak

⁶ Variant spellings are Kołomyja or Kolomyja.

church, the building still stands on MacGregor Street, across from the Ukrainian Labour Temple. After the wedding Petr Ryziuk returned home. The young couple had two children, Natalia (Nettie) born in 1908 and Emil born in 1915.



Nettie and Emil Budnick

The fact that the wedding was held at Holy Ghost Independent Greek Church is the first indication of Budnyk's religious, and particularly his political, beliefs. Bodrug, the church's minister, was part of the original nucleus of Ukrainian intelligentsia in Canada. Arriving in Canada in 1897, his roots go back to the Ruthenian-Ukrainian Radical Party established in Galicia in 1890. Many of the first active Ukrainian community leaders were former members of the Party or were sympathetic to its cause. Bodrug was one of them. Between 1890 and 1900 the Party in Galicia split into three factions. Canadian Ukrainians similarly split into three groups. In Canada, the groups may be categorized into Protestants, nationalists and socialists. What united the groups was their opposition to the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Bodrug favoured Protestantism; Budnyk, as we shall see, favoured socialism. Bodrug studied theology under Presbyterian leadership at Manitoba College and was ordained in 1903. He went on to found the Independent Greek Church in Canada. Apparently for business reasons, Budnyk maintained good relations with the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

Budnyk obtained his naturalization papers, equivalent today to Canadian citizenship, in 1913. The next year war broke out in Europe. With the entry of Great Britain, and consequently Canada, to the war the Canadian government issued an Order-in-Council, which allowed for the registration and possible internment of "enemy aliens". About 5,000 Ukrainians were interned including some who possessed naturalization papers. The Budnyks were not among those interned. However, they had good cause for unease. On one night a gang of "patriotic" thugs came looking for "men with big mustaches". One of Budnyk's friends stayed up all night in his own home, standing behind the door holding an ax to protect himself against possible attack.

The shoe business, mostly shoe repair, continued at 594 Selkirk Avenue until 1918. Dun and Bradstreet estimated that the capital worth of the business was between \$500 and \$1,000 and gave Budnyk a credit rating of "fair to top". In 1918 Onufrey Budnyk ceased operating his shoe repair business and opened a restaurant next door at 596 Selkirk Avenue with his wife Helena. He ran the front of the restaurant and she cooked in the apartment behind it. The restaurant, which also sold fruits and confections such as ice cream, was their main business until their retirement in 1943.

The move to the restaurant business appears to be a natural progression of Onufrey Budnyk's business. He began at 594 Selkirk Avenue and subsequently made additions to this building on two or three occasions. In 1912 Isaac Kepman operated a drugstore in the same building, but next door, at 596 Selkirk. This was probably the initial expansion of the building on the sight. In the years 1914-16 the drugstore was known as Selkirk Avenue Drug Store. Beginning in 1916 or 1917 a confectionery, operated by John Cirka, replaced the drugstore. The Budnyks took over the confectionery in 1918. The shoe repair business continued to operate at 594 Selkirk for another two or three years under other individuals. By 1921 the shoe repair was closed and the restaurant and confectionery occupied the entire front of the building.

In 1924, when the second story was added to the building, now numbered 596 Selkirk Avenue, Dun and Bradstreet reappraised Onufrey Budnyk's business. They estimated his capital worth at \$2,000 to \$3,000, but left his credit rating at fair to middle. The restaurant continued to operate out of the ground floor. On the second floor, now numbered 594 Selkirk, there was an office for a dentist and another for a doctor. In the first two years of this second story addition the doctor was Brany Dyma, one of the first Ukrainian physicians to practice in Canada, and the dentist was Manoliy Mihaychuk, the first Ukrainian to practice dentistry in Canada. Mihaychuk vacated his office after two years, but Dyma remained until the late 1930s at which point he moved his office next door to 592 Selkirk Avenue.

The restaurant was frequented by a wide variety of people that ran the gamut from members of the Ukrainian Labour Temple to the priest at St. Vladimir and Olga Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral. Every day the priest sent his assistant or *dyak* to buy a meal at the Budnyk's restaurant. Although the Budnyks did not attend church themselves, twice a year at Easter and Christmas the priest was invited in for dinner and drinks. Among the customers were schoolteachers from elementary schools nearby, Aberdeen School and Strathcona School, and

businessmen such as Robert (or Reinhard) Litz, who began as a labourer, established a house moving business and diversified into heavy cranes and machinery for the construction industry. There were also members of Ukrainian National Home and the Ukrainian Association of the Chytalnia Prosvita, a reading society. There were lawyers and politicians, among them two members of the Manitoba Legislature: T.D. Ferley who had been the MLA for Gimli and J.R. Solomon who had been the MLA for Emerson. In Winnipeg Ferley had been President of the Ruthenian Farmers Elevator Company and then moved into real estate. Solomon, a lawyer who later became a judge, often came to the restaurant with friends after meetings at the National Home or the Chytalnia Prosvita. This would be in the evening when people would come to the restaurant, buy coffee for a nickel and talk for hours, endlessly arguing politics. This resulted in a long working day for the Budnyks. Helena was up at 6:00 a.m. to take deliveries and serve breakfast. At the other end of the day Onufrey did not often get to bed until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. The reason for the late hours may have been due to competition. During most of the 1930s another restaurant (known variously as Northern Light Café, Selkirk Café, and Mike's Café) operated next door. Both children worked at various times in the restaurant. There was also enough work and business that the Budnyk's employed a maid who had a room by the stairs going to the second floor of their building. For relaxation, Budnyk kept a garden with an apple tree behind the business buildings and went for walks in the summer.

The lot to the west of 594 Selkirk Avenue was a vacant corner lot owned by the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The lot, valued at \$1980 in 1912 with a \$50 building, was registered to the Ruthenian Catholic Mission. Budnyk bought the lot in the 1920s. At first he rented the lot to some others, who operated a gas pump at the location. In 1927 a tin garage, in which car repairs were done, was erected at a cost of \$200. It was only two years later that Budnyk decided to erect his two-story building, designed again by Blankstein, on the corner lot. The tin garage was moved to the back of a house he owned on Flora, directly behind the store on Selkirk Avenue. The tin garage still stands in the lane off MacGregor between Selkirk and Flora. With the erection of this new building at the corner, Dun and Bradstreet upgraded Budnyk's credit rating to the top rating. Until he retired the rating remained high, and was only downgraded a level during the height of the Depression. In 1947 the corner building was named the Budnick Block.

On the first floor of the corner building there was room for two stores. For nearly a decade the corner store was a drugstore, the Empire Drug Company. On the second floor of the corner building there was an office for a dentist and another for a doctor. Mihaychuk returned briefly in the early 1930s. The main tenants, who stayed into the 1950s, were Frank Rybak, a physician, and A. Bloom, a dentist. The second floor of the older building, now second from the corner, had a variety of tenants. Until the mid to late 1930s there was an office for a doctor, the previously mentioned Brany Dyma, and another office for a dentist, Paul Zakus. When these two moved next door to 592 Selkirk, different individuals occupied the rooms they vacated each year. Part of Budnyks' success during the Depression was due not only to the long hours they put into the restaurant, but also to the stability of the tenants who occupied their buildings.

Onufrey Budnyk was a member of the Ukrainian Labour Temple, which stands at the corner of Pritchard and MacGregor in Winnipeg. He donated money towards the cost of its construction and placed something in the cornerstone when construction was completed in 1919. Since he worked seven days a week and put in long hours each day, he seldom went to Labour Temple meetings. Helena, a member of the original Cultural Committee at the Labour Temple, acted in plays there and wrote poetry. Related to their interest in the Labour Temple, Onufrey Budnyk and his son Emil owned shares in the People's Co-operative, a cooperative dairy with very strong socialist leanings. Originating as a coal and wood cooperative in 1928 and then moving to dairy products, the Co-op ceased operation in 1992. They were also members of the Ukrainian National Home; their daughter Nettie sang in the choir. Nettie and her husband-to-be, John Kovalevich, were members of the Ukrainian Students Association in 1927. Later, Kovalevich became a minister in the United Church of Canada. Onufrey and Helena's son Emil sang for several organizations. The Budnyks were also members of the Ukrainian Association of the Chytalnia Prosvita, a cultural organization which had a library and which supported theatricals and choral performances.

To handle Winnipeg winters, Onufrey Budnyk bought a raccoon coat. Because of his long working hours and the fact that he lived behind the restaurant, Onufrey Budnyk seldom went out. The fur coat became his everyday coat that he wore on the occasions he was out of doors during the winter months. The coat is now in the Dugald Costume Museum. George Arnst, a furrier on Selkirk Avenue whose shop was across from Oretzki's Department Store, made the

coat in the late 1920s. Arnst worked there from the 1920s until 1950. Arnst often ate at Budnyk's restaurant.

Other ties to the Labour Temple were as landlord. When Budnyk's new building opened at Selkirk and MacGregor, one of the first tenants on the ground floor, next to the drugstore, was the Workers and Farmers Bookstore. Within about two years they vacated the premises. Later in 1941-42 the Workers Benevolent Association had offices in Budnyk's first building. When son Emil Budnick built a house in 1950 for his own growing family, the mortgage was held by the Workers and Farmers Benevolent Fund.

With their children heavily involved in music, the Budnyks bought a piano. Since they lived behind the restaurant, the piano was delivered through the restaurant. Some of the patrons commented at the time, "Now look where our money is going!"



Emil Budnick

In about 1938 Onufrey Budnyk began to set his son Emil up in business. He began a shoe store in partnership with Walter Strokon. The business, known as Modern Shoes Limited, replaced the Empire Drug Company at the corner of Selkirk and MacGregor. By the early 1940s Emil was working in the store as a salesman. During this time he had been called up for military service but was rejected on medical grounds. The reason was a leaky heart valve caused by rheumatic fever as a child. By 1943 Strokon had left Modern Shoes to become a salesman at another store, Berryhill Shoes farther north on Church, and Emil was the proprietor of Modern Shoes.

The Budnyks retired from the restaurant business in 1943. The business, but not the building in which the restaurant was housed, was sold to James Semeniuk who operated it under the name of "Jim's Lunch". This continued to about 1950 at which point the premises became a radio repair shop.

The Budnyk's only investment outside the familiar North End was part ownership in the Enfield Apartments on Sara Avenue near Broadway and Maryland just southwest of Central Winnipeg. In the 1930s their daughter Nettie sold some property on Selkirk Avenue. The entire

family except the father – mother, daughter and son – eventually decided to pool their money together to buy the building. The Enfield was purchased in 1946 and remained with the family until 1978.



Poem in Memory of Onufrey Budnyk

I never knew Onufrey Budnyk. He died in 1959, about a decade before I met his granddaughter Louise. When he died, his wife Helena wrote a poem to his memory. I did come to know Helena Budnyk who lived at the back of 596 Selkirk Avenue. One of my enduring memories of her was a day in 1973 when Louise and I visited her. As we came in she was reading a newspaper in Ukrainian. On one wall in the kitchen was a picture of King George VI and on another wall was a picture of Christ wearing a crown of thorns. When I asked her what was in the news, she replied that Tim Buck had died. What had made the back pages of the regular local newspaper – the death of one of the founders of the Canadian Communist Party in 1921 and its secretary from 1929 to 1961 – was a front-page article in her Communist newspaper.

Sources

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Appendix I: Onufrey Budnyk's Work Permit from Austro-Hungary

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Appendix II: Translation of the Poem

On the Grave in Lieu of Flowers To Our Father, My Husband Onufrey Budnyk

Spring has arrived, everything is alive again, The flowers are blooming
But I have no husband, no father,
I am crying and so are the children.

Daughter cries out: "Dearest father!"
His son is deeply saddened,
He recalls, the grandfather will no longer
Kiss his grandchildren.

O how the apple tree blossoms With bright, white flowers; Now, dear husband You won't take those summer walks.

Flowers in the garden Have blossomed and they are beautiful, They will no longer be seen by you, Because you are now in your grave.

This apple tree and these flowers Cry for you, You planted them, cared for them And fed them with water.

I am left alone, Dearest husband of mine, I feel an emptiness inside, I am missing you a lot. We live together for a long time, Worked hard together, Raised our children, Wished them good fortune.

Our children and grandchildren Are all saddened, Because your dear words Will never be heard again.

Yesterday was your birthday, Our father's special day, Our grandfather is gone No longer amongst us in our family

All of the grandchildren are hurt Remembering you: Johnny, Paul, Carol and Louise Are wiping their tears away.

You have stopped living with us Father, husband.
Your strength will never go out Of our hearts.

With sadness and sorrow
Wife Helen
Daughter Natalie
Son Emil
Son-in-law John
Daughter-in-law Evelyn

Winnipeg, Manitoba