



Armenian and Ruthenian Streets, Dominicans...



First Armenians settled in Lviv almost at the time it was founded, in the second half of the 13th century. Danylo Halytskyy himself invited Armenian craftsmen, who had been known for their superior skills. Initially, Armenians settled densely at the foot of the Castle Hill, now Pidzamcha Street. After Lviv had been captured by Kazimierz III, some Armenians settled in the so-called Low Castle (contrasted with the Castle Hill, often referred to as the High Castle). That's where Ormianska (Virmenska) Street (derived from Polish «Ormianie» for Armenians) emerged. However, the Armenians were known not only for their craftsmanship. Caucasian merchants played an important role in trade contacts with the countries of the East. Their caravans traveled as far as Cairo, Istanbul, and Baghdad. Goods from the East on Lviv markets were traditionally called Armenian and thus were valued highly. According to foreign merchants, as early as in the 15th century, Armenian Street, Rynok Square, and Ruthenian (Ruska) Street were cobbled, their architecture and sanitation cutting-edge. Water supply and drain sewerage were customary for residents of this district.

In 1527, a fire broke out in a brewery in the street next to Armenian. Fire spread onto Armenian Street and then over the entire town. This fire wiped out gems of Lviv's Gothic architecture.

The center of the colony's life was the Armenian Cathedral. The architectural ensemble comprises the church itself, the premises of the former nunnery, and the Palace of Armenian Archbishops. This is, by all accounts, the oldest intact edifice in Lviv which is a unique example of Armenian architecture. Solid 140-centimeter walls built of cut stone had been covered with stone slabs on the inside and outside. Some fragments dating five centuries back have lasted to this day. The structure of the dome is unique. It rests on hollow ribs made of earthenware jugs. On the whole, the cathedral has undergone a lot of changes as a result of renovations in the wake of numerous fires.

In January 2001, divine services resumed in the cathedral after a lengthy pause. Word has it, this was due to the Pope's visit to Lviv. In fact, the Pope did visit the renewed premises of the cathedral.

Spiritual life, however, always comes hand in hand with secular pleasures. At one time, a decade or two ago a coffee shop, In Virmenska, was a favorite venue for Lviv's nonconformists. A special atmosphere of olden times and modern lack of constraint, plus really delicious Turkish coffee made this place a crowd puller. There was not enough room in the coffee shop and habitués would squat right in the street. Something of the spirit of those days is still lingering in the air.

Fanciers of authentic Armenian cognac can indulge in it in the Ararat coffee shop.

Lviv's creative Bohemia is now quartered at the very end of Armenian Street, in the building of the association of artists, Dzyha (Whirligig). That's where avant-garde mixes with retro, especially in the extravagant coffee shop of the Whirligig.





The very end of Armenian Street opens on a square in front of the Monastery of the Dominicans. According to legend, Prince Lev built his manor at this site. In the late 13th century, his wife Constance invited fathers Dominicans to Lviv. At first, a small wooden monastery was built for them, and in 1405 — a Roman-Catholic Church of the God's Body. Three years from then the church burnt down. Assiduous Dominicans gradually rebuilt it, using stone and brick, in the Gothic style. The heartrending tale of Halshka Ostrozka is connected with this church.

After her famous father met his quietus, Princess Ostrozka came into a fortune. It was only natural that there instantly appeared numerous suitors eager to lay their hands on the estate of the Ostrozkyys. The girl was not really into marriage, but she was forced into marriage with Polish tycoon, Lukasz Gurka. Halshka's mother, Beata revolted against this abuse of her daughter. Aided by the king's mother, the

two of them escaped to Lviv and requested protection from the Dominicans. Disguised as an old monk, Prince Simeon Slutskyy, beloved by the daughter and mother Ostrozkyys, stole into the monastery where they secretly married.

Lukasz Gurka, exasperated by this escapade surrounded the monastery. Having shut off water supply to the monastery, he forced the escapees to give themselves up. Hapless Halshka Ostrozka was imprisoned in the High Castle pending the king's decision. The king gave Ostrozka back to Gurka. But the proud princess never recognized Lukasz as her legitimate husband. Thwarted morally, she died years later in the Polish castle of Szamotuly. To this day, locals point to the tower of the «black princess» dubbed so because until her last day she wore black apparel.

In 1707, in the refectory of the Dominicans' monastery Russian Czar Peter I signed the agreement with Polish nobles on the joint war on the Swedes.

In the mid-18th century, the old church was torn down to be replaced by a new one in Baroque style. Its façade was adorned with the Dominicans' coat-of-arms featuring a dog lying on a book and holding a torch in his mouth. «Domini canes» is Latin for the «Dogs of God». According to legend, the mother of Domingo de Guzman, founder of the Order, dreamt of an angel who told her that she would give birth to a torch, which would set fire to enemies of the holy faith. The book is a symbol of the Holy Writ.

Currently the monastery is housing the museums of history of religion. The cathedral has been given over to worshipers. Divine services are sometimes celebrated to the accompaniment of organ music. The cathedral has one of the three working organs in Lviv.





From Rynok Square you can take Serbska (Serb) Street to Staroyevreyska (Old Jewish) Street. As the latter's name suggests, this street was inhabited by the Jewish community of Lviv. Under constant pressure from the Christian majority, Jews were, nonetheless, actively doing their business in Lviv. They would lend money with interest as well as in exchange for pawned property, traded in goods from overseas and wines. The exclusive business of Jews was running illegal and half-legal brothels. One of the last of them was in the building at the corner of Serbian and Ruthenian Streets, now housing Bank Lviv. In Staroyevreyska Street, remains of the groundwork of an ancient synagogue, Golden Rose, have lasted to this day. According to legend, a certain Jew Nakhmanovich, who sponsored the construction, sacrificed the chastity of his daughter, Rosa, to obtain a permit to build the synagogue. Though another legend says that Rosa offered herself to some ranking official to obtain the permit and took her life afterwards. Another ploy is connected with the construction of the synagogue. City fathers imposed a limitation on the height of the Judaic temple so that it would not outshine Christian churches. Then inventive Jews built the floor a couple meters below ground level. In 1942 a Nazi occupation troops blew up Golden Rose. And with such precision that none of the surrounding buildings was damaged. Lviv's Jewish community hopes to rebuild the synagogue.





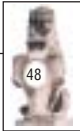
The name of Ruthenian Street does not mean that Ruthenian Ukrainians lived only there in Lviv. This block has always been a center of Ruthenian culture and Orthodoxy. Even at times when repressions of Catholics and Polish authorities were especially fierce. Building No. 20 in Ruthenian Street is especially interesting in this respect. Built for a Ukrainian insurance company, Dniester, in the early 20th century in secession style and richly decorated with ceramics and folk ornaments, it had a theater hall where the premiere of *Stolen Happiness*, a popular play by Ivan Franko was staged in 1907. A year later, a famous Ukrainian actor and director, Les Kurbas, made his debut, playing the leading part in a play called *Jews*. This building also housed a students' sports association, Ukraine. The association sired Ukraine's first ice hockey team, Ukraine, and its goalkeeper, M. Skrypiy, a.k.a. Tiger, was the first in the world to wear a protective face mask. The goalkeeper made it from an old helmet and a mesh. Currently building No. 20 houses an outpatients' clinic and gym.



The architectural ensemble of the Church of Assumption is a real gem of Ukrainian Renaissance. The church used to be patronized by the Stauropagian Society which, as has been mentioned, opposed the Catholic and Polish expansion and fought for the civil rights of the Ruthenians. Amazingly, the fight for equal rights of Ukrainian citizens with other townspeople lasted a hundred and forty (!) years. And only in 1745 were Ukrainians admitted into artisans' guilds and bodies of self-government.

The church ran a library, school, museum, and print shop. In 1918, the first assembly of the Ukrainian National Council was held here, which later turned into the Parliament of the West Ukrainian People's Republic. Under the Council's decree, on November 1, 1918 the national blue-and-yellow flag was for the first time hoisted by strilets Stepan Pankivskyy on the City Hall spire.





As in olden times, the church ensemble comprises the church itself, tower (belfry) of Kornyakt, and chapel of the Three Saints. The church dates from the mid-16th century. It stood in flames a couple of times, but each time was rebuilt mostly by the Stauropegian Society. The construction and periodical renovations of the church was sponsored by Moldavian princes, Zaporozhzhian Hetman Petro Konashevych-Sahaydachnyy, and even Russian Czar Fedor Ivanovich.

The 66 meters high tower adjoining the church is considered the most beautiful belfry in Lviv. Among its bells is Lviv's biggest bell, Kyrylo. Two meters in diameter, it weighs four tones. The resounding dong of Kyrylo has long been an object of envy of Catholic priesthood. In 1594-1595, the Stauropegian Society was contesting at law the right to sound the bell at the top of its voice.

In 1779, a misfortune befell the bell. During a downpour, the lightning hit the tower. Electricity charge was so big that part of the belfry burnt down and the bell melted. Four years later Kyrylo was cast anew (Ukrainian master F. Polyansky) and to this day it resounds above Lviv from where, by all accounts, Leopoldis started...

In fact, Halychyna and Volyn Prince and King Danylo would build castles-fortresses across the borderlands of his principality. One of them he named for his son. Historians traditionally date Lviv's age from 1256 when Leopoldis was first mentioned in the Halychyna and Volyn Chronicle. However, the other day when tram lines were being replaced in Ruthenian Street, builders, and later archaeologists, discovered the remains of a tower dating from before 1256. Unlike women, our city would not mind taking on a couple more years.



In the square in front of the Church of Assumption, there is the grand monument to Ivan Fedorov, a.k.a. Fedorovych or Muscovite. The monument was unveiled in 1975. And although historians keep arguing whether the Muscovite is in fact the first printer, he is no doubt the first Ruthenian printer. Persecuted by boyars in Moscow, Fedorov (allegedly of Belorussian descent) found sponsors and aides precisely among Lviv's Ruthenians. In all probability, here (in the Church of St. Onufriy, in Bohdan Khmelnytsky Street) the first book in the Ukrainian land, *The Apostle*, came off the presses. Here, again, he found his last repose. The work of Fedorov is continued by teachers and students of the Ukrainian Academy of Printing. One of its buildings is here, in Pidvalna (Rampart Frontage) Street. Behind the old ramparts above Pidvalna Street and hidden under the canopy of chestnuts are the solid walls of the Gunpowder Tower. But let us leave it, as well as the High Castle, for later. Let us go down now familiar Ruthenian Street and cross Rynok Square to Cathedral Square.

