

A Look Back in Time

St. Nicholas Church, 4304 17th Avenue, was first designated a local historic landmark in 1987 because of its architectural significance and because the church is associated with one of the unusual ethnic groups that gave Kenosha distinctiveness in the early twentieth century, the Russian immigrants. This church was later re-designated in July 1996.

St. Nicholas Church is a Russian Orthodox church building constructed with Romanesque Revival details. The church has a cruciform plan, a steeply-pitched intersecting gable roof, and walls constructed of brown bricks. A massive square tower projects from the center of the main elevation and is an entry pavilion for the main entrance of the building. The tower features a hip roof topped with a metal-clad octagonal belfry that has a metal-covered onion shaped dome typical of Russian Orthodox churches. A smaller belfry with an onion-shaped dome projects from the roof at the rear of the building. Openings of the church are primarily tall and narrow round-arched windows filled with pictorial stained glass. A small rose window decorates the main elevation of the tower and two small oculus windows are near the roof on the north and south walls of the tower. The main entrance consists of two modern doors decorated with a large round-arched transom filled with stained glass. The entrance is also decorated with a stone frontispiece consisting of a large round arch supported by Corinthian columns. The entire building sits on a raised foundation defined by a stone water table.

Russian immigrants in early twentieth century Kenosha formed a Russian Orthodox Mutual Aid Society in 1912 and this group soon began to organize a formal orthodox church. During the early years of the congregation, services were held in members' homes and in an Episcopal church. In 1916, the congregation began construction of a multi-purpose building that contained the church, parsonage, school, and hall. The multi-purpose building served the congregation until the present St. Nicholas Church was constructed in 1929-30. The pastor at the time, Reverend James Piatieski, was the architect for the new building. Like most churches, St. Nicholas also sponsored men's, women's, and youth's organizations for their members.

St. Nicholas Church is architecturally significant because it is a simple, yet unusual variation of the Romanesque Revival architectural style. The Romanesque Revival was a popular style for church architecture and its main features include round-arched openings and brick corbeling. St. Nicholas Church shows its Romanesque Revival style primarily in its round-arched openings. The building's primary architectural significance lies in its unusual onion-domed belfrys, a detail typical of Russian churches, but not often seen in Wisconsin's church architecture. This unusual detail identifies the church as Russian Orthodox and makes the building distinctive in the city.

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church is historically significant because it is associated with Russian immigrants in Kenosha. Ethnic churches were frequently organized in communities with ethnic enclaves, like Kenosha or

Milwaukee during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ethnic churches not only provided religion, but also social services to the people who were members, and, in some cases, the only historic resources associated with some ethnic groups are their churches. Many ethnic churches have retained their ethnic ties, although most have expanded memberships that include other ethnic groups. Kenosha's ethnic churches are historically significant because they represent the variety of immigrant settlement in the city and because they reflect the important ethnic heritage of Kenosha.

***E**njoy an ethnic experience brought to you by the Russian Orthodox church. Whether it be driving by historic St. Nicholas Church or experiencing a Sunday morning service in the Romanesque Revival church, either way, you will be rewarded with a satisfying taste of Russian culture. Something you will not soon forget.*

