

Holy Assumption can boast links to 2 saints

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Marblehead church was helped by Tsar Nicholas, Bishop Tikhon



MARBLEHEAD - The execution of Russia's last emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, and his family near the end of World War I has been researched, romanticized, fictionalized, and debated.

When Nicholas and his family — including his daughter, Anastasia, who was the focus of historical controversy for decades — were killed by a squad of Bolshevik secret police on July 17, 1918, the imperial family's lives became etched not only in world history but also in popular culture.

While the story is well known, the tsar's local connection is not. Nicholas was a key component to the establishment of Marblehead's Holy Assumption Orthodox Church, which houses gifts sent from Russia by the tsar.

Holy Assumption's beginnings sprung forth in the late 1800s, when a group of Orthodox Christian immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire immigrated to Marblehead and Kelleys Island in search of work at what was then Kelleys Island Lime and Transportation Company. "People moved where there was work," said the church's rector, the Rev. Andrew Bartek.

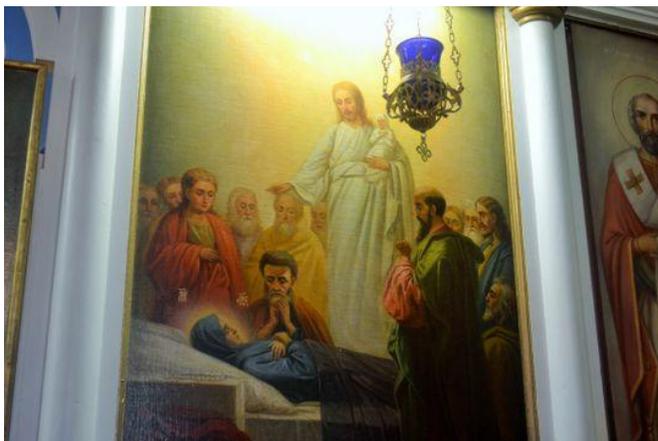


This chalice and liturgical set were gifts to the church from Tsar Nicholas II. They are still used at the church today.

Not wanting to abandon their faith in their new country, the Christians established a parish in 1898 and sought Nicholas' help in funding the construction of a church.

"They had no church. They wrote back to Russia to Nicholas," said Ron Royhab, Parish Council President.

Nicholas sent Bishop Tikhon to help. Tikhon, who headed the Russian Orthodox Church's Diocese of Alaska, which included all of North America, aided the congregation as they constructed their first church in 1899 on land they had purchased from the quarry.



This Icon of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary hangs in Holy Assumption Orthodox Church. The icon was a gift to the church from Russia's last emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, who was executed along with his family in 1918.

"I just got back from Russia, where I got to venerate the body of Patriarch Tikhon. It was the highlight of my trip," Bartek said. "He wanted to buy Kelleys Island and start a monastery there, but he was told to start one in Pennsylvania instead, and it is now the oldest monastery in America."

A split in the congregation triggered by the desire of some members to join with the Church of Rome resulted in the sale of the church in 1901. The Orthodox faithful purchased the Congregational Church building on Alexander Pike and worshiped in the church until 1905 when they traded the land to the quarry for a plot on Main Street. The congregation's present stone church at 114 E. Main St. was constructed on that land and consecrated by Tikhon in 1906.

Today, dozens of icons adorn Holy Assumption, four of which were gifts to the church from Tsar Nicholas, including the Icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, known outside the church as Santa Claus. The tsar also gave the church a chalice and liturgical set that is still used today, as well as financial assistance.

Tikhon presented the church with an icon from his personal collection and an icon from the monks of St. Panteleimon Monastery in Greece.

Not long after his visit to Marblehead, Tikhon was recalled to Russia. After his election as Patriarch of Russia in 1917, he was persecuted by the communists for defending the Orthodox faith and, according to information from Holy Assumption, was ultimately martyred on Stalin's order in 1925.

Both the tsar and Tikhon were subsequently glorified as saints by the Russian Orthodox Church, giving Holy Assumption the privilege of having tied to its history two men whom the church has honored with sainthood.



Formidable traces of Holy Assumption's astonishing history can be viewed at the church through the various icons, relics and religious artifacts highlighted in church tours led by Bartek during the church's 62nd Annual Halupki Festival on Aug. 19. Church tours take place at 2 and 4 p.m.

For more information, visit holyassumptionmarblehead.org.