

# SHAWANGUNK JOURNAL

10/4/2023 • History

7

SUB

SHAWANGUNK JOURNAL

## Kerhonkson Chapel Built to Honor Ukrainian WWII Fighters Falls to Town Zoning Code

*News By Brian Dentz*



+4



*The chapel, just before its demolition.* Brian Dentz

KERHONKSON - As fascist and totalitarian armies invaded his

home country, Colonel Petro Woynowsky led his Ukrainian fighters in their struggle against the invading German Wehrmacht and Soviet Red Army during World War II. After surviving imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp, he emigrated to the U.S. in 1949.

Shortly after building a family retreat in the tranquil woods of Kerhonkson, he was compelled to build, with his own hands, a small Ukrainian Orthodox Church. He did this “to honor the memory of his comrades who gave up their lives” said his granddaughter, Christina McMeekin.

A small metal plaque on the side of the chapel explains: “In everlasting memory of the fighters of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the soldiers of the Bukovinian Regiment who died in battle against the invaders of Ukraine, we dedicate this church memorial ... ”

That very chapel, known as Saint Volodymyr Ukrainian Orthodox Chapel on Rockhaven Road, was demolished on Sept. 23 to

accommodate a pending subdivision of the land and sale of the family house. The chapel was located on the land being separated from the house; as per the Town of Wawarsing zoning code, the chapel had to go. “I’m very sad and we were very upset about it,” McMeekin said.

The family is in the process of selling the house with eight of the 16 acres in order to help take care of the needs of elderly family, McMeekin said.

The eight acres being parceled from the land with the house, included the chapel. The subdivision of the original parcel into two lots left the chapel on its own on one lot. And any structure that does not have water and sewer and electric power is considered an “accessory structure” and not a dwelling. That left the applicants with hard choices: either abandon the subdivision, or move/demolish the chapel. Their dilemma became very clear at the meeting with the planning board as they sought some way to spare the chapel and still divide the land.

A public hearing was held by the Town of Wawarsing Planning Board on Sept. 19th to discuss the matter of dividing the 16 acres of land. “In our code you can not have an accessory structure on a property without having a dwelling. So by subdividing the church from the dwelling we would be creating a non-conformity,” explained Barbara Stanger, who works as the clerk for the Wawarsing Planning Board.

The chapel was dedicated in June 1975 with a ceremony which included five Ukrainian Orthodox priests as well as 200 participants celebrating the event, according to the Rev. George Bazylevsky, Col. Woynowsky’s son-in-law. Bazylevsky, who is a priest in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, was one of the clergy who oversaw the many religious ceremonies throughout the years at the chapel.

“My brother got married there, every Sunday there were weddings, every major holiday like Easter and Christmas,” McMeekin said.

The chapel served the Ukrainian Orthodox community in the immediate area around Kerhonkson. Another Ukrainian church just down Foordmore Road is the much larger Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church which is, while Ukrainian, not Orthodox.

Many of the religious items and books which filled the chapel will find a new home at St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary in South Bound Brook, N.J., McMeekin said.

The chapel, which stood approximately 30 feet high was built in the Cossack Baroque style, according to Bazylevsky, who helped his father-in-law on the weekends build the chapel. Cossack Baroque is an ornate architectural style popular in Ukraine in the 17th and 18th centuries. It typically incorporates a domed roof topped with a cross. The church was dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. The heavy wooden door that guarded the entrance was covered with decorative sheet metal designs with religious themes.

Forty-eight years after Col. Woynowsky erected the chapel to honor his fallen Ukrainian comrades, what's left now is a foundation, and memories.

Kerhonkson • 647 words • 5 photos