

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 88002687

Date Listed: 12/08/88

Russian Village Historic District
Property Name

New Haven
County

CT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Betty L. Savoy
Signature of the Keeper

12-8-88
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Statement of Significance

Significant Person: "N/A", not "multiple" is appropriate because criterion B is not justified in the nomination documentation.

This information was confirmed with John Herzan, National Register Coordinator, CTSHPO, by telephone.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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OCT 26 1988

NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Churaevka
other names/site number Russian Village Historic District (Use for publication.)

2. Location

street & number See continuation sheet. not for publication
city, town Southbury vicinity
state Connecticut code CT county New Haven code 009 zip code 06488

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>29</u>	<u>18</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>6</u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u>1</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>35</u>	<u>19</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] October 17, 1988
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

[Signature] 12-8-88

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structureAGRICULTURAL/animal facility/storageRELIGION/churchLANDSCAPE/forest

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structureAGRICULTURAL/animal facility/storageRELIGION/churchLANDSCAPE/forest

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stonewalls wood shingleweatherboardroof asphalt shingleother concrete/cement block

NO STYLE20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Russian Village Historic District is a small self-contained community located on a heavily wooded hill in the southwest corner of Southbury, Connecticut. Roughly wedge shaped, the district is bounded on the east by Interstate 84 and on the west by the Pomperaug River, just above its confluence with the Housatonic. Both the Pomperaug valley and the highway lie about 300 feet below the district; the land slopes sharply down to the river at 60 degrees.

The district contains 46 buildings: early-twentieth-century seasonal cottages and modern houses with their associated outbuildings, a small stone chapel, a print shop, and several agricultural buildings, all located on a network of gravel and paved roads. Some of the cottages have been modernized for year-round use, but most of them make a historical contribution to the district. Russian Village Road, the entrance road to the village, Kiev Drive, and Tolstoy Lane are the only roads in the district; none of them is a through road.

With some minor changes, the layout of the district conforms to the original survey of the 100 acre development drawn in 1927 by George Grebenstchikoff, the founder of the village. The district also includes land owned by Count Ilya Tolstoy, the son of Count Leo Tolstoy, a 16 acre parcel which was part of the village from its inception. Some of the land on the southeastern side of the village was taken for the widening of Interstate 84, but an overlay of the present tax map of the district on the 1927 plat map shows the remaining boundaries generally intact, the basic road pattern in place, and the configuration of some of the original lots. (Compare the map of the district to the copy of the original survey plan attached as Exhibit A.) The early plan was a combination of individual large lots, some already assigned to owners, and sections divided into small building lots for future development. In the latter sections, particularly those located on the steeply sloping river bank, narrow strips which were clearly never intended for building lots allowed access to the river. Today these lots, comprising about 16 acres, remain as contributing open woodland. A parcel on the north side of the village (in the center of the district map) was part of some additional land purchased for development by Grebenstchikoff in the 1930s. With the exception of a recreation building for the community on this latter parcel called "Camp Easy" which burned down and was not replaced, this area was never developed as part of the Russian Village.

Most of the original cottages, except for an American Four Square built in 1928, are vernacular buildings of no particular architectural style built between 1923 and the late 1930s. They do, however, share some common characteristics which are an

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 2 Page 1

Location

Grechenko Circle: 33, 35

Kiev Drive: 47, 50, 71, 90, 95. Also Map 19B, Block 92, Parcels 92, 102, 102A
95, 95A, 98, 99, 97, and 96.

Manor Road: 96

Russian Village Road: 50, 55, 61, 85, 100, 101, 131, 136, 140, 145, 165, 177, 185,
and 200.
Also Map 19B, Block 92, Parcel 100.

Tolstoy Lane: 3, 31, 33, 35, 39, 51, 65, 79.

Map, Block and Parcel Numbers are taken from the Tax Assessor's Records, Southbury
Town Hall, Southbury, Connecticut.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 2

interesting combination of American stylistic features and subtle influences introduced by their Russian owner/builders, such as steeply pitched roofs, dormers, and door hoods. A number of the cottages also display Colonial Revival porches which appear to be original construction. All are wood-framed buildings set on rubble-stone or cement foundations, mostly sheathed with horizontal novelty wood siding and displaying asphalt-shingled roofs.

Some of the best-preserved, unaltered examples of these cottages are the Somoff Cottage, one of few shingled versions, the Tolstoy Cottage, and the Wassil Cottage (Inventory #s 17, 51, 4; Photographs #1, 2, 3). The Ushakoff Cottage is the more conventional Four Square (Inventory # 54; Photograph # 4). The Matiuck and Ostoia Cottages have both been modernized but still retain their essential original form and display some of the Russian features. Both of these houses have the steep gabled hoods over some of the doors and windows (Inventory #s 26, 52; Photographs #5, 6). Two large wood-frame agricultural buildings are associated with the Matiuck House, both originally used for raising chickens (Inventory #s 28, 29).

The centerpiece of the village is the St. Sergius Chapel, a rubblestone building square in plan (14' x 14') with a hipped roof surmounted by a gilded onion dome with a double Russian Orthodox cross (Inventory #25; Photograph #7). The wide entrance door is elaborated by a pediment with a polychrome fresco. The interior, which contains the altar, has scrolled designs painted around the openings to the three narrow windows, one in each of the other stuccoed walls. Since the chapel is too small to contain the congregation, a small amphitheater with curved stone benches faces the facade elevation. On the west side of chapel grounds is an unusual stone and cement statue which has commemorative symbolic meaning for the village (Inventory #30; Photograph #8).

The Alatas Print Shop, built about 1930, is one of the larger buildings in the district. Originally constructed on a rubblestone foundation which has been partially replaced and extended by cement block, it has three steeply pitched gabled roofs, set one above the other. The second story is sheathed with the same novelty siding found on all but two of the cottages; the walls of the first story have been replaced by cement block (Inventory #24; Photograph #9).

A complete inventory of the contributing and non-contributing resources in the district follows. Most of the buildings are listed as contributing because of their historical significance. Because resources built less than 50 years ago are generally not classified as contributing, some of the later cottages in the district built after 1938 are listed as non-contributing, despite their historical importance as part of the village. Similarly, the significance to the community of the 1987 statue is acknowledged in Item 8, but it had to be classified as non-contributing due to its recent date. Woodland which has remained undeveloped since the founding of the village is included as contributing sites. Only one building has both architectural and historic significance, the St. Sergius Chapel.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 3

INVENTORY OF CONTRIBUTING AND NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

#	Address	Name/Type/Style/Date	C/NC	Photo
1.	33 Grecenko Circle	GRECENKO HOUSE, c. 1940	NC	
2.	33 "	Barn assoc. with #1, 1956	NC	
3.	35 "	Modern residence. 1970	NC	
4.	47 Kiev Drive	WASSIL COTTAGE, c. 1930	C	3
5.	47 "	Garage assoc. with #4, 1986	NC	
6.	50 "	Cottage, c. 1930	C	
7.	71 "	Modern residence. 1982	NC	
8.	(92:102) "	Open land, wooded	C	
9.	(92:102A) "	Open land, wooded	C	
10.	90 "	Modern residence, 1970	NC	
11.	(92:95) "	Open land, wooded	C	
12.	(92:95A) "	Open land, wooded	C	
13.	95 "	Modern residence, 1963	NC	
14.	95 "	Garage assoc. with #13, 1963	NC	
15.	(92:99) "	Open land, wooded	C	
16.	(92:98) "	Modern residence, 1984	NC	
17.	(92:97) "	SOMOFF COTTAGE, c. 1925	C	1
18.	(92:96) Kiev Drive	VON NOLDE COTTAGE, c. 1925	C	
19.	96 Manor Road	Modern residence, 1976	NC	
20.	50 Russian Village Rd.	Modern ranch, 1958	NC	

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 4

21.	55 Russian Village Rd.	GREBENSTCHIKOFF/SOBOLEV COTTAGE, 1927	C	
22.	61	"	GREBENSTCHIKOFF COTTAGE, c. 1930	C 10
23.	61	"	GREBENSTCHIKOFF PRIVY, c. 1930	C
24.	61	"	ALATAS PRINT SHOP, c.1930 foundation rebuilt, c. 1970	C 9
25.	85	"	ST. SERGIUS CHAPEL, 1930	C 7
26.	100	"	MATIUCK COTTAGE, 1931	C 5
27.	100	"	Garage assoc. with #26	C
28.	100	"	Chicken house assoc. with #26	C
29.	100	"	Brooder house assoc. with #26	C
30.	101	"	SVIATOGOR STATUE, 1987	NC 8
31.	101	"	Modern residence, 1975	NC
32.	101	"	ROMANOFF/OUSPENSKY COTTAGE, 1935 remodeled 1967	C
33.	(92:100)	"	Open land, wooded	C
34.	131	"	WASSIL/BORDOVSKY COTTAGE 1930 remodeled 1960	C
35.	136	"	REV. ALEXANDROV COTTAGE, 1930	C
36.	140	"	KARPOVITCH COTTAGE, c. 1930 remodeled, 1987	C
37.	145	"	SKRAEDOFF COTTAGE, 1940 remodeled, 1974	NC
38.	165	"	GRECHENKO/SHOOPINSKY COTTAGE 1935, remodeled 1968	C
39.	177	"	NICOOLICHEFF COTTAGE, 1928	C

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 5

40.	177	Russian Village Rd.	Garage assoc. with #39, 1930	C	
41.	177	"	Cottage, c. 1930	C	
42.	177	"	Cottage, c. 1930	C	
43.	185	"	V. SHOOPINSKY COTTAGE, c. 1930	C	
44.	200	"	House under construction	NC	
45.	3	Tolstoy Lane	MIHALCHENKO COTTAGE, c. 1930	C	
46.	3	"	Shed assoc. with #45, c. 1960	NC	
47.	31	"	LINDSEY COTTAGE, 1948 remodelled, 1983	NC	
48.	33	"	Modern residence, 1984	NC	
49.	35	"	DUNAJEFF COTTAGE, c.1928	C	
50.	35	"	Modern residence, 1967	NC	
51.	39	"	TOLSTOY COTTAGE, c. 1923	C	2
52.	51	"	OSTOIA COTTAGE. c. 1930, remodeled, c. 1970	C	6
53.	65	"	PORTNOV COTTAGE, c.1930 remodeled c. 1960	C	
54.	79	"	USHAKOFF COTTAGE, American Four Square, 1928	C	4

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number Photos Page 7:6

List of Photographs

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

All photographs listed below were taken by Cunningham Associates Ltd. in April of 1988. The negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission, Hartford, Connecticut.

1. Somoff Cottage (facing northeast).
2. Tolstoy Cottage (facing southwest).
3. Wassil Cottage (facing north).
4. Ushakoff Cottage (facing northwest).
5. Matiuck Cottage (facing northeast).
6. Ostoia Cottage (facing west).
7. St. Sergius Chapel (facing east).
8. Sviatogor Statue (facing east).
9. Alatas Print Shop (facing north).
10. Grebenstchikoff Cottage (facing northwest).

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
SOCIAL HISTORY
ARCHITECTURE
PERFORMING ARTS
COMMUNITY PLANNING

Period of Significance
1923 - 1938
1930 - 1938
1925
Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Dates
1930

Significant Person
Multiple

Architect/Builder
George Grebenstchikoff et al. See Item 8.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Russian Village Historic District is historically significant as an unique planned community which played an important cultural role in the Russian immigrant experience in the United States from 1923 to 1938 (Criterion A). The district derives added significance for its association with prominent Russian-Americans who were major contributors to the arts and sciences. It contains a well-preserved stone chapel, the architectural and religious center of the community, which is individually significant (Criterion C).

Historical Significance

Russian Village, or Churaevka, as it is known to its inhabitants, was established as a summer retreat for Russian refugees who fled from Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.¹ Not simply an ethnic neighborhood transplanted to a country setting, the village was created by two Russian writers, Count Ilya Tolstoy (1866-1933), the son of Count Leo Tolstoy, the famous novelist, and George Grebenstchikoff (n.d.-1957). Although Tolstoy was the first to discover the area when he was visiting a translator for one of his books in Southbury, it was Grebenstchikoff who dreamed of establishing a seasonal cultural center and actively planned to create a rural haven where Russian writers and artists could live and flourish.

Both men were attracted by the natural beauty of the Connecticut hills, which reminded them of the Russian countryside. The small dacha (vacation home) that Tolstoy built in 1923 is still standing, one of the few properties in the district that has not been remodelled for year-round use (Inventory #51). He likened the setting for his cottage to his family's estate near Tula, about 130 miles from Moscow, known as Yasnaya Polyana (literally clear meadow). The stands of birches on Horse Fence Hill, as it was first known in Southbury, were also a familiar sight to the first settlers, but these are no longer standing, having given way to other deciduous trees, as well as mature evergreens which were planted by the community more than 50 years ago.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bridgeport Post. July 7, 1928.

Christian Science Monitor. September 2, 1987.

Grebenschikov, Gheorghii. Il Meso: Lettere Dal Pomerag. Milano: Unione Tipographica, Corso Roma, 1935.

Schipul, Robert. "Churaevka: A Russian Village in Southbury, Connecticut." Brookfield, Connecticut, 1967.

Southbury, Connecticut. Archives of the Russian Village Association. c. 1925-1988.

Yankee Magazine. June 1970.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings

Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering

Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State historic preservation office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Specify repository:

Russian Village Association

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 110

UTM References

A 118 641541610 41591031510
Zone Easting Northing

C 118 641631610 41591021010

E 1 8 6 4 5 7 8 0 4 5 8 9 4 2 0

B 118 641561810 41591011410
Zone Easting Northing

D 118 641611618 41581951010

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The district is bounded on the west by the Pomperaug River, on the east by Interstate 84, on the north by undeveloped woodland, and on the south by a modern housing development, as shown on the map of the district taken from the Town of Southbury's Tax Assessor's Map 19B. on file at the Southbury Town Hall.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The district boundaries encompass all the historic resources associated with the development of Russian Village, a.k.a. Churaevka, including land, developed and undeveloped, and the buildings, as shown on Map 7, Southbury Town Hall, entitled "Churaevka Village, Southbury Conn." by George Grebenstchikoff, drawn by E.B. Harger, December 1927.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

name/title Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant

organization Cunningham Associates Ltd.

date 4/20/88

street & number 98 Washington Street

telephone (203) 347 4072

city or town Middletown

state CT

zip code 06457

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 2

George Grebenstchikoff, the son of a Russian peasant, was born in Churaev, Siberia. From 1925, when he came to Southbury, until his death in 1957, he used his talents as a writer to promote Churaevka, named for his birthplace. In one of his books, published in Italy in 1935, he described the area and his ongoing dream for its future. The book, Il Meso: Lettere Dal Pomerag, literally letters from the Pomerag, is liberally illustrated with photographs which capture his romantic vision of himself as a new pioneer in the Connecticut wilderness.²

Underlying this romantic metaphor, however, was the enthusiasm of a zealot combined with a surprising degree of pragmatism. He purchased most of Tolstoy's holdings in 1925. The following year he added another 100 acres to the village, purchased from a local landowner, and had begun to articulate his visionary concept for Churaevka. In an extensive interview in the Bridgeport Post, July 7, 1928, he described his threefold mission for the colony. It can be summarized as follows: In addition to his basic concept of a harmonious cultural center "conducive to creative development," he envisioned the colony as a "practical school of life." His final goal for the village was far grander in scope. Churaevka was to be an active center for the dissemination of the knowledge of Russian life (presumably that of pre-revolutionary Russia) and a force for peace in the world. He believed that a free exchange of ideas and material goods between the United States and Siberian Russia would lead to a spiritual and peaceful cooperation.³ By 1927 he had already sold some of his lots and drawn up his development plan for the community, reserving open space in a manner that anticipated modern suburban planning by many decades. Except for the fact that it never had as many settlers as Grebenstchikoff had anticipated, the village today essentially conforms to his original plan.

With its proximity to New York City, the cultural center for Russian immigrants on the eastern seaboard, Churaevka was ideally situated as a summer retreat. It had been the custom since the nineteenth century for the upper classes in Russia to have a summer house, albeit on a much grander scale than is found in the district, but very few members of this group could afford this luxury when they first came to America. Most of them took menial jobs in the city just to provide the basic necessities. The artists among them were particularly hard pressed to make a living and few were able to do so by their talent alone. Grebenstchikoff himself was unable to support himself as a writer, printer, and lecturer, and by the 1950s had to take a teaching job at Florida Southern College, using Churaevka as his summer home. As a result, although it remained predominately a Russian ethnic community through the 1980s, the village grew slowly and was not restricted to the creative intelligentsia. Those who did come to live in the village simply hoped to recapture some of the life that they had left behind in Russia. Not all of Churaevka's settlers were artists or writers, but each made a contribution to a community by keeping alive the language, faith, and customs of their Russian heritage, unconsciously fulfilling Grebenstchikoff's dream.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 3

Russian refugees who came to the village, mostly from the Ukraine and Siberia, arrived in America in three distinct periods. The first group included some of the Russian nobility who left Russia after the collapse of revolutionist Alexander Kerensky's provisional government and the assassination of the royal family, followed soon after by officers of the Imperial Army and Navy, White Russians who made a futile stand against the Bolsheviki until forced into exile. A number of this latter group first emigrated to other countries, such as Turkey or Czechoslovakia, to wait in vain for the counter revolution. The last group of immigrants to make their way to the village were some of the displaced persons of World War II.

The first colonists to buy land and build small cottages in Churaevka included Leonid Dunajeff, an inventor; George Somoff, composer Sergei Rachmaninoff's personal secretary; and Baron Leo von Nolde, another writer. (Inventory #s 49, 17, 18). Other Russian names appear on the 1927 map drawn up for Grebenstchikoff: Ivanoff, Portnov, and Ushakoff, as well as Lindsay and Tomsen, names taken by former Russians. Of these, all but Ivanoff and Tomsen would come to live in the village.

Among the earliest were the Ushakoffs, life long residents who built a summer house in 1928 (Inventory #54). Ivan and Eugenie Ushakoff were both lawyers in their homeland, Eugenie the first woman lawyer in Russia to present a case in criminal court. Ivan had also been a teacher and was twice elected to the Duma, the first national parliament, in 1906. The Ushakoffs fled from the Bolsheviki in 1919 and came to America after some years in Constantinople. Until 1930, when they retired to Churveka, they lived and worked in New York, where they had established a dressmaking business.

As might be expected, the military officer class was well represented in the village. In fact, as a group they were responsible for building the officers' club, called "Camp Easy." Basil and Helen Nicoolicheff, a couple who came to Churaevka via Constantinople and New York, were both children of the Russian military, Basil a naval officer with the Imperial Navy in Sevastopol at the time of the Revolution. Childhood friends in Russia, they met again in New York and were married there. At the time Nicoolicheff built his cottage in 1928, there were only five others in the village (Inventory #39). Gregory Tomsen, formerly Gigalovsky, is another member of a Russian military family; his father was an officer in the Imperial Army. The family found temporary refuge in Turkey, where the father supported them by driving a taxi. They came to New York in 1922. The elder Tomsen found work as an auto mechanic, his wife as a seamstress. They both saved to build a cottage on their village land but it remained for their son Gregory to do so. His cottage was destroyed by fire in 1969 and replaced by a modern house (Inventory #10).

Grebenstschikoff was responsible for several buildings in the community in addition to his cottages (Inventory #21, 22). The old printing presses, lithographic plates, and cyrillic type still survive for the Alatas Print Shop, a publishing house he established to foster the dissemination of Russian culture (Inventory #24). It

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 4

published a Russian language paper and the work of several Russian authors, in addition to his own books. In keeping with his "practical school of life" philosophy, Grebenstchikoff and his wife Tatiana, an actress in Russia, became accomplished carpenters, actively participating in the construction of most of the early houses. With the financial assistance of Igor Sikorsky, the aviation pioneer, and contributions from village members, he was instrumental in the building of a miniature Russian-style chapel on his property (Inventory #25).

The design for this individually significant chapel was drawn by Nicholas Roerich, (1874-1947), the distinguished Russian painter.⁴ The chapel was built as a memorial to the Cathedral of Our Saviour in Moscow (erected to celebrate the 1812 victory over Napoleon), which was destroyed by the Soviets in 1931, as were many other churches. It is dedicated to St. Sergius, the Russian saint who kept religion alive after the Tartar invasion of the fourteenth century. The fine stonework may have been done by a local mason, Wassileff, who was responsible for many stone walls and foundations in the district (Inventory #s 4, 34). In the early years, Russian orthodox priests from nearby cities came to the village; today the community has its own resident priest, the Reverend Dimitri Alexandrov (Inventory #35). In addition to his religious duties in the village and at a church in Hartford, the Reverend Alexandrov supports himself as an icon painter. He was responsible for the recent rebuilding of the chapel's onion dome and its gilding. The building was deeded over to the Roerich Museum in New York in 1931 and later transferred to the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

In the early years the community gathered together to socialize and celebrate Russian feast days at the Grebenstchikoffs and the Somoffs. Photographs from this period record these occasions and show the people of the village wearing native dress. They were often joined by friends from New York, fellow refugees who had made a name for themselves in the arts, those very people whom Grebenstchikoff had hoped to have as permanent community members.

Frequent guests in the village in the 1930s included distinguished Russian contributors to art, dance, music, and the theater: Grebenstchikoff's patron, the artist, Nicholas Roerich; the pianist and composer, Sergei Rachmaninoff; the actor Michael Chekhov, also a producer of his uncle Anton Chekhov's plays; and Vera and Michael Fokine, both ballet dancers. As a choreographer, Michael Fokine is credited with the development of modern ballet.⁵ Igor Sikorsky, who remained a lifelong friend and supporter of Grebenstchikoff, often visited with his family. He purchased land in the village but never built a cottage there.⁶

George Grechenko and his wife Vera were typical of those who came to the village in the 1930s. As with their predecessors, their emigration to the United States represented a drastic change in their life style. Grechenko, who escaped from Russia, where he had been a member of the White army, first emigrated to

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 5

Czechoslovakia. He built a cottage in the center of Churaevka in 1935. In 1940 he became a chicken farmer to support himself, purchasing part of what had been Tolstoy's land on the southern edge of the village (Inventory #s 38, 1). Although this venture became a profitable business, farming was quite a change for this professionally trained couple. He was a graduate engineer, educated in Czechoslovakia; his Czech wife had been trained as a doctor. Nicholas Matiuck was another emigre who established a chicken farm in this period in the northwest corner of the village. In addition to his house, he built a large chicken house and a brooder house on his extensive property and remained in business until 1980 (Inventory #s 26, 28, 29).

Michael Boris Elin and his wife also came to Churaevka in 1935, purchasing the remaining Tolstoy property with the cottage from his widow (Inventory #51). Elin came to the United States before the Revolution in 1910; his wife Iraida Peterovna and his son Kronid arrived in 1916 from Tomsk, Siberia. Kronid, who inherited the property, was a master mariner, a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy during World War II, and later became the executive vice president of a shipping company. Captain Elin, a leader and spokesman for the village, retired there with his wife Jean in 1984 (Inventory #48).

Churaevka was once again a safe haven after World War II, but it was a turbulent period for the village, particularly during the Cold War. It is clear from the few surviving records that the 1950s were a difficult time for the residents of the district, the era when Russian was synonymous with Communist in the American mindset, a gross misunderstanding of the background of the community. The villagers felt called upon to defend their patriotism and their commitment to the local community of Southbury.⁷ For the first time they referred to themselves as "Russian-Americans," calling the first organization in the community the Russian-American Village Improvement Association.

Not all of the displaced persons who took up residence in the village were of Russian origin but all of them had had their lives shattered by the war. Stephen Konczyk, a Pole born in the Russian part of his country, and Eugenia Shoopinsky were two displaced persons who came to Churaevka by very different routes. Konczyk, an officer in the Polish Army and a graduate economist in the 1930s, fought for Free Poland in World War II (Inventory #20). At the war's end, he was liberated from prison in Germany and served the U.S. Occupation forces as a translator, finally emigrating to America in 1951. Mrs. Shoopinsky, whose recent death at age 80 has saddened the community, was born in Tomsk, Siberia, where her father was helping to build the Trans-Siberian Railroad. He was captured by the advancing Red Army but eleven-year-old Eugenia and the rest of her family escaped from the port of Vladivostock on a Japanese cargo vessel bound for Korea in 1922. Three years later they settled in Harbin, Manchuria, which had a large White Russian population.⁸ Eugenia left Harbin for Brazil in 1930, making her way to New York in 1945 where she

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 6

was hired as a typist in the Russian division of the newly formed United Nations. Before her retirement in 1970, she became the supervisor of the Russian typing pool. Her husband, Andrei, a former member of the Russian Imperial Guard, was born in Smolensk. He came to New York in 1923 after living in Turkey and Bulgaria. A frequent guest in the village in the 1930s, he bought Grechenko's cottage in 1943 (Inventory #38). He married Eugenia in 1960 and they retired to Churaevka in 1968.

The Portnovs, one of the last Russian emigre couples still living in the village in 1987, exemplify the enduring tradition of the community. Margo Portnov, a refugee who left Lithuania in 1918, came to Churaevka in 1930 when Grebenstchikoff and Somoff lived there. She recalled the pleasures and difficulties of living in the village before the cottages had running water or electricity. Clothes were often washed peasant fashion on stones in the Pomperaug; villagers swam there and in the Housatonic. Mushroom-gathering and lively parties were some of her fondest memories of that period. Her husband Gregori, who did not arrive in America until the late 1950s, went into exile in Turkey in 1920 with the rest of his White Army unit, before migrating to Czechoslovakia. He lived there until the government collapsed after the Communist takeover in 1956. Their cottage has been inherited by Margo's daughter, Natalie Jahrsdoerfer (Inventory #53).

Some of the last emigres to come to the village were Nina Lindsay and Alex and Nina Sobolev. Mrs. Lindsay, a professor at Fordham for 22 years, lived in Moscow during Lenin's regime. She left Russia in 1935 to join her husband, who was already in the United States; they became year-round residents in 1948, building on the land her husband Anatole had purchased from Grebenstchikoff by 1927 (Inventory #47). The Sobolevs, who were married in the village chapel, were sponsored by Grebenstchikoff and bought his first cottage on Russian Village Road at the entrance to the village in 1950 (Inventory #23). Nina Sobolev, one the few Russians in the village to grow up under the Communist regime, was captured by the Germans in 1941 and spent most of the war in a labor camp. She taught foreign languages at the Gunnery School in Washington, Connecticut.

Beginning about 1960, some of the cottages were modernized and enlarged for retirement homes. A census of the village in 1966 indicates that approximately 90% of the owners were still of Russian origin.⁹ Eight villagers were permanent residents; the remainder were seasonal owners. Today only 15 Russian-Americans still live in Chureavka. Most of the first generation of immigrants are now deceased and their families have dispersed. Although younger Russians have bought property in recent years, only three houses today are owned by the second Churaevka generation. Estates have been sold to newcomers who are not of Russian descent, but many of them support the preservation of the community and are members of the revived community group, now called the Russian Village Association.

Despite this decline in the Russian-American population, an event took place in 1987

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 7

which demonstrates the continuing commitment of the remaining villagers to keeping alive the history and traditions of Mother Russia. A statue of an ancient Russian hero, Sviatogor, was unveiled in a public ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the St. Sergius Chapel (Inventory #25). Representing eight years of work by Walter Ouspensky, it is located next to his house overlooking the grounds of the chapel. Ouspensky, then a retired naval architect (now deceased), was the grandson of Metropolitan Platon, the leading bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution.⁹

The statue is a visible symbol of not only the special cultural heritage that produced Churaevka but also the determination to keep the village intact. Sviatogor was the most famous of a series of legendary giants in Russia from the tenth to the twelfth century who defended Mother Russia from the invading barbarian hordes. Purported to be 7' 7" tall and weighing almost 300 pounds, he served the Court of Prince Vladimir in Kiev. The prince was responsible for establishing Christianity in Russia in 988 by recognizing the Eastern Catholic religion, later known as the Russian Orthodox Church. The millenium of this event will be celebrated in Churaevka in 1988.

Notes:

1. The history of the village is drawn from several sources: land records, newspaper and magazine articles, and an unpublished graduate student paper. See Robert Schipul, "Churaevka: A Russian Village in Southbury, Connecticut," 1967. Biographical information is taken from interviews published in more than 17 newspapers and magazines between 1928 and 1987. The author has made every effort to reconcile minor discrepancies in dates or the sequence of events that have appeared in published interviews. In some cases, however, the principals are deceased and there is no way to verify the information that was attributed to them. Unfortunately, space precludes the inclusion of more than a representative group of these tragic, but courageous people, or recounting their life stories in any great detail, but copies of all the source materials are on file with the Russian Village Association for further reference. Their extensive uncatalogued archive also includes videotapes, photographs, oral histories, and home movies of the early life of the community.
2. Gheorghii Grebenschikov, Il Meso: Lettere Dal Pomerag. (Milano: Unione Tipografica Corso Roma, 1935).
3. Some of his more concrete objectives were realized. In addition to books and articles that were published in Churaevka's own print shop, a Russian language school was started for children in Bridgeport, also called Churaevka. Grebenstchikoff was active in starting the Artist and Writers of Connecticut, an organization which had its first meeting in Churaevka in 1940.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Russian Village Historic District, Southbury, Connecticut

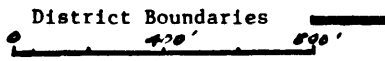
Section number 8 Page 8

4. Nicholas Roerich was a graduate of the St. Petersburg School of Fine Arts. In addition to his reknown as an artist, he was noted as a scholar, archaeologist, and a leader for world peace. See the Christian Science Monitor, September 2, 1987, p. 30. His career in the United States began with an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1920. The museum which houses most of his major work is located on West 107th Street in New York City.
5. Yankee Magazine, June, 1970, p. 73.
6. Igor Sikorsky was also a refugee who fled from Russia after the revolution, coming to Connecticut in 1918. He believed that given the exposure of the free Russian press, Grebenstchikoff would have received world acclaim for his writing. He thought that the author's partially completed multi-volume epic entitled The Brothers Churaev was on a par with Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. In Modern Russian Literature by Marc Slonin, Grebenstchikoff was classed with the "group of old and new realists" which included Bunin, Kuprin and Shmelev. Cited in Schipul, "Churaevka," 1967, p. 12, fn. 6,7. Tanya, Sikorsky's daughter, often came to Churaevka for church picnics, a customary summer outing for Russian churches in Bridgeport and other nearby cities.
7. Minutes of the meeting of the Russian American Village Association, November 17, 1953.
8. Mrs. Shoopinsky's father escaped from prison and made his way to Harbin. In 1944 he was arrested by the Russians and imprisoned along with 7000 other White Russians in a concentration camp, where he died. Her mother came to America in 1951 to live with Eugenia.
9. Schipul, "Churaevka," 1967, appendix.
10. Bishop Platon persuaded President Woodrow Wilson to supply arms to the White Army in Odessa which allowed it to hold the city in 1919. Shipments of supplies to the White Army ceased when the United States recognized the Bolshevik government. He consecrated the St. Sergius Chapel in 1932. The history of Sviagtogor was taken from Ouspensky's speech read at the unveiling of the statue.

RUSSIAN VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

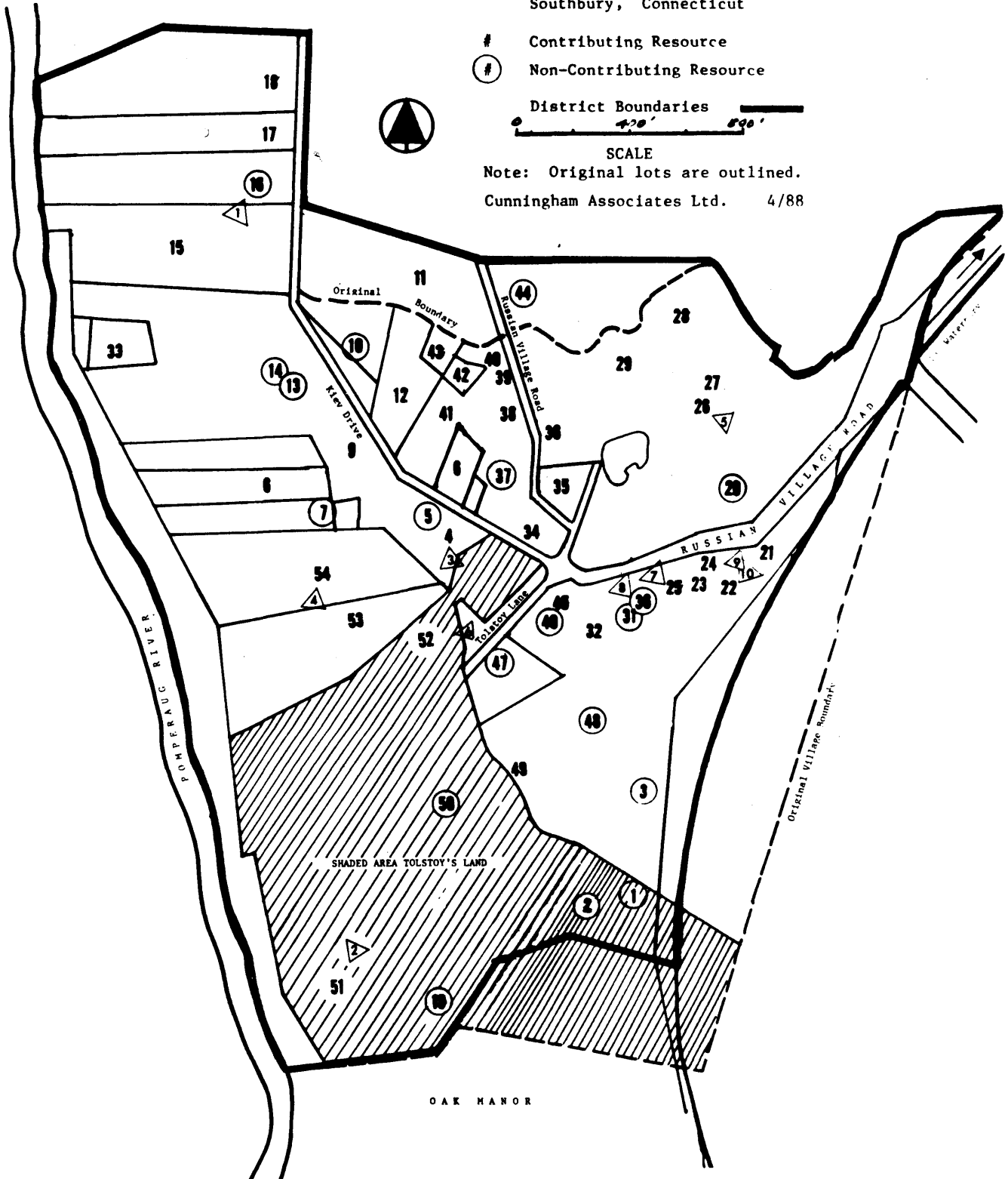
Southbury, Connecticut

- # Contributing Resource
- ⊕ Non-Contributing Resource



SCALE

Note: Original lots are outlined.
Cunningham Associates Ltd. 4/88



OAK MANOR

1. Map #47, Southbury Town Hall, Southbury, Connecticut. 1927

CHURAEVKA VILLAGE
 Southbury, Conn.
 Developed by
 GEORGIE D. GREBENTSCHIKOFF

Scale
 1" = 100'

Map made
 Dec. 1927
 Kirby Geo. E. ...

