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Translated by G. Gressa, C-RKB – original article provided by W. Maksimovich via R. Custer, C-RS

Their tears could not extinguish the wooden church

- This is terrible! First through holes in domes rose smoke,
and instantly the entire roof was ablaze.
- described by residents of the Bieszczady village of Komancha.



Orthodox wooden church (formerly Greek Catholic) in Komancha one of only 3 remaining wooden churches of the type Wschodnio-łemko (tzw. Osławickiego)



Remnants of the knave and an Orthodox cross – in the background is all that remains after the fire at the Church of the Protection of the Mother of God in Komancha

While flames shot into the dark sky, an elderly Lemko woman looked on in tears. – *What now will be, what now will happen?* – uncontrollably sobbed **Eva Kopylec**. She resides a few xxxx meters from the burned wooden church in Komancha. This woman said: *This is as if a person has died ...*

The wooden church began to die Wednesday just before nightfall. First was noticed the smell of smoke and plumes of smoke rising over the hill, on which 200 years ago a wooden church was built. A neighbor ran up, she screamed: „*Our church is on fire!*”. I answered her: „*It is impossible!*”. *I did not believe it* – said **Eva Kopylec**.

The Fire Brigade gave the alarm a quarter of an hour before the nineteenth hour. [6:45 pm].

According to the first volunteers of the Fire Brigade – *we only had two thousand liters of water in our vehicle, this was beyond too little* – said the commandant of the subsections, **Alexandras Hulicki**. *We needed help: the fire was getting larger. This was terrible! First smoke was rising through holes in the domes and then the entire roof was ablaze. Quickly the firemen’s water ran out, we could only stand and break down in each others arms.*

Everybody knows it was that it was not enough to deliver/save the wooden church! said **Danuta Dolzhycka**.

Only after some time did volunteers arrive from Tarnava almost 25 km away at about 19.28 [7:28 pm]

Also

– *From the District Command of State Fire Brigades in Sanok we had to travel 40 km to arrive. The roof was already in ruins. Additional water was obtained from a brook several hundred meters away.*

– *When the additional firemen came, the entire interior of the church was engulfed in flames. The fire threatened to spread to the nearby wooden bell tower located close to the church but did not, because we concentrated and soaked it with water – related Commander **Marek Marcinik** from Life-saving-Commando Gashnichej PSP in Sanok.*

– *At first there was fear that under the parquet floor there could be remains of explosives from the times of war, therefore the nearby homes were evacuated of all civilians, but this fear proved to be unfounded.*

Residents, who ran down here, did not hide at all their tears.

– *With the smoke went the pride of this part of Lemkovyna, as well as part of the life in Komancha. Our village already never will be the same as it was. We Greek Catholics we all live the same, because after all, all of us are brothers. At one time formerly this was a Greek Catholic Church built by our ancestors – spoke with breaking voice **Bogdan Dolzhycki**.*

The last time services were held was Tuesday, the day before the fire.

– *forty days had passed since the death of my husband and we performed on this occasion Service God's – told **Eva Kopylec**.*

And she remembered ancient times:

– *Once resided here several hundred native persons. Then after a long time they went away. Services here now served twenty, thirty persons,
xxxxxxx*



In the inside of burnt church was located a particularly rich iconostas from about the first half of the XIX century

Priest **Jan Antonowycz**, the chancellor of orthodox curia in Sanok, was deeply saddened by the fire: – *This is a huge tragedy. It is a great loss, not only for us Orthodox, but for all cultures. – we will not be able to rebuild this site of the fire by ourselves* – he spoke, while the ruins still smoldered.

An investigative probe to determine the cause of the fire has begun. The police and public prosecutor have already arrived. – *No one can yet tell what the source of the fire was, But when we arrived, the most ablaze was the center of the church* – said asp. Szt. **Marek Marcinik**.

Eva Kopylec added: – *If candle, if recent? It is not, everybody knows.*

And can this be the fault of tourists?

Because not long before the fire a group of tourists visited inside the wooden church, as this church was a pretty popular attraction in the Bieszczady. But above all this was the place for Lemkos in Komancha and neighboring small villages to worship.

- *I am not surprised by their tears. What burned had great value to this orthodox congregation, mainly emotional value. Yes, one can rebuild the structure, but this will not restore the original feeling of the place. –* ascertained **Antoni Bosak**, chief administrator of the regional Office of The Office of The Conservation of Monuments in Przemysl.

Decision about reconstruction was reached yesterday, when **Archbishop Adam Dubec**, Lord Przemysl-Nowy Sadecki Eparchies Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church viewed the steaming ruins.

-- How can we afford even more. – Not long ago we repaired the parquet floor, recently we wanted to restore the walls. Previous funds were given to the Lemko residents from people from foreign countries. Can and now are they willing to assist?

– exclaims the priest from the Orthodox church in Komancha.

– *Our community is not large, therefore we appeal for assistance to the folks of good heart* – says ks. **Jan Antonowycz**.

This fire is the third wooden church fire in the last fairly recent summers in the Bieszczady. From the fire of the wooden Greek Catholic church in Kulashne, near Komancha which with unknown cause exploded into flames in 1974., only the bell tower escaped, but that tower was built of bricks. In 1981 burned the wooden church in Lipiu near Sanok.

On the parish grounds in Komancha there are still some wooden monuments. If they began to burn, it is certain we would need assistance – with regard to distance – and time. – We have to correct our firefighting equipment. They do what they can, but without better implements they are without strength – said chief officer of the group of villages parishes Komancha, **Stanislav Bielavka**.

The Lemkos look at the site of the fire with sadness. It is certain this Sunday, that Orthodox people from other small villages will come here for a service.

– *We had an annual church fair every fourteenth of October. It is already less than a month away. We were always proud even though we have little, but now we have lost everything. Now what will happen with us?* – exclaimed **Eva Kopylec**.

PETER SUBIK

Editor: Author

NOTE –

The parish plans to rebuild the church; financial assistance can be sent to their bank account:

Parafia Prawosławna w Komanczy
[The Orthodox Parish in Komanza]
PBS o/Sanok
97 8642 0002 2001 0033 7832 0001

