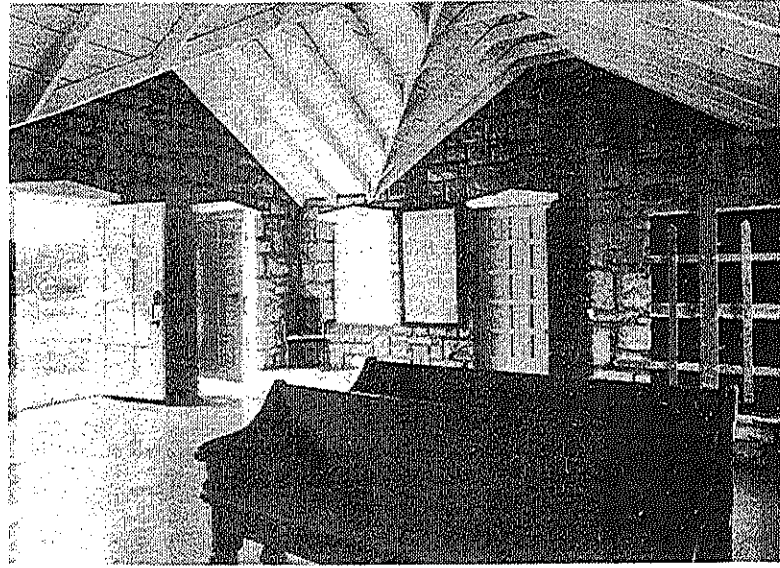


Lee Shriver takes a break from painting the doors at the Olathe Cemetery Chapel this week.



The restored interior of the chapel, with its coffin shelves at the far right.



Maureen McAnarney and her former students stand in front of the fireplace and plaque while making a donation Saturday.

Photos by Scott Smith

Cemetery chapel dedicated after restoration

By GREG SACKUVICH
Daily News Reporter

Fifty years after it was built, the tiny chapel at Olathe Cemetery has been rediscovered and restored in the hopes that it may some day be used for some sort of church service.

In ceremonies Saturday, Phil Mapes, Olathe City Council member, unveiled a plaque honoring the Olathe Lions Club for its work in restoring the chapel, which has never been used.

The chapel was built as a WPA project about 1935, during the Great Depression. During those bleak times, the city of Olathe donated limestone rocks so that unemployed men could be put to

work in the government project. Those workers made quick work of the 20-foot square chapel, constructing it at the southwest entrance of the cemetery, between Chestnut Street and the World War I memorial.

City officials wanted the chapel used for graveside services, and possibly to hold coffins until weather allowed them to be buried.

"I guess that's why it was built, but I guess the families didn't want to leave the bodies out there by themselves," said the sexton of the cemetery, Pat Simpson. "They built two shelves so they could have room for two caskets, but they were

never used, according to everyone I've talked to."

And so the chapel was not used for years, then was later used as restrooms and to store gardening equipment for the cemetery.

"I hated that," Simpson said. "It has always been a favorite spot of mine."

And so Simpson went to work, seeking help in restoring the old chapel. She quickly found two allies in Marlene Natoli, of the Olathe Parks and Recreation Department and Lee Shriver, of the Lions Club.

"I've always been interested in history, and I wondered about this," Shriver said. "I didn't know much about it, except that it was an eyesore."

And so Shriver talked the Lions Club into restoring the building, and Natoli talked the city into helping.

The Lions Club set aside \$1,000 for the project, and eventually spent \$750, Shriver said. Members donated their labor to gut the building and begin the restoration.

Some students even pitched in. After touring the cemetery last school year, Maureen McAnarney's fourth grade students at Washington Elementary School staged a bake sale, raising \$66 for the project.

"We just took everything out," Shriver said of work at the chapel. "We filled two dump trucks. We took the restrooms

out, and decided not to try to fix them. They may have been used at one time, but it's been awhile

The city chipped in by replacing the roof, running an electrical line to the building and landscaping the area, planting shrubs.

The project was almost finished in May, but vandals kicked in the doors to the chapel, delaying the grand reopening.

"I hoped we'd have it done by Memorial Day, but ..." Shriver said. "I just hope they put it to use."

Simpson echoed those feelings. "I'd love to start using it for services in the winter," she said. "I'd like to show it to kids on tours. I just hope it will work."