**The Shirkov Parish.**

To the north - west of Tver among The Valdai Hills, which are covered with confferous and deciduous forest, there is a long chain offour lakes, formed from the river Volga: the Sterzh, Vseloog, Peno and Volgo. These are the upper reaches of the great Russian River Volga. Until the middle of the 19th centory the river was not abundant in water, but in 1843 a dam was built below the present Volgo lake which caused this formation of lakes (The dam was recon structed in 1943).

The Upper Volga is interesting not only for its picturesque suroundings but also for its reach history. In early prehistoric times - mainly during the Stone Age and the Broze Age - this area was already populated by hunters and fishermen.

The ancient Pinns were the first inhabitants of this territory for many centuries. From the 9th century the Slav tribe, Lreeveech lived here, but from the 12th century onwards the Novgorod Slav community was the main population . This land has witnessed many important events of our history such as internal feuds between Princes; Khan Batu"s invasion; and the long and stubborn struggle against Lithuanian and Polish invaders. The oldest paths of trading ran across this territory. The land knew periods of flourishing as well as periods of devastation. Nowdays it is a picturesque region ideal for rest and tourism. Many old relicts and monuments of various ages have been well preserved.

One of the most beautiful spots of the Upper Volga is on the Vseloog lake .

In ancient times there were settlements and a heathen temple here. Today one can see the Shirkov Parish. For three centuries it has been standing in full harmony with the rivers, boundless fore4st and vast skies. Nature and architecture in harmony.

The origin of the name of grave - yard is unknown. The unique Shirkiov ar- chitecture was created by nameless masters. In an old contract, drawn up by the carpenter"s team, who were to build the church, there was the following recommendation: " Build a temple as large and beautiful as your senses command" These words show the character of Russian wooden architecture at its best. The ability of our ancestors to select the sites for their settlements and churches is also well known.

The wooden Ioan Predtechy church is the oldest monument in the Shirkon Pa - rish. It is considered to be finest piece of national wooden architecture. The best traditions of Russian carpenters are exemplified in this masterpiece. It is a peasant"s spacimen of beauty born in daily work and in permanent contact with the field, forest, rivers and village houses. Creatness and simplicity , power and elegance go together simultaneously.

The Ioan Predtechy church is the most interesting wooden tier church of the " tetrehedron on a tetrehedron" style. As far back as 1887 it was noted that " as for Russian architecture, the exterior of the church is unusual and of great interest". This style of church was popular in former times. Thus we known about the existance of similar churches in the Nilowa Stolbenskaya her - mitage from the middle of the 17th centory.

According to the certifecate compiled by the priest of Shirkov church Illynsky, in respose to a census, offered by the Emperor of the Archaeological Comission of the Academy of Arts in 1880s on the basis of the clerge register ( which unfortunately has not been preserved), the church is dated from 1694.