

Ben Schachter

Historical Minute

Overlooking the Passaic River, the Vanderpoel castle<sup>on River Road</sup> was built by George and Maria Vanderpoel in 1885. After the deaths of George and Maria, the castle was left in the hands of their son, failed-lawyer turned recluse Ambrose Vanderpoel. While in his castle, Ambrose devoted much of his time to writing "A History of Chatham, New Jersey" despite residing in Summit itself. After Ambrose's death in 1942, the castle was sold to Victor Zahodiakin, who operated the mansion first as a metalworking plant, but later divided it up into various apartments, which he left to his widow, Mrs. Tania Zahodiakin.

However, in August 1968, Mrs. Zahodiakin had a legal battle with the New Jersey Department of Transportation over the fate of the castle. The Department hoped to build a service road for Route 24 where the castle stood – but Mrs. Zahodiakin refused to sell the castle. Seeing no other path forward, the Department filed for an order of condemnation, which the courts accepted. Seeing as such, the castle was torn down and the road was built in its place.

The act of building the service road at the expense of the castle certainly raises an interesting question of what government ought to do when history stands at odds with progress. In this case, the government decided that the blossoming infrastructure was of more importance than the historical value of the castle. However, this is a question that the council continues to encounter today, and is not one that is going away soon.

Thank you.