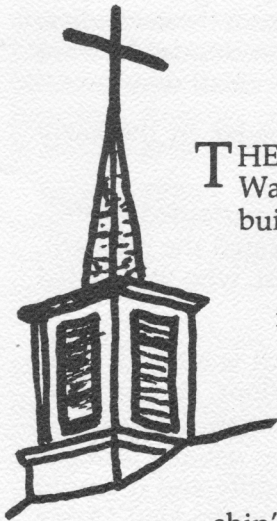


ISLAND (ST. WENCESLAUS) CHURCH TOWN OF WATERLOO



THE only registered landmark in the Town of Waterloo is the Island (St. Wenceslaus) church, built in 1863 as a mission Catholic church. Today (since 1976) it is owned, maintained and managed by the Island Church Foundation, Inc. It is recognized as non-sectarian.

Organizers of that first congregation (in 1863) selected a choice spot for the mission church, a hill, overlooking acres of countryside. Visitors today continue to enjoy the scenic beauty, truly one of the township's finest.

The tiny mission church measures only 32x24 feet, on a log foundation. Richard W. E. Perrin in his book, "The Architecture of Wisconsin" described the Island (St. Wenceslaus) church in this manner:

"Very Eastern in feeling and bearing some resemblance to primitive Slavic churches of log and timber construction is St. Wenceslaus Roman Catholic Church, situated five miles east of Waterloo, in Jefferson County. Built about 1863 by immigrant settlers from Bohemia, the walls of the church are solid tamarack log construction. The outside surfaces were sheathed with vertical boards and batten, but it is questionable this was the original treatment. It is much more probable that the log walls remained exposed until about 1870, when log buildings were generally being covered for reasons of weather-proofing. The inside of the church is extremely plain, with half inch of lime plaster troweled directly to the log walls and left in its original off-white color. Original, unpainted pine pews (hand made by Johann Fiedler) are still in place. The pew ends were cut out to an unusual profile, and all the woodwork has mellowed to the honey color which is characteristic of white pine upon prolonged exposure. A small iron stove with an extended stove pipe stands in the aisle, exactly where it stood over 100 years ago. The altar is enameled white and bears a Greek cross on its frontal panel. Over the tabernacle, and tight against the ceiling, is a polychrome picture of St. Wenceslaus, patron of Bohemia, flanked by the Blessed Virgin and St.

Joseph. The stations of the cross, in the form of framed pictures were placed very close to the ceiling — a typical Slavic treatment — and under each station is a simple L-shaped wrought iron (tin) candle holder, driven into the log wall. Lights from these candles, the six altar candles, and from two oil lanterns on standards, were the sole source of illumination, other than four small windows."

Effie Loomer, writing for the Lake Mills Leader in the early 1970's, added to that description:

"At the front of the church, on the left is the curtained confessional. Behind the curtain, a crude screen separated the penitent, kneeling on a rough hard kneeler, from the priest, who was seated on an equally hard, rough bench.

"The choir 'loft' at the left rear of the church is a rough platform raised about three feet above the church floor. At one time, music for the Mass was played on a small reed organ. The bell still hangs in the steeple". (The organ mentioned was usually brought to the church, by lumber-wagon by the Heil family and it would be returned to their home after the service. Mrs. John Heil (Anna Doubrawa Heil) served as the organist for many years.

Ancestors Involved

It is interesting to note that among those who today are active in the preservation of the church building are ancestors of families involved in the early history of the church. Some of the early involvements are related in the solicited paragraphs that follow:

Johann Fischer, Sr. and wife Ann Habieger Fischer migrated from near Blatz, Austria to the United States in 1850. They brought with them family members: John Jr., a daughter Anna, and they settled on a farm adjacent to the Island (St. Wenceslaus) church. Sons Charles, Joseph, Adolph and daughter, Mary were born in the States.

That farm was in the Fischer family for more than 100 years, and members of the family took part in all phases of the activities in the little mission church and the school that was established there. Charles and Joseph Fischer always made their home on the Island. The former often recalled cutting logs in the winter that were brought to the church building site across the ice on the Crawfish River. Joseph lived on the "home place" and served the church in many capacities, like building fires, maintaining the grounds, ringing the bell. The church bell was rung not only for church services but also for the Angelus each day at 6 a.m., 12 o'clock noon and at 6:00 p.m.

John Blaschke was born in Austria in 1817. He was married to Barbara Skalicky (Skalitzky) in 1844-45 and emigrated to the United States and homesteaded on the Island in 1852. He bought about 49 acres of land in section 10 of the Waterloo Township. Later that farm was owned by Ernest Fischer. Some time after the birth of their son, John, in 1858, the family moved to Amherst Junction. Rosalie, one of the daughters, returned to live in the Waterloo area as the wife of Frank Hiebel, Jr.

In the 1880's John Blaska (the name had been Anglicized) returned to Waterloo from Amherst Junction. On July 7th, 1884 he and Anna Herman Fiedler were married at St. Wenceslaus Island Church.

Anna Haberman Fiedler Blaska had one step-brother, Joseph Fiedler, the only son of Johann Fiedler and Rosalie Peschl. He lived most of his life in a log cabin near the St. Wenceslaus Island Church. The home was destroyed by fire. Their father emigrated from Germany where he was a cabinet maker. He is credited with hand hewing the pine pews in the church.

Franz and Rose Janisch Stangler and their five children came to America and the Waterloo Township in 1863 and the younger Stangler children attended the mission school at the church site. In 1878 Anton Schuster and Theresa Stangler were married and settled in the area. Theresa's sister, Rose, was married to Michael Yanker at the St. Wenceslaus church on the Island in 1877.

Preservation Move Begins in 1970

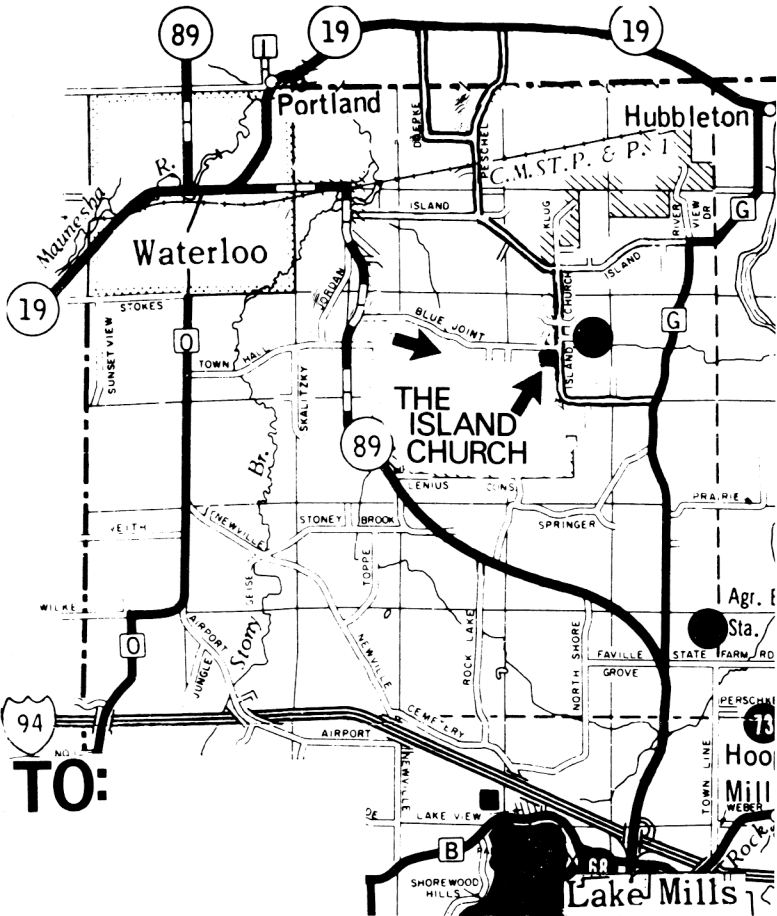
It was in the fall of 1970, when a Milwaukee newspaper carried the release that the St. Wenceslaus church in the town of Waterloo had been given to the State Historical Society, to be moved to Old World Wisconsin, that a local committee was appointed to study ways and means to preserve the historic church at its original site. Named were: Edward Peschel, Ernest Scribner, Les Doubrawa, Roy Haberman, Dorothea Fischer and Kate Radke with James Peschel to serve as the liaison for the St. Josephs congregation. That was done at a meeting at the St. Joseph School where the consensus of the meeting was that the church should be preserved in the Town of Waterloo.

Through the years that followed there were a number of changes in the committee membership. All worked hard and diligently, with one aim: to provide a means to keep the church on its original site. It wasn't until 1976 that the building (not the site) was made available to the Island Church Foundation, Inc., for the sum of \$3,000.00 by the Madison Diocese of the Catholic church.

The mission church stands today, as it did in 1863, on a knoll that overlooks the countryside. One of the most restful and inspiring spots in the township.

Since 1976 the church, now non-sectarian, is owned, preserved, restored and managed by the Island Church Foundation, a non-profit organization founded to maintain the church on its original site.

It is open to the public every fourth Sunday of the month, May through September, and by appointment. Address: Box 12, Waterloo, Wis. 53594.



More concerning the history of the mission church and Foundation formed to preserve it will be included in subsequent releases of this type. More information is solicited.

Doris Deppe, Foundation historian, has made a concerted effort to learn about the heavy wooden cross that stands in the church today. It appears to be weather beaten, suggesting that it might have been used out of doors. It has been suggested that it was used on the original church and that when the logs were covered with boards and batten the belfry-steeple was added to the building and would not support the heavy cross. Another possibility is that it marked the Christian school house on the lot. Neither possibility has been substantiated.

In 1970 members of the Waterloo Knights of Columbus, Council 1669, erected a wooden marker on the church site that read, "The Island Church, Built in 1863, St. Wenceslaus Church served families who came chiefly from Bohemia and Germany. The little church significant in Wisconsin architectural heritage, closed in 1891. It still opens for special Masses. — 1970" Vandals destroyed the standard. It was replaced with the plaque, mounted on a standing rock.

A committee, headed by Dan Burbach, George Reedy and Les Doubrawa was responsible for the erecting of that stone and marker. It stands today as a feature of the site. Today the church is listed in the State Register of landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places in Wisconsin.

This summer (1983) the Island (St. Wenceslaus) will be open to visitors every fourth Sunday of the month, May through September from 2 until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and by appointment. The annual picnic on the grounds will be held August 14th and the St. Wenceslaus Day services will be Sept. 25th.

Serving on the Board of Directors at this time are: Layton Zickert, Bruce Schultz, Martha Sillman, Alfred Klug, Kate Radke, Doris Deppe, Dorothea Fischer, Don Vehlow, Carl Schroeder, Ray Radke, Juan Edwards, Debbie Quinn, all of Waterloo; Clarence Kowski, Lake Mills; Bernadine Skalitzky, Columbus; and Juanita Blaska, Sun Prairie-Marshall. Address: Box 12 - Waterloo, WI 53594.

Take Island Church Road off County Highway G between Lake Mills and Hubbleton; or Blue Joint Road off Highway 89 between Waterloo and Lake Mills.