

# ISLAND (ST. WENCESLAUS) CHURCH TOWN OF WATERLOO



THIS is the third in a series of brochures written to give the history of the Island Church Foundation, Inc., the highlights of the history of the Island (St. Wenceslaus) church itself, and some facts concerning the early life of the "Island" community. The series is made available by the Foundation, contributed to by area residents.

It was on April 23, 1976 that the Island Church Foundation, Inc., was organized and chartered. Fifteen directors were elected at that first meeting. Of that group Edward Peschel was elected president; Byron McClellan, vice-president; Kate Radke, secretary; Jerome Blaska, treasurer. The other directors elected were Bernadine Skalitzky, Bruce Schultz, Leonard Janisch, Mel Cyrak, Les Doubrawa, Doris Deppe, Don Vehlow, Stanley Deppe, Dorothea Fischer, Ray Radke and Juanita Blaska.

The nucleus of the organization was a group of individuals dedicated to the preservation of the Island (St. Wenceslaus) Church on its original site, organized about six years earlier. During that six year period the committee sponsored fund raisers, to generate cash for the eventual purchase of the church; and took on the responsibilities of the care of the church yard and cemetery adjacent. This was a show of determination, and faith that the goal would be met.

It was on January 10, 1977 that the purchase of the church from the Madison Catholic Diocese was finalized at a cost of \$3,000.00. The cemetery was not included in the description of the property, the care of it remains the responsibility of St. Josephs Catholic Church, Waterloo.

The seven years since have been busy, active, productive years. The church, now non-denominational, has been shingled, the interior and exterior have been painted, windows replaced, floor leveled, foundation strengthened, and, in the interest of public safety, the front steps have been replaced — to list the major projects.

Two tracts of land have been donated to the Foundation. Lester and Dorothea Fischer donated an area just south of the church site on which an all-purpose building has been constructed. A similar piece of land, across the highway from the church site, was donated by William and Irene Zickert to be used as a parking lot. Both serve the Foundation well, especially in connection with the annual Island Church picnic. The picnics have become an annual event and not only provide an opportunity to promote public interest in the aims and needs of the Foundation, but generate a renewed interest in neighborliness in the rural community known as "The Island".

Memberships, donations and memorial givings, along with the picnic profits are the major sources of revenue and have supported the Foundation projects to date.

Memberships are always accepted. Once a member, always a member, there are no membership renewal dues. Memorial givings are accepted in any amount. The name of the individual so honored is placed on a memorial cross. When, and if, the giving in the name of any individual reaches \$300.00, that name is engraved on a memorial plaque. Both the crosses and the plaques, along with a membership plaque, are displayed in the church.

### **Area History**

The early entertainment center of the Island Community was today's Kowski farm, owned earlier by the Leschinger family. There was a dance hall, store, blacksmith shop, slaughter house and ice house in the complex. Ice was cut and hauled from the Crawfish River. What was the ice house and the blacksmith shop still stand on the farm, owned by Charles Kowski, a third generation Kowski. The house stood near the bottom of the hill. It was later moved to the top of the hill in the area of the other buildings where it was combined with the store to enlarge the home. An apartment was added to that home in 1912. The home burned in 1948.

Family pictures show crowds of people at the "Center" where picnics, dances, baseball games, tug-of-war pulls and such were popular. The "Island Tug-of-War Team" took the state championship in 1911 and held that honor for several years. Team members were: Otto Michel, William Kowski, Victor Deppe, Robert Fischer, Arthur Draeger, Henry Haberman, Frank Michel and Victor Draeger, with Edward Radke as manager.

River boats would come to the lower level of that complex of buildings known as the Center and provide supplies. That route was made possible by the dam that provided the water to operate

the Milford Mill. In about 1883 drainage operations started and much of the marsh land was made fit for cropping — that followed the burning of that popular Milford Mill.

That Mill and the Dairy at Milford were trade centers for the Island farmers. Grain was taken to the mill to be ground into flour and butter and cheese; Colby and Cheddar, were available at the Dairy.

Thomas and Richard Hooper came to the Milford area from England and in 1849 constructed a mill and home of stone, from an area quarry. The buildings burned 40 years later. The Hooper family continued to operate the business until 1948 when Raymond Kowski, of the Island Kowskis, and his brother-in-law, Alvin Vehlow (Mrs. Vehlow is the former Bernice Kowski) bought the business. In January, 1979, Don Vehlow purchased the Kowski share and father and son operated the business for two years, when Don Vehlow assumed full ownership.

The dairy mentioned was built in 1872. Clarence Kowski, another son of the Island Kowski family (William and Ella Fischer Kowski) bought the business in 1945 and operated it until 1973.

### **Blue Joint — Island — Hog Island**

Blue Joint, The Island and Hog Island are terms long associated with the area that surrounds the Island, St. Wenceslaus, church. Before the drainage to improve the land for agricultural purposes, the area immediately surrounding the site of the church was marsh land and Blue Joint marsh hay was harvested from it. Hence: Island and Blue Joint.

Hog Island came into common usage about the time the railroad was extended from Portland to Waterloo. There was a hog rustling incident that involved the railroad crew and area farmers that was highly publicized and "Hog Island" came into being.

### **Gold on the Island**

In 1900 there was a rumor that there "was Gold in them-there Hills", in the Waterloo Township, in close proximity to the Island Church. An item in the Lake Mills Leader (December 1900) read: "There has been considerable excitement at Waterloo for a week past over the discovery of some gold nuggets in the gizzard of a duck which was being dressed for Thanksgiving dinner by Mrs. John Spies. The duck was purchased at a local butcher and was raised by Fred Haberman, who resides on a farm on what is known as the Island. There were several nuggets found and it was supposed that they were picked up by the duck while feeding

about the farm. If it proves true there is gold on the Island, in the town of Waterloo, there will be a great advance in the price of farm land in that vicinity" — No Gold rush was ever reported.

### **Altar Boy in 1902**

Emil Bartosch, formerly of Waterloo, more recently of Lowell and Beaver Dam, recalls serving as Altar Boy at the Island, St. Wenceslaus, Church in 1902 when he was about 12 years old. He would accompany the priest from Waterloo to the rural church and in the spring, when the roads were muddy, they would have to walk, so that the rig would not get mired.

The Fischer and Setz families, and others, who lived in the area recall that for quite a time the Waterloo Priest would serve the Island Parish and the Lake Mills Parish on alternate Sundays.

### **Additional Names**

In the first of this series of brochures, printed in 1982, there was a listing of early members and supporters of the St. Wenceslaus church. Some additional names have come to light to be added to that list. They include: Anton Lutschinger, Anton Huebel, Joseph Domus, Sylvester Yanker, Franz Kind, Joseph Raedle, Ferdinand Kind and John Sheridan. Hubert Springer and Marie Veith were married in that church in the 1870s and that marriage should be included with those mentioned in the 1982 printing.

Josephine Fischer Niemeyer, Doris Kowski Deppe, and Ernest Scribner contributed items of interest for this printing.

Again, the Island St. Wenceslaus, church will be open to the public this summer, every fourth Sunday afternoon of the month, from 2 until 4 o'clock, May through September, and by appointment. Protestant services will be held there on Sunday, June 24th and the St. Wenceslaus Day services will be on Sunday, September 23rd. The annual Island Church picnic will be on August 12th.

Directors of the Island Church Foundation are: Juan Edwards, president; Alfred Klug, vice-president; Martha Sillman, treasurer; Kate Radke, secretary; Bernadine Skalitzky, Columbus; Clarence Kowski, Lake Mills; Juanita Blaska, Sun Prairie-Marshall; Layton Zickert, Bruce Schultz, Doris Deppe, Dorothea Fischer, Don Vehlouw, Carl Schroeder, Ray Radke and Debbie Quinn, all of Waterloo. Mailing address: Post Office Box 12, Waterloo, Wis. 53594.

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