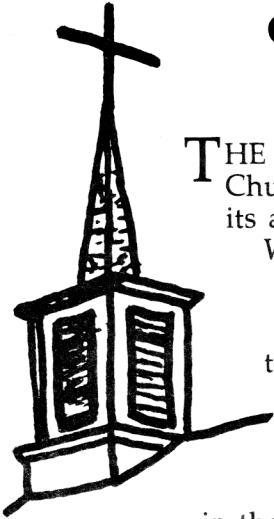


## ISLAND (ST. WENCESLAUS) CHURCH

TOWN OF WATERLOO-WISCONSIN



THE area and community support that the Island Church Foundation, Inc., has enjoyed in fulfilling its aim, to restore, maintain and preserve the St. Wenceslaus Church on its original site, is commendable and worthy of comment.

It was in 1970 when there was a threat that the historic St. Wenceslaus church would be removed from the Waterloo area, that the first committee was formed to study "ways and means" to prevent that. The work and study of such a committee resulted in the formation of the Island Church Foundation, Inc., and the purchase of the church building.

From the beginning (1970) people living in the area of the church and others whose families or ancestors had had a part in the life of that early congregation, or the Island area, joined forces. One of the earliest expressions of determination and support was the volunteer care of the church grounds and the adjoining cemetery, prior to the acquisition of the church. Crews mowed grass and trimmed on a weekly basis, grave stones and markers were uprighted and repaired and in some cases new marker foundations were laid.

That work, plus word of mouth, and much publicity, continued to generate funds and public interest in the restoration plans. The committee staged a number of benefits.

The Foundation was chartered April 23, 1976 and the purchase of the church was finalized in 1977. Immediately following the purchase sections of the church's foundation were replaced and the floor strengthened (volunteer labor and equipment). The bell tower was repaired, shingled and painted. Then volunteers painted the interior and exterior of the church; re-shingled it with wood shingles and replaced some of the windows.

### Picnic Fun

The first annual community picnic, sponsored by the Foundation as a benefit (now an annual event) demonstrated the ingenuity of the people involved. Tractors and generators were

loaned to provide power (no electricity on the grounds); a converted school bus served as the food preparation center; meals were served in a rented tent with organ dinner music. Adjacent landowners allowed the use of fields for parking and still today they rotate crops to accommodate the picnic plans.

While negotiating the purchase of the church property it was understood that the Foundation would seek additional and adjoining property on which to build a shelter or all-purpose building. Lester and Dorothea Fischer donated the land and construction was started on that building in 1978. Now that building is used as a Dining Room.

Weather has always been favorable for the community picnics except for 1977 when it rained all day. Everything was dampened but the spirits of the workers and the public. Crowds attended for choice food, enjoyed organ music, singing in the church, playing cards in a tent and contributions to the coffers. It was a real morale booster.

The annual Island Church picnics have introduced a lot of interesting attractions: the McClellan Christmas Shop, Sky Divers, Frog Jump, Watermelon Seed Spitting, Cow Chip Throwing, Barrel, Fry Pan, Egg and Bale Tossing Contests, Wood Carving and Spinning Demonstrations; Antique Car Show, Tractor Pull, Bed Races, Special Music, Dog Team Demonstrations, Euchre Tournament, Square Dancing, Flea Market, and always special games and contests for the youngsters. Bingo will be a new feature this year (Aug. 10, 1986).

### Memorial Plan

In 1976 a memorial giving in the name of Thomas Krueger initiated the Memorial program within the Foundation. That plan appears to be unique. Giving of any amount in the name of an individual allows for that name to appear on a wooden cross. Four wooden crosses are displayed in the church today listing the names of 268 persons honored with memorial giving. Those four crosses were given in memory of Joseph and Theresa Fischer and William and Ella Kowski; Rose F. Blaska and John J. Blaska, Helen Curl Blaska and William Schultz. When, and if, the memorial giving in the name of an individual reaches \$300.00 that name is engraved on a memorial plaque. To date the names of Henry and Anna Bartosch; William and Ella Kowski; Eda and Charles Hebl; Stanley Fisher; Rose and John Blaska; Rudolph and Anna Fischer Doleshal; Benjamin and Elvina Blaschka; Joseph Fiedler; Lester Fischer; John J. Blaska; George and Frieda Jordan; The August Doubrawa Family; Helen Curl Blaska; Sister Alcantara Blaska;

William and Elizabeth Higgins; Jerome, Harold and Leslie Higgins; Nicholas Kloster, John and Ann McCormick; Eugene and Bridget Doering and Eugenia McClellan appear on such plaques. Doris Deppe is chairman of the Memorial committee and is assisted by Directors Bernadine Skalitzky and Juanita Blaska in the registering of the names.

The Foundation is supported by memberships. A life membership plaque also displayed in the church, carries the names of: Rose Blaska, The Dan Royle Family, Dorothea Fischer, William and Irene Zickert, the Edwin Menz Family, Molly and John Blaska.

Memberships available: General — \$10.00; Sustaining — \$25.00; Sponsoring — \$50.00; Founding — \$100.00; Children's — \$1.00 (up to 18 years); Family — \$15.00; Funding — \$200.00; Life — \$300.00.

### Gifts From Congregations

The interest and support of the community churches and their congregations has been heart warming to the Foundation Directors. In 1975 a special Thanksgiving collection taken in the Waterloo St. Pauls Lutheran and the United Methodist Churches was earmarked for the preservation of the St. Wenceslaus Church. Those two congregations, and others, have held services in the church and St. Pauls congregation has used the facilities of the grounds for congregation picnics. There have been many gifts from area congregations: a Cross from St. Josephs Catholic Church, Waterloo; Hymnals and Childrens Song Books from the St. Pauls Lutheran and United Methodist congregations of Waterloo; a Lectern from the UCC First Congregational Church, Lake Mills; Hymnal from the Immanuel Lutheran Church, Hubbleton; Hymnals and Song Books from the Moravian Church, Lake Mills; Hymnals, chancel cloth and prayer books from St. John Lutheran Church, Waterloo.

Those books, along with many books and Bibles given to be preserved in the Historic Church are on display in a book case given by the family of Margaret and Henry Sillman in honor of their 50th wedding anniversary. A number of items preserved from the days of services at the St. Wenceslaus Mission Church, along with many given by families involved in the early church life, or the Island Community, make an interesting exhibit of religious artifacts.

In 1984 R. Byron McClellan arranged for a living memorial on the St. Wenceslaus Church grounds, in memory of his wife, Eugenia Doering McClellan. This is a planted, well designed, area of about 75 feet surrounding a rock that holds a marker that gives

the date of the Church's Founding (1863) — and a memorial marker in Mrs. McClellan's honor. It has beautified the area at the intersection of Island Church and Blue Joint Roads.

### **Directors Listed**

Directors elected at the Foundation's Organizational Meeting (1976) included: Mel Cyrak, Edward Peschel, Bruce Schultz\*, Leonard Jansich, Les Doubrawa, Doris Deppe\*, Don Vehlow\*, Stan Deppe, Dorothy Fischer\*, Ray Radke\*, Juanita Blaska\*, Jerome Blaska, Byron McClellan\*, Bernadine Skalitzky\* and Kate Radke\*. \*Denotes those serving on the Board of Directors this year along with Alfred Klug, Debbie Quinn, Juan Edwards, Clarence Kowski, Martha Sillman and Bernice Wendt. Others who have served as Directors: Carl Schroeder, Layton Zickert and Theodore Kiesow.

### **Discrepancy In Dates**

Church records note the closing of the St. Wenceslaus Mission Church in 1891, but natives of the Island area recall attending services there in the early 1900's. The late Emil Bartosch mentioned serving as an altar boy at St. Wenceslaus in 1902. Lydia Fischer Will recalls attending services there sometime after 1910.

At that time Father F. X. Hess was serving St. Josephs Catholic congregation in Waterloo. He scheduled services at Lake Mills and the rural Waterloo church on alternate Sundays. It is likely that was done to accommodate the rural parishioners that were seeking new church homes.

Area residents, now third and fourth generation members of the early families such as the Charles Fischers, Albert Setz and Louis Deppes recall that "Church Sunday" at St. Wenceslaus meant a day at "Grandma's House" according to Josephine Fischer Niemeyer.

The Island Church (St. Wenceslaus) is open to the public every fourth Sunday of the month, May through September. This year the St. Wenceslaus Day services will be held on September 28th and the annual picnic is August 10th. Visitors are always welcome and arrangements can be made to accommodate visits by contacting a director.

Take Island Church Road off Highway G between Lake Mills and Hubbleton; or Blue Joint Road off Highway 89 between Waterloo and Lake Mills. The Foundation's mailing address is Box 12, Waterloo, Wis. 53594.