



St. Francis HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

Land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

The Newsletter of the St. Francis Historical Society

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Growing Up in St. Francis

by Mary Drehfal

In 1950, my father took a job as caretaker at Sacred Heart in St. Francis when I was three years old, so we sold our house in Bay View and rented one of the parish houses on South Kinnickinnic Avenue. It was one of the requirements of the job.

When I was about four years old, my mom took us shopping downtown on the streetcar. It ran on tracks on Kinnickinnic Avenue. The southbound route ended at St. Francis Avenue, and when it stopped there, the conductor flipped the backs of the wicker seats so they were facing the opposite direction. They also moved the power control handle to the other end to be ready to go north.

My Grandma Zenker, along with two of my uncles, had a greenhouse business and they would sell Christmas trees. We played hide and seek in the tree, and that worked pretty well until one of the customers would pick up a tree and one of us would be under it.

Rainer's liquor store was right next to my grandma's house, and we bought penny candy there. Mr. Rainer sold the store and the new owner had a pet monkey. Sometimes the monkey would sneak out of their house and get into my grandma's greenhouse and swing from the steam pipes. My grandma didn't like that because he would break the geraniums that were hanging in pots on the pipes.

My grandma's house was across the street from the parish hall, and we would watch the brides and their wedding parties going into the hall for their receptions. We wanted to see their pretty dresses. The parish hall had a bowling alley downstairs, and when we got older there were dances held at the hall.

When we were younger we'd play in the fields around our house pretending we were gypsies. We'd dress up with scarves and long skirts and beads. I remember the smell of freshly cut grass and picking buttercups and clover for my mom. We were barefoot all summer, and our feet must have toughened up because I don't ever remember my feet hurting from walking barefoot. The grass just felt cool and fresh under our feet.



When I was about six years old, the parish built a convent for the nuns right next door to our house. Having the nuns as our neighbors was interesting. Sometimes we would see them through their basement windows when they were having their hour of recreation. The younger nuns would be roller-skating, and the older nuns would be knitting or sewing.

Sometime in the early 1950s, a small chapel in the Sacred Heart Cemetery caught fire late at night. My mom was up ironing and a bus driver knocked on our front door to tell us he had seen a fire behind our house. At that time St. Francis had a volunteer fire department, but they

did a good job putting it out and keeping it from spreading to the priests' cars that were parked in the garage next to the chapel.

As we got older we played in the seminary woods and had picnics there. There was a rope swing on a high hill above Deer Creek in the woods and we had fun swinging out over the creek. Sometimes we ice-skated on the Deer Creek ravine where the seminarians played ice hockey. They didn't like that too much because we got in the way of their games. They always had a big bonfire going there though, and that was nice to keep warm by. It was close to the site of the former St. Aemilian's Orphanage.

The pond in front of St. John's School for the Deaf was another place to ice-skate. We skated with the students who boarded there. We also sledged on the coal piles that were on the Electric Company land near the power plant.¹ 'Flying Saucers' worked the best on the coal piles.

When I was in 7th or 8th grade, Sacred Heart parish decided to build a new church and school. This meant that the old church, school, rectory, and a fieldstone house that belonged to the Schuster family, which was next to our house, had to be torn down. It was sad because the church and fieldstone house were really nice buildings and would have been wonderful landmarks to preserve.

Our house was moved next to the cemetery on East Klein Drive. We left all our belongings in the house when it was moved. The house looked strange going down the driveway to its new location. It took a couple of days to move it and put it on its new foundation. I remember having campouts with my friends in our new back yard, and camping next to the cemetery made it a little more exciting.

Our class was the last class to graduate from the old Sacred Heart School. Ironically, my Grandma Zenker's class was one of the first ones.

All of my friends and I went to St. Mary's Academy on Lake Drive. We would walk through the seminary and convent land to get to high school. We had many discussions about growing up and being teenagers on those long walks in the mornings and afternoons.

Looking back I have a lot of good memories or growing up in the city of St. Francis. I think it was a great place to live and still is.

¹ Property presently owned by the City of St. Francis as a nature preserve and site of the Nojoshing Trail.

What's New?

Membership:

Welcome new members: Kathy Zenker, Sandi Kirchen, Lucille Evans, Jay Wesner, and Beverly Rhoe

Annual report: The annual report will be posted on the website stfranciswihistoricalsociety.org. Hard copies are available.

General Meeting: The next general meeting will be April 19 at 9:30 am.

Cousin's Subs Fundraiser:

Support our fund raiser and come eat Cousin's Subs at 3058 E. Layton on March 23, 2016, from 4-8 pm. The Society earns 10% of the sales for that time period.

Bake sale:

Vote April 19 at the Civic Center and buy some bakery. We need volunteers to bake cookies! Arrangements for pickup can be made if needed. Call 414-316-4391.

New Board

Our annual meeting was held in January and a new board of directors was elected. The officers are: Anna Passante, President; Sr. Ceil Struck, Vice President; Stephanie Maxwell, Secretary; and Barbara Janiszewski, Treasurer. The board members are: Mary Drehfal, CoryAnn St. Marie Carls, Jan Pientok, Randy Borland and Amanda Dahlquist.

Education

An education committee has been working with the 4th grade teachers at Deer Creek Intermediate School. We will be having four programs for the children. The first will be a presentation by historical society member Skip Buechel on the Woodland Indians. The second program will be a "visit" from Maggie Harrington, a former student at St. John's School for the Deaf and also a housekeeper there. She was born in 1855 and died in 1928. The third program will be a scavenger hunt in the Civic Center. The students will be given a list of clues to articles located in the display cabinets in the rotunda and will have to find the items. The final program will be a visit to the either the Lake Protestant Cemetery or the St. Francis Seminary Cemetery. If it is the Lake Protestant cemetery, some of the gravestones may have been restored by then.

Area Landmark

by Anna Passante

Did you ever wonder what the building in Cudahy at 4601 South Kinnickinnic Avenue in Cudahy, north of the Cudahy Depot, was originally built for? Many of us remember it as the home of Affordable Heating Company, that moved across the street into the old Kohl's food store a few years ago.

The cream city brick building was constructed in 1906 for the Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company (TMERL&L) as a substation for the Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha interurban line that ran from Milwaukee's 3rd and Michigan Street interurban terminal to Kenosha. The streetcars ran on direct current (DC) electricity, a safe current compared to alternate current (AC), but the cars needed recharging every 10-12 miles. (The streetcars later ran on AC, which ran longer distance before recharging.) The building on Kinnickinnic Avenue housed the electric transformers for recharging the streetcars on the second floor, with a waiting room on the ground floor. A two-story winding staircase has since been removed.

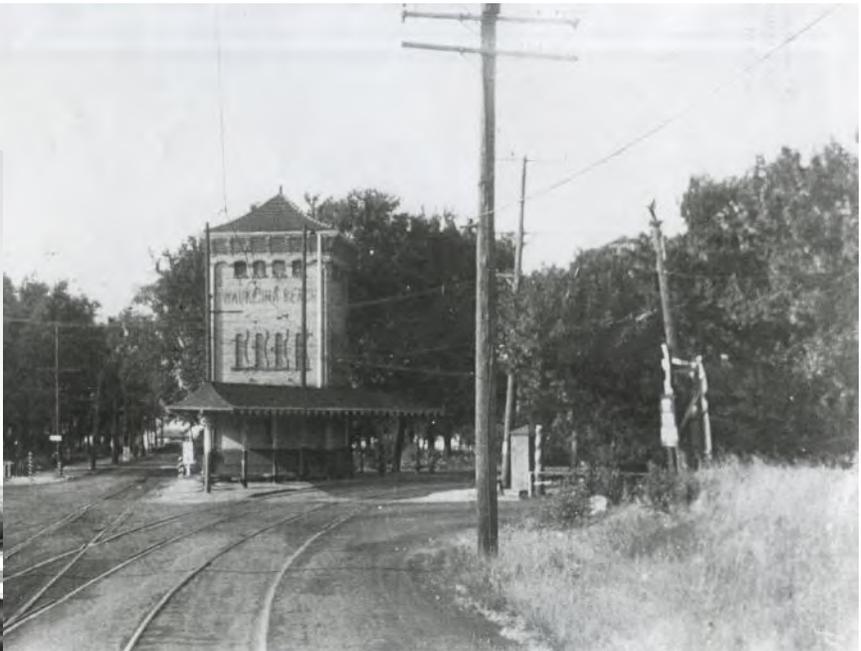
According to Dan Vnuk of the Cudahy Historical Society, the building did not need a furnace or boiler, since the transformers threw off a lot of heat, providing warmth for the building. Mary Becker, a reporter for a community newspaper, wrote that the large bay window on the first floor, facing Kinnickinnic, was where the operator watched the streetcar line. "Just north of the substation the tracks ran between the railroad tracks and South Kinnickinnic Avenue. At the substation itself, the tracks ran in front of the building," said Becker.

The streetcar ran until the 1920s. This building is the only remaining substation in the area. St. Martin's Junction in the city of Franklin and the Waukesha Beach station in Pewaukee (see photo this page) were razed and replaced with open-air facilities.

In 1977, the Wisconsin Electric Power Company (formerly the TMER&L) sold the building to William Heinrich, and since then there has been a succession of owners---John Schmeiger, James Haubert of West Bend, and Edward Kay, Sr. in 1983. According to Becker's article, Kay planned to spend \$70,000 to build a second floor luxury apartment, a third floor artist's loft, and a first floor retail space. This plan never came to fruition. Affordable Heating purchased the building from Keith Anderson in January 1987 and still owns the building.



Milwaukee Electric Railway 4601 S. Kinnickinnic Ave.



Waukesha Beach Station, another substation, looked very much like the one on Kinnickinnic Ave. Courtesy of the late Duane Matuszak. Note the roof on the first level.

Tom Mlinar and His Childhood Memories

by Anna Passante

Tom Mlinar is a walking encyclopedia of growing up in the city of St. Francis. His vast childhood memories of the time spent in this community are a true treasure to the historical society.

Tom was born in 1935 to Louis and Mary Mlinar. The family lived in a house on end of Howard Avenue, east of Iowa Avenue, the last house (now razed) before the railroad tracks. Like most boys, he and his friends explored the area, leaving no stone unturned—except for the old concrete base of former General Steel Company that the boys found in their exploration of the Lakeside Power Plant property. It is now the site of the Nojoshing Trail and nature preserve. Another “playground” was a wooded area bounded by Brust, Kansas, Howard, and Tripoli avenues. Known as Thompson Woods, the boys found a pond in the woods a great place for “frogging.” Another place for play was a large open field, at the southwest corner Howard and Kansas avenues.

There were no major big box grocery stores, only small ma and pop stores, such as the Anthony Shitone’s Italian and general grocery store on Pennsylvania and Tripoli avenues. Another was the Kawaleski grocery, later home to Aggie’s Bakery 1800 East Howard Avenue, at the northeast corner of Howard and Kansas avenues.

Other points of interest were the statue factory at East Cora and the art studio of Joseph Aszklar, a well-known sculptor. Aszklar’s studio was located in a 2 ½ car garage on Iowa Avenue between Tripoli and Howard avenues, the present site of Golden Living Center. Tom liked visiting and chatting with Aszklar as he worked on his artwork and is proud to have known such a talented artist, who was known for the Stations of the Cross at Holy Hill in Hubertus, Wisconsin. (See June 2015 issue of newsletter for article about Aszklar.)

In 1939, the Mlinar family home moved to Steven’s Point but returned to St. Francis in mid-1941. They moved to a house (still standing) at 4323 S. Iowa Ave. just north of Whitnall Avenue. Tom’s father worked as a boiler operator and fireman for the Wisconsin Electric Company. As did other residents in the area, the family had a large garden. They grew all kinds of produce to sell---tomatoes, squash, and cucumbers---to supplement the family income. Tom was the youngest of six boys and selling those vegetables was a lot of fun. He said the following:

We were especially known for our mule and buckboard, selling things door to door. We were especially known and welcomed on Thursdays, when Catholics didn’t eat meat on Fridays. We would pick 25 to 30 dozen (yellow Bantam) sweet corn, along with other vegetables that were in season at the time. We would go to what we



Mlinar boys in 1939 at Howard Avenue house; left to right, Alex, George, Don, Emil, and Tom

called little Italy, which was on Kansas Ave, from the electric company dinkie tracks, north to Norwich Avenue, then east on Norwich. Most of the homes were owned by Italian families--the Perrotis, Zanardis, Gardettos, Fearellis, Gorgies, Contis, and others. My brothers, Vladimir "Loddy," Emil, and I would sell the corn at 15 cents a dozen, and we always threw in an extra ear, 13, for a baker's dozen. Most of the time we were sold out before we got out of the area, then we would go back home and ma would have another 20 dozen or so picked and ready, and we would go out again. We would go into the Bay View area, along Lake Drive north of Oklahoma. So everyone knew us by our last name, but they mispronounced it as "Malenerd."

Tom now resides with his treasure trove of memories in South Milwaukee and is a member of the St. Francis Historical Society. Do you have any memories to share? Send them to us or let us interview you. Call 414-316-4391 or send to 3400 E. Howard Ave. or email st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com



Mlinar family at Iowa Avenue farm. Tom is the smallest of the bunch, first row, second from left



The Mlinar boys having fun on a haystack at the Iowa Avenue farm



Our annual Christmas Party was enjoyed by all that attended. Shane Piek was our speaker and spoke about his work fixing cemetery gravestones.

Kay Beres and Barbara Janiszewski, pictured here, obviously had an enjoyable evening.

Growing Up on Crawford Avenue

By Glenn Gierzycki and Karen Gersonde

We are siblings and were raised in St. Francis on Crawford Avenue. It was an amazing place to live in the 1960s. Our house abutted the Seminary Woods, where Deer Creek was a free-flowing stream. We built model ships and floated them on the creek, blowing them up with BB guns. We found fossils in the gravel strands of the creek and played on sandbars for hours. When we fell into the creek, we got “soakers” meaning shoes, socks, and sometimes our whole body got drenched. When mom asked us what happened, we said we “didn’t know.” Mom of course knew. She always knew.

Back then, student priests from the seminary strolled through the woods. At times they gave us a St. Francis medal or holy card. That was special since we were Catholic.

Our area had a lot of swamps. The best one was on the Lakeside Power Company property. We loved playing there because of the frogs and polliwogs. We were ever vigilant for the “Dinky,” a train that carried coal to the Lakeside Power Plant. We played on private property, and were afraid that if the “Dinky” engineer caught us, he’d call the police. We always hid in the bushes when the train rumbled through. Luckily, we were never caught. If you got a “soaker” in that swamp, your clothes turned black due to the black organic matter. When we came home, we smelled terrible. Mom of course knew what happened. She always knew.

The field area off Koenig Avenue to the west was relatively flat with low grass. We played numerous coed pickup baseball games there. Most games ended when we had to go home for dinner covered in grass stains and dirt. Mom just looked at us. Mom of course knew. She always knew.

In that field were some concrete slabs that gave way to some forbidden basements. We didn’t know what that was at the time. Research shows that there was a steel mill there from 1917 until sometime in the 1930s or 40s. With more research, this may become the subject of a future article.

We also enjoyed roller skating and bicycling in the street on Crawford Avenue. Our favorite activity though, was the touch pickup football games played in the street. Traffic was minimal. When someone yelled “car,” we stopped the game and moved to the side. Boys and girls played alike. We came home with scuffed up shoes and maybe torn blue jeans. Mom gave us the “look.” We said nothing. Mom knew. She always knew.

As kids growing up on Crawford Avenue, much of our playtime was influenced by our surroundings. The woods, creek, and fields gave us opportunities that most other city kids didn’t have. All in all, it was a great time. Those great memories will always stay in our hearts, as will our memory of our mother, who knew. She always knew.



Dad, Albin Gierzycki, mother, Fausta “Lefty” Gierzycki (she was left handed), son, Glenn Gierzycki, daughter, Karen Gierzycki Gersonde. Photo circa 1963



Contemporary photo of family home at 2936 East Crawford Avenue

St. Francis Loses a Train Station

By Glenn Gierzycki

The railroad first came to St. Francis in 1855. It was a passenger and freight line that ran from Chicago to Milwaukee. This line is currently the easternmost tracks that run parallel to Kinnickinnic Avenue. The second track or western tracks were built in 1906 as a freight only line.

Since the earliest railroad came through the area, as far as is known, St. Francis has had a train depot with an agent with regular hours to take care of business. The small batten and board building was on the south side of St. Francis Avenue and east of the tracks.

In 1925, the Chicago & North Western Railway petitioned the Railroad Commission of Wisconsin to substitute a part-time caretaker at the depot in the place of the regular full-time agent, due to declining business. The change was granted.

In 1935, the railroad requested that the caretaker position be eliminated. The railroad stated that for the calendar years 1930-1934, and from January to June 1935, freight revenues totaled \$236.35. Only part of this was earned by the railroad for less-than-carload freight (small shipments and packages). The only duty of the caretaker was to deliver these l-t-c shipments. The petition stated that no express business was done here and that the mail was handled by a government employee. Carload shipments (essentially large shipments that utilized an entire freight car) were handled from Milwaukee. The elimination of the caretaker was granted in September 1935. It's interesting to note that there was no mention of passenger service. It's evident that in 1935, St. Francis Station no longer had a passenger train service. It is unknown when the last passenger train stopped in St. Francis.

The next step was inevitable. In 1936, the C&NW petitioned to remove the depot buildings. These included the small depot, an adjacent freight carbody that served as a freight warehouse, and a platform that was 300 feet long. Mail was still handled at the site but, as usual, was taken care of by a government employee. The official authorization to remove the facilities was granted on January 30, 1936. The buildings were to be removed by May 31, 1936, and I presume that they were. St. Francis still had plenty of trains going through the little town, but they didn't stop any more.

As far as is known, the depot always had the name St. Francis, even though there was no formal town or city of that name. It took its name from the Catholic seminary that was established before the railroad came through.



St. Francis train station circa 1914



St. Francis
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

St. Francis Historical Society
3400 E. Howard Ave.
St. Francis, WI 53235

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Newsletter

Anna Passante
Barbara Janiszewski

Mark Your Calendar

General Meetings: April 19, 2016 at 9:30 am

Bake Sale at Civic Center voting day April 5, 2016.

Cousin's Sub Fundraiser:

Wednesday, March 23, 2016, 4 pm-8pm.

Facebook: St. Francis Historical Society

Email: st.francishistoricalociety@gmail.com

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