

# ST. FRANCIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY

May 2009 Issue

*...Continued from previous newsletter. The following article was written and donated to our collection by Mary Becker. Mary is a retired columnist for the former St. Francis Reminder Enterprise.*

## The “Spunky Sisters” of St. Francis (continued)

About this time, Milwaukee Bishop Henni saw the need for a seminary for German-speaking boys. He was afraid the faith would die out if the immigrants to Milwaukee had no priests who spoke their language. Cardinal Bedini, the papal legate to America, came to Milwaukee for a cathedral dedication. When he drove five miles out to Nojoshing he told Henni, “Make this spot sacred and build here a seminary”.

All of a sudden the brothers and sisters had plenty of work. A viaduct was built across the creek. Bricks were carried over it to build the seminary. The next year the bishop also decided to move St. Aemilian’s Orphanage to Nojoshing. It had been started in Milwaukee as a haven for the many children orphaned when their parents died of cholera and typhoid fever.

From 1853, when the seminary was decided on, there was so much work the sisters had little time for prayers. About this time the Rev. Leonard Batz, a seminary professor, was named their spiritual director.

He was appalled to see the women working beyond their strength. The sisters were becoming despondent with their hard life and lack of spiritual growth.

Batz said their way of life was “unconventional”. “If you Sisters do not become holy,” he said, “it were better for you to go back to the world and get married. Then at least you would receive one sacrament.”

He planned to form this small band into a secluded sisterhood. But Rector Michael Heiss said “no” when the sisters sought his advice. Angered by Batz’ words, he asked the professor to leave the seminary. Batz was re-assigned to a Catholic church in downtown Milwaukee.

The remaining five original sisters and a novice (two despondent sisters had already left) determined to defy the rector. They donned civilian clothes and that very same evening stepped out into the twilight. The morning after they left, breakfast was ready for the seminarians. It was prepared by the eleven sisters and novices who remained.

The nuns who left the convent found life even harder in the outside world. Because of their advanced age – over 40! – a cloistered community in Europe denied them entrance.

Two of the founders became Fr. Batz's housekeepers. The others lived in a cottage adjoining the rectory and performed hard manual labor as they cared for the church.

A Milwaukee sister who entered St. Francis Convent in the late 1890's reported, "Mother Aemiliana was cutting wood for the people in the neighborhood when I was about ten. She dragged a wooden sawhorse from one place to the other, I helped her with it."

*(To be continued...)*

**Attention all St. Francis Historical Society members!!!!!!!!!!!!**

**Save the following date on your calender: Saturday, May 23, 10 a.m.-12 noon**

**Please join us for an informational meeting on Saturday, May 23  
from 10 a.m.-12 noon at the Lupo House  
(located just north of Milt Vretenar park).  
Refreshments will be served.**

**Enclosed is a task list of volunteer opportunities.  
Please fill out the enclosed list bring to the meeting or return to**

**Kathy Matthew  
3404 East Tesch Avenue  
St. Francis, WI 53235**

- **My mother taught me HUMOR. "When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me."**
- **My mother taught me HOW TO BECOME AN ADULT. "If you don't eat your vegetables, you'll never grow up."**
- **My mother taught me about my ROOTS. "Shut that door behind you. Do you think you were born in a barn?"**
- **My mother taught me about about STAMINA. "You'll sit there until all that spinach is gone."**
- **My mother taught me FORESIGHT. "Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident."**