

# NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

Land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

## The Newsletter of the St. Francis Historical Society

June 2014



**St. Francis**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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### Newsletter

Anna Passante  
Barbara Janiszewski

### The Cupertino Tree

by Barbara Janiszewski

Unable to afford a decent place to live, Martin and Victoria Rapant and their seven children moved into an old run-down farmhouse in the 3600 block of Lake Drive. The glass in the windows was broken, and the Rapants put canvas over the windows until they could afford glass. They slept on the floor until they could afford furniture. The family had one cow that provided milk for the children. They had vegetables that were grown across the street, where the Cousin's Center is now located. And they had a wonderful Austrian pine tree in their yard, and the children played under it and climbed it and swung from it. And it survived.

Actors and cameramen took over the farm for a film in the 1920s and mud was plastered on the house and straw was stuck on the mud to make it look like a rural Polish farmhouse. Next to a beautiful pine tree. The director drove a Stanley Steamer automobile.

The tree survived the director, the actors, and the Stanley Steamer.

In 1923, the tree was struck by lightning, and its top was sheared off. But it survived.

The Rapant family moved out of the house in 1935, and the house and barn were torn down. The electric company, which owned the land, filled the area with fly ash from their boilers. And the tree survived the fly ash.

As a young teen-age boy, Supervisor Dan Cupertino meditated under the tree. Mayor Milton Vretenar fished and swam nearby when he was a young man. He considered the tree his but the tree became known as the Cupertino tree.

When Harnischfeger built their headquarters on the site, the tree was to be cut down because it was located in the space designated for an underground parking garage. Harnischfeger

considered several plans to save the tree but they didn't think there was anything they could do to preserve it. Then the company contacted a tree specialist who said he could move the tree with the help of a 100 ton crane, and Harnischfeger said they would pay to have it moved to Bay View Park, a few blocks north.

When the tree was being moved a cable slipped and a big section of bark was scraped off. A tree removal expert said the tree should survive. Pines create their own pitch for healing.

The tree was wrapped in burlap and sisal cloth and a feeding material was applied. Unfortunately, the winter



The Rapant family house was built by Sexton family in the 1850s or 1860s



Pine being moved



Late 1920s photo  
Martin and Victoria  
Rapant surrounded by  
their family

was especially brutal and the tree didn't survive.

Before it was cut down, Tom Javorek and his mother, who was the youngest Rapant daughter, gathered pinecones from the tree, and Mrs. Javorek had a wreath made out of them. Tom donated the wreath to the Historical Society in December.

A group of people gathered to say goodbye to an old friend.

A lonely tree on the lake bluff, it had been admired by many who had walked, biked or driven past. One woman said she just wanted to give the tree a hug. And another said she wanted to thank the tree for whatever it had done for us. As the group gathered under the dying tree, a woman played a haunting melody on a bamboo flute, a fitting goodbye to an old friend.



Pinecone Wreath

### Austrian Pine Part of the Historical Society Logo

Carol L. Wojtecki came up with the concept of our new logo for the Historical Society. When designing, she spends a lot of time processing her thoughts and trying to bring meaning into the symbols, drawing to conceptualize the ideas, and finally seeking help to put her design into a digital format.

A lot of thought was given to develop a symbol for the Historical Society that would represent the generations of people who have lived in this area from the Indians to our present-day citizens. A family tree was the symbol that seemed to stand out. When her ideas were presented to the Society board, they liked the tree concept too. It was decided that the tree silhouette of the old Lake Drive Austrian Pine, also known as the Cupertino tree, be used because it was well known and had been in the community a long time. Randy Borland, a member, suggested that the word "Nojoshing" be put above the tree image. An Indian word used to describe the land surrounding present-day Bay View Park, Nojoshing means "land that extends into the water." Nojoshing is also the name of the Society's newsletter.

The design was given to Lisa Heideman, and she generously gave her time to put our design into computer language. As you can see, it was a group effort to make our new logo and to make it one that can symbolize the St. Francis Historical Society for many years to come.



## What's New?

### Welcome to new members:

Michele John, Ann Carter-Drier, John Buckson, Mike Pierce, Sue Bostedt family, Tom and Betty Javorek, Stacy and Debbie Leszczynski, Lloyd and Chris Buttke, Lynda Smith, and John and Jan Pientok.

### Whoops! Correction!

Newsletters are quarterly, June, September, December and March.

### Fundraiser

A new version of the throw/blanket is being considered, and hopefully will be available for sale at the Civic Center dedication.

### Website:

Randy Borland and Dennis Wojtecki have been working on the plans for a website. Randy presented a mock up of the design to the board.

### 'Lunch as Dinner'

April 24th event drew 32 people. Ron Winkler gave a talk on the Town of Lake. We hope to have more speakers in the future, with a goal of four a year.

### Bike Sale

The Bike sale was a success. Thanks to Superior Equipment & Supply for letting us use their facility, the chef for preparing lunch, and their donation. Big thank you to the St. Francis Police and Public Works Departments for the sale items and donation from the sale. Thank you to all the Historical Society members who helped with the sale.

### Nojoshing Trail

Members of the Historical Society are planting a prairie plant flower bed at the Lake Drive entrance. The trail dedication is June 22.

### Wish List For Display Cases

The display cases for the Civic Center rotunda are coming along nicely. Looking for these items--small chalk board/eraser, Black Bear soda bottles, military items, arrowheads, Indian artifacts, old child's lunch box, roller skate key, wooden yoyo, flintlock musket, farming tools, Town of Lake items, historical school items. Contact Anna 482-1781.

### Meetings

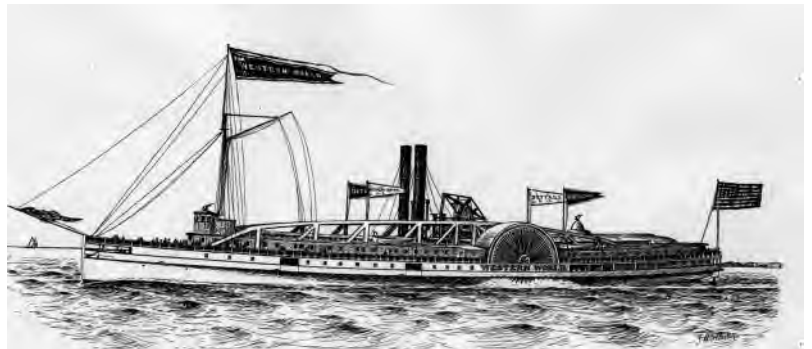
Meetings held on the third Saturday of the month from 10 to 12 at the St. Francis Library. All are welcome!

# Three Shipwrecks Along the Coast of St. Francis

by Anna Passante

Three 19th century Great Lakes sailing ships, the *Boston*, the *Sebastopol*, and the *Alleghany*, had two things in common. All three were shipwrecked off the shore of St. Francis, Wisconsin, and all three were shipwrecked as a result of an inadequate Milwaukee harbor.

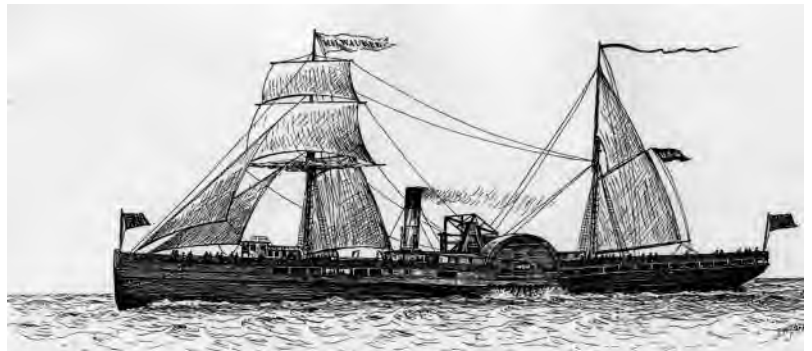
Milwaukee's original harbor (located about a half-mile south of the present day harbor) had a shallow harbor entrance, which kept larger ships from entering the inner harbor. These larger ships were forced to anchor outside the harbor entrance at extended piers to unload their goods. Without the protection of the inner harbor during fierce lake storms, many of the ships risked great damage or destruction. Also, due to inadequate navigational lighting, ship captains found it difficult to find the harbor at night, especially during a storm, resulting in ships running aground. Between 1846 and 1855, the three previously mentioned sailing ships were doomed because of these inadequacies.



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## Fate of the *Boston*

The side-wheel steamship, *Boston*, was built in 1845 and measured 210 feet in length and had locomotive-type boilers that were fueled by coal and wood. The boilers created the steam that turned the ship's side paddlewheels. On November 24, 1846, the *Boston* arrived in Milwaukee from Buffalo, New York, but was unable to enter the inner harbor due to the shallowness of the harbor mouth. The ship instead docked at the extended pier to discharge its cargo. At around 8 p.m. that evening a horrific storm came out of the northeast. Seeking safety, Captain William T. Pease again attempted to take the ship through the harbor mouth into the inner harbor, but the *Boston* was caught by the powerful gale and lost its smoke stacks, rendering the engines useless.



Anchors were lowered, in hopes of riding out the storm, but the strong winds dragged the *Boston* southward and around 11 p.m. the ship struck bottom about 150 feet off the shore of the present day St. Francis Seminary in St. Francis. Help arrived and all the crew and passengers were rescued. The surf broke over her and the ship filled with water. Her remaining smoke stack hung limply over the side. An organ destined for an Episcopal church was rescued, as well as cabin doors and panel work, and the vessel's engine.

There are no known drawings or period images of the *Boston*, *Sebastopol*, or *Alleghany*. Shown here are some period steam-powered vessels that would have sailed the Great Lakes. Top drawing, *Western World* (built 1854) and above drawing *Milwaukee* (built 1859).

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## *Sebastopol* Doomed

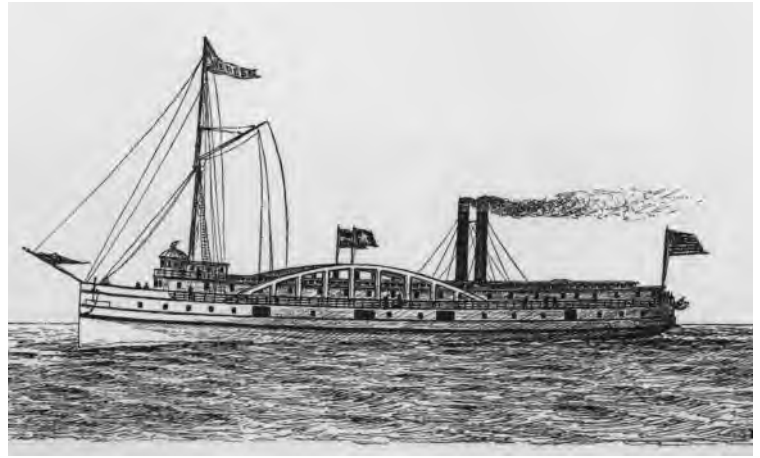
On Sept. 12, 1855, the side-wheel steamship *Sebastopol* left Boston for Milwaukee with a crew of 33 and 60 passengers. The newly built ship measured 234 feet long. The 600 tons of cargo, worth \$100,000, included copper, tin, lead and iron ingots, safes, and 50 horses. The *Sebastopol* arrived near the Milwaukee harbor during a severe northeastern storm. Captain Watts sailed towards what he thought were lights on the harbor pier but in all likelihood were the lights of another ship or the lights of the houses on the bluff. The *Sebastopol* traveled off course three miles south of the harbor and struck bottom 200 feet off the shore of the former St. Mary's Academy in St. Francis.

*Sebastopol* crew members set out in a lifeboat, but it capsized and three were drowned. A government lifeboat rescued crew and passengers, including Captain Watts' wife and four children. Seven or eight of the horses were saved, with some survivors reaching the shore on horseback. Valued at \$1,000 each, more horses



could have been saved but it was impossible to get them to jump in the water, reported the *Milwaukee Sentinel*.

The bodies of the three crew members, James Clark, Frank (last name unknown), and Morris Berry were recovered from the lake. "I have had all three of the bodies taken to the Lake Protestant Cemetery [in St. Francis] and decently buried side by side," said Justice of the Peace Jared Thompson in a *Milwaukee Sentinel* editorial. Three more bodies were later recovered. Cargo was strewn across the beach and at the bottom of the lake. (Divers rediscovered the shipwreck in the 1970s in 15 feet of water near E. Oklahoma Avenue and salvaged items including pewter tableware, ironstone dishes, and a brass belt.)



This propeller ship, *Ironsides*, was built in 1864.

### Last Gasp of the *Alleghany*

On the evening of Oct. 20, 1855, during a heavy northeastern storm, the propeller ship *Alleghany* approached the Milwaukee harbor. The 177-foot ship was built in 1849 and had boilers that provided steam that turned the submerged propellers. Captain Asa S. Curtiss saw no light on the harbor piers and ended up anchoring north of the harbor. Due to the intense storm, the anchor did not hold. The ship lost its smoke pipe, was dragged to the southwest, and struck bottom about 100 feet from the lakeshore of the present day St. Francis Seminary. A local newspaper reported that various articles of cargo were thrown in the water, "forming a sort of bridge from the boat to the shore, on which the women and children were carried." All 30 passengers survived. The *Alleghany* was uninsured, but it was presumed that the cargo was insured, according to the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*. The monetary loss was about \$75,000 (in today's money over \$1 million).

### New Harbor Entrance

In 1848, the Wisconsin State Legislature had passed a law allowing Milwaukee to levy a tax to pay for the construction of a new harbor entrance. But it wasn't until 1857 that a new, safer harbor entrance opened (known as the straight-cut) just north of the original harbor.

(Article originally published in the Bay View Compass February 2010)



Map of harbor entrances (Courtesy of Bay View Compass)

## Miss St. Francis Pageant Celebrates 50 Years

Oak Creek native Brynn Weinzirl was crowned Miss St. Francis on Saturday evening, April 26, 2014, at St. Thomas More High School at 2601 East Morgan Avenue. The Miss St. Francis Scholarship Pageant, celebrating 50 years, began the celebration Friday evening at St. Thomas More with the “Miss St. Francis Review” event. Past winners performed dance and song selections during the Friday evening program. The Historical Society display table was covered with dozens of photos from past pageants and past winners helped identify some of the unmarked photos.

Historically, the first Miss St. Francis Pageant took place at Willow Glen Elementary School in 1965 at “St. Francis Day,” a one-day event sponsored by the St. Francis Association of Commerce and the Gladiator Drum and Bugle Corps. Out of 20 contestants, Antoinette Grabske was crowned and was awarded \$100, half of which she donated to St. John’s for the Deaf. In 1966, the one day event turned into two days and was renamed “St. Francis Days.” In 1969, the Miss St. Pageant moved to Pio Nono High School (now St. Thomas More High School).

Pictured here is Patricia Clark crowning Judith Korpala in 1968. Judith was the first Miss St. Francis to enter the Miss Wisconsin Pageant and finished 2nd Runner-Up.

Did you know that the Historical Society has the first crown worn by Miss St. Francis, the one pictured in this photo? Marge Tessmer donated it to the Society in 1995. It was worn by the first Miss St. Francis, Antionette Grabske in 1965, Kitty-Borck in 1966, Patricia Clark in 1967, and Judith Korpala in 1968. In 1968 the pageant became affiliated with the Miss Wisconsin Pageant, and a new Miss America-style crown was used starting in 1969.



## Historic St. Francis *by Anna Passante*

### *St. Thomas More High School*

What is the history of this site?

- Zebedee Packard claimed the land in 1837 and purchased it in 1839 at \$1.25 an acre.
- Packard sold the site to Joseph Williams but Williams never lived there.<sup>1</sup> Williams sold the land to his son, Sanford Williams, in 1858.
- Sanford lost his leg in the Civil War and could no longer farm, so he sold his property Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese.
- Sanford’s farmhouse was used as Sacred Heart School from 1866 to 1872, at which time a new school was built next to the church on South Kinnickinnic Avenue.
- Bishop Henni built the Holy Family<sup>2</sup>/Pio Nono High School building at this site in 1871, and the Williams’ farmhouse was razed.
- Salzmann Hall was built in 1931 to house Pio Nono High School, and the Holy Family building was razed.
- A new building was added to the rear of Pio Nono in 1968. Pio Nono and Don Bosco high schools merged in 1972 and formed present-day St. Thomas More.



Top left: Sanford Williams  
 Top right: farmhouse/1st Sacred Heart School  
 Middle left: Holy Family/Pio Nono  
 Middle right: Salzmann Hall  
 Bottom: St. Thomas More High School

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Williams’ homestead at 606 East Homer in Bay View is still located behind the Avalon Theater.

<sup>2</sup> Holy Family was a male teachers’ college

St. Francis Historical Society  
4235 S. Nicholson Avenue  
St. Francis, WI 53235



## Membership Form

Do you need to pay your dues for 2014? Do you want to join the St. Francis Historical Society? Please complete this form.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$8.00      \_\_\_\_\_ Life.....\$100

\_\_\_\_\_ Family \$10.00      \_\_\_\_\_ Corporate.....\$100

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to donate materials to the Society

Checks payable to St. Francis Historical Society. Membership runs Jan. 1 to Dec. 31.

Clip and mail this membership form to:

St. Francis Historical Society c/o Barbara Janiszewski 4007 S. Lipton Avenue, St. Francis, WI 53235

Would you like to have the newsletter sent by email?

Questions? Email us: [st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com)