



# 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

published quarterly  
Non-Profit Organization 501c3

## September 2016

### The Very First Day of St. Francis High School, Monday, September 12, 1962

by Jay Wesner

It is difficult for me to believe that the very first day of St. Francis High School is now nothing but an old memory. When I let my mind drift back over the past 54 years, I can still recall what it was like on that first day. John F. Kennedy was this very young, popular, energetic president; the scary Cuban missile crisis showdown between Russia and the US, which would bring terror to the hearts of everyone, was a few weeks away; and there was this boy band from Liverpool driving young girls in Europe to hysterics. In just a few weeks all the girls at St. Francis High School would discover the boy band, when the Beatles' first 45-rpm record hit, "Luv-Luv Me Do," made it to the top of the US charts. The term "Beatlemania" would become a well-known term around St. Francis High School.

That fall I was 13 years old and ready to start my high school education, but there was some concern on my part. Since 1961 I had watched from my parent's kitchen window the construction progress of the high school far off in the distance on Bessey's Hill.<sup>1</sup> Just when the progress looked good in early 1962, and I felt that the school would be finished by the September 6th deadline, the general contractor, the Chenenoff Company and their work crew could not settle their union contract. The work crew went out on strike. This caused me a lot of concern: would

there be school and if so, when and where was I supposed to go? The strike eventually got settled after a six-month delay. But there just was not enough time left to complete everything. The construction company and the work crew did all they could by rushing into overdrive, but they were not able to reach the finishing deadline. St. Francis High School would have to delay their scheduled opening. The first high school principal, Milton Rewey, sent letters to all 302 expected students that school would be delayed one week.

I recall that first day of classes. It was an overcast Monday morning. There was a slight autumn chill in the air. I felt very proud that day knowing that I would be joining 152 students entering the first freshmen class of a new school, opening doors for the very first time. The high school construction site on that day looked like an unsuccessful WWII battleground. There was debris scattered all around the school campus. The school's central section was far from completed; part of the roof was still missing, no completed upper/lower gyms, cafeteria, library, band room, small audio/visual theater, swimming pool, showers, or locker rooms. It would be like this during the first semester. I remember there was no heat because the boiler room equipment was not installed. Everyone



Jay's 9th grade class photo

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Bessey's Hill was named for the Jacob Bessey family who lived on the hill and farmed the land from 1900 to 1912.

was warned to wear his or her jacket to keep warm. There had been a problem with the school's window delivery. As a result, some of the classrooms in the academic wing did not have all of their windows. I can still recall myself thinking that it was going to be quite a struggle with no heat and missing windows. The first rule of the day and for many weeks that followed was to avoid the construction site in the center of the building, because they were installing the rest of the roof panels. Between classes everybody had to hurry around the exterior of the school, dodging construction equipment, to get to their next classes. In the following weeks the main concern from everybody was when is this darn building ever going to get finished? Are we going to have heat soon? The construction progress was slow and it seemed to drag on forever.

My first class of the day was Mr. Krogman's study hall where the daily roll call would be answered. That room was in the industrial arts wing. Of all the classrooms, this study hall room looked the least like a classroom I had ever seen. I remember thinking: Is this what all the other classrooms are going to be like? It was an empty, windowless prison looking room. The room was temporarily furnished with metal folding chairs with a desktop armrest, which were arranged between electrical conduits rising out of the concrete floor. Later I found out that this would be the future Metal Shop. There eventually would be work benches installed between these conduits, and large shop machinery would be placed at the far end of the room. My first study hall was ridiculous since there was no homework to do, and I did not bring any reading material with me. I did meet a cute, redheaded girl named Caroline who was sitting next to me. I felt that we sort of got off to a good start by talking about the new school. I thought to myself that if this is the first day of school, and I already have met my high school sweetheart, school life is going to be great. Then she asked if I would be in any of her sophomore classes, and when I told her I was a freshman, she never spoke to me again.

My second class was Mr. Beyersdorf's English in the academic wing. How exciting that was, to be in an actual classroom---desks and chairs. I thought to myself that this is what a classroom should look like. Everything was new, and the freshly painted room still carried a faint scent of paint. Mr. Beyersdorf had a very strict dress code. For the girls, ratted hair or short hemlines were banned, and for the boys, there were no tight jeans and no Beatle-like long hair. The number one

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## **What's New?**

**Membership:** Welcome new members: Kurt Koenig, Jim and Patty Robinson, Al and Joanne Richards, Andrew and Juliet Ross, John Kolb III, Jayme Krevs, Allan Scott, Chris Sinicki, and Karla Young.

**General Meeting:** The next general meeting will be Saturday, October 15, at 9:30 am.

**4th of July Parade:** We had a good time marching in the parade and talking to people at Vretenar Park.

**Cousin's Subs Fundraiser:** Wednesday, Sept. 14  
Please mark your calendars and support the St. Francis Historical Society by purchasing food at Cousins Subs 3058 E. Layton Avenue on Wednesday Sept. 14 from 4-8 pm.

**Bake Sale:** We are looking for donations of baked goods for our bake sale at the November 8th election. Please call us at 414-316-4391.

**Pizzeria Piccola:** Between the raffle, tips, and 15% of the food sales at Pizzeria Piccola, the historical society earned just over \$800 for the cemetery restoration.

### **Historical Society Display Cabinet**

Do you know someone who has a collection of items that they would like to display for a month or two? The historical society display cabinet (securely locked) is located on the north wall of the Society office. Call us at 414-316-4391 or email us at [st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com)

### **Mark Your Calendars For the Christmas Dinner**

Our Christmas dinner will be at the Polonez restaurant 4016 South Packard Avenue on Thursday, December 8, 2016, at 6:00 p.m..

**National Night Out:** Our table at National Night Out was a great success. Mary Drehfal demonstrated weaving on a small loom. Anna Passante spun yarn on her spinning wheel, and Bill Drehfal demonstrated woodcarving. An old typewriter was a big hit with the kids. A good night!

### **Pie Auction**

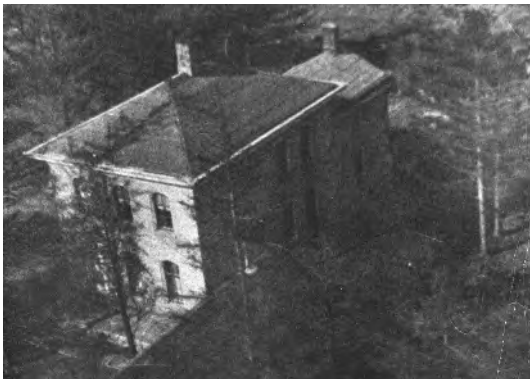
The 2rd Annual Harvest Fest will take place at the civic center on Sunday afternoon, October 2. The Society will again have a pie auction, exact time yet to be determined, but most likely around 3 p.m.

## St. Francis Historical Society's 1st Landmark Dedication

On Saturday, June 25, 2016, the Society had its 2nd annual ice cream social and its 1st landmark dedication. Thank you to Joseph at Jacob's Well Cafe for hosting the social. The turnout was great and all had a great time eating ice cream, cake, cupcakes, and homemade pie.

The dedication of the John F. Koenig house followed the ice cream social. After the history of the property was presented by Society members Anna Passante, Barbara Janiszewski, and Terry Duffey, the new owner of the property, JohnPierre Manchillo, was presented with a bronze plaque, honoring the John Koenig family, who built the house around 1870.

Drive by and view the bronze plaque and the tasteful remodeled Koenig house.



Clockwise: photo (circa 1930) of Koenig house at 3849 South Packard Avenue before it was remodeled decades ago; crowd at the dedication of the plaque; Barbara Janiszewski with her ice cream; JohnPierre removing the covering to reveal the bronze plaque.



sacred rule, never to be broken, was the rule of no smoking on school property or no closer than 500 feet from school. If you wanted to smoke you had to walk on the south side of Lunham because that was Cudahy. Any infraction meant a detention after school. Because the public address system was not completely installed, a teacher would stand in the hall and blast an air horn to announce the end of the class hour.

The next class was Mr. McKeon's geography just up the hall from my English class. Mr. McKeon was the basketball coach and some of the guys in his classes referred to him as coach. This never bothered him. His class was at the far south end of the hall, one of two large double classrooms that had a folding divider wall in the middle that could separate into two normal classrooms. This was one of the rooms I had heard about that hadn't yet had the window installed. This room was twice as cold as the others. The openings were temporarily covered with plastic sheeting. With the wind blowing against the plastic, Coach McKeon had to talk loudly to be heard over the rustling plastic. At the end of his class, an announcement was made asking if anyone could lend the high school any portable electric heaters until there was heat in the building.

After geography, it was a mad dash to the science wing at the other end of the school for Mr. Trost's general science class. When I was getting



School construction site fall 1962

settled in the classroom, I heard several fellow classmates laughing about the very small principal's office. I asked, "Where's the principal's office?" I didn't remember seeing one anywhere. Someone pointed out the utility closet across the hall. It was sad to see this cubbyhole space that our principal had to use. Thank God there were no mops, pails, or brooms that Mr. Rewey had to deal with. It amazed me how they were able to get an office desk and chair in that cramped space. I guess on that first day everyone had to make sacrifices.

Hurrying to my next class I noticed an unsuspecting classmate with a sheet of paper taped to his back, labeled "Kick Me Hard!" I recall thinking then, that poor guy must be a freshman like me and that I was going to have to be extra alert to watch out for these prank-loving classmates.

Mr. Briselden's 5th hour general math class turned out to be a completely different experience. There were some windows missing, and it was the second time where the teacher had to compete with the rustling plastic window covering. To add to Mr. Briselden's stress, there were two students apparently suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), a disorder that no one knew anything about back in 1962. These two students couldn't function as normal students and didn't pay any attention to the teacher. They constantly interrupted math class every few minutes with childish pranks. This caused the teacher, who would turn his back to write something on the blackboard, to turn back to reprimand the students. How Mr. Briselden ever maintained his composure that first day without strangling the heck out of these guys remains a mystery to this very day.

After the chaos in math class was over, I had the later 20-minute lunch period. Since there was no cafeteria yet, lunch would be before or after the 5th hour class. Oh, what an enjoyable lunch break that was to share with these hyperactive troublesome guys from math class. I remember that first lunch break. Cal, the student who sat behind me, told me that he and one of the troublemakers were good friends, and they had broken into the school that summer while it was under construction and had done a little exploring. Eventually, the troublemaker had to relieve himself, so he used one corner of a classroom, which was our unfinished math classroom. That thought has always stayed with me. The very first bathroom break was done in the northwestern corner of my math classroom.

My next class, Mr. Tindel's sixth hour wood shop, was back where my day had begun, in the industrial arts wing. The woodshop was not yet furnished and would be like that for several more

months. The drafting/drawing portion would be done first in the room across the hall from the metal shop room. This room was different than the other classrooms. It had these enormously huge windows that covered the outside wall and let in a tremendous amount of light. The room was furnished with these elevated gray metal drafting desks with stools, and it had all the necessary drafting tools that were needed. Learning the basics of drafting blueprints would be beneficial to me in later years, when I had to read and understand blueprints as part of my job.

The last class was Coach Milton's 7th hour boys physical education. Coach Milton was the football coach, and he ran his classroom like an army drill sergeant. He also looked the part and was very intimidating. What concerned me was this: Without a gym or showers, plus no space outside to run or do calisthenics, how would he conduct any physical education classes? As it turned out these classes would be held in an unused classroom at the end of the hallway in the science wing. For this class we would spend our time reading from a health and nutrition textbook, and then do an outline on the chapters we had read. This arrangement would last for several months until the upper gym and showers were ready for us. Coach Milton was a no-nonsense teacher, and if any cocky student acted up in his class he would shout "HEADS UP!" Suddenly, Coach would send a blackboard eraser sailing across the

classroom and that student had better react quickly. Pity the poor fool if they thought Coach was fooling.

This is what I can recall of September 12, 1962, on the very first day of St. Francis High School. All the anxiety I felt back then has now turned into just sentimental feelings. It's amazing what we had to cope with, and it makes me wonder if today's St. Francis students will ever know or care what those first 302 students went through.



Ground breaking ceremony  
October 15, 1961



St. Francis High School viewed from Lake Drive

## Deer Creek Begins in the City of St. Francis

by Anna Passante

Bring up Deer Creek in a conversation and most St. Francis and Bay View residents will visualize the creek that meanders through the St. Francis Seminary on South Lake Drive. But that creek is only a small section of what was once a stream of water that flowed from St. Francis all the way to Lincoln Avenue on the northern boundary of Bay View.

"Starting from a spring near the intersection of today's South Kinnickinnic Avenue and East Norwich Street, Deer Creek wound its way through the present grounds of the St. Francis Seminary and cut across South Illinois Avenue to the intersection of South Delaware and Oklahoma Avenues," wrote Bernhard Korn, in his book *The Story of Bay View*.

The creek continued north at this point, following South Delaware Avenue. When the creek reached East Estes Street, it detoured west a short distance, connecting with South Ellen Street. According to Arthur Hickman, in his memoir, *Bay View As I Remember It*, "this little detour was known as the 'Devil's Elbow'." Hickman claimed that the creek continued running north parallel to Ellen Street, actually "about 100 feet west of it." When the

creek reached South Pryor Avenue, it went under a wooden bridge and emptied into a marshy area. (Later, this marshy area would be the location of Lewis Playfield.)

Deer Creek created major flooding problems for neighborhood residents. The creek was not only fed by a natural spring but also was a drainage route for all the land between South Superior Street and South Kinnickinnic Avenue. This combination of spring water and drainage water caused this intermittent flooding.

As far back as 1879, there had been talk about draining the creek, but it wasn't until the 1890s that the City of Milwaukee decided to construct sewers to divert it. In 1893, the Milwaukee Common Council authorized construction of "an outlet sewer alongside of Deer Creek, from the east line of the right-of-way of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway Co. to Lake Michigan..."

The 1893 annual report for the Milwaukee Board of Public Works reports: "Two large trunk sewers will receive the outflow, one emptying into Lake Michigan at the mouth of Deer Creek [at Lincoln Avenue], and the other at St. Paul Avenue [now Rusk Avenue]."



Students from St. Mary's Academy sledding and skating on Deer Creek on the Convent and Seminary grounds. Courtesy Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi



This photo of Deer Creek Pond is undated but was probably take circa the 1890s. The view is presumed from the southeast looking northwest. The largest building in the background is likely Mound Street School.---Courtesy of Bay View Historical Society.

Both sewer outlets were completed the following year at a cost of \$36,301.83. (In the 1930s, however, in order to stop the flow of wastewater into the lake, these two sewer outlets were bulk headed and the wastewater was directed into new sewer lines that traveled north to Jones Island.)

Unfortunately, these two sewer outlets did not solve all the flooding problems and more storm sewers and catch basins were constructed over the years. In 1902, a 84" combined sewer was built along South Delaware Avenue, and according to the 1902 annual report of Milwaukee Board of Public Works, 90 feet of 6 inch clay sewer pipe was laid at the southwest corner of Rusk and Kinnickinnic Avenues to help drain the pond.

Another area targeted was the point where Deer Creek left the seminary grounds. According to plat maps, provided by Tony Kotecki, a civil engineer with the Milwaukee Department of Public Works, a 60" combined sewer (sanitary and storm water combined) was installed in 1918 near the present intersection of South Illinois, East Rhode Island, and East Fernwood Avenues. From this point, sewer pipes directed the flow of water west on Fernwood Avenue and then north along South Indiana Avenue to East Oklahoma and South Delaware Avenues.

Flooding continued to plague South Delaware Avenue residents into the 1920s. "In 1921, due to a combination of heavy rains and clogged sewers, Delaware Avenue became an elongated lake," said Hickman. "The only access to the front door of Brandt's market, near the Trowbridge Street School, was by boat." As a result, recalled Hickman, a larger intercepting sewer was built under the full length of Delaware Avenue, and no more flooding occurred.

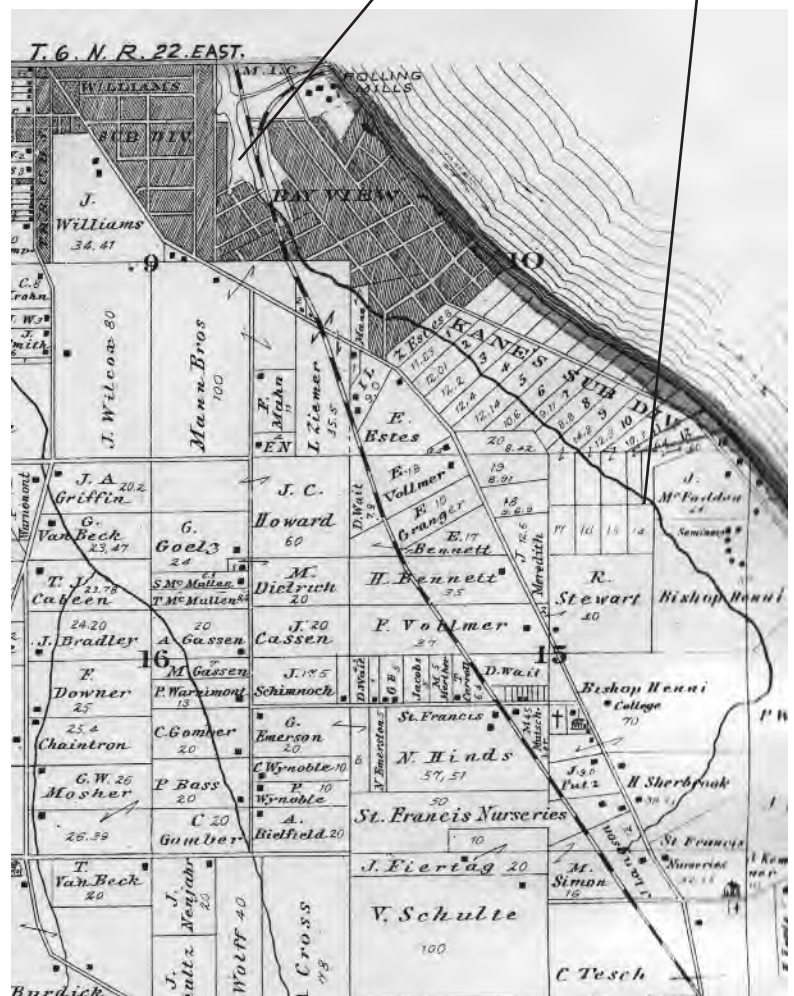
Ultimately the creek disappeared from the landscape. The old creek bed along South Delaware Avenue was paved over with concrete, and the part of the former Deer Creek Pond became the site of the Beulah Brinton Community Center and playground. Presently, all that is left of Deer Creek is a short stretch that meanders through the grounds of the St. Francis Seminary, located on South Lake Drive.

Yet, the creek has left its legacy in Bay View. According to the book, *Bay View Neighborhood Historic Resource Survey*, "employees of the [Brinton] center report unusual problems with dampness rising from the foundation, which is attributed to the creek bed below."

(Article originally published in the *Bay View Compass* newspaper: "Bay View's Deer Creek forced mostly underground" September 2008 and June 2013.)  
See online version:  
<https://bayviewcompass.com/bay-views-deer-creek-forced-mostly-underground/>

Deer Creek Pond, present-day Beulah Brinton Center and playground

Deer Creek



A portion of a map from the Illustrated Historical Atlas of Milwaukee County 1876. Deer Creek is clearly visible flowing north from the St. Francis Seminary into Bay View, through the area marked as Kane's subdivision into the pond (top center of drawing) west of the Rolling Mill.



# St. Francis HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

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Richard Raatz

## Newsletter

Anna Passante  
Barbara Janiszewski

## Mark Your Calendar

**Cousin's Sub Fundraiser:** Sept. 14, 2016 4pm-8pm

**Annual Harvest Fest Pie Auction:** Sunday, Oct 2,  
tentatively 1:00-4:00 with pie auction at 3:00

**General Meetings:** Saturday, Oct. 15, 2016 9:30am

**Bake Sale** at Civic Center voting day Nov. 8, 2016

**Christmas Dinner:** Polonez restaurant 4016 South  
Packard Avenue, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2016, at 6:00 p.m..

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