

St. Francis HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

Newsletter published quarterly

Non-Profit Organization 501c3

September 2018

Progress of New St. Francis of Assisi Convent

3221 South Lake Drive

by Celia Struck, OSF

Each day brings us one day closer to our projected move-in date in spring 2019. It's been a phenomenal experience to watch the transformation of the property from St. Mary's Academy/Marian Center to the new Convent.



Facing west towards present Motherhouse

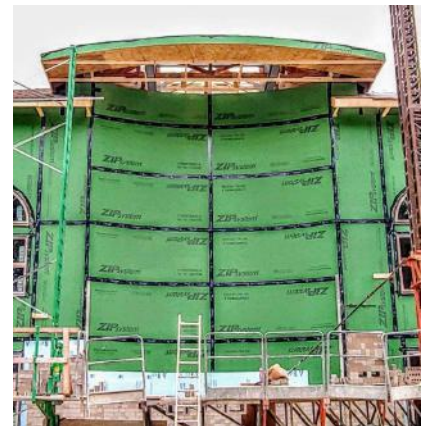
This is the southernmost building. The open space shown is the three-season porch on the second floor. It is right above the dining room, which will look out onto the current front yard. To the right of the porch is assisted living.



St. Francis Niche

Facing South Lake Drive

This is the niche for the large bronze St. Francis piece on the main entrance to the present Motherhouse.



St. Francis Niche closeup view



Facing west towards present Motherhouse
This will be the main entrance to the new convent.



The Marion Center before demolition. The center original section, St. Mary's Academy, dates back to 1904.

For more photos, a drone flyover video, information
Go to: <http://spiritofstfrancis.org>



Have you ever wondered how you could make a significant difference in the future of the city of St. Francis? One way is to include a gift to the St. Francis Historical Society in your will, trust or beneficiary designation. For more information, please contact Anna Passante at 414-316-4391 or st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

What's New?

New Member

Welcome new members: Gary Groth, Angela Scaffidi, Tony and Amy Szuta and Michael Rudolf

Bake Sale

Our next bake sale will be on Tuesday, November 6 during the election (7am-8pm or until bakery runs out). If you can bake something for the bake sale, please contact us at 414-316-4391 or email at st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Doors Open

The historical society will be taking part in Doors Open on Sat., Sept. 22, and Sun., Sept. 23 ,from 1-4 p.m. Come view our display cabinets in the rotunda.

Lakeside Power Plant

We held an ice cream social at La Finca Coffee Shop, after which the historical marker was unveiled at the former site of the Lakeside Power Plant on Lake Drive on August 4. It was well attended.

Regional Meeting:

The Southeast Regional meeting was held on July 7 at the Civic Center. Mark Maurice from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation gave a talk about their grants and investment options. Randy Borland and Anna Passante talked about ground penetrating radar done at the Lake Protestant Cemetery. A box lunch from Layton Fruit Market was served after which there were tours of the St. Francis of Assisi chapel, the seminary woods and the Lake Protestant cemetery.

Cousins Sub Fundraiser

Come eat at Cousins Sub at 3058 East Layton Avenue Wednesday, September 12, from 4-8 pm. The historical society will get a percentage of the sales.

September Civil War Program

Come to the St. Francis Civic Center on Thursday, September 27. Local historians, Tom Ludka and Marge Berres, will relate their journey of identifying 1,000 Civil War veterans at Milwaukee's Forest Home Cemetery. Come hear some of the veteran's stories. Refreshments at 6:30 pm, program at 7:00 pm.

Lake Protestant Cemetery

On September 29th at 2:00 pm, the Sons of Union Veterans, in full dress uniform, will dedicate two newly acquired civil war gravestones at the Lake Protestant Cemetery for William W. Thompson and William Beal. Refreshments will be served--homemade pie, cake, and cookies. Bring the children to experience history.

Lakeside Power Plant Historic Marker Dedication Saturday, August 4, 2018



Above, President Anna Passante admires the new marker.

Right, a group photo (Mayor Tutaj in the blue shirt.)



St. Francis Days Parade September 1, 2018



Left, President Anna Passante with loaned bike from Sprocket Cafe, Bay View

Right, Treasurer Barbara Janiszewski ready to throw the candy



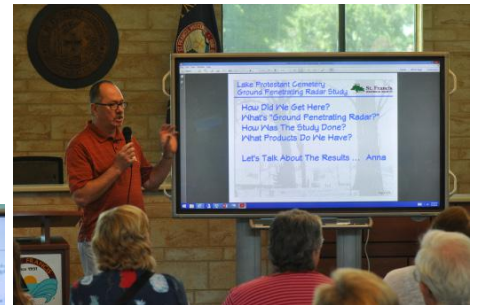
2018 Local History Meeting St. Francis Historical Society Saturday, July 7, 2018



Rick Bernstein, State Historical Society



Mark Maurice, Greater Milwaukee Foundation



Randy Borland, St. Francis Historical Society



Attendees enjoying their box lunch from Layton Fruit Market, St. Francis



Dave Goltz, Barbara Janiszewski, Mary Drehfal



Lake Protestant Cemetery tour

Of the Dinky and the Frogs

By Karen Gersonde

Let me start out by saying I am sorry I missed the dedication of the Lakeside Power Plant Commemorative Plaque ceremony. I saw photos on Facebook and it looked like a good time was had by all, even though it was hot outside. I am glad that the Power Plant is being recognized. Although it is gone, I will always have a special place in my heart for that building, having spent many, many hours playing in its fields and coal piles, tracks, swamps, and trees. Those were such carefree days; I would go back and enjoy those days in a heartbeat. Alas we can't, but at least I have my memories of those days gone by.

I think my favorite place to play on their property was by the swamps alongside the Dinky tracks. I loved nature, so of course the swamp was always calling my name. I would ride my bike along the black cinder path to get to them. You had to be careful not to fall, as the black cinder pieces would tear up your skin, as my friend Mary can attest to as she still has black pieces visible under her skin, on her leg. I used to catch polliwogs, dragonflies, butterflies, and of course, the frogs. If I remember correctly, they were the little green type. They were not very big but they were quick. I had my little pail with me and of course a net. It was so much fun catching them. But there were so many, it was actually pretty easy to do. As much fun as it was, there was one thing I was terrified of as I did not understand it at the time. I was terribly afraid of the Dinky!

I knew that the land we played on was private property and belonged to the electric company. Having been raised of course Catholic in the city of St. Francis, my parents had instilled in me the fear of God. I never wanted to break any laws and get in trouble, but oh those frogs were croaking out my name! So when that old Dinky would come rumbling through on the tracks adjacent to the swamp, I would hide in the bushes so I would not get caught. I used to think it was on patrol looking for us kids, and if the engineer saw us, they would call the cops on us. I felt likewise about



the train car carrying people in them. I did not really know where they were going. I thought for sure they would bust us. It just all seemed too scary and creepy for me as a child. It was not until I grew up that I learned about the history of the Dinky and that streetcar spur line that actually was carrying employees to the power plant, as there was limited parking on site. My brother knew more about all of that than I did, as he was always a train buff, but for me, I was clueless. I just know it really scared the heck out of me to see that Dinky train rambling down the tracks. Hey, I was just a kid, what did I know? It did not look like a regular train engine so I wasn't sure what it really was.

As for the frogs, yah, mom put the brakes on me catching frogs and bringing them home. Why? Well, I guess she was not happy about them getting out of their container in our garage and jumping into her clothespin/laundry wicker basket which was kept next to the frogs. I knew I was in trouble when I heard a loud, "KAREN!" Of course my brother Glenn would laugh. He was not the one in trouble.

So now you know the story of the Dinky and the frogs. I am sure there are many more readers out there with their own stories and memories of growing up and playing on the power plant property. I am glad that there is a plaque recognizing where the power plant was. It needs to take its place in history. For this generation will never know the pleasure that I had of growing up with the Dinky and the frogs.



Courtesy Chris Barney

L-10 locomotive that pulled the coal cars, also known as the "Dinky"

THE SEMINARY WOODS

part 2 of 3

by Mark Hansen

Father Mathias Gernbauer served for three years as the first resident pastor of the St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Waterford, Wisconsin. In 1855, he accepted an invitation from Dr. Salzmann to join the faculty of the St. Francis De Sales Seminary, which had opened shortly before. He took up the new assignment of Professor of Classical Languages.

Born in rural Postlingsberg, in upper Austria, Gernbauer acquired classical education in the city of Linz at the time his father worked as a mason on the city's fortifications.

Dr. Joseph Salzmann, rector of the St. Francis De Sales Seminary, recruited Gernbauer to come to America. In Austria, there was an old religious practice of peasants placing a devotional shrine at a wayside spot of prayer in the woods. Once at the seminary, in 1866, Gernbauer carried on this tradition and erected a small sanctuary in the Seminary Woods honoring the Blessed Virgin. It was known as the Chapel of the Visitation and also as the Chapel-in-the-Woods. Next, in 1870, he built the Way of the Cross (aka Stations of the Cross) leading to the cemetery. Both were then blessed by the saintly Father Kundig, in his role as Vicar General of the diocese.

The simple white chapel was outlined in gold, and had four small windows to let in light. The word "Mary" was painted over and over on the walls around the altar. Carved on either side of the chapel's front outside wall were the two verses of the "Hail Mary," written in Latin. In October 1873, the chapel was enlarged and was finished the following May 1874 with a beautiful altar. Father Gernbauer



The Chapel of the Visitation, color slide, circa 1974. Credit: Father Donald F. Zerkel; Courtesy Mark Hansen

conducted daily Mass there, and it became a favored spot for the hard-working Sisters who made their way from the adjacent institutions to recharge their "batteries."

In 1875, the Milwaukee diocese was elevated to an Archdiocese, and Bishop John Henmi was raised to Archbishop. "Before leaving St. Francis, the Papal envoys, at the request of Father Gernbauer, visited the Chapel — making their way along the fourteen stations. The Chapel at this time was very small, merely the sanctuary of the present one. But the visitors were very much impressed and, recognizing the good work done in fostering devotion to the Mother of God, they promised the good Father that, with the consent of the new Archbishop, they would present the matter to the Holy Father and request him to endow the shrine in a manner that would make it a public pilgrimage. And so it happened. A few months later word came from Rome saying, that "His Holiness Pius IX, had granted the favor."¹



Father Mathias Gernbauer

Professors and students alike enjoyed praying there. Every day, when the weather permitted it, the professors could be seen after dinner wending their way to the woods where, after a short visit in the Chapel, they would take their constitutional on a well-beaten path a little to the west — enjoying at the same time their customary smoke and conversation. Everything was most primitive and beautiful.²

Father Gerend liked to remember his uncle, Good Father Gernbauer, as they called him. He is no more, but he is not forgotten. Even to this day, one can picture him seated on a rustic bench, which the students had ingeniously constructed near the Chapel, smoking his old clay pipe, of which he was very fond, observing the beautiful nature about him.

With the passing of saintly Father Gernbauer, it was Father Joseph Rainer who took over the responsibility of looking after the so-called Chapel of the Visitation. For many

1. *Our Young People: The Deaf-Mutes' Friend*. Vol. 45, No. 9, pg. 5-6.
2. Vol. 45, No. 9, pg. 6, *ibid*.

years he said Mass there in the early morning to prepare himself for his daily task as the Seminary rector.

Father Gerend explained how his grandfather was buried here at an unknown date:

“My mother’s father, Stephen Gernbauer, died in Waterford in the year 1852 and his body was transported to Milwaukee as one of the first to be buried in Calvary cemetery. For many years he rested there, but, somehow, the members of our family, when visiting Milwaukee, experienced such great difficulty in trying to find the grave; then one day I arranged with the sexton to exhume what was left of the remains and bring them to St. Francis for interment beside his son, Father Gernbauer.”³

It was a beautiful evening in the month of May when Father Gerend made his way to the little cemetery back of the Chapel in the woods. He enjoyed these rambles more than anything else. He spent a sweet hour that evening making the rounds of that little cemetery, and reading the names of dear ones departed, whose lives at some time or other had commingled with his. As he recalled, “Away off to one side was the grave of Brother Leo,⁴ the jolly postman for the Seminary; further down the row a slab of a brownish-gray

color and odd design attracted my attention. I read these lines: “Bruder Anton, ein eifriger Diener Gottes, ein edelmüthiger Wohlthäter und treuer Arbeiter für das Salesianum, starb er Gottergeben und gestärkt durch die heiligen Sakramente.” [Google translation: Brother Anton,⁵ a zealous servant of God, a generous benefactor and faithful worker for the Salesianum, he died God-given and strengthened by the holy sacraments.]

Again, Father Gerend moved on, but soon halted to examine more closely the broken slabs of ancient days entangled in the green of wild rosebushes. He had seen these tombstones before, many years ago, underneath the evergreen trees of the first graveyard, across the ravine in front of the Seminary, not far from where the Orphan Asylum used to be. Father Gerend said the following about these stones: “I remembered them and brushed away the dirt that covered the lettering and then deciphered the short stories of the ‘passing away’ of the first priests who had walked on St. Francis’ soil, making the Nojoshing Woods their home. Only few remember their names today, and their deeds of heroism are forgotten. So, it reads: ‘Mathias Steiger, thirty-six years old, died September 12, 1851’ and ‘Anton Keppler, forty-four years old, died September 9, 1851.’ They died only a few days apart noble victims of the cholera scourge in the cause of their suffering fellows. They

3. *ibid.*

4. Brother Leo Bernard had been one of the two Brothers who traveled to Milwaukee with a group of laywomen from Germany in 1849 who later formed the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi Convent. He was one of the carpenters that built the first convent and the seminary buildings.

5. Anton Joseph Zahler was the other Brother that came over from Germany with the laywomen, who later formed the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi Convent.



Students from St. John’s Institute for Dean-Mutes at the cemetery, paying respect to the dead. Scanned from photo paper 1905 from personal digital collection of Mark Hansen.

were the real pioneers, who have been instrumental in preparing the way for so much good, long before the Seminary was built. Only fragments of their history are left from which to draw that information and edification generally furnished by the humble beginnings of all great institutions.”⁶ These two pioneer priests came from Europe with a group of Tertiaries in 1849 and built the first house of worship. The women of this group later developed into the Sisterhood of St. Francis Assisi, a sisterhood that for many years sacrificed itself completely for the Seminary and without whose services it would not have succeeded. Many of the Sisters rest in this cemetery.

St. Francis has always been considered to be the very heart of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin. Even before the raising of the Seminary, Heaven had intended these grounds to be sacred. It is for this reason that the old Catholic pioneers, and others after them, requested that they be placed to rest in St. Francis soil. So here lies in the seminary cemetery the third Archbishop, F.X. Katzer since he requested to be buried near his parents in the little cemetery. The fourth and last foreign-born archbishop, Sebastian G. Messmer, too, in his last will and testament expressed the wish to be buried in that little cemetery in the woods, if he would die in this country. But Heaven ordained it otherwise. He died in his beloved Switzerland, and there he rests in the back of the chapel of his hometown.

Other priests, as well as professors, are buried in the seminary cemetery, including Monsignor Joseph Rainer who spent his entire priestly life on St. Francis soil, and for more than half a century the rector of the Seminary; noted laymen Professor John Baptist Singenberger, the founder of the Caecilian Society, and a professor of music at the Catholic Normal School in St. Francis; Professor Louis Mihm who spent over fifty years as a teacher and composer of Catholic church music, and for fifty-one years as a teacher of the deaf at St. John’s Institute.

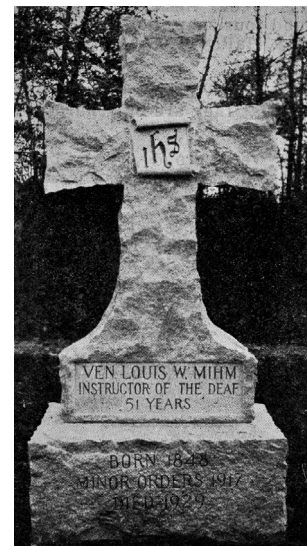
There sits on a shelf in the Archdiocese archives a 16-mm filmstrip in fragile condition, that captured the favorite pastime for Father Gerend on the occasion of golden jubilee of his priesthood in 1931. It was that July when the deaf alumni gathered on the school grounds for the celebration, this 3-minute long flick did manage to include a group walk where Father Gerend was leading the alums past the marker of the just deceased Professor Mihm. (*To be concluded in the December newsletter*)



Mathias Gernbauer gravestone in the cemetery in the St. Francis Seminary Woods. Courtesy Mark Hansen, digital photo, 2017.



Father Gerend walking past marker of Professor Mihm, a frame captured from 16-mm motion film, 1931; Courtesy Mark Hansen



Venerable Louis W. Mihm grave marker. Note the base is currently below grade, scanned from printed photo, 1930, vol. 39, *Our Young People*; Courtesy Mark Hansen



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

Meetings:

September 15, 2018, Board meeting
October 20, 2018, General Meeting
November 17, 2018, Board Meeting

Events:

Cousins Sub Fundraiser Wed. Sept. 12, 4-8pm
Doors Open: September 22&23, 1-4 pm
Civil War talk Thursday, September 27, 6:30 pm
refreshments, 7:00 pm.
Dedication of the Civil War stones Sat., September 29,
(See What's New column)
Bake Sale: Tuesday, November 6, during the election
7am-8 pm (or until bakery runs out).

The historical society office (3400 E. Howard Avenue) is open most Thursday afternoons from 1:00 to 3:30. Please call 414-316-4391 to confirm that we will be in the office.

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