



NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

Newsletter published quarterly

Non-Profit Organization 501c3

December 2025

Victor Schulte's Mansion on the Hill

by Anna Passante

Victor Schulte is inarguably the most famous of the Town of Lake residents of the 19th century. Born in Westphalia, Prussia (Germany), in 1811, at 19 years old, he immigrated to the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania where he studied woodworking. He eventually became a master carpenter specializing in railroad bridges. In 1840, he decided to travel to the West and ended up in Milwaukee. Finding little contracting work, he continued west to Janesville, Wisconsin. According to family lore, Victor traveled to Janesville in November when it was bitterly cold. Traveling by coach, at times he ran along the coach to keep from freezing.

Things were dull in Janesville, so after a year he returned to Milwaukee. His experience in bridge building landed him the job of building the Chestnut Street Bridge (present-day Juneau Avenue) in 1841. Schulte's Chestnut Street Bridge figured in the "bridge riot/bridge war" of 1845 when factions in Juneautown (east of the Milwaukee River) and Kilbourntown (west of the river) clashed. Victor Schulte's shop, employing 13 men, was located in downtown Milwaukee, near North Water and Juneau avenues.

Building bridges was Schulte's business, but his great architectural love was churches. He designed and built Old St. Mary's Church at 844 North Broadway in 1846, St. John's Cathedral at 812 North Jackson Street in 1847, and Holy Trinity at 613 South Fourth Street in 1849. All of them were in the German Zopfstil style.



Victor and his wife with their adult children



Schulte house

In 1855, Schulte began work on the St. Francis De Sales Seminary on South Lake Drive in Town of Lake. He employed 80 workmen. The bricks were made from clay on site. Lumber was hauled from the lakefront piers nearby. The dome was designed to be the heart of the seminary complex. Schulte designed, built, and served as supervisor on all his projects. It took three years to complete and was dedicated on January 29, 1856, on the feast of St. Francis De Sales, the seminary's patron saint. This was Schulte's last major project.

At the time of the seminary project, Schulte was residing with his wife, Verena, and their children in downtown Milwaukee. Schulte had been active in the Milwaukee community, serving as alderman and councilor in the seventh ward. But he must have fell in love with the open spaces of Town of Lake.

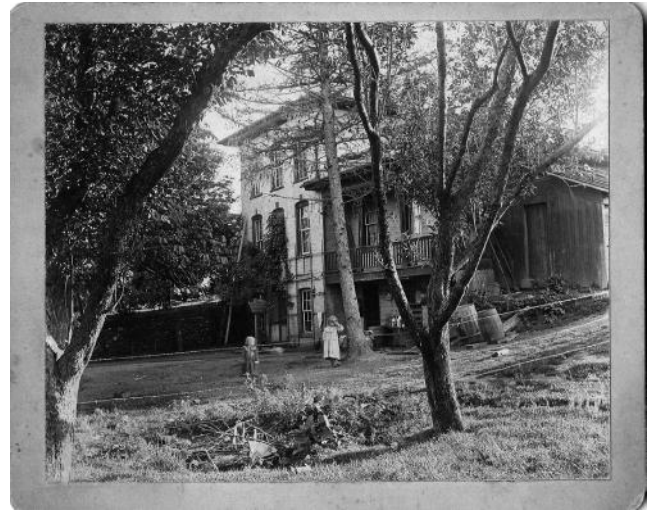
In 1857, he purchased 100 acres in Town of Lake and moved his family there in 1860. The property boundaries were the present-day streets of East Leroy, East Van Beck, South Pennsylvania, and South Brust. He retired from his practice and became a farmer. Russell Zimmerman, Milwaukee historian and architect, described the area in a newspaper article (*Milwaukee Journal*, Oct 6, 1974) as "idyllic, rolling countryside." Zimmerman felt that Schulte most likely designed the two-story, Italianate cream city brick farmhouse at the northwest corner of present-day South Pennsylvania and East Norwich avenues (present address 3975 South Pennsylvania).

It had nine large windows on the south front and six on the sides, "an usual number for so small a dwelling," wrote Zimmerman. The house also had a library containing Schulte's collection of classical literature. The central wing to the rear had a studio balcony that allowed Schulte to walk from the house directly onto the hillside. Years later, a railroad right-of-way went through the farm, and the house had to be moved farther east. Hence, the loss of the studio balcony. In 1877, the house took a direct lightning hit, which knocked off the chimney to its base, splitting several roof rafters.

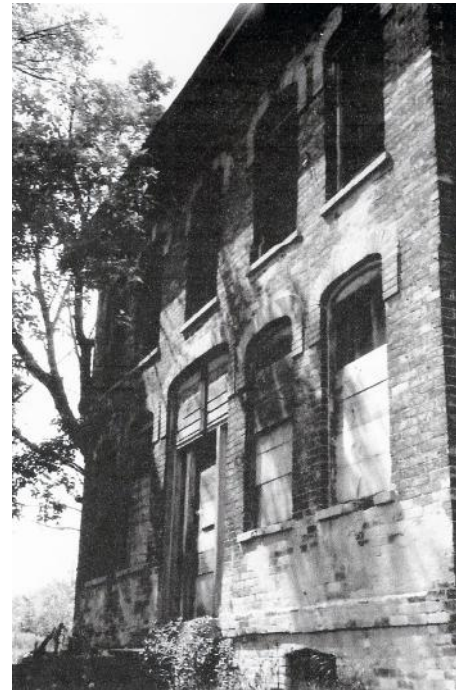
Verena Schulte died in 1878, and Victor died in 1890 at age 79. Their son Adolph took over the farm and later sold it. Adolph was the proprietor of a general store on 2224 East St. Francis Avenue (still standing).

The house on Pennsylvania Avenue changed hands over the years. By the early 1950s, the house was purchased by the Dittmore-Freimuth Corporation for possible expansion of their business that was located on East Norwich Avenue. The Schulte house was used as a warehouse but deteriorated beyond repair. The city ordered the building razed. In 1974, the St. Francis Fire Department used it for fire practice. The site now contains a duplex dwelling.

(Information taken from the book *From Nojoshing to St. Francis, From Settlement to City, Part 2: The Early Settlers of St. Francis, Wisconsin 1836-1900*) by Anna Passante. Book available through the historical society.)



A backyard view of the Schulte house. The children are probably his grandchildren.



Schulte house just before demolition.



Rear view of the Schulte house just before demolition.



Drawing of the Schulte house from the *Milwaukee County Atlas* 1876

• What's New?

• Mark your calendars for these events coming up:

• Thursday, December 11, Christmas Dinner

• The annual Christmas dinner will take place at Joe's K-Ranch. Invite was sent to all members. Paul Akert will present "Storyteller Santa" after dinner. Questions? Contact Jan 414-744-1443 or pientokj@aol.com.

On Thursday, September 11, at the St. Francis Civic Center, Paul Akert portrayed John Muir in his presentation: "Journey with John Muir from Scotland to Wisconsin to California and around the world." He presented a narrative and stories with PowerPoint slide images. It was very interesting and entertaining.

Paul will be presenting "Story-telling Santa" at the historical society Christmas dinner at Joe' K Ranch on December 11 (see *What's New* column).





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

2025 Officers

President..... Anna Passante
Vice-President..... George Ramponi
Secretary..... Bill Drehfal
Treasurer..... Stephanie Maxwell

Board of Directors

Jan Pientok
Mary Drehfal
Jay Wesner
Randy Borland
Juliet Hills

Honorary

Ralph Voltner
Kathy Matthew
Carol Wojtecki

Newsletter

Anna Passante

Mark Your Calendar

Meetings at the St. Francis Civic Center at 3400 E. Howard Ave.:

The monthly board meetings are the 3rd Saturday of the month at 9:30 a.m. Visitors are welcome.

December 20, 2025

January 17, 2026

February 14, 2026

Upcoming events (see "What's New" column for details)

Facebook: St. Francis Historical Society

Email: st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Address: 3400 E. Howard Ave.

Website: stfranciswihistoricalsociety.org

Phone: 414-316-4391