

## *A Parish Is Established -- -1870*

Northwest Manitowoc county was in the process of change from dense forest land to productive farms during the years from 1852 to 1868. These were difficult and trying years. This is recorded in the history of the peoples that settled here. It should be noted that much of this history was written by Father Adalbert Cipin and translated by Mr. Matthew S. Tlachac.

In 1852, about fifteen Bohemian families settled in and around what is present day Kellnersville. By 1862, up to eight hundred Bohemian families immigrated from Europe to this area to make a new home and life with great hopes for freedom and peace. Much of the land was obtained by purchase of the tax title due to the original owner's failure to pay the taxes. It was a difficult time but the tax debit needed to be paid. Paying the tax was a means of gaining title to a small parcel of land on which to build dreams.

The new settlers were poor. Most owned only an ax for tools. But they were hardy people that were accustomed to poverty, hunger and want. They were also energetic, hardworking and determined to make a living from their new land. The settlers were faith-filled people with a dependence upon God. One of the earliest known churches was at French Creek, now called Francis Creek. In 1856, a small log church was prepared

for worship at Greenstreet. Travel was by horse and buggy making it difficult to go to church. Another was built at Reif Mills and dedicated to Saint Augustine. Father Maly, and after him Father August Lang, made regular visits from French Creek to these mission churches to minister to the people and worship with them.

The settlers, whose homes surrounded Kellnersville, soon joined together and made plans for a church of their own. Bishop Joseph Melcher, first Bishop of Green Bay diocese, granted them permission to build a church. September 10, 1868 is marked as the beginning of the new parish. A church soon rose above the landscape. It was a frame church of American Colonial style. The picture shown below is what the building looked like in the early 1900's.



**Saint Joseph Church - 1870**

The location was on the site of the present church. With joyful hearts and prayers of thanks to Almighty God, a

devoted people gathered with Bishop Melcher on August 29, 1870 as he blessed the new church and dedicated it to Saint Joseph. During the next few months Father Gedeon Mazanek came from Greenstreet to serve the parish whenever he could. The Bishop showed his concern for the infant parish by appointing Father George Brunner, a newly ordained priest, as its first resident Pastor. Father Brunner offered Mass in the parish for the first time on Christmas Day, 1870. Although these were humble beginnings, the seeds of growth for the new parish had been planted. The rolling lands soon were cleared and farms painted a picture of prosperity and growth. The endless labors and hard work were now bearing fruit.

The joyous occasion of a birth or wedding in any Christian community was celebrated by all of the community, so was the sadness of death. While burials took place in the community prior to the establishment of the parish, there is a large white stone marker erected in the southeast corner of the parish cemetery marking the place of burial of John Stokes and Matelda Seidl in 1872. They are the first recorded burials listed in parish books.

The years of early growth of the parish are obscure and vague. Little is found in the early records. Father George Brunner remained in the parish until September of 1871. He

was followed by Father Gedeon Mazanek who, according to parish records, cared for the parish until March of 1872. Old records in History of the Catholic Church, found in the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay library, list Reverend Sadimir Klacel as pastor from Father Gedeon Mazanek's death on Easter Monday in 1873 until 1877. Other records indicate that in August of 1872 Father Joseph Maly, first Pastor of Saint Wenceslaus of Greenstreet, assumed the Pastorate of Saint Joseph. Father Maly remained until December of 1880. Father W. J. Revis was Pastor a short time until June of 1881. In March 1882 Father Maly returned to guide the growing parish. The education of the children in a religious and Christian environment was foremost in the mind of Father Maly. Under his direction the parish formulated plans for the establishment of a school. The task of building and opening the parish school was completed by Father Ignatius Lager in 1885.

It was a white frame building standing just south of the present rectory and near the creek that passed through the property.

The school was built by voluntary subscriptions. The completed building cost \$937.57; therefore, at its opening, the school was free of debt. The Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity from Alverno staffed the school. Interest in the school was evident by

the continued increase in enrollment. By the year 1888 the student enrollment was 120 pupils.



**The First School - 1885**

In the same year Father Lager left and was succeeded by Father Frank Privoznik, who retired from the post in July of 1889. Father Wenceslaus Koerner, a new priest in the diocese, was appointed pastor and Father Koerner remained in the parish for four years. He was instrumental in having the church renovated and undertook the construction of the school at Kossuth. In August 1893, Father Frank Jiranek accepted the duties as Pastor of Saint Joseph. The existing problems and internal unrest in the parish were too much for Father Jiranek, and he resigned the post on Ash Wednesday of 1894.

In August of 1894 Father Adalbert Cipin became pastor of Saint Joseph. He had been instrumental in reconciliation between the parish and the bishop in the 1872-1877 feud. He

also had the unique distinction of having served this parish on three separate appointments. His personal ability, depth of perception and skill as peacemaker placed him in a special relationship with the church. Upon his arrival, he set to work to bring reconciliation between the people and the pastor and he reopened the schools at Kellnersville and Kossuth. He continued to encourage high esteem for Catholic education and took steps to improve the school.

Father Cipin left on October 1, 1896 to become the new Pastor for the parish at Reedsville. Father Rudolph Lakomy arrived at Saint Joseph the same day and remained until November of 1897. Father Francis Just followed. He found the parish in a solvent position. The school was operating successfully. He faithfully cared for the spiritual needs of the people and saw to it that necessary repairs were completed on the church and rectory. Father Just remained until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1902, the return date of Father Cipin. However, a dispute between the Bishop and the Slovan congregation at Casco had arisen. As "Peacemaker," Father Cipin was called upon to intervene and attempt to solve the problem. He left for Casco on July 6, 1903.

Father Francis Kolar arrived in Kellnersville July 1903. One acre of land for the cemetery was purchased from Mr. Wanish for \$425.00. A lot

for his family was sold to the Right Reverend S. G. Messmer, Bishop of Green Bay and his successors on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1904. As the parish grew it became more organized.

On August 31, 1905, Father Kolar took an assignment elsewhere and Father Cipin returned for the third time as pastor. He returned to find the parish again besieged by problems. Early in 1906 the dominant concern was the building of a new church and rectory. There was no doubt of the need for a new, more substantial and larger church. At the parish meeting of April 22, 1906-

"It was resolved to build a new church: for the purpose to select a good place for it, thereby elected the following committee: John Vanis and John Pinger, Bohumil Potucek, Jr., Martin Brunner, Joseph Kurz and Anton Novy." The committee met and selected a parcel of land belonging to Mike Kellner and situated between the Kellner and Stokes places. Their suggestion met with great opposition and created no little turmoil in the community. It must be remembered that members of the congregation lived in far-reaching distances from the church. Those living to the west, at Buffalo (now Menchalville), insisted on

having the church near them feeling this location was more central. Those to the east and north demanded the church be nearer to them. Since nothing was being accomplished but arguing and endless discussion, it was proposed that the Bishop be called upon and visit the parish to settle the problem. To add to this disturbance, the Mother Superior of the Franciscan Sisters who staffed the school had written to the parish and very emphatically stated that unless the school house was moved to a better and more suitable location, rather than in the "mud-hole" in which it was now located, she would remove the sisters.

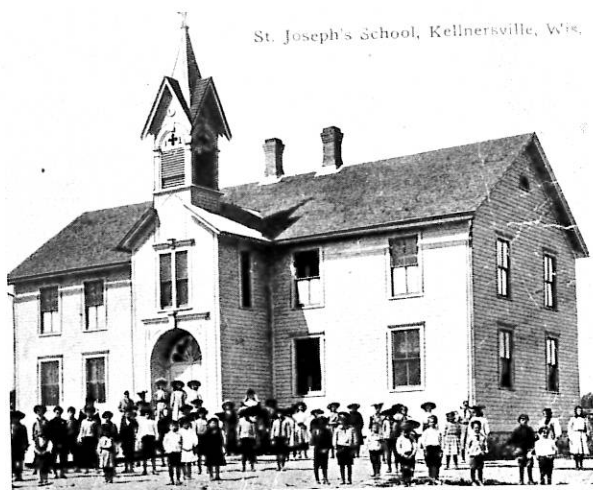
Affairs of the parish were not peaceful. Factions from various areas of the community grew and disagreement with the pastor, committee and even the Bishop over the location of the church were strong.

Bishop Fox visited the parish on May 20, 1906, and after much debate approved the special committee to organize and build the church. They were charged to buy a suitable place for the school house. Father Cipin concluded the written transcript of the meeting by adding his own personal comment. "With great sorrow in my heart, I finish the story of this remarkable meeting, the most



disastrous event except that sad wholesale apostasy in the year 1892. God have mercy on us all." He was referring to a dispute in 1892 that caused many to leave the parish and church forever.

In the following years tempers cooled and gradually agreement was reached. The old school building was moved to the site they purchased and a new school room completed in the middle of November 1908. Classes began on November 19 with Sister Basilia and Sister Antonio in charge.



**The remodeled school with its new front and tower - 1908**

The parish meeting of 1912 proved to be a stepping stone to unity among the members. After years of discord, it finally was decided to build the new church and rectory in Kellnersville. The decision to build the new church on the site of the old was made and accepted. A strip of land ten feet wide and four hundred and seventeen feet long was purchased

from Frank Vanish. The project was now a reality, and by the end of April 1914 the amount of \$20,000 in notes had already been obtained from parishioners.

In May of 1914 Father Cipin left Saint Joseph Parish. The preceding years had taken their toll on him and he was virtually worn out and felt defeated. He left Kellnersville to take up residence at Tisch Mills.

Father William Braun became the pastor when Father Cipin left. He immediately accepted the challenge of guiding the parishioners in erecting the new church. The old church was sold and moved, but was used temporarily by the parish until the new church was ready for services.

Father Braun was a warm and caring pastor. He won the hearts of the people and by his fatherly concern encouraged and received from his people the support and labor necessary to complete the work of building the church. After much hard work by pastor and people, the new church was ready for divine services. It was a festive day when the parish community gathered in the beautiful church for Holy Mass. It truly was, and still is, a fitting House of God. It is a visible sign of the community's love and labors. Unity and peace again was experienced by the community.

Father Braun contracted influenza and died of the dreaded disease during

an epidemic. He died on October 4, 1918. According to one account, Bishop Rhode personally "administered the last rites of the church to the dying priest." The church, the diocese, and in particular, Saint Joseph Parish, lost a loving priest. Father Braun was buried in the parish cemetery among the people he loved dearly.

Father Boniface Pendlewski filled the vacancy created by the death of Father Braun. Although he remained as Pastor of the Parish only until February of 1919, his short stay is marked for purchase of land for future cemetery development. He also guided the parish in the purchase of an appropriate marker for the grave of Father Braun.

Father Reinhard Reindl is responsible for the installation of electric lights in the church and for some of the interior decoration of the church. He died of pneumonia on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 1920, at the age of thirty-one. He lies buried in Saint Boniface Cemetery in Manitowoc.

Father John Rous accepted the appointment as Pastor of Saint Joseph on February 22, 1920. Father Rous initiated a program that freed the parish of excessive debt. A special project in the cemetery made it an area of beauty and a fitting resting place for the departed members of the parish. In 1922, a new crucifixion grouping was purchased and erected. It was during

the early days of Father Rous' pastorate that the mission at Greenstreet was closed.

These were years of development and change as well as depression and hard times. Under the inspirational guidance of Father Rous the parish grew - not materially, but spiritually. Since the issues of when and where to build the church were settled, the parish was faced with developing as a people, as a community united in Christ and a family under God who would learn not only how to work together, but would learn to pray together for the glory of God and the good of the parish. The guiding light of love and patience of Father Rous had finally formed the people into one church.

The burden of caring for the parish became difficult for Father Rous. When it was evident that his health was failing, the Reverend Bishop sent Father Frank Svatek to assist Father Rous and ease the work load. Father Svatek stayed with Father Rous from May to October of 1932.

On November 16, 1934, a fire damaged the school building to such an extent that to repair the building was not possible. Father Rous called a special meeting of the parish and it was agreed to make temporary repairs to the building in order to complete the school year and prepare plans for a new school. Three-quarters of an acre of land was purchased just south of the old school and a new well was drilled.

The great strain of work continued to affect the health of Father Rous. He suffered a heart attack. It was then that Father Cyril Kabat was assigned to the parish to assist Father Rous. On October 9, 1935, Father Rous took a leave of absence and spent some months in Florida to rest and regain his health. During this period Father Kabat was appointed Administrator of the parish and continued to guide the progress of the school construction. On June 16, 1935 the cornerstone was laid. Father Emil Shimek, a native son, officiated at the setting of the stone and delivered the sermon for the occasion.



**The new parish school of 1935 with the 1957 addition**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1935, the parish members gathered for the blessing of the new school. It was a happy day and the feeling of accomplishment lightened the hearts of all. Bishop Paul Peter Rhode was present to bless the school and confer the Sacrament of Confirmation upon

ninety members of the parish. The opening of the new school also saw the continuation of the junior high that was established in the 1920's. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades continued in the parish school until 1952.

Father Rous returned to the parish on July 1, 1936 and witnessed, for the first time, the school that his people had built. Father Kabat remained at Saint Joseph assisting Father Rous until September of 1938. On November 8<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Father Rous went to Tisch Mills to take on new duties. It was at Tisch Mills that Father Rous died on January 7, 1948. He lies buried in the cemetery of the parish at Tisch Mills.

Following the departure of Father Rous, Father Joseph Kalisek came to Kellnersville as Pastor. He continued to zealously care for the spiritual needs of the people. On August 13, 1943, Father Frank Svatek succeeded Father Kalisek. Father Svatek concerned himself with eliminating the parish debt and making the necessary repairs on the parish buildings. In 1956 the overcrowding in the parish school became a matter of great concern and work had immediately begun.

These were trying days for Father Svatek. He was concerned by the open opposition regarding the school addition, and at the same time was hampered by a serious illness. He retired from time to time to Maple Crest Sanitarium for rest. During these

days Father Adolph Dolezel and Father Francis Wenda were sent by the Bishop to assist Father Svatek. On March 18, 1957 Father Svatek commemorated his Silver Jubilee, and on June 15<sup>th</sup> entered University Hospital at Madison. Father Wenda and the Building Committee carried out the work of supervising the building of the new addition to the school. Father Svatek died on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1958. On June 11<sup>th</sup> the members of the parish gathered with Bishop Bona and offered mass for their beloved Pastor. A man deserving of all the honor due him, was buried in the parish cemetery to rest in peace among so many he had served so honorably.

Father Wenda remained to care for the parish until September 26, 1958, and was followed by Monsignor Kalisek. He understood the need of wholesome reading by his people and thus encouraged them to accept full coverage of the newly formed diocesan newspaper, "The Green Bay Register".

Because of age Father Kalisek found it necessary to obtain help from the Salvatorian Fathers on weekends. On occasion, because of health, Father Kalisek would take a leave of absence. During these times Father Duane Dionne and Father Ronald Reimer were appointed by the Bishop to serve the parish. Both Father Leo Schmitt and Father Edward Radey helped Monsignor Kalisek.

On August 21, 1969, Father Francis Kerscher became the twenty-third resident Pastor of Saint Joseph Parish. His coming can be said to have ushered in the beginning of the second century of the life and growth of the parish. One year from the day of his arrival the parish celebrated its Centennial by joining with Bishop Mark F. Schmitt, Auxiliary Bishop of Green Bay, in offering a Mass of thanksgiving.

Monsignor Alfred Schneider succeeded Father Kerscher on February 10, 1972. He continued in the spiritual formation of students through the school and brought changes of Vatican II into focus for community. He also instituted the Eucharistic Ministry program in the parish and encouraged members to join in lay ministry formation programs sponsored by the diocese. After ten years of work with Saint Joseph, he retired. Father Ronald Reimer returned to the parish on July 1, 1982 and served here for about three and one half years. Father Ron expanded the Eucharistic ministry group and encouraged ministries in music and pastoral areas. Under his guidance the church was repainted and some repairs were made. As a worshipping community the parish actively participated in the Renew process and many parish members made a Cursillo. A fresh breath of the Holy Spirit blew through the parish community.



Father Francis Reinke came to the parish on January 21, 1986 and was followed by Father William Eberhardy on July 1, 1988. During the last several administrations and years the issue of operating our school was discussed many times. Rising costs and loss of vocations to the Sisterhood had driven school operating expense out of reason. The spring graduating class of 1988 was the last class. That fall the school did not reopen and over 100 years of history were broken. In time the building was remodeled for use as a Youth retreat center. The diocese of Green Bay now uses it for retreats. The school is once again being used to encourage young people to deepen their faith.

Father William Eberhardy was the last priest to be assigned to the parish. With his leaving the parish operated with substitute priests from the retirement ranks. They came to the parish for weekend liturgy and to serve the sacramental needs of the people.

The parish council and officers continued to keep the community together during this period of time. Much prayer and many meetings were held between diocesan officials, parish members and groups, and other parishes to try to understand alternatives available for the parish. There were no priests available. After the parish was on open listing for many months no priest came forward to serve.

Early in spring of 1993 the decision was made to work with a parish director. On May 1, 1993 Sister Marlene Greatens ANG was appointed to serve Saint Joseph. This heralded a new era for the church. Saint Joseph, with nearly 125 years of history, many times stormy and uncertain, had launched yet another effort to save itself and the parish community that represents the love and work of our ancestors. In slightly over a year of her effort with the parish, debts that had accumulated over fifteen years were gone. Major repairs to the parish buildings have been completed. Many facets of Christian ministry are now flourishing in the parish.

On May 20, 1995 Saint Joseph parish became the first parish in the diocese to have a permanent deacon working with a parish director. On that day Richard A. Meidl was ordained to the permanent diaconate for service in the parish. There are approximately 75 deacons at work in the diocese. This is the first parish where a parish director has teamed with a deacon.

Saint Joseph parish had four young men serve in the priesthood. They are Father Florian Milbauer (ordained 1950), Father James Decker (ordained 1916), Father Emil Shimek (ordained 1919), and Father Michael Ingold (ordained 1990 and serving at SS. Peter and Paul in Green Bay).

Women who have dedicated their lives in service to Christ's church by entering religious life at the Holy Family Convent follow:

Sister Flavia (Agnes) Hochman  
Sister Gervase (Flora) Seidl  
Sister Juliana (Florence) Weber  
Sister Kareen (Ann) Berger  
Sister Karen Ann (Catherine) Berger  
Sister Mary Patrick (Patricia) Touhey  
Sister Vianney (Catherine) Elmer

Through the dedication of these fine men and women the message of Christ has been brought to many in our community and throughout the nation and world where they have served. Thanks be to God for their dedication.



**Father Emil I Shimek**  
**Ordained June 7, 1919**



**Father James Decker**  
**Ordained April 14, 1916**



**Father Florian Milbaur**  
**Ordained: April 11, 1950**