

# History, heritage and faith

## St. James in Cooperstown to celebrate 175th next weekend

By Jacob Heiser  
The Denmark News

This week, parishioners from St. James Catholic Church in Cooperstown are busy putting the finishing touches on a celebration that is nearly two centuries in the making. Next weekend, the parish will commemorate its 175th Anniversary with a range of festivities honoring the congregation's history, heritage and faith. We spoke with some of the parishioners involved with the celebration to get the full story.

The parish that would become St. James in Cooperstown traces its roots to 1850 when a log church was built on the site. Originally, the church was a mission of Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Manitowoc Rapids. In 1854, the first rectory was built for the visiting priests to stay in. After 20 years, the new community had outgrown the log church and, in 1871, a new 50' by 100' church was erected and dedicated to St. James the Apostle, giving the parish its name. In 1882, the old log church was renovated into the first St. James School with Franciscan sisters from Alverno running educational operations. The 1897 census listed 125 families of which 56 were Irish, 56 were German and the rest were Polish.



The current St. James Catholic Church in Cooperstown was built in 1914 and still serves the local community.

The church that was built in 1871 burnt to the ground in a fire on May 9, 1914. A new school, which had just been completed the previous winter, as well as several surrounding buildings were also destroyed in the blaze. Undererred, the parishioners of St. James came together and persevered, with a new brick church and school being dedicated the following year. This is the church that still serves the congregation to this day. St. James School continued serving area families until it was closed in 1964 with the building being razed in 1991.

John Heiser, a member of the anniversary planning committee whose family has been parishioners of St. James since the 1860s, says "this parish has a rich history and we are proud to be part of it. He further stated "we couldn't let 175 years go by without a celebration. We probably won't have another for 25 years". He explains that about a dozen congregants have been meeting since the spring of 2024 to plan for the celebration and a lot of hours and hard work have gone into it.

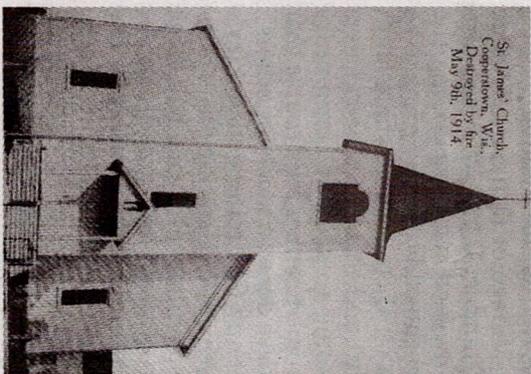
Since last July, the church has been acknowledging and reflecting on the 175 years of faith the year marks. This has involved special prayers, historical displays and a number of commemorations of the past. These observances will culminate next Sunday, July 27 when the parish officially celebrates their 175th anniversary on the feast day of St. James, the patron of their parish.

All are invited to join in a special anniversary Mass to be celebrated in the historic church at 10 a.m. The Mass will be pre-

sided over by the parish's Pastor Father Brian Belongia with guest presiders Bishop David Ricken of the Diocese of Green Bay and Bishop Frank Dewane of the Diocese of Venice, Florida who was a member of the church in his youth.

Following the Mass, one and all are welcome to enjoy a range of festivities outside on the church grounds. Entertainment will be provided by Denmark's own The Mark Jirikovec Band who will perform their polka hits from noon until 4 p.m. and traditional Irish Dancers will provide a demonstration of their skills at 2. Food and refreshments will be for sale and a number of historical displays will attempt to tell the congregation's story. Youngsters will be able to enjoy bounce houses and kids games as well as a "Cemetery Scavenger Hunt". There will also be a photo booth and a booklet that contains 175 prayers from the parishioners to mark 175 years.

The parish's Pastor Father Brian Belongia summed up the historic nature of the celebration by stating "very few parishes in the diocese can claim to have lived for 175 years. The Holy Spirit is alive at St. James and the parish is a testament to the faith of all those who came



St. James' Church, Cooperstown, Wis., Destroyed by fire May 9th, 1914

The former church that was built in 1871 and burnt to the ground in 1914.

before us and called it home. I am blessed and very proud to be counted as one of the newest members of the parish family as pastor of this iconic church on the hill in Cooperstown, Wisconsin 175 years after its birth."

If you are in the mood for a historic and fun celebration for the whole family, please consider stopping out to Cooperstown next Sunday and joining with the parishioners of St. James as they reminisce, reflect on and celebrate 175 years of faithful community.

**In Shop or On Site**

**Koenig's Repair Shop, Inc.**

Farm And Construction Equipment Repair

AIR CONDITIONER SERVICE AND MADE TO ORDER HYDRUALIC HOSES AVAILABLE



**John Koenig**

N269 Cty. Rd. Q

(920) 562-7120 • (920) 776-1209