

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

St. Wenceslaus School also employed nuns for teaching

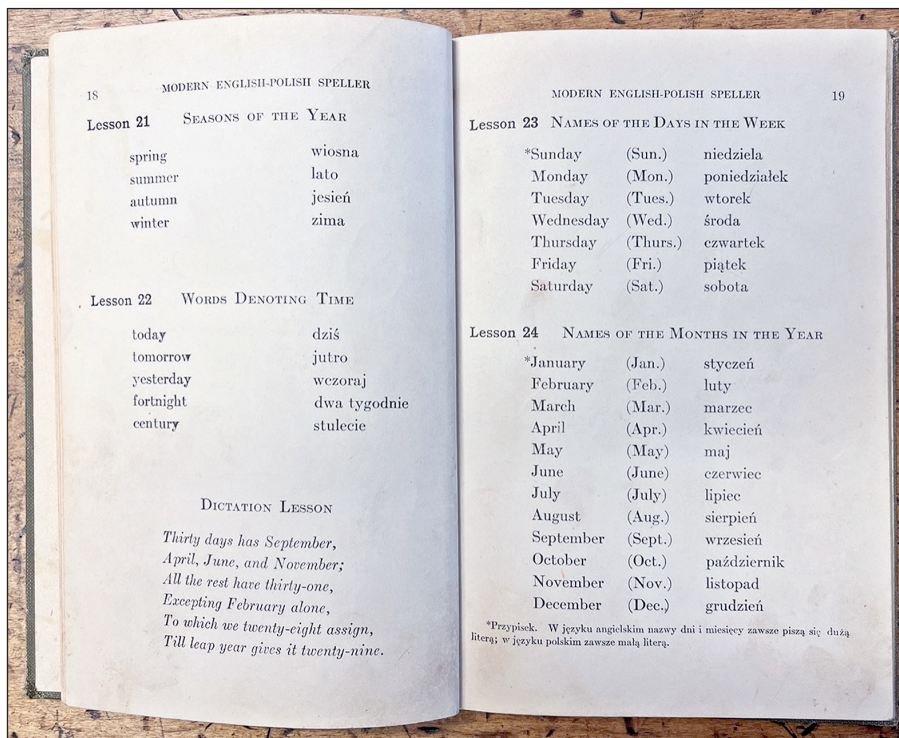
Editor's note: This article is the third and final in a series of articles citing the achievements of Nuns in Ripon.

St. Wenceslaus was a Ripon Catholic parish dedicated Dec. 15, 1896 as a Polish Catholic Church where immigrants could speak their native language.

The reason being is that arriving Polish immigrants wanted to converse with a pastor who spoke and delivered sacraments on Sundays in their own language. To remedy this at first, a Polish priest came to Ripon from nearby communities to administer the sacrament. In 1894, a Polish-speaking German priest became the pastor at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, also located in Ripon.

Ripon College professor George Miller (1919-2011) and Ripon attorney and historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1963) noted in their co-authored book, "A History of Ripon Wisconsin" that "approximately 50 Polish and 20 German families proposed to form a congregation of their own in 1896." On March 7 of that year Father Wenceslaus Kruzka of Milwaukee was appointed to organize a new congregation, incorporated under state law, on April 7, 1896. This became St. Wenceslaus Parish. Today, the St. Wenceslaus Church building itself still sits on Fond du Lac Street, owned by a different denomination.

The start the St. Wenceslaus Church was not easy. The original church



ST. WENCESLAUS SCHOOL second grade primer demonstrates English-Polish spelling and vocabulary. *submitted photo*

building burned in 1906, 10 years after its original construction, making the current building identified as the former St. Wenceslaus Church the second building. Only the original stone base or foundation blocks from the first building remain. The second building's materials consist of stone and bricks with a slate roof, making it as fireproof as possible during its time.

The St. Wenceslaus School was

deemed "Polish," and was organized and operated by the Catholic Sisters of St. Joseph's Convent of Stevens Point.

The connection being they were of Polish heritage. At its peak, the nuns taught 175 students using schoolbook

pages in American English facing a Polish Language equivalents, enabling them to teach students in a primary language and translations simultaneously. The names and identities of the nuns who taught cannot be found at this time.

The school building was located behind the church and some of the students came from as far away as Stevens Point. Although the school closed in 1916, its building accommodated classes for everyday Ripon city students until the Roosevelt School was built.

Afterward, the St. Wenceslaus School building was used for events until it was finally razed in 1963.

The Ripon Historical Society asks that those who have historic St. Wenceslaus materials or information to let it know. The history society can accession original items into its professional archives, or photograph or scan for future generations' access and reference.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.ripon-history.org.



THE ORIGINAL ST. Wenceslaus Church burned in 1896 and was replaced with this stone foundation, brick walls and slate roof structure in 1897. *submitted photo*






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