

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

Holy Cow! Pastor receives bull calf in Christmas offering

The Jan. 5, 1940 *Ripon Commonwealth Press* featured a story about a generous, but unusual Christmas donation. The article stated that “Numerous are the buttons and lead slugs that ministers have found in the collection box of a Sunday, and the Rev. Fr. Joseph Platta, pastor of St. Wenceslaus church here, is proud of the fact that in all his years as a priest he has found none in his Sunday collections.

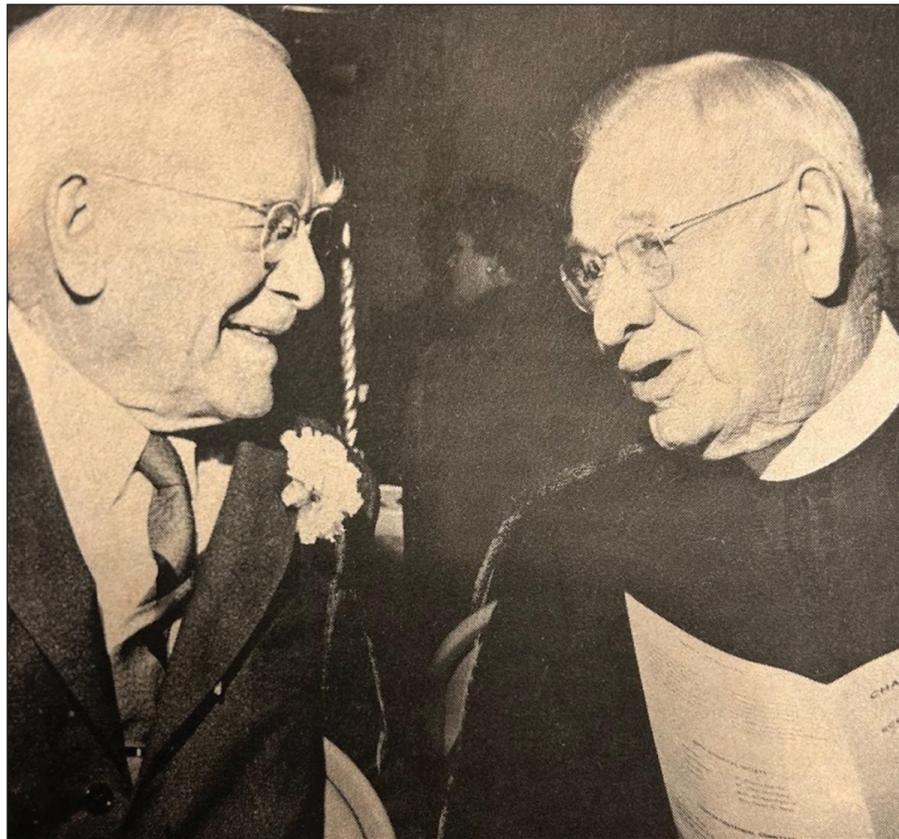
“But on Christmas day he received the surprise of his life. He found a registered purebred Holstein bull calf in the collection.

“A bull in a collection box, however, does not make as much noise as the proverbial bull in the China shop, so the special Christmas services were not disrupted by any snorts or loud moos.”

Found in a sealed Christmas offering envelope was a note which read, “Enclosed you find one registered purebred Holstein bull calf. Registered name, St. Joseph. Merry Christmas, Roy Reed.”

A bull calf in Wisconsin would have had a value of between \$20 and \$40 in 1939. This would be equivalent to \$466 to \$932 today.

Reed (1877-1943) was born in Ripon and was a local attorney. He served as the city attorney and also was a municipal judge for 10 years. It is not known why Reed donated a bull to the church, but perhaps it was given to him



FATHER JOSEPH PLATTA of Ripon’s former St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church served as pastor of the church for 52 years. He is shown on the right of this 1958 photograph with Ripon resident James Stone. *submitted photo*

in trade for his services as an attorney.

Another thought might be that Reed thought the bull was an appropriate donation. Christmas is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus

Christ. The Bible states that Jesus was born in a stable and although it does not specify which animals were in the stable for the birth, it is historically likely that cows or oxen were present. Joseph, who the bull calf was named after, is listed in the Bible as the earthly father of Jesus.

Platta (1881-1968) was born in Milwaukee. For two seasons he pitched for the New York Giants under the name of “Joe Burke.” He became a Catholic

priest in 1908 and came to Ripon 1916.

He spent 52 of his 60 years as a priest as pastor of St. Wenceslaus Church in Ripon. He is buried in Saint Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery just southwest of Ripon.

The first Catholic church in Ripon was St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, which began holding services in 1858. This congregation was founded by Irish immigrants who had come to Ripon to help build the railroad lines.

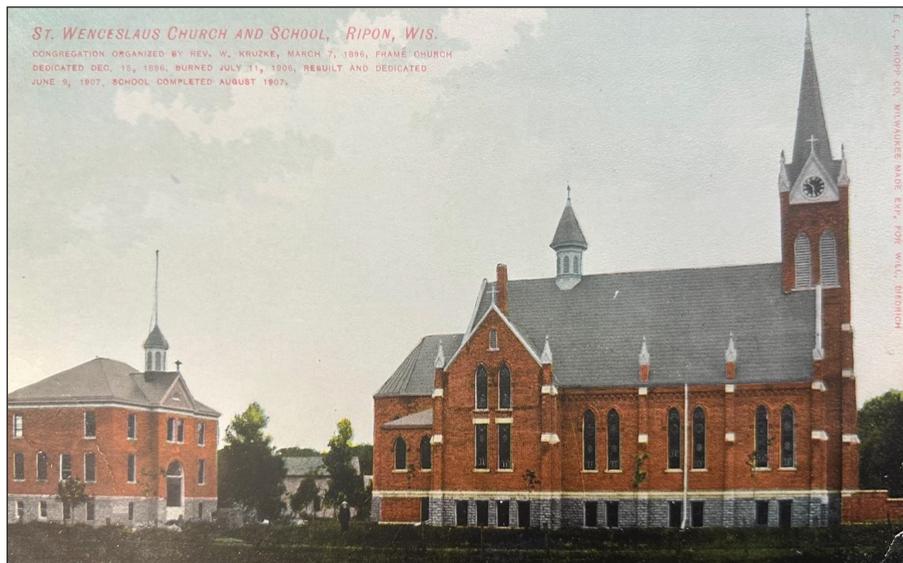
As Polish immigrants came to Ripon, they wanted a church that could hold services in their native language. In 1894, Father Francis Fabian, who spoke Polish, became an assistant pastor at St. Patrick’s Church.

In 1896, approximately 60 Polish and 20 German families formed the original congregation of St. Wenceslaus. A new church was built in 1896 at 415 E. Fond du Lac St. at the corner of St. Wenceslaus Street. It burned to its foundation in 1906. A new red brick church was built in the same location and opened just a year later in 1907.

In 2005, the parish merged with St. Patrick Catholic Church to create St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church. The St. Wenceslaus Church building was decommissioned in 2018. It is now the location of Iglesia de Cristo Refugio de Salvacion Ministerios Ebenezer.

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, visit www.riponhistory.org, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.



THIS UNDATED POSTCARD shows Ripon’s former St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church and School, which was located at 415 E. Fond du Lac St. The photograph was taken looking west showing the buildings along St. Wenceslaus Street. The school building was razed in 1963. The congregation was merged with St. Patrick Catholic Church in 2005 to create St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church and the St. Wenceslaus Church building was decommissioned as a Catholic church in 2018. *submitted photo*

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