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The German-American Village of St. Lucas, Iowa

In a lovely rural setting in northeast Iowa lies the small town of St. Lucas. As travelers approach from any direction, they are struck by the sight of the large twin-towered Gothic church in its commanding location on the highest point in the village. St. Luke's Catholic Church is, and always has been, the focal point of the town.

This paper tells the story of how St. Lucas came to be, and it surveys this German-American community over the past 150 years. The survey highlights some key topics for gaining an appreciation of the history of this unique community. Topics include: the German Town and its Families, the Spiritual Center, Key Clergy and Community Benefactor, Land and Livelihood, and the Importance of Education. It concludes with short essays by three of the authors, each with a unique perspective on Preserving the German Language and Heritage.

A German Town and its Families

The actual beginning of the town of St. Lucas goes back to a chance meeting in 1848 in Cincinnati, Ohio between Johann Gaertner of Oldenburg, Indiana, and Father Remigius Petoit, a French missionary who had worked among the Winnebago Indians in the Neutral Ground in Iowa. The Indians had been moved earlier that year to a reservation near St. Cloud, Minnesota, and northeast Iowa was then ready for settlement.¹

Father Petoit spoke so highly of the great farming opportunities in the Fort Atkinson area—fertile soil and plenty of water—that Gaertner and fellow Oldenburgers George Bachel and Anton Stathel came to explore the area that same autumn. They traveled by boat down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi River to Dubuque, Iowa. From there they walked to Fort Atkinson, a distance of one hundred miles.

They were so excited about the prospects in Iowa that they hurried back to Indiana to spread the good news to their neighbors. But first, they visited Bishop

Mathias Loras in Dubuque; and he promised them a priest, provided more German-speaking families would settle in the same vicinity, then known as Old Mission.

That winter, six families sold their farms and prepared for the big move. On March 1, 1849, they set out from Oldenburg. The group consisted of two of the original explorers, Bachel and Stathel, joined by Joseph Spielman, Jacob Rausch, Andrew Meier and Frank Huber—all with their families. The heavily loaded wagons were pulled by oxen which, though powerful, moved at a leisurely pace.

Their departure was recorded in two sentences in the *1937 Centennial History of Holy Family Parish in Oldenburg, Indiana*. The city was working on a new set of laws, a thirteen-article constitution, that was to go into effect in early May. The Centennial History conjectured: "Oldenburg was likely taking on too much the aspect of a 'citified' settlement for some people, for about this time an Iowa-bound caravan of Oldenburgers plodded up over the western rim of the valley on the Enochsburg State road and disappeared. They settled Fort Atkins, Iowa, where Father Weninger met them in 1853."²

Church and family historian, Lorraine Bodensteiner Kuennen, notes: "Three generations of my mother's paternal family were among this group of early settlers. My Spielman great-great-grandparents and their children had come to America from northern Bavaria in 1836, and farmed for thirteen years near Oldenburg. Margaret Spielman and Jacob Rausch, my great-grandparents, were married in Holy Family Church in Oldenburg on February 24, 1848. Their son John, my grandfather, was born February 13, 1849, just two weeks before the wagon train departed on the long journey to Iowa."³

The Rausch family kept detailed journals of later events such as births, marriages, deaths, the weather and the crops, but no record has ever surfaced about what must have been a very arduous trip in the Midwest winter.

It was well into April by the time they reached the Mississippi River near Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Spring had arrived and the river was high. The only means of crossing the river at that time was a horse-powered ferry. One load made it across to the Iowa side at McGregor's Landing as the river kept rising, and further trips were impossible for several days. When at last they got to the Turkey River near Fort Atkinson and Old Mission, they found it also at flood stage. Days went by before they could get all the wagons and livestock to the other side. It was the early part of May before they finally made it to their destination.⁴

They purchased some Old Mission log buildings that served as temporary homes until they could purchase land for farming. In September the largest of the buildings on the Huber property—a trading post built of relatively new logs—was selected for use as their church. It was moved to a spot near the Turkey River, on land donated by the Huber family. This was their church—Our Lady of Seven Dolors at Old Mission.⁵

More and more German Catholic families kept coming to Winneshiek and Fayette counties. In 1851, Johann Gaertner, Mathias Duclos, Casper Andrew Meier, John Wesling and others came from the Oldenburg area. Kuennen family members arrived in 1854 after a stay of several years in Pennsylvania and Decatur, Indiana.

The Spiritual Center

Their log church was of the utmost importance to the settlers. There they gathered from miles around when Father Plathe made a visit from New Vienna, near Dubuque. They also gathered there to pray and sing in the intervals between the priest's visits. They even continued the Old World custom of Corpus Christi processions, without priest or Blessed Sacrament.⁶ J. Bernard Kuennen carried a portable organ on his shoulders as he walked approximately six miles to the church.

An eight-day mission was conducted at Old Mission in October 1853 by Rev. Franz X. Weninger, a renowned Jesuit missionary and retreat master. Before departing Old Mission, Father Weninger expressed the wish that by the next visit, the parish, which by now comprised about fifty families, would have a more substantial church. A few months later, the log church was destroyed by fire.⁷

Instead of rebuilding on the same site, Andrew Meyer was instrumental in getting the new log church built at Festina, then called "Twin Springs." The first resident pastor was Rev. Philip Laurent, a young priest who had been brought from France by Bishop Loras five years earlier.⁸

Naturally, it was the desire of the other pioneers to have a church closer to their homes. Consequently, those families who lived farther south built a log church of their own in St. Lucas, then called "Statheltown" after its founder Anton Stathel. Land for the new church was donated by Anton Stathel and Mathias Duclos. The first Mass in St. Lucas was celebrated by Father Laurent, pastor of Our Lady of Seven Dolors in Festina, on October 18, 1855, the feast-day of the Evangelist St. Luke. Because of this, the parishioners agreed that St. Luke would be an appropriate name for their new church. Later, special permission was granted by the government to change the town's name from Statheltown to St. Lucas, which is Latin for St. Luke.⁹

The sum of a special church collection held in 1855 was \$64.00. Following are the names of the pioneers of this parish: Juliana Duclos, Mathias Duclos, Widow Duclos, Bernard Foreman, Herman Foreman, John Foreman, Andrew Kraemer, George Kruse, Gerhart H. Kuennen, H. Henry Kuennen, John Bernard Kuennen, Wenceslaus Kuennen, Gerhart Limke, Casper Meier, John L. Meier, John Nieman, John Nieman, Jr., Theodore Rusabeck, Joseph Schabager, Anton Stathel, Francesca Stathel, John Steffes, Lucas Toenjes, John Wesling, Widow Woeler, Michael Wurzer.¹⁰

Soon, other parishes were formed and churches were built. Joseph Spielman, Jacob Rausch and George Bachel settled farther to the west and helped establish St. Clement's Church one mile south of Spillville. The early log church was built in 1856, the present church in 1868. The town was platted by Joseph Spielman, approved by Winneshiek County in 1860 and named after Spielman. St. Rose Church was built by Irish Catholics three miles northwest of Waucoma near the western border of Fayette County. St. Terence Parish was also formed by Irish settlers and a log church was built four miles north of Clermont. Such was the growth of Catholicism in the area.¹¹

In the late 1850s the following families joined the community: the Balks, Bodensteiners, Vondersitts and Aigners. Still later, Luxembourg, Belgium and French families arrived from the vicinity of Belgium and Lake Church, Ozaukee County,

Wisconsin. Among these were the Blong families, the Croatts, Budkes, Neppers and Perrys. Many years ago, when co-author Clair Blong's great-grandfather John Baptist Blong was asked why he migrated from farmland near Belgium, Wisconsin, on the shores of Lake Michigan to the Fort Atkinson-St. Lucas area, he called the soil "black gold," and stressed the less expensive land and more moderate temperatures as the principal reasons. After serving in the Civil War, a Swiss immigrant, Sigmund Schaufenbuel, came from Spillville where there were several other Swiss families, and settled on a farm southeast of St. Lucas.

Over the ensuing years, additional German Catholic immigrants settled in the St. Lucas area. Today, the area of St. Luke's Parish is approximately eight miles wide and thirteen miles long and still contains very few non-Catholic families. Five miles west, Waucoma and Lawler were originally settled mainly by Irish Catholics. To the north, Calmar, Spillville and Protivin were settled for the most part by Catholic immigrants from Bohemia who retained their Czech and Slovak character; however, German speakers were among them. To the northeast is Festina and that area was largely settled by German Catholics. Farther north is Decorah where Norwegian Lutherans were the predominant settlers. To the east, German Lutherans settled the Eldorado area along the Turkey River. The Little Turkey River, or South Branch of the Turkey, formed an effective barrier for expansion to the south, as it was many years before a bridge was finally built across it.

The 1871 Church and a Resident Pastor

St. Luke's Parish continued as a mission of Festina parish until 1871. Father Conrad Schulte came to live at St. Lucas rather than at Festina for about six months in 1870 to help with the plans and the financing of a new church to replace the original log church. It was built of "Milwaukee brick" on the present church site, the highest point in the town, at a cost of \$4610. There were 108 contributors and amounts given ranged from \$1.00 to \$150.¹²

Father Ulrich Frey became the first resident pastor of St. Luke's in March 1871 and remained until 1882. During his pastorate, he built a 34 x 50 two-story frame school and convent. At his request, three Franciscan Sisters of La Crosse came in September of 1876. Sister Amata and Sister Laurentia came a few years later and taught at St. Luke's for over forty years. St. Rose Convent in La Crosse staffed the parochial school very ably for well over 100 years.¹³

From the beginning, the Catholic clergy and nuns played an important role in instilling a strong faith in persons disheartened by the hardships of frontier life. They placed a strong emphasis on maintaining German cultural values and a distinct identity for coping and adapting to the new cultural environment.

Rev. Francis X. Boeding, Pastor of St. Luke's, 1882-1928

A key personality in the spiritual and economic development of the St. Lucas community was Father F. X. Boeding. Father Boeding was born in Neuenkirchen, Westphalia, Germany, on September 5, 1853. He studied the classics in Paderborn; philosophy and theology in Munster, Germany; and theology and architecture in Montreal, Canada in the 1870s. He was ordained in Montreal on December 22,

1877. He served as pastor in Guttenberg, Iowa from 1878 until coming to St. Lucas. He was appointed pastor of St. Luke's Church on September 22, 1882, and for over 46 years was an active pastor and the driving force, not only at St. Luke's Church and School, but also in the community of St. Lucas.¹⁴

Father Boeding focused on building the parish. He was very successful in this endeavor as recorded in *The Centennial History of the Archdiocese of Dubuque*. "The first thing was to increase the number of Catholic families. When he came in 1882, St. Luke's Parish numbered about 75 families. At the time of Rev. Boeding's death in 1928, there were 180 families with 975 souls."¹⁵

How Father Boeding managed to keep St. Luke's Parish all-Catholic is covered in the section titled "Land and Livelihood", with numerous excerpts from the writings of a historian at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and in a lead story in *The Des Moines Sunday Register*.

In 1883 he had an addition built to the church. In 1905 he had an addition built to the convent, and also a new frame school. That school was destroyed by fire on February 11, 1911. The present brick school was erected that same year at a cost of \$13,636.51. There were 148 contributors, with sums ranging from \$4.00 to \$240.00. The lower level of the school served as a chapel for daily Mass and originally seated 300. All students and teachers started every day by attending Mass before they would file to their various classrooms.¹⁶

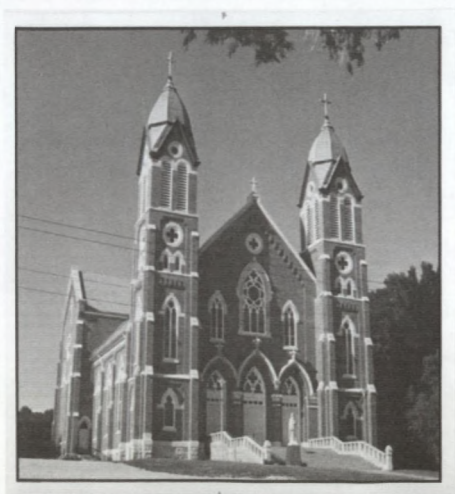


Rev. Francis X. Boeding

The Present St. Luke's Church, Built 1914-1915

The parish grew so fast in those years that in 1914 Father Boeding saw to the dismantling of the 43-year-old church to make room for the present, much larger church. Father had a very grand vision for his new church—a classic Gothic structure with tall twin steeples, high vaulted ceiling and magnificent large stained glass windows from Bavaria. He revisited the Gothic church in Guttenberg to get additional ideas for the new church.¹⁷

In 1914, he chose Guido Beck as architect, and Anton Zwack as the general contractor, for the construction of the church. Both Dubuque firms were highly respected



St. Luke's Church

and had extensive experience in church building. Father Arnold Boeding, in his family history, recalls accompanying his uncle Father F. X. Boeding to Dubuque to pick up the architectural drawings. These 90-year-old blueprints are works of art and are still in good condition.

Parishioners helped tear down the 1871 brick church that was in very good condition but much too small. They also donated much labor for the construction of the new church in 1914 and 1915. During this time Masses were celebrated in the new school chapel.

The First Mass in the new church was celebrated on March 19, 1915. His Excellency Archbishop Keane dedicated it on July 7, 1915. It was built at a cost of \$54,597.91 and was completely paid for by 1919, four years after its completion.¹⁸

The fourteen large Bavarian stained glass windows were installed in 1919, shortly after World War I. Why four years later? A paragraph in the *1937 Centennial History of Holy Family Church and Parish, Oldenburg, Indiana* offers a possibility: "The beautiful stained glass church windows...were ordered in 1914, immediately before the World War, from the German craftsman Zettler of Munich. Only two arrived; the others were portbound in Rotterdam till shipping again became safe in 1919..."¹⁹

The manufacturer of the St. Luke's church windows is not known at the time of this writing. More research will be done on this intriguing subject. We do know that the windows in St. Luke's Church cost a total of \$5920 and were paid by special donations. Names of the donors are inscribed on each window, in English or German, according to the wishes of the donors.

Father Boeding never forgot the land of his birth. Being in an all-German parish and community, it was natural that only German was spoken in the homes, church and school. He loved to sing, and taught the children many songs he had brought from Germany – among them "Watch on the Rhine" and "Morgen Rot"—about young men leaving for the military service. Ben Bodensteiner, father of Lorraine Kuennen, could still sing many of these songs in his late eighties, and could "still see" how Father would raise up on his tiptoes as he sang, whether in school or during Mass. This was "for emphasis," he would explain.²⁰

One of Father Boeding's ambitions was not realized until many years after his death. He had worked very hard to get a bridge built across the Little Turkey River three miles south of St. Lucas, which would have opened up a whole new area for future expansion of his parish.²¹

Father Boeding went to his eternal reward on October 9, 1928, after having served St. Luke's Parish faithfully for 46 years. He was buried at the highest point on the cemetery, in front of the large Crucifixion monument.

Rev. Francis L. Schuh, Pastor of St. Luke's, 1928-69

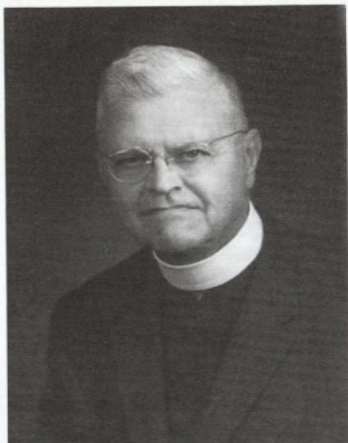
Rev. Francis L. Schuh served as Pastor of St. Luke's Church from 1928 until he retired on June 1, 1969. He had formed the parish of Hopkinton in the days of the Ku Klux Klan, and many a public defense of the church had to be made. It was a great change for him to come to St. Lucas—an entire Catholic community. Until his arrival, only German was spoken in church and in school.

In his Memoirs, published over a period of years in the Sunday bulletin and

the high school newspaper, he wrote: "Only because I learned German was I sent here. Without it, in 1928, I would never have come. Someone in the parish told me that the first English sermon he heard was mine while I was assistant in Dubuque. In fact, I was commanded by Archbishop James Keane, to speak only English when I became your pastor. I asked him to let me speak German too and I would report how much of each I did. He consented. I remember my first day here, All Saints. I spoke 10 minutes in German and 10 in English, and I used up all the small words I could. When I returned to the sacristy after Mass, Father Kirchhoff said to me, 'Das Deutsch war nichts, das Englisch war schön.'—"The German was nothing, the English was nice."²²

Father Schuh did continue giving occasional sermons in German for some time. However, the change to English in the school was made as soon as possible. Leander Stammeyer recalls Father Schuh as being not only the spiritual leader of the community, but also the driving force in establishing St. Luke's High School in 1941 and single-handedly supervising the operations of the parish and school for forty-one years. He also remembers that Father was very frugal in managing the construction costs for various buildings during his tenure.²³ There were no parish councils then, but there were three appointed trustees who served for many years.

Among the improvements which were undertaken during his first year were the modernization of the convent and the installation of a large used tracker pipe organ in the church. The organ cost \$1000.00 plus \$200 for transportation and installation. It was used for the first time on Christmas Day, 1929.²⁴ Father Schuh had recorded these costs for posterity, but where the organ had been in use before coming to St. Luke's remains a mystery. Some speculate that it came from a church in Milwaukee, where German-born William Schuelke built his organs, mostly in the 1890s.



Rev. Francis L. Schuh

The Organ Historical Society included the St. Luke's church organ in their official Northeast Iowa Tour on June 28, 1986. A concert was played on it by Elizabeth Towne Schmitt, the foremost expert on Schuelke organs. Rev. Mark Nemmers, one of the Society's officers wrote to then pastor, Rev. Florian J. Schmidt: "It is one of the few extant Schuelke organs . . . Every Schuelke organ is considered very valuable so I am very happy that you intend to keep and maintain it."²⁵

Lorraine Kuennen started playing this very special instrument more than sixty years ago and now comes twenty-three miles from Decorah every other Sunday to play for Mass. She loves playing that organ, and with the church's wonderful acoustics, finds it gratifying to enable the choir and congregation to sing with great enthusiasm.

In 1939, Father Schuh saw to the building of a new rectory. An annex to the

northeast corner of the school was completed in 1947. The large old frame convent was razed in 1949 to make room for a new, two-story brick convent.²⁶

The annual Corpus Christi celebration was the most significant St. Luke's religious festival in the demonstration of faith and devotion to our Lord, and of community cohesion. On May 29, 1940, the *Fayette County Union* featured a composite of five



Archbishop raising the monstrance during the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Firing squad salute to the right

pictures under the headline: "Corpus Christi Celebration Draws Many to St. Lucas." The story below the pictures reads: "A procession 300 yards in length escorted a group of priests, headed by the Most Rev. Francis J. L. Beckman, S. T. D., Dubuque,



Horses standing at attention near the procession

around the mile-length course on the grounds of St. Luke's parish Sunday to venerate the blessed sacrament at three altars along the route. The procession consisted of 10 horsemen wearing gold and white sashes, a firing squad, 100 school children in white, St. Luke's Choir, 50 altar boys and a band. In the photo at upper left, the procession is seen leaving the church. At the lower left, the school children in white are seen marching through a shaded grove between the first and second altar, and at upper right, the crowd and the rest of the procession kneel as Archbishop Beckman gives prayer at the second altar. At the lower right, the first altar, beautifully decorated in flowers and papal colors of gold and white is seen with the procession kneeling in front. In the center, is a close-up of Archbishop Beckman, as he knelt with his attendants at the second altar. Cars from many foreign counties were noted in the parking lots, and a multitude of cameras clicked continuously at nearly every point of the procession. At the completion of the ceremony at each altar, the church bells rang out as the procession took up its march."²⁷

This was the grandest of all Corpus Christi processions, but all were very memorable events. Gradually the custom was discontinued, perhaps after the weather didn't cooperate for several years in a row.

Lorraine Kuennen has written about the upbringing of the children of her generation in St. Luke's Parish: "I think most of us were raised in loving, faith-filled homes. There were always prayers at meals, and almost every evening the family gathered, on our knees, to pray the Rosary. Our Faith was of the greatest importance in our lives. We lived two miles from town, but rarely missed school or Sunday Mass. The roads could be closed in winter, but my Dad would hitch the horses to a wagon box on runners. It would be lined with horse robes and other blankets and several hot irons to keep us warm. Sometimes it was so bitterly cold that we could ride on top of the snow banks, right over the fencerows! How exciting! And we were supposed to keep our heads under the covers!"²⁸

Father Schuh was always quick to point out to visitors that St. Luke's Parish had an unusually large number of vocations for the size of the parish. He encouraged young people to consider becoming priests or sisters. Father and his young assistant pastors through the years surely served as excellent role models, as did the many aunts and uncles in religious life. On May 30, 1950, three sons of the parish—LaVerne Gerleman, Charles Kruse and Francis Perry—were ordained together in their home church. The St. Luke's High School newspaper, the *S.L.S. Highlights* stated: "Their ordinations this year will crown Father's thirty-five years as a priest . . ."²⁹

In the autumn of 1960, Pope John XXIII promoted Father Schuh to Monsignor. In his generous and wise fashion, Msgr. Schuh saw the promotion to Domestic Prelate as an acknowledgement of the strong faith of the St. Luke's Parish. In his weekly church bulletin, *The Lucana*, he wrote:

"In granting this honor, I take it that you, the members of St. Luke's parish were taken into consideration as much as your pastor. Here I am only as well as it pleases



Father Aloysius Schmitt

Our Dear Lord to have me, in a rather secluded rural parish, having stayed all these years with your church and with your school work, the son of a widowed washer-woman who worked so I might be a priest, now being signally honored by the church that I loved . . . I know you will congratulate me, but let me congratulate you who really are the cause of my rejoicing. God bless you."

Due to failing health, Monsignor Schuh offered to resign on June 1, 1969, at the age of 79. He died on July 10, 1970. His final resting place on St. Luke's Cemetery is marked by a large, white statue on which is inscribed:

RT. REV. MSGR. FRANCIS SCHUH

BORN 11. 15. 1889

ORDAINED 12. 21. 1914

DIED 7. 10. 1970³⁰

At one time, Msgr. Schuh had planned to publish a book of St. Luke's Parish History. Instead, he published bits of history over a period of many years in the *Lucana* and the *S.L.S. Highlights*. Lorraine Kuennen gathered these writings in 1980 and with them as a base, wrote the *125 Year History of St. Luke's Church*.

Perhaps Msgr. Schuh's most important legacy to the parish was his determination to establish the high school. This story will be told in the section titled "Importance of Education."

Father Aloysius Schmitt Dies at Pearl Harbor

St. Luke's parishioners mourned together the loss of native-son Father Aloysius Schmitt during the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. Although most had heard on the radio about the attack, they only learned of Father Al's death the next day at the Masses for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. They were stunned to hear the announcement.

Survivors of the sinking of the *U.S.S. Oklahoma* told the story of how Father Schmitt had helped so many of his fellow crew by locking watertight compartments and pushing them through a porthole. He, being a big man, was not able to exit through the porthole but continued to help others escape. He was "THE FIRST AMERICAN PRIEST TO MAKE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE IN WORLD WAR II."³¹ Father Al was so loved by all, a priest for only six years, and had served as a chaplain in the U. S. Navy for two and one-half years.

A Solemn High Mass was celebrated in St. Lucas on December 20 and in Dubuque several days later. Father Schmitt's heroism has been memorialized nationally, regionally and locally. In June 1943, the Navy named a Destroyer Escort Vessel, the *U.S.S. Schmitt*, for his service. Loras College dedicated its Christ the King chapel to his devotion to God and country, and St. Luke's Church placed a large bronze plaque in his honor in the church vestibule. Much has been written of his short and heroic life.³²

Sixty years later, on December 7, 2001, present pastor of St. Luke's Church, Rev. Marvin A. Salz, arranged for a very fitting 60th Anniversary Mass of Remembrance

for Father Aloysius Schmitt. Archbishop Jerome Hanus O.S. B. was the Principal Celebrant with area priests as Concelebrants.

William Henry Regnery, Community Benefactor

In 1950, construction began on a Recreation Center next to the school, and connected by a walkway. It was to be completely financed by a Chicago friend of the parish, William Henry Regnery, of the Joanna Western Mills Company.

Due to his frugal nature, Father Schuh kept the cost of the building down to \$40,000. The Regnery family was actually disappointed when they saw it for the first time. They would have been happier to have paid much more for a better building. However, it was put to very good use. The basketball teams could now play in their home gym. A two-lane bowling alley—sanctioned with the American Bowlers' Congress—in the lower level was busy every evening. There were two men's leagues and one women's league, eighteen teams altogether. School lunches were prepared and served on the lower level, and meetings could be held in the dining room.³³

William Regnery was born on a farm near Sheboygan, Wisconsin. While still a small child, in the 1870s, his family moved to a farm north of St. Lucas. When he was about 12 years of age, they had to sell the farm and the family moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where he soon had to go to work.

His son, Henry H. Regnery, in his 1981 book *William H. Regnery and His Family*, wrote about his father: "The only formal education he ever had, or at least talked about, was in St. Lucas at the Catholic parochial school, which was conducted by an order of Franciscan Sisters whose Mother House is in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. He often spoke of the St. Lucas School, of the firm but understanding discipline of the sisters. . . . Their equipment was doubtless of the simplest, but they must have been dedicated teachers and, judging from my father, they produced results."³⁴

Henry continued: "The teaching in the morning, my father said, was in English, and in the afternoon in German. As limited as my father's formal education was, he used English correctly and well, could express himself effectively and clearly, had beautiful handwriting, and spoke good German."

Moving from the farm and community they loved must have been very traumatic for the family. Henry wrote: "There was not only the loss of the farm and the support of the neighbors, but leaving a close, homogeneous community of which they were a part..."

Henry Regnery's first trip to St. Lucas was in 1919 when as a 7-year-old he came with his parents and his three brothers and his sister. In 1989, he finally had his dream to return come true. His nephews Peter and Bill Regnery and two of Bill's sons, David and Jonathan, accompanied him. He was so thrilled to see the church and school, and to visit with descendants of friends and neighbors of his grandparents when they lived on that farm near St. Lucas.

Bill and Peter are keeping up this family tradition. Their most recent visit was in August 2004. They have certainly inherited a love for St. Lucas and St. Luke's Church and especially for St. Luke's School. They were very happy to hear that a St. Lucas Historical Society has been formed to purchase and save the school. Plans are

to turn it into a museum, library and social center. The Regnery Family Foundation has given a generous gift to help the Society in these efforts.

On the front page of the October 1953 *St. Luke's Highlights* there is a news item: *Benefactors Visit Parish*. "The benefactors of this parish, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Regnery, visited St. Lucas a number of days last week. They spent some time examining the new Community Library which they have donated to this parish." This library was located in one of the new Annex rooms of the school, and was more commonly referred to as the Regnery Library.

William H. Regnery died on January 16, 1954, at the age of 76. Msgr. Schuh was honored to give the graveside prayers for this great man, a friend and benefactor of St. Luke's Parish.

In the April 6, 1969, *Lucana*, Msgr. Schuh wrote: "Thanks to the Regnery family for the fine set of the *World Book Encyclopedia*. A prayer for Mr. & Mrs. Regnery, deceased, and for the whole family."

Land and Livelihood

During his tenure, 1882-1928, Father F. X. Boeding was a spiritual father and the inspiration and helping hand to the St. Lucas community's growth and prosperity. He loved botany and was instrumental in the planting of hundreds of apple and evergreen trees on the parish and school grounds, and evergreen wind breaks and fruit orchards on the farms. Many of these trees still stand today.

An important goal of Father Boeding was to reawaken the confidence of the parishioners in farming. This young priest came to St. Lucas at a time when this great wheat field community was sadly devastated by the cinch wheat bug. The farmers were discouraged and the times were bad. He made a study of the land and urged people to plant corn and to specialize in blooded stock.

In a tribute to Father Boeding after his death, the Archdiocesan newspaper *The Witness* wrote: "Whenever there was a farm for sale in the vicinity of his parish, Father Boeding bought it. He had no money, but he secured the farm by means of an option to purchase. Then he went in search of a Catholic family . . . and another new family was added to the St. Lucas parish."³⁵

The *125 Year History of St. Luke's Parish* reinforces the above statement: "Father Boeding was instrumental in our community becoming all-Catholic. He was always on the alert, and when he heard of a Yankee wanting to sell his farm, he would find him a German buyer, who incidentally was a Catholic. Many of these Germans came directly from their native land and lived with relatives until they could find a place to reside."³⁶

Tony Meinert, a life-long resident of St. Lucas states, "When a farm became available mostly south of St. Lucas where the Bodensteiners live now, Father Boeding saw that a German Catholic family got the farm. I don't know exactly how he did that."³⁷

In the early 1980s, Mark Friedberger, of the Department of History and Social Sciences at the University of Illinois in Chicago, came to look at the diverse mix of ethnic and religious groups in Fayette County and the considerable variation between townships, including Auburn township that is most of the St. Lucas agricultural area. Friedberger was most interested in the segment of the population that proved most

tenacious in its commitment to the land over the long haul through the depression and beyond.

Friedberger cites the Reicks family, German Catholics near St. Lucas, and their conveyance of real estate and inheritance settlement that passed on the farm as a “going concern” to family members, treated all heirs reasonably fairly in the settlement and at the same time provided sustenance to the widowed spouse. This represented the old world custom of the “bond of maintenance agreement” adopted in some ethnic communities as a method of providing old-age security. Most residents of St. Lucas would agree that farms in the St. Lucas area remain in the same families for many decades and few, if any, outsiders have ever purchased farmland in the community.³⁸

In another examination of the St. Lucas community and its social and economic cohesion, the *Des Moines Sunday Register* in 1981 did a lead story on “Thriving Iowa community has avoided the ‘Melting Pot’ and subtitled it “Cohesion credited with St. Lucas’ success”. The article explores why St. Lucas has stayed so homogeneous. “The answer lies with the land. By an unwritten community code that has stood up—with few exceptions—for generations, farmland simply hasn’t been sold to outsiders.” Tex Heyer, the Fayette County abstractor noted: “I can’t think of a place of similar size where the town real estate would be as valuable.”³⁹

When asked by Daniel Pederson, the *Des Moines Sunday Register* reporter, if he would ever sell to an outsider who offered a good price, Will Kuehner, a local St. Lucas farmer, replied: “Well, if it’s on the open market, it goes to the man with the



St. Luke's School. Reprinted with permission (c) 2003, *The Gazette*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

highest price. Of course, I'd probably sell it quietly so you wouldn't get it.” Pederson goes on to point out “That quiet, word of mouth sales pattern in which land changes hands among generations or neighbors, close kin or shirttail relations before it reaches the open market, has been the almost exclusive practice here for as long as anyone can remember.”

Pederson noted, “The glue that binds the community now, it seems, is simpler

and more universal than matters of theology or ethnic origin. It is the glue of family imbedded in the land. Most people in town won't argue much with that assessment. But they'll point out that the historical problem here has been not so much keeping outsiders out, but finding room for insiders who want to stay."⁴⁰

In the post World War II period, with large families and the focus on family farms, St. Lucas parents helped sons buy farmland in neighboring communities and daughters began marrying men from nearby towns and farms. Urban and Lucy Schmitt Dietzenbach of Cresco, Iowa, note that many St. Lucas families helped their sons secure farms in the Hawkeye, Waucoma, Lawler, West Union, Festina and Cresco areas. Urban Dietzenbach also recalls the close-knit family support in sharing heavy farm equipment with his brothers and good neighbors.⁴¹

Balz Kamm of West Union, the Fayette County seat ten miles from St. Lucas, recalled that during this post-war period there were boundary disputes between the burgeoning Catholics of St. Lucas and non-German or Protestant regions beyond. They were struggles partly inspired on both sides by questions of nationality and religion . . . "No more," says Kamm, who speaks highly of the town to the north, "If everybody was as solid as those people up there, we'd have a helluva country."⁴²

Over the past twenty-five years, St. Lucas has lost its grocery store, hardware store and feed milling service to regional retail forces and rapid farm mechanization. The former hardware store has been converted into a community center. Resisting the current tide of steady decline in small towns, St. Lucas has retained a tavern, a branch bank, regionally well-known restaurant and jewelry store, beauty shop, gift shop and gas station. This small town has also witnessed the growth of a large automobile repair service that specializes in transmission work and the establishment of a convenience store. The town retains its attractive homes and well-kept yards and flower gardens.

Importance of Education

St. Luke's School has been the cultural and educational heart, mind and soul of this very unique Iowa community. From the early pioneer days to the last decade, St. Luke's School played a very significant role in the religious, educational, cultural and economic identity of the German, Luxembourg and Swiss Catholic migrants to St. Lucas.

In a log building close to the first church, St. Luke's Catholic School was conducted by laymen from 1855 when the parish was formed until the coming of the Sisters in 1876. The first teacher was H. Henry Kuennen, followed by Peter Kuehner. Records show that in the 1870-1871 school year, Professor Louis Mihm had an enrollment of 49 boys and 51 girls. When he left in 1872 to join the staff at St. John's Institute for the Deaf in Milwaukee, Adam Steffes and others taught until 1876, when the Franciscan Sisters of La Crosse came.⁴³

Two early Sisters most remembered and revered were Sister Amata and Sister Laurentia who came in the 1880s and taught at St. Luke's for more than forty years. During the winter months, children who lived some distance from town boarded with the sisters in the large frame school/convent. The wood frame school that Father Boeding had built in 1905 was destroyed by fire on February 11, 1911.

The present St. Luke's School building was erected that summer at a cost of

\$13,636.51. It is a three-story structure with a light red brick exterior, six large classrooms (22' x 32' each) and a small annex added in the late 1940s for the high school. The Chapel, at the lower level, seats three hundred persons.

To date, the identity of the architect—if there even was one—still remains a mystery. According to St. Luke oral history, Father Francis Xavier Boeding conceived the design of the school and supervised its construction in those summer months of 1911. After all, he had studied architecture while in seminary. He may have consulted with Guido Beck, prominent church architect, and Anton Zwack, prominent church builder, in Dubuque; three years later Father hired them to design and build the present church. The construction work on the school was performed in great haste by the St. Luke's parishioners, including several skilled masons and carpenters. It was very well built ninety-three years ago.

Father Boeding, from 1882-1928, and Msgr. Schuh, from 1928 to 1969, shaped and led the role of St. Luke's School in the preservation and transformation of German-American individual and community values over the decades.

St. Luke's High School was established in 1941 and produced nearly 300 graduates by the time it closed in 1967 because of the school consolidation process. Throughout its history St. Luke's High School was very competitive academically and in its baseball and basketball programs. The high school students produced an award-winning monthly newspaper, the *S.L.S. Highlights*, with a circulation of over



Sister Amata and students at St. Luke's School c. 1912

320 copies.⁴⁴

Enrollment at St. Luke's Grade and High School peaked in the early 1960s at over 275 students. For many years the school was staffed by eight sisters, and Father Schuh and his assistant pastor. By 1961, only six teaching sisters were available as the number of women entering the convent declined. In 1962, two brothers of St. Pius X in DeSoto, Wisconsin were added to the faculty.

More and more lay teachers had to be hired as well as teacher aides. It was

becoming increasingly difficult to support all twelve grades. At the end of the school year 1966-1967, came the shocking announcement that the High School would close. Seventh and eighth grades were discontinued in 1969. As these grades were discontinued at St. Luke's Catholic School and at Holy Trinity Catholic School in Protivin, they had to be absorbed into the rather new Turkey Valley Community School at Jackson Junction. Until an addition could be built at Turkey Valley, classroom space was rented in several former schools.

Of critical importance in the development and sustenance of St. Luke's School was the role of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of St. Rose Convent in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Both long-time pastors, Father Boeding and Msgr. Schuh, had good business relationships with the Order. They were always given teaching sisters of the highest caliber—especially for the High School. These teaching sisters and the priests placed a heavy emphasis on learning and the value of education that led many students to pursue higher education for positions in the clergy and professions across the nation. In the 140 years of the existence of St. Luke's School, 26 students went on to become priests and 56 students entered the religious life as sisters or as brothers.

Many of the St. Luke's School alumni fondly recall these Franciscan teaching sisters. Linus Bodensteiner praised Sister Theola for "being an excellent teacher. I learned more from her in my last year of school than in all the other grades. She was no-nonsense and more strict. She had a knack for keeping order. She was also kind and fair, and commanded our respect."⁴⁵ Soon after Father Schuh came to St. Lucas, he asked Sister Theola to take on the ninth grade, and the following year the tenth grade was added. The goal of having a complete high school by 1940 was realized, and it was accredited to the Iowa State Board of Education in 1941.

Lorraine Kuennen notes: "The sisters and priests who taught us gave us a very well-rounded education. They instilled in us a zest for learning that continues to this day, and has enriched our lives immeasurably. A very favorite sister was our English teacher, Sister Mary Alice, all through high school. Every day she was smiling and sparkly, eager to teach us about Literature—American and English. She was also the sponsor and adviser for the publication of our High School Newspaper, the *S.L.S. Highlights*. All students learned every aspect of publishing a monthly paper. From this experience, and from two years of her typing classes, I learned to love to write."⁴⁶

"It was wonderful! The nuns were like college professors. We got a top-notch education!" said Kathleen Drilling, a grandniece of Rev. Francis X. Boeding, the pastor who drafted the preliminary design for the 1911 schoolhouse.⁴⁷

Many graduates entered teaching, medicine, law, government, other professions, business, trade and farming with the solid educational basics they acquired in St. Luke's School. It should be noted here that there were no choices of subjects. All students learned the same basic subjects, and they learned them very well. St. Luke's High School graduates reported being much better prepared for college than many other freshmen. No wonder those dedicated teaching sisters are held in such high esteem.

A truly unique part of the St. Luke's School experience was the arrangement by which one of the sisters taught 5th grade and half of the 6th grade in the old one-room Public School building located downtown. This was under the auspices of the Fayette County Superintendent of Schools. Classroom space was needed, and the parishioners got something in return for their school taxes. Religious education

was given in the chapel after Mass, and then the students and their teacher walked down to the Public School. Sister Francilia, who taught there for many years, and her students, felt sort of special, spending the day separate from the big school.

Orlan Love, reporter for the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, notes that the commingling of church and state in this Fayette County community might send shivers up the spines of civil libertarians, but it remains a source of pride for residents working to preserve the most visible symbol of that fading union—St. Luke's Catholic School.⁴⁸

St. Luke's School and St. John's School in Fort Atkinson merged in 1975. Grades K-6 were taught at St. Luke's until the school closed in 1997. Presently, there is a 3-parish merger, with classes held in Protivin.

After being vacant for several years, the 93-year-old school was put up for sale by the Parish Council. A St. Lucas Historical Society was formed in 2003 to purchase the building in order to assure its preservation. A museum, library and social center are being developed. *Christmas Reflections 2003* and *2004* were both such huge successes that it will be an annual event. An Open House is held in the beautifully decorated school on the second weekend of December. Highlights of the event are the Sunday Brunch, scheduled choir concerts by various age groups performed in the lower-level chapel, and instrumentalists accompanying the singing of carols in former classrooms throughout the weekend. Former students, that is, all St. Lucas natives, are thrilled to get back inside its "hallowed halls" again.

Preserving the German Language and Heritage, Part 1

by St. Lucas "Outsider" Carl Most

Some of these observations were presented in an earlier article, but are still valid today. These observations are not those of a St. Lucas native, nor of someone who was acquainted with this area of Northeast Iowa by birth. Carl Most grew up in Detroit, Michigan, the child of German immigrants. So when leaving a major industrial complex and traveling to a small farming village in Iowa, one notices things in that way of life that are "unique" to a big city perspective⁴⁹:

Wenn man sich dem Dorfe St. Lucas im Bundesstaat Iowa nähert, so sieht man als erstes nicht große Getreideschuppen, wie das in vielen Dörfern und Kleinstädten dieses Staates üblich ist, sondern man sieht die Türme der katholischen Kirche, die weit über diese kleine Gemeinde auf einem Berg in die Höhe ragen. Denn seit Beginn der Geschichte dieser kleinen deutschamerikanischen Gemeinde spielt die Kirche die Hauptrolle im Leben hiesiger Einwohner. Die Kirche war wahrhaftig Kulturträgerin der hier wohnenden Deutschamerikaner; sie war Quelle und schöpferische Kraft für die Erhaltung einer Art deutscher Lebensweise in einem Dorf, das sich bis in die Jahre nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg etwa bewusst von seiner Umgebung und deren Einflüsse isolierte.

Das Dorf St. Lucas liegt südlich und westlich von der Stadt Decorah, Iowa, mitten im Dörferdreick Waucoma-Eldorado-Festina. Heute hat das Dorf etwa 150 Einwohner; dazu müssten allerdings die

Menschen gerechnet werden, die auf Farmen wohnen und wirtschaftlich, kulturell, kirchlich und sozial zum eigentlichen Dorfleben gehören.

Immer wieder haben sich deutsch-katholische Menschen hier angesiedelt, sodass die Erhaltung einer katholische-christlichen Lebensart, auf deutscher Basis ruhend, möglich war. Bis in die vierziger Jahre dieses Jahrhunderts wurde in deutscher Sprache gepredigt, viele der Gläubigen haben in deutscher Sprache gebeichtet und gebetet, und noch heute sind vor und nach den Mahlzeiten deutsche Tischgebete zu hören. Und in den beiden Wirtschaften des Dorfes kann man gelegentlich hören, wie sich die älteren Männer und Frauen auf Deutsch unterhalten. Und bei vielen, welche nur noch vom Hören her ein paar Worte Deutsch können, ist das Englisch mit deutschem Akzent gefärbt. Besonders auffallend ist der Gebrauch des englischen Wortes „not“ für „nicht“ in der Fragestellung: *You're coming over tonight, not?* Das nenne ich nur als Beispiel von vielen, die sich in die Lokalsprache eingebürgert haben.

Today not many more persons reside in St. Lucas than 50 or 100 years ago, but the nature of the town has changed markedly. Its populace has been relatively stable near 175-200 persons over the years. Now retired farmers move "into town," new streets have been added and paved and new homes have been built.

In der Kirchenschule war Deutsch die Sprache des Unterrichts bis vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Mein Schwiegervater, Herman Kuennen, der jüngste aus einer Familie von zwölf Kindern, versteht noch viel, spricht Deutsch sehr stockend, kann sich aber noch verständigen. Herman Kuennens Eltern, also die Großeltern meiner Frau Rosemary Kuennen Most, sprachen sehr gut Deutsch, und die Sprache im Hause war fast ausschließlich Deutsch. Interessant für uns war, dass meine Frau nach einem Sommer intensiven Sprachunterrichts die Aufnahmeprüfung an der Universität Marburg bestehen konnte und als ordentliche Studierende dort matrikulieren durfte. Dies bezeugt zu welchem Grade Deutsch noch im Hause mit Großeltern und mit Verwandten und Bekannten im Dorf gesprochen wurde.

Today, there are few persons remaining in St. Lucas who have a conversational command of the German language. Leander Stammeyer, a resident and Vice-President of the St. Lucas Historical Society, recalls that the community was so homogeneous—made up almost entirely of devout German-American Catholic farmers—that no one saw a need to separate residents' spiritual and civic lives. In the 1927-28 period, Stammeyer was among the first students at St. Luke's School to use textbooks printed in English rather than German. The last priest capable of giving sermons in German was Monsignor Francis Schuh who died in 1970. In the late 1920s he decided that the community had to learn English and become fluent in English, the language in America. In 1928, he began the transition by giving one sermon a month in English, then reduced sermons in German so that by the 1950s, all sermons were given in English.

This linguistic change reflected the passing of the older German speaking generation and the influence of the war years. In addition, in the post war years,

many of the parents were speaking only English to their children although they would speak German among themselves. When Carl Most made the acquaintanceship of Monsignor Schuh in the 1960s, Monsignor was still able to converse fluently in German and always spoke German with his parents.

Carl Most states that his father-in-law, Herman Kuennen, once showed him postcards and other correspondence that he had received as a young man, and these were all written in German, and in the Sütterlin script. I was amazed to see the extent to which persons born in this country had mastered German writing.

Another man, Mattie Jakobs, a retired carpenter, with whom Carl Most had quite some contact, spoke absolutely fluent German and could express himself well on even rather complicated subjects, such as how weather affects crops, inflation, building new homes in town and other topics. Mr. Jakobs's parents were immigrants from Luxembourg and they spoke German in the home. Mattie had no formal education beyond what was provided in St. Luke's School in St. Lucas.

Father Joseph Vollmecke, a man who grew up on a farm near St. Lucas did not begin his college education until in his thirties. He spoke German extremely well. Father Vollmecke was totally immersed in German until he left for the seminary to



Sister Francilia and students at the public school in St. Lucas (author appears in the middle row)

become a priest. Once, while talking with him about a car he wished to purchase, he forgot the German word for "carburetor." When Carl Most mentioned "Vergaser," Vollmecke continued to tell him it needed an adjustment, but otherwise the car ran well.

Monsignor Leander Reicks, now living in an assisted living facility in Elma, Iowa, also spoke very good German. Carl Most has seen a video of Msgr. Reicks concelebrating a mass in Germany at a Reicks family reunion, when he and several other members of the family visited their ancestral home. Msgr. Reicks recently noted, "My grandfather Heying spoke High German, so we learned High German. My dad spoke Low German but that was not what we used in (St. Luke's) School. Even when

I came home to the farm from college we spoke German." Concerning farm food, Msgr. Reicks said "My Mom made knoedel and speck for breakfast."⁵⁰

These are but a few examples of how German was the vernacular among those who had attended the parochial school when instruction was in German. And as we know, to converse in everyday situations requires a considerable mastery of the structures of a language, as well as a vocabulary special to the environment, in this case farming. I have already noted the use of "not" for "nicht" in interrogatives. In the use of German in St. Lucas, there was no use of the formal "Sie" among the German speakers. Everyone was addressed with "du," probably a natural thing for a small community in which people knew each other. The use of "Sie" was understood as only a plural, rather than a formal form of address.

In so far as spoken English was concerned, many of the older persons who went through St. Luke's School retained a slight accent. The most prominent deviation was the *th* of English, which became a *t* or *d*, depending on the position of the English word and whether the *th* was followed by a consonant or vowel such as three or then. These have been my observations as one from outside the community who has been privileged to view its changes over four decades.

Preserving the German Language and Heritage, Part 2

by St. Lucas Native Lorraine Bodensteiner Kuennen

I write from the perspective of one who was born and raised on a farm near St. Lucas, married my high school sweetheart, and worked side by side with him in our hardware store on the town square whenever I wasn't working in the post office just up the street.

Together, Ken and I have observed, and been a part of, the pulse of our hometown for over 75 years. Five years ago we moved to a retirement complex in nearby Decorah. We got away from a large yard and garden and keeping up a house, and now have time to enjoy the extras of living in a college town. At the same time, we have more time to devote to recording the history of St. Lucas, and to help preserve our German culture and heritage.

Our new friends and family here at *Vennehjem*, which is Norwegian for Home of Friends, would attest to the fact that we really have never left Home—St. Luke's Church and School and St. Lucas, Iowa. They enjoy our group outings to St. Lucas, where we tour the beautiful church that our new friends refer to as a "cathedral." They like to study the extraordinary windows that depict the Life of Christ according to the Gospel of St. Luke, and they sing hymns to my organ accompaniment. Then our caravan of cars proceeds down the hill for dinner at the White House, one of the best restaurants for many miles around, owned and operated for more than twenty-five years by St. Lucas natives—and St. Luke's graduates—John and Jann Kuehner. In 2005, we expect to add St. Luke's School Museum to the Tour.

While doing research for a Family History published in 1979, I found many relatives—usually third cousins—still on ancestral farms in Germany. Most of my forefathers had emigrated from various parts of Bavaria by the mid-1800s. Only one of my families came from up north in the Oldenburg area. After corresponding with

all of them for several years, it was wonderful for my husband and me to finally meet all of these relatives, and to be invited to stay a few days in the old ancestral homes.

I had learned to understand and speak quite a bit of German from observing my mother translate many documents and letters for area historians. When she translated important documents for me, I double-checked to make sure she didn't miss even a tiny clue. She wrote letters to Germany for me and interpreted those received from there. When Mother was in her mid-eighties, I finally decided I must try writing in German. The first letter took several evenings as I had to look up almost every word in the *Wörterbuch*. My cousins in the Bavarian Oberpfalz area replied: "Wir konnten alles ganz gut lesen und verstehen. Es war sehr schön!"

A year after our first trip to the land of our forefathers, on October 18, 1980, St. Luke's Parish celebrated its 125th Anniversary. Besides authoring and publishing the church's history book, I decided to organize a *Deutsches Liederfest*. After all, Spillville had its Czech music, Decorah had its Nordic music, why not a *Deutsches Liederfest* in all-German St. Lucas? Twenty-six singers, accompanied by myself on the accordion and Kathleen Drilling on the guitar, enjoyed many practices.

We performed several times on the Jubilee Day, drawing people around us who joined in the more familiar songs, such as "Du, du, liegst mir im Herzen," "O, Du Lieber Augustin," "Muss i denn," "Lauterbach," and "Freut euch des Lebens." Our adviser and song announcer was German-born Wilhelmina Kuennen, longtime teacher of German at North Fayette High School in West Union. For the Jubilee she gave us a German flag and a large wall map on which I marked where in Germany the various St. Lucas families had come from. Interestingly, all of our families had come from what was then West Germany, none had come from East Germany.

In 1983, St. Luke's Parish hosted a reception for Horst Kunke, Deputy Consul General assigned to the West German Consulate in Chicago. Wilhelmina had arranged for him to speak to us. People brought mementos from Germany, we displayed pictures and souvenirs from our trip, and we sang many German Songs.

Kunke had come to North High for their annual *Volksfest*, a farewell program for German exchange students. Other years, Wilhelmina had brought the students for a Mass in St. Luke's Church. At the "Sign of Peace," the congregation would sing "Let There Be Peace on Earth," and the final song was always "Großer Gott"—with all the organ stops out. This hymn of praise has traditionally been reserved for the most important celebrations, in Germany, and from the beginnings of St. Luke's Parish to the present day.⁵¹

We have returned to Germany two more times, and are hoping to get there at least one more time. We get lonesome for those dear relatives and friends, especially when we exchange photos and letters by e-mail.

At the present time, the St. Lucas Historical Society is working on plans for an All School Reunion, "a Gathering of the Saints," to coincide with our St. Luke's Parish 150th Anniversary celebration which will be held the last weekend of July 2005. You can be sure that we will be celebrating our Germanness that weekend, with some good old German hymns and the singing of "Großer Gott" to close the Mass. And

yes, I will have all the stops out on the wonderful 1890s Schuelke tracker organ! We are, indeed, very proud of our German heritage, and are dedicated to its preservation.

Preserving the German Language and Heritage, Part 3

By Native Son, Clair Blong

The St. Lucas community is organizing to preserve and celebrate its rich cultural heritage on two levels: the group and the individual. Two years ago, 15 community members and St. Luke's School alumni established the St. Lucas Historical Society that has now grown to 125 members from across the nation. These 15 founding members pooled their resources to purchase the St. Luke's School in June 2003.⁵² The group established several interesting goals and objectives:

- Preserve St. Luke's School for alternative uses;
- Develop an Internet site;
- Establish a family genealogy center;
- Develop a German-American and Native American Museum;
- Develop a community library; and
- Celebrate the community's heritage with special events.⁵³

In just two years, the Society has made significant strides in accomplishing these preservation goals, celebrating the community's history, enlisting the support of the regional business community and alumni from across the country; and in raising the awareness of this unique German-American community's cultural heritage. This brief survey of St. Lucas and its Historical Society offers some insights into the community's social cohesion, historical consciousness and adaptation in today's world.

On an individual level, my parents spoke German amongst themselves but not to their children in the World War II period as Father Schuh was trying to dampen the community's German tradition and help it integrate into the large American society. But I recall classmates who only spoke German when we entered St. Luke's Grade School in 1948. I studied German as an undergraduate at Loras College and researched our family's history to discover relatives in the Tauberbischofsheim locality of Baden.

After some exchange visits, the Dietzenbachs, my mother's family, held a large family reunion in Festina, Iowa, that included relatives from Hochhausen and Mannheim, Germany.⁵⁴ In the process, we also discovered that Andreas Dietzenbach, my immigrant great-grandfather, sent monies home to have an outdoor Crucifixion statuary erected near the Catholic church in Hochhausen. Over the past two decades, several Dietzenbach family members in Iowa and Germany have cultivated these German-American ties with more relatives becoming participants in the trans-Atlantic relationship.

Similarly, a significant number of St. Lucas families have explored their family genealogy and developed very stimulating ties and rewarding experiences with their German cousins. These growing bi-national family ties are reawakening the St. Lucas community members to their German cultural heritage and also their unique

German-American community spirit and values. The organization and growth of the Historical Society reflects that spirit and can foster these cross-cultural ties.

St. Lucas Historical Society
St. Lucas, Iowa

Notes

- ¹ Lorraine Bodensteiner Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church: 125 Years* (1980), 15.
- ² Robert Wilkin, O.F.M., *A Historical Sketch of the Holy Family Church and Parish, Oldenburg, Indiana* (1937), 41.
- ³ Lorraine Kuennen, e-mail to Clair Blong, March 31, 2004.
- ⁴ Mary Richmond, "Saint Anthony of Padua Chapel on the Centennial Anniversary, 1985," *Sumner Gazette* (Sumner, IA), 9.
- ⁵ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 15.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 16.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Archdiocese of Dubuque, *The Centennial History of the Archdiocese of Dubuque* (1937), 195.
- ¹² Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 18.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Archdiocese of Dubuque, *The Centennial History*, 212.
- ¹⁶ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 18-19.
- ¹⁷ Denis Kuennen, e-mail to Clair Blong, April 12, 2004.
- ¹⁸ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 19.
- ¹⁹ Robert Wilkin, O.F.M., *A Historical Sketch of the Holy Family Church and Parish, Oldenburg, Indiana* (1937), 64.
- ²⁰ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 24.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., 27.
- ²³ Phone Interview of Leander Stammeyer by Clair Blong, April 10, 2004.
- ²⁴ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 29.
- ²⁵ Rev. Mark Nemmers, letter to then Pastor Florian J. Schmidt, July 20, 1985.
- ²⁶ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 29.
- ²⁷ "Corpus Christi Celebration Draws Many to St. Lucas....," *Fayette County Union*, West Union, IA, May 29, 1940.
- ²⁸ Lorraine Kuennen, e-mail to Clair Blong, March 31, 2004.
- ²⁹ Msgr. Francis L. Schuh, in letter to the three native sons ordained in Triple Ordination in St. Luke's Church May 30, 1950, *S.L.S. Highlights*, 9, 8 (April 1950): 6.
- ³⁰ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 46.
- ³¹ See Sister Mary Imogene Klein, "Greater Love: The Life of Chaplain Aloysius H. Schmitt, Lieutenant (jg.) U. S. Navy," Thesis, Loras College, 1961, and Rev. Msgr. Francis L. Schuh, "Biography of Father Aloysius Schmitt," (St. Lucas, IA, 1947), 20 pages.
- ³² Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 32.
- ³³ Ibid., 30.
- ³⁴ Henry Regnery, *William H. Regnery and His Family* (Three Oaks, MI: 1981), 5-9.
- ³⁵ Archdiocese of Dubuque, "Rev. Francis X. Boeding," *The Witness* (October 10, 1928).
- ³⁶ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 24.
- ³⁷ Tony Meinert interviewed by Rosemary Kuennen Most, April 8, 2004.
- ³⁸ Mark Friedberger, "The Farm Family and the Inheritance Process: Evidence from the Corn Belt, 1870-1950," *Agricultural History* 57, 1 (January 1983): 8.

³⁹ Daniel Pederson, "Thriving Iowa community has avoided 'Melting Pot,'" *Des Moines Sunday Register* (January 25, 1981), 1A, 3A.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Phone Interview of Urban and Lucy Schmitt Dietzenbach by Clair Blong, April 10, 2004.

⁴² Pederson.

⁴³ Kuennen, *St. Luke's Church*, 37.

⁴⁴ Archdiocese of Dubuque, *The Centennial History*, 212.

⁴⁵ Linus Bodensteiner interviewed by Lorraine Kuennen, April 8, 2004.

⁴⁶ Lorraine Kuennen, e-mail to Clair Blong, March 29, 2004.

⁴⁷ Orlan Love, "St. Lucas School Built on Faith," *Cedar Rapids Gazette* (October 28, 2003), 8B.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Also see Carl Most, "Das deutschamerikanische Dorf St. Lucas, Iowa und die Forschung uber eine dort wohnende weitverzweigte Familie," *German-American Studies* 10 (1975).

⁵⁰ Msgr. Leander Reicks interviewed by Rosemary Kuennen Most, e-mail of April 8, 2004.

⁵¹ "German Heritage Comes Alive Here: Volksfest Big Success," *The Fayette County Union*, (May 20, 1983), 1, 6.

⁵² "Preservation Begins on a Cornerstone of St. Lucas: School Is First Project of St. Lucas Historical Society," *The Fayette County Union* (June 25, 2003), 1, 5.

⁵³ "First Annual Report to Board of Directors and Members," St. Lucas Historical Society, St. Lucas, IA (March 2004).

⁵⁴ "Dietzenbach Family Reunion," *The Fayette County Union* (August 1983).