



The Konkol Corner's Shrine

The red brick shrine located at the intersection of Cty Hwy B and Cty Hwy K in Portage County, WI, a few miles west of Amherst, has long been admired by the motorists who pass by. Portage County is located in the center of the state of Wisconsin with the city of Stevens Point as its county seat. This county is generally recognized as the location of the oldest Polish rural settlement of the state and among the oldest in the United States. The first Polish family arrived in the fall of 1857. Historians relate that by 1864, more than 40 Polish families had joined them. Most of these families had their origin in the Kaszuby region of what was then West Prussia, just to the west of Gdansk (German: Danzig).

For many years, three of the four corners of the intersection were home to members of the John and Malwina (Gostomska) Konkol family, hence the name--Konkol's Corner's. In recent years, one of the corners is no longer occupied by a family member, however its identity lingers. The fourth corner is still an open field.

The Konkol's had arrived in the port of New York on May 1, 1883, with their children, John and Martha. They had lived in the village of Klukowa huta in the Kartuzy district just to the west of Gdansk. Their parish church was in nearby Stezyca. With them were Malwina's parents, Peter and Julianna (Holk) Gostomski and their daughters, Pauline and Elizabeth. The Stezyca parish was the origin of nearly 100 families and individuals who immigrated to Portage County.

The couple purchased a farm the next year where their other nine children were born. John was an accomplished carpenter and bee keeper as well as a farmer. Malwina was a licensed mid-wife and delivered many of the babies in the area for many years. When their son, Anton, married Agatha Trzebiatowski in 1912, they took over operation of the farm and John and Malwina moved across the road into their new retirement home.

The exact construction date of the shrine is not known, however it is possible that John built the shrine at this time. The red pressed brick, probably from the W.E. Langenberg brick yard, used in the shrine is identical to that used in the new farmhouse built by his son, Joseph and Augustina (Stolz) Konkol, and completed in 1912. John's August 18, 1943, obituary noted that he had built the shrine about 30 years before. He and his wife could easily view the shrine from the windows of their new home.

Malwina passed away on June 10, 1922, at the age of 67 years. John continued to live in their home until the late 1930's. He died August 17, 1943, at 90 years. They are buried in the nearby St. Mary of Mount Carmel Catholic cemetery at Fancher. John and Malwina were among the founders of the parish formed in 1884.

Religious shrines and crosses are very common along Polish roadsides and usually at a cross road. In 1985, this writer traveled in the Kaszuby region in which the Konkol's had lived and discovered an almost identical shrine in the village of Podjazy where John had been born on February 4, 1853. His family had moved to nearby Klukowa huta when he was a young boy.

There are 14 roadside shrines and crosses located throughout central Wisconsin. The older residents relate that there were many more. Perhaps, they were erected to remind themselves or passers-by that their faith was more than a Sunday visit to church, but an integral part of their daily lives. This writer's father always respectfully tipped his hat whenever we passed the shrine and murmured a brief prayer, "Niech bendzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus. Na wiek i wiekow, Amen". ("Praise be to Jesus Christ. For age to ages.")

The Konkol shrine has a seasonal motif--the Easter and Christmas seasons are recognized with appropriate furnishings. Descendants still own the farm and provide the excellent care of the shrine.

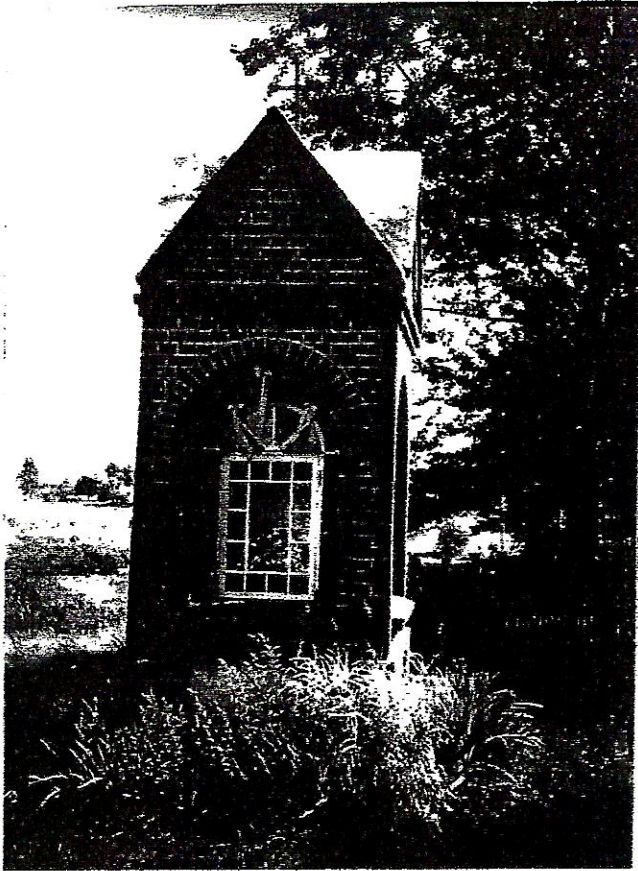
(Since this was written, the Konkol's Corner's shrine was badly damaged when the driver of a car lost control and struck the shrine. Community concern and support indicate that the shrine will be restored. It is considered by most to be a historical landmark in the area.)

Submitted by :

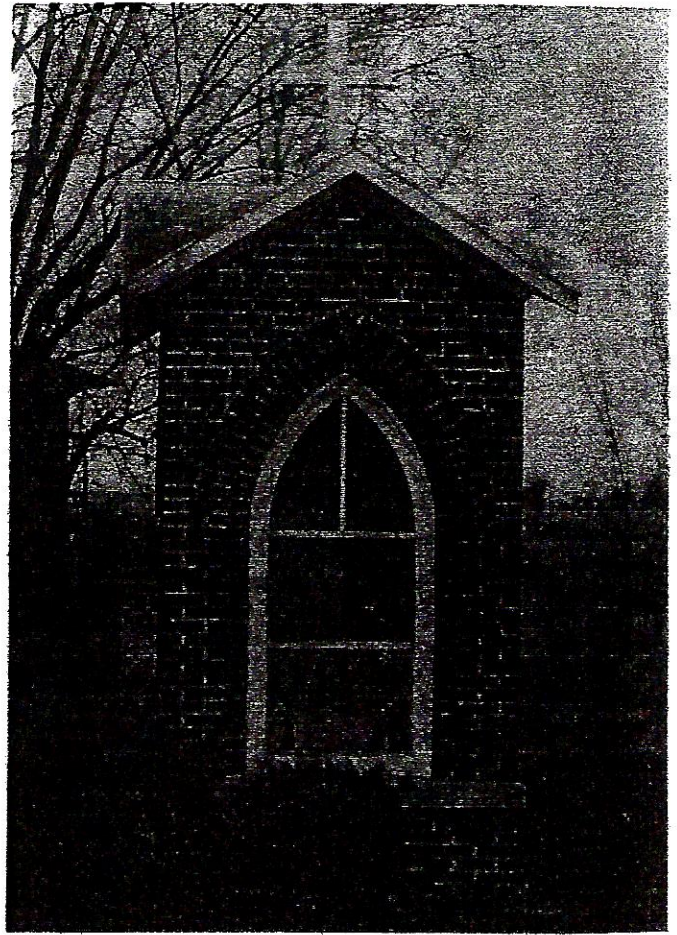
Adeline M. Sopa

2711 Danbar Drive

Green Bay, WI 54313-7022



Shrine in Podjazy, Poland.



Shrine at Konkol's Corners - Amherst, WI.



← ~~Joseph John~~
Joseph Konkol
- Built the
shrine. ~~it~~

Konkol Corners

The clan keeps shrine, grounds spiffy, and visitors often stop

By JOHN ANDERSON

I paid a visit to Konkol Corners recently to see where they used to drink shots and beers on one side of the road and pray on the other. Now it's strictly a place for contemplation.

Located on Highway B, between Amherst and Plover, the crossroad community of relatives is best known for its shrine, a remnant of old world religious practices.

Chet Konkol says the summer brought many visitors to the simple brick structure with neatly manicured shrubbery on the outside and silk flowers on the interior, adorning the likeness of a crucified Jesus.

Chet, 73, a retired plumber, has never lived more than a stone's throw from the shrine and says it is part of his life.

It was built by his grandfather, John Konkol Sr. about the turn of the century and has been a prized keepsake of the family ever since. The shrine is not on Chet's property, but he keeps a watchful eye on it for the owners, heirs of his uncle, the late Anton Konkol. Anton's large, brick house is visited often by his progeny, in their recurring desire to sample pastoral life in the town of Stockton. Grounds around the farmstead are well kept, and floral decorations in the shrine are usually changed each Christmas and Easter.

For about 30 years, according to Chet, his brother, Henry, operated a tavern kitty corner from the shrine. It was a neighborhood gathering spot until fire demolished it about 15 years ago. Henry died a couple of years ago, but his wife remains in a house that stands close to the site of the old watering hole.

All told, there are Konkol houses on three of the four corners of the Highways B and K intersection, hence the name of the place.

It was common years ago for the farmers who traversed what were then dirt roads to stop their horse-drawn wagons near the shrine and offer a prayer. Nowadays, cars whiz by. But once in a while, one stops. Chet says many of the visitors take pictures, a few have questions about the reason for this unusual religious edifice and its history.

One of his cousins who takes spe-

A:COUNTY SAMPLER



A:B:C:1

cial interest in the maintenance is Alvina Konkol, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, who lives in the convent on Maria Drive.

Some of the special touches at the shrine in past years, thanks to her, have been lights at Christmas time and shrouds on the statues during the penitential season of Lent.

I hold the shrine as something very special in Portage County, epitomizing better than most tangible objects the heart of our rich Polish culture. It's a choice example of the interesting things that can be found if you're willing to take the less-traveled roads.

Besides the Konkol shrine, there are only a few others like it in Wisconsin, including at least two in the Polonia-Rosholt area. Unfortunately, they are deteriorating and appear to have been abandoned. Values are indeed changing in these parts.

However, many families continue to scrupulously maintain private shrines of the Virgin Mary on their lawns, and it is not uncommon to find crucifixes at rural crossroads in our county, one of the largest and best cared for being at the corner of Reserve Drive and Jordan Road, directly north of the city.

For many years, the large cross was maintained by Joe Wojcik, who served as chairman of the town of Hull for as long as most people could remember. Joe, who died a few months ago, bequeathed the 28-acre parcel on which Chris-

(See Konkol page 3)

Konkol

(Continued from page 1)

family's symbol stands to five grandchildren, and they continue to keep a flowerbed at its base, just as their grandfather had done.

The shrines and crucifixes in Portage County were erected as remembrances of many things, not the least of which was of the way religion was practiced in Poland by some of our pioneers from there.

Poland is dotted with hundreds and hundred and hundreds of shrines by a people who felt it important to have reminders of their religion in their daily life, not just on Sundays when they went to church.

For those who practice a religion, there's something to be said for that.

SPD J September 24, 1988; page 1

Three farms south of the shrine

By BONNIE BRESSERS

Now and again a car will stop at one of the various shrines built on the crossroads throughout Portage County, but the number is far fewer than in the days when farmers used to stop and pray on their way to market.

Those were the days when butter sold for four cents a pound and potatoes went for seven cents a pound, and some say that farmers stopped their horse-drawn carts at wayside shrines to pray for successful sales.

Or maybe they stopped on their way back and said prayers of thanks.

Nobody knows the one reason, if there is one reason, why the shrines were built or who used them.

According to Henry Konkol, who lives near the intersection of Highways K and B south of Fancher, the shrines range from simple wooden crosses to shrines like the one on his property — statues surrounded by flowers and plants, encased in tall brick structures with wooden frames.

The shrine was built by Konkol's grandfather, John Konkol Sr., as a remembrance to his son, Anton, when Anton bought the family farm.

"My grandfather did all the planning and building himself," Konkol said. "All the grooves and windows and doors were done by hand."

He said the shrine, like all the shrines of the county, was built

on the crossroads so it can be seen from all sides.

"The road which is now B used to be a dirt trail which farmers took to Berlin and Stevens Point," Konkol said. "They stopped to pray and rest their horses."

The family doesn't know exactly how old the shrine is, but Konkol said he's 71 and he remembers it from his early childhood.

Now his two cousins, Sister Evelyn Konkol of Chicago and Sister Alvina Konkol of Milwaukee, and their mother, Mrs. Anton Konkol, care for the shrine. At Christmas they decorate it with lights and at Easter, with Easter flowers and lilies. During Lent, the statues are covered with a shroud like the statues in Catholic churches.

The wayside shrine custom came from Poland, according to Mrs. Adam Bartosz, a native of Poland and informal expert on Polish customs.

She said the shrines weren't for farmers on their way to market as much as for the employes of the big land owners.

"They aren't just built on crossroads there," Mrs. Bartosz said. "And you see more of them in Poland than you do telephone poles. The big land owners who have hundreds of workers built them in the fields so the people could stop at them on their way home."

Some are open air shrines,

she said, and some are encased in glass. They are decorated with fresh flowers in the summer and artificial flowers in the winter.

"They are also decorated for holidays and Poland has a lot more holidays than we have here," she said.

She also said the prevalent local practice of having statues in backyards is a take-off on the shrines of Poland.

"The backyard shrines are an offspring that the younger generation of Poles has taken from the homeland of their grandparents," Mrs. Bartosz said.

According to Eddie Meshak, who is also involved with Polish culture, the wayside shrines had two purposes.

"The Polish people are very religious and the farmers used to stop to and from the markets," Meshak said. "But the shrines were also used for directions. For example, someone would say he lived on the north side of the road, three farms south of the shrine."

The Rev. Stephen Mieczkowski, retired pastor of St. Mary of Mount Carmel Catholic Church and of St. Peter's Church, said the tradition began in Poland because the people lived great distances from the churches.

"They built the shrines because they wanted to worship God even when they were away from church," Father Mieczkowski said. "And also because they wanted to remind

themselves that their land really belonged to God."

Father Mieczkowski also said that some people say the shrines were built as a result of divine revelation, but he added that that "has not been documented as either a theological or historic fact."

According to the Rev. Dominic Eichman of St. Mary of Mount Carmel Catholic Church, the shrines were built in Poland simply "because the people weren't afraid to exemplify their devotion." The local custom is a result, he said, of the spirit that followed the people who emigrated from Poland.

"Probably, everybody had different reasons for building the shrines," concluded Halina Jaworski, another native of Poland. "I don't know if there even was one reason for doing it. It could have been to protect the crops from disaster or maybe in thanksgiving for good crops."

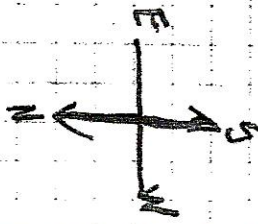
There's another shrine encased in a red brick frame on the intersection of Highways I and Z, east of Polonia. The Jakubek family, owners of the land surrounding the shrine, paint and repair the frames and maintain the bouquet of artificial flowers.

Why was the shrine built? "It was here when we bought the farm six years ago," said Mrs. Ernest Jakubek. "I don't know why it was built. It's always been here and it probably always will be."

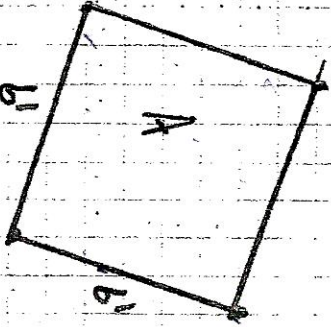
SPD J

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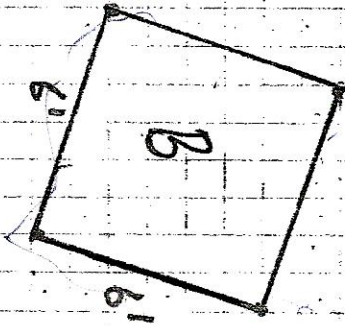
County K



A existing structure
B proposed structure

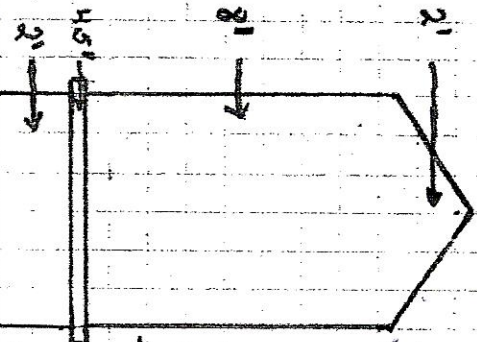


10' west



8' north

County B



12.45'
Road
9' yard
1/4' lawn

CRASH DESTROYS POLISH LANDMARK



CHET KONKOL, 4607 Highway K, looks at the damage to the roadside shrine that stood on the corner of Highways B and K. Below right is the shrine before it was destroyed. THOMAS KUJAWSKI/Stevens Point Journal

Konkol shrine was 'one of the prettiest'

BY GENA KITTNER
Journal staff

STOCKTON — A county landmark at Konkol's Corner survived 90 years only to be destroyed in a car crash.

The shrine at Konkol's Corner, at Highways B and K, was demolished Sunday night when an Amherst man lost control of his car. Harold J. Blum Jr., 18, was eastbound on Highway B at 8:16 p.m. when the car entered the right shoulder, said Lt. Ron Ryskoski of the Portage County Sheriff's Department. Blum over-corrected and

ROADSIDE SHRINES REMAIN

- ◆ At 9288 Highway 54 in the town of Lanark, a shrine encloses a statue of the Virgin Mary.
- ◆ At 8037 Highway B, about a mile west of Konkol's Corner, there is a shrine built by Robert Dempski.
- ◆ In the town of Sharon, shrines can be found at highways I and OO, highways Z and I and 1396 Highway I.
- ◆ In Marathon County, there is a shrine where highways C and J intersect Willow Road.
- ◆ At Jordan and Reserve roads, a cross was erected in 1939.
- ◆ A cross is on a corner in the 1400 block of North Second Drive, and at the Portage-Marathon line on Highway Y.

TO LEARN MORE

- ◆ Contact the Polish Heritage Awareness Society at P.O. Box 726, Stevens Point, WI 54481 or call 344-5752.

entered the right ditch and rolled over, striking the highway sign and the Konkol shrine.

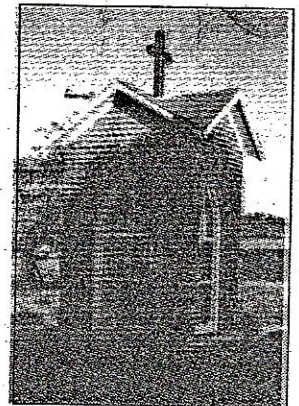
Blum was transported to Theda Clark Medical Center in Neenah, where he was treated and

released, Ryskoski said.

The Konkol shrine was a symbol of the county's Polish Catholic roots. It was built around 1913 by John Konkol, who immigrated to Wisconsin from Poland in the 1880s. It was similar to chapels built in the Kaszuby region of northern Poland, according to the Portage County Historical Society.

"The Konkol one was one of the prettiest. It was one of the more well-kept and beautiful of the shrines," said Gayle Phillip, president of the Polish Heritage Awareness Society.

Roadside shrines and



crosses were more common along roads in central Wisconsin during the early and mid-20th century, but travelers still can see these tributes to the Virgin Mary and Jesus. Through time, many shrines have decayed or the ownership of the land has changed, Phillip said.

"The shrines were very important in the rural areas, especially for Polish settlers in the areas," Phillip said. "They kind of

SEE SHRINE, A2

"These are pretty solid num- paid for by the Policy Research the state economy to improve in of the economy," Miller said.

SHRINE: Konkol monument will be sorely missed

ROM A1

connected them with their home country in Poland."

Some of the shrines were built in thanksgiving for good health, and others were places of prayer for someone to get well. More recently, they have been built to memorialize people who have died.

"This was just something that people in Europe do," said Adele Sopa, Green Bay the granddaughter of John Konkol.

"They were very very religious. Religion wasn't only a Sunday thing with them. They wanted to have shrines or crosses close by so every day they could stop and say a prayer."

Scenes in the Konkol shrine would be changed seasonally, showing the Jesus in a manger during Christmas, and Jesus on the crucifix at Easter, Sopa said.

One member of the Konkol are still lives on Konkol's Corner. Chet Konkol, 88, lives in the house his grandfather John

built, across the street from the shrine.

The shrines have their roots in pre-Christian times in Europe, where statues and carvings on stones and trees were used to mark the presence of local spirits.

"In Poland shrines were built to ward off evil spirits. People were quite superstitious in the old days," Phyllis said.

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aren't amenable to the bite solutions that politicians prefer.

Want to strengthen marriage? Let's re-examine the role alcohol plays in the lives of Wisconsinites. Let's develop a system of powerful incentives for the victims of domestic violence to report abuse. Let's require premarital emotional and financial counseling as a condition of obtaining a Wisconsin marriage license. So the Defense of Marriage act isn't quite what the name suggests, is it?

Instead, it's an aggressively cruel slap at gays and lesbians. We say aggressively cruel because current law already defines marriage as between husband and wife. Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager called the bill "legally indistinguishable from current state law."

It required an act of ill will, not to mention cynicism, to support a bill that duplicates what's already in the books. Perhaps most troubling,

Health care

The people who run St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center in Milwaukee have a problem: Too many patients are using the emergency room like a walk-in clinic, an expensive practice that ties up valuable medical resources which should be used for critical care, not runny noses.

To discourage people from using the emergency department for minor ailments, the hospital announced last week it will impose a \$150 minimum fee.

The story is a symptom of a larger disease. About 44 million Americans lack health

CLEARING AWAY A LANDMARK



THOMAS KUJAWSKI/Stevens Point Journal

VOLUNTEERS CLEAN UP the wreckage Saturday of the roadside shrine hit by a car at the intersection of Highways B and K.

Mason, artist sought for shrine

BY GENA KITTNER
Journal staff

Volunteers seek a mason and an artist to restore the Konkol shrine.

The 90-year-old landmark at Konkol's Corner, at Highways B and K, was demolished Oct. 26 when Harold J. Blum Jr., Amherst, lost control of his car and stuck a highway sign and the Catholic shrine. Blum's insurance company said it will cover the cost of the

Cleanup, restoration work begin on Konkol's Corner

shrine's restoration, said Anton Anday, a Plover historian who is organizing the restoration effort.

Anday and about a dozen other volunteers helped collect the pieces of the shrine during a cleanup Saturday. The larger pieces of the shrine are in storage, and the base has been covered

with a tarp, Anday said.

Volunteers are still looking for a mason to do a cost estimate to rebuild the shrine. A mason/carpenter probably would be needed because the wood on the shrine is complicated, Anday said.

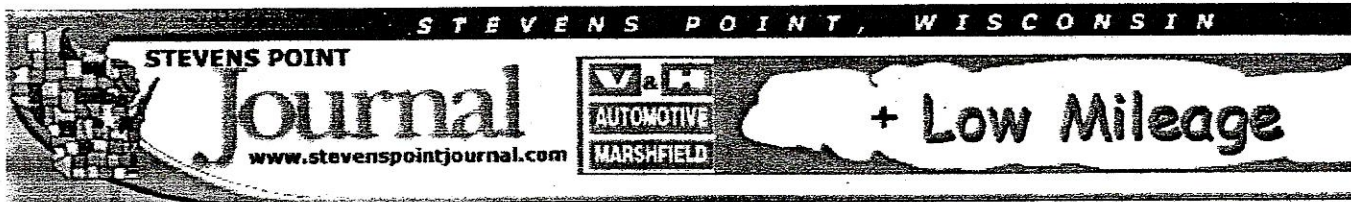
The shrine contained three statues, including a statue of Christ, which

was destroyed in the crash, Anday said. The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point art department is involved in looking at restoration of the Christ statue, he said.

Anday estimates the statue was crafted between 1890 and 1910. The other two statues in the shrine were chipped and can be restored easily, he said.

Scenes in the Konkol shrine were changed seasonally.

*Stevens Point Journal
October 30, 2003*



Thu, Oct 30, 2003

Residents band together to rebuild destroyed shrine

BY GENA KITTNER
Journal staff

As Konkol family members pick up the pieces of a destroyed county landmark, residents are working *ing to put* it back together again.

The shrine at Konkol's Corner, at Highways B and K, was demolished Sunday night when Harold J. *Blum* Amherst, lost control of his car and stuck a highway sign and the Catholic shrine.

Anton Anday, a historian in Plover, said he has spoken with Konkol family members and is trying to *find a* mason to restore the shrine. He's not alone.

Len Dudas, president of Len Dudas Motors, is getting the word out that he wants to help rebuild the shrine.

HOW TO HELP:

Dudas said his wife's father was Polish and the shrine is part of the family's heritage. "Living in Point with the Polish heritage has been so special." Polish immigrant John Konkol built the shrine around 1913. His relatives still are in shock and are trying to deal with the loss, said Antoinette Hoppa, Konkol's granddaughter. "We had to salvage what we could." The Konkol shrine was a symbol of the county's Polish Catholic roots. The Konkol shrine was similar to chapels build in the Kaszuby region of northern Poland, where the Konkol and many other area Poles left in the late 1880s.

To make a monet. donation or to vol e-mail Len Dudas len@lendudasmot or call 344-3410.

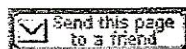
Anday said he will work on removing many of the larger parts of the shrine and preserving some *of the brick* for possible restoration.

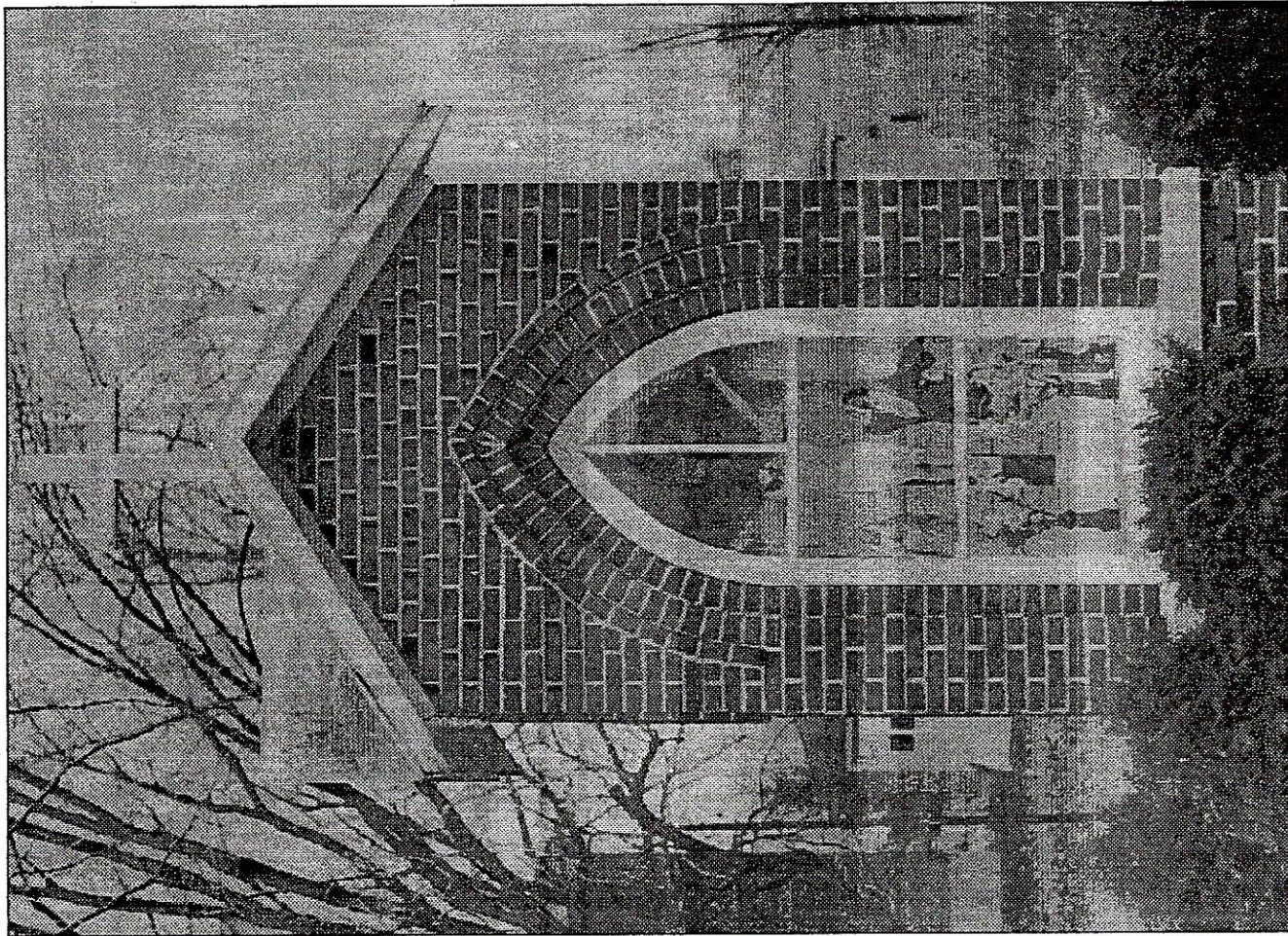
"I think the family wants it rebuilt at the current location," Anday said. Historically, culturally and traditionally, that's the best place, but reconstruction won't start until next spring, he said.

Dale Petersen, patrol superintendent with the Portage County Highway Department, said people *should* check with the county's planning and zoning department to determine the necessary setbacks *before* start reconstructing the shrine.

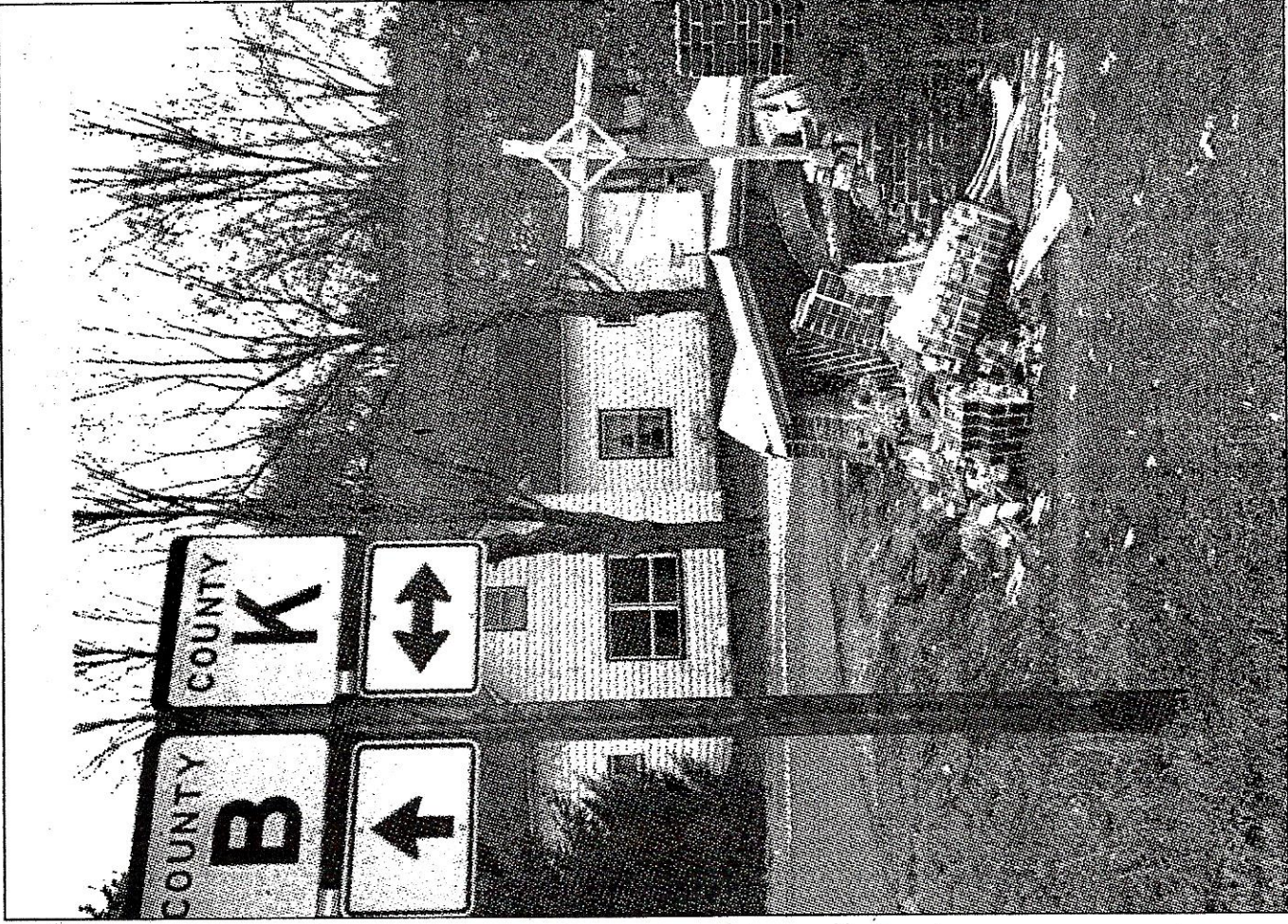
The highway department also should be contacted so it can measure if the shrine would be in the *right of* way, he said.

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John and Malwina Konkol settled in the town of Stockton at the intersection of County Trunk B and County Trunk K, an area known as Konkol's Corners. (Submitted photo)



A traffic accident in October destroyed the Konkol's Corners shrine. (Portage County Gazette photo)

Immigrant built Konkol's Corners shrine

Structure gives thanks for safe voyage from Poland, successful life in America

By ADELINE M. SOPA

Special to The Gazette

The red brick shrine located at the intersection of County Trunk B and County Trunk K in Portage County, a few miles west of Amherst, has long been admired by the motorists who pass by.

Portage County, in the center of the state of Wisconsin, with the city of Stevens Point as its county seat, is generally recognized as the location of the oldest Polish rural settlement of the state and among the oldest in the United States.

The first Polish family arrived in the fall of 1857. Historians relate that by 1864, more than 40 Polish families had joined them. Most of these families had their origin in the Kaszub region of what was then West Prussia, just to the west of Gdansk (German: Danzig).

For many years, three of the four corners of the intersection were home to members of the John and Malwina (Gostomska) Konkol family, hence the name - Konkol's Corners. In recent years, one of the corners is no longer occupied by a family member. However, its identity lingers. The fourth corner is still an open field.

The Konkols had arrived in the port of New York on May 1, 1883, with their children, John (Marianna Jach) and Martha (Felix Jasztrebski). They had lived in the village of Klukowa huta in the Kartuzy district, just to the west of Gdansk. Their parish church was in nearby Stezyca. With them were Malwina's parents, Peter and Julianna (Holk) Gostomski and their daughter,

Pauline (August Literski) and Elizabeth (Sister M. Hipolita). The Stezyca parish was the origin of nearly 100 families and individuals who immigrated to Portage County. Included in this number were John's brother Joseph and Julianna (Patoka) Konkol; Malwina's brother, Anton and Marianna (Lasinska) Gostomski, and her sister, Vincent and Frances (Gostomska) Migel.

The couple purchased a farm the next year where their other nine children, Joseph (Augustina Stolz), Alex (Barbara Glodowski), Leo (Agnes Kinowski), Anton (Agatha Trzebiatowski), Elizabeth (John Makowski), Johanna (Joseph Sopa), Peter (Dorothy Trzebiatowski) and Ben (Frances Rinka) were born.

John was a bee keeper and an accomplished carpenter, as well as a farmer. One of his projects were hand-carved wooden shoes which he and his sons wore. Malwina was a licensed mid-wife and delivered many of the babies in the area for many years. When their son, Anton, married in 1912, and he took over operation of the farm, John and Malwina moved across the road into their new retirement home.

The exact construction date of the shrine is not known. However, it is possible that John built the shrine at this time. The red-pressed brick, probably from the W.E. Langenberg brick yard, used in the shrine is identical to that used in the new farmhouse built by his son, Joseph, and completed in 1912. John's Aug. 18, 1943, obituary noted

that he had built the shrine about 30 years before. He and his wife could easily view the shrine from the windows of their new home.

Members of Anton's family tell that their father had related that their grandfather had built the shrine in thanksgiving for blessings received - a safe voyage to America and a successful life in his new country.

Malwina died on June 10, 1922, at the age of 67 years. John continued to live in their home until the late 1930s. He died Aug. 17, 1943, at 90 years old. They are buried in the nearby St. Mary of Mount Carmel Catholic Cemetery at Fancher. John and Malwina were among the founders of the parish, formed in 1884.

(See Shrine, page 28)

Religious shrines and crosses are very common along Polish roadsides and are usually at a cross road.

In 1985, this writer traveled in the Kaszuby region in which the Konkols had lived and discovered an almost identical shrine in the village of Podjazzy where John had been born on Feb. 4, 1853. His family had moved to nearby Klukowa huta when he was a young boy.

There are 14 roadside shrines and crosses located throughout central Wisconsin. The older residents relate that there were many more.

Perhaps, they were erected to remind themselves or passersby that their faith was more than a Sunday visit to church, but an integral part of their daily lives. This writer's father always respectfully tipped his hat whenever we passed the shrine and

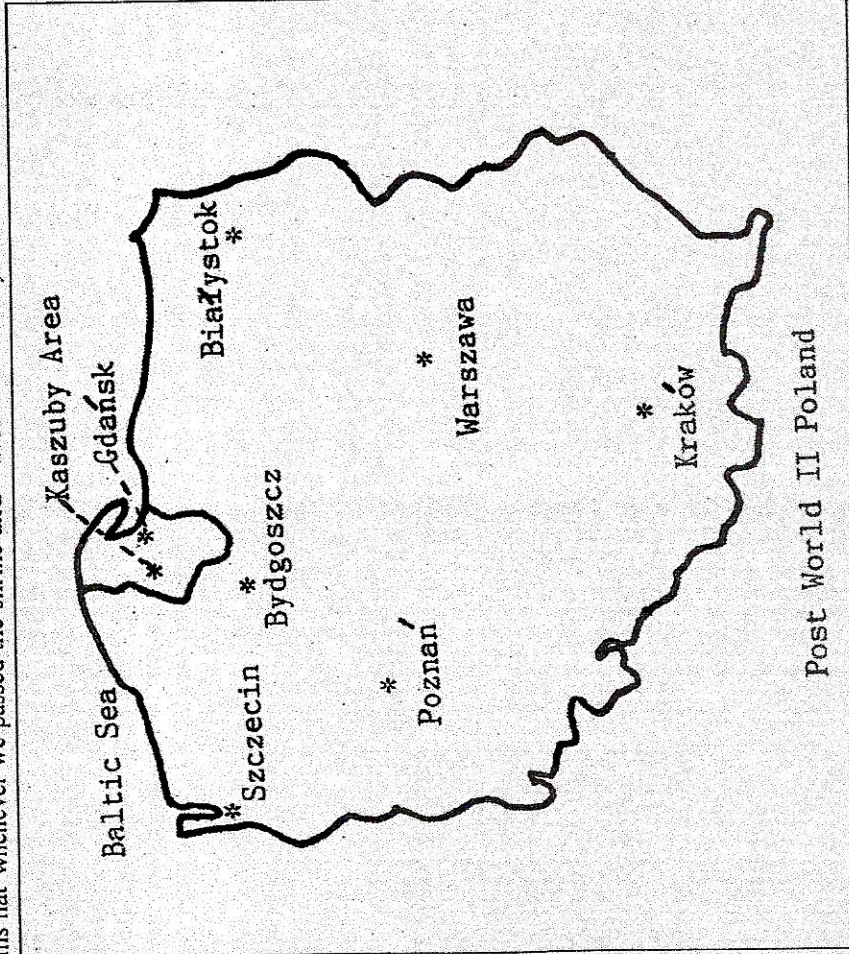
murmured a brief prayer, "Niech bendzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus. Na wiek i wiekow, Amen." ("Praise be to Jesus Christ. For century to centuries.")

The Konkol shrine has a seasonal motif—the Easter and Christmas seasons are recognized with appropriate furnishings. Descendants still own the farm and provided excellent care of the shrine.

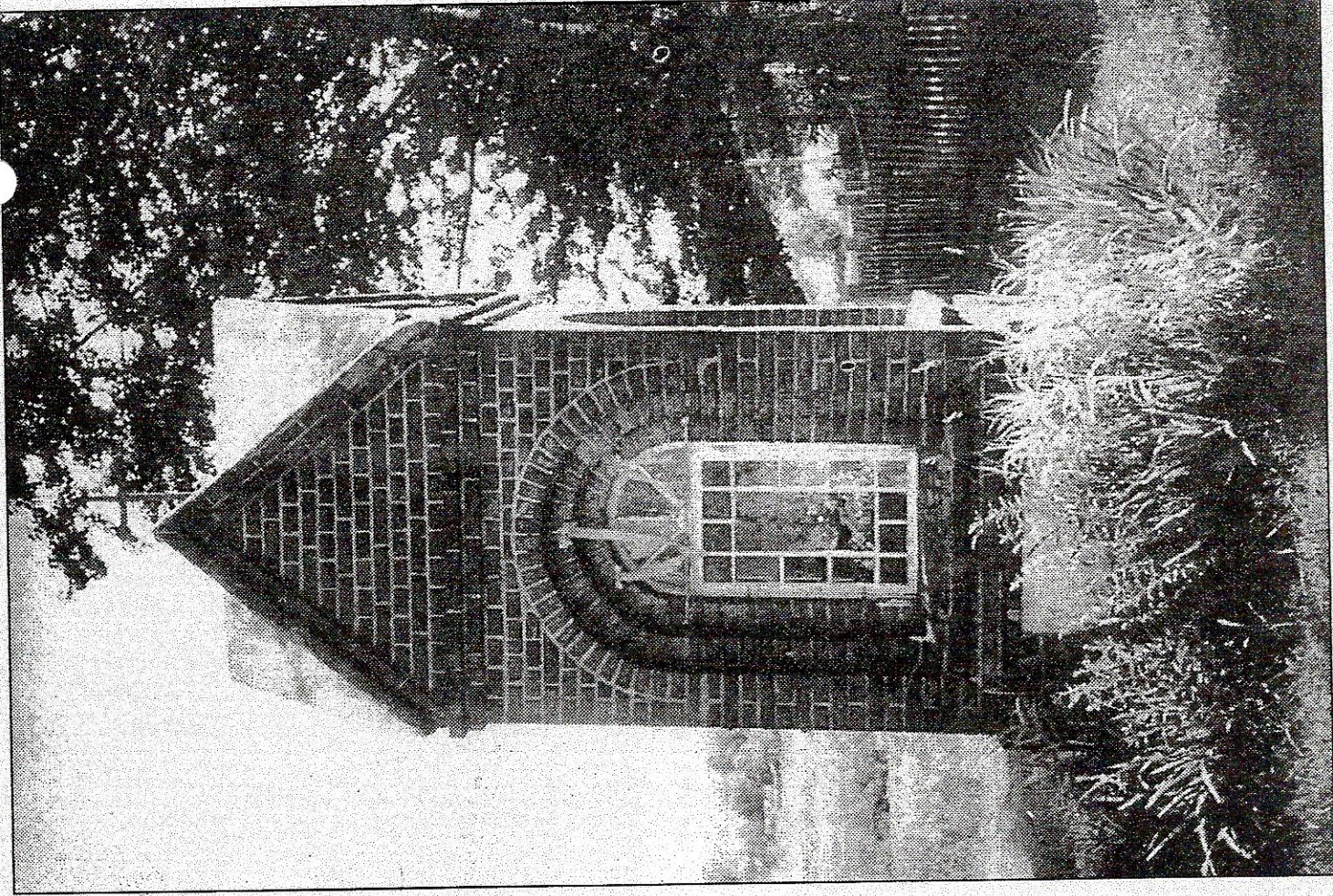
Since this was written, the Konkol's Corner's shrine was badly damaged on Oct. 26, 2003, when the driver of a car lost control and struck the shrine.

Community concern and support indicate that the shrine will be restored. It is considered by most to be a historical landmark in the area.

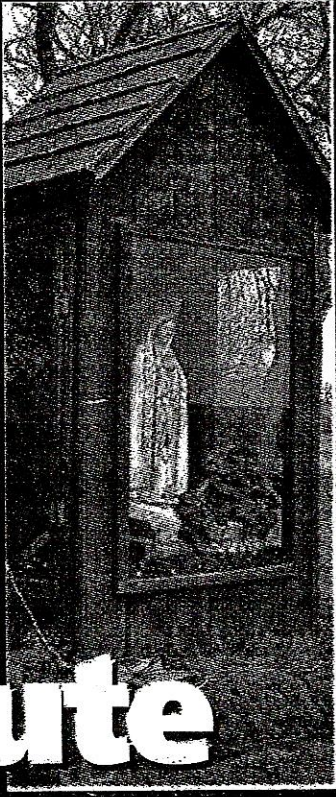
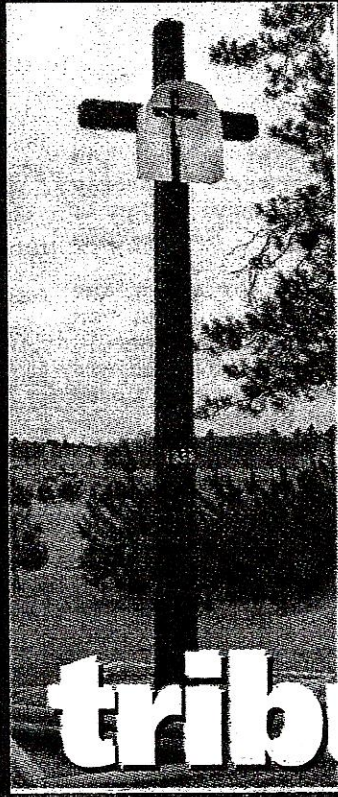
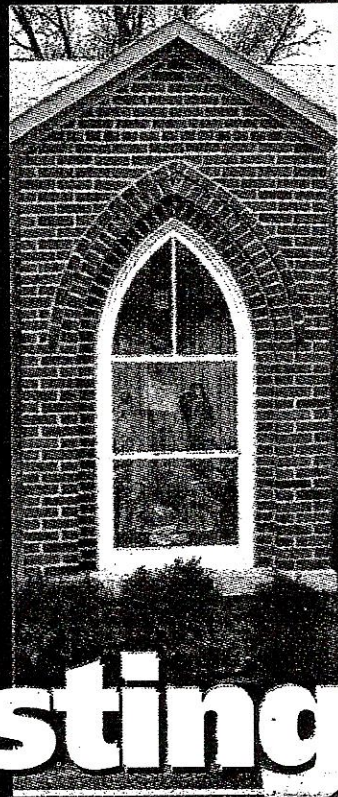
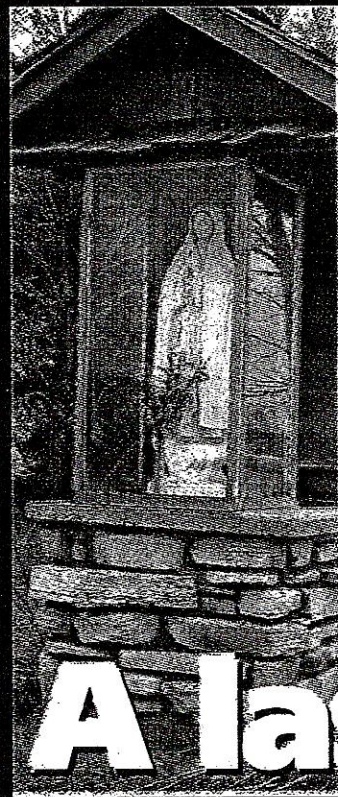
Editor's note: Adeline Sopa is a great-granddaughter of John Konkol and now lives in Green Bay.



This map of Poland after World War II shows the Kaszuby Area in the north, the region where John and Malwina Konkol came to the United



A shrine in Podjazzy, Poland, (above) where John Konkol was born, resembles the architectural style of the shrine at Konkol's Corners. (Continued from page 127)



A lasting tribute

Faithful continue building roadside shrines to the saints

Central Wisconsin Sunday photos by Trudy Stewart

For decades, Portage County roadsides have hosted shrines, such as those located at (left to right) 8037 Highway B, built by Robert Dempski; Highways B and K, built by the late John Konkol; Jordan Road and North Reserve Road, built in 1939; and 9288 Highway 54, built by Helen and Bob Helbach.

4/21/2002 S.P.J.

By Trudy Stewart
Central Wisconsin Sunday

People tend to think of roadside shrines as relics of the past. But the tradition continues, and shrines are being erected today just as they were in the early part of the 20th century.

Helen Helbach and her husband, Bob Helbach, had a shrine erected 15 years ago outside their home, 9288 Highway 54, town of Lanark. The shrine encloses a statue of the Virgin Mary and is lighted at night. Helen Helbach changes the adornments in it at least three times of year: at Christmas, Easter and summertime.

"Our neighbor built this for us. We honor the Blessed Virgin. She granted us a favor, and we built a shrine in her honor," Helen Helbach said. She and her husband are of German heritage

and attend St. Patrick Catholic Church, Lanark.

Roadside shrines and crosses were more common along roads in central Wisconsin during the early and mid 20th century, according to Michael J. Goc, author of "Native Realm: The Polish-American Community of Portage County 1957-1992."

But people taking vehicle or bicycle trips along Portage County's town, county and state highways will discover a number of shrines of both historic and recent vintage.

The origin of roadside shrines predates European immigration to central Wisconsin. The shrines have their roots in pre-Christian times in Europe, where statues and carvings on stones and trees were used to mark the presence of local spirits, writes Goc in "Native Realm."

As Christianity superseded pagan worship, Europeans transposed the ancient shrines to honor their Catholic saints, Goc said.

Most Catholics left their shrines in Europe when they made the trip to the United States. However, many Polish Catholics built new shrines when they arrived here, and they continue to build them today.

Another shrine familiar to many county residents is at Konkol's Corner, the intersection of Highways B and K in the town of Stockton. It was built by the late John Konkol more than 50 years ago and is maintained by his descendants.

A shrine built by Robert Dempski about 20 years ago is located about a mile west of Konkol's Corner at 8037

Highway B.

The Portage County town of Sharon has several shrines, including ones at Highways I and OO, Highways Z and I and 1396 Highway I. There's another shrine just over the Marathon County line, where Highways C and J intersect Willow Road.

Many Catholic churches in the county also have shrines honoring saints, including St. Adalbert Church, Rosholt.

In Portage County's earlier years, almost every intersection was marked with a cross. Some of those crosses have been maintained through the years.

The cross at Jordan Road and North Reserve Road was erected in 1939. There is another located on a corner in the 1400 block of North Second Drive and one at the Portage-Marathon line on Highway Y.

Road tour offers view of Polish heritage

Shrines, crucifixes evidence Polish Catholicity

By PATRICK SLATTERY
Times Review Staff

STEVENS POINT — Roadside shrines and crucifixes have long been a special part of the countryside in Portage County.

A recent initiative has drawn new interest to these monuments, which exemplify this region's deep-rooted Polish Catholicity. The seven shrines and five crucifixes found on private property along roadsides in Portage County are included in the Polish Heritage Trail of central Wisconsin.

A pamphlet offering a self-guided automobile or bicycle tour that includes these shrines and crucifixes, as well as churches and other sites of special interest along the trail was published in 1994 by the Polish Heritage Awareness Society.

The trail's intent not only is to educate tourists, but to build up appreciation among local residents about Portage County's Polish heritage.

Adeline Sopa, assisted by Gayle Zivney, were the individuals primarily responsible for making this Polish Heritage Trail idea come alive.

Adeline grew up on a dairy farm near Almond. Her ancestry is 100 percent Polish, and her mother was a Konkol, a huge family clan, with roots in the Amherst Junction area near St. Mary's of Mt. Carmel Church at Fancher.

Adeline, who is single, taught for 30 years prior to retiring in 1989, and lives near Green Bay. Although a physical education teacher by profession, she always has been a history nut, with a special interest in all matters Polish.

She returns regularly to Portage County to visit her mother, Lillian Sopa, who still lives on the home farm, and usually manages to attend monthly meetings of the Polish Heritage Awareness Society.

Portage County is the second oldest Polish settlement in North America, with Panna Maria in Texas being older, notes Adeline.

The first Poles arrived in Portage County in 1857. The early families were mostly Kaszubian Poles, from a region just to the west of Gdansk along the Baltic Sea.

Poles from the more German-controlled provinces later settled north of Stevens Point.

The last Poles to arrive had first settled in Chicago. Then in the early part of the century, they bought farmland in southern Portage County from an infamous shady realtor, John Heffron.

Much of the farmland in Portage County was cut-over forest, or very rocky and with thin, sandy topsoil. This was especially true in southern Portage County. The Poles ended up farming land that no one else wanted. It was hard going, but having known much hardship and little opportunity in their native land, they were determined to succeed. Against all odds many did so. The substantial red brick farmstead houses, built in this area early in this century, testify to Polish perseverance and success.

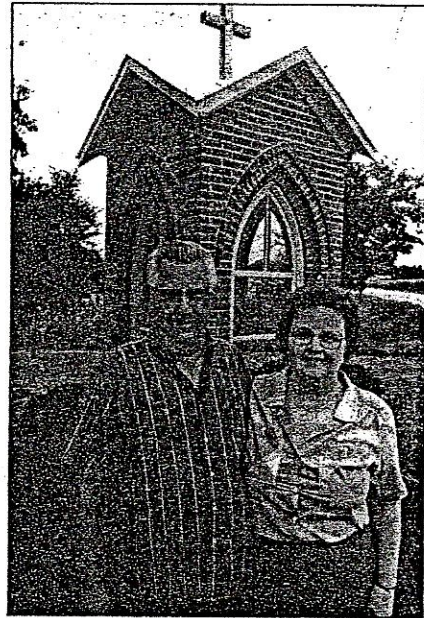
Roadside shrines are ancient expressions of faith that Poles brought with them to Portage County. They are common in the Kaszube area of Poland. Adeline has visited there three times, and found shrines that look exactly the same as back home.

Several miles north of the Fancher church, on Hwy. B, is a shrine especially dear to Adeline's heart, because it was built by her great grandfather, John Konkol. This shrine, which is located on Konkol Corner, was built sometime early this century. She suspects it was built from the same red brick similar to that which came by rail from Stevens Point to build St. Mary's of Mt. Carmel Church.

Adeline well remembers her grandfather John, who lived here into his 90s. When John retired from farming, his son, Anton, bought the farm on which the shrine is located. Anton and his wife, Agatha, had 14 children, among them three daughters who joined the Sisters of St. Joseph in Stevens Point.

Six of their descendants are still alive. This reporter toured the Polish sites with Adeline and met one of these descendants, Margaret, and husband Lawrence Iwanski.

The Iwanskis have lived in Mequon for 40 years, but retain their Portage County roots and come here often. The big Konkol homestead house is not lived in per-



Margaret and Lawrence Iwanski stand in front of the shrine found on Konkol Corner that was built by Margaret's grandfather. (Photos by Patrick Slattery)

manently, but instead is used by all family members.

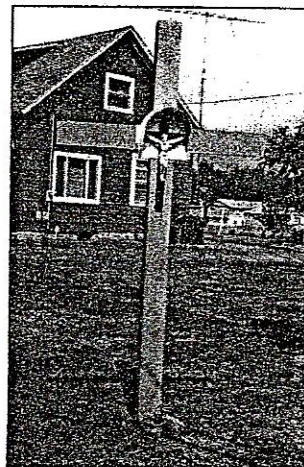
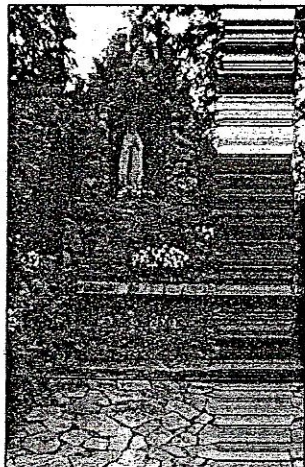
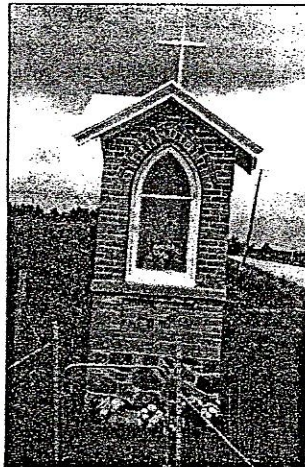
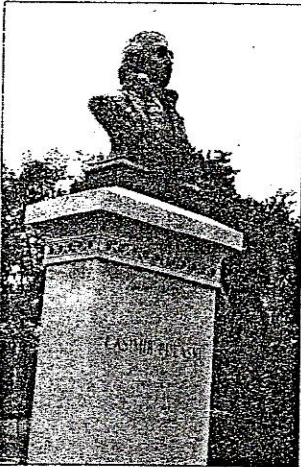
Margaret and Lawrence help care for the shrine in front. They keep it in fine condition, and change the flowers and statuary to mark the Christmas and Easter season.

After visiting with the Iwanskis, we took off to visit other sites on the Polish Heritage Trail.

"Boze Zbaw Polske" (God Save Poland) declares the message inscribed above the wrought-iron gate in front of St. Mary's Church in Fancher.

From there, we proceed to yet another magnificent church that is at the heart of Polish heritage in Portage County, Sacred Heart in Polonia. In this region in

See TOUR, page 6



Left to right: A monument dedicated to Revolutionary War hero Casimir Pulaski is found in McGlactlin Park off Hwy. 10 on Stevens Point's east side; This well-tended shrine is located on a country road east of Polonia; A grotto to Our Lady of Fatima is one of the many dis-

plays of religious artistry found at St. Clare Convent in Polonia; This newly restored crucifix just north of Stevens Point on property owned by Albert and Joyce Hojnacki was rededicated last spring.

soon found out that things like love and friends can be expressed without talking, and that actions truly do speak louder than words.

Meanwhile the other half of the group was busy building homes for the needy. One disabled man had lost the use of

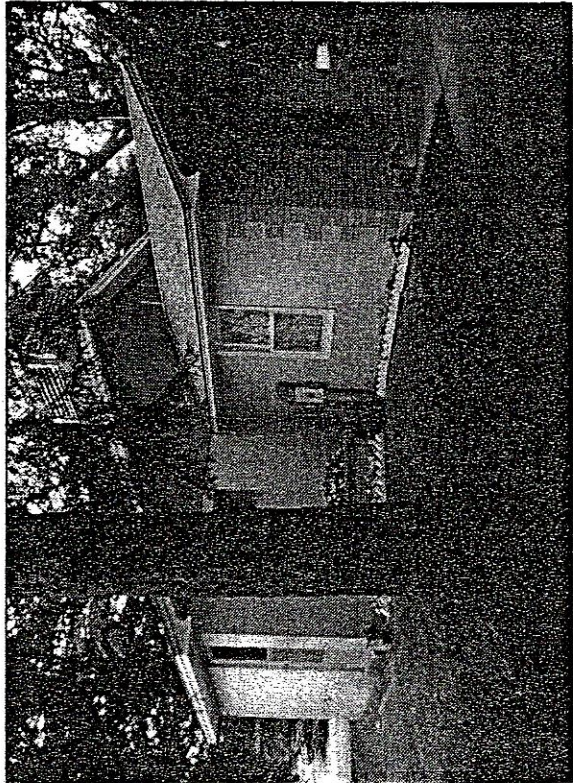
took baths in the river, and washed and brushed our teeth out of water behind in the backyard.

Each day after breakfast we got our work assignments. Some stayed at the mission and did chores, while others went to another branch of the mission,

more secure in knowing that we are not alone on this journey.

Another thing we brought back is the knowledge of what needs to be done in our own communities. By serving God wherever we are, it will ultimately bring us closer to Him.

state court is serving as Wisconsin State Court chief ranger, vice chief ranger and trustee. He held offices in Christ the King Court 1923 and in the Chippewa Valley District.



Tucked away on the far end of the grounds of St. Clare Convent, Our Lady of Sorrows Shrine is a special place for those who come to place their cares before the Blessed Mother. (Photo by Patrick Slattery)

Tour gives view of Polish heritage

Continued from page 5

1864, the first rural Polish Catholic church in the state was built at Ellis, then known as Poland Corners. Trouble with saloon keepers forced the church to relocate to its present site. The present church, built in 1937, although huge, would be dwarfed by its forerunner, which burned down.

The expansive grounds of the Felician Sisters' convent next door are particularly beautiful and historical, and well worth a visit.

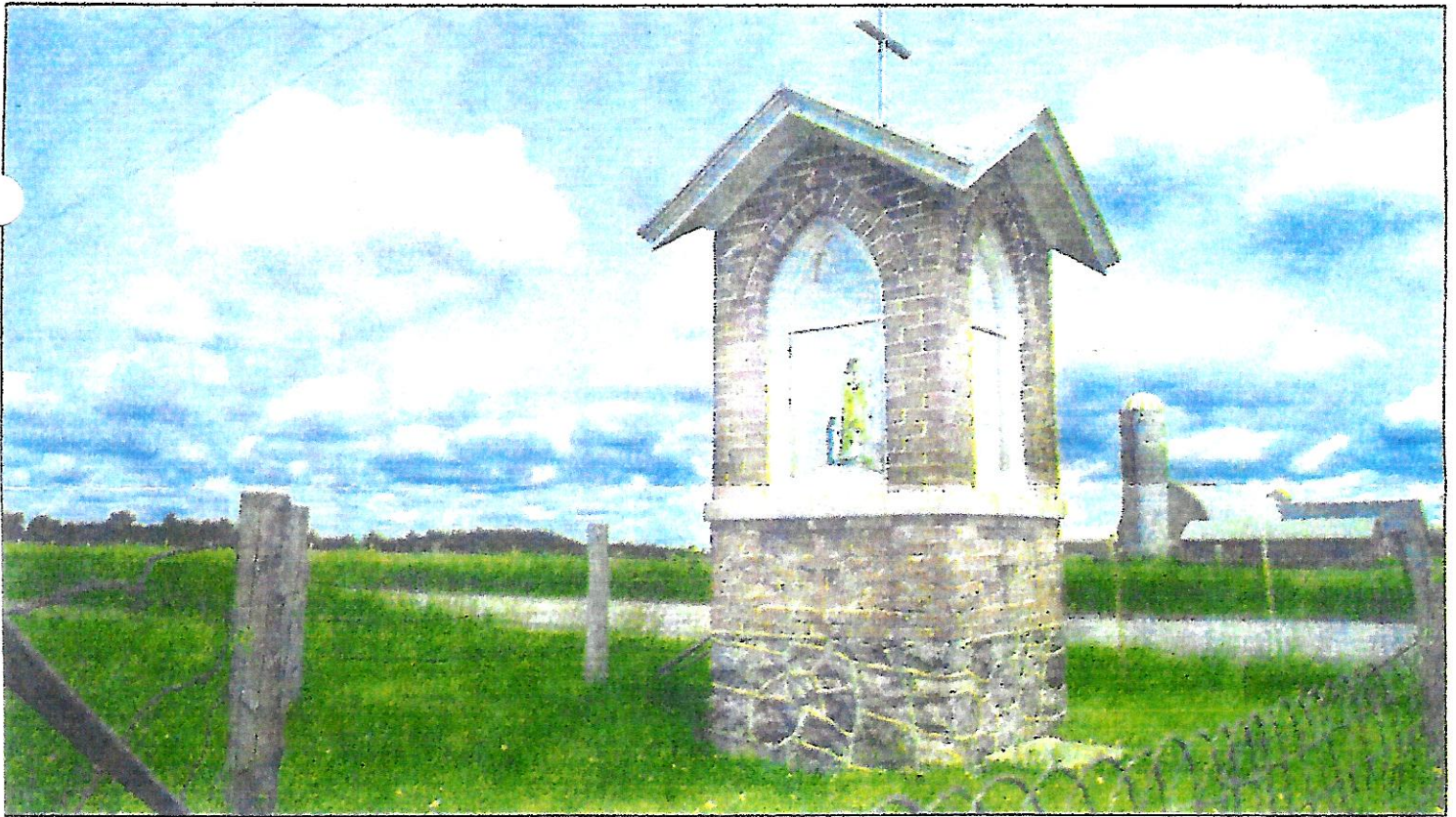
Several more stops at shrines constituted our trail ride.

North of Stevens Point, on the corner of Woodview Drive N. and Second Drive, stands a newly refurbished crucifix. The previous stone crucifix had been a landmark throughout this

century, but old age recently tumbled it. The owners of the property, Albert and Joyce Hohnacki, had the cross rebuilt, and a corpus was imported from Poland. A crowd gathered here on May 3 when St. Stanislaus pastor Father Donald Przybylski came out to bless and rededicate the site.

We also visited a nearby crucifix in the courtyard, located at N. Reserve and Jordan Road, and the sight filled Adeline's heart with joy. She discovered this cross was newly painted and surrounded by carefully tended flowers, making the site look very sharp.

It's Adeline's hope the shrines and crucifixes in Portage County will not be lost to neglect, as some have been elsewhere. For the sake of both history and our faith, she believes, these holy sites deserve recognition and care.



SARAH B. TEWSAWSI PHOTOS

This shrine, at the intersection of Portage County highways Z and I, was built by the neighboring farm family in 1917. Such wayside shrines are common in Poland, and more than 50 of them exist in the Polish heartland of central Wisconsin. Most of the local shrines feature brick walls, tin roofs and statues of the Virgin Mary.

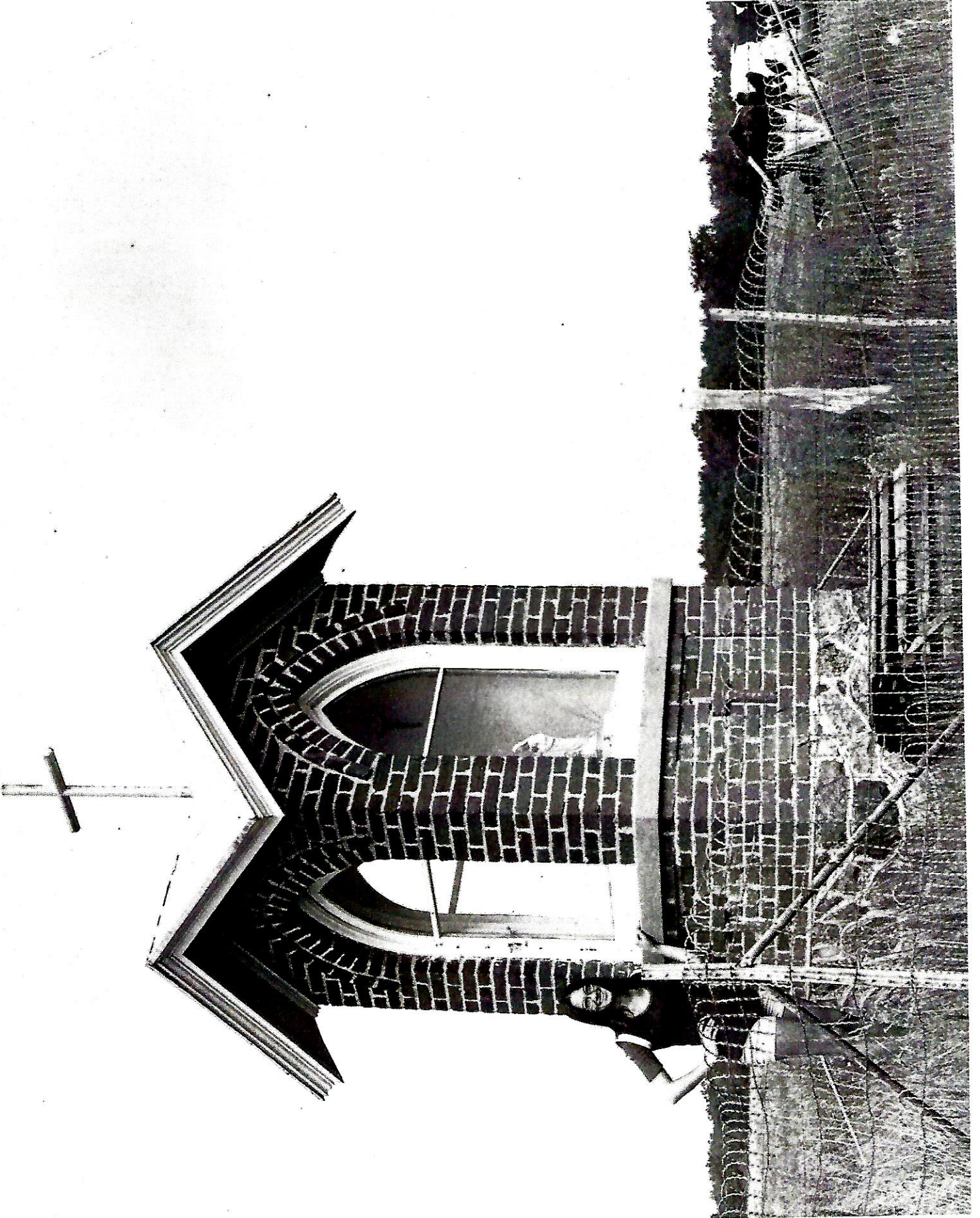
ANTON ANDAY
2141 PLOVER SPRINGS DR.
PLOVER, WI 54467
6/17/13

DEAR ANTON;

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP
IN ASSISTING US WITH FINDING
A SITE AND REBUILDING THE
KONKOL SHRINE. YOUR HELP WAS
INSTRUMENTAL IN DEVELOPING THE
PLANS, GAINING PORTAGE COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUY IN, AND
STATE HISTORICAL APPROVALS. THE
SHRINE IS SCHEDULED TO BE
RECONSTRUCTED THIS FALL. I
WILL LET YOU KNOW WHEN IT
STARTS. ENCLOSED IS THE
BACKGROUND INFORMATION YOU PROVIDED
WHICH WAS SO VERY HELPFUL.

THANKS!

BRUCE GERLAND
AECOM



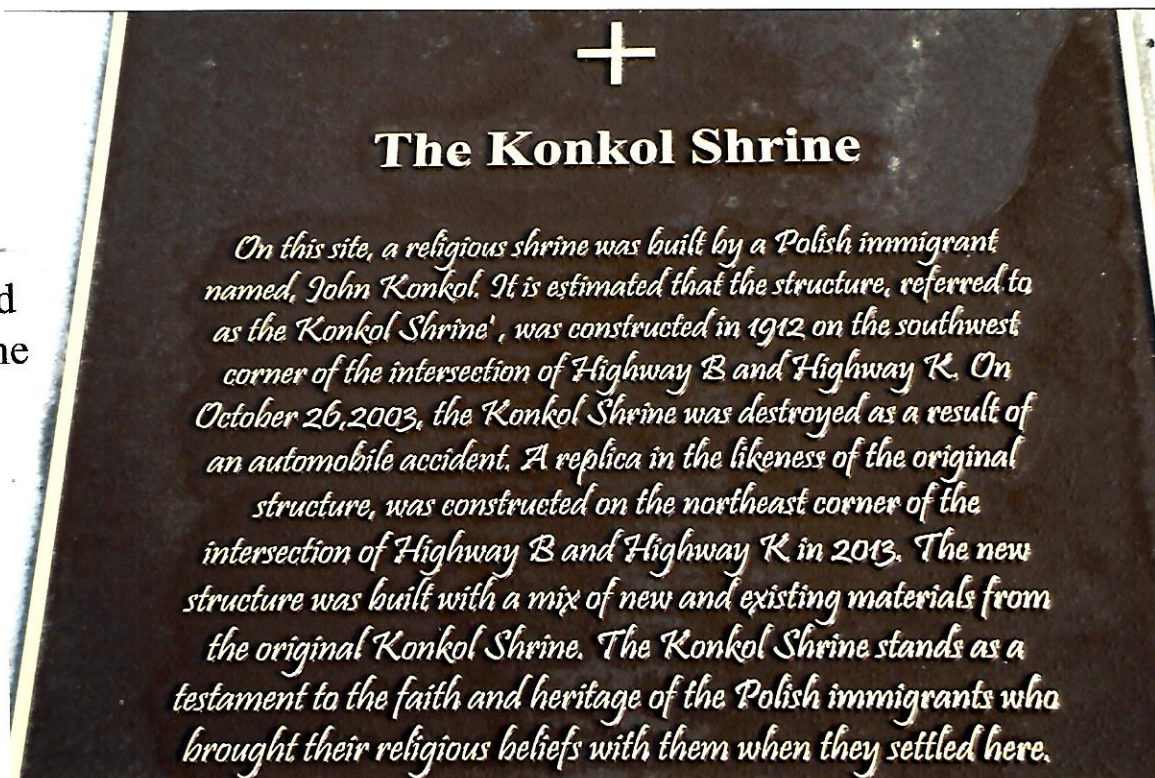
The Konkol Shrine

A Restoration – 2013 – 2014



The marker on the original site of the Konkol Shrine

Commemorative plaque and history of the Konkol Shrine





Restored brick work
on south side

Restored brick work on north
side – cross over door opening



South and east side of
Restored brick work

North and westside of
restored brick work







12/16/2015



