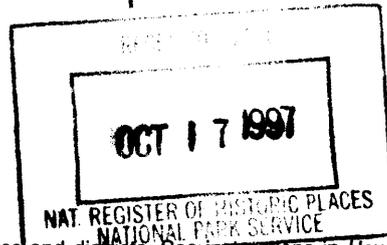
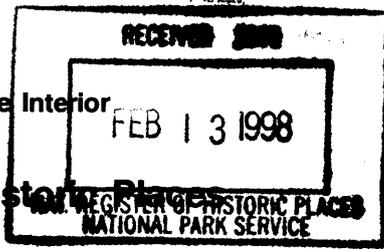


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



Presub

1425

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Church of St. Kilian (Catholic)

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number off County Hwy. 18 not for publication N/A

city or town Wilmont Township (St. Kilian) Wilmont vicinity

state Minnesota code MN county Nobles code 105 zip code 56185

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Ian R. Stewart Date 10/7/97
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
State of Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Bob Boland

Date of Action

3/30/98

Church of St. Kilian
Name of Property

Nobles County, MN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
2	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian: Gothic

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone: Granite, Dolomite

walls Wood: Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Church of St. Kilian
Name of Property

Nobles County, MN
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

Ethnic Heritage: European

Period of Significance

1900-1947

Significant Dates

1900

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Yeub, H. (Builder)

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Church of St. Kilian

Church of St. Kilian
Name of Property

Nobles County, MN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 14.7

UTM References Wilmont, Minn. Quad 1967
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 0 |
Zone Easting Northing
2 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 0 |

3 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
Zone Easting Northing
4 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David C. Anderson
organization _____ date May 28, 1997
street & number 169 Lundy Bridge Drive telephone (319) 382-3079
city or town Waukon state Iowa zip code 52172

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Church of St. Kilian
street & number Box 104 telephone (507) 926-5496
city or town Wilmont state MN zip code 56185

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service**

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Church of St. Kilian
Nobles County, MN

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DESCRIPTION

The St. Kilian Church is located three miles northwest of Wilmont (18 miles northwest of Worthington) in Nobles County, Minnesota. This part of southwest Minnesota was formerly prairie and is now mostly level ground devoted to farming.

The church is at the north end of a 14.7-acre lot next to and east of the platted townsite of St. Kilian, which occupies the west ½ of the northwesternmost 40-acre segment of Section 27, Wilmont Township. The church lot includes a school (erected in 1956), which now serves as a parish hall, and a cemetery. A rectory and school-convent also occupied this parcel over the years, but these are no longer extant. The church stands amidst several large pine, fir, and hardwood trees across from St. Kilian's Main Street, and together the townsite and church stand in stark contrast to the flat, treeless expanse of farmland on all sides.

The St. Kilian townsite was laid out in 1891 by the Reverend C. J. Knauf and still occupies most of the original 20 acres, although some of the streets have been vacated and a portion of the village has been incorporated into a neighboring farm to the south.

The St. Kilian Church is a 116 by 44 foot wood frame structure erected in 1900 with its long axis oriented east-west. This property replaced an earlier church dating from 1887 which was struck by lightning and destroyed by fire in 1898. The ground plan represents a vestigial Latin cross layout with vestries north and south at the west end and a slight projection beyond them which is part of the sanctuary. At the west end there is an entrance bay which extends vertically to include a belfry, which was built in 1968 to replace the deteriorated original. The current belfry is considerably shorter than the original and consequently detracts from the general vertical emphasis of the church exterior.

There are seven short buttress-like structures on each long side of the nave which are placed on stone foundations extending out from the main footings. These are wood frame enclosures which suggest the stone buttresses commonly associated with Gothic churches from Medieval Europe. They may also house an undetermined structural component of the wall system, but since no plans of the church have been located, their structural function if any cannot be determined. As decorative elements they are compatible with other Gothic stylistic features of the building, including the 20 pointed arch stained glass windows in the building, the long narrow nave, and high pitch roof.

Two of the stained glass windows are located in the east wall of each sacristy but are boarded up and sided over on the exterior. There is also a rose window over the main entrance. There are doors placed on the west side of each sacristy, but they appear to be seldom used.

The foundation walls are built up of local fieldstone, which is abundant in the local glacial drift, and faced with quarry-face Kasota dolomite. There is a partial basement under the church which houses heating and ventilating equipment.

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Church of St. Kilian
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One enters the church into a shallow vestibule with doorways to the left and right leading to the choir loft and nave, respectively. Straight ahead a pair of doors opens to the nave under the choir loft which is supported by two cast-iron columns. There was an organ in the loft but this is now located in the parish hall.

The exterior proportions emphasizing verticality are not carried into the interior, where a low, hipped (or gambrel arch) ceiling over the nave and a round arch framing the sanctuary suggest a spacious horizontality. The lath and plaster walls are painted an off-white as is the ceiling, which is covered with pressed metal in a decorative pattern. A narrow band of stenciled decoration runs horizontally above and below the windows on the nave and vertically and just inside the vaulted space which frames the sanctuary.

The woodwork is varnished yellow pine throughout and includes framing for the windows, 10-inch baseboards, beadboard paneling on the choir loft, and doors. The floor is four-inch heart pine now covered with carpet along each long wall and in the sanctuary.

The sacristies on both sides of the sanctuary contain beadboard cupboards and other furniture which date from the early years of the church's history. The stained glass windows mentioned above which are not visible on the exterior are in plain sight here. These were installed in 1914 by the priest at that time and caused a controversy which led to their being boarded up.

Most of the church furniture, including the pews (with kneelers) and three large wooden altars, are original. These altars and a no longer extant communion rail were most likely made in Germany, though church records are not clear about this.¹ These are elaborate, hand-carved wooden structures with painted figures. Wood from the communion rail was used to build credence tables and other furniture in 1987.

Perhaps the most remarkable fixtures in the church are the 14 stations of the cross, painted in oil on bronze panels and hung seven each on both sides of the nave. These are about 16 by 20 inches in dimension and formerly hung on the walls in elaborate frames. In 1942, when the interior was replastered, they were enclosed in simple oak frames and set into the wall.

The light fixtures with molded glass globes which hang in the nave are no doubt original, but they would not have been installed until sometime after initial construction when electricity became available.

Church records from 1900-1901 indicate that it cost the parish a total of \$6,989.50 excluding windows and furniture to build this church. That an architect drew the plan is possible, since \$145.00 was paid for a "plan for the new church."

St. Kilian's Church is in good condition overall and, except for the reconstruction of the belfry and minor alterations to the interior already discussed, the church exhibits a high degree of historic integrity. Historic photos from shortly after construction indicate a rather different exterior color scheme than the current white paint on everything save the entrance portal, namely wall surfaces dark in hue with trim painted white.

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Church of St. Kilian
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¹The church records referred to are minutes of parish council meetings and dispersal accounts, and much of this for the years up to about 1900 is in both German and English. These are in the possession of Elmer Brake, a member of the St. Kilian Church Corporation which has owned the church since 1896. The communion rail and three altars cost \$1,098.99 of which \$42.93 was the freight charge. The published church history (Vosburgh) states that "the wood was shipped from Germany and constructed by parishioners." This probably means that the altar and rail came in pieces and were assembled by parishioners. The church also has a nativity scene with freestanding painted figures which is attributed to German artists from the mid-19th century.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Church of St. Kilian is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as a property which is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history in the areas of social history and European ethnic heritage. As the parish church in a German Catholic immigration community, the history of this property demonstrates the role of the American Catholic Church in facilitating and sustaining the settlement of Minnesota by European immigrants of diverse ethnic origin. It also serves as an example of German-American immigration to rural Minnesota in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since it was built in 1900, St. Kilian's Church has been an important focus in the social and cultural life of the parishioners. This property also relates to the Minnesota statewide context, "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940" and demonstrates the importance of railroads in the settlement of Minnesota. The historical significance of this building satisfies the criteria considerations applied to properties being nominated to the National Register.

Railroads and the Settlement of Southwest Minnesota

Although Minnesota was granted statehood in 1858, Euro-American settlement began after native American (Dakota) tribes ceded most of the land they occupied in southern Minnesota to the U.S. Government via the treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux in 1851. Settlement first occurred in the newly founded cities and adjacent areas along the Mississippi and other major rivers, since these were the most important transportation routes before the advent of railroads.

The settlement of western Minnesota was delayed until adequate rail connections were established there, and it was 20 years after the state was made available for settlement before rail lines connected the western borders of Minnesota with major trading centers in the state and beyond.

The St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad reached Worthington in Nobles County from St. Paul in 1872 and then went on to Adrian in 1876, and both of these towns were platted by the railroad. In 1899 a branch line was extended northwest from Worthington, and this was accompanied by the establishment by the railroad of the villages of Wilmont and Lismore, which are three miles and six miles, respectively, from St. Kilian.

Railroads were important as more than a means of transportation in the settlement history of Minnesota in that they were granted large tracts of land – usually alternate sections for up to five miles on either side of a proposed

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Church of St. Kilian
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route – which they sold to settlers by way of ambitious promotional activities in the eastern U.S. and in Europe. They platted towns and provided jobs which were important in supplementing the incomes of farm families struggling to get established and obtain clear title to their land. They were also important in a negative way in that established towns which were bypassed by the railroad declined and even disappeared.

The American Catholic Church took an active role in attracting settlers to Minnesota and sustaining them after they became established. This effort varied over time and in different locations. Perhaps the most vigorous and focused effort was carried out by the Catholic Colonization Bureau of Minnesota, which was organized in 1876 by St. Paul Diocese Bishop John Ireland. This organization concentrated its efforts on Nobles and four other counties in southwest Minnesota.

The initial objectives of Ireland's bureau were "to populate western Minnesota with Catholics and to recruit these Catholics from Eastern urban centers."¹ Bishop Ireland's strategy was to work directly with several railroads in Minnesota as their land agent, whereby he signed contracts with them to sell their land holdings to selected immigrants at a modest commission. In this way he for the most part avoided direct purchase of any land himself.

Between 1876 and 1880 Ireland and the bureau managed to secure 379,000 acres in southwest Minnesota, and six townships of Nobles County were included. Wilmont Township (St. Kilian parish) was not part of these contracted lands, but it did include railroad holdings as well as U.S. Government lands available for purchase or homestead claims.²

While the initial colonization plan focused on providing land for Irish immigrants residing in urban centers of the eastern U.S., some Irish came directly from Ireland to these colonies, as did other ethnic groups and nationalities, including Belgians, French-Canadians, and Germans. These tended to form enclaves which to a degree are reflected in the names of the towns where parish churches were located, e.g. Ghent and Fulda. Population numbers continued to grow into the early 20th century as the railroads reached the maximum extent of their penetration. Many of these settlements continue to reflect both their Catholic and ethnic roots, and this is in part because John Ireland, who eventually became Archbishop Ireland of the St. Paul Archdiocese, followed up on the initial colonization and settlement efforts with measures which helped ensure that Minnesota would remain an attractive place for Catholics to live. For example, with the financial help of James J. Hill, he established the St. Paul Seminary in 1894 so that an ample supply of priests would be available for not only Minnesota but for other western states as well. Ireland had earlier signed land contracts with two of Hill's railroads which later became part of the Northern Pacific system.

Although St. Kilian was not one of Bishop Ireland's colonies, its location in the midst of the bureau's settlement activities was an important factor in its history. The Adrian colony, also in Nobles County about 13 miles south of St. Kilian, was established in 1877 around the town of that name which had been platted by the railroad the year before. A German-born priest, Christian J. Knauf, was sent to Adrian from his parish in Jordan, MN by Ireland to oversee the colony. The Adrian settlement was in the midst of 70,000 acres of Nobles County land secured by Ireland from the St. Paul & Sioux City Railway. Response by prospective settlers was such that he acquired an

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Church of St. Kilian
Nobles County, MN

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additional 35,000 acres in Nobles County before a year had passed. The first settlers began moving into Wilmont Township also in the 1870s.

Population figures from Nobles County show that in 1880 the numbers of Irish and Germans were about the same, but that from then on Germans far outnumbered Irish. By 1905, the total Irish was 726 and the German 5,701.³

Meanwhile, large numbers of Germans and others were moving into Murray County which borders Nobles to the north where another colony had been established in 1878 (Avoca), located within 52,000 acres of railroad land under contract with Ireland. St. Kilian parish includes most of Wilmont Township in Nobles County and a quarter section of territory in southern Murray County. There is no other church within the St. Kilian parish boundary.

By 1885 there were sufficient German Catholics in Wilmont Township to support a local church, and Father Knauf was persuaded to buy a 40-acre tract in the northwest corner of Section 27 of the township from the railroad for church purposes. These settlers had been using a rural school in the area for their worship until the first Church of St. Kilian was built in 1887. The name was given by Father Knauf who himself acted as the parish priest until 1891 when the parish obtained its own resident pastor.⁴

A community began to grow near the church, and in 1891 Rev. Knauf had the west one-half of the 40 acres laid out into lots, leaving the remaining church land unplatted. All the church facilities and a cemetery dating from the 1880s are located within this unplatted parcel. A thriving village, named St. Kilian after the church, developed since there were no other towns around until the railroad came through three miles south and established the village of Wilmont in 1900. St. Kilian supported a blacksmith, hotel, two general stores, two saloons, and a post office. The hotel was not a success and today it is a general store, one of the very few structures remaining from the earliest days of the village. Today St. Kilian is a hamlet and is one of only two villages in Nobles County which were not established on a railroad line.⁵

In 1898 the original St. Kilian's Church was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The current structure was completed two years later, and it is a much larger building than the first church (116 by 44 feet versus 48 by 32 feet). That St. Kilian village would suffer from being bypassed by the railroad was predictable. Survival of the parish and its church would depend on the stability of the local community, which was based on the land and dispersed.

The definite route of the railroad extension northwest out of Worthington was determined in 1899, and construction began on the line during the summer of that year. The location of Wilmont village was determined by January 1900, and building activity began in the midst of winter. Lismore, a few miles west of Wilmont, was platted in April 1900.

The consequences of these developments for the village of St. Kilian were dramatic in that business enterprises closed down or moved, along with their buildings, to Wilmont. The impact on the parish population and its church facilities, however, was minimal. That there was cause for concern, however, is revealed by a meeting of the congregation in 1904 which passed two resolutions and petitioned the diocesan Bishop in Winona seeking to sustain

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Church of St. Kilian
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the territorial integrity of the original St. Kilian parish against expansion from nearby Wilmont and to abandon the Wilmont mission.⁶

Population figures from parish records indicate that the number of families (letterholders) went from 141 in 1894 to 127 in 1900 to 122 in 1918. Subsequent figures remained stable until they rose to 143 in 1946.⁷ The building of a new church in 1900 was preceded by a parochial school (1898) and rectory (1896). These structures plus the erection of a convent in 1910 suggest that the parish was in a good position to maintain itself, but the decision to build a new and much larger church with the awareness that the railroad was creating a new town three miles away certainly reflects courage and a determination to survive.

The year 1916 was important in the further decline of St. Kilian village in that most of Blocks 3, 4, 5, and 6 (about one-third the total area of the platted village) was sold by the church to a neighboring landowner to the south for conversion into farmland. The village had lost its post office in 1907, but a lot was sold to School District #16 in 1916. The school building is no longer extant.⁸

For the farm families who made up the parish of St. Kilian, however, the advent of a railroad as close as Wilmont was of great benefit, since until then the closest shipping point had been in Adrian, 13 miles distant.

German-American Immigration and the American Catholic Church

The efforts and accomplishments of the Catholic Colonization Bureau represent only one aspect of the Church's role in establishing settlers on the land and sustaining them over subsequent generations. In this context we must consider some special features of German-American settlement and how these people felt their church should function in the new surroundings of Minnesota.

German-speaking settlers began arriving in Minnesota in the early 1850s and until 1905 they were the largest ethnic group in the state. The first centers of rural concentration occurred and still exist around New Ulm in the Minnesota River valley and in Stearns County. Germans continued coming to Minnesota into the early 20th century, and their descendants are still present in large numbers in the state as a whole. Several immigration scholars have noted certain distinguishing features about them when compared with other groups. For one thing, it is clear that their language set them apart from other settlers including old-stock Americans who had moved west and were often well established in commerce and politics when non-English speaking immigrants arrived. A sense of isolation in areas of initial low population density like southwestern Minnesota was thus all the more acute. And even in company with other Catholics, they insisted on establishing their own separate churches and schools as soon as possible in order to ensure cultural integrity via language and customs, many of which were inseparable from religious ritual and practice.⁹

Quoting Colman Barry:

"German Catholics from the outset insisted that separate churches were an absolute necessity. They settled together in colonies whenever possible, often by their own choice, more often under

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Church of St. Kilian
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the direction of a German priest or missionary. They wanted churches of their own in which their traditional religious observances and customs could be carried out, where they could hear sermons in their mother tongue, go to confession as they had learned to confess from early childhood, and take an active part in parish life through their beloved societies."¹⁰

There is no doubt that the manifold efforts of the Catholic Colonization Bureau in attracting Catholics to southwest Minnesota were important in attracting Germans to the area, both within the colonies and in neighboring localities, including St. Kilian parish. Biographies of early settlers indicate that St. Kilian's Germans came direct from many locations in Germany and via settlements in the Midwest as well, in particular from northern Iowa.¹¹ In addition to the campaign by the C.B.B., a German-language publication printed in St. Paul (*Der Wanderer*) and the German Catholic Central-Verein have been cited as instrumental in attracting settlers to St. Kilian parish.¹²

Historian Philip Gleason has emphasized the importance of Catholic auxiliary societies as an aspect of how the church functioned as a social nucleus of the community. At St. Kilian there have always been at least two such groups. For women it is the "Council of Catholic Women," which is responsible for the parish "plant and blossom day" celebration, an annual bazaar, and other activities. For men it is the "Holy Name Society," which manages the "Holy Seven," seven acres of church farmland, maintenance of the church building and grounds, and more.

German immigrants' insistence on using their language in church and teaching it in school often put them at odds with their neighbors and even into conflict with the Church hierarchy in Minnesota. Archbishop Ireland had his problems with many of the German congregations over the language issue, which became acute during the period of World War I. However, no evidence of this important episode in German-American history has come to light at St. Kilian, where the congregation was close to 100% German, and where this language was used regularly in church and elsewhere. Indeed, the apparent lack of conflict here over the language issue can be seen as further evidence of the community's ethnic (cultural) uniformity.

They had a parochial school in St. Kilian at least by 1887, in which year two laymen were hired as teachers, with one of them being granted a lot in St. Kilian village as part of his salary. School was first held in the church sacristies until that structure burned in 1898, at which point they immediately built a school, using this for worship until the new church was built two years later.

German Catholics in the U.S. tended to build large, richly decorated churches and celebrated many religious holidays and feast days.¹³ The large churches in the core areas of German Catholic settlement in Minnesota illustrate this as does the small parish of St. Kilian, which spent nearly \$9,400.00 for its new church, a figure which includes the stained glass windows and furnishings. At this time the parish population was 127 families, and two years before the new church was built they had spent about \$2,600.00 for a school facility. The stained glass intricately carved three large altars and five additional freestanding painted figures are still regarded as the "dominant" features of the church.¹⁴

Among the important religious holidays celebrated at St. Kilian, the most notable according to existing records and recollections are Christmas and Corpus Christi Day. Christmas was and remains the occasion for setting up their

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Church of St. Kilian
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19th century made in Germany nativity scene. Corpus Christi Day, like many events of religious origin and celebration, was also a community social occasion of great importance, serving to re-affirm local identity and ethnic roots. This was a day-long affair which began with Mass in the morning, music, a procession to altars outside the church, and feasting. Afternoon events always included a baseball game.¹⁵

National holidays including Labor Day and Thanksgiving were also celebrated on church grounds, as were many other strictly social events: weekly card parties and dances during the winter months with music provided by a local band. The school basement included a pool table and single lane bowling alley. The St. Joseph's parish hall, built as a school in 1957 at a cost of nearly \$53,000, continues to serve as a community center, as does the church.

Persistence on the land extending over multiple generations was an element in the self-identity concept of German-Americans to distinguish themselves from other groups they encountered in the Midwest, mostly the "Yankees," or old-stock Americans.¹⁶ Certainly persistence characterizes the St. Kilian Germans, and this can be seen in the names on current plat maps of Wilmont township. Published accounts of the community from as early as 1908 recognized this area as settled almost entirely by German Catholic farmers and the village of St. Kilian as "one of the strongest church towns in the county."¹⁷ An account from 1990 of various locations in Nobles County notes that St. Kilian Catholic Church was "the focus of the community from the beginning."¹⁸

The St. Kilian congregation numbers 52 families at the present time, and it is determined to maintain its church and community, which is an attitude shared by at least one of the few non-German Protestants in the hamlet, the proprietor of the St. Kilian store. "It's my church too, and I'm a Danish Protestant," is how Mrs. Sylvia Hoffman put it recently who, with her husband Stan, has owned the store since 1979.¹⁹

¹Shannon, p. 51. All the information included here on the Catholic Colonization Bureau is from Shannon (see Bibliography) unless otherwise stated.

²See Wilmont Township biographies and p. 99, Rose.

³Figures are from Holmquist, pp. 137 and 159, and they include foreign-born and American-born of foreign parents.

⁴Deed signed in March and recorded in April, 1885. Book K of Deeds, p. 419. Nobles County Recorder's Office. St. Kilian was an Irish missionary who had gone to Germany in the 9th century, and he attained the rank of Bishop in the jurisdictions of Franconia and Thuringia. See the Worthington *Advance* for December 15, 1887 and Vosburgh (1991).

⁵The other is Leota in the northwest corner of the county. See SHPO File on Nobles Co. The St. Kilian plat was filed in 1891. The village was never incorporated.

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⁶St. Kilian Parish Annual Report for 1904. Wilmont eventually got its own parish and church, but the border of St. Kilian parish still extends to the northwest corner of Wilmont's corporate limits.

⁷Parish figures are from Parish records. U.S. Census figures for Nobles County are as follows: 1890: 1,958, 1900: 14,932, 1910: 15,210, 1920: 17,917, 1930: 18,618.

⁸The Church of St. Kilian had been incorporated in 1896 and at that point became the owner of all unsold land in the original 40-acre parcel purchased by Rev. Knauf. Proceeds from the sale of village lots went to the church corporation and illustrates in part what was meant by obtaining land for church purposes. Knauf's purchase was a departure from the apparently standard procedure followed by the St. Paul Diocese in establishing new parishes in frontier areas, namely that prospective parishioners donate either land or money to enable the Diocese to purchase a 40-acre plot which would be both the location of church properties but also salable land in one form or another for the needs of the new parish.

⁹Chapman, Kloberdanz, Barry, Johnson and the several studies by Conzen.

¹⁰Barry, p. 81.

¹¹These biographies are published in Rose. One early settler in Wilmont Township, Fred Schmitz, specifically cited Catholic Colonization Bureau advertisements about the Adrian colony he saw in Germany as being the key factor in his decision to emigrate to Nobles County. Rose, p. 425.

¹²Vosburgh (1991) and Vosburgh (1997). James Loosbrock memoir.

¹³Kloberdanz, Rippley.

¹⁴Vosburgh (1991).

¹⁵ibid., which includes photos of these events. Diekmann memoir.

¹⁶Conzen (1985), p. 266. Conzen (1980), p. 11, Conzen (1990), pp. 4-5.

¹⁷Quote is from Rose, p. 269. See also Goff, p. 110, and Crippen (1982).

¹⁸Crippen (1990).

¹⁹Interview of Mrs. Hoffman by the author of this nomination on October 28, 1996.

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----- Correspondence to Julie Brake. January 28, 1997.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Church of St. Kilian occupies a parcel described as the northernmost 14.7 acres of the east ½ of the north-west ¼ of the northwest ¼ of Section 27, Wilmont Township (104 North, Range 42 West) of Nobles County, Minnesota.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The entire 40-acre parcel located in the northwest corner of Section 27 of Wilmont Township was purchased in 1885 by Reverend C. J. Knauf for church purposes. In 1891 he platted the west ½ into a townsite, and since then the east ½ has been the location of St. Kilian Church, other parish buildings, and a cemetery. 5.3 acres at the south end of the east ½ was sold to a neighboring landowner in 1916.

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The St. Kilian Cemetery is located south of the church and school. It measures approximately 500 x 500 feet and contains 364 graves. The earliest internments date to the early 1890s. The entrance to the cemetery is marked with a black, wrought iron entrance gate donated by Joe and Clara Brake in 1987. A wire fence which surrounded the cemetery was recently replaced with white plastic fencing. Plantings are limited to 6 Black Hills Spruce trees which were planted in the center of the cemetery in 1926. In 1960, sixty Colorado Blue Spruce trees were planted along three sides of the cemetery.

Church of St. Kilian - Nobles County, MN
Boundary Map - May, 1997
Church Boundaries Shown With Double Line
Scale: 1 " = 165'

