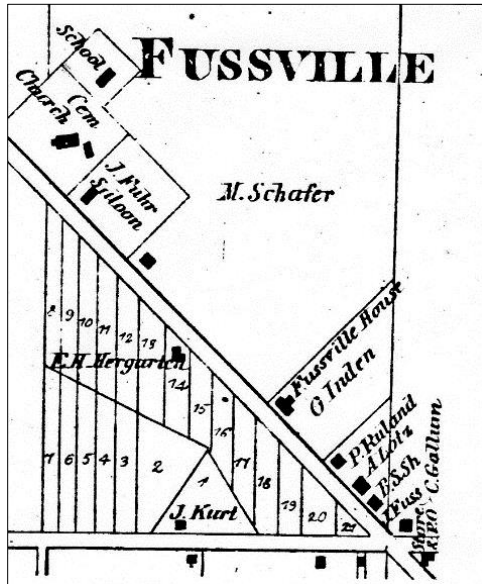


# FUSSVILLE, WISCONSIN

## With Memories from Past and Present

### St. Anthony the Hermit Parishioners



FUSSVILLE: *An unincorporated community in the east central portion of Menomonee Township (Town 8 North, Range 20 East) in Waukesha County, Wisconsin, centered around the Plat of Fussville which identifies property lines along the roadways now known as Appleton Avenue (State Trunk Hwy 175) and Good Hope Road (County Hwy W) from points just east of their intersection and, thence westerly and northwesterly to points east of Lilly Road.<sup>i</sup>*

These were the formal delineations of the town, yet, if you would have talked to farmers living outside of those markings back in the 1920s and 30s, men with last names like Claas, Gross, Brahm, Schmitz, Theine, Wick and others, they would have proudly said that they too were from Fussville.

#### The Beginning – Before 1837



Tamarack Swamp

If truth be told, it was not Johan Fuss or any other white man who was the first to gather, farm and live off this land – it was tribes of the Menomonee and Chippewa. Arrowheads and other artifacts found by modern day farmers were evidence that they lived here, in an area around the Tamarack Swamp (once called the Wild Marsh), among other places. Game was plentiful, the soil was rich and the woods were filled with wild berries and nuts. When the white settlers first arrived around 1837, the two cultures lived together amicably for a time. But as land became more

coveted by the U.S. Government, various treaties were signed in which the Menomonee and Chippewa surrendered their land. At one time, it was the plan to move them from the territory, transplanting them beyond the Mississippi into Missouri and Kansas. However, the plan never really took hold and many tribal people who were moved returned and were placed on reservations in Wisconsin.<sup>ii</sup>

## 1837-1900

“The village and vicinity of Fussville was settled [the end of] 1837, by Americans and Irish.”<sup>iii</sup> Less than ten years later, the farms were bought and the land sold to another group of immigrants – the Germans. These people were said to be “extremely” thrifty and owned some of the finest farms in this part of the county.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1844, John Castenholz, his wife, Mary Sybilla and one year old daughter, Clara, arrived along with three of Sybilla’s older brothers – J.W. Fuss, William Henry Fuss and Mathias Fuss. They bought parcels of land near Fond du Lac Road, allowing them easy access to travel and trade with Milwaukee to the south and Fond du Lac to the north. Legend says that it was on Christmas



Fussville Businessman, Joseph Fuss

Eve, midnight, with a cross nailed above the door, that the first Mass was said inside one of the Castenholz outbuildings, located on the northwest corner of what is now Lilly Road and Appleton Avenue<sup>v</sup>.

In 1845, the patriarch of the family, Johan Fuss along with his wife Clara and three daughters, Anna Maria, Theresia, and Catherine arrived. They had traveled on the ship, Harriet, and been accompanied by neighbors from their village of Niederdrees, Prussia – the Hilgers, Holzems, Mendens and Wilts. According to a letter that Johan wrote to his close counsel back home, Vicar Doman, the remaining four children, Joseph (photo), John Henry, William, and Frederick William, arrived safely as well and all settled along or near Fond du Lac Road.

As the families cleared the land, planted crops and put down roots, they created a community, joined together by common traditions and heritage. But something was missing. It troubled Johan that the Catholic Church in Milwaukee was three hours away, “*Hence it is impossible to attend church there every Sunday. In order to quiet our consciences, we pray God, with our families and neighbors, to bestow, according to His will, strength and aid to erect a church here. And this has come to pass through the industrious hands of our Catholic Congregation, so that the frame is erected and...will be completed this winter.*”<sup>vi</sup>

On January 17, 1846 the first St. Anthony the Hermit Church was dedicated on the feast day of its patron saint, offering spiritual guidance to a nucleus of about 30 families in the area that would become Fussville. Fr. Anton Maria Meyer was the first pastor, serving the parish from 1846-1847. From 1847-1850, Fr. Anthony Urbanek pastored the St. Anthony flock. In letters home, Fr. Urbanek related stories about the condition of those early, primitive churches:

“... small log churches about thirty feet in length, floorless and without plaster were built here and there and a great distance apart, which hardly gave protection from the wind and the rain and wherein any piece of cotton cloth or a few strips of wall paper were deemed magnificent decorations if put on the altar wall.

*Five and a half years ago when (I) arrived here and took charge of St. Anthony parish... often before Mass (I) was obliged to wipe off rain water from the altar which had copiously trickled through the logs during the night. Whatever your Lordship and Grace has ever read in missionary reports about the shabbiness of parishes in forests and of their log churches, found a full application in Wisconsin, then a territory and now a state, shortly vacated by the Menomonee Indians.*"<sup>vii</sup>

Father Urbanek, from Linz, Austria, undoubtedly found the simple churches much different from those back home. Although he sounded unhappy with their unsophistication, the feelings he had for his congregation of faith were another story. He later wrote,

*"What an encouraging sight it is to witness crowds of young and old on Sundays, coming from all sides out of the woods, as though they arose out of the ground, onto the main roads and often the side roads... A European can hardly form an idea of the interest and devotion of these people, closely packed into churches not large enough."*<sup>viii</sup>

In 1848, Benedikt and Margaretha Umhoefer and their three teenage sons came from Bavaria and bought a 40 acre parcel in the Town of Menomonee, north of Fussville and west of the Village of Menomonee Falls. Menomonee Falls was a thriving business center,<sup>ix</sup> with its lime kilns and mill and served the Umhoefers for commerce and trade. But it was predominately Protestant at the time, so, to nourish their souls and perhaps stave off their homesickness, they sought out the likeminded German Catholics at St. Anthony Church in Fussville for faith and community.<sup>x</sup>

### The Town



It is uncertain which came first, the church or the businesses, but it is with certainty that a business district of Fussville did grow and develop. There was William Zastrow, shoemaker; Anton Lotz, the blacksmith; the Fussville House, owned by innkeeper George Inden; and a variety of saloons throughout those early years owned by such men as J. Fuhr, H. Melder, A. Schneider, and S. Szatkowski. Joseph Fuss operated a brewery and the Fussville Post Office was officially opened on July 16, 1864 with Frederick Aude, the first postmaster.<sup>xi</sup>



Carl Hilger, born 1861, remembered his grandfather's story of the post office's dedication. Joseph Fuss provided "the necessary refreshment," Peter Schneider, an elderly immigrant delivered a humorous speech in German and then a Prussian army cannon was wheeled out "to do honor to the occasion." However, being old and overworked, the cannon misfired. Thankfully, there were no casualties.<sup>xii</sup>

### Population Growth

As the parish community of St. Anthony continued to grow with newly arriving immigrants, the walls of the first log church could no longer contain the worshippers. Under the pastorate of Fr. Martin Weiss (1854-1864), the second log church was built, constructed, it was said, to look similar to Johan Fuss's home church in Niederdrees. In 1855 the first combination parish school and convent was built and administered by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. And in less than ten years, the second St. Anthony Church was again overcrowded and so a third was constructed. Under the pastorate of Fr. Ludwig Mueller, this church, described at the time as "one of the most spectacular rural stone churches in southeastern Wisconsin,"<sup>xiii</sup> was dedicated in 1867. Built of dressed Lannon stone, it took three years to build at a cost of \$23,000.<sup>xiv</sup> The first school and convent burned to the ground in 1864 and it is believed that a new school/convent was also built around this same time with the Dominican Sisters of Racine next to educate the children of Fussville.



Second and Third Churches of St. Anthony the Hermit

And so life went at a pace. The men and women, predominately farmers, worked hard to provide for their families. A large family was a blessing and the children worked equally as hard, with chores that some today would consider adult's work.

### 1900s

As the turn of the century approached, life changed for the Town of Fussville. The Village of Menomonee Falls was incorporated in 1892. The Fussville Post Office closed in 1903<sup>xv</sup> with mail service now provided by "The Falls." With improved roads and transportation, travelers no

longer needed to stop in Fussville for rest and refreshment but found Menomonee Falls suited their needs. St. Mary Catholic Church was built in 1905 and enrollment at St. Anthony went from 250 families to less than 100.<sup>xvi</sup> Yet, Fussville was still a place of faith and community. Kermis, the town's celebration of St. Anthony Church's founding, was held every year, along with May Crownings and special blessings for spring planting and fall harvests. A close knit community, the intermarriage within the large families meant everyone knew and was related to most everyone else, in one way or another.



Intersection of Hwy 41 and Hwy W (Appleton and Good Hope Rd)

### 1930s and 1940s

As the population of the town changed, so did the make-up of the town's businesses. Hwy 41 was paved with asphalt around 1932.<sup>xvii</sup> What was Adolph Schneider's tavern and post office became Matt Schmitz tavern and dance hall. What was Anton Lotz blacksmith shop became Adam Guenther's blacksmith shop and filling station; and later, Marach and Schuster's Tavern and Garage. George Inden's hotel at some time in its past was lifted from the old site and moved to the northeast corner of Hwy 41 and Good Hope Road to become Vogl's Tap. Going north from Vogl's on Hwy 41 was "Grandpa"<sup>xviii</sup> Umhoefer's house and barber shop and next door, the White Chip Tavern. Farther down was the Wick Farm, owned by the Wick Family and operated by Leander and Gertrude (Schwister) Wick. Across Hwy 41 was St. Anthony cemetery, school and church followed by Freddie Wick's house and insurance company. In the late 1920s, the last remaining Fuss of Fussville, Charles Henry Fuss (grandson of Johan), sold his farm to Milwaukee businessmen who would transform the rolling hills and groves of trees into North Hills Country Club. Then came Torn's Grocery Store and Meat Market and back to Marach and Schuster's with residential homes mixed throughout. Father Ferdinand Falbisoner pastored St. Anthony from 1924 until his retirement in 1937. Next came Father Joseph Bollenbeck, from 1938-1949; beloved by his parish members, Father was described as a "village priest in a small and humble community."<sup>xix</sup>

## Wartime

World War II came to Fussville and their young men went off to fight. Those at home did what they could for the war effort. Many Milwaukee businesses changed over their production line to support the war effort. Fussville farmer, Leander Wick, took a second job, making bombs at A.O. Smith. John Gross did defense work at Badger Meter. There were also paper drives, rationing and Victory gardens. Lee Wick wrote, from the perspective of his father, Leander, the following regarding blackouts and the uncertainty of the time:

*“In 1942, we were fully engaged in periodic wartime ‘blackouts.’ There was great anxiety in our little community and throughout the country that in the middle of the night, a major bomb attack would take place. What the Japanese did to Pearl Harbor and what the Nazis were doing to England put all of us on edge. When a blackout was imminent, I had to get the chores done before it got dark or else darken the barn windows, so that light did not shine out. All the road lights were turned off and the neon signs for the four taverns were not lighted. The signal to begin a blackout came from three blasts from the Town’s siren. It was scary with no traffic on the road, houses darkened with window shades down and lights off. If a light was needed, it was recommended to put a short lighted candle in a galvanized pail, so the light would shine upward and not outward. We used [Ma’s] scrub pail, until two blasts sounded the end. The children were put to bed before the blackout ended. We just sat and waited until the signal. We listened to Gabriel Heater for news about the war almost every night at 8:00 PM.”<sup>xx</sup>*

## After the War

And then the war ended, and the Town of Fussville was energized. Not only were thanks given for the end of rationing and blackouts, but at last, young men of the community were returning home. They came home to Fussville, as did others, and married and settled down. It was the baby boom era and Fussville grew and prospered.



New St. Anthony Parish School, 1953

After Fr. Bollenbeck took seriously ill, Fr. Joseph P. Reichling came to St. Anthony in 1949. An army chaplain during the war, Fr. Reichling rolled up his sleeves and got busy. He made repairs

to the church and in 1956 made major renovations to its interior including plumbing. The old school's classrooms were overflowing with students. So in 1953, a new school was dedicated with five classrooms, a hall and indoor plumbing at a cost of \$130,000 – the School Sisters of St. Francis were the educators. Expected to last ten years, *“by 1957, the new school building was overcrowded; two classrooms were put in the hall. A classroom in the old school building was pressed into service during the next year. Between June and September of 1957, 100 new children registered for school. In 1958, nine more classrooms were added to the 1953 building at a cost of \$249,000.”*<sup>xxi</sup>

Starting in October of 1958, the Village of Menomonee Falls annexed Menomonee Township, including Fussville, Lannon Springs, and Marcy (a cross roads area around Lisbon Road and Marcy Road). Developers were buying up the local farms for prices too good for the farmers to pass up.<sup>xxii</sup> Yet, although no longer legally called Fussville, the buildings, church and community remained the same - it still *was* Fussville. By 1962, the parish had 897 families. Grade One was dropped from the school due to lack of space and the area thrived.

### Hwy 41/Hwy 175



Hwy 41/175 after Demolition (looking north)  
From the Photograph Library of Helen Vogl

In the mid 1950s, due to increasing traffic volumes, US Hwy 41 was relocated to a new corridor approximately one mile north of, and parallel to, the old right of way through Fussville. The old right of way was given a new designation - State Trunk Hwy 175.<sup>xxiii</sup>

In the late 1960s, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, in conjunction with local officials, undertook a study of potential improvements to Hwy 175.<sup>xxiv</sup>

After many months of deliberation

and public informational meetings, the final design for the highway improvements were made. Fussville property owners were told of plans to widen what was once Fond du Lac Road, then Highway 41 and today, Hwy 175 or Appleton Avenue and that most of the structures along it and a portion of Good Hope Road were to be demolished. Imagine, being told that your long time home or family business building was to be destroyed and you as the owner had really no say, no right to refuse. They would be paid of course...under Chapter 32.05 of Wisconsin State Statutes, the owner of any appropriated land is entitled to reasonable compensation, usually defined as fair market value – eminent domain.

It was remembered that in the spring of 1969, all the buildings needed to be cleared of personal belongings and abandoned. But the demolition was not scheduled to begin until that summer. For weeks the town of Fussville was like a ghost town.



And then the machinery came in. A student at St. Anthony Parish School remembered, “My classmates and I just thought it was cool watching from the windows of St. Anthony’s grade school while the earth movers made Appleton Avenue what it is today. We had no clue that they would wipe Fussville off the map.”

### Fussville Remains

Although the businesses and homes that may have defined the town are long gone, Fussville is still alive. Countless generations still recall the community where everyone was related to one another, however distant. A community of four taverns, not bars as we know them today, but gathering places where children were welcomed, card parties took place and Kermis, the church’s founding day, was celebrated.

Look at St. Anthony Parish membership and you will still find the names Brahm, Claas, Schmitz, and Wick, just like in those early years. And you will find fifth generations of Umhoefers, Grosses and Theines to name a few. Celebrations like May Crownings and traditions like monthly fish fries still bring the community together just like in the past.



Fussville will never die as long as families continue to tell the stories. St. Anthony Cemetery bears the names of brave and hardworking German pioneers among others, who dared to leave the familiar for dreams of something better. And St. Anthony the Hermit Church still stands on its hill, a remnant of the little town where faith in God was at its center and a testament to a community of believers that worshipped, and continue to worship here, today.

Carole McGibany  
St. Anthony the Hermit Volunteer Archivist  
May 2017

Do you have memories of Fussville? I would like to hear them. Email: [mcgibanyc@gmail.com](mailto:mcgibanyc@gmail.com)



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Description supplied by Jerry Brahm, St. Anthony Parishioner and retired Director of Engineering Services for the Village of Menomonee Falls.

<sup>ii</sup> "The Settling of Fussville," Menomonee Falls News, December 2, 1948.

<sup>iii</sup> History of Waukesha County, p. 755.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Appleton Avenue has been known by many names. It was Fond du Lac Road in the early days of Fussville. Then Hwy 41, Appleton Avenue and now, Hwy 175.

<sup>vi</sup> Translated letters were sent to J.H.A. Lacher, Vice President of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, December 12, 1932, from the Institute for Historical Research of the Rhinelands, University of Bonn. This is a treasured document and "sheds much light on the coming of the large German element in the early decades of the settlement." (Taken from introductory remarks from J.H.A. Lacher.)

<sup>vii</sup> THE WISCONSIN MAGAZINE OF HISTORY, September 1926, Volume X, Number 1, published quarterly by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, p. 84.

<sup>viii</sup> IBID.

<sup>ix</sup> History of Waukesha County, p. 754.

<sup>x</sup> From here on, referred to as St. Anthony.

<sup>xi</sup> "The Settling of Fussville," Menomonee Falls News, December 2, 1948.

<sup>xii</sup> "SILHOUETTES OF A PIONEER BOYHOOD, Son of a German Immigrant Family Recalls His Youth as a Member of the First Generation Born in Wisconsin," by Dr. Carl Hilger, date unknown.

<sup>xiii</sup> Menomonee Falls News, July 19, 1979.

<sup>xiv</sup> The Catholic Church in Wisconsin, Written and Compiled by Harry H. Heming, Catholic Historical Publishing Co., copyright 1896, page 418.

<sup>xv</sup> "The Settling of Fussville," Menomonee Falls News, December 2, 1948.

<sup>xvi</sup> "Sing Praise to the Lord! 1844-1977, St. Anthony Parish." Written as a school project by the faculty and students of St. Anthony Parish School under the direction of Sr. Margaret Mary Martin, SSSF Principal.

<sup>xvii</sup> "Remembering My Father, Leander J. Wick, 1912-1990." By Lee Wick. Lee wrote these memories of growing up on a small farm in Fussville from the perspective of his father, Leander J. Wick. Other records suggest that the road was widened earlier.

<sup>xviii</sup> John Umhoefer had the title of "Grandpa" Umhoefer in the community of Fussville as remembered by Lee Wick.

<sup>xix</sup> "Father Joseph Bollenbeck Lives Life of Village Priest and Devotes Even Spare Time to His Parishioners."

Newspaper article, newspaper and date of article unknown.

<sup>xx</sup> "Remembering My Father, Leander J. Wick, 1912-1990." By Lee Wick.

<sup>xxi</sup> Notecards prepared by Sr. Margaret Mary Martin, SSSF, Principal from 1974-1981.

<sup>xxii</sup> "Remembering My Father, Leander J. Wick, 1912-1990." By Lee Wick.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Description supplied by Jerry Brahm, St. Anthony Parishioner and retired Director of Engineering Services for the Village of Menomonee Falls

<sup>xxiv</sup> IBID.