

The Shrine Chapel of OUR LADY OF LORETTO



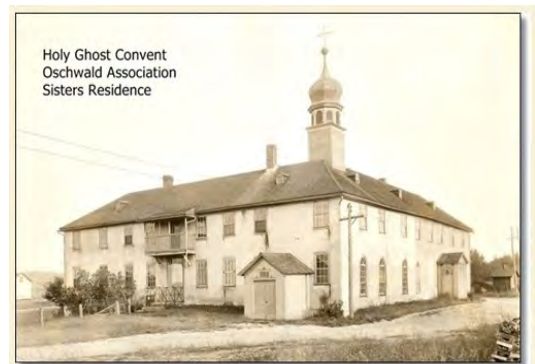
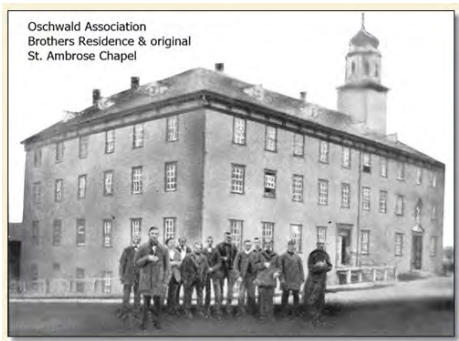
Our Lady of Loretto Chapel stands atop the highest hill on the south end of the village of St. Nazianz, Wisconsin. The story of the Chapel goes back to the original colonists of the village who came there in 1854 to escape from the restrictions and oppressions that were being leveled against the Catholic Church in Germany. The restrictions had begun during the German States Wars of 1848.

Father Ambrose Oswald was a priest of the Diocese of Freiburg in the District of Baden-Württemberg, in the southwest section of Germany which borders France and Switzerland. That area of Germany is the home of the famous “Black Forest.” In 1854, when Oswald was 53 years old, he and 113 members of his parish decided to leave Germany rather than stay and endure the restrictions against the Church. They were among the many Germans who chose to make a new home in the United States. Among the members of the group that came with Oswald were men and women who belonged to an Association of lay people which Oswald had founded. They chose to live simply and in common, and they made a private vow of celibacy. The men in the group were known as the Oswald Brothers. The women were known as the Oswald Sisters. The remaining people who traveled with Oswald from his parish were families – husbands, wives and their children – and some single men and women also. They all wanted to make a new start in the USA.



They made their way across the ocean and across the country to settle in Wisconsin, a state they knew many of their fellow-citizens had gone to as well. Much of the rich farmland in Manitowoc County was for sale. They purchased numerous plots of land and began building the village which they dedicated to St. Gregory Nazianzus, the patron saint of the parish they had left behind in Baden. The Oswald Brothers constructed a large monastery on the south end of the village, and a large convent

was built on the north end of the village for the Oswald Sisters. They also built a church to serve as their new “St. Gregory’s Parish” and it included a rectory for Fr. Oswald.



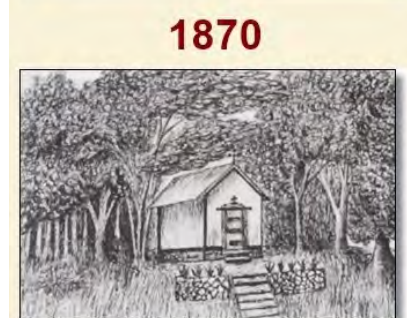


Among the things that the colonists brought with them on their voyage was a small statue (about 16 inches high) dedicated to Our Lady of Loretto. All throughout Europe, devotion to the Blessed Mother under this title was quite popular. The place believed to have been the childhood home of Mary in Nazareth, where she grew up with her parents – Joachim and Anna – and where the Annunciation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel was believed to have taken place, had been taken apart and brought to Europe. During the 14th century, the home was eventually taken to and reconstructed inside the cathedral in Loreto, Italy. (*The Italian spelling has only one “t” in it.*) Mary was thus honored as “Our Lady of Loretto.”

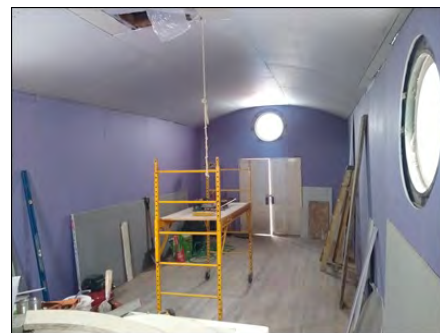
Many times during their transport, the colonists would gather onboard the ship to pray. Fr. Oswald would carefully unwrap the statue he kept in his baggage, and they would ask for Mary’s intercession to God for their health and safety in the long journey.

A year after they arrived and the village was already taking shape, Fr. Oswald decided to create a shrine for this beloved statue. At the top of the highest spot in St. Nazianz, a niche was carved in a large tree and the statue was placed inside the niche. They named the place “Loretto Hill.” In 1862, a storm knocked the tree over, but the statue was unharmed. Then they built a small enclosure to house the statue and placed it atop a wooden stand. Several years later, another storm smashed the small shrine to bits, but again the statue was unharmed. In 1870, they built a small chapel in which to display the statue. Soon it was apparent that this chapel was too small so it was made larger in 1873. This is the chapel we know today. The original statue was unfortunately stolen in 1987. An exact duplicate replaces it now.

Fr. Oswald died shortly after the chapel was finished in 1873. He was succeeded as pastor of St. Gregory’s and leader of the Oswald Association by Fr. Peter Mutz, another German immigrant. When Mutz was ready to retire in 1896, he got in touch with **Father Francis Jordan** - the founder of the Salvatorian community in Rome. Fr. Jordan had also been born in the Baden district of Germany and had much in common with the people of St. Nazianz. Fr. Jordan personally came to the USA with four other Salvatorians who would remain here – two brothers and two priests. The community agreed to pastor the parish and the Association, and in exchange they were given the property where the Oswald Brothers and Loretto Hill were. This transaction was completed on August 15, 1896, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary.



The Salvatorians still own and maintain the chapel and Loretto Hill. Our cemetery and Fr. Oswald’s crypt are behind the chapel. This shrine is recognized on both the State & National Registries of Historic Places. It has been remodeled a few times over the years. In late 2019, the floor of the chapel needed replacing and it was decided to do a complete remodeling once again.



Interior of the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto, St. Nazianz, Wis.



Chapel of Our Lady of Loretto, St. Nazianz, Wis.

