

A Look Back in Time

The Old St. Anthony's Church building located at 5100 22nd Avenue is a religious building used as a parsonage that sits in a residential neighborhood that is located on the near west side of Kenosha. The church sits on a large lot, along with the newer and larger St. Anthony's Church and other auxiliary buildings.

*Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site or structure must meet at least one of these standards. It was determined that **The Old St. Anthony's Church** is architecturally significant under Standards 1: "exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural... history." Old St. Anthony's Church is historically significant because it is associated with one of the ethnic groups that gave Kenosha distinctiveness in the early twentieth century, Czech or Slovak immigrants. Ethnic institutions are significant because they reflect the important ethnic heritage of the many immigrant groups that settled in the state during the nineteenth*



and early twentieth centuries and that gave Kenosha, in particular, its ethnic diversity. The Old St. Anthony's Church was originally designated a Kenosha Historic Site in 1989 and re-designated on July 15, 1996.

The Old St. Anthony's Church is a two-story brick building that has a Front Gable vernacular form with very simple architectural details. The building has a steeply-pitched gable roof with a narrow parapet on each gable end. A six-sided bell tower with a tent roof and louvered openings rises from the eastern end of the roof. It is topped with a simple cross. Under the roof eaves is a narrow band of brick corbeling that suggests a frieze. The corbeling is accented on the gable ends with rectangles that simulate brackets. The window openings are simple single-light double-hung sashes decorated with segmental brick arches. Shallow brick pilasters flank the windows on the north and south walls. A round-arched stone plaque in the gable peak of the east wall of the building identifies and dates the building. It is topped with a simple cross. The old church building is currently being used as a parsonage.

During the 1890s, the Czech and Slovak immigrants came to Kenosha. Many were Catholics and first attended the German Catholic Church, St. George's. In 1906 they formed the First Catholic Slovak Union. They also arranged for for a mass at St. George's in their own language every week, but eventually wanted their own church, In 1910, the formal parish of St. Anthony of Padua was formed and in 1913, the members completed this building as their first church. The church also provided a meeting place for ethnic organizations for men, women, and youth groups like the Sokol, an organization similar to the German Turnverein (Turners). The congregation used this church building until 1930, when a much larger St. Anthony's Church was erected next door.

The Old St. Anthony's Church is historically significant because it is associated with Czech and Slovak immigrants in Kenosha. Ethnic congregations of main-line denominations were frequently organized in communities with ethnic enclaves, like Kenosha or Milwaukee during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ethnic churches not only provided religion, but also social services to the people who were members. And, in some cases, the only historic resources associated with some ethnic groups are their churches. Many ethnic churches have retained their ethnic ties, although most have expanded memberships.