Drobne Echa, *continued from page 1*

to be annexed to the city, fear that they are imposing a further increase in taxes on them, like on wealthy persons, so that it would be easier to take their land. Saloons and stores are springing up here, like mushrooms after the rain, because more and more people are coming in.

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From the issue of March 22, 1900:

THE POLES IN NEW BRIGHTON, in the settlement closest to St. Paul, Minn., are sticking together effectively, as is proper for Poles to do. Through the township elections the following Poles have now been chosen: Messrs. Józef SKIBA and Jan SZUTA, as supervisors, Jan Wiktor SKIBA as justice of the peace, Tomasz FABIAŃSKI, Jan GRUDNIEWSKI and Józef OLSZEWSKI as commisioners of the roads. (*Road overseer*). – This is an example deserving of imitation by other settlements of Polish nationality.

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From the issue of May 10, 1900:

IN NEW BRIGHTON, Minn, Mr. Józef SKIBA has already given a second daughter in marriage this year–to Mr. Michał KUCZYŃSKI, also from New Brighton.

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From the issue of May 23, 1901:

IN NEW BRIGHTON, Minn., not far from St. Paul, 70 Polish families, among them being many well-to-do farmers, are proposing to detach from the Polish parish in St. Paul and to build their own church for themselves. However, Archbishop IRELAND does not want to give permission for the construction of this church, until the number of Polish families in New Brighton has increased to 100.

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From the issue of March 27, 1902:

From New Brighton
(MINN)

We need a Polish church here like we need our daily bread, and the Reverend Fr. Dominik MAJER from St. Paul is coming to our aid on this and Archbishop IRELAND wants to give us permission to build a church. Only with it is the dilemma, that there is no unity among us every single Pole wishes that the church would be erected in front of his house. This circumstance is standing in the way of the building of a Polish church for us here, and thus they still have an Irish Catholic church here.

These Poles, who would not want to give a thing for a Polish church, are sticking together with the Irish. Almost all the young people stand on the Polish side, and there are around 70 families of Poles here while there are only 8 of Irish.

On May 11 the township elections took place here and with the exception of the position of town clerk, which went to the Irishman Patrick FARREL, we elected only Poles.

As supervisors were elected: Józef LANGA, Antoni SKIBA and Jan GRUDZIESKI–as assessor Jan V. SKIBA–as constable Ignacy KUCZYŃSKI–as justice of the peace Jan V. SKIBA–and as treasurer Franciszek JANUSZEWSKI.

For the most part, it is Kaszubians who live here.

Józef SKIBA.

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From the issue of May 21, 1903:

Moundsview, Minn., May 15.

For almost a year already we have had our own parish and our own pastor here and yet he has read nothing in the newspapers about all this. There are only those gentlemen from St. Paul and Minneapolis who write unkind things about us, because we are not going to them as often. – At this time, in our parish we have the reverend Father SZCZUKOWSKI as pastor, and a chapel in Moundsview. We do not have either a rectory or a school, but they are slowly coming about. This year we are building a rectory, and we would have had one already but for the Most Reverend Archbishop from St. Paul not knowing which location would be the most suitable for a church property. Our chapel was built more than 18 years ago it is small and now is worn out and besides, it stands on small lots which would not be sufficient for a rectory, school, etc. And above all we would have to build a new church and, besides, this chapel was founded by an Irish priest, not the Poles, and we have a couple of Irishmen here who hold sway. Now

the Poles want to build their own church, and with the aim of attaining that Mr. J. SKIBA has offered five acres of his own fields, some that he would readily give entirely as a gift, or for a small recompense the lands would be abandoned, provided that the church was erected near the farms. At this time, though, the Archbishop has directed that the church be built in the neighboring village of New Brighton. Thus there the church will stand and there we will be building the rectory this year.

Last week we had penitential rites here. In assistance to our reverend pastor there came: the reverend Father D. MAJER and Father K. KOBYLIŃSKI from St. Paul, Father A. ZALEWSKI from Silver Lake and Father Fr. GAWŁOWICZ from Warsaw in North Dakota. Heartfelt thanks to all of our spiritual Fathers, who gave us such consolation whereas, more particular thanks to our pastor, Reverend Father SZCZUKOWSKI, for the arranging of the rites and for all of the endeavors and labors he has assumed for our new parish. With greetings for all readers of *Wiarus*.

Your subscriber.

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From the issue of July 9, 1903:

On the feast day of the patron saint of our parish, St. John the Baptist, we had penitential rites here again. Our beloved parish priest invited several priests, and because this was during the week, not on Sunday, the priests did come. There were the esteemed fathers from St. Paul, Fr. MAJER and Fr. KOBYLIŃSKI from Minneapolis, Fr. JAŻDŻEWSKI, and another one of the neighboring non-Polish priests. The Reverent Fr. KOBYLIŃSKI delivered a sermon in the English language, but he did this like a native Irishman. (We have a dozen or so Irish families here, now there's a people who smack with their mouths, as if for ice cream.) Perhaps our priests did that intentionally, or they were even playing a prank in language on the Irish but anyway, besides the English language the Irish do not have anything to their credit. I must also mention on this occasion, that the rectory in New Brighton is already being finished. This will be a splendid little building it is expected to cost more than four thousand, for which we can congratulate ourselves, because neither in St. Paul nor in Minneapolis, and perhaps nowhere in Minnesota, does a Polish priest have such a magnificent rectory, like ours will have. We are building it from wood and brick (*brick veneered*), from materials not very costly but good, and from hardwood for the interior. The fixtures in the house will be according to the newest styles. – Soon we will be quarreling among ourselves, as to where the church will be placed, whether in New Brighton or in Moundsview–certainly it will be in New Brighton, according to the will of the bishop– and then we will have a parish just like they do in a large city, God grant it, Amen!

A SUBSCRIBER TO WIARUS.

At right:

The original rectory at St. John the Baptist parish in New Brighton

The rectory was erected in 1903 before work was even started on the parish church.

Photo source:

St. John the Baptist parish archives
[all rights reserved by source]



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From the issue of February 8, 1906:

From NEW BRIGHTON, Minn.

Jan Skiba's secret development of the cultivation of the early potato "Ohio"

The new development of the improvement of the early potato "Ohio" has been revealed by Jan SKIBA (a farmer) from New Brighton, Minnesota, who has just now brought it to light. His discovery is being proven by his own very abundant harvest of potatoes. Thus he is announcing this to the general public, that he knows a way to improve potatoes, their qualities and fertility, how to prevent deterioration, diseases, rot, pests, and scab. Through his new development he has impressed many researchers and experts in the culture of potatoes, who have been involved for many years in the improvement of potatoes, and who have been trying to attain his goal through various means, that is through the aid of chemical elements, or then again in a natural way but in his first and second trials they did not gain much of an advantage. It was necessary to take it to the proper elements, which they could not achieve in any manner, and thus their results remained the same. Finally the Pole set to work, and this one, through persistence, patience and boldness, carried out the work that others had not been able to do.

Thus through labor and invention he is rightly able to boast, that it is through his work that the result has been attained. Being a farm proprietor himself, he studied thoroughly with interest the nature and cropping of the "Ohio" early potato. Everybody already knows that potatoes are not equal and that not all have good qualities. Some of them, if they are not completely mature, destroy themselves and spoil their natural properties and flavor, for whomever does not know how to treat these things and prevent that in advance. The knowledge and methods of the improvement of potatoes may easily be learned from Jan SKIBA he will explain everything to whomever goes to him for advice. This development not only interests the proprietors (the farmers) but also the experts and scholars who, hearing about this, themselves doubt how it would be possible for a simple farmer to have been able to discover something like this, which they themselves had not been able to achieve. Therefore the new discovery is a secret and is precious, and whoever obtains it will be lucky.

In the first place he made the discovery together with his own relatives, and later began to work himself with his own hands but in all that work he never ceased. In the beginning it seemed him to be an impossibility and a puzzle, but after further research everything came to a completed result.

Thus he himself discovered the method, how to propagate potatoes, how to improve them and how to prevent the deterioration, which he had experienced in his own potatoes. All of those who have purchased seed from him also confirm that the improved early potato "Ohio" acquired from him differs greatly from others, through it they are better and more tasty and that they do not have either diseases and scab, and at the same time they yield an abundant crop. Then he can show to everyone that from the ten thousand bushels that he took in last year, among them not a one had to be discarded as foul, that they are of white color, and cooked or mashed they do not blacken like others. He wishes to spread the discovery of his own method of the propagation and improvement of the early "Ohio" among farmers around the whole United States he contends that without exception they are able to bear abundantly in every state and that they will produce a rich crop, if the farmers are willing to keep his method accurately. He wishes all farmers in this country to listen to what is possible henceforth through these improved potatoes and his method, and to yield to them the blessings and abundance of harvest.

He has been engaged in the culture of potatoes a full 15 years and has never taken in less than 250 bushels per acre, and at the same time he has not been adding any more unusual cultivation. Besides the improvement of characteristics noted above, his new early "Ohio" potatoes have this trait, that they ripen comparably with green vines, that is to say, with their stalks. Because there are many potatoes of which the stalks shrivel before the potatoes mature and this once again is harmful to the potatoes, because they do not yet have the strength in order to be able to properly mature. But his potatoes mature one by two, and in that lies the secret.

In 1905 from his own field he took ten thousand bushels of the improved Ohio early potato, and he wants to spread it among proprietors for the performance of trials. Thus all can purchase seed for themselves from him without hesitation and do tests and by that they will receive the necessary instruction.

Whoever would not wish to profit from this, that the early and improved Ohio bring him an abundant yield? Hurry to inquire of this person, because the time of planting and tillage is coming.

Address: JOHN V. SKIBA
New Brighton, Minn.

From the issue of September 17, 1907:

FROM NEW BRIGHTON, Minn.

On August 18 at 4:00 in the afternoon the blessing of the cornerstone of the new Polish church of St. John the Baptist was celebrated. The very reverend prelate Father D. MAJER performed the blessing of the cornerstone. The reverend Father KOBYLYŃSKI delivered the sermon. The following priests took part in the consecration: Father H. JAŻDŻEWSKI, Father J. ZDECHLIK and the local pastor Father A. SZCZUKOWSKI. In his beautiful oration the preacher exhorted all of the parishioners to harmony and unity and to work together with their parish priest, because only in such a manner would they be able to attain the goal for which they were aiming. Indeed, this day has become a great remembrance for the parishioners, because they had been waiting for a long time for this thing that they had desired. To all the Reverend Fathers who deigned to take part in this day, we whole-heartedly send a thousand thanks Polish-style.

ONE OF THE PARISHIONERS.

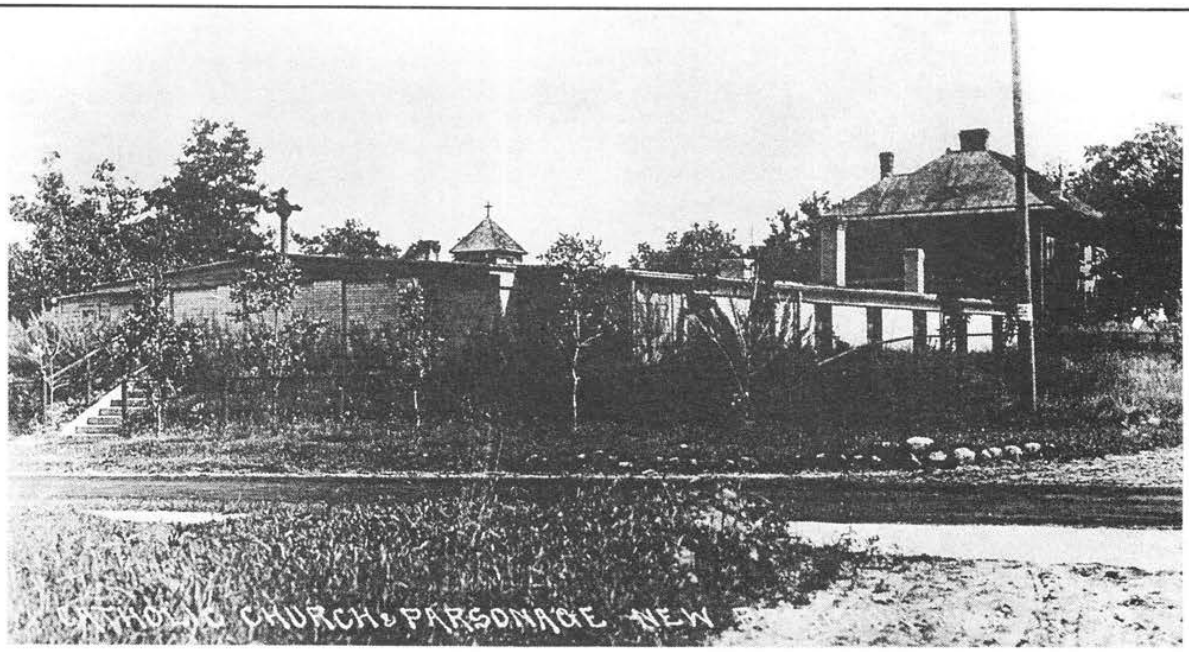
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From the issue of May 14, 1914:

NEW BRIGHTON, Minn.

Esteemed Madame Editor of *Wiarus*!

For their information, I hereby report to our brothers in other parishes, that in our Polish church under the patronage of St. John the Baptist, where the pastor is the Reverend Father F.J. MATZ, the exceptionally beautiful solemnity of a forty-hour devotion was celebrated, on the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd days of last month. The following Reverend Fathers (some of whom had already arrived the day before) came to the assistance of our priest, in order to hear confessions: Father D. RYSZKA from Winona, Father Józ. CIEMIŃSKI and Father S. ICIEK from Duluth, Father A. JAŻDŻEWSKI from Superior, Father W. S. MAJER from Minto, N. Dak., Father H. JAŻDŻEWSKI from St. Paul, Father W. JANY, Father RAKOWSKI and Father A. KRYJEWSKI from Minneapolis. The 40-hour devotions commenced on Tuesday morning and ended on Thursday evening with a procession and benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament.



Above: Original Basement Church, St. John the Baptist parish, New Brighton (1907)
Photo source: New Brighton Area Historical Society [all rights reserved by source].

Nearly all the parish went to Communion. Over all three days the faithful came together to the house of worship in order to pray and to hear the beautiful teachings delivered by our Polish Preachers who had come to us, some of them even coming from their distant parishes. They did not begrudge the time and the burdensome journey, for which we pay homage to them in the pages of *Wiarus* with our most wholehearted thanks and we will be praying for them, that the Lord deign to keep them in good health, so that for long years they may work for the general good and the salvation of souls.

Whereas in particular we thank our Reverend Pastors for presenting us such beautiful services we will strive to behave according to the teachings proclaimed during the penitential rites, which will long remain in our memory.

I must add, that the farmers are now employed in the fields, in tilling and sowing or in the preparation of vegetable gardens despite this, time was found for the beautiful decoration of the church for that splendid ceremony and everyone found enough time to hear the Word of God.

I have been somewhat late in writing, but a guy shakes everyday from the toil of his hands thus, please forgive me. I note, that we all read *Wiarus* with pleasure here, and I wish you still more subscribers in this area.

An old veteran.

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The New Brighton area was another one of the places in Minnesota where Polish immigrants settled earliest. Neighboring Mounds View Township was first opened to settlement shortly after the end of the Civil War, and the prolific Polish Kaszubian SKIBA family was among its pioneers when patriarch Joseph took land there in 1870.[4] The Irish-born FARRELL family, mentioned by name in one of our *Wiarus* reports, was another such, a bit further west in New Brighton proper.[5] But, it seems that Polish-born *rodacy*[6] of the SKIBAs came in such numbers and so quickly that the two townships' Roman Catholic community took on a predominantly Polish character. Thus it was that when the community outgrew the little mission chapel in Mounds View, the new St. John the Baptist parish was unequivocally recognized as one of Polish ethnicity.[7]

What I've presented here is all of the Mounds View- and New Brighton-datelined pieces in *Wiarus* that John Radziłowski or I have found so far. Unfortunately, there's nothing like the longer narratives of early history or closely-sequenced contemporaneous reports of pioneer days that I've found for some other Polish-American communities in Minnesota.[8] And my first reaction on finishing the rough stage of translation was that these scattered pieces, coming annually or less often during the formative years of St. John the Baptist Church, said far less than more about what really was going on.

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[4]Gene F. Skiba, *A Centennial History of New Brighton, Minnesota* (New Brighton, Minn.: New Brighton Area Historical Society, 1987), p. 55. This history indicates that Joseph SKIBA came to Minnesota after a sojourn in Ontario. This raises the possibility that he was a part of the chain migration from Kaszubia through the Renfrew/Wilno/Barry's Bay area of Ontario to the Kaszubian settlements in Minnesota. (Shirley Mask Connolly has published several articles about this phenomenon in our newsletter, starting with "Your Canadian Kashub Cousins and Their Trek from Wilno to Winona," *PGS-MN Newsletter,* v. 3, no. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 5-7.)

[5]Skiba, *Centennial History,* pp. 51-53.

[6]This is the word frequently seen in the original text of *Drobne Echa*'s subject matter, which I always translate as "countrymen."

[7]Almost all of the priests at St. John's, starting with the Father SZCZUKOWSKI mentioned herein, all the way through Father KOSCIELNAK in the mid-20th century, were Polish-born or Polish-descended. Rosina Schmalzbauer Boryczka and Janet Boryczka Johnson, *St. John the Baptist Catholic Church: A Pictorial History* (New Brighton, Minn.: publ. by the authors, 1983) ["*1983 St. John's History*"], pp. 2-3 *St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish: Building on a Century of Faith, 1902-2002* (New Brighton, Minn.: St. John the Baptist Parish, 2004) ["*2004 St. John's History*"], p. 1; 1949 *Questionnaire on Parish History* for Diocese of St. Paul (Father Max Matz, informant) [on microfilm M260, roll 13, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul]. Early on, we covered St. John the Baptist parish in this newsletter: Paul Theodore Kulas, "Polish Catholic Churches in Minnesota, Part I: Polish Catholic Churches in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis," *PGS-MN Newsletter,* v. 2, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 6-7.

[8]The installments of this series for Silver Lake (in our Winter, 2003-2004 issue), Virginia (Spring, 2004 issue) and Sturgeon Lake (Winter, 2005-2006 issue) are the best examples of this sort of material so far, the type that I most enjoy developing and presenting. Our next installment will feature the founding of St. Josephat's Polish National Catholic parish in Duluth, as illustrated in reports from several sources during the years surrounding that tumultuous event.

But one doesn't have to read too much between the lines to infer more about the flow of events and a little background research puts more of the story into perspective. It's fair to say that the New Brighton/ Moundsview Poles were afflicted to some degree with the "spirit of opposition and stubbornness, this original sin of American Poles,"[9] as was seen in so many other Polish-American communities; our correspondents admit as much a couple of times.[10] This seems to have delayed the making of firm plans for a church by some period of time. Too, there was the Bishop's not-unreasonable demand for a Catholic community large enough to financially support a resident priest. These are the apparent reasons why it took a half-decade to really get St. John's functioning.

Nonetheless, one wonders if the New Brighton Poles did not succeed in achieving their goal ahead of a more standard diocesan schedule, anyway. Going through these items, I was struck by the lack of something. In Polish-pioneer reportage I find one reference so often that it is almost a cliche: the mention of the early construction of a *piękny kościół*, a "beautiful church," which in its first incarnation was almost always *drewniany,* "made of wood," in isolated rural regions. Yet in the July 9, 1903 report here, we have a strong statement of pride in the locals' ability to build a very fine rectory for the long-awaited *stały proboszcz,* the permanent parish priest. And this house was erected in 1903, before work was even started on a church in New Brighton.[11]

The two published histories of St. John's parish contain a revelation that may explain the second point, and may do so for the first I surmised: the church structure that the parishioners of St. John's started with in 1907 was a basement church, i.e. the foundation was laid in and roofed over, with the enclosed space serving for sanctuary and all other parish functions. An above-ground church with steeple, of

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[9]The quotation is from Father Wacław Kruszka, the earliest historian of Polonia in the U.S. *A History of the Poles in America to 1908, Part IV*, p. 10.

[10]We have the locals' persisting disagreement as to where the church was to be built. And, our correspondent in the May 21, 1903 report refers to correspondents from Minneapolis and St. Paul who were critical of the New Brightonians' push for an independent parish, as well. I have not yet tried to find this material, hence its absence from this installment.

[11]*1983 St. John's History,* pp. 6-7.

At right:

First full structure,
St. John the Baptist Catholic Church
(erected 1922).

Photo source:

St. John the Baptist
parish archives

[all rights reserved by source]



the customary early-20th century Catholic church appearance, was not erected until 1922.[12]

One of course wonders about the "why" behind this. Whenever Polish immigrants settled in large enough concentrations, they almost always focused their collective resources on organizing their own parish and constructing a distinctive church building as early as they could. Given that, the institutional part of the New Brighton story makes all sense. But the architectural part leaves one wondering. It's a virtual certainty that these rural residents did not have huge financial means. The obvious inference is that they concluded that having a very modern, comfortable, and spacious rectory for residential and administrative purposes would better enable them to retain a priest for the duration, than would putting all of their limited fisc into a full brick church structure. Unfortunately, our *Wiarus* correspondents do not even acknowledge their community's variant strategy for their church, and the extant local histories do not shed any light on the thought-process behind it.[13]

Socioeconomically, the New Brighton area presents one of the more interesting places of Polish settlement in Minnesota. The platted area of New Brighton was established in 1887-1888 as a base for a railyard and associated stockyard and slaughterhouse/meatpacking operation two large packing houses were erected early.[14] The village of New Brighton was incorporated in 1891.[15] Other industries soon followed, including a large commercial icehouse that harvested off Long Lake and the iron works and steel rolling mill at nearby Irondale.[16]

The area's attractions for its first Polish settlers, though, lay in the outlying regions of the townships, where they could purchase land for farms.[17] Several of the early local Polish families came there with connections to the SKIBAs, or formed them there via marriage.[18] Patriarch Joseph's son John, the subject of our lengthy 1906 "infomercial" about his potato innovations, may have picked up his forward-looking approach to agriculture while employed as the caretaker at the William H. Eustis showhorse farm in Mounds View township.

Many of the early Polish settlers in this area took industrial jobs in town on a seasonal basis, working their own farms or those of family members in the warm months. Members of the second and later, American-born generations migrated into Northeast Minneapolis and as far as South St. Paul, to engage in the retail shop trade or to work in mills or factories there. But these people retained strong personal and family ties to New Brighton-Mounds View, returning there for big family events and to pitch in at harvest time.[19]

A century later, St. John the Baptist is a large and thriving suburban Catholic parish, now serving around 3,000 families and having recently expanded its physical facilities once again.[20] Still, however much things may look and feel on-site now in a new century, so different from whence the parish emerged, there is no doubt that this institution and its community owe much to the strong Catholic faith of its Polish founders. As sparse as they may seem at first reading, these *Wiarus* reports to speak to that, in the participants' own words–and thus they were worthy of dissemination to our readers.

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[12] *1983 St. John's History,* pp. 7-8 *2004 St. John's History,* pp. 10-11. Both parish histories have photos of this first structure, which the mother-and-daughter authors say was "not uncommon at the time." *1983 St. John's History,* p. 7 *2004 St. John's History,* p. 11. There's also a photo of the 1922-vintage building superstructure. That was demolished in 1959, after it was replaced by first a temporary "school-church," and later a larger structure that matched the mid-20th century official Roman Catholic architectural esthetic. *1983 St. John's History,* p. 24; *2004 St. John's History,* pp. 20-21.

[13] The authors of the central text of both histories of St. John's say that their founders' way of starting was "not uncommon at the time," *see* n. 12 *supra.* This statement was a surprise to me, as I'd not seen mention of a basement church for any of the several dozen Polish-American parishes that we in the PGS-MN have been researching for the last fifteen years. If anybody out there can speak to this interesting issue, or knows where else the practice was used, let us know!

[14] Skiba, *Centennial History,* pp. 16-19. The packing plants were closed after 1900, having been outcompeted by the huge stockyards in South St. Paul that had been founded at about the same time. *Id.*, pp. 72-74.

[15] Skiba, *Centennial History,* pp. 21-22.

[16] Skiba, *Centennial History,* pp. 25 and 27-28.

[17] Skiba, "Joseph Skiba's Big Family–on New Brighton's Doorstep," in *Centennial History,* at pp. 55 and 60. This chapter in the New Brighton centennial volume is a great little work of family history, with much detail about the SKIBAs' actual life experiences over three generations.

[18] Skiba, *Centennial History,* pp. 55-58.

[19] Skiba, *Centennial History,* pp. 57-58.

[20] The last third of the 2004 parish history proudly attests to this ongoing success