

## Steele County Historical Society

### Saco Church (St. Wenceslaus Mission in Moravia)



The St. Wenceslaus Mission in Moravia church was built in 1891 in the little community of Moravia, seven miles southwest of Owatonna. The community was named for the first settler Frank Moravia who settled in the locality in 1860. Vaclav Pavék donated the land on which the church stood, and the church was named to honor him for his zealous work in the community as well as for Vaclav (Wenceslaus), the duke of Bohemia from 923 to 929. The Duke had ended the attacks of the Germans upon Bohemia, stopped internal fighting to lead the region into safety and prosperity, and was especially noted for his devotion to the Church. In 929 the Duke was stabbed to death at the doors of a church.

The community of Moravia, known after the arrival of the railroad as Saco by local residents, also had a school and several residences nearby. The cemetery still remains across the road from where the church once stood. At various times Saco Church was served by pastors from Litomysl, eight miles away, and from Sacred Heart Parish, Owatonna. It closed in 1952, and in 1962, the Sacred Heart Parish donated it to the Steele County Historical Society as the first building to begin the Village of Yesteryear. It came complete with all its furnishings including the portrait of St. Wenceslaus, painted in 1875 by a Benedictine Brother of St. Procopius Monastery, Lisle, Illinois, and donated by Wencel Pavék in 1892. The other original artworks include the 14 Stations of the Cross. The altar dates from 1910, having been shipped by train to John F. Renchin, Pratt, Minnesota, from Joseph Svoboda, Kewaunee, Wisconsin, and hauled by wagon to the church. The church bell is 30 inches in diameter and is marked Henry Stuckstede, St. Louis, Missouri, 1899. The statues are of Mary, Joseph, St. Stephen and St. Agnes. Outside stand two crosses from the former St. Hyacinth's Polish Catholic Church, South 820 Elm Ave., the building now serving as Owatonna's Knights of Columbus Hall.

*The descriptions of the buildings comes from a book entitled "A Guide to The Village of Yesteryear" - written by Jerry Ganfield (available in the Gift Shop at the History Center)*