



# Building Community Keeping the Faith: German Catholic Vernacular Architecture in a Rural Minnesota Parish

*Fred W. Peterson*

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The German Catholic immigrants who founded St. John the Baptist parish on the central Minnesota prairie effected a remarkable transfer of tradition to their new environment. In this study, Fred W. Peterson documents, analyzes, and interprets the community these settlers built between 1858 and 1915. He reveals how their folk culture, aesthetic values, and religious beliefs were directly embodied in the houses, dairy farms, and churches they planned and constructed.

Peterson's main focus is on some 30 distinctive farmhouses built with locally produced brick in and around Meire Grove, the village at the center of the parish. Employing historical and contemporary photographs and his own precise architectural renderings, he shows how settlers modeled the layouts of their new homes after ones they had known in Germany-and adapted them to the demands of prairie life.

Equally important, Peterson explores how the secular and the sacred were intertwined in St. John the Baptist parish, how piety not only suffused parishioners' lives but also affected every aspect of their built environment.

Through its treatment of a single agricultural community, the book offers a perspective on similar ethnic enclaves in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest. Building Community, Keeping the Faith is vital reading for students of architecture, religion, immigration, and ethnicity-indeed for anyone interested in the complex influence European culture exerted on the development of America.



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