

Tuesday,
July 5, 1983

SOUTH LAKE

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S. Lake briefly

Places to go

● **GARY** — The Synergetic Fine Arts Center will hold a pre-school fine arts workshop from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Thursdays from July 7 through August 11 at the center, 631 W. Ridge Road.

Children between ages three and five will learn dance, music, tumbling and visual arts.

Cost of the workshop is \$60. The center can be contacted for more information.

● **ST. JOHN** — The Lake Central School Board will meet at 7 p.m. Thursday at the School Administration Center.

Included on the agenda are the Kolling renovation project, modification of building use policy and the state accreditation report.

● **MERRILLVILLE** — The Knights Inn of Merrillville has brought a bit of England to the Calumet Region.

A double decker bus will be at Knights Inn, 2-6 p.m., Tuesday to celebrate its open house. Free rides are offered, along with tours and refreshments.

● **MERRILLVILLE** — The Ross Township Parks System is offering season passes to Hidden Lake Park, 6301 Broadway, and the Ross Township Pool, 5311 Tyler Street, both in Merrillville.

The pool is can also be reserved for pool parties, 6-10 p.m. on weekdays: 7-10 p.m. on weekends. There is a fee. More information can be obtained from the Ross Township Trustee's Office, 24 West 73rd Avenue in Merrillville.

● **MERRILLVILLE** — A special evening of fun, fashion and entertainment will be presented from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Century Consumer Mall.

This fashion extravaganza is produced and directed by the Merrillville Hair Performers in celebration of their four-year anniversary and is free to the public.

Stories buried in old cemeteries

By MARILYN ZELLERS
Times Correspondent

ST. JOHN — Many secrets lie buried in the old St. John cemeteries.

The one-and-a-quarter-acre "pioneer" St. John the Evangelist parish cemetery, on U.S.-41 just south of the church was "plotted" with the graves facing north, instead of what many believe was the common practice of burying the dead to "face" the east.

John Hack, said to be the town's first settler, is buried about a half-mile away, in what some call the "original" cemetery, on Thielon St.

An entwinning story of the two cemeteries and four St. John Catholic churches began in 1837, when John Hack emerged from Germany with his large family and settled in an area called Western Prairie or Prairie West.

When a post office was established, the mostly German Catholic settlers, at a public meeting, named the town St. John.

John Hack's house was located near the site of what was to become the "first" cemetery.

According to a book published by Bishop Herman J. Alerding in 1967, until 1839 the Rev. Francis Fischer of Chicago visited St. John twice a month, celebrating Mass in John Hack's house. That year, an 18-by-24-foot log church was built on Hack's land.

But in 1842 there was a split within the group. According to church lore, "some members sided with John Hack, but the majority with the Rev. Anthony Carius, who then held services for the "loyal" parties in the John Thiel home."

In 1844 or 1845 a second church was built on the southeast corner of what is now U.S.-41 and 10th Street.

The third church, made of brick, was built in 1856 where the current church lies, and was used until about 1921 when it was razed.

The "Spanish Mission" type present church was dedicated in 1925.

According to the Rev. Joseph Till, pastor, not much is written in church records about the cemeteries.

According to a "compiled history" of St. John the Evangelist, published in 1974, the 1¼-acre cemetery was "blessed" in 1847.



St. John Evangelist Baptist Church Cemetery holds some keys to St. John's history.

Concerning the unusual layout of the cemetery, Dan Thiel, descendant of a pioneer family, said he heard the graves were placed facing north "so the deceased would face the church."

Thiel said there has been a story circulating for years that the cemetery was written about in "Ripley's Believe It or Not," but no one has a copy of the story.

David Drury, public relations director at Chapel Lawn Memorial Gardens, said some claim the practice of burying the dead facing the east is a Hebrew tradition — "to enter the gates of Heaven from the east." It's not practiced by newer cemeteries, he said.

A walk through the old cemetery today would reveal many of the sandstone grave markers lying flat on the ground, facing east. It appears many of the earliest graves were placed in the "traditional" east-west direction.

However, church records show that in 1872 and 1873, under the direction of Rev. T. McGinty, pastor, "leaning and broken" tombstones (which originally faced north), were taken down and layed across the graves.

Though the inscriptions on most of the oldest tombstones dating back to 1849 are illegible, many descendants of the original German pioneer settlers still reside in town. These grave markers read like a "who's who" of St. John families.

Some are: Thiel, Schiesser, Pfeifer, Gerlach, Ausigro, Lauerman, Bohling, Bucke, Magnot, Dewes, Keilman, Schmal, Scher (of Schererville), Wachter, Lauerman, Huppenthal, Klassen, Kammer.

Though space in the small parish cemetery is limited, Rev. Till said there are a few lots left. And if "someone comes in and shows proof they have a lot, we will honor it."

John Hack, his descendants, and a few "followers" lie at rest in a tiny cemetery on a hill overlooking farmland unchanged from when they were alive.

Away from what was to become a busy highway, in their little corner of the world, separated forever

DeMotte
to go after

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