

St. Mary of the Oaks Chapel

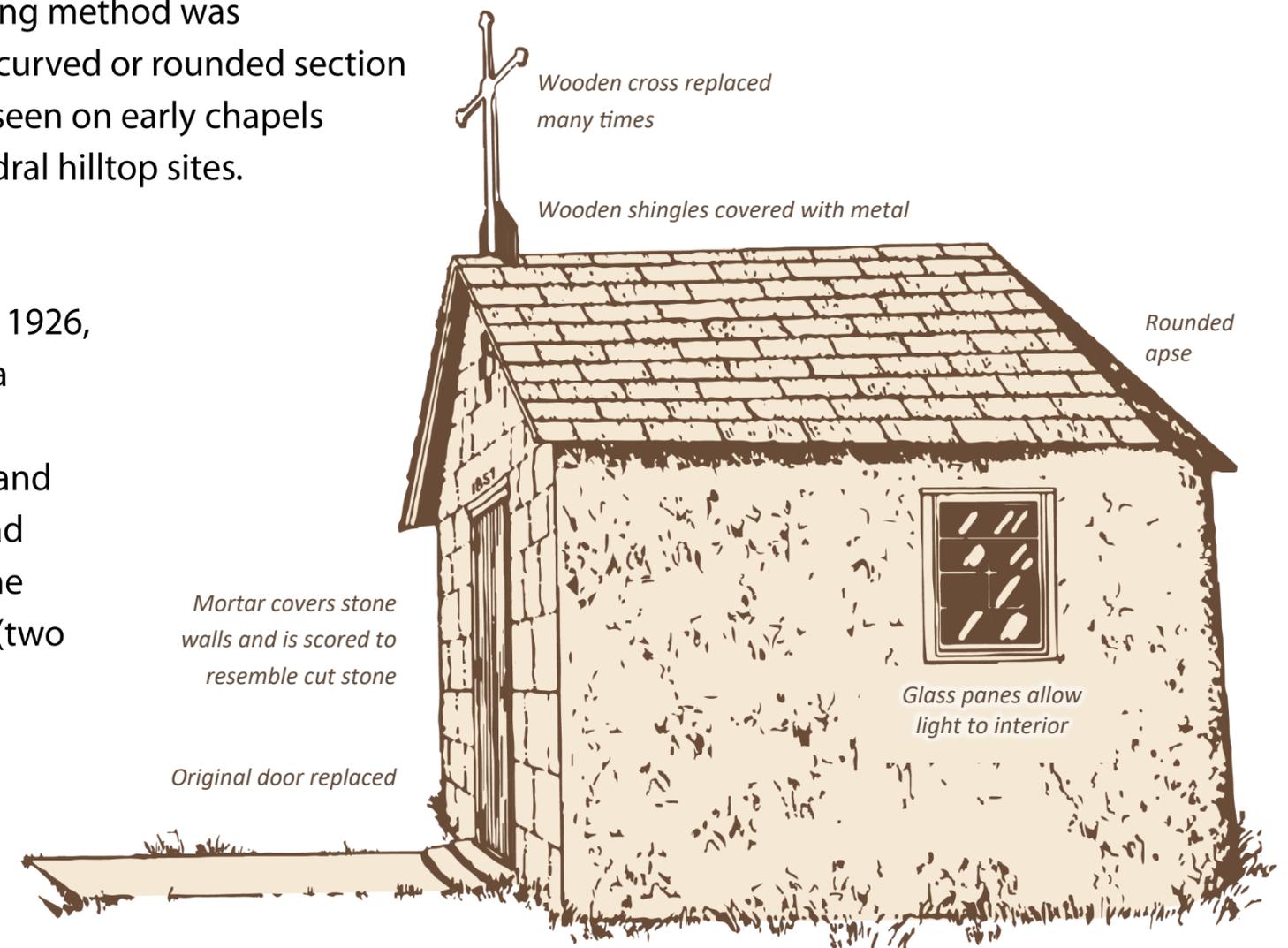
History

In 1852, four years after Wisconsin became a state, John and Anna Maria Endres and their family settled on an 80-acre farm that is now part of Indian Lake County Park. The Endres' built the chapel in 1857, some say in gratitude for their family surviving a diphtheria epidemic. It was constructed on the highest point on their land which overlooked their homestead and Indian Lake.

In this area, most immigrants came from Germany. This chapel reflects the German settlers' stone masonry building methods and the simple rural chapels of their homeland. The chapel was built of local stone, wood and mortar all hauled to the site with a cart pulled by oxen. To give the building a finished appearance, the mortar was scored on just the front of the building into a block pattern. This building method was common in Germany and became common wherever Germans settled. The apse (curved or rounded section at one end of a building) is a distinctly Germanic architectural feature that can be seen on early chapels in southeastern Wisconsin. The chapel's location is reminiscent of European cathedral hilltop sites.

Changes Over Time

The drawing depicts the chapel as it probably looked upon completion in 1857. In 1926, the Endres' descendants covered the original wooden roof with metal and added a fence and wooden alter. At the same time, the chapel was dedicated and formally named St. Mary of the Oaks. Dane County purchased the land and chapel in 1975 and agreed to maintain the chapel for historic value. By the 1980s, the wooden altar had been stolen and was replaced with a replica. In 2020, the Endres family replaced the aging fence and added a plaque to memorialize Larry Endres and Urban J. Endres (two of John and Anna Maria's great grandsons).



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