

East Koshkonong Lutheran Churches celebrate history



East Koshkonong Church to celebrate 125th Anniversary.
Photo submitted by Marilyn Gunderson

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As you travel around the area of southern Wisconsin, the Koshkonong Prairie in particular, you will see the spires of many very old Norwegian Lutheran Churches. Most were built in the late 1800's and early 1900's. It is hard to imagine the vision held by those who designed, and built by people who had the desire to create a place of worship that was beautiful to the eye and respectful of its purpose.

The East Koshkonong churches are among those that represent the vision of those early settlers to the Cambridge area. History runs very deep at East Koshkonong, with the very first Norwegian Lutheran Church established in 1844 on a nearby farm. The congregation had built another small log cabin in 1845 and a stone church in 1858, but it was in 1892 that the First East Koshkonong Church was built.

During the period of the late 1800's a dispute caused the congregation to split (as had been the case in other churches from time to time). As a result, a second church was built just a short distance down the road. Over time, the congregations were able to resolve their differences and is still used for summer worship and special occasions and the lower level is used by the women of the church as their quilting center. The Lower Church is the primary location for services today.

A committee made up of con-

gregation members oversees the maintenance of the Upper Church and arranges for maintenance and repairs to be made as needed. In 2016, the committee saw the need for some rather substantial repairs in addition to regular maintenance. It was then that they arranged for a major tuck pointing project and repairs to the steeple louvers which had broken down over time. This year, the actual steeple work is being done. It is amazing to see the 60 foot and 120 foot lifts being brought in and watching the work being done. And quite a contrast to the way it was done when the church was first built.

For those who enjoy seeing the beauty of these old churches, it is important to maintain them and make sure that they are not only a tribute to the past, but that they will continue to hold a place in the future. The congregation at East Koshkonong will be having a celebration of the 125th anniversary of the building of the First East ("Upper") church this summer.

On Aug. 20, they will be holding a special service at 9 a.m. to commemorate this event. There will be special music, history and an outside reception using the theme of an "ice cream social". There will be access through the rear entrance for those who choose not to use the front steps. They will also offer outdoor seating and handicapped parking will be available. The surrounding communities are welcomed to help celebrate this event.