

1859 -- 1889 Era

**FT. JOHN BERNARD WEICAMP**



JOHN BERNARD Weikamp as a young man and in the robes of the church. --Photos by permission of the owner, Mary Belle Shurtleff.

## 1858-1889 Fr. Weikamp Era Topic for Historical Meet

Mary Belle Shurtleff, teacher, historian and author, who was born and raised in Cross Village, fascinated a large audience at Wednesday night's meeting of The Little Traverse Regional Historical Society with her report on the Life and Works of John Bernard Weikamp, a Franciscan priest who dominated the life of this ancient Indian village for more than 30 years before the turn of the century.

Speaking before the Society in the Library of Petoskey Junior High School, Miss Shurtleff related that Fr. Weikamp was born in Prussia in 1818 and, when 28 years of age, made an extended tour of the Near East. He returned to Rome where he was ordained as a priest on June 2, 1849.

Her research showed that Weikamp was sent to Chicago, Ill. in 1850 as pastor of St. Peter's

Church. Under circumstances not known, he left this church and established The Third Order of St. Francis where he conducted services for only two years, before padlocking the edifice and moved northward to New Arbre Croche, now known as Harbor Springs.

### BOUGHT HARBOR POINT

Her story told how Fr. Weikamp purchased what is now Harbor Point for \$100 in October 1855, and then sold it a month later, because it was too small for his purposes.

He took his followers with him by a flotilla of small boats and went up the shore to Arbre Croche (Cross Village). There he established his own institution which was known as "The Benevolent, Charitable, and Religious Society of St. Francis."

Miss Shurtleff reminded her listeners that this was done 10 years before there were any white people, or stores at Cross Village and 14 years before the post office was established there.

### CAUSED CONCERN

"His appearance in Cross Village caused some concern in the Church for Bishop O'Regan of Chicago wrote Bishop Baraganot to accept Fr. Weikamp in his diocese because of the circumstances of his departure from his jurisdiction. Weikamp convinced Baraganot of the justice of his case and the Bishop accepted Weikamp because he thought he might be of service among the Indians, so the church and cemetery at Cross Village were blessed in June, 1858", Miss Shurtleff said.

She told how Fr. Weikamp proceeded to build a large, self-sustained agricultural convent on 2,000 acres of land near the village with its own grist mill, blacksmith shop, dairy barns, smokehouse, carpenter shop, and winery. Large quarters for the nuns and a church for worship were also built on the grounds. "Everything they needed they built themselves when possible . . . the nuns worked in the fields with wooden shoes made in the carpenter shop."

The convent had about 30 to 40 inmates, some that came with him from Chicago and some Indians, but they lived apart from Cross Village behind a high cedar post fence with heavy gates.

The church was the center of the complex of buildings and here the Indians of the area worshipped.

Miss Shurtleff told how Fr. Weikamp ruled his domain with an iron hand and how stories of his eccentricities have almost become legend.

### COFFIN IN BEDROOM

He built his own tomb years before he died which contained a crypt where he would meditate daily and he kept his coffin in his bedroom.

Fr. Weikamp was killed in an accident in 1889 when his pony cart ran wild and he was buried in his prepared tomb.

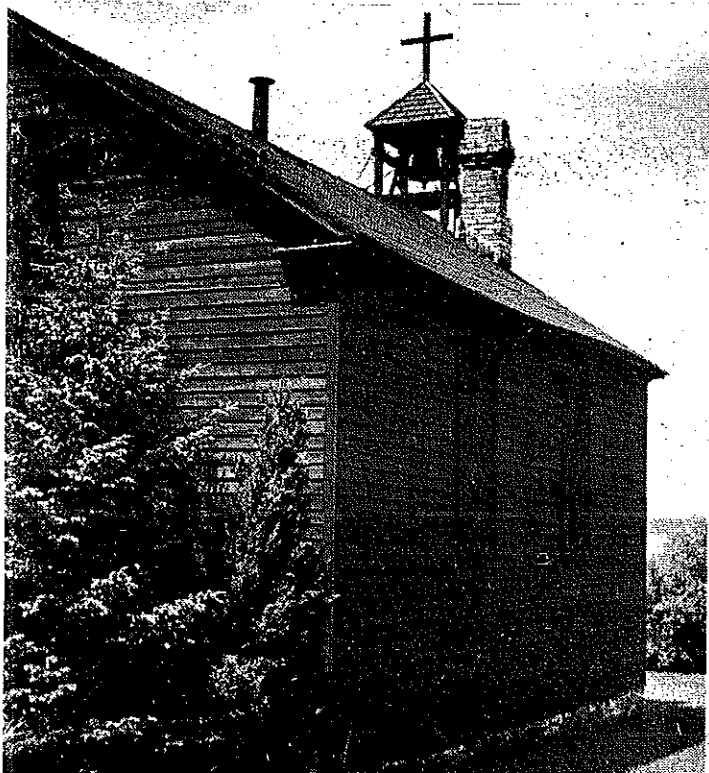
Two Brothers of the Order he had trained tried to continue the experiment but were not successful so all contents of the buildings were sold five years later in 1894 at a large auction sale.

After that, most of the buildings fell into disrepair, or were destroyed by fire.

Miss Shurtleff said in conclusion, "It has always been a regret to me that I didn't know Fr. Weikamp personally. I have always admired a man who followed the philosophy of Hew the line, as you see the line--and let the chips fall where they may' . . . without regard for public opinion. Fr. Weikamp was that kind of a man."

In 1963 Miss Shurtleff published "Old Arbre Croche", a history of Cross Village.

President John Wooden announced that the next meeting of the Little Traverse Regional Historical Society would be held on April 10 when Kenneth Teyson of Mackinaw City, a member of the State Historical Commission, and Don Garber of Petoskey will tell about the old lumbering operations at Cecil Bay.



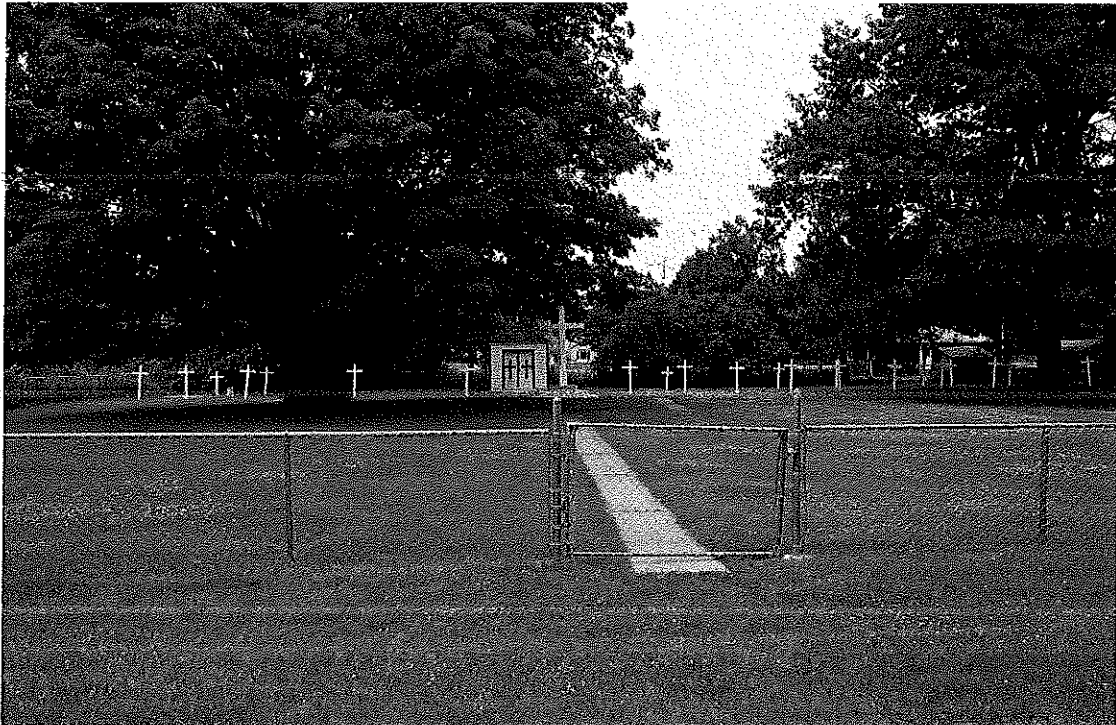
## FR. JOHN BERNARD WEICAMP

**The Emmet County Democrat**  
**Friday, January 21, 1876**

In conversation with Father Weikamp of the Catholic convent at Cross Village, he tells us that the coldest weather he has an account of, was last winter one morning, when the thermometer indicated twenty two degrees below zero. He has kept a record at that point for twenty years. He also, in speaking of his farm, said that the average crop for the past fifteen years was, spring wheat, 38 bushels per acre; winter wheat, 35 bushels; oats, 40 bushels; what country or farmer can give as good showing as this, if there are any let us hear from them.

**FR. JOHN BERNARD WEIKAMP**  
*April 5, 1818 -- March 18, 1889*

*Fr. John Bernard Weikamp was born in Prussia/Germany in 1818.  
He is listed in 1860 census in Township of Lacroix {Cross Village, Emmet County, Michigan  
{Extracted Find-A-Grave Records}*



*Fr. Weikamp Cemetery  
Wadsworth Road  
Cross Village, Emmet County, Michigan*