How Rockne Got Its Name

Rockne was known by several names prior to the official naming of Rockne.

Walnut Creek

1870

The community became known as **Walnut Creek** for the nearby creek that the first church had been named after, being located one mile north of present-day Rockne.

Lehmanville

1900

The Lehman Post Office was in operation between the years 1900–1904 at which time the community became known as **Lehmanville**

Ascension of Christ Catholic Church at Walnut Creek built 1876

Hilbigville

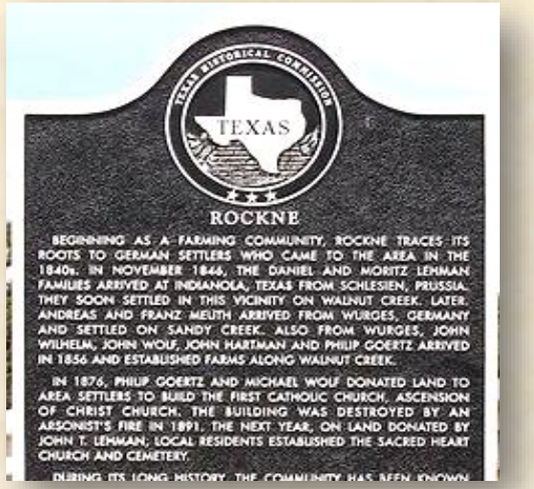
1922

Will Hilbig opened a general store and the community became known as **Hilbigville.**

Rockne

1931

Rockne was named by the students at Sacred Heart school after the famous football coach, Knute Rockne, at Notre Dame University during the 1920's, was killed in a plane crash in 1931.

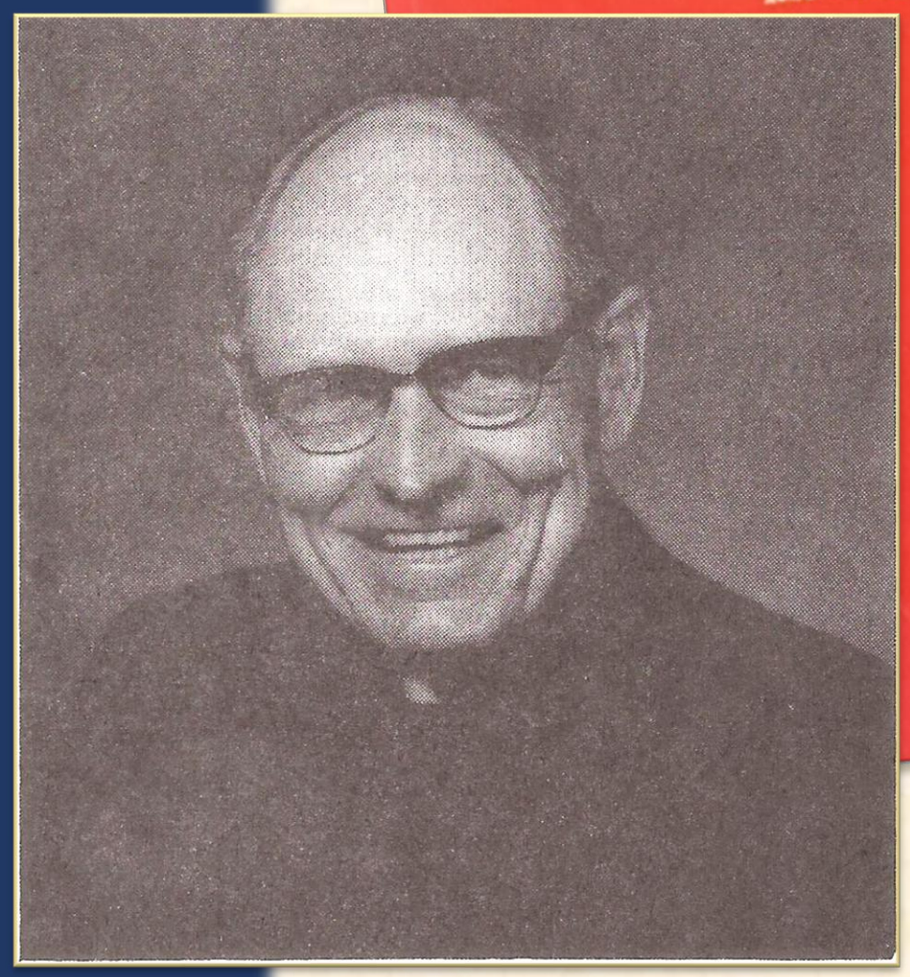


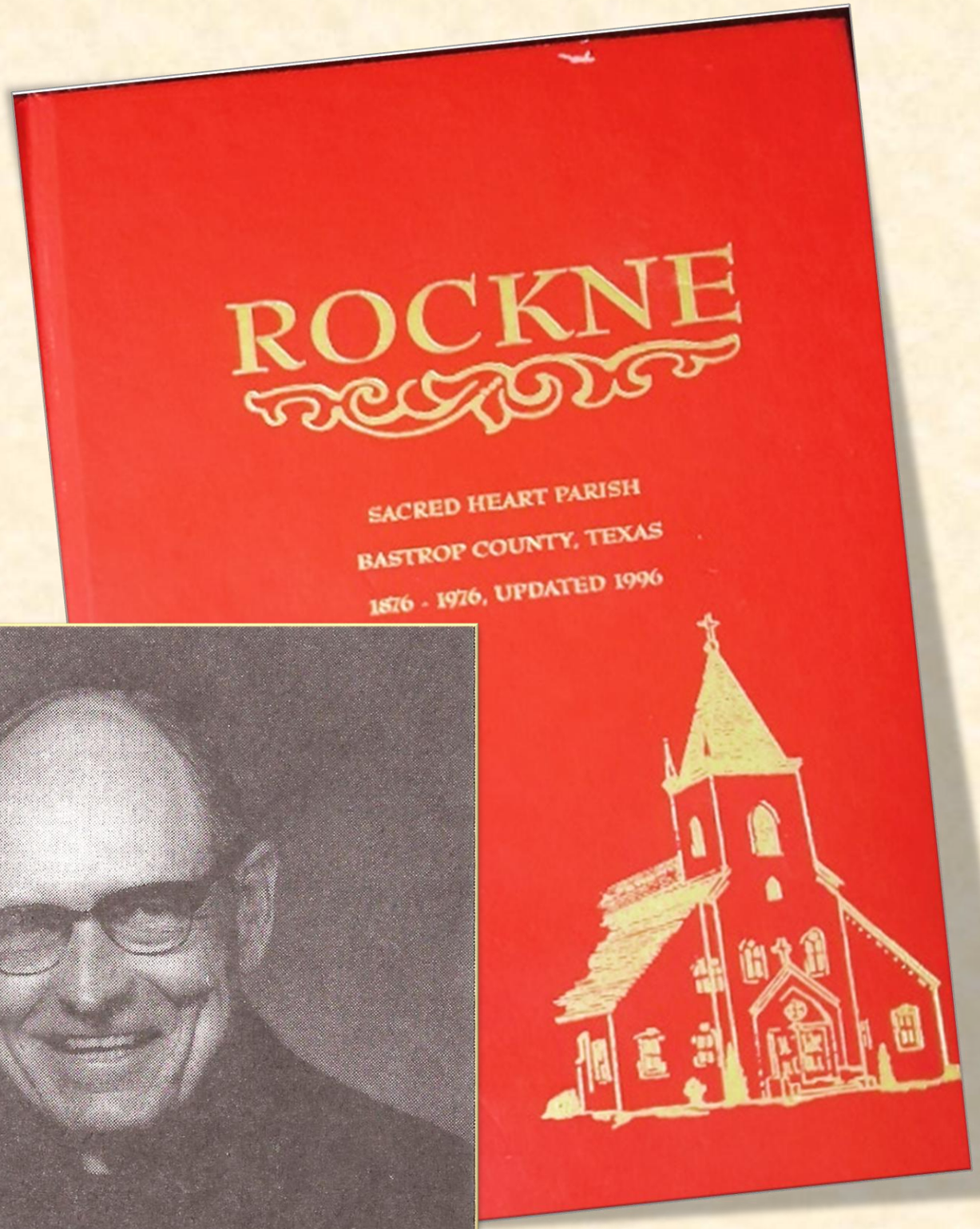
Rev. Mgsr.
Alois J. Goertz

(03/07/1924 – 01/20/2019)

A Native of Rockne
and Author of the book
"Rockne:
Sacred Heart Parish
Bastrop County, Texas
1876-1976"

& Second Edition Update
1996





ROCKNE

Route One
Rockne, Texas 78602

Timeline of *Rockne* ...the Place

- 1856: Rockne begins as a farming community, established by German Catholic settler Philip Goertz.
- 1876: The first church, Ascension of Christ, is built on land donated by Goertz and Michael Wolf. It is destroyed by arson in January 1901; Rev. Anthony Kullman was the pastor.
- 1892: The second church, Sacred Heart of Jesus, is built on land donated by the John T. Lehman family, with Rev. Joseph Mack as pastor.
- March 25, 1940: The current church is dedicated, with Rev. A. A. Leopold serving as pastor.
- 1900: St. Elizabeth's School was founded by Rev. Francis Neisens and later renamed Sacred Heart. It was staffed by Divine Providence Sisters until 1926, then by the Benedictines until 1961.
- 1931-32: Children of the school vote to rename the community Rockne; Rev. Francis Strobel is the pastor.
- December 10, 1950: A new school building is dedicated, constructed using barracks from Camp Swift, with Rev. Claude Faust as pastor.
- 1976: The church is remodeled for its centennial.
- 1977: The school building is remodeled, with Rev. Leonard Leddy as pastor.
- 1986: A new rectory is built, with Rev. Clyde Holtman as pastor.1976: The history of Rockne, written by Rev. Alois J. Goertz, is published and recognized in Texas Historical records.

Post Office for a Day

March 4, 1988

The U.S. Postal Service honored Knute Rockne on his 100TH birthday by issuing a commemorative stamp and Rockne opened a post office for a day.

Rockne to have one-day post office

The national spotlight will shine on Rockne for a day, Friday, March 4, when it becomes an official U.S. Post Office where a Knute Rockne stamp will be sold and postmarked.

Rockne is the legendary Notre Dame football coach. This year is the centennial of his birth.

Rockne was killed in an airplane crash in Kansas in March 1931.

Shortly after his death a group of grade school children at Sacred Heart School voted to change the name of the community from Hilbigville to Rockne in his honor.

"Rockne, Texas is the only town anywhere named for Knute Rockne," according to Minnie Bartsch of the Rockne History Club.

On March 4 the U.S. Postal Service is to issue a Knute Rockne commemorative 22 cent stamp in the Sports Series. For one day only, between 9 a.m. and noon, the department will open a post office where stamps, envelopes with a Rockne logo and a letter size brochure talking about the town and the coach will be sold. The envelopes are being printed by G & C Printing of Rockne.

Cancellation of the stamp will be done with a special Rockne hand stamp.

The Rockne History Club and the Notre Dame Committee of Austin have worked together and received approval for a Texas Historical Marker mentioning the coach and the name change.

Location of the one-day post office will probably be at the Sacred Heart School, according to the history committee.

"A man like Rockne did more spiritual good than a thousand professional evangelists. His career was a sermon in

The commemorative brochures and envelopes will be available at stores in Rockne and through members of the history committee and will be available in plenty of time for you to address for mailing," the committee said.

"You will be wanting a lot of these envelopes to mail to relatives and friends outside of Rockne and to keep as souvenirs of this historical occasion," the committee said.

"Please let the committee members listed below know how many you would like so that enough will be on hand. Minnie Bartsch at 321-2008 after 6 p.m. or Barbara Goertz during the day at 321-6859. Please do this as soon as possible," the committee said.

10,000 Stamps Sold at *Rockne*

Rockne folks had a stamping good time at the Post Office Thursday celebrating the farming community's history and the Notre Dame University football coach whose memory the town's name preserves.

Rockne, nestled at the intersection of FM 20 and 535 south of Bastrop, doesn't really have a post office but Bastrop Postmaster Ronnie White set up a postal substation in the Sacred Heart Catholic Church parish schoolhouse March 10 as the U.S. Postal Service released a commemorative stamp honoring Knute Rockne.

About 10,000 stamps bearing the coach's likeness were sold in Rockne that day, said Minnie Bartsch who helped sell 5,000 special commemorative envelopes

In 1931 students at the parish school voted to name the community after the popular Notre Dame coach.

Stamp collectors from across the nation as well as Rockne residents, former residents and well-wishers sought the red, white and blue commemorative envelopes which also carried the Rockne stamp and a specially designed cancellation showing it was the first day of issue. The cancellation design stressed the community's German ancestry dating to 1856 and its agricultural heritage.

Mrs. Bartsch said the community is the only Rockne in the U.S.

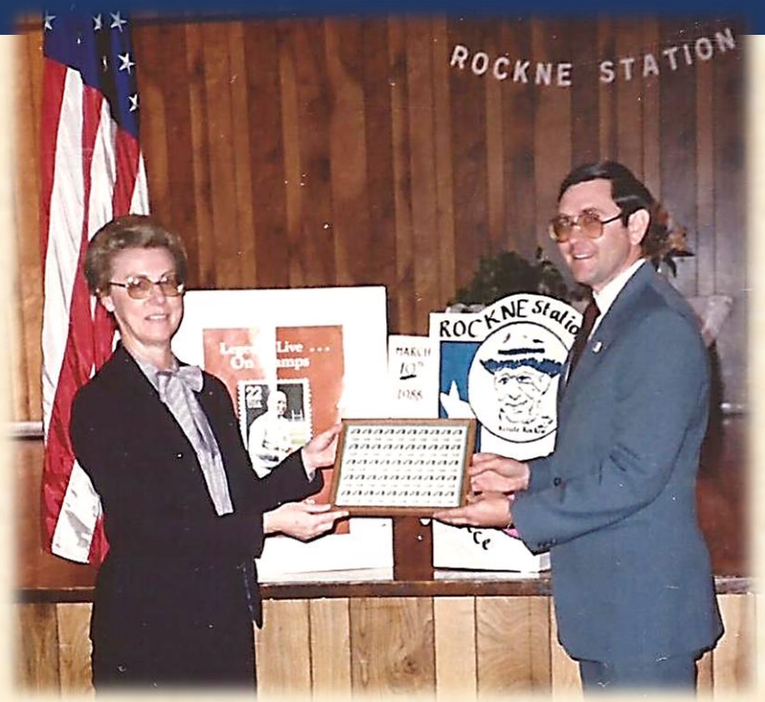
President Reagan visited Notre Dame in South Bend, IN Thursday to take part in ceremonies marking release of the commemorative stamp, probably the last to be sold for 22 cents.

First class postal rates are expected to jump to 25 cents this year.

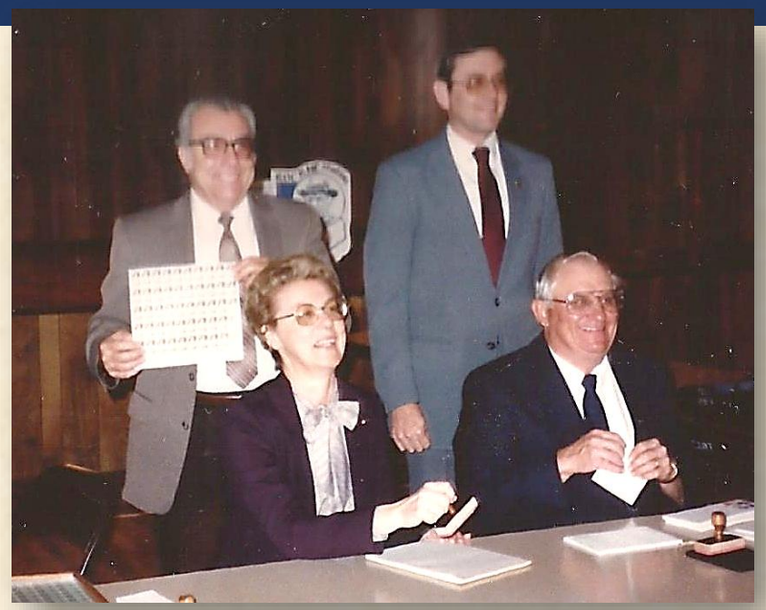
"Sales of the commemorative envelopes will help to pay for a museum to preserve more of Rockne's history", said Mrs. Bartsch.

U.S. Postal Service Employee ***Daniel Lehman*** *of Rockne sold about 10,000 commemorative Knute Rockne postage stamps Thursday when the Bastrop Post Office set up a Rockne substation to celebrate the stamp's official first day of issue.*

Rockne Stamps Itself Into History



Ronald White presents sheet of Rockne stamps for community of Rockne to Minnie Bartsch.



Daniel Lehman, Ronnie White, Minnie Bartsch, Fred Fiebrich, Jr.

Rockne Station - March 10, 1988

Paula Hendrix, Marian Nelson and Minnie Bartsch selling envelopes and sticking on stamps

Daniel Lehman and Ronnie White

Getting those stamps cancelled with special Rockne stamp

at the Rockne Station

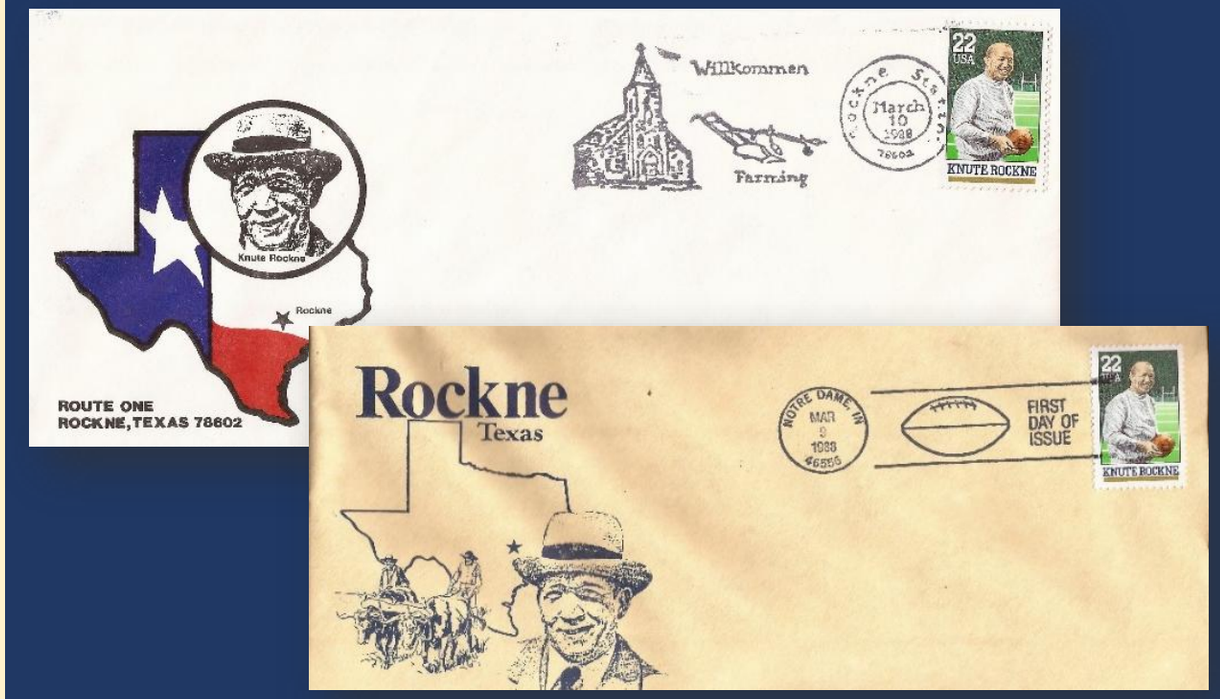
Rockne ...the **Man**

- Born **Knute Kenneth Rockne** in Voss, Norway on March 4, 1888.
- Came to United States in 1893
- He entered the **University of Notre Dame** at age 22 where he excelled at chemistry and football.
- After graduation, he stayed with the University as a chemistry instructor and assistant football coach
- He was head coach from 1918 until his death in a plane crash in Kansas in 1931.

Rockne ...the **Facts**

- Rockne, Texas is the only town anywhere named for Knute Kenneth Rockne.
- The postage stamp commemorates Knute Rockne's football success.
- The cancellation stamp commemorates Rockne as a German Catholic farming community.

- Knute Rockne's "**Fighting Irish**" won 105 games, tied 5 and lost 12. He was a family man and treated his football players as family and friends. He was famous for his insistence on good sportsmanship and for his clever football strategy. His football teams at Notre Dame were among the best in the country. Rockne perfected the "**Notre Dame system**" of offensive football and helped make the **forward pass** a popular play.
- He was considered the greatest of all American football coaches.



Historical Marker Dedication

May 29, 1988...A Heritage Remembered

The Children Choose "*Rockne*"

Sacred Heart School
Class of 1932

Top Row:
Annie Louise Frerich & Dora Waneck

Second Row:
Berta Hoffman Smith, Freda Beck, Elizabeth Bartsch, Alma Bartsch Probst, Lucy Barton Meuth, Christina Seidel Fey, Emma Wolf Bartsch, Josephine Lehman Staudt.

Third Row:
Hilda Bartsch Wolf, Lillian Hoffman Grohman, Katie Seidel Waneck, Dora Bartsch Goertz, Ada Lehman, Josephine Beck Frerich, Edith Goertz Ayers, Irene Goertz, Edward Bartsch, Anton Goertz, Michael Bartsch, Gerard Bartsch, Walter Goertz, Anton Boer, Herman Wilhelm, Robert Klaus, Max Barton.

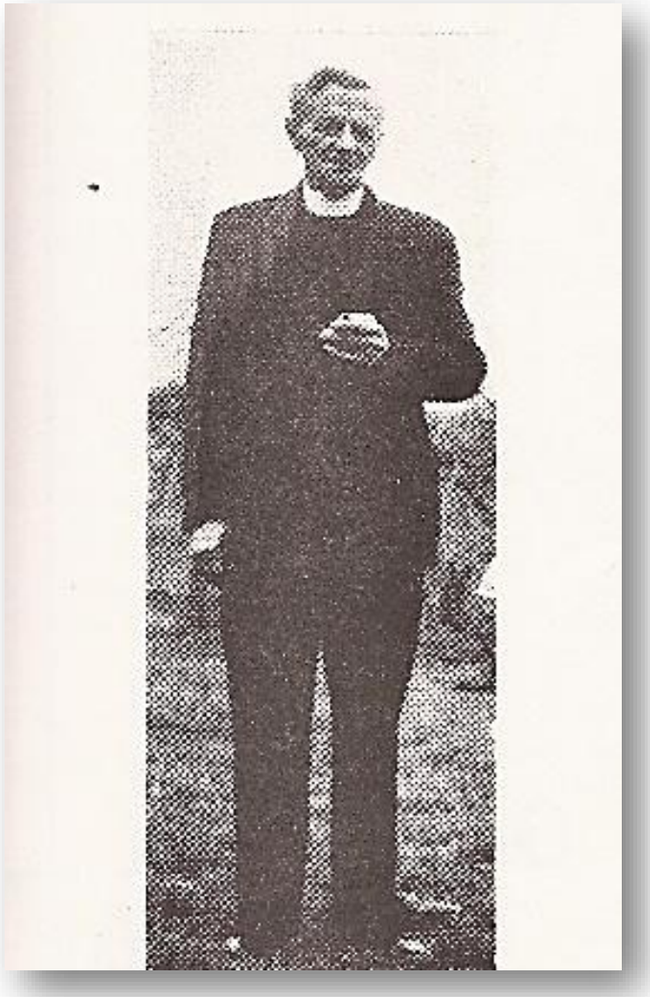
Front Row:
Bertha Klaus, Ernest Bartsch, Richard Goertz

Members of the Class of 1931-32 who named the town of Rockne

Lillian Hoffman Grohman, Anton Goertz, Alma Bartsch Probst, Irene Goertz, Bob Kadura, Msgr. Alois Goertz, Edith Goertz Ayers, Max Barton, Katie Seidel Waneck, at a reunion on May 24, 1987.

*-**Notre Dame Club of Austin** presented the Knute Rockne photo to the community*

Rev. Francis S. Strobel, *who served as pastor from 1920 to 1934, initiated the permanent naming of Rockne in 1931. He had the children of Sacred Heart choose between the names "Kilmer," after poet Joyce Kilmer, and "Rockne," in honor of Notre Dame's legendary coach Knute Rockne.*



The Story of How *Rockne* Got its Name

In 1931, Father Francis Strobel was unhappy with the name of his parish community, which had been known as Hilbigville, Walnut Creek, and Lehmanville. To change it, he proposed a vote among the children of Sacred Heart School, offering two options: poet Joyce Kilmer, a Catholic who died in WWI, and Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne, who had recently died in a plane crash.

The vote ended in a tie, with girls favoring Kilmer and boys supporting Rockne. However, little

EDITH GOERTZ

influenced by her sports loving father, switched her vote to Rockne. Ultimately, the children selected Rockne's name for their village, making it the only town named after the celebrated coach. An official Texas Historical Marker was dedicated to commemorating this unique decision.

Edith recalled that she did fall out of favor with her female classmates for a time, but this had well passed during that afternoon's recess.

Minnie Bartsch

Rockne History Committee Chairperson

presents a copy of the

Rockne Historical Marker

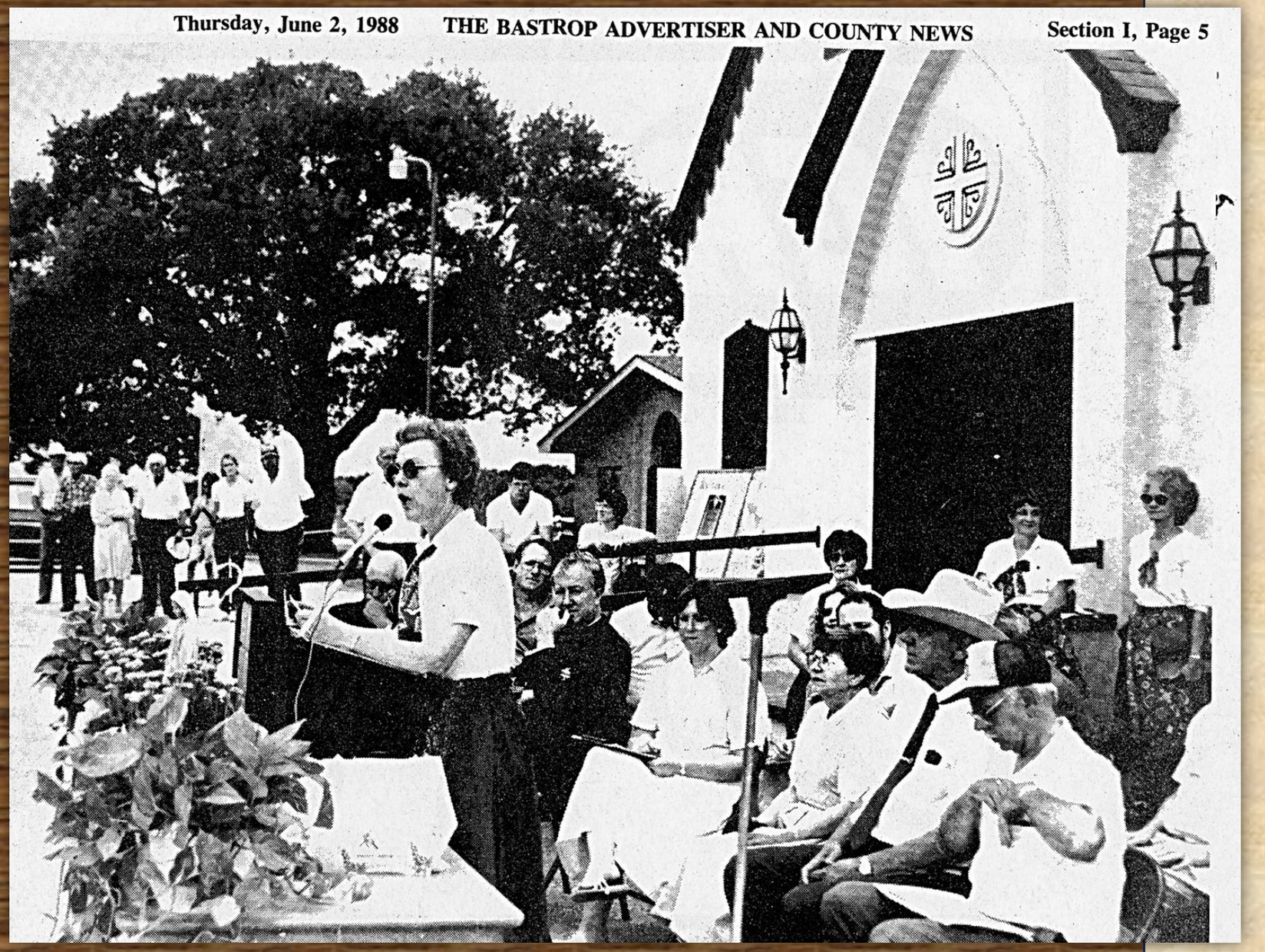
to

Moose Krause

for

Notre Dame University

Rockne's Big Day



Thursday, June 2, 1988 THE BASTROP ADVERTISER AND COUNTY NEWS Section I, Page 5

Minnie Bartsch welcomes a large crowd to the Rockne historic marker unveiling ceremony, part of the 1988 Spring Festival at Sacred Heart Church.

Edith Goertz Ayers is shown unveiling the marker.

1856

Thie First German Catholic settlers came to Walnut Creek in 1856, so named because the earliest settlers built their home along Walnut Creek. The town's name would not be changed to Rockne until 1931.

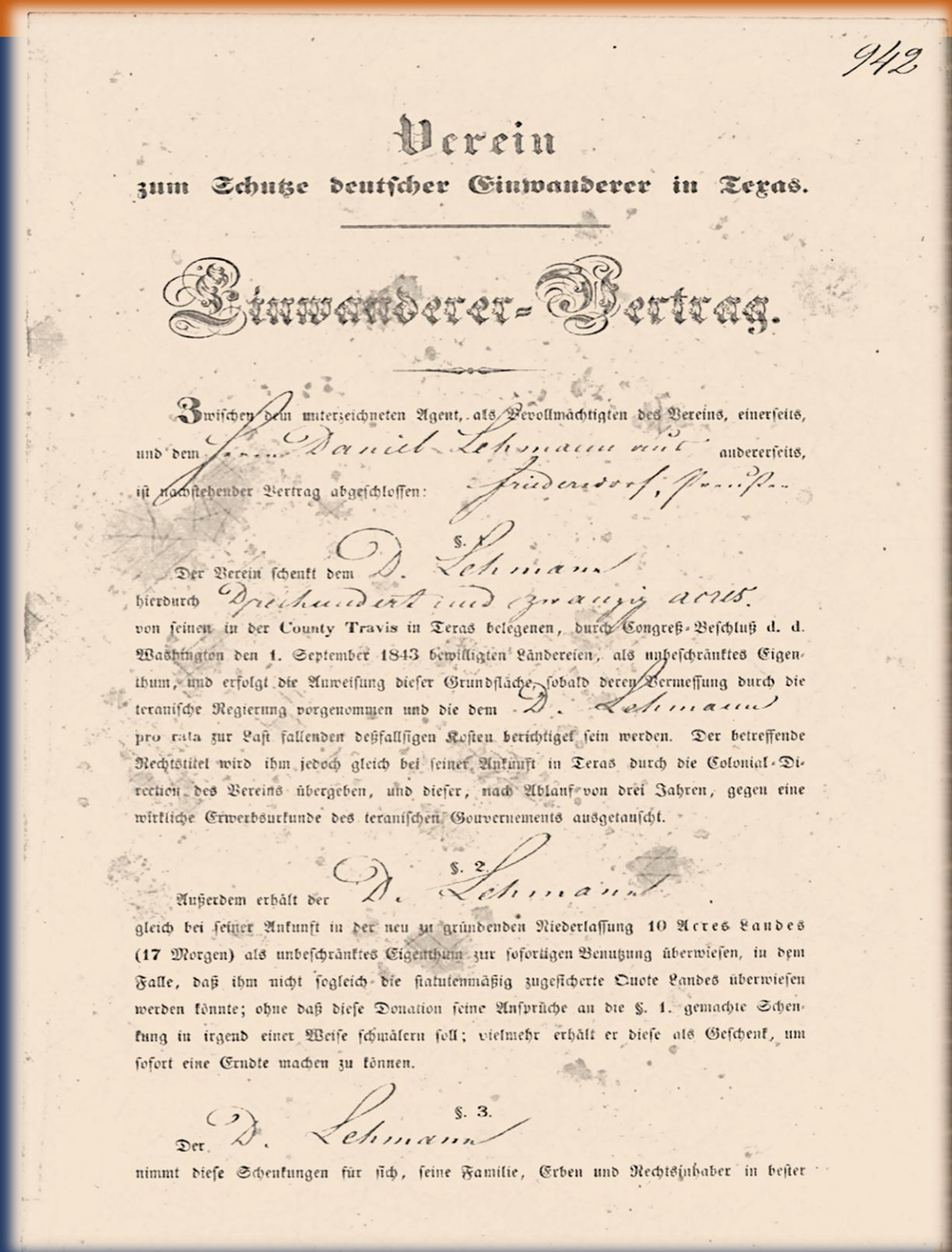
Records show that Philip Goertz, who was born on January 18, 1825, in the town of Wurges (then part of the Electorate of Hessen) about thirty miles from Frankfurt, arrived in New Orleans on January 6, 1856, with his wife Catherine and son John. From New Orleans, the family traveled to Walnut Creek and were soon joined by John Hartmann (Philip's brother-in-law), John Wolf, and Daniel Lehman.

Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas or *Simply* Adelsverine*

Stories about plentiful land and personal liberty in Texas enticed many Germans to leave their homeland and likely were factors that influenced Goertz, Hartmann, Wolf, and Lehman. In addition, the **Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas** (*Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas*) was initially organized in 1842 at Biebrich on the Rhine to establish a German colony on Texas soil through organized mass emigration. The Verein was headquartered near Wurges, a village from which several Rockne settlers came, including Goertz, Andreas Meuth, John Wilhelm, and John Wolf.

***Adelsverine (noble society)**

German Immigration Contract



942

Verein

zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas.

Einwanderer-Vertrag.

Zwischen dem unterzeichneten Agent, als Bevollmächtigten des Vereins, einerseits, und dem Herrn Daniel Lehmann aus Friedersdorf, Preuß. andererseits, ist nachstehender Vertrag abgeschlossen:

§. 1.

Der Verein schenkt dem D. Lehmann hierdurch Dreihundert und zwanzig acres von seinen in der County Travis in Texas belegenen, durch Congreß-Beschluß d. d. Washington den 1. September 1843 bewilligten Ländereien, als unbeschränktes Eigenthum, und erfolgt die Anweisung dieser Grundfläche, sobald deren Vermessung durch die texanische Regierung vorgenommen und die dem D. Lehmann pro rata zur Last fallenden deßfallsigen Kosten berichtiget sein werden. Der betreffende Rechtstitel wird ihm jedoch gleich bei seiner Ankunft in Texas durch die Colonial-Direction des Vereins übergeben, und dieser, nach Ablauf von drei Jahren, gegen eine wirkliche Erwerbsurkunde des texanischen Gouvernements ausgetauscht.

§. 2.

Außerdem erhält der D. Lehmann gleich bei seiner Ankunft in der neu zu gründenden Niederlassung 10 Acres Landes (17 Morgen) als unbeschränktes Eigenthum zur sofortigen Benutzung überwiesen, in dem Falle, daß ihm nicht sogleich die statutenmäßig zugesicherte Quote Landes überwiesen werden könnte; ohne daß diese Donation seine Ansprüche an die §. 1. gemachte Schenkung in irgend einer Weise schmälern soll; vielmehr erhält er diese als Geschenk, um sofort eine Erndte machen zu können.

§. 3.

Der D. Lehmann nimmt diese Schenkungen für sich, seine Familie, Erben und Rechtsinhaber in bester

All contracts stipulated that within three consecutive years, the settler needed to accomplish the following:

1) build a house on the property,
2) cultivate 15 acres of land and
3) build a fence around those 15 acres.

Once met, the temporary title would be exchanged for a permanent, definitive deed granted by the Texas government.

German Immigration Contract of ***Daniel Lehman(n)*** *(dated 1856) found in the Texas General Land Office (GLO).*

The settlers

After landing either in Galveston or at Indianola and making their way to Bastrop County, the settlers faced many challenges while establishing a new life in Texas. Speaking only German, communication with their English-speaking neighbors was difficult. But perhaps the greatest challenge was the prejudice they faced for practicing their Catholic faith. In the early years, there was no church for the settlers to hold worship services. Occasionally, a priest would come from Frelsburg, about twenty-five miles away, to offer mass, baptize the children, and offer care for other needs. Worship services were held in the Philip Goertz home. **One particular priest who made numerous visits was Father Victor Gury, pastor of St. Peter and Paul's Church in Frelsburg from 1854 to 1887**.

1876

First Church Built

In 1876, the small community decided to build its first church. Philip Goertz and Michael Wolf each donated five acres of land to provide a location to build the sanctuary. Under the direction of Reverend Anthony Kullman and a finance committee comprised of John Lehman and Philip Goertz, the new church was completed.

On May 7, 1877, on the Feast of the Ascension, the community gathered for the blessing and first mass in their new church.

1891

Church Burns

Tragedy struck on the night of January 22, 1891. As minutes of the February 22, 1891 meeting of the St. Joseph's Society state,

> **"Some atheistic people, who are fanatical and mean, burned down our church destroying everything that was in it."**

The community very quickly decided that they would rebuild their church, but in a more central location. **John T. Lehman donated ten acres of land** which still serves as the site of the church. The community came together and built their church.

1900 - 1926

The Sacred Heart Cemetery continues to serve the community at the present time. An interesting note for history is the fact that the first person buried in the cemetery was John T. Lehman, the man who donated the land to the church.

The year 1900 was a milestone in the history of Sacred Heart Parish. The community had grown and there was considerable interest in establishing a Catholic school. This was accomplished in the year 1900. Two sisters of the Divine Providence were the first teachers. The enrollment for that first school year shows there were 77 students coming from 31 families.

In that same year a rectory was built. Since that time there has been a pastor living in the community and serving the needs of the people.

Over the years, several young women from the community have entered various religious orders.

Father Leo Goertz was ordained a priest on May 29, 1920 - the first from the community. The following year, on May 21, 1921, **Monsignor F. O. Beck** was ordained a priest.

One other significant move that was made in the **year 1926** was the following: The **Sisters of Divine Providence** were no longer able to staff the school. At that time the **Benedictine Sisters** came to teach at Sacred Heart School. By this time the Sacred Heart Community was well established.

An event that profoundly changed Sacred Heart Community was the entry of the United States into the **First World War in 1916**. Many men from the community enlisted to serve in the military, returning with their experiences from the war.