

History Hike 1

Cows and Chickens and Churches, Oh My!

Clue: If you can “spare” a minute, “strike” out for your first stop. It will put you in the fast “lane” for a location that helped “frame” much of Rolling Meadows’ history.

As you leave the library, turn left and follow the sidewalk around to the East Parking Lot. Stay near the building as the sidewalk turns north and proceed to the following coordinates:

42° 04.600 N
088° 01.240 W



Take a good look at the bowling alley in front of you. Listen carefully on a quiet summer evening and from the distant past you may hear the sound of cows and chickens – or perhaps voices raised in a hymn – or a political debate. Many community organizations, and City Government itself, can point to this spot for their beginning. It may not be the cradle of civilization, but it is considered by many to be the cradle of our community.

It all started, as did most things in Rolling Meadows, with improvisation and high hopes. Local residents had been worshipping together in a model home on Campbell Street. As the congregation grew from the original twelve members, other churches provided financial assistance; however, the most important assistance came from architect, developer, and founder of Rolling Meadows, Kimball Hill, when he donated a barn on Kirchoff Road for use as a church.¹ The barn was originally part of the William Kirchoff farm and was located where the bowling alley now stands.

Esther Perica, in her outstanding history of Rolling Meadows, *They Took The Challenge*, documents what happened next:

In addition to donating the barn, Hill agreed to underwrite the costs of remodeling. When a group from the congregation, accompanied by the Rev. Ringsmuth, inspected the barn, one was heard to note “the cows sure haven’t been gone long!”²

8,000 volunteer hours later, the barn was ready to welcome its first worshippers. A concrete floor had been poured on the lower level and a pulpit and altar had been constructed in the hayloft.³ Old dairy stalls were converted into meeting space. Bea Neubecker remembers the chicken coop being converted into a room for Sunday school classes. In February of 1955, 250 adults who had previously been members of seventeen different religious denominations signed a charter officially creating the Community Church of Rolling Meadows.

Chicago Tribune Religion writer William McDermott, in an article featuring the “Church in a Barn,” posed the rhetorical question of how modern people from brand new homes could “find God in such primitive surroundings.”⁴

The barn that would be a church soon became the birthplace for many clubs and community service organizations. The first City government meetings were held in the barn and the Clearbrook School for individuals with developmental disabilities was conceived there.⁵ In 1958, the church moved to its present location on the corner of Kirchoff Road and Meadow Drive and the barn was demolished to make room for the Rolling Meadows Bowl. So when visitors from out of town drive by, they will only see a bowling alley – but you will know that this piece of ground is where the city of Rolling Meadows became a community. Listen carefully on a quiet summer evening and you may just hear happy voices from the past – the voices of dedicated church members, busy city founders, – and, perhaps, the far away sound of a few contented farm animals!

Looking southeast from the barn/church at the chicken coop which served as a Sunday School classroom. You are now standing where the arrow is and looking northwest toward the bowling alley. The library now stands just behind and to the right of the chicken coop in this photo.



Children outside the chicken coop waiting for Sunday School to start.

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Early residents build a community and a church!





Photos courtesy of the Community Church of Rolling Meadows.
Special thanks to Bea Neubecker and the Community Church for additional Research.