

St. Gabriel's

1817 Father Marie Joseph Dunand, A Trappist, was the first priest to minister directly to the mission at Prairie du Chien which was then known as St. John Baptist (Later to become St. Gabriel)

1827 The priest destined to begin the work of establishing what later became St. Gabriel parish was the Rev. Francis Vencent Badin. May 21, 1827, marks the date of his arrival at Prairie du Chien. He began the construction of a log church. For fear of an Indian attack the project had to be abandoned for a time. Later a log cabin fifty-feet long. Was built on a point some two blocks north of the present crossing from St. Feriole on Washington Street.

1831 In the spring of 1831 the Rec Joseph Lutz reached the mission of St. John the Baptist at Prairie du Chien.

1832 With Father Smuel Charles Mazzuchelli O.P. the history of St. Gabriels Church properly begins. He was born in 1807 in Lombardy, Italy. He came to America in 1828, equipped with a thoroughly classical education. After two years of preparation for the priesthood, he was ordained. His first assignment took him to Mackinaw Island and later to Green Bay. It was from Green By that he set out in company with Judge Doty for his first visit to Prairie du Chien. He made the journey by horse. After riding for eight days he reached his destination on September 21, 1832. The first visit lasted fifteen days. Prairie du Chien was left unvisited by a priest from the day of his departure in 1832 till the day of his return in 1835.

1835 on his second visit, Father Mazzuchelli came for Fort Winnebago, traveling by sleigh over the frozen river to Prairie du Chien where he remained for three months. He left some time in April 1835, going down the Mississippi in a steamboat. In his letter to the bishop, he says "I have started an association for the building of a church: the men pay fifty cents each month and the women, twenty-five cents. But my church will not be built without the assistance of a priest."

1836 It was during his third visit, the Father Mazzuchelli with characteristic energy and foresight, proceeded to carry out his darling project of building a Catholic Church at Prairie du Chien. 1836 A Protestant gentleman, Mr. Strange Powers, donated four acres of land for the site of St. Gabriel Church. The deed to the property was duly drawn up and delivered to the Catholic Bishop of Detroit, the RT. Rev. Frederic Rese on February 16, 1836.

1839 By July the work on the church was sufficiently advanced to permit the ceremony of the lying of the cornerstone. Fr. Mazzuchelli was able to report three weeks later, August 15, 1829, "the walls are twenty feet above the ground" "The stone work is done by Mr. L. R. March, who deserves much credit for his exertions. The carpenter work is in the hands of a good son of Erin, Mr. Benedict F. Manahan, whose zeal for the temple

of God knows no obstacle, and whose knowledge of the trade will be sufficiently praised by this work.” The unsigned is the superintendent of the building. “This church measures 50 feet in width by 100 feet in length. The walls are two feet thick above the base, built of the good and light stone, found in abundance on the hills which encircle the majestic prairie between the junction of the great Wisconsin River and “the Father of Waters” The style of the church is a chaste Gothic; the front is all hammered range work, ornamented with a marble inscription and niche” As for the name, St. Gabriel, which the parish bears, it is thought that s Fr. Mazzuchelli had named the congregations at Galena and Dubuque St. Michael and Raphael, respectively, he chose St. Bavriel for the congregation at Prairie du Chien to complete the trilogy of archangels. With the building of the church, the activities of Fr. Mazzuchelli at Prairie du Chien came to an end. The new parish had to content itself, for almost a year, with the intermittent visits missionary priest from Dubuque.

1840 The distinction of being the first regular pastor of St. Gabriel parish belongs to Rev. Augustine Ravoux, who later became a noted Indian Missionary of the Catholic Northwest.

1844 Prairie du Chien was one of the stops made by Bishop Henri on his first tour of his diocese, undertaken shortly after Pentecost of 1844. He was not favorably impressed by the condition in which he found the parish of St. Gabriels. The following is from a letter he wrote the following year: “Years ago they began erecting a church 100 feet long, built entirely of stone. But I found it not only still incomplete, but also burdened with a debt of \$3,000.

1847 Rev. Lucien Galtier came to St. Gabriels in June 1847 For nineteen years he was pastor at St. Gabriels and visited missions as far north as Chippewa as far east as Boscobel, and south into Grant County. He erected log chapels and churches at many of the Missions. Despite the large debt that hung heavily upon his parish, the progressive pastor somehow managed to install the Station of the Cross at St. Gabriel church. He is supposed to have built the first spire on the church. This brought to completion what Father Mazzuchelli had begun eighteen years before: a fully equipped Catholic Church in Prairie du Chien.

1872 It was during this time the School Sisters of Notre Dame took charge of the school. From that day until 1988? They continued in charge of the parochial school of St. Gabriel parish.

1874 St. Gabriel rectory was built.

1880 – 1891 The first Jesuit Period.

1887 The church was remodel replacing the original steeple by a tall wooden one and providing a new front-entry.

1891 Rev. A. Philip Kremer was appointed and for the next seven years exercised his pastoral duties. In the first year, Fr. Kremer built Columbian High School, which continued in existence till 1908. It is the northern part of what we call the “old School.”

1907 During Rev. Peter Becker’s ten year pastoral term, he accomplished much for the spiritual and material betterment of the parish. In his first year, he proceeded to transform the “chaste Gothic” rock-church of Father Mazzuchelli to make it conform with a “Grecian” type of his own conception. He built a considerable addition to the east end of the church, that part which today includes the sanctuary and both sacristies. Within this enclosure he erected “Grecian” arches to the front of the high altar. At the west end of the church, he built an addition of solid rock, joining the entry below with the gallery above. In carrying out the masonry work, he finished the front with two steeples the taller of which contained the belfry and was surmounted by a gilded cross. The major part of the structure, Fr. Becker left as he had found it. The massive walls of native limestone taken rough-hewn from the bluffs that skirt the eastern boundary of the Prairie stand today, as they have stood from the beginning, solid and immovable. He also decorated the interior of the church. The old pews were replaced with new ones, a pipe organ was added, and the heating system was changed from hot air to steam. Improvements were also made in the school and parish hall. Finally the grounds surrounding the church and school were extensively beautified. When he left his pastoral office, Fr. Becker left a neat sum in the treasury with all debts cancelled.

1916 – to current The Second Jesuit Period

1928 Fr. Joseph Blank S.J. is responsible for the construction of the school gym.

1936 St. Gabriel Church – 100 years old.

1956 The planning and fund raising started for the new school. The building was started in 1960. It was dedicated September 25m 1961, by Bishop John P. Treac. The next project was a new convent for the Sisters. It was dedicated in 1966.

1965 The location of the Mass was transferred to the St. Gabriel School auditorium. Fr. Burns S.J. explained that the church was vacated to permit the construction of scaffolding in the church to investigate the cracks in the ceiling.

1966 Fr. Eugene Zimmerman S.J. completed the remodeling when Fr. Burns was transferred. Fr. Zimmerman and the people of St. Gabriels attempted to do two things in the reconstruction of the church – to preserve the antiquity and at the same time to update the church to incorporate the guidelines for the liturgy. A very old baptismal font, made of pewter, was cleaned and repaired for reuse. The Alta of Sacrifice, the Altar of Repose, and the Ambo (Lectern) were made of Winona stone with a rough-honed finish to correspond to the rugged strength of the two and three-foot thick walls. The Stations of the Cross were preserved with the figures antiqued. The frames were simplified and stained dark to match the pews. The pews are of solid northern white oak with jet ebony finish and open back contour for comfort. Unlike the old church with its drop ceiling, the

tresses and decking are exposed, adding to the aesthetic beauty of the entire church. New and better lighting fixtures enhance the beauty of the church and aid visibility. The Cross which hangs in the sanctuary was made from an original church beam. The paneling of the massive church doors were replaced with English-Fleming glass, which serves to express antiquity. The new doors match the other doors erected throughout the church. A new entrance from the parking lot area provides space for rest rooms. Steps have been eliminated at this entrance. The floor of the church has been dropped so that the main entrance has only one step. The stain glass windows have been cleaned and repaired. The cast bronze church bells were wired into an automatic bell system. Midnight Mass marked the end of yearlong renovation of 126-year-old St. Gabriel Church

St. Gabriel: Our Traditional Landmark. The statue above the entrance of the church was provided by one of our parish families. The statue was carved from Carrara Marble in Italy. It weighs some 1500 pounds. This one should not be affected by exposure to the elements, as was the case with the original one.