

ST. GABRIEL'S ERECTED

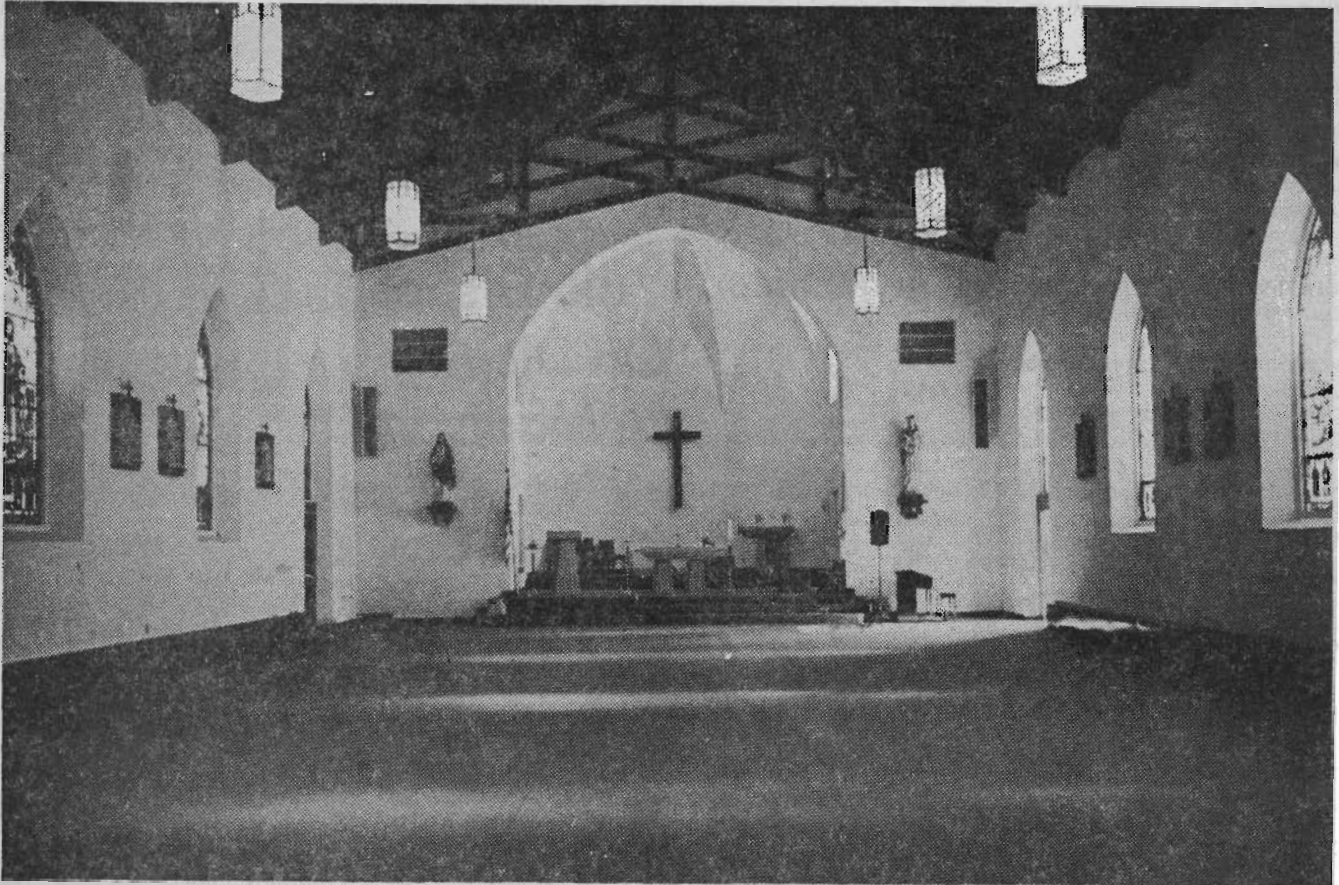
Prairie Church

PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, Wis.— St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, oldest in Western Wisconsin, will have a rebirth when Mass is celebrated in it Christmas Eve, the first in over a year since the beautiful old edifice was discovered to be structurally unsound.

The reconstruction of St. Gabriel's — first since Rev. Peter Becker's in 1908—began Dec. 9, 1965. While much is new in the rebuilt church, there is also much of the old. Rev. Eugene E. Zimmerman, Society of Jesus, present pastor, his assistant, Rev. David W. Brehm, and the people of St. Gabriel's have attempted to do two things in the reconstruction — to preserve antiquity and at the same time to update the church to

incorporate the new liturgy. Unlike the old church with its drop-ceiling, the trusses and decking are now exposed. New and better lighting fixtures enhance the beauty and aid visibility.

The wood paneling of the massive old front doors has been replaced with English Fleming glass, which serves to express antiquity. A new entrance from the parking lot provides rest rooms and also makes possible an entrance to the north sacristy. The steps at this entrance have been eliminated, and in general the floor has been dropped as much as possible so that there is now only one step at the main door. The stained glass windows



THEN AND NOW—St. Gabriel's Catholic Church of Prairie du Chien looked like this (top) last May when it had been partially razed prior to being

reconstructed. Today, it is ready for the installation of pews in time for Mass on Christmas Eve (below).

IN 1839

Church Rebuilt In Time For Noel

have been cleaned and repaired, sealed and protected with storm glazing, and next spring the exterior will be cleaned and the towers painted.

The Stations of the Cross have been preserved, but the figures antiquated and the frames simplified and stained a dark coloring to match the pews. Many other changes have been made, all to enhance the church's natural beauty, which its founder, Rev. Samuel C. Mazzuchelli, styled as "chaste Gothic."

To Fr. Mazzuchelli goes the credit for St. Gabriel's present name, as it was formerly known as St. John The Baptist, but Fr. Mazzuchelli was devoted to the angels, and so St. Gabriel's it became.

But the history of the parish goes back to Rev. Marie Joseph Dunand, a Trappist, who in March of 1817 said goodbye to Missouri and battled 600 miles up the stormy Mississippi to become the first priest in La Prairie des Chiens.

Fr. Dunand was succeeded 10 years later by Rev. F. V. Badin, who vowed to build a church worthy of "Wakan Tanka" — the Great Spirit. But Fr. Badin's dream was shattered by the Redbird Massacre of 1827. Later, Gen. Henry Atkinson is supposed to have said that if it hadn't been for the presence of Fr. Badin "the Winnebagoes would have wiped La Prairie des Chiens off the map."

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Thus it remained for Fr. Mazzuchelli to build the first church. Under his guidance, the pioneer parish acquired the four-acre plot of ground upon which the parish building now stands, the gift of a man called "Strange Powers," a non-Catholic. The deed was duly drawn up and delivered Feb. 16, 1836. Three years later, on a sunny Sunday afternoon in July of 1839, the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Loras, assisted by Fr. Mazzuchelli, who by then

tuary and both sacristies.

Rev. A. Ravoux became St. Gabriel's first resident pastor in March 1940, and a year later he was sent west to do missionary work among the Sioux Indians.

The latest in a long line of devoted priests to serve St. Gabriel's is Rev. Eugene Zimmerman of the Society of Jesus, who came back to Prairie du Chien last summer. Prairie du Chien was not new to Fr. Zimmerman, as he had previously

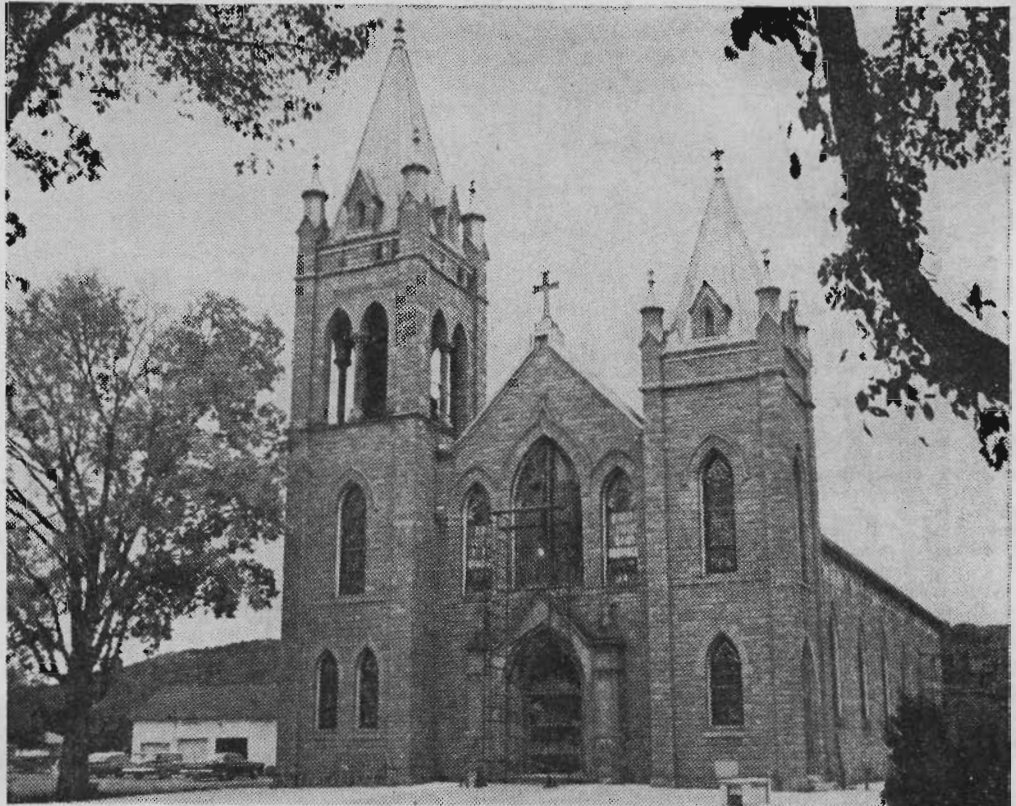
taught at Campion High School.

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Hackner, Schroeder and Associates of La Crosse were the architects for the reconstruction project, and the Steiner Brothers Construction Co. of Prairie du Chien was the general contractor. The stained glass windows were repaired and renovated by the T. C. Esser Co. of La Crosse.

And so St. Gabriel's stands renewed as a monument of lasting tribute to those pioneer priests of vision, as well as to the perseverance of their modern counterparts who had the courage to retain the old without bowing to the modern.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was condensed from one written by Rev. John M. Scott, S.J.)



OLD DAYS—This is how the old St. Gabriel's Church looked before it was found to be structurally unsound. Its designer, Rev. Samuel Mazzuchelli, once described it as "chaste Gothic."

Coulee Region

Boy Scouts
Of Westby

PAIR TO HOLIDAY
IN TRIPOLI, AFRICA

Black River Falls
Area Bird Count