

R-PRESS

Ray Gluss Restores Century Old Statue

Archangel Gabriel Repaired

The Archangel Gabriel has been saved . . . Ray Gluss, local artist, has resurrected the century-old wooden statue for whom the parish was named.

St. Gabriel's Catholic Church in Prairie du Chien is one of the oldest churches in Wisconsin. The building is one of several designed in the style of Fr. Mazzuchelli, a noted early cleric and designer of churches.

This spring the statue was removed from the doorway of St. Gabriel's. It resided in a heap of lumber and other materials. The patron of the parish was almost forgotten.

This week the famed statue was returned to the church for easy visitation of the parish members. The seven-foot statue will reside for a few weeks in the vestibule of the church before the task of replacing it above the doorway is accomplished.

When Ray Gluss talked to the parish officials they didn't know what to expect. The local artist had little knowledge of the problems of reconstruction he would be faced with during his months of re-doing the famous statue.

Mrs. Flora Clanton remembered the talks of her father, when he was a sexton at the church. The family recalled stories of the statue being moved when the addition to the church, the two front towers, was made in 1908.

St. Gabriel was fashioned of laminated wood by a German craftsman.

Possibly more times there had been repairs made to the statue during the 100 years of its residing over the doorway.

Father Brehm had high praise for the artist, Ray Gluss. When we brought the statue to the Gluss workshop, we didn't think there was any chance the statue could be



Artist Ray Gluss and Fr. Brehm

saved. There were rotten spots, holes and the decay of past efforts to patch.

Ray spent hours slowly tearing the statue apart. The layers of wood were slowly urged to separate. These areas were painstakingly cleaned, and glued back together. There was the problem of finding some very dry ash to fashion some of the other pieces which were rotten. The

wood was found; then Ray couldn't find the old fashioned glues to do some of the other work. Sawdust from the ash was made with glues and other items of his knowledge. Ray fashioned a slurry to recreate new wood for the hollow spots. This included the folds in the garments, the section of hair, and a portion of a hand.

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Gabriel...

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With chisel, knife, sandpaper and desire the statue again started to look like new. A call to a Chicago friend brought out the formula for the prime coats. Then there was another call to find the right enamel coat and the gold leaf had to be ground into another slurry so it could applied.

The final application was one of marine varnish to be the sealer.

With pride, the hands of the restoration artist brushed the paint. "You can't even see where the new and the old work is." He pointed to the head, the curls of hair, another fold in the cloak of the Archangel. Ray managed to talk with the statue of the angel. He knows there is some heavenly appreciation of his restoration of St. Gabriel. The horns of the angels are muted in public. Their blast of appreciation is the praise of the parish priest and the people of the community singing their thanks for saving the patron of the parish. The song is centuries old. It is called "THANKS."