

Calvary Cemetery Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin

In the spring of 1817, Father Joseph Marie Dunand had left St. Louis to travel to Prairie du Chien to bring the sacraments to the French Catholics who resided on the prairie. He arrived in early May. Within days, Father Dunand was asked to bless the burial of an elderly man who had been placed within a small cemetery the residents of the prairie had established on part of the Farm Lot owned by François Vertefeuille. As a Catholic priest, Father Dunand would not officiate at a burial in unconsecrated ground, so he took this opportunity to bless “the parish cemetery” on May 10, 1817.

The Catholic residents used what has come to be called “the Frenchtown Cemetery” as a place of burial until Father Augustin Ravoux laid out a cemetery behind St. Gabriel’s Church in 1840.

In February 1836, Strange and Euphrosine Antaya Powers had given to Frederic Rese, the Bishop of Detroit a gift of land. The property was part of Farm Lot No. 28, which Powers owned. On the land, St. Gabriel’s Church and the adjoining cemetery were plotted.

Almost to the day that Strange and Euphrosine Powers presented a portion of their property to the Catholic Church, Hercules L. Dousman sold for one dollar a portion of Farm Lot No. 22 to Bishop Rese. The size of the lot was 150 feet by 700 feet. As part of the agreement of sale, the land was to be used only as a burying ground and was to be divided into two parts. The eastern portion of the lot was to be a “Public Burying Ground.” The western portion of the lot was to be a “Catholic Burying Ground Exclusively.”

After the sale of the land for a cemetery, few residents of the prairie were interred in this burying ground. The cemetery behind St. Gabriel’s Church was new and more

convenient for burials. While Catholics preferred to place family members to rest in the St. Gabriel's cemetery, the public portion of the burying ground presented by Dousman also lay empty.

John S. Lockwood had settled at Prairie du Chien in 1838 and opened a general merchandise store. His wife, Margaret, soon died, and Lockwood donated land for a non-denominational cemetery. People of other faiths preferred this cemetery. It was located in Lowertown, and the newer residents in the community lived on the lower end of the prairie.

The earliest burials, in what came to be called Calvary Cemetery, are mainly the resting places of people associated with the Dousman family. Daniel Fenton, the husband of Madeline Fisher, who was a niece of Jane Fisher Dousman, was buried in the western portion of the cemetery in 1850. Emily Dousman Barrette was buried only a few feet to the west of Fenton. The Dousman family established their family plot in the northeast corner of the cemetery.

The "new Catholic Cemetery," as it was called, was not consecrated until May 1864.

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