

**Tour the Historic Churches
of Downtown Baraboo
Tales of Earlier Days
By Bob Dewel**

The world is full of Christian Churches. St. Pauls in London and St. Peters in Rome are world-famous, for example. In America, there is the Historic Old North Congregational Church in Boston and the National Cathedral in Washington D.C., non-denominational but maintained by the Episcopal Church.

The country teems with thousands of other church buildings large and small. Sauk County has for example the Westfield Methodist and the Loretto Catholic churches, now showplaces. Historically unique is the Free Congregation of Sauk City, now Unitarian-associated.

But let's not forget Baraboo. I suppose every church in town considers itself historic, even very new ones. However, in the history of Baraboo and its growth, there are six churches that stand out from an historical view, not only because of their age but because of their proximity to the downtown of the young village in the middle to late 1800's. That proximity makes for us today an easy afternoon tour to each historic Christian site.

Six Open Churches

In a remarkable demonstration of unity in the Christian Faith, those six Churches will each have an "open house" on Sunday afternoon, October 17. Whether churched or un-churched, everyone is invited to visit each of the churches, view their sanctuaries, and learn more of their history. There are to

be no attempts at conversion during this event.

The six open houses last from 1 to 4 that October afternoon. Allowing for the short walk between the edifices, it would be possible to spend 25 minutes in each sanctuary, enjoy light refreshment, and learn of the Baraboo-related history of each Congregation. Start with any church.

It works this way: At the first church you visit, you will be given a booklet, in which each Congregation has one page for its history and photos. Keep this booklet, for it has a map showing how to walk to each of the other churches. There is no admission charge, nor is there a fee for the booklet. There won't even be a Collection!

You will want to limit your visit to about 20 minutes or so if you want to see each Sanctuary, Each of the host churches will have displays and guides regarding their history and their facility, plus refreshments. Presented in the same order as in the booklet, here are brief notes on the history of each Congregation:

Short Summaries

The St. John's Evangelical Church was formed in 1873, and used German as its language for many years. The present edifice was erected in 1975 on East and Fifth, replacing a large brick structure built in 1915. That had in turn replaced a previous frame structure built in 1878 on Fourth Street. The Church operates St. John's school two blocks east of the Church.

The First Presbyterian Church dedicated its first large building in 1874, at the present Third and Ash Streets. Except for the tower and steeple, that building was extensively remodeled in 1990, relocating the Chancel to the north wall. The pipe organ was preserved,

with the addition of a grand piano. Presbyterian pastors often serve for decades, there only having been three local pastors from 1901 to 2006.

The First United Methodist Church, located on the Square, claims the first Christian Services and the first conversion in the Baraboo valley. That was on April 10, 1842, by itinerant minister Tom Fullerton. A rough cabin served until 1851, when a more substantial structure was used, with frequent remodeling, until construction of the present red brick Romanesque structure in 1898. Frequent additions since then have enhanced its ability to serve its congregation and the community.

The First Congregational United Church of Christ Church on Broadway was formed in 1847. Its tradition of involvement in social issues began at this time with voting rights for women, followed over the years by involvement in slavery, civil rights, world conflict, and full involvement of women and persons of color in the ministry. Dedicated in 1895, the present structure underwent major remodeling in 1995.

The Trinity Episcopal Church, on Ash and 6th Street, was organized in 1853 as St. Paul's Church, with Services in the famed Taylor Hall, Third and Broadway. Renamed Trinity Episcopalian Church in 1867, the present building housed the first Services in 1892. Facilities include a Chapel, Parish Hall, Cloister Walkway, and a Memorial garden with a Columbarium in the courtyard... The stained glass windows are from England.

St. Joseph Catholic Church began in the 1850's with Mass near the site of the Al. Ringling Theatre today. Regular pastoral service began in 1861 in a small frame structure at Second and

Oak. Under the direction of Fr. Durward, who came in 1887, the present structure was erected in 1902 at a cost of \$30,000. This was followed by remodeling in the 1970's. A large addition with a sacristy, chapel, and kitchen was completed in 2004.

Unique Opportunity

This Walk of the Historic Churches of Downtown Baraboo is a unique opportunity to see the interior of churches other than your own. More importantly, it provides not only a glimpse of the thrust or Mission of each congregation, but interesting and sometime humorous anecdotes from the past.

Again, there is no obligation, no collection plate, and no attempt to proselyte. Rain or shine, it promises a pleasant October afternoon visiting among the historic Christian Churches of Downtown Baraboo.

