

About the Catholic Church

The first Catholic services in Baraboo were held in May 1850. Father Maximilian Gaertner had been assigned the parishes of Sauk, Lynden and Delona. One time while passing through Baraboo, he heard that there were Catholics here. He told them he would read mass the following Sunday. Services were held in the Wisconsin House where later the Al. Ringling theatre was built. Because hotel accommodations were limited Father Gaertner held the next monthly service at a Mrs. Gray's home located where the old Lavoo House was later located, on the northwest corner of the intersection of Walnut and Maple Streets.

For four years Father Gaertner, a man over sixty, made his monthly visits, in rain or snow, mud or "rough roads", and most of the time on foot, unless someone driving an ox team happened along and gave him a ride. In the summer he had an Indian transport him in a canoe down the Wisconsin River from Kilbourn to Sauk on his return trip.

Father Gaertner attended to all spiritual wants of his people, administering baptism, marrying, and burying the dead. The people met at the homes of Mrs. Gray, Mr. Doherty or Mr. W. Powers for services. They not only had services at their homes, but they also entertained the priest and all those who walked in from six to fourteen miles to mass. At the age of sixty-five Father Gaertner went back to Austria and Baraboo was without a priest.

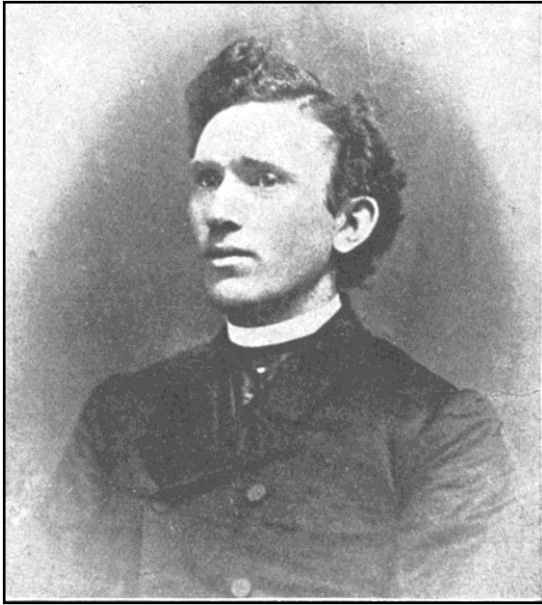
Many of the members of the parish were married in the old Lavoo House; during the years that Mrs. Gray and Mr. P. McGinnis lived there. One Sunday there was a double wedding there, Mr. and Mrs. P. McGinnis and Mr. and Mrs. Kernan. Mr. and Mrs. C. Sarahan, Mr. and Mrs. P. Doherty, Mr. and Mrs. Mike Powers, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Mitchell, Mr. and Mrs. J. McGinnis and Mr. and Mrs. F. McGinnis and many others were married there. A few of those who attended the first mass there were Mrs. Gray, Patrick McGinnis, Mr. Davis, John Rainey, Mr. Steinmetz, Mr. McFadden and Mr. McLaughlin. After Father Gaertner left, Father Montaque, Father Steele, Father Nasseau, Father Heisse, Father Weinhart and others attended here occasionally. At times there were two or three months without services.

In August 1859, Father Montaque who was attending here said, "that since there were fifty families here we should build a church. They met after mass to decide where to build. Some wanted to choose a site on the north side of the river. They had been holding services on the south side, where the schoolhouse and most of the business houses were situated. Father Montaque said that of course the south side was the place for the church, because there were only black shanties on the north side and it was no place for a church. The north side residents were called the "shanty Irish" after that. Most of the Catholics seemed willing to be called that, or they would not have crossed the river. Shortly after that, a meeting was held at Mrs. Cumming's, mother of Martin and Mike Cummings, at which \$500 was raised to build a church. A committee was elected at the same meeting, composed of John O'Connell, Patrick Kelly and Martin Degan.

First Catholic Church Structure

Elder Warren Cochrane introduced Congregationalism to the Baraboo valley on December 18, 1847. The nine-member First Congregational Church first met in the log schoolhouse, which stood in the northwest corner of the village. Later they moved to the courthouse and then in 1852, a small redbrick Congregational Church edifice was constructed at the southwest corner of the intersection of Second Avenue and Oak Street at a cost of \$1200. Just prior to the civil war, the Congregational Society built a larger frame structure at 220-224 Third Avenue.

In August of 1861, a Catholic Church committee purchased the empty church building at the corner of Second Avenue and Oak Streets. The structure was located a little set back from the corner. They paid \$500.00 for this little old red brick structure with green blinds and steep tumbledown steps leading up from Oak Street to the entrance. It was deeded to Bishop Henni on March 17, 1862 and dedicated the next October.



Father Matthew White 1869-1871

Easily Pleased Then

Church members were pleased with their little old red brick church and the following members were part of the fifty-family parish:

Mrs. Gray, P. McGinnis, Kearns, John O'Connell, Degans, Mike and Martin Cummings, Steinmetz, M. Hoffman, Neitchers, P. Kelly, Mrs. Cummings, P. Doherty, B. Doherty, Wm. Power, M. Power, J. Donaghey, C. Sarahan, Maurice Coughlin, Ankenbrandt, Helms, Mrs. Megan, Kinnelley, Mrs. Oats, Finnegans, J. Terrys, P. Terrys, W. Terrys, Brilliotts, George Mertens, J. Hanley, M. Hanley, Michael Buckley, Michael Murphy, Ganleys, Careys, Pettits, Glennins, Mrs. McDormit, Mrs. Muloy, George Bender, Mrs. Reuland, T. McMahan, M. McMahan, M. Mather, Wm. Maher, John Murray, Mrs. Mehan, John Jordan's, James Dowling, John Divers, Stadlers, Sieberz, Hannans, Udells, Cairnes, Kallens and Miles.

Present church property purchased in 1873

Rev. Joseph Schreiner conducted services here from 1859 to 1869. In 1869 Father Mathew White arrived; he was a young Irish-American born and educated in Sauk County, before he went to the University of Wisconsin, where he graduated from law school with the highest honors. He found the church locked and the vestments, chalice, etc. were all gone. The committee had to break open the door to gain admittance. Father White wanted to build a new church, The C. & N. W. railroad was under construction and there were many more Catholics moving into the community. However, Father White being an eloquent speaker was called to a better field in 1871.

In June of 1872, it was announced that the Catholic Society had purchased the old "Angle place" on the brow of the hill on the east side of East Street from Ex-Father Schreiner. It was expected that soon a new church would be constructed there overlooking the south side. The 304 East Street showed up on later maps as being on the northeast corner of the intersection of First and East Street. First Street no longer runs through. Today's church (2007) has an address of 308 East Street.

Then, again in February of 1873, it was reported that the Catholic Society had purchased several fine lots south of Mr. Longley's residence, including the house, which was to be used as a parsonage, and the society would soon put up a church adjoining. Both dates could have been referring to the same location.

But, wait! By May of 1873, the society had decided to build on the corner of Oak Street and Second Avenue at the site of their old building. They were offering the Longley land, almost two acres, for sale. However, in May of 1874, a new church was underway on East Street.

In 1871, Father Coughlin, a very pious and kind man came to Baraboo. His aim was to have a cemetery. It was stated by a parishioner, "We had to go to Portage, Sauk or Delona to bury the dead.

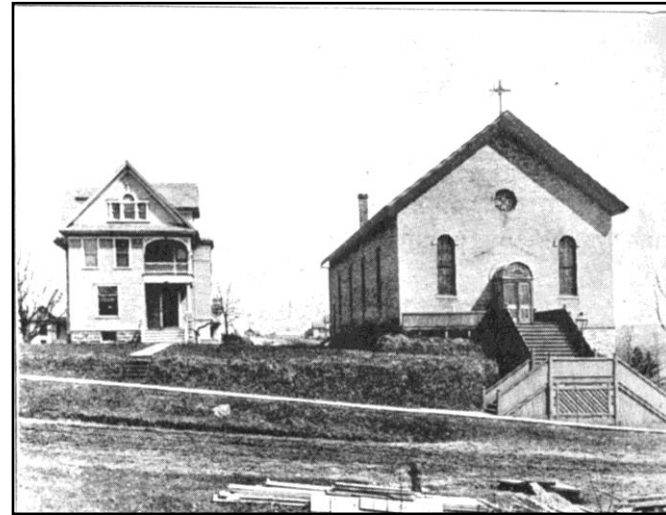
John O'Connell said he would give us four acres of land northwest of the city. We took it and paid him \$40.00 for it, and Father Coughlin was the first person buried there. The cemetery was

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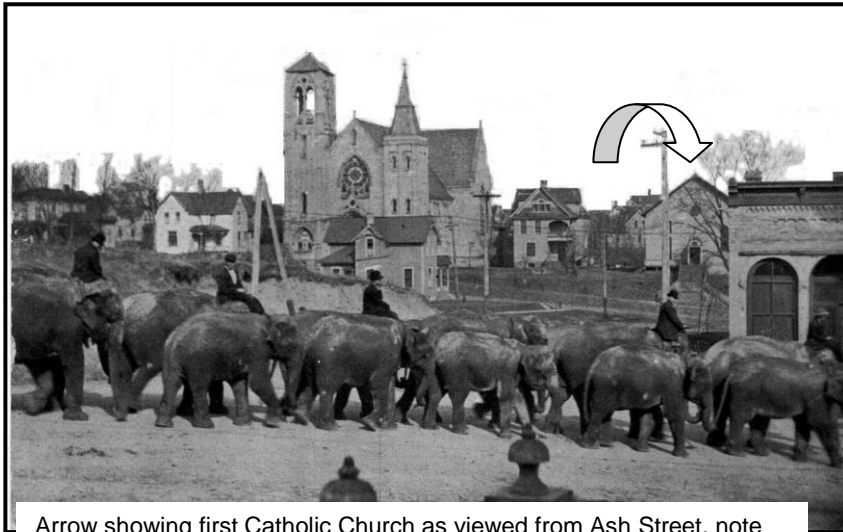
named St. Michaels, because that was the name of the church at the time. The men had a bee and cleaned and fenced it. Many criticized the purchase of the property but it was all we could afford”.

Father A. Verbeck (possibly Verberk) was the next pastor, serving in 1873 and 1874. He tried very hard to raise money for a new Catholic church. He said if the parishioners would pay what they felt they could afford and he did not receive enough to build a church, he would give them back their money, and he did. Father Verbeck instructed the first Holy Communion class and had the first class of over one hundred confirmed on August 3, 1873. Frank Kelly was the first boy confirmed and Anne Donaghey was the first girl.

Father Aloy Laigneil, (possibly Laquiel) a little “Hollander” was the next pastor, from 1874 to 1876. He labored very hard to build a new church holding many meetings to decide whether to build where the red brick church was or on the purchased Schreiner property. Foolishly, it was said, the latter was chosen and it took thousands of dollars to fill the ravine, In December, 1874, the church had its first fair, and how the people looked forward to it. The



St. Joseph's church, constructed in 1874, viewed looking east



Arrow showing first Catholic Church as viewed from Ash Street, note Reul home metal post caps in forefront of photo. Note partial view of brick store building on Ash Street in right portion of photo.

fishpond and grab bag were new to the parishioners. Mr. McGinnis gave a Durham cow, someone else a hog, which was there alive in a box; others live turkeys, sacks of flour, a cord of wood and everything else one could imagine. They voted on the handsomest young lady in Baraboo, Alice Terry and Annie O'Connell were the contestants and they were so near a tie that the committee bought two sets of jewelry and gave each a set. The fair cleared \$1500. Mr. Ballone of Freedom said he would give what pine lumber they wished to cut and haul for the new church. Father Laigneil went to Freedom and helped fell and saw the timber and rode down to Baraboo on the logs. The farmers hauled them to Baraboo. Someone out on the bluffs toward Merrimack gave the other timbers. Father Laigneil found the first parochial school, taught by a Miss Ahern in the parish house.

New Church Constructed in 1874

The cream colored church was built in 1874 and 1875, at a cost of approximately \$5,000. It stood on high ground on the east

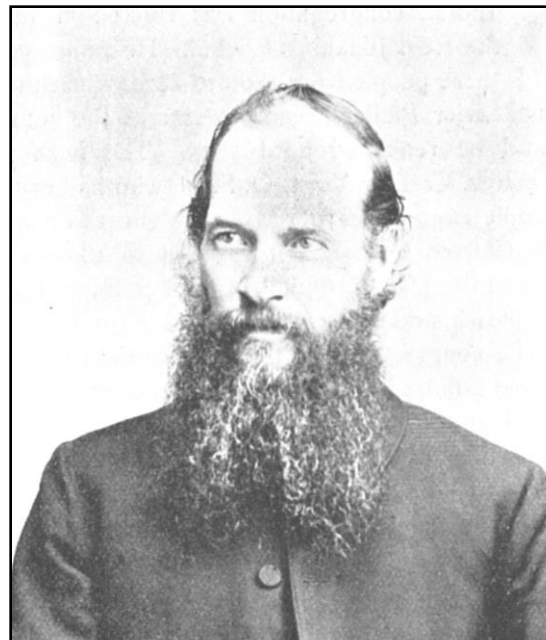
side of and facing East Street. It was 85 feet long by 35 feet wide. It had a deep basement, suitable for school purposes.

The auditorium had walls 20 feet high and the roof was arched. The building was wood, veneered with Milwaukee brick. In April of 1876, the church purchased the pews theretofore used in the Free Congregational Church. The latter was then furnished with settees and chairs to better accommodate its use as an occasional public hall. Father Laigneil went home to Holland later in the spring of 1876, leaving many friends praying for his return. The church was dedicated in September 1877 and the St. Michael's cemetery was blessed on the same day. Father Charles Gunkel, a German, was the pastor from 1876 to 1878 and Father A. Michael took his place from 1878 to 1880. By 1878 the name of the parish was changed from St. Michael's to St. Joseph's.

The old church building on Oak and Second Avenue was eventually sold to J. J. Gattiker and by 1880 S. F. Amy, Carpenter & Joiner, advertised his place of business as being in the old Catholic Church building. In 1905, this corner at Second Avenue and Oak Street would become the site of the new government post office.

In March, of 1880, Father P. J. Lavin arrived just in time for the St. Patrick's Day celebration. He was an eloquent speaker who never gave a long sermon, but a very good one. He had been a chaplain in the Civil War and often told of his experiences with dying soldiers and of their bravery. He was unfortunate in being at the Newal Hotel in Milwaukee the night of a terrible fire. He was saved but he was never the same afterward. He was the pastor seven and one-half years and the parish was saddened by his departure. The church was incorporated under the laws of the State of Wisconsin on January 16, 1885.

In 1887, Father John T. Durward was assigned this parish, to which his people belonged. During his stay here St. Joseph's cemetery was purchased, the parish house built, the first sister's school established and the present church built and paid for, costing \$30,000. Mr. Ballone of North Freedom died in 1894 leaving all of his \$8,000 estate except about \$1,000 to St. Joseph's congregation. The will was contested and went through court for a couple of years.



Rev. John T. Durward

At last it was settled with the church realizing \$1,800, which initiated the fund for the present church.

In January of 1891, members of the St. Joseph's church congregation were making plans to construct a new church. It was their intention to remove the residence north of their existing church, cut down the embankment and use the dirt to fill in the ravine on the east side and thus provide ample room for the new church. In case all that happened, it was planned that the then present church structure would be used as a schoolhouse for the parish. The new house of worship would be brick and was expected to cost about \$15,000.

However, in July of 1894, M. E. MacPhearson, a local sign and carriage painter, was busy completing a fine piece of work at the church. After two months of work, the whole inside of the church had been brightened up. The woodwork, seats, pillars, chancel etc. had been painted, grained and finished in oil. The ceiling and sidewalls

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had all been hand frescoed. The old windows were cleaned and restained in pretty figures. On August 8, 1894, two handsome side altars were received from LaCrosse to be used in the church.

In February of 1895 a fire broke out in the St. Joseph's buildings about 5:00 in the morning. The barn and horses were destroyed and flames spread to Father Durward's residence resulting in the destruction of most of the house and furniture as well as Durward's library. Earlier in the century, about 1847, Dr. Seth P. Angle constructed this dwelling (304 East Street) in which he also housed the post office.

New Church dedicated in 1904 Corner stone laid in 1902

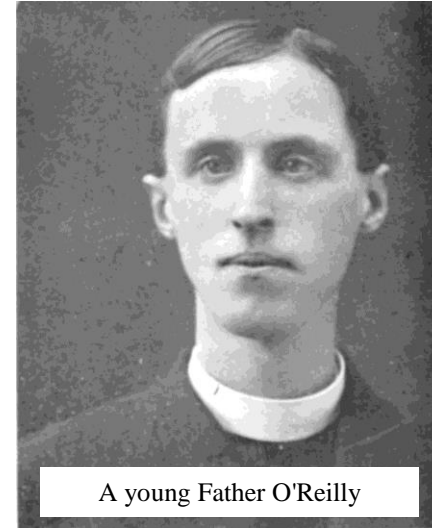
In December of 1901, it was finally decided to construct a new church building between the parsonage and C. W. Whitman's residence. The excavation for the foundation had begun with plans to erect the building in the spring. The old church building would be used as a sister school. The new church was estimated to cost in the area of \$18,000. This estimate, as usually happens, turned out to be quite low because on July 4 of 1904, the fine new \$30,000 stone church was dedicated. The corner stone had been laid two years earlier.

In January of 1906, C. W. Whitman placed a fine engraved transom over the door, which opened into the Blessed Virgin's chapel. The transom was carved from oak and represented the child Jesus. The transom was in memory of Edward W. Melzl, who for a number of years was a most capable assistant in Whitman's Drug Store on the south side.

Following the fire, which destroyed the Grande Opera Hall on the intersection of Oak Street and Fifth Avenue, the old Catholic Church, became the sight of a new hall for that purpose. In December of 1905, workmen were busy, under the supervision of J. P. Hughes of Chicago, constructing a stage. The floor and gallery were expected to seat about 500 people. Plans also included installing electric lights throughout and a beautiful curtain was being prepared. Plans were made for a show about the first of January 1906, which would be put on by members of the Ringling Brothers' Circus and a

noted Chicago company. The house was under the general direction of Father Durward.

Later in November of 1906, great changes were made inside



A young Father O'Reilly

the old church building as it was remodeled to be suitable for a parochial school. The main portion of the church was divided into four sections by means of another floor and partitions. Father Durward was hoping to find three or four sisters who would take charge of the school. The sisters eventually were found and they lived in the attic.

In May of 1907, a new bell for the church arrived. It rang in the key of "G" and weighed in at 2200 pounds with all components. This was the largest of four bells which when put together would form a chime.

In October 1911 the Bishop assigned Reverend Father Edward C. O'Reilly to the parish. It was generally understood that he came to erect a parochial school and he labored very hard for that purpose, far beyond his strength. He succeeded in erecting a school building, costing \$29,000, a convent building for the sisters, costing \$5,500, a new heating plant. He also improved the parish house, had the outside of the church refinished and a gold cross, the symbol of

the society's faith, costing \$2,500, erected upon the dome. A new altar costing \$4,000 was donated by the ladies, and a beautiful pipe organ, the gift of Mrs. Adella M. Ringling, was installed, the choir loft enlarged and supported to receive it. Members of the parish generously donated the carved Stations of the Cross and a devoted daughter placed two handsome side altars in loving memory of her deceased parents.

In June of 1912, the congregation purchased the vacant lot on the south side of Second Street from Charles Whitman. The contract for the school was let in March of 1912 to the Home Lumber Construction Co. of Reedsburg. On April 15, 1912, the old school caught fire so classes could no longer be held there. The building was further demolished and portions of the salvageable material were used in the construction of the convent, which began on May 15, 1912. This project gave most of the idle men in town work. The convent would house six Sisters for the new school. The school and the convent were dedicated in October of 1912.

There is some disagreement here regarding the construction dates of the school and convent. The dates in the preceding paragraph were taken from newspaper reports. Some church records indicate that the school construction started as early as October of 1911 and finished October 16, 1912.

The building of the school was a great undertaking as the school was constructed on an old dumping ground. Over 8,000 loads of dirt were required to fill the rubbish-laden ravine.

Father O'Reilly paid 25-cents a load for fill. The structure was 46 X 80 with three stories above the basement. In an annex on the basement level was the heating plant, which supplied heat for the school and church. The school was in the charge of seven Dominican Sisters who had their home just north of the school.

Probably no pioneer ever devised ways and means of raising money that could excel Father O'Reilly's methods. With his kindness, his wit and tact combined, he has a combination that would be hard to beat. Later, O'Reilly was replaced with Monsignor Francis X. Gray who was responsible for the founding of Camp Gray. The mortgage on the convent was burned in January of 1918. In 2003,



Msgr. O'Reilly and his successor, Very Rev. Francis X. Gray

during Father Vosen's watch, it was decided to expand the church and to that end an addition was dedicated on July 4, 2004. The new addition contained about 4,500 square feet and cost over \$2 million. The addition included a Blessed Sacrament Chapel, Sacristy, Reconciliation Room, a small kitchen, rest rooms and an increase in seating capacity of about 200.