

Parish History...

(from 1982 Pictorial Directory, Wabasha History 1983,)

The first Catholic family came to Lake City in 1856, followed by three more families in 1857. Thus, the Catholic church community in Lake City had begun. The first recorded Catholic service ever held in the fledgling town was in the house of John Moran in 1857, conducted by Father Auster (**also spelled Oster**). Having exclusive charge of an 150,000 square-mile territory that included Mendota, St. Paul, St. Anthony and Wabasha, Father Ravoux would visit these families in passing through Lake City. Father Ravoux and Father Oster came to visit in 1858, staying two days. While the mission church, represented by Father Auster, regularly visited from 'Wabashaw', Father Ravoux repeatedly urged his superior (Bishop Henni, Milwaukee's first bishop) to send additional workers into the mission of the Northwest. Bishop Henni complied, and in July 1850, St. Paul was made an episcopal see under the guidance of Rev. James Cretin. Following the death of Bishop Cretin, Father Ravoux became administrator of the young St. Paul diocese, and realizing the need for a resident pastor in the rapidly growing Wabasha and Goodhue counties, appointed Father Felix Tissot in charge of the Catholics of these two counties in October 1858. His missionary labors included about 25 places, including Lake City, Oakwood, Red Wing, Goodhue and Belvidere. Father Tissot's baptism and marriage records show that between May 8th and November 13th of 1859, he paid four visits to Lake City, baptizing nine infants and marrying one couple. In 1860, Father Tissot again paid four visits and baptized nine infants.

Mass was celebrated in private homes during these visits. But in 1863, less than five years after Father Tissot began his ministrations, two lots were purchased as a site for a future church. Early in 1866, Mr. H.F. Williamson, responding to a need for a public hall, transformed the second story of his large store into an auditorium where church services were held by Father Oster until the old church was built in 1866 on Center Street, one block closer to the lake than the railway tracks. This was a substantial frame building measuring 36 x 60 feet. When Father Hermon (our first resident priest) arrived in 1869, he bought a small house on the corner of Prairie and Center Streets, three blocks from the small church. Then, in 1873, a second property -- an entire block bounded by Lyon, Center, Prairie, and Garden Streets -- was acquired. This property was deemed to be closer to town. The small frame church was moved to the lot adjacent to Father Hermon's residence on the corner of Prairie and Lyon Avenue and services continued at this new location until 1877, when it was converted to a parish school, under the direction of Mother Liguori. Father Quinn, parish priest starting in 1875, converted his own residence into a convent where a boarding school for girls was conducted and he himself moved to a small cottage.

It is to Father Quinn that we owe the present St. Mary's church. He remained in charge during the building of the present brick church, which was completed in 1877 at a cost of \$16,000. William B. Lutz was awarded the stone and brick work contract for the building and Robert White was in charge of carpenter work and decorating.? The top of the cross reached a prominent one hundred and sixty-one feet

above the sidewalk. Clergy and laity came from all areas to witness the momentous event of laying the cornerstone on July 4th of that year. Father Matthew's Total Abstinence Society and St. Patrick's Irish Benevolent Society came by train from Wabasha -- others arrived by wagon and carriage from West Albany and Oakland. They marched to the old church where Father O'Gorman of Rochester celebrated Mass. In the afternoon, Bishop Grace (Diocese of St. Paul) was met at the railroad station and escorted with band music to the church grounds where he officiated during the laying of the cornerstone and Father O'Gorman preached the sermon.

On Christmas Day of 1877, at 6:00 a.m., the first mass was said in the newly-completed church. Three more masses were said that day and the Lake City Leader proclaimed in the December 29th issue,

“The Church is the most chaste and artistic we have ever seen and is carried out with the most perfect harmony. It is the finest Church in the city. It is finished inside to the roof and accommodates about 600 people -- with additional seating space which can be extended to 800 people. The Church is an ornament to the city and its spires can be seen from all parts of Lake Pepin rising above its surroundings.”

The year 1878 marked the beginning of the western colonization movement and a sharp decrease in the size of St. Mary's congregation as ambitious farmers took advantage of cheap land for sale in the West by the railroads. The beautiful church was far from being paid for when these farmers headed west, and now the debt fell on fewer parishioners. The parochial school, conducted in the old church building, had to be discontinued to save expense.

A gift was made in the form of a beautiful one-ton church bell to reside in the bell tower from the “Citizens of Lake City” in 1885. Another inscription read “St Mary, St Joseph, St Francis. Rev F A Quinn, Mrs Anna Killeen. Sponsors: Edward Wise, Mrs P H Rahilly, John O'Brien, Charles Wise.” The saints names were apparently societies within the church at the time. ((Manufactured by HY. Stuckstede B.F. Co., St. Louis, Missouri,)) this bell was recast in 1927 presented as a gift by the Lake City Council of Knights of Columbus.

The parish now began to be supplied by priests from St. Paul, none of whom stayed longer than two years. In 1898, when Father McAuliffe was ordained, St. Mary's wasn't considered a very important first charge. At his coming, the main altar in the church was the one which had been built thirty-one years earlier for the old church. The only church furniture were the pews. Father Hermon's (1869-1875) remodeled small house still served as the rectory and a large debt still burdened the congregation.

In the 13 years that elapsed between Father McAuliffe's coming and going, a new comfortable residence was built for the parish priest and the church was adorned with altars, statues, and lights -- (all in the best possible taste). The debt which had harassed the parish for more than thirty years was paid.

Progress made under Father McAuliffe continued under his successors so again it could be said with truth what had been proclaimed at the first mass celebration in St. Mary's on December 25, 1877 -- "the congregation possessed a house of worship second to none" (Lake City Leader). This material elegance was but the outward expression of the piety and devotion to God of a parish now numbering 150 families.

Father P.G. Gallagher, who succeeded Father McAuliffe, served the parish for a year. He was followed by Father John Cummiskey, who worked to strengthen the faith of his people. To that end, he established the Sodality of Our Lady, the Holy Name Society and St. Mary's Guild. His dream was to establish a school again, which would replace catechism and instruction classes with twelve years of solid religious education. The outbreak of World War I dimmed this dream for a few years, but in 1923, on Easter Sunday, Father Cummiskey announced that the McCahill family wished to give the gift of a school as a memorial to their mother, Mary E. McCahill. The Sisters of St. Francis, from Rochester, were invited as staff (six in total), and Sister Gemma Cagney became the first principal. One hundred and twenty-nine students were enrolled in the first year with two students graduating in June.

With Catholic education assured, Father Cummiskey was authorized by the Church Board to purchase property from Bill Wise on Center and Garden Street for a Sisters' home and to put steam heat in the church building. Many parishioners contributed large amounts to help pay for these projects. When the St. Mary's Guild women added \$1,000 which they had originally been saving toward the purchase of a pipe organ, the sum needed to pay for the expansion was realized. Little did they know that at the same time, Mr. Patrick Rahilly, father of Mrs. McCahill, presented a fine pipe organ to the parish in memory of his wife, Catherine. The pipe organ lends very well to the fine acoustics of St. Mary's. A pipe organ produces odd and even harmonics, which are natural sounds, contrary to only the even numbered harmonics that an electric organ produces. Truly, this pipe organ was a great gift. This completed the furnishing and adornment of the edifice.

Father Cummiskey was replaced in 1927 by Father D.A. Cunningham. During his tenure, the Reding family house (St. Joseph's House?), next to the convent, was bought for the purpose of enlarging the school playground. In 1930, Father Daniel Lavery succeeded Father Cunningham and had the difficult task of guiding the parish during the Depression years. When Father J. Stanley Hale arrived to assume the pastorate in 1939, he immediately began redecorating the church in preparation for its Diamond Jubilee. This was followed by many improvements in church property. Several rooms were remodeled in the school and equipment was added to enlarge and enhance the educational program. The Diamond Jubilee was highlighted by the celebration of a Pontifical High Mass by Most Reverend Francis M. Kelly, the Bishop of the Diocese of Winona.

In June 1943, Reverend Michael Glynn began his ten-year stay at St. Mary's. In 1947, he helped the parish celebrate the ordination and First Mass of Father Coleman Barry, the first priest to emerge from our parish family. In June 1952, the decision was made to close the high school at McCahill Institute because of dwindling numbers so the school now went up to Eighth Grade. Father Glynn was transferred to Adrian in September 1953, and was succeeded by Reverend Henry Russell, a cousin of our present-day beloved Fr. James Russell.

Father Russell spent twelve years in Lake City, directing several major efforts to improve the parish properties. In 1956, the residence at the corner of Center and Prairie Streets was purchased, giving St. Mary's ownership of the entire block. ???The Janitor's former home was razed to provide more playground space and more parking. A beautiful new addition was built onto the Convent, giving the Sisters a chapel and more bedroom space, and the entire house was redecorated. A connecting unit (now called the Annex) was built to join the school and church and insulation and decoration of the church was completed. Father Russell was assisted during these years by visiting priests Father William Kuisle, Donald Grubisch, Phillip Gerlach, Joseph Mountain, and Father John Mountain. The parishioners so loved Father Russell that they joined together to buy him a new car before he left. FOR HIS RETIREMENT? FOR A GOING AWAY GIFT? WHAT TYPE OF CAR?

During this time, the ornate high altar was taken down due to concerns for safety. The altar rail remained in place, as did the front-facing altar. A few years later, due to new directives that Vatican II set forth, the altar was turned around so that the congregation could now see the priest. WHEN?

Rt. Reverend Monsignor Warren Ryan became our pastor in August 1965. During one year of his stay, he was assisted by Father John Czapewski. In June 1968, McCahill School dropped grades seven and eight, due to the decreasing number of Sisters available to teach and the rapidly rising cost of operating the school.

During the summer of 1968, the pipe organ was renovated. Over the past 40 years, the organ had received constant use and a bit of abuse. Mr. Louis Jappe, a Pipe Organ Technician of Winona, cleaned the organ chambers and all 908 of the pipes, and replaced about 45 pipes which were stolen or damaged by vandals. As a result of a fund-drive under the direction of Ben Simons, a solid state transistor (which cuts the number of moving parts) and a rank of pipes called the Four Foot Principle were added. The new rank of pipes increased the total number to around 1,000 and greatly enhanced the versatility of the organ. These renovations returned the organ to its earlier glory. To celebrate, a men's choir was formed under the direction of Mr. Robert Ruberto and accompanied by Mr. Mike Corrigan.

Parish leadership again changed in August 1968. Father A.T. Perrizo arrived to fulfill his duties as pastor. He directed the first phase of a number of improvements to the steeple of the church in the summer of 1969. During Father Perrizo's stay, the parish celebrated the ordination of Father Roger Swenson by Pope Paul VI in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in May 1970, and his first Mass at St. Mary's. MORE ABOUT THIS GUY?? Monsignor Roger Swenson now fulfills his duties at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Metairie, Louisiana.

Father Donald Leary transferred to St. Mary's in September 1971. During his tenure, new furnishings were purchased for the altar and the church redecorated to conform to the new directives for the celebration of the Eucharist. McCahill school had to be closed because the Sisters of St. Francis could no longer staff it. Father Leary enlisted the aid of our good neighbors, the Ursuline nuns from Villa Maria, who established a twelve grade CCD program. They trained lay teachers and, in the course of five years, built up a group of lay people from the parish to keep the classes in religion going. Sister Olga Grof became Parish Coordinator in 1974, and in her three years, continued to amplify the program and supervised all phases of parish religious activity.

In the spring of 1975, the wood steeples of the church were replaced as part of a church redecorating project, but a storm on August 21 of that year produced 100 mile per hour winds that damaged the wooden spires. The large steeple was visibly tilted. To correct this problem, the new steeples are made of insulated aluminum with a steel frame – the large steeple (102') is the same size as the old one, and the small steeple (26') is five feet higher than the old one. The Kentucky company who undertook the project ((OR Campbellsville Industries, Inc. (known as "The Steeple People") of Kentucky)) is the only company in the country which constructs and erects steeples as large as St. Mary's. The new steeples were installed in August 1976.

At this time, the McCahill school building had been rented to the public school system for lower grade classes while awaiting completion of the new Bluff View School. When Father Harry P. Jewison succeeded Father Leary in July 1977 (and the public school no longer needed to rent it), he and the Parish Pastoral Council decided to remodel the structure to provide more suitable space for CCD classes, which previously had been held in the empty convent. Under Father Jewison's direction and encouragement, the McCahill school building was remodeled to incorporate a Parish Center on the first floor, restore the original gymnasium to its former use and redecorate and refurnish four classrooms on the second floor for religion classes. This was a giant step toward more community involvement, for St. Mary's Parish Center was immediately in demand for all kinds of civic events as well as parish affairs. It filled a long-felt need for a central, easily-accessible meeting place and was promptly rented for many activities. Under Father Jewison's leadership, the parish community became active in ecumenical projects such as the Vietnamese

Refugee Resettlement, playing a leading part in finding homes and clothing and in securing space and teachers for English education for the refugees. The parish community reached out in many ways to serve its neighbors.

When Father Richard Engels became our pastor in 1980, St. Mary's had developed a Christian maturity which progressed under his leadership as we continued to grow in wisdom and grace before the Lord. Fr. Engels was instrumental in the preservation of the church's stained glass windows. In 1980, the former janitor's house on the corner of Prairie and Center was demolished.

Father Donald Leary returned to St. Mary's in 1988. During this time, St. Mary's parish continued to grow in faith.

When Fr. Leary retired in 1995, Father James McCauley moved here. In the spring of 1996, it was decided to move the pipe organ to the front of the church. This was quite a change for St. Mary's, having had the organ in the balcony for the previous 70 years. The organ now rests in the front of the church, with the addition of a choir podium and the donation of an upright grand piano by Sue and John McElmury and Lisa and Doug Wallerich in memory of their daughter and sister Kristine. The stained-glass window that was hidden for so many years in the balcony could now be seen and the parish took this opportunity to repaint the inner walls and redecorate the inside.

After the retirement of Fr. McCauley in 1999, our present-day Father James Russell became the new pastor. Under the guidance and encouragement of Fr. Russell, St. Mary's ... In his first year, Fr. Russell started a youth group for 11th and 12th graders, with Janet Thompson and Linda Harvey as leaders. Financial support continues to grow in our parish. WHAT TO ADD?

Our First Priest from our Parish:

Rev. Coleman Barry

grew up in Lake City -- 2 sisters and 1 brother
graduated from St. John's University in 1942 with a degree in history
ordained to the priesthood in 1947
earned a doctorate from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. in 1953
began teaching History and Theology at St. John's -- 1953
became the seventh president of SJU in 1964
from 1973-1978, was dean of religious studies at the Catholic University
visiting professor of church history at Yale University in 1973
director of the Institute for Spirituality at SJU from 1978-1983
president of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library
author of: "Catholic Minnesota"
"Readings in Church History"
"American Nuncio: Cardinal Aloysius Muench"
"Worship and Work" -- history of St. John's
editor of the periodicals -- Benedictine Studies and the American Benedictine Review
chairman of the National Committee on Education for Ecumenism in 1965
president of the Minnesota Association of Colleges in 1967
recipient of many honorary degrees
awarded the Papal Medal at Catholic University in 1977

Reverend Coleman Barry, the first priest from our parish to follow his calling to priesthood, influenced not only his immediate community, but also that of the greater community. He grew up in Lake City, graduated from St. John's University (SJU) in Minnesota in 1942 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1947. From there, he earned a doctorate from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., in 1953 and returned to St. John's to teach History and Theology. His love of learning continued throughout his life, helping him to become the seventh President of his alma mater in 1964. From 1973-1978, he presided as the Dean of Religious Studies at Catholic University while teaching at Yale University in 1973. He returned once again to SJU and was appointed director of the Institute for Spirituality and president of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library. Rev. Barry authored many books, including Worship and Work (history of St. John's), Catholic Minnesota, and American Nuncio: Cardinal Aloysius Muench. He was the recipient of numerous honorary degrees and was awarded the Papal Medal at Catholic University in 1977.

Heating System of St. Mary's:

Previous to the construction of the McCahill School, three hot-air furnaces provided individual heat to the church, the convent, and the rectory. Upon construction of the McCahill School, a central heating plant was installed which served the entire parish complex during the mid-1920s. Originally, the double-boiler operation was fueled by wood, then coal, then oil, and finally gas. Each building was controlled by a separate thermostat. The two original boilers were made of American Standard Cast Iron, with twelve sections to each boiler. Possibly through lack of maintenance, these boilers had to be replaced. Gene McCahill contracted with the Brose Brothers and had the original boilers replaced with steel boilers. For years, only one boiler was used, whereby both should have been in operation. Because of this overuse and lack of proper care, the one boiler had to be removed. At this time, the rectory and the convent were returned to their own individual heating units.

Because both the church and the Parish Center have now been completely insulated, large windows [were] replaced by smaller openings and the entire number of church windows have had a storm type of outer window applied in 1981 for insulation, and preservation of the stained glass windows under the guidance of Father Richard Engels.

Automatic valves were installed on the boiler which allows the thermostats to operate individually, calling for heat in the church or the Parish Center as needed. Due to this automation, the constant care and attention once needed daily, is no longer necessary. The heating system is now in good operating condition with the boiler working at full capacity when this report was made January 20th, 1985.

Information concerning the history of the heating plant located in the basement of the McCahill Parish Center, was given by Ben Simons. (1985)