

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – EAU CLAIRE

MOTHER CHURCH:
THE EARLY HISTORY OF ST. HENRY PARISH
EAU GALLE, WI 1856-1920

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This paper is dedicated to those early members and priests of the congregation of St. Henry whom without, the church and this paper would have been impossible and to my grandfather, Alfred J. Wolf, who instilled in me an appreciation for and love of this parish.

As you drive along County Road D in rural Dunn County, Wisconsin you will see many typical Wisconsin sites. You'll travel past fields of corn, red barns, Holstein cows, and small towns existing of nothing more than a few homes, bars and a church. Among these small towns in Wisconsin is the tiny incorporated village of Eau Galle, located 16 miles southeast of Menomonie, Wisconsin and 65 miles southwest of St. Paul, Minnesota.¹

Your drive will seem rather boring, a few homes dot the sides of the road and eventually you see an imposing structure of brick and glass, with a large steeple. However, if you are not paying attention you just might miss it; after all it looks like just another country church on the side of the road, only appearing bustling and alive on Sunday mornings, or during the occasional weekday funeral or Saturday wedding. Though it is by far the tallest building in the village, a drive through Eau Galle can take merely minutes and if you blink you just might miss the sight of the large Roman edifice as it sits upon the lake.

However, the curious will see not only the large cemetery, parsonage, school building and hall that flank the church, but also the lake upon which the church sits. On a bright spring day, the view can be breathtaking as the flowers and trees blossom to create a backdrop worthy of a painting. As you look at the church, with the cemetery to its right and the parsonage to its left, you will see not only the cornerstone date of 1917, but an old piece of rock inscribed with the date 1893 and a more recent piece of stone bearing a plaque which reads, "In Memory of the Founders and the Faithful of the Parish of St. Henry, who for One Hundred Fifty Years Have Born Witness to God's Love in Eau Galle. Dedicated on the Sesquicentennial of Our Parish – July 16, 2006."²

¹ See Appendix A.

² "St. Henry Dedication Plaque," photograph by author.

Every person has a story - a set of unique events and tales that tells the reader or listener a little more about the human experience. However, it is equally plausible that every building and community has a story as well. In the unincorporated town of Eau Galle, WI there lies a brick building that from all outward appearances appears to be a simple country church. However, upon examination this building and the community that it is tied to have a unique story. As the plaque reads, the parish has been around for over 150 years. How then did it come to be? What is the story of this church? Why is it still standing and alive every Sunday morning? More importantly who were the people and what were the events crucial to the creation and development of this tiny parish and community? The answers to all of these questions are pertinent to understanding the story of this group of people and this village.

The church of St. Henry in Eau Galle, WI is more than a building; it is a group of people shaped by tradition and time. Over the past 150 years this building and the people who make up the parish have been a unifying force in the township of Eau Galle. The parish has witnessed the rise and fall of Eau Galle from a booming logging town to an unincorporated community, and as the plaque reads, throughout this all has continued to bear witness to God's love. Through an examination of available primary sources, this paper looks to discover and analyze the early history of the parish of St. Henry. By researching early church records, census data, and newspapers, a history of important people, events and themes can be constructed.

From its earliest days, as a mission of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin to the rise and fall of the village of Eau Galle, St. Henry parish has been a notable part of the village and important in the religious lives of its inhabitants. The primary sources and this paper will tell the story of one small parish in central Wisconsin, from its creation in 1856 to the dedication of the

current church in 1919. This story then is ultimately the story of the spread and survival of Catholicism in rural America.

To best understand the story of the church, an understanding of the history of religion and Catholicism in the United States is needed. Organized religions such as Catholicism first entered the United States when explorers from the Old World set foot on the land now known as America. Among the diseases, weapons, and values that these early explorers brought with them were their religious beliefs. However, the travel of the religious beliefs was not a simple process of relocation. In *The American Church Experience* by Thomas A. Askew and Richard V. Pierard, they state, “The faith that the early settlers brought to the New World was shaped by its physical and cultural environments, just as Christianity always reflected the character of the cultures in which the gospel message took root.”³

In Wisconsin, the spread of religion and specifically Catholicism began with the exploration of the French. According to the *Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, the territory now known as Wisconsin was originally under the jurisdiction of the Quebec diocese even after the French left the area:

In 1791 the area was formally transferred to the new see of Baltimore. In 1808 it came under the direction of Benedict Joseph Flaget of Bardstown. Flaget actually visited this far-flung area of his diocese and after the trip impressed on Roman officials that it was too far for him to ever go again. In 1821 Wisconsin was transferred to the see of Cincinnati and in 1833 given to the newly created Diocese of Detroit.⁴

By 1844 the Diocese of Milwaukee had been created and by 1850 the Diocese of St. Paul was formed which reduced some of area of the Milwaukee Diocese. Eventually in 1868 after the

³Thomas Askew and Richard V. Pierard, *The American Church Experience: A Concise History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 15.

⁴Michael Glazier and Thomas J. Shelley, eds. *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 1478.

Second Plenary Council in Baltimore, the dioceses of La Crosse and Green Bay were formed. Reverend Michael Heiss, himself a German immigrant to the country and a close friend of the Bishop of Milwaukee was appointed the first bishop of La Crosse.⁵ During this time it is reported Bishop Heiss visited many of the churches in his jurisdiction; St. Henry Parish incidentally was one of those churches.

An understanding of the location of the parish and the history of the village in which it resides is also helpful. The *Dunn County History* of 1984 tells of the origination of the village's name, "In 1832, French *voyageurs* gave the river its name, Eau Galle, which means muddy water."⁶ In the 1925 *History of Dunn County* the author offers a detailed description of the village and township:

Eau Galle is a small village on the Eau Galle River in the southeastern part of the town of the same name, or in Township 36[sic] north of range 14 west. The situation is picturesque, as the river here widens into a small lake called Eau Galle Pond, caused by the building of a dam, and on the opposite side from the village are some fairly high bluffs. It is a rural community and distant some seven or eight miles from the nearest railroad, which is the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul.⁷

The village and township of Eau Galle reside in the southwestern corner of Dunn County, bordered by the Weston Township to the north and the Dunn Township to the east. Much of what is known about the early history of the township comes from oral stories passed down through families. According to John Russell, a local historian who typed an outline of the history of the townships of Dunn County, early records from the county do not exist because of a fire that destroyed the county seat in 1858. When the government was reestablished in 1858, the county

⁵ Ibid., 1479.

⁶ Dunn County Historical Society, *Dunn County History* (Dunn County: Dunn County Historical Society, 1984) 23.

⁷ Franklin Curtis-Wedge, George O. Jones and others, eds. *History of Dunn County*, (Minneapolis: H.C. Cooper, Jr. & Co, 1925), 210-11.

seat moved to Menomonie and the county was divided into the five townships of Eau Galle, Spring Brook, Rock Creek, Dunn and Menomonie; subsequent townships formed after this year were broken off of the original five.⁸

Stated in both the *History of Dunn County* and the *History of Northern Wisconsin*, European settlers first entered the area of Eau Galle circa 1832 and came because of the attraction of pine lumber. Curtis-Wedge notes the building of a dam and sawmill in 1838 by Captain George Wales, Thomas Savage, and a Captain Dix. Eventually, the mill would undergo several ownership and names changes until the final owners William Carson and Elbridge D. Rand . The mill was instrumental in the settlement of Eau Galle; numerous employees of the firm settled near the mill and the town.⁹ Though originally a sawmill, by the 1870s nearly all the lumber had been cleared and the mill was converted into a roller flour mill, one of the first in the state.¹⁰ One of the impacts of the dam and the mill is on the landscape. The creation of the dam on the Eau Galle River formed the small Lake Eau Galle, also known as Mill Pond, upon which the current church sits.

Though initially prosperous due to its location on a river and the success of the mill and dam, Eau Galle did not continue to flourish during the 20th century. As the *Dunn County History* states:

The village proper at its high point in the early 1900s boasted many shops, a planning mill, as well as a resident physician. In the 1920s a fire swept through the town gutting many buildings which were never reconstructed. In decline since that time the population of Eau Galle leveled off in 1950 to its present number.¹¹

⁸ John M. Russell, "Outline history of townships and villages of Dunn County," located in Area Research Center County Archives Library Learning Center, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie.

⁹Curtis-Wedge, 210.

¹⁰ Curtis-Wedge, 210.

Despite the decline, during the mid 20th century the village did flourish for a time. The post office is thought to have originated around 1885 and three different creamery operations were also installed.¹² For a time, a wagon and repair shop was run by George R. Topliss and by 1925 there were three general stores in operation.¹³ On the 1888 plat map compiled by C.M. Foote, a boarding house, School No.1 and a carpenter shop are all shown.¹⁴ Today the village remains unincorporated with only a small general store, the Catholic church, a wedding chapel, and bar functioning within the village limits.

As documented in the 1925, *History of Dunn County* the religious needs of citizens of Eau Galle were served by the Catholic parish of St. Henry's and the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodist Episcopal Church began in 1856 and erected several church buildings – the final of which was built in between 1916 and 1920. Initially the parish began with over 103 members but that number dwindled to 72 by 1979, and 60 by 1984.¹⁵ Today though the building stands, the church no longer operates as a Methodist Episcopal church but instead serves as the Lakeside Wedding Chapel. Though it received no mention in the original *History of Dunn County*, the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church operated for a short time in rural Eau Galle. Organized in 1889 it shared pastors with neighboring towns and in 1952 the members agreed to close the

¹¹ Dunn County Historical Society, 23.

¹² Curtis-Wedge, 211.

¹³ Ibid., 211.

¹⁴ Charles Martin Foote, *Plat book of Dunn County, Wisconsin drawn from actual surveys and the county records by C.M. Foote & W.S. Brown*. (Minneapolis: C.M. Foote & Co., 1888), 20. See Appendix C.

¹⁵ "Dedication Day the Eau Galle Methodist Church" pamphlet, electronic photocopy of the original, 12 April 1959; and Dunn County Historical Society, 23.

church and join St. Peter's Church of Elmwood.¹⁶ The church building no longer stands, though the cemetery is still maintained.

Though no major publications exist on the parish of St. Henry alone, several books have been written that do offer brief histories of the parish. Starting in 1895, Harry Heming compiled a *History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin*. This book documents the spread of Catholicism into the area now known as the state of Wisconsin, as well as providing brief histories of parishes indexed by diocese.¹⁷ Subsequently in 1925, the *History of Dunn County* by Franklyn Curtis-Wedge was published, documenting the history of the parish under the history of the Eau Galle Township in which the church resides.¹⁸ In 1960, Very Reverend Stephen Anderl, V.F., published *Parish of the Assumption* a centennial history of St. Mary's Parish in Durand, Wisconsin. Though the main focus of the book is the title parish, it also offers a significant contribution to the history of the nearby St. Henry Parish.¹⁹ Once again in 1984, Dunn County published another history of their area and a history of St. Henry's was included. Finally, by far the most complete history of the parish to date was written by Rosey Asher and Marge Hartung, parishioners of the church for the sesquicentennial of the parish. "St. Henry Parish Eau Galle, Wisconsin 1856-2006," provides information on many facets of parish life during the 150 years

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Harry Hooper Heming, *The Catholic Church in Wisconsin: A History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Milwaukee: Catholic Historical Publishing Company, 1895-1898).

¹⁸ Dunn County Historical Society, *Dunn County History*.

¹⁹ Stephen Anderl, *Parish of the Assumption: The Life and Times of the Mystical Christ in Durand, Wisconsin 1860-1960*, (Park Falls: Weber Publishing Co., 1960).

of the church.²⁰ Though these books are instrumental in constructing a history of the parish, early knowledge of the church before the construction of the current building is still weak.

However, a significant amount of primary sources are available. In 1979, the Genealogical Society of Utah photocopied the records from the parish which are now available on microfilm at the University of Wisconsin-Stout Area Research Center.²¹ The parish also maintains copies of these records but they are unavailable for browsing and records may only be individually requested. Newspaper reports on the parish exist in several newspapers which served the Eau Galle area. *The Dunn County News* from Menomonie, Wisconsin and *The Entering Wedge* and *The Pepin County Courier* which combined to form the *The Courier Wedge* all published in Durand, Wisconsin offer valuable information on the creation and growth of the parish.²² Finally several maps and census records from Eau Galle give insight to the early history of the church.

During the first thirteen years of the parish, details are sparse. However, the most important theme that resonates is St. Henry Parish's missionary origin. Sometime during the year of 1856 the first mass was celebrated in Eau Galle marking the beginning of the congregation. Though no primary sources exist on the convening of this mass, numerous secondary sources attest to this year as the beginning of the Catholic congregation of Eau Galle. As the *St. Henry Parish History* book states, "St. Henry Parish was founded in 1856 by Fr. John Phalen. It is one

²⁰ "St. Henry Parish Eau Galle, Wisconsin 1856-2006" written and compiled by Rosey Asher and Marge Hartung (Unpublished book created for the sesquicentennial of the parish) 2005-2006.

²¹ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Genealogical Department. "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin" microform, 1861-1979, photocopied.

²² *The Dunn County News* (Menomonie); *The Entering Wedge* (Durand); *The Pepin County Courier* (Durand); and *The Courier-Wedge* (Durand).

of the oldest parishes in the LaCrosse Diocese and is considered the mother church of the Durand-Menomonie area. The Mass was first celebrated in the homes of James Rayburn and other early settlers.”²³ Both Dunn County history books cite this year as the beginning of the congregation of Eau Galle. One source apparently incorrectly cites a different year; Steven M. Avella writes in his book on the history of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, “Dunn County had St. Francis in Menominee [*sic*] and St. Peter in Eau Galle which opened doors by 1863.”²⁴ This appears to be a mistake upon the author’s part as not only was St. Henry at no time referred to as St. Peter’s but there is no confirmation that at any point the parish of St. Joseph in Menomonie was called St. Francis. Incidentally St. Joseph’s accepted date of origin is seen as 1861.

As cited in the parish history book, the first mass was said to have been performed at the home of James Rayburn a prominent Eau Galle citizen. Like many of the early settlers of Eau Galle, Rayburn was of Irish descent although he was originally born in New Brunswick, Canada.²⁵ The *History of Dunn County* also credits him as being the first blacksmith in Eau Galle.²⁶ Another prominent citizen of the time, Patrick Fitzgerald, originally from England, found work in Eau Galle with Carson & Eaton while also being one of the first members of the parish.²⁷ By 1859, the parish had established their own building for worship. This building was erected east of the current building near the bridge that crosses the Eau Galle River.

²³ “St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006,” 11.

²⁴ Steven M. Avella, *In the Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1843-1958* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 200), 265.

²⁵ Anderl, 45.

²⁶ Curtis-Wedge, 211.

²⁷ Anderl. 45.

Little information is available on the first pastor at the church though he is thought to have said mass starting in 1856. Father John Phelan's pastorate term is listed in the parish history as lasting from 1856-1866 and is cited in the *History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin*, as being the founder of the parish and being succeeded by Rev. Smitting, which is an accepted misspelling of Father Smeddinck's last name.²⁸ If this is the case, Father Phelan's term could not have lasted to the extent it did. Because early records from Notre Dame Catholic Church in Chippewa Falls reveal baptisms being performed September 1860, May 1862, June 1862, September 1863, June 1864 and September 1864 by Father Benneidict Smeddinck as well as records of burials from 1864 to 1866, Father Smeddinck's term must have begun much earlier than 1866 and Father Phelan's time must have ended prior to 1860.²⁹ It also appears from these records that early missionaries made visit primarily during the months of May, June and September; most likely because those months had the most favorable weather and thus traveling conditions.

The discrepancies in the first pastoral terms exist largely because no formal records were kept for St. Henry Parish alone until Father Nicholas' pastorate began in 1869. While plausible that both Phelan and Smeddinck were saying mass during the same time, it seems incongruent with what has been written about the missionary nature of the church until 1866. In several histories of the church, missionary priests are given credit for serving the parish until the appointment of Father Arthur Fagan as the first resident pastor in 1866.³⁰ Therefore, it is likely

²⁸ "St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006", 25 and Heming, 809.

²⁹ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Genealogical Department. "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Chippewa County, Wisconsin" microform, 1858-1982, photocopied.

that Father Phelan's term serving the parish was not as extensive or as well recorded as Father Smeddinck's service.

However, the memory of St. Henry parishioners and other historians attests to the story that one of the first men to say mass at St. Henry was the Reverend Michael Heiss, who would later become the first bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse before becoming Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Though no known records document this, collective memory seems to suggest it did occur. In the parish history book, the biography of Reverend Heiss states that he is believed to have been one of the first men to say Mass in Eau Galle.³¹ Reverend Michael Heiss's visit is also documented in the 1925 *History of Dunn County*, though again no reliable source is given³²

Though 1866 was the first year that a permanent pastor was placed at the parish, 1869 proved to be a more important year for future generations. In this year Father D.L. Nicholas began his pastorate at the parish and began keeping detailed records of baptisms, marriages, and burials. From these records much can be learned about the nature of the church during this time. In the first pages of the records, Father Nicholas records the previous history of the parish and the priests before him including, "Revdus Fagan [*sic*] 1866, Rev. Florenz, Fr. Smithing (said to be a missionary)." The surname Smithing is seen as a corruption of the Father Benedict Smeddinck's last name.³³ Most likely Reverend Fagan refers to the first resident pastor Father

³⁰ "St Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 25 and Heming, 809.

³¹ "St Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 25.

³² Curtis-Wedge, 212.

³³ "St Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 25.

Arthur Fagan, while Rev. Florenz refers to Reverend Florentine Zadioski a Carmelite of Minor Conventual and a native of Russia.³⁴

The most prominent theme from the early records of the church is St. Henry's role as a mission to other parishes. In the same way that Father Smeddinck made his way to Eau Galle to perform masses, baptisms, and burials, the resident priest at Eau Galle would travel to nearby towns to offer his ecclesiastical services. Included with the records for the Eau Galle congregation, are records for congregations in Durand, Menomonie, Plum City, El Paso, Farmhill, East Springfield, and Mondovi. All of these missions were served for sometime by the resident pastor at Eau Galle between the years 1869 to 1881.³⁵ Prior to 1866, Eau Galle was included among a list of missions served by Father Smeddinck and Notre Dame Parish in Chippewa Falls. As recorded in the *History of the Catholic Church*, "The parish of St. Mary's at Durand, Pepin County, Wis., was established in 1860 by the Rev. B. Smedding, at that time resident pastor at Chippewa Falls."³⁶ In 1861, St. Joseph's Parish in Menomonie was also established through the work of Father Smeddinck with records for the church as early as 1859.³⁷ All three parishes thus made up a group of churches that Father Smeddinck helped establish.

Eau Galle baptismal records for the parish indicate that Durand was served as mission from 1869 to 1877.³⁸ This coincides with one parish history which attests to the service of D. L.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Genealogical Department. "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin" microform, 1861-1979, photocopied.

³⁶ Heming, 805.

³⁷ Gerald Edward Fisher *Dawn is My Dusk: History of the LaCrosse Diocese*. United States: np, 1969) and "Church and Cemetery Records: Chippewa County."

³⁸ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Genealogical Department. "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin" microform, 1861-1979, photocopied.

Nicholas and John Meurs both priests from Eau Galle. However, another parish history printed in 1985 states this about the origination of St. Mary Parish in Durand:

The first Catholic congregation in Durand was started in 1860 when Mission services were held by Father B. Schmedding of Chippwa Falls.... In 1868 Father B. Schmedding took charge and in 1869 Father D.I. Micheuas. In 1870 came Father John Meuers in 1873 Father H.J. Wirtz and Father George Keller and in 1875 Father Froelich.³⁹

Though not verified, it is assumed that Father D.I. Micheaus is Father D.L. Nicholas since other histories cite his reign at the church during this time period and records from Eau Galle corroborate this.⁴⁰

While Menomonie records range from the years 1869 to 1875, Plum City records from Eau Galle range from 1878 to 1880. El Paso baptismal records range from 1870 to 1875 and from 1878 to 1880 and Farmhill baptismal records 1878 to 1881. East Springfield was served during 1870 and 1871 and Lost Creek records indicate service during 1879 and 1880. Finally, St. Patrick Parish near present day Mondovi was served from 1873 until 1876.⁴¹ This corroborates with the history of the church printed by Curtis-Wedge.⁴² The missionary work that the priests of St. Henry did to the surrounding areas thus tells the story of the spread of Catholicism in rural parts of America. In the same way that Eau Galle was established through a traveling priest, other parishes in the area were established through a traveling priest who was based in Eau Galle.

³⁹ Faith of our Fathers: Past, Present, Into the Future 1860-1985, St. Mary's Assumption Durand, Wisconsin, np, 1985

⁴⁰ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Genealogical Department. "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin" microform, 1861-1979, photocopied.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Curtis-Wedge, 210.

During the late 1870s, the Catholic Church of Eau Galle first began to receive notice in the recently established newspapers of the area. On December 27th, 1876 the Dunn County News reported the Christmas service as being well attended.⁴³ Likewise, the following spring, the paper commented on the Ash Wednesday services and the funeral of a parish member.⁴⁴ These reports, though rather simple, give insight into the importance of the church in the town and the functions of the church in the community as a worship and burial center. Future reports give further insight into the happenings at the parish including improvements to the church; in October of that year the church was able to add a bell to the building costing 158 dollars.⁴⁵

In December of 1877 the town of Eau Galle made plans to host a New Year's Ball in aid of the church. The following week they reported on the success of the dance:

The dance that left all other dances for a long time past in the shade, was the one at Eau Galle, in Messrs. Carson & Rand's boarding house, New Year's night. One hundred and fifteen numbers were sold, and over three hundred people partook of a supper that would do credit to any first-class hotel. The people came from all points of the compass. Pepin County, Menomonie, and Rusk had representatives. Only one place in Dunn County could muster such a crowd to a dance and that place is Eau Galle. The proceeds of the part was give to the Catholic church of Eau Galle, which is now in a very prosperous condition; they having recently placed a very fine bell on the church and otherwise improved the premises.⁴⁶

The large attendance to the dance attests not only to the prosperity of Eau Galle at the time, but may also be a result of the many missions that the Eau Galle priests were attending to in Pepin County and Menomonie at this time.

⁴³ *Dunn County News* (Menomonie), 27 December 1876.

⁴⁴ *Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 17 February 1877 and 26 May 1877.

⁴⁵ *Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 16 October, 1877.

⁴⁶ *Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 5 January 1878.

Unfortunately reports on the church were not always of the positive nature, in a report two months later the paper detailed the burglary at the home of the priest. It read, “Last Sunday while the Catholic priest was holding public service some villain broke into his residence. He broke a stove hook trying to open a bureau drawer. Nothing was missed except for a few cigars.”⁴⁷ It appears that the victim priest was most likely Father Nicholas Flammang a man who served from July 1877 to September 1880.⁴⁸ Apparently despite the idyllic setting of Eau Galle not even the local priest was safe from a burglary. Incidentally two years later in February of 1879, the Dunn County News would report yet another loss to Father Flammang, that of his valuable horse.⁴⁹ This report was also the first newspaper account to refer to the Eau Galle Catholic congregation as that of St. Henry’s, however subsequent reports continued to refer to it as the Eau Galle Catholic Church.

As the newspaper reports on the church continued in to 1879 they reported on the improvements being made to the 1859 frame church. “The Catholic society are [*sic*] making quite a change in the external appearance of their church. They have the spire nearly completed. We understand it is their intention to repaint the building also to enclose both church and parsonage within a picket fence,” declared the *Dunn County News* in March of 1879.⁵⁰ Though it is unknown how the church was able to finance such an addition to their building, the article does illustrate the continued success and growth of the church during the late 1870s. One

⁴⁷*Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 7 March 1878.

⁴⁸ “Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin”

⁴⁹*Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 19 February 1879.

⁵⁰*Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 17 March 1879.

financial solution comes from the parish history which credits Father Henry J. Wirtz with improving the finances through quotas that charge five dollars per family per year.⁵¹

Though from 1869 until 1876, the parish of St. Henry was a mission to other parishes in the area, eventually this time ended and the growth of Durand led to the placement of Father Albert Mendl to Durand where he served Eau Galle, Bear Creek Valley and Nelson as missions. Anderl writes:

He [Mendl] became aware very soon that the Durand community was growing and that the parish there was much more centrally located in relation to the missions attached to St. Henry's therefore, the logical place for the pastor to live....In the summer of 1876 he finished the Durand church and built a rectory, and with the approval of Bishop Heiss, he moved to Durand and took up residence there.⁵²

However this placement in Durand seems not to have lasted long as by 1878 Reverend Nicholas Flammang was living at Eau Galle long enough to be robbed during mass.⁵³ Likewise, the 1880 United States Census lists Flammang as living in Eau Galle at that time⁵⁴. Both Reverend Flammang and his successor Reverend Joseph Maria Bauer were appointed as pastors of both St. Henry Parish and St. Mary Parish during their pastorates though it is unclear where they took up residence.⁵⁵ Despite reports that Eau Galle was served as a mission by St. Mary's in Durand, during this time, the parish register still included records for Eau Galle and the other missions in Pierce County.⁵⁶

⁵¹ "St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 11-12.

⁵² Anderl, 60.

⁵³ *Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 7 March 1878.

⁵⁴ Manuscript Census, Town of Eau Galle, Dunn County, Wisconsin, U.S. Census of Population, 1880 in Area Research Center County Archives Library Learning Center, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie.

⁵⁵ "St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 27.

⁵⁶ "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin"

The next significant event in the church's history came with its incorporation on December 6th, 1883 as reported by Harry Heming.⁵⁷ The parish history book also mentions the event declaring, "In 1883 St. Henry Parish became incorporated, with papers being signed by Bishop Killian Flasch, Fr. Weckes, Michael Kelly and Aloys Wolf."⁵⁸ Anderl describes the same incorporation process as it was done at St. Mary Parish in Durand and attributes the act to a change in Wisconsin by-laws for religious organizations.⁵⁹ It was also during this time that plans were made for the building of a new church at a different location on the western side of town. This building was also financed through parishioner donations, according to the church history, "As parishioners made some preset minimum pledge for the new church, they were permitted to purchase cemetery lots at a reduced cost. Also, as the people pledge an amount, they were given a pew number which corresponded to a number painted on the end of a church pew. These numbers were used to track contributions, thus the term, 'pew rent'."⁶⁰

Though the plans for the new building are thought to have begun as early as 1883, it was not until 1893 that any significant work was done on the building. Incidentally, the work on the building was reported not only in the local papers but also in the *Marshfield Times*. On Friday August 4th, 1893 the paper reported "Rev. J.M. Baur of Durand, laid the corner-stone of the new St. Henry's church at Eau Galle with appropriate ceremonies."⁶¹ A month before that however the *Entering Wedge* of Durand reported the building as being nearly finished and the arrival of

⁵⁷Heming, 894.

⁵⁸"St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 12.

⁵⁹Anderl, 67.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Friday August 1893.

the new pastor, Father William Redding. As the paper notes, he took residence in the old parsonage until a new building could be built.⁶² However, by August 31st of that year the parish had installed a sidewalk in front of the church.⁶³ By September 10th, 1893 the church was ready to hold Sunday morning mass; however the parishioners must have said mass without pews as the paper reports the seats were not installed until after October 26th of that same year.⁶⁴ Luckily for the parishioners, the furnace was installed before winter and the dedication of the new church which occurred on November 21st, 1893.⁶⁵ The *Entering Wedge* reported on the occasion saying:

The Catholic Church at Eau Galle was formally dedicated Tuesday forenoon. The ceremonies were impressive and notwithstanding the unfavorable condition of the weather, a large number of people were in attendance. After the dedicating ceremonies and the celebration of the Mass, the congregation listened to a sermon in the German language by Rev. Kaluza, which was followed by an able English sermon from the Bishop. Rev. Reding, of Eau Galle, assisted at the dedication by Bishop Schevebach and Rev. Kalusa, of La Crosse, Rev. Jorres of Menomonie, and the Rev. Baur and Reisser of this city.⁶⁶

By March of the following year though the new parsonage was not finished, the old parsonage was sold to the new butcher for Eau Galle.⁶⁷ During this month they also disassembled the old building and recycled the parts for a new barn building.⁶⁸ Finally in June of that year the new parsonage neared completion. Incidentally nearly ten months after the dedication of the new church building, a new \$400.00 altar arrived from St. Paul and was installed in September

⁶²*Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 6 July 1893.

⁶³*Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 31 August 1893.

⁶⁴*Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 7 September, 1893 and 26 October, 1893.

⁶⁵ *Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 9 November 1893 and 23 November 1893.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 11 March, 1894.

⁶⁸ *Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 5 March, 1894.

1894.⁶⁹ Finally after a summer of construction by a Mr. Grazeley, the parsonage for Rev. Redding was completed in November of 1894.⁷⁰

As illustrated by the need for a new building, during this time the church was growing at increasing rates largely due to a rise in immigration to Eau Galle at this time. The new church's dedication even further illustrates the changing demographics of the community as the dedication sermon was conducted in both German and English. This increase in population was credited with beginning in the 1870s after the Franco-Prussian war.⁷¹ According to the census data organized by the University of Virginia, the German born population in Dunn County alone rose from 842 in 1870 to 2,431 in 1890. No information is available for the 1880 census though it appears that 1890 was a peak year of German-born settlement, as the numbers dwindled in the decades that followed.⁷² Similarly by 1870 the Irish-born population in Dunn County numbered only 227 in 1870 rose to 250 a decade later but continued fall in the decades to follow.⁷³

As the German-Americans began to settle in and around the Eau Galle area their influence on the church can be seen. Besides the language influence that was evident by the building of the new church in 1893, the German influence may even be seen as early as 1878 with the first report of St. Henry as the name and patron of the church. Born in 972 CE, Henry was the son of the royalty of Bavaria and became emperor in 1002 after the death of his cousin.

⁶⁹ *Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 26 September, 1894.

⁷⁰ *Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 8 November, 1894.

⁷¹ Curtis-Wedge, 211.

⁷² Historical Census Browser. Retrieved 15 March 2007, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Thus it seems plausible that a heavily German congregation may have chosen the name of a saint from Bavaria because of the connection to their homeland.

Decades later the German heritage of the parishes can still be remembered. As *The Encyclopedia of American History* notes:

It is impossible to estimate with any precision either the total number of Catholics who emigrated to America from German-speaking Europe over the past three centuries, or the total number of German-speaking immigrants who chose to affiliate with American Catholic congregations during that same time period. What is clear, however, is the central role played by Germans within the evolution of American Catholicism. Only the Irish and the Italians contributed larger number of Catholics to the American population. By 1870 almost one-sixth of all American Catholics belonged to German-speaking parishes. A century later, roughly the same proportion of American Catholics still acknowledged German descent.⁷⁴

In a 1938 cookbook published by the parish, recipes such as German Pear Bread, Dumplings for Sauerkraut and Sauerkraut Roast are featured.⁷⁵ Even more recently when *The Times-Review* featured an article on the parish's weekday mass tradition, it commented on the heritage of the people, "It's good farming country and many who live in the unincorporated hamlet of Eau Galle are retired folks of German heritage who have passed on the torch to succeeding generations of family dairy farmers."⁷⁶ This corroborates with what James T. Fisher has said about German Catholics in Wisconsin,

The great majority of German Catholics, however, settled not in the cities but in farming communities. Many of these immigrants came from small landholding families and they were highly attracted to the fertile, inexpensive farmland available in the Midwest. These communities were invariably centered (page break) around a newly created parish with churches staffed by priests who traveled from Germany to minister to their compatriots.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Glazier, 571.

⁷⁵ "St. Henry Parish Cookbook," Eau Galle, WI prepared by the Catholic Ladies Aid. 1938, 12, 22, and 62.

⁷⁶ *The Times-Review* (La Crosse) 14 May 1994.

⁷⁷ James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America*. (USA: Oxford University Press, 2002) 50-51.

German Catholic immigration was not isolated to Wisconsin alone, however the strongest concentrations of German Catholic immigrants were found in the Midwest in rural parishes like Eau Galle.⁷⁸

When the *History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin* was published in 1898 it reported on the current status of the church:

The congregation consists of about four hundred and ninety-five souls. In connection with this congregation are a number of societies, among them being St. Joseph's Society, of which Alois Wolf and M. Kelly are officers; St. Henry's Ladies' Society; Mrs. John Rayburn, Jr. president, and M. Kelly, secretary; and the Sacred Heart Society and Sodality of the B.V.M.⁷⁹

According to the parish history book, the Sacred Heart Society and the Sodality of the B.V.M (Blessed Virgin Mary) evolved over the years into the present day Parish Council of Catholic Women. It appears that it was during this time and the pastorate of Reverend William Redding that religious organizations began to be created and attended regularly. By 1925, with the publication of the *History of Dunn County* even more societies were present, "There are six active societies connected with the church: the Holy Name Society, for men; the Catholics Knights of Wisconsin, for adults and a juvenile branch of the same order; the Ladies Altar Society; the Young Ladies' Sodality and the Catholic Boys' Brigade."⁸⁰

The abundance of societies within in St. Henry Parish follows national trends of that time. Jay P. Dolan writes of this advent of church organizations, "After 1880 the picture changed dramatically when not only were many more parish societies founded, but they also represented a greater diversity of purpose. Now societies with explicit social, recreational, charitable, and

⁷⁸ Glazier, 573.

⁷⁹ Heming, 809.

⁸⁰ Curtis-Wedge, 212.

educational goals were beginning to appear.”⁸¹ According to James Hennesey in *American Catholics*:

Women joined rosary and altar societies; men belonged to the Knights of Columbus (1882), Knights of St. John (1886), and the Knights of Peter Claver and Holy Name Society (both 1909); for children there were cadet corps and clubs. Catholic societies cared for inmates of public institutions, provided rudimentary life insurance, and paid for burial.⁸²

In St. Henry Parish organizations like the Knights of Columbus and the Holy Name Society, which were not active in the 1890s, had become active by the 1920s. Therefore, though slightly behind the trends, St. Henry fits into the national trend of the church as more than a worship center. Dolan explains the need for these organizations in *In Search of American Catholicism*, “These confraternities also had a social function, because they provided Catholics with an opportunity to bond together. By coming together as Catholics, they were able to strengthen their sense of identity.”⁸³

From the construction of the church in 1893 to the destruction of the church by fire in 1917, little is known about the activities of the parish other than what is available from the church records. After Father Redding left in May 1904, Father Adolph Miller assumed the pastorate until May 1908. During this time church records show a continued work towards performing the sacraments in Eau Galle. Though the first confirmation was celebrated as early as 1872, with another event in 1887, the decade of the 1890s saw an increasing rise in the frequency of both first communion and confirmation masses. An 1872 confirmation class shows a register

⁸¹ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, (Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1985) 205.

⁸² James Hennesey, *American Catholics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) 177.

⁸³ Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 86.

of 60 participants at Eau Galle; the confirmation was presided over by Reverend Michael Heiss, Bishop of the La Crosse Diocese.

By the turn of the century, Eau Galle was able to focus on meeting the needs of their parish members; at this time no missions had been assigned to the parish. In May of 1894, 33 children received the Eucharistic sacrament for the first time and on June 30th 1895 the mass was celebrated with 27 participants. Church records indicate that the following September both first communion classes were confirmed. Eleven more children made their first communion the following year and in 1897, 37 more students were confirmed. On October 6th 1899 after a two year hiatus, the church initiated twelve boys and twenty-one girls into the sacrament of the Eucharist.

During this same time the parish also confirmed 33 individuals on October 6th, 1899 and another 41 on October 8th, 1899.⁸⁴ At this time it is not known why there was a two-day delay between confirmations. However, it is plausible that the church was simply not able to hold all of the people for a confirmation class of 74. After 1899, records indicate continued yearly efforts to serve the Eucharistic needs of the parish. In 1900, sixteen individuals made their first communion, 1901 saw seventeen individuals, sixteen in 1902, and 30 in 1903.⁸⁵

Confirmation celebrations were far sparser, after the 1899 records, the next confirmation did not occur until 1902 with a class of 52 boys and 38 girls. A total of fifteen adults were noted on the lists of the confirmed, while the others were assumed to be children. While ages of the confirmed are not given, it is possible to pinpoint an approximate age for a confirmation student.

⁸⁴ “Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Ida Margaret Wolf one member of the class of 1902, and a great great aunt of the author, was born in 1888 and would have been approximately fourteen at the date of her confirmation.⁸⁶ The fact that both children and adults were confirmed suggests that the parish was gaining membership through conversion as well as procreation.

The confirmation and Eucharistic sacraments continued to be celebrated in 1906, 1908, 1910, 1911 and 1914.⁸⁷ With such random dates it is unclear as to why the irregularity. Most records do not indicate that the masses were officiated by the bishop of the diocese, which would have explained some of the spaces between dates. However regardless of the frequency in the first decade of the twentieth century, it is obvious that around the turn of the century was when the church became more focused on performing and recording the sacraments of first communion and confirmation.

Beyond confirmation and communion records, the parish history does record an addition to the church during this time, “In 1900 Fr. Reding had an addition built to the north end of the church so it would now assume the shape of a cross. It was at this time that he persuaded carpenters to erect a new 125’ steeple with a huge cross on top.”⁸⁸ The pastorate of Father Redding is remembered fondly by those who knew him, as his appointment to Eau Galle was his very first assignment. By 1906, the parish record books had changed and for the first time a reference to parish as St. Henry rather than the Catholic Congregation of Eau Galle is given. Also during this time the parish of St. Joseph in Arkansaw was given a resident pastor. Though St. Henry never missioned to other churches during this time, many residents of the Arkansaw

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸ “St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006,”13.

area would walk the five to ten miles to mass at Eau Galle or Durand and the addition of another Catholic parish in the area illustrates the increasing spread of Catholicism in rural Wisconsin.

As the parish gained members and continued serving Eau Galle, the congregation's faith would be tested in 1917. This event that would forever change the parish of St. Henry occurred on Thursday morning July 5th 1917 at 4:15 a.m. For other German Catholic parishes the entrance of the United States into World War I brought struggles and adversity and would forever change their parish. However for the parish of St. Henry the events of July 5th proved more fateful. Only five months into the arrival of Father Steinhauser, the new pastor of the parish, the church was struck by lightning and burned to the ground on July 5th, 1917. Many newspapers reported on the tragedy and *The Pepin County Courier* reported on the day of the fire:

During the severe electrical storm early this morning the large and beautiful St. Henry's church at Eau Galle was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. At daybreak all that remained to be seen of the once stately edifice was a mass of ruins. The fire spread so rapidly that little could be saved from the building. This is a severe blow to the congregation, who are now without a house of worship.⁸⁹

An article in *The Entering Wedge* provides even more details on the fire:

St. Henry's Catholic Church at Eau Galle was struck by lightening while a severe storm was in progress at 4:15 o'clock last Thursday morning....

Nearly all the furniture was saved. The bolt struck the steeple about eight feet down from the top and the steeple was soon seen to be in flames. The fire burned slowly for a long time and gradually worked its way down the roof of the building, after which it burned more rapidly. There was sufficient time to remove the furniture the building [*sic*] except the high altar. The building burned down in a little more than an hour from the time the fire was discovered...

The building was erected in 1896 [*sic*] at a cost of \$20,000. It would cost considerably more to erect a building of that kind now. There was only \$6500 of insurance.

The congregation of this church is a large one comprising, more than one hundred families. Rev. Joseph Steinhauser is the pastor.

⁸⁹*Pepin County Courier* (Durand) 5 July 1917

We understand that it is the purpose of the congregation to rebuild at an early date.⁹⁰

Despite the destruction to the church, thanks to a northwestern wind the parsonage was able to be saved.⁹¹ *The Dunn County News* also reported on the event, though misnaming the church as that of St. Mary.⁹² When the *La Crosse Tribune & Leader Press* reported on the fire they too incorrectly cited the parish as that of St. Mary.⁹³ The mistake is easily understood since for large periods of time the two parishes were conjoined in some capacity.

As illustrated by the newspaper articles, the parish community, though devastated by the loss of their building, was determined to rebuild. Within weeks of the tragedy, the congregation had already made plans to rebuild. Originally there were reports that the church would be built on the site of the first church on the opposite end of town. However, in the end when construction plans were finalized the new building was built in the exact same spot as the ashes from the 1917 fire. By July 26th, the parish was discussing plans for rebuilding and by September 6th of that same year the contract for the new church had been finalized, “The contract for rebuilding the Catholic church has been let to Albert Hitz of Menomonie who expects to begin work on it this week. It is to be a brick edifice and will be valued, when completed and furnished at thirty thousand dollars.”⁹⁴ A photocopy of this original contract illustrates the specific details for the agreement:

St. Henry’s Congregation,
Eau Galle, Wis., Gentlemen:

⁹⁰ *Entering Wedge*, (Durand) 12 July 1917

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 5 July 1917.

⁹³ *La Crosse Tribune* (La Crosse) 6 July 1917.

⁹⁴ *Pepin County Courier* (Durand) 6 September 1917.

We hereby agree to erect a complete St. Henry's Catholic Church, at Eau Galle, Wis., according to plans, specifications and agreements as prepared by Andrew Roth, Archt., for the sum of Fourteen Thousand One Hundred Dollars (\$14,100.00).

The following includes parts the we figured to furnish material and labor, on cast, wrought, iron and steel, Romanesque, and ornamental plaster, all carpentry work and lumber, all millwork and labor, shingles and labor, insulation, finished floors, painting, hardware, sheet metal work.

The following includes labor only. All excavating, concrete work, stone work, brick and tile, cut stone and plating. Alternate on plaster finish, \$53.90. cost of front cement step, \$79.50.

Very Truly Yours,
 JAEGER & HITZ, CONTRACTORS,
 Per. Edgar Hitz⁹⁵

Even further information on the building of the new church is available through the newspapers, which documented the process of the building, much like they did during the construction of the second church. The promptness and perseverance of the community in the face of adversity explains how small rural parishes were able to survive.

The new church officially began construction on September 1st, 1917.⁹⁶ In fact, an Oshkosh newspaper, *The Daily Northwestern* reported on Wednesday evening of October 10th, 1917 the laying of the cornerstone, "The cornerstone for the new \$20,000 St. Henry's Catholic church at Eau Galle, near Maiden Rock, was laid Tuesday, Rev. William Redding, a former pastor of the church, officiating."⁹⁷ Even after have been gone for nearly thirteen years, Father Redding came back to attend to the building of a replacement for the church that he had worked so hard to build. By the following year though plans had been in place for sometime, construction on the church was slow. In the parish history as well as the *History of Dunn*

⁹⁵Edgar Hitz, Menomonie, to St. Henry's Congregation, Eau Galle, 24 Aug 1917, Photocopy of original typed transcript.

⁹⁶*Courier Wedge* (Durand) 15 May, 1919

⁹⁷*Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh) 10 October, 1917.

County, this was attributed to the United States' involvement in World War I.⁹⁸ Most likely, the war took away many of the young men of the parish who support, labor and income would have helped the construction of the parish. Economically it is plausible that the war drew away resources and money that could have gone into erecting the church.

Though the building of the church was documented in the newspapers, many of the notices concerning the parish give information on the nature of congregation during this time period. Without a church and a place of worship, the congregation made use of the parsonage, cemetery and grove when conducting masses. Reports during 1917 and 1918 suggest that the parish utilized the resources in the Eau Galle community to maintain their congregation. The October following the fire, the Ladies' Aid organization continued to function; they organized their Annual Fair which was held at the Topliss Hall as opposed to their church grounds.⁹⁹ While without a church, marriages were often performed at the parsonage of the rector, as was the case with the November 1917 wedding of John Lieffring and Myrtle Webb.¹⁰⁰ It appears that if the weather was cooperating marriages also took place outside in an area known as the grove, this was the case for the June 1918 wedding of Rose Hartung and Harry Bates.¹⁰¹ This coincides with the information given by Leonard Weber in the parish history book that his August 1917 baptism occurred outdoors in the butternut grove. However, the parish history book documents that the Bates marriage occurred in the rectory not in the grove as *The*

⁹⁸ "St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 14 and Curtis-Wedge, 212.

⁹⁹ October 18th, 1917

¹⁰⁰ Nov 29th, 1917

¹⁰¹ *Entering Wedge* (Durand) 20 June 1918.

Entering Wedge documents.¹⁰² Other celebrations such as ice cream socials were also held in the grove, while funerals were conducted at the grave.¹⁰³ The adaptations that the parishioners of Eau Galle were able to make while they waited for the completion of their new church are a testament to their faith and the importance of the church in the community. It also offers an explanation of why this church is still standing and operating today. The Eau Galle congregation's time without a building illustrates the point that churches are more than their physical representations, but are truly the community of people who continually come together to celebrate their faith.

In September 1918, the *Entering Wedge* reported the arrival of the church windows and the start up of work on the church again, though it is unclear why the work had stopped.¹⁰⁴ However, a month later reports began to surface of schools and churches being closed. The following week the closing of the schools and churches was identified as a quarantine to prevent the spread of influenza as it had taken to the town.¹⁰⁵ Nearly two months later the ban was still in place and the disease appears to have afflicted the pastor of the church for a time.¹⁰⁶ Finally by January 1919 the flu ban was lifted and churches and homes were finally able to begin operation regularly.¹⁰⁷

However, despite the war and influenza, the church was completed by December 1918 and by February 20th, 1919 the Catholic Ladies' Aid was able to serve dinner in the new

¹⁰² "St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 13.

¹⁰³ *Entering Wedge* (Durand) 27 June 1918; 25 July 1918, and *Courier Wedge* (Durand) 2 January 1919.

¹⁰⁴ *Entering Wedge* (Durand) 9 September 1918.

¹⁰⁵ *Entering Wedge* (Durand) 24 October 1918.

¹⁰⁶ *Entering Wedge* (Durand) 7 November 1919 and 19 December 1919.

¹⁰⁷ *Courier Wedge* (Durand) 2 January 1919 and 9 January 1919.

basement of the church.¹⁰⁸ They would continue to use the church for worship and socializing until the dedication in May of that year during better weather.¹⁰⁹ By May of 1919, with the completion of the church, a dedication and confirmation was scheduled for Sunday May 18th. The event gained attention in several newspapers, and even affected the mass schedules for other parishes.¹¹⁰ Individuals were said to have come from many neighboring areas and priests from Arcadia, Menomonie, Plum City, Durand, Lima, Arkansaw, Grand Rapids, and Mondovi assisted the Bishop of La Crosse with the dedication. Reports suggest that over 1,200 people attended the dedication ceremony, after which all were served lunch in the basement of the church. The logistics of such an event seem impossible as the church itself was designed to hold only 600 people.¹¹¹

The new church, which still stands today, was described in detail in the newspaper:

The church is a beautiful Gothic structure of solid brick construction, 98 x 46 ½ feet in dimensions. Its side walls are 26 feet high and the middle of the panel ceiling is 46 feet above the floor. The tower extends 110 feet above the ground.... It has a seating capacity of 400 on the main floor and 200 upstairs, though the number in the church was much greater on Sunday. There are eighteen handsome memorial windows in the church.

The basement contains a large dining hall, kitchen, furnace room, and fuel room and the dining room can be converted into a hall with stage when desired.¹¹²

The report from the *Courier-Wedge* gives even more details stating that the church's style was developed to ensure an open congregation without pillars and in easy hearing distance of the high altar. The article also makes note of the memorial stained glass windows, as well as the

¹⁰⁸ *Courier Wedge* (Durand) 20 February 1919 and 22 May 1919.

¹⁰⁹ *Courier Wedge* (Durand) 6 March 1919.

¹¹⁰ *Courier Wedge* (Durand) 15 May 1919.

¹¹¹ *Dunn County News* (Menomonie) 25 May 1919.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

fourteen Stations of the Cross all of which are still present at the church today. Finally, the paper states the most amazing feature of the new building:

The new church decorations, and furnishings, cost \$30,000 and the most commendable feature about it is that it is all paid for by the free contributions of the members of the parish, a very rare occurrence in the history of our parishes, at least in this district.¹¹³

The construction of this new more ornate worship center actually follows a trend in American Catholicism that began in the 1890s. According to Dolan:

Church architecture reflected the shift taking place in the religious world of Catholics. Gone were the plain structures of the early years as large, expensive churches became commonplace across Catholic America; most often Gothic or Romanesque in style, their interiors were elaborately decorated in a manner that visually instructed people in the basics of devotional Catholicism.¹¹⁴

Dolan recognizes this trend as beginning as early as the 1890s, however the St. Henry church built in 1893 did not exhibit fully the ornate national trends. However, by 1917, the trend either appears to have entered the rural communities or the parish of St. Henry was simply able to finance such a structure.

With the construction and dedication of the final St. Henry Church, an end of an era in the church's history began. After the pastorate of Reverend Steinhauser, the church would not be a mission to other parishes for years to come. During Reverend Steinhauser's pastorate, records indicate for a short time, that missions were held at Farm Hill and El Paso during 1913.¹¹⁵ However, the building of the new church also signaled a prosperous time for the parish that would continue to be involved in the daily lives of its parishioners and the Eau Galle community.

¹¹³ *Courier Wedge* (Durand) 22 May 1919.

¹¹⁴ Dolan, *American Catholic Experience*, 215.

¹¹⁵ "Church and cemetery records (Genealogical Society of Utah Project): Barron and Dunn Counties, Wisconsin"

The story of St. Henry Parish does not end in 1919, however the story of how the building that now stands came to be does. There is much more to the story of St. Henry Parish. With the dedication of the final church in 1919 the parish continued to grow, and eventually during the 1930's saw the building of its own Catholic grade school. As time passed however, the school underwent budget constraints and would close following the 1969 school year.¹¹⁶ Finally entering into a new century, the church once again resumed mission work as the priest became appointed pastor at parishes in Arkansaw and Boyceville.¹¹⁷

There is much more to a building than the outside. What makes up the church of St. Henry is not just the building but also the people and the work they put together to keep the parish going. Though parishioners and local historians have written on the history of the parish, few others have taken time to document the history and importance of the parish. Through understanding the early history of this parish it is possible to see prominent themes in stories of successful rural parishes. Beginning in 1856, as a mission of Chippewa Falls, and then entering into the following decades as a mission to other parishes, the story of St. Henry Parish is also the story of the spread of Catholicism in rural areas. Notably, this church's story is also the story of German immigration in the late 19th century and the impacts of such a change in demographics.

In the years to follow, the parish functioned not only as a Catholic institution which celebrated the sacraments of the church, but also as a means of socializing and entertaining a community through socials, celebrations, and organizations. Finally, the destruction of a church to fire and the resiliency of the parish in their efforts to rebuild illustrate the true nature of the parishioners of this area. As *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History* states, "The parish

¹¹⁶ "St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006," 18-19.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 22.

stood at the core of German Catholic life. In rural America, the prevalence of group colonization testified to the importance these immigrants placed on parishes of their own.”¹¹⁸

As a Catholic parish in rural America the story of St. Henry is one that is often left out of the larger picture of Catholicism in America. Steven Gross notes that the focus of American Catholic historians has often been on the spread of Catholicism in urban areas:

Catholic immigrants in the nineteenth century were more often destined for American cities, and they typically arrived too late to participate fully in the market revolution. Not surprisingly, then, historians have proven more interested in the experiences of urban immigrants and have opted to emphasize themes of institution building, assimilation, and anti-Catholic nativism. None of this is misplaced. However, large numbers of Catholic immigrants did choose to settle in the rural Midwest and often in areas that were, at least initially, poorly integrated into a larger market economy.¹¹⁹

To some extent general religion in rural America has been addressed in research and what has been concluded about the role of churches in rural seems to match the trends and events in St. Henry Parish history. Robert Swierenga writes,

The church was more than a religious meeting place; it was a cultural nest, integrating families, social classes and nationality groups. It gave members a cultural identity and status and socialized them into the community...The reach of rural churches was remarkable. They provided charity and aid in times of sickness and disaster educated children, offered recreation and leisure activities, facilitated marriages, consoled the grieving, buried the dead in the adjacent cemetery, and sought to legislate morality through political action.¹²⁰

Certainly St. Henry Parish was one of these rural churches. With its German heritage and numerous societies the parish reached beyond its religious purpose to impact, change and indeed mother the members of its church. Why indeed did this parish flourish when the other churches in Eau Galle did not, it is hard to say with certainty. However it is highly possible that the answer

¹¹⁸ Glazier, 577.

¹¹⁹ Steven Gross, “The Grasshopper Shrine at Cold Spring, Minnesota: Religion and Market Capitalism among German-American Catholics,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 92.2 (2006): 220-221.

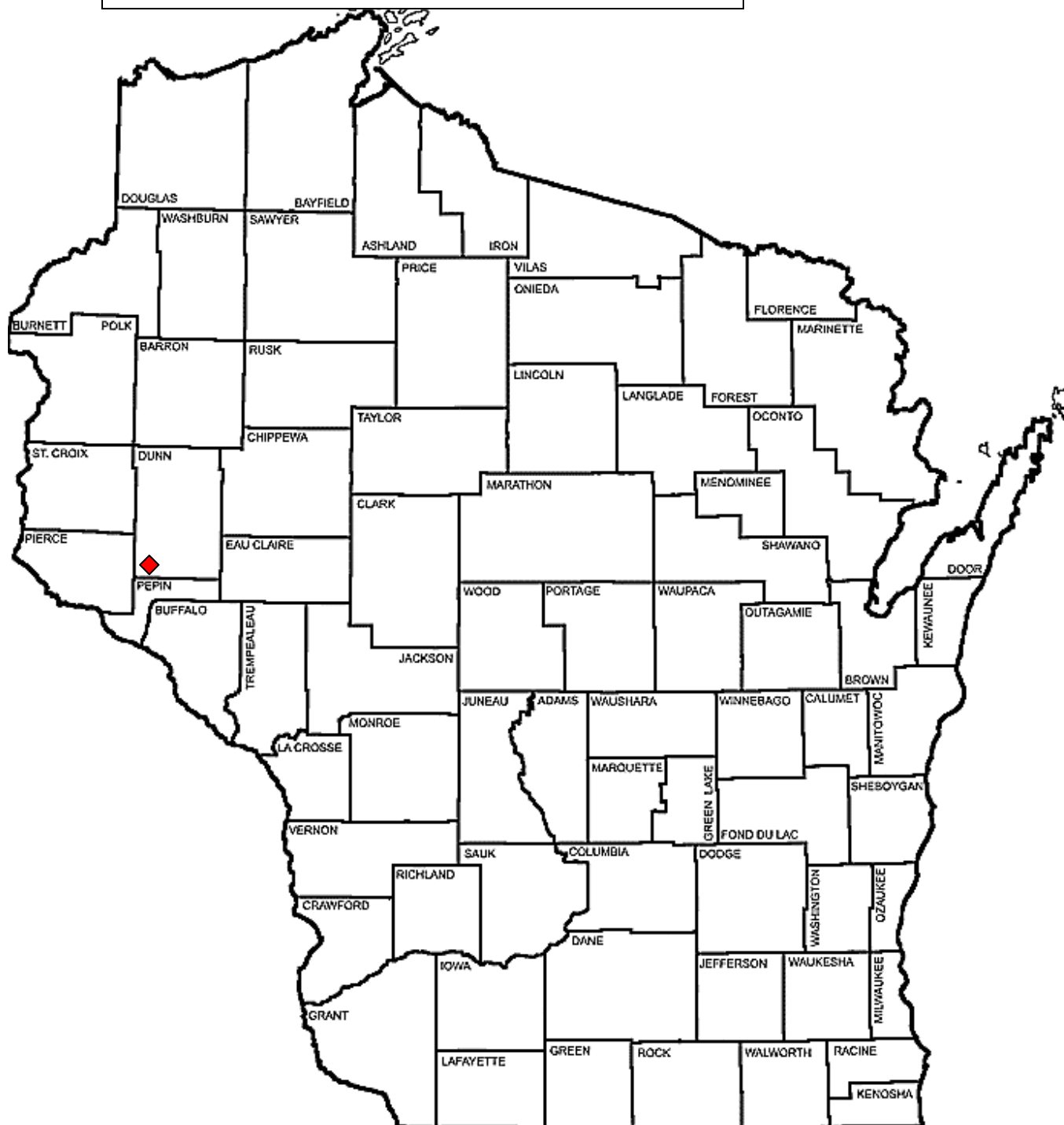
¹²⁰ Robert Swierenga, “The Little White Church: Religion in Rural America,” *Agricultural History* 71.4 (Fall 1997): 417.

to that question lies in the early history of the parish and the experiences and perseverance of its settlers.

By examining the available primary and secondary sources on this topic, the early history of this parish can be told and appreciated for its role in the community and the greater Catholic Church. The mission statement of the parish describes the church the best, “Our goal is to pass on this spiritual heritage as we serve one another in our membership, in our community and in the world.”¹²¹ No longer is this structure on County Road D in rural Dunn County, just another old Catholic Church. Now this structure is a representation of the spread of Catholicism in rural America as well as a testament to the faith of the community. Every building has a story and now after 150 years the beginning of that story has been told.

¹²¹ “St. Henry Parish, Eau Galle, WI 1856-2006,” 2.

APPENDIX A:
LOCATION OF EAU GALLE, WI



¹²²“Map of Counties in Wisconsin” accessed on-line 19 April 2007 from <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org>

APPENDIX B:
IMAGES OF ST. HENRY PARISH



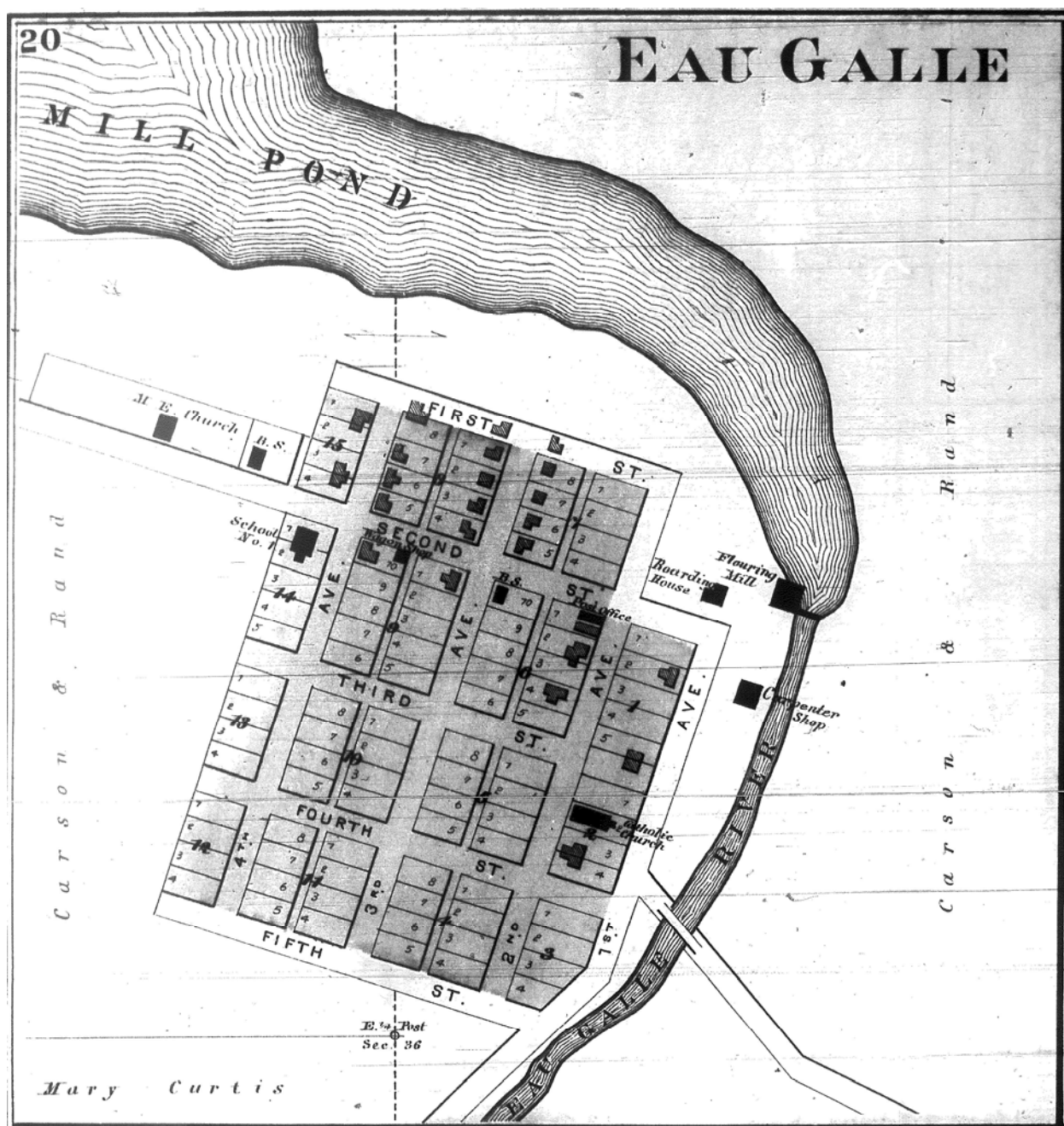
123

¹²³“St. Henry Church,” photograph taken by Father Joseph Smetana, reprinted from original.



¹²⁴“St. Henry Church II,” photograph taken by Father Joseph Smetana, reprinted from original.

APPENDIX C:
1888 Map of Eau Galle, WI



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¹²⁵ Charles Martin Foote, *Plat book of Dunn County*, 20.

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