

A History of Religion and Churches in Prairie du Chien

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Holy Trinity Episcopal Church - Exterior

Introduction

Examining the lower third of the Wisconsin Riverway is an effective way to contextualize the complex development mechanisms our State and Nation, in general, have employed to progress throughout time. Specifically, the unique case of Prairie du Chien, the city at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers, can be analyzed to show that historical progress is anything but predictable, and that its important position along the passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River defines its historical growth and development. One of the most exceptional impacts of Prairie du Chien's location is the influence it had on the foundation, adoption, and proliferation of religion among the expanding community. It is the goal of this article to address the various and unique factors contributing to the establishment of the many religious communities and institutions in Prairie du Chien, and through evaluating a range of historical documents, including texts, periodicals, diaries, census reports, photographs, and personal interviews, we will answer the questions: how was the growth of Prairie du Chien associated with the establishment of religious institutions, and to what extent has that religious community influenced the modern Prairie du Chien.

Location – Western WI, confluence of Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers

Owing its name to a local Indian Chief, "Chien", meaning Dog in French, Prairie du Chien's location contributed as much to the city's growth as it hindered the establishment of organized religion (Scanlan 1936). An outpost for trading and commerce since its earliest settlement, this land drew parties from far and wide, unfortunately, these interactions did not remain peaceful, and early on the Prairie became too volatile to attempt to establish a Parish. With a resilient faith in the community's ability to cooperate and embrace the Word of God, it

took until the early 1800's for a French missionary to preach in the "midst of the Indians" (Scanlan 1936). The picturesque land at Prairie du Chien and the powerful force of these sublime rivers undoubtedly evokes inspiration and the contemplation of a Higher Power, so it seems inevitable that a faith-based community would emerge at the site where Bishop Henni proclaimed, "the Mississippi absorbs the Wisconsin" (Scanlan 1936).

Just as the Mississippi absorbs the waters of the Wisconsin, it also channeled the first explorers, traders, and missionaries, and likewise, those travelling up and down the Mississippi were naturally drawn up the banks of the Wisconsin into our State's interior. These early missionary outposts at Prairie du Chien, as we'll see later, significantly influenced the spread of religion throughout the Wisconsin Riverway. Well before airports, highways, and railroads tattooed our country's landscape, waterways were the primary medium of transportation, and Prairie du Chien's important placement at these rivers' divide put it in a unique position to mediate a variety of travel routes (Mary Antoine).

Foundation of Prairie du Chien

Marquette and Joliet – late 1600's

The city of Prairie du Chien, and the State of Wisconsin to a great extent, owes their European conception to the renowned French-Canadian explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet. It was on June 17th, 1673, while following the current of the Wisconsin River, that these explorers laid their eyes on the "Immaculate Conception" of the Mississippi River; and while mapmaker, and explorer, Joliet 'discovered' the river in his expedition, Father Jacques Marquette, in his official capacity as a Catholic Priest, christened the Great River in the name of the King of Kings claiming it for God (Scanlan 1936). This moment in history, effectively the

'baptism' of the Great River, foreshadows the importance of this remarkable place, and the association it shares with the Sublime. The initial French-Canadian/French-Catholic exploration and 'baptism' of the confluence would also have implications on the earliest settlement history of the region.

The French Settlement in Prairie du Chien

Ever since Father Marquette and Louis Joliet first landed in the area of Prairie du Chien in 1673, the French began to move into the area and take advantage of the location to spur its fur trading businesses. The typical French settlement however usually had three main components: first, a military presence of some type, to protect their economic interest in the fur trade, second, a missionary from the Catholic Church, in order to convert the Native Americans to Christianity, and third, an economic interests, usually in the form of a fur trading post (Mary Antoine). Nicholas Perrot was one of these key figures who was sent to the Upper Mississippi Valley to begin to negotiate and trade with the Native Americans in this region; in 1685 Perrot established a fur trading post, named Fort St. Nicholas, in Prairie du Chien where these transactions would take place (An Administrative History). Eventually the French sent some type of military presence to this area to monitor and protect the interests that France had on the region. What was missing from that of a typical French settlement was that of a religious presence in the area, in the form of a Catholic missionary; though Father Marquette was a Jesuit Missionary, he did not stay in Prairie du Chien, as he merely passed by the area, making observations of the area in his journal. The French Monarch, along with the Catholic Church, never sent a missionary to the area of Prairie du Chien; this was hindered by the out break of the French and Indian War (Antoine). This was a major setback to Prairie du Chien, in terms of religion having a part in the

foundation and development of the French settlement and eventually what evolved into an American city.

British control 1760's – 1810's

As a result of the British's victory of the French and Indian War, the French had to cede all of their North American territory to Britain and Spain. Shortly after the war, the British moved into the Upper Mississippi Valley, taking up locations that were previously held by the French, which included Prairie du Chien. The fur trading business was then taken over by the British who then expanded the business (A Historical Resource Study). The British also built a fort and stationed some military units here, some of which were used to fight in St. Louis during the Revolutionary War (Founders and Frontiersmen). Though this period was short in Prairie du Chien's history, it did however contribute indirectly to the religious development there. Towards the end of the British's control of this area, many of the British soldiers that were stationed at the fort were of the Episcopal faith; though there was no religious activity that occurred during the British period, some of these soldiers that were of the Episcopal faith, remained in Prairie du Chien and set the groundwork for the Episcopal faith to set its foundation in the city (Antoine). With the British losing the American Revolutionary War, the new United States were suppose to gain control of the area of Prairie du Chien through the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783; however the British remained in this area until their defeat in the War of 1812, in which the city officially became under American control (Founders and Frontiersmen).

“American” city – 1810’s on: fort Shelby and fort Crawford

During the War of 1812, the U.S. erected Fort Shelby in 1814 to defend Prairie du Chien from the British; this led to the Battle of Prairie du Chien, the only battle that happened in Wisconsin, in which the British defeated the Americans. However the British abandoned Prairie du Chien as a result of the Treaty of Ghent, and destroyed Fort Shelby. When the American forces moved in to take control of the city, they constructed Fort Crawford in 1816 (Founders and Frontiersmen); this fort was where some of the earliest religious activity takes place. Soldiers of British heritage that were of the Episcopal faith were stationed here and eventually, along with their families, paid for a chaplain to come to Prairie du Chien to say masses in the first half of the 19th century. Later towards the second half of the 19th century, many Cumberland Presbyterian soldiers of British heritage were sent to Prairie du Chien from states such as Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia; this began a similar process in which the Presbyterians also had a chaplain come to Prairie du Chien to hold masses for them and their families (Antoine). In both the Presbyterian and Episcopal religions, as well as others, the services were usually held at Fort Crawford as this was the main place where such large gatherings would happen (Antoine). As it can be noticed, Prairie du Chien had some type of contribution towards religious development in its earlier years, although it was not as prevalent in comparison to other frontier settlements. In the 19th century, religion began to grow into a larger role in the city’s evolution, as churches were finally being erected; the main churches that were and still are a part of Prairie du Chien’s community is detailed in the following section.

Founding of Religion in Prairie du Chien and their Influence

St. Gabriel's Catholic Church

Throughout the course of Prairie du Chien's ethnic evolution the French community there remained strong, and fittingly, a French-Catholic Benedictine Trappist Priest, Father Marie Joseph Dunand, reached the settlement, "where until that time there had never been a Priest", and established the Parish of St. John the Baptist (Scanlan 1936). Spread far too thin by the end of the 1700s, there were not nearly enough priests, Catholic or Protestant, to minister to the exponentially expanding Nation. One effort to overcome this issue was the Catholic Home Mission Plan, an initiative to establish permanent and well-formed Christian organization centers. Its goal, however, was made increasingly difficult due to the geographical extent of the budding Nation, the political setbacks- especially with the Native Americans, and the meager amount of qualified ministers (Scanlan 1936). This plan was advanced by Reverend John Carroll, the first Bishop of the U.S. Territory based out of Baltimore, and within one century, the Catholic dioceses fragmented and re-localized from Baltimore to: Detroit, New Orleans, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Dubuque, Milwaukee, and finally to Lacrosse by the middle of the 1800's (Scanlan 1936). During this time Father Dunand made his way up from Kentucky to Prairie du Chien, although, after a decade of occasionally ministering to what he referred to as "savages" and "½ breeds" alike, a Reverend Francis Vencent Badin began the initial work of, what would later become, St. Gabriel's Catholic Church (Scanlan 1936). St. Gabriel's, arguably the most important piece of this city's religious development puzzle, inevitably was to be established to complete a trilogy of Archangel Churches, however this process was slow and fraught with complications- mainly due to the absence of a permanent pastor. Although Father Badin's building at the crossing of St. Feriole Island was the first formal place of worship the Catholic

Church community utilized, it was not until 1936 that the Italian-born “French Priest”, Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, erected a stone building and began the official history of St. Gabriel’s (Scanlan 1936). Following his establishment of St. Michael’s Parish at Galena, and St. Raphael’s Parish at Dubuque, St. Gabriel’s Catholic Church was Mazzuchelli’s final piece of the Archangel Trilogy, and only the second Catholic Church to be built in the State of Wisconsin (the first was in Green Bay). Interestingly, the property was donated by a Protestant man named Strange Powers, but the funding for the church came primarily from the generous donation of Father Mazzuchelli’s family inheritance. As we will see, St. Gabriel’s has remained a pillar of worship in the community through present day, contributed to the foundation of over two dozen churches in the area through mission work, and served parishioners like John Lawler that have been remarkably influential in the development of Prairie du Chien and the proliferation of religion in the area.

Architecture – St. Gabriel’s Church

Most of the early congregations in Prairie du Chien formed without a permanent building to worship in. This may be because early citizens did not stay for long periods of time, and therefore did not provide a strong financial base to start a church. Worshipers often met in private homes, school rooms, or any other suitable building. Most of the original churches followed a similar design of a simple rectangular hall, sometimes with a steeple or belfry on the front center portion of the roof. The old St. Peter’s, Holy Trinity, and St. Gabriel’s all follow this design.

Built in 1839, St Gabriel’s is the oldest church in the city (Budahl 1967). The building originally had a short, flat, open belfry atop the entrance. The church replaced this with a three-

tiered rectangular tower, similar to other Wisconsin churches of the time, sometime between 1851 and 1874 (Fig. 1) (Budahl 1967). An octagonal spire replaced the tower in 1889 (Fig. 2) and stood until the 1908 construction of the present two towers in front of the original structure (Fig. 3) (Budahl 1967). Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, who presided over the construction, describes the design as “chaste gothic” (Budahl 1967). However, the building lacks the typical steep-pitched roof of other gothic churches, and may be early evidence of a more “Americanized” design.

The inside of the church originally contained decorative arches and ceilings and an elaborate altar (fig. 4), but much of this work was removed during Vatican II (Antoine). The present design is relatively simple with the ceiling open to the wood support beams and flat drywall on all four walls (fig. 5). The original stained glass windows that adorn the walls may be the only remnant of the beautiful original decoration.

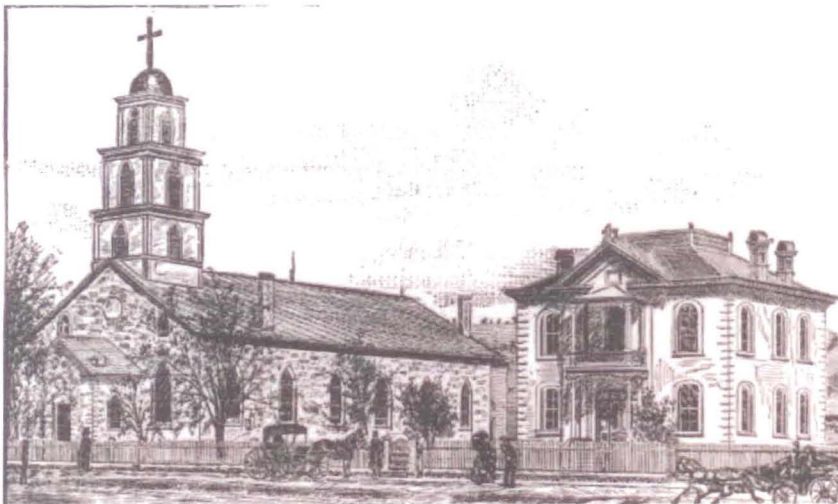


Fig 1: St. Gabriel's-1887 Source: WHS ID: 42047

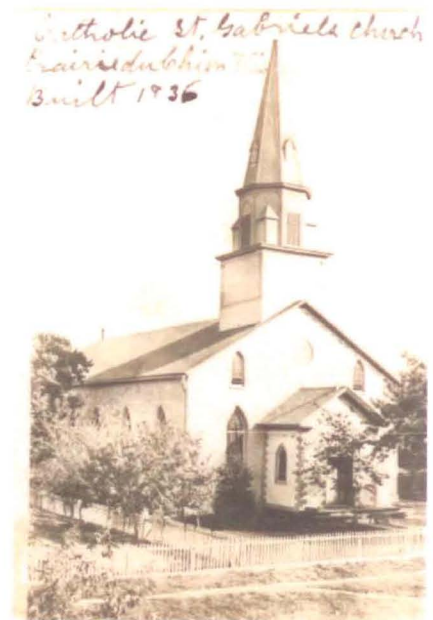


Fig 2: St. Gabriel's-1908 Source: WHS ID: 42036



Fig. 3: The exterior of St. Gabriel's Church



Fig 4: The interior of St. Gabriel's, c. 1890. Source: WHS ID: 42040



Fig. 5: Present interior of St. Gabriel's

Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

Holy Trinity church is the only Episcopal Church in all of Prairie du Chien. Although it has never been a large parish, at its highest point there were about 30 families, it has always been a constant presence in the city (Ted and Janet Finn). Holy Trinity began in 1836 when an Episcopal Priest, Reverend Cadle went to the military base Fort Crawford. When Rev. Cadle arrived to the fort, he found eager families ready for an organized church. The reverend immediately set up services in Fort Crawford and sent for aid in creating a vestry for the parish. By 1837 the church had a vestry, a lot for their building and a constitution (Sims 1986). Holy Trinity Church is the second oldest formally organized parish in the state of Wisconsin, and the

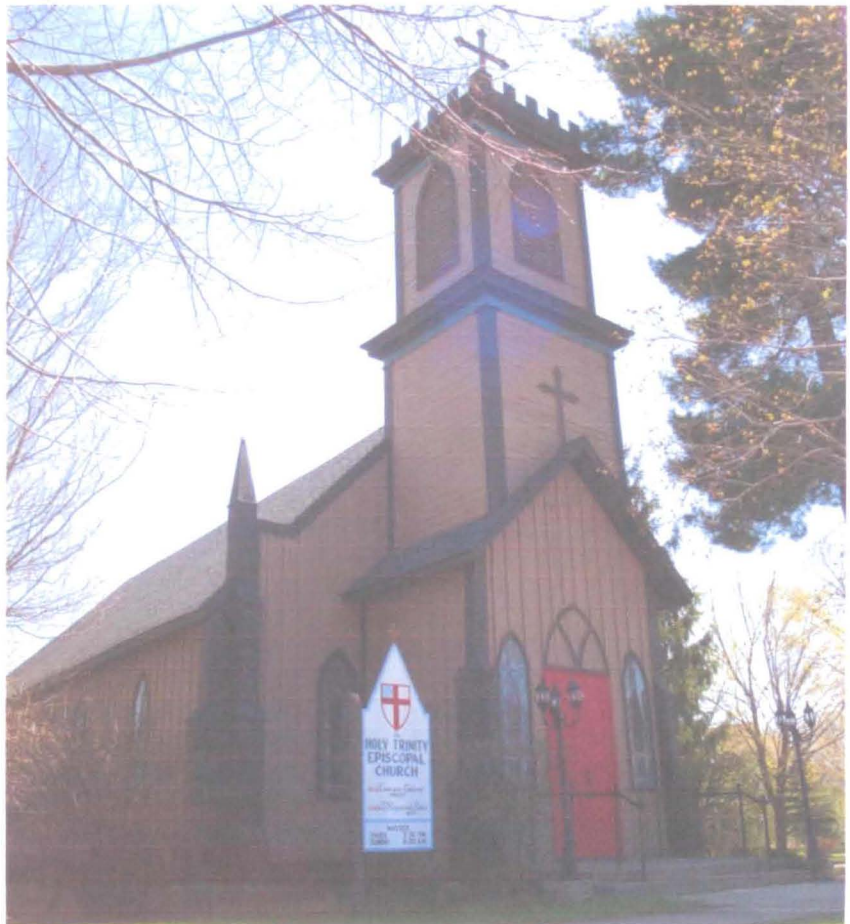
first in the Episcopal diocese of Milwaukee (Sims 1986). The start of the church parish was through the military fort stationed in the city, which is similar to how many of the organized religions came to Prairie du Chien. Fort Crawford had a lot of people, yet there was a low presence of organized religion even if the people were religious (Antoine) and it usually took a religious figure visiting Prairie du Chien to get people involved in creating a congregation.

The actual construction of the church took place in 1856 when the congregation found out that Fort Crawford would close (Stemper 2004). Through the construction and donations to the church it is easy to link many prominent members of the Prairie du Chien community to Holy Trinity. These linkages show that the citizens valued organized religion and believed it was important within their city. The land for the church was donated by the Prairie du Chien Land Company, and a large donation from Herman Baldwin was what funded the construction of the building. Herman Baldwin was a very successful trader in the booming pork and grain business taking place in Prairie du Chien (Stemper 2004). The initial construction of the church building was only temporary and was made to replicate in a wood copy, the stone gothic churches of Europe (Sims 1986). When the church was erected a small town paper wrote "On the whole we think the present Trinity Church, though only designed as temporary until the congregation is able to build a stone edifice, an improvement upon the ecclesiastical architecture of our not too religious town." (Stemper 2004). As said in the paper, the wood building was not a permanent structure; the plan was to eventually have a stone version of the church built. But in 1885 the congregation decided that the church structure was going to stay, wood and all. A man by the name of Thomas Savage, who was a prominent merchant and a founder of the modern Prairie du Chien, started planting trees around the church and cemented the buildings permanency. Stained glass windows were donated starting in 1895 by men such as Thomas Savage, Dr. Sieger and

other outstanding Prairie du Chien citizens (Stemper 2004). The community that came forth to construct the church symbolizes how even though religion may not have been a factor in the founding of Prairie du Chien, many important community members found religion to be an important aspect of their city.

The same church building from 1856 is still standing today. It is a relic of the past in the town of Prairie du Chien and it adds to the historic presence that exists throughout the streets. The building architecture is known as rural gothic and is a wood version of the stone churches and cottages of England and Europe (Stemper 2004). In 1856 the exterior of church was described in a local newspaper the *Courier* as so simple that it was severe. In true gothic form, the sides were low, the lines vertical, the roof had a steep gable with overhanging eaves. The eleven narrow, pointed windows reinforced the gothic design. The total length was 65 feet, the width 26 feet. From the outside the church looked smaller than it really was (Stemper, 2004).

The inside of the Church is almost all completely original as well. There is one center aisle and the pews that line the isle were donated by each family that were a part of the church parish in 1856. There have been two additions since 1856. The front bell tower was added after 1856,



Holy Trinity Episcopal Church - Exterior

the bell that is still used today is from the remains of old steamboat ships. The other addition is the backroom that was added for the purpose of having an office and an unofficial meeting area. Even with the additions the church looks very similar to how it did when it was first built, particularly on the inside. The members of Holy Trinity take pride in their church and the historic value it brings to the city of Prairie du Chien.



Holy Trinity Episcopal Church - Interior

The Methodist Church

At around the same time that the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church began forming, the Methodist Church in Prairie du Chien, with its founder Reverend Alfred Brunson, began to form as well. This church has a deep history rooted in the early stages of the development of the city, especially because of the works by Brunson. Unlike most of the other religions in Prairie du Chien, the Methodist Church was founded by more traditional ways; these traditional ways are in the form of a religion being started in a frontier settlement by the works of a missionary (Antoine). The majority of the other religions that were founded during the early stages of Prairie du Chien were not founded by a missionary, but by people already residing in the city and having to pay a priest to come to Prairie du Chien or by having the people of those religions go without services over a great period of time.

In 1836 Reverend Alfred Brunson, from Meadville, Pennsylvania, heard of a settlement with a “sad plight of Indians in the northern Mississippi Valley. Fired with zeal, he sought and obtained the office of presiding elder over all of the Upper Mississippi Valley...” (Clark). After gaining the position of being the presiding elder, Brunson visited Prairie du Chien and decided to make it his home; because of the high cost of building materials in the frontier realm, Brunson, with the help of his wife’s suggestion, headed back to Meadville, bought the building materials there, packaged up the materials, put it on a steamboat, and headed to Prairie du Chien; three other families accompanied them on their nearly 2,000 mile journey (Clark). Once they arrived in Prairie du Chien, they assembled the house with wooden pegs and no nails, because they were too expensive. Brunson quickly began to organize the first Methodist Society holding services outdoors, in barns, or other people’s homes. (Wisconsin State Journal) The Methodist Episcopal Church was then built on land which was donated by Hercules Dousman. (History of UMC)

While living in Prairie du Chien, Brunson practiced law, served on the territorial legislature, and was an Indian Agent for the Chippewa; he also led the effort which created the first land based highway in Western Wisconsin, which connected Prairie du Chien with Black River Falls. In addition to these activities, Brunson planted one of the first apple orchards in Wisconsin, served in the War of 1812, and enlisted as a chaplain for the 31st Wisconsin Infantry during the Civil War (Wisconsin State Journal). As it can be noticed by this list of activities that Reverend Brunson was involved in, this person was much more than a missionary, he was a leading figure in the establishment of Prairie du Chien as an important city on the lower third of the Wisconsin River. It seems that Brunson has done just as much work in the civic realm as he did in the religious realm. After sixteen years of being the presiding elder in Prairie du Chien, Brunson went on to do more missionary work, assisting in the building of thirty churches and

schools; Reverend Brunson died in Prairie du Chien in 1882. “At the time of his death, he was almost the last survivor of the men who had given distinguished service to the early development of southwestern Wisconsin” (Wisconsin State Journal).

St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church

Reverend Johannes Himmler and a group of 15 recently-immigrated German families organized St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1862 (*Seasons of Change*, 1986, p. 15; *History of a Century of Grace*, 1962). Protestant Reformation and the intense division of Europe from the 17th to 19th centuries may have contributed to early German immigration. Many of the early members of St. Peter’s came from what was then Prussia, part of the highly fragmented Germanic region and a nation of both Protestant and Catholic beliefs (*Seasons of Change*, 1986, p. 17). The long history of European war, along with mandatory military service in some of these countries may explain why many Germans did not sign up for military service during the Civil War. While soldiers stationed at Fort Crawford established other churches in Prairie du Chien, service records contain only a few German names out of the several hundred area men who served (*Seasons of Change* 1986).

While Germans immigrants did not dominate Prairie du Chien like they did in eastern Wisconsin, there was a large enough population (around 20 to 40 percent of foreign born citizens) to retain their heritage long after moving to America (*Seasons of Change* 1986). Many immigrants spoke only their native German and families formed a close relationship. St. Peter’s held all services in German until 1919 and all early church records were also written in German (*Seasons of Change* 1986). However, with many immigrants coming and going through the frontier town, the lack of English services prevented St. Peter’s from growing. The first

generation of American-born children increasingly left their heritage behind in favor of modern American culture, and World War I further complicated the issue. Many Germans still had relatives remaining in Europe and were torn between their cultural pride and their allegiance to the American government (*Seasons of Change* 1986). This led to tensions between Germans and non-Germans, and fueled the already strong animosity among Protestants and Catholics.

Architecture – St. Peter’s Church

The old St. Peter’s Evangelical Church, located next to Holy Trinity, resembled the late 1800’s design of St. Gabriel’s, except that the steeple was built on the front of the building, rather than on the roof (Fig. 6). The current building was constructed across the street in 1960 with a much more modern look. The building is not as tall and has a more unique shape instead of the simple rectangular shape of the old building. There is also no belfry or spire atop the building, something every church in Prairie du Chien previously had. The bell tower sits in front of the church as a separate structure and contains the bell that previously hung in the old E.U.B. church the old congregational church before that (*Seasons of Change* 1986).



St. Peter’s as it stands today.



Fig. 6: The old St. Peter's building with Holy Trinity on the right. Source: Seasons of Change, 1986

Community Church Components

Religious Education

Equally, if not more important than the structures and churches to the establishment of a religious community in Prairie du Chien, religious education served as an institution instilling moral fortitude and a spiritual connection for a lifetime of Faith. The establishment of religious education in Prairie du Chien was married to the growth of the church in the area, if only a little delayed, but the instruction of the next generation of ministers would be this city's greatest contribution to the religious community throughout the region. Following the establishment of a young ladies seminary in 1840, a convent was opened in Prairie du Chien in 1857 by the Dominican Sisters of Denton, WI (Scanlan 1936). There, the sisters instructed girls from across

the Midwest in the Way of the Cross, and nurtured them to do the same for others throughout a lifetime of service. Later, in 1869, a stand-alone parochial school was opened downtown by the Franciscan sisters of LaCrosse, where those without the desire to work within the Church would be able to benefit from a holistic education nonetheless (Scanlan 1936). Another school catering to women specifically, St. Mary's Institute, began under the supervision of three School Sisters of Notre Dame that came from Watertown, WI; and eventually, St. Mary's College was established to provide secondary schooling, but in 1926 it was moved to Milwaukee where it remains under the name Mount Mary College (Scanlan 1936). The initial institute was erected upon the seven-acre site of Old Fort Crawford which was donated by railroad entrepreneur John Lawler (Scanlan 1936). As mentioned, John Lawler was a parishioner of St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, and with the fortune he amassed patenting the design of the Trans-Mississippi River Pontoon Bridge, he became a significant donor to a variety of Catholic institutions throughout Prairie du Chien.

Through another generous action of Mr. John Lawler, the Prairie du Chien Hotel Company building was donated in 1866 to renovate and later open what became St. John's Catholic College. Adjoining St. John's Bohemian Catholic Church, and based on the foundation of Old Fort St. Nicholas, this College was aimed at enriching the lives of its students with a top-notch, faith-based education. Although this first attempt was widely deemed a failure, through the efforts of thirteen Christian Schools Brothers the College eventually enrolled over 180 students by 1877 (Campion College Building). Two years later, St. John's was renamed to the "College of the Sacred Heart" by the Society of Jesus priests, and again renamed to "Campion College of the Sacred Heart". As the student population there soared, the original Lawler hall was added on to with over \$2 Million dollars in renovations, and enrollment drew upon students

across the nation- and even beyond our borders, as it was internationally renowned for a place of higher learning and spiritual education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Scanlan 1936). Eventually, by the 1920's, Campion College was absorbed by Marquette University in Milwaukee, yet the Campion Boarding School remained for high school students for many years (Campion College Building).

Church Relations – Catholics and Protestants

Prairie Du Chien was a small town of committed working people but it was not without its flaws. Among the religious communities there were differences and discriminations. The main one was between the Catholics and the Protestants of the town. The Protestants of Prairie Du Chien viewed the Catholics as completely unholy, mainly because they were marrying Indian women and they did not have any institutionalized religion. To fully understand how this started, one has to start with the fur traders. The fur traders that settled in Prairie Du Chien were French and Catholic. Although they were of the Catholic faith, they did not bring institutionalized religion with them. They settled in Prairie Du Chien in the 1770's purely for economic reasons. But the people who did settle were working closely with the Indians and many of them married Indian women and started families long before any Protestants settled in the area. Then the construction of Fort Crawford brought many new military people, but in particular it brought Cumberland Presbyterians to the city of Prairie Du Chien. This particular group of military men and their families came to the fort from the southern states of the U.S. They brought with them slaves and ideas of racism and thus looked down on the Native Americans as savages. When they found out that French Catholic fur traders had families with the Native Americans they too were looked down upon. In addition, the Fur traders lived a very different lifestyle than the

military men all together. The fur traders were not necessarily wealthy at the time; they did what they had to in order to live a comfortable lifestyle. They did not keep regular hours and often were found drinking. All of these reasons, coupled with the fact that the Catholic men were married to “savages”, is where the differences started. The Catholics too had their views of Protestants once it became clear that there was so much discrimination (Antoine 2009). The Catholics viewed the Protestants as close minded WASPs who could not fathom a lifestyle other than their own being acceptable (Antoine 2009). These undertows of religious difference stayed in Prairie du Chien and separated the religious community of the town.

The religious community today in Prairie du Chien is quite different. Since the 1800's there has been unification among the religions. This unity did not happen overnight. In fact it took until 1965 for there to be real progress on the issue. Father Sims of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church came to Prairie du Chien in 1965 and organized monthly meetings for the local church leaders where all they did was get to know one another (Father E. Raymond Sims, April 2009 interview at Prairie du Chien). Through these meetings Father Sims worked on creating one large religious community, and today he says that every church is open to one another. In addition the churches work together to create community events and outreach. Although Father Sims may not say it, he was a key factor in unifying the church and this is stated by Mary Ann Stemper in piece she wrote about Holy Trinity, “In 1965 Father E. Raymond Sims came to Holy Trinity and has since worked to build an ecumenical spirit among the churches of Prairie du Chien. Happily that spirit flourishes in the community as one important legacy to Father's pastoral work” (2004). The unification among the churches has strengthened the religious community for Prairie du Chien and has made is a stronger force within the city.

St. John's and St. Gabriel's

Not only where there differences between the Catholic and Protestant churches in Prairie du Chien, but there were also major problems with the relationship between the two Catholic communities in the city. Prior to 1891, St. Gabriel's was the only Catholic parish in Prairie du Chien; in 1981 a new parish, named St. John Nepomuc, spun off from St. Gabriel's so that it could cater to the Bohemian population that resided in the city (Chronological History). From this time up until the mid twentieth century, the two Catholic Churches were often at odds with each other, usually not communicating to the other (Antoine). It was a city wide church initiative that was brought together by Fr. Sims, of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, that bridged the gaps between the two Catholic Churches' differences. This initiative brought together all of the church leaders from the different religions in Prairie du Chien and helped all of the churches to support one another's functions and fundraisers. The big accomplishment of this initiative though was bringing of the two catholic churches back to talking terms (Sims).

Conclusion

Through a deliberate and encompassing approach to the subject of religion in Prairie du Chien, all the while confined by our scope, it has become clear that religion and the church as an institution were not significantly influential to the early settlement history of Prairie du Chien, but their impact has been remarkable and sustaining throughout the generations. Notable setbacks delayed the establishment of religious communities, for instance: the Indian American conflicts amongst themselves and involving European settlers, the ethnic evolution of the military outposts, and the inconsistent availability of devoted priests and missionaries. By the early 1800's however, greater local stability and community growth demanded a permanent

religious presence in Prairie du Chien, and quickly several influential Parishes cropped up to meet the growing demands of the people. The Church communities, while unique in many ways, all shared a reverence for God above, and enriched the lives of their parishioners- many of whom gave back to Prairie du Chien and its surrounding communities through philanthropy, religious education, municipal/political/civic contributions, evangelization, and missionary work. While many of the parishioners, churches, and relics of the initial religious community have faded away into obscurity and been forgotten underfoot like the Old French Cemetery (pictured below), there remains a vibrant and engaging modern religious community in Prairie du Chien, and the faith that it will remain strong in generations to come.



Old French Cemetery as it is Today

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