

St. Gabriel's School Made Milestones Of Progress In Local Parochial Education

Today, St. Gabriel's is a Catholic school with 220 pupils in grades one through eight. But it is also a school with a history of more than 102 years in Prairie du Chien. The Chronicles of St. Gabriel's tell the school's history to 1920.

In 1872, the year the first St. Gabriel's School came into existence, there were only seven pupils, all French children.

This school was the home of a former parish pastor, the Rev. Galthier, who upon his death on Feb. 22, 1866, willed his home to the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa Mound on the condition they open a school for French children. His wish was not fulfilled until 1872.

Meanwhile, the Franciscan Sisters from La Crosse took over from the Dominican Sisters in 1870. However, they were not able to provide enough sisters for Prairie du Chien and in February 1872, the Sisters of Notre Dame came to Prairie du Chien.

On Sept. 2, 1872, Mother Caroline of the Notre Dame Sisters fulfilled the will and opened the school for French children. Sister Pamphelia was supervisor of the school.

The Rev. Koko served as

the parish in 1890, sought to improve the schools. By 1891, he had developed a high school department and had turned the school into a free school.

Near the end of that scholastic year, in 1892, work began on a high school building. It was completed in October and solemnly dedicated on Oct. 21. This was the first school building dedicated by the Rt. Rev. James Schnebach, then Bishop of La Crosse.

Because the ceremony took place on the fourth centennial of the discovery of America, the building was named St. Gabriel's Columbian High School. Twenty-five pupils were enrolled in the high school in 1892.

In 1894, St. Gabriel's grade and high school opened with 210 pupils; in 1895, 255 pupils and 1896, 300 pupils of which 20 were in the high school department.

The 25th year of the existence of St. Gabriel's School, under the direction of the Sisters of Notre Dame, 1897, was to be marked by a celebration. But the unexpected death of Sister Cirina, one of the pioneer sisters who had served at St. Gabriel's for 23 of the 25 years, suspended these plans.

bedrooms, bath and lavatories built onto the west end of the old structure.

The school, too, was modernized with the addition of new lavatories and drinking fountains.

A change in administration occurred in 1916. The Jesuit Fathers again assumed charge. An additional classroom was equipped to alleviate crowded conditions in the school.

Soon after, Nov. 14 to Nov. 24, 1916, the school was closed due to an epidemic of scarlet fever in the city. Not one of the pupils of St. Gabriel's contracted the illness.

The centennial of the congregation and the "Golden Jubilee" of the school were celebrated on June 11, 12, and 13, 1917. As a jubilee memorial, an educational fund was shared which enabled the class of 1917 and many in the following years to receive free, four-year high school educations at Campion Jesuit High School and St. Mary's Academy.

During this school year, St. Gabriel's had the honor of being the first school in the county to enroll as a school auxiliary of the Red Cross. A Red Cross banner

One period weekly was devoted to Red Cross work under the direction of Mrs. M. Doran. Military training was given to the boys.

Because of the scarcity of laborers during the academic year 1918-1919, the older pupils were obliged to remain at work after the date set for the opening of school.

The school was closed Oct. 13 to Nov. 11 because of an outbreak of influenza. The sisters visited the homes of the poor to help the influenza patients. The Rev. M. Speich succeeded Father Schiermann from 1919 to 1920.

This is as far as the Chronicles telling the story could be found.

Other sources state that the St. Gabriel's Grade School now in use was completed in 1960.

The parish pastor is the Rev. David Brehm, S.J., who is assisted by the Rev. Charles Scherman, S.J.

It is interesting to note that the school enrollment ranged from seven pupils in the beginning to a high of 403 to the present 220.

The philosophy of the school continues in hand with the ideals expressed through the church. In effect, the Catholic school accepts

Gospel truths to students, provides religion classes which help students to make the choice of living the Gospel message and in the school the impact of scripture and liturgy celebrations effect a change in student attitudes. An example of this is that individual classes celebrate Mass each week. Teachers, students and Father Brehm help prepare these Masses.

Also, St. Gabriel's challenges students to integrate religious truths and values into their lives, clarifies the Gospel values in classrooms, instructs and provides an atmosphere of faith community that assists students to change and to internalize a Christian value system.

St. Gabriel's is aware of the need for cooperation with parents in effecting change and growth in the response to children to the Gospel message and so the parents and the school work together in preparing the children for the reception of the sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation.

The students then take these learned ideals and ultimately helps to create a better world, make decisions about values and extends

School.
The Rev. Koke served as pastor at this time. He was succeeded by the Rev. Abbelen, the Rev. Muers who was pastor until the fall of 1877, the Rev. Keller, the Rev. Anthony, the Rev. Meinulph and the Rev. William Eversmann.

The number of pupils increased over those first years, and extra room was needed to accommodate the children. Two rooms in the convent had to be used as classrooms until 1879 when a new building was constructed under the direction of Rev. William. This building was later used as a parish hall.

Sister Amata Schmitt assumed charge of St. Gabriel's School on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 26, 1879. Three sisters helped run the school.

The supervision of St. Gabriel's parish also changed hands in 1879. The Jesuit Fathers came to Praire du Chien in the latter part of June to re-open St. John's College, which was formerly in charge of Christian Brothers, and also took charge of St. Gabriel's Parish.

St. Gabriel's for 25 of the 30 years, suspended these plans.

The Rev. Kremer, creator of the high school department, was appointed Vicar General of the diocese in September 1898 and a new pastor, the Rev. A. Joseph Joerres, replaced him.

One year later, on Aug. 19, 1899, the Feast of St. Francis, a small chapel dedicated to St. Joseph was built for the sisters. This was the sisters' first chapel and it was the first time the Blessed Sacrament was allowed to remain in the convent.

A total of 34 pupils were enrolled in the high school in 1900. At the close of that scholastic year, several of these high school students were awarded teacher's certificates.

Some improvements took place in the school the next year, 1901. The classrooms were remodeled and newly furnished by Sept. 9, 1901. Rev. Joerres had a new heating plant and ventilating system installed in the school.

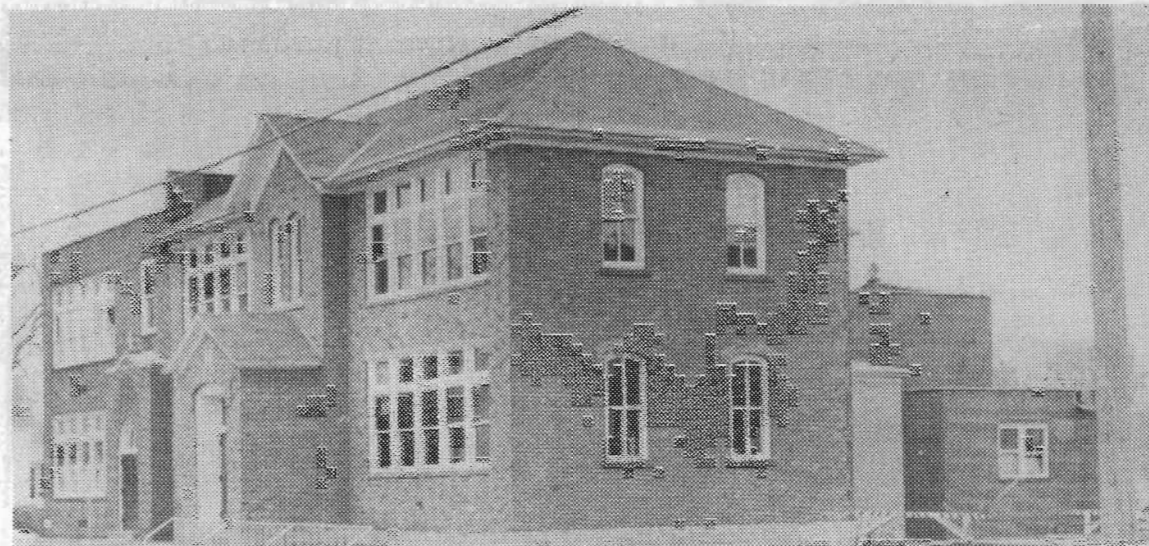
What the Cronicles considered a very joyous event occurred during the month of August 1901.

The Rev. William R. Lawler, O.P., a former pupil of St.

St. Gabriel's, by Red Cross. A Red Cross banner was presented to the school.

In effect, the Catholic school accepts the challenge to proclaim the

to create a better world, make decisions about values and extends peace and justice to all persons.



This is the composite of two additions to the St. Gabriel's Parish school. The north sections housed the first phase of construction and education. The addition of a gymnasium, classrooms and parish hall kitchens were made later. The building is used for storage, classrooms for special education and the parish basketball teams.

St. Gabriel's Parish.

In 1880, the school began to increase its student roll by taking in poor children. Mother Caroline, a former administrator, visited St. Gabriel's in October 1880 and advised the Sisters to take, educate and provide for some poor children.

Accordingly, a 3½-year-old girl (Marie Bowser) was taken in by the Sisters Nov. 26, 1880. The Rev. Richard, S.J., was pastor at the time.

A few months later two more poor children were received and in December 1881, one more was brought to the sisters.

The number of pupils steadily increased. It was impossible to accommodate all who applied for admission. Because of this, one classroom was added to the building.

Rev. Richard was replaced by Rev. Koerling, S.J. The Rev. Koerling, in turn, was succeeded by the Rev. N. Greisch, of Burlington, Ia.

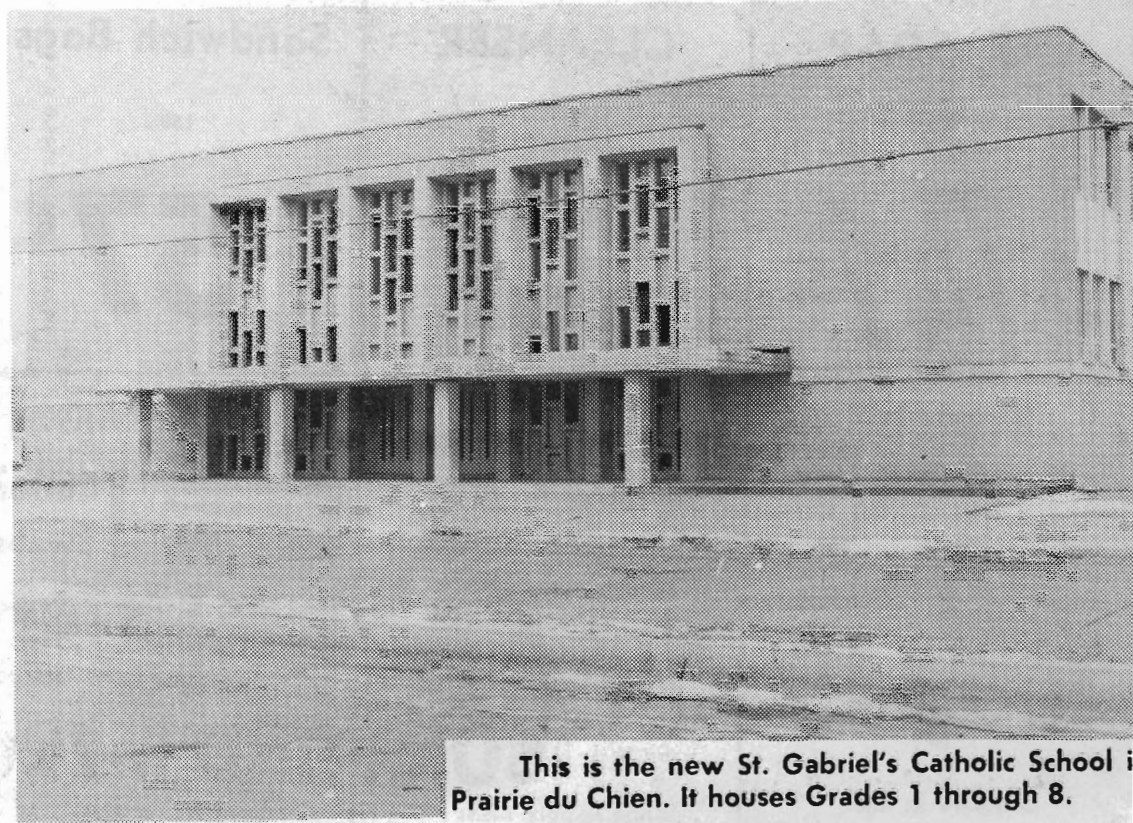
The Rev. Kremer, appointed to

The Rev. William R. Lawler, O.P., a former pupil of St. Gabriel's Columbian High School, celebrated his first Holy Mass in St. Gabriel's Church. He was the fourth pupil to enter the priesthood.

The other three are the Rev. A. B. Dunne, Eau Claire, Wis.; the Rev. Ed. O'Toole, Ellsworth, Wis.; and the Rev. Charles Cannon, O.S.B., St. Cloud, Minn.

By the end of 1907, a reversal in enrollment had taken place. On Dec. 31, 1907, one classroom had to be closed because of a decrease in pupils. The next year, 1908, saw the closing of the Columbian High School itself. A total of 53 students had completed the course of study and received a diploma from the high school.

A large remodeling project began in January 1912. While the sisters' residence was remodeled, the sisters were boarded at St. Mary's Academy. On completion of the project, the sisters found the old convent thoroughly remodeled and an annex containing a dining room, kitchen, pantry, three



This is the new St. Gabriel's Catholic School in Prairie du Chien. It houses Grades 1 through 8.