HISTORY OF CHURCH

The beautiful church that is ours today had its beginnings a century ago as European peoples came into the vast Midwest to seek their fortunes and to find religious freedom.

BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Pioneers soon realized their need for a church. Early pioneers in the area of Rice Lake owed their entry to Augustine Cadott who came from Montreal, Canada, to build a stockade somewhere on the Red Cedar River in the nineteenth century. German, Irish and French Canadians coming into the region later began to seek a priest. Occasional visits were made by priests from Chippewa Falls.

In 1878, Rev. Joseph Dole' came from Dobie (Stanfold then) to offer Mass in the old city hall. In 1880, the Parish of St. Joseph was organized as a mission of Stanfold, remaining a mission until 1887.

FIRST PROPERTY PURCHASE

The first purchase of church property, made in 1880 by Rev. Joseph Dole', consisted of Lots 15 and 16, Block 21, Original Plat, City of Rice Lake, on West Marshall St., purchased from the Knapp-Stout Lumber Company. Because this part of the state was a part of the Diocese of LaCrosse, the property was held in the name of that Bishop, Most Rev. Killian Flasch. Parishes were not at that time incorporated. In February, 1892, after the death of the Bishop, the title of the property was turned over to St. Joseph's Congregation, which had been incorporated as of March 18, 1891. The present church building is located on this property.

FIRST CHURCH

The first church was erected in 1881 with Charles Guay and Thomas Lally as two of the men responsible under the leadership of C. Mercier. The original structure was wood and brick veneer with a High Altar made by LaFarney, a member of the parish.

A resident pastor, Rev. Michael Schoelch, was appointed in 1887, but he remained only eight months. The parish again became a mission of the adjacent parish until 1889.
Church records begin the month of September, 1887. On July 4, 1889, Father Peter Becker came as resident pastor and the real organization of the parish began.

**NEW CHURCH**

As the Parish prospered, the need of a larger and better church grew also. In 1881, when the first church was built, Rice Lake had a population of 471 inhabitants, but by 1892, the population had increased to 2,500. By 1889, there were 125 families in the parish, mostly French, German, and some Irish. At a meeting called by Rev. Christopher Schmit, pastor at that time, on December 6, 1907, plans for a new church building were discussed. At this meeting, $12,000 was pledged by members of the parish and plans were made to erect a structure to cost approximately $25,000. The March 6, 1908, issue of the CHRONOTYPE has a drawing of the proposed building.

March, 1908, the demolition of the old structure began. By June, the work on the new building had progressed so that the cornerstone was laid in July 4, 1908.

The CHRONOTYPE of July 10, 1908, carries the following story, "in the presence of a vast throng of people, the new cornerstone of the new St. Joseph's Church was laid on July 4th. As the Most Rev. Bishop Augustin Schinner was unavoidably prevented from being there in person, he delegated the Very Rev. J. A. Barney of Hudson to perform the ceremony. Fr. Barney officiated, assisted by the Rev. L. O'Tolle of Ellsworth as deacon and the Rev. A. Rene' Hopdegard of River Falls as Sub-deacon. The stone was blessed and located in its place, the cement being set by T. J. Barney who had the contract for the brick work of the church. A very appropriate and eloquent sermon was delivered by the Very Rev. S. A. Leinfelder, D. D., Ph. D. of Rhinelander, Wisconsin. The following clergy were in attendance: The Very Rev. J. A. Barney, Hudson; The Very Rev. S. A. Leinfelder, D. D., Ph. D., Rhinelander; The Rev. L. O'Toole, Ellsworth; The Rev. A. Rene' Hopdegard, River Falls; The Rev. P. A. Walsh, Erin Prairie; The Rev. L. A. Charron, Turtle Lake; The Rev. A. J. Van Helden, Stanfold; The Rev. W. A. Beaudette, Chippewa Falls, and The Rev. C. A. F. Schmit, Rice Lake.

"The following Latin Document was placed in the stone: 'Anno Salutis Reparatee milesimo nonagesimo octavo beatissimo Papa Pio X feliciter regnante Ecclesiam Catholicam Romanam; Reverendissimo Augustino Francisco Schinner, D. D., prio Superiorenses Episcopo; Reverendo Christophoro F. Schmit, decano et rectore ecclesiae St. Josephi; Illustissimo Theodora Rooseveltt Statumm Foederatarum Praeside; Honorabili Jabobo O. Davidson, Gubernatore Status Wisconsin; A. G. Clarke praetore urbano huius urbis; Joanne Ruths, Emerico Rodier Ecclesias Aedituis; Aedilibus Joanne Ruths, Emerico Rodier, Wilfredo Demers, Timotheo Dorgan, Joanne Schneider, Francisco McFarland, Henrico Wilz, at Samuele Couture; Architectis Schick et Roth, Crossensibus; Aedificatore Petro Nelson, Crossensi, iste lapis angularis magna astante popudi multitudine positus est as Ad Rev. Joanne Barney, V. F. de mandato Reverendissimi A. F. Schinner, D. D. die recuperatae libertatis americanae quarto Julii'."
Besides this Latin document, copies of the Rice Lake Chronotype, The Times, and The Leader, the three Rice Lake newspapers, were sealed into the stone together with the names of anyone who donated a dollar to the edifice just begun. The stone was donated by the Nelson Monument Works of Rice Lake, Wisconsin.

Work continued rapidly during the rest of the summer and fall, and early in November the building was completed. The architecture of the church suggests the Gothic style and had two spires. The outer walls are brick with red sandstone trimming.

The Gothic carved oak altars were mahogany stained.

A new pipe organ was installed and on November 23, 1908, Professor L. A. Brooks presented a recital.

The bell was taken from the old structure. An entry for March 1, 1891, lists a payment of $60 as "balance on the bell" and in parenthesis, ($623.50) which was most likely the total cost of the bell.

On November 26, 1908, Thanksgiving Day, His Excellency, Bishop Schinner, dedicated the new church. Following the dedication, a Solemn Pontifical Mass was celebrated by His Excellency. The assistants at the Mass were Monsignor Weber, assistant priest; Father Babinski and Father Boyce as Deacons of Honor. Fr. Becker was deacon of the Mass and Father Gerhards. There was a brief address by His Excellency, the Bishop. The sermon of the day was given by Father Leinfelder, D. D., Ph. D., who chose as his text, "Behold the Tabernacle of God with Man; They shall be His People and Himself with them shall be their God." (Apoc. 23:3).

The trustees at the time were Messr. W. A. Demers and Henry Schneider.

**UPKEEP AND REPAIR OF THE CHURCH**

The cost of the building had exceeded the plans and reached $45,000. The debt on the church proved a heavy burden and Father Florian Gerhards introduced an assessment plan (1917-1920) and also the weekly envelope system which was continued by his successors. The debt was finally paid in March, 1930, under Father A. J. Van Helden.

In the Fall of 1926, a contract for the painting and redecorating of the church was let by the parish to the J. D. Abbot and Sons Co. of St. Paul for $2,000.

In 1936 a kitchen was installed in the church basement; a tile wall was built and plastered between the kitchen and the furnace room. At the same time, two rest rooms were installed.

**ADDED PROPERTY**

In 1921 Father A. J. Van Helden acquired added property for parish expansion. Lots 4 and 5 on Humbird Street were purchased at a cost of $2,685. The house on Lot 4 was then remodeled to serve as a convent for the Sisters. Lots 4, 5, and 6 were originally purchased by Father Christopher Schmit on May 16, 1912, at a cost of $3,500 from Joseph Gates. After his death, the
administrator of his estate sold the lots to J. P. Schneider and W. A. Demers on March 5, 1917, for $3,200. On September 8, 1919, Lot 6 was sold to Sam Couture who resold it to William Burton in 1930. The original oak altars were painted white in 1922 by Fr. Van Helden.

Under Rev. Bernard Niggemann, ordained on June 11, 1931, serving as Administrator from 1931 until October, 1946, much property was acquired looking to needs of the new school.

A severe windstorm which swept through the territory on June 7, 1939, destroyed the three large stained glass windows in the church. The loss was covered by insurance and the claims were settled for $4,088.78. The T. C. Esser Company of Milwaukee repaired and installed the windows. The subject on one of the windows was changed this time. Instead of St. John the Baptist, who was depicted on the east window, a new picture of the Blessed Virgin, under the title, Queen of Peace, was installed. More improvements followed in the Fall of the same year when new lighting fixtures were installed in the church. The old fixtures with its fifty-three separate globes was removed and replaced by four lantern type fixtures. In November the church, rectory, and convent were insulated with rock wool at a cost of $1,200. The improvements accomplished in 1939 were brought to a climax when all the statues and stations were redecorated by the St. Paul Statuary Company for a consideration of $300. In March, 1940, the church walls were cleaned by Joseph Davison on a contract for $500. Inlaid linoleum was laid in all the aisles, both sacristies, and the vestibule by Charles and Odeline Mercier, materials and labor amounting to $443. Shortly afterwards the rectory was stuccoed by Bert Currier at a cost of $176.80 for labor and materials.

Monsignor Peter F. Meyer arrived in 1946 and began industrious work for the parish.

In 1947 the entire church was tuck-pointed, many bricks were replaced and its facade was steam washed. A new entrance was built and wires strung over the doors and gables of the steeples to keep off flocks of pigeons. At this time, the four lantern type light fixtures in the nave of the church were replaced by new fixtures which provide ample and sufficient light. During the winter months the boiler in the church gave way and a new one was purchased and installed.

In the fall of 1948 a new vestment case and cabinets for the altar boys’ cassocks and other necessities were built by the King Brothers. The sacristies received attention.

THE ALTARS

In 1949, the interior of the church was enhanced by the erection of three new marble altars and predellas, imported from Italy through the T. H. Stemper Company of Milwaukee, a canopy over the main altar, a large crucifix, communion rail with Red Verona marble top, pulpit, cedilla, credence table, tabernacle, a repository, Holy Water Fonts for the vestibule, Sanctuary lamp, loud speaker, statues, and marble brackets for them, and chairs for the Sanctuary were installed, all gifts of individual parishioners. With these a beautiful plastic tile floor in a field of green with a white feature stripe was laid in the Sanctuary. Last, the baptistery was transferred to the rear of the church on the Gospel side.
As a climax to these additions and improvements in the interior of the church, its walls were redecorated in soft pastel shades, with a generous amount of gold and silver leaf especially in the Sanctuary. Five hand-painted murals and thirty symbolic emblems adorned the walls. An historic event of greater importance occurred when the Bishop came on November 30, 1949, and assisted by more than fifty priests of the diocese solemnly consecrated the three marble altars. The church itself could not be consecrated because the basement had to be used for the school lunch program and other social events of the parish.

In 1950 the Pastor called the attention of the people to the pitiable condition of the church basement. A concrete floor was poured over the entire area, the walls were painted, the kitchen was enlarged, new and modern equipment was installed, and the entire basement made into a pleasant parish hall. That the parishioners approved of all these major repairs and improvements is sufficiently evidenced by the fact that they willingly cooperated in providing the financial wherewithal! On May 18, 1954, several thousand dollars damage from smoke and fire was done to the interior of the nave of the church. Complete washing of walls and ceiling was required. The entire exterior of the brick edifice was reconditioned in August, 1963. The bricks were treated to give them a red cast and the wood trim was repainted white. A coat of protective paint was applied to the ten-foot cross and spire. The entire exterior of the 60-year old edifice was reconditioned by Norbert Kolb and Sons of Chicago. The new bells were installed in St. Joseph's Church by the I. T. Verdin Co. of Cincinnati in October, 1963. A 400 lb. bell and 700 lb. bell were placed on either side of the 1,100 lb. original bell in the tower. The new bells were made in Holland.

Following Vatican II, when Father James Dabruzzi was pastor at St. Joseph, the communion railing was removed and a wooden altar was placed in mid-sanctuary facing the people. The sanctuary and the aisles of the church were carpeted.

In October, 1974, the crosses, steeples, and all the wood trim were painted. The bricks were tuck-pointed. This project was done by three men from the Austin Walker Steeplejack Service from Kendall, Wisconsin.

It was during this time that two rooms were built in the church hall in the south and east corners. In 1977, a coffee nook was added for the convenience of the Altar Society.

From its very inception as a parish, Rice Lake’s St. Joseph’s Church has been fortunate to have been served by a great number of forward-looking and dedicated priests. These men, with the help of Catholic laity, have helped people of all ages to live more fully their Catholic faith by becoming participants in the spiritual and physical growth of their parish.

Here then are listed the men who have guided our church for its first 100 years.
PASTORS

Priests from Chippewa Falls


1887-1888 Rev. Michael Schoelch First Resident Pastor
1889-1894 Rev. Peter Becker
1894-1895 Rev. Constantine Maria de Droste-Hulshoff
1895-1902 Rev. A. Rene Hopdegard
1902-1914 Rev. Christopher Schmit
1914-1915 Msgr. W. A. Beaudette
1915-1916 Rev. Christopher Schmit
Father returned after spending a year as Vicar General. He died May 4, 1916, at Superior.
1916-1917 Rev. J. B. Scheyer
1917-1920 Rev. Florian Gerhards
1920-1931 Rev. A. John Van Helden
Father died suddenly on June 6, 1931, while offering Mass.
1931-1946 Rev. Bernard Niggemann
1946-1959 Msgr. Peter F. Meyer
Father died on January 2, 1959, at St. Joseph's Hospital, Rice Lake.
Father celebrated his Silver Jubilee on May 17, 1961.
1975 Rev. John Spanjers