

Brief History of St. Joseph Catholic Church Buildings Garnavillo, Iowa

In 1868, eight (8) lots in the southwestern portion of Garnavillo (Block 15, along Washington Street) were purchased by Rev J. J. Quigley and deeded to John Hennessy, Bishop of Dubuque. Lots 3 and 4 were purchased from John & Mary Linton. Lots 1,2,5,6,7, and 8 were purchased from Bernard & Anna Schroeder. Located on the property was a foundation that had been laid a few years earlier by the town of Garnavillo for a public high school with the assumption that the county would provide funds for it. The funds were refused and due to lack of money the site was abandoned for that purpose. In 1866, six (6) years after selling the previous church, a delay perhaps due to the Civil War, a committee was appointed to make plans and raise funds to erect a new catholic. church.

The church was to be erected on the abandoned school foundation a site completely surrounded by pine trees. A contract with Mr. John Dehn, to build the church using brick from the local factory east of Garnavillo, states that the building was to be completed by July 1, 1876. The church was to be built on the existing 50' x 60' foundation *with well burned bricks. The walls were to be 5 courses thick with one inch hollow space, and 25 feet high up to the square with gables extending in the center 20 feet above the square. The brick to be laid in the style and workmanship equal to the Congregational Church of Garnavillo.* The church was built for \$6,500. The dimensions were 50 x 66 feet and 26 feet high. However, the church was still in need of a sanctuary to the north and an addition of about twenty feet with a tower and spire to make the structure complete.

There is not much said about the interior or exterior detail of the church. However, in the 1885 church ledger of Father Joseph Hellrigl, it is stated: the bell is paid, the three statues of angels are paid, the trees are planted and paid, the painting of the church is paid, the fence is paid, the banner is paid, the chalice and paten are paid, giving some idea of items put in place.

The beautiful high altar was donated by Mrs. Anna Berns in memory of Herman Berns, 1892. New side altars were installed in 1893 according to a news item in the March 16, 1893 Elkader paper. Between 1893 and 1918 the church was decorated, new pews installed, new furnace, etc.

In May 1935, extensive remodeling was begun with the addition of a new sanctuary, new front entrance and new bell tower with lightning rods, a new furnace and organ blower. New art glass windows were also installed. Several new pews, made to match the existing ones, were added to the front of the church. And the entire interior of the church was re-decorated. The remodeling was completed in May 1936 at a total cost of \$21,095.63.

The interior of the church was again re-decorated in 1963.

The first rectory was built in 1877 for \$1,000. The modest house was located southwest of the church (where the present brick school stands). It was moved in 1927, when the school was built, to the northeast corner of Washington and Maple¹ (Chestnut) streets. The house was later remodeled but still stands.

A new brick rectory was erected in the fall of 1926 for a total of \$13,348.19, and a new brick school followed in 1927.

The first Catholic school in Garnavillo was organized in 1889. It was held in a frame building that had housed the Briggs Academy (a private school), and was located on the northwest corner of Main and Maple¹ (Chestnut) streets. The school and lot on which it stood were purchased for \$1,000. The school consisted of two classrooms (a little room and a big room), both located on the second floor with the chapel and the bedrooms of the nuns. The boarding students bedrooms, dining room, kitchen and living and dining space for the nuns were on the ground floor. Students attended this school until about the age of 13 or 14.

A new brick school was erected in the summer of 1927 where the old rectory previously stood near the church, on corner of Oak and Adams streets, for a cost of \$31,084.26. It contained living quarters for the Sisters in the west part of the building, four classrooms, provisions for the chapel, music room, a parish kitchen and auditorium (located 12-15 steps below the entrance level), along with quarters for boarding students until 1934 when students were no longer boarded due to the convenience of cars for transportation. Eight classes were taught, two to each room. In 1934 a two year high school program was established. In 1954, high school classes were discontinued due to a shortage of nuns. The auditorium floor was raised to ground level when the school was remodeled in 1967. The grade school of St. Joseph's Parish officially closed in 1969. The brick building remains standing and in use as a fellowship hall.

Compiled February 2017 by Jane Thein, Garnavillo Historical Society

¹Church history records reference "Maple" street. However, all city plat maps, as far back as 1858, reference the applicable street as "Chestnut" street. No reference has been found that there was a "Maple" Street.

Sources:

1977 St. Joseph's Centennial Celebration book

Garnavillo Tribune 1927 article announcing Jubilee celebration (50 years)

1882 History of Clayton County pages 800-801

Garnavillo Gem of the Prairie by Arnold Roggman, page 168