

## St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Parish

No. 3 of a Series on Our Parish's First 100 Years

Our research did not disclose exactly when, after the new St. Mary's Church was dedicated in 1891, that the question of a second Catholic Church for Burlington was raised. The number of Catholics continued to increase with the increase in Burlington's population. In 1905, the population of the city and town, combined, stood at 3,760, about 620 more than had been reported in 1890. A St. Mary's parish census, also taken in 1905 at the direction of Archbishop Sebastian G. Messmer, showed a total of 1,904 persons in the congregation – 401 families and 76 singles. In the families, there were 1,134 children, of whom 801 were under 18 years of age.

The possibility of a second church was noted in a June 1906 article reporting that St. Mary's pastor, Father Theodore Jacobs, had donated a new altar to the church. The old altar, which had been procured in 1870 for the 1859 church, had been moved to the 1891 church and been in use for about 36 years. In reporting on the new altar, one of the Burlington newspapers said that the old altar was still in good shape and would be "used in a second Catholic church to be established here soon."



Rev. Philipp Dreis -  
St. Charles  
founding pastor

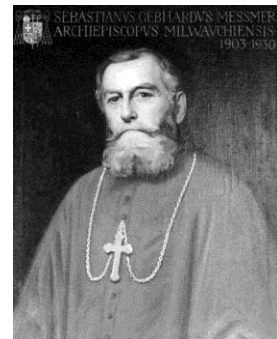
It was not until June 1908, however, that the matter of a second Catholic church in Burlington was again mentioned in the local newspapers. On Sunday, June 7, Rev. Jacobs announced that, by order of Archbishop Messmer, St. Mary's congregation would be divided and another parish formed, with Rev. Philipp Dreis of Caledonia as pastor. The congregation was to meet June 14 with "immediate steps taken to outline the new parish and commence the labor in the new field." It was expected that a suitable site would be purchased and a new church would be built as soon as possible.

According to the articles, the present church building was too small for the existing congregation and there was an imperative need of more room. One of the newspapers added "The congregation has increased from 175 families when Rev. T. Jacobs came here eighteen years ago to 430 families at the present time."

At the June 14 meeting a committee consisting of Father Jacobs, Frank Schemmer, Dennis McCarthy, William Wagner, Francis X. Klein, and Charles B. McCanna was appointed to look after the necessary details of establishing the proposed new parish. On August 17 and 18, Archbishop Messmer and Father Dreis were in Burlington to meet with the committee to go over the matter of dividing St. Mary's parish. After the Archbishop was taken over the proposed dividing lines in McCanna's automobile, the committee and clergy met and determined the following division:

Starting at the corner of Amanda and Conkey streets, follow the center of Amanda street north to the city limits. From the same corner follow the center of Conkey street to Lewis; on Lewis to Geneva (now Milwaukee avenue); on Geneva to Pine; on Pine to Adams; on Adams to the Fox river, and then follow the Fox river south.

1910 - 2010



Sebastian G. Messmer  
Archbishop of Milwaukee  
1903 - 1930

All territory east and north of the line was to belong to the new parish. With this division, it was estimated that the new parish would take in about 200 families. An option was secured on the Dailey property on North Chestnut street where it was thought that the new church would probably be located. The Dailey property, which was in the area of the present day Herman street, had a frontage of 12 rods on Chestnut street and ran through to Lewis street.

The Archbishop signified that the new congregation was to be principally English speaking, that the Gospel and publications would be read in English and German, and that a German sermon would be preached once a month.

In a meeting on August 23, those residing in the new parish elected Charles B.

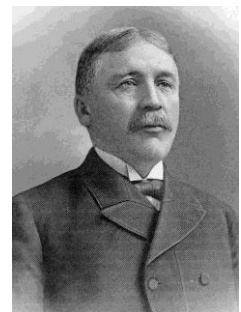
Wagner as secretary and Charles B. McCanna as treasurer. These two men, with the Archbishop, the archdiocese's vicar general, and Rev. Dreis, would constitute the board of trustees of the new parish, which was to be known as St. Charles. (One of the newspapers reported that the name of the parish would be St. George, but it corrected its mistake the following week.) The work of incorporating was to proceed at once. The officers were also instructed to buy the Dailey property if it could be secured at a right price.



Charles B. Wagner - first parish secretary

There was some opposition to the placing of the new church "out on Chestnut street" which some considered a rather inconvenient location for the greater majority of Catholics of the new congregation. One "Catholic Citizen" suggested in a letter to one of the newspapers that the largest Catholic farming community lived east and southeast of Burlington and, with a number of Catholic families on the east side of the Fox river, a church there near the south boundary of the city would be a more desirable location. The letter writer also made the point that for future needs, a spacious spot on the outskirts of the city would be a better selection for less money than property in a thickly settled district.

In a "spirited" meeting on October 11, an informal vote was taken on whether to locate the new church on the east or west side of the Fox river. The matter was "hotly contested on both sides" and when the vote was taken, the east side won 130 to 107. After eliminating double votes by some families which were entitled to only one vote, the revised vote stood at 109 to 89 in favor of the east side. The matter was not settled, however, until Archbishop Messmer, in a letter read at the Sunday Masses on October 25, said he favored the west side of the Fox river.



Charles B. McCanna - first parish treasurer



Portion of 1908 map of Burlington

*(to be continued)*