

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Parish

No. 4 of a Series on Our Parish's First 100 Years

1910 - 2010



St. Charles' articles of incorporation, filed August 23, 1908, were signed by Wisconsin's Secretary of State on September 10, 1908. The incorporators were Sebastian G. Messmer, Archbishop and president; Rt. Rev. Joseph Rainer, vicar general; Rev. Philipp Dreis, vice president and pastor; Charles B. Wagner, secretary; and Charles B. McCanna, treasurer.

Father Dreis, after being given a warm farewell party by his parishioners at St. Louis Church in Caledonia, moved to Burlington in October, occupying the residence at what is now 233 N. Chestnut street. From November 24 to 28, the two congregations, St. Mary's and St. Charles, held a church fair at Burlington's Opera House for the benefit of the new congregation. The Opera House, also known over the years as Teutonia Hall and the Orpheum Theatre, stood at the corner of Geneva and Dyer streets (now Milwaukee avenue and N. Kane street) where Schilli's Automotive Service is currently located. In January 1930 the building, then known as the Orpheum Theatre, burned down. It was not rebuilt.

The fall fair, which continued a St. Mary's tradition, included a Thanksgiving dinner and supper, an oyster supper on Friday evening, a Saturday afternoon "kaffee klatch," and lunches served at other times. Musical programs were presented each evening. Booths were set up to sell needlework and other fancy goods made by the ladies and young ladies, candy, sweets, fruit,

Following is a list of the booths with the names of those in charge:

Soft Drinks—The Kleins.
Candy Booth—The Misses Jennie McCarthy, Laura Warren, Josie Schemmer, Dora Schemmer.
"Old Ladies' Home," Useful Household Articles—Mrs. Louis Rein, Mrs. Frank Zwiebel, Mrs. Wm. Gill, Mrs. Jacob Steinhoff.
Fish Pond—The Misses Frances Schwaller, Rose Cook, Salome Schwaller, Irene Woeste, Dora Rueter.
Canned Fruit Booth—Mrs. F. W. Lelendecker, Misses Frances Stang, Rose Wiemers.
Japanese Booth, Fancy Work—The Misses Ada Bankes, Lulu Jacobson, Mayme Cunningham, Frances Reuschlein, Tena Brehm, Jessie Smith.
Dutch Booth, Windmill, Dutch Miller and Dutch Girls, Aprons, Dutch Souvenirs, Steins and Wooden Shoes—The Misses Hilda Rose, Veronica Schenk, Kate Finke, Leona Beller, Vinnie Zwiebel, Laurretta Uhen.
Wheel of Fortune—Dennis McCarthy.

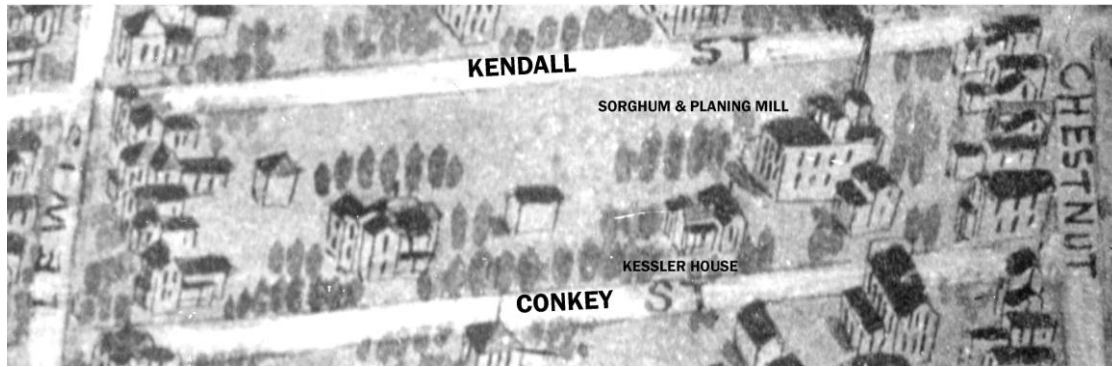
poultry, fish, produce, and home-baked goods. Those in charge of both a Dutch and a Japanese booth dressed in the costumes of those countries. Instrumental and vocal selections were offered; and a wheel of fortune served as a means to get rid of the many donations of chickens, geese, ducks, and various kinds of grain. The accompanying illustrations show a list of the booths, with the names of those in charge, and the winners of the various articles on which chances were offered.

Below we give a list of the winners of some of the principal articles disposed of:

Bed room set, donated by Foresters—Miss Nellie Callahan.
Rug, C. G. Foltz & Son.—Dr. H. Fehr.
Stove, Wagner Hardware Co.—Albert Leber.
Two scholarships, Burlington Business College.—Wm. Rehneman and Herbert Vos.
Overcoat, Matt. Cunningham.—Henry Kies.
Silk plush robe, J. V. Itzin.—A. F. Brown.
Electric stand lamp, L. J. Smith.—H. F. Woeste.
Library table, Roessing & Haas.—Miss Clara Cunningham.
Dresser, McCarthy & Itzin.—John A. Kareher.
Tea set, Burlington & Racine Tea Co.—Frank Pihringer.

Despite some weather problems, the fair was a decided success, netting about \$3,700 from the total receipts of over \$4,000. According to one of the newspapers, the active workers were tired out but glad to see that success had crowned their efforts. The cooperative efforts continued in February 1909 when the ladies of both congregations organized the St. Anthony's Aid Society to help the poor and visit the sick of the two parishes.

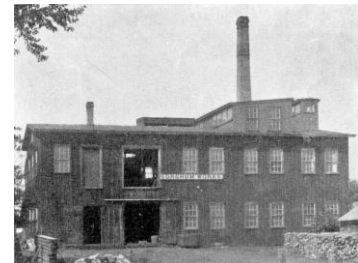
A suitable site for the church was the next matter of importance before St. Charles congregation. In March 1909, the present site on Conkey street was finally selected, with the greater portion purchased from Elias S. Voorhees and George W. Fiske at a reported price of \$4,800. That property, 20 rods in depth, had a footage of 4 rods on Conkey street and 4 rods on Kendall street and included an additional 2 rod portion in the center of the tract, making that segment 6 rods wide. The main building on the site had served as a planing mill and sorghum



Artist's 1896 depiction of block in which St. Charles was later located

mill, but had long since fallen into disuse. Voorhees and Fiske were to take all the machinery and fittings out of the building, with the congregation getting the building. The congregation also purchased the Lewis P. Kessler residence property on Conkey street. The consideration was not made public. That property, adjoining the Voorhees and Fiske property on the west, had a frontage of 8 rods on Conkey street and was 10 rods deep.

On May 7, 1909, the Archdiocese authorized a \$5,800 loan to the congregation. At a meeting on May 9, the resignations of Charles B. Wagner and Charles B. McCanna as secretary and treasurer, respectively, were accepted, and William H. Wagner and Henry Pihringer were appointed in their places. Meeting attendees were told that the work of securing subscriptions to the building fund was "going on nicely" and that in a short time everything would be in readiness to adopt plans and go ahead with the building of the new church.



Voorhees & Fiske planing and sorghum mill, 1898

In addition to the subscription drive, various fundraisers were held. In June, for example, a new musical club, called the "Mozart Club," gave its first program at the residence of S. M. Reinardy, with the receipts for the benefit of St. Charles congregation. The performers, all local musicians, included 9-year-old piano prodigy William Beller, who would graduate from St. Charles grade school in 1914 and go on to win a national piano competition, to give concerts throughout the United States and in Europe, and to teach piano at Marquette and Columbia Universities. With tickets at 25 cents, the club raised a total of \$43. In July, the ladies of the congregation held an ice cream social and home baking sale on the new parish's lawn on Conkey street, raising about \$105. They also raised about \$170 with a "measuring party" in the mill building, with each attendee being measured on entering and, with a payment of so many cents per foot, being entitled to a dish of ice cream and to a musical and literary program.

In July the congregation advertised the former Voorhees and Fiske planing mill building for sale at auction, along with the barn from the Kessler property and two smaller buildings. At the July 10 auction, Frank Schemmer was the high bidder on the planing mill building at \$350, with Albert Bernert having the top bid of \$231 on the Kessler barn. The buildings were to be removed from the premises within 30 days. While Bernert removed the barn from the Kessler property and moved it to a lot in Perkins Park (probably on Edward street) where he planned to remodel it into a residence, Schemmer apparently did not complete the planing mill purchase. Instead, the congregation paid Ben Rothering to tear down the mill, saving the timbers and lumber in good condition for use in the new church. The rest were sold, along with other items such as windows, tables, and benches, to offset the wrecking costs.

(to be continued)