

# Portage Catholic Church Marks 100th Anniversary

[State Journal News Service]  
**PORTAGE**—The Catholic church in Portage today paused to observe the 100th anniversary of its founding in a tiny log church built in 1833 by Pierre Pauquette, believed to have been the first church built in Wisconsin between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi river.

No celebration is being held in connection with the anniversary. The age of the church was simply announced by the Rev. Father J. B. Piette, pastor, on the final Sunday before the church passes into its 101st year. A celebration, at which the archbishop of the Milwaukee diocese will probably be present, is planned for next summer.

St. Mary's church of Portage had its founding in a period of rich history, the date following closely that of the building of Fort Winnebago in 1828, and construction of the Indian Agency house two years later. It was built by one of the most picturesque characters in the history of this section, Pierre Pauquette, trader, interpreter, fighter, freighter, and government representative among the Indians, his mother's people.

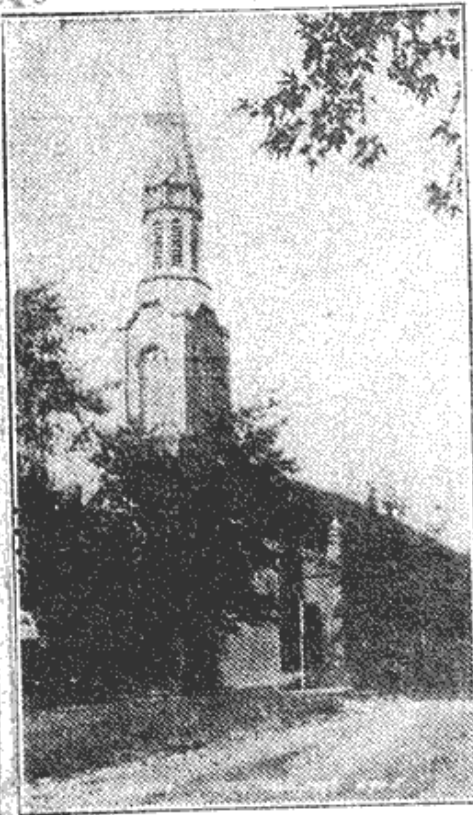
The history of Catholicism in this section, however, antedates by two years building of the church. Father Samuele Carlo Mazzuchelli, Dominican missionary to the Indians, first came to the portage in 1831. He was the first missionary to this section since Allouez, Daben and Marquette, who preceded him by 150 years. Father Mazzuchelli held his first Christian service on the prairie near Chief DeKaury's village, in a bower constructed by the Indians.

### Erected Own Tombstone

Father Mazzuchelli succeeded in awakening a great deal of religious interest among Indians in this region, among them Pauquette's wife, Therese Crelic. To encourage the cause, the trader, at his own expense and with his own hands, erected a small building in 1833. It was the first church built in Wisconsin, historians believe, and until 1840, when it burned, was the only church edifice at the portage.

Pauquette, in building the little church, unknowingly erected his

own tombstone. The life of this picturesque trader and scout ended only three years after the church was constructed, when Pauquette was assassinated by an Indian with whom he had had trouble. Mourned by all the Indians of this section to whom he was the chief of chiefs, and by the white men, to whom he was a friend, Pauquette was buried beneath the little Catholic church. After the church burned, the body was moved when the city was platted, and the burial place lost sight of until 1904 when workmen, digging the basement for the Baptis-



church parsonage, exhumed the casket and bones, which were taken to the Catholic cemetery.

### Permanent Church Established

Although the church burned, the faith thrived among both the whites and Indians, and the coming to Portage of permanent settlers in the '50s, Patrick Lennon, Charles Moore, M. R. Keegan, James Collins, Thomas Christopher, John Sweeney and Mrs. Ward, marked the establishment of a permanent Catholic church.

A missionary, Father Godhardt, said mass in 1850 in the home of Mrs. Ward, and nearly in 1851, a frame church was erected. The Rev. James Roach came in 1852 as the first permanent priest, and in 1857 the Rev. J. Doyle became pastor.

Father Doyle was ambitious for his parish and through his activities the present church property was purchased. The Catholic church was dedicated in the new building as St. Mary's of the Immaculate Conception. Father Doyle also purchased a tract of land just north of Portage, now used as the parish cemetery.

The Revs. P. J. O'Neil and F. Pettit succeeded Father Doyle. The next priest was Father F. Keenan, who preached at Kilbourn, Lodi, and Dane besides Portage. During his pastorate the parochial school was built on West Conant st. Father Keenan died in 1880 and was succeeded by his brother, Joseph Keenan, who served eight years.

#### Church Is Improved

His successors were Fathers John Brady, J. A. Giessler and George Brady. Under Father George Brady, who was pastor 13 years, improvements to the extent of \$8,000 were made in the church. He died in 1897, and his successors were the Revs. J. D. Cummane and M. H. Clifford.

The Rev. James H. Brady came to the church to become one of its most able pastors, after the transfe. of Father Clifford. Fathers John Morrissey, Berlin, James Nichols and Charles McBride followed him. The present priest, the Rev. J. B. Piette, came to Portage from Kenosha 10 years ago to take over the parish.

The church, which began in a log structure erected by one man a century ago, now is the largest in Portage and its parish numbers the largest membership. The property has been extended to include, besides the handsome brick church, the parochial school and parish hall, the large parsonage, and the convent for the order of Dominican nuns. St. Savior's hospital and St. Savior's annex, a home for old people, also belong to a Catholic order, but are not under supervision of the Portage church.

#### Parish Unusually Active

The parish here is unusually active and numbers among its members many of the professional, civic and social leaders of the city. Many societies, auxiliary to the church, assist in carrying on its work. Among them are the Portage Catholic Woman's club, the Junior League of the Woman's club, Portage council of the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Order of Foresters, St. Mary's Catholic Order of Foresters, St. Mary's Guild, Sacred Heart Society, Young Ladies' Sodality, and the Altar Society.

