

## **Parochial Schools Play Major Role in Marshfield Education**

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### **Serve Needs of 2,000 Students**

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#### **Four Congregations Have Own Schools**

Physical plants of four Marshfield churches identified with the Lutheran and Catholic denominations operate parochial schools in which more than 2,000 students were officially registered during the past scholastic year.

The parochial education facilities include a high school, serving city and area Catholic parishes, and elementary schools identified with Immanuel Lutheran Parish and each of the community's three Catholic parishes St. John's, Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Peace.

Two other religious schools formerly operated here under the auspices of St. Paul's Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

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A history of St. John's Catholic School cannot be attempted without writing biographies of two former faculty members, School Sisters of Notre Dame, who have staffed it for more than a half-century. Sister Mary Theodine, who witnessed the growth of St. John's and Marshfield, arrived on Aug. 5, 1886, when the city was in its infant stage. The school in which she and the other four sisters were to teach had been established four years previously.

Sister Mary Phileta came to Marshfield in 1896. During her 50-year term here she taught more than 2,150 pupils. She observed her golden jubilee here on Aug. 9, 1945, and died in the Mother House at Milwaukee in August, 1954.

Sister Theodine, so much a part of the history of the parish, left St. John's in 1936 and died 10 years later, on April 15, 1946.

The population hardly exceeded 1,000 when Sister Theodine came to the city which had been incorporated three years before. Numerous stumps, remnants of recently logged virgin pine, were still standing in the school yard. West and north of the parish buildings there was little, if any, appreciable development. A farm had been established in a small clearing on a site which is now that of St. Joseph's Hospital.

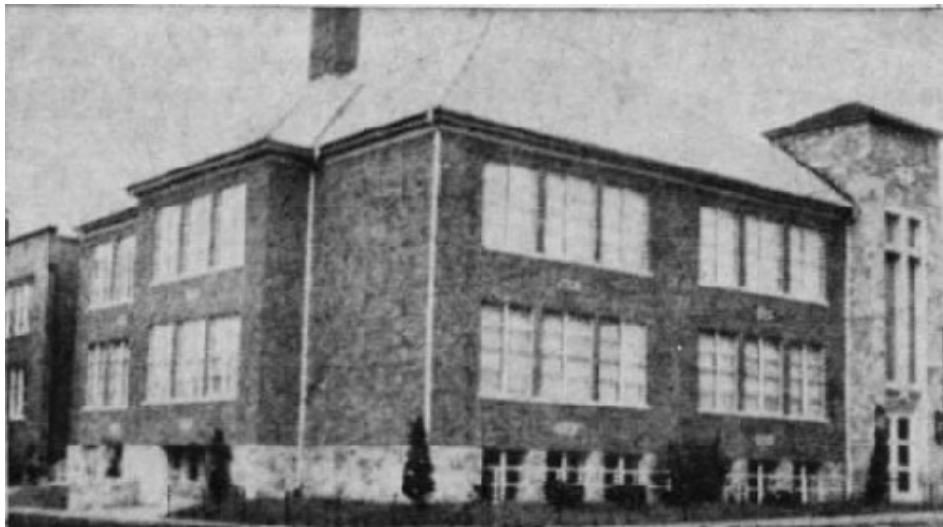
Sister Theodine, who after her retirement spent several years here, enjoyed telling of the Marshfield fire of 1887, in which the St. John's buildings just barely escaped. She related to her many visitors the story of the "bath" the Rev. Ignatius Schaller received when one of the Sisters climbed on the roof to extinguish a small blaze and dumped two buckets of water on the pastor. He ran for cover.

The Sisters gathered some belongings together and hurried into the woods for shelter. When they returned later they found St. John's Church filled with homeless persons, some of whom stayed several days. A diphtheria epidemic broke out a few days later.

In those days school continued into July, but in 1887 St. John's did not resume classes after the fire. Instead the building was turned over to several families who lived there until their own homes could be replaced.

Venerable Sister Mary Hippolita was the first principal of the school which opened its doors Dec. 6, 1882. Assisting her with the task of teaching the 86 pupils were Sisters Mary Amadea and Monegundis.

Among the pupils who sat in the benches of the small frame school, were children of other faiths whose parents paid tuition for them to attend. Later the enrollment mounted to such proportions that priority had to be given to Catholic students.



*St. John's School*

The oldest Catholic parochial school in Wood county soon found it necessary to expand. Six years after the first school opened a four-room brick building was erected. The old school was remodeled for the Sisters' convent. In 1897 another new building was put up. This was a two-story building housing eight class-

rooms, an assembly hall and library, costing about \$16,000. During the pastorate of the Rev. Joseph F. Volz a new convent for the Sisters was built.

To accommodate the upper grades and two years of high school. Father A. J. Dorrenbach put up a new school in 1928. (This building, until recently, was known as St. John's High School and later Columbus High School.)

On July 18, 1943, the "old school" as it was called, was gutted by fire. Hardly were the embers cold when plans were drawn up for the present grade school. Until its completion, classes were held in every available space, even in the basement of the Sisters' convent and the church chapel. The new school was built during the pastorate of the Very Rev. Michael J. Kelnhofer. It stands on the corner of Blodgett and Walnut streets, on the original school site.

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The building, constructed on the framework of the original building at a cost of \$116,000, was planned by a committee composed of Leo Fehrenbach, A. G. Felker, F. X. Pritzl, F. S. Schneider, Adolph Kleinheinz and Jacob Thomas. The fifth school erected by the parish, is 90 by 90 feet, and has 12 classrooms. It is constructed of Marshfield brick and Stevens Point sandstone.

When the Bishop of La Crosse appointed the late Very Rev. Hugh J. Deeny, principal of Columbus High School, to change St. John's from a two-year high school to a four-year, the building constructed in 1928, served until the new building on Columbus Ave. was completed and ready for occupancy in 1952. Today it is again used for the upper grades of St. John's.

The two buildings now accommodate about 750 students.

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A Lutheran summer school was opened here in June, 1883, by F. C. Wurl, then a student pastor at Immanuel's Lutheran Church.

In 1886 the people of the parish organized a regular day school, which was conducted in a frame building also serving as a church. The Rev. L. Th. Thom, who was the first resident pastor of the church, served as the teacher. The enrollment was about 50 pupils. As the school grew an additional teacher was employed.



*Immanuel Lutheran School*

Quarters were soon inadequate and in 1892 a new church had to be built. The old church building was used for school purposes. In order to provide better facilities for the school the congregation decided to build a four-room brick structure to house it. The building was put up in the rear of the church and faces Chestnut street. It was completed in 1906 at a total cost of \$7,000. Dedication was held Oct. 28, 1906.

In 1889 Professor Otto Hellerman assumed the principalship of the school and served in that capacity for many years. Early teachers were Miss Emma Kionka, Miss Hattie Kehrberg, Miss Martha Perlewitz, Miss Irmgard Hensel and others.

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Economic conditions forced the school to close in 1933. In the fall of 1941 the services of Erich Albers were engaged. He assisted in the training of the children and worked with the choir, serving also as organist. In the fall of 1942 the Day School was reopened with Mr. Albers serving as principal and Miss Martha Wendt teaching the lower grades.

Roy Knaak came after Albers resigned in 1944. He served for one year and George Pingel of Milwaukee, who is still principal, accepted a call. Miss Wendt left the teaching profession in 1953 and since then the lower grades have been taught by Mrs. Herman Stecker. Last fall 85

pupils were taught by three teachers.

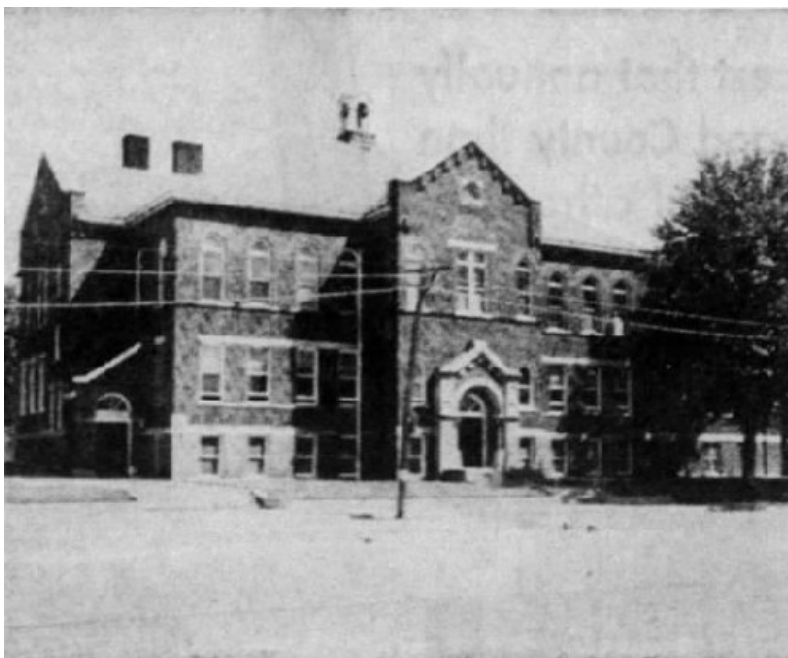
One former Immanuel Lutheran School pupil recalled having learned the German alphabet before the English A, B, C's. Soon after World War I the German language was dropped.

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St. Paul's Evangelical and Reformed Church had a parochial school next to the church on E. Fourth St., and Miss Alta Sherman (Mrs. J. B. Vedder) taught public school classes there. The students were an overflow from the Lincoln School. It was erected in 1907 but there are no available records to show when the school closed.

The members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church had a school room built on the rear of the church in 1914. One teacher was employed to take care of this school. The number of children in attendance from year to year varied from 10 to 15. The school was supported by the congregation, was discontinued in the spring for 1923, and later reorganized. For lack of enrollment it again closed a few years ago.

Sacred Heart Catholic Grade School opened its doors in September, 1917, under the direction of four School Sisters of Notre Dame. At first the church, school and sisters' living quarters were in one large building. The cornerstone was laid in August, 1916, by the Very Rev. Joseph Volz, then dean of the Marshfield deanery.



*Sacred Heart School*

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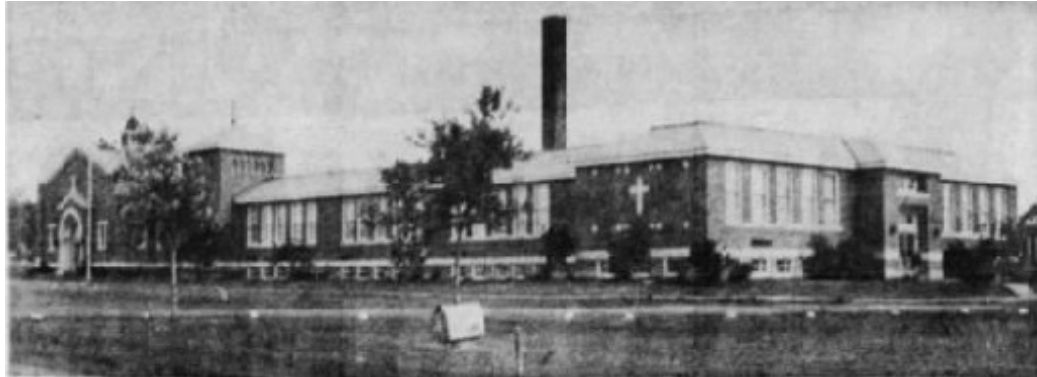
So rapidly did the parish expand that in 1924 the Sisters moved out of the school into a convent, thus making more classrooms available. A two-story addition of four more classrooms was made in 1932.

In that same year the present church was built. When Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church was organized many of the Sacred Heart parishioners were within its boundaries. The enrollment of the school is currently about 342 with a staff of six regular-studies Sisters, two lay teachers and one Sister in charge of music. Classes in religion are conducted by clergy.

Overcrowding of facilities of the two older churches and schools, St. John's and Sacred Heart, resulted in the official decree of the erection of a new parish on June 21, 1947. Antedating the decree by two months was the official appointment of the Rev. Walter J. Dillenburg to the charge on April 17.

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Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church and School was finished and dedicated on June 10, 1949. The eight classrooms in the building, 171 ft. by 60 ft., are of modern styling and there is a dining room in the basement that seats 340 and a club-room for 150.



The School Sisters of Notre Dame who formerly made their home in sev-

*Our Lady of Peace School*

eral of the school rooms, have since moved into their quarters at the new convent which they share with the Sisters who teach at Columbus High School. The convent, located on Columbus Ave., is between the high school and Our Lady of Peace Church.

Present enrollment in the school is approximately 350.

"Bishop, that's a big order . . . I'll take it and with God's protection and your help we can do it."

With that comment the first principal of Columbus High School, the late Very Rev. Hugh J. Deeny, accepted the challenge to build a replacement for St. John's two-year junior high. From that meeting on Sunday evening, June 12, 1949, on through to the groundbreaking, the laying of the cornerstone and finally the dedication, Father Deeny never gave up the huge task of building a new school while still caring for a large parish, St. John's.

His interest in the school which he built with the assistance of 10 area congregations, didn't end when he "graduated" from the principal's job during the 1953 commencement exercises. It ended, rather, with his death, June 30, 1955, in an automobile accident near Milwaukee, which also claimed the life of E. M. Lee, local businessman.

The Most Rev. John P. Treacy, Bishop of La Crosse, at the funeral Mass read for Father Deeny, dedicated the auditorium in his memory. It is now known as the "Father Hugh J. Deeny Memorial Auditorium" in memory of the man who built and established Marshfield's Catholic high school.

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Following the first formal announcement of the proposed new school on Jan. 16, 1950, planning pushed ahead, and on April 22, 1951. the ground was broken by Father Deeny for the structure. The cornerstone was laid on Aug. 18, 1951, by Bishop Treacy. Final dedication of the million-dollar building was made on Sept. 14, 1952.

Originally classes were held in the old St. John's High School, where every available inch was



*Columbus High School*

rough planks, on May 30, 1952. The ensuing fall term was delayed from Sept. 3 to Sept. 8 as the last stages of construction were completed. Local parishioners volunteered to level, plant, and clean up the school grounds. The first students attending classes in the new building were taught by 19 instructors, School Sisters of Notre Dame, lay persons and clergy.

Enrollment of the school has continued to grow and has now increased so much that all available classroom space will be utilized this fall to accommodate the nearly 500 students expected. There will be 13 homerooms, including four for the freshmen and three each for the other classes — a fitting tribute to the man who built and loved the school.

used to take care of the mounting enrollment. A corridor was partitioned off for a library, and the music department crowded into an off-stage dressing room.

In a partially completed auditorium, 69 members of the first graduating class sat on the stage, which was covered with



*FUNERAL CORTEGE  
FOR FATHER JOHN  
EISEN*

*The funeral cortege for the Rev. John Eisen, who died May 29, 1907, after serving St. John's parish in Marshfield for 15 years, is shown here as it passed St. Joseph's Hospital on the way to Hillside cemetery. His name was given to the Knights of Columbus Council, which held its first Initiation May 16, 1915, the day its charter was granted. This photo was obtained from W. A. Uthmeier.*