

July 5, 2008

To: Landmarks Commission members

From: Ledell Zellers

Subject: St. Rays

I believe that buildings can carry important historic meaning even if they have been gutted by fire. St. Raphael's is such a building. While both the city and the diocese seem to have "written off" this piece of Madison and the state's history, the church is still extraordinarily meaningful to many people and as a Madison City Landmark can tell a story to generations to come. As noted in the Landmarks Commission ordinance:

33.19.(1) It is hereby declared a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of improvements of special character or special historical interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of health, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people. The purpose of this section is to:

- (a) Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history.
- (b) Safeguard the City's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in such landmarks and historic districts.
- (c) Stabilize and improve property values.
- (d) Foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past.
- (e) Protect and enhance the City's attractions to residents, tourists and visitors, and serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry.
- (f) Strengthen the economy of the City.
- (g) Promote the use of historic districts and landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the City.

33.19 (4) Landmarks And Landmark Sites Designation Criteria.

(a) For purposes of this ordinance, a landmark or landmark site designation may be placed on any site, natural or improved, including any building, improvement or structure located thereon, or any area of particular historic, architectural or cultural significance to the City of Madison, such as historic structures or sites which:

1. Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community; or
2. Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state or local history; or
3. Embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship or
4. Are representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influences his age.

Clearly St. Rays meets the qualifications of being a Madison Landmark under all four designation criteria. Especially noteworthy is it having been designed by the noted German

born architect Victor Schulte. Schulte was one of the most prominent architects practicing in Wisconsin at the time. Please see the attached history of St Raphael Cathedral by Jack Holzhueter which is attached.

To show how another community has protected and now enjoys and uses a church (built in 1837) that was also gutted by fire (in 1876) I have attached some photographs. This church in its park setting is enjoyed by tourists as well as locals. Sections of the church have been rebuilt and stabilized throughout the 20th century. Madison could perhaps learn from the successes of other communities about options for recognizing our historic heritage even when finances dictate that a building cannot be totally rebuilt after a fire.

It saddens me that the City of Madison and the Catholic diocese are showing so little vision and such little regard for Madison's history in their push for the demolition of St. Raphael's. I'm hopeful you may not take the easier route of endorsing demolition over the more difficult route of voting to recommend landmarking this important building.

Sincerely,

Ledell Zellers
510 N. Carroll St.
Madison, WI 53703

St. Raphael Cathedral, a History of the Structure and Its Site

By John O. (Jack) Holzhueter

[Prepared initially for delivery at the December 15, 2005, forum at St. Patrick's Church, with a new introduction and additional facts spelling out a parallel situation for the creation and location of the cathedrals in Milwaukee and Madison.]

It is a pleasure and a privilege to talk with you tonight about St. Raphael's history, and to share with you my findings that St. Raphael Cathedral was an early centerpiece of Madison city planning and architecture, comparable to the cathedral in Milwaukee, as well as being a symbol of Roman Catholicism's contribution to the city and state. Two figures emerge as key to the realization of the cathedral and the courthouse square, across from which the cathedral stands. The figures are Bishop John Martin Henni of the Diocese of Milwaukee and James Duane Doty, the father of the Madison plat, the promoter who succeeded in having Madison made the capital city of the territory and state, and the governor of the territory, with headquarters in Madison, at the time Bishop Henni acquired from the block on which the cathedral stands. The bishop subsequently choose the same architect he had for the cathedral in Milwaukee, which also stands across from a square where Milwaukee County's courthouse stood at the time the Milwaukee Cathedral was erected. In sum, Bishop Henni arranged for Madison to enjoy the same situation that existed in Milwaukee—a strong suggestion that he had intended a cathedral to exist in Madison when it exists today, but a full century before that circumstance took place.

St. Raphael's Cathedral already has its historian, Charles T. Scott, who wrote a sesquicentennial history of the church and the parish in 2004. His work assembles many useful details, but does not make the connections to the history the cathedral to the Milwaukee cathedral, nor to the parallel history of the sites for the Milwaukee and Madison cathedrals. I developed my insights from a different background: work in religious history, architectural and planning history, and state and local history in which I was engaged over a 35-year period as an employee of the Wisconsin Historical Society as an editor, researcher, and writer.

The bare bones of the cathedral's history are pretty simple.

First masses for Madison Catholics were said in households beginning in 1842 by the bishop of the Diocese of Milwaukee (John Martin Henni) and a priest or two out of Milwaukee, the diocesan headquarters, and later also out of Roxbury and Sauk City, where Catholicism in Dane County took root in 1845 under the leadership of Fathers Adalbert Inama and Maximilian Gaertner. Madison had received its first residents in 1838 (they had come to build the territorial capital), and the population was still very tiny in 1842. That same year the diocese acquired a full city block for a church site, across from what was intended to become the courthouse square, obviously in anticipation of the growth of Madison as a capital city, and obviously because the diocese wished to make a significant statement for Catholicism in that capital.

Madison acquired its first resident Roman Catholic priest in 1848 who stayed only briefly. This was the year of statehood and Bishop Henni assuredly understood the

implications for the city's growth once statehood had been achieved. Bishop Henni was known far and wide for his prescience about sites for towns and churches, as described in Msgr. Peter Leo Johnson's biography of Henni. In 1850 Henni sent the Rev. Fr. Francis Xavier Etchmann to Madison, doubtless to have him build a church, since Madison Catholics at that time were still worshipping in public halls. Etchmann quickly set things in motion, and around 1850 a small wooden church was erected, and later a larger brick edifice was added to it—a pattern similar to that experienced a little earlier in Roxbury at St. Norbert's, where Father Inama had presided since the mid- 1840s.

In 1854, a push for a large edifice took place, fulfilling what were apparently the bishop's earlier aspirations. The timing for the push coincided with Madison's finally being joined in 1854 to the growing railroad system in the United States. True municipal growth had not been able to occur earlier because the community had lacked a readily convenient transportation connection to the commercial world. The railroad and the city's isthmus location prompted a flurry of activity among resort builders and summer visitors, it brought numerous Irish-Catholic settlers to the community as workmen (they found a pre-existing Irish community south of Madison and in Rock County), and it occasioned church building by other denominations as well. Besides St. Raphael's, only the Grace Episcopal church building on the Capitol Square survives from that period. The tireless Fr. Etchmann raised construction funds by campaigning in the East. Bishop Henni doubtless arranged for the German-born Victor Schulte, Milwaukee's premier architect for the day, to furnish a design and plans. Schulte had earlier designed St. John's Cathedral in Milwaukee, as well as St. Mary's in Milwaukee, both of them significant landmarks. Again it must have been Bishop Henni who instructed Schulte to design a structure that far exceeded the needs of the Madison Catholic community at the time, even though it was growing rapidly. The gesture was surely symbolic—the planting of Catholicism firmly in the young state's capital.

Schulte's design is Romanesque and the plan is that of a "hall" church—a long, fairly wide plan without a crossing. Such high-ceilinged churches were common in Germany. (I am not familiar with the plans of St. Mary's and John's, so cannot compare the three.) Etchmann's fund-raising appeals worked somewhat successfully among earlier German settlements in states to the east, and doubtless he used Madison's capital status to help persuade prospects to donate.

Construction dragged on through the acute depression of 1857 (the year the church seems to have received its name, for St. Raphael the Archangel) and into the Civil War, which began in 1861. The war launched a boom in Madison, because thousands of soldiers were trained at Camp Randall and the associated governmental and military demands helped the city prosper. In 1862, the church was finished enough to be occupied (something Fr. Etchmann was brought back to Madison to accomplish), but it was not fully finished until 1866, when Bishop Henni dedicated it properly. The tower or steeple at that point was a stubby affair, not the tall, Germanic, Romanesque spire that appears in a drawing from 1854. That artist was Samuel Hunter Donnel, a Madison architect who

arrived about the time the church was being promoted, and he probably drew directly from Schulte's design, which was never executed.

In 1882, the congregation added a steeple, but in a completely different design from Schulte's. The architect for it was Stephen Vaughn Shipman, then of Chicago but formerly of Madison. He contributed the design free of charge, and true to his form he ignored Schulte's original intentions, just as he had he designed a dome for the capitol building 1868. The dome was in the beaux arts style, popularized by the relatively new dome on the U. S. capitol in Washington, and did not at all match the rundbogenstil (German Romanesque) design created by the capitol's German-born architect, August Kutzbock. (Kutzbock was the partner of Donnel, who had made the 1854 drawing.) The Shipman steeple mixes Romanesque, Gothic, and Second Empire design elements—a *mélange* that was characteristic of 1880s architecture in the U.S.

From 1882 until the fire in March, 2005, the exterior of the church remained mostly unchanged, except for necessary expansions for entrances mechanicals at the back of the building. The steeple had been thoroughly rebuilt, but not redesigned, in 2004, as part of the sesquicentennial observance for the church and to make the tower safe for the future.

Now, in late 2005, even in its ruined state, the building is the oldest, most important architecturally and historically, large masonry building in the city, being rivaled only by Bascom Hall on the campus, the central portion of which dates to 1859. Additionally, St. Ray's location on the central Madison hill overlooking Lake Monona gives it pride of place unrivaled by any other church in town.

As for the interior of the church, I have not found records, photographs, or useful descriptions about the appearance of the interior of the church between the 1860s and the 1950s. Extensive changes were made to the interior in 1955, when, already a cathedral for nine years, St. Raphael's sanctuary it was significantly modified using plans drawn by the John J. Flad Company assisted by New York ecclesiastical specialists. A similar adjustment was made in 1973 in connection with the recommendations of Second Vatican Council.

So much for the chronological history and the importance of the building. I would like to turn to a discussion of its site, and what I have to say links the development of Madison directly with St. Raphael's, beginning in the territorial period, and puts it on a par with the cathedral of the Diocese of Milwaukee.

To put it plainly, St. Raphael's is the only church in Madison which was integrally tied to the creation of the original plat of Madison and the transformation of that plat into a city. Today, little except a street plan, the location of the capitol building, and St. Raphael Church still exist from that period.

To grasp both the importance of this issue and its background requires an understanding of how two of Wisconsin's most important early figures conducted their business—James

Duane Doty and Bishop John Martin Henni, both of whom seem to have been known more by their middle names than by their first names.

Doty was entrepreneurial, a consummate promoter, and a man of taste. He fashioned the Madison plat along the lines of Indianapolis's plat, which in turn has antecedents in the plats of Detroit, Washington, and Paris. His entrepreneurial desires for Madison were assuredly what led him to sell to the diocese, for only one dollar, one of the prime blocks in the city—a ploy that secured the site for a dramatic and highly visible building, more visible than the first capitol itself. At the time of the sale, he also knew that Dane County would build its courthouse (a domed building, like the capitol) directly across Main Street on the downhill side toward the lake. Thus, the two full blocks of significant structures would create a courthouse square as an adjunct to Capitol Square only a block away. For travelers approaching the city, St. Raphael Church and the courthouse would dominate the view of Madison as one arrived from the south, east, or west, especially by rail. (By the 1840s, Doty would have known that railroads, not canals, would link Madison to the rest of the world, and railroads were routinely built along the edges of lakes and rivers.) Doty developed several plats in Wisconsin, and he routinely thought about how his plats could be developed to maximum dramatic effect as well as maximum economic effect. In those respects, he varied little from most town-site promoters and developers at the time. (Developers today are generally not as acutely aware of prospects and views.)

Doty found a ready ally for his Madison ambitions in Bishop Henni. The two must have known one another, since most immigrant Irish and Germans to Wisconsin at that time were Democrats politically, as was Doty, who was living in Madison as the territorial governor at the time of the sale of the St.

Raphael block. Doty would have gravitated toward Henni for both political and promotional reasons—to cement support for his party and to lend his townsite some luster. (The president appointed territorial governors; they were not elected. But citizens of the territory did elect congressional representatives and the territorial legislature.) I have not checked the excellent biographies of Henni, by Peter Leo Johnson, and Doty, by the late Alice Smith, to verify these hunches, but the physical appearance of things, the men's biographies, and the existing evidence all suggest that I am probably spot on.

There is, furthermore, the physical evidence that Bishop Henni and Doty seem deliberately to have imitated the earlier juxtaposition of cathedral and courthouse square in Milwaukee which was realized in the 1830s and 1840s.

Doty's cousin, another developer named Morgan L. Martin, gave the diocese the site for its Milwaukee cathedral, which was then sited directly east of the courthouse square in the city. The county eventually abandoned that square, and it has been renamed Cathedral Square. The coincidence is remarkable and suggests strongly that both Doty and the bishop in the 1840s and 1850s believed that Madison would be the seat of a diocese, and that they together prepared for that eventuality.

For his part, Henni was no slouch at land speculation either. Peter Leo Johnson points out that he routinely acquired prime sites for churches throughout the developing territory and state, and that he seemed to have an uncanny genius for selecting them. Henni differed from Doty primarily in his motivation. He desired to advance the church in

Wisconsin, not to promote himself personally or to acquire a personal fortune. But both men had to use some of the same techniques, and situating St. Raphael's on the Lake Monona hill was just too good an idea for either of them to reject. It gave the church high visibility and planted Catholicism adjacent to the capitol. It gave the city a second, highly traditional courthouse square overlooking its more beautiful lake, compared to Lake Mendota. And it helped promote immigration. The abundance of mere physical and chronological evidence indicates that these arrangements were not accidental, but highly intentional and had a precedent in Milwaukee. They were a marriage made in heaven for the bishop, and a marriage made in the countinghouse and the statehouse for Doty.

Thoughtful Madisonians grasped the spirit of Doty and Henni's intentions readily. When St. Raphael's cornerstone was laid on May 28, 1854, by Bishop Henni, the Wisconsin State Journal noted the next day: "The situation of the Church is fine, overlooking both the Third and Fourth Lakes, and when erected it will be the most prominent building in town as seen from the Railroad."

This was a critical observation, since it suggests a verification of Doty's and Henni's intentions. The article goes on to note and condemn the anti-Catholic prejudices of the American Party or Know-Nothing party, then at its zenith in Wisconsin. In that political climate, the prominence of St. Raphael's made a strong statement to the citizens of both the community and the state that Catholicism was here to stay, would not be intimidated, and would occupy a high point within Wisconsin's capital city.

The pairing of courthouse and the church remained intact until the erection of the City County Building in 1957, when the truly ugly Dane County parking ramp took the place of the old courthouse. (The county should reconfigure the ramp to make it more useful and attractive.) As with churches, private schools, and large commercial and retail structures in every community, the public quickly took emotional ownership of St. Raphael's, even though it has no stake in its operation, nor does it have any fiscal responsibility for the church.

This common public trait seems to apply only to private structures in the central parts of towns and cities, not to suburban or mall developments. The public's affection attaches itself to clusters of buildings and spaces among which pedestrians may walk and experience the architecture close up. It also attaches itself to buildings of architectural merit, such as, in Madison, St. Raphael's, Grace Episcopal, and the Unitarian Meetinghouse in Madison. Each has its own magnetic attraction. Average residents may never enter them nor understand their purpose, but they love the buildings, their lawns and gardens, and their beauty spots and blemishes. They constitute "neighborhood," they give us a sense of place, and we develop pride in them.

Thus, Madisonians and residents of the greater metropolitan area have come to "own" St. Raphael's, though the vast majority of them have never set foot into the place. The diocese may own the structure, the clergy, religious, and parishioners may imbue it with spiritual and sentimental attachments, but the wider public puts it into a context of place and space. The wider public endows it with its status as a landmark, confirming the success of the original intentions of James Duane Doty and John Martin Henni.

I cannot resist concluding on a personal, not historical, note in the form of a dream. I dream that diocese, the county, the city, and the Overture Foundation will enter into a conversation about the future of St. Raphael's. I dream that an uber-architect, Rem Koolhaas from Rotterdam is my pick, will design a rehabilitated structure and landscape for it, as he is doing for the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. I dream that the county will acknowledge the exceptional site on which it has put a ramp deserves something better and let Koolhaas come up with some other ideas for it—a rethought Union Square (like those in New York and San Francisco) or Pershing Square (Los Angeles) or Millennium Park (Chicago). I dream that this dream will become an adjunct to downtown revitalization as seen in the Overture Center and the restoration of the capitol. I dream that the results will restore the long-forgotten courthouse-square notion that Bishop Henni and James Duane Doty brought into being in the early years of statehood and Madison's life when it was the size of a town. And I dream that everyone will find some way to pull together to keep St. Raphael's a significant part of the city for more centuries to come.



