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# St. Mary of the Snows Catholic Church

Delwiche / Namur  
1860-2016

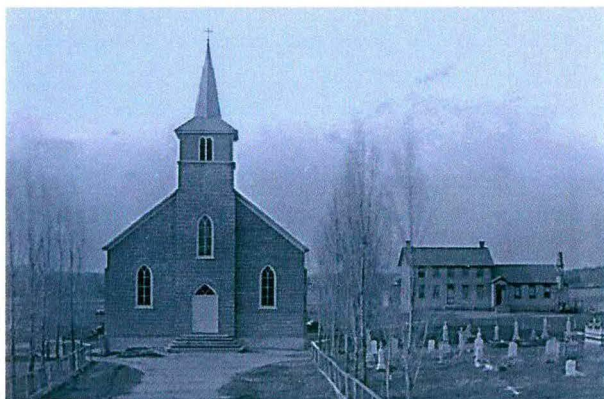
Town of Union: Door County  
Brussels, Wisconsin, USA

## **A Short History**

**Written by**

**Sister Claudette Jeanquart, OSF**

*Assisted by Father Sam Jadin, O.Praem.*



*St. Mary of the Snows Catholic Church,  
Convent and School, circa 1895*

St. Mary of the Snows Church is in Namur, Wisconsin. Namur is the very same place as Delwiche and Fairland. These names depend upon the years indicated in our history books.

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**St. Mary's** is the place where I was baptized, made my First Communion and received the Sacrament of Confirmation. While I was growing up, in the 1930's and 1940's this place was called Fairland. Previous to that it was named Delwiche, after one of the pioneer families who came to Wisconsin from Europe. Before any Church was built a zealous Dominican missionary priest, Father Theodore Van den Broek, would come from Little Chute to offer Mass in the home of Guilliame Delwiche.

In 1850 some Holy Cross priests came to Wisconsin from Crosier Monastery in Diest, Belgium. Father Edward Daems and Brother Peter Witvens joined them in 1851. After over a year in Little Chute, Father Daems came to Bay Settlement. He was full of zeal and anxious to help Wisconsin immigrants from Holland, Belgium, Germany and France. These are our forefathers who were settling the area at the time. The Belgians settled mostly in the Champion area in 1853. In 1856, they were moving past Dyckesville into Namur, Brussels, Gardner, Rosiere and Duvall areas. They traveled through the wilderness to the Delwiche home in Namur, for Mass when the priest came. In the 1860's a little log cabin church was built in Namur and in 1875 a bigger church was built to replace it. The new church could accommodate 100 families. In 1884 an adjacent rectory was built and in 1889, a classroom was added which served as a parochial school. Both were rebuilt after a fire in 1892.

The people of Namur requested help in education because they had much difficulty in America since they did not speak English. These settlers from Belgium spoke Walloon, which is similar to the French language. They invited The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross to come from Bay Settlement, where Father Daems had enrolled them into the Third Order of St. Francis and asked the Sisters to come and teach in their district school and to establish a parochial school in the classroom adjacent to St. Mary of the Snows. Sister Pauline La

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Plant came to teach in the Parochial School and Sister Claire Doyle became qualified, through Door County, to teach in the District School. Since 1889, our Sisters have been serving St. Mary of the Snows in Namur, helping the priests with education until the parish closed in 2001.



*St. Mary of the Snows, now the Belgian Heritage Center*

**The Sisters** lived in the Rectory while they taught in the Schools. They were still living in the Rectory in 1893 when Father Bernard Pennings (later became Abbot) came from Europe. He and other priests from Premonstratensian Abbey of Heeswijk, Holland, came to help the people of the Belgian settlements in Wisconsin. They came to combat a heresy spread by Joseph Rene -Vilatte. Vilatte was an apostate priest who rejected the infallibility of the pope and got the non-suspecting people who did not know English to follow him. In 1894, Abbot Pennings built a new school and convent for the Sisters of St. Mary of the Snows, Namur. He lived in the Rectory while serving St. Mary of the Snows and the surrounding parishes in Brussels, Gardner, Little Sturgeon and Marchand (Duvall). The Champion church had been established since 1861. In 1908 Father Gloudemans was pastor at Delwiche. He moved to St. Francis Xavier in Brussels and became its pastor when it was made a parish in 1919. At that time Father Mathias Vanden Elsen, O. Praem, became pastor of St. Mary's in Namur. He was our priest while I was a child, and Delwiche/ Namur was called Fairland at the time. "Father Van" baptized

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my twin sister and myself in 1933 and was still our pastor when we made our First Holy Communion in 1940. We also received the Sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Bona in St. Mary's Church while Father Van was our pastor.

I remember times when my father, Joseph Jeanquart, Jr. would go to see Father Vanden Elsen on business after Sunday Mass when I was a child. The housekeeper, Gustie Martin, would take us children aside and give us her personal attention and some cookies while Dad took care of business with "the priest." One time we went to "The Old School," where the priest was staying while the Rectory was being renovated. "The Old School" is how we referred to the convent/school that was built in 1894. Today it is the Peninsula Belgian American Clubhouse. The school has been closed since 1925, so I never got to attend it. However, my Father had attended St. Mary of the Snows parochial school when Sister Pauline was teaching in it. My oldest sister, Irene, also attended that school.

**St. Mary of the Snows** had three daughters of the parish, as well as myself, who entered the Congregation of The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross. I entered in 1954 and received by training in the Preparatory Novitiate at "The Chapel" in Champion. "The Chapel" is how we referred to what is now the National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help. At that time this was a High School for candidates for The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross. I finished my High School academics there, and by 1970 I graduated from St. Norbert College in De Pere with a B.S. in education. I have been a teacher ever since. Sister Berchmans Meunier (Odile) entered in 1890. She died soon after I entered. Sister Stephana De Decker (Anoinette) entered in 1896. She was being cared for in our infirmary when I was a novice. I was assigned to prepare her tray at mealtime and to serve her meals during the time I was a senior novice. Sister Stephana died in 1957.

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Sister Agnes Mallien (Lucy) was retired, but not in the infirmary at that time. She entered in 1903 and died in 1973. She had been a teacher throughout her active religious life. Sister Agnes was also a painter. During her retirement years she painted pictures of St. Francis in the context of our Franciscan History. These precious oil paintings hang in our convent. Gospel stories were a favorite subject painted by Sister Agnes. The one that I like best is of Jesus in the wheat fields with his disciples. Sister Agnes painted these with precision, grace and beauty.

Many holy priests came to serve our area. Previous to Father Gloudemans there were two Norbertine priests: Father Athanasius J. Van Heertum (1899) and Father John Crielaers (1900). After him came Father Milo Smits to Brussels in 1951 and Father Urban De Cleene to Namur in 1952. In 1962 Father John Righino served St. Mary's and in 1965 Father Roland Hoffman came to assist him at Brussels. The next Norbertine priest was Father Ambrose Peeters. He came in 1971, lived in the rectory in Brussels, and served both parishes at that time. Three more Norbertines: Father Kilp, Father Peter Renard, Father Mel Wigman, came to serve both parishes from 1974 to 1986. Norbertine priests continued to serve these parishes from 1974 to 1986. Other priests came from the Green Bay Diocese and served our Church from 1986 to 1991. These were not from the Premonstratensian order. They include Fathers Stanley Brown, Jerome Taddy and Philip Dinh-Van-Thiep. In 1993, Bishop Banks of the Green Bay Diocese joined them into ONE PARISH with a new name: St. Francis and St. Mary's Parish. At this time, a Franciscan priest, Father Pius Cotter, OFM, Cap. was named administrator of the new parish which is now located in Brussels.

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross served our little Church of St. Mary of the Snows. Most of the priests sought the help of the Sisters for educating the children of the parish in their faith and to provide a visible presence of women serving

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the Church. The Sisters, who were professional educators, came to teach the children and adults through Summer Vacation Schools and Adult Education programs of religion. I, myself, came back to Delwiche/Namur in 1978 to coordinate a program of religious instruction for children and adults. The program invited adults to become involved in teaching religion to the children. It included training programs for adults, on the diocesan level and the local level. It was geared to prepare children, youth and adults for the Sacraments of Penance, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation. Its goal was to teach the basics of Catholic Faith to the entire student body. At Delwiche/Namur we used the old rectory as a CCD Center or School of Religion. This way the classes were smaller so education could be more effective. The two parishes, St. Mary of the Snows and St. Francis Xavier worked closely together in this program. My ministry at St. Mary's, my home parish, ended in 1983.

Bishop Robert Banks officially closed St. Mary of the Snows Church building as a place of worship for our diocese on May 13, 2001. In 2010, the St. Mary of the Snows building was sold to former parishioners and became the Belgian Heritage Center where I am helping document the history of Delwiche/Namur.



*Sr. Claudette Jeanquart, OSF in 1954 and today*

*For more information, please visit  
[gbfranciscans.org](http://gbfranciscans.org) or [belgianheritagecenter.com](http://belgianheritagecenter.com)*

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