

## Naming of Loreto

By Beatrice Ringelstetter Blau

Loreto is a small community located 7 miles north of Plain at Highways G and GG in Town 10N Range 3E in Section 14 of Bear Creek Township in Sauk County, Wisconsin. In the late 1800s, the area was called Dean's Corners because Michael Dean owned much of the land there. Locals pronounce the name as "Loreto" and some refer to the hilly "ridge" area as Loreto Ridge and Irish Ridge because of early Irish settlers. It was also considered part of an area called Marble Ridge (see footnote on page 3).



A turn of the century view of the community of Loreto is shown in this photograph supplied by Larry Walsh. On the left is his great-uncle John Walsh's store and post office. In the background is the early edifice of St. Patrick's Catholic Church. *Home News*, Feb. 2, 1994



St. Patrick's church fire, Feb. 15, 1962, believed to have started by faulty wiring.

Loreto was once the largest village in Bear Creek Township with a store, post office, Loreto Cheese Co., tavern, and public school (Joint District No. 9). There was a Loreto baseball team, and the "Loreto Coronet Band" played at picnics and dances. Buildings today are St. Patrick's Catholic church (brick with vaulted ceiling, no steeple), brick rectory with garage, and other outbuildings. Across the highway, the old public school still stands. Loreto also has a Catholic cemetery. Some last names of landowners in Section 14 in 1898 were Bindl, Dean, Dederich, Dwyer, Knudson, and Ostermeyer; while owners in 1905 were Burns, Dederich, Dean, Dwyer, Lins, Mears, Ostermeyer, Peterson, Ringelstetter, Sponholtz, and Vorndran.

Much has already been written about St. Patrick's church, public school history, and the early Irish settlement, but sometimes with conflicting information. Following is a summary. St. Patrick's church and cemetery did not always exist at the present location. The first three churches were destroyed by fire. Rev. Max Gaertner held services in the Donahoe home from 1855 to 1860 in Section 9. The **first St. Patrick's church** building was built of logs beginning in 1860 at T10N R3E Section 4 (six-tenths of a mile west on Chapel Road off Highway G) on land donated by John Rice (he owned a land patent dated Nov. 10, 1855). The first Mass was held on St. Patrick's Day on March 17, 1866, by Rev. Theophilus Beau.

The Catholic parish soon outgrew their log church and built a frame **second church** with steeple, across the road on land donated by Michael O'Neil. It was blessed on April 30, 1874. Unfortunately, on May 7, 1887, both Catholic churches burned down. Flames could be seen 15 miles away. The fire was discovered about 8 pm, but by time help arrived, the fire was out of control and nothing could be saved.

A new **third church** was built about 3 miles south, Hwy. G, (Section 14) "to accommodate a larger number and to avoid climbing the hill upon which the old site is." Nearly half the members were against this new location. The newspaper reported on March 8, 1888, "Loads of lumber by the dozen are passing out of this place every day, for St. Patrick's Catholic church to be erected at Dean's Corners." The frame church with 100-foot steeple was built on/near where the present-day church stands; the first Mass was held on October 21, 1888. In 1935, the upper part of the steeple was removed. Tragically this church burned down on Feb. 15, 1962. A **fourth church** made of bricks was built; the first Mass celebrated on Dec. 25, 1966.



St. Patrick Catholic church (built in 1966) and rectory in Loreto (Section 14). Google Maps 2020



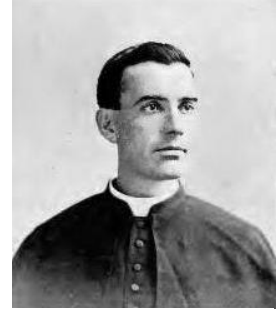
**Left:** St. Patrick's old cemetery with burials beginning in 1860 (E3694 Chapel Road) in Section 4. The chapel pictured is the "Old Chapel" (renamed in 1958 as "Our Lady of the Fields") built in 1903 by Dennis Phelan's donation, located on the exact site of the original St. Patrick's (log) church. (Blau photo 2013)

**Right:** St. Patrick's new cemetery at "Loretto" in Section 14 with burials beginning in the late 1880s. Sometime after 2013, the entrance arch was removed. (Blau photo 2004)

There is a similar sounding "Loretto" on County Hwy C between Leland and Denzer in Honey Creek Township with a Catholic church and cemetery, "Our Lady of Loretto." A post office was established at "Lorettoburgh" from June 3, 1875, to Sept. 4, 1876, in Section 16 of Honey Creek Township.

### Who named Loreto and why?

A new priest arrived at St. Patrick's parish at the third church. The *Weekly Home News* of July 29, 1899 reported: "The Catholic church at White Mound is now in charge of **Rev. F. A. Byrne**, who preached his first sermon on the 23d. He comes from Ettrick, near Galesville, and the papers there speak highly of his work as a priest and his conduct as a man. The Republican says *he has in his three years' work done more to promote temperance in his parish than all his predecessors combined. His departure is regretted by Protestants and Catholics alike.* Reedsburg Free Press" (Note: The nearby village of White Mound had a Methodist Episcopal church but not a Catholic church.)



Rev. Felix A. Byrne

Rev. Felix A. Byrne served as pastor at St. Patrick's Church (at Loreto) from June 1899 to August 1900. It was during this time when a post office was established there on May 14, 1900, with Rev. Byrne appointed as postmaster. He apparently was not happy with the informal name of "Dean's Corners" and chose the name Loreto for the post office. Nearly seven years later, on January 31, 1907, the post office was discontinued, with mail service from Sandusky.

In 1912, *The Baraboo Weekly News* ran weekly columns entitled, "Sauk County Place Names." In the July 18, 1912, issue was a column about the naming of Lodde's Mill, Loganville, and Loretto. In response to their inquiry concerning the naming of the post office at Loreto, Rev. Byrne wrote:

"Cheerfully do I grant your only reasonable request. In the month of June 1899, the Rt. Rev. James Schwebach, bishop of La Crosse, appointed me pastor of St. Patrick's congregation three miles from White Mound, Sauk county, Wisconsin. I arrived at my new post of duty on the 18th of July 1899. To get my daily mail I was obliged to drive or walk three miles. A few months later I applied to our good congressman, J. W. Babcock, for a postoffice at the church. The office was secured through the kindness of Mr. Babcock. When I was about to choose a name for the office, Rev. Fr. P. F. Garrity of Black River Falls [photo page 6] happened to be paying me a visit. Among the names suggested he favored Loretto; so did I. It was short and sweet; sweet because of sacred memories. Loreto (it is and may be spelled Loretto) is the name of a famous little city in Italy which is noted as the site of the sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, called Santa Casa or Holy House, and which is reputed to be the identical house in which the Holy Family lived in Nazareth. It is believed to have been miraculously transported to Loreto in the year 1295. Thousands of pilgrims visit this shrine annually. This is what makes the memory of the name sweet to me. The word itself is also musical as well as short. I was also appointed the first postmaster of Loreto." With the coming of the rural carriers the office was discontinued.

From the *Weekly Home News* of June 14, 1900: "Loreto. The new postoffice has been opened for the business of Uncle Sam." From another column: "Loreto is a new postoffice established at **Marble Ridge**<sup>1</sup>, and Rev. F. A. Byrne, rector of St. Patrick's church, has been appointed postmaster. The Home News congratulates the patrons of the new office on the very able and painstaking service they will receive by this arrangement." The newspaper also reported, "Loreto will celebrate the fourth with a picnic, and a tent

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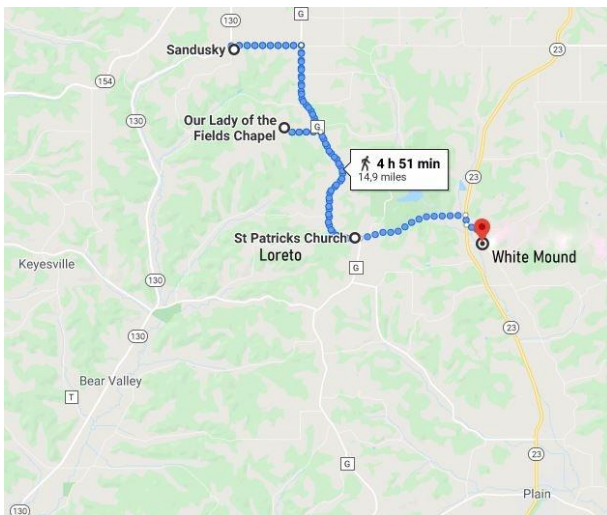
<sup>1</sup> **Marble Ridge** refers to an area with a marble stone quarry, a ridge, and a post office. According to the *Weekly Home News*, July 15, 1971: "Marble Ridge post office was established Oct. 19, 1860, in a house situated in **Section 27**, Township of Bear Creek. The road to that site is now County Trunk G. This office was discontinued Dec. 15, 1874. Abijah Sweet was the first postmaster." The mail route from 1862 to 1866 was from "Richland Centre, by Neptune, Sandusky, White Mound, Marble Ridge, Bear Valley and Ithaca, to Richland Centre, equal to 20 miles and back, once a week. Leave Richland Centre Thursday at 6 a.m. Arrive at Richland Centre by 8 p.m." To the south was Marble Ridge Cemetery (in **Section 34**) but headstones no longer exist. There was also a Regular Baptist Church where Rev. Sylvester Elmer Perry Sweet (originally of Canada) was ordained. The Irish Catholics founded St. Patrick's congregation in **Section 4**, and that area as well as **Section 14** (now Loreto) was part of "Marble Ridge." Early mid-1850s settlers were Shea, Donahue, O'Neil, Quinn, Welsh, Couley, Lakey, Mich, Karney, Kavanaugh, Murray and Roaney. See plat maps on the next page.

performance in the evening. Father Vaughan, of Eau Claire, will be the orator of the day." Two years later, Father Vaughan would become pastor and postmaster at Loreto in 1902.

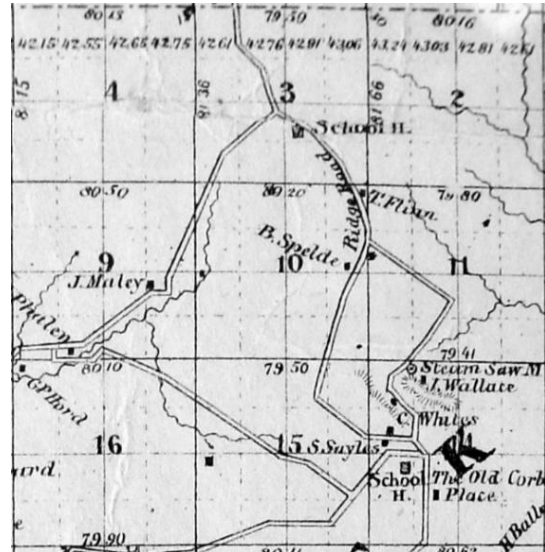
**Postmasters at Loreto:** May 14, 1900: Felix A. Byrne. Sept. 28, 1900: John Walsh. Oct. 3, 1902: Lawrence J. Vaughn. Jan. 29, 1904: James R. True. Oct. 22, 1904: Wm. A. Dwyer. Jan. 31, 1907: discontinued Mail to Sandusky Nov. 30, 1906

406		Sack Co.		Wisconsin		407	
Dis	White Mounds	John H. Carpenter	23 Sep. 86	Wm. R. Prosser	12 May 98	Charles L. Carver	3 Jan. 05
Dis	do	Jodie Volk	19 Aug 18	John W. Magli	22 Dec. 05	Louis L. Yaffe	21 Nov. 11
Dis	Wituan	John C. Wituan	30 June 92	John G. W. La	6 Apr. 25	John L. Plain	21 Aug. 1905
Dis	Oaks	Anna L. Mason	11 Sept. 97	John L. Mason	10 Feb. 1901	John L. Mason	10 Feb. 1901
Dis	Kirkland	George B. Dack	3 Dec. 77	Fred S. Case	13 Nov. 1902	John L. Mason	10 Feb. 1901
Dis	Woodlawn	Edgar A. Wood	25 July 99	John L. Mason	10 Feb. 1901	John L. Mason	10 Feb. 1901
Dis	Loreto	Felix A. Byrne	14 May 1900	John Walsh	28 Sep. 1900	Lawrence J. Vaughn	3 Oct. 1902
Dis	Devils Lake	John M. Rusey	19 July 09	Louise Perwilliger	18 Feb. 16	William M. Dwyer	25 Aug. 01

Source: Ancestry.com: U.S., Appointments of U. S. Postmasters, 1832-1971 (page 406-407)



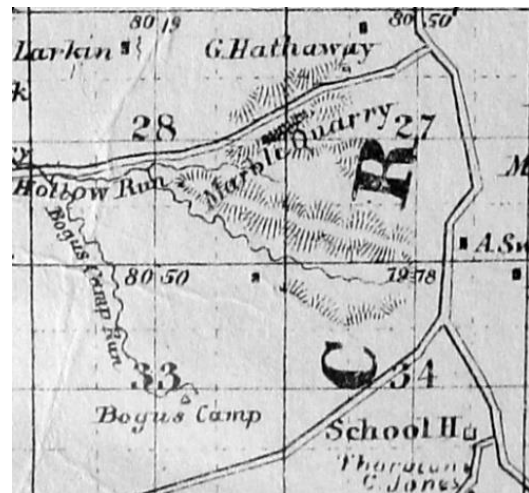
This Google map from 2020 shows the walking distance between the little villages near Loreto, from Sandusky to White Mound. Village of Plain is to the south.



1859-1861 plat map shows Section 4 & 14



Loreto public school (1891-1960), Joint District No. 9 in Loreto, Sec. 14 (Blau photo 2014)



**Loreto, WI, was named after this Italian village:**

The Catholic pilgrimage church in Loreto, Italy, is named Basilica della Santa Casa (Basilica of the Holy House). Loreto is a hill town in Ancona province, Italy, in the Marche region. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica\\_della\\_Santa\\_Casa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_della_Santa_Casa)

It is not known if Rev. Byrne ever visited Loreto, Italy, but in 1932, a friend, Rev. John Murphy, said his first Mass in Rome. The Basilica at Loreto, Italy, was among the many religious places Murphy visited on his European tour.

1859-1861 Section 27 & 34, Marble Quarry



Over the years, the spelling of Loreto in Wisconsin has been shown in different ways in publications and on maps, such as: Loreto, Loretto, Loretta, Loreta. An amusing article in the June 21, 1945, *Weekly Home News* discussed this dilemma:

Does Anybody Know How to Spell Loreto (tta)? The Home News is ready to step to the foot of the spelling class if any boy or girl, aged 9 to 90, can spell Loreto (tta). We hadn't thought much about it until the word bobbed up on some wedding announcements we were printing. With a natural horror at the thought of Dan Cupid reading proof, we got panicky and ran pell-mell to the postoffice to consult the official Postal Guide. Hmm. Two t's and an a. Rand McNally, map publishers, think the same way about it. But in Loreto it's Loreto, and the home folks ought to know. Meanwhile, we've sweated out an alibi for our own defense: The word is suspiciously Spanish, and that calls for an "o" ending when the male element predominates; but there's a war on, the boys are gone and it's a gal's town for the time being. That's why we spell it Loretta.

Rev. Felix Andrew Byrne was born in Millville, Iowa, on October 3, 1864, the son of Irish immigrants, Michael Byrne and Catherine Farrell. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 12, 1896, at Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. With Irish roots, Rev. Byrne likely felt very much at home at St. Patrick's parish in Loreto. During his time as pastor and postmaster, Rev. Byrne may have been the Loreto correspondent for Spring Green's *Weekly Home News*. In the Aug. 9, 1900, Loreto column, it was reported that "Father Byrne preached his farewell sermon yesterday" after which time the Loreto news column was discontinued for a while. Though Byrne left Loreto to become pastor at parishes in Stanley and Cadott in Chippewa County, Wisconsin, he kept in contact with his friends at Loreto and Plain. He was present when the cornerstone was laid at St. Luke's in Plain in 1903 (the church later destroyed by a cyclone).

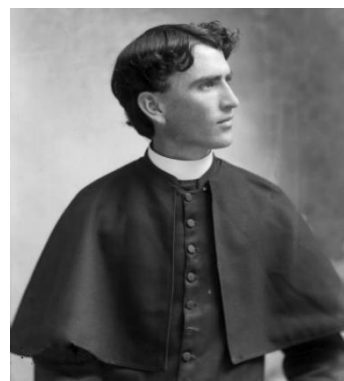
For many years, Rev. Byrne belonged to the Apostolic Mission Band under the direction of Bishop Schwebach from the Diocese of La Crosse. On the occasion of his Silver Anniversary to the priesthood, an article appeared in the June 16, 1921, issue of the *Des Moines Western* newspaper:

Having spent eighteen months in the east doing mission work under the auspices of the Apostolic Mission Home at Washington, and the Apostolate Missionary Band of Philadelphia, Father Byrne, returned to La Crosse to receive the following official commission from his bishop. Father Byrne spent ten years in the Missionary field, conducting missions, retreats and triduums in various parishes and religious institutions in the following states: New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, District of Columbia, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Idaho and Oregon. . . . He spent a number of months in Puerto Rico and promoted amicable relations between this island and the United States. In addition to Loreto, he also served as pastor to several other villages in Wisconsin, namely Ettrick, Kendall, Stanley, Richland Center and Cuba City.

Rev. Byrne also gave lectures according to the Feb. 22, 1900, *Weekly Home News*:

Rev. Byrne's Lecture. Rev. F. A. Byrne, pastor of St. Patrick's church, White Mound, is announced to lecture in Post's opera house Sunday afternoon next at 3:30. His subject is "The Men and Religion." Wherever Rev. Byrne has spoken the press speaks in the highest terms of him, his work and his lectures. He recently gave a series of lectures in Trempealeau, Galesville, Ethrick and Black River Falls, and all the papers of those places are unanimous in expressions of commendation. Pleasing entertaining and instructive. Free to all. Excellent music. Rev. Byrne is a young man, and while it is hoped that Spring Green in general will turn out to hear him, it is desired that the young people of the town and vicinity have a good representation present.

Rev. Byrne died at a hospital in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, on March 27, 1937, at the age of 72, and was buried at Hope Cemetery in Chippewa Falls (Blau photos 2019).



Rev. Patrick Francis Garrity helped name Loreto.

**About Rev. Vaughan:** Rev. Lawrence G. Vaughan was born in 1863 in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. He served as pastor of St. Patrick parish in Loreto from 1902 to 1903 and attended to the duties of postmaster.

*Weekly Home News*, Jan. 11, 1900: "A five days' mission will be inaugurated in St. Patrick's church Monday evening, the 22d, by Rev. L. J. Vaughan, of Eau Claire. Father Vaughan was at one time a star tragedian. As a preacher he is a power for good. All who can, should hear all his sermons."

Rev. Vaughan began his life as an accomplished Shakespearean actor, playwright, and orator. After a number of years in the acting field, he tired of it and joined the priesthood. While a priest, "his play, *A Woman of the West*, was performed for the first time in Chicago. The drama, set in a mining camp, toured the Midwest and became perhaps best known for a controversial scene in which parts of a Catholic Mass were performed on stage. Several members of the Church found the detailed portrayal of a Mass irreverent, and one of the harshest critics was Vaughan's own bishop, Bishop Schwebach of La Crosse." Rev. Vaughan died at age 46 in May 1909 in Dubuque, Iowa. At the time of his death, he was pastor at St. Rose Catholic church in Cuba City. His body was taken by train and buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Janesville, Wisconsin. He had recently purchased a home and land in Janesville and planned to establish a school. The "Life and Works of Father Vaughan" Volumes 1 and 2 can be read online:

<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100783547>. More about his life: [http://cubacityhistory.blogspot.com/2018/03/father-vaughan\\_9.html](http://cubacityhistory.blogspot.com/2018/03/father-vaughan_9.html)

### Loreto captures your heart

Agnes Hess McClusky, Loreto correspondent for 40 years, wrote a very moving statement about Loreto in her 1976 report on festivities held during the Bicentennial of America: "It makes no mind how you got to the ridge in the first place, once you've been there the people and the atmosphere capture your heart. A wee bit of it is buried forever on the ridge and you carry a tiny particle in the corner of your heart. That was the feeling of the 300 people who spent the 200th birthday of our nation on the ridge."

*If anyone has more information, comments, or corrections, please contact the author.  
Complete list of sources and more at <https://sites.google.com/site/auswanderer20/towns/loreto>*

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