

Elizabeth's Tower

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John Black died on October 25, 1899, attended by Father James Keogh of the Cathedral who administered the sacrament of Extreme Unction (anointing of the sick). His funeral was likely a large one. Black had been a prominent public official: serving in the state legislature (assembly and senate), and as mayor from 1878-1880.

John Black (or Jean Schwartz) was born in Lorraine, France in 1827 and came with his family to the United States in 1844. He settled in Lockport, New York and there met and married Elizabeth Schoeffel of Rochester. They had two daughters. He was an enterprising man, working as a clerk and also a real estate agent, especially for German immigrants who wanted farm land or residences.

In 1857, he moved from New York to Milwaukee—what better place to serve German-speaking customers? Here he got into the wholesale liquor business and later politics and became a wealthy man. Elizabeth and his daughters were no doubt his refuge in the worlds of business and politics. The Blacks were devout Catholics and rented a pew at the Cathedral.

Elizabeth died in January 1891 and was buried from the Cathedral. The grief stricken Black was anxious to memorialize his wife. Cathedral archives contain several letters from Black asking for Masses to be offered for her. But he wanted something more. The original cathedral tower had been dismantled in 1880 by order of Archbishop Henni. The Zopfstil dome and the tower clock (once Milwaukee's official time piece) had given the Cathedral a quaint look. But the structure had been poorly constructed and the wood was rotting. When it was dismantled, it left the Cathedral looking denuded.

After his wife's funeral, Black requested an appointment with Father Keogh and pledged \$10,000 (nearly \$300,000 in current dollars) for the construction of a new tower and steeple. Keogh gratefully accepted and contacted the architectural firm of Ferry and Class (also designers of the Pabst Mansion (the future home of Milwaukee's archbishops and the Central Library) to design the present tower. It is today one of Milwaukee's iconic structures—but it is also a monument of a grieving husband's love. It is Elizabeth's tower. "Stern as death is love, relentless as the netherworld is devotion." (Song of Songs 8: 6).