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ST. BERNARD'S CHURCH

BELPRE, KANSAS



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Belpre, Kansas, 1901-1976

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PREFACE

Reading the history of St. Bernard's, or any Parish can be an as-dry-as-dust matter if we fail to see it as an account of the high aspirations of, and the love of God and neighbor burning in the hearts of a number of individuals, young and old, clergy and laymen, who dream and do — dream of a building in which Christ lives and in which they may come together to be united in prayer — to thank Him, to ask His forgiveness, to beg His blessing on their lives, on the work of themselves and their families, their neighbors, and friends.

The men and women who came to the area now known as Belpre, Catholic or Protestant, their roots in England or Ireland or Germany, saw to it that they brought Christ with them, in their hearts, and saw to it, too, that their love of Christ would be made manifest to all the world by the wood and brick and mortar, by the days and months of labor and sweat, which they would put into their demonstration of love and need in the form of houses of God in the area. To all of them we bow today, and in particular to those men and women of an earlier day who gave us St. Bernard's. May we remember them in our prayers, and may God bless them!

One of those who very early in his life conceived an intense admiration for those who worked and struggled to build homes, lives, and churches, is David Kearney whose interest has never waned, and part of whose work is evident in the entire text of this history of St. Bernard's which he researched and wrote.

Fr. James C. Murphy



David Kearney



POPE LEO XIII
1878-1903



POPE PAUL VI
1963-

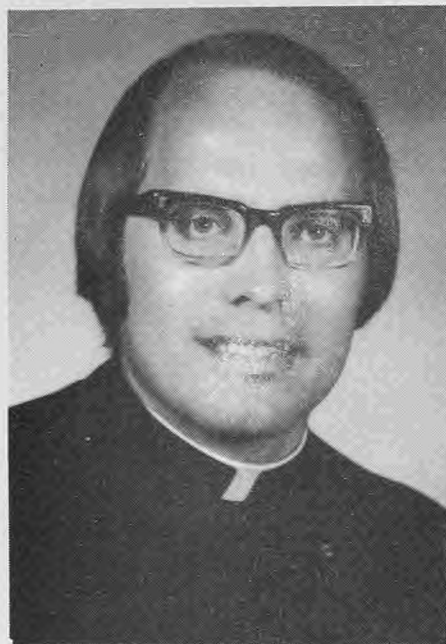


THE MOST REV. JOHN JOSEPH HENNESSY, D.D.
1888-1920

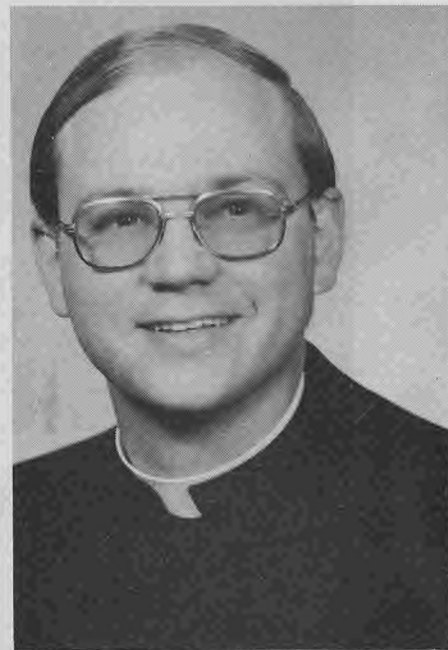


THE MOST REV. MARION F. FORST, D.D.
1960-

From St. Bernard's Into Service To Their God



FATHER DAN SCHARZ
(Ordained 1968)



FATHER TED SKALSKY
(Ordained 1972)



SISTER VICTOR & ROSE RITA KINKELAAR



SISTER REDEMPTA MEYER



SISTER ROSE G. KOLL



SISTER BERNARD KOETT

SISTER MARY FRANK
(Picture not available)

A HISTORY OF ST. BERNARD'S CHURCH

During the years 1890-1892, services were conducted by Father Kehrvoegel (known as "Father Careful") of Dodge City at Fahey's farm eight miles southwest of Belpre. The congregation consisted of eleven families: Andrew Demoraski, Austin Jennings, John Carrol, John Fahey, John Biernacki, Henry Wahlmeyer, Bernard Meyer, Pat Sweeney, David Unzicker, James Cavanaugh, and Bill Linen. There were 92 services in all.

For four years, from 1892 to 1896, no services were held around Belpre.

From 1896 to 1898, Father J. B. Disselkamp held services every three months in a sod house 2½ miles south and one mile east of Belpre. The collection amounting to about \$4.00 constituted his salary. Father Disselkamp, from Windthorst, covered a wide area of churches in counties surrounding Ford County.

In the fall of 1898, Father Disselkamp was succeeded by Rev. John Splinters, also of Windthorst, who held services one mile south of Belpre until October, 1899, when St. Agnes Church, commonly called the Dublin Church, located northeast of Belpre, was moved to donated land just west of the present Belpre Cemetery.

St. Agnes Church was taken apart in sections and re-assembled on the southernmost portion of the new Belpre church site. Rebuilding of the church was done by Henry Wahlmeyer, John Biernacki, Andrew Demoraski, John Kearney, Thomas Cavanaugh, Austin Jennings, Gehart Korte, Anton Elmiger, Bernard Meyer, John Minnrett, Bernard Muhlenkamp, and August Korte. Doing some of the carpenter work was David Unzicker.

Although there was some opposition to locating the church so close to the railroad, the majority of the members accepted the donated land when they discovered the rising prices of lots in the community, which some people thought might cost up to \$500. The church cemetery was dedicated in 1898 and located north of the church. That same year church members placed a fence around the cemetery.

In the spring of 1900 the first Mass was read in the church by Father Borniger of Windthorst, who held services once a month on Sunday until the fall. That year the church was painted, and pews were installed.

Father Borniger was succeeded by Father Lenihan who had Mass once a month until Christmas and then Father Deitman of Dodge City held services until the spring of 1901. Father B. Schroeder had services periodically in Belpre from 1901 until the spring of 1903 when he went to Germany. All summer there was no Mass until he returned in the fall.



Gerhardt Korte.



John and Mary Kearney.

During the winter of 1903-1904, services were held by Father J. A. Pomponey of Hutchinson, Father Frank O'Connor and Father Berk. In December of 1903 Father Pomponey held the first Catholic lecture in Belpre in the public school. At that time people were enthusiastic about building a \$3,000 church in the future.

The first class to receive Holy Communion was in 1904 as recorded in a newspaper of the area: "Sunday, June 1, the Catholic church in Belpre was the scene of unusual solemnity. A class of 12 children received First Holy Communion. During the previous week they had been under the instruction of Rev. Frank Connors, and the precision with which the class moved through the ceremony showed the labor was not in vain.

"At an early hour the little church was packed to overflowing. Vehicles of every description poured in from the surrounding country. They were mud-covered, and the occupants' clothes evidenced long drives and a terrific rain, but their hearts were centered in the children, and they braved every difficulty to witness the splendid Communion ceremony.



Florence Gales and first grade.



Joyce Gales and third and fourth grade.

1975



Mrs. Al Rues and fifth and sixth grade.



Betty Wood and seventh and eighth grade.



Graduation class, 1966.



Clothes for needy children, 1965.



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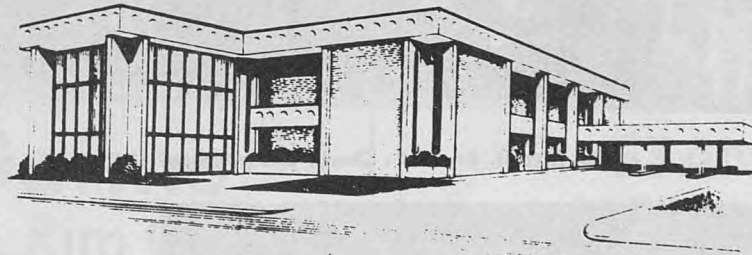
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"Many non-Catholics were present and were loud in their praise of the sermon. There is nothing more sublime than the Catholic ritual, where conditions permit its fulfillment, and even Belpre, with its cramped church building, an absence of music, and all that would tend to make a cathedral gorgeous, was an evidence of this truth."

Those receiving Holy Communion were: Henry Wahlmeyer, Frank Biernacki, Mary Wahlmeyer, John Breitenbach, Peter Lunz, William Lunz, John Meyer, Anna Breitenbach, Catherine Meyer, Mary Biernacki, Katherine Kearney, and Otilda Korte. In the second class of 1906 were: Bernard Meyer, Peter Breitenbach, Joseph Biernacki, Adolph

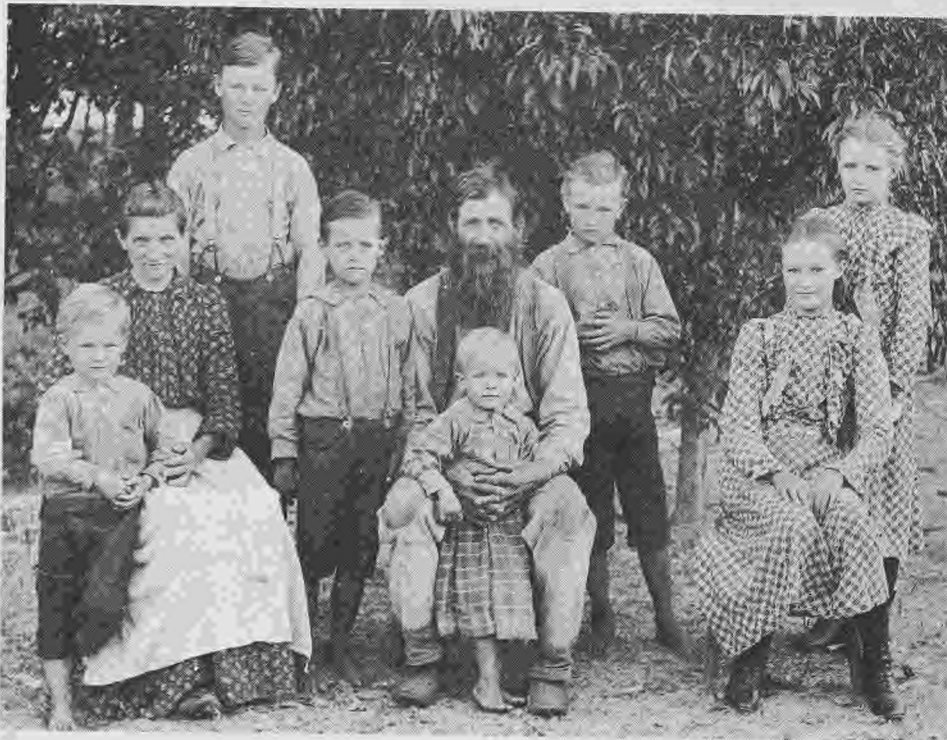
Giessel, Rose Graf, Mary Meyer, and Annie Biernacki.

In the fall of 1904 Father Disselkamp returned and held services once a month until the fall of 1905 when his assistant, Father A. B. Hull, began coming twice a month.

During the fall of 1905, St. Agnes Church was moved from near the cemetery to the west portion of the present property. The land was purchased from James Burk November 14, 1904. Burk had purchased the property from E. H. McKibben June 24, 1904, and McKibben had purchased the land only six months before, December 28, 1903, from the Arkansas Valley Town and Land Company.



The first St. Bernard's Church and parishoners.



The Bernard Meyer family, 1903.



Father Null.



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Services were held in this church while the new church was being built.

Construction of the new church was begun in November of 1905. By late December the foundation was being laid, with the Schull brothers doing the carpenter work. The main building was 32 x 60 feet with a 20-foot wing. By mid-January the frame was up and subscriptions for the \$3,000 were received. In April the church was plastered and was being made ready for the dedication.

Dedicated to St. Bernard, it was completed in the spring of 1906. Father Disselkamp, still the nominal pastor, offered to name the church after anyone who would donate an extra thousand dollars. There being no response, it was named after Father Bernard Disselkamp, Father Austin Bernard Hull, and Mr. Bernard Meyer who always took up the collection.

In August a new Seybold organ, donated by Father Hull, arrived, and in October, the new altar, candlesticks and three sets of vestments were received. The first Mass was offered in the new church by Father Disselkamp November 3, 1906.

Dedication ceremonies were held November 26, 1906, with Rev. J. Henry Tihen, secretary of Bishop John J. Hennessy, acting for the bishop who was ill.

In May of 1907 the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered for the first time in Belpre. Receiving the sacrament were: Austin Joseph Jennings, Andrew Joseph Demerewski, Joseph Stanislaus Biernacki, John Joseph Meyer, Frank Joseph Biernacki, Peter Paul Lunz, William John Lunz, Peter Aloysius Breitenbach, Bernard Aloysius Meyer, Adolph Joseph Giessel, John Joseph Breitenbach, John Miles Kearney, Maria Caroline Demerewski, Mary Brigit Jennings, Mary Magdalene Biernacki, Annie Mariea Biernacki, Rose Petronilla Graf, Mary Agnes McCarthy, Catherine Annie Graf, Catherine Agnes Meyer, Mary Agnes Meyer, Katherine Agnes Kearney, Mary Francis Lunz, Loretta Mary Kearney, Amelia Margaret Giessel, and Annie Cecelia Breitenbach.

Father E. M. Coolen became pastor of the parish in the summer of 1908, replacing Father Hull. It was under his guidance that the first rectory was built. Until he became the first resident pastor in early 1909, he held Mass twice a month.

In November 1909, a first Mission was given by Father Klein. During the week-long mission, he would give his sermon in German at the morning Mass and English in the evening. Beginning in 1908, First Holy Communion became a yearly event with Confirmation being administered every three years.

In mid-October of 1908, parishioners had raised over \$1,300 for construction of a rectory. By January 1909, Father Coolen was living temporarily in a portion of the John Githens home in Belpre while the rectory was being built. On January 28-29 a violent storm struck and the walls of the partially constructed rectory collapsed, tearing up the material to a considerable extent and crushing the south wall of the foundation. Work began again and the rectory was ready for occupancy in the spring.

During the first three years of the new church building, additions to the interior included: 18 pews, sanctuary light, Sacred Heart and Blessed Virgin statues, gold chalice, ciborium, crib and two new sets of vestments. Sacred Heart, Purgatorial and AFC societies were also formed.

In 1911 while Father Coolen vacationed in Holland during the spring and summer Father August P. Heimann said Mass once a month. Upon his return from the trip, Mass was held every Sunday.

The number of families in the parish totaled 28 in 1911, a large increase from the eleven who formed the parish.

On August 1, 1913, Rev. J. E. Hackenbroich came to Belpre, replacing Father Coolen. Full-time services were held during the five years he was pastor. One of the first parish picnics, held in 1913, was attended by more than 800, despite inclement weather. The picnic was held at Colvin Grove and the highlight of the afternoon was when Belpre beat Macksville 6 to 3 in a baseball game. Merchants



Father Coolen and friends.

and businessmen in Belpre closed their businesses in the afternoon and many races and contests were held. Father Hackenbroich announced that because of the success of the day, it would become an annual event.

In February of 1914 a box supper was held in the Catholic Club House. Proceeds amounting to \$51.75 went toward buying a fence for the Catholic cemetery.

Father John J. Faber was the third resident pastor, being appointed to the Belpre parish July 4, 1918. Regular services were held during the two years he was pastor.

In September of 1920, Father B. C. Drath was assigned as the pastor of St. Bernard's Church, replacing Father Faber.



Father Drath

In November, 1920, church members were being bothered by smoke from the furnace. At a meeting it was unanimously decided to give the furnace a thorough overhauling. In early December the repairs for the furnace arrived and the furnace was overhauled, eliminating the smoke.

In the summer of 1923, Armory Volleyball was held, with teams from the four churches in Belpre participating: Catholic, Christian, Baptist and Methodist.

The Catholic church served as a community center for Catholics in the area, but the small church would, in late 1924, fall victim to fire.

One of the last major services in the church was Midnight Mass, Christmas Eve. A High Mass was held by Father Drath, and the choir, under the direction of Helen Lunz, performed the music. The Lunz orchestra presented some extra carols at the Offertory in a Yuletide fashion.

On the day of December 28, 1924, St. Bernard's Church was discovered engulfed in flames. The following was written by Father Drath: "The sweet Christmas airs still floating and our church still dressed in its beautiful festive attire, disaster swept down on it, when on last Sunday noon shortly after morning services closed, the edifice caught fire from an accidental cause, probably an explo-

sion of gases in the furnace of the church basement, as it was first discovered that it was thickly filled with smoke and the whole church too. A general alarm was given by the Central and although many citizens turned out and put forth their best efforts to save the building, their best results proved in vain and the structure collapsed by 2:00 p.m. and had dwindled to ashes. The fire caused a total loss of about \$6,000, which is partially covered by insurance."

While the building was totally destroyed, quick action by local citizens saved much of the furniture and statues.

On December 29, 1924, the following letter was received:

Dear Father Drath:

The Bishop regrets very much the loss yourself and parishioners have sustained in the destruction of your church.

F. J. Morrell, Chancellor

In January 1925, plans were already being made for a new church. In the meantime, services were being held in the old Dublin church. A total of \$4,500 was received from the insurance company and this was put in the Church Building Fund.

At first Father Drath thought the new church would be of stucco because of the high cost of building a brick church. A. E. Blaes, an architect from Springfield, Mo., was secured to do preliminary plans for the new structure and the decision to build a church of brick was made.

The Right Rev. Bishop August Schwertner visited the parish in March and decided that the new



St. Bernard's Church and rectory, 1914.

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**St. Bernard's parish
plant in the early 1920s.**

church would be located in the northwest corner of the parish property.

In April 1925, the Bishop gave Father Drath permission to have an addition built to the Dublin Church because of crowded conditions. During the Easter season, even though double services were held, more than a dozen men had to stand outside the church because of lack of room.

Work was commenced on a 14-foot frame addition for the altar and confessional at a cost of \$400. Permission was granted by the Bishop to hold double services every Sunday.

Sketches were made for the new church and the cost was set for \$20,000. The proposed plans called for the new church to be completely fireproof.

The extension on the temporary church was completed in June. In addition to the extension, the old Dublin Church was remodeled and painted.

During the year 1925-26, a large fund drive was underway to collect funds for the building project. The first subscription netted \$14,090 in the parish of only 33 families. A second collection later brought in another \$2,695.

During the mid 1920's the Lunz choir sang at most church functions. Despite the building addition, the little church was still crowded and the population of the parish was growing steadily. By late 1926, there were 44 families in the parish.

In 1926 the ladies of the Altar Society had a bazaar and dinner in the Commercial Club building



**Picture of church burning.
1924**



Groundbreaking for present St. Bernard's Church.

to raise money for the church building fund. The Commercial Club building was located approximately where the Schartz Repair shop now stands. On that same day the Altar Society raffled off an electric alarm clock and dinner set.

The architects of Brinkman and Hagan were contracted to make up the final plans and to superintend the church-building operation. There was some question about the location of the new church, with options being near the former church or facing north toward the public school. It was finally determined that the best location would be in the northwest corner of the parish grounds, with the building facing west.

St. Joseph's Church in Offerle was being constructed at the time plans were being made for St. Bernard's Church. H. W. Brinkman was superintending the construction at Offerle and would come to Belpre in 1927 to superintend construction.

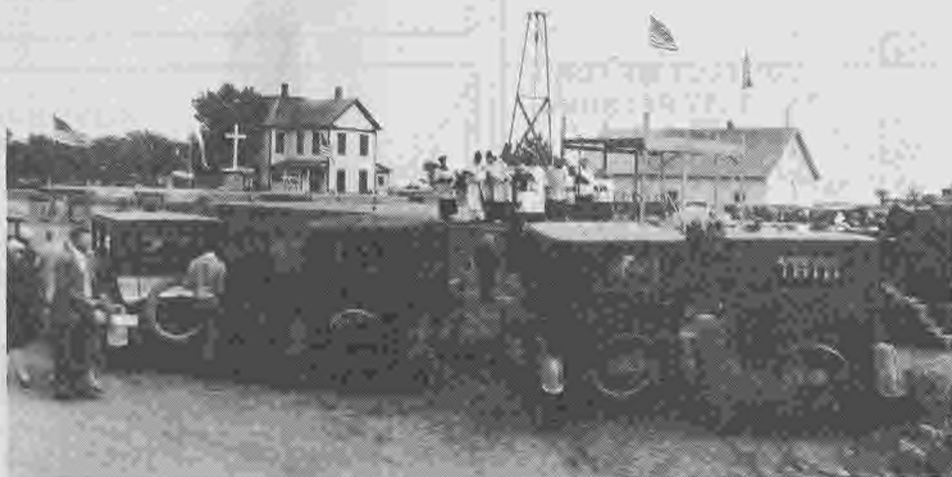
Bids for the new church were let in March and the contract was awarded to the Joseph Sebacher Construction Company. This company was in

charge of building the St. Joseph's Church in Offerle and their work there was completed in mid-1927.

Men in the parish began excavation for the church basement in March and the foundation was laid in April and May. The cornerstone was laid May 29, 1927 with Bishop Schwertner officiating. A large group was in attendance at the ceremony.

The building of the new Umbro-Romanesque-style church began in late June. Following is a report by Father Drath in the Belpre **Bulletin**: "Since our last report by Mr. Arnold, the foreman in charge of St. Bernard's Church building, both the east and west gables have been raised above the part of the roof covered by stone coping and adorned by a stone cross. The west front, with its porticos and big circle window, the both side elevations and front gable with its circle exhibit a sample of genuine Romanesque church architecture. The tower with its belfry, also all interior work and decorations will be executed in exactly the same style."

Stained glass windows, purchased from the Wichita Art Glass Company, were donated by



Laying cornerstone of present St. Bernard's Church. 1927.



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Present Church soon after completion.

parishioners. By August the tile roof was being completed and thoughts turned to purchasing furniture for the interior. To complete the interior in time for dedication in November, it was necessary to borrow \$5,000 from Josephinum Pontifical College in Columbus, Ohio. The main altar, pulpit, communion rail, and pews were ordered from the Sweboda Altar Manufacturing Company of Kewanna, Wisconsin, with the stipulation that the side altars would be ordered the following year.

St. Bernard's Church was dedicated November 5, 1927 by Bishop August J. Schwertner of Wichita. Following the dedication ceremony, a dinner was served in the basement of the new church by the Altar Society. On the same day a bazaar was held in the old church.

The dedicatory sermon was delivered by Father O'Brien of Larned and the Right Reverend Bishop addressed the confirmands and congregation. He congratulated the pastor and the congrega-

tion on their success in finishing the church. About 500 persons attended.

The following clergy assisted in the ceremonies: Bishop Schwertner, Very Rev. F. J. Morrell, Very Rev. V. J. Smith, Rev. J. E. Hackenbroich, celebrant, assisted by Rev. J. J. Faber, Rev. F. Dembronsky, Rev. J. M. Staab, master of ceremonies, Rev. A. Zink, Rev. William Paul, Rev. J. O'Brien, Rev. J. Butler and the pastor, Rev. B. C. Drath.

The choir, under the direction of Miss Helen Lunz, rendered the Mass music.

According to Father Drath, the new church measures 40 x 100 feet and was built with a spacious sanctuary and sacristy, mother's room and baptistry. The church proper can seat about 280 people, with another 25 in the choir. When it was built it was the largest church in Edwards County.

On the church and building committees during the church construction were Bernard and John Meyer, John Apel, Miles Kearney, John Breitenbach and Peter Breitenbach.

DONATIONS BY PARISHIONERS:

Altar Society	\$1,300.00	Goins, Forrest	\$ 25.00	Lunz, William	\$ 100.00
Apels, John	900.00	Graf, Joseph	50.00	William, Madden	10.00
Baumann, Mrs. Rose	25.00	Graf, Hugo	50.00	Meyers, Bernard	1,850.00
Breitenbach, Mrs. Anna	1,502.00	Hammekes, Joseph	775.00	Meyers, Andrew	325.00
Breitenbachs, John	702.00	Huslers, John	750.00	Meyers, Paul	275.00
Breitenbachs, Peter	600.00	Judge, Edward	75.00	Meyers, Bernard	50.00
Breitenbachs, Frank	465.00	Kearneys, John	587.50	Meyer, John	575.00
Budde, Henry	700.00	Kearneys, Miles	475.00	Meyer, Catherine	134.00
Budde, Otto	762.50	Kearney, Etta & Katherine	125.00	Neidig, August	250.00
Deveney, Thomas	100.00	Kinkelaars, Henry	1,480.00	Rileys, Mamie	10.00
Drath, Rev. B. C.	650.00	Kirmers, Peter	100.00	Roenbaugh, Nora	878.00
Frack, Rose Mrs.	365.00	Kleins, George	550.00	Scheuflers, Chas	550.00
Franks, Wm	150.00	Koll, Nicholas	450.00	Skalskys, Gottlieb	350.00
Gales, Mathias	450.00	Koetts, Ferdinand	500.00	Skalsky, Mrs. Matilda	45.00
Gales, Peter & Leon	280.00	Lunz's, J. E.	1,775.00	Wendels, John	250.00
Giessels, Louis	250.00	Lunz's, Elmer	250.00	Wolf, Mrs. Joe	600.00

The new church, built at a cost of \$33,360, left the parish with a debt of only \$5,000 to be paid the Josephinum Pontifical College in 1932.

With the new church completed and the use of the basement for religious instruction and social events, it was decided to raze the Dublin Church. In early 1928, the building was torn down and the lumber disposed of.

The debt of \$5,000 to the Josephinum College remained. With the Depression in full progress, parishioners could not make the payments and the debt remained for much longer than originally anticipated.

To help generate additional funds into the church treasury, the first parish picnic in over a decade was held in 1934, under the direction of Father Drath. The picnic, besides an abundance of food, had games, drawings and a dance. The picnics continued annually throughout the last half of the 1930's.

On July 20, 1935, Father John J. Steines of Fowler was appointed to St. Bernard's Church, replacing Father Drath, who had served at Belpre for almost 15 years. In the fall of 1935 a major renovation of the rectory was undertaken and in 1936 numerous trees were planted on the parish grounds.

Father Godfrey Juelich, appointed pastor June 30, 1937, was succeeded by Father Harry Cabell. During his three-year stay, the dust bowl days now over, the debt on the church was paid.

The Altar Society was particularly active in the 1940's, holding rummage sales, card parties, suppers and bingo. Another church organization which met regularly in the early 1940's was the St. Jude Study Club.

In March of 1942, the church grounds were greatly improved when men of the parish leveled and sanded the roads on the church property. In addition, they also set out trees on the church lawn.

Improvements to the church property were made in 1943 when sidewalks were run around the church and from the church to the rectory, a new furnace installed in the rectory and statues cleaned and decorated.

Rev. W. L. Birzer was appointed as pastor of St. Bernard's Church January 1, 1944. While here, Father Birzer directed a complete redecoration and repair program for St. Bernard's Church. In December of 1945 the St. Theresa Little Flower statue and pedestal was donated by a parishioner.

While Father Birzer was at Belpre, he began the parish picnics which had not been held since before World War II. In 1946 the picnic was held in the city park in August. Events included a chicken dinner at 5:30 p.m., concession stands, drawings and dancing on an open air platform.

The idea of a parochial school in Belpre had been considered from the earliest days of the parish but it was deemed impractical because of the relatively few Catholic children of school age and because of the cost involved. The first step toward the building of a Catholic school occurred when Father Wenzel Birzer appointed a building committee to consider costs for such a project.

Father Vincent J. Smith replaced Father Birzer in 1948. He worked with committees and laid some of the groundwork for the first major construction project of the church in more than 20 years when plans were made to construct a Catholic school. Members of the Building Fund Committee were R. F. Graf, Paul Meyer, Lawrence Koett, Roger Gales, George Klein and William Schartz. In July of 1949 the Oscar Skalsky home west of the church was secured for the Sister's convent as the next step in the beginning of a Catholic school system in Belpre.

Father Smith retired October 6 to Larned and was replaced by Rev. John B. Vesecky.

Numerous meetings were held during the fall and winter months to study various building plans and to figure ways and means of financing the project. Upon his appointment to the parish, Father Vesecky was instructed by Bishop Mark Carroll to continue with the construction of the school.

In early 1950 parishioners did extensive work on the interior of the new convent, getting it ready for the day the Sisters would move in when the school was completed.



Father John J. Steines.



Father Godfrey Juelich.



Father Harry Cabell.



Father W. L. Birzer.

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Parish picture, 1949.

Plans for a school and hall costing \$59,000 were approved April 25, with Tom Lenahan of Jetmore as contractor. The men of the parish began hauling sand, cement, cinder blocks, and brick preparatory to the actual construction of the structure. Their time was being kept and this was a savings of \$673 to the parish since their earnings were deducted from the total of the contract.

Actual work by the contractor began May 8 with an excavating machine digging the openings for the footings of the building. When the walls were half-way up, a storm came up one afternoon and toppled the east wall. This caused a delay but no extra expense since this was covered by insurance. The erection of the building progressed quite smoothly during the spring and summer months, with plans being made to begin the school in the fall. During the week of June 18, the Altar Society sponsored a linen shower for the Sister's Convent and all the necessary linens, towels and bedding were obtained. The annual picnic was held in July and brought in about \$2,000. During the summer the parish also borrowed \$48,000 from the Diocese of Wichita to meet the expenses for the new school.

September 6 marked the opening of school at St. Bernard's School in Belpre. A total of 27 children were enrolled. They were: Vernon Penka, eighth grade; LeRoy Schartz, seventh grade; Edward Hussler, Kay Skalsky, and Betty Penka, sixth grade; Robert Schartz, Beatrice Warner, Virginia Skalsky, and Margaret Breitenbach, fifth grade; Patricia Penka, Janice Hussler, Ellen Breitenbach, and Paul Skalsky, fourth grade; Dorinda Breitenbach, Larry John Koett, Larry Gales, Patricia Breitenbach, Margaret Warner, and Daniel Schartz, third grade; Larry Penka, Thelma Skalsky, Jeanette Van Arsdale, second, and Patricia Schartz, Marilyn Koett, Norman Leonard, Chris Breitenbach, and Patrick Kearney, first.

The first Sisters to teach in the school were: Sister Mary Dalmatia, O. P., primary grades; Sister Mary Monica, O. P., upper grades; and Sister Mary Sophia, O. P., housekeeper.

The dedication of the school was set for Tuesday, November 28, by Bishop Mark K. Carroll. The High Mass of Thanksgiving was sung by the pastor, Father Vesecky, that morning at 9:15. Immediately after the Mass the Bishop confirmed 32 children



St. Bernard's School and Parish Hall.

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Dedication of school, 1950.

and adults. After Confirmation, Bishop Carroll blessed the new school and the Sisters' convent.

The year 1951 was an active one for the parish. The Knights of Columbus Council of Larned and Belpre sponsored a father-son banquet in March and the Altar Society held a mother-daughter banquet in the parish hall, complete with style show, in April. Sunday, June 3 was the first Sunday on which the parish began having two Masses on Sundays and holydays. Prior to that time there had been only one Mass. In July the men of the parish constructed a large concrete slab in the Belpre City Park. The people in the community were asked to join in and make this a community project and many did. The concrete area was used for the first time as a dance pavilion at the parish picnic. The Belpre City Council passed an ordinance stating that St. Bernard's Church would have full use of the concrete slab for all its picnics without interference.

In 1951 the new Diocese of Dodge City was formed. Bishop John B. Franz was installed September 12 as the first bishop of the diocese.

The Golden Jubilee of the parish was held November 7, 1951. The day began with a Solemn Pontifical Mass at 10:00 a.m., followed by a large banquet at noon. The afternoon was spent in playing games and renewing old acquaintances and the evening was spent in dancing. The Mass in the morning was the first Solemn Pontifical Mass for the Belpre parish.

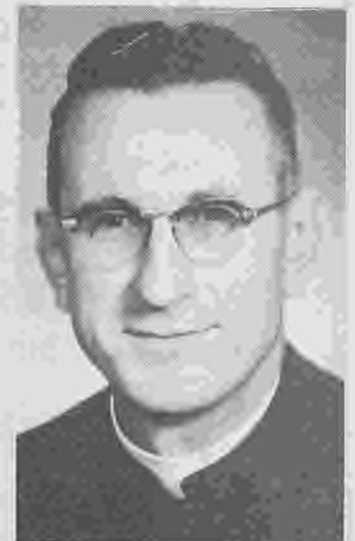
Celebrant of the Pontifical Mass was Bishop John B. Franz, with Msgr. J. J. Steines as assistant priest; Fathers Godfrey Juelich and Peter Stremel

as deacons of honor; Father Wenzel Birzer, deacon; Father A. F. Preisner, sub-deacon; Father William Vogel, book-bearer; Father Herman Schulte, bugia-bearer; Father Jacob Dreher, crozier-bearer; Father James Tainter, mitre-bearer; Father John Zenner, first master of ceremonies; and Father Leo Kelty, second master of ceremonies.

At the banquet Father Tainter acted as toastmaster. Father Tainter introduced Ben Meyer, who represented the people of the parish. Msgr. J. J. Steines, former pastor, represented all the former pastors of the parish and then Bishop Franz was the principal speaker. Father Vesecky, pastor, thanked all the persons who helped with the day's activities.



Father Vincent J. Smith.



Father John B. Vesecky.



Golden Anniversary, 1951.

In 1953 the first basketball team for St. Bernard's School was organized with Dale Meyer as coach. Throughout the following years of the school the basketball program was to be very active and won a number of trophies.

Also in 1953 a statue, "Our Lady of Fatima" was presented to the primary room in memory of John Patrick Kearney, who died in September.

In 1956 a tradition of 10 years ended when the annual church picnics were replaced by Monday-night Bingo games. Throughout the years the picnics raised about \$2,000 annually for the parish and the Bingo games were also instrumental in providing additional revenue to the parish and quickly reducing the debt.

The extent of the people's generosity in reducing the debt on the school building was quite significant. On December 31, 1951, the debt was \$43,339.07, and within a five year period, December 31, 1956, it was down to \$12,294.16. In another two years, 1958, the parish was free of debt.

Throughout the 1950's the parochial school maintained an enrollment of approximately 35 students. Students were divided into rooms of

grades 1-4 and grades 5-8, with one teacher per room. A housekeeper was at the Sister's convent.

By 1958, the debt on St. Bernard's School and the assessment to St. Mary of the Plains in Dodge City being paid in full, the parish began formulating plans for construction of a new rectory. At this time the building committee consisted of Henry Kinkelaar, Pete Penka, Lawrence Koett, Maloy Breitenbach, John Kearney, Ted Skalsky and Andrew Meyer. Members of the church committee were John Breitenbach, Ollie Van Arsdale, Wayne Clowers, and Ed Scheufler. The firm of Kinkelaar and Kinkelaar of Dodge City was contracted to do the work and plans were made up by Father Vesecky and the committees. On February 10, 1959, the pastor and housekeeper moved temporarily into the Lunz rental property, after 40 men and women came and moved all the furnishings out of the rectory. On February 11 demolition of the rectory was begun by men of the parish. The structure, 51 years old, was dismantled and much of the lumber was used in the new rectory.

The site for the rectory was staked out February 12 and the excavating crew moved in the next day to work on the basement and footings.



The present rectory.

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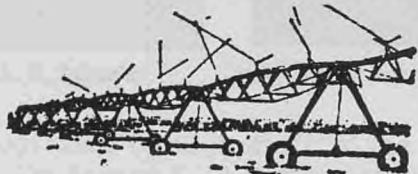
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Golden Jubilee, November 7, 1951.



First Communion Class, 1951.



Early Parishioners, 1951.



Msgr. A. B. Dziemian.



Father Gerald Hammeke.

Work progressed through much of the spring and summer. On August 9, 1959, the rectory was completed at a cost of \$35,491.78. The cost of the structure was kept down by donations of time and supplies and through the use of materials from the old rectory. In September the parish had a sale to sell surplus lumber, furniture, small buildings and other items. Money from this sale went to pay off the debt.

On September 15, 1960, Father Vesecky was appointed pastor at Pratt and Father A. B. Dziemian was named the new pastor at Belpre.

In 1962, under the supervision of Sister Mary Beatrice, two parish functions began that have since continued — the annual parish turkey supper and the Sunday morning coffee-and-roll get-togethers. The turkey suppers gained in reputation and brought people from a distance each year.

The Second Vatican Council from 1962-65 brought many changes in the liturgy of the Mass, including the gradual change from Latin to English and the altar facing the people. The first "little altar" in the church was one that was originally in the church that burned in 1924. This was replaced later with the altar and pulpit now in use, which were donated to the parish.

In the fall of 1965 the Belpre-St. John Catholic School Association was founded and for the first time Catholic students from St. John parish in St. John and St. Francis Xavier parish in Seward were transported by bus to Belpre at St. Bernard's School. Because of the added students, enrollment at the school jumped to over 50, a new record. For the first time, three nuns were instructing the students and a third classroom, previously known as the music room, was utilized as an intermediate room. The presence of a housekeeper made a total of four Sisters stationed at Belpre, the largest number in the history of the parish. In 1966 a student council was formed at the school as was a monthly newspaper.

Father Dziemian was transferred in the fall of 1965, and Father Gerald Hammeke was named pastor.

Under the supervision of Father Hammeke, the Catholic Youth Organization, high school students who had been meeting for some years, became more active in church and community functions.

Father Hammeke organized a men's social group and an Adult Study Club in the parish. Beginning in the mid-1960's a spirit of ecumenism was being shown, with women's interfaith teas being held and youth from different religious denominations meeting together to better understand each other's religious beliefs.

In July of 1967 the parish council was formed, which was made up of members of the church committee, school board and Altar Society. This council is still functioning today.

During the 1967-68 year, St. Bernard's School was operating efficiently but various factors that year cast a shadow on the future of the school. At this time a shortage of nuns was developing, the school bus transporting students from St. John was in a deteriorated condition and the possibility existed that the public school lunchroom would not operate after that year.

On March 4, 1968, a school meeting was held with diocesan officials and it was determined that the school would be closed at the end of the school term. An era in the parish came to an end May 20, 1968, when St. Bernard's School officially closed after being in operation for 18 years.

With the closing of the school, other provisions had to be made for religious education of the young people. On June 2, 1968, five women in the parish were certified as the first Confraternity of Christian Doctrine teachers. They were Mrs. Greg Neidig, Mrs. Ollie Van Arsdale, Mrs. Dennis Laber, Mrs. Ed Scheufler, and Mrs. Norman Wood. Religion classes, held weekly, began in the fall. The CCD classes are still being held today with parishioners as teachers.



Father Rory O'Neill.



Father James Murphy.

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If you will,
When there were but few dwellings
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Where there were
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When life was simple
But not easy,
There were those who paused
To worship Him

Because they were needful
Of His Divine help—
And they were grateful
For their blessings—
And down through all these years,
The spirit of Needfulness
And the spirit of Gratefulness
Have laid their kind hands
On St. Bernard's
And on all those
Who come Home
Through its ever open doors.

From A Friend

In August, 1968, Father Hammeke was transferred and Father Rory O'Neill assumed the position as pastor of St. Bernard's Church.

Under the direction of Father O'Neill, the CCD program was organized in the parish and for several years nuns were secured to coordinate religious education events and classes.

The parish no longer needing the sisters' convent, it was sold at public auction with many other items December 7, 1968. Mr. and Mrs. Ross Boman purchased the residence.

During the eight years Father O'Neill was at Belpre, numerous improvements were made to parish facilities, including roof repairs to the church, school and hall as well as painting of the parish hall and the installation of a ventilator and new curtains.

In 1973 painting was done to all woodwork on the exterior of the church and in 1974 the refurbishing of the interior of the church was undertaken. Work included repairing imperfection in the walls, complete painting of the entire church in-

terior, the repainting of the altars and the installation of new chandeliers.

To help pay for the remodeling, a special fund was established and donations, many in memory of Francis Riegel, helped pay almost half of the total cost of \$8,339.76.

In September 1974, Rev. James Murphy was assigned as pastor of the church, replacing Father O'Neill. While he has been here, he has made many improvements and repairs to the church, parish center and rectory. He, like Father O'Neill, divides his time between the parish and Larned State Hospital, where he is Catholic chaplain.

While he has been pastor, St. Bernard's Church has received several gifts, among them being an intinction set, a hymn board, oil-stock set, a sign in front of church, an offerings table and flags for the church.

Since 1974, Father Murphy, with the assistance of Mrs. Edward Scheufler, Mrs. Edward Keiter and Mrs. Norman Wood, has organized a CYO Choir and initiated an adult assistant-at-Mass program, replacing young servers.

St. Bernard's Graduates 1950-1968

Vernon Penka	Glenda Schartz	Darryl Apel	Donna Scheufler
Leroy Schartz	Leonard Gales	Patrick Meyer	Nancy Skalsky
Kay Skalsky	Roy Gene Penka	Ronald J. Gillen	Cathy Stalcup
Betty Penka	Elizabeth Gales	Edward Meyer	James Wondra
Robert Schartz	Mike Hammeke	Joyce Penka	Rachel Perez
Virginia Skalsky	Allen Penka	Steven Hammeke	David Hammeke
Margaret Breitenbach	Ted Skalsky	Thomas Hammeke	Terry Koett
Patricia Penka	Sharon Riegel	David Kearney	Bill Davidson
Ellen Breitenbach	Robert Davidson	Mark Meyer	Theresa Meyer
Paul Skalsky	Mike Meyer	Edward Michel	Connie Penka
Larry Penka	Elizabeth Boman	Harvey A. Moore	George Peintner
Thelma Skalsky	Doris Schartz	Mark Scheufler	Byron Shields
Patricia Breitenbach	David Breitenbach	Steven Clowers	Phyllis Gales
Larry V. Gales	Kenneth Hammeke	Cathy Hammeke	Loren Leiker
Larry J. Koett	Dennis Meyer	Ann Marie Meyer	Rochelle Apel
Daniel J. Schartz	Mary K. Kearney	Jacqueline Neidig	Susan Hammeke
Jean M. Shackelford	Joyce Gales	Gerald Penka	Brenda Scheufler
Chris Breitenbach	Lynette Schartz	Diane Platt	Dale Moore
Marilyn Koett	Diane Hammeke	Kevin Raven	Joe Hammeke

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*Frank Meyer	LeRoy Hammeke	Vernon Penka	Eugene Salmans
Joseph Graf	John Kearney	Roy Gene Penka	Lynn Salmans
Richard Boman	Bernard Koett	Larry Penka	Duane Boman
*Joseph Biernacki	Justin Lunz	Larry Gales	Jerome Budde
Leonard Boman	Dale Meyer	**Bernard Meyer	Norman Wood
John Breitenbach	Paul Bernard Meyer	Charles Scheufler	Ed Keiter
Bernard Breitenbach	Dennis Meyer	Linus Scheck	Wayne Clowers
Gaylord Davidson	Kenneth Hammeke	Paul Scheufler	
Harold Gales	Garman Breitenbach	Edward Scheufler	

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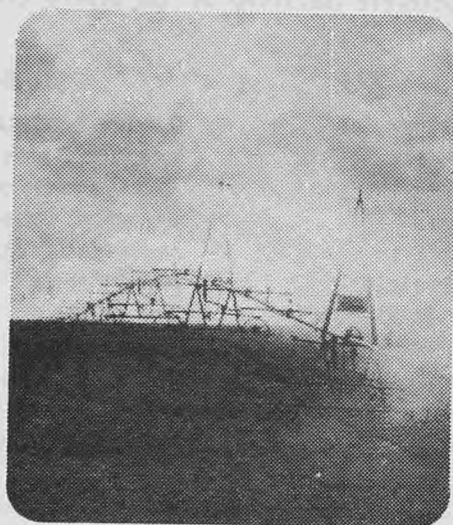
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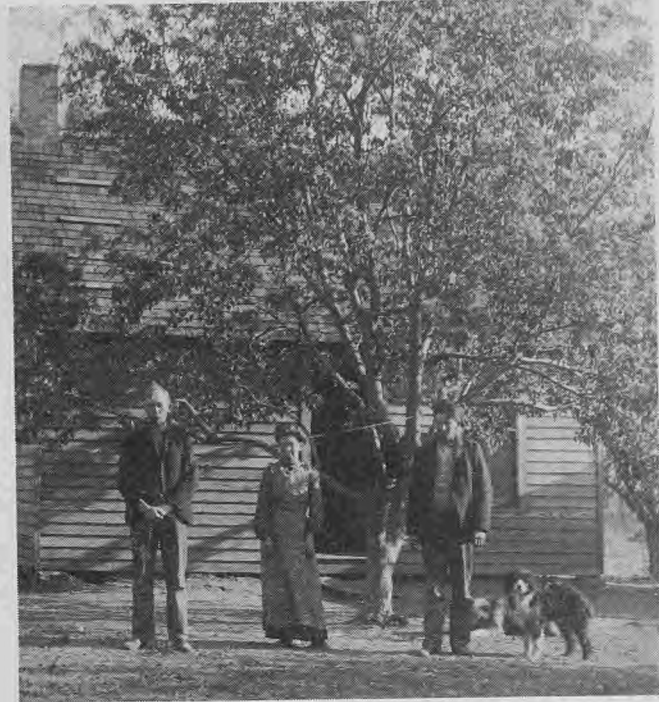


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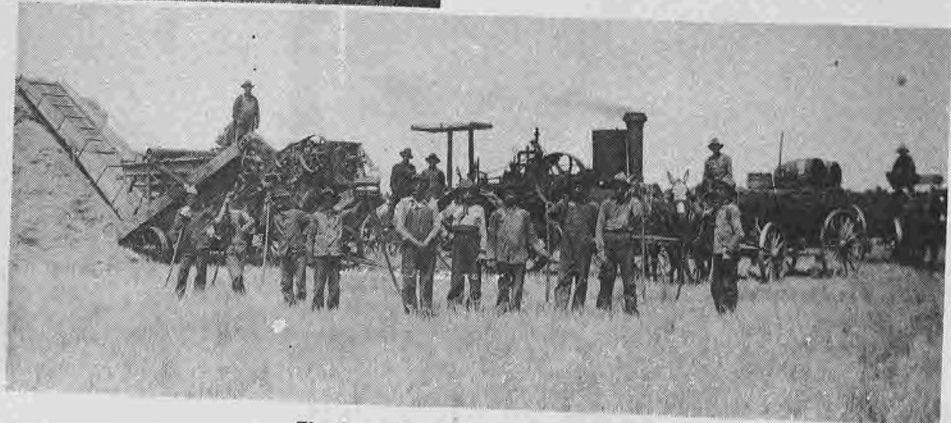


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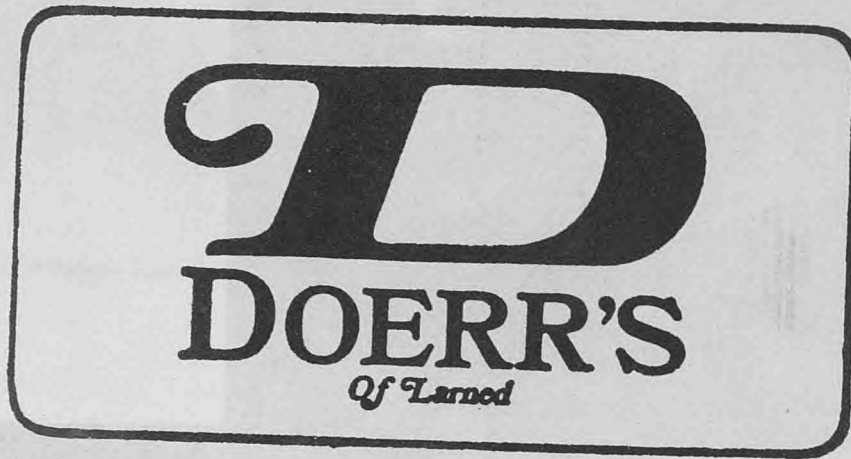
Biernacki family, 1912.



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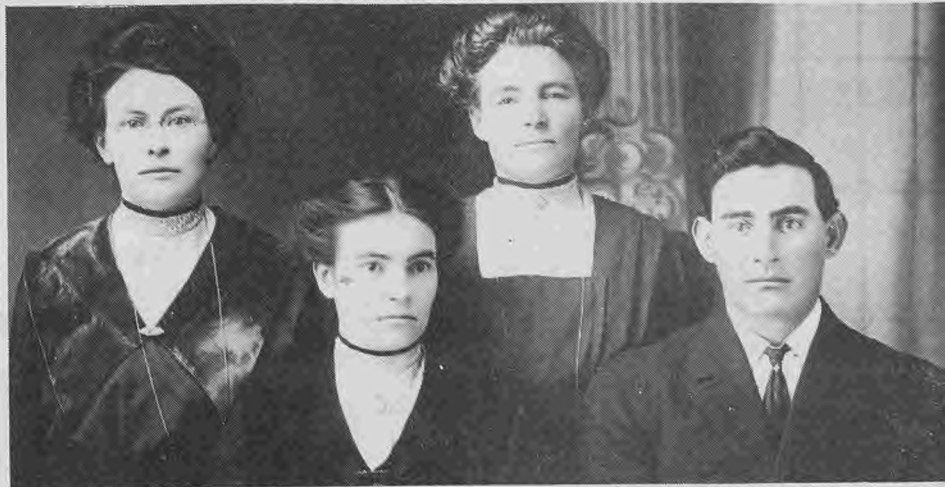
Marjain and Anna Breitenbach with nine of their 10 children in 1916.



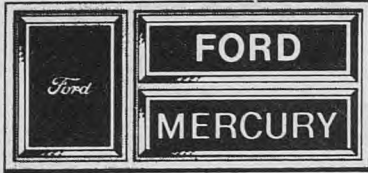
John and Martha Breitenbach, 1911.



Henry and Nora Kinkelaar, 1966.



Loretta, Kate, Ellen and Miles Kearney, 1904.



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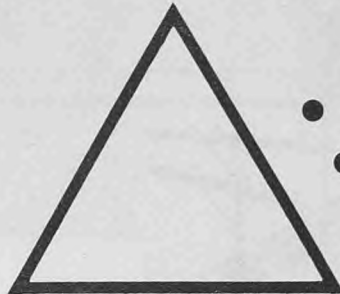


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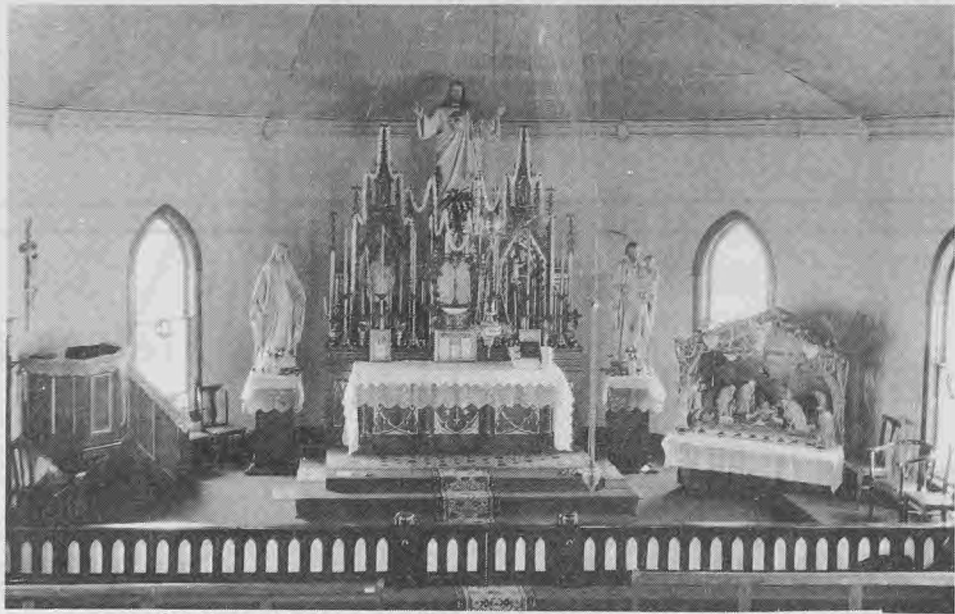
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First Communion Class, 1919.



Interior of St. Bernard's Church that burned December 28, 1924.



First Communion Class with Father Hackenbroich, 1915.



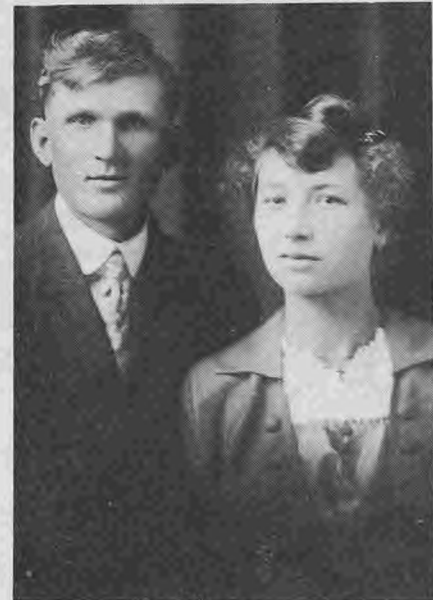
Father Ted Skalsky and his parents.
1972



C. Scheufler and family, 1941.



Father Dan Schartz and his parents. 1968.



C. Scheufler and Mary Spaciel.
1912

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**The Joseph Skalsky family.
1908**



The G. G. Skalsky family, 1912.



G. F. Skalsky and family, 1912.



The Bernard Meyer family.
1915



A double wedding in 1925: The Paul Meyers and the John Birzers.



Andrew and Mary Meyer, 1925.



Ben and Mary Meyer
Golden Wedding, 1972.



**St. Bernard's School, 1964-65.
Grades 1-4**



**St. Bernard's School, 1964-65.
Grades 5-8**



Familiar peddler of the area.



Threshing time.



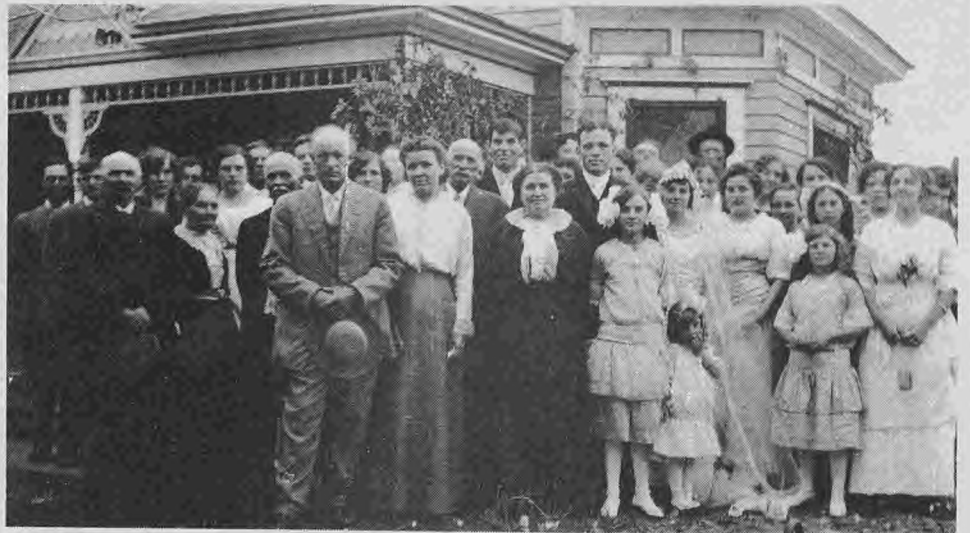
**A Kearney reunion.
1914**



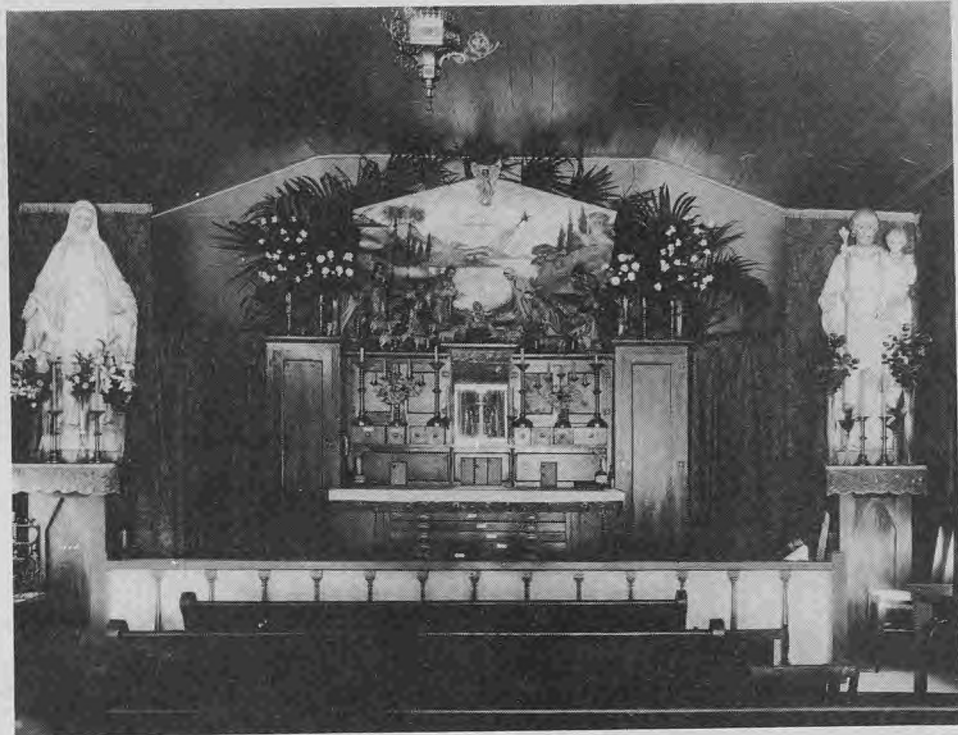
Miles and Viola Kearney, 1917.



**Thomas Gibney and John Kearney.
1919**



**A Roenbaugh-Gibney-Mayhew family reunion.
1914**



Interior of first St. Bernard's Church.



Interior of Church, 1976.



Lydia Neidig, as a young woman.



The Henry Walmeier family, 1908.



Crowning of the May Queen, May 11, 1975.



Andrew Demoroski, John, Nora and Joe Minet, 1913.



Joe Hammeke.



Kate Hammeke.

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Leroy Schartz, President of Parish Council.



Parish Council.
1976



Ruth VanArsdale, organist.



Commentators at Mass.



Assistants at Mass.



Jubilee Book editors.



Liturgy Commission.



**Confirmation class, 1920.
Father Kramer was pastor.**



**Kindergarten graduation.
1960**



First Communion Class, 1949.



Confirmation Class, 1950.

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First Communion Class, 1976.

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St. Bernard's School, grades 1, 2, 3, and 4, 1958-59.



St. Bernard's School, grades 5, 6, 7, and 8, 1958-59.



St. Bernard's basketball team, 1962.

First place in tournament.

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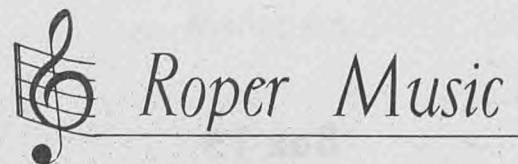
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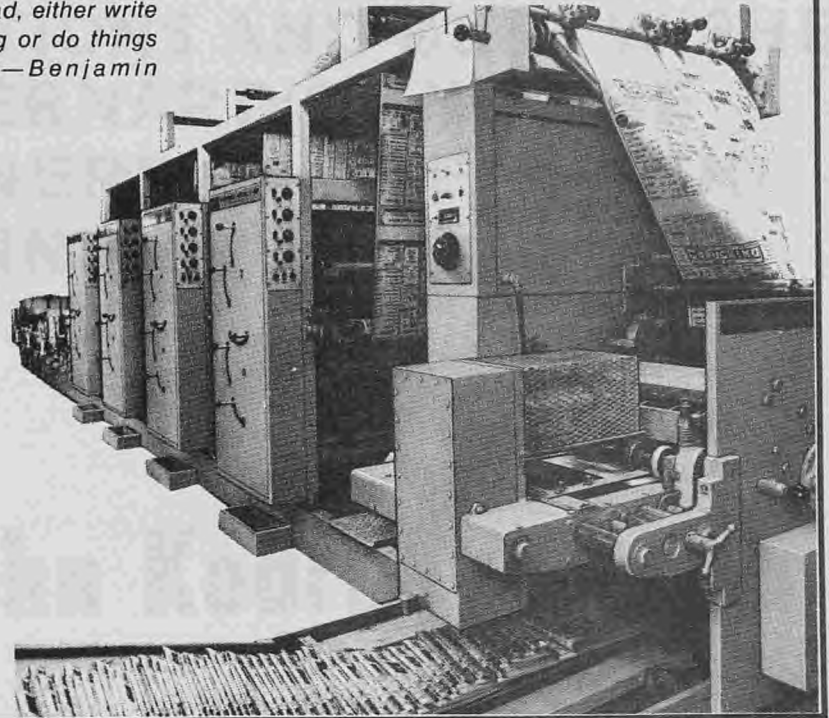
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