

# Hecla St. Anthony of Padua

Hecla (Brown County) St. Anthony (of Padua)

Thirty-five miles northeast of Aberdeen, Hecla owes its location to the North Western Railway which crossed Brown County in the 1880s. The first Catholic services were held in a public school-house in 1885 by the priest from Ellendale, N. D. The following year Father Bernard J. Hens came from Ipswich (Father Hens almost froze to death on a sick call and died, probably from the effects, in 1888).

By 1887 the number of Catholics in Hecla had increased to ten Germans-from-Russia and eight English-speaking families. Priests from Frankfort, Bristol or Ipswich came two or three times a year, offering Mass in the home of J. J. Stehly or in a school. In June of 1904 Bishop O'Gorman directed newly ordained Father P. X. Feldmaier of Columbia to organize a parish and direct the building of a church in Hecla. Father Feldmaier's enthusiasm inspired the Hecla people -- both Catholic and non-Catholic -- contribute generously of both time and money, and the frame church was completed in the late summer of 1904. It was not solemnly dedicated until March of 1905. Missionary Henry Hensings blessed it and Father Nikolas J. Dahlmans preached. Worshipers sat on planks laid across nail kegs until 1906; then Anthony Zabara donated funds for building a church loft and for pews. The J. J. Stehly Lumber Company donated the lumber. Zabara also presented the parish with a statue of St. Anthony of Padua. The parish was served from Columbia or Aberdeen until 1917 when it received Father J. D. Byrne as first resident. In Hecla a parish house valued at \$1,900 was built in 1916 and occupied by Father E. J. Senechal, St. Anthony Parish of 50 Catholic families grew with the years. Father Pius Mardian (1948-53) enlarged and renovated the church built in 1908. A new church was erected and dedicated on August 22, 1959. A new catechetical area was added by Father James Wolf, pastor from 1956 to 1961.



Confirmation class of 1903 - Columbia, Wesport and Hecla

# Weblen St. John Nepomucene

## History

St. John Nepomucene parish church in Weblen was dedicated in 1907 by Bishop O'Gorman. Although the present church building has been the parish church for seventy-five years, it was not the first church building of the parish.

The parish really began with a group of homesteaders and other settlers. These people wanting to worship God started attending Mass at St. Matthew's, a mission started by the Sisters of Charity.

When the sisters arrived in this part of the country they filed a homestead on a piece of land west of the present St. Matthew's Cemetery. On their homestead they built a church, which stood north of the creek, a small convent, in which two sisters lived and an orphanage. The priests from Sisseton came to the mission to serve the sisters. It was here that the first group of parishioners worshipped.

But as times got hard, the sisters ran into financial difficulty. As their debt on the homestead increased they could no longer even afford to feed the orphans so they left the homestead and moved away.

The people, however, continued to come to the mission for Mass. During this time Maria Barbara Vrchota, the daughter of John and Barbara Vrchota, was one of the first children to be baptized in this new "parish".

Some months later in 1906, the priest and parishioners arrived one Sunday morning to find the church locked and bolted shut. It was later discovered that the church had been built too far north of the property line. This original church



This is St. Matthew's Church without the steeple and addition.

# New Effington Sacred Heart

New Effington (Roberts County) Sacred Heart

Twenty miles northeast of Sisseton is New Effington, a Czech community first mentioned in the 1901 Catholic Directory. It was attended from Sisseton. This arrangement continued until 1915. In 1913 Father Henry Berg, a Bavarian, sojourning in Dakota for two years, had directed the erection of Sacred Heart Church. New Effington remained a mission which was attended from Clair City or Lake City. Sacred Heart Church attended by 22 Catholic families of Czech descent has been a mission in recent years of Sisseton, Weblen or Rosholt. However, Father Michael Wisniewski, OMI, was the pastor after 1970. The church, built in 1913, was still in use. Its basement afforded space for social gatherings and CCD classes. (CD)



# Rosholt St. John the Baptist

## HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The story of Catholicity in the Rosholt area began with a small group of families who settled near Vernon, a village established in 1892 four miles north of Victor. They were: Nicholas Pohl, Peter Pohl, and Bernard Pohl who came from Belgium, Wisconsin; Peter Kaiser, Math Sand Sr., Nicholas Sand, Peter Keiffer, and Math Brandenburger Sr. who had originally come from Luxemburg. They arrived here soon after the reservation was opened for settlement in 1892 to establish homes and engage in farming.

During the very earliest years of settlement, these people went to church in Hankinson, North Dakota. The eighteen mile trip was made by wagon or buggy. Upon arrival, the horses were often put into the Jake Glasner barn. After the people attended Mass and ate dinner, they again hitched up the horses for the 18 mile trip home.

Father Studnicka, the Hankinson priest, occasionally came to Vernon and celebrated Mass in some of the homes. The very first service ever held was at the Peter Kaiser home. The bedroom at the east end of the house was cleared of all furniture except a dresser which was used as an altar. Mass was also said at the Math Sand Sr. home, Peter Keiffer's and others.

When the building of the church was to begin, Mr. Lockway from Hankinson was hired to guide the construction. He was assisted by two helpers and by volunteers from the settlers. The building progressed well. Nicholas Pohl saw the church being built, but unfortunately, he died in 1910 before its completion. On November 1, 1910 the men hauled pews, statues, and an altar which the people of the old Hankinson church donated. Finally on June 29, 1911 the church was blessed by Father Studnicka and named St. Nicholas Church in memory of the donor of the land. After the service, the ladies served dinner to those present. A feeling of joy, pride and gratefulness filled the hearts of all. They had built a suitable place to worship near to their homes.



Lawrence Kaiser has given a few comments. "The old church stood where the cemetery is still located. Go through the gate about ten rods and to the left two or three rods and that is where the church stood. The building had white lap siding and a steeple on the south end. The inside was covered with wainscoting. A stove that burned either wood or coal was used for heating. This was the perfect place to worship in the sweet lands of South Dakota. I served Mass but don't recall whether I was the first one but do know that I learned the Latin responses. There was a small organ and a choir. The only choir member that I recall was Elizabeth Keiffer. There was a Board of Trustees to run the financial end and to see that all bills were paid. For many years this was a mission church. There was no local priest."

Gertrude Holstrom remembers that the choir often had practice sessions at her parents' home, the Peter Keiffer's. Other choir members were: Margaret Brandenburger, Martha Roob, Celia Keiffer, Tillie Remelt and Mary Pohl.



After some years these people decided to establish a church and cemetery of their own. Nicholas Pohl, Alex's father, willingly donated five acres of his land as a location for a church and cemetery. This was four miles north and three and one half miles west of the present Rosholt. The cemetery was actually begun before the church. Some of the earliest marked graves show the years 1904 and 1905. It is thought that the first grave was that of Kate Pohl. The funeral of Bernard Pohl in 1907 was held in the home.

## NEW CHURCH DEDICATED

On Sunday, December 22, 1957, the Most Reverend Lambert Hoch D.D., Bishop of the Sioux Falls diocese dedicated the new church in honor of St. John the Baptist. At 3:00 p.m. the ceremony began by blessing the church with Holy Water. The altar which was donated by the Catholic Foresters, was consecrated and relics were then sealed in its septiche. The Bishop then offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the people of the parish, blessed the Stations of the Cross, and led the people in making the Stations publicly for the first time in their new church.

Bishop Hoch congratulated the people for their sacrifices and stressed the importance of working together. He urged them to continue this spirit in united prayer and worship of Almighty God.

The new church was filled to capacity with local parishioners and friends. Clergy visiting were: Fathers Pohlen, Hennes, and Keohane of Sisseton; Father Duszczek of Weblen; Father Stumpel of Fairmount; Father Ludwig of Geneseo; Father Weber of Wausay; Father Lang of Polo; and Father Delahoyde of Sioux Falls.

Immediately following the services, a supper was served in the auditorium by the ladies of the parish.

# Sisseton St. Peter

ST. PETER'S CHURCH of SISSETON

The Harpers Weekly dated March 8, 1890 shows the opening of the Sioux Reservation to settlers and homesteading depicting Northeast South Dakota. This would include all of Roberts County and parts of Day and Marshall Counties.

This gave the settlers and homesteaders new opportunities, horizons and challenges never before offered to them in their home countries of Europe - land ownership. This was limited only to the wealthy.

Mixed nationalities, customs, cultures not known to them before but now a way of life, to live and work side by side. Language was no barrier when a neighbor needed help it was offered freely. Mixture of German, Irish, Polish, Scandinavian and others rubbed shoulders daily, working side by side homesteading across country roads and fence lines.

Traditional faith in God and the need of a central location of worship required the building of churches. This was also used as community get-together of families and neighbors. Prior to this, the sacrifice of Mass was celebrated in homes or business places that were available in the area and served by what had been known as a 'Circuit Rider' priest. They would travel by horseback or buggy to the different places serving their congregations along the way, quite possibly returning no more than once a month, if that often.

Sisseton was served by such a priest from the Post Office location of Nutley, just a few miles from the present town of Reelyn, Day County. An order of Nuns of the Ursuline Order established an orphanage across the road of the present Tekakosha Children's Home just outside of Sisseton. This was started in the mid to late 1800s and existed to about 1910 when it closed. According to the information provided on this it was financial problems which caused it to close. The Mother of the Nuns had visions and dreams of an orphanage near Weblen, also financial problems never caused this to materialize.

St. Peter's Church was built in the late 1890s and opened in the very early 1900s. Mass was celebrated in different locations until the settlers had their own "church". This served the community which was growing but the need required more than just a church to celebrate Mass, but also a school. In the mid 20s, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate assumed the surrounding area in the northeast corner to include parts of Day and Marshall Counties as well. The OMI are from the Central Province with the Mother House in St. Louis, MO. Fr. Joseph Schuster, OMI was the first Oblate assigned. Fr. John J. Pohlen, OMI was the next and he had dreams of a school to be added. In the mid 1930s the church was moved from the Northwest corner of the block to the Northeast corner, set on high cement walls, the basement was then used as the church, the first floor for the class rooms and the upper story (added) as the dormitory. An addition was added to the rear of the church for two classrooms and kitchen and luncheon facilities. Fr. Pohlen also converted an existing home in the same block, early on, and used it as a hospital, which he named Tekakosha Hospital, after Sister Tekakosha. He had envisioned an orphanage for the Indian children which was started in the early to mid thirties and continue for many years. The buildings are still in use as an Adolescence Treatment Center and Fine Arts Center.

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