

1788

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH
VAN HORNE. IOWA 52346

HISTORICAL DATA:

In January, 1863, a Benton County pioneer, Francis Murphy deeded two sections of prairieland, near what is now Keystone, to the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, to pay for the education of his two sons. In the spring of 1866, the provincial of Holy Cross Fathers sent the Rev. Paul E. Gillin, the first priest, together with Brothers Matthew, Cessaire and Aloysius to take possession of the recently acquired tract of land and to care for the spiritual needs of settlers of the then prairie Benton County, and eventually, if found advisable, to open a college there. Land records in the Courthouse in Vinton show the land Murphy deeded was 1,280 acres.

Father Paul Gillin came from Indiana with his mass kit and began missionary work in the surrounding areas. Parish records show Fr. Paul conferred the sacrament of Baptism, July, 1866. Father Paul is considered the first resident pastor in the County as he lived there before Holy Cross church was built.

Fr. Paul persuaded many Catholics to settle in the area, even going "back East" to persuade some to come to Benton County. He soon disposed of 1270 acres reserving 10 acres for the church and cemetery. Much of this land was sold at low prices to encourage pioneer settlers of the Catholic faith to move into this area. Many Irish Catholic names in the region between Keystone and Van Horne owe their presence to this missionary priest.

At Holy Cross mission, the first building was a combination church and house. The first person to be baptized at the mission in September 15, 1867 was Bridget Cantwell, daughter of Paul Cantwell. The first recorded marriage officiated at by Rev. Paul was that of Michael Kelly and Bridget Ryan on Feb. 9, 1868. This building was destroyed by fire.

A frame church, approximately 30 ft. x 60 ft. was constructed in 1869. The first Mass was celebrated there June 19, 1870. The first couple to be married in Holy Cross Church were James Powers and Catherine Malone in 1870. Collections to start the church amounted to \$69.00. Pew rents were collected 4 times a year. The price depended on the position in which the parishioners sat, either north or south, front or back: average donation was \$2.50 per quarter. Some paid as high as \$15.00 yearly dues. Brother Aloysius is the only member of the Congregation of Holy Cross parish to be buried in Holy Cross cemetery.

Baptisms and marriages as early as 1867 in Fr. Gillin's hand indicate the presence of the names Barry, Cantwell, McCormick, Nolan and O'Brien in the Van Horne area. Other names appeared: Kelly, Ryan, Barron, Maher and Duncalf.

Central feature of Holy Cross Cemetery today is a stone altar surmounted with a massive oak cross built on the location of the original Holy Cross church. Limestone used for the altar is from Stone City. Celtic style of the cross is commemorative of Irish origin of the first settlers who brought the Catholic faith to this area. This altar was dedicated and the first Mass was offered Memorial Day, 1974 by Rev. John J. Pitzten, then the pastor of Immaculate Conception in Van Horne. The historical memorial marker will remind future generations that this is an important place in local church history.

The first diocesan priest to succeed Holy Cross Fathers, the Rev. Thomas J. Reynolds was appointed pastor in 1888.

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By 1895 the first Catholic Church was built in Van Horne under the direction of Rev. Thomas J. Reynolds of Holy Cross. The first Church was a frame building which stood on the site of the present church. This served until 1914 when it was destroyed by fire. From 1895 through 1902 Van Horne was served as a mission from Holy Cross. The Van Horne congregation increased in numbers while the Holy Cross parish declined.

In 1902, Rev. John Hogan exchanged parishes with Fr. Reynolds. Fr. Hogan decided to make Van Horne the principal church and a parish house was built in 1903 and was still in use until 1978. Holy Cross became a mission and remained such until 1928, when the church was officially closed.

Fr. Hogan served the parish the longest of any pastor, almost 30 years. When the frame church burned in 1914, Fr. Hogan decided to rebuild immediately with bricks. The next year 1915, the present \$40,000 brick building was erected.

The church is classical basilica style, 50x100 ft, with Munich stained glass windows, and a seating capacity of 400. Today it stands in Rev. Hogan's memory.

Sister Laurentia (Lorene) and Sister Laurentina (Loretta) Barron, twin daughters of the William Barrons entered the Sisters of Mercy, Cedar Rapids, on December 6, 1921.

Rev. Conrad R. Schallau, son of the Con Schallaus, was ordained a priest on Dec. 18, 1942. He said his First Solemn Mass on Dec. 21, 1943 at his hometown parish.

Leland M. Barry, son of Matt Barry's, studied for the priesthood upon graduation from Loras College, but lost his life in a boating accident.

Priests who have served the parishioners of Immaculate Conception include Rev. John Hartigan, 1931, Rev. T.J. Norris, 1936, Rev. John L. Byrne, 1948, Rev. Francis J. Churchill, 1950, Rev. Paul Evans 1969, Rev. John J. Pitzen, 1970, Rev. Duane Raftis, 1974, and Rev. Wm. C. Michael.

Fr. Francis J. Churchill, former pastor of I.C., died in November, 1979, and is buried at Holy Cross Cemetery near Keystone.

Parish member, James Naso was ordained to the order of Deacon on November 5, 1978.

A new rectory was built beside the church in 1978 when Fr. Duane Raftis was pastor. The old rectory was removed from the church property.

In the summer of 1980, a stone altar and a redwood cross was given and placed in Calvary Cemetery near Van Horne.

Rev. Wm. C. Michael became Pastor in 1983. Fr. Michael and Fr. Con Schallau celebrated their 40th anniversary to the Priesthood at I.C. Church in 1983. Also during this year a new sound system was given and installed in the church and a Chapel was completed in the Rectory and is used for daily Mass.

In July, 1986, a Team Ministry for 5 parishes in Benton County was formed. The parishes include: St. John's - Blairstown, St. Paul's - Newhall, St. Michael's - Norway, I.C. - Van Horne, and St. Patrick's of Watkins. The Team

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consisted of two Priests - Rev. Wm. C. Michael and Rev. Vincent Hatt; one Religious Sister - Sister Anne Kisting; and one part-time Pastoral Associate/ Youth Minister - Debbie Gross. Father Hatt remained one year. Rev. Richard J. Ament was assigned to the Team in July, 1987.

Fr. Michael became ill in October of 1987 and is currently on a medical leave. Rev. T. Donelan Collins was temporarily assigned to the Team in January, 1988.

The parish is presently composed of 132 households.