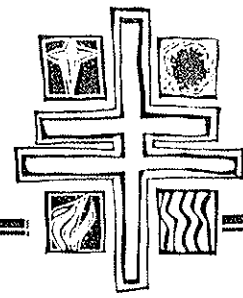
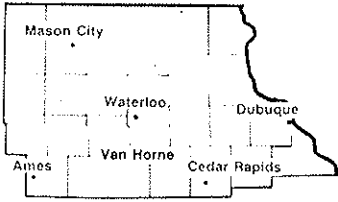


Parish Profile #93



Immaculate Conception Parish, Van Horne



By Rev. Msgr. Edgar Kurt

The Catholic Church in Benton County began with the deeding of two sections of prairie near Keystone, Iowa, to the University of Notre Dame in Indiana in January of 1863. Francis Murphy, a Benton County pioneer, gave those 1,280 acres in return for the education of his two sons.

In the spring of 1866, the provincial of the Holy Cross Fathers sent Father Paul E. Gillen together with Brothers Matthew, Cesaire, and Aloysius, to take possession of the tract of land and to care for the spiritual needs of settlers of the area, and eventually to open a college there if it was found advisable.

Father Paul, a Civil War chaplain, drove his old war horse "Sarsfield" all the way from Indiana with his Mass kit and other needs in a buggy. The Brothers drove two yokes of oxen with wagons loaded with implements to break up the fertile prairie and raise potatoes to supply the community and students at Notre Dame.

Father Gillen persuaded many Catholics to settle in the area. To some of them he sold most of the land, reserving enough for church and cemetery. Many of today's residents with Irish names such as Barron, Barry, Cantwell, Duncalf, Kelly, Maher, McCormick, Nolan, O'Brien, and Ryan owe their presence in Benton County to his efforts.

The first building was a combination church and house. A frame church was built in 1869 and given the appropriate name of Holy Cross. There is evidence of a school, but no further information.

Father Paul was assisted by other Holy Cross priests. These names are in the baptismal register: Fathers John Ford, J. A. Quinn, and G. Demers. Two more Holy Cross priests were his successors: Father R. C. Maher from 1880 and Father James Gleeson from 1884 to 1888.

In 1888 the community of Holy Cross Fathers and Brothers left the parish, and Father Thomas J. Reynolds was

the first diocesan priest to serve the parish.

The first Catholic church in Van Horne was built at Father Reynolds' direction, a frame building on the site of the present church. Father Reynolds established a school in 1890, taught by the Franciscan Sisters of Clinton. It was discontinued in 1894 and there has been no school since then.

In 1902 Father Reynolds and Father John Hogan traded parishes. Father Hogan soon decided to make Van Horne the principal church, probably because living in a town was preferred to living at the rural Holy Cross Church. A rectory was built in Van Horne in 1903 and served for 75 years.

Holy Cross Parish continued to be served by the pastor of Van Horne until 1928, when it was officially closed. The frame church remained at Holy Cross Cemetery until Father Thomas Norris disposed of it in the 1930s.

Father Hogan served the Van Horne parish for thirty years. After the frame church was destroyed by fire in 1914, the present brick structure seating 400 was finished in 1915 at a cost of \$40,000. The church is in the classical basilica style with Munich stained glass windows.

The next pastor, Father John Hartigan, served from 1931 to 1936. He was followed by Father Thomas J. Norris, who disposed of the Holy Cross Church building, but renewed the cemetery.

Father John L. Byrne served the parish from 1948 until his sudden death on July 4, 1950. He is buried in the parish cemetery on highway 30.

Another longtime pastor, Father Francis J. Churchill, served from 1950 until his retirement in 1969. He died in 1979 and is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery.

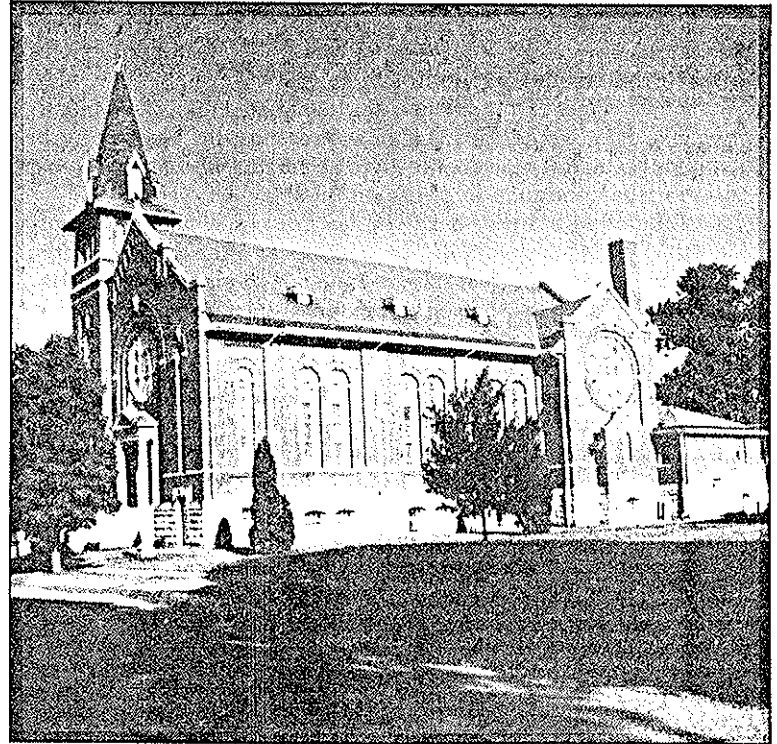
Father Paul Evans served one year, and Father John J. Pitzen for four years.

From 1974 to 1983, Father Duane Rafis served the parish and directed the building of the present rectory in 1978.

Father William Michael was appointed pastor in 1983 and was joined by Father Vincent Hatt in 1986 in a team ministry for the five Benton County parishes: Blairstown, Newhall, Norway, Van Horne, and Watkins.

Father Richard Ament replaced Father Hatt in 1987 because of the latter's ill health.

After Father Michael became ill in late 1987, Father T. Donelan Collins



Immaculate Conception Church

assisted the team ministry from January to July in 1988.

Father James Miller joined the team ministry in July of this year. Now the five Benton County parishes are served by the team ministry made up of Fathers Ament and Miller, Pastoral Ministers Sister Anne Kisting OSF and Sister Corine Murray PBVM, and Permanent Deacon Jim Naso. There are over 300 members in the Van Horne

parish.

Julie McCormick, director of religious education, and Debbie Gross, youth minister, work with the children and youth of the parish.

Two women of the parish entered the Sisters of Mercy, Cedar Rapids. One man of the parish was ordained to the priesthood, another died as a seminarian, and a third serves as a permanent deacon in the parish.