

# **HISTORY OF ST. EDWARD'S CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**Kinnear-Morton, Wyoming**

**1915-1977**

**(Written for the rededication, May 29, 1977)**

**(By Mabel Marvel?)**

The turn of the century saw the coming of many settlers to the upper Wind River area of Fremont County, Wyoming. Among these early pioneers were a number of Catholics from as far away as Spain. The Church followed her people West and established missions, such as St. Stephens, Wyoming in 1884. The priests at St. Stephens Mission seeking to bring the sacraments to the people, established a number of satellite mission stations up the Wind River from St. Stephens. These mission stations were served on a somewhat regular basis by the priests of St. Stephens. One of these mission stations was a log cabin chapel established sometime before 1915 near the Wind River below Pilot Butte. This cabin no longer exists. Among the early priests of that time was the much beloved Fr. J. B. Sifton, S. J.

In 1915 Fr. A. J. Keel, S.J., of St. Stephens petitioned the Extension Society for funds to build a new church at Pilot Butte, and in 1916 the new wooden frame structure complete with bell tower was completed on the hill above Wind River on a location known as Mexican Flats. The bell that was installed in the bell tower (and is still in use) was cast by "Stuckstede & Bro. St. Louis, Mo. - 1914". This new location was on land owned by Katherine Chavez (1876-1918), a sister of Amelia Barquin. The site is about one mile east of the present Tee Pee Trading Post. Besides two hired professional carpenters among those who helped build the new structure were four Hurtado boys (Sequiel, Fred, Dell and John Joseph) -brothers of Katherine Chavez; Mr. Chavez, her husband; Alex Demontier whose wife was a cousin of Mrs. Chavez; a Mr. Bower (no known survivors) and the Kinnear family (grandparents of Mrs. Charles (Irene) Miranda and Mrs. Isabella Murphy. Mr. Napoleon Bonaparte Kinnear supplied teams and wagons to haul in the materials

probably from Lander. Next to the church was also established a small cemetery known as the Chavez Cemetery. This little fenced-in plot is where Katherine Chavez and many of the Hurtado family are buried including Alex Demontier.

As was noted before, the priests from St. Stephens Mission served all the missions up the Wind River on the Reservation (St. Joseph's, Ethete; Sage, between Arapahoe and Ethete; at Ft. Washakie and this Church of St. Edward's, Pilot Butte). About once a month, or whenever a priest could come, he came by team and buggy or by horseback, as roads before 1930 were but wagon trails. In those days the people made an heroic effort to attend, using teams of horses and wagons and wrapping their children in blankets to keep them from freezing. Special effort was made at Easter to attend Mass even when there were bad spring storms. Christmas too was a special time to get to Mass even when weather conditions made it difficult. It is noted that many times Midnight Mass was celebrated using kerosene lanterns with the priest using candles for light. Two priests who are noted from this time are Fr. A.C. Riester, S.J., (a favorite) and Fr. A.C. Zuercher, S. J.

In the Fall of 1934, due to the fact that many of the Catholics had died or moved away from near the church and that the greater number of Catholics were nearer Riverton to the southeast, and at the urging of the McCoy family, the priest, Fr. Matt A. Connell, S.J., agreed to allow them to move the church six miles southeast to land belonging to Katie Erickson (daughter of N.B. Kinnear), about two and one-half miles southeast of the town of Morton. This location is about one-half mile east of the present Wind River High School. The church was tucked in between two small hills at its new home; it was moved to the Erickson property by William M. and Ambrose McCoy (father and son). Mr. Merrill Olson did a remodelling job on the church after the move. A new confessional, painting inside and out and the bell tower were rebuilt. An Organ was loaned to the church by Mrs. Katie Erickson. It had belonged

to her mother, Isabella Kinnear. The first services were held during Lent, 1935.

The church was served by the Jesuit priests from St. Stephens all this time. Father taught catechism after Mass and Sisters from St. Stephens would come when they could. They were able to come to teach religion during the years of 1954 through 1957 on a regular basis.

In 1924 a church was built in Pavillion for the Catholics of that area by Fr. Edward Cassidy from Lander. As long as Riverton was served from Lander so was Pavillion. Due to a decrease in population in the Pavillion area the church came to be used by the Pavillion School as a music classroom and eventually was moved to Dubois about 1946. Today it is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Linsdau. (A new church was built in Dubois in 1964.) At various times a priest from Riverton came to Pavillion, sometimes on Saturday; at times to the homes in the North Portal area; and at times to the Reclamation Hall. After discontinuation of Mass in the Reclamation Hall about 1950, the people from the Pavillion area went to the church at Morton.

In 1960 the church was broken into and the tabernacle and chalice were stolen. They were found a few miles away along the highway. The church was briefly closed at that time. About six months later it was reopened with the priest from Riverton, Fr. Adolph Pate, coming for Mass twice a month at 4 P. M. In 1963 Dubois was assigned to Riverton and Fr. Pate scheduled a mission run. Mass has been held every Sunday since at St. Edward's at 10 A. M.

In 1964 the church was remodeled, the ceiling was lowered and the church was repainted. A propane heater with electric blower was installed replacing the coal-oil stove. A coal stove had been used prior to the coal-oil stove.

Extension Volunteer Teachers taught catechism during 1963 and 1964. Sheila Forst (Pennsylvania) and Ann Mura (New York) were here in 1963 and Jeri Nee (Wisconsin) – later Mrs. Larry Kennah of Lander -- and Priscilla Thayer (Boston) taught in 1964. Others who taught CCD through the years are Mr. and Mrs. Norman Harebo and Irene Miranda.

The priests who served since 1960 are Fr. Adolph Pate, Fr. Jerome Logue, Fr. Jose Dh Fraher, Fr. Cletus Prado, Fr. Gilbert Callahan, Fr. William Gianola, Fr. Colm Woods, Fr. James Doudican, Fr. William Espenshade, Fr. Vincent Langfield and at present Fr. Ronald Stolcis.

In the summer of 1975 Bishop Newell appointed Fr. Ronald Stolcis, assistant pastor at St. Margaret's, Riverton, in charge of the mission run (Dubois-Morton-Shoshoni). A number of the parishioners complained that summer about how they feared for the lives of their families because of how dangerous it was to leave the church after Mass, coming out onto the highway and not being able to see either direction for more than 100 feet due to the hill on either side. Also after investigating the deeds for the missions it was discovered that title was not held to the property on which the church sat. That fall of 1975, Fr. Stolcis asked the parishioners if anyone would be willing to donate a parcel of land upon which the church might be moved. It was noted that a location which would give safer entry and exit onto the highway was being sought.

At that time Mrs. George (Ethel) Griebel, daughter of Amelia Barquin, came forward and offered as much land as would be needed for a new location wherever it was wanted along the highway, as long as the parcel would be fenced. A location was chosen along the right-of-way of the newly resurfaced section of Highway 26, having a full mile view of the road in both directions. This setting included an attractive outcropping of limestone rock of the upper Wind River formation, next to which the church would nestle. The tract of land came to 3.5 acres, which was generously donated by Ethel Griebel.

The Sunday before Palm Sunday, April 4, 1976, was the last Sunday that Mass was held at the Erickson location. During the following week Mr. James Tallman was hired to move the church, donating \$500 of his services. In moving the church a power line was hit and the steeple was knocked off. Other than that, the move went smoothly and the church was placed at its new home on a 6 inch slab of concrete poured by Joe Gantenbein and his brothers at a nominal fee. At the time the foundation slab was poured it was also decided to add a 12,x16l addition to the existing 32,x16l church structure. In this addition are a sacristy, a reconciliation (confession) room and a bathroom. Fr. Stolcis contacted Mr. Michael Sinicki, Riverton, as architect and general contractor for the building of this new addition. Mr. Sinicki donated all of these services. The key factor making this new addition possible was a gift of \$6,000 from the Catholic Church Extension Society of Chicago which has built many of the small missig,n churches, including the early church at Pavillion and the Dresent church at Dubois. Besides this gift, \$1,500 was collected from parishioners to help finance the new improvements, and Bishop Hubert M. Newell gave \$1,000.

With the volunteer help of some of the men of the parish, Fr. Stolcis and Mr. Sinicki worked through the rest of the summer, fall axid winter of 1976 to bring the addition to near completion. The spring of 1977 saw the completion of the project. The only carpenter hired was Mr. Ross Vogelsang to do some of the finish work. Among some of the men helping in the construction work were the Westling boys, Jerry, Walter and David, and their father, Walter; Mike Miller; Herb Bower; and Spider and Gordon Gantenbein. Carpet was laid throughout the church and the church was repainted inside and out. The carpet contractor was Bernard McCoy from Lee's Furniture, Riverton and the paint contractor was Corky Davis (Percy Davis' son). Electric heating was installed in the building. Steven Smerud installed the electrical wiring at no cost to the parish. Much of the electrical wire and fixtures were donated by Modern Electric, Casper, Wyoming. Also helping in construction work were Lynn Freeman, Casper and Jerry Fehring, Kinnear.

In order to have the bathroom facilities, a septic tank and drain field were installed. Robert W. Campbell donated the excavation work for the septic system. The septic tank was purchased from Ray Gustin who also was hired to rebuild the steeple. The steeple was replaced on the church through the efforts of Phil Anderson who obtained a 85' sign company crane from Signs Incorporated with out charge. Also working on putting up the steeple were Les Hammerstrom; Laverne Olheiser; Wally, Dave and Jerry Westling and Ray Gustin.

The well was drilled by Louis Olheiser who donated all of his labor and equipment; the church paid only for the 5" casing. The tape player for the sound system was given by Roy Buckmaster. The statues of Mary and Joseph were donated by Jerry Westling. A new altar cloth was given by Mrs. Mable Marvel of Casper. The statue of St. Teresa of the Little Flower was brought out of storage from St. Margaret's, Riverton.

To conclude the project a shrine to Mary under the title "Our Lady of the Wind Rivers" was erected on the top of the mound of rock next to the church. This project was under the direction of Mr. Sinicki.

Many thanks to the ladies of the parish among whom are Mrs. Darwin Griebel, Mrs. Frank Duhring, Mrs. Alice Olheiser, Mrs. Florence Gantenbein, Mrs. Mary Arima and Mrs. Walter Westling who cleaned the church each week during the construction period in order that Mass might be held continuously. Only one Sunday was missed due to wet paint.

The Church of St. Edward was rededicated at its new location on May 29, 1977 by Bishop Joseph Hart, auxiliary Bishop of Cheyenne.