

Powell, St. Barbara Bishop McGovern

[156] The history of St. Barbara's parish dates back to the very earliest settlement of the Shoshone government reclamation project. A few families of Catholic faith came with the earliest homesteaders in 1908. The beautiful Powell valley of today was then little but a sage desert and only a few homesteads dotted the inhospitable country-side.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Robinson, who came from Iowa to homestead a mile north of Powell were closely associated with the early organization work of the parish. Mass was celebrated at their home for two years.

In the summer of 1908 while on his way to Powell Mr. Robinson met Rev. N.J. Endres on the train. They discussed the possibility of Fr. Endres visiting Powell in his missionary trips through the Big Horn basin and it was arranged that he stop at Powell once a month on a week day. The first Mass was celebrated in Powell by Fr. Endres in the fall of 1908.

Fr. Endres had begun his work in the Big Horn basin in 1906, and maintained his headquarters at Cody. He attempted to cover the entire northwestern Wyoming area between the Big Horn mountains and Yellowstone Park but it was a difficult task. Bad roads and [157] inadequate transportation facilities were responsible for the infrequency of Fr. Endres' visits to any one locality. He had his own horse and would ride to such stations as Meeteetse and other places. Train service through the Big Horn basin was also employed by Fr. Endres. The advent of the automobile did not prove useful to Fr. Endres for some time because of the poor roads. The group of Catholics in the pioneer settlement at Powell grew steadily and soon the Robinson home proved to be inadequate to hold the people who came to Mass. As a consequence plans were made for the construction of a wooden building in the form of a cottage, with a seating capacity of 125, costing \$3,500.00.

It was dedicated July 20, 1910, under the patronage of St. Barbara. Bishop Keane had planned to be present for the dedication, but illness prevented his coming. In his absence the dedicatory sermon was preached by the Rev. Ignatius Berna, O.M.C., Douglas, Wyo. The little church building was crowded with Catholics and non-Catholics who had gathered for the ceremony.

In the newspaper account of the dedication which appeared in the Powell Tribune, the following was said: "It was only fitting and proper that to Fr. Endres should fall the honor of actually dedicating the church for to him in a very large measure is due the credit of having been instrumental in securing the first church [158] building ever erected in Powell. He has made possible not only a splendid church edifice but under his guidance and inspiration the congregation has forged steadily to the front alike in membership and in comparative standing among the Catholic organizations of the State."

During the busy days following the World War Fr. Endres realized that he could no longer minister to all the fast developing communities of the Big Horn basin. It was decided that his efforts should be confined to the southern half of the basin country with headquarters at Thermopolis, and another priest should be stationed at Powell to minister to the Catholics in Powell, Lovell, Cody and Meeteetse.

In December, 1919, the first resident priest of St. Barbara's parish arrived to take up his charge. He was the Rev. Bernard Schneiders, a native of Holland, who had served for a short time at Kemmerer before being assigned to Powell. As there was no official residence for the pastor, Fr. Schneiders occupied a room in the Virgil Orland cottage.

June 20, 1920, Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., bishop of Cheyenne, came to the Big Horn basin and to Powell to administer the sacrament of confirmation to a class of nineteen. Bishop McGovern also confirmed ten at Lovell and four at Cody during his trip.

[159] The increasing population of Powell was rapidly outgrowing the little frame church and during Bishop McGovern's visit plans for a new church building were discussed by the bishop, Fr. Schneider and Fr. Endres. It was proposed to erect a new church the following summer. However, ten years were to lapse before the structure was built.

Fr. Schneiders was transferred to Casper, and was replaced the first week in February, 1922, by the Rev. John Spillane, who had been stationed at Rock Springs.

In June, 1923, a new rectory was completed at a cost of \$1,948.90.

In 1924, Yellowstone National Park was added as a mission; prior to this it had been unattended. In October, 1926, the Lovell mission was transferred to the newly formed parish at Greybull.

In the intervening years between 1922 and 1932 the people of Powell worked zealously to secure funds for their projected church. Finally after ten years of waiting, ground for the new building was broken in the early part of 1932. The fine new church edifice, built by Fr. Spillane and his large and growing body of communicants, was dedicated, Thursday morning, September 22, 1932.

Bishop McGovern officiated at the beautiful ceremony which was attended by fifteen priests, exclusive [160] of the pastor. Their names follow: Rev. William Short, Kemmerer; Rev. James McBride, Pine Bluffs; Rev. J.J. O'Connor, Torrington; Rev. John Henry, superintendent of St. Joseph's orphanage, Torrington; Rev. Daniel Doherty, Lander; Rev. A.C. Zuercher, S.J., Riverton; Rev. N.J. Endres, Thermopolis; Rev. John Brady, Buffalo; Rev. John McDevitt, J.C.D., Monarch; Rev. John O'Connor, Ph.D., Carroll College, Helena, Mont.; Rev. William Spillane, Glasgow, Mont.; Rev. John Molyneaux, Red Lodge, Mont.; Rev. John Higgins, Billings, Mont.; Rev. D.J. Dineen, Billings, Mont.; and the Rev. J. Connolly, Geraldine, Mont.

The dedication was followed by a banquet at which Thomas Shea, Cody attorney, was toastmaster. Other speakers were Bishop McGovern, Mayor David E. Powers of Powell, Rev. John O'Connor of Helena, Mont., and Rev. D.J. Dineen of Billings, Mont.

The \$20,000.00 church was built of brick and terra cotta. The seating capacity is about 275, but as many as 400 could be crowded into the large auditorium with room for fifty more in the choir-loft above the front entrance. All the seats and all of the interior appointments are of a beautiful hardwood finish. The building was entirely paid for at the time of dedication. Final completion of the interior will raise the total cost of the church to \$25,000.00.

[161] Fr. Spillane was transferred from St. Barbara's parish in the fall of 1936. The parish members were saddened at his departure as his regime had been happy and successful. To replace him came Rev. Frederick Kimmett, October 16, 1936.

The fourteen year period from 1925 to 1939 marked a steady material and spiritual growth of the parish. During those years the number of Catholics in the parish was more than doubled. In the census of 1925 there were sixty-nine practical Catholics listed in Powell and twenty-seven in Cody. The 1938 census of the parish lists one hundred and sixty Catholics in Powell and ninety in the Cody mission. In 1925 the census gives the number of Catholic families residing at Powell as twenty-nine and Cody, thirteen. In 1938 there were fifty-three Catholic families residing at Powell and forty-five at Cody. These figures do not include the one hundred or more Catholic boys that are enrolled in the CCC camp in Powell nor the large number of Mexican families that spend the summer months in the vicinity of Powell as beet-field laborers.

The material progress of the parish went hand in hand with the spiritual progress. In the year 1925 the congregation of Powell attended Sunday Mass in a small frame building which had a seating capacity of about

125 people. At the side of this first Catholic church of Powell now stands the beautiful church of [162] French Gothic design which we have described. In the fall of 1938 through the efforts of Fr. Kimmett a new liturgical altar was installed in the church at a cost of \$1,469.80. A new pipe organ was also purchased and installed in the church.

Several improvements have been made in the mission church at Cody since the year 1925. In 1927, an addition was made to the rear of the church building to provide sleeping quarters for the pastor on his visits to Cody. On two different occasions it has been necessary to add new pews to the church in order to increase the seating capacity. A new forced air heating system was installed in the church in 1939. The total cost of improvements to the Cody church since 1925 is more than \$3,000.00.

Bishop McGovern made three visits to the parish to administer the sacrament of confirmation in the period from 1925 to 1939. The first of these visits was made in May, 1926. On the 13th a class of eight was confirmed at Lovell; on the 14th ten children were confirmed at Cody; and on the 16th a class of twenty was confirmed at Powell. The second visit of Bishop McGovern was in May, 1932. During this visit the bishop confirmed thirty-nine at Powell and fifteen at Cody. The third visit was in May, 1938. On this visit Bishop McGovern confirmed a class of fifty-six [163] at Powell, May 15th. Of this number ten were from the Cody parish.

In the year 1938 there were thirty-eight infants baptized in the parish. In the same year five converts were baptized, and eight marriages were performed.

Between 1925 and 1939 three missions have been conducted in the parish. A Dominican father gave a mission in Powell and Cody from March 22-29 in 1925. In 1930, a mission was given in Powell by a Jesuit father. In 1937, the Rev. P.G. O'Connor, SS.R., gave a mission in Powell

from October 31 to November 7, and in Cody from November 8 to November 14.

Up to this time Yellowstone National park has been attached to St. Barbara's parish as a mission. During the summer months Masses have been said in the park for the Catholic tourists. In 1925, Mass was said regularly at only one point in the park, the government chapel at Mammoth. In 1933 arrangements were made for a Mass to be said each Sunday at the Canyon Lodge as well as at Mammoth. In 1938, a schedule was made and followed whereby Mass was celebrated each Sunday at the four principal points in the park, Old Faithful Lodge, Lake Lodge, Canyon Lodge and Mammoth chapel.

At this writing the church of St. Barbara has no debt and deposits and bonds in favor of the church amount to \$7,000.00.

[164] At the beginning of 1940 the Cody church corporation purchased a house and lot, because the bishop had expressed his intention of r