

Riverton, St. Margaret Bishop McGovern

[179] Since the town of Riverton itself is of comparatively recent origin, St. Margaret's parish has not much of a history.

Rev. John B. Sifton, S.J., of St. Stephen's Indian mission was the first priest to attend the town. The small Catholic population gathered in John Malone's black shack for the services. The church, since enlarged, was built by Fr. Sifton in 1911.

In 1912, Fr. Sifton was withdrawn from Riverton and Rev. William Keavey of Lander attended to its needs during part of 1912 and 1913. Mass was said only twice a month during his charge.

Because of the ill health of Father Keavey and the long distance between Lander and Riverton it was considered necessary to have Riverton attended from St. Stephen's mission again, and this was continued until 1923.

Rev. Aloysius Keel, S.J., superior of St. Stephen's mission, one of the most illustrious of Indian missionaries, attended Riverton during part of 1913 and 1914. Rev. Stephen E. McNamara, S.J., served from 1914 to 1919. Rev. James V. O'Conner, S.J., then came, remaining until 1921. Succeeding Fr. O'Connor was the Rev. M. J. Hoferer, S.J., who served until 1923. During his [180] charge there was a substantial increase in Catholic population and Mass was celebrated every Sunday.

Rev. William J. Short was appointed the first resident pastor in 1923. Fr. Short worked hard, but the parish was small and scarcely able, as yet, to stand alone. Hopes of prosperity dimmed and many people moved away. With the decrease in church membership it was necessary to withdraw the resident pastor. Fr. Short was transferred to Kemmerer in the middle of the year 1924. It was decided to have Riverton attended by a priest from Lander. Rev. Edward Cassidy began his duties in September, 1924.

In October, 1925, Fr. Cassidy was promoted and transferred to Torrington. Rev. Martin Kennedy of Lander succeeded him. Fr. Kennedy held services every Sunday and holyday of obligation at Riverton.

Following Fr. Kennedy were Rev. Daniel O'Doherty, Rev. Arthur J. Crann and Rev. Leo B. Morgan.

In 1936, the Jesuit priests from St. Stephen's mission served Riverton.

The next two years witnessed Rev. Walter McGrath, Rev. Francis T. Penny and Rev. Theodore Rath, C.P.P.S., serving the Riverton congregation in rapid succession from Lander. During Fr. Rath's brief incumbency a gilded cross replaced the old dingy wooden one and the church building was lengthened 22 feet to accommodate the people.

[181] In September, 1938, youthful Fr. Rath was replaced by an older Precious Blood priest, Rev. Albert Kaiser.

A class of fifty-three was confirmed at Riverton, May 4, 1938. There were four marriages that year.

Pavillion mission was established in 1925, when a chapel was erected. Later, due to a shrinkage in population, religious services were discontinued. Mass was reintroduced in October, 1938. One Mass is said on the fourth Sunday of the month, on Christmas, and All Souls' Day.

Riverton is now a distinct parish of its own and a legal perpetual corporation under the title of St. Margaret's Catholic Church. Roughly speaking, it includes all the territory surrounding Riverton as far as Shoshoni, inclusive, on the northeast; Hudson, exclusive, on the southwest; and Pavillion inclusive on the northwest.

At present two Masses are celebrated every Sunday at Riverton, except the fourth Sunday of the month, when one Mass is said at Pavillion at 8 o'clock.

On the departure of Fr. Kaiser, Oct. 1, 1939, Rev. John Spillane was placed in charge of the parish, which, under his wise direction, gives promise of an active and prosperous future. As we write (July, 1940) he has just brought to completion a six room brick rectory, at a cost of \$6,000.00.