

MOUNT CALVARY CEMETERY - BRAZOS COUNTY

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Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church was officially started in 1873 as recorded in the United States Catholic Directory. During the next 25 years, Catholics of Bryan and Brazos County used existing cemeteries of that day which were Bryan City Cemetery, Smetana Cemetery (Called the “Moravian Cemetery”¹ at that time), and Kurten Cemetery. “A graveyard situated near A&M College”¹, and other cemeteries throughout Brazos County.

In July of 1890, Rev. Joseph Pelnar was appointed as Pastor of Saint Joseph Catholic Church, Bryan, Texas. Father Pelnar tried to establish a Catholic Cemetery but due to lack of support from the parishioners of Saint Joseph Catholic Church, it had to be placed on hold.

On Monday, December 14, 1896, the Bryan City Council met to conduct city business. One of the items on the agenda was a letter from the Bryan City Sexton, Mr. H. H. Jones. The following is part of the Bryan City Council Minutes which pertain to Bryan City Cemetery:

“Commucate from H. H. Jones, City Sexton, received and read asking the council order him as Sexton to make no sale of lots in the city cemetery except to bonafide

¹ “A Short Chronicle of Calvary Cemetery” by Rev. Joseph Pelnar, December 1, 1898

citizens of Bryan. After considering the foregoing communication, on motion duly seconded and passed the said H. H. Jones and his successors in the office of City Sexton is ordered and directed to make no sale of lot or lots or parcel of lots in the cemetery to anyone except the purchaser be a bonafide citizen of Bryan".²

After the news of this city council meeting got around, Father Pelnar's Catholic Cemetery was back in the lime light again. Many of the parishioners of that time lived outside the city limits, and the area for the City of Bryan was small compared to 2003 standards. This was a stimulus that started what is today Mount Calvary Catholic Cemetery.

In April 1897, a ten acre tract of land was purchased from Mrs. M. L. Smythe on the south side of Bryan, outside the city limits, by Mr. J. V. Rosprim³ for \$300.00 and he then turned the property over to Saint Joseph Catholic Church for use as a cemetery⁴. Father Pelnar noted "Several of our Catholic farmers donated sufficient fence posts and fence costing \$40.86 was built"¹.

Some of the citizens of Bryan and the neighboring land owners raised strong objection to the location of a cemetery in this area. Quoting Father Pelnar, "for sanitary reasons and because it would materially injure the interests of those who owned

² City of Bryan Council Minutes of December 14, 1896

³ Brazos County Deed of Records; Vol. 16, page 427

⁴ Brazos County Deed of Records; Vol. 16, page 452

¹ "A Short Chronicle of Calvary Cemetery" by Rev. Joseph Pelnar, December 1, 1898

property in the neighborhood”¹, therefore a request to buy the improved property back was made to Rt. Rev. N. A. Gallagher, Bishop of the Galveston Diocese. The property was sold back to Mrs. M. L. Smythe for \$450.00⁵ with the guarantee that the Catholic Cemetery would not be located on the south side of Bryan. The approximate present day (2003) location of this ten acre tract is bordered by South College and Fountain Streets of Bryan, Texas. Part of the tract is owned by Atofina Chemicals, Inc. where their plant is now located. Also it was almost across the street from Memorial Funeral Chapel. Please note that in researching this, there was not a railroad between South College Avenue and Fountain Streets at time of sale, the right of way for the spur was later than 1897 and this may have been why the land owners claimed it would materially injure their interest.

Father Pelnar bought another ten-acre tract from Mr. W. T. James⁶, December 23, 1897 which was located about one and a half miles, north-north east of Brazos County Courthouse off the Kurten Road of that time. Present day (2004) location is between Texas State Highway 6 (East By-Pass) and Waco Street off Old Kurten Road.

The land was blocked off and made ready for use as a cemetery and named “Calvary Cemetery”¹ and present day Mount Calvary Cemetery. On March 25, 1898, the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mother, Father Pelnar preformed the ceremony and blessed the ground for burials except for one acre located in the back

¹ Ibid

⁵ Brazos County Deed of Records; Vol. 19, page 42

⁶ Brazos County Deed of Records; Vol. 19, page 45

¹ Ibid

of the ten acres which would be used to bury people who could not be buried on blessed ground according to Catholic Church Laws of that day. This section has been incorporated into the whole but is still noticeable.

Father Pelnar concluded his Short Chronicle with “As a token of appreciation of the generosity of Mr. B. Luza, the writer of this short chronicle mentions that he donated \$50.00 toward the purchase of the land for the cemetery”¹.

During his tenure at Saint Joseph Church, Father Pelnar and parishioners kept good records and it is because of their efforts, this history was written. Also Father Pelnar must have had some type of cemetery board working with him for in the old records, it mentioned that Mr. Vincent Luza was Treasurer and Mr. John J. Stangel was the Secretary.

¹ Ibid