

**A NARRATIVE HISTORY OF
ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH
BRYAN, BRAZOS COUNTY, TEXAS**

Submitted to the
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By

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INTRODUCTION

Trying to recapture the history of the early Catholic church in Brazos County is not an easy task. Early record-keeping during this period was more haphazard than it is today, and many records simply did not exist, have not survived or have been misplaced. Conflicting information exists among various sources covering the history of St. Joseph Catholic Church of Bryan, so logical conclusions must be made. As historians and genealogists well know, we can only gather as many clues as possible and try to make the pieces of the puzzle fit. Many pieces of the puzzle are still missing prior to 1883. Additionally, the early Catholic church directories are usually at least one year behind the actual assignment date when compared to the Brazos County Deed Records, various newspaper accounts, civil records and St. Joseph Church sacramental records.

St. Joseph Catholic Church of Bryan, Texas has been serving the spiritual and material needs of the Catholic community in and around the city for at least 125 years, since the first church was built in 1871. It is possible that St. Joseph Church dates back to 1867, or 129 years, when the Catholic church was established at Millican, but the name of the Millican church is unknown.

In 1871, when the city of Bryan was incorporated and St. Joseph Catholic Church was established, the governor of Texas was E. J. Davis. City of Bryan and Brazos County officials were: H. T. Downard, mayor; T. J. Dearing; city marshal; J. J. Hall, Richard Sloan, E. Littlefield and Charles W. Gardiner, county commissioners and justices of the peace; John N. Henderson, county attorney; Frank Moore, county/district clerk and tax assessor; W. B. Foreman, county sheriff and tax collector; S. H. Farrill, county treasurer; J. B. Thomas, county surveyor; John E. Millican, Pct. 1 constable; I. M. Onins, district judge; G. R. Scott, district attorney; George T. Haswell until December 2, 1871, succeeded by C. W. Gardiner, state representative; W. A. Saylor, state senator; H. T. Downard, chief justice/county judge; and William T. Clark, U. S. congressman.¹ The president of the United States was Ulysses S. Grant, and Brazos County was in the midst of reconstruction following the Civil War. According to the Daily State Journal of Austin, "Brazos is the banner county of the State in growth and prosperity, with a population increase of 232%. During the last decade of years, towns and cities have sprung into existence, lands have trebled and quadrupled in value, and the population has augmented from 2766 to 9205."²

The City of Bryan was officially incorporated on November 29, 1871 by the State of Texas following the Civil War. After the slaves were freed, plantation owners in East Texas solicited workers from foreign countries to come to America to work for them as contract workers. In 1880, immigration to Brazos County was encouraged when immigration societies were formed to bring much needed labor to the county.³ These contracts were outlawed by the State of Texas in 1885. However, immigrants continued to come to Brazos County in hopes of

¹Brundidge, Glenna Fourman, Brazos County History, Rich Past - Bright Future, Family History Foundation, Bryan, Texas, 1986, pp. 332-342.

²Ibid., pg. 100.

³Brenham Banner, Brenham, Texas, December 15, 1880, pg. 1.
Also, Houston Post, Houston, Texas, December 23, 1880, pg. 2.

making better lives for their families. The membership of St. Joseph Church included many of the early settlers of the county and early immigrant groups, including the French, Irish, Bohemian, Czech, German, Polish and Italian. A large majority of these immigrants were of the Catholic faith and required a priest to administer the sacraments. The need for a Catholic church in Brazos County developed during this time of growth after the Civil War.

THE EARLY CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN MILLICAN

The first Catholic church in Brazos County was founded in 1867 at Millican. Due to the subsequent decline of Millican, the church moved to Bryan about 1870. The Millican community then became a mission served by the Bryan church. Neither the name nor the sacramental records of the Millican church can be found in the records of the Galveston or Austin Dioceses or at St. Joseph Church in Bryan. It is certainly possible, even likely, that the records of the Millican church were transferred to the Bryan church when it was established in 1871. However, this cannot be confirmed because a fire at St. Joseph Church in 1876 apparently destroyed all the church records, because the existing sacramental records begin in December, 1876, the month after the fire.

The first mention of the Catholic church in the Brazos County Deed Records is a February 14, 1867 deed executed by Jas. B. Conger to C. M. Dubuis, Bishop of Galveston, for 1/2 of Block 39 containing five lots, and one lot in S/2 of said block in the town of Millican at a cost of \$600.⁴ The deed was recorded May 15, 1868. Conger was possibly a relative of Steven D. Conger, physician, dentist and in 1867 one of several aldermen of Bryan. The 1870 Census of Social Statistics lists only four churches in Brazos County, and no Catholic church was listed, but the statistics may not be accurate because other known churches are not listed.⁵ The Official Catholic Directory of 1869 for the year 1868 indicates that a church was located in Millican and served by Revs. Louis Bussant and Francis Derue.⁶

Millican experienced a serious decline after 1867, and the Catholic church there had little chance of success. The Houston & Texas Central Railroad was extended from Millican to Bryan, taking with it much of the prosperity Millican had enjoyed. The first train arrived in Bryan on August 19, 1867. Shortly thereafter, a yellow fever epidemic swept through Millican devastating its population. Fearing the dreaded disease and loss of trade, many residents, businesses and churches began moving further north. Some decided to settle in Bryan, which had become the center of trade and the county seat by 1866. In Millican, race riots of Millican in July of 1868 cost even more lives and unrest. The population of Millican dwindled from 3000 in 1866 to a mere 1200 residents in 1868.⁷ The church at Millican officially became a mission of the Bryan church in 1872.⁸

⁴Deed Records of Brazos County, Texas, Vol. I, pg. 125.

⁵Page, Bill, TAMU Sterling Evans Library, College Station, Texas. Letter to Joanne Glowski dated March 26, 1991.

⁶Official Catholic Directory, Catholic Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD, 1869, p. 184.

⁷Brundidge, pp. 28-29.

⁸Official Catholic Directory, Catholic Publishing Company, Baltimore, Maryland, 1873, pg. 196.

A plot of land covering 9/10 of an acre in Block 117 in Millican was given to the Catholic church for use as a cemetery by W. D. Herrick and wife Margery Herrick by deed dated January 8, 1872. Herrick served as an alderman for Millican, having been appointed by Governor Davis at the end of August 1870 as one of several aldermen of Millican. There are no marked graves or known burials on this land to indicate that the church ever used the land as a cemetery. The land for the church and cemetery in Millican lay idle for over a century and was virtually forgotten. Only in the past several years was the land sold by the church.⁹ Much of the early history of the first Catholic church in Millican and the county was not preserved. Records regarding the priests assigned to the Millican church are detailed later in this narrative.

ST JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BRYAN

The first recorded activity of a Catholic community in the City of Bryan is a mass said in the home of Marcellius Bonneville, Sr., in 1869.¹⁰ Bonneville's home was located in part of Lot 3 of Block 259 (currently bounded by West 24th, West 23rd, Main and Bryan Streets) in Bryan, Texas.¹¹ Mass then was offered in unidentified homes at various locations throughout the county. About this time, Mr. and Mrs. Bonneville offered the second floor of their store, located in downtown Bryan, to be used for services until the first church was built in Bryan about 1871.¹² The Brazos County Deed and Tax Records indicate that Bonneville owned Lot 2 of Block 258, (currently bounded by W.J. Bryan Parkway, West 24th, Main and Bryan Streets) where he declared \$ 8,000 in merchandise. It is likely that the store was located on this lot in downtown Bryan.

Various sources give conflicting information regarding the founding date of the Catholic church in Bryan, no doubt, attributable to the passage of time, as well as the 1876 fire, detailed below. Apparent mistakes have been perpetuated many times over, resulting in the reporting of several different dates as being "the beginning" of the church. Depending upon which source one chooses, the church was established in 1870, 1871, 1873, 1875, 1876, or 1878. The best evidence indicates that by 1871 there was a small, but active, Catholic congregation meeting in a church building in Bryan. This group grew into the present-day parish.

The 1871 date is supported by the fact that several deeds for property of the Catholic Church of Bryan were recorded in 1870 and 1871. Additionally, a December, 1871, newspaper article (detailed below) states that a Catholic church was in the process of being built in Bryan. Further credence is lent to this date by an 1895

⁹Letter dated October 23, 1991, from Rev. Msgr. Donald J. Fruge, Diocese of Austin, Austin, Texas, to Ms. Patty Todd Chenault, Millican, Texas.

¹⁰Dworaczyk, Rev. Edward J., The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas, The Naylor Company, San Antonio, Texas, 1936, pg. 180.

¹¹Deed Records of Brazos County Texas, Book L, Page 142.

¹²Brundidge, pg. 142.

newspaper account of the church,¹³ which states that the history of the Catholic church began in 1871 when the first building was erected by Rev. A. (Augustin) Antoine. The earliest reference to the Catholic church of Bryan is in an 1870 deed for the first church property purchased in Bryan in which Rev. M. Pairier was listed as of the Roman Catholic Church of Bryan. (Pairier was assigned to the church at Millican, and possibly Bryan, in 1871). Additionally, a 1939 history of certain Catholic communities in Texas, which was published under the auspices of the Catholic church, confirms 1871 as the date of the first church building.¹⁴ These documents strongly support the contention that St. Joseph Church of Bryan was likely founded by 1870 and was building its own church building in 1871 when the city of Bryan was in its infancy.

However, there is contradictory data. Because its own sacramental records begin in 1876, the church has reported on several occasions that it was established in 1876.¹⁵ The 100th Anniversary booklet of St. Joseph Catholic Church recorded its founding year as 1873, the first time that St. Joseph Parish was officially recorded in the U. S. Catholic Directory.¹⁶ (As was previously mentioned, these directories were frequently one to two years late in reporting due to delayed communications at the time.)

Even though there is some uncertainty regarding the founding date of the church and its history before 1883, it is undisputed that the site of St. Joseph Catholic Church has remained in the same block for 113 years, ever since the Odd Fellows School Building was purchased and remodeled as a church in 1883. A new church was built and dedicated in 1904, which was succeeded by the present church structure, dedicated in 1960.

CHURCH SITES IN BRYAN

The site of the second Catholic church in Brazos County was located in the original Bryan townsite. Purchases of two separate parcels of land, one on the west side of town and one on the east side, were made within a year of one another. It appears that the east side location was the one actually used to build the church.

In the west side transaction, C. M. Dubuis, Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Galveston, purchased two parcels of land from W. R. Baker and A. Groesbeck, Trustees for the Houston & Texas Railroad Company. Lot 9

¹³Special Edition of Brazos Pilot and Bryan Eagle, Bryan, Texas, September 12, 1895, pg. 1.

¹⁴Svrcek, Rev. V.A., translator and ed., A History of the Czech-Moravian Catholic Communities of Texas, Texian Press, Waco, Texas, 1974. This book is a translation of Nase Dejiny, (no author given), Nasinec Publishing Co., Granger, Texas, 1939.

¹⁵"Questionnaire for the use of the Chancery Office, Diocese of Galveston, St. Joseph Parish, Bryan, Texas," Catholic Archives of Texas, Austin, Texas, circa 1950, in the handwriting of Msgr. J. B. Gleissner, pastor of St. Joseph Church 1905-1953.

¹⁶St. Joseph Parish, Bryan, Texas, 100th Anniversary 1873-1973, no author, page numbering or date, ca. 1973, listed under "Events of the First 25 Years 1873-1898."

in Block 156 was purchased December 14, 1870. Lot 10 of Block 156 was purchased December 13, 1870.¹⁷ The lots were bounded by Lamar (29th) and Sterling Streets.¹⁸ The land for Lot 9 was purchased for \$60 in gold, while the land for Lot 10 was purchased for \$1.00 paid for by Rev. M. Z. Poisier (Pairier) of the Roman Catholic Church of Bryan. The deeds were not filed for record until March 31, 1873, the date the lots were sold to O. J. Howard.¹⁹ Because these lots were held little more than two years, it is extremely unlikely that the Catholic community ever built a church on them. No records have been found explaining why the lots were bought and sold so quickly.

In the east side transaction, occurring only ten months after the west side acquisition, property was purchased by C. M. Dubuis, Bishop of Galveston, Texas for \$1.00 on October 3, 1871 from Chas. W. Gardiner.²⁰ Gardiner was county commissioner, justice of the peace and, by the end of the year, State Representative.²¹ The deed covered Lots 1, 2 and 3 of Block 64 located at Caldwell (24th) and Preston Streets.²² There was a clause in the deed stating that if the church was not built within two years, the lots would revert back to the Grantor. A newspaper article noted on December 9, 1871 that a Catholic church was being built in Bryan.²³ Because there is no record of any reversion of the property, it must be assumed that a church was built on these lots, most likely in 1871, as the newspaper article indicates. It is interesting to note that the 1887 tax roll of Brazos County indicates that the Catholic Church of Bryan was paying taxes on Lots 1, 2, 3, 5-1/2, 6, 7 and 8 of Block 64. No deed to the church for lots 5-1/2, 6, 7, and 8 has been found. This appears to be the first year that the church paid taxes on its property, possibly because the premises were no longer the site of the church building.

The Bryan church appears in the Official Catholic Directory for the first time in 1873, indicating that Rev. J. Moore was assigned to Bryan in 1872. Additionally, a 1936 account indicates that the church rented a house for church purposes three blocks northeast of its present site from 1873 until 1876.²⁴ It is unknown what use the church made of the house.

On November 28, 1876, the Brenham Daily Banner reported that a fire had totally destroyed the Catholic Church of Bryan. Rev. Claude Clair was pastor at this time, and he wanted to rebuild the church at a new location.

¹⁷Deed Records, Book N, pp. 387-389.

¹⁸Map of Bryan Townsite, Deed Records, Bryan, Texas, Book H. Also Bryan-College Station City Map, 1996, Bryan, Texas.

¹⁹Deed Records, Book N, pg. 389.

²⁰Ibid., Book M, Page 252.

²¹Brundidge, pp. 332-342.

²²Map, Book H.

²³Cleburne Chronicle, Cleburne, Texas, December 9, 1871, pg. 2.

²⁴Dworaczyk, pg. 181.

From the time of the fire until 1883, the church met in temporary quarters. Mass was celebrated in a store building (probably belonging to Mr. Bonneville) until a site for a new parish could be found.²⁵

A letter dated March 7, 1877 from Rev. C. Clair to Right Rev. Dubuis mentions negotiations for the purchase of five lots at a cost of \$500 "with our old place" from Defranchis (possibly Peter DeFrancis), with Mr. Guy Bryan as the mortgagee. Mention is made of "Chas." in the letter, indicating that Chas. Gardiner was involved with the "old place." Clair mentions that Defranchis does not want to let the five lots go.²⁶ No further information has been found to prove that these negotiations were ever completed. A deed from DeFrancis to the Catholic church has not been found in the deed records of Brazos County, Texas. The Galveston Daily News of April 3, 1877 stated "...The Catholic Church, Father Claire (sic), since its loss by fire, hold services in a private building where its membership enjoys religious ministrations...." The Galveston Daily News of September 7, 1877 and September 15, 1878 mention intentions of erecting a brick church, but there is no evidence that such a church was ever completed.

Various sources give different accounts of the history of the church up to 1883. According to Dworaczyk, Rev. Clair wanted to build a new church after the 1876 fire. However, the immigrant members of the church decided it was "better to wait a little longer" as they were poor and feared debts. Mr. Bonneville again granted permission to use one-half of the upper story of his store. The congregation "worshiped here for five years, at the end of which time a Masonic school house (Odd Fellows School Building) was purchased and converted into a church at an expense of about twelve hundred dollars."²⁷ The source of Dworaczyk's information has not been found, although references are given in his book. Other conflicting sources are more fully explained in the paragraphs to follow covering the next site of St. Joseph Church.

The next site for the church was purchased for \$500 by N. A. Gallagher, Bishop of Galveston, on February 15, 1883 from R. M. Smith, lawyer and founder of the Bryan Eagle and Brazos Pilot newspapers.²⁸ The deed, which was recorded February 22, 1883, covered Block 62 in the city of Bryan known as the "Odd Fellows School Building."²⁹ The location was bounded by Anderson (26th), Preston, Mosely (William Joel Bryan Parkway) and Polk Streets.³⁰ Rev. Victor Lisicki was the pastor at this time. It did not take long to remodel the school house. The Brazos Pilot reported that, "The Catholics have the finest church in Bryan."³¹ The article gives a very detailed

²⁵Brundidge, pg. 142.

²⁶St. Joseph Church Files, Catholic Archives of Texas, Austin, Texas.

²⁷Dworaczyk, pg. 181.

²⁸Brundidge, pg. 334.

²⁹Deed Records, Book X, Page 184.

³⁰Map, Book H.

³¹Brazos Pilot, Bryan, Texas, July 12, 1883, pg. 3.

description of the church, indicating that the church had to be completed by the date of the article, July 13, 1883, in order to give such a vivid description. The location of St. Joseph Catholic Church of Bryan is still in this block.

A thesis by Elmer G. Marshall on the history of Brazos County asserts that, "In 1875, the block of land on which St. Joseph's church now stands was bought for \$400, and soon after a building was erected."³² This statement was based on an interview with Rev. J. B. Gleissner, pastor of St. Joseph Church of Bryan, on June 31, 1937. The block of land was actually purchased in 1883 for \$500. The incorrect year used by Marshall was quoted in subsequent works covering the history of St. Joseph Church.

A thesis by Lois Alyne Wilcox³³ cites Marshall's thesis. Wilcox alleges that the church was built in 1878, but Marshall's thesis states, "...soon after a building was erected." No further reference is given to the source of the year 1878.

The church's own history noted 1878 as the year the parish dedicated its first church, "a remodeled two-story public school building."³⁴ However, the first public school in Bryan was established on October 29, 1877, when the city of Bryan voted to build a free public graded school. The cornerstone was laid in 1879, and the school opened for students in the fall of 1880.³⁵ Obviously, there was confusion between the Masonic school building and a public school building.

The year 1878 is also given by Mary Edna Dorsey in her pictorial history of Bryan that includes a reference to St. Joseph Church. According to Dorsey, the church was built in 1876, was dedicated in 1878 and was located on 24th Street. Dorsey further states that "When this building was destroyed by fire, a school was moved to the church property to serve until 1904."³⁶ Actually, the school building already existed, was remodeled as a church and was located a block away. (It is worth noting that the information in Dorsey's book was collected by high school students as part of a school project. While it is a fabulous collection of historical photographs, some of the facts set forth may be subject to question.)

A Texas Historical Marker was dedicated in 1972 at the site where the Odd Fellows University and Orphans Home was established, the same site where St. Joseph School now stands. The marker states that the

³²Marshall, Elmer G., The History of Brazos County, Texas, thesis, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, August 1937, pg. 114.

³³Wilcox, Lois Alyne, Early History of Bryan, Texas, Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1939, pg. 124.

³⁴Brundidge, pg. 142.

³⁵Ibid., pg. 116.

³⁶Dorsey, Mary Edna, Those Were the Days, Bryan, Brazos County, 1821-1921, Bryan Independent School District, 1976.

building housed St. Joseph Church from 1876 to 1903. The application and correspondence pertaining to the marker is on file at the Bryan Public Library of Bryan, Texas. The file contains a letter from the Catholic Archives of Texas to the Brazos Historical Commission regarding the history of St. Joseph Church. It states that the records of St. Joseph Church begin in December of 1876, and mentions that a letter dated March 7, 1877 was found in their file regarding negotiations for the purchase of lots from Defranchis. DeFrancis was not the owner of Block 62 (the present site) during 1877.³⁷ The obituary report of Rev. Victor Lisicki in 1884 indicated that Lisicki had built St. Joseph Church during the year.³⁸ In 1950, Rev. J. B. Gleissner noted in a questionnaire that the church was erected in 1880 by Rev. Victor Lisicki.³⁹

The conflicting dates regarding the establishment of the church at the Odd Fellows site cannot be verified and appear to be erroneously stated in previous works covering the history of St. Joseph Church. The history of the church from 1876 to 1883 cannot be confirmed. The files at St. Joseph Catholic Church of Bryan do not contain supporting data of a church being built in 1876. It is possible that the parish rented the Odd Fellows School Building before it was purchased, but this fact cannot be verified. Lacking other evidence, it must be assumed that the year St. Joseph Church was founded in Block 62 was 1883, as confirmed by the deed recorded at the Brazos County Courthouse. The church probably was dedicated in 1884 during a formal dedication ceremony.

The 1883 church building was succeeded by a new frame-structure church in 1904. When the congregation outgrew the 1904 church building, a new church, which is still standing, was built at the intersection of East 26th Street and Preston. The present structure was dedicated in 1960.⁴⁰

A house was built in 1889 to be used as a rectory by the pastors.⁴¹ Prior to this date, the pastors apparently boarded with parishioners or at boarding houses. Marshall's thesis⁴² indicates that in the 1860's a residence in Boonville, which was not identified, was used as headquarters for the priests, and an old store on Main street was used as a church. However, Dworaczyk stated that Mr. Bonneville provided food and shelter when the missionaries came to visit. The residence and old store on Main Street probably belonged to Mr. Bonneville, which was located in Bryan, not Boonville. Difficulties in transportation would have made it quite impractical for the priest to live in Boonville, so it must be assumed that Marshall simply confused the names. The 1880 federal census for the county indicated that Rev. Lisicki boarded with the Victor Kotch (Kochanowicz) family.

³⁷Tax Rolls of Brazos County, Texas, 1846-1888, TAMU Sterling Evans Library, College Station, Texas.

³⁸Galveston Daily News, Galveston, Texas, May 13, 1884.

³⁹Questionnaire, c. 1950.

⁴⁰Brundidge, p.142.

⁴¹Mechanic's Lien Book of Brazos County, Texas, Book A, pp. 205-209.

⁴²Marshall, p.114.

PRIESTS WHO SERVED ST. JOSEPH CHURCH

In the early years, the Catholics of Brazos County were served by missionaries from Galveston, Texas, including Bishop Dubuis, Fathers Anthony (Antoine?), Martiniere, Blum and Granger.⁴³ From 1865 until 1867, there was no Catholic church in Brazos County. Millican was a mission served by the church at Hidalgo Prairie in Washington County, Texas, a town that lasted only briefly. It was located at the northeast corner of Washington County at a junction of the Brazos River running west to east, and south of Millican. Revs. John B. Bellaclas and Jean Louis Bussant were assigned to Hidalgo Prairie.⁴⁴ Sacramental records for the years 1865 to 1867 for this church have not been found. In 1868, Hidalgo became a mission served by the church established in Millican.

From 1868 until 1870, Revs. Louis Bussant and Francis Derue were assigned to the Millican church.⁴⁵ Bussant was born April 18, 1845 in Lyons, France and ordained a priest December 21, 1867 at St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston by Bishop Dubuis. Bussant died March 5, 1918 in Lyons, France.⁴⁶ Derue was born November 1, 1843 in St. Julian Lu Vetre at Loire, France and ordained a priest December 24, 1867 at St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston by Bishop Dubuis. Derue died October 30, 1888 in Dallas, Texas.⁴⁷ According to a recent history of Millican, "Father Bussant and the Catholic Church moved in 1869."⁴⁸ An 1876 account relates that, "Father Bussant was transferred from Millican to Calvert in February, 1869. He had been detained there due to the slow progress of the construction of the church in Waco, to which he had been assigned."⁴⁹ The marriage records of Brazos County reflect that Bussant performed a marriage on February 10, 1869.⁵⁰ Bussant must have left shortly after this date. Rev. Francis Derue likely stayed in Millican until 1870, as the marriage records of the county indicate that he performed two marriages on February 3, 1870. It was noted in the records that Derue was the Catholic priest of Millican.⁵¹ No other records for Derue were found after this date.

⁴³Questionnaire, ca. 1950.

⁴⁴Official Catholic Directories, 1866, pg. 157; 1867, pg. 146; 1868, pg. 168.

⁴⁵Official Catholic Directory, 1869, pg. 184; 1870, pg. 324; 1871 pg. 324. The 1871 issue was a reprint of the previous year's report.

⁴⁶Biographies of Priests, Catholic Archives of Texas, Austin, Texas, no date.

⁴⁷Biographies.

⁴⁸Hayes, Mary E., Millican, Texas, Millican, Texas, 1986.

⁴⁹"History of Church of the Assumption - Waco, Texas," taken from the 1876 City Directory. Central Texas Genealogical Society, Inc., Heart of Texas Records, Vol. XXIX No. 3, Fall 1986, pg. 86.

⁵⁰Marriage Records of Brazos County, Texas, Vol. B, pg. ?

⁵¹Marriage Records, Vol. C, pp. 11 and 19.

Rev. Mathurin Z. Pairier was assigned to Millican in 1871.⁵² Pairier was assistant at St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston during 1869 and 1870. He may have been sent by Bishop Dubuis to organize the church in Bryan while assigned to Millican. Pairier appears to have been a vigorous organizer of new churches, as he founded churches in Dallas (1873), Davis (1874) and Fort Stockton (1875).⁵³ It is not clear if Pairier was serving Millican, Bryan, or both, but it is apparent that the church was in the midst of relocating at the end of the year 1870. Pairier died November 17, 1890 in San Antonio, Texas.⁵⁴

The Bryan church is listed for the first time in the 1873 Official Catholic Directory with Rev. John Moore assigned as pastor in 1872. This was shortly after his ordination on March 27, 1872 in Galveston by Bishop Dubuis. He was born September 14, 1833 in the diocese of Kerriensi (no state or country was given), and died on January 18, 1895 in Dallas, Texas.⁵⁵ Moore served Bryan and its missions until 1874.⁵⁶ Volumes D and E of the Marriage Records of the county indicate that Moore officiated at marriages in Millican on September 2, 1872; February 6, 1873; and February 11, 1874; and in Bryan on October 1, 1874.

It would appear that either Rev. Pairier, Rev. Antoine or Rev. Moore was the founding pastor of the church in Bryan, but Rev. Claude Clair is considered to be the first full time pastor of St. Joseph Church.⁵⁷ According to the 1895 newspaper account in the Brazos Pilot and Bryan Eagle newspaper previously mentioned, the church was erected by Rev. A. Antoine, not Pairier. The Official Catholic Directory of 1872 for the year 1871 lists Antoine as assigned to Pleasanton, Atascosa County, Texas.⁵⁸ Rev. Antoine was not listed as serving the church at Bryan during its history. No marriage records by Revs. Pairier or Antoine have been found in the records of Brazos County, Texas to prove that they indeed served the Bryan church.

Rev. Camillus Monin served Bryan from 1875 to 1876, according to the Catholic directories.⁵⁹ Monin was born June 1, 1849 in France. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Dubuis in Galveston on October 27, 1871.⁶⁰ No records have been found in Brazos County to verify that he indeed served the Bryan church. Monin likely served

⁵²Official Catholic Directories, 1872, pg. 189.

⁵³Nollie, Sister M., O.S.F., Sketch of the Life of Father Mathurin Pairier, Catholic Archives of Texas, Austin, Texas.

⁵⁴Biographies.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Official Catholic Directory, 1873, pg. 196; 1874, pg. 199; 1875, pg. 197.

⁵⁷St. Joseph Parish, listed under "Events of the First 25 Years 1873-1898."

⁵⁸Official Catholic Directory, Catholic Publishing Company, Baltimore, Maryland, 1872, pg. 189.

⁵⁹Official Catholic Directory, 1876, pg. 194; 1877, pg. 272.

⁶⁰Biographies.

St. Joseph Church until mid 1876. Little information can be found on Rev. Monin as he is not listed as serving in Texas after 1881. He may have returned to France.

Rev. Claude Clair served as pastor from mid-1876 until December 26, 1877.⁶¹ He was born in Roanne, France on January 15, 1845 and ordained a priest December 17, 1870 at St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston by Bishop Claude Dubuis. Clair returned to France in 1890 where he died March 15, 1924.⁶² The earliest record of Rev. Clair is recorded in Volume D, page 305, of the Marriage Records of Brazos County, Texas indicating that he officiated at a marriage on June 14, 1876 in Bryan. The first entry in the sacramental records of the church by Rev. Clair is December 10, 1876. The fire had consumed the church in Bryan a month earlier, and the sacramental records probably burned, as the records begin after the date of the fire. The 1895 newspaper account mentioned earlier related that, "...this building was burned in 1877 (sic), and from that time until 1884 (sic) the Catholics, being unable to erect a new building, held service in the half above M. Bonneville's place of business..."⁶³

Rev. Victor Lisicki was assigned as pastor in 1878.⁶⁴ Lisicki was born in 1835 in Prussian Poland, a Polish nobleman,⁶⁵ and died May 13, 1884 in Bryan, Texas.⁶⁶ In Book I on page 54 of the baptismal records of the church, Lisicki signed his name Victor Eques de Borussia Lisicki, Prof. (Professor?) et Dir. (Director?) Semi (Seminary?) Putovini? (possibly Puteaux near Paris, France,) Cand (Candidate?) Theology?, S.T. (Scientia Theologica?).⁶⁷ Lisicki had previously been assigned (from 1876 until 1877) to St. Joseph Catholic Church of New Waverly, Texas, where he had built the first church for the parish. Lisicki was pastor of Bryan from January 6, 1878 until August 22, 1880, when he was assigned to Panna Maria, Texas for one year. Rev. Lisicki returned to Bryan in August of 1881 and served St. Joseph's until his death. Rev. Lisicki's death notice noted that "The merchants and businessmen of Bryan closed their stores and offices out of respect for the deceased priest. The funeral was one of the largest that has ever occurred in this city. The ceremony was very impressive."⁶⁸ To his

⁶¹Marriage Records, Sacramental Records of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Bryan, Texas.

⁶²Biographies.

⁶³Special Edition of Brazos Pilot and Bryan Eagle, Bryan, Texas, September 12, 1895, Church Section pg. 1.

⁶⁴Official Catholic Directory, 1879, pg. 266.

⁶⁵Vasovski, Frank K., Personal History of Father Victor Justinianus Lisicki 1835-1884. LDS Film #1311225, Item 6, City Cemetery Records, Bryan, Brazos County, Texas, June 15, 1979. "Eques de Borussia in his signature denotes reference to his Barony, a title of nobility tied to military service for the Prussian Empire by the bearer or his ancestor."

⁶⁶Biographies.

⁶⁷Vasovski.

⁶⁸Galveston Daily News, Galveston, Texas, May 13, 1884, pg. 1.

credit is given the founding of the St. Joseph Church, established in 1883, on the same block of land where the present church now stands.

During Lisicki's absence, the church was served by Rev. Joseph Mosciewicz, and by visiting priests Rev. James Grabinger of Brenham and Revs. A. L. David and George Allen of Galveston.⁶⁹ Rev. Mosciewicz was born in 1831, probably in Poland, and resided in Rodez, France.⁷⁰ He was ordained March 12, 1875 by Bishop Dubuis at St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston, and died February 9, 1883 in Marlin, Texas. However, he was buried in the City Cemetery in Bryan, Texas.⁷¹ Mr. M. Bonneville donated the cemetery plots for both Mosciewicz and Lisicki.

Rev. Adam Laski was the pastor from June 22, 1884 until January 29, 1888.⁷² Laski was born in the Diocese of Studzianna, Russian Poland, and ordained a priest on November 23, 1879 in Galveston by Bishop Dufal. He returned to his home in Poland and continued his ministry, was put in prison by the Russians and died a martyr in 1897.⁷³

From May 10, 1888 until January 13, 1889, Bryan was without a pastor. Two visiting priests, Rev. James Grabinger of Brenham and Rev. Peter Litwora of Bremond, attended the Bryan church.

Rev. Jacob (James) Dumm (or Dunn) was the pastor from March 22, 1889 until November 4, 1889.⁷⁴ No vital statistics have been found for Rev. Dumm. During his pastorate, a rectory for the pastor was built.⁷⁵

Rev. Peter Litwora of the Bremond church visited⁷⁶ from November 24, 1889 until July 13, 1890.⁷⁷ Litwora was born in 1857 in Poland and ordained a priest on July 25, 1881 in Tarnow, Poland. He died December

⁶⁹Sacramental Records.

⁷⁰Vasovski.

⁷¹Biographies.

⁷²Sacramental Records.

⁷³Morkovsky, Msgr. Alois J., Short Biographies of Czech and Other Priests in Texas, Hallettsville, Texas, 1982, at Diocese of Houston-Galveston, Houston, Texas.

⁷⁴Sacramental Records.

⁷⁵Mechanic's Lien Book of Brazos County, Texas, Book A, pp. 205-209.

⁷⁶Saint Joseph's Church, Bryan, Texas, no author or date, St. Joseph Church Files, Catholic Archives of Texas.

⁷⁷Sacramental Records.

12, 1927 in Bryan while serving as assistant Pastor.⁷⁸

Rev. Joseph Pelnar was the pastor from July 30, 1890 until February 5, 1900.⁷⁹ Pelnar was born on February 21, 1865 near Straz in Domazlice, Bohemia. He was ordained a priest on June 5, 1890 in Galveston by Bishop Dufal. While he was pastor, he founded St. Joseph School, which was conducting classes by 1894 and is still in operation today. Pelnar died December 11, 1940 in West, Texas.⁸⁰

For a list of accomplishments for the pastors from 1890 until the present date, see the section on "Church Organizations."

Rev. Charles Kolin was pastor from April 5, 1900 until April 12, 1902.⁸¹ No vital statistics are available for Rev. Kolin.

Rev. Francis Machan was pastor from April 28, 1902 until March 2, 1904.⁸² Machan was born April 15, 1865 in Valasske Mezirici, Moravia and ordained a priest in Olomouc, Moravia on February 26, 1888. Machan died September 27, 1917 in Shiner, Texas.⁸³ During his pastorate, a new church building was erected.

Rev. John Baptist Gleissner was the pastor from April 25, 1904 until February 28, 1953.⁸⁴ Gleissner was born in a little Bavarian village on the River Main in Germany on October 31, 1866. He was ordained a priest on July 10, 1880 in Galveston by Bishop Gallagher, and elevated to the position of Monsignor on September 24, 1931.⁸⁵ After nearly 50 years as pastor, death came to Monsignor Gleissner on February 28, 1953 in Bryan.⁸⁶

Rev. Timothy Valenta was pastor from February 28, 1953 until September 19, 1977. Valenta was born June 22, 1907 in Corn Hill, Texas, and ordained a priest on May 7, 1933 at the church in Corn Hill. On February 13, 1966, Valenta was elevated to the position of Monsignor. Valenta died on September 19, 1977 in Bryan,

⁷⁸Biographies.

⁷⁹Sacramental Records.

⁸⁰Morkovsky.

⁸¹Sacramental Records.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Morkovsky.

⁸⁴Sacramental Records.

⁸⁵Morkovsky.

⁸⁶Ibid.

Texas, having served the parish first as assistant pastor, then pastor, for 24 years.⁸⁷ During his pastorate, a new church, the third church building on the "Odd Fellows" site, was built and dedicated in 1960.

Rev. John Driscoll was pastor from 1978 to 1985. Driscoll was born January 4, 1930 in Boston, Massachusetts, and ordained a priest on May 25, 1957 at St. Mary's Seminary in Houston, Texas. He was elevated to the position of Monsignor on March 14, 1985. Driscoll died December 23, 1990 in Waco, Texas.⁸⁸

Rev. Donald Chatham was Pastor for a short time during 1985. Chatham was born October 1, 1935 in Waco, Texas and ordained May 29, 1965 in Waco, Texas.⁸⁹

Rev. John McCaffrey was assigned to St. Joseph Church on September 1, 1985, first as Administrator and then as Pastor, the position he still holds today. McCaffrey was born November 16, 1947 in Plymouth, New Hampshire and was ordained a priest on June 5, 1976 at St. Mary's in Austin, Texas.⁹⁰

Assistant Pastors have included the following: Rev. Peter Litwora 1904-1927; Revs. Nicholas Rocke and Anthony Kripajtis 1905; Rev. George Wilhelm 1906-1908; Rev. C. J. Martin 1928-1929; Rev. J. K. Reybaud 1929; Rev. F. D. Urbanovsky 1930-1933; Rev. Timothy Jerome Valenta 1933-1953; Rev. Ed Matocha 1946-1949; Rev. Sylvester Fuchs 1949-1959; Rev. Charles Elmer 1954-1964; Rev. T. Everett Trebtowski 1959-1963; Deacon Lee Polansky 1959-1966; Rev. Richard Ketzler 1962-1969; Rev. Raymond Brezna 1963-1966; Rev. John Frizelle 1964-1967; Rev. Cornelius Green 1966-1968; Rev. Mike Leary 1969-1973; Rev. Walter Matus 1973-1978; Rev. Kirby Garner 1978-1979; Rev. Patrick Zurek 1979-1983; Revs. Gregory Patejko and Dan Delaney 1982; Rev. Louis Pavlicek 1983-1984; Rev. Scott Mikkelson 1984-1985; Rev. Jim Deaconson 1985; Rev. Richard Tijerina 1986-1990; Rev. Thomas Nitschke 1990-1992; Rev. Melvin Dornak 1993-1994; Rev. Peter Royal 1995; Rev. Benedict Sellers 1996 to present date.⁹¹

Although not all achievements for the various pastors and assistant pastors have been listed due to lack of space, all contributed in numerous ways for the good of the parish and are fondly remembered. The contributions of Revs. Lisicki, Pelnar, Gleissner, Valenta and McCaffrey are especially to be commended for all the progress made at St. Joseph Church during their years of service to the parish.

CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Pamphlet for Mass of Christian Burial for Rev. John Driscoll, St. Mary of the Assumption Church, Waco, Texas, December 27, 1990.

⁸⁹Clergy Files, Catholic Archives of Texas.

⁹⁰Telephone Interview with Rev. McCaffrey, Bryan, Texas, July 5, 1996.

⁹¹St. Joseph Church Files.

St. Joseph Catholic Church has influenced the people of Brazos County by meeting their spiritual and material needs through many of its services and organizations. The K.J.T. (Katolicka Jednota Texaska) Czech Catholic Union of Texas was organized in 1889 and formally chartered in 1892; St. Joseph School was opened in 1894; St. Elizabeth Society was formed in 1897; Mt. Calvary Cemetery (located at Old Kurten Road) was dedicated in 1898; Villa Maria Academy moved to Bryan in 1901 after the devastating Galveston storm of 1900, and the Ursuline Sisters served St. Joseph School; St. Clair Society was formed in 1915; Knights of Columbus was organized in 1916; St. Monica's Mother Club was formed in 1920; a new school was built in 1924; the first St. Mary's Chapel at Texas A&M University was dedicated in 1926; the C. Y. O. (Catholic Youth Organization) was organized in 1935; a new school, gym and convent were built 1947-1948; St. Mary's Center in College Station was dedicated in 1954; St. Joseph Eagles won the State Championship in Catholic School Football League of Texas in 1956; new St. Mary's Chapel was dedicated in 1958; new St. Joseph Church was dedicated in 1960; C.Y.O. Youth Center was dedicated in 1966; St. Monica's Mother Club became St. Joseph's Home and School Association in 1967; St. Joseph Eagles won the Greater Houston Junior High Football Championship in 1970; investiture of Knights of St. Gregory in 1972;⁹² Mt. Calvary-Smetana Cemetery (located at Smetana Road) was dedicated and a Parish Activity Center built in 1988; Travis Elementary School was purchased from Bryan I.S.D. in June 1990.⁹³ Other parish activities include the Women's Guild, the Age Managers, P.N.A. (Polish National Alliance), Nursing Home Visitors, Sponsor Couples, Parish Nursery, Jail Ministry, St. Vincent De Paul Society, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H Club, Folk Group and Children's Choir, Ladies Bible Study, Charismatic Prayer Group, and Evening Bible Study.⁹⁴ Through the guidance of the pastors and assistant pastors serving St. Joseph Catholic Church and its organizations, many members of St. Joseph Catholic Church have become successful and useful citizens and serve the community and country through various volunteer services.

CONCLUSION

According to the history of St. Joseph's Church written by Mary Kay Charanza, parishioner and, at that time, Director of Religious Education, "The most striking feature in St. Joseph Parish's long history is the fact that it has survived so many difficulties. It is a testament to God's care and blessings and the dedication and determination of faithful parishioners. St. Joseph Parish has grown from a little frontier mission to a large, urban parish with a church that stands tall and beautiful on the exact bend in the road where the little Church once stood,

⁹²St. Joseph Parish, listed under "Events of the First 25 Years 1873-1898, Events of the Second 25 Years 1899-1923, Events of the Third 25 Years 1924-1948, Events of the Fourth 25 Years 1949-1973."

⁹³"Questionnaire for the use of the Chancery Office, Austin Diocese," St. Joseph Church, Bryan, Texas, by Helen Metzger, Secretary, dated January 7, 1992. On November 15, 1947, the Bryan church was placed in the newly-created Austin Diocese.

⁹⁴St. Joseph Catholic Church, Bryan, Texas, no date or author, published circa 1990 for St. Joseph Church, Bryan, Texas by The National Directory Service for Catholic Parishes, Cleveland, Tennessee. Includes a history of St. Joseph Church, together with Roster Listing and pictures of many of its members.

modest and hopeful."⁹⁵ The church membership has grown from a handful in the early 1860's to 450 families in 1895,⁹⁶ over 1200 families by 1992,⁹⁷ and 1600 families as of September of 1996.⁹⁸ St. Joseph Catholic Church and the City of Bryan were founded in the same year, have weathered many of the same storms, and have grown up together. The church building has been located in the same city block in the city of Bryan since it was purchased in 1883 and is worthy of a Texas Historical site marker.

⁹⁵St. Joseph Catholic Church Directory, c. 1990.

⁹⁶Special Edition of Brazos Pilot and Bryan Eagle, pg. 1.

⁹⁷St. Joseph Church Directory, c. 1990.

⁹⁸St. Joseph Church Parish Newsletter, September 1996.

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