

St. Patrick's Catholic Church has changed during it's 100 years



First Church built in 1887

Father Conrardy built the first Catholic Church erected in this vicinity at Vinson, 30 miles from Heppner, where he conducted services and ministered to the spiritual needs of the scattered Catholics of the area. This first Church, more correctly termed a chapel, was a small, simple, and humble slabwood building, constructed entirely by the Irish families who lived nearby.

About the time that the railroad first came to Heppner, then a very small town, a meeting was held in the chapel at Vinson to discuss the building of a church in the Heppner settlement. A dispute arose about where the Church should be located. While some considered the lower ground in the canyon a more favorable site; others, remembering an earlier flood, desired higher ground be chosen. To decide the matter, a committee composed of Jerry Brosnan, William Hughes, James Hagar, Patrick Quaid, Felix Johnson, James Neville, William MacAtee, and John Quinlan was appointed. High ground was chosen, and the wisdom of the selection was dramatically revealed later when people fled to the protection of the Church during the disastrous Heppner Flood in 1903. Tom Quaid donated the land and subscriptions were taken up to cover the cost. Non-Catholics also contributed generously and helped willingly until the building was completed in 1887. Because of the nationality of most of the parishioners, the Church was naturally dedicated to St. Patrick.

The first Pastor of St. Patrick's Church was Father Mercier. The first recorded baptism was of Rose

Ann Kenny (Mrs. John Healy). The first recorded marriage was of John Kilkenny and Rose Ann Curran Farley with Rev. Briody officiating.

Father Lemay, the second pastor, was followed by Father Bola, who went to Portland after leaving Heppner. Father Servais, a young French-Canadian priest, was pastor for only a short time. Father Beutigen said Mass at Vinson and at the home of Patrick Doherty on his journeys to Heppner. Father Briody, who was the chaplain at St. Joseph's Academy at Pendleton in 1893, rode over to Heppner on Sundays from St. Andrew's Mission near Pendleton. Father Briody was an elderly man and later had to give up the long trips and hard riding. These early missionaries shortened the distance somewhat by following Indian trails across country. They usually stayed overnight on the way with Patrick Doherty.

Father M. J. Kelly became pastor of St. Patrick's Parish about the fall of 1898. He had the practice of "making the stations" in the Sand, which means visiting the various families. He visited each home once in the fall, and again in the spring to enable the settlers to attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to give the Irish shepherders an opportunity to fulfill their Easter duty. His parish included not only Morrow County, but extended to Mayville, Spray, Fossil and Condon, until Condon was made a separate parish in 1907. He traveled throughout this area by team and buggy, always carrying two suitcases. One suitcase was filled with red bags of black-and-cream candy, and a bag was given to the children of every family on each of his visits. Father Kelly enjoyed taking long walks, usually followed by all of the children, while he read his Daily Office. He occasionally found it necessary, when visiting distant parishioners, to make his own Hosts for use in the Mass. This small, gray-haired, very good-natured priest with a hearty laugh, was perhaps one of the most beloved priests of this sparsely populated parish.

Bishop O'Reilly visited Heppner for the first time in 1901, which was two years before the creation of the Diocese of Baker City.

During these earlier times, Mass was said in Heppner only once a month. It was on one of these "Church Sundays" in 1903 that the



Red Brick Church built in 1941



Present Church built in 1971

Heppner Flood occurred.

Father John Walsh was in Heppner while Father Kelly was on leave in 1903 until Father Kelly returned on November 1.

The Chapel Car, "St. Anthony", came to the Heppner Parish in October 1911. This car was brought in by the train and left on the sidings while missions were given in Lone, Lexington and Heppner. Father T. J. Brady and his helper, Mr. George Hennessy, lived on the car. At this time, Father Patrick Driscoll was in charge of the parish, Father Kelly being on leave.

Father Patrick J. O'Rourke was appointed as Father Kelly's successor on January 13, 1912. Father O'Rourke started on monthly visits to the Sand Country. He took a train to Lexington on "Church Sunday," was met by someone, and was taken from there on a hack to the Juniper School. This school had an altar which could be pushed out of the way during the school hours. Father O'Rourke started catechism instruction classes for the children, organized the Sand Altar Society, and even began to plan for a Church in Juniper Canyon. After the school burned down, Mass was said in the different homes. The practice of saying Mass in the Lena Hall at Lena, about 15 miles from Heppner, was also begun by Father O'Rourke. A rectory was purchased and the Church was improved during his pastorate. Prior to this time a priest in Heppner either had to board or stay at the Palace Hotel.

During the year 1912, Sister Colletta, O.S.B., of Illinois, opened a hospital and school in Heppner. The attempt failed because of the small number of Catholics there and the lack of sufficient support.

When the State Convention of the Ancient Order of Hibernians was held in Heppner in November 1914, Bishop O'Reilly was present.

Father O'Rourke was administrator of the Diocese from December 5, 1918 until April 1, 1919. After being transferred to The

Dalles, he was succeeded as pastor by Father Thomas Cantwell.

Father Cantwell, a tall blonde, curly-haired priest, disliked the idea of a church in the Sand, preferring a community hall which could also be used as a church. Thus, the Juniper Hall, where Mass was said once a month, was built by local labor about 1924, at a site 21 miles from Heppner.

When Father Cantwell visited Ireland in 1922, Father Felix L. Geis was in charge of the parish until his return on June 29, 1923.

Bishop Francis Leipzig, as a young priest, visited Heppner for the first time with Bishop McGrath when the Knights of Columbus were initially organized on March 16, 1924.

The mother of Father Cantwell had been in failing health and Father Cantwell left for Ireland in June 1927. She passed away, unfortunately, before he reached home. As he prepared to return to Heppner, Father Cantwell died on December 30, 1927, and was buried in County Kilkenny.

Father Thomas J. Brady, remembered in Morrow County because of his earlier visit with the Chapel Car, became pastor on January 1, 1928. He had an intense devotion and love for the Cure of 'Ars, and through Father Brady's efforts, a shrine in honor of the saintly Patron of Parish Priests was erected to the memory of Father Cantwell. At this time the Heppner pastor cared for Mission Stations at three places: Juniper, Lone and Lena. Father Brady undertook the construction of a plain wooden church at Boardman, with Mass being said there monthly. Because of the great distance by way of the Heppner Junction, Boardman was placed in the care of the Hermiston parish.

Father P. J. Stack, who became pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in 1929, continued traveling to the Sand to say Mass and care for the spiritual needs of the people there. It was during his pastorate that a long

drought and the depression struck the people of Morrow County forcing many to abandon their homes and move elsewhere. At the present time, the Sand has few residents compared to the years when it possessed so many Irish Catholic families. Without doubt, Father Stack had a very hard time during this period when many were unable to contribute very much to the upkeep of the parish.

Father James O'Reilly, who succeeded Father Stack in 1936, was in Heppner only a short time and was in turn followed by Father James Walsh.

Father Walsh was in Heppner less than a year. The rectory was some distance from the Church and to save time, he would take a short cut by way of a narrow foot-bridge over Willow Creek. In the darkness one night after services at the Church, Father Walsh fell from this bridge into the water. An elderly man, he died soon after in St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton of the injuries which resulted from his accident.

Father Richard Healy, pastor from 1937 until 1940, was succeeded by Father Francis McCormack who became pastor on April 7, 1940.

Father McCormack worked unceasingly for a new church in Heppner, and ground for the project was broken on September 17, 1941. The new church, with an exterior of red brick veneer, was completed November 27, 1941. Bishop Joseph F. McGrath dedicated the new St. Patrick's Church, with 30 priests present for the ceremony.

The old Church building was sold and remodeled for use as an American Legion Hall.

Father Francis McCormack's 15-year term as pastor ended when Father Patrick J. Gaire was assigned to Heppner on September 1, 1955. Father Gaire served four years as pastor until he was chosen to be Diocesan Historian on September 1, 1959.

The new pastor, Father Raymond H. Beard, arrived in Heppner for his first Mass on September 4, 1959. It was fortunate that he was a capable builder as his first major task was to continue construction of the new parish hall, for which ground had been broken on August 17, 1959.

The new hall was officially dedicated by Bishop Francis P. Leipzig on February 21, 1960. Father Beard attacked the debt retirement with his customary vigor, and the mortgage

on the hall was burned on August 15, 1963, in the presence of Bishop Leipzig and about 150 parishioners.

The 25th Anniversary of Father Beard's ordination to the priesthood was celebrated on May 10, 1966. Following the Mass, a banquet was held in the parish hall for Bishop Leipzig, 36 priests and the laity. This event was one of the largest gatherings (400) in the history of the parish.

The latest chapter in the story of St. Patrick's began in April 1971. Restricted by lack of space and threatened by rising maintenance costs, the parish embarked on construction of a new church building in Heppner. Removal of the 1941 structure began on April 19, 1971.

The new church is a triumph of excellent design and superb workmanship. The crossed arches soar above a pleasing harmony of wood, brick and glass expressing a brilliant blending of attractiveness and practicality.

Bishop Thomas J. Connolly and a former Bishop Francis P. Leipzig were invited to dedicate the new church on November 10, 1971, and to share the joy of the parish at a banquet after the concelebrated Mass with the former pastors and present pastor.

Early in 1974, Father Beard was transferred from St. Patrick's church to Milton-Freewater. Father John A. O'Brien was appointed to take over at St. Patrick's on January 15, 1974, and remained pastor until his death in December 1982. Death came while Father O'Brien was on leave visiting in Ireland. Father David Hazen was appointed administrator to St. Patrick's from December of 1982 until January of 1983. Father Beard returned for a brief stay to cover the Parish until a permanent Pastor was appointed. Father Brian J. McGovern filled that appointment in March of 1983 and remained through January 1986. Since that time Father Edward Receconi, O.S.B. has administered to the needs of the Parish.

Father Mercier, the first pastor of St. Patrick's in 1887, would surely gasp at the profound changes which have occurred in the past 100 years. The magnificent new church structure stands in tribute to the sacrifices made by many good priests and the efforts of dedicated lay people through several generations.



Senior citizens sponsor boat drawing

Heppner Senior citizens have begun selling tickets for a drawing on a boat, motor, and trailer. Proceeds will go toward the senior citizen center building fund.

The boat and trailer, licensed through 1987, was donated by Judy Wittekind, Bill and Daisy Collins' daughter. The motor was donated by Dr. Wallace Wolff.

Tickets will be on sale during the St. Patrick's Day celebration in Heppner for \$1 each or seven for \$5.

ELKS DANCE

Night Train will be playing at the Heppner Elks Club Sat. March 24th from 8-2. Join us for some fun!

TOWN HALL MEETING

Tuesday, March 17 :-: 7 p.m.
at Heppner Grade School Multipurpose Room
Representatives from the following groups will be present:
Heppner Hotel Project
Port of Morrow Candidates
Morrow County Operating Budget
Morrow County Health Care Budget
Willow Creek Park District

Sponsored by
Morrow Co. Chamber of Commerce

Electrolysis & Thermolysis

Permanent Hair Removal

Anna Schwarzin
Certified Electrologist

676-9248

Open Tuesdays Only
or by Appointment

BEDRACE CALCUTTA!

at Bucknums
Saturday, Mar. 14th. 11:30 a.m.

Gary Largent, Auctioneer
Bet on the team of your choice!
Proceeds go to St. Patrick's Day Celebration & Muscular Dystrophy

\$50.00 to the winning bedrace team!

Bucknum's Tavern

TOWN HALL MEETING

Wednesday March 18th.
7:00p.m.-Lone High School Cafeteria
Come hear discussions on:

- * County Levies
- * School Levies
- * Candidates for Mar. 31st. Election
- * Health Budget
- * Park District

Coffee and punch will be served
Sponsored by ICABO