

HISTORY OF ST. CATHERINE'S PARISH

Back in the pioneer days when Kentucky was a vast wilderness, in the days of ox-drawn plows, when men and women toiled diligently in the fields, the parish of New Haven had it's origin.

A company of unscrupulous men in the colony of Maryland sold land charts to the eager groups of immigrants, anxious to start a settlement in Kentucky. Those pioneers, predominately Catholic, ventured across the Allegheny Mts. and migrated to that part of Kentucky which the land charts indicated. The exact year of this colonization is not known, but it was in the latter part of the eighteenth or the early part of the nineteenth century. (1778)

The first group of settlers who came occupied the territory around what is now Holy Cross and Saint Thomas. A second group came later and made their settlement near Lebanon and Springfield. Holy Cross Church was the first Catholic Church west of the Allegheny. Both settlements, Lebanon and Holy Cross, soon realized the unfairness of the men who had sold them the land. The ground was very poor. Despite all the trials and hardships of these God-fearing people, the faith so much in evidence today, was practiced.

Many of the settlers of Holy Cross migrated to New Haven, among the first settlers of New Haven were the Boones', Johnsons', Mahoneys', and Bowlings'. Captain Tom Bowling and his brother, Charles, came from Maryland and settled in Kentucky in 1785. Charles left shortly; however, Tom stayed and started the Bowling clan in Kentucky.

He married twice. The second time he married a Mrs. Hutchins. Tom Bowling and the widow Hutchins had five children. Robert, their oldest is my great grand father.

Long before any church was erected, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered, at irregular times, in a little hut built of rough hewn logs. It was the humble dwelling of Dowe Boweles, my great-grandfather on my grand-mother's side. This house stood on Center Street directly across the street from the present Bowling and Cecil's garage. It had a long since been torn down. The priest who first offered Mass for the Catholics of New Haven was the aged Fr. Baden, who was the first priest ordained in the United States and one of Ky's early missionaries. It is possible that he came from St. Thomas as it is an established fact that St. Catherine's Parish was attended from there many years before 1844, the arrival of the first pastor.

Certain occasions, when it was impossible to have a priest at New Haven, the settlers walked many miles over the hills to Holy Cross, carrying their shoes, (the rough country was very hard on the leather) to attend services there. These early settlers cherished their faith and stayed close together for fear their later generations would go astray.

Later, as Catholicity spread and the parish grew, necessity forced the seeking of a larger place of worship than the log house. In this regard a pleasing incident, handed down through the generations, is still related by old residents of New Haven.

As the means of transportation now employed were unheard of and railroads were few, New Haven as early as 1804, became a shipping port of note. On the banks of the Rolling Fork River, a large warehouse was built for the storage of commodities and bacon. In those days each farmer had his own "distillery". This was before the tax was placed on this item.

When the water was up, a boat took items down to Louisiana. The men walked back. This warehouse stood where the present water pump house is, and the present swimming hole was the boatyard, where the boats were kept.

Since this settlement was young there was no dignified edifices for any religious denominations. It soon became the habit for the various denominations to seize every opportunity, when the building was not being used for the purpose it was originally intended, to meet there for services. Due to this fact a certain Minister Downs challenged the Reverend John B. David, a renowned missionary of Kentucky, to a controversy. What religion Mr. Downs professed is not known, but it is probable that he was a Baptist, because the first Baptist Church was organized in the front room of Edward Hagans' present house about this same time. The house was then owned by Millers. Samuel Pottinger, owner of the warehouse and witness of the controversy, said: "Downs, if you let that priest get ahead of you, you will have to look for some other place to preach for if he wins I intend to let Catholics have the warehouse in the future." The heated discussion between the clergymen continued, but in the end the minister was completely defeated, and true to his word, Mr. Pottinger, a protestant, gave the use of the building to the Catholics of New Haven.

As Catholicity became more and more widespread the necessity of appointing a resident pastor was realized and met. So it was, the little town of New Haven came to know its first pastor in the year 1845. He was Rev. Robert A. Abell. Fr. Abell is known as one of the renowned, pioneer, missionary priests of Ky. He was born near Lebanon in the year 1792. This note came from The Louisville Times: "He was ordained a priest in 1818, being the first native Kentuckian to enter the Catholic ministry and was pastor of the church of St. Louis, in Louisville, in 1823. Fr. Abell was a power in the pulpit, and was renowned as one of the most eloquent priests in the United States."

In 1848, he erected the first St. Catherine's Church in New Haven. There is some evidence that there was a temporary church in New Haven before the appointment of Fr. Abell. Reference is made to a church there in the early Catholic Directories. If there was a church, it probably stood in the old section of the cemetery for in those days it was customary to build the church, and lay out the cemetery around it. According to the older members of the parish, the "new Cemetery" is really the old cemetery, the first burial ground for the people of St. Catherine. The present so called "old part of the cemetery" was originally the garden and cow lot for the Sisters of Loretto who came to New Haven in 1868.

Fr. Abell built the first church. This building, now a show house still stands, a monument to the early Catholicity of the parish, and to the beloved memory of the priest who built it. It is believed that Fr. Abell also built the present priests' house the same time the church was constructed. "Uncle Billy" Riggs of Loretto made the bricks for this church. The dirt was obtained from the present River View Cemetery. It is an established fact that there was a brick-making device in New Haven. It stood on the very spot where our home is built, but if the bricks for the church were made here, it is not known. That the Abbott Benedict of Gethsemani Abbey, was consecrated in this church is a story handed down by older people of the parish. Fr. Abell's connection with the parish ended about the year 1860. Everyone should be very grateful to this perserving missionary. It is to him we attribute the work of starting a wonderful parish. He met his Maker in the year 1873.

The second resident priest and Fr. Abell's successor was Rev. Francis de Muelder, whose laborious and holy life was a mark of edification to all. Ben Webb says that; "He was of the number of Flemish priests first introduced to this country through the American College of Louvain and the second of these to lay down his life while serving on the missions of the diocese."

People have referred to Fr. de Muelder as being "simple as a child," humble as a saint." In this way he performed his pastorate duties. After the Civil War he built a school for colored children. This log construction burnt only a few years ago while it was being occupied by Felix Bryan's family. However, this land still belongs to the Church. In Fr. de Muelder's will he left a lot of land in New Haven, in trust for a chapel and school house to be used forever by the colored Catholic children. This fact is told by the members of the parish who state his intense love for the Negroes.

Fr. de Muelder also built a Sister's home although much of the original has been torn down. These edifices were built shortly before the year 1868, for it was this year that the Sisters of Loretto came to New Haven for the purpose of teaching in the two schools. Before this time the children of New Haven attended school at the monks and at the Lorretine convent, then located near Trappost. Fr. de Muelder also built three small log churches. These were located at Howards-town, Hodgenville, and Mulhall (today White City). These places were missions of New Haven until a resident priest was sent to them.

The money obtained for the construction of these buildings was furnished chiefly by Sylvester Johnson who was knighted by Pope Leo XIII for his overwhelming generosity to the Catholic Church. It was in 1863 also that General Bragg's army occupied three days in passing through this town. General Joseph Wheeler was in command of the rear guard of Bragg's army.

The Rev. A. Viala succeeded Fr. Francis de Muelder in the pastorate of New Haven, and that the Catholic spirit flourished under his energetic direction, was evident by the erection of the beautiful Church, destroyed by fire in 1928. Again we see the generosity of Sylvester Johnson who gave a dollar for each dollar put up by the congregation. He was the greatest contributor to the building fund. The stone foundation was the work of John and James Daisy of Lebanon and was about finished when the corner stone was laid by Rt. Rev. Wm. George McClosky, Bishop of Louisville on Sunday, May 4, 1884. The consecration took place at the time the big bell was blessed in 1886.

It can truthfully be said of Fr. Viala, that he was always noted for his outstanding ability to work unceasingly without tiring, that he was ever ready to help in a big lift or to aid in any other way in his power.

The church was of Roman architecture and was designed by Abbot Edward, former abbot of Gethsemani. The architects were McDonald Brothers and D.X. Mupily of Louisville; however, the architect in charge of the erection was Baker Smith of Bardstown. A notable coincidence was the fact that "Uncle Billy" Riggs of Loretto, who made the bricks for the first church also furnished them for this church. At the time of its completion, it was said to be one of the finest churches in the diocese of Louisville.

During Fr. Viala's term as pastor Fr. Quinlvin came to New Haven by train to visit Fr. Viala, but Fr. Viala was away at the time, supposedly visiting his relations. Fr. Quinlvin was ill when he arrived at New Haven, and as the hours passed by it was discovered that he was stricken seriously with cholera. Mrs. Felicia Barry and Mrs. Sylvester Johnson went to the priests' house where he was, and assisted him during his suffering. However the deadly disease took its toll. Fr. Quinlvin died several days after his arrival here and is buried in St. Catherine's Cemetery.

The amusing story is told that Fr. Viala would go in the sacristy, and get something to eat, then come to the pulpit to preach his lengthy sermon.

Fr. Viala and John Atherton (Protestant) were said to be two of the smartest men of their days. Atherton lived in the present Will Boone's house. This building

served as a stagecoach stop and a place where people changed their horses while traveling between the North and South during the Civil War.

Fr. Viala left New Haven and America never to return. Some say he returned to France, his native country. It was there he died.

Succeeding Fr. Viala as pastor of St. Catherine was Rev. G.A. Weiss, who was here only four years. His pastorate at New Haven was very short and he was very young. In spite of these facts he is responsible for starting the Altar Society which is still accomplishing much in the parish.

In 1898, the Rev. Wm. Paul Hogarty replaced Fr. Weiss as pastor, but remained only three years.

Fr. Buckman, whose remains lie in the cemetery, succeeded Fr. Hogarty in 1900. What a saintly man Fr. Buckman was. He is quoted as having said "Give me a dime, and I will remember you in my Mass." The collection on Sundays probably amounted to no more than eleven or twelve dollars. Most the work needed on the church property was donated by the parishoners. Upon the death of Fr. Buckman in 1908, Fr. Hogarty returned to administer to the spiritual needs of New Haven.

Many historical events occurred during Fr. Hogarty's pastorate at New Haven. The first great event during his stay was the closing exercises of St. Catherine School. Sr. Agnita, of the Sisters of Loretto said that the children had shown through their examination papers to have accomplished work consisting of architectural, map making, and sewing. Fr. Hogarty said in his commencement address, "We shall strive to live without fear and without reproach that our dear St. Catherine School may ever be as proud of their eighth grade graduates of 1909 as we are of the diplomas she confers upon us today." May 3, 1920 was May Day at New Haven. The sodality of the Blessed Virgin assembled at the church to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and almost all the members, eighth in number received Holy Communion. That evening the societies of the congregation formed a procession accompanied by the boys and girls of the school. The Societies represented in the procession were: Holy Name, Total Abstinence, Altar Society, and the Young Ladies Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The day was climaxed with the crowning of Mary, our Mother and Queen.

Another historical day which is added to the annals of St. Catherine's parish is when Bishop Donohue first visited New Haven. Fr. Hogarty, assisted by about 2,000 members of the congregation greeted him. The town was illuminated by Japanese Lanterns. The business houses, hotels and residences of Main Street were also artistically decorated with flags, lights and flowers.

The following day the Holy Ghost descended upon 245 parishoners. The Bishop was assisted by Rev. J.R. Kerner, O.P. of St. Rose Priory, Rev. Patrick Monaghana and of course Fr. Hogarty.

It was during the pastorate of Fr. Hogarty that the Loretine Sisters were replaced by the Ursuline Sisters of Maple Mount, Ky. Fr. Hogarty remained until he was called to his eternal reward on Nov. 12, 1924 at 6:30 PM while conversing with Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Boone.

No brick or mortar monument glorifies his name, but his pastorate may be told briefly in the words of a parishoner who said: "Fr. Hogarty preached Christ and Him crucified, and practiced Christ, and Him crucified." His successor was Rev. B.J. Wight, who during his brief sojourn at New Haven, renovated the old church built in 1848 by Fr. Abell, and converted it into a high school. Fr. Wight, who desired to establish a high school in New Haven, called together a number of prominent men of the parish and asked them if they would help him by each giving two hundred dollars

to remodel and furnish the building which had been used as a storage house since the erection of the church by Fr. Viala in 1884. The men contributed as Fr. asked, and the town of New Haven came to know its first high school around 1926. Fr. Wight, who loved the poor said: "The poorest people are the men of the day." Ill health compelled him to resign from the too arduous duties of St. Catherine's Parish. The Rev. James H. Willett succeeded Fr. Wight. He had been here only a few months when the beautiful church built by Fr. Viala in 1884 was destroyed by fire. The general estimate of the losses was one hundred thousand dollars. It will take fully that amount to replace it. The original cost of the building proper was forty thousand, and this did not include the windows, bell, or pews which would easily add ten thousand to the above. The new pastor was faced with a tremendous burden of erecting a new church. The church he built was completed in 1929, and stands today as a monument to the zeal, energy, and sacrifices of the parish under Fr. Willett. The Church, was designed by Carl J. Epping, architect, is built as follows: Concrete foundation, fireproof boiler room, heavy brick walls, steel window frames, steel top trusses, tile roof with copper cornices. The stations of the cross, by Fereferstin, was a gift from the Rt. Rev. Abbott Obrecht of Gethsemani. They were imported from Munich, Germany. The main altar and two side altars are the finest statuary and Poanazzo marble inlaid with Venitian mosaic.

It was during Fr. Willett's pastorate that the present grade school was built. This was to serve as a grade and high school combined. The grade school built by Fr. de Muelder was done away with and part of the remaining is used as the Sister's home. The high school was transferred from the original church building, built by Fr. Abell, to the new school. The church building was later converted into the present show house.

In 1939, after many years of work and sacrifice, Fr. Willett was moved to St. Joseph's parish in Bardstown. Rev. Fred J. Gettlefinger replaced him.

Since his coming much has been done for the parish and community. A few of the many improvements are: He opened a picture show to supply recreation for everyone. The grade and high school has grown greatly. Bus routes have been established at Fr.'s own expense, giving Catholic children from the public schools an opportunity for a Catholic education. The teaching staff as well as the school has grown year by year as well as pupil enrollment. The school playground has been improved, and the tennis court blacktopped. Fr. has had the church redecorated and a heating system installed in the rectory, and Sister's home. A very modern laundry for the Sisters, and a cafeteria for school represents some of his many efforts. He put into operation the only factory in town, and later turned it over to members of his parish. He has sponsored some of the most successful picnics in Nelson County.

Among the many spiritual services, Fr. opened a novena to Our Mother of Sorrows in March 1943, and later the First Saturday Devotions in honor of Our Lady of Fatima. In 1951, the parish under the guidance of Fr. Gettlefinger completed the beautiful high school building. This building was constructed, and is supported by the generosity of the parishoners.

Fr. Gettlefinger, and Fr. Hardesty, assistant, are constantly in earnest efforts to save the souls of the parishoners, so that they may some day obtain the eternal goal for which they were created.

As the representatives of the Eternal Shepherd have come and gone from New Haven they have carried each of us in their minds to their Eternal home where they will spend their eternity pulling for us His sheep.

The present pastor, the past pastors, and those to come have the responsibility to see to the sanctification and salvation of each one of their parishoners souls.

Fr. Paul Russell succeeded Fr. Gettlefinger. The grade school continued and it was during his pastorate that St. Catherine became a tri-parish school including the parishes of Immaculate Conception and St. Vincent de Paul. St. Catherine High School was closed in 1971 by Fr. Russell.

Fr. J.J. Brown succeeded Fr. Russell and continued the grade school. When Fr. Brown arrived there were only six grades. Fr. Brown brought back the 7th grade and the following year the 8th grade.

Fr. Wayne Jenkins, present pastor, has appointed a development committee to explore the value and on-going existence of a grade school in this part of the county.