

Acknowledgements

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The parish has tried to confirm all statements made herein. If errors or omissions still remain, we sincerely apologize for them.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief, but detailed, history of St. Aloysius Parish, including the area, its parishioners, the facilities and its staff. Many of the readers will be familiar with much of the history, such as the donation of the land by Christian and Magdalene Miller, and Father Koerdt being the first resident pastor. Some of the other material may be new, like the Sheldon Song, and the drowning deaths of the Krouse family. The entire parish can be very proud of the past 150 years and the many accomplishments due to the work and sacrifices of many generous and faith-filled people.

History of the Area

In order to understand the establishment and history of St. Aloysius Parish, it is important to know the context in which it was founded. In the 18th century the area of what is now Pleasant Township was inhabited solely by Indians, usually of the Miami Tribe. The township was legally organized in 1842. There were a few fur traders, generally French, who came through on their way to their camps near the Great Lakes. The site of the church is actually directly on the borderline of a former, triangularly shaped Indian Reserve. The southeast vertex of the reserve was at a spot directly behind what is now St. Mark's Lutheran Church, on the east side of the Thiele Road. One line runs from that corner northwest, through the parish property, directly over the church building, to another corner of the reserve, which was in the area of what is now Jefferson Pointe, the shopping center west of Fort Wayne. The other line runs southwest toward Huntington. (Appendix – A).

Pleasant Township was first settled in 1832 by Mr. Cooper and his family on the Godfrey Trace, which is now called the Bluffton Road. Their home was at a place called "Green Camp," a favorite place with the Indians and early immigrants, because of the refreshing spring water in the vicinity. The area was primarily all forest at that time. The other roads, or trails, that led to the "fort" were Wayne Trace from the east, and Winchester Road from the southeast.

The next family that came into the area was the Horney Robinson family. The Robinsons settled permanently in 1834. Mr. Robinson and his wife, Catherine, were Methodists. They offered their home for the first religious services in the township's history. The Rev. Stephen R. Ball was the first minister to hold services in the Robinson home.

Johan Heinrich Herber, aka, Henry Harber, came to the area in June 1834 from Germany. This may have been the first family to later become a member of the parish.

In the winter of 1840 the first wedding in the area occurred in the house of Mr. James Campbell. His daughter, Rachel, became the wife of Dennis Dunn. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Jacob Colcazar of the Methodist Church.

The first white child born in the township was Horney and Catherine Robinson's son, Warren, born on Nov. 30, 1834. He died in 1914. The Robinsons had 12 other children. The first recorded death of a white person in the township was Mary Bay, wife of Mr. David Bay, a sister of Horney Robinson, who died in 1841. Robinson built a sawmill on Lost Creek, to take advantage of the abundant forests and provide lumber for all the anticipated new settlers.

Other early settlers were: Edward Kennark from Ireland in 1834, William Bradbury in 1834, and William Watson, John Whetton and Thomas Greer in 1842. Jacob Smith was born in Pennsylvania in 1814, came to settle in 1847, and he became the first township trustee. In 1841, Andrew Miller arrived with his sons, Christian, Joseph, John, and Andrew, from Alsace Loraine, in France. Joseph and Barbara Miller sold a farm to John Harber on March 17, 1857. The Harber family then became one of the founding families in the parish. Other settlers who arrived in that early wave of immigrants were Nicholas Herber, George Woods, Andrew Orrin, William Henry, Thomas Swank, etc.

The small village of Sheldon was founded in 1869 when Andrew J. Taylor established a plant to manufacture carriages on his land that was adjacent to the "Lake Erie and Western Railroad," which was also called the "Fort Wayne, Muncie, and Cincinnati Railroad." The name of "Sheldon" was taken from the name of the railroad foreman who was responsible for laying that section of track. The first post office opened in Sheldon on Feb. 25, 1870. On May 27, 1920, the railroad, now called the Nickel Plate, and the United States Post Office, without permission of the inhabitants, changed the name from Sheldon to Yoder to eliminate mail confusion with Sheldon, Ill. Mr. Taylor also built a sawmill in 1871, which he personally operated until he cut off his left hand in the operation of his business.

In 1906, an interurban electric railroad passenger line was installed just east of the railroad right of way. This line connected Bluffton with Fort Wayne. Bluffton had a central interurban depot that provided connections to Ohio and Illinois. There was a stop and small depot in Sheldon. This line operated very effectively until the early 1920s when the automobile made its use unprofitable.

In the late 1800s Sheldon developed a very unsavory reputation. There were at least 10 saloons, gambling establishments, etc. There were frequent murderous, drunken brawls. During this period, Mr. A. J. Taylor wrote a song entitled, “Sheldon Song,” describing the wild character of the place. A copy of this song is included in the attached (Appendix – B). There is no indication of the tune to which the lyrics were assigned.

As Mr. Taylor aged, he and other members of the community decided to “clean up” the town. A “dry” Sheldon took on a new life. The Sheldon Drain Tile Company built three brick and tile kilns. Two grain elevators were started. One was called the Sheldon Equity Union, managed by Mr. E. A. Smith. The other was Farmers, owned by Standard Milling Company, managed by Mr. E. H. Smith. The Sheldon State Bank started with a capital of \$25,000 and gradually built it to \$200,000, in spite of a bank robbery. Mr. Charles True was the president. The American Express Company had a small office at the interurban train depot. Mr. John Gray managed the Sheldon Hotel, which also contained a restaurant. Mr. Ambrose Freiburger, a member of the parish, operated the blacksmith shop. A hardware store was managed by Mr. McCoy. There were two general stores kept by Mr. John Williams and Mr. J.E. Miller. Dr. Shortt was a general physician who had an office in the village. The Sheldon post office was in the charge of Miss Leona Mayer and had two rural routes. The carriers were Alfred M. Woods and Lumely Swain. There was no central telephone exchange in the village, but borrowed lines were used from Zanesville, Ossian, Nine Mile, and Poe

Establishment of St. Aloysius Parish

In the mid-1800s a number of Catholic families moved into the area described above.

Most of these families were of German origin, although there were a few French, Irish, and English immigrants. Some had settled in Pennsylvania, or other eastern states, and then decided to move farther west in the quest of better farmland. Others came directly from Europe. Among those early potential parishioners were the following families: Vachon, Miller, Harber, Sorg, Freiburger, Schuhler, Christman, Heckber, Andorfer, Harkenrider, Minich, Kirkhoff, etc.

The Catholic bishop recognized the need to provide spiritual aid to these families. In 1858, Bishop John Henry Luers, the first bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne, assigned Father Jacob Mayer, then pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Decatur, Ind., to help the Catholic families in Pleasant Township. Father Mayer was born in 1832 in Muhlheim, Wurttemberg, Germany. He was the uncle of Sabina Mayer Christman and sister of Maria Barbara Jung. In 1858 Father Mayer said the first Mass in the area in the house of Fred Weaver, then on the northeast corner of what is now Interstate 469 and Bluffton Road. Sixteen families participated in the celebration of Mass. Thereafter, Father Mayer visited the area on the third Friday of every month. The Miller and Harber families were very instrumental in organizing the parish.

In 1859, Christian and Mary Magdalene Miller donated three acres of land on the east side of the Bluffton Road for the parish plot. Christian Miller was mentioned above as being the son of Andrew Miller, who had arrived in the area in 1841. There is unsubstantiated folklore indicating that the initial name for the parish was to have been Sacred Heart of Jesus. Mrs. Miller asked to have the parish be established under the name and patronage of St. Aloysius. Since she and her husband had donated the land, her wishes prevailed.

The patron saint of the parish, Aloysius Luigi Gonzaga, was born in northern Italy in 1568. He entered the Jesuit Order at age 17. He died at age 23 and was canonized in 1726 by Pope Benedict XIII. Within the entire church, St. Aloysius is the patron saint of youth.

Maria Magdalena Mayer/Maier/Meyer, 1826-1890, had two children, Harmon and Kosmas, by Ferdinand Krouse. Her brother was Father Jacob Mayer. In 1859 he sent for Maria. She and her two children emigrated from Muhlheim, Kreis, Tuttlingen. They came through the Port of New York on the S.S. Bremen steamship in October 1859. Harmon Krouse married Catherine Steinbacher, daughter of Michael Steinbacher and Anna Schuler, in 1860.

Following Father Jacob Mayer, there were several priests assigned to the fledgling parish as a mission outpost, i.e. they lived elsewhere and came to the parish only once or twice a month. These were Rev. Martin Kink, Rev. William Woeste, Rev. Aloysius Meile, Rev. Theodore Hibbelen and Rev. Joseph Nussbaum. A complete list of all the subsequent pastors of the parish is included herein (Appendix – C).

In 1859 Father Mayer had erected a small frame church, 29 X 36 feet in size on the site. On Dec. 24, 1859, Bishop Luers paid Mr. John Harber \$50. for an additional plot of land to add to that already donated by the Millers. It appears that this acquisition was done to expand the land available for a cemetery.

As the parish grew, in 1875 Father Joseph Nussbaum added a sacristy, spire, and a new roof, all at a total cost of \$1,400. There were 65 families in the parish by that time. Over the years the church building was decorated and furnished. The statue of the Blessed Mother is called the “French Madonna.” It was made in 1890 and has been kept

in the sanctuary ever since. Each May it has been crowned by a young girl from the parish for well over 100 years. The original matching statue of St. Joseph has been recently returned to the church in honor of this jubilee year. The statue of St. Aloysius, presently in the south side alcove, was found broken and battered in the attic of St. Peter's Church in Fort Wayne. It was refurbished and repainted by Father Daniel Leeuw. The baptismal font, which is still in use today, was purchased in 1895 at a cost of \$118, which was a lot of money at that time.

The original frame church building had brick siding added in 1922. At that time a basement was dug underneath the original structure. Teams of horses were used to raise the frame structure. This was an enormous effort by the whole parish community. Father Hasler personally went to each family in the parish and asked for donations. Also at this time, stained glass windows were added with donations from various families of the parish.

In 1984, at the 125th anniversary of the parish, the original church bell was refurbished and mounted in the shrine between the school and the church which honors all the prior pastors of the parish up to that time. Bishop William McManus officiated at the dedication with the pastor, Father Daniel Leeuw.

On July 31, 1876, Bishop Joseph Dwenger, who had replaced Bishop Luers, assigned Father Ferdinand Koerdt as the first resident pastor of the new parish. Father Koerdt had been born at Oestinghausen, Westphalia, Germany, on Aug. 23, 1853. He received his seminary training in Bechem, at the Royal Gymnasium at Paderborn and at Munster. He completed his training at Mount St. Mary's Seminary at Cincinnati, Ohio, and was ordained by Bishop Dwenger on July 8, 1876, at the Cathedral of the

Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne. In addition to St. Aloysius, Father Koerdt served Bluffton as a mission church.

Although he had only been at the parish since July, and he was only 23 years old, Father Koerdt immediately began work establishing a school. He opened the school, a small frame building, on Oct. 17, 1876, with 38 pupils. The school, and its replacement, will be discussed in greater detail later in this document.

Initially Father Koerdt lived with John Harber at his farm, just north of the church.

In 1877, Father completed a brick rectory at a cost \$3,500. In 1882 he built a two-story brick school, at a cost of \$4,000. At this time the school had 54 children.

In order to provide for his transportation, a small wooden barn was built approximately where the pole barn is today, southeast of the church. Thereafter, each priest could keep his horse, hay, and carriage there.

In 1896, Father Koerdt was transferred to St. Peter's Parish in Fort Wayne.

Although he was only 52 years old, he had poor health. He moved to Los Angeles, Calif., where he died on May 7, 1905. His body was returned to Indiana and he is buried in the cemetery of the parish that he founded.

The parish had a number of organizations and social events throughout the years.

Prior to the Holy Name Society, there was the St. John's Society of Young Men, which was established on Nov. 5, 1876, by Father Joseph Nussbaum. It had three objectives: "1. The promoting of a truly religious spirit. 2. The forming and cherishing of sincere friendship among its members. 3. The support of church and school." There was a charge of 75 cents to join and 10 cents per month thereafter. All members were required to say three "Hail Marys" daily. All members were asked to wear their badges

during Mass. A list of the members of the society in the years 1884 and 1885 is included in (Appendix – D).

Another early parish organization was the Archconfraternity of the Holy Rosary which was established on Oct. 3, 1886. Under “Duties” it is stated, “The only thing that is required of the members, is the weekly recitation of the whole psalter, that is, they must recite the joyful, the sorrowful, and the glorious mysteries of the rosary once a week according to the intentions of the confraternity, particularly for the destruction of heresy and the conversion of sinners.”

The early records of the parish are quite sparse. But, among the first Catholic marriages recorded was that of Nicholas Christman and Catherine Heckbor on Oct. 12, 1860. The first recorded funeral was that of Magdalena Franzell Christman on Sept. 4, 1870. The first baptism was Anna Philomena Kinder, daughter of Paul and Barbara Kinder, on Jan. 8, 1860. There were seven additional baptisms listed in 1860. On June 1, 1876, Bishop Joseph Dwenger provided the sacrament of confirmation for the first time in the parish.

A number of families have remained in the parish and contributed to its growth and development over the years. For example, Helen Christman and Robert Freiburger, both were born into the parish, married in 1946, and have remained members of the parish for their entire lives. Alice Christman and Jacob Harber were also born into the parish, married the same year as the Freiburgers, and have lived in the parish throughout their lives.

In addition to the religious organizations, there were social groups as well. There had been a tradition of putting on dramatic plays of various types by the young people of

the parish. On Dec. 22, 1923, the parish drama group presented “The Adventures of Grandpa” in the church basement and also at the Ossian Community Building. During the 1940s, Father Jesse Lothamer encouraged the Catholic Youth Organization, CYO, to put on many plays. Among the leaders in the CYO were Pat (Edwin) Sorg and Fritz (Wilbur) Sorg. This tradition was continued by the school for a number of years. A play written and directed by Father Daniel Leeuw, “The Christmas Story,” was presented in December 1975, by the school to the parish, to St. Joseph’s Hospital, and to the Catholic Order of Foresters in Fort Wayne. A list of the cast is included in the (Appendix – E). In 1982 Father Leeuw again wrote and directed a school play entitled “And He Came To Heaven.” This was performed at the Covington Manor Nursing Center, St. Joseph Hospital and at the parish Christmas party.

The initial financing of parish activities was quite different than it is today. In the early decades, each family rented a particular numbered pew. That family was then solely entitled access to that specific pew at all services. Included in the (Appendix – F) is a copy of a receipt, in the amount of \$13.50, signed by Father Koerdts, for pew rent paid by John Schuhler on Dec. 2, 1888, for access to pew No. 28. Such rents from all the parishioners represented a substantial portion of the revenue to the parish.

Included in the (Appendix- G) is a chart showing the revenues and expenses for the parish from three early years, 1895, 1909 and 1934. You will note that in each case the revenue from pew rent was the primary source of income and the weekly Sunday collections were far less.

The diocese requires each parish to annually submit a “*Status Animarum*,” or “Condition of Souls,” document. These records are kept in the diocese and provide a

source of data that show parish changes over the decades. A brief chart is provided in the (Appendix – H) for review. The years 1909, 1934, 1959 and 1983, have been selected as they are approximately 25 years apart, depending when they were submitted. It is clear from the records that, from early on in history, the parish picnics were a big fund-raiser for the parish. These were usually held on Labor Day and involved the entire parish providing a big chicken dinner. Initially the dinners were held in a huge tent. After the church basement was dug in 1922, the dinners were held down there. There were games for the children, a lottery, etc. On at least two occasions, the lottery top prize was an automobile. People came from many miles around to attend. The events required a lot of work by the parishioners but the revenues to the parish were very significant. During the 1960s the parish picnics were terminated. In 1972 Summerfest was initiated and has continued as an opportunity for parish fellowship and community activity.

As the years progressed, at times modifications were made to the interior of the church building. Initially there was a large wood and coal burning stove in the front left corner. This was later replaced with furnaces. Approximately in 1945, Father Jesse Lothamer replaced the old wooden Stations of the Cross with the gold colored Stations that are still in place today. During this installation, station 13 was mistakenly installed as station 14 and vice versa. To date, the error has not been corrected. In 1951 Father Phillips had a used pipe organ installed in the choir loft. This organ was replaced by an Allen electric organ in 1984 that had been donated by a generous parishioner. At that time a new level floor and a new railing were installed in the choir loft. The organ was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 22, 1984, with a recital by Vincent Slater,

a renowned organist of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne. Also, the main altar was moved forward toward the pews so that vesting could take place behind the altar in the sanctuary. In approximately 1964, Father Hayes had Mr. Richard Cayot build and install new altars, which were in the front of the sanctuary, as many churches did following the Second Vatican Council. They are in place to this day. New oak altars, more in keeping with the architecture of the church building, have been built by David Meyer and will be installed as part of the sesquicentennial celebration. In 1970, with the help of a generous donation, a bronze relief depicting the Last Supper was obtained. This work of art will be a central component of the main front panel of the new oak altar.

When the Sisters of Saint Joseph, from Tipton, Ind., who had been teaching in the school, left in 1970, the priests began to use their former convent as the rectory. The old brick rectory was demolished in 1972. In September 2000, the parish purchased the former home of Ruth and Ken Bowman, parishioners on the Pleasant Center Road, and had it moved to its present location. That house became the current rectory.

In spite of all the good times, there were tragedies along the way. Among the worst was the drowning of three parishioners on May 12, 1905. Mr. and Mrs. Daniel (Agnes) Krouse, ages 25 and 20 respectively, and Daniel's sister, Mary, age 18, were driving in a horse and buggy from Sheldon to Mardenis, a village west of Zanesville, to attend a party at the Ludwig family home. There was major flooding of the Little River. While crossing a bridge, the carriage slid off the embankment and into the stream that was approximately 20 feet deep at that point. The horse pulled to the wrong side of the stream and the carriage fell into the water. All three passengers drowned. It took a

massive effort to retrieve the bodies. Agnes Krouse was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Miller, also of the parish. Daniel and Mary Krouse were the children of Harmon Krouse of the parish. William Brindle, the undertaker in Sheldon, made the arrangements for the three funerals, which were held in the parish church officiated by Father Hellhake. The three simultaneous burials were in the parish cemetery.

Through the years there have been a number of young men and women who attended the parish school, at least for a time, and later dedicated their lives to the Church. Among the priests are Precious Blood Father John Herber, Father Earl Harber, Father Ed Freiburger, Father Jason

Freiburger, Precious Blood Father Donald Davison, Father Vincent Giese, Msgr. Bernhard Richter, Msgr. John Suelzer, Father Clifford J. Reed, Jesuit Father F. Joseph Bilstein and Father

Bernard Weber. Among the sisters were Sister Helen Clara Freiburger, Sister Generosa (Ruth) Harber, CSJ, Sister Myrtle Harber, Sister Celeste Harber, CSC, Sister Rosalie Weller, S.P., Sister Marcelina Weller, OSF, Sister Fidelia Krouse, CSA, Sister Gonzaga Harber, CSA, Sister Henrietta Vebert, CSJ, Sister Agnesia, CSA. Both Sister Fidelia and Sister Gonzaga are buried in the parish cemetery.

Father Vincent Giese became Editor of Fides Publishers, Our Sunday Visitor, and the diocesan newspaper. Father Ed Freiburger was director of St. Joseph's Orphanage in Lafayette, Ind. Father John Herber served as a hospital chaplain in Chicago for many years. Msgr. Bernhard Richter joined the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minn., and was pastor of St. Boniface Parish when he died. Msgr. John Suelzer is pastor of St. Charles Parish in Fort Wayne. Father Jason Freiburger is currently assistant pastor at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Fort Wayne. Father Donald Davison is assistant pastor at St. Charles Parish, Bloomington, Indiana. Father Earl Harber died early in his priestly

work. Father Clifford J. Reed served the area, which is now in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana, until his death April 6, 1945. Father Joseph Bilstein worked in Chicago as a member of the Society of Jesus. Father Bernard Weber spent most of his priestly life at St. Mary's Parish, Salem, S.D., in the Diocese of Sioux Falls.

In the late 1950s and into the 1960s the Christian Family Movement (CFM) was promoted by Father Aloysius Philips. The organization remains active to this day.

In June 2002 a Chapter of the Knights of Columbus was established. Andy Wyss was the first Grand Knight. He was followed by Jim Cole, Tim Sorg, and Mike Follis. The chapter has grown from an initial membership of 30 to currently 82 members. The Chapter has won awards for its effectiveness and many accomplishments.

To provide music liturgy for the parish there have been a number of talented and dedicated musicians and singers. Gertrude Andorfer was the organist for many years. She was followed by Garnett Sorg and then her daughter Cheryl White. Tim Johnson began playing the organ in 1984 and remains the current music director. Paul Dietrich has provided guitar accompaniment for many years.

St. Aloysius Parish School

As noted above, the first schoolhouse was a small frame building. Initially the building was used for school only two or three months of the year. It was used primarily to prepare children to receive their first holy Communion. On Oct. 17, 1876, Father Ferdinand Koerdt opened a regular parochial school with 38 pupils. He was assisted by Gottlieb Schmoll, then only 14 years old. In 1879, Mr. Joseph Kenning became the teacher, and he was followed by Mr. Robert Gruber. At that time, Father Koerdt contracted with the Sisters of St. Agnes, of Fond du Lac, Wis., to

provide teaching services. Sister Mary Meinrad was the first religious principal. This order of sisters taught in the school until 1921. The last Sisters of St. Agnes to teach in the school were Sister Mary Lucilla and Sister Mary Evangeline. Apparently the order of sisters did not have enough sisters to supply all their missions. So, they left some of their smaller missions that were at a distance from their mother house, such as St. Aloysius Parish.

The sisters lived a rather primitive life. Some years they kept chickens on a back porch and they tended a small garden. Through the years, the parishioners were generous to both the priests and nuns with homegrown vegetables, fruit, meat, etc. The old frame convent was moved from its location behind the school to a location south of Hamilton Road just east of the railroad track, where it still stands. Jacob Harber had a large steam engine. He dragged the house across the fields and the creek until it was set in its present location. For many years it was the home of the Alphonse Schuhler family. Currently it is the home of parishioner Stanley Smitley.

In 1922 a new frame convent was built and the services of the Sisters of Saint Joseph from Tipton, Ind., were obtained. They taught in the school until the end of the 1970 school year. A listing of the Sisters of Saint Joseph who taught in the school is in (Appendix I).

A listing of all the school principals is provided in (Appendix J).

In 1882, the two-story brick schoolhouse was erected at a cost of \$4,000. The corner stone was laid on Aug. 10, and the building was dedicated on Nov. 6, 1882.

The Right Reverend Msgr. Julian Benoit, vicar general of the diocese, officiated at the ceremony. At the time, it was claimed that the school could accommodate up to 150

pupils, with 75 children and four grades in each classroom for one teacher. In 1882, there were 40 families in the parish and 45 children in the school. A beautiful statue of St. Joseph was installed in a niche over the door at the west entrance. The statue was six feet high and showed St. Joseph holding the hand of the Divine Child. There was a lily in the hand of the baby Jesus. The school was free to all members of the parish. The average annual expense per pupil was between \$6 and \$8.

The school was heated by a large wood and coal-burning stove in each room. Each morning the older boys had to bring coal and corn cobs from the barn or the basement to each of the stoves, start the fires and try to heat the classrooms. The students next to the stoves were very warm. The students away from the stove were very cold. The toilet facilities were boys and girls outhouses east of the school, down by the cemetery. There was no running water in the school building. In 1951 an inside toilet and a water fountain were installed in the school.

Many anecdotes are told about the old school. One never really graduated if you had not taken the forbidden slide down the stair rail at least once. Everyone in the entire school drank from the same tin cup on a chain attached to the hand pump south of the church. No one ever got any serious diseases from this sharing. It was a highlight of the school year when the township trustee, usually Willard Henry, came and brought a new softball and bat. Father Jesse Lothamer had a Dalmation dog that was not very friendly, having bitten some of the school kids. Dale Harber, Arlene Aker and Steve Heckber claim to still have scars to prove the dog's attitude. At times, the dog would follow father into the sanctuary and lie by the sacristy door while Mass was being said. When father would genuflect and leave the altar, the dog would follow him back into the

sacristy. Father Phillips enjoyed coming over to the school at times during lunch hour to play his accordion and teach the school kids how to square dance.

When the old brick school was demolished, it was found to be in very bad condition.

Some roof trusses had less than an inch of support on the outside brick walls.

A building committee consisting of Sol Andorfer, James Palmer, Robert Freiburger, Jacob Harber and Everett Redding reviewed all the needs of the school, and plans were made to erect a four-room school with a basement for a meeting space. Bids were received in April 1955. The building was completed by November. The first two months of the 1955-56 school year classes were taught in the auditorium and stage of the Pleasant Center Public School. The total cost for the new building was \$98,000. The cost was \$8.01 per square foot, which was very economical. The general contractor was Weigand Construction, Fort Wayne, Ind. The corner stone was laid by Father Aloysius Phillips in September 1955. The Sisters of Saint Joseph present for this event were Sister Herman Joseph, Sister Celeste, and Sister Lucy.

The school continued to grow reaching its highest enrollment in 1983 with 142 students. In 1996, under the direction of Father William Hodde, a new committee was formed to explore the future needs of the parish school. Among the parishioners on this committee were Robert Kelty, Julie Heckber, Vickilou Wyss and James Christie. When a decision was made to move ahead with an addition to the school, a building committee was formed that included Don Andorfer, Pat Wyss, Bob Freiburger, Jr., Larry Heckber, Greg Byrd, Steve Smith, Mary Czech, William Sorg, Bud Sorg, Bob Kelty, David Meyer and Father Hodde. It was decided to embark on a capital campaign to raise \$1.5 million to add five new classrooms, a library, an office

area, and a community center/gymnasium. Mr. Don Andorfer assumed the leadership role in raising the funds for this construction. In 2001 the construction was complete and the building addition was opened with Bishop John D'Arcy presiding and blessing the new building.

Very few of the early graduates went on to high school. Of those who did, and did not attend the local public high schools in Ossian or Waynedale, a few rode the Interurban train to Fort Wayne to attend St. Augustine School for girls or the boy's school taught by the Holy Cross Brothers.

Cemetery

Like most rural parishes, St. Aloysius immediately established a cemetery for its parishioners directly on the parish property. The first recorded burial in the parish records was Zachrie Vachon, who was buried in 1823 at the age of three. It is unclear exactly where this burial took place, since the parish plot had not been established at that time. The first recorded direct burial in the church plot was Henry Harkenrider, buried in 1865 at the age of 42.

The parish records then show a continual burial rate of approximately three persons per year. The oldest person buried during these early years was Nancy Boyle, born Jan. 25, 1778, and died Feb. 15, 1876. The oldest tombstone is that of John Hourigan, dated Oct. 29, 1855, at age 61 years. The year 1908 had the largest number of burials, which was seven. Now there are approximately 600 graves in the cemetery. There are eight priests buried in the cemetery. Around the large cross in the center there are four priests buried, all former pastors. They are: Father Jacob Mayer, 1832 – 1872; Father John Biedermann, 1867 – 1915; Father Rudolph Denk, 1866 – 1901;

and Father Henry Hellhake, 1849 – 1909. Father Ferdinand Koerdt, the first resident pastor is also buried in the cemetery. Father John Oberholtz, 1864 – 1932, is buried under a headstone that initially simply said, “My Jesus Mercy.” This was an expression of his deep humility. Later his name and birth and death dates were added on a nearby separate stone. Father Edward Freiburger, Father Earl Harber and Father Vincent Giese, sons of the parish, but never assigned there, are also buried in the parish cemetery.

A small section of the cemetery, in the southeast corner, has a number of unmarked graves. These were generally used for babies or for people who were non-Catholics. It was a kind of Potter’s Field. There is at least one veteran of the Spanish –American War buried in the cemetery..

Robert Schenkel and Frank Gelzleichter took care of the cemetery for many years.

In approximately 1970 Joseph Schuhler took over the responsibility. He was followed by David Simerman who currently maintains the cemetery.

Included in the cemetery are a number of Veterans of the United States military, who have served our country. A listing of those, for whom we have records, is included in the (Appendix – K).

Sports Activities

The first organized parish teams began in approximately 1970. Some of the first basketball players were Norman Burke, Peter Sorg, Tony Sorg, Stan Wyss, Bill Gephardt, Tom Wyss, Mike Heckber, Dave Heckber, Tom Quackenbush, Larry Mourey, etc. The school colors of blue and orange were chosen at that time. Also, the name, “Gators,” was determined, apparently by Tom Wyss. The pinnacle of success was reached in 1989 when the school team played in the diocesan championship basketball

game. The team was coached by Pete Sorg. Among the players were; Deke Heckber, Aaron White, Dave Follis, Dan Schmidt, Don Wyss. Apparently it was not discovered until after the game that St.Aloysius had actually been assigned to play the wrong team, a team from the “large school” league.

Summary

St. Aloysius Parish eagerly looks forward to continued growth and achievement. This is especially true in its role in leading all parishioners to our heavenly home, to which we are all called. We are very grateful to all the wonderful priests and sisters who have served the parish so generously over these past 150 years, most of whom have been named herein. There have been approximately 1,000 alumni and alumnae who graduated from our outstanding school. The Sisters and dedicated, self-sacrificing lay teachers over the years have instilled a deep faith in addition to providing an excellent academic preparation for life. The school and parish have provided an environment to nurture 11 young men to join the priesthood and 10 young women to join the religious life. We hope and expect that vocations will continue to be fostered. We are all better off, being closer to our Divine Lord, more aware of our faith, better prepared to help others because of our association with St. Aloysius Parish.