



# Church of St. Michael PARISH HISTORY

## Bulletin ~ Feb. 18, 2007

On this date, February 18, 1908, a church dedicated to St. Michael, located in Spring Lake Township, was moved across the ice of Prior Lake to the Village of Prior Lake. Four sleighs and five teams of horses were able to move the building across the ice in about 20 minutes. During the spring and summer of that year a foundation was built and the building was renovated to create the beginnings of the Church of St. Michael of Prior Lake.

## BULLETIN ~ February 25

There is no record of the date on which the first Mass was celebrated in the Church of St. Michael in Prior Lake. What we do know comes mainly from stories published in the "Jordan Independent" newspaper. From that newspaper we learn that the foundation for the church was being laid in June of 1908. From the same source we learn that plastering and painting were being done during August of 1908 and that an ice cream social was held in September of the same year. It seems reasonable to assume that the social was held after the decorating and renovations were completed and that the first Mass was probably celebrated around that same time.

## BULLETIN – March 4

The first priest to serve the Church of St. Michael was Father John Deere. In 1906 Fr. Deere became pastor of the Church of St. Peter in Credit River. When the Catholics of Prior Lake established a church dedicated to St. Michael in 1908, Fr. Deere began to celebrate Mass in both churches. At first he lived at Credit River and Prior Lake was considered a "mission" church. In 1917, however, the Catholics of Prior Lake built a new rectory on the south side of the church. Fr. Deere then moved to Prior Lake and Credit River became the "mission church." Fr. Deere continued to serve as Pastor of St. Michael until his death in 1936. He is the only priest to be buried in St. Michael Cemetery.

### Bulletin – March 11

Did you know that Prior Lake was formerly known as “Long Lake”? The name was changed to Prior Lake to honor Mr. Charles H. Prior who was the superintendent of the Minnesota Division of the Milwaukee Railroad. He was the person considered responsible for the establishment of that railroad between upper and lower Long Lake in 1872. In those days the presence of a railroad often determined whether a town grew or died. Thanks to the decision of Mr. Prior to place the railroad where he did, Prior Lake grew.

### Bulletin - March 18, 2007

About 50 years ago the Church of St. Olaf in downtown Minneapolis burned down on Ash Wednesday. Many people thought it was very ironic that such a fire happened on that particular day. It was on the evening of Easter Sunday, March 27, 1921 that the original Church of St. Michael burned down. While that may seem like the worst possible day for such devastation, it also marked the beginning of a new era for St. Michael. The people of the parish decided immediately to begin plans for a new church which was completed by Thanksgiving of that same year: 1921. Thus the fire provided a powerful symbol of new life arising out of destruction. Perhaps the day of the fire was not so unfitting after all.

When the first church did catch fire the parishioners, aided by the Shakopee Fire Department, tried valiantly to put it out. They were able to save nearby houses but the church and its contents were destroyed. It is said that the only item to survive the fire was one holy water font. This accounts for the fact that we have nothing from the original church in our present parish complex.

### BULLETIN – March 25, 2007

The history of the Catholics of Prior Lake is interwoven with the history of St. Peter Church in Credit River. In the mid 1850's Irish settlers arrived in the Credit River area. For about 10 years Mass was celebrated in homes whenever a priest was available. In 1860, or 1861, a log church and rectory were built. Around the year 1871 the log church was replaced by a wood framed building that remain standing until it was torn down in the early 1960's. Some say the log church burned down; others say it was simply replaced. The log rectory at Credit River was replaced in 1885. In 1858 a cemetery was established next to the property of St. Peter Church. This cemetery was legally incorporated in 1926 and continues to be used today. After the Church of St. Peter was torn down the cemetery became known as Credit River Cemetery. Throughout the nineteenth century the Catholics of Credit River, Prior Lake and Spring Lake were all part of the one parish of St. Peter. The sacramental records from St. Peter Church in Credit River are presently stored at the offices of St. Michael Church, Prior Lake.

## BULLETIN – April 1

The second St. Michael Church was built in 1921 to replace the original building that had burned down on Easter Sunday of that year. Two additional lots were purchased and the firm of Fleisbin and Mather was hired to design the new church. The cost of the new building, including interior decoration, is recorded as being about \$50,000. Parishioners did as much of the work as possible to keep down the cost. Archbishop Austin Dowling laid the cornerstone on July 24, 1921. The church was used for the first time on Thanksgiving of that same year.

The new building was considerably larger than the original church. It had room for 550 worshippers. Its most outstanding feature was its central tower that was described, at the time, as being of “battlement style.” In the middle of the tower, in a niche over the main door, a statue of St. Michael was placed. This statue, made of carrara marble and concrete, is now located over the doors to Archangels Hall. A new bell, weighing 1200 pounds, was installed at the top of the tower. That same bell is now mounted in a special structure on the north side of the present church.

At the time this second church was built the population of Prior Lake was about 250 people and it is said that about 125 were Catholic. The willingness of such a relatively small number of people to undertake such a substantial project is a testimony to their faith in God and to their love for the Catholic Church.

## BULLETIN – April 8

During its 100 years as a parish, the Church of St. Michael has been served by 11 pastors. Fr. John Deere was the first pastor. From 1908 until 1912 he was pastor of St. Peter Church in Credit River and served St. Michael, which was then a “mission church.” From 1912 until his death in 1936 he was the resident pastor of St. Michael Church; he continued to serve St. Peter in Credit River which had then become the “mission church.” Fr. Deere’s 28 years of ministry to the Church of St. Michael makes him the longest serving pastor in the parish’s history.

In 1936 Fr. Edmund O’Connor became administrator for several months until a new pastor was named. In 1937 Fr. Cyril Farrell became pastor and served until 1941. Fr. Edmund Barry was made pastor in 1941 and served until 1955. In 1955 Fr. Melvin Blais was appointed pastor and served St. Michael until 1967. It was during his time as pastor that St. Michael School was established and the convent was built.

From 1967 to 1970 Fr. Robert Thurner ministered as pastor. He was followed in 1970 by Fr. John Hemp who served until 1980. By the time Fr. Hemp left St. Michael, the parish had grown so much that the church was too small to hold all those coming to worship on Sunday. At that point, Masses were also celebrated

in the auditorium/gymnasium of the school. Fr. Roger Carroll was pastor for one year, from 1980 to 1981, making him the shortest serving pastor in the parish's history.

Fr. James Remes became pastor in 1981 and served until 1983. In 1983 Fr. Gilbert DeSutter became pastor. It was Fr. DeSutter who determined that a new church building was needed to serve the people of St. Michael. In 1986 the original portion of the present church was completed. Fr. DeSutter left St. Michael in 1993 to be followed by Fr. Richard Banker. Father Banker served from 1993 until 2004. In 2004 the present pastor, Fr. Thomas Sieg, was appointed to serve the Church of St. Michael.

### BULLETIN – April 15

In the early years of St. Michael Parish, the pastor, Father Deere, personally conducted all religious education and formation. At that time education and preparation for sacraments was mainly a matter of memorizing the "Baltimore Catechism." Later a few sisters would come for a couple weeks in the early summer to offer a more extensive "summer school." At that time the sisters would stay with parishioners during their short visits. Sometime in the 1940's several women of the parish began to take over the work of the pastor in educating the children of St. Michael.

By the early 1950's the Archbishop indicated his desire that a Catholic School be built in Prior Lake. Construction of a school began in September of 1958. Bishop Leonard Cowley, the auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese, blessed the school on June 21, 1959. The original building had eight classrooms, a principal's office and a library. The basement was left unfinished. The school opened in September of that year with six grades. The School Sisters of Notre Dame came to teach in the school. Since there was no convent, the rectory was renovated and refurbished to serve as a residence for the original sisters. A convent was eventually built in 1964.

### BULLETIN – April 22, 2007

Often when a parish is 100 years old and people have gathered in three different churches during that time, elements from the earlier churches are preserved in the newest one. At St. Michael, however, there were very few elements to preserve. When the original 1908 church burned, it is said that only one holy water font survived. If it was saved, its present location is unknown. When the second church was built in 1921 it was decorated very plainly and there was very little that could be brought into the new church in 1986. The 1921 church had one stained glass window that was located in the sanctuary, facing the sacristy (so it was seen clearly by the priest but not so clearly by the congregation).

This window, which depicts the Christ's Crucifixion, is now located in the present church chapel. The cross that had been on the main altar can now be found in the church library, located behind the sanctuary. Some parishioners were able to salvage a number of pews for use in their homes.

#### BULLETIN ~ April 29, 2007

Fr. John Deere, the founding pastor of St. Michael Parish, was born in Gooldscross, County Tipperary, Ireland on May 10 (or May 3) 1877 (although some records give the year as 1876). It is recorded that he studied for the priesthood in Ireland at St. Patrick's College in Thurles and was ordained June 21, 1903. He came to serve in the Archdiocese of St. Paul in September of that same year. His first assignment was as Assistant Pastor at the Church of St. Stephen in Minneapolis. He served there until February of 1906 when he was appointed pastor of the Church of St. Peter in Credit River. When St. Michael Church was established in 1908 it became a mission of the Church of St. Peter with Fr. Deere as its pastor. In 1917 Fr. Deere moved his residence to Prior Lake. He died at St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Paul on January 8, 1936. The cause of death was said to be a heart attack, brought on by pneumonia.

#### BULLETIN – May 13, 2007

In May of 1928 the Church of St. Michael celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the priestly ordination of their founding pastor, Fr. John Deere. It was apparently one of the major social events of that year. Fr. Lee of Shakopee, Fr. Maloney of Glencoe, Fr. Carey of Rosemount, Fr. Farrell of St. Patrick and Fr. O'Callahan of South St. Paul assisted at the Anniversary Mass. After the Mass there was a reception on the parish lawn that was followed by a dinner prepared by the women of St. Michel Church in Prior Lake and St. Peter Church in Credit River. Parishioners gave Fr. Deere a gift of over \$1000 that he used to make a trip back to Ireland to see his mother and other family members and old friends. According to newspaper accounts of the day Fr. Deere declared, at the end of the anniversary dinner, that this jubilee day was "the happiest in his life."

#### BULLETIN – May 27, 2007

During the 100 years that St. Michael has been a parish we have information about only three members who accepted the call to serve the Archdiocese as priests. The first was John Roach who was ordained a priest on June 8, 1946. In 1975 Father Roach became Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis. On June 2, 1956 two members of the parish were ordained: Merle Monnens and Francis Roach. When the Diocese of New Ulm was established in 1957 Father Monnens became a priest of that diocese. Father Roach is still a priest of this Archdiocese. There may have been others men who joined religious orders but we do not have any records of that. If someone knows of such a priest, please

inform the parish office. Unfortunately, we also do not have a record of those women from St. Michael Parish who may have entered Religious Life. We would like to have this information at the office as well.

While the parish has grown dramatically in the 50 years since Fathers Roach and Monnens were ordained, no young men have answered the call to ordained ministry in this Archdiocese since then. It is hard to believe that in all those years God did not call any member of the parish to a priestly service. Perhaps some young men in the parish will hear that call today.

#### BULLETIN – June 10, 2007

After Fr. Deere, the first pastor of St. Michael, moved to the new rectory in Prior Lake in 1917, people began to think about the need for a cemetery specifically for the Church of St. Michael. Within a few years, four acres of land were purchased just northeast of the village of Prior Lake for use as a Catholic Cemetery. Records show that \$800 was spent on the purchase of the land. A fence was soon built around this land and a gate was established. The labor for this was primarily donated by parishioners.

When the first church burned down in 1921 attention was focused on a new church and little more was done with the cemetery. Burials were carried out before the land had been properly surveyed and lots had been platted. After Fr. Deere's death in 1936 he was buried in the parish cemetery. It was then that an effort was made to beautify the cemetery and create a fitting memorial for Fr. Deere. A large cross, made of Vermont granite, with a bronze image of Jesus, was erected in the center of the cemetery near the grave of Fr. Deere. This crucifix remains the central focal point of St. Michael Cemetery to this day.

#### BULLETIN – June 17

The history of St. Michael Parish is intimately linked with the history of Prior Lake itself.

Prior Lake was platted in 1871. The first building recorded was a general store that soon included a post office. In 1872 several new buildings were constructed: a train depot, a grain elevator, a blacksmith shop and a saloon. A hotel was built in 1884 and a livery barn was built in 1887. In 1897 a Presbyterian Church was built, the first church in Prior Lake. By that time the town already had at least three saloons.

In its early years Prior Lake became a resort destination for tourists from many parts of the country, especially the southern states. On May 15, 1879, the Grainwood House was opened. Guest could use a variety of boats for lake excursions, and horses and buggies were available for travel in the country. Various musical events were also provided for the entertainment of guests.

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For forty years the Grainwood was considered one of the finest resorts in Minnesota. After 1920 the resorts in northern Minnesota became more attractive to summer visitors and the Grainwood declined in popularity. When it burned down, it was not rebuilt.

Until the 1950's Prior Lake resembled many small rural towns in Minnesota. Before the 1960's Prior Lake experienced only modest growth as a place for summer recreation. In the 1960's the town gradually became a suburban/bedroom community for those working in the Minneapolis area. Growth became increasingly more rapid in the 1970's. This relatively brisk development continues to this day.