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*HISTORY OF*

*ST. GABRIEL'S*

*PARISH*

**BIGGAR, SASKATCHEWAN**



**Photos and Story by L. D. Campbell**

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# ST. GABRIEL'S CHURCH

**BIGGAR, SASKATCHEWAN**

**Dedicated**

**in this Jubilee Year**

**of the Province of Saskatchewan**

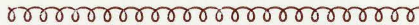
**By Most Reverend Francis J. Klein, D.D.**

**Bishop of Saskatoon Diocese**

**Wednesday, June 9, 1965**







## *Introduction*

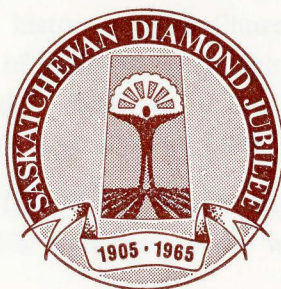
"In 1890, the Vicarite-Apostolic Mission Territory of Prince Albert was erected (formerly part of the St. Albert See) taking in most of the present Saskatoon Diocese and much besides. Most Reverend Albert Pascal, OMI, was consecrated bishop of this new mission territory." \*\*The foregoing is a quotation by J. H. Grant Maxwell, from "An Historical Sketch on the Diocese of Saskatoon." (1955).

It was just 19 years following Bishop Pascal's consecration that the new Parish of St. Gabriel's was added to his apostolic care, and about two years after Pope Pius X had made the Vicarite-Apostolic Territory of Prince Albert a diocese in December 1907. Bishop Pascal died in 1920 while on a visit to his native France.

Following his death, Reverend Father A. Jan, OMI, parish priest of St. Paul's Church,

Saskatoon, was appointed administrator for the Diocese of Prince Albert and served in that capacity until the latter part of 1921, when the newly consecrated bishop, Most Reverend Joseph H. Prud'homme was installed bishop of the joint diocese of Prince Albert and Saskatoon.

In 1934 the new Diocese of Saskatoon was formally proclaimed by Most Reverend James Charles McGuigan, and Most Reverend Gerald Murray, CSsR, was installed as the first bishop of Saskatoon. In January 1944, Bishop Murray was appointed coadjutor of the Winnipeg archdiocese. He was succeeded by Most Reverend Philip Francis Pocock. Following the death of Archbishop Murray in 1951, Bishop Pocock was appointed archbishop of the Winnipeg archdiocese and Most Reverend Francis Joseph Klein was consecrated bishop and was installed in St. Paul's Cathedral on May 7, 1952.







## Diocese of Saskatoon

I am greatly pleased with this brief history of St. Gabriel's Parish at Biggar. It has been compiled with patience and care for every detail, making it an accurate record for our diocesan archives. Besides this, the story is told in a pleasing manner.

The history is also instructive, and for good reason. Just as the history of a Diocese is the history of the Church in one portion of God's vineyard, so the history of each parish is the history of the Church in a single plot of that vineyard. Here, as in the Universal Church, are the Vine and the branches — Our Blessed Lord, His priests and people.

May the reading of this history recall happy memories and also inspire many to follow in the footsteps of the worthy pioneers of St. Gabriel's Parish.

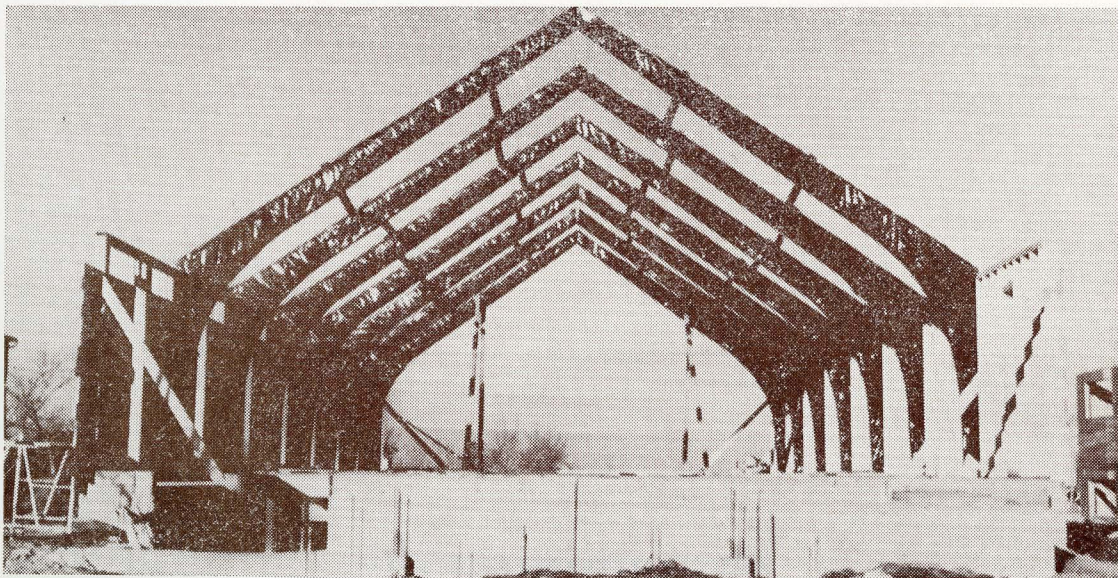
FRANCIS J. KLEIN,

Bishop of Saskatoon.





Most Reverend F. J. Klein, Bishop of Saskatoon Diocese, officiating at the dedication and sod turning ceremonies for the new church and rectory, July 1964. Assisting were Monsignor A. Tombu, Rev. J. Biszyto and Rev. Alvin Pich.



The new church and rectory under construction, November 1964



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# *History of St. Gabriel's Parish*

## *Biggar, Saskatchewan*

In presenting the history of St. Gabriel's Parish, I would like to make a few remarks in explanation.

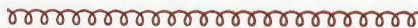
The history will give only the most important events, gathered from some of the first settlers who related the events as they could recall them. Should there be any omissions or errors, it is unintentional.

Events related herein, it will be noted, do not all appear in chronological order. They will be in "free lance" style and, perhaps, be more interesting reading. They were secured, principally, from two of the earlier residents in the vicinity who could recall the events up until May 1912. After that date, the events are from the recollection of the author. It is with the intention of preserving the facts of the formation and growth of the parish that this is written.

Work on this story started in 1963. It is now March 1965 — the Diamond Jubilee Year of the Province of Saskatchewan — 1905-1965. For the Parish of St. Gabriel's, shall we say, it is a happy coincidence, as we join in commemorating this event, that we should find the parish celebrating it in the form of a transition from the early era of 1909 to a newer one in 1965 when the parish will, within a few months, be dedicating a new church and rectory.

At this time, I wish to express sincere thanks to His Excellency Bishop F. J. Klein, Monsignor A. Tombu, Mr. John Hogan, Mr. and Mrs. Hilaire deMoissac, and any others who may have rendered assistance.

L. D. CAMPBELL.





Gathering the facts for this history, I discovered, was more of a challenge than I had anticipated. Guessing or imagining would only create a fictional story and this would not be satisfactory. So there must be a better solution; someone whom we could question for facts and answers to all questions.

After contacting several of the remaining settlers, I found that some could not give the information wanted; others gave some particulars but were unable to remember dates and other important matters. Finally, an early settler whom I knew from the early days, now living in Saskatoon, John Hogan, but one of the original founders of St. Gabriel's Parish, was able to give me much of the needed information.

He came to Biggar before the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and proved to be an encyclopaedia of facts, having a very alert memory, relating incident after incident as if they had only recently occurred. He related early experiences of his arriving in Biggar; his various occupations; filing on his homestead which was some three miles southeast of town; the influx of new settlers; the building boom of stores and homes.

It was interesting to listen while he related facts about the organizing of the parish. The Biggar Hotel, one of the earlier buildings erected, was owned by Eugene Baron. He and his wife came from the town of Lake Megantic, Quebec. They were a very friendly couple and were active in the organizations in the fast-growing village. The hotel parlour and dining room served as the meeting place for meetings, socials and dances. Unfortunately, in the latter part of 1910, Mrs. Baron died after a brief illness. It seemed Mr. Baron's health was none too good. He became quite ill during the latter part of 1911 and passed away about June 1912.

When Mr. Hogan arrived early in 1908, well over a year before the railroad reached the new townsite, he found considerable activity around about. Construction crews, horses, mules, equipment, etc., had established their camps and were then grading the yards and erecting some of the railroad buildings. Lumber and materials, hauled by teams,

was arriving daily.

Holy Mass was offered at nearly regular intervals in the parlour of Biggar Hotel until the church was built. Attendance was good, some coming from considerable distances. At times the parlour was filled to overflow into the hallway. Attendance at these semi-regular services increased to the point where more accommodation was required. After one of the services, plans for building a church were discussed. A committee was chosen and, after investigating costs, location and other details, a general meeting was later arranged when all agreed that a church should be built immediately. The meeting adopted the recommendation proposed by the committee. There was not complete agreement on the choice of location. The committee recommended a two-lot location on the corner of Fifth Avenue West and Queen Street. Some were of the opinion it should be located more centrally and on the east side of Main Street. But, lack of getting two lots together and the price, also, was a factor in the choice. But the site chosen by the committee was finally accepted.

With the choice of the site settled, work on the building of the church soon followed. The newly-formed congregation did not lack experienced carpenters. Under their direction, a group of volunteer workers gathered and in a short period of time their new church was completed. Because of limited finances, no basement was dug; no cement foundation laid. Instead, the church was built on timbers about two feet long and eight-by-eight inches square. These were placed on their ends, equally spaced and covered with boards and drop siding. Needless to remark here how cold the floor would be in cold weather! Likewise, the walls, which also only had two ply of lumber on the outside. No inside lining, no storm windows or porch covering the entrance! A large cast-iron heater, commonly known as a "Station Agent" heater (a type designed purposely for heating railway stations), supplied the heat which was adequate for temperatures around zero but failed to be comfortable at 10 be-

low — especially in windy weather.

The writer recalls a particularly cold Sunday in January 1913, the stove glowed dull red and some 15 to 20 persons huddled around it. When it was time for Father Schweers to start Holy Mass, he removed his coon skin coat, put on his mission vestments and put the fur coat on again and proceeded to the altar. In spite of the intense cold, he read the Gospel for that Sunday, gave the announcements and preached in both English and German.

Among the congregation that Sunday were homesteaders; some remained in town over night in order to attend Mass; others drove several miles that day. Their usual conveyance was a wagon grain box on a set of sleighs, with prairie wool or sheaves for feed for the horses. Some used the lighter "cutter" or "jumper". With these were needed sleigh robes and extra blankets. Nearly everyone used the "foot warmer" heater. The "Bennett Buggy" would have been a welcome conveyance in those days, but closed cars were still unheard of and some could not even afford a "jumper". Even our present parkas would have been a most popular piece of clothing. I wonder why someone never thought about that! At that time, unless you wore a long fur coat or sheepskin coat when travelling you would suffer from the extreme cold.

Father Schweers was, at that time, living at Scott and it was convenient to visit Biggar because of train schedules. He was kept very busy visiting his many mission parishes scattered over a wide area. He was a German Oblate from St. Joseph's Kolonie at Leipzig; medium height, chubby; a very pleasing personality, devoted to his work. He spoke fluently in English and could also speak in French. At all his services at Biggar, he spoke in both English and German.

A brief word about finances. During the early years it was rumored that the Catholic Church Extension Society had assisted financially toward the building fund. But, Mr. Hogan, who was also a member of the finance committee, stated that he had no knowledge of such assistance. Funds for the building were



all raised locally.

I asked Mr. Hogan if he could remember the date the first church was opened or when the first Mass was celebrated; who were the first couple to be married in the church; the first Christening. He stated the church was built during the summer of 1909. He could not remember the exact date when the first Mass was celebrated, but thought it would be very soon afterwards. He mentioned the name of the priest, Rev. Father Laufer, OMI, who was most likely the one who celebrated the first Mass because this priest had been coming quite regularly before the church was built. As to the first Christening or marriage, he could not remember.

This history would not be complete without some reference to some of the persons connected with the erecting of the parish and church. He was able to remember several names such as: the Barons, Turcotts, Gagens, Thibaults, Tobins, Morans, McFarlens, Mrs. Mattenly and Mrs. Dawson, the Gillis family, and others whom he could not remember by name. This he regretted.

The ladies of the parish played a big part in the organization work, sponsoring card parties, box socials, dances, fowl suppers. Their organization was known as the Altar Society. They contributed much towards the financial fund. In the summer of 1913 they sponsored a successful strawberry social on the church grounds, climaxed with a dance in the evening in the dining room of Biggar Hotel. Funds from this project paid for lining the inside of the church and making pews. These improvements added much in comfort during the winter.

During the early years, the rumors about a Catholic church having been built in the vicinity of Sixty Mile Bush were sometimes heard. Some believed there was, some doubted it, but the rumors apparently were never confirmed or denied. These reported rumors are being investigated and more information will be given in this story before completion. It is quite possible there was a church there — an ideal location where travellers using the Swift Current - Battleford Trail rested and re-

plenished their supplies.

The "Sixty Mile Bush", a name often spoken about years ago, derived the name because of its location on the trail. It is approximately 60 miles from Battleford. We have every reason to believe that the troops of the Queen's Own Rifles rested at this settlement during their historic long march from Swift Current to Battleford in the spring of 1885 during the troublesome days of the Louis Riel Rebellion. Just a few further remarks about this famous old trail. It is famous for many reasons. It was a federal government surveyed trail; an important communication route between the south and the north. It played an important part in the early settlement of the Old North West. There must be many romantic incidents associated with its history! The survey shows every mile marked with an iron rod bearing the mile number in Roman figures. The rod could be located by the three mounds dug in triangular form. Some of these "mile posts" can still be located along the old trail.

Sixty Mile Bush is a thickly Western Poplar treed area comprising several sections of land; varying in width approximately five miles, and extends in length to about eight or more miles. The Argo Pool Elevator is at its northeastern border and the Hamlet of Duperow, formerly named "Lydden", borders on its northwestern fringe. It proved a welcome haven for early settlers and served as a woodlot from which firewood was obtained by many of the adjacent settlers.

We are now able to confirm some of the answers to doubtful questions mentioned in the previous pages. The property on the corner of Fifth Avenue West and Queen Street first appeared on the assessment roll on Jan. 1, 1910. This would seem to confirm the purchase of this property during 1909 and the construction of the church also. Because the two lots were purchased from GTP Development Co. on the instalment plan, full payment was not completed until Nov. 11, 1912, and the title was issued in the name of the Incorporate Parish of St. Gabriel's.

We can also issue confirmation as

to the reported rumors about the church built along the Swift Current Trail in the Sixty Mile Bush. This small church, built of logs and lumber, was located on Section 1, Township 35, Range 16, West of Third Meridian. It was built April 1906 on the homestead of Mr. Desjarlais, who owned and operated a general store at this location where travellers and freighters rested and purchased supplies. This information was confirmed by Mr. Hillaire de Moissac who helped to build the church. Mr. de Moissac filed on his homestead in the Cochery district the spring of 1905. The little church at Sixty Mile Bush served the surrounding district until the summer of 1911 when the present Mission Church at Cochery was built on the N.E. 6-36-16 W3, being one of Mr. de Moissac's quarter sections.

From the foregoing pieces of history it will be noted the important parts these two settlements played in building St. Gabriel's Parish, made up of settlers from eastern Canada, United States, France, the British Isles and central Europe. There were several German Oblate priests from St. Joseph's Kolonie at Leipzig, an early settlement of German Catholics. Principal among the first priests who served the Mission Church at Sixty Mile Bush were Fathers J. Laufer and Theodore Schweers. It appears that Father Laufer was a regular visitor while Father Schweers called less frequent.

Pages of tribute could be written about these devoted missionaries. Their spiritual works have left an indelible imprint that is difficult for the pen to describe. It is a consoling thought to remember that, although no glowing tributes may be written about their labors, their efforts have not been unrewarded. On the contrary, they have merited an Eternal Reward which no earthly tribute could equal.

We now have, quite definitely, found the answer to the final question: the name of the first priest who ministered to the first settlers at Biggar and who celebrated the first Holy Mass in St. Gabriel's. There is no reason to doubt that this was Reverend Father J. Laufer. He is the most frequently mentioned by





**Most Reverend Albert Pascal, OMI**

First Bishop of Prince Albert Diocese  
1890 - 1920



**Rev. Father A. Jan, OMI**

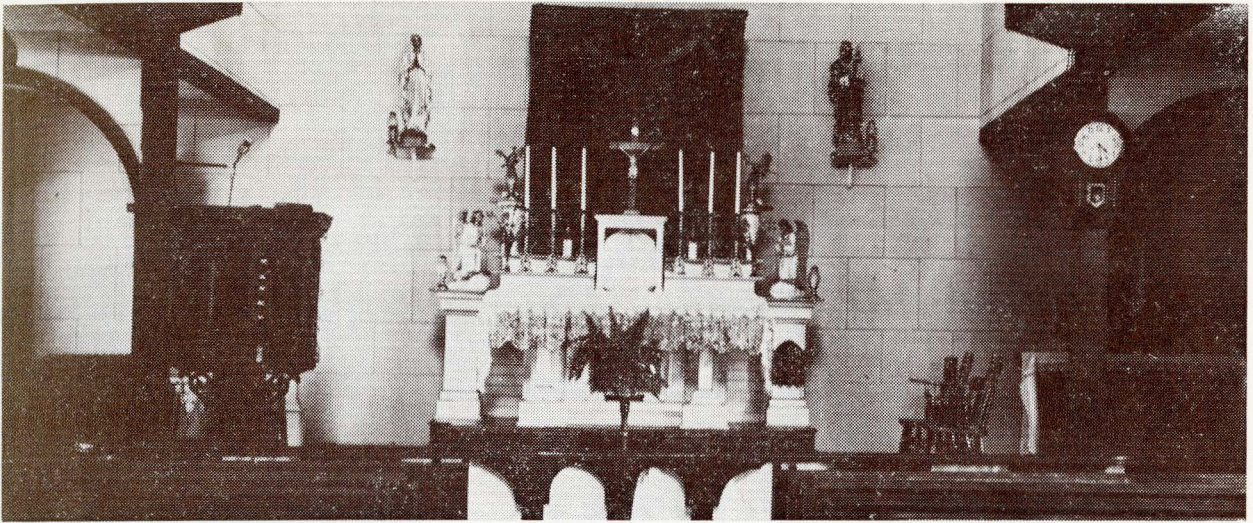
Parish Priest St. Paul's Church, Saskatoon, Sask.  
1914 -  
Administrator of Diocese of Prince Albert  
1920 - 1921



**St. Gabriel's Church, Biggar, Sask.**

Built about April 1909 — Remodelled July 1921  
Served the Parish until August 1927



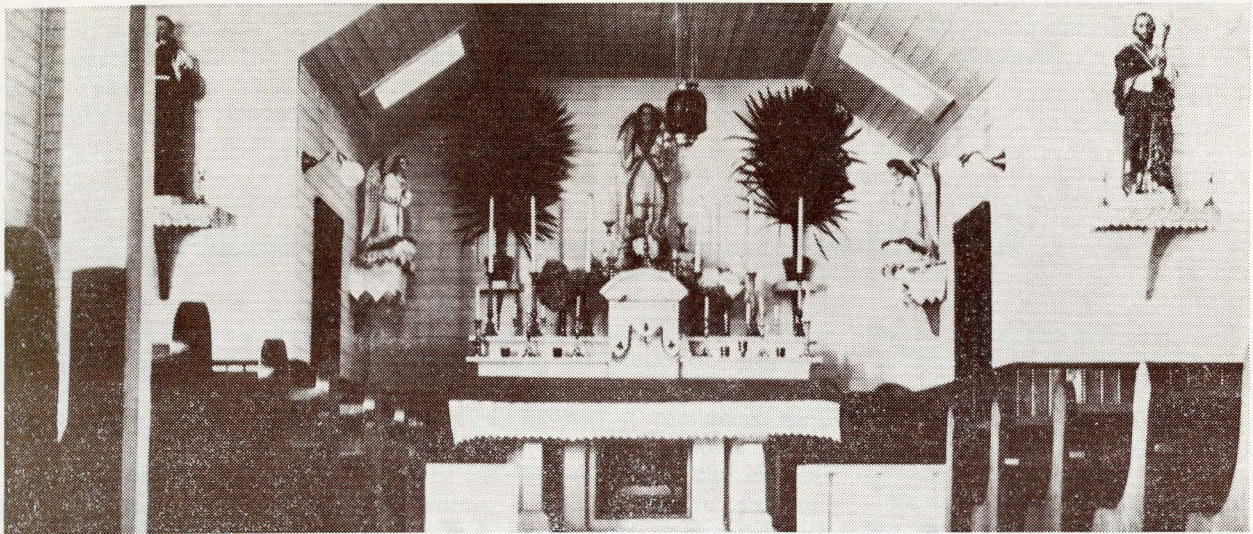


Altar of St. Gabriel's Church  
August 1927 — June 1953

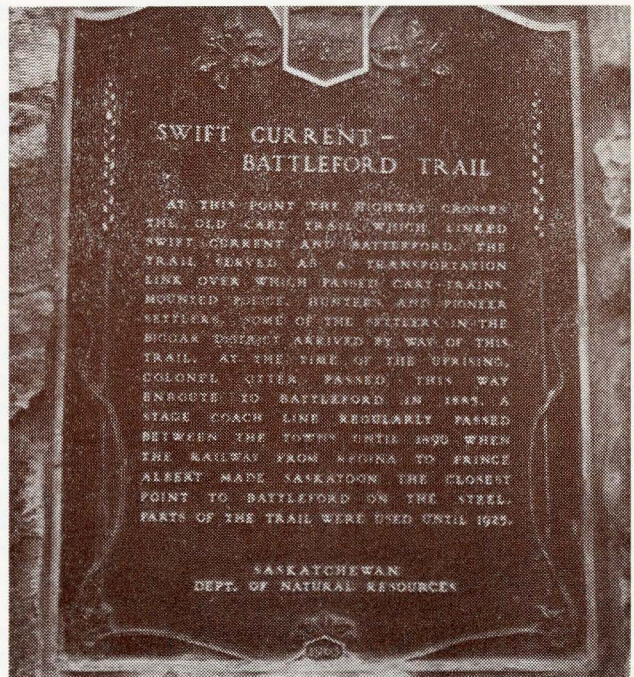


Altar of St. Gabriel's Church  
June 1953 — June 1965





Altar and interior of remodelled church as it appeared August 15, 1921



This natural-stone cairn, erected by Oxborough Local Lodge of the Saskatchewan Farmer's Union, was dedicated to the memory of the early settlers of the surrounding district. It is located on No. 14 Highway, seven miles west of Biggar. At this point the highway crosses the old Swift Current-Battleford Trail.

**Plaque Inscription** — "At this point the highway crosses the old cart trail which linked Swift Current and Battleford. The trail served as a transportation line over which passed cart-trains, mounted police, hunters and pioneer settlers. Some of the settlers in the Biggar district arrived by way of the trail. At the time of the uprising, Colonel Otter passed this way enroute to Battleford in 1885. A stage coach line regularly passed between the towns until 1890 when the railway from Regina to Prince Albert made Saskatoon the closest point to Battleford on the steel. Parts of the trail were used until 1925."



the early settlers as serving before the church was built. So, it is certain he would be the first priest to celebrate Holy Mass in the first church built in 1909. We would also

like to suggest that Reverend Father Theodore Schweer's name be equally shared with Father Laufer. We must believe these two noble priests played an equal role in laying the founda-

tion for our St. Gabriel's Parish. We feel deeply honored to claim them as our founders.

## *Priests Who Have Served the Parish . . .*

Following are a few brief biographical notes of the priests who have served as pastors and assistants at St. Gabriel's Parish, Biggar, Sask.

### **— Prior to 1910 —**

Before the first church was built in 1909, two or more Oblate Fathers from St. Joseph's Kolonie at Leipzig, some distance west of Biggar, made regular visits to the territory around Biggar, even before the site was a village. Therefore, we can accept as an historical fact the name of Reverend Father Joseph Laufer, OMI, as being one of the first priests to serve this territory. His name is the one most frequently mentioned by the first settlers. Next to Father Laufer, the name of Father Schweers is mentioned. Both these priests had visited around the district in 1905 or earlier. From our conversations it would seem that either Father Laufer or Father Schweers was the Superior of St. Joseph's Kolonie. This fact has not been confirmed.

### **1910 — 1912**

The first resident parish priest of St. Gabriel's was the Reverend Father Simon, a native of France. He came to Biggar early in the spring of 1910. It seems his health was not too good. He was frail, of medium weight, had a quiet disposition, was very friendly, aggressive and ambitious.

Since the new parish, at this time, could not afford to build a new rectory and no other living quarters were provided, he resided at Biggar Hotel.

Possessing a strong determination, he was not the type that backed away from a situation like this. His mind was made up! He was going to do something about this. After some consultation, he made his own decision!

Father Simon decided to build his own rectory, or rather, his own residence. With the help of some volunteers, he had it completed sufficiently to take up residence during the late fall of 1910. The building was a two-storey square structure with a cottage roof. It was built on a corner lot, facing Campbell Avenue now renamed Seventh Avenue, and Queen Street. This building still stands on this site though it has had considerable improvements made over the years.

Father Simon was instrumental in establishing and building the mission church at Cochery during the early summer of 1911. This mission was continually served by priests from St. Gabriel's until about 1960. He also visited several mission posts in the outlying districts around Biggar. It was while he was attending one of these missions in January 1912, that he died unexpectedly.

After Father Simon's death, St. Gabriel's was without a resident priest until September 1913. During this interval, the spiritual needs of St. Gabriel's again depended on the generosity of Father Schweers. He now had so many new mission parishes under his care that his visits to Biggar were very irregular. But he came when and as often as he could.

### **1913 — 1917**

Reverend Father Matthew Collins was appointed to St. Gabriel's in September 1913. A native of Ireland, he had just completed several years of mission service in Bombay, India, prior to coming to Biggar. Unlike his predecessor, he was the robust type; tall, medium dark complexion, a very friendly personality. He was a scholarly man, distinguished orator, spoke French fluently and commanded a keen knowledge of world affairs. Within a month after arriv-

ing in Biggar, he had convinced his parishioners of the urgent need of a rectory. Needless to say, the rectory was built and occupied in January 1914. Under his direction, St. Gabriel's progressed rapidly.

Father Collins devoted much of his time to instructing the young people of the parish and surrounding missions. First Holy Communion classes were held at regular intervals. A notable event for St. Gabriel's took place on the Feast Day of the Assumption on Aug. 15, 1915. Bishop Pascal made his first and only visit to Biggar and confirmed a class of some 35 candidates from Biggar and surrounding missions. It was a gala occasion, being the first time St. Gabriel's was honored by a visit of their bishop. It also marked the dedication of the church and rectory. In August 1917, Father Collins moved to central British Columbia.

### **1917 — 1919**

Reverend Father M. Miard succeeded Father Collins in September 1917. A native of France, he was of medium build and complexion. Friendly, but with a reserved personality, one almost felt the impression of a touch of aristocracy. A highly-rated student of the arts in literature and music, he was an accomplished pianist. Yet, in the discharge of his priestly duties, he displayed a high quality of humility and kindness when counselling. In parochial work, he lacked the aggressive spirit of his two predecessors. As a consequence, progress in the parish, generally, reflected a general slowing down to a very slow ebb. Father Miard was transferred in September 1919.

### **1919 — 1933**

Reverend Father J. M. Drapeau was appointed to St. Gabriel's in mid-October 1919. His appointment



was made by Rev. Father Jan, OMI, acting as administrator of the Diocese of Prince Albert during the absence of Bishop Pascal who was on a visit to his native France.

Father Drapeau, also a native of France, came to America soon after his ordination. He first came to the United States. His first assignment was as an assistant priest at St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hartford, Conn., where he served for several years before moving to the Diocese of Regina. He served that diocese for several years as parish priest at Weyburn. He later moved to Prince Albert diocese where he had charge of the parishes of Duck Lake and Rosthern. He came to Biggar from Rosthern.

Father Drapeau brought to St. Gabriel's a wealth of experience gained in the Canadian West during the years which saw a very rapid development and expansion in all fields of industry. He also was the robust type, average build, fair complexion, keen sense of humor, witty, jovial and a warm personality. Although a native of France, one could scarcely ever detect it by his speech. He was a master of the English language, and a forceful orator. His sermons displayed the quality of a trained theologian and philosopher. Though he qualified in all of the foregoing, there is still one other I have yet to mention. He was a great builder — a builder of churches, schools and hospitals. In this field, at times, he would display impatience if the work in hand did not progress. He was aggressive in all his undertakings.

His first year was aimed towards organizing and co-ordinating the affairs of the parish. The spring of 1921 saw the beginning of a program for much needed improvements to the church, rectory and grounds. Under his direction, the following years saw a continual era of growth and development. The church was enlarged, basement dug and a furnace installed. A lover of nature and a noted gardener, trees were planted around the property in 1920. When the alterations to the church were completed, new furnishings were required. This he accomplished by his friendly approach. One

person, William Lambert, donated the material and built the pews. These are still used in the present church. By the same means, the statues and stations of the cross were gifts from one or more persons.

After all these things had been taken care of, he was still looking towards the future! One could sense a feeling he was still not satisfied and that, soon, he would launch another project. And, sure enough, he did!

In 1922, an implement building on Second Avenue East was acquired and remodelled into a club and recreation hall. The year 1923 saw this building again undergoing further remodelling. This time it was changed into a temporary hospital. On Dec. 8, 1923, four Sisters of Charity arrived in Biggar — two from St. Albert in northern Alberta and two from Nicolet, Quebec. No special event marked the occasion. Again, 1924 saw another project underway when preparations were started to set up a separate school district. In 1925 work was started on the building of the St. Teresa's Academy and the present church. In August 1927 the church and academy were blessed and dedicated by Most Reverend Joseph H. Prud'homme, bishop of Prince Albert and Saskatoon. By September 1927 classes were opened in the new academy. Later, about 1930, we witnessed the culmination of his highest ambition — the humble beginning of seminary classes in conjunction with the academy. This feature apparently did not merit the support he expected and the project was suspended indefinitely, sometime around 1932.

To keep the records straight: during the proposed construction of the joint church and academy, several parishioners did not hesitate to voice their opposition to the idea. They felt they were surrendering a vital part of their efforts attained down through the years. They were not opposed to the school or academy but they wanted to retain the church independently and as a separate responsibility. The vote on the question was by no means unanimous.

We must not close these comments without a reference to the missions assigned to his care. For several

years from 1920, he divided Sundays between Cochery, Doddsland and Lovernna. He continued attending the missions at Arelee, Clunie, etc. Father Drapeau was transferred to St. Mary's parish in Saskatoon in April 1933. In retiring from Biggar, Father Drapeau left a chain of monuments in his memory. He finished the work he was sent out to do. What more tribute can we add to this noble priest!

#### 1933 — 1935

Reverend Father J. E. Provost was appointed to St. Gabriel's in April 1933. He was a native son from the Province of Quebec; medium build, fair complexion; very friendly, warm personality, keen sense of humor and a determined will power, aggressive. He was determined in maintaining most of the program carried on by his predecessor. His was more for the continuing of a work, rather than planning new projects, though he did make some minor changes. He showed great interest in promoting youth movements and parish organization work. In these branches he received support and co-operation. In May 1935 he was transferred to the Eston parish.

#### 1935 —

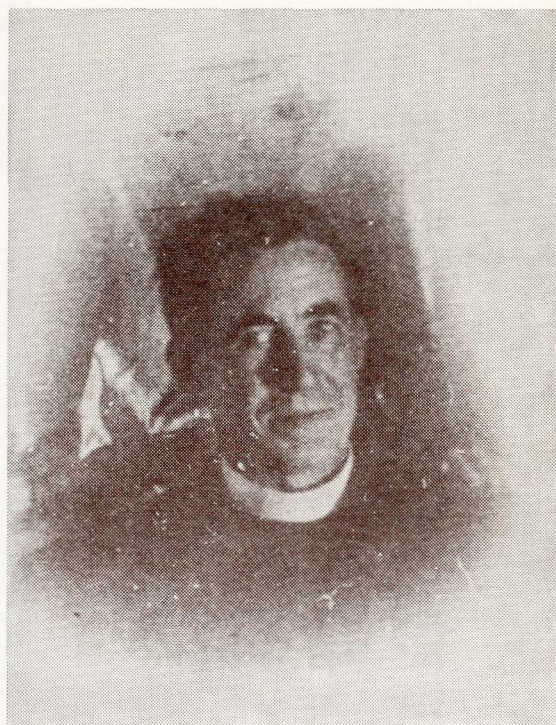
Reverend Father A. Tombu succeeded Father Provost in May 1935. He first came to St. Gabriel's on Nov. 21, 1932, as assistant to Father Drapeau. Soon after assuming charge of the parish, the country-wide depression was beginning to make itself felt in all branches of the economic field. From 1935 until 1940 and later, he had the difficult task of directing the parish, school and the hospital through the most difficult times in our history. He always showed great courage and calmness. He shared, with his charges, their trials and hardships. He was a compassionate counsellor to them during those trying years.

He is a native of Belgium. His first years in Canada were spent as a farmer in the Aberdeen district. His vocation to the priesthood came in his later years. A very kind and humble personality, although the robust type, he is a victim of a gas attack during the First World War,





**Rev. Theodore Schweers, OMI**  
who along with Rev. Joseph Laufer, OMI,  
were the first priests to minister to the early  
settlers of the district.



**Rev. Father Matthew Collins**  
Priest of Parish — 1913-1917



**Rev. Father J. M. Drapeau**  
Parish Priest October 1919 to April 1933



**Very Rev. G. E. Provost, V.F.**  
Priest at St. Gabriel's from  
April 1933 — May 1935





**Monsignor A. Tombu**

Parish Priest of St. Gabriel's  
Commencing May 1935  
Elevated to rank of Monsignor  
in November 1960



**Reverend Father Alvin Pich**

Appointed administrator of St. Gabriel's Parish in September 1962. He is a native of Biggar district and was ordained in St. Gabriel's Church in June 1953 by Most Rev. F. J. Klein, Bishop of Saskatoon.



causing serious impairment to the vocal cords. Now in his 84th year, he is still very active and devoted to his vocation.

During 1941, despite the restrictions on building materials because of the war, he was instrumental in convincing authorities of the urgent need of a new St. Margaret's Hospital at Biggar. With the co-operation of local and provincial authorities, construction of a new hospital was approved. Construction started in 1942 and on Dec. 8, 1943, the institution was formally opened by the Hon. Dr. Ulrich, minister of public health. The new hospital, with its fully modern equipment and conveniences, was a welcome improvement for doctors, staff and also the patients.

In addition to the mission parishes regularly served from St. Gabriel's, Father Tombu added three new ones. The first one was at Valley Centre. An unused school was purchased and remodelled to serve as a church. This building was later moved to its present location at 'Mike's Filling Station' on No. 4 Highway, mid-way between Biggar and Rosetown. The mission was opened in the hamlet of Valley Centre in July 1951. In March 1952 missions were opened at Perdue and Cando. All these missions are still being served from St. Gabriel's.

In November 1960, Father Tombu was elevated to rank of Monsignor in a colorful ceremony at St. Gabriel's Church with a large representation

of dignitaries present from Winnipeg and Saskatoon. Bishop F. J. Klein officiated at the ceremony.

#### 1962 —

Reverend Father Alvin Pich was appointed administrator of St. Gabriel's Parish in September 1962. A native of Saskatchewan, he also being the aggressive type, likes to keep things moving forward. During the summer of 1963 he organized a committee to explore the feasibility of building a new church. After a very lengthy study of the matter, plans were quickly launched; goals set and attained, and the construction soon started. In July 1964, Bishop F. J. Klein attended the sod turning ceremony and work was started almost immediately.

The new church is of modern design; is 40 feet wide and 108 feet long. The rectory is attached to the church at the rear. It is also modern in design with an attached double garage.

The church has a full basement and will provide modern conveniences including kitchen facilities. As mentioned previously, the new church and rectory will open this June and, coincidentally, be associated with the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Province of Saskatchewan. The new church is located immediately east of St. Margaret's Hospital on Seventh Avenue West.

\* \*

Assistant priests who have served at St. Gabriel's:

Following is an incomplete list of the names of assistant priest: 1923, Rev. L. A. Pierre; 1923, Rev. Bailargeon; 1925, Rev. L. deJ. Belleau; 1925, Rev. J. R. Ouimet; 1925, Rev. C. Charron; 1926, Rev. J. A. Aubin; 1926, Rev. A. Champagne; 1926, Rev. Siccard; 1927, Rev. A. Ouellet; (Rev. Father Ouellet served for over 10 years); Rev. J. Biszyto; Rev. S. Rakus; Rev. D. O'Driscoll; Rev. Claffey; Rev. J. Kendsiorski. (Years omitted from several of the last named).

\* \*

This history would not be complete without a few brief remarks about some of the parishoners sharing in some of the "first honors". Unfortunately, the records from 1910 to 1913 are lost. The only authentic record to be found comes from two participants still living in the parish: Mr. and Mrs. Len Hawkins. They vouch that the information that theirs were the first marriage vows performed in St. Gabriel's Church. Rev. Father Simon performed the ceremony on June 6, 1911.

We regret being unable to report the first baptism or the first funeral service after the first church was built but there are no available records.

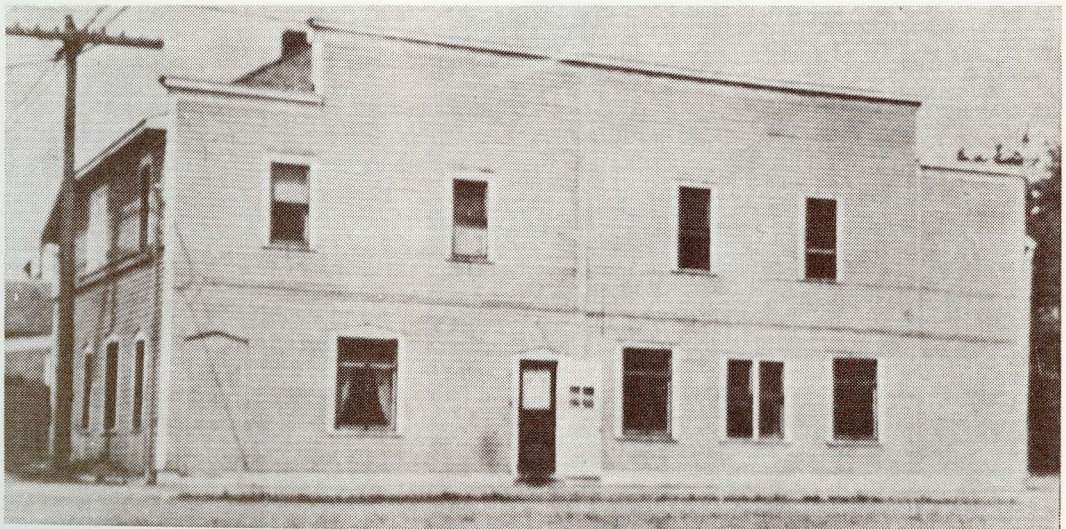


Mr. and Mrs. L. Hawkins, Biggar, first couple married in St. Gabriel's Church





The present St. Margaret's Hospital, located on Eighth Avenue West, was formally opened on Dec. 8, 1943. Equipped for some 35 beds, it is operated by the Sisters of Charity. With the latest modern facilities, it qualified for national hospital accreditation and received the award in 1964. It serves a large area around Biggar.



The first St. Margaret's Hospital opened Dec. 8, 1923. It was located on Second Avenue East. The government liquor store and telephone buildings now stand on this location. This building comprised a former recreation hall which was remodelled from an implement building, and a two-storey dwelling, part of which is seen on left side. This temporary hospital served until Dec. 8, 1943.





**St. Margaret's Mission Church at Cando**

Formerly a school, this mission was organized and founded by Monsignor Tombu in March 1952. The photo taken Sunday, May 2, 1965, shows the congregation gathered after Holy Mass. Mr. S. Pritchard, first on left, recently celebrated his 104th birthday.



**Holy Rosary Mission Church at Perdue**

This mission was organized and founded by Monsignor Tombu in March 1952. The picture, taken May 2, 1965, shows the congregation after Holy Mass. Father A. Pich is in the back row at center.



**St. Hilaire's Mission Church at Cochery**

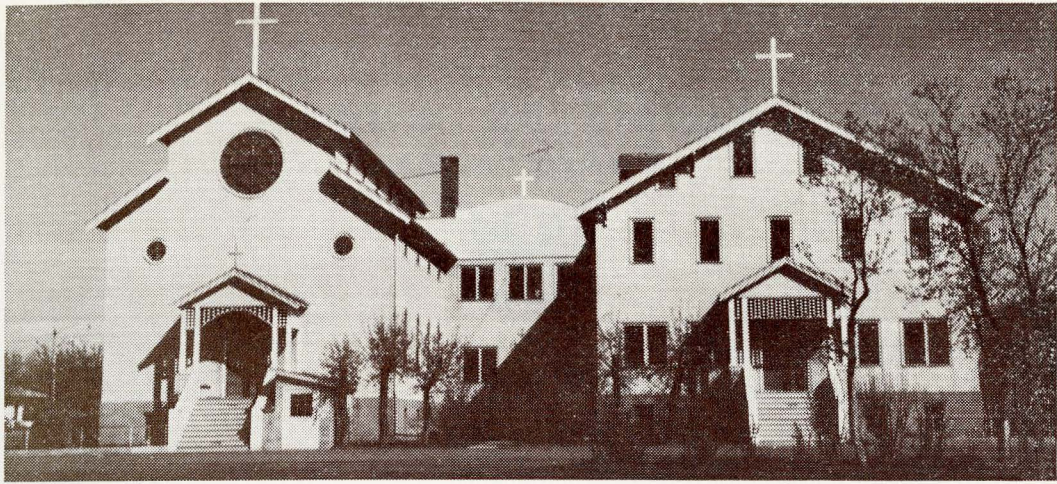
Built early in 1911.  
Located on N.E. 6-36-16 W3rd.



**Valley Centre Mission Church**

Opened in the Hamlet of Valley Centre in July 1951. Located now mid-way between Biggar and Rosetown.

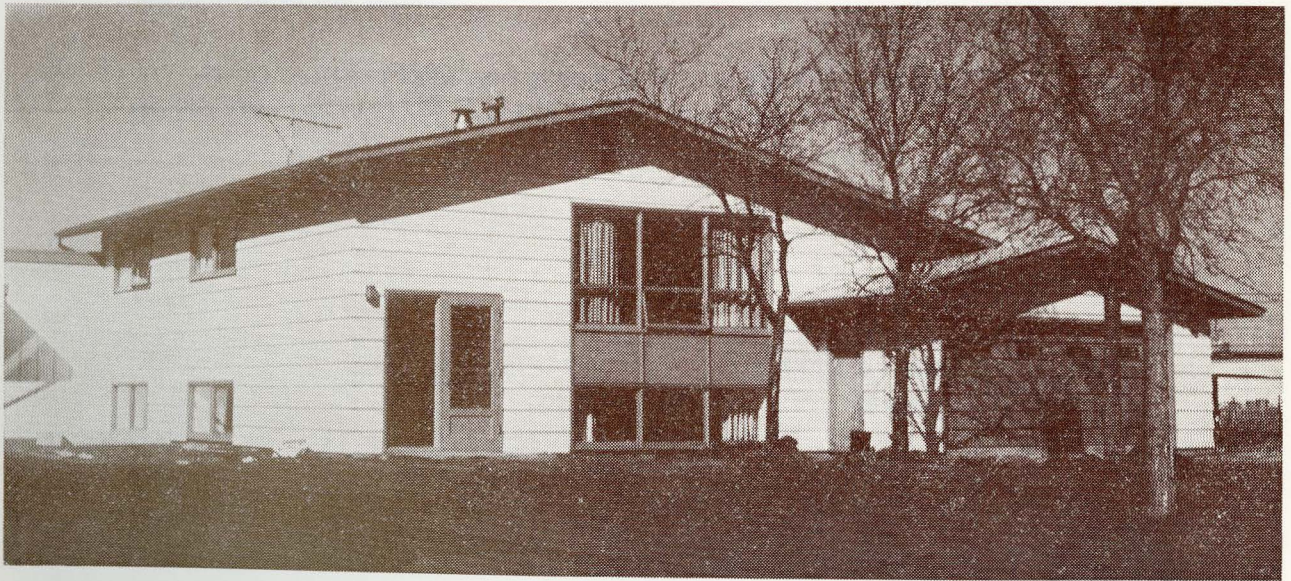




St. Gabriel's Church and Academy — 1927 - 1965



St. Gabriel's Rectory until May 1965



New Rectory for St. Gabriel's Parish May 1965 — Saskatchewan's Golden Jubilee Year



MAYOR  
LIONEL A. JONES

TOWN CLERK  
ERCELL L. LINDQUIST

TOWN OF BIGGAR  
SASKATCHEWAN



Office of the Mayor  
BIGGAR, SASK.

On behalf of the Town Council and the citizens of Biggar may I extend sincere good wishes to St. Gabriel's Parish and offer congratulations on the blessing and dedication to God of the new church, rectory and office quarters.

The attractiveness of these fine new buildings will add much to the appearance of the town. This new House of Worship is a credit to the clergy of St. Gabriel's, to the planners and workers and to the entire membership of the parish.

St. Gabriel's Church and its people have contributed a great deal to the growth and welfare of the town and community. This new church and rectory reflects the progressiveness of the parishioners and predicts a vigorous spiritual growth in the future.

We are pleased with and proud of the pleasant association the Town of Biggar has had with St. Gabriel's Church and parish.

Respectfully,

LIONEL A. JONES,  
Mayor.



