

### Celebrating our Rich Parish History

St. Joseph Church at Stark settlement was located 5 miles northwest of Fairfax and was a mission of St. Patrick, Fairfax. The first Mass at St. Joseph was celebrated in 1880. Throughout the existence of St. Joseph, the St. Patrick pastor also said Mass at Stark settlement. St. Joseph remained an active mission church until it was closed in 1959 due to a decline in membership and the hardship of the priest to serve during the winter months. The land for the church was donated by Andrew and Mary Stark, early pioneers, after whom the community was called Stark Settlement. Other founding families included Lucas, Wieneke, and Voss. Other families who later helped with the organization of the church included Gibney, O'Connell, Donahue, Fox, Farrel, Fritz, Mueller, Ockenfels, Coolihan. In 1880 a few acres directly to the southwest of the church were purchased from the O'Connell family for a cemetery. This cemetery is still known as St. Joseph Cemetery and is supervised by St. Jude of Cedar Rapids. It is located one mile north of Highway 30 on Sisley Grove Road. The interior of the church was renovated in 1936. The main altar was flanked by two side altars. Pat (O'Connell) Davis, currently a member of Blessed John XXIII, grew up at St. Joseph, and also took her small children there. She remembers the church as small and friendly, where everyone knew everyone else. It had Stations of the Cross and plain glass windows. Confessions were held before Mass. Pat commented that Mass started up to an hour late at times because of so many confessions. When the church was closed, it was taken down and the lumber was used for buildings on various farms. Pat's grandfather referred to an old Irish superstition that if materials from a church were used for another building the new building would burn down. Consequently he didn't use any of the lumber.