

Celebrating our Rich Parish History

St. Joseph, Stark Settlement

Mike Gibney was 19 years old when St. Joseph Church at Stark Settlement closed in 1959. The church, founded in 1878 and located 5 miles northwest of Fairfax, was a mission of St. Patrick, Fairfax. Mass was said at St. Joseph by the St. Patrick pastor.

Mike commented that after 1940 most St. Joseph funerals were held at St. Patrick. According to some 1st Communion pictures that Mike has, a porch was added to the front of St. Joseph around 1940. The doorway into the porch was too narrow to carry a casket through. The main doors into the church were double wide so they were no problem. Mike's parents talked about a time when the porch was taken off for a funeral and put back on afterwards, but Mike doesn't know if that really happened. There was a funeral Mass for Henry Stark, Jr. who died at the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. Those who attended do not recall there being a casket.

The Sisters from St. Patrick School held catechism classes on Saturday mornings in Fairfax for the Stark Settlement students and other rural students. The Sisters also taught catechism two weeks each summer at St. Joseph. A big part of the two weeks was preparing new altar servers who had to learn Latin. First Communion was always the culmination of the two weeks. During those two weeks the kids played ball on the gravel road with a hill. Mike commented that it's amazing they didn't get run over. Sr. Mary Andrew liked to play ball. At one time there had been an iron fence around the church, but by this time it was a regular farm fence with barbed wire at the top. Mike said, "If the cattle weren't in the field we could climb over the fence to play ball in the pasture. Sr. Mary Andrew climbed over the fence in her habit."

Fr. Dean Murrin, ordained in the early 1940's, was a native son of St. Joseph parish. He grew up about a mile from St. Joseph Church on the Stark farm, where his dad worked. He was a missionary priest, ministering primarily in Asia, and retiring in Rhode Island. He came home every Christmas for a couple of days and said three Masses in a row on Christmas Day.