

History of Starks Settlement Church

Complete records of the construction of St. Joseph's Church, better known as Starks Settlement, are still in the hands of Charles Stark of Newhall, a grandson of one of the pioneers, Andrew Stark, who donated the land where the church was located.

It was in May, 1878 when stone was hauled with teams of horses from Sutcliffes who lived on the west side of Cedar Rapids. This was used for the foundation and better stone was purchased at \$12.50 per carload from Anamosa. However, the wooden frame church was not completed until 1880 when the first mass was celebrated and became a mission of St. Patrick's of Fairfax. The first church in Fairfax was built in 1875, a distance of five miles between the two churches.

The five main pioneers responsible for building St. Joseph's church were: Andrew Stark, Firman Lucas, Chris Wieneke, Nicholas Stark, and Frank Vojs, now spelled Voss. In 1880 these same five raised \$50.00 among themselves and bought a few acres to the southwest for a cemetery, which is still known as St. Joseph's Cemetery, but was transferred to St. Jude's of Cedar Rapids at the time the church was closed in 1959. An additional sixty acres were purchased, to the south, from the O'Connell estate and now accomodates all the Catholics from the west side of Cedar Rapids and the surrounding area.

Other families who helped later with the organization and establishment of the church were the Gibneys, O'Connells, Donohues, Foxes, Farrells, Fritzes, Muellers, Ockenfels, Coolihans, and many others. The church was located one mile south and two miles east of Atkins and because of the proximity, many farmers in this area contributed to the growth of Atkins by their patronage. The church was located on what was known as "The Old Red Ball Highway." All labor towards the building of the church was donated with a few exceptions. Many fund raising events were held in the community. The Norway parish which was established in 1867 raised \$150, and many individual contributions were made

from 50¢ up. The lumber used amounted to \$973.81, and Rinderknecht Lumber Company donated \$5.00 worth.

An organ was purchased in 1885 for the sum of \$75.00, and Catherine Stark Schottmer was organist for a period of forty years until the closing of the church in 1959. She was the ~~gran-~~daughter of John Stark and the granddaughter of pioneer Andrew Stark.

It was during World War I that this community gave the life of one of its sons by the name of Ralph O'Connell, and another name was added during World War II, that of Henry Adam Stark, who was killed in "The Battle of the Bulge." He was the son of C. H. Stark and grandson of Andrew Stark.

Those who dedicated their life to the service of God were Rev. Joseph D. Murrin and Rev. Robert Henry who served in the Phillippines. Although, Rev. R. Henry was not a native son, he was befriended by the Lee O'Connell family who made it possible for him to complete his studies for the priesthood. A daughter of the Lee O'Connells entered the order of the Sisters of Mercy and is known as Sister Mary Brigid. At present she is teaching the Montessori Method to the poor in Kansas City. Bing Miller, in "The Baseball Hall of Fame" was a grandson of Andrew Stark.

The interior of the church was renovated in 1936. The main altar was flanked by two side altars which were placed there at a later date and donated by Misses Anna and Emma Stark, daughters of Nicholas Stark.

Several weddings took place in this church, one was that of Miss Emma Stark, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Stark, to Russel Ard of Cedar Rapids. The priest officiating at their marriage was Rev. J. J. Buzynski and one of the altar boys was Francis Daniel Voss, son of Francis J. Voss and great grandson of Frank Vojs. At the time of this writing Francis D. Voss is 52 years old and the father of five children and is still farming in the community. Another wedding which was a special event was the double

wedding of Charles Stark and his sister Catherine.

Due to the decline of membership and the hardship of the priest to serve during the winter months, the mission church was closed in 1959 when Rev. Bernard White was pastor. The land reverted to the C. H. Stark family.

There are over twenty families now living in the town of Atkins who are affiliated with St. Paul's Catholic Church in Newhall. There are only two descendants of the pioneers of Starks Settlement making their home here. Mrs. Melvin Semmelroth and her family, a great granddaughter of Andrew Stark and Mrs. Francis J. Voss, whose husband was the grandson of Frank Vojs (Voss).