

St. Thomas Church will celebrate anniversary

Parish turns 125, building turns 100 this year

By Carrie McDermott • Daily News

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Parishoners will celebrate the rich history of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Kent, Minn., Sunday, June 19.

Daily News file photo



A special anniversary celebration will be held Sunday, June 19 at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Kent, Minnesota. The parish celebrates 125 years and the church building turns 100 this year.

A mass at 10 a.m. will be held with Bishop Donald Kettler of St. Cloud, Minnesota, and Father Joe Backowski, the parish priest. Dinner will be served following mass, and a special welcome will be given to past members. Kristi Bevens is the pastoral associate and resides in the rectory on site.

Bonnie Wold, member of the parish, said anyone is welcome to join current and past members in the celebration.

The history of St. Thomas Parish is closely related to the history of

the early days in the Red River Valley, Fort Abercrombie, and the town of McCauleyville. The fort was built in 1857 and when David McCauley opened a store on the east side of the river in 1864, the McCauleyville settlement sprang up.

The first Mass was said in 1865 when a three-day mission was held for the soldiers and the few white settlers in the area. Several other priests came as missionaries in the next decade.

The fort was dismantled in 1880, at which time different nationalities were settling in the area. People of various faiths worshipped in the same building, originally a schoolhouse. The parishioners finally decided to build a church in 1885, which was located where the Jerome Haire, Sr., house later stood. The church's builder was John Kuehn, an uncle of the Lennartz family. The bell was donated by the Anton Weling and has sounded for church services ever since.

The new church, built in Kent, Minnesota, was constructed of lumber at a cost of \$12,000 and was placed under the patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas. It was completed in 1904 and dedicated on June 24 with the Right Rev. Bishop Trobec officiating. The church was devastated by a fire in 1915, but Father John Schritz risked his life to save the Blessed Sacrament. The parish house and school building were saved by firefighters.

A building committee was eventually formed to construct a new church of bricks at a cost of \$17,000. With furnishings, the total cost was \$23,729.25. The cornerstone was laid June 18, 1916 with ceremonies conducted by Bishop Joseph F. Busch, D.D. of St. Cloud. While it was being constructed, the parish used the school as a temporary chapel.

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church is located at 114 Harris St., Kent, Minnesota.

Historical information provided by the Wilkin County Historical Society.