



A Brief History of
the Church of St.
John the Baptist in
Minneota Township,
Jackson County,
Minnesota

The Catholic mission church of St. John the Baptist was located 8 miles south of Lakefield in the northeast corner of section 17 of Minneota Township. On June 1st, 1893 Mr. August Albertus and Mr. Schiek, realtors at Jackson, Minnesota, donated to the Catholic settlers in Minneota township twenty acres of land. It was deeded then to the Slovanic Association, a fraternal organization, and later to the Diocese of Winona. The settlers were determined to erect a church at the site. (It is interesting to note that the twenty acres just to the west of this parcel belongs to the Lutheran Slovak parish and they have their cemetery there, so perhaps they received this land in the same manner as the Catholic settlers did.) Four acres of land were reserved for a future church building and associated cemetery. The first interment at the cemetery was on October 12th, 1896.

Up to this time the Catholic settlers affiliated with the Catholic Church of St. Wenceslaus in Jackson, Minnesota which began in 1893 with Mass once a month. There was no resident priest, but the parish was attended by priests from Wells and Fairmont, Minnesota. (As a result, early church records of baptism, death, etc. are to be found at the Catholic parishes in Wells and Fairmont. It was not until 1895 the records were kept at Jackson.) The country at that time was still mostly uncharted prairie with just lanes for roads. The distance to Jackson, (thirteen miles today) was considerable and when traveled by oxen or horse teams was time consuming. To attend services in Jackson often required a start at sunrise and a return at sunset.

Later and previous to the erection of the church, priests would come from Jackson and hold services for the Catholic settlers of the Minneota area in a local school or private homes. By 1901 there were some forty Catholic families in the area and they decided to erect a church. Construction began the week of April 13th and by summer the building was used for services. Bishop Cotter of Winona dedicated the building on September 25th, 1902. The priests of St. Wenceslaus parish in Jackson held services at St. John the Baptist once a month.

By 1912, the Catholic parish of St. Joseph was established in Lakefield, Minnesota and it was at this time that the St. John the Baptist community became a mission of the Lakefield parish. From this time onward, all church records were maintained at St. Joseph's in Lakefield. In 1924 the St. Joseph parishioners along with those of St. John the Baptist built a new church in Lakefield. It was at this time that the parishioners at St. John the Baptist decided that services at St. John the Baptist would be held every other Sunday.

Because of good roads and a lack of priests, Bishop Waters of Winona ended services at St. John the Baptist and merged the mission with the parish of St. Joseph's in Lakefield in 1977. Because of liability concerns the parish removed the building and erected a small memorial to the church at the site in which hangs the original bell of the church which now welcomes visitors to the still active cemetery of St. John the Baptist.



A recent photograph of St. John the Baptist Cemetery. This is a view looking south from the site of the old church building. The cemetery sits on a windswept hill with a large crucifix crowning the hilltop. It is a good example of a prairie cemetery.



Another picture of the cemetery including the graves along the eastside.