

History of St. Joseph Parish, continued.

1923 - 2003

Jesuits travel to Polk from Tampa



In 1890 Father Philip de Carriere, S.J., celebrated the first area Mass in Haines City. Fr. Carriere was the 11th pastor of St. Louis in Tampa. In attendance were Mr. and Mrs. Bannon and two Italians who were working to build the railroad which did so much to populate this part of the state. Fr. de Carriere returned two years later to baptize Bridgett Mary Bannon, who would later become Sister Anthony with the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Augustine. Next, in 1895, Fr. Theophilede Beurme, S.J. celebrated Mass in the Bannon home. Bannon planned to offer \$500.00 - a huge sum at that time- to build a church in Haines City, but this was not yet to be. Two of the Bannon grandchildren still live in Florida. Eileen O'Leary lives in Haines City and Patrick O'Leary lives in Jacksonville.

Three other Jesuits from Tampa, Fathers Firmin Ybarrechevea, Conrad Widman and Louis LeBlanc, visited Winter Haven between 1894 and 1902. At this time a few Catholic settlers lived on the outskirts of what would become Winter Haven. It is unclear if these priests celebrated Mass in the area, though supposedly they did. As one historian has said, "much is lost in the mists of time."