

A Peak Inside an 1850s Church

Recently, I found a page written in gothic cursive in our oldest baptismal register. Dr. Esther Bauer translated this 1858 document for us. This sacristy and church inventory is written in impeccable Bavarian, probably by missionary pastor John Baptist Haslbauer, and it provides an interesting contrast to the original state of affairs.

The Original State of Affairs

The future archbishop, Rev. Mr. Michael Heiss brought Rev. Dr. Joseph Salzmann to St. Boniface Mission on October 14, 1847. Here's what Dr. Salzmann, the new pastor, saw:

"We arrived at the church which is really nothing more than a log house. It is 12 paces long and 7 ½ paces wide and so low that it is possible to touch the ceiling with the chalice at the elevation. Several lathes nailed onto the wall comprise the altar, and two boards serve as a platform. The tabernacle is a brown box standing alone, and an old glass painting is used as an altar crucifix, better ones being found in the homes of the farmers. Add to this a red woolen cloth hanging on the rear wall and five very simple pictures on black paper and you have the complete furnishings of the church. The sacristy contained a small empty bookcase, an old red vestment, two surplices and nothing else: no ciborium, no censor, no monstrance." (Sources: A Noble Priest-Joseph Salzmann, 45-46; Volksblatt, Linz, Upper Austria (#7), July 17, 1848, by Albert von Pflugl)

Dr. Salzmann began the construction of a wooden frame church in 1850. It was never finished and had tipped over by the time Rev. Dr. Franz Xavier Paulhuber arrived in 1851. Dr. Paulhuber took-up the project completing construction of a 40' x 80' brick church at a cost of \$1500. The Ludwig-Missionsverein donated \$400 toward the building, the parishioners paid \$300 upfront with an \$800 debt remaining. The new church was dedicated by Bishop Henni on Nov. 2, 1853.

Ten Years Later

By 1858, the sacristy and church included the following items:

- A monstrance
- A ciborium and a chalice
- 2 vestments
- 2 cruets (messbecher)
- 5 more vestments
- 3 albums (missals)
- 2 robes
- An old and a new altar cloth
- A communion cloth (The altar rail would be covered with a long cloth for communion. The communicants kneeling at rail placed their hands on top of the cloth and then the servers folded the other half of the cloth over the top of the communicants' hands.)
- 8 small chalice clothes
- 4 corporals plus 4 small linen remnants for 6 corporals
- 6 small towels
- 9 small chalice cloths(purificators)
- 5 red and 6 white robes for altar servers



- 2 blue and 2 black collars
- A parchment
- 6 gold plated candlesticks and one gold plated cross;
- 8 small brass candlesticks and six wooden ones; another cross;
- 3 small bells
- 6 flower bunches and six flower pots
- a tabernacle
- 2 altar cloths for the side altars
- 2 standards and one flag
- A cross for funerals
- An incense burner and small thurible
- 2 plates
- A holy water font and a aspergil
- A large and 8 small paintings



So how did a small congregation of pioneers acquire the more expensive of these items, some of which may not have even been manufactured in the United States? They were probably donated by the Ludwig-Missionsverein, the Leopoldinen Stiftung or the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Our early missionaries were tied to all three: the Bavarians to the Ludwig-Missionverein; the Austrians to the Leopoldinen Stiftung and the French priest, Mauclerc, to the Society. These organizations were known for supplying personnel, finances and the material items needed by the fledgling missions throughout the Midwestern frontier.

None of these items remain. They wore out, were replaced as part of one of the remodeling jobs, or burnt with the church in 1954. The chalice, monstrance and altar cross pictured here are typical of what was designed in the 1850s. Ours may have looked differently especially if one of the parishes in Europe contributed items from their older unused stock to one of the mission societies.

Fr. Mike