

Our Parish School

By Liz Kissel

St. Martin Parish celebrates its centennial this year, however, St. Martin School is only 99 years old since it did not open until the 1912-13 school year. But how can we talk about the history of St. Martin Parish without talking about the school? The school was part of the plan from the earliest discussions about starting a parish, both from the standpoint of the early parishioners as well as the Archdiocese which encouraged parish schools. What better way to instill the Catholic faith in children than to expose them at every opportunity in their formative years.

The pastor, Father Auer, invited the Sisters of Notre Dame from Covington, Kentucky, to run the new school. With construction of the red brick church-school building underway in 1912, there was much anticipation for the start of that first school year. However, the building was not quite ready in September for the start of classes. A temporary solution was to move the Blessed Sacrament from the church to the sacristy after morning Mass and then turn the little wood frame church into a classroom. As children know, kneelers make perfectly good seats. By sitting on the kneelers facing backward and using the pews as their desks, they were ready to learn. Sr. Mary Anicetis (the first principal) and Sr. Mary Edmund taught the older children in the church, while Sr. Mary Bridget took the first and second graders outside during good weather. When it got cold and inclement, they retreated into a large frame building rented from the Kessen family on what is now church property near the corner of Harding and Glenmore Avenues. The sisters traveled back and forth from Covington by streetcar until their new quarters were ready.

The students finally moved into their new school on November 11, 1912, the feast day of St. Martin of Tours. An additional sister came, Sr. Mary Ligouri, and the eight grades were divided into the four classrooms on the first floor, each classroom



containing two grades. During many years of the school's existence, there have been "split" classes consisting of a combination of students from two different grades.

Within a few years, more classrooms were needed for the growing enrollment. The sisters relocated to a house on St. Martin Place in order to open up the second floor of the school for classrooms. The school continued to grow along with the population of Cheviot as new streets and subdivisions were built. In 1927, a wood frame colony school building was added in the area now occupied by the newer wing of the yellow brick school.



Sister Mary Clea with boys on playground and colony building in background. This is the only photo we have of the colony school, courtesy of Bob Reiner

Some people laughingly describe it as a barracks, some as a quonset hut. A number of long time parishioners recall being in the colony for the primary grades and then moving to the red school building for the upper grades.

The ever increasing enrollment resulted in the construction of the first wing of the yellow brick school to replace the colony building. It was designed by Edward Schulte and cost \$200,000. On May 4, 1950, the cornerstone was laid as part of the May Crowning celebration. The school building was dedicated with much fanfare on August 4, 1951. A new wing of equal size was opened in time for the 1963 school year to add even more classrooms plus other needed space such as the library.

In 1960, there were 890 students. By that time, many of baby boomers were of school age. However, as the population of children began to decline in general, and Catholic children in particular, school enrollment declined. In addition, changes in the demographics of Cheviot and increased cost for tuition over the years have impacted the enrollment. In 1995, a Kindergarten was introduced. By 2004, the classrooms in the red school building were no longer needed for the school and have been used instead for other parish functions such as meetings. Today there are 216 students at St. Martin School, including a number who are not Catholic.

1916 first grade class



Msgr John Metzdorf at cornerstone laying for yellow school building