

*John Duder*  
TR Museum

## HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, TABLE ROCK, NEBRASKA

This is December, 1989. I am John Duder making a copy of several pages that I recently discovered among Duder family papers. These were written in long-hand by my mother Mary L. Duder. We are not certain now what prompted her to do so. The one part she must have researched herself in the time frame of 1953-1962. The other appears to have been copied from old records.

### ST. JOHN'S TABLE ROCK

The Rev. A.C. Rausch was appointed pastor of the three missions of Table Rock, Humboldt and Odell in 1881 by Bishop O'Connor of Omaha. Table Rock was the only one of the three places that had a church and it had a debt of \$143, which after a house-to-house canvas Father Rausch paid off in 1883.

Since there was no rectory at any of the missions, Father Rausch boarded at the homes of various parishioners until the fall of 1881 when he took up his residence with the Rev. James McNally at Tecumseh. Bishop O'Connor visited Table Rock in 1884, confirming 24 persons.

Joseph Miller, the eldest parishioner of St. John's says he thinks John Dufek and Pete Muller were the founders.

Mrs. Lena Mertes recalls that the lot on which the church was built was donated by her Uncle, Joe Zelenka and Vincent Clema.

In 1882 the first marriage took place when Peter Muller married Mary McBride. Mrs. Sue Phillips was one of the guests and said it was a very lovely wedding.

Joseph Miller recalls that his first instructor in Catechism was Father Rausch. In 1882 he attended with Frank Duder, William Miller, Rudolph Riatora, Jake and John Reuter. At noon these boys and some girls whose names he does not recall ate lunch at a restaurant located on the present site of the Frank Sochor residence..

Joseph Reuter another of the parishioners was two years of age when the church was built. His father Joseph Reuter and Pete Muller came to this country together.

He attended religious instruction class with Bert, Josie and Annie Blacklaw. He received his first holy Communion August 25, 1889. Father Philip Maly was then pastor and the certificate shows it was called St. Wenceslaus church at the time. He thinks the name of St. John's was used some years later when the parish was served by a priest from Steinauer.

Mr. Joseph Reuter and two other men bought a lot near the church with the hope of having a resident pastor and constructing a rectory but when those plans failed to materialize they sold the lot and used the means gained thereby to improve the interior of the building which was scarcely more than a shell at first.

Theodore Grof who had come here from Luxembourg and liked the country returned to his native land recounting to his relatives and friends the many opportunities offered here. He induced quite a number to accompany him here some of whom were Nick and Pete Goodenkauf, Jim and Dominic Mertes and his sister Catherine Grof. They were welcomed into the Joseph Reuter home until they could establish themselves in the new land.

Catherine Grof worked in the home of Orval Howe's grandmother where she learned many things including the native tongue. She married Dominic Mertes about a year later.

The choir was composed of men namely Pete Huffman, organist who lived where Peter Jaska now resides. Singers were Nick and Peter Goodenkauf, Dom Mertes and Theodore Grof.

The Chatraw and Gondringer families were another of the early members.

Two daughters of early families joined the order of the Sisters of St. Francis. One was Julia Duder who left at the age of twenty-one and served in the religious life twenty six years until her death in 1916 at Lafayette, Indiana. Her name in religion was Sister Mary Siegfrieda.

The other was a sister of Joseph Miller whose given name was Anna. She was named Sister Kristine. For many years she served in St. Elizabeth's hospital in Lincoln. She also retired and passed away in the 1920's at Lafayette, Indiana.

Mass was held about once a month in the early days. Later twice a month and in more recent years every Sunday and Holy day.

Table Rock's St John's became a mission of Burchard in 1909. Pastors serving since then are Fathers James Gilroy 1909-10; Jeremias Cronin 1910-1914; O.N. Turgeon 1914-1921; Joseph Blacha 1922-24; Wm. T. McKenna 1924-1931; Paul Donavan 1931; P.F. Quilligan 1931-1933; J.A. Kean 1933-1937, Joseph Ress 1937; P.J. O'Leary 1937-1942; John Flynn 1942; Alois Reibold 1942-1947; E.A. Valasek 1947-1954; and present Pastor Father Gregory J. Petrus who came in 1953.

Remodelling was done in 1932 and in 1952 redecorating of the interior took place.