

*St. Clements Catholic Parish
Bankston, Iowa
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The History of St. Clements Catholic Parish and its Community

In the early 1850's, Bishop Matthias Loras traveled through the Bankston area on horseback (St. Clements Parish was not organized at this time). He visited with many of the settlers; which were mostly of whom had come from Ireland, there were also some from Germany and Luxemburg. Many of these settlers frequented mass at the French Settlement 10 miles northeast; which some had walked to and from, while others went by horse and buggy. This church is now the Rickardsville Parish in Rickardsville, Dubuque County, Iowa.

It is believed that Father McGauran named St. Clements Parish after Bishop Clement Smyth. This was to stop the confusion of the many various names Bankston had from 1851 to 1869 when St. Clements became the official name of the parish.

In the first one hundred years of Existence, St. Clements has had 12 Pastors. The first was the Reverend Dr. John Alyward who organized St. Clements Parish in 1860. He arrived in Bankston in 1859 and stayed until November 11, 1860; when he left to become a Professor at the Sinsinawa Boy's College. Rev. Dr. Alyward said his first mass at Maurice Kirby's house, which was just west of the church grounds. Many masses were then said at Maurice Kirby's house; until a church could be built. The church would be built a short distance from Mr. Kirby's house, on land which was donated by Mr. Kirby. This included land for the cemetery.

There were many settlers that assisted in building the first church, which was erected in 1859. This building was a white frame building, which was big enough to seat 400 parishioners. Some of the settlers were: Maurice Kirby, James Kirby, Nicholas Ferring, Timothy Murray, Francis Duggan, Isaac Sullivan, T. Kelley, J. Casey, Patrick O'Connor, W. Hegarty, M. Hegarty, and M. Daly. Other settlers that helped were: J. Daly, Maurice Hartnett, M. Kennedy, O. McMahon, A. Kane, M. Quirk, M. Foley, R. Barry, J. Dunn, J. Coleman, J. Leahy, J. Callahan, J. Vanderscheid, J. Thielen, J. Guery, J. Heiberger, Owen Duggan, Isaac Duggan, J. Roach, J. McDonald, P. Lyons, George Wolf, M. Hogan, J. Cotter, J. Mallon, J. Callahan, M. Mahoney, P. Kerrin, A. Smith, and O. O'Hare.

After Rev. Dr. Alyward left in 1860, the Reverend Andrew Joseph Bennett took over November 8, 1860 until December 16, 1864, when he passed away. Rev. Bennett was the first Pastor to die at St. Clements, and is buried in the church cemetery. He established a school

here, which at one time was conducted by a brother and otherwise by lay teachers. Father Andrew Bennett was known as the Pioneer Priest. Reverend Charles J. McGauran became pastor at this time until 1867 when he left to become the priest at Farley.

In about 1876 at the cost of about \$3200; a house was built for the Priest. This dwelling was a splendid two-story brick house fit for a worthy Priest and an honor to his congregation. Reverend James B. McGowan was a young and zealous priest, who was Pastor of this fine congregation at this time. A 1200 pound bell and steeple were added to the church a little later. The bell was a donation by one of the ladies of the congregation. Father McGowan left St. Clements in 1882.

In the 1890's community buildings located just East of the church (and across the road), included a Forrester's Hall and 2 stores. One store was owned by Michael Ferring and the other was owned by Larry Duggan. These stores are no longer in existence. On the hill the little church yard had gravestones dating back to 1855.

Father Banfield first covered the parish with a high stepping horse pulling buggy. When Father Banfield arrived in late 1893, Bankston was a small rural community that consisted of three or four houses and a store, which were about one mile northeast of the present site.

Since 1858, Bankston has had a resident pastor, until 2001. Although years earlier Missionaries said mass in the pioneer cabins.

It was said that the church site was chosen for travelers on the old Fort Atkinson-Dubuque military road, might stop and take a break from their journey with a prayer, as well as its convenience on the farm population. Shortly after his arrival Father Banfield began talking about a new church to replace the old white frame church that was built by the early settlers. To summon parishioners to church, Father would pull the bell rope.

The present church, which is of Gothic architecture, was built in 1898 and was completed in 1900. The Father William Banfield had this 52x130 feet brick and Bedford cut stone church erected, with a 150 foot bell tower. The new church had pointed arches, murals, three gold and white altars, a pipe organ, and lighting, which was superior to those churches in many small cities. This new church could seat 400 parishioners. The cost of the church was about \$30,000 during a depression. This was when materials were cheap and men worked for \$2.00 a day. The men of the parish did most of the work, while the ladies held suppers, bazaars and also social's to help meet the cost of building the new parish.

Father Banfield is accredited for building the church, the school, rectory, gymnasium, and hall (all present ones). Father Banfield gladly helped with his own hands. In the fall of 1906, construction of St. Clements School was started and opened in 1908 to grades first through eighth. This school had three Mercy Sisters, Sister Mary Genevieve R.S.M., Sister Scholastica R.S.M., and Sister Loyola R.S.M. and Miss Ellen Close whom was the lay teacher.

The school (in present Bankston) was the first one in the parish which was built for about \$40,000. In 1914, St. Clements High School opened its doors to ten students. This school had four class rooms, a Chapel, the living quarters of the Sisters and an auditorium. The auditorium was used for all parish activities. Later in 1920 enrollment for the twelve-grade school was 112 students with 7 sisters, a third floor was completed which served as the convent for the sisters. Father Banfield formerly taught American History and Economics, with the new school he taught dogma, scriptures, and morals. It was an accredited school that the Sisters of Mercy of Dubuque taught at. Including the church activities the school had girls and boys basketball and baseball teams. It also had 4-H clubs. Establishing the school was his most satisfying experience in his 54 years at St. Clements.

In August, 1959, St. Clements High School closed and the students started attending St. Joseph's High School in Farley. This ended 41 years of high school activities at St. Clements, Bankston. The grade school continued for about another 34 years closing its doors for good in 1993.

The little red brick house that was built by the parishioners for their pastor back about 1876 was replaced in 1936 with an eight room, brick rectory at the cost of \$14,000. The last priest to live in the rectory was Father Paul Weis. Father Paul died in 2001 while serving as Pastor at St. Clements. Today the rectory is used for Religious Education classes.

In 1947 the gymnasium was completed at the cost of \$15,000. This project was the latest project and the closest to Father Banfield's heart. This was another phase of the young priests dream, the church as a community center. This was also a part of the old world tradition. The gymnasium had basketball nets and volleyball courts on the top floor and on the bottom floor was where the social and meeting rooms.

On November 17, 1952, Reverend William Banfield, celebrated his sixtieth sacerdotal anniversary, with a Mass of Thanksgiving. This mass was offered by the Jubilarian at 10:00 o'clock at St. Clements Church. Hundreds of friends and parishioners attended the celebration, which also had an open house in his honor. Rt. Reverend Msgr. M.M. Hoffman, head of the Dyersville deanery, delivered the sermon on "The Rural Pastor".

At the age of 80, Father Banfield was still coaching the teams with the aid of a few young people. Today the gymnasium can be rented for gatherings and is still used for Bankston's Lenten Friday night Fish Fry.

Father Banfield served St. Clements Parish for 60 years. It is mentioned in his file, at the Archdiocese of Dubuque, that he was sent to St. Clements temporarily and was to wait for the Bishop to send for him. Over 60 years later he was still waiting. He had served his entire priestly life at St. Clements in Bankston. There also was no official letter of appointment in his file.

Reverend Banfield chose this diocese because it was close to his home in Cuba City, Wisconsin. Reverend Banfield had never missed a mass in his 60 years of serving St. Clements Parish, until Laetare Sunday of March, 1954, when he fell and broke his hip. He was then obliged to resign his pastoral duties to Reverend William Blessington.

In August, 1954, the Reverend William Mullen arrived in Bankston. During his five years as pastor of St. Clements many improvements were done to the parish.

In 1958, renovation of the church was begun. This included new wiring, floors, Stations of the Cross, and complete refreshment of the interior.

In May of 1960, parishoners of St. Clements had a triple celebration. The ceremony honoring the one hundredth anniversary of the parish, the fiftieth anniversary of the school and their former pastor, Reverend William Mullen's twenty-fifth ordination anniversary.

In 1964, a convent was built for the Sisters that taught at the school next door. The construction was done by many of the parishoners. The convent was built at the cost of \$20,000 and lots of many hours of donated labor. The convent includes a chapel, community room, reception room and an office which also includes the sleeping rooms. A garage is attached to the convent. Also in the summer of 1964 the parishoners attached a garage to the rectory.

In 1993 St. Clements Church received a new facelift. The interior was repainted and carpeting was added throughout the whole church. The outside was repainted as well. And a handicap entrance which included a ramp and railing was constructed in 1997.

Also in 1993 St. Clements School closed for good and the students were then bused to Farley, Epworth, or Peosta. The three centers formed the Seton Catholic School. The Epworth Center handles the kindergarten thru second grades, the Peosta Center has Pre-kindergarten and third thru fifth grades. And the Farley center has Pre-kindergarten and sixth thru eighth grades.

In 2000 St. Clements School was torn down. In its place was erected The Father Paul Weis Pavilion. This pavilion is used for many occasions such as, family reunions, Christmas's, and wedding receptions, and many other events.

In 1994 a new Altar was placed in the sacristy. In 2010 the old pulpit was replaced with a new one that matched the altar. The Entrance to the Cemetery received a new Entry gate in 2008. The bricks used came from the school after it was torn down.

The Sisters of Mercy came from Detroit and taught at Saint Clements School when it opened in 1908. There was a lay person and 3 Sisters. If the Sisters received more than \$50.00 per month for a salary they were lucky, if they received it. The parishioners were very kind and would bring the Sisters meat and potatoes.

In the early years, you could have called the living conditions a little primitive, there were no phones and no frills like they have now a days. The Sisters slept on the third floor of the school. There was very little heat in the bedrooms and at night the water that was sitting on the night stand would freeze. Classes were held on the second floor and in the basement were they would eat. The Sisters stayed the whole school year and then when the school year was done they would teach vocation school in Western Iowa before returning to Detroit, before coming back to Bankston for the next school year. The Sisters were truly very dedicated.

There is one Sister that stood out in the memories of many of the Parishioners, that was Sister Bernadette. She taught nearly all of Bankston and was there for many years.

In the 1930's basketball was introduced to St. Clements School by Sister Bernadette and Father Banfield.

The high school closed in 1959 and students were then sent to St. Joseph's in Farley. Later in the 1960's the Mercy Sisters quit their teaching in Iowa. After the Sister left a new convent was built in 1965. And the Presentation Sisters lived in the convent until May 29, 1981 when there was an auction at the convent. This was done after the Sisters moved to Farley and school was done for the summer.

In 2001 St. Clements and St. Joseph Parish in Farley started sharing a Priest. In 2008 Epworth and Placid would join Farley and Bankston and thus becoming St. Elizabeth Pastorate.

A Little History on the Town of Bankston

In the book "History of Dubuque County, 1880" it states that Willis Thompson, crossed the Mississippi River, on the ice, at Dubuque and remained there for a week, this date was January 1831. He stayed at the mines and then left to go back East and he returned in 1835 and stayed on Bankston's Prairie (later named Bankston). Other early pioneers that relocated to Bankston were: Colonel John Bankston (whom the town was named after), John O'Connell, John Kirby, Timothy Murray, William Hagerty, Larry Duggan, and Michael Ferring (a German native). Bankston was official opened in 1835 in Section 9 of the Iowa township in Dubuque Count. Colonel John Bankston as well as Willis Thompson served in the Black Hawk War in 1832.

The first Post Office in Bankston was in Owen Duggan's store and it opened September 2, 1860, this is also where Owen served as postmaster. There also was a stagecoach that went to Peosta for a charge of 50 cents a trip. There was a small school here as well. Marvin Elgin now owns the land that the school and store used to be located at. By 1892 the Post office was moved from section 14 of the Iowa Township to section 9 of the Iowa Township. The Bankston post office closed in November 1902 when the Rural Free Delivery arrived and mail was then handled by a rural route carrier that came from Farley.

Michael Ferring (a German native) also owned a large store which was a place of interest to traveling salesmen, whom with team and buggy would travel to and from other stores in the county. He also had a large farm.

Mrs. Marguerite (nee Ernzen) Ferring was well known for her sympathetic ways with suffering neighbors and her fine cooking and great hospitality. When Nicholas Ferring passed away in 1849, Mrs. Ferring along with her children kept the store operating. They also built one of the first creameries in Bankston as well.

In the 1900's there was a tavern-grocery store, a fence supply building and a blacksmith shop, among other buildings.

In order to permit the sale of beer within the little town's limits, Bankston was incorporated in 1933. This was due to the Iowa Legislature Mandate. In December 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved a Work Progress Administration grant that provided for electricity, plumbing, and sewer facilities for a community building in Bankston. This grant also was for the improvement of the sidewalks and surrounding grounds.

In 1951 the town of Bankston was moved South 1 ½ miles to it's present location. Parts of this former town still stand today. The new location of Bankston consists of a Feed store and the Church grounds, and some houses. Today Bankston has a feed store and about 6 houses.

St. Clements's Daughters in Religion

Sister Mary Romana, (Catherine Thielen), Franciscan Order

Sister Mary Josephine, (Ellen Casey), Mercy Order

Sister Mary Josephine, (Elizabeth Hartnett), Visitation Convent

Sister Mary Francine, (Mary Leibold), Franciscan Order, La Crosse, Wisconsin

Sister Mary Ruth, (Alberta Sahm), Presentation Order, Dubuque, Iowa

Sister Mary Rita, (Catherine Teschler), Mercy Order, Detroit, Michigan

Sister John Marie, (Gladys Daly) Mercy Order, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Sister Mary Alphonsus, (Mildred Strief) Mercy Order, Detroit, Michigan

Sister Mary Rosalie, (Agnes Wolf), Franciscan Order, Dubuque, Iowa

Sister Mary Andre, (Mary Berns) Poor Clares, Rockford, Illinois

Sister Mary Ishmael, (Ellen Lattner) Poor Clare of Perpetual Adoration, Canton,

St. Clements's Sons in Religion

Reverend Joseph McDermott S.V.D. Catholic Mission, Alexishofen Madong, New Guinea

One of Bankston's own parishoners went on to become a Brother of the Glenmary Home Missionary of America from Cincinnati, Ohio. Born on April 7, 1945 Eugene Heisler went to school in Bankston and graduated from St. Joseph's High School in Farley, in 1963. He was a star athlete in high school. At the age of 18 it was discovered that he had cancer, the head of the Glenmary order, gave him permission to profess his vows in his home parish early. The head of the order and other members of the religious order came from Cincinnati, Ohio to St. Clements to conduct the ceremonies. Brother Peregrine professed his vows as a Glenmary Home Missionary on August 5th, 1963 at St. Clements in Bankston. He took the name of Brother Peregrine when he said his vows. He remained at his parent's home reciting daily the prayers said by the Glenmary Missionaries until his death in October 1963.