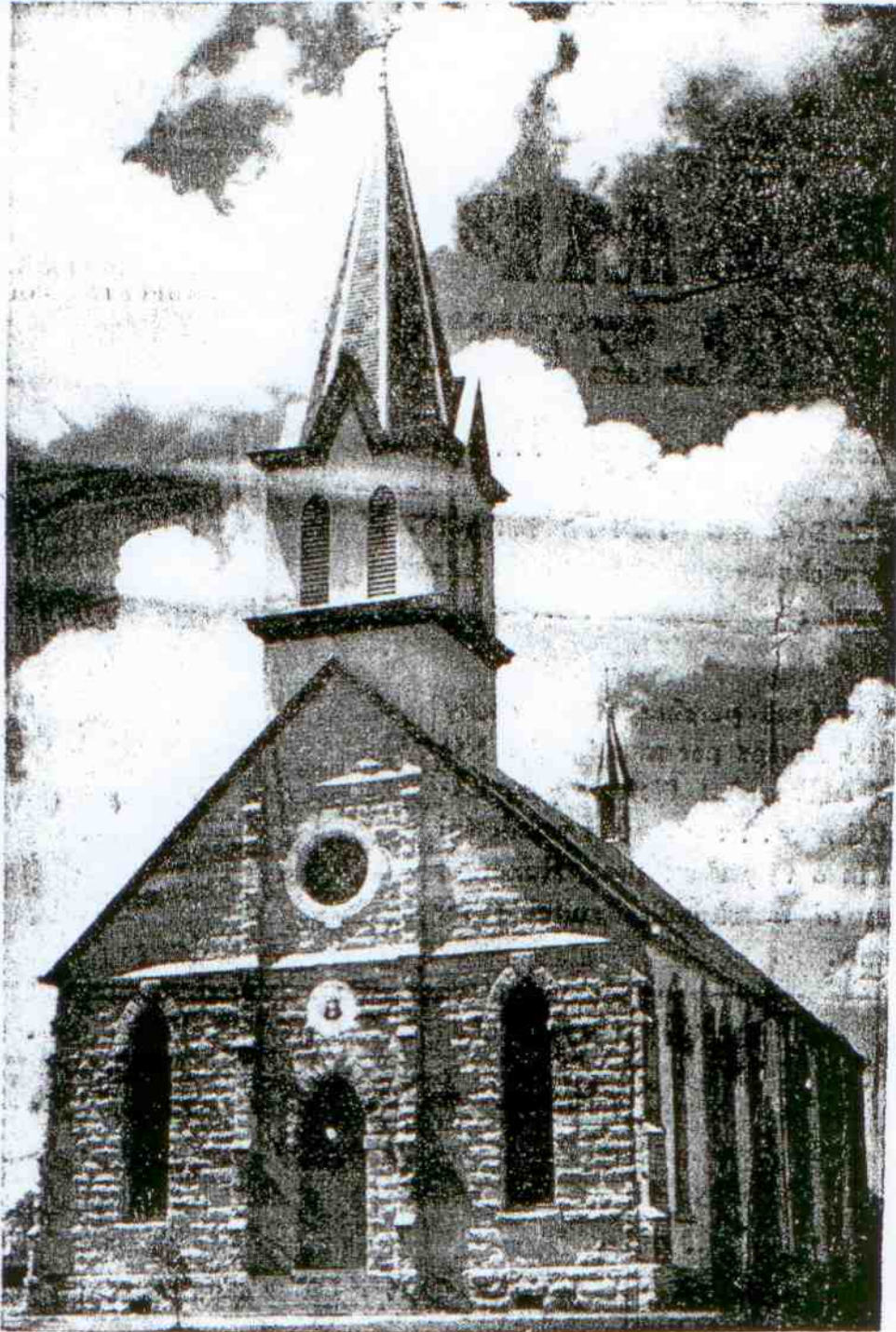


TUESDAY, AUGUST 16th, 1955

## CHURCH OF 100-YEAR-OLD PARISH



Above is St. Mary's Church as it stands today at Praha, upon the occasion of Praha parish's Centennial Celebration, Monday, August 15th. Around this church all-day festivities are taking place today.

## Praha Community From 1855 to 1955.

The first known Czech Catholic in the Praha community was Matthias Novak who settled here in 1855. The place was first known as Mulberry because of the nearness of Mulberry Creek. It had the nickname of Hottentot due to a pioneer outlaw element which eventually became extinct. The name of Praha originated about 1876. It appears on the church records first in 1884, and has survived its post office designation as New Prague dating from that year.

Father Victor Gury from Frelsburg attended periodically to the spiritual needs of the settlers and in 1864 and 1865, Father Joseph J. Martiniere from Hallettsville offered Mass occasionally in the Novak home. In 1865 a small frame hut was built in which Mass was first offered at midnight on Christmas Day by Father Joseph Bitkowski, a Bernardine Father laboring here under the jurisdiction of the Resurrectionist Missionaries who had come to Texas to minister especially to the Polish missions. He was the first resident priest and he remained a year and a half, serving also the missions of Bluff (Hostyn), Navidad (Dubina), High Hill, Ross Prairie and elsewhere, as was done by his successors at Praha until 1878. Already in 1866 he directed the building of a new church at Praha measuring 30 by 16 feet, and using lumber hauled by ox-wagon some 150 miles from Spring Branch, about 20 miles beyond Houston. Matthias Novak donated the church site, about 20 acres of the present parish property. The parish cemetery was also started in 1866.

Father Bitkowski was succeeded in April, 1868 by Father Felix Orzechowski, a Resurrectionist Missionary Father, who stayed only until September when he was followed by another priest of his Order, Father John Nep. von Frydrychowicz, who was pastor until June 1871. Then Father Paul Kraus, a German secular priest served the parish briefly until November, 1871. A young Moravian secular priest, Father Francis J. Antl, came in the meantime to try the Texas missions, but the July and August heat was too much for him. He returned to the Chicago archdiocese where he spent over fifty years in distinguished missionary and pastoral service.

From November, 1871 to the end of 1875, Father Clement Rogdzinski was pastor at Praha. Father Felix Dombrowski, who had been his assistant since January, 1873, succeeded him as pastor and served until March, 1879. In 1876, a new and larger frame church, measuring 66 by 36 feet, was dedicated under the title of the Assumption of the B. V. M. The old church became the sacristy and rectory. Father Francis A. Deuermeyer was the next pastor until Feb., 1880.

For about a year after this, Praha was left without a resident priest and was served monthly from Hallettsville by Father Francis C. Zak (Shea) who became in 1881, the first resident Czech pastor and served until October, 1894. In this time, he administered nearly two thousand baptisms, since, though its former missions were served from Praha since 1878, the faithful still came there from a wide radius including Moulton, Cistern, Flatonia, Engle, Moravia, and other smaller centers. The parish is estimated to have embraced some 700 families at one time. After leaving Texas in 1894, Father Zak (Shea) saw many years of service in Wisconsin and among the Slovaks of Pennsylvania until his death in retirement at La Crosse, Wisconsin, November 6th, 1924. Under Father Zak the construction of the present rock church was begun about 1890. It was completed under his successor, Father Julius V. Vrana, beautifully furnished by generous gifts from parishioners, and dedicated November 20, 1895.

**Father Vrana** came to Praha after five years of service at Hostyn (Bluff) and remained as pastor until the end of 1901 when he exchanged pastorates with Father Louis P. Netardus, pastor of Hallettsville. In 1904, Father Vrana left Texas for Pennsylvania where he died April 14th, 1955 at the age of 89. Under his administration the first Catholic school was built in 1896, mostly from the lumber of the old church. Sisters of Divine Providence taught here from that year until 1913, and since that date, the Sisters of Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament have been in charge. In the summer of 1897, Father Vrana began attending to Cistern monthly as a mission of Praha and later directed the building of the first church at Barton's Creek. He now alternated monthly Masses between the two missions, which was continued for the next five years by Father Netardus. During Father's Vrana's absence in Europe in 1898, Father Stanislaus Niedbalski administered the parish for four months, immediately after his first solemn Mass here. In 1901, Fathers Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B., and Bartholomow Kvittek, O.S.B., of Lisle, Ill., gave a mission in the parish.

**Father Netardus** was pastor at Praha from the beginning of 1902 until November, 1919, and baptized nearly 1,500 souls. When deaneries were first designated in the diocese he was made dean of the district. Once again in 1912, Praha became a mother parish when Father Netardus had a church built at Flatonia and served it as a mission as long as he was pastor. Soon afterwards, it became a separate parish and Praha has been without a mission since that time. Under his administration, a brick rectory was built in 1906. In 1911 two acres of land were bought at the rear of the church; the cemetery was enlarged by more than three acres, donated by Joseph Bily, and an ornamental iron fence was erected around the cemetery. Father F. X. Lepsa, C.S.R., gave a mission in 1912.

After a short vacancy, Father Bedrich (Fred) Neubert was appointed pastor in January, 1920. Under his charge the present two-story parish hall was built in 1922, and the present frame rectory replaced the older brick building in 1927. In 1926 the four-acre corner site of the State school adjacent to the church property was bought for this parish.

**Father Neubert** became seriously ill in 1929 and lingered for several months, but death came on April 7th, 1930 and he lies buried at Praha. During his illness, the parish was served by neighboring priests except that in February, 1930, Father Anthony Rehor, C.S.R., from Czechoslovakia gave a mission and then took care of the parish intermittently until Easter Monday. During the ensuing vacancy of six weeks Father Alois J. Morkovsky served the parish on the last four Sundays from St. John's Seminary, while Father Matthew J. Gilbert similarly attended Weimar from the Seminary during the illness of Father Szymanski.

**Father John A. Anders** was appointed resident pastor of Praha in June, 1930 and served until the end of 1944. Under his charge in 1930 the old rock church was stuccoed and some 500 feet of sidewalk was laid on the church grounds. In 1934, the cemetery was again enlarged and in that year also the Sisters began to teach in the State school as well as in the parish school. Father Anders was elected State school trustee for several terms. In 1926, a new parish school, 80 by 64 feet was erected, and about 1938 a large pavillion replaced an open platform, dating from 1927.

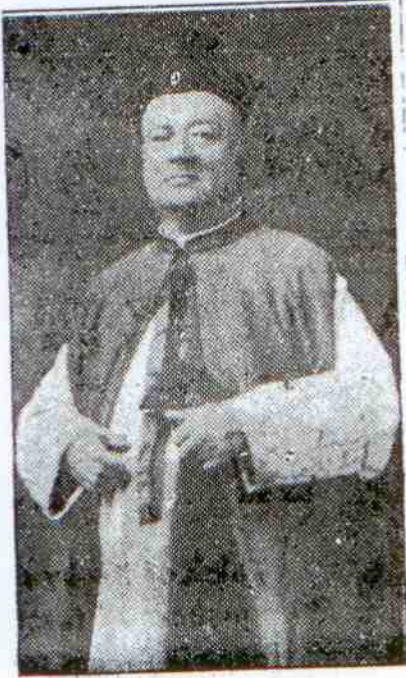
**Father Alfons Raska** succeeding Father Anders, was pastor from February, 1945, until his death in December, 1948. He was buried at Praha on the same day as the mother of Father Edmund Bily. Under his administration a Butane heating system was installed in the church and rectory, and four chapels were erected on the grounds in honor of the war dead of the parish and for use in the Corpus Christi procession which, according

to long-standing tradition, is observed with great solemnity, as is also the annual parish feast on August 15th, a giant homecoming without parallel.

**Father Leo E. Pesek** was assistant at Praha from June, 1945 to October 10, 1946 and **Father Benedict Pruski** briefly in 1948 on account of **Father Raska's** failing health. Immediately upon **Father Raska's** death, **Father Francis Kolar, S.V.D.**, was appointed administrator and served until June, 1949. He was a Moravian missionary from British India on leave after 14 years of labor there. He was succeeded by the present pastor, **Father Julius A. Petru**, June 15, 1949.

Praha community has had many religious, benevolent, and cultural organizations. It is almost entirely Catholic and comprises about 200 families. The parish still includes a number of old centers: Engle dating from 1885; Kaznic(h)ov from 1870, Grfeve school district from 1882, known as Pesek school previous to 1892; and Novohrad from 1876. Novohrad school, about four miles south of Praha, dates from 1882 and has had Czech Catholic teachers for almost 65 years, among them **F. A. Parma**, who was their director at Praha for a long period and was supreme president of the K.J.T. for 25 years, and **W. J. Janeczek**, who was supreme secretary of the K.J.T. for many years until his death.

Vocations have been numerous in this community. There are **Father Edmund Bily** (ord. March 19th, 1936), **Father Václav J. Bily** (ord. March 20, 1939), **Fathers Jerome Stryk** and **Francis Kalina** (ord. December 21, 1944), **Fathers Ladislaus Jasek** and **Edward Bily** (ord. May 30, 1951). There are also the following natives of this parish who entered the Seminary from other parishes: **Rt. Rev. John E. Morkovsky**, **Very Rev. Anthony F. Drozd**, **Rev. Frank J. Dobias**, and **Rev. Theofil Okruhlik, O.M.I.** At the present time there are three young men of the parish studying for the priesthood; **John C. Bily**, **Alfred Stryk**, and **Patrick Jasek**. Praha has given 34 Sisters to various religious orders. These are: **Sister M. Agnes Anderle**, **Sister M. Hedwig Bily**, **Sister M. Ludmila Bily**, **Sister Rita Rose Bily**, **Sister M. Stanislaus Bily**, **Sister M. Victoria Bily**, **Sister M. Alberta Bija**, **Sister M. Rufina Blahuta**, **Sister M. Sophie Braneky**, **Sister M. Agata Dusek**, **Sister M. Gabriel Gajdos**, **Sister M. Bernadette Kalina**, **Sister M. Joan of Arch Kalina**, **Sister M. Rebecca Kalina**, **Sister M. Rogata Kalina**, **Sister M. Genevieve Krenek**, **Sister M. Methodia Mikulik**, **Sister M. Gerard Kubicek**, **Sister M. Alphonse Kubenka**, **Sister M. Bernadette Lala**, **Sister M. Regina Lev**, **Sister M. Roberta Lev**, **Sister M. Frances Mares**, **Sister M. Stanislaus Migl**, **Sister M. Veronica Neskoric**, **Sister M. Cyprian Okruhlik**, **Sister Eustacia Okruhlik**, **Sister M. Monica Okruhlik**, **Sister M. Agnes Pospisil**, **Sister Jane Frances Rudolph**, **Sister M. Eudoxia Smetak**, **Sister M. Bernard Stryk**, **Sister M. Loretta Tupa**, and **Oblate Rose Okruhlik**.



**MSGR. L. P. NETARDUS**

Pastor at Praha from 1902 to 1919. The parish grew both in souls and materially during his leadership and spiritual guidance.



**REV. JOHN A. ANDERS**

Former pastor, who is credited with having much to do with making Praha Parish what it is today.



**REV. JULIUS A. PETRU**  
Present pastor of Praha Parish.