Sights and Sounds

March 7, 2019

For the Month of March

Birthdays		Perpetual Vows	
March 29	Fr. Eugene Warnke	March 19	Br. Walter De Mong (62)

Community Days
The dates for our June, 2019 Community Days have been changed. Please mark on your calendar the *new dates: June 20 & 21.*

Trinity Manor
Please join us for our next coffee gathering on Thursday, March 14, 2019 at 3:00 pm. See you there!!

News from the Treasurer's Office:

- Alex and Vincent, from the Audit Team of Marcil Lavallee are on site and working hard. All is going well!
- It is hard to believe that March 2019 has arrived! The Treasurer's office is hoping that Members of the SDC Community begin to complete their first quarter financial report so that they are able to send their report into the Treasurer's Office no later than April 25th, 2019.
- ***Congratulations to the SDC District Members****: This week the SDC office received the 2018/19 SGI Business Recognition Assessment. SGI determined that based on our claims history a **discount of 12%** will apply to our fleet of vehicles registered in Saskatchewan. Congratulations on achieving this award SDC Drivers!*

Submitted by Corrine and Fr. Paul

Queen's House News – Brendan Bitz

This is the time of the year when thoughts and hearts turn to springtime and the explosion of new life that this season brings with it. So too here at Queen's House as we prepare for our **Annual Spring Fling Lottery 2019**. This is an important component of our fundraising efforts and the benefits of this raffle assist us with the work of your mission and ministry as it lives here at, through and with Queen's House. We invite you to play, and welcome your assistance in encouraging others to support our work by playing. And who knows – you might just have your name drawn in one of the daily draws that take place each day in May. The Mother's Day award in $1,000 and the extra 50-50 play will provide half of those funds as the prize. So we invite you to play – it is fun, it is very helpful, and you might just win!

Please refer to our website by clicking on the link below for more information or to print the information and order form brochure and order form from our web site.

For more information or to purchase, please contact us at: Phone: 306-242-1916.

Email: receptionist@queenshouse.org
Website: http://www.queenshouse.org/?page_id=6037

From all of us here at Queen's House ... God Bless Us All!

The Old St. Vital Church: A short history - Hiebert on Heritage
(As written in the December 20, 2018 Issue of the Battlefords Regional News – Optimist)

This essay will give an overview of the evolution of the St. Vital Church from its inception I 1877 and the construction of the church in 1883, and a synopsis of the Catholic education system in Battleford (doubtlessly the most important endeavor undertaken by the St. Vital Church).

The priceless 118-year old St. Vital Church – our heritage - belongs to the citizens of the Battlefords. The iconic building has been part of the social fabric of the Battlefords for more than a century. This historic structure enhances our communities. It stands sentinel over the river valley and North Saskatchewan River. There is something about the old church that defies understanding. It's different than the new St. Vital Church. If you have attended a wedding and a funeral in the old church as I have some time ago, perhaps you will know what I mean.

The Parish Church

It is believed the old St. Vital Church is the oldest Roman Catholic Church in Saskatchewan. The building itself is designated as a municipal heritage property (which unfortunately does not prevent it from demolition). It is located on a 1,820-square-metre piece of land in the town of Battleford. It was constructed in 1883. It survived the conflict of 1885.

The heritage value of the old church lies in its association with the town of Battleford, an integral part of the community. As the town grew, so did the Roman Catholic parish of St. Vital.

Founded in 1877 in the Diocese of Prince Albert, the original church was constructed of logs with a thatch roof and located south of the Battle River. Due to the destructive annual flooding, a new church was constructed where it now stands.

The Church was built in the Red River post-on-sill frame method, which demonstrated both the construction method and architecture of that time. The building was a simple rectangular structure. The gabled roof and five-metre ceiling gave a sense of quietness and reverence, and a wood ceiling gave a sense of worship. Over the years, many valuable religious icons were placed in the church (most of these are now located in the new church and include the Stations of the Cross).

In 1894, a front porch was added (a sacristy and a new annex at the back of the building extended the length of the church), which required the building of a new altar. The original post-on-sill construction was covered with wood siding.

Extensive renovations of the old church were undertaken in 1971. Coloured glass windows were installed. The old pews, which were painted plank slabs of wood with spaces between them, were hauled away. Well-made solid pews were taken from the Carmelheim church, no longer in use, near Leipzig. It was necessary to provide seating for 200 of the faithful.

In 1977, St. Vital Church celebrated 100 years of faithful dedication to the citizens and communities of the Battlefords. In 1983-84, the present St. Vital Church was built two blocks south of the old church. It's a wonderful structure with cedar interior and vaulted ceiling. It must be at least four or five times the size of the old church. The new church was sorely needed, too, because it traces the history of Catholicism in Battleford and area from the hard years of the late nineteenth century to the relative affluence of the 1980s and beyond. Perhaps, and more, important, the old church is a symbol of faith and continuity in our communities.
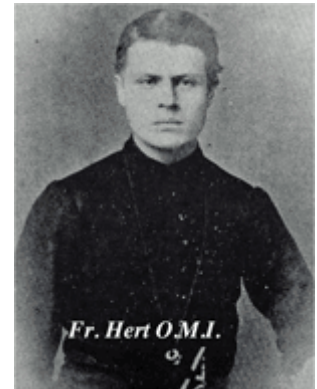
The Priests

Fr. Roger Jourdain
Diocesan Priest

Fr. A. H. Bigonesse, OMI

Fr. Florent Hert, OMI

St. Vital Church was founded in 1877. The church had its origin in Bishop Vital Grandin's vision – **a** desire to see the Roman Catholic faith firmly established in the fledging hamlet of Telegraph Flats (later to be named Battleford) and area, and First Nations.

Father Jean Lestanc, OMI and Father Alexis Andre, OMI were co-founders. Bishop Grandin, OMI urged Father Lestanc to investigate the town and area. Was it practical to establish a new mission? It was so.

Father Andre, OMI, was sent to establish a new mission and was the first priest to serve in the fledgling St. Vital Church. The second parish priest was Father J.J.M. Lestanc, OMI who served from December of 1877 to the spring of 1878. The third parish priest to

serve was Father Florent Hert, OMI. A native of Alsace, France, he was educated at Strasbourg and ordained to the priesthood in June of 1878. He arrived in Battleford the same year. He constructed a log church south of the Battle River to serve the needs of his faithful congregation.

During the few short years Father Hert lived in Telegraph Flats, he constructed two more churches, each more spacious (relatively speaking) than the one before it. Father Hert was a gifted teacher and instructed the children of the community to learn their colours and numbers, serve mass, sing hymns and pray. Father Hert's pleasant demeanor and desire to help everyone regardless of their age and station in life endeared him to everyone. Sadly, Father Hert died of freezing cold while duck hunting south of Battleford in October of 1880. He was 27. His body was buried beneath the church south of the Battle River. His body was later disinterred and buried beneath the altar in the newly constructed church.

In April of 1880, Father Bigonesse was ordained in Ottawa and arrived in Battleford the same year. Father Bigonesse was an extraordinary individual – a dedicated priest, a gifted writer, a teacher and school inspector, secretary to his parish, and a member of the newly formed board of education. Father Bigonesse served his parish and community for 31 years.

Church records show that all of the priests who served the Roman Catholic Parish of Prince Albert in the Battlefords were remarkable men of the cloth. But a few (Father Bigonesse among them) contributed to the church in key areas. Father Roger Jourdain, for example, served the parish of St. Vital from 1958 to 1980. He was instrumental in forming the Catholic Women's League in 1963 and the Knights of Columbus Father Bigonesse Council 5626 in 1964. Both continue to be very important organizations within St. Vital Church.

Devotion to the church was of first order importance for the early parishioners. January 1, 1901 began with a solemn midnight mass in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed, conforming to the decree Urbi et Orbi which had been issued by Pope Leo XIII.

On the practical side, work amounting to $400 was done on the St. Vital Church during the summer. The altar was painted and a new floor was installed.

On July 25, 1912, Albert Pascal, OMI, Bishop of Prince Albert, moved to incorporate the Catholic Parish of St. Vital in communion with Rome. He indicated that "…we do canonically institute a Catholic Parish and under the Title and under the invocation of 'St. Vital' at Battleford, in the Province of Saskatchewan. And by the fact of this canonical erection, made by these our Official Letters, of the Parish of St. Vital, said Parish become a body corporate under the name and Title the Roman Catholic Parish of St. Vital of Battleford, Sask…''. Thus, 35 years after the founding of the St. Vital Parish, it became incorporated.

It is interesting to note that in January of 1926, the population of St. Vital Parish was 383. If the convent students had been counted, the population would have been 415. Of 383 members, 214 spoke English, 143 spoke French, 22 spoke German and four spoke other languages. The current population of St. Vital Parish is 600 plus.

In July of 1934, in commemoration of the discovery of Canada by Jacques Cartier in 1534, the Canadian Bishops requested that the chant of thanksgiving Te Deum, be sung in all Canadian churches. This was to thank God for all his blessings during the last 400 years since Cartier landed on the shores of Canada.

Education

The early Catholic citizens spared no effort in establishing a school. In 1879, Father Hert established the first school, a log building (which he built himself) in Telegraph Flats. Father Bigonesse succeeded Father Hert. In 1880, he was able to persuade Miss Onesime Dorval, the first qualified teacher in Western Canada, to teach at St. Vital School. In 1896, the St. Vital School District was formed. By all accounts, the school was an excellent institution. In 1893, a new school was built, and to everyone's pleasure, the Sisters of the Assumption came to administrate and teach. A new three-storey brick building was built in 1915 to house St. Vital School. In 1919, the Sisters of the Assumption bought the old Windsor Hotel and converted it to a convent and boarding school. Yet another St. Vital School opened in 1962. This also marked the end of 70 years of exemplary service by the Sisters of the Assumption. The current St. Vital School is located in the former Battleford Junior High School, which of note, is the only Catholic School in a public school division in Canada.

The priests and members of the church were diligent in providing a Catholic education for the children and youth of the parish. While the St. Vital Parish was originally administrated by the Diocesan priests, in 1940, it was placed under the direction of the Oblate Fathers, who had been installed in 1931.

In 1932, the Oblate Fathers purchased the old government building that overlooked the original town site and the North Saskatchewan River Valley. They converted it into a seminary for priests and a boarding school for boys of high school age. Teachers and administrators were largely drawn from the ranks of the German-Polish Oblate Fathers. In 1948, the Marion Press was opened. It provided the communication arm of the Oblate Fathers. In 1949, Our Family magazine, a publication concerned with the Catholic family in the modern context, rolled off the press.

In 1950, the boarding school was relocated to North Battleford in a new beautiful building overlooking the Saskatchewan River Valley and the North Saskatchewan River. It became St. Thomas College.

In 1972, the seminary section was moved to Edmonton. In 1973, the Oblate Fathers established the Novitiate, a school for aspiring priests' first year of training. The efforts of the Oblate ministry were remarkably successful. Graduates excelled in business,

Government, higher education, the arts and religious life. The Oblate Fathers were strict, but kind. Their young charges were expected to take their studies and sports in the gymnasium and on the athletic field very seriously. Their teachers wanted results – the best their students could achieve in preparation for success once they graduated and stepped into a brave new world.

The old St. Vital Church is the historical link between the early days and the present. No organization, congregation, or church should forget its roots.

Article written by Richard W. Hiebert, Ph.D.
President, Battlefords Heritage Society

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Updated March 7, 2019 rm