



Saint Louis Academy celebrates 100 years



Saint Louis Academy was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day 1915. It replaced Saint Joseph School, a wooden structure that opened in 1900 and which was destroyed by fire.

The photo above was taken from SLA web-site

The following article appeared in the Dupont Valley Times-February 27, 2015

By Michelle Castleman

2015 marks a special year for the students and staff at Saint Louis Academy in rural New Haven, for it was 100 years ago, on Thanksgiving Day, 1915, at 9:30 a.m. that the dedication of their new school was held after a fire destroyed the former wooden structure called Saint Joseph School on the French settlement at Besançon.

According to records of the Besançon Historical Society, the original school was opened in the fall of 1900 with the Sisters of Saint Agnes in charge. The school was built along with a nunnery for approximately \$4,000 after the Rev. F.X. Labonte purchased six acres of additional land on Sept. 1, 1897. Newspapers dating back to the fire in January 1915 describe the nuns and parish priest "forming a bucket brigade to fight the fire for over two hours bravely entering the burning structure to the heart of the fire and climbing to upper parts pouring water on it before finally being driven back when a draft would give the fire new life."

Men and volunteer fire-fighters retrieved a base burner stove from the fire that may have contributed to its cause. Although the temperature was zero and the ground was snow covered, the stove kept fire for several hours outside the burning structure.

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President's Message ... Barbara Gorney

What's happening at the archives? The archives have been closed since July when the building was undergoing restoration for class rooms. The smaller items in the archive office were moved to the middle room because a new stairway has been put in which takes up part of the office. No it is not complete yet. The two rooms on the east side of the archives had the wall removed. The Gladys Lomont memorabilia was removed by Mick Lomont. This one larger room has not been assigned. It could be for a classroom or the archives. It would be nice for a meeting room for the society. Also there is hope that a restroom will be on the second floor.

I was able to tour the Lincoln Collection which is on lower level one of the Allen County Public Library. There are soft lights that are always on and these are not harmful to the books. There are many books on shelves and more that are behind locked cabinets. The temperature and humidity are regulated. In case of fire there is the sprinkler system and also a chemical that can be released which takes out the oxygen. This first room has a large table and chairs for research and a replicate of the chair Lincoln sat in at Ford's Theater.

The next room is locked and stores more books and 3 glass top tables that contain pictures and letters. An explanation was given on these articles which enhanced our knowledge of Lincoln. The TV show Mysteries at the Museum filmed a segment in 2010. The picture shown was of Mary Todd Lincoln with a faint picture of President Lincoln behind her. What is unusual is the time the picture was taken was 7 years after Lincoln's assassination. The photographer was apparently using Mary's séance fantasy and superimposed the picture of Lincoln.

There are over 28,000 items online. The collection contains not only books but pamphlets, fine art, magazines, newspapers, manuscripts, documents, cartoons, broadsides, sheet music, photographs, textiles and three dimensional objects. The Curtis Collection is part of this. Edward Curtis started photographing the Indians in the west in order to record the traditions of the Indian culture. He started in the late 1890's and published between 1907 and 1930. There are 20 volumes which are oversized. Each volume has information and large photogravure plates. There are only several places that have this and the library is one. There is a digital collection on the Northwestern College site and the Library of Congress site.

The library will give scheduled tours to one person or several.

BARBARA

Classes did not cease after the fire, but the students were moved to the rectory while the pastor moved to the summer kitchen of a neighbor across the highway. Tables, boxes and sewing machines were used as desks.

A new school and convent were immediately erected under the “untiring efforts and efficient work” of the Rev. Michael P. Louen.

Historical accounts of the dedication event detail a “grand time” with Bishop Herman Joseph Alerding, countless clergy and hundreds of visitors from near and far attending as they traveled via the interurban. After a solemn high Mass at the church, the faithful along with the schoolchildren marched to the school which was “gaily decorated with a dozen American flags” for a blessing of the interior and exterior of the new building. Classes in the new school, which opened under the name Saint Louis Academy, began on Oct. 4, with three teachers from the Sisters of Notre Dame (who had started at the old school Sept. 3, 1910) and 116 students. The fabulous new brick building boasted four large school rooms, a basement and auditorium “well arranged and solidly constructed.”

During the early years, students thrived in the Catholic setting of the family atmosphere. Various reports found in the archives itemized improvements made. In 1936, new cement floors were laid in the basement of the school and in 1937 the interior of the school was painted, the floors reconditioned and stokers were installed. New storm windows were placed in the school in 1946 when the School Sisters of Notre Dame were still in charge and taught eight grades in four classrooms to 137 pupils. During this era, the Rev. Joseph Hession served as the parish priest at Saint Louis and the hall held many activities. Schoolchildren participated in school plays and skits. Bingo nights were held and there was often a full house with people having to sit on the steps. Boxing tournaments and basketball tournaments were also home to the gymnasium and the Catholic Youth Organization hosted dances for members from other parishes. At this time, it was noted that no Catholic child in Jefferson Township had attended a public school in the past decade---“a unique proof of the cooperation and Catholicity of the parishioners of Saint Louis Church.” World War II caused some conditions to change briefly as fewer families in the parish were making their living by farming, but reports described that gradually returning to normal.

The Sisters of Notre Dame continued to serve the children of SLA for a total of 67 years until June 1977. A kindergarten program was started in 1979.

During the early 1980's, when conservation of energy was a concern, one third of the cafeteria was transformed into a chapel for daily Mass during the winter months. The large windows were removed, thermopane windows were installed and the front doors of the school were replaced. In 1983, the school had 69 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Ten years later, in 1993, an updated history of the school reported 73 students enrolled in preschool through grade six, with five classrooms, and the school maintained a first-class accreditation. In 1996, students totaled 65. A very active school board and home and school association continued the strong tradition of parents playing a crucial role in the school's vitality. At the time, the parish property consisted of the school, church, rectory, parish office building, two cemeteries, athletic field, large playground and a parish hall, all nestled on approximately 13 acres between the

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corn fields of rural Jefferson Township.

Several remarkable sisters and lay principals have served SLA over the last century. Most special in the memory of the current parishioners is Mrs. Agnes Hart, whose music and energy filled the halls from 1987-2004. Mrs. Cheryl Layton-Whitaker and Mrs. Carolyn Kirkendall also provided leadership in the new millennium. Presently, Mrs. Cheryl Klinker is principal. She has been at the helm since 2011. Under her exceptional direction, the school has significantly increased enrollment and continued to grow and flourish. With her expertise and director background for the learning disabled, SLA became a pilot school for special needs students in the diocese in 2012.

Today, the school houses interactive boards and technology in every classroom and 102 students in preschool through eighth grade with seven full-time and three part-time teachers. Most recent improvements include remodeling the former art room into a resource room, replacing the original slate roof with a new one of steel tile, and adding a larger, covered back porch and new windows and doors around the turn of the century. Efforts to remodel the former convent/parish office to include space for a science lab, art and music classes are also in the works.

In her January newsletter to alumni, Klinder wrote, "Saint Louis Academy has stood the test of time. Our physical building may have been updated and our educational practices modernized, but it is the community pride in Saint Louis Academy that sustains the Catholic mission it was destined for." For nearly two decades, the current pastor at Saint Louis, the Rev. Stephen E. Colchin, has lovingly referred to SLA as the parish gem. The valued advocate added his gratitude to the parish and its families, "For 100 years, this parish and its families have supported SLA with their time, talent and treasure and made personal sacrifice to send their children to a Catholic school. We have much to be thankful for as the Lord has guided us over this past century and we pray this same guidance will sustain us well in the future."

The celebration will culminate on Nov. 1, 2015, All Saints Day, with Mass celebrated by the Most Rev. Kevin C. Rhoades, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

About the author:

Michelle and Mike Castleman are members of Saint Louis Besancon Parish and have generations of ties to Saint Louis Academy. Michelle's father and grandfather, Michael Lomont and Allen Lomont, attended the school. Michael's grandmother, Eileen (Oberley) Castleman, attended Saint Louis Academy. Mike and Michelle's six children have attended the school; their youngest is in the seventh grade. Michelle Castleman, a frequent contributor to Today's Catholic, wrote this history of the academy, and shared it with readers of Times Community Publications.

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Friends of Besancon.....

Update on "old Convent building" –which houses the BHS Archives:

The old sisters' Convent building is presently being completely remodeled with some walls removed to make larger rooms. A new stairway has been installed and 2 new bathrooms on the 1st and 2nd floors. The basement is being redone to be used as the youth fellowship and activity room. The first floor will be used as a much needed classroom for art, music. The second floor far eastern room is being made larger to be used as a conference/meeting room. The other 2 rooms of the second floor Archives will be unchanged. The whole building will look great after completion and much more user friendly. At present, the Archives will remain closed until after the completion.

VISITOR to St. Louis Church: by Gene Yoquelet

Just recently we had a visitor by the name of Jim Gallagher, who was traveling on State Road 30 when he came upon the name of "BESANCON". Curiosity got the best of him and he had to find out about the "Besancon" as some of his ancestors also had the surname of "Besancon". He stopped at the church of Saint Louis and was so impressed how the architecture resembled some of the rural village churches in France. He was also greatly impressed and in awe with the interior. Jim also had a nice visit with Fr. Ben Muhlenkamp, the new pastor of St. Louis parish.

Jim called Gene Yoquelet and explained his ancestry in relation to the first French settlement of Saint Genevieve in Holmes Co., Ohio and the names of French families that he was related to: Besancon, Malcuit, Chenevey, Cholley, Jeanmougin, and Jeanvoine. Jim was kind enough to send the history of this "French Community" of Saint Genevieve and his family genealogy chart for the Besancon Archives

Saint Louis-Besancon is alive and well, along with a number of the descendants of its early French ancestors. Not so with Saint Genevieve, as the French community eventually faded along with the parish church. The only thing that is still left is the old church cemetery where many of the founders and settlers are buried.

MISSION OF
THE BESANCON HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

ARTICLE 11 - SECTION 2

The mission of the Besancon Historical Society of East Allen County, IN is to preserve, interpret and foster a deeper understanding of the history, heritage, and other culture of the rural community known as Besancon, Indiana, generally located in Jefferson Township, Allen County, Indiana, and which has as its central focus Saint Louis Catholic Church.

Established 1994

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LOOK FOR BHS ON INTERNET

www.Besanconhistory.org

Yester-Year.. . . .copied and submitted by Jane Morow

OBITUARIES

Louis Bercot

Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette, Oct. 28, 1906

Louis Bercot, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs Frank L. Bercot, died Saturday night at 10:45 o'clock at the home of his parents on South Hanna street beyond the city limits. The cause of death was tuberculosis. Mr. Bercot had been ill a year. He was twenty-three years old.

The surviving relatives include the parents, three sisters-Lucy, Emma and Julia-and one brother-Frank. The funeral arrangements will be announced later.

Frank Bercot (brother of above Louis)

Ft. Wayne Sentinal, Sept. 8, 1909

Frank Bercot, a well-known young blacksmith, and the only son of Mr. and Mrs. F. Bercot, died Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the family home on South Hanna street at the age of 21 years and 10 months, after an extended illness. His health began falling a year ago, and in February last he went to Hot Springs, Col., in the hope of improvement. He received no benefit, however, and returned home a few months later.

Mr. Bercot was born and reared in this city, and at the age of 16 started as an apprentice to learn the trade of a blacksmith. At the age of 20 he became

the owner of a shop at the intersection of Lafayette street and Piqua avenue, which he conducted until failing health compelled his retirement. Mr. Bercot was an exemplary young man and had a host of friends. He is survived by the parents and two sisters—the Misses Lucille and Julia Bercot. The young man was an active member of Mechecannochqua tribe No. 106, Improved Order of Red Men, of this city.

Philomeme Dodane Reuille

Fort Wayne News-Sentinel, August 29, 1927, p. 19

Mrs. Henry Reuille, aged 74, died at 7 o'clock Sunday morning at her home in Jackson township, of heart disease. Surviving are three sons, Joseph, at home; Henry and Edward, of Fort Wayne; four daughters, Mrs. Charles Meyers, of Fremont; Mrs. Clem Girardot, of Monroeville; Mrs. Henry Girardot, of Zulu, and Miss May Reuille, of Monroeville; 12 grandchildren; one sister, Mrs. Rose Langard, of this city, and one brother, Joseph Dodane, of New Haven. Funeral services will be held at 9:30 o'clock Wednesday morning at St. Joseph's Catholic church at Besancon. Burial at Besancon.

Yester—Year continued

2 Articles pertaining to the Academy/School: Submitted by Barbara Gorney

The Monroeville Breeze, Thursday Sept. 20, 1900

The new Sisters school at Besancon, in Jefferson township, was dedicated Tuesday last with appropriate ceremonies. Rev. F.J. Dandurand, pastor of the Catholic church at this place and the choir of his church was present and assisted in the ceremonies. The new school is quite an addition to the St. Louis church property and great credit is due Rev. F.X. LaBonte for the earnest effort he has put forth in building up the church and property since being located there. However he is an earnest worker.

The Fort Wayne News, Saturday Nov. 20, 1915

New St. Louis Academy, St. Louis Parish, Besancon

The handsome new Catholic school, which has just been completed at Besancon, will be dedicated Thanksgiving morning. The new building, which will be known at St. Louis academy, is the result of the untiring efforts and efficient work of Rev. Michael P. Louen, of St. Louis' parish at Besancon. While Father Louen has been in charge of the parish at Besancon he has labored unceasingly for the good of his people, building up a bigger and better congregation, and the new school is the consummation of his latest efforts.

The dedication services will be in charge of Bishop Herman J. Alerding, of the Fort Wayne diocese, and will be attended by many of the Catholic clergy of the city.

VICTOR DELAGRANGE OBITUARY Submitted by Jane Morow

The Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette, Monday July 20, 1903

WIDELY KNOWN FARMER DIES, VICTOR DELAGRANGE OF MILAN TOWNSHIP IS DEAD

Was reared a catholic but joined the church of the dunkards, who befriended him in adversity--funeral took place Sunday July 19, 1903. News reached the city yesterday of the death and burial of Victor Delagrange, of Milan township, one of the best known Amish farmers of the county and long a well-known citizen. He was 76 years of age, & a native of France, but had lived here the greater part of his life. He was once very wealthy, but lost everything by endorsing for friends, who showed themselves ungrateful in the hour of adversity. When he was penniless the members of the Amish Brotherhood, who respected him for his honesty & sympathized with him in his misfortune, advanced him enough money to pay off his indebtedness, restock his farm & start life anew. He was thrifty & a fine farmer, & in a few years was able to repay all the money his neighbors had advanced without security to him. Although reared in the Catholic faith he forsook it & joined the Amish brotherhood, continuing a member of the denomination until his death. He was buried yesterday afternoon, according to the simple ritual of the brotherhood.

Mr. Delagrange was a well-known figure on the streets, his venerable form, the shoulder covered by long flowing locks, white as snow, being familiar for many years. He was a progressive farmer and was well liked. His wife died a few years ago. They had a family of 14 children most of whom are still living.

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET PAID.....

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Payable, first of FEBRUARY

Individual---\$15.00

Family-\$20.00 Lifetime-\$200.00

Send a check Attn:

Treasurer, Besancon Historical Society

15535 Lincoln Hwy East

New Haven, IN 46774

The archives will be open by appointment only

Please Call

Barb Gorney (260)490-6725

Or

Gene Yoquelet (260)622-4067

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