

HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF OUR PARISH.

FATHER COSMOS SEEBERGER

Peggy Hake

Between 1881 and 1887, Father Cosmos Seeberger was a Catholic priest in Miller County, serving both the parishes at St. Elizabeth and Mary's Home. His life, while in our central Missouri community, is one of great interest.

Father Cosmos was on his way to Miller County at the end of October, 1881 but was detained by high waters at Jefferson City. While in the city, he filled in at a jubilee celebration for a "festpridiger" who had failed to appear. Among his audience was Missouri's Secretary of State another man who was a close friend of Governor Criddenden. When they learned he was coming to Miller County, he was told if ever he needed help to contact them. Miller County had quite a reputation in those years!!

NOTE: Since I do not understand the German language, I don't know what or who a "festpridiger" was. If it was to be a jubilee celebration, it must have been an important event....."

One of the first things he had to contend with after arriving was bailing three young men out of trouble who had been selling beer without a license. Father Cosmos went to Jefferson City and pleaded the case for the 3 men whom he said were poor; the parish was in debt; the people were good folks at heart, etc..... The Governor informed him that the people of Miller County were known to be a 'bad lot'. The priest presented such a heart-rendering story that the Governor proclaimed the fines of the 3 men were "paid in full".....

Father Cosmos found Miller County's citizens to be rough and hardy mountain folk and, at times, difficult to control. He was determined to fill their hearts with a deep and lasting faith and he was spunky enough to do just that! The new pastor was well-liked by his flock and they were amazed how the "limping priest" (he was handicapped from an old leg injury) could work so hard and untiringly. He first settled at Old St. Elizabeth where the county's first Catholic Church was established on the east bank of the Osage River. Other business places in the old town included a blacksmith shop, a Wagoner shop; combination post office and grocery store/saloon; and a club-room. He later moved to Charlestown (today's St. Elizabeth) which was a few miles southeast of the old settlement.



Robert Morgan, land owner and tavern proprietor in Mary's Home during the 1880's.

Later he moved west of the river to accommodate the people who lived in that western area of the county which numbered about 50 families. A new church, St. Mary of the Snows, was built where two roads crossed. A town was established around the church, first called Morgan, later renamed Mary's Home. Father Cosmos certainly had his work cut out for him...every Sunday he spent half the day at the St. Charles Church in Charlestown (later St. Elizabeth); forded the river and spent the remainder of the day at the Mary's Home church. He performed masses; also benedictions, and religious instructions at both churches.

St. Charles at Charlestown and St. Mary's at Mary's Home continued to flourish, but Old St. Elizabeth gradually died away and the folks moved to Charlestown about 1881/82. Father Cosmos also performed masses on certain days at other places in the area...Gravois, Tuscumbia, Bond's Mines..... No matter what the weather, he always kept his appointments and there was a time he nearly drowned in the rushing flood waters of the Osage, but finally made it safely to the other shore.

Father Cosmos Seeberger was well-known throughout the entire county and was easily recognized as he passed through the heavily-wooded countryside. He rode a beautiful white horse and was often heard singing loudly as he ventured along in the darkness of the night. In 1887, Father Cosmos was recalled from Miller County. Many priests have served since he left the county over a hundred years ago, but none were so devoted nor so colorful as this Jesuit priest who left his footprints on the hearts of his many friends and fellow countrymen of German descent.

The town of Mary's home was originally to be given the name "Morgan" when, in the 1880's, early settlers in the area were petitioning the government for a post office. Robert Morgan ([photo 44](#)), a local tavern proprietor and land owner, was honored by this suggestion, however Father Cosmas Seeberger, priest of the parish, was outraged at such an idea.

In his sermon Father Seeberger stated: “I founded this place; there was nothing here before I came. And now, without so much as a whisper to me, your pastor, you have taken this matter into your own hands and named this post office after a Protestant, a Yankee, a saloon keeper, while a founder of the place, I have the right to give it its name. This town belongs to the Mother of God, and its name shall not be “Morgan,” but “Mary’s Home.” What, do you imagine, does your mother think of this act of infidelity? See to it that this wrong is righted at once.”



Herman and Mary Ann Tellman. The first mass was said in their home.

Needless to say, the name on the petition was immediately changed and the town officially became known as Mary’s Home.

When Father Seeberger first ventured into Miller County in the early 1880’s, he found a rough, wooded region that was sparsely settled by people of predominantly German background. Few fields had been cleared and the roads were little more than muddy cow and mule paths. The early settlers that Father Seeberger encountered traveled solely by foot, by mule, or by boat on the Osage River.



William and Helen Berendzen. Some of the first masses were celebrated in their home.

Some of the early settlers in the area were John and Anna Wilburs, Henry and Elizabeth Schulte, Henry and Anna Eichholz, Charlie and Christine Frank, Henry and Theresa Evers, William and Helen Berendzen (photo 46), Franciscus and Sophia Lepper, John and Marie Hake, Anton and Margaret Lepper, August and Elizabeth Schulte, Herman and Mary Tellman (photo 47), John and Gertrude Mertens, John and

Margaret Arens, and Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Roels.

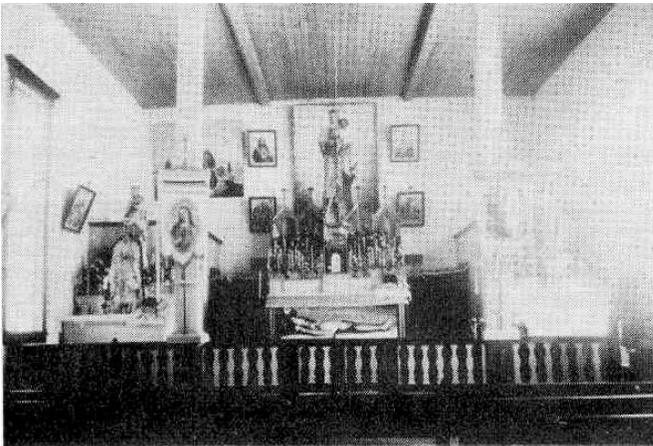


The Tellman home where some of the first masses were celebrated.

The Osage River divided the existing “parish” into two parts. Father Seeberger would say mass at St. Elizabeth and the families west of the river would attend when possible. The location of the church in St. Elizabeth caused an inconvenience for those families, especially during times of flood. It was deemed necessary to establish a parish west of the Osage River in what is now the

community of St. Mary’s Home. Father Seeberger was now busy travelling between St. Elizabeth and Mary’s Home to say mass. Although services were held in a church at St. Elizabeth, the members west of the river, as yet, had no church to call their own. For a little over two years Herman Tellman and William Berendzen volunteered the use of their homes for Father Seeberger to celebrate mass in.

Eventually Father Seeberger and his parishioners saw the need for a permanent church. A dispute then arose over where the new church would be located, each farmer demanding it be built close to his farm. When Father saw



This is the inside of the original wood frame church. The painting above the altar was done by Fr. Lambert Nipper.

no happy end to the discussion, he chose a spot where two of the main roads in the area met.

On November 16, 1882, five acres of land were purchased by the parish from John and Nancy Henley for the amount of \$30.00. Henry Schulte and Herman Tellman acted as trustees for the Mary’s Home church in this transaction. On two later occasions land was purchased in order to extend the parish grounds. On May 26,

1888, 1 ½ acres were purchased from Robert and Mary Morgan for the sum of \$25.00. Trustees representing the Mary's Home church were listed as J.H. Hake, Frank Sanning, Herman Bruening, and John Arens. Again, on January 29, 1889, Robert and Mary Morgan sold ½ acre of land to the church. This time the purchase was listed as \$50.00.



On August 5, 1885, Bishop J. Hogan ([photo 49](#)) of Kansas City dedicated the first church in honor of St. Mary.

The original church was a 30' X 30' wood frame building erected at a cost of approximately \$2000 ([photo 50](#)).

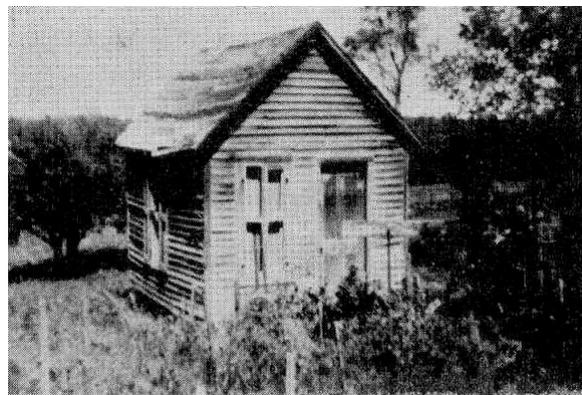


The original wood frame church which was dedicated on August 5, 1885.

The wooden floors and plastered walls were a result of hours of effort put forth by volunteers. Each parishioner was also responsible for providing wood for the pot bellied stove that supplied the heat for the church during the winter months.

Apparently, the stove did not supply sufficient heat for the entire church. Sister Christine Wierschem and Sister Casimir Gawronski, of the Order of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, recorded in their files that the stove sat in the middle of the church. Those who sat near it roasted on one side and froze on the other. It was sometimes so cold that the wine cruet had to be set near the stove until Offertory to keep the wine from freezing.

With the organization of the new parish came added duties for the priest. Father Seeberger's schedule was so hectic that after two masses each Sunday, he many times was not able to eat his first meal until 4:00 p.m. Parishioners arriving early for mass were instructed to say the rosary and sing hymns until Father arrived.



Mary's Home's only doctor's office was torn down in 1958.

With the new parish also came new citizens to Mary's Home. This influx produced a need for merchants to provide necessary items to a growing community. Peter Kaullen, R.L. Morgan, and Martin Tremain were considered the "pioneer merchants." Between 1886 and 1887, Peter Kaullen built a general store. Another general store/saloon was built and this store is today operated by Frieda Hart



Schulte's General Store is today owned and operated by Hiram and Frieda Hart.



John Mertens, John Holzhauser, Henry Schulte, and R. A. Sanning in front of Merten's Blacksmith Shop.

Other businesses in Mary's Home around this time included a lime kiln, a copper shop, a wagon shop, a blacksmith, and a doctor's office.

In 1886, Father Cosmas Seeberger was succeeded by Father Charles Meyer, CPPS, who was followed by Father Salser, CPPS, in 1887, Father Charles Meyer returned to Mary's Home as the first resident pastor. It was probably during his two year stay that the first parochial residence was erected.

Here is a photo of the finished church at Mary's Home

