



Visitor Experience #48

Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church

Meyersville, Texas



Photograph courtesy of: Janet Jones, editor, The Catholic Lighthouse

Meyersville, Texas, and Its Early Catholic Churches

by Mary Ann Moczygemba Watson

In 1846, **Adolph Meyer** with his family settled near the Twelve Mile Coletto Creek, and in 1847, the community was named Meyersville. The colony is located about 14 miles from Cuero which is the county seat for DeWitt County. Until a store was established, supplies had to be brought from Victoria requiring a three-day trip. In 1851, a post office was established in **Adolph Meyer's** home on the Clinton-Goliad road.

At first the settlement comprised a dominant German population. **Peter Bluntzer**, a Catholic from Alsace, donated 15 acres of land for the first church, but until the project was accomplished, Mass was observed in the Bluntzer home. Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Meyersville was completed in 1859, and the first Mass in the new church was celebrated on November 4th by **Rev. John Koenig**. The church was dedicated on January 1, 1860. In 1876, a Catholic cemetery was established near the Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church.

Following the 1854 settlers to Panna Maria, a second group emigrated in 1855 from the region of Upper Silesia in present-day Poland, purchased land, and made their homes in the Meyersville area. Because of language and cultural differences between the original colonists, the Silesians formed their own place of worship, a mission church of Panna Maria.

The devoted parishioners built their church in 1902 on the Yorktown-Meyersville road two miles northwest of Meyersville and named it in honor of St. Joseph. The members instituted their own burial grounds, the St. Joseph Cemetery.

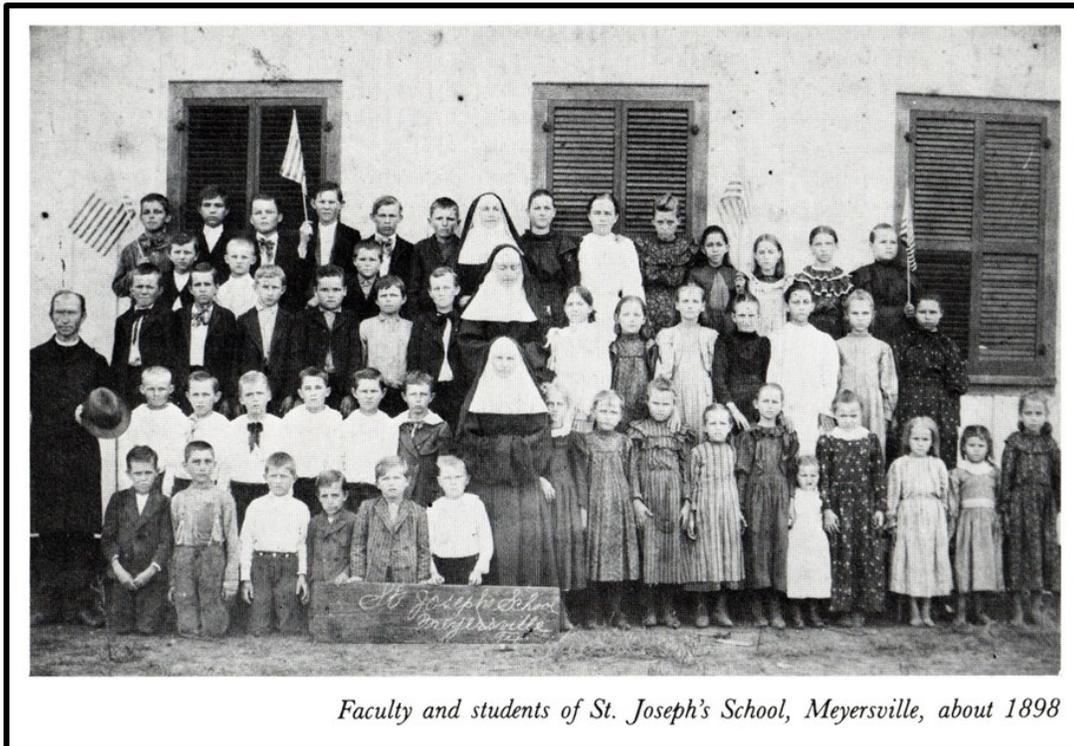


St. Joseph Catholic Church, Meyersville, Texas
Photograph from: *Travel Notes*, page 129

Throughout history though, perhaps to distinguish the parishes, the two houses of worship were referred to as the “German church” and the “Polish church.”

The earliest known sacramental archives begin in 1867, and it appears that both the German and Polish churches recorded their documents in the Sts. Peter and Paul register. Interspersed with German names, familiar Silesian surnames such as **Bednorz, Bomba, Długi, Gregorczyk, Jendry, Kolodziej, Kolodziejczyk, Korcz, Kozielski, Ledwick, Olejnik, Prukop, Richter, Scheffler, Sklorz, Tam, Warzecka, Winkler, Zając, and Zowada** are obvious.

St. Joseph Catholic Church was at first ministered by **Rev. Anthony Rossadowski** and **Rev. Julian Przysiecki**. Later the Benedictine Fathers and Resurrectionist Fathers took charge of these Catholic worshipers who never had a resident pastor. From 1892-1898, **Rev. Henry Gerlach** served the parish, but he did not speak Polish. It was during his tenure that **Fr. Gerlach** directed the building of a school in early 1892 and employed a Sister to teach in the Polish language.

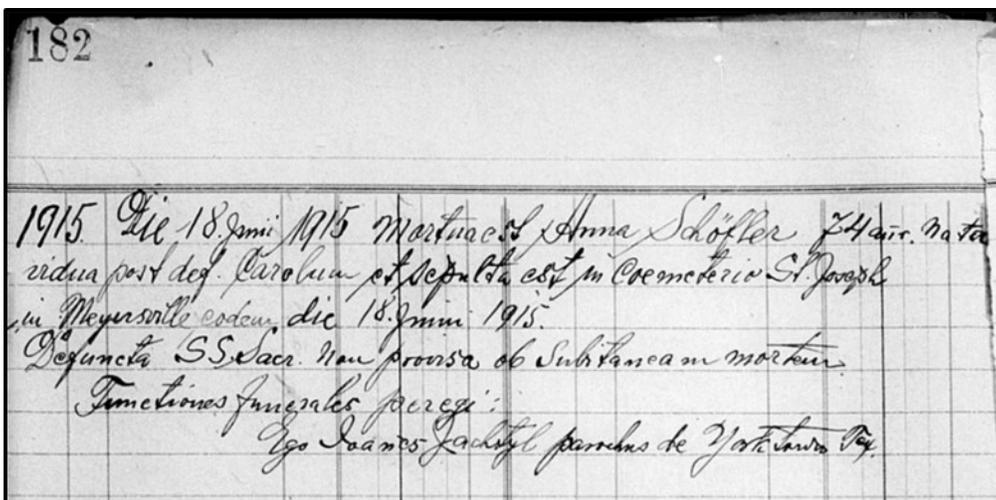
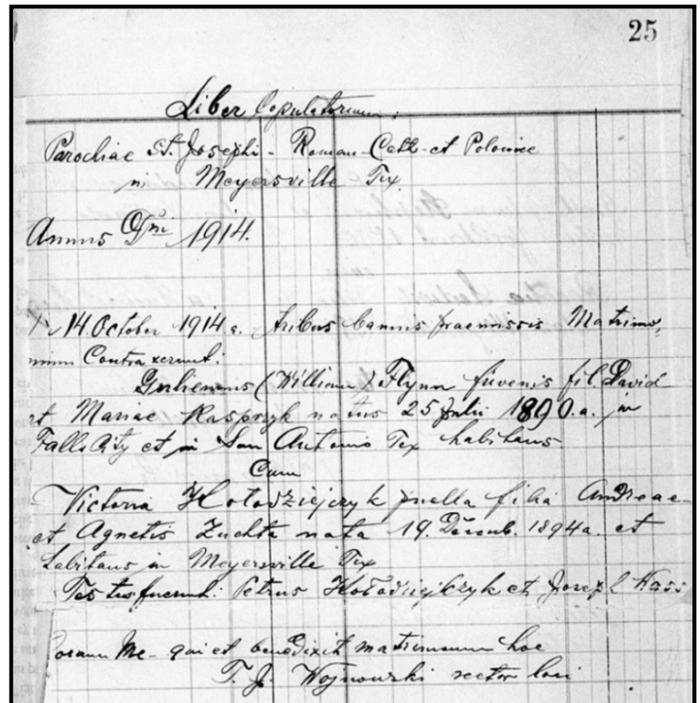


Faculty and students of St. Joseph's School, Meyersville, about 1898

*Photograph courtesy of: Doris Fischer Obsta, Victoria, Texas
Published in: The Polish Texans, page 87*

In the early 1900s, **Rev. Thomas J. Moczygemba** served the “Polish church” and was followed by **Rev. Emanuel J. Wrobel** from 1907-1909. Rarely ever did the sacramental recordings designate which of the two churches the parishioner was a member. Here are two exceptions:

The priest, **Rev. T. J. Wojnowski**, noted at the top of the page, St. Joseph Roman Catholic Parish *est Poloniae* in Meyersville, Texas, where the marriage took place on 14 October 1914. The groom was **William Flynn**, son of **David and Marie Kasprzyk**. The bride **Victoria** was the daughter of **Andreas Kolodziejczyk and Agnes Zuchta** (p. 25, first entry).



Anna Schöfler
[Scheffler], age 74,
widow of **Carol**
Scheffler, died on 18
June 1915 and was
buried the same day in
caemeterio St. Joseph
in Meyersville. The

priest signed his name: **Joanes Jachtyl**, parish of Yorktown, Texas (p. 182, first entry).



In 1955, **John B. Scheffler** (1879-1963) took his grandson **Marvin** to Meyersville to show him the schoolhouse where he had attended as a young student.

Photograph courtesy of: Anton C. Scheffler (1921-2007)



The parochial school was closed in 1902, but the community preserved the original building by restoring and adding to the structure creating a church communal hall for the Sts. Peter and Paul parish.

Photograph courtesy of: Geraldine Moczygemba Wilder, Portland, Texas

In 1911, according to an article in the *San Antonio Express*, **Rev. A. Stroebele** had been assigned to oversee two Catholic churches in Goliad “and the St. Joseph (Polish) Church at Meyersville” (20 March 1911, p. 7).

Though the Sts. Peter and Paul parish persevered, it suffered many trials. The present building is the fourth to be constructed. After the first, dedicated in 1860, a second and larger church was completed in 1880. A hurricane demolished this structure, and a third was built, along with a rectory, but this third building was

destroyed by fire in 1938. “**Adam Jendry**, here from Meyersville Saturday to renew for the paper, said that the destruction of the Meyersville Catholic Church and rectory was a huge loss. The loss was covered with about \$4,000 insurance... The congregation has decided to make use of the old St. Joseph’s Church, a few miles this side of Upper Meyersville, until arrangements can be made to build a new edifice. The grounds and building of St. Joseph’s Church are being reconditioned, and services will be held there for the present, **Mr. Jendry** said” (*Victoria Advocate*, 2 December 1938, p. 4). Again the worshipers rebuilt, and the Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church continues to be an active parish reporting to the Diocese of Victoria.

In the earlier years, the south side of Meyersville was called “Upper Meyersville,” and the settlement on the north side became “Lower Meyersville.” This distinction which separated the two areas was dropped when the population began to decrease and was referred afterward to its original name of Meyersville. By 1940, some from the “Polish Church” had returned to the Sts. Peter and Paul Church, but most began worshiping with the Silesian community in Yorktown twelve miles away. The Meyersville St. Joseph Church was demolished in 1946, and the lumber was used for building the new Yorktown school.

The St. Joseph Cemetery still remains on FM 237 as a testament to the early settlers whose names are carved on the tombstones.

Photograph courtesy of:
**Geraldine Moczygamba
Wilder,**
Portland, Texas





The Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, 11220 FM 237, Meyersville, Texas.

Pictured on the left is the church as it existed in the 1940s. The photograph on the right is a current depiction.

Photograph on left from: *Archdiocese of San Antonio Diamond Jubilee 1874-1949*, page 79

Photograph on right from: www.victoriadiocese.org

Sources:

Baker, T. Lindsay. *The Polish Texans*. San Antonio, Texas: The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1982.

Dworaczyk, Rev. Edward J. *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas*. San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1936.

Gilbert, Rev. M. J., editor. *Archdiocese of San Antonio Diamond Jubilee 1874-1949*. San Antonio, Texas: Schneider Printing Company, 1949.

Nesterowicz, Stefan. *Travel Notes*. Translated by Elzbieta Szczepaniak McNeilly. Houston, Texas: Polish Genealogical Society of Texas, 2007.

San Antonio Express [San Antonio, Texas] 20 March 1911, p. 7.

Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Meyersville, Texas. Baptism, Marriage, and Burial Records, 1867-1957 LDS Microfilm #0025295.

Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas:

<https://www.tshaonline.org/meyersville-tx>

Victoria Advocate [Victoria, Texas] 2 December 1938, p. 4.

**With great appreciation, we would like to
acknowledge the gifts and donations received from
the following for the period of January 16, 2021
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News from PHC

As a first real test of the ability of our Polish Heritage Center to withstand the elements, it passed with only the expected problems, mainly our water well froze! The brutally cold weather of the week of February 14th tested man and material. With tremendous thanks, we acknowledge the great work that John Ebrom (the now “trying to be retired” project foreman of Keller-Martin) and Board member, Randy Pawelek, accepted by ensuring that the critical systems of the Heritage Center would be able to withstand the cold onslaught! All of this, while also tending to their own homes. We are all truly thankful for their work, dedication, and service to the Center.

Dziękuję Bardzo!

Calendar of Events

Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Virtual Events for Spring:

Please see Facebook and Website for details. We will share

Summer and Fall events as we schedule:

- March 24 (virtual event-presentation): "Mary Rzeppa Schulz: Pioneer Entrepreneur of South Texas" - the public is invited to share their photos and stories of Polish Texas women in honor of Women's History Month" (during the program and all month via Facebook).
- April 21 (virtual event-presentation): "Ask an Archivist" presentation and Q and A from the PHC Library/Archives Director. The public is invited to submit questions and share photos, documents and stories during the program and all month via Facebook.
- May 19 (virtual event-presentation): "Early Polish Texas Builders and Contributions to the Texas Landscape and Recent Preservation Projects and Resources in Honor of Historic Preservation Month." The public is invited to share photos and stories and ask questions about documenting and preserving Polish Texas buildings and early farmsteads.

Pictures from the Center



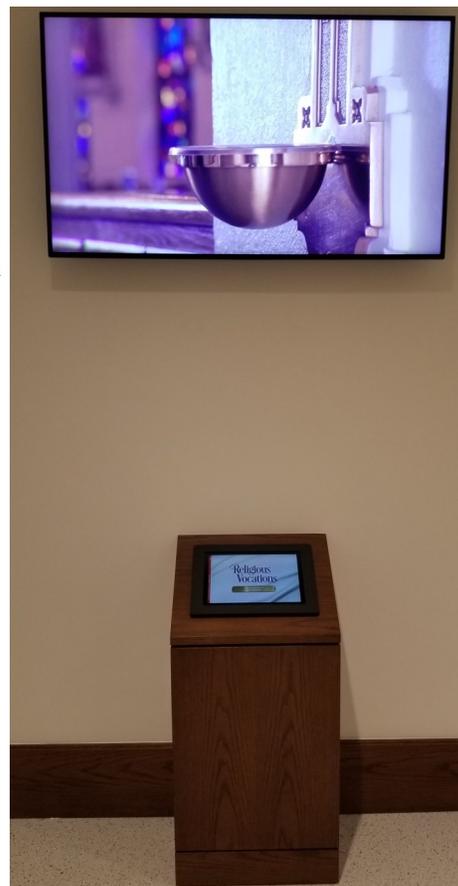
On Left: the back of the glass behind the images of Sts. Cyril & Methodius, showing the dove of the Holy Spirit.



On Right: The images of Sts. Cyril & Methodius with the image of St Hyacinth on their left and St. Stanislaus on their right.

On Right: the interactive display for the Religious Vocations located to the left of the door going into the Temporary/ Rotating Exhibit Room. On the right of that door is a corresponding interactive display of those from the Heritage area who served in the Military.

Below: is a replica of a travel trunk that was used by our immigrant ancestors in their journey to Texas.



Welcome our Librarian!

Lauren Robertson

Questions about the PHC library and archive?

Ask an archivist/librarian!

My name is Lauren Robinson, and I am privileged to have been hired as the archivist/librarian at the beautiful Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria. I was born in Houston and moved to my family ranch in Smiley, Texas, when I was three years old. I graduated from Nixon-Smiley High School in 2008 and moved to Corpus Christi to enroll at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi. I earned a Bachelor's Degree of History in 2016 and then a Masters of History in 2018. It was during my time as a graduate student I began working at the university library and fell in love with the profession and decided to obtain a second masters in library and information science. I enrolled online at Rutgers University in the fall of 2018 and am set to graduate in May. My concentration is archives and preservation. As a historian, I am passionate about history, especially cultural history and archives. I am excited to begin my work here at the center and have several goals including organizing the library and archives in an educating, engaging, and easily accessible manner. I am anxious to set up and share knowledge regarding Panna Maria and its community members and welcome all those interested. I am eager to begin an oral history project because I believe collecting and exhibiting first hand stories and experiences of the community is a very special form of remembrance that can be passed down through generations. I am very happy to be here and cannot wait to meet all of you and answer any research questions you may have!

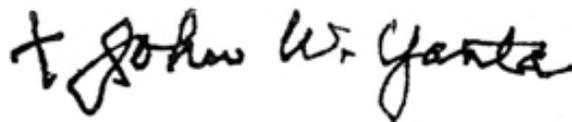


Bishop's Corner: Polish Easter Traditions Then and Now

Excerpts from an interview with Fr. Wieslaw Iwaniec,
Pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, Panna Maria, Texas

Based on the testimony of some parishioners I have learned that in the past, people were very dedicated to their faith and observed the Lenten season with sincerity and in a way strictly. For example, not only did they abstain from meat on Friday, but on the other days limited themselves to one meal with meat a day. Because many were farmers and ranchers, they were able to stop their work and come to the church on Fridays for the Stations of the Cross. The church was always full. On Sundays they would sing the *Gorzkie Żale* (Lenten Lamentations) in Polish, the language of their hearts. Now this tradition continues but in English. After Palm Sunday Mass, parishioners would take the blessed palms home and make small crosses and place them on their fence posts, above their doors, in their gardens etc. as profession of their faith asking God for His blessings and protection. On Holy Thursday after the celebration of the Last Supper, families would spend time in adoration reflecting on Jesus suffering in Gethsemane. There was a special list made for it, so families listed by their last name had specific hour assigned to them. The adoration lasted till midnight. On Good Friday at the end of the liturgy, the veneration of the relict of The Holy Cross took place. People would process up and kiss the Holy Relict and then continue to the main altar (where Tabernacle is located) to reverence the Tomb of Christ (below the mensa). The Blessed Sacrament was exposed in veil covered monstrance and placed above the tomb for adoration of Christ in the tomb. What was so significant that the younger men of the parish would help elderly in this procession to the main altar where the tomb was, so they could see it and venerate it. This veneration was an act of faith acknowledging that "I am a sinner, here is my Redeemer Who died for my sins." I witnessed it; they do this every year with so much affection. On Holy Saturday at the end of the liturgy procession of the Resurrection takes place around the church 3 times as a proclamation to the world that Christ rose from the dead and brings us new life. This procession sometimes took place on Easter Sunday very early in the morning. It is good to know that after celebration of the Resurrection in the church, people greeted one another in this way: *Jezus Zmartwychwstał*, and the answer was *Prawdziwie Zmartwychwstał*. Jesus is Risen, He truly is Risen!

May the Peace, Hope, and the Consolation of the Risen Christ be with you,
this Easter Season,



†Bishop John W. Yanta