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Compiled and Narrated
by
Mattie Kilborn Webster for
The Two Hundredth Anniversary
of the
Town of Merrimack NH

EPISODE 16 - Presented by Catholic Women's Club

FOUNDING THE CATHOLIC MISSION

1897 - At the close of the 19th century, a small band of Catholics in Merrimack were doing their best to follow the Catholic Faith, without benefit of a church or priest. Occasionally the more devout would obtain a horse and wagon and attend services in either Milford or Manchester. So often did their faces appear in Milford that they caught the eye of the Rev. George Marshall who was the priest there. He felt that their efforts and sincerity should be rewarded; and so he volunteered to come to Merrimack on the first Sunday of each month. And thus it was in 1897 that the Rev. George Marshall celebrated the first Mass in Merrimack, assisted by all the members of the 25 Catholic families in Town who could possibly attend.

The Rev. Marshall was brought here by a two-horse team. On Christmas and Easter he came on the preceding afternoon, and an early Mass was held in order to allow him to return to Milford to celebrate Mass there.

These arrangements were not very satisfactory. Traveling conditions between the two towns were uncertain and the Rev. Marshall made many sacrifices in order to continue.

The first year Mass was held in Ayres Hall (now the second story of Mrs. Keistlingers Store) but in 1898 the Town Hall was hired for this purpose.

1903 - In 1903, The Bishop decreed that Goffs Falls be made a part of the Blessed Sacrament parish, and that Merrimack be a mission of it also. Thus the Rev. Marshall was relieved of his duties, and the Rev. Francis Lyons came across the river from Goffs Falls to celebrate Mass. However at the end of two years it was decided by the Bishop to be more feasible to include Merrimack in the mission covered by St. Joseph's in Nashua. Rev. O'Neil was the first priest to come here from Nashua, but after several years, due to failing health, his duties were turned over to Father McDonough who continued in this service until 1913. By this time the number of Catholics had increased greatly as new industries moving into Town brought many new families.

1913 - In 1913 Pinardville was made into a separate parish and it was decided that the Rev. Liberty from that parish should come to Merrimack each Sunday to hold Catholic services. However in 1915 the last change was made by the Bishop of Manchester to place Merrimack in the Parish of St. Joseph's Cathedral under whose care the Catholic Faith has waxed strong, and the membership has increased to such a degree that the present members are anticipating a parish of their own - not primarily to be separated from St. Joseph's Cathedral, but that they might stand alone and be a credit to their "Founders" who have worked so hard to help them and encourage them.