

SUPERIOR HISTORIAN

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HECLA MINE SHOOTOUT SUBJECT OF SPRING PROGRAM

Ron Buffo will present an account of Louisville's Hecla Mine strike of 1914 at the Historical Commission's Spring Program April 19, 2007 at Eldorado K-8 school. Mr. Buffo's multi-media presentation will begin at 7:00. This strike received national attention, involving labor activist Mother Jones, militia and regular army, and rampant gunplay. All are welcome!

SUPERIOR HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Larry Dorsey — Chair and Editor

of the Superior Historian

Denzil Acklin — Vice Chair

Bob Morgan — Treasurer

Karen Waligorski — Secretary

Commission meetings are held the third Friday of every month at 10:00 A.M. at the Superior Town Hall. All are welcome. Please join us. Questions: call Larry Dorsey, 303-499-1969 or Jennifer Dunn, Town of Superior liaison, 303-554-9005

IN MEMORIUM

We are saddened by the passing of Violet Bednar Gardner, long time resident of Superior and member of the Historical Commission. Violet was unselfish in her contributions to the Commission and of her precious photographs to the compilation of the Lost Superior book. She is missed by so many.

ST. BENEDICT'S CHURCH SERVED SUPERIOR'S FAITHFUL



More than eight hundred Catholics and non-Catholics attended the dedication of St. Benedict's in December of 1916 as depicted in this photo.

For nearly fifty years, the spiritual needs of many Superior residents were served by a small red brick Catholic mission church by the name of St. Benedict's. It was located at the northeast corner of Coal Creek Drive and Fourth Avenue in original Superior and was an outreach of Sacred Heart of Mary Church on South Boulder Road.

The idea of a local church was posed to Superior citizens early in 1916. Up to that time, people mostly went to Louisville for church services, and many were known to walk the six miles between towns. The building was dedicated in December of that same year, the culmination of hard work and organization by church leaders and Superior Catholics.

An interesting oddity about St. Benedict's is its distinction of once having been a saloon. Since Colorado was one of the states to enact prohibition by 1916, (individual states enacted prohibition before the constitutional amendment was passed)



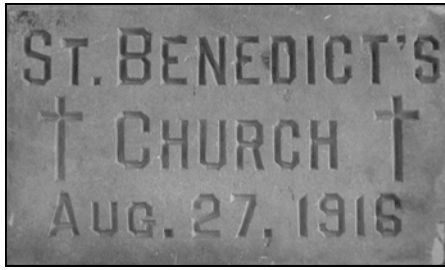
Helen Malczyk, Helen Sekulich, Marie Machin, and George Kupfner pose for their first Holy Communion at St. Benedict's in the early 1940's.

it had two saloons that were no longer functional.

According to Denver Archdiocese records, a Father Robert was dispatched to Milwaukee where he purchased the defunct saloon and two town lots for five hundred dollars from the Milwaukee Brewing Company. The building was then moved a few hundred feet down the street to its new location where a significant make-over was to take place.

Not only were the local residents instrumental in acquiring their new church, they pitched in to convert it from bar to house of worship. The Kerr family had actually operated the saloon at one time, and as loyal Catholics, strongly influenced the move to acquire a church. Sacred Heart of Mary parishioner, Polite Clynke, moved the building down the street.

Then it was old-timer George Summers who threw himself into the task of remodeling the one-time watering hole. He transformed the wooden building by adding a veneer of red brick. He changed the windows and doors, added a bell tower, then focused on the interior. Imagine the



The church cornerstone is the only remnant of the building. It was donated to the Superior Historical Commission by Bessie Kerr.

bar room transformed into the church body and the card room made over into a sanctuary. The seventy-two year old Summers donated his craftsmanship to the cause. Father Raymond Layton wrote that "George Summers will ever live in Superior as the outstanding factor in that commonwealth's Key to Heaven."

Since the new church was a Benedictine parish, naming it St. Benedict's was logical. Many of the religious furnishings came to Superior from Pueblo's recently decommissioned St. Boniface's, a Benedictine church there.

By all accounts, the results of Summers' craft and the accouterments from Pueblo were striking. Sisters Helen Sekulich Warmbourg and Mary Sekulich Malmstrom spent their childhood in the St. Benedict's congregation and recall beauty of the statuary and interior woodwork. Bessie Kerr remembers the large, coal-fired heating stove that provided warmth for parishioners during cold weather.

All the usual congregational functions took place at St. Benedict's: mass, catechism classes, christenings, communion, weddings, funerals, etc. Michael Sekulich and Catherine Pankoski were married in the church on October 27 of 1918, not long after the church was dedicated. Theirs was typical of the American Experience. Mike immigrated here from Croatia

and Katy from Poland. He worked in the local mines while she "kept house" and raised the family. They were faithful to their Catholic heritage, Helen receiving Holy Communion at St. Benedict's.

The immigrant experience is also reflected by the Kerr family. Irish brothers Patrick (Paddy), William, and Thomas Kerr were among the prime movers to get a Catholic church in Superior. Paddy's wife Susie worked at raising over \$300 in donations for the new church over the span of just a few weeks in 1916. The Kerr brothers are also cited as being part of a group who donated other important items, such as the "church bell, statuary, new pews, etc."

Tommy "T.V." Kerr, Jr. was born and raised in Superior (his siblings all were born in Ireland). He recalled putting nickels and pennies in the spaces between the bricks during construction, but was unable to find them again when the building was torn down. Tommy's mother, Mary Ann Kerr, always missed her homeland, the Emerald Isle, and never adjusted to the arid environment of the Superior area. Bessie Kerr remembers her mother-in-law saying she "would walk across the ocean to get back to Ireland" because she missed the green so much.

Since it was a mission church, the priests and nuns who attended to the parish were based at Sacred Heart of Mary Church on South Boulder Road. The sisters from St. Walburga's Abbey at that same site taught catechism classes in Superior and priests, such as Father O'Malley, conducted masses (in Latin in those days) and other ceremonies.

After the closing of the Industrial Mine in 1945, the population of Superior dwindled as did the size of St. Benedict's congregation. Father Kevin Carr received permission to



This undated view of St. Benedict's is courtesy of the Kupfner family. Note the how the inscription on the back of the photo shows through. What could we learn from it?

scale back activities in Superior. By 1951, Sunday mass was held at the home church and a mass held at Superior on Thursdays. In his appeal, Father Carr cited the severe decrease in population and the moving of houses out of the town.

Along with the closing of Superior school in the early 1960's came the discontinuing of all church services and the eventual tearing down of the building. Contents, such as pews, the bell, and organ, were donated to other churches in Colorado.

With its demolition came an end to Superior's little church and its saga of transformation from saloon to sanctuary and its spiritual role in the community.



Sources: Superior Historical Commission: Lost Superior; Cynda Arsenault, Superior: A Folk History; Elinor McGinn, et.al., Sacred Heart of Mary, 1862-1999; print material from the Archives the Catholic Archdiocese of Denver; archival material from Sacred Heart of Mary Church, Boulder, Colorado; interviews with Helen Warmbourg, Mary Malmstrom, Bessie Kerr, and Phyllis Hardin.