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By Rev. Lucien J. Caillouet

Historical Sketch

On August 3, 1920, the Missions of Lobdell and Port Allen detached from the parent church of St. Joseph in Baton Rouge and set into a separate parochial unit with Lobdell as the original parish seat. Lobdell is a settlement in the sugar-growing section of Baton Rouge parish, located on the Mississippi River about five miles upstream from Port Allen which is the civil parish seat. The population is scattered for the most part among the various sugar plantations of the surrounding region. The settlement had formerly been a river landing of some consequence and in earlier days was populous enough to require the services of a resident pastor. With the gradual decline of the river trade, the ceaseless encroachments of the stream itself, the movement of population, the Lobdell of other parishes has now become little more than a memory.

As far as it is possible to reconstruct the history of the parish from information available in the church records, it appears that the Rev. E. M. Lossuarn was the first resident pastor and his term extended from January 1876 until May 1882. He was succeeded by the Rev. H. Cajone who served the parish but for a short interval, being replaced by the Rev. F. Laroche in the early part of 1883. Father Laroche remained as pastor until June 1886, when he was apparently granted a year's leave of absence during which time we find the Rev. J. Fallon in charge. Father Laroche returned to parish in June 1887, and served continuously thereafter until June 1890. At this time, the Rev. A. E. d'Hommee was appointed to succeed him. Father d'Hommee's pastorate came to a close in January 1894, and he was replaced by the Rev. P. J. Healy who was in charge of the parish until August 1899. Father Healy's successor was the Rev. Robert Moise who was destined to be the last resident pastor, as the parish reverted to the status of a mission in May 1904, being attached to Grosse Tete under the pastorate of the Rev. Francis Badeaux. From May 1904 to December 1906, the missions of Lobdell and Port Allen were served from Grosse Tete by Father Badeaux.

In December 1906, these two missions were transferred to St. Joseph Church, Baton Rouge, under the pastorate of the Rev. J. F. Solignac. Father Solignac gave complete charge of the West Baton Rouge parishes to his assistant, the Rev. Adrian Loots, who attended them regularly until April 1909. The Rev. A. Delnom, likewise assistant pastor at Baton Rouge, also rendered service for a short time.

In January of 1910, the missions of Lobdell and Port Allen were more changed hands and we find them again allied to Grosse Tete. The Rev. P. C. Cambiaire, who had meanwhile been appointed pastor of Grosse Tete, had charge of them until June 1915. He was replaced temporarily by the Rev. Vincent Ciolino, assistant at Baton Rouge, during the months of July and August, 1914.

In July 1915, Lobdell and Port Allen were adopted a second time by St. Joseph Church, Baton Rouge, under the pastorate of the Very Rev. Arthur Drossaerts. They were served by the Rev. Vincent Prats, assistant, until April 1916, and by the Rev. M. H. Chauvin, also assistant,

that date until February 1917. When Father Chauvin was assigned there, Father Prats again took charge of both missions and continued thus until January 1919. At this time, the care of the West Baton Rouge missions was divided between the two assistants. Father Prats remained in charge of Lobdell, where a new chapel had just been completed solely through his efforts, and Port Allen was given in charge of the Rev. Lucien Caillouet who had but recently been named assistant at Baton Rouge. This arrangement continued in effect until September of the same year, when Father Caillouet was assigned care of both missions.

The following year, August 3, 1920, the missions of Lobdell and Port Allen were erected into a separate parish, as aforesaid, and Rev. Lucien Caillouet was appointed the first pastor. Father Caillouet immediately took up his residence at Lobdell where he was hospitably given a home by the late Mrs. Nora Cronan, pending the construction of a rectory. On August 23, 1920, Messrs. Leon Bernard and Edouard Bourg were appointed the first trustees to serve on the Board of Directors. The parish was incorporated under the title of the Congregation of Sts. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Church and the first meeting of the Board was held on September 17, 1920. The charter was filed with the Secretary of State on September 22, 1920.

The property on which stood the chapel at Lobdell had been donated by the Cronan family in the early part of 1918 when the construction of a new levee made it necessary to demolish the old church and erect a new one further removed from the river. It was on this new property that the rectory was built, adjoining the church. The building was completed and ready for occupancy in February 1921.

The chapel in Port Allen was a small frame structure located on a plot of ground originally deeded to Archbishop Janssens on March 11, 1922. The building dates from that time. It must have been originally very small as an addition was made to it in course of time to bring it to its present dimensions of 30 x 60 ft. The Lobdell chapel was approximately the same size. It was this old chapel in Port Allen that served as a place of worship for the Catholics of the community for 35 years. Mass was attended regularly from Lobdell while the pastor resided there. Mass was said on Sundays and holy days and twice during the week, on Wednesdays and Fridays. Catechetical instructions were also given two times a week. During Lent and on other special occasions, evening services were provided on two nights a week or on Sunday. Similar services were regularly held at Lobdell, so that both congregations received equal attention. A notable event was the first official visit of His Excellency, Archbishop John W. Shaw, to the new parish, when he also administered the sacrament of Confirmation to a class of forty boys and girls, on November 27, 1923. That year was also marked by the first mission given in the parish from March 11 to March 25th under the able direction of Rev. Charles Cassidy, C.P.

Strange as it may seem, the larger percentage of the members of the parish resided in and around Port Allen and the services there were always better attended. This was due to a greater concentration of the population in that area and easier means of access to the church. As time went on, it became increasingly evident that the situation would have to be reversed and Port Allen made the parish seat with Lobdell as a mission. The growth and development of Port Allen kept pace with the times, while Lobdell steadily declined due to unfortunate business

itions in the agricultural area which obliged many Catholic residents to emigrate from the parish. Port Allen had the advantage of being also the civil parish seat and therefore a logical center for establishment of a church parish. Its location directly opposite Capital City of Louisiana and its rapid development into a progressive town were other factors which justified the belief that welfare of the parish would best be served by a change in location.

It was with this eventuality in mind that provision for future needs of the parish was made in the purchase of a centrally located square of ground on March 21, 1925. Two years later, on August 8, 1927, formal approval of His Excellency, Archbishop John W. W., was obtained to proceed with the removal of the rectory from Lobdell to Port Allen. This action met with the approval of the great majority of the parishioners who signed a petition requesting it. Actual work of dismantling the rectory began on September 6, 1927, and materials were transferred to Port Allen where it was rebuilt on new church property. The old chapel in another section of the parish continued to serve as parish church until a larger one could be erected on the new location. This was not long delayed as actual construction on the new building began on June 20, 1928. The present church, a commodious structure with a seating capacity of 600 and fully furnished, was completed in time to be dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, November 29, 1928. The congregation was honored by the presence of the Archbishop, three prelates, and a score of visiting priests on that memorable occasion. The church was filled to the doors with parishioners, friends and well-wishers among the laity. Under such auspicious circumstances, the parish of the Holy Family, Port Allen, began its career with much promise. It has steadily progressed ever since and is maintaining a healthy spiritual and temporal growth. As to advance predictions, the town of Port Allen has forged ahead and has attracted new dwellers with the excellent advantages it has to offer the home-seeker. The Catholic element in the resulting increase of population has been preponderant, so that to-day the parish numbers approximately 1300 Catholic souls.

The old chapel in Port Allen has now been converted into a parish hall where religious instruction classes are held daily, parish societies assemble, and church benefits are occasionally given. The chapel at Lobdell has now ceased to exist as such. With the permission of the Archbishop and by resolution of the Board of Directors, it was disposed of by sale on February 3, 1932. This action was made necessary by the construction of a new levee line at Lobdell requiring the evacuation of the church property. The chapel had not been in use, except for catechetical instruction, since January 1929. At that time, Sunday Mass was discontinued at Lobdell owing to the small number of attendants which did not justify the service. It was found more desirable to have two masses on Sunday at Port Allen where the need was more pronounced. The wisdom of this move became immediately apparent in the notable increase in attendance at both masses. The short distance separating Lobdell from Port Allen, with travel made easy by model roads, placed Mass within convenient reach of all. As a matter of greater facility for the school children, catechetical instructions are still given twice weekly to a large number of children living in the Lobdell sector. But the automobile and the paved road of to-day have eliminated the necessity of having Holy Mass celebrated on Sunday in churches only a few miles apart, especially where the attendance does not justify

As a far cry from the days of the early pioneers when travel from mission to another entailed hardship and often required the greater portion of a day. To-day, the convenience of the telephone, the automobile, and the hard-surfaced road places the furthest corner of the parish within fifteen minutes of the services of the priest. Things are now so matter-of-fact that it is sometimes difficult to realize that this startling change has been effected during the twenty years. While deploring many of the abuses attendant upon material progress, honesty compels the admission that it has been one of the Church's greatest allies in extending her scope of activity and bringing the benefits of Religion to everyone's doorstep. To the West Progress as an efficient missionary in promoting the work of saving souls is the great opportunity of the hour. May future history translate this opportunity into a record of accomplishment.

(See Lobdell) -