

Settlement in Western Iowa and Monona County

Iowa was admitted to the Union in 1846 and soon afterwards the western part of the state was opened for settlement. The influx was slow at first, but as the word spread about the great possibilities in this new land, the tide of empire soon went westward.

The first settlement in Monona County was made in the summer of 1851, in what is now Franklin Township. The first known Catholic settlers here date back to 1855. From early Monona County histories and newspapers we gather that Isaac Davis settled in Section 34 of Franklin Township in April of 1855, having come here from Lee County in this same state. This family belonged to the Catholic Church and later, with the establishment of a separate parish at Blencoe, were prominent members of that parish. Timothy Murphy and his son John R. Murphy came here in October of 1857. They first settled on a farm near Gard Lake in section 20 of Franklin Township, and later in section 12, west of Onawa in the vicinity of Blue Lake.

Patrick G. Dundon came to the county in 1861, locating first in Fairview Township, and later in Ashton Township, section 6. Peter Reily and his father Patrick Reily came to Sherman Township, section 8, on March 25, 1865, from Webster City, Iowa, and were the first known Catholic settlers in the town of Blencoe.

Among the early Catholic pioneers of western Monona County before and during the year 1872 besides the above-mentioned Davis, Murphy, Reily, and Dundon families, we find early records showing the names of John Kelsey, Phil O'Neal, Dennis McCarthy, Owen Conlan, Thomas Cody, William Tone, John Olrey, John Jennewine, James Gaffney, L. A. Harper, Thomas Carroll, John Clarke, Patrick Walsh, Germain Schurdevin, David Bowers and John McGarr families.

Later, in the 1880's and 1890's, in and around Blencoe we find the names of John Kelsey, who was one of the organizers of the Onawa parish, and Robert Kelsey, who had formerly resided in the Whiting vicinity, Anthony Brown, Pat Manley, W. H. Bassett, M. A. Marley, James Bruen, Tim Bruen, Mark and Honora Bruen, Tom Bruen, Pat Bruen, Nora and Maggie Bruen, Bernard Quinn, Jessie Peck (later sheriff of Harrison County), the Kerwin family, John C. McKenna, Edward and

Charles Torticill, Tom Duffy, Richard Nichol森, Peter McCarville, Pat and John Marley, Pat Neales, Mary McShane and her mother, Tom and John Croghan, the Kennedy family and Mrs. John Henry.

In and around Whiting in the same decade we can add the names of Pat Dunn, Pat Rogers, Lilly Moon, the McDerrmotts, the Olreys, Mrs. Girardott, the Mustards, Mrs. Henry Dunagen (who was a Rogers), William Zongker, Pat Crowe, Louis Mathys, the Malones, the Riordans, the Zortmans, Mrs. Will Folsom and Mrs. Rose Folsom. Some of these later lived in and near Onawa and Blencoe.

In the Onawa vicinity, at the turn of the century, the names of the following families were added to the list: Benjamin, Clodfelter, Henry Brennan, William Brennan, Mike O'Gorman, Nick Keitges, Ed S. Cody, John Beigel, William Corrigan, Dr. Drew, and M. A. Marley. There no doubt were others, but, writing this years later, we have not been able to gather all the names.

Early Catholic Services

Services for these pioneers were held as far back as 1858. There were only a few Catholic families in the vicinity at that time, and they attended the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which was offered in the homes of the different members. The Divine Services were conducted by various missionary priests who traveled from place to place on foot or on horseback to bring spiritual comforts to the early struggling pioneers. Their visits were, of course, few and far between and at uncertain intervals; but in those homes the priest, weary and footsore after long journeys over bad trails and swollen creeks, always found a welcome, and continued on his way rejoicing. Among the early homes where Mass is known to have been offered, were the Timothy Murphy home west of Onawa, where the first known Mass in this parish was celebrated in the summer of 1858; the Isaac Davis, Thomas Duffy and M. A. Marley homes near Blencoe; the Peter Reily home in Blencoe; the Olrey home at Whiting; and the Patrick Dundon home northwest of Onawa.

Although we know that Mass was offered earlier in farm homes around Blencoe, the first recorded Mass within the limits of what is now the town of Blencoe was offered in the Peter Reily home in 1866 by Father McLaughlin, a missionary priest.