

## Stories about Oakwood and Sacred Heart

### Appearing in the newsletter Chez Nous

1. About Sacred Heart Parish: Nov-Dec 2000
2. Bishop Ray Lessard, a son of Sacred Heart: Nov-Dec 2000  
(Bishop Lessard's recounting of his 1975 visit to Ste Anne de Beaupre can be found at [www.chez-nous.net/account.html](http://www.chez-nous.net/account.html))
3. Memories of Christmas and Midnight Mass by Marvin Campbell Jan-Fev 1995
4. Les Canadien-Francais de Quebec by Ernest Ebert Jan-Fev 1993
5. Christmas in Grafton ND by Henry Bernard Jr Dec-Jan 1989

# Chez Nous

The newsletter of **La Société** **Canadienne Française** du Minnesota

### The tiniest of thumbnail sketches of Oakwood, North Dakota, and it's parish, Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Information from the Centennial Book of  
Sacred Heart Church, 1981, and  
Volume I of Walsh Heritage,  
the History of Walsh County ND, 1976.

Oakwood ND is the tiniest of villages, no longer appearing on any maps, located perhaps four miles east of Grafton, in northeastern North Dakota. While it predated the founding of Grafton by several years, it was early "left in the dust", since the railroad came to Grafton... and not Oakwood.

Today's Oakwood is a pristine and beautiful little place with several houses, one or two businesses, all surrounding a beautiful prairie Catholic church. Long gone, but still an active memory, is a large Catholic school which educated thousands of local children until it closed in 1967.

This issue is a small tribute to this community and to one of its progeny, Bishop Raymond Lessard.

What was to become Oakwood was first settled by Mr. Joseph Charpentier. Charpentier and his wife Louise (Allard) and family left Cochrane (probably Corcoran), 23 miles west of Minneapolis, in 1872, settling first near Fort Abercrombie (near Wahpeton ND), and by 1874 arriving at the general area of Oakwood.

In 1878, and years following through the late 1890s, many French-Canadians homesteaded in the Oakwood area. There are innumerable stories. Many came from eastern or lower Canada (as Quebec was sometimes called). Many others came from Minneapolis-St. Paul and other areas. Some of the many French-Canadian surnames in the initial settlement were as follows (many of the below names are represented



Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Oakwood ND,  
August, 2000

1878 -Barnabe, Brunelle, Charpentier, Collette, DesChenes, Girard, Huard, LaChapelle, LaRoche,

Savard, Trudeau,

1879 (new surnames) Boivin, Bourcier, Boutin, Chaponneau, Desautels, Donelly, French, Goulet, LaBerge, LaBonte, Lessard, McLernan, Parent, Patenaude, Pellant, Poole, Sullivan, Suprenant, Vary.

1880 (new surnames) Bellegrade, Bolduc, Bradford, Campbell, Couture, Daley, Demers, Faille, Fortier, Lacoste, Lamarre, Garant, Sabourin, Sevigny, Soucy,

And on, and on, through 1897, many more French-Canadians, mostly farmers, appear in Oakwood... Even with a sprinkling of Irish<sup>2</sup>, this was a French-Canadian parish in all ways.

On July 11, 1880, Father Louis Bonin made his first visit to the community, then called Park River settlement, and "celebrated the first high Mass in Oakwood, where on this same occasion he also baptized ten children. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was celebrated in a log cabin, located on the south side of the Park River about one and one-half mile west of the present church site. That building still [stood in 1981] serving as a granary." (Sacred Heart Centennial History)

In 1906, St Aloysius Academy was founded at Oakwood, and until 1965 (high school) and 1967 (grades) the school staffed by nuns served the children of Oakwood Parish. (Even earlier, an ambitious priest had endeavored to begin a college in Oakwood, but his dream, while it actually came to fruition, was short-lived.)

This was a parish in which vocations to the religious life were apparently taken seriously. Through 1981, one bishop, five priests, two brothers and twenty-two sisters claimed Oakwood, Sacred Heart and St. Aloysius Academy as home.

<sup>1</sup> - This partial list represents about a third of the names listed as settlers through 1897 (the last listing is LaFreniere). Often the names are repeats as entire families, as sets of brothers, migrated to the community together, some from Canada, some from Minneapolis area, some from other places. The initial settlement date of 1878 coincides with the completion of the railroad from Minneapolis to Winnipeg, and thus the settlement time may not be coincidental. Some non-French names appear in the list, but even this can be deceiving. The family name Campbell, for instance, is virtually 100% French-Canadian - the surname ancestor Campbell, from Scotland, was in Canada in the early 1700's, and all subsequent marriages were within the French-Canadian culture.

<sup>2</sup> - The interaction of ethnic groups was a dilemma even in these early days on the almost empty prairies. One pioneer French-Canadian woman was warned by her parents to be wary of the Indians and Norwegians.

## Connections: some brief observations

By Dick Bernard, editor, Chez Nous

I probably first visited the tiny village of Oakwood, North Dakota long prior to my ability to remember such visits. My grandparents lived in nearby Grafton ND, and Oakwood was home to many relatives and friends of Grandpa Henry and Grandma Josephine (Collette) Bernard. Josephine grew up in Oakwood, and husband to be Henry surfaced there from Quebec ca early 1890s, following his brother Joseph, who had migrated there with his new wife and her family (Gourde) in 1888. Josephine and Henry (his baptismal name was Honore) married in June, 1901, at Sacred Heart church a half mile or so from her home.

In 1981, in my infancy of searching for family history, I returned to Oakwood, meeting people such as cousin Rene and spouse Lil Collette, long time residents of suburban San Diego CA. Rene grew up in the Oakwood area.

I toured, of course, the bulletin board of any community's history - the cemetery. The gravestones in the Sacred Heart churchyard were a potpourri of very French names. There was even a family name "French", which appeared frequently.

It was at Oakwood, at age 41, where I finally got in touch with my French-ness.

About the same time, in the very early 1980s - through some unrecalled serendipity, I met Alice Sell, a Collette cousin of my grandmother, who had grown up in Dayton MN, and now lived in north Minneapolis. (Her father, Alfred, had originally migrated with his siblings and parents from Minneapolis area to Oakwood, but a short time later had decided to return to the Minneapolis area. The family had earlier, in the 1860s, migrated from St. Lambert PQ to the forerunner of Minneapolis, St. Anthony.). In turn, Alice introduced me to Anna Plaisance, yet another Collette cousin, whose voice was an absolutely identical twin to my Grandma Bernard's. The resemblance was almost eerie. Her voice was Grandma, no mistake, even though I had no recordings of Grandma's voice. I had known Anna's son, Vernon Plaisance, when he was a Minnesota state legislator in the early 1970s. I had no idea, then, that he and I were relatives! (Alice, Anna and Vernon are all since deceased. May they rest in peace.)

Through them, I think, I learned of a Bishop Raymond Lessard of Savannah GA diocese, who had Collette roots on both sides of his family, and who had grown up in Oakwood, North Dakota. In late 1988, I first corresponded with Bishop Raymond, and it was nine years later, in October, 1997, when I first met him in person in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

### Bishop Raymond Lessard

Note: At the end of November, 2000, retired Bishop of Savannah, GA, Raymond Lessard, was in Savannah to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Savannah Diocese, and the completion of a major renovation of the beautiful Cathedral there. Raymond Lessard, a country kid from rural North Dakota. Here is his story, as told in the 1981 Centennial History of Sacred Heart Parish, Oakwood, North Dakota

Raymond William Lessard was born at Oakwood, ND, December 21, 1930....

After graduating from St. Aloysius Academy in Oakwood and attending business school for one year in Grand Forks, he began studies for the priesthood in 1949 as a college freshman at Nazareth Hall Preparatory Seminary in St. Paul MN. Two years later, he was

enrolled at the St. Paul Seminary, also in St. Paul, where he earned a B.A. Degree. In 1953, he was sent to Rome by Aloisius Cardinal Muench, then Bishop of Fargo, to study theology at the North American College. He was ordained a priest in Rome on Dec. 16, 1956, by Bishop Martin J. O'Connor. In June of 1957, he was graduated from the Pontifical Gregorian University with a license in Sacred Theology.

He returned to the United States in July of 1957, serving for three years as an assistant to the pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral in Fargo. In 1960, he returned to Rome as secretary to Cardinal Muench, who was then assigned to the Curia (administrative officers) at the Vatican. At the same time, Father Lessard continued graduate studies in theology and canon law at the Gregorian University. After Cardinal Muench's death in 1962, he was named assistant superior of the North

## Prelate enroute to Georgia



Grand Forks (ND) Herald late April, 1973

**BISHOP-ELECT RAYMOND** Lessard chatted with his parents Mr. and Mrs. Victor Lessard, Oakland, N.D., as they waited to board a plane Thursday morning at Grand Forks International Airport. Msgr. Lessard will be installed as Bishop of the Savannah, Ga., Diocese on Friday afternoon. (Herald photo by Ken Kleen)

Msgr. Raymond W. Lessard, 42-year-old native of Oakwood, N.D., left Grand Forks International Airport Thursday morn-

←  
ing for Savannah, Ga., a city he has never visited.

It will be in Savannah on Friday afternoon in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist that Msgr. Lessard will be consecrated Bishop of Savannah. Taking part in the consecration

will be the Most Rev. Justin A. Driscoll, Bishop of the Fargo Diocese. The Savannah Diocese covers an area of 36,346 square miles and has a Catholic population of 35,280.

Joining the bishop-elect on the flight from Grand Forks were his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Lessard of Oakwood and other friends and relatives. On the plane from Grand Forks was Rev. Robert Mullins of the University of North Dakota. Joining the group in Savannah will be Msgr. Lessard's sister, Mrs. Charles (Evelyn) Smith, Longview, Wash. and Rev. Kenneth Gallagher of Grand Forks, a cousin of the bishop-elect.

Msgr. Lessard has spent the last 13 years in Rome, Italy, serving in various positions in the Vatican. He has spent the past 10 days visiting with friends and relatives in Oakwood. Many friends and relatives attended a special parish service on Easter Sunday honoring the bishop-elect.

American College Graduate House in Rome.

During the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), Father Lessard served as a "peritus" or theological advisor to the Bishops.

In January of 1964, he was assigned to the staff of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Bishops, a position he held until his appointment in 1973 as Bishop of Savannah.

Also from 1969-73, he was director of Villa Stritch, a residence erected in Rome for American priests and bishops working at the Vatican.

He was named a papal chaplain, with the title of monsignor, in March of 1971, by Pope Paul VI.

His appointment by Pope Paul VI as Bishop of Savannah was made during a Consistory held on March 5, 1973, at the Vatican. He received Episcopal ordination in St. John the Baptist Cathedral of Savannah on April 27, 1973.



Bishop Lessard with Pope John Paul II (1993)



St. John the Baptist Cathedral, Savannah GA,  
January 1999

### Catholicism with a French accent: French Refugees in Savannah and Augusta

By Rita H. DeLorme

From The Southern Cross publication of the Diocese of Savannah GA, April 1, 1999.

They were into music and the arts and they spoke a different language. Yet, foreign tongue and all, they were central to development of the Church in Georgia. Who were they? They were the French who immigrated to the cities of Savannah and Augusta in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. At first mistrusted because of their differences and because of the slaves some of them brought with them, they found sympathizers among those who realized that they had survived not one, but two revolutions.

They had left behind them a France scarred by bloody revolt. Members of nobility or friends of the nobility or even, as the little seamstress in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, employees of the nobility,

soon became fugitives in their own country. In jeopardy, too, were the lives of those who practiced Catholicism in an age when questioning of Christianity and everything else became both popular and accepted. Priests and nuns were among those hunted by the new, "enlightened" French state.

These people, then, had fled France and gone to St. Domingue, a part of Haiti where the French had been operating prosperous coffee and spice plantations by using African slave labor. The refugees were not long in St. Domingue before, as often happens where there is the evil of slavery, another revolution took place, causing Frenchmen living there to seek asylum in this country. They emigrated to the United States all along the eastern seaboard, with the city of Charleston as their chief gateway to a new life in South Carolina and Georgia.

With these transplanted Frenchmen came Catholic clergy, notably the priests LeMoine, LeMercier and Carles. Father Jean (John) LeMoine evidently administered sacraments in Savannah in the early 1790's, as his death was noted in the *Georgia Gazette* of November 20, 1794.

One week later, the *Georgia Gazette* contained an announcement by one Francois Courvoisie, agent for the French consulate, of the sale of "... all the personal estate of John Lemoyne (sic), deceased." Father LeMoine was buried in Colonial Cemetery in Savannah. A marker in his memory stands in the cemetery just across the street from the second location of the Church of Saint John the Baptist, on Abercorn Street, between Liberty Lane and Hull Street.

When Father Olivier (Oliver) LeMercier came to Savannah in 1796, one of his first duties was to perform the Christian rite of burial at Father LeMoine's grave because no priest had been available to provide these rites for the man who had been called "the first parish priest" of Savannah.

Father LeMercier, who was called the "Missionary of Georgia," had also been authorized in 1796 by Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore to take care of Savannah's Catholics. It was LeMercier who tended the Catholic flock, largely French at this time, when the first Catholic Church was located at 123 Montgomery Street.

Another French clergyman and refugee, the Abbe Anthony Carles, also was on the scene. Abbe Carles' relative, Madame Cottineau, began the operation of what may have been the first school in Savannah. In late 1803, Father Carles signed church records as "priest rector *per interim* of the church", Father LeMercier having been named pastor at the troubled Saint Mary's Church in Charleston. Later Father LeMercier was lost at sea on what was probably a voyage to the West Indies. Abbe Carles first identified himself as "pastor of the



Bishop Lessard and Dick Bernard, October, 1997

Church" in 1804 and, except for brief intervals of travel, continued as pastor of the Church of Saint John the Baptist until 1819.

Given the provenance of so many of the diocese's early priests, it is no wonder that archival records of the first churches in Savannah and Augusta are dotted with the names of Frenchmen, many of whom brought their entire families and remaining slaves to receive the sacraments. The names of these people echo from that distant time to our own: Boulineau, Gaudry, Rossignol, Roma, du Bignon, to cite just a few.

Some of the French in Savannah moved on to Augusta, site of another French refugee enclave, while others remained in Savannah or sailed back to their homeland once the situation there settled. Remarkably, in an emotional climate which still was not altogether favorable to Catholics, these "foreigners" had charmed their way into acceptance.

The French brought, it was said, a certain "lightheartedness" to the communities in which they lived. Early parish registers in both Augusta and Savannah, written in their language, confirm the fact there was a time in Georgia when the Catholic Church, indeed, had a French accent.

# MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS AND MIDNIGHT MASS

by Marvin Campbell  
Brainerd MN

(Editors Note: Campbell may sound like a Scotch name, and it is, but Marvin Campbell is definitely a French-Canadian through and through. Marvin's earliest ancestor was a Scottish soldier who came to Canada during the French and Indian Wars, and who later married a French-Canadian woman. Thereafter, all his ancestry was French-Canadian. Marvin's cousin wrote about the family history in the Juillet-Aout, 1994, Chez Nous.)

My Mother was born in the village of Oakwood ND in 1895. Oakwood, a French-speaking farming community, is located about five miles east of Grafton. The "town" was made up of a livery stable, a "general" store, Sacred Heart Church, a Catholic elementary and high school, and a convent. Mother was always proud of having graduated from St. Aloysius Academy in both French and English.

Albert Campbell, a "foreigner" from northern Minnesota, and earlier Somerset WI, met Blanche Collette on the humble Collette farmstead located just one half mile from the church only two years after Blanche graduated from school. They were married at Sacred Heart when Mother was 18 years of age.

Contact with the Oakwood church was lost for a time as Mother and Dad rented farm land away from the thriving Oakwood area. But with time, we found ourselves near enough to call Sacred Heart of Oakwood our parish church. It was 7 miles to Oakwood from our farm and the country roads were such that often it was impossible for our Willys-Overland to overcome the black mud of the Red River Valley. This necessitated bringing into service our horse-drawn buggy, transportation which assured reaching our destination, but which "tried men's souls". Of course, we knew that when winter really "set in" that good old Bill and Ben would be called into service to pull the farm sleigh for our winter trips.

The highlight of these excursions was our annual nocturnal sleigh-ride to Oakwood to attend midnight Mass.

Father Bastien, a French-Canadian, was the Parish Priest for many years. He was a large burly man, not good looking, but very kind and loving. His entire existence was devoted to his Parish and

the good people he served. His summer visits to the farm of each parishioner in his old touring car were sources of joy to him and the people whom he visited. He would bless the crops, the animals and anything else which needed sanctification. We all looked forward to his friendly visits. Another call was made in the dead of winter with members of the parish chauffering him from place to place in a farm sleigh. He usually spent the night with our family, and his presence was always a special occasion for us.

We were accustomed to complying with Church rules outlining our need to fast and abstain from eating meat on certain days during the weeks of Advent. Naturally, this religious compliance only whetted our appetites for the many "treats" and special dishes which would be ours on Christmas Day and the weeks following.

Preparation for Christmas actually began in October and November of each year. We had no refrigeration, so the icy cold days of early winter heralded the butchering of beef, hogs, chickens and turkeys. Vegetables had already been canned and stored in the "cellar" along with an abundant supply of sauerkraut, potatoes and processed eggs. Fresh cuts of meat were wrapped and stored outdoors in barrels. Sausage, head cheese and bacon were salted and smoked. Salt pork, especially prepared for Dad's famous baked beans, was designated its special space, all in preparation for the long winter and Christmas Day!

A specific amount of ground and seasoned pork was put aside for French meat pies known as "Tourtiere" by all of the housewives in the Oakwood area. This "cholesterol" delicacy is unique. [Note recipes in following section of this newsletter - Editor].

Mother would often make a dozen pies which were frozen for later meals. The baked pies were served piping hot. I loved them with plain old-fashioned mustard.

Dad's forte was baked beans. He would soak the beans overnight after which he added cubed salt pork, molasses, brown syrup, onions, salt and pepper, some dry mustard and catsup. There was a cooking shelf on the back of the living room hard-coal heater where Dad placed the crock of beans early in the morning of Christmas eve. Invariably, they were perfect to eat when we returned home from Midnight Mass. We still use Dad's recipe to this day!

The intestines of the hogs were cleaned and

used as casings for blood sausage, known as "boudin" in French, a very special delicacy which Dad took great pride in preparing for the Christmas season. Other "festive" French foods were prepared for the "Holidays". Creton which was made from cracklings from rendered lard was used as a substitute for butter. One can easily ascertain that little of the hog was wasted!

In preparation for the Christmas Eve sleigh ride, a grain box which afforded maximum protection from the wind with a degree of safety was placed on one of the farm sleighs. Yard benches were located on each side of the box and an abundant amount of clean straw was spread on the floor. Horse blankets, which could be used later to keep the animals comfortable during the two hour service were placed "on board" for use by all of us en route to the church. We boys wore four buckle overshoes, sheep skin coats and warm caps with ear laps - ugly but warm. Bricks which had been heated in the kitchen oven were placed under the benches where Mother and "the girls" would sit so their feet could be kept warm. A ten gallon cream can of fresh water was also made a part of the equipment. That which was not used as drinking water was given to the horses when we arrived at the church. Despite the bitter cold, the horses were covered with "sweat" at the end of their journey.

Many of our friends and relatives added sleigh bells to the horses' harness, wove the tails and mains and generally "showed us up" as far as appearances were concerned, but we still enjoyed a very special pride in the dependability of good old Bill and Ben.

The seven mile ride was always a pleasure and joy. It seemed as though the stars were much brighter on this special night, and we always managed to find a "special star" which we agreed must have been the Star of Bethlehem! Jingle Bells was sung with gusto and we reverently practiced singing Silent Night and Adeste Fideles. We knew that the choir would be singing several Latin hymns. We also recognized that many of the more popular and modern Christmas songs would be considered too "secular" to be sung at a Mass commemorating the birth of Christ!

Clouds of vapor preceded our entry into the decorated little church as we climbed the steps which ultimately led to our regular pew. The pungent smell of fresh incense filled the air and the evergreens surrounding the altar made us all wonder where such beautiful trees actually grew. Electric

lights cast new shadows in every direction accenting the stained glass windows which seemed much brighter this very special evening. After removing our scarfs and heavy coats, we strained to get a glimpse of the Christmas creche which the "good sisters" had built and located where all could see. It was a ritual for the parents to guide their children to the foot of the Nativity scene where all could witness the "Baby Jesus" with his outstretched arms as we imagined him pleading with us to love him and each other.

Despite the happy nature of this yearly celebration, we were accustomed to being quiet and very reverent. Holiday greetings could wait until we exited the Church.

The Mass was celebrated only in Latin and Father Bastien insisted on sermons delivered in both French and English, so we children knew that we would be "victims" of Father's Christmas celebration for at least two hours. Heads would bob, but we had been warned, "You had better stay awake if you don't want Santa Claus to forget you." We really didn't expect much, but we surely wanted to receive the gifts which Mother and Dad had hidden for all of us for when we got home.

It was after two a.m. by the time we started back in our straw filled sleigh. The stars shown brighter than ever and the moon which had moved to another part of the winter sky seemed to be prepared to guide us safely home.

Dad took care of the horses as we all scampered after Mother into the front room, where a brightly trimmed Christmas tree greeted us. "Boughten" decorations were sparse, but the garlands of popcorn and cranberries thrilled all of us. Maybe we didn't realize it at the time, but we probably appreciated our parent's sacrifices more than we recognized.

While we reveled in the surprises of the day, Mother moved to the kitchen where we could all join with Dad in devouring the wonderful and tasty Christmas surprises. When bed time came, we tripped upstairs to our comfortable beds, happy that Christmas was such a special day and aware that we were blessed with the most wonderful Mother and Dad in all the world!

## LES CANADIAN-FRANCAIS DE QUEBEC

by: Ernest Ebert, Grand Forks, ND

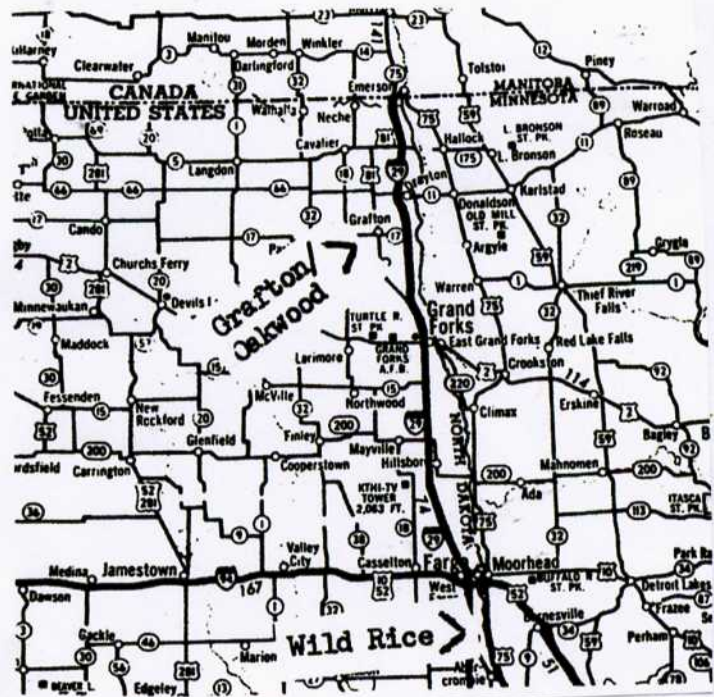
The first bonafide farmer in North Dakota was Charles Bottineau, a Frenchman who came to Dakota Territory in 1859. Not all early settlers had time or were in a position to raise the food that they needed. He saw an opportunity to produce it for them in the form of wheat, mutton, beef and vegetables and this was in the area now known as northeast North Dakota.

The first French-Canadian community in Dakota Territory was at Wild Rice southwest of Fargo. The settlers began to arrive in 1869. They came from small farms in Quebec. They wanted larger farms and came to stay.

Further north and in the area now known as Walsh County, early settlers in large numbers arrived during the years 1878, 1879 and 1881. German, Norwegian, Bohemian, Polish and French-Canadian people answered the call of the siren song of publicity which spoke of cheap land and bountiful yields to be harvested, from the as yet, largely unbroken prairies of Dakota Territory. This vast expanse of land could accommodate many farmers and larger farms, it was intimated.

Mostly, the French-Canadians came from small villages not far from the island-city of Montreal and some had spent some time in New England and Minnesota on the way. My grandparents came from one of those villages—St. Remi, Quebec. My mother remembered the long, narrow farms laid out in that way to afford a maximum number of frontages on the river. In a sense, it was like living in a town. Each farm contained about 25 arpents—an old French unit of length equal to about an acre.

Oakwood village, now Walsh County, was the center of a French-Canadian community located on the Park River seven miles west of it's junction with the Red River and about four miles east of later developed Grafton. It was here that Joseph Charpentier had established a settlement in 1878 on land that he had bought the rights to from some Indians for \$25. Later, when he gained title to the land on which he lived, he gave 10 acres for the purpose of building a church, convent, and establishing a cemetery. French-Canadian families came in large numbers in the late 1870's and early 1880's. Their family names included Brunelle, Barnaby, Collette, LaRoche, Girard, Savard, Deschenes, Laberge, Lessard, LaChappelle, Parent,



Pellant, Huard, Boutin, Vary, Patenaude, Suprenant, DeSautel and others. My grandparents, the Bernard Failles, came in 1879. Of these early pioneers the names DeSautel, Collette and Lessard are still prominent in the Grafton-Oakwood area.

The early settlement name of Park River, was changed to distinguish it from the name of the river and named Oakwood because of the many oak trees in the area. Of necessity, early pioneers were inventive. They used the strong oak trees to fashion neck yokes for their oxen, to make eveners and to construct parts for their wagons and other equipment. As soon they could, the settlers obtained a cow for milking and two or three pigs as a source of meat. They all had vegetable gardens which they planted with seeds brought from Canada. Sometimes, they ground their own flour at home with a grinder; other times the men went to Grand Forks to buy flour and salt.

Here are some of the French foods used for festive occasions, others for everyday consumption: CRETON, which consisted of cracklings from rendered lard, LA SOUPE AUX POIS (pea soup), TOURTIERE (meat pie), PORC SALE (salt pork), BOUDIN (blood sausage). Creton was used on bread like butter.

French priests occasionally visited the little cluster of homes of early Oakwood. One of these priests was Father Bonin who urged them to build a church. By 1881, the settlers had erected a church on the land donated by Charpentier. The



lower part was to be used as a chapel and the second floor provided a residence for the clergy. It was fitting that Father Penin offered the first Mass in June 1881. Father Malo was the first resident pastor. Since Grafton was a mission of Oakwood at that time and they had no church, Father Malo said Mass in a public hall over a saloon until the congregation built a church in 1883. A separate rectory in Oakwood was built in 1886. The first sisters from France.

Once established, the Oakwood parish

resembled every North Dakota French community in it's celebration of St. Anne's Day (July 26) and St. John Baptist Day (June 24). On special feasts, an assortment of processions, blessings and festivities broke the summer routine. Mardi Gras, a time for mid-winter excitement, men dressed in special costumes, visited farm homes throughout the day and invited neighbors to join in their revelry, for the Lenten days of restraint were approaching.

## Christmas Recollections:

CHRISTMAS IN GRAFTON, N.D.

*by Henry Bernard  
Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville, IL*

This is of no particular year though most refers to the years between 1910 and 1920 when I was not yet a teenager.

I recall the hardcoal heater that was set up in the corner of the living room just off my parents bedroom. It was put up in the fall and taken down in the spring. When it was real cold, there was a reddish glow from the burning coals that almost gave sufficient light for a room.

The space behind is where we hung our Christmas stockings (one of the clean black stockings we wore). Standard filling by Santa Claus was an orange in the toe, some candies, usually hard rock candy, that was

not wrapped; popcorn, an apple, and maybe an article of clothing. If the single toy was able to be fitted into the stocking it was put there, but if not, it was put on the floor. I mentioned SINGLE TOY; I remember getting an erector set one year, tinker toys another year and a windup locomotive, cars and tracks another year. Joe Bernard, who was also my Godfather, gave me a roll of nickels as combination birthday and Christmas gift each year until I was a senior in high school.

Midnight Mass was always attended regardless of the cold, snow, or storm. We walked the ten blocks to the church. Some people had a big meal when they returned home. I am sure that my grandparents Collettes had this to in their rural church parish in Oakwood. I am sure that we children were ready for bed right away when we got home BECAUSE SANTA CLAUS HADN'T VISTED YET!