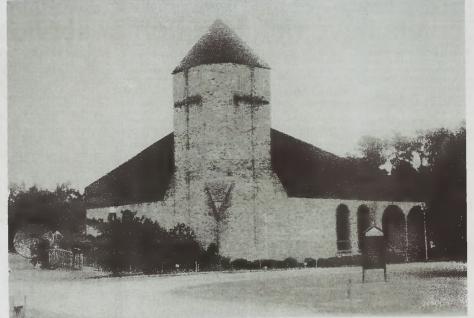
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St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church ound was broken for St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church West First Street in 1977, and the church was dedicated in

1980. Despite many construction problems and earlier challenges to find a home, the church now flourishes.

## Small Catholic church flourishes after rocky beginning in Ahoskie

By Gloria Newlin Shriver St. Chales Borromeo Church Jesus told his disciples that one man would sow and another would reap the harvest. That's exactly what happened at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Ahoskie. Early in the 19th century, the young bishop of Charleston, John England, traveled through his dio-cese, which included both Carolinas and Georgia, in an attempt to locate Catholics.

The reported that North Carolina had the fewest Catholics of any state — only about 500 — while South Carolina had 7,500, Unfor-tunately, the church lost many of those members, especially in the rural areas where few churches ex-isted, to other denominations. The only counties in the Roanoke-Chowan that were noted giving the bishop any hope were Hertford and Chowan. It's hard to understand why he considered these counties as helpful, because it also was recorded that there was a total

countes as netptu, because it also was recorded that there was a total of fewer than 10 Catholics in them. However, he continued to travel by boat up the Chowan River to visit five Catholics in Edenton and a Catholic couple in Murfreesboro. In spite of the hishop's hard work, the faith did not survive in the area. For many years, if any Catholics existed in the area, the found it pru-dent to keep their whereabouts un-known, for in those days, it was commercially and socially prudent to keep one's Catholic faith hidden. **Farnily starts church** Many years later, in 1934, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Foreman moved into a home on N.C. 42, where J.T. Hall now lives. So far as it is known, the Foremans were Ahoskie's first Catholic couple. The Foremans converted to Catholicism during the 1928 presi-dential election. They had left their faith, because their former minister made so many highly discrimina-tory remarks about presidential can-didate AI Smith's Catholic faith. When the Foremans moved from Norfolk, Va., to Ahoskie, they may have been dismayed to discover that not only was there no Catholic church but that there were no other Catholics in town. For seven years the Foremans raveled to the Edenton church, or to the Hule Scoltand Neck mission or to the thas on Sundays. In 1941, they discussed the pos-sibility of having a priest come to Ahoskie to say Mass at their home on Wednexday morninge.

to have a Mass said at their induce on Wednesday mornings. The Foremans are considered the founders of the Ahoskie church, but it is believed that Arthur and Hilda Myers of Woodland, a Mrs. Shearon and a Mrs. Allen also

Shearon and a Mrs. Alten also joined them for services. Shortly thereafter, one of the two priests in Tarboro arranged to come to Ahoskie so that Mass could be celebrated on Sunday mornings.

## Rental building found

During World War II, as more people came to town, the Foremans sought to get a better meeting

place. They were allowed to rent space in the Garrett Building on Mitchell Street for \$10 a month, and the little congregation set about converting it into a chapel. The work completed, Ahoskie had its first Catholic church, called St. Richards. The first Mass was

Mr. and Mrs. William Foreman, who converted to Catholicism during the 1928 presidential campaign, are believed to be first Catholic family in Ahoskie.

celebrated on Thanksgiving Day, 1942, with Edward Ashe, Dr. James Shannon, Mrs. Carroll Credle and Dr. Archie Monk. A year later, however, the con-gregation was asked to vacate the building by the new owner. Candy store bought So, the membership located a

building by the new owner. Candy store bought So the membership located a two-story, red-brick candy store on Academy Street that was put up for sale by the Ely family. A grant of 56,000 from the Catholic Exten-sion Society was obtained on condi-tion the church be named St. Charles. With the grant and donations from others, including \$100 from a non-Catholic neighbor, Eugene Moore, who arranged the purchase, the litle band of Catholics bought de store. Bishop Eugene McGuinness then appointed a resident priest for Ahoskie, Father Giles Wade, a Franciscan, who lived in a room over the Foremans' garage. Father Giles spent many recorded hours traveling in nearby countries in search of other Catholics. The worshipers celebrated their first Mass in their new home on taster Sunday in 1944, but the bishop did not come to dedicate the church until Oct. 15. 1944. The first person baptized in the new church was Martha Louises Shannon, the daughter of Dr. James and Beverly Shannon, on Jan. 20, 1946.

1946. The first pastor, however, was called back to seminary in Pennsyl-vania to instruct new students. He left behind 27 parishioners, includ-ing Dr. T.A. Monk and Joe Andru-sia, who are members today.

## Church integrated

Church integrated By 1954, the church had 85 members, and a weckly Bible study was added for children and adults. Miss Charlotte Brett helped instruct the children. During this time, St. Charles welcomed its first African American members, and it is be-lieved to be the first integrated church in the Roanoke-Chowan area

church in the Roanoke-Chowan area. The bishop designated the Ahoskie church in 1954 as a train-ing ground for new pastors, and a succession of newly ordained priests followed. In later years, because of the increase of Catholics and the de-crease in the number of priests, St. Charles has been served by older priests willing to help the little church. The first priests resided in an apartment above the worship area of the church on Academy Street, until the parishioners rented a little brick

attend Mass in Williamston. Only one St. Thomas priest has been buried in Ahoskie Cemetery, Fahter Herman Bosschermuller, a native of The Netherlands. After a near-fatal auto accident, he con-tracted an illness and died in 1966. New church dedicated The "feature of the church"

home on First Street, adjacent to the church, as a rectory in about 1956. St, Charles members also helped Catholics in Bertie County found a mission in Windsor. The mission continued until it was closed a few years ago, and those Catholics now

New Church dedicated The "father of the church," William Foreman, died in 1969 in Virginia Beach, Va. His wife, how-ever, lived to see the dedication of the present in church in 1980. Father John Bierman, SAC, of the Pallotime Fathers came to serve the church in 1975, and Brother William Sharkey was sent to assist

him. They wrote in the journal that the condition of church was poor,

the condition of church was poor, almost dangerous. The church owned land on N.C. 561 and they proposed it be used as the site of a new church. They se-curred a \$50,000 grant from their or-der to help in the construction. The order was concerned about the American church and its rural min-istry, but the two emphasized the commitment of St. Charles parish-ioners because of the funds they raised. Eather Bierman wrote in The

raised. Father Bierman wrote in The North Carolina Catholic Journal in 1976: "Sometimes the parishioners of St. Charles feel they ve been for-gotten by the rest of their fellow Catholics in North Carolina and elsewhere in America. They've wor-ried about the building they use for a church.... It's failing down." So strong was the concern for the Ahoskie church was that \$7,000 was raised in donations from across the country.

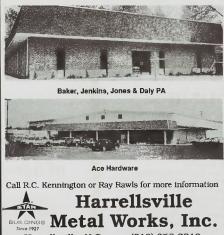
was raised in donations from across the country. Ground-breaking was held July 9, 1977, for the new church, and in the fall, Father Tim O'Connor was assigned as pastor. Then three religious sisters, Mary Genino, Theresa Cunningham and

(See CATHOLIC, Page 12B)

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News nugget from 1935

Miss Deborah Brown spent the were supplied by Mrs. Martha weekend with her mother, Mrs. Hope Basnight Smith and were in Mary Brown, in Menola. Editor's note: News nuggets News-Herald.

