



St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church
Ground was broken for St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church on 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. Charles 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 diocese, which included both Carolinas and Georgia, in an attempt to locate Catholics.

He reported that North Carolina had the fewest Catholics of any state — only about 500 — while South Carolina had 7,500. Unfortunately, the church lost many of those members, especially in the rural areas where few churches existed, 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 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 bishop's hard work, the faith did not survive in the area.

For many years, if any Catholics existed in the area, the found it prudent to keep their whereabouts unknown, for in those days, it was commercially and socially prudent to keep one's Catholic faith hidden.

Family 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 presidential election. They had left their faith, because their former minister made so many highly discriminatory remarks about presidential candidate Al 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 traveled to the Edenton church, or to the little Scotland Neck mission or to the Roanoke Rapids church to attend Mass on Sundays.

In 1941, they discussed the possibility of having a priest come to Ahoskie to say Mass at their home on the Aulander highway. Father Peter McMeeny, the Roanoke Rapids priest, helped them arrange to have a Mass said at their home 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 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 congregation was asked to vacate the 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 \$6,000 from the Catholic Extension Society was obtained on condition 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 little band of Catholics bought the 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 worshippers celebrated their first Mass in their new home on Easter 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 Louise Shannon, the daughter of Dr. James and Beverly Shannon, on Jan. 20, 1946.

The first pastor, however, was called back to seminary in Pennsylvania to instruct new students. He left behind 27 parishioners, including Dr. T.A. Monk and Joe Andrusia, who are members today.

Church integrated

By 1954, the church had 85 members, and a weekly 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 believed to be the first integrated church in the Roanoke-Chowan area.

The bishop designated the Ahoskie church in 1954 as a training ground for new pastors, and a succession of newly ordained priests followed. In later years, because of the increase of Catholics and the decrease 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

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

attend Mass in Williamston.

Only one St. Thomas priest has been buried in Ahoskie Cemetery, Father Herman Bosschermuller, a native of The Netherlands. After a near-fatal auto accident, he contracted an illness and died in 1966.

New church dedicated

The "father of the church," William Foreman, died in 1969 in Virginia Beach, Va. His wife, however, lived to see the dedication of the present 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, almost dangerous.

The church owned land on N.C. 561 and they proposed it be used as the site of a new church. They secured a \$50,000 grant from their order to help in the construction. The order was concerned about the American church and its rural ministry, but the two emphasized the commitment of St. Charles parishioners because of the funds they raised.

Father Bierman wrote in *The North Carolina Catholic Journal* in 1976: "Sometimes the parishioners of St. Charles feel they've been forgotten by the rest of their fellow Catholics in North Carolina and elsewhere in America. They've worried 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.

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)

News nugget from 1935

Miss Deborah Brown spent the weekend with her mother, Mrs. Mary Brown, in Menola. *Editor's note: News nuggets were supplied by Mrs. Martha Hope Basnight Smith and were in the Feb. 21, 1935 issue of The News-Herald.*

Congratulations Ahoskie

During The Centennial Celebration

Rose Brothers Paving Co., Inc.
GRADING AND PAVING CONTRACTORS

4 LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU
•Murfreesboro •Lewiston •Gaston •Elizabeth City
Home Office: Hwy 258 N., Murfreesboro, Phone 398-4126

We are Proud to Be a Part of Ahoskie's 100 Years of Growth by serving as the Contractors of Pre-Engineered

Metal Buildings Commercial and Agricultural



Eddie Harrell's Auto & Sports Store



Baker, Jenkins, Jones & Daly PA



Ace Hardware

Call R.C. Kennington or Ray Rawls for more information

Harrellsville Metal Works, Inc.
Harrellsville, N.C. (919) 356-2912
-ALSO- Complete Machine & Welding Shop

Furniture Galleries INC.

Congratulations Ahoskie!

Furniture Galleries is proud to have served the Roanoke-Chowan for over 32 years.

Guess Who Contest

The first person to guess who these two children are from our advertisement which ran in 1967



- 1967 Prices Not Valid Today!
- High Chairs Birch with Plastic or Wood Tray
 - High Chairs, Maple with Foam Seat and Back
 - Playpen Nylon or Wood Sides Folding Type
 - Training Chair (Wood)
 - Strollers by Taylor - Tot
 - Crib Mattress Innerspring
 - Crib Spindal Sides and Ends

Baby Crib AND Mattress \$49

Reg. 79.90 Value NOW \$49

Reg. \$19.95	NOW \$13
Reg. 29.95	NOW \$19
Reg. 29.95	NOW \$ 7
Reg. 9.95	NOW \$ 7
Reg. 19.95	NOW \$13
Reg. 9.95	NOW \$ 7
Reg. 29.95	NOW \$19

Will Win A Free Lamp

125 W. Main St. Ahoskie 332-3155

Valued at **100⁰⁰**