

HISTORY OF THE SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH IN DEL RIO,  
VAL VERDE COUNTY, TEXAS

In 1884 Bishop John C. Neraz of San Antonio offered the Oblate Fathers the parish of St. Mary's in San Antonio with the proviso that they also take charge of Eagle Pass and its missions, including Spofford, Bracketville, Uvalde and Del Rio. By that time the settlement of San Felipe del Rio was twenty years old and still situated in Kinney County; Val Verde County was created in 1885. Until the Catholic church was built in 1892 Mass was celebrated in various homes and buildings in Del Rio (as San Felipe del Rio came to be called), including the home of Dona Paula Losoya de Taylor de Rivers and the home of Mrs. Geneva Wallen.

Property was acquired in 1885 at the corner of Mill and Greenwood Streets with a loan from the Oblate Fathers, and Mass was said in a small wooden shack already of the grounds. In the same year Bishop Neraz blessed a bell on the church grounds which was suspended from a wooden platform about five feet from the ground. Later it was placed in the belfry of the newly constructed church and still calls the faithful to Mass. Money for the new church was raised by many festivals and contributions from the Oblate Fathers and a special collection at San Antonio's St. Mary's Church, as well as donations by local parishioners of both time, labor and money.

F.J. Malmartel, O.M.I., undertook the erection of a stone church of Gothic architecture which replaced the old wooden building. The buff-colored limestone came from local sources. Mr. John Taini was the master stonemason and was assisted by Mr. Joe Tagliabue. This church was fifty-five feet long and thirty-six feet wide by twenty-one feet high at the lowest point of the roof, with a vestibule in front, measuring ten by twelve feet. On Nov. 15, 1891 Fr. Malmartel blessed the cornerstone. Records placed within it contained the signature of the Most Reverend Bishop Neraz, the Reverend J.M. Malmartel and laity as follows: Mary, Ella and

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1. Val Verde County Deed Records, Vol. K3, page 519

Annie Griner, Mr. G. Wallen, Mrs. Joseph Jones, Mrs. Theresa Howard, James Burns, Isabel and Esteban Salvatierra, Mr. J.H. Brauer, Francisco Franki, John Taini, Louis Kieffer, G. B. Casinelli, Frank and Mary Qualia, Victor Molano, Maria Roguillo, Thomas A. Carr and Mrs. Ed Kelly.

In 1895 the mission of Del Rio became the Parish of the Sacred Heart and Fr. Bule its first resident pastor. He built the rectory just north of the church which is still in use today.

This stone church served a growing number of parishioners for three decades, but by the late 1920's it was too small. In 1929 it was extensively enlarged, modernized and decorated. The remodeling was under the supervision of C.L. Monott of Oklahoma City, Okla. The ~~new~~<sup>remodeled</sup> church is a fine example of 13th Century Gothic architecture and seats 280 persons. Fifteen Gothic windows of stained glass depicting the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary were placed in it. These windows, by Dupleix Freres of Paris, France, are reproductions of the famous Medallion windows of Chartres Cathedral. On April 28, 1929 Archbishop A.J. Drossarts, D.D., of San Antonio dedicated the ~~new~~<sup>remodeled</sup> church and at the same time blessed the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes on the grounds.

On May 7, 1946 Sacred Heart Parish celebrated its Golden Jubilee in the presence of Archbishop Robert E. Lucy.

The parish continued to grow until there were a thousand parishioners and some were standing during each of the three Masses celebrated on Sundays. In 1966 plans were made to construct a new church on the same block as the old one. The new one was dedicated on February 9, 1969. The priceless stained glass windows are in it.

The fine old Gothic church has been used as a school cafeteria most recently and is in need of some repairs and restorations on the exterior.

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The above data is from a Souvenir Booklet of the Dedication of the Sacred Heart Church, Del Rio, Texas, compiled under the direction of Mrs. J.T. Mayfield and assisted by Mrs. J. Farrell, Mrs. J. Holmes, Mr. L. Kesler, Mrs. Frank Centilli and Mr. Dan Bus.