

History of Assumption Parish Grade School

“A first-class school is the glory and crown of a parish,” was the philosophy of the clergy and parents since the establishment of Assumption Parish. Stressing God’s laws while instilling the elements of the three R’s, teachers were able to reach the minds and hearts of the charter pupils of the parochial school dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. This has continued into the present generation.

The first brick church was built in **1848**, a respectable parsonage in **1871** and a teachers’ dwelling in **1884**. A log cabin school had been sponsored by the parishioners from the beginning, but it was not until **1881** that qualified teachers were available. The **Franciscan Sisters of the Province of St. Clara** whose motherhouse is in Paderborn, Germany, consented to teach the children. They lived and taught at Assumption from **1872** until **1886**. Their combined salary was \$350.00 a year with “free” room, furniture, coal and wood.

So it was in **1884** that **Reverend John T. Feltman** was sent to Assumption as pastor. He was the first American born priest to serve the parish. A native Kentuckian, he studied in Europe and was ordained in St. Louis in **1880**. Following his appointment to the parish, he made a number of physical plant improvements to the existing structures. He had erected a church steeple on the **1848** brick building. The bell for the steeple was donated by the **Auer** family and was blessed by **Archbishop Kenrick** in **1893**.

In **1886** after the **Franciscan sisters** were recalled by their order, **Father Feltman** engaged **Agnes Crumbach** for an interim teaching assignment. She was followed by **Mme. Cora LeCompte** from Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. **Mme. LeCompte**, of multi-lingual background, taught the children, whose primary language was German, in that language for half the day and in English the other half of the day.

The pastor, **Father Feltman**, gave instructions in Catechism and Bible History in German. There were 27 pupils at this time. A frame addition to the log cabin school was erected to serve the growing enrollment.

There was no school janitor, so the maintenance was done by the children. They washed the floors, brought in wood, made the fire, shoveled snow and also rang the church bell. The pupils wore no uniforms, but did wear “school clothes” which they had to take off when they came home from school! Many children attended school for only a few years,

according to **Joe and Anna Fuchs**, life-long members of the parish. “Once you learned your Catechism and made your First Communion, further education seemed unimportant for a farmer.” Those parents who desired advanced schooling (beyond fourth grade) for their youngsters sent them to Washington School (also a log edifice), then located at the intersection of Butler Hill Road and Kerth Road.

During seeding season and harvesting times, parents kept their children at home to assist in this work, even though the pastor verbally reinforced the importance of learning the basics without interruption.

Mme. LeCompte, the teacher who served for 25 years at Assumption, retired in **1911**. A series of lay teachers (**Miss Bick, Miss Marie Costello and Miss Ann Finder**) guided the school children from **1911** to **1915**. An addition to the school building was made, at which time three **Precious Blood Sisters** of Ruma, Illinois (**Sister Raymunda, Sister Stanislaus and Sister Romanna**) became the instructors from **1915** to **1919**. They were succeeded by lay teachers once more. Thirty-eight children were then on the rolls.

In March **1920**, the **Reverend Frederick J. Schlattmann** was assigned as pastor. He again enlisted the aid of the **Congregation of the Most Precious Blood** of O’Fallon, Missouri, to staff the school’s growing enrollment, now **70** students. In September **1922** a newly-erected brick school, housing eight grades, was opened. The following June **1923** Assumption School had its first graduating class of four students.

In **1946**, at the time of the 25th anniversary of the school built by **Father Schlattmann**, the entire interior of the building was redecorated. An acoustic ceiling was installed and classroom floors were covered by asphalt tile. Shortly after this (**1948**), the government school lunch program was started, requiring the purchase of an ice box, Garland range, coffee urn, hot water heater, three-compartment sink and a slicing machine.

Construction of the present school building on the site beside the cemetery was begun in **1950** with the cornerstone laid by **Bishop John P. Cody**. The building plan incorporated the construction of a school and chapel. The school had eight classrooms, a kindergarten, a library and offices. The auditorium, which was used as a church, was dedicated in May **1951** by **Archbishop Joseph Ritter**. The old brick church which had served the parish for 103 years was razed in **1951**.

The **1922** school building was torn down in **1964** when six classrooms and a cafeteria were added to the present school. The enrollment at that time had reached 600.

In **1979**, three years after the erection of the present church, a gymnasium/multi-purpose room was remodeled from the portion of the building originally occupied as a place of worship.

From its beginning, Assumption School has maintained a standard of learning that is religious and basic, cultural and practical. Qualified teachers have followed prescribed courses of study with regular evaluations of the teaching personnel as well as the accomplishments of the students. Educational areas have been amplified as the progress of science and culture has demanded.

Parents and guardians, aware of the value of a Catholic education, have always supported, both personally and financially, the parish school. Even the early settlers, hardworking German immigrants and farmers, knew the importance of education and sent their offspring to learn to think, work and pray under the direction of responsible instructors.

There was a steady increase in enrollment from the 19th century era into the early 20th century. Assumption was a “free school” (no tuition) so that every child could receive a Catholic education. Financial contributions for the support of the church and school were minimal but generous from those who could give not money but material goods (products from their farms, dairies and forests). Parents worked with the priests and leaders; the men assisted with clearing the land and erection of the buildings; then afterward, with making the props needed to furnish them.

The women cooked, sewed and guided the parish endeavors. In the early Twenties, enrollment and the costs of education rose at Assumption as they did throughout the city. Cost per student was \$15.00. (Students then numbered 70). During the Depression years, the cost doubled that amount as did the enrollment. Circumstances such as higher wages for lay teachers, increased cost of utilities, maintenance and general improvements caused the school budget to soar along with the number of pupils on the roster. From **1965-75**, the enrollment was approximately 600 with a cost of \$375 per child. At the time of the school’s Centennial in **1981**, the student cost grew to \$620 per child with 22 teachers and 545 school children.

In **1973**, because of a decrease in religious vocations and, subsequently, the unavailability of nuns, the school administration was directed by a lay principal, **Mr. Louis D. Peters**, and a predominantly lay faculty. With the complete departure of the sister-teachers in **1974**, Assumption became the first Archdiocesan school to change to a lay staff.

A lay principal, **Adrienne Galant**, followed **Mr. Peters** from **1981** to **1985**. **Sister Mary Ann Wachtel**, SFCC, was hired as school principal by **Reverend Albert F. Kovarik** in **1985** and served until **1991**. **Sister Mary Ann** was Assumption's first principal to have earned a Ph.D. **Mrs. Margaret Adams** was hired as principal by **Msgr. Thomas Dempsey** in **1991** and served for 10 years until **2001**. From **2001-2015**, **Mrs. Cyndi Hasten** served as principal, hired by **Msgr. Thomas Dempsey**. Assumption School's current principal, **Mrs. Jennifer Sykora**, was hired by **Fr. Thomas Keller** in **2015**.

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