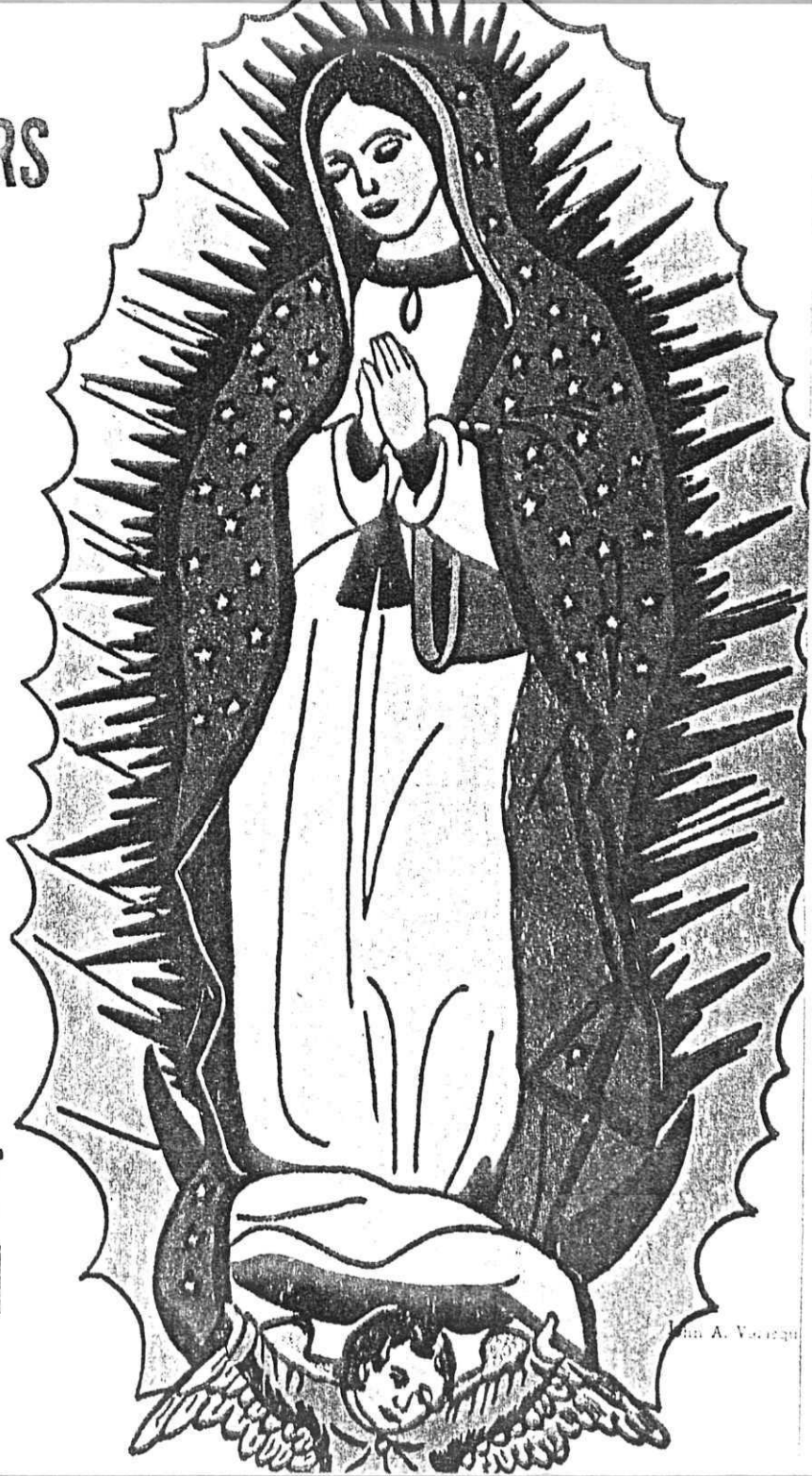


**100 YEARS
IN
C O L O R A D O ' S
OLDEST
PARISH**

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John A. Vasquez

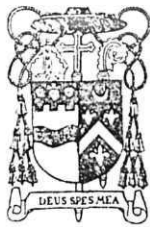
**100 YEARS
IN
COLORADO'S
OLDEST PARISH**

By

**Monsignor Patrick C. Stauter
Editor, Southern Colorado Register**

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FOREWORD

One hundred years is not a long span in the history of the Catholic Church, but it is a significant period in the life of the Church in Colorado. The end of that period is signalized in the centenary observance of the dedication of the first permanent church edifice in this commonwealth, the church blessed under the title and patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Conejos on June 10, 1853 when the *jacal* was dedicated to proclaim the establishment of organized religion in the State of Colorado.

Although Conejos is designated as the cradle of Catholicity in Colorado, missionary priests accompanied the Spanish explorers in the early 17th century and founded some settlements of uncertain duration. With very meager religious instruction, thousands of Indians, notably the Utes, were baptized in Southern Colorado. After the Conejos treaty in 1863, under their chief Ouray, these were moved to the Western Slope, some holding to a vestige of the faith, but more of them inclining to their pagan traditions.

The establishment of the Vicariate Apostolic of New Mexico brought ecclesiastical organization closer to the borders of Colorado. Bishop Lamy and his Vicar, Father Machebeuf, ministered to the Spanish settlers around Conejos, and the sacrament of Confirmation was first administered here in 1854. Although there must have been many baptisms during these early visitations, the first recorded baptism was on Jan. 8, 1860 when Father Vigil baptized Maria de la Luz Ortega.

From Conejos the blessings of religion radiated to other settlements in the San Luis Valley, but it remains as the focal point of Church history in Colorado. Its prospects for development are not notable, but the foundations were well laid and its influence for good will endure. It poses as a monument to the zeal and apostolic energy of the great pioneer Bishop of Colorado who defied every obstacle of comfort and travel to bring the good tidings of the Gospel and the graces of the sacraments to every portion of his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. His untiring labors built well the spiritual edifice of the Church even as this, his memorial in Conejos has endured to this day, and will endure for the dissemination of the faith for many future generations. He brought to Colorado the first Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the very year that gave Mary Immaculate the title of Our Lady of Lourdes to bring faith and hope to all the world. The devotion and love of her faithful clients, so deeply instilled into their hearts by the childlike piety of the saintly founder of the Church in Colorado, will insure the fruits of a living faith to this and future generations in this hallowed region.

Joseph Clement Hilgeling
Bishop of Pueblo



THE MOST REV. JOSEPH C. WILLGING,
First Bishop of Southern Colorado.

Luis it was only natural that the next few years would see people settling down a few miles farther west in San Acacio (1853) and in Guadalupe in August, 1854.

We leave to romanticists the legend of the balking mule refusing to move from the site of Guadalupe until the vow was made to build a church on the location. The group of settlers who were the pioneers of Guadalupe were led by José María Jaquez. All came from the Rio Arriba country of northern New Mexico from little "placitas" with names such as Llanito, La Cueva, El Rito, Servilleta and Ojo Caliente. They came in oxcarts and on burros, bringing with them wheat, corn, beans, flour, hogs and chickens and driving their horses, cattle and sheep before them. With minor changes the scene could have been a page from the Old Testament.

They had behind them generations of Spanish blood, language, training and customs and, therefore, were experts in irrigation. One of their first major projects was the construction of a 10-mile ditch in order to get water to desirable land.

The autumn of 1854 they were joined by one Anglo, Lafayette Head, who had lived with them in New Mexico after being mustered out of the U. S. army with the rank of Major. In Major Head, who later became the first Lieutenant Governor of Colorado, they found a faithful and permanent friend who played an important part in the subsequent story of Conejos and its church.

THE SUBJECT OF A HUNDRED LEGENDARY TALES, Lafayette Head was a Missourian and was about 29 years of age when he became a "Conejano." His previous life had been full of experience. As a soldier in the U. S. army he fought against the Indians who took part in the Taos revolt in which New Mexico's Territorial Governor Charles Bent was massacred. For a while he served as U. S. marshal and later as U. S. Indian Agent to Jicarilla Apaches. He had conducted a trading post in Abiquiu, N. M. before joining the Conejos settlers. While in Conejos he served as a member of the New Mexico territorial legislature in the terms of 1856-57, 1857-58 and 1858-59, being president of the last named session.



LAFAYETTE HEAD
(Courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado.)

The one bad mark on his record was his attempt to form a partnership with Celedonio Valdez to gain control of the lands of the Guadalupe grant. Such a coalition would have barred independent settlers from receiving small parcels of free land and would have made Head something of a high-powered real estate promoter. As Father Michael Pascual says, "He made amends for this slip later by his good work in Conejos."

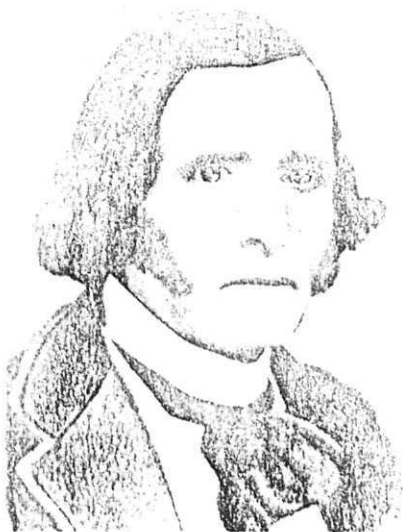
He was the husband of Maria Martina Martinez and since the couple had no children, they took several Spanish and Indian servants and made them their wards.

One of his most famous exploits occurred in the early history of Guadalupe which awoke one morning in March to find itself under attack from a group of Utes under the leadership of Kanacache, a sub-chief who had warned the settlers to get out of the area or face the alternative of death. In the ensuing battle some of the colonists were wounded though not mortally. The Indians suffered both killed and wounded.

TOUGH OLD KANACACHE was armed with a thick shield of hides from which bullets would bounce off without penetrating. He would lead his braves into close quarters with the colonists and they would fire and retreat, the chief being fearless because of the protection of his shield.

After a long study of the situation Major Head exposed his hat on a stick and took careful aim where he knew Kanacache's head ought to be if it ever was raised from behind the shield. The ruse worked and after Kanacache advanced firing at the Major's hat, he lowered his shield a little to observe the effect of his shot. At the precise moment Head fired, wounding Kanacache so severely that the Utes retired from the attack. After that it is related the Utes berated the settlers loudly with their tongues but were fairly respectful in their actions.

For more than 50 years Lafayette Head played an important part in the history of Conejos. For several terms he represented the county in the Colorado legislature. He was known far and wide throughout the state and in his later life was associated with another fabulous character, Otto Mears, in the operation of a flour mills in Antonito.



CELEDONIO VALDEZ

All of his exploits, however, were not limited to Indian fighting and politics. He took a very active part in the interests of Guadalupe church. He was a convert to Catholicism in his early life and for years acted as secretary of the church committee.



UTE DELEGATION TO
WASHINGTON, D. C.
1867-68

Photo by the famous photographer Matthew Brady.

Left to right, Lafayette Head, Indian agent; Waro, Daniel C. Oakes, Indian agent; Chief Ouray, Edward H. Kellog, Capote and William J. Godfroy.

The Treaty of Conejos in 1863 was the first step toward removal of nearly all the Ute Indians from Colorado. Chief Ouray, a friend of the whites, was mainly responsible for Indian compliance.

(Photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado.)

BUT TO RETURN TO OUR COLONISTS in Guadalupe:

They spent the first fall and winter building houses out of cottonwood logs which they cut and hauled from a grove nearby. Of utmost importance was the building of a stockade to protect their livestock from raiding Indians. The whole settlement formed a little plaza of rectangular shape with small openings on each end. Within these walls the horses, cattle and sheep were driven at the close of day and one or two watchmen remained on guard through the night. In spite of these precautions, Indians descended on the baby town early one morning and drove off the stock leaving the unarmed settlers with nothing. It was perhaps the memory of this calamity that caused them to acquire arms and to fight so hard against Kanacache some time later.

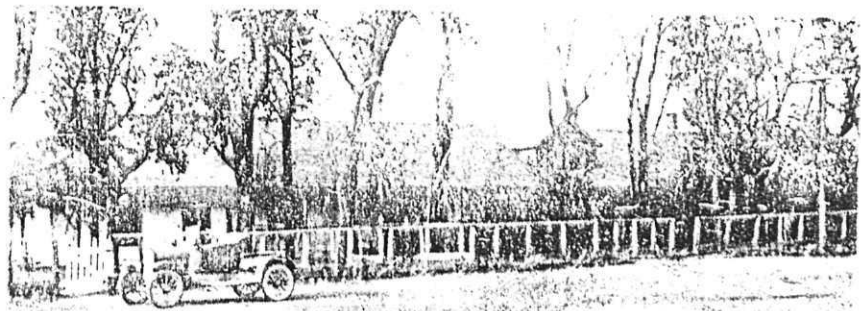
THE SITE OF THE TOWN THEY BUILT was on the low land of the north bank of the Conejos river, across the bridge and about a quarter of a mile removed from the present Conejos community. José Maria Jaquez set up a grist mill in 1856 but it was located two and a half miles east and on the opposite bank of the river.

The religion of all these people who lived in this pastoral paradise hampered only by isolation and raiding Indians, was Catholic. We do not know how many times a priest visited the Guadalupe locality prior to 1857. We must accept the well-used diary of Father Gabriel Ussel as testimony that Bishop John B. Lamy of Santa Fe had administered the sacrament of Confirmation in Conejos in 1853 or 1854. It could hardly have been 1853 if the Guadalupe community was not founded until 1854.

At any rate, Father Ussel goes on to say, "Before January, 1857 the ecclesiastical administration had been attended by the parish priest from Abiquiu (New Mexico). Father Lucero (from Arroyo Hondo) had been there once also. The distance for either one was over 100 miles. The population enjoyed the services of a priest from four or five times a year. During the winter there could be no possibility for priests to visit these far away settlements... January, 1857, Father Ussel, assistant priest to Father Julliard at Arroyo Hondo, made his first visit to Conejos and said Mass at four different points..."

Father Ussel returned in late April or early May (whether it was 1857 or 1858 is not certain) with Joseph P. Machebeuf who later became the first Bishop of Colorado. At the time Father Machebeuf was a pastor in Albuquerque and Vitar General of the Santa Fe See under Bishop Lamy. Because of his constant travels he referred to himself laughingly as "El Vicario andante," the traveling vicar.

Although Gabriel Ussel wrote his diary in something less than perfect English, we get the exact flavor of the visit by quoting directly from it.



MAJOR LAFAYETTE HEAD'S HOME, CONEJOS

(Courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado.)

"Guadalupe: At last here we are!... This baby town, small and scarcely five years old, might for its location have pretended to the glory of the capital city of the Conejos Valley. The few and modest houses that had been built were very unjudiciously on the flat bottoms, north side, of the majestic Conejos river. Consequently the hamlet was subject to frequent inundations.

"ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE RIVER on an eminence of ground at the point of what used to be called "La Isla," because bounded south and north respectively by San Antonio Creek and the Conejos, the Guadalupe people had already platted their future town. This is the Conejos town of the present day and the seat of Conejos county. (Although Father Ussel called this location "La Isla," it could not be the same locality which is called "La Isla" at the present time which is five miles east of Conejos —Author).

The first persons that had come to meet the Señor Vicario were Don Jesús Velasquez and Lafayette Head. No one could have disputed them the honor of being the supreme lords of the miniature commonwealth.

"The dwelling of the first named was reduced to two rooms. There we received hospitality. The house of the second was no better. A kitchen and a large adobe hall. This hall was offered for our temporary church...

"By the early hours of Sunday we were at work. Father Machebeuf had to decline the reception, introductions and usual compliments of many persons and postpone for after Mass and there came so many 'bona fide' Catholics. To speak of the immense multitudes, the pressure of hundreds of confessions and communions, demands for certain dispensations, private business with the Father in his capacity of representative of the Bishop, would be a rather tedious repetition of what has already been mentioned of the Costilla and Rio Colorado localities already visited...

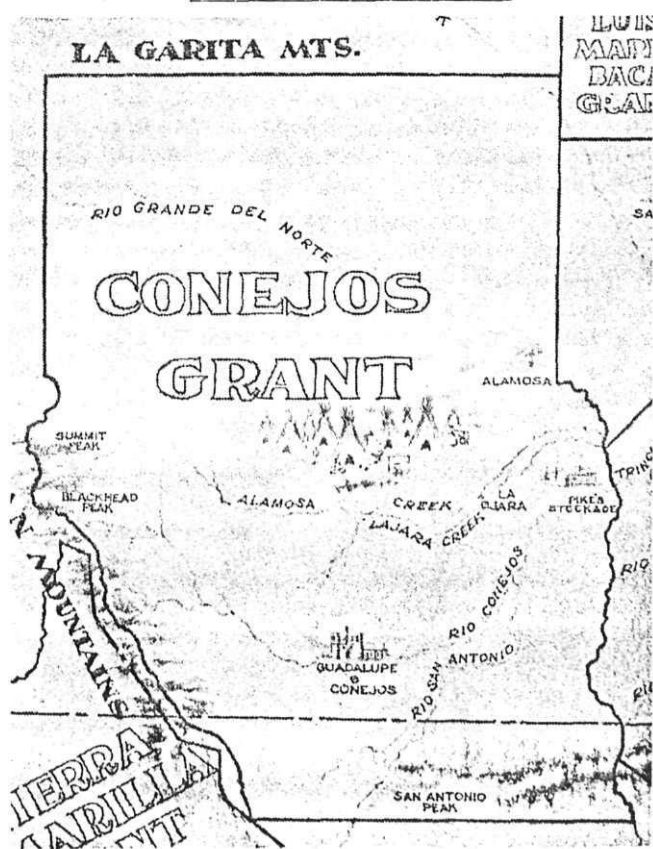
"To return to our good Vicario. Was he done with the whole of his work? No, still there was a long way for him on that second day. The people's commissioners had come with a petition, 'Señor Vicario, the Catholics of Conejos and all the settlers pray for permission to build a church.' 'I knew that the vital question would be presented to me. Very well, dear people of Conejos. Indeed and from the bottom of my heart I give you verbally now such a permission to build a church. It must be in the center of your future town that you will locate it, and the church then will be protected from those too common inroads of the Indians... Let me see the site of the church and after a while I will send over a ground plan.'"⁵

THIS DIARY ENTRY DESCRIBES THE FIRST FORMAL ESTABLISHMENT of the parish. We surmise that almost immediately there was begun the building of the first church. It was 16 by 30-foot "jacal" affair and was finished the same summer it was begun. Tradition says the typical "jacal" method of building was followed. Four large cedar posts were placed in the corners. Between these were smaller posts, set firmly in the ground and spaced close together. The tops of the posts were pointed and over these points were fitted large logs from corner to corner. All cracks and open spaces were plastered over with adobe." The floor was tamped earth. It was a sturdy, easy and cheap method of getting a serviceable structure within a short time. This edifice which was the first church in Conejos was at the same time the first Christian house of worship in the present state of Colorado. In this designation both Catholic and non-Catholic churches are included so that it may be stated the first church building in Colorado was a Catholic one.

THE FIRST RESIDENT PASTOR of Conejos was the Rev. Vicente Saturnino Montaño. He was one of the 15 priests working in New Mexico when Bishop Lamy came to the territory in 1851. One of the chief things we know about him from the time of his arrival in Conejos until he left in

January of 1860 is that he kept no church records. In the Spanish language we have Bishop Lamy's own word for it, "Father Montaña was the first pastor of this new parish which was erected three years ago. He did not leave any church records, neither baptisms, nor marriages, nor funerals." This document is signed in Bishop Lamy's own hand and is dated July 22, 1860, the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.

From the archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe we are told a few more things about Father Montaña. A letter from Padre Damaso Talarid of Taos complains to Bishop Lamy that Padre Montaña was always in the company of the famous Padre José Antonio Martínez of Taos and from these same archives we learn that Padre Montaña had a blood sister who was a nun in Mexico.



(Courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado.)

CHAPTER TWO

UNDER THE SANTA FE SEE

BISHOP LAMY WROTE THE STATEMENT that "this parish was set up three years ago (hace tres años)" and this evidence together with a marginal notation reading "1857" in explanation of the "three years ago" gives some foundation to think the parish was set up in the year 1857 since, as seen in the previous chapter, Bishop Lamy put the date of July 22, 1860 as being the day on which he wrote this statement.

The Theatine Fathers who staff the parish at the present time, however, believe it was begun in the year 1858 and cite in support of their contention a document which reads as follows: "The parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe commonly called Conejos was set up June 10, 1858. The Rev. V. S. Montaña was the first priest in charge. The same year the church was begun..." This document has no signature in the strict sense of the word although the top of the page is headed with three names reading as follows: "José Prejecto Machebeuf, V. G., Pedro Eguillon, J. B. Salpointe."

Both the 1857 document and the 1858 document are kept on file in the first baptismal record book of the Conejos parish, but neither of them alone can prove either 1857 or 1858 as the year the parish was established.⁷

The 1858 document, in fact, is the weaker of the two because it lists the name of J. B. Salpointe who later became the second Archbishop of Santa Fe, but who was not ordained to the priesthood until the year 1859. Therefore any testimony he would make of events prior to this date would not be the evidence of an eyewitness.

The document which proves beyond all reasonable doubt that Guadalupe parish was actually set up June 10, 1858 is not found in Conejos at all but was finally located in the records preserved in the parish rectory of Taos, N. M. It is here that the recordings are kept of the Baptisms which were administered from Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Arroyo Hondo and it was from this small New Mexican community that the Conejos faithful were visited by Father Ussel in the years 1857 and 1858.

It was the practice of the early day priests to bring back a fist full of records to inscribe in the books of the mother parish at the end of every missionary trip. It was during this time that Father Ussel made regular visits at one and two-month intervals to Conejos and Culebra, both in Colorado, and Arroyo Seco, Rio Seco, Rio Colorado, San Antonio (present Questa) and Costilla, all in New Mexico. The baptisms are recorded just as regularly as they occurred and almost every day of his missionary trip he was baptizing somebody somewhere. What a life of journeying his must have

been! And what hardships on horseback or riding a buggy or wagon he endured!

Scanning the dates of the Baptisms that took place in Conejos gives us a record of his journeys to Guadalupe. From these recordings we find he was in Guadalupe Jan. 16, 17, 18 and 20; March 24 and 25; April 26 and 28; June 30, July 2 and 3; Aug. 9; Oct. 4, 5, 6 and 7; and Nov. 19 and 20, all in the year 1857.

Jan. 10, 11 and 13; Feb. 28 and Mar. 1; April 20 and 21, and June 10, all in the year 1858.

His last entry of a Baptism performed in the Guadalupe district was June 10, 1858, the very day the Theatine Fathers claim to be the date the Conejos parish was established. The proof, however, does not come from the Conejos parish but from the Taos record.

The fact that Father Ussel baptized in Conejos regularly until this date is circumstantial evidence but it becomes practically a certainty when we reflect that Father Ussel's name continues to be found on the baptismal records of the other missions of Arroyo Hondo in the year 1858 but it never again appears on a baptismal record of the Conejos district after June 10 of that year.

Obviously the parish was set up at that time and one of the greatest achievements to come out of this present 100th anniversary celebration is the establishment beyond reasonable doubt that Colorado's first Catholic church which was also its first church of any kind officially goes back to June 10, 1858 and not 1857 as has been given in the majority of books and articles printed on this subject up to the present time.

Ten Good Men and True

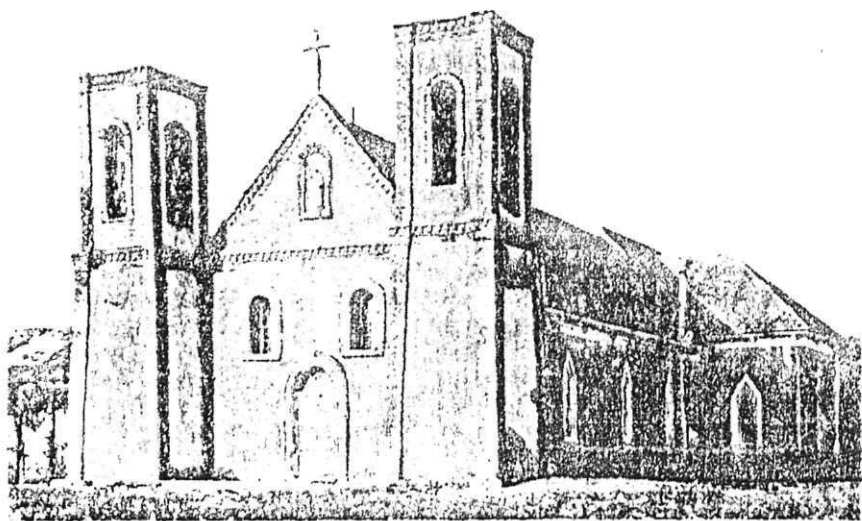
In order to support the pastor each head of a family promised to give five bushels of wheat per year and in case it would be impossible to collect this much grain the "mayordomo" was to try to get the equivalent in money.

The charge for the burial plots was also stipulated by dividing the church into three parts with the choice sections near the altar going at \$40, the median parts at \$16 and the rear from inside the vestibules to the doors at \$8. Probably if these arrangements were being made today, the prices would have to be reversed with the sections near the altar being the cheapest and the sections in the rear of the church being most expensive.

There was a lay sacristan and a man choir singer who received a salary of \$3 for a regular funeral and \$6 for a solemn funeral. This singer was also to perform in the missions of the parish at the price agreed upon with the "mayordomo." Manuel Ortega was the choir singer and his organist was Quirino Ocaña who was to receive \$10 a year in salary in addition to

50 cents whenever he performed in the mission places. Also whether he needed it or not he was to receive one Sunday off every year as vacation.

THE MEN WHO DREW UP THE ABOVE RULES formed the church committee which met Feb. 20, 1859 to hear Celedonio Valdez explain the reasons for the organizing of such a group. Father Montaña was made president and Lafayette Head was approved as secretary. Others chosen, besides Mr. Valdez, were Juan Gabriel Chacón, Antonio Galves, Rafael Gallegos, Juan Antonio Mascareñas, Roman Sisneros, Salvador Salazar, Juan Gomez, Vicente Sanchez, José Gabriel Martinez, Manuel Romero and Quirino Mesa.



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado.)
THE CONEJOS CHURCH PRIOR TO 1926 FIRE.

Politics were not entirely absent that long ago February day because the officers were not automatically considered members of the committee of 12 and by further motions three more members were added, Felix Borrego, Hilario Atencio and Jesús M. Velasquez. The last named, however, resigned Mar. 25, 1860 and was succeeded by Juan José Gallegos.

Before the Feb. 20 meeting adjourned, the churchwarden (fabriquero) was awarded a surplus of \$37 after the bills for the wine and candles were paid. The warden was also given the right to have three burial plots under the church floor.

THE REV. JOSE MIGUEL VIGIL, newly ordained, came to Conejos in January, 1860 to take the place of Father Montaña. Besides starting to keep the church records, Father Vigil began to build a larger church.

Following a pattern of building often used in New Mexico, the second church was built around the original one. A foundation was set down for a building with adobe walls and on July 22, 1860 when Bishop Lamy paid the visit to the parish described in the document mentioned above, he could report that "the church being built has reached a height of about 10 feet in its wall constructions and the edifice is a large one (la fábrica es muy grande) but because there are few people here and those that are here live in scattered locations and the community is new and poor, the parishioners have not yet been able to finish the church...

"All faithful of this new parish are very satisfied (son muy contentos) with the zeal and conduct of the present pastor." Notice that Bishop Lamy's mistakes in Spanish, using "ser" where it would be more correct to use "estar," add weight to the reasons for believing this is a genuine historical document but a little farther on Bishop Lamy also adds his portion to the puzzle to the early years of the Conejos parish by saying "In this parish there is as yet no chapel" (En esta parroquia no hay todavía ninguna capilla).

Bishop Lamy visited the parish for the second time Sunday, Nov. 16, 1862. It was actually his third visit to the area if we take into account the time he conferred Confirmation in the district in 1853 or 1854. In the 1862 visit he signed the baptismal book of the parish with the notation that the church records were in order and very neat and went on to say that the church (second one) was not yet finished but he had hopes it would be completed the following year.

Under Father Vigil's direction, the second church was built exactly over and around the location of the first one and though not complete in all details, it was ready for use when it was dedicated on the patronal feast day of the parish, Dec. 12, 1863 by Bishop Lamy. The floor was still an earthen one and remained that way until the manufacture of lumber became more common in the vicinity when a board floor was laid and some crude benches were secured to pass as pews.

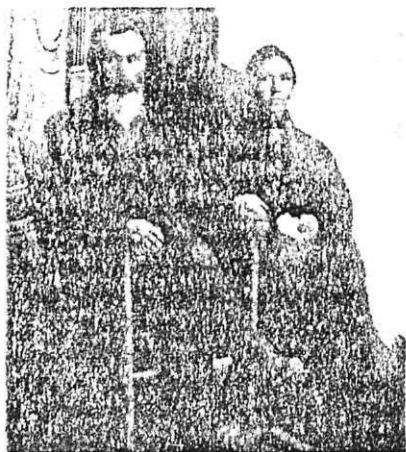
It Had a Bell

Though the church had no floor except the earth, it did have a bell to peal joyfully or mournfully from one of its towers. The bell was a crude casting by Francisco Lujan and Pedro Lobato of the San Antonio "placita." Celedonio Valdez, Lafayette Head and Jesús María Velasquez canvassed the whole region for material from which to cast the bell and many women contributed jewelry and plate for the purpose. Rawhide thongs were used for the bell's mountings.

For many years its tolling called the faithful to services but it was eventually replaced by a modern one. This was not the end of its service, however, as it was installed in the tower of the church at Las Mesitas where

it served until 1919 when it was replaced with a new one when the Las Mesitas church was rebuilt. At that time the faithful old clarion was surrendered to an Antonito firm as partial payment on the new bell.

All the developments in the parish were not confined to the immediate vicinity of Conejos. The population was growing as new settlers began to come. Father Vigil was responsible for the building of chapels in Los Pinos and Los Rincones before he was assigned elsewhere and the Conejos parish was given into the keeping of the Rev. Michael Rolly. Father Rolly was one of the numerous priests who had come from the Auvergne district of France to New Mexico due to the coaxing of Bishop Lamy and Vicar General Machebeuf. He remained in the Conejos parish from 1866 until 1871 when, not caring to learn a third language in addition to his native French and acquired Spanish, he returned to New Mexico.



Mr. and Mrs. VICENTE VELASQUEZ

The lady Crisanta Vigil Velasquez was the niece of the Rev. Jose Miguel Vigil and performed the duties of parish housekeeper while she was a young woman.

Mexican territory was considered to extend north to the 38th parallel, the same line of demarcation which was fought over 90 years later in another part of the world called Korea. Even Fort Massachusetts which was located some 58 miles Northeast of Conejos was considered to be a part of New Mexico." Major Head had represented the Guadalupe district in three terms of the New Mexico territorial legislature, being chosen president of the House of Representatives during one of them.

The fact that the San Luis Valley of Colorado had been administered by priests from New Mexico played some part in determining that the new mining camps in the Pike's Peak region would fall under Bishop Lamy's

A MAJOR CHANGE IN THE LIFE of the Guadalupe area is traceable to the happenings in far-off Gregory Gulch where the greedy shine of bright, gleaming gold showed up in the miners' pans in 1859 just about the time the Conejos settlers were becoming dissatisfied with their first "jacal" church and planning to erect a better one sometime in the future.

The boundaries between the states of New Mexico and Colorado were not defined until 1861 when the first territorial legislature of Colorado convened in Denver on Sept. 9. Prior to that time the whole Southwestern area went by the name of Guadalupe and was considered to be a part of New Mexico to which the Conejos settlers were bound by ties of origin, blood, aspirations and customs. New

jurisdiction instead of under the spiritual authority of Vicar Apostolic John B. Miede, S. J. of Leavenworth, Kans. Bishop Miede made a trip to Denver, Central City, South Park and Leadville in May and June, 1860. At the conclusion of this surveying trip he conferred with Archbishop Peter R. Kenrick of St. Louis, Mo. and the other Bishops of the Province regarding the problem of bringing the opportunities to practice the Catholic religion into the Pike's Peak region.

The decision reached by these dignitaries was that the region should be turned over to the jurisdiction of Bishop Lamy of Santa Fe. Besides the fact that New Mexico was nearer to Colorado in mileage, the argument was also advanced that priests from Santa Fe were already taking care of part of Colorado in the San Luis Valley. This decision was later confirmed by the Holy See.



BISHOP JOSEPH P. MACHEBEUF,
FIRST BISHOP OF COLORADO.
(*Southern Colorado Register.*)

When Bishop Lamy learned that the whole districts of present-day Colorado and Utah were to be added to his already huge ecclesiastical jurisdiction, he sent his "Vicario Andante" (who else?) to see what could be done for the hard-rock mining Catholics flowing in great numbers into the vicinity of the Front Range of Central Colorado. This was the casting of the die that eventually caused Joseph P. Machebeuf to become the first Bishop of Colorado. The great Frenchman himself was probably the only non-native of the state who knew it at the time, but Conejos also was included somewhere within the confines of this vast territory.

Fulfillment of Missionary Vocation

The vivid, written descriptions of work among the Indians by the great Jesuit missionary, Pierre De Smet, played a part in inspiring the future Bishop Machebeuf to leave his native land of France when he was 26 years of age and to come to work in the mission field of the United States. Father De Smet is famous for his labors in behalf of the Indians in the present states of Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, Idaho, Utah and South Dakota as well as in the Canadian Province of British Columbia.

When Joseph P. Machebeuf was around 37 years of age, he personally met Father De Smet, probably in 1849 in St. Louis, and commenting on the visit, the future Bishop said he viewed "such work (as De Smet's) to be the ultimate fulfillment of his own missionary vocation."

The crossroads of pioneer life brought Major William Gilpin into contact with Father De Smet somewhere in the Indian country. Major Gilpin in 1861 was named by President Lincoln to be the first territorial governor of Colorado. It was an appointment that changed Gilpin's hitherto adventurous life into a life of troubles.



JOSE VICTOR GARCIA,

Son-in-law of Jose Maria Jaquez

Represented Conejos County in the First Colorado Territorial Legislature.



ARCHBISHOP JOHN B. LAMY,
FIRST ORDINARY OF SANTA FE.

It was under his orders that the first parish in Colorado was established.

(Courtesy of Denver Register.)

CHAPTER THREE

THE JESUITS TAKE OVER

IN THE EARLY 1860s MAJOR GILPIN had purchased a part of the Sangre de Cristo grant from Ceran St. Vrain, the famous as well as wealthy trapper.¹⁰ The Sangre de Cristo grant centered around San Luis on the Culebra and we will take Sister Lilliana Owens' word for it that Gilpin wanted to bring about friendly relations between the territorial government which he headed and the Spanish-speaking people in Southern Colorado.¹¹ His wife was a Catholic, although he himself was a Quaker favorably disposed to the Catholic Church. He envisioned Catholic priests as being of great help to him with the problems of the San Luis Valley and because Father De Smet was the Catholic priest he knew best, he wrote to him asking for help in obtaining Jesuits to take care of the Culebra and Conejos areas.

Nothing definite came of the correspondence between the two men at this time but a decade later Gilpin again corresponded with De Smet making the offer of a donation of land to the Jesuits if they would come to Southern Colorado's flat and fertile mountain-valley. This letter was forwarded to the Rev. Donato M. Gasparri, S. J., superior of the Jesuits in New Mexico where they had been working since 1867. The superior was strongly advised by Father De Smet to go to Costilla and talk the matter over with Gilpin. About this time Vicar Apostolic Machebeuf also wrote Father Gasparri asking him to staff the Conejos parish with his Jesuit priests.

Because of political conditions in Italy of that era, the priests of the Neapolitan Province of the Jesuit Fathers had been expelled from that country and were available for missionary work. They began such work in New Mexico. Father Gasparri consented to take on the work of the Conejos parish and from that time on this particular field was referred to as the Colorado-New Mexico Mission. Some writers invert the order by calling it the New Mexico-Colorado Mission.

THE REV. SALVATORE PERSONE, S. J. arrived in Conejos Dec. 9, 1871 as the first Jesuit pastor. He was accompanied by Brother Cherubin Anzalone, S. J. and with these two men was begun the Jesuit administration of the parish which lasted 49 years until October, 1920. Many of the priests who were assigned to the Conejos parish were fluent in the Spanish language because they had become familiar with it while residing in Spain after leaving Italy where anti-clericalism was rampant at the time.

The Catholic population of Guadalupe parish was estimated at 3,000 in 1871 meaning that the bulk of the people in the San Luis Valley lived in

the 25 little communities or "placitas" that made up the parish. A U. S. army report from Fort Garland to the Surgeon General's office in Washington, D. C. dated Dec. 5, 1870 stated the population of the whole park (San Luis Valley) was 5,853 people, "all strong and hardy frontiersmen." The same report said the nearest railroad was 210 miles away across the Arkansas River and was called the Kansas Pacific.¹²

Territorially, Guadalupe parish consisted of a narrow rectangle only 25 miles wide but 120 miles long and the usual limits are given as Saguache on the north; Los Pinos on the south; Las Cruces on the east, and Las Mesitas on the west. The mission stations were Guadalupe, located about one half mile from Conejos; Guadalupita, Mesitas, Cañon, San Rafael, San Antonio, Los Pinos, Pura y Limpia, La Isla, Cenicero, Rincones, Los Sauces, Los Cerritos, Fuertecitos, El Brazo, Servilleta, La Jara (today's Capulin), Alamosa, Costillas, Loma, La Garita, San Luis and Saguache.

The San Luis mentioned in the list probably was San Luis on the Culebra which beginning in 1865 had the Rev. Louis Merles and the Rev. Joseph Percevault as pastors at various times while they were residing in Costilla.¹³ In later days San Luis was given religious administration by the Jesuits headquartered in Conejos.

Just as the diocesan priests had done, Father Persone and the Jesuit Brother Anzalone struggled alone with the immense and scattered Conejos parish before they were joined by the Rev. Alexander Leone, S. J. and Brother Prisco Caso, S. J. in February, 1872.

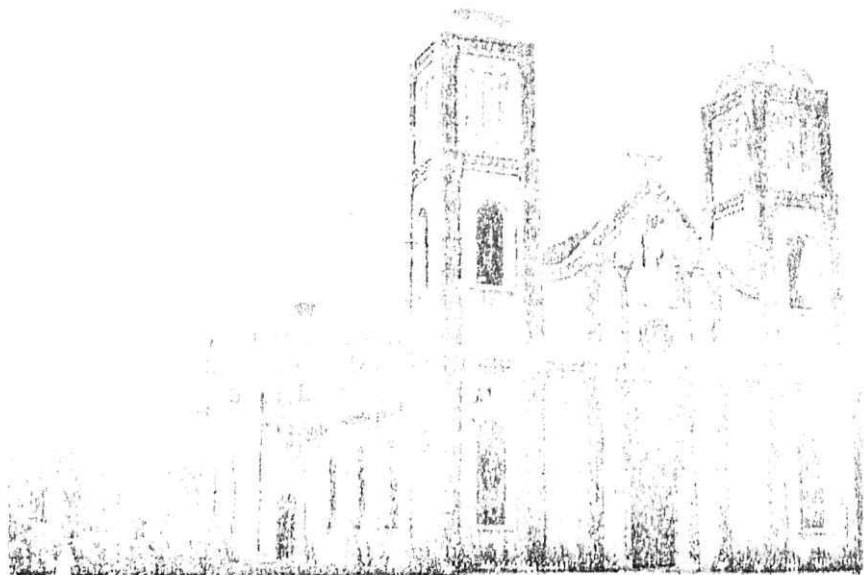
Although Vicar General Machebeuf had praised the people of Conejos some 15 years previously for their practical religious spirit which he rated superior to that which he found in Costilla and Rio Colorado,¹⁴ the "Conejanos" by this time must have been imitating some of St. Paul's converts by becoming lukewarm and asleep in that religious spirit. The Jesuits judged that the whole parish needed a complete stirring up, a spiritual tonic, and the first few months were spent in giving missions and, as one writer puts it, in going from house to house hearing confessions and preparing many children and adults for the reception of First Holy Communion.

Moving Sermons They Were

As many an overburdened pastor before and after him has done, the Rev. Santiago Diamare, S. J., second Jesuit shepherd of the Conejos parish, set upon the establishment of a school as being a big aid to the solution of his problems and the school became the subject of much correspondence between Conejos and Vicar Apostolic Machebeuf in Denver, who told the Conejos priest to provide a convent for the sisters and he would see that nuns were secured to staff the school.

The Jesuit superior of the Colorado-New Mexico mission, the Rev. Donato Gasparri, S. J. must have been an eloquent man when he and Father

Minasi gave a mission in the Conejos parish in April, 1876. At the time a rather modest house was being prepared to become quarters of the sisters who would come to teach in the school. At a special meeting of parishioners Father Gasparri suggested as a fitting memorial of the mission that the sisters' house be made larger and a number of scattered communities or "placitas" agreed to sponsor one room to be added to the house. A committee was appointed to enforce uniformity in carrying out the plan. The convent ended up being a 10-room affair so that it can truly be said Father Gasparri's sermons got results.



OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CHURCH, CONEJOS, AS IT APPEARS TODAY.
(Rev. Francis Colom, C. R.)

The Christian Mothers' Sodality started to scour the parish as far as Alamosa and Los Sauces begging contributions for the promised sisters. The Jesuit "Diary of the House" sums up the abundant results, "The convent consists of 10 rooms with three halls, the whole well-roofed, plastered and calcimined... Every room has a fire-place except the larder, kitchen and chapel where there are stoves. Besides, five of the rooms have a floor and there is sufficient lumber for one more. Four of the rooms are whitewashed as also one of the halls. Moreover, there are the following household articles: a large kitchen-range with all its battery, a table for the dining room with table-cloths, plates of all sizes, soup-tureen, pitchers, cups, spoons, forks and knives, everything for six persons at least... As to provisions there is sugar, coffee, ham, rice, lard, butter, and cheese at least for a month; soap, candles, eggs, hens; not a few sheep, two or three calves, wheat and Mexican beans... As was said before, all these are the proceeds of the soliciting by some lady members of the Christian Mothers' Sodality."

In June, 1877 Father Diamare received a long letter from Bishop Machebeuf discussing many points touching the state of things in the Colorado jurisdiction of the Church. At the end of the letter he revealed the good news which he had been holding back from the beginning.

The glad tidings concerned the coming of the Sisters of Loretto to Conejos for the purpose of opening a school. This letter was signed with a



INTERIOR OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CHURCH.

(Rev. Francis Colom, C. R.)

nickname which gives us great insight into Bishop Machebeuf's character. The signature of his name was followed by a postscript asking for prayers for "El Cojito," which means "the Little Cripple," and, of course, referred to the extreme lameness from which Bishop Machebeuf suffered the rest of his life after the buggy upset on him near Central City in 1863.

The action on the Conejos school after this was rapid and in September of the same year, Bishop Machebeuf wrote another letter to Father Diamare to the effect that the sisters would leave Denver Sept. 7, 1877 and go by train to Fort Garland where they should be met with a horse and wagon. At the time Fort Garland was the end of track for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad.

This letter went astray, however, and when the sisters arrived in Fort Garland there was no Conejos priest there to meet them. They were given

shelter by Francis Manzanares and brought to Conejos in a buggy by Father Garassu who was pastor of Costilla.

According to the Nerinx archives of the Sisters of Loretto the names of the first sister-teachers in Conejos were Sister Vicenta Gonzales, superior; Sister Mary Fara Maloney and Sister Mary Othilia Connell. They were Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross, the same order of nuns who had begun teaching in St. Mary's Academy in Denver in 1864 and who opened Loretto Academy in Pueblo in 1875, two years before the establishment of the school in Conejos.

Known as Guadalupe Academy, the school opened its doors to girls Sept. 17, 1877 and to boys about a month later. One of the teachers, Sister Mary Fara Maloney, died as a victim of smallpox the January after the school began operation. According to Bishop Machebeuf, she had "offered herself as a victim to appease Divine Justice and obtain a cessation of the plague." It may have been coincidence and it may have been something more extraordinary but the plague exhausted itself almost immediately with the good sister's death.



FOUR LORETTINES AND PEDRO, the Indian handy man, in a photo which cannot be positively identified. The religious habits worn by these sisters pictured here are the same as those worn by the Loretto Sisters who worked in Conejos. The sister on the right is identified by the Loretto Motherhouse as Sister Teresene. The others remain unidentified. The Indian worked for the Sisters of Loretto in Taos and often took wheat from Taos to Conejos to be ground into flour in the Conejos mill. —(Photo courtesy of Theresa Garcia of Gardner.)

THE SCHOOL, HOWEVER, HAD MANY DIFFICULTIES facing it and never prospered. By 1888 the sisters were in charge of the public school where the enrollment is reported as being 74 boys and 92 girls. This situation continued until 1918 when the Sisters of Loretto left Conejos probably because of a critical economic situation being created in the construction of a new school building. This is but one of many reasons advanced to explain the move.

The imprint of the sisters is still evident today in many of the older people of the community who remember the Sisters of Loretto with gratitude for one of the most precious treasures life can offer, —a good education.

Durango's Mercy Hospital Paused Here

What proved to be perhaps the shortest-lived hospital in Colorado lasted less than 90 days under the Sisters of Mercy in Conejos. Five of them came from Denver on the order of Vicar Apostolic Machebeuf Feb. 12, 1882 and were accepted by the Conejos County commissioners Feb. 27 to take charge of the sick and poor of the district in a rest home and hospital. The whole arrangement was discontinued May 17 the same year and the Sisters of Mercy left for the San Juan region which at that time was all broken out with a rash of mining fever. In Durango these same Sisters of Mercy founded Mercy Hospital which in the summer of 1957 celebrated the 75th anniversary of its establishment.

Siempre Fiesta

Faithful celebration of the "fiestas" year by year brought the Conejos parish a reputation for being the most colorful in the state. Leading in pageantry was the patronal feast of the church on Dec. 12, the day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Feast of Corpus Christi came in for a good celebration too. Many times Bishop Machebeuf was present for these celebrations and in his later life he looked back upon them with nostalgia.

Without the ever present distractions of the modern day, people made their own entertainment in their simple festivals and the visitation of a Bishop to a parish was a long-anticipated event. Bishop Machebeuf enjoyed these visitations as much as the people did and was cheered by the hearty and noisy reception when he would be met two or three miles outside the town by a cavalcade of 80 or 100 men on horseback who would go through a regular ritual of formal greetings and welcome to the esteemed visitor.

As the honored and escorted party came nearer the town, he would be met by members of the various parish societies marching in procession with banners flying. The whole scene took place to the accompaniment of voices singing, guitars twinkling and fireworks popping. Colorful, indeed, is the

word for it, and it was memories of these events that caused Bishop Machebeuf to say if he had his choice, he would prefer to be Bishop only of people of Spanish-speaking backgrounds and customs.

THE SECOND CHURCH WAS IMPROVED and enlarged in 1879 by the addition of two towers. Heading the list of contributors was Lafayette Head with \$50. Celedonio Valdez, Juan Francisco Chacon and Pablo Garcia each gave \$25. Manuel Archuleta donated two cows. T. McCunniff and W. A. H. Loveland gave \$20 each with José Simón Garcia contributing \$15. Mr. Loveland was a Denver banker and financier who had promoted the building of the Colorado Central railroad up Clear Creek canyon west of Denver. In those far away days these donations were princely sums of money which added to the smaller amounts contributed by the other parishioners were sufficient to pay for the tower-addition.

The contract was let to Michael Lesperance for \$300 and called for the construction of towers of two stories, 22 and 18 feet high. The parish was to pay additional for the material necessary to build the scaffolds. The contract was signed Mar. 28, 1879 by the Rev. Santiago Diamare, S. J., J. F. Chacon, Lafayette Head and Mr. Lesperance. The motive behind the building of two towers was probably to make the church structure more impressive.

Further improvements completed by May, 1881 included a new roof for the second church, a fence around the grounds and 20 pews. George R. Percival was the contractor at a figure of \$620.

Even to the Last Farthing

The years 1886 and 1887 bear the reputation of being particularly bitter ones in the cup of the Jesuit Fathers while they were stationed in Conejos. In October, 1886 the adobe walls of the sacristy of the second church fell in and in 1887 the north wall of the church also came tumbling down with as much of a crashing noise as is within the power of adobe to make. To fill the sour chalice to overflowing was the fact that Bishop Machebeuf's vestments had been destroyed by a fire in the railway station in Alamosa while he was on a visit to Conejos. Only his seal with its motto "Aspice Maria" (Watch Over Us, Mary) escaped fiery destruction.¹⁵

The next year the priests marshaled the strong right arms of their parishioners as clergy and laity co-operated to rebuild the church. Some made adobes; others hauled stone and sand while still others turned themselves to the reconstruction and redecorating operations.

The conclusion of this work called for a re-blessing which was a gala occasion replete with banners waving high and bands playing. Wisely the Jesuits set the date to coincide with the canonization of other Jesuits, Alphonsus Rodrigues, John Berchmans and Peter Claver. The "Diary of the

House" ends its account of this event on the happy note that all reconstruction bills were paid "even to the last farthing" (usque ad ultimum quadratum).

COLORADO CEASED TO BE A TERRITORY and was admitted to the Union as a full-fledged state five years after the Jesuits took over the administration of the Conejos parish. By this time development of the Catholic Church in the 38th state was also becoming full-fledged and the Vicariate Apostolic gave way to an unlimited diocesan organization. Bishop Machebeuf in 1887 was made a Bishop in the full sense of the word even down to the detail of having a Coadjutor-Bishop to help him in the person of Bishop Nicholas C. Matz. The pioneer Bishop of this Colorado state passed to his well-deserved reward July 10, 1889. His acquaintance with Conejos had lasted 31 or 32 years and he was one of the best friends the parish ever had.

Antonito on the Upgrade

A little more than a year before Bishop Machebeuf died, he had been approached by a committee of laymen from Antonito for permission to build a church in their community. The date was May 8, 1888 and the venerable Bishop was paying one of his visits to Conejos at the time. The same afternoon the Bishop and the Jesuit Fathers picked out a site in Antonito where the new church would be built on a block of ground donated for the purpose by Mr. Sampton.

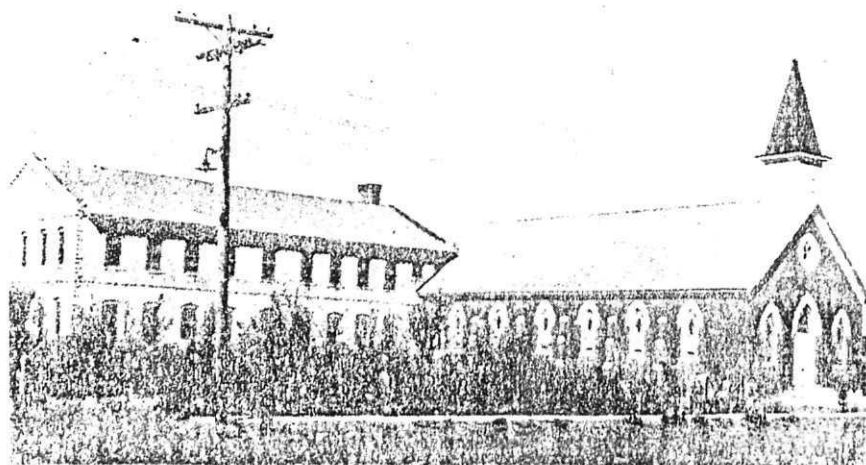
Antonito got a huge push from the railroad which introduced the area to a new age and ended forever the pastoral isolation in which the district had previously slumbered. As the railroad extended itself in a direct line southward from Alamosa it was surveyed towards Conejos. Popular history relates the transportation company tried to obtain sufficient land in Conejos for the setting up of a station and switching yards but the price asked was excessive.

For this reason, it is said, the railway company chose to relocate its survey so that its line went through Antonito instead of Conejos. Railroad building in those days was as much a matter of investment and land speculation as providing transportation. This was the heyday of the narrow gauge before General William Palmer and his successors started to broad gauge their mountain lines and incorporate the name of "Western" into the two consolidated companies which later became the Denver and Rio Grande Western.

THE ANTONITO LOCATION WAS AN IMPORTANT ONE for the railway company because it was the junction where two lines would separate, one continuing south to Española and Santa Fe and the other turning west to Durango and Silverton. After Antonito attained this distinction it grew larger than Conejos but for a number of years the people of Antonito had

to go to Conejos to fulfil their religious duties. This situation was changed by the building of St. Augustine's Church in Antonito.

Three months after Bishop Machebeuf had given his permission, the cornerstone was blessed Aug. 7, 1888. The building committee was composed of the Rev. Pascual Tomassini, S. J., president; Dr. Mitchell, secretary; John Egan, treasurer; D. Colleton and Charles Dubor. In order to continue the construction work this committee had to borrow \$900 from M. A. Steltzer who was happy to lend the money for such a purpose. Mr. Steltzer donated a statue of St. Augustine and the Stations of the Cross to the church.



ST. AUGUSTINE CHURCH AND RECTORY, ANTONITO.

When completed the building measured 30 by 50 feet. Bishop Machebeuf died the summer previous to its dedication which took place with Bishop Matz officiating on Nov. 17, 1889. At the time of its dedication the cost of the church had been \$3000. The building was greatly enlarged in 1939. Until 1928 Antonito was administered as a mission of Conejos but in that year with the opening of the new rectory in Antonito the situation was reversed so that today the oldest parish in Colorado is a mission from Antonito although the one is only about half a mile from the other.

Bishop Matz, whom Bishop Machebeuf had envisioned as a kind father to his beloved people with Spanish-speaking backgrounds, was again in Conejos Sept. 28, 1891 for a solemn observance of the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel, the patron saint of the "Unión Católica" which was founded Jan. 23, 1883. A new statue of St. Michael the Archangel was blessed in the course of a Pontifical Mass, the sponsors of the blessing and "fiesta" which followed being José Simón García and Pablo García.

The cemetery (camposanto) which is located about a quarter mile south of the church was established in 1897 after Lafayette Head dickered with the State of Colorado for the purchase of the land. At the present day the memorial marker over the grave of the same Lafayette Head is the largest in the burial plot.

As the Church in the United States grew strong and healthy, it increasingly showed a tendency to stand on its own feet and become independent of its European origins. It was this attitude that ultimately was responsible for the Jesuit Fathers giving up the Conejos parish. In fact, discussions concerning the possibility of dissolving the Colorado-New Mexico Mission had taken place in Jesuit circles as early as 1880.¹⁶ The discussions increased with each passing year until the proposed dissolution became a certainty. The Colorado-New Mexico Mission would be abandoned with the houses in Colorado being administered by the Missouri Province and the houses in New Mexico being taken under the care of the New Orleans Province. Conejos was the first of the missions to be given up, the transfer being made in 1920.¹⁶

The Jesuits had staffed the parish one year short of a half century and had seen the Church grow in the sunny mountain vale of San Luis to rather healthy proportions. Besides the headquarters in Conejos they had developed Del Norte into a sort of second headquarters for missionary work through Rio Grande and Alamosa counties. From 1877 until 1889 Del Norte had a resident diocesan priest as pastor, but the Jesuits had celebrated Mass in El Carnero and La Garita, near del Norte, as far back as 1871, the year they first entered the work in the San Luis Valley. When there was no resident priest in Del Norte they took care of the parish. This meant that with the exception of 12 years they took care of Del Norte from 1871 until 1923. The church they erected in Del Norte became the first church to be consecrated in Colorado.

ALAMOSA AND MONTE VISTA were also missions of Old Conejos and the parish of the Sacred Heart in Alamosa was not separated from Conejos until Nov. 8, 1919 when the third Bishop of Colorado, the Most Rev. J. Henry Tihen, appointed the Rev. J. J. Murphy, a diocesan priest, as the first resident pastor of Alamosa.

The people of Conejos county have good reason to feel indebted to the Jesuit Fathers for their untiring work and zeal preserving the faith in Conejos, Alamosa, Rio Grande and Saguache counties mainly because of their innumerable sallies from the Conejos headquarters.

* * * *

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEATINE REGIME

When the Jesuits made their exodus from Conejos the oldest parish in Colorado was taken over by the order of Clerics Regular more commonly known as the "Theatine Fathers," after the Archdiocese of Chieti in Central Italy which is translated into Latin as "Archidioecesis Theatinensis." These priests came to the United States for the first time in 1906 on the invitation of Bishop Nicholas C. Matz. Most of them were natives of the island of Mallorca off the coast of Spain and in addition to Spanish they spoke Catalan. Their first parish in Colorado was Sacred Heart in Durango which they began to administer March 9, 1906.

In 1920 they simultaneously took over the parishes of Conejos, San Luis and Capulin and started building St. Cajetan's in Denver. Since then they have taken up work in parishes located in Fort Collins and Colorado Springs. All of Colorado's Bishops and Archbishop Urban J. Vehr have held them in high esteem because of their invaluable aid in working with Spanish-speaking people.

The first Theatine pastor in Conejos was the Rev. John Bonet, C. R. with the Rev. Joseph Alavedra, C. R. as assistant pastor. They were accompanied in the work at Conejos by Bartholomew Caldentey, a lay brother. Full of enthusiasm, they came from Durango to Conejos on Oct. 29, 1920 to take charge of the parish. They began remodeling the interior of the church and installed new floors, ceilings, electric fixtures and colored windows. In 1922 these improvements were followed by new pews and in 1924 by another bell, this one purchased from a non-Catholic church in Monte Vista.

A GREAT SET-BACK TO THE PARISH came on Ash Wednesday, 1926, when the church caught fire and all was destroyed with the exception of some shattered walls and towers. A short circuit in the electrical system is believed to be the cause of the conflagration. Luckily the church record books were saved, even including the two documents creating the conflict between 1857 and 1858 as the year of the origin of the parish.



Rev. JOHN BONET, C. R.
First Theatine Pastor of O. Lady
of Guadalupe.

Much discussion followed concerning the possibility of moving the site of the church to Antonito where most of the parishioners were now residing, but Bishop Tihen, Father Bonet and the pioneer members of the parish argued that a third church should be built on the original site of the other two churches and in this way there would be assurance of continuity in the existence of Colorado's oldest parish church.



THE CONEJOS CHURCH as rebuilt
after the 1926 fire.

The two adobe towers which survived the fire were incorporated into the new building which was faced with brick. The construction took place in September, 1926 and when finished the structure was re-dedicated with Bishop Tihen celebrating a Solemn Pontifical Mass.

In 1934 a new altar and reredos constructed by Benjamin Chavez were installed in Guadalupe church. This altar with its retablo was blessed June

20, 1934 by the then Bishop of Denver, Urban J. Vehr. The day was a memorable one and was celebrated as the 75th anniversary of the parish. The Rev. John Ordinas, C. R. was pastor at that time. Sermons were given in English by Bishop Vehr who since has been elevated to the rank of Archbishop, and in Spanish by the Very Rev. John B. Liciotti who was pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Walsenburg, and dean of the district.

THE BENEDICTINE SISTERS from their Motherhouse in Atchison, Kans. came to Antonito in the autumn of 1934 to conduct the public school of the district. There were eight sisters the first year with Sister Cyrilla, O. S. B. as principal. The student body at the time was around 200. At the present writing it is approximately 800.

Let it be said for future records that when these teachers began to instruct in the institution, the public school district was bankrupt and even the physical facilities of the educational plants had fallen into quite a state of disrepair, so that among other things many windows were without panes of glass. It was at this point that the Rev. John Ordinas, C.R. offered to the school board his services in securing the Benedictine Sisters from Atchison, to take over the school. According to Frank McCunniff, long time secretary of the school board, "The Benedictine Sisters took over when no one else wanted the burden. The year before the coming of the sisters, school had been conducted only for three months. No one wanted to teach in the school because the teachers had to accept county anticipation warrants instead of cash. These warrants were being honored by merchants at discounts running as high as 40 per cent. The first year no salary at all was given the sisters. The second year they were given \$75 a month per teacher."

In order to provide groceries for the sisters that first difficult year, the PTA staged a series of parties and entertainments. Lacking another place to live, the sisters stayed in the mansion loaned for the purpose by Mrs. Fred Warshauer.

Under the Benedictine Sisters, the Antonito schools have produced a number of outstanding students who have distinguished themselves in civic and cultural activities and the number of college degrees from the ranks of the Antonito graduates runs higher in proportion than in other localities of the valley where people of Spanish-speaking backgrounds predominate.

Impossible to Maintain Old Towers



HIS EXCELLENCY URBAN J. VEHR, D. D.
ARCHBISHOP OF DENVER

Although the building of the third church was planned so that the towers of the second church were incorporated into it, maintenance of this situation proved to be impossible because the old adobe towers were heavily cracked and in poor condition. It again was the scriptural case of putting new wine in old wine skins. For this reason the old towers and facade had to be demolished and new ones erected. Manuel Chavez was in charge of this work which included an enlarging of the building by remodeling the whole front. With towers and walls built of matching brick, the seating capacity became more than 500.

ALUMINUM DOMES were added to the towers and with them the towers stood 56 feet high, making the building stand out on the landscape almost rivaling San Anton peak for eye-catching appeal. The domes were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Ortiz and Mr. and Mrs. Delfino Garcia. Helen Lobato of Denver gave \$250. Mercedes Ortiz paid for the colored window in the vestibule and Peter Romero made the largest single donation of \$500.

Four new windows were also installed with the window of the Sacred Heart of Jesus being given by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Mondragon; the Immaculate Heart of Mary window being the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Anastasio Jiron; St. Cajetan of Thiene being the window donated by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Romero, and the window of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, patron of the Southern Colorado Diocese, being the donation of Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Romero.

Rubber tiling in the sanctuary was installed by the "mayordomos" of 1947 while the "mayordomos" of the following year gave new front doors along with the National and Papal flags. All the work of remodeling the church including the new towers, domes and windows was finished by the early summer of 1948.



Rev. MICHAEL PASCUAL, C. R.
Pastor of the Conejos Parish
from Dec. 1946 to the present time.

Byrne of Santa Fe preached in both Spanish and English, being fluent in Spanish because he was Bishop of San Juan, Puerto Rico before being promoted to the Archbishopric of Santa Fe.

THE BEAUTIFUL LOURDES GROTTTO which stands on the lawn outside Guadalupe Church is also a gift of the Peter Romero family and was dedicated with fitting solemnities Aug. 15, 1954, the Marian Year. Constructed of native stone, it stands 12 feet high and features a constant flow of water from the rock. There is a certain parallelism between Lourdes and Conejos

Six years before this, however, the old parish of Conejos found itself again in a new diocese —this time the Diocese of Southern Colorado with headquarters in Pueblo and His Excellency, Joseph C. Willging as its first Bishop.

A solemn Pontifical Mass was celebrated in the Conejos church by Bishop Willging on Aug. 7, 1948, this day being chosen because it was the Feast of St. Cajetan who died on that day in 1547 thereby making 1948 the closing of the year which was celebrated as the 400th anniversary of his death. Previous to the fiesta day, the Rev. Ernest Dannegger, S. J. of Trinidad had preached a "triduum" to the Conejos faithful.

Priests and dignitaries from far and wide attended the event of the Pontifical Mass. Archbishop Edwin V.

parish, both having their origins about the same time. Lourdes is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and so is the Conejos Parish.

IN THE SPHERE OF LOCAL ECONOMICS, the Guadalupe Parish Credit Union was established in January, 1941. Its annual report at the end of the year 1957 disclosed its membership as 863 with total assets of \$190,077. The amount loaned at the end of the year was \$146,516.87. Regular reserve was \$5,037.26. Undivided earnings were \$13,814.93 and the net profit was \$6,320.84.

Of necessity this booklet had to be written before the centenary celebration in Conejos took place. Once more Bishop Willging was slated to be the celebrant of the Pontifical Mass to be performed solemnly June 10, 1958 and again Archbishop Byrne was invited to attend along with Archbishop Vehr and a great number of religious and civic dignitaries including the Rt. Rev. Anthony March, C. R., General of the Theatine Fathers and Governor Stephen McNichols.

The State Historical Society of Colorado has consented to erect a historical marker on the church grounds and the wording of the inscription on this bronze tablet is reproduced in these pages.

As becomes its age, the old parish in Conejos is venerable and mature. It is the site of the oldest church building in Colorado. Although it twice just escaped being part of Archdioceses, it shares honors with the Catholic Churches in San Luis de la Culebra and Trinidad because past history includes its membership in one Vicariate Apostolic and three Dioceses.



The Very. Rev. ANTHONY MARCH, C. R.
Present Superior General of the
Thatine Fathers.

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CREDIT NOTES

Most of the material presented in this booklet is founded on a five-installment history of the parish in Conejos written by the Rev. Michael Pascual, C. R. and appearing in the "Southern Colorado Register" editions of July 9, 16, 23, 30 and Aug. 20, 1954.

Additional handling of the subject is found in the "Denver Catholic Register," Section Two, Dec. 19, 1957 which presents a synopsis of a thesis on file in St. Louis University by the Rev. Martin Hasting, S. J., "Parochial Beginnings in Colorado to 1889."

This booklet, however, is by no means a mere plagiarism, all materials being put through a distillation process and checking of source materials, employing the use of original sources wherever possible.

REFERENCE NOTES

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2. "En El Valle de San Luis," Southern Colorado Register, Nov. 29, 1957, Rev. John Sierra, S. F., p. 2.
3. "History of Guadalupe Parish," Rev. Michael Pascual, C. R., Southern Colorado Register, July 9, 1954, p. 3.
4. Ussel Diary, original, p. 112.
5. Ussel Diary, original, p. 113.
6. This is the testimony of Epifanio Garcia of Mogote, Colo., taken by C. E. Gibson, Jr.
7. "Origin of the Church in Colorado at Conejos," Msgr. Patrick Stauter, Archives of the Diocese of Pueblo, p. 2.
8. "Colorado," Hafen and Hafen, p. 193.
9. "Colorado Magazine," State Historical Society, January, 1933, p. 14.
10. Richardson, "Beyond the Mississippi," p. 255.
11. "Most Rev. Anthony J. Schuler, S. J., First Bishop of El Paso," Sister Lilliana Owens, p. 44.
12. "Colorado Magazine," State Historical Society, July 1937, p. 28 seq. Col. M. L. Crimmins, "Fort Massachusetts, First Military Post in Colorado." Also Rev. W. J. Howlett, "Life of Bishop Machebeuf," p. 373.
13. "All Our Yesterdays," Very Rev. Howard L. Delany, p. 20.
14. Original of the Ussel Diary, p. 112.
15. Martin F. Hasting, S. J., "Parochial Beginnings in Colorado to 1889."
16. "Most Rev. Anthony J. Schuler, S. J., First Bishop of El Paso," Sister Lilliana Owens, p. 222 seq.

PASTORS OF GUADALUPE PARISH, CONEJOS

1858-1860, the Rev. Vicente S. Montaña
1830-1866, the Rev. Joseph Michael Vigil
1836-1871, the Rev. Michael Rolly

1871-1875, the Rev. Salvatore Persone, S. J.
1875-1879, the Rev. James Diamare, S. J.
1879-1885, the Rev. Pascual Tomassini, S. J.
1885-1889, the Rev. M. Penella, S. J.
1889-1897, the Rev. Pascual Tomassini, S. J.
1897-1898, the Rev. Francis X. Tomassini, S. J.
1898-1901, the Rev. Joseph M. Montenarelli, S. J.
1901-1905, the Rev. M. Penella, S. J.
1905-1908, the Rev. Gabriel Massa, S. J.
1908-1911, the Rev. Alexander Leone, S. J.
1911-1913, the Rev. Anthony Brunner, S. J.
1913-1914, the Rev. Pascual Tomassini, S. J.
1914-1920, the Rev. Casimir Alvarez, S. J.

1920-1927, the Rev. John Bonet, C.R.
1927-1930, the Rev. Michael Mas, C.R.
1930-1933, the Rev. Humphrey Martorell, C.R.
1933-1937, the Rev. John Ordinas, C.R.
1937-1945, the Rev. Michael Mas, C.R.
1945-1946, the Rev. Anthony Sagrera, C.R.
1946-1960, the Rev. Michael Pascual, C.R.
1960-1966, the Rev. Bart Nadal, C.R.
1966-1971, the Rev. Anthony Homar, C.R.
1971-1972, the Rev. Andrew Bonet, C.R.
1972 to present, the Rev. Felix Lopez, C.R. and Rev. Andrew
Bonet, C.R.

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ASSISTANT PASTORS OF GUADALUPE PARISH, CONEJOS

January, 1861 to August, 1861 —Rev. Thomas Aquinas Hayes
March, 1871 to September, 1871 —Rev. A. R. Quellan
February, 1872 to November, 1873 —Rev. Alexander Leone, S. J.
October, 1872 to January, 1873 —Rev. Henry Ferrari, S. J.
January, 1873 to December, 1874 —Rev. Laurence M. Fede, S. J.
March, 1873 to September, 1876 —Rev. Francis X. Maffei, S. J.
August, 1874 to July, 1875 —Rev. Rafael Baldassane, S. J.
September, 1874 to April, 1876 —Rev. A. M. Minapi, S. J.
January, 1875 to October, 1876 —Rev. John D'Aponte, S. J.
November, 1876 to June, 1878 —Rev. Rafael Tummolo, S. J.
November, 1876 to September, 1878 —Rev. Gabriel I. Ravel, S. J.
July, 1878 to March, 1879 —Rev. Richard Di Palma, S. J.
September, 1878 to June, 1879 —Rev. Anthony Aragnetti, S. J.
September, 1879 to September, 1880 —Rev. Laurence M. Fede, S. J.
March, 1879 to September, 1882 —Rev. Camillo M. Capilupi, S. J.
October, 1880 to June 1881 —Rev. Gabriel I. Ravel, S. J.
July, 1881 to August, 1885 —Rev. Francis X. Maffei, S. J.
December, 1882 to February, 1886 —Rev. John D'Aponte, S. J.
December, 1894 to April, 1895 —Rev. Francis X. Gubitosi, S. J.
July, 1886 to August, 1888 —Rev. G. Lezzi, S. J.
June, 1887 to August, 1890 —Rev. Aloysius P. Brucker, S. J.
February, 1889 to August, 1889 —Rev. Gabriel Massa, S. J.
August, 1889 to November, 1890 —Rev. Louis M. Ramos, S. J.
October, 1890 to April, 1892 —Rev. Anthony J. Brunner, S. J.
February, 1892 to April, 1899 —Rev. Manuel Fernandez, S. J.
May, 1892 to March, 1893 —Rev. J. Arthuis, S. J.
May, 1899 to October, 1900 —Rev. Joseph Colle Di Vita, S. J.
April, 1900 to October, 1901 —Rev. Francis X. Maffei, S. J.
July, 1900 to November, 1903 —Rev. Ferdinand Troy, S. J.
December, 1903 to 1906 —Rev. Aloysius P. Brucker, S. J.
August, 1909 to April, 1920 —Rev. Edmund E. Behiels, S. J.
August, 1910 to January, 1911 —Rev. P. J. Weckx, S. J.
June, 1914 to January, 1915, —Rev. Dominic Scorpetta, S. J.
June, 1914 to January, 1915 —Rev. Joseph Lafon, S. J.
December, 1915 to June 1916 —Rev. A. Gilbert, S. J.
July, 1916 to November, 1917 —Rev. A. J. Laur, S. J.
November, 1916 to October, 1920 —Rev. S. Good, S. J.

October, 1920 to March, 1921—Very Rev. Bartholomew Caldentey, C.R.
 (He later became Superior General of the Theatine Order and died in Rome in 1933. He is a different person from Brother Bartholomew Caldentey, C.R. who died in Del Norte in 1937.)
 October, 1920 to June, 1926—Rev. Joseph Alavedra, C.R.
 September, 1921 to July, 1923—Rev. Stephen Melis, C.R.
 April, 1922 to December, 1924—Rev. Isidore Llevat, C.R.
 July, 1923 to August, 1925—Rev. James Canyellas, C.R.
 July, 1923 to June, 1926—Rev. James Torrandell, C.R.
 July, 1926 to January, 1931—Rev. Jacinto Mateu, C.R.
 July, 1926 to June, 1930—Rev. John Fullana, C.R.
 January, 1927 to March, 1931—Rev. Nicholas Femenia, C.R.
 October, 1927 to August, 1929—Rev. Peter Ribas, C.R.
 November, 1930 to January, 1931 and 1934—Rev. Bartholomew Bennaser, C.R.
 March, 1931 to October, 1933—Rev. Isidore Llevat, C.R.
 June, 1931 to February, 1932—Rev. James Canyellas, C.R.
 November, 1931 to October, 1934—Rev. John Fullana, C.R.
 October, 1932 to March, 1934—Rev. Bernard Rotger, C.R.
 October, 1933 to September, 1935—Rev. Nicholas Femenia, C.R.
 October, 1933 to May, 1935—Rev. Peter Ribas, C.R.
 January, 1935 to May, 1937—Rev. Anthony Sagrera, C.R.
 January, 1939 to 1948—Rev. John Alzamora, C.R.
 September, 1942 to April, 1945—Rev. Anthony Sagrera, C.R.
 April, 1945 to 1946—Rev. Peter Ribas, C.R.
 May, 1947 to December, 1948—Rev. Stephen Ufnal, C.R.
 1948 to 1950—Rev. Andrew Mantua, C.R.
 1948—Rev. Carmine Porro, C.R.
 1949 to 1950—Rev. Anthony Homar, C.R.
 1951 to 1954—Rev. Bartholomew Quetglas, C.R.
 1951 to 1952—Rev. Bartholomew Nadal, C.R.
 1953 to 1959—Rev. Francis Colom, C.R.
 1959 to 1960—Rev. Ramon Lopez, C.R.
 1960 to 1964—Rev. Mariano Santos, C.R.
 1964 to 1966—Rev. Michael Verd, C.R.
 1966 to 1968—Rev. Angelo Urdiain, C.R.
 1968 to 1970—Rev. John Jaume, C.R.
 1970 to 1971—Rev. Andrew Bonet, C.R.
 1971 to 1972—Rev. Felix Lopez, C.R.

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IMPORTANT DATES
IN
COLORADO'S CATHOLIC CHURCH HISTORY

1851 —John B. Lamy went from Ohio to Santa Fe, N. Mex. as Vicar Apostolic.

1858 —First parish in present Colorado was set up in Conejos.

1858-59 —Gold discovered in Gregory Gulch near Central City attracted hordes of people to the Rocky Mountain region.

1860, May and June —Bishop J. B. Miede, S. J. of Leavenworth, Kan. made an ecclesiastical survey of the Pike's Peak area.

1860, October —Vicar General Joseph P. Machebeuf from Albuquerque, N. Mex. arrived in Denver to organize the Catholic Church in the region.

1866 —Third Plenary Council of Baltimore recommended an Ecclesiastical See be set up for Colorado and Utah.

1868 —Vicariate Apostolic of Colorado was set up with Joseph P. Machebeuf as Vicar Apostolic.

1875 —The See of Santa Fe which had become a diocese July 29, 1853 was elevated to the rank of an Archdiocese on Feb. 12.

1887 —Colorado ceased to be a Vicariate Apostolic and was set up as a full-fledged diocese, suffragan to the Province of Santa Fe.

1889 —Bishop Machebeuf died and Nicholas C. Matz became the second Bishop of Colorado.

1917 —J. Henry Tihen became Colorado's third Bishop.

1931 —Urban J. Vehr became Colorado's fourth Bishop.

1941 —Colorado was divided into two ecclesiastical jurisdictions with the Northern Colorado See headquartered in Denver and the Southern Colorado See headquartered in Pueblo.

Joseph Clement Willging became Southern Colorado's first Bishop. Bishop Vehr was elevated to the rank of Archbishop and Denver became the Provincial See with the Dioceses of Wyoming and Southern Colorado as suffragan sees.

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PRIESTS AND SISTERS WHOSE BODIES REST IN OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
PARISH CEMETERY, CONEJOS

The Rev. Peter Penella, S. J., died April 11, 1908.

The Rev. Gabriel Massa, S. J., died April 2, 1913.

The Rev. E. Montell, S. J., died in Alamosa July 2, 1916.

The Rev. Joseph Alavedra, C. R., died Oct. 29, 1929.

The Rev. John Bonet, C. R., died in Denver July 23, 1939.

Brother Bartholomew Caldentey, C. R., died in Del Norte Oct. 2, 1937.

Sister Mary Fara Maloney, died Jan. 4, 1878.

Sister Mary William Ann Edelen, died Feb. 5, 1898.

Both were Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross.

MISSION CHAPELS NOW ADMINISTERED FROM CONEJOS

Espinoza, Santo Niño

Las Mesitas, St. Isidore

Lobatos, Holy Family

Ortiz, Sts. Cajetan and John Nepomucene

San Antonio, St. Anthony

San Rafael, St. Raphael

St. Joseph's Church, Capulin, was a mission of Conejos until 1939 when the Rev. Peter Ribas, C. R. became its first resident pastor.

PARISH SOCIETIES

The Association of Christian Mothers, founded Dec. 25, 1877. Probably the oldest parish society in the state of Colorado.

"Unión Católica de San Miguel," founded Jan. 23, 1883. Its first banner was blessed by Bishop Joseph P. Machebeuf on May 24, 1883.

The Daughters of Mary Sodality, established May 8, 1886. It could be the oldest Sodality of the state of Colorado.

The parish unit of the Apostleship of Prayer, established Oct. 15, 1889.

The "Vela Perpetua," established on the Feast of Corpus Christi, 1917.

Other parish groups are the Knights of Columbus and Holy Name Society.

FIRST RECORDED BAPTISM IN THE PARISH

María de la Luz Ortega on Jan. 8, 1860. There were other baptisms prior to this date but they were not recorded.

An old family record states these facts:

El Año de 1858

El día primero de junio nació José Alejandro de Amarante Garcia y fueron los padrinos Don Seledón Valdes y Doña María Guadalupe Valdera, hijo de José Vitor Garcia y de María Candelarita Jaquez.

Y fué bautizado por el padre Vicente Saturnino Montaña en la parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe el día doce del mismo junio del año 1858.

This is a private record, however, and not a church record.

* * * *

SIGNING THEMSELVES AS DEVOTEES OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE,
November 25, 1883

"All who declare themselves to be devotees of Our Lady of Guadalupe will be obliged to give an offering of 25 cents every year." —Minutes of the public meeting.

The Rev. Pascual Tomassini, S. J., Pastor and Mayordomo

Celedonio Valdez, president

Lafayette Head, Secretary

A. D. Archuleta

José N. Lucero

J. P. Garcia

Teodoro Lobato

José Fresques

José Gabriel Martinez

Benito Martinez

José P. Trujillo

Juan de J. Garcia

J. Amarante Garcia

Juan B. Lobato

A. M. Vigil

Juan Ignacio Garcia

José Vicente Chavez

Juan Romero

Florencio Marquez

José S. Garcia

Flavio A. Garcia

Policarpio Lobato

Felix Lopez

Jesús M. Lobato

José N. Valdez

José G. Trujillo

José F. Valdez

Jesús Ma. Valdez

J. Francisco Chacon

Pedro Dominguez

Antonio J. Dominguez

José Bonifacio Romero

Perfecto Romero

Martin Romero

J. Aniceto Romero

Ramon De Herrera

José de Jesús Romero

J. Rodriguez

Claudio Martinez

José Ma. Martinez



HIS EXCELLENCY EDWIN V. BYRNE,
ARCHBISHOP OF SANTA FE.

* * * *

HEADS OF FAMILIES WHO CAME TO THE DISTRICT IN 1851
All from New Mexico

José Maria Jaquez from Llanito
Vicente Velasquez from La Cueva
Jesús Velasquez from La Cueva
José Manuel Vigil from La Cueva
Santiago Manchego from La Cueva
Juan de Dios Martínez from La Cueva
José Francisco Martínez from Servilleta
Lafayette Head from Servilleta
Juan Nicolas Martínez from Servilleta
Antonio José Chavez from Servilleta
Antonio Chavez from Ojo Caliente
Hilario Atencio from Ojo Caliente
Juan de la Cruz Espinoza from Ojo
Caliente.

Celedonio Valdez, one of the holders of the original grant which was never confirmed by the U. S. Congress, settled on La Isla very early but the exact year is unknown.

Anastasio Trujillo and his son, Luis Rafael Trujillo, came from El Rito, N. Mex. to the vicinity of Los Rincones in 1847. After staying there long enough to raise a crop, they returned to El Rito and came north again in 1849 with their families and other families including two of Anastasio's brothers, Ignacio Francisco and Antonio, and another of his sons, Manuel.



JOSE MARIA JAQUEZ,
Leader of the pioneer settlers who
came to Guadalupe in 1854.
(Meliton Velasquez.)

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WORDING OF THE PLAQUE ON HISTORICAL MARKER
ERECTED ON THE GROUNDS OF THE CONEJOS CHURCH BY THE
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF COLORADO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE PARISH

This Tablet Is The
PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF COLORADO
June 10, 1958
D. O. M.

THIS TRACT WAS SELECTED BY BISHOP MACHEBEUF, FOR THE FIRST PERMANENT CHURCH IN COLORADO. HERE WAS BUILT A JACAL (PICKET) CHURCH, LATER REPLACED BY A LARGER CHURCH. THE FIRST PARISH OF COLORADO WAS ERECTED 100 YEARS AGO WITH OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE AS PATRON BY JOHN B. LAMY, FIRST BISHOP OF SANTA FE. FATHER MONTAÑO WAS THE FIRST PASTOR. THE FINISHED CHURCH, DEDICATED BY BISHOP LAMY ON DEC. 12, 1863, WAS UNDER THE JESUIT FATHERS 1871-1920. SINCE 1920, IT HAS BEEN UNDER THE THEATINE FATHERS. FIRE DESTROYED THE CHURCH ON ASH WEDNESDAY 1926. JOHN HENRY TIHEN, THIRD BISHOP OF DENVER, DEDICATED A NEW CHURCH DEC. 12, 1927. IN 1948 THIS CHURCH WAS ENLARGED AND EMBELLISHED WITH ITS TOWERS BY THE REV. MICHAEL PASCUAL, C. R., PASTOR. THE MOST REV. JOSEPH C. WILLGING, FIRST BISHOP OF PUEBLO, DEDICATED AN ADDITION TO THE CHURCH ON AUG. 7, 1948.

Placed by
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF COLORADO
THROUGH THE MRS. J. N. HALL FOUNDATION