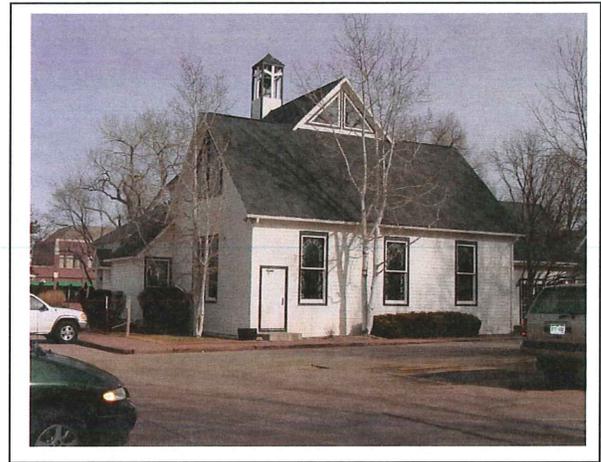


Ave Maria Chapel at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

By: *The Town of Parker Historic Preservation Commission*



This photo is of the Ave Maria Catholic Church which was built in 1916 on the north side of current Parker Mainstreet, across from Parker's Consolidated School, currently the Parker Methodist Church. This building was later moved to become part of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, currently located off present day Pilgrim's Place in Parker. Photo courtesy of the Local History Collection, Douglas Public Library District.



In the Early 1900's

Today

The Ave Maria Catholic Mission was founded by Rt. Rev. Msgr. John Judnic, who served as Colorado Springs Monsignor from 1913-1915. The area's first mass was celebrated in Deepe Dance Hall in downtown Parker. On Feb. 5, 1915, G. W. Parker sold the land for the new church, and the foundation and floor joists were laid 10 months later. The frame church was completed by 1916 as the result of donations from local residents as well as The Extension Society of Chicago. Local contributors included: Mr. and Mrs. William O'Brien; Mrs. Katherine Cline, grandparents of Mrs. Jean Elliot, a current resident of Parker; Mr. and Mrs. Michael Carberry grandparents of Mrs. Geniveve Chubb; Mr. and Mrs. Tom O'Neil; Mr. and Mrs. William Duray; and Mr. and Mrs. Cameil Vynekie. Father William Larkin celebrated the first Mass on Jan. 12, 1916 and served as parish priest for the first year. A Parcel Post sale netting \$65 was held on Dec. 28, 1917 to finance a belfry for the structure. At that time the Mission of Ave Maria Parish was located at the northern edge of an enclave of the small plains missions in Elbert, Castle Rock, Kiowa, Elizabeth, and Monument.

Ave Maria Mission saw many priests during the period of 1917 to 1955. Pastors were: Father Larkin (1916-1917), Father C. J. Vaughn (1917-1921), Father Joseph Bastine (1921), Father Andrew Murphy (1922-1932), Father Bernard Gillick (1932-1933), and Father Walter Steidel (1933-1955). In 1955, Catholic Church activities were moved to Castle Rock; and the old church was boarded up and sat idle until May 1982. St. Matthew's Episcopal Mission had acquired several parcels of land just west of Pikes Peak and south of Pilgrim Place. (In 1982, Pilgrim Place was known as University Place.) They were looking for a worship space and learned about the empty and unused Ave Maria Chapel. As they said, "We were a family without a church; and the chapel was a church without a family." Melba Investors offered the building to St. Matthew's and the Mission started to get ready to accept this generous offer: raise enough money to affect the move down Mainstreet, and construct a foundation for its new location. Finally, in September 1982, Melba Investors signed over the deed to the chapel and St. Matthew's moved it to its current location.

On March 10, 1983, Archbishop James V. Casey officially renamed this Parker church "Ave Maria". In 1983, Father McDaid left Colorado to study Canon Law in Rome, and Father Dennis Dwyar became pastor. The first Mass at the chapel was celebrated at 11 a.m. on Oct. 7, 1984. Official occupancy of the facility occurred on Wednesday, Nov. 21, 1984 followed by its dedication on Feb. 20, 1985.

The chapel remained unfinished until 1985 when St. Matthew's finished the interior and it finally became their worship space. St. Matthew's used two of its parishioners to do the job: Dick Lehman was the architect and Mike Gorman the general contractor operating his business, McGee Construction. The curved framing in the original windows were preserved in the current stained glass window replacements.

By 1994, the 27x47 ft. size of the Ave Maria Chapel became too small to handle the growing congregation at St. Matthew's. In February 1995, St. Matthew's entered into a new agreement: this time to "grow" the Ave Maria Chapel through its north wall. This time St. Matthew's contracted with a Denver architectural firm, but again used one of its parishioners, Mike Kelley as the general contractor. Except for its north side the, Ave Maria Chapel remains in its original condition.

St Matthew's has grown from Mission to Parish status over the years since the chapel was relocated. There have been several priests in residence during this time, too. Father Rick Myers was the Vicar of St. Matthew's Mission in 1982; Father Michael Richardson is currently the Rector at St. Matthew's Parish.

Presently, there exists a new Ave Maria Roman Catholic Church on East Mainstreet.