



Church of the Holy Spirit Gallup's First Church Building

by Sally Noe

Few residents now remember former teacher Katherine Brown. Her parents had moved to Gallup from Holbrook just before she was born in 1895. She once said, "We moved here because there were not any churches in Holbrook. So we came to live in Gallup."

Gallup, New Mexico was known as the only Protestant community in Catholic New Mexico. Even though many underground miners came from the Catholic countries of southern Europe, our earliest residents came from beyond the Mississippi and northern Europe. Two hundred years of Spanish rule had not settled our immediate area.

This was Navajo country. They would only come into Fort Wingate for "Treaty Goods" distribution. Their settlement areas were on tribal lands and suitable for grazing sheep and other livestock. Under the Indian Reorganization Act, western lands were already being distributed for Indian Reservations. These allotted lands did not recognize existing Catholic settlements and land claims.

The religious denominations of President Grant's Cabinet membership were allotted tribal oversight. It was assumed that church membership and practical skills would be a condition of trading post licenses. The unwritten marriage requirements would bring families and honest dealings with their customers. They would be expected to notify army officials of unrest or area problems. There were no federal forts built on the reservation.

Nearby Gallup was the newest industrial town in New Mexico. There was no nearby labor force to apply for underground coal mining jobs, for cultural taboos did not allow the Navajo to work underground. Mine officials were recruited or sent by parent companies from the mid-western mine areas. Additional flyers were posted for the needed workers across northern England and northern Europe.

Hiring did not depend on any church affiliation. Workers came for the extra dollar a day that the Gallup mines paid. After 1910 job calls were posted, the Catholic parish built their local community church.

In 1895 Gallup's very first church building opened. The red brick Church of the Holy Spirit, Episcopal, on the corner of Second and Aztec was built to honor the memory of the Right Reverend Gregory T. Bedell, Bishop of Ohio.

Other Protestant denominations — Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Christian Reform, shared the Episcopal facility until construction of their own "homes" was completed.