

#4 Telling the Nativity story: beginning the 20th century

The turn of the century witnessed Lewiston growing, despite the fact that the Territorial capitol had been moved (some say “stolen”) south to Boise. By 1890 Idaho Territory had become the State of Idaho. The city of Lewiston was expanding eastward – John Vollmer had helped Nativity to build out at 11th and F Streets instead of down town between 4th/5th and D streets. Then, in 1919-20, the sanctuary was moved up to Normal Hill. Nativity’s priest Rev. David J. W. Somerville, 1904—1929, born in Ireland, taught at the Normal School, on Normal Hill, during his tenure at Nativity.

The national economic Panic of 1893, caused in part by the shaky financing of the railroads, affected banking and the money supply nationally. In Lewiston, Nativity parishioners, John Vollmer, William F Kettenbach, J. D. Kester, among other entrepreneurs, saw an opportunity to speculate on land locally and on the Camas Prairie¹. Transportation limited commerce.

Lewiston remained a mining and commercial center and became a farming and logging center after the opening of the NezPerces’ Reservation land for settlement. For Lewiston to develop, there was a need for improved transportation to get timber and agricultural commodities to market. In the 1890’s, Lewiston began building a railroad depot, but when it was completed in 1895, there was still no train servicing the town. The depot was referred as, “...the only railroad station in the country without a railroad.” The Camas Prairie Rail Road finally came into the city in 1898 and the line to Grangeville was completed in 1910.

John Vollmer took advantage of the train going up to the Prairie. He platted a town (Ilo Vollmer) and named it after himself (today’s Craigmont.) He speculated on prairie and timber lands between Mason and Cottonwood Buttes. My father, Elmer Jungert, bought his farm and timber near Cottonwood Butte from John Vollmer in the second decade of the century.

On a personal level, Lewiston families suffered from the rampant diseases of the late 19th and early 20th century. Many of the gifts to Nativity Episcopal Church were given in memory of young children who died of these diseases. Mrs. Henriette Gustafson compiled a catalog of gifts. The list appears on pages 25 – 28 in the Centennial Booklet.² Last month we cited the Nativity Window, the Kester windows, and the McConkey window. In addition, there is the Ann D. Jacobs window. Ann was the mother of Maj. Adolph Kroutingier, a soldier who fought in the Nez Perce Indian War. The Wiggin Window was given in memory of two young sons, Albert and Charles. Lott Wiggin was one of Lewiston’s pioneers. The Butler window was given later.

Nativity literally grew along with Lewiston in the 20th century, from that *Sheltered by a Tree* site near the Clearwater, to 4th5th Street, and finally building at 11th and F street, to our present site at 8th and 8th. Nativity parishioners carried our symbolic Celtic cross along to its several locations. Note the cross in the Vollmer drawing below—photos and drawings shown from left to right: 1894 (photograph—shows no cross), but the 1894, (drawing by Norman Vollmer) shows a cross on the bell tower, the Centennial

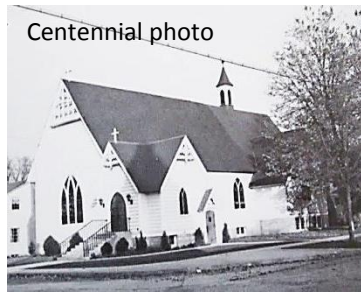
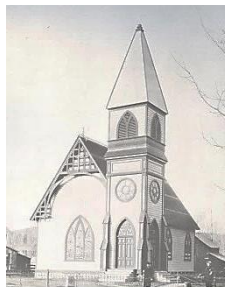


photo of 1973 shows the cross as it is today, and today’s cross is visible from the street and from our secret garden. What is our Celtic Cross’ significance for us today? Legend tells us that the Celtic cross represents a circle (the sun) imposed on a Latin cross. The Celtic tradition is one of the three foundations of our Episcopal Church—the others, Roman Catholicism and the Reformation. Both John D. McConkey (serving from 1881 to 1899) and D.W. J. Somerville (serving from 1904 to 1929) came to the United States from Ireland with Anglican backgrounds. “Celtic spirituality is deeply incarnational.”³ Both priests served here on the *edge of the world*, just as 5th century St. Patrick brought an incarnational Christianity to Ireland⁴ Reverends McConkey and Somerville must have seen Lewiston, Warren, and Mount Idaho as the *edge of the world* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Coming: a look at the women of Nativity, their Episcopal hospitality to feed the body, mind and spirit – the early years.

End notes:

- 1 Branting, Steven D. *Lost Lewiston* pp 76-78 There is an interesting story about land speculation by Kettenbach and Kester in Branting's chapter titled 'The Forest for the Trees.'
- 2 Boren, Charles P. and Campbell, Thomas *The Centennial Booklet* pp. 25—28
- 3 DeWaal, Esther *Every Earthly Blessing* p. 15 *Praying is not separated from singing or working or any other aspect of life. Because of the way in which they saw their world they were ready to accept, enjoy, transform whatever lay at hand.*
- 4 Cahill, Thomas. "Good News from Far Off "The First Missionary" *How the Irish Saved Civilization* Chapter IV. pp 101-119

Works cited.

- Boren, Charles P. and Thomas W. Campbell. "The Mists of History." *The Centennial Booklet* 1983
- Branting, Steven *Lost Lewiston Idaho* History Press Charleston, SC 2014
- Cahill, Thomas *How The Irish Saved Civilization* Anchor Doubleday New York 1995
- DeWaal Esther *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition* Morehouse Publishing reprinted 1999.

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