

“We learned much here that we carry with us...I want to thank you all for being here, to share and remember with us.”

Janice Walker Berry

time, she wouldn't come because she always cried. All of us found a part of ourselves here, and lost a part of ourselves here.” As he wandered the halls, Hinmon stood by a bell at the end of the hallway. “We waited for the bell to ring because that meant someone had come for a visit. I saw my parents once a year and I still have a picture of us gathered in the room when they visited.”

Hinmon encouraged those with “hard memories to leave them behind. There have been enough tears for the hard things and loneliness,” he commented. “Leave the tears here.”

He also asked that, to encourage healing when the new building is constructed, that the parish do something to tell people of the history of the property and to remind people who come to the parish of “what was here before.”

Though the formal ceremony ended, few people left as one by one former students moved to the front of the room to share memories. Janice Walker Berry, who also attended the school with her six siblings, had spoken with her cousin in Belgium and in a sign of solidarity, at the exact time of the ceremony in Harbor Springs, they were also conducting a ceremony in Belgium. Similar groups were gathering in Texas and Oklahoma as well.

Janice summed up the thoughts of many saying, “It’s a day of mixed emotions. We learned much here that we carry with us. We have friends and family worldwide who are with us today. I want to thank you all for being here, to share with us and remember with us.”

Fr. Graff invited everyone to stay and visit throughout the day and to join in the traditional

fry bread and corn soup which had been prepared.

“There are many memories, good and bad, about this place,” Fr. Graff remarked. “Today we



Six children from the Walker family who attended the school returned for the closing ceremony. Front row: Mary Margaret Walker, Janice Walker Berry; 2nd Row: Donna Walker DeLap, Sharon Walker Hinman; 3rd Row: Paul & Jim Walker.

recall both and recognize that they are but a foundation of what we are yet called to be.”

The building is set for demolition at the end of the summer. There will be a yard sale on July 20 and 21 from 9 AM to 4 PM where artifacts from the school will be sold. Plans are for a new parish faith formation center, parish hall and gathering space to be built on the land. #

Photos courtesy of Marie Reno, Holy Childhood of Jesus Parish and Candace Neff, Diocese of Gaylord.

June, 2007



Harbor Springs Bids Farewell to Holy Childhood School

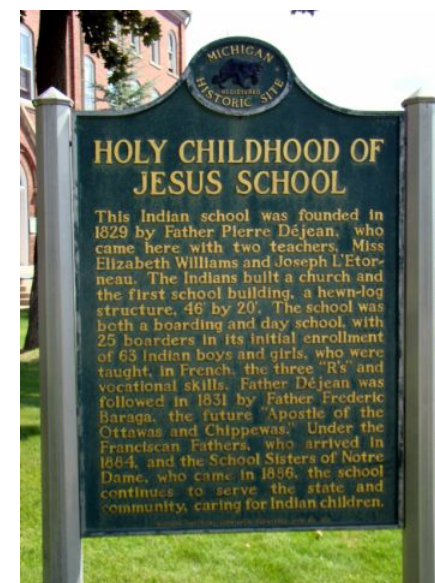
On Saturday, June 30, community members, parishioners and friends of Holy Childhood of Jesus Parish in Harbor Springs gathered for a ceremony to close Holy Childhood School. The day came and went with a mix of emotions and memories, rituals and recollections. The school has been an institution for the small northern Michigan town in many ways—having begun operation in 1829 while Harbor Springs itself was not incorporated as a village until 1881.

In the beginning the small Indian school in the village then known as “New Arbre Croche” (later Harbor Springs) was built by Native Americans working with Father De Jean the first resident pastor. The complex consisted of a log church and a two room log school/rectory. It initially served 25 boarders and 13 day students. By 1834, under Father Frederic Baraga, New Arbre Croche had become one of the largest and most successful Indian Missions in the United States.

In 1886 a three-story wooden frame building that had origi-

nally housed two former hotels became the school’s home, and three School Sisters of Notre Dame arrived to run the facility. In 1913 the first brick structure was built, replacing part of the 1886 wooden structure, and a new brick addition was completed in 1928. In 1929 the facility was officially declared the largest Indian Mission School in the United States with 214 boarders serving first through eighth grade students.

The boarding school closed in 1983, having housed nearly 3,600 children over the years.



The facility remained a day school, daycare center and thrift shop until 1988. At that time the day school was discontinued. The daycare center and thrift shop remained open to serve the community but were recently relocated to other areas in Harbor Springs to allow for the taking down of the school. The facility has also served other groups in the community over the years.

“When the committee began investigating the facilities, a structural engineer on our Building Oversight Committee (BOC) informed us it would cost between \$8 and \$13 million to renovate the building -- including the removal of walls which, of course would be necessary,” stated Fr. Joseph Graff, Pastor of Holy Childhood of Jesus Parish. “So the BOC decided that renovating the building would not be feasible or responsible,” Fr. Graff continued. “And after our farewell ceremony with the Native American community, I feel it is the right thing to do to facilitate the healing and reconciliation which received great impetus at that ceremony.”

Goodbye my Grandmother... your spirit is in this place and in my heart.

*Shirley Mae Shonin
from your grandson*

A note left on chalkboard in one of the rooms.

The planned demolition of the school itself has brought mixed emotions from many who attended the facility as students. Strict discipline and separation from parents were the norm at the school, and at times some of the disciplinary actions were extreme. While most of the students went home for the summer months, some of the children only saw their parents one time a year or not at all. As difficult as some of those times may have been for the students, many who returned for the closing ceremony held on to the memories as building blocks of the people they have become. The hurt and isolation of those times are things that they won't forget, yet several former students returning to the school also spoke of fond memories of friends and fun.

Don Portman, Sr., an elder with the Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa tribe, attended the school from 1943-1948. "I was seven years old when my father dropped me off here. The first year was lonesome, but sometimes those are things you just have to go through. A lot of the things taught here are still a part of me today," Portman said.

Portman noted everyone had a job to do at the school whether it was picking potatoes, shoveling coal or cleaning. He was one of a few students who were trustees – "They trusted us to do our job, including sometimes taking something to people downtown who supported the school; and they trusted us to come back," Portman smiled. He added, "I also remember Sr. Arnold used to take us skiing on barrel slats and we went tobogganing on the hills back there."

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*Fr. Joseph Graff, Pastor
Holy Childhood of Jesus Church*

On Friday, all rooms of the building were smudged in preparation for the closing. Smudging is a Native American ritual where a mixture of sage, sweetgrass, cedar and tobacco is burned in a shell and the smoke is fanned with feathers to create a cleansing smoke bath which is used to purify people, spaces, or objects.



As the people gathered for the closing ceremony Saturday morning, the Little Traverse Band of Odawa Indians Ladies' Drum group, the Woodland Singers, played and sang outside the building and visitors were smudged at the door.

The entire building was opened, with all doors unlocked so that people could walk through every area throughout the day.

Historic photos lined hallways and gymnasium.

"I think that's me – oh, and look! There's you!" exclaimed one woman as she and a friend peered closely at a class photo from many years ago.

Upon entering the gymnasium, former students and visitors had the opportunity to pick up note cards with historic photos, have coffee and share memories with one another.

The ceremony itself began with the Presentation of Staffs and Processional with a welcome song by the Men's Drum Group.

Fr. Graff welcomed those gathered saying, "It is good for us to be here. God, the Great Spirit, is hovering above us, in our heads

and in our hearts. It's really that which we celebrate," he stated. Fr. Graff offered his apologies for "those hurts that happened in this building," and encouraged people to celebrate the good things that happened as well. He described the day as a chance to remember, to heal and to look toward the future. "This is a sacred occasion and we are here together in the presence of God," Fr. Graff proclaimed.

At the beginning of the ceremony Joe Kishigo led the Lord's Prayer in Odawa. At its conclusion, Kishigo noted, "In the Catholic tradition, the Lord's Prayer is followed by the Sign of Peace. I think it would be good to share a Sign of Peace together now here as well."

Frank Ettawageshik, chairman of the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, addressed the assembly saying the event was an "opportunity for healing and an opportunity for celebrating. It is a special day, one we mark in time as part of the Circle of Life. Every time there is an ending, there is a beginning."

The joys and pains, "all of these things weave together in a tapestry to make us who we are," Ettawageshik said.

Kateri Mary Margaret Walker, who attended the school with several siblings, spoke with great emotion. She wasn't allowed to pray in native language at the school and longed to reclaim her native heritage and to be a "jingle dancer" (so named because the dress is adorned with bells) who dance healing dances. It has taken a long time, but "I have come to understand and accept the love of the church; and I have come to understand and accept the education I received here," Walker stated. "I accomplished everything that I was told I could not do. Today, I came out of forgiveness and I came to say goodbye to ghosts."

As a healing dancer, Walker offers her dances and prayers for those who are sick in body or mind. "I dance today not for

myself, but for you and I offer my prayers for all," she added.

Walker also brought a dress she had. "I wasn't sure who I was going to give this to, but earlier I met a woman who said she always wanted to be a 'jingle dress dancer' and I knew she was the one," Walker stated as she presented the dress to Veronica Medicine.



Tony Davis performed the Pipe Ceremony, another Native American ritual. Sharing stories of his own background of alcoholism and drug addiction and finding his way back, Davis explained, "The purpose of my story is that given time, everything can be healed. Everything in our life brought us to this moment. I never thought there'd be this many people here sharing our culture. I'm

glad I'm a part of this because it's a whole new beginning for mankind – red, yellow, black or white," he added.

The pipe ceremony was followed with Aaron Otto captivating the crowd of more than 200 as he played a wood carved flute.

Bishop Patrick Cooney also offered apologies for those who were hurt at the school and asked for forgiveness from the Native Americans. He noted, "We have crossed some of those bridges together and we hope to do better in the future. It is my hope and my prayer that now we can go forward together."

Others who attended the school had the opportunity to come forward to express their feelings and memories about their experiences at the school. One woman noted, "The first thing I think of is I got a quality education here; it might have been an education brought about by fear, but I always did my homework!" She said, "I do not have sad memories of when I went to school here, but I have been talking with others who have great sadness."

Ben Hinmon attended the school with his four siblings from 1967-70. "I have come back every year to look at the school with my wife. The last

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