



The Catholic  
Archdiocese  
of Edmonton

*Joy in Christ*  
**100** Jubilee  
1912-2012

## Jubilee 100 Biography Project

### **Biography of the Hoven Family**

Submitted by St. Matthew Parish, Rocky Mountain House



The Hoven Family, undated

The Parish of St. Matthew Catholic Church in Rocky Mountain House includes the Mission Parishes of Evergreen (Jesuit Martyrs), Caroline (St. Joseph the Worker) and Nordegg (St. Theresa - now used inter-denominationally). For many years prior to the coming of the Alberta pioneer families, the area witnessed the early beginnings of our Catholic faith through the impact of the Oblate Missionaries visiting the nearby fur trade posts from 1800-1878, converting many Métis and First Nations. Soon the pioneers began arriving with the promise of new land and new beginnings and with their Catholic Faith paramount. This area offers as testament two very special families who persevered in the faith: the Hoven and the LeCerf families.

In the summer of 1909, Matt and Barbara Hoven moved their family from South Dakota to an area 10 miles southwest of the Evarts post office, to an area soon to be known as Evergreen. Matt Hoven and his two older sons had come to the area in 1908 and filed on homesteads.

They came to this area from the Dakota prairie because of the abundance of “wood and water.” When they arrived in 1909 they first lived in the Diamond Valley area, but then bought land that had a house on it next to their homesteads.

In November of 1909 Matt and Barbara took their new daughter Elizabeth to Red Deer to be baptized by Father Voisin, head of the Trenchbary Priests. From then on Father Voisin or one of his assistants, Father Renut, Father Ronci, or Father Harnet, would periodically come out by horse and buggy to celebrate Mass and visit the settlers. One of the Hoven boys would ride throughout the countryside and let all the settlers know when Mass would be said in the Hoven living room. After the railroad came through Hespero and on west to Rocky in 1913, the priest would let the Hovens know when he was coming on the train, so he could be picked up and taken on visits to the many homes and say Mass at the Hovens.

An excerpt from the history of Pierre LeCerf: *“I remember the Masses in the Hoven home. It was the custom to have dinner afterwards for those who had come long distances. I remember Mrs. Hoven and her daughters setting three long tables. Then all the adults would eat, with the children waiting till all the adults had eaten before they could eat. On Sunday May 15, 1921, I took Father Renut home with me to baptize our first born, Henri, and the next day I took him to the home of Frank Dobia for their marriage ceremony. The Hovens were there so afterwards took him back to the train.”*

Any larger celebrations were held in the Gaetz School, which had been built in 1910. One occasion was the funeral of Matt Hoven Jr. in 1917; another was the wedding of Marie LeCerf and Edgar Vick in 1923. In the mid-1920s several Catholic families arrived from the Hebrides and settled in the Diamond Valley area. This meant that the Hoven living room was no longer large enough to hold the growing congregation, so Mass was held in the Gaetz School. Also at this time a new priest, Father J.R. MacDonald, arrived in Red Deer. He saw the growing number of Catholics in the area, and proposed that a church be built. He asked Archbishop O’Leary in Edmonton for permission to do so. In October 1926, Fr MacDonald received a letter stating that the planned church could be built, it was to be called the Jesuit Martyrs of Canada Catholic Church, and enclosed was a cheque for \$300.00 to help with construction costs.

In 1928 the church was built on land donated by Matt Hoven. Its interior was unfinished – just open studs and bare rafters, with two airtight heaters with many feet of black pipe leading to the chimney above the altar. The first wedding was to be that of James LeCerf and Elizabeth Hoven, but as the church was not closed in yet and James had to go away to work, the wedding was in the school. The first funeral was that of Nick Hoven in November of 1928. The first wedding was that of Jeanne LeCerf and Paul Hrdlicka in 1942.

In 1933 Father Francis Gillis became the first resident priest in Rocky Mountain House, so Mass could now be celebrated at Evergreen more than once a month. Fr. Gillis spearheaded the completion of the interior of the church.

In 1962, Father Anthony Dittrich became the priest in Rocky and oversaw the mission at Evergreen. He and the CYO and the parishioners further renovated the church by adding a tower entrance and a sacristy. In 1981, Father Matt Kuefler became the priest in Rocky and suggested building a new church at Evergreen. So in 1984 a new church was built at the back of the old church, and in 1988 the old church was demolished and replaced with a large greeting area, catechism rooms, a kitchen and bathrooms. Much volunteer labor was used, and people dug into their pockets to pay for it. Our church was now complete.

The Hoven name has remained active in the church. In the 1940s son Adie and his wife Dorothy took over the family farm, and always had the church warm for Mass – whether it was the airtight heaters or a diesel stove. The boys became altar servers. The priest would always go down to the Hovens for dinner after the 11 o'clock Mass. Daughter Elizabeth and her husband Jim LeCerf were active in the church, as were daughter Mary and her husband Jack Leahy. Theresa Hoven came back to the farm in 1946, and was instrumental in keeping the church and linens clean. Helen Hoven came to the farm from South Dakota in 1949, and played the organ at the church for the next 30 years. Grandson Cecil and his wife Carol took over the family farm in the 70s and now live next door to the church. They look after the thermostat and the operations of the church. Granddaughter Edna Leahy Bradshaw and her daughter Kathy Neal are active parishioners and regular church cleaners and look after the linens. Great-grandson Gordon Bradshaw is an active member. Grandson Roy and his wife Eileen are active members. Great-grandson Tim and his wife Lori are now on the family farm, and are very active in the church. Their children are now some of the altar servers, so the family role should continue well into the future of the church.