

Texas Historical Commission Staff (DKU), 1/22/80

18" x 28" Official Texas Historical Marker without post for  
attachment to post

Comal County (Order #5781)

Location: 300 North Castell, New Braunfels

THE GROTTO\*  
SAINTS PETER AND PAUL CATHOLIC CHURCH\*\*\*

A MAJOR INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC  
SPREAD ACROSS THE UNITED STATES  
IN 1918 CAUSING MANY DEATHS.  
UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF FATHER  
J.M.J.WACK(d.1927),WHO SERVED  
SAINTS PETER AND PAUL CHURCH FOR  
38 YEARS, MEMBERS CONSTRUCTED  
THIS GROTTO TO COMMEMORATE AN  
END TO THE DISEASE-RELATED DEATHS  
IN THE PARISH. MODELED AFTER THE  
LOURDES GROTTO IN SOUTHWESTERN  
FRANCE, IT WAS BUILT OF NATIVE  
ROCK GATHERED FROM AREA RANCHES.  
AIDED BY PARISHIONERS, J.J.SCHOLZ  
OF NEBRASKA COMPLETED THE  
STONWORK. THE CONGREGATION  
DEDICATED THE SHRINE DURING A  
CELEBRATION ON JUNE 29, 1921.\*\*

(1980)\*\*\*

\*3/4 inch lettering  
\*\*1/2 inch lettering  
\*\*\*1/4 inch lettering

APPROVED

Trustt Latimer,

*Walter R. Reed 2-25-80*

RECEIVED  
NOV 29 1979

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

5781

THE HISTORY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL  
CHURCH AND PARISH

RESEARCHED BY  
Monica Fuhrmann

WRITTEN BY  
Monica Fuhrmann  
Genevieve Moeller  
Emma Wille  
Elvera Zengler

RECEIVED  
NOV 29 1979

FIELD SERVICES DEPARTMENT

## THE GROTTTO

It was during the administration of Father Wack that the influenza epidemic of 1918 struck the city, bringing death to 45 members of Sts. Peter and Paul's Parish. Led by Father Wack, the people made a solemn vow, promising the Blessed Mother to build a grotto, a replica of the one at Lourdes if there were no more deaths in the parish from influenza. Their petition was granted; not another parishioner died from the disease.

In fulfillment of the vow, Father Wack went to Lourdes, returning with exact specifications for the grotto. A stone-mason, J.J. Scholz came from Nebraska to do the work. A member of the Stone-mason's Union, he received \$10 a day. But the men of the parish donated their labor, and those who could not work themselves, paid others to work in their stead.

Farmers hauled the honeycomb rock from the Ferdinand Wenzel, Andreas Friesenhahn, and Richard Schumann ranches. Edmund Wenzel and Pius Friesenhahn tell how they and other young men scoured the parish and the old hospital grounds for flint rocks, then hauled them to the site to build the dome forming the back of the grotto. No dirty rock was permitted at the site. The young men hauled the stone in their wheelbarrows from the wagons that brought them from the country and cleaned them carefully before taking them to be placed for use.

Many parishioners worked all through that April, May and into June of 1921 building the grotto. The names of all those who helped were sealed in a spot in front of and below the tabernacle of the grotto.

Then on the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, 1921, there was a double celebration, when Bishop Droessarts and many dignitaries celebrated the dedication of the beautiful grotto, and at the same time the investiture of Father Wack as a Domestic Prelate.

Every Palm Sunday since that time has witnessed the blessing of the palms before the grotto, followed by the solemn procession to the church. This custom was discontinued during the sixties.

Another much loved and long-cherished tradition was the annual May Devotions. The entire congregation gathered in front of the grotto on May first. The school children carried lighted candles and the pastor led all in the recitation of the rosary and singing of the Lourdes Hymn. In later years a slight change was added. A young girl, dressed as a queen with two small boys carrying her train, crowned the statue of the Immaculate Conception as Queen of May.

## LOURDES HYMN

- |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Die Glocken verkuenden<br>Mit forelichem Laut<br>Das Ave Maria<br>So lieb und so traut<br>Ave, Ave Maria, Ave, Ave, Ave Maria | 4. Auf Massabielle schaut es<br>Ein strahlendes Licht<br>Wie solches entstanden<br>Begrift es wohl nicht,<br>Ave, Ave, Ave Maria etc. |
| 2. Der Engel geleitet<br>Mit sorgender Hand<br>Das Kind Bernadette<br>Bis an Flusses Rand<br>Ave, Ave, Ave Maria etc.            | 5. Mit freundlichem Antlitz<br>Gar lieblich und mild<br>Erscheint dort ein<br>Himmlisches Frauengebild<br>Ave, Ave, Ave Maria etc.    |
| 3. Im brausen des Windes<br>Das Maedchen vernimmt<br>Das ihm eine Gnade<br>Des Himmels bestimmt,<br>Ave, Ave, Ave Maria etc.     | 6. Der Blick ist erfuellet<br>Mit Goettlichem Licht<br>Das wonnige Loecheln<br>Sagt fuerchte dich nicht<br>Ave, Ave, Ave Maria        |

Additional information on Father Wack submitted as part of the <sup>6</sup> history when Sts. Peter and Paul Church was marked in 1975 with an 18" x 28" subject marker.

4484

as teachers. In 1868 the Sisters of Divine Providence were brought to the school. This is the religious order which helped to found the schools of Castroville, Texas, and which has its convent and school at Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio. The sisters still operate the school, which has a modern plant on the grounds near the church. It has indeed progressed since the first group of sisters offered to its thirty students music, drama, handwork, and kindergarten.<sup>12</sup>

One of the outstanding pastors of the parish was Father <sup>J.M.J.</sup>Wack, under whose direction the 1898 renovations were made. A native of Lorraine, he was for thirty-eight years, until his death in 1927, much beloved by his congregation. In addition to the improvements on the church, he built the rectory, the parish hall, and enlarged the school. He was instrumental in erecting the grotto beside the church, which is a replica of Lourdes, built when the congregation was spared the deaths that claimed so many lives during the 1918 influenza epidemic.

Under his influence many vocations were declared by church members, among them Father Columban Wenzel, Msgr. Joseph Jacobi, Rev. J.J. Hildebrand, and the Reverend Bruno Hubertus. Father Hubertus (1912) has distinguished himself with many honors during his career. He was made Papal Chamberlain in 1954, Domestic Prelate in 1957, and Protonotary Apostolic in 1968, each a successively higher title offering privileges of vesture as well as prestige.<sup>13</sup>

The Sisters of Divine Providence were instrumental in the education of one New Braunfels woman to the vocation. Reverend Mother Angelique Ayres (1882-1968) grew up in New Braunfels and attended Sts. Peter and Paul after her conversion as a young woman. She later entered the convent of Our Lady of the Lake, and was teacher, First Councilor, Dean, and finally Superior General of the College. Her administrative

