

ST. PASCHAL'S CHURCH, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945



I. COMING OF THE FRANCISCANS

The Order of Friars Minor has engaged in missionary work ever since its inception. Thus, when the Most Rev. Daniel F. Desmond, D.D., Bishop of the Alexandria Diocese in the northern part of the State of Louisiana, petitioned the Very Rev. Vincent Schrempp, O.F.M., Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province of Franciscans in the United States, to send Franciscan priests into his diocese, to supplement the zealous work of the diocesan priests in the missionary territory of northern Louisiana, the Very Reverend Provincial gladly consented.

The first Franciscan to arrive for permanent work was Rev. Anselm Reckamp, O.F.M., who arrived in Monroe, La., December 30, 1939. His activities at once centered on establishing a parish for the colored people of the city of Monroe.

At the summer chapter of the Sacred Heart Province held July 10, 1940, the Rev. Henry Freiburg, O.F.M., was assigned to open a new parish for white people in the city of West Monroe, across the Ouachita River from Monroe. Rev. Jasper Mauss, O.F.M., was assigned as his assistant. Father Jasper arrived in Monroe July 20, 1940, and Father Henry came July 24. All three of these Fathers took up temporary residence at the St. Francis Sanitarium. This gracious hospitality was extended by the Franciscan Sisters of Calais who conduct this hospital.



First Three Franciscans to work permanently in Monroe-West Monroe Area

Rev. Anselm Reckamp, O. F. M., formerly pastor of Corpus Christi Church for colored in Chicago, now assigned to Bolivia, South America.

Rev. Jasper Mauss, O. F. M., now Ass't. Secretary of the Province.

Most Rev. Daniel F. Desmond, D. L., late Bishop of Alexandria Diocese, who inaugurated the work of the Franciscans.

Rev. Henry Freiburg, O. F. M., first and present pastor of St. Paschal's Church.

Picture taken on occasion of ground breaking for new church, October 26, 1940.

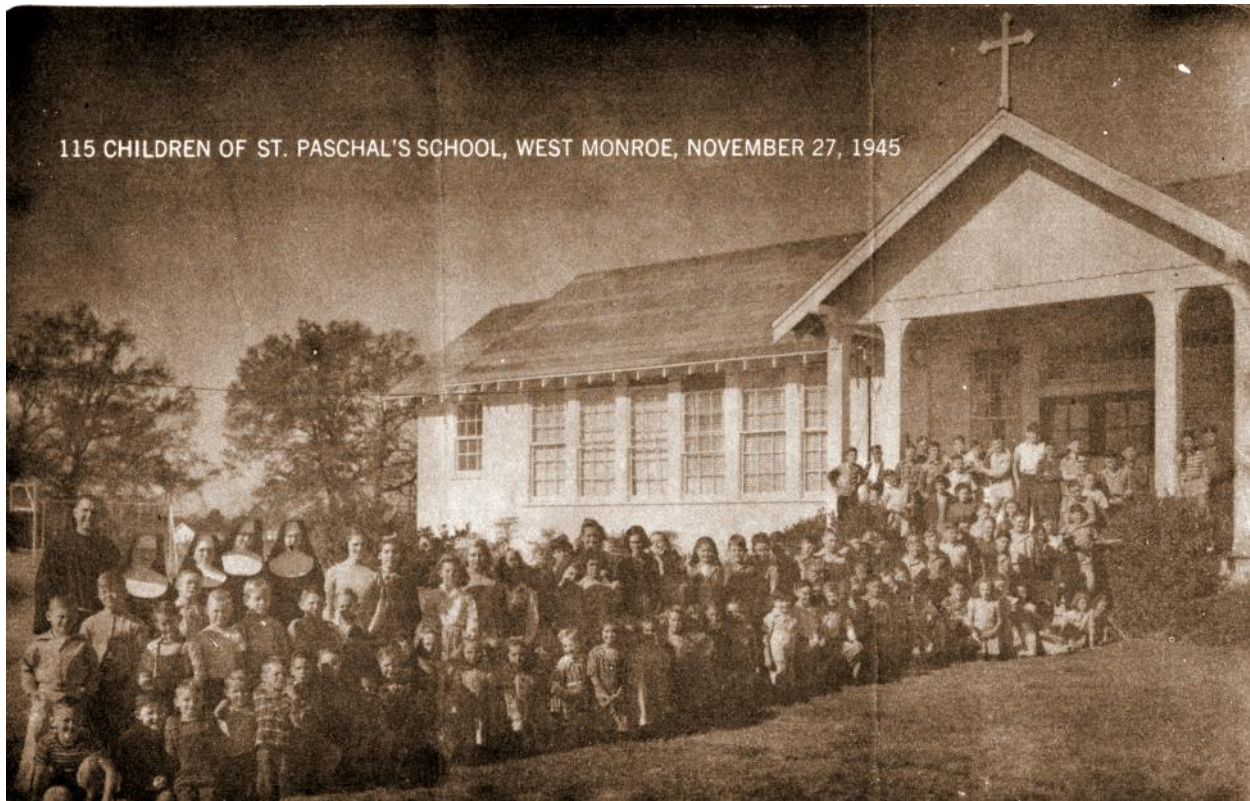
II. BEGINNINGS OF THE PARISH

His Excellency, Bishop Desmond, prior to the arrival of the Franciscans, had procured a large piece of property on North Seventh Street in West Monroe to be used for parish purposes. The property was about one block square. An early and constant benefactor of the West Monroe parish, Mr. Thos. H. McMillan, quietly purchased this property in his name and later sold it to the Bishop. This first piece of property was in reality one-half of a two-block area which seemed desirable to get in its entirety for the future needs of the parish. After the Fathers came efforts were made immediately to acquire the second half of this tract. Six lots of the desired second half were donated by a generous citizen of Monroe, Mr. John Spatafora. When Mr. Spatafora was approached for this donation on the feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1940, he heartily consented with the words: "I give to Jesus Christ six lots." Another lot was purchased for \$100.00, leaving three lots still to be had.

On one of the three remaining lots a new little home was being built and the chances of ever getting this lot and home seemed small indeed. But on the feast of the Seven Joys of Mary, August 22, 1940, again through the efforts of Mr. McMillan, this little four-room house and lot were purchased for \$1500.00.

Purchase of the remaining two lots was held up for almost a year; but finally on June 10, 1941, the price for these two remaining lots was paid and the deed properly recorded. The entire tract of about two square blocks now was St. Paschal's and this important matter of property was happily concluded.

115 CHILDREN OF ST. PASCHAL'S SCHOOL, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945



III. FIRST FRIARY FOR THE FATHERS

The little house, referred to above, was moved to the opposite side of the property, namely, from Wilson to Woodrow Street. It was placed on the spot where it would some day serve as a Sisters' Convent. It was used by the Fathers in those first months of getting established and until such time as the large new friary would be built. The little home was known as "St. Paschal's on the Range" and it was not uncommon to have the neighborhood cows pay the Fathers many a familiar visit and graze contentedly in early morning near the bedroom windows. The little house had one front room which served as office and bedroom and dining room deluxe. There were two other small bedrooms, a bath, and a kitchen. A small front and back porch completed the floor plan. The Fathers moved into this little friary on October 2, 1940. They prepared the morning breakfast and the noon meal themselves; a colored mammy took care of the evening meal. On October 18, 1940, a three-car garage was completed. A driveway of gravel was made and about 200 yards of top-soil were laid under and about the friary.

IV. SCOPE OF ACTIVITY

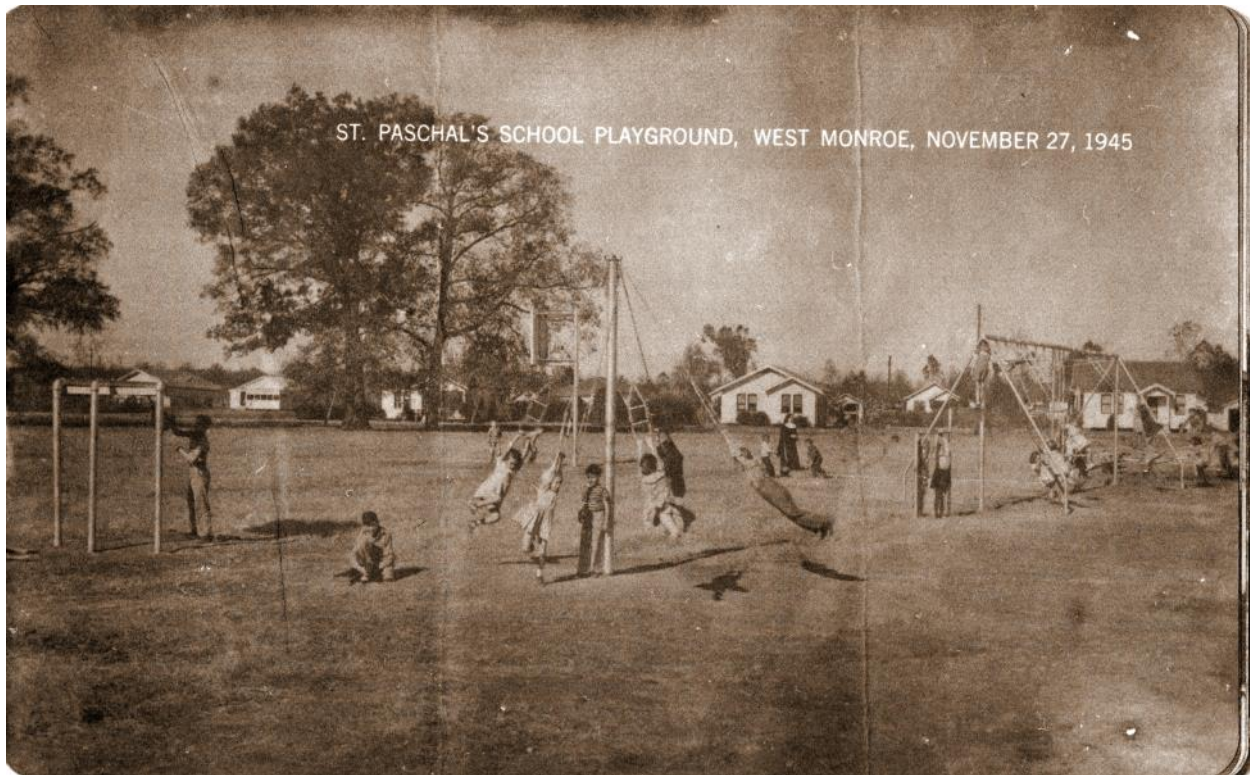
Bishop Desmond came often to visit the Fathers, and discussion centered on the extent of their activity. On October 28, 1940, an official letter came from His Excellency giving the Franciscans perpetual charge of 4½ parishes (counties) and temporary charge of a fifth. The parishes are: Ouachita Parish, west of the Ouachita River, Union Parish, Lincoln Parish, Morehouse Parish, Richland Parish, and temporarily Franklin Parish. These parishes cover an area of more than 3,143 square miles.

V. BEGINNINGS OF ST. PASCHAL'S PARISH

A mass meeting of the West Monroe Catholics was held Monday evening, September 16, 1940, in the auditorium of St. Matthew's School in Monroe. Rev. Father Henry presided. Plans for the erection of a new church and the raising of funds were discussed.

The drive for funds began throughout the Twin Cities on November 24, 1940. Over \$2,000.00 was realized the first week. Plans for the new church were drawn up by Mr. H. H. Land, a local architect. Mr. C. C. Burkett, a member of the parish, was accorded the contract. The new parish was to extend from West Monroe about fifty miles west and north through territory about 1% Catholic. West Monroe itself was about 4% Catholic.

ST. PASCHAL'S SCHOOL PLAYGROUND, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945



VI. THE NEW CHURCH

On October 26, 1940, His Excellency, Bishop Desmond, blessed the ground and turned the first spade full of dirt. On Tuesday, October 29, workmen began digging holes for the foundation footings. The new church, as most of the buildings in the area, would have no basement but would rest on piers built up on the footings.

Work progressed rapidly and the church was unofficially opened when the pastor, Father Henry, celebrated Midnight Mass on Christmas of 1940. It is a coincidence that the young man, Arlin Turner, who served this first Mass in St. Paschal's was later on the first and only casualty of the parish in World War II. The parish knows it has given one of its finest young men in the cause of freedom.

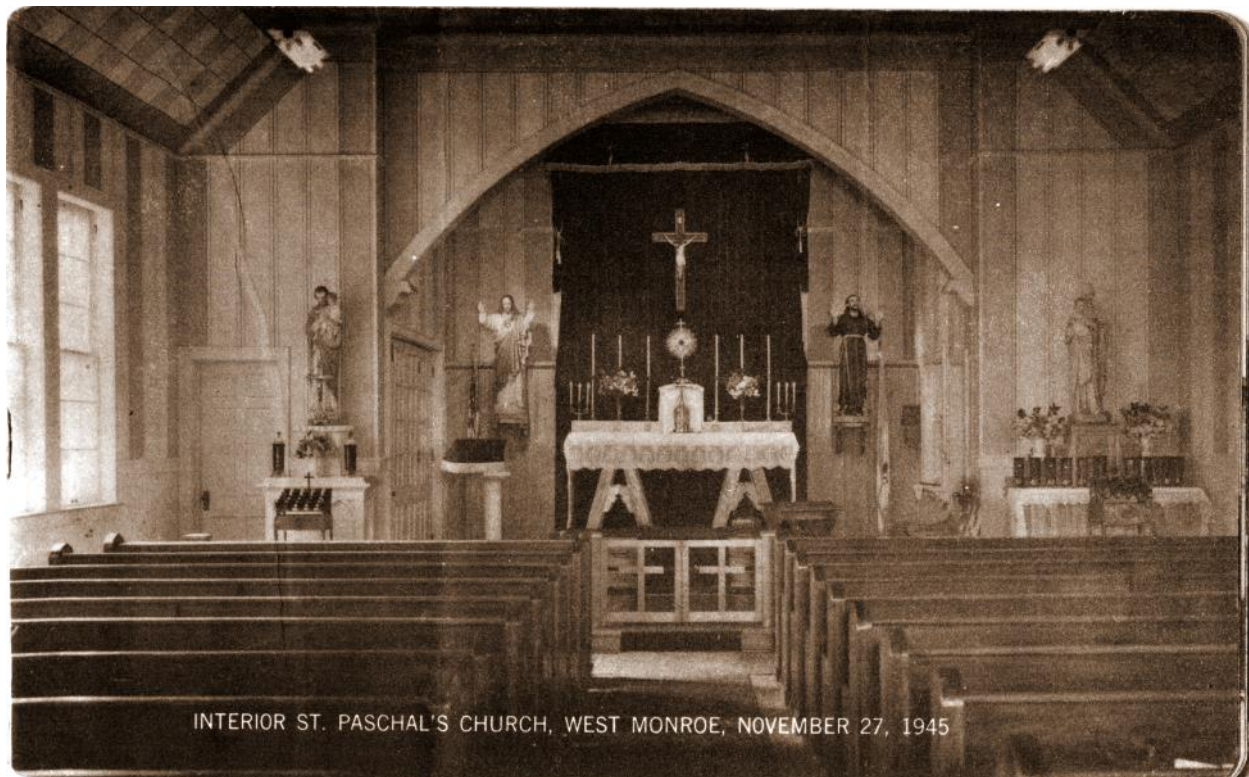
On Sunday, January 19, 1941, the Very Rev. Vincent Schrempp, O.F.M., celebrated High Mass at 9:00 A. M. in the new church; and at 10:00 A. M. the church was formally dedicated and blessed by His Excellency, Bishop Desmond. Daily Mass began the next day.

VII. INTERIOR OF THE NEW CHURCH

The new church is 70 feet long, 30 feet wide, and has a seating capacity of 180. About fifty more can be accommodated in the side chapel to the left of the high altar.

The church is of frame construction throughout. The walls and ceiling are in three-tone insulating board. A large cross is worked overhead in the ceiling of the nave and also in the ceiling of the side chapel. The wainscot and window casings of the nave and the mouldings throughout are in ivory color. In the sanctuary the back of the altar creates a pleasing impression with the dark blue velour drapes suspended almost from the ceiling, flanked by the steel gray drapes of lower length, to form a passageway behind the altar from the side chapel to the sacristy. Against the dark blue drapes a large ornamented crucifix is overshadowed in its impression only by the highly polished dome tabernacle standing out as the most important thing in the church. Fluorescent lighting enhances the appearance of the church. The altar is simple but unique—an ordinary table with trestles underneath. But altar and trestles are made of heavy tupelo gumwood timbers, cut from trees pulled out of the Louisiana swamps near Buckeye, La. It is a replica of DaVinci's famous painting of the Last Supper.

In its entirety the church creates a restful and pleasing general impression, but its construction is simple throughout.



INTERIOR ST. PASCAL'S CHURCH, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945

VIII. THE NEW SCHOOL

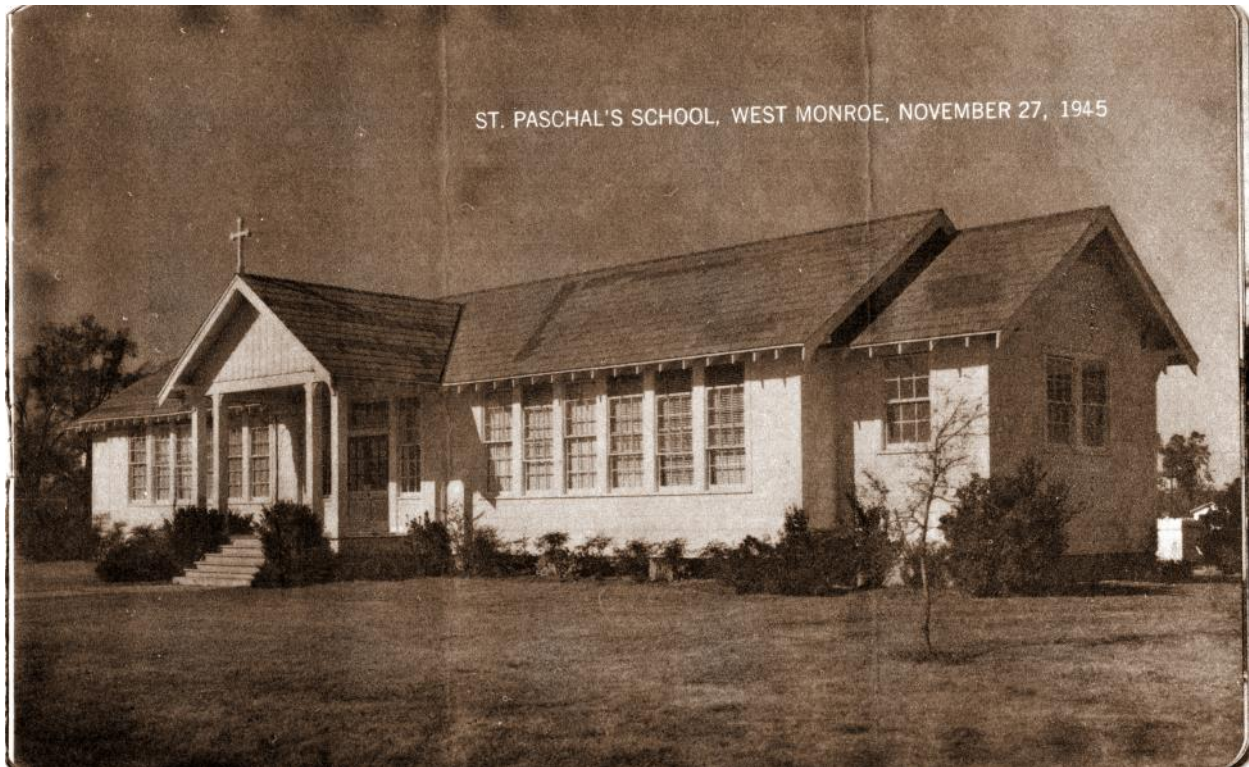
The future of a parish rests in the children of the parish. Therefore a thoroughly Catholic education for its children must be the primary aim of every parish. Thus with St. Paschal's. No sooner was the church completed than the pastor and the people began considering plans for a new school.

The site was chosen to the rear and left of the church, and on May 5, 1941, ground breaking ceremonies were held. Rev. Father Conradin Wallbraun, O.F.M., secretary of the Province, turned over the first spade of earth. Erection of the new school soon followed, and on September 29, 1941, St. Paschal's School opened its doors for the first time to 38 children. This number increased in the course of the next few years as grades were added, so that at present there are in eight grades 115 children. The first graduation class will receive their diplomas during our fifth anniversary year.

The new school was formally blessed and dedicated by the Most Rev. Bishop Desmond on December 14, 1941.

The school was built in accord with the architectural scheme of the new parish. It has an overall length of 108 feet. In the beginning there were two classrooms, 24'x30', each well lighted by six large windows in the south wall and by transom light in the north wall. Later, partitions in these two rooms provided two extra rooms, making four in all. Artificial illumination is provided by ample ceiling fixtures. Between the classrooms an attractive office room has been built providing space for the business of the school and convenience of the teachers. Large toilet rooms with cement floors are built on the ends of the building. The exterior walls are of asbestos siding in white, and the roof is asbestos shingle. The inside walls are finished in celotex fibre board and the woodwork is in ivory and light green. Venetian blinds shade all the windows.

ST. PASCHAL'S SCHOOL, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945



IX. THE NEW FRIARY

The small four-room house which served as a convent for the Fathers for the first year proved too small for the increasing number of Franciscans who were assigned to the Louisiana area, and a new and larger friary became a necessity. Plans were drawn up by the local architect, Mr. Land, and ground was broken on April 22, 1941. Construction of the building went on apace, and during the first week in September, 1941, the six Franciscans working in the Louisiana territory around Monroe moved into the new rectory.

The new friary was built at a cost of about \$12,000.00. This figure does not include some \$3,000.00 worth of plumbing, which was donated by a generous benefactor of the parish, Mr. W. J. Riley. The building is a two-story structure with six living rooms on the second floor, which also has space for a large common or recreation room, shower room, and screened porch. One bedroom, equipped with private bath, serves as a guest room for visiting clergy. Three offices are arranged downstairs, two to the right of the main entrance, and one to the left. In the interior part of the first floor is a dining room, kitchen, laundry, furnace room and wardrobe. White asbestos siding covers the outside walls, and the roof is gray asbestos shingle. The interior is finished in nu-wood panels and squares; two of the rooms are finished in knotty pine.

The second floor of the friary has been set aside as convent enclosure. Before the friary was occupied by the Fathers, however, an open house was announced and many people availed themselves of the opportunity to go through the new building.

X. THE COMING OF THE SISTERS

Requests for teaching Sisters to come to West Monroe were sent to various Franciscan communities of teaching Sisters in the United States. The Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, whose motherhouse is located in St. Louis, Missouri, graciously answered the call. The Reverend Superior General was happy to extend the field of their activities to the missionary territory of northern Louisiana. On September 26, 1941, three Franciscan Sisters from St. Louis arrived in West Monroe to take charge of St. Paschal's School. They were: Sister M. Cecilia, superior and principal; Sister M. Armella, and Sister M. Berchmans.

They established living quarters in the little four-room house which was now available for them after the Fathers moved to their new friary. For two years this little home served their needs. With the coming of more Sisters, however, more space was needed; and so, in the summer months of 1943 a two-story addition was made to their convent and a large screened porch was added. The Convent now has room for ten or more Sisters.

ST. PASCHAL'S FRIORY, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945



XI. THE CAFETERIA

Many of the children attending St. Paschal's School come from a far distance and must needs stay at school during the noon period. This fact, together with the attractiveness of the government's free lunch program, suggested the erection of a separate building to provide warm and wholesome food for the children. This building, with the permission of the War Production Board, was constructed in the summer and autumn of 1944. It incorporated the existing garage and laundry into one large unit. In construction it matches the style of the other buildings. It also serves as a parish hall and meeting room for the societies.

XII. THE CEMETERY

On March 31, 1943, five acres of land were purchased from the City of West Monroe to be used for cemetery purposes. This land was part of a 28-acre tract bought by the city for cemetery purposes back in 1936. The land was bought at cost to the city and the consideration was \$2,234.55. A loan was made from the bank to pay off the city, and His Excellency, Bishop Desmond, made the first down payment of \$500.00 on the loan. The debt on the cemetery will be liquidated this year, 1946. The cemetery is excellently situated on high rolling ground and is completely staked, roaded, and fenced. At present five persons are buried in St. Paschal's Cemetery.

XIII. THE SOCIETIES OF THE PARISH

1. St. Paschal's Altar Society. This group of ladies of the parish has always been most assiduous and helpful in providing for the needs of the sanctuary and in cooperating in all parish activities.
2. St. Paschal's Men's Club. This society has never failed to aid the pastor when their services have been called upon for parish needs.
3. The III Order of St. Francis. The fraternity was canonically established on March 20, 1941, by Rev. Juvenal Emanuel, O.F.M., Provincial Commissary. Its purpose is the personal sanctification of its members.
4. The St. Paschal's Mothers' Club. This group of mothers of the children in school cooperates actively with the pastor and teachers in providing for the needs of school and playground.

ST. PASCHAL'S CAFETERIA & ASSEMBLY HALL, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945





ST. PASCHAL'S SISTERS' CONVENT, WEST MONROE, NOVEMBER 27, 1945

PATRONS

C. C. Bell Manufacturing Co., Inc.
B. J. Breard Insurance Agency
Robert M. Breard Jr. Insurance
Bridge Service Station
Bruno's Electric Shoe Shop
S. E. Burgoyne
W. A. Burgoyne
C. C. Burkett
Central Culvert Co.
Central Savings Bank and Trust Co.
Charlie's Cafe
City Cafe - Simmie Wood
Couch Refrigeration Service
D. & E. Furniture Co.
Velma Daigle
Danna's Crystal Market
Davis - Lawhead Funeral Home
Durrett Hardware and Furniture Co.
Durrett's Incorporated
Firestone Home & Auto Supply
Fisher's Bakery
N.P. Fontana Grocery and Market
D.C. Golson, Mayor of West Monroe
Geo. Guerriero Insurance Agency
Hall Funeral Home

Hatchell's Dry Goods
H. R. Hayes Lumber Co.
Judge Jesse S. Heard
Tom Hicks for Buddy Boy
Hislop Refrigeration Service
Murray Hudson
Humphries Insurance Agency
Johnson Studio - Ed Hayman Owner
J. F. Jones Electric Co.
M. Kaliski Jewelry Co.
Keystone Paint and Decorating Co.
R. L. (Bob) Kilgore
KNOE - 1450 on Your Dial
H. H. Land
Lucien Larche
L. C. Leake's Grocery and Market
The Lieber Comqahy
Louisiana Power and Light Co.
Mary's Flower Shop
Thos. H. McMillan
B. Miano Grocery
Miller-Guerriero Hardware Co.
Millsaps and Company
Milner-Fuller
Monroe Auto and Supply Co.