

History Continued...

Ground was broken Sunday, August 16, 1964 on an eighty acre site on North Lipkey Road, about two miles north of Rt. 18 in North Jackson for the construction of a \$200,000 replica of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon at Harissa, Lebanon. This was to be the first Shrine of its type in the United States, and would be built of stone matching the original.

On July 20, 1965, the statue of the Virgin Mary was placed atop the tower. Just when the statue was put into place, a large cloud overhead turned brilliant shades of pink, blue and other colors of the rainbow. The occurrence was taken as a sign by onlookers, that the Blessed Virgin was smiling on the project.

The dedication of the complete Shrine took place on Sunday, August 15, the Feast of Our Lady of the Assumption. Auxiliary Bishop James Malone blessed the Shrine, gave the homily at the Mass afterward, and spoke at the closing banquet at the Idora Park ballroom.

Lack of water for the rest rooms and drinking forced the committee to limit the dedication to three hours. Three wells had been drilled on the property. One drew salt, another yielded only a meager water supply, and a third supplied only enough for the convent. Because of this water problem, the Shrine was not able to have any Pilgrimages that year.

A new temporary, glass-enclosed, pavilion chapel was in use for the first time for the holiday season of 1965. The uninsulated structure, blessed as a chapel, was glass-enclosed with three walls of windows having the conditions of bitter cold in winter and extreme heat in summer, which could make the votive candles liquefy. The sacristy was inside the main building and so having vested for services, the priest would go outside then enter the chapel in every kind of weather condition.

The second annual pilgrimage to the National Shrine was nearly cancelled in 1966 because of a threatening water shortage. The Isaly Dairy Co. donated its 3800-gallon stainless steel milk truck to be used as a water reservoir. The well water supply had an output of 6 gallons a minute, which was not adequate. The former Lordstown Government arlery water line was to be made available to the Shrine, by the City of Niles, in the fall of 1966. In 1980 the water project was finally completed thanks to Lordstown Township and Father Ashkar of St Maroun's administration abilities. His Excellency Bishop Francis M. Zayek's first visit to the National Shrine was at this second annual Pilgrimage on the 9th of March.

On August 12, 1967 the third annual pilgrimage was held and an estimated 2,000 people were present.

Even before ground was broken at the Shrine, many young people worked long, hard hours helping to clear and clean the area pulling weeds, planting flowers and shrubbery, cutting grass and even carrying water long distances (due to sewage problems), to prepare for the establishment of the Shrine. In all of this, some spent their days and nights working hard for Our Lady. Here on the Shrine grounds the youth of the area worked together, enjoyed one another's company, and made lasting friends, while playing a major role in the development of the Shrine. Many celebrating this Jubilee today, and who are the supporters of the Shrine, can look around and see the fruits of their labors. This was the beginning of a movement-today's Maronite Youth Organization (MYO). On Saturday, June 8, 1968, eleven parishes from six states participated in the first Midwest regional Maronite Youth Organization conclave at the Shrine.

The financial condition of any organization or entity is a factor that can ever be overlooked. Sound reasoning and financial planning were also very important for the survival of the National Shrine. Fundraisers and other sources of income, besides the generosity of pledges, had to be thought of by those involved and concerned.

The 25 Club is a group of people who purchased tickets for \$25.00 which entitle them to a weekly prize drawing for a period of six months. At the end of these six months, a banquet was held where larger money prizes were given. This fundraiser first started in 1968 and was a really successful program. It was only recently that the price was raised to \$30.00 due to the increased cost of food. The first couple of years these funds from the 25 Club were used to pay all the utilities.

During the first years of the Shrine, the priest's Rectory was a trailer with an addition of a living room and garage to help disguise the trailer. In 1980 an addition was added on to allow for guestrooms for visiting priests and to expand the garage as a workshop when needed. Just recently, within the last year, a patio was added. Even after all the additions, the main part of the Rectory home for the priest, is still a trailer!

There have been three Administrators since the Shrine was founded: Msgr. Peter Eid from 1965 to 1969, Msgr. Peter Tayah from 1971 to 1973 and Msgr. Dominic Ashkar from 1975 to 1983.

Directors included the Rev. Ronald Zidian, 1965 to 1969 and 1972 to 1974, Msgr. George Webby, from 1969 to 1972 with Father Joe Thomas as his assistant, Father Mike Kail from 1974 to 1976, Father Bill Bonczewski from 1976 to 1978, Father Bill Decker from 1978 to 1980 and Father Bill Bonczewski from 1980 into the new millennium. Msr Anthony Spinosa is the current Director.