

# Community of Verboort

By Paul Senz

Verboort is a small, unincorporated community about three miles northeast of Forest Grove. In 1846, famine and poverty in the southern Netherlands propelled a large migration of people to the United States. Many settled in Wisconsin; but because of severe winters there and the lure of fertile land in the West, a good number continued their migration. One of those migrants was Father William Verboort (1835-1876), a Catholic priest from Holland, who had a desire to proselytize in the Far West.

Scouting trips by John Verboort, Fr. Verboort's brother, to the Willamette Valley yielded favorable reports of beautiful scenery, mild climate, and fertile land. In February 1875, the first five families from DePere, Wisconsin, arrived in Portland. They purchased 550 acres of land and a large farmhouse near Forest Grove. Fr. Verboort arrived later that year, and by September a temporary chapel had been constructed and blessed under the name of St. Francis Xavier. The community called itself The Catholic Colony of Forest Grove. After Verboort's death in July 1876, the name was changed to Verboort.

In 1883, a larger church was built and dedicated as Our Lady of the Visitation. That fall, John Ramsey Porter donated several sequoia trees in honor of the Twelve Apostles, which still stand around the church.

The original church building was used as a school under the care first of Dominican Sisters from San Jose, California, and, since 1891, the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon. Over time, additional school buildings were constructed, including a high school in the mid-twentieth century.

During the night on February 8, 1941, the church of Our Lady of the Visitation burned to the ground. The high altar, the stained-glass windows, and the oil paintings and fresco work by Swiss artist Philip Staheli were reduced to ashes. Parishioners saved the crucifix above the altar, which now hangs in the new church, dedicated in November 1949.

Larry Jansen (1920-2009), a pitcher for the New York Giants (1947-1954) and the Cincinnati Reds (1956), was perhaps Verboort's most prominent resident. He was the winning pitcher of the 1951 National League pennant game featuring the "shot heard round the world."

Verboort is known for its annual Sausage and Sauerkraut Dinner, which started in 1934. The first year, 150 dinners were served, with 198 pounds of sausage and 10 gallons of sauerkraut. By 2010, 9,000 people attended, requiring 30,000 pounds of sausage and 20,000 pounds of sauerkraut. The event is always held near Election Day, and it has often been attended by Oregon's governors, senators, representatives, and political hopefuls.

No exact census information is available for the population of Verboort; however, the author (who lives in Verboort) estimates it to be between fifty and seventy-five as of 2011.

## Sources

"A Visitation Parish History." *Visitation Catholic Church*. <http://www.verboort.org/history.html>.

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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