

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher! Stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle

Canal Boat

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

Back in the days before trains, planes and interstate highways, people would travel by water. They used kayaks and canoes, sailing ships and steam ships and riverboats. Back in the Midwest, where I come from, people also traveled by canal boat.

Near the farm where I grew up, not far from the bank of a creek, was a shallow ditch of stagnant, green water. At one time, that shallow ditch was a major waterway for people and cargo called the Miami-Erie Canal. Back in the early 1800's mules pulled canal boats up and down that canal between the City of Cincinnati, on the Ohio River, and the City of Toledo, on Lake Erie.

As a boy, I used to ride my bike down to the canal. It was great hide-out, tucked away at the back of a woods, its banks overgrown with thickets and bramble. It looked like a Louisiana bayou. The only thing missing was alligators.

My grandmother told me that a hotel once stood along the bank. One summer, I spent much of my free time looking for the ruins of that hotel. One day, I stumbled across its foundation stones. Not far from that foundation, I located a stone well.

It was an amazing discovery. What was amazing was that, after 150 years, not one of the stones in the circular wall had slipped out of place. That shaft made of chiseled stone still stood straight as a plumb line.

I often think of that stone well when I look the baptismal font in my church of St. Hyacinth's. Like that ancient well, the chiseled stones that comprise this font were set in place for an important purpose. And I hope it will still be standing here, tall and proud and straight as a plumb line a hundred years from now.

A person can't travel far without water. And a Christian won't make it Heaven without the water of Baptism.

Jesus once engaged a woman in conversation at the side of an ancient well. What he did for her he does for us all: he lowers a bucket into the well of God's love and hands us a ladle full of acceptance, a cup running over with friendship, a canteen sloshing with the sound of mercy and forgiveness.

The water of Baptism becomes a mighty sacramental current, transporting us—passengers in the boat of St. Peter—down the rivers of life on earth to the shores of Heaven.