

July 13, 1920

Bishop John J. Hennessy



Bishop Hennessy was born near Cloyne, County Cork, Ireland, July 19, 1847. He was ordained Nov. 28, 1869 by the Rt. Rev. Joseph P. Machebeuf, bishop of Denver, at St. John's Church, St. Louis. He was engaged in missionary work in 10 counties of the Iron Mountain district of southern Missouri until he was appointed rector of St. John Church, St. Louis, in 1880. He was named bishop of Wichita and consecrated in his parish church on Nov. 30, 1888, by the Most Rev. Peter Richard Kenrick, archbishop of St. Louis.

When Bishop Hennessy arrived in Wichita, there were only 8,000 Catholics, 33 churches and 16 priests in the diocese. His bishopric extended over 32 years. At the time of his death there were 37,000 Catholics, 149 churches and 106 priests. Despite the struggles of tremendous growth, a re-division of his diocese and financial problems, he was still able to buy land (1890) for and build a new cathedral in Wichita (1912).

Bishop Hennessy died of a stroke at St. Francis Hospital in Wichita on July 13, 1920, at the age of 72. The Most Rev. (later Cardinal) John Glennon, archbishop of St. Louis, celebrated his funeral in St. Mary's Cathedral. The Bishop J. Henry Tihen of Denver, former chancellor of the Wichita diocese, delivered the eulogy. "He was strong as a woman, gentle as a man. A lion's courage and a giant's strength of character were his; they were never used to crush but to support, not to tear down but to build up worthy individuals and causes. ...He was a church man first and last and all the time." (CA July 24, 1920)

Burial was in Calvary Cemetery in Wichita.