CHAPTER 12

At the dedication of the first steel Catholic Church Extension Society chapel car, St. Peter, June 16, 1907, dignitaries gather around the car at the Chicago LaSalle Street Station. [Loyola University, Cudahy Library archives, Chicago]

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In Memory of my husband and co-author

Norman Thomas Taylor
CHAPTER 12

St. Peter, the First Steel Apostle
and Peter Kuntz

St. Peter, finished in a rich St. Jago mahogany with dark green ceilings touched with graceful designs had a handsome communion railing in the English fashion. A rood screen of scroll nature on which was mounted the “rood” or the cross, separated a neat altar and a permanent confessional from the nave. [Catholic Church Extension Society, Chicago, IL. (CCES)]

During a stop in Dayton, Ohio, before its mission to the northwest, a wealthy Dayton businessman, Peter Kuntz, visited St. Anthony. After examining the renovated Wagner car, Kuntz, who was never a man to mince his words, as the Extension Society would discover, said to the chaplain on board, “Why doesn’t your Society build a good chapel car, instead of this old thing?”

It was likely that Kuntz had seen the brand new Baptist cars coming out of the nearby Dayton Barney & Smith shops and had made some comparisons. So in 1912 the Catholic Church Extension Society turned to the Barney and Smith Car Company in Dayton, the Baptist chapel car builder, to build their second car — a steel St. Peter, with a $25,000 donation from Peter Kuntz.
Head of the mammoth Kuntz lumber enterprises; he was known for his charitable giving and was a man of deep religious convictions. “Eccentric he was to a degree, but a more practical man never devoted himself to any industry,” wrote one biographer, “and he gave without attracting public attention.”

Father Kelley described his first impression of Kuntz, whom he met at a lecture Kelley gave in Dayton. Even in the packed house, Kelley had no difficulty in spotting Kuntz—a small, oldish gentleman sitting in a box to his left, with funny and very long side whiskers and a skull cap. “One glance sufficed. I knew that Mr. Kuntz was present, and launched out with a bit of the Story of Extension. The audience thought that I was talking for the benefit of all; but, truth to tell, I was talking only to Peter Kuntz. When I glanced at him, as I did now and then, I rather fancied that his twinkling eye was trying to tell me that Peter Kuntz was “wise to me”; and Peter Kuntz was.”

Kuntz wanted people to think him a bit odd, so as to have them always guessing. No one ever knew what he would do, according to Kelley.

He dressed like a poor man, but he had three automobiles. He lived in a rented house, but could easily have bought ten city blocks. He was crusty, and could say “No” to anyone; but year after year he took hundreds of poor children out into the country and gave them a gala time at his expense. He gave in his own way, and at his own time. He was really the greatest “bluff” I ever met, for he systematically went about disguising the fact that he had the softest and most loving old heart in the world; trying to make people think him a crank and a skinflint, making enemies who liked him, and friends who wondered why they thought so well of him as to be his friends. He always refused with his lips, and consented in his heart. He was a wonderful father and husband, a Catholic who practiced his religion, who feared no man and no devil, but who certainly feared God.”

The agreement entered between Kuntz and the extension society specified that the car be used only for religious purposes, and if the society either went out of business or did not want the car, it should be returned to the ownership of Kuntz. Part of the contract was made that “to all priests celebrating Mass in the car, that the donor and his family, both living and dead, shall have a memento; and, further, that on one day during each week, that said car is in actual missionary work, a Mass, the stipend for which it is understood shall be taken from the offerings given on board the car, shall be offered for the donor and his family, both living and dead.”

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2 Ibid.
3 Agreement between Peter Kuntz and The Catholic Church Extension Society. [LUCA].
St. Peter, a modern car compared to St. Anthony, was dedicated by the Right Rev. Msgr. John B. Murray, D. D., Vicar General of the Diocese of Cincinnati, June 30, 1912, in Dayton. It would serve in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Kansas, and North Carolina. Said to be one of the longest cars in the world at that time, just as Baptist car Emmanuel had been in 1893, the overall length was eighty-four feet with the part set aside for the chapel measuring forty-three feet.

Finished in a rich St. Jago mahogany, with dark green ceilings touched with graceful designs, the sanctuary platform, elevated six inches above the car floor, had a storage area underneath. A handsome communion railing in the English fashion—a rood screen of scroll nature on which is mounted the “rood” or the cross, separated a neat altar and a permanent confessional from the nave. Stations of the cross were built in to form a part of the car’s interior decoration, and an organ, built by the Hinners Organ Company of Pekin, Illinois, was installed near the entrance.

Remaining space, including a shower bath and adequate toilet facilities, on the car was used as living quarters by the chaplains, managers, and porters. The compartments included a study that could also be used as a dining room, a library or office; sleeping quarters, and a kitchen. Storage areas were located throughout the car that was lighted with acetylene gas and heated by the notorious Baker system.  

From Dayton, with chapel car superintendent George Hennessey and Father Emmanuel B. Ledvina, the extension society’s vice-president, aboard, the beautiful, brand-new cathedral on wheels made its apprentice exhibition journey to Chicago on the Big Four lines, dropping down to Cincinnati and Hamilton, Ohio, over to Indiana, stopping at Lawrenceburg, Evansville, Vincennes, Princeton, Washington, Loogootee, Seymour, North Vernon, and Terre Haute, and on Illinois tracks to Mt. Carmel and finally Chicago. 

While in Chicago, St. Peter was sided on the Illinois Central Railroad

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5 Financial Report of George Hennessey, July 16, 1912, LUCA.
tracks in Grant Park, opposite the Blackstone Hotel, which was, according to Fr. Edward L. Roe who was in charge of transportation for the chapel cars, “the most advantageous site in Chicago.” This feat was accomplished by the courtesy of Illinois Central officials, Judge Payne, the president and superintendent of the South Park Commissioners, and Dolese and Shepard, contractors.

The matter of passes for the chapel car and its missionaries soon brought up an unintentional deceit that sometimes turned into an intentional advantage. George Hennessey was a layman. The railroad policy was that to get a clergy pass, a person had to be an ordained minister or priest, and sometimes even if a person was ordained they did not get a clergy pass. For example, Mrs. Cutler, a Baptist missionary wife, an ordained minister, could not get a pass because she was a woman.

Roe wrote to Ledvina on August 14 that he had secured a time pass good to September 30, 1912, on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad for Hennessey under the mistaken impression the railroad had received that he was a priest. “This wrong impression came to them from seeing passes issued on western roads to him as Rev. Geo. C. Hennessey. I would advise that any communications had with the C. M. & St. P. Ry., be on the official stationery of the Society and not on that of the Chapel Car on which his name does not appear as Rev., for I am sure the pass would be recalled if this road found out he was only a layman.” Roe also obtained passes on the Chicago, Milwaukee and Puget Sound Railroad, the Tacoma Eastern Railroad, and the Idaho and Western Railroad for the chapel car and “Rev.” Geo. C. Hennessey, under the same camouflage.6

**Hennessey Was the Heart of Chapel Cars**

Redheaded, Irishman George Hennessey was the lay-heart of the Extension Society chapel cars. Born in Prince Edward Isle, Canada; as a boy, he was brought to assist his cousin—the young Father Francis Kelley, founder of the Extension Society—in his work in Lapeer, Michigan. Among Hennessey’s duties were altar boy, sexton, organist, and horse driver. When the first chapel car became a reality, Hennessey was named superintendent, “a natural for the job,” his cousin would brag. “Brimful of personality, a splendid speaker, a fine singer, he was a magnet to Catholics and non-Catholics alike.”

George was a man who knew how to get things done, with his jovial manner and Irish wit, and sometimes a few cigars. Fr. Ledvina kidded him when hearing about the Baptist chapel car missionary who was shocked when he received his repair bill from the shops. “I have no worry about your getting that kind of treatment; but then, of course, there is a reason—you are no Baptist minister, and you know how to handle situations of that kind diplomatically. A box of cigars goes a far way at times.”

*St. Peter*’s first trip was not to the West, but to the East—Boston, where it made its debut at the First Missionary Congress, visited by thousands of people eager to see a church-on-rails. When the car finally started on its westward jour-

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6 Report of Edward L. Roe, in regard to chapel car “St. Peter,” transportation, August 14, 1912, LUCA.
8 Correspondence from E. B. Ledvina and George C. Hennessey, December 12, 1919, LUCA
ney with Hennessey and Father William O’Brien on board, the trip followed almost exactly the schedule of towns visited by the first Baptist chapel car, Evangel, twenty-one years earlier—Davenport, Iowa, where the local paper reported that hundreds visited the car: St. Paul, Minneapolis, Aberdeen, St. Cloud, Fargo, Bismarck, Glendine, Miles City, Billings, Helena, and Missoula.

The financial report for September 4 to October 19 showed $100 received from the office for expense, collections of $421 for income, and expenses of 400 lbs of Carbide at $3.50 per, a cot for $3.50, living expenses for chaplain and Hennessey, $175, for the cook $50, oil stove $5.50, four months laundry $2.75, charcoal, incense, candles, sanctuary oil, floats, etc. $10.50 and transportation for Father O’Brien on an Idaho trip, $25; leaving a balance of $224.80.

From Portland the car went to La Grande, Oregon, where both the older St. Anthony and the new St. Peter were together in order to transfer literature and other necessaries on the new car. After the transfer, St. Anthony returned to Willowa, Oregon, and St. Peter for the Boise Diocese, first stopping at Haines, in the Baker City Diocese with Father J. F. Murphy and Father P. L. Barrett, CSSR, in charge. At Weiser, Idaho, over one hundred and fifty approached the sacraments, among them several who had been away from their duty for years.

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

The advent of motor chapel cars like the Extension Society’s St. Peter, introduced in Temple, Texas, provided competition for the rail chapel cars. [CLAC]

In May 1913, the introduction of a new motor chapel car in Texas, also called St. Peter, proved another rival for the Catholic rail chapel cars. Motor chapels that were also being used by the Baptists as well as most major denominations certainly had some advantage over rail cars, mainly that they could go many more places for less expense.

At New Meadows, a town of only eighteen months with a population of about four hundred, the car was filled for the week, not withstanding bad weather and roads. Council, a town of about five hundred down the line, was warring with New Meadows over the honor of being county seat, and at the last election, Council won. Some new residents as a result of the election might join the three Catholics in town. At Midvale, the Church of Christ had the town sewed up, as the saying goes. Barrett reported, “They really believe it is the only true church and the majority of its members that include some of the businessmen of the town are firmly convinced that their church was founded by Christ.” In spite of the Church of Christ monopoly, “a couple of renegades returned and one forsook the Odd Fellows and promised to be a good catholic from henceforth.”

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9 Reports from P. L. Barrett, for period of November 2, to November 30 1912, LUCA.
Some important officials in the Catholic Church favored the growing trend toward motor chapels. Father Francis Kelley pointed out, “Pope Pius X was always a devoted admirer of ‘these modern missionary innovations,’ but he was more interested in motor chapels than in chapel cars, and Monsignor Diomede Falconio, afterwards Cardinal, ‘could not abide the thought of them [rail chapel cars].’ His Excellency was always cordial until he had brought the talk round to his bete noire. After that there was no peace, for I couldn’t destroy the cars and wouldn’t if I could; and His Excellency would never rest until they were ‘all burned up.’”

*Baker Heater Plagues Hennessey in Icy Weather*

It did not take long for an old and familiar problem to surface on St. Peter. Chaplain Alvah W. Doran, reported from Montpelier, Idaho, on January 5, 1913:

The temperature of Jan. 5th and 6th, twenty eight-degrees below was too much for the heating plant of the car that together with the water system was completely frozen. The railroad men took pity on the crew and moved the car alongside the round-house where a fine pressure of steam made things comfortable. We had expected to complete the line of missions in charge of Fr. De Stoop but on account of this severe weather and the lack of getting steam compelled us to postpone till the warmer season.

After having repairs made on the steam pipes, the car moved on the Oregon Short Line to Blackfoot where three-and-a-half years earlier *St. Anthony* had stopped for a week. At Idaho Falls more than 350 people, including a Mormon apostle, attended the lecture, “Why I Became a Catholic.”

Hennessey received the news that Sister Mary Catharine of Jesus was making some lovely purple tabernacle curtains at the Holy Rosary Hospital of the Dominican Sisters in Ontario, Oregon, and she would send them along as soon as she was finished. “The purple is not ready yet as I had great delay in getting the right shade.”

Father Doran especially enjoyed the visit at Pocatello, where *St. Anthony* had stopped in 1909. “It is not often the chapel cars get to work in such a large community as our time is so largely spent in small places which have no church. However the car showed its usefulness on this occasion. Pocatello is a hustling railroad centre and many Catholics are train-men or work in the shops or yards. Week-day Mass was said for them at 6:30 A.M. so that they could come in their working clothes and get to work before the whistle blew.” The Knights of Columbus secured a public hall for the closing lecture and an audience of over twelve hundred listened to Father Doran again give his lecture on “Why I Became a Catholic.”

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11 Report of Alvah W. Doran, Montpelier, Idaho, January 5, 1913, LUCA.
12 Letter from Sister Mary Catharine of Jesus, Holy Rosary Hospital Dominican Sisters, Ontario, Oregon, February 15, 1913, LUCA.
13 Report of Alvah W. Doran, Pocatello, Idaho, March 1, 1913, LUCA.
From Adams, Oregon, in May of 1913, Father R. J. Murphy reported that most of the Catholics in town were half-breed Indians who had come under the influence of the Jesuit priest, Father Ball, in the reservation twelve or fifteen miles north. The chapel car proved to be a great attraction and many non-Catholics came to the services and a church building plan was started.

Hennessey lost his cool in the frosty March of 1914 when the pipes of the Baker Heater created havoc. They were supposed to have been repaired at the Parsons shops of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas, but leaked in the very spot that was supposed to have been fixed in the shops. But he was steamed when he wrote, “The water ran all over the floor in the chapel and I was obliged to drain the water entirely from the pipes and it has not been used since. Today we are suffering with the cold on this account for it is blowing a fierce Kansas gale here at this moment, using four oil stoves to keep this little room warm. Now that’s the way the repairing was done. Do you think a job like that is worth the bill?”

“All tested well when the car left our shops and our best man did the work,” the manager responded, claiming no responsibility. Hennessey replied, “I suppose the poor “Katy” will go out of business if this bill is not paid. I am enclosing check for Thirty-three dollars and forty cents ($33.40). Thirty three dollars as a donation and forty cents for the work done during the four days the car was in the shops at Parsons.”

From the northwest to the southwest, St. Peter took its mission to the Mexicans of Kansas. The first Mexican mission was at Hutchinson, where daily attendance averaged seventy-five and seventy-two received the Sacrament of Penance, and one hundred and twenty received Holy Communion. Eighteen children made their first Holy Communion on the last day, the children from the Catholic school singing during the Mass. At Florence even more came out, and at Augusta, Arkansas City, and Woodward short missions were held for the little bands of Mexicans living in such poverty in those areas.

The last town visited on this mission was Pratt where one of the Mexicans who came to the car told of a black Protestant pastor who on several instances had extended to them a cordial invitation to attend services in his church, assuring them that he was also a Catholic. As proof he produced a medal of Our Lady of Guadalupe that he wore around his neck. Father R. Serrano, C.M.P., Spanish-speaking chaplain for the mission, was upset over what he felt was a perverted attempt to proselyte Catholics.

When Father Serrano arrived at Hutchinson with the chapel car, the very sound of his “velvety Castilian tongue” caused a train of precious memories that struggled for expression in the souls of the Mexicans of the town. “Some of them cried and some of them laughed, and in their glee some had the light-hearted gaiety that made them shout.” From Mass with instruction in the morning to catechism for the children after dinner, to meetings with the rail workers in the evening, the car was full. Little groups would depart for their cottages

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14 Letter from George Hennessey, Turon, Kansas, to Mr. J. P. Seymour, Chief Clerk, MK&T line, Parsons, Kansas, March 19, 1914, LUCA.
15 Letter from George Hennessey, Wichita, Kansas, to W. H. Maddocks, MK&T, Parsons, Kansas, April 8, 1914, LUCA.
Only to return in an hour of more. These same groups would go and come half a dozen times in a single day.

There was a score or more of daily communions. All approached the Sacraments at least once. There were marriage kinks untwisted, and at the closing service tawny faces peered through the windows from the observation platform, half envious of these who occupied the seats or crowded in the aisles. When we moved away, it was very gently. The engine seemed to understand the sorrow of these poor neglected Catholics and fairly crawled.

Every one had to kiss the missionary’s hand and say good-by. There were many tears on the sturdy faces of the sun-bronzed trackmen. Here and there a woman sobbed. Children kissed their finger-tips to say an “Adios.” The people were saying many things in Spanish, which of course we could not understand. And we wanted to know, so we asked Father Serrano. “They are saying that I am going,” he answered, “and that I will never come again. ‘We are orphans!’ they are crying.” And as the engine slipped around a bend, we realized in part the sorrow that had come into the lives of that little group of exiles from poor old war-scarred Mexico, for their beloved Padre had gone.16

Father P. J. MacCorry related the rocky trip St. Peter took on the tail end of a freight train from Dodge City to Elkhart, the end of the Kansas line. St. Peter went swinging, and swaying and bumping down the rail that had been laid just a year and which now sagged desperately until “one could close his eyes and believe he were on the heaving billows rather than railroading across the Kansas plains. The way we plunged and pitched and pirouetted made mad pandemonium among our pots and pans, and not infrequently the monotony of ‘the song of the rails’ was punctuated by the crash of a lamp-globe or a precious plate hurtling to destruction in the depths of the kitchen.”

According to MacCorry, three times the engine broke her dry bar and went romping alone giddily across the sand dunes. Twice the car seemed to poised an instant on its left-side wheels, as though undetermined whether to return to its jerky job or flop over.

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on the green and give up the attempt to finish it. But they finally landed at Elkhart, where Baptist Chapel Car *Evangel* had been pulled on one of the first trains into town a year earlier. From Hugoton, where anti-Catholic material had been distributed, “a hog-train” bumped them on to Copeland, where a tiny Catholic Russian-German settlement nearby provided most of their audience.\(^\text{17}\)

Following the Mexican mission, the car spent several weeks in western Kansas. At Bazine, there was not one Catholic in town but several families, half Irish and half German-Russians, lived out from town about eight miles from the railroad tracks. The newspaper commented most favorably on the presence of *St. Peter* at Ness City, and believers and unbelievers came to see the ingeniously constructed “roaming” missioner.

Heavy rains formed large lakes at Dighton, but crowds overflowed the chapel car into the Baptist Church. Father Andrew felt that longer stays were needed to “really make non-Catholics reflect seriously on the truths of our religion, and enable them to grasp what the Church is and teaches.” Scott City was the last stop, and a disappointing one at that, for even with a Catholic chapel in town, there seemed to be little interest.

### Anti-Catholic Sentiment Follows to Idaho

From July 4 to October 25, 1914, *St. Peter* worked in the Diocese of Boise, Idaho, on the Oregon Short Line, starting with Rupert, where Chaplain Alvah W. Doran and Hennessey found the town in the middle of a 4th of July celebration with games of all kinds. At Burley, which Doran described as “over-boomed,” they found that although a little chapel had been built with Extension Society assistance many of the Catholic families had left the predominantly Mormon town, leaving only a handful.

*St. Peter* was the first chapel car to travel over the Oregon Short Line, Montana Division Victor branch line, as it had only been in operation one year, and Doran had seen no finer country than this valley along the Teton Mountains. Their congregation at Victor was “truly Catholic,” with fourteen present distributed among six nationalities—Italian, Mexican, Chinese, French, Belgian, and Irish American. Finishing the mission in the Boise Diocese, *St. Peter* was left in Pilot Rock, Oregon, a mission town of the Capuchin Fathers, to be used as a chapel for several months while George Hennessey went East to get the new *St. Paul* ready for dedication.

After being painted and revamped at Pocatello in April 1915, *St. Peter* continued on working in the Boise Diocese along the Bend Branch of the Oregon Short Line where there were many new towns although not many Catholics. Some of the towns, like Murphy, consisted of no more than six dwellings, two saloons, three general stores, a hotel and restaurant combined and a post office.

Frequently there were clashes between the priests and non-Catholics, but in August 1915 there was a problem with the parish priest at Harrison, Idaho. He insisted that George Hennessey change his schedule, which the Bishop of Boise had set, to accommodate his wishes, and when Hennessey refused to do so, the planned mission for Harrison was canceled.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
St. Peter Joins Baptist Car at 1915 Panama Exposition

There had been some doubt whether the extension society would send a car to the San Francisco Panama Exposition. What decided Dr. Kelley, now raised to Rt. Rev. Monsignor Kelley, to send St. Peter to San Francisco was that the new Baptist Car Grace was there. Kelley wrote Ledvina that Grace was a very fine car with a good appearance inside and out. He thought that the pews were not as nice looking, but more practical for the reason they were reversible.

Also, Kelley was quite taken with the brass bedstead in the sleeping quarters, giving it a little more home-like appearance. Kelley had talked with E. R. Hermiston on board Grace, who said he would be pleased to see Chapel Car St. Peter join them there and again see Mr. Hennessey. Reverend Hermiston and Catholic layman Hennessey had become good friends.18

With new carpet in the sanctuary and replated candelabra, cross, and chimes, September 19 St. Peter was on exhibition at the Southern Pacific depot. Hennessey had been instructed by Ledvina to “take special note of all the points on the new Baptist Chapel Car. Take your time to give me a sketch of any point or feature that strikes you as very practical, and which might be applied to any possible future Chapel Car of our own. Mr. Kuntz is still anxious to give us another car for Florida, provided we can get the transportation...”19

This was not difficult for George to do. St. Peter was coupled on to Grace. They could not have been any closer. George took careful notes and wrote that he was not that impressed with the Baptist car. Fr. Ledvina replied that he was glad, for according to Monsignor Kelley’s description, “It had us beat. I now feel very much satisfied that we are still ‘on top.’”20

Unlike lines in the South, where St. Paul was having serious transportation problems, the railroads in the Northwest were very generous to the chapel cars. They seemed to realize the usefulness of the cars in helping the development of their colonization enterprises, and realized, according to Ledvina, that Catholic settlers are more contented if they see their spiritual wants are looked after.

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18 Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, Pendleton, Oregon, August 23, 1915, LUCA.
19 Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, San Francisco, California, September 13, 1915, LUCA.
20 Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, San Francisco, California, October 15, 1915, LUCA.
Like the Baptist cars, the Catholic cars had lighting problems too, and they also found the solution in the Coleman Lamps. “As for the selection of lights for the car . . . go ahead with the installation of ‘The Coleman System,’” Ledvina instructed Hennessey, when problems occurred on St. Peter.

Baptist and Catholic car workers over the years had certain areas, generally of creed and practice, where they could not agree, but some bonds tied them together—such as the Baker Heater. “We see that the Baptist Car, Emmanucl, is in the shops, and has been there for several months. Those Baker Heaters seem to give everybody trouble, if they are not watched closely. I see that Baptist Heaters freeze just as quickly as Catholic heaters.”

In the spring 1916, St. Peter was busy along the Oregon Western Railroad and Navigation Company lines in the Baker City Diocese under Archbishop Alexander Christie. Father Thomas Brady was again chaplain and although many of the little towns along the line barely contained more than a couple hundred souls, he delighted in the few Catholics which were found, including a young Irish boy working on a ranch about three miles from Kent, Oregon.

Brady was not treated so well at Shaniko, the end of the branch line, as the parish priest and the bishop, for some reason not stated, ordered the car out of town. Brady expected trouble from those along the line who had read the poison pen of the Menace, an anti-Catholic publication that followed the Catholic cars wherever they traveled, but to have this kind of treatment from fellow priests was a most upsetting experience.

Riverside, a railroad town that had a history of only two years, “peopled by that class of people who follow railroads into new territory and as a consequence few care for religion,” had poor attendance. Up at the Oregon Western Railroad and Navigation Company’s construction camps though, the St. Peter crew found some thirty Catholic men who came into the car and another forty or so who thought their working clothes did not become the interior of a chapel car and who remained outside, still participating in the services.

Someone else was thinking of building a chapel car, for in the summer of 1916, Father Ledvina received a letter from a Cincinnati law firm asking how much it would cost to fit up a railroad chapel car, such as the extension cars. Ledvina thought the request was either prompted by someone who wanted to give another chapel car, or, perhaps from a source trying to get information for the building of a Protestant chapel car.

While St. Peter was in the Pocatello shops being repainted and revarnished, George Hennessey was teased by Ledvina that the reason George always requested Murphy’s Varnish on the chapel cars was because George’s mother was a Murphy. “Your mother varnished you all right; but, I have no doubt, that your old daddy helped too, at least in the ‘rubbing down’ act.” Ledvina also suggested that Hennessey knew how to use his own brand of varnish—knowing how to “polish up” the workmen with cigars and other favors.

21 Correspondence from E. B. Ledvina and George C. Hennessey, January 14, 1916, LUCA.
22 Report of Thomas J. Brady, Riverside, Oregon, June 11, 1916, LUCA.
23 Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, Vale, Oregon, June 27, 1916, LUCA.
One concern voiced by Ledvina was that *St. Peter's* crews might be rushing along too fast and not spending enough time in one place. He used the Baptist cars as an example, citing that they worked their field more thoroughly, and urged Hennessey to slow down a bit. “There is no question about it but that when our cars are in operation, they work and they work hard, and everybody on board does likewise; but that does not mean that we shall close our eyes to any improvement, if we get still better results.”

Come the spring of 1917, Fr. William D. Cronin was on the car. At Scappoose, Oregon, they were surprised to find a spot where the Catholic services were preached in Bohemian and the children instructed in Bohemian, and on this account, English-speaking people did not attend mass. Cronin was busy instructing the children after school and rounding up Catholics who had been absent from the mass.

At Oak Grove the mission was disappointing, even though they had gone to great trouble to get there, first on the electric line of the Portland Railroad Light and Power and then on the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Road, then the southern Pacific, and finally the Portland Railroad Light and Power Company. What seemed to be the problem at Oak Grove was that the town was made up of ex-ministers—the store man, the butcher, the postmaster, even the guy that peddled the papers. Too many Protestant ministers spoiled the Catholic chapel car broth.

The first wedding on the Extension Society cars was at Richfield, Idaho, where a local rancher and a New York City lady, who had known each other since childhood, were married in *St. Peter*. At the same stop seven married children who had not spoken to each other in two years were reconciled, much to the joy of their Irish mother.

Chaplain Jerome B. Donegan thought that *St. Peter* was the first chapel car the folks at Myrtle Point, Oregon, had seen, but he soon discovered that the Baptists had been there first and had worked all the towns along the line. “However we are not bothered by what they have done so far and the difference in “Class” of the cars has also helped us. They had one of their wooden cars [Chapel Car 4, *Good Will*] and did not draw the crowds that we are having all along the lines.” At Powers, Donegan saw some of the results of the Baptist car’s visit, as a new Baptist church was being built right next to the new Catholic church, and the Baptist minister came to several of the lectures.

Oregon’s loveliness was not wasted on Donegan. “'Nature has been partial to the south Western part of Oregon. The sombre fir and hemlock—the tender myrtle—the gorgeous rhododendron—the brilliant scotch bloom—the quiet white lilies in the sheltering leaves of green, combine here to make it a wonderfully attractive place."

Hennessey, facing his tenth year of chapel car work, thought that he might have been on the car long enough.

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24 Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, Hailey, Idaho, November 20, 1916, LUCA.
25 *Extension*, May 1918, LUCA, 29.
26 Report of Jerome B. Donegan, Powers, Oregon, June 3, 1917, LUCA.
He was hearing glowing reports of the work of layman Michael Cousins on Chapel Car *St. Paul*, and perhaps he was feeling a little unappreciated.

He also was hearing reports that some chaplains who served on the cars felt that he was getting too much salary, as much as they were, and some resented that. With World War I heating up, maybe he should join the army? Ledvina was relieved to hear a few letters later that George had changed his mind and would stay for a while longer on the car.

During the months of July and August 1917, the car was at Clackamas, Oregon, for the benefit of the soldiers encamped there, and Hennessey got a close up view of army life. While there were only a few Catholic boys in the camp, still the archbishop wanted to do all in his power to assist them and look after their spiritual welfare. While the car was at Clackamas, the archbishop visited the car, along with Father Kelley of the Extension Society. 27

*St. Peter*, which had been a wedding chapel, now became a funeral car as it bore the body of Bishop Alphouse J. Glorieux of Boise, an unwavering supporter of the chapel car work in his Diocese, to Boise. There *St. Peter* remained until after the funeral, and then it carried the Archbishop and his party back to Portland, where it was used as a chapel at Arleta Station.

Ledvina was confident that the society cars would have no problem in transportation, even with the wartime government control. He wrote to the president of the Portland Railway Light & Power Company, expressing thanks for their courtesies to the chapel car.

We have on our Executive Board, prominent men in the business world. One of them is the Vice-President of the Pullman Company, and the other is the President of the Haskell & Barker Car Co., formerly General Manager of the American Car and Foundry Co., and at present associated with Mr. Hurley at Washington, with the transportation problem for the war activities of our country. We likewise have among the members of our Board, some prominent Railway men of the country. We mention this, just by way of substantiation of our confidence that we may have opportunities to evidence our appreciation of courtesies, in one or another way, that may prove welcome and acceptable,

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27 Report from George C. Hennessey to E. B. Ledvina, Arleta Station, Portland, Oregon, September 10, 1917, LUCA.
when opportunity may present itself in the future.  

In spite of the government regulations, *St. Peter* continued to move along the Idaho lines, revisiting many of the towns where they had stopped earlier. At Hailey local non-Catholics said they would close the businesses in town for a couple of hours if Chaplain Austin Fleming would give a talk on the position of the Catholic Church on Americanism. The largest theater in town was filled and the lecture was well received.

**Utah Mission Starts at Salt Lake**

April 1918 found *St. Peter* parked at the Union Depot in Salt Lake City, ready for a Utah mission, with Austin Fleming as chaplain. Permission had been denied by the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad (L.A. & S.L.R.R.) as well as the Coast Lines, but the Denver and Rio Grande had permitted movement on their lines to Murray and Midvale and to Eureka, a silver and lead mining town of about four thousand, at an elevation of over seven thousand feet. Fleming noted that the town was all undermined from the drives from the mine shafts and it was no unusual thing to be awakened at night with the loud report of blasting underneath the priest’s house where they were lodging. In their services was a

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28 Letter from E. G. Ledvina to Mr. Franklin T. Griffith, President, Portland Railway Light & Power Company, Portland, Oregon, February 7, 1918, LUCA.
Mormon bishop and many of his congregation.

*St. Peter* had the honor of being the first and last chapel car to visit Thistle, Utah, a roundhouse railroad town in the midst of a barren mountain district. It had a population of one hundred and fifty. Fleming reported that for smoke and dust, it equaled Pittsburgh. It would not equal Pittsburgh for long, for Thistle would soon be removed from the map as the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad was moving the roundhouse to Summit. Observing “the cloud of Mormonism” (Sic) over the town, Fleming quipped, “America is known over as the land of invention and discovery, as it is sure the home of new modes of getting to heaven.”

At Helper, which was so called for being the station where the big engines, the “helpers,” were hooked on to drag the trains over the mountains, mainly Italian children were rounded up to form a First Communion class. Their Catholic mothers who had married outside the church could not be remarried, as their husbands were at some far off construction point, but they promised they would remarry in the little Catholic Church in town when “the first chance presents itself.” The reception at Park City, a mining town and one of the oldest parishes of the diocese, was quite different, where Fleming was asked to speak at the 4th of July Celebration and the chapel car was full.

According to a letter from Ledvina, Hennessey might still wear the uniform of his country; “if the new draft includes men of forty-five I can see our genial Superintendent of Chapel cars keeping step to the tune of “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary.” Ledvina also cautions Hennessey to be careful with the new Kerosene Gas Machine purchased for *St. Peter*. “Be sure however, to have the different cans properly marked for gasoline and kerosene. You might happen to get the contents switched and you might have a typical war trench disaster.”

### War, Flu Discouraged Hennessey in Oregon

In the fall of 1918, *St. Peter* was working along the Southern Pacific lines in Oregon. At Tillamook, one of the oldest towns in the state, famous for its cheese, the Catholic population was about 120 families, mostly Swiss, who could not come to the scheduled services because of morning and evening milkings. After leaving Banks, down the Tillamook branch of the Southern Pacific, the car returned to Portland because of the Spanish Influenza that had caused all churches and theatres and public gatherings to be closed by the

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20 Report of Austin Fleming, Thistle, Utah, June 3, 1918, LUCA.
State Board of Health, which was just as well, as Hennessey was still suffering from his own battle with the flu.

By December Chapel Car St. Peter was back on the Southern Pacific, and, after a rather circuitous ride on the end of a freight train, arrived at Tigard, Oregon. There the crew found, as they had in many of the other towns in Oregon, that a woman described as “the infamous and shameless ex-nun Lucretia of Portland,” had made her visit to the town with her well rehearsed story of the supposed vice of priests and nuns succeeded in stirring up prejudice against anything Catholic.  

As early as January of 1919, with all the problems with transportation and the war, plus the Spanish Influenza, Monsignor Kelley had expressed his preference to bring the chapel car program to an end, as he thought they had run their full course. February found George sleeping in a sidetracked St. Peter, temporarily out of service.

I am sleeping on the St. Peter and believe me it is some cold in the morning and also at night. The only heat I have is oil stoves and as for water I have to carry it about half a mile. The car is a long way from the street and down behind a lot of freight cars and when it comes to carrying oil and gasoline I sometimes wonder if the people are not a little suspicious of me because now they see me and now they don’t.

At night when I come in here I am always looking for some guy to say “hands up” or suddenly get hit with a club in the back of the head. When I’m inside the car I breath a deep breath and say “safe again. . . .” The charge for living expenses - I am taking it for granted that I am allowed this amount as heretofore when there is no mission work going on. Of course no white man can live on two dollars a day and live at restaurants etc. but by taking two meals a day one can get along fairly well.  

George was not the only one discouraged about the future of the chapel cars. Ledvina wrote to console him in his uncomfortable situation. “This Chapel Car business is certainly coming to an inglorious end; but we certainly cannot help it, nor can anyone criticize us for it. If conditions were favorable, we certainly would keep it up; but under the circumstances, there is nothing else left for us to do but to play quits. Too bad that it is so!”

Even in his discouragement, Ledvina felt that they must do everything possible to keep the cars in operation, as long as the donors hold out the hope that they will pay for the transportation and parking charges. He asked George to send him an itinerary and estimate of transportation and parking charges for St. Peter and St. Paul, and Ledvina would forward it to the Kuntz estate for their consideration. “If we can give them an idea what it would cost, I feel that we have to meet them at least half way.”

Ledvina was surprised to get a bill from George for altar wine as St. Peter was not in service, but George explained, “I got tired even trying to beg wine, so

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30 Letter from J. B. Donegan, C.S.S.R., Tigard, December 15, 1918, LUCA.
31 Report of George C. Hennessey, Portland, Oregon, February 5, 1919, LUCA.
32 Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, March 1, 1919, LUCA.
thought it best to order some for future use. The subject of altar wine out here, in this bone-dry state is becoming very serious. There are places where the district attorney had taken it upon himself to say just how much the priest in charge is allowed. To ask for a bottle of Altar wine out here is like asking for a loan of a thousand dollars. If you offer to pay them for a bottle or two they’ll think you are lacing them in the bootleggers class - so they would just as soon you wouldn't ask them at all."

Sale Plans Fail As St. Peter Gets New Life

Bad news came in April as the Kuntz Estate decided to have St. Peter and St. Paul sold and to record the proceeds in the books of the society to the credit of the Kuntz Estate. Hennessey was instructed to inventory the contents of the car which were strictly ecclesiastical and which properly ought to be excluded from the sale, and to provide other details that would be of interest to a potential buyer. He was not to mention the anticipated sale to anyone, especially railroad men. Then Ledvina writes of Hennessey’s tenure with the chapel cars.

Coming back to the regretful development of our Chapel Car work; I want to express in the name of the Society, even at this advanced date, my deep regret that this climax of the Chapel Car work, at least according to present indications, means the severance of the pleasant relations between Mr. Geo. C. Hennessey and The Catholic Church Extension Society; unless something turns up or develops that may open some position for the continuation of this relation. At this writing, I do not see anything of that kind; but perhaps when Monsignor Kelley returns, his vision may be better than mine, and he might see a place now obscured from my vision. I hope so."

Something happened on the way to the sale barn for St. Peter and St. Paul. The Northwest Federal Manager of the United States Railroad Administration, J. P. O’Brien, wrote Bishop Christie of the Portland Diocese, “It has been decided that for the present we will continue former practice of transporting your chapel car free over lines under my jurisdiction. If you will re-submit request for transportation same will be granted.”

Confusion reigned, or as a perplexed Ledvina said, “Now, this whole Chapel Car matter is, indeed, in a muddle; and I cannot understand how your Federal Director in the Northwest can issue orders diametrically opposite to those which have been settled upon definitely by the headquarters at Washington. Either the Federal Director in the Northwest has taken it on his own responsibility to go ahead granting free transportation, or the Washington office doesn't know what it is doing, or at least had taken an arbitrary stand which Regional Directors, or Federal Directors may feel privileged to differ.”

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33 Report from George C. Hennessey, Portland, Oregon, March 31, 1919, LUCA.
34 Correspondence from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, April 9, 1919, LUCA.
35 Letter from J. P. O’Brien to A. Christie, Portland, Ore., April 1, 1919, LUCA.
Ledvina cautions Hennessey to proceed carefully: “move slowly; for we might get tripped-up, and might have a fine big bill presented to us at the end of an itinerary, demanding pay for the transportation.”\textsuperscript{36}

George was tired of sitting in a cold chapel car in a spooky back rail yard in Portland, and he did not go slowly. He quickly got the car ready, called his favorite porter, Joe, back to the car, and with Chaplain J. B. Donegan, C.SS.R, on board took off for the state of Washington. On the Spokane Portland and Seattle road in the Diocese of Seattle, they opened the mission Sunday morning, April 27, at Goldendale, with an inspiring view of Mount Adams and Hood. Even though the flu still had its grip on many members of the community, the car was crowded. The car visited Centreville, Fallbridge, White Salmon, and Stevenson, Washington, before ending the mission.

Just as Ledvina feared, April 30 found Federal Manager O’Brien writing to Bishop Christie of Portland again, regretfully stating their previous stance was wrong and that the chapel car would be charged according to existing tariffs.

June found \textit{St. Peter} at Parkrose, Oregon, a little settlement outside the parish of St. Rose, where the Bishop requested that it remain for a period to help start a parish until matters of transportation could be more stable. Late September the car was moved to the shops of the Oregon Western Railroad and Navigation Company at Albina for a general overhauling with exterior and interior painting. Ledvina felt that if the car was to be overhauled it would be just as cheap to do it in Albina, Oregon, than to bring it back to the Barney & Smith Car Shops in Dayton, Ohio.

The beleaguered vice-president lamented, “You know, our old friends at that place have all been ousted. We would meet none but strange faces there now. I don’t know where our different acquaintances have gone. I know that when I wanted to get a full copy of the blue Print of the “\textit{St. Peter}”, they wanted to charge us $300, whereas before I could have gotten a set for the mere asking. That will plainly indicate how the wind blows there.”\textsuperscript{37}

What Ledvina did not realize was that Barney & Smith was undergoing desperate times and was in receivership, and for the first time in the history of the company, an outsider, Willard Sullivan, was hired as general manager. A group of Cincinnati stockholders had assumed control in an attempt to re-organize the business, but had failed, and much of the machinery had been sold to meet debts. The company could no longer afford to give away prints. It was having great difficulty just keeping the doors open.\textsuperscript{38}

In May of 1920, free transportation was again granted \textit{St. Peter} and it resumed its missions with Father Doran aboard, along the Oregon Western Railroad (O.W.R.R.) between Vancouver and Seattle, in charge of the Franciscan Fathers of Cowlitz Prairie. Father O’Hara, who would become archbishop of

\textsuperscript{36} Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, April 15, 1919, LUCA.
\textsuperscript{37} Letter from E. B. Ledvina to George C. Hennessey, Portland, Oregon, October 23, 1919, LUCA.
Kansas City, was on the car in January 1921 along with Father Eugene McGuinness, who would become bishop of Oklahoma—Tulsa. At Oakridge, in the depths of the Cascade Range, Father McGuinness had been leading a Mass, and a non-Catholic commented to a Catholic friend, “I have listened to this young orator from Chicago, but all he speaks in Latin and I do not understand the Italian language.”

Before St. Peter would leave the Northwest, 268 missions would be completed: 108 in the Oregon City Archdiocese, 64 in the Bake City Diocese, 73 in Boise Diocese, 10 in the Salt Lake Diocese, and 13 in the Seattle Diocese.

The message and financial statement from George Hennessey at Warrenton, Oregon, in December 1921 to Fr. William D. O’Brien, who was now vice president and general secretary of the society, was to the point. “Please send the balance due as soon as possible for I need the money for Christmas and besides I cannot put up any more for the running of this institution because I haven’t any. So hurry.39

*Lack of Support Dishheartens Hennessey As Missions Continue*

George Hennessey discouraged and feeling much neglected and abused by the lack of financial support and direction on the part of extension society officials, was not comforted by the outlook for the chapel cars. Even Father O’Brien’s kidding and jokes did not make the situation palatable. Although he continued to keep St. Peter in service in 1922 visiting Washington towns like Prescott, and he was discouraged at the lack of interest of Irish families and fallen away Catholics who had become members of the “forbidden societies,” like the Masons and the Odd Fellows.

Although the car was busy in the prosperous farming community of Dayton, at Waitsburg down the line, a visiting lecturer, “Three Fingered Jack,” had visited and lectured on the dangers of the Catholic faith and frightened the people. At Starbuck, on the Oregon Western Railroad & Navigation Company, many Catholics would not attend Mass as it was held in the Masonic Hall, the only available place in town. Once-genial George seemed to have lost his Irish knack for fun and optimism.

Cold weather in Idaho in November 1922 caused Hennessey to explain that expenses would be higher as they were obliged to keep five oil stoves going both day and night so the car would be warm in the morning for the people. At Harrison, on the north bank of Lake Coeur d’Alene, on the Union Pacific branch, they gave two missions, one in English and one in Italian. Because it had been so long since the Italians had a priest who used their language, there were thirty-six confessions and forty-eight communions and five marriages rectified.

Chaplain McDevitt, whose fluent Italian was so much appreciated, was delighted with the scenery. “The old saying regarding Naples “Un pezzo di Cielo caduto” — a piece of Heaven fallen down, may be applied very aptly to Lake

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39 Letter from George C. Hennessey to William D. O’Brien, Warrenton, Oregon, December 2, 1921, LUCA.
Coeur d’Alene and the majestic parts of Kootenai County, Idaho, which surround it."

In February 1923 O’Brien jestingly reminded George that he needed to file his income tax return for his yearly salary of $1500, “or he would go to jail where he should have gone long ago.” After filing his taxes, Hennessey and crew traveled the beautiful routes through the evergreen covered mountains and along the sparkling rivers of Washington state up to the Canadian line. Among that lovely scenery George pondered his future with the chapel cars and without the chapel cars.

At Jumppoff, a most amazing event occurred. Jumppoff, Washington, was not a town, just a colony of Austrians and a few Germans. According to legend, many years ago there was a stage driver whose name was Joe. At the steepest part of the road, between Valley and Jumppoff, Joe had the habit of shouting to his passengers “Everybody jump off,” and the passengers did jump off and walked up the steep grade so as to lighten the heavy task for the horses.

The mission opened with Mass on Sunday morning, June 10. On Monday this written request was found in the question box. “Please Father don’t holler so loud like you did Sunday night. Some people are very nervous in this church God blessed you with to loud a voice.” Father O’Brien read this request verbatim to the fine congregation assembled Monday evening and expressed regret if he had shocked the nerves of any of his hearers by speaking too loudly.

Then I reminded them that my poor little human voice, no matter how loud it might be, was as nothing, compared to the way in which Almighty God speaks to us His children at times in the storm winds, the thunder and the lightning, even though these make many of us nervous. He had his own divine purpose.

When the services were ended that evening and those good people had begun to leave the church, a terrific storm verified what had been said in reply to that rather amusing request “Please Father don’t holler so loud” — Awe-inspiring lightning flashed again and again followed by peal after peal of frightful Thunder. Rain came down in torrents followed by a destructive hailstorm. Fortunately the people returned to their pews in the church for safely. Many were in tears not knowing what might happen.

Then took place a most edifying episode. Spontaneously those dear people fell on their knees, and led by the women, in their native tongue, they implored our Dear Lord and His Heavenly Mother to protect them. And their supplications ceased not until the storm had passed. It was a scene never to be forgotten.

It seemed the extension chapel car program lost its heart when, after sixteen years as manager, George Hennessey resigned in October 1923. He felt quite at home in Portland where he had served so long in the diocese of Archbishop Alexander Christie, who had him honored as a Knight of the Holy Sepulcher, so he chose to stay. He entered the mortuary business, the trade practiced by his

40 Report of H. J. McDevitt, Jumppoff, Washington, June 10, 1923, LUCA.
father. But *St. Peter* was not done with its work yet, although without George’s direction a terrible mix-up of cars occurred which would come back to haunt the Extension Society in the form of old Peter Kuntz’ words.

Donor Peter Kuntz had insisted all along that *St. Peter* was to be used mainly in the North, and Chapel Car *St. Paul* was “never” to go north but to work in the South. When the two cars were in storage in Chicago, there was a mix-up in orders, and *St. Paul* that had been brought up from the South was sent north. *St. Peter* that was to have gone north was sent south—the opposite of what Kuntz had in mind. If George Hennessey had been around, this never would have happened.

*Weakened Father Albert Starts North Carolina Mission*

Father Stephen Sweeney, the first of four Passionist missionaries to serve on the car in North Carolina, had taken *St. Paul* to Chicago and returned to work on *St. Peter*. Then the work was taken over by Fr. Egbert J. Albert, C. P. who conducted a twelve-week mission in the towns along the east side of North Carolina.

Named after the English monk who crossed the Irish Sea during the Anglo-Saxon period to acquire sanctity and learning in Ireland and influenced the monks of Iona to follow the Pope Gregory’s Roman calendar, Father Egbert was described as always ready with sparkling wit or a flash of delightful repartee. Loved by young and old, by Catholics and non-Catholics, fellow priest Fr. Charles J. Gable said of him, “He was loved not because he played to the popular whims of men, but because he spoke to them in a most buoyant, irresistible cheerfulness of God.”41

In January 1926, *St. Peter* rolled into Morehead City with Father Egbert Albert on board. Not well, the young priest worked hard to establish a church at that town which jutted out into the waters of the North Carolina coast. Three years later, after a strenuous tour of mission stops, he passed away February 7, 1929, while he was at a retreat at the Passionist monastery in Springfield, Massachusetts. The physical demands of his missions in the South and pernicious anemia that developed into pneumonia, was the cause of death. The church at Morehead City was named after Father Albert, and when that building was replaced, a devotional area in the new church was named after the young priest.

After the death of Father Egbert, Passionist Father Luke Hay, a Massachusetts native, served his first mission on *St. Peter* in 1930 in a little town outside the city of New Bern, where no more than a hundred people lived. It was not an auspicious beginning for the young priest. Very few came to the car. After preaching for about an hour, he stopped and inquired if anyone had any questions. No questions. “I then asked one man if he had ever heard about the Catholic Church, and to my surprise he answered “No.” I asked another man and he said that he had heard about the Pope and he believed that the Pope was a Catholic, but since he knew very little about him he never paid much attention to what he had heard. He guessed the Catholics were all right and about as good as anyone else.

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The other stops of Father Luke’s mission were somewhat better, and he reported that all whom he talked to told him it was the first time they had ever heard a Catholic priest, or had ever seen what the inside of a Catholic Church looked like. “When the many things were explained to them, they not only saw the reasonableness of it all, but likewise much of its beauty.”

For many months the car worked along the Atlantic coast section of North Carolina, a section barely two or three feet above sea level, a district under the supervision of Fr. Charles J. Gable. In that district over a period of seven years they received into the Catholic Church almost one hundred converts, most of whom could be traced either directly or indirectly to the visits of the Chapel Car. Many of the converts were black, members of the St. Joseph’s Colored Mission at New Bern.

Near Easter 1931, the car made its way to the heart of the state, a place of mill towns and small farms. At one such mill town, Father Hay was interrogated by a man about whether the wine Jesus turned from water contained alcohol, and when told by Hay that all wine contained some alcohol, the man replied, “Well, I know that Christ ain’t the kind of a fellow that would make such wine, and if you believe that wine had alcohol in it, then I don’t believe anything you have to say.”

At High Point, a large city, down the line, Meb, the black porter on board, was told by a woman, when she discovered that he was a Catholic, “When you joined that Church, surely your poor mother must have turned over in her grave.”

“If she did,” replied Meb, “she turned over with joy.”

February 23, 1933, while St. Peter was in storage in Raleigh, the news came that George Hennessey had passed away. He would have been distressed to know that the car had been broken into and some damage done. But he would have been relieved to know that none of the sacred vessels were harmed. They were then removed to the cathedral at Raleigh for safe-keeping.

St. Peter’s Last Station, Oxford, North Carolina

In 1939, the car was given to the Diocese of North Carolina, and in 1940 the car was sent to Oxford, North Carolina, to serve as the parish church. An article in the Oxford, North Carolina paper on August 2 reported, “Recently the Seaboard Air line Railroad deposited a Chapel Car on their siding near Military street in southeast Oxford. This car will serve the Catholic people of Oxford until a church is erected.”

Most of the Catholics who attended the car were assigned to duty at Camp Butner, where no chapels were yet completed. In March of 1941 the car was still used as a church with Lenten services announced in the paper. Father Cletus J.

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Helfrich of Henderson was the pastor. Mass was still being said in the chapel car in July 1944 on Sunday.

Soon after the car sat unused on a siding for ten years.

**AUTHOR’S NOTE**

*Oxford, North Carolina, is a quiet town, and in the public library on a quiet afternoon, we had a pleasant surprise in store for us. We had come to town looking for information about the demise of Chapel Car St. Peter. The librarian directed us to a small room where several people were quietly at work on an Oxford church history project. One gentleman glanced up from his research as we told the librarian about our interest in the chapel car, and as soon as we settled down with some local church history material at the table, he told us that he knew about St. Peter—in fact had a close encounter with the chapel car.*

*As a child, he had played in the chapel car while it sat deserted, unsupervised, and unlocked on the siding on Military Street. When told that I was a retired schoolteacher, he laughed, and said, “You probably would not want to know how roughly we played in that old car. You know how little boys are.” But he remembered that St. Peter still had the beautiful wood paneling, the green window glass trim, although some panes were broken; the beautiful rolled top desk and the bookcases in the study. In the midst of their boyish games of hide and seek in the chaplains’ rooms, the washroom, and the kitchen, they could still sense the difference of this adapted playroom on wheels.*

*We climbed in his van and he took us to the spot where the rail car had set, past the regal grounds of the old military school, past the lovely old homes, past the Catholic church which had been built with the funds from the dismantled St. Peter—the same church which would stand empty, abandoned, when the parish moved to Henderson.*

*He obviously enjoyed his recollection of the unique old chapel car and those boyhood days. He enjoyed sharing his memories with strangers, and we enjoyed hearing them. We stepped from the van and stood looking at a field of weeds—imagining, recreating the form of Peter Kuntz’s gift, the once beautiful, shining St. Peter. Our gracious guide stood quietly too—looking, calling up, and cherishing his own childhood memories.*

*As we climbed back in the van for our return trip to the library, the thought occurred to me that St. Peter would not have minded little boys playing within its mahogany walls. For didn’t Jesus say, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19:14, KJV).”*

*In April of 1953, after being stripped of all metal by young members of the Oxford Parish, about 1,000 pounds of copper, removed from the top of the car, had been sold for $169. In addition, 100,000 pounds of iron and steel brought in about $1,500, and all the proceeds were used for the building of a new Catholic Church in Oxford. That church would move to Henderson, North Carolina,*
years later, leaving the town of Oxford without the church *St. Peter* was sent to start. 44

Peter Kuntz’s beautiful steel chapel car that he ordered never to be sent “South” sacrificed itself to support a Southern church, but on its erroneous journey to Oxford, it left behind thousands in the Northwest who had come to a new relationship and acceptance of the Catholic faith.

In April of 1953, the young people of the Oxford Parish working with axes and wrecking bars ripped apart the beautiful interior mahogany finished panels of Chapel Car *St. Peter* preparing for the steel-cutter’s torch that reduced the car to metal junk. [LUCA]

44 “Church on Wheels Goes to Scrap Pile,” *Raleigh News Observer*, April 5, 1953