

History of St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church

The history of St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Caledonia goes back more than a century when Catholic families began to gather in the district and planned for the building of a church. The site was secured on August 18th, 1849, it being the southeast corner of Orkney and Nairn Streets, at the top of what has been known as the Catholic hill, leading down to the town square. It was ten years before construction of the church begun and the interval Mass was said by various priests from the surrounding districts in the village theatre and in a warehouse on the south side of the river. In 1855 Reverend Father William Fitzgerald was made first pastor of Caledonia and in 1859 the first St. Patrick's Church was completed. On July 31, 1859, Bishop Farrell of Hamilton, assisted by Rev. Father McNulty, LaRue and Northgreaves blessed and dedicated the service of the God.



Inside the first St. Patrick's Church in Caledonia. This photo shows the sanctuary area behind the altar. The tabernacle is separated by a lace curtain, behind which is most surely a monstrance to display the communion host.

The first child being baptised was one Patrick Lynch a familiar surname in the district. Succeeding the first resident priest Rev. Wm. Fitzgerald were Rev. Father W. McNulty, J.P. Doherty, P.J. Maddigan, J.T. Kelly, E.M. Carre, Francis, O'Reilly, I. Lynch, A.C. Walters, Wm. E. Gehl, G.J. Cleary, J.J. Traynor, B.A. Harris, J.B. Ryan, P.J. Bodendistel, G. Robson, C.O. Day, L. Sullivan, G. Beck and Father Wubbles. For more than fifty years the Caledonia priest has also administered the Walpole and Hagersville parishes. It was during the time Rev. J.B. Ryan that the old church was considered inadequate and plans were made for the building of a new church and it was Father Ryan's successor Rev. P. Bodendistel who supervised the building of the present new church. The old church was torn down and the new brick building put on the existing lot, facing north on Orkney Street. The new edifice was blessed on December 16, 1952 by Bishop J.F. Ryan of Hamilton, assisted by Rev. P. Bodendistel and other clergy. The high mass was sung by Rev. J.B. Ryan and the choir under the direction of Miss Katie Doyle, a most impressive historic service.

On July 6, 1956 the 100th anniversary of the parish was celebrated with his Excellency Joseph F. Ryan and Rev. R. Jordan of Dundalk, Ontario assisting with the ceremonies. After the Mass a reception was held in the Parish Hall when old and present parishioners renewed friendships and were greeted by distinguished guests. It was on this occasion that Bishop Ryan expressed his hope for a separate school in Caledonia and just one year later, his Excellency and Father C.O. Day officiated at the Blessing and opening of St. Patrick's Separate School, the first Roman Catholic School in Haldimand County. The attractive two room school is erected at the very corner of the Church lot facing north and is administered by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The old Thomas Arrell home across the street was purchased by the church and made into a Convent for the Sisters.



The

original St. Patrick's Church in Caledonia faced West onto Nairn Street. It was demolished to make room for the building of St. Patrick's School and the new Church building in the late 1950s. The original St. Patrick's Church in Caledonia faced West onto Nairn Street. It was demolished to make room for the building of St. Patrick's School and the new Church building in the late 1950s.

In August 1959, an important event took place which greatly affected the parish, this being a re-division of the dioceses, which put Caledonia, Walpole and Hagersville parishes in the St. Catherine's diocese under his Excellency Bishop T.J. McCarthy. That fall, Bishop McCarthy made his first visit to Caledonia and the occasion was marked with a day celebration beginning with High Mass in the morning and a general reception in the afternoon.

There are four active organizations within the church, The Catholic Women's League, The Ladies' Auxiliary, the Holy Name Society, and the Catholic Youth Organization.

The history of St. Patrick's Church would not be complete without mention of names who are still within the parish. As far back as 1843 there were Doyles, Higgins and Breens, McGarrys and Fagans. Also there were Keatings, Maddigans, Daltons, O'Rourke, Brittain, Sheehans, Welchs, Herods and Dennis Kelly. St. Patrick's Cemetery is just east of the Caledonia Cemetery on the south side of the river and was purchased about the same time as land for the first church. The graves date back to 1849 and it has been under the care of a Cemetery Board. More recently a fund has started for perpetual care.

—From The Tweedsmuir History (Caledonia Women's Institute: 1967).

We have a gap in the written history between about 1965 and the 1990s.. Anyone with information on this period please feel free to leave comments.

Father Peter Botman and Father George were at the Caledonia Parish for many years through the 1990s and early 2000s. During this period there were many young people involved in the church and Altar Serving was popular. Around 2005 Father Peter and Father George retired from the Parish and moved to Toronto's Hyde Park area.

Father George Sammut was the replacement. During his years in the Parish upgrades and improvements were made to the church including new carpeting, the installation of a confessional and shelving in the back of the church, and renovation to the sanctuary.

Father George moved to a Parish and school in Florida in 2009. His Replacement was Father Stan Pietlock who came to Caledonia from a Welland Parish. Father Stan retired in 2013 and Caledonia Parish was taken over by Father Mario Fernandez formerly the Dunnville Parish Priest.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic School is now in the hands of the Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk Catholic District School Board (BHNCDNB) and is administered from their Brantford offices.

In 1997 Notre Dame Catholic School was built on the south side of the river to alleviate the congestion at St. Patrick's school which had many portable classrooms along the playground. An addition to this school was built to the West in 2002. The first principle was Mr. T. Brophy, secretary Mrs. Longland, and custodian Mr. Taylor. Long time staff here include Mrs. A. Vidmontas (retired), Mrs. K. Yuill, Mrs. V.

Partington, Mr. Y. Leveille (retired), Mrs. K. Gallagher, Mrs. C. Robitaille, Mrs. G. Porco, Mrs. D. Damignani, Mrs. D. Cimmadamore, Mrs. T. Fraser, Mrs. S. Hunter and others.

The Parish has a long history in Caledonia, and is sure to continue for many years to come. This is just the beginnings of a full history, hopefully as time progresses more information will become available here as it is researched.

— Ian Thompson U.E.