



75 Years at
720 West Main Street
Rochester, New York 14611



SS. Peter & Paul Church

**SHORT HISTORY
OF**

**SS. PETER & PAUL
PARISH
COMMUNITY**

1836 - 1987



The original German Catholic Congregation of Rochester was St. Joseph's, founded in 1836 by the Redemptorist Fathers. The initial location of the church was on Ely Street off South Avenue. This took care of German Catholics living on both the east and the west sides of the Genesee River.

In 1841, the Redemptorists began to consider moving to a better location on Franklin Street. This did not set well with the west-side Germans. Since they lived at such a distance from St. Joseph's, they thought that a church west of the river should be given the priority. They undertook to buy a lot on the corner of Maple and King Streets, and to begin there a small church. Although the Redemptorists were displeased, Bishop John Hughes of New York City accepted the church as a Catholic Church, as long as the title to the property was vested in his name in trust as church law required. To avoid further friction, the Bishop assigned only non-Redemptorist German Priests to the parish.

The 1845 census reveals that Germans outnumbered the Irish in the City's Population. The original congregation of a few hundred families was almost 100% German. Many of St. Peter's pioneer parishioners worked at trades learned in the old country, and a large number of them were gardeners who found ready employment in the Flower City. By 1850, the city was almost surrounded by vegetable, flower and tree nurseries.



Construction of the first church, an unpretentious, building with basement and gallery and fronting on King Street, was started in the spring and completed in December of 1842 at a cost of \$3,100.00.

An interesting sketch of the parish set-up in its earliest days was written (in Latin) in the front of the Sacraments record book by the first pastor, Father Leviz: during the four-hour dedication Mass on June 29, 1843, the sermon was preached in English and German. "The church is still destitute of ornaments and necessary utensils for the celebration of divine worship."

During the first year of the Parish's existence, there were 68 Baptisms, 7 marriages, 21 deaths (17 children), 434 Paschal confessions and Communions, and 22 First Communions of children.

Generally people are tempted to keep the "skeletons" well hidden in the family "closets". But being aware of the serious problems in our history can give us greater appreciation of subsequent historical events of growth and life, and can even allow us to have a better perspective on the "problems" we face in our own daily history.





In the early years of our parish, the rise of the Know-Nothing Party and the tide of anti-Catholic bigotry were not unknown to the church in Rochester. Trusteeism, in the form of dissatisfied laymen who insisted on holding tenure of the church property, was highly publicized in the secular press during the 1850's. Lawsuits and indictments for assault and battery were launched. Bishop Hughes, and his successor, Bishop Timon, were named defendants in the suits. One trustee suit was won in Supreme Court but was reversed on appeal. Yet the trustees managed to hold their elections year after year and at times not without riot and violence.

In 1842, Bishop Hughes came to Rochester. The majority of parishioners of St. Peter's adopted the church law (1829) that stated no church could be erected or constructed unless title was assigned by a written document to the Bishop of the Diocese.

The first pastor left the parish in 1845, over a dispute with the trustees, but returned for a few months until May of 1846.


The next pastor remained for three years. There was peace, membership doubled, debts were paid, and a \$500.00 organ was installed. By 1851, a small group of "malcontents stubbornly pushed their incorporation plans in bitter conflict" with the next pastor. As a result St. Peter's Society was incorporated in Monroe County on July 3. There followed some years of litigation, recriminations, and even physical violence resulting in another pastor's resignation in 1858.

In 1855, a triumph occurred for the Know-Nothing Party, the formulation of the Putnam Bill, to "compel lay ownership of all church property." For some years, this law successfully blocked the efforts of N.Y. Catholic Bishops to put their ecclesiastical properties on a secure legal basis. Finally on March 10, 1859 parishioners met to reorganize the church, changing its name to SS. Peter and Paul, and electing new trustees. St. Peter's Society was dissolved. But not until November 5, 1862 do we read in Bishop Timon's diary these words: "Met with rebels of St. Peter's... all present reconciled.... only two absent hold out. Deo Gratias."

Thanks be to God. One can almost hear the sigh of relief through the words.....

In the midst of these dark years of conflict between the trustees and church authority, there was a bright spot: There had been much bitterness over the separation from St. Joseph's and setting up of St. Peter's on the west side. After twelve years, a Love Feast celebrated restoration of good feelings among people of the two parishes. The feast took place on Easter Tuesday, 1854 under the "solicitous zeal" of the pastor, Father Krautbauer. There were 300 people in attendance.





In 1859, a new brick church with a gallery was built, with the cornerstone being laid on June 26, and the dedication taking place on August 15 of that year. Seven years later, a church tower was added. Bishop Timon blessed the two bells for the tower on September 8, 1866.

These bells have an interesting history all their own. One of the bells hung in the original church, and was used not only for the church services but as a firebell for the volunteer firemen of the neighborhood. The fire company paid the bell-ringer \$1.25 per fire to sound the alarm. Peter Renaud was the first bell-ringer, assisted by his sons. On his retirement, he was succeeded by the janitor, Peter Voss.

During the 1880's, fire alarms were tolled on a big bell in City Hall tower. Henry Dengler rigged up an electrical apparatus in the Maple Street rectory, to repeat the fire alarm box numbers. The device was a boon to the youth of Dutchtown, ever on the alert to run to the scene of a fire. Henry Dengler died in 1951 at the age of 84, having been long active in parish affairs, and at one time president of the St. Francis Xavier Society.



Disaster struck the parish community on the night of January 6, 1869. More than 1500 people were enjoying the Festival of the Three Kings, when a section of the second story collapsed, sending nearly 300 persons toppling onto the crowded first floor. The injured and dying were carried into the adjoining rectory and church while the church bells were rung to summon all available firemen, police and physicians. Last rites were administered by the saddened pastor, Father Sinclair. Bishop McQuaid came to the scene, as did priests of other parishes.

Eight persons died in the accident: Mr. and Mrs. Bernard DUNNER, parents of four children; George POPP; Mrs. Bartholomay SPERL; Mrs. George REINCK; Kate LAWRENCE; Margaret WEISS; and 14 year old Emma BEERS.

As a mission of SS. Peter and Paul's, Star of the Sea Chapel, Grand View Beach on Edgemere Drive, was built through the efforts of Father Sinclair to serve those in lakeside cottages during the summer months. It was dedicated in the summer of 1907, shortly before Father Sinclair's sudden death. In fact, he had been at Star of the Sea to celebrate the season's closing service on the morning of the day he dropped dead from a heart attack, September 22, 1907.



Probably the most important event in the long history of SS. Peter & Paul parish took place in 1910 when the entire parish plant on Maple and King Streets was sold to the Buffalo, Rochester, and Pittsburgh Railroad, and property was acquired on West Main Street. Some interesting details are noted in Father Gefell's building statement of January 1, 1913:

SS. PETER'S AND PAUL'S CHURCH - BUILDING STATEMENT

January 1, 1913

Purchase of property for Site.....	\$76,614.09
Total Cost of Construction of Buildings.....	<u>193,733.14</u>
	\$270,347.23

ASSETS

*Appraised Value of Rental Real Estate Mortgages held.....	\$27,064.14
Appraised Values of Securities held.....	25,600.00
Balance Due from Railroad as per Contract Sale.....	20,000.00
Balance in General Fund January 1, 1913.....	211.20
Parish Debt, January 1, 1913.....	<u>62,024.66</u>
	\$134,900.00

*Value of Parish Property Not Included in the
Above Assets.....\$270,450.00



Received from Railroad (to date).....	\$150,000.00
Borrowed on Notes.....	100,000.00
Sale of Vacant Houses Removed from Premises.....	685.00
General Fund.....	<u>19,662.23</u>
	\$270,347.23

LIABILITIES

Borrowed on Notes.....	\$100,000.00
Mortgage on Old Church Property and Notes.....	24,500.00
Notre Dame Order for Old Convent...	<u>10,400.00</u>
	\$134,900.00

J. EMIL GEFELL, PH.D., Rector and Treasurer

PETER A. VAY
FRANK N. BRAYER
TRUSTEES

JOHN P. SMITH
WM. J. HAUSER
AUDITORS

Construction of the "new" church began in 1910 and took a year and a half. The main altar and side altars, the pulpit, several statues, including those of St. Peter and St. Paul which originally stood in the facade of the 1859 church, were incorporated into the new edifice. Seven stained-glass windows were also transferred, inscribed with the names of donors: Joseph and Josephine LOWENGUTH, William ROSSENBACH Family, Mary HUBER, Mr. & Mrs. Henry BRAYER, Frank R. RUDY, Caspar and Salome DAUS, Peter and Catherine SPANG.

An altar of the Sorrowful Mother was erected in memory of Father Sinclair.

After buying the property on Maple and King streets, the Railroad allowed it to be used by the newly formed Italian Congregation of St. Lucy while their own church and school were being built at 247 Troup Street. St. Lucy Church was dedicated on May 18, 1913. It was closed and the buildings sold in 1975.

At a ceremony in October, 1911, Bishop Hickey laid the cornerstone. The 1843 and 1859 cornerstones were also added to the new building.

Bishop Hickey also officiated at the dedication of the nearly completed church building on June 30, 1912.



The present rectory was erected at a cost of \$60,000.00 and occupied in 1926. This is a far cry from the description given by the first pastor, Father Leviz: " The quarters for the priest in the church basement, consisting of two rooms, were arranged in 1845..."

There was an "Open House" at the rectory on April 20, 1926

Due to the heavy debt incurred by the building project, the decoration of the interior of the church was delayed for 17 years. Assisted by his son Luigi and a crew of artisans, Professor Gonippo Raggi started the work in June, 1929. In five months, he had transformed SS. Peter and Paul's interior into full integration with its classic style. Completion of the project was celebrated on Sunday, November 10, 1926. The Bishop administered the Sacrament of Confirmation in the afternoon.

How does one begin to capture in a few sentences the 125 years of service and dedication of the School Sisters of Notre Dame to the parish and young people of SS. Peter and Paul? Whether or not they were ever thanked enough or appreciated enough by their students, the great majority of the Sisters have now received the ultimate reward for which they unselfishly spent their days.



For who else but the Lord can measure or count
the hours of teaching and counseling..
the mountains of paper....
the hours of practicing for processions....
the number of First Comunions and Confirmations..
the pride and joy of seeing graduates receive high
school scholarships....
the satisfaction of a child's progress,
however slight....
the pain for those who failed
or who could not succeed....
the struggles through declining enrollment and
eventual closing of the school....

All these and so many more events, happenings, feelings,
are unknown to most of us, but known to God... But
those of us who do know, can remember the sisters with
pride and gratitude:

"I remember Sister _____ of grade _____."

"I was one of the fortunate ones to have Sister
Rosamond for two years."

And so the school that began with 100 girls in the "small
dwelling near the church" occupied by the sisters, grew
through hundreds and thousands of students, and
through three school buildings over the years, to its
closing, due to low enrollment and high costs, in 1972
with 161 students.

What stories those walls could tell !!



In 1950, Father Fox inaugurated a long - range plan of
remodeling and refurbishing the entire parish plant. The
bell tower masonry was repaired and the cement crosses
replaced with copper ones. Kneeling pads were installed
on all the pews. The decorations and paintings in the
church interior were cleaned and restored. Extensive
repairs were done in the school and around the property
outside, including walkways and parking lots. In 1954 the
entire plant was converted to gas heat and a gas boiler
installed in the rectory. Carpeting was installed in the
entire church.

Listed as an "Extraordinary event" in the parish history is
the installation of an electronic organ in 1958. It was
blessed by Father Fox on Sunday, March 16, and after a
Solemn High Mass there was a recital by John Paul Bonn.
He and his brother Francis were sons of a distinguished
organist, Professor Eugen Bonn.

In 1959, new lighting fixtures were installed in the church
ceiling to provide direct lighting for the entire nave.

The next entry in the HISTORICAL REPORT states :

"March 6, 1959, Father Fox suffered a mild heart attack
and was hospitalized (St. Mary's) for several weeks." This
is no great surprise considering all the work that was
being done!





CONCLUSION



Some people believe that history repeats itself.

One thing is certain however: We can learn from history to repeat the successes and to avoid the failures. The question is: "Do we", "Does anyone?" This question is a valid one in our own personal and family history as well as in the history of our church, our community or our country.

In trying to emphasize the importance of people in this history of SS. Peter and Paul Church, an uncanny fact was discovered: from the first bell ringer, Peter Renaud; and early janitor, Peter Voss; the donor of a six-acre plot to the church for use as a cemetery, Peter Till; to our own beloved Peter (Pietro) Guerrieri. Peter seems to be a popular name in this parish ! Do you know any others?

Perhaps there is still enough nostalgia in us that the next time we see Peter Guerrieri going up into the tower to ring the bell on Sunday morning, we can think back to another Peter, calling neighbors to help fight a fire.....

If at any point during this celebration of our 75 years on West Main Street, anyone has said: "I didn't know that!" or "I never thought of it that way." or "I didn't realize they were related...." or "Imagine what that must have been like" then the purpose of our year of celebration will be completely fulfilled!



PASTORS

1843 - 1987

Rev. Ivo Leviz, OFM

Rev. Anthony Berenyi

Rev. Leonard Schnieder

Rev. Rudolph Filimius

Rev. Francis Krautbauer

Rev. Joseph Sadler

Rev. Francis Sinclair

Rev. J. Emil Gefell

Rev. Robert J. Fox

Rev. William Davis, ss.cc.

Rev. Daniel McCarthy, ss.cc.

Rev. William Heffron, ss.cc.

Rev. Richard McNally, ss.cc.

Rev. Richard Czerwein, ss.cc.





PASTORS
1843 - 1987

*Dates from 1st & last
Baptisms*

Rev. Ivo Leviz, OFM *Apr 21, 1843 - 1846*
Rev. Anthony Berenyi *Aug 25 - 1846 - 1848*
Rev. Leonard Schnieder *May 28, 1848 - 1849*
Rev. Rudolph Filimius *Sept 30, 1849 - 1851*
Rev. Francis Krautbauer *Oct 18, 1851 - Apr 13, 1859*
Rev. Joseph Sadler *Apr 10, 1859 - July 30 - 1865*
Rev. Francis Sinclair *Oct 1, 1865 - Aug 4 - 1907*
Rev. J. Emil Gefell *Oct 20, 1907 - June 1950*
Rev. Robert J. Fox *June 50 - ?*
Rev. William Davis, ss.cc.
Rev. Daniel McCarthy, ss.cc.
Rev. William Heffron, ss.cc.
Rev. Richard McNally, ss.cc.
Rev. Richard Czerwein, ss.cc.
Rev. David P. Reid ss.cc.

*Fr Cismann
interim administrator*



— June 96

Rev. Paul Tomasso 1996 - 2000