

## The History of St. Patrick Parish in Chesterton, Indiana

Father Heeg has on occasion joked about the "atheist train engineer" who blasts the locomotive's horn while Father is saying Mass. But in a way it is appropriate that St. Patrick Church is in such close proximity to a rail line, for the church had its start serving Irish rail builders literally only a few blocks south of its current address on North Calumet road. So while the blast of the train's horn may not be appreciated, its echoing of our church's past might be.

The history of St. Patrick Church began in 1822 when Joseph Bailly, a French Canadian fur trader, landed on the north bank of the Calumet River in what is now Porter County. Bailly successfully traded with the area natives and made a home here. In 1824 Bailly married his second wife, Marie LeFevre, who was part Ottawa Indian. Devout Catholics, the Baily's built a homestead that became a recognized and frequent stopping place for missionaries en route to and from Chicago. The parlor of the Bailly home served as the sacristy, and the dining room as the sanctuary. The Catholics of the area attended Mass at the Bailly homestead until 1841.

In 1858, Father E.B. Kilroy, a missionary, founder and pastor of St. Peter's in LaPorte, came to the area and built a small frame church on the corner of Calumet Road and Michigan Avenue. The church was dedicated to Ireland's patron saint, St. Patrick, and for 10 years, the little St. Patrick's served as a mission.

The first resident pastor of St. Patrick's, Father John Flynn, planned a larger church and purchased two lots on the corner of Third and Indiana for that purpose. Two years later, in 1868 Father Flynn died. Patrick Flynn commissioned a stained glass window of St. Patrick and donated it in memory of his brother, Father John Flynn. That window is located in the narthex of our church today.

A portion of the second St. Patrick Church was erected in 1874 by Father Michael O'Reilly. In 1879 Father Kroll came to St. Patrick. Taking on his first assignment, Father Kroll had a congregation of 35 families and faced \$1,560 in debt. Yet every year for 19 years, Father Kroll made a major improvement at St. Patrick's. He built a rectory, enlarged the church, furnished and decorated the interior, built the spire, and built a two room classroom under the church.

On September 4, 1890, St. Patrick's school opened with 50 students in attendance. In 1894 Father Kroll brought the School Sisters of Notre Dame to St. Patrick School. They remained until 1973.

In 1898 Father Kroll was transferred and Father F. Von Schwedler became the new pastor. Although at St. Patrick's for only fourteen months, Father Von Schwedler built Father Kroll's school at Third and Broadway. Rose Howe, the second daughter of Joseph Bailly, left in her will (d. 1891) \$2,900 for a school. A stone plaque, which today is in the garden of St. Patrick's School, was inscribed, "In Grateful Memory of Rose Howe-Founder of St. Patrick School-Built 1898."

Father E. F. Eisenhardt built the new St. Patrick School in 1950 for \$125,000. Father Ralph Hoffmann added a chapel and three classrooms to the school in 1962 for \$92,000. By 1981, plans to enlarge the church were made because the congregation had grown to 1,150 families. Father Lawrence Heeg, who had come to St. Patrick's in 1976, built the new St. Patrick Church on the school grounds in 1989 instead.

In 1991, St. Patrick Church had a congregation of 2225 families; the school had an enrollment of 240 students.