

“The History of St. Dennis is entwined with the history of the canal, the immigrants who built it, and the growth of the city of Lockport. St. Dennis represents the struggles, the ambitions, and the sacrifices of the parishioners.”

– Parishes on the Prairie by Dr. Eileen McMahon

1846 – 2021 History of Our Church

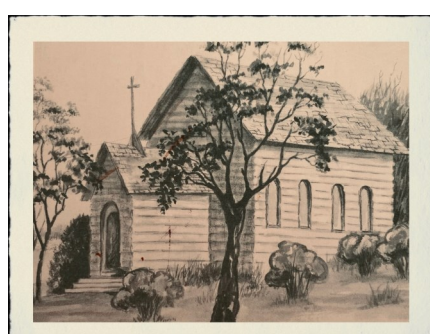


St. Dennis Church

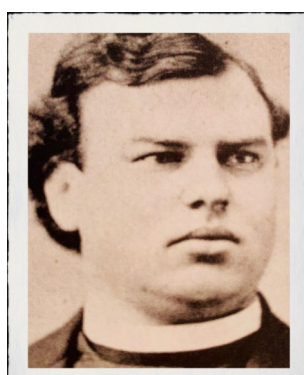
Established 1846

Celebrating 175 Years of History, Community & Faith.

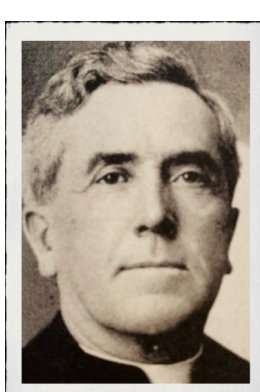
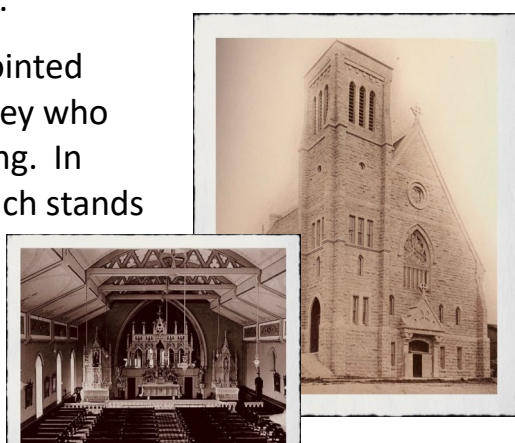
The last Sunday in May, 1846, marked the first time Mass was celebrated in the newly formed parish named Saint Dennis. The first Mass was held in a simple wood framed chapel which was moved from its original site in what was then Haytown/Emmetsburg. The Haytown/Emmetsburg church building was the actual structure of the first Catholic Church organized in Lockport in 1837.



Fr. Dennis Ryan came to serve as the first pastor of Saint Dennis Parish. Fr. Ryan served as pastor of Saint Dennis until his death in 1852.

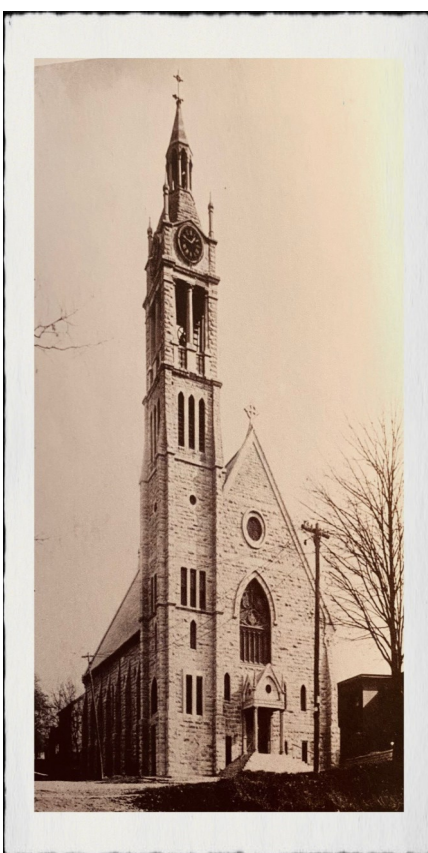


In 1872, Fr. Maurice Dorney was appointed pastor of Saint Dennis. It was Fr. Dorney who saw the need for a new church building. In 1877, work began on the building which stands today as the visible sign of the durability of Saint Dennis Parish. Our church was completed in 1879; at the time, it cost \$25,000 to build the visibly impressive structure.



In 1880, Dr. James J. McGovern, the first native-born priest to be ordained in the Chicago Diocese, was assigned as pastor of Saint Dennis Church.

Dr. McGovern established our parish school. He converted the old church building into a school building, and convinced the Sisters of Providence from Saint Mary of the Woods in Indiana to open their first mission school in Illinois.

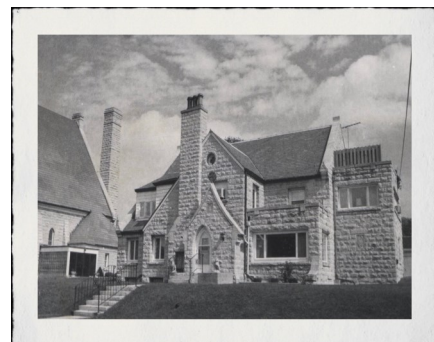


In 1887, the church tower was increased in height and a statue of the Sacred Heart was placed on its pinnacle.

Fr. James P. O'Donoghue became pastor in 1922. It was Fr. Donoghue who was responsible for building the current school building. The new parish school was dedicated and named Sacred Heart School. The school name changed in 1957 to St. Dennis Catholic Grade School.



Fr. O'Donoghue also remodeled the interior of our church, adding murals, opening the basement, and changing the entry point of the church to its present day configuration. Fr. O'Donoghue also built the present day rectory in 1923.

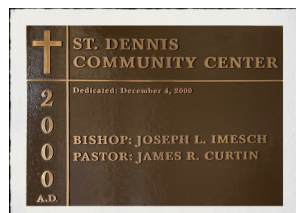


On March 30, 1947 a fire swept through parts of the inside of our church. Several changes were made to the interior during reconstruction and remodeling. The sanctuary obtained the most notable changes.



In August 1965, a tornado struck Lockport. The tornado peeled off much of the roof of the church and ripped off the taller part of the church tower destroying the statue of the Sacred Heart. Once again, Saint Dennis was repaired and rebuilt, strengthening our structure and community.

In April of 1977, a second fire occurred on the inside west section of the church. Though there was significant damage, thankfully the fire was contained and the core structure was sustainable.



In December of 2000, the St. Dennis Community Center Gymnasium addition was dedicated as a new meeting place for ministries, community events, and youth sports.