

SAINT MICHAEL CHURCH

In the month of June 1872, some members of St. Joseph's and Holy Redeemer's Catholic parishes held a meeting for the purpose of considering the advisability of building a church and forming a parish nearer their homes in the northeastern section of the city. There was no streetcar service in the section and this fact made quite a hardship for the older people to attend the church services especially in winter months. Several meetings of these men were held to discuss the ways and means of financing the undertaking. Finally, the course was laid to take up voluntary subscriptions from the people of the proposed parish limits. This method was followed and \$6,000 was pledged. A committee presented their cause to Bishop McQuaid to obtain from him the necessary permission to build the new church. In compliance with their request, the Bishop authorized them to purchase 2 acres of land on Clinton Avenue North near Clifford Avenue.

In January 1873, the committee sought a pastor for the parish. The Reverend A. Pingel of St. Joseph's church was given temporary charge over the 80 families leaving St. Joseph's and 100 families leaving Holy Redeemer parishes to form the first congregation for the new church.

On May 26, 1873 the new parish was organized. St. Michael was chosen to be the patron Saint of the new church. Before the meeting was closed, plans were drawn up for a combination church and school. The architect, O. Knebel, made the plans for the building 126 feet long and 66 feet wide. Contract for the mason work was let to Michael Henricus and for the carpenter work to Dominic Nura, totaling in amount to \$16,000. For fear work might come to a standstill because of lack of funds, seven members of the new parish mortgaged their homes and gave promissory notes in the amount of \$8,000.

The digging of the foundation began in July 1873. The labor in digging the foundation was volunteer work. Men came with their teams of horses and dug the foundation without pay.

The corner stone was laid amid great ceremony on September 14, 1873. Early in the afternoon the societies connected with the various neighboring parishes on N. Clinton Avenue and paraded to the new church grounds, carrying the cornerstone. The church was to be erected 200 feet back from Clinton Avenue with the idea that the future would see a new church on Clinton Avenue itself and this one would be used for the school. Bishop McQuaid addressed the audience and congratulated them on the great work that they had undertaken. Father Pingel preached to the people in German, acknowledging their hearty support.

On February 1, 1874 Reverend Fridolin Pascalar was appointed pastor of the parish to succeed Father Pingel. It was under his supervision that the new church of St. Michael reached its final completion and was made ready for the dedication and blessing by Bishop McQuaid.

On Sunday, March 8, 1874 the dedication ceremony took place. The Bishop was escorted from his home to the ceremony in a carriage drawn by four white horses. Both he and Father Pascalar addressed the gathered parishioners.

On Sunday, May 17, 1874 in the afternoon a large congregation assembled in the new Church of St. Michael to witness the blessing of 2 new bells, destined to be hung in the belfry. They were manufactured in the foundry of Meneely and Kimberly, West Troy. The bell weighing 1,015 pounds bore the inscription, "Pio IX papa, Pontificatus anno 27; Bernafdo McAuid, Episcopo; Fridalino Pascalar, pastor primo ecclesia Santae Michaelis' Rochester, N.Y. 1874." The small bell weighing 525 pounds was inscribed: Sancta Maria, Ora pro nobis; St. Michael's Church, 1874.

In 1878 the parish erected a large, handsome brick rectory with

stone trim adjacent to this first church/school building and fronting on Evergreen Street (now Melita House).

It was in the year 1887 that the plans were drawn up for the new St. Michael's Church. These plans provided for a magnificent Gothic stone church. It was in the form of the Latin cross, in length 177 feet and 92 feet in width of transept. "The most prominent feature of the front of the church will be the grand tower which will be 220 feet in height (the tallest in the region). Immediately above the base of the tower will be the belfry to contain at present the 2 bells which later will be replaced by 5 new ones. A clock with 4 dials, 14 feet in diameter, will surmount the belfry. A long tapering spire will be surmounted by a gilded cross 10 feet high. The plans call for 3 front entrances, each surmounted by a gable. Directly above the front center entrances will be a copper statue of St. Michael, the patron of the church, represented as trampling on Satan and driving him into hell. Ten large windows will light the transepts. A vestry will be connected with the rectory."

The cost of the church was estimated at about \$150,000. The working plans were to be completed in December of the same year so that contracts might be let at the first of the year.

At this time there were 715 families in the parish, with children under 12 years of age numbering about 1,300. The growth of the parish had been tremendous and the necessity of the new church was growing with it.

On March 18, 1888 Bishop McQuaid made a canonical visitation to St. Michael's Church to announce the names of parties whose bids for work on the new church were accepted. They were as follows: The stone contract including the polished granite columns went to Whitmore, Rauber and Vicinus who bid \$39,800. The stone material was to be the Lockport sandstone, rock-faced. The base walls were to be of brown Medina stone. Mason work was given to H.H. Edgerton for the sum of \$40,773. The carpenter

work was given to Joseph May at a cost of \$24,350. The 3 contracts did not include the cost of excavation or the construction of the tower above the roof. The parish had on hand \$40,000 and a large fair was held in August 1888, which netted another \$9,042.63 in cash.

Dedication of the New Church – 1890

Work continued rapidly on the new church. Two years later the church was completed. The dedication day, September 29, the feast day of St. Michael, was a banner day in the history of the parish. Long before ten o'clock, the hour appointed for the dedication ceremony, there was no room available within the new church. The procession included the Chancellor of the Diocese, Reverend H. DeRegge, students from St. Andrew's Seminary, Rt. Rev. Otto Zardetti of St. Cloud, Minn., and the Rt. Rev. Vinand Wigger of Newark, N.J.

Thousands came from the city in the weeks that followed the dedication to view the splendor of the church. All were edified with the stained glass windows that graced the church. Ten large stained glass windows give light to the nave and transept, 5 on each side. The semi-circular sanctuary contains 5 more stained glass windows. They represent the archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, the angel appearing to St. Joseph, and the guardian angel protecting the child Jesus.

The gables are decorated with original wrought iron crosses with filigree designs and other decorative wrought iron brackets. There is a graceful secondary tower of copper construction on the ridge of the roof above the transept.

The tons of Lockport sandstone and Medina brownstone were hauled by barge down the Erie Canal, then onto horse and wagon, affixed to gin poles with slings and pulleys. The amount of human labor was phenomenal. The building was designed to seat 1,100 parishioners. The 15 large stained glass windows show scenes of the Old and New Testament in brilliant red, blue, green, and gold

hues.

The church yard is still surrounded on the north side by its original 19th century wrought iron fence, which lends character to the site.

Interior

“The interior of the church is of such architectural beauty that visitors express for it the utmost admiration” (History of the City of Rochester, 1895 John DeVoy).

Diocesan historian, Rev. Robert McNamara recently stated that “for size and daring, and aesthetic interest, St. Michael’s is tops.”

The interior of the church reflects the medieval concept that a church isn’t mere architecture, but truly the house of God constructed with a kind of mystical vision. Upon walking through the massive front doors of St. Michael’s one’s eyes are drawn immediately to a slender gold crucifix over the altar.

The main altar is of richly carved oak, executed by a German woodcarver, Anton Halstrick. Five spires rise from the altar, each highlighted with gold leaf. Two scenes of Christ’s life are carved in bas-relief on either side of the altar; one shows Jesus as a child, the other later in his life teaching children. The interior walls are frescos in red and gold borders with the fathers of the Roman Catholic Church overhead. The original pulpit from which sermons were delivered is designed with an unusual canopy behind and slightly above it. In the shape of a cloud, the canopy features a painting of a white dove, symbolizing God in the form of the Holy Ghost, on a sky blue background (Upstate, 9/25/83). (The interior wall stenciling was executed in the 1930s.) Ten 80 foot monolith granite columns impart an appearance of solidity to the interior that is in keeping with the entire work.

Stained Glass Windows

The 15 large stained glass windows show scenes of the Old and

New Testaments in brilliant red, blue, green, and gold hues. Ten large stained glass windows give light to the nave and transept. The semi-circular sanctuary contains 5 more stained glass windows. They represent the archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and angel with St. Joseph, and the guardian angel protecting a child.

Among the windows outside the sanctuary, purchased from a firm in Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria, there is one that is of special importance. The firm wished to exhibit a specimen of its art at the World's Fair in Chicago in the 1890's and asked if it would be allowed for them to send one of the windows in this church as a sample of their work. Permission was granted and the window was sent away on May 1st. Father Pascalar and several members of the parish saw the window on exhibition at the Fair and remarked that it was placed in a very poor position so that its beauty could not be seen to good advantage. Nevertheless, news was received that the window had been judged worthy of the First Prize in ecclesiastical art. The window thus honored represents Daniel in the Lions' Den as related in the Book of Daniel.

Another window depicts in color the scene of the Nativity. Upon close observation the observer can notice that one of the figures presenting gifts to the Christ Child is none other than Bishop McQuaid, which caused much controversy when the window was installed.

Most prominent of the windows in the sanctuary is the figure of St. Michael, the Archangel, directly above the High Altar. In his right hand is the lance with which he overcomes the rebellious Lucifer and hurls him into the flaming abyss.

Gothic encasements enclose each of the windows to make one harmonious exterior and interior. Every window in the church, with the exception of one, has a scene with an angel represented.

The Organ

The magnificent organ was built by the J. W. Steere & Son Organ Company of Springfield, Mass., and was dedicated in 1903. It has 33 stops and 39 ranks. There are a total of 2,169 pipes. The organ was installed at that time for \$3,400. Today its replacement would cost well over \$600,000.

There were two organists from 1893 until 1970-Pohl and Kames-since that time we have been blessed with several Eastman School of Music graduates and doctoral candidates. The Bells/Chimes

Originally the present tower contained the 2 bells that were moved from the tower of the original church structure when the new church was completed in 1890.

Early in 1903, the parishioners of St. Michael's decided to raise, by popular subscription, a sum sufficient to purchase a "chime of bells, a new pipe organ, and a belfry clock" and have them installed prior to the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the ordination of their pastor Rev. M. J. Hargarther.

The new chime of bells cost \$8,000 in 1903 and still to this day they are considered "the finest in the state" (today it would cost \$140,000 to replace them). Thirteen bells comprise the CHIMES and these were blessed on Sunday, July 26, 1903. The largest bell weighs 4,800 pounds and the smallest bell 127 pounds. They were cast by the McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore, MD.

Of the 13 bells, 8 are stationary and comprise full octave of C, a sharp fourth, a flat seventh, and 3 notes above the scale. The 5 swinging bells are also played regularly and can produce a much greater volume of sound than the stationary chime bells.

As is customary with bells in churches, all of the bells have names, ranging from "Johanes" the great bell, through St. Anthony, St. Leo, St. Andrew, St. Francis, St. Michael, St. George, St. Luke, and St. Francis, as well as the Sacred Heart bell and the Blessed Mother's bell.

The New School – 1896

The pioneers of St. Michael's realized the necessity of opening a parish school with the opening of the church itself. The church and school were served by the same building. In fact, it was the home of the sisters who taught them. March 9, 1874, the day following the dedication of the first church, marked the first session of St. Michael's school with an attendance of 240 pupils. The rear of the church directly in back of the altar was given over to the schoolwork. The two classrooms were arranged, one for the boys and one for the girls. The care of the children was under the direction of the Sisters of the Order of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Before long the rapid growth of the parish necessitated the erection of a new church in 1888. In 1896 Father Hargather took charge of the parish and saw the need for a new school to satisfy the requirements of the growing community. Just 2 years after he began his work, ground was broken for the present St. Michael's School. That building was dedicated in 1899. It has been gloriously restored to its former grandeur in the 1990s and is used as public housing.

God Builds No Schools

God builds no schools! by His plan

The labor has been left to man.

No walls miraculously rise,

No halls or rooms from the skies

Fall on a bleak and barren place

To be a home of truth and grace.

The humblest school demands its price,

In human toil and sacrifice.

Men call the school a path to God

O'er which the souls of Children trod

In search of trust and love and hope
As blindly through life's mists they grope,
To where God dwells, but it is man
Who builds the school and draws the plan,
Pays for the mortar and the stone,
That none may die with God unknown.

St. Michael's Parish

In June 1872 some members of St. Joseph's and Holy Redeemer parishes joined together to discuss the needs of the German Catholics in the Butterhole area of Rochester. Bishop Bernard McQuaid, who had been bishop 4 years, gave permission for the purchase of 2 acres of land on N. Clinton near Clifford Avenue. The parish was formally incorporated in July 1873 with Rev. August Pingel, C.S.S.R. named as temporary pastor of the 200 family parish. By March 8, 1874 the first church was completed and dedicated, and in November 1874 the first pastor Rev. Fridolin Pascalar arrived from Germany to take over as permanent pastor. The first rectory was built in 1878, and in 1893 when the new rectory was finished, the former rectory was added onto to be used as the convent for the sisters. The parish grew in numbers rapidly, and so more land was purchased, and even a wooden school was built in which the School Sisters of Notre Dame had more room to give classes.

The 3-ton foundation stone for the present-day large church was laid in May 1888 in the center of the rear wall where the high altar now stands, and the first mass was celebrated in it on September 29, 1890. The first church was eventually converted into the parish activities center. The new church was 200 feet long and 92 feet wide at the transept. The cross at the top of the 220-foot spire is 10 feet high. A great copper statue of St. Michael rests above the outer gable. This gothic edifice was designed by

the Chicago architect Alphonse Druiding, modeled after some European structures. The exterior Lockport sandstone, and Ohio sandstone trim, and Medina brownstone for the foundation were hauled by barge down the Erie Canal, and from there on horse and wagon to the site.

The main altar is of richly carved oak executed by a German woodcarver, Anton Holstrich. The interior walls are frescoes in red and gold borders with the Fathers of the Catholic Church overhead. The ten 80 foot monolith granite columns give solidity to the interior. The stained glass windows in the nave were purchased from a firm in Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria. They show angel scenes from the Old and New Testament, using brilliant red, blue, green, and gold hues. Five large windows in the sanctuary represent the archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, the angle with St. Joseph, and a guardian angel protecting a child. Ten other large stained glass windows give light to the nave and transept. The one picturing Daniel in the lion's den won a prize at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The nativity scene window includes likenesses of Bishop McQuaid and Father Pascalar, in accord with the tradition at the time.

At the turn of the century the parish had grown to include 1,000 families and the School Sisters of Notre Dame taught classes to 1,044 children in the new 1898 H-shaped school, designed by architect J. Foster Kelley. The school closed in 1975, and was vacant for a long time except for the ministry of St. Michael's Woodshop. The building was sold and today houses St. Michael's Apartments (28 subsidized units).

Father Mathias Hargather was appointed second pastor in 1896 and remained as pastor for 33 years. In honor of his 25th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood in 1903, the people had 13 bells which comprise the chimes (the largest weighing 4,800 pounds and smallest 127 pounds) and a tower clock placed in the church tower, and a new organ of 2,169 pipes, built by JW

Steers and Son Organ Company, blessed. Two years earlier the sacristy was enlarged and a chapel for the sisters was added to join the convent building to the church. In 1922 the office and the restroom were added to the church. The chimes were electrified by 1939 during the 25-year pastorate of Father Arthur Florack, the fourth pastor. The parish was financially secure, and so was able to help new parishes in their beginnings.

The 1960s witnessed the urban riots, the movement of people to the suburbs, and the beginning arrival of Hispanics into the city. Again St. Michael's welcomed immigrants into its midst by beginning a Spanish mass in July 1967 during the pastorate of Father Benedict Ehman, and an Italian mass in 1975. Bingo was begun to try to supplement the income. The whole Church was changing after Vatican II, and so the liturgies began to have more participation by the people, the Parish Council was begun in 1974, the parish was under the co-pastorate of Father Anthony Valente and Father Paul Freemesser, and a religious education coordinator, Ada Isasi-Diaz (today a well known theologian), was hired. Men from the parish were accepted into the permanent diaconate program; Julio Vasquez was among the first Hispanics to be ordained deacons. During the 1960s social outreach and advocacy began, and continues today.

During the pastorates of Father John Dillon and Father Vincent Panepinto the parish was gradually becoming predominantly Hispanic, with the Hispanics assuming greater responsibilities in leadership. When Father Panepinto was assigned to prison ministry in 1991, no pastor was appointed, and so Sister Kay Schwenzer was named pastoral administrator, and then along with Father Bob Werth, and followed by Father Laurence Tracy. In 1993 St. Michael's, along with Mt. Carmel and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier formed the cluster Community of Hope under the pastorate of Father Dennis Shaw. During these years there has been some cooperative ventures in ministry, and a sharing of some staff. We have begun small faith-sharing groups, a children's

liturgy of the Word was initiated in 1999, partnerships were formed with suburban churches, and we are attempting to be a more welcoming parish to all in the neighborhood and beyond. A ramp was added onto the church, stage one of the roof repair was done in 1999, the parish offices and meeting rooms moved from the former rectory to the former convent when the Melita House ministry moved out. In September 1999 a 7:00 p.m. Sunday Eucharistic liturgy was begun to respond to the desire of some people of having a more traditional celebration.

Our community is filled with members having hopes for increased ministry and evangelization, and the restoration of our church building so as to strengthen the Church in the city.

Modern History

Founded by German Catholics and once considered “the great German parish,” St. Michael’s today dominates the skyline of a burgeoning Hispanic community.

The history of St. Michael’s church leads one through a neighborhood’s transformation. At first, from the 19th century into the 20th, the neighborhood was known as “Butterhole,” the home of the German dairy community. By the middle part of this century, 1964-74, it was an area in upheaval. Today, it is still an area finding itself and one that is now predominantly Hispanic. The German population has all but left. Some second and third generation German descendants remain members of St. Michael’s parish, though they have moved elsewhere.

The first Spanish Mass was said at St. Michael’s in 1967. The school closed in 1973, after 99 years of operation. The nuns left the convent that year, and in 1974 missionary nuns from Guadeloupe, Mexico came to work with the growing Hispanic community.

Today, North Clinton Avenue serves New York State’s second largest Hispanic population. It also houses many Hispanic

organizations and is the home of the diocese's Spanish Apostolate, an outreach arm doing advocate work in the Spanish community.

The Hispanic parishioners are taking a more active role in St. Michael's Church. St. Michael's council has brought in Spanish resources and leadership moving into a position of greater representation.

"With all of these changes, St. Michael's remains the dominant structure on North Clinton Avenue. Rising the distance like a European cathedral, it continues its mission into its 111th year. (Excerpted from Upstate magazine, September 25, 1983).

One hundred nine years after its construction, the grace and elegance of St. Michael's church still towers over the 7th ward. The feeling and character of the site of St. Michael's is unique. The complex is the sole remaining example of an entirely 19th century religious campus in Rochester. The church, convent, parish hall, rectory, and former school were all constructed prior to 1900 and have all been preserved into the late 1990s.