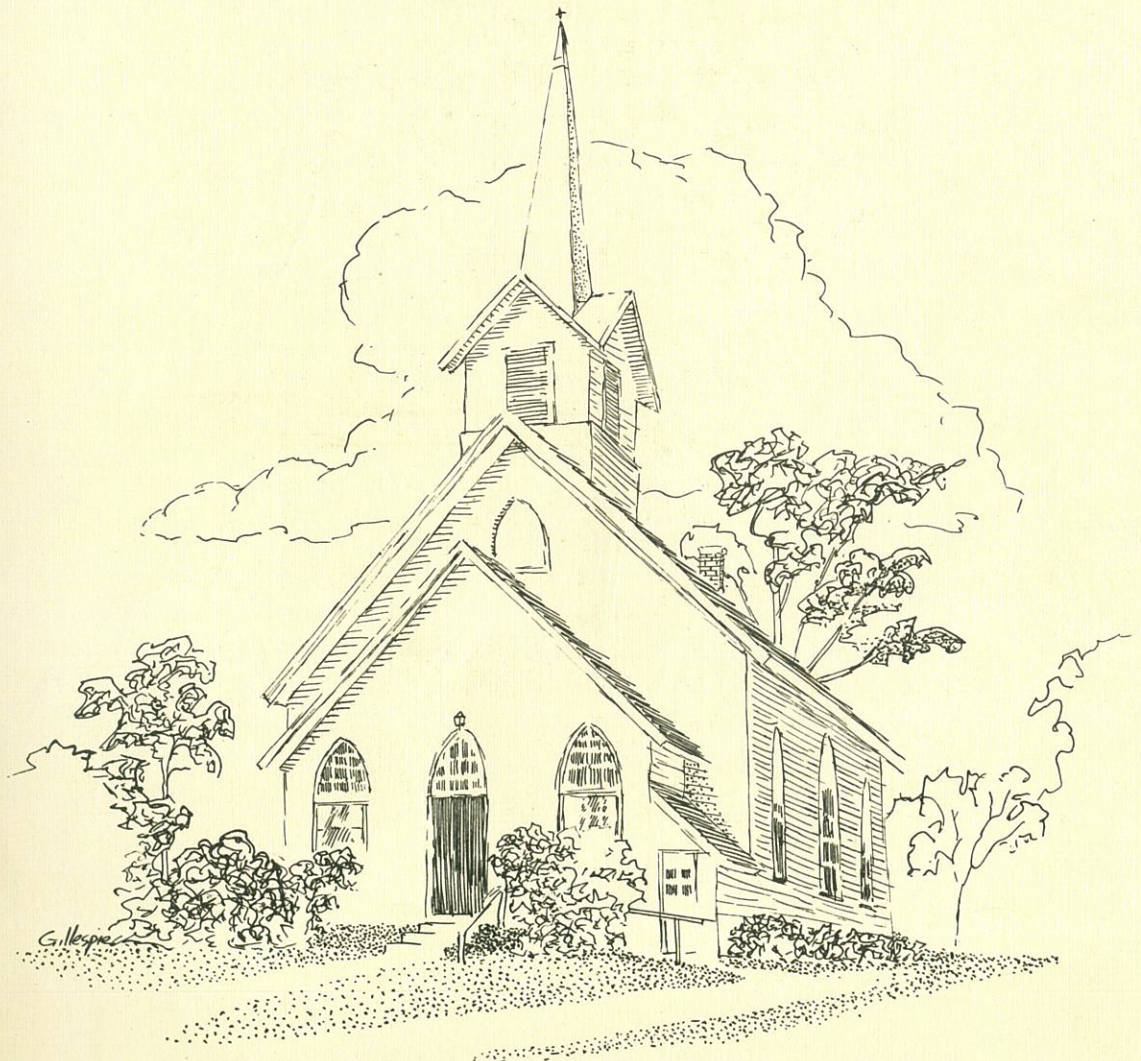


# ASPIRING CHRISTIANS

## HISTORIES OF YATES COUNTY CHURCHES



**Compiled by: Linda J. Jackson**

*Created for the 175th Anniversary of Yates County, New York*

1823-1998

## ST. MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, PENN YAN

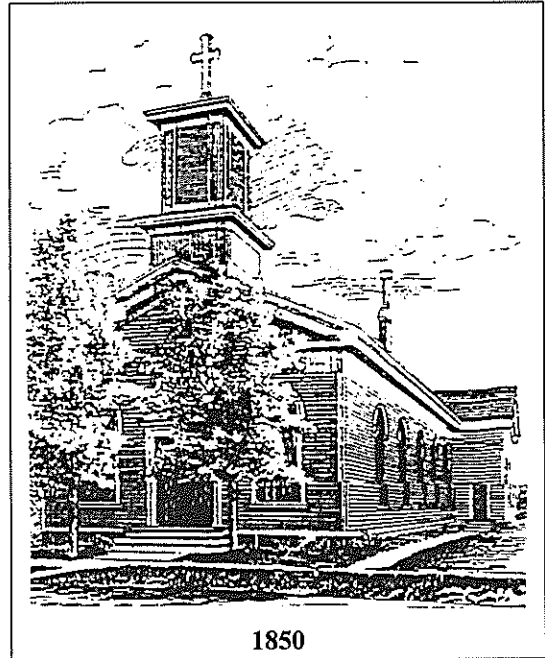
The first Catholic services in Yates County were probably in the 1780's at Kashong on Seneca Lake known then as Ben Barton's Landing. It has been said that De Bartzch and Poudre, white French traders who were established there, were visited by a priest from Oswego and he held religious service, the red men and women of the vicinity forming the principal audience. Such a visitation, if it occurred, was in the footsteps of the Jesuit fathers who had done so much, more than a century before, to convert the Iroquois to Catholicism.

Before 1847, Father O'Flaherty of Geneva came to Penn Yan and said mass, sometimes in the Court house, at other times in a school house located near the Fox's mills; then again in the home of Mrs. Mary Mulligan.

Some of the services, it is believed, were held in 1847 at the residence of Mr. Thomas Hendrick. His own family made up a good share of the congregation as he was the father of 14 children. They lived on lower Keuka Street, then called Pine Street; (as you cross Elm Street going toward the boat landings, it was the third house on the left). The Hendricks were a wonderfully fine family, and devout Catholics. The children were brilliant and turned out well. Peter became a Supreme Court Judge of New York, Michael became a U.S. Consul in Germany, two of the Hendrick daughters became Madames of the Sacred Heart in Rochester and two distinguished sons were given to the Church; the late Rt. Rev. Thomas A. Hendrick was Bishop of Cebu in the Philippine Islands, and the Rt. Rev. Joseph W. Hendrick was pastor of the Holy Cross Church in Ovid, NY and Domestic Prelate to his Holiness Pope Pius X. They were an exceptionally fine family and well loved by all who knew them.

Thomas Hendrick came to the United States from Ireland in 1847 and almost directly to Penn Yan. He was employed in the Anson Wyman Market for about two years and then for many years conducted one of his own. He was disturbed by the absence of a church here. In 1849, Mr.

Hendrick collected funds to build a church across the street from his home. Abraham Wagener gave them the land, and it was erected in 1850 and dedicated in honor of St. Michael.



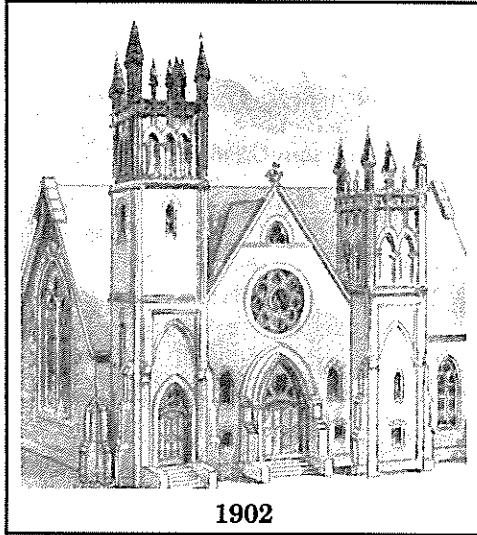
The modest new church was built in six months time, at a cost of \$2200 and with a debt of only \$900. Father Gilleride was the first resident pastor and stayed two years.

In 1882 and 1883 Father Eugene Pagani built the first parochial school. There was a newspaper editor Leon Lewis and his wife Harriet, a popular novelist who had a large house on Liberty St., with an equally handsome stable for their valuable horses, (some of them world famous in their day as were their owners). This house was later turned into the Catholic Rectory, and the barn made into the present day convent.

The present church on Liberty Street was built in 1902. A newspaper article describes the 1902 dedication: "Sunday, June 15, 1902, will long be remembered among the parishioners of St. Michael's Roman Catholic church in Penn Yan as the day of dedication of their beautiful house of

## ST. MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, PENN YAN

worship. Long before the hour announced for the services to begin visitors began arriving from all parts of the county and by rail from surrounding villages. There was a vast throng of interested spectators far out numbering the seating capacity of the edifice". The total cost was \$27,000. Of that, the seats were \$1400; windows, \$2500; the stations of the cross, \$560; other furnishings, about \$2000.



The altar boys that day were: George Shannon, James Dolan, William Reilly, Frank Reilly, John Loftus, Vincent Farrell, Thomas Burns, Peter Burns, Charles Craugh, Martin Craugh, Joseph Craugh and Edward McDonald. There had been provided for the occasion a silver trowel, with a royal purple velvet handle, and an enameled mortar board, inscribed "May 12, 1901".

In 1912 the Abraham Wagener Estate commenced an action in Supreme Court for ejectment against St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church of Penn Yan. The property in dispute is the old church building and land on Keuka (Pine) St. occupied as a place of worship until the new church on Liberty St. was dedicated June 15, 1905. In default thereof or when property ceased to be used "as a place of divine worship of a Roman Catholic Church" was to revert to the Wagener heirs.

Another newspaper item appeared thus: "Thursday morning, about 4:45 o'clock, Dec. 11, 1924, the fire alarm sounded forth and it was found that the frame structure of the old Catholic church on Keuka Street was on fire. The fire companies quickly extinguished the blaze, which would have destroyed a building which has long been an eye-sore and a bone of contention. It is reported that an unidentified man rapped at the door of the William Bolan home, which is situated next to the old property and gave the alarm, then disappeared. The close proximity of the dwellings near the old shell, frightened the residents when the fire was discovered. It is the consensus of opinion that the building was fired. It was unoccupied and is in a state of disrepair".

The newspaper article goes on to say: "The Old building is identified with the early history of the village. In 1849, there were about fifteen families of Catholic denomination living in or near Penn Yan. Rev. John Timon, Bishop of Buffalo, authorized Thomas Hendricks, the father of Monsignor Joseph Hendricks, of Geneva, to raise, by subscription, funds for the erection of a church building, which was done. Abraham Wagener, grandfather of H. Allen Wagener, of this village, donated a lot on Pine Street (now Keuka) for the erection of the church. On this lot John Southerland built the church at a cost of \$2,200. The church was dedicated during the same year and was called St. Michael's Church. Afterward the parsonage, across the street, was erected, costing \$1,500 and later on, Father English, a pastor, enlarged the church edifice, frescoed its interior, placed new seats in the building, painted it, and otherwise improved the property at a cost of \$1500. In 1902 the old building was abandoned and a new one erected on the Lewis property on Liberty St. This was during the pastorate of the late Rev. Martin J. Hendrick. When the old property ceased to be used as church property, according to the provisions of the deed, it reverted back to the heirs of Abraham Wagener and now is the property of Frank Wagener, of this village."

## *ST. MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, PENN YAN*

In 1924 Wilfred T. Craugh joined the priesthood after growing up in Penn Yan and working at the bakery of his uncle Mr. Richard Craugh. An older brother who was studying for the priesthood, Mr. Martin Craugh, died before he was ordained. Rt. Rev. Monsignor Wilfred Craugh went on to become rector of St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester.

A newspaper item dated April 30, 1931 mentions St. Michael's being capable of holding its whole congregation, which is the largest in the village, numbering over 1,000. The church has a social room and auditorium added in the basement.

A fire threatened the Liberty St. church in 1965. Fire broke out shortly after 8:40 a.m. in the boiler room of the 63 year old church serving approximately 1500 catholic parishioners in the community. Firemen quickly contained the blaze. The blaze followed an explosion when a spark ignited some gasoline.

In 1975 St. Michael's celebrated its 125th anniversary. They thanked God for all the blessings that have come upon them and their community through this parish.

Contributed by: *Oliver House Museum*

