

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION - ST. PATRICK PARISH

1868 to Present

The Immaculate Conception parish in Amenia, originally established in 1868, included the parishes currently in Dover Plains, Pawling, Pine Plains and Millbrook. At present, the parish consists of St. Patrick's church in Millerton and the Immaculate Conception church in Amenia; both primarily agricultural communities with dairy farming declining and horse training and breeding becoming increasingly prevalent.

The parish records indicate that in 1844 the first priest known to attend the sick and say an occasional Mass in the area of Northeast and Amenia was Fr. Riordan of St. Peter's Church, Poughkeepsie. In Amenia, he first celebrated Mass in the home of Thomas McEnroe. Then, in 1859 Father Charles Slavin became responsible for early Catholics here by being given charge of the whole Harlem Valley. He resided at Dover Plains and built the church there.

Fr. John Orsenigo followed him, in 1864, living at Croton Falls. He used to say Mass in the sheds at the railroad station in Amenia and in homes around Millerton. It was he who purchased the land and started to build the churches in Amenia and Millerton.]

During the pastorate of Fr. Orsenigo, masses were held in private homes around the village while preparations were made to build a church.

It was difficult to obtain an appropriate piece of land, because of opposition from non-catholics, until George Greathead (a Protestant) purchased the necessary land for the church. The ground was broken and the building began through the labors of the parishioners. In 1866 the church was completed. The first wedding occurred on the 14th of November 1876 between John Burk and Mary Ann Mack.

In Amenia, the first church was located at the corner of Route 22 and Powder House Road, on the site of a house later belonging to Edward Foley. The church was dedicated in September 1868 with the first baptism that of John Edward Jahem, the son of John and Ann Jahem, born on the 9th of July, 1868. The first recorded marriage was between James Milas St. John and Catherine Farrelly.

Fr. Tandy became the first resident pastor in 1864 and established the first Immaculate Conception Church in 1868 presiding over the additional missions in Pawling, Dover Plains, Millerton and Millbrook for twelve years. In 1871 the cornerstone was laid for St. Joseph's Church - Millbrook; the church being completed in two years, the cost of the church and land was \$17,000.00, including the property it was on. According to his diary, Fr. Tandy was forced to resign in 1880 "under the strain of so many outlying missions"; a complaint which was echoed by many of the succeeding pastors. Before retiring, in 1880, however, Fr. Tandy built a small one-room school on the northeast side of the church. The school began on the 7th of September 1881; with an initial response of seventy children. The classes were taught by lay persons, as there was a scarcity of teaching nuns in the area. Miss Esther Langtry was the first teacher, who commuted from St. Lawrence County; at quite a distance. The school contained two rows of double seats and a teacher's platform.

Fr. Tandy's successor, Fr. Daniel J. Corkery, arrived on the 27th of June 1880. He inherited mortgage debts on three churches located in Millbrook, Millerton and Amenia. The church in Millbrook had a mortgage of \$6000 at 6% held by Mrs. Caroline Weaton of Poughkeepsie, though the interest was made payable to Mr. Homer Weaton who had charge of her affairs.

The mortgage on the church in Millerton and property was \$2000 at 6% held by Edwin Vincent of Dover Plains. It was Fr. Coyle who sought out Martin Griffin to raise the funds necessary to pay off the mortgage. He wrote to many influential people from as far away as Alabama. Through entertainment and collections \$1300 was raised by Mr. Griffin. Then within a year the entire debt was removed.



Original Church

The church in Amenia had a mortgage of \$3000 at 7% held by Mr. Cornelius McCoon, 17 East 66th St. New York City. A second mortgage of \$1000 at 7% was held by Mr. William Tyman of Lithgow. The interest of this mortgage was also payable to Homer Weaton who had charge of his affairs. But before the mortgage in Amenia could be paid, the Amenia church was struck by lightning and completely destroyed July 29, 1886 by the result of a fire. The school was destroyed during the same time.

On January 7th 1881 the first assistant priest, Fr. D.J. Cealy arrived in Amenia. Then on the 28th of March 1881 deeds were received turning over about 2 acres of land, a house and barn on the corner of South and New Streets. The house was improved to accommodate the two priests, though the cost of this work would not be paid off until the 20th of December 1885. The barn was improved with fences and a terrace added to make a one room school house. The school opened here in September 1882.

For the new church, approximately four acres were acquired from J.W. Hughes for \$5000, including a house (which later became the rectory) and a barn. On April 5, 1887, the ground was broken and a cornerstone laid by Michael H. Corrigan, Archbishop of New York. Archbishop Corrigan and his party arrived by train from New York to lay the cornerstone which contained the newspaper and coins of the day. The church was completed by the end of the year, at a cost of \$12,775.00. After many delays, the church was dedicated on Sunday the 12th of February 1888 by Archbishop Corrigan. Fr. Corkery began teaching classes in the basement of the church on the 3rd of September 1888 and thus, the school began as soon as was possible after the opening of the new church.

Only a small "nest egg" from the fire insurance was recovered from the old church, but Fr. Corkery managed to pay \$3000 of the church debt through fund raising before he left in 1888.

On January 13th 1888 Fr. Molloy replaced Fr. Corkery as pastor and moved into the new church which had been accepted by Fr. Corkery that very day. In 1889 Fr. Molloy gained permission to make

parishes of Millbrook and Dover Plains, thus lightening the load of the mission work. On the 12th of May 1890 Fr. Anthony Molloy and the trustees voted to turn over church and land of St. Joseph's to the people of Millbrook for one dollar. Fr. Molloy resided, as pastor, from 1888 until 1894 when Fr. James McEntyre became the pastor from the 12th of July 1894 to 1898. During 1894 and 1895 both churches were repainted. Then in January 1896 the interior of St. Patrick's was totally renovated.

Fr. McEntyre proudly wrote about a "parish mission" opening in Amenia in 1896 preached by Rev. James Dougherty and a similar one opening in 1898. "On the first Sunday of October 1896 a mission was opened at Amenia by the Rev. James Dougherty. About 403 confessions were heard. This was followed by a three day mission at Millerton. One hundred confessions were heard." '

On the 17th of January 1898 a mission was opened by Rev. Thomas F. Cusack and William J. Guinon D.D. of the New York Apostolate. The mission was crowned with great success. People came to the Sacraments who were not known as Catholics. The second week of the mission was given at Taylors Hall to non-catholics. Over one hundred pro-testants attended this mission every night. Two hundred copies of Fr. Searle's book Plain Facts for Fair Minds were distributed to them. Many conversions were effected.

On April 17th, 1898 a mission to non-catholics was opened at Barton's Hall Millerton by the Rev. James E. Goggin and Daniel Cuninion of the New York Apostolate. The hall was crowded every evening with non-catholics. Besides the doctrinal leaflets that were distributed to them every evening, three hundred copies of Plain Facts for Fair Minds were given to them gratis. The results were most gratifying. The number of confessions heard during that week was one hundred fourteen.

On the 22nd of December 1899, Fr. Dennis Coyle replaced Fr. McEntyre. The school had grown and now required two teachers with Miss Jane McEnroe teaching the older children. Fr. Coyle instructed the younger ones, until he was able to secure the services of a group of French nuns from the Order of St. Ursula of the Blessed Virgin. In addition to 4f teaching the basic educational requirements, French, Embroidery, Art and Music were taught on Saturday afternoons" * and parents as well as children availed themselves of the opportunity. Perhaps, due to difficulties with the language and cultural differences these nuns, however, remained only about a year.

Fr. Coyle managed to remove the remaining \$2000 debt; primarily, by allowing Martin Griffin to raise funds by asking donations from private persons and community officials. All responded generously, as an evening of entertainment was given for the benefit of the church. Over \$1300 was raised in this manner, and the following year the entire debt was removed.

Fr. Francis Lavelle,, ordained and educated in Rome, succeeded Fr. Coyle in 1907 and spent forty-three years with his devoted parishioners] His older brother was the Rev. Monsignor Michael J. Lavelle of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Manhattan. During his tenure, he managed to acquire the Guernsey Estate and a substantial amount of land, to which he returned in his later years when Fr. Hughs took over the pastorate.

In 1910, Fr. Lavelle gained the assistance of the Dominican Sisters from Blauvelt, New York, in the school. The first nuns of this order were Sr. Benevenuta, Sr. Angela and Sr. Anselmi. With these three sisters and the help of Fr. Lavelle, the seventh and eighth grades were added. By 1913, the first eighth grade graduation was held. The members of the first class were - Maria Bevins, William Blinn, Elizabeth Buckley, Thomas Cunningham, John Fitzgerald, Christina Flynn, Mary Martin, Mary McEnroe, John O'Brien, Margaret O'Connor, Veronica Tobin and Marcella Turner. Marcella Turner, now Marcella Dahoney, was a member of that class and recalls fondly the teaching of Jane McEnroe, Sister Grace and Sister Helen Proper. At nearly ninety years of age, she is still deeply grateful for the excellent education the Catholic school provided herself, her family and her community.

Fr. Lavelle's acquisition of the Guernsey Estate included a house which eventually became the caretaker's house. Michael Stapleton began working for Fr. Lavelle in 1931, and after marrying Katie whom he had met at a church bazaar, they moved into the caretaker's house in 1932.

During the succeeding years the duties of the priest and sisters mounted and enrollment continued to climb while the Dominican nuns became more scarce. After twelve years, Fr. Lavelle requested to be transferred in a letter to Most Rev. Patrick J. Hayes, citing the long drives to Pine Plains and Millerton as "very difficult for even the strongest man to stand, even though "he loved the work, the place and the people." This request was denied and he remained until 1950 as pastor.

Though Rev. Daniel Hughes was pastor for only one year before he died of a sudden illness, his forthrightness, energy and untiring zeal resulted in the building of a new four classroom school and the repairing of the rectory, totaling \$75,000.00. Until the rectory was finished, Fr. Hughes had to live in a rented furnished room for many months. Finally, Fr. Lavelle moved to the Guernsey Estate with his housekeeper, Jane McEnroe, in order to vacate the rectory for Fr. Hughes. To help raise funds for the school and rectory, a street fair was held August 17,18 and 19,1950 which proved very successful in drawing broad community support. Parish boundaries were established that same year as South: below the Wassaic Institution; East to the Connecticut state line; North to the Dutchess County state line and West to Pine Plains. At the time of the building of the school Sr. Marie Gabriel, Sr. Ann Louise and Sr. Timothy were teaching approximately ninety pupils a year."

Fr. John J. Kane, assisted by Fr. Gilmartin, resided from 1950 to 1961. The new school and convent were dedicated by Cardinal Spellman in 1959 and Fr. Kane was elevated to the rank of Rt. Reverend Monsignor. During 1959, through efforts and generosity of Cecilia Trunz, the Church of St. Patrick, Millerton was completely renovated. Fr. Lavelle continued to say Mass at the Wassaic Institution; thereby lightening Fr. Kane's duties. After Fr. Lavelle's death in 1953, Rev. Bede Scully, O.F.M. Cap., was appointed as a full time chaplain at the Wassaic State School. In 1954 the Guernsey Estate which had been purchased by Fr. Lavelle earlier was turned over to the parish adding approximately twenty acres behind the current rectory and convent.¹

Fr. Dunn was the pastor from 1961 through 1973 and was assisted by Rev. John J. Manning and Rev. Peter McKeon. Fr. Dunn is credited with the addition of the gymnasium and new classrooms added to the school; dedicated ^ by the Most Rev. James E. McManus in 1965^In 1968 as the parish prepared to celebrate its 100th anniversary; the men of the parish cooperated in repainting Immaculate Conception. Fr. Dunn died in 1973 and was well-remembered for his fatherly care and devotion to the school.

Rev. Joseph P. Gallagher, a retired Navy Chaplain, was pastor from 1973 to 1985. He was first assisted by Fr. - Thomas Hoffay; then, Fr. Ivan Csete. The Dunn sisters recalled his devotion to the parish and his commitment to the parish school. By 1984, financing the school became increasingly difficult as enrollment dropped and the declining number of nuns available required the use of competitively paid lay teachers. Then Sister Helen Proper, after fourteen years as the principal of the school, resigned in 1985, because of continued illness; while Msgr. Gallagher retired and Fr. Csete became a Franciscan.

Fr. Richard A. LaMorte was appointed pastor in July 1985 with the retirement of Monsignor Gallagher and the transfer of Fr. Csete.

By September of the following year, the school could not be sustained with only 25 students enrolled. The convent was used by the Cardinal Hayes Home and the school for several programs, for learning impaired, handicapped and retarded children; as well as parish offices and a School of Religion.

In the spring of 1987, the people of the parish raised over \$150,000 for the renovation of the church and in preparation for the celebration of the beginning of its second hundred years. The renovated church was rededicated by Bishop Anthony F. Mestice, Vicar of Dutchess County, on

Sunday the 13th of December 1987 at a solemn liturgy. This was followed by a dinner for all parishioners in the parish center gym.

The parish now prepares to sustain the gifts of all its members; the faith of the past and the challenges of the future. Sr. Catherine O'Leary, O.P. is engaged with the development of lay ministry and adult education in the parish. Mrs. Cathy Valyou coordinates the parish effort of volunteer catechists from the parish for the religious education of youth. Mrs. Ann Bray sees to the management of the day to day responsibilities of parish records, calendars and communication. Mr. John Alessi cares for the physical needs of sustaining the parish building and grounds in good condition. Finally, a parish advisory board strives to articulate the needs and direction of the parish for the future.

Immaculate Conception - St. Patrick's has been blessed with an abundance of energetic and inspirational priests and religious from whom the parish has benefitted throughout its years of pilgrimage. However, it is certainly, the ongoing faith and commitment of the people who have been the fabric of this parish that has provided for its continued growth and made its vision ever new. At this writing, the people of the parish look forward with pride in their accomplishments and hope in the future.

"God has given us the gifts - we seek the vision to use them."

Rev. Richard LaMorte
Easter 1988

Certificate of Incorporation of The Church of the Immaculate Conception erected in the town of Amenia County of Dutchess.

State of New York }
 County of Dutchess }

Whereas, in pursuance of an act entitled, "An Act supplementary to the act entitled, 'An Act to provide for the incorporation of religious societies,' passed April fifth, eighteen hundred and thirteen; passed March 25th, 1863, we
Cardinal John McCloskey
 the Roman Catholic Archbishop of the Diocese of New York,

William Quinn
 the very Reverend Vicar General of said Diocese, Rev Daniel J. Corkey now the Pastor of the
Church of the Immaculate Conception
 erected in the town of Amenia County of Dutchess
 have selected and appointed Horace Wheaton
 and Joseph F. Connor two laymen,
 members of said Church, for the purposes in said act mentioned.

And Whereas, we, whose names are hereto subscribed, are desirous of incorporating said Church, as the Congregation thereof, pursuant to said act.

Now, Therefore, Know all Men by these Presents, That we do hereby certify that the name or title by which we and our successors shall be known as a body corporate by virtue of said act, is The Church of the Immaculate Conception that said Church is erected in said County of Dutchess and that we are the trustees thereof.

In Witness Whereof, we have signed these presents in duplicate, one part thereof to be filed in the Office of the Secretary of State of the State of New York, and the other in the Office of the Clerk of said Dutchess County of _____ and have acknowledged the same according to law.

Dated this twentieth day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and Eighty Two.



Signed in presence of
William Quinn
Charles Walsh
Daniel J. Corkey
Joseph F. Connor