

# HISTORY OF SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

Burlington, Vermont

From 1834 to 1930

Lake Champlain was discovered and named by the French explorer, Samuel de Champlain in 1609; and it belonged to the French Canadians until Quebec was invaded by three British Armies aided by many American Colonial Regiments, Militias and Ranger Companies in 1759 and 1760; a force almost equal to the total population of Quebec.

There were several waves of French-Canadian immigration to Vermont and other New England states: the first, at the time of the American Revolution; the second, after the failure of the Papineau insurrection of 1837; the third and greatest, during the last half of the nineteenth century, the period of industrial development. These Canadians worked in the lumberyards along the lake, in the cotton mill at Lakeside, in the woolen and cotton mills at Winooski Falls, on farms, on the railroads then under construction, and wherever else they could find work. Pay was good; and when several members of these large families had work, they pooled their savings, bought building lots and built their homes, friends and relatives helping. They clustered in settlements referred to as "French Village" or "Little Canada". Church and school formed the center.

Canadian volunteers in the American Revolution were the first arrivals. They could not return to Canada after the war because of the English sentiment, therefore many of them settled in and around Burlington and throughout the Champlain Valley. In 1815, Bishop Plessis, of Quebec, visited Burlington with Father Matignon and two other Canadian priests. He reported that there were about one hundred Canadian Catholics who could easily be formed into a parish. In October of that year, Father Matignon gave a mission in Burlington, validated marriages and baptized 17 children. In 1818, Bishop Plessis appointed Father Pierre Mignault, pastor at Chambly, Canada, to minister to the Catholics of the Champlain Valley. By horse and buggy, with indefatigable zeal, Father Mignault went about visiting families, baptizing, hearing confessions, celebrations Mass. He was appointed Vicar General by Bishop DeGoesbriand and continued his work until 1854. The earliest records of baptisms and marriages in the Catholic Church in Vermont begin in 1830 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, then St. Mary's Church, and at St. Joseph's Parish in 1834, before its foundation. They were left by the many missionaries who served the area. Many of the baptisms recorded at St. Joseph's were performed at St. Mary's Church, as well as marriages, but many of them took place in homes throughout the area. The working schedules and efforts of these amazingly hardy and zealous French-Canadian missionaries, who traveled the winter roads of Vermont to keep the faith alive in their emigrant flock, must have been grueling.

REV. AUGUSTE PETITHOMME, SS.CC., was the first French-speaking priest to live in Vermont. He signed his records simply "F. Amable, pretre missionnaire", his name in religion, and between June 1834 and Dec. of that year, he recorded 107 baptisms, at St. Mary's, at homes in Fairfax, Swanton, St. George, Milton, Charlotte, and a Vergennes schoolhouse. Schoolhouse #103 was "dans ma maison". The early records have preserved names we no longer hear in their

full glory: Bal dit Printemps, Vandandaigle dit Gadbois, Lefebvre dit Descoteau, Lefebvre dit Boulanger, Drogue dit Lajoie, Fonteneau dit Desmoulins, Sanctuaire, and a variety of imposing first names no longer bestowed on children. The year 1835 shows 107 baptisms, but curiously 1837 shows only 11, all of which were performed in Old Town, Maine, in St. Anne's Church. No more until 1841 when there 12 by G. L'Abbe and 12 by St. Germain. No more until 1849 when Father Petithomme entered one. April 28, 1850, seems to indicate the formal opening of the Baptismal Register by "Pierre Mignault, ptre, V. G., cure de la paroisse St-Joseph de Chambly, district de Montreal, Bas Canada, et Vicaire General de Boston".

In November 1841 the French Canadians of the county met in Burlington and decided to erect their own church. The Canadians, whose number had increased, asked for a French priest. Early in 1842 Bishop Fenwick appointed ABBE FRANCOIS ANCE pastor of the Canadians and work began on a separate church for them. It was the first French-Canadian Church in New England and stood on Prospect Hill, near the site of the previous Catholic Church destroyed by fire in 1838. The Canadians had won their own parish and pastor but they were not to enjoy them for long. Father Ance was robbed and injured by four criminals who had fled to Vermont to escape Canadian justice. His overly kind handling of the case led to such discord in the parish that Bishop Fenwick felt the priest could no longer function there effectively. The Canadians petitioned to keep him but he was sent back to Canada. Their church was sold and became a grocery. The Canadians returned to St. Mary's and to the care of Father O'Callaghan, supplemented by occasional visits by Father Mignault of Chambly.

FATHER MIGNAULT: Bishop Fenwick of Boston noted in his diary in 1847 that Father Mignault's journeys through Vermont had always been at his own expense and without remuneration. It was Father Mignault, as Vicar General for the diocese of Boston, who opened up the question later by asking the Canadians whether they wanted their own parish, since he knew of a priest who was willing to come. Their enthusiasm convinced him and in 1850, with the permission of the Bishop of Boston, Father Mignault appointed the Rev. Joseph Quevillon their pastor.

FATHER QUEVILLON: Leaving his pastorate, St. Elizabeth's of Joliette, P.Q., Father Quevillon arrived in Burlington and celebrated his first Mass for the Canadians on April 8, 1850, in the Old Court House. On April 28 an organizational meeting was held. The Canadians won permission to form a separate parish. They decided to buy their own land and they selected a site at the end of Gough St. (now Prospect), extending from Archibald to Pomeroy St. Work began July 29. On August 28, 1850, Father Pierre Mignault blessed and placed the corner stone. Father Quevillon was present. The building was roofed in and ready for divine services by Christmas. All the Canadians of Chittenden County attended the services. On Dec. 28, 1850, Father Quevillon, using the prescribed formula, recorded a marriage in the parish register:

Alfred Lafontaine, fils d'Amable et de Marguerite Cene  
Julie Langevin, fille de Paul et de Marguerite Brailleur  
"dans notre nouvelle eglise dediee sous le patronage de St-Joseph en presence de Joseph et de Charles Lafontaine".

Father Mignault, as Vicar General, blessed and dedicated the new church on June 1, 1851, placing it under the patronage of St. Joseph, the first patron of Canada. The church overflowed with people for the ceremony. It was the first "national" or language parish in New England.

**BISHOP DeGOESBRIAND:** On July 29, 1853, the Holy See separated Vermont from the Diocese of Boston and the Very Rev. Louis DeGoesbriand, a French nobleman, was named first bishop of the Diocese of Burlington. Bishop DeGoesbriand was consecrated on October 30 and arrived in Burlington on Nov. 5, where he was met by several thousand Catholics and escorted in procession to St. Mary's Church. He was installed in his pro-cathedral on Nov. 6 by Bishop Fitzpatrick. In the afternoon he presided at Vespers, preached in French and gave benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Joseph's Church. On the same day he appointed Father Mignault Vicar General of the new diocese. On Christmas Day after High Mass at St. Joseph's he confirmed 180 persons. During the next three years there were over 400 baptisms each year and on Oct. 16, 1854, Father Quevillon recorded the 357th for that year. On Oct. 18 he left the parish to return to Montreal.

**THE OBLATES:** The parish was served by the Oblates from late 1854 to Jan. 1857 during which time eleven of them were in residence but never more than three at one time. They had been sent by Bishop Bourget of Montreal. Father Augustin Gaudet was the first to be pastor, with Father Eugene Cauvin as his curate. They had ten missions besides the parish to look after. By this time there were five large Canadian parishes in Vermont, Brandon and Vergennes having been founded by Father Quevillon and Swanton and Highgate by Father Lyonnet. A lay brother, Brother Louis, arrived soon after. Others of the order who arrived later were Rev. Francis Xavier Coopman, Rev. Richard Maloney, Rev. Andrew Mary Garin, pastor for 2 months. Rev. Francois Andrieux, administrator for about 8 weeks. Others were present for brief periods. Their ministry ranged through at least 31 missions and stations, from Derby to White River Junction, from the Islands to Castleton. They were zealous and did much good. On Oct. 9, 1856 the Provincial of the Oblates notified Bishop DeGoesbriand that the Oblates would be withdrawn from Burlington. The Bishop strove to keep them but succeeded only in delaying their departure until after Christmas. Father Andrieux performed a baptism on Jan. 11, 1857 and the Oblates left Burlington on the following day.

Bishop DeGoesbriand now added the duties of Administrator of St. Joseph's Parish to those of his diocese. The baptismal register shows his entries, not in French but in Latin, with his signature and cross. During his administration of St. Joseph's Parish, Bishop DeGoesbriand laid down regulations for the conduct of parish affairs. This included the election of three trustees. On June 19, 1857 the entire congregation met to elect the first ones, who were: Michael Ledoux, for one year: Peter Allard, for two years: Patrick Fournier, for three years. Their responsibilities and authority are startling. They collected the pew rent and the offertory collections, kept the accounts, paid the priest the salary fixed by the bishop and took care of the current expenses of the church.

**FATHER CARDINAL:** On October 22, 1857, Rev. Herve Cardinal arrived from Brittany. Now the signature "Cardinal, recteur" appeared in the baptismal register. He started the repairs and additions planned by the trustees and the church were completed by Dec. 2nd. The Civil War began a few years later and many of his parishioners volunteered for service. Through the efforts

of Father Cardinal, four religious, Daughters of the Heart of Mary, arrived in Burlington, from Cleveland, Ohio, in 1863. They become know as the "Ladies of Nazareth". A portion of Father Cardinal's house served as their temporary home. In the garden there was a woodshed which they converted into a school for girls and began classes in January 1864. The winter was severe and the heating inadequate but by spring 125 girls were enrolled. This was the first St-Joseph's School. It was soon replaced by a new building, which was enlarged in 1867 to admit boys.

**MONSIGNOR CLOAREC:** Rev. Jerome Marie Cloarec, born in St. Sauveur, Brittany, arrived in Burlington as pastor of St. Joseph's church on August 1, 1871. Ordained in 1858 he had already served several Vermont parishes, including an eight year term as rector of Cathedral, collaborating with the bishop in it's construction. St. Joseph's registers now show Father Cloarec's signature, but not for the first time. He had made several entries between 1858 and 1871. Like his bishop he recorded baptisms and marriages in Latin. He insisted upon the correct form of the old French names and was careful to indicate in marriage records the Canadian parish from which the parents came, in the many cases where they were not native to the state.

Father Cloarec decided to build a new church and to keep St. Joseph's on the hill in repair until the new one should be ready. With the permission of Bishop DeGoesbriand, Father Cloarec and the three trustees of the parish, Alexander Rousseau, Louis Germain and Oliver Varennes, bought a lot on Allen and Locust Sts. (Elmwood Ave.), which included a house. On June 7, 1873 John Stephen Michaud was ordained priest and immediately assigned as curate at St. Joseph's. His father was Stephen Michaud who came from Isle du Portage, P.Q. to Burlington about 1836. His mother was Catherine Rogan from County Connaugh, Ireland. They were married in Burlington in 1841. It was Stephen Michaud who contributed so largely to the building of the first St. Joseph's Church on the hill. His son John was destined to become the second bishop of Burlington, Nov. 3, 1899, after a seven year term as Coadjutor bishop, and to found St. Stephen's Parish in Winooski. In 1874 three more young priests arrived from Brittany to serve expanding St. Joseph's and its attached missions. All served at different times in the parish; Rev. Joseph Kerlidou, Rev. Francis Yvinec and Rev. Jean Marie Coathuel.

Sept. 5, 1883 saw the beginning of the construction of our present St. Joseph's Church on the lot on Allen St. Contract for the basement went to Maxime Manseau, Winooski. The cornerstone was blessed and laid in June 1884. On Easter Sunday, April 10, 1887, the new church was opened to the public and Bishop DeGoesbriand presided at Pontifical Vespers. The following week a long mission was preached by two Jesuits and 500 men were enrolled in the League of the Sacred Heart. On June 19, three new bells were blessed by Very Rev. Thomas Lynch, VG. The bells were named Joseph Louis, Marie Jerome Francois, and Anne Antoine. St. Joseph's is now the largest church in the state, Romanesque in style, 200 feet long, 80 feet wide and 55 feet high in the interior. On April 8, 1888, Father Cloarec erected the magnificent Way of the Cross. 1889 saw the installation of the grand pipe organ, originally constructed for the Chicago Exposition. The wrought-iron cross on the steeple was erected, surmounted by the gilded cock, so typical of a Canadian parish. Father Cloarec bought our magnificent marble altar and had it installed by July 18, 1901. Our present rectory next received Msgr. Cloarec's attention and was constructed in 1904 and 1905, of the same red stone as the church and with even more durable masonry work.

CURATES: Msgr. Cloarec was now seventy years old and was given two assistants. Rev. Joseph Lacouture arrived in 1902 and Rev. Jean Marie Billon in 1905. These two priests were to remain with Msgr. Cloarec until his death in 1920. After celebrating his 80th birthday, Msgr. Cloarec left on a trip to Rome and to his native Brittany. Father Lacouture was administrator during his pastor's 3 month absence. When Msgr. Cloarec returned he was greeted with 80 joyous peals of his church bells. In 1918 there was a rare celebration - Msgr. Cloarec's Diamond Jubilee in honor of his sixty years of priesthood. He himself celebrated the solemn high Mass. Although being 85, he was active as before, insisting on taking his turn in the round of parish work and visiting of the sick, which last eventually brought on his final illness. On a night in the first week of February, when he had reached the age of 87, a call came in from St. Joseph's on the hill for a priest to administer the last sacraments to a Daughter of the Heart of Mary who was critically ill. Father Cloarec took the call. It was for Miss Virginia Francin, one of the oldest and most devoted of the religious, with a long record of service to the parish. Father Cloarec went to her, walking both ways. A chill brought on pneumonia and death came on Feb. 10, 1920. The funeral services were memorable. His body was laid in a vault in front of the altar in the basement chapel where he had said daily Mass throughout his long pastorate, A life-size plaque of him in his robes was erected in the upper church near the 12th station.

REV. NORBERT PROULX came to Burlington in March 1920 as pastor of St. Joseph's from Rutland's Sacred Heart of Mary, which he had constructed. He was a native of St. Zephirin, Yamaska County, P. Q. and had served several Canadian parishes. The crowded conditions at Nazareth School now forced Father Proulx to convert the old rectory behind the school into classrooms. In 1925 he called a meeting of the parish on the need for a new school. Before the end of 1929 the present structure was completed, equipped with the latest in ventilating, plumbing, heating and lighting. It was one of the largest parochial schools in Vermont, with over 900 children enrolled. After thirteen years of ministry at St. Joseph's, Father Proulx died on May 27, 1933. The bell tolled his age of 78, and his burial was in the family lot in St. Zephirin, P. Q.

This history contains many excerpts from the "History of St Joseph Parish, Burlington, Vermont" in the repertoire "Mariages de St Joseph de Burlington, Vermont 1834 - 1930" which was compiled by Veronique Gassette, a lifelong parishioner of St Joseph Church; and published by Editions Bergeron & Fils, Montreal, Quebec in 1978.

In 1988, St Joseph Parish published an excellent 240 page hardcover history book of the parish titled, "History of Saint Joseph Parish, Burlington, Vermont 1830-1987".