

The Roman Catholic Church in Skowhegan

The first record of mass being said in Skowhegan was in 1856 by Father John Bapst, a Jesuit from Bangor. That first mass was held at the home of Michael Dumont on what is know East Maple Street. The Catholics had no resident priest for a number of years but were regarded as a mission attached to the parish of St. Francis de Sales of Waterville.

About 1870 Father Halde of Waterville came to conduct services in Skowhegan and it was through his efforts that the original Methodist Church, located on Water Street, where the present Catholic Church stands, was purchased on December 18, 1871 and received the name of St. Mary's Church. Unfortunately, on March 21, 1880 the church burned and services then were held in the Engine Hall for awhile.

In 1881 Rev. Edmond Genereux was appointed the first resident priest and under his direction the new Notre Dame de Lourdes Church was built in the same location as the former church. Soon afterwards, the house west of the church was purchased and became the home of Father Genereux and succeeding priests. On October 14, 1883 special services were held on the occasion of the blessing of the bells and several visiting priests attended. Father Genereux remained with the church until 1888.

On August 23, 1889, Rev. Adolphe O. LaCroix came from Three Rivers, Canada to assume the duties of pastor. While here, Father LaCroix was responsible for the construction of galleries in the main part of the church and the addition of vestries. He also introduced the first Parochial School in September of 1897. Also in September the property east of the church was purchased and was fitted for a convent and six nuns of the Ursuline Sisters from Three Rivers P.Q. came to take charge.

In 1902 the Catholics built a brick building on the edge of the Kennebec River to serve as a school for Catholic children. The Sisters of the Franciscan Order from La Baie, St. Paul, P.Q. later took over the work of the school. In 1909 Father LaCroix retired from active duty and was succeeded by Rev. Phillippe A. Jouvin. Father Jouvin was with the parish for about eight months and lived in the convent during this time. Fire again hit the Catholic parish in December 1909 when the rectory was burned. In March, 1910 Father Jouvin passed away and Father Raoul Bourbeau carried on his work for a few weeks.

April 1, 1910 Rev. Phillippe E. Desjardins came from Chisholm to take over the parish and under his direction the church was remodeled throughout. In 1913, a brick rectory was built on the site of the old one and Father Desjardins was the first occupant. In 1916, Father Desjardins was transferred to Westbrook and replacing him was Rev. Louis A. Renaud. Father Renaud was a lover of music and took great pride in his organization in Skowhegan of St. Cecelia's Orchestra which had State-wide recognition.

In 1928 a new Austin pipe organ costing \$8000.00 was given to the church by Herbert H. Vigue of Detroit, Michigan and on September 23, it was dedicated with Bishop John Gregory Murray of Portland present. In July of 1928 Rev. Alban Michaud came to Skowhegan to assist Father Renaud as the first curate of Notre Dame de Lourdes Church. In June of 1932 he was replaced by Rev. Gaston E. Auger who remained in that office for thirteen years assisting Father Renaud and his successor, Rev. Ludger D. Ouellette.

On July 14, 1946, tragedy hit when fire hit the 65 year old church. Father Ouellette got permission to begin immediate construction of a new church; however he was very ill at that time and in November he succumbed to his illness before the new church could be built. Rev. Lucien H. Chabot then came to Skowhegan and assumed the task of constructing the new church. Through his tireless efforts, a brick church began to take shape in October of 1950. While the new church was being built, services were held in the chapel of the school and also in the Skowhegan Opera house. On June 5, 1951 the cornerstone was blessed by His Excellency Daniel

J. Feeney and on Sunday, August 17, 1952 the blessing and dedication of the new Notre Dame de Lourdes Church took place.



In September of 1966, Father Chabot transferred to Auburn and his replacement was Rev. Gaston E. Auger. Father Auger began renovations of the Merrill building because he was very desirous of the return of the Ursuline Sisters on a full time basis. During the year of 1970 and the first part of 1971, Father Auger put great effort into restoring the old school, both interior and exterior. Once completed the Ursuline Sisters returned to Skowhegan and continued their laboring in the field of education and social work. In 1972, Notre Dame de Lourdes celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of the church in Skowhegan as a mission.

In September of 1974, Father Gilbert A. Patenaude replaced Father Auger whom retired. During Father Patenaude's pastorate many renovations took place on the church including repairs to the chimney, waterproofing, work on the front of the church, belfry and cross. Father Patenaude was assigned to St. Francis Xavier Church in Winthrop in 1979 and was replaced by Rev. Armand R. Neault. In 1981, the Notre Dame de Lourdes Parish celebrated it's 100th birthday.