

David J. Lavigne

In Celebration
of
A Heritage



St. Peter's Church
Tilbury, Ontario
1802 — 1985

September 1, 1985

S.F.O.H.G.
Régionale Ottawa-Carleton

Honouring

Our Past

THE UNVEILING AND DEDICATION OF HISTORICAL PLAQUE

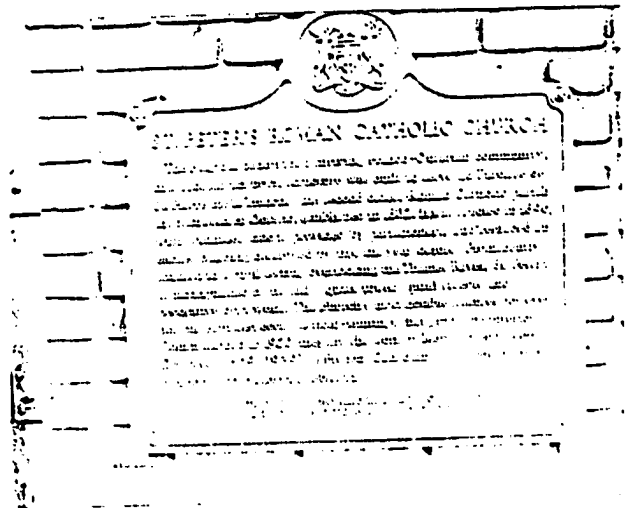
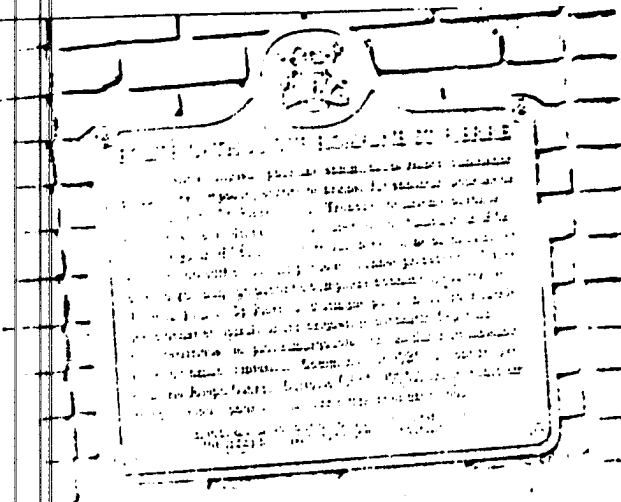
Sunday, September 1, 1985
at 3:00 p.m.

St. Peter's Church
R.R. 2
Tilbury, Ontario N0P 2L0

* * *

PROGRAMME

Chairman.....	<i>Mr. Dan Peltier</i> Parishioner of St. Peter's
Greetings.....	<i>Mrs. Nancy Wills</i> Ontario Heritage Foundation <i>Mr. Glen Robertson</i> Reeve of Tilbury East Township <i>Mr. Jim McGuigan, M.P.P.</i> Government of Ontario <i>Mr. Jim Caldwell, M.P.</i> Government of Canada <i>Mr. Andy Watson</i> Honoured Guest
Historical Background.....	<i>Miss Gloria Tollans</i> Parishioner of St. Peter's
Unveiling of the plaque.....	<i>Senior Members</i> of St. Peter's Parish
Dedication.....	<i>Fr. C. W. Janisse, Pastor</i>



Inscription

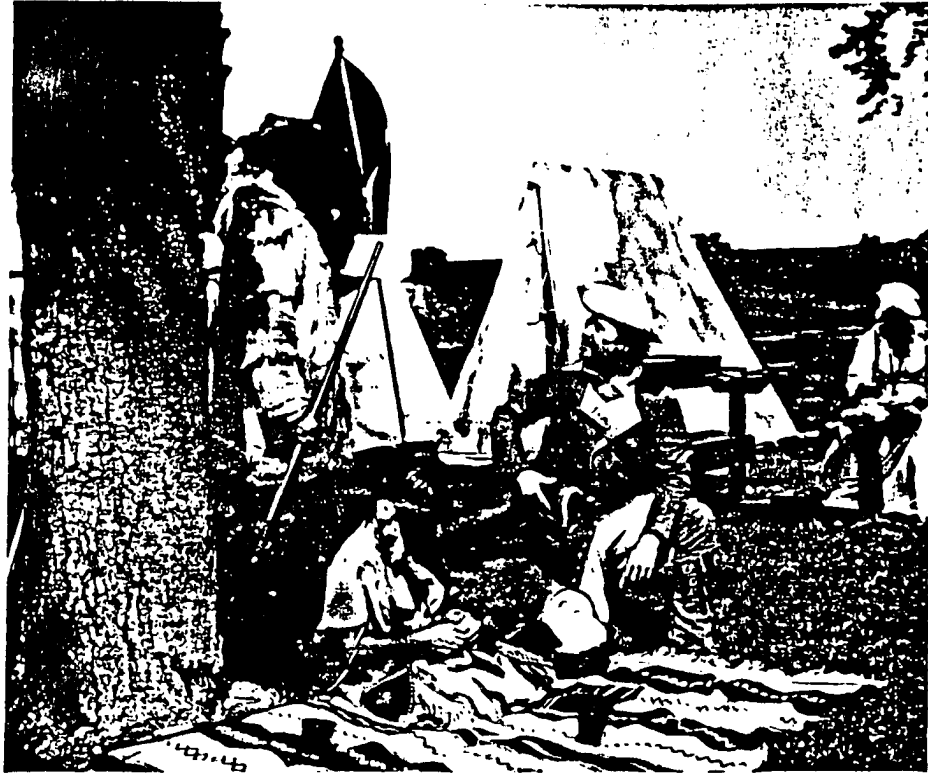
St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church.
The religious centre for a thriving Franco-Ontarian community, this substantial brick structure was built to serve La Paroisse de St. Pierre sur la Tranche, the second oldest Roman Catholic Church in Southwestern Ontario established in 1802. It was erected in 1896, with volunteer labour provided by parishioners, and replaced an earlier building destroyed by fire the year before. Prominently situated in a rural setting overlooking the Thames River, St. Peter's is distinguished by its tall, square tower, spiral steeple and decorative brickwork. The church's most notable features, however, are the eighteen ecclesiastical paintings that grace the interior. Commissioned in 1920, they are the work of Marie Joseph Georges Delfosse (1869-1939), a French-Canadian artist noted for his religious and historical tableaux.

On a sunny late summer afternoon, September 1, 1985, approximately 200 parishioners and their families gathered on the grounds of St. Peter's Church to witness the unveiling and dedication of an historical plaque presented by the Ontario Heritage Foundation in recognition of the significant historical value of the church and its site.

A monument was erected by John Nissen with brick from the recently demolished Ursuline Convent, Villa Angela in Tilbury built in 1897. A plaque on either side of the structure, one in English and one in French was put in place by members of the Parish Council and unveiled on the historic day by senior members of the parish. The present pastor Father Janisse dedicated the memorial.

A group of people from the Detroit Militia, Campeau Company, added atmosphere to the event by portraying through dress, displays, and demonstrations, life as it was for the pioneers in the late 1700's.

After a pleasant social hour of greeting friends and former pastors Father Ouellette, Father Poisson, and Father Robert, the parishioners enjoyed a sumptuous supper in the Parish Hall.



Members of the Detroit Militia, Port Huron, in a Pioneer setting.

Opening Address



Before we begin, I would like to thank everyone for coming. I would like to thank you for coming here to-day to help us in the celebration of the 183rd anniversary of the founding of St. Peter's parish — our present and former parishioners and pastors, our honourable members of parliament, and our honoured guests.

Since 1802, when Father Marchand built his log chapel on the banks of La Tranche, the people of the surrounding townships have come here together to worship, to be christened, to be married, and to be buried. To-day, we are dedicating two historical plaques to honour the significance of this church.

It is important to recognize and preserve these pieces of our heritage, since they are our anchors in the present. They are our physical links with our past, to remind us where we have come from and where we stand to-day. But it is also important to remember that without our ties of community spirit and simple brotherhood, they become no more than old buildings and stone cairns. On this day of celebration, let us also remember the ties of kinship and friendship which have bonded this parish together for so many years.

Dan Peltier, Chairman

A History of St. Peter's Parish



The year is 1790. The pioneer surveyor, Patrick McNiff, is wending his way up La Tranche, the Thames River, beginning at Lake St. Clair. He reports finding meadows, marshes, and trees. On his first trip, it is believed he travelled as far as the present location of Thamesville. Successive trips by him and others led to a plan of the river which showed 27 houses between Chatham and the mouth, 19 on the south side and 8 on the north. Improvements to their farms suggested well-established residences and some may have arrived as early as 1775. These first settlers were French-Canadians who had come via Detroit and Loyalists from United States who had arrived by the same route when British rule ended there and Detroit was no longer part of the Thirteen Colonies. They had settled along the river for obvious travel reasons but also to escape the swampy areas further inland.

Jesuit missionaries, no doubt, provided these pioneers their first spiritual contact, but, sometime in the late 1700's, another historic trip took place which was to profoundly affect their access to religious guidance. Father Hubert, Vicar General of the Detroit district which included all of Michigan, Ontario, and Ohio (a small part of the greater single diocese for the whole of Canada, the diocese of Quebec) also proceeded up the Thames but for an entirely different reason from that of McNiff. He was seeking to establish new missions between Amherstburg and Chatham. On passing this picturesque site where we stand to-day, he was impressed by its location and beauty. He envisioned a church here one day to serve the scattered Catholic families of the area.

In June, 1802, his dream came true with the erection of a small chapel by Rev. Jean Baptiste Marchand who travelled once a month on horseback from his Assumption Church parish in Sandwich to serve the parishioners of this new district. The original records of those first years are still intact in the Archives of the Diocese of London and record, in his own hand, the first baptism, that of Michael Desloges, aged 10 months, apparently on the same day as the dedication of the parish to St. Peter on July 8, 1802, also documented in the early registers of the church. Two unnamed burials took place even before the blessing of the cemetery with the first recorded burial being that of Jaque Delise. The first registered marriage was dated 1806, that of Charles Peltier and Genevieve Balard.

Registre des baptêmes, mariages et sépultures qui se feront devant la chapelle de la paroisse de St. Pierre dédieu en l'honneur de St. Pierre apôtre le 8. juillet ¹⁸⁰² et ledit registre sera tenu le même jour signé par le curé et par le paroissien ou par un autre paroissien qui sera nommé par le curé et par le paroissien. Le même jour sera aussi fait la bénédiction de la chapelle au fort St.

Marchand

Photocopy of the entry made by Father Marchand, July 8, 1802 in the church register on the occasion of the blessing of the new chapel and the dedication to St. Peter. The blessing of the cemetery the same day is also noted.

A copy of the French text follows with an English translation, courtesy of Sister M. Teresita, Archivist, Diocese of London.

Régistre pour les Baptêmes, Mariages, et Sepultures qui se feront dans la chapelle de la nouvelle paroisse bénite et dédiée en l'honneur de St. Pierre, Apôtre, le 8 juillet, 1802 et le dit registre commencé le même jour coté et paraphé par moi prêtre soussigné: le même jour aussi a été aussi par moi soussigné béni le cimetière adjacent à la dite chapelle au côté est.

* * *



Marchand, Prêtre

NOTE: "parafser or parapher" to put one's flourish or initials to; to sign.

Father Marchand always put a little flourish in front of his name. It is two curved lines with about five dots between and two below.

He seems to have crossed off two words in the middle of the fifth line as if he were uncertain of the spelling of "coter". It means to number or to quote. Then he spells it with a "q". This may be a misspelled word, a bit of confusion over the English and Latin spelling, or even a bit of patois.

* * *

English Translation

Register for Baptisms, Marriages, and Interments, which will be made in the chapel of the new parish, blessed and dedicated in honour of St. Peter, the Apostle, on July 8, 1802 and the said register begun the same day quoted and signed by me the undersigned priest: the same day also has been also by me the undersigned blessed the cemetery adjacent to the said chapel on the east side.

Marchand, Priest

In 1832, 210 acres of surrounding land was purchased by Bishop McDonell from Mark Sterling for 125 £ (less than \$300 by to-day's standards) for the use and benefit of the church and its people to be held in trust. 8 acres was subsequently sold to the Great Western Railway. To-day, the remaining land is still a possession of the parish, commonly called The Farm.

No trace of that first log chapel, later used as a school, remains to-day. It was replaced in 1824 by a larger white frame church while Father Crévier was pastor. This building became a landmark on the Thames and was known as "St. Pierre sur la Tranche" or "The French Church" but it was destroyed by fire on October 28, 1895 - the only articles saved being an old chalice and the church records. The Chatham Daily Planet devoted a full column to the calamity, entitling it "A Prey to the Flames - St. Peter's Church, Tilbury, Utterly Destroyed." The article states that the housekeeper first discovered the fire about 11 o'clock but that "providentially, the wind was from the south and the parsonage, large barns, and outbuildings were spared." (That parsonage, incidentally, was built in 1892 by Father Parent and is in use to the present day.) It further stated that the church was "handsome and commodious with fine interior appointments". Vestments, statues, and organ were destroyed with the loss placed at \$5,000. "I do not think," said Father Parent to a Planet reporter that morning, "that the insurance of \$1,000 in the Waterloo Mutual will make up the loss on the furnishings and vestments, but we must not rebel. It was the will of God."

The faith of the parishioners of those early years can also be seen in the barely discernible epitaphs on the fading headstones. The oldest marker in the cemetery is that of Lambert Labadie who was buried in 1872. Enscribed on his stone is the following:

*Farewell my wife and children dear
I am not dead but sleeping here
I was not yours but God's alone
He thought it best and called me home.*

Their stoic approach to life is illustrated by the words on the monument of Elizabeth Keller who died in 1878:

*Kind friends beware as you pass by,
As you are now-so once was I,
As I am now so you must be,
Prepare therefore to follow me.*

The present red brick structure was then erected and opened for services a year later in 1896 while Father Parent was still in charge. Records indicate that a beautiful lawn sloped 300 feet to the river from the white frame church which had been destroyed, but, because of the dangers of constant erosion from the Thames, the site for the building you see to-day was wisely chosen 200 feet back from the previous location. No doubt, to-day, that original spot is now part of the river bed.

A former pastor, Father Morin, who had served from 1834-1846 and had initiated the construction of a small chapel to serve the Catholic population of the Pain Court district, was buried, at his request, under the sanctuary of St. Peter's, and, after the fire, placed beneath the new structure.

In 1902, the parish celebrated its 100th anniversary with its pastor Father Ladouceur. Pontifical High Mass in the morning was followed by a picnic in the afternoon at Bagnall's Grove across the river.

During the ministry of Father Martin from 1910-28, 18 beautiful and expensive paintings by Georges Delfosse of Montreal were secured and these priceless Canadian works still hang in the church having been restored during the time of Father Scalisi.



One of the 18 exquisite paintings by Georges Delfosse which hang in the church. Mr. Delfosse did portraits of famous individuals including Sir Wilfred Laurier and nearly 200 large paintings with religious themes which hang in churches in Canada and United States.

Former Pastors of St. Peter's



Father Martin
1910 - 1928



Father Parent
1892 - 1900



Father Ladouceur
1900 - 1910



Father Rondot
1928 - 1933



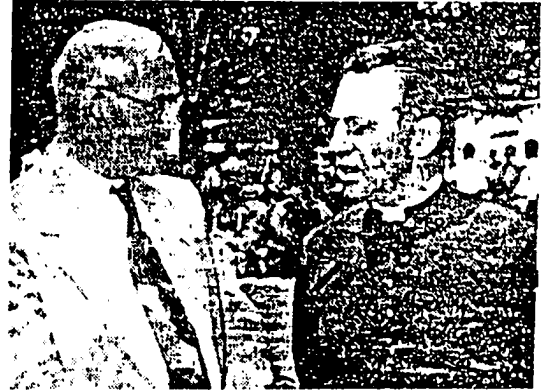
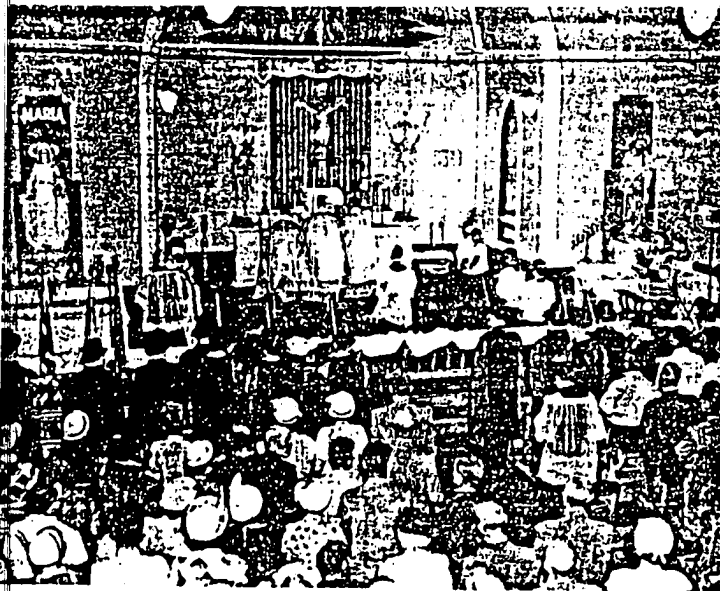
Father Lefaive
1933 - 1945



Father Scalisi
1945 - 1953

While Father Scalisi was pastor, the parish celebrated its sesquicentennial, 150 years of existence, the oldest in Kent County and the second oldest in Ontario - Assumption Parish in Sandwich having been established first. The 1952 event was headlined in the Chatham News under "Bishop Cody Attends Pontifical Mass As St. Peter's Celebrates Anniversary". Many of you here will remember that occasion. Two services were held and over 1,000 people celebrated with us. The Choir sang the Mass of Don Lorenzo Perosi under the skilled direction of Anthony Vandersteen. The news made much of the Dutch background of Mr. Vandersteen and others from Holland who added so much musically to the occasion. St. Peter's was referred to as the 'mother church' and native son Father Boudreau celebrated Mass.

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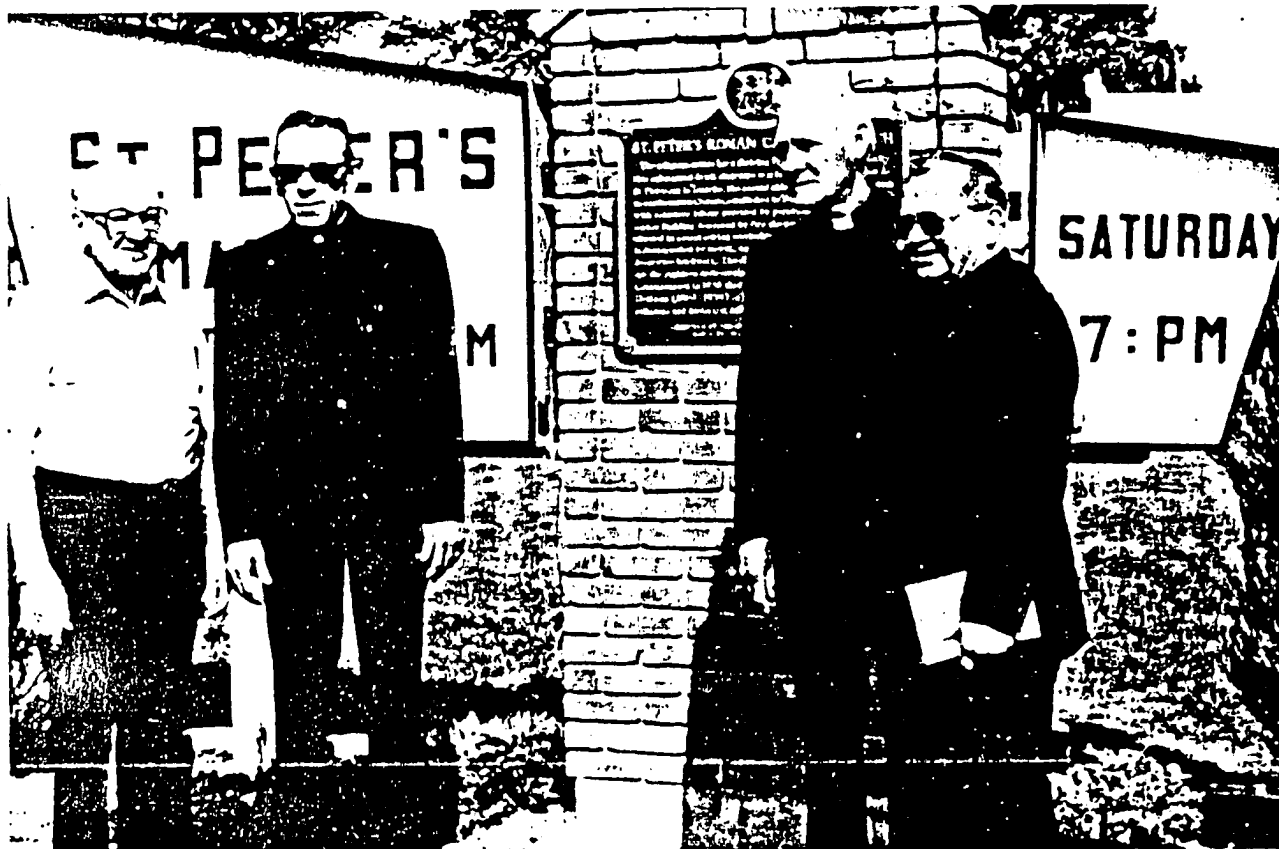
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On July 11, 1977, 300 parishioners gathered to hear Bishop Sherlock as the 175th anniversary was remembered. A gigantic picnic followed. Father Robert, our pastor, read the gospel.

To-day, approximately 120 families comprise the parish with varying ethnic backgrounds making it no longer "the French Church" but truly a church of the people. Some have been baptized, married, and, may, one day, be buried here. 36 pastors have guided this parish through the years and many parishioners rest peacefully in the cemetery beyond.

Of the 6 surviving pastors, past and present, 4 are with us to-day. Each has guided the flock and discharged his duties nobly. Each has left his mark upon us in his own way. Little memories creep back of their times with us. Father Ouellette, who served from 1952-58, will never be forgotten for his quiet devotion and gentle charm. When he led us in a last prayer in the church before he left, tears were evident in many eyes. Father Van Vynckt, whom we affectionately called Father Van, was with us from 1958-64. He was tall and thin, always in a hurry, but never too busy to tend his flock. Father Bezaire, who served from 1964-67 was always very down-to-earth, matter-of-fact, and always had a joke or story to tell. Jolly Father Poisson was with us from 1967-70. He had a sense of humour 'par

excellence' and he taught us that religion has its humourous side as well as its serious. He taught us, also, to follow, somewhat reluctantly, Vatican II's edict to participate more fully in the Mass by singing our little hearts out! He actually is the only former pastor who appears to have been adequately fed while in our midst. Kindly, fatherly, Father Robert remained with us from 1970-81. He also enriched our vocal attempts, one of the few individuals I know who needs no musical accompaniment to begin a hymn in perfect key! He stayed the longest of the group, and, whether by coincidence or not, retired after his time with us.



Father C. W. Janisse with former pastors present for the occasion: l. to r., Rev. E. H. Robert, Rev. C. W. Janisse, Rev. L. L. Ouellette, and Rev. L. T. Poisson.)

Our present, affable pastor, Father Janisse, arrived in 1981. In his term thusfar, with the help of the Parish Council, he has affected countless improvements. His current project is the renovation of the hall, built in 1952. He has such uncanny ability - he need only 'asketh' of his parishioners and he 'receiveth'! I'm certain he has many more plans waiting to be implemented, so we hope to keep him for years to come.

History is only an account of the lives of people. Without the human element, it is meaningless. Occasions such as to-day make us more aware of the rich legacy that is ours. The buildings, the waters that lap at the banks, the land on which we stand, the air about us, the trees, all veritably cry out their stories of life and death in ages past, and exhort us, "Remember". It is our prayer to-day that this historic site will continue to be cherished and preserved by future generations so that the dream of Father Hubert and those who have gone before will truly never die.

Gloria Volland

REFERENCES:

Chatham Public Library Research Dept.
Sister Teresita, Archivist, Diocese of London
Kentiana-Kent Historical Society
St. Peter's Sesquicentennial Booklet

NOTE:

Copies of the early church records are located as follows:

- (a) in the Hiram Walker Museum in Windsor
- (b) all records to 1910 were microfilmed in 1981 by the Mormons in Utah. They are available on request and will be sent to the local Latter Day Saints Church Library for viewing. They also may be seen at the Genealogical Library, Church of the Latter Day of Saints, 95 Melbert, Toronto, Ontario.
- (c) The Archives, Diocese of London (original records at Chancery Office, London)
- (d) The Detroit Public Library.

* * *

Dedication Message



St. Peter's Church, established in 1802, stands to-day as the second oldest parish in the Diocese of London. Like all human history, ours is a story of sunshine and shadow, of laughter and tears, of triumphs and failures, of life and death, but the Golden Thread of our Faith has never lost its lustre. If the valiant pioneers could return for this memorable occasion, they would have reason to be proud of their successors.

We pray that the dedication of these plaques to-day will be a time both of gratitude for the past and a recommitment to the future. Priests, religious, and laity must continue to work together to spread the Gospel in a spirit of shared responsibility for the Good News which Christ brought us.

Il est tout juste que nous rendions hommage et dire merci à nos vaillants pionniers qui sont venus établir dans cette belle région. Ces aventureux colonisateurs ont amené avec eux une foi sincère en Dieu et en son Eglise- et c'est nous, les paroissiens d'aujourd'hui qui en sommes les héritiers.

Notre tâche c'est de léguer cette foi et amour à la jeunesse d'aujourd'hui.

Fr. C. W. Janisse, pastor



SENIOR CITIZENS UNVEILING THE HISTORICAL PLAQUE

Left to right:

Mrs. Percy Vollans, Berniece Peltier, Percy Vollans, Wilfred Reaume, Mrs. Wilfred Reaume, Parish Council President Paul Caron, Rose Bagnall, Mrs. Alphonse Marchand, Alphonse Marchand.

NOTE: Mrs. Bagnall is the oldest member of the parish:



PARISH MEMBERS WITH DIGNITARIES

Left to right:

Father Janisse, Andy Watson, Jim Caldwell, M.P., Gloria Vollans, Dan Peltier, Nancy Wills from Ontario Heritage Foundation, Jim McGuigan, M.P.P., and Glen Robertson, Reeve of Tilbury East.



Parishioners Mr. and Mrs. Percy Vollans visit the pioneer display. They are the oldest couple in the parish and Mrs. Vollans, the former Beatrice Peltier, is the oldest member to have been baptized and married in the historic church of St. Peter's.



ST. PETER'S PARISH ADVISORY BOARD 1981-85

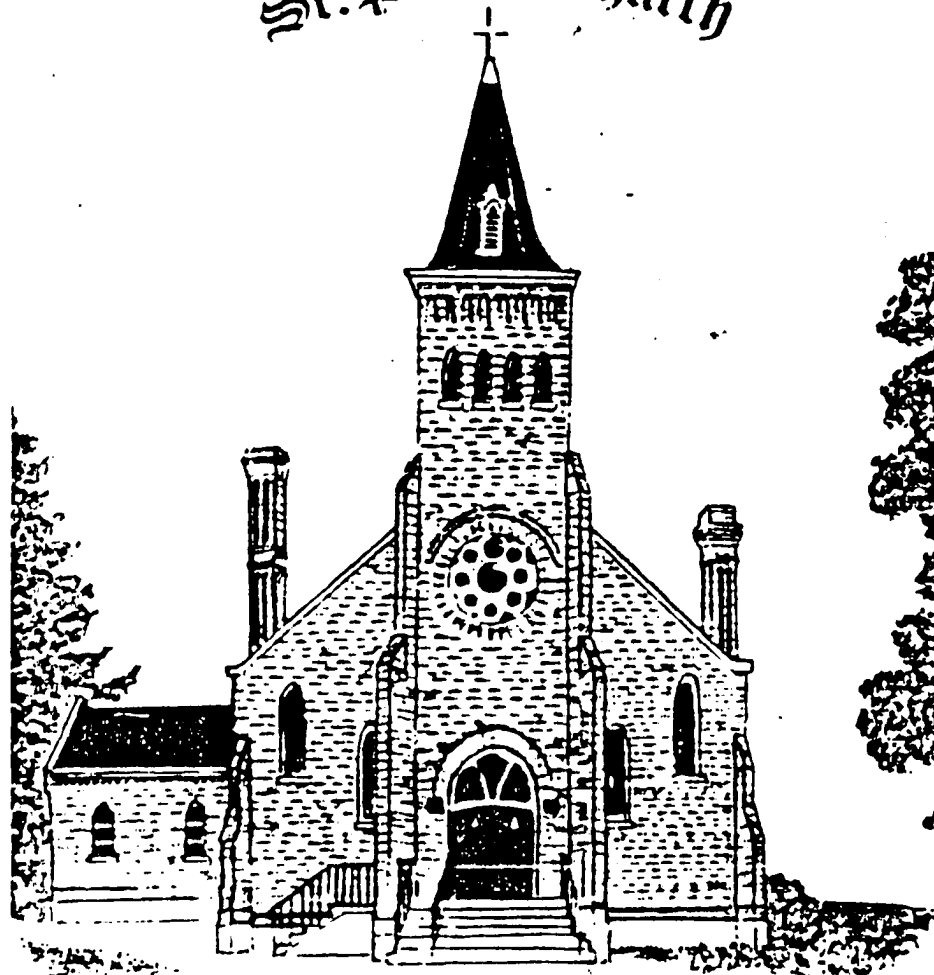
This group of dedicated individuals, among many other accomplishments, succeeded in bringing this historical dedication to St. Peter's, an honour long overdue but justly deserved.

L. to R., Back Row: Marvin Johnston, Gerard Larsh, Tony Kearns, Mike Caron, Cathy Reaume.

Middle Row: Robert Peltier, Rosaire Donais, Leah Herman, James Laevens.

Front Row: Ken Pelkey, Mary Goodreau, Rev. C. W. Janisse, Paul Caron, Chairman, Margaret Roszell.

St. Peter's Church



Tilbury East, Ontario
1802-1985

THE COMMEMORATIVE PLATE

The above photograph is taken from the beautiful commemorative plate made available through the efforts of Marvin Johnston and the Parish Council. Shades of brown, green, and blue enhance the fine art and detailing. It is decorated in 22K gold. Over 400 of these souvenir plates have been sold to date.

Pastors of St. Peter's

*Rev. J. P. Marchand	1802-1819
*Rev. Jos. Crévier.....	1819-1825
*Rev. L. F. Fluet.....	1825-1832
*Rev. Angus McDonnell	1832
Rev. P. Foley	1833
Rev. C. F. Maurice or Fitz-Maurice.....	1833-1834
Rev. Geo. A. Hayes	1834
Rev. J. B. Morin.....	1834-1846
Rev. T. L. Maurice.....	1846
Rev. J. B. Dillon or Billon	1847
Rev. P. Voin or Point	1847-1851
Rev. J. W. Joffroi or Jaffré	1851
*Rev. Claude Ternet	1851-1853
Rev. J. A. Raynell	1853
Rev. Bartholomew Boubat	1853
Rev. Gilbert V. Girard.....	1859
Rev. Paul Andrieux	1864
Rev. Joseph Delallys or Delabays	1864-1872
Rev. Jean Thomas Raynell.....	1872
Rev. Antoine P. Villeneuve (From Tilbury).....	1872-1884
Rev. B. Fauteux (from Pain Court parish).....	1884-1886
Rev. L. M. Leveque (from Big Point).....	1884-1886
Rev. A. Carrière (from Big Point).....	1886-1887
Rev. P. Langlois (from Big Point).....	1888-1892
*Rev. Charles Parent	1892-1900
*Rev. E. C. Ladouceur	1900-1910
*Rev. Theo. Martin	1910-1928
*Rev. A. A. Rondot	1928-1933
*Rev. Romeo J. Lefaive	1933-1945
*Rev. A. F. Scalisi	1945-1953
*Rev. L. L. Ouellette	1953-1956
*Rev. R. A. Van Vynckt	1956-1964
*Rev. F. M. Bezaire	1964-1967
*Rev. L. T. Poisson.....	1967-1970
*Rev. E. H. Robert.....	1970-1981
*Rev. C. W. Janisse	1981-

NOTE: It is most difficult to give a completely accurate listing of the priests who have served St. Peter's Parish, Tilbury over the years. Faded records, handwriting that is hard to decipher, variations in spelling, etc. have led to errors. Some pastors served the area on a full-time basis, some were infrequent visitors, and others included St. Peter's in their priestly duties while serving in residence at another parish. From 1859-1872, there was no resident priest. Those pastors who were truly 'resident priests' have asterisks by their names.

Acknowledgements

Assistance by the following in the compiling of this booklet is hereby gratefully acknowledged:

Dan Peltier — photography

Susan Peltier — photography

Sister Teresita, Archivist, Diocese of London — research

Father Janisse and the Parish Advisory Committee — advice and moral support.

Special thanks to the parishioners of St. Peter's whose initial interest suggested this undertaking and whose usual co-operation and encouragement made it all possible.

The path I have chosen in life
Has carried me far and wide.
I have travelled the busy highways
Swept along by a drifting tide.

A myriad of uncaring faces
Pass before me day by day,
They leave me restless and wanting
No joy or peace on my way.

'Tis then I search for a refuge,
I flee once more to the land.
To a bend in the winding river
On that hallowed ground to stand.

Pause here, the grass grows greener,
The sun shines brighter too.
The stately spire majestic
Gazes down from a sky of blue.

The headstones of ages past
Throw shadows across the lawn,

They give a silent blessing
To the living from those who've gone.

Childhood memories return
Of prayers and a chalice bright,
Black robes, sweet music, and incense,
Soft words and candlelight.

Snowflakes gently falling
As the midnight hour draws near.
Friendly faces, sleepy children,
Heartfelt wishes, Love is here.

A peace in my soul long absent
Calms all my morbid fears,
A kinship long forgotten
Reaches out to bridge the years.

From whence comes this contentment?
Gone is the need to roam,
This place is mine and here I'll stay,
God knows, I have just come home!

They who ignore the Past, do so at their own peril for it is
in its lessons we learn,
in its memories we find kinship,
in its adversities we find courage,
in its dreams we are inspired,
in its faith we find the courage to persevere.

And above all else, because of it, we can create, from our Present, a Future Past, worthy, in its own turn, to be remembered and cherished.

Glenn J. Valla



REV. FR. C. W. JANISSE — 1981
Present Pastor of St. Peter's

History of St. Peter's Parish

1802 - 1947

LOT 1, RIVER ROAD,

TILBURY EAST TOWNSHIP.

* History of the Parish of St. Peter's: As compiled and read by Rev. Theo. Martin, at Chatham Theological Conference, October the 24th, 1928.

Nestling quietly and unobtrusively opposite an elbow point, in one of the numerous and tortuous bends of the River Thames, eleven miles west of Chatham, an unpretentious, though picturesque, brick church, built in 1896, marks the spot where early history on the crooked stream is accurately traced for the past 126 years.

Numerous motorists from the Border Cities and Michigan whirl by this neat Catholic Church with only an admiring glance, little realizing that in the ancient church-yard adjoining, lie many of the pioneers of Kent, Essex and Lambton counties; in fact, the first white settlers of that part of the Western Ontario peninsula.

For considerably more than a century, the present church grounds have been the site of St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church, a church that holds the distinction of being the second oldest Catholic place of worship in Western Ontario. Its only rival and predecessor is Assumption Church, Sandwich. So closely linked is the history of the two churches that the first pastor of St. Peter's Church, the Rev. Father J. P. Marchand, also served at the identical time as the Pastor of Assumption. His arduous dual charge was made possible by this pioneer priest making hurried trips on horseback along the river and lake trail, at least once a month.

That was the day before buggies, automobiles or aeroplanes. It was even a time before roads, worthy of the name, existed. The hundred and one adjuncts of present day civilization, lying at the very doors of this generation, were undreamed-of possibilities to those early faithful settlers who struggled to wrest a livelihood from the little clearings and products of the hunt. It was a day when, after long and arduous hours of toil on the little clearings bordering the Thames, parents and their children would trudge miles to receive blessings and encouragement, always cheerfully given by Catholic spiritual leaders in Ontario's pioneer settlements.

It may be said to the credit of the early Roman Catholic Clergy, that they were unceasingly ready to undergo the hardships of the primeaval forest with their parishioners, and to share with them their dangers, privations and trials in time of sickness.

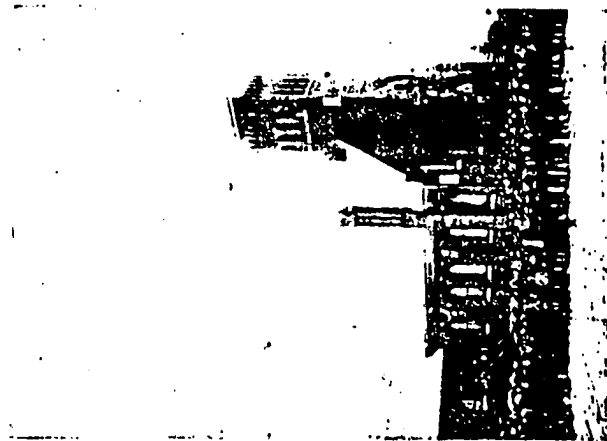
For the past eighteen years, as Pastor of this historic church, I have been privileged to guide the destinies of one hundred or more families. I am glad to say that St. Peter's has certainly proved a source of great pride and interest to me. During my service as its Pastor I have endeavoured to place this Church among the most beautiful and interesting Catholic Churches of old Ontario. (This work has necessitated much manual labour which, personally, I have often performed.)

It is interesting to note that every birth, christening and marriage that has taken place in St. Peter's Parish since 1802, is chronicled in well preserved books, the pages of which are written in ink in the handwriting of the Church Pastor at the time of their happening. Among these names are recognized those of many French families of Lambton, Kent and Essex counties today. Descendants from these early families have multiplied, in Biblical terms, as the sands of the seashore.

The parish books, referred to above, often contained the complete cycle of life's major events of those early settlers, including birth, christening, marriage and death. Due to the continual migrations to all parts of the country, especially to the great lumber forests of Michigan, there are many instances where the deaths of early



FR. PARENT
1892 - 1900



OPENING OF THE PRESENT
CHURCH
1896

parishioners are not therein recorded. Records of their demise would doubtless be found in the parish books of some distant Catholic Church in the country to which the early habitant had wandered.

The history of the Parish of St. Peter's, of the diocese of London, is inseparably linked with the history of what was later Upper Canada, in 1780. In that year there was but one diocese in the whole of Canada. Its precincts stretched from Halifax to Vancouver. It was named the diocese of Quebec. In addition to all Canadian territory, the diocese stretched far into what later became the United States. It included Michigan, Illinois, Oregon, Ohio, Mississippi, Louisiana and, in the New England States, up as far as Baltimore.

Up to 1780, Father Hubert (later Bishop of Quebec, and 12th French Canadian Bishop) had filled many posts of confidence in the eyes of his Bishop, His Lordship D'Englis. Father Hubert had been director of his Grand Seminary, and Apostolic Visitor of the Vicars General, located at various points of the North American continent which comprised that immense diocese of New France.

Destinies of certain men are fore-ordained in a peculiar way. One day Father Hubert was sent by his Bishop to Illinois to fulfil a very delicate mission with the Vicar General Gibeault. On his return, by way of Fort Detroit, he arrived at the pioneer post just in time for the funeral of Father Bocquet, Recollet Order. Following the funeral, Father Hubert, of necessity, replaced the deceased as parish priest of Fort Detroit and as Vicar General of all the region of the immense

Detroit district. That great vicariate embraced all Michigan, the Province of Ontario and the State of Ohio. Such an immense territory was surely enough to occupy the full services and time of such a Vicar General who, by his very nature, was the soul of zealousness and devotion to his charge. If the various missions in his care were not numerous, they were far distant from one another and sufficient to tax the energies and devotions of the strongest of men.

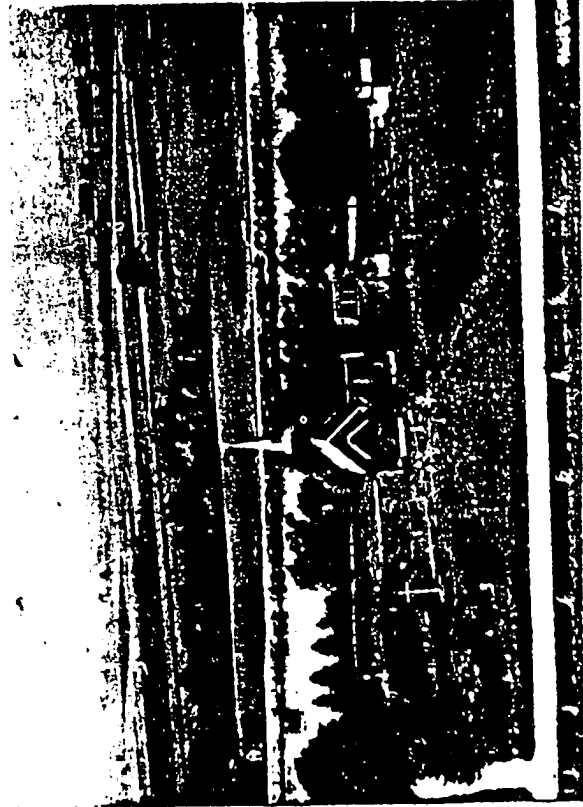
Because the principal center (noyau) of Father Hubert's administration was Detroit and its adjacent territory, that pioneer spiritual leader constructed a church and presbytery there. Immigration to the Detroit district, including what is now Western Ontario, had already gotten well under way. The great fertility of the soil, the admirable climate and wealth of natural resources, had already become known to distant inhabitants of the old and new France. Feeling a great tax on his strength, because of the increasing numbers of settlers under his spiritual care, Father Hubert asked his Bishop in Quebec for several priests to assist him in his mission yet to be established in the immense Detroit field of labours.

Taking the great wooded Detroit River as a natural division, the Parish of Detroit soon became divided into two parts; one a church, L'Assomption at Sandwich, and the other at Detroit, Ste. Anne. On each bank of the river the population, swelled by continual immigration, was growing very rapidly. That tide of growth on the Canadian shores stretched from Bois Blanc Island as then named, to near Sarnia of today. Again, from Amherstburg to Chatham, French Canadians came from Quebec to establish their homesteads along the shores of the rivers and lakes. For all this great territory there were only two churches and two missionary priests.

Following 126 years of early settlement, in the beautiful counties of Essex and Kent alone, we find today more than 35,000 Catholic French Canadians. This number is entirely separate from the English speaking people of other nationalities. All this territory formerly formed a part of the Parish of Assumption Church at Sandwich and was a second division of the Parish of Detroit. In 1870, at Detroit, the Vicar General, Father Hubert, administered all this region which comprised part of the colony of Detroit. On what is now the Canadian side of the river, Father Pothier (Jesuit) was the only missionary parish priest under the administration of Father Hubert.

Illustrative of the natural increase of French Canadians in this territory, Father Hubert relates that the Campeau family alone counted 3,000 souls. Because of its numerous members this family had erected for itself a little chapel in Detroit, the parish priest conducting mass in it periodically.

Zealous and devoted to his charge, Father Hubert, on observing the continued immigration of French Canadians to the Detroit district, conceived the project of establishing new missions in the most populated sections of his vicariate. With this in view he visited all the



AERIAL VIEW OF PRESENT CHURCH 1952

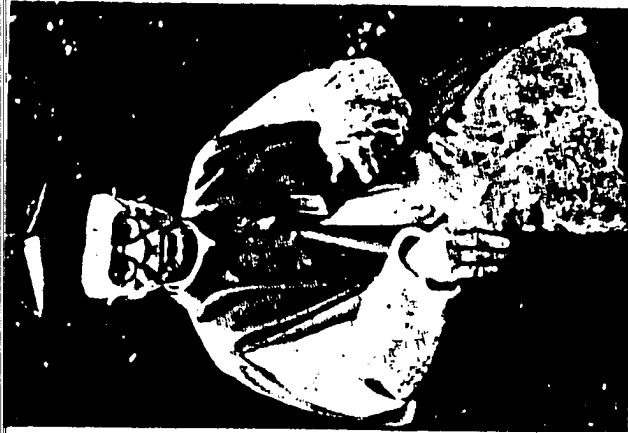
what is the United States of today, having Baltimore as its chief center. In this division, the immense diocese of Quebec lost what is now Oregon, Illinois, Michigan, Louisiana, Mississippi and all the New England States up to Baltimore. News travelled so slowly in those early times that it was four years before Msgr. Hubert learned of this momentous change. While witnessing his great diocese being taken from him in large sections of territory, he had one consolation in being able to keep what is the Canadian part today, including the parish of St. Peter, for which he had planned wisely and well. This beautiful parish has since given birth to fifteen parishes and missions including Belle River, St. Joachim, Tilbury, Stoney Point, Raleigh, Staples, Chatham, Pain Court, Big Point, Wallaceburg, Thamesville, Bothwell, Lambton and Dresden. Attending these today are twenty-one priests.

Father Hubert believed that the Parish of St. Peter would prove an inexpugnable fort. St. Peter's, accordingly, became the fortress of the Catholic Church in Canada West in those days. The office of a Catholic missionary in those early times was not an enviable post. This path was beset with dangers both physical and spiritual.

Despite the fact that Father Hubert visited all this part of the country during his four years' administration as Vicar General at Detroit, it was not possible for him, because of a long illness, to realize the entire fulfilment of his projects, following his elevation to the Episcopacy. The immensity of his diocese combined with his ill health, greatly curtailed the prosecution of his many projects. Realizing his inability to carry out his plans, he entrusted their execution to Msgr. Denaut, his successor.

The Parish of St. Peter has the distinction of having been visited by Msgr. Plessis, the eleventh Bishop of Canada, 1816. The parish at that time was known as St. Pierre sur la Tranche, the name La Tranche having been applied to the tortuous and beautiful stream now commonly known as the Thames. St. Peter's was honored in the Bishop's visit by his determination in 1806 to visit every part of his immense diocese from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The great contrast in pioneer travel in the early part of the century to that of today is best exemplified in the fact that the immense itinerary planned by the Bishop took him ten years to complete. Today a similar journey could be accomplished within a few months at the most.

Following visits to the many parts of his great diocese in the east, including Nova Scotia (then Acadia), New Brunswick, Boston, New York and Albany, it was not till the year 1816 that he undertook to visit the western part of his diocese, travelling by way of the St. Lawrence River by boat and portage. At the time there were only four missions in Ontario: Kingston, Malden, Sandwich and St. Peter. He visited St. Isidore of Kingston on May 28 — June 4; Notre Dame of Assumption, Sandwich, from the 20th to the 29th of June. During his stay at Notre Dame of Assumption he visited St. John of Malden (the Amherstburg of today), and returned in



MSGR. LANGLOIS
1888 - 1892



FR. SCALISI
1945 -

region between Amherstburg and Chatham, now known as the Canadian side, but, which at that time, formed a part of the Detroit vicariate. The parish of St. Peter owes its inception to that memorable trip of Father Hubert. On passing the quaint spot along the Thames, he was impressed with its natural charm and geographical position, the ideal center for a great mission. He determined that the day would not be far distant when a missionary priest would be sent to administer to Catholic souls along the beautiful shores of Lake and River St. Clair.

The great dream of Father Hubert, regarding the future of St. Peters, has since become a reality far greater in its fulfilment than even the zealous and devoted disciple of God had anticipated. As a mother church, St. Peter gave birth later to fifteen parishes or missions. Already 23 pastors have faithfully kept this precious flock so dear to Father Hubert (later Bishop Hubert).

So energetic and zealous a priest was destined by God for even greater responsibilities than those associated with his great vicariate at Detroit. While in the midst of his organization projects in our country, he was named Assistant Bishop of Quebec, with future succession. In the fourth year of his episcopate, Rome took from him almost half of his diocese. Pius VI formed an apostolic vicariate in

the dependence or supervision of Msgr. Plessis, the British Government having consented to the arrangement but wishing to settle matters with the Bishop, Msgr. Plessis, alone.

The erection of the Parish of St. Peter is fairly accurately traced to the month of June, 1802, since the first act of baptism is dated July 7th, 1802. The limits of the parish at that time were not well defined owing to the almost impenetrable forest which covered the country between the region of what is now East Kent and the Detroit River. Our ancestors had come to establish themselves in this virgin forest by travelling by boat from Montreal to Detroit; water being the only accessible route. Our missionaries of the time visited the far scattered missions in one of three ways; by foot, canoe or horseback. Roads were unheard of in those pioneer days. The missionaries were content to make the sign of the cross before starting on their long pilgrimages, and placed their respective voyages under the protection of God and the Blessed Virgin.

Detroit was only a little village, the only place for several hundred miles where one could get his grain ground, or get mail from a post office. These hardy ancestors of ours for a number of years came to Detroit by canoe pushed forward by strong arms. They experienced the peculiar joy of splitting the waves of St. Clair Lake en route to Detroit. Later, when a semblance of a trail had been blazed along the river and lake banks, they journeyed from the Parish of St. Peter to opposite Detroit by slow plodding oxen hitched to that rare carriage of the day — the charette. The trip to Detroit took from three to four days; a trip now accomplished by motor car in a couple of hours or less. When night fell on them, they slept in the open air along the shores of Lake St. Clair. Their food was extracted chiefly from the hunt by the wayside. It consisted often of fish, wild duck, partridge or other game. Ey making a smudge, to drive away the troublesome mosquitoes, they slept peacefully under the canopy of heaven.

Further changes occurred as the years passed. The first store in the Parish of St. Peter was situated about one mile from the actual church toward Lake St. Clair, where a post office was established named Dolsen. A little later a hotel was erected near the post office and store, where travellers who made the trip from London to Detroit by canoe or stage — according to the season and passability of roads — enjoyed the rest provided by the pioneer half-way house.

Several years later, another small store appeared below Prairie Siding, together with a small elevator, where grain was brought from the little farms cleared with great labour of heavy forest growth, as well as from those farms nearer what is now Chatham. Another post office, named 'Williams', was established about a mile and a half east of what is Prairie Siding today.

The present Church of St. Peter, a substantial brick structure, is the third edifice to grace the site of the pioneer parish churchyard. It was opened for service in 1896, just 32 years ago. Church



FATHER LADOUCEUR
1900 - 1910



FATHER MARTIN
1910 - 1928

time to arrive at St. Peter's for July 1st, 1816. Just what activities he engaged in at the Parish of St. Peter at the time of his visit is not definitely recorded; but it is certain that he gave Confirmation to numbers of souls there. This deduction is made from his memoirs which record having given Confirmation to 33,725 people during the general visit to his immense diocese. Msgr. Plessis, eleventh Bishop of Canada, was the first to visit the Province of Ontario. Travel was so arduous and difficult in those days that the journey from Kingston to Sandwich consumed 16 days. Msgr. Plessis is regarded as the greatest Bishop of Canada, up to his time.

We owe to Msgr. Plessis the liberty of freely practising our religion in this country independently of the civil power. For his great services he was well named the great Canadian Athanasius, one of the Fathers of the Church in Canada. It was under his regime that the big diocese of Canada was divided into four parts, the division taking effect on December the 5th, 1822, six years after his memorable visit to the whole of his diocese. The division was as follows: No. 1 district: Upper Canada, under the administration of Msgr. Alexander McDonald; No. 2, District of Montreal, under Msgr. Lartigue; No. 3 District of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, under Msgr. McEachern; No. 4, District of the Northwest Territories, under Msgr. Provencher. The four administrators of as many districts were under



FATHER A. A. RONDOT
1928 - 1933

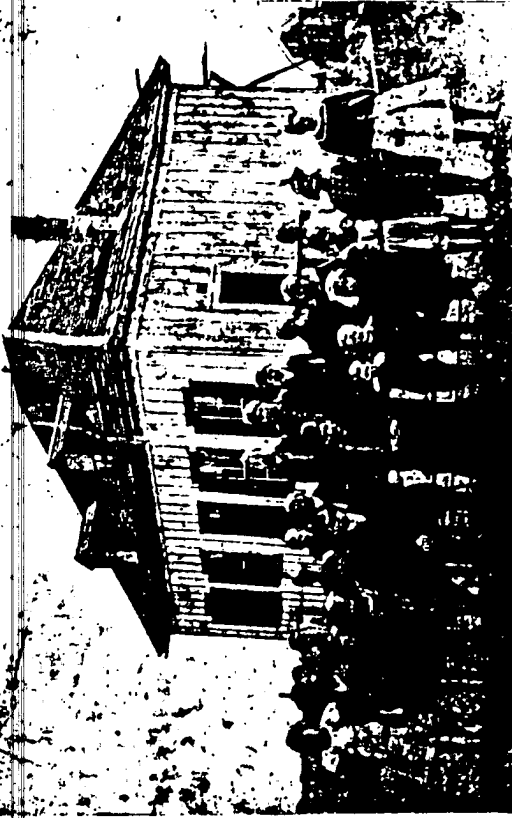


FATHER R. J. LEFAIVE
1933 - 1945

history of St. Peter's parish starts with the erection of a chapel in 1802 — which undoubtedly was constructed of hewn logs, no trace of which remains today. It is known that when this pioneer church became too small for the rapidly growing congregation, it was replaced by a larger frame church in 1824, the edifice being blessed by the then parish priest, Father Joseph Crevier, on the 28th of Nov., 1824. The former chapel was used for a number of years after the building of the new frame church as a school. The latter church, which served St. Peter's Parish for close to a century, was destroyed by fire in 1895 — an old chalice alone being rescued from the ashes of the venerable edifice.

During the interval between the burning of the frame church and the erection of the present brick church, Mass was said in the old presbytery; itself since replaced by a more modern brick structure. Following construction of the present church, the old presbytery, for a while, was used as a separate school and now serves as a stable on the church farm.

St. Peter's Church, as it stands today, is a well constructed edifice measuring 80 by 40 feet. It was opened for service in 1896, since which time it has received a number of major improvements, including extensive decorations in 1920 (carried out by myself). St. Peter's Church today is not only famous because of its ancient site as a house

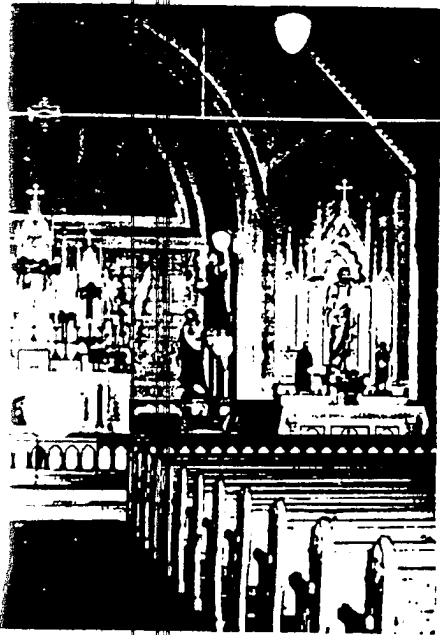


FIRST CATHOLIC SCHOOL
FR. LADOUCEUR'S TIME—1900-1910

of God's worship, but too because the walls are adorned by eighteen of the most beautiful and costly ecclesiastical paintings to be found in any church building in Canada. They are the work of George Delfosse of Montreal, the product of whose brush and canvass adorns a number of the famous churches of that Quebec city as well as other notable edifices throughout the Dominion. No more realistic portrayer of scenes during the time of Our Saviour has lived than Delfosse, whose genius for art has greatly enriched Canadians and whose work again proves that some of the contemporary world masters are quite equal in skill to any on the other side of the Atlantic. (The securing of these famous paintings was only obtained through sustained efforts of myself, made possible by the full co-operation and help of the parishioners of my parish.)

In reviewing the history of St. Peter's it would not be complete without reference to that fact that a station or chapel was erected on the site in 1802 by the Rev. J. B. Marchand, a priest of the Congregation of Sulpice, and at that time a director of the College of Montreal. He was also Pastor of Assumption Church at Sandwich, the only one in the western peninsula to be erected before St. Peter's. Rev. Father Marchand conducted for years services in both Sandwich and St. Peter's, and won the love and respect of the early settlers along the River Thames.

The popularity of the little chapel soon necessitated the erection of the larger frame edifice, since burned, but which for three quarters of a century provided a place of worship for generation after genera-



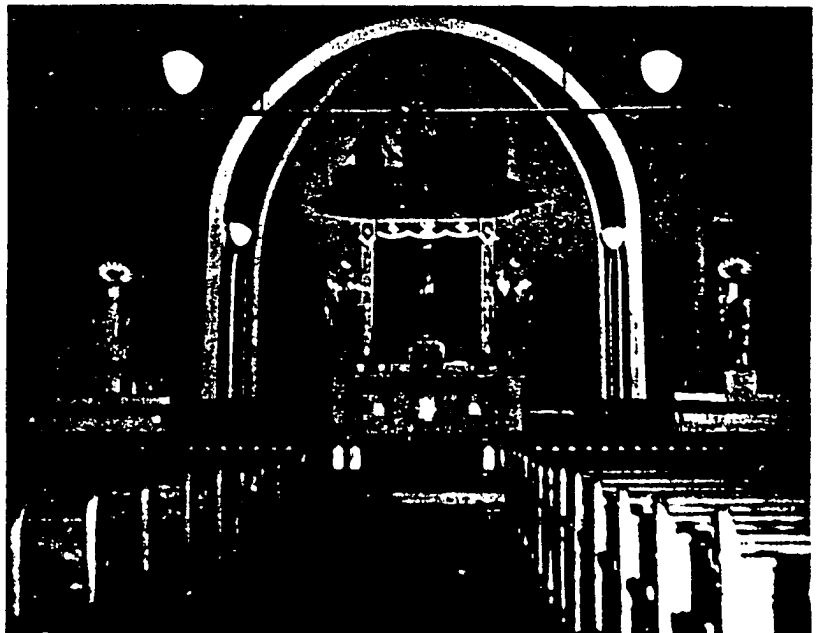
ST. PETER'S CHURCH (Interior) BEFORE 1946

Many there were whose cycle of life
 there. There they were born, christened,
 christened; and when life's span was
 all services were held in the old frame

Baptiste Morin, a native of Lower
 Acadia in Nova Scotia and stationed at
 St. Peter's in the discharge of his sacred
 duties until his reward at the ripe age of
 December, 1849, under the sanctuary
 of the altar, as he had requested.

of St. Peter's at the time of the fire,
 occurred a year previous, but these escaped
 destruction of the wind.

Note the effect of the ever changing
 topography especially in the vicinity of St. Peter's
 same church, since burned, is so near
 the river. The edifice there today it would
 be a highway. So deeply has the river
 cut its way of the frame church there was a
 distance of more than 300 feet towards the
 river disappeared before the mad spring



ST. PETER'S CHURCH (Interior) AFTER RECONSTRUCTION 1952

rushes of the turbulent Thames. At the time of its construction the
 present brick church was built some 200 feet back from the site of
 the former church. The bank in front of the present church was first
 constructed thirty years ago as a protection against the spring floods
 induced in a great measure by the gradual drainage of more and more
 land extending towards Chatham. This great rush of water in the
 spring caused the river bank to be built from Prairie Siding to a couple
 of miles west of the church. Flood waters necessitated this bank
 being rebuilt, straightened and strengthened several times, while the
 river became wider and deeper each succeeding year. Because of its
 meandering course, the early French settlers knew the present
 Thames only by its name of the period, "Riviere La Tranche."

Topography of land along the route of the Thames has formed
 a most colorful page of history. One hundred years ago Indians were
 plentiful along its North bank in what is now Dover Township. The
 river traversed a thick forest through almost all of Kent County and
 broke into open land in the vicinity of Lake St. Clair, from Mitchell's
 Bay to the lighthouse at the mouth of the river. Indians in their
 boats and canoes were to be often seen travelling down the river
 towards Lake St. Clair, the only route of travel available through the
 heavily forested country. In a few days these Indians would return,
 their boats and canoes laden down with the trophies of the hunt and
 assurances of a well stocked larder for the family board. When stores

were replenished, it would mean another voyage down stream to the better hunting grounds along the shores of beautiful Lake St. Clair.

One of the greatest aids to travel is found today in the fine government bridge over the Thames, built in 1924, which connects Dover and Raleigh Townships. Recognized as a crying necessity for many years, it remained for this fortunate generation to see the ultimate fulfillment of a long cherished dream of quick transport over the Thames. Situated two miles east of the church the new bridge has enabled parishioners from the north bank to drive to Mass each Sunday under far more favourable conditions of travel.

Few Catholic Churches in Western Ontario have to their credit such a fine tract of fertile land as has St. Peter's. This land, a part of the church property, comprises approximately 200 acres which in the year 1832, with ten acres additional, was bought for the munificent sum of 125 pounds from Mark Sterling by the following church trustees: Rev. Angus McDonald (later Bishop of Kingston), Rev. Frederick Fowley (Foley), Alex. Trudell, Frank Trudell and Nicholas Janisse. The land was bought for the benefit and use of the church and clergymen. Several years following the purchase, nearly eight acres of this land were sold to the then Great Western Railway, now the Canadian National Railways, for extension of the road through to the Detroit River at Windsor. On the thirtieth of November, 1853, all this church land was turned over in trust of the R. C. Episcopal Corporation, but again for the benefit of St. Peter's and its clergymen.

Owing to the fact that this church land, along with more than 1000 acres additional, is part of a big drainage system, it is heavily taxed and, despite the fertility and productivity of its soil, there is not the return customary where land is not under such a taxation burden. The drainage scheme was found necessary to protect this church land and other land from flood conditions which occur along the banks of the Thames almost every spring.

This history of St. Peter's Church would be most incomplete without recording the resident and non-resident pastors of this second oldest ecclesiastical mission and place of worship in Western Ontario.

Rev. Father J. P. Marchand, first Pastor of St. Peter's Mission, served from 1802 to 1820. He was followed by Rev. Joseph Crevier, 1820 to 1825. To him was credited the building of the former frame church which replaced the log mission. Father Crevier blessed this on Nov. 28th, 1824. The ceremony was attended by the priest of L'Assomption from Sandwich and others.

Rev. Father L. F. Fluet served as Pastor of St. Peter's from 1825 to 1832. He in turn was succeeded in 1832 to 1833 by Rev. Angus McDonnell and Rev. Father P. Foley. Rev. Father Chas. Francois Maurice served from 1833 to 1834, assisted by Rev. Father George A. Hayes in the latter year. From 1834 to 1846, Rev. Father J. B. Morin was Pastor of St. Peter's, and at his death was buried under the sanctuary of the church. His body was removed after the church fire many years



ST. PETER'S HALL — DURING PROGRESS

later and placed under the present church. Rev. Father T. L. Maurice served for a short time in 1846 following the death of Father Morin. It appears that no less than three pastors officiated during the years 1847 to 1851; the three being Rev. Fathers J. B. Dillon, P. Voin and J. W. Joffroi. It is recorded that in 1851, on the 16th of July, there were 289 persons in the confirmation class conducted by His Lordship, Bishop de Charbonnel, of Toronto.

From 1851 to 1853, Rev. Claude Ternet was residing pastor at St. Peter's. He was succeeded from 1853 to 1864 by the Rev. Fathers J. A. Raynell, Boubat and Girard. From 1864 to 1872 the church pastors are recorded as Fathers Andrieux, Joseph Delallys and J. A. Raynell. Rev. A. P. Villeneuve served as pastor from 1872 to 1884, coming to the parish from Tilbury. Rev. Father P. Fauteux, from Stoney Point, was resident pastor of St. Peter's from 1884 to 1886, and was succeeded by Rev. Father L. M. Leveque, first parish priest of Big Point. Father A. Carriere served from 1886 to 1887, in turn succeeded by Father P. Langlois from 1888 to 1892.

In 1891, at a confirmation class held by Msgr. Dennis O'Connor, there were 137 persons confirmed, including myself. Rev. Father Parent, Pastor of St. Peter's from 1892 to 1900, built a new parish house and barn, the old church burning down in 1895 and the new one being constructed the next year. Rev. Father S. Rocheleau served in 1900 from July 11th to November the 4th.

Rev. Father E. C. Ladouceur was parish priest at St. Peter's from Nov. 4th, 1900, to 1910, when I succeeded and have been happy to remain its pastor to the present time. I might modestly record such

By Rev. Father A. F. Scalisi

After eighteen years of hard labour, Father Theo. Martin departed for McGregor on December 1st, 1928. He was followed by the Rev. Father A. A. Rondot, who was pastor here for four and a half years, a great spiritual priest who did much to foster and increase the love and devotion of his people to Catholic truths and ideals and made many new improvements to the church. Father Romeo J. Lefaive followed in May, 1933, remaining until the 23rd of July, 1945. He found a depressing debt awaiting him for solution of and in twelve years of planning and saving reduced the debt to \$5400.00. To Father Lefaive much credit must be acknowledged and to this day his name is kindly remembered, like those of his predecessors. He, too, left for McGregor.

I, Father Anthony F. Scalisi, followed on July 23, 1945. Since the debt was at the low ebb already noted, improvements could now be made, and to me fell the duty as well as to continue those works of priestly administration in which every Priest of God is specially trained: to teach, to bless, to pray, to console — in all kindness and generosity of spirit. If the history of this Parish, venerable as it is, is replete with humbling narrations of priestly privations and hard work, then too must the record of these last Pastors, prior to myself, be written in the same vein of achievement. I follow only to reap what has already been sown. Had any of the others begun where I had the good fortune to, what little I may have done and still pray to do, would have been the same for them. In all modesty I acknowledge this, realizing that pioneer work has already been done and gone down into history.

In re-copying the history of Father Martin, of late memory, so thoroughly and intimately recorded, I have visions of how inspiring and beautiful old St. Peter's must have been, and to my mind there comes the resolve to restore it — if for no other reason than to resurrect what was before, that which others worked so hard to make possible; and, too, a resolve to re-install a love of their parish in the hearts of these my people.

The picture today?

The banks of yesteryear have been dredged again and floods from the Thames continue their work of havoc. Necessity, a few years ago, closed the old road before the Church and Rectory, in Father Lefaive's time — and often did it become impassable because of long rains and soft earth. To my period of service the task befell to reopen this road so that parishioners would not have to continue using the church walk to back their cars so that they could leave as they came in. With the help of parishioners, part of the north cemetery was employed and levelled to act as a juncture between the old road and that leading to the school, now affording all a continuous road circling house, church and cemetery. This road was in the Fall of 1946 given a cover of crushed stone.



ST. PETER'S HALL — TO-DAY

improvements as I have effected since coming to the parish. These include cement walks, sheds, alterations to the pastor's house, installation of gas in church and house, extensive decorations and a new roof to the church, new stations of the cross and alterations in the presbytery. On December the 21st, 1926, I celebrated my Silver Jubilee in the priesthood, on which occasion I was presented with a purse from my parishioners and a purple vestment and a golden chalice from my confrere priests. (For all this kindness I have ever been grateful to my faithful parishioners and to my fellow priests.)

In 1902 St. Peter's celebrated its centenary, and, although not pastor at that time, I had the honor to be present along with many other priests. His Lordship, the late Bishop McEvay, was in attendance as well as the late Msgr. Boudette of Three Rivers, who preached the sermon on that occasion. The fact that Msgr. Boudette died suddenly several days later in Walkerville was a most regrettable incident.

In concluding the history of my parish I may say that although St. Peter's occupies a comparatively secluded and isolated site, it is by peculiar coincidence, on direct route of all important lanes of travel today between the Border Cities and Eastern Canada. These include railroad, motor car and even aeroplane routes. In fact, many notables in world history, including members of royalty, government and high ecclesiastical officials of the Roman Catholic Church, have passed frequently through the actual grounds of St. Peter's Church property while unaware of the fact. As they whirled along the rails of the now Canadian National Railway, which for nearly a century has bisected the property of this venerable church, they have been unconscious of the fact that only a stone's throw distant was situated this second oldest Catholic Church in Western Ontario.

As Pastor of St. Peter's I trust that the record of my ministry will be in keeping with the excellent records of the various pastors before me, who so valiantly and faithfully served their people and this historic church.