

A Short History of Catholic Parishes in Waterbury and the Mad River Valley

Introduction

Some of the first Catholics in Vermont came from Canada and settled the northern most part of the state. They were served by priests who also came from Canada. Other Catholic settlers came from southern New England.

After the American Revolution, all of the United States east of the Mississippi River (except Florida, still under Spanish sovereignty) composed a single diocese -- the Diocese of Baltimore. In 1808, four new dioceses were carved out of the original including the Diocese of Boston.

In the 1820s, Jean de Cheverus, the first Bishop of Boston, made two visits to Vermont and thereafter sent itinerant priests into Vermont from time to time. In 1830, Benedict Fenwick, the second Bishop of Boston assigned Father Jeremiah O'Callaghan to Vermont. During his twenty-three years of service in Vermont, he served the religious needs of Catholics throughout the state. He was the first priest to say mass in Waterbury and in Moretown. At the age of 75, he retired in 1853 and returned to Massachusetts, just after Bishop Goësbriand took office. The second priest assigned to Vermont was Father John B. Daly, sent by Bishop Fenwick in 1837. Father Daly served Catholics in southern Vermont.

By the early 1850s, there were nearly 20,000 Catholics in Vermont, five priests and about ten Catholic churches located in such places as Fairfield, Highgate, Swanton, Brandon, Castleton, Burlington and Montpelier.

The Diocese of Burlington was created in 1853. In the same year, Father Louis de Goësbriand was consecrated Bishop of Burlington in old St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Previously, he had served as Vicar General of the Diocese of Cleveland.

Waterbury

The first mass in Waterbury is believed to have been celebrated by Father Jeremiah O'Callaghan in 1847 for Irish laborers constructing the Vermont Central Railroad. Other priests who served Catholics in Waterbury before the establishment of a parish were Fathers John B. Daly, Hector Drolet, Zephyrin Druon and Joseph Duglué. Until a church was built, mass was

celebrated in private homes on an irregular basis.

The first Catholic church in Waterbury was dedicated in 1857 and named for St. Vincent Ferrer -- a fourteenth century Dominican priest, theologian and preacher. The church was located a short distance east of the railroad station on what became Hill Street. Ten years later, Saint Vincent's Church was enlarged. In 1860, mass was celebrated ten times in Waterbury, and there were nineteen baptisms and two marriages. Like his priests, Bishop DeGoësbriand is known to have said mass in Waterbury from time to time.

In 1869, Bishop DeGoësbriand, established a parish in Waterbury and appointed Father John Galligan its first pastor. In 1870, the Diocese of Burlington purchased a house on Main Street to serve as a rectory. In addition to his duties in Waterbury, Father Galligan celebrated mass and looked after the spiritual needs of Catholics in Moretown and Northfield. On May 8, 1874, Bishop de Goësbriand attended mass at St. Vincent Church in Waterbury (perhaps presiding) during a mission conducted by two Redemptorist priests.

When the building adjacent to the rectory owned by the Society of Adventists became available, it was acquired by the diocese. After renovation and expansion, the Advent church, as it was known, was dedicated by Bishop DeGoësbriand on November 30, 1876 and named for Saint Andrew, the Apostle. With the opening of St. Andrew Church, old St. Vincent's church was closed and ownership eventually passed to others and the building was used for various purposes.

In October of 1876, a month before the dedication of Saint Andrew Church, Father Galligan moved to Northfield to become pastor of St. John Church. Reversing the prior arrangement, the churches in Waterbury and Moretown became missions of Northfield and Father Galligan said mass in Waterbury every other week. Father Duglué, pastor in Montpelier, left that post for reasons of health around 1877 or 1878. After returning from Europe, Father Duglué served in Waterbury for less than a year.

When he became pastor in Waterbury in 1869, Father Galligan was also responsible for missions in Northfield and Moretown. His transfer to Northfield changed nothing except his base of operation. That transfer was, most likely, a response to population shifts. The population of Northfield grew rapidly between 1850 and 1870 surpassing both Waterbury and Montpelier. In

fact, Northfield's population in 1860 was about equal to the combined population of Waterbury and Montpelier. Most of the Northfield population influx was composed of Irish immigrants attracted by employment opportunities at the Vermont Central Railroad in Northfield. As a result, Father Galligan's flock in Northfield came to greatly outnumber his Waterbury flock.

In 1885, Father Joseph Brelivet replaced Father Galligan in Northfield looking after the spiritual needs of Catholics in Waterbury as well. When he left Northfield in 1892 to become the first resident pastor at St. Monica Church in Barre, he was succeeded by Father Thomas Donahue as pastor in Northfield with responsibility for the Waterbury mission. Father Theodule Blais was appointed pastor of St. Andrew Church in 1895 with responsibility for the mission in Moretown. Thereafter, Saint Andrew has had a resident pastor.

Pastors of Saint Andrew Church

Period of Service		Pastor
From	To	
1869	1876	Father John Galligan
1876	1886	Father John Galligan*
1886	1891	Father Joseph Brelivet*
1891	1895	Father Thomas Donahue*
1895	1899	Father Theodule Blais
1899	1900	Father John C. McLaughlin
1900	1903	Father Henry J. Maillet
1903	1904	Father Thomas Leonard
1904	1906	Father John A. Lynch
1906	1907	Father Richard J. Cahill
1907	1911	Father Patrick J. Doheny
1911	1914	Father Danel E. Coffey
1914	1935	Father Robert Devoy
1935	1942	Father Laurence R. Cain
1942	1970	Father John M. Dwyer
1970	1983	Father Charles Fitzpatrick
1983	1990	Father Bernard Couture
1990	1992	Father Paul Citti
1992	1993	Father Kevin Rooney
1993	2000	Father Donald Ritchie
2000	2006	Father Bernard W. Bourgeois
2006		Father Jerome Mercure

*Pastor of St. John Church, Northfield serving Waterbury as a mission.

The Mad River Valley

Mass was celebrated for the first time in the Mad River Valley in May of 1853 in a pasture on land donated by Frank Lee, Peter Lee and Colonel J. P. Miller of Montpelier. The first Mass and Father Jeremiah O'Callaghan, the celebrant, are commemorated by a small granite marker atop the flat rock which served as an altar.

Moretown land records show that J. P. Miller of Montpelier and Peter Lee deeded an acre of land in Moretown to "the Roman Catholic Society" in 1841 for use as a burying ground and a church. Again in 1845, Moretown land records show the transfer of the same land parcel to Benedict Fenwick, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Boston. The second transfer was probably intended to rectify the earlier attempt to convey land to "the Roman Catholic Society" that, unless it were incorporated, could not hold a land title.

The first Catholic church in Moretown was built on the same site on South Hill in 1857. The land was already serving as a graveyard. Today, only the steps of the church, and the grave markers remain.

In 1882, Moretown land records show that property in Moretown village owned by George Fletcher was deeded to Francis Hassett who in turn deeded the same land to Bishop Louis DeGoësbriand. The present St. Patrick Church was built on this site in 1882. The disposition of the original church on South Hill is unclear. Some sources say that it was used for other purposes after the new church was built and others that materials from the old church were used in the construction of the new church.

From 1869 until 1895, the spiritual welfare of Catholics in Moretown and the Mad River Valley was the responsibility of Father John Galligan and his successors in Northfield. In 1895, with the appointment of Father Theodule Blais as pastor of Saint Andrew Church in Waterbury, the spiritual welfare of Catholics in Moretown and the Mad River Valley became the responsibility of the pastor of St. Andrew Church in Waterbury although he was often assisted by visiting priests including some from Saint Michael's College.

In 1954, Fr. Louis Logue was appointed curate at St. Andrew in 1954, and soon became the regular celebrant for Sunday Mass at Saint Patrick church.

In the 1950s, the population of the Mad River Valley began to grow as it became a major ski

resort area in the East. A skier himself, Fr. Logue began celebrating Mass on Sundays at Mad River Glen. When the Sugarbush Resort opened in 1958, Fr. Logue celebrated Sunday mass in the cocktail lounge of the Sugarbush Inn.

In 1960, Father Logue began a fund drive to build what is now Our Lady of the Snows Church in Waitsfield. With a gift of land for the church from Philip and Fleurette Lareau, a \$50,000 gift from the estate of Jane Foley Martin and the contributions of local residents and visitors alike, the \$100,000 needed to construct the church was secured before long.

The first mass in the new church was celebrated by Fr. Logue on Christmas Eve of 1963. In 1964, Father Logue became the Catholic Chaplain at the Vermont State Hospital in Waterbury, a post he held until his retirement in 1993.

During the 1990s, Father Logue frequently celebrated mass in Our Lady of the Snows Church on Christmas Eve and often recalled in his homilies the Christmas Eve mass of 1963. The new church was finished except for the pews. Before mass, the congregation was lined up along the outside walls of the church. He reminded his hearers in the 1990s how moving an experience it was for him to see the congregation on Christmas Eve of 1963 move forward *en masse* as he and the acolytes entered the sanctuary from the sacristy.

Our Lady of the Snows Church was dedicated by Burlington Bishop Robert Joyce on March 1, 1964. In 1965, Father Raymond A. Adams was appointed pastor of Our Lady of the Snows with responsibility for the mission in Moretown.

Between 1965 and 1995, Our Lady of the Snows Church had a resident pastor whose responsibilities included St. Patrick's Church in Moretown. In 1995, when Our Lady of the Snows pastor Father Kevin Rooney was appointed pastor of St. John Church in Northfield, the spiritual care of Catholics in the Mad River Valley again became the responsibility of the pastor of Saint Andrew Church in Waterbury -- at that time, Father Donald Ritchie.

After his retirement as chaplain at the State Hospital in 1993, Father Logue frequently celebrated weekend masses in Waitsfield. After his death in 1999, weekend masses in Waitsfield were often celebrated by Father John Kenney, a retired priest and by Father Wendell Searles, Vicar General of the Diocese of Burlington.

In the Spring of 2000, Bishop Angell appointed Father Bernard W. Bourgeois pastor of Saint Andrew Church and Our Lady of the Snows church with responsibility for the mission in Moretown.

In 2002, Father Bourgeois discussed the notion of merging Our Lady of the Snows parish and St. Patrick parish with the members of both Mad River Valley parishes in a "town meeting" held in Waitsfield on June 10, 2002. On the recommendation of Father Bourgeois, Bishop Kenneth Angell merged the two valley parishes in 2003 into a single parish known as "Our Lady of the Snows and Saint Patrick Parish."

Pastors of Our Lady of the Snows Church

Period of Service From To		Pastor
1965	1968	Father Raymond A. Adams
1968	1972	Father William P. Morgan
1972	1977	Father Donald J. Ravey
1977	1985	Father Michael K. Madden
1985	1986	Father John W. Connell
1986	1991	Father Michael Augustinowitz
1991	1995	Father Kevin E. Rooney
1995	2000	Father Donald Ritchie
2000	2006	Father Bernard W. Bourgeois
2006		Father Jerome Mercure

Sources:

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- Jack Smith, *Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Church* (2004)
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