

A Brief History of Saint Joseph on the Brandywine Church

It is the 175th anniversary of St. Joseph on the foundations of the parish two hundred years ago. In saying Masses in the the nearby DuPont powder celebrated in the Sunday School, which



By the late 1830s and Wilmington Diocese, the mills on the Brandywine Philadelphia Archdiocese petition was granted, and portion of their weekly of the church building. The financially the effort. On Mass was celebrated in the Brandywine Church is the operating Catholic Church in Delaware, with Saint Peter's Cathedral in Wilmington being founded in 1818.

of the dedication of the Church Brandywine. However, the began to take shape more than 1814, a traveling priest began homes of Catholics working in mills. In time, Masses were Brandywine Manufacturers could accommodate more people.

before the establishment of the Catholic workers in the DuPont River began to petition the for their own parish. The mill workers contributed a salaries toward the construction DuPont family also supported December 20, 1841, the first church. Saint Joseph on the second longest continuously

Dedication took place on December 20, 1841. The following quotation from the Church of St. Joseph on the Brandywine (1841-1994) by Joyce Longworth and Marjorie McNinch published 1995 for the 150th anniversary, Page 26 tells it all and we quote, "the church was plain, made of local materials, and built by and for the local workforce. On November 16, 1841, the youngest of E. I. duPont's daughters, Sophie M. DuPont (1810-1888), remarked in a letter to her friend Clementina Smith, "The Catholic Church is finished except the altar, etc., and they talk of consecrating it at Christmas." Sophie also related to Clementina, "there was a very large concourse there I hear - protestants as well as Catholics - I think this church will surely be the means of increasing the Roman Catholics in this neighborhood."

Since Wilmington was then part of the Diocese of Philadelphia, Bishop Kenrick, who negotiated the purchase of the land for the church, officiated at the dedication services, along with Father Bernard McCabe, first pastor of Saint Joseph's Church. The only known contemporaneous newspaper account documenting the event is found in the Catholic Herald in 1841:

'On Sunday, the 20th a neat and commodi(o)us stone church with its cemetery, was dedicated to Almighty God, under the invocation of St. Joseph, at Du Pont Mills, Del. by the Rev. Patrick Reilly, of Wilmington, assisted by the Reverend Bernard McCabe, its pastor. The building does credit to the Christian zeal of its generous subscribers." The rectory for the church was also opened at this time. No mention is made of a choir being present at this event, but an 1843 subscription list of parishioners towards the purchase of a church organ illustrates the desire for one."

Shortly after the church opened, a school was established in the basement of the church. A two-story stone schoolhouse was built in 1855 on what is now the Family Center parking lot. Although the Sisters of St. Joseph staffed the school from 1853 to 1870, the Sisters of St. Francis took responsibility and led the school until it closed in 1972.

The oldest tombstone in the cemetery dates back to 1843. Since then, soldiers from every war, as well as several priests who served the parish, have been laid to rest in the cemetery, which was expanded in the 1990s to include the parcel along Kennett Pike. Today, well over 5,000 graves surround the church.

In 1848, the church was enlarged, and again in 1878 the front tower was added. It was not until 1887 that the steeple with the bell finished the top of the front tower. Three arches were added to the altar in 1894 and four years later, stained glass windows were installed. But the most dramatic transformation of the church building in that same year was the wiring of the church for electricity. Electric light allowed for the first midnight Mass at Christmas to take place. In 1902, the Church exterior received its distinctive yellow color with paint donated by Alfred I. duPont that matched many of the duPont homes in the area. And in that year the first pipe organ was installed.

The 1941 renovation of the church included new stained glass windows, which are in place to the present day. The only stained glass that remains from the 1898 windows is the small purple circular pieces at the very top of each window. The sacristy was enlarged in 1950, and significant changes were made to the interior of the church in 1974 in keeping with the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council guidelines on liturgy. This was certainly a controversial time, when the altar rail, main and side altars, and many other traditional parts of the church were removed. Two years later, in 1976, the church property was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The 1994 renovations attempted to harmonize the liturgical rite with the more-than-century old traditions and environment of the church. The current Allen organ was installed in that year, a unique installation in that the one organ is playable from two separate consoles, one in the sanctuary and one in the choir loft. In the new millennium the church has received a new slate roof with repair to the steeple and a new HVAC

system has been installed. In 2016, a Delaware State Historic Marker was placed on the church property.

During all of these years, the parish has been shepherded by twenty pastors and many more associates. The pastors of Saint Joseph on the Brandywine Church include: Fr. Bernard McCabe (1841 – 1842), Fr. Frost (1842), Fr. Daniel Magorien (1843-1846), Fr. John S. Walsh (1846-1867), Fr. John Scanlan (1867-1869), Fr. George J. Kelly (1869-1887), Fr. Edward Henchy (1887-1893), Fr. Peter J. Donaghy (1893-1893), Fr. John D. Carly (1893-1895), Fr. George S. Bradford (1895-1895), Fr. William J. Bermingham (1895-1900), Fr. William J. Scott (1900-1926), Fr. Martin McHale Ryan (1926-1933), Fr. Patrick A. Brennan (1933-1946), Fr. Francis X. Fitzpatrick (1946-1950), Fr. Henry J. Dreyer (1950-1966), Msgr. Henri I. Foltz (1966-1977), Msgr. Paul J. Schierse (1977-1992), Fr. Stephen J. Connell (1992-1997), Msgr. J. Thomas Cini, VG (1997-1998, Administrator), Fr. David F. Kelley, VF (1998-1999, Administrator), Msgr. Joseph F. Rebman, VG (1999-Present).

From humble beginning our one hundred and seventy-five year-old parish was born. In gratitude to Almighty God, we will celebrate throughout this anniversary year of 2016 for what has been and what will be in the future. The Church celebrated the 175th anniversary of the dedication of the Church of St. Joseph on the Brandywine with an Opening Mass and Prelude Concert on the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Sunday, May 1st, 2016

