

St. Patrick Catholic Church

St. Patrick Catholic Church is not only the oldest church in (what became) Lake Forest, but one of the oldest in Lake County, and was even among the earliest dozen parishes established in the Chicago archdiocese.

But it was St. Patrick's Cemetery that came first, not (as more often happens) the other way around. According to local lore, in 1840, two ships collided near the Lake Michigan shoreline, and dozens of sailors perished in the wreck. This was just a few years after the local lands opened for settlement. Because several Irish families had built homesteads near what became Waukegan Road, the deceased Irish seamen were brought here for burial. Michael Yore and Lawrence Fagan donated land for a proper cemetery along what is now Telegraph Road.

At that time, in 1840, this largely Irish Catholic settlement was served by itinerant priests from Waukegan (then called Little Fort), who celebrated Mass in private households.

The first church building was constructed in 1844, of logs, on the cemetery grounds on Telegraph Road. It was 40 feet by 30 feet in size and was called St. Michael's, possibly to honor the patron saint of contributor Michael Yore. Also among the first members were the families of Michael Meehan, Patrick Dawson, Michael Davan, John Atkinson, Patrick Carlin, James Mahan, and John Conway.

In 1849, the local parish was founded; when Bishop James Van de Velde visited that year, he found the five-year-old log church already too small for its membership, and at his urging plans began for a new building. A new site was chosen, at the northeast corner of what is now Waukegan and Rte. 60. Patrick Melody offered his nearby farm to store and fire the bricks and board the bricklayers, who finished their work in 1855. The new brick church and adjacent parish house cost \$14,000.

Several directories of the time dub the new parish "St. Ignatius," but apparently this never entered the local vernacular, and the church was officially known as St. Patrick by the 1860s. In 1875, St. Patrick gained its first resident pastor, Rev. James McGovern. This state of affairs proved short-lived, as Father McGovern also sought to serve the growing population center to the east. He undertook leadership in the construction of the first Church of St. Mary, near the town center in Lake Forest, and relocated his residence to the rectory there. At that time, then, St. Patrick became a mission church of St. Mary.

By 1883, St. Patrick's nearly 30-year-old brick building had grown dangerously cracked and unsafe. Though its members chose to tear down the church, they recycled its original building materials – it was rebuilt with the very same bricks!

Over the succeeding 25 years, the St. Patrick church building seemed to find itself under an unlucky star, and burned not once, but twice. In 1893 it was struck by lightning; the redoubtable church members built it yet again. A 1908 fire, spread from a nearby house, proved more definitive, particularly as it came at a time of transition for the Church of St. Mary as well. (St. Mary's frame church at Illinois and Green Bay was just that year declared in danger of collapse.)

Both churches were rebuilt, in larger, more substantial fashion, according to designs by architect Henry Lord Gay. St. Patrick chose to relocate about a mile to the south, close to the center of the farm community of Everett at the intersection of Waukegan and Everett roads. At this time St. Patrick became its own parish once more, with a new mission church in Deerfield and a resident pastor, Rev. Thomas F. Quinn. Archbishop James Quigley dedicated the new church on October 16, 1910.

In the century since 1910, when the church served less than 100 families, St. Patrick has sustained an astonishing period of growth, counting nearly 1,800 families among its parishioners today. The church's physical plant has grown as well, with a new multi-purpose Parish Center built in 1968, extensive restoration work completed in 1986 (returning the bricks to their original red), and a modern, spacious church constructed in 1997 adjacent to the small 1910 structure, creating a new worship complex.