



In two years Fr. William entered the new church rebuilt by the parishioners' efforts. The walls of the church had withstood the blaze. Clearstory windows were added to the height of the church. Fr. William had them added to illuminate the murals he had installed along the vaulted ceiling. The German muralist Gustav Kinkelin designed the artwork and personally saw it installed. They tell the story of the life of Jesus. New glass was added. The 15 Mysteries of the Rosary was chosen as the theme. By the organ was the tallest glass- that of St Patrick preaching to the Chieftains at Tara. A new high altar was built, replacing the damaged one that was moved downstairs (and is still there today). The marble was from the same pits Michelangelo used in Italy. Images of the sacrifices of Noah after the Flood and the Offering of Melchizedek flank the tabernacle. Statues of St. Patrick and St Joseph grace the altar. A big change was the moving of the altars of the Sacred Heart and St Dominic, installed in the 1890s to celebrate the anniversary of Fr. Michael O'Brien, from the transepts to the front on either side of the main altar. This covered up two former window sites, but the effect was most pleasing.

The church was made to be almost identical to that before the fire. A sacristy was added to the side so the priest no longer had to vest in the cold cellar. Electric bells were added behind the altar so they could be rung automatically at the lifting of the chalice and host. Rubberized flooring was added to quiet the shuffle of shoes. The capitals of the columns were filled with tiny figures of squirrels, ducks, and birds. Over 1000 gas and electric lights illuminated the interior.

At the time of the rededication in 1906, the Cardinal ended his sermon with a reminder that the church was not only the building, but also the people of God. This House of God, continues its mission of serving the people who call the Acre home.

Quick Facts

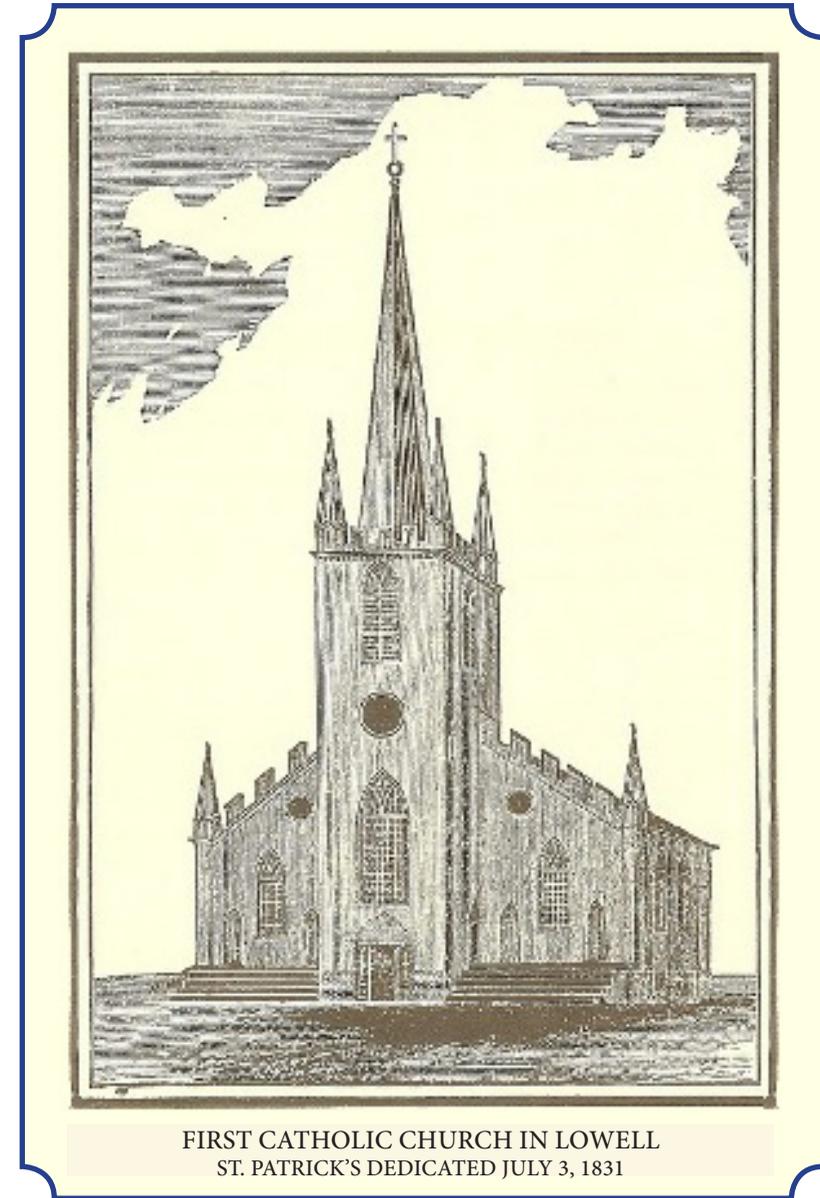
- Original Church built – wooden construction, 1831.
- Oldest Catholic Church in Merrimack Valley and third oldest in Archdiocese of Boston.
- Present structure built 1854. Rededicated after fire in 1906.
- Designed by Patrick Keely, architect of over 150 churches throughout New England.
- Designed in 13th century Gothic style.
- Marble altars and statuary designed by Joseph Sibbel Studios.
- Murals designed by Gustav Kinkelin, depicting the miracles of Christ and sacrifices of the Old Testament.
- Stained glass installed in 1906 imported from Germany.
- Organ designed and built by Jesse Woodberry. Largest pipe organ Woodberry ever built – 2,748 pipes
- Fathers Timothy, John, and Michael O'Brien are interred under granite marker in front of the church.
- Eleven bells are hung in the belfry. The largest bell, St. Patrick weighs 3,600 pounds.
- Side buildings once contained Girls' School, Boys' School, Girls' High School, Girls' Academy, Convent, Rector, and Home for Working Girls
- School Staffed by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (1852-present)
- Masses currently celebrated in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.
- Listed on National Register of Historic Places
- Major restoration completed in 2014-15 returned the church to its original colors and decorative work using paint samples discovered through curatorial work.
- Archaeological dig (2010-2014) showed front yard of church contained shanties built by first generation Irish and uncovered over 1300 artifacts.

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Saint Patrick Parish

Founded ~ 1831



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“Thrice Upon This Holy Place”: The Art & Architecture of St. Patrick Church

William Cardinal O’Connell spoke these words during the rededication ceremony of Saint Patrick Church in November of 1906. On that day the church was crowded to overcapacity. People had arrived at dawn to claim a seat for the ceremony. The Cardinal poured oil on the altar, consecrating it for its use in the Mass. Litanies were chanted as the clergy lie prostrate on the marble steps before the altar. Then the Cardinal ascended the steps of the pulpit to begin the first sermon given in the church.

Beginnings & The First Church



The first Saint Patrick’s was a wooden edifice built by local craftsmen and parishioners after their labors working for the mills. There has been an Irish presence in Lowell (then known as Chelmsford) since the early 1800s.

In 1822 Kirk Boott, agent for the mills, brought a crew of workers from Charlestown to widen the existing canals and build mills for the new industrial city. Father Mahoney was assigned to come periodically to say Mass for the growing Irish population.

In May of 1831, even before the construction of the Church, a Yankee mob attempted to attack the church. The following days newspaper accounts defended the rights of the Irish to practice their faith. The church was dedicated on July 3, 1831. It was the first Catholic church in the Merrimack Valley. Before the building was even finished, plans were being made for expansion. Bishop Fenwick himself came up to Lowell to talk with the male leaders of the community about making donations for the 2 additions needed. He would return soon after because of lack of payments being made.

Growing Pains & The Present Structure

It was obvious when Father John O’Brien arrived in Lowell in the 1840s that an entirely new building was needed. Patrick Keely, famed architect of over 170 churches in the New England region, designed the new house of worship, opened in 1854. It was made of canal stone and designed in the 13th century Gothic style. It was a massive undertaking. Stained glass was imported from Germany. The marble altar had onyx from Mexico and specially cut pieces of Connemara marble from Ireland. The altar stone had a piece of the True Cross embedded in it. On each side of the altar in niches were statues of St. Patrick and St. Bridget. The pulpit was located halfway down on the left hand aisle for better sound.



It is interesting to point out that the same time the Church was being built was the same period that the Irish were going through their worst persecution by anti-Catholic bigots, known as the Know-Nothings.

The political group was rampant in the US at this time. They were anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic. They formed committees that “smelled out” supposed problems and made several visitations to St. Patrick’s harassing the immigrant population.

One of the crowning achievements of Fr. Michael O’Brien’s pastorship in 1874 was the consecration of the church. First the debt on the church had to be fully paid. Many parishioners pledged large amounts of their paychecks to see that this would be accomplished. Bishop Williams spread sand on the floor of the church and wrote the letters of the Greek alphabet as a sign of claiming the church. He then walked around the church three times incensing it. Saint Patrick’s was the crowning glory of the Irish presence in Lowell.

St. Patick School

Father Timothy O’Brien understood the benefit that education could have for the Irish. In 1852, five Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur opened a school for the neighborhood’s children.



Within days 350 students were attending classes with the Sisters. In a short time a kindergarten was opened to care for younger children. Later an academy was added for older girls that taught Greek, Latin, chemistry and physics, subjects not usually taught to young ladies of this period. Later this became Notre Dame Academy in Tyngsboro. The Sisters continue their mission today and Saint Patrick’s remains open teaching young minds.

Fire



The night of January 12, 1904 would never be forgotten by the people of the Acre. A Sister of Notre Dame looked out her window and saw a glow of orange in the night sky. The church was ablaze. Before their eyes they saw the cross on the steeple sway and fall into the church. Firemen used their hoses to break the stained glass to get the water inside. Fr. William O’Brien unashamedly stood before the church and cried.