

**L'Église de Saint Pierre  
ou  
St. Peter's Church  
1874-1974**

## Early History

April 24, 1776, may have been the date of the first Mass to be said within the bounds of our present Parish. "In an attempt to win the sympathy of Catholic Canadians for the cause of American Independence, the Continental Congress delegated Benjamin Franklin, Charles Carroll and his cousin, Father John Carroll to go on a diplomatic mission to Montreal." They sailed up the waters of Lake Champlain and they may have spent the night at the home of Peter Ferris of Panton. (This is the site of the Arnold Bay Farm, now owned by Mr. Alan Lowenstein.) It is thought that Father Carroll said Mass there the next morning. Whether he did or not is not certain, but when he was named first Bishop of Baltimore in 1789 he was also named Ordinary for whatever Catholics there were in the Independent Republic of Vermont.

Between the years 1800 and 1810 about three hundred French Canadians settled in Vergennes. This influx was due to the development of the Monkton Iron Works in Vergennes which had a need for good labor. "French Village" on the West side of Otter Creek came into being at that time, and three boarding houses were erected to care for the laborers who worked for the Monkton Iron Works for ten dollars a month and their "keep."

In 1810 Rev. John Cheverus became Bishop of the Boston Diocese, which included the State of Vermont. He turned to the Bishop of Quebec for missionary aid. In 1819 a very remarkable priest, Father Pierre Marie Mignault of Chambly began his ministry in Vermont. He carried on his priestly work, travelling as far South as Vergennes until 1853. He did this at his own expense and without remuneration, except for the pleasure of doing good.

Bishop Cheverus, accompanied by Father Turgeon of Canada, visited Vergennes during the summer of 1822 and confirmed two persons and in the afternoon preached at the Court House. (Site of the present water tank on the hill behind the City Hall.)

It appears from the records that a priest from Montreal came to the "French Village" in Vergennes and said the first Mass here sometime between 1815 and 1818. At that time there were twenty Catholic families in Vergennes, all Canadian except two English families named Nash and Miller. In 1833 or 1834 the second Mass in Vergennes was said by Rev. Auguste Petithomme, a Father of the Sacred Hearts from France, in the home of Jean Freriere.

At the earnest solicitation of Mssrs. White and Nichols, early businessmen in Vergennes, the Bishop of Boston sent the Rev. Paul McQuade to Vermont where he made his headquarters in Middlebury and travelled to Vergennes. During this period various Missionary priests from both Canada and Boston visited the City and said Mass once or twice a year in the

little red school house on School Street (now an apartment house owned by George Adams) and in various private homes.

Father James Fitton S. J. made a missionary tour of Vermont in 1829 at the request of Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick of Boston and reported back to him that there were several small colonies of Catholics in Vermont, including Vergennes, who needed resident priests. He stressed in his report the friendly spirit with which he was received by the Vermonters, including the Protestants. Because of this request, Rev. Jeremiah O'Callaghan was sent to Vermont as its first full-time Missionary, during the summer of 1830. He was well received and in his report to the Bishop that Fall he indicated that Vergennes was considering building a church. As a result of this, Bishop Fenwick visited Vergennes in December of 1830 and said Mass at the Nichols home.

1834 was an important year for the Catholics of Vergennes as the Rev. James A. Walsh organized a Parish in the City. However, until about 1840, a Priest came only once or twice a year to say Mass and administer the Sacraments. After 1840 Missionary Priests came every three months. It is noted that in 1842 Father Jeremiah O'Callaghan came and performed marriages and blessed those that had been performed by the Justice of the Peace.

In 1842 or 1843 Mgr. John Bernard Fitzpatrick (who became Bishop of Boston in 1846) accompanied by Rev. Beauvis, came to Vergennes to give Confirmation. Over in "French Village," on land owned by Jean Imbleau, an altar was improvised under a walnut tree by the edge of Otter Creek. It is said that a large number of people assisted at this service - Protestants as well as Catholics. Seventeen were baptized and many were confirmed on that day.

During this period we have the following Priests' names recorded as having said Mass in Vergennes: Fathers O'Callaghan, L'Eveque, Drotet, Ancé, Burns, Fitton, Walsh and McQuade.

Family names of early Catholics in Vergennes include: Branchaud, Michel Ferriere, Joseph Maillause, Jean Imbleau, Eloi Langlois, Gorget, Charretier, Maheux, Miller, Nash, Precourt, St. Arnaud, Young, Adams, Goulait and Ainlebeau.

Perhaps without the services of a Priest on a more regular basis the Parish organization of 1834 was not very successful, for it is noted that in 1846 a Parish was organized and a Board of Trustees elected, for the purpose of purchasing land for a chapel. Evidently they met with much opposition locally, but in spite of this they were able to buy the present site of St. Peter's Church. This was a very historic site, being property that had originally belonged to Ethan Allen and later to his daughter, Lucy, who lived there with her husband, Hon. Samuel Hitchcock, for five or six years about 1800.



*From a water color by Arthur K. D. Healy, depicting Bishop Fitzpatrick's visit to the French village in 1842 or 1843.*

Louis DeGoesbriand became the first Bishop of Burlington on October 30, 1853. Diocesan records state that on "4 April 1854, Mgr. deGoesbriand bought a large house to make into a church, and Father Joseph Quevillon was charged to come and say Mass in Vergennes. First Pastor." Local records state that in 1854 Rev. John B. Daly built a wooden church on the site of Holy Family Church.

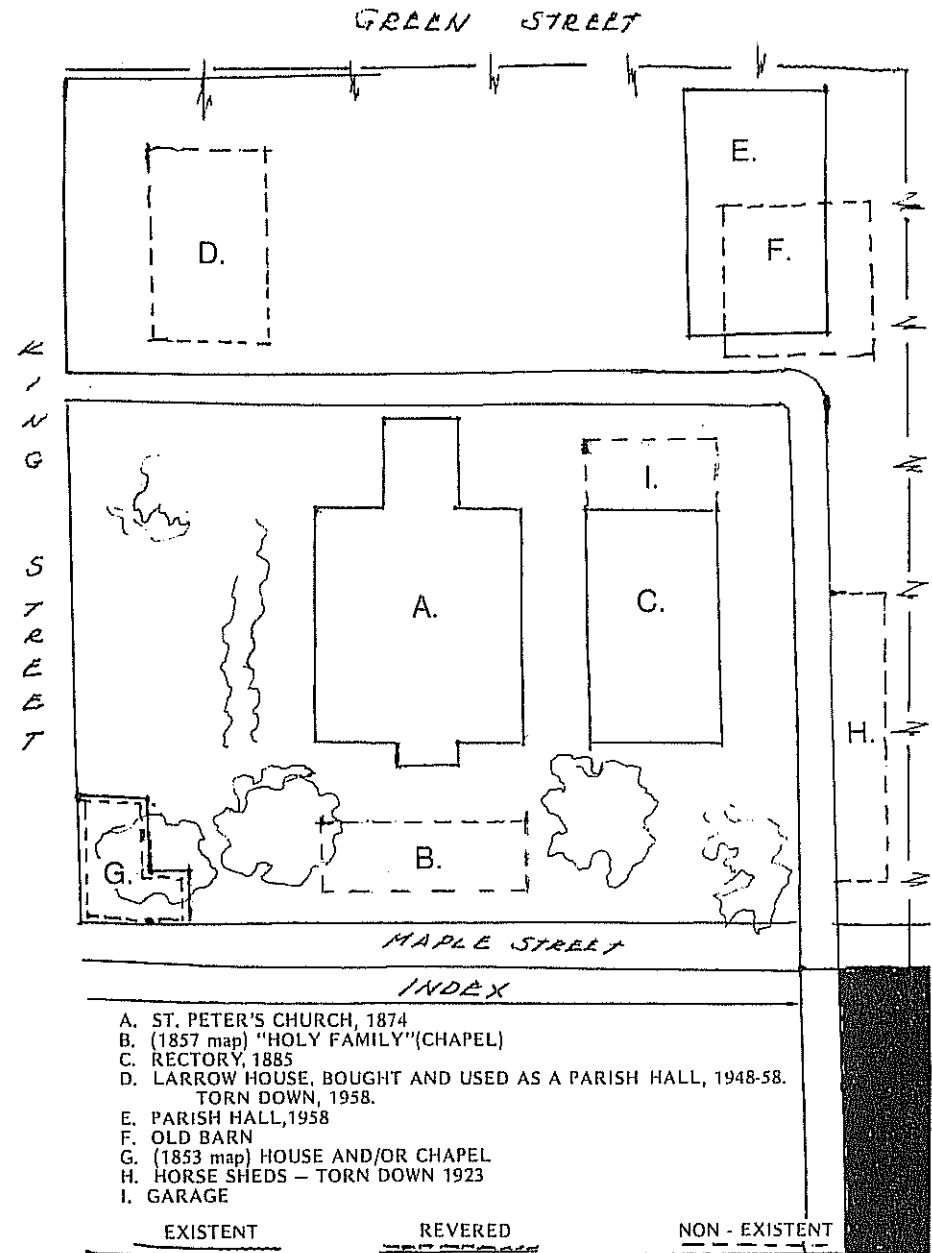
The Rev. Daly was sent to Vermont in 1837, by Bishop Fenwick, to assist Father O'Callaghan and centered his labors at first in Castleton and later in Middlebury. Father Daly was an Irish Franciscan and it is said that true to Franciscan style he never stayed two nights under the same roof. He left Vermont October 3, 1854. Perhaps he was the one that planted the seed that resulted in Bishop deGoesbriand buying the house to make into a Church.

Father Quevillon was the Priest who ministered to the French-speaking Catholics in Burlington and was responsible for the building of St. Joseph's Church for them in 1850, the first French-language church in New England. In 1852 he built the first Catholic Church in Brandon. Father Quevillon returned to Canada in 1854, so if he was our first Pastor he did not serve the Parish long.

In 1855, the Burlington diocese was headed by Bishop Louis deGoesbriand, who had nine Priests and a Deacon to care for the Catholics in the State of Vermont. Between 1855 and 1867 there were three hundred fifty to four hundred Catholics, mostly Canadians, living in Vergennes. During this period Mass was said once a month in the City. The Priests serving Vergennes during this time were: Fathers Cauvin, Peter Le Calver, J. De Glue and Francis Picard.

There are no known pictures of the Chapel but there are many different stories about it. We do know that Bishop deGoesbriand bought a large house, which stood on the corner of Maple and King Streets, to make into a church in 1854 and we are also told that the Reverend James Daly built a church on the site of the "Holy Family Church" in 1854. It is also stated that sometime after 1846, when land was purchased for a chapel site, that a hay barn was purchased and moved to the lot and made into a Chapel, complete with a small sanctuary, a vestry, and a small gallery. It was called the Holy Family Roman Catholic Church in the history books. We have not been able to find out when or why the name was changed from the Holy Family Roman Catholic Church to St. Peter's Church, but the baptismal records of 1857 refer to it, as St. Peter's Church.

In 1857, Mrs. A. J. Austin held a mortgage on the Chapel for \$300 which had been paid off by 1860 where it is recorded there was no debt on the Chapel.

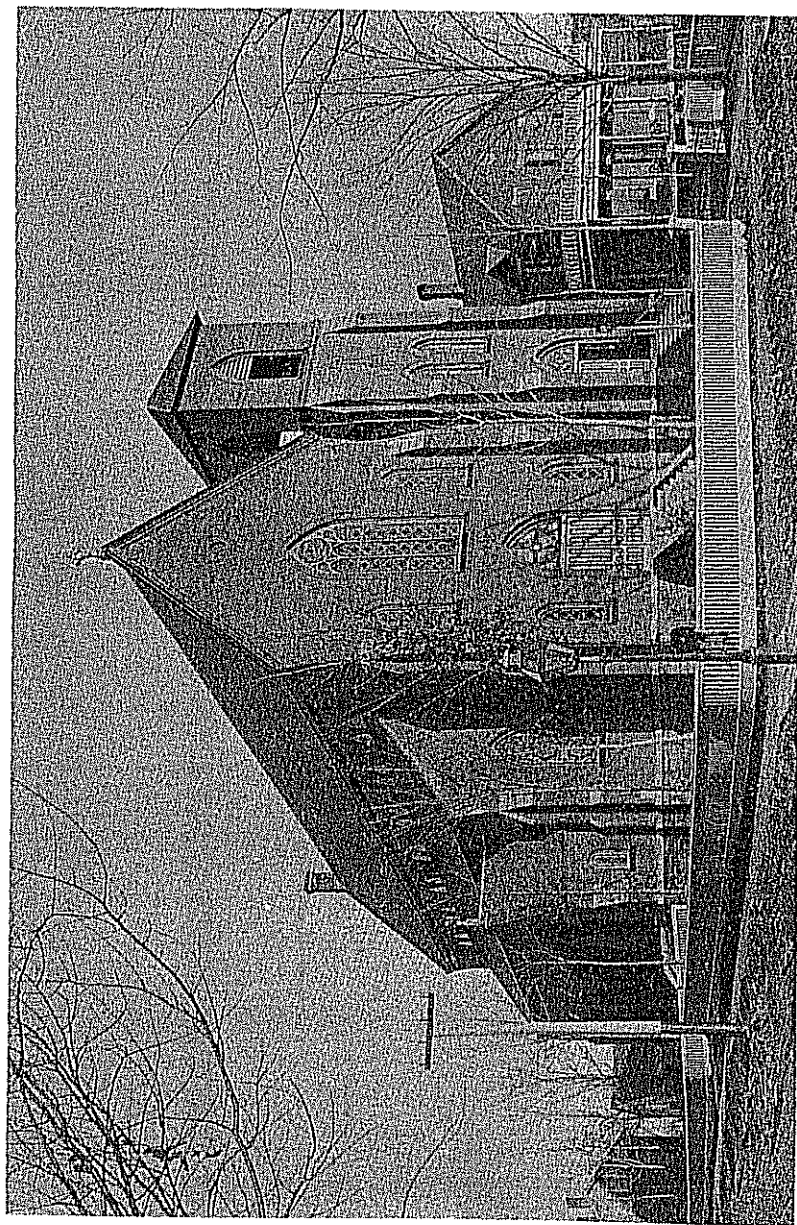


HYPOTHETICAL MAP OF ECCLESIASTICAL EDIFICES  
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VERGENNES, VERMONT

From 1853 until 1881, St. Peter's Parish was cared for by Priests from Middlebury. They came to Vergennes every two weeks to say Mass and care for the needs of the Catholics in the area. Father Francis Picard, a native of France, was assigned to Middlebury and Vergennes and made his residence in Middlebury. He purchased a house and lot on Maple Street, which later became the site of St. Peter's Cemetery. There is no indication that he lived in this house, although the house was still standing in 1871, according to an old map of Vergennes. In 1864, Father Picard returned to his native home, in France, and unfortunately died on his way home. So, once again, there was a change of Priests and Vergennes was served from Middlebury by Fathers Halpin and Gagne. In April 1865, the Rev. Patrick Cunningham (age 26) was appointed to care for the needs of the Catholics in Middlebury, Vergennes, Bristol and Shoreham. He lived in Middlebury and came to Vergennes every two weeks as the others had done. Father Cunningham served as Pastor until 1881 when he was moved to Brattleboro, Vt. It was under his direction and with his foresight that our present St. Peter's Church became a reality.

The Chapel stood on the same lot as our present church but directly in front of it and was used until the present church was ready. Of course, there were those that thought that the Chapel was all that was needed at the time. What happened to it? Some say that the ell of A. E. Frost's house on Water Street is made from it, and others say that Miner Milo's house is at least a part of the Chapel.

*St. Peter's Church as it was built in 1874 before the steeple was added.*



## St. Peter's Church

The first reference to the building of St. Peter's Church came at a time of great prosperity in Vergennes in 1865. There were many new Catholic families moving into the community to work in the industries that had sprung up around the Falls. Father Cunningham saw the need for a larger Church to replace the small chapel that had been in use for nearly ten years. Evidently the new church was started in 1871 as an architect, a Mr. Keely, was paid \$100 for his services and another \$2500 spent on construction costs. He was greatly encouraged by the members of the St. John the Baptist Society as well as the business and professional men of the area. The Hon. F. E. Woodbridge of Vergennes (Grandfather of Mrs. Samuel Wagstaff), U. S. Congressman from Vermont, an attorney and an Episcopalian, offered the Parish all the stone needed to build a Church. Since he owned the land where the stone crusher was, on Green Street extension, it is probable that the foundation came from that site. Hawkins diary of 1871 says "November - The Catholic Society laid the foundation of their new Church which is to be built of brick." "October 1873 - The Catholic Society have built the walls of their church and have the roof on." The cornerstone was laid by Bishop deGoesbriand in 1873. "November 10, 1874 - The new Catholic Church is so far completed that they can hold services in it."

Father Cunningham, it is said, worked along with the laborers in making the foundation. Many families recall that their Fathers and Grandfathers worked on the building of the Church as a labor of love. The bricks for the church came from the Brickyard in Ferrisburg, two miles west of the City, where Dr. Bicknell now lives. The bricks were made of river clay by George Young (Father of Mrs. George Slack) who owned the Brickyard. The bricks were drawn by ox-cart by the Parishioners who came from as far away as Bristol, Monkton and Ferrisburg to help with the project.

There were stonemasons in the parish and it is assumed that they did most of the brick work. They were Mr. George Young, Mr. George Myers, Mr. Ira Myers, Mr. Oscar Myers and Mr. Edward Fagan.

The total cost of the Church was about \$12,500 with a \$6,000 mortgage. In 1885 it was insured for \$10,000.

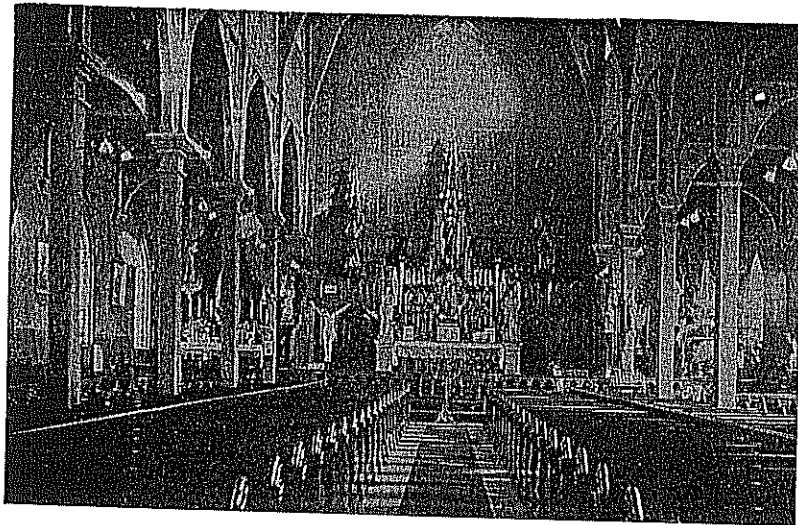
Except for the magnificent stained glass windows, the interior of the church was very simple. The walls were of plaster painted white; and the altar, also painted white with gold scrolls, was the one that had been used in the original Chapel.

Father Campeau evidently felt that the interior of the church should be more in keeping with the edifice itself and in 1884 employed an architect, from Montreal, to redecorate St. Peter's. Mrs. Casey, in her his-

tory of the church says: "Its design originated with a Montreal architect, a Mr. Bouffard whose patterns were jigged out at Ketcham's factory in this city. Mr. Henry G. Miner, of Maple Street, was assisted by Mr. Louis Renaud, with the jigging, but all the carving was done by Mr. Miner, and is a miracle of exquisite skillful craftsmanship. The delicate spirals and raised motifs are most admirably executed. Mr. Miner's co-workers in the construction of the altar also included Edward Belding and Leon Pontbriand." This work was started in 1884, and in January of 1886 Father Campeau records that three altars and the wainscoting were placed in the Church. It is also noted that funds for this project were raised by a collection of five cents per week!

It has been said that Father Campeau expected all workers to donate their talents and it appears that all work was done at a minimum of cost to the church. The Ketcham Furniture Factory suffered as a result of this project as did the families of the workers. Perhaps they felt they had done enough, because in 1890, Father Campeau bought a new pulpit for the church rather than have one locally made. This was a very tall pulpit on castors which was, at times, moved to the center aisle of the church and from which Father Campeau gave his sermons. Later it was used on the altar.

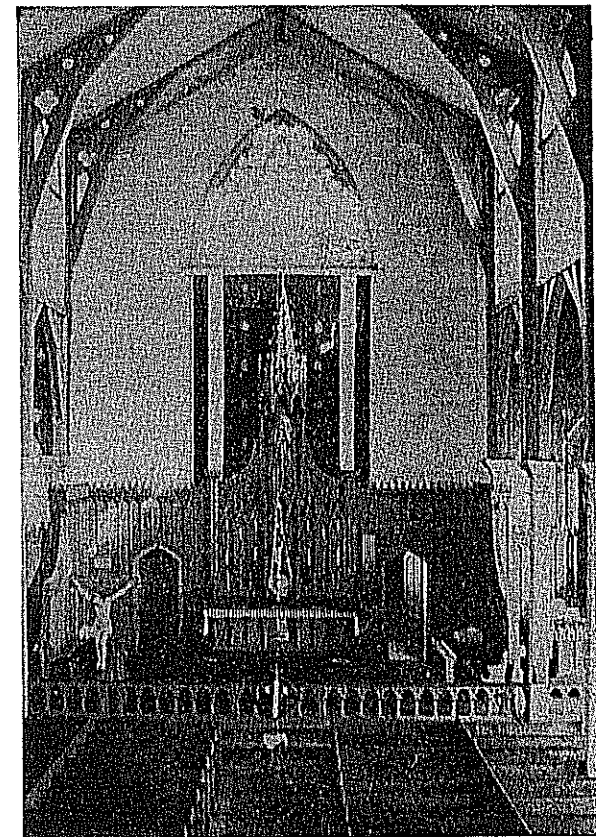
By 1892, Father Campeau felt the need to redecorate the walls of the church. The stark white walls were repainted in tones of tan and brown, and appropriate and rather somber fresco work adorned the walls. At this time, our present Stations of the Cross were installed. The old Stations were given to the mission church in Charlotte which was served by Father Campeau at that time. The generous Pastor donated \$830.00 of the total cost of \$2,229.00 for redecorating the church.



Forty-five years later, in 1937, Father George L'Ecuyer contracted with the ecclesiastical artist and decorators, Frederick G. Necker Co. of New York, to redecorate the church. The following description of the work done was written at the time.

"The walls, from the wainscoting to the ceiling have the appearance of substantial limestone construction. It is as though each stone was laid in place with geometrical precision and each with delicate shadings as is typical of selected limestone ashler. The illusion is made possible by the expert use of a synthetic material which becomes as durable as the product it imitates.

"The main ceiling has been designed in a series of triangular panels. In each panel adoring angels are beautifully painted. A fine appreciation of the use of pastel shades by the artist gives to the figures the feeling of having been superimposed on a background of bluish gray. The effect is one of fine art, conceived in splendid proportions and expresses a charming delicacy of understanding in color harmony.

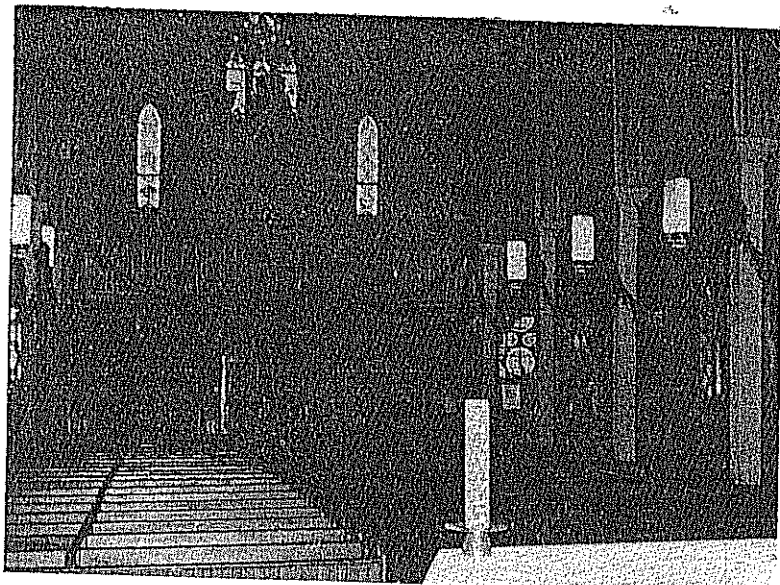




"The very considerable woodwork in the church has been entirely re-finished. Perhaps in no other aspect of his work has the decorator accomplished more appropriate and ornate transformation.

"In treating the wood of the altars and screens special care was used in removing every trace of their former finish. Then, on the natural wood surfaces, the skill of the artist joined with the technique of the cabinet finisher in giving to the old altars a mantle of newness. Their appearance is that of oak which has been mellowed after years of weathering. The carving is made to appear as if done by a craftsman of the 14th century., adding elegance to the famous Gothic temple of that period. It reveals a combination of excellent polychroming and antiquing, while shadings are employed with subtle effect as if to show the accumulated dust of the centuries. Hence the altars arouse the spirit of meditation, reminding us of the enduring gift of faith as they recall the early years of ignorance and persecution."

"Upon entering the church attention is immediately drawn to the Sanctuary, the principal object of devotion. The magnificence of the main altar is emphasized by the addition of a hanging, or drapery in brilliant red. This hanging, called a dorsal, is draped from the base of the rose window, above and behind the Tabernacle. It is made of special material to retain and properly produce the particular variety of color used and it is embroidered with emblems, "PX", "Alpha Omega" etc. The effect is truly magnetic to the eye, the striking richness of the hanging giving a tone of solemnity to the surrounding beauty of the sanctuary and achieving the illusion of height."

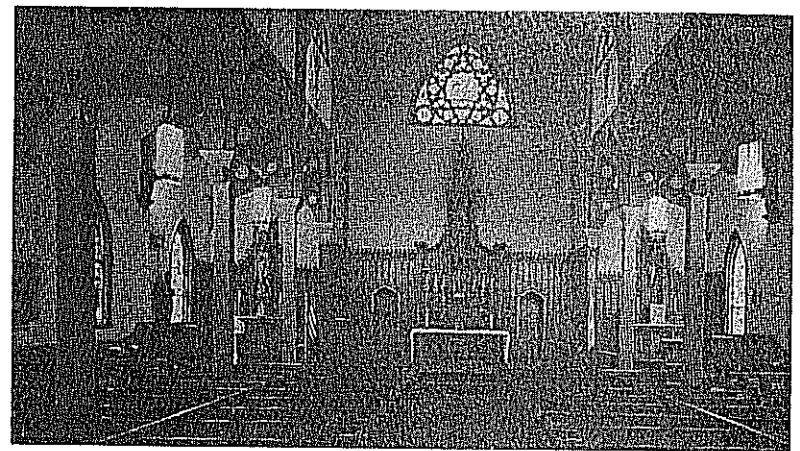


"New lighting fixtures supplant the old. They fulfill an artistic sense of proportion as well as practical utility. Manufactured of Swedish iron, wrought by hand, each contains three mica cylinders, through which sufficient illumination is diffused without their losing purpose in the general scheme of decoration.

"The fourteen Stations of the Cross have adorned the walls of the church for many years. They are of French origin. Father L'Ecuyer and Father Boivin, as well as all the parishioners, cherish them highly and it is gratifying to all that the decorators have so successfully restored their beauty. Even the frames have been enlivened by removal of the wooden ornamentation, while beneath each Station a copper plate is used to carry the inscription in French - the first language of the founders of the church.

"In the Baptistry, at the rear of the church, a splendid example of fresco technique has been inscribed. It depicts St. John baptising Our Lord in Jordan. It is a work of uncommon excellence and lends appropriate significance to the Baptistry.

"The redecoration of all the Statues follows the original Gothic style. The restoration has been very well executed and the Statues now appear unharmed by their years of use."



Again in 1972, it became apparent that the Church needed redecorating and Father Gelineau selected the church decorating firm of Aesthetics and Sacred Arts Ltd. of Montreal, P.Z., Canada."to redo the interior of the church. The ceiling has the stencils of the 1937 redecoration reproduced. However, the background blue of the walls of the church and the coral walls of the Sanctuary are much brighter, reflecting the French influence. It is clean and bright, and all can be proud of our well maintained church.

An organ was purchased for the church in January of 1891 for nine hundred and twenty-five dollars. Of this amount, Father Campeau personally paid four hundred dollars. When the organ was installed, it was necessary to enlarge the balcony to its present size.

On February 24, 1891 Rev. Suave, of Montreal, came to St. Peter's, to give an organ recital. This attracted a large gathering of both Catholics and Protestants as well as ten visiting priests. Dr. Edward Pilon was our Parish Organist and soloist for many years and occasionally gave organ recitals in the church.

We would be remiss if we did not mention Mrs. Frederick Charbonneau, who for over forty four years was the faithful organist at St. Peter's. In 1961 she very deservedly received the Papal Honor called the Benemerenti Medal, in gratitude for her service to her church. It is granted by the Pope in the same spirit of love and charity which prompted Christ to say on occasion, "Well done, good and faithful Servant."

Other organists giving of their talents in recent years have been Mr. David Aubin and Mrs. Ann Sullivan.

For thirty-four years Mrs. George Slack was choir director and soloist. She remembers Mr. and Mrs. Charles Barrows, Mr. William Larow and Mr. Foster Young as contributing greatly to the music in the church in the past as have the Tisbert family and Mrs. John Emerson in recent years.

In 1943, the organ was completely rebuilt and a new console installed by Edward F. Collins of Troy, N.Y., as a cost of \$1,8000. The original pipes were used, the rest of the organ was new.

Since 1972 the young people, under the guidance of Fathers McShane and Bilodeau have been assisting at the Folk Masses with Guitar music.

It was not until 1884 that the Church had a belfry built. On November 27th of that year a large bell was consecrated and hung in place. It weighed fifteen hundred pounds and with its yoke weighs nineteen hundred forty pounds. This bell was given by the parishioners. When the bell was blessed, twenty couples were chosen to be its sponsors and all donors were privileged to pull a white ribbon attached to the great tong and ring the new bell. The name of the bell is "Marie Piere Louis" and an inscription reads "Sanote Petre, ora pro nobis."

The very lovely belfry and steeple with its iron cross, made by Mr. John Dubuke of Shelburne, stands 125 feet six inches from the ground. The work of constructing this was done by local workmen who completed it in 1887.

At the time of the Consecration of the Convent, by Bishop deGoesbriand, on August 28, 1886 a smaller bell was blessed for the Church. Father Campeau states, this bell named "Louis Pierre Augustine" weighs seven hun-

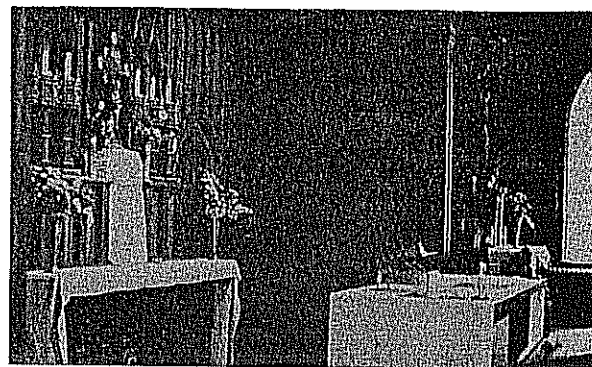
dred pounds. Mrs. Casey's history, however, says the inscription is "Maria Aemelia Ludovica Agnes."

Before Father Candon's death in 1967, one of his fondest hopes had been to have the bells, which had been silent for five years, ring again. The automatic bellringer which he wanted seemed a most fitting memorial for him and the money for it began to come in, from members of the parish, from non-Catholics in the community and from people who attend St. Peter's while vacationing in the area. The \$4,000.00 came in very quickly and the electric bellringer was dedicated to Father Candon's memory in February 1968 with appropriate ceremonies.

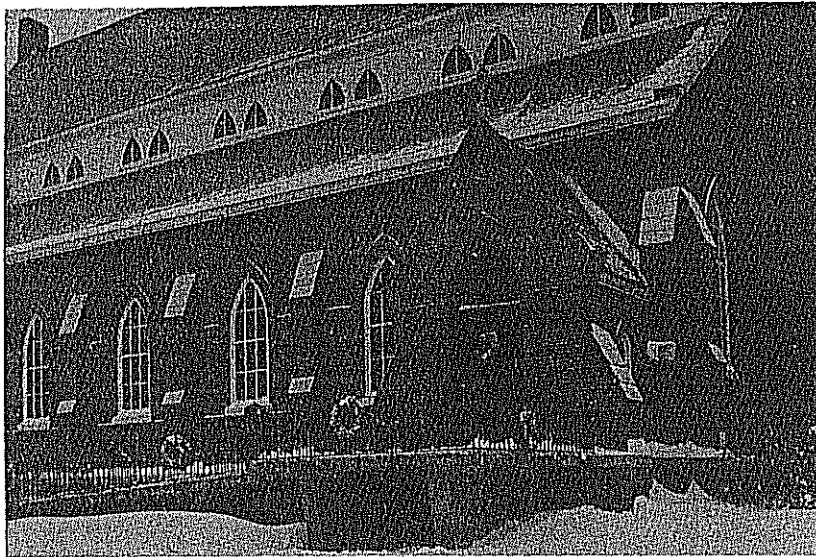
The automatic bellringer, operated by a clock makes it possible for the bells to be rung at any time. They ring for the Angelus at noon and at 6 p.m. On Sundays and Holy Days they ring fifteen minutes before each Mass and again five minutes before the service begins.

By 1962, the ravages of time had taken their toll on the brickwork of the church and it became necessary to have it repaired. The exterior was sandblasted and waterproofed at that time under the guidance of Rev. W. A. Gelineau.

Following Vatican II in 1962, there were many changes in the church. The people of God were no longer to be mere passive spectators, but active, intelligent and prayerful worshippers at the Eucharistic Liturgy. The Altar was changed to face the people so as to permit a greater participation of all in the central act of worship, with the introduction of the vernacular from the Latin prayers. H. J. LeBoeuf and Son were the contractors and they did an exceptionally fine piece of work in making the Altar over in keeping with the Gothic architecture of the church to meet the requirements of the new form of service. At this time the steps on the altar were removed and a new altar table was placed directly in front of the main altar with a lectern placed on either side. The partitions between the two side altars were removed at the same time as was the altar rail. In 1973, a new Tabernacle was placed on the north side altar and the Tabernacle on the main altar was removed.







The ramp leading to the North side door of the church was built in 1966 at a cost of \$2,000 to make it easier for the elderly and handicapped to enter the church and to facilitate the handling of funeral services. Formerly this door had been closed and the entrance area had been used as a Baptistry. At that time the Baptismal Font was moved to the bell tower entrance and later moved to the south side altar where it is at present.

According to a newspaper article, written in 1936, the stone holy water font in use at the entrance of the church was carved from stone taken from the grounds on which the church was built. This evidently is the one that now stands in the south entrance way of the church.

We can all be very proud of St. Peter's Church, which the early Catholics of Vergennes had the courage and foresight to build and which has been so well maintained and cared for by the priests and parishioners since it was built.

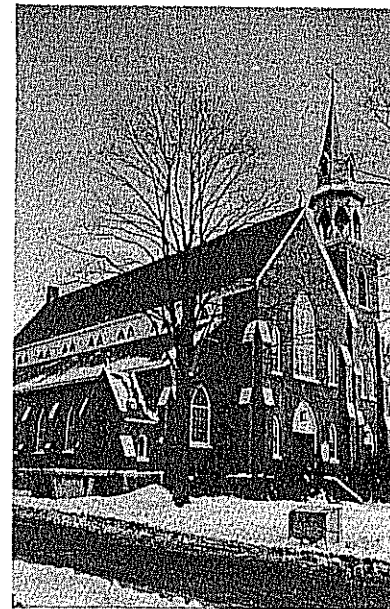
## St. Peter's Rectory

"The Catholic Society, by the liberal gift of their priest, have built a fine brick parsonage adjoining their Church." is a quote from Hawkins diary of 1885.

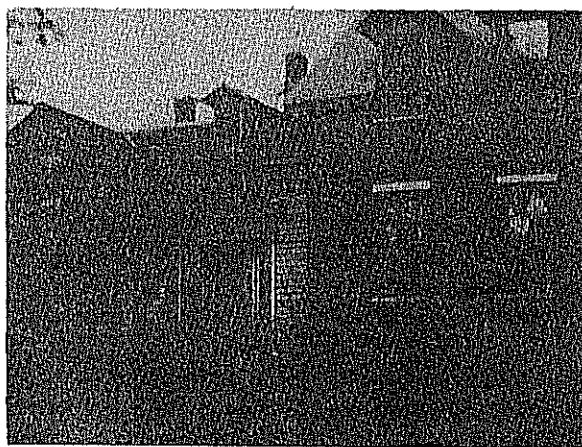
When Father Campeau came to Vergennes in 1884, as the second resident Pastor, there was no rectory. We do not know where he or his predecessor, Father Kerlidou lived, perhaps at the house at the Cemetery or in part of the church. In 1885, Father Campeau built the rectory next to the church and moved into it in October. Mr. C.L. LeBoeuf was the contractor and was assisted by Mr. George Myers, a stone mason. The records show that the cost of the house and the barn was \$2,995.00. In 1894 the Rectory was enlarged at a cost of \$535.00.

Through the years the Rectory has been well maintained and improved. The barn, which stood near the present Parish Hall, has been torn down and replaced with a modern two-car garage. On the south side of the barn the priests maintained a vegetable garden.

The horse sheds which were in use during the horse and buggy days stood on the south side of the driveway between the Rectory and the Chamberlain property. These were rented to parishioners who drove their horses to church. They were torn down during the 1920's.



## St. Peter's Convent-School



The Convent was a two-story brick and wooden structure facing Maple Street on the so-called Convent lot, between the Miner house and Clifford Austin's. The square brick two-story structure was on the South side and contained classrooms. On the ground floor, as you entered through the double doors, was a hall from which you could go upstairs to two classrooms or into the basement to another class room. The first floor also had a classroom and music room. Behind this brick structure was a long wooden hall - St. Peter's Parish Hall - which held over three hundred people and was complete with stage and dressing rooms. The wooden North portion of the Convent was where the boarding students and nuns lived and had their Chapel. Unfortunately these buildings fell into disrepair and finally burned and were torn down in 1932. The Parish Hall was used during the 1920's as a Basketball Court.

In 1884, when Father Campeau came to Vergennes, there were 200 practicing Catholics and he rightly felt that many had lost their faith because for many years there had been no regular Pastor or Catholic education. By 1885, the size of the Parish had increased to one hundred seventy-five families and he recorded that seven hundred fifty made their Easter Duty under his guidance. He felt the time had come when a Catholic school was a must. A local diary reads: "Prosper Elitharp has sold his place on South Elbow Street (Maple Street) to the Catholic Priest. It is to be made into a Catholic School." In September 1885 the same diary states: "A Parochial School has been opened in connection with the Catholic Church. The building of brick was erected on a lot recently bought from Prosper Elitharp. It is a fine building and opened with about 200 in attendance. The teachers are four nuns from Montreal." Father Campeau notes that the building of the convent and repairs on the old house cost \$4,637.00. The wooden part, used as the Convent was the original house that stood on the

land when it was purchased by the church. In 1897 Fr. Campeau was negotiating to buy the lot of land adjacent to the Convent.

The following information comes from the archives of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, in St. Laurent, Quebec, who very graciously shared their records with us and to whom the Parishioners of St. Peter's owe a great debt of gratitude for their twenty-one years of service to the Parish from August 1886 to March 1907.

On August 28, 1886, four sisters of the Holy Cross (Sisters Ste. Catherine, Ste. Euthyme, St. Francis Assissi and Ste. Helene) arrived in Vergennes, by train at eleven P.M., and were greeted with great pleasure by Father Campeau who explained their mission to them. The following day Bishop deGoesbriand came to bless the Convent and the Convent bell. The bell was a gift of Mr. Patrick Rafferty of Montreal and is inscribed "Patrick Helene," which makes one wonder whether Mr. Rafferty was Sister Helene's father. The bell weighed two hundred pounds. The sermon at the Mass, given by Father Kerlidou, our first resident Pastor, was on education and was to encourage all parents to send their children to St. Peter's School. Vespers and Benediction were included in the day's activities.

The enrollment was larger than expected and on September 13th, Father Campeau went to Montreal to secure the services of another Sister for the school. As a result, Sister Ste. Aldegone came to teach French and the first and second grades. Music was an important part of the curriculum. Evidently, this was a model school as many Pastors from the diocese and local teachers visited the school.

Examinations were oral. The first noted is in November 1886 when Father Campeau and his brother, also a Priest, came to the school to examine the children in both French and English and it was stated that they were well satisfied. After that, examinations were given in December and May. The December examinations were given by the Pastor and his Assistant with the parents and Dr. Hopkins, the local Superintendent of Schools, present. The examination period was mixed with the singing of hymns. Dr. Hopkins approved the profound teaching. In May, Bishop deGoesbriand and his Assistant came to test the children. He returned again before the close of the school year when fifty-seven children received First Communion and were Confirmed. The enrollment for the year shows a maximum of 224 and a minimum of 180 students. Total receipts for the year were \$1,256.36 and the expenditures were \$1,085.62.

The enrollment gradually dwindled from the 224 in 1886 to a low of 65 in 1906. Part of the cause may have been financial, since in 1905 the Sisters noted that the Bishop came and gave a special mission praying for employment for the fathers of the students. Locally it is known that those children, who had for various reasons, transferred to the Public School, were set back a grade or two. This was probably because of a language barrier, most of the classes having been taught in French at the Parochial School. In 1905, when the sisters were asked to teach the Catholic children who attended public school their Catechism on Sunday afternoons they

recorded: "It is a great pity to see so many of our children deprived of a Christian Education by the ill will of the parents who refuse obstinately to send their children to the Convent."

The Fall of 1906 saw very few children enrolled at the Convent because "of English," and Father Campeau said "when I leave Vergennes the sisters will soon leave after me, if my successor has less zeal, for he will close the school rather than pay the Sister's salaries from his own pocket." Father Campeau left December 25, 1906 and the school closed March 1, 1907.

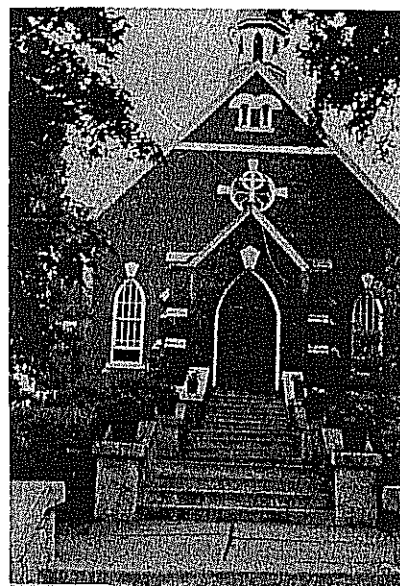
Each year the Sisters returned to their Convent in St. Laurent, Quebec, for the Summer, and in late August five or six sisters would return to Vergennes by train, where they would be met by two wagons and taken to the Convent where they labored in the service of the Lord in educating the Catholic children of our Parish. There were classes every day. Catechism was taught to the public school children as well as those attending the Convent. They participated in all the Parish Missions, Forty Hours, Suppers, Bazaars, etc. When the children participated in the Celebration of the Centennial of the Inauguration of George Washington in 1889, one hundred forty Convent students took part in the parade and were praised for their good conduct which gave honor to the Parish school. At the close of each school year, Father Campeau took them all on an excursion picnic. He evidently rented one of the boats and took them to his property at Keeler's Point (Ecole Champlain) where they picnicked, fished, chased butterflies, picked strawberries and played games. The parents put on suppers, the students enacted plays, and Bazaars, lasting as long as eight days, were put on to raise funds for the school.

Those who attended the Convent received a fine Catholic Education and the Parish will always be grateful to Father Campeau and to the Sisters of the Holy Cross for their generosity in making it possible for St. Peter's to have had a parochial school for 21 years.

Beatrice Daniels Casey (Mrs. George W.), who dedicated her life to God, her family, her church and her community, received her early education at St. Peter's Catholic School, and always gave credit to the Sisters of the Holy Cross for her good education and religious zeal. Mrs. Casey was especially interested in the youth of the parish, for more than fifty years she taught religion to the children of the parish and part of that time, to the Catholic children at the Weeks School, directed and played the organ for a girls' choir as well as being very active in all parish activities. She was a well known historian, wrote a history of the parish and took part in many community activities. In appreciation of her talents and her willingness to use them for God and for souls, Bishop Joyce bestowed upon her in 1962 the Benemerente Medal, a Papal Award, in gratitude for her service to mankind, especially the youth of St. Peter's Parish.

In 1961 Mrs. Casey was honored by the CYO for her fifty years of service to the youth of the parish when she was presented the PRO DEO et YUVENTUTE award (For God and Youth.)

## Weeks School



The Catholic children at the Weeks School have been under the jurisdiction to the Pastor of St. Peter's since Father Kerlidou became the first resident Pastor in 1881. At first there were no regular classes of instruction, but they attended mass at St. Peter's from time to time, were baptized, received First Communion and Confirmation.

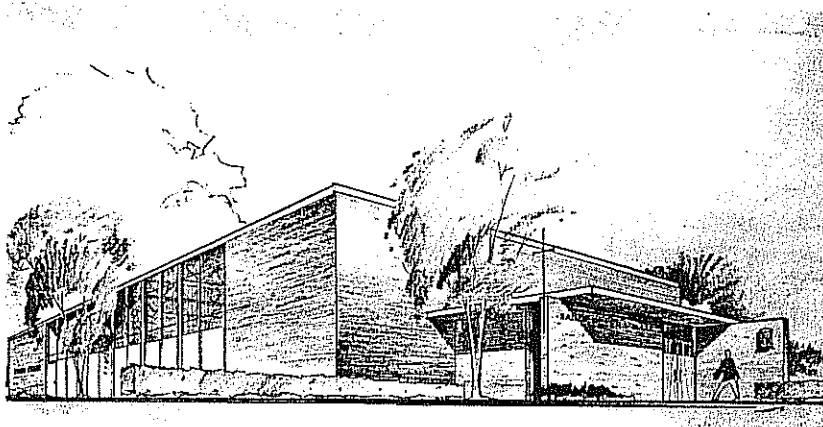
Under Father Campeau and his Assistants, regular classes of religious instruction were instituted, which were carried on by Father Vezina and his assistant Father Marion with all the Catholic children from the Weeks School attending Mass regularly at St. Peter's. From 1920 to 1936, the religion classes were taught by lay people of the parish and Catholic members of the staff at the school, with Mass attendance at St. Peter's. From 1936 to 1944 religious instruction was given by the Sisters of Charity. From 1944 to 1951, the school had a Catholic Chaplain from the office of Vermont Catholic Charities and attended Mass at the Chapel at the School. Since 1950, the religious instruction has been the responsibility of the Curates, who have instructed the young people and said Mass at the Weeks School Chapel.

## St. Peter's Parish Hall

"The opening of this new hall can be likened to the lighting of a candle that will bring light to this and future generations," were Bishop Joyce's words at the dedication of the Parish Hall in 1958. The new hall was built to benefit our youth, our Parish, our community, and has served its purpose well.

When Father Alfred Couture came to Vergennes in 1942 he realized the need for a Parish Hall and consulted with Bishop Brady about the possibility of our Parish meeting this need. Three possibilities were considered; building a new hall on the Convent lot, making a hall in the basement of the church, or buying the small house in back of the church for a temporary hall. Because of the wartime shortages of materials and labor, the last alternative was chosen and the small house on King Street, occupied by Mrs. Larrow, was purchased in 1944 for \$2,000, with the provision that the church would not take possession until after Mrs. Larrow died. So it was not until May of 1948, that there was once again a Parish Hall, there having been none since the Convent closed in 1907.

In 1955 Father Couture received permission from Bishop Ryan to proceed with plans for an adequate hall provided that \$30,000 could be raised in the Parish immediately. The response was most encouraging and over \$32,000 was raised between June and September of 1956 from members of the Parish and friends in the Community. "Prayer, Work and Sacrifice" was the motto for the successful campaign. Several pieces of property were acquired at this time and the old Parish hall torn down to make room for the present hall and parking area. Mr. and Mrs. David L. Ryan gave a strip of land on the back of their lot, and land was taken from what is now the Grange Hall property. The property which was not needed was then resold.



It was thought that this new building might be the start for a Parochial School which would be built at a later date, but this never materialized and probably partially accounts for its being a combination gymnasium and hall. Original plans for a two-story building with a full basement has to be modified because of costs. A contract was given to the Carles Mabel Co. of Burlington and ground for the hall was broken September 18, 1956, and completed in January of 1958.

The building is of fireproof construction, 70 feet by 60 feet, made of cement blocks faced with red brick. The modern gym and all purpose hall has bleachers to see 300 and folding chairs and tables to seat another 300. The first floor also contains a ticket lobby, a fully equipped kitchen, toilets and shower rooms complete with lockers, in addition to a furnace and large storage room. On the second floor there are three classrooms for use of the Catechism classes and smaller group meetings.

Unfortunately, Father Couture's untimely death in 1956 prevented him from seeing his project completed, but we of St. Peter's will always be grateful to him for his foresight and planning for our Parish Hall which was dedicated to his memory. We were most fortunate to have as his successor Father Wilfred Gelineau, a very able business administrator, to carry the project to completion.