



History of St. Stanislaus Parish.

100 Years of Love 1892-1992 St. Stanislaus, Hilliards, MI, p. 2-22.
CAP at Orchard Lake.

The historical events of our parish began when a few Polish families settled in the North Dorr/New Salem area. This was an area principally established by German farmers. However, it was in our present day Hilliards where a small colony of these Poznanian and Kashubian Polish farmers decided to relocate and form their own community. Foremost among them was Michael Burchardt, who in 1868, emigrated from the Tuchola region, north of Poznan, Poland, to Hilliards.(1) Mr. Burchardt generously donated two acres of land for the use of building the church and school.

During the early years, the Catholic pioneers traveled by horse and buggy, or on foot, to attend Sunday Mass at either St. Mary's Church, New Salem, or Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, North Dorr. A rich land owner, David Hilliards, after whom the hamlet was named, donated the material to build the first church, in an attempt to prevent the Poles from moving out of the area to a vicinity more accessible to a Catholic church. A little frame church was erected so that they could be served as a mission by visiting priests.(2) These priests stayed at the home of Michael Burchardt, whose home still stands today adjacent to the church property. When priests were not available to say Mass, the community held para liturgical services.

The priests who served the Hilliards area during this time included Fr. V. Bronikowski, Fr. Anton Joseph Burhsenmann, Fr. Ponganis, and Fr. Leopold Moczygemba. Fr. Bronikowski, pastor at St. Mary's, New Salem, came to say the first Mass in Hilliards.(3)

Fr. Burhsenmann was the resident pastor at North Dorr Visitation Parish.(4) Fr. Ponganis was from St. Adalbert's Parish in Grand Rapids and often took the train to Hilliards to offer Mass.(5) Fr. Moczygemba, while still a young priest in Poland, was recruited as a missionary to the United States by a Bishop from Texas. In 1879, he received approval from Pope Leo XIII to establish a Polish College and Seminary in the United States. He was instrumental in the initiation of its construction in the (Arch) Diocese of Detroit.(6) Fr. Moczygemba founded schools and parishes in ten states and upon coming to Hilliards, built the rectory.(7)

In 1976, these Polish settlers formed the St. Stanislaus Society and Rosary Society. These benevolent organizations met the social and spiritual needs of their member.(8)

Being concerned about the education of their children, the settlers built a parochial school before their church. This structure was constructed in 1885 on part of the two acres donated by Michael Burchardt and served as school and convent. For the first two years, a lay teacher was hired (whose

identity is unknown to us at this time.) The Felician nuns came in 1887 upon the request of Fr. Ponganis. The first Principal and Mother Superior was Sr. Mary Kunegunda, accompanied by Sr. Mary Hedwig and Sr. Mary Casimir.(9)

Mr. Francis Pattok donated the land which was blessed by Fr. Bronikowski as our cemetery and is located one half mile west of our present day church. The first known funeral of the parish is that of Bronislaus Chylewski (Hilaski), who died on August 13,1889.(10)

During the winter of 1892, men of the parish, using horse drawn sleighs, hauled red brick over ice and snow from Hamilton, Michigan to the current church site. Two teams of horses with sleighs were taken on each trip. When encountering a steep hill, both teams of horses were hitched together to pull each load up the incline. The bricks were made and purchased at the Veneklasen Brick Yard. This flourishing brickyard used igloo-shaped kilns to fire their bricks.(12)

The foundation of the church was constructed of field stone brought to the building site from local fields on stone boats.(13) In the spring of 1892, construction of the church began with the cooperation of the whole community under the leadership of Fr. Casmir Wolajtyts.

Work on the new Catholic Church at Hilliards is progressing rapidly. The building will be 42x98feet, with 20 foot posts, and a basement in which will be a furnace. The spire will be 68 feet high. The Church will contain three altars and a large gallery, and the interior will be finely furnished. The windows will be large and 14 feet long. It is expected that the structure will be completed about Oct.1.

The Wayland Globe, June 30,1892.

The Pattok brothers, bricklayers by trade, oversaw the stone and brick work. At one point during construction, part of the sanctuary fell and had to be rebuilt.(14) A sedimentary rock of sand or limestone was used as the cornerstone. It was placed at the southeast corner of the building and marked with the year 1892. Looking to the future, these pioneers head out this cornerstone to enclose a message to their descendants.

The church was completed and ready for services in the fall of 892.

The new Catholic Church just north of Hilliards station was dedicated last Sunday. There was a large crowd of people present to witness the form of ceremony. An excursion train of six coaches from Grand Rapids brought many people of that faith, accompanied by a brass band. The Toledo Brewing Company furnished fifteen barrels of beer for the occasion free of charge and the invigorating beverage was dealt out in a grove nearby, the proceeds going toward paying for the handsome new edifice. Sheriff Strabbing and Prosecuting Attorney Newman of Allegan were present, by request, to see that good order prevailed. The building will be completed soon.

The Wayland Globe. Oct. 13,1892.

Frank Pattock and Joseph Waynski, trustees of a Polish Catholic Church at Hilliards, who were accused of violating the revenue laws by selling beer at a church fair, were tried Tuesday morning in the United States Court. Pattock was convicted and sentence was deferred two weeks. His compatriot with the jawdislocated cognomen was allowed to depart in peace and take his name with him.

The Saturday Globe. March 25,1893.

It was during the year of 1892 that the (Arch) Diocese of Detroit officially recognized St. Stanislaus as a parish. The Most Reverend John S. Foley served as Bishop from 1888 to 1918. (It wasn't until 1937 that Detroit became an Archdiocese.)

On November 21, 1893, Agnes and Stanley (Jim) Kurdelski were the first couple to solemnize their marriage in the newly constructed church. They were married 58 years and raised their nine children in the Dorr/ Byron Center area.

The first marriage to be recorded in the parish records was that of Adalbert Chylewski (Hilaski) and Josephine Morawska. This wedding took place on August 6, 1889, after the parish had been formed but prior to the building of the existing church.

After much painstaking saving by parishioners, and through memorial contributions, enough money was accumulated to purchase the stained glass windows. They were installed in October of 1910.

Sometime between the initial construction and 1911, the current sacristy was added. It is believed that at this time, the addition of the new white altars was made.

The church and its grounds saw many improvements under the leadership of Fr. Leo Malinowski who began his pastorate on July 3, 1936. The interior of the church had deteriorated to the point of needing costly repairs. Fr. Malinowski, through his diligent money managing skills, accomplished the task of renovating the church. This remodeling included new furnishings and a new electric organ. Improvements were also made to the rectory and convent at this time.(15)

Foreseeing the need for a larger, more modern school for the parish, he managed to save \$28,000 for this purpose.(16) Fr. Leo enjoyed gardening and beautified the church grounds with flowers and shrubs. The parish was noted throughout the Diocese of Grand Rapids for its appearance. (17) In 1938, St. Stanislaus Parish was transferred from the jurisdiction of the Archdioceses of Detroit to the Grand Rapids Diocese.

After twelve years of service to St. Stanislaus Parish, Fr. Leo was reassigned to a new parish in October of 1948. In appreciation for his dedication and in conjunction with his Twenty-fifth Jubilee, the parishioners showed their love with a surprise farewell party.(18)

St. Stanislaus Parish was notorious for their chicken dinners as people traveled great distances to eat country chicken. These dinners were started as fund raisers by the Rosary Society. Originally, the chicken was cooked in the homes of parishioners. It was brought to the school, reheated in the convent kitchen, and served in the classrooms. The dinner and its accompanying festivities were moved in the 1930's to the parish hall, one half mile south of the church. This hall was originally built in 1892, as the Congregational Church of Hilliards and was later purchased by St. Stanislaus Parish. Profits from these chicken dinners were used for parish improvements and the building of the new school.

On September 6, 1942, St. Stanislaus Parish observed their Golden Anniversary with their annual chicken dinner.(19)

During the week of July 25th, 1949, construction of the new school began. The brick structure consisted of three classrooms, a library, lavatories, an office and storage rooms.

The Most Reverend Francis J. Haas, Bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, officiated at the ceremony of the blessing and erection of the cornerstone on Sunday, October 16, 1949.20 Enclosed within the

cornerstone was a history of St. Stanislaus Parish, photographs of the present Bishop and pastor, the latest newspaper, coins and a relic touched to the True Cross. The ceremony was witnessed by a large crowd. Many local clergy were present to assist Bishop Haas with the ceremonies.(21)

A separate ceremony, taken from ancient liturgical rites, was held to dedicate the new school on February 19,1950. The Right Reverend Monsignor Joseph Pietrasik was the main celebrant of the ceremony. A procession from the rectory to the new school began the festivities. Monsignor Pietrasik offered a blessing upon the building and all those who would work, teach, and study within it. The dedication services closed with Benediction in the church with Fr. Raymond Pattok.(22)

In 1953, an additional structure was built onto the school. This included a parish hall, kitchen, and another set of restrooms. Many parishioners assisted with the construction that was supervised by Romuald Belka.

In the 1950's, the church bells were removed from the cupola due to its structural damage. They were stored in the convent until it could be decided what to do with them.

The 1960's brought many changes to the world, as well as St. Stanislaus Parish via the Second Vatican Council, called together by Pope John XXIII. Upon John XXIII's death, the direction of Vatican II fell under the auspices of Pope Paul VI.

The Council called for "active participation" of the laity, and liturgical reform, thus the Mass was changed from Latin to our vernacular (English), to aid in the people's comprehension. In order for the laity to better participate, a new wooden altar was placed in the sanctuary of St. Stanislaus Church, at which the priest faced the congregation while saying Mass. Lay lectors and Eucharistic Ministers were also incorporated at this time.

In order to make bishops more accessible to the growing population within the church, Vatican II created more dioceses, including two in Michigan. Consequently, the Diocese of Kalamazoo was formed in 1971, with nine counties of southwestern Michigan. It was comprised of 46 parishes, including St. Stanislaus, and 19 missions which had formerly belonged to the Grand Rapids and Lansing Dioceses.(23) The Most Reverend Paul V. Donovan was installed as the diocese's first Bishop on July 21,1971. John Cardinal Dear den, Archbishop of Detroit, was the principal consecrator at the ceremony.

In 1974, it was decided to update the church structure. A side exit was created on the west wall of the church. This exit was temporarily used as the entrance, while the main entrance was being remodeled. Barrier free restrooms were added on to the east of the vestibule and a sound proof cry room to the west. The damaged bell tower was removed and was replaced with a large aluminum cross. The archway and overhang, constructed of red brick, completed the handsome new facade.

In 1976, the Home and School Association was formed by parents of St. Stanislaus School students. The purpose of this organization was to host activities such as the Annual Open House and the Christmas Program. Eventually a commitment was agreed upon between the School Board and the Home and School for the Association to take over the fund raising activities within the school.

On September 15,1979 a special fund drive officially began to obtain the monies needed to have

the bells refurbished and build a tower in which to place them. By spring of 1980, the funds had been raised and construction of the tower was begun by the I.T. Verdin Co., of Cincinnati, Ohio. The bells were sent to Verdin's to be sandblasted and polished. The three bronze bells consist of one 36 inch Stuckstede bell, and one 32 inch Stuckstede bell (both cast in 1892) and one 24 inch Vanduzen and Tuft bell (cast in 1889). They were polished to a satin finish and placed in a 50 foot tower made of self-weathering steel on July 11. A crown of anodized gold aluminum was placed on the top of the tower. The new tower structure was connected to an electronic ringing system. The ringing functions were set to ring the Angelus and Mass call on weekdays and Sundays. The Angelus and funeral toll ring on the largest bell.(24) Upon completion, the tower structure was dedicated on August 24, 1980, by Bishop Paul Donovan.(25)

During this time, the Felician sisters, still serving St. Stanislaus School, resided at the St. Therese convent in Wayland. Thus the original convent and school building stood down by Arthur Harnish to make room for the bell tower and adjacent parking lot. The stained glass windows from the convent chapel were purchased by Anthony Rakowski of Dorr. The chapel pews were transferred to the cry room and are still currently used.

Sacred Heart Church of Watson became a mission of St. Stanislaus Parish in 1980, and shared the services of one pastor.(26) Prior to this, Sacred Heart was a mission of Blessed Sacrament Parish of Allegan.

As the parish grew, the need for more space in the school became evident. School enrollment increased making it necessary to use parish hall space for temporary classrooms. In late October, 1984, a fund drive was begun to raise money for an addition to the school.(27) Bishop Donovan granted permission for the expansion, upon the request of the Pastor, Fr. Dennis Boylan. This was the first time in the history of the Diocese of Kalamazoo that any school had undertaken such a major expansion.(28)

On Sunday, May 19, 1985, a ground breaking ceremony was held and construction of these six new classrooms began. The architect for this project was Reid & Associates, while the contractor was Pioneer Construction Company out of Grand Rapids.

The new classrooms were complete and ready for use when school began in the fall of 1985. An open house was held on September 22, to celebrate its completion.

In 1988, the Felician sisters concluded 101 years of spiritual guidance and teaching. At this time, the first lay principal, Peter J. Boyd, was hired. A kindergarten was started in 1989 and a pre-school was added in 1990.

Costly repairs to both the church and school roofs were performed in 1991. Also, the parish took advantage of the opportunity to connect to the newly laid natural gas pipeline. New furnaces were purchased for the church and parish halls, while the school furnace was converted to natural gas.

At the close of the first hundred years, St. Stanislaus Parish can account for 1735 baptisms. On July 28, 1889, Nicodemus Laskowski was the first to be baptized into this community. Emily Renae Davis was the most recent to be baptized on June 21, 1992.

Since November 21, 1893, when Stanley and Agnes Kurdelski were married, (the first wedding to take place in St. Stanislaus Church), there have been 579 weddings. The latest vows to have been solemnized are that of Gary and Angela (Schumacher) Venturo, which took place on August 8,1992.

It is difficult to give an exact number of funerals having taken place in St. Stanislaus Church. This is due to the incomplete records from earlier years when it was not a requirement for parishes to record them (only records of Sacraments were mandatory). However, the parish records do show a total of 570 funerals. The first death recorded was Bronislaus Hilaski on August 13,1889. The most recent funeral to sadden our community was that of John Kramer, which took place on June 29,1992.

FOOTNOTES OF PARISH HISTORY

- 1 Edward Adam Skendzel, A Schematic Historical Overview of the Pioneer Grand Rapids Polonians. (Grand Rapids Historical Society, 1983).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 The Wayland Globe, Feb. 24, 1950.
- 4 Leslie Tentler, Seasons of Grace; A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit. (Wayne St. Univ. Press, 1989).
- 5 Edward A. Skendzel, The Sacred Heart Story, (Grand Rapids, 1981).
- 6 Father Leopold Moczygemba, A Biographical Overview, (Panna Maria Historical Society, Panna Maria, TX).
- 7 The Wayland Globe, Feb. 24, 1950.
- 8 Edward Adam Skendzel, A Schematic Historical Overview of the Pioneer Grand Rapids Polonians. (Grand Rapids Historical Society, 1983).
- 9 The Wayland Globe, Feb.24, 1950.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 St. Stanislaus Parish Records (St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, Dorr, MI).
- 12 Michael Neuhaus, parishioner who interviewed Bernie Voorhorst, a long time resident of Hamilton.
- 13 Chester Belka, parishioner whose father, Walter Belka, helped haul the bricks from Hamilton in 1892.
- 14 Anthony Rakowski, Interview, August 5, 1992, Dorr, MI.
- 15 Detroit Archdiocesan Archives, Detroit, MI.
- 16 Pastoral Visit of Pope John Paul II, Sept. 18-19, 1987, Archdiocese of Detroit, Archdiocese of Detroit, 1987.
- 17 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 7, 1910.
- 18 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 29, 1948.
- 19 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 21, 1949.
- 20 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 29, 1948.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Detroit Archdiocesan Archives, Detroit, MI.
- 23 Adeline Marcinek, Interview, Aug. 7, 1992, Wayland, MI.

- 24 Mildred Moraski, Interview by Tom Kurdelski and Louis Harnish, July, 1992.
- 25 Adeline Marcinek, Interview, Aug. 7, 1992, Wayland, MI.
- 26 The Wayland Globe, Sept. 4, 1942.
- 27 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 14, 1949.
- 28 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 21, 1949.
- 29 The Wayland Globe, Feb. 24, 1950.
- 30 The Kalamazoo Gazette, June 18, 1971.
- 31 St. Stanislaus Parish Records, Bell Tower File, (St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, Dorr, MI).
- 32 Proclaimer, Sept. 12, 1980.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 The Wayland Globe, Oct. 1984.
- 35 The Wayland Globe, Mar. 27, 1985.
- 36 Ibid.