

ST. PETER'S CHURCH - LOWVILLE

The first white settlers in the town of Lowville came from Westfield, Conn., in 1798. There is no record of the religious affiliation of these first settlers. The early Catholics were James Hefferman, who came from Tipperary, Ireland, and who settled in Martinsburg in 1828; John Lynch, from Dublin, Ireland, in 1832; William Curtis, from West Meath in 1832; and James Kelly from New York City in 1840. It was at Mr. Kelly's house in 1840 that the first Mass was celebrated in this settlement by Father James McBride of Utica.

Father William Howard was appointed parish priest of Lewis County in 1845, with headquarters in Constableville. He visited Maple Ridge and offered Mass in the home of James Hefferman. During this period, the North Country was under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Albany. It was Bishop John J. Conroy of Albany who established St. Peter's Parish, Lowville, in 1865. He appointed Rev. J. Herbst as the first pastor with Mass being celebrated in the court house. The towns of Lowville, Watson, Martinsburg, Harrisburg and Pinckney made up the new parish. There were three churches at this time, St. Patrick's in Maple Ridge, St. Mary's in Harrisburg and Sts. Peter and Paul in New Boston.

Since Lowville was the largest town and the railroad was in the process of being built through this town, the residence of the pastor was located here with Father Herbst as the first resident pastor. He was succeeded by Rev. Joseph Fitzgerald who was appointed pastor on Dec. 8, 1867. The first recorded baptism was on Christmas Day, 1867 - that of James Mahoney.

In 1869 the first St. Peter's Church was built with land donated by the Hon. Dewitt C. West. It was located in the eastern section of the village at a site which is now the juncture of Church Street and Highland Ave. Because no streets were laid out at that time, the church was built in the middle of pasture land. The church was dedicated in 1870.

In 1871 Rev. William Nyhan succeeded Father Fitzgerald. With the Utica and Black River Railroad being completed, the population increased. Mass now was said every Sunday with the Catholic population consisting of about 80 families, some German but mostly Irish.

In 1872 the Diocese of Ogdensburg was established with Most Reverend Edgar P. Wadhams appointed as the first bishop by Pope Pius IX. In 1873 St. Peter's Church was incorporated with Rev. William Nyhan as pastor. Trustees were Patrick Gleason and Jacob Guepe. During Father Nyhan's pastorate, the rectory was built in 1876 and a new sanctuary with marble altar and a pipe organ were installed. In 1901, during the pastorate of Rev. John O'Rourke, a tower and belfry along with a ton and a half bell were added to the church. The Knights of Columbus and Holy Name Society were also established in the parish under Father O'Rourke.

With the building of St. Mary's Church in Glenfield in 1918, St. Patrick's Mission Church at Maple Ridge was removed from the Lowville jurisdiction. In 1922, the Catholic directory listed 280 families for St. Peter's with Rev. George L. Murray as pastor. With the growing population in Lowville it soon became apparent that a new church would have to be built. The site chosen was on Shady Avenue near the business district. The cellar was dug in 1927 and on April 28, 1928 the cornerstone was laid with dedication of the church taking place on Trinity Sunday, May 26, 1929 by Bishop Joseph H. Conroy. Built with Gouverneur marble in Romanesque style, the cost of the church was two hundred thousand dollars.

Four Felician Sisters from Buffalo came to St. Peter's in September, 1940 at the request of Msgr. George Murray. A convent house was provided for them, the former residence of Eugene Arthur, which had been moved to land at the rear of the church. At one time this house served as a Knights of Columbus Hall.

With Rev. John A. Cotter as pastor, a significant event in the history of St. Peter's Parish took place on May 4, 1959 when ground was broken on land behind the church for a new parochial school. St. Peter's School opened on September 8, 1959 with 122 children in Grades K-3. It was dedicated on October 25, 1959 by Bishop James J. Navagh. An additional grade was added each year with the first 8th Grade graduation in June of 1965. According to the 1962 -63 Catholic Directory, there were 424 families registered with the parish at that time with 289 students, 6 Felician Sisters and 1 lay teacher listed at the school. In 1965 at its peak there were 353 students registered at St. Peter's School. In 1972 there were 175 students in K-6 with 4 Felician Sisters and 3 lay teachers. Grades 7-8 closed in 1969. To help support the school a May Festival was begun in 1982 on the church grounds.

In 1999 a capital campaign was begun under Rev. David Wisniewski for the restoration of the current church and for the purchase of the building beside the church at 5457 Shady Avenue. In 2000, the former convent was demolished with the two remaining religious, Sister Judy Adams, SSJ and Sister Lucille Beaulieu, OSM moving into the new building at Shady Avenue. The parish offices moved from the current rectory on 5444 Shady Avenue to the newly purchased building in 2002. Due to financial difficulties and declining enrollment, in 2007, during the pastorate of Rev. Timothy Soucy, St. Peter's School closed. Father Soucy died unexpectedly on March 14, 2009.

A second capital campaign was begun in 2012 during the pastorate of Rev. Christopher Carrara to address structural problems in the church including issues with the tower, roof and windows. Aging structures continue to need attention and so efforts to maintain the church are on-going.

In 2013 the Parish May Festival was moved from the church grounds to the Lewis County Fair Grounds. Although the Festival was originally organized to support the school, it now serves as a valuable means of building community while helping with the parish operating expenses. Lewis County BOCES began renting St. Peter's School in May of 2013 with an option to buy the building. Purchase of the school building by BOCES was finalized in 2018.

On February 20th, 2020, the Bishop of Ogdensburg, Most reverend Terry R. LaValley, D.D., J.C.L., Approved the merging of St. Mary's Church in Glenfield and St. Hedwig's Church in Houseville with St. Peters Church in Lowville under the name of "The Catholic Community of St. Peter, and St. Mary, And St. Hedwig". At the same time, St. Thomas Oratory in Greig, formally a Mission of St. Mary's in Glenfield, was closed and related to sordid but profane use.

With the merger, we currently have three worship sites; St. Peter's in Lowville, St. Mary's in Glenfield, and St. Hedwig's in Houseville. As of 2020, the total number of families in the merged parish stands at 1018. The full text of the bishop's letter can be found on the documents page of the parish website.

Pastors of St. Peter's Church Lowville

1865-67	Rev. Herbst
1867-71	Rev. Joseph Fitzgerald
1871-83	Rev. William Nyhan
1884-86	Rev. Joseph Redding
1886-93	Rev. P.H.J. Ryan

1893-98	Rev. Charles J. McMorrow
1898-1908	Rev. John H. O'Rourke
1908-1942	Msgr. George Murray
1942-49	Msgr. John Hogan
1949-64	Msgr, John A. Cotter
1964-64	Rev. Howard Gosier, Administrator
1964-65	Msgr. James Lyng
1965-65	Rev. Howard Gosier, Administrator
1965-72	Msgr. Joseph Luker
1972-73	Rev. Aloysius R. Isele
1974-1977	Rev. James Flattery
1977-77	Rev. Floyd J. Bleaux, Administrator
1977-82	Rev. William G. Muench
1982-96	Msgr. Bernard Christman
1996-2002	Rev. David E. Wisniewski
2002-2002	Rev. Joseph Giroux, Administrator
2002-09	Rev. Timothy Soucy
2009-09	Rev. Christopher Looby, Administrator
2009-17	Rev. Christopher c. Carrara
2017-	Rev. James W. Seymour