

ST. HEDWIG' S - HOUSEVILLE

During the years of 1920 and 1921 a movement was started among the Polish people in Lewis County for a church to serve the Polish community residing in the area. About 50% of them migrated here from the Pennsylvania coal mines seeking health in fresh air and farm work. In 1922, under the guidance of Father Mauritius (Maurice) Siekiewicz, a two-story frame building was obtained in Martinsburg just north of Houseville which served as a temporary church. It was originally named St. Martin' s Church.

When Father Alexander Konus arrived in 1924 he continued collecting funds for a new church to be built in Houseville, a site chosen by Bishop Joseph H. Conroy since this was considered to be the center of the Polish population. St. Hedwig' s Church was incorporated on May 28, 1926 with the trustees, Joseph Paczkowski and Andrew Tarasek. Mr. & Mrs. Cyril A. Seymour deeded the land for the church on September 9, 1926, and the edifice was opened for worship on September 25, 1927.

Father Konus was the first resident pastor and remained until 1935. In July of 1936, at the request of Bishop Conroy, the Polish Franciscans from the Province of St. Anthony took over the parish with Father Damian Wyoro, OFM Conv., serving as the first Franciscan pastor. Due to heavy debt with no funds available, Father Damian was boarded at a parishioner' s home until a new rectory was completed, a used home brought in part by part from Glenfield.

Under Father Victor Balcerak, OFM conv., who was appointed pastor in 1948, some improvements were made to the church. With the advice and consent of Bishop Bryan J. McEntegart, the inside of the church was remodeled with the work being completed in 1950. With generous donations from some families, new stained glass windows replaced the ordinary double sash windows in 1951 and in 1952 church pews and altars were refinished; the outside church was painted and new church steps and entrance were built.

On September 28, 1952, the church celebrated the 25th Anniversary of its founding with Bishop McEntegart blessing the renovated church and presiding at a solemn Mass with Father Damian Wyoro, the first Franciscan pastor of St, Hedwig' s, invited back as the celebrant.

During the summer of 1961 a beautiful shrine was built on the parish grounds in honor of Our Lady of Fatima and is located by the front entrance of the church. In 1963, 70 families were listed as members of St. Hedwig' s Church. As of 2018, 66 families were listed.

Many traditions reflecting the Polish heritage continue to be a part of this Catholic community including commemorating the Birth of Christ with the Christmas Wafer (“Oplatek”); the Blessing of Entrances on the Feast of Epiphany; Blessing of the Easter Foods; Blessing of the Herbs and Flowers on the Feast of the Assumption; the Polish Festival in October; and throughout the year a Polish Greeting for special guests with a gift of bread, salt and flowers.

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.