



**SAINT MARY'S CHURCH IN GRAFTON**



## SAINT MARY'S CHURCH, GRAFTON, 1875

*Architect: Joseph Connolly*

### **Historical Perspectives and the Architect:**

Joseph Connolly was born in Limerick in 1840 and came to Canada in the early 1870's. He received his architectural training with J. J. McCarthy of Dublin. McCarthy, like the eminent Augustus Pugin, saw in the religious architecture of the Middle Ages the embodiment of Christian unity that had existed in the pre-Reformation period in England. These men looked back to mediæval Gothic architecture for their inspiration in designing churches in the Victorian period and their style became known as Revival Gothic or Victorian Gothic.

St. Mary's Church is uniquely important because it represents a watershed in ecclesiastical architecture in Ontario. Up to the time of its construction most churches of a similar size in Ontario had a plain rectangular plan, usually with a projecting west tower. Any Gothic features were simply imposed. In Connolly's Gothic Revival plan for St. Mary's, he defined the different areas of the church according to their intended use, a systemised form of architecture which began in the Middle Ages with the Gothic period. Gothic architecture sought to show that the whole is a sum of its parts, and that the parts must all form a harmonious whole. Thus St. Mary's floor plan was devised with its liturgical needs in mind. It has a porch on the West End which opens into the nave. Projecting from the eastern end of the nave is the sanctuary which is visually defined by having an arched entrance, a narrowing of the width, and by having its roof level lower than the nave. A chapel and vestry adjoin the sanctuary on the north side. There is a choir loft at the West End. The bell tower with pinnacle stands on the northwest corner of the nave. The church is built of yellow brick and ornamented with red-brick bands. Paired lancet windows adorn the north and

south walls, accentuated by red brick bands. This contrast in the brickwork is one of the hallmarks of High Victorian Gothic architecture.

There is an intrinsic relationship between a Gothic church and The Virgin. In the Middle Ages the Gothic period covered an era that was gentler than earlier centuries in many aspects. Up to that time mediæval man lived in terror of the judgment of his God and of the demons who seemed to exist all around him. However the Crusades which started in the 11th and 12th centuries brought about increased commerce and new ideas, and man began to understand that he and nature were part of a harmonious whole created by a loving God. The veneration of Mary increased because she was perceived as the Interceder of the faithful before the judgment seat of God. Whereas in earlier centuries statues and depictions of The Virgin were stiff and formal, by the 13th century these depictions had changed to become graceful, gentler smiling ones. The age of chivalry, another name given to this period, also introduced a more romantic note. The Virgin became the spiritual lady of chivalry, and knights dedicated themselves to Her and brought into use the title of "Our Lady". Her banner was carried into wars. Scores of magnificent cathedrals and simple parish churches were dedicated to her. It is therefore very appropriate that our Gothic Revival church is dedicated to St Mary.

#### **Construction and Decoration:**

A search of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Kingston through the courtesy of The Rev'd Fr Jan Appelman, MHM, of St. Mark's Church in Prescott, reveals some details about the construction of St. Mary's Church. The amount of the contract agreed upon on June 1st, 1875 for the construction of the church was \$7,800. Bricks totalling 194,000 were purchased, at a cost of \$8.50 per 1,000. Thomas Heenan donated four acres of land valued at \$800, and from correspondence between himself and Bishop

O'Brien, it would appear that he also personally raised through private loans \$5,500 to finance the construction of the church, the balance having been collected by subscription. When the church was completed and furnished it was entered on the books at \$9,000. Smedly and Elliot of Colborne were the contractors and builders.

On a fine summer's day with not a cloud in the sky, the ceremony of the blessing and laying of the cornerstone occurred, presided over by The Most Rev'd Dr. O'Brien, Bishop of Kingston, with priests from Perth, Brockville, Emily, Port Hope and Cobourg in attendance. The *Cobourg Sentinel* of August 14th, 1875 reported that the Bishop congratulated the Catholics of Haldimand on the beautiful church that they were building and he congratulated the Protestants of all denominations "who had with such a liberal and generous spirit added their donations to the fund." On that occasion the Bishop spoke of his desire to return in three months' time for the dedication but no record of that event could be found.

However, the *Cobourg Sentinel* of December 1st, 1882 reported that the newly appointed Bishop of Peterborough, The Most Rev'd John Francis Jamot made his first official visit to the parish of Grafton on Friday, November 17th, 1882. On Saturday Bishop Jamot visited the recently completed church in Burnley "in that portion of the Grafton mission" and blessed it, and on Sunday the 19th the "new church was blessed". No mention is made of a dedication. On July 25th, 1900 The Rev'd Michael Larkin celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood and in the report of those festivities in the *Cobourg World* of August 3, 1900, mention is made of the debt free state of the parish (the rectory had been built in 1879).

St. Mary's Church was first decorated in 1909 by Peter Charles Browne. His grandson, T. G. Browne of Thomas G. Browne Church Interiors, submitted the following information:



*The mural on the gospel wall of the sanctuary is the only original art existing in the church from that date [1909]. The other art and decoration there is the work of my father Thomas which took place in 1963 during the pastorship of Father Black. In 1967 the floor levels in the sanctuary were changed and the Shrine of Repose relocated [to its present position]. In 1980 the whole interior of the church was gutted and renewed. New insulation, drywall, lighting etc. [was carried out]. This included the etched glass in the new inner entrance doors, and some minor stained glass repair, but the decoration was a duplicate of that done [by the family firm] in 1963. The 1980 project was funded by George Heenan [a direct descendant of Thomas Heenan who donated the land for the church in 1875].*

The work done in the 1960s was carried out in accordance with Vatican II.

#### **Iconography:**

In the mediæval period education was usually limited to the clergy. Church decoration was therefore designed to instruct the faithful in the traditions of Catholicism. Symbolism in art was readily recognized by the faithful who grew up in this tradition. The decoration of St. Mary's Church reflects this idea to a certain extent.

Beginning at the Gospel side of the altar (near the first station of the cross), the first window is of ***St Paul the Apostle*** (d circa A.D. 64), who is usually shown with a long beard, a sword and either a scroll or a book. The sword is a reference to the fact that he was beheaded instead of crucified (his right as a Roman citizen) and the book or scroll refers to his Epistles. He is considered the co-founder of the Church with Peter.

**St Peter** (d A.D. 64), the companion window to St. Paul (one tradition states that they were put to death on the same day) is always shown with two keys because Christ gave him the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16.19). He also carries a book of his letters to the young Church.

Dedication: The deceased members of the Thomas Walsh family.

**St Dominic** (1170-1221) a Spaniard, founder of the Dominican order, is usually dressed in the robes of his order (a black cloak and hood over white robes). He popularised the recitation of the rosary and his vision of receiving the rosary from the Blessed Mother with Child is depicted.

Dedication: To the memory of The Rev'd M. Larkin.

**St John the Apostle** (1st C) carries a book of his Gospel and a pen, signifying his authorship. The Evangelists all have special emblems that originated in the mystical vision of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:5 ff.): St Matthew's is a angel because his Gospel traces the genealogy of Jesus and emphasizes his immortality; St Mark's is a lion, because his Gospel begins with the "voice of one crying in the wilderness", which is likened to a lion's roar; St Luke's is a winged ox. The ox is a sacrificial animal and his Gospel emphasises the atonement aspects of Christ's life; St John's is an eagle, a reference to the soaring majestic quality of his Gospel.

Dedication: Michael Kanary to his wife.

**St Aloysius of Spain** (1568-1591) is the Patron Saint of youth. He was a Jesuit priest who died at the early age of 23. He wears a black cassock, holds a lily stalk, the symbol of chastity, and carries a crucifix.

Dedication: To the memory of Chris Burns.

**Christ as the Good Shepherd:** The imagery of sheep



and shepherds runs like a connecting thread throughout the Old and New Testaments. (Ps 23; Is 40.11; Ezek 34; Jn 10.11, etc.)

***St John the Baptist.*** (d circa 24 A.D.) is considered the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first Saint of the New Testament. He is dressed in "raiment of camel hair and a leather girdle about his loins" (Mt 3.4). He sometimes holds a lamb.

Dedication: James O'Brien by his brother and sister.

***St. Cecilia*** (2nd - 3rd C) is credited with inventing the organ, her major attribute, and she is often shown in a red gown to denote her death as a martyr with a martyr's wreath of red or white roses in her hair and sometimes with three wounds at her throat. St Cecilia is the Patron Saint of church music.

***St Bridget of Ireland*** (d. circa 450) carries the crozier, an ornate staff resembling a shepherd's crook, which is usually held by bishops to symbolize their role as shepherds of Christ's flock (turned out to draw souls to Christ), or by the abbot or abbess of an order (turned in) to signify their authority. St Bridget and St Patrick are the Patron Saints of Ireland.

Dedication: Patrick Kanary by his wife.

***St Anthony of Padua*** (1159-1231) a Franciscan friar, noted for his preaching, scholarship and miracles, is shown with the Christ Child, a reference to a vision in which the Child appeared in his arms. He is invoked to find lost objects.

Dedication: The Rev'd M. Calnan.

***St Michael The Archangel*** is clothed in armour and holds his attributes: the sword and the scales. The sword refers to Revelation 13.7 which mentions that he will

defeat Satan and drive his hordes into hell. The scales refers to his role at the Last Judgment administering justice. He is the Patron Saint of soldiers and Christians.

Dedication to Thomas Dodd, Sr.

*St Margaret Mary* (1647-90) was a nun of the Contemplative Visitation Order. Her vision of Christ showing His Sacred Heart instigated that devotion.

Donated by the members of the Sacred Heart League.

*St Patrick* (385? - 461?) the Patron Saint of Ireland is shown dressed in bishop's robes, holding a shamrock which he used to explain the concept of the Trinity to the Irish. The snake at his feet refers to the tradition that he is credited with ridding Ireland of all snakes and vermin.

*St Joseph* is always shown with a flowering rod, similar to a tall lily stalk. Tradition says that when Mary was 12 or 14, and the time came for her to be married, Zacharias, the high priest assembled all the eligible men from the House of David (as he was instructed to do in a dream) and the men were told to leave their rods or staffs in the Temple overnight. The following morning the staff of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, was found sprouting blossoms. In this fashion he was chosen to be Mary's husband.

Dedication: Deceased members of the family of Thomas Walsh, SP

The three stained glass windows in the choir loft represent the Virgin flanked by two angels. On the Virgin's right, the Archangel Gabriel's hands indicate a message or instruction; while on Her left, the Angel's hands are closed in prayer. The Virgin Mary is dressed in white (purity) with a blue cape (constancy), lined with red (suffering and love), and



she wears a girdle or belt (chastity). As Queen of Heaven, she wears a crown of twelve stars (Rev 12.1). As the new Eve, she treads upon a serpent in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (Gen. 3.15).

All the stained glass windows of the church are unified by the common elements of a Gothic design at the top of the windows, and by the ornate fleur-de-lys symbol below the figures.

Over the nave there is a panelled ceiling with wall posts supported on corbels. On the ceiling are nine pictures. Beginning on the Gospel side are representations of the sacraments: Baptism, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and then a decoration of grapes. The harp over the choir loft (on the Epistle side) is appropriately placed as a reference to all music that glorifies God, and is the attribute of David. Continuing along, the next painting of an altar with cross, candles, book and two jars or vials represents the sacraments of Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick. The crossed keys is a reference to Peter and the Church, and the whip or scourge usually associated with flagellation, is also a symbol of chasing away the devil, a reference to Matthew 16.18: *On this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* The Chalice and Host in the next painting represents the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and the ninth picture is of the Menorah, a seven branched candlestick, the symbol of Israel and a reference to the Old Testament.

There is a lot of grape imagery in the decoration of the church referring to the Eucharist and the Passion: over the Blessed Sacrament Altar, and etched into the glass doors leading from the porch into the nave, and following around the vaulting arches of the roof.

Above the wainscoting, shamrocks curl in circles like the head of a crozier, one leading to another and each grouping faced away from the centre where there is a symbol of three circles intersected by a larger circle in the middle of

which is either a lily or a star. The intertwining circles are a reference to the Three Persons in One God. The star and the lily are attributes of Mary (she is referred to as the Star of the Sea, and the lily symbolizes her virginity). The fleurs-de-lys on a blue background that bookend each group of shamrock stencils, are a further symbol of the Blessed Mother. The shamrocks and stained glass windows of the Patron Saints of Ireland are no doubt a reference to the benefactor of the Church, Mr. Thomas Heenan, an Irishman, and to the other Irish Canadians who made up the early congregation.

High above the altar is a rose window, which is usual in churches dedicated to the Virgin. She is called "a rose without a thorn". Eight petals each with a lily, encircle a cruciform nimbus within which is a chalice and grapes. Below, to left and right, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega, shown over the Latin Cross, signify the eternal nature of God. Below these letters, covered by the wall, are two lancet windows which can only be seen from the outside of the church.

The Holy Trinity is represented by a hand (the Father) on the right, the Chalice and Host (The Son) on the left and the downward flying dove (the Holy Spirit) seen below the rose window. Mr. Browne says of the general overall design behind the altar: "the simple symbols in the all-over-pattern of lilies [depict] purity tied together with crowns in pure gold". This diaper patterning is reminiscent of mediæval illuminated manuscripts. The design is banded with a brown and white stencil pattern which includes the Rose of Sharon, another emblem of Our Lady.

In the mediæval period to mark the separation of the Sanctuary from the Nave, it was customary to set up a Rood, depicting our crucified Lord, with Our Lady and Saint John standing below Him on either side. It usually surmounted a beautifully carved screen that stretched from the column of the chancel arch on one side of the nave across the front of the sanctuary to the column of the other side. Sometimes it was a



painting on the wall above the arch. Here at St. Mary's it is painted on the Gospel wall of the Sanctuary. The third figure of a woman clasping the foot of the cross may be an allegorical one as she wears no halo. The chancel arch is decorated with symbols of the Greek Cross and lilies.

On the Epistle wall of the sanctuary, two stained glass windows, one to the *Sacred Heart of Jesus* and the other to the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*, are dedicated to the memory of The Rev'd M. Larkin, the first pastor of St. Mary's.

Contrasting with the decoration above the Blessed Sacrament Altar, the large red mandorla with grape and chalice and wheat, is a similar depiction in blue with the letters M and R and a crown, the monogram of Maria Regina. It is found over the Gothic door leading from the nave to the side chapel, a quiet area with a small altar dedicated to the Virgin. The Virgin's monogram is repeated in the stenciled design above the stained glass windows, with an embellishment of lilies.

#### **In Conclusion:**

Sadly Joseph Connolly never lived to see St Mary's Church complete with its decorations. The *Catholic Register* of December 17th, 1904 recorded his sudden death from bronchial asthma as follows:

*The deceased was one of the best known architects in Toronto and perhaps Ontario. The new churches of St. Paul and St. Mary were built under his supervision. He was also the architect of the church in Guelph, the cathedral in London, St. Patrick's, Hamilton, and St. Michael, and the beautiful church destroyed by fire in Belleville, besides others throughout the province. He was not alone a specialist in art, but a man of fine literary instincts and of superior intelligence. The people of Toronto*

*may say of him as is inscribed of the great architect Wren in Westminster Abbey "If his monument you require, look around you." The churches for many a day will tell of his connection with them.*

Connolly built more than 30 churches and chapels in Ontario and a cathedral in Sault-Ste-Marie, Michigan as well as other buildings such as orphanages. St John the Evangelist at Arthur, Ontario, (1874-1876) has the honour of being his first church in Canada, and St Mary in Grafton his second church. His most famous work is perhaps Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Guelph which is patterned on the cathedral in Cologne. He died in his 65th year and is buried in St. Michael's cemetery in Toronto. His life's work in Ontario was noted in all the newspapers of the day.

A.W.N. Pugin became famous in England when, with Charles Barry, he submitted the winning design in 1835 for the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament. He converted to Catholicism and went on to revolutionize Roman Catholic Church architecture in England and Ireland. Because of the parallels that can be drawn between the architecture of McCarthy, Pugin and Connolly, McCarthy has been called the Irish Pugin and Joseph Connolly has been called the Irish-Canadian Pugin.

Otto von Simson in *The Gothic Cathedral* wrote: "Architecture mirrors eternal harmony as music echoes it." Joseph Connolly's fine understanding of this accord gave to the people of Grafton a legacy of lasting value.

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