

The History of St. Malachy's Parish

In the mid 1800's with many countries in Europe involved in revolutions, famine, and tyranny, notably the Germans and the Irish, people began to look to the New World for their future hope. Following the signing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act by President Pierce, many of these immigrants, along with Americans from the Eastern States, began to travel West seeking fortune and opportunity. Under the Right of Pre-emption, a person could file for government land and if he improved it and lived on it for six months, it could be purchased from the government for \$1.25 an acre. This provided the incentive and the opportunity for the first settlers.

It was around the year 1858 that the first inhabitants of Marshall County arrived and many of these early pioneers were of the Catholic faith. The settlement around Irish Creek, near where Frankfort is now located, was mainly Catholic, and the same was true of the people living around St. Bridget. Historians agree that the first Mass was celebrated in May of 1858 in Marshall County in St. Bridget, at the home of John Coughlin.

As the Catholic population of Marshall County increased, so did the need for establishing new parishes. In 1879, Saint Malachy's Church in Beattie was established. Prior to the formation of the Beattie parish, Catholic families traveled to St. Bridget Church, approximately 18 miles distant, or to St. Joseph's Church in Irish Creek, about 22 miles away. Many stories persist about families making these long journeys and upsetting their buggies and wagons in the hills around St. Bridget.

Fr. Wm. Fitzgerald travel by horseback from Irish Creek to Beattie, to celebrate the Mass. Before the Beattie Church was built, Fr. Fitzgerald offered Mass in private homes, and later as the congregation grew, the Mass was celebrated at the old stone school house. But it was the Fitzgerald home in Beattie that became officially the first Church, rectory, and hotel for the traveling clergy.

In 1879, a 10 acre tract of land, north of Beattie, was purchased for use as a parish cemetery and was named after St. Patrick. The construction of the first church at Beattie began in 1880 under the guidance of Fr. Fitzgerald. The lots were donated and the building cost was approximately \$3,000, a substantial amount of money for a budding parish and for the times.

On October 24, 1924, under the leadership of Fr. William Nelligan, who ended up being pastor for 49 years in Beattie, the new (current) church was dedicated.

The new structure was built right next to the original church, which was converted into a social center for the parish and the community. In the Fall of 1928, the old church caught fire and burned down due to an unattended furnace. In 1971 and 1972, the church underwent an extensive remodeling program and in the succeeding years more remodeling was done.