

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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KCHS MEETING AND CHRISTMAS PARTY

DATE Tuesday, Dec. 11

TIME 7 PM

PLACE Trinity Church
4th & Madison
Covington

A trio of Holmes Alumni will put their spin on the their years at Holmes High School, the years when Holmes had THE undefeated football team, featuring Bruce Ferguson, former Boone County Judge-Executive, Betty Lee Nordhiem, retired Holmes art teacher, and Don D. Davis (Quarterback). Please bring some snacks for Christmas celebrating!!

Bulletin

December 2001

St. John's Roman Catholic Church

Editor's Note: Every time I drive north on I-75, I see St. John's Church. It's lighted spire is especially beautiful at night reaching majestically toward the heavens. This excerpted history was written for St. John's Diamond Anniversary.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1924, after fifteen years of planning and fund raising, and two years of construction, the new St. John's Church was dedicated. Seventy-seven years later, this magnificent structure of old German Gothic design, the gathering place for the Catholic community to worship and profess their religious beliefs, remains the centerpiece of the Lewisburg neighborhood of Covington, Kentucky.

The story of St. John's can be roughly divided into two parts. The initial part represents the founding of the parish and the construction of old St. John's Church, school and rectory which was located at Leonard and Worth Streets. The second part began with the purchase of the property where the parish plant is presently located and the resolve, the leadership and the dedication of Monsignor Anthony Goebel who guided the parish through the period of the building of the school, the rectory and culminating with the construction of the new St. John's Church.

Old St. John's

The third oldest parish in Covington and the first congregation organized from Mother of God parish was St. John's. In 1848, a number of zealous men and women formed themselves into what was known as the St. Aloysius School Society of Louisburg. The children of Louisburg (now known as Lewisburg) had to walk a long way to Mother of God School, and the roads were particularly treacherous in the winter and early spring. The object of the society was to collect funds for the creation of a school. Three lots were purchased at Leonard and Worth Streets. Another lot was donated on condition that a church would also be built on the property. Church and school were to be dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Paul. The cost of the three purchased lots was \$150.00.

As noted in the parish Kirchen-Buch (Church Book), "the members of the School Society paid their dues faithfully" and in the following year work on the new school began. In a few months the small frame structure was ready for occupancy. A young seminarian by the name of Mr. Wittler was hired as the schoolmaster.

In 1853, the Diocese of Louisville, which embraced the entire

Commonwealth of Kentucky was divided and Covington was selected as the seat of the new Bishopric. The first bishop of the Diocese of Covington was George Aloysius Carrell, S. J., rector of St. Xavier Church in Cincinnati.

He was consecrated on November 1, 1853. One of the first official acts was the establishment of a church in Lewisburg. The Rev. Joseph Gezowsky was appointed the pastor, who, at the time was an assistant pastor at Mother of God's Church.

In the spring of 1854, the new congregation received permission to build a church. Work was begun almost immediately. The church was to be of brick and because of its generous dimensions, a deep and solid foundation had been laid.

Before the end of the year, the church was under roof and although much more work was needed for completion, the church was dedicated to the patronage of St. John, the Evangelist, on his feast day, December 27, 1854. Rev. Ferdinand Kuehr, the pastor of Mother of God Church was responsible for the christening of the church. It was to be called St. Peter & St. Paul Church, but Father Kuehr insisted that St. John the Evangelist should be the patron. "You are the children of Mother of God Church," he said to the trustees and the building committee, "and your new church should be placed under the protection of her adopted son, St. John."

Father Gezowsky pastored the fledgling parish until 1859 when he was succeeded by Rev. Andrew Michel. In 1861, Father Michel built a school, the old one having become too small for the increasing numbers

of school children. Three years later, he built a new rectory, added a tower to the church and renovated its interior.

In 1870, Rev. J. Stephany became the pastor of St. John's. Father Stephany centered his efforts on the improvement of the Boy's School; the students of the parish school being separated by gender. He also built a much needed residence for the teachers.

The pastorate of Rev. William Tappert began in 1873, but in 1879, he was transferred to Mother of God parish. His successor was Rev. William Robbers. In 1892, Father Robbers began major improvements to the church. The interior was enlarged, a sanctuary was added with stained glass windows. A marble floor was laid. New altars were installed as well as a much needed communion rail. Father Robbers served the parish for twenty-three years.

Father Robbers was succeeded by Rev. Herman Jos. Kramer who administered to the parish for a little more than two years. He died on January 4, 1906.

Rev. Joseph Schaefer became the new pastor of St. John's. In 1908, the Bishop of Covington, Rt. Rev. Cammillus Maes arranged for the purchase of the land which is the site of the present parish plant. The church and school at Leonard and Worth Streets were in need of major repair. One of the walls of the church was out of plumb eleven inches and another wall more than nine inches. In a matter of time the whole building would have to be condemned as unsafe. The school was in worse shape. The only alternative was to find a new location for the parish.

Father Schaefer started a

building association, each member of which pledged to pay ten cents a week. Tragically, in the midst of his priestly labors, Father Schefer passed away on February 6, 1909.

The New St. John's and The legacy of Father Goebel

Great tasks awaited the new pastor, Rev. Anthony Goebel, who came to St. John's from Augusta, Kentucky. His first concern was to liquidate the debt on the site purchased by Bishop Maes. When this was accomplished, he resolutely set to work to build a new parish school, church and rectory.

On a visit to Rome in 1911, Father Goebel was granted an audience at the Vatican with Pope Pius X. His Holiness showed a lively interest in Father Goebel's account of his far off parish in Kentucky. He was especially pleased that his decrees in regard to the first communion were carried out. Father Goebel responded "my people are mostly poor in this world's goods but they possess something worth infinitely more, simple, childlike faith, love for their church and their school, and love for the Holy Catholic Church. They all want a souvenir of Your Holiness, the Apostolic Blessing, and a special blessing for the new school which they are about to erect."

"That is right," replied the Holy Father, "build Catholic Schools, they are the great need of the world. If you have to build a new church and a new school, build the school first."

Upon his return from Rome, Father Goebel began the challenge of erecting the new parish plant. He never started anything until he knew exactly what he wanted. He negotiated with the City of Covington to

remove the twenty-eight foot hill which crowned the church property. The city used the dirt to build West 9th Street between Crescent Avenue and Philadelphia Street. He then built a hall where the present church now stands. The building was utilized to enrich the parish treasury with euchre tournaments and raffles. There was an ancient piano available for an occasional dance.

Ground was broken on Labor Day, 1913 for the first permanent building located on the property of the new parish plant. Work proceeded rapidly and the new building was dedicated on December 27, 1914, the feast of St. John and the sixtieth anniversary of the dedication of Old St. John Church at Leonard and Worth Streets.

The new building served in a multi-purpose capacity. It was Church, School, Sisters' residence and rectory. The school on the second floor accommodated up to four hundred students. The auditorium which served as the church had a seating capacity of six hundred. The Sisters of Notre Dame who have been teaching the students of the school from 1874 through the present, occupied one end of the second floor as living quarters. The rectory and the living quarters of the pastor were located at the opposite end of the same floor. Parish social events were conducted in the basement which is presently the school cafeteria.

The cost of the building was \$50,000 and it served as church, school, rectory and hall for nine years.

During the early years of Father Goebel's pastorate at St. John, he bore the responsibility and work of the parish alone. Because the growth of the parish was so rapid,

Father Goebel was fortunate in obtaining the services of the newly ordained Rev. Henry Hanses who was his nephew.

On the first Friday in June, 1922 ground was broken for the new St. John Church. It would be of German Gothic style to suit contemporary conditions.

As the work on the church building progressed another challenge faced the parish: the need to provide appropriate religious and spiritual furnishings to accommodate the interior of the edifice. Once again, the members of the congregation were asked for their financial support.

Father Goebel, his assistant, Father Hanses and the church trustees conceived the idea that members of the parish "purchase" certain items to be considered as memorials, as noted in the following excerpt from the May-June issue of the "Holy Name Bulletin of St. John's."

Bells

The bells for the new church are ready for installation. They are four in number and they make as beautiful combination of sounds as any known set of bells in the world. They are an exact reproduction of the bells in the Cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) Germany. Which brings us to the question of

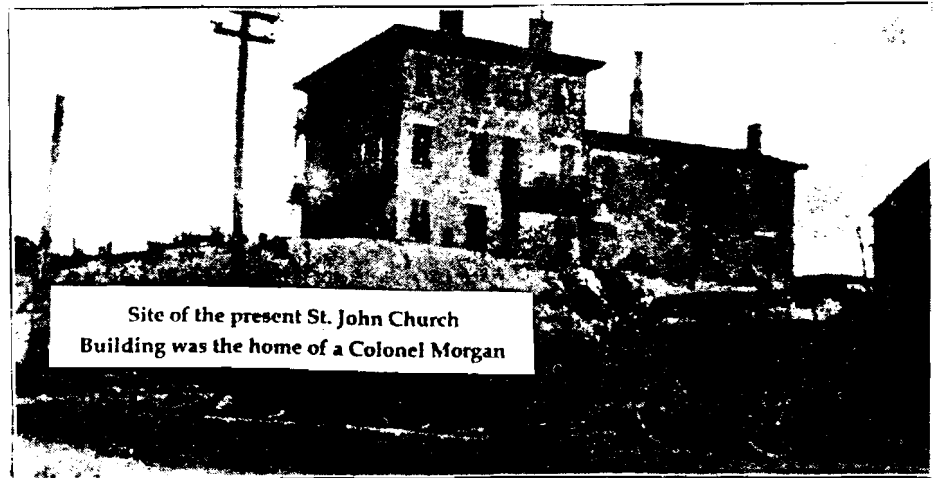
Memorials

Who wants to pay for one or two of these bells? So far the altar, the tabernacle, the sanctuary lamp, and several windows make up our list of Memorials. We would like to add to that list: four bells, a baptismal font, communion rail, windows and four statues of Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John for the outside niches. These memorials range in price from \$200 up. We need also a new monstrance, ciborium, chalice, crucifix and candlesticks.

Later issues of the "Holy Name Bulletin" indicate that the parishioners generously responded to the "memorial" idea with one notable exception. The niches in the front of the church reserved for the four Evangelists still stand vacant.

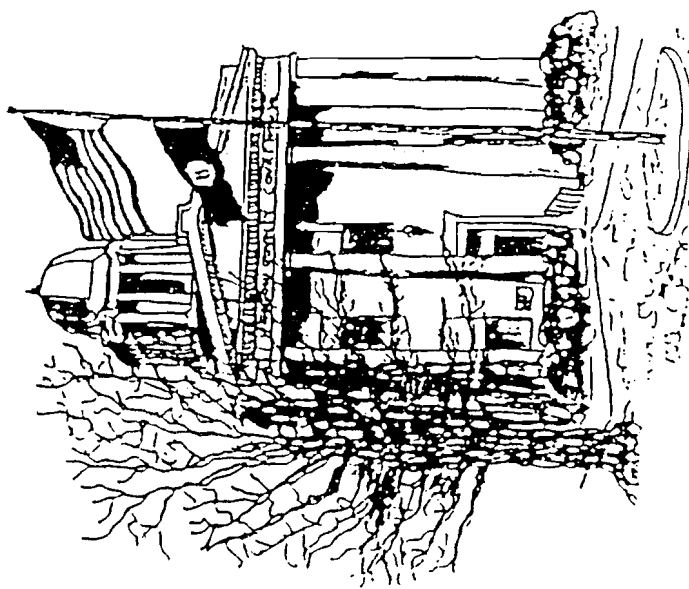
On Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1924, the new St. John Church was solemnly dedicated by Bishop Francis W. Howard. The dedication of St. John Church received front page coverage in The Cincinnati Enquirer, reporting on the day long activities and the history of the parish since its beginning.

Father Goebel continued as pastor of his beloved parish for another thirty years. In 1950, he was raised to the position of Monsignor. He passed away on January 6, 1954 in the centennial year of the parish in his 45th year as pastor of St. John's, in the 55th year of his priesthood.



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INSIDE: History of St. John's on Pike Street

Kenton County Historical Society
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