

From the Catholic Church in St. Peters Bay

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The history of the Catholic presence in St. Peters Bay begins with the French Settlers who began arriving Circa 1720. During the French Regime, the Island was divided into five parishes. Havre St. Pierre was located within the St Pierre du Nord Parish, which encompassed the majority of the NorthEastern Ile St Jean (PEI). It was the second parish to be established, but eventually became the largest with respect to the population.

In 1751, Colonel Franquet, a military engineer working at Louisburg, visited Ile St. Jean. He visited Havre St. Pierre in August of that year and documented that on the higher ground there was a large and strongly built church dedicated to St. Peter. In 1758, the Island's Acadian and French settlers were expelled from the Island. Knowing that they would be forced to leave, the residents of Havre St. Pierre buried the bell from their church, which was unearthed by a farmer from St. Peter's Harbour Circa 1871. This bell hangs today in the St. Alexis Church in Rollo Bay, PEI.

Church records for the St. Pierre du Nord Parish have also been discovered in France, microfilmed copies of which are now available at the PEI archives and records office in Charlottetown. These records tell us that there are at least 50 people documented as having been buried in the now unmarked Catholic cemetery in St. Peters Harbour.

A Canadian historian named Georges Arsenault estimates that there are in fact more interred in this cemetery because the records are missing for a number of years and deaths were not always recorded, especially when a priest was not present for the funeral.

The Second Church

After the expulsion of the Island's French settlers, the next wave of Catholic settlers began arriving in St. Peters Bay Area Circa 1791–1792. Some reports indicate that the early settlers in the area had Mass only twice a year, which occurred in the homes of Angus MacIsaac in St. Peter's and Angus McIntyre in Cable Head.

The First Catholic Church built in St. Peters after the expulsion of the French settlers occurred Circa 1830. Father Burke's History of Catholic Churches on PEI states it was Bishop MacEarchern who chose the location of the new church, the contract for which was given to Messrs. Long, Large, Maloney.

The Royal Gazette newspaper ran an advertisement on the 25th of October 1836, stating that tenders would be received until the first of November 1836 for work that needed to be completed in the interior of the church:

“Clap boarding..., providing window sashes and frames, molding gable ends, eave boards, corner boards, and wash boards, with good sound pine boards in a workmanlike manner. The dimensions of the building are as follows: Frame - 46 x 36 feet; Height the post 21 feet and 9 inches; 14 windows.... The Contract must be completed by the first of June next. Payment will be made in Country produce at cash price. Good security will be required for the due performance of the work.”

The Third Church

As the community's population increased, a larger church was needed. In 1881, construction began on a larger and more modern church in St. Peters. It took five years to build this next church. Although it was not completed until

1886, it opened in 1881 with its interior unfinished.

This new church was made of locally made brick and measured from tower to chancel 104 feet. The spire rose to an impressive 176 feet.

In 1926, however, this church was struck by lightning. This occurred in the days previous to local fire departments and it was therefore the members of the community that came to fight the fire, alerted by the ringing of the church bell. Due to the community's help, many of the statues, pews, paintings, as well as the altar were saved.

The Fourth Church

It took two years to rebuild the church. Initially, attempts were made to build over the existing brick walls that had been left, but this was unsuccessful due to the poor quality of the brick that had survived the fire. The walls were torn down and the church was built from scratch.

During the next two years, Mass was held in the Holy Name Hall, with two Masses being held every Sunday as the hall was large enough to accommodate the entire congregation at once.

The church reopened on 1st of July 1928, but it took almost forty years to pay off the debt. Father MacAulay was the priest throughout these years and he remained in the parish for almost forty years.

Ordained in 1890, Father MacAulay came to St. Peters in 1913. Remembered for his long sermons, Father MacAulay is also remembered for his intuitive methods of paying off the debt of the current church. Card plays, cake sales, and annual bazaars produced revenue for the church debt. Money was also raised by members of the community living in Boston, who ran whist parties, dances and banquets—the profits of which were sent back to the church in St. Peters.

There have also been many men and women from our parish who have dedicated their lives to the service of the church: one individual in particular, who lays claim to have been the first man to be ordained from St. Peters is Peter McIntyre, who eventually became Bishop of Charlottetown.

Bishop Peter McIntyre

Peter McIntyre was born the 29th of June 1818 at Cable Head, PEI, the youngest of eight children of Angus and Sarah McIntyre, who had emigrated from Scotland in the late 1700s.

Angus McIntyre's death notice that appeared in The Examiner on the 20th of November 1848 states that he had emigrated to PEI from Stonebrick, on the Isle of South Uist, Scotland.

Peter McIntyre studied for three years in the nearby St. Andrews College, and five years in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, where he was ordained on the 26th February 1843.

He served as the first Pastor at St. Simon and St. Jude Parish in Tignish before becoming Bishop of Charlottetown in 1860—a position he maintained for thirty-one years until his death in 1891.

During his tenure Bishop McIntyre visited Rome five times between 1862 and 1889, and met Pope Pius IX at least once.

Bishop McIntyre died in Antigonish on 30th April 1891. On the 4th of May 1891, The Examiner printed details about the funeral procession in Charlottetown:

“The platoon of police, the Irish Society, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the clergy, the altar boys, pall bearers, hearse guards, and mourners formed in line and the greatest funeral procession ever seen in the province began to move through the streets to the railway station..... the first train carried three and the second four hundred passengers to St. Peters Bay. In St. Peters Bay the concourse of people was even larger than in Charlottetown. It is estimated that between four and five thousand persons followed the mournful procession.”

Notes that followed the description of the funeral in the newspaper also stated that Bishop McIntyre had died poor, having given all his money to charity, and his books and personal property had been left to St. Dunstons College.

Other remarks made included that the St. Peter’s Church was beautifully draped by the pastor and a special train from Souris to Georgetown had brought hundreds of people to St. Peters and the railway arrangements were perfect.

Bishop Peter McIntyre was interred in a vault below the altar of the church while the rest of his family rest in the McIntyre crypt in the cemetery.

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