



The Founding of the Church of the Immaculate Conception

Immaculate Conception Parish owes its existence to immigrants who worked on the Erie Canal in the 19th century. Most of the Catholic settlers were Irish families from Fayetteville and Manlius: Farrell, McCarrick, O'Brien, Bohan, Gaynor, Sheedy, Holland, Shea, Tobin, Griffin, Kennelly, Moloney, Foley, Flattery, and Murphy. There were also several prominent German Catholic families: Hueber, Riegel, Bromser, Friess, and Fischer.

Fayetteville was originally a mission of St. James Church in Cazenovia, part of the Albany Diocese. The first Mass in Fayetteville was celebrated by Father James Cahill, pastor of St. James, in the home of John Farrell, probably in late 1853 or early 1854. Before long, the need for more space was apparent, and Masses were offered by visiting priests from Cazenovia, Minoa, and Syracuse in Beard Hall. In 1854, Father Cahill purchased land at the corner of Canal Street (now Lincoln Avenue) and Warren Street and had stone drawn to the grounds to build a church, but the site was later deemed to be unsuitable. In 1864, Father James O'Hara of Syracuse purchased a lot in a beautiful spot in the upper part of the village on the corner of South Manlius Street and East Genesee Street, near the other churches. The lot remained empty for a decade, however, because the Fayetteville Catholics lacked the funds to begin construction.



I.C. Church Drawing

In August 1869, Father James O'Reilly was selected by the Bishop of Albany to be the first pastor of Fayetteville. The 26-year-old native of County Cavan, Ireland, was loved and admired by his parishioners for his keen intellect and scholarly mind. He was a powerful preacher, a conscientious executive, a sterling defender of the faith, an organizer, and a natural leader. In the 1936 Parish History by Father Charles N. Oley, our seventh pastor, Father O'Reilly is also described as a fierce protector of his flock: "When Father O'Reilly came here the Catholics – Irish Catholics – were ridiculed and persecuted by the Yankees – New Englanders – whose forefathers came to these parts and took up claims and land grants. ... Father O'Reilly was often called upon to keep the Irish from personal harm and, being a large and very strong man, he was always equal to the occasion. At times he was called upon to escort an Irishman through the village so that he might not be beaten up by the Yankees."



Father O'Reilly

Immediately, Father O'Reilly set about making the dreams of a Fayetteville Catholic church a reality. In only three months' time, he raised \$3,000 from the 110 families in his charge and engaged a builder. The cornerstone of the new church was laid by the Very Reverend Edgar P. Wadhams, then Vicar General of the Diocese of Albany, on November 25, 1869.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception, 103 South Manlius Street, was incorporated November 4, 1870. The rectory was built on the corner of Salt Springs Street and South Manlius Street and a two-story barn was built behind the church soon thereafter. The first Mass in the new Immaculate Conception Church was celebrated on Christmas Day, 1870. In the early years, services were held here only every other week, because Father O'Reilly also served the missions in Jamesville and Pompey. In June 1892, after 23 years of laborious work, Father O'Reilly was called upon by the Bishop, the Rt. Rev. P. A. Ludden, to become the pastor of St. Mary's Church, Clinton, New York. He died on February 26, 1915, at the age of 71.