

The Diocese of St Catharines in Ontario was erected by Pope Pius XII on November 9 1958 by a division of the Archdiocese of Toronto and the Diocese of Hamilton. It comprises the Regional Municipality of Niagara and the County of Haldimand, of Haldimand-Norfolk Regional Municipality.

Foreword

This short history of the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Catharines was written in 1982 to meet the needs of three events: 1) the 4th Annual Niagara Peninsula History Conference held at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, on Saturday, April 17, 1982, on the subject of "Religion and Churches in the Niagara Peninsula" at which this paper was first delivered: 2) the sesquicentennial (150th) celebrations of the Cathedral of St. Catherine which were held throughout the year 1982: 3) in preparation for the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Diocese of St. Catharines, 1958-1983.

I would particularly like to thank the Bishop of St. Catharines, the Most Rev. Thomas B. Fulton, for his kind invitation to research the history of his Diocese in general and to give this paper in particular. My gratitude also to Father, now Msgr., Mel J. Shaefer, then Rector of the Cathedral, and his staff who were always most generous in their hospitality whenever I visited St. Catharines. I would also like to thank the library staff at the central St. Catharines Library and at Brock University for their bibliographical help. Above all I would like to thank Mrs. Karen Booth, Michael Power, Wayne Kirkpatrick, Brian and Virginia O'Sullivan, who as research assistants were able to put before me a wealth of historic material, some of it long forgotten. Their findings have added so much interest and even excitement to this historical project. We all owe a deep debt of gratitude to these largely unknown heroes of contemporary historiography.

Introduction

The scope of this short history is cursory and factual as it tries to give a fair overview of the most important events in the history of the Diocese of St. Catharines in a quick, point-by-point manner. There is no time to go into any event in great detail. Some filling in of the gaps is thus left to the reader's imagination. However, a certain extra emphasis has been given to the Diocese and to the Cathedral in their own right in view of their anniversaries.

In general the history of the Diocese of St. Catharines can be divided into four main periods and each of these four main periods can in turn be sub-divided into three smaller periods of time. Thus the history of the Diocese could be said to have progressed through an even dozen time periods, periods which become ever shorter as we approach the present day.

The four main periods of time would be: A) The French and British colonial period, 1615-1815; B) The Irish period of settlement, 1815-1900; C) The European period of settlement, 1900- 1960; D) The contemporary period as a Diocese unto itself, 1958 to the present. These time-frames should not be considered so much as being imposed upon the facts of history as flowing forth from them and thus giving meaning to events which might otherwise not be fully understood if seen out of context.

The Area of the Diocese of St. Catharines

Geographically the territory of the Diocese of St. Catharines, the subject of this paper, consists of the entirety of the Region of Niagara (the former counties of Lincoln and Welland) and all the area of the former county of Haldimand (now the eastern half of the Region of Haldimand-Norfolk). Thus the Diocese of St. Catharines occupies the same area as what is generally considered to be the full extent of the Niagara Peninsula.

Ecclesiastically it has been a part of four other Canadian Dioceses before it became a Diocese in its own right on November 25, 1958. It was first under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Quebec City from 1674 until 1826 when it became part of the Diocese of Kingston which then embraced all of Upper Canada (now Ontario). In 1841 it became part of the Diocese of Toronto and in 1856 its territory was divided with Lincoln and Welland counties remaining in the Toronto Diocese and Haldimand going to the newly formed Diocese of Hamilton. Only in 1958 were the parts brought back together again to form the new Diocese of St. Catharines. Whether one passes through the Toronto or Hamilton episcopal lineage of the Diocese, the present Ordinary of St. Catharines, Bishop Fulton, is the 24th Bishop in Canada to rule over the Niagara Peninsula area. Bishop O'Mara is thus the 25th.

The question is often asked why Lincoln and Welland counties remained attached to the Toronto Diocese across Lake Ontario after the 1856 split of the Dioceses and not to the Hamilton Diocese with which it was contiguous. In addition to reasons of ease of water transport at that time and the fact that the Bishops of Toronto seemed to have a special predilection for the Niagara area, the best reason appears that Toronto needed the then (1856) relatively large Catholic population of Lincoln and Welland counties: otherwise, its suffrages sees of Hamilton and London would actually have had more Catholics than Toronto.

The French and British Colonial Periods, 1615-1815

The French Missionaries and the Neutral Indians

The first baptized Christian ever to set foot in the Niagara Peninsula was Etienne Brule, the French explorer, trader and adventurer, who on his journey in 1615 from Huronia to what is now New York State, touched upon the shores of Lincoln County while going around the western end of Lake Ontario. Brule returned to the Niagara Peninsula in 1625 and told Fr. Daillon about his travels.

Father Joseph de la Roche Daillon, a Recollect priest (a branch of the Franciscans), lived and taught among the Neutral Indians in what is now the area of Hamilton-Wentworth Region during 1626 and was the first priest to say Mass there. He studied their language and customs and wrote the first account of them. That he narrowly escaped death at the hands of his potential converts persuaded him to leave soon and return to France via Huronia and Quebec.

The next missionary priests to visit the Neutral Indians were the Jesuit Fathers, Jean de Brebeuf and Joseph Chaumonot who came down from Huronia to spend the winter of 1640-41 with the Neutral Indians in their villages. The area which they visited would be what is today the Hamilton-Wentworth Region and that part of the Grand River flowing through Brant County. Unfortunately, suspicions about the black-robed priests, spread amongst the Neutrals by the Huron Indians, made it a very lonely and unfruitful winter for the Jesuits who were glad to return to Huronia the following spring as they record extensively in the Jesuit Relations for 1640-41.

As for the Neutrals, the Iroquois massacred one of their villages in 1647 on their way to Huronia. On their way back from the Huron massacres the Iroquois annihilated the rest of the Neutral Nation between 1649 and 1651, thus leaving no Indians in the Peninsula and hence no need for further missionaries.

The French Military Chaplains

The next priests who visited the Peninsula did so as part of the exploration and trading missions of Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle who built Fort Conti at the mouth of the Niagara River on what is now the American side in 1679. Thus the Sulpician priests, Fathers Francois Dollier de Casson and Rene de Brehant de Galinee spent the winter of 1669-70 in various parts of the peninsula. Before leaving they raised a cross at what is now Port Dover on Lake Erie in the Region of Haldimand-Norfolk to show that they had taken possession of the area for God and the King of France. The Recollect, Father Louis Hennepin visited much of the Peninsula during 1678-79 and was with the first Europeans who saw Niagara Falls, where he said Mass on December 11, 1678. However, it is doubtful whether one can attribute to him the tradition that he had anything to do with giving the name St. Catharines to the city.

Jacques Rene de Brisay de Denonville, Governor of New France from 1685 to 1689, built Fort Denonville on the same site as Fort Conti, which is today the site of Fort Niagara, U.S.A., opposite Niagara-on-the-Lake. Jesuit priests Father Jean de Lamberville and then Pierre Millet were appointed as chaplains during 1687 and 1688 to care for the spiritual needs of the fort's 100 men left under the direction of Sieur de Troyes. But the fort was soon abandoned under pressure from the Iroquois so that from 1690 to 1720 no priests or men were stationed there.

Louis-Thomas Chabert de Joncaire rebuilt Fort Niagara in 1720 which remained garrisoned by the French until its capture by British troops on July 25, 1759. During these forty years there was always a military chaplain at the fort. Unfortunately the names of most of them have been lost. We do, however, know the names of at least four of them who served as chaplains sometime between 1720 and 1750: Father Durand, Father Charlevois, Father Crespel and Father Piquet.

The British Military Chaplains

The next Catholic presence in the Niagara Peninsula was to be that of representatives of the Glengarry Scots who in the last quarter of the eighteenth century removed themselves from their ancestral home in Scotland to the area around Cornwall in eastern Ontario. Under their first chaplains, Fathers John McKenna and Roderick MacDonell, they remained loyal to the British Crown and began to play a prominent role in provincial politics in the 1790's. The first Provincial Parliament, which met in 1792 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, had three Roman Catholics among the fifteen Members of Parliament.

Among these prominent Scottish Catholics three in particular deserve mention. The Honourable John MacDonell, Speaker of the First Parliament of Upper Canada, spent much of his military career at the Forts Niagara and George. His men, mostly Catholics, helped build Fort George. The Honourable Alexander McDonell was Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada and lived at Niagara-on-the-Lake for a time before moving on to York (Toronto). Colonel John MacDonell was Attorney-General of Upper Canada, Aide-de-Camp to General Brock and a Member of the Legislative Assembly. He is probably the most famous Catholic to take part in the War of 1812. He fell with General Brock at the Battle of Queenston Heights where he is buried.

By 1793 the British Government had granted Irish Catholics the right to enter British military forces. This act promptly brought about the presence of a large number of Irish Catholic troops to Fort George, a presence large enough to require permanent chaplains. The first priest to attempt to become chaplain was Father Jean-Antoine le Dru, O.P., a French Dominican, 1793-94, who soon became a persona non grata because of his republican sympathies for which Lt. Gov. Simcoe ordered him out of the province.

The first priest to visit the Catholic soldiers at Fort George regularly was Father Edmund Burke from Ireland. In his capacity as Vicar General of Upper Canada for the Diocese of Quebec, 1794 to 1801, he was the first Catholic cleric to exercise quasi-episcopal powers in Ontario. Though he had to visit Catholic settlements all over the province, he made the military garrison at Fort George his principal residence, as befitted the provincial capital Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake) at that time.

In 1801 Father Edmund Burke became Vicar General of Nova Scotia and took up residence in Halifax. During the period up to 1815 the Catholic troops were served by a variety of priests visiting from Glengarry, Kingston, Toronto, Windsor, etc., some Irish, some Scottish, and some French. Often Roman Catholic and Anglican services were held on alternate Sundays at Fort George, the soldiers of one denomination often attending the services of the other denomination.

Certainly there was always a high proportion of Catholic officers and regulars amongst the troops at Fort George. Some of these would in turn bring their families with them, thus becoming the first permanent Catholic settlers in the Niagara Peninsula by 1815. A few French Royalists under the leadership of Count Joseph de Puisaye also settled around Niagara-on-the-Lake after the failure of their settlement between Richmond Hill and Aurora, Ontario, in 1802.

The Irish Period of Settlement, 1815-1900

The Canal Workers, 1815-1845

After the end in 1815 of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and the cessation of hostilities between Canada and the U.S.A. after the war of 1812 settlers began to enter the Niagara Peninsula rapidly. By the 1820's many Irish immigrants came to help build the first Welland Canal which was opened in 1829. Many of them had previously worked on the Erie Canal in western New York State.

In fact, communities of Catholics were springing up all over the province of Ontario in the 1820's. To meet their spiritual needs the Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell was appointed Bishop of Kingston for all Ontario in 1826. In the same year he in turn appointed Father Campion to Niagara-on-the-Lake, as the first parish priest of the first parish in and for the whole of the Niagara Peninsula and beyond. Needless to say, such a vast amount of territory required a great deal of travelling between mission stations. All the same, the Peninsula now had a permanent priest of its own.

Catholic emancipation in 1829 in Great Britain now enabled Catholics to purchase the land they needed on which to build their churches. Gradually churches were built where there were large numbers of permanently settled Catholics. Thus St. John's Church was completed at St. Catharines in 1831, St. Vincent de Paul at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1835, and St. Edward's at Niagara Falls was begun in 1837. St. Catherine's (then still St. John's) became a parish in its own right in the late 1830's and soon added Thorold as its mission church. Further west, in Haldimand County, by the 1840 St. Rose of Lima had been

established at Indiana on the Grand River Canal. A small community of German Catholics was also established nearby in Fisherville. But the vast majority of the Catholic immigrants in this period were from Ireland and they settled in the larger centres of industry and commerce where usually there was a church and regular religious services. Smaller groupings of Catholics would be visited by their priest on an occasional basis only.

The Aftermath of the Potato Famine in Ireland, 1845-1860

In Ireland from 1845 to 1850 there were successive failures of the potato crop, a disaster to the Irish who were so dependent upon this staple for their diet. Large numbers of Irish were soon forced to emigrate from Ireland to avoid starvation and in the hopes of securing a better livelihood elsewhere. The Niagara Peninsula received its fair share of immigrants from Ireland in the late 1840's and 1850's, thereby doubling its Catholic population to about 15% of the total population of the Peninsula by 1855.

Many of these new immigrants were in need of extensive assistance and thus a number of educational, social and charitable organizations were established. The Toronto Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in St. Catharines in 1856 to begin teaching and hospital work as well as generally visiting families in any way distressed. The St. Vincent de Paul Society was also set up in the various churches during this period to come to the aid of the needy in their respective parish areas. But over all, it was a time when the demands especially for charity made upon the church and her institutions were far greater than could be met.

The 1850's, relatively speaking, was the decade during which the Catholic population increased more quickly than at any other time in its history, both in the Niagara Peninsula and in Ontario in general. By 1860 there were five parishes, i.e., churches with resident priests, in the Peninsula: at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, St. Catharines and Caledonia. These five parish churches served another dozen or so mission churches.

Consolidation, Respectability and Irish Triumphalism, 1860-1900

After the Irish had recovered from the shock of the famine and migration experience, they began to establish themselves on firmer ground in their new homeland. They became more prosperous and wanted institutions that would compare favourably with those of their Protestant neighbours. Also, Catholicism took on a strongly Irish nationalistic flavour, especially under a number of Bishops from Ireland.

Education was strongly promoted with elementary schools beside almost every church, and secondary schools were begun, a new venture for Catholic education. The Sisters of Loretto opened up their Academy in Niagara Falls in 1861: the Sisters of St. Joseph opened their new convent-high school in St. Catharines in 1875: and the Christian Brothers taught in the schools generally from 1876 until 1897.

Ecclesiastically the church came of age in its own right when in 1861 the Deanery of St. Catharines was established, thus making Lincoln and Welland counties, which contained about 90% of the Peninsula's Catholic population, a distinct unit of administration within the Diocese of Toronto.

In 1876 the Carmelite Fathers took over the former St. Edward's Church which had already on August 18, 1861, become a Shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Peace as a gesture of friendship between Canada and the United States. This gesture was particularly appropriate after the Fenian raids at Fort Erie and

Ridgeway on June 2, 1866. The church could be Irish and yet remain British at the same time! In addition to running the Shrine Church, the Carmelite Fathers conducted retreats and had a deep spiritual influence upon the Peninsula. In 1892 they began publishing the Carmelite Review, the first Roman Catholic periodical in Ontario.

The Catholic laity were also active in this period, forming themselves into a large number of mutual benefit associations, Temperance Societies and more nationalistic Emerald Leagues. Patrick Marren, a prominent layman, became the first Catholic mayor of St. Catharines - by acclamation - in 1871.

By 1875 three more parishes, at Thorold, Port Colborne, and Cayuga had been added, and there were now some twenty mission churches. After 1875, however, the rural population of the Peninsula began to decline as elsewhere and henceforth most of the new churches would be built in the larger urban areas. By 1900 a number of the small rural mission churches had closed and only Smithville, Merritton and Dunnville had been added as new parishes.

The European Period of Settlement, 1900-1960

Refugees from Imperialism, 1900-1920

Irish immigration had greatly slowed down after 1860, when conditions somewhat improved in Ireland. Immigration in general was not to pick up again until 1896 when the new Liberal government in Ottawa opened wide the doors of Canada to immigrants from all of Europe and not just Great Britain as had been the case in the past. Soon large numbers of peoples began to flee their homelands, often dominated by foreign and oppressive imperialistic powers. They began to arrive in Canada by the early 1900's and by the 1910's they were organizing themselves into ethnic, social, political and religious groupings.

The Niagara Peninsula was no exception to this process as once again it proved to be a popular area in which new Canadians wished to settle. Thus St. Anne's Parish, established in Niagara Falls in 1913 for the Italian Catholic community, was the first so-called ""ethnic" parish to be founded in the Peninsula. Soon after, St. Mary's in Welland was also serving the Italian community. For the Polish Catholics, Our Lady of Perpetual Help was established in St. Catharines in 1914 and Saints Peter and Paul in Welland at the same time.

Other ethnic groups were still too small to have a church of their own, though often priests of their own background would visit them occasionally to minister to their spiritual needs. In 1915 the Carmelite Sisters came to Merritton to cater especially to the needs of the newly arriving immigrants from all ethnic backgrounds. The new immigrants brought with them new religious customs and devotions. Altar Societies and the League of the Sacred Heart of Jesus now became quite popular.

In 1910 there was some 12 parishes in the Peninsula; by 1915, some 15 - a number which would remain fixed until the end of the First World War, which prevented any further immigration.

Refugees from Nationalism, 1920-1940

The carving up of the map of Europe after the First World War left many pockets of minority groups in countries other than their own. Rather than live as second-class citizens in what they considered to be

their former homeland, many chose to immigrate to Canada during the 1920's, a process which would have continued into the 1930's, had it not been for the Great Depression.

Thus the Hungarians established a parish of their own in Welland in 1928. A number of Eastern Rite Catholics also began to establish churches in the Peninsula during this period. Perhaps most noteworthy during the 1920's was the large influx of French Canadians who came mainly to work in the textile mills and who established parishes at Welland in 1920, at St. Catharines in 1924, at Port Colborne in 1951 and at Niagara Falls in 1955. The number of parishes in the Peninsula increased from 15 in 1920 to 25 in 1940.

There was progress on other fronts as new religious communities entered the area, some to help specific ethnic groups, others to cater to the special educational, social or charitable needs of segments of the people. The Holy Name Societies and Knights of Columbus now played a large role in uniting the men in Christian activities as did the Catholic Women's League for the women. A highlight was the Eucharistic Congress held in St. Catharines in June of 1938, which attracted large crowds of worshippers.

The inter-war period was also a time for improving still further the quality of education offered to Catholics. Mount Carmel College and Seminary, run by the Carmelite Fathers, attracted students from far away who wished to benefit by the specialized studies offered. Grey Gables School was opened at Welland from 1931 to 1942 along the lines of a private Catholic school. Unfortunately war time economy measures necessitated its closing.

The depression of the 1930's lessened immigration and general physical growth, but at the same time it gave people both time and reason to deepen their spiritual lives and their understanding of the faith. The church became increasingly fixed in her ways and conservative in her outlook towards all innovations from the outside.

Refugees from Communism, 1940-1960

In the aftermath of the Second World War once again the Niagara Peninsula was the destination of many immigrants, this time largely from the eastern European countries behind the Iron Curtain. Refugees fled as much for religious as for personal and political freedom, since Communism was determined to stamp out all vestiges of religion, both in its public manifestations and in the private lives of individuals.

New parishes or at least religious services were now established for the smaller ethnic groups such as the Lithuanians, the Slovaks, the Croatians and the Slovenians. In terms of absolute numbers the 1950's was the period of greatest growth ever in the history of Catholicism in the Peninsula. It had, by 1960, some 40 parishes.

The Pre-Vatican II Church tried to influence almost every facet and age of life, from the Catholic Youth Organization to all sorts of societies for specialized activities within the church. Thus it was a time for the building of many new elementary schools and in particular the new High Schools, Notre Dame in Welland and Dennis Morris in St. Catharines. In an era of Catholic triumphalism more local seminaries appeared such as Holy Cross at Welland and the Ukrainian Catholic Seminary run by their Basilian Fathers at Grimsby.

More groups of Priests and Religious entered the Peninsula, many of them from a particular ethnic background, some to serve their own people in specialized apostolates, others to serve the Catholic community in general in whatever capacity they were called. The Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph arrived in 1945 at St. Catharines, where they built their Hotel Dieu Hospital in 1953, a great triumph for both the charitable and the institutional church.

The Diocese of St. Catharines, 1958 to the Present

A New Diocese in an Old Church, 1958-1968

On November 25, 1958, the Most Rev. Thomas J. McCarthy, originally from Goderich, Ontario, was installed as the first Bishop of the newly formed Diocese of St. Catharines. Bishop McCarthy quickly established the structures and officials necessary to give the new Diocese an ecclesiastical identity of its own. It was a question of welding together parts of two previous Dioceses, Toronto and Hamilton, to create a new church jurisdiction that would be proper to and very much part of the Niagara Peninsula, something many thought was long overdue.

The huge post-World War II immigration had now tapered off but there were still some new churches being built in the more suburban-like areas of the larger cities in the Peninsula. What immigrants there were often came from the countries of the Third World rather than from Europe as in the past.

This was the period of the Sessions of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65. Changes were being planned for the universal church but they had not yet taken practical effect to any large degree. It was still very much a new diocese working within the confines of an old church. If changes were introduced towards the end of the first decade of the history of the new diocese, they were seen only as small modifications of the older church structure which was still intact. The old conservatism so typical of much of English-speaking Catholicism in Canada still held sway. The new diocese was certainly not prepared to rock the ecclesiastical barque (boat) as the full impact of Vatican II was yet to be understood and felt.

A Young Diocese in a Church Of Experimentation, 1968-1978

The year 1968 is generally considered to be the year in which the old church structures finally fell apart amidst so many changes that most people did not know in what kind of church they were. It was no longer a question so much of grafting the new onto the old as retaining what one could of the old church within the context of the new post-Vatican II church. Clergy and laity alike throughout the world-wide Catholic Church became divided along conservative or liberal lines. The Diocese of St. Catharines was to feel some of the effects of this general disruption but under the sound leadership of its Bishop, it would weather the storm and persevere through the second decade of its history changed but undamaged.

In general the laity began to assume a larger role in the work of the church as more ministries were opened to them. The numbers of clergy and religious declined somewhat in places, yet there were still new communities of religious willing to settle in the Diocese during these years. Old church institutions took on new names and roles. Many new religious organizations and movements were formed to meet the new challenges of the day in ways now more understood by the younger generation. For some Catholics these were troubled years as they saw disappear the church of their childhood. Yet for many

more Catholics these were years of exciting change as new church structures were worked out to meet ever more effectively the new problems of the day.

A Mature Diocese in a Seasoned Church, 1978 To 1982

The year 1978 saw three Popes seated successively upon the throne of St. Peter in the Vatican. It also saw a new Bishop installed for St. Catharines' Diocese. The Most Rev. Thomas B. Fulton, a native of St. Catharines, was installed on August 29, 1978 as its second Bishop.

The church had now settled down after the changes of the previous decade and was willing to tolerate the conservatives and the liberals, provided each of them were willing to tolerate each other. The church was now willing to accept a reasonable amount of pluralism and diversity but extremists at both ends of the theological spectrum usually found it hard to find a place within a church which refused to allow itself to be taken over by any faction within it.

The mood now was one of willingness to work hard and to immerse oneself fully in the new church and thereby to discover its many strengths. Changes that formerly might have been viewed as being disruptive were now seen in a very positive light. There was slow but steady growth spiritually as the church continued to adapt itself prudently to the needs of the changing times.

The Niagara Peninsula in recent years has not experienced the physical growth that it did previously and this has enabled the St. Catharines Diocese to avoid becoming a bricks and mortar diocese and instead to concentrate upon becoming a family-like diocese where people know one another. Above all, its spirit has become that of optimism, joy and love.

Fifteen Years of Change and Consolidation, 1982 To 1997

The Diocese of St. Catharines has undergone considerable change and consolidation from 1982 to 1997, in terms of episcopal leadership, spiritual renewal, the first ever lay diocesan congress, and Catholic secondary schools. Bishop John A. O'Mara has made the congress the primary diocesan instrument to prepare local Catholics for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000. Priests and people have also celebrated many notable anniversaries and undertaken a number of church renovations and expansions, the most impressive among them being the wholesale restoration of the cathedral.

The founding bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Thomas J. McCarthy, died on November 15, 1986. He had been bishop for twenty years, from 1958 to 1978, during which time he guided the local church through the many reforms in liturgy and governance brought about by the implementation of Vatican II. His was not an easy or enviable task. Interestingly, the subject of Bishop McCarthy's doctoral thesis in Sacred Theology was the mystical body of Christ. Much of his work was later incorporated by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical by the same name. Most Rev. Thomas B. Fulton, now bishop emeritus, was the second bishop. Ordained to the priesthood in 1941, he was named titular bishop of Curzola and an auxiliary bishop of Toronto, on December 28, 1968, and ordained to the episcopacy by Pope Paul VI in Rome on January 6, 1969. He was bishop of St. Catharines for nearly sixteen years, until his mandatory retirement on February 2, 1994. Bishop John A. O'Mara, formerly the bishop of Thunder Bay from 1976 to 1994 became the third bishop in a colorful installation ceremony on April 13 1994.

As an aside three of the diocese's priests were made bishops. Monsignor Anthony F. Tonnos was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Hamilton July 12 1983 and installed Bishop of Hamilton June 18 1984.

Monsignor John S. Knight was named an auxiliary bishop of Toronto on April 27 1992 and Monsignor Frederick Colli was ordained an auxiliary bishop for the archdiocese of Ottawa on February 22 1995.

One of Bishop Fulton's most important pastoral initiatives was the implementation of RENEW. St. Catharines was the second diocese in Canada (after Hamilton) to adopt this program. A parish based process RENEW began in 1982 and ended three years later in 1985. Its central purpose was ""to help people know and love Jesus better and more clearly understand what he said and taught and to help people pattern their lives in closer harmony with the word of Jesus."" Using a core group of volunteers from each participating parish the program developed three basic themes: teaching and witnessing to the Word of God; developing vibrant faith communities; and establishing justice formation and action.

Some of the more lasting results of RENEW have been the establishment of Pastoral Councils in the parishes the publication of Vineyard the official diocesan newspaper beginning in 1987 adult religious education programs such as the University of St. Michael's College satellite degree in theology and concrete responses to the plight of many refugees in our midst.

Soon after his installation as bishop of St. Catharines Bishop O'Mara prepared for a Diocesan Congress. Invited to the congress opening session on September 24 1994 were two delegates from each parish lay parish assistants representatives from the women religious the three Catholic school boards and diocesan organizations as well as young adults from the high schools and Brock University. Parish priests were also invited but they were scheduled to have their own private study sessions only for Congress I. The 150 delegates to the three sessions of Congress I were asked ""to assess the needs of the people of the Diocese; to establish priorities for those needs; to discern the pastoral ministries required to address those needs; and to formulate a Mission Statement of pastoral priorities for the Diocese and parishes. Before the close of Congress I the bishop had set up a diocesan-wide Youth Ministry.

There are five more congresses to follow for both clergy and laity. Each one will take place in two sessions. Their themes are Congress II Evangelization; Congress III Evangelization and Ecumenism; Congress IV United in Jesus Christ (Baptism and Faith); Congress V Open to the Holy Spirit (Confirmation and Hope); and Congress VI God the Father (Penance and Charity). The final session of Congress VI is scheduled to take place in the autumn of 1999. In the Jubilee Year of Redemption there will be catechetical instructions on the Eucharist and a major celebration ushering in the third millennium of Christianity.

Since 1982 Catholic secondary education in the diocese has experienced tremendous growth in the number of students and new schools. Added to the roster of high schools were St. Paul in Niagara Falls (1982); Holy Cross in St. Catharines 1985; Lakeshore Catholic in Port Colborne (1988); St. Michael in Niagara Falls (1989); Monsignor Clancy in Thorold (1989); Blessed Trinity in Cirimsby (1994); St. Francis and Ecole secondaire Jean Vanier in St. Catharines (1995). Major renovations and expansion have been carried out at Lakeshore Catholic St. Paul Notre Dame Denis Morris and Holy Cross.

There have been many anniversaries in the diocese during the past fifteen years: Our Lady of Peace Shrine in Niagara Falls 150th in 1987; Star of the Sea in Port Dalhousie 125th in 1996; St. Patrick's School 100th in 1992; St. Helen's in Vineland 50th in 1988; Hotel Dieu Hospital in St. Catharines 50th in 1995; St. Aloysius in Thorold 40th in 1991; St. George's in Crystal Beach 25th in 1989; and St. Julia's in St. Catharines 25th in 1992 and St. Denis in St. Catharines 50th in 1997.

The parishioners of St. Joseph's in Grimsby built a new church the third one to serve the parish. It was blessed and opened on September 17 1995. Other parishes in the diocese have spent large sums of money either restoring or expanding their churches. St. Thomas More in Niagara Falls built a \$400 000 addition and installed an eighteen-foot-high stained glass window designed and executed by Port Colborne artist Tony Osborne. Our Lady of Peace Shrine replaced their roof. Star of the Sea financed the parish's first major expansion in its history. St. Kevin's in Welland constructed a much needed foyer. Sts. Peter and Paul the Polish parish in Welland is planning to rebuild after a disastrous fire that destroyed their completely renovated church shortly after it had re-opened. St. Alfred's in St. Catharines added a new parish pastoral centre.

The biggest restoration project however belongs to the cathedral parish of St. Catherine of Alexandria. More than one million dollars was spent on the following work: removal of the old pipe organ; new foundation retaining walls under the nave; major sub-beam under the Church Street wing; stronger columns to support the choir loft; removal of recessed ceiling lights; repairs to the bell tower roof; removal of old plaster; cleaning and repainting of interior masonry joints; new plaster and paint; new hand-carved oak panel behind main altar and matching repository altar; carpeting; front entrance steps; tuck pointing of exterior masonry; rereading of stained glass windows; handicap entrance; new pipe organ.

Currently the diocese is busy renovating the former Church of the Resurrection on Merritville Highway near Brock University for a diocesan pastoral centre. It will house the Chancery the diocesan archives the Marriage Tribunal the Office of Religious Education the diocesan newspaper and a pastoral/theological resource library.

The History of the Parish of the Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria

In this general overview of the history of the Diocese of St. Catharines it is fitting that we briefly review the history of its Cathedral Parish a story which so typifies the struggles of all the early Catholic pioneers in the Diocese.

The first Catholic Church at St. Catharines was built to meet the spiritual needs of the Irish labourers who built the first Welland Canal which was opened in 1829. It was a wood structure on the same site as the present cathedral and was called St. John's because the Anglicans were already using the name St. Catherine for their church in the town of the same name. On November 12 1831 Bishop Alexander Macdonell of Kingston blessed and opened this church which was the first Roman Catholic Parish church to be built in the Niagara Peninsula. The title deed to the land for this church was signed on April 13 1832 by Bishop Macdonell and others.

This first Catholic Church was burned down by an arsonist on August 23 1842. Fortunately the second Welland Canal was being built between 1842-45 and thus there were once again many Irish labourers in the area. There was much sickness in the work camps and Dr. Constantine Lee then Pastor at St. Catharines contracted one of the diseases while ministering to the workers and died in the winter of 1842-43. Wherever there was a church and a priest there soon would be numerous Irish families who wished to have the pastoral services of the church readily available to them.

Often there were delays in construction of the canal and so under the guidance of their new Pastor the Rev. Patrick McDonagh the Irish workers used their free time to build a new parish church this time of stone as we can see in the structure of the present Cathedral Church. Father McDonagh laid the cornerstone on Ascension Day May 25 1843. The Irish Canal workers continued to build the church for the next two years - for which there is a commemorative stone in Latin dated 1844 by the entrance to the church. Father McDonagh opened the new church on June 10 1845. The new church was now dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria - the name then being free since the Anglicans had built a new church which was dedicated to St. George their first church also having been burnt. The building of the new church also diverted the canal workers from rioting against others and brawling amongst themselves common enough occurrences in those times especially around St. Patrick's Day and the Glorious Twelfth.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century many additions were made to the church to give us the structure we have now. In the post-Vatican II period its interior was updated somewhat to give us the fine appearance that it has today.

For almost a century the church was usually the seat of the Deanery of St. Catharines the Dean residing at its Rectory. In 1945 it celebrated the centennial of the opening of the present church. On November 25 1958 it became the Cathedral Church of the newly formed Diocese of St. Catharines.

In 1982 it celebrated its sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary its legal establishment by government deed being 1832. On Sunday September 19 1982 an historical plaque was blessed in the Cathedral by Bishop Fulton and dedicated by His Excellency Sean P. Kennan the Irish Ambassador to Canada. This was the first diocesan historical plaque to be dedicated in the Diocese and was also the first time the new diocesan crest was displayed in public.

The Story of St. Catherine of Alexandria

The Diocese of St. Catharines was erected under the patronage of St. Catherine of Alexandria whose feast day is November 25th

Although the exact reasons why the City of St. Catharines was originally called by this name remain in doubt there can be no doubt about the strong affection the Catholics of the Cathedral and Diocese of St. Catharines feel towards their patron saint. The presence of the Catherine Wheel of torture has always figured prominently in the insignia of the Cathedral and the Diocese.

A citizen of Alexandria Egypt St. Catherine died around 310 A.D. in one of the persecutions of Christians that were so common in the Roman Empire. She refused to renounce her Christian faith and in her trials she converted many to Christianity. She was tortured on a spiked wheel which broke miraculously when she was placed upon it. Hence the broken Catherine Wheel in church symbolism. Eventually she was beheaded and her body is reputedly buried in a monastery on Mount Sinai.

St. Catherine was one of the voices that spoke to St. Joan of Arc and St. Catherine has always been a particularly popular saint among the people of France. Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys brought over from France to Quebec the tradition of special celebrations on St. Catherine's Day November 25th of each year. In the Province of Quebec St. Catherine's Feast is still celebrated as the special day for unmarried women. For the children there is taffy candy as in our Halloween. Whatever the customs that have

grown up around her cult she remains the patroness of maidens philosophers and preachers and of the Cathedral and Diocese of St. Catharines. **St. Catherine pray for us!**

The Crest of the Diocese of St. Catharines

When the new Diocese of St. Catharines was established in 1958 it followed church custom in having a heraldic crest designed for itself. This crest consisted basically of the Bishop's mitre and the broken Catherine Wheel superimposed upon the Welland Canal. In planning for the 25th anniversary of the Diocese in 1983 it was decided to design a second diocesan crest which would incorporate still more of the theological historical and geographical features of the Diocese.

The components of the new crest are: The crest is divided into left and right halves from top to bottom by the Welland Canal - portrayed in the crest by six links going from right to left back and forth three times. The crest is divided into a top and bottom half by two wavy lines representing the two major rivers in the St. Catharines Diocese - the Grand River to the left and the Welland River to the right.

In the top left-hand corner is the cross representing the arrival of Christianity from the north-west via the shores of Lake Ontario through the efforts of the French and Irish missionaries. The cross is a Celtic Cross - for the Irish with Fleur-de-Lys at its points - for the French. The blue background represents the official national colours of both Ireland and France.

In the top right-hand corner is the wheel of torture upon which St. Catherine patron of the Diocese was tortured. The broken part of the wheel i.e. the Catherine Wheel symbolizes the power of God over that of man since it broke when St. Catherine was stretched upon it. The red background here and below at bottom left represents the need for sacrifice in the shedding of blood.

In the bottom left-hand corner is a cluster of grapes symbolic of Christ's shedding His Most Precious Blood for our Salvation. It is a particularly appropriate symbol in view of the special renown for the growing of grapes which the Niagara Peninsula and hence the Diocese of St. Catharines enjoys.

In the bottom right-hand corner is the dove with an olive branch - the traditional religious symbol for peace. This symbolism has been chosen in recognition of the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace at Niagara Falls - which was dedicated over a century ago in 1861 by Bishop Lynch of Toronto.

It symbolizes the desire for peace with our neighbours in the United States of America and also within our own local Niagara Peninsula community an area of Canada which has had more than its share of battles over the centuries.

The blue background represents the sky and the rest and peace that only Heaven can give.

Thus the new crest of St. Catharines Diocese incorporates some of the most notable historical events and theological features of the area. It should serve as a constant reminder to each generation of what has gone before and what the future should be. It is not intended to be an heraldic mystery but a herald of the Good News which can only be found in the unravelling of the mystery which is the Christian life - lived in Christ.

The Diocese of St. Catharines Today

Today in 1997 the Diocese of St. Catharines numbers about 150 000 Catholics who worship in about 50 parish and mission churches served by some 100 priests. There are some twenty religious communities

of fathers, brothers, and sisters who run a wide variety of educational social medical and charitable institutions within the Diocese. Catholic chaplains are assigned to major religious and secular institutions.

The Separate School System is flourishing with a Catholic elementary school available to every Catholic child. Ten Catholic High Schools attempt to meet the needs of the teenage population for a Catholic education. There is a Separate School Board for each of the three major municipal jurisdictions now within the Diocese: Lincoln Welland and Haldimand-Norfolk. A Catholic chaplain is assigned to Brock University in St. Catharines to meet the needs of Catholic students there.

As a small Diocese St. Catharines may not have all the large institutions of a large diocese though it has elements of all these. What it lacks in institutional development it more than makes up for in strong family spirit something that the uniqueness of the Niagara Peninsula naturally encourages.

Relatively speaking the Catholic population is only about 30% of the total population of the Province of Ontario yet it is a very representative cross-section of that population. Just as Catholics come from many different ethnic backgrounds across the Province likewise much the same groupings are to be found in the Niagara Peninsula. Just as Catholics are about one third of the total population of all Ontario likewise they number about one third of the total population of the Peninsula. Indeed the Diocese of St. Catharines represents almost a perfect microcosm of the Ontario Catholic community as a whole. The various groups within the Diocese work well together just as the Catholic community as a whole gets on well with its non-Catholic neighbours. All in all St. Catharines is a nice intimate family diocese.

The Catholic community has contributed to all walks of life in the Niagara Peninsula over the years. In addition to their spiritual role first as missionaries then as chaplains and finally as parish priests the clergy have taken a strong hand over the years in building up the institutional and spiritual life of the area with the help of religious communities. The laity over the years have served as explorers, traders, soldiers, farmers, canal builders, railroad workers, and factory labourers. Today in the desire to return to the land they have become grape growers. In addition to their spiritual and charitable contributions the laity have added immensely to the social intellectual and cultural life of the Peninsula community.

As a final gift of the Catholic community one might note that though Laura Secord was not a Roman Catholic herself the man who made her famous was. Senator Frank O'Conner named his candy company after her and both prospered. For one reason or another today Laura Secord is probably the best known figure from the Niagara Peninsula after General Brock himself.

The relatively small Diocese of St. Catharines is sandwiched between some large and powerful Diocesan neighbours. On the Canadian side are the Diocese of London and Hamilton and across Lake Ontario the Archdiocese of Toronto. On the American side is the Diocese of Buffalo. Both liberal and conservative strains of contemporary Catholicism have an influence on the Diocese of St. Catharines. Today St. Catharines can be said to be a very stable and flourishing Diocese always open to the best of what the future has to offer it. We wish it every success in the years ahead.

Bibliography and Sources

The only book written specifically on the History of the Roman Catholic Church in the Niagara Peninsula is a book by the title *The Catholic Church in the Niagara Peninsula 1626-1895* written by Dean William R. Harris in 1895. While it gives the general idea of what happened it cannot be considered an accurate

piece of writing by the standards of today's historiographical scholarship. A more up-to-date source is Michael Power's History of the Roman Catholic Church in the Niagara Peninsula 1615-1815. He is also the author of "An Introduction to the Life and Work of Dean Harris 1847-1923" in *Catholics at the Gathering Place: Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto 1841-1991*.

A number of histories of some of the parishes within the Diocese of St. Catharines have been written over the years. These will be of great interest to local historians though often the more historical parts of them leave something to be desired. These books are now often difficult to obtain. They should be regarded as secondary or tertiary sources of reference.

For primary sources one should visit the Archives of the Diocese of St. Catharines for documents on the more modern period and the archives of the Archdiocese of Quebec the Archdiocese of Kingston and the Archdiocese of Toronto and the Diocese of Hamilton for documents that give the background to the earlier history of the churches in the Peninsula. A number of religious communities and institutions also have in their archives valuable documents on their particular apostolates in the Niagara Peninsula.

For books documents and newspapers dealing with the history of the Niagara Peninsula in general including religion - one should consult the local history sections of the Central Public Library in St. Catharines and also its counterpart at Brock University. Also many local public libraries have the histories of the churches in their respective areas.

Rev. Edward Jackman O.P.
Roman Catholic Historian

THE BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

The Most Rev. Thomas J. McCarthy 1958 - 1978

The Most Rev. Thomas B. Fulton 1978 - 1994

The Most Rev. John A. O'Mara 1994 - 2002

The Most Rev. James Mathew Wingle 2002 - 2010

The Most Rev. Gerard Paul Bergie 201- - present

The First Bishop of the Diocese was Thomas J. McCarthy S.T.D. D.D. who until his appointment to St. Catharines had been Bishop of Nelson B.C. He was installed as the Bishop of St. Catharines on November 25 1958 the titular feast of the newly-created diocese. Bishop McCarthy retired on July 8 1978 and died on November 15 1986.

Bishop Thomas B. Fulton J.C.D. D.D. succeeded Bishop McCarthy by his appointment July 8 1978 as the second Bishop of St. Catharines. Prior to this Bishop Fulton had been one of the Auxiliary Bishops of Toronto having been ordained Bishop by Pope Paul VI on January 6 1969 in Rome. Bishop Fulton was installed as Bishop of St. Catharines on August 29 1978 and retired on February 2 1994.

Bishop John A. O'Mara J.C.L. D.D. was appointed the third Bishop of the Diocese on February 2 1994. He had been ordained Bishop of the Dioceses of Thunderbay on June 29 1976. Bishop O'Mara was installed as

the Bishop of St. Catharines on April 13 1994 and retired on November 9 2001 on which day Bishop James M. Wingle D.D. was appointed the fourth bishop of St. Catharines.

On November 9 2001 Pope John Paul II appointed Most Rev. James Mathew Wingle formerly bishop of the Diocese of Yarmouth as the new bishop of the Diocese of St. Catharines.

Born in Pembroke Ontario on September 23 1946 Bishop Wingle was raised and educated in Eganville. He completed his Secondary School in Brokville. He obtained an M.A. from University of Windsor. The Government employed him for five years as a counselor in the correction system. He completed seminary studies at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto. He was ordained a priest on April 16 1977 for the Diocese of Pembroke. After his ordination he served in several parishes before pursuing graduate studies in moral theology at the Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome.

Upon his return to Canada he was assigned to Toronto's St. Augustine Seminary where he taught moral theology. In 1987 he became President Rector of the Seminary and continued until May 31 1993 when Pope John Paul II named him Bishop of the Diocese of Yarmouth. He was ordained a Bishop on August 24 1993.

Bishop Wingle was installed as the fourth Bishop of the Diocese of St. Catharines on Thursday January 24 2002.

Bishop Bergie has been the diocesan ordinary since 2010.