

The History of Catholicity in Dunnville and its Vicinity

The following brief outline of the history of Catholicity in Dunnville and its vicinity has been compiled by the Rev. Father Donovan, the present pastor of St. Michael's church, Dunnville. The information that is furnished has been gathered chiefly from the older members of the parish, who have lived here during Father Donovan's pastorate. The late Father Crinion left a few notes that have also been used. The story of the experiences of Father Dollier and his band of faithful workers has been taken from Dean Harris' "History of the Early Missions in Western Canada."

There will be found, too, a full account of the Silver Jubilee of the parish, which was celebrated Sunday, September 17th, 1911.

St. Michael's parish, Dunnville, was formed into a separate parish on the 5th of September, 1886, with the Rev. J. E. Crinion as first resident pastor. Previous to this date Dunnville was attached to Caledonia parish. As nearly as can be ascertained, the first Mass ever said in Dunnville was celebrated in a tavern kept by a Mrs. McKeever. The celebrant of the Mass was the Rev. Father McIntosh, in the year 1848. Mr. James Barry, now living in Dunnville, was baptised by this priest on the occasion of this visit. Father McIntosh was probably the first priest to visit Dunnville. Previous to, and even at intervals for a while after this visit, the few Catholics who lived here were obliged to drive to Buffalo to have their children baptised. After Father McIntosh's visit, at irregular intervals, came Dean Grattan and his nephew, Father Conway, also Fathers McLaughlin and Fitzgerald. We next hear of Mass being celebrated in a barn situated near the Grand Trunk station, and owned by John Timmons; then upstairs in Thos. Carroll's house. Mass was afterwards celebrated in the residence of Jasper Murphy. After this we read that just before the old church was built, the holy sacrifice was offered in the Amsden and Boswell Halls. Thos. Carroll and Andrew Devine are said to be the first Catholics of Dunnville.

It will be of considerable interest to add here that a Father Lee visited Broad Creek, now known as Stromness, about the year 1841. He came at the time the canal was being dug, and was instrumental in quelling what was known as the Broad Creek war. In 1842 Father Lee died of dropsy, after an illness of three months. A Father McDonough arrived in time to administer to him the last sacraments. He died at the home of a Mr. James Darraugh, a Protestant gentleman of Stromness, who kindly drove the remains to St. Catharines for interment.