

# History of St. Mary's Church (Dedham, Massachusetts)

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The **history of St. Mary's Church in Dedham, Massachusetts** begins with the first mass said in Dedham, Massachusetts in 1843 and runs to the present day

From the first mass with only 8 Catholics present, St. Mary's grew into one of the largest parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston. The first church constructed by the congregation was quickly outgrown, and so a second church was built on High Street. Designed to be a "cathedral in the wilderness," it is "the largest and most imposing church in the town" and "one of the most conspicuous edifices" in the town.

Several parishes have grown out of St. Mary's, most recently St. Susanna's. Today it has a large Life Teen program, and over 40 other programs for parishioners.

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# First Catholics

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The history of Catholicism in Dedham begins in 1758, only 120 years after the settlement of the Contentment Plantation and fully two decades before the American Revolution. During the French and Indian War the British expelled over 11,000 Acadians from what is today Nova Scotia.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> Eleven of them resettled in Dedham, and though the town and the Massachusetts Bay colony were both officially Congregationalist, they were allowed to reside here as French neutrals<sup>[4]</sup> until they returned to Canada in 1760.<sup>[2]</sup>

After the Acadians returned to Canada in 1760, Dedham would not see another Catholic resident for decades. The townsfolk would not always be so welcoming. When an Irishman and his wife came to visit friends in the village of Dedham, the Selectmen asked them to leave as soon as possible.<sup>[5]</sup>

The first Catholic who spent any length of time in Dedham was Mr. Gill, who lived in what is today known as Riverdale, but was then called Dedham Island.<sup>[5]</sup> The few Catholics who lived in Dedham would have to travel 16 miles to St. Joseph's in Roxbury, the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Franklin Street in Boston, or to St. Mary's in Waltham to attend Mass.<sup>[2][1][4][6][3]</sup>

## Early Masses

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By the early 1800s a few Catholics had settled in Dedham. The first Mass in Dedham was celebrated in Sunday, May 15, 1843,<sup>[7]</sup> in the home of Daniel Slattery, with eight Catholics present.<sup>[1][3][4][5][7][8][9][2][nb 1]</sup> An altar was set up by the window.<sup>[11]</sup> For the next three years Slattery's 17-year-old brother-in-law would bring Father James Strain from Waltham and back each Sunday to minister to the needs of the small congregation.<sup>[1][3][4][9][nb 2]</sup>

By 1846, the Catholic community in Dedham was well established enough that the town became part of the mission of St. Joseph's Church in Roxbury.<sup>[1][3][4][7]</sup> The geographic boundaries of the town were much larger at the time, however, and only one Catholic boy lived in the central village in 1850.<sup>[13]</sup>

Slattery was well regarded among his fellow Dedhamites and, when his wife died in 1849, the hands of the clock were stopped at the hour of her death.<sup>[11][14][nb 3]</sup> The unusual occurrence of a Catholic funeral mass elicited much interest around the town.<sup>[14]</sup>

The flood of Irish immigrants escaping the Potato Famine necessitated holding Mass in the Temperance Hall, often by Father Patrick O'Beirne.<sup>[4][15][16][1][3][5][8][10][11]</sup> Mass was also occasionally celebrated in the Crystal Palace on Washington Street.<sup>[2]</sup> Worshipers came from Dedham, South Dedham, West Dedham, and West Roxbury.<sup>[2]</sup> Ordained for less than a decade, the 33-year-old O'Beirne had charge of the Catholics in Dedham, Norwood, Randolph, Holliston, Walpole, and Needham, as well as Roxbury.<sup>[12][nb 4]</sup>

## First church

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The number and devotion of the first parishioners permitted a church to be constructed within 10 years.<sup>[17]</sup> In 1856 the cornerstone was laid, and in 1857, the first St. Mary's Church was completed on Washington Street between Spruce and Marion Streets.<sup>[3][4][7][18][17]</sup>

On Easter Sunday, April 12, 1857, Father O'Beirne said Mass for the first time in a new church that could seat 600.<sup>[15][17][19][5][7][8][12][nb 5]</sup> Reading from the 20th chapter of John's Gospel, Father O'Beirne proclaimed the news of Jesus' empty tomb.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Parish growth

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The large growth in the number of Catholics in the area in the middle of the 19th century made the original St. Mary's too small. During this time, St. Mary's was responsible for the mission in South Dedham, which later separated and became the Town of Norwood.<sup>[4]</sup> Like those closer to the center of town, South Dedhamites would travel to either



The first St. Mary's Church

Roxbury or to nearby Canton for Mass, but eventually Mass was offered several times a year in the home of Patrick Fahey. By 1860, a priest was available to say mass in South Dedham every other week.<sup>[20]</sup>

During the Civil War, "no church in Dedham lost so many men in proportion to their numbers."<sup>[4]</sup> "Almost to a man," the Dedham Transcript wrote, the Catholic men of Dedham "answered Lincoln's call,"<sup>[11]</sup> and sadly "no church in Dedham lost so many men in proportion to their numbers as did St. Mary's."<sup>[1]</sup> Their patriotism and deaths did much to counter the anti-Catholic bias that existed in town.<sup>[11]</sup>

In 1880, the pastor of St. Mary's was also responsible for churches in South Dedham, East Dedham, and West Roxbury.<sup>[21][15]</sup> During this decade, Father Johnson was publicly raising the issue of discrimination against Catholics in the public schools. In 1885, as a member of the School Committee,<sup>[nb 6]</sup> he claimed the principal of the Avery School ridiculed Catholic students,<sup>[22]</sup> and several years later had a lengthy debate with a Protestant minister via letters in the Dedham Standard about the "rank misrepresentation of the Catholic Church" in a history book adopted by the School Committee.<sup>[23]</sup>

In 1890 there were an estimated 2,000 parishioners, including 957 Irish, 250 English-speaking Canadians, 58 French, 19 Italians and Portuguese.<sup>[9]</sup> There were 400 students in the Sunday School classes in 1884.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Present building

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In 1867 a house was purchased on High Street by Father John Brennan and was converted into a rectory.<sup>[4][15][16]</sup> In February 1880 it was announced that a Protestant who had business in Boston had paid off the parish's \$700 debt, allowing the congregation to commence work on a new building.<sup>[25]</sup> This was welcome news, as the parish was bankrupt at the time.<sup>[3]</sup>

A building used as a bath by male parishioners of St. Raphael's in East Dedham was torn down on October 10, 1880 in order to be used as a staging ground for the construction of the new church.<sup>[26]</sup>



A newly married couple in St. Mary's

Charles Logue, who built numerous churches in the Greater Boston area as well as Fenway Park, died in the arms of his son while inspecting the roof of St. Mary's in 1919.<sup>[27][28][29]</sup>

## Cornerstone ceremony

The cornerstone of the present church was laid at 3:00 on October 17, 1880 by Archbishop John Williams.<sup>[30]</sup> A crowd of between 4,000 and 5,000 people attended,<sup>[30]</sup> and special trains were run from Boston and Norwood to accommodate all those who wished to attend.<sup>[4][26]</sup> It was one of the largest gatherings in Dedham's history.<sup>[31]</sup>

The congregation marched from their present building on Washington Street to the site of the new Church on the High Street for the ceremony.<sup>[30]</sup> Included in the procession were the Holy Name Society, the Young Men's Lyceum, the Rosary Society, the Young Ladies Solidarity, St. Aloysius Society of Boys, and the Children of Sacred and Holy Angels Solidarity.<sup>[31]</sup>

The crowd included many of the leading citizens of Dedham<sup>[4]</sup> as well as 30 priests.<sup>[30][31]</sup> The clergy included St Mary's pastor, Father Robert Johnson, Father Theodore Metcalf of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross who served as Master of Ceremonies,<sup>[nb 7]</sup> and Father Joseph Henning of Roxbury who gave a homily.<sup>[30]</sup> The Cathedral choir sang and Higgins's band provided music,<sup>[30]</sup> as did the united choirs of Dedham.<sup>[31]</sup>

Williams blessed the cornerstone and the place where the foundation was to be poured, as well as the white cross that marked the location of the future altar.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Construction

The current church was constructed next door to the rectory Father Brennan established on High Street.<sup>[24]</sup> The footprint of the Gothic church, which Father Johnson said was to be a "cathedral in the wilderness,"<sup>[32][33]</sup> measures 150' long by 65' wide, and the bell tower is 164' tall.<sup>[30][24]</sup> The apex of the ceiling is 80'<sup>[34]</sup> and it has the longest aisle in the Archdiocese of Boston.<sup>[35]</sup> It was at the time, and remains today, "the largest and most imposing church in the town"<sup>[24]</sup> and "one of the most conspicuous edifices" in the town.<sup>[36]</sup>

There are four large doorways facing High Street, and granite buttresses give the church "an appearance of strength and solidarity."<sup>[37]</sup> The doors, like the pews, were made of polished oak.<sup>[8][37]</sup> The altar was carved from Caen stone,<sup>[36][37]</sup> and the altar rail of green onyx.<sup>[36]</sup> Today one of those doors is permanently shut as that portion of the vestibule has become a Reconciliation room, and the altar rail has been moved down to the space in front of the front pew. As built, it had a seating capacity of 1,200 in the vestry and 1,500 in the church proper.<sup>[36][37]</sup> An organ sits high above the nave<sup>[36][37]</sup> in a choir loft that can hold 50 singers.<sup>[34]</sup>

The broad front stairs originally pointed out away from the Church with a brass railing in the middle,<sup>[37]</sup> but due to a widening of High Street in the 1920s they were turned to run parallel with the street. When built, the church was said to be fireproof with "ventilation and heating system of the best, and the acoustic properties unexcelled."<sup>[37]</sup> The windows are of "rolled cathedral stained glass"<sup>[34]</sup> and were made by Tyrolese Art Glass Company<sup>[nb 8][nb 9]</sup> a company from Innsbruck, Austria.<sup>[40][41]</sup>

The interior walls were plastered by William Gould, an escaped slave who settled in Dedham.<sup>[42][43][44]</sup> One of Gould's employees improperly mixed the plaster and even though it was not visible by looking at it, Gould insisted that it be removed and reapplied correctly at his own great expense.<sup>[42]</sup> Lining the Church are fluted Grecian columns<sup>[37]</sup> and seven arches.<sup>[8][34]</sup> Crystal chandeliers hang along both sides of the nave, above the altar and above the doors.<sup>[8]</sup>

The semicircular apse had stained glass windows showing, from left to right, St. Patrick, St. Peter, the Assumption of Mary, St. Paul and St. Brigid.<sup>[8]</sup> At either end of the altar are statues of Saints Peter and Paul.<sup>[8]</sup> In between are three paintings framed by elaborate gothic ornamentation on the reredos.<sup>[8][45]</sup>

The new church was designed by P.B. Ford, and architect with offices on School Street in Boston,<sup>[34]</sup> and built by Welch and Delano.<sup>[31]</sup> They were charged with hiring 18 Dedham men to complete the basement, as well as a master mechanic to serve as superintendent.<sup>[46]</sup> Construction began on June 28, 1880,<sup>[46]</sup> and in 1883 The Dedham Transcript wrote that "The plastering of the new catholic church is nearly finished, the windows put in place, and everything betokens an early occupancy of the basement."<sup>[43]</sup>

While the upper church was still under construction, the lower church was used for Mass and the upper portion for various fairs and other gatherings.<sup>[4]</sup> The first mass was said in the lower church at 10:30 a.m. on October 24, 1886.<sup>[10]</sup> The crowd was overflowing, and included 20 Protestants, many of local importance, and a choir from St. Peter's in South Boston.<sup>[10]</sup> The church, though "in constant use,"<sup>[9]</sup> would not be completed for another 20 years after the cornerstone was laid.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Dedication

After 20 years of working, praying, and fundraising from the meager immigrant wages of many of the parishioners, the Upper Church was finally completed. It took so long that another architect had to take over but was, Father Fleming said, "almost too beautiful for ordinary use."<sup>[1][8]</sup>

The upper church was completed and dedicated by Archbishop Williams on September 9, 1900 at 10:00 a.m.<sup>[3][33][37]</sup> In addition to Williams, Archbishop Sebastiano Martinelli the papal delegate to the United States, attended, as did Bishop Denis Mary Bradley of New Hampshire.<sup>[37]</sup> The crowd, numbered at 1,200, included the communion class and many prominent citizens of the Town, including Protestants.<sup>[1][37]</sup> The dedication packed the church, requiring many to stand,<sup>[37]</sup> and tickets were required to enter.<sup>[1]</sup>



A map from September 1892 showing the "not entirely finished" church and the parochial hall

The ceremony began with a procession of clergy from the rectory to the church, where a prayer was chanted on the porch at the top of the stairs.<sup>[37]</sup> The clergy then walked around the building, blessing the walls with holy water.<sup>[37]</sup> Back on the porch, the litany of the Saints was said before the interior walls were sprinkled with holy water.<sup>[37]</sup> A final prayer was said in the sanctuary to complete the dedication.<sup>[37]</sup>

Martinelli then said the first mass in the upper church with a number of clergy from the surrounding areas present.<sup>[37]</sup> Music was provided by a choir of 30, plus four soloists and part of the Germania Orchestra of Boston.<sup>[37]</sup>

In his homily, which the *Boston Globe* published, Bradley said that

Today, my beloved brethren, like unto Solomon on the occasion of the dedication of the Great Temple of Jerusalem, your zealous Pastor proclaims that you have built a house in God's name . . . To you has been reserved the privilege of offering to God a house as worthy of His Name as this beautiful structure in which we are assembled this morning.<sup>[4][8][37]</sup>

After Mass, at 4:00, about 200 children were confirmed, and solemn vespers were sung in the evening.<sup>[37]</sup>

## Cost and fundraising

After the cornerstone laying, a dinner was held at a local hall where \$1,250 was donated.<sup>[30]</sup> The largest donation of \$100 came from Timothy Callahan, and he received a golden trowel for his gift.<sup>[30]</sup>

Albert Nickerson, a member of Dedham's St. Paul's Episcopal Church, donated \$10,000 towards the effort.<sup>[4][15][nb 10]</sup> The Dedham Granite for the outer walls was donated by another Protestant, John Bullard,<sup>[4][15]</sup> who did not live to see the church completed.<sup>[37]</sup> The granite came from Bullard's own lot.<sup>[3]</sup> In 1886 it was estimated the cost would be \$100,000,<sup>[34]</sup> by 1890 the cost was reported to be \$125,000,<sup>[47]</sup> and at the dedication in 1900 it stood at \$250,000.<sup>[36]</sup>

Fundraisers, including a "grand coffee party" in Memorial Hall, were held for years to come to pay for the edifice and drew people not only from Dedham, but from many surrounding communities.<sup>[48]</sup>

## Early 20th century

In June 1890 Father John H. Fleming arrived at St. Mary's and began a 33-year tenure as pastor.<sup>[1][5][8]</sup> During his pastorate the parish the upper church would be completed, the parish cemetery in West Roxbury would be purchased,<sup>[5]</sup> and the old wooden rectory next to the church<sup>[5]</sup> would be torn down so a new rectory could be built<sup>[17]</sup> of Dedham Granite<sup>[49]</sup> in 1913.<sup>[8][nb 11]</sup> On Sundays, however, the quality of his preaching was such that other priests would come to St. Mary's to listen to the quality of his preaching.<sup>[8]</sup>

The rectory was designed by Edward T. P. Graham.<sup>[8]</sup> The stone came from the same quarry as the church, which had to be reopened for the purpose.<sup>[8]</sup> It was donated by General Weld, a Protestant, whose daughter converted to Catholicism and became a nun.<sup>[8]</sup> He honored her early death with the donation.<sup>[8]</sup>

In 1901, an unusual double marriage ceremony took place where two sisters, Frances and Mary Curtis, married two men during a single mass.<sup>[50]</sup>



A drawing from page 7 of the September 10, 1900, issue of the *Boston Daily Globe* depicting the Dedication of St Mary's Church in Dedham, Massachusetts

In the 1920s, with the building work completed, new pastor Father Henry A. Walsh was able to focus on the various groups and societies within the parish.<sup>[8]</sup> The Catholic population in the area grew, as did the amount of social activity within the parish.<sup>[8]</sup> By 1936, the parish was one of the largest in the Archdiocese of Boston with 6,000 parishioners, four priests, and six nuns.<sup>[13]</sup> The Sunday School alone had over 1,300 pupils.<sup>[13]</sup>

Within months of arriving as pastor in 1929, Father George P. O'Connor began a parish school with three Sisters of St. Joseph.<sup>[8]</sup> He also began a Catholic Youth Organization, and was generally regarded as having a focus on youth.<sup>[8]</sup> He also added an additional floor to the rectory to accommodate the assistant priests coming to the parish.<sup>[8]</sup>

Father Mark C. Driscoll became pastor in 1943, and two years later became a monsignor.<sup>[8]</sup> In 1953, Driscoll purchased land at 700 High Street to be used as an adult center.<sup>[8]</sup> When he celebrated his golden jubilee of his priesthood, Cardinal Francis Spellman returned to Boston and celebrated the Mass.<sup>[8]</sup> Cardinal Richard Cushing provided the homily.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Mid-20th century

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In 1953, the newly established St. John Chrysostom Church in West Roxbury took some of St. Mary's territory.<sup>[51]</sup>

Following the reforms the Second Vatican Council, a new temporary altar was installed in the church in 1964, and a permanent oak altar was in place in 1965.<sup>[52]</sup> Monsignor Edward C. Bailey, who became pastor in 1960, also introduced microphones and speakers into the cavernous church, and remodeled both sacristies.<sup>[52]</sup><sup>[nb 12]</sup> He also added additional exterior doors to the church.<sup>[52]</sup>

A new carillon was added in 1962, and the bells pealed the Angelus and the call to worship on Sundays.<sup>[52]</sup> By the 1990s, however, the bells no longer chimed, but a tape recording played three times a day.<sup>[53]</sup>

In the 1960s, St. Mary's remained one of the largest parishes in the archdiocese.<sup>[8]</sup> A new convent was needed for the nuns who worked at the school. A total of \$300,000 was pledged for a larger convent, and it was paid off within three years.<sup>[8]</sup> The construction began in the spring 1963, was finished the summer of the following year, and had stained glass windows in the chapel depicting Jesus and Mary.<sup>[8]</sup> When it opened on Avery Street, 15 nuns moved in and there was space for 22.<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[8]</sup> The old convent was torn down, and a parking lot was put in its place.<sup>[8]</sup> At the confirmation mass in 1965, Bishop Thomas Joseph Riley blessed the new building.<sup>[8]</sup>

The church was still too small, and was too much work for one pastor and three assistant priests, however. A second parish was established for the Riverdale neighborhood, St. Susana's, in 1962.<sup>[8]</sup> In 1968, Fr. Frank Daly came to St. Mary's.<sup>[54]</sup> He later was married and left the priesthood.<sup>[54]</sup> In 2016, two years after the death of his wife, he returned to his priestly faculties.<sup>[54]</sup>

Monsignor Charles E Dewey became pastor in 1969.<sup>[52]</sup> It was Dewey who hired the Andover Organ Company to renovate the Hook & Hastings organ in the choir loft, which was said to be one of the finest in the Archdiocese.<sup>[52]</sup> In the 1970s the lower church was renovated, and a reconciliation room was added.<sup>[52]</sup>

## Late 20th century

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In 1975, Father Edward Banks, S.J. arrived at St. Mary's. He had previously taught in Baghdad, Iraq, but "our friend" Saddam Hussein expelled him as an American spy.<sup>[53]</sup> He had grown up in St. Catherine's<sup>[55]</sup> and also spent time in other Middle Eastern cities.<sup>[53]</sup> With one brief intermission, he would remain at St. Mary's until his death in 2001.<sup>[56]</sup> It was a sign of the mutual affection between Banks and the parish that his funeral was held at St. Mary's, and not at the Jesuits' Campion Center as would be typical for a member of his religious order.<sup>[56]</sup>

In 1980, in preparation for the 100th anniversary of the church, small changes were made to the pews to improve traffic flow during Communion.<sup>[52]</sup> A coronation tapestry also hung behind the statue of Mary in the lower church.<sup>[52]</sup>

The number of people attending mass each week began to drop off rather dramatically in the early 1990s. In 1989, the average weekly attendance was 2,843 people.<sup>[57]</sup> By 1995, however, it dropped to just 1,030.<sup>[57]</sup> The following year, 1996, Father (later bishop) John Anthony Dooher and Father Chris Hickey arrived at St. Mary's within weeks of each other. Mass attendance increased

by 50% that year alone, and in 1997 it was over 2,500.<sup>[57]</sup> In September 1997, Hickey and youth minister Seán Flynn began a Life Teen program to minister to high school students.

## 21st century

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As of 2016, the parish had 2,700 families as parishioners.<sup>[3]</sup> The nature of the parish switched from being a place simply where sacraments were offered, to offering more social services as well.<sup>[3]</sup> The parish grounds are currently used for community groups such as three Alcoholics Anonymous groups, senior citizens, and a Moms and Tots group.<sup>[3]</sup> There are between 600 and 700 people who come to the church each week.<sup>[3]</sup>

The parish itself has 40 active groups.<sup>[3]</sup> These include outreach to the poor and senior citizens, a crocheting, knitting, and quilting group, a women's bowling league, book clubs, and youth groups.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition, the St. Joseph's Chapel in the parish center is open from 6 a.m.-9 p.m. each day<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2015 painting

After consulting with the Parish and Finance Councils and holding a parish-wide Town Hall Meeting in the spring of 2014, Pastor William Kelly proposed repainting the interior of the Upper Church for the first time in over 25 years.<sup>[58]</sup> It was originally painted with vibrant colors and patterns, but in the 1970s was completely painted in white with gold trim. As reasons for undertaking the project Kelly cited the need to maintain the physical structure of the church, the upcoming 150th anniversary of the parish, long-term planning and the collaborative process by which St. Mary's and nearby St. Susana's would come under a single pastor, and beauty in itself being "a fundamental element for our human, spiritual and intellectual happiness."<sup>[58]</sup>



Ceiling above the altar

The cost was projected to be \$300,000 and pledges were requested.<sup>[58]</sup> The donations and pledges made were insufficient, however, so the plans were scaled back, a loan was taken out to cover the remainder, and a second collection was instituted once a month.<sup>[59]</sup> As conducted, the project included the four walls of the church and the sanctuary, the two side altars, Stations of the Cross, the ceilings in the side aisles, and the center columns as high as the capitals.<sup>[59]</sup> The center arches, main ceiling and choir loft were not included.<sup>[59]</sup> The painting included many colors, and white stars painted on a blue background above the altar. Children of the parish were invited to sponsor a star.<sup>[60]</sup> The project began on January 5, 2015<sup>[61][62]</sup> by the Graham Company and finished by the end of March.<sup>[63]</sup>

### Lower church

In 2010, the parish sold the parking lot across High Street to the Town of Dedham and a housing developer. The proceeds were used to demolish the old school building, and to re-purpose the lower church. Half of the lower portion of the church is a clubhouse for the LifeTeen program, and the other half is a multipurpose gathering space known as Mary Hall.<sup>[4]</sup>

The pews from the lower church were salvaged and reused. Some became wall paneling and table stock for fast food restaurants, and others were transformed into serving boards for high-end restaurants.<sup>[64]</sup> The pew ends were sold as is.<sup>[64]</sup>

## Schools

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### St. Mary's School and Asylum

Though not sponsored by the parish, in 1866 the Sisters of Charity founded the St. Mary's School and Asylum at what was formerly Temperance Hall, where some of the first Masses were said in Dedham two decades before.<sup>[16]</sup> The land was sold to them<sup>[nb 13]</sup> for \$1 by Martin Bates who, out of a "spirit of vindictiveness,"<sup>[66]</sup> gave it to the Sisters because the Town of Dedham would not purchase the run down building from him at his asking price.<sup>[67][68]</sup> Bates, who was not Catholic, had previously tried selling the building at auction, but could find no buyer willing to pay a price equal to his mortgage.<sup>[69]</sup> At news of the sale, the *Dedham Gazette* wrote in an editorial:

Whatever prejudices may naturally exist against the establishment of a Roman Catholic School in so central a location, the community cannot but feel that the transformation of a building recently used only for the indiscriminate sale of liquors into an institution founded for 'promoting virtue, learning and piety in the town of Dedham' is an object worthy only of the most exalted motives, and in this view should be accepted as a public blessing.<sup>[69]</sup>

Soon after Sister Catherine of Syracuse, New York, Sister Veronica of Troy, New York, and Sister Anselm of Chicago, Illinois, arrived on July 20, 1866, they endeared themselves to the community.<sup>[70]</sup> One year later, the school was educating 60 girls and was home to 10 orphans.<sup>[70][71]</sup> By 1871, the first parochial school in Norfolk County<sup>[72]</sup> was winning praise in the press for "elevating the foreign class both intellectually and morally"<sup>[73]</sup>

The school held a number of fundraisers,<sup>[73]</sup> but with the heavy debt of the parish the school closed on June 27, 1879.<sup>[73][71][67][68]</sup> The closure was intended to be temporary<sup>[67]</sup> but it never reopened.<sup>[15]</sup> The building was sold in 1905.<sup>[74]</sup>

The School's superiors included Sisters Mary Ann Alexis, Mary Frances, and Mary Vincent, and its teachers included Sisters Mary Josephine, Mary Martin, Mary Genevieve, Mary Theotina, Mary ~~M~~torina, and Mary Vincent, among others.<sup>[74]</sup>

## Parochial school

A parochial school was started in 1932 by Father George P. O'Connor and run by the Sisters of St. Joseph.<sup>[71]</sup> For the first few years the school was limited by the lack of space,<sup>[75]</sup> and classes were held in the convent.<sup>[8]</sup> On June 16, 1935, the cornerstone for a new school was laid using the same golden trowel and ivory handle that was used in 1880 for the church.<sup>[75]</sup> In September 1936, the new building on High Street was open.<sup>[3][8]</sup>

On Sunday, January 24, 1954, it was announced that an increase in the school population required more space.<sup>[8][76]</sup> The new school was constructed on the Greenhood Estate on High Street, which had been purchased several years before.<sup>[76]</sup> The cost of the 16-room school was estimated to be \$450,000.<sup>[76]</sup>

A new school building was constructed in 1958, and in 1966 it had over 800 students.<sup>[4][8]</sup> It was in the 1960s that the 8th grade was added.<sup>[8]</sup> The school had two classes per grade, with both nuns and laity as teachers.<sup>[8]</sup> The school had a debt of \$250,000, but it was paid off by 1966.<sup>[8]</sup>

In 1973 it was announced the school would close in 1975.<sup>[3][77]</sup> The school was largely vacant for many years, being used only for CCD classes.<sup>[3]</sup> In the 1990s it was used by the British School of Boston, and the Rashi School, a Boston area Reform Jewish K-8 independent school.<sup>[3]</sup> The building was razed in 2010.<sup>[3][4][78]</sup>

## Daughter congregations

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There have been a total of four congregations that have had territory partially split off from St. Mary's: St. Raphael's in East Dedham (1878), St. Catherine's in South Dedham (Norwood), (1890), West Roxbury's St. John Chrysostom (1952),<sup>[51]</sup> and St. Susanna's in the Riverdale section of Dedham (1960).

### St. Raphael's



Due to the growth of the Catholic population, about 200 parishioners in East Dedham were reassigned in January 1878 to Father Richard Barry's care in the Germantown Association's Chapel (St. Theresa's Church<sup>[17]</sup>) in West Roxbury.<sup>[79]</sup> On October 28, 1878, St. Raphael's Chapel was established on Thomas Street<sup>[17]</sup> in East Dedham<sup>[21][80][15]</sup> with the territory that had been broken off from St. Mary's.<sup>[81]</sup> Dedicated by Archbishop Williams,<sup>[21]</sup> St. Raphael's sat about 400 people,<sup>[81]</sup> and in 1880 they added a hall for the amusement of young men at a cost of \$8,000.<sup>[21]</sup>



A map from 1888 showing St. Raphael's Church in a red circle at top left

Many were not pleased with the change,<sup>[79]</sup> and the first mass was attended by only six people.<sup>[21]</sup> A petition was presented to Archbishop Williams asking him to reunite the parishes, and proposing to transform the chapel that had been erected into a school.<sup>[82]</sup>

The new parish sponsored Court 26 of the Catholic Orders of Foresters.<sup>[83]</sup> The Court survived the Church, staying active at least into the 1920s.<sup>[84]</sup> After it burned to the ground on December 17, 1887, St. Raphael's was merged back into St. Mary's.<sup>[85][18]</sup>

## St. Catherine's

Only six years after building the first church, another building was purchased from the Unitarians of South Dedham at the site of the present day St. Catherine's rectory.<sup>[20][17]</sup> The purchase price was \$3,000.<sup>[55]</sup> Named for St. Catherine of Siena, it was dedicated on August 3, 1863.<sup>[20]</sup> The Town of Norwood broke away from Dedham in 1872, and St. Catherine's was established as a separate parish in 1890<sup>[86]</sup> with 1,500 parishioners.<sup>[55]</sup>

## St. Susanna's

By the 1930s St. Mary's was one of the largest parishes in the Archdiocese with over 6,000 parishioners and 1,300 students in Sunday School.<sup>[13]</sup> During the middle of that decade there were four priests and six nuns ministering to the congregation.<sup>[13]</sup> In the 1950s it became clear that a second parish was needed in Dedham,<sup>[nb 14]</sup> and so St. Susanna's was established in 1960 to serve the needs of the Riverdale neighborhood.<sup>[89]</sup> When St. Susanna's opened it had 300 families, while 2,500 stayed at St. Mary's.<sup>[32]</sup> The first pastor of St. Susanna's, Michael Durant, lived at St. Mary's while his church was being constructed.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Notes and citations

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### Notes



1. While the Slattery home is still standing, at the corner of Washington and Worthington Streets, at the time it was on the corner of Washington and High, where the Police Station sits in 2016.<sup>[3][10]</sup> During the Revolution, the Worthington Street land was the site of an encampment for French troops under the command of Count Rochambeau.<sup>[11]</sup>
2. Father Strain was born in Ireland in 1815, and was received into the Diocese of Boston in 1840. He had a rather tumultuous career here, and bounced around not only from parish to parish, but even to several other dioceses, before eventually returning to Ireland in 1850.<sup>[12]</sup>
3. Slattery "was well educated, had a practical knowledge of agriculture," according to Dedham Historical Society librarian and archivist Sandra Waxman.<sup>[3]</sup> He held "considerable property" and had a "splendid education and a wide knowledge of Arbor culture."<sup>[11]</sup> He also set out many of the trees in Dedham.<sup>[11]</sup>
4. The Irish-born O'Beirne had previously served in Vermont, Rhode Island, and Maine, which were then parts of the Diocese of Boston.<sup>[12]</sup>
5. One source says it was Christmas Day.<sup>[10]</sup>
6. Johnson served two terms, from 1884 to 1890.

7. Theodore Metcalf was a descendant of Michael Metcalf, a signer of the Dedham Covenant and the first teacher in Dedham, the first public school in America<sup>[4]</sup>
8. Also known in German as the Troler Glasmalerei Anstalt.
9. The Tyrolese Art Glass Company was a leader in the use of style of composition and painting techniques which became known as the Munich Style,<sup>[38]</sup> which was very popular at the time.<sup>[39]</sup>
10. Nickerson was the wealthiest man in Dedham at the time of his death. He was a philanthropist, and donated to several causes in Dedham, including other churches.<sup>[3]</sup>
11. Parr has the date as 1915<sup>[49]</sup>
12. Baily was born in Waterford City, Ireland and moved to Wātertown, Massachusetts at the age of 9. He was ordained in the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran in 1927 and given the title monsignor in 1963.<sup>[8]</sup>
13. Actually sold to Ann Alexis Shorb, Andrea Corry and Aloysia Reed as trustees.<sup>[65]</sup>
14. The population of the town as a whole more than doubled between 1930<sup>[87]</sup> and 1970.<sup>[88]</sup>

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