

A special thank you to all our sponsors:



An agency of the Government of Ontario

Doors Open Ontario is a community-based celebration that builds pride in Ontario's heritage for residents and visitors alike. The Ontario Heritage Trust works with community partners throughout the province to produce this innovative program.

If you would like to receive a free copy of the *Doors Open Ontario Guide* to visit other Doors Open Ontario community events happening this year, contact:

Ontario Heritage Trust
10 Adelaide Street East,
Toronto, Ontario M5C 1J3

Tel.: 416-325-5000
Fax: 416-325-5071

Or call 1-800-ONTARIO
1-800-668-2746

Fiducie du patrimoine Ontarien
10, rue Adelaide Est
Toronto (Ontario) M5C 1J3

Tél.: 416-325-5000
Télééc.: 416-325-5071

www.doorsopenontario.on.ca
www.heritagetrust.on.ca

Doors Open Lambton County

A participating partner in Doors Open Ontario



ST. JOSEPH ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

346 Beresford Street

Corunna, ON

Saturday, September 29, 10am-4pm

Sunday, September 30, 10am-4pm

(Saturday Mass 5pm; Sunday Mass 10am, visitors welcome)



ST. JOSEPH ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, CORUNNA

St. Joseph Church in Corunna is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Built in 1862, it is the oldest surviving Roman Catholic Church in Lambton County.

Heritage and Architectural Significance

Facing St. Clair Township's first "highway", the St. Clair River, St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church is an excellent example of carpenter's Romanesque, the only one of its kind in Lambton County.

MacRae and Adamson in their definitive book on church architecture of Upper Canada provide this description:

...impressive in its twin-towered integrity is the carpenter's-Romanesque church of St. Joseph, Corunna. ...[the church was] designed by a builder-architect of great sensitivity who handled his simple medium with great skill. Board-and-batten cladding in his hands became a texture of elegant blind arcading, gracefully varied on the west front by a band of richer texture above the entrance porch, and deepened at the angles of the building to form defining pilasters – bracketed under the eaves. ... The highway from Sarnia now passes close behind the beautiful curve of the semicircular apse, flanked in the Frankish Romanesque manner by pyramidal-roofed twin bell towers.

Three other churches in the area display a degree of kinship with this building – St. John, Sombra, a pretty little wooden chapel ... [built in 1870-71; demolished after damaged by tornado on Mar. 27, 1991]; the more ambitious brick church of St. Simon and St. Jude in Belle River on Lake St. Clair; and St. Francis Xavier, Carlsruhe, in Bruce. (MacRae, pgs. 224-227)

"St. Joseph Church is the jewel in the crown of St. Clair Township's architecture." Ian L. Mason, member, Heritage St. Clair Committee

The First Church – St. Joseph Church, Moore

St. Joseph Church traces its beginnings to the establishment of the parish of St. Joseph Church, Moore Township. On June 12, 1838, Bishop Macdonnell of Kingston secured a grant of 100 acres from the Government for the Church of Moore [Township] in 1838. A cemetery was established, soon to be followed by a log church which was constructed in 1843. The site was situated on Lot 43, Moore Township about ¾ of a mile north of Mooretown (a plaque identifies the location of this historic church in the yard of the private residence at 989 St. Clair Parkway).¹

In 1842, Rev. Father J. B. Morin of Sandwich, Ont. began construction of the log church. The church was dedicated in 1843 by Bishop Powers. Father Morin said Mass regularly in this church for over a year until his retirement. About this time, the Jesuits took over the Sandwich missions and took charge of the St. Clair Missions.

Father DuRaucuette was a master of all the First Nation languages. He covered all the country from Corunna to Bayfield saying Mass in wigwams, cabins and log churches.

In 1851, Father J. V. Jaffre arrived followed within the year by Father J. M. Mainguy who came as a missionary to the St. Clair area and continued to 1853.

In October, 1854, Father Michael Moncoq arrived from France. After he learned First Nation dialects at Oka and Cauhnawaga, he became the first resident priest at St. Joseph's Church in Mooretown. He had charge of all missions in the area including Bâby's Point, Port Lambton, Moore, Sarnia, Kettle Point, Grand Bend, Aux Sauble, Bayfield, Plympton and Enniskillen. On New Year's night in 1856, at age 27 he slipped through the ice and was drowned as he returned from administering the last sacraments to a woman dying in Algonac, Michigan.²

Father John Raynet resumed pastoral duties until the Very Rev. Theo Kirwin from Sarnia took over responsibility for the parish in Sept. 1856.

On April 1, 1860, Rev. B. Boubat took up residence at the Mooretown Church. The Mooretown Church was considered small, out-of-date, and in need of repair. The congregation approved construction of a new church to be located in Corunna. The Mooretown Church property was sold. By June 10, 1861, remains of bodies in the cemetery were exhumed by their families and re-interred

in the new cemetery of St. Joseph Church, Corunna.³

History of the Building

St. Joseph Church was erected in Corunna in 1862, under the direction of Father Bartholomew Boubat, the pastor. It was completed in 1862 at the total cost of \$5,000. St. Joseph Church was dedicated by Bishop Pinsonneault on Sept. 21, 1862. On that Sunday, 116 children and adults were confirmed. (Mugan)

Photograph right: The upper portion of the arched apse windows are visible, but are covered with curtains. In its original location, the choir would stand on the second level of the apse, behind the wooden railing. This area is located above the sacristy. Not visible from the sanctuary, this area is the only area in the church in its original condition. The window tracery and exterior plastered walls and moulding are original.



Photo Credit: *A History of St. Joseph's-St. Charles Parish. Altar, ca. 1920s.*

The 1862 church featured air ventilation. Louvred wooden grills in the ceilings of the south and north altars drew out the heat of the sanctuary during the summer. The louvres would be opened and would permit hot air to rise in the shafts and ventilate through the four louvred arched openings on the four sides of each tower. A day with a breeze would enhance the ventilation process.

A complete and costly renovation of the church took place during the pastorate of Father John Ronan (1882-1886).

In 1890, parishioners hauled hard rock from Point Edward to Corunna. This rock was purchased from St. Mary's quarries near Stratford and shipped via the old Canada Southern Railroad. The rock was laid by Billy Garroch's father in 1901 to form a solid, rock foundation for the church.

The church bell at St. Joseph's was installed by Father Mugan. It was elevated, consecrated and rung for the first time in June, 1891.

The bell was consecrated by Rt. Rev. Bishop O'Connor assisted by Rev. Fr. Bayard of Sarnia, and Rev. Fr. Philip J. Gnam of Wyoming. The bell is inscribed with the names of three little girls, Annie Roberts, Maud Stanley, and Jennie McLaughlin, who had collected a considerable amount of money towards its purchase. The carpentry work and the placing of the bell in the south tower was done by David Birmingham. The inscription, "Annie, Maud, Jennie" was painted on the bell by Walter David and was still visible in 1957. The bell weighed 810 pounds and with hangings, 1100 pounds. The bell has two distinct tones controlled by two separate ropes. One rope controls the main wheel and allows the bell to be swung in a wide arc. This rope would allow the bell to be rung continuously in order to call parishioners to Mass. The second rope controlled a second smaller clapper that would strike the bell on the rim (near the lip or soundbow). When this rope is pulled, the clapper only strikes once. This rope would be used for tolling for the Mass of Christian Burial.

In December 1893, the church was re-opened after extensive repairs and renovations. A solid stone foundation was placed under the buildings.

Father Mugan records that the altar was installed in 1898 during his pastorate. (Mugan)

In 1917, parishioners volunteered to wash off at least three coats of calcomine from the walls, erected scaffolding made from poles cut in the bush, and removed all plaster from the centre ceiling (the sides were good). A metallic ceiling was installed and made an attractive ceiling at the time.

During the pastorate of Father Peter McKeon (1926-1939), many repairs were made to the church which included decoration of the interior by professionals.



Photo Credit: *A History of St. Joseph's-St. Charles Parish*. Altar, ca. 1940-1957.

During the pastorate of Father A. M. McHugh (1939-1949), the exterior of St. Joseph's was painted, the towers were repaired, the sanctuary and the centre arch were re-plastered and the Stations of the Cross were replaced.

In 1956, the parish was looking ahead six years to its centennial in 1962.

Dan O'Donohue, who served as Chairman of the Centennial Building Fund Committee, recalled the physical state of the church:

By 1956, the church building had deteriorated to an alarming degree. We still had the original, square-backed, uncomfortable pews. Heating and lighting were primitive. The plaster was falling from the walls. The windows were unattractive. The sanctuary was very narrow and consisted only of the space between the two main pillars. The choir loft was tiny. Rough boards covered the church floor and the ceiling was finished in sheet metal pieces which were in poor condition. Only one entrance door existed. The old altar was falling to pieces. The situation was intolerable.

In 1957, in order to prepare for the centennial in 1962, the church adopted a two-year pledge campaign of \$30,000. The bulk of the work would be accomplished by the men of the parish. There would be no financial aid from the Diocese of London. The first phase completed in 1957 involved the replacement of the church's windows.

The new memorial windows were donated by various families of the parish.

The pledge campaign was successful within three years, and the total cost of the project was well in excess of \$100,000. The renovations included: a new roof; enlarged sanctuary; plastering; new flooring; modern oak pews; lighting; and an up-to-date, gas-fired, hot water heating system. Also installed were new windows, choir loft, confessional and washroom. The upper arches of the former choir loft above the sacristy were filled in with plaster. This blocked the view of the upper portions of the apse windows, but created an upper level storage area. The exterior of the church was painted and necessary cement work was completed.

During the pastorate of Father C. F. McMartin (1960-1971), the balance of the renovations were completed. These included installation of three matching oak altars, together with drapes, candlesticks, and the Stations of the Cross.

During the pastorate of Father Milne (1976-1994), the ceiling was once again repaired. The timbers under the church were elevated to allow cement piers to be poured.

Father Dikran Islemeci (1996-2002) initiated the study of the structural state of St. Joseph Church. The beams under the church were rotting; the roof required replacement; the exterior lead-based paint had to be removed. The plaster inside the church had to be repaired and the interior painted.

In 1999, the significant decision was made by the parish to renovate the church rather than replace it. *The integrity of the board and batten exterior was maintained because St. Joseph is considered one of the few churches of this style on the continent.*

Consequently, another major renovation took place. This was a major project that took place over the summer and fall of 1999. The loan from the Diocese was \$500,000.

In order to replace the beams, **the entire church** was elevated and placed on concrete footings poured for the new foundation. The wooden floor support beams were replaced by steel beams. A 30 foot addition to the church entrance was constructed. A full basement was constructed under the addition. A proper crawl space was excavated under the church, the foundation was constructed and the church lowered onto the new foundation. The driveway at the south side of the church was removed.

The original balcony which served as the later location of the choir loft was removed. The narthex was constructed and a balcony was built above it, masterfully matching the sanctuary's heritage features. The large round-arched stained glass window on the west wall and the

four matched smaller round-arched clear windows (two on the south wall; two on the north wall) complement the sanctuary's original window frames. The balcony's railing had originally been installed as the altar railing in the renovations undertaken prior to the building's centennial in 1962. The altar railing was later removed and stored until its use as the balcony railing. In order to conform to the building code, the height of the railing was increased by adding wood underneath it.

The roof was also replaced. New stained glass windows were installed, replacing the stained glass windows installed in 1957. The plaster was repaired. The entire interior of the church was painted. After linoleum and carpeting were installed, the pews were re-affixed. The statues were refurbished. Two washrooms were installed.

The majority of the work was done by the general contractor, K and L Construction, London, Ont. and the sub-trades, under the supervision of Allan Avis Architects, Goderich, Ont. Some of the work was done by parishioners -- removal and replacement of the pews, moving and storing the Stations of the Cross, and small items.

Initially, payback of the loan was envisioned to take 10 years. By the summer of 2006 -- within seven years -- the loan was paid.

In 2007, St. Charles Church, Courtright, the mission church established and constructed in 1888, closed and the parish was amalgamated with St. Joseph Church. Parishioners of St. Charles donated items of significance from their parish to St. Joseph Church, including:

- statue of St. Charles, located on the north side of the sanctuary entrance
- Stations of the Cross – Stations of the Cross of St. Joseph Church were re-located to the parish hall
- the pews in the balcony and the 4 pews at the back of the sanctuary

Throughout 2012, the congregation of St. Joseph celebrated their 150th anniversary. On Sun. Sept. 16, 2012, the highlight of this milestone anniversary year was the attendance of Bishop Ronald Peter Fabbro who conducted the Mass. On the same day, Bishop Fabbro dedicated the new altar with holy oil. The altar, weighing 1,000 pounds and comprised of three sections, had been crafted by Corunna resident and parishioner Peter Devost. Its style matched the ambo (pulpit), created by this same craftsman.

Architectural Highlights:

- Frankish Romanesque architecture
- board and batten cladding
- blind arcading
- semi-circular apse
- pyramidal-roofed twin bell towers
- barrel-vaulted sanctuary and chancel ceilings
- choir loft was originally located above the sacristy on the upper and open level in the apse (no longer visible from sanctuary)

¹ Some of the carved stones from the first St. Joseph Church have been salvaged from the river bank where they were thrown after the church was demolished. They form part of the rock garden around the range light of **Moore Museum**.

² On June 11, 1878, Father Moncoq's relics were interred beneath the side altar at the newly constructed Sacred Heart Church in Port Lambton where a marble slab commemorated him as the first martyr in these regions.

³ Five or six unidentified and unmarked graves lie on the property where the cemetery of the original St. Joseph Church was located.

Chief Source:

McAuslan, Terri and Jacqueline (Bedard) McLellan Roger. *A History of St. Joseph - St. Charles Parish, 1862-2007*.

Sources:

Celebrating One Hundred Historical Years, St. Joseph's Church, Corunna, Ontario, 'Centennial Building Fund Campaign'. [Sarnia, Ont.]: Haines Frontier Printing Limited, (1957?).

MacRae, Marion and Anthony Adamson. *Hallowed Walls, Church Architecture of Upper Canada*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1975.

Mugan, Father James G. "Historical Sketch of the Parish of Corunna", 1901.

St. Joseph Church website. www.stjosephstcharles.rcec.london.on.ca



A Couple of Inadvertent Archaeological Discoveries

1913-1926

Father Gerald LaBelle (beloved priest of St. Joseph Church whose pastorate spanned the years from 1913 to 1926) relayed the following incident:

"One day when digging a post hole near the road behind the Church, we hit a square box, the top of which was partly rotted. To the astonishment of Father Campeau and myself, it contained six small, gold candle sticks with marble centres, a censer, a holy water pot and a collapsible chalice which must have been hidden there during the Jesuit mission days. They polished up beautifully. One pair Dean Campeau took, another pair I gave to St. Joseph's Hospital, Sarnia, and I have one pair." (McAuslan, pg. 5)

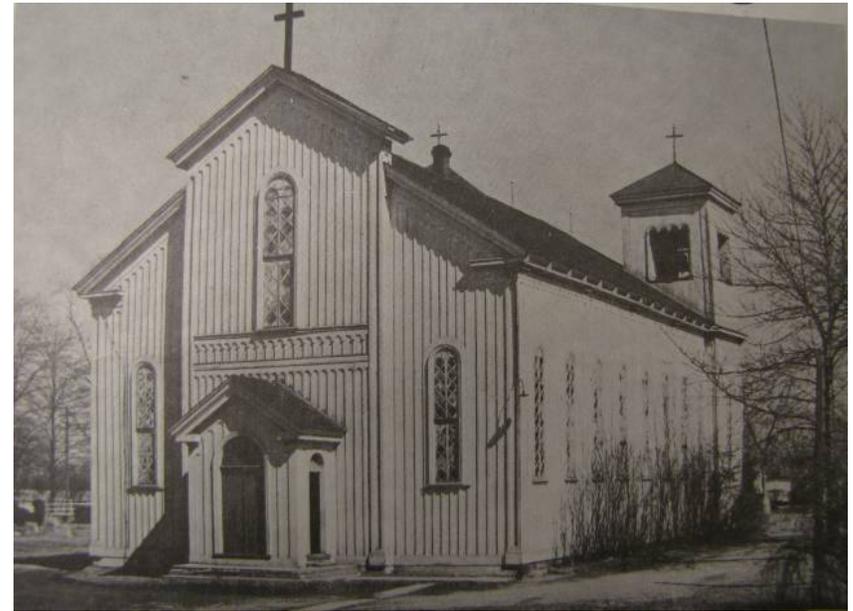
1999 Renovation

"There were several delays in completing the work, the most notable of which was the discovery of bones during excavation near the church. Father Dikran had been away on vacation. When he returned, he found yellow caution crime scene tape around the entrance blocking the entire drive way. ... It was determined the bones that had been unearthed were human. The entire project was shut down for 5 days until the archaeologist, a forensics expert, a Cemetery Board representative, a representative of the Diocese and the police could get together. Once it was determined the bones were remains which had been moved from the original cemetery in Mooretown to St. Joseph's Cemetery, either when or after the Church was built in 1862, the scene was released. Father Dikran presided over the service to re-inter the remains in an unmarked grave." (McAuslan, pg. 28)

St. Joseph Church and Its Optical Illusion

True or false: the church's twin pyramidal towers are the same height.

Answer: View the towers for yourself, or, see answer below.



False: The south tower is slightly shorter than the north one. Did the architectural experts, MacRae and Adamson, miss this detail? They describe them as " 'twin' bell towers".

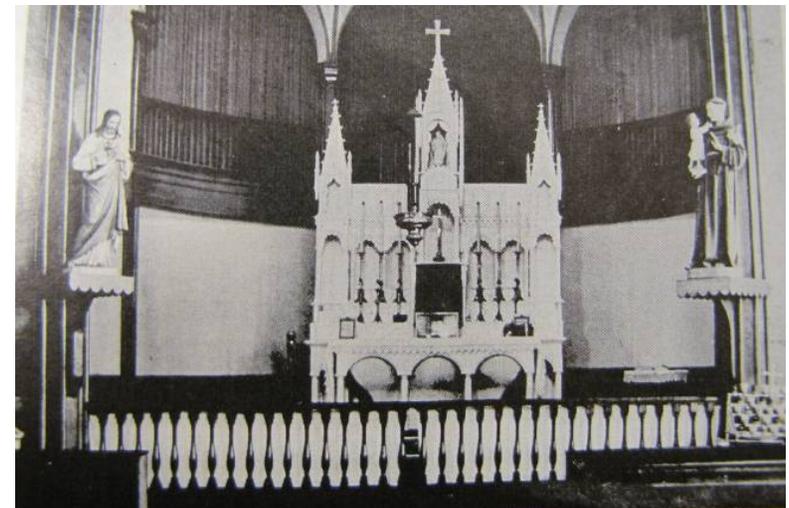


Photo Credit: *Celebrating One Hundred Historical Years Church and Altar, ca. 1957*

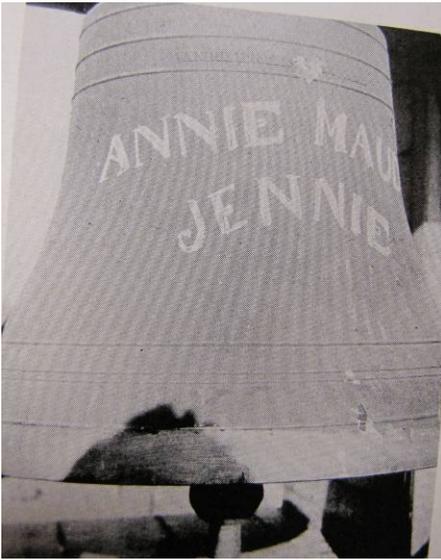


Photo Credits: *Celebrating One Hundred Historical Years*

Left Photograph: Bell in south tower dedicated in 1891 and 1920s. The inscription, as photographed in 1957, honours the collection canvassed by Annie Roberts, Maud Stanley and Jennie McLaughlin to purchase the bell.

Right Photograph: Detail of altar, ca. 1920s