

DID YOU KNOW

FACTS AND STORIES FROM OUR PAST

From the Alton Telegraph – Oct. 14, 1858

“New Church -- The German Catholics of our City have commenced the erection of a church upon the corner of Henry and Third streets. It is to be of the Grecian style of architecture, 90 feet in length by 40 feet in width. The basement walls are to be of stone and the walls of the main part of brick. The top of the cross crowning the tower will be 110 feet from the ground. The basement, which will be 11 feet in height, will be divided into two school rooms, and rooms for the residence of the Priest. The body will be 20 feet high, and furnished with seats for 410 persons. Mr. Jas. A. Miller is the architect, and Mr. J. A. Cooley does the brick work. Already the walls of the basement are about up, and the job will be pushed forward with rapidity, twelve or thirteen men being at present actively engaged upon it.”

From the Alton Telegraph -- Oct. 21, 1858:

“GERMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. – The corner stone of this building was laid on Sunday afternoon in the presence of several hundred of our citizens. The exercises of the occasion were as follows:

At two o'clock the children of the School Society of the Church, under charge of their teachers, assembled at the Cathedral, formed into procession with the citizens and others there, and marched down State and Third streets, to the foundation of the new Church. Arrived there, the service was opened with music by the Jaegers' Brass Band, and singing by a choir, after which a short address in English was delivered by Rev. Mr. Brennan. This was followed by the laying of the corner stone by Rev. J. Menge – the Bishop being absent. This done, and the ceremony of blessing the Church performed, an address in German was made by the Rev. Menge, and then the closing exhortation, in German, by Rev. J. Menge.

The falling of a platform on which were the Ministers and a number of people, caused some excitement for a short time. One woman was slightly injured.”

From the Alton Telegraph -- April 25, 1862:

“NEW BELL. -- We notice that the German Catholic Church, in Hunterstown, has put in position their new bell, which now rings out its merry chimes, reminding the benighted denizens of that neighborhood that there is still a God in Israel.”

From "Echo Von Sancta Maria" 1906 (Predecessor to Sunday Bulletin)

Each family, and also adults independent for themselves, should rent seats in the church. It is forbidden to occupy seats rented by others, except with their permission. Those not having seats of their own will be shown to vacant seats, for which they have to make an offering of 10 cents each time."

St. Mary's was founded in 1858 in response to a petition from German speaking immigrants to establish a German speaking church because they had difficulty understanding the English spoken at Sts. Peter and Paul's services.

The first church was destroyed by a tornado on June 2, 1859. The pastor and housekeeper were trapped under the rubble, but were successfully rescued.

The Bishop required the debt of \$4,000 remaining on the church destroyed by the tornado had to be paid before a new church could be built. Father Ostrop, the pastor, started out on a begging tour outside his congregation, city and state. He visited house after house, traveling as far as Cincinnati, Dayton, St. Louis and Quincy. He raised enough to pay off the debt as well as funds to start building a more spacious and more beautiful new church.

The second church was dedicated on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1862.

Father Ostrop, pastor, wanted to pay off the debt of \$3,500 remaining on the second church before it was consecrated. To do this, he made an appeal from the pulpit to the people of the parish. He called upon each one present to state publicly how much he was willing to give to liquidate the debt. The entire amount was promised. The church was consecrated on January 1, 1862.

The first school, a frame school house fronting on Third Street, was built in 1863, followed by the erection of a brick school house in 1866.

The cornerstone of the present St. Mary's Church was laid July 16, 1893. Copies of the Telegraph, Sentinel-Democrat and Banner, and a document written both in English and Latin were placed in the stone.

The current church was consecrated on Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1895.

In 1911, 200 children from the third through eighth grades made their First Communion. This was the result of a decree by Pope Pius X, that young children should receive Holy Communion.

In 1918, because the church had been spoiled by time, the pastor, Father Meckel decided the church needed to be frescoed. The cost was \$20,000. At the same time, new electric chandeliers were installed.

The first St. Mary's School was located in one room in a rock house on the corner of Sixth and Ridge Streets. The room was rented from Lawrence Fahrig and served the children of the first German Settlers. Mr. Mueller was the first teacher.

In 1866, the school was located in the Sister's residence. One of the teachers was 13 year old Bartholomew Hartman, who later became a priest.

Father Ostrop, the first pastor, was a very learned man who had been educated in Germany. He was often asked to give private lessons to non-Catholic boys, but generally declined to do so. Once he was treated for an illness by Dr. Hope, who asked Father Ostrop to give private lessons to his son, Alex (who later became a judge). Father Ostrop said he would not give a lesson for less than \$50. Dr. Hope replied, "Well, here are \$100, give my boy two lessons".

The first choir sang German hymns during the High Mass. When this was forbidden, it became necessary to employ only such choir members that could learn to read and sing Latin Masses. It was the source of no little emulation and pride for a man or woman to be permitted to sing a solo. Naturally, there were petty rivalries, occasionally heated enough to result in a strike.