**A Brief History** 

Of

Sacred Heart Parish

1858 - 1876

The Early Years of Worshiping

In Their

**Small Wooden Church** 

## GESCHICHTE DER HERZ JESU KIRCHE.

THE HISTORY OF SACRED HEART PARISH OF DUNKIRK, N. Y.

The Early Years from 1856 to 1876.

Previous to the year 1857, the few German Catholic families in Dunkirk worshipped at St. Mary's Church. It was on August 16th of that year, that the German people assembled at the residence of Jacob Stahler on Lion St. (Now 110 Main St.) and decided to build a church for themselves. They were encouraged to do so by Rev. James Nagel, C.S.S.R. of St. Mary's Church in Buffalo, N. Y., who came to Dunkirk to talk to the gathering. A lot was purchased on Ruggles St. near Lion St. The cost of the 60' X 100' plot was \$300, and the construction of the church was begun at once. The edifice was to be 70' long and 35' wide and the cost was estimated at \$1,695. It was finished the following year and dedicated in honor of St. George on February 15, 1858, by Rev. W. Deiter of St. Louis Church, Buffalo, N. Y.

The first trustees were George Dotterweich, F. A. Peter, Leonard Frey, John Buscher and George Usehold. The membership of the new parish consisted of about 35 families. The greatest benefactor of the congregation was George Dotterweich, and he continued to be very generous to the parish throughout his lifetime. It is well nigh impossible to estimate the extent of his many donations. Other charter members of the new congregation were Andrew Dotterweich, Jacob Stahler, Vincent Bohn, Jacob Mehs, Frank Braun, Peter Hansen and others.

The needs of the little parish were attended to by Rev. Dominic Geymer, who came to Dunkirk every two weeks from the Franciscan Monastery at Allegany, N. Y. According to the church records, the first baptism took place on February 20, 1858. The child baptized was Barbara Guenther; the first marriage was that of Vincent Bohn and Dorothy Stahler on May 7, 1858. The first death recorded was that of Vitus Rau, on February 28, 1858.

The Rev. D. Geymer tended the mission church until June 1859, when he was relieved by Rev. J. N. Arent, who resided in Hamburg, N. Y. He also came every two weeks until November 1960. Then came Rev. Andrew Pfeifer, O.F.M. from Allegany, N. Y. who continued to serve the church until January 1862. In March 1863, Rev. Luke Baudinelli, C.P. gave the first mission in the church. It was at this time that the Passionist Fathers, who had charge of St. Mary's church since 1860, also took charge of this church. The Rev. Frederick Lang, C.P. was the first priest from that order to attend it from February 1863 until December 1866.

In 1864 a lot 30' X 100' adjoining the church was purchased for \$200, thus making the property 90' X 100', all of it on Ruggles St. In 1865 a schoolhouse was built at a cost of \$1,200. The

first teacher was Mr. Korker. Other teachers were Schmidt, Chelius and Jung. In 1873, the Sisters of St. Joseph were installed as teachers. The first nuns to serve were Srs. Aloysius and Genevieve. In the beginning there were 90 to 100 children attending in winter and 70 to 80 in summer.

Rev. Philip Birk, C.P. was the next pastor and he officiated from October 1866 until March 1867. He introduced the payment of Pew Rent, but not without some difficulty. Then Rev. Henry Esler, C.P. from March 1867 until June 1869. On March 2, 1869, the congregation was legally incorporated, and as the matter was not properly understood by the parishioners, some difficulty arose, and in consequence, the church was closed from December 26th, 1869 until May 8th, 1870, when it was reopened with a mission conducted by Rev. Stanislaus, C.P. He remained until September 1870, when he was succeeded by Rev. Daniel Rimmels, who was in charge until April 1874. He started a subscription for a new church in 1875 when he was replaced by Rev. Ignatius Sauer, C.P. He only remained for a few months, and Father Daniel came back. The parishioners became dissatisfied, and things being rather disagreeable, the Passionists withdrew entirely from serving the church in July 1874.

The Jesuit Fathers came from Buffalo every Sunday until November 18, 1874, when Rev. Ferdinand Kolb was appointed the first resident pastor. He was born in Baden, Germany, October 17, 1847, and was ordained a priest at Louvain, Belgium on May 30, 1874. Soon after his arrival, the question of building a new church was again discussed, but there was a difference of opinion in regard to its location. Finally the question was settled by George Dotterweich, who bought a large house and lot on Railroad Ave. (Now Franklin Ave.), where the present school stands. He deeded the property to the congregation to be used as a parochial residence. This was in 1875. Up to that time Father Kolb boarded and lodged with a private family. He was glad to get a house of his own, and the congregation gladly accepted Mr. Dotterweich's generous donation of the property. The dispute was settled, and the old location was retained for the new church. It was not a desirable spot, and never was, but what else could be done? So the records show.

Then there arose the controversy about building another frame church, or building the new one of brick. This question was settled when the few Polish families who were attending this church decided to build a brick church of their own. The Germans decided to do at least as well, and they too agreed to build of brick. The excavations were begun on April 23, 1876, and the cornerstone blessed on June 11th of the same year. The church was completed and dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, on November 18, 1877, by Rt. Rev. S. V. Ryan, Bishop of Buffalo.