

## Early Interesting Medina Catholic Roots

Additionally, the congregation traces its roots back to the pioneer period and the regular visits of Rev. Bernard O'Reilly (March 1, 1803—January 23, 1856), who came from Lockport in 1834 from Rochester. Fr. O'Reilly was one the first to minister to the Catholic families in Medina and is a cleric of some note. He was an Irish-born prelate of the Roman Catholic Church and served as Bishop of Hartford from 1850 until his death in 1856 when he was lost at sea.

O'Reilly was born in Columkille, County Longford, and embarked for the United States in January 1825. He was ordained a priest on October 13, 1831 whereafter he served in New York City and Brooklyn. There he distinguished himself for his heroism during the cholera outbreak in 1832. He twice fell victim to the disease himself. He was transferred to Rochester in 1832, and became vicar general of the Diocese of Buffalo in 1847. It was during this time when he ministered to the fledgling Irish-Catholic population in Medina.

On August 9, 1850, O'Reilly was appointed the second Bishop of Hartford, Connecticut, by Pope Pius IX. He worked to secure priests for the diocese, and defended Catholics from the anti-Catholic movements of the era, such as Know-Nothingism. O'Reilly visited Europe in 1855 and upon his return trip was lost at sea in January 1856. The SS Pacific, which sailed from Liverpool for New York was lost and not heard of for over 130 years, until in 1991 her wreckage was identified in the Irish Sea.



**Most Rev. Bernard O'Reilly**

## St. Mary's Church today



**St. Mary's sanctuary as it appears in 2010.**

St. Mary's RC Parish is now Holy Trinity Parish, having merged with the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish of Medina and St. Stephen's Parish of Middleport.

The building itself remains "St. Mary's Church" as it was consecrated in 1904. It endures as one of the most stunning structures in the Village of Medina and Western New York.

The current pastor of Holy Trinity Parish is Reverend Daniel Fawls.

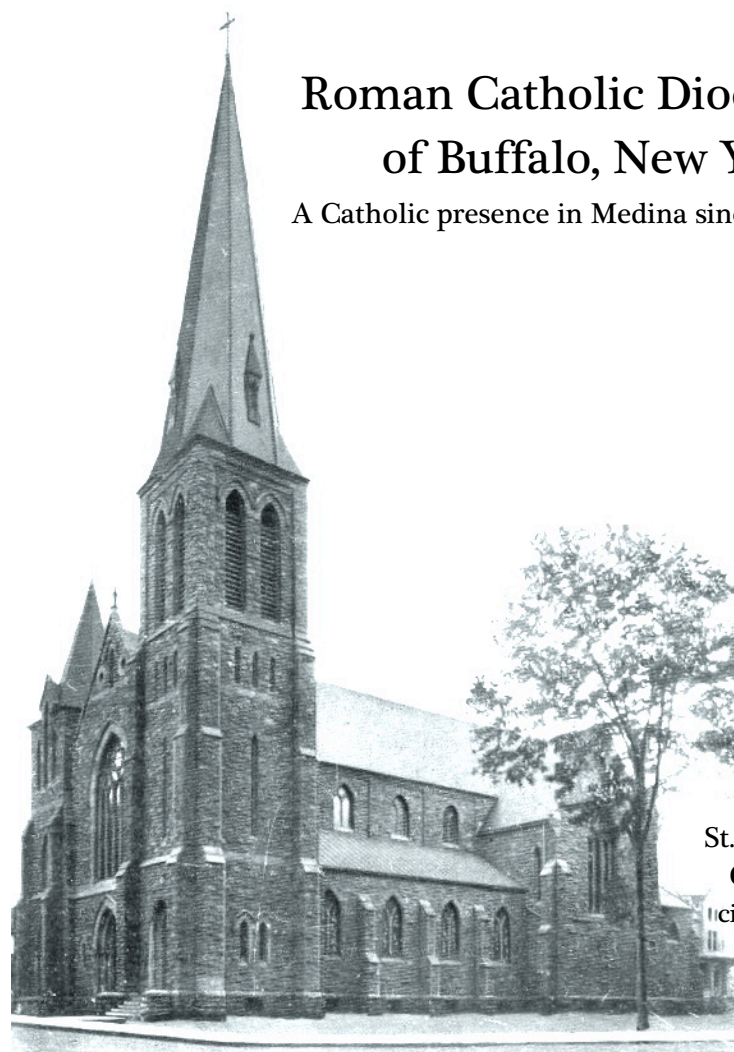
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# St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church

West Avenue & Eagle Street, Medina, New York  
Built 1902 A.D.

Roman Catholic Diocese  
of Buffalo, New York

A Catholic presence in Medina since 1834



St. Mary's  
Church  
circa 1918

## Notable features of the Building

Built in 1902, its design is Fourteenth Century English Gothic, and is an outstanding example of the ecclesiastical Gothic Revival architecture of the late and nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and rivals many other examples in the region and the state in size, design, and stature. The project was undertaken by the then newly appointed pastor, Rev. Peter Berkery, with the cornerstone being laid on September 21, 1902. The church was dedicated and consecrated July 10, 1904, by the Right Reverend Charles H. Colton, Bishop of Buffalo. The cost of the church was \$75,000. The architect was A. A. Post of Buffalo, stone masons- McDonald Brothers of Lockport, and the woodwork- Stokes Brothers of Buffalo.

The exterior is of locally quarried brown Medina Sandstone, with the steeply pitched gabled roof being of asphalt shingles replacing the original slate. The spire is clad in the original Vermont slate, with the original metal Gothic cross at the apex, measuring some ten to twelve feet in height. The northern engaged square tower and spire rise 170 feet above the pavement, with the southern engaged square tower and spire measuring 100 feet.

The structure is cruciform in plan and contains narthex, nave, aisles, transepts, sanctuary, baptistry, and sacristies. The extreme length is 152 feet, and the width over the transept 80 feet. The east front is 70 feet wide a tower on each corner flanking the central gable in which is a five-mullioned window filled with elaborate tracery and leaded colored glass.

Three large portals of cut stone give access to the vestibule. This vestibule leads directly into the church proper which is divided into nave, aisles, and transepts by clustered columns having ornate foliated plater capitals. On these columns rests the clerestory arcade, while the ceilings are groined. The molded plaster work is both unique and exceptional.

The molded plaster ribs spring from enriched caps and corbels and follow the curved lines of the ceilings, and finish at the apex against foliated bosses. The apex of the nave ceiling is forty-eight feet above the floor, and the ceiling of the narthex is paneled in quarter-sawn oak. The sanctuary is raised two feet above the church floor and is flanked by two chapels. The west end apse is hexagonal.

The organ gallery contains some of the original Tellers-Summerhof instrument on the east end of the church. A restoration of the pipe organ was recently begun by using elements of the original Tellers-Summerhof organ and an entire Barckhoff pipe organ, circa 1890. The pipe chamber is paneled in quarter-sawn oak and is carried on clustered oak pillars. All additional woodwork and wainscot are of quarter-sawn white oak. The bell, a gift of William J. Gallagher, was forged in Troy, NY and remains in use. The main altar is extremely ornate being carved of Carrera Marble.

An elaborate redecoration of the church interior was undertaken in 1940 upon the hundredth anniversary of the parish founding. The work was done by the internationally known Panzironi Brothers Studio of New York City. The Panzironi Studios trace their roots back to sixteenth century Florence, Italy. They were renown as eminent ecclesiastical artists in both Europe and North America, having done work in the Vatican and many other cathedrals and churches. Ilario Panzironi, who worked on St. Mary's was knighted (title Chevalier) by Pope Pius XI in 1926.

The theme of the frescoes was drawn from the Celtic Book of Kells, reflecting the Irish immigrant heritage of the parish. Many of the ancestors of the parish congregation worked on the Erie Canal. The original Panzironi artwork remains almost in its entirety, and was restored during a recent renovation of the entire church, both inside and out by McHugh Painting of Clarence, NY.

The church also houses a significant piece of art, painted by Julius Zimmermann (1824-1906), a noted nineteenth century German artist, principally known for his landscapes. *The Assumption of Mary*, original painted by Italian master Guido Reni, was copied by Zimmermann for Leopold I of Belgium. The Zimmermann painting was then given as a gift to the Right Reverend John Timon, Bishop of Buffalo, while on a European trip collecting items suitable for his new cathedral in Buffalo. Upon his return, he gifted the painting to St. Mary's where it hung above the main altar in the former stone church (ca. 1854).

The painting was stolen by thieves from Buffalo (allegedly from another Irish parish) who were apprehended when men of the parish caught wind of the act and gave chase on the Erie Canal. The painting was lost until it was returned upon the consecration of the existing church. It was restored in the 1980's during the pastorate of Rev. Msgr. George B. Yiengst, by Diane and Sheldon Berlyn of Buffalo. It was reframed in New York, and rededicated in a special ceremony by the Right Reverend Bernard Joseph McLaughlin, Auxiliary Bishop of Buffalo.

## Historical and Architectural Importance

This church is an important example of late-nineteenth century ecclesiastical architecture within Medina and Western New York. The church is one of the region's important examples of the Gothic Revival style, specifically Fourteenth century English Gothic. The church retains its distinctive form, proportions, and detailing, with the exception of the removal of original slate on the roof.

This property is also significant for its association with the period of growth and prosperity experienced by the Village of Medina during the early twentieth century. During this period, immigrants arriving on the shores of the United States from all over Europe contributed to the growth of numerous local industries and a rapidly expanding economy.

The Irish who were the principal communicants of this congregation were part of that heritage and culture from the mid-nineteenth century to its culmination in the early twentieth century, and were integral in the founding of this congregation, the building of this church, and to contributions both culturally and economically (Erie Canal) to a burgeoning Medina municipality. They were part of the larger Golden Age of Industry upon which our nation and community grew to become an industrial power. This parish complex, which was the center of their ethnic community, is a vestige of their sacrifice and irrefutable contribution to the culture and heritage of the neighborhood, community, Western New York, and the nation.

The church is also significant as the church interior houses artwork completed by artists of world-renown (i.e. Panzironi, Zimmermann) and is significant in terms of high artistic value, unique to this church. The ornamental molded plasterwork is of equal artistic value. It remains an integral part of what was a large immigrant neighborhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its 175 ft. spire is an irreplaceable and integral part of the Medina area skyline, visible from miles around.