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EXPLORING PARISH CHURCHES

St. Patrick in Apalachicola

The third-oldest parish in the diocese has a fascinating history.

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In this article, the third in a series on historic parishes in the Diocese of Pensacola - Tallahassee, the Florida Catholic reviews the history of St. Patrick Parish, 27 Sixth Street, Apalachicola. Sunday Masses are celebrated at 10:00 am and 5:00 pm. Saturday Vigil Mass is at 5:00 pm, and daily Mass, Tuesday through Friday, is at 8:30 am.

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APALACHICOLA | Tucked away in the small city of Apalachicola along the Gulf of Mexico is St. Patrick, the third-oldest church in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. The city sits on the Apalachicola River about 70 miles southwest of Tallahassee.

Although inhabited by the Apalachicola River Indians in the years prior to the city's European establishment, it wasn't until 1831 that Apalachicola, or "friendly people on the other side" in the Hitichi language, gained recognition as the third-largest port on the Gulf of Mexico during the boom of its cotton-shipping industry. Cotton was shipped down the Apalachicola River from the rich plantation lands of Georgia and Alabama to be loaded onto ships. As a result, priests began to arrive from Mobile and Columbus to spread Catholicism in the prospering town. By the middle of the century, the growing number of Catholic families congregated to form St. Patrick Parish at the suggestion of Father Patrick J. Coffey of Columbus.

In June of 1851, Father Coffey appointed a board of trustees, which agreed to pay \$4,700 to build a church. The building began one month later, and the congregation dedicated the new parish to St. Patrick.

Before its completion, however, a hurricane destroyed the frame church. Determined to house his congregation, Father Coffey traveled through the region to New Orleans, begging for building funds along his route. His efforts prevailed, and in the summer of 1852, a new church was completed.

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The parish's first permanent pastor was Father Dominic Manucy, who traveled from St. John Parish in Warrington to serve the fledgling Catholic community. His service to the parish preceded 35 priests who would eventually serve at St. Patrick.

Just before the Civil War began in 1861, the congregation decided to build a more stable structure. One year later, when St. Michael the Archangel Church in Pensacola burned, St. Patrick became the only remaining Catholic church in west Florida.

In the early part of the 20th century, the congregation had plans to build yet another church. In 1929, Father Michael J. Keyes and his parishioners, who numbered 100 families, completed the construction of the current building in the Italian Romanesque style.

Today, Father Roger Latosynski serves as pastor over a year-round congregation of approximately 160

parishioners. During busy vacation months, however, the church sees as many as 300 Catholics at its Masses.

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