

THE FIRST YEARS OF SAINT HEDWIG CATHOLIC CHURCH BARRY'S BAY, ONTARIO

The first Polish-Kashub church was built on Siberia Road, two miles from the village of Barry's Bay by the Father Bronislaus Jankowski in 1896. Prior to that Father Jankowski and his predecessors, Fathers Dembski and Korbutowicz offered Mass several times a year in the homes of the settlers, going as far as Siberia. There were at that time about forty Polish-Kashub families in the district. This first church measured forty feet by twenty and was dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

New settlers began to arrive and occupy the surrounding farms. The number of Polish-Kashub families grew to forty-eight and this first church soon became much too small. A general meeting of the parishioners was held in March 1914 and it was unanimously agreed that there was need for a larger church and that it should be more centrally located. Father Jankowski, Parish Priest of St. Stanislaus, Wilno, had served the Mission of Barry's Bay for a good number of years but with the growing population, the increasing pastoral work began to overtax his health. It was he who entrusted his young assistant, Father Peter Biernacki, a native of Barry's Bay, with the very big task of organizing a Parish in Barry's Bay and providing it with a Parish Church.

Under the pastoral foresight and capable planning of Father Biernacki, a large tract of land was purchased on the north shore of the lake. Ground was broken and the actual work of building began in May of 1914. The cornerstone, the site of the new altar and the foundation were blessed by Bishop Patrick Ryan, then Bishop of Clazmene and auxiliary Bishop to Bishop Zepheryn Lorrain, Bishop of Pembroke, on July 22, 1914. The building was completed in 1915. On February 12, 1915 Bishop Ryan blessed the new bell (the large one) giving to it the names of Bronislaus, Peter, Stanislaus, Hedwig. The smaller bell, dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was that same year transferred from the Mission Church and installed in the belfry of the new church. By special faculties granted by the Bishop, Father Jankowski officially erected the Stations of the Cross on the third day of May 1915. The solemn blessing of the new church took place on June 2, 1915. It was dedicated to St. Hedwig. The year 1916 was spent clearing and preparing land for a new cemetery near the church. It was blessed in 1918. The Rectory, a two story cement block building, was erected in 1922. The Convent for the teaching Sisters was completed in 1928.

[from the Parish Register at St. Hedwig's]