

History of Immaculate Conception Parish

1884-2013

Father John Power, who was then pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Peru, Illinois, established Immaculate Conception Parish in Spring Valley. His first mass in Spring Valley was said in 1884 on the second floor of the building at the corner of St. Paul and Greenwood Street. Later masses were said in the Spring Valley Coal Company office on the northeast corner of St. Paul and Spalding Street.

In 1885, the first church of the Immaculate Conception was built and dedicated by Bishop Spalding. It was a wooden structure costing \$6,000. The day was wet and to make things as pleasant as possible for the Bishop and visitors who arrived by way of the Rock Island Rail, scores of men turned out. And under the direction of Mr. Devlin built an entire plank walk from the depot to the church in two hours.

Due to increased attendance, it was necessary to enlarge the Church in less than a year. Constructing naves on the north and south sides and moving the west wall resulted in a structure in the form of a cross large enough to accommodate one thousand people. The cornerstone was laid with impressive ceremonies on Thursday, December 8, 1887.

Quarters for the Pastor were in the attic above the sacristy. A new rectory was added in 1901. In the summer of 1886, a free school was opened in the sacristy of the Catholic Church. Mr. Jennet was the teacher. Father Power put in desks at his own expense. At that time, there was not any public school and children of all denominations were in attendance. The first parochial school was built in 1888 at a cost of \$6000.

One of Father Power's long cherished projects was the formulating of plans for a hospital for Spring Valley. He purchased several acres of ground adjoining the old Power's property in the north part of the city. He donated this land for the construction of a hospital. He named the hospital after his mother, Margaret. It is now known as St. Margaret's Hospital. In addition, Father Power appealed to the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation to staff the new hospital.

He was a resident pastor of the church of Immaculate Conception for 22 years. Father Power died March 16, 1916 and is buried in the small cemetery on the hospital grounds between the graves of his father and mother.

At 6:03 p.m. on May 19, 1917 during a heavy thunderstorm, lightning struck the rear of the church. It was burned to the ground along with the parochial residence of Reverend Denis Walsh, the pastor. Both structures were leveled to the foundations and practically everything in the two buildings was consumed. Damage was estimated at \$50,000 to \$60,000. The school building to the north, which also housed the Sisters, was damaged some but saved.

Also escaping ruin were the nativity figures purchased in 1898 by Father Power. They were displayed at the church for many years. Before its' official closing, the nativity figures were donated to the hospital.

The present brick building was erected in 1917 under the leadership of Reverend Denis Walsh and then dedicated by Bishop Dunne in November of 1917.

In 1982, under the direction of Reverend Charles Kelly the renovation of the entire church was done with a new Wicks pipe organ.

In July 2013, Immaculate Conception Parish merged with St. Anthony Parish and Sts. Peter & Paul Parish to form Nativity of Our Lord Parish.

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