

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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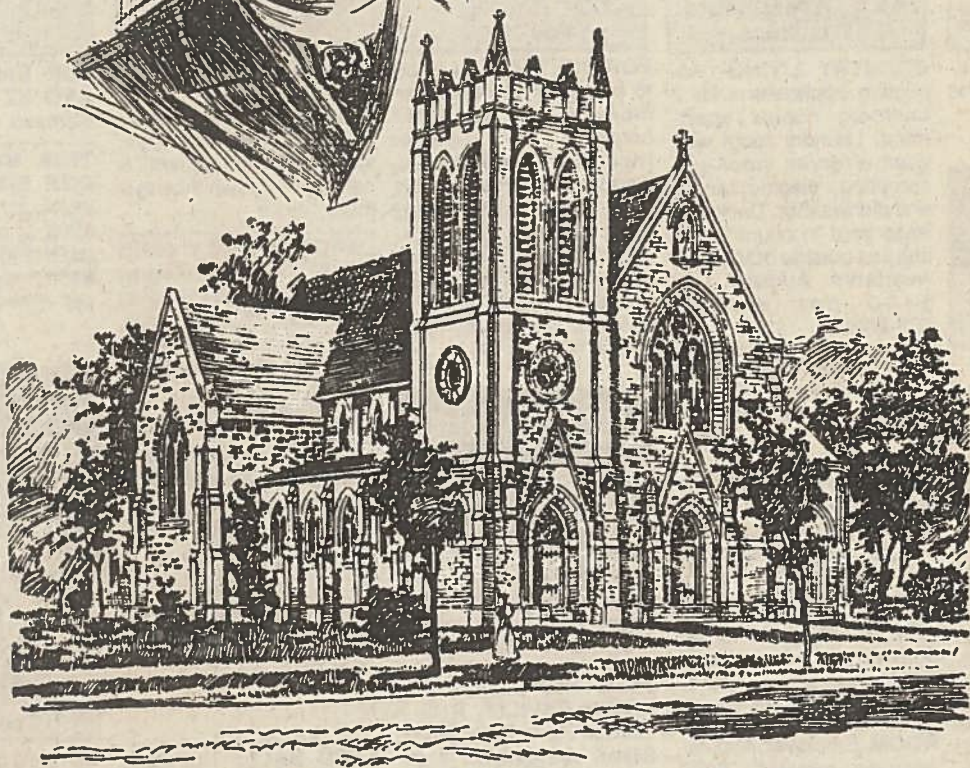
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No. 31

"A Little Cathedral In Albion"



THE REV. JOHN D. BIDEN



St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, Albion

On Sunday, June 8, 1896, the Most Rev. Stanislaus Brzana, S.T.D., L.L.D. of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo presided over the blessing of the cornerstone of St. Joseph's Church. The cornerstone located at waist height in the northeast corner of the church tower simply states "St. Joseph's Church 1896." It was just one hundred years ago that this outstanding Medina Sandstone landmark was under construction. Our old engraving of the church which was the architect's conception, shows in advance, how the finished edifice would appear.

After the death of the Rev. John Castaldi in March of 1895, Bishop Quigley appointed the Rev. John A. Biden pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Albion. At that time St. Joseph's Church was located on the east side of North Main Street between Caroline and Erie Streets. In his first sermon, Father Biden announced, "My predecessor was a humble saint, I am not. You should now be tired of being canalers. The moment is here when you don't have to apologize for your faith. We intend to take our rightful place in this community, so stand and be counted."

Indeed, it was through Father Biden and his vision that "A Little Cathedral in Albion" came about and Catholics took a rightful place in the community. From St. Joseph's Centennial book published in 1952, we find the following information:

"Father Biden was confronted with a church that could not accommodate the growing parish and it was impractical to extend the old structure. He searched the village for a new location and finally purchased the property on Clinton and Park Streets where the late Mrs. Burt McNall lived. His decision was premature, for God had other plans in store for St. Joseph's. In those days on Main and West Park Streets stood the loveliest mansion of the village called the "Proctor Homestead." All that wealth and human ingenuity of that period could devise was used for its construction so as to rate it the showplace of Albion. The residence was inherited by W.P.I. Stafford, a son-in-law of Proctor. The story of the acquisition of this property teems with interest. Mr. Stafford was a former district attorney of the county and in the execution of his sworn duty he was instrumental in sending to the gallows a certain George Willson, the only man

ever to be hung in the county. Mention is made of this incident because it was said that the case backfired and later cost him the election to a county judgeship. He afterwards asserted that he was double-crossed by his own co-religionists who had promised to uphold him. Be that as it may, he decided to abandon Albion and move to California. He offered his property to Father Biden for \$8,000.00, a mere pittance considering the fact that four times that amount had been expended on the residence alone! The sale was completed with the explicit proviso of Mr. Stafford that the Church was to be built on the Park Street property next to the Baptist Church."

It seems that Mr. Stafford was a member of the Baptist Church and in taking revenge against his "co-religionists" he wanted the new Catholic Church built where it is so it would block out the view of the Baptist Church from Main Street. The economical price of the property was indeed an offer Father Biden could not refuse. The centennial book also notes that on June 28, 1896 ... "Bishop McQuaid of Rochester accompanied by Dr. Hanna, afterward Bishop of San Francisco, laid the cornerstone during the colorful ceremonies of the church ritual. The tireless Father Biden watched the new structure rise but he was called to the rectorship of St. Joseph's Old Cathedral in Buffalo before the edifice was completed. The transfer of Father Biden seemed a catastrophic blow. However, the vacuum was adequately filled when the Rev. Francis Sullivan was appointed irremovable rector of St. Joseph's."

Thus it was under Father Sullivan's leadership that St. Joseph's Church was dedicated on Sept. 1, 1897. The ceremony was performed by the Most Rev. James Quigley, Bishop of Buffalo. Father Biden sang the Mass and the Most. Rev. Bernard McQuaid of Rochester preached the sermon.

The whole building framed together in Him, rises into a temple that is holy in the Lord.

Ephesians 2:21