



Fall Mountain, Stevens, Sunapee

WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW | PAGE B3



The satisfaction of Christmas

BRAMBLINGS | PAGE A3

1823-2023
St. Mary
Roman Catholic Church

200 Years of Faith
SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY SECTION INSIDE TODAY

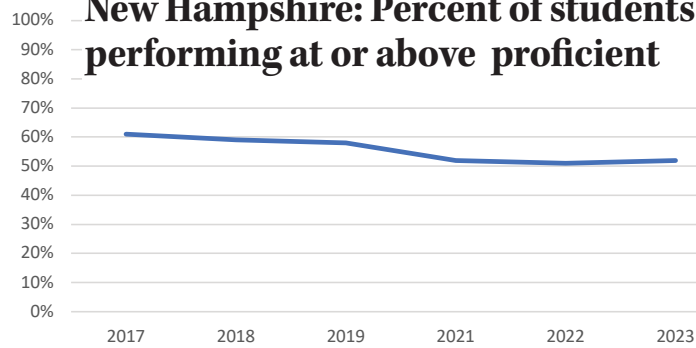
NEW HAMPSHIRE EDUCATION

Tests offer bad news and worse news

By JODY UNDERWOOD
Eagle Times Correspondent.

CLAREMONT, NH — Results from the 2023 NH State Assessment System (SAS) have finally been made available for individual schools and grades within schools. Scores for the entire state and for individual districts were available earlier this year. As a comparison to the school data that will be

New Hampshire: Percent of students performing at or above proficient



presented below, about 60% of the state's students were scoring proficient or better between 2017 and 2019. That dropped to about 50% and stayed there. There was no improvement in 2023. This article will present reading performance data for each elementary school in the Eagle Times circulation area over the last 7 years, from

See TESTS, page A3



School Resource Officer Crystal Simonds, left, Mallory Skinner and comfort dog Sully are all smiles as they embark on a shopping adventure Thursday at Walmart in Claremont, NH.

CLAREMONT, NH

Shop with a Cop delights kids

By CHRIS FROST
Eagle Times News Editor

CLAREMONT, NH — Kids had their dreams come to life Thursday, Dec. 14, as Shop with a Cop 2023 scored, and everybody walked away full of holiday spirit. Claremont Walmart delivered plenty of toys for kids to enjoy while parents waited for their children to return with the goodies. Claremont Police Department School Resource Officer Crystal Simonds organized

the event and said Shop with a Cop restarted in 2016.

"Funding for Shop with a Cop came from the Byrne Foundation, a nonprofit from the upper valley," Simonds said. "Jack and Dorothy Byne donated to various causes, including numerous things for the schools."

Simonds works closely with SAU 6 Social Worker Courtney Porter to identify children who would benefit from shopping with a

See SHOP, next page

CLAREMONT, NH

Council suspends Authority

Calls for investigation of development board

By CHRIS FROST
Eagle Times News Editor

CLAREMONT, NH — As one of his last official acts, outgoing Councilor Jonathan Stone made sure his tenure on the City Council will have an impact after he is gone.

During the Wednesday, Dec. 13, City Council meeting, Stone brought forward a successful motion to indefinitely suspend the Claremont Development Authority (CDA) and to authorize an investigation into the group's purpose, structure and management. "The [city] manager shall also develop a report and recommendations for the council to address any perceived needs for updating, amending and create new legislation within the City Code and the bylaws of the CDA to assist the body with achieving its declared purpose and charge," said Stone. Councilor Andrew O'Hearne seconded the



Jonathan Stone

More inside

Outgoing Councilors Stone, Mooshian and Contois honored. **PAGE A3**

See SUSPENSION, page A3

NEWPORT, NH

Haley, Sununu on run for the White House

By VIRGINIA DRYE
Eagle Times Staff

NEWPORT, NH — After an endorsement from Gov. Chris Sununu on Tuesday night in Manchester, both Sununu and Nikki Haley came to Newport for a Town Hall at the Newport Recreation Center on Wednesday, Dec. 13.

Newport native and founder of the Sunshine Initiative Jay Lucas welcomed the more than a hundred people in attendance and Sununu introduced Haley, expressing his excitement Haley's bid. Haley, who is leading in a Wall Street Journal polls against President Joe Biden, spent most of her town hall discussing her plans

for the White House and answering questions from the audience.

Afterwards, Sununu and Haley spoke with the Eagle Times.

Sununu sees a lot of energy, especially around Haley's race, and everything is going in the right direction, "despite what the national press might

say and what former President [Donald] Trump might want you to believe."

Haley said she feels the momentum on the ground going into the primary.

"We knew the energy was good, but then to turn and have the live-free-or-die

See HALEY, next page

LOTTERIES

MEGA MILLIONS 12/12/23
8-23-44-45-53 MB: 3

POWERBALL 12/13/23
3-8-41-56-64 MB: 18

MEGABUCKS 12/13/23
3-4-12-17-28 MB: 2

PICK 3/4 DAY 12/14/23
1-6-2 AND 6-0-6-0

PICK 3/4 EVENING 12/14/23
3-8-6 AND 2-3-9-7

WEATHER TODAY

40°/31°

Partly sunny, with a high near 40. Northwest wind around 5 mph becoming northeast.

SUNDAY

42°/39°

A 50 percent chance of rain after 1 p.m. Cloudy, with a high near 42. Southeast wind around 5 mph.

MONDAY

55°/32°

Rain. High near 55. Chance of rain is 100%.

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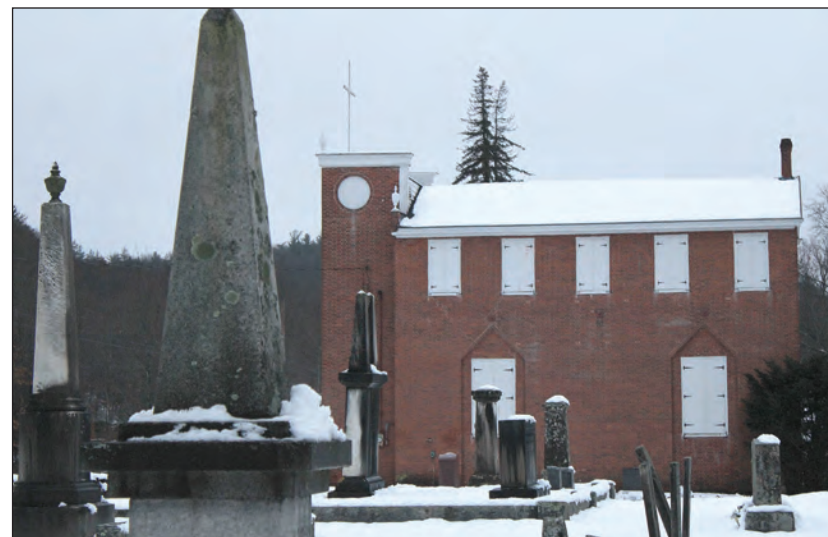


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Roman Catholic Church

200 Years of Faith

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Parishioners share fond memories Page 13

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

November 20, 2023

Reverend Sebastian Susairaj, HGN
Pastor
Saint Mary Church
32 Pearl Street
Claremont, NH 03743

Dear Father Sebastian, Parishioners and Friends of St. Mary Church:

It is a sincere pleasure to celebrate with you the 200th anniversary of St. Mary Church, the first Roman Catholic church in New Hampshire.

It is an historic occasion, and one that implores us to give thanks to God for the seeds of faith that were sowed in this community by Rev. Virgil Barber, formerly an Episcopal minister, who laid the cornerstone of the "Old" St. Mary's Church on his family's land. Indeed, those seeds grew roots that blossomed into generations of faithfulness among countless parishioners who were fed and sustained by the Eucharist and Holy Sacraments provided at St. Mary Church.

When one considers the joys: the baptisms, weddings, First Communion and Confirmations, along with the sorrows: the funeral Masses, prayers offered during times of war and strife, and the many minds shaped in faith at the former St. Mary School, the sheer number of souls God has touched and moved through His Spirit at St. Mary Church in all these critical moments of life is awe-inspiring.

Truly, the Holy Spirit is alive at St. Mary Church, which is evident in the dedication and devotion of every one of its parishioners to the work of the church and its parish. This is a community of believers, one that works tirelessly to support and love their neighbors as themselves.

I am honored to have the privilege of celebrating this important milestone with you, and having you counted among the parishes of the Diocese of Manchester. We all rejoice with you and thank God for the deep faith that has made a positive difference in the lives, educations and vocations borne of your community. May your genuine faith and loyal love of God and the Church lead those who come after you, through the next 200 years, to a deeper appreciation of God's goodness, wisdom and love.

With prayerful best wishes for a blessed and happy anniversary, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci, D.D.
Bishop of Manchester

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Pastors of Old St. Mary Catholic Church

Rev. Virgil H Barber, SJ
Rev. John Brady
Rev. John B. Daly, OSF
Rev. John C. Brady

Among the itinerant priests who visited Claremont between 1827 and 1868

Rev. James Fitton
Rev. Jeremiah O'Callaghan
Rev. Thomas J. O'Flaherty
Rev. William Tyler
Rev. Isidore H. Noiseaux

The Pastors of St. Bernard's Church, Keene, who served Claremont

Rev. James Ph. Perrache
Rev. Bernard O'Hara
Rev. William Herbert
Rev. Daniel W. Murphy

Pastors of St. Mary Parish

Rev. Georges-Stanislas Derome
Rev. Michael J. Goodwin
Rev. Maxime Laporte
Rev. Cornelius O'Sullivan
Rev. Patrick J. Finnigan
Rev. Alphonse F. Simard
Rev. Joseph Mélançon
Rev. James B. McCaffrey
Rev. Edouard Lessard
Rev. Frederick J. Gaumont
Rev. Cornelius P. Buckley
Rev. John J. McCarthy
Rev. Armand J. Provost
Rev. Hector O LaMontagne
Rev. David P. Morley
Rev. Gerard V. Dauphinais
Rev. Arthur J. Obin, OMI
Rev. Arthur Obin, OMI
Rev. Gilmond Boucher, OMI
Rev. Michael Ciullo
Rev. Rick Dion (Administrator)
Very Rev. Shawn M. Therrien, VG
Rev. Maria Sebastian Susairaj.

Pastoral Vicars

Rev. John J. Sullivan
Rev. D. Alexander Sullivan
Rev. John J. McBride
Rev. Timothy W. Coakley
Rev. Hugo Paff

Pastoral Vicars

Continued from page 3

Rev. Henry E. Lennon
 Rev. Joseph Mélançon
 Rev. James E. McCooey
 Rev. Edward J. Kean
 Rev. Michael J. Moher
 Rev. Daniel J. Cotter
 Rev. Thomas C. Laughlin
 Rev. Edouard Lessard
 Rev. Jeremiah S. Buckley
 Rev. John P. Moran
 Rev. Walter L. Dee
 Rev. John A. Belford
 Rev. John A. McCarthy
 Rev. J.G. Albert Jutras
 Rev. Samuel J. A. Côté
 Rev. Rodolphe Héon
 Rev. L. Rodolphe Drapeau
 Rev. Onesiphore Drapeau
 Rev. Onesiphore Lacroix
 Rev. Albert J. Burque
 Rev. Charles Eugene Bourque
 Rev. John M. Groves
 Rev. Arthur L. Massicotte
 Rev. Maurice A. Halde
 Rev. Arthur J. Dufour
 Rev. Francis J. Crowley
 Rev. Joseph E. Shields
 Rev. Leo F. Nadeau
 Rev. Leon Lampron
 Rev. Thomas S. Hansberry
 Rev. Roger A. Houle
 Rev. Hubert F. Mann
 Rev. Silvio J. Beaudet
 Rev. James F. Quinn
 Rev. Nelson H. Perrault
 Rev. George D. Chicoine
 Rev. Leo E. Lavoie
 Rev. Edward J. MacDonald
 Rev. Colin A. MacDonald
 Rev. Paul J. Vaichunas
 Rev. John T. Sullivan
 Rev. Robert F. Griffin
 Rev. William J. Shanahan
 Rev. Hector O. LaMontagne
 Rev. Silas Bessette
 Rev. Gerard F. Noel
 Rev. Francis R. Lamothe
 Rev. Maurice R. Lacroix
 Rev. Charles J. Boland
 Rev. Robert E. Carty
 Rev. Albert L. Boulanger
 Rev. George J. Soberick
 Rev. Jean A. Tremblay
 Rev. Romeo J. Vallière
 Rev. James P. Maloney
 Rev. James J. Moran
 Rev. Robert J. Densmore
 Rev. Robert A. Champagne
 Rev. Paul L. Aube
 Rev. Raymond A. Demers

The State of New Hampshire
By His Excellency
Christopher T. Sununu, Governor

A Commendation

In the year of our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-Three

OLD ST. MARY'S CHURCH, CLAREMONT, NH
200th ANNIVERSARY

WHEREAS, the original St. Mary's Church, located on Old Church Road in West Claremont, NH, is the first Roman Catholic Church in the State of New Hampshire and the second oldest Catholic structure still standing in New England; and

WHEREAS, under the direction of the Rev. Virgil Barber, the building was erected 1823 by Andrew Comings (1776-1853) and became the first Catholic boys' school and Jesuit preparatory college in New England. The tuition fee amounted to one-dollar per week; and

WHEREAS, the building hosted a sanctuary and gallery, a large study room, and two small classrooms on the upper level, and the church was directly accessible to the existing Barber home and next to the only cemetery in Claremont; and

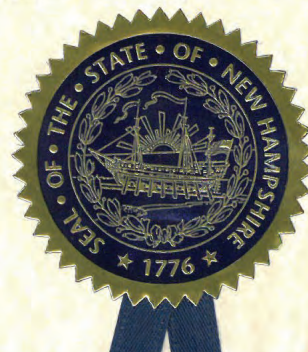
WHEREAS, the church was regularly utilized until 1866, but rarely in good repair. Although it was advertised "for sale" it never sold and in 1914, the Barber house was demolished. In 1921 a new brick wall was built where the home had been attached; and

WHEREAS, late in the 19th century furnishing from the new church on Central Street consisting of pews, a reed organ and an altar were placed in the old St. Mary's Church and in 1905, Fr. Simard began the practice of celebrating an annual Mass in the old church; and

WHEREAS, by 1939, the Knights of Columbus made numerous repairs to the building and between 1942 and 1948 the church was the recipient of new pews, an altar, and a new roof. In 1965 the New Hampshire Knights of Columbus supplied funds for renovations to include electricity and during the late 1990's, further repairs were made, a furnace was added, and the original altar rail was reinstalled; and

WHEREAS, in 1949, Rev. Buckley began the tradition of celebrating Saturday morning Mass during the summer months – a practice that is enjoyed to this day;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU, GOVERNOR of the State of New Hampshire, do hereby commend **OLD ST. MARY'S CHURCH** in Claremont as they celebrate their **200th ANNIVERSARY**, and wish them continued success in the years ahead.



IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the State of New Hampshire to be affixed this 30th day of August, 2023.

Clitch T. Sununu

Christopher T. Sununu
Governor



Mayor
City of Claremont
 58 Opera House Square
 Claremont, New Hampshire 03743
 Ph: (603)558-0860
 Fax: (603) 542-7014
 Email: dgirard@council.claremontnh.com
www.claremontnh.com

To the parishioners of St. Mary's:

On behalf of the City of Claremont, I would like to congratulate St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church on the momentous occasion celebrating having the 200th anniversary of the Old St. Mary's Church. Two centuries of faith and community spirit impact the lives of all who are and were touched by this church.

As New Hampshire's oldest Roman Catholic Church, St. Mary's has not only stood as a beacon of faith but also played a pivotal role in shaping the history and character of our community.

St. Mary's rich history is woven with countless stories of faith, love, and service. From the dedication of its founding members to the continuous support of its current parishioners, the church is a source of inspiration and strength.

As we celebrate this bicentennial, let us reflect on the countless moments of joy, comfort, hardship, loss, and celebration that have taken place within the walls of St. Mary's. This is a time to honor clergy, parishioners and all those who have contributed to the church's legacy of compassion, inclusivity, and spiritual growth.

Here's to the next chapter in the storied history of St. Mary's Church; a history that has undoubtedly left a mark on the hearts and souls of many. May the light continue to shine brightly on St. Mary's, guiding future generations in faith and fellowship.

Once again, congratulations to all and may the coming years be filled with continued blessings and growth.

Sincerely and on behalf of the city of Claremont,

Dale R. Girard
 Mayor

Pastoral Vicars

Continued from page 4

Rev. Fernand L. Pichette
Rev. Roger A. Vachon
Rev. Nomran J. Simoneau
Rev. Leo A Shea
Rev. Francis R. Lamothe
Rev. Maurice D. Lavigne
Rev. Gerald R. Belanger
Rev. Conrad V. LaForest
Rev. Marius F. Bordenave
Rev. Gerard V. Dauphinais
Rev. Raymond J. Potain
Rev. Leonard R. Foisy
Rev. Roger Yves Tremblay
Rev. Roger L Moquin
Rev. Michael L. Pollitt
Rev. John E. Healey
Rev. Edmund A Babiez
Rev. André J. Gagnon
Rev. Donat E. Tremblay
Rev. Shawn M. Therrien
Rev. Gilmond C. Boucher, OMI
Rev. Arthur Obin, OMI
Rev. Gilmond Boucher, OMI
Rev. Michael Ciullo
Rev. Rick Dion (Administrator)
Very Rev. Shawn M. Therrien, VG
Rev. Maria Sebastian Susairaj.

Sisters of St. Mary Grammar School and St. Mary High School

Sisters of Jesus – Mary, 1890-1895
Sr. St. Andrew
Sr. St. Fidèle (Annie Corcoran)
St. St. Honoré (Adele Bourget)
Sr. St. John of the Cross
Sr. Madeleine-de-Pazzi
Sr. of Perpetual Help

Sisters of Mercy, 1896-1990
Sr. Adele Hennessey
Sr. Agnes Wall
Sr. Agnita Keating
Sr. Albert Dorgan
Sr. Alberta Bell
Sr. Albertus (Rachel Dumont)
Sr. Alexandrine Veilleaux
Sr. Alma Pelletier
Sr. Alphonsa (Madeline Dion)
Sr. Amrose Donovan
Sr. Anastasia Smith
Sr. Andrea (Margaret Gardner)
St. Angeline Murphy
Sr. Angélique (Hellen Girard)
Sr. Angélique LeLoup
Sr. Ann Claderon
Sr. Antionette Hebert
Sr. Aquin (Irene Hathaway)
Sr. Arnoldine Fitzgerald

Sisters

Continued from page 5

Sr. Arthur Dakin
 Sr. Assunta Riley
 Sr. Augustine (Monique Therriault)
 Sr. Austin (Helen Gill)
 Sr. Beatrice Costello
 Sr. Benedict Talty
 Sr. Benedicta (Angie Whidden)
 Sr. Berechman (Margaret Elizabeth Gearon)
 Sr. Bertrand Emond
 Sr. Bonaventure O'Donnell
 Sr. Cabrini Callahan
 Sr. Camilla Lyons
 Sr. Carmela Dion
 Sr. Carol Andruskevich
 Sr. Carol Clifford
 Sr. Carolyn Doran
 Sr. Casimir (Elizabeth Seadova)
 Sr. Catherine Sullivan
 Sr. Cecelia Ferland
 Sr. Celine Mullane
 Sr. Christina Branswell
 Sr. Christine Johnson
 Sr. Clare McCarthy
 Sr. Clarita Stanton
 Sr. Cletus Goetz
 Sr. Colman McCarthy
 Sr. Conrad Glearin
 Sr. Cornelia Sullivan
 Sr. Cyril Healy
 Sr. Cyrilla McCarthy
 Sr. Danielle Ham
 Sr. De Chantal (Roseanna Descoteau)
 Sr. De Chantal (Sullivan)
 Sr. Delia Guimond
 Sr. Della (Mae Cornin)
 Sr. De Lourdes (Anne De L. Molloy)
 Sr. Delphine Morin
 Sr. Denis Noonan
 Sr. Denise Bourgeois
 Sr. Denise Therriault
 Sr. De Paul Thornton
 Sr. De Sales McCarthy
 Sr. Dorothy McConnell
 Sr. Edith Beck
 Sr. Edwina Carroll
 Sr. Elaine Gauthier
 Sr. Elanor Pelletier
 Sr. Elanor Shaughnessy
 Sr. Emmanuel (Dorothy Fullam)
 Sr. Esther Norton
 Sr. Eulalia Griffin
 Sr. Eunice Davidson
 Sr. Euprasia Strobel
 Sr. Evangelista (Alice Dolphin)
 Sr. Eymard Riley
 Sr. Fidelia Caulfield
 Sr. Florian Campbell
 Sr. Frances Lauranzano
 Sr. Francis Trudeau

Reflections on St. Mary Church

The Formative Years

By **MARY CARTER**
 Eagle Times Correspondent

From Our Bicentennial Edition of the Daily Eagle

CLAREMONT, NH
 On October 30, 1964, the hard-working staff of the Daily Eagle produced a keepsake Bicentennial Edition. Its banner read: "Time Doesn't March Alone."

An editorial introduction explained that work on this special publication had begun early in the year. Apologies were made for any changes that occurred along the way. Some noted events were: the return of First National Stores to Claremont, the retirements of Police Chief William Nobbs and Fire Chief Esmond Dansereau, and the decision, not yet fully resolved, by Coy Paper to build a modern plant in the Claremont area.

An entire pullout section of the October 30, 1964 keepsake edition was devoted to Claremont's then 18 houses of worship. It began: "Claremont's ecclesiastical history extends back nearly as far as its history as a community. It boasts two of the oldest churches in New Hampshire, both still at West Claremont."

In preparing this special section, the Daily Eagle praised the help of many researchers, including the pastors of each church, "without whose aid the religious history of Claremont could never have been written."

Residents were also applauded for their dedication and involvement with especial thanks to Mrs. Michael Adamovich, Benjamin Diamond, Mrs. William Haubrich, C.W. Otis, Mrs. Thomas Weidner, Brian K. Bogle, Amelia Skill, Cynthia McKee, Anne Dexter, and Daily Eagle reporter Bertha Emond.

The section highlighting Saint Mary Parish reads:

Any history of Catholicism in Claremont must begin with Rev. Virgil Barber, who not only built the old Catholic church in West Claremont, but was responsible for a sort of ecclesiastical history all its own when he became a convert to this faith in 1816. In his train followed his father, an Episcopalian minister, his mother, his wife, and his five children.

Father Barber was ordained a priest in December, 1822, after going to Rome to ask for a special dispensation since he was married.



Old St. Mary Church, the first Roman Catholic Church in New Hampshire, was built by the Rev. Virgil Barber. He was the son of an Episcopalian minister and was a convert to Catholicism, with a wife and five children.

His first step was to build a brick chapel opposite the church of which his father was formerly minister. The chapel was downstairs, while the upper part of the building served as a school. Among his students were James Fitton, William Wiley and William Tyler, all noted clergy of a later day. Tyler became the first bishop of Hartford.

The congregation of St. Mary consisted of one hundred and fifty members, chiefly converts, some of whom traveled ten to fifteen miles to attend church.

Unfortunately, the excellent beginning made by Father Barber was not permitted to develop. Barber was recalled to Georgetown by his Jesuit superior, and the only congregation of native-born Catholics was allowed to fall away.

In 1835, there were 387 Catholics in New Hampshire in a total population of 250,000.

After Father Barber's departure in 1827, the Catholics of Claremont were served at rare intervals by Fathers O'Callaghan, Tyler, O'Flaherty and Fitton.

The first priests of St. Mary Church

By **MARY CARTER**
Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAREMONT, NH

When founder Father Virgil Horace Barber was recalled to Georgetown in 1827, the fate of the church he built fell into sometimes distant but caring hands. Four New England priests initially carried on Barber's mission at intervals, three being known students of Barber's. One of these devoted men was Father William Wyley.

Wyley is mentioned in the College of the Holy Cross' "Jesuit Heritage" as being the caretaker of St. Mary's in Taunton, Massachusetts. Dedicated on October 28, 1832, Taunton's St. Mary church had cost over \$2,000 to build. The worshippers there were primarily factory workers who found Taunton to be a better place to live and work than Fall River. The congregation was said to be 500 strong by 1838.

Another priest who cared for Claremont's St. Mary's church in the early days was James Fitton. Born in Boston in 1805, Fitton was ordained on December 23, 1827 after receiving his classical education in Claremont.

In 1828, Fitton was sent as a missionary to the Passamaquoddy people in what is now Maine. The Passamaquoddy exist today as a federally recognized tribe, with most members over the age of fifty still speaking the Maliseet-Passamaquoddy language.

Fitton would go on to serve Catholic churches, often traveling by foot from the northeastern tip of Maine to the Lake Champlain regions of Vermont. Extending his territory, Fitton journeyed from Boston to the Berkshires and all throughout Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York. He established the church of Our Lady of the Isle at Newport, Rhode Island and, likely inspired by his own instructor, Claremont's Virgil Barber, Fitton founded the College of the Holy Cross.

In 1855, Fitton returned to Boston where he devotedly served throughout the final twenty-six years of his life. Fitton's eulogy praised him as "a heroic figure among Catholics in six states, and the great missionary of New England."

When James Fitton left Claremont, the care of St. Mary's church continued with visits from Fathers O'Callahan, O'Flaherty, and William Tyler. Tyler was also a student of Virgil Barber's.

One of eight children, William Tyler was born in Derby, Vermont in 1806. His



One of eight children, William Tyler was born in Derby, Vermont in 1806. Tyler, who would become the first bishop of the Diocese of Hartford, visited St. Mary as an itinerant preacher.

mother was Virgil Barber's aunt. Moving to Claremont, William attended his cousin's school, converting to Catholicism when he was sixteen. Tyler went on to study theology in Boston, and was ordained on June 3, 1829.

Tyler served as curate at Holy Cross Cathedral. After traveling as a missionary throughout Maine, Tyler was named Vicar General of the Diocese of Boston.

On November 28, 1843, Tyler became the first Bishop of the newly established Diocese of Hartford. His appointment was sanctioned by Pope Gregory XVI. This diocese covered the entirety of Connecticut and Rhode Island, serving nearly 10,000

Catholics. Tyler eventually relocated to Providence, Rhode Island where a higher population of Catholics thrived. The Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul was placed under Tyler's care. It wasn't long until the cathedral was unable to accommodate the growing number of Irish Catholic immigrants who flocked there.

Tyler was known for distributing food to the hungry from his own door weekly. Dismissing the use of a carriage, Tyler traveled on foot, faithfully visiting the sick, the needy and the poor. Weakened by consumption, Tyler died from rheumatic fever at the age of forty-five.



Rev. James Fitton

Sisters

Continued from page 6

Sr. Gemma Mahan
 Sr. Georgina Reynolds
 Sr. Gerard Ryan
 Sr. Geraldine McCarthy
 Sr. Gloria Morin
 Sr. Gonzaga Reardon
 Sr. Gregory (McConald)
 Sr. Helen Driscoll
 Sr. Ida Sorette
 Sr. Ignatia McDonald
 Sr. Ignatius Provost
 Sr. Inez Bernier
 Sr. Irenaeus Orthmann
 Sr. Irene Duffy
 Sr. Irma Moran
 Sr. James Dillan
 Sr. Jane Sullivan
 Sr. Jeanine Coté
 St. Joachim Donovan
 Sr. John Bosco (Mary Goodwin)
 Sr. Joseph Driscoll
 Sr. Josephine Baker
 Sr. Judith Dolloff
 Sr. Judith Mountain
 Sr. Julia (Amatus) Hartnett
 Sr. Julie Brown
 Sr. Justina Dodge
 Sr. Karen Ross
 Sr. Kathleen McGinnis
 Sr. Kathleen Sullivan
 Sr. Kevin O'Donnell
 Sr. Laetitia Dolan
 Sr. Laurentia Pheur
 St. Laurentine Waggett
 Sr. Leonie Murphy
 Sr. Leontine Mason
 Sr. Linda Trafton
 Sr. Loretta Kyne
 Sr. Lorraine Brooks
 Sr. Louise Foisy
 Sr. Lucina Keegan
 Sr. Lumina Lemire
 Sr. Magdalen Rafter
 Sr. Marcellus Isabel
 Sr. Margaret Lamontagne
 Sr. Margherita Sutherland
 Sr. Marguerite (Ann Marineau)
 Sr. Marietta Kirby
 Sr. Marietta Laporte
 Sr. Marjorie Byrne
 Sr. Martin McDonald
 St. Martina Maddix
 Sr. Mary of Fatmia
 Sr. Mary Vachon
 Sr. Matthew Conroy
 Sr. Matthew Speneck
 Sr. Maurice Armstrong
 Sr. Mildred (Charlotte Ann) Fortier
 Sr. Muirin Flaherty
 Sr. Miles McHugh

Sisters

Continued from page 7

Sr. Natalie Tobin
 Sr. Noël Desporte
 Sr. Nolaseo Stone
 Sr. Noreen Keleher
 Sr. Olive Mattison
 Sr. Patrick Burke
 Sr. Paul Pitman
 Sr. Philippa (Lolita Charleston)
 Sr. Philippa Laprise
 Sr. Priscilla Girard
 Sr. Raymond Twomey
 Sr. Regina O'Donnell
 Sr. Roberta Crowley
 Sr. Rosemary Burnham
 Sr. Sara Churchill
 Sr. Sebastian Charron
 Sr. Simeon (Lorraine Trombly)
 Sr. Stella Hamel
 Sr. Terence Gallagher
 St. Teresa Dobbin
 Sr. Thérèse Gaillardetz
 Sr. Thomasita Delaney
 Sr. Timothy McCarthy
 Sr. Vietox (Alice Marie Perkins)
 Sr. Victoria Murray
 Sr. Vincintia Harte
 Sr. Virginia Stanton
 Sr. Walter Hines
 Sr. Wilhelmina O'Donnell
 St. Winifred MacVarish
 Sr. Xavarius Murphy

Sister of our Lady, Mother of the Church, 1897-1991

Sr. Alberta
 Sr. Bernadette
 Sr. Marie André
 Sr. Mary Daniel
 Sr. Ruth

Sister of the Presentation of Mary, 1991

Sr. Celia Laliberté
 Sr. Thérèse Martineau

A symbol of faith and time

By MARY CARTER
 Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAREMONT, NH

The original St. Mary Church was envisioned and constructed at the north end of Virgil Barber's family home in West Claremont. The Barber home had served as the rectory for the Episcopalian Church across the road where Virgil's father served.

Cornish New Hampshire's Andrew Comings built New Hampshire's first Catholic church, which still stands today. Born on October 9, 1776, Comings worked in his father's mill for ten years, beginning at the age of fourteen. He built himself a brick cottage on a farmstead a mile away from his birthplace. A man of the land and a carpenter, Comings built St. Mary Church for Virgil Barber and the Methodist Episcopal in Cornish, among other buildings.

Comings died in the summer of 1853, surviving his first wife and six of his nine children. He was seventy-seven.

St. Mary's uniquely designed sanctuary and gallery held a study and two classrooms overhead. The church itself is twenty feet by forty-eight feet, six inches high, with thirty-four feet to the eaves. The church was directly attached to the Barber home. It was here, 200 autumns ago, that the first Catholic boy's school in New England began. Three of Barber's first students served as priests for St. Mary in its early years.

The original St. Mary Church was attended regularly, until after the Civil War. Pastors and parishioners dealt with the building's signs and suffering due to age. At one point, the church was put up for sale. It was, perhaps, ordained to never sell.

With the parishioners newfound determination, walls were reinforced and new furnishings brought in. A reed organ and



The Barber House and Old St. Mary in 1910.

The church itself is twenty feet by forty-eight feet, six inches high, with thirty-four feet to the eaves. The church was directly attached to the Barber home.

an altar from the new St. Mary Church, constructed on Central Street in Claremont from 1870-1873, were added to the upgrades.

In 1905, Father Simard began holding mass annually at the original St. Mary Church. At this same time, parts of the building were being used to store cemetery equipment. The church itself would be without electric power until 1954.

The original Barber residence was rented out, with apartments often occupied by immigrant workers. In 1914, the wooden home was dismantled. A reinforced wall

would be built where the Barber home once connected to the sanctuary and a previous small doorway was bricked up. Windows were installed to balance the look where the home had adjoined. A new roof and eaves were added. Rods were installed to stabilize the upper floor walls, along with plaster and paint. A staircase, which may or may not have been a part of the 1823 design, was altered.

In 1939, the Knights of Columbus would step up with repairs and a bronze dedication plaque placed over the door. Not long after, the present pews were brought in and, in 1948, a new altar was set.

A year later, Father Buckley offered Saturday morning Masses during the summer, "in order to increase visitational devotion to that of a shrine." Saturday services are still active on Saturday mornings at 9 am from June to October.

As of 2023, the original St. Mary Church stands proud at 200 years old.

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A Place for the people: 1850s to 1960s

By **MARY CARTER**
Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAREMONT, NH

Following the first pastors of St. Mary, the church was served by Rev. John Brady. Brady was a retired pastor from Biddeford, Maine. In 1856, an attempt was made to form a parish. However, with Brady's relocation to Keene in 1862, these hopes fell to the wayside.

Eight years later, Rev. George G. Derome became pastor. Under his direction, the new St. Mary Church would be built. The lumber used came from Unity by oxcart.

The new church on Central Street in Claremont would take three years to build. Its construction was not without difficulties. The original plans proved defective, and reinforcements had to be added to the central walls. The proposed cost of building the church was \$4,500. It ended up being \$7,300. Still, as the National Eagle reported in 1871, "Thus far, the society has been able to keep well out of debt."

During this time, services were led by fathers L'Hiver, Goodwin, LaPorte and, in

1873, Fr. Cornelius O'Sullivan. The new church was dedicated on July 18, 1875 by the Rt. Rev. James A. Healy, Bishop of Portland, Maine. Born to a Georgia plantation owner and a mixed-race enslaved woman, Healy was the first known African American to serve as a priest or bishop.

In 1881, Rev. Patrick J. Finnegan was appointed pastor, serving for a then unprecedented twenty years. Finnegan would make improvements, adding a spire and three bells weighing 1,200, 1,600, and 2,300 pounds. These bells, blessed by Bishop Bradley, officially welcomed parishioners on Sunday, October 20, 1889.

During Fr. Finnegan's time, four mansions on Central Street were purchased for the church's use. These stunning Greek Revival homes had been created for industrialists Henry Russell, Ormond Dutton, Charles L. Putnam and printer Simeon Ide during

the boom known as "Speculation Times." These lovely homes with their Doric porticoes were transformed into a rectory, a school and a convent, with the fourth becoming Saint Mary High School in 1925.

In 1901, the Rev. Alphonse Simard

became pastor. He saw to it that steam heat and electrical wiring were added to the new church. Fr. Simard was awarded a gold ciborium in 1911 for his silver jubilee. After Fr. Simard's passing, the Rev. John P. Morgan served as administrator until the appointment of Fr. Joseph Melancon.

Fr. Melancon's time with St. Mary's was one of significant upswing. A transept was added, greatly increasing the seating and making St. Mary the largest capacity church in Claremont. The grammar school, which started in 1890, received an annex in 1921. This increased the school's space to 16 rooms for the then 671 pupils enrolled.

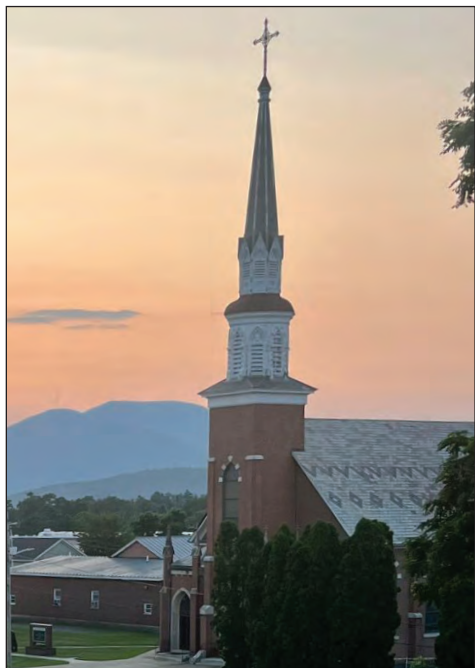
In 1928, the Rev. James B. McCaffrey was responsible for the completion of the rectory. Rev. Fr. Albert Burque served as administrator until Rev. Edouard Lessard arrived in 1932. Fr. Lessard worked diligently to pay off the church's debt of \$55,000, and was still able to purchase an additional building on Central Street to serve as a school gymnasium. Sadly, a fire destroyed this building in 1946.

Under the 1948 direction of Fr. Gaumont, the church was repaired and revitalized for a cost of \$40,000. A home on the corner of Pearl and Central Streets was also obtained as an annex for the high school. The development of a new gymnasium marked the pastorate of the Rev. Cornelius Buckman in 1949-50.

The October 20, 1964 edition of the Daily Eagle noted the arrival of Fr. John J. McCarthy as: "probably the ablest administrator St. Mary's has had, Fr. McCarthy arrived in September 1950 to cope with a \$250,000 debt and a parish whose rapidly expanding needs could not long be deferred."

In 1956, Fr. McCarthy purchased land for a new high school. Built at a cost of \$450,000, it was dedicated on September 7, 1958.

The Daily Eagle reported that the added debts quickly dwindled and that St. Mary Church, as of 1965, was "nearly \$1 million operational, serving 1,679 families with a total of 5,562 souls and employing nearly fifty people."



The new church on Central Street, in Claremont, NH, was dedicated in 1875.

St. Mary Church

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Fr. Shawn Therrien speaks from the pulpit in September at Old Saint Mary Church in West Claremont.

Memories from the heart

By MARY CARTER | Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAREMONT, NH

Very Rev. Shawn Therrien always knew his life's devotion would be to the Church. "Although," he admitted, "there was a time, when I was five to seven years old, that I wanted to be either a military general or a busdriver." Fr. Shawn was fascinated by the way the doors to his childhood school bus opened and closed.

Fr. Shawn grew up in Tilton, NH — a very different place than the shopping mecca it is today. Fr. Shawn prepared for the priesthood at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Founded by French immigrant missionary Fr. John Dubois, the Mount — much like

Old Saint Mary Church in West Claremont — has served the faithful for over two-hundred years. The Mount, or the "Cradle of Bishops" as it came to be known, produced a fine assemblage of alumni including the first American born cardinal. The Mount was also home to the first native born saint of the United States, Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Ordained in 1987, Fr. Shawn, then a deacon, was called to Saint Mary Church in Claremont. Fr. Morley and Fr. Dauphinais were already in place at the active parish. With Fr. Morley's transfer and Fr. Dauphinais' decision to enter the monastery, Fr. Shawn remained.

See **THERRIEN**, next page

Therrien

Continued from page 10

In 1990, Fr. Shawn was called to Portsmouth, New Hampshire for fourteen months, followed by Sacred Heart in Greenville. 2002 marked the return of Fr. Shawn to Saint Mary's Parish, and its people were thrilled to have him back.

Throughout Fr. Shawn's leadership, St. Mary's continued to thrive. Catholic Outreach assisted those less fortunate. Programs were established to prepare people of all ages for a joyful life in the Catholic faith.

There were trying days, too. The loss of the Saint Mary convent by a massive fire in 2014 was devastating, and never solved. "The case remains open even today," said Fr. Shawn.

Another troubling event would occur. On a warm Saturday night in August of 2015, a Charlestown teenager and a juvenile broke in and vandalized Saint Mary's by emptying the contents of the fire extinguishers all around the church. It was to such a degree that indoor services could not be held the following day.

Not long after, Fr. Shawn received an unexpected call from the Claremont police. The older of the two vandals wished to apologize. Fr. Shawn met with the then eighteen-year-old perpetrator. "You must realize that you hurt our people," Fr. Shawn gently advised the young man, adding that the offender had also hurt his own mother. "Lesson learned," said Fr. Shawn. "He began to cry."

Neighboring tragedy struck when, in 2016, Fr. George Majka of St. Joseph Church drowned while visiting the Dominican Republic. Fr. Shawn stepped in to assist with the daily needs of St. Joseph Church as well. In 2018, the Most Rev. Peter A. Lebaschi, Bishop of Manchester, appointed Fr. Shawn to serve as a Vicar General of the



Standing on the steps of St. Mary Catholic Church in Claremont, NH, Fr. Shawn Therrien holds up a monstrance containing the Eucharist as he blesses the city during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Diocese of Manchester.

Covid's hold was life changing for Fr. Shawn and Saint Mary Church. Daily services were enacted with social distancing in mind. Fr. Shawn had to take special precautions to continue his visits to the sick at home and in hospitals. Sunday Mass was live-streamed. "It felt odd," Fr. Shawn admitted, "preaching to an empty congregation." Still, the parishioners kept the offerings coming in, and the Parish office remained busy.

When the perils of Covid finally faded, the parishioners of Saint Mary were back in action planning fund and awareness raising events. Fr. Shawn couldn't be more proud of all the hard-working folks, such as the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic

Daughters of America, who made, and still make, these successful gatherings a reality.

Fr. Shawn was the heart of Saint Mary's Parish for over twenty years. When it came time for Fr. Shawn to focus on his duties as Vicar General, his parishioners were happy for him, yet sad for themselves.

"I'm really going to miss you," a longtime parishioner told Fr. Shawn in his closing days at Saint Mary's. To this, Fr. Shawn compared his time at the church to being like a hand pulled out of water. "That hand is gone, but there is no hole. There will be another devoted priest in place to keep faith alive and parishioners in the right direction."

Fr. Shawn's Manchester New Hampshire office may be located in what some might

consider the "tougher" part of town. "Still, everyone here respects the church and its people."

As Chair of the Priest Personnel Board, Fr. Shawn assists with placing and relocating clergy where needed. In a way, Fr. Shawn got that job of his younger dreams inspired by school bus doors that wondrously open and close.

"Twenty years went by in the blink of an eye," said Fr. Shawn. He always had and still holds, "a fondness for everyone involved with Saint Mary's in Claremont".

"It's a beautiful church and a very good parish," Fr. Shawn concluded, noting that Father Sebastian Susairaj, who has been with the wonderful people of Saint Mary Parish since 2022, is doing a marvelous job.



Congratulations to St. Mary's Parish on their 200th anniversary.

We are truly blessed to have St. Mary's as our neighbor in Christ.

Our history, which is posted on our website tells the story of Newport Catholics walking barefoot the eight mile journey to Old St. Mary Church, Old Church Road.

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We here at St. Patrick Church, Newport are celebrating our 140th year of dedication, check our parish history at www.saintpatrickparish.net



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Gratulacje!
Congratulations!**

*from the parishioners of
St. Joseph Church*

58 Elm Street,
Claremont, NH
Established 1920

Virgil Barber and the founding of Old St. Mary

By MARY CARTER

Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAREMONT, NH

While awaiting his ordination, Virgil Barber bravely prepared his own land as the site of New Hampshire's first Roman Catholic church.

Born in Claremont in May 1782, his father fought in the Revolutionary War before becoming the minister of Claremont's Union Episcopal Church. After attending Dartmouth University, Barber repeated the path of his father and became an Episcopalian minister, serving in Connecticut and New York.

In 1812, New Hampshire became part of the Diocese of Boston. Catholicism itself had not been a permitted practice in Massachusetts until the year 1780. In his own words, Barber expressed his introduction to the

Catholic faith:

"I had in my house a good Catholic Irish servant girl whom I often noticed using a certain prayer book ... A happy curiosity which was undoubtedly an effect of Divine grace made me open and examine the little book which proved to be a Novena to Saint Francis Xavier."

Barber was moved by what he read and concluded that a religion that formed such men could not be "a mere human institution."

Contemplating a turn of faith in such a time took courage and strength. However, Barber followed his convictions. Father Fenwick, who would become the second Bishop of Boston, guided Barber and his family into their new lives. Barber's wife and daughters entered a convent while their son studied with the Jesuits.

Returning to Claremont, Barber

discovered that his father shared his new-found beliefs. Barber built his new church adjacent to his family home and the town's only cemetery. The unique brick entry was 16 feet by 8 feet, leading into a sanctuary that held 40 people. Above were a study hall and two small classrooms.

By the fall of 1823, Virgil Barber opened the first Catholic Boys' School in New England. He went on to serve as a missionary in Maine and ended his days in Maryland.

With its steadily growing industries, Claremont's population soared.

St. Mary's Catholic Church served its worshippers regularly until 1866. A larger St. Mary's was built on Central Street over the course of three years, with a first holy mass celebrated in October 1871. The original St. Mary's became a storage area for the cemetery, and Barber's home was converted

into housing for immigrant workers.

In 1905, Father Simard began the practice of holding an annual service at Old St. Mary's. After Barber's home was demolished, a new brick wall was erected where the wooden home had been attached, and the church building was stabilized.

In 1939, the Knights of Columbus made further repairs, adding a commemoration tablet over the front door. More than 80 years later, Old St. Mary's continues to thrive with Saturday morning services held faithfully throughout the summer.

Created through a personal vision, Old St. Mary's is more than just a landmark. This shrine has been a cornerstone of life's journey, a place of belonging and celebration and support. With its simplistic yet welcoming beauty, Old St. Mary's has stood tall for 200 years. With the care from its community, it will proudly stand 200 more.

A House of Good Deeds: 1964-2023

By MARY CARTER

Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAREMONT, NH

In 1964, Saint Mary Parish continued to flourish and thrive under the direction of Rev. John J. McCarthy.

With the new St. Mary Catholic High School up and running on Hanover Street, Fr. John began planning for a post Vatican II makeover of the church interior on Central Street. While still pastor of St. Mary Parish, he was named a monsignor.

As explained in the October 2, 2019 online edition of the Lincoln Diocese: "Monsignor is an honorific title given to priests

by the pope, often based on the recommendation of the local bishop. It is granted to individuals who rendered valuable service to the Church." Fr. John would now be referred to as Rt. Rev. John J. McCarthy.

Rev. Armand J. Provost guided the church through the end of the 1960s. During his time, the refurbishment of St. Mary on Central Street took place. The high altar was replaced with a free-standing altar of marble. In 1971, the high school on Hanover Street closed. That September, it became part Disnard Elementary, a Claremont public school, still in operation today.

The 1970s were served by Rev. Hector O. LaMontagne. Prior to coming to

Claremont, Fr. Hector had been instrumental in the development of the first parochial school in Hudson, New Hampshire. Fr. Hector compiled a history entitled, "St. Mary's Church, Claremont, NH, 1823-1973: 150 Years of Faith."

Rev. David Morley served the first half of the 1980s, and the Central Street church was renovated once again. Rev. Gerard V. Dauphinais, previously the assistant pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish of Manchester, completed the decade.

Fr. Dauphinais was responsible for bringing the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady, Mother of the Church to St. Mary Grammar School. Present day parishioner and historian Steve Denis remembers Fr. Dauphinais "pitching in to help paint the grammar school." The convent where the Sisters of Charity took up residence was renovated. Fr. Dauphinais stepped down as pastor in the fall of 1990 to become a Maronite monk at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Petersham, MA.

Rev. Arthur T. Obin took over in the fall of 1990 with assistance from Rev. Gilmord Boucher as associate pastor. Fr. Obin had served as chaplain for the Boy Scouts of America at Camp Carpenter in New Hampshire in 1964.

Saint Mary Grammar school saw its

100th anniversary in 1990. While the Sisters of Charity held roles in administration and education, the Sisters of Mercy, who "had served the grammar and high schools so faithfully and selflessly for over 90 years," were still present. They'd been at the Claremont convent since 1896, remaining through the difficult times of the Great Depression.

Sister Eleanor Shaughnessy, a native of North Walpole, NH, was a Sister of Mercy for 72 years. She taught computer classes at St. Mary. Sister Marietta Laporte was born in Canada, but raised in Claremont. After retiring from teaching, Sister Marietta served as a eucharistic minister and lector at St. Mary Parish. She faithfully visited the sick and tutored children in the Foster Grandparent Program.

In the late 1990s, under the guidance of Rev. Michail Ciullo, the interior of the Old St. Mary Church was renovated. As church historian Steve Denis recalls, "the floors were sanded and returned to their natural color, and the walls were repaired and painted." A furnace was also added. A campaign was set in motion for the repainting of the new church on Central Street.

Rev. Richard Dion acted as administrator in 2002 until the arrival of Very Rev. Shawn Therrien. Under Fr. Shawn's term, many ministries flourished. St. Vincent de Paul, now known as Catholic Outreach, assists those less fortunate. Catechetical programs

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200th Anniversary
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Good
wishes
for the
future!

Parishioners share fond memories

By **MARY CARTER**
Eagle Times Correspondent

CLAIRE and WALT STAPLETON used to live in a different Sullivan County. Theirs was in New York. Walt's career in railroad operations brought the couple to Claremont in 1983, when Walt signed on with the Claremont Concord Railway. This led to private consulting, insurance work and serving as a NH state Rep. The Stapletons are happy to call Claremont their home.

Initially, Claire and Walt went to both St. Mary and St. Joseph churches. Settling on St. Mary, Walt became a member of Knights of Columbus and has been with them ever since.

At St. Mary, the Stapletons found "a network that feels like family." Food

celebrations are a cherished ritual. A recent Indian dinner prepared by Fr. Sebastian and his religious brothers proved to be, as Walt put it, "a delicious experience of good food and good fellowship." This meal was part of a series of monthly International Food Festivals offered by the parish and served in the St. Mary's Gym.

"People are welcomed and supported here," Walt said, adding that, "St. Mary has such a positive influence on the community."

ALBERT ST. PIERRE'S parents were married at St. Mary Church on September 4, 1943. Born in 1959, Albert was the ninth of thirteen children. "At the same time I was being born, my father was buying a gravel pit," said Al.

Al remembers Sunday visits to St. Mary's. "There were several large families here in



Parishioners fill the school gym to share a meal.

the 1960s," he said. Ushers were needed to manage seating for all the worshippers. St. Mary Church holds 800. Extra seats had to be brought in for Al's father's funeral.

Al became a parish volunteer at an early

age. "Going to St. Mary School and all, it was easy to fall into," he said. Al recalled running paper drives in his dad's truck. "You got involved to keep things going."

Al and his wife Carol were wed at St. Mary Church in October of 1979. Carol has become an integral part of the cooking events at the church. After Al's father passed, they'd take Al's mother to church on Sundays. "On the way, she'd point out all the homes my dad had dug the cellar holes for," said Al. This was in the days it was done with a team of horses.

Al continues to volunteer for events and special moments, such as the third annual setting of the Crèche and Menorah at Broad Street Park. At every St. Mary's penny or yard sale, Al is on hand with his

See **MEMORIES**, page 16



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St Mary's Music Director Joe Labrecque plays the organ in the choir loft above the nave of Old St. Mary.

The anniversary of the first Catholic Church in New Hampshire was recently celebrated with Bishop Peter Libasci at St. Mary's Catholic Church on Pearl Street in Claremont, NH. The parish began 200 years ago at Old St. Mary Church, which still stands on Old Church Road.



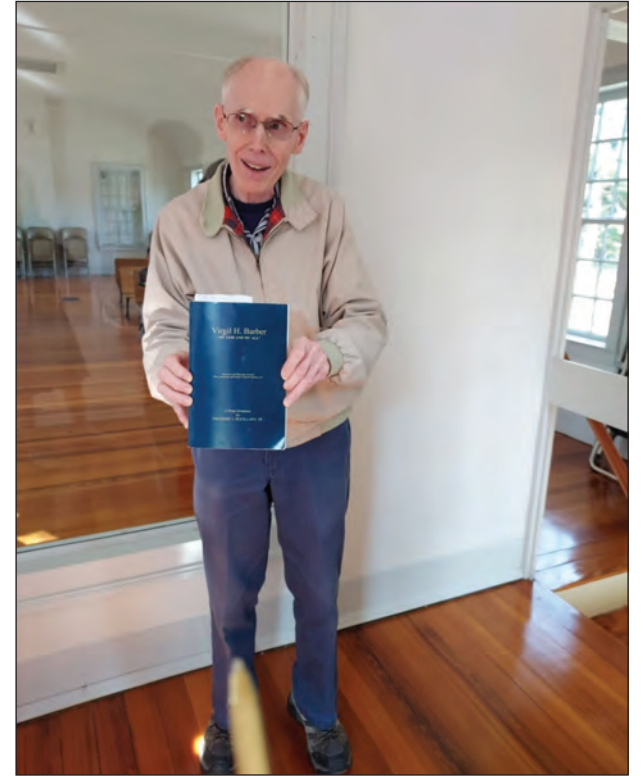
St. Catherine
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 Charlestown, NH 03603
Masses are Sunday 10:30 AM

St. Peter
 39 Church St.
 North Walpole, NH 03609
*Masses are Saturday 4 PM
 and Sunday 8:30 AM*





Old St. Mary was recently buttoned up for the winter.



Steve Denis shows the biography of St. Mary's founder Virgil Barber.



Graves in the public cemetery next to Old St. Mary are blanketed by snow.



The church cemetery wraps around two sides of Old St. Mary.

Steve Denis gives a tour of the 200-year-old Old St. Mary church. The tour included the second-story classroom.

Memories

Continued from page 13

truck to help with set-up and clean-up. Al is a dependable, reliable and topnotch volunteer. "But don't thank me," Al said. "It takes a solid team." Al praises the ladies of St. Mary's for all their hard work. "Being a part of the St. Mary community is a rewarding experience," said Al.

CLAIRE LESSARD was an Administrative Assistant at St. Mary Parish for forty years. She considers these some of the best years of her life. "It was a time of inspiration and growth for me and I'm so happy that I was blessed to take part in the history of this wonderful parish."

CHRIS TERRELL first came to St. Mary's in the late '60s and early '70s as a child. "We'd travel from Connecticut to visit my grandparents in Lempster. Sunday Mass in Claremont was an important part of our week." It never crossed Chris' mind that, twenty-plus years later, she'd become a regular parishioner. "While the staff, the furnishings and the city have changed over time, the heart of St. Mary's remains the same," said Chris. "It is an oasis of reflection, faith, serenity and peace."

PEG and DON CHABOT were married in their hometown of Windsor, VT and moved to Claremont in 1969. Their son DJ was baptized at

Saint Mary's, followed by their daughter Michele. Don fondly remembers the church choir. "One of the best in the state at the time," said Don. The family was devoted to the church, so much so that daughter Michele had her twins baptized at Saint Mary's even though she was living over a hundred miles away in Boston. Peg and Don are impressed by the level of volunteer commitment that happens behind the scenes of every event. "They are the backbone of this church," said Peg. Don sees Saint Mary "as a vital and welcoming part of the Claremont community."

LORRAINE DION was born on Federal Street in Claremont. "As a kid, I practically lived in Barnes Park," she confessed. Baptized at Saint Mary's, Lorraine also made her first communion and confirmation there. Her schooling was at Saint Mary's School; her wedding at the church. Other than residing briefly in New Jersey, when her husband was drafted, Lorraine and her family have been right here in town with "Saint Mary's being home." Lorraine, a Catholic Daughter, volunteered for every activity at the church. "We were fortunate to be involved all our lives at Saint Mary's." Lorraine's daughter Diane was married at the Old Saint Mary Church. As for Lorraine, her 70th St. Mary High School reunion is coming up in 2024. "We still have twelve classmates out of twenty-six," Lorraine said. With a glow in her voice, Lorraine said she was, "very happy for her lifelong Saint Mary voyage."

Deeds

Continued from page 12

prepare youth for the sacraments. The R.C.I.A. guides adults into the Catholic faith. The Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Daughters of America organize fundraisers and events to help keep the parish going.

On Easter Sunday in 2014, the convent building, which was not in use, caught fire and was destroyed. The cause of the fire is still unknown.

In 2016, when Fr. George of St. Joseph Church died, Fr. Shawn saw to the welfare of that church as well. Not long after, Fr. Shawn was named Vicar General for the Diocese of Manchester.

In 2022, Rev. Maria Sebastian Susairaj was welcomed. Wasting no time, he designed a capital campaign for the restoration of the Central Street church. Fr. Sebastian also headed up the community's ten day celebration commemorating

the founding of Old Saint Mary Church. Folks from all areas and all faiths visited our state's first Catholic church, delighting in its serene and peaceful setting.

A Marian Prayer Group, which focuses on a deeper understanding of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, was begun. Men of St. Joseph was formed toward understanding his role as well, and how Joseph's example can be carried on today. Fr. Sebastian has seen to making the Adoration Chapel available again to 24 hour visits. He is also responsible and applauded for instituting International Dinners as a way of bringing parishioners and members of the community together in joy and fellowship.

Saint Mary Church offers a host of welcomers who are ready to answer questions and invite one and all in to establish or renew their faith.

The Eagle Times wishes to thank Steve Denis for his invaluable assistance in making this article possible.

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