

Brock Mission History

Including

**St. Malachy's Catholic Church
Vroomanton & Sunderland**

**St. Joseph's Catholic Church
Beaverton**

**St. Anthony's Catholic Church
Virginia**

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A HISTORY OF SAINT JOSEPH'S PARISH

BROCK MISSION

BEAVERTON, ONTARIO

MEMORIES OF THE PAST - HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The history of Brock Mission is dedicated to the original members of the parish of Brock Mission: St. Malachy's Church at Vroomanton, St. Joseph's Church, at Beaverton, and the Church of St. Anthony, at Virginia, who were influential in the formation of St. Joseph's Parish. The three churches within the confines of one parish has often been compared to St. Patrick and his teachings on the Holy Trinity and the shamrock.

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THIS IS WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Just east of the small hamlet of Vroomanton, on the eighth concession of Brock Township, there lies a small cemetery called St. Malachy's, with a designating sign, and a small cairn and plaque dedicated to the pioneers of the area, who are buried there.

However:- Turn the clock back "sixty-two years and it was a different story!

There was a flourishing Mission Church named for the Irish Saint Malachy on the site, and nearly a quarter of a century before that, a flourishing parish and rectory, serving eight townships: Brock, Georgina, Thorah, North Gwillimbury, Mara, Scott, Uxbridge and Reach. The boundaries extended from Port Perry and Uxbridge on the South, to Uptergrove on the North, and from the town line, now called Simcoe Street on the East, to Cook's Bay at Lake Simcoe on the West.

Vroomanton was established as the center of this Mission, because of the large number of Catholics in the area and for it's central location.

For every one hundred acres granted, the settlers were required to build a dwelling house sixteen by twenty feet, and to clear one half of the road allowance in front of each lot. This was to be done in the first two years of the date of arrival! The forest was almost unbroken, there were no roads, the Summers were unbearable, what with the heat and the mosquitoes, and the Winters were very severe, with impenetrable cold and much snow.

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The following is a listing of dates in chronological order, outlining events as they happened, in the history of Brock Mission and St. Joseph's Church, Beaverton.

1820 - 1840: The area was first administered from Kingston, Ontario, by Bishop McDonnall and by itinerant priests such as Father Dempsey, and Father Church from Toronto. Some of the priests, such as Father Gordon, are said to have crossed Lake Simcoe on the ice, so that they could tend to their flock.

1835:- A Land Grant was applied for and received for a piece of land at the now South East corner of Highway 12 and the Argyle Road, for the first St. Joseph's church.

1841: In this year, the Kingston Diocese was divided, and Reverend Michael Powers was appointed as the first Bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Toronto.

1843: From this time on, the area was administered to, by priests from the village of Whitby, quite possibly making the journey by train or horseback. Due to the distances involved, Mass would only be said once a month for each area.

One of these priests was Father Proulx, who was responsible for all Catholics residing in Ontario County. A legendary figure in missionary work, he went on to become the first Domestic Prelate in Toronto Diocese. One of the old stained glass windows in the present St. Joseph's Church, is dedicated to his memory.

1846: In 1846, Brock Mission received two acres of land from Mr. Sterling Pangman, on the eighth concession of Brock Township, just east of the village of Vroomanton, for a church, and an additional 1.5 acres was bought from Mr. Pangman, and another half acre was purchased from a Mr. Patrick Keenan. A frame church was built by Father Proulx around 1854. An acre of land was set aside for a cemetery, and the rest of the land reserved for a rectory, and as named after the Irish Saint Malachy, an Irish monk and Bishop of the twelfth century. The earliest gravestone is dated 1847 in the name of Doyle. There could be earlier ones, but the passage of time

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has all but obliterated any lettering, as well, some of the stones are broken and no date is visible. The first permanent resident pastor was Father John Walsh.

1853: At this point in time, the Church was built at Virginia, and a cemetery was established and dedicated to St. Anthony the Hermit. This served the people living in the Western area of the Parish.

1854: December 8th, 1854 a notice appeared in the Toronto Mirror, announcing that Mass would be said in the church in Brock.

1856: another item announced in the Toronto Mirror states that "we, the Catholics of Brock, have a spacious church and presbytery completed." So we know that the church was built by 1854 and the rectory by 1856. At the time of settlement, some of the names in the poll book were, Michael Keenan, John McNenly, Sterling Pangman, Michael & Patrick Malone, Arthur Kelly, Patrick O'Donnell, Charles Ward, Brian Martin, Wm. Curtin, James O'Brien, John Doyle. No doubt residents in St. Malachy's for these many years.

1856-1857: To the North, a church was needed in Beaverton, for which the Government had granted land in 1835. The first St. Joseph's Church was built in 1856-1857 on the Eastern portion of St. Joseph's Cemetery, on what is now the south-east corner of Highway #12 and Argyle Road. Father Walsh began the construction of the frame buildings, one in Virginia and one in Beaverton, but he had to resign because of ill health and so they were completed by Father Lee, who is also remembered in one of the stained glass windows at St. Joseph's. There is a replica of this first church on display above the confessional in the present church in Beaverton. We have been told on good authority, Mr. Millar McClorey, died December, 2002, that the wood in the present drive shed at St. Joseph's, was from the old frame church at the cemetery.

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1861:- The church was built at Port Perry, Boralia, and called Immaculate Conception.

1864:- The church was built at Uxbridge, and named in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

1870:- Soon after 1870, the size of Brock Mission was reduced by the removal of half of Mara Township to the North, and the removal of Scott, Uxbridge and Reach Townships to the south. This is confirmed by Parish records which indicate Brock Mission contained five churches in 1873 and only three in 1875.

Thus, from 1875 onward, our parish would no longer have an assistant priest, due to the decrease in revenue, and the shortage of priests, but would be served by one priest, the Pastor.

1881:- Father Francis Rohleder succeeded Father Braire, another name mentioned in the stained glass windows at Beaverton. Father Rohleder was a graduate of St. Michael's College, and was organist and conductor at the Cathedral. Father Fred, as he was called, taught many of the parishioners carpentry and gardening, the planting and also the grafting of fruit trees. The row of majestic mature maples along the edge of St. Malachy's Cemetery, are probably there due to his expertise. His knowledge was extensive and given to all with pleasure.

Father Rohleder was unable at the time to get the deed to the property for a new brick church at Virginia, but with perseverance, it was built eventually in the early 1900's under Father Michael Cline, who also built the brick church at St. Malachy's.

1901:- Toronto was made an Archdiocese.

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1901:- This is also the year when the first stone for the foundation of the brick church at St. Malachy's was laid. His Grace, Archbishop Dennis O'Connor officiated at this event. The Beaverton Express, Spring, 1901, contained the following announcement: Mass was said at St. Malachy's Church, every Sunday. Parishioners came by foot, horseback, and buggy, for this event. Joseph McEnery, born in 1905, and living in Kirkfield in his later years, served as an altar boy with Father Hayes, 1907-1913, Father Redmond, 1913-1918, and Father France, 1918-1936.

1903:- The brick church of St. Anthony the Hermit was completed. This church served the Western reaches of the Parish. Many of the pioneers of the area are resting in the adjacent cemetery.

1909:- Under the direction of Father Hayes, the Parish seat was moved to Beaverton. The rectory at St. Malachy's was in very poor condition, a new one was needed. Also, there ^{A STORY} was in the local history that had a great bearing on this move, Vroomanton was slated to become a railway town, but at the last minute, the decision was made to grant it to Blackwater, which meant that Vroomanton had no railway station, therefore anyone wishing to go to Toronto, had to first get to Beaverton to catch the train. (Msgr. O'Neill)

1909:-The brick church in Beaverton was built. Mr. Millar McClorey remembers as a small boy, being present at the blessing of the cornerstone, and recalling that he had never seen so many priests in one place.

1910:- The rectory of St. Joseph's Church was built next door to the church, these at 573 Simcoe Street, and as was said before, the driving shed behind the rectory was built with lumber from the frame church at the cemetery.

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For the next thirty years, St. Malachy's served as a mission church for the area around Sunderland.

But, on May 14th, 1942, when a caretaker was burning leaves, a spark became lodged in the wooden shingles, on the roof of the church, and St. Malachy's was gone in a few hours. The damage to the building was severe, and so the Pastor and the congregation decided that it was too badly damaged to be rebuilt, the walls were bulldozed into the open basement, it was filled in with dirt and rubble, covered with grass, and St. Malachy's was, as it was in the beginning, just level ground.

1950:- Sometime in the early "50's" the last part of Brock Mission was taken to make the parish in Sutton. This church was called The Immaculate Conception.

1952:- The St. Malachy's Church, for the next ten years, had Mass at the homes of parishioners in the area. Finally, in 1952, it was decided to build a small chapel under the direction of Father Joseph Murphy. It was also decided not to build at Vroomanton, the roads being what they were in Winter and Spring, it was too difficult for the parishioners to get through the mud and snow. Father Murphy wanted the new St. Malachy's to be seen by travellers passing on Highway #12, and so land was, as I understand it, donated by the Doyle family at the corner of Highway #12 and the 7th Concession on the northeasterly corner, for the new chapel to be built. The chapel was built for the sum of around \$500.00 and was chicken wire, with stucco on the outside and plaster on the inside. It was built by a contractor from Virginia, with volunteer labor, and was blessed by Bishop Robert Clune. There was no running water and no washroom. The windows and furnishings were donated by parishioners, and the brass plaques are on display in St. Joseph's Church, Beaverton.

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1966-1967:- St. Malachy's was closed for this period of time, due to the cost of upkeep, and the shortage of priests.

1967:- St. Malachy's was opened by Father Thomas McManus.

1979:- A new organ was purchased for St. Malachy's, by Father J. J. Mbyer, at a cost of \$700.00 and Mrs. Marg Bernier was hired as organist for the three churches.

1997:- Due to the low attendance at Masses, the journey down from Beaverton, especially in the winter, it was decided to close the chapel again for an indefinite time period.

2000:- Unfortunately, the church at St. Malachy's had fallen into disrepair, the basement walls were crumbling and falling in, the sump pump was not reliable, and it was felt for safety sake and for insurance liability reasons, it would be best to take the old chapel down. The sanctuary furnishings, the altar, the candle sticks, the lectern, the large votive candle, were all sent to the church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Port Perry, as they were burnt out a few months before. And so, it is fitting and with pleasure that the furnishings should still be in service, used in the parish that, long ago, was under the care of Brock Mission. So, at this time, there is no Church of St. Malachy, it is a name without a church, just a memory, but if you happen to go to Vroomanton one day, stop in and visit the old Cemetery. You will still be able to feel the spirit of the old pioneers there, the Nealons, the Doyles, who had Mass every week in their home, until the new chapel was built. There were the Coyles, the Curtins, who had the farm at the south-east corner of Ridge Road and #7 Highway, the Burnies, the Kays, the Novasels, who all worked so hard for the chapel, Bill McRoberts who walked up to open the church and put on the heat, every week, from Sunderland even though he was in his eighties, the Malones, the Kellys, Pilkingtons, McFaddens, McGriskins, Williamsons, O'Donnells, O'Briens, McLeans, Kelly & Lorene Tunstell. Kelly looked after the church at the last, and Lorene wrote the notes from which many useful facts were gleaned for this

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article. Ambrose Bernier built the cairn that stands on the place where the old brick church once stood, and he also helped out with the little chapel on the highway.

1991:- a rededication ceremony took place at the cemetery, Bishop Clune said Mass, on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in August, with many dignitaries present. Then a social time was enjoyed by all. It was the first time in forty-nine years, that Mass had been celebrated on the site.

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LIFE GOES ON

1909:- From now on, the activities of St. Joseph's Parish, centered around the town of Beaverton, and a new era began!

1945-1950:- This was the post war era and St. Joseph's experienced a great influx of people from Holland. Such hard working people, they were a real asset to the parish, and also to the community! Most of them are now retired, and a second generation have taken over the farms.

1950:- In this year, under the direction of Father Murphy, a council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada was formed in the Parish, with Mrs. Ann Walley as the first President. Meetings were held in the various homes, due to the large area of the Parish. This organization, with their motto "For God and Canada", flourished for fifty years, and leaves a very proud history of their accomplishments. Some of the Presidents were, Mrs. Ann Walley, Gertie Woodrow, Margaret CoMartin, Pauline Nealon, Sylvia Farrell, Agnes Pronk, Jenny Mitchell, Alma McDougall, Joanne Doucette, Barbara Rowe, Shirley Matt, Marg. Bernier, Sheila Adams, Jean Niccoli, Mary Halligan and more. Congratulations to all the presidents for all you have done to keep the organization going for fifty years.

Times were changing, and it became increasingly difficult for members to attend meetings, and so The Women's Auxiliary was formed to look after the needs of parish and pastor. Mrs. Marg Bernier was the last president of the C.W.L. so she took the position of chair for the auxiliary.

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1989:/ During the 1980's, a Council of the Knights of Columbus was started with David White as the first Grand Knight. Other Grand Knights have been Michael Scanlon, Jim McDougall, Karl Kappes, John Kearsley, Tom Adams, Robert Mahon and this organization has come forward to assist Father and the Parish also in many ways.

1980-1985:- During the time of Father Ouellette, a new vestibule was added to the church of St. Joseph's, which greatly added to the beauty of the church, and also served to keep the heat inside the church in the Winter. There was no main door to the basement, and only one antiquated washroom, and these problems were also resolved with the new addition.

EDUCATION:

1990:- This was a very important time for the parish, as it was this year that St. Joseph's opened Holy Family School in the parish. Before that, pupils were instructed in their religion first by the Sisters who came to Beaverton for two weeks in the Summertime, and then by certain parishioners who devoted their time and talent to holding instructions every week in their home. Mrs. Mary Duff conducted classes in Cannington, Mrs. Richard Barnard and Mrs. Marg. Bernier looked after the children living in Sunderland.

Under the guidance of Father Ouellette, he consolidated the classes all together in one place in the parish under Mrs. Barbara Martin.

For a short time, correspondence classes were tried, under Father Frank Skumavc, but these were not too successfull.

One other problem, was that at First Holy Communion and Confirmation time, the children from the northern area of the parish, received the sacraments at Brechin,

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AS THEY attended school there, the children who lived in the southern part, received the sacraments in Uxbridge, and the ones from the western region, received the sacraments in Sutton, at each place where they attended school.

1990:- In September of this year, Holy Family School became a reality, and our children were in their home parish. Mrs. Jean-Ann Ralph was the first Principal and Mrs. Jean Niccoli the first Secretary. Mr. Jerry Kavanagh was the first custodian. One of the original teachers, still teaches there, Miss Peggy McFadden. From these humble beginnings, Holy Family School was born. Classes were held in portables, the office and lunchroom was in the basement of the Church. Miss Mary Pat Hay, one of our parishioners, here at St. Joseph's Church, even composed a school song.

1996:- In this year, the brand new Holy Family School was opened in their own building. We now have a school that everyone is proud of, a school that is second to none. Congratulations to all who helped to make this facility what it is today.

When one thinks of the huge area that Brock Mission covered, it comes to mind that there certainly must have been more than one place that the priests of long ago would say Mass, and this also makes us realize the great number of people and families who have participated over the years in the formation of St. Joseph's from the parishioners of the Virginia area to the Sunderland area.

From Beaverton, we have the McRaes, the Farrells, the Lytles, the Martins, Bob and Martina Jones, Sam and Jean Niccoli, the Fiumes, Frances and Maurice Mangan, the McDougalls, Alma and Jim who are the proud parents of six sons, two of them in the military, Janny Mitchell, the Coxworths, the list goes on and on.

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From the Virginia area, we have Len and Dorothy Matt, who received the Mene Merenti medal for their work of over sixty years at St. Anthony's Church, Dorothy as sacristan and Len as caretaker of the church and cemetery. We have Jim and Shirley Matt, the LaViolette's, and the Charpentier's, Andy and Lillian O'Neill, the Pilkingtons, Denis and Theresa Salt, Denis being the organist and Theresa as sacristan since Dorothy's passing, the Ritchies, the Woodrow Family, the Griffon family, the Sherwoods, the O'Neills, the Sedors, the Doyles and the O'Briens, the Prossers and so many more.

VOCATIONS:- A history of the parish would not be complete without a listing of some of the vocations that have come from this old parish.

The Lytle family had two daughters who entered the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy. The Greenwood family of Virginia had two daughters in the convent. Sister St. Omar, and Sister Mary David. The Kea family had a son, Father Henry, who was a Redemptorist priest, and although he was educated and ordained in Holland, his mother and father and siblings emigrated to Canada, and he considered Canada his home.

Father Charles VanItem said his first Mass at St. Joseph's, although his parents were in Holland, he was ordained in Canada.

From the Virginia area we have the Prosser family, who had a son a priest, from the Sunderland area we had the Doyle family, who had many daughters in the Grey Nuns.

If there are some names we have missed, it is only because we do not have the details. The Teefy's and the Curtins of Sunderland both had priests in their families.

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And so, with this small history, we have brought Brock Mission, the Virginia area, and St. Joseph's Parish, Beaverton, up over one hundred and fifty years, into the twenty-first century, and have tried to acquaint you to some of the families and individuals who have contributed and shared in bringing the parish into the present time.

We trust that God will continue to bless our parish with many vocations and blessings into the future, as he has in the past, so that the "Faith of our Fathers" will continue to flourish in this beautiful part of Ontario!

Many thanks to: Lorene Tunstell, A Brief History of Brock Mission.
The Beaverton Story, Harvest of Dreams,
Mr. Millar McCrorey, (1900-2000)
Mrs. Marg Bernier, A History of St. Joseph's Parish,
Remembrances and memories of people in the Community.

The Pastors at Brock Mission were:

Rev. John Walsh	1854-1857	Rev. Jos. Murphy	1947-1952
Rev. John Lee	1857-1860	Rev. Art. McMahon	1952-1955
Rev. Louis Braire	1860-1881	Rev. V. McGivney	1955-1956
Rev. F. Rohleder	1881-1891	Rev. Jos. H. O'Neill	1956-1964
Rev. Pat Kiernan	1891-1894	Rev. John Buckley	1964-1967
Rev. Chas. Cantillon	1894-1900	Rev. Thos. J. McManus	1967-1979
Rev. Michael Cline	1900-1907	Rev. J. J. Moyer	1979-1980
Rev. James Hayes	1907-1913	Rev. Robt. Outlette	1980-1985
Rev. Thos. Redmond	1913-1918	Rev. Franc Skumavc	1985-1997
Rev. Geo. France	1918-1936	Rev. Bernard Canning	1997-1998
Rev. F. J. Flanagan	1936-1942	Rev. Chas. Faleiro	1998-1999
Rev. Thos. Toomey	1942-1947	Rev. Wilf. Lenius	1999-2010

REV. OSWIN FERNANDES 2010-