



Marker Text

Side one:

Congregation founded 1836, serving Irish who immigrated to area to work on construction of Wabash and Erie Canal, 1834-1837. Many Irish bought land and stayed as permanent residents using their religious and cultural interests to build Lagro, originally platted 1834, into a thriving trade center.

Side two:

Church dedicated first building 1838; used for activities until razed in 1960s. This brick structure, built 1870-1873, designed in Victorian Gothic Style; original bell still in use. Brick made in Huntington and Lagro. Features include hand-carved altars and statues, stained glass windows, and oak and walnut curved stairway. Listed in National Register of Historic Places 1999.

Report

The marker text lacks context, leaving the reader with a number of questions. However, this marker certainly meets the current guidelines for state and national significance due to the economic impact upon the state. The Irish immigrants who came to Indiana to dig the canals, stayed and helped settle early Indiana. The resulting canals provided the creation of hundreds of businesses and Hoosier products which were sent beyond the borders of the state.

I have found nothing to suggest the congregation was founded in 1836. Karen Oddi, archivist at the Archdiocese of Indianapolis states in her email, "I have searched our file unsuccessfully for anything that might be considered a primary document for establishing the foundation date for St. Patrick's at Lagro."¹ She then refers to Bishop Herman J. Alerding's book, *The Diocese of Fort Wayne* in which he gives the year of 1838 as the founding of the parish.² The History of the Catholic Church in Indiana states, "... no church records have been preserved before the year 1846. . ."³ Another secondary source, *History of Wabash County* states, "The church was fairly founded when, in 1838, Thomas Fitzgibbon, one of the canal contractors, donated two lots for church purposes and a frame house of worship was erected."⁴ A small booklet was published for the church's sesquicentennial anniversary. The title gives the dates as 1838-1988.⁵ The only source for the 1960 date of the old church being razed is the sesquicentennial.⁶ Newspaper articles must exist.

The church's baptismal records prove the church did serve a large Irish congregation who had immigrated to area to work on the canal. The 1850 census confirms the large number of Irish living in Lagro. In their 1833 report, canal commissioners state they recruited men in Boston and New York and that many Irish



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were hired.⁷ Lagro received a post office on May 17, 1834.⁸ Lagro was platted in 1834.⁹ According to secondary sources, Lagro actually surpassed Wabash in business.¹⁰ A look at the Wabash and Erie Canal records and the tolls collected might substantiate the text.

Most aforementioned sources give the date as 1838 as the first church being built. Since records of the church before 1846 are missing, there is no primary source to determine the actual date.¹¹ According to the Alerding's history, it was Rev. Matthew E. Champion, who from August 3, 1868 until October 1, 1873 built the present church.¹² The architectural style is Victorian Gothic.¹³ There are no primary sources that prove the bricks were made at Huntington or Lagro. According to Alerding, "Rev. John Grogan, from October 1, 1873, until March 1, 1882, who placed oak pews in the church, a stairway to the gallery, a most ornamental communion railing of black walnut, a handsome pulpit, confessional, baptismal font, and , besides all this, had the church frescoed. The total cost of the church with furnishings was more than 20,000, all cash paid.¹⁴ The church was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999.¹⁵

Additional Sources

J. [Jessie] L. Williams, "Report of the Principal Engineer to the State Board of Internal Improvement," December 5, 1837, *Documents of the House of Representatives at the Twenty-second Session of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis, Bolton and Livingston, 1838) p. 1. Report states, "At the date of my last annual report, that portion extending from Huntington to La Fontain's Creek was nearly completed . . . on the 4th of July boats were passed as far west as the town of Wabash. . ."

Alice McNarney Gray, *Records of St. Patrick Cemetery, Lagro, Indiana* (August 1, 1846-April 15, 1883). The cemetery records clearly show that many Irish settlers are buried in the church cemetery.

V. Frederika Van Buskirk, *Wabash and Erie Canal, 1832-1876: With Emphasis on the Lagro Locks*

Glen A. Blackburn, Comp., *John Tipton Papers 1809-1827*, V. 1 (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Bureau, 1942)

Glen A. Blackburn, Comp., *John Tipton Papers 1834-1839* (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Bureau, 1942, Vol. 3

Dorothy Riker, Ed., *Messages and Papers Relating to the Administration of David Wallace, Governor of Indiana 1837-1840* (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Bureau, 1963)

Links

Canal Society of Indiana, accessed <http://www.indcanal.org/>



¹ Oddi to IHB, February 7, 2013, email.

² Most Reverend Herman J. Alerding, *Diocese of Fort Wayne, 1857-September 1907: a book of historical reference, 1669-1907* (Fort Wayne, Archer Print Co., 1907) pp. 208-10. "Lagro has no church records prior to 1846 . . . It was in 1838, when Thomas Fitzgibbon donated two lots, and a frame church, 30x40 feet was erected."; *Wabash County, Index to Deeds, 1835-1853*. Ind. 1-085B-1. A quick search of Wabash deed records for that year does show a Thomas Fitzgibbon owning and selling property in Lagro. I could not find a reference to St. Patrick's, nor could I find he was donating land to the church. A more extensive search might find something.

³ Col. Charles Blanchard, Ed. And Comp., *History of the Catholic Church in Indiana* (Logansport, A.W. Bowen & Co., 1898), pp. 347-49. Blanchard states, "The spiritual wants called upon the attention of several missionary priests; and although no church records had been preserved in LaGro before the year 1846, nevertheless the place had been visited occasionally by some pioneer priests-mostly French-at least during the preceding years."

⁴ Clarkson W. Weesner, *History of Wabash County Indiana: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests* (Chicago, Lewis Publishing Co., 1914

⁵ *Sesquicentennial Anniversary 1838-1988, Saint Patrick's Church, Lagro, Indiana*. Provides a great deal of history of the church and although there are no footnotes, many full dates are given which provide further research.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷ Alice McNarney Gray, *Baptismal Records, May 24, 1846-August, 1973, St. Patrick Church, Largo, Indiana and Surrounding Communities, Genealogy Division, Indiana State Library*. The records show many Irish being baptized in the church.; *1850 United State Federal Census*, Lagro, Wabash Indiana; Roll: M432_178; Page: 317A; Image: 46. Census has page after page of Lagro citizens from Ireland.; "Report of the Commissioners of the Wabash and Erie Canal," December 24, 1833, *Journal of the Senate of the State of Indiana, During the Eighteenth Session*, (Indianapolis, Douglas and McGuire, 1833) pp. 137-38. Report states, "In May and April, it appeared difficult, if not impracticable for the Canal Contractors to procure the requisite number of hands to carry on the work, with sufficient rapidity to insure its completion within the stipulated time . . . The price of labour had so advanced that many of the contractors informed the Commissioners that they could not finish more than one section of their jobs, and would be compelled to abandon the others . . . [The Commissioners] directed Mr. Lewis to proceed to Buffalo and other places in New York, to hire and when necessary, pay the passage and expenses of the requisite number of hands for the canal line . . . A number of Irish and German Emigrants were brought to the canal. . . ."; Report *Journal of the Senate of the State of Indiana, During the Twentieth Session*, # 18 (Indianapolis, Bolton and Emmons, 1835) David Burr's detailed report of the Irish riot on July 12, 1835 near Lagro, Indiana. Over six-hundred Irish were involved.



⁸ Nellie Armstrong, Dorothy Riker, Eds., *John Tipton Papers*, V. 3 (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Bureau, 1942) p. 54.

⁹ *Tipton*, V. 3, Elias Murray to Tipton, August 9, 1834, p. 70; “The plat of Largo is recorded in the Huntington County Deed Records. It is not dated.” p. 71, fn. 38.

¹⁰ *Tipton*, Vol. 3. , pp. 197-98, Elias Murray to Tipton, January 1, 1836. “Lagro is the best market between Logansport & the Lake-it is much better than Fort Wayne. It is almost daily full of Waggons loaded with produce & and most of the pork lands here first.”; Weesner, 415-16.; Fatout, 130. “Lagro set a record for shipments of whiskey, over 5,000 barrels at the peak.”

¹¹ See footnotes 2 and 5.

¹² Alerding, p. 209.

¹³ “St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, February 1, 1999.

¹⁴ Alerding, 209.

¹⁵ “St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, February 1, 1999.