

The History of Saint Barbara Parish

1867-2017

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Saint Barbara our Patroness

Since our church originated when mining was a flourishing industry, it seemed appropriate to make St. Barbara, patroness of miners, our patron saint.

Her 11ft. statue constructed of limestone stands in front of the school. It was presented to Fr. Reichlin in June of 1953 by Fr. Hilary A. Zwisler, the previous pastor, as a gift to our parish community.

Church history tells us that St. Barbara was a young virgin and martyr of the early church (approximately 235 A.D.). According to legend, she was the daughter of Dioscorus, a rich heathen who lived during the reign of Emperor Maximian. Dioscorus wanted her to marry one of the young men of Maximian's court, but she refused.

During her father's absences, she lived in a tower. Once to help explain the theory of the Trinity, Barbara had three windows built in to a bathhouse he was having constructed. When her father returned and found what she had done, he took her to the provincial prefect because he didn't want to appear harsh in punishing her. The prefect ordered her to be tortured and tried to get Barbara to give up her beliefs in Jesus, but she refused. Dioscorus took her up a mountain and tried to get her to recant her beliefs. She refused again and her father killed her. As he came down from the mountain, he was struck by lightning and reduced to ashes.

The exact area of St Barbara's death is uncertain—cities in Egypt and Syria , and places in Antioch and Rome having been named for her. She is patroness of miners, artillerymen, architects, prisoners, and stonemasons. St. Barbara is invoked against thunderstorms, fire, lightning and sudden death. Her emblems are a tower, palm, chalice and a cannon. Relics of St. Barbara are in both Burano, Italy and Kief Russia .

G.K. Chesterton celebrates her in the poem, "The Ballad of St. Barbara" There is also a large metal plaque erected on a parapet at Del Morro Castle in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico inscribed: St. Barbara, Patroness of Artillerymen.

St. Barbara's feast day is December 4th and the Byzantine Rite still honors her on this date.



Reverend Peter Goebbels & schoolchildren during the early 1890's.

As we celebrate Jubilee 2000, it seems appropriate to look back to our beginnings and honor our predecessors. We extend our praise and gratitude to these pioneers whom with fervor, prudence and sacrifice founded our Christian Community, and to those who followed them.

In the middle of the last century, long before steel dominated the industry in our area, men worked in the local coalmines. The great exodus of families from Europe and the British Isles in the early decades of the nineteenth century furnished Massillon and surrounding communities with the sturdy men needed for that type of work. Some of these men, mainly German, settled with their families in West Brookfield close to their jobs. Many had emigrated from Alsace Lorraine, an area located between France and Germany and north of Switzerland , which contained a high percentage of

Roman Catholics. Natives of Wuerttemberg, Baden and Bavaria , all in Germany , also came to West Brookfield . At that time, St. Mary's Massillon was the only Catholic Church. The difficulties of distance, conveyance and inclement weather had to be met and constantly endured if our ancestors were to practice their religion. No doubt, these conditions played a major role in the founding of St. Barbara's Parish.

There is an old record extant which reads as follows: "In January 1866 the Catholics of West Brookfield met, that with the permission of the Right Rev. Bishop of Cleveland Amadeus Rappe, and under God's protection and help, they might build a small Roman Catholic Church". It is further recorded that 33 families were represented at this meeting and that each family subscribed from \$50 to \$100 toward the establishment of a parish church.

The building committee consisted of Andrew Blantz, Fred Blantz, John Kraft, George Ertle and Martin Ertle as the secretary. The other families represented in this group of 33 were John Blantz, Henry Brand, John Borell, Bartholomew Bessler, Casper Dalheimer, Philip Dalheimer, Valentine Gresser, Magnus Hammer, Simon Hammer, Franziska Hock, Hilary Kern, Xavier Kern, Matthias Marks, John Nelson, Andrew Paul, Joseph Paul, Peter Paul, Jacob Paul, Sr., Joseph Paul, Sr., Frank Ritzka, Christian Reichert, Peter Schroeder, Jacob Shapuite, William Sibila, Philip Sonnhalter, George Sonnhalter and August Yohn. Many among our present parishioners take pride in being direct descendents of a number of these stalwart souls.

The pioneers of St. Barbara understood the ancient tradition of Catholic education and, being faithful to it, in 1866 their first project was to found a parochial school -- a donated old wagon shop. The first teacher was Elizabeth Pirrong of Canton .

When the school was completed the building committee set about to consider acquiring a church and cemetery. The Blantz and Kern families donated an acre of land as a site for this purpose. A 36ft. by 68 ft. church was constructed on the northwest end of the site, and the southeast end served as the cemetery. Valentine Gresser's burial, the first recorded, occurred the summer of 1867.

Area residents, both Catholic and non-Catholic, donated much of the material and labor for construction. Men of the parish cut timber and hauled it to East Greenville where it was prepared at little cost. Abe Meyers, a carpenter, directed the erection of the church. Parish stone masons, seeking no financial compensation, donated material and labor for the laying of the foundation of the church. A public bazaar was also held netting nearly \$1,000 toward the purchase of materials.

The building work was completed about October 1867, with the total cost for the new church put at approximately \$3,000, including furnishings and vestments. Dedication took place December 19, 1867, and the church was placed under the protection of St. Barbara, patroness of miners.



Interior of the new church during the early 1900's.

Rev. George Verlet, pastor of St. Joseph church, Massillon became the first pastor of St. Barbara Parish. West Brookfield was to be his mission church. For about two years, services were held one Sunday a month and later twice a month. About 1869, Fr. Verlet offered the first High Mass and made this a monthly practice. In 1871, a one-room frame building was erected in front of the church to replace the old wagon shop, which had served as a school for five years. This humble building was to serve the parish faithfully for twenty years.

Several priests were given the responsibility of our parish during the following years. Our ancestors must have been strongly in favor of a resident pastor for, without permission of Bishop Gilmour, they built a rectory. Rev. John Kleekamp was assigned as the first resident pastor in 1881.

From time to time, the parish reverted to mission status. Nevertheless, improvements continued. The sanctuary was enlarged and sacristies were added to the rear of the building. In 1891, Rev. Peter Goebbels came and had the task of increasing the size of the school. The old one-room school constructed in 1871 was moved to the rear of church property and a new two-story frame school building was erected at a cost of \$1,600. The original school building served later as the humble residence of Francis X. Feurstein, a teacher well known at the parish. Fr. Goebbels did not live to enjoy the best fruits of his labor. Three years later, in October 1894, the congregation was saddened by his death. He was buried in our cemetery among the people who loved him.

The church was damaged considerably by lightning in June 1896, but the loss was insured and provided funds for remodeling of the structure. In the early 1900's, additional land was purchased from Kate Kern for cemetery expansion.

It is evident that each pastor strove not only to improve the spiritual life of the parish, but also to expand the parish complex. In 1922, Fr. Hilary Zwisler became pastor of St. Barbara and, in May the following year, the site of the present school was purchased from the Joseph Paul Estate. The brick school was built in 1923 at the estimated cost of \$57,000. Mr. Kohl, of Cleveland, was the architect; and the building contract was given to Minehart Company, of Massillon. The school was finished in 1924 and it was dedicated on May 25th of that year.

With the beautiful new school gracing the property, the old school was sold and moved to a new location off parish grounds. The sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary assumed the teaching of St.

Barbara School . Also in 1924, the site for a convent was purchased from the Kraft Estate and the Kraft home was remodeled serving as the sister's convent in the interim.

West Brookfield was incorporated into Massillon in 1927, and the parish figured in the public utility improvements extending to the area.

In July 1928, Rev. Zwislser was succeeded by Rev. Joseph L. Reichlin, who had the distinction of serving the parish longer than any other pastor to-date-- a total of 33 years. He also became the dean of the Massillon clergy. Inheriting a heavy indebtedness, Fr. Reichlin, with characteristic energy, immediately set out to put the parish "in the black". The struggle promised to be most difficult.

The great depression that began in 1929 made itself felt here as elsewhere. The parish was burdened with a debt of \$51,000. Just to meet the yearly interest of over \$3,000 was a gigantic task since few of the 120 families had regular work, and more than one half were receiving aid from the local relief organization. Be it said to the credit of the pastor and his people that not once did they fail to meet their financial obligations. St. Barbara parish succeeded by dint of hard work, frequent parties, festivals, and bazaars. They even redecorated the church during one of the bleakest years, 1933. Throughout the entire period, they bore the expense of operating a bus so that children living at a distance might enjoy the benefit of the parish school. Meanwhile, improvements and repairs were never neglected and most of this work was donated by the men of the parish.

In 1930, the Lincoln Highway was paved and sidewalks laid. To enhance these improvements, the front lawns of the church were terraced and additional shrubbery planted.

When St. Barbara celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1942, the parish debt was \$7,000. This was partly due to successful refinancing, by reducing the interest rate from 6% to 4%. Fr. Reichlin had gone to Our Mother of Perpetual Help for aid in such great burdens and, in gratitude for her assistance, had introduced weekly Novena devotions in her honor.

This was a grand time for celebrating jubilees: The Parish, its Diamond (75th); the Altar Society, its Diamond (75th); St. Peter Society, its Golden (50th), and the pastor his silver (25th).

When Bishop James A. McFadden was named bishop of the newly created Youngstown Diocese in 1943, he appointed Fr. Reichlin to assist him in organizing the diocese. In 1944, the entire parish debt was wiped out. St. Barbara's first assistant priest, Rev. John P. Gallagher, was assigned to the parish in 1948 and remained until 1951 when Fr. Joseph Czaja was assigned.

The cornerstone of the present modern brick church was laid October 14, 1951, by Bishop Emmet M. Walsh. The Gothic style church seated 500 and served 350 families. The new church measured 132 ft. by 46 ft. by 30 ft. at a cost of \$136,000. Bishop Walsh dedicated the church on November 16, 1952 and, during the dedication word was received of the death of Bishop McFadden.

Before the new church was constructed, the old white frame church was moved to a back portion at the left of parish grounds. In its new location, it served as a site for parish recreational activities and meetings and later classes were conducted there. It was known then as Crusader Hall.

A limestone statue of St. Barbara (Msgr. Zwislser's gift to the people of his former parish) was erected in front of the school and was blessed in June 1953.

Rev. John W. Schmidt was named assistant in 1956 and remained until 1963.

In spring 1961, the planned modern brick convent was built under the direction of Msgr. Reichlin. Construction cost was \$100,000 and it accommodated twelve nuns.

On April 27, 1961 Msgr. Reichlin was named a domestic prelate, and on May 23rd of that year he died in his sleep. He was buried in the parish cemetery. Rev. Edward C. Gallagher succeeded him in June 1961, and in 1963 Rev. Robert Coleman arrived as the assistant.

In January 1965, Fr. John Daum was named as the newly appointed pastor. He didn't know at the time that he would spend one half of his priesthood, 19 years, in this growing Massillon parish. Later that year, he received a new assistant, Fr. John Nentwick. It was also in '65 that Fr. Daum attended the closing of the 2nd Vatican Council in Rome .

In 1966, the ground breaking ceremony took place for a new administration building and an eight-room school addition and social hall. These would be constructed at an approximate cost of \$460,000 as part of St. Barbara's 13-acre complex.

Work was begun in spring 1969 for a number of church improvements. Two white marble altars with gold strands were ordered from Italy to replace our wood altars. The main altar was placed near the congregation and weighed-in at 3,000 pounds. A new bronze tabernacle and pendant sanctuary lamp were also installed. A carved wood statue of the holy family executed in Oberamergau , Germany was placed at the site of St. Joseph 's altar along with a marble ambo (pulpit). All of these beautiful improvements were fondly donated by parishioners in honor of their loved ones. Drywall paneling was installed and carpeting and electrical fixtures were added.

Fr. Daum celebrated his 25th year in the priesthood in 1970, and the parish presented him with a purse that enabled him to take a European trip on a luxury liner. Fr. John Humphrey came as an assistant in July 1971. From 1973 to 1977, Fr. Robert P. Barrett was in residence to assist Fr. Daum -- no associates were named during that time.

In November 1976, our parish sent a team of men to St. Paul , North Canton , to prepare for "Christ Renews His Parish" renewal weekends. Early in 1977, the first men's weekend was held at St. Barbara. In September of '77, the first women's group trained at St. Paul 's for their initial week-end, which was held in January 1978. Renewals were held regularly through October of 1982 and were a great source of religious awakening and parish zeal. Rev. Lou Santucci was named associate at St. Barbara in August 1977 and remained until June 1983. Both he and Fr. Daum worked diligently at these ongoing renewals, which often included non-Catholics and members from other parishes not offering this inspiring program.

In March 1982, the Parish Outreach Program began at St. Barbara. The core team was trained by Sr. Eileen Wentzel from Catholic Charities. Visitations were made to parishioners and house meetings were held. At these meetings major concerns of the parish were formulated and addressed. St. Barbara's Outreach Assembly was held in January 1983 with the theme, "Together We Can Build Community". Resolutions were made at the Assembly to aid the youth, senior members and shut-ins of the parish, and the needy of the neighborhood.

In July 1983, Fr. William Shipe came as an associate. The summer of 1984 brought the retirement of Fr. Daum. Father moved to the rectory of St. Joan of Arc parish where he resides at this time. Following his retirement, the Crusader Hall was renamed "Father Daum Hall" in honor of Fr. Daum and his contributions to the parish. That same month Rev. James McKarns joined us as the new pastor. In June 1986, Fr. Shipe assumed duties in another parish, and since then no associates have been assigned to share the clergy responsibilities at St. Barbara.

However, in 1986 Rev. Dacian Barrette came to live in residence at our rectory after retiring from St. Anthony parish in Canton . He had previously been a Brother of Christian Instruction at Walsh College before joining the priesthood.

The parish hired its first pastoral minister in 1987. Sister Jane McDowell came in July and served in that capacity for 4 years. In June 1991, Sr. Jane was succeeded by Mrs. Marcia Popovich, a member of our parish. At this time, Nick Orazi retired and was honored as our faithful organist of many years.

We would be very remiss in this history if we neglected to pay tribute to the blue nuns and their contribution to our parish. The Sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary, were founded in Nancy France, in 1854 and the group emigrated to America in 1864. The sisters serving here dedicated their lives to

instilling the love of God and proper Christian values in us and our children. Besides schooling, they instructed us in the sacraments, choir, prepared our devotions, and performed innumerable acts of kindness and hospitality to those in need of spiritual or material help. May God be thanked for permitting these blessed women to live among us and share our lives.

In 1990, the Planning Committee was formed under the direction of Fred Berens to study the future needs of St. Barbara Parish. With Fr. McKarns' concern for input from parishioners, a survey was conducted and the committee worked with the list of parish needs to develop a plan for renovation and expansion. With Fred as architect, the group developed drawings for the major construction.

On Sunday, October 25, 1992, we celebrated the 125th Anniversary of St. Barbara Parish. A Concelebrated Mass began the day's events with the Most Rev. Benedict C. Franzetta, auxiliary Bishop of Youngstown. The celebration dinner and program followed that afternoon at the Massillon Knights of Columbus Hall.

Spring of 1993 brought a change in parish leadership. After being involved in the extensive planning for the enlarged church, Fr. McKarns received news from the bishop of his transfer to St. Paul , North Canton , in July 1993. A reception was held in his honor on Sunday, July 11th. We were very fortunate to have his leadership and guidance for nine years. Father's homilies were a strong source of direction as we faced life's challenges, and thankfully, we can still draw from his wellspring of knowledge through the many books he continues to author.



Fr. Thomas Cebula

Our new pastor, Fr. Thomas Cebula (a Canton native), came to us from St. Pius X in Warren , and previously served at Massillon St. Mary's. With Fr. Cebula's entrance, came a new wave of parish activity. Not only did he enthusiastically join in the Second Century Building Program, but also continues to support the spiritual renewal of our parish.

In early summer 1993, McCarthy and Associates of Chicago had been hired to run our building campaign. Using the theme "Our Second Century, The Tradition Continues," the parish initiated the fund raising phase for enlarging our church. The general drive commenced in mid-September shortly after Fr. Cebula's arrival. It ran for six weeks with the assistance of many teams of parish volunteers.

The estimate for the renovation and expansion was \$1,100,000. In 1993, the parish also anticipated some of the labor, materials and services might be provided by our parishioners -- since many are in the construction and building trades.

The Second Century Ground Breaking Ceremony was held Sunday, April 17, 1994. Bishop James Malone, Father Cebula, former pastors, state and local dignitaries and contractors joined with the parish to celebrate this event. Fred Berens was named project manager of the building and oversaw all construction and renovation.

As demolition work and the new construction began, Mass was held in the remaining section of the church. This reduced area would not accommodate all of our people and an additional Sunday Mass was scheduled for nearly a year. We should also gratefully acknowledge that the pastors of both St. Joseph's and St. Mary's graciously offered their churches for our parishioners' weddings.

On December 17, 1994, St. Barbara Parish received its first permanent deacon, Thomas E. Hughes. He immediately began his ministry here and we thank Deacon Hughes for his commitment to us and our Christian Community.

The parish recognized two other celebrations affecting our clergy and nuns. Sr. Genevieve Burke celebrated her Golden Jubilee as a Sister of Humility of Mary. She was honored with a special Mass and reception on Sunday, May 22, 1994. Our pastor emeritus, Fr. John J. Daum, celebrated his Golden Jubilee as a priest in May 1995.

The Feast of Pentecost, Sunday, June 4, 1995 saw the celebration of the rite of leave taking and entry into our new worship space. After this first Mass in our new church, many of the parishioners continued the celebration at a spaghetti dinner held in the school cafeteria. This meal was prepared by our junior high youth, assisted by their parents. It also included a short program in which the Youth Group presented Fr. Cebula with \$500 they raised toward the building fund.

In an era when many Catholic schools are closing their doors, our parish school continues to prosper. Back in September 1975, St. Barbara launched the first Catholic School Kindergarten in Massillon. With the cooperation of parish families, the first class opened with 27 students -- some of them from other parishes. In 1986 our school, one of only two schools in Stark County and one of 19 throughout Ohio, was honored in the National Elementary School Recognition Program. School enrollment continues to hold steady with projections of increasing enrollment due to extensive residential development on the westside of Massillon.

More recently, a Parish Mission Committee was established to examine our purpose and goals as a faith community. The Bereavement Ministry was formed to offer support and consolation at the time of a family death. Lay leaders of prayer have been commissioned. R.C.I.A. is adding many new members to St. Barbara's Christian Community. Fr. Cebula was so impressed with Msgr. Reichlin holding novenas to Our Mother of Perpetual Help for debt retirement in the early 1940s that he reinstated this weekly devotion and placed the Second Century building program under her patronage.

Scanning 133 years of history was a momentous, arduous task, but the progress made since our parish ancestors held their first committee meeting is even more mind boggling. We can never repay them for laying down such healthy roots in American soil, but we can look ahead toward the Twenty-First Century and see again the men and women of St. Barbara giving time, talent and treasure to continue the dreams of ages past and making our expansion of our parish church and school a reality.

The building project logged countless volunteer hours, and the talents of many skilled craftsmen were used to advantage. Parish businessmen volunteered their services and equipment and they continue to do so with the present construction of a new four-classroom addition to our school.

The formal dedication of the church took place on Sunday, September 17, 1995. Bishop James Malone presided at the special Mass of Dedication, laying of the cornerstone and setting the time capsule. A Parish Celebration Dinner followed at the Massillon K of C Hall. 1995 saw other developments. The parish began a census of its membership and Pastoral care ministers were selected to visit the homebound and sick of the parish. Vince Ambrosetti, liturgist, composer and pianist/vocalist held a mission in November. The last night of the program we published the parish mission statement as follows: "We the Christian Community of St. Barbara Parish, are united in our solid Catholic Faith and Tradition. We strive to live out our baptismal call through service to our members and God's people. Through support and education, we shall nurture spiritual growth, at all

ages, while promoting a strong foundation for our values and beliefs. Joyfully, we go forth, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.”

In order to better educate our Parish Community the Little Rock Bible Study began in January 1996 and continues today to be a successful program. In July of the same year the parish welcomed Rose Naegeli as Youth Ministry Coordinator. Rose divides her time between our youth and those of St. Philip and James Parish in Canal Fulton. September saw the beginning of Eucharistic Adoration, a 24 hour period of prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It begins on Thursday morning and ends on each first Friday morning. A farewell reception was given for Deacon Tom Hughes who accepted a position in Atlanta , Georgia . After being secretary and office manager for over 23 years Marianne Jurkovich retired the end of 1996. She was succeeded by Marylou Hefling. Marylou, in turn, was succeeded by Linda Anderson in early 1999.

Our Parish Minstrel was last held in the spring of 1997 under the direction of Fred Berens. Since its inception in 1967, our parishioners have entertained audiences for 30 years. The minstrel was later discontinued, but there is strong sentiment to re-establish this fine musical tradition in our parish.

When the church was completed, work was begun to renovate the former convent for apartment dwellings. In April 1997 the Barbara House Apartments had an open house and was converted to five apartments for senior adults. Also in April of 1997 we extended a farewell to Marcia Popovich who had been our parish Pastoral Minister for 6 years. She left to join the Poor Clare Nuns of Perpetual Adoration at Sancta Clara Monastery in Canton and was succeeded by Pauline Brady. Marcia returned to us a year later. 1997 also saw the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers Program begin at St. Barbara's under the direction of Agnes Peters with special emphasis placed on volunteer work and service to the elderly in our community. In December the parish purchased an Allen Renaissance Organ and later, in early 1998, held a concert in celebration of this blessing.

The spring of 1998 saw the opening of our Parish Library and Media Center to the parish community. In October of that year the Memorial to the Unborn was dedicated as a fitting tribute to all the unborn children and a statement of our parish community's belief in the right to life.

In March of 1999 we welcomed the arrival of Lou Centric from St. Philip and James Parish in Canal Fulton as our newly ordained permanent deacon. We also celebrated Sister Genevieve Burke on the occasion of her 25 years service and ministry at St. Barbara, her 75th birthday, and her 55th year in the order of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary.

In July of 1999 a seminarian, Kevin McCaffrey, came to join us for a year of internship and pastoral experience. He soon began the undertaking of our parish census and saw it to completion.

Our school has continued to grow over the years. Back in 1990, a School Development Fund was initiated to meet future challenges and build resources for the school's continued operation. In 1995, the school staff, under the leadership of our principal Mrs. Gloria Woronka, began an Auction of Treasures to subsidize the school income. Also in 1995 a pre-school was added and by 1999 we are maintaining two full day kindergartens and an after school program. It is expected that by the fall of 2000 a new four-classroom addition to the school will be ready for use.



Aerial View of St. Barbara's

The parish community of St. Barbara continues to receive many blessings and we look to the new millennium to grow and prosper in the name of Jesus Christ. One of the greatest gifts we can continue to give our children, the generation to follow, is an example of service to our God and our Church . . . St. Barbara.



The Innocent Victims of Abortion Memorial

In Loving Memory Of The Innocent Victims Of Abortion

Dedicated To The Sanctity Of Life