

CULTURAL MOMENT

Saint Mary of the Purification Roman Catholic Church

Mount Forest



The site where St. Mary of the Purification Roman Catholic Church stands today was purchased by Father Holzer in 1861. Construction of the church was initiated in 1863 but Father Holzer did not live to see it completed. He suffered from a stroke in January 1864, and died the same year. Father Mahuet served the parish when the church was dedicated on February 1, 1865. The church was designed in the Gothic Revival style, characterized by elongated windows in the Gothic arch form.

On August 14, 1902, a fire caused considerable damage to the original church. At the time of the fire, the current priest, Father O'Connell, was in Rome. The church burned but the origin of the fire was not definitely determined. One possibility was the furnace, but there was no fire in it at the time. A second possibility was an incendiary, but there was no proof of this. The third possible cause, which seemed to be most likely, was a burning sanctuary lamp. In fact, at 2:00 AM the night of the fire, a passerby happened to see a light on in the church, giving credence to the lamp as the cause.

Father O'Connell died shortly after his return from Rome and because a severe blizzard had recently occurred he was buried under the church. He is commemorated by a plaque located in the church. Saint Mary of the Purification Roman Catholic Church was rebuilt in 1902-1903. It appears that the walls of the present church are from the original building. Large beams which were charred by the fire are still visible in the dirt cellar.

More than 150 years since its dedication, St. Mary of the Purification Roman Catholic Church stands today as a prominent feature of the Town of Mount Forest.