



**St. Hedwig Parish: The First Polish Church in Toledo**  
by Larry and Rosemary Chorzempa.  
The First Hundred Years 1875-1975. A History of St. Hedwig  
Parish, Toledo, OH, p. 65-70. CAP at Orchard Lake.

The first wave of Polish immigrants arrived in Toledo in 1871. These people, most escaping the oppression in Poland by Bismarck, settled in the then-northwest section of Toledo, which had just been incorporated into the city in 1868. It was for the most part unsettled woods and potential farm land. This area was chosen because the Mohr Brothers Realty Company had offered it to the newcomers at very reasonable rates.

Before St. Hedwig Church was built, the Polish Catholics attended Mass at St. Mary's Church (then on Cherry Street), or St. Francis de Sales. They were occasionally visited by a few Polish priests, two of whom were the Rev. F. X. Szulak of Chicago, and the Rev. V. Zareczny of Berea, Ohio, the first Polish settlement in the state.

Eventually a sufficient number of families were settled in the Lagrange Street area to form their own parish where they could worship God in their beloved and oftensuppressed native tongue. In 1874 they obtained permission from the Cleveland Diocesan administrator, Msgr. Boff, to organize a new parish. In the fall of that year Father Vincent Lewandowski, an exile from Poland who had belonged to a dispersed order of Franciscan priests in Prussia, was invited by the head of the St. Vincent de Paul Society to become the first pastor of St. Hedwig Parish.

Upon his arrival on October 11, 1874, Father Lewandowski found 60 to 80 families who were ready to begin work on a church; most lived in the Lagrange Street area, but there were a few families from the Nebraska Street area also.

October 16, 1875, marked the official beginning of the parish with the first Mass, which was celebrated in the basement of St. Mary's Church on Cherry Street. The parish record books begin with entries dated shortly after this. Most records are in Latin, which was used as the official language of the Church, and therefore strict translation of Polish names into Latin, and then into English is fairly difficult. The original books (since 1875) are for the most part complete, and safely kept in the present Rectory.

The first infants baptized were: Martin Gołębiewski, born October 18, son of John and Anna (Brykacz); and Cecelia Stelmaszak, born October 8, daughter of Joseph and Rose (Słoińska). Both were baptized on October 24, 1875, By Father Vincent Lewandowski.

The first marriages were also performed by Father Lewandowski. John Czerniejewski married Anna Maciejewska, on November 21, 1875; their witnesses were Jacob Stelmaszewski and Adalbert Majewski. John Czaja married Frances Pryba, on November 24, 1875; witnesses were Melchior

Swajkowski and Michael Bialecki.

Father Lewandowski, on behalf of his parishioners, purchased nine lots fronting on Dexter and Bronson Streets just east of Locust Street (now Warsaw Street), for \$3,500 in January 1876. Dexter Park is presently located at this site.

Ground was broken in the spring and construction was begun. Services were held in the basement of St. Mary's Church until completion of the building, which was a two-story combination churchschool (two classrooms were located on the lower level and the church was on the upper level), made of red brick, measuring 33 feet by 83 feet. The church was blessed on May 7, 1876. A two-story frame parish house was also constructed. The church building was located on the north side of Dexter Street, the rectory standing beside it.

The dedication of St. Hedwig Church took place on October 22, 1876. A procession started at 9:30 a.m. at St. Francis de Sales Church, marched down Cherry to Franklin Avenue (Mettler Street), then to Locust (Warsaw Street) to Dexter Street to the new church. The parade contained many units: St. Mary's Band and Cadets and Men's Sodality, St. Patrick's Cadets and T. A. & B. Society, Good Sheperd's Society, St. Peter's Society, St. Joseph's Society, St. Michael's Benevolent Society, and St. Vincent Venton. An address was delivered in English by Father Patrick O'Brien from Good Sheperd Church, in German by Father Zoeller from St. Mary's, and in Polish by Father Kockerols also from St. Mary's.

Services were held on Sundays at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. The first trustees were Anton Gomulski and Anton Jagodziński. Other trustees in the first ten years were Valentine Nadolny, Anthony Bojarski, Valentine Łodyga, Isadore Komorowski, Michael Chłopek, and Michael Grzezinski.

In July of 1881, a belfry was erected to house the two large bells (still in use in the present church), cast in that same year.

Mr. Jacob Rozan was hired as the first teacher, and also served as the organist. He boarded with the Albert Dałkowski family on Everett Street about the year 1880.

There were some parishioners who were extremely opposed to the ideas of Father Lewandowski.

In 1885, an unexploded bomb was found under the parish house, which led to an event termed the "Polish Riot." Things came to a head on June 28, 1885, a Sunday evening, when an argument broke out in the Szelaszkiewicz Brothers' Saloon on Dexter and Locust, across the street from the church, between Father Lewandowski's supporters and his opposition. The fight began there and moved to a house nearby, where two people were killed, and several severely wounded.

Nearly thirty people were arrested, men and women alike, and charged with crimes ranging from malicious destruction to murder. Individual trials were begun shortly thereafter and lasted almost a year. Meantime, those arrested and awaiting trial (the women were all released shortly after their arrest) in the county jail had endured many hardships, including dirty, overcrowded conditions, separation from their families who were impoverished because they had no other means of support, and were troubled by the long drawn-out decision of their fate. Several men were imprisoned for various amounts of time. It was a sorrowful and bleak time for the prisoners and their families as well as those who were the victims and the families of the dead men.

Father Lewandowski had come to dislike his assignment in the preceding few years before this conflict, and on many occasions had asked the bishop to relieve him of his pastoral duties, the re-

quest always being turned down. After the conflict, he resigned and left Toledo in late June 1885, for Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A number of priests had been given the unhappy task of attending to the needs of the emotion-filled parishioners. Serving as temporary pastors or administrators were Father Kolaszewski, Father Barabasz, Father Felix Orzechowski, Father Cyrillus Augustynski, and Father J. M. Koudelka.

During this time another sorrowful event had taken place. On Tuesday, February 17, 1886, just before 5 p.m., the Fire Department was called out to extinguish a fire raging in the church. Nothing could be done to save the furiously burning building, and it was a total loss, with only the bare walls left standing. The building and property were worth \$8,000, and insured for only \$6,000. The next morning, small groups of men and women gathered mournfully in the streets. Someone had found a partially charred prayer book and the leaves were distributed among the bystanders as relics.

The church was rebuilt within the next few months, and then rededicated by Bishop Gilmour on June 27, 1886. On the same day, Bishop Gilmour installed Reverend Simon Wieczorek as the new pastor. In the summer of 1886, a frame pastoral house was built to replace the older one, at a cost of \$1,600. It may well be possible that this second parish house is still in existence, having been sold in 1904, after the stone rectory on Lagrange Street was built, and relocated to the south side of Bronson Avenue, the second house from Dexter Park. The house bears a strong resemblance to written descriptions of the rectory (also used by the Sisters as a convent and as a school), and many oral legends. It is a large building, a full two-stories-and-a-half, is definitely of the 1880's type of architecture, and towers over all other homes in the block.

Things seemed to change after the appointment of the well-liked Father Wieczorek, and the parish seemed more united than ever. In 1887, the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, Minnesota, answered the request of Father Wieczorek and came to St. Hedwig to teach school. They were very successful and well-liked.

## **The Church on Lagrange Street**

by Melvin R. Ogradowski and Gerald A. Mazuchowski. .

The First Hundred Years 1875-1975. A History of St. Hedwig Parish, Toledo, OH, p. 104-107.

The Parish of St. Hedwig grew rapidly between the years of 1886 and 1889. The Pastor, Rev. Simon J. Wiczorek realized the need for a new Church as there was an increase in the number of families constituting the parish.

Reverend Wiczorek purchased a large tract of land and donated lots bounded by the streets of Lagrange, Dexter and Thompson (Bronson) for the new site. The property was 160 feet wide and 300 feet deep.

The construction of the new Church began in the Spring of 1891, and was completed in October of 1892. It is modeled after St. Rose Church, Perrysburg, Ohio. The old slate roof attested to the dates of completion as one side bore the year 1891 and the other the year 1892. The church is built of Sandusky bluestone. The dimensions are: 160 ft. long, 60 ft. wide, and 75 ft. at the transept. The total cost, including the stained glass windows and furnishings was approximately \$65,000.

The day after the cornerstone was laid the following article appeared in the Toledo Blade: Dated July 12, 1891, "The laying of the cornerstone of the St. Hedwig's Catholic Church, is an event in the Polish Catholic Community history of Toledo, one full worthy of the pomp and circumstances which attended it.

The site of the new edifice is in the heart of the Polish settlement. Beneath the generous shade of stately trees it will be a monument for future generations.

It became necessary to erect this, which promises to be a noble pile, (building), because of the growth of the congregation. Around the little park in which the Church is being built, are scattered the cottages of the members. Everything and everybody is so neat, so clean and so comfortable, and the popular idea concerning the sons and daughters of Poland would by a visit be dispelled. The parade was a brilliant affair, and a large one. Three bands furnished the music and the scene was altogether inspiring. At 2:45 o'clock the different societies had gathered on Cherry Street and the march began.

Headed by Mounted Marshalls John Henry of the City Patrolmen and Peter Szelazkiewicz of St. Hedwig's Parish, followed by: Squad of Patrolmen, City Band, Stephan Batory (uniformed) St. Hedwig, Mounted Marshall Tomaszewski, St. Martin's C. K. of A., St. Mary's, John III Sobieski, St. Hedwig, Great Western Cornet Band, St. Aloysius Society, St. Joseph's School Society, St. Joseph's, St. Michael's D.R.K. Society, Holy Rosary Ladies Sodality, St. Hedwig, St. Joseph's Society, St. Joseph's, Sacred Heart Society, East Toledo, Stephan Batory Band, St. Hedwig, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Hedwig, St. Hedwig Ladies Sodality, St. Hedwig, and St. Joseph's Society, St. Hedwig.

It required 15 minutes for the procession to pass a given point. The sidewalks were completely filled with people, and the dust behaved very badly. The heat, 98 degrees, was almost unbearable, and the perspiration which adorned everybody was dried up by the flying particles of dust. (LaGrange Street was being repaved).

At 3:50 o'clock, the Church was reached and the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone was at once begun. The clerical party consisting of Msgr. Boff, representing the Bishop, Reverend Fathers: Hert and Barry—Good Shepherd Church, Zoeller—St. Mary's, Braire—St. Joseph's, Rosinski —

Berea, Ohio, Hannin—St. Patrick's, McCarthy, Smith, Rieken, Mertes, Wieczorek, and Martinski at once appeared and Msgr. Boff opened the ceremonies by the recital of a psalm, at the north end of the edifice.

The ecclesiastical party then proceeded to the front where the cornerstone was suspended from a derrick, ready to be laid. As Msgr. Boff performed the ceremony with the trowel, psalms were chanted, after which the stone was hoisted from where it rested. In the hollow of the under stone were placed a parchment on which were inscribed the names of the President of the United States, the present Pope, Mayor, Aldermen, and Councilmen of the City, the several pastors of the Catholic Churches, of the prominent contributors to the building fund of the Church, copies of the current issues of the city papers, a silver dollar and a copy of the Bible.

The stone was again lowered into position and this part of the ceremony concluded with the singing of the Litany of the Saints, and the recital of appropriate prayers by the Clergy.

Then Msgr. Boff in his kindly way, expressed his much interest was manifested in the welfare of the Catholic Church. Fifty years ago as Pastor in this City he had built the first Catholic Church in Toledo, the frame building of St. Francis de Sales, which is now behind the magnificent brick on Cherry Street. In the fifty years, eleven new Churches—all fine ones—had been erected.

Msgr. Boff finished in Polish, "KOCHAM WAS ZAWSZE POLACE."

Rev. B. Rosinski, of Berea, Ohio, then delivered an address in the language of the Polish people lasting twenty minutes. At the conclusion, the priestly party retired to the residence of Fr. Wieczorek for tea, and the procession moved back to the city, arriving at six o'clock.

Fully 3,000 people took part in the ceremonies which was an excellent turn out considering the almost unbearable heat. In the procession the different societies wore their regalias."

The new church was formally dedicated on April 23, 1893. The dedication ceremony commenced at St. Francis de Sales Church, corner of Cherry and Superior Streets at 9:30 a.m., Various Polish Societies dressed in full uniforms and plumes marched up Cherry St. to Bancroft, turning left on LaGrange Street and proceeded to the new edifice.

The different groups and societies that marched in the parade were arranged as follows: Platoon of Police—24 men, Toledo City Band, St. Martin's C. K. of A. (uniformed) 30 men, I. J. Wernert—Marshal (St. Anthony Polish Hussars —John III Sobieski. 40 men, Frank Zielinski—Marshall St. Anthony's, Knights of Stefan Batory—40 men, Jacob Tomaszewski—Marshall (St. Hedwig), Toledo Marine Band, St. Joseph's German Society 125 men, St. Aloisius German Society—175 men, St. Michael's German Society—200 men, St. Joseph's French Society—100 men, M. Kerscher—Marshall, Stephan Batory Band—St. Hedwig, St. Vincent's Polish Society—200 men (St. Hedwig), St. Stephen's Hungarian Society—100 men, Tony Leon's G. A. R. Band, St. Joseph's Polish Society—200 men (St. Hedwig), John III Sobieski Society—100 men (St. Hedwig), Marine Band, St. Joseph's Polish Society—200 men (St. Anthony's), St. Stanislaus Polish Society—150 men—(St. Anthony's), St. Dominic's Polish Society—200 men—(St. Anthony) Carriages and Buggies.

Upon the arrival of the lengthy procession at St. Hedwig's Church, the uniformed Polish Societies marched to the old Church—a block away, and escorted Bishop Horstmann and eight priests to the new Church.

Bishop Horstmann headed the procession, which then marched around the outside of the gray stone Church edifice. He blessed it and sprinkled Holy Water on the outside walls. This was repeated in the Church interior. The procession moved around the entire interior of the Church, the Bishop meantime blessing and sprinkling Holy Water on the interior walls.

By this time every one of the 1,265 seats in the roomy edifice was occupied and every inch of standing room was taken. Hundreds of the members of the different marching societies could not even get inside the Church doors.

High Mass was sung by Rev. Byczewski, Detroit, Michigan, Fr. Rosmski, from Cleveland, Deacon. Father Kolasinski, Sub-Deacon, from St. Anthony's, Toledo. After Mass, Father Byczewski delivered the sermon in Polish. Bishop Horstmann delivered a short sermon in English, in which he congratulated the Polish people of Toledo, in erecting such a beautiful house of worship, lauding the energy and intelligent work of their beloved pastor, Father Simon Wiczorek.

Confirmation began at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on that same day. The class numbered nearly 900. Their ages ranged from 12 to 70 years of age. There were but comparatively few elderly in the class however. Several hundred young girls were candidates for confirmation. With white frocks, wreaths of white flowers in their hair, modest and lady-like manners, they made a beautiful picture as they marched slowly down the aisle to the front pews reserved for their accommodation.

The young men wore white gloves and seemed to realize the solemnity of the proceedings. Two were confirmed at a time. As a matter of course the confirmation ceremonies were very lengthy, occupying about three hours.

Many Polish homes were decorated in honor of the dedication ceremonies, and colored bunting and flags could be seen in every block adjacent to St. Hedwig's, as far as the eye could reach. At the Church, huge festoons of evergreens and colored ribbons were stretched from the Church doors to adjacent poles. A huge banner of "WELCOME", hung in a conspicuous position over the curbstones. A cross composed of very-colored rosebuds was placed over the main entrance. The interior of the Church was also nicely decorated. The chancel, pulpit, and the altars were one mass of beautiful flowers. Appropriate mottoes in the Polish language greeted the eye as one entered.

In the Spring of 1901, a stone pastoral residence was completed next to the Church, costing nearly \$10,000. In 1903, a school was built behind the Church on Dexter Street at a cost totaling \$85,000. The school consists of sixteen classrooms, and was built under the direction of Rev Francis F. Doppke. On May 1, 1904, a marble statue of St. Hedwig was uncrated, blessed, and placed in the niche reserved for it on the front of St. Hedwig Church. Made of white marble, it is ten feet tall, costing over \$500, it was a gift of the Ladies Rosary Sodality of the Parish.