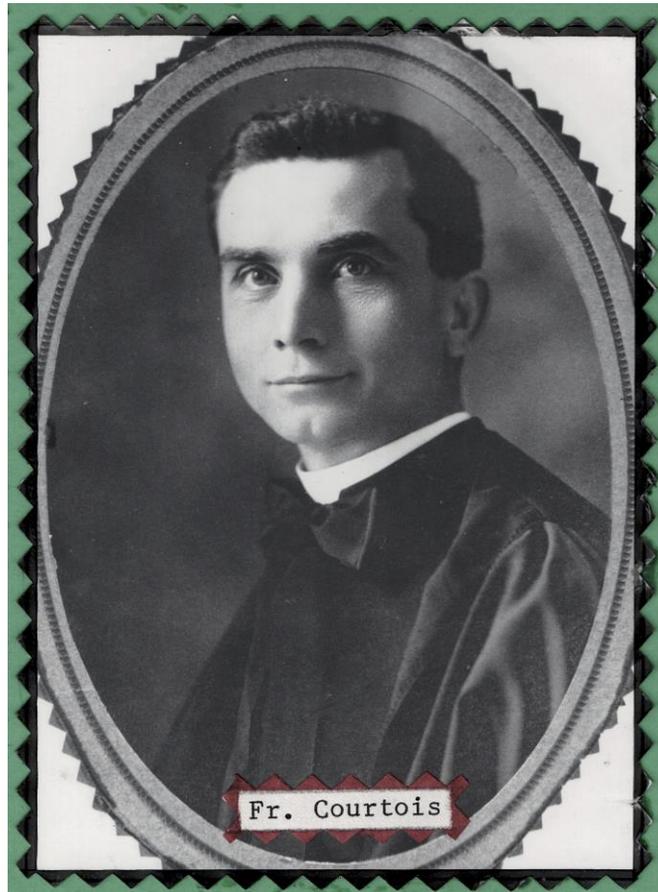


St. Pierre Aux Bouleaux

French Settlement – 1900



The original history was written in French, by Rev. Fr. Joseph E. Courtois and is located in the Diocese of London Archives. Photos were added to the translated version.

Transcription and translation
by Elaine (Jeffrey) Coxon, 2017

French Settlement, St. Peter's, Drysdale Ont.

[scan0000 pg. 1]

A.M.D.A St. Joseph Ont.

French Settlement
St. Peter's
P.O. Drysdale
Ont.

Boundaries: West, Lake Huron, South, Dashwood Road, East Bronson Line, North, Bayfield River road.

There is no priest buried here.

In 1847 some French Canadians from Assumption, Joliette, Berthier, St. Thomas and St. Elizabeth P.Q. came to settle on the shores of Lake Huron. They bought or rented land from the Canada Co. and set out to clear it themselves with courage; but this work always

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slow, did not obtain for them sufficient sustenance immediately, so they also engaged in fishing and hunting: game and fish abounded at that time.

Among the colonists who have made a living and many of whom are still living there are: Norbert Denommé, Basile Geoffroi, Basile Durand, Elie and Christophe Ducharme, Pierre Corriveau, Henri Mailloux, Joseph Champagne, François Papillon, Joseph Laporte, Pierre Masse, Martin Ducharme, David Ducharme, Pascal Charette, etc. etc. A few years after Louis, Alexandre and Urgel Denommé joined their brother Norbert and today Denommé, Ducharme and Geoffroi form a large number of families: Denommé

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19 families, Ducharme 9 families, Geoffroi 6 families. Remarkable if not unique:

Basile Geoffroi, who died last year at the age of 98, lived with the eldest son, whose daughter was also a mother: four generations lived under the same roof.

This parish had very humble beginnings. The first settlers who could not speak English would often find themselves in a state of embarrassment and exposed to being deceived by unconscionable speculators who liked to create misery for them because of their religion and nationality.

However, with all their energy, they managed to make themselves an honest living and today, we like to cite them as an example,

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for their honesty in all of their transactions and their respect for the laws of the land.

Being isolated from any Catholic center they were several years without a day in the presence of a priest. The closest mission was Goderich, 22 miles away. Not yet having a road opened, they went there along the shore of the lake, which in its angry moments and it was often angry, Lake Huron refused even the use of this road, already so difficult in calm weather.

A holy missionary, Rev. Father Snider of German origin having seen the sad state in which this small group of farmers found themselves, began to visit them and to provide them with the consolation



Fr. Pierre Snider

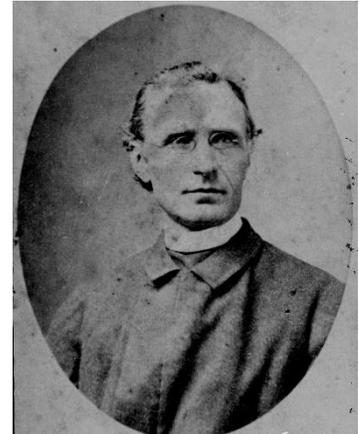
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of our holy religion. The joy was great among these brave people which had preserved their faith and were attached to their religious practices. Mass was then said in the house of a farmer, by the name of J. B. Ducharme, built on the bank of the lake shore. The sacrifices made and the miseries endured by the good Father Snider defied all description: he was a type of Catholic missionary and a valiant soldier of Christ – he is remembered with great veneration wherever he

went for his good deeds. A school was built at a short distance from the present church, which also served as a church for several years. It is about this time that the Rev. Father Murphy of Irish Town

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took over the direction of the mission which was served by him or by his vicars. So a worthy emulator of Father Snider's zealous charity was Father Lamont who came on behalf of Father Murphy to give religious consolation to the mission. Here Snider and Lamont are synonymous with Saint. Enemies who purify and strengthen the faith have not spared the fledgling mission: their primitive church is destroyed by fire - a pretty little wooden church 50 X 40 high at the price of great sacrifices. Another church, had been built of "logs" to be used for worship until the erection of the current church. Until that time in 1871 the German Catholics of Zurich were joining the Canadians and using



Fr. Murphy

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the same church; but having become more numerous, they decided to separate and to have a church in Zurich. In 1873 the present church 71 X 37 was built in brick on stone foundation. In 1875, a presbytery was built, 34 X 24 stone and brick, comfortable for a resident priest. Father Murphy made the plans and directed the work on these two buildings. But it was not until 1875 that Father Snider, a young German priest, took over the management of the parish with Zurich as Mission. He stayed there for 2½ years and was replaced by Fr. Moreau, a Polish priest who stayed for three years and four months. In 1880, the episcopal authority deemed it necessary to confide once more to Father Murphy the direction of the two missions which he or his vicars were to serve.



Rev. J. A. Kealy

In November 1884 Fr. Kealy, an Irish-American priest and vicar at Irish Town was sent here as parish priest with Zurich as a mission. During the four years and a few months that he administered the parish, he caused an uproar over his extravagances and at his departure in 1889, the parish was in debt of \$ 1,100.

Being the sole administrator of the parish business affairs, he kept secret the financial state of the parish and in his farewell speech, led the parishioners to believe that the parish was prosperous – a Yankee Trick

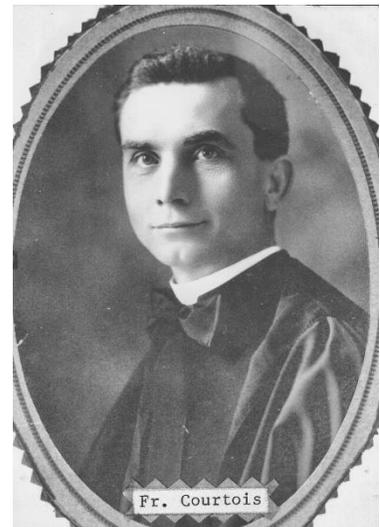
The task of his successor would be arduous and it was. He was replaced by Father Mугan who, not knowing the French, could not do anything: He stayed here for only eight months.

On December 1st, 1889, Father Courtois, curate at Windsor, was appointed parish priest with Zurich as Mission; he arrived on the fourth of the same month. It took a lot of prudence and charity on the part of the new priest who had only three months of experience in the exercise of the holy ministry, because the financial disaster was known and the majority of the parishioners were discouraged and lost all hope of being able to pay the debt while keeping a resident priest.

However with all the care possible not to compromise the honour

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of the religion and the priest who had deceived them, we managed to get along and then began a new era for the parish.



Fr. J. E. Courtois,
author of this article

Helped by the advice and encouragement of Mgr. O'Connor, who had just been declared bishop of the diocese, the new priest, who was not very delighted with his position, set to work. The main task was to rebuild the finances, because despite the setbacks the parishioners had remained faithful to their religious practices and if the parish priest had been able to live and pay the debt without appealing to their purse, the incident mentioned above would have been quickly forgotten. The new system, however, was accepted and everyone contributed, according to his means, as the pastor suggested and did his part

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to pay the debt of the church so well, that after five years, with the rent of the pews and some subscriptions, they were able to pay for everything and do the necessary repairs to the neglected properties that were falling into ruins. We began by fencing the ground and painting the inside of the church at a cost of \$300.

The cemetery had become a forest and had no fence: it was done for \$100 labour and a 25 foot high cross was erected in the center.

In 1892, some fanatical Protestants, jealous of the peace and happiness which reigned in the parish, resolved to put obstacles in the way of the good which operated there. With the consent of Msg. Welsh, the school that had been built on



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church grounds was a public school, but the trustees were Catholic and hired Catholic teachers.

It was decided to change the division of sections; to separate our section thus dividing the Catholics, so that they would be in the minority, in the sections so divided, thereby removing from them the ability to hire teachers of their religion.

A separate school was formed, but it was necessary to plead their case to keep the use of the school built on the grounds of the church. The trial was judged in favour of the Catholics but the Protestant group being insoluble? in this case, the \$150 fee fell on the Catholic side and this sum was never refunded.

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The trustees at the time deserve the eternal gratitude of the Church and their parish for the skillful manner in which they lead and defended their cause. Here are their names: Narcisse Masse; J. B. Laporte and Arthur Sreenen (sic)

The parish was then able to enjoy a moment of peace and tranquility, but God still had in reserve a test which delayed the execution of the planned enterprises. The debt having been paid and the cost of the work and repairs generously subscribed, they prepared to establish a reserve fund to enlarge and renew the interior of the church which was no longer suitable for the functions of worship.

March 18, 1894, Palm Sunday parish priest and servants are awoken by

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a strange and sinister sound that did not bode well. Arisen in great haste, leaving his sleeping quarters, the priest sees that the fire had consumed the small wooden kitchen adjoining the house and before the rescuers arrived, that part was gone from the house, and in a few hours everything was ravaged by the flames; only the walls blackened by the smoke remained. Nothing was saved from the disaster. Losses were valued at \$100 on parish property and \$500 for the parish priest. All he had left was the coat he was wearing at the time of the disaster, all wardrobe, personal effects and books were burned.

This new catastrophe cast consternation

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everywhere, and we wondered if we could get up from so much ruin.

Once the initial shock had passed, they could see a way of rebuilding, having obtained assurances, they set to work with courage and with the unanimous help of the parishioners, the construction work began with great activity. In four months the house was built: it was blessed one Sunday after mass in the presence of parishioners. This is a brick house on stone foundation of 24 X 34 with (ansuie?) from 18-2?



Peace was restored again, but it was necessary to save and pay a balance of \$1000 left over on the new house and its furnishings.

Finally we restored the reserve fund

[scan0015 pg.16]

for church work that had become urgent. At this time, the priest had to replace his wardrobe and rebuild his library, which was done in silence and without any outside aid and today he does not regret his sacrifices. After three years of saving and cutting costs we had a total of \$1000 to start the church work. During the

winter of 1898-99 the parishioners hastened to answer the parish priest's call, and all the material was brought to the location. It began May 1st, not without being placed under the protection of Mary to dig the foundations for an extension, a transept and portico and a sacristy.

The work was executed with as much

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speed as possible, and on October 22, 1899, the Solemn Blessing of the enlarged and restored Church was made by Mgr. McEvoy Bishop of the Diocese of London.

Despite a torrential rain that lasted all day, the attendance was large and the menu satisfactory. After the blessing of the church, the Rev. Father Murphy who has died since celebrating the Mass, Rev. Father Miller / Meuse? as deacon and Rev. Father Valentine, as sub deacon. Mgr. gave the sermon and warmly congratulated the parishioners in the afternoon. Vespers sermon by Father Meunier, erection of a new Way of the Cross and blessing of three statues. The day ended with the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament presided over

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by the Bishop, assisted by the deacon and sub deacon.

The renovated church measures 95 feet long by 53 wide - in the transept and the sacristy 20 X 30. The total cost of repairs was \$ 5700. From the various donations the parishioners subscribed \$ 3000 and with the careful consent of Mgr. we borrowed \$ 1700, balance due. In 1900, with the annuity of the pews and subscription of \$ 1.00 per family, the interest was paid \$ 85, and the first bill payable \$ 450 - \$ 535.



The church is heated with warm air, three beautiful altars and modern pews of oak. All of the windows are stained glass windows with figures of saints; a metal iron vault and walls were covered with oil paint.

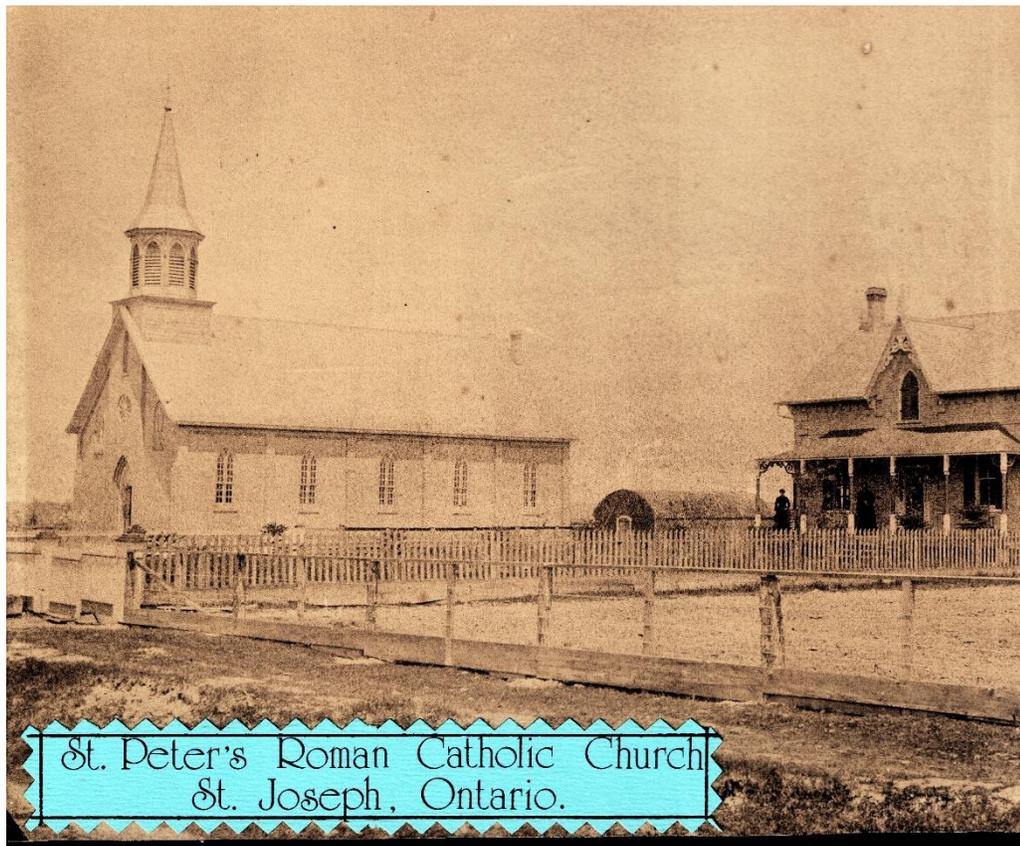
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in all a very nice effect. The parish is built on solid foundations that will make for a better future. The parishioners are firmly attached to their religious practices and if some some unforeseen misfortune or some unhealthy influence does not come to obstruct religious and material progress, we can hope for a future of happiness and prosperity. The revenues of the priest "Pastoral Law" are from \$ 400 to \$ 450.

On December 15th, 1900, there are 89 families, forming 506 souls.

J.E. Courtois, parish priest
Drysdale, Dec. 15, 1900

St. Peter's church with horse shed. Photo courtesy of Phil LaPorte



Photo, courtesy of St. Joseph Historical Society