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TIMELINE - SINCE 1559

THE CATHOLIC CONGREGATION IN PENSACOLA



Exploration and Discovery 1559 - 1561

1559

August 15, 1559. First Mass. Attempted settlement of Pensacola by Tristan de Luna accompanied by five Dominican friars and one lay brother. Fray Pedro de Feria, O.P. was superior. Settlement abandoned 1561.



First Spanish Period 1693 - 1719

1693

Exploration by Spain prior to resettlement. April 25, 1693, St. Mark's Day. First known location of religious service in the area. Rev. Dr. Carlos de Sigüenza said Mass "amidst the leafy trees on Sigüenza Point," [today Ft. Pickens]; artilleryman buried near spot of Mass; Crosses carved on the trees. Ships sailed with freshly cut masts.

1698

Father Rodrigo de la Barreda, OSF, and two other priests accompanied Don Andrés de Arriola y Guzmán to establish settlement at Pensacola Bay, the permanent settlement of Pensacola. Other priests during the first Spanish period (to 1763) were probably Franciscans.



French Occupation 1719 - 1722

1719

France declared war on Spain; French in Mobile captured the settlement of Santa Maria [Pensacola] near mouth of the Bay. After several exchanges of flags, the French remained in control until the peace treaty ending the Quadruple Alliance in 1722. The French abandoned the fort in November, 1719, burning most buildings and taking war booty of chapel lamps, altar silver, and sacred vestments.



Spanish Period Resumes 1722 - 1763

1722

Spain regained possession of Pensacola and rebuilt the settlement on Santa Rosa Island (recreated in 1959 for the Quadricentennial celebration). A sketch of the village shows an octagon shaped church, the earliest picture of the church in Pensacola.

1752

On November 3, 1752, a hurricane raged for three days and destroyed the island village, leaving only the storehouse and hospital standing. Many people perished and others set up a village near Seville Square [on the mainland].



British Period 1763 - 1781

1763

With the treaty ending the French and Indian War, Great Britain gained possession of all of Florida. There was a mass exodus of Spanish citizens, 108 Christianized Indians, two Franciscan monks, soldiers, and civilians. This ended the first chapter in the history of St. Michael's parish and the Catholic Church in Florida. Two years later, a small group of Minorcans arrived on the east coast of Florida and established a colony south of St. Augustine.



Second Spanish Period 1781 - 1821

1781 - The Official Establishment of St. Michael Church

May 10, 1781. After Spain captured West Florida in the Battle of Pensacola, the church was reestablished the next day. Father Cyril de Barcelona, a Capuchin missionary, was chaplain to the troops and blessed an old two story wooden warehouse for a church, officially establishing St. Michael Church in Pensacola. A *Te Deum* was sung, and most probably a Mass held. The church in St. Augustine and East Florida were not reestablished until the 1783 Treaty of Paris. The old warehouse church was located on the beach near the present day intersection of Jefferson and Zarrogossa. Main Street marked the water's edge. Father Pedro de Valéz was named the first pastor of St. Michael and chaplain to the troops.

1791

Cyril de Barcelona named auxiliary bishop of Havana with residence in New Orleans. Visited parish where he found 411 Catholics and 161 Protestants.

1793

Diocese of Louisiana established. Ignacia de Peñalver y Cardenas named bishop. Visited Pensacola in 1798 where he found church in "pitiful condition." 135 confirmed at St. Michael.

1797

Bishop had difficulty getting priests to agree to go to Pensacola. He wrote that he "could not even get angels to go to Pensacola."

1803

The Louisiana Purchase put the Pensacola church in a dilemma. Given the relationship of the Church and State in Spanish Colonies it was impossible for Florida to remain under the American New Orleans Diocese. September 13, 1806 an order came breaking all ties to New Orleans, and West Florida reverted to the Diocese of Havana under Juan José de Espada y Lander. Because of the distance to Havana, Fr. Santiago Coleman, St. Michael pastor, named *vicario* and ecclesiastical judge.

1807 - St. Michael Cemetery Created

Thirty arpents (25.5 acres) set aside as a burying ground. It served the entire community until another cemetery was ready for burials in the 1880s.



American Period

1821

July 17, 1821. Florida ceded to the United States, removing government control from the church. St. Michael so poor, this was a big blow.

1823

Father Constantine Maenhaut named pastor of St. Michael; he left in 1821. In July, parish incorporated as "The Catholic Congregation of the City of Pensacola." Ecclesiastic jurisdiction returned to Louisiana in New Orleans, making it one of the world's largest dioceses.

1826

Rev. Michael Portier named to lead the Vicariate of Alabama and the Floridas; later the Diocese of Mobile. St. Michael stayed under Mobile and the Archdiocese of New Orleans until 1968, when it was transferred to the Diocese of St. Augustine.

1831

A dark year for the parish. The old warehouse church collapsed, and in June two hurricanes destroyed the half completed new church. It would be 1833 before the new church on Jefferson Street at Church Street was dedicated.

1840

Ladies of the Retreat opened a Catholic School for Girls.

1851

St. John's Church in Warrington became the second West Florida parish.

**Confederate Period 1861 - 1865****1861**

St. Michael Academy advertised for students.

1863

Church on Jefferson Street at Church Street burned, destroying all church records.

**American Period Resumes 1865 - Today****1871**

St. Michael Academy re-opened.

1867

New church dedicated on December 17, 1867; many fundraisers held during holidays. Severe poverty as a result of the war.

1877 - Sisters of Mercy Open St. Michael School

Sisters of Mercy took over operation of school Fall, 1877. Girls school on South Palafox Street [site of the old "Lerner" Building] and the boys school near Plaza Ferdinand VII, site of the old churches.

1882

Lumber boom brought prosperity to town and parish; building too small. Negotiation for new church began in May. On September 15 fire burned rectory and church, hastening the resolve for a new church. During the 1880s there was much building, including Methodist Church on Garden and Palafox; a Lutheran Church on Baylen and Garden and a new Court House opposite St. Michael.

1886

June 6, 1886 the present church [at 19 North Palafox] was dedicated by Bishop Jeremiah O'Sullivan, fourth Bishop of Mobile. Rectory, a 2-story frame building on Chase Street [between Palafox and Baylen], purchased in 1889 for \$6,500. Father John A. Baasen, Pastor.

1891

In keeping with changes brought on by the Civil War and the growth of the parish, St. Joseph's parish formed for Creoles and Blacks.

1896

July 6, 1896. Church sustained damage during hurricane; two large stained glass windows shattered -- one had been presented by Catholic Knights of America; the other by Mrs. W. A. Blount.

1900

Father Baasen left in new year; Fr. J. P. McCafferty arrived in Spring. Church redecorated; added was a mural around sanctuary alcove by artist Theo Weber; magnificent new pipe organ installed.

1911 - 1912

School and convent on South Palafox sold in 1911. Torre School built on Chase and Baylen Streets about 1912 [present site of AmSouth Bank]; serves parish for 40 years; became co-ed soon after opening. Present rectory [on North Palafox] built about this time. Old rectory on Chase Street became new convent [for Sisters of Mercy].

1939

Fr. William J. Cusick arrived to become pastor, serving St. Michael for 32 years. Father Cusick renovated/remodeled rectory when he arrived. It was refurbished by Marston & Quina.

1941

September 14, 1941, Pensacola Central Catholic High School opened in the old Elks Club [at Baylen and Garden Streets]. St. Michael and St. Stephen closed their high schools. Church was renovated; north tower entrance closed, became baptistry in keeping with liturgical changes; main entrance widened; two small doors replace two small windows in main façade. Vestibule mahogany paneled; beautiful doors and stained glass window in baptistry added.

1962

Changes to the sanctuary - back wall was pushed west and rebuilt;

sanctuary, sacristy and storage room "greatly enlarged;" tabernacle and table of main altar removed; Blessed Mother's altar became a Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

1970

In September, 1970 Msgr. Cusick celebrated 50 years in the priesthood. He retired on August 7, 1971.

1972

Father Frank Geri, who grew up in St. Michael Parish, became its pastor. He died July 11, 1976.

1975 - Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee Created

November 6, 1975, Bishop René Gracida became the first bishop of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

1976

Msgr. Dennis Gray named pastor; Father Richard J. Bowles arrived August 1 to serve as administrator.

1986

Father Bowles renovated and restored both the rectory and the church. On June 6, the church was rededicated on the 100th anniversary of its original dedication.

2004

Father Peter McLaughlin appointed new administrator of St. Michael in July. In September, both the church and the rectory sustained major damage as result of Hurricane Ivan. Extensive repairs included replacing shingle roofs on both buildings with copper.

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