

HISTORY OF St DECLAN'S

By Ian P McKenzie, B.A., B.Ed.ST.

The little Catholic Church of St Declan's near the Pacific Highway at Springwood has an absorbing history that has been lost in the hustle and bustle of the moving times. It's story is one of fulfilling the needs of pioneering people from 1865 to 1978. To fulfil these needs the Church has existed in four different locations.

The origins of the church can be traced to the 1860's when the Irish Immigration Commission financed a number of shiploads of Irish migrants to Queensland. These people endured eight long and distressing months aboard such vessels as "Erin-go-broch" and "Fiery Star". Such well known family names as Ryan, Cusock, Egan, Walsh, Plunkett, Yor and McDonald settled at Logan Reserve.

In 1865 the settlement was large enough to warrant the building of a church. The timber for the Church of the Assumption was brought up the Logan River, unloaded at Pettigrew's Wharf, and delivered to a block of land donated by the Coglan family. Most of this timber is still in the present building – including the six inch beech floor boards. The building with its shingled roof gave protection to a capacity congregation of eighty people.

The first known priest to cater for the people was Fr Connolly. He and other priests made the journey from Brisbane on horseback, leading a pack-horse bearing the Mass vestments. In 1874 Fr Scortechini was appointed as the first parish priest of the Logan and Albert district. In 1884, this Italian botanist was seconded by Sir Samuel Griffith to carry out scientific experiments in New Guinea. Fr James Enright (grand uncle of Fr Rollo Enright) succeeded Fr Scortechini who later died of malaria.

In 1885, Fr Enright moved to the newly established railway centre of Beaudesert. His parishioners included people in Beenleigh, Cleveland, Pimpama, Mudgeeraba, Tallebudgera, Coomera, Coopers Plains, Hemmant, Southport, Logan Reserve and numerous cattle stations. He was supported by many curates in his 37 years of work. These priests were Fathers J. O'Reilly (1886-1891), P. Grady (1892-3), R.D. O'Shea

(1893-4), J. Healy (1894-7), R. Walsh (1897-1900), J.P. Bergin (1900-1909), W. Byrne (1909-10), J. Robinson (1915), O. Hayes (1918-20).

By the early 1870's the Irish settlers conceded defeat to the bandicoots and moved on to Tamborine and Waterford. The Church of Assumption was rarely used. By the turn of the century the resourceful Catholics at Waterford had dismantled the church and had it floated down the Logan to a block of land donated by the Leo family. The site chosen was on the present vacant block near the Caltex Service Station. Virgil Kenny remembers Masses being said once every three months in the renamed St James' Church. With improvement in communications that was increased to once per month! In rainy weather parishioners dreaded the experience of walking across the swampy church grounds.

Fr Enright continued his pastoral work until he was struck by lightning in 1921. He was succeeded by Fr John Hennessy. In 1925 Waterford was attached to Yeronga only to be rejoined to Beaudesert in 1947. By this time St James' had fallen into disuse. The one last recorded duty the church performed was to shelter some of the 1947 flood victims just as it had done last century at Logan Reserve.

On hearing of the need for a church in the Eight Mile Plains area, Fr Owen Steele offered the church to Fr David Dee (Parish Priest of Holland Park). The parish curate, Fr John Rosenskjar called on the assistance of Mr Jack Tierney to move the church to the present site of St Martins. In late 1949 when Jack and his band of willing workers arrived at Waterford they found a near dilapidated building resting on posts of varying angles and levels. Once again, the old building suffered the indignity of being stripped down to be moved. Some alterations were necessary. The building was lined and the front porch was 'redesigned'.

By 1950 the church was opened as St Declan's in honour of a hermit who lived near the Irish town of Waterford. The accelerated growth in population in areas adjacent to the Pacific Highway can be clearly exemplified by the following dates parishes were established since 1950.

1952 – St Agnes of Mt Gravatt

1969 – St Martins of Eight Mile Plains

1969 – St Catherine's of Wishart

1974 – St Peter's of Rochedale

1978 – St Edward the Confessor of Daisy Hill.

With this upsurge in population the little church was becoming inadequate in coping with Sunday Masses. In the 1960's St Martins was built. Jack Tierney, the church builder, as directed by Fr Aspinall, moved the church to its present site. In this move the roof was to come off so as to allow the building to move unobtrusively along the highway to Springwood. With the building on concrete stumps and with a bricked porch, Jack left St Declan's to cater for another growing area.

In 1974 with the inception of St Peter's Parish, Fr Rollo Enright found his only church too small, the building of the church and school at Rochedale Road centred the parish at Rochedale. St Declan's was to serve the people of Daisy Hill with Sunday masses said by Fr Enright and his curate Fr Terry Collins.

By the 8th January 1978 a new parish was formed at Daisy Hill. Fr Leo Burke as its parish priest found his only church too small. However, Fr Enright had the foresight to initiate the building of a larger church at Chatswood Road.

On April 30th 1978 St Declan's would again outlive its usefulness in the Parish. Although Fr Burke and the parishioners do not see St Declan's being used as a church at its present site, they will not see it used as anything else. It will stand at Springwood until someone with a need for a church requests its use.

St EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

The log cabin style church situated off Chatswood Road, Daisy Hill blends in with its bushland setting. It brings to fruition an idea Fr Rollo Enright had in 1974. He had just taken charge of the densely populated parish of St Peter's at Rochedale. The number of parishioners equalled the size of many country dioceses of Queensland. He saw the need for two churches to cater for this pressing problem. The only church in the parish held eighty people! With the building of the church and school at Rochedale, he was in no financial position to stretch his resources to the building of another church at Daisy Hill.

He saw, however, the possibility of building a log church from the trees being bulldozed in a nearby housing estate! Immediate action was required. He called on Laurie Fitzpatrick who worked tirelessly selecting, cutting and collecting logs that the bulldozers were knocking down around him. The logs were dragged onto the land that Fr Aspinall had purchased when he was responsible for the area. Dennis Pokarier drew up a building based on the log cabin concept. To comply with Local Government requirements Pat Grosvener, Mike De Sousa Roque and Pat Lambert combined their engineering skills to produce the submission which received approval in late 1977.

The parish took on the building of the church in the capacity of an owner builder. Mr Harry Vlug became the supervisor with Laurie as log expert. By Christmas 1977 the (60ft x 40ft) concrete slab had been poured. With his arrival in January of the first Parish Priest of the new parish of St Edward the confessor, Fr Leo Burke took over the responsibilities of furnishing the new building.

It is estimated that when completed the church will have cost less than \$30,000. It is expected to seat 350 people comfortably. The church was opened and blessed on April 30th by his Grace Archbishop Francis Rush.

When one considers the final product with its rugged exterior and spacious homely interior built at such a low cost one can only thank Fr Enright for his timeless efforts. Father Enright, we thank you.