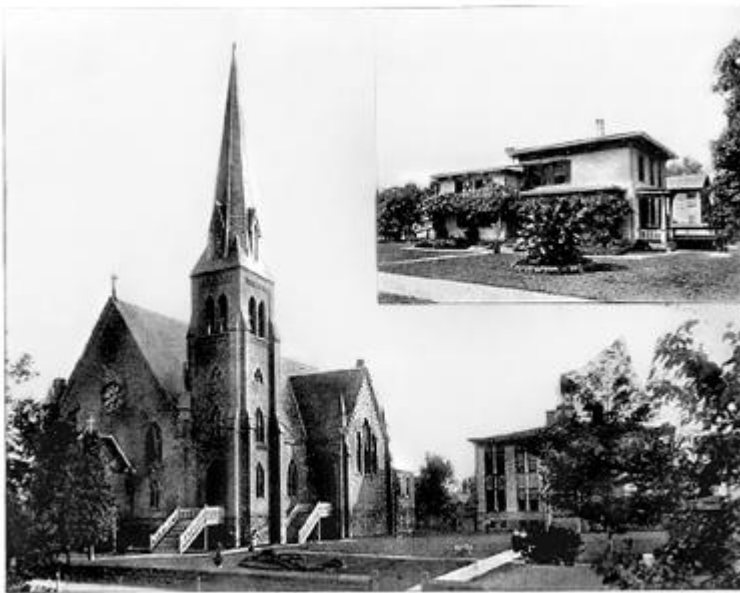


The following was taken from the Souvenir Edition of the The Middletown Tribune, dated 1896. It was lent to us for this reproduction by Mike Giuliano, a local resident. Excerpts include short articles regarding the churches that existed in Portland at the time, and some of their histories. The writing itself is classic late nineteenth century, and gives an extraordinary view of the time period.

St. Mary's Parish



ST. MARY'S CHURCH AND SCHOOL, AND ST. MICHAEL'S CONVENT.



REV. T. R. SWEENEY.

The first mass read in Portland was celebrated in an open field on Main Street, near Strong's Lane. Afterward a barn which had been tendered through kindness of Mr. Worthington was used. In time a more comfortable place of worship was found in the house of Mr. Condon, who was the first Catholic of Portland. Later Portland became a part of the Middletown mission. As time wore on it was determined to erect a church, and Rev. Wm. E. Duffy was assigned to the pastorate, beginning his duties on the 8th day of August, 1872. The mission then included Glastonbury, though this was later attached to East Hartford parish and East Hampton substituted, the latter still being ministered to as part of St. Mary's. For a while mass was celebrated in Waverly Hall, afterward in the building now owned and occupied by John Bransfield and finally the present site was purchased. Under Rev. Desmond, who assumed control of the parish in October, 1876, a subscription list was opened and so liberal was the response that in less than one hour, between seven and eight thousand dollars were promised. He had been but 18 days in Portland when ground was broken for the church foundation and the year following the basement, now known as St. Mary's Hall was dedicated. In this mass was read until the completion of the proper. During the pastorate of Fr. Desmond and his successors, prior to the coming of the present pastor, the rectory was

built, St. Mary's Cemetery purchased and the Convent building and additional ground secured.

Rev. Timothy R. Sweeney, the present pastor, was appointed to Portland, January 31, 1889. He was ordained at Grand Seminary, Montreal, In December 1878, after which he was appointed, in order, to Meriden, the French Missions and Norwich. His first pastorate was Litchfield, where he remained three and a half years and during which he erected one of the most beautiful of Connecticut's Catholic churches. He found the Portland church burdened with a debt of over \$3,400, yet in less than a year this was liquidated and there was a balance of \$700 in the church treasury. The parochial residence was remodeled, the entire exterior of the parochial buildings was repainted and all of the property out in first class repair. At great expense the grounds were graded, over 5,000 loads from the quarry being used in filling in; handsome and durable stone walks were laid and bronze grates placed at the street entrances to those leading to the church, residence and schools and a new system of drainage and sewerage for the entire property had been instituted. May 8, 1890, a new bell, costing \$800, one of the finest in the State, was dedicated in the presence of a large concourse of people, and Thanksgiving Day of the same year was a notable one in the history of the parish and of the town. It marked the dedication of the commodious and handsome St. Mary's School, a two story building, having ground surface of about 70 by 57, setting deep in from the street and fronting a spacious, well kept lawn. The interior planning of this building was done by Father Sweeney; The system of ventilation devised by him is unexcelled and all of the sanitary arrangements are of the most approved kind. The school is largely attended. it is presided over by the Sisters of Mercy and in inclement weather its large basement is used as a play-room. The church proper has seating capacity for about 1,000 people and the basement, St. Mary's Hall, will accommodate as many more. A handsome brownstone wall fronts the entire premises. the grounds are admirably laid out and adorned with floral design, and the lawns surrounding are particularly well cared for. The same may be said of the whole property - rectory, school, convent, church and cemetery, and it has been said of it that it is one of the most perfectly equipped parishes in the diocese.

The affairs of the East Hampton mission of St. Mary's parish are in a prosperous condition. A most eligible site for the proposed new church at Eat Hampton has been purchased and over and above the money paid for this lot there remains some six or seven thousand dollars in the treasury of the East Hampton church, for the proposed church edifice which will probably be started this year.