



Episode 2: Old Dallas Churches

Thank you for joining us for the Dallas Road Trip where we are exploring Dallas Catholic History in our own backyard. Episode 2 has us all over the diocese checking out some of the first and oldest churches and Catholic communities!

Before there were any churches in which to celebrate the sacraments, the first recorded Mass was celebrated in 1859 in the home of a carriage-maker in Dallas.¹ As the numbers of Catholics grew, the communities were eventually able to erect small, scattered, humble chapels in various areas of what is now the diocese. Today, there are approximately 1.2 million Catholics in the diocese and our numbers are anticipated to continue to grow.²

The Archives Office of the Diocese of Dallas, which maintains an historical archive of the diocese,³ published *Prairie Gothic*, a visual tribute to the earliest churches in our diocese and their architecture.

“Carpenter Gothic”, the architectural style of the prairie churches, is known for its “traditional American light-frame construction, with details such as steeply pitched roofs, pointed arches, barge boards, and steep gables. The windows were often inspired by the English Gothic cathedrals, which were made with high pointed arches.”⁴

Catholics living in southern Collin County were first visited from Nacogdoches by Father Tom Hennessy in the early 1880s. In 1869, a missionary center was established and St. Paul Church, the first church in the present Diocese of Dallas was built. The

¹[History of Dallas PowerPoint](#)

² <https://www.cathdal.org/about>

³ <https://www.cathdal.org/archives>

⁴ [Carpenter Gothic](#)

area, known as “Lazy Neck,” became St. Paul, Texas, named for the church.⁵ When a railroad was built, running through the town of Wylie, Wylie became a more natural location for the church. But, we haven’t forgotten St. Paul mission station! It is remembered by the 2 swords, the symbol of St. Paul the Apostle, on the Dallas Coat of Arms.

The oldest active parish of our diocese is Immaculate Conception in Corsicana, formed in 1871⁶ and the first church in downtown Dallas was Sacred Heart. Sacred Heart was established in 1872 and then designated as the temporary Cathedral, as there was not one at the inception of the Diocese of Dallas.⁷ The second church was St. Patrick in Dallas, built in 1882 and the third church was Blessed Sacrament in Oak Cliff, originally named Corpus Christi, in 1901.⁸

Amazingly, you can still see some of the original church structures today, despite the fires, tornados, and highways that threatened to take some of our churches off the map! The 1901 chapel of St. Anthony in Wylie can still be visited, though the 1890 chapel was destroyed by fire. You can visit St. John Nepomucene in Ennis, but its former churches were hit by a tornado and then damaged twice by fires! Sacred Heart in Rowlett was also blown off its foundation by a tornado, though it was able to be restored, and the original St. Patrick of Dallas was removed to make way for the 1-30/1-45 interchange, before the parish was re-established in Lake Highlands.

It was not easy to build these early churches; an account shared by St. John Nepomuce parish details the extensive financial contributions and construction efforts that parishioners put into building their parish structures.⁹ Today, we are the fruit of the early Dallas Catholics’ labor. We benefit from the hard work they selflessly put forth to establish a community here in North Texas. We are their legacy of faith. Buildings will eventually crumble, but it is the People of God who have an eternal destiny.

⁵ [Prologue to the Future](#), 16

⁶ [Prairie Gothic](#), 11

⁷ [Prairie Gothic](#), 7

⁸ [Prairie Gothic](#), 8

⁹ <https://www.stjohncc.net/about-2>