

The land on which Sacred Heart Church is located was deeded to Bishop John Quinlan, Bishop of Mobile in 1873 by the Kyle, Madden, and Osborn families for a Catholic Church to be erected, according to the records and deeds located in the archives of the Diocese of Mobile.

On April 9, 1874, the first Church was officially named “Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” and was blessed by Monsignor Baasen with approval from Bishop John Quinlan. This first church building was a log cabin style with no windows, and split logs for pews.

During 1874 the Catholic community had grown so much it was able to establish a board of trustees that included John Fromhold, August Gruenger, Herman Lehring, John Maier, and Ferdinand Krellhaus. Later that year the South and North

Alabama Railroad Company gave four lots to the trustees for use by the Catholic Community for a rectory and school.

The first recorded Death at the newly established Sacred Heart Church is of Martin Fromhold April 29th, 1875.

The first recorded First Holy Communion at Sacred Heart Church is from Monsignor Baasen’s records (which are held in the Diocese of Mobile Archives) from May 7, 1876. The class included: Joseph Behrens, Mary Madden, Odilia Mayer, Henrietta Hersant, Josephine Stricht, Michael Nish, Catherine Risse, Mary Spraul, Anna Fromhold, and Frances Sackfield.

He also recorded the first known marriage at Sacred Heart Church on Oct 10, 1876 of Julia Hassenbein to Joseph Schmidt, and on Dec 18th of the same year Anne Weggman married William Bellenger.

On Oct 30, 1877 the first resident pastor, Fr. James Meurer, a German-speaking priest came to Sacred Heart. On Nov 1, 1877 Sacred Heart became an official Parish. Soon after, construction of a new second church (which was a little white church without a steeple), a small house for the Pastor, and a small convent for the sisters began and was completed before Dec of 1878.

Also in 1877 Joseph Fromhold deeded land for Sacred Heart Church to Bishop Quinlan, and in 1878 the trustees transferred the title of all the property given to them by the South and North Alabama Railroad to the Bishop as well.

The first recording of Baptisms from Sacred Heart Church occurred during this year: 1877, Nov 1, there were 2 baptisms:

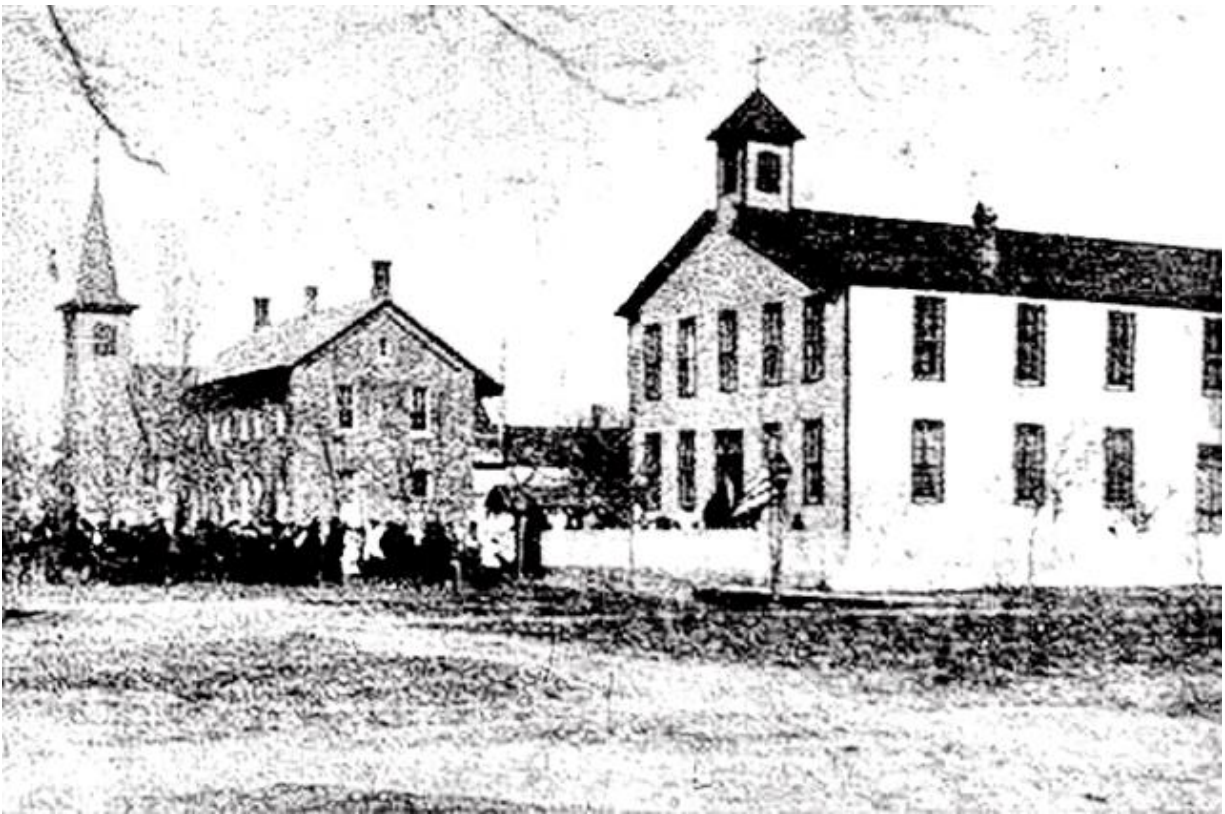
Guillemus Mulkin (b: April 29, 1876) f: Ernestres Mulkin; m: Elisabeth (Barron) Mulkin; godparents: Jacobus & Brigita Barron; priest: Meurer

Helena Schmidt (b; Oct 1, 1877) f: Guillemus Schmidt; m: Maria (Brunes) Schmidt; godparents: Lambert, Ruhlunder & Helena Ruste; priest: Meurer

The Sisters of Notre Dame arrived on December 14, 1878 and the convent was opened. Construction of a schoolhouse began on July 1, 1879. The church was updated in 1887 to include a steeple and a set of bells. According to records the white wood framed church was dedicated in 1894.

The Sacred Heart Cemetery was deeded in November 1887. That same year Joseph Fromhold and his wife deeded more land for Sacred Heart to Bishop O'Sullivan.

In 1887 Father Gamelbert Brumer OSB, succeeded Father Meuer. By 1889 there was need for expansion of the school, so construction of a new larger schoolhouse was started. "It had three large classrooms, a cloak room and meeting room for church societies on the first floor with a large hall of exhibitions, concerts, and fairs on the upper floor. The nuns then occupied the old school and took in orphan girls or girls who lived a great distance from the school as boarders." It was completed the same year and blessed on Oct 27, 1889. In 1890 a twelve room priest residence was built and Fr. Brumer started the pre-Thanksgiving Turkey Festival.



Circa 1900 from left to right is the second church, the convent, and the school



Inside the second Sacred Heart Church building

Benedictine priests began their tradition of service as parish pastors in 1888 and soon after came the foundation of St. Bernard Abbey (1891) and Sacred Heart Convent (1892).

On Oct 24, 1910 groundbreaking for a larger church took place. The third Sacred Heart Church building was built of stone during the pastorate of Rev. Ignatius Mayer, O.S.B. who became Pastor 1905. The corner stone was laid on July 3, 1913. The building committee helped with the finance of the construction by taking a loan of \$30,000 for the Commercial Life Insurance Company of Louisville, and that money was deposited into the German National Bank of Cullman. Tragedy struck when there was a loss at the bank due to embezzlement and the bank had to close in 1914. To make matters worse, the bank claimed the church owed them and the committee was forced to pay six notes of \$5,000 each to the bank. However, the bank was not owed this money, but rather the lender which was the insurance company. The committee filed a lawsuit that Dec.



The third and current Sacred Heart Church building during construction

The third and current stone church was dedicated in 1916. The matching stone school was built during the pastorate of Rev. Marion Schwallie, O.S.B. during the late 1940's. Rev. Louis Funk, O.S.B. was pastor during the building of the present rectory in 1961.

Sacred Heart Church exemplifies a rather late example of the German Revival of the Romanesque style. There is a slight indication of the popular cruciform style, in that the sides near the east end of the nave, at the crossing, are somewhat wider than the rest of the side walls. Local sandstone was used on the exterior. The original roof was asbestos shingles.

The stained glass windows were designed by the Von Gerichter Ecclesiastic Studio of Columbus, Ohio in 1914. Twenty-four of the windows were built in Munich, Germany and when a couple of them were ready to be shipped to Cullman, the outbreak of World War I necessitated their burial to protect them. They were dug up and shipped to Cullman after the war, and installed in 1920. (There is a link to the online book "Sacred Heart Church Windows" under the Archives tab at the top of the page)

The pipe organ (Austin Organ—Opus 1029), one of the largest in North Alabama, was built in 1921 and was acquired by Sacred Heart in 1959. It received a major overhaul in 1988.

Rev. Cletus Meagher, O.S.B., the current Abbot of St. Bernard Abbey launched the Family Life Center Program in 1991. The year was spent refining the design, visiting numerous churches from Birmingham to the Tennessee line. The “Best of all Possibilities” included offices, classrooms, conference room, youth room, kitchen, locker rooms, gymnasium and stage. Some of the building’s features include standing seam roof, table & chair storage under the stage, kitchen located between conference room & gymnasium, electric retractable basketball goals with center curtain and a truly remarkable fireplace designed by Brother Jude Johnston, O.S.B., of St. Bernard Abbey. The Center is a beehive of constant activity and is utilized by nearly every member of the parish.

In the fall of 1999 an extensive repair and restoration project was begun on the church steeples and roof, including gutters and downspouts. Sacred Heart’s most prominent feature, the gold crosses atop its steeples, came into being as part of the restoration project. They are a recognizable landmark to Cullman residents and visitors. Twenty-three (23) tons of zinc, and 600 pounds of solder were used by Copperworks Corp. of Decatur for the job. A fish-scale pattern of shingles was used on the steeples and the high roof. There are 4,000 shingles on each steeple; each held in place with five nails. The lower roof is standing seam design.

The latest cleaning and restoration of the stained glass windows was in 2011 under the leadership of our current Pastor, Rev. Patrick Egan, O.S.B.. He began studying for the priesthood in 2003 after retiring as a Colonel in the United States Army, and was ordained in June, 2008. He was assigned as Pastor in August 2009. The restoration ended with the installation of three new rose windows in the sanctuary and a new rose window in the school building. A new, elevated pulpit or ambo, as well as a display cabinet for the sacred oils, were also installed.