

**A Brief History of  
Catholics in the South  
and Sacred Heart Church**

**CELEBRATING**

**150**   
**YEARS**

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**SACRED HEART OF JESUS**

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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**April 9, 1874 - April 9, 2024**

# History of Catholics in Alabama

1540

De Soto reached the west coast of Florida on May 25, 1539 and went through Georgia to reach the western part of Carolina in 1540. He marched his company along the Tennessee River to what is now Gunterville, through Jackson and Marshall counties. He then took the Coosa River which would take him through the corner of DeKalb and into Etowah County near Gadsden and then through Calhoun and St Clair counties into Talladega county. He visited the upper Indian Capitol Village of Coosa.

Fr Sigura, the lead Chaplain, and the priests that were in the company were said to have “offered Mass outside the village”.



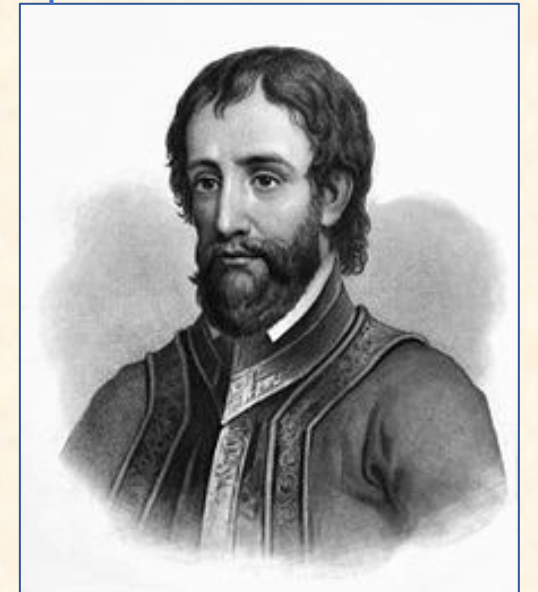
Still searching for gold, he took Indians as slaves and hostages, confiscating their provisions and destroying their villages along his route across central Alabama as he went to meet the great Indian Chief Tuskaloosa. At Maubila the capital village of Chief Tuskaloosa’s province, there was a “fierce battle against Chief Tuskaloosa and the warriors of several Indian tribes”. The Spaniards lost 82 men and 45 horses on October 18, 1540.

De Soto then altered his plans and began to travel northwestward through what is now Marengo, Hale and Greene counties. He came to the Black Warrior River on Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>. He continued fighting and pillaging the Indians of the area on his route to the Tombigbee River Valley into Mississippi to the town of Chickasa.

1542

De Soto discovers the Mississippi River, builds two Brigantine vessels and crosses the river and roamed through several states.

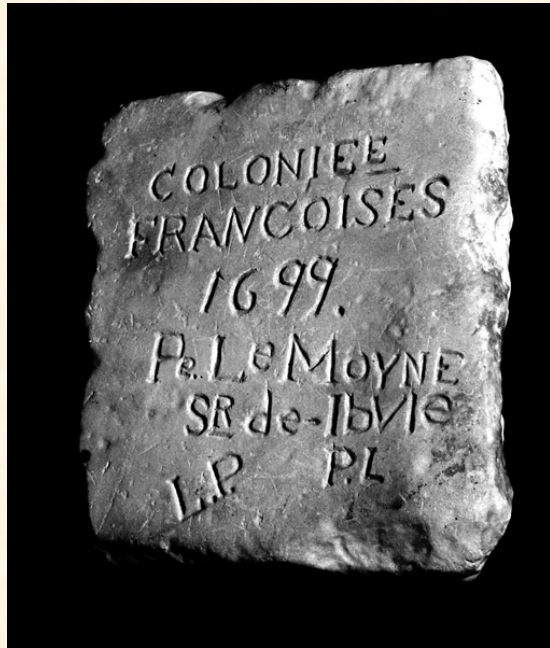
De Soto died on May 21, 1542, and was buried in the banks of the Mississippi River.



# History of Catholics in Alabama

1699

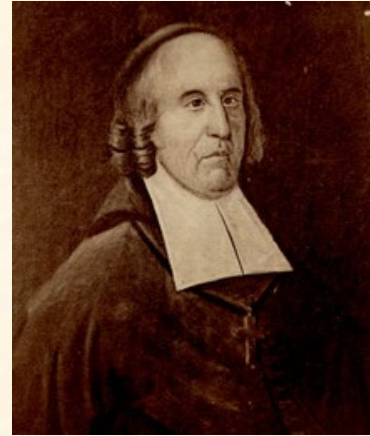
Iberville establishes a colony on the gulf coast of Alabama. Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville was a Catholic that founded the colony of Louisiana in New France. He was accompanied by Father Anastase Douay, who had once been an explorer with the La Salle Catholic missionaries



1700

The first resident priest of Mobile was Fr Paul du Rhu of the Society of Jesus.

1703



Mobile's Cathedral Parish was established on July 20, 1703, by Jean-Baptiste de la Croix de Chevrières de Saint-Vallier, Bishop of Quebec.

1763

Treaty of Paris: England is given Canada and Louisiana east of the Mississippi River as well as Spanish Florida. The territory that is today Alabama was then in the British Province of Illinois. Many priests are forced from serving Mass in the areas they have been for many years.

1775

America Revolutionary War begins; it ends in 1783

1817

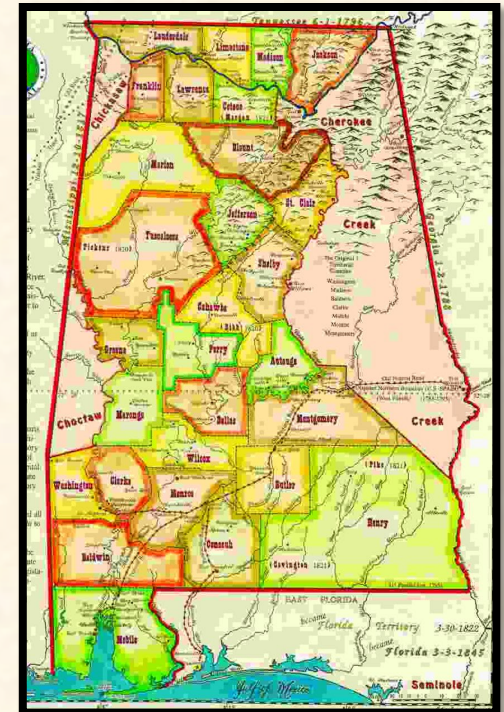
Alabama becomes a territory

1818

First attempt at a Catholic mission in areas that are now in the Diocese of Birmingham

1819

Alabama becomes the 22<sup>nd</sup> state on Dec 14, 1819



# History of Catholics in Alabama

1820

About 200 Catholics live in the areas of Moulton, Tuscumbia, Florence, Sheffield, Courtland, and Huntsville.

1824

Earliest record of a priest visiting to administer the Sacraments to residents in North Alabama was in 1824 when Fr. Robert Abel of Saints Joseph's in the Diocese of Bardstown Kentucky, came south.

1826

Bishop Portier entered upon his office, the church in Mobile, now called the Immaculate Conception, was the only one in Alabama, and he was the only priest.

1829

Diocese of Mobile established on May 15, 1829

1830

Bishop Portier sends Fr Loras and Fr Chalon to canvass the central and northern parts of the diocese. They first visit Montgomery for a few days, then to Tuscaloosa (at that time was the capital of AL), next to Huntsville, then Moulton and Tuscumbia, Florence, then back to Tuscaloosa where they separated ways.

1833

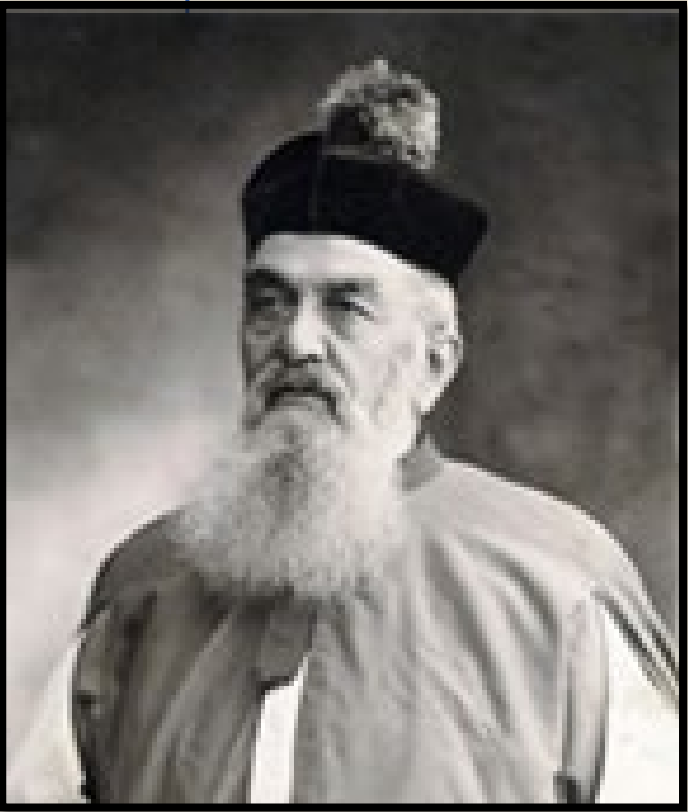
March 1833 Fr Jules Massip was appointed to "form a parish and build a church in Moulton, Alabama."

1835

Resurrection Catholic Chapel in Moulton is constructed

~1860

Fr John B Baasen was appointed as missionary to the faithful in North Alabama. He began with headquarters in Tuscumbia.



1869

On Sept 30<sup>th</sup>, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was dedicated by Fr Baasen in Tuscumbia.

Catholics were thriving across north Alabama. Monsignor Baasen was conducting Mass to all in the area before and during the time Col Cullman settlers arrived in 1873. North Alabama was often referred to as "his parish". Fr Baasen was the first priest of the diocese ever to be honored by the Pope (Leo XIII) as a Domestic Prelate with the title, Right Reverend Monsignor.

# The beginning of Sacred Heart Church and first church building

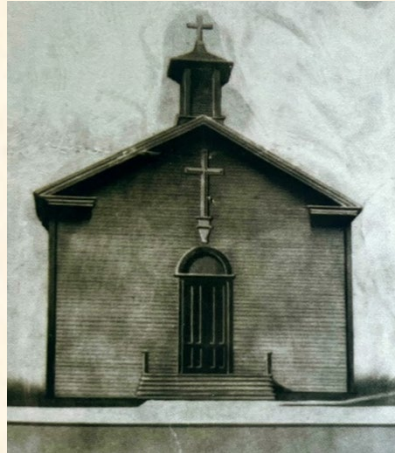
1871

Catholics are being persecuted in German Empire and began to leave.

St Ann established in Decatur by Benedictines from St Bernard and was a mission church to Our Lady of the Shoals Parish.

1872

St Paul's the first Catholic Church in Jefferson County in the newly incorporated City of Birmingham in June and dedicated in Sept.



1873

April Col. Johann Cullmann brings 5 families to what is now Cullman and town is founded.

The Kyle, Madden, and Osborn families deed land to Bishop John Quinlan, Bishop of Mobile for a Catholic Church to be erected.



Bishop Quinlan

1874

**On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1874, the completed church was officially named "Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" and was blessed by Monsignor Baasen with approval from Bishop Quinlan.**

Establishment of a Board of trustees that included John Fromhold, August Gruenger, Herman Lehring, John Maier, and Ferdinand Krellhaus.

South and North Alabama Railroad Company give lots to the trustees for use for a rectory and school

1875

First recorded death in the Sacred Heart parish record book is Martin Fromhold April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1875.

1876

The first First Holy Communion was on 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.

The first marriage on record was on Oct 10<sup>th</sup>, 1876; Julia Hassenbein to Joseph Schmidt

## Era of Sacred Heart Church in the second church building

1877

1878



Construction completed on St Boniface Mission Church, the first Catholic Church in Hanceville

Dec 14<sup>th</sup>, 1878, Notre Dame Sisters of Milwaukee arrived in Cullman and opened the School for Catholics and non-Catholics.

Cullman becomes a county made up of parts of Blount, Walker, Winston, and Marshall counties (Ala Acts 1876, bien. sess., no 56, sec 1/p68)

Second church building built -small white church with no steeple- as well as a small house for the new pastor, and a small convent for the sisters begins.

Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, 1877, arrival of Fr James Meurer, the first residential priest at Sacred Heart

**Nov 1<sup>st</sup>, 1877, Sacred Heart becomes a Parish Church.**

Joseph Fromhold deeds land to Bishop Quinlan for Sacred Heart

1879

Construction of a new schoolhouse starts as school enrollment increases to 100 students.

1880

Sisters of Norte Dame move into new quarters in the schoolhouse

Fr James Meurer is replaced by Fr Matthew Meurer

1882

Fr Matthew Meurer is replaced with Fr Buergler

1887

Fr Buergler is replaced with Fr Oswald Moosmuller O.S.B

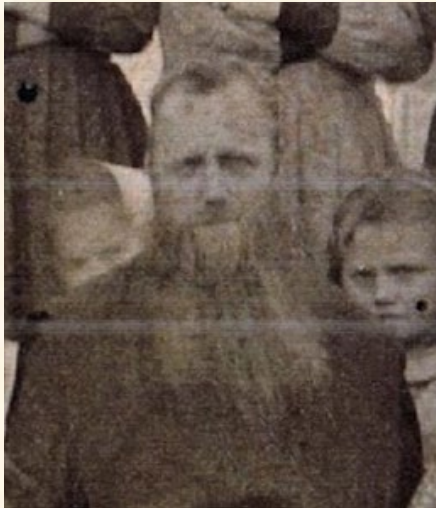
Benedictine priests began their tradition of service as parish pastors.

Nov 8, 1887, Deed for cemetery

# Sacred Heart Church in the second church building



1888



Fr Gammelbert Brunner O.S.B. replaces Fr Moosmuller

Fr Brunner's family donate for improvements to the church to include a steeple and a set of bells.

Construction of a new and larger schoolhouse begins

1889

May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1889, Bishop O'Sullivan dedicates St Mary's, a small church 9 miles south of Cullman built by Fr Brunner and is dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help <sup>1</sup>

Oct 27<sup>th</sup> construction of a new schoolhouse blessing at 3:30pm <sup>1</sup>

Construction of a larger rectory

1890

Sept 29<sup>th</sup>, founding of St. Bernard Abbey.



1891

1892

March 20<sup>th</sup>, founding of Sacred Heart Convent; convent breaks ground in 1903



Dedication of the updated Sacred Heart Church with its steeple and bells.

1894

1898

Fr Jacob Lauth O.S.B. replaces Fr Brunner

## Sacred Heart Church in the second church building

## Sacred Heart in the current church building

1899



Fr Theodosius Oesterrieder O.S.B. replaces Fr Lauth.

St Boniface moved to present day location and enlarged

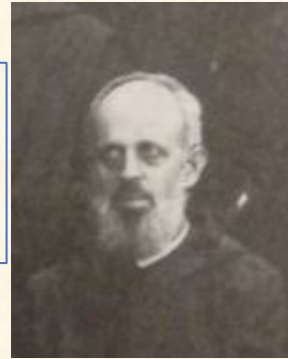
1900



Photo Church, convent, and school as they stood in 1900

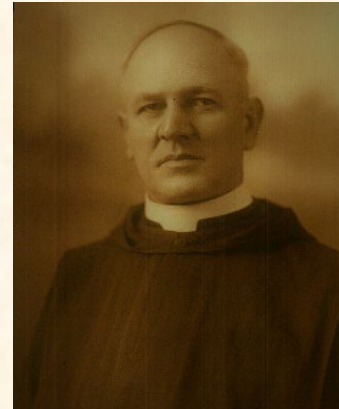
1901

Fr Severin Laufenberg O.S.B. replaces Fr Oesterrieder.



1905

Fr Ignatius Mayer O.S.B. replaces Fr Laufenberg.



1910



Sacred Heart Knights of Columbus established. This is the oldest Order of Knights in the diocese.

Photo of Building Committee at the Groundbreaking for current Sacred Heart Church building



1912

Sacred Heart Altar Society established

# Sacred Heart in the current church building



1913



Ordo Divini Officii, Laying of cornerstone for the current church building

1915

June 4<sup>th</sup>, dedication of the newly completed Church building



1920

Sacred Heart Church exemplifies a German revival of the Romanesque style; among its prominent features is the stained-glass windows. The stained-glass windows were designed by the Von Gerichten Ecclesiastic Studio in Munch, Germany in 1914. When the last twenty-four of the windows 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.

Fr Theodosius Oesterrieder OSB replaces Fr Mayer

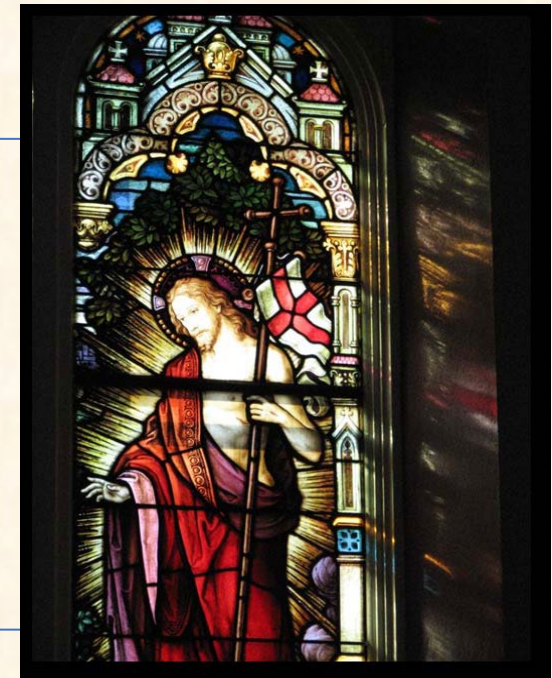
1926

Fr Thomas Schnur OSB replaces Fr Oesterrieder

1943

1947

Fr Marion Schwallie OSB replaces Fr Schnur



1949

Construction completed April 12<sup>th</sup> on the matching stone school



1950

March 21<sup>st</sup>, Dedication of new Sacred Heart school building

1951

Fr Louis Funk OSB replaces Fr Schwallie

1959



Austin Organ – Opus 1029 (built in 1921) acquired by the parish

1961

The current rectory was constructed

1964

Fr Claude St. Germaine OSB replaces Fr Funk

1972

Fr Leonard Giardina OSB replaces Fr Germaine

1977

First German Festival in the City of Cullman was born at Sacred Heart School commemorating the school's 100th anniversary. Two years later, the City of Cullman Oktoberfest Committee was formed. This Oktoberfest celebration has grown and has become an annual event for the school, the parish, and the City of Cullman.

1978

Fr Bernard Patterson OSB replaces Fr Giardina

1984

Fr Roger Lott OSB replaces Fr Bernard Patterson

1986

Fr Cletus Meagher OSB replaces Fr Roger Lott



1988



Refurbishment of the Opus Organ

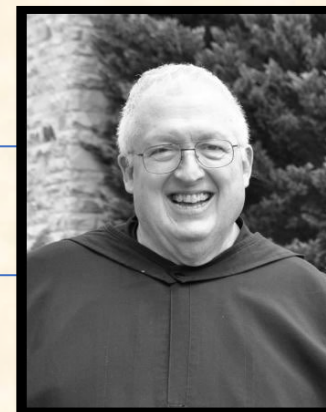
1991

Launch of the Family Life Center Project



1995

Fr Kevin McGrath OSB replaces Fr Cletus



1999

Restoration of the church roof and steeples



2009

Fr Patrick Egan OSB replaces Fr Kevin

2012

Completion of the stained-glass window refurbishment.

2013

Mass celebration of the centennial of the laying of the church building corner stone in 1913.



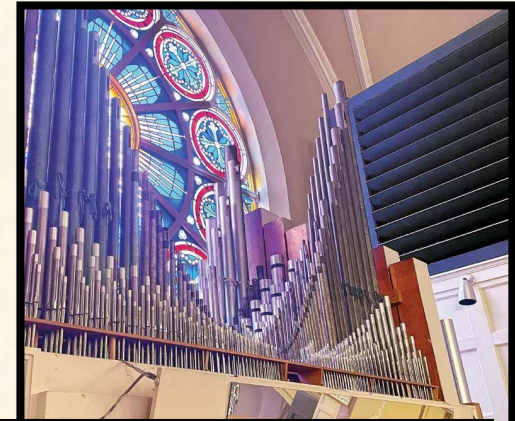
2020

Completion of repair of steeples due to the 2018 hailstorm: All new zinc shingles and shielding are now in place. The crosses were redone in 24-carat gold leaf. Lightning protection was improved with new arrestors placed at the tip of each cross.



2022

Campaign for New Organ



2024

**150<sup>th</sup> Celebration**

Sacred Heart Church



April 9, 1874 – April 9, 2024