



SAINT STEPHEN CATHEDRAL

610 Locust Street, Owensboro KY 42301

By Jerry Long
c.2024



St. Stephen Cathedral, Owensboro Diocese, Owensboro, KY

History of Daviess County, Kentucky,
Chicago, IL, Inter-State Publishing, Co., 1883, p.368:

CHURCHES

St. Stephens' Catholic.— The first religious services according to the Catholic faith were held at the residence of W. Coomes, about a mile below town, once a month, by Rev. Wathen. The pastors since then have been: W. S. Coomes, 1841, to August, 1855; Eugene O'Callaghan, September, 1855, to March, 1870; Ivo Schacht, March, 1870, to April, 1874; A. J. Brady, May, 1874, to Nov 1, 1877; D. F. Crane, Nov. 1, 1877, to the present.

The congregation now comprises 235 families. The church building, three squares west of the court-house, was erected many years ago; and were it not for a stringency of the times at present a larger edifice would be erected.



The Centenary of Catholicity In Kentucky, Ben. J. Webb,
Louisville, KY, J. C. Webb & Company, 1884, pp.425-428:

CHAPTER XXXVIII – THE MISSION OF DAVIESS COUNTY.

"As early as the year 1808," writes an old Catholic resident of Daviess," there were nominal Catholics in this county. They married out of the Church, and their children were brought up without knowledge of the precious inheritance that was due them. Some of these latter retained traditions of their faith that afterwards smoothed the way for them to the knowledge of the truth and its joyful acceptance. Others of them are even more inimical to the Church than are those whose Protestant ancestry drifts into the past for hundreds of years. We have here, at least, a good argument against *mixed marriages*. Two of my own cousins thus lost their faith and brought a like misfortune upon their families. One of them was led back to the ark, together with his entire family, when a resident priest was sent to the district. The other still continues to wander. It would astonish you to learn how many there are, even here, who ought to be in the sheepfold, and are not, simply because they were without a shepherd in their youth. The outlook has been brighter since 1833, when Rev. John C. Wathen was sent to the district, of which Knottsville is the center. Abandonment of the Church is now a rare occurrence, and now and then a wanderer of times past is seen to re-enter the fold."

The first Catholic settlers in Daviess county, worthy of the name, were William Jarboe and Mrs. Ezekiel Henning. The husband of the latter was not a Catholic, but he afterwards became one, and it as in his house, as is generally supposed, was said the first mass that was ever offered up in Daviess county. The officiating priest on that occasion was, doubtless, Rev. Charles Nerinckx. In 1820, at least on one occasion, mass was celebrated in the house of William Jarboe by Rev. Robert A. Abell. From 1816 to 1830 there was an influx of Catholic movers, mostly from Nelson county, to the neighborhood from which was afterwards drawn the congregation of St. Lawrence. Among these were the families of John Payne, Charles Jarboe, Leonard Knott, from whom the town of

Knottsville takes its name, Thomas Montgomery, John Bowles, Hilary Drury, S. McDaniel, Richard R. Coomes, Ben. All, Peter Higdon, and - Carrico.*

*The house of John Bowles, named above, was the church station for the neighborhood for a number of years preceding the erection of the church of St. Lawrence. The venerable Mother Bertha Bowles, of the Loretto society, is one his daughters. Thomas Montgomery was the father of Hon. Zach. Montgomery, of the California bar Hilary Drury removed from Maryland to the Cox's Creek settlement, of Kentucky, in 1809, where he afterwards married a daughter of Richard Coomes, to whom reference will be found in the text. Hilary Drury, accompanied by his brother-in-law, R. R. Coomes, removed to Daviess county in 1830. One of his sisters died a member of the Loretto society; his oldest daughter, Matilda, is a member of the same community; his oldest son, J. G. Drury, is a prominent physician residing in Knottsville; his youngest son, Rev. E. Drury, has charge of the church and congregation of St. Francis, Chicago, Kentucky.

Richard R. Coomes, whose name appears in the above list of early settlers in the county, is a grandson of the veteran patriarch of the Cox's Creek settlement, Francis Coomes, who died a centenarian in 1822. The history of the family, as sketched for the writer by its oldest living representative in Daviess, though it may have hitherto been referred to in this history, is sufficiently interesting to be here introduced:

Francis Coomes, from whom one branch of the family so designated and residing in Kentucky has its descent, was born in Maryland about the year 1722. When a young married man, he strayed away from Maryland and went first to Virginia, and afterwards to North Carolina. Here there were children born to him, and these grew up with little, if any, knowledge of their ancestral faith. When his oldest son, Richard, father of the venerated friend whose account the writer is here quoting, reached his majority, he became dissatisfied with his surroundings in North Carolina, and, after wandering from place to place for a number of years, finally came to Kentucky in the year 1790. It is more than likely he fell in with some of his father's former acquaintances of Maryland, then on their way to the settlement on Cox's creek.

Richard Coomes was accompanied to the State and to the settlement referred to by two single sisters, Anna and Rachel Coomes, the first of whom afterwards became the wife of Walter Coomes, favorably mentioned by Dr. Spalding in his "Sketches of Kentucky," and the mother of the late Rev. Charles I. Coomes, referred to in many places in this history; and the last, the wife of William Coomes, who removed from Nelson to Daviess county in the year 1815.

In 1794, or thereabouts, Richard Coomes returned to North Carolina and brought back with him to Kentucky his aged father and mother, and two single sisters. One of these latter afterwards intermarried with Wilfred Wathen, and became the mother of the resident pastor of Daviess county, the late Rev. John C. Wathen. The other was married to John Speaks. Having still a widowed sister residing in Virginia, Mrs. Margaret Wathen, he went after her a year or two later, and brought to Kentucky herself and her two infant children. This Mrs. Margaret Wathen was afterwards united in marriage with Zachariah Aud, of the Cox's Creek Catholic settlement, and she became the mother of the present venerable chaplain of Calvary convent, Rev. Athanasius A. Aud, still living at the advanced age of eighty-one years.

Long before these latter passages in the life of Richard Coomes, he had found his way back to the Church in which he had been baptized; and it was through his instrumentality, principally, and under God, that each and every member of his father's family, before estranged from the faith, was led back to the one fold of the one shepherd. The death of Richard Coomes took place in 1868, at the age of eighty-eight years.

After the year 1824, and up to 1833, the Catholic people of Daviess county were visited at long intervals by Rev. E. J. Durbin, from Union county, or by one of his assistants. The first Catholic church put up in the county, that of St. Lawrence, a poor log edifice, was erected in 1831. The pastorate of Rev. John C. Wathen began in 1833, and his mission at the time extended to the counties of Daviess, Breckinridge and Meade. His nominal residence, however, was at the church of St. Lawrence. Nearly two years before his death, which took place on the 19th of October, 1841, he replaced his home church by one of brick.

It would appear from the annexed extract from a letter addressed to the writer by a highly respected priest of the diocese, that the first Catholic settlers in Daviess county were unfortunate in their selections of lands for permanent residence. "The land upon which stands the church of St. Lawrence was a gift from the owner of a great deal of the adjoining property, all of which is poor, and it was given, no doubt, in order to secure sales of the lands near by to Catholic settlers. The hilly lands at St. Raphael's, on Panther creek, were given, I think, with the same design." *

*The annexed items are recorded in a book kept by Father Wathen, and still preserved at St. Lawrence: 1. "Took charge of congregation of St. Lawrence May 5, 1833." 2. "Commenced at Yellow Banks (now Owensboro) May 12, 1833." 3. "Entered upon ministerial exercises at Hardinsburg, Breckinridge county, August 4, 1833." 4. "April 2d, 1840, Rev. Cousin Charles I. Coomes, has come to stay with me; he leaves in October." 5. "February 5, 1839, members of congregation meet and resolve to build a church; they sign eight hundred and twenty-eight dollars."

Rev. Linus O. Coomes was pastor of the church of St. Lawrence in 1844, and the following year, Rev. A. A. Aud was named pastor of the entire mission of Daviess county. In 1846 the mission was divided by Revs. Walter S. Coomes and A. A. Aud. In 1848 Rev. Michael Coghlan became pastor of St. Lawrence's, in which position he remained for nearly a quarter of a century. He was succeeded, in 1872, by Rev. Charles Eggermont, and he by the present pastor, Rev. P. J. Rock, about the year 1880.

In the year 1844, a church was built on Panther creek, in Daviess county, to which was given the title of St. Raphael's. It was but a plain structure of logs, and, in 1857, it was destroyed by fire. Two years later it was rebuilt under the pastorate of Rev. Ivo Schacht. On the same water course, but a few miles distant from St. Raphael's, was built, in 1859, the church of St. Alphonsus. The district in which these churches appeared, were settled, for the most part, by families whose ancestral homes had been in Nelson county, the greater number of them having been former members of the congregation of Holy Cross, on Pottinger's creek.* The church of St. Alphonsus was destroyed by fire in 1868, and has since been replaced by one of brick.

The church of St. Mary of the Woods, Whitesville, stands thirteen miles southeast from that of St. Lawrence. It was originally built of logs by Rev. Walter S. Coomes, in 1845. Since that time, however, it has been replaced by a handsome frame structure, put up, as is supposed, by Rev. Michael Coghlan, about the year 1862.

Under the pastorate of Rev. Ivo Schacht, of St. Stephen's, Owensboro, two other churches, both small, were erected in Daviess county. One of these is that of St. Peter, at Grissom Landing, and the other that of St. Martin of Tours, not far removed from that of St. Raphael's. The first named dates from 1872, and the other from 1873. About the same time was begun and finished the church of St. Joseph, Owensboro, designed and constructed for the accommodation of the German element of the population of Owensboro and the surrounding country.

In the year 1882, the pastorate of the churches of Daviess county comprised seven clergymen. The names of these were: Rev. D. F. Crane, at St. Stephen's, Owensboro; Rev. P. J.

Haeseley, at St. Joseph's, Owensboro; Rev. P. J. Rock, at St. Lawrence's, Knottsville; Rev. P. Volk, at St. Alphonsus', Panther Creek; Rev. G. A. Vantroostenberghe, at St. Raphael's, Panther Creek; Rev. Kyran King, at St. Mary of the Woods, Whitesville; and Rev. Dom. F. Croghan, at St. Peter's, Grissom Landing.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 10 June 1900, p.1B:

**OLD ST. STEPHEN'S,
MOTHER OF MOST OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES**

In Daviess County, and her Three Score Years and Ten of Usefulness and Growth.

St. Stephen's congregation was recently reminded by the reverend pastor, Father, A. T. McConnell, that the parish had entered upon its "three score and ten years" and this announcement was made a pretext for a request that some improvements be made in the present structure, which has served the congregation since 1854, when it was erected. The response to this call was prompt and as a result "old St. Stephens" stands on an entirely new foundation, has a new roof and several feet of the wall next to the foundation has also been renewed. The interior, is soon to be wainscoted and this will doubtless be followed by the placing of an elegant cornice, the frescoing of the church and other improvements which will make it more substantial and attractive than when new.

St. Stephens is the mother church of all congregations in the western end of the county, there being but one parish older, that of St. Lawrence, two miles east of Knottsville, from which only two churches sprang, St. Mary's, at Whitesville, and St. Williams, of Knottsville, while St. Stephens has called into being and nurtured St. Peter's, at Stanley, St. Augustine's, at Reed's, St. Alphonsus, at Curdsville, St. Raphael's, on Panther creek, St. Martin's, at Rome, and St. Paul's and St. Joseph's, of Owensboro. Not only have these places been served from St. Stephen's, but at least two of them, St. Martin's and St. Peter's, have been furnished pastors from the list of assistants who served at St. Stephen's. Rev. J. F. McKearney, now stationed at Stanley, and Rev. H. Herberth, now pastor at Rome, were in recent years assistants at St. Stephen's.

The present Catholic cemetery in which the three Catholic congregations bury was also bought and prepared by the mother parish. A committee, of which the late John F. Lancaster was chairman, made the selection of the site, which was then, 1858, in the woods.

The pastors who have served this congregation, with dates of their coming and going, are as follows: Previous to 1833, Rev. E. J. Durbin, from St. Vincent's, Union county; 1823 to 1840, Rev. John C. Wathen, from St. Lawrence; 1841 to 1855, Rev. Walter Coomes, he being the first resident pastor; 1855 to 1871, Rev. Eugene O'Callahan; 1871 to 1874, Rev. Ivo Schacht; 1874 to 1877, Rev. Hugh Brady; 1874 to 1883, Rev. Dominick, F. Crane; 1883 to 1885, Rev. J. F. Gambon; 1885 to the present time, Rev. A. T. McConnell.

Of these few are living. Father Wathen died fifty years ago at Flint island and was brought back to this county by relatives and buried in the old St. Lawrence cemetery, where a cruciform slab marks his grave.

Father Crane is now chaplain at the St. Mary and Elizabeth hospital, and Father Brady has a similar place at St. Joseph's infirmary, both of Louisville.

Father Gambon is rector of the largest parish in Louisville – St. Patrick's – and is wearing with becoming dignity the decorations of a monsignor, bestowed upon him a few months since by Leo XIII.

Father Schacht.

Rev. Ivo Schacht was one of the most zealous and popular priests ever stationed in Owensboro. It is uncertain whether he was a Hollander or a Belgium by birth, but he came here from his native land, qualified for priestly duties and very quickly became the peer of any native minister in good works and patriotic zeal. He was pastor of the Nashville cathedral for a time, from 1857 to 1861 was a missionary in Kansas, from whence he came to Kentucky. He was not here long when Bishop M. J. Spalding assigned him to St. Stephen's, where he spent four years. He built St. Peter's church at Grissom's landing in 1872 and St. Martin of Tours, at Rome, in 1873. He had the true apostolic spirit and, unwilling to sit in his study and await the coming of the people to him, he went out and sought them. He also attended St. Raphael's and St. Alphonsus churches, in the western part of the county, and Beech Grove, in McLean county. The great number of "Ivos" to be seen on the baptismal registers of every parish in which he officiated bears ample testimony to his great popularity." He was an enthusiastic advocate of total abstinence and had a successful society in his parish devoted to that cause. In 1874, as now, the Protestant ministers were also ardent in this matter and on Easter Sunday of that year a great total abstinence rally was held in the Baptist church. Father Schacht and his society were invited and the invitation was gladly accepted. At the great meeting he was one of the first to be called upon to speak. He had spoken only about twenty minutes when he was seen to falter and fall back heavily. He was taken to his home, and though local skill and love did all that was possible to save his life, he died on the Thursday following. The funeral was the most notable in Owensboro's history up to that date. He lies buried in the Catholic cemetery here and a beautiful marble shaft marks his grave, which is not far from Owensboro's only other sacerdotal tomb, that of the late and much esteemed Rev. Henry J. Civil.

The First Church.

The first church was a small brick, standing on the site of the present church, but fronting on Main street. It was built in 1839. The few Catholics at Yellow Banks at that time held a meeting and sent a committee to Louisville. They employed a bricklayer and contractor, James Wilhoite, of that city, to put up the church. After building it he concluded to make Yellow Banks his home and to this fact Owensboro is indebted for several of her best citizens, his descendants.

This church, however, soon proved to be quite too small and in 1854 the present structure was commenced under, the direction of Rev. Walter Coomes and was finished the next year by his successor, Father O'Callahan. At this time the parish extended east only as far as what is now Ensor, but in other directions it included all of Daviess, McLean and Henderson counties, Ky., and part of Spencer county, Ind. With all the losses of territory sustained in the way of new congregations being organized and the widely extended work of the pastor being lessened, the old congregation has grown in strength and even in territorial authority, for the present pastor has been for several years dean of this district and is, therefore, the bishop of Louisville's direct representative in this ecclesiastical district, which embraces Hancock, Breckinridge, Daviess, Ohio, Henderson and McLean counties. Besides this, about two months ago the bishop and his counselors made St. Stephen's what is known as an irremovable rectory. This adheres to the TWO ST. STEPHEN church and not to the man, but the step was taken principally in compliment to the

present worthy pastor, who has his own peculiar way of doing much without very many ever hearing of it.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 3 March 1901, p.9:

ST. STEPHENS

RESPLENDENT IN THE WORK OF THE DECORATORS.

Extensive Repairs and Improvements in the Old Church – A New Assistant Pastor.

The beautiful weather of yesterday was most timely for the people of St. Stephen's church, as the many improvements recently made on that structure were completed and caused it to loom up quite resplendently. Similar weather today will cause that progressive congregation to thrill with increased pleasure for the interior decorations are especially beautiful under the free rays of ample light.

For five weeks past four men have been working on the interior, frescoing side walls and ceiling, and the last touch was given on Saturday afternoon.

The center panel in the ceiling is a fine, life-size painting of St. Stephen, in sacerdotal vestments. The companion scenery is a very fine piece of landscape painting, all done in fresco colors. On the adjoining panel, near the church entrance, a cross and crown painting, and the panel nearer to the main altar has in it the chalice, with vines of grapes and sheaves of wheat, emblematic of the holy communion. The border work to each of these panels is especially fine, that of the centerpiece being imitation relief or raised work, which is quite effectively done. The sanctuary ceiling is richly decorated in symbolic figures and here again is a rich blending of harmonious colors. The passion flower prevails and the Holy Ghost, in the form of a descending dove, is the main figure. The pillars which support the roof, and of which there are two rows, are painted in golden yellow and their capitals are finished in gold leaf. On each side there are five nave panels that are also beautifully done in sky effect colors. The border work of all is particularly attractive. This work was done by Leber Bros., of Louisville, who rank among the best of decorative artists in the West.

Other improvements recently completed were new base wall, basement furnace for heating, and the repainting of the exterior of the church. So, in the language of the reverend pastor, Father McConnell, "old St. Stephen's is a much better structure today than when built forty-five years ago." But if such be true of the building, much better structure is it of the congregation, which has mothered, in a way, at least six other congregations and is now doing more than ever. This recently received episcopal recognition in the appointment of Rev. John Gastoldi as assistant priest to Father McConnell. Father Gastoldi has been stationed at Glasgow, Ky., for two years and has the experience, the culture and the congenial manner well calculated to add still more to the prestige of old St. Stephen's.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 30 December 1914, p1:

CELEBRATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF ST. STEPHENS

Church Rounds Out Three-Quarters of Century of Usefulness

HIGH MASS IS HELD

Father McConnell Delivers Address, Consisting of a Historical Review

Rounding out three-quarters of a century of usefulness in the community, on Tuesday morning every pomp and ceremony permitted by the church was carried out in celebration of the diamond jubilee of St. Stephen's Catholic church, the mother church of all Catholic churches west of Knottsville in Daviess county. Solemn High Mass, with full accoutrement, with the high altar ablaze with candle and electric light, and the sanctuary crowded with clergymen and acolytes, was sung at 9 o'clock. Rev. J. J. Finnegan, assistant pastor of the church, was celebrant with Rev. Louis Herberth, of Rome, as deacon and Rev. S. J. Mensa, assistant pastor of St. Paul's church, as sub-deacon. Rev. A. G. Meyering, pastor of St. Anthony's church at Brown's Valley, acted as master of ceremonies.

Very Rev. Alexander T. McConnell, who for thirty years has been the pastor of St. Stephen's, occupied the *prie dieu* of honor in the sanctuary. Besides these there were present in the sanctuary Reverends L. E. Clements, of St. Lawrence, John D. Fallon, assistant at St. Paul's. Others of the clergy were prevented from attending the services because of deaths in their own congregations and demands of sickness.

Father McConnell's Address.

Father McConnell delivered the address, consisting chiefly of a historical review of the church and its pastors, three, of whom now survive, who are besides himself, now acting, Rev. Hugh Brady, now chaplain at Sts. Mary and Elizabeth hospital in Louisville, and Rev. Dominic Crane, chaplain at St. Joseph infirmary at Louisville. He told of the worshipping of the congregation at long intervals more than eighty years ago, in a log, cabin situated where is now the Taylor property in West Second street, better known as the Sisters' field, it having at one time belonged to the Sisters of Charity. They were attended by priests sent in as they could be spared. As the little band full of parishioners grew, a large room in the residence of William Coomes, who lived on what now is known as the Guthrie farm, a mile west of the city was used, for four years, or from 1835 to 1839. The log cabin was used for seven years, during the period of 1827 to 1835.

St. Stephen's Church Erected.

Old St. Stephen's was begun in the October of 1839. At that time there was not a brickmason in the then village of the Yellow Ranks, afterwards known as Owensboro. Representatives of the congregation went to Louisville and induced Jas. Wilhite to come to Owensboro and do the brick work for the church. Mr. Wilhite acquiesced in the request and settled in the community, where he lived and died. Members of his family now reside in the city. Rev. Walter Coomes, a very earnest and hard-working priest was assigned to the care of the church in 1840, which then embraced all of Daviess county and scattering families in surrounding counties, besides Southern Indiana. Father Coomes spent a great deal of his time in the saddle visiting his flock, until 1855, when he with his years of care in a low, swampy country as Daviess county then was, broke down and was removed.

Father O'Callaghan succeeded to the pastorate of St. Stephen's upon the retirement in 1855 of Father Coomes. He is remembered by many of the older members of the congregation, as he continued in charge of it until in 1871 when after an arduous and zealous life of work and

privations, he retired to Nazareth, where he died some years afterwards. It was during Father O'Callaghan's charge that a parochial residence was built on the site of the present one. He was known as the gentle, lovable pastor of St. Stephen's.

Pastorale of Father Schacht.

Following in 1871 came Rev. Ivo Schacht, who was the militant pastor, and whose remains are interred in the Catholic cemetery on the Henderson road . It was during the pastorate of Father Schacht that the church nourished and became the nucleus for many of the clergy not of his faith. He was a very learned man and a deep scholar and acquired the esteem and respect of all his confreres. Father Schacht was a strong preacher, and it was while in the act of delivering an address in the First Baptist church of this city, on the subject of temperance that he was stricken and had to be re moved to his residence, wherein he died in a short while. Under his charge the present church was completed outwardly and many of the inside improvements made. He was buried from the edifice in April, 1874, beloved by the citizens generally and in particular by his congregation.

Father Hugh Brady, in 1874, took charge of the congregation and remained as the pastor for four and one-half years. He bought what is now known as the Hart building in Daviess street, having in mind the construction of a large church edifice in the heart of the city. Before the completion of his project, however, he was removed. He was liked by everyone and it was with great regret that his parishioners learned of his removal.

For a period of twenty months the congregation was cared for by Rev Thomas F. Gambon. an earnest and zealous worker, who spared no toil to look after the church and the smaller missions of St. Martin, at Rome and others that were then growing into lusty children of the old mother. Father Gambon went to Knottsville in 1885 and later, in 1887, began the new congregation of St. Paul's, in East Fourth street.

St. Peter's at Stanley, begun in 1872 under Father Schacht, and St. Martin at Rome, in 1879, and St. Anthony's at Brown's Valley, started fourteen years ago, have been carved out of the original parish of St. Stephen's.

Father McConnell Takes Charge

Father McConnell, the acting pastor and dean of the parish, took charge of the church in July 1885. He immediately began the renovating of the old building, raising it some three feet from the ground and building under it, a feat at that time unknown locally, and it was under his personal supervision that this was accomplished. He has added every comfort and convenience to the church, in the way of furnace, electric and gas lights. The building was roofed and new altars of a modern and handsome design replaced the older ones. Father McConnell was the donor of the Blessed Virgin's altar on the left of the high altar. He had the present parochial residence reconstruct ed into a, two-story, modern residence with conveniences in keeping with the period and an ornament to the portion of the city in which it is located. He is beloved by his congregation, admired and respected by the clergy of his parish. While advanced in age, Father McConnell is hale and hearty, active in the work of his church and always alert for the betterment of his congregation.

To the reverend assistant, Father Finnegan is given great credit for, the energies displayed in the church work. Under the wise guidance of his chief, Father Finnegan has established and carried out all of the regular church societies and has accomplished a great deal of good work. He is held in the highest esteem by his brother priests, and beloved by all of his congregation. Father

Finnegan is but a young; man, full of enthusiasm and zeal for his work, and sparing himself at no time in his labors.

The pastor and his assistant were hosts to the visiting clergymen to a banquet served at the parochial residence at 1 o'clock in the afternoon.



The Record, Official organ of the Diocese of Louisville, 11 October 1917:

St. Stephen's Church

St. Stephen. Church, corner Second and Cedar streets, is the mother church of the county. The church building was erected over eighty years ago, but is in good condition. painting and other improvements having been made in the past few years.

Rev. A. T. McConnell, dean of the diocese, is the pastor of St. Stephens. and Rev. Joseph Finnigan is assistant pastor. Owing to the ill health of Rev. Father McConnell, the greater part of the work of the parish , which comprises 360 families, devolves largely upon Father Finnigan.

There are 200 children in the congregation. thirty of whom attend the public schools of the city. For the later a special Sunday school service is held every Sunday, following the children's Mass at 2 o'clock.

Masses at St. Stephen's Church are celebrated at 6 o'clock and 10 o'clock with Vesper service in the evening at 7:30 o'clock.

Father Finnigan is preparing to have a special service, a Solemnes chant on Sunday evenings. The best singers in the parish will take part, and if plans formulated are carried out, the initial service will be held the first Sunday in Advent.

In addition to the Sunday services, dally Mass is said at 7 o'clock, with special First Friday services, which include Masses at 5:30 and 7 o'clock, the latter followed by benediction.

The month of October, known in the church as the month of the Rosary, will be one of double devotion, special services being held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 8 March 1938, p.8:

New Cathedral Parish Oldest in Owensboro

St. Stephen's Church, Owensboro, which has been designated as the Cathedral church of the new diocese, dates its origin to the efforts of the missionary, the Rev. B. J. Durbin, who in 1824 visited small gatherings of the faithful from Louisville to Union County. Masses were said in homes of Catholics, and some services were also held in the Daviess County courthouse. Father Durbin covered his territory on horseback. There was little of a village at that time where Owensboro now stands, the small settlement being known as "Yellow Banks."

The first pastor of St. Stephen's, which was then only a mission, was the Rev. J. C. Wathen, who was pastor at St. Lawrence Church in the eastern end of the county. He attended the mission of St. Stephen's Church, as well as the mission at Flint Island, afterward named Rhodelia, where

he subsequently died. Father Wathen died on October 19, 1841, at the home of Stephen Burch, where he was seized with illness while about his work. He was a native of Kentucky.

Services at Courthouse

It was on June 15, 1838, that Catholicism began to take on virulent life in this section. On that date, the Rev. Martin J. Spalding preached at the Daviess County courthouse on "The Marks of the Church." Father Spalding later became Bishop Martin Spalding. Two days later Bishop Chabrat made his Episcopal visitation to the church at St. Lawrence. At that time there were 100 Catholic families in Daviess County, most of them living in the St. Lawrence section.

Following Father Wathen came the Rev. Walter S. Coomes. He was born in Virginia. Father Coomes remained as pastor from the death of Father Wathen in 1841 until 1855 when he was made chaplain of the orphanage at Louisville. He died Nov. 27, 1871. Father Eugene O'Callaghan took charge of the parish in 1855, remaining until 1870, when because of advancing age, he was made chaplain of Nazareth where he remained until his death, Nov. 26, 1897. In March 1870 the Rev. Ivo Schacht took charge of St. Stephen's parish. It was he who built the residence in Cedar Street which was used by the priest until 1926 when the new church was built. At that time adjoining residence was purchased and used as a rectory until the present new edifice was started in 1937, and completed this year. He obtained the stations, the organ, proper furniture, frescoing of the school and the building of St. Peter's Church in "The Roost" west of Owensboro. Father Schacht's death occurred in Owensboro, April 14, 1874. He was stricken while addressing a convention.

Father Hugh Brady was assigned to St. Stephen's Church upon the death of Father Schacht and he remained three years. The next three years the pastorate was held by the Rev. Dominick Crane, he being assigned elsewhere in 1883. His death occurred while chaplain in Sts. Mary and Elizabeth Hospital in 1920. Father Thomas F. Gambon succeeded Father Crane in 1883, remaining but a short time when he was assigned to Knottsville, and from there to the organization of St. Paul's Church, Owensboro. He died in Louisville, Dec. 11, 1901, while pastor of St. Patrick's Church.

Pastor for 34 Years

Father Alexander T. McConnell followed and he held the pastorate of the church for 34 years. He was made irremovable rector in 1900 when Bishop McCloskey raised the parish to that dignity. Father McConnell died on January 31, 1919, and was buried from the church where he had ministered so long. The Rev. John M. Higgins, Father McConnell's assistant, remained in charge of the church as administrator.

The Rev. Bernard Cunningham had charge of the parish for several months in that year while Father McConnell was in Europe. The Rev. Richard Maloney, who built the new St. Stephen's Church, which is now the Cathedral church, became pastor of the church in June 1919. Father Maloney served the church until he was transferred to St. Brigid's parish, Louisville, in February 1935, when the present pastor, the Rev. Albert J. Tompkins, came here from Fancy Farm, Ky.

Assistants at St. Stephen's have been Revs. Louis Spalding, John Gastaldj, Francis Felten, Louis Herberth, D. J. Higgins, J. F. McKearney, L. B. Ford, Francis O'Connor, J. J. Finnegan, J. M. Higgins, R. J. Jenne, J. J. Donovan, R. Trudall and Leo Dienes.

Before 1876, for some time, the first St. Stephen's School was conducted in a building across from the armory in Third Street. In 1876 the old Hart School building in Daviess Street,

between Fifth and Seventh Streets, was purchased and conducted as St. Stephen's School for Boys. More than 20 years ago this school was abandoned.



**Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943, by William Foster Hayes,
Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., 1943, pp.200-204:**

ST. STEPHEN'S

The parent church of this faith in Owensboro is St. Stephen's, now St. Stephen's Cathedral. Amplifying somewhat the account of this church in the older history, this parish had its origin in the missionary labors of the Rev. E. J. Durbin who as far back as 1824 rode horseback on his ministrations through a territory extending from Louisville to Union County. No church was established here, however, at that time, and the effective impetus of its establishment seems to have been given by the Rev. Martin J. Spalding, afterwards Bishop Spalding, who preached in the Daviess County Court House on June 15, 1838.

The Rev. D. F. Crane, who had been pastor for several years when the History of 1883 was published was then nearing the end of his pastorate. In that year he was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas F. Gambon, who in a short time, was transferred to Knottsville and later to St. Paul's. The next pastor was the Reverend Alexander T. McConnell who enjoyed a pastorate of 34 years, one of the longest in the history of Owensboro churches. Following his death, the Rev. Jno. M. Higgins, who had been his assistant, remained in charge for a time as administrator.

Subsequent pastors have been: The Reverend Bernard Cunningham; the Reverend Richard Maloney, 1919 to 1935, in whose incumbency the great church building (now the Cathedral) at Seventh and Locust Streets was erected; the Reverend Albert J. Tompkins, who remained until the church was elevated to its cathedral status, when he was succeeded by the Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton, first bishop of the newly created Owensboro Diocese.

THE NEW DIOCESE

A little over a century after Father Durbin began his missionary labors in that section of the wilderness mentioned above, and almost exactly one hundred years after Father (later Bishop) Spalding preached his memorable sermon in the Court House, the centenary was fittingly observed by the establishment of the new Diocese of Owensboro. And it is further appropriate that this Diocese covers approximately the same territory traversed by the zealous missionary in his lonely journeyings.

By papal bills of the 9th and 10 of December, 1937, the Diocese of Owensboro was erected and the Diocese of Louisville was raised to the rank and dignity of a metropolitan church, to which the new diocese was attached as suffragan. The Owensboro Diocese contains an area of 12,502 square miles and embraces thirty-two counties, being all the Kentucky counties west of (and including) Grayson, Butler, Allen, and Warren. Its creation was naturally an occasion of great joy among the adherents of that faith, and indeed of lively interest in the entire community.

On December 16, 1937, the Holy See announced the appointment of the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton, then chancellor of the Louisville Diocese, to be Bishop and Pastor of the new Diocese, an appointment which was received with as much pleasure and enthusiasm as was the creation of

the Diocese. But one other matter of great interest and importance was yet to be decided. One of the Owensboro churches would be designated the Cathedral, but which one?

The interest and accompanying suspense were naturally greatest in the two larger parishes, St. Stephen's and St. Paul's. The members of the former based their anticipation on the fact of their new church building and the handsome new rectory which was then building; while those of St. Paul's reasonably expected the honor because it was the largest parish and was for many years the ranking parish in Owensboro. Even an outsider can readily understand that such a situation must have aroused an interest amounting to anxiety. This was finally relieved on January 18, 1938, when at a meeting of the clergy of the new Diocese, St. Stephen's church was selected as the cathedral.

The new Bishop was solemnly consecrated in the Cathedral of the Assumption at Louisville on February 24, 1937, Archbishop John A. Floersh (of that cathedral) being the consecrator and Bishops Moses E. Kiley of Trenton, New Jersey, and Edward F. Hoban of Rockford, Illinois, the co-consecrators.

Bishop Cotton, first bishop of the newly-created diocese, was installed as such with elaborate and impressive ceremonies held at the newly designated cathedral on March 8, 1938; Archbishop Floersch presided. Some 250 priests from various dioceses were in attendance and a vast throng filled the great cathedral.

As indicated above St. Stephen's parish is not the largest in Owensboro. Its membership is approximately 2,500. (The writer is informed that in making this enumeration or estimate only members of families who are also members of the parish are included. Babies are not counted, but young children beginning around six or seven years of age, are included.)



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 28 June 1972, p.1C:

**St. Stephen Cathedral Renovation
Nearing Completion, Pastor Says**

By Dale Blegen, Messenger-Inquirer

A \$250,000 renovation of St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro is nearly complete, according to the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph Rhodes, pastor.

In 1937 the church became the see of the Owensboro Diocese of which the Most Rev. Henry J. Soennecker is bishop. Renovation was begun in January and is the most complete of several renewal projects since the church was built in 1926.

The original St. Stephen church was constructed in 1839 about two blocks from the 614 Locust St. address of the existing building.

An open house has been scheduled for July 9 from 2-5 p.m. Tours and organ recitals are being planned.

Some of the features of the renovation, which was the main project of a lay parish council, include imported mosaics, imported marble wainscoting, an electronic organ, new sound system, new lighting system, carpeting and pews.

Msgr. Rhodes said the exterior of the building received a new roof, a cleaning and new rain gutters. What he considers the most handsome outside addition is an imported mosaic of the welcoming Christ.

This welcoming mosaic is placed directly above the cathedral's bronze plated doors at its main entrance.

The mosaics were designed by the architect, Rudolph N. Rohn of Pittsburgh, Pa. His designs were sent to Italy where the stone pieces were cut and sent back to Owensboro for installation, Msgr. Rhodes said.

Six large and 14 smaller mosaics were obtained by the cathedral. The 14 are placed one at each station of the cross. The other six are located throughout the church. Behind the altar, in the front of the sanctuary, is a mosaic measuring 39 by 18 feet.

Msgr. Rhodes said it depicts Christ and the church's patron saint, St. Stephen. The mosaic was so heavy that steel beams had to be placed to support its weight. A single slab of imported marble on the altar itself, Father Rhodes said, weighs 900 pounds. The marble wainscoting weighs several hundred tons. It was quarried in Italy and shipped by boat.

The renovation was prompted by a change in the liturgy, Msgr. Rhodes said. The new service called for moving the altar and the floor setting. An electronic organ increases the organ range of the present pipe organ, from 13 ranks to 39 ranks of the new custom built organ.

The audio system has 16 directed speakers, designed to provide equal amplification to each pew in the church.

The lighting system, Msgr. Rhodes said, is about three times as bright as the old system. The new system also has a control device which allows intensity variation during services to bring emphasis to various stations and altars.

New pews, because of the additional organ and other changes, will seat about 740 persons, Msgr. Rhodes said. He said seating capacity has been reduced with the new arrangement.

The pastor said 14 paintings which used to be at the stations of the cross will be retained in a rotunda gallery. The church is also keeping several statues and is adding four Lindenwood carved statues.



A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky,

Hugh O. Potter, Montgomery, AL, Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, 1974, pp.52-53:

Webb's A Centenary of Catholicity In Kentucky informs us that, according to an old Catholic resident of Daviess county, "as early as the year 1808 there were nominal Catholics in this county." Of course, the area was known as Ohio county at that time. The first Catholic settlers in Daviess county "worthy of the name," says the same source, were William Jarboe and Mrs. Ezekiel Henning. The first Catholic service was held by Rev. Charles Nerinckx, from Bardstown, in Mrs. Henning's home in 1820. This was in the eastern end of the county in the Knottsville-St. Lawrence area. From 1816 to 1830 there was a large influx of settlers, who were Catholics, from Nelson county into the area from which was drawn the St. Lawrence congregation afterwards. Among these families were those named Payne, Jarboe, Montgomery, Bowles, Drury, McDaniel, Coomes (Coombs), Aull, Higdon, and Carrico. As early as 1822 Rev. A. A. Able conducted services at William Jarboe's home, which resulted in the organization of the St. Lawrence church. The first house of worship was completed about 1828, and the first service was conducted by Rev. Elisha J. Durbin. From 1824 to 1833 the Catholic people of Daviess county were visited by the priest, or by one of his assistants. He resided near Morganfield, in Union county, and was in charge

of the Catholic missions and churches in western and southwestern Kentucky. The first St. Lawrence house of worship was a log structure. The present brick structure dates from 1839-1840.

On May 5, 1833, Rev. John C. Wathen became the first resident priest in Daviess county, serving missions and churches in Daviess, Breckinridge, Hancock, and Meade counties, with nominal residence at St. Lawrence. He held services at the home of William Coomes at Second and Cedar streets, in Owensboro, in 1833 and afterward, as his predecessor Rev. Durbin had done, according to one source, as early as 1824. However the organization of a Roman Catholic congregation (St. Stephen's) did not take place until June 15, 1838. Rev. Wathen died in 1841 and was succeeded by Rev. A. A. Aud, who was named pastor of the entire Daviess county mission. In 1846 the mission was divided between Rev. Aud and Rev. Walter S. Coomes. By this time congregations had been established at St. Raphael (1832) by Rev. E. F. Durbin, and at St. May of Woods (1833) near Whitesville, by Rev. John C. Wathen.

Prior to 1885 the following additional Roman Catholic churches were organized in Daviess county: St. Alphonsus (1854), St. Joseph (1870), St. Peter (1872), St. Martin of Tours (1873) and St. Paul (1886) in Owensboro.

From 1808 to 1840 the Roman Catholics of Daviess county were under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Bardstown. From 1841 to 1937 they were in the Louisville diocese. Since 1937 they have been in the Owensboro diocese. From 1846 to 1885 from two to seven priests served the Roman Catholic people in this area.

The 1965 *Sesquicentennial edition of the Owensboro Messenger and Inquirer* also published the following under the heading: 'Owensboro Attracted Settlers and Was Called At Early Age 'A City of Churches'.'

The first sustained religious effort in Owensboro dates from 1824, the year Father 'E. J. Durbin came to Owensboro as a missionary of the Roman Catholic church.

Father Durbin conducted services in the log cabin home of William Coomes at what is now Second and Cedar streets. An actual church, however, was not established until after the Rev. Martin J. Spalding preached at the Daviess county courthouse June 15, 1838.

St. Stephen's church, erected in 1842, was the outgrowth of this activity. Other Catholic parishes followed—notably those of St. Joseph (1870) and St. Paul (1886).



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky
Paducah, KY, Turner Publishing Company, 1995, p.171:

St. Stephen Parish, Owensboro

The Beginning

In this year of Kentucky's Bicentennial, it seems appropriate to look at the special history of Catholicism in Western Kentucky. Missionary priests celebrated Mass at Yellow Banks, as Owensboro was once called, as early as 1822. Eleven years later, the first church was established at Knottsville with St. Stephen's as its mission. In 1939, Reverend John C. Wathen, then pastor of St. Lawrence at Knottsville, was also appointed pastor of St. Stephen Church in Owensboro, thus establishing it as the first parish in Owensboro and the second in Daviess County. A church building for the fledgling parish was erected at Second and Cedar Streets in that same year. It was

described in archives of the church as being "40 x 40 with Gothic windows." This first building was completed in 1842 and dedicated by Reverend J. McGill of Louisville. By 1848, the population of the young parish had doubled and so did the size of the church building. Upon completion, the building addition was dedicated in 1858 by the Most Reverend Martin J. Spaulding.

The first resident pastor of the new church in Owensboro was the Reverend Walter S. Coomes. Successive pastors were the Reverends Eugene O'Callahan, Ivo Schacht, Hugh Brady, Dominic Crane, Thomas Gambon, and Reverend Alexander McConnell, who brought the church into the twentieth century.

Education

Catholic education in a formal setting also began early in Daviess County. In 1849, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth established Saint Frances Academy, the first Catholic school in the county. In fact, it preceded by twenty two years the establishment of the first public school in the county! Both boys and girls attended the Academy until the public school system was founded in 1871. After that time, the boys attended for grades one through three, then moving on to the public school. Girls of that day attended St. Frances for all grades.

In 1879, St. Stephen Boy's School began operation and continued until 1914. St. Frances Academy continued as the girl's school during this time. When St. Stephen Boy's School closed, the Academy became the "church school" and remained so until 1939.

At that time, the old Knights of Columbus hall at Seventh and Frederica Streets was converted into classrooms for grades one through five and named "Our Blessed Mother." Grades six through eight continued to attend Saint Frances Academy. In 1948, the school at Seventh and Frederica was renamed Saint Stephen School. In that year also, Blessed Sacrament Chapel was established by Father Robert Conner as a mission of St. Stephen Cathedral. By 1951, the girl's and boy's schools were merged to form Owensboro Catholic High School located, as now, on Parrish Avenue. In 1962, construction for an elementary school to serve grades one through eight was begun. The school was an integral part of the parish until 1989 when it was closed as a part of the school consolidation program. The building now serves as the Diocesan Pastoral Center and houses the parish preschool.

Organizations

The earliest parish group to organize was the Altar Society which began in 1848. It was not until 1880 that the St. Vincent de Paul Society established itself in the church community and not until 1936 that the Society was chartered at Saint Stephen Church. Immediately after the turn of the century, in 1902, the Blessed Virgin Sodality was begun. The following year, the Knights of Columbus was chartered in Owensboro. In 1927, the Holy Name Society was established. The League of the Sacred Heart was begun at St. Stephen in 1941.

The Second Vatican Council, responding to the call of Pope John XXIII for a spiritual renewal and *aggiornamento*, or "updating" began an era of involvement by the laity which continues and expands even to this time. A parish council to assist the pastor was established in 1971. Ministries to involve parishioners as choir members, lectors and ministers of Communion were also begun. In addition, ministries to the homebound and to those in the two community hospitals were also created. Recognizing the importance of serving the youth of the church community and keeping their involvement at a high level has resulted in the establishment of a Youth Ministry which has both a Middle School and High School group. In 1985, in response to community-wide needs, a soup kitchen was established in the undercroft of the church building.

Although the parish school was closed in 1989, a preschool and kindergarten were established to meet the needs of the youngest members of our faith community.

The Building

In 1924, the third Saint Stephen Church was gun at the site of the present church, 614 Locust Street. Completed and dedicated in 1926, the Church is of Italian Lombardian architecture, a cruciform design of 150 x 83 feet with a campanile of 83 feet. The Stations of the Cross and Holy Water fonts were brought from the original church. In 1972, in order to conform with the changes made by the Second Vatican Council, the church was completely renovated. The walls were lined with marble and contemporary mosaics adorn many areas of the church, most notably behind the main altar, the Tabernacle and the Baptismal font. Equally notable are the stained glass windows, rich in symbolism, which remain from the original construction.

Leadership

It was in December of 1937 that the Church of Western Kentucky came of age when Pope Pius XI created the Diocese of Owensboro with the Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton, D.D. as its first Bishop. Saint Stephen Church was designated as his Cathedral in 1938. Bishop Cotton was succeeded in May, 1961 by the Most Reverend Henry J. Soennecker, D.D. who served as Bishop from that year until 1984. On December 15, 1984, Most Reverend John J. McRaith, D.D. was installed as the third Bishop of Owensboro at a Pontifical Mass celebrated at the Owensboro Sportscenter.

The aforementioned Reverend Alexander McConnell was pastor of St. Stephen Church for thirty-four years, until 1919. Reverend Richard Maloney became pastor at that time, serving until 1935, overseeing the completion and dedication of the new building as well as continued growth and change in the church. Serving as pastor in successive years were Reverend Albert J. Thompson, Reverend Joseph Egan, Reverend Leo J. Dienes and Reverend William M. McAtee. In 1949, Reverend Anthony G. Higdon was named rector of Saint Stephen Cathedral. He had been the first to be ordained in the new church, in June 1938. Monsignor Higdon continued to serve as rector of the Cathedral until 1969 when Reverend Joseph V. Rhodes was appointed pastor. Fr. Rhodes ministered to the Cathedral until 1985 when the present pastor, Rev. J. Edward Bradley was appointed.

In addition, the parish has been ministered to, and the Catholic Faith lived and taught by many assistant pastors.

St. Stephen Cathedral Church, along with the Universal Church, has sustained through controversy and change and surmounted it all, as Christ promised we would. The same pioneer spirit which brought the Catholic Church to Western Kentucky remains in those who persevere through struggles both personal and public. It is not the building, as beautiful as it is, nor those who have led us, as much as we owe to them for their leadership. It is the love of the greatest gifts of all, the gift of the Eucharist and the gift of Faith, which sustain us and will continue to sustain as they are passed on to succeeding generations of the Cathedral faith community.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 19 November 2012, p1A:

Renovated St. Stephen Cathedral leaves worshipers in awe

About 30 priests dressed in ivory robes with gold stripes chatted in front of St. Stephen Cathedral Sunday as they waited to process into the ceremony.

The patter of water in the baptismal font echoed through the church as people took their seats. With the blessing of the font, the "Rite of Dedication of the Altar and Blessing of the Renovated Church" Mass began.

The cathedral, which serves 800 local households and the 32-county Diocese of Owensboro, and houses the chair of the Most Rev. William Medley, was rededicated after a seven-year restoration campaign.

It was last renovated about 40 years ago.

Its restoration includes a new altar, reredos behind the altar, the bishop's cathedra (chair), pews, a tabernacle, Blessed Sacrament Chapel, images of the Stations of the Cross, statues of several biblical figures, lighting, baptismal font, an electronic organ, a refurbished undercroft and marble and wood flooring where there used to be carpet.

"I can feel the difference here," said Sister Anne Marie Joshua.

She works at the St. Gerard Life Home for pregnant women and often attends Mass at St. Stephen.

"All these images make you feel like you're in the presence of God," she said through a smile she had been holding throughout the service. "I'm speechless today."

Natalie Ellis, a 12-year-old member of St. Stephen, sang each hymn proudly during the Mass.

"All the new things add perfectly to the church. They make me want to be here more," she said. "I think more people should come to church."

But the meaning of the \$2.5 million restoration goes beyond aesthetics, said the Rev. John Vaughan, pastor of the church.

"This isn't just about beauty," he said. "These things encourage worship, they encourage us to raise our hearts and minds to God."

As Medley, the Most Rev. John McRaith, bishop emeritus, and visiting bishops from Nashville and Lexington ended the procession out of the church, the congregation sang "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name" — the same hymn that was sung at the first dedication of the cathedral in 1926.

With the altar now smeared in oil, thus anointed by the bishop, the church was officially able to continue its worship services after one year of hosting them in other places.

"It's a day we've been anticipating," Medley said as he shook hands with and hugged parishioners as they exited. "And wow, what a day!"



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 1 September 2018, p.1D

New steps, porch coming to St. Stephen Cathedral

By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

Although it might not look like it, St. Stephen Cathedral at 810 Locust St. is open for all the normal church activities, including Catholic Mass at 5 p.m. on Saturday and 7, 9 and 11 a.m. on Sunday.

"We want to emphasize that the cathedral is open for all services," said Eddy McFarland, St. Stephen's business manager.

Possible confusion about the status of St. Stephen Cathedral, which McFarland and the Rev. Jerry Riney, the rector at St. Stephen, want to eliminate, is because the steps and porch on the front of the cathedral have been demolished to make way for a new set of steps and porch. Currently, the old original front steps of the church are visible, but entry through St. Stephen's main front door is impossible. Side entrances are now being used and will continued to be used for the next several months, probably through late December.

"We want to be back for Christmas," said Riney. "What a Christmas gift that will be."

The new steps and porch will have the same look and design -- with steps on either side leading to the porch -- as the previous steps and porch, Riney said. The project, which is costing a total of \$850,000 including a security system, was needed because the old steps and porch were allowing water to seep through to restrooms beneath the steps.

St. Stephen Cathedral will celebrate its 92nd anniversary this month. Originally, a series of steep steps led straight up from Locust Street to the front door of the cathedral. Those steps were replaced in 1952 with side steps and a landing, or porch, area. Now, after 66 years, those steps and porch are being replaced as part of an overall master plan to refurbish St. Stephen that began in the early 2000s that saw the building get a new tile roof and a completely restored interior, which required the church to be closed for 18 months beginning in 2010.

However, soon after the church reopened, problems with the front steps and porch began to be seen.

"People had noticed water entering the restrooms under the porch," McFarland said. "The structural integrity was being compromised."

Riney had been the rector at St. Stephen for only a matter of days in 2013 when he learned of the porch problem. "The first week I was here people asked me 'When are you going to start on the porch?' " Riney said. "I said, well, let me unpack first."

So, the first thing on Riney's plate became starting a fundraising campaign entitled "Keeping Safe and Secure" to replace the failing porch and steps. "I can't say enough about the generosity of the people, because they love the church," Riney said.

The project received a big financial boost from the Most the Rev. William Medley, bishop of the Owensboro Catholic Diocese, who allowed the diocese to pay \$150,000 toward the project's cost, Riney said. St. Stephen Cathedral is the mother church of the 32-county diocese and the bishop is officially its pastor. The diocese's priest council approved the payment, Riney said. The rest came from church members and supporters.

"The families of this parish have been outstanding in their involvement in ministry and sacrificial giving and prayerful support to ensure the legacy of welcoming and evangelizing and worship in the name of Jesus Christ," Riney said.

The porch replacement project began just a few weeks ago. The finished product will be a big improvement, said Riney, because heating elements embedded in the concrete will reduce ice, and lighting will be enhanced. Landscaping will be added across the front of the porch at street level.



Chronology of Events

St. Stephen Cathedral, established in 1839, was the first parish in the city of Owensboro. The present church was completed in 1926.

1822-1839	The mission years. Mission priests celebrated Mass in the homes of the early settlers in Daviess County.
1839	The first St. Stephen Church was built at Second and Cedar Streets. Rev. John C. Wathen was appointed pastor of the new church; completed in August 1842 and was dedicated on 21 August 1842
22 May 1849	First organ used in Owensboro at St. Stephen's
1858	A second and larger Saint Stephen Church was built at the same location; edifice was dedicated 30 May 1858.
7 July 1878	New bell for St. Stephen's Church is consecrated.
1 July 1920	The properties of Michael Carey & Frank Dell at 614 & 620 Locust Street were purchased for the construction of the new St. Stephen's Church
26 Apr 1925	Cornerstone of new St. Stephen's Church laid.
6 Sep.1926	The third Saint Stephen Church was built at 610 Locust Street; dedicated on 6 September 1926
Aug. 1931	Old St. Stephen's Church at Second & Cedar is razed.
9 Dec.1937	Pope Pius XI created the Diocese of Owensboro.
18 Jan 1938	St. Stephen's Church is named Cathedral church of the new Owensboro Diocese
8 March 1938	Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton (1895-1960) named first bishop of Owensboro Diocese on 16 December 1937; consecrated at St. Stephen Cathedral on 8 March 1938; he died 25 September 1960.
11 June 1938	Rev. Anthony G. Higdon was the first priest to be ordained at St. Stephen Cathedral.
1939	St. Stephen's is 100 years old and the first parish school was opened at 7th and Frederica Streets for grades 1-5.
1948	Blessed Sacrament Chapel established as a mission church at 7th & Sycamore.
1952	Front porch was replaced with steps that were on both sides of porch, originally the steps continued straight from front of church down to Locust Street.
9 May 1961	Most Rev. Henry Joseph Soenneker (1907-1987) installed as the second Bishop of the Owensboro Diocese in St. Stephen Cathedral; at the age of 75 he retired in 1982 and died on 2 September 1987.
30 Dec. 1962	New St. Stephen Cathedral parish school at 600 Locust Street was dedicated on 30 December 1962 and was opened on 2 January 1963.
1972	Church was renovated, including the replacement of the altar and installation of large mosaic behind the altar; open house held on 9 July 1972.

15 Dec. 1982	Rev. John Jeremiah McRaith (1934-2017) installed as the third bishop of the Owensboro Diocese at the Owensboro Sportscenter; he retired in 2009.
1986	St. Stephen Cathedral Preschool was established.
1989	Owensboro parochial schools consolidated; St. Angela Merici became the designated school for the parish's children.
1989	Celebrated 150 years as a parish.
2 Oct. 2004	St. Stephen Cathedral parish held its first annual Parish Picnic. The first Capital Campaign " <i>Preservation for the Next Generation</i> " was opened to renew and refurbish the parish facilities.
10 Feb. 2010	Rev. William Francis Medley consecrated as the 4th Bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro at the Owensboro Sportscenter.
2011	Work on the interior renovation of the Cathedral began in November 2011.
18 Nov. 2012	The newly renovated Cathedral was re-opened and the new altar dedicated.
2018-2019	The " <i>Keeping Safe & Secure</i> " Capital Campaign was begun to replace the front porch and steps as well as to improve campus security; ribbon-cutting for new porch was on 6 September 2019.
2023	Membership is approximately 620 households.



Newspaper Headlines

- New bell for St. Stephen's Church – Owensboro Weekly Messenger, 10 July 1878, p.3
- "Old Stephen's Mother of Most of the Catholic Churches in Daviess County..." – Owensboro Messenger, 10 June 1900, p.1B
- Repairs and improvement in the old St. Stephen's Church – Owensboro Messenger, 3 March 1901, p.9
- Two new statues consecrated – Owensboro Messenger, 26 August 1902, p.7
- News stations of the cross dedicated – Owensboro Messenger, 7 April 1903, p.6
- Electric lights installed at St. Stephen's Church; gas lighting discontinued – Owensboro Messenger, 10 March 1904, p.2
- St. Stephen's 75th anniversary – Owensboro Messenger, 29 December 1914, p.1 and 30 December 1914, p.1
- "St. Stephen's Church, Another Old Owensboro Landmark Is Shortly To Disappear" – Owensboro Messenger, 5 September 1920, p.2
- Celtic Cross at Mater Dolorosa Cemetery monument to St. Stephen's Father A.T. McConnell; dedicated on 7 November 1920 – Owensboro Messenger, 6 November 1920, p.2
- Cornerstone for new St. Stephen's to be laid – Owensboro Messenger, 19 April 1925, p.1B and Owensboro Inquirer, 27 April 1925, p.3
- "St. Stephen's New \$200,000 Church is nearing completion – Owensboro Inquirer, 11 July 1926, p.1B
- New St. Stephen's Church is dedicated – Owensboro Messenger, 5 September 1926, p.1A
- Dedication of new St. Stephen's Church – Owensboro Inquirer, 5 September 1926, p.1A

- “Razing Of An Owensboro Landmark Is Begun – Old St. Stephen’s Passes” – Owensboro Inquirer, 25 August 1931, p2
- New Owensboro Diocese created – Owensboro Messenger, 11 December 1937, p.1
- St. Stephen’s Catholic Church In Owensboro Is Designated As Cathedral For Diocese Recently Created By Pope Pius” – Owensboro Messenger, 19 January 1938, p.1
- “1500 Attend Reception Here for New Bishop: Installation Today” – Owensboro Messenger, 8 March 1938, p.1
- “Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton Is Installed As New Bishop Here” – Owensboro Inquirer, 8 March 1938, p.1
- “Catholic Churches and Pastors in New Owensboro Diocese” – Owensboro Messenger, 8 March 1938, p.7
- “Chronology of Catholic Church in Ky.” – Owensboro Messenger, 8 March 1938, p.8
- “New Cathedral Parish Oldest In Owensboro – Owensboro Messenger, 8 March 1938, p.8
- “Bishop Cotton Dies Of Heart Attack At Home” – Messenger-Inquirer, 26 September 1960, p.1
- “Second Bishop Of Owensboro Consecrated In Impressive Rites” – Messenger-Inquirer, 26 April 1961, p.1A; see also “New Catholic Bishop Is Installed Today” – Messenger-Inquirer, 9 May 1961, p1A
- “St. Stephen Cathedral Renovation Nearing Completion, Pastor Says” – Messenger-Inquirer, 28 June 1972, p.1C and 10 July 1972, p.1B
- “McRaith takes seat as bishop” – Messenger-Inquirer, 16 December 1982, p.5A
- “Ex-Bishop Soenneker Dies” – Messenger-Inquirer, 25 September 1987, p.1A
- “Picture Perfect: Cathedral raising money to restore artwork” – Messenger-Inquirer, 7 January 2001, p.1A
- “Medley to be ordained today Bishop-elect professes faith during vespers” – Messenger-Inquirer, 10 February 2010, p.1A
- “Renovated St. Stephen Cathedral leaves worshipers in awe” – Messenger-Inquirer, 19 November 2012, p1A
- “Cathedral’s Vaughn reassigned” – Messenger-Inquirer, 24 March 2013, p.1C
- “The Most Rev. McRaith dies at 82” – Messenger-Inquirer, 20 March 2017, p.1A; see also 24 March 2017, p.1A
- “New steps, porch coming to St. Stephen Cathedral” – Messenger-Inquirer, 1 September 2018, p.1D and 7 September 2019, p.1B
- “Grateful Ministry: [Jerry] Riney retiring from priesthood after nearly 46 years” – Messenger-Inquirer, 5 June 2021, p.1D
- “Full Circle: [John] Thomas leading St. Stephen Cathedral 32 years after serving there as seminarian” – Messenger-Inquirer, 1 January 2022, p.1D



Bishops of the Owensboro Diocese

1938-1960

Francis Ridgely Cotton

(19 September 1885 – 25 September 1960)



Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton

1961-1982

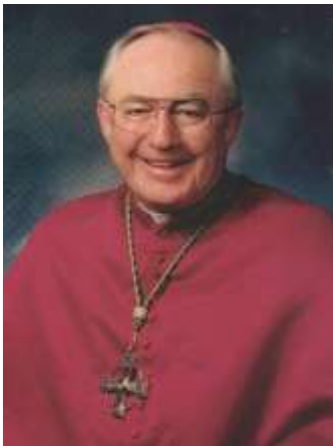
Henry Joseph Soenneker (27 May 1907 – 24 September 1987)



Most Rev. Henry J. Soenneker

1982-2009

John Jeremiah McRaith (6 December 1934 – 19 March 2017)



Most Rev. John J. McRaith

2010-

William Francis Medley (17 September 1952 –)



Most Rev. William Medley



Pastors of St. Stephen Church (Cathedral)

1839-1841	John C. Wathen	(14 October 1801 – 17 October 1841)
1841-1855	Walter S. Coomes	(19 February 1796 – 27 November 1871)



Rev. Walter S. Coomes

1855-1871	Eugene O'Callaghan	(14 April 1821 – 26 February 1897)
-----------	--------------------	------------------------------------



Rev. Eugene O'Callaghan

1871-1874

Ivo Schacht

(1821 – 15 April 1874)



Rev. Ivo Schacht

1874-1877

Hugh Joseph Brady

(24 January 1833 – 16 October 1916)

1877-1883

Dominic Francis Crane

(12 May 1843 – 21 January 1921)



Rev. Dominic Crane

1883-1885

Thomas F. Gambon

(c1837 – 11 December 1901)



Rev. Thomas F. Gambon

1885-1919

Alexander Thomas McConnell (5 May 1842 – 31 January 1919)



Rev. Alexander T. McConnell

1919-1935

Michael Richard Maloney (8 July 1882 – 5 December 1965)



Rev. Richard Maloney

1935-1938

Albert Joseph Thompson (3 August 1889 – 5 January 1970)



Rev. Albert J. Thompson

1938

Joseph James 'Declan' Egan (9 December 1903 – 26 June 1992)



Rev. Joseph Egan

1939-1943

Leo John Dienes

(19 December 1912 – 24 July 1990)



Rev. Leo J. Dienes

1943-1949

William M. McAtee

(3 July 1916 – 22 August 1976)



Rev. William McAtee

1949-1969

Anthony George Higdon

(14 August 1911 – 19 August 1992)



Rev. Anthony G. Higdon

1969-1985

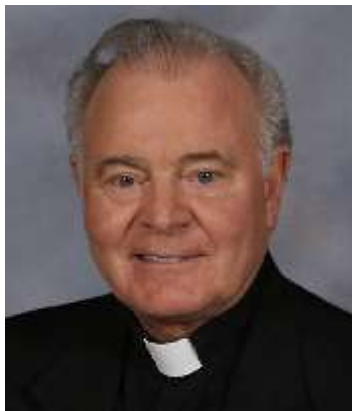
Joseph Vernon Rhodes (11 March 1915 – 6 December 2010)



Rev. Joseph V. Rhodes

1985-1995

Joseph Edward Bradley (24 April 1943 –)



Rev. Edward Bradley

1995-2013

John Richard Vaughan (24 June 1948 –)



Rev. John Vaughn

2013-2021

William Jerry Riney

(10 February 1949 –)



Rev. Jerry Riney

2021-

John McNeil Thomas

(1 November 1965 –)



Rev. John Thomas



**Postcard History Series: Owensboro, Terry Blake & David Edds, Jr.,
Charleston, SC, et al, Arcadia Publishing, 2007, p.45:**



St. Stephen's Catholic Church began in 1839 under founding pastor Rev. John C. Wathan. St. Stephen's constructed its first church building on the southwest corner of Second and Cedar Streets in 1842. This site is currently the home of Don Moore Cadillac's showroom. As shown above, the church's building had 12 stained-glass windows flanking the sanctuary and a three-level bell tower along with an east exposure, all reflecting early traditional symbolism of the religious order. The postcard below shows an earlier view of the congregation's second church building, erected in 1924 at 614 Locust Street, with the original bell tower roof and the steps leading directly out of the church. This second building, like the first, faced east awaiting Christ's return. The Romanesque design was drawn under the watchful eye of Louisville architect Frederick T. Erhart.







Installation of Bishop Francis R. Cotton on 8 March 1938



Wedding in St. Stephen's in 1949. Front of church, altar & communion rail, remained unchanged until interior of church was modernized in 1972.



Large mosaic, 39 ft by 18 ft, installed on wall behind the altar during a major renovation of the church in 1972. Picture was made in 1998. Mosaic and altar remained until renovation in 2012.



Rededication on 18 November 2012 after renovation of St. Stephen's



St. Stephen's in 2022



St. Stephen's in 2023



St. Stephen's in 2023



St. Stephen's in 2023

