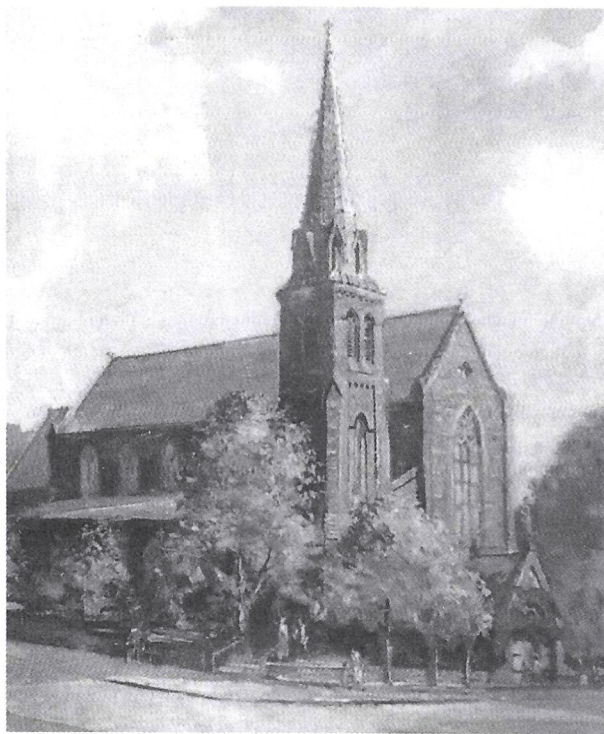


A Brief History of  
Holy Name of Mary,  
Our Lady of the Isle  
Roman Catholic Church  
Newport, Rhode Island



## A Brief History of St. Mary Church

- On April 8, 1828, Rhode Island's first permanent Roman Catholic parish was established in Newport. Land was purchased on Barney Street, and the first church was a repurposed schoolhouse already on the site.
- On June 6, 1828, the first Mass was celebrated. Burials began in the churchyard, the first consecrated Catholic burying ground in Rhode Island.
- The parish grew rapidly, fueled by immigration from Ireland. Two adjoining plots of land on Barney Street were purchased, and a much larger wooden church that could seat approximately 400 was constructed and dedicated to St. Joseph in 1837.
- The parish continued to grow, and on February 2, 1847, Father James Fitton paid \$4,000 for the land on Spring Street where St. Mary Church now stands. Mrs. Goodloe Harper (née Catherine Carroll), daughter of Charles Carroll of Maryland, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, made the donation that enabled the purchase of the land.
- Shortly thereafter, Patrick C. Keely (1816-1896) of Brooklyn, an immigrant from Ireland and America's first prominent Catholic Church architect, drew up a blueprint in the Gothic Revival style.
- The church is built from coursed brownstone from Connecticut. The church is 129 feet long and 72 feet wide. There are 28 rows of pews, and it seats 700 worshippers.
- Work began on August 7, 1848, with the men of the parish volunteering at least one day's labor to help dig the "trenches." The first stone was laid on August 15, 1848.
- Bishop Bernard O'Reilly dedicated the structure in 1852 under the patronage of "The Holy Name of Mary, Our Lady of the Isle" ("Isle" being a reference to Ireland). Over the next few years, the tower, bells, pews, tile flooring, gallery, and organ will be added. Rhode Island's oldest Catholic parish would now be known as St. Mary's instead of St. Joseph's, as the new church is dedicated to a different patron saint.
- Circa 1852, a new, much larger cemetery, initially called "Saints Mary and Joseph Cemetery," was established on Spruce Street

(now Kingston Ave.) to serve the growing congregation.

- St. Mary's was given new responsibilities during the Civil War (1861-65). The United States Naval Academy was relocated from Annapolis, Maryland, to Bellevue Avenue in Newport. During those four years, St. Mary's Church served as the Naval Academy chapel.
- St. Mary's has hosted several society weddings, including that of Colonel Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, the Emperor of France's grandnephew. He married Caroline LeRoy Edgar, a granddaughter of the great statesman Daniel Webster, in 1871. Colonel Bonaparte was one of St. Mary's most generous patrons, according to 1881 records.
- Mrs. Theodore Havemeyer (née Emily de Loosey), wife of the Austro-Hungarian Consul-General in New York City, generously donated the funds for the 1878 renovation of the sacristy.
- St. Mary's 42 magnificent stained-glass windows were created by the Tyrolean Art Glass Company of Innsbruck, Austria, in 1892-95. The windows were completely restored in 1978-79 and are still as stunning today as when installed.
- In 1902, America's second cardinal, James Cardinal Gibbons, celebrated Mass at St. Mary's Church to commemorate the church's golden jubilee (1852-1902).
- The church sanctuary was remodeled in 1936-37 to include an Italian marble altar and carved oak reredos. The marble flooring in the sanctuary, the current Stations of the Cross, and the current sacristy will be added during this renovation.
- R. Milton Kenyon, a Providence architect, redesigned the sanctuary in 1967 to comply with the revised Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. The present altar was fashioned from the one installed in 1936.
- A most famous and poignant wedding took place on September 12, 1953 at St. Mary's Church, when Jacqueline Lee Bouvier married then-Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy (later, the 35th President). The ceremony was performed by Archbishop Richard Cushing (later Cardinal Cushing) of Boston. When President and Mrs. Kennedy spent weekends in Newport, they attended Mass at St. Mary's Church and were always seated in pew #10.

## Our Magnificent Pipe Organ

- St. Mary's organ was installed in 1958 by its builder, Casavant Frères Ltée. of Quebec. It was one of the last (if not the last) organs built under the tonal supervision of Stephen Stoot, who was renowned for the beautiful tones of his organs.
- The organ has three keyboards, a pedalboard, and over 1,900 pipes.
- In 2016, the pipe organ was disassembled and shipped to the Casavant Company in Canada, where it was meticulously restored. The work was all done by hand by skilled craftsmen. The organ was returned to St. Mary's in spring 2017 and re-installed in the completely renovated choir loft.

St. Mary Church was added to the NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES on March 6, 2008, an honor distinguishing this parish from many others. The church remains one of New England's most beautiful edifices and is home to a thriving parish of approximately 1,200 families.

**Visit us at [StMaryNewportRI.org](http://StMaryNewportRI.org)**

Rev. Mark A. Sauriol  
*Pastor*

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*Front cover: Photo of painting by the late Richard Grosvenor*

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