

Historic Religious Ground

Few of the present generation realized, we feel sure, that the plot of ground so long enclosed by a high board fence at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Barney Streets is an area of historic religious significance particularly to those of Roman Catholic faith.

But now that the protective fence is removed and landscaping work is underway, it won't be long before this spot takes on the aspect of a religious shrine, because here it was that the first Catholic church in Newport was established.

While Catholic chaplains said mass in the Colony House during the French occupation in the Revolution, and services were conducted by visiting priests, it was not until 1828 that an abandoned school on this plot was utilized for a church.

So rapidly did the congregation grow that the first St. Joseph's Church was built there. It was dedicated in 1837, only

to be abandoned when St. Mary's Church was completed.

But the site was consecrated ground and while the church building eventually was razed the site remained a cemetery in fact. The ancient markers even now are being restored, to be replaced on the graves they marked a century ago.

When the restoration of the site of this first Catholic church has been completed we will have, within several hundred yards of each other, three well kept relics of Newport's early religions. On one side of Barney Street, running through to Touro Street, is the ancient Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House and the venerable Touro Synagogue. Nearby, across the street, will be the site of Newport's first Roman Catholic Church and cemetery. Here, indeed, will be a complex of historic, religious significance.