

St. Louis DeGonzague French Catholic Church



Newburyport's French Canadian community took root in the 1890s, when farmers from Quebec arrived to work in Newburyport's mills and factories during the winter months. Although some workers stayed only seasonally, many felt they had better opportunities in Newburyport than in Canada, and decided to stay. Meanwhile, Newburyport's shoe factories were thriving, and provided jobs for many newly arrived immigrants to Newburyport, including French Canadians.

French Canadians working in shoe factories and other industries soon found themselves longing for the familiarity and camaraderie of the French Catholic churches they had left behind in Canada.

Known locally as the "French Church", the church was on the corner of Federal and Beck Streets in Newburyport. St. Aloysius de Gonzaga was erected on 25 Federal Street in 1904, and the church and its accompanying school served as the focal point of the community's social and spiritual life for decades. In addition to church activities, families enjoyed many popular pastimes of the era, including bicycle rides, trips to the beach at Plum Island, and seeing movies at local theaters.

Though the church on Federal Street closed its doors in 1999, and the shoe factories were shuttered long before then, French Canadian families left their mark on Newburyport's history, and many of their descendants continue to call the city home today.

The former name of the ecclesiastical edifice paid homage to a boy saint of France, St. Aloysius.

Friar Raymond Plourde was instrumental in having the house in the foreground moved in the 1980's for a new entrance and in implementing the restoration of the 1890's organ enjoyed by past and present French Canadian members of the congregation.

By September 1907 the new parish had built their own school which was run by the Sisters of St. Chretienne until 1923 when the Sisters of Jeanne d'Arc cared for the needs of "The French School," as it was called, until its closing in 1966.

References:

<https://www.newburyhistory.org/calendar/2019/3/6/newburyports-french-canadian-community>

<https://www.hriccatholic.org/church-histories>