

Turn of the Century Irish Catholics in St. Malachi's Parish

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Between 1880 and 1920, St. Malachi's parish was the spiritual, social and educational center for thousands of immigrant Irish and their children who lived in Cleveland's west side "Angle" neighborhood in the Flats.

They swelled the ranks of devotional, fraternal, and benevolent societies, organized fund-raising fairs and picnics, and applauded plays performed by parish youth in the school auditorium. The children of St. Malachi's attended the parish's excellent schools, receiving an education which often led to somewhat higher status jobs than those of their parents. Many second-generation men became firemen rather than laborers, and women became stenographers and telephone operators rather than servants.

This rise in economic status did not cause an immediate exodus of second-generation Irish from St. Malachi's; many of them remained in the neighborhood's overcrowded housing during the severe economic depression of the 1890s. It was not until 1903, the year in which the Irish-born founding pastor died, that baptisms began to decline, indicating that young families were leaving St. Malachi's. By 1920, Irish of all ages had moved from the parish, and the Angle's residents were primarily Eastern Europeans and southern African-Americans who did not attend the Irish church. St. Malachi's congregation had dwindled to half its 1880 size, and declined even further during the 1930s. The vigorous Irish immigrant era of the parish was over.