



History Reclaimed:

Authentic American Vintage  
Lumber from St. Patrick's 1891  
Church in Watervliet, NY

## Transportation Hub

In 1629, Kilean Van Rensselaer established the feudal manor of Rensselaerwyck, after being granted manorial privileges under the former Dutch governments of New York and New Jersey. The land ran 24 miles along the Hudson River and included what is now known as Schodack, Nassau, North and East Greenbush, Sand Lake, Grafton, Brunswick, Petersburg, Berlin, Stephentown, Pittstown, Troy and Rensselaer.

The area was important for its natural transportation routes. Along the Hudson River, a well-used road had been built to accommodate those travelling north, and a stage line was established west to Schenectady. Recognizing the revenue potential John Schuyler Jr. organized a village to house workers and businesses, which eventually became known as West Troy in 1823.

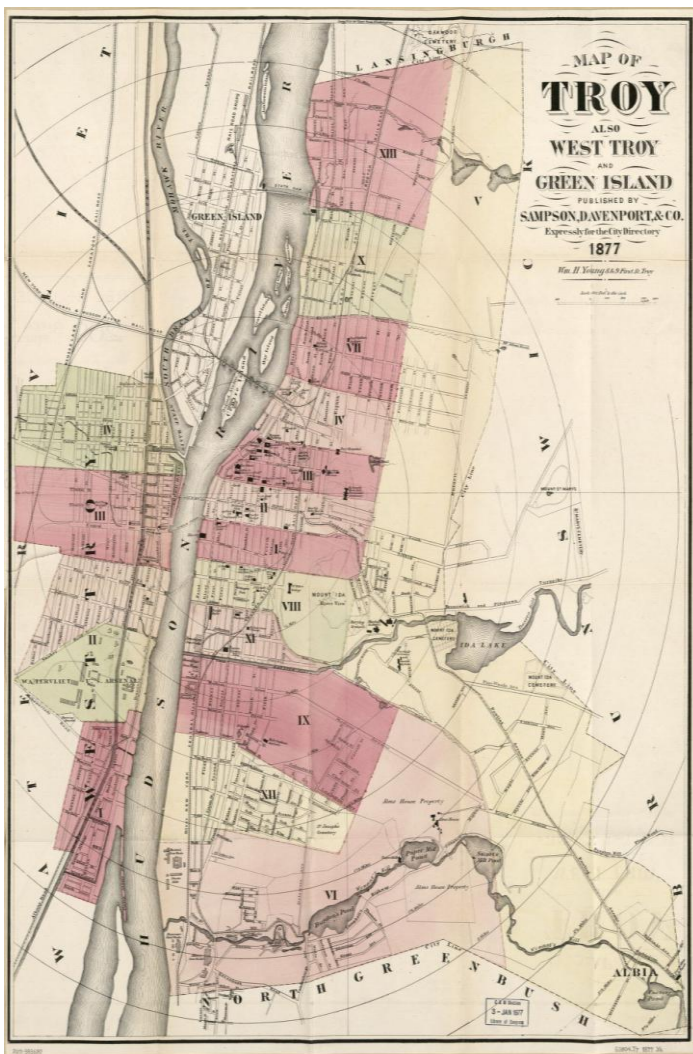
By 1825, the Erie Canal was completed and West Troy marked the point where the canal entered the Hudson River. Initially warehouses and boat slips were erected and eventually the canal spurred on sister industries like ship building, carriage construction, lumber yards, livery stables, ice houses and foundries.



*Circa 1840 map of the Erie Canal across New York State*

## Hudson River Crossing

To fuel the region's explosive growth, labor was required and immigrants flooded in seeking new opportunities and better lives. Those who labored were largely Catholic who crossed the Hudson into Troy by bridge or ferry at a cost of 2 cents each way to attend church. The Bishop at St. Peter's Church in Troy saw an opportunity and authorized the organization of a new parish for West Troy in 1839. Being largely comprised of Irish immigrants, the new parish was named after the "Apostle of Ireland" Saint Patrick and its first mass was held on Christmas day in 1840.



Left: 1877 Map of Troy and West Troy  
 Right: The original 1840's St. Patrick's Church, now called Our Lady of Mount Carmel



## Potato Blight and Expansion

In 1845, a potato blight in Ireland destroyed the basic staple of virtually all the Irish people's diet. The blight returned for multiple years leaving the country starved and an estimated 800,000 dead. In West Troy, the Church of Saint Patrick's spearheaded many fundraising efforts to help the desperate land and its parishioner's brethren.

Thousands immigrated to West Troy, and many saw Saint Patrick's as a beacon of hope, yet those immigrants who survived the voyage to the New World were almost equally destitute. Housing, employment, food and education was provided with help of the church, which strained under the magnitude of assistance required.

In 1855, Father Fennelly establishment St. Patrick's first parochial school. The creation of Catholic schools was part of a national trend to ensure that Catholic children received an education which did not dilute their religious training. In 1872, the Sisters of Mercy moved to West Troy and conducted classes for girls and soon after Sisters of the Presentation began an orphanage, all under the umbrella of St. Patrick's. Despite its territory being reduced in size as new parishes were carved out, its facilities were proving to be inadequate, especially the 300-seat church.

The solution offered by then pastor Father Sheehan was to build a new, much larger church based on the "grand and ample" design of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in the South of France. Father Sheehan had been captivated by the simple beauty of the church at the Grotto while on a pilgrimage to the French city. Returning to West Troy armed with drawings and photographs, he contracted with Mr. Steven Loth, an architect from Troy to design the proposed church. After studying the feasibility of the plan, both men traveled to Lourdes to inspect the French structure.



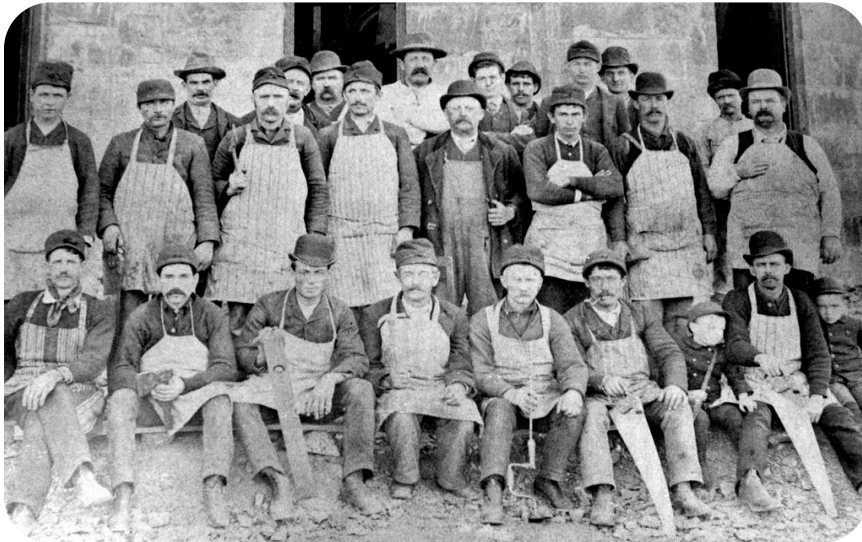
*The Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France, after which St. Patrick's was modeled*

## Construction

Hiring an architect and deciding upon the form of the new church were simple tasks compared to what followed. First, an appropriate site was needed and second, funding had to be secured. Father Sheehan was able to purchase a large tract of land on Nineteenth Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in modern day Watervliet, closely situated to the original church, convent and rectory.

To raise money, brick buying became the most popular fundraising technique, where families promised to purchase a certain number of bricks at the cost of one dollar each – a hefty price for that day.

On July 4, 1889, the cornerstone was laid for the new church. Gradually the pillars and walls were raised and the ceiling was placed. In a time before electricity and power equipment, the extraordinarily high roofline and brilliantly vaulted ceilings attest to the skills of the construction crews.



*Construction workers for “New St. Patrick’s Church, West Troy, October 25, 1889”*

The Watervliet church differs from the Lourdes structure in two respects: Lourdes cost \$250,000 to build while St. Patrick’s was constructed for just \$100,000. Secondly Saint Patrick’s was to be faced with the same stone as Lourdes, however, a local labor dispute created delays in obtaining the stone. Father Sheehan decided to use brick not just as a structural component as originally planned, but also as the face of the church.

When completed the bell tower’s final height was 138 feet and the interior had a 60 foot high nave, featuring 56 stained glass windows, including windows by the noted firms Mayer of Munich and James Powell and Sons of Whitefriars, London.

Amazingly, considering the intricacy and scope of the building project, the first mass was celebrated just two years after construction began, on Christmas Day, 1891.

## Meneely Bell Company

In 1908, 17 years after the completion of St. Patrick's Church, a bell was hung in its tower. It was cast by the Meneely Bell Company of Watervliet and was reputedly the largest bell cast by the firm at the time. The bell itself weighs more than 5 tons and was cast from 77% copper and 23% tin. It was donated by Holy Name Society at the cost of about \$3,500.

The bell became a complex project for the Meneely Company, even with their expansive operation and expertise. First, the bell had to be recast because a crack appeared in the first casting. Then, when the bell was tested, the vibration was so great that there was concern for the structural integrity of the tower. As a result the bell was chimed, that is, struck to produce the sound.



*A worker with St. Patrick's bell casting*



*The bell today at Watervliet's Historical Society*

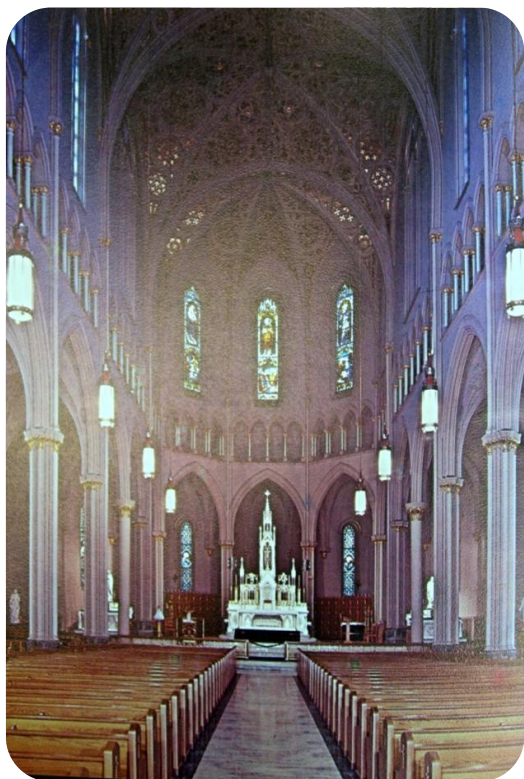
## Decline, Closure and Reclamation

On September 25, 2011 St. Patrick's held its last mass. St. Patrick's had been rumored to be closing since 2006 when the Albany Diocese announced it would close six churches and combine them into one parish, citing the decline of parishioners and the exorbitant cost to maintain their largest church.

In early 2012 The Nigro Companies purchased the church and related buildings from the Diocese for \$1 million, aiming to develop new retail space. Razing the relic caused a contentious fight, with preservationists desiring that the building be saved and repurposed. Alternatively, others argued that the church was quickly crumbling similar to the already abundant vacant buildings in the city of Watervliet.

Ultimately, "no other individual or organization stepped forth with a plan and the funding necessary to save the buildings." As a result the church was razed in May 2013. Before the materials were hauled away to the landfill, StoriedBoards was able to reclaimed lumber from St. Patrick's – preserving its history while ensuring that it would live on in your unique project.





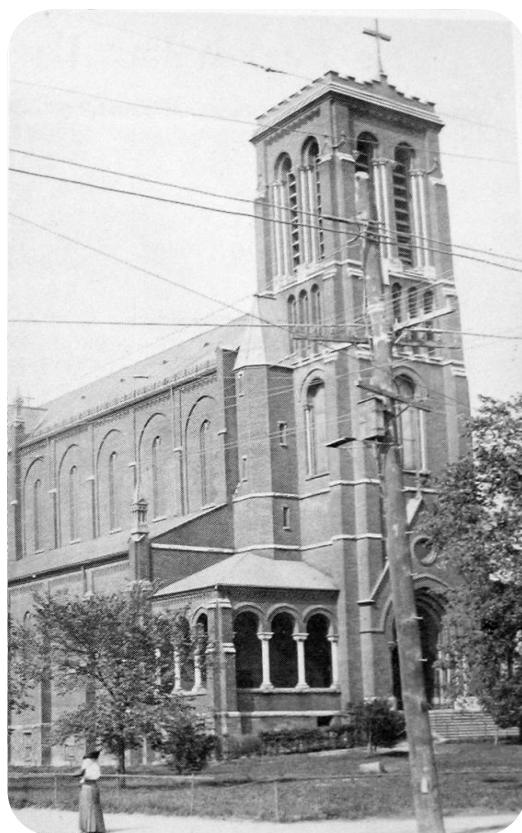
*Interior of St. Patrick's*



*St. Patrick's in 2012*



*Church in 1908*



*Church in 1905*



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