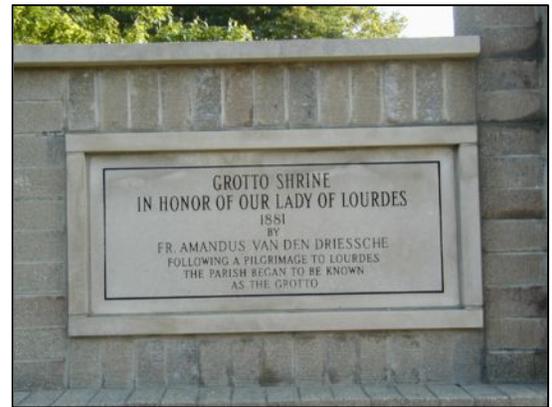




**ASSUMPTION GROTTTO**  
 Assumption Grotto Parish 1832-1982  
 By Catherine Bicknell, Ph.D.  
 Detroit, Michigan



Assumption Grotto Catholic Church  
 13770 Gratiot  
 Detroit, Michigan  
 Rev. Eduard Perrone, Pastor



**THE BUILDING OF THE GROTTTO:**

On October 6, 1875, Father Van celebrated his Silver Jubilee. The priests in attendance were his brother, Reverend Charles Driscoll, S.J., Reverend William Corby, D.M.C., and the Reverend Fathers Ganthier and Decker. Three days later, Bishop Borgess sent him the following letter;

We learned with regret from Very Rev. Peter Hennaert, V.G. that you are in a very debilitated state of health which is attributed to an excess of labor imposed upon yourself by an immoderate zeal. Therefore, in justice to you and prompted by the kindest of motives we believe it our duty of confining the jurisdiction given to you of exercising the holy ministry to the limits of the congregation of the Assumption of the Bl. Virgin, Wayne Co.....



Several months later, Father Van returned to Belgium for his first visit since coming to America. The solemn High Mass he dedicated to his deceased parents and relatives in Kachtem on July 27, 1876, was attended by about fifty priests. From there, he went on to Lourdes<sup>28</sup> to make his devotions to Our Lady and try to renew his failing health. His visit inspired him so much that he resolved to build a replica of the Grotto of Lourdes behind the Church of

Assumption. The shrine would be the outward expression of his own devotion to the Blessed Mother, and would provide his fellow Americans with the opportunity of worshipping at an outside shrine.

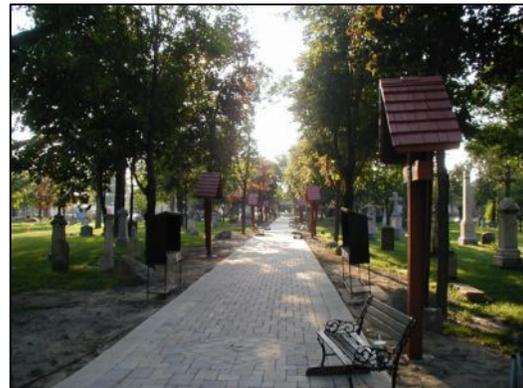
When he returned to Detroit, Father Van built a little chapel on a mound in the rear of the churchyard grounds. He made a path through the cemetery leading to the shrine bordered on each side by a double row of pine trees. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Blessed Sacrament was borne down the path to the chapel in a procession. The chapel was later moved to the side of the cemetery when the Grotto was constructed.

#### THE GROTTA:



*In the midst of some disputes*, Father Van had been trying to raise money to build the Grotto. Early in 1880, Father Schutjes cautioned him that no improvements “whatsoever” could be made until the church’s debt of \$1,000.16 was paid in full. In 1881, the Bishop wrote: “The ‘Grotto’ is a pure matter of devotion, and no necessity whatever. But as it is no necessity, why go into such a serious debt? Why not wait patiently until devotion has furnished the requisite means?” The Bishop’s own enthusiasm for the project may be guessed, however, from the fact that he forwarded Father Van the dimensions of the Grotto at Lourdes and offered to pay for the centerstone.

On May 29, 1881, the Grotto was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The cornerstone was laid in a ceremony preceded by a procession down to the site of the shrine. On April 30, 1882, Pope Leo XII granted Bishop Borgess an audience in Rome during which he signed a proclamation<sup>28</sup> authorizing the shrine for devotions. Father Van’s request was granted for partial and plenary indulgences for all who visited and prayed there.



The architect for the Grotto was Mr. P. Dederichs, Jr. and the stonecutter, Felix Meier, was in charge of construction. When it was completed, the shrine was made of boulders which the farmers had laboriously brought in by horse and wagon from all parts of Michigan. One of the young parishioners who worked on the shrine was Charles Lefevere,<sup>29</sup> who helped haul stones in from Utica.

The shrine was lined with squared stones. Parish families and church societies had donated the ones which rose up in rows from the marble floor. The names of the popes were engraved on those which spanned the ceiling. The Litany of the Virgin was carved at eye level starting on the left exterior against the rear wall. On it were inscribed the names of the three church societies: the Altar Society, the Society of St. Sebastian,

and the Society of St. Joseph. Above the altar, under an arch of lilies, was a statue of Mary, over which was a small oriel window containing the painting of a dove. Another statue of the Holy Mother, shielded by a canopy of stone, was placed at the apex over the centerstone, flanked by two stone angels..



In front of the Grotto was a fountain, around the base of which were written the words: “Glory to the One Triune God, Now and Forever.” On the three sides of the stem of the fountain, the words appeared again, in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. To the side of the mound

was a little chapel, representing the stable of Bethlehem.

The shrine as described was not completely finished in 1881. Expenses for the year 1882 included work on the Grotto: a statue of the Blessed Virgin, an iron fence, a fountain, a stained window, Lourdes holy water, labor, candlesticks, flowers, angels, and linens. In 1883, there were expenses for finishing the roof, carving emblems, sculpting and marble for the cupola, and for the Stations of the Cross in the cemetery.



Carved into the cornerstone on the left, dated A.D. May 29, 1881, are the words: "Upon This Rock I Will Build My Church, Pope Pius IX, R.I.P. and Pope Leo XIII, Presented By This Congregation." The cornerstone on the right reads: "Most Rev. John Carroll, Died 1815, Rt. Rev. P.P. Lefevre, Died March 4, 1869. Donated By Rev. Amandus Vandendriessche." Inside the Grotto, the four rows of stones rising from the floor are inscribed with dedications. The letters carved on some have become illegible over time, but the ones that remain are a treasure of parish history. They read as follows:

In Memory of the LII Year of the Marriage of Philip Wiegand & Anna Mandel  
In Memory of Bruno Van Damme, Wife and Family  
In Memory of Rev. Father A.F. Bleyenbergh, Pastor of Holy Trinity Church, Detroit, 17 years, died 1885.  
Given by Wendelin Baumgartner & Wife Fr. Anselm  
Given by Charles Maddelein & W. Rosalia Velyn  
Donated by Henry Brinkers and Wife Cath. Koch  
Donated by the Boys of the Cath. School of the Assumption  
In Memory of Peter Ja. Viaene, July 12, 1865 & W. R. Vandendriessche by Miss Mary Viaene  
Patrick Lappin & Wife Mary....<sup>30</sup>  
Donated by John Brinkmann & Wife E. Dreisbach  
In Memory of Anthony Schaid by his Wife Anna Reuter  
In Memory of Francis Weber by his Wife e. Reichenbach  
In Memory of Rev. Gustave Limpens  
In Memory of Eva Hauck by Wendelin Sprenger  
Given by Hugh McCarran  
**Donated by Casper Salter**  
Given by Michael Schoenherr and W.M.A. Young  
Given by Philip Kerwin & Edward Chapoton  
In Memory of Joseph Gerardy  
...celebrated his Golden Jubilee 1882, George Godez, Died January 1883, R.I.P.  
In Memory of Rev. M.E.E. Shawe, and English Noble and Soldier, Ordained in France was Pastor of the Cathedral of St. Peter & Paul, Detroit, was fatally injured in coming to the consecration of the Assumption Church, died May 10, 1853, R.I.P. Donated by Mrs. Frances Elliott.  
Given by Gerard Keiles & W.J. Viet  
Given by Anthony Baumgartner & W.T. Zuger  
Donated by Rev. Theophilus Buyse  
To the... Very Rev. Gabriel Richard, Elected to Congress in 1825, died September 15, 1832 a Victim of his Heroic Charity in the Cholera '32, Donated by Hon. Wm. G. Thomson, Alex Chapoton, T.P. Hall, W.Y. Hamlin, Mrs. E. V. Watson, George H. Hammond, Daniel Scotten, John Moran, James Edson, Celimene, Beloved Wife of F.F. Palms, R.I.P.  
Given by John March  
Donated... Rev. L. Sifferath  
Given by Blasius Zuger & W.J. Elspas  
Donated by Rev. G. Tileck  
Silver Jubilee November 5, 1882, of Very Rev. Ed Joos as Director of the Sisters Servants of the I.H.M.  
In Memory of Michael Kratz by his W. E. Arnauld



Donated by Rev. J. Francis Broegger  
 In Memory of Her. O'Leary & W.M. O'Sullivan by Florence O'Leary  
 Donated by Rev. Camillus P. Maes, Sec.  
 ... Winkelmeier  
 ... Waterschoot

**Donated by John Salter**

Donated by... Wife Marg. Girard  
 Donated by Anth'y Reichenbach & W. Odenbier, Records their S. Jubilee October 29, 1882.  
 Given by Francis Ternes and W. Helen Brinkers  
 In Memory of Louis Diegel by his Wife E. Reichenbach  
 In Commemoration of my First Mass Celebrated April 9, 1882, Rev. D. C. Coyle.  
 In Memory of my Prematurely Departed Parents Louis Compeyn, Renilde Constance De Donder, Donated by Mary Elodia C. Compeyn.

Donated by Henry Diegel & Wife Mag. Schoenherr  
 Donated by Anthony Phent & Wife Mar Brinkers  
 Donated by Thomas Corby & Wife Anna Lappin  
 Donated by John Corby & Wife A. Trombly  
 Donated by the Girls of the Catholic School of the Assumption

**Given by John Kelly & Wife... Collins**

... Corby... Wife Mary Foley



Word of the new shrine soon spread and people began to make pilgrimages. Crutches were left behind as a testimony to the power of prayer. An 1883 article from the Michigan Catholic related:

Miss S., a young lady who has been a sufferer for years, paid a visit to the Grotto of Our Lady of the Assumption parish recently with the most satisfactory results. Writing to a Lady who is herself a sufferer and at present residing in Detroit, Miss S. says: "I am happy To inform you that I am improving every day. I paid a visit to the Grotto about two weeks Ago, since which time I have improved so much that with the help of God I will be able to Lay aside my

crutches in a few weeks. I am making a Novena and it is to last 33 days. It Has done me more good than all the doctors I ever had. I can walk now quite a ways without my crutches, and I attend Mass every morning in spite of the weather.<sup>31</sup>

Pete Dedenbach, born in 1860 and baptized by Father Van, remember the healings:

Never forgot the boy who doctored all over. They gave him up. His parents heard about the Grotto and came for nine Sundays. The boy was cured- still living today. Weighs 225 pounds.

There was a very pretty young lady. She came here on crutches. Made a Novena. One day Father Vandendriesche preached a sermon. 200 people were there. I can still remember his words: "My friends, this young lady is going to walk away cured." She die-and her crutches are still her today.<sup>32</sup>

On July 8, 1883, a solemn blessing ceremony for the new Stations of the Cross took place at the Grotto. Reverend Francis Lings, O.S.F. officiated, and Reverend C.P. Maes, Secretary of the Diocese, preached.

In May of 1887, there was a special ceremony at the Grotto celebrating Pope Leo XIII's fiftieth year as a priest. A "Festal Lyric: for the Pope and "May-Song to the Madonna" were composed and sung on the occasion.

As a result of the shrine's fame, the Church of the Assumption began to be known as Assumption (Grotto) Church, or simply as "the Grotto." The Protestants from the neighboring settlements proudly led visitors of tours of the cemetery and Grotto. One the last Sunday in May, the anniversary of its founding, and on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Assumption, crowds of people visited and attended services. People would often come on foot from the city, just as in Europe they had made pilgrimages to shrines outside their towns.

Sometime during the 1870s or 1880s, a couple named Grambau lived with Father Van as rectory housekeeper and caretaker of the buildings, grounds, cow, and horses. The Grambaus were Lutherans but soon converted to the faith of their beloved employer. Both are buried in the Grotto Cemetery.

<sup>28</sup>See Appendix for the text of Pope Leo XIII's proclamation.

<sup>29</sup>Charles used to walk from the family farm on Conner and Warren to the parish school.

<sup>30</sup>Dots (...) indicate that the rest of the inscription is undecipherable.

<sup>31</sup>"Diocesan News: Connor's Creek, "Michigna Catholic, Thursday, November 29, 1883

<sup>32</sup>Spilos, Steve, Northeast, Detroit, "Tombstones Relate Work Well Don," Northeast Detroit, February, 1948.

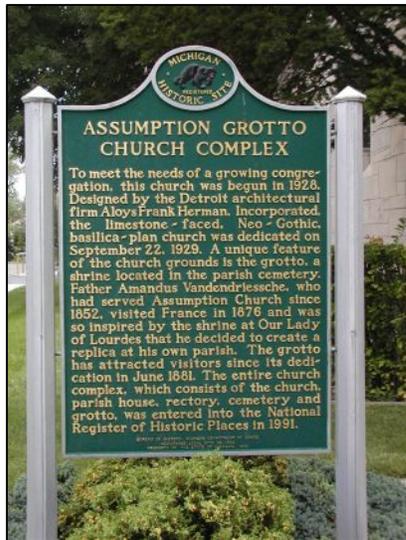
<http://www.assumptiongrotto.com/>

Website of the Assumption Grotto Catholic Church:

Assumption Roman Catholic Church

Assumption Roman Catholic Church / Grotto

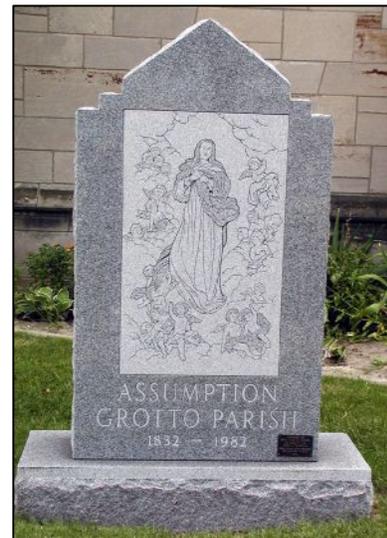
The origins of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Roman Catholic Church can be traced to 1830, when German immigrants first arrived in Detroit. Warned away from cholera-stricken Detroit, they built a log church here in 1832. In what was then the outskirts of the city, Redemptorist missionaries served Kirchen Wald (Church in the Woods) until it was designated a parish by Bishop Peter Paul LeFevre in 1847. It is the second oldest parish in Detroit. Father Amandus Vandendriessche, the first full-time pastor, was assigned here in 1852 and immediately began building a permanent structure. Built of bricks made on the premises, the church was completed in time for Christmas services that same year.



create a replica at his own parish. The grotto has attracted visitors since its dedication in June 1881. The entire church complex, which consists of the church, parish house, rectory, cemetery and grotto, was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

#### Assumption Grotto Church Complex

To meet the needs of the growing congregation, this church was begun in 1928. Designed by the Detroit architectural firm Aloys Frank Herman, Incorporated, the limestone-faced, Neo-Gothic, basilica-plan church was dedicated on September 22, 1929. A unique feature of the church grounds is the grotto, a shrine located in the parish cemetery. Father Amandus Vandendriessche, who had served Assumption Church since 1852, visited France in 1876 and was so inspired by the Shrine at Our Lady of Lourdes that he decided to



Registered Site L1764  
Erected 1992

Location: 13770 Gratiot Avenue near Six Mile Road  
Detroit, Wayne County



Father Amandus Vandendriessche

May he be remembered in your prayers for his love of the blessed sacrament which prompted him to use this pelican in corpus Christi sermons. His love of the suffering Christ which urged him to make the stations of the cross in this cemetery on his knees. His love of the blessed mother which inspired him to erect this Grotto in her honor.

Early Detroit: 1701-1760

Detroit was founded July 24, 1701, by Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac, who landed in this vicinity on that date. With him were one hundred Frenchmen and a like number of Indians. Cadillac took possession of the land in the name of Louis XIV. Here was built Fort Pontchartrain to prevent English traders from using the water route to the upper Great Lakes. The site was on the peninsula between the Detroit River and Savoyard Creek. Huron, Ottawa and Potawatomi Indians accepted the invitation of Cadillac to settle near the fort. Detroit he wished to develop as an agricultural settlement. Mesdames Cadillac and Tonty arrived later in 1701. Other families followed them. After Cadillac's removal in 1710, Detroit's growth was retarded for many years. In 1712 the French and their Indian allies fought and destroyed a band of Fox Indians camped north of the fort. The French crown encouraged the development of the colony in the 1740s by offering seed, livestock and farm equipment to settlers. The fort was enlarged in the 1750s. Detroit then had a French population of about one thousand, and farms lined the river above and below the fort as well as across the river.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>