



Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall

This Week in History

January 30, 2015

St. Columban Parish Welcomes its First Resident Priest

The year 1834 marked the arrival of Father James Bennett, the first resident priest at St. Columban Parish.

1834 also marked the beginning of the construction of the canal in Cornwall. When word of steady labour reached the home land, Irish immigrant workers came in great numbers to this area. When work was done for the day - the men would go drinking.

By late January of 1835, Fr. Bennett was fully in charge at St. Columban and took pride in serving his community. He became involved in the lives of his parishioners and was opposed to the drinking of spirits. If a member of his flock transgressed they had to contend with Fr. Bennett, a man, “who did not hesitate to charge his horse into the midst of unruly and drunk canal workers with whip in hand,” dispersing them instantly. Fr. Bennett was known to have broken up the tavern brawls and as one account states “he dismounted his ride, entered the tavern and expelled the drinkers through the windows and doors.”



Some of the information for this story was compiled from these sources:
<http://cornwallirishmemorial.wordpress.com/about/cornwalls-irish-history/>
the Cornwall Irish Memorial and the Cornwall Community Museum

Construction of the Cornwall Canal—1897

