

**Traditional**

# **St. Mary's Covered Bridge**

**Constructed 1889**



**Traversing  
Shade Creek**

**Renovated**

**1954 & 1974**

**Historic**

# **St. Mary's Parish** **Shade Gap, Pennsylvania**

**Founded 1798**



**by  
Prince Demetrius  
Gallitzin**

**Stone church erected  
1848**



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Nestled in the mountains of southern Huntingdon County, three miles south of Orbisonia on State Route 522, opposite the covered bridge across Shade Creek, is St. Mary's Catholic Church. This venerable, time-worn sanctuary, the original stone walls dating from 1848, is the focus of life and worship for seventy-five Catholic families in the surrounding area.

How this part of Huntingdon County came to bear the names Shade Valley and Shade Gap is hidden by the mists of time. An historical marker on Route 522, a country mile south of the church, offers this inscription: **"Shadow of Death"—The name applied to this locality by Conrad Weiser, and other travelers on the Frankstown Path in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Its local significance is now unknown.**

The first priest to serve the Catholics of Shade Gap was Fr. Matthias Manners, S.J., circa 1740. Fr. Manners, operating from the Jesuit plantation at Bohemia Manor, Maryland, had Anglicized his name from Sittensperger—"sitten" being German for "manners."

On March 21, 1780 Hugh and Jane Logan purchased a farm encompassing what was known as the Turkey Hill region from William Winton of Dublin Township for the sum of 1,325 pounds. Sixty-eight years later the stone church would be built on a portion of that land, but in the intervening years Catholics would meet for services at the Logan house, which still stands a short distance north of the present church.

In 1796 Fr. Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin, the Russian prince who emigrated to this country in 1792, who was ordained a priest by Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore, and who was destined to become the "Apostle of the Alleghenies," whilst on an early missionary

journey, paused at the Shade Valley farm of Jacob and Margaret Hegie to water his horse. Margaret was ill and asked Fr. Gallitzin to pray for her healing, and she subsequently experienced a remarkable recovery. Jacob and Margaret petitioned baptism, and in 1798 Fr. Gallitzin received them into the Church, a landmark event remembered in the community's oral tradition as the actual founding of St. Mary's parish as an organized entity.

In 1816 Jane Logan was widowed, and in the disposition of her husband's property she directed that a section of the farm be set aside for the construction of a Catholic church, and for the establishment of the two cemeteries associated with the church. The deeds bear the names of the first and third bishops of Pittsburgh, Michael O'Connor and John Tuigg.

In 1847 Fr. Thomas Heyden, the founding "stone and mortar" pastor of St. Mary's, ministering to Shade Gap from Bedford, erected the limestone church at a cost of \$1,200.00.

The church was dedicated in 1848. Bishop Michael O'Connor, with a well-educated sense of beauty and relevance, dubbed it the "Mission Church of Our Lady of Vallambrosa" (Latin for Shade Valley). The appellation, beautiful and melodious as it was, did not stick. The church would always be called, simply, St. Mary's.

In 1962 the parish, long a mission of Huntingdon and Mount Union, attained independent status, and Fr. John Halka was named the first resident pastor. In 1983 the church was renovated, the improvements made possible by a 1981 bequest of \$255,000.00 by Philip Franklin "Pete" Oppel of Shippensburg.

Sunday services at St. Mary's (HC 62 Box 696, Shade Gap, PA 17255, (814) 447-3172) are at 8:00 and 10:30 A.M.; confessions before Mass. **Visitors welcome!**