

St. Anthony's Catholic Church

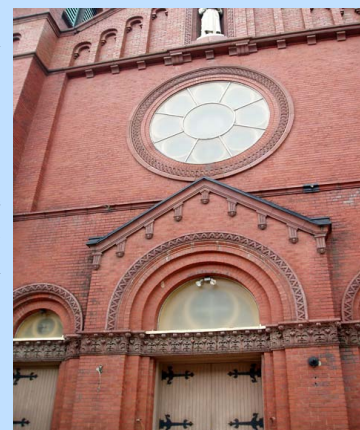
5247 Sheridan Avenue between Frederick and Gratiot on Detroit's East Side

Potato crops failed in much of northern Europe in the late 1840s and 1850s. That propelled the rural population to look for opportunities elsewhere. In Germany, the Revolution of 1848 also encouraged an out-migration. Shortly after the completion of the Erie Canal facilitated travel from the seaports of the East Coast, Germans began coming to Detroit, meaning that they and the Irish were the first two European streams to arrive in sizable numbers. [St. Mary's Church](#) on Monroe was the first Catholic Church in the city to serve the needs of German immigrants, followed, shortly later by [Assumption Gr.](#) Indeed, Assumption Grotto is located at Six Mile and Gratiot because German immigrants fled the city's riverfront when cholera and other contagious diseases spread there in the late 1830s.

The federal government completed the canals at Sault Ste. Marie in 1855 and many Great Lakes cities—including Detroit—became centers for the iron and steel industries. Germans who migrated to Detroit just before the Civil War found work. As the German population spread outward along Gratiot, the Catholic diocese established a mission church, in 1857, at the intersection of Field and Gratiot.

The German community grew and prospered later in the Nineteenth Century as the cities' factories increased in number and output. In July, 1901, Bishop Foley laid the cornerstone for the impressive church that you view. This is a classical Romanesque Revival church constructed of terra cotta and rich red brick. Note the arch windows on the façade and the two gabled towers with crosses. Typical of the construction practices of that era, the massive church sits upon a raised stone foundation, suggesting importance and permanence. Inside the church there is, I believe, a large white stone Romanesque altar. The craftsmen who did brickwork in Detroit about a century ago were extraordinarily talented artists. The façade of this church is one of many marvelous examples of their ken.

This parish is named, I presume, for the St. Anthony who is considered the founder of Christian monasticism. Born in Asia Minor in the middle of the third century to well-to-do parents, Anthony inherited wealth, but at about age 20, decided he wanted to emulate the lives of the Apostles and early Christians. As his faith grew, he decided to become an ascetic, eschewing almost all of the world's goods. He moved to Egypt and lived as an isolated hermit, apparently depending upon gifts. It seems his reputation for holiness spread, and gradually, disciples became associated with him. Allegedly, he spent about 45 years counseling or leading others who shared his rejection of the world's goods in the name of Christ. Thus, he may be the founder of Christian monasticism, but there is, apparently, much still to be learned about him and his life, including the claims that he died at age 105.



Architects: John M. Donaldson and Henry Meier

Date of Construction: 1901

Architectural Style: Romanesque Revival

City of Detroit Local Historic District: Not listed

State of Michigan Registry of Historic Sites: P25,220 Listed: June 20, 1985

State of Michigan Historical Marker: Placed on the front of this church on August 26, 1986.

National Register of Historic Sites: Not Listed

Use in 2009: This parish was closed by the Detroit Roman Catholic diocese in 2006. It is now an empty church.

Photograph: Ren Farley; May 24, 2005

Description updated: August, 2009

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