

Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta

Historical Timeline to 1900

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** Approximate date of founding. No official records have been located that document exact date of establishment as found on a Decree. Other historical documents were used to determine approximate dates. Dates for the establishment of missions are particularly obscure. The oldest extant official decree of establishment in the Archdiocese of Atlanta is dated June 15, 1936 for Saint Peter Parish in LaGrange.*

- 1732 – The British Colony of Georgia was established. The original charter prohibited rum, slaves, lawyers, and Catholics.
- 1775-83 – Revolutionary War.
- 1776 – Declaration of Independence.
- 1777 – Georgia's first Constitution abolished religious discrimination, except in Savannah.
- 1780 – The city of Washington, Georgia was named for General George Washington prior to his becoming President and is the first city to be named for him in the U.S.
- 1785-1795 – Augusta became the second capitol of Georgia; Savannah had been the first.
- 1788 – U.S. Constitution ratified; Georgia was the 4th state to ratify it on January 2.
- 1789 – **First diocese in America, Diocese of Baltimore, was established.**
- 1789 – George Washington became 1st President of the U.S.
- 1790-92 – **Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Locust Grove/Sharon*** Founded as a mission in Locust Grove by Catholics from Charles County, Maryland and was the "first Catholic settlement in Georgia." Originally called "Mary Land." Located in Taliaferro County, originally part of Wilkes County. Georgia's oldest Catholic cemetery was established with the first burial in 1794 (listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2006). **A log cabin church was built in 1800.** Irish settlers arrived in 1820. Frame church was built in 1821. Visited by four bishops as early as 1821. Locust Grove Academy was established around 1818 and three of its students became Georgian governors. By 1824 the church was referred to as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1826 the church was incorporated by an act of the Georgia General Assembly. By the 1840s it served the stations in Washington, Crawfordville, Athens, Louisville, Sparta, etc., and one in SC. Congregation began moving to Sharon because of the railroad that was built after the Civil War. Also, many had died of yellow fever. In 1877, Fr. J. M. O'Brien relocated and reassembled the old 1821 church in Sharon. It was later abandoned and used as a peach house. Another cemetery was built on an old gypsy camping area behind the church. **Current frame church in Sharon was built in 1883** across the street of the cemetery. It became a station of Saint Joseph Parish, Washington in 2001. Early deeds, plat maps, and sacramental records in the Archdiocesan Archives date from 1822-1946. Included is the handwritten history of the Purification Church by Bishop John England.
- 1792 – George Washington was re-elected President.
- 1793 – Missionary priest, Fr. Jean le Moyne (died 1794), arrived in Locust Grove area and was known as the "first parish priest in Georgia." He also served Augusta and Savannah. Fr. O'Reilly then arrived and served in the areas of Warren, Wilkes and Columbia.
- 1795-1804 – Louisville became the third capitol of Georgia.
- 1796 – Fr. Oliver Le Mercier was appointed the "first pastor in Georgia" by Bishop Carroll and resided at Locust Grove for two years. He relocated his headquarters to Savannah in 1798. The French Congregation de Saint John-Baptiste in Savannah had been established in 1796. Savannah's sacramental registers for 1796-1836 include records of Warren, Washington, and Wilkes Counties. The Catholic communities then were served primarily by French missionaries.
- 1799 – December 14, death of George Washington at age 67.
- 1800 – Washington, DC became the official U.S. capital. First Catholic church in Georgia built at Locust Grove, Taliaferro County.
- 1804-1868 – Milledgeville became the fourth capital of Georgia.

- 1808 – **Baltimore became an Archdiocese.**
- 1810 – The Augusta church was incorporated by the state. Fr. Robert Browne was appointed pastor of both Augusta and Locust Grove, and also served Savannah. First church building in Augusta constructed 1812-1814.
- 1812 – War declared on Britain.
- 1813 – There were 200,000 Catholics in the U.S.
- 1820 – **Diocese of Charleston was founded. First bishop was John England (1820-1842).** Included NC, SC, and Georgia. There were only two priests serving in the diocese, one in Charleston and one in Augusta, Father Carles, and only 375 Catholics in the entire state. Irish settlers arrived at Locust Grove.
- 1821 – In January, Bishop John England first visited Warren and Wilkes Counties and dedicated the church at Locust Grove. He visited Locust Grove 13 times from 1821 to 1839.
- 1835 – **Saint Joseph, Washington.*** Originally founded as Saint Patrick Station and was served by the Purification Church. **First church was built in 1840** on North Alexander Avenue, which later burned in the 1880s. Became a mission in 1845. First resident pastor, Fr. James O’Brien, was appointed in 1874. Built a new frame church, renamed Saint Joseph, in 1887 on corner of Mercer and Liberty Streets. The current Spanish Mission style church was built in 1972. Today it serves Saint Mary’s Mission in Elberton and Purification Station. The sacramental registers in the Archdiocesan Archives date from 1854-1954.
- 1839 – Dedication of the new Saint John the Baptist Church in Savannah.
- 1843 – Catholic families arrived in Atlanta (Marthasville) from Augusta. The mission held its first mass in 1845. From 1846-1848, mass was celebrated in the Terence Doonan residence where the basement was converted into a chapel. First sacramental register was kept by Mr. Doonan until Immaculate Conception church was built.
- 1844 – Second Charleston Bishop Ignatius Reynolds visited Purification Church.
- 1845 – **Sacred Heart, Milledgeville.*** First mass was said in 1845 in the Newell Hotel. In 1847, the mission, which was served out of Macon, was visited by Bishop Reynolds of Charleston. Visited by Bishop Gross of Savannah in 1873. **First new church completed in 1874** and dedicated by Bishop Gross. Catholic Directory first lists it in 1878 as Sacred Heart Church, not the Milledgeville mission, with Rev. Thomas O’Hara assigned. Listed as a mission of Saint Joseph in Macon from 1896. Oldest Catholic Church building still standing on its original spot in the Archdiocese.
- 1846, April 1 – First convention of the Catholic Church in Augusta, Georgia. At the time there were only three churches in the State: Holy Trinity (St. Patrick) in Augusta, St. John the Baptist in Savannah, and the Purification Church in Locust Grove. One of the delegates from Locust Grove was made president. The delegates choose St. Peter the Apostle as the patron saint of the State of Georgia.
- 1846 – **Immaculate Conception, Atlanta.*** The “first parish in Atlanta.” Earliest sacramental registers date from 1846-1871 (in Archives), beginning when mass was held in the Doonan house. First recorded baptism was in 1846 by Fr. John Barry, then pastor of Holy Trinity in Macon (Barry later became the second bishop of Savannah). The baptism took place at the Doonan home and lists the name of the mission as “The Catholic Church of Atlanta.” **Small wooden church built in 1848** (deed dated February 23, 1848), which was saved during the Civil War by Father O’Reilly. Officially received its present name in 1849. In 1850, while still a mission, it was served by the Church of the Assumption in Macon. First official pastor in Atlanta, Fr. Jeremiah O’Neill Jr., raised in Locust Grove, was appointed in 1851 and served various early missions. **Present church was built in 1869-1880.** It was designed by Mr. W. H. Parkins, a leading Atlanta architect. The old church was moved to an adjacent lot. The church contains a crypt beneath the main floor where Father Thomas O’Reilly and Father Thomas Cleary are buried. Father O’Reilly was responsible for saving most of the downtown churches from being burned by General Sherman during the Civil War. Became a Shrine in 1954 and suffered a devastating fire in 1982. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.
- 1846-48 – Mexican War
- 1847 – City of Atlanta was incorporated.
- 1850 – **Diocese of Savannah was established.** It included the entire state of Georgia and part of Florida, had seven parishes, eight priests, and 4000 Catholics.

- 1851 – **Saint Mary, Rome.*** Listed as a mission visited by priests from Atlanta in 1852 Catholic Directory. **First church was completed in 1874** and dedicated by Bishop Gross of Savannah. By 1874 it was served by Saint Joseph in Dalton to 1897-98. By 1899 it was served by Sacred Heart in Atlanta. Became a parish in 1929 with Fr. Joseph Cassidy as pastor. **Present church built in 1931.** Earliest sacramental records begin in 1883 and are housed in the parish.
- 1852 – **Saint Joseph, Dalton.*** Began as a mission served by Immaculate Conception in Atlanta. **Erected first church around 1852,** which was burned during the Civil War. In 1869 Fr. O'Reilly of Atlanta had the church rebuilt. In 1883 it was placed under the care of Saint Mary, Rome. The Dalton mission was closed by the Marists in 1902. It was reinstated in 1930 and was served by Saint Mary, Rome again. Became a parish in 1941. Current church was built in 1957.
- 1861-65 – Civil War; Georgia was the 5th state to secede from the Union.
- 1864 – September 2, Atlanta was captured by Sherman who said "I can make Georgia howl!"
- 1864 – December 21, Sherman reached Savannah and offered the city as a Christmas gift to Lincoln.
- 1865 – May 5, President Jefferson Davis met with his Confederate Cabinet for the last time in Washington, Ga.
- 1868 – Georgia State Capital moved from Milledgeville to Atlanta.
- 1869 – **Sparta Mission, Sparta.*** Small chapel was built in 1869 by Linton Stephens for his wife. It was one of the earliest integrated churches and at one time a "station" of Saint Joseph in Macon of the Savannah Diocese. Chapel was torn down in 1935, but the cemetery remains.
- 1870 – Georgia was the 11th state to be readmitted to the Union.
- 1873 – New Cathedral built in Savannah (1873-1876). Only 12 priests in the entire diocese.
- 1873 – **Saint Joseph, Athens.*** Property purchased in 1873 for a mission; under the care of the Marists from 1893-1910. First baptism performed August 18, 1873. Pastor permanently assigned in 1910. New church dedicated in 1913. Under its care was Sacred Heart Mission 1957-1959. Sacramental register of 1873-1893 are missing.
- 1879 – There were 17 Churches, 35 Chapels and Stations, 27 priests, and 25,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Savannah.
- 1880 – **Sacred Heart of Jesus, Atlanta.*** Second parish in Atlanta, but first church in the archdiocese that did not begin as a mission. Originally called Saints Peter and Paul (1880-1898). Property for church purchased February 28, 1880. In 1897 new property was purchased and another church was built by 1898 with Mayer stained glass windows. Consecrated in 1920. In 1976 the church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its architecture. Visited by Mother Theresa in 1995. Became a minor basilica in 2010. Earliest sacramental registers from 1880 located in the parish. Basement burned in 1978.
- 1893 – Sacred Heart Mission, Nitra and Saint Joseph Mission, Budapest, were two congregations established for Magyar and Slovak Catholics from Pennsylvania and New York. Abandoned around 1908. Last mass in 1954 with few families. Then mass was moved to Carrollton where the mission of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was formed; it became a parish in 1965.
- 1898 – Cathedral of Saint John in Savannah burned. The U.S. declared war on Spain.
- 1899 – Bishop Thomas Becker of Savannah died at Saint Joseph Male Orphanage in Washington, Georgia.