

The Windows of St. Michael's

A brief history about those who donated the stained glass windows of St. Michael's, or in whose memory they were given.

Window Symbol: Pillar and Cross

The pillar and cross are symbols of Christ's scourging and crucifixion during His passion. Christ freely accepted the suffering imposed on Him. By His willing sacrifice, He offered His sufferings and death to His Father on our behalf and for forgiveness of our sins.

Given by: Michael Higgins

Michael C. Higgins was baptized on September 28, 1851 in Knockanore parish, County Waterford, Ireland, son of Michael Higgins and Margaret Geary. He was named Michael in honor of an older brother who died in the Great Hunger a few years earlier. As a teen, Michael followed his older siblings and emigrated, arriving in 1870 at the Port of Boston aboard the *Palmyra* and settling in Pawcatuck. He married Mary Ann Burke in St. Michael parish on September 9, 1879. They soon settled into a home at 86 Liberty Street, where Michael established a grocery business, Higgins Grocery, and became a successful merchant. In later years, the business moved to West Broad Street and eventually evolved into Higgins Pharmacy during the next generation.

Michael and Mary Ann Higgins had 11 children: Michael; Joseph; Mabel who married Charles Mattingly; Margaret; William R. who married Mary Gormley; Charles Leo who married Marie Henry; Francis; Julia Rosalie who married Charles Trebbe; Edwin Carlton who married Mary Quinn; Walter; and Madeline Higgins. Francis became a priest and Madeline became a Sister of Mercy (Sister Mary Clarissa).

In the 1890s the Know Nothing party made it difficult for local Yankee landowners to do business with Catholic parishes. When they blocked the parish's attempt to buy land to build St. Michael School, Michael Higgins came to the rescue. He thwarted the Know Nothings by purchasing the land himself, as a local businessman, and then selling it to the parish a few weeks later!

In 1910 Michael had a stroke while he was working at the store and suffered paralysis. He died six years later and is buried with Mary Ann in St. Michael's Old Cemetery.

Descendants

Descendants of the Higgins family include members of the **Higgins, Burke, Mattingly, Trebbe, Marr, Kelleher, Shea, Beverly, Deady** and **Delaney** families. Among the children were a doctor, pharmacist, priest and nun. The family included Civil War heroes, founders of Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and Pawcatuck PTA, and a carpenter who built most of the homes in Downerville. Among the descendants are members of the Kelleher family of Vermont Timberworks who built the new trusses for St. Michael Church. Not only were the Higgins family among those who helped to establish the early church, they also are among those who are restoring it now. Quite a legacy.

