

DRIVETHEFIVE

Tolton Sites

QUINCY IL



FATHER AUGUSTUS
TOLTON 1854-1897

*The first Black
Roman Catholic priest
in the United States*

INTRO

John Augustus Tolton was born in Brush Creek, Missouri on April 1, 1854. He was the middle child of Peter Paul Tolton and Martha Jane Chisley Tolton. The Toltons were enslaved on a farm in the eastern region of the state, approximately 20 miles west of the Mississippi River and the free state of Illinois.

Augustus's early childhood coincided with the Civil War. His father escaped slavery to join the Union Army while his mother remained the maid of her owners. Augustus was raised in the Roman Catholic Church as Martha had been baptized a Catholic because her owners were of the Catholic faith. He was christened "Augustine" at St. Peter's Catholic Church of Brush Creek in Missouri.

Unsure of her husband's fate, Martha and her family found the courage to escape slavery in 1862. She and her three young children crossed the span of the Mississippi by boat under the threat of gunfire into Illinois, settling in Quincy.

Follow Father Tolton's Quincy Steps

1862-1872

Upon arrival in Quincy, 9-year old Augustus attended St. Boniface School intermittently while working at Harris Tobacco Factory. His family attended the 2,000-member church which was predominantly German. Young Gus learned the German language from attending the church before being forced to leave school due to prejudice.

The Toltons transferred to St. Peter Church, where Fr. Peter McGirr welcomed them and took steps to ensure that Augustus would flourish in his parish school. The tenacious learner studied at St. Peter for the next several years for 3-4 months at a time, working the remainder of each year at the tobacco factory.

At the age of 16, Augustus received his First Communion at the Church of St. Peter in Quincy on the Feast of Corpus Christi. He graduated from St. Peter at the age of 18.

1873-1886

Despite McGirr's support, Augustus was rejected by every American seminary to which he applied. Several Quincy priests outlined a study plan for him and in 1878 St. Francis Solanus College (now Quincy University) enrolled Augustus. Upon graduation he attended the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome, where he became fluent in the Italian language as well as studying Latin and Greek. He was ordained at St. John Lateran Basilica.

1886-1897

Augustus returned to Quincy as the first Black priest in the United States in 1886. Some 1,500 people greeted him upon his return. He was beloved by his following, renowned for his singing and the power of his sermons. Father Tolton celebrated his first Solemn High Mass in the community at St. Boniface in that same year and became Pastor of St. Joseph Church in Quincy. After three years of overseeing the church and school, Fr. Tolton was reassigned to Chicago due to extreme opposition from a new priest at St. Boniface.

At the age of 43, Augustus collapsed and died the following day at Mercy Hospital in Chicago as a result of the 1897 heat wave. After a funeral which included 100 priests, Augustus Tolton was buried in the priests' lot in St. Peter Cemetery in Quincy, which had been his expressed wish.

[MORE TO EXPLORE >](#)

1 8TH & MAINE
SAINT PETER
CHURCH SITE,
CURRENTLY
QUINCY CITY HALL

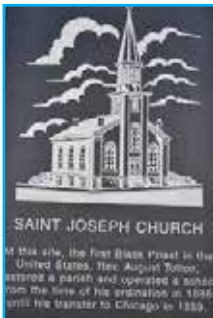


northeast corner of building

2 701 MAINE
SAINT
BONIFACE
CHURCH



3 7TH & JERSEY
SAINT
JOSEPH
CHURCH
SITE



southwest corner
marks original site

4 2600 MAINE
CURRENT
ST. PETER
CHURCH



southeast corner
of the parking lot

5 3300 BROADWAY
ST. PETERS CEMETERY



5

Regional Father Tolton Connections

14690 GENTRY ROAD
ST. PETER'S CHURCH
MONROE CITY, MO

Augustus Tolton was baptized at St. Peter's Brush Creek Catholic Church. The original log structure was rebuilt with limestone in 1862.

A plaque honoring Father Tolton may be viewed on the exterior.

The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



33RD & DEARBORN, CHICAGO, IL
SITE OF ST. MONICA'S CATHOLIC CHURCH



Romanesque style with twin towers

Father Tolton led the development and construction of St. Monica's Catholic Church as a "national parish church." After four years of preparation, St. Monica's was dedicated in 1894. It was Chicago's first African-American parish. Upon Father Tolton's death in 1897, St. Monica's was made a mission of St. Elizabeth's Church. In 1924 it was closed as a national parish.

Timeline of Father Tolton's Canonization

2010 The Augustus Tolton cause for canonization is announced by Cardinal Francis George

2011 A celebration of the 125th Anniversary of the Priestly Ordination of Father Augustus Tolton and his Cause for Saint-hood was held in Quincy, Illinois

2012 The Sacred Congregation for Causes of Saints at the Vatican grants the title "Servant of God" to Father Augustus Tolton

2015 The Congregation for Causes of Saints at the Vatican declared in the affirmative the juridical validity of the Archdiocesan Inquiry into the life and virtues of Father Tolton

2019 Pope Francis issues the declaration that Father Augustus Tolton lived a life of heroic virtue thus advancing him to the title, The Venerable Father Augustus Tolton