

Demolition begins at Notre Dame Church in Worcester



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WORCESTER - Patrons on the third floor of the Worcester Public Library had a clear view Monday afternoon as a wrecker crane, like some prehistoric beast, bit into the facade of Notre Dame des Canadiens Church.

“I feel bad for the people who built it,” said Glen Wilkin, 58, of Worcester, as the 89-year-old former mother church of the city’s French-Canadian Catholics began to fall.

Mr. Wilkin was reading a newspaper by the library's third-floor window that offered an unobstructed view across Salem Square of the Notre Dame demolition.

"I used to go to AA meetings in the cellar," he said of the old church.

Was he sad to see it go? "Naah," he said. "Now there's going to be a coffee shop there I'm sure.

"That's the way it is. Everything goes."

Sitting nearby, Richard Healy, 71, of Worcester, took an unsentimental view of the church being reduced to rubble across the street.

"What do I think? I think they should demolish the institution, period, that's what I think, as a former Catholic," he said.

Mr. Healy, who wore a cap from St. Michael's College, his daughter-in-law's alma mater, continued: "How does the Church survive? I grew up in it. If it weren't for the immigrant communities, I don't think the Catholic Church would be surviving in America right now."

It was a day of beginnings and endings in the city.

As the wrecker swung into action in mid-afternoon, preparations were underway on the Common across the street for a civic celebration to be held that evening welcoming the Boston Red Sox' Triple-A farm team, the PawSox, to Worcester.

Orchestral music from a pre-WooSox-gala sound-check filled the air as the church facade fell.

When the large crane began clawing away at the stone structure Monday it brought to a close years of public debate over the fate of the former church.

The signature Romanesque Revival structure has stood in downtown Worcester since 1929. Notre Dame's large, French-Canadian parish dwindled over time, and the church was closed in 2008. The building, sold in 2010 to the developers of the multimillion-dollar CitySquare project, lies in the footprint of downtown revitalization.

Many, including Preservation Worcester, a nonprofit that aims to save historical structures in the city from the wrecking ball, opposed the idea of demolishing the church.

Last week, [the bell was removed from the church steeple](#). The Hanover Insurance Group, principal investor in CitySquare, announced the company would donate the steeple bell, as well as \$10,000 and a portion of the land, to the city to develop a memorial to preserve and display the bell.