A Brief Visual of the Beginnings of the Diocese of Davenport

The French Imprint. “This is a seed cast into the ground which will bear fruit in its time.”
(Jesuit Relations, LIX, p.153)
The crest of the Diocese of Davenport reflects our history.

*The Diocese of Davenport coat of arms* shows three dagger type crosses arranged above and below a crenulated tower. Its design is taken from the Davenport family crest of England for which the See city is named.
The first touch of Catholicism with Iowa was through the fur traders (coureur de bois) who came from the French colony which became Canada. These adventurers and entrepreneurs followed the rivers making contacts with Indians who would sell them furs. They had a Catholic heritage, they often married Indians and in some places they became the leaders of the Church.
They were followed by or accompanied by the missionaries. The most famous is that of Marquette and Joliet in 1673; explorer and adventurer. They discovered the Mississippi and went along what became Iowa before they turned back to return to the Great Lakes. At this time we were part of the Vicariate of Canada.
The next year, 1674 until 1762, we were a part of the Diocese of Quebec as French fur traders swept the Northwest and the Mississippi Valley. With the French and Indian War, Spain took control of the Mississippi Valley and we became part of the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba. After this time until 1837 we were a part of a number of dioceses of both French and Spanish influence because church administration followed the changing tides of civil control and U.S. expansion.
In the early 19th century (1803) the land west of the Mississippi became part of the United States.

About 30 years later, Pope Gregory XVI appointed Mathias Loras first bishop of a diocese which included Iowa, Minnesota and parts of North and South Dakotas.

Here is Bishop Loras who was born in France of parents who suffered in the French Revolution. At the time of his appointment he was a priest in Mobile, Alabama.

He thought the new diocese would be mainly composed of Indians, but this was the time of the resettlement of Indians and the coming of people from the Eastern States and from European countries.
Bishop Loras was worried because there was only one priest in the area: Father Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli who rode on horseback serving the Indians and white people who lived on the eastern edge of Iowa, in Illinois, Wisconsin and around the Great Lakes. The Irish called him Mathew Kelly, but he was really Italian born and he was a Dominican priest.
In 1837, the Diocese of Dubuque was established, which included all of what was to become the State of Iowa as well as what now is Minnesota, North and South Dakota and beyond to the north & west. While Davenport was not to become a diocese until 1881, it was the period after 1837 that many of the older parishes were established.
Father Samuel Mazzuechelli built parishes of St. Anthony, Davenport; St. Mathias, Muscatine; Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Iowa City and the parish of St. Paul in Burlington.
In 1881, the Diocese of Davenport came into existence. At that time it was half of the state of Iowa.
The Diocese of Des Moines was created out of the western half of the then Diocese of Davenport in 1911. What remained, plus the addition of Clinton county from the Diocese of Dubuque, became the new Diocese of Davenport. This is how it has remained to this day.
In Davenport, the prime founders of the church and the leading citizens of the city for over 25 years were Antoine LeClaire and his wife Marguerite. He was part Indian, a fur trader and friend of the Indians. He spoke 14 dialects. The Indians gave him property that made up much of Davenport and he, in turn, gave property to the church for St. Anthony Church, St. Marguerite Church and St. Marguerite Cemetery. (They were named for his wife). Antoine was very heavy set and weighed over 300 pounds. He not only helped found the church, but he played the bass viol in church and his wife sang in the choir.
Marguerite LeClaire, the granddaughter of a Sac Chief, educated by Sisters in St. Louis. She and her husband were the social as well as the civil and religious leaders of Davenport. Their 3rd home on 9th street had a ballroom for the dances they hosted.
Antoine LeClaire gave the property and much of the money for St. Anthony Church (named for his patron). This picture shows the second church built in 1857.
The first church is the school. Northeast of the church. The wings were added to the east end of the church later.
This is the first pastor of St. Anthony – Father Jean Antoine Marie Pelamourgues who Bishop Loras recruited in France for Iowa. He felt that those who came to the United States should learn English which he found to be a very difficult task, but, he said: “I do not despair.” During this time all large gatherings were at St. Anthony’s. When something important happened, he rang the bell and people met at St. Anthony’s.
He also started the first Catholic school. The Blessed Virgin Mary sisters taught there from 1843 on.
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Father Pelamourges with the help of Antoine LeClaire built another church on the crest of the hill. This picture is of the church building of St. Marguerite. The first church was the first cathedral. Later in 1895, the name was changed to Sacred Heart Cathedral.
The LeClaire’s, who were buried next to the first church, were transferred to the St. Marguerite Cemetery which later became known as Mt. Calvary Cemetery. With the name change, Sacred Heart was required to have a chapel with the original name of St. Marguerite as it is now known.
Our first bishop was John McMullen, formerly Vicar General of Chicago. Unfortunately he was bishop only two years before he died of cancer.
One special accomplishment of Bishop McMullen was the founding of St. Ambrose College. The first classes were held in the school next to the Cathedral. The original building was built in 1885. Most of the priests of the diocese have received their college education at St. Ambrose.
Our next bishop was Henry Cosgrove, who led the Diocese from 1884 until 1906. He was the first native born American to head a diocese west of the Mississippi river.
In the years from 1911 to 1966, three bishops served as leaders of the Diocese of Davenport:

- **Bishop James Davis**
  - 1906-1926

- **Edward Howard**
  - Auxiliary Bishop
  - 1924-1926
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Bishop Henry Rohlman
1927-1944

Bishop Ralph Hayes
1944-1966
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Through the years some parishes in the rural areas closed as people left the farms and moved to town because of the relocation of railroads, the closing of coal mines, and changing patterns in the American way of life. At this time the Church was making its presence known in other ways and ministries: *The Catholic Messenger* was founded in 1882.
St. Vincent Orphanage in Davenport was founded in 1895 to serve the needs of homeless and needy children from throughout the diocese.
Out of those momentous years that the bishops of the world met in Rome came the understanding that we were to write our own history in a new way. Implementing the decrees of the council was the challenge Bishop O’Keefe received when he was appointed Bishop of Davenport in 1966. We are to gather the people as still a pilgrim church, called not to be served but to serve.
On November 20, 2006, Bishop Martin John Amos, a Titular Bishop of Meta and Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland, was installed as the eighth Bishop of Davenport succeeding Bishop William Franklin who retired at age 76.
In June of 2017 Bishop Thomas Robert Zinkula was ordained and installed as the 9th Bishop of the Diocese of Davenport. Under the leadership of a new shepherd the Church of Davenport moves boldly into the future.