September 21, 1731, Captain Mr. Michael Franklyn, from Rotterdam, sailed his ship into Philadelphia after a voyage from Cowes, England. Among the 104 passengers on board was a gentleman by the name of Casper Weis.

The common spelling of the family name is Wise but various spellings will be found as Weis, Weiss, Wys, Wees, Wice, and Weyse. Casper Weis was listed in the passenger list as being age 33. Other passengers listed were John Nicholas Wise, Casper Wise and John Butt (or Bott), all German immigrants.

Casper Weis, born in 1698, probably in Germany, was married to Mary Sibilla, and died in Paradise in 1782. Their children, Casper, 11, and Sebastian, 1, were probably born in Berks and Lancaster Counties. Tradition says that these Weis children were raised along Beaver Creek with the Indian children as playmates.

As he walked down the gangplank, little did Casper Weis realize the impact he was to have on the place he would call home. Upon his arrival at the Paradise area, he built his home to include a room that could be used by visiting missionaries. In the early days of Pennsylvania, before we became the nation we are today, many houses were built to appear as a private dwelling, so as not to be in open violation of penal laws of England. They were referred to as “Mass Houses.”

Many parishes at that time had no church building so early missionary priests traveled a circuit seeking isolated Catholic immigrants. A visiting priest would search out a leading Catholic of the area. In his dwelling would be a large room where the priest could say Mass and perform other religious duties. Tradition tells us the first Mass in the neighborhood was probably said at Abbottstown by Father de Barth. It may have been said at the home of William Jenkins, a prominent Catholic of the time.
The original Mass House was a settler’s cabin built by Casper Weis, a tailor, in 1761. The entrance on the southwest side was low and wide and faced a great old-fashioned chimney. On one side was a narrow ladder way to the attic and on the other side a door into the larger room. Older generations (around 1902) of Wise’s and Klunk’s remembered the marks on the wall and on the floor where the altar stood. The foundations were made of clay and mortar mixed with straw and lime. The floors were a double thickness of split planks, hewed and planed, and the space between the joists was filled with clay which made a warm house. It was a one story structure about 18’ x 24’ with and attic and basement.

Location is:
N 39° 54.367’
W 76° 58.911’

The cornerstone of the Mass house is presently preserved in our fountain construction on the south side of the church entrance. Clearly visible are the C, W, the scissors symbol and the date 1761. The old map at left shows the mass house location, the present church location and Brandt’s mill, which was on the creek behind Brandt’s farmhouse (the present rectory).
The year was 1809… The date was June 28th. On that date Frederick Brandt received full title to a tract of land, 237 acres in all, which he purchased from Matthias Bouzer. In the patent from the Commonwealth, the property was known as “Brandtsburg.” Mr. Brandt paid $460.13 into the treasury of the State, along with monies paid by Matthias Bouzer, which gave him a clear title to the land. This same tract of land had been owned, per records dated October 28, 1746, by Matthias Bouzer.

Paradise Parish, now known as Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, was a fitting name given to that area north of Abbottstown in the early 1700s when the first settlers, German, French, and Irish, came to make it their home. The rich rolling fields and healthy greenery, stretching out in all directions, was a wonderful testament to a land created by God. Not long after taking up residence in the area, Mr. Brandt purchased an additional five acres of land. On it he built the first Grist Mill of its kind in the neighborhood.

Early worshippers in the local area met in homes where families had set aside rooms in which Mass was celebrated. These homes were referred to as Mass Houses. William Jenkins, Casper Wise, Joseph Heront, and Peter Dellone were among those early Catholics that opened their homes as a place for the local people to worship.

In the early 1800s, Frederick and Mary Magdalene Brandt, immigrants from Bavaria, built the front section of the house pictured above and in 1815 they added the rear wing and converted the second story into a permanent chapel for the celebration of Mass. The congregation continued to celebrate Mass here until 1845.
The original Brandt farmhouse was built in 1810. Mass was celebrated in a large room on the second floor of the house. It was reserved as a Chapel from 1815 to 1845, with a set of stairs outside. Renovation was completed in 1984, turning it into the present day rectory and church office.

The prior rectory erected to the south of the present day cemetery. It was removed in 2003.
February 8, 1842, twenty men of the area signed a pledge wherein they agreed to pay a subscribed amount toward the building of a church. A financial report dated December 21, 1843, shows $2,623.39 and ½ cent was paid or pledged by that date. (The ½ cent was due to the fact that in 1843 the U.S. minted a 12 ½ cent coin.) In 1844, working under the direction of Father Sacchi, S.J., the church was completed.

In 1845 the church was blessed and dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This is believed to be the first Church in the United States, and perhaps the world, to be dedicated to the Mother of God under this title.

In the summer of 1941, a severe wind and rainstorm damaged Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. During World War II no repair work was done. In February of 1949, Father Chester L. Loszewski had work begun on the restoration of the church. At the time of the restoration a new stone memorial tower was erected, a gift of John N. Heltzel, president of the Heltzel Steel and Iron Works, Warren, Ohio. Near the roof of the tower is a stone on which is engraved the figure of a heart and the words, “Heart of Mary Pray for Us, 1843.”
Painting of the Immaculate Heart of Mary by the same artist who painted the Basilica at Conewago. Originally over the altar, it still hangs in the church today.

Front (below) and reverse of a souvenir postcard (right) from the “Shrine Church”, circa 1972.
 Severely damaged in a storm in 1941, repairs were completed by 1949.

Photos by Russell M. Stroup, Jr.
September 1, 1911, Paradise School opened its doors to ten boys. The dream of Frederick Brandt was being fulfilled. In his will dated Feb. 9, 1816, he stated “With the advise and consent of my wife, I have determined to appropriate my real estate for the benefit of God and Country.”

“The Paradise Protectory and Agricultural School” was chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by the Court of Common Pleas of York County on May 1, 1911.

This mission of mercy and charity began under the direction of the Xaverian Brothers. Brother Simeon was appointed Superior, with Brothers Ambrose, Loyola and Claude as assistants. The community faithfully fulfilled the purpose of the school as indicted in the charter...“to educate orphans and destitute boys as Christian gentlemen.”

Christian doctrine, Catechism and the formation of a spiritual life were the responsibility of the Chaplains. Initially the Chaplain served as the Pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. In August 1915, the Sisters of St. Joseph from Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania assumed charge, and have been there ever since.

The school is run by Catholic Charities for residential care of boys 12-17 referred by the Juvenile Probation court system.

The chapel with its gorgeous stained glass windows is used by IHM parishioners weekly for special masses.