

St. Peter & Paul Parish, 'Mother Church Of Elmira,' Marks 100th Jubilee

One hundred years of Catholicism in Chemung Valley, cradled and nurtured by hardy pioneer first settlers and climaxed in Elmira's seven Catholic churches of today, will be marked at Centenary Ceremonies Sunday in the "Mother Church" of St. Peter & Paul, with the Rev. William J. Naughton, pastor, celebrating the Jubilee Mass.

Twelve pastors and 32 assistants served the first church in the Elmira township during its century-long history, which dates back beyond the City of Elmira itself to what was called the Village of Newtown.

Woven into the pattern of its long record are the struggles of the early Catholics of German and Irish descent who pioneered the parish, the establishment of Elmira's first Catholic school, the partial burning of the church by fire, and damage by a flooded Chemung River.

The present St. Peter & Paul Church, a Gothic edifice on the property at East Market and High Streets, is only a few years younger than the parish itself. Its cornerstone was laid on Sept. 8, 1854, and it was dedicated by Bishop Timon of Buffalo on July 19, 1857.

Famed among the pastors of the "Mother Church" were the Rt. Rev. Msgr. John J. Lee, V.F., who guided its destiny for 29 years from 1916 to 1945, and the Rev. John C. Long, who completed a 20-year pastorate in 1916.

It was during the pastorate of Monsignor Lee, who died in 1945 after 51 years in the priesthood, that the beautiful marble altar in St. Peter & Paul's Church, considered without equal in the area, was donated. Imported from Italy by Thomas B. Fitzgerald as a memorial to his wife and son, it was consecrated in 1924. The body of the Rev. John O'Boyle, who lost his life in the construction of the church, is interred beneath the altar.

KNOWN HISTORY of the Chemung Valley dates back some 330 years, when Stephen Brule, from the Colony of New France, was reported to have journeyed through the area in company with some Huron Indians. But it was not until 1786 that the white man made a permanent settlement in the section.

Newtown dates from 1792, and in 1808 the township took the name of Elmira. The City of Elmira was established in 1864—16 years after the foundation of St. Peter & Paul parish.

Earliest recorded accounts of the area tell of the journeys by horseback of a German Jesuit missionary, the Rev. James Fellenz, who came in 1787 to minister to the spiritual needs of Catholic settlers in their homes. Later visits are ascribed to another Jesuit from Baltimore, Father Dilbert.

Historical accounts also tell of the celebration of Mass in the section about 1825 by the Rev. Patrick O'Flynn.

CATHOLICS in the Elmira area were considered a mission of the Binghamton parish, in the New York Diocese, in the years preceding establishment of the Buffalo Diocese in 1847. In 1834, Matthew Laffin and Michael Biggs sent to Auburn for the Rev. Francis O'Donoghue to baptize their children. For several years he and a Father Bradley came from Auburn for baptisms, Masses and marriages.

In 1845 Owen O'Hanlon gave to Bishop Hughes of New York a parcel of land fronting 51 feet on High Street and 125 feet on what is now Market Street.

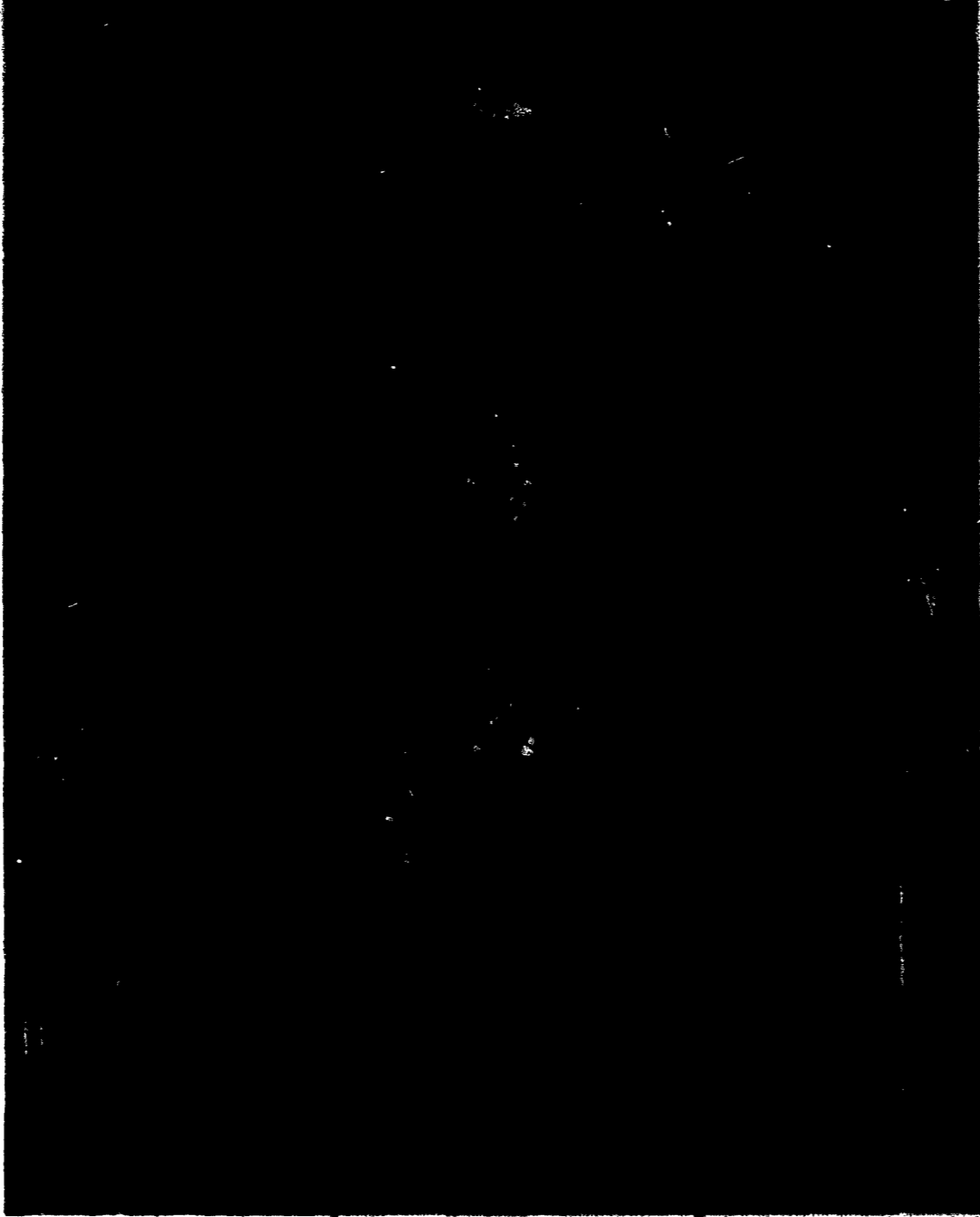
With establishment of the Buffalo Diocese in 1847, the Rev. John Sheridan, former pastor in Binghamton, was appointed first resident pastor in Elmira. During 1848 Father Sheridan, assisted by Trustees Mark Cummings, John Kayanagh, Michael Conley and Thomas Mahoney, completed the first St. Peter & Paul Church building.

In 1850 Father Sheridan was succeeded by the Rev. John O'Boyle. Before he left, Father Sheridan purchased additional land on the northwest corner of Market and High Streets.

DISSATISFIED WITH the hurriedly constructed brick church, Father O'Boyle began construction of the present edifice in 1854. During its erection, Father O'Boyle, while overseeing the work, fell from a high scaffold.



THE LATE RT. REV. MSGR. JOHN J. LEE
Monsignor Lee's 29-year pastorate (1916-1945) at St. Peter & Paul Church will be recalled during centenary ceremonies.



View of the recently remodeled interior of St. Peter & Paul Church, Elmira.

of the appointment of the Rev. Peter O'Donoghue of Addison, Father O'Donoghue's assistant, the Rev. Louis A. Smith, organized the Father Matthews Temperance Society.

In 1891 Father O'Donoghue was replaced by the Rev. Nicholas Gibbons. During his five-year stay Father Gibbons installed a new furnace, new lights, a new sacristy and new side-walks, and brought the church treasury from indebtedness of \$6,000 to a surplus of \$1,000. He was transferred to a pastorate in Niagara Falls.

APPOINTED PASTOR in February, 1896, was the Rev. John C. Long, a native of Owego and pastor of Holy Name Church in Buffalo. He labored for 20 years in his Elmira parish.

In 1907, by papal receipt of Pope Leo XIII, the counties of Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Tioga were transferred from the Diocese of Buffalo to the Diocese of Rochester under Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid. Father Long remained as pastor until his death, which came in 1916 just one week after the celebration of his 48th anniversary as a priest. Bishop Thomas F. Hickey celebrated the funeral Mass, attended by some 60 priests.

After a few months administration of the parish by the Rev. Edward Lyons, Father Lee, pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Church, Watkins, was appointed pastor.

A NATIVE OF Rexville, Steuben County, Father Lee had prepared for the priesthood in Baltimore at Niagara University and the Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels, Niagara. Ordained May 19, 1894, he served for two years at St. Stephen's Church, Buffalo, before being sent to St. Patrick's in Elmira as assistant. Three years later he was named pastor at Watkins.

Father Lee found his Elmira church in need of repair, owing to a fire which had occurred under Father Long. He undertook redecoration and improvement by installing a new heating system, a new lighting system, a new floor, new pews, and an additional vestry.

Over the 29 years of his busy pastorate, Father Lee's leadership in the community had not gone unnoticed. In December, 1922, he was raised to the rank of Monsignor by decree of Pope Pius XI, and was named dean of the Elmira Deanery—an office he held until his death.

The parish showed great progress during Monsignor Lee's pastorate, with a large increase in communicants and the formation of several church societies.

CELEBRATION OF Monsignor Lee's 50th anniversary of ordination in May 1944 was saddened by the beloved priest's illness. Bishop Kearney came from Rochester for the jubilee Mass, celebrated by the Rev. Jerome P. O'Mara, assistant pastor. A spiritual bouquet was presented the pastor by Elmira Council, Knights of Columbus.

In February 1945 Monsignor Lee was back in St. Joseph's Hospital with recurring illness. After intermittent illness during the spring, he again was hospitalized, and he died at the age of 81 on July 14, 1945. Bishop Kearney celebrated the funeral Mass.

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THE PRESENT pastor, the Rev. William J. Naughton, was appointed by Bishop Kearney on July 19, 1945. Son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Michael Naughton of Rochester, he attended Corpus Christi School there and prepared for the priesthood in St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries. He was ordained June 11, 1939, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester.

Following his ordination he was appointed assistant pastor of Holy Name Church, Rochester. In July 1932 he was named to the staff of St. Bernard's Seminary by the late Bishop John P. O'Hern. He served as professor and preparator of the Seminary until his appointment to Elmira. He continued as through his years at St. Bernard's in assistant at Holy Name Church on weekends, and is widely known in Rochester.

Father Naughton's pastorate has witnessed much activity at St. Peter & Paul Church. Special devotions, food and clothing drives for Europe, food showers for the convent, Masses for the boys of the parish who died in World War II—these and many other activities have marked the spiritual and material life of the parish.

In 1946 Father Naughton inaugurated a series of novenas in honor of Mother Cabrini which have continued each year. He opened a new kindergarten. Under his leadership the parishioners consistently overachieved their quotas on diocesan financial needs.

Then came the deluge!—on May 23, 1946, the Chemung River burst over its banks and dikes and poured its muddy waters over great areas of the city. Its flood crest poured over the pews of St. Peter & Paul Church, and inundated the school, rectory and convent, as well as nearby St. Joseph's Hospital.

There followed a saga of charity and courage which has typified Elmira Catholicism. Priests, nuns and parishioners rolled up their sleeves, scrubbed, cleaned and scrubbed again. Collections were started throughout the city. Everyone joined in with great good will in rehabilitating the old church and hospital.

WORK WAS BEGUN on new church windows. Those in the transept were repaired, and the windows representing St. Patrick and St. Brigid, which had been in the sacristy, were moved into the sanctuary. The school also was reconstructed. Father Naughton announced that five of the new windows had been donated, and the parishioners presented a new monstrance.

During 1947 parish activities increased. The Holy Name Society added membership, the women organized the Immaculate Heart Society and the Young People's Society flourished. In his financial report of January, 1948, Father Naughton disclosed that \$34,000 had been spent on improvements in the two previ-

Jubilee Parish Identified With Catholic Education

Catholic education in Elmira is closely associated with the pastors and parishioners of the jubilee parish, St. Peter and Paul Church.

During the pastorate of Father O'Boyle (1850-1857), Bishop Timon of Buffalo sent a group of Sisters of Charity from Leominster in the parish to teach. They established a small select school in a frame building on the corner of High and Market Streets.

BECAUSE THEY were moved elsewhere, the Sisters were recalled a short time later. The school, however, was continued by lay teachers, among whom the names of J. J. O'Connor and Miss Cummings are remembered.

In 1868 Bishop Timon sent some Sisters of Mary to the school. Sister Clara was the first principal. Names remembered include Mother Teresa and Sisters Regina, Constance, Antonia, Camilla and Bertha.

From 1871 to 1877, St. Peter and Paul School was the only Catholic school in Elmira. It was called "an auxiliary public school" and the Board of Education paid maintenance and the salaries of all the Sisters. This practice of interest in promoting Catholicism continued in 1877 because Catholicism outside Elmira entered the

school and the only Catholic school because the law then decreed that no children of the community.

The Sisters of Mary also erected a brick school building where St. Joseph's Hospital now stands, and started Our Lady of Angels Academy—an adult learning and day school for girls.

WHEN ELMIRA became part of Rochester Diocese and other parochial schools were built, the number of pupils at the Academy decreased. So in 1902, in the regret of many a former pupil in Elmira, the Sisters were withdrawn by their superiors in Lockport, who needed them for new missions.

In 1905, shortly after Elmira became part of the Rochester Diocese, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception were called. At the time of their establishment the school was considered one of the finest in the city of Elmira.

The school was started in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph. They have remained in the parish ever since, and as the school has grown the number of Sisters has increased. There

18 Women of Parish Entered Sisterhood

A list of 18 women who entered the Sisterhood of the Immaculate Conception, Rochester Diocese, during the pastorate of Father O'Boyle, is given below.

Names of Sisters: Sister Mary, Sister Joseph, Sister Anne, Sister Mary, Sister Joseph, Sister Anne, Sister Mary, Sister Joseph, Sister Anne, Sister Mary, Sister Joseph, Sister Anne, Sister Mary, Sister Joseph, Sister Anne, Sister Mary, Sister Joseph, Sister Anne.

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32 Assistants Served Parish

Thirty-two priests are listed among assistants of St. Peter and Paul Church, Elmira, during the 100 years of its existence as a parish. They include:

The Reverend Fathers: Thomas Cunningham (1869), Forcell (1869), McDonald (1869), Hopkins (1869), James Brady (1869), Michael Cunningham (1876), John J. Gleason (1883), James C. Cain, Louis A. Smith (1886), Fyne (1891).

From 1896 to 1916: The Reverend Fathers: John E. Casey, John A. Moley, F. J. Sullivan, Arthur Smith, Joseph Diacet.

The Reverend Fathers: Edward Lyons (1916-22), Louis Morgan (1924-25), Herbert Newman (1925-27), Maywood Lyne (1927-28), Francis Heilly (1928-29), Thomas J. McCarthy (1929-30), John G. Maxwell (1930-31), Francis E. Turner (1931-32), Philip E. McGinnis (1932-33), William E. Carver (1933-34), Louis Whalen (1934-35), Edward Xavier (1935-36), Thomas Fleming (1936-37), Jerome P. O'Mara (1937-38), James Collins (1938-39), Joseph G. Martin (1939-40), Thomas J. Farnan (1940-41).