

# 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 22 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" was the Rt. Rev. Mayr, John J. Lee, V.F., who guided its destiny for 27 years from 1916 to 1946, 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 H. 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 200 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 1782, 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.

Historical records recount of the town of Elmira, the journey by boatmen of a German boat, the Rev. James Peltier, who came in 1807 to minister to the spiritual needs of Catholic settlers by St. Joseph. Later visitors are mentioned in various local publications. Father, D.M. Ryan.

Historical records also tell of the construction of St. Peter & Paul in 1854 by the Rev. James O'Boyle.

**ESTABLISHED IN** the Elmira area were considered "missions" of the Diocese of Buffalo, in the New York Diocese, in the years 1847-1854. In 1854, the Diocese of Buffalo was established. In 1854, Father John J. Lee and Michael Ryan came 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 Cunningham, John Kavanaugh, Michael Conley, and Thomas McInerney, completed the first St. Peter & Paul Church building.

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

**DEDICATED WITH** the recently 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 and sustained injuries from which he died in 1856.

Appointed in 1857 to succeed Father O'Boyle as pastor was Gen. G. No completed construction of the church, which was dedicated July 19, 1857, by Bishop Timon. No relics being available, the Bishop removed some relics and placed them in the altar stone. The stone from the old altar is today in the altar of the Sisters' chapel.

Father O'Flaherty was transferred to Rochester in 1863, and was succeeded by the Rev. Martin Kavanaugh of Seneca Falls. It was during his pastorate that the St. Peter & Paul Benevolent Association, which still exists, was organized by John Byrne, John Matthews, Christopher Gill and James Noonan.

**DURING THE CIVIL WAR** period Father Kavanaugh ministered to the religious needs of men in a rebel camp in Elmira. In 1861 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, 1866, 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 1867, by papal request 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. McQuinn. Father Long remained as pastor until his death, which came in 1916 just one week after the celebration of his 40th anniversary as a priest. Bishop Thomas F. Hecker 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** Roxville, 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, 1923, 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 1948 Monsignor Lee was back in St. Joseph's Hospital with recurring illness. After intermittent illness dur-



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

ing the Spring, he was hospitalized, and he died at the age of 81 on July 24, 1948. Bishop Kearney celebrated the funeral Mass.

**THE PRESENT** pastor, the Rev. William Naughton, was appointed by Bishop Kearney on July 19, 1948. 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 19, 1937, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester.

Following his ordination he was appointed assistant pastor of Holy Rosary Church, Rochester. In July 1932 he was named to the staff of St. Bernard's Seminary by the late Bishop John F. O'Hern. He served as professor and procurator of the Seminary until his appointment to Elmira. He continued all through his years at St. Bernard's to assist at Holy Rosary 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 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 oversubscribed their quotas on diocesan financial needs.

**Then came the deluge!**—on May 28, 1946. The Chemung River burst over its banks and dikes and surged its muddy waters over great areas of the city. Its flood crest pounded 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. Bridget, which had been in the sacristy, were moved into the sanctuary. The school also was reconditioned. 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 Sodality flourished. In his financial report of January, 1948, Father Naughton disclosed that \$34,000 had been spent on improvements in the two pre-

vious years, but that no money had been borrowed. Some \$10,000 was taken from the capital funds, \$5,400 came from gifts and legacies, and the remainder was from church revenue.

Even more pride was expressed by the pastor in the spiritual report, which included 29,000 Holy Communions, 132 baptisms, 48 converts and 217 children in the school.

In 1948 the altar steps and Communion rail were reset, work on the towers was resumed, a new church roof completed. A new cross at the apex of the main door was erected.

**THIS YEAR** much additional improvement has progressed. The walls of the church, time worn and flood-damaged, were weak. Complete redecoration of the church interior was undertaken and finished in June.

Father Naughton's hope to establish a physical education and recreation program for the children and young people of the parish also bore fruit in the appointment of Walter Bosley, who grew up in the parish as physical director. He is carrying out an extensive program for various age groups.

At present the old school behind the church is being torn down to be replaced by a new convent for the school sisters. Future plans call for erection of a new rectory.

Thus is Father Naughton carrying out the century-old tradition of paternal and spiritual progress in Elmira's "Mother Church." Truly much has happened since a Jesuit priest rode his horse into the valley in 1787. St. Peter & Paul Church and parishioners enter their second century with the best wishes not only of their Elmira neighbors but of the entire Rochester Diocese.

## 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'Flaherty (1857-1861), Bishop Timon of Buffalo sent a group of Sisters of Charity from Emmittsburg to 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 needed 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 1866 Bishop Timon sent the Sisters of Mary to the school. Sister Claver was the first principal. Names remembered include Mother Teresa and Sisters Regina Gonzaga, Antonia, Camilla and Bertha.

From 1867 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 to present-day America was discontinued in 1877 because Catholics from outside Elmira entered the

school and the city withdrew support because the new students were not taxpayers 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 a select boarding 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 1906, to 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 1898, shortly after Elmira became part of the Rochester Diocese, the cornerstone of the present school building was laid. At the time of its completion the school was considered one of the finest in the city of Elmira.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The following year the registration jumped to 70. As the third year approached, the question of added facilities for the increasing number of students arose, and it was decided to move the high school department to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

## 15 Women of Parish Entered Sisterhoods

At least 15 young women parishioners of St. Peter & Paul Church, Elmira, have entered religious life, according to parish records. They include:

**Sisters of Mercy**—Sisters Berchman McGreevy, Emma Sullivan, Magdalen Sullivan, Bernadette Tierney, Ludovica O'Neil, Johanna Welsh, Camilla McCarthy, Celestine McInerney.

**Sisters of St. Joseph**—Sisters Julia Clare Richards, Rose Alice Kennedy, Rose Gertrude Houlihan, Rose Ellen Leary, Immaculata Connelly, Teresina Curran.

**Mariat Order**—Sister Mary Sienna Kennedy.

now are 225 pupils and seven nuns.

In 1938 Bishop O'Hern asked Monsignor Lee to start a Catholic high school. It was opened in September, 1939, with a registration of some 20 pupils, all first-year high students.

The following year the registration jumped to 70. As the third year approached, the question of added facilities for the increasing number of students arose, and it was decided to move the high school department to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

The school was staffed in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, parish to St. Patrick's. The third floor of the St. Patrick school was remodeled and turned into the present Elmira Catholic High School.

## FRED M. BOTTCHER & SON

CONTRACTORS

Painting and Decorating

CHURCHES — INSTITUTIONS

INDUSTRIAL — RESIDENTIAL

ALL STEEL SCAFFOLD FOR ANY SIZE JOB

ELMIRA, N. Y.

OFFICE  
Dial 9968

RESIDENCE  
Dial 29295

## 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 (1850), Purcell (1861), McDonnell (1866), Hopkins (1867), Isaac Brady (1869), Michael Cunningham (1876), John J. Gleason (1883), James C. Cain, Louis A. Smith (1889), Pyne (1891).

From 1896 to 1916: The Reverend Fathers John E. Casey, John A. Masley, P. J. Sullivan, Arthur Smith, Joseph Dissett.

The Reverend Fathers Edward Lyons (1916-23), Lester Morgan (1924-25), Herbert Sturmer (1925-27), Raymond Lynd (1927-30), Francis Kelly (1930-32), Daniel McCarthy (1932-36), John G. Maxwell (1936-37), Francis H. Turner (1937-41), Philip E. McGhan (1938-41), William E. Carver (1938-41), Leslie Whalen (1941-43), Edward Tolster (1941-43), Walter Fleming (1943-45), Jerome P. O'Mara (1945-48), James Callan (1945-48), Joseph G. Merkel (1948-), Thomas J. Florack (1948-).