

75-Year History of Holy Ghost Church Shows Steadfast Loyalty of Pioneers

By ARTHUR P. HARRIS

Post-Civil War days, when scattered Catholic families a few miles west of Rochester walked eight to ten miles to Sunday Mass, will be recalled Sunday, Sept. 24, when parishioners of Holy Ghost Church, Coldwater, mark the 75th anniversary of this little "country parish" in the shadow of the big city.

Several pioneers still remember the days of 1865 in the Buffalo Road community when some 30 German-speaking families, who attended St. Joseph's Church, Rochester, engaged a layman part time to teach religion to their children in a small frame building donated by Leonard and Euphemis Vogel on Coldwater Road.

In the memory of many, too, is the red-letter day in 1870 when almost all the men of the parish mounted horses to meet the first Bishop of Rochester, the Most Rev. Bernard J. McQuaid, and escort him to the parish plot for the laying of the cornerstone of the new brick church building.

It is the latter date that will be commemorated Sunday, when His Excellency Bishop Kearney will preside at a Solemn High Mass Coram Episcopo at 11 a.m., to be celebrated by the Rev. Albert J. Geiger, pastor.

THE MASS, however, will not be celebrated in the mission church dedicated 75 years ago. Converted into a parish school in 1906, it was leveled by fire Oct. 26, 1936.

The present magnificent edifice, seating 400, one of the most modern fully-appointed churches in the diocese, was blessed in 1907 by Bishop McQuaid. Rising upward in an area where industry has yet to be multiplied

bold and George Klem.

It was while Father Boppel (who later became the Rt. Rev. J. J. Boppel, chancellor of the diocese) was pastor of St. John's that the present Holy Ghost edifice was dedicated in May, 1908.

THREE YEARS later, on June 14, 1909, the Rev. Peter A. Erras, then pastor of St. Plus Church, Cohocton, was appointed pastor of Holy Ghost Church. Under his 24-year tenure the parish expanded in many ways.

Among early organizers of the parish were Mrs. Emma Wegman Scheg and Mrs. Eleanor Scheg Knoepfer. About 1908 the latter was succeeded by the now Mrs. Alma Stett Redick who, at the age of 14, began a span of 42 years' service in the choir loft, where she still may be found. Also at the organ for a short time during this period was Rose Heeg.

Included among early choir leaders was Nora Scheg, William Gagliardi, who directs the choir. Longtime vocal residents also include Mrs. Clara Bonesteele, rectory housekeeper for the last four years.

WALTER ERBAS died Nov. 27, 1936. Presiding at the funeral rites was the Most Rev. Archbishop Edward Mooney, then Bishop of Rochester.

The pastorate of Father Erras had seen some improvements in the church, school, rectory and cemetery. Although the number of families at no time was more than 50, they had succeeded in eliminating the more than \$10,000 indebtedness.

To meet expenses the parishioners had inaugurated a series of socials which later evolved into the now widely-known and well-attended annual Summer Festival—still drawing throngs each year to justly-famed chicken dinners.

For several months following Father Erras' death the parish was serviced by the Rev. Elmer Heindl, under the administrative leadership of the Rev. Edward M. Lyons of the St. Andrew's Seminary faculty.

THE REV. Joseph C. Wurzer, vicar-general of Aquinas Institute, was appointed pastor of Holy Ghost Church on June 23, 1937, by Bishop Kearney.

Born Nov. 1, 1890, in Rochester, he attended Holy Family School, St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries. Ordained May 23, 1920, his first assignment was as instructor in Rochester Catholic High School, forerunner of Aquinas Institute.

Immediately addressing himself to his pastoral task, Father Wurzer began work on a new parish hall. Constructed by Joseph Entress, builder, with the voluntary aid of parishioners, it is a shingled frame structure including a large meeting room, a collapsible stage and kitchen facilities.

Ravages of fire brought the parish its greatest loss on Oct. 26, 1936, when the school—the former first church—was leveled. All children left the building safely.

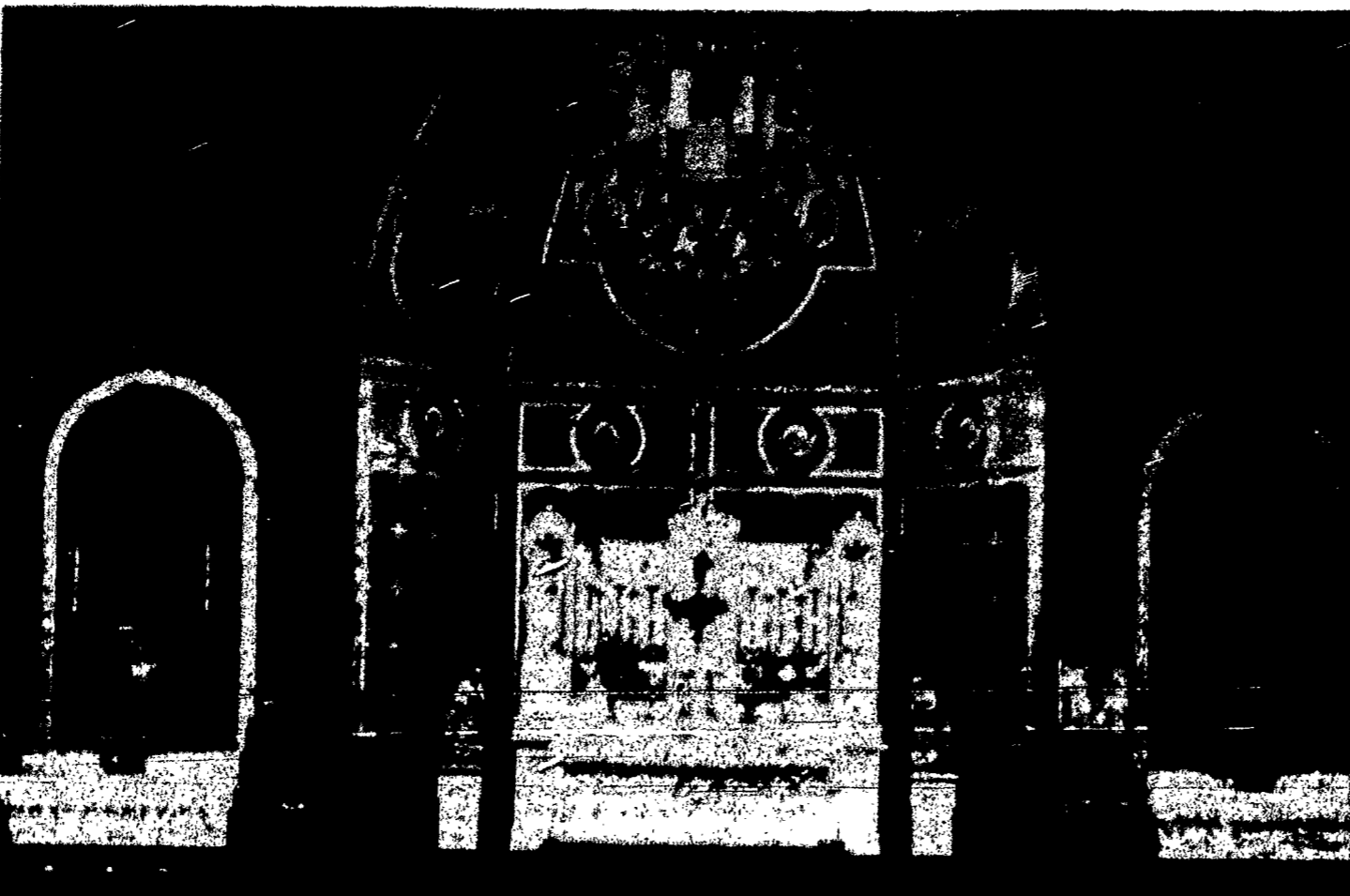
Ground was broken at once for the present school. Laying of the cornerstone took place Jan. 1, 1939, and the building was consecrated by Bishop Kearney on Apr. 21 of that year. It is a modern one-story structure with four classrooms.

Father Wurzer died unexpectedly July 28, 1943, in the rectory. Subdeacon of the Solemn Mass of Requiem, held July 31 in the church, was a brother, the Rev. Michael Wurzer, who now is a member of the Aquinas Institute faculty.

FATHER GEIGER was appointed by Bishop Kearney to succeed him on Aug. 16, 1943. He has renovated and decorated the church, landscaped the entire property, purchased three additional small parcels of land for parking and expansion, and equipped playground facilities.

A total of 180 families now make up the parish. Last year's statistics show 27 baptisms and six marriages. Current trustees are John Knoepfer and Rupert Vogel, Charles Datz and Leo Entress are auditors.

Among 1949 parish statistics is a record which Father Geiger wishes would be repeated. There were no burials in the little parish cemetery—all that year.



Beautiful interior of Holy Ghost Church in Coldwater, recently redecorated by the internationally-known artist, Professor Gonippo Raggi of New Jersey, who has been invited to the parish's 75th anniversary celebration. Completely appointed, the church seats 600 persons.

Early Teacher at Holy Ghost Rode Horseback to Classes

Catholic education in Holy Ghost parish, Gates, has come a long way from the days when one of the early teachers rode on horseback or bicycle to get to her classes in the little frame building on Coldwater Road.

Hundreds of graduates of Holy Ghost School through past decades have been grateful for the foresight of parish pioneers in recognizing the value of Catholic education.

Eighty-five years ago ten years before the parish had even a church building a small group of Catholics in the community gathered in great part through voluntary labor, and on donated land, the first schoolhouse for the religious education of their children.

Through the years, the parents and parishioners continued loyal support of their school. It was not easy. In the early times the children of all grades were assembled in a single room, with a single teacher for the entire school.

FIRST TEACHER credited in parish historical records is the late Engelbert Entress, who lived with his family in the parish house and acted as church sexton. He taught from 1890 to 1918.

In 1899 he was joined by Miss Julia Fous, a young girl from the neighboring parish of St. John the Evangelist in Greece. The Rev. Jacob F. Staub, then pastor of St. John's and Holy Ghost, asked her to assist Entress in conducting the school. It was she who oftentimes rode horseback to get to the schoolhouse.

Today Miss Fous—now Sister Mary Walburga of the Sisters of Mercy—still is connected with the Catholic education of children as superior of St. Charles Borromeo Convent in Greece.

Three Give Lives In World Wars

Three youthful parishioners of Holy Ghost Church gave their lives for their country in the last two World Wars.

Killed in World War I was Bernard Witzel. World War II took the lives of Paul Scheg and Robert Wegman.

Blessing of Graves At Parish Oct. 1

Annual blessing of the graves in Holy Ghost Church Cemetery on Coldwater Road will take place Sunday Oct. 1 according to the Rev. Albert J. Geiger.

Many pioneers of the community are commemorated in the varied dates of headstones in the little parish cemetery directly opposite the church building.



Wholesome recreation features the program at Holy Ghost School, where a completely-equipped playground and ball field recently were added.

Gates Church Decorated By Art Expert

Evidence of the finest in ecclesiastical art abound in the parish of Holy Ghost in Coldwater. That is because the work was done by an expert.

It is Professor Gonippo Raggi, of Orange, N. J., considered one of the foremost ecclesiastical artists of the Catholic Church in this country. He is a cousin of the late Cardinal Lauri, who died in Vatican City in 1941, and a personal friend of Pope Pius XII.

WHEN THE Rev. Albert J. Geiger, pastor, undertook renovation and redecoration of the church interior recently, he called on his friend, Prof. Raggi, to do the work. Paintings by the professor also embellish the reception room in Father Geiger's rectory.

Years ago Prof. Raggi did the murals in St. Peter and Paul Church, Rochester. He has been invited to redecorate this church again.

A professor of fine arts, Raggi taught for many years at St. Luke's Royal Arts Academy in Rome and has visited Vatican City almost every year. He has had numerous exhibits of his classical paintings. Named a royal chamberlain of Pope Pius XI and XII he is a knight of St. Gregory and a Knight of Sylvester.

The officers of the Mass were: Celebrant, the Rev. Father Rosenbauer, who founded the parish; deacon, Rev. M. J. Hargather, of St. Michael's Church, Rochester, a former pastor; subdeacon, Rev. John F. Boppel, the present pastor of the church.

The first master of ceremonies was Rev. John J. Goggin of St. Bernard's Seminary, and the second master of ceremonies, Frederick C. Straub, of St. Andrew's Seminary. Rev. Frank G. Kunz, of Holy Redeemer Church, Rochester, was in the sanctuary.

ASSISTING Bishop McQuaid as deacons of honor were Revs. Francis X. Sinclair, D.D., of St. Peter & Paul's Church, and Frederick R. Rauber, of St. Boniface Church, Rochester. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Bishop McQuaid in English and by Father Hargather in German.

The new church is a handsome edifice built of Medina block stone, of the Gothic style of architecture. The interior finish is very beautiful, the walls being frescoed in delicate tints, and the woodwork is of oak finish. The high altar is beautiful and artistic, painted white, with trimmings of gold.

During the Mass the priest occupied a temporary booth erected for the occasion.

School Sisters of Notre Dame were brought by the pastor, the Rev. Peter Erras, to conduct the school. Twenty years later the schoolhouse burned down. The present modern four-classroom building serving children was erected immediately and consecrated by Bishop Kearney in 1939.

School principals since 1919 included Sisters: Bartolomeo, Aloysia, Martini, and Sylvester. Sister Justin is present principal. Serving with her in Holy Ghost Convent are Sisters: Meria, Charlotte, Magdalena and Kazimiera.

Six Parishioners At Seminaries Holy Ghost parish has six young men studying for the priesthood. To be ordained a Franciscan priest next June is a young parishioner, Roger Trabold. At St. Andrew's Seminary are Richard Bubel, Eugene McKay, Neil Goodman, Raymond Datz and William Entress.

Father Geiger Well Known For Work With Teenagers

There is no "juvenile delinquency" problem in Holy Ghost parish in Coldwater—a situation which, however fortunate, leaves a certain void in the life of the pastor, the Rev. Albert J. Geiger.

For many years Father Geiger has had a widely-recognized talent in dealing with teenagers—in organizing activities for them to keep them "off the streets."

Testimony of Father Geiger's leadership of youth may be gained from hundreds of today's citizens from all walks of life who at one time or another were affiliated with the famed "Aljo Club" formed in 1922 in Holy Redeemer parish, Rochester.

During the 16 years of Father Geiger's association with that parish thousands of young people of the city, of all creeds, were entertained at public parties.

THE ALJO CLUB pioneered the dry night club idea for youth, which since has become widespread. The club transformed a dumping ground into Aljo Premier Park, used for years by young people in the city's North-east section. In 1932 the Aljo basketball team won the city championship. The club also conducted for many years a summer camp for boys at Conesus Lake.

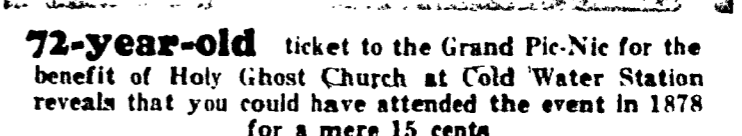
Born in Danville in 1896, Father Geiger attended St. Mary's School there, Cathedral High School in Rochester and St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries. He was ordained June 10, 1922, and assigned to Holy Redeemer Church.

In 1938 he was appointed administrator of St. John the Evangelist's Church, Greece, during a two-year illness of the Rev. John J. Baier, pastor. For the next three years he served as pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Church, King Ferry, and All Saints Church, Ludlowville, being appointed to Holy Ghost Church Aug. 16, 1943.

AN OLDER brother, the Rev. Otto E. Geiger, ordained in Rochester in 1913, died in 1918 during the influenza epidemic. Father Geiger has two brothers in California and two sisters in Rochester. The Rev. Clatus Snyder of Buffalo Diocese is his nephew.

Among frequent visitors to the rectory of Holy Ghost parish today one will find scores of former youthful associates of Father Geiger, members of the Aljo Club, and members of the alumni of the old Cathedral High School and Rochester Catholic High School (forerunners of Aquinas Institute) who many years ago elected Father Geiger their permanent president.

72-year-old ticket to the Grand Pic-Nic for the benefit of Holy Ghost Church at Cold Water Station reveals that you could have attended the event in 1878 for a mere 15 cents



Parish Served By 13 Priests

Of the thirteen priests who have served Holy Ghost Church in its 75 years' history, the Rev. Peter A. Erras pastor from 1908

ing as assistant pastor of Holy Family Church for six years, he was appointed pastor of St. Plus Church, Cohocton. He came from there in 1908 to the pastorate of Holy Ghost Church.

Since most Catholics of the community back in the 1860's attended St. Joseph's Church in Rochester, it was a Redemptorist from that church, Father Rosenbauer, CSS R., who first directly serviced them in the Gates area, going there at intervals to prepare the children for First Holy Communion.

IN 1876, on erection of the first church, the Rev. F. Kraus was appointed first resident pastor. Following his death a year later, the parish was served for 31 years by pastors of St. John the Evangelist's Church, Greece. They included: The Reverend Fathers: Frederick R. Rauber (1876-79), Henry Egler (1879-80), Mathias Hargather (1880-88), M. D. Musmacher (1888-90), Hubert J. Straten (1890-94), Jacob F. Staub (1894-1901) and John F. Boppel (1901-08).

Resident pastors from that time were the Reverend Fathers Peter A. Erras (1908-1936), and Joseph C. Wurzer (1937-43) and Albert J. Geiger (1943).

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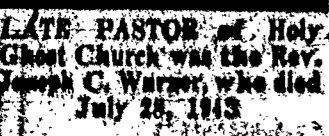
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LATE PASTOR of Holy Ghost Church was the Rev. Joseph C. Wurzer, who died July 28, 1943.

It is a place rural scene you see upon as you turn off Brookwater Road, six miles from Rochester, toward the north. The parish property in the townships of Gates. You are reminded of Gray's elegy as you note the towers and spires of the little church across the road from the church.

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