

100 Years' Service To God Marked By St. Mary's Church In Watkins Glen

By ARTHUR F. FARREN

"The Bells of St. Mary's" will peel joyous tones next Sunday, May 20, to mark the century-old record of Catholicism in Schuyler County, in the Southern Tier of the Rochester Diocese.

They are the bells of St. Mary of the Lake Church in famed Watkins Glen, at the tip of Seneca Lake, which will herald the celebration of the parish's centenary.

Back in the 1840's there were fewer than a dozen Catholic families receiving the ministrations of a priest who traveled many miles to visit them once or twice yearly. Often these families would journey from 50 to 300 miles to hear Mass or receive the Sacraments of Baptism or Matrimony in a Catholic church.

Today the community has its own parish church, with pastor and an assistant and hundreds of parishioners—and in addition the presence of more than a score of priests in two Orders—the Atonement Fathers and the Franciscans.

BEGUN WHEN the entire state was but one diocese with the See City in New York, the parish traces its history through the subsequent establishment of the Buffalo and Rochester Dioceses.

Schuyler County had been a hunting ground for Indians of the Six Nations until, because of their aid to the English against the American colonies, they were chased toward Niagara Falls by the General John Sullivan expedition in 1779. During the next six decades the beautiful glen country was peopled with white settlers, mostly Irish immigrants, and later persons of German and Polish nationality.

Among the best known Catholic families of the early 1840s were those of General Kernan of Tyrone and the Klems of Rochester. Visiting priests offered Mass in the Kernan home.

It was a Protestant who contributed mainly to the first important date in St. Mary of the Lake parish history. He was George Edward Quin, who married one of General Kernan's daughters.

In December 1845 Quin obtained permission from Bishop McCloskey, Coadjutor of New York, to undertake purchase of the Presbyterian Church in the community, a frame building which had been erected in 1830 at the corner of First and Jackson Streets. The building was later torn down, and there is at present no structure on the spot. Quin became a Catholic before his death.

IT WAS the Rev. John Sheridan of Owego who organized the tiny mission in 1846 in the former Protestant church building. It remained a mission through the establishment of the Buffalo Diocese in 1847 and until Dec. 13, 1860, when the present church building, at 906 Decatur Street, was dedicated by Bishop Stephen V. Ryan of the Buffalo Diocese, successor to Bishop John Timon, who had visited the Watkins area previously.

Although the Rochester Diocese had been formed in 1860, the counties of Schuyler, Tioga, Chemung and Steuben were not included in this diocese until 1866.

St. Mary's first cemetery was an acre of land donated by Dr. Samuel Watkins, founder of the village, in 1849. Its weatherworn and leaning tombstones still bear poignant witness to the sorrows and tears which nurtured the parish.

Watkins first had called the village Salubria. In 1842 it was named Jefferson. Following Watkins' death in 1852 it was called Watkins to commemorate him, and received its charter in 1861.

Prominent among names associated with the church in these years were those of George G. Freer, who built the Lake View (Glen Springs) Hotel, and the Magee brothers, Duncan and George. In 1845 Bishop Timon visited Freer and aided him in the purchase, for \$350, of seven small lots at the present church site.

The new church building seated 400 persons, and cost \$22,000. It was a notable achievement for the parish, then grown to some 700 souls, who had braved the trials of the "Know-Nothing Movement" and the Civil War Days. The Rev. Denis English of Penn Yan offered the dedication Mass.

FIRST RESIDENT pastor of St. Mary's was appointed by Bishop Ryan in 1869. He was the Rev. James McManus, who built

the present rectory and the church spire.

Father McManus first recorded baptism was that of Ellen, daughter of John Brown and Catherine Sullivan, on Feb. 21, 1869.

In 1872 Father McManus was appointed to the pastorate of St. Mary's Church, Elmira, and was succeeded by the Rev. Henry Ledy. Some assistance was given Father Ledy during his pastorate by a Father Herrick of Elmira. Father Ledy organized the Temperance Cadets and the Young Men's Temperance Society.

It was while Father Ledy was pastor that the parish purchased the present cemetery site on the highest point along the rim of the glen.

FATHER MARTIN EVAN was appointed pastor of St. Mary's in 1879. On Nov. 17, 1891, he died incorporation of the parish with Trustees Peter Conboy and Charles McDonald.

During the same year Father Ryan installed the tower bells. Prominent in the securing of funds for the installation were Patrick B. Sullivan, Hannah Kelly (later Mrs. F. B. Sullivan), Thomas O'Rourke and Patrick Lynch.

Transferred to Owego in 1893, Father Ryan was succeeded by Father Morrison of Akron, N. Y., who guided the parish for six years until transferred to Hornell by Bishop Bernard J. McQuinn.

THE REV. JOHN J. LEE was appointed pastor of St. Mary's in 1899, and served for 17 years. During these years there was a tidal wave of immigration, and many Italians came to the Watkins area to work at the salt mines. Father Lee was highly respected by the immigrants for his kind treatment of them.

In 1901 Father Lee redecorated the church building, and replaced gas with electricity. Through subsequent years he was a stalwart citizen of the community. He was transferred to the pastorate of St. Peter & Paul Church, Elmira, in 1916, where he later became a Monsignor and Dean. He died in 1946.

LONGEST OF all pastorate in Watkins Glen was the 28-year span of Father Lee's successor—the Rev. Thomas F. Carroll. Born in Ireland in 1876, he was educated there, and in Ovid and Geneva before entering St. Andrew's Seminary in Rochester. Completing his studies at St. Bernard's Seminary, he was ordained June 6, 1903. Before going to Watkins, he had served as assistant in churches in Elmira, Auburn, Waverly, Bath and Hornell, and as pastor of St. Theresa's in Stanley.

In 1922 Father Carroll supervised alterations and additions to the church building at an expenditure of \$23,000. On Aug. 31, 1931, the parish cemetery was consecrated by Archbishop Thomas J. Walsh of Newark, N. J., who attributed his vocation to the interest of Father Ledy, St. Mary's second resident pastor.

Interred in the cemetery in 1930 was Monsignor Thomas Barrett, who, so far as is known, was the first native son to be ordained.

THE YEAR 1936 marked two

highlights at St. Mary's—the coming of the Religious Teachers Filippini, and the dedication of the new church organ.

Presenting a recital at the organ ceremony Jan. 30 was Prof. Philip G. Kreckel, widely known musician, composer and choir director of Rochester.

Father Carroll, who had served St. Mary's under four Bishops, died at the age of 68 in Florida, where he had gone for his failing health. For a month following, the parish was administered by the Rev. Benno Brink, a Benedictine from St. Vincent's Abbey, Latrobe, Pa.

THE REV. WALTER J. KOHL was appointed pastor of St. Mary's by His Excellency Bishop Kearney on Mar. 3, 1945.

Born in Rochester May 19, 1897, he attended Blessed Sacrament School, Nazareth Hall, St. Andrew's Seminary and St. Bernard's Seminary, and was ordained June 10, 1922. His postgraduate studies at Loyola University and St. Bonaventure College earned for him the degrees of master of arts and doctor of philosophy.

Appointed to teach at Aquinas Institute in 1922, he joined the faculty of St. Andrew's Seminary in 1930, where he served for 15 years as instructor in chemistry and biology.

During his two years as pastor at St. Mary's, Father Kohl reorganized the Holy Name Society and the Rosary and Altar Society. He introduced the first Field Mass in the parish cemetery—now an annual ceremony.

True to his teaching training, Father Kohl also systematized the religious instruction in the parish. He organized instruction of Catholic students in the public high school under the "released time" practice in the state, and also established a Summer month's "vacation school."

BECAUSE THE parish properties were badly in need of repair, Father Kohl decided, in 1946, to postpone celebration of the parish centenary until the work could be accomplished. His plans for improvements, however, were left to his successor with his appointment, on Sept. 25, 1947, to the pastorate of St. Boniface Church, Rochester.

It was during Father Kohl's pastorate that St. Mary's obtained its first regular assistant pastor. He was the newly-ordained Rev. Daniel Hogan, appointed in October, 1946. Father Hogan began an extensive survey for the parish census.

NAMED BY Bishop Kearney as successor to Father Kohl was the Rev. Benedict A. Ehmman, present pastor. On July 5, 1949, Father Hogan was transferred to St. Vincent's Church, Corning, and was succeeded by another newly-ordained priest, the Rev. James Doyle, present assistant. Into Father Ehmman's hands fell the task of remodeling and redecorating the church and preparing for the centenary observance. Much of the research for the parish history was undertaken by Father Doyle.

The contract for reconstruction of the church was signed with Floyd Marshall, Watkins Glen, on July 6, 1949, for \$23,000. Several other thousands of dollars of decorations were contributed by parishioners and interested persons.

Included in the restoration were: a new front vestibule and baptistry; new side exits and vestibules, one of which is extended into rest rooms and a servers' sacristy and supply room; new tile flooring over a plywood base on top of the original floor; carpeting for the aisles; rearrangement of floor levels; new pews; repainting the interior and refinishing the woodwork; a new boiler and stoker; alterations of lighting, plumbing and raft conductors.

ARROW SHOWS ST. MARY OF THE LAKE CHURCH ON SENECA LAKE SHORE IN WATKINS GLEN



REDECORATED INTERIOR OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WATKINS GLEN

Filippini Sisters Came To Glen Parish 15 Years Ago

Many religious needs of St. Mary of the Lake parish in Watkins Glen and the surrounding area have been cared for during the last 15 years by Sisters of the Religious Teachers Filippini (Maestre Pie Filippini), only Sisters of their Order in the Rochester Diocese.

Because there is no parochial school in Watkins, the work of the Sisters has been very valuable among children of the countryside parish, according to Rev. Benedict A. Ehmman, pastor.

Under the direction of Mother Felicitas Gennaro, M.P.F., Catholic grammar school children receive daily instruction in the Faith. Mother Felicitas is aided by Sister Perina D. Clemente and Sister Grace Fernandez. They reside in a convent home on the parish property.

The Sisters were brought to Watkins in 1936 by the Rev. Thomas F. Carroll, then pastor, through the grace of Archbishop Thomas J. Walsh of Newark, N. J., a friend and frequent visitor of Father Carroll. They provide music for services, work in the sacristy, and the parish census and engage in many other parish activities.

Founded in Italy in 1892, the Order first was established in the United States in 1910 in Trenton, N. J. The American province is at Villa Walsh, Morristown, N. J.

Lucia Filippini, foundress, who staffed more than 40 schools in Italy, died in 1733 and was canonized in 1883.

Sisters of the Order are engaged in schools and in parish missionary activities in three U. S. Archdioceses—Newark, Baltimore and New York—and in 11 dioceses.

Father Ehmman Preaches Role Of Laity In Church

The participation of the laity in the church is a subject which Father Ehmman has been preaching for some time.

Coming to the parish in 1947, Father Ehmman has been preaching the role of the laity in the church. He has been preaching that the laity should be more active in the church and should take more responsibility for the church's future.

Recently, the pastor gave a sermon on the role of the laity in the church. He said that the laity should be more active in the church and should take more responsibility for the church's future.

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TWO OF THE THREE FILIPPINI NUNS SERVING WATKINS PARISH—MOTHER FELICITIA (LEFT) AND SISTER PIERINA

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