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

By ARTHUR P. FARREN

"The Bells of St. Mary's" will peal 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 [illegible] of General Kernan [illegible] and the Kleins of [illegible]. Visiting priests offered Mass in the Kernan home.

[illegible] was a Protestant who contributed [illegible] to the first [illegible] date in St. Mary of [illegible] parish history. He was [illegible] Edward Quin, who [illegible] son of General Kernan [illegible].

[illegible] December 1845 Quin obtained [illegible] from Bishop McCloskey, Coadjutor of New York, to [illegible] purchase of the Presbyterian Church in the community, [illegible] frame building which had [illegible] erected in 1830 at the corner [illegible] and Jackson Streets. The [illegible] 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 [illegible] 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, [illegible], when the present church [illegible] [illegible] Bishop John Timon, who had visited the Watkins area previously.

Although the Rochester Diocese had been formed in 1868, the counties of Schuyler, Tioga, Chemung and Steuben were not included in this diocese until 1896.

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 those years were those of George G. Freer, who built the Lake View (Glen Springs) Hotel, and the Magee brothers, Duncan and George. In 1865 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 1871 Father McManus was appointed to the pastorate of St. Mary's Church, Elmira, and was succeeded by the Rev. Henry Leddy. Some assistance was given Father Leddy during his pastorate by a Father Herrick of Elmira. Father Leddy organized the Temperance Cadets and the Young Men's Temperance Society.

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

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

During the same year Father Ryan installed the tower bells. Prominent in the securing of funds for the installation were [illegible] Sullivan, Hannah Kelly (later Mrs. P. 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. [illegible] Bernard J. [illegible] of the [illegible]

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, [illegible] many Italians came to the Watkins area to work in the [illegible] 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 SS. Peter & Paul Church, Elmira, in 1916, where he later became a Monsignor and Dean. He died in 1946.

LONGEST OF all pastorates 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 $28,000. 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 Leddy, 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. 26 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 69 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.

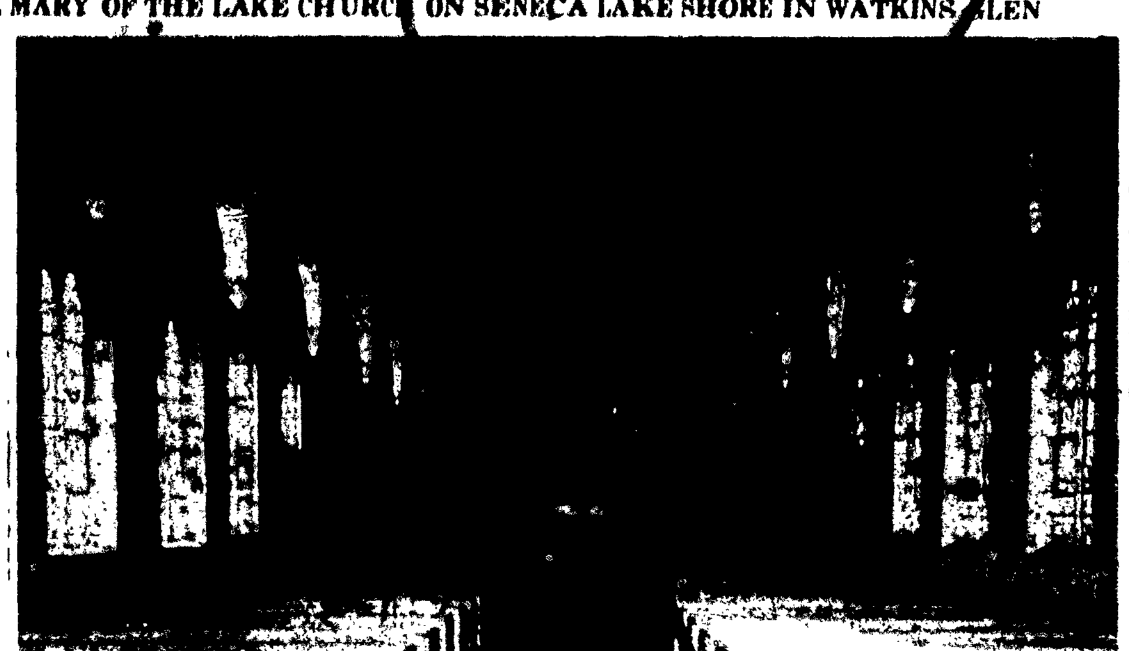
NAMED BY Bishop Kearney as successor to Father Kohl was the Rev. Benedict A. Ehmann, present pastor. On July 5, 1949, Father Hogan was transferred to St. Vincent's Church, Corning, and was succeeded by another newly-ordained priest, the Rev. James Doyle, present assistant.

Into Father Ehmann'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.

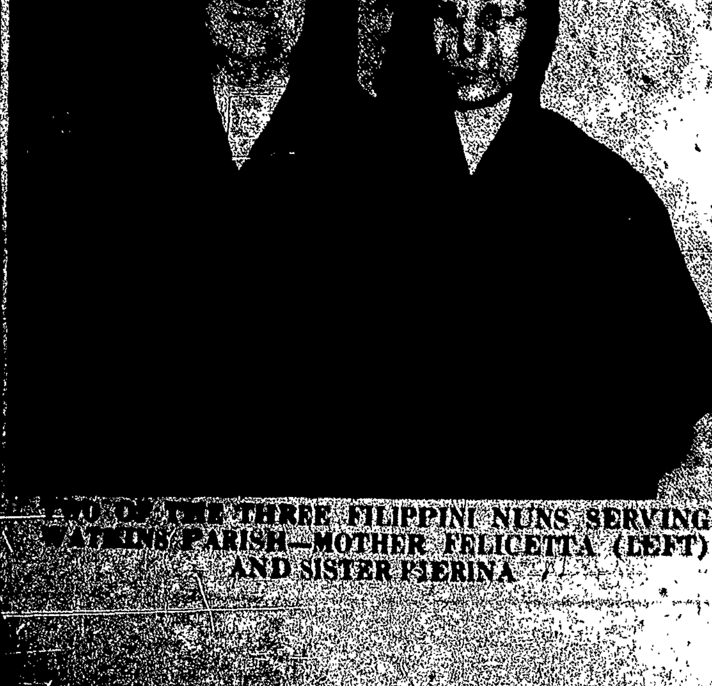
The contract for reconstruction of the church was signed with Floyd Marshall, Watkins Glen, on July 6, 1950, for $33,000. Several other thousands of dollars of decorations were contributed by parishioners and interested persons.

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 rain 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



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

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 countrywide parish, according to Rev. Benedict A. Ehmann, pastor.

Under the direction of Mother Felicetta Somma, M.P.F., Catholic grammar school children receive daily instruction in the Faith. Mother Felicetta is assisted by Sister Pierina Di-Clemente and Sister Grace Ferassano. They reside in a convent house on the parish property.

The Sisters were brought to Watkins in 1936 by the Rev. Thomas F. Carroll, then pastor, through the graces 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, aid the parish census and engage in many other parish activities.

Founded in Italy in 1692, 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 60 schools in Italy, died in 1732 and was canonized in 1933.

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

Glen Parish Plans Mission

Eventual establishment of a mission or catechetical center in Odessa, a community seven miles from Watkins Glen, is foreseen by the pastor of the Glen parish, the Rev. Benedict A. Ehmann.

Title to a parcel of land adjacent to the Central School in Odessa was obtained by St. Mary of the Lake parish in 1948, Father Ehmann pointed out.

It was in that year that formal and regular religious instruction of children was undertaken by priests of the parish, assisted by the Sisters of the Religious Teachers Filippini. More than 30 children are instructed each week.

Other classes in religious instruction outside Watkins Glen have been underway by the parish in Montour Falls and Burdett.

Father Ehmann Promotes Role Of Laity In Liturgy

Full participation of the laity in the Mass and the sacramental life of the Church is one of the principal goals of the Rev. Benedict A. Ehmann, present pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Church, Watkins Glen.

Coming to the parish in 1947, Father Ehmann first introduced the Leaflet Sunday Missal, which gained wide usage at the Masses.

Recently the pastor began participation of the congregation in the "Dialogue Mass," with the laity joining the Mass servers in vocal responses and prayers.

Among other innovations was Father Ehmann's establishment of a parish library in the rectory.

Father Ehmann's priestly life, like that of his predecessor as pastor, the Rev. Walter J. Kohl, has been devoted mainly to teaching.

BORN IN Rochester in 1905, he attended St. Boniface School, and prepared for the priesthood at St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries. He was ordained June 8, 1929, in the first class to be ordained by the late Bishop John F. O'Hern.

Father Ehmann's first appointment was as assistant at the old St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester, and at the same time professor of music at St. Andrew's Seminary. In 1931 he was assigned to fulltime teaching of church music, English and public speaking at the minor seminary.

Appointed professor of church music at St. Bernard's Major Seminary in 1938, he continued for a year to teach also at St. Andrew's.

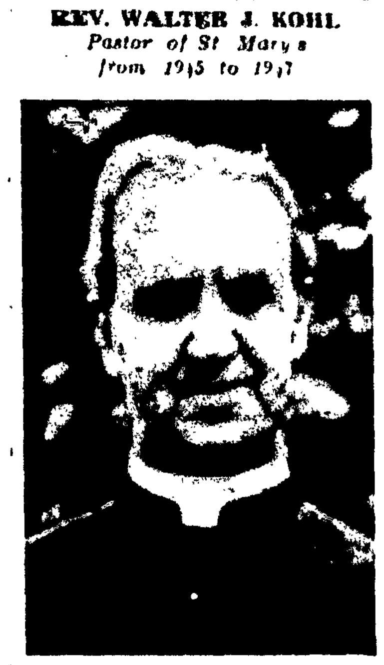
DURING subsequent years Father Ehmann served the faculty of Nazareth College, and was a visiting professor at the Pius X School of Liturgical Music in New York City. He is editor of "The Choirmaster," national magazine of the Gregorian Society of America.

Father Ehmann founded and directed the Catholic Evidence Library in Columbus Civic Centre, Rochester, and for more than a decade conducted the "Library Signpost" book review column for the Catholic Courier Journal.

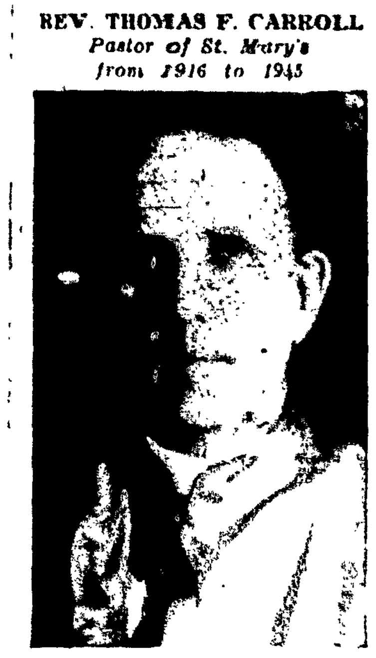
Sought widely because of his speaking ability, he carried on many activities while still teaching at St. Bernard's. In 1947 he suffered failing health and was forced by his physician to give up many duties and take a three months' rest.

It was at this time — Sept. 25, 1947 — that he was appointed to succeed Father Kohl as pastor of the Watkins Glen parish, where with renewed health and vigor, he is in the midst of preparations for the May 20 celebration of the parish centenary.

REV. WALTER J. KOHL
Pastor of St. Mary's from 1945 to 1947



REV. THOMAS F. CARROLL
Pastor of St. Mary's from 1916 to 1945



REV. JOHN J. LEE
Pastor of St. Mary's from 1899 to 1916

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