

Centenary Of St. Patrick's Church, Mumford

# Historic 100-Year-Old Mumford Church Hailed As Wheatland 'Cradle Of Faith'

Celebration of a special Centennial Mass this Sunday (Sept. 19) at 11 a.m. in St. Patrick's Church in Mumford recalls the fact that the little 100-year-old church is one of the cradles of Catholic Faith in the Wheatland area.

After its erection in 1854, the Mumford Church served the Catholics of Caledonia as well as Mumford for 30 years. In 1885 Caledonia Catholics built their own Church of St. Columba. Three years later, when Father George Eisler came to Caledonia as the first resident pastor, the Mumford Church became a mission of Caledonia, with Father Eisler pastor of both churches.

"The history of our parish," wrote Father Eisler in 1907, in a sketch of St. Columba's, Caledonia, "must begin with the history of St. Patrick's, Mumford, N. Y. St. Patrick's of Mumford is the mother church, and St. Columba's of Caledonia is her daughter.

"What memories of past events cling to the walls of that dear old church!" Father Eisler continued, in loving reverie; for he himself was not only pastor, but a Mumford boy by birth. "How many of our younger families had the bond of marriage blessed there; how many of our younger people received the cleansing waters of baptism at her font; how many a contrite heart was absolved there; how many had their souls refreshed and nourished by the Bread of Life; how many from far and near assisted at holy mass; how many Requiem masses were chanted over the remains of a good father, mother, loving brother and kind sister; how many a noble priest and missionary preached the word of God from her altar and administered to the faithful for the past fifty-five years, since the erection of that church. Here Bishop John Timon, of saintly memory, and the venerable Bishop Bernard McQuaid administered the sacrament of confirmation. No wonder, then, the Catholic heart loves the dear old spot that has associated with it so many memorable events.

"And Father Eisler's thoughts, appropriate enough in 1907, are still more appropriate in 1954, St. Patrick's Centennial year.

ALTHOUGH THAT reckless trader, Ebenezer (Indian) Allen lived for a while in the Wheatland district, the family of Peter Shaeffer, who arrived in 1789 from Pennsylvania, were its first true pioneers. Donald McKenzie, a Scot, was the first pioneer in Mumford village, moving in about 1806. Thomas Mumford bought out a sawmill here in 1809. It was he whose name was eventually given to the villages of Mumford (although for years it was called Mumfordville). When the town of Wheatland was separated from that of Caledonia, on February 23, 1821, it was first also given a Scottish name—Inverness. But in April of the following year, the name was changed to Wheatland. The name was appropriate, for the soil was good for farming, and there were extensive deposits of marl and gypsum.

As might be expected, the first Catholic settlers were, like the majority of the pioneers, farmers. William Tone and James Early are the names of two of these Catholic area pioneers. They were, of course, Irish. So were the majority of the early Catholic settlers, although there were also a number of German families. Some Italian families came into the neighborhood, but this was much later on.

THERE WERE already enough Catholics in Wheatland

The population had nearly been growing in the Mumford neighborhood. Consequently Mumford itself was established as a mission station. It was about 1850 that Father Walsh celebrated the first Mass in Mumfordville. The Mass was offered in Michael Callan's house, which still, in 1954, stands as a memorial to that sacred fact. The Callan house—diagonally opposite the Mumford church—was also the place where Mass continued to be celebrated once a month thereafter.

In the fall of 1853, Father McGlew decided that Mumford should have its own church, to serve the Catholics of the Mumford-Caledonia area. The list of subscriptions which he took up on October 15, 1853 to defray the cost of the church lot, totalled about \$780.00. The building of the church must have begun soon after the subscription was finished, for the little frame church of St. Patrick's was already finished—at least substantially—by early March, 1854.

The deed tells us as much. Executed on March 4, 1854, it conveys the church lot from David McCrary to Bishop John Timon, Bishop of the Buffalo Diocese and, after describing this lot, it identifies it as that "upon which has been erected a Roman Catholic Chapel or Church."

FROM 1850 to 1888, Catholics from Caledonia attended Mass at Mumford. Since it was still a mission of the Scottsville parish, the pastors of Scottsville continued to be pastors of Mumford as well.

They were: Rev. Richard Story (1856-1858); Rev. Joseph O'Donohue (1858-1868); Rev. M. J. Loughlin, D.D. (1868-1869); the first pastor named after the appointment of Rt. Rev. Bernard J. McQuaid in 1868 as first Bishop of Rochester; Rev. T. A. Maher (1869-1870); Rev. E. J. McDonald (1870-1871); Rev. Louis J. Miller (1871-1872); Rev. J. J. Buckley (1872-1873); Rev. Martin M. Meagher (1873-1874); Rev. Thomas L. Rossiter (1877-1881); Rev. George J. Eisler (1881-1888).

Meanwhile, however, the Mumford-Caledonia Catholic population had continued to increase:

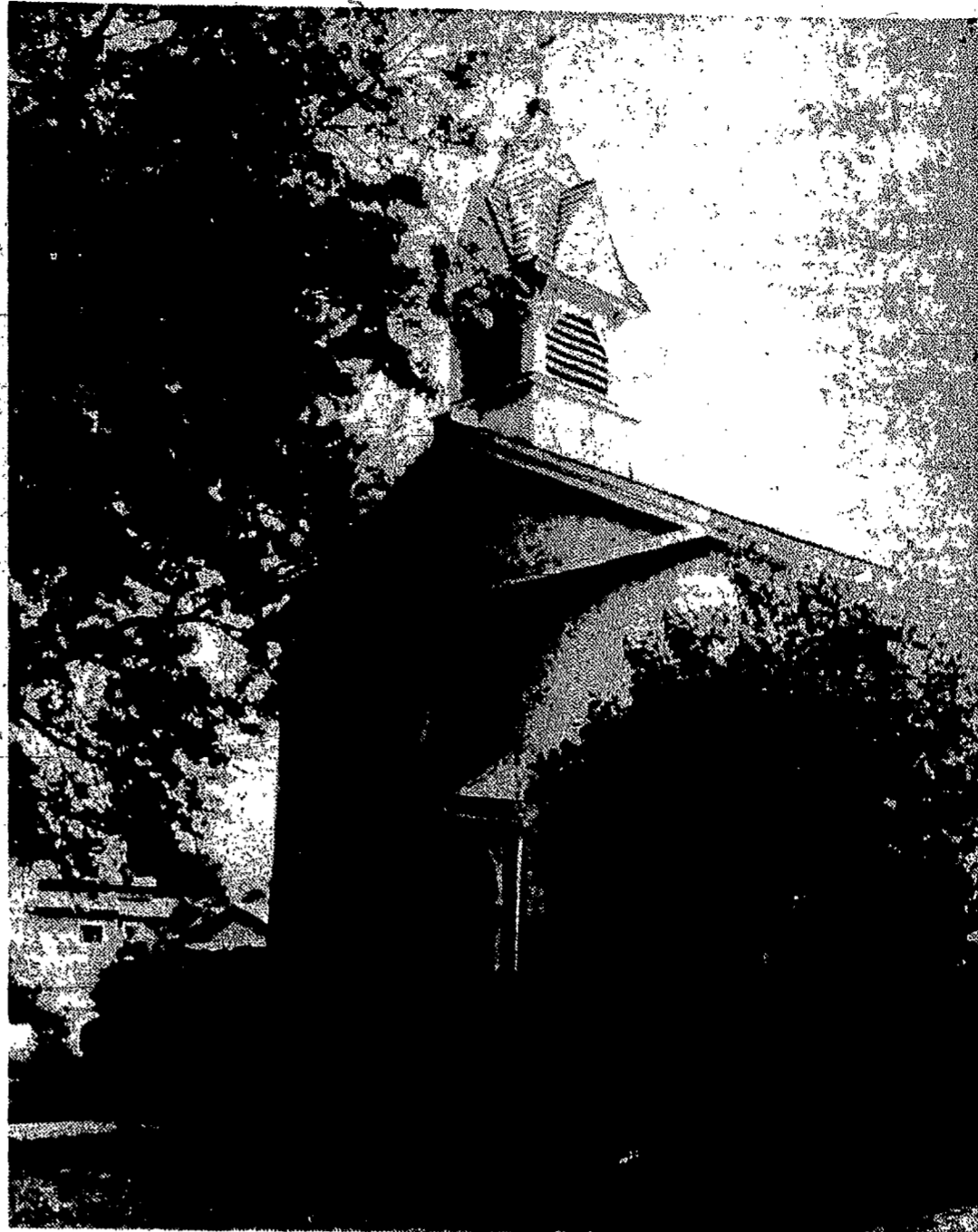
not in any spectacular manner, but sufficiently to justify an independent parish there. Furthermore the growth was apparently larger at Caledonia than at Mumford. It was decided therefore, in 1880, to build a church at Caledonia, and a lot was purchased for it that same year.

FATHER EISLER, as pastor in the years that followed, had the duty of constructing the Caledonia church. St. Columba's was built in 1885 and dedicated by Bishop McQuaid on November 26th of the same year, which was Thanksgiving Day. Finally the rectory at Caledonia was constructed and finished in 1888. Father Eisler moved into it from Scottsville, for the Bishop had appointed him the first pastor of St. Columba's. St. Patrick's, Mumford, was retained, but as a mission of the new church at Caledonia. Thus, indeed, the daughter had superseded the mother.

Father Eisler, already known to the Wheatland parishioners, was to become an institution in the two parishes. He left Caledonia in 1901, to become procurator of St. Bernard's Seminary. Father William B. Commenginger was then appointed to succeed him. But Father Eisler was back in his old position once more in June, 1903, to serve his people for two more decades. The older folks of Caledonia and Mumford revere his memory as that of a country pastor who knew the art of gearing his pastoral work to the needs of an industrious but placid rural community.

NOTHING GIVES a better insight into his pastorate than the remarkable little magazine, Our Parish Register, which he began in June 1907 and continued to issue monthly, with the help of the Caledonia and Mumford trustees, until 1913.

The purpose of the Register, as stated in the first issue, was to record all important events in the parish; keep an accurate record of all church work, give information on more general church events, give sketches of the saints, make church announcements, revive interest in church libraries and societies, bring to mind church regulations, encourage pious devotions, set down items of parish history,



100 year-old St. Patrick's Church, in Mumford.

list pew holders and contributors, publish Sunday School rolls, and finally lay the (financial) foundations of a parish hall and school. This was an ambitious program but it was actually carried out, though in a gentle, casual way.

From the Register, we learn that it was Father Eisler's custom to celebrate Mass once at each of his churches, alternating early and late Masses between the two. May devotions, held Sunday and Wednesday mornings at Caledonia back in 1912, were scheduled for Sunday mornings at Mumford.

The Sunday School—which ran each Sunday except in August—while separate groups for each church, sometimes collaborated in a celebration like given on Easter Monday, 1912. Directed by Misses Mamie McCall and Eliza-

beth Mack, the children of both churches gave a variety show in Burgess Hall, with choral singing, recitations, dialogues, and even an opera.

Father Eisler was far from discouraging parochial get-togethers under proper auspices. St. Patrick's day was, of course, an annual cause for rejoicing in Wheatland, and on this day St. Patrick's naturally took pride of place over St. Columba's although both congregations participated in the festival. The observance started off with a high Mass in St. Patrick's, and then in the evening there was usually a lecture in Caledonia on St. Patrick.

MEMORABLE, ALSO, were such outings as the one which the Sunday School pupils, their teachers, parents, and friends,

had at the State Fish Ponds on August 15, 1907.

These ruminative records, along with the rest of the assorted well written information in the Register give a total impression of country peace and plenty, of a sort which seems to belong to a more placid age which has gone and will not return. Perhaps the relative poverty of the little parishes was one reason for the simple happiness of its people.

The total parish income of St. Patrick's did not amount to more than \$1,200.00 in any of the early years of this century, yet appeals for charity from the parishioners were generously heeded. Each year, for instance, they gave about \$30.00 in cash and seventy bags

of potatoes to St. Mary's Boys' Orphan Asylum in Rochester.

Father Eisler retired from parish work in 1923 and spent his latter years at St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira, where he died on August 5, 1941. He was succeeded by Father James E. Kennedy, who continued as pastor until his death on December 23, 1933. In the last months of his life, Father Kennedy had yielded his burdens to Father Cornelius Hogan, who was named parish administrator in 1932.

Father Hogan was appointed pastor on February 9, 1934 and continued in that office until June, 1940. However, due to illness in the latter months of Father Hogan's pastorate, Father Charles R. Reynolds served as administrator of the parish from May, 1939 until June, 1940 when Father Hogan retired and was succeeded by Father John M. Sellinger.

Father Sellinger remained as pastor until January 11, 1944 at which time he was appointed chaplain at Craig Colony, where he remained until his death only a short time after his transfer on October 12, 1945.

His Excellency Bishop James E. Kearney, on January 11, 1944, named the present pastor, the Rev. William J. Devereaux to succeed Father Sellinger in Wheatland. Father Devereaux, after his ordination in June, 1924, had been assistant pastor at St. Patrick's, Seneca Falls (1924-1925), at St. Mary's, Elmira (1925-1928), at St. Mary's, Canastota (1928-1934), and at Holy Apostles, Rochester (1934-1940). He was named pastor of Holy Angels, Nunda, in 1940, and remained there until his transfer to the Caledonia-Mumford parishes.

At present in the tenth year of his Mumford pastorate—the longest in the history of the parish since that of Father Eisler—Father Devereaux has the unusual privilege of presiding over the centennial celebration of a parish which is not only a century old, but which still, at the end of its first century, occupies the same little white, wooded country church.

As St. Patrick's first century comes to completion, its parishioners think affectionately of what this church and its good pastor have meant to them and their forefathers and children. But along with this sentiment of affection goes a sentiment stronger still, a feeling of deep gratitude to God for the grace which have flowed upon them from this little sanctuary during the past ten decades.



REV. WILLIAM DEVEREAUX

by 1840 to think of providing them with a mission. Father Bernard O'Reilly, pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Rochester, first gathered the local Catholics together at Scottsville in 1841 and made their village a mission station. It was only after 1847, however, when Pope Pius IX established the Diocese of Buffalo and assigned as its first bishop the zealous Vincentian Missionary, John Timon, that real progress was made towards establishing a Wheatland parish.

Bishop Timon, in 1848, appointed the Rev. Edward O'Connor, the first resident pastor of Scottsville with mission stations at Caledonia, "Genesee" and Lima. Father Michael Walsh succeeded him in 1850 and remained until 1852. Father James McGlew became the third resident pastor of Scottsville in the latter year, for a term which was to last four years.

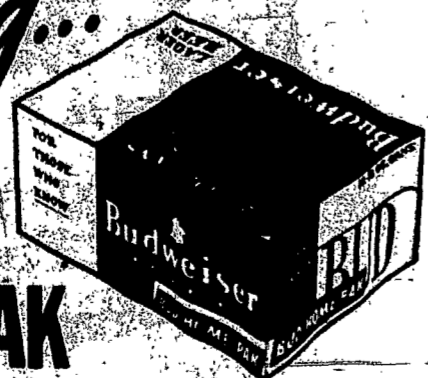


Interior of St. Patrick's Church, Mumford.

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