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**Nationalities in the Diocese of Rochester**

By Father Robert F. McNamara

Father McNamara's 650-page centennial history of the Diocese of Rochester is to be published shortly after Easter. This is another of his special series of glimpses of our diocesan past.

Walt Whitman once wrote of this country: "Here is not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations." We might make a similar statement of the Diocese of Rochester. It is not merely a diocese but a Diocese of dioceses. That is, our population has come, both of late and originally, from many different nations on the face of the earth.

A very large percentage of our people trace their origins to Ireland. This is true throughout the twelve counties of the Diocese.

Among the other big percentages to arrive here in the last century, the Germans were second largest. Most of them settled in Rochester and vicinity, but there were other sizeable groups in Auburn, Elmira and in the Dansville-Perkinsville, Wayland - Cohocton - Naples sector. The Germans came principally from western Germany, especially the Rhine district.

Rochester itself also received a fair number of French-speaking immigrants, both from France and French Canada.

**Immigrants Came**

The later wave of immigrants, in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, came principally from Eastern and southern Europe. From Eastern Europe came the Poles and Lithuanians, who belonged to the Latin Rite, and the Ruthenians (Ukrainian and Russian) who belonged to the Slavonic Greek Rite. A fair number of Syrians came over, too—members of two other eastern Rites—the Melkite-Greek Rite and the Maronite Rite.

From the western end of the Mediterranean came the Portuguese—a few dozen families at most. The majority of the Portuguese established themselves in Rochester's St. Augustine parish. But there are also several Portuguese families in Corning.

A much larger immigration was that of the Belgians and Catholic Hollanders. Father Alphonse Notebaert, the pastor of Our Lady of Victory Church (the "French Church") in



Bishop O'Hern lays the cornerstone, (1929). Mount Carmel Church, Rochester.

Rochester estimated in 1911 that by then 4,000 people from the Low Countries had come into the Diocese, of whom more than 800 lived in Rochester proper. As a matter of fact, by then they already outnumbered the French in the congregation of Our Lady of Victory.

The largest "second-wave" group to enter the Diocese was, of course the Italians. Italians from all over the peninsula, but especially from south-central, southern, and Sicilian Italy, settled in every quarter of the Rochester Diocese.

**Post-War Immigrants**

The period since World War II has witnessed a new influx, especially of Displaced Persons (Poland, Lithuania) and Hungarian "Freedom-Fighters" of the abortive revolution of 1956.

Another revolution, the Cuban, has of late brought some Cubans to Rochester.

But the largest groups of new arrivals have been immigrants—that is, Americans who have come here from elsewhere in the United States. The southern Negroes are, of course, English-speaking; and only a few of them are Catholics. But the Puerto-Ricans are of Catholic background, and their settling in the Diocese (a few thousand in Rochester, and a few hundred at Geneva and Newark) has necessitated a new Spanish-language apostolate under diocesan auspices.

Now these linguistic groups we have mentioned—and they are only the major groups—have not all been large enough to warrant the establishment of "national" churches for them. (The five Ukrainian churches in the twelve counties are under the Ukrainian Bishop of Stamford and St. Nicholas Melkite Church is under the new American Melkite bishop.) In addition we have had five types of national church: German, Italian, Polish, (several of each); and Lithuanian and French-Belgian (one apiece).

It is a little difficult to distinguish the officially national church—such as used to be established before World War I—and the unofficial national church. But there have been several officially German churches. In Rochester, St. Joseph's (1838) was the first; and SS. Peter and Paul, St. Michael, Holy Family, Holy-Redeemer, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Boniface came later. St. Mary's, Dansville, St. John the Baptist, Elmira, and St. Alphonsus, Auburn were German churches; and there were several others which while territorial, were actually German, like Sacred Heart, Perkinsville.

**Italian Parishes**

The main Italian churches in Rochester were Mount Carmel, St. Anthony, and St. Lucy. St. Anthony in Elmira was officially Italian, as was St. Francis in Auburn and the (defunct) Assumption Church in Mount Morris. In addition to these were several "unofficial" churches, in Rochester and elsewhere.

Officially Polish parishes were: St. Stanislaus and St. Theresa (Rochester), St. Hyacinth (Auburn) and St. Casimir

Although each national Catholicism has tended to become Americanized over the years, each has made its own contribution to popular piety. The Irish brought St. Patrick and "the green." The Germans, St. Boniface, Shrove-Tuesday Cookies, and the Easter-sepulcher. The Italians, SS. Lucy and Rocco, and the St. Joseph Tables. The Poles, SS. Stanislaus (the King and the Jesuit), the Opilki Cakes of Christmas, the blessing of eggs and mops in Holy Week, and the Easter-morn service called *Rezunkcja*. The Lithuanians, St. Casimir, the Christmas Eve fish supper, and the cold-cut luncheon of Easter Sunday. The Portuguese, St. Anthony (of Lisbon, of course, for that is where St. Anthony of Padua was born); and the sugar-doughnut of Shrove Tuesday called the *mallasada*. And finally, there are the Puerto Ricans, with their patron, St. John the Baptist, their holiday candy, and their "pina-ta" full of gifts.

"How much we are all at home here," said Bishop McQuaid at the dedication of the original St. Stanislaus Church. "... Irish, Scotch, German, Swiss, Italian, Belgian, French, yes and Poles. One great noble Catholic family!"

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