

# COURIER-JOURNAL

## St. Patrick's Church Celebrates 100 Years

By MARGARET CONNOLLY

On July 4, 1870, before their pastor had arrived in Elmira, the people of the new St. Patrick's parish held a big picnic and raised enough money to pay for a church — \$1,600.

The temporary frame structure was dedicated July 22, 1871, by Bishop S. V. Ryan of Buffalo, and even then Father James J. Bloomer was thinking about the church that stands today. He lived at the time in the Delevan House, a hotel near the parish property.

Today, the property at Clinton, Main and Park Place has a school, convent and rectory, built in Father Bloomer's time, and a modern recreation and social center added 14 years ago.

Incidental to the centenary, renovation of the church interior will be undertaken this summer. Nineteen years have elapsed since the last redecoration.

As a centennial souvenir, Father Joseph M. Egan, pastor, has planned a parish directory that will contain photographs of today's parishioners with a history of their community.

St. Patrick's parish was begun by Father Patrick Hopkins, an assistant at St. Peter and Paul, who visited the people and bought land before illness ended his work. He died July 9, 1870.

The pastorate was taken up that July 22 by Father Bloomer, an Irishman raised in Philadelphia and educated at St. Bonaventure's, who made a 61-year career in the Elmira parish.

Father Bloomer was not yet 29 when he was appointed. He lived and worked past his 90th birthday.

The parish was organized for people drawn by the rolling mills and busy railroad center to the northern part of the city — the "pleasant part," as early accounts put it.

The church "is on one of the most prominent and sightly spots in the whole city, on a rise of ground looking down Main Street, one of the finest of our avenues, to the river," the Elmira Daily Advertiser reported on July 1, 1872.

The newspaper story concerned the cornerstone ceremony which had taken place the previous day, attracting a good crowd, "notwithstanding the extreme heat of the morning."

Pius IX was in the 27th year of his reign; Ulysses S. Grant was president of the United States; John T. Hoffman, governor of New York, and P. H. Flood, mayor of Elmira, papers sealed in the stone recorded.

Bishop Ryan "delivered a discourse full of that practical good sense and religious devotion for which he is so well known," and at the Mass "a collection which must have been very large was taken up," the Advertiser said.

In the afternoon, 50 children were confirmed.

Noting that Father Bloomer "is deservedly beloved by his people and highly esteemed by all who know him," the Advertiser writer concluded his story with this observation:

"The more churches in our land, the better for it."

Father Bloomer always had a good press. After the church had been damaged by fire, it was redecorated at a cost of \$5,000, according to the Elmira Sunday Times, in an article which treated the reopening as a "Grand Jubilee."

"The statues, candelabra and all the paraphernalia required in decorating the sanctuary are new and of the most elaborate design and finish," the Times man wrote. "The frescoing is in complete harmony with the rest of the interior."

On Easter Sunday, 1880, Father Bloomer's choir sang Mozart's 12th Mass and "unquestionably took the lead for precision, contrasts of light and shade, as also for the large and well-balanced chorus with which it was given," the Daily Advertiser commented on March 29, 1880. The pastor "discoursed very eloquently."

On Oct. 14 of that year there was a "grand public rehearsal of the choir," the Advertiser reported next day. Rendering music by Rossini, Verdi, Haydn and Handel, "each lady and gentleman on the programme did splendidly."

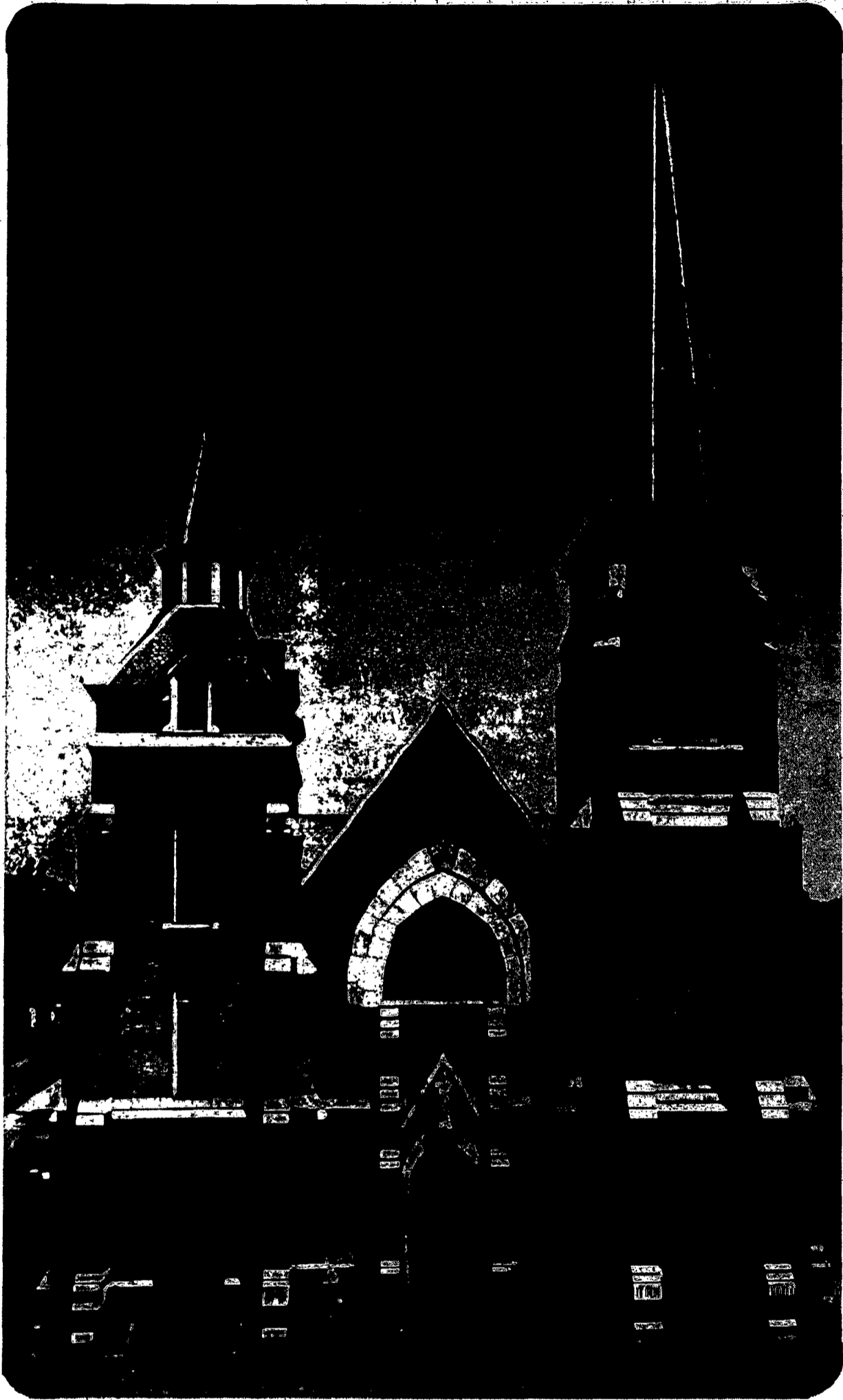
"The character of the edifice precluded any manifestations of applause, but this could not conflict with the enjoyment afforded by each number," the writer observed. "Such concerts should come oftener."

On July 11, 1892, a reporter for the Daily Gazette and Free Press had a scoop in the news that Father Bloomer was planning to build a school and remodel his rectory into a convent, at a total cost of \$20,000. On June 24, 1893, the paper commented on the "handsome appearance of the rapidly rising building" which when finished, would be "one of the best-equipped institutions of learning in the Southern Tier."

Picnics, fairs and subscriptions were the money-raising devices of the day. One fair raised \$6,200 for the school, Father Bloomer wrote to the Gazette editor on Feb. 12, 1894. "The interest manifested in the affair by your paper greatly helped," he said.

The school was opened in 1894, with four Mercy Sisters from

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## A Combination Pastor-Teacher

Father Joseph M. Egan, pastor of St. Patrick's for the past five years, spent the greater part of his priestly career in teaching. He was a professor at St. Bernard's Seminary for 23 years before his assignment here June 28, 1966.

He holds a doctorate in Sacred Theology from St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein, Ill., where he completed studies begun in Rome.

In 1938, Father Egan went from St. Andrew's and St. Ber-

nard's to the North American College in Rome. His work was interrupted in 1940 by the spread of war in Europe, and he returned to study at the Mundelein seminary. He was ordained at Sacred Heart Cathedral June 6, 1942. After receiving his degree in 1943, he was assigned to the diocesan seminary as a teacher of dogma and patristic theology.

He is the son of Ethel Egan of Elmira and the late Joseph Egan.



FATHER EGAN

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