

# St. Michael's in Penn Yan 125 Years Old

By JOHN DASH

**Penn Yan —** The nation's Bicentennial is also a significant year for the parish family at St. Michael's Church. Friday, Sept. 26, marked the 125th anniversary of the appointment of the area's first pastor. Plans are as yet incomplete for the observance of the anniversary, but it is expected that a number of activities in the community will note that event throughout the year.

**Penn Yan —** They were stormy days in the beginning.

Thomas Hendrick, because he was a leader in the Catholic community, found himself flat on his face once and bloodied up another time. Folks in those days figured the Catholics in their midst were preparing for an invasion by the Pope, feared by many as an anti-American foreign power bent on superstition and monarchy.

The irony of the incidents is that Hendrick gave the world a New York State Supreme Court justice, a United States consul, a priest and a bishop.

As well as a church. St. Michael's.

A history of Catholicism in the area begins some 200 years earlier with the evangelization of Indian groups by the French missionaries. By 1786 two Catholic settlers from France had established

homes in the area and Mass was celebrated occasionally in their homes.

By the year 1847, the parish history recounts, 15 Catholic families were living in the established village of Penn Yan and the Fathers Bradley and O'Flaherty, both based in Geneva, would celebrate the Eucharist in Hendrick's home.

At this time the area was under the jurisdiction of Bishop John Timon who was head of a diocese with its see in Buffalo. With the Bishop's permission Penn Yan Catholics began a fund campaign to build a church on a site donated by Abraham Wagener. When the building was completed Bishop Timon appointed the first resident pastor, Father Michael Gilbride, who wrote on the first page of the Baptismal Register, "I hereby certify that I became pastor of the mission embracing Penn Yan, Yates County . . . on the twenty-sixth day of September, 1850."

Now Father Gilbride was no stranger to the anti-Catholicism rampant in his parish. When he earlier celebrated Mass in Ovid, in the home of James Murphy at Benton's Corners, his host was told by the landlord that eviction was sure and that employment would be scarce should the priest continue his duties under his roof.

Father Gilbride served two years — two years before his death. He was succeeded by Father Michael Creedon, Father

Patrick Canny and Father Joseph Deen, all of whom stayed with the community but a year.

Father Creedon was a military man. William Seward, President Lincoln's secretary of state, cited his patriotism on one occasion. It is said that he had once been an officer in the British army. He later proved a great recruiter for the North in the Civil War and visited the troops during the conflict.

Father Joseph McKenna, who, at least according to a list drawn up by Bishop Timon, was considered for the title of Bishop of Rochester was the parish's pastor for the years 1855-1862.

Father Dennis English then took charge and during his pastorate he got drafted.

It should be remembered that the draft caused riots in 1863 in New York. Bishop Timon, fearing that a similar occurrence could happen in his diocese wrote a pastoral letter begging his people to accept the draft law. But then Father English was greeted by the war's conscriptors.

On hearing the news, Bishop Timon went straight to the governor, evidently ready to make a test case against the drafting of the clergy. But the governor, Horatio Seymour, advised him to pay a "substitute" fee and Father Creedon urged the bishop to forget the matter.

Father Robert McNamara, diocesan historian, gathers that "It must have been the principle at stake . . . that troubled Bishop Timon."

It was during Father English's tenure that the Diocese of Rochester was formed and Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid named to head it.

Father Edward McGovern led the parish from 1869 to 1874. He was succeeded by Father Guilelmus Gregg whose pastorate lasted from 1874 to 1876.

In 1876 the parish's first Italian born pastor was named, Father Eugene Pagani. During Father Pagani's reign, the parish school was dedicated and the Sisters of St. Joseph have staffed the facility since.

And a curious thing also happened in the neighboring town of Dundee.

A Protestant community, the Free Christian Church, had several years earlier flourished, built a church, and had failed.

Catholics in the town bought the building, and Father Pagani began a fund campaign to restore it. Protestants in the area contributed \$300 to the effort.

When the parish church was dedicated in 1877, as a mission of

St. Michael's, Bishop McQuaid lauded the Protestant benefactors, and said that the days of anti-Catholic bigotry were over, and affirmed that Catholics were loyal to the nation.

Father Pagani, a former Franciscan, returned to his order in his last days.

He was succeeded in 1893 by Father Angelo Lugero, a former Passionist, and also Italian-born.

Penn Yan-born-and-reared Father Martin Hendrick assumed the pastorate of St. Michael's in 1899, and by the year of the Golden Jubilee (1900) the original parish of 15 families had grown to more than 300. Under Father Hendrick's direction the present church was constructed to accommodate the increasing ranks of the faithful. The cornerstone for the building was laid in 1901 and the following year Bishop McQuaid dedicated the edifice.

Father Bernard Gommenginger was appointed pastor in 1915. Father Gommenginger opened the convent on Keuka Street for the sisters who staffed the parish school.

He was followed by Father Hugh Crowley, who served the parish from 1923-1930.

A 16-year pastorate, during which the church was redecorated and a parish hall built, fell to Father John Killeen. When Father Killeen's health failed, Bishop James E. Kearney appointed Father John P. O'Beirne as administrator. Father O'Beirne was succeeded by Father Hubert Bisky who became pastor on Father Killeen's death in 1946.

Father Francis C. Waterstraat followed Father Bisky in the parish's centennial year, 1950.

When he was assigned as pastor of St. Alphonsus in Auburn, Father Waterstraat, among other notable accomplishments had added a six-room addition to the school.

He was succeeded in 1958 by Msgr. Joseph J. Sullivan, who, in his 10-year pastorate renovated the church building.

Msgr. Sullivan was replaced in 1968 by Father Thomas F. McVeigh, the present pastor.



Popcorn for Sale!

Father T. Paul Murley, pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Victor, accepts a package of popcorn from Cub Scout Michael Crowley as Pack 52, sponsored by the church, opens a house-to-house sale. Profits will be used for re-registration, insurance and supplies.

## Local Agencies Plan 'Fair Shake' Fair

A number of local agencies of established reputation are getting up what they call a Fair Shake Festival to dramatize the difference between government spending for military and for social purposes.

The festival is scheduled for Sunday, Oct. 5, noon until 8 p.m., in Genesee Valley Park, but will be held in Duffy School at 999 South Ave. if it rains.

Among more than 40 groups taking part are the Genesee Regional Health Planning Council, the Baden Street Settlement House, Urban League, Monroe Branch YMCA, Ibero-American Action League, the Housing Council and the Center for Environmental Action. They will have booths showing what they do and why they think they should be getting more of a "fair shake" than they are getting out of tax revenues.

On the lighter side, there will be clowns, mimes and balloons; theatrical encounter and storytelling; refreshments, jewelry and books for sale; all to the music of the John Mooney Blues Band, the Swamp Root String Band, the Wednesday Evening Consort, the Earl Reems Revue and other groups. Child care service will be available.

The local festival is sponsored by the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center of 713 Monroe. It is part of the national Peace Conversion Campaign launched by the American Friends Service Committee and Clergy and Laity Concerned.

## Knights Award

The Rochester Council of the Knights of Columbus will honor its past grand knights at an award and memorial dinner slated for Friday, Oct. 10 at the council's clubrooms on Monroe Avenue.

Living past grand knights expected to attend include Daniel F. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. O'Connor, John J. Kinney, Raymond L. Nary, Joseph B. Rooney, George T. Vick Jr., Vincent L. Hannon, John R. Ward, George J. Shenk, Robert J. Farrell, Edward L. Miller, F. Robert Ridley, Kenneth A. Bennett and Charles J. Northcote.

Deceased past grand knights will be remembered in a prayer service.

Another feature of the dinner will be the awarding of pins to knights who have been in the organization for 25 years.

**IN BUSINESS FOR YOURSELF?**

MINIMUM INVESTMENT \$25. CAR NEEDED CALL LIFETIME 244-0880 Mon. thru Wed. 11 to 1, 5 to 6:30

**all-you-can-eat-WEDNESDAY \$1.99**

Beer Batter — Dipped Haddock French Fries Creamy Cole Slaw Rolls & Butter

**all-you-can-eat-FRIDAY \$2.99**

New England Clam Chowder or soup French Fried Clams or Beer Batter — Dipped Haddock French Fries Creamy Cole Slaw Rolls & Butter



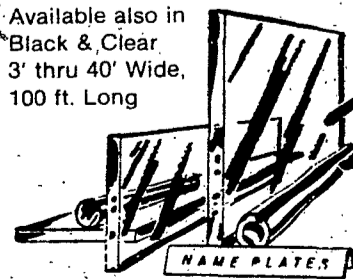
1881 MONROE AVE. at 12 Corners

## SWIMMING POOL COVERS

- 24' x 25' ..... \$ 9.45
- 24' x 50' ..... \$18.90
- 32' x 33' ..... \$14.50

Black Polyethylene 6 MIL EXTRA HEAVY

Available also in Black & Clear 3' thru 40' Wide, 100 ft. Long



Ward's Plastic CENTER

556 LYELL AVE. 458-3227

HOURS: MON.-FRI., 8:30-4:30

SATURDAY 9 A.M.-1 P.M.