

... a History

By Father
Robert F. McNamara

Stella Maris, the Rochester diocesan summer camp on Conesus Lake, is unique among diocesan institutions; it was founded by two seminarians, Gerald C. Lambert and Eugene B. Hudson.

The camp came into being in 1926, just 50 years ago. Gerald Lambert had spent July 1926 as a counselor at Camp Morning Star in the Syracuse diocese. Out of a job at the end of the month, he conceived the idea of starting a camp in the Rochester diocese, which had none at the time. Eugene Hudson, recuperating from a heart ailment, offered his help. They had \$20 between them. Lambert paid \$10 as a deposit on the Frederick Goddard cottage, McPherson's Point, Conesus Lake. The other \$10 went for provisions. Gerald's sister, Mrs. Jerome Dalton, agreed to be cook and "Camp Mother." Their younger brother, Paul, also volunteered his services. Father Edward M. Lyons, assistant pastor at St. Augustine's Church, rounded up 12 prospective campers. The initial week of the two-week season was pretty hectic. The second week ran more smoothly, thanks in part to the assistance of two other seminarians, George Vogt and Leonard Kelly.

At the end of the brief 1926 season, everybody agreed — especially the parents of the campers — that the project was worth continuing. But at what site? A permanent location was necessary.

At this point, Max Russer Jr., a prominent meat-packer of Rochester and the father of one of the pioneer campers, undertook the task of finding a permanent site. Two other businessmen of Rochester worked with him: Herman Hetzler, the head of Hetzler Foundries, and Clarence Pihler, an insurance agent. The trio decided that the old Lake View House, built before the turn of the century by Jerry Bolles, and one of the first hotels on Conesus Lake, would be ideal for a camp. It took some persuading to get the owner, Mrs. Lucette Woodworth, to sell, but she finally consented. Russer himself purchased the 10-acre property in May 1927, and turned it over to the two seminarians on loan for the summer. The old hostelry, solidly built, has remained the main building of the camp ever since. Camping season ran for eight weeks that second summer, with some 40 young campers

present each week. The counselors included seminarians Leonard Kelly, Benedict Ehmann, Joseph McDonnell and Joseph Vogt.

Gerald Lambert was ordained a priest in 1929, and forthwith appointed by the bishop of Rochester, John F. O'Hern, to the post of camp chaplain. In 1930 the diocese officially took over the camp as a diocesan institution. Father Lambert remained a ruling figure in the camp's management for more than a decade thereafter, and his interest in it continued until his death in 1975.

As the years passed, Stella Maris attracted an increasing number of campers, even

from outside the diocese and outside the state. In 1941 a portion of the camping season was for the first time allotted to girls. Two young women attached to Rochester Catholic Charities, Ruth Ehmann and Mary Hannick, were directors during the pioneer girls' encampments. In 1971 the management initiated family encampments, which have also proved popular. From the start, Rochester Catholic Charities has tried to keep the amount charged to campers at the minimum. Reduced charges and free places have also been made available to underprivileged children.

(Continued on Page 3A)

Father McNamara

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