

# Old St. Mary's Celebrates

On Sunday, Sept. 17, when Bishop Joseph L. Hogan celebrates the 12:15 Mass at Old St. Mary's Church, the parish and its friends will also be observing the 125th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone for the present church building.

St. Mary's Parish, however, has an even older foundation, predating, by a year, the chartering of the City of Rochester.

Back in 1834, Irish Catholics had banded together to purchase a church building once used by a Methodist congregation. A year later, however, the the Catholic group met with financial difficulties and sold the property back to the Methodists. Fathers Bernard O'Reilly and Patrick Foley, who also were the priests at St. Patrick's Church, were shepherding the flock at the time.

For six years the St. Mary's congregation then worshipped at St. Patrick's; but they were years of some discord, and, in 1841, a second group re-purchased the Methodists' building.

In the following year, Bishop John Hughes of New York, who was that same year to be named that diocese's first archbishop, recognized the new congregation and appointed Father Lawrence Carroll its pastor.

Father Carroll was able during his 10-year pastorate to put the parish on a sound financial footing. He was succeeded by Father Michael Creedon, who, a year later, was transferred but during whose time, the land where the present church stands came into the church's hands.

Father Thomas McEvoy was pastor when, on Sept. 18, 1853, Bishop John Timon, the first ordinary of the newly created Diocese of Buffalo, laid the cornerstone for the new church.

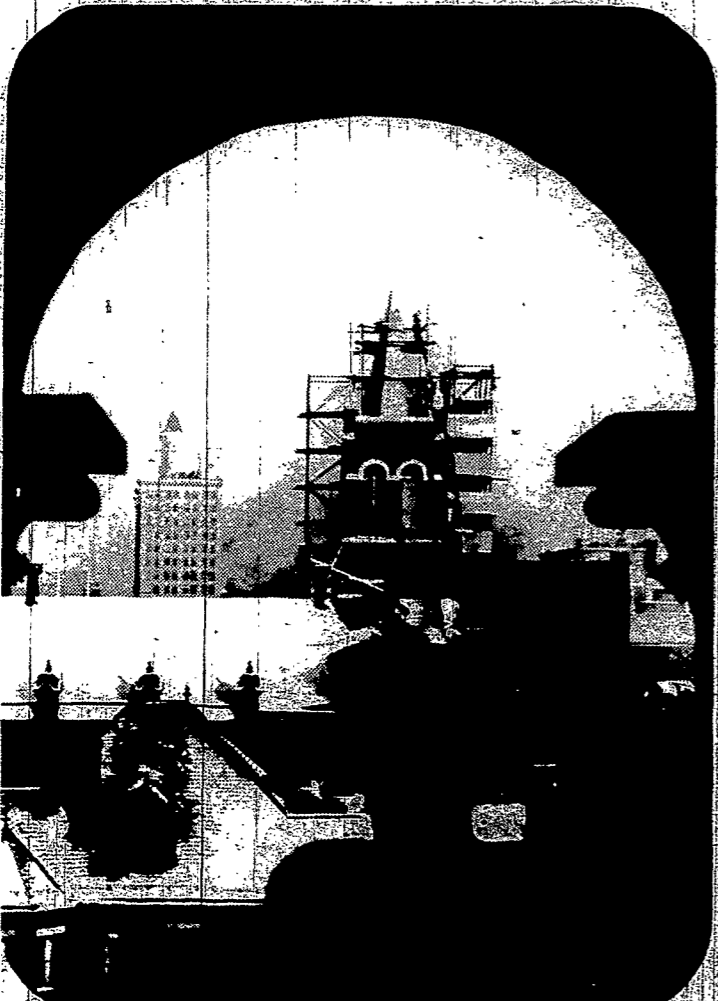
It is this event which will be celebrated on Sunday.

The building of the church took about five years to complete; and on the very trip that Father McEvoy took to New York, to arrange for the dedication rites for the building, he suddenly died.

Father Daniel Moore was named rector of the church in 1858. He remained until 1861, when, with the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined the army in defense of the Union.

There followed in rather quick succession three pastors for the parish: Fathers Thomas O'Flaherty, James McManus and James M. Early.

The latter two priests had an unusual career pattern. In 1865, Father Early was named pastor of the Cathedral, and, from 1867 to 1876 was Vicar General of the Diocese of Rochester. He was succeeded in that post by then Msgr. James McManus.



A view of the church, taken in the winter of 1940, shows the then skyline of Rochester.



This view of St. Mary's, taken with a special lens last week, shows the extensive rebuilding of downtown Rochester which has occurred in the past 15 years.

In 1865, Father Peter Barker was named pastor and served for six years, until he was succeeded by Father James P. Stewart who served as pastor for a quarter of a century.

During Father Stewart's tenure, a parish school was built as well as a parish residence. He also built a combination day-care center and convent.

Father Stewart died in Boston in 1897. In the next four years, St. Mary's was to lose three pastors to death: Fathers James P. Kiernan, Timothy C. Murphy and James J. Leary.

Father William Gleeson was named pastor in 1902, and served the remaining ten years of his life in that capacity. During his pastorate he built the present rectory, made extensive improvements in the parish plant and redecorated the interior of the church.

Father Simon Fitzsimons followed him as pastor. He was an unusual man. Bishop Bernard McQuaid, the first Bishop of Rochester, recruited him, while still a seminarian, for work in the diocese.

Extraordinarily gifted, Father Fitzsimons was noted as an educator, preacher, writer and financier. He died while saying Mass in 1928.

Father James B. Keenan was then named pastor and died in 1934, a month after the parish celebrated the centenary of its foundation.

He was succeeded by Father George F. Kettell in 1935. A former faculty member at St. Bernard's Seminary, Father Kettell was known as a linguist, a teacher of more than ordinary ability and a gifted preacher. At one point in his priestly career he had entered the Jesuit novitiate in Shadowbrook, Mass.

During Kettell's 14 year pastorate he had built and dedicated the Madonna of the Highways Shrine which stands to the north of the church. The parish debt was completely wiped out by 1946. In 1947 the church was air-conditioned, the first Catholic church in the country to be so.

Father Kettell died in October of 1949. In November of that year, Msgr. James C. McAniff, a doctor of Sacred Theology and a canon lawyer, the chancellor of the diocese, was named pastor of St. Mary's.

Msgr. McAniff's pastorate has been the longest in the history of the church. Msgr. McAniff was ordained in 1933 in Rome and celebrated his first solemn Mass in Rochester nearly 100 years to the day after the foundation of St. Mary's Parish.

He was 38 years old when he was named chancellor of the diocese, becoming the youngest priest in the history of that post locally up to that time.

He continued to serve as chancellor until 1954 when he was named vicar general.

In February 1956 he was informed that Pope Pius XII had named him Protonotary Apostolic with the privilege of pontificating at Mass four times a year.

He retired as vicar general in January of 1967.

As pastor, Msgr. McAniff has shepherded St. Mary's through a time of extraordinary change, not only in the physical nature of the parish, but also in the religious.

In the course of the past quarter century St. Mary's neighborhood has almost completely changed. Major office buildings and new structures stand where once the parish resident population lived.

As long as a decade ago the parish was described as "having little now in terms of ordinary parish activity." Hospital and nursing home work was said to be the priests' major ministries.

In more recent years, the parish has become a center for activities designed to draw people from the suburbs into the city. Each summer the church has played a major role in the development of the national festivals. Priests also take part in the community development of neighboring areas, in the public exchange over city policies and legislation.

In 1951 a new High Altar was erected in the church as a memorial to Father Kettell; and two years later an organ with more than 3,000 pipes divided among three manuals and pedals was installed. The organ has 52 stops and each manual has an independent diapason chorus.

In 1971 fire hit the church shortly after the last Easter Sunday Mass. The fire was confined to the basement sanctuary, however the church was damaged by heavy smoke and the heat of the blaze broke stained glass windows.

Restoration work on the church was completed for the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception that same year.

Also during Msgr. McAniff's pastorate, the wooden shrine of the Madonna of the Highways, originally constructed by Father Kettell, was rebuilt in stone as a permanent memorial to the former pastor. (It is ironic that Father Kettell's death came in an automobile accident.)

In 1966 the church was rearranged to conform to the New Order of the Mass proclaimed by Pope Paul VI.

The chimes of St. Mary's, long a feature of downtown life, have for some time been silent. On the day of the celebration however a new electronic chiming system will be dedicated, and once again, in the words of the associate pastor, Father Charles Bennett, they will ring out "daily songs of God's love as a meditation and soothing balm for those caught up in the trials of the world of business."