



The old Church, now a public library.



Father John M. Maurice.



Father Daniel O'Rourke cements the cornerstone to the convent built in 1958.

Mother of Sorrows

This month, the spiritual descendants of those pioneers who built the first rural Catholic church in New York State are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the foundation of their parish.

The festivities, which will culminate in a Mass, celebrated by Bishop Matthew J. Clark, and a dinner-dance on Sunday, Sept. 16, note the historic milestone reached by Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in Greece.

According to a book, *The Church in the Wood: Our Mother of Sorrows Parish, Greece, New York, 1829-1979*, by diocesan historian-archivist Father Robert F. McNamara, which will shortly be published, the establishment of the parish was due in large measure to Felix McGuire and Nicholas Lead, both Irishmen who had early on assumed the leaders' mantles of the Irish community of Greece.

In fact, Father McNamara says, McGuire was one of the founders of Rochester's St. Patrick's Parish some years before; and it was he who brought priests to the Greece area for the celebration of Mass, in his own home, prior to the establishment of the Greece parish.

The first church for the community was dedicated on Feb. 2, 1832. The officiating prelate was Father Francis O'Donoghue, head of the "Salina (Syracuse) Mission," for the Bishop of New York. The priest chose the great Milanese Father of the Church, St. Ambrose, as the patron of the community.

From the outset, Father McNamara says, St. Ambrose Church became celebrated and romanticized in verse.

Although the site of the church, the corner of Mt. Read and Latta, is popularly known even to this day as "Paddy Hill," Father McNamara recounts that the Irish in the area resented such an appellation. At that time "Paddy" was an ethnic slur, he says.

But the numbers of the Irishmen in the area were so concentrated that they formed "almost a closed corporation centered around their church, and the tendency to intermarry made their society even more exclusive," he says.

Up until 1841, the chapel was used as a mission church. In that year, the missionary priests were finally able to offer Mass there every Sunday.

Such missionaries were from Rochester's St. Patrick's and St. Mary's. The best known among them was Father Bernard O'Reilly who later became the Bishop of Hartford.

Also in 1841, on the occasion of a pastoral visit from the Bishop of New York, John Hughes, the parishioners pleaded for a permanent pastor. The bishop responded by sending Father Dennis Kelly, who also served a number of other communities in the area at the same time.

Father Kelly's successor was an Irish Dominican priest, Father Charles French, a convert to Catholicism. He served from 1842 to 1845. On his departure, the parish again was served by priests from St. Patrick's, although for one year, 1848-1849, they had the ministry of a French priest, Father Julian Delaune.

In the meantime, the Diocese of Buffalo had been formed and Bishop John Timon, its head, appointed the first full-fledged pastor to St. Ambrose, Father Joseph Biggio, in 1849.

He served until 1855 and was succeeded by Father William Carroll, who, however, only served a few months.

In 1856 Bishop Timon appointed a priest who would serve the community for 39 years.

He was a French priest, Father John Maurice, a missionary who had served in Africa, a teacher in France,

and, by Father McNamara's account, an extraordinarily dedicated servant of God.

It was Father Maurice, at the dedication of a new church, built to accommodate the increasing numbers of communicants at St. Ambrose, who in 1860 petitioned the church be changed to honor Our Mother of Sorrows.

His wish was granted and the new church was so named on the Feast of Our Mother of Sorrows, Sept. 16, 1860.

In 1875, again on the feast of Our Mother of Sorrows, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, head of the recently established Diocese of Rochester, blessed a bell-tower and bell.

During Father Maurice's tenure, he saw to it that chapels were established for Catholics in the Charlotte area and out on Ridge Road, the former dedicated to the Holy Cross, the latter to St. John the Evangelist.

Father Maurice preached his farewell sermon on Nov. 17, 1895 and died Christmas Day that year.

The parish was served by Father Andrew B. Meehan for a time. Father Meehan served as administrator until July 1896 when Bishop McQuaid appointed Father John P. Quinn.

Father McNamara notes that although Father Quinn's tenure lasted 33 years, records of his time are meagre. He attributes this to the fact that the parish population was decreasing and to the fact that Father Quinn "was the most unobtrusive of men."

In 1929, following Father Quinn's resignation from the pastorate, Bishop John F. O'Hern named Father Daniel O'Rourke to be the shepherd of the Greece flock.

"Delving without delay," Father McNamara writes, "into the history of the parish, (Father O'Rourke) learned