

Seneca Falls Parish Notes 150th Jubilee

Seneca Falls — When Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey presides at the closing Mass for St. Patrick's "Come Grow with Us" program this Saturday, he will also be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the parish.

Actually, however, the records establishing the parish as 150 years old are a bit fuzzy, and at any rate, St. Patrick's (with that name) didn't really exist until 1864. Prior to that time, Catholics here worshipped in buildings dedicated first to St. Jerome, and then to St. Thomas.

But since it can be established that in 1831 a band of Irish immigrants gathered in the home of one Henry Graham to discuss the formation of the "Catholic Society of Seneca Falls," which eventually led to the establishment of the parish, and since, 25 years ago, the parish observed its 125th birthday without quibble, Saturday's celebration should be taken as the milestone.

The first Sunday Mass to be celebrated in Seneca Falls was on Oct. 4, 1835, by Father Francis Donoghue, pastor of St. Peter's Church in Salina, whose post included ministry to Seneca Falls.

The one Mass was celebrated in two different places. It seems that there was such a crush of people in the home of Henry Graham where the Mass began, that the floor collapsed, pitching many people into the cellar. An eyewitness who was not a Catholic, reputedly said he thought the event was part of the ceremonies. Since there are no records of injury, it could not have been a disaster. Indeed, the celebrant simply moved the site of the Mass across the street to the home of James Hurley and mentioned in his sermon that early Christians worshipped in the catacombs.

Three days later the men of Seneca Falls met with Father Donoghue to discuss building a proper church, a building eventually dedicated May 24, 1836, and dedicated to St. Jerome.

Records indicate that Protestants in the area also contributed to the construction of the building.

The congregation, about that time, fell to the care of, successively, Fathers M. Balfe, J. O'Donnell, Connelly, Michael Heas and William Grace.

In 1840, Father Patrick Bradley began a five-year term as pastor of the area. During his tenure the church was enlarged and a new altar was built.

The fledgling parish had begun as part of the Archdiocese of New York, and in 1847 became a part of the newly established Diocese of Buffalo, under the care of Bishop John Timon. In January 1848, Bishop Timon visited the area and the congregation, headed by Father O'Flaherty (whose first sermon, it is said, consisted of "My dear people, you mind your business, and I'll mind mine.")

It was Father O'Flaherty

who guided the congregation to the construction of a new church which was dedicated in 1849, under the patronage of St. Thomas.

At that point the parish was given a resident pastor, Father O'Farrell, who was shortly succeeded by Father William Carroll, who immediately set about enlarging the church.

Nine years later, in 1850, Father Thomas Brady became pastor and he was determined to construct a school. It was later written of the man: "He was a young man, zealous, enthusiastic, a forcible and logical preacher, eager to see his people rise in the world." He himself taught both children and adults, in the daytime and in the evening.

The priest left in 1859 and eventually joined the Civil War's Mulligan's Brigade as a chaplain. On his way home after the war, he fell ill of exposure and died.

He was succeeded in Seneca Falls by Father James McGlew who stayed but a year and was replaced by Father Edward McGowan, during whose four-year tenure additions were made to the church building, a new altar and statues were installed, and the land for a cemetery was acquired.

On July 12, 1864, the church was rededicated to the patronage of St. Patrick.

Following Father McGowan, there were a number of pastors who only stayed a few months. They included Fathers Michael O'Brien, Hugh Mulholland, and Martin Kavanaugh.

In 1868, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Seneca Falls was again changed, this time into the hands of Bishop Bernard McQuaid and the newly created Diocese of Rochester.

The bishop visited Seneca Falls on Aug. 9 that year and drew a crowd large enough to swell the collection to \$132 from its average of \$15.

A year later Father Terrance Keenan was named pastor; however, the following year he died, thus gaining the sad distinction of being the first pastor to die in the village.

He was followed by Father Bernard McCool who constructed a rectory, dedicated a convent and built a school.

He was followed, on his death in 1879, by Father George Osborne during whose pastorate the parish staged a fund-raising fair which from the records of the time must surely have been among the most successful such events ever held in the diocese.

The parish even auctioned off an oil painting of the pastor which fetched nearly \$1,000 from John "Old Tammany" McKeon.

Father Osborne left the village in 1886 and was succeeded by Father William A. McDonald, who, in turn left in 1890, to be succeeded by Father O'Connor.

The priest also gained a reputation for imaginative fund raising but six years



St. Patrick's Church.

after assuming the pastorate, he fell ill, and thus the parish acquired its first assistant, Father Michael Dwyer. Father O'Connor died in 1910 and Father Dwyer succeeded him as pastor.

Father Dwyer was to spend nearly his entire priestly career at Seneca Falls. He had been appointed in his first year as a priest and he died in 1924 as pastor emeritus.

He was aided in his last years by Father Thomas Quirk who assumed the pastorate on his death.

Father Quirk immediately set about the construction of a new convent, to be followed by the construction of a new church, which was dedicated in 1931.

It fell to the priest to be pastor during the grim years of the Depression, during which, it is said, he even gave away his own food and clothing to the needy. The stresses of those years finally took their toll on the priest and he submitted his resignation in 1945 and Father John P. O'Beirne was named pastor.

Under Father O'Beirne's regime, the parish constructed an auditorium-cum-gymnasium, the Church was refurbished, and a suitable rectory was constructed.

Then, in 1960, Father O'Beirne turned the soil for the construction of a new school which was opened a year later.

Father O'Beirne retired the pastorate in 1969 at the age of 75. Father O'Beirne died in February of this year.

He was succeeded by Father Leo Lynch who served until his retirement for reasons of health in 1978. Father Lynch was followed by the present pastor, Father Michael Conboy.

GUILD TO MEET

The Cardinal Mooney Women's Guild will meet at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 27, at the school. The agenda includes a Memorial Mass, cocktails and dinner. Reservations by Oct. 23 are made by calling 621-5505; 225-7672.

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