

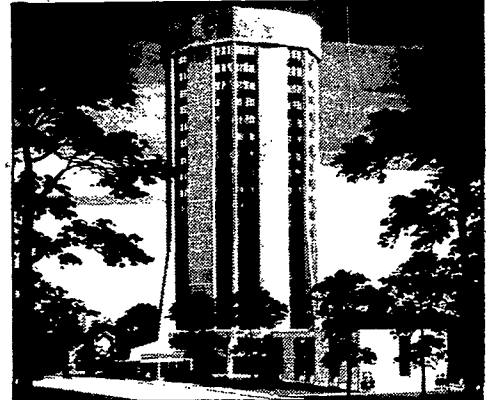
# Home's founding topped news in new century

By Father Robert F. McNamara  
Guest contributor

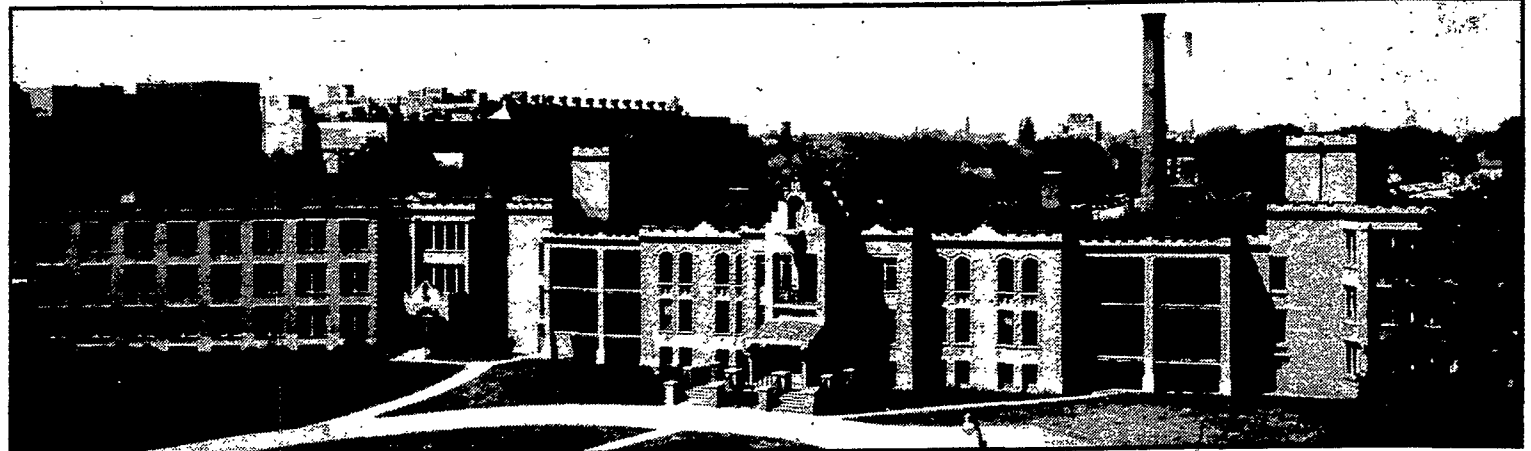
ROCHESTER — In 1899, the *Catholic Courier*, then-called the *Catholic Journal*, began its second decade. What news made the biggest headlines during those years?

In my opinion, the opening of St. Ann's Home for the Aged in 1906 was the most important event. This was Bishop McQuaid's last foundation, just preceding his death in 1909. But unlike our two seminaries and a number of now-defunct institutions that date from his years as bishop, St. Ann's has not only endured but still provides an invaluable service as well.

In a sense, McQuaid's decision to set up the home was a byproduct of his interest in orphans. That interest sprang from his personal experience. Orphaned himself at eight, he had been entrusted to the Sisters of Charity who conducted the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum in Manhattan.



The modern, nine-story Portland Avenue tower familiar today as St. Ann's Home was the dream of Monsignor Arthur M. Ratigan, a former director of Catholic Charities.



One of Rochester Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid's most enduring legacies has been St. Ann's Home, which he established at the Lake Avenue site shown above in 1906 as "a home for the aged that would be worthy of my declining years."

When he came to Rochester as its first bishop in 1868, McQuaid was gratified to see that there were two "Irish" orphanages and one German orphanage in his see city. Eventually, all three of these asylums were given new homes during the McQuaid years.

But a problem remained: what to do about orphans who had finished the eighth grade and were not yet old enough or skilled enough to make their way in the world? For the boys, the bishop set up Excelsior Farm, but this did not succeed. The orphans of St. Patrick's Girls' Orphanage were more fortunate. In 1872, the bishop approved of the plan of Sister Hieronymo O'Brien to open a resident trade school for the girls, where they could learn domestic science and handicraft skills that would prepare them for employment or home-making.

Sister Hieronymo was a woman of skill and imagination. As a Sister of Charity she had founded St. Mary's Hospital in 1857. Now, as a Sister of St. Joseph, she brought into being another enterprise that would serve its purpose well for several years. In 1888, this institution, called the "Home of Industry" moved into a new building at 876 East Main Street, next to Corpus Christi Church.

Now, the number of orphans and other young women received at the Home of Industry was fluctuating. As early as 1876, Mother Hieronymo began to welcome elderly women to fill available spaces in the home. After her death in 1898, the sisters in charge reappraised the future of the establishment. The need for an industrial school had diminished, but the need for a shelter for the elderly had increased. The sisters therefore phased out the industrial

program and, after making a few alterations in the building, devoted it solely to accommodating elderly women and others needing residential provision.

When Bishop McQuaid reached his 80th birthday in 1903, he suddenly began to run out of steam. A bout with pneumonia weakened him and necessitated convalescence in Georgia. Idled by his illness, he had long thoughts about aging and death. What saddened him most was the fact that so many older people had nobody to care for them. Out of these thoughts came his resolution to "build a home for the aged that would be worthy of my declining years."

Once back home, he set about planning for "St. Ann's Home for the Aged." He bought a property on Lake Avenue between the present Merrill Street and Eastman Avenue. The initial unit was a two-story crenelated structure designed by Rochester architect Willis J. Brockett (1854-1931). It was solidly but inexpensively constructed, largely of local stone. It had its own chapel and was built to house 180 people, 150 women and 30 men. Guests were welcomed on a non-sectarian basis.

As usual, McQuaid entrusted the project to the intercession of the souls in purgatory. It was financed by a series of mammoth fairs. Consigned, of course, to the Sisters of St. Joseph, St. Ann's Home was formally dedicated on January 6, 1906. One imaginative phase of the founder's intention that was not accomplished during his lifetime was the opening of another "small house for older married couples."

Under the able direction of Sister Eusebius Cunnean, a former associate of Mother Hieronymo, the new home quickly proved its usefulness. The now-empty Home of Industry, meanwhile, was turned by the sisters into St. Agnes Institute, a conservatory of music and art, which in 1939 became St. Agnes High School.

In 1909, the very year in which he succeeded McQuaid as head of the diocese, Bishop Thomas F. Hickey began to acquire acreage adjacent to St. Ann's and, on July 26, 1912, opened a new wing designed by architects Gordon and Madden to provide for 50 more guests. Then on February 20, 1931, the third bishop of Rochester, John F. O'Hern, blessed yet another wing, an infirmary with 30 beds. Although this wing was built during the Great Depression, its price of \$100,000 was covered by a legacy from Mrs. Anna Wilkins, an old friend of the home. (It was this enlarged hospice that I served briefly as chaplain in 1938. Sister Eusebius was still in charge. By then the home was nearly overcrowded with 250 guests.)

After World War II, when building materials again became available, the diocese decided to build a new St. Ann's Home. The then-director of Catholic Charities, Monsignor Arthur M. Ratigan (1911-1987), dreamed of a larger residence near a local hospital. As a result, 32 acres were purchased at 1500 Portland Avenue in Irondequoit, opposite the new Rochester General Hospital. There rose a

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