

Church offers taste of the past

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

MUMFORD — Visitors to the Genesee Country Museum can see a bit of Rochester diocesan history.

St. Feehan's Church, which served Catholics in the Chili area for more than a century, still stands as part of the museum's many features. The old edifice is still used to celebrate Masses each year.

The building was constructed by Irish immigrants, who settled in Chili in the mid 1800s, to end weekly trips into Rochester for Sunday Mass. At first, they arranged for a priest to travel to Chili by train to celebrate Mass at homes.

Patrick Golden, an Irish native, was among the people who opened their homes for Mass. His 13 children included Father Walter Golden, who was born aboard a ship while his family crossed the Atlantic Ocean.

As their numbers continued to grow — and at the urging of the priests who came to celebrate Mass — the people decided to build a church. Construction began in 1854 after Patrick Golden donated land near the railroad that the priests used to reach Chili. Because of the land's dampness, the edifice became known as the "swamp church." The building was later moved to higher ground on Chestnut Ridge.

The church was officially named St. Feehan's — a saint to whom Golden had devotion because it was his father's name. Golden also claimed that it was the name of his parish in



Stuart Bolger, director of the Genesee Country Museum in Mumford, opens St. Feehan's windows before Mass May 17.

Ireland.

St. Feehan's — or St. Fechan's, as it was sometimes called — continued for a century as a mission parish.

According to the parish's centennial history, it "was separated from (St. Vincent de Paul Parish in)Churchville, and given the task of standing on its own legs" in 1954. The history notes that Father Donald Murphy, associate pastor at St. Vincent de Paul's, was named pastor.

Father Murphy, however, was also charged with laying the groundwork for a new parish, St. Pius X, which was formed in 1955 on Chili Avenue.

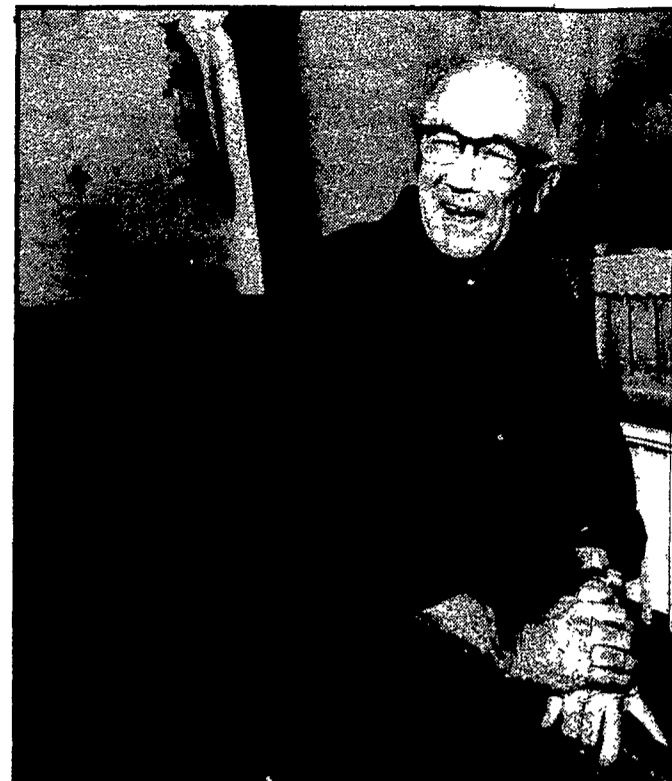
As St. Pius X Parish grew and a parish church was completed, St. Feehan's

Church was no longer needed for liturgies. After the pews were removed, the church building was used for a time to house some classes of the new parish's school.

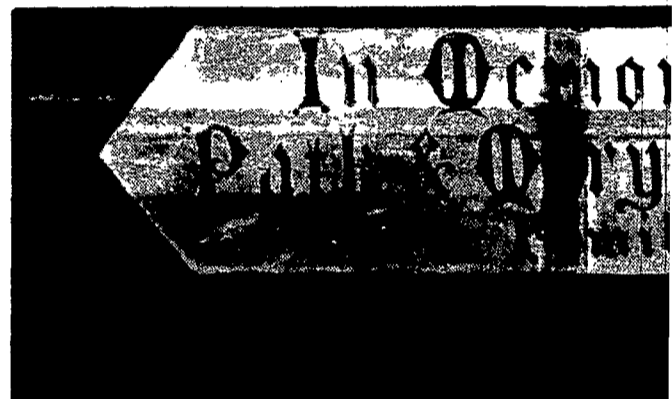
The stained-glass windows installed in the early 1900s were taken out and replaced with clear windows, Father Murphy recalled, "so the children could see better."

The priest saved the stained-glass windows, which will be reinstalled in the museum church this summer. One of the windows — in memory of the Golden family — is already on display at the church.

By the late 1960s, St. Feehan's was no longer being used for classes,



(Above) Father Donald Murphy was named pastor of St. Feehan's each year on the Sunday following Mother's Day — including this one in which stained-glass windows — including this one in memory of the Golden family — were being reinstalled this summer.



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