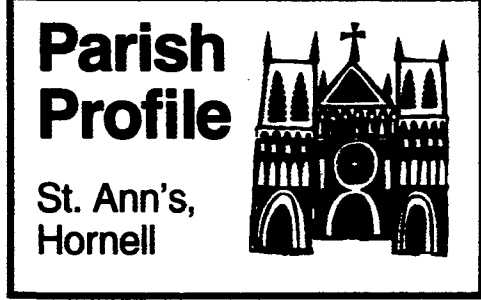


# Roots run deep at 145-year-old Hornell parish



By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

**HORNELL** — Ties to St. Ann's Parish are as big as the church building itself.

Located downtown at the corner of Erie Avenue and Elm Street in this Steuben County city, St. Ann's is a church where townspeople and truck drivers traditionally make the sign of the cross as they pass by.

And a comment by Father Elmer J. Schmidt, pastor of St. Ann's for the past 11 years, reveals that the St. Ann's experience is never forgotten.

"This is the only town I know where, in an obituary, they put that someone was a graduate of Hornell High School and St. Ann's School," remarked Father Schmidt.

"People have been very supportive down through the years," said Dolores Andrus, a St. Ann's eucharistic minister.

Andrus is certainly a qualified resource on the parish's history. She has been a St. Ann's parishioner for all of her 73 years, and her family ties have covered several generations: Andrus' grandmother, born in 1872, was baptized at St. Ann's; and a great-grandson of hers was just baptized at the church four years ago.

St. Ann's is one of the oldest parishes in the Southern Tier. The first church was built on Cass Street in 1849 in what was then known as Hornellsville. A new church building was erected for the quickly growing community only 20 years later, and St. Ann's was dedicated at its present location on April 11, 1869.

Its large structure has a seating capacity of 1,100. Also immediately no-

ticeable — for those who turn their eyes to the heavens — are the church ceiling's beautiful oil paintings.

Much of the fledgling St. Ann's growth can be attributed to the tireless work of Father James M. Early, who served as pastor from 1879 until his death in 1890. Father Early was responsible for enlarging the church, building the parish convent and beginning construction of the current St. Ann's School. He was also the founder of St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell.

Originally a part of the Buffalo diocese, St. Ann's Church became a member of the Rochester diocese in 1897. To accommodate the needs of Hornell's growing Catholic community, a second Catholic church — St. Ignatius Loyola — was added in 1931.

However, the thriving railroad industry which contributed to such rapid expansion has since dwindled dramatically.

"We don't have the kids anymore. They go away to college and get jobs up in Rochester," Father Schmidt acknowledged.

Yet Father Schmidt added that St. Ann's still numbers a sizable 1,320 families — many of whom have longstanding ties to the parish.

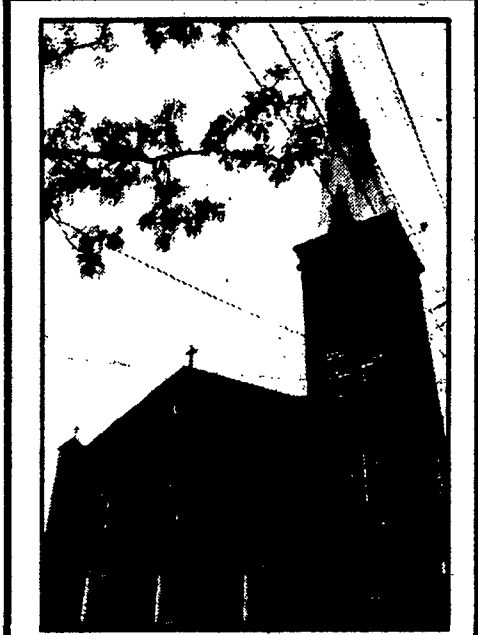
One such parishioner is Michael Colomaio, 30, who serves as parish-council



S. John Willkin/Staff photographer  
**Dolores Andrus (right) stands in the doorway of St. Ann's School with current principal Sister Dolores Ann Stein, RSM. Andrus, a lifelong member of St. Ann's, is also a graduate of the school.**

president and has also taught at St. Ann's School for the past six years.

According to Colomaio, Steuben County's rural area surrounding Hornell — along with the 90-minute drive from Rochester — render St. Ann's as a sometimes separate entity in the diocese.



## Vital Statistics

**Name:** St. Ann's Parish.  
**Location:** 31 Erie Ave., Hornell.  
**Number of families:** 1,320.  
**Significant dates:** established in 1849; current church dedicated in 1869; current school dedicated in 1890.

"Hornell is kind of isolated. It's so far away from Rochester, Elmira and Corning — we're in a little corner," said Colomaio. "We've kind of developed our own attitude about life. You come down Route 390 and the attitude changes a little bit. It's a little slower, maybe."

However, in his role with the parish council, Colomaio knows well that Hornell residents' attitudes are not necessarily universal. Controversy ensued this past winter when Father Schmidt decided to allow altar girls to serve at St. Ann's — prior to Pope John Paul II's recent approval of female altar servers.

"It's kind of funny. St. Ann's is very traditional for the most part, but other people will follow their faith no matter what changes take place," Colomaio said.

An accepting attitude ultimately prevailed in the altar-girl situation, he added. "The majority of the parishioners said, 'I'm here to pray, so who cares?'"

Another example of change emerged in the late 1960s, when St. Ann's became one of the first diocesan churches to incorporate a lay parish council.

"The church has always been turning and changing, and this is the part that people forget," said Father Schmidt.

Yet one constant has remained at St. Ann's through any historical changes, he added.

"People here are just full of faith; that's it," the pastor stated.

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