



Catholic Courier

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TOASTING IRISHWOMEN!



SISTER ST. MARK MCM
(1899-1982)

ILLUSTRATION BY
MARY KAY WILLIAMS

KATHERINE C. CONWAY
(1852-1927)

SISTER HIERONYMO O'BRIEN, SSJ
(1819-98)

Erin's daughters of yesteryear have left a deep, lasting mark on diocese

Some 12 percent of metropolitan Rochesterians, we are told, claim Irish roots. Have local Irish made a proportionate contribution to Rochester's history?

An Irish wit would respond with another question: "Where would the city be, at all, at all, without its Irishmen — and its Irishwomen?"

A boast, of course, but not a vain one. I could prove it by dropping a few names of vicinity Irishmen who in bygone years have made their mark.

But let's skip the men for a change and focus on the Irishwomen. If most of them have starred as homemakers, a good many have carved out significant public careers. I toast a few of them today. Let other regional historians follow up this largely neglected subject.

Rochester had its Irish aspects from the beginning. When Nathaniel Rochester laid out the town in 1812, one of his co-founders was Maj. Charles Carroll of Belle Vue, a Marylander of Irish ancestry. Even before 1812 there were Hibernian emigrants in the neighborhood. Others continued to arrive, from all four of Ireland's provinces — Protestants as well as Catholics. The Catholics erected their first parish church, St. Patrick's, at North Plymouth and Platt, in 1823.

Trickle became flood in the mid-1840s. Now the immi-

grants were fleeing their homeland's famine and plague. Impoverished, uprooted, and socially disadvantaged because of harsh British misrule, they were frowned upon by some Anglo-Saxon Rochesterians as incapable of assimilating into "the American Way." Local discrimination diminished, however, after the Civil War. The wartime heroism of such Irish soldiers as Col. Patrick H. O'Rourke and Gen. John McMahon could not be overlooked.

Outnumbered eventually by the city's German and Italian minorities, the Rochester Irish remained a basically lower-to-middle income group until World War II. But all along the line some of them had begun to rise into roles of public consequence.

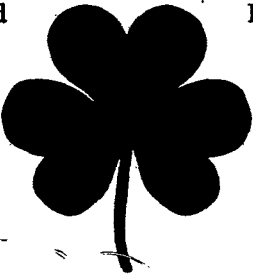
Women take naturally to works of "hands-on" philanthropy. One well-recognized Rochester philanthropist was Sister Hieronymo O'Brien (1819-98). This Washington-born Daughter of Charity founded St. Mary's Hospital, the city's first hospital, in 1857, and in later life continued to serve the disadvantaged.

Then the Charles Settlement House opened its doors in 1917. The agency was the brainchild of its first director, Harriet L. Barry (d. 1954), granddaughter of Patrick Barry, the

Continued on page 14

'Where would the city be, at all, at all, without its Irishmen — and its Irishwomen?'

STORY BY
FR. ROBERT F. MCNAMARA
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR



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