

PARISH  
FEATURE*Parish has sprouted along with its community***Parish Profile**St. Mary  
Our Mother,  
HorseheadsBy Mike Latona  
Staff writer

**HORSEHEADS** — Traveling south on Route 14 from Watkins Glen is one of the most peaceful experiences imaginable. The drive features a sprinkling of small villages, terrific scenery and vehicles traveling under the speed limit.

Yet that tranquility only lasts about 15 miles, until signs for Route 17 in the town of Horseheads begin to appear. Suddenly, if your window is rolled down, the buzz of vehicles hurtling through this busy interchange is waging a decibel-count battle with your car stereo.

Sitting right at the edge of this tremendous contrast is the Church of St. Mary Our Mother. In many ways, the parish itself has reflected a shift from simpler times to the growth of a booming community.

Mary Smith has belonged to the parish since 1937, when St. Mary Our Mother — then known as St. Mary's — was a small church in the center of the largely rural village of Horseheads.

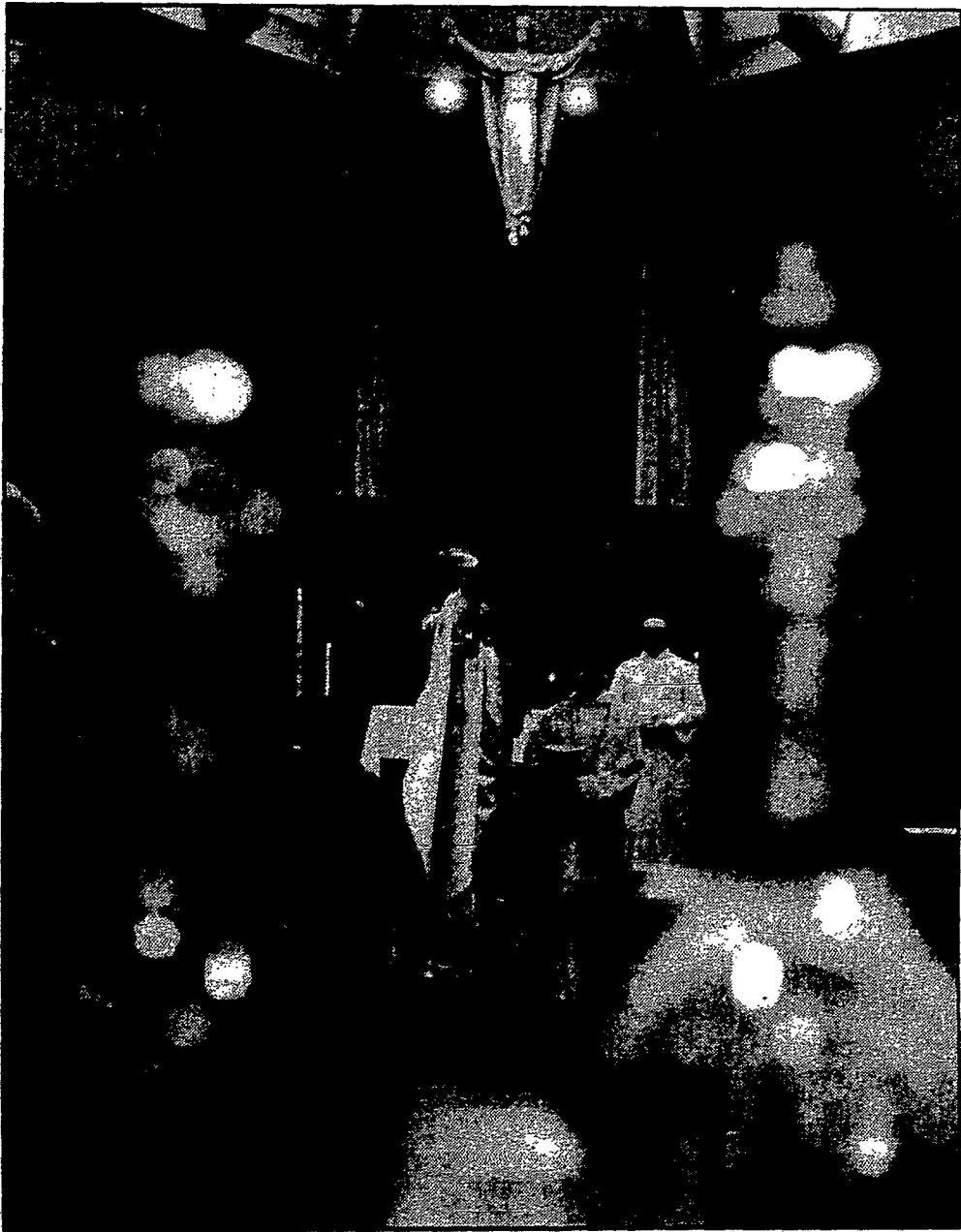
"It just had the intimacy of being family. You never rushed off after Mass," Smith recalled.

Yet the entire Horseheads community experienced a suddenly quickened pace as various industries moved into the area. In fact, noted Father Thomas W. Burr, pastor, Horseheads was one of the fastest-growing towns in New York state just after World War II.

Big changes at St. Mary's were abundant near the time of the parish's centennial observance in 1965. St. Mary's School had been opened in 1959 at its current location, 811 Westlake Street, and the eight-acre complex had continued to grow. A chapel in the school was dedicated in 1964, and it was to serve as the parish church for the next 15 years. A new rectory/administration building opened in 1965.

Also that year, Father Bartholomew J. O'Brien added "Our Mother" to the parish and school title during his first year as pastor. He remained in that role until his retirement in 1984, and continues to reside in Horseheads today as a St. Mary Our Mother parishioner.

The long-awaited new church was ded-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

**Father Robert C. MacNamara (center), priest in residence, blesses the congregation assembled at St. Mary Our Mother Church in Horseheads during a recent Saturday evening Mass.**

icated Nov. 10, 1979. This attractive circular structure had been made possible by a successful fund drive, noted Roger Joy, who served on the building campaign committee.

When the drive was launched on an autumn Sunday in 1977, Joy had announced at Mass that day for parishioners to "stay home today and have your wallets ready to be emptied — we'll be there to help you later this afternoon."

"We did quite good, actually. We wound up with over \$600,000 pledged, and recovered over 90 percent of it," recalled Joy, a parishioner since 1968.

Today, according to Father Burr, the parish serves approximately 1,650 families. "We have young families and a number of children," said Father Burr, who is nearing the end of his first year

as pastor. "We're a very young parish and growing."

The same could be said for St. Mary Our Mother School. Deacon Daniel R. Hurley, who also serves as principal of the pre-kindergarten-through-sixth grade school, said enrollment has risen each of the past five years to its current figure of 240.

"The parish has always had education as one of its major missions, and that's reflected in the strong school and religious-education programs," said Deacon Hurley. He added that more than 500 children are enrolled in religious education.

Large numbers of people will also be populating the St. Mary Our Mother grounds the weekend of June 2-3, when the annual parish festival takes place. It

**SNAPSHOTS**Church of St. Mary Our Mother,  
816 W. Broad St., Horseheads

Phone: 607/739-3817

Established: 1865

Current church built: 1979

**Ministerial staff:**

Pastor: Father Thomas W. Burr

Parochial Vicar:

Father Scott M. Kubinski

In Residence:

Father Robert C. MacNamara

Deacon/School Principal:

Daniel R. Hurley

Religious-Education Coordinator:

Gail Murray

Religious-Education

Administrator: Flo Fender

Director of Music: Cathy Fargo

Parish Secretary: Joyce Pirozzolo

Parish Council: Linda Stundtner,  
Chairwoman

begins at 5 p.m. Friday and noon Saturday.

"The festival draws people from a large geographic area, and we're also fortunate that the location is obvious to people driving by," Joy said.

"It's a big one. It's a family-oriented festival," added Father Burr, referring to attractions such as a petting zoo for children.

As far as the parish's future goes, much will be dictated by diocesan Synod recommendations, acknowledged Father Burr.

"One of the things I'm trying to get off the ground is small Christian communities," the pastor said.

Father Burr is also increasing parish council from nine to 15 members in an effort to generate new ideas. Based on his perception of his people, that goal should be easily attained.

"Probably this is one of the most active parishes I've been in," he said.

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