

## St. Patrick Church, Mount Morris, New York

A Historical Overview compiled by Theresa Gall and Dianne Cicero

The village of Mount Morris had its beginning in the spring of 1792, when Robert Morris of Revolutionary War fame purchased the site on which the village now stands. The history of St. Patrick's Parish begins with the arrival of Irish-Catholic immigrants at the time of the construction of the Genesee Valley Canal (1838).

The first Catholics had no church building or resident pastor in Mount Morris but a succession of priests from Buffalo, Rochester, Portage, and Dansville traveled here to preside at Mass in private homes. In a short time, a small church was erected in Tuscarora (5 miles south, and then known as Brushville), where many of the Irish working on the canal had settled. By 1842, canal construction had ended, and families moved away, so services at the church were discontinued. Families who moved back to Mount Morris resumed meeting for Mass in private homes.

Under Rev. Father Maguire, the first church was built in 1850 on the site once occupied by the parsonage facing Chapel Street. It was a very small building and was enlarged several times. The Rev. James Ryan, who came in 1857, was the first resident priest in Mt. Morris. He remained for just one year due to poor health. He was succeeded by the Rev. Bernard McCool (January 1858) and his assistants, the Rev. John Vahey (June 14, 1858) and (Rev. R. Stack (July 15, 1858). In less than a year (October 10, 1858) Rev. Richard Story came to St. Patrick's where he remained for four years.

On October 30, 1862 a new pastor was assigned. Rev. Daniel Moore, who had previously ministered to the Mt. Morris community while in Portage, became pastor. Fr. Moore remained until March 1866 when the Rev. Edward McGowan was appointed his successor. He remained until 1869 when the Rev. David O'Brien succeeded him. Fr. O'Brien purchased the house and lot on the corner of Chapel and Stanley Streets, owned by James Conkey, adjoining the lot on which the church stood (53 Chapel Street). The old church was moved back and made into a barn, the same barn that remained standing behind the present rectory until Father Rafferty's time (1928). The house which stood on the corner was moved and placed on the site of the old church and enlarged for a rectory. The new church was then built on the

corner lot. It is a brick structure of Gothic architecture, 40x100 feet; the tower is 138 feet high, surmounted by a gilded cross 6 feet high. The cornerstone of the church was laid in the fall of 1869 and the church was dedicated on Thursday, December 1873, by Rt. Rev. Bernard J. McQuaid, First Bishop of Rochester.

On March 8, 1875, Fr. O'Brien was succeeded by the Rev. M. M. Meagher, who remained in charge a little over a year. His successor was the Rev. John J. Donnelly (May 5, 1875) who was appointed pastor of churches at Mt. Morris, Geneseo and Nunda and continued in charge until the summer of 1882.

Fr. Donnelly was succeeded by Rev. Charles Flaherty (Sept 2, 1882), during whose time the church was frescoed, new pews and two side altars were installed and a cement sidewalk was laid in front of the church. On April 24 1885, he purchased eighteen acres of land on Murray Street for a parish cemetery. The location of the cemetery, on a prominence overlooking the village and miles of picturesque Genesee Valley at the time was considered a suitable final resting place for the dear departed of the parish. The cemetery was solemnly dedicated on September 5, 1886.

Rev. James Day was appointed pastor on May 1, 1893. St. Patrick's had greatly increased in membership. Due to the building of the Winters and Prophet Canning Company (later Bird's Eye-Snyder), many Italian immigrants had come to this little village along the Genesee. From July 1898 to November 1900, the Rev. E. A. Rawlinson was Fr. Day's assistant.

100+ years ago, the trustees of the church were the Bishop of the Diocese, his Vicar- General, the pastor and two laymen, who were members of the parish. The lay trustees were N.E. DeLany and John McMahan. The following gentlemen served as trustees in the early years of the parish for periods of 1 to 23 years: Cornelius O'Leary (father of Timothy C. O'Leary of (Damonville), Richard Burke, James Hart, Daniel Riordon, Dennis Evans, Timothy Hennessy, M.J. Noonan, and Peter Schirmer.

When Fr. Day was appointed pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Rochester, the Rev Dr. A.E. Breen came to Mt. Morris on March 14, 1909 and rev. Andrew T. Dissett became his assistant and took charge of the church at Groveland Station.

Dr. Breen's days in Mt. Morris will long be remembered as days of rapid and daring expansion. He made plans for the building of St. Patrick's School. Land on Stanley Street as well as a house on the corner of Stanley and Murray Streets were purchased from Frank Wakeman. Permission for the building of the school was given if the parish debt was not to increase beyond \$21,500 for school, convent and equipment. Only the extraordinary executive ability of Dr. Breen, and the fact that the men prominent in the building of the school (architects Gordon and Madden) exacted little or no profit, made it possible to keep within the prescribed sum.

The school was made from blue stone secured from the quarries of nearby Portageville and is the only building of its kind in Western New York. It is a three story building with a large auditorium and basketball court. The building housed eight grades and the Sisters of St. Joseph were assigned to teach. A town team and a St. Patrick's team used the court.

On July 16, 1910 the cornerstone of the school was laid and on

September 3, 1911, Bishop Thomas Hickey solemnly dedicated the school building. Among the officiating clergy were Rev. A.A Hughes of Geneseo, Rev Walter McCarthy of Sonyea, Rev. Dr. John F Goggin of Rochester and Rev. Joseph Gefell of Wayland.

The house on the corner of Murray and Stanley Streets became the convent. The ladies of the parish generously furnished and prepared it for the Sisters of St. Joseph, who staffed the school. On September 3, 1911, the convent was also blessed by Bishop Hickey.

The five pioneer Sisters who came to St. Patrick's School were Sisters Sebastian, Alcantara, Cypria, Imelda and Aurelia. The registration in those years reached 400 pupils. Due to financial difficulties and also the division of the parish in 1914, it became necessary to charge a small tuition to those who were not members of St. Patrick's Parish in order to meet the expenses of the school. As result, school enrollment dropped considerably.

Due to the large increase of the Italian population in the village, work was commenced during November 1912 on the new national Italian Roman Catholic Church in Mt. Morris. A small tract of land was purchased off the rear portion of the

Bacon property facing Clinton Street on which the new edifice was erected. Gordon and Madden of Rochester, the architects who drew the plans for St. Patrick's School, drew the plans for the church. Rev. S Colanna, an Italian priest, had personal charge of the work. The Assumption church was completed in 1914. At the time of the erection of the new church there were 269 Italian families in the town with a population of about 1,300 or nearly half as large as the entire Mt. Morris population.

The Rev. Dr. Breen served as pastor of St. Patrick's from 1909 to 1919. A former professor at St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester and St. Francis Seminary in Wisconsin, he died September 10, 1938, at the age of 75.

On January 26, 1919, Fr. Charles Muckle took over the pastorate. He remained until 1928 when William Rafferty came to Mt. Morris. To Father Rafferty much credit must be given for the outstanding beauty of St. Patrick's church. Under his direction, the church was redecorated, electrical fixtures and new pews installed. Much of the carpenter work in the church, rectory and school was a result of his personal effort and skill. Fr. Rafferty also improved and enlarged the rectory, added a large side sun porch to the convent and had the convent shingled and painted. The old barn, that had many years before been the parish church, was torn down. In the school, the basement was equipped for parish dinners and social affairs.

On August 28, 1944, Fr. Rafferty died after a brief time of inactivity and Rev. John Guy was appointed pastor on September 22, 1944. Rev. Lawrence W. Gannon came to St. Patrick's from St. Gabriel's Church in Hammondsport and the Mission Church of St. Patrick in Prattsburg. Within a short time several spiritual organizations were organized: the Rosary Society, the Holy Name Society, the young Peoples' Sodality and the Nocturnal adoration Society.

Fr. Gannon replaced the frosted windows in the school, and a new ceiling and newly painted walls created a pleasant atmosphere for the children who returned to school in September 1945.

Fr. Gannon started the First Friday Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament by the women of the parish. A full kindergarten class was started with 30 pupils. The chapel in the convent was enlarged and the entire convent was redecorated. In 1947 Fr. Gannon was responsible for many improvements. Through his interest and work in cleaning up the cemetery, the leveling of sunken graves, the restoring of

dilapidated tombstones and markers, mowing the grass, etc., he made the cemetery a beautiful final resting place for the beloved of the parish.

St. Patrick's Parish has been blessed with a few priestly and religious vocations. Rev. Alfred J. Horr, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Horr, was ordained by Bishop James E. Kearney of Rochester on May 18, 1940. Bishop William Larkin, S.T.D., son of Mrs. William T. Larkin, was ordained in Syracuse by Bishop Walter A. Foery on May 15, 1947, for the Miami, Florida Diocese. Robert J. Keating, son of Mr. and Mrs. William J Keating, also studied for the priesthood but died before being ordained.

The girls called to religious vocations were:

Sister M. Dafrosa, S.S. J. (Joanna Cannon) reception April 3, 1918

Sister M. Bernice, S.S.J. (Mary Agnes Baily) reception April 3, 1924

Sister M. Euphemia, S.S.J. (Barbara Hughes) reception September 5, 1934

Sister Josephine Ignatia, S.S.J. (Frances Macaluso) reception Oct. 15, 1943

Sister M. Gonzaga, S.S.J. (Annette Truby) reception July 2, 1953

Rev. Thomas Brennan was appointed pastor on September 28, 1948. He came from St. Andrew's Preparatory Seminary in Rochester, where he had been a professor for nineteen years. After four years, on February 10, 1953, Rev. Thomas Brennan was transferred to St. Mary's Church, Corning. Rev. Robert Fennessy was appointed pastor of St. Patrick's for two years and four months. During this time the general income of the dwindled considerably, due to a sudden decrease of employment in the village. Many industries moved from this community and there followed a period of limited employment with a resultant loss of revenue to the working class people in this parish. To help finance some of his parochial improvements projects, Fr. Fennessy was compelled to make a loan of \$5,000 from St. Patrick's Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund.

The village of Mt. Morris enjoyed "boom days" during the construction of the huge storage dam in the Genesee River, a federal project in March 1948 and officially dedicated on June 26, 1952. The village had a slogan most appropriate to those prosperous days: "The best Town by a Dam Site." The following years saw

the transfer of the large Bird's Eye Frozen Food Plant and the Hickok Belt Company to other communities and decreased employment at the Hickey- Freeman Clothing Company branch. These economic changes affected St. Patrick's Parish, membership in the parish decreased, families moved to other communities, young couples married and moved on to cities to secure their future, and Sunday contributions dropped proportionately.

Rev. John F. Woloch, pastor for eight years of St. Michael's church in Livonia Center and its mission, St. Mary's Church in Honeoye, succeeded Fr. Fennessy on June 28, 1955.

During his pastorate, Fr. Woloch made many improvements in the various parish buildings. In July 1956, a new set of Stromberg-Carlson Carillon Bells was installed in the church, a gift of Mrs. Theresa Lariton in memory of her husband Michael. The bells were installed by Rochester Radio Supply Company.

Due to an unexpected large enrollment in St. Patrick's School in the fall of 1957 and some overcrowded individual classrooms, a new classroom was prepared on the first floor during the summer months. The room was re-plastered and painted; the floors were sanded and varnished; venetian blinds and fluorescent lighting fixtures were installed and the fourth grade was ready for the children in September of 1957. Mrs. Margaret Farruggia of Wadsworth was the new lay teacher; she was the third lay teacher in the school. The other lay teacher was Mrs. Dolores Scura, kindergarten teacher who replaced Mrs. Olive Downey in September 1957.

In 1961, Fr. Dominic Grasso succeeded Fr. Woloch as pastor of St. Patrick's. It was also the time that the Italian national parish, The Assumption, was consolidated with St. Patrick's Parish. Even today there is a strong identification among the older population with the church of the Assumption. Fr. Grasso celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his ordination on May 21, 1982. Beautiful stained glass windows grace the side entrances to the church and are a memorial to the beloved pastor.

There are sixteen memorial stained glass windows and two front doors with a beautiful stained glass window over them, taken from a painting of Jesus as a young boy. On both sides of the church there are half windows (near the altar) with slices of bread and wine which become the body and blood of Christ at Mass. Behind the

altar, in the sanctuary, are panels of the Alpha and Omega, standing for God- the beginning and end of all things. There is a three dimensional insert on the altar of the Last Supper taken from the painting by Leonardo daVinci. The beauty of the memorial Stations of the Cross, representing the journey of Jesus from Pilate's Hall to his crucifixion, can be seen in detail and artistic work.

Over the years, many improvements to the exterior and interior of the church have been made. Much of the work was done by volunteer workers of the parish and also local businessmen. A substantial undertaking in 1998 was the repair of the church steeple. During Fr. Grasso's pastorate the Rectory on Chapel Street was demolished and the Russell house on Chapel Street, next to the church, was purchased for use as the Rectory.

Fr. Robert Kanka (1972-1974) followed Fr. Grasso's years of service and was pastor at the time St. Patrick's school closed. Given the major expense of running a school, the parish population could no longer provide the needed financial support.

Fr. John Whalen (1974-1982) followed Fr. Kanka with Fr. Grasso in residence. Fr. Whalen was instrumental in the expansion of the center section of the cemetery, the "Mother of Sorrows" section, and had a shrine erected. Fr. Norbert Nolan served as pastor from 1982-1991 and during that time St. Patrick's School was sold and since the fall of 1998, housed a Head Start Program on the ground floor.

Since the establishment of St. Patrick's Church the parish has had approximately twenty Assistant Pastors. Rev. Charles Muckle was an assistant from May 19, 1918 – January 26 1919 when he was appointed pastor.

In 1991 Fr. Daniel J Condon became the twenty –third pastor of St. Patrick's Church. In addition to his pastorate at St. Patrick's, Fr. Condon assumed the spiritual leadership for Holy Angels parish of Nunda in 1994. The parish communities of these two neighboring towns learned to work in Christian harmony under the guidance of Fr. Condon. During Fr. Condon's tenure, he expanded the faith formation and religious education programs, youth ministry and family events; hired a Director of Religious Education; formed committees to address pastoral issues, finances, liturgy and buildings and grounds an increased substantially the members of volunteers active in the church.

In the summer of 1997, the Western Livingston Planning Group (Holy Angels in Nunda, St. Lucy in Retsof, St. Mary in Geneseo, St. Patrick in Mount Morris, St. Thomas Aquinas in Leicester, SUNY Geneseo's Newman Community and the Livingston County Jail, Groveland and Livingston Correctional Facilities) was formed to begin the planning process undertaken by the Diocese of Rochester for the new millennium.

Over the past decade this group has labored to become a unified entity and to build a strong supporting faith community (transitioning in 2005 and officially in 2006 under the name of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish Community).

1998 - 2005 Rev. Michael Brown – during his term a substantial undertaking was made to repair the church steeple. Father Brown also took responsibility for Holy Angels as the Western Livingston Planning Group continued its work.

2005 - 2007 Reverend Father Patrick Connor, Pastor of St. Patrick and the newly formed St. Luke the Evangelist Parish Community in 2006 (Holy Angels, St. Lucy, St. Mary, St. Patrick and St. Thomas Aquinas); Rev. Joseph Marcoux, Parochial Vicar

2007 - 2009 Reverend Father William Kamau, Pastor; Rev. Edward Dillon as Resident Priest

2009 – June 30, 2016 Pastoral Administrator Michael Sauter; Rev. Edward Dillon and Rev. Bernard Dan as Resident Priests

July 1, 2016 - 2019 Parochial Administrator Reverend Father Bernard Dan with Rev. Edward Dillon as Resident Priest (until Fr. Dillon's retirement June 30, 2019); Rev. Jeffrey Tunncliff became Parochial Vicar in July 2019