

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN PERINTON

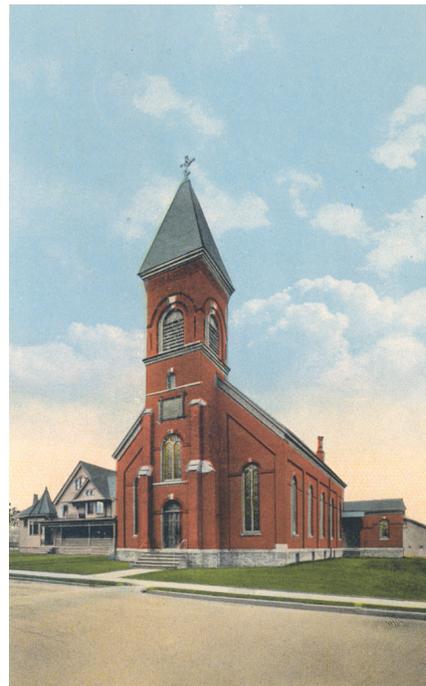
It was 1849 when Father Michael Guilbride, an upstate missionary, celebrated the first Roman Catholic mass in Fairport. Smith Brennan, an immigrant Irish blacksmith who lived along the towpath on what would become State Street, opened his home for the services. Brennan was one of the many Irish Catholics who had immigrated to the United States in the 1840's to escape the first of the potato famines. Between 1852 and 1856, mass was celebrated in various homes by Father John Tuohy, who came in from Palmyra to serve this new mission of St. Anne's of Palmyra.

The fledgling parish moved into its first home in 1856. Father William Casey oversaw the building of a 30'x35' frame building on High Street. The building, enlarged in 1866, still stands and has been used over the years as a feed store and a grocery store. When masses were first held there, the building served as a produce market during the week. Bishop Bernard McQuaid held the first confirmation on June 20, 1864. The first baptism, that of Mary White, was held on August 26, 1866, and the first wedding, that of Martin O'Neal and Anna Quirk, was celebrated on September 9, 1866.

By 1866, the new congregation had doubled in size and under Father Lewis Miller, Assumption of Our Lady Church became a self-sustaining parish. A house was purchased as a rectory and moved east of the present church. In 1872, growth led to the purchase of three lots on East Avenue for \$1500, where, within ten years, a new church would be built.

Father John Codyre, born and educated in Galway County, Ireland, came to Fairport in 1878, and in the subsequent fifty years witnessed great change and growth. In 1883, he presided over the dedication of a \$15,000 brick church building on East Avenue. During the period of his pastorate, Fairport developed as an industrial center, home to the DeLand Chemical Company and the Sanitary Can Company, among others, and the population of Perinton more than doubled from under 4,000 people to over 9,000.

Father Codyre was a strict priest, but one who was both respected and loved. He cared for families, literally from the cradle to the grave, as he baptized them, married them, and buried them. Fairport became his home, even after retirement and a trip to Ireland. Since he was so much a part of so many lives for so long, there are numerous anecdotes that feature his wit and personality. Many of Assumption's parishioners came by the Rochester, Syracuse, and Eastern Trolley to the village of Fairport and would often sneak out of Mass early in order to catch the trolley home. "Father Codyre would whip around from the altar and scream at them, 'Come back here, you Egyptians.'" There was a man who used to go through the church refuse checking the wine bottles, raising them and peeking in to see if anything was left. "Around the fifth or sixth bottle, with it still in the air and him looking up at it - he hears, much to his embarrassment, a voice from behind coming from Father Codyre saying, 'Sorry, but them's all dead soldiers.'" Dr. Willis Trescott, who owned the Trescott Company on Railroad and North Main Street, and Father Codyre were friends, even though Trescott never attended church. One evening, during his walk, Father Codyre passed Dr. Trescott, who was watching his workers remodel the front of his building. He stopped and looked and said to Dr. Trescott, "Whatcha doin'?" Trescott, puffing on his cigar and not turning around said, "I'm building me a new



Church of the Assumption, East Ave.

church.” Father Codyre took a couple of steps, stopped, turned around and said in his Irish brogue, “It’s not churches we need, it’s Christians!”

Following Father Codyre, two priests served Fairport’s Assumption parish for the next fifty years, from 1925-1975. These years were ones of challenge, growth, and change. Father James Wood’s pastorate weathered the Depression, World War II, and the beginning of suburban growth. A new rectory was built, the church was remodeled and redecorated twice, and a new heating system and a new pipe organ were installed. Under Father Leonard Kelly, the church implemented the changes in form and practice called for by the Vatican II council, which included the celebration of the Mass in English. The church building itself underwent a \$100,000 renovation which included new exits, a new basement hall, and an expanded parking lot. Father Kelly’s brainchild, the Assumption School for Religious Training, said to be unique in the nation, opened in September, 1956. Under a released-time program, all Catholic children received religious instruction for one hour each week. The school and convent were located on Baumer Place in Fairport village and were originally staffed by lay volunteers and four Sister-teachers: Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart from Baltimore.

Perinton and Assumption parish continued to grow through the 1970's and into the 1980's, serving more than 2,000 families. The parish clearly needed more space, and Father Joseph Beatini began an appeal for a building fund and began planning for a new church building. In 1983, the old church, which had stood for 100 years, was demolished and replaced with a modern and much larger facility. Father John Norris presided over the building and the subsequent move. Father Edward Palumbos, the current pastor of Assumption Church, has seen the completion of a new parish life center, the creation of new offices, and the relocation of the rectory to High Street, near the original church building.

Between 1960 and 1973, two other Roman Catholic parishes were established in Perinton, reflecting the tremendous growth, not only of the town itself, but also its faith community. St. John of Rochester was established in 1961 and the Church of the Resurrection in 1973.

Worshippers had been attending mass at the mission Chapel of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the corner of Pittsford-Victor and Thornell Roads in Bushnell’s Basin since 1948. By 1961 there were enough members to form an independent parish, and in 1962, Bishop James Kearney formally established the parish of St. John of Rochester, named after St. John Fisher, who was Bishop of Rochester, England, during the reign of King Henry VIII. In 1963, a combined church and school building was built on the corner of Wickford Way and Pittsford-Palmyra Road and was opened by Father John LeVeque, its first pastor, in September of that year. Over the next 20 years, St. John of Rochester continued to grow and expand, eventually constructing a new church building which was dedicated in 1983. St. John’s school served students until its closing in 2008 when the Rochester diocese shuttered 13 suburban parish schools.

The Church of the Resurrection was originally founded at the request of Bishop Joseph Hogan of Rochester in 1973. The first daily masses were celebrated by Father Robert Kreckel in the basement of the rectory on Hamilton Road and the first Sunday masses were held in the building next to Martha Brown School (now a Montessori School). The congregation moved into its current contemporary building on Mason Road in 1976. During the subsequent twenty years, the community continued to expand, and in 1998 completed an ambitious expansion of its worship area.

These three parishes continue to be active and vibrant contributors to the spiritual life of the Perinton/Fairport community.

