

## **St. Mary's Church, Hamilton The Old Cathedral Church and its Parish**

BY

VICTORIA MUELLER CARSON, M.A., PH.D.

This study of St. Mary's church and parish has been organized around five outstanding dates.

The first date, which may be said to begin our history, is that of one hundred and seventeen years ago, 1826; the event, the erection, by the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XII, of Upper Canada into a diocese with the Rt. Rev. Dr. McDonnell as the first Bishop and Kingston as the Episcopal See. Before 1826 the few Catholic settlers in Hamilton district, already a flourishing centre in 1813, were visited by missionaries from Kingston, Niagara and Toronto. Among these priests were Fathers Proulx, Cassidy, Forbes, Campion and Cullen. There was no church in Hamilton but mass was celebrated at times in the building which stood on King William street adjacent to the Fire Hall. On special occasions parishioners went for mass to Dundas, where a church had already been erected.

The new Diocese of Upper Canada covered the province of Ontario (now divided into nine dioceses); and, because of the scarcity of priests to administer to this scattered diocese, it was only twelve years after the formation of the diocese that Hamilton received its first resident priest, the Rev. William MacDonald. Here we come upon our second important date, 1838. For in 1838, Father MacDonald erected a small frame, roughcast church on the site where the Cathedral Lyceum now stands. The church was built by the grandfather of Mr. William Fitzpatrick. The ground surrounding the church, on which the present St. Mary's church stands, was used as the earliest Catholic cemetery in Hamilton. Another cemetery site was that of the present Basilica of Christ The King.

Already in 1841 the vast diocese of Upper Canada, or Kingston, as it was sometimes called, was subdivided and the diocese of Toronto was formed with the Rt. Rev. Michael Power as the first Bishop. Father MacDonald at Hamilton was appointed the Vicar-General, and one of his activities was the publishing of a paper, "The Catholic", in Hamilton 1841-1844, our first diocesan Catholic newspaper.

Because of the ill health of Father MacDonald, the Rev. Edward Gordon was given charge of Hamilton and became pastor of St. Mary's on November 13th, 1846. In the next year, 1847, Father Gordon found it necessary to

enlarge the church of St. Mary's by building two extensive wings. In the same year, Father MacDonald died, and in 1848 Bishop Power also died, and was succeeded by the Rt. Rev. Dr. de Charbonnel as second Bishop of Toronto. In 1851 Bishop de Charbonnel appointed Father Gordon his Vicar-General and sent Father Carayon to assist him in Hamilton. Father Carayon proved a zealous priest and is remembered chiefly for his great interest in Catholic education and his part in the erection of St. Mary's and of old St. Patrick's schools. Among the outstanding teachers of these schools the names of Mr. Cornelius Donovan and Sr. Aloysius will be well-known to many in the audience.

In 1854 Hamilton was visited by a dreadful cholera plague, and Fathers Gordon and Carayon made St. Mary's a centre of relief and spiritual administrations to the sufferers.

Father Gordon devoted twenty-four years to St. Mary's and died at seventy-nine years of age in 1870. He is buried under the present St. Mary's, where a marble tablet is erected to his memory. A monumental tablet to his father, Aungier Gordon, who died in 1856, marks the grave of one of the first parishioners who is buried under the Cathedral church.

As early as 1850 Bishop de Charbonnel conceived the idea of forming a new diocese of Hamilton; but the plan was not carried through at the time, for Father Dowd, of Montreal, the eminent Sulpician, who was chosen as the first Bishop, wished rather to remain a simple priest of St. Sulpice. However the prelates at the Council of Quebec, 1854, urged the petition for the formation of the new diocese, and a Bull, dated February 17th, 1856, was issued establishing the See of Hamilton with the Rt. Rev. John Farrell, of Peterborough, as its first Bishop. On May 24th, 1856, the new Bishop made his entrance into his episcopal city. For St. Mary's church, that day, May 24th, 1856, was a memorable one; for then St. Mary's church was elevated to St. Mary's Cathedral.

I shall not elaborate upon the work of this great bishop for the convents, hospitals and schools of his diocese, for you will hear subsequently during the Convention a paper by the Rev. Father Battle on Bishop Farrell. But there are two events which concern the Cathedral, which must be mentioned. One of the first acts of the new Bishop was to consecrate his diocese to the "Ever glorious and Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Annunciation". What joy must have been his that his Cathedral church bore the name of Our Blessed Mother — for it was dedicated to "Mary, Our Lady of the Immaculate-Conception", but termed "St. Mary's" for more convenient use.

The second event was a sad one, for the frame church of St. Mary's was destroyed by fire in August, 1859. This was a terrible loss, for the insurance on the building had expired some days before the fire! To meet the situation required a great effort which was promptly made by the Bishop and his

people, and the result was the building of the largest, most handsome and most expensive church in the city at the time.

Already in the spring of 1860 the corner-stone was laid by Bishop Farrell for the new stone structure which stands to-day at the corners of Park and Sheaffe Streets. The building itself is of red brick Gothic with white stone trim. It was designed by the late Mr. Kortum, who unfortunately died before it was completed: The interior of the church was designed by the late Mr. Perrault, under whose supervision every detail was perfected. The paintings in the interior of the church are not wall murals, but are paintings on canvas and are the work of the late Joseph Barth, of the firm of the Van Marck Company of Detroit. Mr. Barth had studied in Munich, and had also painted the interior walls of the church at Formosa, Ontario. I am indebted to Father Lenhard for the observation that an examination, of the paintings of St. Mary's, Hamilton, of the church at Formosa, and of the Basilica of Christ The King reveal that the artists are all of the same Munich tradition of painting.

It is due to the interest and kindness of Mr. John Webber, our former Postmaster in Hamilton, that I have the precise data regarding the building of St. Mary's in 1860, for it was to the Webber brothers, John, Essau and Frederick, that the contract for building the church was awarded. Essau, who was the father of my informant, became a great friend of Bishop Farrell's. I learn that Bishop Farrell purchased a lot for the erection of a Cathedral on the block bounded by James, Forest, Hughson and Young Streets. The Bishop "was anxious that the Cathedral be built there and had he lived it probably would have been carried out".

The bell in the tower of St. Mary's weighs four thousand five hundred pounds and was the largest bell then existing in the province.

A great deal of the work of the building of St. Mary's was done by volunteer workers. The foundations were dug for the most part by workmen from all over the city, who worked in the long evenings and in every spare moment. Parties were made up to go and "dig for the church". The carpenter was Mr. O'Brien, father of James and David O'Brien. In the early days the church had several sets of galleries to accommodate the ever growing congregation. Those galleries were removed in the 1870's, when St. Patrick's church was opened. The pews were made and installed by Mr. P. Bastien.

The main high altar was built by Mr. Clohecy, father of Mrs. J. E. Bymes. Mr. Clohecy also started the first choir in the new Cathedral and led it for many years.

The stained glass windows, of Bavarian art, were inserted gradually from 1860 until 1899. They represent in part the Rosary mysteries and were donated respectively by the family of Wm and Anne Harris; Thomas

Moony; Mrs. Mary Jones; Mrs. Catherine Sullivan; Mrs. O'Brien and Josephine O'Brien in honour of Donald O'Brien; Bishop Dowling, for his mother and father; and by the single men, the married men, the Altar Society and the sodality of the parish. Memorial windows were added later for deceased Bishops and are the gifts of the Bishops, clergy and religious communities of the diocese. The baptistry windows are in memory of Wm. Joseph O'Brien and family.

When the Church was first opened in 1860 it was heated by two wood stoves, one near the pulpit, the other at the back of the church. But because of lack of fuel, the church was opened only on Sundays; on week-days mass was held in the basement. Often it was so cold that the sanctuary boys served mass in their overcoats and mittens. Mr. James McGowan, now of St. Joseph's parish, formerly of St. Mary's, who, I am told, is the oldest sanctuary boy of Hamilton still alive, and Mr. John Bucke, remember having to break surface ice in the crucibles before presenting them to the priest. What is now known as the Lower Chapel, was used in the early days as St. Mary's school.

From the opening of the new Cathedral in the late autumn of 1860, its history is largely the history of its bishops and rectors. The first Bishop, Bishop Farrell, died in September, 1873, and his remains are interred in the vault beneath the western crypt of the church. The first rector was the Rev. Father Gordon, Vicar-General, but because of his ill-health, the active work of the parish from 1862 fell to Father Heenan (later Monsignor Heenan of Dundas). It was during Father Heenan's time that the heating system was installed in the Cathedral. In order to lay the pipes in the basement, deep trenches were dug there, and many bones of the cemetery below were discovered. These were carefully gathered and were laid under the baptistry of the Cathedral. Father Heenan proved a beloved and active priest; a great man who brought many fine converts to St. Mary's. Among them must be mentioned Mr. William Harper, who became the director of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and the former Fire Chief of Hamilton, Chief Ten Eyck. Father Heenan remained rector for twenty-seven years, until 1889.

The second Bishop of Hamilton was the Rt. Rev. P. F. Crinnon, who, like Bishop Farrell, was a native of Ireland. His chief work was to bring many more priests to Hamilton, and for this purpose he made several trips to Europe. There is an interesting story told of Bishop Crinnon on one of his trips and of the statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph which were destined for the side altars of the Cathedral. While the Bishop was in Rome, he purchased these two statues, but on the voyage back, there was a very great storm, and in order to lighten the vessel, the Captain ordered that part of the cargo must be thrown overboard, and all excess of passenger baggage. The Bishop was informed that one of the statues must go. The Bishop's struggle was brief but

poignant. He decided he could not give up Our Blessed Lady, so St. Joseph was cast overboard! The voyage ended safely and the Blessed Virgin's statue arrived in St. Mary's and was duly installed. To finish the story: a temporary statue of St. Joseph was erected, but in 1921 the young ladies' Sodality, by means of draws, bazaars and socials, purchased and donated a fitting statue of St. Joseph, which is in place to-day.

Early in 1882 Bishop Crinnon became ill, and died in Florida in November of the same year. His remains were brought to Hamilton and were interred beside those of Bishop Farrell. The Rev. Dr. Dowling was elected Vicar-Capitular and acted as administrator of the diocese until the arrival from Ireland of the new Bishop, the Rt. Rev. James Joseph Carberry, O.P., in 1884. Bishop Carberry remained only two years when ill-health forced his return to Ireland, where he died at the Dominican monastery of Limerick in 1887. A memorial tablet is erected to him in St. Mary's.

In January, 1889, the Rt. Rev. J. J. Dowling, a former priest and Vicar-General of the diocese, was installed as the first native Canadian Bishop of Hamilton. It was in the same year, 1889, that Father Heenan became Monsignor Heenan of Dundas, and Father McEvay, became rector of St. Mary's Cathedral until he was elevated to the Bishopric of London, Ontario, in August, 1899. Father M. J. Mahony, known later and deeply loved as the Very Rev. Dean Mahony, became rector of St. Mary's.

Acting on the recommendation of Bishop Dowling, Father Mahony began at once to prepare for the consecration of the Cathedral and the celebration of the golden jubilee of the diocese in May, 1906, our fourth great date.

As a church may not be consecrated while in debt, Father Mahony's and the parish's first steps were to liquidate the obligation by an annual house-to-house collection by the priests. This effort not only brought the clergy and parishioners into direct contact and established a tradition which has kept St. Mary's folk near their pastor and priests; but it was so successful financially that in six years the debt was wiped out and extensive improvements could be made in the church buildings and property.

Before 1889 the Bishop and priests had lived on Sheaffe Street in the building which is now Holy Angels' School. In 1890 Bishop Dowling purchased as an episcopal palace the home belonging to the Harvey family on King Street West. Father McEvay had the present St. Mary's Presbytery built on the corner of Mulberry and Park Streets. Under Father Mahony, extensive improvements were made to the priests' home.

In spiritual preparation for the Consecration and Jubilee a mission was preached in the Cathedral by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus from April 21 until May 7, 1906.

This brings us to what was perhaps the most glorious historical moment of St. Mary's Cathedral, May 1906.

The Consecration and Jubilee were celebrated during three days: from Saturday, May 19th, until Tuesday, May 22nd. Many distinguished guests were present; Pope Pius X was represented by the Apostolic Delegate, the Most Rev. Mgr. Sbaretti, and all the Archbishops and Bishops of Ontario attended. The program consisted of a canonical reception for the visitors with a guard of honour composed of members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union and the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association.

The consecration of the Cathedral took place on Sunday, with the Rt. Rev. F. P. McEvay, Bishop of London, as consecrating prelate. At the same time, the present main altar was consecrated and within it were placed the relics of St. Victor and St. Valerianus.

The Cathedral had been closed for two weeks, in preparation for the ceremonies, and mass was said on week days in the chapel.

On the Sundays the parish masses were celebrated in a large tent which was set up on the adjacent lawn of St. Joseph's Convent.

During the two weeks new stone stations of the cross were put in place, each a gift from a family in the parish: H. L. Bastien, F. Burdett, T. J. Coughlin, Bishop Dowling, P. J. and J. Galvin, Misses Harris, Mrs. R. Martin, H. J. McIntyre, W. Joseph O'Brien, Mrs. Kuntz-Perrie, James Shea, the Altar Society, the Benevolent Society and the Young Ladies' Sodality. A large electrically illuminated flagpole, "Gloria in excelsis Deo", was set up over the main altar.

The Ladies' Altar Society refurnished the entire sanctuary, and donated a set of vestments. The men of the parish donated the marble pulpit; the ladies donated the Sacred Heart Altar; Mr. and Mrs. George Knapman, the Holy Family Altar; Dr. Balfé, the Holy Water font; Mr. Philip Martin, the episcopal throne; and Mr. and Mrs. Roche Cherrier the tabernacle. The Altar Society also donated the Altar railing, raising a fund by selling photographs of the pastor and the parish priests to the parishioners! Mrs. George Knapman was President of the Altar Society at the time. She was succeeded by Mrs. John Wilson, who held the office for fifteen years. Mrs. Tom Kelly is the president to-day.

Pontifical High Mass was sung on Sunday at ten o'clock and on that occasion perfect order was preserved, in spite of the vast throngs, by the good work of Mr. J. J. Bucke and his brother, Mr. Nicholas Bucke, who were in charge of the ushers. The sermon of the Mass was preached by the eloquent Basilian from St. Michael's College, the Very Rev. J. R. Teefy, C.S.B.

Addresses on behalf of the parishioners were made by Ex-Alderman J. O'Reilly and Ex-Alderman William Kavanagh.

The music for the occasion was provided by a choir of one hundred and twenty-five separate school boys under the direction of the Rev. P. J. Donovan, superintendent of schools, with Mr. J. L. Cherrier at the organ. Here we might pause to pay tribute to the organists and choir-leaders of St. Mary's, among them, Mr. Cloney, Mr. Cherrier, Flaff Cherrier, Donald O'Brien, and, more recently, my uncle, Mr. Adam Blatz; and to the long line of singers, including Mrs. Martin Murphy, the Presnail family and the Filgiano family, for the excellent music that has praised God in St. Mary's Cathedral.

Monday a solemn pontifical requiem mass was sung for the repose of the souls of the departed Bishops, priests and people of the diocese. Later, the clergy were taken on a trolley trip to Grimsby through the "Garden of Canada" on a private trolley car provided by the Hamilton, Grimsby and Beamsville Company. St. Mary's Hall was the scene, in the evening, of a reception for the diocese. This reception was the occasion of a large diocesan social gathering of all the people, a great family party, the like of which is difficult for us to picture in these days of war and rationing!

The Jubilee closed on Tuesday with a Mass of Thanksgiving and the children's mass. On behalf of the children, Joseph McGowan of St. Mary's School presented an illuminated address to the Apostolic Delegate. The members of the school board for the year, Messrs, P. S. Bateman, Chairman, P. Arland, C. J. Bird, T. J. Coughlin, J. P. Dougherty, J. Flahaven, M. Foster, P. J. Galvin, J. Keating, A. O'Brien, P. Ronan, M. D. Sullivan, H. N. Thomas and James Wall, were presented to the Delegate.

It was a joyful coincidence for the parish that 1906 saw also the golden jubilee of St. Joseph's Convent and commemorated the opening of St. Mary's Orphanage, the present building of which was erected in 1873.

The years following the consecration of the Cathedral were filled with the ever expanding work of the parish. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society, founded in 1856, the Holy Name Society, the Altar Society, the parish Benevolent Society and the Sodality, were carried on devotedly by able executives. More recent activities include the Legion of Mary, founded approximately nine years ago; the Catholic Youth Organization (C.Y.O.), with its various branches, seven years old; the Boy Scouts and the Cubs, with three years of intense activity behind them. The parishioners participate in the Knights of Columbus Councils and the Diocesan Lay Retreat Movement, as well as in other diocesan activities, as the Catechetical Conferences, House of Providence picnics, and charitable drives.

The years from 1906 to 1933 saw the deaths of Dean Mahony (1918) and Bishop Dowling (1924). Dean Mahony was succeeded by Father Kelly, who remained rector until his transfer to Dundas in 1921. Bishop Dowling was interred in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, the first Bishop to be buried outside the Cathedral walls (except Bishop Carberry, who was buried in Ireland).

Bishop Dowling was succeeded by the Most Rev. J. T. McNally. In 1930 Bishop McNally undertook the erection of the magnificent Basilica of Christ the King which was completed in 1933. In 1940 Bishop McNally was elevated to the Archbishopric of Halifax.

Dean Kelly was succeeded by Father O'Sullivan as rector of the Cathedral in 1921. However, in 1925, Father O'Sullivan was made President of St. Augustine's Seminary, Toronto, and subsequently, in 1930, Bishop of Charlottetown. Father J. F. Ryan succeeded to the rectorship in 1925 but in the following year he left for two years' study in Rome. During his absence, Monsignor Gehl acted as rector in 1926 and Father J. O'Reilly in 1927.

When the Basilica was opened in 1933, Father Ryan was transferred there as rector and Monsignor Hinchey, the present beloved pastor, was made rector of St. Mary's. To complete the record, we add that Father Ryan became the Rt. Rev. J. F. Ryan, Bishop of Hamilton, in 1940.

Some historians declare that history never repeats itself but that perhaps the same impulse shows itself after a period in the same spot. In this connection, it is interesting to learn from an old announcement sheet donated by Mrs. J. J. Austin, of the second annual Meeting of the first Catholic Library in Hamilton in 1859. It was housed in St. Mary's Chapel and its curator was Mr. Thomas Walsh, Mrs. Austin's father. There were two hundred and sixty-five books which circulated among the Catholics of the district.

Some ten years ago, St. Mary's Church again became the centre of a Catholic Library Movement, this time under the direction of Father V. Priester. Several rooms in St. Mary's were fitted up as library and reading rooms and some ten thousand books, Catholic in authorship or in spirit, were procured by donation or were purchased. The Library also sponsors a series of lectures throughout the year. By its activity it is doing an apostolic work not only for the parish of St. Mary's but also for the whole of Hamilton.

When the Basilica was opened in 1933 and became the episcopal cathedral church, St. Mary's was henceforth to be known as St. Mary's pro-Cathedral, but tradition dies hard and this beautiful church is still affectionately referred to as "the Cathedral".

That Our Lady has richly blessed her parish with spiritual gifts is to be seen in the number of men and women who have received the gift of the

religious vocation. There are fifteen young men: two Bishops, J. O' Sullivan and J. F. Ryan, and the Reverend Fathers Charles Coughlin, James and Gordon Ryan, James Ford, Neville and Arthur Anderson, Corbett and Gerald Warren, Harold Carroll, John Halleran, James Clohecy, Bernard Harrigan and John McCowell (deceased). In addition there are fifty-one Sisters in various Communities: in St. Joseph's Community, a total of forty-one, twenty-three of whom are still living : the Rev. Mother Antoinette McBride, Srs. Martina Long, Anna Hart, St. Edward Daffy, Rosary Peche, Helena Harris, Adrian Smith, St. Stephen Smith, Marcella and Eusebia Rooney, Basilla Holland, Columba Spafford, Redempta Rigby, Seraphia Mundy, Mary Grace Stevens, Assumpta Kehoe, Frances Therèse Stanton, Eymard Isabelle, Mary of Lourdes Hughes, Jane Frances Twohey, Louise Holland, Alfonse Meegan and Mary Warren.

The deceased members of the Community are the Rev. Mother Celestine O'Sullivan, Srs. Bonaventure Halloran, Evarista Baine, Leocadia Kelly, St. Sebastian Rogers, Angelica Clohecy, Eucharica Foley, Ethelreda Burns, Louis Bertrand Malone, Bernadette O'Brien, Bride Cleary, De Sales Donovan, Genevieve Arland, Febronia O'Sullivan, Regina Tobin, Leo Cass and Hilda Gorman.

In the Loretto Community are Mother Mechtilde and Mother St. Anne Burns.

To the Sisters of Service went Sister Matilda Grace and Sister Mail Rogers.

To the Monastery of the Precious Blood, Sisters Gabriel Thurston and Mary of the Good Shepherd Kennedy.

The Misses Kennedy to the Poor Clares, Miss Bastien to the Sisters of Charity and Mother Marie Paula Halloran to the Franciscan Sisters.

When we are speaking of the history of St. Mary's we cannot consider our tale complete without reference to Patrick Crane, who for the past forty years has been the caretaker of the church and the intimate participator in all its activities. He is as unique to the church as is that other symbol of St. Mary's, the golden umbrella. For St. Mary's alone of the churches of Hamilton, possesses a golden umbrella to shield the host as it is being conveyed to the canopy for ceremonial processions.

These two symbols – on the one hand of loving care and of golden completeness on the other, seem to me to express the whole story of this eighty-three year old, beloved and beautiful St. Mary's church and its parish.