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The sanctuary of St. Mary Church, Shawnee, as rebuilt in 1939.

St. Mary Parish, Shawnee, Salt Lick Township, Perry County 1880-1992

When it opened in 1882, St. Mary Church in Shawnee, Saltlick Township, Perry County, replaced St. Peter's, the Old Stone Church. St. Peter's, also called the Monday Creek church, a mile and a half northwest of Shawnee, had been founded in 1844 by and for the farm families in that vicinity, but by 1882 Shawnee had become a prosperous town because of the opening of coal mines.

Shawnee had been founded in 1872. At the time of St. Mary's founding there were "several large coal works within and about the town, and

four furnaces, furnishing employment for large numbers of laborers. It has a postoffice, newspaper, station-house, two telegraph offices, two hotels, a large union school-house, five church buildings, several large stores, carrying heavy stocks of goods, and numerous smaller shops of various kinds." The population in 1880 was 1,770 and by 1883, after the arrival of the railroad, was thought to have been over 3,000.¹

The first Mass in Shawnee of which there was any remembrance was offered by Father O'Sullivan of Junction City, who came on

weekdays from July to October in 1873.² Up until 1880 Shawnee was a station attended by the pastor of St. Augustine's church, New Straitsville, and occasionally by priests from St. Joseph's Priory near Somerset. Father Bernard M. O'Boylan was the pastor of New Straitsville and the first Mass in Shawnee offered by him was in the basement of the residence of Mr. and Mrs. James Barrett, on Walnut Street. Father O'Boylan was succeeded by Father Simon P. Weisinger. On July 1, 1879 Father Weisinger opened a subscription for funds to build St. Mary's Church.³

Property Development

The lot for the church was purchased on August 19, 1879 by Rev. Nicholas A. Gallagher, as Administrator of the Diocese, for \$200, from the New York and Straitsville Coal and Iron Company.⁴ This was lot 292 in the New York and Straitsville Coal and Iron Company Second Addition, at the corner of Perry and Walnut streets, northwest of the center of town.

On April 27, 1880, Father John Sylvester Hannan was appointed pastor of the Shawnee congregation and he took charge on May 8. He secured lodging with Mrs. Ann Coyle, on Walnut st. The upper part of the Saffel building, adjoining the K. of L. opera house, then known as the Hughes' Hall, was used for church purposes.

When Father Hannan took charge only a small part of the subscription for the church had been collected. Young, light-hearted, and hopeful, he began the task before him. On June 24, after his arrival, a picnic was held for the benefit of the church, from which was realized \$1,200.85.

Soon Father Hannan had the excavators at work on the church lot. The contract for the stone work was awarded to Matthew Murray, and he began laying the foundation about the first of July 1880. The brick work was commenced the latter part of the same month, all the brick being made and burned on the adjacent lot behind the church,

where St. Mary's school later stood. Work on the walls was discontinued in the fall owing to bad weather, but was resumed early in the spring of 1881, and on June 26, of that year the first Mass was offered in the new church. The walls were not plastered nor were there any pews in the church at that time.

On June 18, 1882 the church was dedicated by Rt. Rev. John A. Watterson. First Holy Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation were administered for the first time in the new church, to sixty-three persons, including three converts. At the Mass, the bishop complimented the congregation and thanked the non-Catholics for their kind assistance in the past and their large and respectful attendance, then delivered a sermon on "The Real Presence."⁵

The new church measured fifty by eighty feet, smaller than the old stone church that was now abandoned. It was the only brick church in Shawnee, the other four being of frame construction.⁶ From the front steps of the church, one could look down the length of Walnut Street to the east. As rebuilt in 1939 it had fifteen rows of pews and might have held 240 adults. In June of 1888 the church was frescoed at a cost of about \$600.00. At the same time new altars and statues were put in at a cost of about \$700.00. The total cost of the church and its equipment amount to about \$16,000.

The frame rectory was built and furnished in 1883, at a cost of \$2,300.00.

A peal of bells was donated in 1921 by Edward G. Blaire in memory of his family. They were cast at the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore and cost \$2,350.⁷

Lot 291, adjoining the church lot in the rear, was purchased by Bishop Watterson on Oct. 28, 1886 for \$250.⁸ Work on St. Mary's school and convent was commenced on May 11, 1891, and completed in September of the same year. The brick school building, including hot water apparatus for heating, cost \$4,452.79. It had four large rooms, two downstairs and two upstairs. The Sisters' residence, furnished, cost \$1,936.31.

It was located next to the school and behind the rectory, facing Walnut Street. It had only two bedrooms, but these were divided into three bedrooms and a chapel. Coal stoves provided for cooking and heat in the buildings. The parish complex, thus completed, was said in 1907 to be “among the most substantial structures of Shawnee.” The school was taught by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth from 1891 to its closing in the 1940s. The educational efforts of the parish and Sisters included a high school by 1907 and music for all grade levels.

When Father Horan arrived in 1903 the parish still had a debt of \$5,000, but under his leadership, with careful management, the parish paid this off within two years.

1901 to 1943

Pastors during this period were:

Rev. James J. McCann 1901-1903

Rev. Thomas J. Horan Nov. 1903-Sept. 1913

Rev. James B. Rooney, Sept. 1913-Sept. 1921

Rev. B. J. Kessler, Sept. 1921-Sept. 1930

Rev. Eustace H. Foley, Sept. 1930-Sept. 1943

About 1920 the effects of the coal mine fires, set during the strike of the 1880s, were still strong. Just as people thought a vein was burned out, another fire would start up, indicated by a little curl of smoke coming up from the ground. Said one of the Sisters, “One time, we came out onto our porch and it was Hell! Fire was just pouring out of the opening of the mine. But it never hurt the six of us who lived in the convent. It never came that close.”

School enrollment was about 100, with the elementary school in two rooms. The earlier effort apparently having failed, a two-year high school was opened in 1920. The Sisters had a music teacher in the school. “Nearly everybody in Ohio who could do it at all took music lessons. Every house you would pass had a piano.” Many of the music students were from the public school. Six sisters lived in the little convent: three teachers, the music teacher, a housekeeper, and

a cook.⁹

The Sisters’ annals for 1923/23 note, “The influence of the Ku Klux Klan is affecting former friends of the sisters, some even showing a spirit of ‘animosity.’ Several Catholic men stood guard around the convent during the Klan’s last night in Shawnee. Not one music pupil was lost, even though most were Protestants.”¹⁰

Declining economic conditions of the town were reflected in the number of baptisms performed at the parish year by year. From an average of over 16 per year in the 1910s and early 1920s, the number dropped to single digits in 1927 and never recovered.

The high school was reduced to just the ninth grade in 1933 and was closed in 1934. At the end of the 1935/36 school year, Mother Mary Catharine, of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, wrote to Bishop Hartley concerning the school. There had been fewer than sixty children in the school the last year and fewer were expected the next year. She asked whether the Sisters could reduce their commitment to Shawnee to only two Sisters instead of four, and proposed that they live in Corning, where they would have more of a community. A draft reply from Bishop Hartley noted that, “If the Sisters are not there, everything will go to pieces. Coming from Corning will not help keep up the work.” He continued, “the Sisters have done so much there throughout all the years that the Bp has not the heart to ask them to do more, but if possible let us try again.”¹¹ The Sisters continued to staff the school.

Church Fire and Reconstruction

A fire broke out on Thanksgiving morning, 1938 and heavily damaged the church. Services were moved to the school building. The debris was removed and the reconstruction was all carried out by volunteer efforts on the part of the people, men and women, laborers and mechanics, “and the skill displayed and workmanship performed are marvels of excellence.” Standard Oil Company donated three buildings at their abandoned bulk station in Shawnee and most of

this lumber “in excellent condition and better than can be bought today,” was used to rebuild the church.

They gave the church a new main altar and new statues; the tabernacle was recovered and repaired. Side altars were refinished and restored. The ceiling was replaced. Interior walls were lined with glazed brick and the same material was used on the floor of the sanctuary and the altar steps. (Previously they had been of small, white tiles.) A new communion rail, new stations of the cross, and a new steam heating system were installed. It was said that in some respects the new interior surpassed the old, which had had a reputation for its beauty.

The church was reopened on Sunday morning, April 23, with Mass at the usual times of 7:30 and 9:00. At 7:30 that evening, the bells pealed forth for the first time since the fire, “their joyful, soul-stirring chimes,” to call the people to a sermon and Benediction.

Father Foley reported to Bishop Hartley in May that the work on the church was almost complete and that the parish had purchased an organ from a Presbyterian congregation in Cincinnati.¹²

Decline during the War, 1941-1945

During the Great Depression, the parish population had held up to some extent. People could live without work in Shawnee as well as anywhere else—perhaps better. An empty house was not to be found in Shawnee then. But by 1943 people had moved to industrial centers and every second house was empty.¹³

In 1941 there were not many Catholics in Shawnee, but all the residents were happy that the Sisters of Charity were present. They had made an imprint because their charity was for everybody and their kindness was for the whole town. Many of the people were retired; many others worked in New Lexington. Only one family was still mining there. But the dentist provided for the Sisters’ needs for free, as did the man who ran the drug store.

Father Foley was attentive to the Sisters and their needs. He would spend every Sunday evening with the Sisters, and would drive them to and from convents in Columbus for their holidays.

At least once a week after school the Sisters would visit Italyville, a section of Shawnee where all the Italians lived. “The people were so grateful to have sisters there. Every house we went into, they would give us something. If they had just made wine, they would give us a bottle; or a loaf of bread or cookies or rolls: everybody had something for us.” The Sisters began a sodality for the girls in Italyville, because “there was not too much going on in the town, and the pastor didn’t have too many church affairs.”¹⁴

In 1942 Bishop Hartley received another letter from the Sisters of Charity, this time from Mother Ann Sebastian. She noted that in the 1941/42 school year there had been only 31 students in the school when it opened and 28 when it closed. There was great need for the teaching Sisters elsewhere and she wondered whether the school in Shawnee should be closed. The Bishop replied, “The priest is not so anxious about the school, except to tell me - and get others to tell me - it is a burden.” Bishop Hartley had not the heart to close the school. “I remember only too well how Father Hannan and the people worked so hard to build the School and Sisters’ House, and it really would be a sad thing to close it.... let us still hold on.”¹⁵

During these years there were three Sisters from Nazareth in the parish, two who taught and one who cooked. The bishop was paying the Sisters’ salary.

Father Foley wrote again about the school in the summer of 1943. He noted that there was no industry of any kind at Shawnee. The mines were all worked out. The last of the three brick plants was being scrapped. People were moving to Columbus and Newark. Total Catholic population in the parish was only 103 souls. The school had educated only sixteen pupils the previous academic year and only nine were

expected in the fall. He also noted that he had received no salary in “a long time.”

Bishop Hartley replied to Father Foley on July 8, “The School and Sisters’ House are to be kept in order. Catechism classes are to be held every week in the school. The Sisters’ House is to remain just as it is, with all its contents- and it is not to be rented or opened to anyone. It is parish property. If you can, arrange to have the Sisters from New Straitsville to come over once a week to teach the children their prayers and Catechism. When they come the Sisters’ House may be opened for their convenience during their stay.”¹⁶

The children of the parish attended St. Augustine School in New Straitsville, a few miles away, beginning in the fall of 1943. After the school closed and the Sisters left, there was very little Catholic influence in the town.

(To be concluded)

NOTES

- 1) Graham, A. A., *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties, Ohio*; Chicago: W. H. Beers & Co., 1883, p. 305
- 2) Many of the facts presented here, up to 1901, are taken from Shawnee’s *The People’s Advocate* of July 5, 1901, for which see the *Bulletin* of January, 2006.
- 3) For the names of the forty-four subscribers,

- see the *Bulletin* of January, 2006
- 4) Deed Record 23/556
 - 5) *Catholic Columbian*, June 24, 1882
 - 6) Graham, *op. cit.*, 306
 - 7) Fr. James B. Rooney to Bishop Hartley, Feb. 24, 1921, Chancery file, St. Mary Parish
 - 8) Deed Record 34/100
 - 9) Reminiscences of Sister Restituta, S.C.N. in *SC NEWS*, Vol. 5, No. 8, April, 1977, pp 6-8
 - 10) Information provided by Ellen Clifford, Archives, Sisters of Charity of Nazareth
 - 11) July 31, 1936, Mother Mary Catharine to Bishop Hartley; and attached draft reply, Chancery files, St. Mary Parish
 - 12) *The People’s Advocate*, April 14, 1939. May 2, 1939, Father Eustace H. Foley to Bishop Hartley, Chancery files, St. Mary Parish.
 - 13) letter noted by Ellen Clifford, Archives, S.C.N.
 - 14) Reminiscences of Sister James Patrick, S.C.N., in *SC NEWS*, Vol. 5, No. 8, April, 1977, pp 6-8
 - 15) July 28, 1942, Mother Ann Sebastian to Bishop Hartley; July 29, 1942 Bishop Hartley to Mother Ann Sebastian; Chancery file, St. Mary Parish
 - 16) Courtesy of Ellen Clifford, Archives, Sisters of Charity of Nazareth

St. Peter Church, Monday Creek, Perry County Baptismal Records, 1854-1878

These records are in an untitled book of baptismal records, the continuation of which was the record of St. Mary Parish, Shawnee.

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1854

Dec. 10 John Joseph, born Dec. 2, son of George Cook and Teresa Shearan, spouses; spon. John Donnelly and Julia Shearan. F. J. V. Daly
same day James Martin, born 9 Oct., son of Sylvester Riffle and Amelia Jones, spouses;

spons. George Riffle and Martha Riffle. JVD
same day Elizabeth, born 2 Nov., daughter of James McGravy and Mary Ross, spouses; spon. George Cook and Eliza Riffle. JVD

1855

Jan. 7 George Bird, age 16; spon. William Dougherty and Mary Rafferty. JVD
March 7 Peter, son of John Griffen and Catherine, spouses; spon. James Dunn and Jane Ward. JVD

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April 22 Margaret Jane, born Apr. 14, daughter of George Riffle and Ann Hoy, spouses; spons. George Cook and Eliza Riffle. JVD

July 23 Vincent Albert, born 1 July, son of Adam Beaver and Rosann Tharp, spouses; spons. John Reenan [Keenan?] and Sarah Currin. JVD

Aug. 23 Ann, born Aug. 21, daughter of Michael Bowe and Mary Reenan [Keenan?], spouses; spons. Thomas Grogan and Elizabeth Reenan [Keenan?]. JVD

same day Philip, born 18 Aug., son of Thomas Allen and Alice Little, spouses; spons. Casper McCabe and Ann Currin. JVD

same day ceremonies supplied for Daniel, born 5 July, son of Peter Lee and Bridget Feeny, spouses; spons. Philip Little and Agnes Cook. JVD

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October 28 Thomas Albert, son of Francis Retallie and Catherine Fieltz; spons. John Keeny and Catherine Hudlow [the H is questionable]. J. Monahan

same day Margaret, daughter of Thomas McEvoy and Mary Logue; spons. Michael Meagher and Mary Ross. JM

Nov. 26 Martha Ann, daughter of John Dyke and Sarah Hoye, born Nov. 15; spons. John and Elizabeth Keenan. Ja: Monahan

Dec. 17 Adam, son of William Scale and Rosann Doherty, born 4 Nov.; spons. John McCourtney and Ann Rafferty. JM

[1856]

April 20 Margaret Alice, daughter of Thomas Conlon and Elizabeth Moore, born Feb. 7; spons. James Dunne and Elizabeth Ward.

same day Harriet Ann, daughter of Harold Whitehaft and Elizabeth Braddy, born 22 Aug.; spons. Joseph Ward and Elizabeth Durham. JM

June 8 James Augustine, son of John and Catherine Griffin, born 17 April; spons. George and Ann Riffle. JM

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1856

June 8 James, son of William and Rosann Clarke, born 20 March; spons. James and Mary Clarke. JM

same day Mary, daughter of George and Teresa Cooke, born 22 May; spons. Gadories Begoon and Sarah Agnes Cooke. JM

August 31 Margaret Jane, daughter of Henry[?] and Elizabeth Lannen, born 13 July; spons. John S. Hoy and Catherine Riffle. JM

Sept. 1 John Chrysostom, son of Patrick and Catherine Doherty, born 1 Aug.; spons. George Riffle and Susan Doherty. JM

Oct. 23 Patrick, son of John and Ellen Keenan, born 21 Oct.; spons. Thomas Gordon and Mary McGreavy. JM

Oct. 20 James Levi, son of James and Mary McGreavy; spons. James McGreavy and Elizabeth Keenan.

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1857

July 19 Martha Ann, daughter of Sylvester and Isabell Riffle, born March 16; spons. Martin and Catherine Riffle. JM

October 4 Nathaniel, son of James and Ellen Green, born Aug. 4; spons. John Diken and Catherine Hoy. JM

same day Alice, daughter of Peter and Bridget Lee, born 20 Sept.; spons. Daniel McEvoy and Mariann Rafferty. JM

same day Barbara, daughter of John and Sarah Dyke, born July 5; spons. John Konkle and Catherine Riffle. JM

same day Elizabeth, daughter of Mesiac Martin and Anna, born Aug. 3; spons. James McGreavy and Elizabeth Dunn. JM

same day Mariann, daughter of Thomas and Alice Allen, born 2 Sept.; spons. Bernard Murphy and Mary Murphy. JM

page 10 is blank

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1858

- March 25 James, son of George and Teresa Cooke, born March 4; spons. George and Ann Riffle. JM
- March 26 Cecilia, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Conlan, born March 18; spons. John Hanigan and Rosella Shirky. JM
- April 18 Thomas, son of John and Ellen Keenan, born March 18; spons. Thomas Grogan and Ellen Keenan. JM
- April 22 Mary, daughter of Casper and Ellen McCabe, born April 16; spons. Thomas and Henrietta McCabe. JM
- same day Julia, daughter of Nicholas and Mary Dumolt, born October, 1857; spons. Martin and Sarah Dumolt. JM
- June 20 James, son of Michael and Mary Murphey, born May 14; spons. George Riffle and Mary Ward. J
- same day Jeremy, son of William and Rosann Scale, born 21 March; spons. Joseph Bird and Sarah Cu[rin?]
- page 12
- July 18 John Henry, son of Tobias and Mariann Santee, born June 30; spons. Christian Foley[?] and Ann Curren.
- Oct. 22 Catherine, daughter of Francis and Catherine Retallic, born 12 June; spons. George Bird and Lucy Hoy. JM

1859

- 13 March John, son of Charles and Elizabeth Carey, born October 14, 1858; spons. Martin and Ann Mary Dumolt.
- same day John, son of James and Ellen Green, born Jan. 28; spons. John and Margaret Hoy.
- same day Catherine, daughter of George and Ann Riffle, born 27 of "this" month; spons. John McGreavy and Susan Hoy. JM
- page 13
- same day Catherine, daughter of James and Esther McGreavy, born March 2; spons. George Bird and Elizabeth Meagher. JM
- same day Sarah, daughter of Hugh and Susan Shirky, born Jan. 26; spons. John Hanigan

and Rosella Shirky. JM

- March 15 John, son of Zachary and Margaret Conrad, born March 6; spons. Christian Beaver and Mary M. Boley. JM
- page 14
- 25 Sept. Rose, daughter of Edward and Juliann Grogan, born 10 Sept.; spons. John Dicken and Ann Curren. G. Phew
- same day Sarah, daughter of Michael and Mary Traynor, born 10 March; spons. George Riffle and Catherine Riffle. G. Phew
- 16 Oct. Thomas Edward, son of Patrick and Elizabeth Purcell, born 27 Sept.; spons. Edward Grogan and Mary Bowe. G. Phew
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1863

- January 15 Catherine Jane, age about two years, of Peter Lyons? and Bridget Finney; sons. John Fisher and Mary Bowe? Charles F. Hone
- 25 [Jan.?] John, born 25 June, 1861, of Patrick Purcell and Elizabeth Grogan; spons. Thomas Allen and Mary Maher. Chas. F. Hone
- 26 [Jan.?] Flora, born 5 Oct, 1862, of William Clark and Ruth Agnew; spons. John Fisher and Rosanna Clark. Chas. F. Hone
- Nov. 29, 1863 Maria Josephine, born 22 Nov, 1863, of James Fisher and Lucy Hoy; spons. George Riffle and Catherine Paxton. Chas. F. Hone
- page 16

1864

- Jan. 6 Margaret, born 22 Nov., 1863, of James McGravy and Ester Ross; spons. Henry Riffle and Nancy Carpenter. CFH
- [blank] 6 Mary, born Nov. 8, 1863, of Patrick Purcell and Elizabeth Grogan; spons. Casper McCabe and Elizabeth McGravy. CFH
- May 22 James, born 31 March, of Patrick More and Mary A. Dillon; spons. John Dillon and Susan Dillon. CFH
- May 22 Susan, born 1 July 1863, of Henry Lannan and Elizabeth Hoy; spons. John Fisher and Margaret McClane. CFH
- page 17

June 26 Clement, born 17 June, of Edward Groghan and July [Julia or Judy?] A. Keenan; spon. Patrick More and Mrs. More. CFH

[1865]

May 27 July Agnes, born 12 April, 1865, of Zachary Conrad and Margaret Bowe; spon. John Belz and Margaret Beaver. CFH

May 28 George Elmer and Elmeda Ellen, born 23 May, 1865, of Basil Hoy and Rachael Roberts; spon. for George, Henry Riffle and Ann Riffle; and for Elmeda, John Conlan and Mary McCane. CFH

July 2 Francis Marion, born 16 June, 1865, of John McGlaughlen and Mary Curran; spon. James Dougherty and Mary Seals. CFH
same day Margaret Rose, born 25 June 1865, of James Dougherty and Mary Gilligan; spon. John Fisher and Sara Seals. CFH
page 1

[1867]

6 Oct. 1867 Mary, born 1 October, daughter of Patrick Morris and Mary Dillon, spouses; spon. Lawrence Bow and Margaret Bow. Eml Thienpoint

[1868]

3 May 1868 James Albert, born 23 Feb. 1868, son of George Riffle and Mary Ann Guy[or Hoy?], spouses; spon. John Carpenter and Catherine Connor. Eml Thienpont
same day John, born 19 Nov. 1867, son of John Carpenter and Ledia Guy, spouses; spon. John Moore and Susan Terrell. Emil. Thienpont

page 2

same day Elizabeth Ann, born 18 April 1868, daughter of Patrick Purcell and Elizabeth Grogen, spouses; spon. Lawrence Bow and Margaret Little. ET

4 May 1868 Almira, born 2 May 1868, daughter of William Peston [sic] and Catherine Foy; spon. Charles Little and Margaret Bow. ET

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14 Sept. 1868 Judith Armelia, daughter of James Green and wife Rebecca Ellen Lyon[?]; spon. Lawrence Bow and Rachel Deason[?]. Emil. Thienpont

(To be concluded)