

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS

In the year 1876 Ulysses Grant was rounding out his second term in the White House. Memories of the Civil War were still vivid. Early in the summer General Custer and his men had met with the ultimate disaster at Little Bighorn. America was celebrating its first hundred years. That same year the parish of St. Mary's was established with the Town of Winchester as its territorial limit. Father Cornelius O'Connor assumed the office of first resident pastor on September 19.

Winchester itself, formerly a part of Woburn, had been incorporated as a town at mid-century only twenty-six years before. It was just at this time that the first Catholics had come into the area, a few Canadians and a greater number of Irish, many of them driven from their homeland by the terrible famine. They were poor people for the most part, earning their living as farm workers, in building construction, and in the tanneries or factories that were beginning to arise in the town. But they were people of a sturdy faith, willing to walk winter and summer the good distance to St. Charles in Woburn for their Sunday mass.

Priests were desperately few in the diocese but by 1874 Catholics in Winchester were numerous enough for the archbishop to grant them the privilege of their own church, a mission of St. Charles. The parishioners set up a small wooden chapel on the site of the present church. We may assume that it was built for the most part by the labor of their own hands. They called it the Church of St. Mary. Father Edward J. McClure, an assistant at St. Charles, said the first mass there on Christmas Day, 1875.

The little chapel was not to stand for long. With the encouragement of their new pastor, Father O'Connor, the people of St. Mary's replaced their first rude house of worship with a somewhat larger and more attractively designed frame church. In a region that had been solidly Protestant only a few years before, the growth of the parish was astounding. By 1882, when Father Patrick J. Daley took over the pastorate after the long illness and death of Father O'Connor, St. Mary's numbered nine hundred souls. Once again it was necessary to enlarge the church, this time to the dimension that it still retains.

Father Daley proved himself an extremely capable administrator. Despite the expansion of the church, the addition of a tower, the purchase of the adjoining Shattuck estate as a parochial residence, and the construction of a mission church in East Woburn, he left the parish free of debt when in 1888 he was appointed pastor of St. Francis de Sales in Roxbury, one of the largest and most important churches in the diocese.

Father William M. O'Brien, a native of Nenagh in Tipperary, was only thirty-seven when he succeeded Father Daley in June of the same year. His pastorate, like that of Father O'Connor, lasted only five years and was interrupted by his death in the year 1893. He was buried at Mount Calvary Cemetery in Montvale. The records of this period are scanty but they show that he purchased a piece of property of about an acre on which the school now stands.

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

We have a description of the old wooden church written at about this time and published with interior and exterior views in the *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*. The style is characterized as Tudor Gothic and the impression is that of a rural church of pleasing proportions with a spired tower some ninety-eight feet in height. Structurally the interior is not very different from the present church. There is a familiar look to the gracefully arching oaken roof trusses. One striking difference in decoration is a series of large medallions painted on the roof vault depicting saintly figures and religious symbols.

Father Henry J. Madden came to St. Mary's in January, 1894, and remained as pastor for twelve years. They were years of accomplishment. Like all of his predecessors Father Madden had been born in Ireland, though he had begun his sacred studies at the Sulpician seminary of Beauveaux in France. It was he who conceived the bold idea of transforming St. Mary's from a wooden church to a brick one by encasing it.

The plan of the conversion was entrusted to the Boston architect, P. W. Ford, and the result was an immense success. The entire front wall was replaced and the remaining walls enclosed. The entrance arches were brought forward to form small vestibules and buttresses were added along the side walls. Although the alterations preserved much of the original character of the building, the new material brought simplicity of line and warmth of color that were in harmony with its modest proportions.

Father Madden's years at St. Mary's, evenly divided as they were between the old and new centuries, saw many changes besides the reconstruction of the church. There were technological changes. The street car had come to town and electric lights. The congregation itself, composed almost wholly of Irish migrants twenty years earlier, was giving place to their children and grandchildren, second and third generation Americans. The changing trend of migration too was bringing people of another culture to the parish.

The first Italian families arrived in Winchester around 1890 and the trickle soon grew to a current that was reminiscent of the Irish influx of a generation before. These were years of prolific growth for the village. The population of less than five thousand in 1890 had reached more than seven thousand by 1900, more than nine thousand by 1910. They were years of growth for the parish that brought it to twenty-five hundred members before the end of the century.

In addition to reconstructing the church exterior, the people of St. Mary's under the guidance of Fr. Madden frescoed the interior walls and re-slated the roof. At the corner of the church a small building was erected to serve as a Parish library. It has since then been used as a Baptistry and is presently used as a Parish meeting room. The Judkins mansion and grounds on Washington St. were purchased to be used as a rectory. Although they were working people living through the hard times that followed the panic of 1893, they cleared their parish of debt before the end of the decade and the century.

The Reverend Dr. Daniel J. Keleher was appointed pastor in 1906. The reputation of this distinguished priest was such that a group of prominent citizens including the Reverend Mr. Suter of the Episcopal Church welcomed him to Winchester in a rare display of ecumenism for those days. Unfortunately Dr. Keleher's brilliance was to limit his stay to three years. In 1909 he was elevated to the rank of monsignor and made rector of St. Peter's Church in Lowell.

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

Monsignor Keleher's spiritual influence on the parish was undoubtedly great but he is perhaps remembered best for an improvement that he made to the church building. In the reconstruction and brick veneering that was done in Father Madden's time only the base of the tower had been overlaid. The dormered spire of wood had been left as it was. Appropriate to the original wooden structure, it seemed to detract from the appearance of the new brick exterior.

By what proved a fortunate chance, about the time of Monsignor Keleher's arrival the spire was struck by lightning and severely damaged. It was decided not to replace the spire but to extend the square brick base upward to form a bell tower with eight graceful louvered openings and to crown the tower with a low cupola surmounted with a cross. The effect was a happy one for the tower greatly enhanced the architectural unity of the church. A bell was donated by a generous parishioner and hung in the belfry where it was in use until recent years.

The long and richly productive pastorate of Father Nathaniel J. Madden began in August, 1909, and covered a span of twenty-five years. In little more than two years after his arrival the church had undergone extensive renovation and the parish had acquired the handsome rectory that stands on the highest point of its land. Less than two years later, in September, 1914, St. Mary's School was opened to its first pupils. Today, more than sixty years later, its advanced design and sound construction give it the appearance of a modern building.

The old Judkins mansion that had previously served as a rectory was moved toward the rear of the grounds and redecorated for the Sisters of St. Joseph who were to conduct the school. The convent arrangement included a devotional chapel with an altar designed by the renowned Boston sculptor, Hugh Cairns.

Father Merritt's building program was halted for a time by World War One. During that tragic period more than two hundred young men of St. Mary's parish were in military service, almost a hundred of them overseas. Eight gave their lives. In Winchester's joyful homecoming celebration of July 4, 1919, Father Merritt who was very active in civic affairs read the invocation. Three years later he completed the last phase of his program with the dedication of St. Mary's High School for girls, a frame building erected on the former site of the convent. A parishioner donated land behind the convent as a playground for children of all ages. It soon acquired the name by which it is still known, "The Campus."

The decade following the war was a period of headlong social change for the entire nation from which neither the town nor St. Mary's was to escape. To Father Merritt fell the challenge of guiding his people through an era that witnessed the disastrous experiment of prohibition and the proliferation of radio, moving pictures, and the automobile. It was a labor for which he was admirably suited.

Winchester's rapid increase in population continuing through the Twenties was to result not long afterward in the first division of the parish. Another aspect of this growth was the flourishing of the Italian community with its moving display of fervor and pageantry in religious expression. Many can recall their procession through the streets of the flower-decked image of the Blessed Virgin, particularly on the feast of the Assumption when the festivities would culminate in a band concert and fireworks display at Manchester Field.

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

In September, 1931, the new parish of the Immaculate Conception was established from what had been the northern portion of St. Mary's and the southern portion of St. Charles. Father Merritt died after some years of failing health in February, 1934. No more fitting tribute could be paid him than the words of Cardinal O'Connell spoken almost twenty years earlier at the cornerstone ceremony of St. Mary's School. "I knew Father Merritt to be a man of zeal and energy but as I saw him take one burden after another upon himself I feared that his bodily strength would be unable to stand the strain. It only shows what a man can do even with a frail body."

Father Aloysius S. Malone came to St. Mary's as its new pastor in April and soon afterward launched one of the most extensive programs of renovation in its history. The program included a new church roof and strengthening of the structural support, new stone steps, new flooring in the upper and lower churches, new heating and electrical systems, new pews, lighting fixtures, and frescoing of the upper church, a new altar, communion rail, and confessionals in the lower church. By good fortune the work was completed before the onset of World War Two and the sudden and untimely death of Father Malone in June, 1940.

The debt incurred by the renewal program was a heavy one in the aftermath of the Great Depression. One means of defraying the debt was a series of annual carnivals on the parish grounds remembered not only as exciting and colorful events but for the spirit of sharing enjoyed by the many who labored to make them successful. The Holy Name Society dating almost to the beginning of the parish was reorganized in 1945 and continued to be a center of lay activity until recent times. For many years its Thanksgiving "turkey shoots" dispensed vast flocks of holiday birds and countless baskets of food and drink on the wheels of chance. The proceeds of this traditional affair supported a scholarship fund for St. Mary's boys.

The twelve year pastorate of Father John O'Riordan came to an end in 1952 when poor health forced him to resign. His spiritual guidance of the people of St. Mary's brought them through the turbulent and difficult years of the war when once again they gave more than their share in sacrifice, service, and the lives of their sons and loved ones. In spite of failing health Father O'Riordan remained to the end of his term an active participant in the affairs of Winchester.

He was succeeded in September, 1952, by Father John M. Manion who was to remain at St. Mary's for more than sixteen years. Soon after his installation Father Manion began to activate plans for a parish hall, plans which had been dormant since the erection of the school in 1914. The girls' high school, a small wooden building unused since 1938, was razed and on its site the hall with a seating capacity of five hundred was adjoined to the main school building. Three years later Father Manion commissioned the rebuilding of the church organ and redecoration of the church interior. On January 24, 1959, Father Manion was granted the rank of domestic prelate and the title of monsignor.

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

By 1964 so many Catholics had moved to the west side of Winchester that the archdiocese established the parish of St. Eulalia's to include sections of western Winchester and eastern Arlington. Monsignor Manion had in fact been a moving spirit in the creation of the new parish, in recognition of which Manion Hall was named in his honor. Monsignor Manion was one of the leaders of the ecumenical movement in Winchester until his retirement in January, 1969. He died on April 26 of this year at Regina Cleri in Boston. His parishioners will remember him for many things, not least for originating the unique custom of kneeling in silent prayer for deceased family members observed by St. Mary's people at the end of every mass.

Father James A. Garrity, now the only surviving former pastor, began his tenure at St. Mary's in 1969 and retired because of ill health in 1974. A lasting contribution of Father Garrity was the installation of a series of beautiful stained glass windows each depicting an event in the life of the Blessed Mother.

Early in 1973 the parish was stunned by the announcement that the Sisters of St. Joseph who had conducted the school since its opening nearly sixty years earlier were withdrawing because of a change of emphasis in their ministry. Father Garrity's timely and decisive action in arranging a cooperative effort among several teaching orders, with Sister Stephanie as principal, assured the continuance of the school. Father Garrity resides at Regina Cleri and keeps in touch with his many friends and former parishioners.

Installation ceremonies for Father Arthur L. Reardon, the present pastor, were held on July 21, 1974. One of Father Reardon's first concerns in his new pastorate was the renovation of the church for the centennial celebration of St. Mary's parish this year. Details of the restoration program, now fully completed, will be found in another section of this book.

To complete the history of Saint Mary's Parish mention must be made of the many associate pastors, formerly called curates, who served the people of the parish with special devotion. Remembered fondly by many present parishioners are those priests who were at Saint Mary's during the past two decades and now are active in other parishes.

Rev. Martin Dolphin, Pastor of Saint Raphael's Parish, West Medford, enriched Saint Mary's Parish for many years with his scholarly and informative Bible classes for adults. Rev. Charles Anadore, Pastor of Saint Barbara's Parish, Woburn, ministered to the Italian-speaking community of Saint Mary's with loving care and gave memorable leadership to the Sodality. Rev. Francis Turke, Pastor of Holy Family Parish in Duxbury endeared himself to all through unceasing hard work and quiet accessibility. Rev. Edmund Parker, now at Saint Joseph's Parish, Medford, brought to Saint Mary's, soon after his ordination, youthful enthusiasm and appealing dedication to his assignments.

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

Rev. Stephen Koen, stationed now in Saint Mary's Parish, Foxboro, will be remembered for his concern for the Christian Doctrine program and the altar boys. At Saint Mary's for eleven years, Rev. John O'Donnell, Saint Mary's Parish, Beverly, possessed a wide smile, happy disposition and worked devotedly with the Holy Name Society and the Mr. and Mrs. Club. Most recently Rev. Bernard Hoy left Saint Mary's for Sacred Heart Parish in Lexington. Through his annual C. Y. O. show, Father Hoy became a special friend of the young people of the town as well as their parents and all the townspeople. The show meant long hours and extra duty which for him was a "joy."

No words can ever express the gratitude of the people of the parish for these and all the other priests of the past who worked so tirelessly in the Lord's vineyard at Saint Mary's.

Even a very brief telling of the story of Saint Mary's reveals the devotion with which priests and generations of parishioners have added piece by piece to its grounds and buildings and have sought, often at the cost of sacrifice, to maintain and modernize them and to add to their usefulness and beauty. This is especially true of their church, the Church of Saint Mary, which now in the hundredth year of its history they have made more beautiful than ever before.

(St. Mary's Centennial Book – 1976)

THE SECOND CENTURY

Saint Mary's upper church has been renovated in anticipation of the Centennial Celebration, enlarging the sanctuary in conformity with the liturgical recommendations of the documents of Vatican II, and replacing some of the furnishings. The walls and ceilings have been repainted and the lighting improved.

Saint Mary's Church is an example of English Gothic architecture. Oak was used originally throughout the interior of the church for the paneling, furnishing and carvings. The renovations harmonize with the basic architecture. The new oak paneling and furnishings have simple but traditional lines.

The altar of the Eucharist is in the form of a table with four posts supporting the mensa. At the rear of the sanctuary, the oak paneling is embellished by a beautifully hand carved canopy, accentuating a wood carving of the Risen Christ. The church furniture is also styled in accordance with the architectural-design of the church and tastefully placed in the sanctuary.

The tabernacle altar is located in a chapel apart from, and to the right of the sanctuary, giving it the special reverence it deserves. The old tabernacle has been refinished in a soft bronze and encased in a new housing. The rest of the appointments are in keeping with the new tabernacle. The pieces that require frequent handling are made of bronze with color to enhance their appearance.

**The History of St. Mary's Parish
Winchester, MA
Part I "The First One Hundred Years"
Part II "The Second Century"**

On the left side of the sanctuary, the new Baptistry is open and visible to all. It is constructed of bronze and oak and highlighted by an exquisite wood carving of the Madonna and Child. The priests of the parish believe that the renovated church has resulted in a place of worship that exemplifies the true meaning of sacred art and fervently hope that it will foster the faith of those who gather there.

An important part of the preparation of Saint Mary's upper church for the Centennial Celebration has been the renovation of the organ. The complexity of the task is such that the organ will not be ready until several months after the celebration of the Centennial Mass. Research by organ builders established that the original organ at Saint Mary's was a tracker-type instrument, installed in the gallery sometime just before the turn of the century.

In 1957, this tracker instrument was replaced with a two-manual electro-pneumatic rebuild by the Beacon Instrument Company of Boston. Most scholars of the organ and most professional classical organists prefer the tracker-action organ to the more complicated electro-pneumatic instrument, which has a high frequency of breakdown and offers less sensitive key-to-pipe action.

The new instrument is a rebuild of twenty-one stops and three manuals by the Philip A. Beaudry Company of Somerville. It utilizes all the good pipes in the former organ, the blower and some wind reservoirs. It features a restored tracker mechanism and some new pipes in a large case flanking the rear gallery stained glass windows.

It is hoped that with the restoration of the pipe organ, this instrument will contribute now, and for many years, to the musical and liturgical life of the parish.