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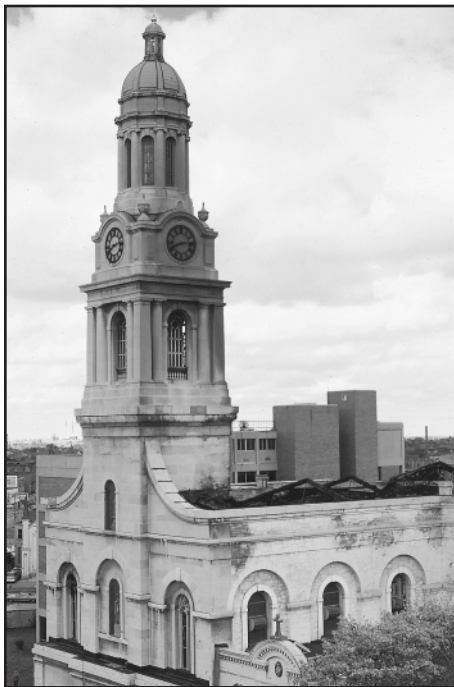
Summer 2001

No. 3

St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church One Hundred Twenty-Eight Years on Franklin Street

by Vincent A. Lenti





St. Joseph's Church as it is today. (Photo by Vincent Lenti).

*Cover Photo: A familiar Rochester landmark: St. Joseph's Church tower.
(Courtesy of Redemptorist Provincial Archives for the Baltimore Province).*

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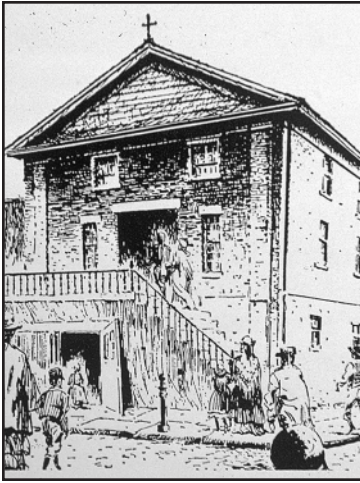
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St. Joseph's School, Church and Rectory, showing the exterior steps of the entrance (later replaced) and the original wooden steeple.

Fire! The Destruction of a Rochester Landmark October 17 & 18, 1974

Late in the evening of October 17, 1974, the Rev. Albert J. Reissner, C.S.S.R. sat watching television in the rectory of St. Joseph's Church. Joining Father Reissner were two other residents of the rectory, Brother Thaddeus Wright, C.S.S.R., and Phil Maguire. At around midnight Father Reissner and Brother Thaddeus retired for the evening, while Maguire remained for a while to read the evening newspaper. Just before going to his room, he thought that he smelled smoke and glanced into the adjoining church building. Much to his horror, Maguire saw that an entire wall of the Perpetual Help Shrine was on fire. Rushing back into the rectory, he awakened all of the sleeping residents and told Father Reissner to summon the fire department. By this time, however, the telephone lines were burned out, and Father Reissner had to make the call from a nearby White Tower restaurant across Franklin Street. The alarm was turned in at 1:15 a.m. and fire trucks were on the scene within minutes. By 2:00 a.m. the fire chief had determined that the church probably could not



An artist's rendering of the Church on Ely Street (from "The Bells of St. Joseph's").



The building on Ely Street which had served as the first church and parochial school. It was later a carpentry and blacksmith shop.

be saved. Despite heroic efforts by the fire fighters, the flames soon broke through the roof of the church and spread in all directions. At 3:45 a.m. the roof collapsed, destroying the pews and caving in much of the main floor.

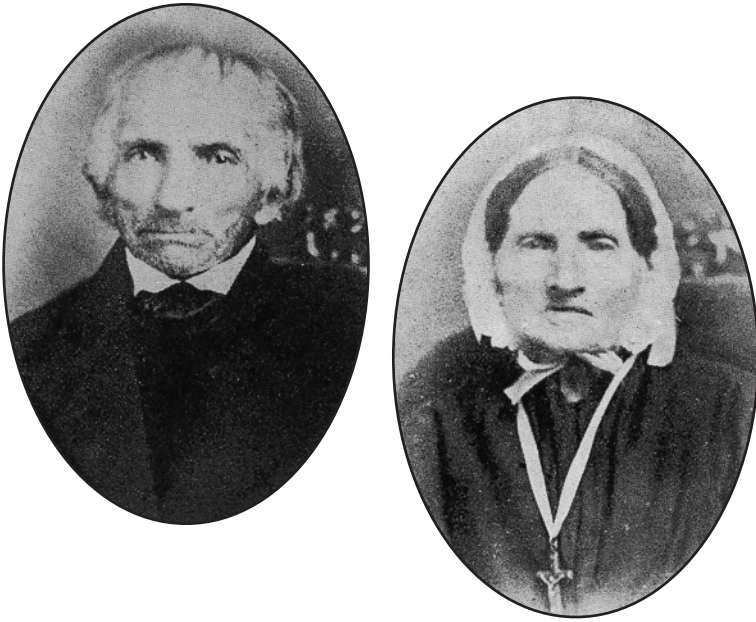
The fire had been courageously fought by more than 100 fire fighters and was declared under control at 5:53 a.m. The exterior walls and tower of St. Joseph's somehow survived the inferno, but the interior was nothing more than a smoking shambles. As Rochester awoke on the morning of October 18, news of the fire spread throughout the city. Curiosity-seekers, parishioners, and friends of the church gathered on Franklin Street, stunned at the loss of this 128 year-old structure which had so richly contributed in so many ways to the history of the city.

The German Catholics of Rochester 1817 - 1836

The building lost in the fire during the early hours of the morning had opened in 1846, but the origins of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church date from 1836. It was established in that year to serve the needs of growing numbers of German Catholics who were settling in the Rochester area. The first of these German Catholics was apparently John Klem, who arrived in Rochester with his wife and son in 1817. Klem and other early Catholic settlers in the region had no priest available to them, the closest being in Albany. Therefore, they would make a yearly trip to Albany to receive the sacraments and to get their children baptized. In 1823, however, Rochester's Catholics constructed St. Patrick's Church, and the Rev. Michael McNamara became the first resident pastor. Seven years later, a larger stone church was constructed to serve the needs of Father McNamara's parish and the growing numbers of Roman Catholics in the area.

German Catholics, however, yearned for a church of their own and a priest who could minister to them in their own language. Their prayers were answered in 1835 when the Rev. Joseph Prost made an unexpected but fortuitous stop in Rochester. Father Prost was a Redemptorist, or more properly a priest of the Order of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. This order of Catholic priests had been established in Italy by Alphonsus Liguori less than a hundred years earlier. Its work had quickly spread to other areas of Catholic Europe, including southern Germany and Austria. The first Redemptorist priests to come to America arrived in 1832 and came at the request of the Bishop of Cincinnati to minister to the German Catholics of his diocese. Although priests of this order were supposed to live in a centralized community, these earliest Redemptorists found themselves dispersed throughout the diocese, which then embraced almost all of Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Father Prost had been appointed Visitor and Superior of the American Mission by the Vicar General of the Order and arrived in New York in 1835. He was welcomed to America by the Rt. Rev. John Dubois, Bishop of New York, whose jurisdiction at that time included the entire state. Prost remained there for two months before setting out to join his colleagues in the mid-West. The journey took him up the Hudson



John and Anna Maria Klem, early settlers in Rochester and among the first parishioners of St. Joseph's Church. The Klems arrived in 1816 and celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary at St. Joseph's in 1853. They had a farm at the corner of East Avenue and Goodman Street.

River to Albany and then westward via the Erie Canal. Although he had not intended to stop in Rochester, a break in the canal forced a temporary halt to his journey. The pastor of St. Patrick's, Father Bernard O'Reilly, greeted him on his arrival and persuaded Father Prost to preach to the German Catholics on Sunday. They were so overjoyed with having a priest who could minister to them in German that they urged Prost to remain with them in Rochester. However, he was committed to continuing his journey and left. Later on, while in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Father Prost received a letter from the German Catholics of Rochester urging his return, a request which was supported by Father O'Reilly and also by Bishop Dubois. He decided to respond to their call.

The Origins of St. Joseph's Church 1836 - 1846

Father Joseph Prost arrived back in Rochester on July 10, 1836. In preparation for his return, the Germans had purchased a building to serve as a church. Located at the corner of Ely Street and Minerva Place, the structure was small, but had galleries on three sides to provide fairly adequate seating space for Sunday worship. Living accommodations for the priest and a school room were located in the basement. Regular services were established within a short while. There were two Masses on Sunday, one at 8:00 a.m. and the other at 10:30 a.m., and Vespers and Benediction were held at 3:00 p.m. The first baptism took place on July 24, two weeks following the arrival of Father Prost. The first funeral was on July 31, and the first marriage on August 10. In the fall of 1836, a handful of children began to attend school in the basement room of the church building, the first parochial school in Rochester, with instruction being provided by Louis Kenning, a layman. The church was formally dedicated in 1837 by Bishop DuBois, with Father O'Reilly and Father Prost assisting in the ceremonies.

The following year Father Prost received a grant of 5,000 florins (about \$2,500) from the Leopold Foundation in Vienna. He used this money not only to pay off the debt on his own church, but also that of St. Patrick's. At about the same time, he received a gift of 6,000 florins (about \$3,000) from the Rt. Rev. Roman Sebastian Zaengerle, Bishop of Graz, Austria, sent for the purpose of building a church in America in honor of St. Joseph. Using these funds, Prost purchased property on Franklin Street for \$1,400, consisting of lots 84 and 85 in the Atwater and Andrews tract. Each lot was about a quarter-acre, and the only existing structure was a small frame house which Prost rented out. In addition, he added to the church's property on Ely Street by spending \$1,480 for lots 21 and 24 in the subdivision of the old Ely homestead. With the Franklin Street property in hand, Prost proposed to the Redemptorists that Rochester should become the location of their first community in America. To his surprise he encountered some opposition to the proposal. More serious dissension, however, came from his own parishioners.

Parish opposition to Father Prost's plans was possible because the existing church was owned and controlled by lay trustees. When the

Roman Catholic Church was established in America, its first bishop, the Rt. Rev. John Carroll, instituted a policy of "lay trusteeism" for Roman Catholic churches in which church property would be held by trustees elected by the congregation. He did so because he felt that this policy was in harmony with American democratic principles. The policy, however, conflicted with many principles of Roman Catholic church governance, and in 1829 the American bishops decreed that no new churches were to be erected unless the deeds were made out in the name of the local bishop. New York State, however, had passed a law which mandated lay trustees for all religious denominations. In accordance with this existing law, therefore, trustees were elected from the membership of St. Joseph's (or St. Mary's as the congregation was initially known), and these trustees became the legal owners of the property. Father Prost's proposal that the congregation should build a new church on Franklin Street and turn it over to the Redemptorist priests met with opposition from the lay trustees, an opposition supported by a segment of the congregation. While many of the German Catholics supported Father Prost, the dissension within the congregation became so great that he decided to temporarily leave Rochester at the end of May 1838. This soon left the German Catholics without a pastor, and they were forced once again to turn to St. Patrick's Church for their spiritual needs.

In August 1839, the Rev. Simon Sanderl, C.S.S.R., arrived as a new pastor for the German Catholics. The need for a new church building had become gradually more and more apparent, and the majority of the congregation supported the construction of a church on Franklin Street, to be staffed by Redemptorist priests. A small group of dissident parishioners, however, left the congregation at this time to form their own German Catholic parish on the west side of the Genesee River. On June 21, 1841, Father Sanderl purchased additional property on Franklin Street, adjacent to the two parcels which Father Prost had obtained several years earlier. The following year, the Rev. Benedict Bayer, C.S.S.R., succeeded Father Sanderl as pastor, and it was Father Bayer who was present at the laying of the cornerstone for the new church building, the ceremony taking place on August 15, 1843. The plan called for a simple 125 x 60 foot rectangular structure with chapels on either side of the sanctuary, each chapel being 40 x 20 feet. Construction proceeded rather slowly, but the new church building was finally completed early in the summer of 1846. The church was built of Lockport stone and cost approximately \$32,000. The opening of the church and its dedication to the patronage of St. Joseph took place on July 26.

Years of Growth 1846 - 1875

The rapid growth of the congregation not only led to the opening of the new church building in 1846, but also quickly allowed for many improvements of the facilities. In 1849 the church was enlarged by extending the rear wall to make a larger sanctuary, and at the same time sanctuaries were added to the two side chapels. Additionally, a new home was built for the community of priests who had been living up to this point in the small frame house which still stood adjacent to the church on the plot of land purchased by Father Prost. The new house was a three and a half story brick structure with a stone basement. The first floor contained parlors and a sacristy adjoining the sanctuary of the church. The second floor contained a community room, accommodations for the priests, and a community chapel located above the sacristy. The third floor provided space for the library and infirmary, as well as living quarters for the brothers. There were storerooms in the attic, and the community kitchen and dining room were in the basement.

In 1851 a further enlargement of the church took place by adding galleries which increased the seating capacity of the building to about 1,000. But now attention turned to the needs of the school. When the new church building opened on Franklin Street in 1846, the parish's growing parochial school had remained in the old Ely Street building. However, the number of students grew so rapidly that these facilities were soon totally inadequate. Therefore, in 1848 the school was temporarily moved to two large rooms in the basement of the new church building. By then enrollment was 220 students, a number which more than doubled in the next six years. To meet the needs of the school, the parish purchased two triangular plots adjacent to the church for the construction of a new three-story school building, which was completed in 1852. Up until this time, instruction of the children had been provided by lay teachers. But on October 15, 1854, the School Sisters of Notre Dame arrived to take care of the girl's department. Seven years later, the Brothers of Mary arrived to provide instruction to the boys, and on November 17, 1862, a separate school building for the boys was opened by the parish. Four years later, total enrollment at St. Joseph's parochial school exceeded 1,000 students.

In addition to caring for the school children, the good people of St.

Joseph's Church also organized an orphan society in 1861, which was incorporated on April 23, 1863 as the "St. Joseph's Catholic Orphan Asylum of Rochester and Monroe County." A building site was purchased in 1866 on Andrews Street, and a structure was erected which would serve both as a new Sisters' convent and as a home for the orphans of the parish. It was formally occupied by the Sisters and five orphan girls on January 12, 1867. This structure, however, proved woefully inadequate in providing for the needs of increasing numbers of orphans, and a new building was erected in 1874. The orphanage was later enlarged through the addition of an east wing in 1882 and by a west wing in 1897. Being separately incorporated, the St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum legally belonged to the orphan society and not to the church, but it depended upon the steady generosity and support of the parish.

Attention to the needs of school children and orphans did not preclude improvements at the church. Shortly after the construction of the 1852 school building, a new organ was installed in the church at a cost of \$2,800, replacing a small instrument which had been brought from the old church on Ely Street. Three years later, the existing mortgage of \$7,000 was liquidated, and plans were drawn up to add a 173 foot wooden steeple to the church. Since St. Joseph's was built on the highest ground of the central part of Rochester, the new steeple made the church the most recognizable local landmark. Three bells were ordered from Meneely's Foundry in Troy, New York, and named for three saints. The largest was dedicated to St. Joseph, the mid-size bell to St. Alphonsus, and the smallest to St. Boniface. The bells, not yet installed in the tower, were blessed on August 2, 1857, and rang from the tower for the first time twelve days later. At the request of the City of Rochester, "St. Joseph" (i.e. the bell, not the church) came to be used as the fire alarm for the city.

During the following years, further additions and improvements were made. The first of these was the addition in 1864 of a clock to the church tower. Then in 1870 a new building was erected on the site of the wood frame house which Father Prost had purchased twenty-three years earlier. It was a two-story brick structure which provided parlors and an office for the Redemptorist brothers on the first floor, and guest rooms on the second. At the same time, a large chapel was added adjacent to the nave of the church, a space which became known as the Confessional Chapel. In 1871 modifications were made to the entrance steps of the church, including the addition of an attractive

iron railing, and in 1872 the choir loft was considerably enlarged.

These improvements to the church, school, and living quarters were only possible because of a tremendous growth in church membership. In 1865 there were more than 6,300 parishioners, the highest number which St. Joseph's Church would ever have. The community of Redemptorists who ministered to the congregation had varied in number over the years since the founding of the parish, but it had become a fairly large staff of priests and brothers by the mid-nineteenth century. And, as previously noted, these Redemptorists were joined in the work of the parish by the School Sisters of Notre Dame and Brothers of Mary, who were involved with the parochial school and orphanage. Among the priests who ministered from time to time in the earlier days of St. Joseph's was the Rev. John Nepumucene Neumann, C.S.S.R. (later to become Bishop of Philadelphia), who has recently been officially declared a "Saint" by the Roman Catholic Church. A priest assigned to the Rochester church typically stayed for only a few years before being reassigned by the congregation to another parish in another part of the country. The Redemptorist priests at St. Joseph's worked tirelessly on behalf of the people. Their work, however, was not limited to their own church on Franklin Street, for they ministered to many other German Catholics throughout the area, including mission work in Auburn, Corning, Dansville, Mount Morris, Seneca Falls, Webster and Waterloo. Within the Rochester Roman Catholic Diocese today, nine parishes can directly trace their origins to St. Joseph's and its Redemptorist priests.



St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum on Andrews street, following the addition of the west wing in 1897.



The church property seen from Chatham Street, dating from before the replacement of the wood



wooden tower. The rear of the orphanage is seen on the right, and the rectory garden on the left.

Years of Change 1875 - 1950

The growth of the Roman Catholic population in Rochester, however, brought inevitable changes to St. Joseph's parish. As the number of churches increased in the area, especially those with ministry directed towards the German Catholics, membership at St. Joseph's began to decrease. For example, there had been almost 500 baptisms in 1860, but only 177 fifteen years later. School enrollment also declined. The highest number of students ever enrolled at St. Joseph's School had been in 1866 when there were 1,058 school children. By 1875 there were 640 students, and the number had declined to 483 by 1885. These changes do not suggest that the ministry of the Redemptorist Fathers at St. Joseph's was somehow failing. It was simply a reflection that there were now many others assisting in ministering to Rochester's Roman Catholic population.

Declining numbers of parishioners, however, did little to slow constant improvements in the church and associated buildings. In 1876 a beautiful new statue of St. Joseph and the Child Jesus was imported from Bavaria and installed over the main altar. At about the same time, work was completed on a new addition to the Priests' House which provided a new refectory and kitchen on the first floor, two new living rooms on the second floor, and a magnificent large room for the library. There was general interior remodeling in 1895, including the installation of fourteen beautiful Austrian stained glass windows. In addition, 227 electric lights were installed in the church, St. Joseph's being the first Roman Catholic church in Rochester to be illuminated by electric lights. In 1897 there were exterior improvements including cleaning the facade and painting the tower, and in 1899 the church installed a new cement sidewalk along its property on Franklin Street. Four years later, a new addition was constructed to the Priests' house by extending back from the sanctuary of the church. This provided space for a new oratory on the second floor and two new sacristies on the ground floor.

In the spring of 1908 the clock in the tower suddenly stopped functioning, the time constantly showing as 6:18. Among those noticing the malfunction was George Eastman, who used to check his watch by using the clock in St. Joseph's tower as he went from his East Avenue home to work at Kodak each day. Genuinely annoyed at the inconven-

ience caused by the non-functioning clock, he stopped by the rectory and agreed, if necessary, to pay for the cost of repair, declaring that the clock was a "public service" to the community. The clock was duly repaired, George Eastman contributing \$100 to the cost. But the repair was a temporary matter since work began the following May to replace the old wooden tower with one made of stone. After the careful removal of the old tower, construction began in June. The new stone tower, 167 feet 6 inches in height, was solemnly blessed on November 7, 1909. The three bells were replaced in the tower the following June, and a new tower clock was then installed in December.

Meanwhile, there were many changes in the parochial school. In 1889, faced with declining enrollment following the opening of other parochial schools in Rochester, the boy's school building was torn down and their classes transferred to the girls' school building. A new school building, which included a parish hall, was then constructed at a cost of \$36,650 on the site of the former boys' school. This facility opened on April 7, 1890, and shortly afterwards the School Sisters of Notre Dame assumed responsibility for all of the instruction at St. Joseph's School. The work of the school was significantly expanded in 1904 by the establishment of a Commercial Department which provided a business education by offering courses such as shorthand, book-keeping, typing, and accounting. In those days few students - especially those from working class families - completed four years of high school. The Commercial Department at St. Joseph's was an admirable effort to provide these children with a practical education which could assist them in securing employment. The initial enrollment in 1904 was only eighteen students, but within a short while enrollment increased fourfold. Although opened as a coeducational endeavor, the Commercial Department was limited in later years to female students. Many of its graduates went on to useful employment throughout the City of Rochester. When declining enrollment finally forced the closing of the regular parochial school in the mid 1950s, the Commercial Department - now known as St. Joseph's Commercial School - continued to provide a business education to many young women of the Rochester area.

Another important initiative associated with St. Joseph's Church at the time was ministry to the deaf and hearing-impaired Catholics of Rochester. The first such activity was scheduled on a bi-monthly basis in 1908 by the Rev. William Kessel, C.S.S.R., who was rector of the church at the time. A full ministry to hearing-impaired Catholics



St. Joseph's School on Franklin Street, adjacent to the church. The building was also the location of the St. Francis de Sales Chapel for the Deaf.

began in 1926 with the arrival of the Rev. Charles Burger, C.S.S.R.. Father Burger had a long history of ministering to the hearing impaired and was appointed by the Bishop of Rochester to be Chaplain for the Deaf in Rochester. In 1931 he was able to provide his community with a regular place of worship by opening the St. Francis de Sales Chapel in the school hall. Two years later he was succeeded as chaplain by the Rev. William Doherty, C.S.S.R. A very notable ministry to hearing-impaired Catholics in Rochester was provided by the Rev. John B. Gallagher, C.S.S.R., who arrived in 1943. Father Gallagher was not stationed at St. Joseph's Church, but commuted from Buffalo. The Bishop of Buffalo and Bishop of Rochester combined resources to provide Father Gallagher with a car which allowed the priest to minister in both locations. The remarkable part of Father Gallagher's story is that he was sent to this ministry through a clerical error. It seems that there were two Father Gallaghers among the American Redemptorists. Unlike his namesake, the Father Gallagher sent to minister to the hearing impaired of Upstate New York had no previous training for this ministry. The Redemptorist Order simply confused the two priests and sent the wrong man. The success of his ministry in Rochester and Buffalo, however, would seem to indicate that perhaps they had really sent the right man for the job after all.

Final Years 1950 - 1974

As the years passed by, the priests and brothers of St. Joseph's Church faced many changes. The Germans for whom the parish had been founded had long since been fully integrated into Rochester society, and the neighborhood where parishioners had once lived had long since disappeared. The Orphanage had closed in the late 1930s after merging with two other local Catholic orphanages, and now the parish faced the unpleasant task of closing its parochial school. Faced with declining enrollment, the school closed its doors for the last time in 1955, ending a commitment to the education of elementary school children which extended back to the very foundation of the parish in 1836. At the church, Sunday Mass attendance, baptisms, marriages, and funerals all declined as more and more Catholics re-situated themselves in the suburbs and became parishioners at other Catholic churches. Yet, somehow "St. Joe's" maintained a vital and important role for local Catholics. Its central location in downtown Rochester made the church a natural attraction and resource for Catholics working or living in the City. For a long while the two most prominent and well-known Catholic religious goods stores were located nearby, and St. Joseph's became a kind of downtown Catholic oasis. A convenient schedule of weekday Masses, confessions, and various devotions attracted large numbers of people, and the readily available staff of Redemptorist priests encouraged many people to stop by the rectory office for spiritual guidance and assistance. On days such as Ash Wednesday, the church was filled to a point of being overcrowded. There was also something about the church itself which attracted visitors who stopped by for prayer and meditation, or even just to momentarily escape from the stress of everyday life. The atmosphere of the church interior was inviting, and moments spent inside were comforting and peaceful.

Throughout the years St. Joseph's had always been well-maintained. In 1931 a new and enlarged vestibule was added, slightly altering the exterior appearance of the church. The interior had been re-modeled in 1924 and then once again in 1952. The parish celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1961 with pride in its past accomplishments and confident that it could fulfill an important role in the future. But wise leadership somehow eluded the parish in 1965 when it was decided to construct a new building for the Commercial School, recently reorganized

as St. Joseph Business High School. The original design for the new school building called for a six-story structure with a dining room, kitchen, and library on the ground floor, four floors of classrooms, and a convent on the top floor for the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Some time later a decision was made to also include a spacious gymnasium-auditorium. The total cost initially had been estimated at \$800,000, which may have been a manageable figure, but the final cost of construction and equipment came to an incredible \$1,750,000. Funds for this ambitious project were obtained through two mortgages, plus money from parish savings and from the Redemptorist Fathers.

The hope that this impressive new facility on Franklin Street would guarantee the future of the Business High School was sadly not realized. In spite of rising enrollment, the school closed its doors forever in June 1971, only a few years after it had opened with such high expectations. The decision to close the school followed an independent "feasibility study" which concluded that there was little hope of raising the necessary funds to pay off the capital debt, and even less hope that the school could continue to operate without a substantial yearly deficit. After studying this report, the Very Rev. Joseph L. Kerins, C.S.S.R., Provincial of the Redemptorist Fathers, concluded that the school would have to cease operations at the end of the 1970-71 school year. His decision was announced to the parish and school on January 13, 1971, and the final graduation ceremony took place in June. The State University of New York at Brockport began leasing the school building in August 1972, but their annual payment to the parish was \$40,000 less than the yearly expenses of the building, including its mortgage. Therefore, the ill-advised construction of a new school building would prove to be a continual financial drain on the parish and on the Redemptorist Fathers.

Nonetheless, the church seemed to outwardly survive this expensive disappointment, and plans were announced in early 1973 for a new interior re-decoration. The budget provided \$48,000 for repairs to the ceiling decoration of the main body of the church, \$2,000 for repainting the vestibule and Confessional Chapel, \$1,674 for refinishing the pews, \$5,250 for new carpeting, and \$800 for painting and water-proofing one bay of the outside wall. The interior of St. Joseph's perhaps never looked lovelier than when this work was completed. On July 15, 1974, the church was designated a City Landmark and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Three months and three days later, it lay in almost total ruin.

After the Fire Since 1974

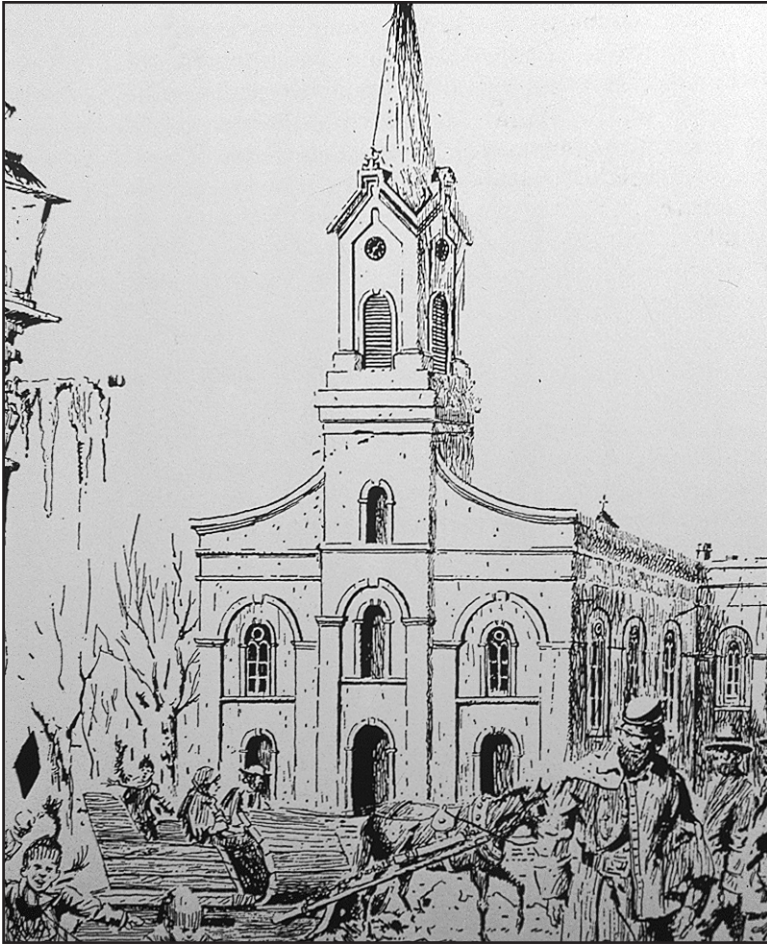
The Fire Bureau and the General Adjustment Bureau of Fire Underwriters determined that the cause of the fire which had destroyed St. Joseph's Church had been a short-circuit in an electrical wire under and behind the altar at the Perpetual Help Shrine, located to the right of the main sanctuary. The short-circuit had caused a slow-burning fire which eventually erupted into a major blaze. The church interior was almost totally destroyed, and there was major damage to the adjoining rectory. Nonetheless, many parishioners and friends of St. Joseph's hoped to see the church rebuilt, especially since the facade and tower - and the side walls - had survived the blaze. Even when it appeared that there was little if any chance that the church would be rebuilt, many people hoped for the construction of at least a smaller chapel contained within the surviving facade and the walls of the central nave. None of this, however, would take place.

One might have hoped that the Redemptorist Order would have wanted to rebuild St. Joseph's, since the church was so intimately connected with the earliest history of the Order here in America. But the school construction project had depleted the parish's financial resources and left the Redemptorist Fathers with a very heavy debt. Moreover, the church building itself had been accepted as collateral for a \$900,000 mortgage on the school building. Since the church was now destroyed, the insurance money was frozen - at least for the time being. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that no initiative was forthcoming from the Redemptorist Fathers to rebuild their church in Rochester. The Diocese of Rochester also may have had reasons for not actively encouraging reconstruction of the church. There were already two other centrally located Catholic churches in downtown Rochester - Old St. Mary's on Washington Square and Our Lady of Victory on Pleasant Street, not to mention Corpus Christi on East Main Street. Surely the needs of Catholics in the downtown area could be fulfilled by these other churches. The Redemptorist priests and brothers, therefore, returned to St. Joseph's only to salvage what they could of their personal belongings. Surviving artifacts, statues, books, and other material from the church and rectory were sold, and the church property was boarded up and closed. There it remained for what seemed like an eternity.

When it became evident that the church would not be rebuilt, efforts turned towards salvaging the facade and walls. These efforts involved the Landmark Society of Western New York, SUNY Brockport, officials of the City of Rochester, members of the Downtown Development Corporation, and the Redemptorists. The resulting plans called for the Landmark Society to purchase the site containing the shell of the burned-out church and to restore and stabilize the structure to create within it an urban park. The State University of New York agreed to purchase the school building, and the City of Rochester acquired the balance of the church property. The three parcels of land, therefore, were transferred to their new owners in March 1980. The demolition of the ruined church and rectory was finally completed in June, almost six years after the fire.

The Landmark Society of Western New York used fund-raising events, gifts, and grants to obtain the necessary funding for creating St. Joseph's Park. Major donors included the City of Rochester, Sibley's Department Store, Rochester Savings Bank, the Rochester Area Foundation, and the Redemptorist Fathers. Frank S. Grosso was hired as architect, and final plans included a fountain dedicated in honor of William E. Lee, Chairman of Sibley's from 1966 to 1979, for his efforts to make the park a reality. The dedication of St. Joseph's Park occurred at 12:00 noon on October 6, 1980. Master of ceremonies for the occasion was Rowland Collins, a Professor of English at the University of Rochester who was President of the Landmark Society. The invocation was given by the Rev. Charles J. Lavery of St. John Fisher College, and remarks were offered by Mayor Thomas P. Ryan, Jr., and by Frank Grosso, the architect.

Standing in front of St. Joseph's Park today, it is difficult to envision the church community which once occupied this site. Franklin Street itself, now re-routed, no longer runs past the entrance, and the church location seems strangely isolated and out of the way. What they now call Franklin Street used to be Chatham Street, and it runs behind St. Joseph's, not past the entrance. The Redemptorist priests and brothers are gone, and there is no trace of the rectory where they lived and worked. For a while they moved over to nearby Our Lady of Victory Church (now called "Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph's"), but they finally left downtown Rochester in 1996 after more than a century and a half of ministry to the city's Catholics. There is no orphanage or convent on Andrews Street, and the School Sisters of Notre Dame who lived and labored there are gone. The parochial school adjacent to the



St. Joseph's in 1864 when the clocks were put in the tower (From the "Bells of St. Joseph's.")

church, where thousands of school children were educated, is but a faint memory. The St. Francis de Sales Chapel in the school building, where Father Burger and his successors ministered to the hearing impaired, is largely forgotten. All that really remains is an empty shell of what was once a vibrant Catholic institution which contributed in so many ways to the betterment of the community in which it was founded.

Note and Sources

The most readily available sources concerning St. Joseph's Church are the three published commentaries concerning the history of the parish: *Four-Score Years: A Contribution to the History of The Catholic Germans in Rochester* by the Rev. Thomas W. Mullaney, C.S.S.R. (Rochester, 1916); *Centennial Souvenir/St. Joseph's Parish/Rochester, N.Y.* by the Rev. John F. Byrne, C.S.S.R. (Rochester, 1936); and *The Bells of Saint Joseph's: A Souvenir of the First Century and a Quarter of the Redemptorists in Rochester* by the Rev. James J. Galvin, C.S.S.R. (Rochester, 1961). Important information can also be found in *The Life and Letters of Bishop McQuaid* (three volumes) by the Rev. Frederick J. Zwierlein (Rochester, 1925, 1926, 1927), and in *The Diocese of Rochester in America: 1868-1993* by the Rev. Robert F. McNamara (Rochester, 1998).

Other valuable records concerning the history of St. Joseph's Church have been found in various files and archives in Rochester and elsewhere. The author is grateful to Robert Vogt for his assistance at the archives of the Rochester Roman Catholic Diocese, to Sister Virginia Mullaly for information contained in the archives of the Wilton Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, to the Rev. Carl Hoegerl for material from the Redemptorist Provincial Archives for the Baltimore Province, to the Landmark Society for allowing access to their records and files, and finally to City Historian Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck for her encouragement and assistance with this project.

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The interior of St. Joseph's Church in 1974, following the final redecoration. (Photo by Vincent Lenti).

Back cover: Aerial view of St. Joseph's Church after the fire in 1974.

