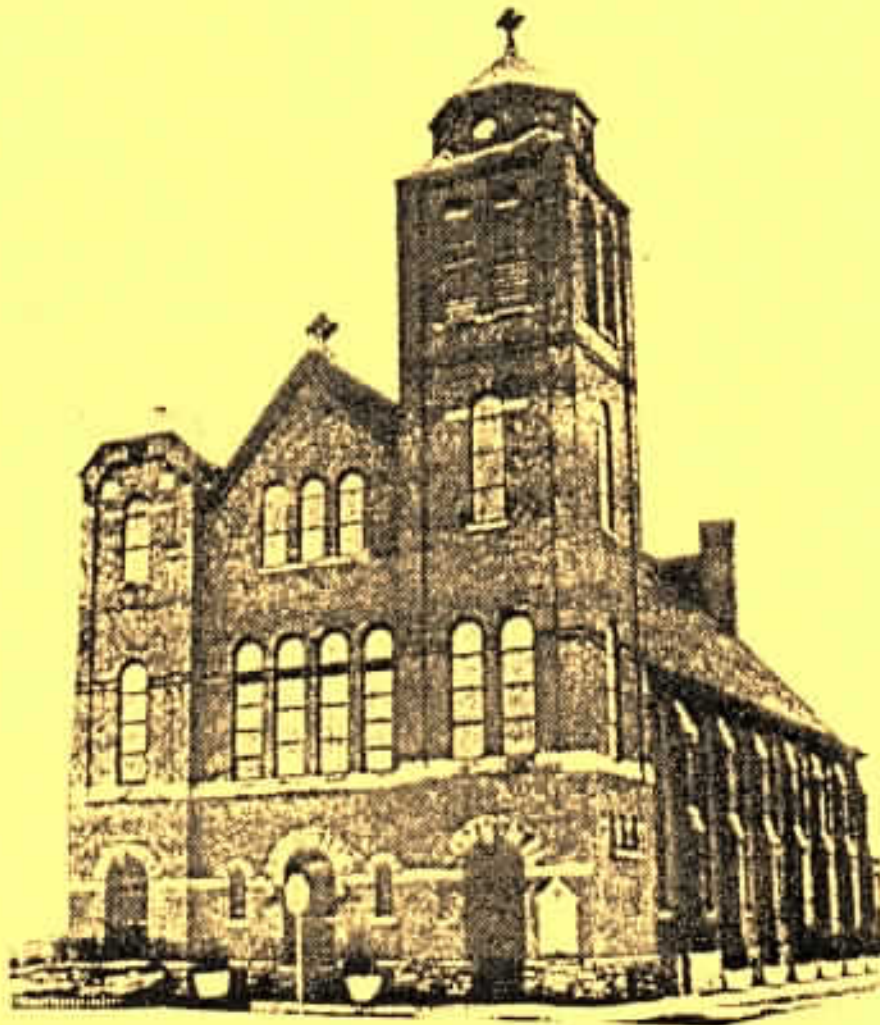


125TH ANNIVERSARY

APRIL FIFTH

1869 - - - 1994



CHURCH OF ST. JOSEPH

925 HURON AVE.

RENOVO, PA. 17764

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A PARISH HISTORY

BY

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## A HISTORY OF SAINT JOSEPH PARISH, RENOVO, PA.

The beginnings of Catholicism in the western end of Clinton County is elusive. The Diocesan record of 1929 has two distinct accounts. One account describes the labors of Father John C. Gilligan, the other traces the efforts of Father Louis Michael Fink, O.S.B.

During the twenty years from 1853 until his death in 1873, Father Gilligan was the "pioneer priest" who cared for Catholic families from Bellefonte in Centre County, northward through Howard (where once a parish was established by him), to Lock Haven, in Clinton County, where he established a chapel, which shortly became the Immaculate Conception parish. From there he was known to travel up-river by boat to minister to the Irish Catholic families in their homes and other temporary buildings\* in the area of what later became Renovo.

Father Louis M. Fink, originally from Saint Marys, PA., joined the Benedictine Order in Latrobe, PA. Upon his ordination on May 28, 1857, he was assigned to Saint John

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\*"Temporary buildings" seems to have been an editorial interpretation of the technical land-usage term "improvement". Improvements were any building constructed on a claim, showing that the land was occupied or being worked or used. Many of them were not the most substantial of buildings, hence "temporary" until something more lasting was built.

the Evangelist Parish, in Bellefonte. From there he ministered particularly to the German-speaking Catholics of the area. His travels took him by way of Snow Shoe, PA., over the mountain to Renovo. An historical note on Father Fink is that this local Catholic missionary later became the bishop of Eucarpia (Kansas and the Indian Territory) and first Bishop of the Diocese of Leavenworth, KS. (today the Diocese of Kansas City), the great missionary of the Kansas prairies until his death in 1904.

The missionary migrations of these two attest to the predominant Irish and German composition of the population of the valley formed by the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. They also show that even in the mid-nineteenth century the two now-familiar routes, which have become PA State Routes 144 N&S and 120 E&W, were already being used.

The Great American Civil War was fought between 1860-65. During the post-Civil War boom, the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad became a major land-holder of the valley, and the area between Paddy's Run and Drury's Run was developed into the town of Renovo, incorporated in 1866. In 1869, Father Joseph Kaelin (Koelin) was sent by Bishop Jeremiah F. Shanahan, Bishop of the new Diocese of Harrisburg (estab. 1868) to begin the new parish of Saint Joseph in Renovo. The birth date of our parish is April 6, 1869, when six lots were bought from the Philadelphia and Erie Land Company in the name of the Bishop of Harrisburg for the Parish of Saint Joseph. The total cost was \$1,027.00 for the tract of land

extending back from Huron Avenue, between Larch Street (our present-day alley) and Ninth Street.

Father Kaelin or Koelin was assigned as pastor on May 6, 1869. Was it diplomacy or coincidence, that the change of a single letter in his name, he could appear as Irish or German. It is hard to determine the actual nationality of this first pastor even from parish documents, the second letter seems to be deliberately vague. He was apparently only an organizing agent of the Bishop, for he was succeeded in 1870 by Father Edward Field. Father Field is recorded in the Baptismal Records of July 20, 1870, seemingly inspecting the potential of the new parish. He was assigned as the second pastor in October of 1870.

In 1869-70, the First Vatican Council was held promulgating the primacy and infallibility of the pope as dogma, and defining doctrine on natural religion, revelation, faith and the relationship of faith and reason. During this time of changes and renewal in the Church Universal, Fr. Field has the honor and responsibility of organizing the parish in the construction of its first Church. It was a rough log-wood frame building measuring 75 feet by 25 feet facing Larch Street (our present-day alley), while the rectory was built facing Ninth Street, beside and behind the Church.

The pastors of Saint Joseph's did not seem to stay long. Father Thomas J. Reilly was named the third pastor in October of 1871. He apparently contracted smallpox during

the epidemic in the spring of 1872. Father William J. Pope administered the parish until August. Upon resuming his duties perhaps too prematurely, Father Reilly died in September of 1872. Fathers Bastible and Barry are noted as filling in until Father Francis Xavier Schmidt was assigned as the fourth permanent pastor on October 10, 1872 until his transfer on November 22, 1877.

Father Schmidt realized the rapid growth of the parish was going to necessitate a larger, more roomy church. He was also concerned about the spiritual and educational growth and development of his people. He is credited with organizing the Catholic Education of Renovo. He established a Parochial School of nine grades under the charge of Thomas Egan, Mary Hogan Weymouth and Gilbert Benton. Gilbert Benton was the first son of the parish to enter the priesthood. Mr. Benton later achieved the title of Monsignor and served in the office of Vicar General of the Harrisburg Diocese.

During the year of 1875, Father Schmidt supervised the building of a combination Church-and-School. This would become Saint Joseph's second Church in less than six years. Facing Huron Avenue along Ninth Street, the main body of the Church would be 64 feet long by 36 feet wide. The building formed a large rectangle with two "wings." The rear of the Church extended out containing the sanctuary, 12 feet deep and 18 feet wide. A vestry measuring 9 feet wide and 17 feet long, probably extended off the rear side wall opposite Ninth Street. The main walls of the larger body of the building were 32 feet high with "Gothic gables"

facing Huron Avenue. Seating capacity was acknowledged as 480, with a gallery capable of holding another 100. Adjoining the Church by a hall was the School wing. It is described as containing three 9 feet by 24 feet rooms.\*

T.F. Singer was awarded the contract for the building on May 20, 1875. Bishop Shanahan "consecrated" [more likely solemnly "dedicated"] the new Church on October 19, 1876. The total cost of the building project was \$12,000.

Father Schmidt also saw the need to build the community of Saint Joseph Parish-family, and to strengthen its faith. To this end, Father Schmidt requested four Sisters of Mercy be assigned to teach in Saint Joseph's Parochial School. They took up residence in the former Koller home on Ninth Street.

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\*There exist no photographs of the second Church and first school nor any people with living memory of it. Some argue that it faced Ninth Street, I cannot say which. Arguments can defy logic. The total length of the second Church was 85 feet. To face Ninth street, it would have overlapped with the first church extending 75 feet from Larch Street. Yet 85 feet from Huron Avenue, would have the second Church colliding with the Rectory. The School of three 9 x 24 rooms poses another problem, it is purported to have been at right angles to the first Church to which it was later connected forming an L-shape, access to the school was from Huron Avenue between the two Churches which created a sort of courtyard for the School.

[second house from the corner, immediately behind Dr. Dwyer's house which was on the corner, across from the Church.]

On November 9, 1876 the school opened for classes, beginning a one hundred and seven years history of Parochial Education in Renovo. The first year's enrollment was seventy-one pupils. By October 1877, enrollment was at two hundred and sixty pupils. It was necessary to connect the school to the first Church building. It is said that planks were added to the backs of the pews to make desks.

In the wider world, 1876 was the year that Col. George Custer and 264 soldiers of the Seventh Calvary were massacred at Little Big Horn; and Mark Twain published Tom Sawyer. Besides the opening of St. Joseph's School, Fr. Schmidt also acquired five acres from James Murphy and his wife, at the cost of \$500 for the creation of the Saint Joseph's Parish Cemetery at Drury's Run. On June 6, 1881, Bishop Shanahan visited again the twelve year-old parish of Saint Joseph's. On that occasion he administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to one hundred people. Then a procession moved the celebration to Drury's Run where the newly cleared cemetery was solemnly consecrated. The present day cemetery at Drury's Run is approached from Brewery Hollow, but in earlier times the cemetery was approached from the Drury's Run side by a steep bank of steps. Funerals were usually carried from the Church to the railway station on Ninth Street and a special funeral train with a car for the mourners took the body of the deceased to Drury's Run stop.

Then with pure man-power the remains were carried up the steps to the burial site.

Father Schmidt seems to have had some help during the last year of his pastorate, one Father W.J. Grill's name appear frequently in the sacramental registries (from July 29, 1876 to April 22, 1877). But Father J.J. Reilly is accorded with becoming the first assistant pastor from April 22, 1877 to September 27, 1878. There have been no less than sixty-five assistants, associates or parochial vicars from 1877 until Father David J. Arseneault was transferred in 1984.

An Irish terrorist society, known as the Molly Maguires, with strong ties to the coal mining areas near Scranton, PA were broken up in 1877; and the first violent national railroad strike occurred that year. Father William Francis McIlheny became our fifth pastor, from November 23, 1877 until October 12, 1878. Father worked mainly to reduce the debt created by the constructions. It was also during his time that the Parochial School was expanded to include High School.\* The High School department would survive ninety years. One discrepancy of history:- the High School department is said to have been housed from 1877-1883 in the southern front parlours of the Convent, which was built during Father Igoe's pastorate which began in October, 1878.

The Catholic Church saw the election of a new pope, Leo XIII in 1878, to succeed Pope Pius IX. The Catholic population of Renovo saw the appointment of a new pastor,



their sixth, Father James Igoe on October 13, 1878. To his credit is accorded the dispelling of a "considerable sectarian feeling." With the aid of his assistant Father James M. Barr, they were able "to equip a pioneer corps which was long remembered."

Father Igoe looking after the needs of the teaching nuns, had built in 1878 the original convent on Ninth Street. Very early on, in 1882, a third story was added. Another discrepancy of history notes that this convent was used until 1961 (eighty-three years). But very clearly history records the moving date into a new twentieth century convent occurred on January 31, 1962. Either the poor nuns went unhoused for a semester or the date of the cornerstone of the new convent was being used as an indicator.

Bingo was developed from the Italian lotto game of tumbula (tombola) in 1880; it would become for Catholic parishes, including Saint Joseph's, an important money-raising enterprise. On a more spiritual side, the American Catholic Church held the Council of Baltimore in 1884 producing a standard American Catholic policy and the infamous Baltimore Catechism. On October 15, 1887 Father Matthew Ignatius O'Reilly was appointed Pastor and administrator of Saint Joseph's Parish. Father A. Kenny was the assistant, replacing Father Barr in 1883. Father O'Reilly's major accomplishments were on pastoral levels to reduce the parish debt and the formation of the Father Matthew Total Abstinence Society.

The newly consecrated Bishop of Harrisburg, Rt. Rev. Thomas McGovern, D.D., appointed Father Joseph J. (J.J.) Gormley as the eighth pastor of Saint Joseph's Parish on May 21, 1888. Within a month, on June 17, 1888, the bishop made his first official episcopal visitation for the purpose of administering Confirmation on one hundred and seventy candidates (representing four years of students plus adults). Thus realizing the vitality of the less than twenty year old parish, plans began on further expansion of the parish facilities.

Before Father Gormley could arrange for this expansion, the Eastern United States endured the blizzard of 1888, in which 400 deaths were attributed to the storm and its aftermath. The famous Johnstown flood of 1889, in which 2,300 lives were lost, overshadows the flood devastating Renovo at the same time. In the world on the American scene, Ellis Island was opened in 1890 to accept the rising tide of immigrants coming from Europe. Pope Leo XIII wrote and promulgated his encyclical Rerum Novarum in 1891 on the condition of the working class. But before the spring of 1892, Fr. Gormley expanded the existing school in the area between the rectory and convent facing Ninth Street. It is believed that an auditorium was constructed in this expanded school that would house St. Joseph's congregation for Mass during the building phase of its third and newest Church-building. Undesignated improvements were also made on the rectory and convent at that time as well. In early 1892 the two existing

Church buildings were razed, and ground was broken on May 11, 1892, for the new Church. Bishop McGovern returned to Renovo on August 14, 1892 [some accounts state August 15] for the solemn and fitting services dedicating and laying the cornerstone of this third Church of Saint Joseph's Parish. It is not recorded where the Catholic population gathered for Sunday Mass during this period of demolition and construction. [Although one newspaper account refers to "the old church on Ninth Street" as a gathering place for procession to the new Church on the occasion of its dedication in 1897.]

Who would have known that this was economically going to be a bad time for building. 1892 was the year of the Homestead Steel Strikes of Pennsylvania which had a adverse affect on associated industries like coal and railroading. A financial panic began in 1893 and led into a four-year depression. It is all the more amazing and to his credit that Father Gormley proceeding undeterred once demolition had commenced to bring the project to completion.

It is noted that excursion trains were run from Kane to Williamsport on the occasion of the dedication ceremony for the laying of the church's cornerstone. Bishop McGovern arrived in Renovo on the "Fast Line" accompanied by Father G.L. Benton (native son of the parish). Services that day would include three Masses, the administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation to another one hundred and seventy, a parade in which all the Catholic Societies of the parish were reviewed by the Bishop. Before this assemblage of people, according

to the Rites of the Catholic Church. Bishop McGovern, attired in appropriate Episcopal robes, led the prayers and the blessing of a Cross, which was placed where the main altar in the completed Church would be erected. He proceed to the area of the corner of the foundation, and with a golden trowel placed some mortar on the foundation. With the aid of a bar he put the cornerstone, containing a tin box with appropriate Church data inside, into place. A procession commenced around the foundation, during which it was blessed and made holy for the support of the Church building that would rise on that site to house the parish community of Saint Joseph. There is some inconsistency concerning the cornerstone information. It is inscribed:

on one side: A. M. D. G.

J U L Y 17

on the other side: A. D.

1 8 9 2

It appears the original date for the cornerstone laying was to be the seventh of July, and was later moved to the seventeenth of July after the stone-cutter had engraved the original date. He was able to squeeze in the "1" to make a "17" out of a "7". Then the date must have been changed again more radically to August 14 -- too late for later changes. Many people also ask what does the lettering, "A.M.D.G.," signify. It is a Latin abbreviation for Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam, which means "For the Greater Glory of God."

Completion of the building would take the better part

of five years. The community was under roof "by the following November" following the laying of the cornerstone. This may, be interpreted to mean November 1892 or November 1893. In either case a remarkable achievement. But considering the dimensions of the building, the latter date seems more logical. The interior encloses a nave and sanctuary 120 feet long by 50 feet wide to a ceiling 40 feet high without a single interior pillar or support, thus permitting an unobstructed view of the altar from any point in the church. The seating capacity was cited as for 800 people. Exterior dimensions are 125 feet by 65 feet. The apex of the roof rises 75 feet. [Recent repairs in 1989 to the rear chimneys demonstrated the accuracy of this measurement, an eighty-foot boom just barely reached the slightly higher chimneys.] It is within this thirty-five foot space between ceiling and roof that a unique beam-work supports holds up walls and roof, reinforced with exterior buttresses. Quite an accomplishment before the use of steel beams and girders. A bell tower is incorporated into the corner of the building on Huron Avenue and Ninth Street, rising nearly half again as high as the apex. This home of Saint Joseph's Parish was considered the most magnificent church in the state, and the only (or first) church-building in the United States of its size for its time (before the popular use of steel) to allow such a large open area for worship. The style is considered "Romanesque," and was designed by Wagner and Reitmeyer, of Williamsport. The original cost was \$45,000 [a sixtieth anniversary newsclip

sites the cost as \$65,000.].

Father G. L. Benton, our parish's first native son to be ordained and who accompanied the bishop for the laying of the cornerstone, was the main celebrant of the Mass on June 27, 1897. [the centenary issue of the church history wrongly published "January 27, 1897"] when Bishop McGovern, accompanied by fifteen priests, solemnly dedicated our Church. Another completing addition to the Church was its large Pipe Organ made by the A. B. Felgemaker Company of Erie, Pa. which was placed in the small choir gallery some time between 1897 and 1899. A name remembered in connection with Saint Joseph's Organ and Choir was the late Miss Johanna A. "Josie" Donley who was the parish's official organist for nearly sixty years until a couple years before her death on November 8, 1975.

Father J.J. Gormley was indeed a powerful force within the Parish of Saint Joseph and the Renovo Community. He was a pastoral pastor as well as a physical builder. He looked to the needs of the poor, little known is that he bought several entire lots of the Drury's Run Cemetery from his own funds so that no one would be refused Christian burial. He also established the priest's burial lot with his own funds, his own monolithic tombstone marks the site.

Shortly after beginning the demolition phase of the new Church, a period of national economic depression commenced and prevailed throughout the construction phase. Father Gormley not only sought the combined cooperation of the parish for

the building and appointing of the new Church, but he also joined in with his own endowments. His contributions to the intellectual and moral improvement of the community was through the organization of the Renovo Catholic Lyceum in February of 1891. In 1892 the First Catholic School Board was formed with Mr. John Russell as its chairman. The formation of this Board was a feat of political engineering. In order to demonstrate to the Catholic congregation and to the community at large the necessity and service provided by Parochial Education in a time when financial debt would descend upon the parish, and while the general economy was tight, Father Gormley announced the closing of Saint Joseph's School. The Public School Board was at a loss how to respond or to accept the influx of so many students in all grades. The Catholic congregation also became aware of what they might lose. After much negotiation, resulting in the laying bare of much of what the parish thought and felt as well as what the public community was willing to do to help, Father Gormley notified the Public School Board that he would reconsider and continue to operate Saint Joseph's School.

His death on February 27, 1906, set off the largest public display of communal emotion ever seen in the Borough of Renovo. Saint Joseph's Church was filled past its 800 person seating capacity, to standing in every available space, and then out into Ninth Street and Huron Avenue, where loudspeakers had to be hastily set up to allow at

least an audial participation in the funeral ceremony. It was the custom to have the pall-bearers carry any person's casket from the church up Ninth Street to the train station. From there one or two cars of a special funeral train would carry the deceased and the mourners to Drury's Run. It is reported that the twelve pall-bearers led a procession that filled nineteen mourners cars when Father Gormley was laid to rest.

Also during Father Gormley's pastorate, the main altar was consecrated on September 27, 1899 by the third bishop of the Harrisburg Diocese, Rt. Rev. John W. Shanahan. The Knights of Columbus, Council #542, was chartered for the fraternity of its members and service to Catholic endeavors on November 12, 1900. On May 27, 1901, the Diocese of Altoona was established. Once again the axis of spiritual direction and vitality would flow north and south, linking Renovo again with the origins of its growth. Catholicism moved from Philadelphia to Bedford, from Bedford to Bellefonte, from Bellefonte to both Lock Haven and Snow Shoe, and from Lock Haven and Snow Shoe to Renovo.

Part of the effect of the establishment of a new diocese are the re-aligning of loyalties. Father Gormley from Harrisburg would ever remain loyal to Saint Joseph's, remaining even after his death. The Sisters of Mercy on the other hand decided to remain within the Harrisburg diocese. So after twenty-six years of service (1876-1902), they vacated Renovo. To fill the void, the Sisters,



Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary began their tenure at Saint Joseph's.

Before Fr. Gormley's death, the Church lost the longest reigning pope, the one who took the church into the twentieth century, Pope Leo XIII. In August 1903 Pope Pius X was elected, this man would later be recognized as a Saint. He would further promote development of Eucharistic devotion and Catholic and Christian community. Bishop Eugene Garvey named Father John J. Ludden the ninth pastor of Saint Joseph's Church on June 17, 1906. Father J.J. Brady, the assistant pastor, had acted as administrator until the new pastor arrived. Father Ludden found that the accommodations made by Father Gormley in 1892 for the students of Saint Joseph's School no longer were sufficient. With over 300 elementary students and fifty high school students, the building of the long-familier three-story white-brick School was begun. The cornerstone was laid in 1910 and the school opened for classes in 1911. During the interim, students were taught both in the Knights of Columbus building and in the Renovo Borough building.

Father Ludden also saw the women's Catholic zeal flower in the charter received by Court St. Veronica, #111, of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas in 1909. This organization dedicated to promoting unity and charity still remains active to this day. On a much wider scale, an organization which would also have its affect on Renovo and on Saint Joseph's Parish was being founded. 1910 saw the

Boys Scouts of America formed; 1912 beheld the founding of the American Girl Guides, which changed its name to the Girl Scouts in 1913.

Father Ludden was replaced as pastor in June of 1912 by Father Peter J. Fox, who later became a Monsignour at Saint Mark's Parish in Altoona, PA. Saint Mark's and Saint Joseph's seem to share much. The churches are strikingly similar in style and size, their later convents-turned-rectories are virtually identical, Msgr. Fox went to Saint Mark's from Saint Joseph's, and Fr. Grimme later came from Saint Mark's. Pope Pius X died in August of 1914; his successor, Benedict XV was named in September.

Father Fox was a zealous and tireless pastor working to develop the spiritual and liturgical, religious and fraternal spirit of the parish community. The "Lyceum" originally started by Fr. Gormley in 1891 expanded its format to provide entertainment for Catholic boys. Home talent shows were popular in those days, and Saint Joseph's Dramatic Club was second to none. Sports were encouraged by Father Fox in Saint Joseph's School. In 1913 the first basketball team was formed, and in 1923 the first football team. During World War I, Father Fox was instrumental in organizing the Saint Joseph's Chapter of the American Red Cross. It was in this way, that many of the ladies of our parish were able to give many kinds of aid to our soldiers.

The Altar Society and The Rosary Society were incorporated into The Altar and Rosary Society of Saint

Joseph's Parish in 1913. [origin dates for the two independent societies are unknown. A physical memorial to the Rosary Society and a testament to its existence in 1892, is one of the lovely main-nave stain glass windows in the Church] This society contributes its time and talents for the maintenance of the Church and altars and vestments to this very day. The Men's Choir, which is still fondly remembered and acclaimed by all, was formed during this time with the encouragement of the pastor. Finally, for the aesthetic and spiritual enhancement of the church and parish, the murals and angels which still adorn the sanctuary walls and church ceiling were painted. Shortly before Fr. Fox's transfer, Pope Pius XI succeeded Pope Benedict, in February 1922.

The eleventh pastor assigned to Saint Joseph's parish was Father Michael T. O'Connor. He served from May 15, 1924 until his death on April 5, 1932. Father O'Connor was an advocate of scouting; Troops 4 and 5 were formed, consisting of Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Sea Scouts. A house on Tenth Street was used for their meetings. [The scout house seems to have been donated to the church at an unascertainable time, then given for the use of the scouting efforts. Its location appears to have been near the rear of the present Administration Center, facing Tenth Street.]

The bell which strikes the noon hour and evening Angelus each day, and peals for Sunday Masses, was installed in the Church bell-tower in 1924. This bell was donated in

Memory of William George McCrea (1899-1924), who lost his life in the service of his country in an explosion of Turret #2, on the U.S.S. Mississippi, donated by his parents and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Charles R. McCrea and Mary. The bell was cast by the McShane Bell Foundry Company, Baltimore, MD. It measures 46 inches wide at its base, and 33 inches in height. In 1982, an electronic striker and clock was donated and added to the bell system. In Memory of Charles F. and Anna McCarthy Maxwell and deceased members of the Maxwell Family by the Maxwell Children, this system of the Verdon Bell Company, Columbus, Ohio, has been in service for ten years at the time of the centenary celebration of our church-building in 1992.

Father O'Connor was becoming aware of the shortage of usable burial space in the Drury's Run Cemetery. On September 25, 1925 forty acres were purchased from the Mrs. Molly Farwell Estate at a cost of \$2,500 for the new Saint Joseph's Cemetery in Hyner, PA. Bishop John Joseph McCort consecrated the cemetery on October 11, 1925, when in Renovo for the administration of Confirmation to ninety-seven candidates. The first interment was of the remains of Robert J. Kujawa on December 14, 1926.

This was an era of change and growth, rise and fall. John T. Scopes was found guilty of teaching "evolution" in Dayton, TN, and fined \$100 and costs in 1925. Capt. Charles A. Lindbergh successfully flew the Atlantic Ocean in 33.5 hours in 1927. 1929 saw the Saint Valentine's Day massacre in Chicago; the beginning of the Empire State Building in New York City; and the Stock Market crash on October 29. In our diocese, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament was also begun in 1929. Both the Empire State Building and the Cathedral were opened in 1931. The latter was incomplete until 1959.

On September 15, 1932, Father James J. Gill was named the twelfth pastor of Saint Joseph's Church. The time was the beginning of the Great Depression. Father Gill was concerned that he would have to close Saint Joseph's School due to a lack of operating funds. Due to the large enrollment of Saint Joseph's, the Public School teachers realized that the added burden of the increased enrollment in the Public School would be excessive. It was learned that voluntarily, the public school teachers donated one month's pay to aid in maintaining Saint Joseph's School. The parishioners were asked to pay \$.10 a week per child to further maintain the school. The earnestness and sacrifice of the parishioners did come through to keep the school open. It is also noted, that the economic condition of the times were such that some families did transfer their children to the Public School because of the inability to

pay the ten cents aweek per child.

The Saint Patrick's Day Flood of 1936 occurred when a heavy snowfall was followed by a heavy rain melting the snow and clogging the streams and rivers. The waters rose to reach the Church's front doors, but no water has ever entered the main floor of the Church.

The Holy Name Society, a movement throughout the United States for Catholic men, organized a chapter at Saint Joseph's in 1937. This organization provided a sense of Catholic morality to the community and help provide man-power for church projects. In 1969, for the centennial celebration of the parish there were still 31 members. But it has faded from existence since then.

In 1938, Saint Joseph School Band was formed. As Father Gill was reaching the end of his time at Saint Joseph's, the School spirit and enthusiasm was waxing again, as indeed the depression was waning. Robert Nicholas was the director of the Band. The efforts of the parents with many fund-raisers and bake-sales were rewarded when the Band was able to purchase "natty" looking uniforms in 1940.

December 8, 1939, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, was also the date that marked a destructive fire in the rectory. The danger of this fire was in its close proximity to the Church. As with most of Renovo buildings they were built almost on top of one another. Father Philip J. O'Donnell, one of the assistants, was credited with saving the life of Father Paul Carroll, who was badly burned

in the fire. Fortunately, the fire was confined to the rear of the rectory building and the office part of the rectory was unharmed and so no harm came to the Church records. The Murphy residence on Fourth Street and Huron Avenue was used temporarily as a rectory while rebuilding commenced on Ninth Street. During the same year, close on the heels of World War II, Pope Pius XI died and was succeeded by Pope Pius XII.

Father Howard Miller replaced Father Gill after his death on August 31, 1943, becoming the thirteenth pastor on September 26 that same year. Increasingly Catholic students were going to the public school, Father Miller introduced the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (C.C.D.) for religious education of the public school students. This program has waxed and waned through the years, but continues to the present day as the only form of Religious Education for the Catholic student population of the Renovo area. In Father Miller's time the Parent Educator Organization (P.E.O.) replaced the School Board in 1942. This organization's initial purpose was the financial aid of the school. Later this organization became the Home-School Association and remained active until the school closed in 1983.

The Second World War was already two years underway, when Father Miller became pastor. He turned the people's attention to a prayerful resolution of the worldwide conflict, conducting regular novena services for our

ilitary men.

On the occasion of Renovo Old Home Week, celebrating the eightieth anniversary of the borough, a capsule description of the Catholic influence on the whole community is given as follows:

"St. Joseph's Roman Catholic, the largest of Renovo's churches, has over 600 families in its fold. Rev. Harold T. Miller is the pastor and Rev. Vincent A. Luther, his assistant. They serve a mission charge in Bitumen with 21 families. The church supports its own elementary school and senior high school. A progressive adult study club and a Parent-Educators group are under the leadership of the parish priests. The church property includes a fine school and convent as well as a rectory and church."

As this synopsis points out, the Parish of Saint Mary, in Bitumen, PA. had become part of the Saint Joseph's Parish. Having existed for about forty-five years as a parish, the coal strikes of the 1920's and the Great Depression of the 1930's, reduced the once thriving community and parish in Bitumen. In 1936, until it was dissolved in 1966, Saint Mary's was served from Saint Joseph's in Renovo. In 1966, the boundaries of Saint Mary's parish were incorporated into Saint Joseph's. The Bitumen Shrine Association began in 1966 for the preservation and maintenance of the former parish-church as a Shrine. This shrine was incorporated as one of the four



diocesan shrines of the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese, still under the independent control and care of the Shrine Association. But should the Shrine Association ever fail, the Diocese will see to the preservation of this piece of local and diocesan history. The adjacent Saint Mary's Cemetery, because it is consecration ground, became the third site of the Saint Joseph's Cemetery Association.

Saint Joseph's Athletic Association was formed by the men of the parish in 1948 to enhance the intramural and athletic programs of the school. This association remained in existence until 1967 with the closing of the Catholic high school and the reducing of the athletic schedules.

Upon Father Miller's death on November 14, 1953, Father Albert Bechtold, then assistant pastor, became administrator until the appointment of Father Charles H. Hipp as pastor on July 31, 1954. Father Hipp was a renovator. He renewed the furnishings in the school. A cafeteria facility was established and outfitted in the Church basement for the benefit of the school children. Renovations were also done to the rectory. Among his most memorable achievements was a redecorating of the interior of the Church. Included in this project were the refurbishing and re-gilding of the Church statuary and the installing of a new lighting system and light-fixtures. It is the general consensus, that these chandeliers are what are being referred to as the "Lighting Tableau." In 1956, a bronze plaque dedicates the "Lighting Tableau" as a memorial to "All War Veterans of Renovo and

Vicinity." Some report that the collection of donations for the rewiring and new electrical fixtures included people and organizations outside the parish census. Yet it seems to elude everyone how the term "lighting tableau" (meaning any picture or picturesque representation; especially, a striking scene presented dramatically) came to be applied to chandeliers.

On October 9, 1957, the Diocese of Altoona was re-named the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. This was during the interim between the death of Bishop Richard T. Guilfoyle, the third bishop of Altoona, and the consecration of Bishop Howard J. Carroll. Father Hipp was among the pastors transferred by the new bishop. Father John Austin O'Toole became the fifteenth pastor of Saint Joseph's Parish on May 5, 1958. Later in 1958, in October Pope John XXIII succeeded Pope Pius XII as Roman Pontiff.

Father O'Toole realized that there was a need for a new convent for the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and initiated a \$100,000 building campaign. The lots #32 and 33 on Huron Avenue were purchased from James Hayes, on December 19, 1958 at the cost of \$10,000. These along with the property already owned by the parish, which served as the Scout House, became the site of the new convent. The contract for the building was awarded to the Sergeant Construction Company of Nanty Glo, PA for \$105,000. Ground-breaking ceremonies took place on July 12, 1961, under the administration of Father Richard Conti, a native

son of the parish who has later become a Monsignor in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. The convent building has ties with Saint Mark's Parish in Altoona from whence the blue-prints came, replicating a similar convent building in that parish. The convent was completed and was occupied by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on January 31, 1962. Father Conti also supervised the updating of the school building with the installation of efficient fire-escapes and modern lavatories.

Father Gerald Oeler replaced Father O'Toole as pastor on June 9, 1962. He was pastor while the parish celebrated its seventy-fifth year in the present church building (1967) and the one hundredth anniversary (1969) of the parish. He supervised new lighting and painting of the interior of the school; new heating systems in the school and church; paving the parking lot (where the old convent was raised in 1962); renovation of the near seventy year old church organ; cleaning and pointing of the church's brick and stonework; refurbishing and cleaning of the stain-glass windows and installation of protective storm windows. Father Oeler would begin to implement the liturgical standards of the Second Vatican Council with changes in the sanctuary and altar-location.

For a short period of the parish history the Legion of Mary flourished, beginning in 1963. This group carried on local missionary work, calls on the shut-in and hospitalized, and promoted devotion to Mary. For about five

years, a group called "The Little Singers" under the direction of Father Joseph Bender delighted and regaled the parish with group singing at church and public functions.

The Second Vatican Council was only half completed when Pope John XXIII died, his successor Pope Paul VI would complete the Council and begin the implementation phase of the Council documents. Saint Joseph's Parish history includes both of the Vatican Councils.

It was with great regret and reluctance that Father Oeler found it necessary to close Saint Joseph High School in 1967. Because of a lack of teachers, the ninety year tradition which began so humbly in the front parlors of the old convent on Ninth Street ended. Saint Joseph's Teen Club, the forerunner of our present-day Youth Group was first organized shortly thereafter.

Saint Joseph Home-School Association was reorganized in 1968 into the Saint Joseph School Board to foster Catholic Education in Renovo. At that time the enrollment of eight grades was 194 pupils.

December of 1969 saw the transfer of Father Oeler and the assignment of Father John V. Orlando as pastor. The new pastor was faced very shortly with the prospect of the closing of Saint Joseph's School entirely because of the withdrawal of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary back to Scranton Diocese. With much effort and advertisement, the Catholic School Board and their pastor secured the services of the Franciscan Sisters from

Scotland. Sixty-nine years of devoted service and many vocations to the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, ended; but a new introduction of the Franciscan Sisters from Scotland into our Diocese began.

In February, 1975, Father Richard Clark replaced Father Orlando as pastor. In 1978, Pope Paul VI died; Pope John-Paul I was elected, installed and died within 39 days; and the first non-Italian pope in 400 years was elected, Pope John-Paul II. A new turn for the Church in a time of approaching darkness for the parish. Father Clark's lot was to be pastor during a low period of the parish history. The Franciscan Sisters end their stay in Renovo after only nine school terms (in 1980). There is no religious order to be found to replace them. Father Clark makes the convent into the rectory, which becomes the Administration Center in 1980, the 110 year old rectory is razed that same year.

Economic conditions of Clinton County reach catastrophic limits, unemployment in the area reaches 80 per cent at one point. Families are having to move out of the area in hopes of finding livelihood. Due to low enrollment, the inability to find teachers, and the transfer of students to Public School because of economic frustration, Father is forced to close Saint Joseph School before the 1983 term. Due to the shrinking size of the parish, Father David Arseneault is transferred, ending the long line of sixty-four assistant pastors who have served at Saint Joseph's.

The darkness of that period is slow to leave. But Father Clark did try to pull parish cooperation together and to build parish pride. He is noted for his efforts to clean and repair the parish cemeteries. He is responsible for the Internment Chapel that graces our Hyner Cemetery, and the pine tree cross.

Father Clark ended his term as pastor in April of 1985, being replaced as pastor by Father Ronald V. Osinski. For sometime, various plundering of the fixtures of Saint Joseph School had been going on (radiators, lavatory fixtures, plumbing and lighting fixtures). After a couple of years with no heat, in which C.C.D. classes were nonetheless held, the premature deterioration of the school necessitated a decision. To refurbish the school for some as yet unknown parish purpose or to raze the building. Economics of the times being what they were, the less expensive decision was made. The wrecking ball did its work in 1987. At Memorial Shrine to Saint Joseph was built upon the site to acknowledge the efforts of one hundred and seven years of Catholic Parochial School Education in Renovo, and the seventy-two years of use of that building [the building lay virtually dormant for four years, with only C.C.D. classes being held, before it was torn down.] Bishop James J. Hogan retires after twenty-one years as prelate of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown; in May of 1987 Bishop Joseph V. Adamc becomes the first non-Irish bishop of our Diocese.

A brief pastorate was enjoyed by Fr. Philip Bender from

June until December 1988. Perhaps for the diocesan policy makers, Fr. Bender is a testimony that there needs to be a period of adjustment for long-term pastor to adapt to new assignments.

And so on January 26, 1989, Saint Joseph's Parish received its twentieth-first pastor, Fr. D. Timothy Grimme. It is a time of change within the diocese. Bishop Adamec encourages the development of Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils. These Councils along with the existing organizations of the parish and the Ministries of the parish help to maintain and advise the direction of the Parish-Family. In 1992, was celebrated the event of the building of the present Saint Joseph's Church in 1892. The Celebration was a Festival, July 10-11-12. The Spirit of that celebration seems evident in the re-activated Knights of Columbus Council, #542; the already active Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Court St. Veronica #111; the Altar and Rosary Society; and the Saint Joseph's Youth Group. These organizations all worked hard on the joint celebration, and hold many events of their own as well.

On April 15, 1993, Father Carl Spishak succeeded Fr. Grimme as pastor of Saint Joseph's Parish. As we prepare to celebrate the milestone of the Quasiquicentennial, in 1994, April 5, 1994 is slated for a celebration with the Bishop and the Parish. But celebrations of the past are only valuable as incentives for the future growth. Fr. Gilligan, Fr. Fink, and Fr. Kaelin's work continues in the time of Fr. Spishak. The Faith of the families of 1869 is handed on to the families in 1994. We in turn prepare to hand them on to another generation and generations as yet unborn.