

St. Patrick's Church Organizes in 1877

First Priest — Father Smith — Lives in Private Homes

On March 4, 1934, Rt. Rev. J. G. McNamara came to O'Neill under appointment to assume the duties of pastor of St. Patrick's parish. The history of this parish began with the assignment of Rev. Father T. Smith as resident pastor in October of 1877 and has marked a steady growth from that date until the present. Starting with little the church's interests now comprise not only the fine edifice for worship, a home for the clergy but one of the largest and most efficiently administered parochial academies in the state.

Monsignor Cassidy, for many years the highly esteemed pastor, wrote the history of the parish. Through the courtesy of the present pastor, Monsignor McNamara, The Frontier has been given access to this history from which the following facts are gleaned.

Official organization of the parish was effected in 1877 with the appointment of two trustees. Bishop O'Connor visited the parish for the first time in the Summer of 1880 when he administered the sacrament of confirmation to 91 communicants.

During his pastorate Father Smith had as assistant pastor part of the time Rev. Thomas Cullen and Rev. P. Brophy. He secured the erection of a church building 40x100 feet and after living for a time in the homes of John Cronin, Dennis Daly and J. P. O'Donnell, a permanent home was built for the pastor. At the close of Father Smith's pastorate there were 165 families connected with the church and a cash balance on hand.

In 1886 Rev. M. F. Cassidy was transferred from the Rawlins, Wyo., church to O'Neill and Father Smith was assigned to the Cheyenne, Wyo., parish.

Bell Installed

Father Cassidy's first undertaking was to enlarge the church making room for 10 more pews which furnished a seating capacity in the church of 500. And in the autumn of 1886 had a 90-foot tower built at the front of the church and a bell put in which, with the iron frame, weighs 4,000 pounds. This bell tolled for the first time for the early mass celebrated Christmas morning that year.

The cost of these improvements was \$1,125 for the tower and \$594 for the bell. For many years the bell was rung to announce six in the morning, 12 noon and six evening, and now in the tower of the enlarged new church the familiar tones of the bell call to worship. The bell sounded as a beacon during the '88 blizzard.

November 9, 1886, St. Patrick's church of O'Neill was incorporated under the laws of Nebraska at Omaha. The incorporators were Rt. Rev. James O'Connor, bishop of Omaha; Very Rev. R. A. Shaffal, vicar general; Rev. M. F. Cassidy, pastor; and Patrick Hagerty and John McBride, lay members. Bishop O'Connor, ex-officio president, Father Cassidy, treasurer, and Mr. Hagerty, secretary, were the officers selected.

By 1888 the membership had increased to 200 families.

As the outgrowth of growing sentiment, much planning and many meetings, on Sept. 13, 1890, the corner stone of St. Mary's Academy was laid and the work of building what has become a great educational institution was begun.

Bishop O'Connor died before this work was undertaken and Rev. John Jeannette, of Omaha, came to O'Neill to officiate at the laying of the cornerstone. Plans and contract called for a



St. Patrick's Church and St. Mary's Academy . . . there were 91 communicants in the Summer of 1880 when the bishop made his first visit. Today, the Academy is one of largest and most efficient institutions of its type in the state.



Rt. Rev. M. F. Cassidy . . . he came to O'Neill from Rawlins, Wyo., in 1885 . . . writes and makes history of St. Patrick's church.—O'Neill Photo Co.

building 75x45 feet, two full stories with basement and attic.

St. Mary's Burned

The building was about completed when fire broke out in the basement through carelessness of some workmen, Father Cassidy says in his history. (See photo on page 7, section F.)

Crowds of town people could only look helplessly on as there was no fire protection at the time. There had been invested \$14,000 in the building and after unsuccessful efforts in the courts to obtain judgment for this sum against the contractor and bondsmen there arose out of the ashes of that disaster renewed determination to build the academy and there now stands on the original site the splendid fruitage of that determination.

During the famine year of 1894 Father Cassidy perhaps rose to his greatest efforts in behalf of people threatened with ruin. It was largely through his efforts that funds were secured for relief of the destitute. His history gives the detailed itemized accounts of receipts and expenditures, disbursements listing sums of money given to individuals and such items as flour, sugar, coal and clothing.

Growth of the Parish

Rev. M. F. Cassidy was elevated to the dignity of monsignor but those who had known him through the long years of his pastorate preferred to think of him simply as Father Cassidy.

4 O'NEILLITES TO ACADEMY

Francis N. Brennan and Son, Herbert, Go to West Point

Two wars of world dimensions and a third of less extent took a toll of young men from this as well as other communities. It was in peace times that the military academy at West Point took in for training the sons of three of O'Neill's early families—Charley Meals, Owen Meredith and Francis Brennan. Meals, son of Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Meals, early day hotel proprietors of Atkinson, later residents of O'Neill, G. W. being a member of the Holt County Bar Association. Meredith, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Meredith, one of the first couples to be married in O'Neill, J. H. also being a member of the bar association. Owen, like the next to go to West Point, is a native son. Francis Brennan, son of Col. and Mrs. Neil Brennan was the third from a pioneer family to be appointed to West Point. His father was one of the original colonists, and Mrs. Brennan, a daughter of the Keys family, early settlers of the Dry creek community, was also one of the town's early brides.

Col. C. A. Meals, Retired

Following a period of teaching country schools, Charley Meals went to North Platte by horse in February, 1900, and took the examination for appointment from the Sixth congressional district for entrance to West Point military academy. He had the distinction of being the first from the O'Neill community to get the West Point idea. Came out well enough at North Platte to be ordered to Ft. Leavenworth for physical and metal examination. Appointed by Congressman Neville and started in at W. P. June 19, 1900. Came out as second lieutenant, served in various capacities in various world fields and during the first war, promoted to Lt. Col. and made Division Quartermaster in 1918. Retired in 1933 and makes his home at Santa Barbara, Calif.

Col. Meals was in the St. Mihiel and Argonne engagements and after assignment to the general staff of the 9th Corps supervised the feeding of Russian prisoners at Zebrst, Germany and spent two years in Paris studying the French supply system, later transferred to the staff of the Assistant Secretary of War, and various other posts of duty.

Col. Owen Meredith

Owen entered West Point academy in 1904 and graduated in 1908 and entered at once into the infantry service of the army. This took him to various military posts in the States and across the Pacific to the Philippine Islands, back to America and to all the military posts and then an assignment that took him to France, later to Panama. Besides the various forts and military posts where Col. Meredith was given assignments he served in military capacity as officer at the Universities of Minnesota and Kentucky.

He was serving as chief of staff of the 9th Corps area, later changed to Ninth Service Command, in command in order mentioned at San Francisco Presidio, Ft. Douglas Camp White, Oregon, Presidio of Monterey and the Central Security District with headquarters in San Francisco. Retired in 1945 with rank of colonel.

The Merediths make their home at Del Monte, Calif. They lost their oldest son in 1936, and have two living, the older of these came out of the late war as commander of a navy LSM and the younger as a B-29 pilot. Both now are in civilian work in San Francisco.

Col. Francis M. Brennan

Born in O'Neill to Mr. and Mrs. Neil Brennan, June 21, 1894. Early education at St. Mary's Academy and O'Neill High. In 1912 attended Preparatory School at Annapolis before entering United States Military Academy, West Point.

Military Academy was given him by Congressman M. P. Kinkaid.

After graduation from U. S. Military Academy as a 2nd Lt. in the U. S. Army, one of his first details was with the Army of Occupation in Germany. Here he was commissioned a Captain, and later attained the rank of colonel. While there he was united in marriage to Mary Devine, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Devine, of Providence, R. I. The marriage took place in Brussels, Belgium, February 2, 1922. Leaving Germany, one of the last acts of Captain Brennan's group was to take down the American flag from Fort Ehrenbreitstein and return it to the United States. It might be added that in World War II, his son, Lt. Herbert Brennan's group took Koblenz and later watched the American flag raised over the same Fort.

On his return to the United States, Captain Brennan spent five years at the University of Florida on ROTC duty; attended advanced Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, graduated in 1931 from the Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, from the Tank School, Fort Meade, Md. in 1932, and from The Army War College in 1933. From 1934 to 1939 he was an instructor at the Command and General Staff College. In 1940 served on the staff of the 1st armored division, in 1941 on the staff of the 1st armored corps and in 1942 was advanced to the general staff on the armored force until ill health caused him to retire.

Returning to his home in O'Neill with his wife, Mary, and children, Neil, John Herbert, Mary Devine, and Patricia, his condition seemed to ease, but



Lt.-Col. C. A. Meals (left) and Col. Francis N. Brennan (right) among four from O'Neill graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point. (Not pictured are Col. Owen Meredith and Lt. Herbert O. Brennan.)

on January 8, 1943, he suffered a stroke, which caused his death about midnight of that day.

Col. Brennan's son, Herbert, also choosing a military career, graduated from the United States Military Academy in June, 1947, and is now in the Army Air Force.

Lt. Herbert Owen Brennan. Graduated St. Mary's Academy, O'Neill, 1943; born Gainesville, Florida, August 27, 1926; Presidential appointed U. S. Military Academy 1944; Graduated from U. S. Military Academy, West Point, 1947. Now serving as a lieutenant in the air service, son of late Col. Brennan and Mrs. Brennan and the fourth to enter West Point from this area.

Prairie Fire Sweeps Chambers Vicinity

A disastrous prairie fire broke out South of Chambers in April, 1893. A barn, four horses and two cows were burned at the Imhoff ranch. The fire reached the Elwood ranch South of Emmet, destroyed the barns and 25 head of cattle perished.

EDITOR - POSTMASTER

Miss Theo Hall, who held down a claim in the 1880's five miles Northeast of O'Neill, and then went farther West for more pioneer experience, landed the job of postmaster at Medical Lake, Wash., after a five-year stretch as editor of the Medical Lake Ledger.

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75 CANDLES

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TRIPLETS BORN HERE . . . Three husky babies, two boys and a girl, weighing 4½-, 6- and 6½-pounds, were born to Mr. and Mrs. Telfer Pollard, farmers Northeast of O'Neill, according to The Frontier on January 21, 1926. Dr. J. P. Gilligan attended.