

Story and Pastors of St. Philomena's First of Nebraska's Cathedrals

CHURCH edifice is second only to the home in the attachments it inspires in its members. It shares with the home many tender associations of the family, tempering the joys, consoling the troubled, and brightening the shadows of life's journey.



RT. REV. JAMES O'GORMAN, First Bishop of Nebraska and Builder of the Cathedral



REV. WILLIAM KELLY, Collector of Cathedral Building Fund.



REV. JOHN CURTIS, First Pastor of the Cathedral.



REV. P. A. MCGOVERN, Priest in Charge of Cathedral Parish.



REV. JAMES W. STINSON, Assistant to Father McGovern.

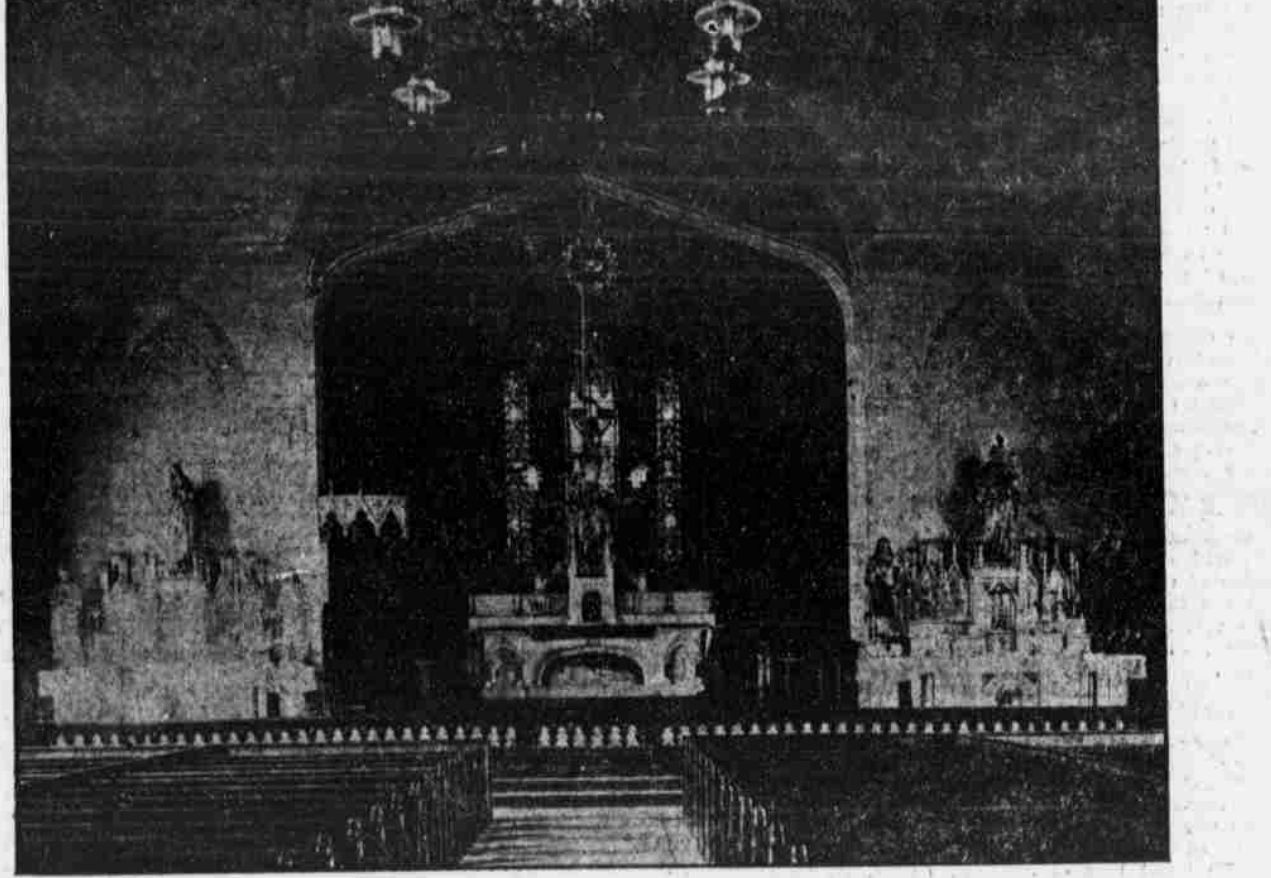


REV. P. A. MCCARTHY, Pastor of Cathedral, 1886-1898.

St. Philomena's was the first cathedral or bishop's church erected by the Catholics in Nebraska. At the time of its dedication in 1886 it was considered the finest church in the state. For a dozen years it was the only parish church in Omaha, and its chiming bells called worshippers from all parts of the city.

The plan of the property of St. Philomena's Roman Catholic cathedral and the coming demolition of that favorite house of worship severs the relations and associations of nearly forty years and is deeply felt by the older families of the parish. In a few short weeks the cathedral doors will be closed forever.

The roster of pastors of the cathedral is as follows: Rev. John Curtis, February 1867, to July, 1873; Rev. William Byrne, to December, 1873; Rev. J. Jeannette, to December, 1877; Rev. P. O'Brien, to May, 1878; Rev. D. I. McDermott, to October, 1879; Rev. William Kelly, to September, 1880; Rev. J. E. English, to June, 1881; Rev. M. Riordan, to August, 1885; Rev. Thomas O'Connor, to December, 1885; Rev. P. F. McCarthy, to June, 1898; Rev. S. F. Carroll, to January, 1917; Rev. M. J. Barrett, to October, 1897; Rev. M. J. McDevitt, to October, 1898; and Rev. P. A. McGovern, the present pastor. The latter has the distinction of being born in the parish, ordained in the cathedral and of serving as pastor longer than any one on the list, his term being nearly nine years.



ALTAR OF ST. PHILOMENA'S, ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL IN THE WEST.

McDermott acted as spiritual adviser of the condemned "Mollie Maguire," an organization held responsible for many crimes committed in the coal mines around Scranton. Knowing every phase of that tragedy, the motives of the actors, the plots and counterplots, he brought to his new field of labor an intense dislike for the society, particularly Irish societies. He was not long in telling the congregation his opinions. He told the members of the societies they must get out of the church too hot for some of them.

He failed to give the proper keynote to St. Patrick's day service. It is a tradition of the cathedral that he gave the congregation annually successive chapters of Irish history. How many years this occupied is not known. It is recalled, however, that on one 17th of March he treated his congregation to a revised version of his favorite theme. He imported an orator for the occasion, a priest of vast mental resources, eloquent and exhaustive, one capable of sounding every note in the keyboard of Irish sentiment. Mass began at 9 a. m. It was expected the service would be concluded in about an hour, giving the orator about forty minutes to perform his task. Therefore, a funeral was scheduled for 10 a. m. The cathedral was crowded. Father McCarthy snuggled into a comfortable chair and the distinguished orator got into action. The first half hour was devoted to the marshaling of the four masters. Oliver Cromwell was taken in hand in the second half hour and was receiving a force lambasting when the funeral party arrived. The pallbearers and some of the mourners pressed into the aisles. Father McCarthy was observed to shift his position. But the orator noted neither time nor incident. The third half hour found him slashing the penal laws, and the fourth half hour, reserved for the Victorian period, might have extended into the fifth. If something didn't happen. The funeral party solemnly marched up the aisle, with the casket at the head of the procession. The orator paused. The congregation turned to view the solemn scene. "Talked to death," suggested an unfeeling spectator. "A benediction for the living," murmured another. Whether intentional or not the interruption brought a sudden close to a two-hour flow of Irish oratory, leaving the base procurers of the act of union hanging in the air.

Some activities and incidents of special note. In response to a request for his recollections of nearly fourteen years service in the cathedral, Rev. P. F. McCarthy of Jackson, Neb., writes in part: I caught my first glimpse of St. Philomena's cathedral in September, 1877, as I was whirled past it in a hack, enveloped in a cloud of Omaha dust. After fixing myself up at the old Metropolitan hotel, after my long journey from New York city, I went out to look for the cathedral and found my surprise correct that the edifice I saw on my way to the hostelry was the building I was in search of. I found domiciled in the old Episcopal residence Bishop James O'Connor, Father Kelly, Father Jeannette, Father Reynolds and Father Martin. I was immediately booked to sing the high mass the next Sunday, but when Sunday came I was so sick, as a consequence of an attack of ague, that all I could do was to hear mass. Father Kelly was the celebrant and I was the server. My first night in Omaha was spent in the haunted room in the old house. In the morning one of the priests asked me if I had been annoyed in any way during the night. I had to reply that I had slept the sleep of the just quite undisturbed.

Building the Cathedral. The first active steps toward building the cathedral were taken in 1868. In the fall of that year Bishop O'Gorman commissioned Rev. William Kelly financial missionary for the building fund. Generous contributions were secured by him in eastern cities. He secured the donations of the congregation, sweetened the fund sufficiently to warrant construction. The cornerstone was laid June 2, 1867. The Herald of the following day said: "A large concourse of people witnessed the interesting ceremony. There were present from every Catholic parish in the city, many of the Council Bluffs, Bellevue, Florence and all the surrounding precincts, 2,600 in all. The afternoon was clear, warm and brilliant as if God and nature contributed liberally to render more gorgeous the ceremonies of the day. The mud had dried up." The ceremony was conducted by Bishop O'Gorman, assisted by Revs. Egan and Brasell, the latter delivering the address on the occasion. In the cornerstones were placed coins of the year, copies of newspapers of the day, relics, missal, etc.

Careful investigation shows one mistake in this scant account. Rev. John Curtis, to whom fell the honor of first pastor of the cathedral, delivered the dedicatory sermon, speaking on "The Infallibility of the Church." Bishop O'Gorman conducted the dedicatory ceremony and was celebrant of the pontifical high mass which followed. His assistants were Rev. Keenan, deacon; Rev. I. Dexacher, subdeacon, and Rev. John Curtis, master of ceremonies. Among the altar boys on the occasion were Frank Burkley, John J. H. Swift, Will Moran and Patrick Clifford. Benefactors and Cost. The principal benefactor of the church was Mr. Edward Creighton. As a tribute to his liberality a marble tablet was placed in the east wall of the sanctuary. The marble altar, costing \$4,000, was donated by Mrs. Edward Creighton. It was completed and put in place in the fall of 1888. The ladies of the congregation donated the large organ, costing \$4,000. The original cost of the cathedral building and its equipment is not definitely known. It is estimated at \$50,000. The school building, erected in 1883-4, cost \$21,000. The parochial residence was erected in 1888 at a cost of \$7,000. Two thousand dollars were paid to O. D. Richardson for lots seven and eight, and \$2,000 to William A. Gwyer for lots one and two. The original investment for the four lots and the short-

ings now on them was at least \$82,000. As evidence of the high hopes of Omaha's future entertained at that time an extract from a letter written by the pastor, Rev. John Curtis, is instructive. Under date of May 6, 1869, he writes: "Omaha, they say, is going to be a very large city. Its inhabitants have doubled every year in number. We opened our cathedral a few weeks since only and even now it is as much crowded as the little old church."

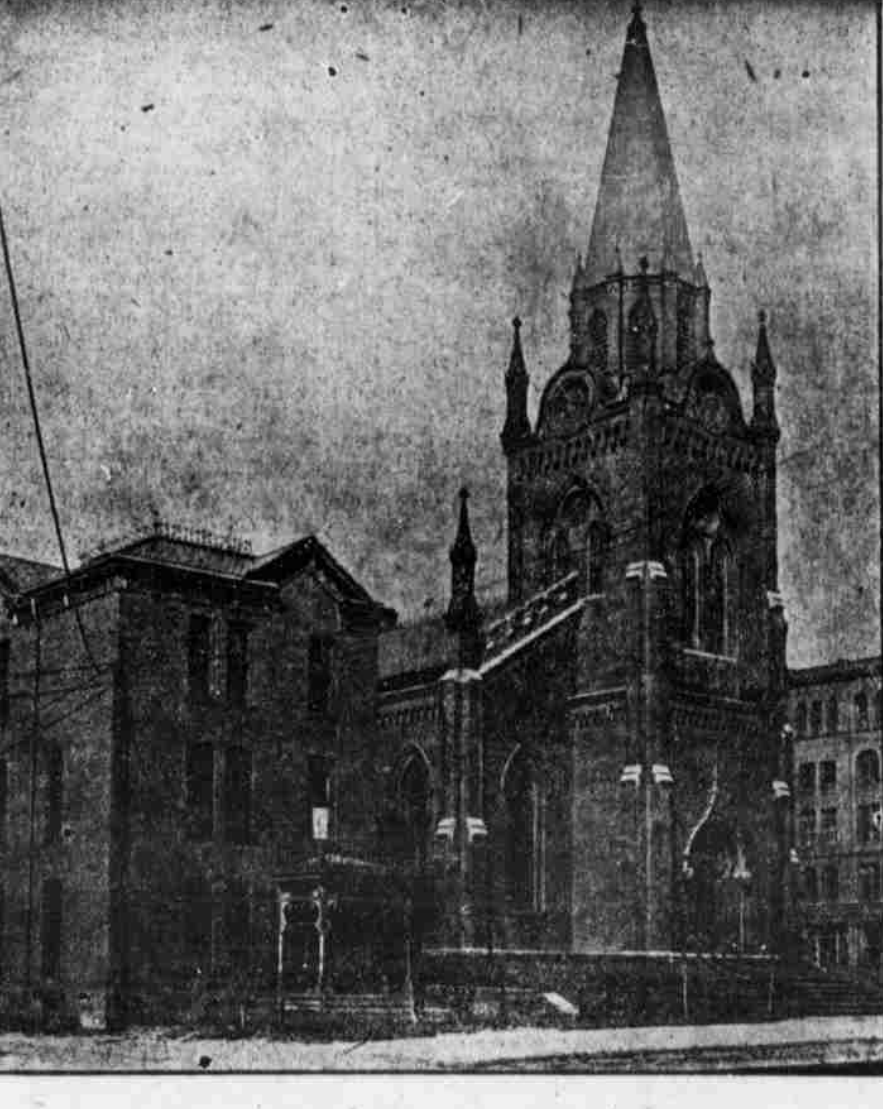
A scene of thrilling interest, surprising because unexpected, one wholly different from any witnessed in the cathedral, occurred during the pastorate of Rev. D. I. McDermott. Father McDermott was induced by the bishop to come to the diocese from Stratton, Pa. A man of uncommon ability, an eloquent orator, forceful, aggressive, intolerant of shams, very soon he had the congregation sitting up, wide awake and taking notice. As Father McCarthy describes that period, "there was something doing all the time." Only a short time before, in his home city, Father

Some Quaint Features of Everyday Life

Girls Duck a Masher. EARLY in the morning of Saturday, September 15, 1907, a masher of the name of Tobias, who lived in the east end of the city, was following two young men who had been following them for several squares and threw him into a watering trough. The girls, Mary Foley and Margaret Donavan, both 15 years old, were out for a Sunday evening's stroll, and when they were near Frankford avenue and Berks street two dapper young fellows, in light suits, flashy ties, white vests and tan shoes, began to ogle them. The girls tried of running away from and trying to dodge their pursuers. At Second street they seized on the masher and threw him into a trough on the sidewalk. His companion quickly took to his heels. A policeman helped the water-soaked masher out of the trough and told him to go home and let girls on the street alone; he disappeared.

New Way to Pull a Tooth. In the attempt to employ a door and a match in the extraction of an aching molar, John Tobias of Philadelphia, 23 years old, burned his neck and chin severely. Incidentally he lost a necktie and a shirt through fire. He extracted the tooth, however. Tobias had been awakened in the early hours of the morning with a jumping pain

when a child takes whooping cough. It is the custom for the mother to put it to play among the sheep, and the next day it is well. The men and women who work among lavender, gathering or distilling it, never have neuralgia or nervous headache. Lavender, moreover, is as good as a sea voyage for giving tons to the system. Run-down persons often work for nothing among lavender plants in order to build themselves up. Salt miners can wear summer clothes in blizzard weather without fear of catching cold, for colds are unknown among salt workers. Breweries and tanneries and printing ink factories bar out consumption. Turpentine works and rope works bar out rheumatism. Copper mines bar out typhoid. Horse a Tobacco Chewer. Harry Ewan of Clayton, Neb., has a fine black horse, but it is addicted to bad habits. It is an inveterate tobacco chewer, and it is almost impossible to drive it past a hotel without treating it to a glass of beer or whisky. The horse seems to prefer the beer, takes it from the pail without spilling a drop and licks out the pail. Mr. Ewan can't imagine where the horse learned its bad habits and says it is often very embarrassing, especially when he has women in his carriage. On his way to church, accompanied by several women, the horse stopped in front of a hotel and it took some time to convince him that he could not get a drink on Sunday.



ST. PHILOMENA'S CATHEDRAL AS IT STANDS TODAY.

build a new house and put in a steam heating plant. We got along smoothly enough until 1903, when something dropped. In fact, the hard times struck us suddenly and your humble servant was caught like a man half-way across a fence. I was up against it, to use a modernism. While the old church fortunately weathered the storm, it lost me as a helmsman. I thought I might live to see St. Philomena's church celebrate its golden jubilee, but I notice the fates have decreed otherwise. Memories sweet, and the reverse, are associated in my mind with St. Philomena's. May the masses offered up therein and the prayers of its people insure to the salvation of all who were ever connected with this sacred edifice. Vale, St. Philomena's.

FR. MCGOVERN'S FAREWELL NOTE. Pathos of the Leave-Taking of Pastor and Flock. Rev. P. A. McGovern, pastor of the cathedral, was born in the parish, baptized and ordained in the cathedral and naturally feels keenly the conditions which make abandonment necessary. He says: "The removal of St. Philomena's will be to many of the Catholics of Omaha much as the death of one of the family is to the household. It will leave a vacancy that can never be adequately filled to many of us, who, through baptism, received our spiritual life within its walls; it will be as the loss of a tender mother whose worth can be measured only by the inestimable favors she has bestowed upon us. To others, who have had a devoted love sanctified and perpetuated in the sacrament of matrimony, the spot on which the church now stands will ever recall memories sweet and tender, even though the necessities of commercial life have dedicated its hallowed precincts to different activities. "To me, the old church is doubly dear, because the grace of the priesthood, as well as the gift of faith, was conferred upon me beneath its vaulted roof. I deem it a great honor to close the long line of worthy pastors who have presided over its destinies during the forty years of its existence. For almost nine years I have ministered to the spiritual wants of its people, and what has impressed me most about them is the spirit of harmony and union which is so marked a characteristic of their corporate life. Without a single exception this spirit has prevailed, and it has contributed not a little to the happiness of both pastor and flock. It is this one thought that reconciles me to the passing of the old church, namely, that I hope to continue in the future with its parishioners the same pleasant relations that have characterized the past."