

The Story of 2 Churches in 'Kellyville'

By JOSEPH P. BARRETT

In the earlier years of the last century James Crowley, a native of Cork and a convert to Catholicism, walked every Sunday from the village of Morgan's Corner (Radnor) to St. Mary's Church, Fourth and Spruce sts. in Philadelphia, to attend Mass.

In those olden times there were no Catholic churches between those in Philadelphia and St. Agnes Church in West Chester, although from time to time Mass was celebrated in the "Belle Air" home of Colonel John Rudolph, which is now Villanova University, and in the home of Thomas Wilcox at Ivy Mills, which is now Chester Heights. Mass was celebrated in the Wilcox Home prior to 1729, which makes it



CHARLES KELLY

the oldest parish in Delaware County, but the church of St. Thomas the Apostle wasn't built until the 1840s.

On a sweltering hot day in June, 1806, 27-year-old Dennis Kelly, a native of Trubach, County Donegal, Ireland, got off the boat in Philadelphia, boarded a stage coach and headed west to fulfill a dream of owning a ranch to raise cattle and horses. Along the way, he played an important role in the founding of two Delaware County parishes. Here is his story.

The stage went out Market st. and crossed the new bridge over the Schuylkill River, which had been built the year before. It was the first covered bridge in America. It went out the Lancaster Turnpike, the first turnpike in America, and travelling on it was not unlike driving on the Schuylkill Expressway today.

Conestoga freighters lumbered over the horizon and bore down the pike. And they were not alone. There were all sorts of vehicles on the road: Stages, pack horses, drays and wagons, some pulled by as many as eight horses. They came a-clanking and a-clinking as feed buckets and tar cans swung underneath. The sounds of the reins slapping horses' backs mingled with the rattle of hundreds of horses' hoofs and the clatter and jurgings of the wagon drivers.

Kelly, his wife, Mary, and their daughter, Margaret, settled in Ardmore and lived for a time in a house on Lancaster pike across from Wyoming ave. which is now Wayne O'Dell's, Sir Speedy Printing Center. In fact, O'Dell has a picture of the original home on his wall.

Kelly began by carrying stones at the mill dam near the nearby Nitre Hill Powder Mills. But he saw the advantage of having cotton and woolen mills, so with help from some well-to-do people he began to buy the powder mills and converted them to manufacturing cloth. Soon he became wealthy.

As the need for workers grew, Kelly brought friends and relatives over from Ireland. The one closest to his heart was his 18-year-old nephew, Charles Kelly. Born in Ardnamanna, County Donegal, on Aug. 2, 1803, he was just as generous and energetic as his uncle Dennis.

In the same year that he arrived in America, 1821, Charles Kelly obtained a lease on the Asher Lobb Cotton Mill located near the spot where the Baltimore Turnpike crossed Darby Creek at the east end of Clifton Heights. By 1825, it became one of the largest such companies in eastern Pennsylvania.

The saying that tumbled over the hills of Donegal was "if you want to go to America, see Dennis Kelly."

And they came. Out Lancas-

ter ave. they came. On drays or wagons, but many walked the distance. As the old song said:

*With my bundle on my shoulder
Faith there's no man could be bolder.
I'm leaving dear old Ireland
without warnin'.
For I lately took a notion
To cross the briny ocean,
And I start for Philadelphia
in the mornin'.*

They headed out for the mills of Dennis and Charles Kelly, where they knew they would be welcomed with a pot of tea and hot scones with plenty of butter.

The migration of the Irish to the mills along Cobb's Creek soon proved the need for a Catholic Church in the area. The various choices narrowed to two. Colonel Rudolph offered Bishop Henry Conwell a small tract of land on his farm. However, Dennis Kelly pointed out that there were many more Catholics living along Cobb's Creek and it was more centrally located to best serve the Catholics living in Radnor, as well as the growing number of Irish immigrants settling in Kellyville.

Bishop Conwell ruled in favor of Dennis Kelly and he and his wife donated a plot of land consisting of one acre and eight perches. It was built on a hill just off the northwesterly side of the Goshen Trail, which was the predecessor of Eagle rd. Although it was built in 1822, the first Mass was not celebrated until 1825 because of a dispute between Kelly and the Bishop as to the title of the land and building.

Nevertheless the first Mass was celebrated on a hot Sunday in July, 1825, by Father Michael Hurley, O.S.A., pastor of St. Augustine's Church in Philadelphia.

Although St. Thomas the Apostle is the oldest parish in Delaware County, St. Denis is the oldest church and coincidentally is across the street from the Friends Meeting House, which was built in 1683 and is the oldest church of any denomination in the county. William Penn came here to pray on two occasions, if anyone can visualize Penn coming out Darby rd. on horseback.

Although the new church was placed under the patronage of St. Denis, the first bishop of Paris, France, it was spelled "Dennis," with the double "n" and remained this way until 1865, the year after Dennis Kelly died.

The church was served by Augustinian priests, who came out from St. Augustine's until 1832 when it was turned over to the diocesan priests who were stationed in Old St. Joseph's on Willings alley in Philadelphia.

Eight priests who served the "crickers" went on to become bishops, including the famous

John Hughes, who, as archbishop of New York, built St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Augustinian, Father Nicholas O'Donnell, who served here in 1835, is credited by many writers to being the founder of The Catholic Herald in 1833. This was the forerunner of The Catholic Standard and Times.

Although a mission was established at Kellyville in 1827, Mass is said to have been celebrated within the confines of St. Charles parish as early as 1740 when a Jesuit celebrated Mass "in a Catholic house on the banks of Darby Creek at the place now called Kellyville."

A mission was established at Kellyville in 1827 and was served by the priests from St. Denis. Mass was celebrated at infrequent intervals in the offices of the Lobb Mill but by 1845 it became a more or less regular practice to have Mass celebrated in Kellyville once or twice a month. On the Sundays that Mass was not offered here, the people walked to St. Denis.

The Catholic Directory mentions the Mission at Kellyville for the first time in 1848 when it stated that Father James C. McGinnis was the pastor of St. Denis as well as caring for a temporary chapel on Darby Creek. He was pastor of both parishes until 1851, when he was succeeded by Father John Shiels, who took on these twin responsibilities until the end of 1853 when the people of Kellyville built a rectory for him for \$1,950, including the costs of the furnishings. At this time St. Denis returned to the care of the Augustinian Order, where it remains until today.

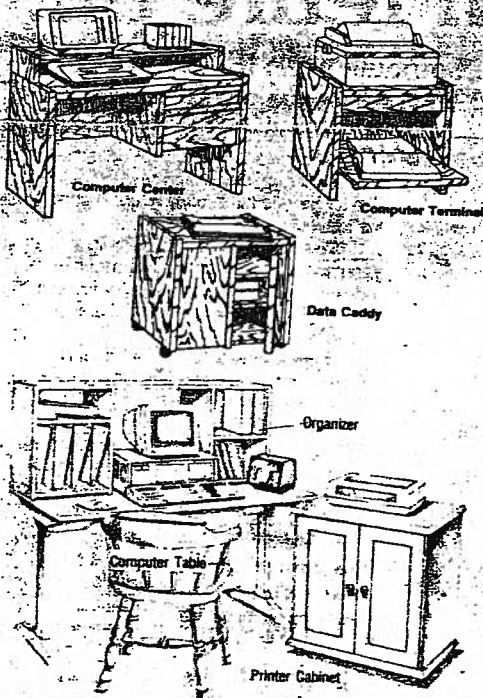
Like his uncle Dennis, Charles Kelly donated one acre of land on which the church was built. He also headed a committee which set out to raise funds for the new church. And on Sunday, Oct. 13, 1950, it was solemnly dedicated under the title of St. Charles Borromeo by the right Reverend Francis X. Gartland, pastor of St. John's Church in Philadelphia and Bishop-elect of Savannah, Georgia. As a young priest he had served at St. Denis.

It became the fourth regularly constituted parish in Delaware County. In addition to St. Denis and St. Thomas the Apostle, it was preceded by Old St. Michael's in Chester, and St. Thomas of Villanova, presently the campus chapel at Villanova University.

Although even the United States Post Office called the area Kellyville when the population became more cosmopolitan, it was renamed Oakview.

(Two sources were used for this story. The Sesquicentennial History of St. Denis Parish, by Joseph P. Barrett in cooperation with Father Edwin T. Grimes, O.S.A., and Kellyville Centennial: 1849-1949 by Father Joseph Ward.)

FASTMAN'S "USER FRIENDLY" FURNITURE



FASTMAN'S UNPAINTED FURNITURE

623-2951

Mon., Thurs., Fri. 9:30-9:00
Tues., Wed., Sat. 9:30-8:00

16 E. BALTIMORE AVE.
CLIFTON HEIGHTS, PA.

• 3 Miles from Philadelphia
• Municipal Parking Across From Store