

St. Charles Celebrates 150 Years in 'Kellyville'

By LOU BALDWIN

Industrialist Charles Kelly had quite an impact on his little corner of Delaware County. Back in the middle of the last century, it was called Kellyville.

Since then it's been described variously as Oakview and even Clifton Heights; now it's part of Drexel Hill. But the parish he was instrumental in founding in 1849 still bears the name of his patron saint — St. Charles Borromeo.

Kelly, who operated a mill in the area, had really been subsidizing a mission chapel since about 1827.

He donated the land on which the church is built and the stone for the first church, and advanced a loan for construction costs. The church was substantial for a country parish — it seated 450.

If you think parish twinning is a new phenomenon, guess again. At its foundation, St. Charles was twinned with neighboring St. Denis, Havertown (built on land donated by Kelly's brother, Dennis), with Father James McGinnis as pastor of both.

During his two-year tenure, he did build the first St. Charles Church. Father John Shiels, who served from 1851-55, became the first resident pastor.

Father Richard O'Connor, the seventh pastor, opened the first parish school in 1869, which was staffed by lay teachers Mary Allen and Mary Gough.

Kellyville was still a village in 1874 when Archbishop James F. Wood came to confirm 249. The next year, according to a 1989 parish history, 10 priests were kept busy hearing confessions at the annual Forty Hours devotion.

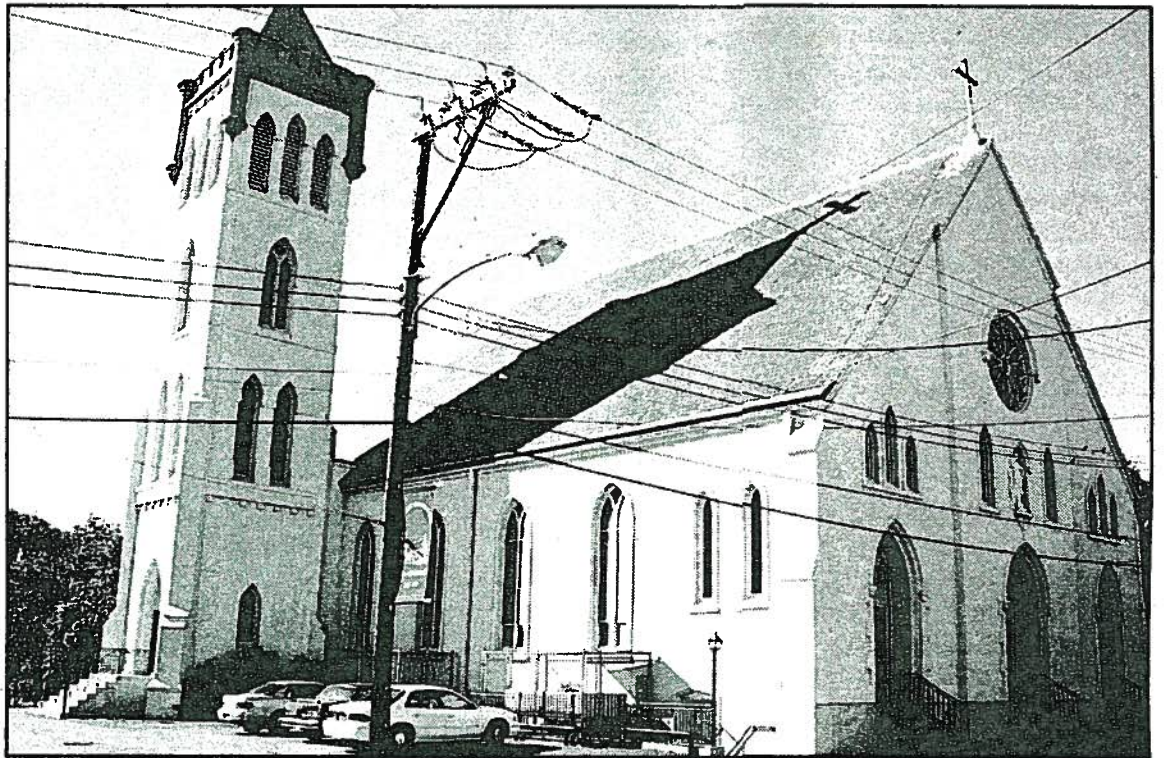
Father Matthew P. O'Brien, the 10th pastor (1885-1905), purchased four additional acres for the parish cemetery, brought in the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the school (under Mother M. Ambrose) and built the graceful church where Cardinal Bevilacqua will celebrate the parish's 150th anniversary Mass on Sept. 26.

Father O'Brien is also listed as general contractor in old parish histories. He had either a fine sense of history or economy, because one side wall of the original church was preserved and became the rear wall of the new church.

As with so many suburban areas, there was a fair amount of housing built in the parish after World War II, and an influx of people followed.

"I watched my house being built," said Joe Reale, who came in 1950 and has been an active parishioner and usher for many years. "It's still the same kind of neighborhood as it was then, but of course a lot of kids move out."

"My children went to the school and we had 1,100 students; they were using everything for classrooms, even the church hall. Then Msgr. (John J.) Sefton came and he



ST. CHARLES BORROMEIO CHURCH, DREXEL HILL

(Christen J. Conte)

built the addition to the school which took care of it."

Msgr. Sefton was followed by Father James F. Gallagher, who was succeeded in 1994 by Msgr. Daniel A. Murray, St. Charles' 15th pastor.

"There are still Irish in the parish, but there are a lot of Italians, Germans, Polish and Slovaks, too," the pastor said. "They came in waves with different languages and customs but with the same faith. It is that immigrant faith that is the glue that has kept the parish together. We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors in faith."

Today's parish "is no longer a poor mill town," Msgr. Murray said, and "the people are generous with their time, talent and treasure." It is

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a densely populated area "where people have put down roots. We just buried a lady who was 100 years old and who had graduated from the school."

There are 2,245 families in the parish community and 410 pupils

in the school, grades K-8, still under the direction of the Immaculate Heart Sisters.

Major organizations, the pastor said, include a very large Ladies Auxiliary, an active St. Vincent de Paul Society, a large RCIA program and a very active CYO group.

"We also have HOPE (Helping Other People Every Day)," Msgr. Murray said. "That is a society which sits and reads with old people, or helps them with their shopping or housecleaning. It is very successful."

The greatest attribute of St. Charles is "our sense of Christian community," said director of religious education Kathy Kozak, a 42-year parishioner and graduate of the school. "The young members and the old members of the parish band together helping one another. The nuns are very strong witnesses for Christ and active with the community."

"The pastors have just built on one another, and Msgr. Murray is really interested in our spiritual welfare," she added.

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