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THE FIRST CATHOLIC CEMETERY
IN COLUMBUS

By Donald M. Schlegel

The first Catholic cemetery in Columbus, antedating Mt. Calvary, was located on the south-east corner of Washington and Mt. Vernon avenues. It has sometimes been called St. Patrick's Cemetery, no doubt because of its proximity to St. Patrick's Church; but at the time of its opening in the late 1840 s, the entire Catholic community of Columbus was still attending tiny St. Remigius' Church.

The cemetery appears to have had no saint's name or other particular name; it was listed in city directories from 1870 to 1882 simply as "Catholic Cemetery." When it was opened the cemetery was on the north-eastern edge of the city, almost out in the country-side. The site is now the campus of the Columbus Technical Institute, within the city's innerbelt expressway.

The site measured some 274 feet south and 498 feet east from the above-named intersection, and contained about $3\frac{1}{4}$ acres. The land was conveyed from Samuel Brush to a committee of Catholic men of the city (1) by a deed dated October 6, 1846. The chief man of the committee, in whose name the deed was made (2), was Peter Ury, who was a member of St. Remigius congregation and a member of the building committee for Holy Cross Church (3). The purchase price was \$600, of which \$50 was paid in cash from funds collected from the congregation for that purpose. Five promissory notes of \$110 each, payable one each in the next five successive years with six percent annual interest, together with a mortgage on the property completed the transaction. The committee, with Ury as treasurer, sold small burial lots and applied the receipts, along with contributions received, to the discharge of the promissory notes (4).

On September 11, 1848, Peter Ury and Johanatta, his wife, conveyed the tract to John Baptist Purcell, Bishop of Cincinnati, "To be held by the said Bishop in trust as a burial ground for the Roman Catholics of Columbus, Ohio" (5). The use of the land as a cemetery before this date is confirmed by Martin's History of Franklin County, which states that "the ground had been used for this purpose some two or three years before the date of this deed" (6). In addition, one of the tombstones noted below contained the date of June 6, 1848. Once established, the cemetery served more than the city, for Catholics sometimes came distances of thirty miles to inter their dead there (7).

The Catholic Cemetery probably was never consecrated. In Bishop Watterson's petition in the court case over the land (see below), dated 1888, he stated that "soon after the conveyance of said premises by said Brush to said Ury - the exact time the plaintiff is unable to state for want of knowledge - the same was formally dedicated and consecrated a grave

yard and burial place....."(8). This statement was deleted in a later, amended form of the petition. Remarks made in Rev. D. A. Clarke's historical sketch of the Church in Columbus, published in 1892, imply that the ground in question was never consecrated (9).

Only ten years after its opening, the cemetery was becoming surrounded by the city. Developers and residents of the area, fearing contamination of wells and therefore slow improvements and sales in the new subdivisions, petitioned the city council in 1856 to forbid any more interments. The council obliged, passing an ordinance dated July 21, 1856, whereby burial anywhere within the city limits was prohibited. This ordinance was a surprise to the majority of the city's residents, on whose objections it was repealed on August 18 (10). The Catholic Cemetery remained in use for another two decades.

In addition to being divided into burial lots, as described above, the cemetery was also divided into two major sections: an Irish section and a German section. The Irish were content to allow Father Fitzgerald of St. Patrick's Church to oversee their section, but the Germans placed a board of trustees over theirs. The cemetery was listed as two separate organizations in its only listing in an early city directory, in 1862 (11):

Irish Catholic Cemetery

Cor. Johnstown plank road and Washington Ave.
Under the charge of the Pastor of St. Patrick's Church
James Fleming, Sexton.

German Catholic Cemetery

Cor. Johnstown plank road and Washington Ave.
George Banman, Treasurer, Christian Whittman, Sec.; George Schmidt,
Sexton

Trustees - Henry Theado, Chas. Bear, Geo. Eienman, Martin Hintershitt.
The Irish section probably included the north-west corner, where Mrs. John McMahon was buried about 1863 (12).

Upon the erection of the Columbus Diocese, the cemetery and other church properties were deeded by Bishop Purcell to Bishop Rosecrans; the cemetery deed was dated December 29, 1868 (13). By this time the Catholic cemetery had become nearly full and the first burials had already been made at Mt. Calvary. In 1874, the year of the consecration of Mt. Calvary (14), Bishop Rosecrans directed that no further interments be made in the Catholic cemetery (15). Bishop Watterson purchased three adjoining lots at each of the southern corners of the cemetery in 1881 (16), but apparently only as an investment, the expanded site being more valuable than the separate properties. It seems to have been about the end of 1887, when the deed for these lots was recorded, that the Catholics of Columbus were advised to remove the remains of their friends and relatives who still remained there from the old burial ground to Mt. Calvary, and efforts were made to dispose of the ground. The widow and children of Peter Ury objected to this action, claiming that as Catholic citizens of Columbus they had the right upon their decease to be buried in the old cemetery with Peter, whose remains they apparently refused to move. They demanded that the land either be returned to them as the heirs of Peter Ury or be maintained as a cemetery for those already buried and still remaining there. The first petition in the case was filed by Bishop Watterson in January, 1888 (17).

The case was eventually taken to the Supreme Court of Ohio. During the circuit court hearings in 1891, the condition of the cemetery itself was described:

....the land is in a neglected condition, wholly unprotected by fence, or otherwise; that it is in a populous part of the city, surrounded by dwellings and business houses, and is used by the public in common for passing and repassing, without let or hindrance. That its use as a burial ground is no longer practicable.

The Bishop wished to dispose of a property which he had attempted to properly close, which was a burden on the Diocese, and in which any further interments would be a menace to the public health. No fund had ever been established for the maintenance of the cemetery, and since the sale of burial permits ceased, no revenue was being received. Assessments had been incurred for the improvement and repair of the two adjacent streets which were then a lien on the property (18). The Franklin County Common Pleas Court, the Second District Circuit Court, and the Ohio Supreme Court each in turn held that Bishop Watterson had clear title to the property and was free to dispose of it. The final decision by the Supreme Court was dated December 18, 1894 (19). Twenty years had passed since the cemetery had been closed to interments.

In 1898 the land was still recognizable as a "disused graveyard" when the inscriptions on the thirty remaining tombstones were copied by William Pengelly and published in the first volume of "The Old Northwest Genealogical Quarterly"(20). Shortly thereafter, the land was cleared and consideration was again given to its disposal. It was examined in September of 1900 and appraised at \$30,000. No sale was made, however, and soon it was put to a new use for the benefit of the Church. In 1905 Bishop Hartley established there St. Patrick's College, which later became Aquinas College and High School (21).

Although ample time had been allowed for the relatives and friends of those buried in the Catholic Cemetery to remove their remains to Mt. Calvary, and many were so removed, many more were not. Many of the Catholic families of Columbus of the 1850's undoubtedly took part in the westward migrations of the late 1860's and the 1870's, leaving no members behind to care for those in the cemetery. If the cemetery had been nearly full, as claimed, then there must have been about four thousand graves there; it is not likely that a very high percentage of them were removed. Their remains stayed there until disturbed by workmen digging foundations. Each time excavations have been begun for a new building at Aquinas or at Columbus Technical Institute, more bones have been disinterred, but none quite as dramatically as the first:

"While excavating at the site of the proposed St. Patrick's High school and college, at Naghten and Eleventh streets, Monday morning, the hoof of one of the horses crashed through a metallic casket, and a few minutes later a wooden box was broken into in the same manner. the site was formerly a Catholic cemetery, but no bodies have been buried there for more than half a century. The contractors, W.H. Gill and Son, have found other evidences of graves, but none equal to that of Monday morning.

Priests of St. Patrick's church were informed of the finding of the casket, and they will make provision for its interment, probably at Calvary (22)."

The deceased probably would not have minded that their "final" resting place was disturbed for the use of the Church. Aquinas College educated many

priests for the Dominican Order and the High School provided its over six thousand graduates with a Catholic education.

The land and building were transferred by the Bishop to the Dominican Order, in the form of the Aquinas Literary Society, in 1912 (23). When the high school closed in 1965, the land and buildings were sold by the Dominicans to the Columbus Board of Education (24), who later transferred the Property to the trustees of the Columbus Technical Institute. Though the use of the land for Catholic education was not objectionable, is the same true of its present use? Not only is the land no longer in the Church's possession, but now it is said that the razing of "Aquinas Hall", the last remaining building of the College or High School, is imminent. Soon there will be not one symbol of the Columbus Catholic community left on this once hallowed spot, where the dust of many of its early members still remains.

- 1) Franklin County Common Pleas Court, Record, Vol. 134, p. 32 (Case #20640).
- 2) Unrecorded deed, mentioned in subsequent deed: Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 38, p. 109; also mentioned in the court case, op. cit.
- 3) Diocese of Columbus, The History of Fifty Years, 1868-1918, p. 170. The 1842 Columbus business directory lists Peter Ury as a boot and shoe maker, residing on the north-west corner of State and Fifth streets. He was born in Germany around 1796 (Federal census of 1850, Columbus 4th ward, page 477, house 43, family 59); he died in 1865, according to his widow Theresia's statements in the court case.
- 4) Common Pleas Court, op. cit., pages 32-33.
- 5) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 38, page 109.
- 6) Martin, William T., History of Franklin County; Columbus, Follett, Foster & Co., 1858, page 392.
- 7) Diocese of Columbus, op. cit., page 72.
- 8) Common Pleas Court, op. cit., page 32.
- 9) Lee, Alfred E., History of the City of Columbus; Munsell & Co., N.Y. and Chicago, 1892; Vol. II, page 674 (Rev. D. A. Clarke wrote chapter 42, pages 633-674.)
- 10) Martin, op. cit., pp. 391, 393.
- 11) Lathrop's Columbus Directory, Columbus, Richard Nevins, April 1862, p. 132.
- 12) Mrs. McMahon's grandson's widow, Mrs. Catherine Besch of Columbus, has stated that to the best of the family's knowledge, Mrs. McMahon still lies buried there. Ellen Upton McMahon - could be "Emma" buried in German hall, 1867, @ 24 yrs.
- 13) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 98, p. 127.
- 14) Lee, op. cit.
- 15) Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit Courts of Ohio, Vol. 5, 1891, pp 348 and 351.
- 16) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 190, p. 447; Thomas M. Rianhard of New Brighton, Richmond County, N.Y., to John A. Watterson for \$2500, lots 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9 "of John Morrison's subdivision of ground adjoining the Catholic Cemetery." Signed December 6, 1881; transferred December 14, 1887.
- 17) Franklin County Common Pleas Court, op. cit., pages 18-89. In support of his statements, Bishop Watterson presented dispositions made by Dennis Corcoran and "Aloiseus Woelfel." They were not copied into the record, so their exact involvement with the cemetery is unknown. The Woelfels or Wolfels were in Columbus at a relatively early date, the brothers Joseph and Cyriach having been among the "pioneers" of St. Remigius church in the 1830's. (Diocese of Columbus, op. cit., pages 159, 162, 163.) The 1842 directory lists "Woolfull, A., wagonmaker, res S s Cherry alley east of

- Front." Dennis Corcoran's name appears in the St. Remigius records as early as 1849.
- 18) Reports of Cases, op. cit., pp. 349, 351, 352.
 - 19) Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Ohio, Vol. 52, p. 637.
 - 20) "The Old Northwest Genealogical Quarterly," Vol. I, pp. 72-74.
 - 21) Diocese of Columbus, op. cit., p. 567.
 - 22) "The Columbus Evening Dispatch," Monday, June 26, 1905, p. 8.
 - 23) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 518, p. 117 (Jan. 19, 1912).
 - 24) Ibid., Vol. 2657, p. 60 (June 29, 1965).

The Columbus Catholic Cemetery
Inscriptions

These inscriptions were published on pages 72-74 of volume I of "The Old Northwest Genealogical Quarterly" in an article entitled, "Monumental Inscriptions Remaining in Two Disused Graveyards in Columbus, Ohio." The other graveyard included was the old Franklinton cemetery. The article was ascribed to W. G. Pengelly, who presumably copied the inscriptions. William G. Pengelly (who was a bookkeeper for the Capital City Bank) and his family first appeared in the city directories in 1884, so it is possible that the inscriptions might have been copied several years before their publication in 1898.

In memory of John Healey native of Co. Kerry, Ireland Died Mar. 16, 1861 aged about 65 yrs.	William Nixon, Jr. Died Mar. 29, 1853 aged 8 mo. 22 d's.
Dennis Lyons Died July 1, 1865 aged 34 years native of the parish of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork Ireland	Mary Nixon Died July 21, 1851 aged 3 mo. 29 d.
Ellen Buckley wife of Charles Lyons Native of Kilcarney, Co. Cork Ireland Died Dec. 30, 1863 aged 30 yrs.	David Joice Died Nov. 28, 1864 aged 47 yrs.
Jeremiah son of C. and E. Lyons died May 7, 1864 aged 6 mo.	Dennis Moriarty a native of Ireland Died May 8, 1867 aged 62 years
	Mary Ellen dau. of J. and L. McNamee died July 30, 1850 Aged 1 yr. 10 ds.

Bridget
wife of
Wm. Feely
Died
June 28, 1862
aged
about 28 years

James M.
Son of
J. and L. McNamee
died
Sep. 29, 1855
Aged 4 yrs. 6 mo.

Thomas Joyce
died
Aug. 27, 1850
Aged 27 yrs.

also his brother
Edward
died
May 18, 1854
aged 19 yrs.
They were natives of
Co. Kilkenny, Ireland

Timothy McLoughlin
native of Burr, Kings Co.
Ireland
Died Dec. 22, 1861
aged 55 years

Mary
wife of
Martin Doyle
native of the Co. Carlow
Ireland
Died Aug. 9, 1858
aged 44 years

Children of Michael
and Ellen Conlen
William P.
Died Aug. 20, 1851
aged 1 yr., 6 mo.

John A.
Mary E.
Died May 7, 1861
aged 7 yrs. 2 mo.

Daly
native of Westport, Co.
Mayo, Ireland
Died July 7, 1865

Bridget Moren
wife of
Dennis Daly
native of Westport
Co. Mayo, Ireland
Died Sep. 3, 1854
aged 32 years

Edward Kinsalla
native of the Co. Wicklow
Ireland
Died Aug. 11, 1861
aged 61 years

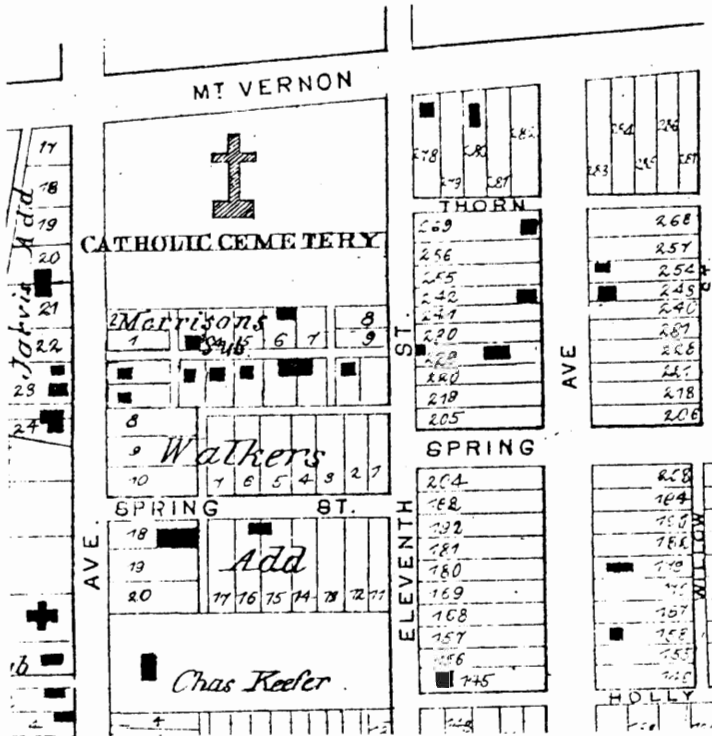
Catherine
wife of
E. Kinsalla
Died Dec. 5, 1863
aged 40 years

Margaret
aged 10 mos.
dau. of Margaret Keating
Catharine
dau. of Mary Keating
aged 3 years

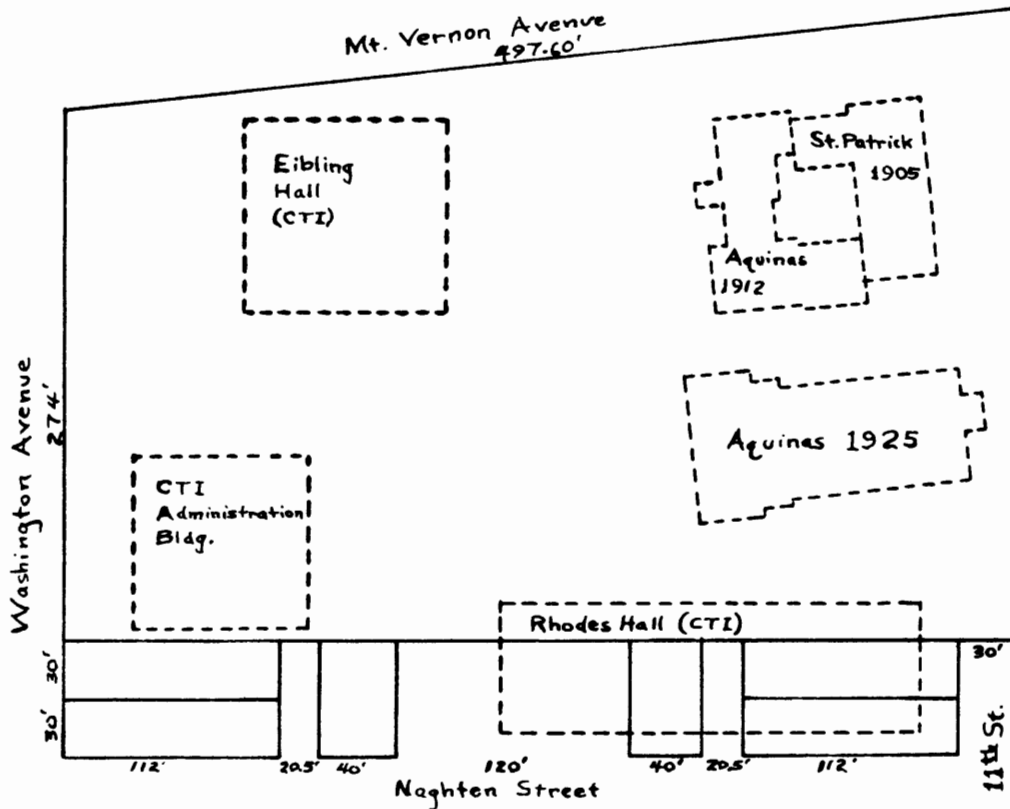
Henriette Amy
Born
Kuerpenning
native of
Veyesack, New Bremen
Died at Col. O
Sep. 15, 1852
ages 52 years

Peter Dogate
native of Ireland, Co. Dublin
Died Jan. 6, 1861
aged 46 years

Margaret
wife of
Patrick Keating
died May 9, 1862
aged 38 years
(more)



The Catholic Cemetery as shown on page 71 of Caldwell's Atlas of Franklin County. (J. A. Caldwell & H. T. Gould, Columbus, 1872)



The original cemetery and six added lots shown with past and present buildings on the site.

Anne
Aged 1 year
Sarah J. 9 mos.

Thomas Lennon
native of the Parish of
Dishard, Co. Roscommon
Ireland
Died June 6, 1859
aged 49 years

-
also, Michael, Mary Ann,
and Patrick, children of
Thos & Ellen Lennon

Roger McLane
native of
Co. of Wexford, Ireland
Died Jan. 19, 1866
aged 66 yrs.

-
also his son
Pat'k McLane
died July 31, 1865
aged 22 years

Francis Craven
a native of the Co. Dublin,
Ireland
Died Mar. 4, 186*
aged 60 years

Wife of
Peter Fry
Born In Germany
Jan. 5, 1787
Departed this life
Aug. 16, 1853
aged 64 yrs 7 mo 10 ds

Agnes
Ziegelmilller
Gestorben am 6 un Juni
1848
Un aller von 23 Jahren

Mary
wife of
M. Buchert
Died Sep. 2, 1859
* 11 mo 23 ds.

Daniel Geary
native of Co. Cork
Ireland
Died Feb. 13, 1864
aged 45 yrs.

Edward H.
Son of
John M. Jacobs
Died
July 7, 186* [1868]
aged 24 yrs 1 mo
14 days

John George
son of
John & Elizabeth
Engler
died July 28, 1849
aged 50 yrs 6 mo 15 ds

*Defaced
