

# History of Corpus Christi Parish

In 1877, the new Diocese of Peoria was founded, with John Lancaster Spalding as the first Bishop. Bishop Spalding that same year sent Fr. Joseph Costa, I.C., to Galesburg as Pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, with the special job of building a parochial school for the growing Catholic population of the city. In 1877, Fr. Costa was 56 years old and he had already done enough building for one lifetime. He was born, far from Galesburg, in Pettinengo, about 30 miles northeast of Turin, Italy, in 1821. He was the youngest of four sons born to a farmer of that region, and the only one to enter the religious life. In 1845, Joseph Costa joined a new congregation, known as the Institute of Charity (Rosminians). The Institute of Charity was founded in 1828 at Monte Calvario, Domodossola, Italy, by Antonio Rosmini, priest, theologian, and philosopher. In 1851, Joseph Costa was sent to England to continue his studies and to help other Rosminians already working there. He was ordained in 1853 and worked there for 11 years in parishes, preaching missions, and teaching. In answer to a request for help from Bishop Yuncker of Alton, Illinois, in 1864, Fr. Costa was given permission to go there to work. Prior to being sent to work in Galesburg, Fr. Costa had worked in, among other places, Jacksonville, El Paso, Lincoln, and Springfield.

The task of building a parochial school would have daunted a lesser man. Since the Catholic population of Galesburg was small and poor, each family was asked to donate 1,000 bricks or the equivalent of \$10.00. The foundation stone for the new school, to be called St. Joseph Academy, was laid on June 24, 1878. The school opened in the fall of 1879, staffed by 14 Sisters of Providence from St. Mary of the Woods, Indiana. There were between 350-400 students, boys and girls. Many of the girls were from the surrounding countryside and were boarders. The sisters lived in a rented house until a convent was built, joined to the school, at a cost of \$11,388.52 and opened in 1881. The first commencement took place that same year, 1881, and three young ladies graduated. Rev. Mother Mary Raphael, long-time Superior General of the Sisters of Providence, was one of the three (Mary Slattery).

Having completed the parochial school, Fr. Costa decided that a second Catholic Church was needed in Galesburg. Although the town at that time was anti-Catholic, Fr. Costa, through the agency of Michael English, purchased a site on the corner of South Prairie and East South streets, a good location in the center of the city. The land cost \$4,885. Work on the site for the new church began in 1884 as several dilapidated buildings were removed. The contract for building the church, to be called Corpus Christi, was awarded to Matthias Schnell of Rock Island for \$38,611. Much of the credit for the design and plan of the building must be given to Fr. Costa. A man of extraordinary vision, he was the most influential figure in the early Catholic



Corpus Christi Church and Lyceum  
Built in 1885

history of Galesburg. The laying of the cornerstone of Corpus Christi occurred August 10, 1884, on a Sunday afternoon, with the Rt. Rev. Bishop John Lancaster Spalding presiding and a large crowd present. The cornerstone was inscribed as follows: "In the year of our Lord, 1884, the tenth of August, under the Pontificate of Leo XIII, Most Rev. John L. Spalding being Bishop of the Peoria Diocese, Fr. Joseph Costa, O.C., being Pastor of the Galesburg congregation, Chester A. Arthur, President of the United States, John Hamilton, Governor of Illinois, John C. Stewart, Mayor of Galesburg, Bishop Spalding, before a large assembly, blessed and laid the cornerstone of this church."

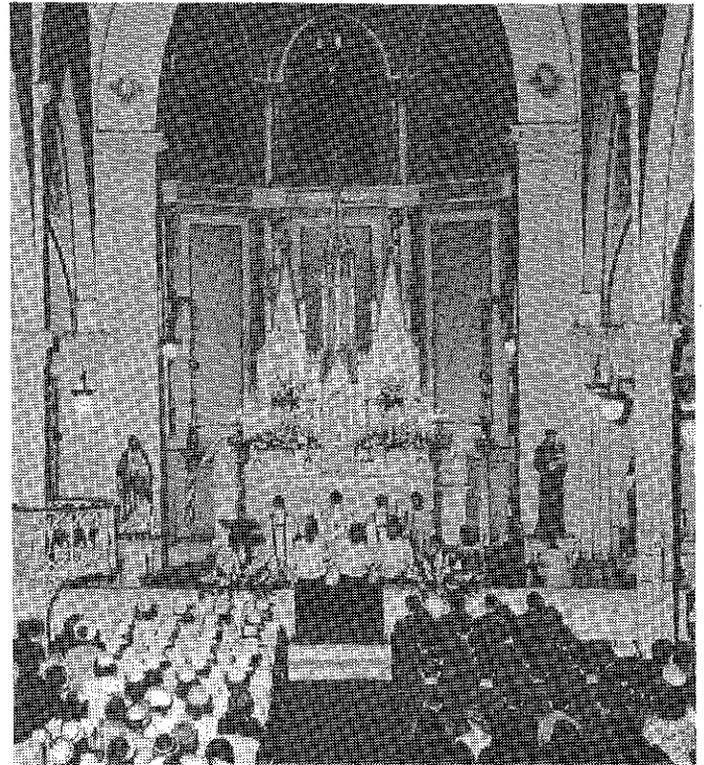
Corpus Christi Church was dedicated and officially opened with solemn ceremonies on Sunday, October 4, 1885. It is an imposing building and the people of Galesburg welcomed it as a becoming addition to the city. The architecture is neo-Gothic in style. On approaching the church, the first and most striking feature is the tall spire, rising 150 feet into the air. The building itself is 122 feet long by 57 feet wide. The inside features high pointed arches and tall slender columns. Side arches at the center create two galleries. The one on the north contains the pipes for the organ and the other provides additional seating for overflow crowds. The side en-

trances are under these galleries. There is a third gallery over the three main entrances, now used for the organ console and the choir.

The side walls provide light through stained glass windows, an art form which was very popular during the time the church was built. There are eight large windows depicting lives of some of the saints. Beginning on the north side at the front of the church, we see St. Michael the Archangel, St. Rose of Lima, the Blessed Virgin as a child with St. Ann, and in the rear St. Patrick. On the south side stands St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Thomas Aquinas. High over the altar are 12 little stained glass windows.

There were three altars in the church, as was the custom in those days. The main or high altar was against the east wall of the church and rose imposingly about two-thirds of the height of the wall. The side altars were smaller and were dedicated to Our Lady and St. Joseph. Of course, many of these things were changed over the years. Four very narrow sets of stairs (still in existence) led down to the basement, where there was a furnace and a dirt floor. The basement has been improved to contain a social room, full kitchen, and bride's room.

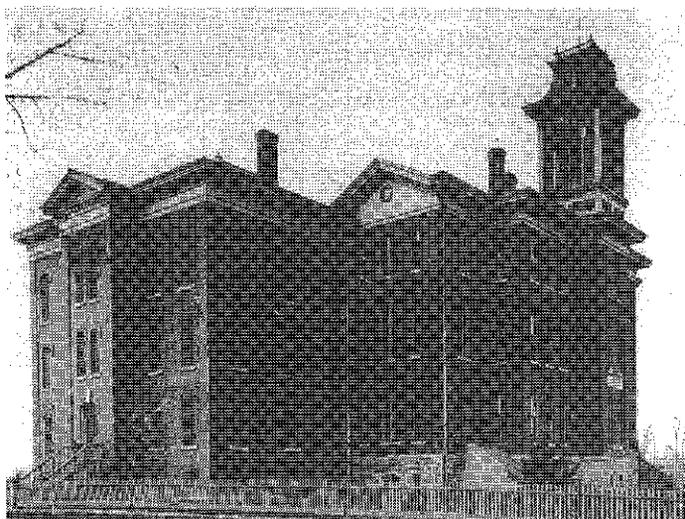
Even though he was a great worker, Fr. Costa's next project would require the assistance of his brethren in the Institute of Charity. He wanted to open a school for high school boys. Seeking manpower and financial help, he went to England and Italy, and finally Rome, where he met with Fr. Lanzoni, Superior General of the Institute of Charity. He was disappointed when Fr. Lanzoni informed him that the brethren were all promised elsewhere. He was given some money and the promise of men in the future, provided he received permission from the Bishop of Peoria to establish a religious house in the Diocese. Also, as a sign of his esteem, Fr. Lanzoni entrusted to Fr. Costa the relics of St. Crescent, martyr. These relics, excavated from the catacombs of St. Cyriaca, Rome, in 1838, had been given



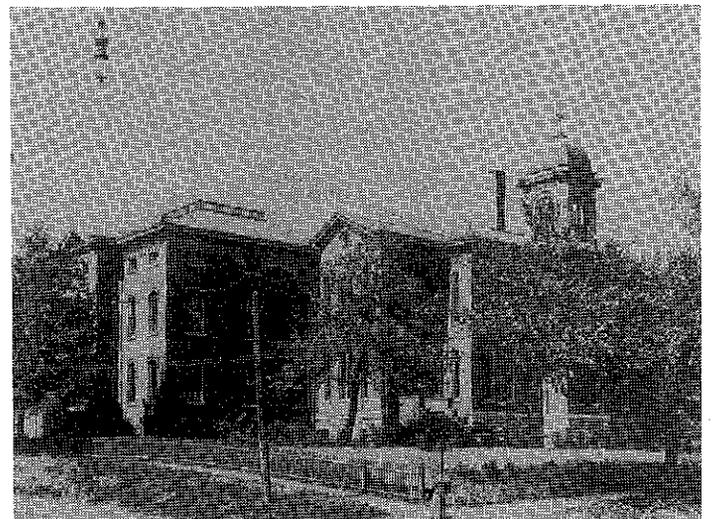
Interior of sanctuary prior to 1956

into the care of Antonio Rosmini. Fr. Rosmini had the relics taken to Stresa, Italy, and placed under the altar in his chapel. Fr. Costa placed them under the side altar (Blessed Virgin) on the north side of the church. The feast of St. Crescent is celebrated (in Corpus Christi Parish only) on August 27.

Although no Rosminians were able to return with Fr. Costa, he had persuaded his nephew, Fr. Louis Selva, a diocesan priest, to return to Galesburg with him. Upon his return from Italy, Bishop Spalding told Fr. Costa to reopen St. Patrick's Church, which had been closed when Corpus Christi opened. His nephew was appointed Pastor of St. Patrick's. There were about



St. Joseph's Academy before 1913 fire (three stories)



St. Joseph's Academy after fire (note new bell tower)

400 families in the combined parishes. Both priests continued to live in the rectory at St. Patrick's. In 1888, the original Corpus Christi Rectory was built, just north of the church, at a cost of \$5,500. The following year, St. Joseph's Cemetery was opened in the southwest part of the town, and the old St. Mary's Cemetery east of the town was closed in 1891.

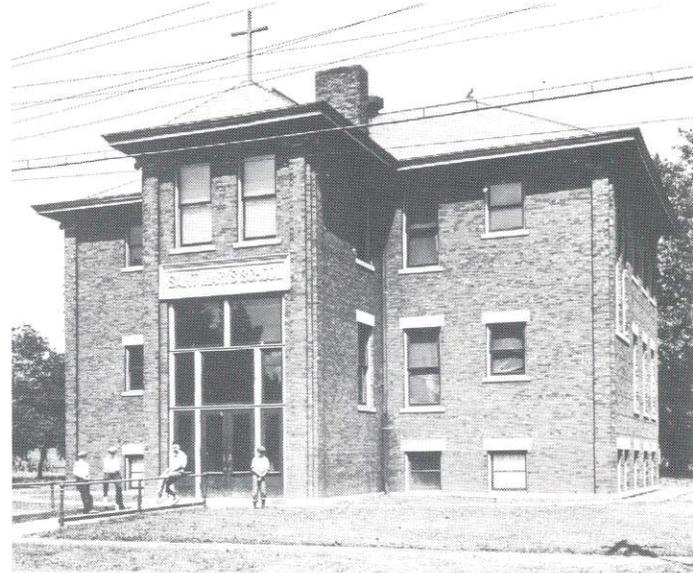
St. Mary's Primary School was established in 1891, when Fr. Costa realized the necessity of providing a Catholic education for many of the children who lived in the east part of the city, then known as the 7th Ward. These children had to cross on foot the railroad switchyards to get to the Academy. As a safety measure, the old Charles W. Butt home at Fourth and Seminary streets was purchased and renovated for use as a school. In 1906, the old frame house was replaced with a new brick structure, St. Mary's School. The sisters from the Academy traveled daily to instruct the children. The parents took turns providing a noonday meal for



Original St. Mary's School (note bell between chimneys)



Fr. Doubleday with ladies of Sodality



New St. Mary's School, 1906



St. Joseph's Academy lower grades in 1921

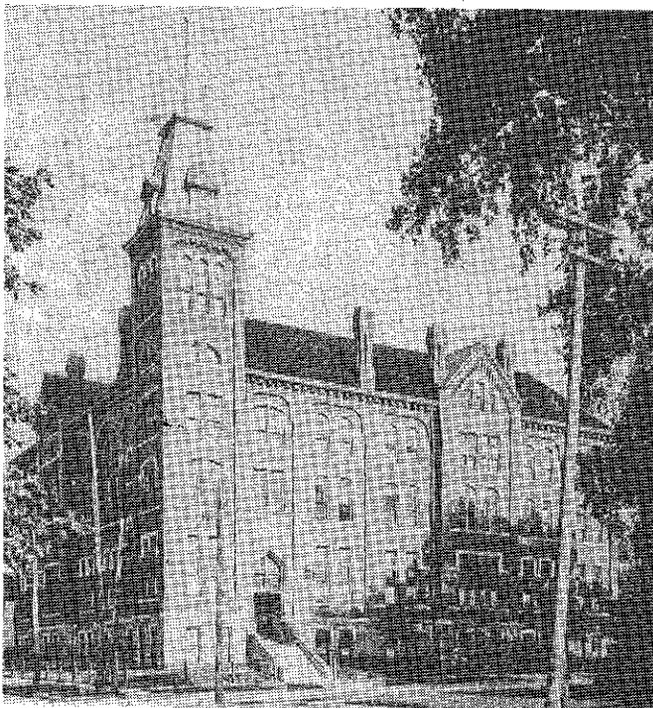


Funeral of Fr. Costa, February, 1917

the sisters. A viaduct to enable people to walk over the switchyard tracks was built a few years later. St. Mary's was closed in 1924, as all children could now attend the Academy.

The same year, Fr. Costa took the first steps toward his dream of a school for the higher education of young men. He purchased the land for the proposed school, on the same block as Corpus Christi Church, for \$5,000. The lot faced Prairie and Tompkins streets, and work was started to prepare the land for the new building. In 1892, the first Rosminians arrived in Galesburg to assist Fr. Costa. They were Frs. Joseph Tonello, Ernest

Hawley, and John Harrington, and Bro. Francis Foradori. The school was completed and opened in 1894, but a more solemn opening was held in 1895 on September 5, with Bishop Spalding in attendance. The modern brick building had three stories, besides a well-lighted basement. It provided nine classrooms and apartments for the priests and brothers who taught in the school, also an oratory and sacristy. It was both a boarding school and day college for young men. The original cost was \$42,000, but additional expenditures brought the total outlay to \$50,000. Twenty-five students enrolled the first academic year.



Corpus Christi Lyceum, erected 1894



Fr. George Doubleday, Fr. Joseph Costa, and Fr. John Phelan



Fr. Costa with boys' Sunday School class (1910)

On February 19, 1903, the Golden Jubilee of the ordination of Fr. Costa was celebrated in Corpus Christi Church. The celebration began in the morning with Mass, attended by a large number of visiting clergy. A Vesper Service was held in the evening, and at the closing Fr. Costa was presented with a gold plate bearing \$500 in gold. The money was contributed by various societies and the gold plate was a gift from the Knights

of Columbus. It bore the inscription: "Greetings from the Knights of Columbus, Galesburg Council #556, to the Very Rev. Dean Costa in remembrance of your Golden Jubilee February 19." In the center it bore the dates 1853-1903, and between them was an engraved emblem of the Knights of Columbus. Following the Vesper Service, an elaborate banquet was served in the Lyceum by the ladies of the parish.



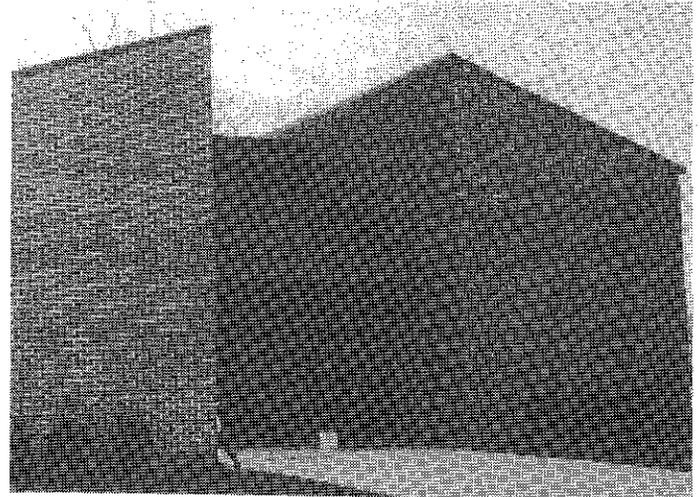
Fr. Costa with girls' Sunday School class (1910)



Original Rectory, erected 1888

Although advanced in years, Fr. Costa was not one to rest contented. He went to Bishop Spalding with the idea for a Catholic Hospital in Galesburg. With the Bishop's approval, he took the idea to the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis in Peoria. The plan was approved in 1908, and seven sisters from St. Francis Hospital in Peoria were sent to take possession of the old Thompson residence on South Cherry Street in Galesburg. The three-story brick building was remodeled to provide room for 27 patients, in what was to become St. Mary's Hospital. Though there were many trials and hardships in the early days of the hospital, it prospered, and today the hospital is one of the most modern and comprehensive in western Illinois or even the state.

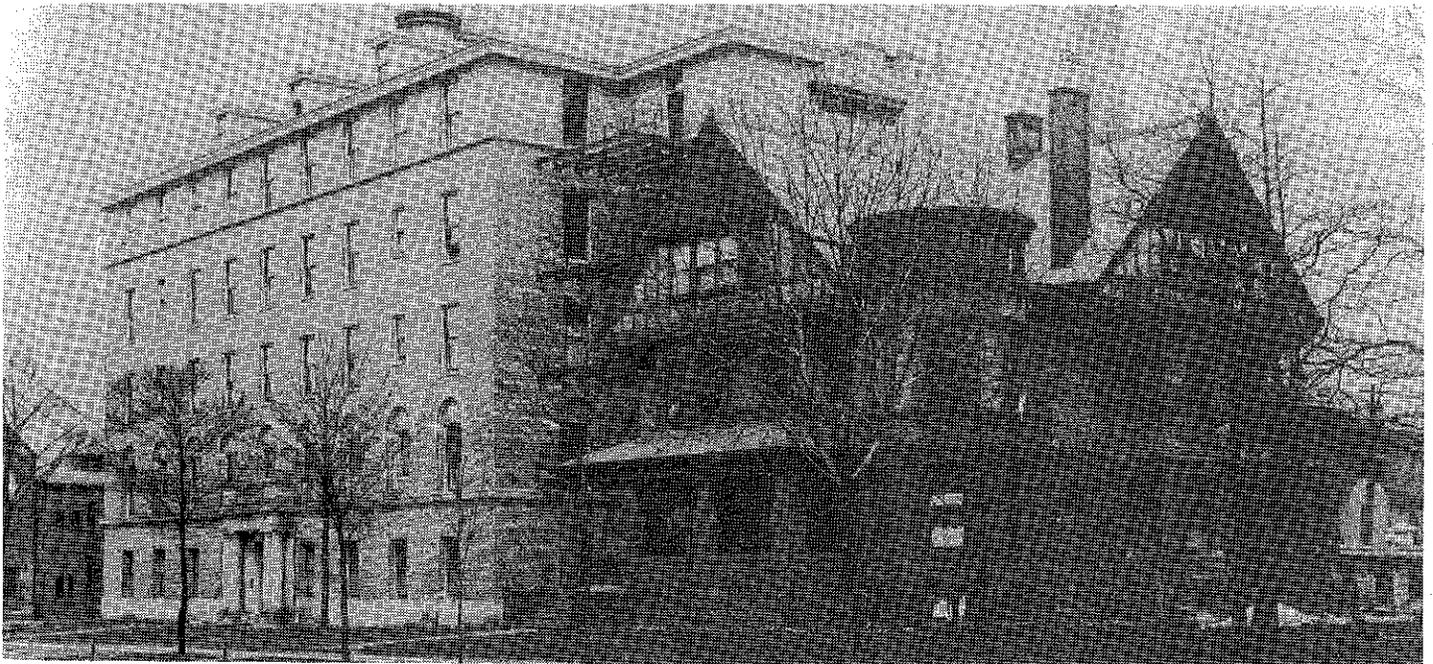
In 1910, the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the parish and Fr. Costa's 88th birthday were celebrated at the same time. Fr. Louis Selva, who had pre-



Present Rectory, erected 1979

sided at the Mass 25 years earlier, was celebrant of the Mass before a full church. Carpenders' Mass was played by the organist, Miss Marie Simmons. Fr. Costa thanked God that he had lived to see the 25th anniversary, and spoke of the help he had received and also of the dedication services 25 years before, in 1885. The ladies of the parish served a banquet at noon, as was done at the dedication. At the conclusion, a public reception was held and a purse of \$88.00 was presented to Fr. Costa. The Galesburg Evening Mail, in noting Fr. Costa's 88th birthday, said: "In an institution so great as the Catholic Church, it becomes difficult to pick out individuals to whom credit, in large amount, can be given for church upbuilding. There are such individuals, however, and Fr. Costa is one of them.

In October of 1912, Fr. Costa, just six days short of his 90th birthday, resigned his pastorate, and his assistant, Fr. George Doubleday, became Pastor. Fr. Costa continued to do some work in the school and in the parish. February 2, 1917, marked the end of an era, when Fr. Costa died peacefully in the rectory. Mary Gabe Foley Campbell recalls the following: At the time

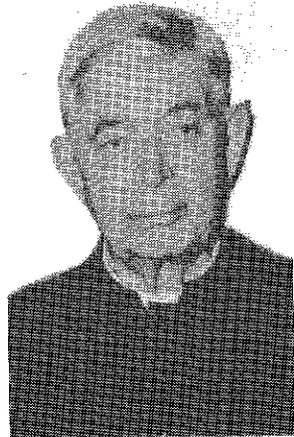


New St. Mary's Hospital, erected 1913-14

Original St. Mary's Hospital, 1908

of Fr. Costa's death, there arose a controversy over the transporting of his body to the cemetery. J. P. Foley, mortician (Mrs. Campbell's father), had just purchased an automobile hearse and wished to use it. Fr. Costa had opposed the automobile, he walked everywhere, and some people felt he should be transported by a horse-drawn hearse to the cemetery. The Bishop ruled in favor of Mr. Foley, and so Fr. Costa, who had always avoided automobiles, became the first one to use the new automotive hearse. Fr. Costa was a unique "one-of-a-kind personality and pastor."

Fr. George Doubleday, who succeeded him, came to Galesburg in 1898 to assist Fr. Costa at Corpus Christi and to teach in the school. In 1901, he became Pastor of St. Patrick's Church and in 1904 he was made principal of Corpus Christi Lyceum. Then in 1912 he succeeded Fr. Costa. During Fr. Doubleday's pastorate he was mainly concerned with strengthening the foundations already in existence. First he made an addition to the rectory; then in 1913 an addition to the Lyceum. The work on the school consisted of enlarging the basement and adding a story to include workshops, a library, two classrooms, and a recreation hall. The cost was \$10,000. At this time there were 80 boys in the high school and 40 in the 7th and 8th grades. All classes were taught by the priests and brothers of the Order (Institute) of Charity, except the commercial and athletic departments. In 1928, after purchasing additional land for the use of the boys at the Lyceum, Fr. Doubleday erected as a parish building a spacious gymnasium. The cost was \$55,000.



Fr. George Doubleday

On July 25, 1948, Fr. Doubleday resigned from the pastorate of Corpus Christi. At the time of his retirement, he observed the 50th Anniversary of his ordination. He went to live at Antonio Rosmini College, Rome, and he died there on December 16, 1954, at the age of 85. In its first 63 years, Corpus Christi Parish had only two Pastors—Frs. Costa and Doubleday.

Throughout the history of the parish, many different organizations have come and gone. The Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick preceded the Knights of Columbus, as many members had joined these two organizations before coming west after emigrating from Ireland. The Knights of Columbus, one of the better-known area Catholic organizations, was issued a charter in 1901. There were 42 charter members, and M. T. Dougherty acted as Grand Knight. Over the years, the local council grew to its present membership of over 400 who live in Galesburg and surrounding areas. Besides the nationwide projects, the local council has been active in local charitable projects, such as Pro-Life and the St. Vincent DePaul Society. The latter society was active in the '30s but disbanded. Recently, through the efforts of the late Ray Bevenour and others, it was revived. With members

from both St. Patrick's and Corpus Christi, they established a food pantry. Today the Society of St. Vincent DePaul is a member of the 14 Parish Peoria Council that meets regularly with Bishop O'Rourke. In the '30s, also, there was a Sacred Heart Sodality, an organization for young single women from the time of graduation until they married.

The Corpus Christi Altar Society (now called the Altar and Rosary Society) has been a strong supporter of the parish since the 1920s. No official records were kept until the 1950s. Mrs. Margaret Conley, the first president, became known as the "Mother of the Altar Society." Other early presidents were Mrs. Michael Graham and Mrs. Roy Marden. During the 1920s, the Altar Society sponsored teas held in members' homes. When the gymnasium was built, the ladies held monthly dinners to help pay for the building. The main function of the Altar and Rosary Society is to care for the altar, altar linens, and vestments, and to encourage the recitation of the Rosary. Now, plus caring for the altars, they are responsible for cleaning and equipping the church social rooms. They also serve at special functions, and at wedding and funeral dinners. Besides membership fees, they have Spring and Fall luncheons to finance these activities.

Two Parent-Teacher Associations were formed in the 1920s. In 1923, Mrs. Frank Reavy organized the St. Joseph's P.T.A. In the Fall of the following year the Corpus Christi High School P.T.A. was formed. The first officers were: Mrs. Albert Kummer, president; Mrs. J. P. Quigley, vice president; Mrs. Hutmacher, secretary; Bro. Mulligan, treasurer. The Corpus Christi P.T.A. would continue until the closing of the school.

In 1951, the Corpus Christi Carmelite Chapter was established, with Fr. Cronin as spiritual director. One hundred members were received into the order on February 11 by Fr. Howard Rafferty, National Director of the Third Order Carmelites. The members were from the Galesburg parishes and parishes in the surrounding area.

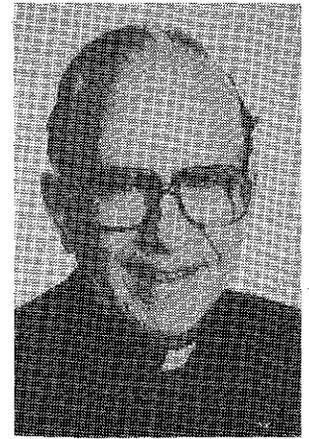
In the '20s and '30s, the influence of the priests went beyond the role of teaching. On weekends and in the summer months they helped out in nearby parishes. Some took over as Pastors, while continuing to teach in the school. They were also kept busy, in what spare time they had, giving instructions in the faith to those who wished to join the church. Fr. George Cody is especially remembered for his work as a hospital chaplain. The first priest to be ordained in Corpus Christi Church was Fr. Daniel Rooney, a high school teacher, in 1942. All of this was changed by World War II. The Allies would not issue visas to the religious in Ireland to enable them to come to Galesburg. For almost seven years, no replacements could come. As a result, those Rosminians who were already there were overworked and unable to do all that was required to keep the school in first-class condition. It became necessary to make a change in the operation of the school. In the summer of 1945, Corpus Christi Lyceum was completely remodeled in order to make it suitable as a co-educational school. The faculties of St. Joseph's Academy High School for girls and Corpus Christi School were combined and the Sisters of Providence were placed in charge of the new school. Thus ended this part of Fr. Costa's dream.

Fr. Michael J. Cronin, who succeeded Fr. Doubleday as Pastor in 1948, came to Galesburg in 1932 from Ireland to teach at the school. From 1938 to 1948 he was assistant at the parish. Due to the continued growth of the Catholic population, a new parish comprising that portion of the city north of Losey Street was begun in 1956. In 1957, extensive remodeling was done at Corpus Christi Church, including redecorating, a new lighting system, and a large painting of the Last Supper on the wall surrounding the High Altar. Fr. Cronin retired in 1961 and returned to live in Ireland.

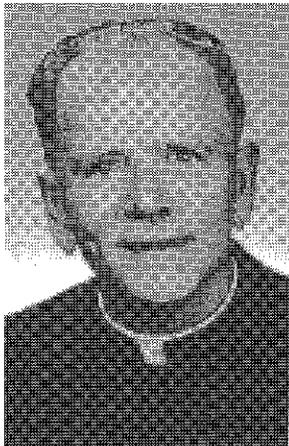


Fr. Michael Cronin

from the Tey family inheritance. The brothers of the Christian Schools came to staff the new school, along with the Sisters of Providence. That same year Fr. Curran was appointed Vice-Provincial of the Rosminians in America. His place as Pastor of Corpus Christi was taken by Fr. John Horan, who had been Pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, Galesburg, since 1960. On March 2, 1966, Corpus Christi High School, which had been a landmark in downtown Galesburg for almost 75 years, was demolished. During Fr. Horan's pastorate, some of the changes in the church being brought about as a result of the 2nd Vatican Council began to make themselves felt. The communion rail was removed and a temporary altar was put in the sanctuary to allow Mass to be said with the priest facing the people. Later the old High Altar was reduced in size and moved forward in the sanctuary.



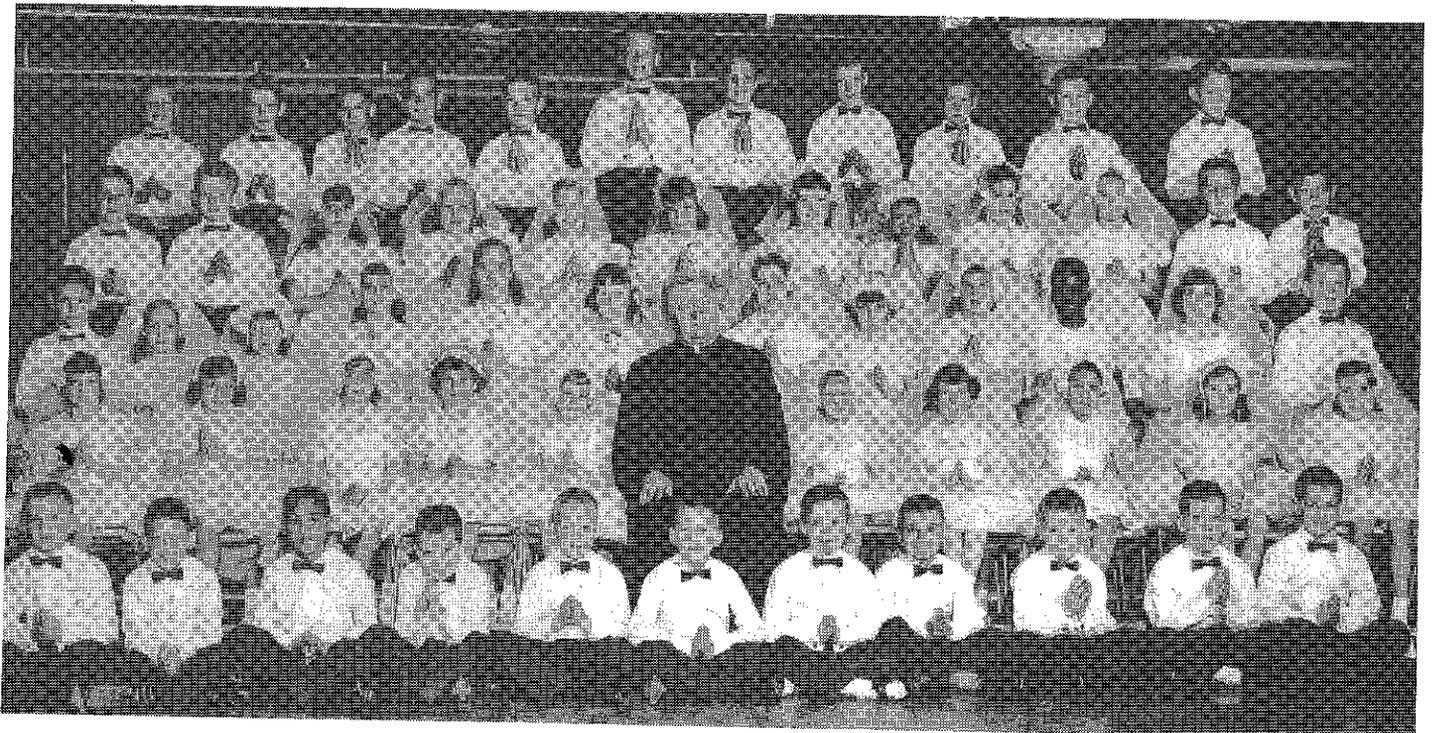
Fr. John Horan



Fr. Alphonse Curran

Fr. Curran, who had been assistant since 1949, became Pastor upon Fr. Cronin's retirement. One of the first acts of his pastorate was the replacement of the pews in church at a cost of \$12,533.43. In 1962, the parish contributed the major portion of the \$69,905, which it cost for a new addition at St. Joseph's School. The parish also contributed the biggest share of the cost of the new school being built to replace the old Corpus Christi High School. Costa High School, as it was called, was opened in 1964. It was built on land received

Fr. Horan resigned in 1969, and Fr. Francis M. Oman, who had been Pastor of Sacred Heart, Abingdon, since 1960, took his place. It was during his pastorate that some of the more traumatic changes took place. In 1970, the Christian Brothers announced that they would not be returning for the 1971 year, because of declining vocations. The Sisters of Providence said they would be unable to carry on alone. The Pastors of the three Galesburg parishes decided after consultation that as they would be unable to financially support a school with an all-lay staff, that Costa School should be closed. This was a bitter blow to those who had supported Catholic education in Galesburg down through



Fr. Michael Cronin and First Communion class, May 7, 1961



Fr. Francis Oman

the years. The high school building was closed for one year. It reopened in 1972 to grade school pupils from a combined St. Joseph and Immaculate Heart of Mary schools. In 1973, the St. Joseph School building was sold to the Bethany Baptist Church. Thus the only buildings from Fr. Costa's time still being used by Catholics were the Corpus Christi Church and Rectory.

In 1971, a December wind-storm severely damaged the church steeple. Repairs, paid for by insurance, were completed by April, 1972, at a cost of \$22,365.36. In 1974, a bigger vestibule was made by putting a partition under the gallery at the entrance, and at the same time the confessionals were moved there. Various statues, which had been located around the church, were placed together in the empty spaces at the side entrances, where the confessionals had been. Later it was discovered that the brick wall of the clerestory (upper part) was separating from the frame of the church, and it had to be replaced at a cost of \$42,962.80.

In January, 1975, Bro. Thomas E. Seibert was appointed Deacon at Corpus Christi. On May 31, he was ordained in St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria, and he offered his First Mass in Corpus Christi on June 1.

Also in the same year, the election of parishioners to a parish council was held for the first time. William Leeper became the first president of the parish organization, which had been recommended by the 2nd Vatican Council. In 1979, on June 2, Kevin Morrison (a former parishioner) and Rick Pilger (from Canton, Illinois) were ordained in the church. The following day, Fr. Morrison offered his First Mass in the parish church.

An inheritance from the wills of Bernadine Murphy Welch and Frances Murphy paid about two-thirds of the expenses of building a new rectory and extensive remodeling of the church. This took place in 1979 while Fr. Oman was pastor. The side altars were removed and placed underneath the statues at the side entrances. The sacristy was made into a Blessed Sacrament Chapel. The former High Altar was divided. The center front carving of the Last Supper was hung on the wall of the chapel and the two ends joined to make a new Blessed Sacrament altar. New furnishings were added to the sanctuary. The church was redecorated and the painting of the Last Supper on the east wall was retouched. The contents of the old rectory were auctioned off in 1980 and the house torn down. The following year, many more improvements were made in the landscaping, sidewalks, and parking lot.

In 1981, Fr. Oman was chosen to head the Rosminians in America. His successor was Fr. James McAteer. During his pastorate, two organizations have been formed. SPEC (Special Persons Encounter Christ) is a religious education program for the mentally retarded

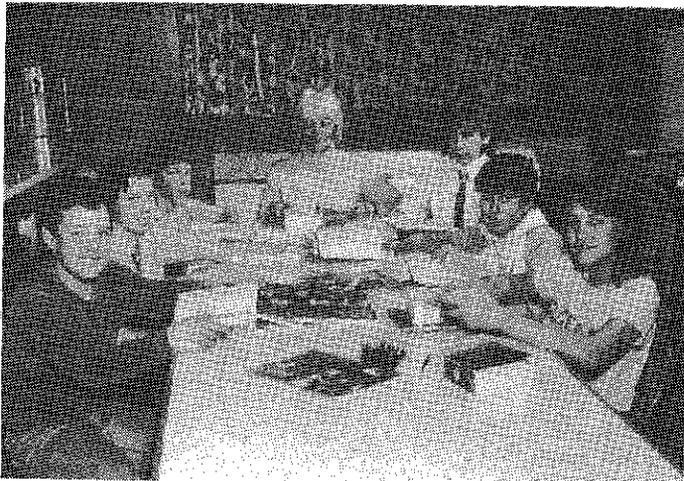
of all ages. Weekly classes began at Corpus Christi on October 20, 1983, with each student being assigned to an individual teacher. Volunteers are from all three parishes in the city. The Rosary Makers were organized in the parish in February, 1983, for the purpose of making rosaries to be sent to the missions or to others in need. The Legion of Mary was active in the early '60s, visiting the sick and elderly. Today they take care of the religious goods stand. A group of ladies called "The Marthas" was organized in 1976 and are still sewing quilts, lap robes, baby clothes, collecting and distributing clothing for the poor in the area as well as deprived areas in the United States. There is a "First Friday Club" which meets for 12:10 Mass each month and then enjoy lunch together and socialize in the church basement. All three of the city's parishes are represented in this group. Through the years there have been adult study groups formed in the parish as well as charitable projects such as ward partners of the Mental Health Center in Galesburg. Other ministries which came into being as a result of Vatican II are as follows: Teen Ministry, Lectors, Ministers of the Eucharist, and Gift Bearers.

While the accent has always been on Catholic schools, yet over the years there has been a strong religious education program for children who went to public schools. This was organized and staffed by the Sisters of Providence, who throughout the years gave their Saturdays and Sundays to teach the program. Not only did the Galesburg children benefit, but also those from nearby parishes. Also, at this time, summer sessions were in existence. During the past 10 years, lay parishioners have assumed the responsibility of CCD teachers.

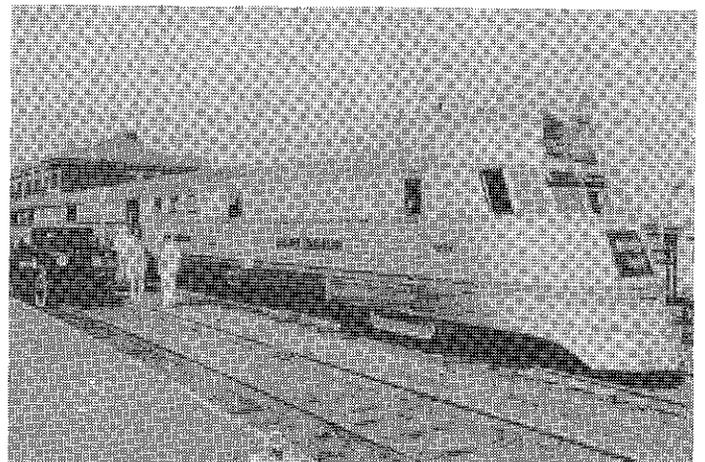
Throughout its history, the church has had adult choirs, especially to sing the 11:00 a.m. Mass. Mrs. L. F. Mattson recalls when the organ had a wooden bellows which had to be pumped by hand, either by a strong boy or man. The burst of power was sometimes sporadic and hard to control. When there was a funeral mass, there have always been some faithful members who could be called upon to sing. The current choir director is Mrs. Alice Rabenort, and Miss Joan Mattson is the organist. Besides the adult choir, there is a children's group that sings for the Children's Mass each month, and a folk group which sings at the 6:00 p.m. Mass on Saturday nights.

As of this writing, one of the few faculty members surviving from the old Corpus Christi High School is Brother Edmund Oman. He plans to attend the Centennial celebration, coming from Dublin, Ireland.

It is hard to condense a hundred years into a few pages, and we probably have not even mentioned some of the people and events that you consider important. There were those people who struggled, prayed, and sacrificed throughout the years to provide a worthy place where God could be worshipped in dignity. As the parish celebrates its centenary, we look forward with hope. The past century has seen growth, expansion, and change. We pray that in the next hundred years Corpus Christi will continue to move ahead and to help its members grow.



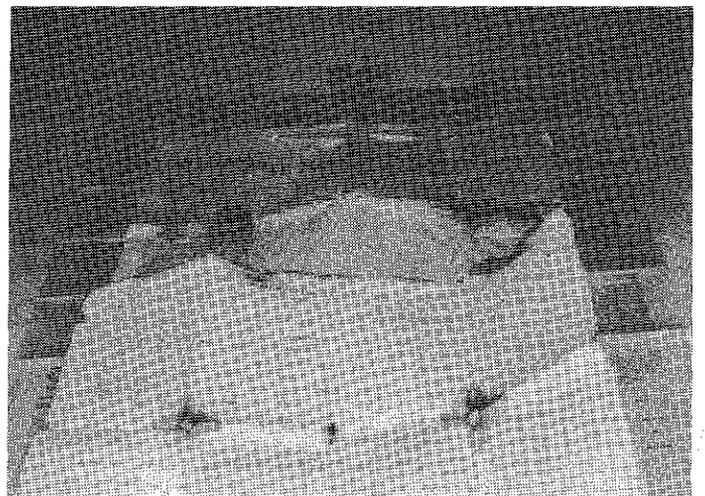
Mrs. McQueen's CCD class.



Speed record setting Pioneer Zephyr.



Cornerstone crew (left to right): Dorothy and Bill Krupps, Centennial Dinner co-chairmen; Bob Nichols, Vonnie and Bob Martin. Not present for picture: Scott Mellican and Bob Mills.



The contents of the cornerstone included Father Costa's letter written in English and Latin; two newspapers, *Press and People* and the *Republican Register*, dated August 8 and 9, 1884.

