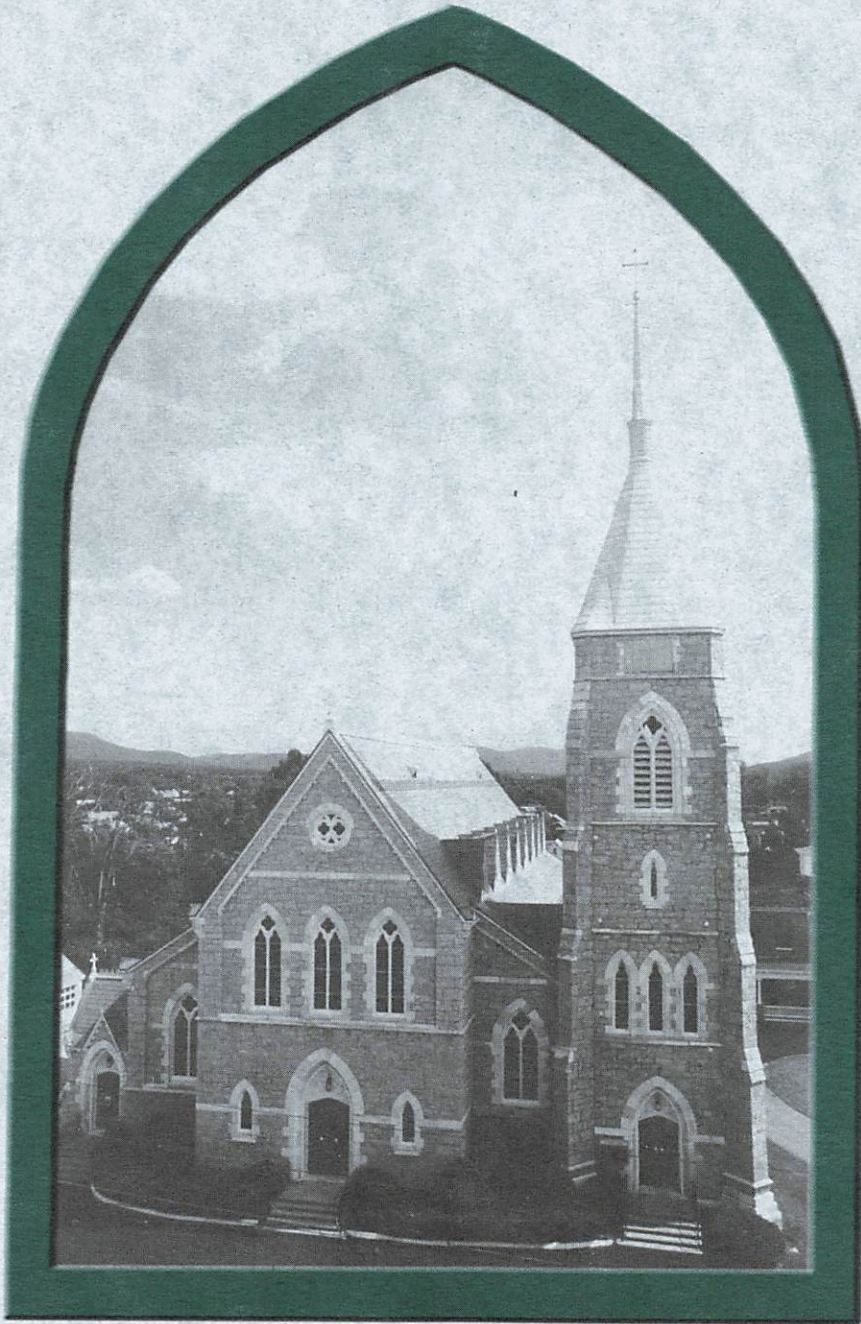
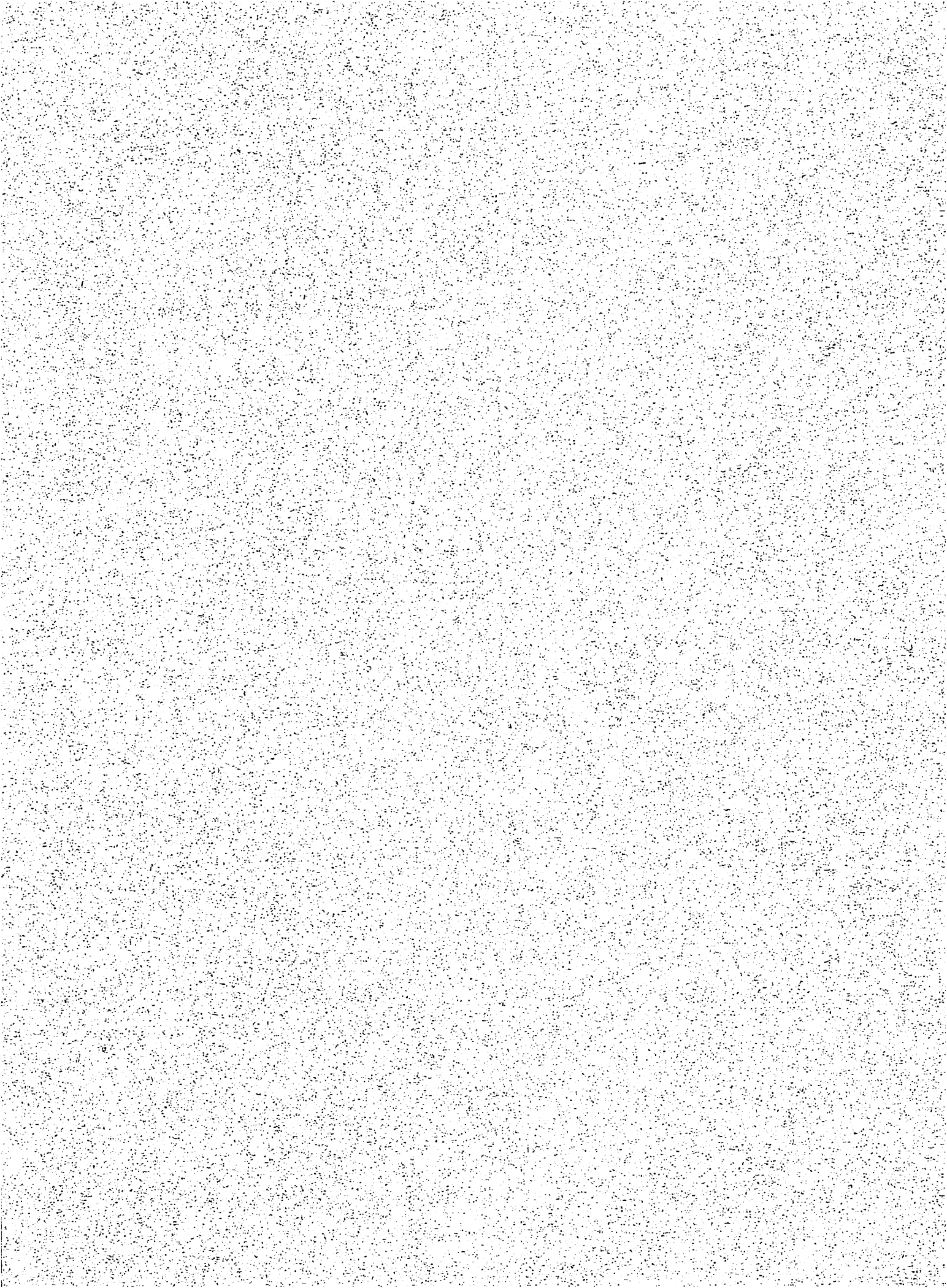


# “home”



A History of St. Peter's Parish  
Rutland, Vermont

by Patrick T. Hannon



**“home”**

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Rutland, Vermont**

by Patrick T. Hannon

edited by Jim and Helen Davidson

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## Editors' Preface

It is through ordinary men and women, whether the priest at the altar or the person in the pew, that we are able to find the Lord Jesus. Although the human family spans the globe, it is in that unique and intimate interrelationship that we call the parish family that we work out our eternal salvation, day by day. It is in these frequent, and oft repeated, simple little interactions that an almost imperceptible, yet real and permanent, change takes place. We are not what we were yesterday.

This extended family life is what parish family is all about. Parish family has a "home" and that is where our hearts attain the peace that Christ wills for all. This earthly home is only a precursor to our eternal, heavenly home but it is the pledge of hope that leads to faith, which blossoms in love. Whether born and baptized in the parish or the most recent newcomer, for each there is that quality of "home" that makes the parish of St. Peter special.

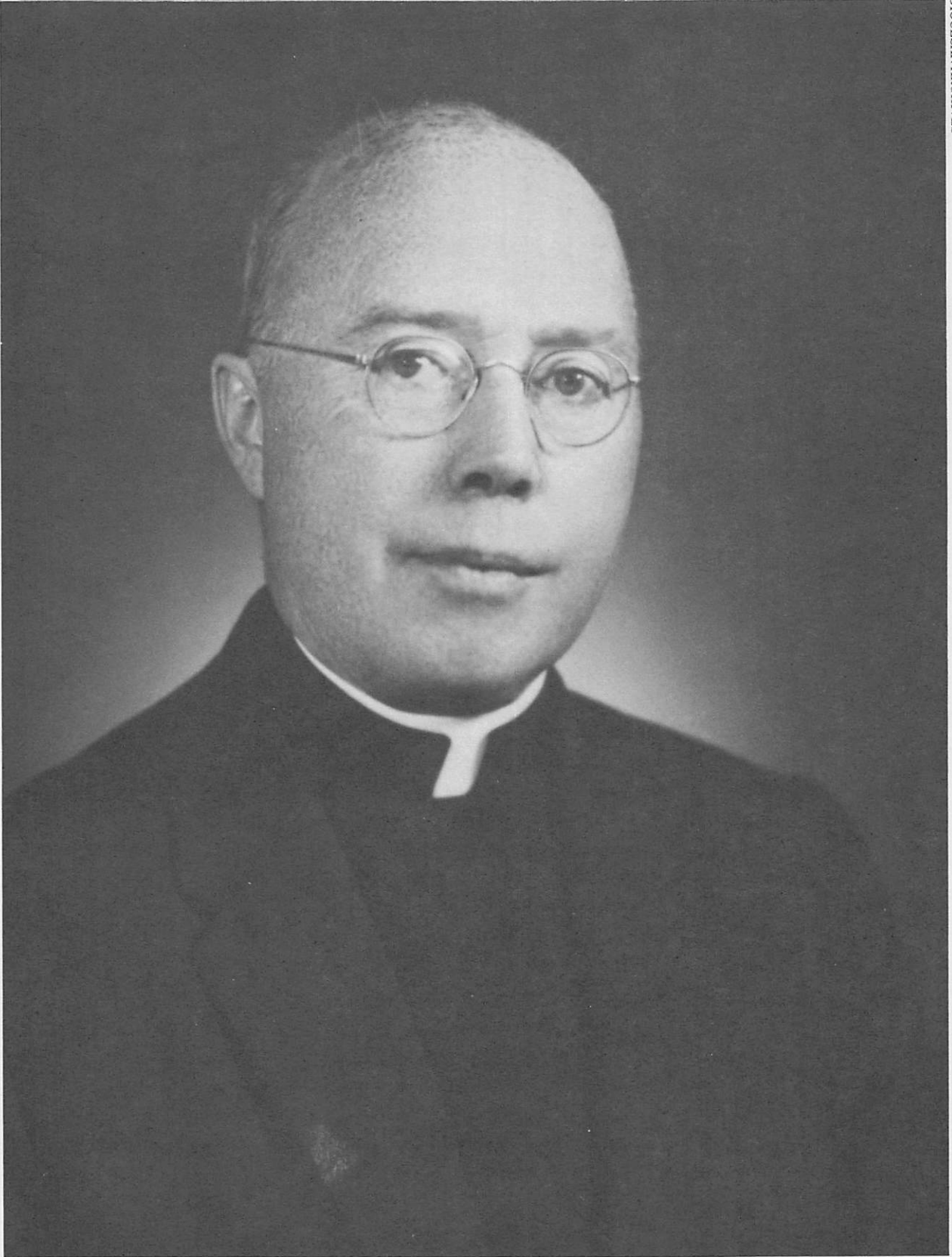
May God welcome you to this "home" here in this life and to His eternal "home" in the next life.

Father Patrick T. Hannon was one of those fortunate enough to be born, baptized and to go home to God from this parish. In his lifetime his love of this "home" led him to devote untold hours to retrieving the pieces of parish history to contribute to this heritage. For over twenty-five years this work has remained in hand-written and typescript forms except for some brief summaries.

The editors have supplied the usual editorial role of correcting typographical and human errors and slightly reorganizing material. They have attempted to respect the author's work while trying to bring it to the reader in the best possible form. The editors have added a brief final chapter to cover the last twenty-five years. May those who share this "home," help to share its heritage with all.

Thank you, Father Hannon.

Jim and Helen Davidson



*Father Patrick T. Hannon, the author, died in 1984.*

### Author's Preface

Because in 1973 St. Peter's Parish will be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the dedication of the present church, and because the writer is a native son of St. Peter's, this attempt of its history was written. It is a tribute to its former pastors and to the staunch self-sacrificing parishioners who made this history. It should be recorded not only for the edification of the present parishioners and friends of St. Peter's, but also for the future.

The writer acknowledges that it is far from perfect. But since it is the first attempt of a history of this parish, your kind indulgence is asked for any errors or omissions that have been made.

Acknowledgement should be given to the Rutland City Clerk, Mr. John Barrett, and his staff; to the staff of the Rutland Free Library; to the Chancery Office; to the Cathedral; to St. Michael's College; and to the Vermont State Library for their kindnesses to me when I used their facilities and sources while researching this work.

Feast of St. Bernard  
August 20, 1970

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## Sowing the Seed

The complex of buildings on the corner of Meadow Street and Convent Avenue make it difficult to envision the day when none of them existed. Today there are St. Peter's Church, Rectory, and Parish Center; Mt. St. Joseph Assisted Living Residence and Academy and the Loretto Home. The limits of St. Peter's Parish as they are today – the western section of the city of Rutland and Center Rutland – make it difficult to realize that this parish was not always so circumscribed.

The numbers of people now pouring out of the church after Sunday Masses also make it difficult to visualize the day when only a few Catholic families resided in Rutland.

In 1761 when the town of Rutland was chartered, it consisted of what is now the City of Rutland as well as the towns of Rutland, West Rutland and the village of Sutherland Falls (now Proctor). The first settlers of this town were former residents of Connecticut and Massachusetts. Their religion was Protestant, mainly Congregational. Little villages grew up in both the east and west sides of the town. The first church was built in the center of the town in 1774, but several years later, in 1784, another Congregational church was built on what is now Main Street. In 1787 the parishes were divided, hence the terms, "Rutland, East Parish" (or East Rutland) and, "Rutland, West Parish" (or West Rutland).

It is difficult to ascertain who were the first Catholic settlers of Rutland. There were non-Catholic families bearing the distinctly Celtic and Catholic names of Kelley, Gleason, Butler, Barrett, etc. whose ancestors came here in the 1790's and 1800's and who might have been Catholics. Among those who brought the faith here, and whose descendants still retain it, were the Lystons, McMahons, Cliffords, Fitzgeralds, Kelleys, Brohans, Burns, etc. – the first named two families coming here in the 1820's and the others coming later.<sup>1</sup>

But what caused this Irish immigration? Without going into detail, it is safe to say that economic and financial conditions in Ireland at that time were the cause. During the years 1815 to 1830, the population of Ireland grew to such an extent [8 or 9 million people] that agricultural Ireland could not support its people. The English landlords divided and subdivided their rented lands so that the Irish tenants could not make a living off their small plots. In some areas the potato [the main staple of the diet] failed so that the people were on the verge of starvation. Anxious for their lands to make money, the English landlords let their lands out for sheep grazing, thus reducing the land on which the potato could be grown. As a result of these and other conditions, poverty existed in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 1700's, the first immigrants were from Protestant Ulster. They were small farmers and not paupers. They brought some money with them and hoped to better their lot. As the years went by and fares were cheap, many others left Ireland for America to improve their lot. Some of these people came to this area where they settled on farms in Shrewsbury, Tinmouth, Wallingford, Rutland, etc. Others found work in the iron works in Pittsford. This minor immigration continued into the 1840's.<sup>3</sup>

When the diocese of Boston was formed in 1808, it included all of New England

which included Vermont. Owing to the slow but steady increase in the Catholic population in Vermont, Bishop Benedict Fenwick of Boston decided to send a priest to Vermont as soon as one was available. On a visit to New York, he was approached by the Rev. Jeremiah O'Callaghan who asked for work in the bishop's diocese. On July 6, 1830, Bishop Fenwick sent him to work in Vermont and to have his headquarters in Burlington where there were about 100 Catholics.

Western Vermont was the richer and better settled half of the state. It was dotted with small Catholic settlements with usually not more than a score or two of persons. Such was the zeal of Father O'Callaghan that he visited the Catholics in Vergennes, Middlebury, Pittsford, Rutland, Castleton, Wallingford, and Bennington and offered Mass in these places.

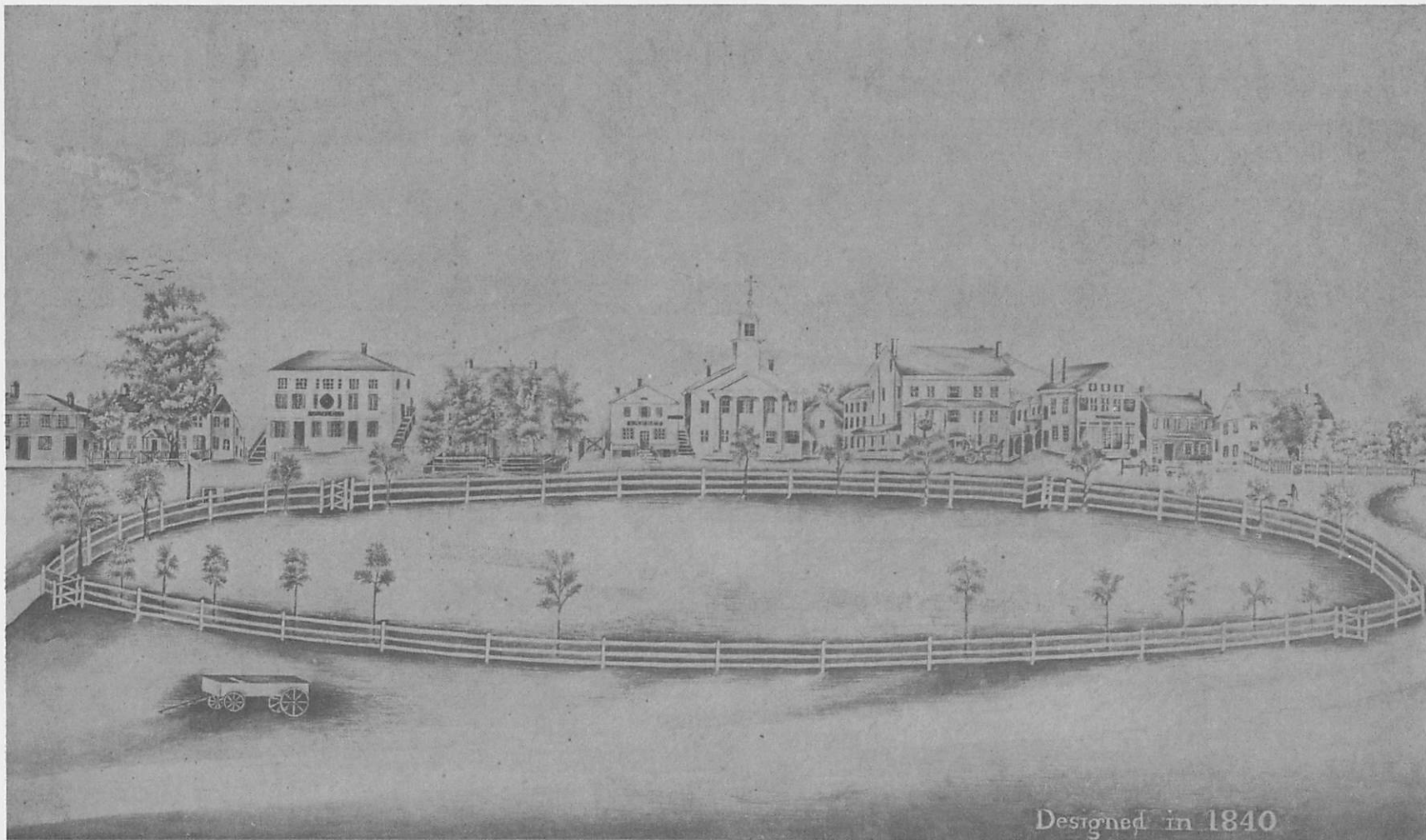
"Father O'Callaghan was the first priest to visit Rutland. He came here in 1830 and said the first Mass in a private home, for at that time it could not have been deemed necessary, if possible, to rent a hall for such a purpose. In 1830 there were not more than five or six families, or about 25 to 30 souls in this place. Father O'Callaghan continued his visits until about 1837."<sup>4</sup> He traveled by stagecoach, horse and buggy, or by horseback. How often did he come here? He was probably able to visit this area four or five times a year.

Father O'Callaghan was 50 years old when he began his missionary labors in Vermont. Bishop Fenwick, aware of the toll that incessant travel and advanced age would take on a man, had sent him assistants, but none of them remained here very long. Occasionally a priest from Albany would make the circuit through southwestern Vermont. Father O'Callaghan "organized little congregations at, and periodically visited, St. Albans, Swanton, Fairfield, Montpelier, St. Johnsbury, Vergennes, Middlebury, Brandon, Pittsford, Rutland, Castleton, Poultney, Tinmouth, Wallingford, Dorset and Bennington. His apostolic forays frequently carried him into northern New York as well as into western Massachusetts [North Adams and Pittsfield]."<sup>5</sup>

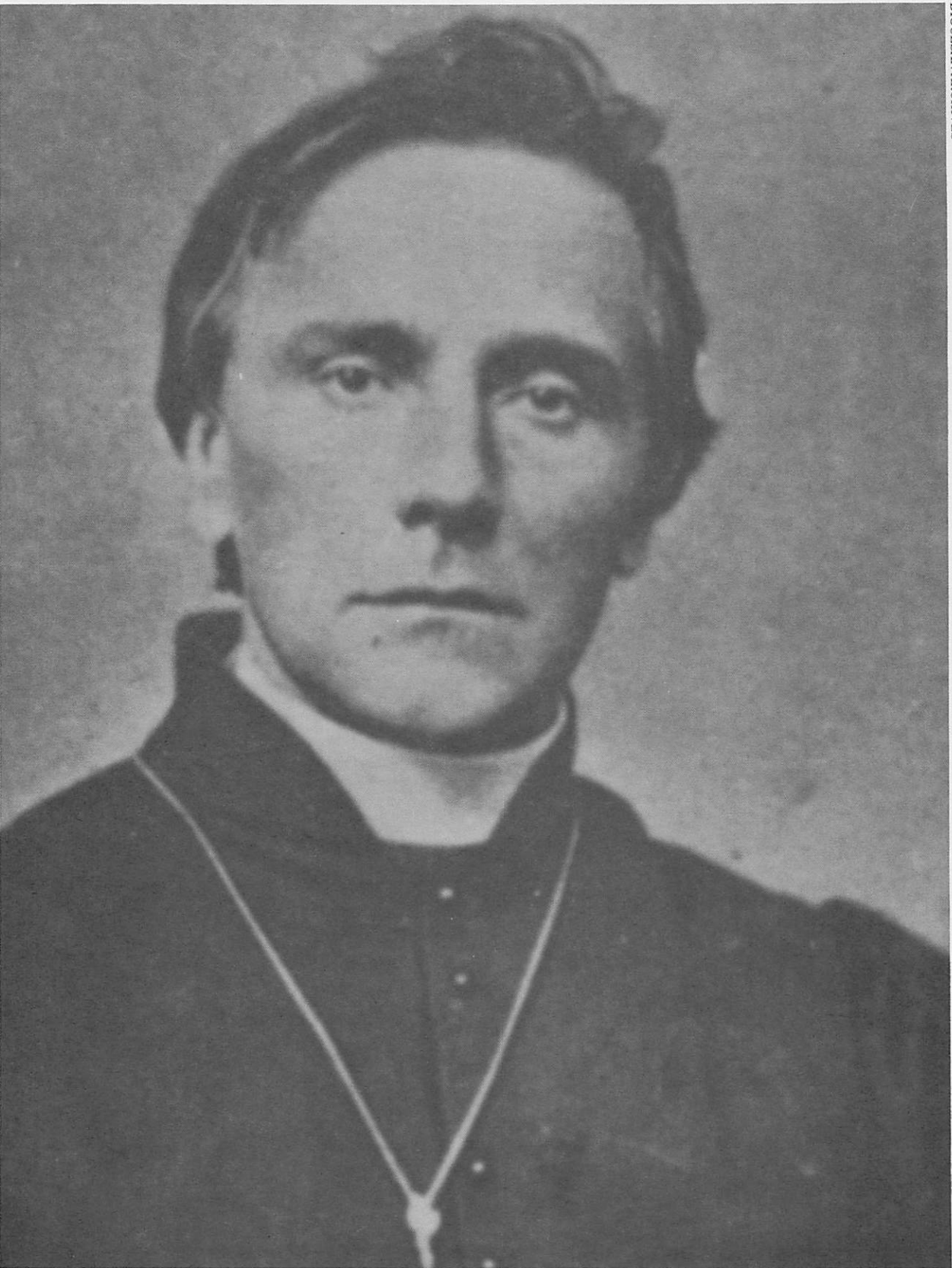
But in 1837, the Bishop found another priest with a zeal similar to Father O'Callaghan's. He was the Rev. John B. Daly, a Franciscan priest, just received into the Boston diocese. He was sent to help Father O'Callaghan and, between them, they divided the state of Vermont; Father O'Callaghan taking the northern counties of Chittenden, Franklin, Orleans, Essex, Lamoille, Caledonia, Washington, and Orange; while Father Daly had charge of the southern counties of Addison, Rutland, Bennington, Windsor, and Windham. In 1847, Father George Hamilton, a priest of the St. Louis, Missouri, diocese was given charge of St. Albans and the northern counties, leaving Father O'Callaghan with Chittenden, Washington and Orange counties.<sup>6</sup>

With Middlebury as his headquarters, Father Daly visited all the southern missions of Father O'Callaghan. In 1840 he listed 27 missions in three states. He added to those already established: Manchester, Bellows Falls, Plymouth, Norwich, Windsor, and Woodstock in Vermont. In western Massachusetts, Greenfield was added to the list; and in New Hampshire, he visited Claremont, Cornish, Charlestown, Lebanon, Hanover and Keene. In 1839-1840 he built a brick church in Middlebury.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1840's Father Daly added the following to his list of missions: Ludlow, Brattleboro, Arlington, Northfield and Rockingham.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas there were about 1,000 Catholics in Vermont in 1830, by 1843, the



*In 1840 a Miss Hale designed a painting of Main Street Park and the buildings to the east. At that time this was the business center of Rutland. Miss Hale's work was preserved in this photograph. The location of the original painting is unknown. The courthouse, where Mass was offered, is the building with the tower in the center. The Post Office is on the left and the Franklin House is on the right.*



DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

*Bishop Louis DeGoesbriand was the first bishop of the Burlington Diocese.*

number had grown to 4,940. In this latter year in Father Daly's area, there were about 500 Catholics in Middlebury, 150 in Castleton, 400 between the towns of Brandon, Pittsford, Rutland, Shrewsbury and Wallingford, 150 in Bennington, and 400 between Woodstock, Windsor, Plymouth and Rockingham.<sup>9</sup> At this time in East Rutland there were only about 100 dwellings and 13 stores.

These priests received no salary or stipends. Their livelihood depended on the free will offerings made in church on three times a year - Christmas, Easter and summer.<sup>10</sup> Father Daly visited Rutland about once a month. As the congregation increased beyond the capacity of a private house, he offered Mass in a building known as "Ball Alley" on Main Street and in 1853 in the Old Courthouse, also on Main Street.<sup>11</sup>

Hemenway in her *Historical Gazeteer of Vermont*, under the heading "Methodists" remarks that the Methodists of East Rutland tried to rent the Courthouse for divine services, but were turned down because "The Romanists" were using it at the very hour that they desired to use it.<sup>12</sup>

The Catholic population slowly increased in Rutland. After the failure of the potato crop in Ireland in 1846, tens of thousands of Irish men and women immigrated to Canada and to this country, landing in Quebec, Boston and New York and other ports. The potato blight also affected other crops - wheat, oats, turnips, beans, etc. The results were appalling. Disease and starvation caused deaths everywhere.

The exodus from Ireland included all classes - farmers, tradesmen, and shopkeepers. Although most of them stayed in Boston or New York in Irish neighborhoods, a number ventured west and north. In June 1847, Burlington felt the influx of these unfortunates. House after house was crowded with those who were stricken with ship fever. No doubt other towns in Vermont experienced a similar influx.<sup>13</sup>

In 1848, the construction of railroads began in Vermont. The laborers on these were mostly Irish, hired in gangs by the builders. Since Rutland was a railroad center many of these men settled in Rutland after the construction was over and worked for the railroads at various jobs, or in the machine shops, or the marble industry, which began to boom in the 1850's. French Canadians, who had settled in northern Vermont earlier, now began to come into Rutland County although in smaller numbers. By 1853, there were 20,000 Catholics in Vermont.

On July 25, 1853, the Holy See founded the diocese of Burlington, as a suffragan diocese of the Archdiocese of New York. It remained so until May 2, 1875, at which date it became a suffragan of the newly created Archdiocese of Boston.<sup>14</sup>

The new diocese comprised the whole state of Vermont. Father Louis DeGoesbriand, the chancellor of the Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio, was appointed as its first bishop. He was consecrated by Cardinal Bedini, the Nuncio to Brazil, on October 30, 1853, in the Cathedral in New York City. He traveled by train to Boston where he was met by Bishop John B. Fitzpatrick who accompanied him on the trip to Burlington. In Rutland they were joined by Father Daly. On Sunday November 6, 1853, Bishop DeGoesbriand was formally installed as the first Bishop of Burlington.<sup>15</sup>

At this time there were only three churches in southern Vermont - Middlebury, Castleton, and Brandon - and Father Daly was the only priest in the area.

## Chapter 1 Sowing the Seed

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- <sup>1</sup> *History of the Catholic Church, The New England States*, Vol. II, p. 547
- <sup>2</sup> C. Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger*, Chapter XI
- <sup>3</sup> *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, Vol. II, p. 106
- <sup>4</sup> *History of the Catholic Church, The New England States*, Vol. II, p. 547
- <sup>5</sup> *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, Vol. II, p. 147
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p. 570
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid* pp. 277-278
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid* p. 572
- <sup>9</sup> Thompson, *History of Vermont*, 1842, pp. 201-202
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>11</sup> *History of the Catholic Church, The New England States*, Vol. II, p. 547
- <sup>12</sup> Hemenway, *Historical Gazeteer*, Vol. III, p. 1048
- <sup>13</sup> *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, Vol. II, p. 570
- <sup>14</sup> Bishop DeGoesbriand's Diary
- <sup>15</sup> *Centenary Booklet of the Diocese of Burlington*