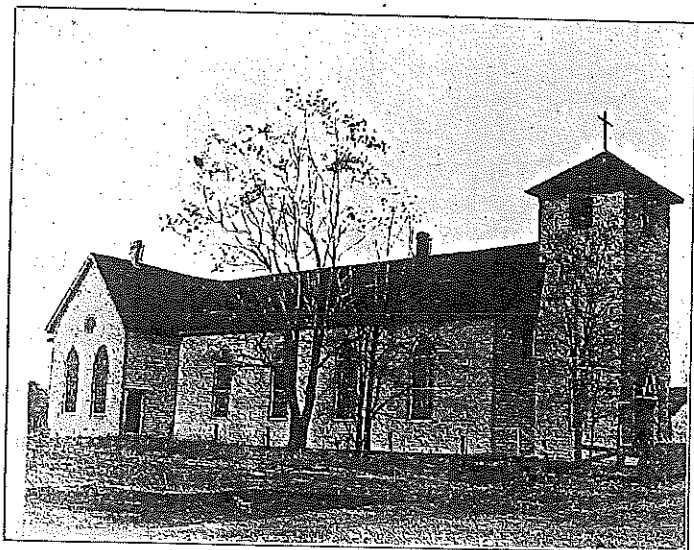


St. Mary's Church, Lyndon Station, Wis.

ONE of the oldest parishes in the Diocese of La Crosse is the Immaculate Conception of Lyndon Station. Half a century has almost elapsed since it was first founded and from this it may be learned that the old landmarks are fast fading from view, and that in a few years nothing

will remain to tell the story of pioneer days. At present there are living, a few miles from Lyndon, old homesteaders who delight in speaking of those early days, when they were in the prime of manhood, and relate how they cut the logs and helped to build the first church. From these was learned what little is narrated in the following:

Lyndon Station lies on the Chicago and Milwaukee Railway at about an equal distance from the cities bearing those names. Some six miles to the southeast are the famous Dells of Wisconsin, a part of the parish overlooking Witches' Gulch and Coldwater Cañon. But



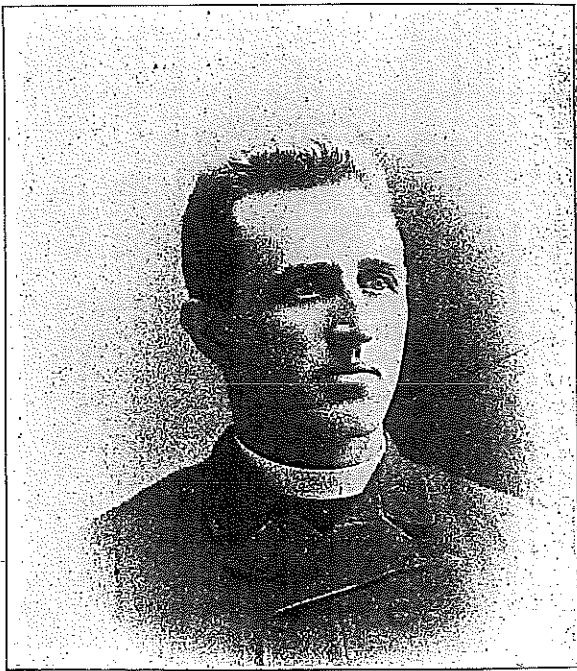
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long before Lyndon was thought of St. Mary's or St. Bridget's, as it was then called, was erected. In 1849, 1850 and 1851 a number of homeseekers, hailing from the "Little Green Isle Across the Seas," came and settled in what is now known as Seven Mile Creek and Kildare townships. Among these were the Taylors, Harveys, Doyles, Greens, Dixons, Smiths, Leonards, Mooneys, Caseys, Hayes and Murrays. One of the first things after erecting their rude dwellings, to claim the attention of those sons imbued with the faith of St. Patrick, was to find a priest to minister to their spiritual wants. Accordingly, in 1851 we see the Rev. Maximilian

Gaertner of Sauk City journeying by slow stages (he used ox teams for the major portion of the journey, but also traveled a considerable distance on foot), to pay them his first official visit. On arriving he read Mass and held services at the home of a Mr. Patrick Casey, continuing to do so until the new church was built, which was some time in 1853. This church was named after St. Bridget and located on section five in Kildare Township, at a point known as the McEntur Place. Father Gaertner attended St. Bridget's about four years (1851-

1855), and was succeeded by the Rev. Father Godfrey. During the latter's administration (1855-56) the removal of the church to the place where the cemetery now lies was agitated, although not carried into effect until the advent of the Rev. Nicholas Stehle in 1856. Father Stehle, besides moving the church, purchased thirty acres of land adjoining the cemetery, whereon was located the first parsonage, he being the first to occupy it as permanent pastor. He was relieved (1858) by the Rev. Dennis O'Neil, who, two years afterwards (1860), gave way to the Rev. Father Montague. About the time of his arrival the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Company extended their line through to La Crosse, locating a depot at Lyndon Station. St. Bridget's being two miles distant, it was determined to build a church in the new town. Accordingly, a frame structure 60x30 feet was erected, the same doing service to this day. The wings to the church, as it now appears, were attached some twenty years afterwards by the Rev. John Meurs. Father Montague also purchased the present priest's house and had it moved to where it now stands, but so many changes have been made, within and without, during the thirty-seven years of its occupancy that it would not now be recognized by its original builders. Father Montague attended Lyndon and missions, including Mauston, New Lisbon, Necedah, Kilbourn City and others, for upwards of ten years (1860-1870). He died after a brief illness at New Lisbon, his remains being interred in St. Mary's Cemetery, where they still repose. The next pastor was the Rev. Father Conroy, who remained about seven years (1870-1877), and was succeeded by the Rev. Father Meurs of Prairie du Chien. Father Meurs eclipsed all of his predecessors in duration of pastorate at Lyndon, having charge from December, 1877, to September, 1892. He built the annex referred to, changed the name of the church from St. Bridget's to St. Mary's, purchased the present schoolhouse and had the parsonage veneered. On his resignation, the Rev. J. F. Lang, formerly Counsellor of the Diocese of Fort Wayne, took charge. During his short stay of nine months some five thousand dollars were expended in making improvements on the parsonage and church.

The partial indebtedness thus was gradually decreased through the efforts of the Rev. J. F. Kennedy, who was appointed pastor of St. Mary's in July, 1893, but has not yet been entirely removed. Father Kennedy remained in Lyndon a little over two years, when, owing to failing health, he was compelled to retire from active work. He then went to St. Mary's Hospital, Rochester, Minnesota, where he died of consumption on February 25, 1897. The present pastor, the Rev. J. Nevin, took charge of St. Mary's November 1, 1895. He was born in Vernon County, which adjoins the one in which he now lives, August 13, 1861. In the fall of 1882, he entered the Seminary of St. Francis, where in June of 1891 he was ordained priest by the Most Rev. Frederick Katzer. Shortly afterwards he was made assistant to the Rt. Rev. James Schwebach, then rector of St. Mary's Church, La Crosse. In this capacity he served seven months, when on the promotion of his Lordship to the episcopate he was assigned to Reedsburg and missions, which he resigned in the fall of 1894 to take charge of Necedah. He is much taken up with St. Mary's and its people and hopes, in accordance with their established generosity, in the near future to erect a new church befitting their Patron Saint as an enduring monument of their zeal, so



Rev. J. Nevin.

that fifty years hence their good deeds may not only be emblazoned in the Book of Life, but also recorded in history as examples of unquestionable devotion. The present trustees of the parish are: William Troy and

J. T. Doyle; consultors, James Taylor and Thomas Polard. The census of 1895 gives to St. Mary's a congregation numbering nine hundred souls. There are at present one hundred and thirty-five Irish, fifteen German, seven Dutch and seven Polish and Bohemian families holding pews. A free school has been conducted in connection with the parish for twenty years, presided over by two Franciscan Sisters from La Crosse. It has an enrollment of about ninety pupils, the average attendance being fifty. Lyndon Court, No. 411, of the Catholic Order of Foresters, was organized March 21, 1894, and has enrolled sixty members, all of whom are in good standing. The present officers are: M. F. Conway, chief ranger; Dannie Fox, vice chief ranger; G. J. Hayes, recording secretary; William Troy, financial secretary; J. Welsh, treasurer; trustees, John Caney, P. J. Cowles and Thomas Tracey. St. Bridget's Total Abstinence Association was organized February 14, 1875; M. F. Conway is now president. Among the most zealous workers in the Society are Joseph Taylor, Patrick Morrisy, Michael Moran and Miss Blake. A Reading Circle was formed in March, 1896, and has about thirty members, with Miss Mary Foley president. A League of the Sacred Heart was started about the same period and has some two hundred and fifty members enrolled. A Ladies' Altar Society has been doing good work for the last forty years. It numbers at present seventy-five souls. Mrs. Blake and Mrs. G. J. Hayes are the secretary and treasurer. There is also a flourishing Young Ladies' Sodality, having for prefect Miss Maggie Blake.