

**St. Patrick's
Wildfield**



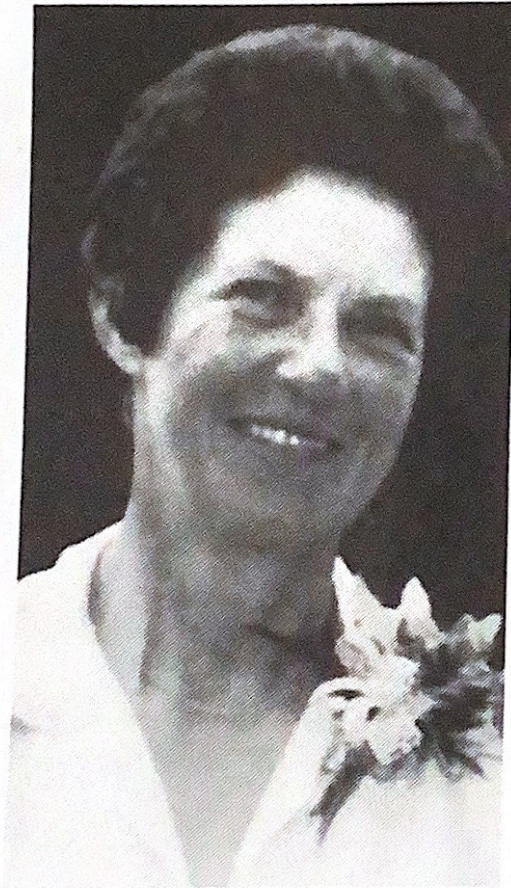
**150th
Anniversary**



Photo by George Beshiri

*Three stained glass sanctuary windows
Keep vigil over the congregation*

Dedicated to the memory of
Mary Catherine Byrne ...



1926 - 1983

... Through whose faith, and love for her parish, this volume
was conceived.



Bishop's Office • West Pastoral Region
Archdiocese of Toronto

Dear Friends:

What a marvellous and blessed privilege to celebrate 150 years of the foundation of your parish.

Many great and wonderful things have been done for the Lord and St. Patrick's parishioners during its long history.

We rejoice with you on this occasion.

I am, always in Jesus Christ,

+ M. Gene Lacey

Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto



ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, WILDFIELD, 1830

During the 1820's immigrants, mainly from Ireland, began to settle in the Toronto Gore and neighbouring townships. On Sunday, June 27, 1830, the parish priest, Father Edward Gordon, blessed the first church on this site. Rev. Eugene O'Reilly enlarged and embellished it in the 1840's. The present church was built in 1894 by Father Francis McSpirtt, well known locally as a miracle worker.

In the early years the then 200 acres of property originally granted to the parish by the Government served as a farm for the clergy. During the 1860's St. John's Agricultural School used the land for the education of orphan boys.

The church was the first to be placed under the patronage of St. Patrick in the Province of Ontario and the second parish to be established in what is now the Archdiocese of Toronto. Its priests served mission churches over a large area for many years and today it can proudly claim to be the mother church of all the parishes in Peel Region.

This plaque was blessed and dedicated at the sesquicentennial anniversary of the founding of the parish on Sunday, June 26, 1983, by His Grace, The Most Rev. Philip F. Pocock.

AN HISTORICAL PLAQUE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF TORONTO



The hand of Providence is wonderful. It has lead me in a most mysterious way from far-off Italy to live and carry out my mission in this lovely parish to which I have become totally dedicated in this the 25th year of my pastorage.

It is with great joy that I see coming to fruition this historic account of the foundation of St. Patrick's Wildfield on the occassion of its 150th Anniversary. My prayers and deepest respect are extended to all parishioners who have loved this church and especially to those families and priests who have passed on leaving us with the wealth of historic tradition that makes St. Patrick's unique. May they be rewarded for their good and simple lives and for the hopes which they held for our future.

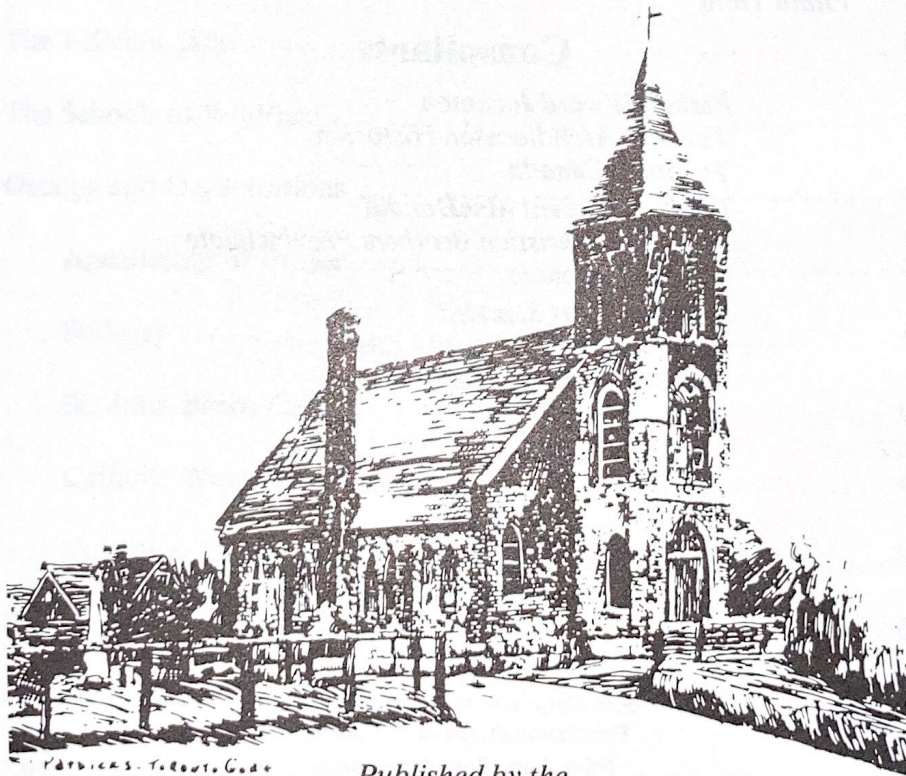
I extend on this occassion also my heartiest greetings to the present family of St. Patrick's Church as well as to those of its children who have now moved away. As I have learned in the past years only a short stay at Wildfield is necessary for one to feel that it is home.

My appreciation and congratulations to all those who have dedicated their time and work to the publication of this book.

May the Peace and Grace of God be with you all.

Reverend Michele Perrella

St. Patrick's Wildfield 150th Anniversary



PATRICK'S - T. ROUT. C. & C.

Published by the

ST. PATRICK'S RESEARCH COMMITTEE

1985

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Special Thanks

To Marion Pendergast and Maureen Chown for their tireless efforts over many years in the research and compilation of this volume.

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To all parishioners of St. Patrick's and friends who generously supplied photos, articles, charts etc. to aid in the completion of this book.

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St. Patrick's
Church
Wildfield

**GORE
of
TORONTO**

The Early Years

In 1818 the government of Canada bought 648,000 acres of land from the Mississauga Indians for 8,500 pounds. Early in 1819 the townships of Albion, Caledon, Chinguacousy, and Toronto Gore were surveyed, but the first visit of a priest to this area was probably in 1822 when Bishop Macdonnell is said to have administered the Sacrament of the Sick to Alexander McVean and stayed at the McVean home on the 8th Line. During 1822 St. Paul's Church in Toronto was built; the first Catholic Church in all of southern Ontario.

Irish Catholic settlers had begun to arrive about 1818 in the Gore Township and names still familiar in this area were represented among these pioneers: Edmund Pollard, Martin Byrne, Thomas Smythe, William Harrison, Peter Fitzpatrick, and Alexander McVean among others. Until 1829 the nearest place Catholics in the Gore could attend Mass was at St. Paul's Church in Toronto. In 1829 Father Angus Macdonnell and William Bergin petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor for a grant of 200 acres of land: Lot 17, Concession 10, in the North District of Toronto Gore Township. The reason they adduced was that it seemed the most central location for a place of worship. Not long after the receipt of this petition, an order in council was passed recommending that upon payment of the patent fees, the grant be made to the trustees of the church.

Even though the deed for the property had not been obtained (Peter MacDougal of Erindale had wanted the church built near his mill) the people of the Gore started clearing the land for a cemetery. Father O'Grady was appointed pastor and although the first Mass was said in 1829, St Patrick's was in fact, not formally blessed until June 27, 1830.*

In 1830, he was given an assistant, Father Edward John Gordon, to take over the outlying missions; Oakville, Etobicoke, Bradford, Orangeville and any settlements between them. During the same period a log chapel, (St. James), was built on Colonel Baldwin's estate at the south end of Toronto Gore Township and another in Adjala. Work was also started

**At that time the priest used a private register. When the age of the church was being determined in order to plan the 100th Anniversary the private register was missed. Instead the formal registers dating back to 1833 were consulted. As a result St. Patrick's anniversaries in effect are celebrated 3 years late.*

on St. Margaret's in Tecumseh and on St. Bernard's on the 5th Line in Toronto Township.

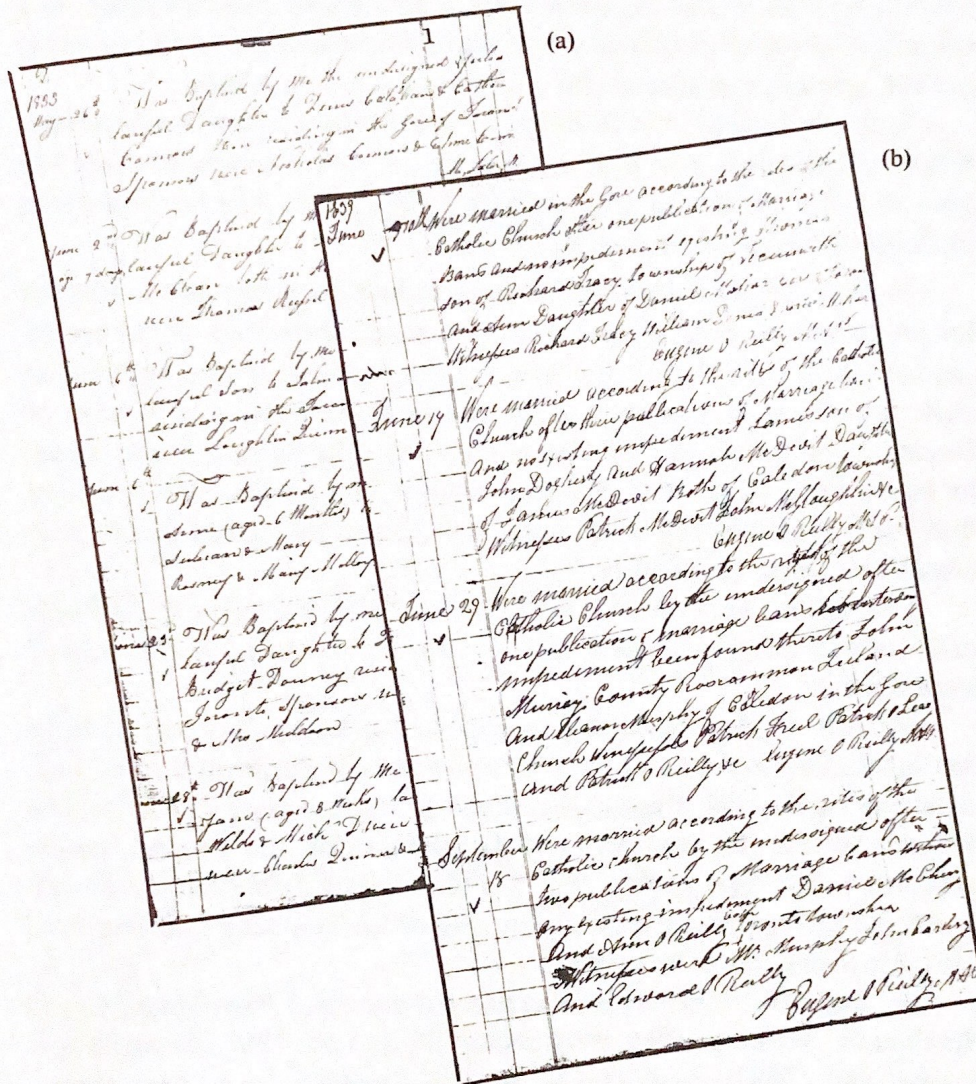
Three years of mission work broke the health of Father Gordon and in May of 1833 he was replaced by Father Murtagh Lalor. The following year, 1834, the property in the Gore was deeded over to Bishop Macdonnell, Bishop Gaulin and the Honourable Thomas Baby, a resident of the area. Father Lalor set about to build a frame church just to the south of the land cleared for the cemetery: the first St. Patrick's Church in Ontario. In due course log churches were erected for Caledon and Albion Townships and the church in Tecumseh was completed.



*Photo from a painting by Sir Martin Archer Shee, P.R.A., 1710-1858
Reproduced from The Perkins Bull Historical Series*

*Right Reverend Alexander Macdonnell, D.D., 1760-1840
Titular Bishop of Rhesina and Auxiliary to the Bishop of Quebec for Upper Canada,
12 January, 1819; consecrated 31 December, 1820; Bishop of Regiopolis (Kingston),
14 February, 1826; died 11 January, 1840.*

In 1837, Father Eugene O'Reilly, a widower, came to St. Patrick's. Born in Drumlomine in the diocese of Ardagh County Cavan, Ireland, Eugene O'Reilly had married and settled down to the life of a farmer.



Sample pages from the church registry: (a) Baptismal Register (b) Marriage Register

When his wife died he and his daughter emigrated to Canada in 1832. He made provision for the care of his daughter and entered the classical college of Chambly near Montreal. On June 19, 1836 he was ordained a priest and was appointed to his first and only parish. A few months after

his arrival in the Gore, on the death of Father Peter Polin of St. Bernard's Church, the new priest took over the whole of Peel and Halton Counties.

Father O'Reilly was a builder. He enlarged and completed the parish church. In 1843, under his leadership, a new frame church topped by a spire (St. Cornelius at Caledon) was built. Not long afterwards, probably in 1845, a rough cast church, (St. John's) was built in Albion.

In the meantime Colonel Baldwin had opened a school on his estate. When he could no longer bear the expense, in 1843, a separate school was built just over the line in Etobicoke Township; such were the beginnings of Catholic Education in the Gore Mission.

In 1847 the same Colonel Baldwin turned his home into a hospital for the cholera victims, emigrants from Ireland at the time of the potato famine. Only Fr. O'Reilly and Thomas Smythe were willing to help the sick, sometimes in company with Bishop Power, the first bishop of Ontario, who contracted the disease and died. The Loretto Sisters whom he had invited to teach in Toronto arrived just at this time and were distressed upon learning of his death. In the not too distant future, they also, would come to the Gore.

During his twenty-four years as pastor of St. Patrick's Fr. O'Reilly presided over nearly 400 weddings and baptized nearly 2,000 of whom 71 were adults.

In 1859 Fr. Joseph Michel came to assist the aging pastor. A large frame building was erected with three stories. On the ground floor were classrooms and a dining hall. The second floor was a huge dormitory with accommodation for eighty boys. In 1860, with the project almost completed, the new pastor, Fr. Mulligan, took over the parish. Fr. O'Reilly was happy to attend the opening of the new school in March of 1861. He died a few months later.

Fr. Richard O'Connor, later to become bishop of Peterborough, and the then Fr. William White were pastors in turn. In 1867 the parish was divided and Caledon received Fr. Francis McSpiritt as its first pastor. Young Fr. John Joseph McCann came to the Gore. He built a church at Claireville which was closed after a few years. In 1870 Fr. John Joseph Gribbin came to St. Patrick's. He established a post office in which he served as post master. As a result the whole area became known as Gribbin and retained this name for almost fifty years.

In 1876 Fr. Patrick Keane came to Gribbin and was followed by

Fr. Patrick Whitney. The territory to the east, King Township, was also given a pastor and a church and a second St. Patrick's was built at Schomberg.



GOD BLESS YOU

How sweetly fall those simple words
Upon the human heart;
When friends in holiest terms thus seek,
Their best wish to impart.

From far or near they ever seem,
To bear a power to cheer you;
And soul responsive beats to soul,
In breathing out:—"God Bless You!"



Photo reproduced from The Perkins Bull Historical Series

Father Francis McSpiritt

Father McSpiritt The Mystery of Faith

In 1887 Fr. Francis McSpiritt, affectionately known by his parishioners as Father Mac, came to be pastor of the first St. Patrick's and remained there for the rest of his life. He had a reputation for working miracles. Pilgrims seeking cures were constantly at his door. Toward the end of his life he built the present church: a severe exterior, but pleasant and graceful within - it resembled the character of the builder.

Born in County Cavan, Ireland, in 1830, Francis McSpiritt had emigrated to New York in 1854. From New York he moved with his sister Ann to Toronto in order to join another sister, Mrs. Hoffman. In Toronto he entered St. Michaels College as a student of philosophy and following seminary studies was ordained in 1865 by the then Bishop Lynch.

Father McSpiritt's first placement was the Gore Mission where he served as curate to the pastor of St. Patrick's, Father W.J. White. Following his curacy and still in 1865 he was sent still farther north to reside as pastor of St. Cornelius in Silver Creek. Here he remained for four years.

It was following his transferral to St. Patrick's parish in Niagara Falls that Father McSpiritt became known as a man of miracles. Here he was reported to have returned the sight to a blind man and to have restored peace to a girl suffering from St. Vitus Dance, a nervous disorder.

Both Catholics and Protestants are said to have sought him out for cures. To these he would give his blessing and exact a promise of penance to be fulfilled in Thanksgiving. When asked how he worked his miracles he would answer: "It is between the afflicted and God, I know nothing of it." Oral tradition in the parish of St. Patrick's confirms the opinion that Father McSpiritt consistently denied his ability to work miracles. The same tradition still firmly believes, however, in the reality of his healing power. As with many holy men who were believed to be healers no concrete evidence of Father McSpiritt's powers was ever documented by local medical men, by the catholic community in the Gore or by the Archdiocese. This is not to say that the faith of Father McSpiritt's followers in his regard, did not, in effect, work miracles for them.

In 1875 Father McSpiritt was moved to the parish of St. James in Adjala township and in 1887, at his own request, was returned to St. Patrick's in the Gore of Toronto. His reputation followed him. Throngs of pilgrims from far and near, including former parishioners, came to

St. Patrick's to be cured. He took up sleeping quarters in the basement of the church in order to be available at a moment's notice. Those who sought his cures were instructed in penance: abstinence from meat was required



*Glass cane used by Father McSpiritt now in the possession of
Mr. & Mrs. E. O'Donnell*

on Wednesdays and Saturdays which reflected the tradition of Lenten Ember Days. Liquor was forbidden. Women, to reflect the grief of the Mother of Christ on the death of her Son, were not to groom their hair on Fridays. To emphasize the holiness of the Lord's Day men were urged not to shave on Sundays.

Each evening at eight Father McSpiritt would recite the Rosary in the rectory of St. Patrick's. When on his way to visit parishioners or the sick he would recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary and expect anyone riding with him to interject the appropriate responses.

By 1895 parishioners of St. Patrick's realized that Father McSpiritt was growing quite ill and fearing his passing asked him for words of comfort. "A bit of earth from my grave will do ye ..." he replied, "say a little prayer for the repose of my soul when you take it." In fact, for a long period following the burial of Father McSpiritt, parishioners took earth from the grave site with the strong conviction that a clod of earth from his resting place carried curative powers. Oral tradition recounts the frustration of the local grave keeper who was unable to maintain a decent covering over the spot where Father McSpiritt had been laid to rest.



Chalice used by Father McSpiritt which is now kept at St. Joseph's Convent in Niagara Falls.

Father Francis McSpiritt died on Wednesday, August 14, 1895 at Sacred Heart Orphanage, Sunnyside, Toronto. The bell of the new church of St. Patrick's tolled for the first time when news reached Gribbin that Father McSpiritt had gone to his eternal rest. On Friday, August 16, a solemn Requiem High Mass was offered and his body laid to rest near the site of the old church where he had dedicated 9 years of humble service.

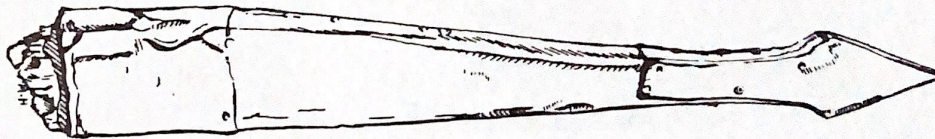


*Death Announcement as reproduced from the Bolton Enterprise,
August 16, 1895.*

The many friends of the Rev. Francis McSpiritt, pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Gore of Toronto, will regret to learn that he died at the Sacred Heart Orphanage, Sunnyside, Toronto, at 2 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. Deceased had been ill a few weeks but only those near his bedside were aware of the serious nature of his illness. He was about 60 years of age, and among his many missions had spent twelve years at Adiala and six at Niagara Falls. Under his direction a grand new edifice was erected in the Gore last year. During his residence there of about nine years he had made many friends both in and out of the church and was held in the greatest esteem by his parishioners. The remains were removed from Sunnyside to his late residence on Thursday. Solemn mass of requiem will be chanted this (Friday) morning at 10:30.



Father McSpiritt's grave was dug on the very spot where the cross of the old church had fallen as it was being dismantled.



Arm of Cross that fell where Father McSpiritt's gravesite is located.

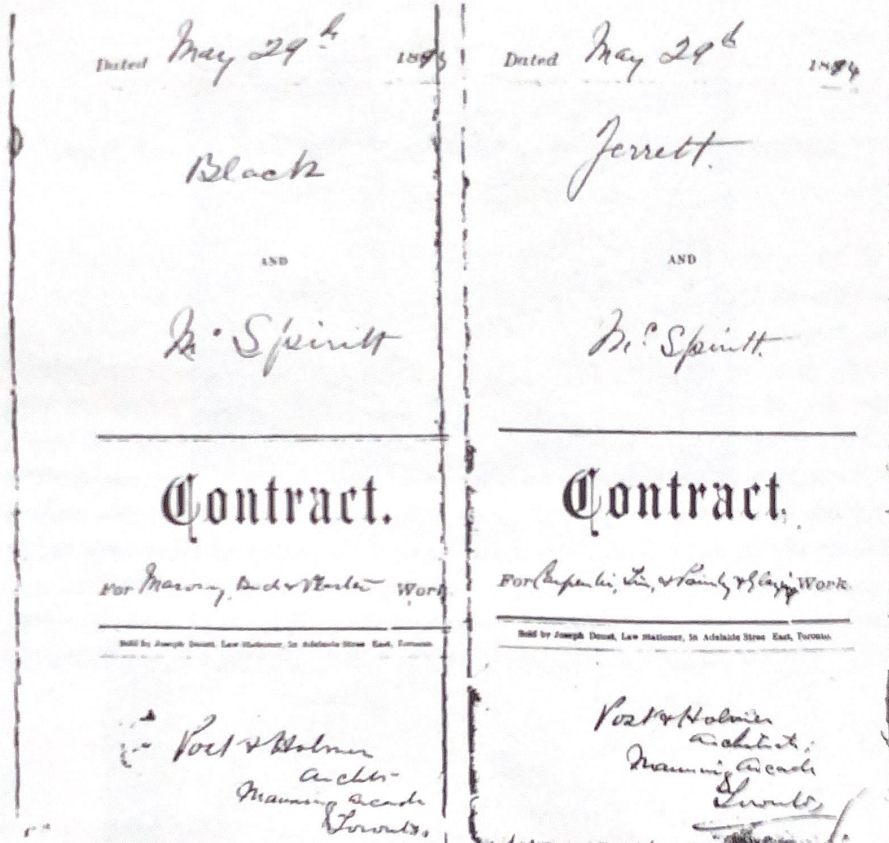


Father McSpirtt's grave.



Grotto erected by the Byrne family in gratitude for favours received.

Miss Ann Byrne, accidentally shot in her early teens, was on the point of death. It is said that after she received the blessing of Father McSpiritt she recovered from her wounds. Later in life when Ann had moved to New York and married she remembered the gift of life restored to her by the Lord through the intervention of Fr. McSpiritt and, in respectful gratitude, she had a modest grotto built flanking the tomb of Fr. McSpiritt and erected thereon a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Documents shown above are the original contracts for the building of St. Patrick's Church, between the two contractors and Father McSpiritt.

In early fall of 1894 St. Patrick's Church (free of any debt) was completed except for the bell which was installed in early August of 1895. Names inscribed on the bell are Fr. Francis McSpiritt, Martin Byrne and Michael Doherty.

Archbishop Walsh of Toronto Diocese was in Ireland so Bishop O'Conner of Peterborough Diocese dedicated the new St. Patrick's Church of Toronto Gore, his first parish.

*Response to a letter sent by Miss McSpiritt inquiring about her late
great-uncle Father (Mac) McSpiritt.*

January 26th, 1939

Dear Miss McSpiritt:

Your great-uncle was Pastor of Niagara Falls over 60 years ago. Then he was P.O. of St. James Church, Adjala Colgan P.O. out from 1881. He was a fine outstanding figure of a man. His sister Ann was a fine lady and his nephews Francis McSpiritt and Eddie Koffman used to visit him in Adjala in 1881-1887. I know them all very intimately. "Father Mac" as he was called, was a great priest, a holy man who had the power of miracles. His reputation was unusual. He cured literally thousands, both Prot's. and Catholics. He was called "The miracle worker". I knew of several cases from my own personal experience.

As there was need of a new Church at Colgan and he was getting old, he asked to go to St. Patrick's Church, Gore of Toronto, where he built a nice little church. He had a lovely home there and his people adored him. His monument is in the graveyard there. Sometimes people come from all parts and take away the soil from the grave in the hope of a cure. As far as I can remember, I was at the funeral. He was about 5 ft. 8 in., dark iron gray hair, fine open reddish face and a fine speaker. R.T.P.

I served Mass for him over 50 years ago.

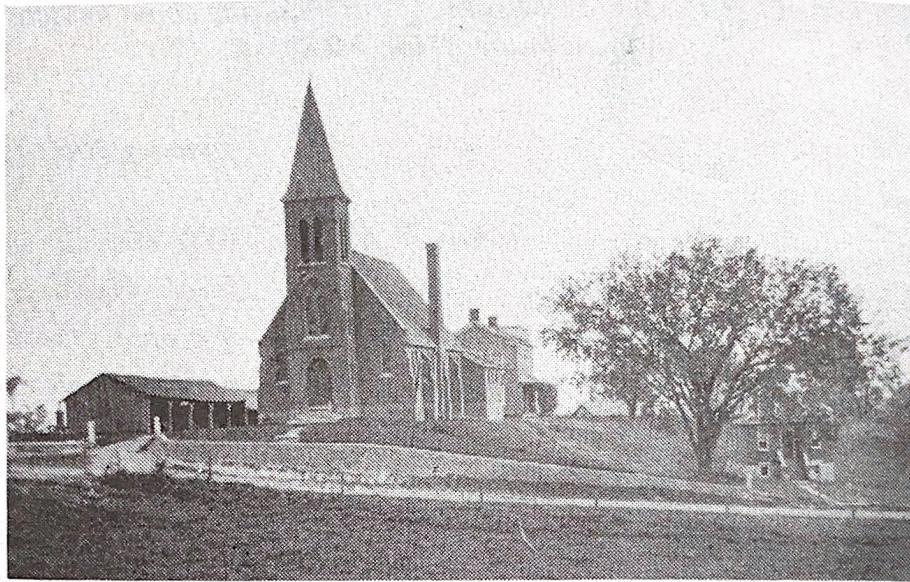
With very best wishes for the family, I am,

Yours sincerely,

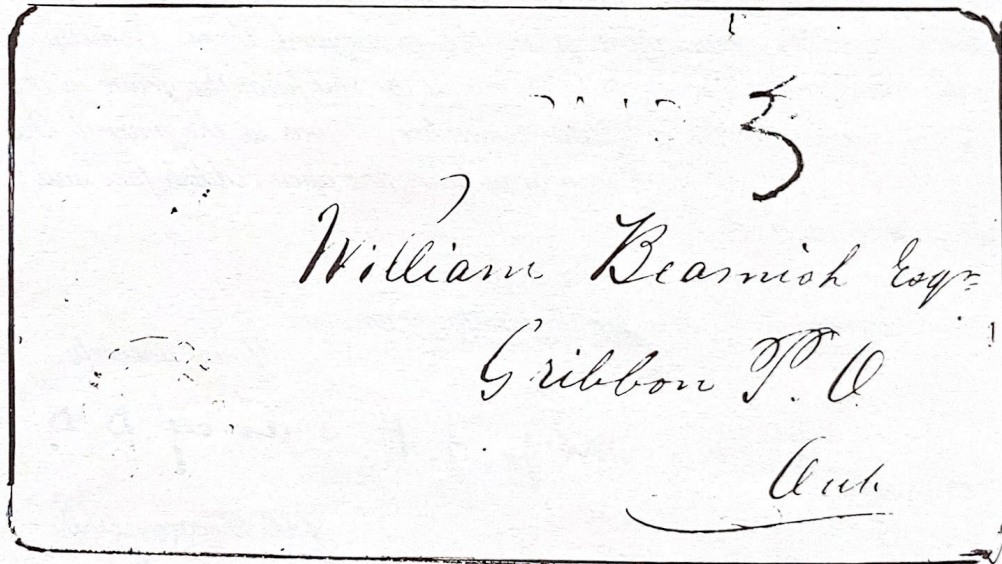
Msgr. J. P. Treacy, D.D.

J.P. Treacy, D.D.





St. Patrick's Church Wildfield before 1916, showing driving shed, horse barn, rectory and church hall.



Envelope sent from Caledon East to Gribbin P.O. in 1894.

The Middle Years

About the turn of the century Squire Ellis who lived opposite the Gribbin post-office copied names from the tomb stones of St. Patrick's cemetery and forwarded them to the government with a petition that the name Gribbin be changed to Wildfield, the name of his estate in England. (It is said that he could not bear to have a priest's name honoured). His petition was granted, but the name Gribbin continued to be used until as late as 1915.

After pastorates by Fathers M.J. Reddin and Patrick J. Kiernan, Fr. George Williams arrived in 1905. The church was decorated, new stations of the cross were obtained and a new brick school was erected in 1907.

The new Stations of the Cross were erected and blessed by Archbishop Fergus P. McEvoy, on the date of Confirmation, October 25, 1908; on which day also the school was blessed. Father George Williams was the Pastor at the time.



Donors

Rev. Thomas O'Donnell
Messrs. A. & R. Gough
Miss Francis O'Donnell
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Miss Mary Byrne
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Mrs. P. (O'Donnell) Keenahan
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Mrs. Daniel Doherty



The next pastor was Fr. Robert Walsh who later became pastor of