

News

Writing a history on St. Augustine Church

Sister Anna Louise Staub

In 1995, a group of active parishioners from St. Augustine Church met in the rectory to form a committee to begin preparations for a centennial celebration in 1998.

One of the outstanding issues was the choice of a person/persons to record the history of the parish. The group decided to ask Victoria Schmitt (Vicki) and me, Sister Anna Louise Staub, to work as co-writers.



St. Augustine Church and School commenced operations in 1898 in this plain mission church at the corner of Chili Avenue and Hobart Street. Part of the structure burned in 1906. The next year, a more substantial duplex church/school replaced it.

Vicki had recently moved from Inglewood Avenue in St. Augustine's parish to Chili. She, her husband, and two children remained participating members in the worship and social activities of the parish. Vicki's position as Curator of History at the Rochester Museum and Science Center eminently fitted her for knowledge of

valuable sources of research and historical background. I had always enjoyed writing, was born and reared in St. Augustine's parish, attended the parish school, entered the convent, and returned as principal of the school from 1966-1972.

We, two women unknown to each other, became co-authors of St. Augustine's centennial history. Each complemented the other: Vicki, the fervent historian - the accurate adherer to fact; I, the dreamer - the creative lover of poetry. There was not always unanimity in our choices; but compromise often saved the day. We agreed wholeheartedly upon the title, "Building an Urban Faith Community."

At one of the early meetings Vicki had broached the possibility of having the history published by the city of Rochester. It would save a large amount of money and it would make the church familiar to many *Rochester History* subscribers.

The committee decided upon this venture. As a result, Vicki pursued the idea with the city historian, Ruth Rosenberg Naparsteck, who agreed to the proposition if the city's history and development were adequately stressed. Therefore, we were writing to fulfill a double agenda. It was not easy!

Vicki had to make certain that the city's west side history was



Sister Anna Marie Hynes, pioneering teacher and principal of St. Augustine School, as she appeared while working at the school, c. 1900. Few photographs of Sisters of St. Joseph survive from this era.

represented, and I had to recall my experiences at St. Augustine's. In the final outcome it was a two-way street, keeping both ends open for further developments. Vicki, with her publishing skills, had access to hidden sources for research, typed the manuscripts, and provided the dated footnotes; I perused 25 years of weekly church bulletins, performed most of the oral interviews, and researched materials from the Sisters of St. Joseph archives. All of this writing had to be submitted to the city historian, who critiqued the work and eliminated any material which might offend the subscribers' religious or political beliefs. We strove to be sensitive to these directives.

The end product was published in two issues of *Rochester History*. Part one, published in Vol. LX No.2, Spring 1998, covers the years 1898-1945, which included the lifelong rule of Father John H. O'Brien, as pastor. Part two, published in *Rochester History* in

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Vol. LX No. 3, Summer 1998, continues the history from 1945, the beginning of the pastorate of Monsignor John M. Duffy, to the present year of celebration, 1998.

Since each booklet had to conform to 32 published pages, we had to cut, cut, and recut our story. It represented a real disciplinary penance, but probably strengthened the account.

Along the way we received much support. **Sister St. Luke Hardy** was always available for information and in her quiet way helped us weather any crisis that occurred.

Mrs. Kathy Murty, longtime active parishioner, mother of 12 children, and my At-Home Retreat codirector, was at our beck and call. She contributed many hours of research and recalled actual participation in day-to-day events in church life.

Father Robert F. McNamara, Rochester Diocesan Historian, was

one of our readers and gave immeasurable help.

Finally, this whole project depended upon Mrs. Shelly Dinan, who edited and designed the booklets. Shelly works as a staff member in the tri-cluster parishes of St. Augustine, St. Monica and Our Lady of Good Counsel in the role of communication consultant. She unselfishly gave an enormous amount of time and energy to this project, and we are most grateful.

The publication is a comprehensive work covering three years of intensive research and writing. Parishioners have responded positively to the completed project. No manuscript could adequately describe the simplicity and beauty of the lives of St. Augustine's parishioners, nor the acceptance and willingness with which they have responded to change. Vicki and I are proud to be counted as part of such a vibrant Christian community of worshippers.