

THE ERECTION OF THE NEW EDIFICE

OF S.S. PETER AND PAUL

PARISH
BY

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The Church of S.S. Peter and Paul, located at 720 West Main Street, Rochester, New York, is one of the finest examples of church architecture in this part of the country. The larger part of the credit for this must go to the Rev. Dr. J. Emil Gefell, who was pastor at the time of the erection of the new building and who is still pastor after 38 years of fruitful labor.

The original church property was situated at King and Maple Streets and the parish was founded in 1843.¹ Through the following years many improvements were made. The most important of these took place in 1905 when the entire church was remodeled and redecorated in basilican style.² Father Gefell became pastor of the parish in October, 1907.³ As a further improvement, in September of 1909 an handsome new memorial altar was dedicated by the Right Reverend Bishop Hickey in memory of its former pastor, Rev. Francis Henry Sinclair, who had ruled over the parish successfully for 42 years.⁴

At this time, then, the church was more than fit for the parish needs for many years to come. The city, however, was in a period of expansion and improvement. The Baltimore, Rochester, and Pittsburgh Railroad Company, the present Baltimore and Ohio line, wanted to run its tracks through the property of the parish church. The company made overtures to the pastor for the desired property. Father Gefell, however, was not interested in selling. He could not see where the parish would profit by the sale. The church was well situated in the

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1. Peck, William F., Semi-Centennial History of Rochester, N.Y. Syracuse, N.Y., 1864, pp. 281, 448.
 2. Peck, William F., History of Rochester and Monroe County, New York. New York and Chicago, 1908, pp. 119-320.
 3. Historical-Pictorial Edition of the Catholic Journal, Rochester, N.Y., 1914, p. 49.
 4. Ibid., p. 49.

center of the parish. It was now in very good condition and it served the purposes of the parish. The company made repeated attempts to change the pastor's mind. After some months of negotiations the pastor was forced to yield to circumstances much against his own will.⁵ The church, school and convent were sold to the company in 1910. The buildings were razed after the new church was ready for use.⁶

The property at 720 West Main Street was then purchased and work began immediately. This property was situated near the junction of Brown Street and Main Street West. The new church was dedicated on June 30, 1912. The cost was \$100,000. The contractor was Hiram H. Edgerton. Gordon and Madden were the architects.⁷

The church is beautiful in construction. The interior is said to bear a resemblance to the venerable church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome as regards the formation of the pillars and as regards the fact that there is no break at the transept.⁸ It is a 2½ story structure of tapestry brick in modern Lombardy style with a square tower and three bells. The tower follows the graceful lines of the Siena Cathedral.

Because of lack of funds the interior could not be decorated according to the plans of Father Gefell. He prudently allowed for this and the church was so constructed that the decorative work could be done in later years. This actually took place in 1930-31. The cost of this project was approximately \$50,000.⁹

5. Gefell, Rev. J. Emil. Personal Memoirs.

6. Historical-Pictorial Edition, op. cit., 1914, p. 49.

7. Ibid., p. 49.

8. Ibid., p. 49.

9. Gefell, loc. cit.

Today the church is unsurpassed as regards beauty and value. It is a living tribute to the executive foresightedness of its lovable pastor, Rev. Dr. J. Emil Gefell.

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