

Friends of Saxonville

Newsletter of The Friends of Saxonville, P.O. Box 3236, Framingham, MA, 01705-3236

Autumn 2003

St. George's Parish

Story by Cynthia Buscone

"Oldest of the Catholic colonies of that region was to be found in the little manufacturing village of Saxonville, in the northern part of the town; and St. George's Church in that village was the first Catholic place of worship erected anywhere in the western reaches of Middlesex County." Rich in history, a vibrant part of village life today, St. George's Church, with its mansard roofed rectory and adjoining parish center, occupies a plot of ground rising from Cochituate Brook, known at the time of its purchase in 1842 as "Indian Hill" ...a four acre spot on which, in those days "Indians assembled ... to sell beadwork, baskets and wicker ware."

The need for a Catholic church in the area had been growing. Early missionaries coming from the Hartford Diocese had noticed an increasing number of Catholics, mainly Irish, trickling into the area to build the western railroad lines and roadways, and to work in the mills that were popping up along the rivers to the interior of the



state. These folks were the forerunners of the tidal wave of Irish, Italian, Polish, and French Canadian immigrants that would follow. To meet their needs, one Father James Fitton (for whom Fitton Field at Holy Cross is named), while on his mission route, celebrated the first mass in Saxonville in 1834 on a Sunday in May. In 1842 he purchased "Indian Hill" for a church and cemetery. Old timers passed down oral history of how ancestors would come from outlying farms on a Sunday. While the men dug and worked and built, the women and children unpacked lunch for workers and their families and then visited as the day's construction progressed. Marion Byrnes Burke, at 92, recalls her grandmother telling of great-grandfather Luke McCann who journeyed from his farm in Sudbury to work on the project. Their reward was great; on Christmas Day, 1846, with the roof of the new edifice only partially complete, Catholics of Saxonville heard Mass in the church for the first time, as snow sifted through the unfinished roof. In 1847, the Church was officially dedicated.

(Continued Page 5)

Inside this issue:

- St. George's Church
- School Days
- Cochituate Rail Trail Cleanup
- Sax-On-Foot
- Holiday Gift Ideas
- Saxonville Postcard from the Past

Sax-On-Foot

Article and Photos by Charlene Frary

On a lovely Sunday afternoon in October, guests were treated to several walks about Saxonville. The first was a guided tour of the Cochituate Rail Trail, led by Dick and Jill Miller. What an accomplishment to actually walk below the Mass Pike on the trail easement that runs along Speen Street toward Route 30!

The Historic Walking Tour through Saxonville's National Register Historic District was led by Stephen Herring, Town Historian and Friends of Saxonville member volunteer, who elaborated on the great history of our village. The group was thrilled to receive a surprise invitation – a look inside historic Edwards Church!

The afternoon concluded with a peaceful stroll along the Carol Getchell Nature Trail, led by Dan Cleveland. Both Dan and Jeremy Longden are Saxonville residents who are completing Eagle Scout projects on the nature trail.

Sax-on-Foot was preceded by Ace Hardware's Grand Opening Celebration. At the celebration, Ace donated hot dogs, fix-ins, popcorn and soda, which the Friends sold with proceeds to benefit the Athenaeum. The event raised approximately \$200 – Thanks Ace!



Sorry We Missed You!!

If you were not able to join us on October 5 but wish to take the self-guided tours of the Historic Walking Tour or the Carol Getchell Nature Trail, please print a map from our website – www.saxonville.org!

School Days

by Cynthia Buscone

When we arrived back at the Saxonville School in September, the air was always permeated by that rich, clean back to school smell of soap, and oiled wooden floors and polish, fresh arithmetic paper, and chalk free blackboards. Every one of us knew who was responsible for the autumn “back to school” welcome. His name was Mr. James Graham.

Mr. Graham was a tall quiet, strong man. I thought he was old, but I’m sure now he wasn’t. Mr. Graham could do ANYTHING, and we all held him in great respect, awe, and maybe even fear, especially if a teacher threatened a misbehaving child with a trip to Mr. Graham’s boiler room whose entrance was across the hall from the boys’ basement. Even I knew, however from the few times I had been down there on errands, that it was a cozy, pleasant place, and that Mr. Graham was always solemnly courteous to visitors from above. The threat seemed enough to get the naughtiest junior high school boy back in line, though! For a long time I thought Mr. Graham lived at the school, in his boiler room, of course. Then I learned that he had a proper house just up Edwards Street. At that point, I decided that a person of such importance must own both the school and the house!

To be sure, Mr. Graham kept our school spotless and mowed the lawn out front on Elm Street and took reverent care of the school flag and had long discussions with Mr. Cavanagh about our school, but he did other things too. He pitched the softball for the 5th and 6th grade boys’ ball game in the middle section of the playground at recess. He supervised carefully as the coal man sent the coal zipping down the chute in the window of his boiler room, and he never let the coal man come on the playground to deliver until we were all lined up AFTER recess. When we needed the auditorium for gym or a dance, he could get the sectioned folding chairs out of the auditorium so fast, you’d hardly know that they’d been there, and he could return them just as quickly. When we

got bigger he was always ready with a ladder or hammer if we were decorating for an afternoon social, a play or musical, or the biggest event of all, the Prom!!

I think Mr. Graham built the tables that vanished high against the wall on the ground floor and only came down on their two sturdy fold-up wooden legs at lunchtime. Then they made the perfect comfortable spot for the few kids who lived up near Potter Road, too far from school to go home to lunch, to enjoy their sandwiches.

By the time we were in Junior High, there was another custodian who was younger and joked with us and was efficient, too; but somehow the memory of Mr. Graham lives on. His sense of the importance of his work and HIS school enveloped us all. We absorbed his lesson well, with special pride for our school, too!

Please make your school day memories a part of this window on the world of school in Saxonville! To share your recollections simply drop a line or an e-mail to the address below, or if you’d prefer to be interviewed in person or by phone, just call and we can make arrangements.

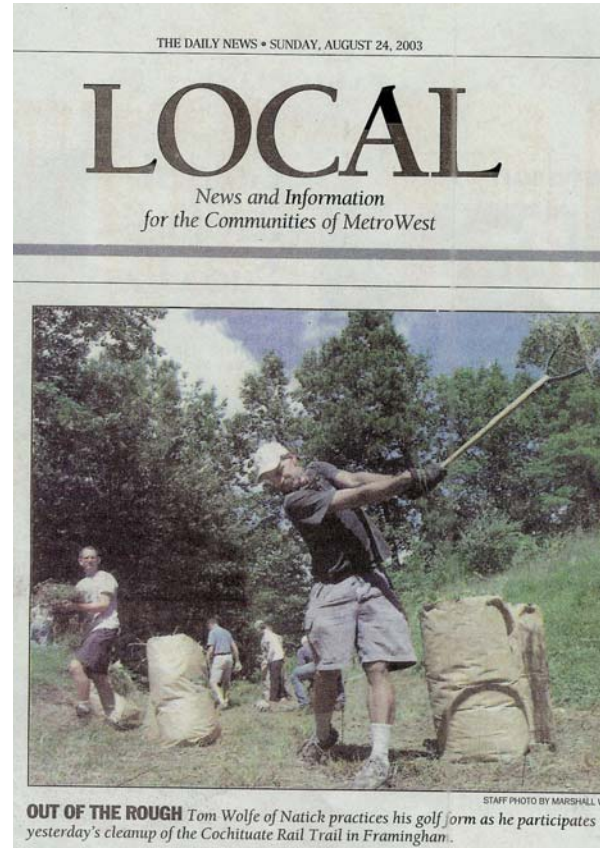
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CRT Cleanup

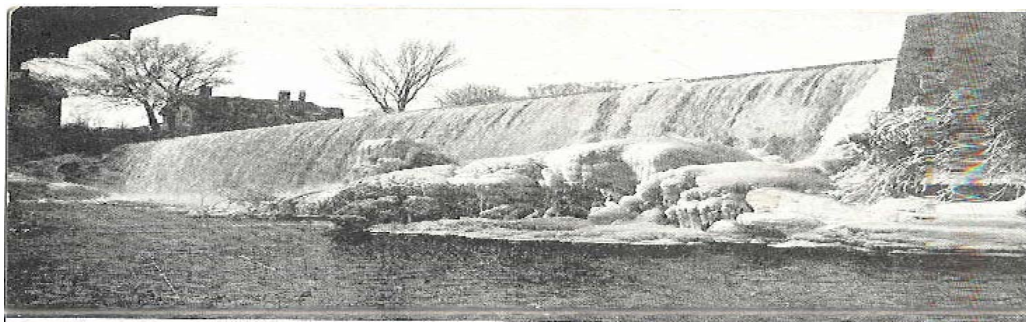
August 23, 2003

A special **THANK YOU** goes out to the more than 30 volunteers who helped to clear brush and trash from the portion of the trail that runs from Old Connecticut Path to Route 30 near the Home Depot entrance.

We are also pleased to report that the Town of Framingham has officially accepted an easement from the Mass Turnpike Authority for a the portion of the trail that runs form the Mass Pike to Route 30. This easement has been several years in the works and is a significant step towards actual trail building! The Framingham CRT committee is now reviewing lease arrangements with the MBTA for the remaining portion of the trail that is in Framingham.



Postcard from the Past



Saxonville Dam, Framingham, Mass.

Life in the parish was a reflection of life in the youthful nation. By the early 1850's Father Farrelly, the first resident pastor, established a parochial school in the Church basement for his young parishioners. Then, in 1853, as the "Know Nothing" Party gained strength around the country, a mob of rowdies entered the church and desecrated it. Deacon Stone, a well-known town official, was quickly summoned to disperse the law-breakers, "who then repaired to the town square where the liberty pole stood, and proceeded to hang Fr. Farrelly in effigy." The following St. Patrick's Day the same group caused more trouble by setting a fire as Fr. Farrelly was conducting a lecture at Athenaeum Hall. Wise to their methods by now, Fr. Farrelly calmed his audience and continued his discourse.

The outbreak of the Civil War saw young men of the parish going off to fight and by war's end many names were inscribed on the left front stained glass window of the old Church -- dedicated to the soldiers of the Civil War of this Parish. Shortly after the end of the war, in 1869, the present rectory was built under the direction of Fr. Anthony Rossi.

By 1892, Athenaeum Hall was again pressed into use by the parish, this time for services while the Church underwent renovation -- new ceiling, hard maple floors, pews, and wonder of wonders -- steam heat! Father McNamara presided over this work, and church improvements continued with the arrival of the energetic Father Patrick B. Murphy, who re-

mained from 1894 -- 1907. A child growing up in Saxonville in the forties and fifties heard an abundance of "Father Murphy" stories! Grandparents, older neighbors, everyone, it seemed, had a good recollection! The Methodists, Congregationalists, and Catholic rectors enjoyed each other's company and had a fond regard for their collective flocks, richly returned.

Fr. Murphy, a man of many interests, set about a beautification project in preparation for St. George's Golden Jubilee, scheduled for 1897. He added a colonnaded porch and cupola to, as he said, "Lend dignity to our quaint, old, wooden church." At the rear of the Church came eventually to be a lovely parkland with birds and animals which Fr. Murphy had collected and which he shared with all, including Mr. Simpson of the Mill. The parish for many years was the focal point for visitors from surrounding towns. The Pilot in June 1897 reported that, "The grounds are especially attractive. On them are an aviary, beautiful birds, a park in which there are two deer, rustic bridges and seats, flower beds, shrubs and trees. In front of the rectory is a large flagpole from which the national colors float every fair day. Nearby is a rustic structure containing an American eagle. In the rear is a pretty grotto, a copy of the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes." His preparations culminated in the ceremonies and festivities of the Golden Jubilee in June 1897. In 1907, Fr. Murphy was transferred from St. George's Church, a man "very much loved" by all

Continued on page 6

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THE GROTTA

Father John A. McCauley, longest serving pastor (35 years) presided over the parish's Diamond Jubilee in 1922, at which time Fr. Murphy returned to celebrate the Jubilee mass, assisted by Saxonville natives, Rev. Dennis Maguire and Rev. Domenic Rock. Gentle and scholarly, Fr. McCauley's health failed in the latter part of his stewardship. Marist priest such as Fr. LeMay assisted the parish. What sermons he gave! Many in the Sunday School decided to become missionaries! Parishioners who remember Fr. McCauley through a child's eye view tend to recall the little hand bell he used to call the entire Sunday School to order after 8:30 Mass (about 8 rows -- one row per grade, boys on one side of the aisle -- girls on the other). He was ferocious in his forbidding girls wearing long pants to church, and that included snow pants in winter when almost everybody was still walking to church. Children's choir rehearsed in the rectory, with Fr. McCauley at the piano. On Sunday, the

old pipe organ wheezed and needed to be pumped sometimes by an energetic altar boy. By the time of Fr. McCauley's death, the Church needed much attention and changes were in the wind.

Fr. Quinlan took over, repairing, painting, fixing. The parish got a curate -- two priests at the same time?! Plans were in the works for a new parish center. The parish organized its first big fair. Msgr. Reagan took the helm. The sixties saw huge changes -- again a reflection of the trends of a nation -- the old church was torn down, replaced by the present modern brick edifice. It was an exciting time and a sad time all at once. The population of Saxonville had grown to such an extent that another parish, St. Jeremiah was created. What a long way the "oldest ... of the Catholic colonies," has come, from those days when Framingham's entire population numbered under 5,000, to the present, having recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, and still an important facet of life to its many parishioners and to the village.

Sources:

History of the Archdiocese of Boston.
Vols. II and III.

The Pilot June 19, 1897, May 1834
Parish Commemorative Booklets.

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Friends of Saxonville Membership Form

(detach and return to Friends of Saxonville, PO BOX 3236, Framingham, MA 01705)



The mission of the Friends of Saxonville is to educate the public about the special identity of Saxonville, an historic neighborhood of Framingham, Massachusetts, and to preserve, enhance and protect its cultural, environmental and historical qualities.

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