ST. JOSEPH MISSION AND PARISH, PLAIN CITY
ORGANIZED 125 YEARS AGO

Most of the heads of the families who founded St. Joseph Church in Pleasant Valley, now Plain City, were, like their patron, humble workmen. Most of them probably arrived on the railroad which connected Pleasant Valley with Columbus to the southeast and, to the west, with Urbana and other county seats. The railroad and the men's status as laborers, however, also made it easy for them to depart. Out of nearly eighty adult males who appear as part of the congregation between its founding in 1864 and the year 1870, no more than about half appear to have been present at any one time.

The majority of the families consisted of Irish-born parents and Ohio-born children. Many lived in the part of Pleasant Valley lying east of Church street and south near Swanee Run and the railroad tracks - the less affluent part of the town. Others were farm laborers who lived some distance away. Of those who have been located in the 1870 federal census in Pleasant Valley, Darby Township, and Canaan Township, eight were farm laborers, twelve were day laborers (one in a brick-yard), one a retail grocer, and one a farm owner. All were Irish-born except one native of France.

Only six Catholic households are known to have existed in the Pleasant Valley area in 1860. Michael and Bridget Strapp, Walter and Mary Strapp, and James and Catherine Walsh (or Welch) and families were living in the town. Francis and Isabella Nugent, Thomas and Ann Rinn, and James Duffy and families were living in Canaan Township, near Amity, some miles south of Pleasant Valley. The Strapps, Rinns, and Nugents, together with a few others such as the families of Matthias O'Holleran, Bartholomew O'Keefe, and Michael Malone, can be said to have formed the core of the Catholic community during its early years. Francis Nugent was the only member who would have been considered well-off. A short biographical sketch appeared in the 1883 History of Madison County (1):

Francis Nugent, farmer, P.O. West Canaan, was born in Ireland about sixty years ago; he is a son of Michael and Christinia (Broadburn) Nugent. He came to Ohio at the age of nineteen years, and engaged in farming, which occupation he has since followed. He owns 180 acres of land in Canaan Township, one half mile from Amity, on the lower pike. He is a member of the Catholic Church, and in politics is a Democrat, and has served as Trustee and member of the School Board. He was married in December, 1859, to Isabel Gallaher, a native of Ireland, who was born in 1825, and died August 27, 1865.
She was a daughter of John and Sarah Gallaher. Mr. Nugent has had eight children, one son and seven daughters, of whom three survive.

His farm was immediately south and west of Amity.

Pleasant Valley was a station visited occasionally by the priests from St. Patrick Church in Columbus as early as 1861. (2) The congregation was organized just 125 years ago, in the spring of 1864, by Rev. Edward Fitzgerald, the pastor of St. Patrick Parish. A subscription book was opened and $298 was pledged. Someone threw in another two dollars to make an even $300 and the cash account records that total received on April 1, 1864. Unfortunately, the first page of the subscription and cash account book is gone and only nineteen of the subscribers' names are now known. (See the table below.) On April 1, the $300 was paid to Josiah Beard of Madison County as down payment on two lots in Pleasant Valley, which were placed in Father Fitzgerald's name. (3) These lots were numbers 89 and 90, the sixth and seventh lots east of Church street and fourth south of Main street, on the north side of what is now called Jackson street. In this neighborhood many of the Catholic families lived. On the lots was a one-story, frame house, facing south, measuring about 35 by 18 feet and having an ell on the northeast. This soon was converted for use as a church. (4) The cash book shows expenditures in May amounting to $5.00 "for Hollands Window blinds," $5.10 for wallpaper, and $3.65 to J. Bauers "for Altar."

Even with this good beginning, the community soon found itself in debt. A second subscription in 1865 brought in $263.65 and a third in 1866 brought only $121.00. After paying all costs, including another $475 plus interest to Mr. Beard, by June of 1866 the community owed Father Fitzgerald $150. To cover this debt, the northern half of the church lots were sold. On September 10, 1867 Fitzgerald, by then Bishop of Little Rock, deeded the south half of the two lots, including the little church, to Archbishop Purcell in Cincinnati. The north half of the lots was purchased on the same date by Michael Malone, a member of the congregation, for $250. (5)

On February 20, 1867, after his consecration Bishop Fitzgerald wrote to Archbishop Purcell for permission to confirm two or three persons at Pleasant Valley and to bless the "little chapel" there. Rev. Francis C. Mallon, also
stationed at St. Patrick's, was preparing the confirmation candidates. (6) To
this the Archbishop apparently assented. After Bishop Fitzgerald's departure,
Father Mallon took care of the mission.

On November 2, All Souls' Day, 1868, Father Mallon visited and told the
congregation that the Archbishop was sending him elsewhere. He apparently was
returning to the Cincinnati Archdiocese, having continued residing in Columbus
and attending Pleasant Valley for a few months after the new diocesan boundary
along the county line separated the mission from its mother church. This
prompted the people to write to the Archbishop, in these words:

The Reverend Father McMelon as you are aware had been attending
our Congregation here in Pleasant Valley this time back and told us
this morning that he thought he could not attend our Mission anymore
on account of your Reverence sending him some where else. May the
Lord help us therefore we the undersigned Members of the Catholic
Church implore you in the Name of God not to neglect us poor
Catholics here without some priest as it is your will to take the
Revd F. McMelon from us we hope youl send us some priest before
long.

We are willing to contribute liberally towards the support of our
Priest as Father McMelon can tell you. I almost believe that we
could support a Priest here ourselves we would be willing enough
anyway. Therefore we implore you again and again not to neglect us.
And youl have our Prayers night and day. May the Lord Bless you
Reverence. No more at present from your ever faithful Catholics at
P. Vally. [There follow 38 names, as designated in the table below.]

All those are men of families except 3 or 4 besides there are some
more in the country that attends almost regular. We should like if
it did not encrach on your time two much to write us a few lines
letting us know what you can do for us and if so your Reverence will
Direct to John Hartney, Pleasant Valley, Maddison Cy., Ohio. I
suppose your Reverence is aware of we having our Catholic Church
Dedicated it was blessed by the Rt. Revd Bishop Fitzgerald
before he went to Arkansas. (7)

Archbishop Purcell must have kept this petition in mind for some time. Rev.
N. A. Gallagher of St. Patrick's continued that parish's care of Pleasant
Valley, even though now across diocesan boundaries, visiting in June of 1869.
Then, late in 1869, the opportunity arose for the Archbishop to send a pastor
to reside at Pleasant Valley.

Rev. Matthew F. McGrath, O.P., a native of Nenagh, County Tipperary,
Ireland, had been ordained by Archbishop Purcell at St. Joseph's near Somerset
in 1856. He worked at St. Joseph's College near Somerset, in Kentucky, in
Washington, in London, Ontario, and again in Kentucky, everywhere with zeal
and eloquence, bringing a number into the Church and bringing many sinners
back to the practice of their Faith. In 1869 Father McGrath became
dissatisfied with his order and applied for secularization. (8) With
permission from his Dominican superiors, Archbishop Purcell sent him to live
at Pleasant Valley, where he arrived about the month of October.

In his year at Pleasant Valley, Father McGrath made St. Joseph's the hub
of a wide mission area. This had been suggested by Father Fitzgerald in 1866;
### Heads of Households whose Names appear in Various Records
1860-1870

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
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<td>70b, 70PV</td>
<td>D(avid) Lynch</td>
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<td>John Lynch</td>
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<td>Michael Lynch</td>
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<td>Mt. Lynch</td>
<td>66s</td>
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<td>Bryan Cavanagh</td>
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<td>David McGrath</td>
<td>69b</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Connors</td>
<td>64s, 64b</td>
<td>Patrick McGrath</td>
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<td>John Connor</td>
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<td>Francis Maguire (McGuire)</td>
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<td>William Corrigan</td>
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<td>Mr. Mahale</td>
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<td>Michael Finnegan</td>
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<td>John Hartney</td>
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<td>Bartholomew (O)Keefe</td>
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<td>John Kirby</td>
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<td>Jacob (James) Weaver</td>
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</table>

In this table, the numbers indicate the years of the records (65 for 1865, for example). "s" indicates one of the subscription lists, "p" the 1868 petition to the Archbishop, "b" a baptismal record, and "m" a marriage record. "D", "C", and "PV" indicate that the household was found in the federal census in Darby Township, Canaan Township, or Pleasant Valley.
he had estimated that the parish and its missions might hold 1,000 souls! (9) Using the railroads, Father McGrath visited Marysville and Milford Center in Union County and Woodstock, Mechanicsburg, North Lewisburg, and distant St. Paris in Champaign County. From October of 1869 until October of 1870 he recorded 24 baptisms which he performed on these missions, while recording only nine performed at Pleasant Valley. In the new record book which he began for St. Joseph's he also recorded three baptisms performed at West Jefferson. He had charge of that town's new church, but he recorded most of its baptisms in the separate register kept there. Father McGrath recorded his last baptism at West Jefferson on Nov. 6, 1870. It was about that time that he withdrew his petition for secularization. Everything was prepared for his official return to the Dominican province when he suddenly died, already in the arms of his Dominican brothers, on Dec. 15, 1870.

In 1872 and 1873 Pleasant Valley was attended as a mission by Rev. Henry Kiffmeyer, a German priest. In 1873 Archbishop Purcell sent Rev. Benedict M. Müller as the first resident pastor at West Jefferson. Father Müller attended Pleasant Valley, driving up from his residence in an old fashioned buggy one Saturday each month and staying over night with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Scott and their daughter, Mrs. Lillie Malee. He continued this care until his death on November 16, 1898. He was succeeded by Rev. Martin A. Heintz. There were twenty-six families in the congregation at Plain City in the 1890s.

In 1898 the first steps were taken toward the construction of the present St. Joseph Church. (10) On Sunday, June 5, "There being no mass it was decided by the congregation to establish a society, for the general good and upbuilding of Catholicity in St. Joseph's mission and especially for advancing the building of a new church in this mission." Elected as officers were Joseph Foark, president, Simeon Sheehan, vice president, Miss Winnifred Keefe, secretary, and John Noon, treasurer. A committee was appointed to work with the officers to draft a constitution, namely the Misses Katie Kirwan, Margaret Strapp, Anna Hafey, Nell Donlan, Mrs. Lill Malee, and James Foard, Mathias Holleran, and John Minogue. On the following Sunday twenty-three came forward and joined the society, which they called the St. Joseph's Union. Winnifred Keefe was appointed Sunday School teacher and money was voted to purchase books. The constitution provided for bi-weekly meetings in the church at 10 o'clock, "no allowances for Sundays of Church." All who were Catholics in good standing and had received their first Communion were eligible for membership. The constitution added the office of Preceptor or Preceptress, whose duty it was to lead the rosary at every meeting.

Father Heintz's first visit to Plain City was made on Christmas Day, 1898. He saw then the poor condition of the old church and seems to have worked closely with the St. Joseph's Union for its replacement. A building committee was formed, consisting of Father Heintz, D. H. Kirwan, Frank Zimmer, Simeon Sheehan, John Noon, Matt Holleran, William Scheirer, James Ford, and
Joseph Fork. (11) On March 18, 1899 the western two-thirds of lots 33, 34, and 35 in J. E. Bigelow's South Side Addition to Plain City, the site of the present church, was purchased for $375. (12) A contract to build the new church was let to J. C. Gault of Cleveland on August 15, 1899 and ground was broken on August 21. The cornerstone was laid on October 1, the Vicar General, Rev. J. C. Albrink, presiding. The building was dedicated on Tuesday, August 28, 1900, Archbishop Elder presiding, with fourteen priests in attendance in addition to Father Heintz. The choir of Columbus St. Patrick Parish provided the music. After the ceremony, the Archbishop addressed the congregation, "thanking and praising each individual for their efforts" toward the construction of the new church. The newspaper account at the time of the dedication mentioned the trials and struggles of the congregation. At one time, by laborious saving, they had $1,800 in the bank, only to lose it when the bank failed. But "never for a moment did they give up; the thoughts of a new church kept beckoning them on." When completed, the new church had cost $9,000 and of this only $800 was still owed. (13)

The last Mass had been offered in the old church by Father Heintz on August 19, 1900. (14) On April 7, 1901 the congregation held a formal meeting and decided to sell the old, "temporary" church. That property was transferred by Archbishop Elder to Frank A. Zimmer on June 6, 1901, for the grand price of $200. (15)

Plain City was given the canonical status of a parish in 1904 when Rev. Herman N. Santer took up residence there. He has as missions Milford Center and Woodstock. His successors were Rev. Lawrence L. Denning and Rev. Joseph Prieshoff. From 1909 until 1917 the parish was cared for by the priests in Urbana. In 1917 Rev. David Powers was sent as pastor to the three communities. He lived in Milford Center and the canonical title of parish was transferred to Sacred Heart Church there. (16) Plain City still was the largest of the three communities, but Milford Center was centrally located.

Rev. William J. Leaver was sent as pastor to Milford
Center, including the mission at Plain City, effective Sept. 12, 1924. During his twenty-five years there, but not through any fault of his, the parish and mission reached a low point, the number of souls falling by two-thirds as the young people moved away and the older ones died. During these years Father Leaver received a monthly stipend from the Archdiocesan Mission Society. Early in 1945, when the parish and mission had come into the Diocese of Columbus, he reported fifty souls in fourteen families at Plain City, which was about twice the size of the Milford Center congregation. (Woodstock, being in Champaign County, remained in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and so the pastor's responsibility was reduced to just the two communities.) In 1947 he reported thirty souls at Plain City. Bishop Ready considered attaching the two churches as missions to other parishes, but Father Leaver asked to remain a while longer. The parish still had financial reserves. (17)

In 1949 Milford Center and Plain City came under the care of the fathers of the Society of the Precious Blood, who took up residence in the rectory at Milford Center. During their years, the parish and mission at last began to grow again, so that by 1974 St. Joseph had 160 souls, half of them of school age or younger, in fifty-four household units. The parishioners, however, were new arrivals from various places; apparently none of the original families remained by that time. The last of these fathers to serve in the parish was the well-loved Rev. Karl A. Wuest, C.PP.S. On February 1, 1977 the Society of the Precious Blood withdrew and Rev. Stephen Metzger, a priest of the Diocese, was sent to Milford Center. In 1980 Father Metzger moved his residence from Milford Center to Plain City and on August 6, 1981 Bishop Hermann transferred the canonical title of parish from Milford Center back to Plain City. Since that time the pastors have been Rev. Raymond Carter, Rev. Homer Blubaugh, and Rev. Charles Klinger.

The church of St. Joseph erected in 1900 is still in use, although it has been modified inside and out: inside by the requirements of the liturgical changes of the last quarter century, outside by a severe storm on the evening of July 12, 1966, which toppled the steeple. In addition, in 1958 the basement was excavated under the entire structure for a meeting hall, kitchen, and other necessary facilities. Happily, the size of the church at present, at last, matches the size of the congregation worshipping there. In the on-going census, 328 souls are reported.

NOTES
A special thanks to Mr. Joseph Hofbauer, a member of St. Joseph parish, who provided the photographs of St. Joseph Church and Mr. Noon.

1. The History of Madison County, Ohio; Chicago: W. H. Beers & Co., 1883; page 1079.
2. Rev. Joseph Fitzgerald, Delaware, to Purcell, Mar. 18, 1861; courtesy of the University of Notre Dame Archives; copy in the Archives, Diocese of Columbus.
3. The cash account book is in the possession of the present pastor, Rev. Charles Klinger, who kindly made it available. Madison Co. Deed Record 30/326.
7. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Rev. Jerry
The oldest baptismal register of Pleasant Valley St. Joseph was kept on a single sheet of paper, which sufficed for the period from 1864 until 1869. When Father McGrath arrived as pastor in 1869, he began keeping the records in a small book. Later missionaries added to the book, but some scattered the records in odd places. The first two pages, left blank by Father McGrath, were used by later priests to record baptisms in 1879, 1872, and 1873. Father Kiffmeyer also wrote some records in 1872 and 1873 near the back of the book. All of these records have been returned to their chronological order for this publication. Their location in the book will be noted if not in chronological order there. The book continues into the year 1900. A complete transcription will be placed in the Society's files.

(Loose sheet) 1864

June 12 John, son of Michael Noon and Ann Meltay, age three weeks; spons. John and Mary Farrell. E. Fitzgerald.

same Ann, daughter of Joseph Connors and Bridget Kirwan, born Jan. 4; spons. James and Margaret Powers. EF

Oct. 9 Sara, daughter of John Sweeney and Catherine Carr, born Sept. 17; spons. John and Margaret Clarke. J. B. Murray

Feb. 12 Michael, son of John Lynch and Mary Neil, age 5 weeks; spons. Michael Lynch and Honora Maher. EF

Mar. 12 [blank], son of Barth. O'Keefe and Elizabeth Murphy; spons. John Fitzgerald and Honorata Maher. EF

Mar. 26 Matthew, son of David Lynch and Catherine Murphy, born Mar. 7; spons. Edward Quinn and Jane Lynch. EF


July 9 Catherine, daughter of Patrick Quinn and Ann Lavan, born May 9; spons. Michael Noon and wife. Jno. B. Murray

July 9 William, son of Edward Quinn and Elizabeth Gainor, born May 16; spons. Francis Nugent and Ann Quinn. JBM

Sept. 10 David, son of Francis McGuire and Jane O'Neill, born Aug. 26; spons. John Kane and Bridget Maher. J. Fitzgerald

---
Dec. 3 Thomas Fr., son of John Farrel and Cecilia Noono, born Nov. 26; spons. Jeremiah Noon and Elizabeth Nugent. JF
Dec. 3 Catherine, daughter of Michael Malone and Cecilia Collins, born Nov. 15; spons. Jeremiah Heshan and Julia Strapp. JF

1866
Mar. 11 Thomas, son of Matthew O'Halleran and Julia Burke, born Feb. 17; spons. Thomas Foody and Honorata Maher. "EF"
Mar. 11 James Thomas, son of Thomas Rinn and Ann Dugan, born Feb. 27; spons. Michael Finnegan and Cecilia McGlone. JF

1867
Aug. 18 Rose Frances, daughter of Michael Malone and Cecilia Collins, born July 24; spons. Matthew Hollaran and Julia Burke. F. C. Mallon

1868
Aug. 2 Mary Ann, daughter of Patrick Noon and Mary Cavanagh, born July 27; spons. Thomas Noon and Ann Cegan. FCM
July 5 John, son of William Gill and Jane Scott, born July 1; spons. John Toomay and Ann Kennedy. FCM
Aug. 2 John, son of Michael Gugan and Marcella McDermott, born July 18; spons. Michael Graham and Marcella Burns. FCM
Sept. 6 at Milford Center, Timothy, son of Daniel Egan and Mary Connor, born Aug. 23; spons. William Darcy and Catherine Connor. FCM
Oct. 4 Louis John, son of Laurence Sullivan and Catherine Enwright, age two months; spons. Patrick Lyons and Bridget. FCM

1869
June 16 (Provided whatever was missing for) Agnes Ann, daughter of Michael Malone and Cecilia Collins, born Apr. 18; spons. James Hartney and Isabella Holloran. N. A. Gallagher
same Catherine Teresa, daughter of Bartholomew Keefe and Eliza Murphy, born Apr. 5; spons. John Hartney and Mary Egan. NAG
same John Adam, son of John Adam Gundermann and Elizabeth Paulk, born Nov. 3; spons. Honora Hartney. NAG

1870
[no date given] Stephan Mary, son of Thomas Rinn and Honora Keegan, born Dec. 30; spons. John Murray and Hanna Noon. MFM
Feb. 8 Jane Mary, daughter of Daniel Clifford and Julia King, born Jan. 8; spons. Patrick and Mary King. MFM
Feb. 11 at Woodstock, John and James, twin sons of James Curren and Mary Spollen, born Feb. 10; spons Michael and Margaret Sullivan for one and
James Benden and Mary Mary [sic] Morressy for the other. MFM
Feb. 12 at Mechanicsburg, Edward Walter, son of Michael Fitzgibbon and
Ann Mahony, born Jan. 18; spon. Ann Nonnen. MFM
Feb. 12 at Mechanicsburg, James, son of James Conway and Margaret
Hasting, born Dec. 25; spon. Thomas Sullivan and Eleanor Hennessy. MFM
Mar. 20 Patrick, son of Patrick Noonan and Mary Cavanaugh, born Feb.
28; spon. Bartholomew Keefe and his wife Elizabeth. MFM
Mar. 25 at Marysville, Julia, daughter of Patrick Healy and Margaret
Bolton, born Mar. 11; spon. Michael St. John and his daughter Mary. MFM
Mar. 26 at St. Paris, Teresa, daughter of James McNally and Eleanor
McNally; spon. Thomas Cooney and Jane Cooney. MFM
Apr. 7 at Milford, Dennis, son of Dennis Denine [Devine?] and Honora
Clifford, born Mar. 25; spon. Timothy Clifford and Jane King. MFM
Apr. 8 at St. Paris, James, son of James Ryan and Margaret Cully, born
Feb. 24; spon. John Donehue and Jane Cully. MFM
Apr. 8 at Woodstock, Edward, son of Richard Lenihan and Eleanor Ryan,
born Apr. 2; spon. David Hanly and Margaret Stapelton. MFM
Apr. 10 at Mechanicsburg, John, son of Joshua Kennington and Bridget
Noonen, born Mar. 25; spon. James Sullivan and Jane Kennington. MFM
[no date] at Marysville, Catherine, born Apr. 6, daughter of James Walsh
and Ann Healy; spon. Patrick and Margaret Healy. MFM
Apr. 22 at Milford, Jane, born Apr. 2, daughter of James Lowrey and
Winifred Lyons; spon. John ——cke. MFM
May 1 Bridget Teresa, born Apr. 20, daughter of James Cary and
Eleanor Wilder (?); spon. George and Catherine Blackburne. MFM
May 2 at Jefferson, Edward, born Mar. 29, son of John Butler and Jane
Crego; spon. Richard Powell and Catherine Kennedy. MFM
May 15 James, born May 7, son of William Gill and Jane Scott; spon.
Michael and Margaret Grimes. MFM
May 22 at Milford, Nicholas, born Jan. 28, 1869, son of John Diugnen
and Catherine Moran; spon. Edward Doggett and Catherine Murphy. MFM
May 22 at Luisburg, Michael William, born May 14, son of Michael
Morrissey and Catherine Nagle; spon. Daniel Flinn and Margaret Cushman. MFM
May 29 at St. Paris, Joseph, born May 5, son of James Breslin and
Bridget Murphy; spon. John Moran and Winifred M'Keon. MFM
June 5 at Jefferson, Patrick, born May 29, son of Thomas Shanahan and
Margaret Campfield; spon. Patrick and Mary Powers. MFM
June 5 at Jefferson, Barbara E. and Mary A., twin daughters born Apr.
14 of Peter J. Fry and Anna ——iney; spon. N. Fry and Emelia Muller and Thomas
Murphy and Barbara Fry. MFM
June 5 (at Pleasant Valley) Ann, born Oct. 27, daughter of John
Flanagan and Mary Molony; spon. Thomas Flynn and Elizabeth Clark. MFM
June 7 at Marysville, Bridget, born Jan. 24, daughter of Edmund Cary
and Elizabeth Slattery; spon. John and Catherine Powers. MFM
June 8 at Woodstock, James Garett, born June 3, son of David Hanly and
Catherine Mealy; spon. William Shea and Bridget Connors.. MFM

(To be concluded)

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