



Haverford Township Historical Society



REV. JOHN J. FARRELL (1865-1939)

Compiled by Richard D. Kerr

[The following is excerpted and adapted from A History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania and Its People, John W. Jordan, editor, published by Lewis Historical Publishing Company, New York in 1914.]

One of the oldest Roman Catholic congregations in Pennsylvania is that of St. Denis, of Haverford township, their house of worship being the first of that faith erected in Delaware county. The first gatherings of what is now the St. Denis congregation were held at the house of Dennis Kelly, near the present Penfield railroad station. There were but few worshippers at first, but their number increased, and two years later, in 1825, the present site was selected and the first steps taken to erect a house of worship. Dennis Kelly, a wealthy woolen and cotton manufacturer, who may be called the founder of St. Denis, donated the site and was the largest contributor to the building fund, and the church members at that time were being employed in his mills on Cobb's Creek. The original building was small, plain and unpretentious in appearance, but after a few years was remodeled and enlarged, presenting a most pleasing appearance, both within and without. In the cemetery, beside the church, which it antedates, rest the ashes of the founder, Dennis Kelly.

Services were at first conducted at St. Denis by missionary priests from Philadelphia, until 1853, when the church became the spiritual charge of the Fathers of the Order of Saint Augustine, and has ever since continued under the direction of the Augustinian Fathers. The present church edifice was erected about 1852, and enlarged in 1873, and in 1903 the beautiful stone parsonage was added to the church property. The congregation meanwhile became a large and prosperous one, the membership reaching over one thousand souls, when the creation of a new parish at Ardmore somewhat decreased that number. The cemetery lying on both sides of the road, near the church and older than the church itself, is the resting place of many of the congregation who bore the burden of its upbuilding. Many priests have served the congregation, some of whom later rose to high position in their church. Among these may be named Bishops Kendrick O'Hara, O'Connor and Galberry, and the good Father Saurin, founder of Notre Dame University.

Rev. **JOHN J. FARRELL**, the present efficient pastor of St. Denis, was born in Philadelphia, November 2, 1865. His early education he obtained at the public schools, finishing at high school. He then prepared for the priesthood at Villanova College, under the direction of the Augustinian Fathers. He was ordained in Philadelphia, in 1895. His first official charge was at Atlantic City, New Jersey, where until 1906 he was assistant pastor of St. Nicholas' Church. He was then appointed pastor in charge of St. Denis, of which he has since been the spiritual head. Under his care the parish has maintained its leading position, all departments of its work being prosperous and useful. A devoted priest, Father Farrell has won the love and respect of his people, while those in ecclesiastic authority repose in him the greatest confidence.

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