

Madding Crows

By John Roe
district editor

If you drive too fast you'll miss it.

As you speed east towards Punkeydoodle's Corners on South Easthope Concession 2 & 3 — a road still called Pork Street by locals — you crest a small hill and dip down into a hollow, seeing a little blur as you pass by.

Stop and go back a moment.

The church you see lacks the cathedral-like grandeur of St. Patrick's in Kinkora.

Nor is it even the county's oldest church — losing that honor to the 132-year-old St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church a few miles north of Shakespeare.

But many would argue that St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church is the most beautiful in Perth County.

A small building fashioned from local field-stone, it is deceptively simple. It forms part of the rolling landscape of farms and woodlots, created from the forests, clay and rocks of South Easthope Township.

Look closer at the delicate woodwork rising like a sun above the whitewashed door — and the single row of red bricks arching above that.

And higher still, you see the date — 1863 — when the first pioneers built a permanent place of worship to replace an old log chapel.

On each side, three windows, that once let streaming sunlight in on the church-goers, are boarded up — but for the one day of the year when descendants of the original pioneers return for a summer memorial service.

Nothing disturbs the simple lines of the building. No gingerbread clutters the gables, no intricate carvings, gaping gargoyles or rambling spires.

Only a narrow white eaves surrounding the roof, leading always to the four triangular

cornices that themselves point up to the peak and the steeple — topped by a plain black wrought-iron cross.

Presiding over the whole scene a tall white stone angel raises an arm to bless the church and farm fields crowding around the churchyard fence.

At this time of year, snow still hides many graves, but spring will soon uncover a churchyard that goes back to the very beginnings of St. Anthony's when a small wooden chapel was built in 1839.

For years after the second stone church was built, township farmers faithfully attended mass, sitting in sun-washed pine pews, kneeling before the hand-carved altar, and listening to hymns played on the old manual pump organ.

After a time, most families turned to the larger church in New Hamburg, and St. Anthony's closed.

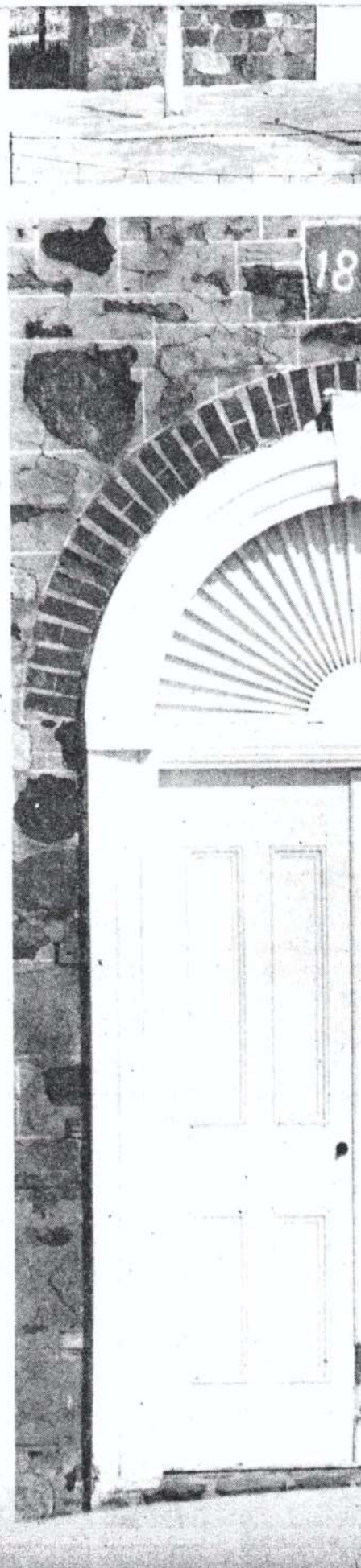
But after 67 years of disuse and neglect, the descendants of the church's founders banded together in 1939 and vowed to restore the building and churchyard.

Volunteer workmen, all local residents, restored the church inside and out, rebuilding the fences, ripping out roots and shrubs, pulling fallen tombstones back on their pedestals.

A local woman still acts as custodian, tending the church for the yearly service and any passers-by who care to stop and look.

But though attendance is always high for the yearly mass, St. Anthony's sits quietly for the other 364 days of the year, waiting perhaps for the blast of the last trump to break through the sound of the wind, or the quiet whirr of farm machines out in the fields.

It has already waited 129 years and today looks ready to sit patiently until the end of time.



Annual pilgrimage honors restored rural parish

Tiny stone church stands strong

By Mark Stewart
staff reporter

SHAKESPEARE — The tiny stone church stands alone on a small patch of land a few miles southeast of Shakespeare, surrounded only by the markings of a small cemetery.

Some of the gravestone inscriptions are barely legible, worn faint over the years. But the church itself is in near perfect condition. Its solid stone walls, tiny steeple, arched doorway and simple delicate windows are all intact.

The year 1863 is carved on a small stone inset above the front door. The well-preserved church looks almost brand new.

Thanks to family pride and local initiative, St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church has withstood the test of time and recovered from years of neglect. In the fall of 1988, when the church opens for its annual services, descendants of parish founders will celebrate the building's 125th anniversary.

The stone structure is one of the oldest standing churches in Perth County but according to a Beacon Herald story compiled by Rev. W.T. Corcoran in the

1940s, the roots of the rural parish go back nearly 150 years.

In 1839, the first log chapel was built on the same site in South Easthope Township.

For years, a small separate school was conducted in the log chapel but declining enrolment brought an end to classes after the new stone church was built 24 years later.

The present stone church including a small sanctuary, three altars and a small tower were built in 1863 under the charge of Rev. Fr. E. Funcken.

An original list of church subscribers contains 46 names, mostly Germans along with a handful of Scots.

Mass was apparently celebrated no more than once a month until the early 1870s when services were stopped because of a dwindling congregation.

With continued complaints of distance, isolation and primitive travelling to St. Anthony's, people of the parish were gradually split between alternative churches in Stratford and New Hamburg.

Continued on next page



Three old gravestones are tucked away in the corner of the small rural cemetery at St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church in South Easthope Township (a few miles southeast of Shakespeare). A small log chapel was constructed on the site in 1839 and these worn headstones are an indication of how long the tiny parish has survived.

Tavistock church 'lives' one day a year

By John Roe
Record staff

TAVISTOCK — For 364 days of the year, old Joseph Dietrich, Vincent Weiss, an angel and the other residents of St. Anthony's cemetery have the place to themselves.

All that time, the silence surrounding Perth County's oldest Roman Catholic church is broken only by a chorus of nesting birds in spring, the crickets chirping in late summer and the occasional tractor grumbling over the land.

But one day every year, company comes calling on Dietrich, Weiss and the tall, stone angel that raises an arm in silent blessing over the fields crowding around the churchyard.

And suddenly, St. Anthony's lives again. It doesn't matter that regular services stopped here in 1871 when a handful of farmers began walking and driving down the road through Punkydoodie's Corners to a bigger church in New Hamburg.

Long after dozens of other pioneer churches in the area have been abandoned, forgotten and allowed to crumble back into the soil, St. Anthony's walls stand strong and proud, and the faithful still return to the church named for the patron saint of those who seek what has been lost.

"My great-great grandfather gave the half-acre for this church," explains 77-year-old Francis Dietrich, of Tavistock, a direct descendant of the Joseph Dietrich who lies beneath the green turf nearby.

"It's part of our family, I guess. This is an old landmark around here and there's no way we'll ever let it go."

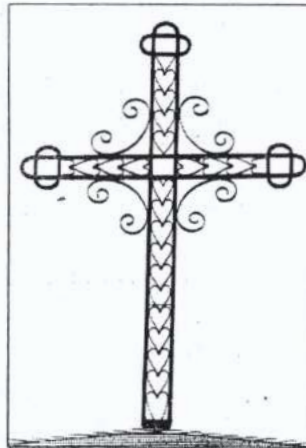
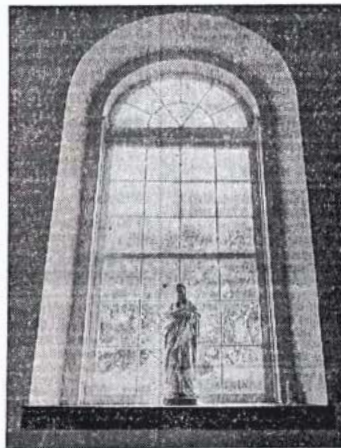
Last Sunday, 150 people — many descendants of Dietrich, Weiss and the other German-speaking pioneers who built the little fieldstone church — came back to celebrate St. Anthony's 125th birthday.

On that one day, the shutters came off and sunlight streamed in again on whitewashed walls and wine-colored carpets laid for the occasion.

The sound of wind rushing through the cornfields was replaced by the murmur of voices praying and the soft words of benediction uttered by the priest.

With worshippers sitting shoulder-to-shoulder inside, the big doors were flung open and dozens more sat in lawnchairs outside looking in.

Strangers may wonder why they bother to



The church is spare, but appealing, with its large windows, heart-filled cross and carefully tended statuary.

ramrod straight in those hard-backed pews, or why they pay in money or sweat to preserve the church.

It's a mixture of faith and family, people like Dietrich will tell you. The worshippers come to St. Anthony's, he explains, to find something most other people have lost and which they themselves might otherwise lose.

The church, he admits, lacks a cathedral's grandeur. But its simplicity and its place — cradled in the lap of a hillside five kilometres northeast of Tavistock, on a road locals still call Pork Street — make it one of Ontario's most beautiful churches.

The earth bore St. Anthony's. In a Tavistock nursing home, 94-year-old Charles Yausie still tells how his grandmother picked stones from the fields to raise the church walls.

The wide-planked floor, the sun-bleached pine pews, the hand-hewn altar were all wrested from primeval forest. No gingerbread clutters the gables, no gaping garroves or rambling spires disturb the cen-

But a delicate, fan-shaped transom rises like a sun above the double doors, and the four, triangular cornices guide the eye to the steeple — topped by a stark, black wrought-iron cross of interlocking hearts — and the sky above.

Few Roman Catholics ever lived in South Easthope Township and priests performed mass at St. Anthony's regularly for only eight years. After that, the congregation dwindled and dispersed and the church doors slammed shut for 68 years.

"It was a real mess in the '30s," Dietrich recalls, thoughtfully stroking the stubble on his unshaved chin. "I remember it as a boy, smothered with weeds with the choke cherries all around it. But we got together and changed it. The stone angel was falling over but we put him back up. Then we drew 100 loads of earth in here."

Ever since 1939, Dietrichs and Weisses, Dantzers, Hatleibs, Scheerers and others have loyally returned once each summer to St. Anthony's.

goes on. This summer, 15 farmers worked with a contractor to put a new roof on the building. Dietrich and others are now trying to raise about \$12,000 to fix the stonework.

And on a late summer's day, Dietrich and his three-legged dog Eno can be seen poking around the churchyard, trying to root out the groundhogs that tunnel down into the tombs of his ancestors.

Even people from other denominations lend a hand. Robert Krug, a Lutheran from Tavistock, attends the yearly mass and helped put on a new roof earlier this year.

"How did they get those big fieldstones up top on the walls?" he asks, marvelling at the little church. "Who made the altar, who were the people? Did they walk across the fields and up the dusty roads? It will never be known."

He twists the skeleton key in the lock and tests to see the door is locked again.

"When you come here, you can set yourself back six-score years in time, you can feel the seasonal stillness of the area. It's far from the maddest of times, and you can

Church is used once a year

By Record Staff Writer

TAVISTOCK — The little stone church nestled in fields of corn and wheat sits like a jewel mounted in the serenity of the countryside.

Tourists seek it out for its beauty and history while local people speak of it as a shrine.

St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church was built in 1863 under the leadership of Rev. F. E. Funcken but was only used for eight years before it was closed.

Why it was closed is uncertain because historical records are either non-existent or sketchy.

The windows were boarded and grass and weeds in the small, rolling yard and cemetery allowed to grow unattended for 68 years.

In 1939, the little church was given a new lease on life.

Members of Immaculate Conception Church in Stratford under the leadership of the late Rev. W. T. Corcoran restored the building and grounds.

For 33 years since the restoration the church has been used only once a year each autumn for the celebration of mass.

This year the annual mass will be celebrated Sept. 10 at 12:30 p.m. by Rev. Vincent Gleason, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church. St. Anthony's is three miles northeast of Tavistock.

Robert Krug, a Tavistock funeral director and local history buff, said as many Prot-

estants as Catholics attend the annual mass.

"I wouldn't miss that mass for anything — and we are Lutherans," he said.

Women from the Stratford church dust, sweep and scrub the church's interior a few days before the mass and decorate the altars and window sills with flowers.

A red threadbare carpet, which could be as old as the church itself, is rolled down the centre aisle.

The interior is made entirely of unfinished pine, some of it hand hewn.

The sanctuary is built two steps higher than the main floor of the church and is enclosed by a communion rail.

Two rows of pews — seven in one and eight in the other — provide seating for about 60 people.

Six rounded windows made up of small, clear panes of glass are the only source of light since the building has never been wired for electricity.

The church is not heated, but a wood-burning stove once sat in the centre of the building with a long stovepipe stretching up to the chimney.

The only purpose for the small belfry seems to be to support a cross, since, as far as is known, there has never been a bell.

The 14 stations of the cross spaced around the inside look tiny, even for this small church. They are pictures

showing the various stages of the passion and death of Christ in black six-by-four-inch frames.

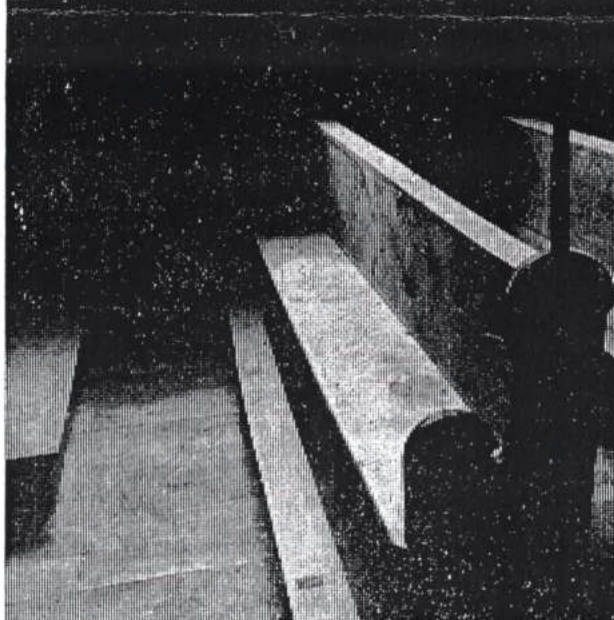
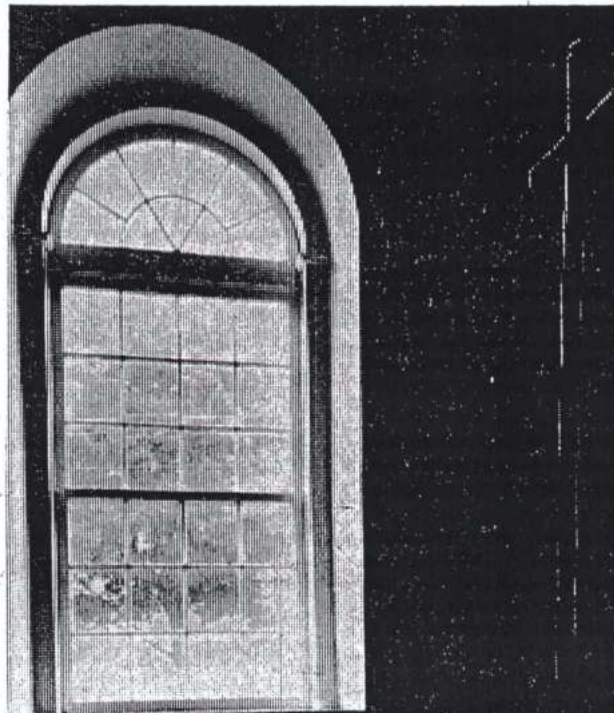
Stairs lead to a choir loft, whose main distinction is an ancient reed organ, the age of which is anybody's guess. It can still produce some sounds and could probably be repaired if the right craftsman were found.

The rolling lawn that surrounds the shrine is mowed

and trimmed every week while wild flowers thrive on both sides of the wire farm fence that separates the yard and surrounding fields.

The six-inch steel key that unlocks the front door — the only door — is carefully guarded.

It is kept at the neighboring farm of Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Bundscho who only give it out to visitors with the permission of the pastor of Immaculate Conception.



Need A Good Read?

(continued from page two)

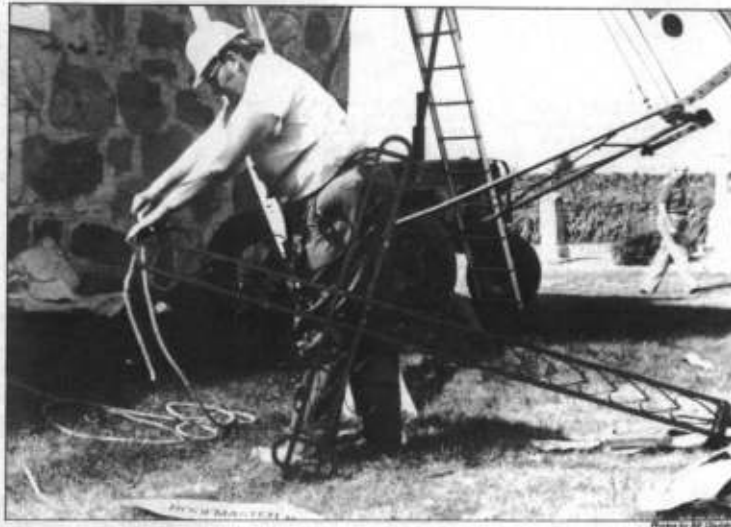
who don't accept the inevitability of violence and who are risking their own lives to live in peace.

Now two books just for fun. Did you ever earn a trip to church camp by memorizing Bible verses? Can you recite the books of the Bible in their correct order with the appropriate sing-song? Then you'll probably laugh, like I did, through the pages of a whimsical *Growing Up Born Again* (Fleming Revell, 1987, \$5.95) by five writers who were all born, like I was, between 1949 and 1951. That age span may be as important as the "born again" label in appreciating what to some may be irreverent humour. But I thought I'd roll off the couch when I read that someone besides me and my sisters used to wonder at prayer meetings (the kind where you turned around in your seat and knelt with your face towards your bench) about the awful smell of the bench where a hundred bodies before you had sat. In case you're curious whether the authors are just making fun, on the back cover they say, "our memories are sometimes hilarious, sometimes poignant, but mostly affectionate and full of gratitude."

The fourth book you might try for light summer reading is called *The First Book of Last Times*, (Palm Beach Newspapers, 1987, \$6.95) by Ron Wiggins and Pat Crowley. You'll get the gist of the book if I quote you a few lines like "When was the last time your Dad carried you in sleeping from the car" or "You had a splinter and your Dad held you down while you thrashed and screamed." the authors point out that everyone keeps records of the first - first step, first word, first date, but no one commemorates the "lasts" because who knows it's going to be the last time your mother reminded you to wear clean underwear because you might end up in a hospital emergency room.

A good book takes us places we may never visit, lets us "get inside of" people we'll never meet, helps us to feel a shared humanity, and, if nothing else, provides a good belly laugh in a time when there is often so little to laugh about. Happy reading!

For two leaflets recommending other good books, write to Melodie Davis, Your Time, 131 Erie Street West, Waterloo, Ont. N2L 1T7.



Pork Street Church Refurbished by Volunteer Workers

St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church on Pork Street in South Easthope Township received a new roof and other renovations last week. The job was performed

by at least fifteen volunteers and friends of the old church.

New asphalt shingles were applied to the roof after the removal of the old chimney which was located at about two-thirds of the way back on the roofline. The steeple (which may originally have contained a bell) also received a covering of vinyl siding. Foreman, Herb Wagler, (top) attaches a rope to the church's metal cross just before it was hoisted into position by three workers last Wednesday morning. The handmade symbol features a unique, interlocking hearts design within the cross pattern. It received a new coat of black paint before it was re-positioned on the steeple.

Joe Wagler, Brent Wagler and Don Mordue are seen on the peak placing the cross back on its

moorings.

Built in 1863, and presently under the jurisdiction of Immaculate Conception Church in Stratford, the old structure hosts mass once a year in late summer of the year.

**THE DEPARTED
Dorothy Pearson**

Mrs. Dorothy Pearson of RR 5, Woodstock, in her 87th year passed away at the Woodstock General Hospital on Saturday, July 9, 1988.

She was the widow of Joseph William Pearson who died in 1976. Dear mother of son J. Edward (and his wife Vita) Pearson of Woodstock and daughter, Mary E. (and her husband Donald) Sanders of RR 5, Woodstock. Also surviving are thirteen great grandchildren. Sister of Mrs. Nancy Chesney of RR 5, Woodstock, Mrs. Alice Earl of Woodstock, Mrs. Nellie Chesney of Inverkip and the late Bob and the late Tom Chester, the late Meta Hayward and the late Elizabeth Counsel. Friends were received at the M.D. (Mac) Smith Funeral Home, Woodstock until Tuesday when transfer was made to the Old St. Paul's Anglican Church for the complete service.

Interment was in the Anglican Church Cemetery.

**THE DEPARTED
Mrs. Marion B. Tucker**

Mrs. Marion B. Tucker, 89, of the Caressant Care Home, Woodstock passed away on Saturday, July 9, 1988.

She was formerly a resident of Marlboro Street in Woodstock and widow of Ernest T. Tucker who died in 1974.

She is survived by her daughter Mrs. Jean Roberts of Salford and son, Norman Tucker of Tavistock. Grandmother of five grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.

She was predeceased by sisters Annie Gillott, Tillie Walker and a brother John Stewart.

Friends were received at the M.D. (Mac) Smith Funeral Home, Woodstock where a service was held by Rose Rebecca Lodge on Monday at 7 p.m. and the funeral service was held on Tuesday, July 12th with Rev. Dr. C.H. Dickinson officiating.

Interment was in Oxford Memorial Park Cemetery. Those planning expressions of sympathy are asked to consider the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

**GET YOUR WEDDING
INVITATIONS AND
BUSINESS STATIONERY
AT THE GAZETTE**

**NOTICE TO RATEPAYERS
TOWNSHIP OF EAST ZORRA-TAVISTOCK**

Your co-operation is hereby requested during the current dry spell to refrain from open burning of any kind. The risk of fire spreading to surrounding buildings is very high due to the lack of moisture.

Thank you - and have a happy, fire-free summer!

Mahlon Leis,
Township Fire Chief

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES (Please check membership desired)
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Cheque enclosed for \$ _____

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- Junior Lessons - FREE - Sign up at tennis courts
- Senior Lessons - If Requested



FOR LESSONS - Sign up at tennis courts or contact Alfred Thier - 655-2661