

## Acton's St. Joseph's Church

# These bells are now electric

By ASTRA PAPE  
Herald Staff Writer

Acton's St. Joseph's Catholic Church is one that has attempted to keep pace with the times, yet certain things remind those who enter it of days when things were less complicated.

Like the lone bell in the steeple. Until recently, the bell had to be rung by hand, using a long rope just as the friars did centuries ago. Now the bell has become automated.

It only takes the flick of a switch to ring the bell. But once the cold weather hits, the mechanism becomes obstinate and the church reverts back to the time-honored method of hauling on the rope to summon the worshippers.

St. Joseph's was actually built to serve another branch of the Christian faith. It was built by the Congregationalists of Churchill in 1877. The Congregationalists had decided that they wanted a newer, larger church and left the century-old building they had been worshipping in.

They built the structure on Church Street at a cost of \$8,000, an exorbitant sum for those times. A few years later, the toll of maintaining the payments for the church construction and properly supporting the minister was soon felt as more and more of the congregation moved away.

The Congregationalists were forced to surrender their church and they moved back into the little old church that had served them well for 100 years.

St. Joseph's was occupied for a few years by the Lord's Army and the Salvation Army until the St. Joseph's congregation paid off the mortgage

and secured the church as their own.

St. Joseph's parish had been established long before they moved into their present building. It was founded in 1842 as a Catholic community steadily grew in the northern part of Halton county and in particular around Acton and Georgetown. The parishioners were served by Jesuit priests from the Church of Our Lady in Guelph who visited and celebrated mass in various Acton homes until 1857.

At that point, it was decided that the people needed a church to worship in since their numbers had grown and they could no longer accommodate all the followers in one home at a time.

They constructed their first church at Little Dublin, approximately two and a half miles from the site of the present church. The construction commenced in 1857 during the eve of the Feast of St. Joseph on two acres of land that had been donated to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton by two area residents.

The first service was performed in the church over a year later in August 1858.

Within twenty years, the congregation had already outgrown the church they had built and rather than build another one, they decided to purchase another. In 1877, the parish moved into their present church after some renovations to the building had been completed.

The church at Little Dublin was torn down but the spot is still considered to be sacred by the congregation and a cemetery is maintained there. A monument has been erected to dedicate the site of their first

church and in memory of the early congregations.

The population of the Roman Catholic community in Acton remained fairly stable until

well into the 20th century so relatively few changes were made to the church once the parish had settled in. Yet by the late 1920s the

congregation had grown slightly to warrant further renovations and the church had to be altered somewhat to accommodate the additional people.

The entire outer wall was removed and pulled out so that the altar could be moved a few feet further back and an additional front row of pews could be installed. A vestry was also added during the construction and the church now seats 200 people.

Approximately ten years later, the plain glass windows had to be removed and it was suggested by a member of the parish that they install stained glass instead. They agreed it would enhance the church and ten stained glass windows were installed by several families in memory of various outstanding members of the parish.

Construction was far from completed on the church interior. A few years later, the basement was renovated to serve as a meeting room for the various church groups and activities. The meeting room did double duty as a furnace room and all the members had to hold their meetings around the giant monstrosity that kept the church warm.

In the early 1970s this problem was resolved when a new heating system was installed along with a kitchen

in the hall. The old furnace was torn out creating a much larger area. Five years later, the hall received its final touch with the addition of carpeting.

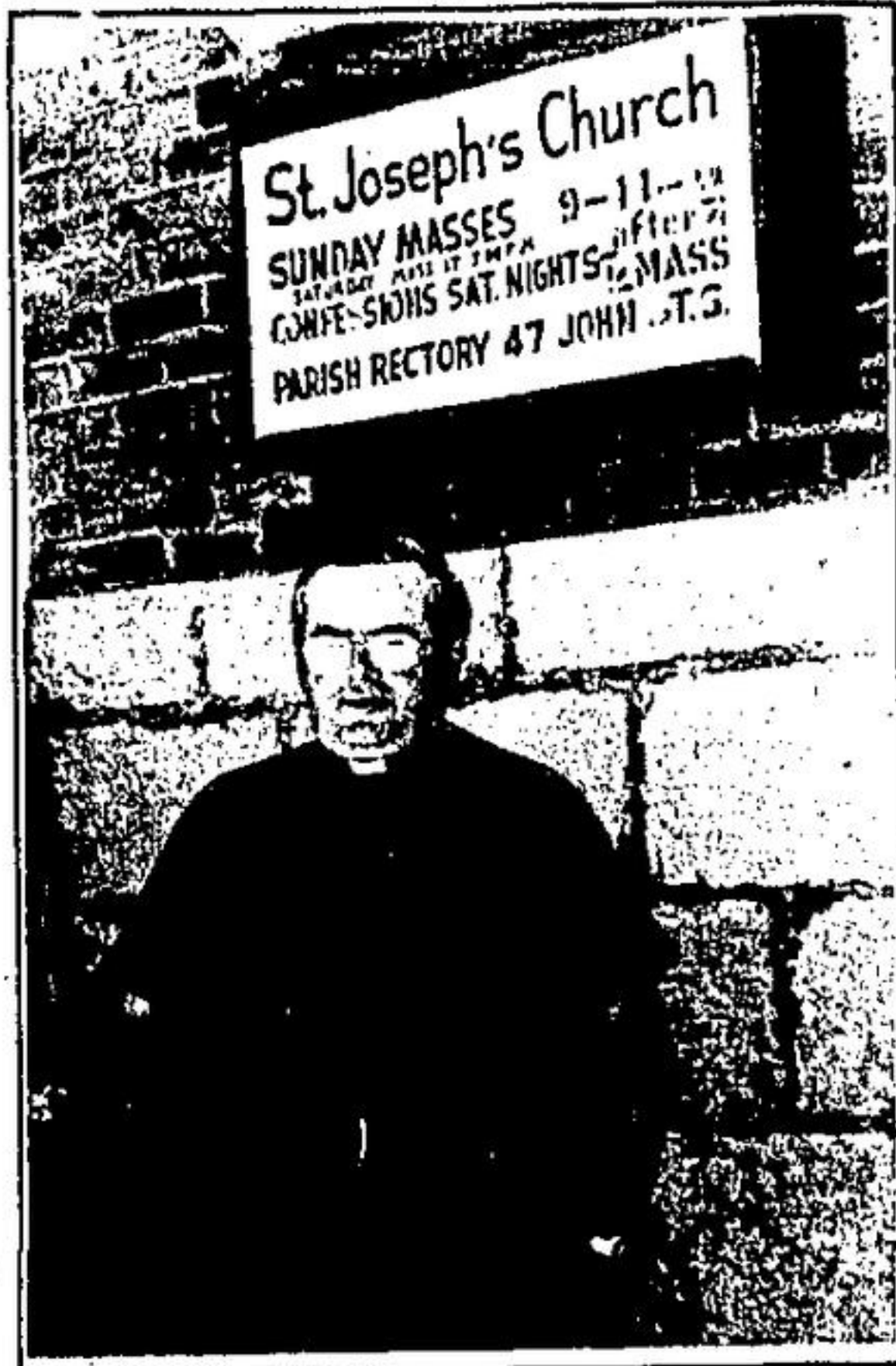
The hall is used today for various church functions and by community groups including the Brownies, and the Catholic Women's League. Alcoholics Anonymous also hold their meetings there.

A new altar has been added to the church within the last ten years completing its new look.

Twelve priests have served St. Joseph's since the first permanent priest was stationed there in 1893. Father Leo Speagle is the thirteenth priest, serving a community of 400 families. Most of the priests have lived in the rectory house on John Street which was bought in the early 1900s.

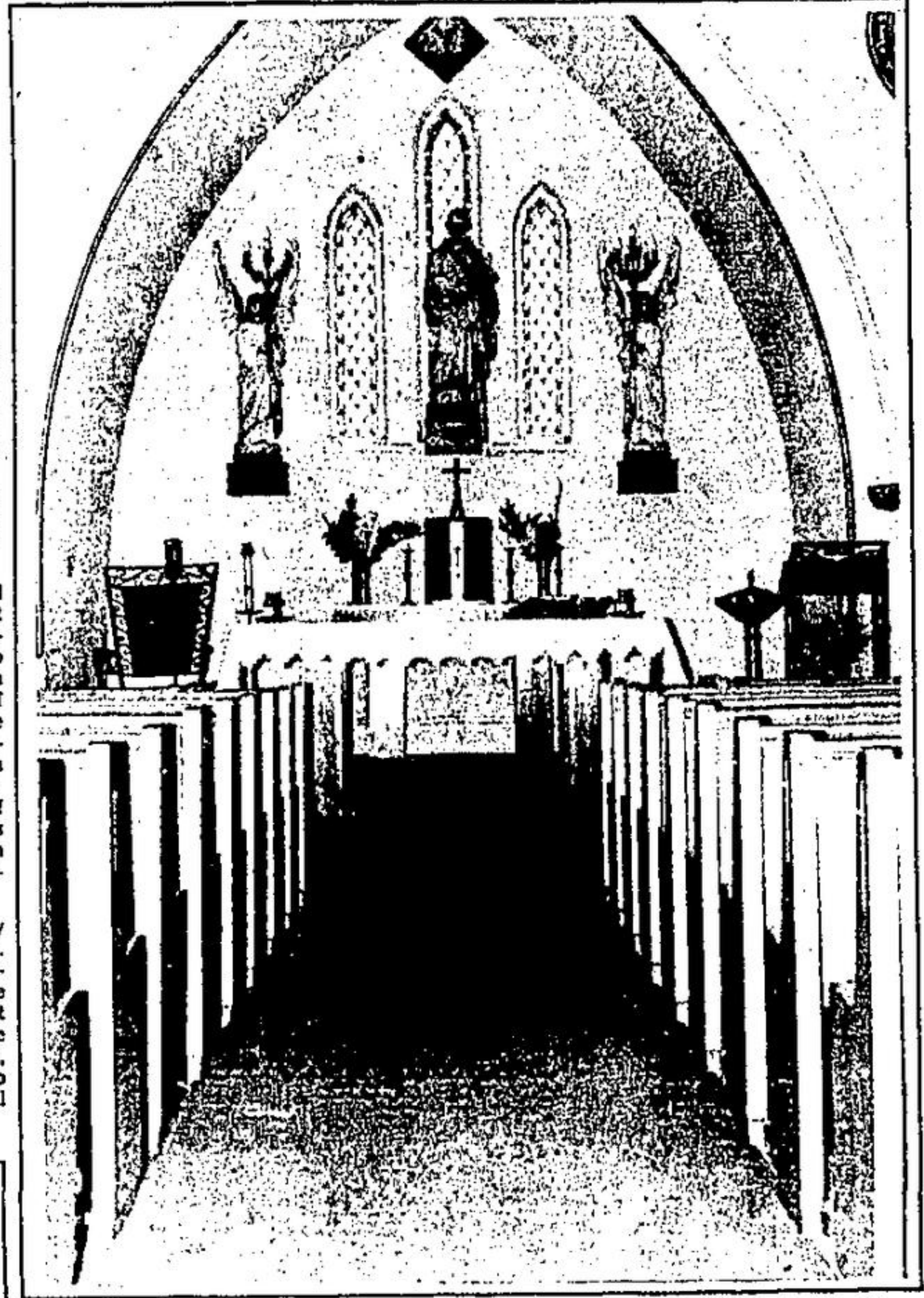
The priest that the parish of St. Joseph's will always remember is Father Morgan who served the people faithfully for 32 years.

Acton has changed greatly over the past 100 years and St. Joseph's has changed accordingly. However, its little mutations are subtle and not readily apparent from the exterior. The community will, in all likelihood, continue to grow and with any luck, so will St. Joseph's.



Father Leo Speagle has been serving the parish of St. Joseph in Acton for the last three years and was in Hamilton prior to that. The priest who had served the parish the longest was Father Morgan who had worked for 32 years with the Acton community.

Father Speagle conducts services for St. Joseph's every day except Monday. Services are held Saturdays at 8 a.m. and 7 p.m., Sundays at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., Wednesdays and Fridays at 8 a.m. and Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7 p.m. Sunday school classes held in preparation for the first communion are also offered but times vary depending upon the individual children. Father Speagle hears confessions every Saturday after mass.



The entire outer wall of St. Joseph's church was removed completely in the 1920s as the altar was pulled back a few feet to accommodate another row of pews in the front. The altar itself was again removed a few years ago and replaced by a new one.



St. Joseph's Church in Acton was actually built by the Congregationalists of Churchill in 1877. They left the church when they could no longer maintain it and the St. Joseph parish bought it a few years later after their own church at Little Dublin had become too small.

### School break-in

Various persons broke into Speyside Public School in Acton over the weekend for no apparent reason. They broke into the school through a window but caused no damage and stole nothing from the school premises.

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## Art Williams new area Mennonite pastor

### IN THE CHURCHES

The recently formed Brampton Mennonite Church has announced the appointment of a new full-time pastor.

Reverend Art Williams began his new assignment July 1 at the church which meets in the Centennial Recreation Centre on 80 Mary Road. Pastor Williams arrived from Leamington (Ontario), where he was in charge of the Mennonite Brethren Church for over six years.

He has also pastored the Bethesday Church in Huron, South Dakota and the Lakeview Church in Chicago, Illinois. He has studied at the Columbia Bible Institute, the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg and Trinity Theological Seminary in Deerfield, Illinois.



ART WILLIAMS

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