



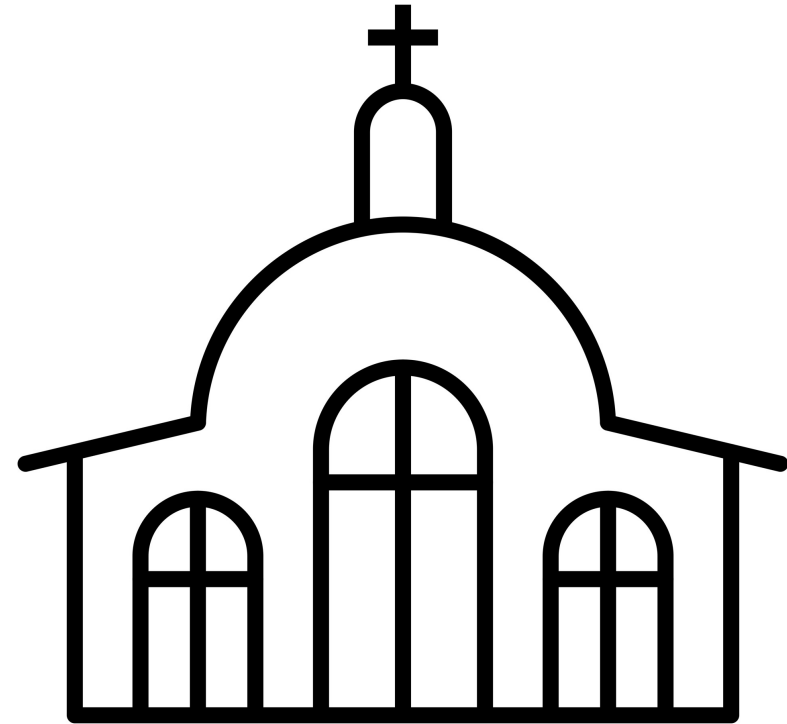
# A SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK

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The Story of Monsignor Edward J. McGolrick  
and St. Cecilia's Parish  
Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York

Monsignor McGolrick used to joke “there was not one rich parishioner left in his parish...”

Obituary, August 25, 1938,  
*The Brooklyn Citizen*



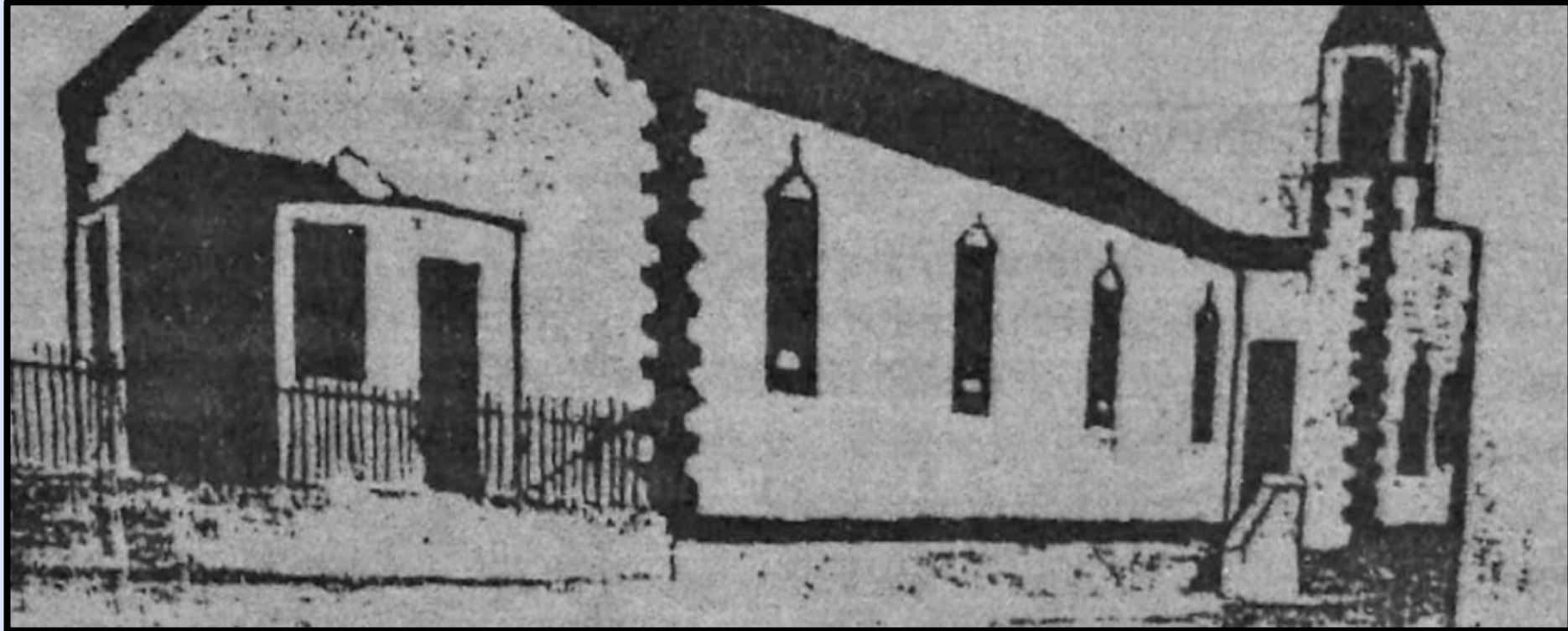


In the 1880s, Greenpoint, Brooklyn, was home to Irish working-class families who built, fitted and rigged ships. All kinds of ships - sloops, clippers, whalers, steamships, tug-boats, etc.

Most notably, Greenpointers built the U.S. Navy's first iron-clad warship, *USS Monitor*, in 101 days.

Glass, porcelain and pottery manufacturers peppered the area. In 1867, the first modern oil refinery was built in Greenpoint. The average salary was \$15 per week.

Launching the *USS Monitor*



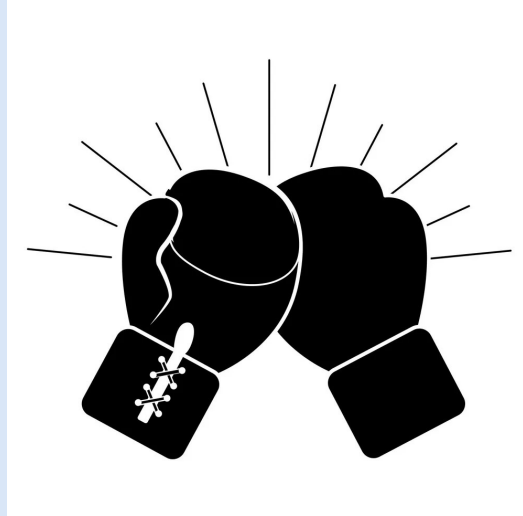
Founded in 1869, the parish of St. Cecilia's got off to a rocky start. The fledgling congregation built a small frame church that seated 400.

In 1883, parishioners stormed the Bishop's residence to demand he remove the pastor. For the next five years the parish floundered along.



Then, on a freezing rain-soaked November evening, young Father Edward J. McGolrick arrived. He jumped off a streetcar and made his way to the dilapidated church. The roof leaked. The parish was “burdened with debt and dissension.”

In the gloom, Father McGolrick spotted a small shed with a promising sign - “The Young Men's Literary Society of St. Cecilia’s.”



The few books scattered around were unopened. Many years later, Monsignor McGolrick recalled, "The young men of that literary society were very busy in the use and care of their boxing-gloves."

But at that moment, "a resolution was born in Father McGolrick's heart that those earnest young men should receive from him every possible encouragement." One went on to be a Kings County District Attorney and New York State Supreme Court Justice.

Before the boys headed home, Father McGolrick recruited them to be ushers. One, who had to be forced into it by his friends, served for thirty years – until his death.




One alum of those early days at St. Cecilia's told *The Brooklyn Eagle*...

“Back when I was a kid, I was a choir boy at St. Cecilia’s Church. I didn’t see Msgr. McGolrick for 20 years. Then I recognized him as he led a St. Patrick’s Day parade. I said: ‘Hello, Father.’ And, right off the bat, he said, ‘Hello, Ed. How are you living?’

“The biggest kick I ever got out of anything was when I felt I was able to look him in the face and say, O.K.”

Edmund Smith  
33+ years with the Register’s Office  
*The Brooklyn Eagle*, March 14, 1935



For the benefit of St. Cecilia's and the Greenpoint community, over the course of thirty-five years, Father McGolrick built:

1892 – Rectory

1893 – St. Cecilia Church

1903 – Loughlin Lyceum

1904 – The Day Nursery

1909 – St. Cecilia's School

Ca. 1910 - Library

1912 – Convent

1917 – McGolrick Playing Field

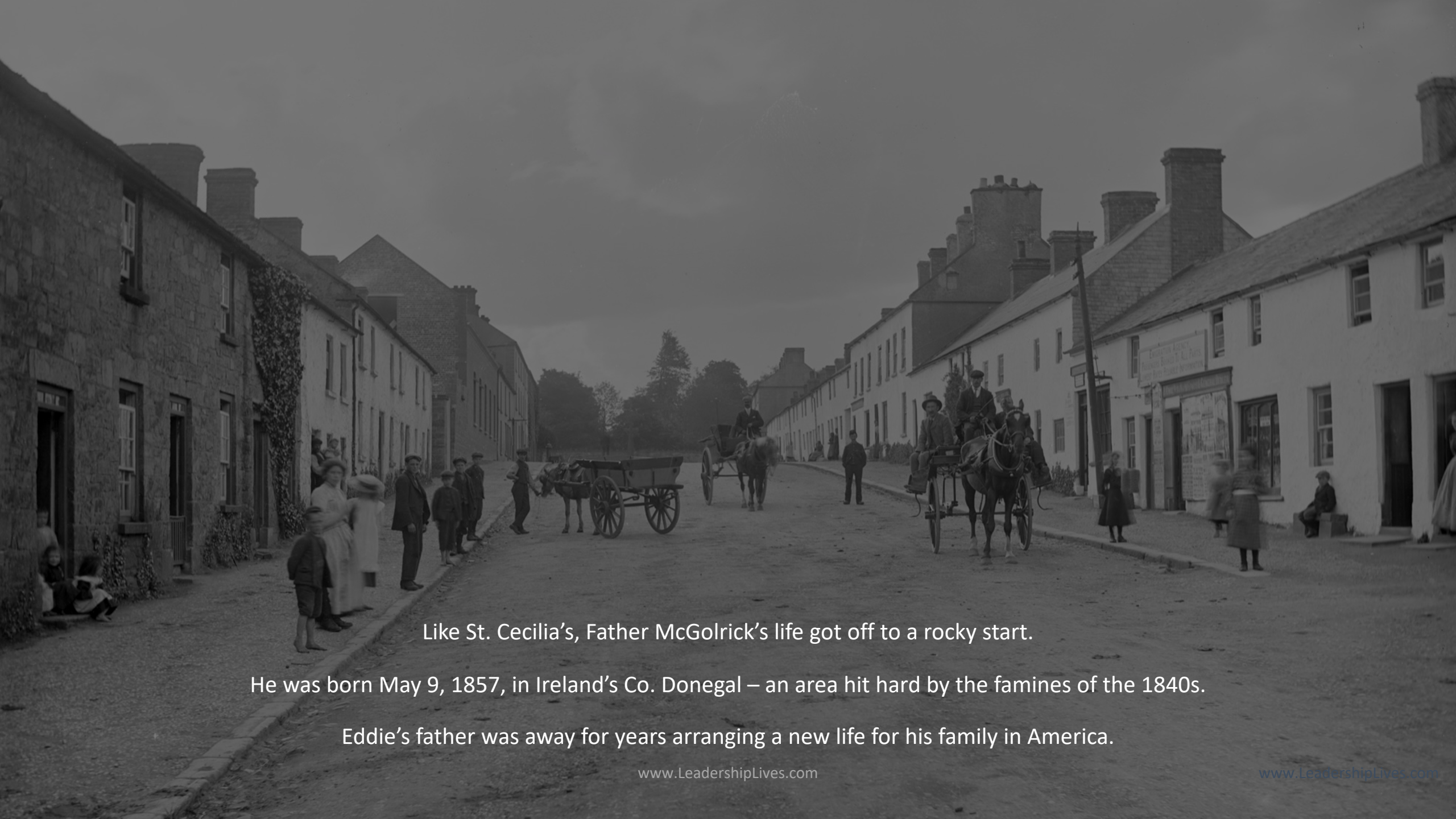
1927 – The Maternity Hospital

McGolrick Park  
Greenpoint, Brooklyn



# St. Cecilia Properties Ca. 1920s – 1940s

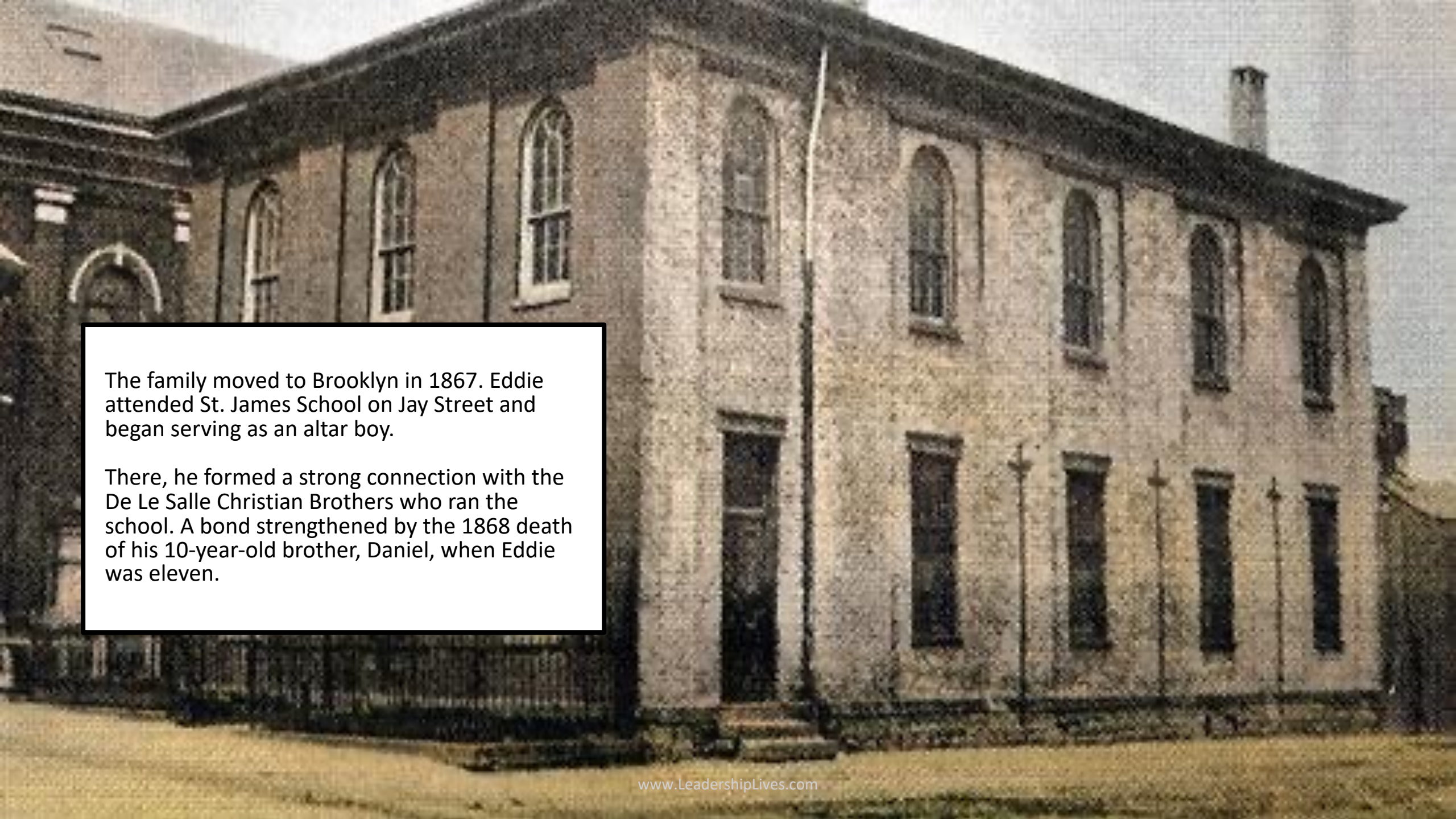
1. St. Cecilia Church
2. Rectory
3. Lyceum
4. School
5. Convent
6. Library
7. McGolrick Field
8. Day Nursery
9. Maternity Hospital



Like St. Cecilia's, Father McGolrick's life got off to a rocky start.

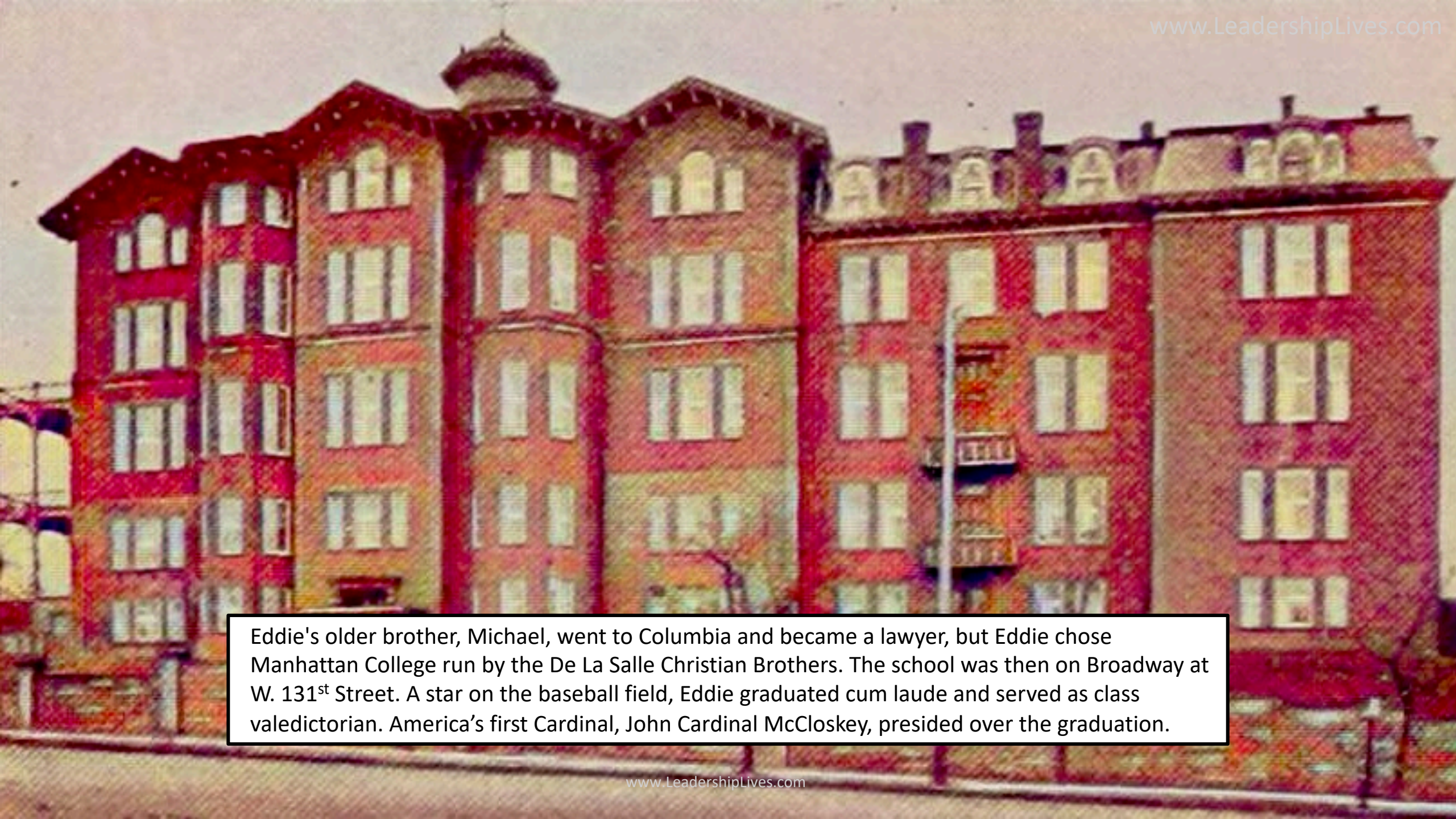
He was born May 9, 1857, in Ireland's Co. Donegal – an area hit hard by the famines of the 1840s.

Eddie's father was away for years arranging a new life for his family in America.



The family moved to Brooklyn in 1867. Eddie attended St. James School on Jay Street and began serving as an altar boy.

There, he formed a strong connection with the De Le Salle Christian Brothers who ran the school. A bond strengthened by the 1868 death of his 10-year-old brother, Daniel, when Eddie was eleven.



Eddie's older brother, Michael, went to Columbia and became a lawyer, but Eddie chose Manhattan College run by the De La Salle Christian Brothers. The school was then on Broadway at W. 131<sup>st</sup> Street. A star on the baseball field, Eddie graduated cum laude and served as class valedictorian. America's first Cardinal, John Cardinal McCloskey, presided over the graduation.



Eddie, then, enrolled in a five-year seminary program at the American College in Rome. His father traveled with him as far as Ireland.

By all accounts, Eddie was a cheerful, happy and “buoyant” person, but he always looked rather glum in photos.

His father and brother-in-law attended his ordination in Rome. Then the once-poor Irish immigrants spent seven weeks touring Europe - Italy, Strasbourg, Paris, London, and Ireland – before returning home.

Back in Brooklyn, Father McGolrick was assigned to St. Patrick’s on Kent Avenue as an assistant pastor. He served there for six years.

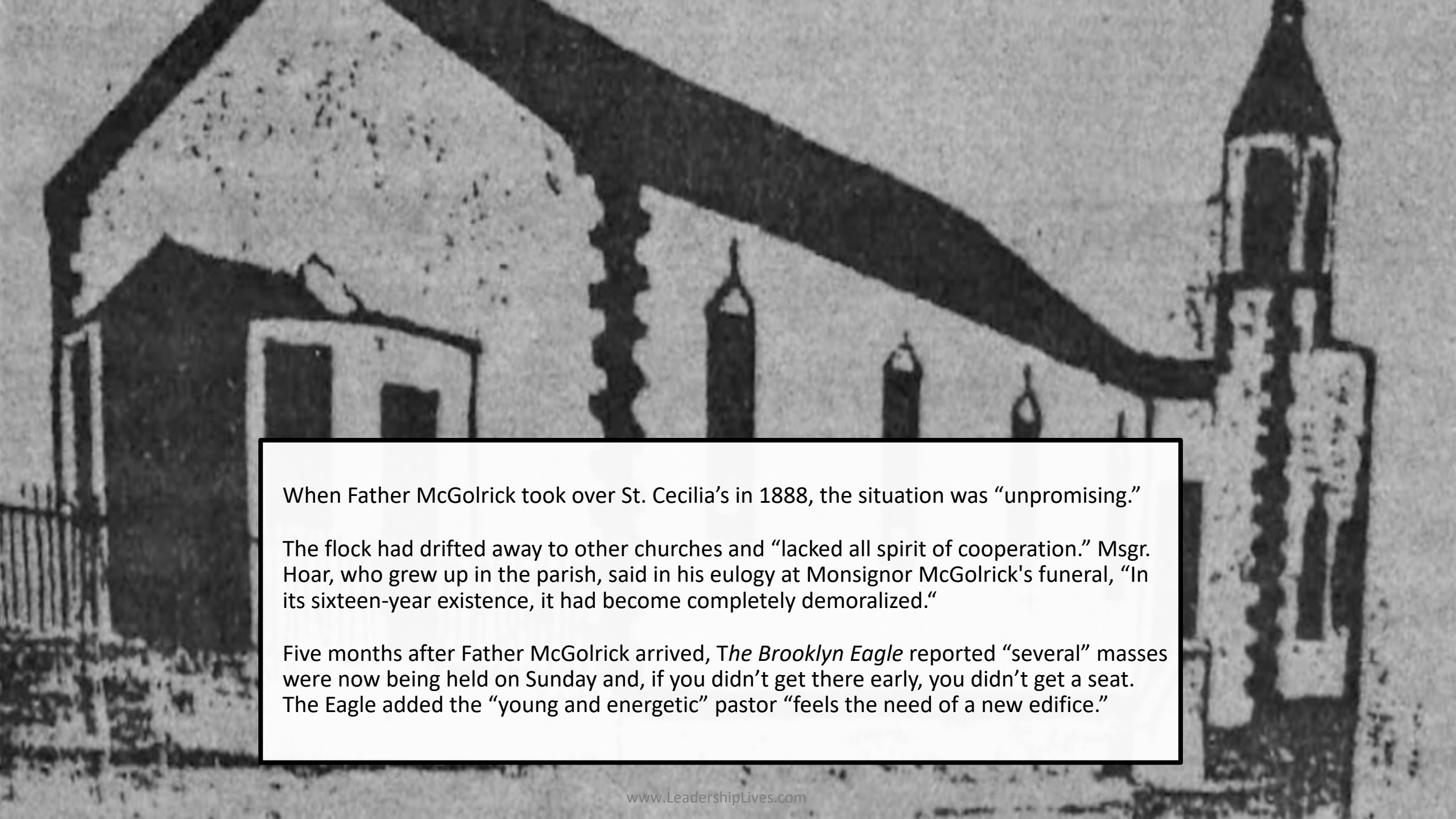
Edward J. McGolrick during his seminary days at the American College in Rome, 1877 – 1882.

Eddie grew up in a robust parish of immigrants.

In the early 1870s, his parents, along with other families, built Church of the Sacred Heart on Clermont Street - steps from the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Sacred Heart encompassed most of a city block and included a rectory, convent, school, playground and a "Lyceum," a meeting place for the community.

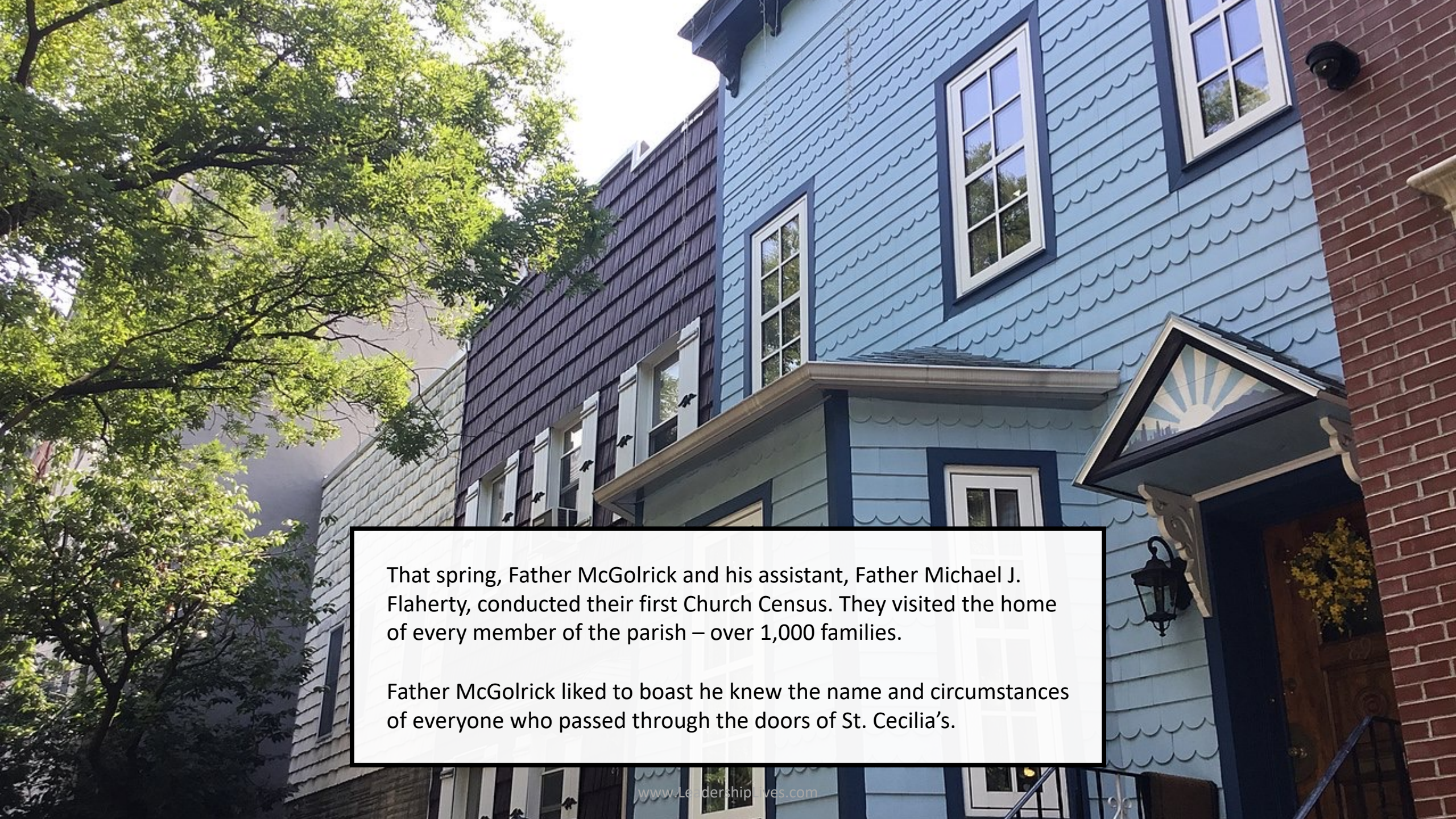




When Father McGolrick took over St. Cecilia's in 1888, the situation was "unpromising."

The flock had drifted away to other churches and "lacked all spirit of cooperation." Msgr. Hoar, who grew up in the parish, said in his eulogy at Monsignor McGolrick's funeral, "In its sixteen-year existence, it had become completely demoralized."

Five months after Father McGolrick arrived, *The Brooklyn Eagle* reported "several" masses were now being held on Sunday and, if you didn't get there early, you didn't get a seat. The Eagle added the "young and energetic" pastor "feels the need of a new edifice."



That spring, Father McGolrick and his assistant, Father Michael J. Flaherty, conducted their first Church Census. They visited the home of every member of the parish – over 1,000 families.

Father McGolrick liked to boast he knew the name and circumstances of everyone who passed through the doors of St. Cecilia's.



# CENSUS COLLECTION

MAY, 1889.

## St. Cecilia's Roman Catholic Church,

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Union Ave.		Consoyca St.		Frost St.	
230	Mr. Taylor.....	\$1 00	33	Eliza McCormack.....	\$1 00
238	" Bertram.....	50	142	Nicholas Birmingham.....	5 00
240	" Leach.....	50	143	Louis Doyle.....	5 00
241	Mrs. Jane McDouald.....	2 00	142	James Flanagan.....	5 00
246	Margaret Frain.....	1 00			
254	Mrs. Dunleavy.....	23			
265	Mr. Foley.....	1 00			
269	" Fitzpatrick.....	5 00			
268	Thos. Farmer.....	5 00			
269	Mrs. Doyle.....	1 00			
290	Margaret Campbell.....	1 00			
299	Patrick Campbell.....	5 00			
299	James Campbell.....	1 00			
292	P. Hanley.....	2 00			
312	Patrick Bourke.....	5 00			
Lorimer Street.					
311	Ed. Kelley.....	\$1 00			
319	James Cullen.....	1 00			
322	John Conry.....	1 00			
372	Thomas Quinn.....	2 00			
372	Thomas and Mary Clober.....	5 00			
372	John Clober.....	5 00			
374	William Keegan.....	1 00			
477	Patrick Easterson.....	2 00			
477	Bridges Keegan.....	2 00			
477	James Bartus.....	1 00			
472	Patrick Tierney.....	5 00			
477	John Calderman.....	2 00			
376	Patrick Kane.....	5 00			
381	Daniel Boyd.....	1 00			
331	Ann Dolan.....	2 00			
342	John Clark.....	5 00			
342	John McNeill.....	5 00			
342	Patrick.....	10 00			
346	Mrs. ....	5 00			
346	William Morris.....	5 00			
383	Clairine Shale.....	2 00			
383	Mrs. McKewen.....	5 00			
333	" Chesson.....	5 00			
317	Sarah Conway.....	1 00			
Guernsey St.					
32	Robert McConaghy.....	\$1 00			
34	John Daniels.....	2 00			
Driggs St.					
57	Dr. William Kissane.....	\$5 00			
57	William Kissane.....	5 00			
Lorimer, cor. Drigg.					
	Ann Duggan.....	\$2 00			
	Mary Duggan.....	2 00			
	John Fitzpatrick.....	5 00			

Consoyca St.		
33	Eliza McCormack.....	\$1 00
142	Nicholas Birmingham.....	5 00
143	Louis Doyle.....	5 00
142	James Flanagan.....	5 00

Sullivan Ave.		
20	George Kennedy.....	\$1 00
25	Michael Meehan.....	1 00
28	John B. Powers.....	50
29	Michael Kildes.....	40
98	John Johnson.....	1 00
29	Leslie Mallen.....	1 00
90	Patrick Cassidy.....	5 00
80	Mr. Kane.....	2 00
103	John Smith.....	1 00
105	Mrs. P. Burns.....	2 00
105	James McCormack.....	2 00
109	Edward Sweeney.....	5 00
111	Johanna McGrath.....	1 00
111	H. C. Wood.....	1 00
211	Mrs. William Ewe.....	1 00
119	Thomas Nugent.....	5 00
112	James O'Brien.....	1 00
154	Mrs. Mary McDemott.....	2 00
145	William Whitford.....	1 50
	Michael Sullivan.....	5 00
147	Kate Stillmeyer.....	50
178	Thomas Derrick.....	10 00
176	Daniel Shon.....	1 00
176	Mary Whelan.....	1 00
188	Mrs. O. Volzer.....	50
188	James Flanagan.....	2 00
287	John Whl.....	1 00

Bushwick Ave.		
8	Patrick Golden.....	\$10 00
24	William Besslin.....	10 00
27	Mr. Daniel Dougherty.....	5 00


Frost St.		
11	Terence Murphy.....	\$5 00
19	Mary Reilly.....	2 00
27	John Hardy.....	5 00
29	Ann Sullivan.....	2 00
29	Thomas Hand.....	2 00
31	Bridget Welch.....	1 00
39	Patrick Daly.....	1 00
56	James McKenna.....	5 00
96	Katie Kimah.....	2 00
106	Patrick Fitzpatrick.....	1 00
126	Clairine Taggart.....	2 00

Frost St.		
128	John O'Donnell.....	\$5 00
145	Patrick Smith.....	5 00
149	Mrs. John Coffee.....	2 00
149	John Coffee.....	2 00
149	Adam Keller.....	5 00
149	Mary Darcy.....	5 00
149	John Haffin.....	1 00
151	John Schuler.....	1 00
152	Mr. Kane.....	1 00
142	Mrs. Catharine Lane.....	10 00
153	Leonard Hagenbarger.....	5 00
152	Philip Schillo.....	5 00
174	John Lounsbury.....	5 00
168	William Walker.....	5 00
189	Leola Benn.....	5 00
171	Bernard Momey.....	10 00
185	Neil McLoughlin.....	5 00
180	Charles Travis.....	5 00
189	John H. McKeena.....	1 00
180	John Murphy.....	2 00
198	William A. Drury.....	2 00
181	James Adams.....	10 00
191	Patrick Hynes.....	5 00
191	Auguste Montague.....	10 00
207	Patrick Donagan.....	5 00
211	Bryan Shon.....	5 00
217	Samuel Gallagher.....	5 00
217	Thomas Kelly.....	5 00
223	Philip Taggart.....	5 00
207	Nat. Condm.....	1 00
225	William Crane.....	5 00
227	Patrick Cumberley.....	5 00
227	Ered. Wohlbeber.....	5 00
227	Thomas Coniskey.....	1 00
227	Michael Smith.....	5 00
229	Patrick Nolan.....	15 00
241	Thomas Shanley.....	5 00
247	Michael Salam.....	5 00
247	Mrs. Prumell.....	5 00
248	John Keegan.....	10 00
236	Mrs. H. Sover.....	5 00
238	Bernard Kierman.....	1 00
238	James Conway.....	5 00
250	Thomas Henratty.....	5 00
250	Denis O'Leary.....	5 00
258	James Ryan.....	5 00
268	Thomas Farley.....	5 00
214	John Blason.....	5 00
214	Margaret Blason.....	5 00
214	Maggie Blason.....	5 00
214	Owen Campbell.....	5 00
229	Denis Duhan.....	5 00
212	Patrick Travis.....	5 00
247	Nora Wilson.....	1 00

## Census Collection May 1889

Father McGolrick asked his parishioners to make a "small donation" to the building fund. His flock donated mostly in \$1, \$5, and very occasionally \$10 increments. Almost every donation represented a sacrifice. Father McGolrick contributed \$300. The community raised an astonishing \$3200 - the equivalent of \$103,000 in 2022.

\$1 in 1889 = \$32 in 2022

The image shows the interior of St. Cecilia's Church, a Gothic Revival style church. The architecture features tall, slender columns supporting a high, vaulted ceiling with intricate ribbing. The altar area is highly decorated with a large, colorful mural depicting a religious scene, possibly the Resurrection, with figures rising from their tombs. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. In the foreground, a wooden pulpit is visible on the left, and a sign on the right reads "VIVERE LA VITA" and "PER LA VITA". People are seated in the pews, and the overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and historical significance.

In his first six months at St. Cecilia's, Father McGolrick paid off the mortgage on the crumbling church. *The Brooklyn Citizen* credited his “untiring labors and happy manner.”

His goal was to build a church for the “God of love and truth and beauty.”  
Modelled on the great churches of Italy.



That summer, “The Young Men’s Literary Society” sponsored a picnic with games for children. There was dancing in the evening. In the fall, they put on a play – followed by a dance that lasted till 5 a.m.

In November, the parish hosted a two-week fair that far “exceeded expectations.” The fair was extended. *The Brooklyn Eagle* reported, “receipts have reached way into the thousands.”

Confident of his ability to raise the necessary funds, Father McGolrick had already purchased the property that St. Cecilia’s stands on.

Father McGolrick's top donors were his hard-working parents, Peter and Ann McGolrick.

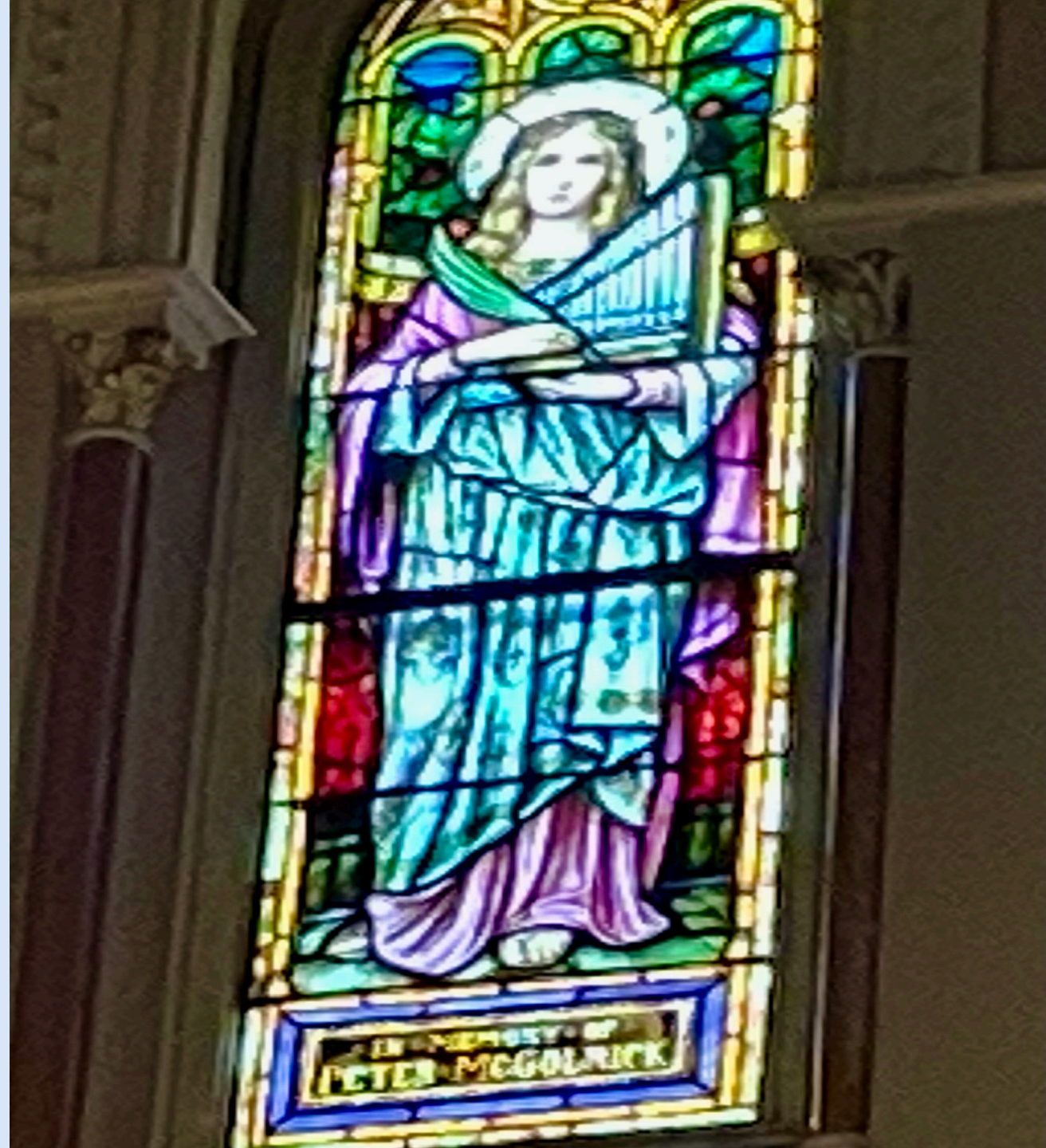
In 1851, Peter McGolrick left his wife and 1-year-old daughter in Ireland to attempt to make a fortune in the California gold rush.

Being a gold miner was risky. Peter McGolrick opted for a more certain route to wealth - running a saloon.

On his way to California, he was so poor, he walked across Panama carrying his one pair of shoes. He returned via clipper ship – luxury travel – and finally got home to his wife and daughter in 1854.



Peter McGolrick's substantial contributions to St. Cecilia's building fund are commemorated on the donor plaque inside the church's front door and in the stained-glass window with the image of St. Cecilia, playing her harp, in the south transept.



Monsignor McGolrick's "quiet, prayerful" mother, Ann Gallagher McGolrick, is honored in the north transept's stained-glass window.

A 1907 obituary said, Ann had been a "devout" member of the Sacred Heart parish and "took an active interest in every kind of parish work, especially charitable work."





In Ann McGolrick's window, St. Agnes is holding a lamb - a reference to a 3-year-old grandchild, named Agnes, who died in 1890.



According to *The Story of a Rare Parish*, in January 1891, Father McGolrick went to see Bishop Loughlin to explain he didn't think it worthwhile adding to the existing church. The Bishop asked what a new church would cost.

Father McGolrick replied, "I might build one for \$150,000." The usual cost of a church at the time was \$45,000.

Bishop Loughlin spluttered, "How could you attempt that?"

"Well, Bishop, I've been at St. Cecilia's for two years. In that time, I've raised over forty thousand dollars."

"Go home," said the Bishop, "and do what you like!"

The final cost of St. Cecilia's was over \$200,000. Father McGolrick and his parishioners paid off the mortgage in twelve years.





Father McGolrick hired an architect – Cambridge-educated Thomas H. Poole who specialized in designing Roman Catholic churches.

Born in England, Poole now lived in Manhattan and, while working on St. Cecilia's, was also working on the design for Our Lady of Good Counsel on E. 90th Street.

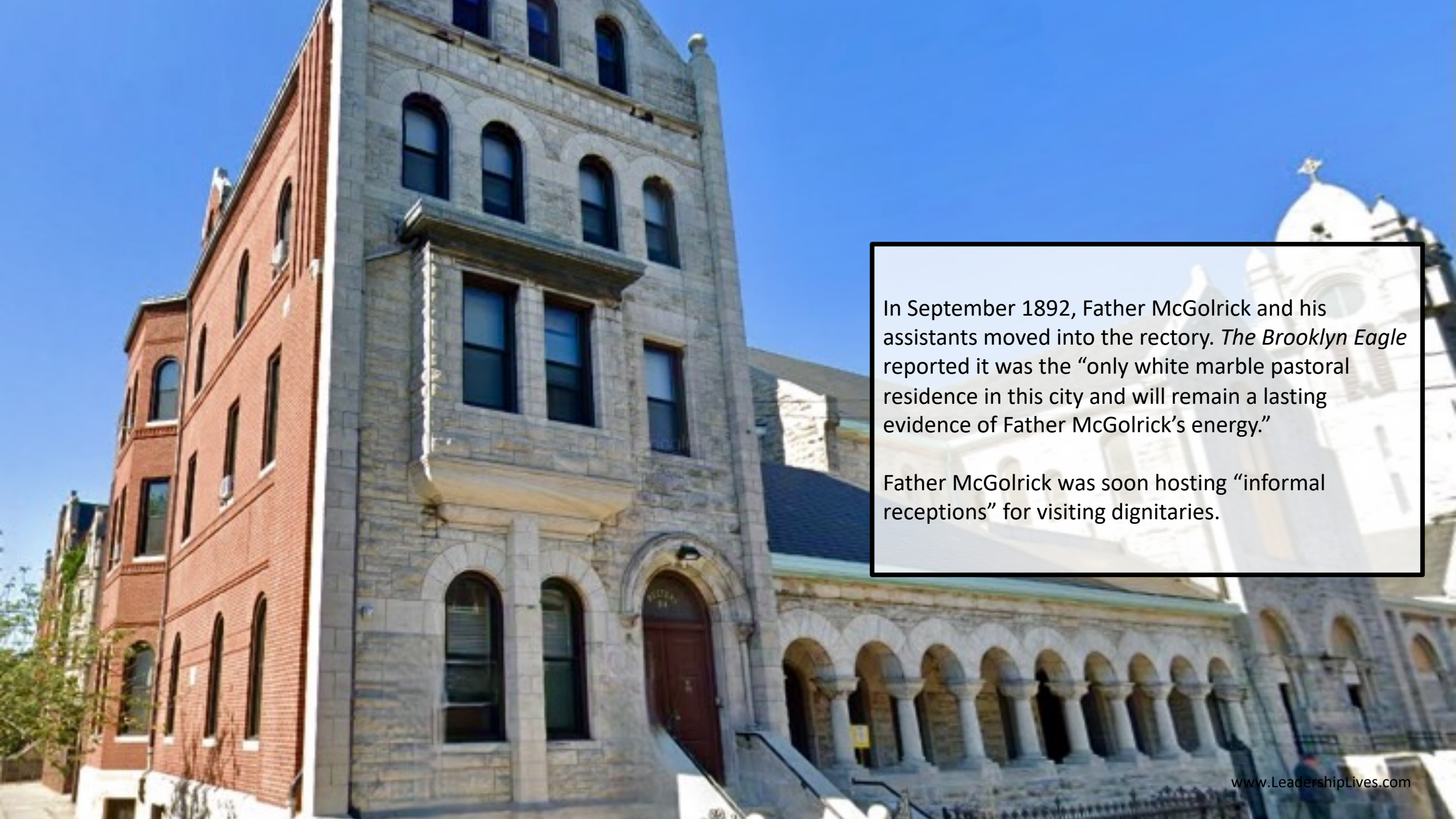
They laid the cornerstone for the new St. Cecilia's on June 27, 1891.



Thomas Poole and Father McGolrick placed a Celtic cross atop St. Cecilia's distinctive copper-topped bell tower which can be seen for miles.

[www.LeadershipLives.com](http://www.LeadershipLives.com)





In September 1892, Father McGolrick and his assistants moved into the rectory. *The Brooklyn Eagle* reported it was the “only white marble pastoral residence in this city and will remain a lasting evidence of Father McGolrick’s energy.”

Father McGolrick was soon hosting “informal receptions” for visiting dignitaries.



Fourteen months later, *The New York Times* reported on the opening of the new church.

“The exercises were of an imposing character. A throng of parishioners and others” attended.

The *Times* noted the church is built of Georgia marble, “and has a seating capacity of 1,400.”

The morning service was followed by a “banquet” in the rectory for 80 guests.

As soon as the church was completed, Father McGolrick set about fulfilling the promise he made to himself the evening he stumbled into the meeting of “The Young Men’s Literary Society.”

The original church had been moved to a new foundation. Now it was enlarged and repurposed as a Lyceum.

Completed in 1903, it had bowling alleys, billiard tables, a well-equipped gym and a swimming pool.

It also had an auditorium with seating for 600 and a roomy, well-furnished stage.

It was a place for young and old to hold “joyous gatherings” but also a place where practical help could be offered to the needy.




The neighborhood's most pressing need was for a day care center.

The "Day Nursery's" first home was in the Lyceum. On opening day, in 1904, about 20 children were registered. Parishioner William Glinnen, M.D. volunteered to look after the children's health.

Another neighbor stepped forward to help. Isaac Fluegelman donated food and toys. When the Nursery moved to a new building, Mr. Fluegelman furnished the kitchen, dining-room, and meeting-room and paid to have electricity installed.

For years he donated a Thanksgiving dinner and stopped by to carve the turkeys. Even when he moved to Manhattan, he brought gifts for the children on Thanksgiving and Christmas. He was not a member of the parish or a Catholic. He was a Jew who admired how St. Cecilia's was taking care of the little ones.





St. Cecilia's School was dedicated on September 13, 1908.

Children in grades 1- 6 were enrolled that year and seventh and eighth grades were soon added.





In recognition of his contributions to St. Cecilia's, to the community and to the Church, in 1909, Pope Pius X named Father McGolrick a monsignor – an honorific for highly esteemed priests.

Monsignor McGolrick decided to take an extended vacation and booked a cruise around the world leaving the parish in the capable hands of three assistants.



In 1908, eight nuns from the Order of St. Joseph arrived to teach at St. Cecilia's new school. For four years, the nuns lived on the top floor of the school building.

In 1912, when they moved to a roomy Convent next door, their living space in the school was redesigned into classrooms.

The Library, next to the Convent, was used by the school during the day, and open to the Greenpoint community in the evening.

From his earliest days at St. Cecilia's, Father McGolrick wanted a playground suitable for children and adults.

For a while the parish used vacant lots for baseball, races, hurdles, and for the parish's military unit and band. At night there were athletic competitions and military drills under electric lights.

But the property was sold by the city to build a hospital.



Baseball fan, Msgr. McGolrick throws out the first pitch.



Then a miracle happened. Parishioner Ella Finnegan worked in a real estate office on lower Broadway. One day, 20 staffers got into a spirited discussion on the merits of their various parishes. The firm's president heard Ella's voice rise above the rest. Mr. Harmon asked Ella to introduce him to Msgr. McGolrick.

When William Harmon, who wasn't Catholic, heard about the need for a playground, he arranged the purchase of property not far from St. Cecilia's at a bargain price. He donated \$3000 to the project and arranged a matching contribution.

For years, the boys of St. Cecilia's swept all the prizes in the Christian Brothers Inter-Parochial School League.



In 1927, the parish opened a maternity hospital.

At the dedication, Msgr. McGolrick said, “This hospital, though erected by the people of St. Cecilia's parish, will not be parochial in its work of caring for mothers; all will be received irrespective of race or creed.

We wish to state that people of many races and creeds, Jews and Gentiles, have helped us in the erection of this hospital of mercy.”

*"It is the duty of those who have done or seen things worthy of remaining in the memory of man to record them"*

*Baunard, translated by Stoddard*

# THE STORY OF A RARE PARISH

BY  
AGNES KING

R

AUTHOR OF "REAL CHRISTIAN SCIENCE"  
"BRIEF LIFE OF SISTER AUGUSTINE, I. H. M."  
AND THE HISTORICAL NOVEL  
"DUNCAN DAVIDSON"

1931  
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3

## 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee - 1932

A few years later, at the bottom of the Great Depression, Msgr. McGolrick celebrated his 50th anniversary as a priest.

He suggested a quiet celebration, but the congregation wanted to do more.

His parishioners commissioned a local author to write a history of Monsignor McGolrick's years with St. Cecilia's – *The Story of a Rare Parish*.



In 1935, a record number, 140 students, graduated from St. Cecilia's.

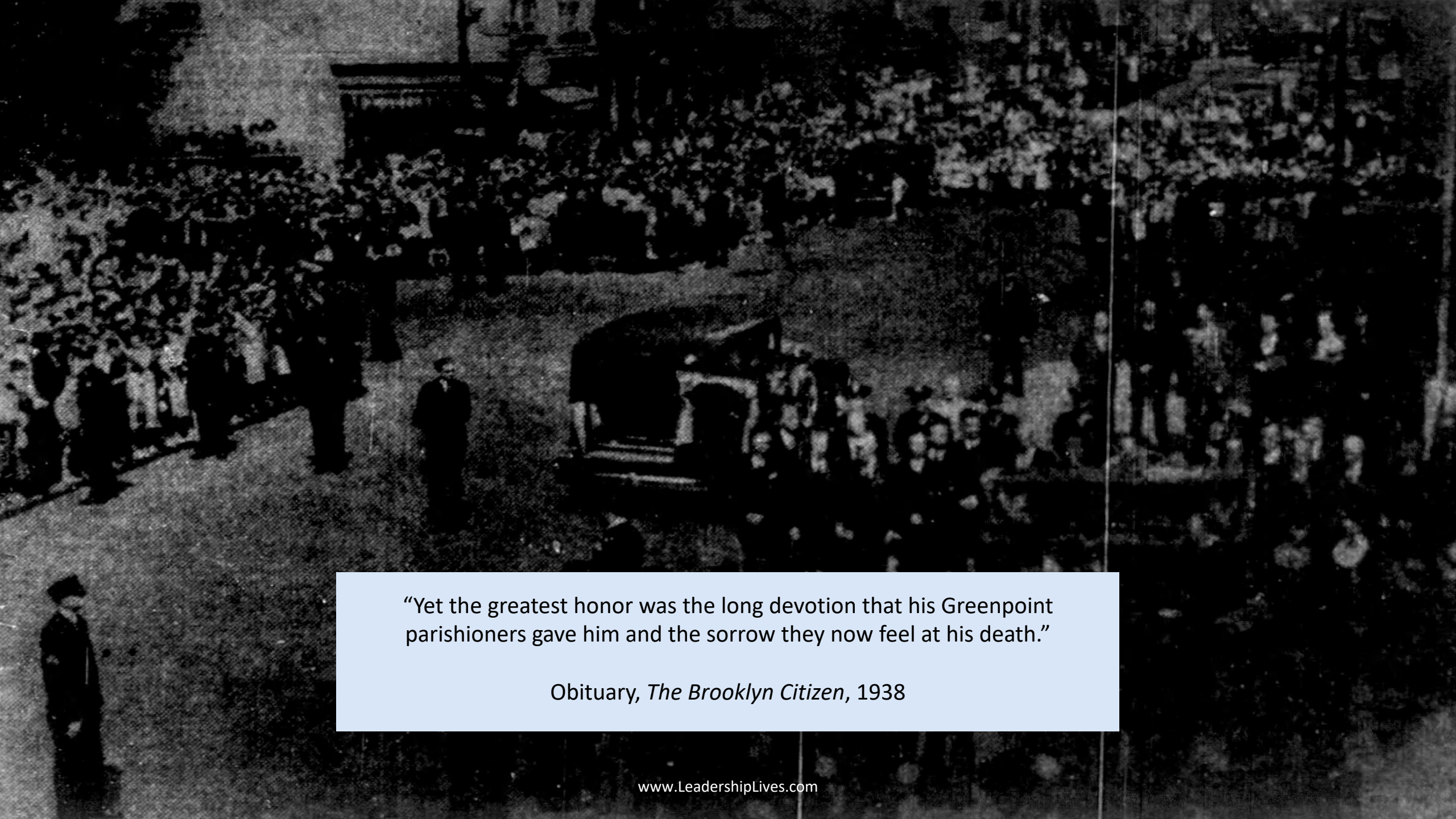
The *Brooklyn Times Union* wrote, "All who have watched the career of Mons. McGolrick will be interested in the progress of the school..., for he has labored for his Church, the neighborhood and the best interests of the community for many years."



In his seventies, when he might have been slowing down, Monsignor McGolrick was a trustee of Manhattan College, founder and president of *The Brooklyn Tablet* Publishing Company, a trustee of Catholic University and a member of the Bishop's Board of Consultors.

In 1931, he was elected vice-president of the American Catholic Historical Association.





“Yet the greatest honor was the long devotion that his Greenpoint parishioners gave him and the sorrow they now feel at his death.”

Obituary, *The Brooklyn Citizen*, 1938

Six months after Father McGolrick took the helm at a struggling “demoralized” parish, *The Brooklyn Citizen* wrote a tribute to “a truly good leader.”

“The parishioners of St. Cecilia’s are completely wrapped up in their church work and believe that in united effort great good will result. That has been the secret of such remarkable harvests. With the assistance of such a formidable coworker as Father McGolrick any other outcome would have been an impossibility.”

From Monsignor Hoar's Eulogy:

"The heart of Monsignor McGolrick was a father's heart, and his thoughts were for his flock. He did not think down to them, he thought with them. He tried to lead them up."

## MCGOLRICK PARK

Thousands of Greenpoint residents turned out for the dedication of MCGOLRICK PARK in September 1941.

Countless lives had been improved by his ministry.

[www.LeadershipLives.com](http://www.LeadershipLives.com)

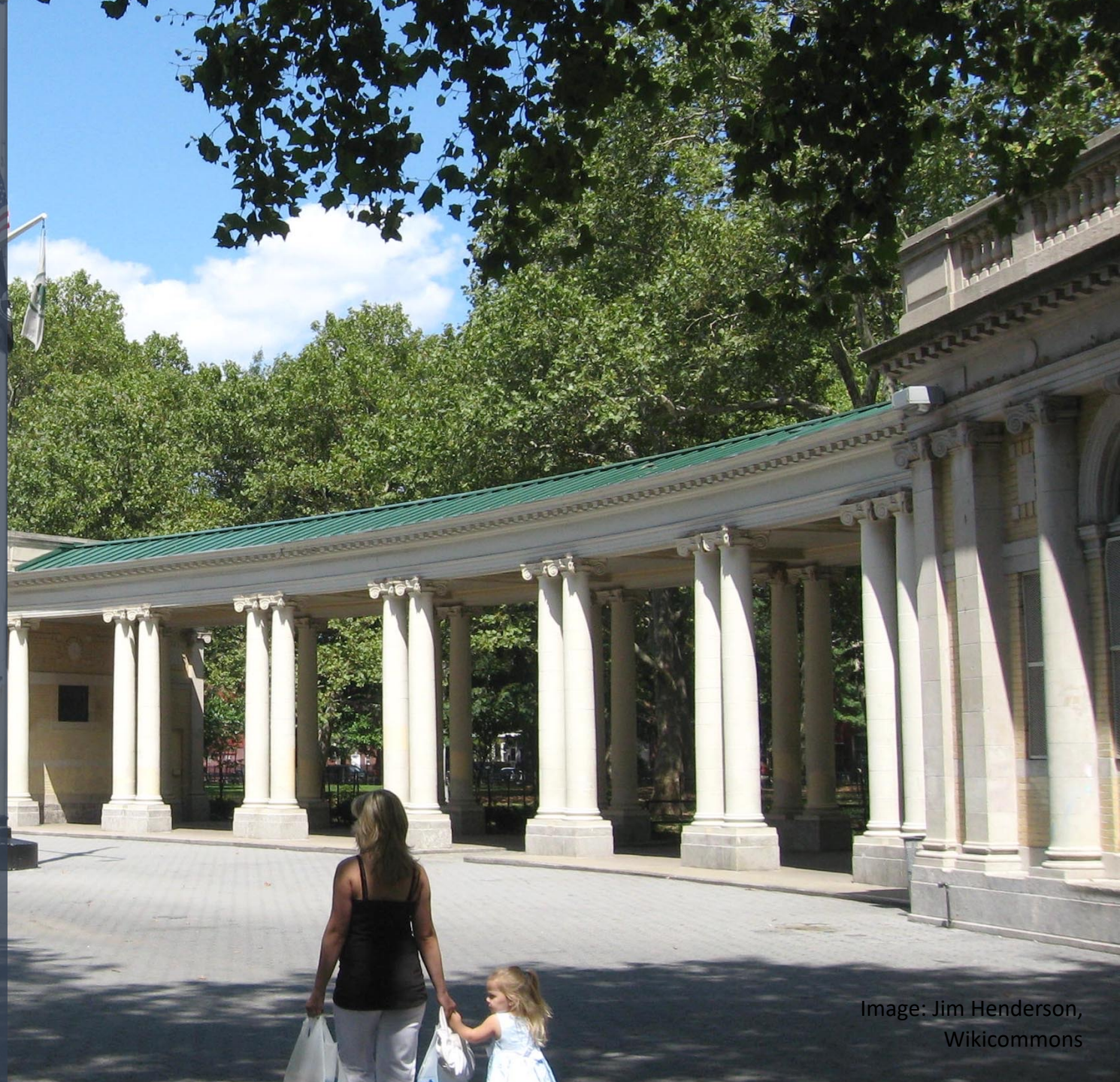


Image: Jim Henderson,  
Wikicommons

## LEADERSHIP LESSONS:



**LED BY EXAMPLE** – New to the parish in 1889, he asked parishioners for “small donations.” He donated \$300 – the equivalent of \$10,000 in 2022.



**COMMUNICATED EFFECTIVELY** – an example, is how he rallied and engaged the young men of the St. Cecilia’s Literary Society.



**KEPT UP MORALE** - he asked everyone to participate and contribute to picnics, fairs, and entertainment. Built the Lyceum, the day care center, school and playground.



**MAINTAINED A POSITIVE ATTITUDE** – through hardships and difficulties. When others thought his goals were impossible, he kept going.