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A Story of St. Cyprian Parish in Columbus

by Margaret E. Mooney

Part II -- Seventy Years as a Black Catholic in Columbus

Now begins a story, a first-hand account, by a very wise octogenarian, a former east-side Columbusite, now a resident of Grandview and a St. Christopher Parishioner, Mrs. Ethel Jennings. The Catholic Record Society had the opportunity to hear as much of her story as was possible in an hour's time. Her visit prompted a desire to know more details about a neglected treasure: the gifts of St. Cyprian Parish, its founders, yes, but perhaps more essentially, the story of the people who worshipped there, the children who learned to be justly proud of their accomplishments, and, later on, the people who were not asked... but told... to become members of St. Dominic's Parish because St. Cyprian's was closed.



This 1914 school building at St. Cyprian's was a twin of the 1912 church and school. After 1958 these buildings housed the offices of the Diocesan Councils of Catholic Men, Women, and Youth, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis who ran St. Anthony Hospital.

Now, the story of one of the best remembered parishioners of St. Cyprian's, Mrs. Ethel Calloway Jennings.

"In the early 1900's there were not many Black Catholics in Columbus. Most of the Catholics were of German or Irish descent. The Germans lived in South Columbus, the Irish in what was the North, by the railroads; 18th St., 20th St., and Miami, etc. The Irish were settled in St. Dominic's Parish.

"Early in the 1900's, St. Cyprian's was established through the efforts of two people: Bishop Hartley and Mother Katharine Drexel, from Philadelphia. She had been West and saw the plight of the Indians. She had been South and saw the plight of those who were then called Negroes. She was very sadly impressed with the poverty and lack of schooling. And so, with the money from her father's estate and the encouragement of the Bishop of Philadelphia, she started the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

“It was an order of nuns devoted to the establishment of services to Indians and Negroes. That was her idea. So she started several schools in the West for Indians, and throughout the South, for Negroes. She had schools in almost every state in the Union. Many of the nuns she brought into her order were Irish. She would go to Ireland and get these girls that wanted to be nuns and bring them back and train them. They were missionaries, so to speak, for Indians and Negroes. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were known for their service to Indians and Negroes. They didn’t go into any other places but to work for Indians and Negroes.

“She established a school in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and a school in Dayton; finally she came to Columbus. With the help of Bishop Hartley, and mostly from her money, she built three buildings on Hawthorne Avenue out by the old St. Anthony’s Hospital. There were very few Black Catholics. I remember there was one family of sisters who came here from North Carolina: the Gichrist girls.... they were all married and had children.

“The Bishop named the church St. Cyprians; it’s named for a black Bishop and Martyr. Mother Katharine sent her nuns here and they virtually went up and down the street and encouraged people to allow their children to come to their school.”

The Pastor then, Father Kilgallen, was the Chaplain at St. Anthony’s and lived there.

“This was before I was involved...I was a little girl, but was NOT involved in the Catholic Church. My family was basically Baptist. My own grandmother was one of the founders of The Union Grove Baptist Church, right on the corner of Hawthorne and North Champion Avenues; that was the Church that I attended. And, besides, we always wondered about those Catholics. But, oh, they were always held in awe... we thought they were going straight to hell, those Catholic people!

“Still, they built a very good group of Black People who were very devout Catholics. And, they encouraged the people to bring their friends. In the early 1930’s, the church was beginning to establish itself very well in the community. You see, at that time that was the only church where Black people, as Catholics, were welcome. They couldn’t belong to another Catholic church. They couldn’t even take instructions in another Catholic church. If they wanted to become Catholic, ‘Go out there on Hawthorne Avenue and see that priest.’

“Now, the way we came into the Church was, in 1931 or 1932, I had two brothers, and we were going to Eastwood Elementary. That was at the corner of Eastwood and Winner Avenue. It was predominately White. There were only about twelve Black kids in the whole school. The Principal was Miss Jane Phillips (she rented right down the street, at 46 Winner Avenue). And the principal was, in my estimation, as I look back on it, she was prejudiced. She wasn’t really pleased with these little Black kids that were in HER school. So, all the little boys that showed any indication that they weren’t doing their work well, she had a special class for them... in the basement of the school. And I had an older brother who wasn’t the brightest child. My mother, being a teacher herself, knew that he really could benefit from having fewer children in the class. So, when Miss Phillips wanted to put my brother in this class, my mother agreed.

“That must have been 1927 or 1928. Now, the next year Miss Phillips approached my mother and said, ‘I’d like to put Harry in this special class’ (in the basement). Now this was my second brother, Harry, and he was VERY BRIGHT. And my mother said, ‘No.’ And the principal said, ‘We’ve decided that’s where he’ll go for next year.’

“So, rather than have Harry placed in the class for what they called ‘slow learners,’ my mother took both boys out of Eastwood School and put them in the Catholic School, Saint Cyprian’s. I guess that was in 1930.



Sister Maria Goretti (Betty Jones) about 1958, when she took her final vows as an Oblate Sister of Providence. The adults are: Msgr. Kilgallen, George Morgan (step-father), Sister Maria Goretti, Evelyn Jones (mother), unknown woman Roland Jones, Joseph Jennings, Ethel Jennings, Bernice Brown, unknown man, unknown woman, Wendell Brown. The two children next to Sister Maria Goretti are unknown; the other three are David, Harry, and Joseph Jennings.

“Well, when the boys came home they were talking about the catechism and taking instructions and all of that. My mother was of the inquisitive kind and said, ‘I’ve got to go to this school and find out what they’re teaching the children.’ She was a staunch Baptist, and came from a strong Baptist background. She had a brother who was a Baptist minister. He had gone to Denison University and had become a Baptist minister there. And, my grandmother, being one of the founders of the Union Grove Baptist Church, just east on Hawthorne at Champion, she just thought my mother was going to die and go straight to Hell.

“My mother was asking my brother Harry about it, and he said that the priest suggested that she come over to the instruction class and see for herself what it’s all about. So, she went. And, when she got there, she got hooked too. She went on to the instructions and finished, and my Father went along with her. And, my father being

the quiet man that he was... caused everyone on my mother’s side to say, ‘Minnie’s just got that boy, leading him by the nose.’ And, he just followed. But, they both became Catholics; and we all went back to Eastwood School because the principal had left, and we went on to Pilgrim Junior High at the southeast corner of Emerald and Taylor Avenues. So, that’s how our family got started at St. Cyprian’s Parish.

“That’s how it was then. Whole families came into the Church at once.” Mrs. Jennings credits that to the evangelizing by the priests and Sisters, and the school that attracted families in the area. It was the sense of community she remembers most. “The nuns walked the streets. They came in and visited after school. The priests were in the neighborhood and you felt a sort of bonding. Almost all the people who lived around St. Cyprian were Catholic because Father went over there and made them Catholic! There was a presence.”

As an adult, Mrs. Jennings was a member of St. Joseph Cathedral Parish. In the mid-1930's she "was privileged to meet Mother Katharine, on several occasions." It happened this way. "In 1934 my family came into the Church. It was the summer of 1934 and I had spent one year at East High School. My mother, a former teacher in the public schools, felt that I would benefit from a Catholic Education. Upon inquiring about putting me in a Catholic High School, we discovered that 'Negroes' could not attend Catholic high schools in Columbus. So, Father Patrick J. Kilgallen, our pastor, and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who staffed the grade school there, suggested that mother enroll me in St. Francis de Sales High School, a boarding school for Girls, established by Mother Katharine in Rock Castle, Virginia."



Mrs. Jennings said, "My two years as a student at Rock Castle, as a new Catholic, were the most cherished years of my life." There she met Mother Katharine Drexel a number of times. "Witnessing her dedication and total commitment to the quality of life for all people has left a profound and lasting impression on my life."

Mrs. Ethel Calloway Jennings has continued the Rock Castle tradition of excellence. After the abrupt closing of St. Cyprian's she and her family attended St. Dominic's. She went on to get a degree in education and has done work toward a Masters degree. Mrs. Jennings spent forty years in Education and retired as Supervisor of Special Education Programs for the Franklin County

Board of Education. Until recently she was a tutor at Champion Middle School.

While in Virginia, Ethel met Curtis Washington, who was attending a similar school nearby for boys. A convert, he wanted to be a priest but had no support from his family. He came to Columbus to meet with Ethel's family. Unable to attend a local seminary, he went to a seminary of the Society of the Divine Word, in Mississippi, one of the first orders to take Black men. Summers, Curtis lived with the Calloways. He worked to earn money and Msgr. Kilgallen and Msgr. Kulp helped him to get through the seminary. Father Curtis Washington, S.V.D. was ordained in Bay St. Louis, Miss. in 1949, coming "home" to say Mass at St. Cyprian's in July. Father Washington then left for a thirty-six year mission in Ghana, primarily among the Krobo tribe. He drew large

numbers to the Faith, assisting ten Ghanian men to become priests. He had come to the States for medical treatment when he died in 1985, at the age of 68.

Curtis Washington lived with Ethel's family and so must have enjoyed meeting Mrs. Calloway's mother, Mrs. Eliza Patterson, who was a former slave, as was her husband. Ethel Jennings said that her Grandmother was a house-slave, not allowed to learn to read and write. "But," says Ethel, "she was taught all the graces." She was a lady. She made sure that each of her children graduated from High School. Minnie Patterson Calloway graduated from East High School and passed on

that love of learning to each generation. Ethel Jennings' daughter and son-in-law, Anita and George Keller, have named their daughter Eliza, after her courageous great-great-grandmother. Anita Keller works at Grandview Library and is a Grandview School Board Member.

What a story of Faith and human kindness! Think, it all happened because a bright little boy named Harry did not go to the basement to the class for slow learners. There were many heroes in this story, yet a mother named Mrs. Minnie Calloway, a teacher herself, chose to turn away from injustice and find Truth and Compassion, Justice and Mercy for her family, just as Saint Katharine Drexel would have wanted. And, there is a fitting close to our story: On October 1, 2000, Mrs. Ethel Calloway Jennings was blessed to attend the canonization of Saint Katherine Drexel, foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, whose lives were and are given to help the Indian and the African-American to grow in Wisdom and Grace.

As to the merging of Mother Katharine's and Bishop Hartley's beloved St. Cyprian's with St. Dominic Parish, nothing can replace the memories. In closing, contemplate the good that was done, as told by Bishop Hartley in the Diamond Jubilee Edition of *The History of the Diocese of Columbus* in 1943:

St. Cyprian's Parish was founded in 1912, and on the day when the First Mass was offered there was only one colored Catholic present, all others were non-Catholic. The little school opened with 28 non-Catholic children. Today the history of the parish is a great source of consolation to those who faced the discouraging task of starting a parish under such difficult conditions.

Today the parish can point proudly to a beautiful group of buildings. The little chapel, complete in every detail, is neat and devotional and most inviting to all. The schoolrooms in both parish buildings, the Sisters Convent, the spacious playgrounds,

everything perfectly arranged and furnished, present a very impressive appearance and never fail to inspire great admiration in all who see them. The facilities provided in this splendid group of parish buildings are without equal anywhere and the colored Catholic people of the city have reason to be proud of their beautiful auditorium and hall for parish facilities.

Today [1943] the following figures tell the story of the parish:

The Baptismal Record discloses that 659 have been baptized and received into the church.

The school has an attendance now of 125... more than half are non-Catholics.

The parish shows a membership of about 400. Many of the best converts have gone to other cities and when they return to visit from time to time they are unanimous in declaring that there is no place like St. Cyprian's.

St. Cyprian's has sent two young women to the Convent to pursue the Religious Life, and one young man is studying for the Priesthood in the Novitiate of the Society of the Divine Word.

The results of Father Kilgallen's efforts are really wonderful. Every night at eight o'clock all the Catholic colored people gather...to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to say Night Prayers. Every Sunday the Altar Rail is crowded with the members of the parish receiving our Blessed Lord in Holy Communion.

Every evening Father Kilgallen is on hand to give special, private instructions to those interested in learning about the Church. The instructions are very thorough and none are baptized until they have completed this intensive and detailed study of the Church's teachings. So today the Sisters tell us that the members of St. Cyprian's parish are among the best Catholics they find in all their missions. The Sisters... have charge of the school and the care and attention they have given to the people who attend St. Cyprian's church and

school has helped to build up the parish....
 The people...are strongly devoted to Father
 Patrick J. Kilgallen.... By his kindness,
 patience and unfailing zeal, he has achieved
 so much for them and because of this has a
 wonderful influence over them.

May we who have been given so much,
 appreciate these stories of Faith and Holiness, of
 determination and appreciation. Most of all, may
 we celebrate the Triune God with the devotion
 and gratitude of these Holy People of Hawthorne
 Avenue.

Let us remember, too, with gratitude, The Poor
 Working Girl who left her savings

TO BUILD A CHURCH WHERE THE
 COLORED MIGHT FEEL AT HOME
 AND BE DRAWN TO THE FAITH.

SOURCES

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Calvary Cemetery, West Jefferson, Madison County, Ohio

Calvary Cemetery is located on the north side of Lilly Chapel Pike, just outside of West Jefferson, not quite as far as the high school.

The cemetery was donated to the Church by John and Mary Frey on September 14, 1877. This was the third Catholic cemetery in central Ohio that the couple's families had founded. John Frey and his brother Henry were sons of Joseph Frey, who had come from Selbach, Canton Selz, near Strassbourg, to the countryside east of Alum Creek in the 1830s. The father bequeathed to them his farm and on October 19, 1846 they donated the cemetery lot there to Bishop Purcell for the use of Catholics in that vicinity. It became known as St. Jacob's Cemetery. (*Bulletin*, August, 1978 and Sept., 1980) Mrs. Mary Frey's father was Peter Uri, an immigrant from Tolei near Trier, who was head of the committee of Catholic laymen who purchased and opened the Catholic Cemetery in Columbus in 1846. (*Bulletin*, Dec., 1977) The virtual abandonment of the latter cemetery in

the mid-1870s may have been one factor behind the donation of Calvary Cemetery in 1877. In the Columbus cemetery, which is known to have been used by Catholics from as far as thirty miles away, was buried Peter Dogate, a name so rare in central Ohio that he must have been related to the Doggetts later buried in Calvary Cemetery. The old cemetery in Columbus also received the remains of Dalys and Moriartys, both names that later appeared in Calvary.

The Calvary Cemetery property includes two acres, measuring 264 feet along the centerline of Lilly Chapel Pike and 330 feet deep from the centerline. (Deed record 39/278)

After visiting St. Patrick Parish in London on Tuesday, November 13, 1877, on Wednesday Archbishop Purcell visited West Jefferson. "High Mass was sung by the pastor [Father Miller]. There were fifty-seven confirmed, Wednesday morning. In the afternoon a cemetery of two acres,

conveniently situated about a mile from town, the generous gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Frey, was blessed by the Archbishop, assisted by the afore mentioned priest. Rev. Mr. Miller boards in the house of a very respectable and worthy couple, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Powell, natives of the County Cork, Ireland [where the Archbishop was born], who feel honored and happy in providing a home for their pastor and entertaining his reverend brethren who visit him.” (*Catholic Telegraph*, Nov. 22, 1877, p. 4)

The cemetery lots were measured and the tombstones read in the fall of 2003. The lots are listed in the following order: first the side southwest of the central roadway, then the northwest. On each side, the first row of lots next to the center roadway has been marked Tier 1, the next farther away Tier 2, etc. Lots are numbered beginning in the front. On the southwest side, the first three or four lots in the first two tiers have the appearance of being the original single grave area.

Initials or names noted below in double quotation marks, with the tier and lot numbers, are as found on lot corner markers. These markers are indicated by black squares on the diagrams. Names in single quotation marks are as found on large monuments on the lots.

Initial braces {{ or brackets [[indicate names on the same stone.

A transcription of burial records for this cemetery made from West Jefferson Village records was given to the Society by Sts. Simon and Jude Parish in November, 1999. To the extent possible, these have been correlated with the tombstones. Such records are marked “WJV”. Those that could not be related to any tombstone are listed at the end.

Sts. Simon and Jude Parish has burial records from 1899 to the present, most of which indicate which cemetery was used. Those indicating burial in Calvary cemetery before 1979 have been transcribed for this listing. For those from 1958 to 1978 only the date, name, age, and any

lot information were transcribed. To the extent possible, these have been correlated with the tombstones and are marked “SSJ”. Those that could not be placed are listed at the end.

Southwest Side

T1L1

Mary M. [Mallony?]. . . [with a sheep, probaby a child]

Michael Grady, died Feb. 14, 1904, Aged 70 Y.
SSJ: 1904, Feb. 14, Michael Grady, born Ireland, age about 75, dropsy

T1L2

{McCLOSKEY: (Father) Joseph T. 1872-1895
{ (Mother) Mary I. (Belle) 1893-1920
SSJ: 1970, Feb. 18, Mary Isabelle McCloskey, 76

T1L3

Mary M., wife of Jas. Douley Died Mar. 28, 1888, aged 30 years
{MORIARTY: Patrick 1861+1929
{ Agnes his wife 1861+1932
SSJ: 1929, Jan. 6 in Columbus, Patrick Moriarty, born Covington, Ky., age 65, organic heart
SSJ: 1932, Feb. 26, Mrs. Agnes Moriarty, born W. Jefferson, age 65, pneumonia, parents Patrick Quinn and Ann Lavin

T1L4

(Mother) Catherine
William Doggett Died Mar. 24, 1882 Age 69 Y.

T1L5

{F. B. Graessle born Apr. 16, 1835 died Sep. 8, 1880
{Fredie son of F.B. & T. Graessle born Sept. 25, 1867 died March 18,1873
Charles Greassle + ...
Jonie son of Chas. & Johanna Graessle born Jan. 5, 1887 died Aug. 17, 1890
probably here:
SSJ: 1920, Mar. 28, Teresa (Rieser) Grassle, born Germany, age 81, Bright's disease
WJV: 1920, Mar. 28, Theresa Grassle, age 80, born in Germany

Carroll Miller

Kubitschack 17 Bunting 12	Redmond McDonald	Adelsberger Rump Ducey
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18 Birkenbach 25	McCarty Slaven 18 Doggett	Burns 17 Frey
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Quinn 25	Biggert Gillivan	P.J. Frey 12 Sullivan 17 Holland 13 Daily
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Carey Miller	Murray	O'Leary 6 1/2 Ernst Holland 16 Grassle
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Wise	O'Flaherty 15 1/2 Flanagan McElroy Baronda Groves 25 Ryan	Grassle Doggett Moriarty Dovley McCloskey
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		Doggett Grady Mallony
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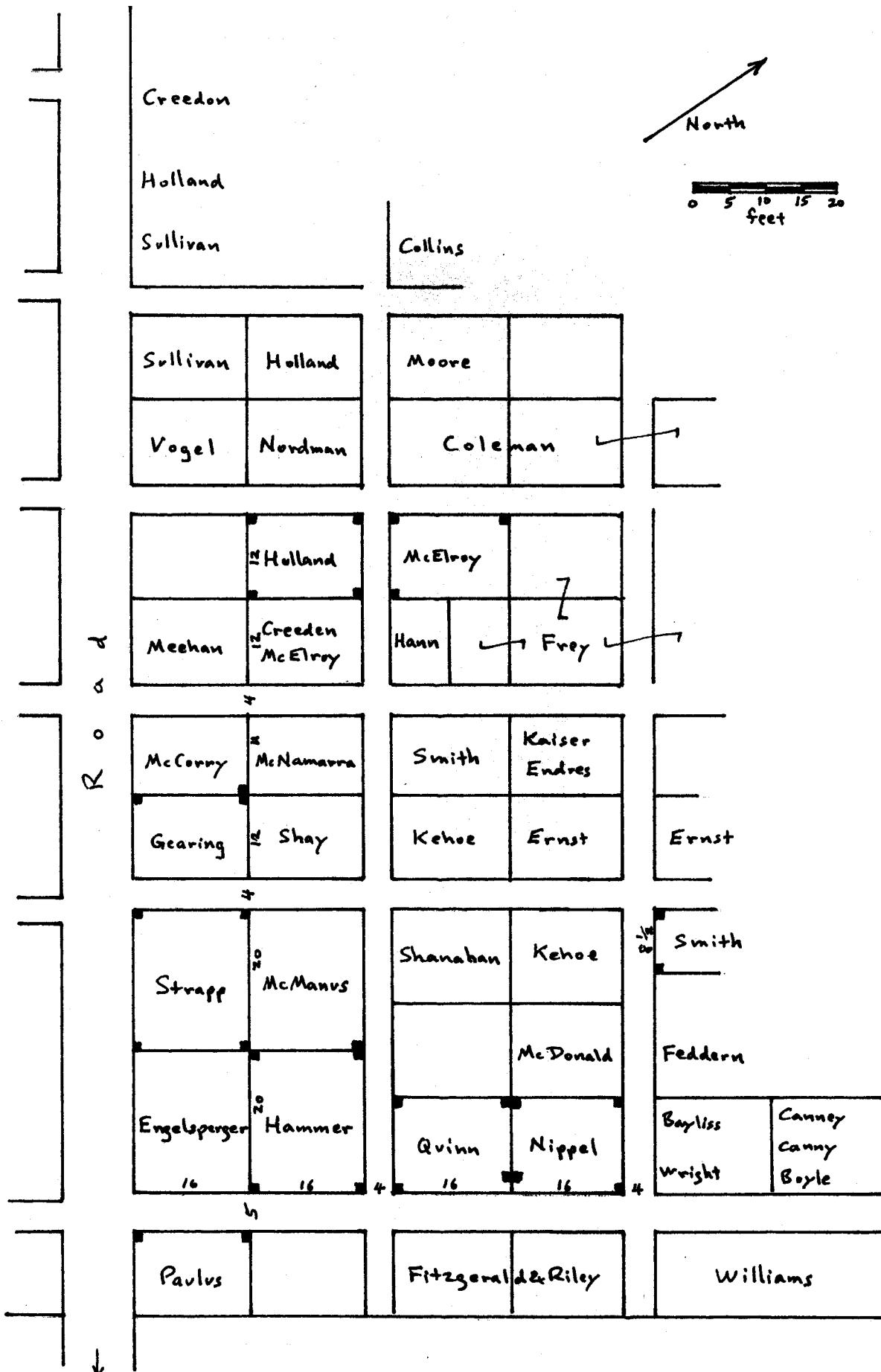
property line

R o a d

R o a d

↓
gate

Calvary Cemetery, W. Jefferson, O.



T1L6
Father and Mother + ERNST
probably:
SSJ: 1906, Dec. 13, Ign. Ernst, born Germany, age 74
WJV: 1921, Dec. 23 Mrs. Theresa Ernst, age 78, born in Germany
SSJ: 1921, Dec. 22, Teresa Ernst, born Germany, age 78, pneumonia

T1L7 "PD"
{Patrick Daily died Feb. 15, 1892 aged 77 years
{Johana wife of John Daily died Mar. 30, 1875 aged 65 years
{Natives of Parish Knock..[agru?] Co. Cork Ireland
{John Daily died Mar. 7, 1878 Aged 77 Years
{John son of D. & J. Fitzgerald Died Oct. 5, 1891 aged 16Y 5M 20D
{Patrick died Nov. 18, 1880 aged 4 Mo's
Johanna Daily
John Daily
Patrick D. Fitzgerald
Patrick Daily
John D. Fitzgerald

T1L8 "S"
{Timothy Sullivan Native of Bra[nahur?] Parish Ireland Died Feb. 29, 1880 Aged 69 Yrs.
May his soul rest in peace Amen [verse]

{Catherine died Oct. 6, 1883 Aged 24 Years
{Margaret died July 23, 1886 Aged 23 Y'rs
{Wm. A. died Dec. 20, 1887 Aged 26 Y's
{Children of T. & J. Sullivan

T1L9
{John Frey born at Strassburg Co. Gell, Germany Jan. 6, 1818 Died Dec. 31, 1899 in the 72. Year of his Age
{Mary Frey died Dec. 21, 1891 Age 69 Years
PATRES
(Mom) Bessie Frey, Nov. 11, 1890-Jan. 3, 1922
SSJ: 1922, Jan. 2, Bessie Frey, born W. Jefferson, age 30; convert

T1, L10 and 11
No stones

T1L12 (front)
John J. Ducey 1921+1969
SSJ: 1969, Sept. 5, John J. Ducey, 48
+ Michael Douglas Rump Nov. 5, Dec. 23, 1962
SSJ: 1962, Dec. 24, Michael D. Rump, 6 weeks

T1L13
{MILLER: (Father) Charles L. 1918-1975
{ (Mother) Leona R. 1919-1991

to be continued...