

650 CELEBRATE AT AN 'IRISH' CHURCH

By Gareth Hiebert
Oliver Towne columnist

ST. PATRICK, MINN. – They were four Irish families who came this emerald place in Minnesota so long ago.

James and Michael Hickey left County Clare for America in 1841 and reached here in 1857 after a pause in Pennsylvania.

Michael and Nora Roach came from the same County Clare through Pennsylvania, too, and found their roots not far from the Hickeys.

John D. and Mary Bridget Ryan of Limerick found the same part of Minnesota in 1856.

James Garry of County Mayo arrived in 1859 and built a farm homestead on a promontory of a lake called Cedar, much like those back home.

LAST SUNDAY, A century and more later, 650 descendants of those four families came here to the church called St. Patrick's which their forefathers built in 1873 on a windy hill in the crossroad community of the same name, 40 miles southwest of St. Paul as Highway 13 winds.

Here they held their first reunion amid the lawns and the shade and dust of their ancestors, who rest on the sunny slope stretching east, south and west of the church.

The day dawned with the "Luck O' the Irish" – sunny, hot with a light breeze that newer quite sifted through the church where Archbishop John Roach – one of them – celebrated a mass of "family togetherness." And not a few remarked how much like St. Patrick the head of the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese looked in his vestments.

THIS WAS THE opening event on the day's agenda, beginning just after 1 p.m. when the cars still came bringing Hickeys, Ryans, Roaches and Garrys, who also have become O'Flynnns, Doughertys, Brennans, Burns, Hills, McClures and Murrays, Yes and Fortneys, Saubers, Westmans, Peperas and Jensens too. The pure Irish blood strain have become a rainbow of ethnic city – German, French, Norwegian and Swedish.

Ryans, Garrys, Hickeys and Roaches gather outside St. Patrick's Church before Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Roach, a descendant of one of the founding families.