



Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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The Church in Ohio Prior to 1868

by Donald M. Schlegel

(Concluded, from Vol. XX, No. 4)

In 1815 Bishop Flaget sent a report on his diocese to Pope Pius VII, in which he said he had found about 50 Catholic families in Ohio, but had heard there were others scattered elsewhere, many losing the Faith for want of ministry. In 1818 he made another missionary journey through Ohio, while on his way to Detroit (all the way on horseback). In May he stopped in Cincinnati for two days and made arrangements for the Catholics there to buy a lot and build a church. On May 24, he offered Mass in Urbana. In September he came back south to St. Mary's, Ohio, to attend a vast meeting of some 10,000 Indians of various tribes and nations with the Indian Commissioners to negotiate a land treaty. He attended to the spiritual needs of the sub-agents, interpreters, and Native Americans, many of whom were Catholics, and "won all hearts". He tried to persuade all of the need to establish missions among the Indians. In June of 1819 he came down the Ohio River on his return from Detroit and found that the Catholics at Cincinnati had completed their little frame church of St. Patrick -- but this was not the first Catholic Church in Ohio.

Near the end of his journal of his 1812 trip to Baltimore, Bishop Flaget wrote:

It is almost impossible to form an idea of the Catholics who forget their religion on account of the lack of priests, or the lack of zeal in the priests who have charge of these congregations. Not a day passes

that we do not find great numbers of these strayed sheep, who, because they do not see their real shepherd, become Baptists, Methodists, etc., or at least nothingists. To remedy this great evil it would be necessary that a priest, filled with the spirit of God, and convinced of the value of souls, should often get away from his accustomed route, and going out into the country, ask if there are not Catholics in those regions. The discovery of a single one will lead to the discovery of ten others. If he found only one family he could say Mass there, preach, catechise and pray. Let him show a great desire for the salvation of souls, and a contempt for their money. With such dispositions a priest would have the consolation of bringing to the bosom of the Church millions* of her children who never will enter it unless we go after them. [* Millions may be a bad translation for "thousands."]

This is, indeed, almost in the proverbial nut-shell, the early story of the Church in Ohio and describes the careers of Fathers Edward Fenwick, the Apostle of Ohio, and his nephew, Nicholas Young, both of the Order of Preachers. It was not until 1818 that Bishop Flaget was able to send these two to take up their residence in the cabin built on the land donated by the Dittoes. On December 6, 1818, they blessed the first Catholic Church in Ohio, St. Joseph's near Somerset, in the presence of the Dittoe, Fink, and McFadden families. The patron of the little log church was chosen by Jacob Dittoe, and apparently was chosen as the baptismal patron of

his father; but it was also the name of the new Cathedral of the Diocese, in Bardstown, which had been solemnly consecrated by Bishop Flaget just four months earlier.

With St. Joseph's as their headquarters and home, the two Dominicans spread out across Ohio in ever-widening circles to find the lost sheep, as their Bishop had seen to be so necessary. Their travels, usually alone, exposed them to all extremes of weather and danger. Often one had to swim his horse across swollen streams to reach a mission or to administer the sacraments to someone in the agony of death. Not infrequently, when overtaken by darkness in the wilderness, and not knowing the way, Fr. Fenwick would recommend himself to God, fasten or hobble his horse, and lay down to sleep with his saddle for a pillow, the bare earth for his bed, and no protection but that of heaven. (A picture of Father Fenwick appeared in the *Bulletin* of October, 1992.)

Bishop Fenwick

On June 19, 1821 Pope Pius VII erected the Diocese of Cincinnati and Father Fenwick was appointed its first bishop. Ohio then had three churches (St. Joseph's near Somerset, St. Mary's at Lancaster, and St. Patrick's, outside Cincinnati), some 6000 Catholics, and still just Fathers Fenwick and Young to attend them. The new diocese also included all of Michigan and Wisconsin, which at that early date were home to more of the Faithful than lived in Ohio; in 1826 it was estimated that Ohio had 8,000 and Michigan 12,000 Catholics -- the latter mostly Native Americans and some French; but Michigan had only one priest, stationed at Detroit.

According to his biographer (who may exaggerate, as biographers are wont), "Possibly no Christian prelate was ever confronted with greater destitution than that which Cincinnati's first ordinary had to face". Flaget's Diocese of

Bardstown had been erected on the strong Catholic communities that had come from Maryland and settled in Kentucky *en masse*; Fenwick's Diocese of Cincinnati was erected on a mountain of debt. He spent 1822 organizing his diocese and the additional priests that Bishop Flaget had released to him, and moved the little frame St. Patrick's church into Cincinnati and rebuilt it as his cathedral.

In 1823 Bishop Fenwick went to Rome to resign his bishopric. That being forbidden by the Holy Father, he asked for assistance, which was generously forthcoming, both from Rome and from France, in the form of money, objects for the new churches, priests, and even one Sister of Mercy, who came to see what prospects Ohio might hold for her order.

Bishop Fenwick returned to Cincinnati in 1825 and that year laid the cornerstone of a new cathedral. This was not just an ornament or a vanity, but was a necessity. In the small, first cathedral, the oratory of Dominican Father John A. Hill had captivated all of Cincinnati, of whatever religious convictions. The little church was filled to capacity, with eager listeners crowded into the sanctuary and perched in windows or wherever footing could be found. Others gathered in the streets or anyplace else where they could hear Father Hill's ringing voice and words, whose overpowering logic silenced all adversaries. The best-known Protestant ministers of the city were among his audience. The grace of God abounded and conversions were plentiful, not only in Cincinnati but throughout the diocese. (It should be noted that in these years, through births, immigration, and conversions, the Church in Ohio was doubling every year.) The Dominican friars were accustomed to preaching on all occasions and in any place they could obtain permission or a hearing. Schools, court-houses, public squares, and even Protestant churches were used for preaching and public discussions. However,

intellectual bouts were generally avoided, for it was felt that they tended to deepen prejudice. Bishop Fenwick and his priests made their discourses "doctrinal, calm, and sober." They were designed to make the people realize the value of the soul; the importance of salvation; the meaning of the doctrines of the Church; the divine institution of the Church; and Her commission from Christ to teach all nations and to carry out His work until the end of time. It was a method that brought many converts to the Church and many sinners to repentance.

Bishop Fenwick himself, an American born, unlike many of his priests in those early days, was frank, open, and sincere and possessed the gift of dealing with his non-Catholic fellow-countrymen and bringing them into the Church. But, the foreign-born priests also had their triumphs. Cincinnati's German priest in 1825 "unearthed" 33 Catholic families who had been attending Lutheran services. This nearly ruined the Lutheran congregation and had its pastor "spitting fire and flame" against the priest.

The bishop continued his almost annual journeys throughout his vast diocese, while at the same time its institutions were being built up. In 1828 a school was started in Cincinnati; in 1829 St. Francis Xavier Seminary opened, with ten students; in 1829 on a trip to Michigan and Wisconsin, he established two schools for the Native Americans and brought two of them back to enroll in his seminary; In 1829 the Sisters of Charity, of Saint Elizabeth Seton's foundation, came to Cincinnati to open a school for girls and an orphanage. In 1830 Dominican Sisters from Kentucky came to Somerset and opened a convent and an academy for girls, the direct "ancestor" of St. Mary of the Springs and Ohio Dominican College. In 1831 the college for young men, the Athenaeum, opened in Cincinnati. By this year, 1831, the "sectarian ministers", as the Protestant preachers were called, were wrought up by all of the conversions

to Catholicism that had been taking place and they had begun to attack the Church in the newspapers. To answer them, this year Bishop Fenwick started *The Catholic Telegraph*, his weekly newspaper, which contained largely not news but apologetics and doctrine, which still exists today as the oldest Catholic newspaper in the country.

In 1832, Bishop Fenwick visited distant points such as Arbre Croche in Wisconsin, but was ill during the entire journey. Entirely worn out, he finally succumbed to the cholera then raging, and died in a hotel room in Wooster, Ohio on September 26. He was attended by two doctors and a Catholic lady, but no priests were present to console him. By this time, he was already, and rightly, called the "Apostle of Ohio."

At the time of Bishop Fenwick's death, in addition to the institutions already mentioned, there were sixteen Catholic churches in Ohio and fourteen priests. The Catholic parishes included that at Zanesville, where the first parish school in Ohio had been opened in 1830.

Bishop Purcell

Bishop Fenwick's successor was like him in many respects, but in some superficial matters was quite different. Unlike Fenwick, John Baptist Purcell was foreign-born, a native of County Cork, Ireland. As a boy he aspired to the priesthood and he came to America at the age of eighteen with this intention in mind. Like Fenwick, however, he was ordained in Europe -- in France -- and like him, he was a college professor. One great difference was that when he was appointed bishop, Purcell had never had any pastoral experience. And so it is remarkable, in a sense, that this education priest, like his predecessor, was noted for his almost annual, arduous journeys through his diocese to visit his priests, confirm his people, and bless their new churches.



Bishop John B. Purcell

Self sacrificing all his life, the new bishop was so poor that, like his predecessor, upon his appointment and consecration in Baltimore in 1833, he had to borrow money to travel to Cincinnati. He was content always to live with his priests at the Cathedral and to partake in their meals. He did not know how to keep money; offerings received in the morning were given out in charity before night. He was a hard worker in the diocese, and indeed he had to be, for the diocese was still growing by leaps and bounds. Catholics laborers came to the state to build the canals, then the National Road, then the railroads. And, having come, many of them stayed and more arrived via these routes and settled in Purcell's diocese, all demanding the ministrations of the Church. To quote from a sketch of Purcell in the Archdiocesan history:

When at home in his cathedral, he preached masterly dogmatic sermons, much needed then as now...He was constant in the confessional, took part in the regular offices of the parish priests, and tended to

sick-calls. ...His pastoral letters...are masterpieces of literary expression as well as careful expositions of doctrine. He was always in demand on festive occasions. Nor did he ever refuse...an invitation to deliver an address. He was ready to serve the humblest of his own churches, or those of other bishops; he welcomed the occasion to speak to Protestants as a means of bringing them nearer to the Catholic Church. He traveled east and west and north and south to further Catholic enterprises or to rejoice in the happy jubilees of his friends. He was most accessible to the down-trodden.

He undertook seven trips to Europe to find aid for his diocese, bringing back priests and sisters himself and encouraging others to do so, for it was not until 1867 that he considered the diocese to be self-sufficient in vocations.

In 1840, in an effort of great importance to the future Diocese of Columbus, Bishop Purcell brought the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to Cincinnati from Namur, Belgium. They soon had flourishing schools in Cincinnati and in 1855 came to Columbus to take charge of the two parish girls' schools here.

By 1847, there were in the state 70 churches and several under construction, along with some fifty other stations; 66 priests; the seminary with twelve students, attached to St. Xavier college for young men, in Cincinnati; seven religious communities, of which two were conducting academies for young ladies and two orphanages; and some 70,000 Catholics. In 1847, the diocese of Cleveland was formed in the northern one-third of the state, with Bishop Amadeus Rappe as its first ordinary. This took away some 20,000 of the diocese's Catholic population, but they were quickly replaced by births and immigration.

Of great importance in this era of the history of the Church in Ohio was Mrs. Sarah Worthington Peter (1800-1877). She was a daughter of Thomas Worthington, "Father of Ohio," a

remarkable, charitable, and cultured lady, born at Adena near Chillicothe. She became a Catholic in 1855 and devoted the remainder of her life to works of charity through the Church. She succeeded in bringing to the diocese small groups of religious sisters to establish houses of their orders, to relieve the poor, the imprisoned, and the orphaned. In 1857 she brought the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to Cincinnati from Kentucky (who came to Columbus in 1865). In 1858 she brought from Aachen the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, who founded St. Mary's Hospital in Cincinnati in 1859 and St. Francis Hospital in Columbus in 1862. Also in 1858, she brought the Sisters of Mercy from Kinsale, Ireland to Cincinnati, where they soon opened an orphanage and school. Mrs. Peter also is given some credit for the arrival in Cincinnati of the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1868, the Religious of the Sacred Heart in 1869, and the Passionist Fathers in 1871. (A picture of Mrs. Peter appeared in the *Bulletin* Vol. IX, No. 8 (July, 1983).)

By the 1860s, the bishop's job was too large for one man, and so in 1862 Father Sylvester Rosecrans was appointed and consecrated to be Bishop Purcell's auxiliary bishop. Purcell for some time had been asking for a coadjutor, which Rome would not grant, so they gave him this auxiliary, the first ever named for a diocese in this country. By 1868, the diocese had grown to 154 churches and 60 chapels and stations; 159 priests; six male and nine female religious institutions; three literary institutions for young men; seven female academies; 37 parochial schools, three hospitals; two orphanages serving 560 children; and a Catholic population of some 150,000. In that year, 1868, the Diocese of Columbus was erected, with Bishop Rosecrans as its first ordinary, generally comprising all of the state south and east of Delaware and Morrow Counties.

To round out Archbishop Purcell's story, it was

stated above that the diocese of Cincinnati was erected on a mountain of debt. Archbishop Purcell never overcame that problem and in 1878 the Archdiocese -- to which it had been raised in 1851 -- failed financially -- but eventually recovered. Archbishop Purcell lived on until 1883, outliving Bishop Rosecrans, when he finally died at the age of 83 years.

Conclusion

The Diocese of Columbus has been blessed with excellent bishops. When the historians of the future look back at our own era, the last four decades of the twentieth century, if their perspective is wide enough they will remark how especially blessed we have been. One hears and reads of so many strange and sad things happening in other dioceses, that the future historians will remark how we had a line of bishops who took to heart their charge -- to teach all that our Lord commanded, and to provide the sacraments and the liturgy in accord with the mind of the Church. Perhaps, they might judge, those of this century did fully as well as the heroes mentioned above -- Blessed Francois de Laval, Benedict Joseph Flaget, Edward Dominic Fenwick, and John Baptist Purcell, who founded the Church in Ohio.

Some Sources

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- O'Daniel, V. F., *The Right Rev. Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P.*; New York, Cincinnati: the Dominicana, 1920.
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Abstracts from *The Catholic Telegraph*

(Continued, from Vol. XX, No. 4)

April 21, 1832

OBITUARY

Died, in Somerset, Perry County, Ohio, 13th inst., after a lingering illness, Mrs. Jane Slaven, wife of Mr. James Slaven. This amiable lady had but recently embraced the Catholic Religion, and received the Sacrament of Confirmation, during the later visit of the Bishop. Her husband and friends have suffered a loss which cannot be easily repaired, and her neighbors an example of piety truly edifying. She received all the rites of religion with the most fervent devotion, and to her last breath seemed to feel their consoling influences.

May 29, 1832

Extract of a Letter from Somerset, Ohio dated May 7.

I am happy to inform you that the good Sisters of St. Mary's Seminary are doing well. They are employed by the school Directors of this district to teach a District school. They are much patronised by the District; having already received under their tuition nearly 60 girls. I have additional pleasure in assuring you that their house is, next to the benefits of a church and its ministry, the greatest public blessing to the people of this neighborhood that kind Providence could have bestowed on us. It will surely form one of the brightest gems in the crown of glory reserved in heaven for the benevolent heads that conceived the design of establishing it here. I could add nothing to the praise of the worthy Sisters who conduct it, were I to attempt it. Their comportment and good example, are perfectly uniform, so pious and edifying that they are subjects of admiration and respect to all who see them.

August 18, 1832

St. Mary's Seminary, Somerset, Perry Co., Ohio--We have seen, in the "Western Post," an

account of the examination, held on the 30th ulto. in St. Mary's Seminary, Somerset, Perry County, Ohio. From a view of the details, we are highly gratified with the success, which has attended the first scholastic course of this new and highly respectable Female Institution.

From its central location and scientific resources, we fondly indulge the hope, that St. Mary's Female Seminary, will continue to receive that liberal patronage which is always due to laudable exertion, for the public welfare. Institutions of this kind, in the West, are, yet, rare. Their necessity is becoming, daily, more urgent, in proportion to the rapid increase of population in the West. Those therefore, who have been foremost, in the establishment of respectable literary institutions, which combine the advantages of correct government with the accomplishments of education, are highly deserving liberal and generous patronage. The qualifications of the Ladies who superintend the Seminary are such as to command respect, and to afford the young Ladies, who may be entrusted to their care, the embellishments of a superior education.

August 4, 1832

Information Wanted

Patrick Daley, Somerset, Perry County, Ohio would thankfully receive information of Peter, Michael, or Thomas Early, brothers, natives of the parish of Aragal Keran [Errigal Keerogue], County Tyrone, Ireland, -- sons of Barnard Early and Ann Harish. They emigrated to the United States in 1801, and are supposed to be in Western Virginia, Ohio, or Kentucky.

August 18, 1832

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Fenwick, Bishop of Cincinnati, accompanied by the Rev. Mr. Jeanjean, left the city in June, to visit the Indian schools and congregations belonging to his diocese. We

learn, that he administered the sacrament of confirmation in the churches of Somerset and Canton, on his way to the Lake....

Dec. 15, 1832

Married in Zanesville 29th ult., by Rev. Mr. Mills, Mr. James Taylor, of Duncan's Falls, and Mrs. B. C. Dugan, of Zanesville.

Jan. 12, 1833

[A biographical sketch of Bishop Fenwick appeared in the *Telegraph*, signed "R." Perhaps this was Fr. Rese. In part, it says:] In 1810 he began to penetrate the forests of Ohio, whence he merited the title of the Apostle of Ohio. In his first apostolical excursion he found three catholic families in the centre of the state. They consisted of twenty individuals occupied in clearing their lands, who had not seen a priest for ten years. He heard at a great distance the stroke of the axe interrupting the silence of the forests. The joy of these good people at seeing the first catholic priest was so great, that Bishop Fenwick could never recall the circumstance without experiencing the greatest consolation, because he considered it the first fruits of his Ohio mission. Even these families still speak of it with the greatest transports of joy. They have since built there a new town, Somerset. this mission was always a species of delight for the good Bishop. There are now, at that place, two handsome churches and two convents, one for the Fathers, the other for the Sisters of St. Dominic. Through a special benediction, this parish is one of the most numerous and best instructed in the whole diocese.

Father Fenwick penetrated, with incredible ardor, the forests of Ohio, and found many persons, who, after hearing his instructions, felt a desire to become christians. Catholics now began to emigrate and the good missionary quitted, twice a year, the Convent of St. Rose, to visit and console his new children. It was at this time that the town of Cincinnati began to rise; seven catholic families were found there....

Jan. 26, 1833

The Editors of the Catholic Telegraph,

I have just read with pleasure in your paper the short biography it contains of the late respected and beloved Bishop of Cincinnati. Permit me, Messrs. Editors, to correct an error the writer of the article has unintentionally made. Bishop Fenwick was born in 1768, which you will find makes a considerable difference in his life, which may perhaps be all important to his future historian to know, when a more detailed account of his life shall be published. The writer has also neglected to mention that he settled in Ohio, where St. Joseph's is now situated, in 1818, and resided there the four years preceding his nomination to its first Bishop in 1822.

If you think proper to give the above an insertion in your next paper you will oblige a

FRIEND

[Note that "Friend" -- could this have been Father Young? -- did not correct the date of 1810 when Father Fenwick first came to Ohio.]

(To be continued)

+ + +

Chillicothe St. Mary's Church

Baptismal Register, 1835-1846

(Continued, from Vol. XX, No. 4)

1845, continued

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Oct. 8 Simon, born Oct. 3, son of Peter Kerbel and Margaret Kerbel (born Hameltian?); spons. Christopher and Elizabeth Hamelthard?.

Oct. 9 Elizabeth Louisa, born Oct. 3, daughter of Peter Bermann and Maria Louisa Bermann (born Keller); spons. Ferdinand Bader and Anna Maria Noll.

Oct. 11 [blank], born Oct. 3, son of Peter Ring and Kunigunda Ring (born End); spons. Peter End and Walburga End. Tusch Andreas, missionary [Fr. Andrew Tusch was stationed

at St. Mary's Church in Cincinnati in this year, according to the annual Catholic Directory.]

Oct. 11 [blank], daughter of Heinrich? Frank and Maria Frank (born Ober?); spon. Peter Frank and Maria Frank. AT

Oct. 11 F--- Jacob, son of John Eichenlaub and Caroline (born Mukleseer?); spon. Louis Bauman and Amalia Muschler. AT

Oct. 11 Franz Xavier, son of Barnhard Hans? and Maria Friedmark (born Leidman?); spon. Franz Xavier Hanngs and Josephina Jakob. AT

Nov. 9 John Lin?, born Oct. 3, son of John Lin (or Sin?) and Helen Welsh; spon. Patrick Keny? and Mary Murphy. A. Rappe

Nov. 9 Barbara Kepick?, born Oct. 20, 1845, daughter of Michael and Ann Mary Hacinger; spon. John Korb? and Barbara Korb. AR

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Nov. 9 Francis Xavier Spitzer, born Oct. 30, son of Michael and Mary Maure; spon. Barnhard ----- and Theresa Hiss. AR

same day Henry Centour [above which someone has written Santo], born Oct. 25, son of Alexander and Sophia -----; spon. Simon Sventis? and Juliana Bochgenshitz. AR

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Nov. 16 John, born Sept 10, son of Sebastian Roth and Magdalene Sucker; spon. Michael Brendle and Rosa Zimmermann. O. H. Borgess

November 16 Luke, born October 28, son of Luke Keller and Eva Sauter; spon. Celestine Hermann and Gertrude Hemmerle. OHB

November 16 Anna Catharina, born November 7, daughter of Fridolin Bärmann and Elizabeth Meyer; spon. Martin Leisingand Maria Eiserle. OHB

November 17 John, born Sept. 20, son of William Lang and Maria Anna; spon. Anna Maria Baumann. OHB

November 23 Edward, born Nov. 18, son of David Weisenburger and Christina Armbruster; spon. Edward Armbruster and Ursula Krämer (or Krömer?). OHB

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November 24 Maria, born Nov. 3, daughter of Rudolph Siegfried and Elizabeth Hackmann; spon. Michael Brendle and Maria Anna Lind. Otho H. Borgess

November 26 Mary Catherine, daughter of George Meyer and Catherine Hiller; spon. Barbara Dell. OHB

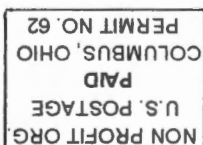
December 18 Caroline, born December 4, daughter of Philip Gerteisen and Josepha Sporer; spon. Frederick Hangs and Caroline Fürtherer. OHB

Dec. 21 Maria, born Sept. 28, daughter of Peter Rape? and Mary Elizabeth Green; spon. Timothy Quinn and Catherine Shea. OHB

(End of 1845)

(To be continued)

Catholic Record Society - Diocese of Columbus
197 E. Gay Street Columbus, Ohio 43215 Donald M. Schlegel, editor



CHANCERY OFFICE
DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS
198 E. BROAD STREET
COLUMBUS OH 43215