



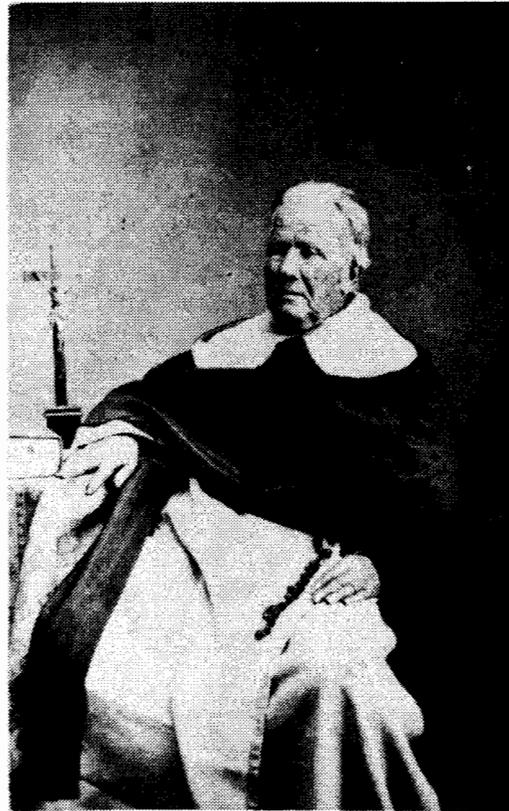
Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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- Dec. 6: St. Nicholas -

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Rev. Nicholas D. Young, O.P.
(1793-1878)

Many were the early Catholic missionary priests whose work in Ohio earned for them appointments to Bishoprics, the enduring recognition of historians, and even full-length biographies. No priest was more important, however, to the Catholic people of frontier Ohio than Father Nicholas D. Young, O.P. This devoted son of St. Dominic must have been known to every Catholic family which lived in Ohio before 1830. There could hardly have been a Catholic family here who did not have at least one child baptized by his hand and voice or one marriage blessed by him for the Church. Since the facts of his life have not been generally available, the Society asked Doctor Tony Lisska, our expert on things Dominican, to assemble the following story of Father Young's life for the benefit of our readers. The above photograph, taken in the early 1870's, was provided by Pat Mooney, descendant of Somerset families.

REV. NICHOLAS DOMINIC YOUNG, O.P.
EARLY DOMINICAN MISSIONARY IN OHIO

by Anthony J. Lisska, Denison University

In the annals of nineteenth century Roman Catholic Church history in Ohio, several names stand out with distinction, among them those of Fathers Edward D. Fenwick, Jean Baptiste Lamy, John Baptist Purcell, Joseph Machbeuf, and Frederic Rese. The list would not be complete without the name of the dynamic missionary, Rev. Nicholas Dominic Young, O.P. The nephew of Bishop Edward Fenwick, Father Young became one of the most traveled missionaries in Ohio history. Late in life, he once remarked that if his trips were placed end to end, they would certainly string around the globe. As a missionary, a religious leader, a church builder, as well as an early example of a cleric who attempted to blend without conflict his Catholicism with his Americanism, Nicholas Dominic Young served his Church and his Ohio Dominican brothers with distinction.

The Youngs in Maryland

Nicholas Young was the fourth or fifth of the nine children born to Nicholas and Sarah (Fenwick) Young. Nicholas's mother was a sister of Rev. Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P., the priest who established the Dominican Order in the United States. Religious vocations were prominent in the family. Two other Young sons entered the religious life, Robert becoming a Dominican and Benjamin a Jesuit. Robert, however, died in 1812, well before ordination, becoming the first clerical student of the newly established Dominican Order in the U.S. to die as a member.

Nicholas was born on June 11, 1793 at the Youngs' ancestral manor, called Giesboro. This manor, the Dominican historian Rev. V. F. O'Daniel writes, was situated partly in the southwestern part of the District of Columbia and partly in Prince George's County, Maryland. Giesboro was near the mouth of the Piscataway River, opposite George Washington's Mount Vernon. (1) A vast stretch of land, the manor extended to the Potomac River. Nicholas's great-grandfather was an English judge sent to the New World who on becoming a Roman Catholic was removed from office. (2)

As a youngster, Nicholas received his early education at Georgetown College. In 1805, however, he was taken to St. Rose Priory in Springfield, Kentucky. There he was educated under the auspices of his uncle at the College of St. Thomas Aquin located within the priory. Under the tutelage of his uncle and another learned Dominican, Rev. Samuel Wilson, Nicholas later joined the Dominican Order. He was ordained a priest on December 18, 1817 at St. Rose Priory by Rt. Rev. Benedict J. Flaget, Bishop of Bardstown.

Missionary and Church Builder

The freshly ordained priest was assigned to assist his uncle in the wide-reaching pioneer sections of Ohio. Father Young appears to have accepted this challenge with gusto, as he was to spend the next quarter-century laboring with indefatigable zeal in the often bleak stretches of the Ohio frontier. Commenting on the extraordinary work accomplished by this uncle/nephew team of missionaries in Ohio, O'Daniel wrote the following:

Perhaps never did two missionaries work harder, or co-operate more cordially, or gather richer spiritual fruit. They are the two corner-stones of the early Church there. Fenwick is the apostle of Ohio; Young is co-apostle. (3)

From the time of his ordination in 1817 until he was elected Prior of St. Rose in Kentucky in 1843, Father Young spent the bulk of his time doing missionary work in Ohio. He served as superior of St. Joseph's near Somerset from 1828 until he was appointed Provincial of the American Dominicans in 1833; he served his four year term as Provincial at St. Joseph's. For a three year period he served as Prior of St. Rose in Kentucky, then returned to Ohio. Referring to Father Young's work in the Ohio missions, Rev. V. F. O'Daniel wrote the following vivid account:

During that period, he traversed and re-traversed every part of the state, and built a number of its Catholic Churches. Often he was overtaken by the night, while on a journey from one place to another, and obliged to hitch, or hobble, his horse, and wait until the morning before he could proceed further. Neither heat nor cold could deter him in his ministrations. In his old age he used to claim, in his modest way, that he had ridden on horseback several times the length of the girth of the globe. (4)

Among the churches in Ohio which he saw opened was the very first, St. Joseph's near Somerset, blessed on December 6, 1818. On Easter Sunday of the following year, he offered the first Mass in the new Cincinnati Church of St. Patrick. In 1822, he accompanied his uncle on an episcopal visit through Ohio and Michigan and in 1827 we find him again helping his uncle preach the "jubilee" throughout the vast area then composing the Diocese of Cincinnati. He and Father Mullon opened and blessed three churches on this journey. Later, he preached at the corner-stone laying of the third church at St. Joseph's near Somerset in July of 1839; a year later, November of 1840, he presided at the Mass of dedication of the new church of St. Luke in Danville.

Six years before the outbreak of the Civil War, we find Father Young assigned to Washington, D.C., with his friend, Father George A. Wilson. (5) Together, Young and Wilson helped establish the Priory of St. Dominic in southwest Washington, near Young's ancestral home. This was the Dominicans' first venture into the East, the area where Father Fenwick had originally hoped to establish his Dominican college when he returned to the United States in 1805 after completing his education in Europe. It was fitting that a half century later his nephew brought the Dominicans back to the nation's capital. In fact, Young built St. Dominic Church in Washington, so he remembered in later life, on the "very spot where stood his grandfather's barn." One writer suggested that the Washington church Young built was, at the time, the "finest specimen of Gothic work in this country."

Father Young returned to Kentucky during the early part of the Civil War, but we find him in Washington again in 1863. In 1878, he served as chaplain for the Sisters of the Holy Cross on East Capitol Street. One morning after his prayers, he felt ill; he remained at the convent and died there within a few days, on November 28, 1878. O'Daniel notes that when Father Young died in his eighty-fifth year, he was the oldest priest in the United States and the longest ordained. He served sixty-one years as a Dominican priest,

ministering mostly to Catholics in Ohio. The Catholic Columbian noted that "at his death, he was the oldest priest in the world, except one in South America."

Dominican Provincial

Father Young appears to have been an activist in many ways. He was continually on the go, doing work for his Order and for his Church. During his term as Provincial, many new activities were undertaken, most of which contributed greatly to the development of his Order in this country. At this time, the center of Dominican activity had shifted from central Kentucky to Ohio. This was in part due to the continual troubles the Dominicans experienced in working with Bishop Flaget of Bardstown. But as we will soon see, the new Bishop of Cincinnati, Rt. Rev. John B. Purcell, would take over in Ohio where Flaget left off in Kentucky.

As Provincial, Father Young set about the task of building a new priory near Somerset. This building was completed in 1837, shortly after he left office as Provincial. Before that, he had secured permission and the necessary decrees from Rome to establish St. Joseph's into a General Novitiate for the Dominican Order, to erect a Studium Generale (a major seminary, for all intents and purposes) and a college. It is highly probable that the Roman authorities did not realize the extent of the poverty of the American Dominicans at Somerset, nor the forlornness of the American frontier. In 1834 when Father Young received the permission from Rome, the only living accommodations at St. Joseph's amounted to a log house built in 1822, consisting of three rooms and a kitchen. Nonetheless, Father Young set about building his new convent or monastery, which was completed and dedicated in 1837. The building served the Dominicans well for the next century and a quarter, until it was demolished in the early 1970's. Father Young seems to have used part of his inheritance to help pay for the new priory and for the church at St. Joseph's, which was begun in 1839. We can grasp a glimpse of the immense poverty of these early Ohio Dominicans when we read what an Irish Dominican wrote in 1853 about his American brothers: "Their labors for many years have gone to build churches in different places and to procure an organ for the church [Holy Trinity in Somerset]... the Fathers in Ohio hardly get shoes to wear on the missions. (6) The Ohio Dominicans did receive some assistance from European sources, for Father Young thanked the Provincial of Holland for a gift of 1,000 florins. He also wrote that his new college building would not be as big as he had hoped, but would nonetheless be three stories high, 62 feet long and 40 feet wide; it would hold ten or twelve Dominicans. He also sought European-trained scholars to staff the new seminary, which he received through the good graces of the Dominican Master General in Rome.

Bishop Purcell traveled to Somerset in 1836 and apparently liked what he saw. The Catholic Telegraph (August 18, 1836) reported on the visit in the following words:

The Reverend N. D. Young is now engaged in building a new monastery. ...[The Dominicans] received a splendid accession within the preceding year, from the munificence of Dr. O'Finan [an Irish Dominican stationed in Rome]. Among other works, to the number of 2000 volumes, we noticed with much pleasure Bibliotheca Graeca, (14

volumes), 8 volumes...all Latin and Greek classics elegantly bound...French, English and Italian classics...besides theological works of great value.

Commenting on this passage written by Purcell, Reginald Coffey noted, "you begin to wonder if there was room in that little log house for anything else besides Young and the library." (7)

As Provincial, Father Young kept his pen busy writing to the Master General in Rome, occasionally chiding the Roman officer for his apparent neglect of the Dominicans' American Province. He mentioned that the religious spirit was alive and well in the United States' Dominicans and that the spirit of poverty was observed. One wonders if this was through religious discipline or just through the nature of being abjectly poor circuit riders in the Ohio wilderness! During this period, Father Young served as an Ohio correspondent for the United States Catholic Miscellany, a weekly newspaper published in Charleston, South Carolina. His reports published in the Miscellany serve today as the basis for much of our early history of Catholicism in Ohio. He used an informal yet thoroughly descriptive style in narrating the accounts.

One large problem Father Young faced as Provincial was keeping enough Dominican priests around to minister to the frontier Catholics. Many European priests did not last long on the frontier. Young Father Fahy from Ireland returned home and the Italian Dominican, Rev. Samuel Mazzuchelli, would not submit to the objectives of the American Dominicans but insisted on going at the missions on his own. Other Dominicans who left the Ohio mission included Fathers Alleman, Martin, and D'Arco. To be a religious superior in the first half of the nineteenth century meant much struggle for any American.

Father Young had several tussles with Bishop Purcell; both men were strong-willed and it took several years for their affairs to settle down. Originally, Father Young had wanted a Dominican named as successor to his uncle as Bishop of Cincinnati. In this he was disappointed, but when Purcell was named to the post Young journeyed to Baltimore to assist at his consecration and returned to Cincinnati with him. Purcell even named Young his first Vicar General. The first disagreements came over ownership of church lands and an ecclesiastical tax. When Purcell succeeded to Cincinnati, it was a very poor diocese, where debt reigned supreme. In addition, however, there were very few churches to which he as bishop held title. Outside of Cincinnati there were thirteen churches, nine of which were legally in the possession of the Dominicans. The Bishop found evidence from a Roman decree of 1828 that the Dominicans were to pay him \$300.00 per year. This had never been paid, and Father Young had no intention of paying it, even if he could. This dispute was not settled until 1852. The other major disagreement concerned the correct treatment of a Dominican priest who had departed St. Joseph's without permission. This too took several years to settle. (8)

Thoroughly American

In addition to his zealous work for his Church and his Order, Father Young was a keen observer of the American character. A deeply committed American, when traveling during his early days and asked who he was, he always replied, "I am an American Priest!" The Cincinnati Telegraph noted in his obituary that "it was difficult to judge whether Father Young was most a

priest or an American, he was so preeminently both." Describing his appearance, one writer suggested that Young was "a short man; thick set, with the voice like the roar of a bull, he seemed to have been born especially for the life he so grandly filled." (Catholic Telegraph) On this last point, a letter written by Rev. Richard P. Miles, O.P. comments on Father Young's singing ability, or rather his lack thereof. Miles, it appears, was an accomplished musician, while Father Young was tone deaf.

Father Dom [Young] says he SUNG the first solemn Mass at Lancaster. This made me laugh of course. I fancied that I saw him with all the additional wrinkles in his forehead singing Vere dingum et justum est, astonishing and delighting the surrounding thousands with the melody of his voice. Oh, how it must have tickled the musical ears that were present. (9)

Father Young appears to have been an "inveterate smoker." In this habit he was, so it was suggested, like his famous bishop uncle. This habit was contracted while "traveling through the Western wilds, where a lighted cigar was a great companion during a dark night." (Telegraph) A letter of Bishop Fenwick survives in which he called for some "James River Chew."

From an early age, Father Young was familiar with the political aspirations of the new republic, a republic in which he believed his democratic ideals and his Dominican/Roman Catholic ideals were compatible. He was a Whig to the core, probably because of his English background in a land-baron family with early Maryland roots. It is unclear whether his Whiggish political philosophy was a cause for friction on the frontier, where certainly Andrew Jackson was a folk-hero. In the Telegraph, his biographer noted:

Father Young saw all the public men from Washington down. He recalled Jefferson, Madison and Monroe riding around the race track in Washington, and Henry Clay, J.C. Calhoun and some of the first men of the day were frequent guests at his Father's house.

Commenting on Father Young's priestly and earthly ideals, Father Coffey wrote:

But Nicholas Dominic Young was also a man of great virtue. He was consumed by zeal and love for the only three things in life that mattered to him: his God, his Church-Order (for he identified them), and his country (he was a great anti-Jackson American). Next to his bible, his favorite reading was the National Intelligencer, a newspaper published in Washington. He was, moreover, that rare anomaly -- a Dominican with a Jesuit's esprit de corps.... (10)

The Consummate Missionary

Through his missionary activities, Father Young found his true calling and life's work. That he was an outstanding circuit rider is undeniable. Yet he also served as a religious superior, both as Prior and as Provincial. In these roles, he seems not to have fared as well. Father Coffey noted frequently that Father Young did not work well with others as their superior. Father O'Daniel, recalling conversations he had with Dominicans who had served under Father Young, once commented that he could be "tight-fisted." Coffey suggested that Young appeared to demand from his religious subjects "a blind,

unquestioning, and probably, subservient obedience." (11) Probably Father Young knew this about himself, and in following the footsteps of his uncle, who likewise preferred the missionary life to that of administrator, Father Young found his true satisfaction. As late as 1850, when Father Young was approaching his sixties, he wrote to his brother asking, "What would you think if I should be sent to the California Mission ? or rather, if I should desire my Superiors to send me there to assist in establishing our Order in that country." (12) That desire for the missions so characteristic of all great missionaries certainly was evident in Nicholas Dominic Young. Father Young was without equal as a frontier missionary in nineteenth century America; and most of his missionary activity took place in parts of the wide area which eventually became the Diocese of Columbus.

NOTES

1. The December 5, 1878 Catholic Columbian contains a long obituary of Father Young, a complete account of his life and work. It seems to have first appeared in The Freeman's Journal in New York City. The Catholic Telegraph ran a slightly different version on December 12, which is found in the centenary issue of the Catholic Times which appeared in 1968. The author expresses his thanks to Mike Collins, editor of the Catholic Times, for showing him the 1968 publication.
2. Pat Mooney provided important materials on the Young family from Bessie Wilmarth Gahn's Original Patentees of Land at Washington Prior to 1700. Notley Young was one of the last owners of a vast tract of land which covered Capitol Hill, southwest Washington, the Navy Yard, southeast Washington, and areas north of the capitol building and the Library of Congress. The author is grateful to Pat Mooney for providing this useful material.
3. O'Daniel, V. F., O.P., Dominican Province of St. Joseph, pp. 95-96.
4. Ibid., page 96.
5. See the author's article on Father Wilson in the Bulletin of April, 1988.
6. Coffey, R. M., The American Dominicans, page 182.
7. Ibid., page 181.
8. Coffey gives a rather detailed account of the bickering between Bishop Purcell and Father Young.
9. Coffey, page 213.
10. Ibid., page 187.
11. Ibid., page 263.
12. Ibid., page 265.

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, SOMERSET, OHIO
REGISTER OF BAPTISMS AND MARRIAGES, 1827-1851
(Continued from Vol. XIII, No. 10)

1833, Continued

Apr. 6 (or 16?) in the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lancaster, Charles, born March 14, son of Matthew Gardner and Magdalene Engel; spons. Frederick Repe [? Could this be Bishop Reese?] and Mary Ann Weld. TJVDB
same Barbara, born Jan. 27, daughter of Daniel Ahne and Anna Philip; spons. Meinrat Philips and Barbara Schatreler (?). TJVDB

Apr. -- John, son of Charles Smit and Magdalene Mongold; spons. Michael Bets and Bridget Bets. TJVDB

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Apr. 28 (26?) in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Louisa Anna, born Mar. 15, daughter of Samuel Benjamin and Delily Dien; spons. James Dien and Mary Ann Dien. TJVDB

May 6 in Lancaster, George, born June 15, 1830, son of Lawrence Tohil and Sara Beker (non-Catholic); spons. Michael Hardman and Mary Krion.

same Joseph Jacob, born Mar. 20, 1833, son of Joseph Philips and Mary Krion; spons. Joseph Philips and Mary Philips. TJVDB

May 16 in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Elizabeth, daughter of Samuel Dien and Magdalene Herhols, born Apr. 19; spons. Joseph Herhols and Helen Reinhart. TJVDB

May 26 John Clark, son of James and Mary Ann Clark. NDY

June 1 Procilla Dean, daughter of Lucy Dean; spons. Mary Ann Ramsey.

NDY

June 5 conditionally, George Good, adult convert; spons. Mrs. Huit.

June 2 in St. Mary, Lancaster, Wilhelmina, daughter of Joseph Wald and Mary Müller; spons. Simon Veld and Magdalena Engel. TJVDB

June 23 Sarah Johnson, widow, adult with three children, namely James, Sarah Jane, and Elizabeth Johnson; spons. for Mrs. Johnson and Elizabeth was Elizabeth Gordon and for Sarah Jane was Adam Gordon and for James was John Cain (?). [NDY]

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(date ?) conditionally, Mrs. Elena Gordon, wife of Adam Gordon; spons. Elizabeth Gordon. NDY

June 18 Barbara Ann, daughter of John Roby and Margaret Sharky, born June 2; spons. Hugh Sharky and Elizabeth Gangloff. Thos. Martin.

June 26 James Louis McGowen, son of Jesse and Mary McGowen; spons. James Finck and Elizabeth Finck. NDY, O.P.

June -- Francis Joseph, son of Francis Joseph Freyermoed and Maria Agatha [blank]; spons. James Borer and Mary Fidelia Marks. TJVDB, OP

July 9 Julianna Clark, adult, conditionally, wife of Thomas Clarke, at Lancaster; spons. Mrs. Garathey. NDY

July 14 Nicholas ---- Ronberry [Rosenberry ? - see Oct. 25, below], adult convert; spons. Mrs. J. Johnson. NDY

July 22 Catharine McDonnell, daughter of James and Mary Ann McDonnell; spons. Alexander Bond and Mary Bond. NDY [Note: this was Mrs. Catherine May, born July 15; her descendants included Rev. Frederick Gordon, O.P. and his sisters, Sr. M. Amelia, Sr. M. Edmund, and Sr. M. Virginia, O.P.]

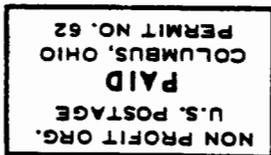
July 24 in the Church of St. Mary, Lancaster, Magdalena daughter of Martin Bish and Magdalena Groof [Groff], born 17 July; spons. Frans Ant. Stek and Magdalena Grootgoed. [TJVDB]

July 26 in Columbus, Mary Ann, daughter of James Curen and Bridget Curen; spons. Wilhelm A. Mo---. [TJVDB]

(To be continued)

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