



# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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Aug. 15: Death of St. Luis Batis Sáinz

August, 2012



*William F. Montavon*

*(Photo courtesy of the Catholic University of America Archives,  
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## **From Pond Creek to the Potomac: William F. Montavon (1874-1959)**

*The recent release of the movie "For Greater Glory," concerning the Cristero Rebellion in 1920s Mexico, caused us to push this sketch to completion. The boy whose life began at Pond Creek in Scioto County went on to the Philippines, Peru, and the nation's capital. Mr. Montavon was influential in bringing a temporary peace to the Cristero conflict in Mexico. Unfortunately, little material is available of a personal nature, so this sketch concentrates on Montavon's career and the Mexican conflict.*

### Part 1 - Biographical Sketch

William Frederick Montavon was born on July 14, 1874 and was baptized at Holy Trinity Church, Pond Creek, by saintly Father Joseph Mertian on July 26. He was about in the middle of the thirteen children of John Baptist and Mary (Mueller) Montavon. John was a native of Switzerland who had come to America with his siblings; Mary was born in Holland of German parents. John was a shoemaker in rural Rush Township, Scioto County, but in the early 1880s moved the family into

Portsmouth. There they became members of Holy Redeemer Parish, the parish for English-speaking Catholics. John was sponsor for all of the boys in the parish's Confirmation class of 1885.

### **Student and Teacher**

William attended Holy Redeemer parochial school from 1880 to 1887, where he was taught by Franciscan Sisters from Rochester, Minn. He then attended St. Edward's College in Berlin, Ontario, for a year. He moved on to the Sulpicians' St. Charles' College in Ellicott City, Maryland. At about that time, Charles Watterson and John Wagner, future priests of this diocese, were attending the college course there. He attended the University of Notre Dame in 1892 and 1893, where he received his A.B. degree.

At the age of just nineteen he moved to Watertown, Wisconsin, where he spent two years teaching. He then went to Paris, France, to attend L'Institute de Sainte Croix in 1895.

Upon returning to the United States in 1897, he enrolled at The Catholic University of America as a member of the College of the Holy Cross to do graduate work in Social Science. He left the university in 1901 without completing his studies.

About 1895 he had met Mary Agnes Burrow, a native of Norfolk. They were married on Dec. 4, 1901, in Lynchburg, Va.

Catholic University was called upon by the U.S. government to supply a teacher to work in the Philippines. Montavon was selected and stayed at the job for fourteen years, improving his Spanish and in time becoming superintendent of schools for the province of Tayabas, largest in the islands.

### **Diplomat and Oil Man**

When he returned to the U.S. in 1915, the Department of Commerce was organizing its foreign service. Montavon won first place in a competitive examination and was named U.S. Commercial Attache in Lima, Peru. His territory covered Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Mary lived with him in Lima from March, 1916 to August, 1918, when they returned to Washington, D.C.

That year Montavon became an executive representative for the International Petroleum

Company, a position he held until 1925. In March, 1919 he and Mary returned to Lima. When the Inter-Allied Board on Enemy Trading was formed in Lima during World War I, he was chosen secretary and chairman of its committee on investigations. He returned permanently to the U.S. in February, 1923.

### **At the NCWC**

In 1925, at the age of fifty, Montavon accepted the position of director of the legal department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the organization of the American hierarchy that has now become the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. During his long tenure in that position he worked to raise awareness of the turmoil caused by civil war in Mexico as well as the problems of other Latin American countries. His earlier career and knowledge of Spanish and French were especially important in preparing him for this post. Throughout his career, Montavon lectured and published and even testified before Congress on subjects such as health, education, immigration, and welfare.

As detailed below, in 1928 he accompanied Msgr. John J. Burke, C.S.P., NCWC General Secretary, on two missions to Mexico to meet with the President of that country to attempt a reconciliation between Church and State.

Early in 1930, President Hoover appointed him to the Forbes Commission to Haiti. The purpose of the commission was to investigate Haiti's political situation and the reasons for ongoing minor rebellions there. Montavon's job was to be a press correspondent to the Catholic Papers in the U.S., but he was also influential in aiding efforts to improve conditions on the island.

Following this appointment, he served the NCWC News Service in 1931 as correspondent to the Constitutional Assembly in Spain, returning to the U.S. that November. Back in this country, he tried to raise American awareness of the situation in Spain. Indicative of his interest are several series of papers now in the Catholic University archives: a writing set of his titled "The Second Spanish Republic and The Catholic Church;" a collection of printed and typewritten materials focusing on the problems



in Spain from 1931 to 1937; news releases in both English and Spanish, covering the years 1924-1951; and photographs, mostly from the 1930s showing the ravages of war in Spain.

In following years he served in a number of advisory posts for the U.S., principally in Latin American affairs, while continuing as legal head for the NCWC. In 1938 he visited Puerto Rico.

In May and June of 1942, as the U.S. effort in World War II intensified, he testified before the House of Representatives in a hearing regarding "National Defense Migration" concerning the exploitation of an over-supply of Mexican labor in the U.S. and the resulting harsh conditions in which workers lived, focusing on San Antonio. He testified that their malnutrition, their lack of education, their miserable huts lacking sanitary conditions, was reducing them to uselessness as laborers.

He retired in 1951, aged 76, having served as director of the NCWC legal department for 26 years.

#### **Later Years and Honors**

He was a member of many associations and groups, such as the Knights of Columbus, American Academy of Political and Social Science, Catholic Association for International Peace, and the American Catholic Historical Association.

Mrs. Mary Agnes Montavon had died on October 21, 1940. A year later, on October 2, 1941, William had married Leo (Leocadia) Kerby at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Washington, before Rev. Wm. H. Russell of the Catholic University. Leo died on October 25, 1956.

William died Feb. 15, 1959 after an illness of several years, at the age of 84. His Solemn Requiem Mass at the Shrine of the Blessed Sacrament, Washington, was offered by Msgr. Paul F. Tanner, NCWC General Secretary. He was survived by his brother Henry Montavon of New Boston, O., and niece, Mrs. Hilda Matthews, of Portsmouth. He

was buried with both Mary Agnes and Leo at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

Throughout his career his strenuous efforts had gained for him many honors. In 1929, in recognition of his work with the NCWC and his efforts in the Mexican situation, Pope Pius XI conferred upon him knighthood in the Order of St. Gregory the Great. In 1930 he made a trip to Mexico and was honored by members of the Mexican hierarchy and by Catholic societies of Mexico. He was commencement speaker and recipient of the honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Dayton on June 7, 1931. That year also he was named for the Catholic Action Medal by St. Bonaventure University (New York). In 1945 Pope Pius XII named him a Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great. On the occasion of his retirement he received the paternal blessing of Pope Pius XII and tributes from scores of members of the U.S. hierarchy.

#### **Part 2 - Toward Peace for the Church in Mexico**

##### **Background to the Rebellion**

A constitutional convention gathered in Mexico in 1917 to consider changes to the constitution of 1857. Radical anti-clericals quickly took control and launched an attack on the Church. The convention had been "elected" under the shadow of the revolution that had rocked the country in the preceding decade. However the convention was "stacked:" the majority of the electors were not permitted to exercise the franchise; and no candidate was permitted to be declared elected who could not prove that he had given material support to the revolution which had made the new constitution possible.

Montavon said (before 1933) that this constitution "was imposed upon the people by a chosen band of revolutionists who did not have, by any means, control, even in a material way, of the Republic, and who had refused to fight under the national flag of Mexico, but only under their own Red banner. The Constitution has never been submitted to any form of ratification by the people

of Mexico.”

The 1917 constitution, among other things, forbade ministers of religion or religious bodies to found or direct primary schools. It banned religious orders and prohibited the taking of vows and declared religious associations incapable of acquiring, possessing, or administering movable or immovable property. All Church property was to be confiscated by the State. The State would fix the number of churches necessary for public worship. It declared marriage a civil contract only. It declared that all ministers of religion must be Mexican by birth. It stated that ministers of religion could not, either at public meetings or in private committees or in the course of religious services or in religious propaganda, criticize the fundamental laws of the land, nor authority, nor the Government in general; nor could they vote, nor have a right to associate themselves with any political aims. It denied recognition to courses of studies designed for the training of priests.

The government did not dare to put these provisions into effect at once. Most of the harsher ones were allowed to lie dormant until the 1924 election of the revolutionary general Plutarco Calles, as President. “Calles was outstanding among the Masonic enemies of Catholicism in Mexico. He was obsessed with an inveterate hatred of the Church.” (O’Reilly) Though his first priorities were agrarian reform, workers’ rights, and oil issues, he soon began to enforce the anti-religious provisions of the Constitution in all their rigor. In 1926 his party passed a new penal code to implement them. Foreign priests were deported; Church property was nationalized; religious schools, convents, and monasteries were closed.

Catholics rose in rebellion in western and northern Mexico (most strongly in the states of Colima, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Nayarit), united only by their battle-cry of “Viva Cristo Rey!” their opposition to Calles, and their dedication to the Church. It was from mid-1926 to mid-1928 that many priests and thousands of laymen lost their lives for their faith. The Vatican counseled peace but individual Mexican and U.S. prelates

endorsed the rebellion.

### **U.S. Catholic Involvement**

In the United States, the Coolidge administration was swamped by Catholics at all levels seeking action on behalf of their Mexican brothers and sisters in Christ. The K. of C., National Councils of Catholic Men and Women, individual Catholic leaders such as bishops, the NCWC, and local representatives of the laity were all involved. Some sought severance of diplomatic relations while others sought a lifting of the ban of the export of arms and ammunition to Mexico (imposed in 1912 during a violent, military phase of the revolution). Montavon was key to this effort, working tirelessly, through both writing and speaking, to make the Mexican crisis an American concern and thus to inflame public opinion.

In October of 1927 Patrick Cardinal Hayes and Judge Morgan J. O’Brien of New York suggested an interview between U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Dwight W. Morrow and Rev. John J. Burke, C.S.P., General Secretary of the NCWC. As a result, the Ambassador undertook an effort to mediate the Mexican conflict. Facilitated by Mr. Morrow, Father Burke and William Montavon met in secret with President Calles at Veracruz on April 4, 1928. Montavon later wrote, “This conference served to clear the atmosphere...” A month later Burke and Montavon, this time accompanied by His Excellency Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, Archbishop of Michoacán, spent several days in Mexico City conferring with Calles. As a result of this conference, a meeting of the Mexican bishops was held and reconciliation seemed to be at hand. Opposition and political events delayed the outcome, but negotiations continued the next spring and on May 2, 1929, President Emilio Portes Gil and Archbishop Ruiz made public, conciliatory statements. On June 21 an Act of Reconciliation was ratified by the representatives of the Church and the government. On June 27, for the first time in almost three years, church bells were heard everywhere in Mexico.

Under this pact, which came to be known as the *arreglos* (“arrangements”), worship was resumed in Mexico and Catholics were granted three minor concessions: the hated registration law would apply

only to priests who had been named hierarchical superiors; religious instruction was permitted in churches (though forbidden in schools); and all citizens, including members of the clergy, were allowed the right of petition for the reform or derogation of any law.

### **Second Phase of Persecution**

In 1931 a new phase of the persecution began. The governor of Veracruz and the Mexican Congress for the Federal District enforced the constitutional provision limiting the number of priests who could carry out church services. (That year, 1931, Rev. Michael J. Ready, future Bishop of Columbus, became Assistant General Secretary of the NCWC. He became General Secretary in 1936.) As the persecution in Mexico intensified in 1931, “the NCWC Administrative Committee began to mobilize public sentiment in the United States. Chairman Hanna justified the NCWC’s effort to guide and encourage this sentiment by claiming that the values of the movement—freedom of religion and worship—were self-evident, and as American citizens, Catholics in the United States should see themselves as guarantors of these liberties for the people of Mexico.”

President Pascual Ortiz Rubio, after making pretense of accommodation with the Holy Father, if anything, intensified the tyranny under which an entire Catholic nation groaned. The Catholic press was persistently and cruelly persecuted. So little public worship was permitted by the government that it amounted to a virtual prohibition. Only a small proportion of the churches of the country were open for worship. Licenses to open the churches were withheld at the will of the state governors. Each church was required to have a trustee to see to it that the anti-religious laws were observed by the priest. This trustee, together with a committee of ten persons from the locality, who needed not be Catholics, in essence appointed the priest, for they nominated him to the municipal council, which had the power to accept or reject him.

The number of officiating priests in each state was limited. In Veracruz and Yucatán one priest was allowed for every 100,000 inhabitants. In Chiapas

the quota was 60,000. In Michoacán only 33 priests were permitted in the whole state.

To foment the sentiment that Catholics in the United States should see themselves as guarantors of religious liberty for the people of Mexico, the NCWC devoted itself to education, through the 1934 publication of a pamphlet written by Montavon, titled “The Church in Mexico Protests.”

When a Papal encyclical expressed sadness that the government had not lived up to its 1929 promise of a reasonable application of the laws, President Abelardo Rodríguez forced the Catholic hierarchy into exile.

Calles had continued to dominate Mexico after his presidency through administrations that were his puppets. He had hand-picked his immediate successors. In 1932 the ruling party selected Lázaro Cárdenas to be its presidential candidate. Calles went along, thinking he could control him as he had the previous two presidents. As governor of the state of Michoacán, a principal site of the Cristero rebellion, from 1928 to 1932 Cárdenas had proved himself loyal and anticlerical. As President from December, 1934, he proved his socialist credentials quickly. He destroyed the great haciendas and redistributed land to the peasants. He implemented the recent constitutional amendment that required that all education be socialist in nature. Conservatives and church officials opposed his educational programs so vehemently that in part of the nation they and pro-socialist education groups maimed and killed each other. At the state level, some governors began closing church-owned schools, which were still forbidden by the constitution.

But Cárdenas realized that his great battles were economic and social, against problems exacerbated by the world-wide depression. In 1935, sure of army support, he began replacing pro-Calles cabinet officers with his own supporters. Cárdenas and the Mexican Congress turned on Calles and condemned his continued war-like persecution of the Church. In 1936, Cárdenas had Calles and twenty of his associates arrested and deported, a decision greeted with great enthusiasm by the majority of the Mexican public. Cárdenas established cordial personal

relations with the Mexican archbishop, thus reducing tensions between Church and State.

Events and social and economic conditions had moved Cárdenas and his government to make peace with the Church. While William Montavon's efforts clearly had an impact in bringing about the 1929 temporary peace between Church and State, it is not clear that, other than moving Ambassador Morrow into action, Montavon's and the NCWC's efforts to rouse American public opinion ultimately had any decisive impact on the situation in Mexico.

#### MAJOR SOURCES

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*The Catholic Times*, Feb. 27, 1959

"Persecution of the Church in Mexico" by Dr. Frank O'Reilly, K.C.S.G., Secretary of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, in the *Irish Independent*, March 6, 7, and 10, 1933

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"Church and State in Mexico, the American Mediation" by Walter Lippmann, *Foreign Affairs*, January, 1930

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#### NOTE

Thanks to Edgar Ortega Barrales of Brooklyn for reviewing and providing comments on this article.

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### Father Slevin and the Zaleski Missions, 1875

Jackson is a town of blast furnaces...and is built in a region abounding in ore and coal. The coal found here is an excellent substitute for charcoal for blasting purposes. The furnaces have shafts running down deep into the earth beneath and raise, by steam elevators, the coal from the mine direct to the point desired for use. Jackson is also celebrated for its numerous and well patronized saloons, despite the unceasing and zealous endeavors of the true priest whom God has placed over this section to the salvation of so many souls.

Father James Slevin, when appointed to this region four years ago, visited all Catholics on the C. & H. V. R. R. [Columbus & Hocking Valley Railroad], east of Lick Run to Athens. On the M. & C. R. R. [Marietta & Cincinnati Railroad], he traveled, saying Mass at different places every day, from Harmar to Londonderry, alias Sugar Run, and down the Portsmouth branch as far as Washington Furnace, a small parish of about 115 miles in length. The deep love of his people, and the notable decrease of the number of drunkards, and the high esteem entertained by non-Catholics for him are infallible

proofs of the conscientious manner in which he fulfilled his duties. Since the appointment of Rev. Francis Campbell to the care of Athens, Chauncey and Gallipolis, Father Slevin has only ten or twelve missions to attend, Zaleski, his residence, and Jackson, being the principal points. Jackson, when the new railroad is finished, will be well able to support a resident priest and build the new church they have been so long talking about.

- part of a letter from Ironton in *The Catholic Columbian*, June 12, 1875

### Death of Father Kargé

Rev. Fr. Karge, O.S.F., died at the Mother-House of the Sisters of Charity, Cincinnati, on the 25th of last month. Fr. Karge was a native of Poland. For 16 years he was pastor of Portsmouth. Fr. Karge was of noble birth, but renounced worldly titles and became a poor Franciscan friar, and, when the storm of persecution drove him from his own country, he came to this, devoting himself generously to the care of souls. His funeral was largely attended.

- *Ave Maria Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 20, May 20, 1875, p. 327

# St. Joseph Parish near Somerset

## Baptisms, 1834-1850

(Continued, from Vol. XXXVII, No. 7)

**1837** continued

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June 4, Elizabeth, daughter of James McDonnel and Mary Ann Stine, spouses; spons. William Stine and Mary McKinney

same day, Nicholas Dominic, son of Mathias Flowers and Mary Elder, spouses; spons. Henry Dittoe and Susan Flowers. F. J. H. Clarkson

The following little ones were baptized by Rev. Mr. Martin in May in McCluney settlement:

Margaret, daughter of John Chiles and Rebecca Chiles or Hiles; spons. John Flowers and Ann Edington

Christopher, son of Henry Flowers and Jane Flowers or Hiles; spons. Thomas Flowers and Mary Huddleston

George Flowers, son of Louis Flowers and Fabia? Rose; spons. John Nugen and Ann Doyle. Alleman

June 18, John Joseph, son of Samuel Crossin and Margaret Crossin, spouses; spons. Owen Martin and Sarah Martin (ONeil) F. J. H. Clarkson

July 7, Emma Rogers, wife of Pat Rogers of Covington; spons. Thomas and Sarah Cassilly. F. J. H. Clarkson

July 9, William James, son of Frederick Kintz and Margaret Elder, spouses; spons. William Garner and Sarah Kintz. F. J. H. Clarkson

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July 16, Mary Elizabeth, daughter of Sebastian Werlin and Ann Mary Worlin or Woolenshneider; spons. Celestine Woolenschneider and Mary Hoffmeyer. Alleman

same day, John Hilary, son of William Sutton and Elizabeth Sutton or Huskinson; spons. Jonathan King and Elizabeth Sterner?. Alleman

July 18, Hyacintha, daughter of John Scrivener

and Rebecca Ward, spouses; spons. Hyacintha Ward (alias [blank]).

same day, Thomas, son of Thomas Colman and Elizabeth Ward, spouses; spons. Rose Colman. F. J. H. Clarkson

July 16, Mary, daughter of Laurence Pearl and Susan Nicholas, spouses; spons. Andrew Gosman and Henrietta Keizer.

same day, Benedict, son of the same; spons. Joseph Reyhard and Agatha Porman.

same day, Laurence, son of the same; spons.

Frederick Gosman and Sarah Ryan his wife.

same day, John James, son of the same; spons. John Longstreth and Franny Gosman.

F. J. H. Clarkson

same day, Margaret, daughter of [blank]

Masterson and Ann Walpert; spons. [blank]

same day, Rosanna [remainder of record blank].

F. J. H. Clarkson

July 23, Prudence Ann, daughter of Levi Bourgoon and Ann Bourgoon or Lilly; spons. Joseph Fink and Jane \_aron. Alleman

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Aug. 11, Magdalen Ann, daughter of John Groof [Groff] and Bridget Friel, spouses; spons. Doctor McGruder [Magruder] and Mar—Shiely. F. J. H. Clarkson

Aug. 17, Lydia Ann, daughter of Joseph Flowers and Mary Clark, spouses; spons. Dom. McCristian and Margaret McCristian. F. J. H. Clarkson

Sept. 17, Mary, daughter of John Stalter and Mary Stakely, spouses; spons. John Mouter and Mary Stalter. F. J. H. Clarkson

Oct. 9, James, son of Thomas Skinnian and Ellen Leonard; spons. John McCabe and Susan Heany. FJHC

Oct. 10, Mary, daughter of Michael Curran and Ann Mitchel, spouses; spons. Michael Mitchel and Ann Mellon.

same day, Ann, daughter of Thomas Sweeny and Bridget McCabe, spouses; spon. Brian Murtagh and Ann Murtagh. FJHC

Oct. 9, Elizabeth, daughter of James Ronon and Margaret Fitzsimons; spon. Michael Mcdonnald and Bridget Mcenalley.

J. G. Wilson

Oct. 10, Rhodeann Ward, adult; spon. Mrs. Reese. FJHC

Oct. 15, John Louis, son of Michael McFadgin and Mary Kelly, spouses; spon. John Cassily and Ann Redmond. FJHC

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Oct. 15, David James, son of Michael McFadgin and Mary Kelly, spouses; spon. William Sterner and Susan Cassily.

same time, James, son of James McGravy and Mary Carr, spouses; spon. James McCrystal and Sarah McCristal.

same time, Ann, daughter of James Grace and Mary Ward, spouses; spon. Rose Ward and Richard McGonigle. FJHC

Oct. 29, Emily Catherine, daughter of Robert Mcdonnald and Rosann Bennett; spon. Allen Clark and Mary Connely. F. G. J. Wilson

Oct. 20, John Baptist, son of Maurice Fitzgerald and Rose Robertson; spon. Owen Martin and Margaret Jones. F. G. J. Wilson

Oct. 26, at Newark, James, son of Charles McAffrey and Mary Mckahel; spon. Michael Carey and Mary Walker. F. G. J. Wilson

Oct. 26, John Henry, son of John McCarthy and Elizabeth Clark; spon. Cornelius McCarthy and Margaret Wilson. F. G. J. Wilson

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Dec. 3, Louis Green son of Josue and Sara? Green; spon. Cornelius Lidy and Mary Ann Staly. N.D. Young

Dec. 11, Ellenor daughter of Michael Cuningham and Elizabeth McManus, spouses; spon. John Cuningham and Eliz. Walpool. J. H. Clarkson

Dec. 24, Mary Frances? Fisher, daughter of Anthony and Elizabeth Fisher; spon. James Holt and Ann Bringardner. N. D. Young

Dec. 24, Catherine daughter of James McNally

and Bridget McNally; spon. James McGreavy and Mary McGreavy. N. D. Young

Dec. 27, Emily Brite, [parents names blank]; spon. Joseph Flowers and Mary Ann McGlocklin. N. D. Young

Dec. 31, John, son of George Sliger and Helen Riley who was Helen Ivory; spon. Charles Doldue and John McGraw. G. F. Wilson

Dec. 31, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Flowers and Mary Dougherty; spon. Simon Flowers and Elizabeth Sterner. G. A. J. Wilson

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### 1838

Jan. 1, Cornelius son of Charles McFagen and Margaret Murry; spon. James McBarren and Mary Gallaher. G. A. J. Wilson

Jan. 6, Mary Ellen daughter of James Wathen and Amanda Fitch, spouses; spon. William Sterner and Sarah Sterner.

same time, Elizabeth daughter of Hugh Donnelly and Susan [blank], spouses; Spon. Mary Ann Swope. Fr. J. H. Clarkson

Jan. 29, Mary Rose Dittoe, daughter of Edward Dittoe and Margaret (lately Johnson) spon. Jacob Dittoe and Catherine Dittoe. N. D. Young

Feb. 12, Margaret daughter of John McCarthy and Mary Ryan, spouses; spon. John McCabe and Ellen Leonard. Fr. J. H. Clarkson

Feb. 17, Mary Unarin?, adult

Same day, Susan Pearl (lately Nichols) adult. Fr. J. H. Clarkson

Feb. 21, Anna, daughter of Charles Burgoon and Barbara Hampshire; spon. Jacob Cohoe and wife Susan Cohoe. G. A. J. Wilson

Feb. 13, John William, son of George Sanders and Eleanore Bennet; spon. George Bennet and Elizabeth Lynch. G. A. J. Wilson

(To be continued)

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