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St. Pius Church in Winter (photo by the late Msgr. C. Bennett Applegate)

St. Pius Mission, Moxahala, Perry County 1908-1989

St. Pius at South Fork

The Catholics who farmed lands in western Pleasant and southeastern Pike townships in Perry County were the basis of the mission of St. Pius at South Fork when it was established in 1852. Prominent family names were Slevin, Sheeran, Riley, O'Connor, Malloy, Carroll, Craddock, Dillehay, Bennett, Forquer, Hillis, Brady, Kiener, Grannon, McGonigle, and Gaughran. Two acres near the western edge of Pleasant Township were donated in 1852 and a church was dedicated to God under the patronage of St. Pius in 1854. (This was Pope St. Pius V, who had been canonized 142 years

before; St. Pius X had not been born then.) The mission was attended by the Dominican Fathers at first and later by diocesan priests stationed at New Lexington and McLuney (later Crooksville). The congregation comprised some 25 to 40 families in the 1880s. (The story of this mission is given in the *Bulletin* of January, 1983.)

The Town of Moxahala

The town of Moxahala, near the center of Pleasant Township, was laid out by A. S. Biddison in 1873 and within a few years had prosperous industries. The Moxahala Iron Company built a blast

furnace there that opened in January, 1878. Using local ore as fifty percent of its raw material, it employed about fifty hands and produced, on average, fifty-seven tons of pig iron per day.¹ The Ohio Central Railroad line passed by near the furnace at the east end of town. A nearby pottery shop employed ten.

In 1897 the blast furnace shut down and moved to Columbus, taking the workmen and their families with them. But the minerals remained and coal mining was the major industry of the area for the next several decades. In addition, timber provided lumbering and saw mill employment (Kiener's saw mill ran in the summer and the Kiener company employed men to cut ice from the creek and reservoir in the winter to be stored for summer use). Pottery clay and oil production provided a few additional jobs.²

Moxahala had a resident priest for a short time, for Father Edmund C. Richards lived there from 1900 to 1902 while a rectory was being built at Crooksville.

In 1904 the Chapman Mining Company was established, which soon was operating four coal mines at Moxahala with total capacity of 2,500 tons per day and employing over five hundred men. The future of Moxahala seemed secure, but this proved to be an illusion.

St. Pius Church, Moxahala

After the blast furnace was moved to Columbus, its property had come into the hands of George Forquer Sr. and his wife Mary, who offered it to the congregation of St. Pius, South Fork, as a more suitable location for the church. The offer was accepted by the mission congregation, which at the time comprised some thirty families, and its pastor, Father Baltasar J. Mattes, who was stationed at the Church of the Atonement at Crooksville.³ The deed from the Forquers was not signed until October 4, 1909. The lot they donated was 0.83 acre in extent, on the east side of the State Route on the north edge of town, measuring 259 feet along the road and 148 1/2 feet to the east.⁴

The church was designed by Columbus architect Frank S. Gleichauf in Spanish Mission style with



Rev. B. J. Mattes (1873-1956)

reinforced concrete, supported by a story of paving block. Seating capacity was to be 300. Ground was broken in the summer of 1908 and the church was finished that year, with the front facing south and the side to the road. The first Mass was offered on Christmas morning at 5 o'clock. The building was dedicated on Sunday, May 23, 1909 by Bishop Hartley.⁵

The original cost of the church was about \$6,000, including architect's fees of \$160. \$3,500 was subscribed and paid by the mission's members in 1908. There was \$2,000 debt, secured from a New Lexington bank on the personal credit of the heads of several families of the congregation, namely Albert and James Hillis, Michael Carroll, James Kiener, William J. Forquer, George Forquer Sr., and the sons of Mrs. Caroline Kiener. The congregation paid off \$500 of this indebtedness in 1909 and the remainder in 1910. The principal source of income was an annual parish picnic that netted over \$1,000 in each of the first few years. Added expenses on the new church, including interest on the loans, structural work, property improvements, and new pews in 1915, brought the cost to \$8,000.⁶

Father Mattes and the mission had agreed early-on that they would pay him \$200 per year salary and \$200 traveling expenses. The salary often was in arrears. But he visited from Crooksville only twice a month in good weather and once in bad.⁷

1920s Improvements

The Chapman coal mines were closed in 1914 but that same year the Ohio Central mine opened,

keeping employment steady. The White Elm mine opened during the World War. Around this time a gas company was formed in Moxahala, with controlling interest being held by Messrs. Carroll and Kiener, both of whom were local merchants and members of St. Pius Mission. Mr. Kiener later assumed total control of the company. The company operated until the 1950s. In the early twenties employment was at the Kiener saw mill, on the railroad, or farming.⁸ William S. Forquer ran a hardwood dealership in the town. Coal mining continued but the mines gradually closed after the World War.

These relatively prosperous times were reflected in the mission. Under Rev. Wm. C. O'Brian, who became pastor in 1918, improvements were made to the church, mainly in 1920. The exterior was repaired and painted; the interior was decorated and twelve emblems or pictures put on the walls; the beams and ceilings were painted cream and lavender. Extra lights were added in and around the sanctuary. The altars were changed and finished in onyx. A life-size painting of Christ in the Garden of Olives, executed by Miss Doha of a New York studio, was placed on the wall just above the sanctuary. New statues of the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin, and adoring angels were purchased and installed.⁹

Land was added around the original church lot. By a deed dated June 27, 1922¹⁰, George C. Forquer (unmarried) transferred 3.44 acres to Bishop Hartley. This extended the property east to the T&OC railroad right of way. This deed encompassed the land transferred in 1909 from George and Mary C. Forquer. It also says it encompassed another 0.53 acre lot from W. J. Forquer, for which no previous deed is to be found. This seems to be the same lot that was deeded to Bishop Hartley the next year, on March 10, 1923¹¹ by W. J. Forquer and his wife Mildred. This lot, as described, overlaps with the one transferred in 1908. It appears that the description in the 1908 deed is

Pastors or Assistants who attended St. Pius:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 1906-1918 | Rev. B. J. Mattes of Crooksville |
| 1918 | Rev. William M. Sullivan of Crooksville |
| 1918-1926 | Rev. William C. O'Brian of Crooksville |
| 1926-1931 | Rev. John N. Diegelman of Crooksville |
| 1931-1949 | Rev. L. Kessler, living in Zanesville |
| 1949-1952 | Rev. Peter Grabaskas of Murray City |
| 1952-1953 | Rev. Charles W. Jones of Murray City |
| 1953-1956 | Rev. Robert A. Klee of Murray City |
| 1956 | Rev. Vaclovas Suminas, living at St. Aloysius Academy, Admr. |

The following through 1972 lived at St. Rose Parish in New Lexington:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 1956-1957 | Rev. Maurice J. Donovan |
| 1957-1958 | Rev. William McEwan |
| 1958 | Rev. Patrick J. Byrne, Assistant |
| 1958-1959 | Rev. Charles J. Foeller, Assistant |
| 1959-1960 | Rev. Joseph A. Hakel |
| 1960-1961 | Rev. Paul J. Elsner, Assistant |
| 1961-1964 | Rev. James B. Pickett |
| 1964-1967 | Rev. Francis M. Stanton |
| 1967-1969 | Rev. Arvids Bernans |
| 1969-1972 | Rev. William Huber |
| 1972-1976 | Rev. Ronald Arter of Crooksville |
| 1976-1983 | Rev. Patrick Hannon of Crooksville |
| 1983-1988 | Rev. John J. Dreese of New Lexington |
| 1988-1989 | Rev. Raymond Carter (retired), Administrator of Crooksville |
| 1989 | Rev. David A. Gwinner of Crooksville |

defective and this 1923 lot abutted the 1908 lot on the north. The two lots in total measured 511 feet, just short of 529 1/2 feet along the road described in the 1922 deed. The depth of the final church property was 442 feet from the road to the railroad on the north and 279 1/2 feet on the south, for a total of 4.8 acres.

In the 1920s the mission began holding several card parties per year in addition to the picnic. During the depression, the card parties and annual picnics brought more funds in to the mission than the offertory collection and pew rents.¹² Times were hard, as in the rest of the world. The coal mines ran less or closed. The town's railroad depot was closed in

1932. Prohibition closed the saloons, but speak-easies opened. It was not until World War II that the old Ohio Central Mine was reopened, bringing better incomes to the dwindling population.

After the War

Bishop Hartley commented in 1943 that the church made a striking appearance as it stood near the public highway, with its nice approach over the spacious grounds that stood out in all their beauty, expressing a warm welcome to all who pass by. The few Catholic families there were very proud of their beautiful church and very happy that they had Mass every Sunday.¹³ Father Lucius Kessler after his retirement lived in Zanesville and, beginning in 1931, came to Moxahala every Sunday to offer Mass and other devotional services were held by him from time to time. In 1946 he remarked that when he first came to the mission it consisted of some fifty families but by that time had dwindled to eight families and parts of eight other families, most aged and infirm members. The others had moved away to cities for better opportunities.¹⁴

The Bishops of Columbus seldom visited the remote mission. From Confirmation records we know that Bishop Hartley visited St. Pius on June 9, 1912 and May 28, 1913. After that, the mission's

small Confirmation classes normally went to Crooksville to receive the sacrament. A small class, under the care of Father Kessler, was confirmed at Corning in 1944 by Bishop Hettinger. His next class, of four children, was confirmed at Crooksville in 1948. But between these two events, in the fall of 1947 Bishop Ready visited Moxahala, spoke to the people, and was celebrant at Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁵ The mission responded to this visit from their Chief Pastor by contributing \$273, without any objection, towards the construction of Bishop Ready's new chancery over the years 1949 through 1951. Bishop Hettinger returned to St. Pius to confirm a "class" of one (John F. Heavener) in May, 1967, and Bishop Issenmann confirmed 26 children and four adults in St. Pius Church in November, 1960.

In 1965 Peabody Coal opened a strip mine near Moxahala and when that source was depleted opened a deep mine. This brought new miners and their families to the area. But by 1980 the population was again on the decline. In 1975 Father Ron Arter noted, "The membership is declining. I don't believe Mass every Saturday is necessary. The few can't support it for much longer. It should either be phased out or made a summer mission only." (No mission activities were reported.) Despite Father Arter's



Sanctuary of St. Pius Church (Photo from the collection of Rev. Charles Foeller)

suggestion, Mass continued to be offered on the evenings of Saturdays and eves of holy days.

In 1967 an oil painting by Renee Cannon was dedicated and donated to the church. (It was to be returned to the painter if ever removed from the church, and it indeed was retrieved by the painter's sister following the closing Mass.)¹⁶

(To be concluded)

NOTES

- 1) *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties, Ohio*; Chicago: 1883, pp 259-260 of Perry County
- 2) partly from Mark Vess, "The History of Moxahala" <http://littlecitiesofblackdiamonds.org/stories/moxahalhistory.html>
- 3) Hartley, Rt. Rev. James J., *Diocese of Columbus, History of Fifty Years*; Columbus; 1918, pp 496-497
- 4) Perry County Deed Record 76/536
- 5) Hartley 1918, pp 496-497. *The Catholic Columbian*, May 21, 1909.
- 6) annual financial reports, Diocesan Archives. Hartley 1918, pp 496-497.
- 7) financial report for 1920, note inserted by Father O'Brian
- 8) Vess, op. cit.
- 9) *The Catholic Columbian* Dec. 24, 1920. financial report for 1920.
- 10) Perry County Deed Record 100/615
- 11) Perry County Deed Record 104/146
- 12) annual financial reports, Diocesan Archives
- 13) Hartley, Rt. Rev. James J., *The History of the Diocese of Columbus, Vol. II*; Columbus: 1943, pp 137-138
- 14) Aug 30, 1946, Rev. L. J. Kessler to Bishop Ready, Diocesan Archives
- 15) Sept. 19, 1947, Rev. L. J. Kessler to Bishop Ready. Feb. 17, 1948, Bishop Ready to Father Kessler, Diocesan Archives.
- 16) note in Chancery file

St. Pius Mission, Moxahala Baptisms, 1898-1912

The records kept at Crooksville Church of the Atonement in this era do not differentiate between those administered in St. Pius and those at Crooksville. Those included here say the parents were "from" South Fork or Moxahala. These must be places of origin, not current residences, because some spouses are listed with different towns. Father Baltasar Mattes, who became pastor in 1906, appears to have recorded residences rather than birthplaces of parents, for the most part.

We are preparing a transcription of the earlier baptismal records, beginning in 1855, to be posted on our website. Records less than 100 years old are considered private.

1898

- Apr. 9, Margaret, born Jan. 24, daughter of Robert Meikle and Elly Teal from Moxahala; spons. Patrick McCabe and Lucy Christian. Patrick J. Maher
- May 29, the following children of Adam Boop and Mary Jane Donnelly from Moxahala:
Mary Anne, age 16; spons. Alice Duffy Rose, age 12; spons. Catherine Bennett Agnes, age 8; spons. Kate Clarke Lewis William, age 6; spons. Mary Duffy Francis, age 10, spons. Caroline Kiener Andrew, age 15; spons. Catharine Dean P. J. Maher
- May 29, Joseph Leo, born May 13, son of Joseph Dean and Julia Dillehay of Moxahala; spons. James Kiener and Mrs. James Kiener. P. J. Maher
- July 3, Charles, born June 16, son of James Hillis and Annie Carroll of South Fork; spons. Albert Hillis and Catherine Hillis. P. J. Maher
- Oct. 30, Walter, born Oct. 20, son of John Kiener from Claybank and Ella Cumiskey from South Fork; spons. William Hillis and Catherine Kiener. John Joseph Banks, Ph.D.
- Oct. 30, Florence, born Oct. 18, daughter of

William A. Hillis and Eva Steiner of South Fork; spons. George M. Harnetty and Florence Harnetty. J.J.B.

1899

Jan. 22, Agnes, born Jan. 9, daughter of Albert Francis Hillis and Catherine Carroll of South Fork; spons. James Hillis and Mary Hillis. J.J.B.

Mar. 5, Joseph, born Feb. 24, son of Edward Hillis and Cecilia Smith of South Fork; spons. Will. Hillis and Eva Hillis. J.J.B.

1900

June 10, Ralph Augustine, born May 24, son of James Hillis and Ann Carroll of South Fork; spons. Ambrose Hillis and Mary Ratcliffe. Edmund C. Richards

Apr. 8, Agnes Pauline, born June 25, daughter of Moris? McDonnoll (O'Donnell in margin) from Roseville and Annie Selby from Rehoboth, spouses; spons. Patrick Cusick and Louise Selby. ECR

Apr. 15, Walter, born Mar. 2, son of William Hillis from Moxahala and E. Steiner from Bristol, spouses; spons. Mr. and Mrs. Michael Keiner. E.C.R.

Oct. 7, Mary, born Sept. 28, daughter of William McCabe and Clara McGonigle of Moxahala; spons. Mr. & Mrs. Keiner. E.C.R.

Nov. 30, Raphael, born Nov. 9, son of Brian Sorohan from Moxahala and Catherine Riffle from Shawnee; spons. Nicholas and Mary McCabe. E.C.R.

1901

Jan. 20, Helen Catherine, born Dec. 20, daughter of William Forquer Jr. and Mary McGonagle of Moxahala; spons. George Forquer and Mary Forquer. E.C.R.

Aug. 4, George William, born July 2, son of William Forquer from South Fork and Mildred Deaver from Moxahala; spons. George Forquer and Mary Forquer. E.C.R.

Sept. 1, Catherine, born Aug. 9, daughter of Albert Hillis and Catherine Carroll from South Fork; spons. Richard Carroll and Bertha Carroll. E.C.R.

Oct. 2, John, born Aug. 29, son of Richard Doughty (noncatholic) from Millersport and Maud Brewster from Moxahala; spons. William Forquer and Ora Brewster. E.C.R.

1902

Apr. 27, Raymond William, born March 19, son of William Hillis from South Fork and Eva Sterner; spons. Francis Hillis and Mary Ratcliffe. ECR

Sept. 28, George Wilfred, born Aug. 29, son of William Chamberlain (noncatholic) and Genevieve Teal from Moxahala; spons. Nicholas Duffy and Josephine Duffy. ECR

Sept. 28, George, born Aug. 27, son of James Hillis and Ann Carroll from South Fork; spons. William Forquer and Clemencita Forquer. ECR

1903

Aug. 30, Mary, born Aug. 10, daughter of William Forquer and Mildred Deaver (noncatholic) from South Fork; spons. Michael O'Connor and Margaret O'Connor. ECR

Sept. 13, Helen Bernadette, born Aug. 11, daughter of Robert (corrected in margin to Richard S.) Doughty (noncatholic) from Millersport and Maud Brewster from South Fork, spouses; spons. Vaughn Brewster and Katherine Dean. ECR

1904

Jan. 31, Mary, born Jan. 18, daughter of Thomas Elder from Shawnee and Maud Forquer from Moxahala; spons. George Forquer and Mary Forquer. ECR

May 29, Albert, born April 26, son of William Hillis from South Fork and Eva Sterner from Bristol, O.; spons. Albert Hillis and Catherine Hillis. ECR

June 19, Elizabeth Dolores, born June 4, daughter of Charles Carroll from South Fork and Kate Nelson from Corning; spons. James Hillis and Cecilia Hillis. ECR

1905

June 25, William, born Apr. 10, son of Catherine Kiener of South Fork; spons. George Haffler and Mrs. George Haffler. ECR

June 25, Walter, born Dec. 4, 1894, son of Peter

Kernan from South Fork and Hanna Darner (noncatholic); spons. James Kiener and Elizabeth Kiener. ECR
 Oct. 24, Mildred Rose, born Oct. 8, daughter of William Forquer from Moxahala and Mildred Dean (noncatholic) from Moxahala; spons. Richard McGonigle and Mrs. McGonigle. ECR
 Dec. 8, Guy, born Nov. 25, son of William Hillis from South Fork and Eva Sterner from Bristol; spons. Vincent Hillis and Nellie Hillis. ECR
 Dec. 31, Helen, born Dec. 18, son of Thomas Kinsel (noncatholic) from Moxahala and Mary Ilinon? from South Fork; spons. James and Julia Noon. ECR

1906

Aug. 15, Lawrence Brewster Kiener, born July 30, son of Hugh Kiener and Ora Brewster from Moxahala; spons. William Foraker and Tresa Maher. B. J. Mattes
 Aug. 26, Mary Dolores, born Aug. 15, daughter of Richard Daughy and Maud Brewster from Moxahala; spons. William Brewster and Miss T. C. Maher. BJM
 Sept. 30, Teresa, born Aug. 21, daughter of William McCabe and Clara McGonacle from Moxahala; spons. William and Catherine McCabe. BJM

(To be concluded)

Death of Dr. John M. Bigelow

Many of the readers of the COLUMBIAN who are acquainted with the family will be pained to hear of the death of the esteemed Dr. Bigelow, formerly of Lancaster, Ohio, but latterly of Detroit. We believe that Dr. Bigelow was a native of Lancaster, Ohio¹, where he was born June 23, 1804. He studied medicine in his native town, and being admitted to practice, lived there until about 1865, when he moved to Detroit, making it his future home. At the time of determining the boundary between this country and Mexico, he received the appointment of Botanist, and very ably filled that position. A short time ago the Doctor met with a severe accident, by which he broke a thigh bone, the injury superinducing dropsy, which finally proved fatal, and on the evening of Sunday, August 18th², he peacefully expired, after being fortified by the Sacraments and consolations of the Church. Of the family of eight children, there are living Henry, John, Rachel, Rev. Frank C., Sister Mary Blanche, and Mrs. Cecilia Boretler.³ Rev. Wm. Bigelow, of the Diocese of Columbus, who died a few years ago whilst pastor of the church at Steubenville, was also a son.⁴ Father Frank C. Bigelow, of the Order of Holy Cross, at Notre Dame, Ind., is at present the brilliant editor of the *Scholastic*. Sister Mary Blanche is a member of the Sisters of Holy Cross, at St. Mary's Academy, Notre Dame.

We sincerely condole with the family in their bereavement. May the soul of good Doctor Bigelow rest in peace.

- *The Catholic Columbian*, Aug. 29, 1878

NOTES

According to the *Columbian* of Sept. 5, 1878, Dr. Bigelow was a convert to the Church

- 1) Census records indicated that Dr. Bigelow was born in Vermont.
- 2) The civil record of his death gives the date as August 14, 1878.
- 3) The other child who predeceased the Doctor was James, who was born on Sept. 8, 1840 and was baptized on June 15, 1841 at St. Mary Church, Lancaster, sponsor being Mary Garaghty. Through their mother, Mary Myers Bigelow, and her sister, these children were cousins of Mother Angela Gillespie, C.S.C., Father Neal Gillespie, C.S.C., and their sister, Mary (Mrs. Philemon) Ewing.
- 4) Rev. William Thomas Bigelow was born in May, 1842; was ordained for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati on Aug. 6, 1864; and became a priest of this diocese upon its erection in 1868. He died on Jan. 23, 1872 and is buried in Steubenville.

Columbus Church Directory

from *The Catholic Columbian*
November 27, 1875

This listing, carried in the first year of Bishop Rosecrans' new diocesan newspaper, shows the status of the churches and chapels in his see city at that time, with the number and kinds of services available to the residents.

Since the erection of the diocese just seven and a half years earlier, the zeal of the good Bishop, the clergy, and the laity of the diocese had founded the Cathedral (opened for services in 1872), Sacred Heart Convent (1874), St. Aloysius Seminary (1871), St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum (1875), and, apparently, a formal chapel at the Ohio Penitentiary. "Hospital Chapel" refers to St. Francis Hospital at State and Sixth streets, which had been founded in 1862.

The Bishop's residence at this time was on the south side of Broad Street, on the third lot west of Seventh Street (now Grant Ave.)

Cathedral

Corner of Broad and Fifth Streets. Mass on Sundays and Holidays at 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m. Vespers at 7:30 p.m. On week days Mass will be at 6:00 a.m. and 7:50 a.m. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at 7:30 p.m. on the first Friday of every month for the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart. Time for Baptisms from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays and Holidays. Rt. Rev. S. H. Rosecrans, Residence 283 East Broad Street.

Holy Cross

Corner of Fifth and Rich Streets. Mass on Sundays and Holidays at 7:30 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Vespers at 2:30 p.m. Weekdays, Mass at 7:30 a.m. Revs. J. B. Hemsteger and J. B. Eis. Residence next to Church.

St. Patrick's

Corner of Seventh and Naghton Streets. Mass on Sundays and Holidays at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Vespers at 3:00 p.m. Weekdays Mass at 7:30 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Rev. J. Casella. Residence next to Church

St. Mary's

Third Street – South End. Mass on Sundays and Holidays at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Vespers at 2:30 p.m. Weekdays Mass at 7:30 a.m. Rev. F. X. Specht. Residence next to Church

Hospital Chapel

Corner of State and Sixth Streets. Mass at 8:00 a.m. Benediction at 5:00 p.m.

Sacred Heart Convent

Corner of Seventh and Broad Streets. Mass at 6:00 a.m. Sodality meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Seminary Chapel

The Seminary is situated about one and one half miles west of the city on National road. Mass at 6:00 a.m. Vespers at 3:00 p.m. Rev. N. A. Gallagher, President

Chapel of the Good Shepherd

This institution is situated near the Seminary. Mass at 7:00 a.m. Benediction at 4:00 p.m. Rev. G. H. Ahrens, Chaplain

Penitentiary Chapel

Mass at 8:00 a.m. on Sundays only

St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum

Mass on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:30 a.m. Mass and instructions on Sundays at 8 o'clock attended from Holy Cross Church.

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