

Early Catholic Immigration into
South Eastern Ohio
By Kathy Elizabeth Kreppner

The first missionaries to set foot in the area now the state of Ohio were the French Jesuits. They traveled with their compatriots who were seeking colonies for France. The Jesuits are thought to have preached to the Indians from approximately 1650 through the War of Independence. Although the Jesuit labors were of significant value, no records witness their having founded any churches within this area.

As early as 1785 some Maryland Catholics migrated west of the Allegheny Mountains. "The largest groups of Maryland Catholics began to move to Kentucky about 1787..." (1) They did so because they desired to be "... where religious life was quite unhampered by the remnants of colonial penal legislation." (2) In the English colonies religious persecution had been a reality for over a century. The first "rapid expansion of the frontier occurred ...between 1790 and 1810." (3) Leaders of the older states, alarmed at this exodus and engaging in Puritan self-scrutiny to discover the cause, admitted that one expelling factor lay in the harsh religious laws they were inflicting on their people. (4) Those who migrated across the Appalachians at first took a more southern route into Kentucky and Tennessee. Ohio was avoided due to the English-held forts and the fear of the scalping knife.

In 1790 a group of French Catholics settled at present Gallipolis in Ohio, but their stay was short, for no permanent house of worship was constructed. Their spiritual leader, the Benedictine Dom Pierre Joseph Didier, traveled farther west with the group. However, in 1793 Fathers Michael Bernard Barriere and Stephen Theodore Badin said Mass for the few Catholics who remained at the Gallipolis colony. (5) Father Badin returned again in 1807 to find Irish Catholic settlers in the vicinity, and "...baptized forty children..." (6) Nevertheless, no priest stayed there and no permanent church was constructed.

It was only after Mad Anthony Wayne's decisive victory over the Indians in 1794 that the United States government came into undisputed possession of the region presently called Ohio. This meant withdrawal of the British and little apprehension regarding scalping knives.

Between 1795 and 1800 several villages dotted the Ohio countryside: Marietta, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Hamilton, Dayton, Chillicothe, Steubenville and Zanesville. Several other smaller settlements had also sprung up so that by 1800 Ohio had 45,000 inhabitants. (7) In 1803 Ohio attained statehood.

The Establishment of the Church in South Eastern Ohio

The period from 1800 to 1850 begins any significant study of Catholic immigration into Ohio. It is in this period that Catholic priests began organized missionary work and helped with the erection of permanent churches and priories throughout the state.

At the turn of the century, the famed and aristocratic Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore, the only bishop in the country at that time, received two appeals from Jacob Dittoe, a frontier settler in Ohio. Jacob was a German Catholic who, between 1795 and 1800, settled in "Middletown", so named because it was equidistant from Zanesville and Lancaster. His homestead was staked out one and a half to two miles from present day Somerset. In his first appeal of January 5, 1805 (1802?), Dittoe requested that Bishop Carroll send a freshly ordained levite to the twenty to thirty persons (the number varies with sources) residing around Middletown/Somerset. Still without a pastor, Dittoe wrote again on February 1, 1808. Conditions were critical: his letter revealed the plight of a religious community without a priest:

"Every day's acquaintance in this country brings to my knowledge some of the Catholic profession tossed about through this country by the vicissitudes of fortune, deprived of the advantages of church communion, and extremely anxious for an establishment of that kind, and to contribute as far as in their power to support it." (8)

The answer to Dittoe's call came in the person of a forty year old Dominican missionary, Edward Dominic Fenwick, who was destined to become one of Ohio's foremost apostles of the Catholic faith. Fenwick was a remarkable man, one of a rare breed of truly intellectual and progressive frontier missionaries, such as his contemporary, Jesulino Kino, whose similar career forever marked the American South West. Although Fenwick was raised in Saint Mary's County, Maryland, an English-Catholic stronghold, he studied and became a staff member at the college in Bornhem, Belgium. When the French Revolution forced the closing of the college, Fenwick continued teaching in England. During this time, Fenwick forged two main ideas which he sent to the Master General in Rome. His goals were the founding of the Dominican Order in the United States and the dedication of his life to missionary work west of the Appalachians. Upon approval of the plans, Father Fenwick set sail for Norfolk, Virginia, where he arrived in

1804. From there, Bishop Carroll directed him and three other Dominicans, Thomas Wilson, William Raymond Tuite, and Robert Angier, to Kentucky. (9) Using Fenwick's personal wealth, the first Dominican Priory, St. Rose of Lima, was established near the little town of Springfield in Washington County, Kentucky. (10) Father Fenwick relinquished the Superior title to Father Wilson and set out on a missionary circuit. It was in 1808 that Father Fenwick set out enroute to the distressed Catholics in Ohio, who had been brought to his attention by a letter of Bishop Carroll. The journal he kept during his apostolate comprises the major source for early Catholic history. Father Fenwick reached the small community of Middletown where he discovered three Catholic families who had migrated there from Somerset, Pa., around 1800: Jacob Dittoe and his brother-in-law, John Finck. The third was most likely that of Joseph Finck. Joseph was not a member of the Church, but "...his wife and children were staunchly Catholic." (11)

In the house of John Finck "...the holy sacrifice of the Mass was offered for the first time in central Ohio." (12) Father Fenwick could not yet permanently remain with his newly discovered flock, which numbered twenty, but visited them as often as possible while traveling the countryside. Father Fenwick traveled from Maysville to Cincinnati, Canton, Youngstown and Somerset. There were "fifty Catholic families in Ohio...in 1812." (13) Father Fenwick's travels were long and tiresome, for "...unlike Kentucky, where they Catholics were nearly all from Maryland and ordinarily settled in groups, they Ohio Catholic settlers were from everywhere and scattered throughout the state." (14) They did not settle in concentrated groups comprised principally of those belonging to their Church. (15) Nor did they settle in the northern half of Ohio for two reasons: 1) Many of the first migrations were from around Bardstown, Kentucky, and its environs and from direct settlements from Maryland. Thus, these people wanted to remain close to the Catholic priory. 2) Those who went north did not always remain due to the despair of being without a priest. Nevertheless, the number of Catholics continued to increase. In a letter of Father Fenwick's, dated 1815, he cited the increase in the number of this minority religion in Newark and Owl Creek in Fairfield County. He noted the following Catholic families there: Major, Logan, Arnold, Baker and McKensey. (16) In 1817, Father Fenwick reported to the bishop that he had visited the old Catholic colony of Gallipolis, "...where he found many persons eighteen years of age who had not been baptized. He also discovered sixteen Catholic families, 'at no great distance from the town'." (17) In another of Father Fenwick's letters, dated 1818, he mentioned the increase of the Irish and of the German Catholic immigrants who knew no English at all. More priests and certainly more priories were badly needed. Father Fenwick was by 1816 totally assigned to the Ohio territory, and deeply concerned with building the Church there. (18)

In the meanwhile, Jacob Dittoe's two younger brothers, Joseph and Anthony, joined the Middletown/Somerset settlement. With the dream of a church and priory for the settlement, Jacob purchased 320 acres of land, which he deeded over to Father Fenwick. The construction of the church was finished by the fall of 1818 and Father secured permission from his Kentuckian Superior, Father Wilson, to reside at Jacob Dittoe's home until a priory could be built for his headquarters. Arriving on December 1, 1818, with him from Kentucky, was his newly ordained nephew, Nicholas Dominic Young, who in the following year, established the first church in Cincinnati.(19) On December 6th, Father Fenwick, as Father Young and the small community attended. blessed the church, "...the first of its kind in the state of Ohio..." (20) The church was named Saint Joseph's after the patron saint of Father Pius Joseph Gaddi, the Master General at the time of the erection of the first American province. Saint Joseph was also the patron saint of the province. This small church, which was twenty-two feet long and eighteen feet wide, was already too small upon the time of its completion, as Rev. Young explained in a letter to his father: "...the influx of those of the faith, especially from around Conewagon, Pennsylvania, had so increased the congregation that the church was much too small." (21) Until a second church could be built, this humble dwelling house of God was to serve as the center from which the two Dominican priests could fare to the scattered Catholics: south to the Ohio River, east to Pennsylvania, north to Lake Erie, and northwest into Michigan.

During the early 1820's, more than fifty full-sized families were attending the too-small church of Middletown/Somerset. (22) Along with his parishioners, Father Young drew up plans for remodeling the first Saint Joseph's. The log portion would be rebuilt with brick, thus adding greater space to that part. It is doubtless that Jacob Dittoe felt some regret as plans were being drawn to alter the log chapel which had been the birthplace of Catholic worships in central Ohio. He did not live to see the second Saint Joseph's for he died three years before its completion in 1829.

The parish had to seek outside assistance in order to secure funds for the construction. Bishop Fenwick (23), donated 250 dollars. The money collected, along with hard work, started construction. In the presence of his parishioners, Father Young blessed and laid the new cornerstone, on May 26, 1825. In less than four years, January 11, 1829, Father Young dedicated the second Saint Joseph's, which was "...actually eight times as large as the first log cabin church, " (24) with its steeple and cross rising above the surrounding forests. (25)

(to be continued)

EARLY BAPTISM RECORDS OF ST. JOSEPH'S
SOMERSET, OHIO

(continued)

1820 (cont.)

Jan. 18: Mary Keegan, adult, wife of J. Keegan; witness, Polly Myers.
Jan. 25: David Burgoon, of Richard and -----.
Jan. 27: William C. Rogers, of John and Ann.
Jan. 30: Stephen Newcomer, of Jacob and Mary.
Feb. 3: Hannah Archer, of Jacob and Sarah.
Feb. 3: Eliseus Archer, of Michael and Rudy.
Feb. 3: Robert A. Archer, of Simon and Rudy.
Feb. 3: Roseanna Crossin, of Manuel and Mary.
Feb. 23: Mary Timoney, of Denis and Ann.
Feb. 23: Mary McConnaughy, of Hue and Jane; March 2, 1820.
Feb. 28: William Waterhouse, of William and Eleanor.
Feb. 29: Daniel McConnaughy, of Hue and Jane.
Feb. 29: James Delong, of George and Rachel.
Mar. 11: Mary of Mary and ----- Keegan.
Mar. 19: Mary Elizabeth Empic(?).
Mar. 19: Jeremiah Hart, Samuel Hart, William Hart.
Mar. 25: Peter Hannum(?), of Joseph and Marcolina.
Apr. 2: Nicholas A. Cody, of Thomas and Nancy.
Apr. 2: Peter T. Cody, of Thomas and Ann.
Apr. 3: Roseanna Crossin, of Manuel and Mary. (also under Feb. 3)
Apr. 9: James Longstrith, of Bartholomew and Sarah.
Apr. 9: Susanna George, of Michael and Mary.
Apr. 9: Sarah George, of Michael and Mary.
Apr. 10: Mary Ann Burgoon, of James and Mary.
Apr. 15: Ann McManimy, adult.
Apr. 15: Amelia, of Ann McManimy.
Apr. 15: Sarah Hart.
May 21: David Flowers, of Christopher and Catherine.
June 1: Mary Ann McGlocklin, of John and Maryann.
June 11: Jacob George, of Michael and Mary.
June 12: Elizabeth Miller, of George and Catherine.
June 18: Anastasius Rian, of William and Mary.
June 18: Sarah Ann Brown, of Michael and Catherine.
June 25: Francis P. Hodge, of Joseph and Rachel.
June 25: Roseanna McGonnigall, of Denis and -----.
July 7: Mary Ann Agnes Fink, of John and Elizabeth.
July 12: Susanna Mary Will, of John J. Will and Teresa Will.
Aug. 12: John Gallagher, of Michael and Mary.
Aug. 19: Sarah Ann Welch, of James and -----.
Aug. 19: William Egan, of Elizabeth.
Aug. 20: Dominic Stimer(?), of Henry and Mary.
Aug. 20: Mary Cunigan, of Peter and Mary.

1820 (cont.)

Sept. 3: John Wifil, of John and Mary.
Oct. 1: Jane Shearan, of Patrick and Mary.
Oct. 3: Luke Walpole, of Michael and Ann.
Oct. 9: John Delong, of David and Jane.
Oct. 9: Levi Burgoon, of John and Mary.
Oct. 20: Mary Beall, Margaret Water, ---- and a young man, adults.
----- 12 children in Stark and Guernsey counties.
----- Margaret Cambell, adult.
Nov. 3: Benjamin Blubaugh, of John and Elizabeth.
Nov. 3: Henry Plott, of Henry and Abby.
Nov. 3: John Pain, of Raphael and Winifred.
Nov. 3: Louis Boyle, of George and Ann.
Nov. 3: Mary McKinney, of Jonathan and Sarah.
Nov. 4: Thomas C. Martin, of David and Bridget.
Nov. 5: Susanna Stephen, of Christopher and Mary.
Nov. 7: Jonathan Arnold, of Elias and Mary.
Nov. 15: Mary Long, of Catherine and Hue.
Nov. 15: Mary Lynch, of Patrick and Patience.
Nov. 15: William McGuire, of James and Margaret.
Nov. 2-: Barnabas Burns, of Andrew and Sarah.
Nov. 21: Catherine Jones, pf J---- and Margaret.
Nov. 21: Jacob Plum, of Henry and Susanna.
Nov. 21: Sarah Dullaugh, of John and Jane.
Nov. 22: Sarah Roughcorn(?), of William and Sarah.
Nov. 25: John N. Maguire, of James and Margaret.
Nov. 25: Peter Arnold, of Joseph and Susanna.
Nov. 26: James Boyle, of Daniel and Ann.
Nov. 26: James McN---l, of John and Rose.
Nov. 26: Thomas Anders, of Robert and Catherine.
Nov. 27: Mary Jones, of Samuel and Catherine.
Nov. 28: James Kelly, of Daniel Kelly.
Nov. 29: ----- Archer, of George and Rebecca.
Nov. 29: Ann Archer, of Henry and Mary.
Nov. 29: Elizabeth Carrol, of George and Ann.
Nov. 29: Henry Archer, of James and Ann.
Nov. 29: Joseph Archer, of Henry and Mary.
Nov. 29: Joseph Archer, of Michael and Cynthia.
Nov. 29: Mary and Margaret Carrol, of George and Ann.
Nov. 29: Michael and Margaret Archer, of George and Rebecca.
Nov. 29: Michael Archer, of Michael and Cynthia.
Nov. 29: Margaret Archer, of James and Ann.
Nov. 29: Sarah Archer, of James and Ann.
----- Simon Lindicum, of Daniel and Mary.
Nov. 30: John Dial(?), of George and Margaret.

(To be continued)