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Chapel Hill, Perry County

Many are the descendants of the parishioners of the famous Chapel Hill church which flourished during the latter half of the last century in Monroe township, Perry county, Ohio. Attended by missionaries in the 1840's, the annual Catholic Directory first records Father A. Olivetti as attending the early settlers of the area in 1842. Early in the 1900's the church was no more. The sketch above was prepared for the Catholic Record Society by Mr. Wally Toscano of the staff of Karlsberger and Associates, Architects, Inc., Columbus.

CHAPEL HILL: A RETROSPECT

(Editor's note: The following interesting article was written some years ago by a Geneva, New York, columnist who signed himself as "Quill". In his early years he lived in Perry County and was known as "Quill" Thompson, a member of a well-known family of St. Francis parish, Chapel Hill. Indeed Chapel Hill was first known as Thompsonville. "Quill's" article of reminiscences provides a great deal of history of the area. The Chapel Hill parish dates back to the 1840's. The deed for the property on which the church stood was dated September 9, 1847.)

When the nineteenth century was yet in pinafores, when the state of Ohio was considered the west, when virgin forests grew on the sites of Glouster, Corning and Rendville, a hardy pioneer left the beaten path and with his young wife crossed the tedious Allegheny mountains, thence by flat boat down the Ohio river to historic Blennerhassett island, and through the well nigh unbroken forests to an eminence in southeastern Perry county known now as Chapel Hill.

This man was George Thompson, the first man to blaze the trail with the true faith and had rock quarried in block to build a church. He was the youngest of a well to do family who had emigrated from Ireland and took up residence in New York city. Through a difference in religious opinion he was ostracized by his family, and set out with a given determination to establish a home for himself far removed from contention and strife.

The descendants of the Thompson family still reside in New York. The third generation boasts a lawyer near the head of the profession, a minister of the Episcopal church, and a politician of the republican persuasion, who has more money, and does less to get it, than either the lawyer or preacher.

With a few crude household utensils and still cruder agricultural implements, the young pioneer began the almost herculean task of subduing and making tillable the forest, literally hewing a home out of the wilderness. Not long was he alone. Soon following the trail of the pathfinders came other emigrants from Ireland and Germany, attracted by the lure of the new world's possibilities, and the constitutional promise of freedom in religious worship. These men and women were prototypes of the characters so admirably outlined in Cooper's stories of frontier life. Men, who have done more toward the up-building of a great nation than all the statesmen, politicians and lobbyists that ever graced or disgraced our halls of legislation.

Soon the rude cabins of these pioneers formed a hamlet designated as Thompsonville. Such it is named on old maps of this region. Upon the establishment of a postoffice it was found another of a similar named existed in the state, so the founder of the colony, as first postmaster, disclaiming personal emolument, re-named the little village "Chapel Hill."

It is not the purpose of this writer to assume the role of historian, but rather to describe Chapel Hill, its people and customs as we saw them with the eyes of youth. That stretch of muddy road that exists today, besides which stands at intervals ramshackle, decaying buildings, once presented a scene of life and pastoral beauty, in adverse proportion to its present desolation and squalor. To the center of the village on an eminence that gave it strong scenic relief stood the church of St. Francis Xavier, fronted by a row of sweet locust trees that

extended from the postoffice to "Pat-the Watchs". In the rear of the sacred edifice stood the residence of Squire Thompson surrounded by fir and cedar trees, interspersed with apple, pear and cherry. The well kept church-yard was the object of tender care by the women of the parish. How carefully they nurtured that circle of Easter lillies, first blossoms of early spring, the center of which later on would be redolent with the bloom of begonias, nasturtiums and dahlias.

Often in the spring time would the passer by stop to inhale the fragrance of sweet locusts and feast his vision on their bright green foliage and yellow-tinted blossoms, contrasting them with the pink and white bloom of apple, pear and peach trees, and the sombre green of cedar and fir in the background. The ensemble forming a Phantasmagoria of color that appealed - Rembrandt like - even to the eye inured to the beautiful in nature.

The colonists were uniformly of one faith and this well kept church-yard was a clearance house for the exchange of opinions, comments on crop prospects and matters in general. Every Sunday the entire population, young and old, for miles around greeted each other, with a sincere concern and brotherly interest that is now a relic of a bygone day. The memory of the writer goes back only to the ministry of Father Brogard. For many long years he was pastor of the parish. He was of French parentage and a man of rare attainments. Calm, sedate, a profound scholar, and forceful orator. It seldom falls to the lot of a human to be accorded the reverence and love Father Brogard engendered in his people. The little child he had baptized would later on be toddling by his side, and on Sunday afternoon intently listen while he guided its uncertain, faltering steps along the straight and narrow path. In after years he would pronounce the nuptials, and bless the little hoop of gold, emblem of unending affection for a partner through life, and how often he stood by the foot of a coffin holding all that was earthly of a little bundle a fond mother had brought to him - seemingly yesterday - to be admitted to the fellowship of Christ. His voice would falter and tears course down his sallow cheek as he performed the last sad rites of the Church for one of her children. When the infirmities of age caused him to reluctantly retire, there was a sorrow in every household akin to that caused by the grim reaper claiming its best beloved.

He was succeeded by Father Boylan (O'Boylan), a man who in many respects was his very antithesis. Young, impulsive, brilliant, possessing the ardent temperament of the true born missionary, he was not long in endearing himself to the people of Chapel Hill. He was the pastor of St. Augustine's in New Straitsville, and came monthly and later semi-monthly to Chapel Hill. Through his efforts was secured the last pastor of old St. Francis church, jolly, jovial Father Rooney. The latter died at Chapel Hill and his remains are interred at the entrance to the cemetery, where a handsome stone marks his last resting place.

The missionaries who accompanied Lord Baltimore into the wilds of Maryland, or the French Fathers who penetrated the wilderness along the banks of the St. Lawrence, never left a more lasting impression upon their particular sections than did these good men upon the people of Chapel Hill. They taught them a faith that was unbounded, unquestioned, implicit. Warned them against placing finite reason against infinite design. It can be said to the credit of the parish, that of the old folks, their children or their children's children, not in a single instance have they asked a mortal judge to put asunder what the Immortal Judge has joined together.

How often do our memories revert back to the days when we were gathered in the old stone church? How proud we were of that choir organized by Father Rooney, consisting of the Bennett girls, Emma Kronenbitter, Ella Coyle, Sadie Brecht, and Mamie Thompson, organist. And Oh! We almost forgot to mention that Phil Rye andof the musical organization. Just what their respective parts were we cannot tell, as no man, woman or child could ever distinguish the voice of either in the composite waves of harmony that came from the gallery. Just what Phil's musical emoluments amounted to we never knew, though we have on a few occasions heard Joe tackle the popular songs of the times. In them his voice forcibly reminded us of a frog with bronchitis, while in sacred music it was always so low and indistinct as to be comparable only to Theodore Roosevelt's after the last fall's election.

In those days of long ago Chapel hill was a hustling little business mart, for as Albert Souders once put it, all the "process" from Morgan county came that way. Two general stores proprietored by Monahan Brothers and Dennis Souders traded calico, muslin, staple groceries and "dog-leg" tobacco for butter, eggs, feathers, tallow, skunk hides and ginseng.

McLuney on the C. & M. V. railway was the nearest shipping point and twice weekly John Monahan sent teams there laden with products of the dairies and poultry yards. Two hotels took care of the traveling public and dispensed whiskey at five cents per drink. And it wasn't the "moving picture" brand either. Local option was then a long way ahead, and the W. C. T. U. people were not yet in evidence. The women brazenly wore wine colored shirt waists, and the men to be in prevailing fashion occasionally decorated their noses in the same crimson hue.

But remorseless Father Time has laid a heavy hand on poor old Chapel Hill. Where carefully nurtured flowers once grew, now rank weeds and briars hold sway. Only ragged walls mark the spot of a home that once sheltered a happy contented family. The old church has tottered and fell, only the ruined walls standing as a silent reminder of bygone days. Even the old bell has been moved away. That bell, the tones of which is associated with childhood's earliest memories. How joyfully would its peals go forth, how merry would be its melody as it called the parish together to witness the nuptials of some happy young couple. How solemn, sad and sorrowful would it toll the requiem of a dead neighbor. For many long years Peter Nash rang the "Angelus." To Peter this was a duty of devotion, a labor of love. In summer and in winter, in sunshine and in storm, three times daily with never failing regularity he rang it, even when the population within the radius of its sound had dwindled until so few, so pitifully few, were left to cease their toil, bare their heads and repeat the angel's salutation.

Down at the foot of the hill still stands the little old schoolhouse where "Kiss" Adams and Pat Skinnin crammed the "rule of three" into our stubborn little heads, and what memories cling to that old weather-beaten ruin. How carefully he would prepare for that red letter event, the last day of school and its attendant exhibition. The entire adult population of the district would be on hand to witness a display of our historic talent. No metropolitan audience of culture and refinement ever waited more impatiently the raising of a curtain on a Modjeska or Mansfield than did the old folks the beginning of exercises. After several whispered consultations, a little tot, tousele-haired and freckled, would come forth, deliver a bow she had practiced for weeks and in a voice resembling a worn-out phonograph record declaim "Mary had a little lamb, etc." Her effort would be greeted with prolonged applause. Next would come something in a deeper

vein. An embryo statesman with a wealth of oratorical gestures would deliver Patrick Henry's famous "Liberty or Death" speech. Again tumultuous applause, followed by knowing nods or winks as to the future of the boy orator. the consensus of opinion seemed to be if he escaped the penitentiary he would surely make the United States Senate.

When the crops were garnered in the fall and the long winter evenings were at hand, the debating society would spring up. First and foremost would come "Fourpaugh", followed by Andy Haughran, Maurice Donahue, "Quill", Pat Skinnin, Billy Goulding and a number of lesser parliamentarians. With what vim and earnestness we would argue pro and con the merits and demerits of women suffrage, compulsory education, annexation to Canada, etc. A favorite topic for discussion was, Resolved, That intemperance is a greater evil than war. On this important question Thomas Masterson, Esq., now a distinguished citizen of Gloucester, could always be found irrevocably on the negative side. Quoting in part from General Sherman, Tommy would preface every argument with the unanswerable assertion, "By damn, war is hell." But the old time exhibition of weekly debate became insignificant when the old time dance was on deck. All the young people would gather at a neighbor's house. The best room was cleared for action. Either Professor Tommy Duffy or Dick Tolberth would officiate as orchestra, rendering a repertoire of musical selections ranging in merit from the "Devil's Dream" to "Pop Goes the Weasel." The young folks used to say that one of John Grannan's feet was inclined to the holy roller persuasion, thereby handicapping his terpsichorean abilities, so John was usually pressed into service as "caller off."

The changes of dance would consist for the most part of "Alaman left," "swing your partner" and "balance all." During the latter feature the ladies would demurely teeter, first on one foot, then on the other, like a frozen-toed rooster, while the gentlemen would execute the famous Athens' roád back-step, interspersed with a few Chapel Hill pigeon wings, and winding up with a finality as sharp and decisive as a rap from Mayor Gormley's gavel.

The "swing your partner" change is also worthy of especial mention. The rustic Romeo would encircle the waist of his Juliet in a bear-like embrace, and as the latter emitted a delicate little squeal, would swing her around and around until her calf skin shoes resembled the swiftly revolving ponies on a merry-go-round.

In one respect the Chapel Hill boy had a distinct advantage over the youth of modern times. He knew precisely where to locate his best girl's waist line. It was always where nature intended it should be, instead of being scattered any old place between her shoulders and her hips in accordance with fashion's latest decree.

So we lived, care free, contented and happy, when ever and anon would come to our ears the reverberations of a blast in the moxahala tunnel. How joyfully we greeted the news that the hole was completed. How anxiously we awaited the coming of the highway of steel down the Sunday Creek valley. With what amazement we watched the springing up - over night as it were - of Corning and Rendville. To our untutored minds Aladdin's lamp had lost its lustre and Monte Carlo became common place. How eagerly we deserted the independency afforded by our homes and farms and rushed away to become servants for others. And we never missed the sunshine until the shadows came. We left the old folks as they came - alone.

Once away from the shelter of the paternal roof tree, the wanderlust came easy. Soon we were scattered, hither and thither, here and there. But who of us in our wanderings have ever met people like the old folks at home? Where have we ever found such neighborly affection, such kindly hospitality, that though one met a stranger, he left them a friend? Where in our travels have we found such fine old families as the FArrells, Currans, Donahues, Donnellys, Duffys, Corrigans, Nashs, Cummiskeys, Thompsons, Monahans, Weiners, Grannans, Souders, Gouldings, Haughrans, Martins, Mastersons, Anglers, Coyles and more than a score of others? How we children of Chapel Hill admired and respected these old pioneers. Even now we can recall their kindly wrinkled faces, with character in every line, their backs bent with the toil of building homes that are now deserted, clearing fields that now lay waste. Poor backs! They are straight enough now lying in their long last resting place. And their children, them of the second generation have nearly all gone the way of their fathers. Of the few that are still with us, their hair has become very silvery, their eyes have lost their luster, their steps have become laggard. Soon, only too soon, will their existence be but a memory.

And we the grandchildren of these old first comers, men and women of today, scattered though we are over the map of America, some day will wander back again in person to the scenes of our childhood we so often re-visit in memory. Wander back again to where the birds sang so sweetly in the morning, the stars shone so brightly at night. There is but one spot of interest left there for us now - the little cemetery, that acre of God's. We enter beneath the arch erected from the ruins of the old church. to read the inscriptions on the silent gravestones is to bring up blessed memories and drench them back with tears. On those simple stones are no epitaphs. They needed none. Poor, honest, kindly people, the world has only too few such as they. As we kneel by the graves of our grandparents, father and mother, perhaps a brother or sister, fervently offering a prayer in their behalf to the Father of mercies, while we brush aside the scalding tears, there creeps into our hearts the sincere conviction that, when the recording angel had summed up their life's account they were welcomed at the portals of heaven with the salutation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Quill.

Geneva, New York.

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NEW LEXINGTON NEWS, DECEMBER 9, 1897

(Editor's note: The following news items appeared on the front page of the "New Lexington Herald," New Lexington, Ohio, December 9, 1897.)

Rt. Rev. Bishop Watterson reached here on the 9 o'clock train from Columbus, Saturday morning, and went from here to Crooksville on the afternoon train. He returned overland Sunday afternoon from Crooksville, having confirmed a class there Sunday morning. The distinguished Prelate still suffers from rheumatism, but is much better than he was three months since.

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Very Rev. N. E. Pilger, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic church, Lancaster, who has been ill at Good Samaritan hospital, Cincinnati, for the past few weeks, has so far recovered as to return home last week.

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Rev. Father Rhode, of Holy Cross church, Columbus, and Emil Wiederhold, also of that city, enjoyed a visit with Rev. Father Schmidt at Academy, last week. They enjoyed a hunt while here, and were quite successful.

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GRAND AND IMPOSING SERVICES

Rt. Rev. Bishop Watterson Confirms
a Large Class at St. Rose's Church

Sunday evening, the auditorium of St. Rose's Catholic Church was taxed far beyond its seating capacity, the occasion of the distinguished Bishop administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to a class of one hundred and three souls. The sacred edifice contained many of other religious denominations, who were inspired by the solemn and impressive services, and many were unable to gain admission within the sacred walls.

The evening Devotion or Vespers was celebrated at 7:30, the Rt. Rev. Bishop, Rev. Fathers Cush and Schmidt, officiating. The music of the choir was grand, and the singing reflects great credit on those who materially aided in making the services sublime and august.

At the conclusion of Vespers, and before Bishop Watterson administered the Sacrament of Confirmation, he spoke eloquently and instructively to the class on the graces bestowed thro' the Sacrament they were about to receive; exhorting them earnestly to be faithful and perfect soldiers of Jesus Christ. Confirmation endowed them with the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost - Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord - and the learned Prelate minutely defined each gift in a most elaborate and able manner; yet in language so plain that the youngest could fully comprehend. The Bishop's elucidation of the Catholic Faith was superb, his able and flowery command of language and eloquence of delivery, touched the hearts of the non-believers in Christianity. His exhortation was edifying in the extreme, and will bear good fruit.

The Confirmation Class was composed of 103 persons, of whom four were adults and six converts to the church. The beloved pastor, Rev. Father Cush, devoted much time to the instruction of the members of the class, and has every reason to feel gratified over the crowning success achieved. The appended is a list of the boys, girls and adults forming the Confirmation class.

Boys. - Wm. F. Farrell, John Charles Studor, Carl Leo Schneider, Joseph Bernard Flowers, Albert Hamilton, John King, Chas. Alex. Forquer, Wm. Gordon, John Gilbert Dusenbury, Chas. Dusenbury, Thos. Vincent Allen, Joseph Dillehay, Charles Dimond, Robert Thacker, Samuel Ambrose Ward, Charles Joseph Tague, Daniel Raymond Humphrey, Wm. Henry Tague, Wm. McConnell, Vincent Tague, Louis Chas. Sweeny, Thos. Joseph McTague, Paul Noon, Carl Duffy, Paul Tague, Chas. W. McShane, Edgar Francis Sheeran, Ferdinand Dimond, Geo. Henry Kessler, Daniel Edward Clark, Frank William Clarke, Wm. Geo. Mullen, Albert Clement King, Chas. W. Sherlock, Frank McCabe, John Archibald McCabe, Patrick Earl Selby, John Aloysius Page, Edward Paul Dimond, William M. Minaugh, Charles Edward Johnson, Chas. Ferdinand Studor, Matthew Studor, John Tague, Arthur Tague, Frank Tague, Patrick Desmond, Wm. E. Cody, Wm. Bennett, Ralph Austin Edmiston.

Girls. - Lizzie Frances Flood, Gertrude Flood, Mary Murphy, Mary Ellen Quinn, Mary Agnes Flowers, Mary Frances Dimond, Mary Josephine Tague, Rosalie Sheeran, Lucy E. Minaugh, Cecilia Donahue, Frances Sheeran Elizabeth Frances Siemer, Rose Tague, Frances Farrell, Susan E. Hammond, Cora Dean, Frances Dean, Gertrude Noon, Mary Sweeny, Ellen Sweeny, Gertrude Sweeny, Catherine Noon, Laura Meenan, Dora Hamilton, Maud Stalter, Elizabeth Tague, Ellen Tague, Clara Studor, Mary Frances Coyle, Mary Beatrice Sheeran, Catherine Siemer, Theresa Sheeran, Mary Elizabeth Johnson, Mary Ann Noon, Blanch A. Little, Mary Hammond, Cordelia Mary Flowers, Anna Fitzgerald, Lena Bennett, Amelia Flowers, Alice Fitzgerald.

Adults. - Mrs. W. A. Clark, Mrs. Elizabeth Horahan, Mrs. Charlotte Thacker, John Clint Wilson.

In addition to the above class, Bishop Watterson on Sunday confirmed a class of 26 at Crooksville, on Monday a class of 10 at St. Aloysius Academy, and a class of about 60 at St. Pius' church, South Fork. Making an aggregate of about two hundred.

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Acquisitions

Ontology by Msgr. Paul J. Glenn, Ph.D., S.T.D., B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis. 1937. Gift of Rev. Ralph Huntzinger.

History of Fairfield and Perry Counties by E. S. Colborn. 1883. Gift of Rev. Robert Noon.

Fifty Years in Brown County Convent. 1895. Gift of St. Charles School.

History of Mt. St. Mary's of the West by Michael J. Kelly and James M. Kirwin. 1894. Gift of St. Charles School.

A bound volume of hand-written sermons by Bishop Sylvester H. Rosecrans. Gift of St. Charles School. (This is the second such volume now treasured by the Catholic Record Society.)

Evolution and Dogma by Rev. J. A. Zahm, C.S.C., Ph.D. 1896.

Through South America's Southland by Rev. J. A. Zahm, C.S.C., Ph.D. D. Appleton & Co., New York. 1916. Gift of St. Charles School.

The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the United States by John Gilmary Shea, LL.D. 1896.

Notes on Chess Knight Tours and Magic Squares, a manuscript bound volume by Rev. Serge de Stchonlepnikoff. 1871. Gift of St. Charles School.

History of Franklin County by William T. Martin. Columbus. 1858. Gift of St. Charles School.

A History of the Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburg and Allegheny by Rev. A. A. Lambing. Benziger Brothers, New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis. 1880. Gift of St. Charles School.

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