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FIRST CATHOLIC CHURCH IN HOLMES COUNTY?



The above sketch is made from a photo which designates it as the first Catholic church in Holmes County, Ohio. The date is given as 1847, and its location as in Knox Township. There is no deed record of property bought by Bishop Purcell in that township. Property for St. Joseph's, Mohican (Greer), was bought in 1847, and the Deed states the church is already erected on the tract of one-half acre. Further, the locale of the above sketched church does not fit that of the church at Mohican (Greer) in Richland Township. Could this be still another Mission? Bishop Rappe in a letter to Bishop Purcell writes of a church in Holmes County being in ruins. It could possibly have been the above one allegedly in Knox Township.

HISTORY OF ST. JOSEPH PARISH
MOHICAN (GREER), HOLMES COUNTY, OHIO
By. Herman E. Mattingly

Nestled among the hills and forests of west central Holmes County, Ohio, there was once a flourishing mission. Dedicated to God under the patronage of St. Joseph, it was located in Richland Township near the east boundary of Knox County. Stones which were part of the foundation of the little chapel can still be seen indicating the location of the structure. Little else remains to testify to its active membership of the 1840's except a few scattered tombstones hidden amongst towering trees and underbrush. Some years ago there were quite a few tombstones in the little cemetery behind the chapel. These tributes to the memory of Catholic pioneers have since been taken by vandals to make patios for homes.

The earliest record found pertaining to St. Joseph's is in a letter (1) written by that great missionary, Father John Baptist Lamy, afterwards Archbishop of Santa Fe. Father Lamy was the first resident pastor of St. Luke's, Danville, Knox County, Ohio. From there he wrote on January 20, 1844, to Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati giving "some accounts of my congregations for the last year." His "congregations" as he listed them were: St. Luke's, Danville(Knox County): St. Joseph's, Mohican (Holmes County) - "also with Pine Run, Richland County, and Killbuck, Coshocton County"; St. Vincent de Paul, Mt. Vernon (Knox County), and St. Francis de Sales, Newark (Licking County). Father Lamy wrote that there were "300 families in all these places."

While Father Lamy located St. Joseph's as being at Mohican, there seems to have been no village by that name in western Holmes County. The Catholic families were farmers and scattered throughout the area. As was done in other instances, the mission was designated by the Mohican River which flowed nearby, making a short digression from Knox County into Richland Township of Holmes County. Many years later the mission was referred to as St. Joseph's, Greer (2).

In his letter of January, 1844, Father Lamy listed the number of Baptisms, marriages, First Communions and deaths for the previous year. He combined St. Joseph's, Mohican, with Pine Run and Killbuck in one report. There was a total of 75 families in the three places, with 24 Baptisms, 3 marriages, 5 First Communions and 7 deaths (3).

In August, 1845, Father Lamy started a separate register of sacraments for the little Mohican mission. Records previous to that date were most likely included among those of St. Luke's, Danville, where Father Lamy resided. However, none of the Danville records are designated as belonging to the Mohican mission. One curious entry was made in 1842: "Baptisms, German Congregation: Jan. 2. Marianne Honner, daughter of Silverius and Theresa Chinie. Sponsors were Joseph Chinie and Marianne Chinie." The record was in Latin. The "German Congregation" could only have been St. Joseph's, Mohican. Later in the Danville records are found the identical first two records with which Father Lamy started the St. Joseph's register.

In his letter of 1844 Father Lamy offered to go on a begging trip to help reduce the debts at Mt. Vernon and Newark. He also wrote of the increasing importance for a priest to visit regularly the town of Mansfield, where he had gone a number of times.

Father went on the begging trip and wrote from St. Louis to Bishop Purcell (4) on March 16, 1844. He expressed his sorrow at hearing that the church at Mt. Vernon had burned, and asked that a German priest from Norwalk visit the Germans near Danville. This was evidently in reference to the little St. Joseph mission.

Apparently the St. Joseph Mission gave some promise, although sacramental records showed no increase during the early years. Four Baptisms in 1845, and six each in 1846 and 1847 would not seem to indicate a very large congregation. Yet a church was already built since Father Lamy refers to it as "St. Joseph's, Mohican," in his letter of January, 1844. Just when the church was built is not known.

The first record which makes explicit mention of a church is the deed for the property on which it stood (5). Dated February 15, 1847, the deed transfers one half acre from Peter Durand (also Durant) and Elizabeth Durand his wife of the County of Muskingum to Right Reverend John Baptist Purcell, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. The one half acre was to be taken "so as to include the Catholic Church now erected and standing thereon....."

Father Lamy again made a report of the status of his missions in a letter written to Bishop Purcell on August 27, 1847 (6). The report:

"Danville, Knox Co. St. Luke's: priest's residence; about one hundred families; Mass every Sunday except the third Sunday of the month.

"Mt. Vernon, Knox Co., St. Vincent de Paul: Church not completed; Mass every month on the third Sunday; twenty-five families; attended from Danville.

"Mohican, near Mt. Holly (7), Holmes Co., St. Joseph: fifty families; Mass on the first Monday of the month; attended from Danville.

"Pine Run, near Brownsville (8), Ashland Co. (9), St. Ann Church (10) not completed: 20 families; Mass on the last Monday of the month; attended from Danville.

"White Woman (11), near Walhonding, Coshocton Co: visited from Danville every three months; 9 families.

"Mansfield, Richland Co: 20 families; visited from Danville, and Sandusky City every month.

"I have written to the Bishop to ask the permission to let me stay at Danville two or three weeks longer if he has no objection, or until he sends a priest in my place. Please, when he returns home tell him to have the kindness to write to me, and mention if I must go immediately" (12).

That there were fifty families at St. Joseph's would indicate its importance as a mission in those days. More evidence of this is contained in a letter (13) written November 7, 1848, by Father Christopher Grandeler (14), who had succeeded Father Lamy at Danville. Father Grandeler had only recently come to the Diocese of Cincinnati, and this was likely his first appointment.

Although stationed at Danville, his letter was concerned almost entirely with St. Joseph's, Mohican. It gave a good account of this mission.

Writing in French, Father Grandeler stated that the people at St. Joseph's were glad to have a German priest. "You would scarcely believe," he wrote, "how very pleased and satisfied the German Catholic families are at the realization that the Bishop has sent them a German priest to help them grow in the faith. Having such a person around who can speak even a little English has been a rarity in the past."

"The frequency of Mass attendance," he continued, "the prayer life of the adults and of families with their children at home, the regularity of reception of the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, the harmony which is beginning to take root in them and with other groups give me the assurance that they are growing in virtue.

"Regarding these matters generally, Bishop, I'd like you to be aware that a number of non-Catholics visit our churches at St. Joseph and St. Michael (15) - not merely out of curiosity, but more from an inner desire to discover religious truths. This observation of mine is borne out in the devotion with which they attend -- even kneel down -- among our faithful parishioners, and by their concern about being present every time Mass is offered. But they don't want to be noticed making the sign of the Cross.

"The people here want to contribute toward my living expenses, but with the condition that I live here at St. Joseph's. I don't like to ignore their request - particularly when I recall last winter (16) and my not being very well settled in. It must be considered, first of all, that during the hardships of last winter, the Mohican River rose from time to time such that all communication from one side to the other was cut off for a whole month. And it apparently happened for two consecutive months the previous winter. In such a situation, the faithful are without Mass and any formal instructions; the sick do not have their spiritual needs taken care of, and the dead are without Christian burial rites. Equally distressing for the parents is the lack of Christian instruction for their little ones who attend the public schools here and there - schools in which, as you well know, Bishop, religion is not even mentioned, and only the secular studies are learned.

"In the second place, please realize my advanced age (17) and the frequent spells which I suffer from rheumatism. It would be a comfort to me if I did not have to undergo those difficult and bitter cold trips for each need that arises.

"For the well-being of the people on both sides of the river, several fathers of families here have promised to help me build a wood frame house not far from St. Joseph's. For this purpose, they have given me the supplies needed to build a suitable house, and they have built the foundation already on a small tract of land which I have purchased for it (18). I am hoping it will be ready for me in a few weeks...."

Father Grandeler wrote further that he had visited the parish near Loudonville (19), and the one at Millersburg, as well as both sides of the river Killbuck. "A number of families in this deserted area," he wrote, "did

give me a hearing, while others would not listen to me at all. But they may be more open at another time and I will not cease challenging them with the Gospel message."

Father Grandeler's records (20) of the sacraments during 1848 are not signed by him, but he does designate the location of each ministration. During that year there were ten Baptisms and two marriages at St. Joseph's; three Baptisms and two marriages at St. Michael's; six Baptisms at Coshocton; three Baptisms at Newark; two Baptisms and one marriage at Loudonville; two Baptisms at Danville, and one Baptism at Millersburg. His last entry was made on Nov. 18, 1848. The next record is dated July 16, 1849, and was made by Father Joseph Brunemann, pastor at Newark.

There was no listing of St. Joseph's, Mohican, in the annual Catholic Directory until 1851 (21) when it was given under the Diocese of Cleveland. In a letter (22) written Jan. 22, 1849, to Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati, Bishop Rappe of Cleveland accepted the administration of Holmes County. In the letter he expressed some concern about the work of Father Grandeler.

The Directory listing for that year was "St. Joseph, Holmes County, attended from Wooster." It continued to be so listed until 1856 when it was given as under "Mount Eaton (23), Holmes County, St. Genevieve. Rev. L. Thomas, who visits St. Joseph and Napoleon (24) in the same county." At least for a time St. Joseph's was concurrent with the present Glenmont mission.

In 1852 (25) Bishop Rappe wrote to Archbishop Purcell regarding the mission at Mohican in Holmes County. "Touched with compassion for the congregation of St. Joseph," he wrote, "I have sent to it Mr. Berguere (26). But those poor Germans are not able to provide for a priest...." He suggests that some other small congregations be attached to St. Joseph. "Our neighbors from St. Joseph," he continued, "could form a big enough parish to keep a missionary busy. I think that a good solution would come of it. I would be happy to announce it at Wooster, but the distance is so great and the route so very difficult that this would be most impossible. You see, Monseigneur, it would be possible to find in Knox County, or Coshocton, a small number of people who could be visited by the pastor of St. Joseph. Or if one of your missionaries could take St. Joseph as his charge, it would be alright...."

Again in 1858 Bishop Rappe wrote to Archbishop Purcell saying that on a recent trip through his diocese he came across a stone church in Holmes County which had been built by some men of Napoleon (Ohio). The German Catholics of St. Joseph showed him where they had started to build a new church in Knox County (27). Bishop Rappe advised them to seek aid from Archbishop Purcell (28).

The little mission continued at least until 1861 when four Baptisms were recorded. Probably after that date the people of St. Joseph's attended the church in Napoleon or St. Michael's in northern Knox County. The Catholic Directory first listed Napoleon in 1855, and gave it as under the Diocese of Cleveland and attended from Mount Eaton, the present Calmoutier. It was so listed in 1856 and again in 1861. There was no Directory in 1862 and 1863.

Beginning in 1864, and continuing thereafter, Napoleon was listed as under the Archdiocese of Cincinnati (29). Napoleon was a mission as early as 1855; but St. Joseph's continued six years after that date. It seems clear, then, that

Napoleon was not St. Joseph's transferred to a new location.

It is not known when the church at St. Joseph's was razed. Stones outlining its foundation can still be seen. The Diocese of Columbus still holds title to the one-half acre tract.

- (1) Letter from Father John Lamy of Danville, Ohio, to Bishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati, dated Jan. 20, 1844, now in the University of Notre Dame Archives.
- (2) Diocese of Columbus, a History of Fifty Years, 1868-1918, p. 395. The little village of Greer in Knox County takes its name from a family of that name who settled in the area as early as 1827. Robert Greer, who laid out the town of Greer in 1836, was born in the County of Antrim, Ireland, in 1806. He came to America in 1826, settling in Maryland. See History of Knox County, Ohio, by N. N. Hill, Jr., p. 494.
- (3) St. Luke's, Danville, was listed with 90 families, 20 Baptisms, 6 marriages, 42 First Communions and 8 deaths; St. Vincent's, Mt. Vernon, had 20 families, 8 Baptisms, 3 First Communions, one marriage and 3 deaths; St. Francis de Sales, Newark, had 110 families, 30 Baptisms, 6 marriages and 9 deaths (First Communions not given). Archives of the University of Notre Dame.
- (4) Letter of Father Lamy from St. Louis to Bishop Purcell, Cincinnati, dated March 16, 1844, now in the University of Notre Dame Archives.
- (5) Deed Books, Holmes County, Ohio, Vol. 13, pp. 143-144.
- (6) Letter of Father Lamy from Danville, Ohio, to Bishop Purcell, Cincinnati, dated August 27, 1847, now in the University of Notre Dame Archives.
- (7) Mt. Holley is shown on an old Knox County map as the present Brinkhaven.
- (8) Brownsville is the present Jelloway in Knox County.
- (9) There is a Pine Run not far north of the Brownsville mission. It is in Ashland County, Father Lamy probably used it to designate the location of St. Michael's.
- (10) It is difficult to understand his naming the church St. Ann. It seems always to have been St. Michael's. It was sometimes referred to as the "Henley Church" after the family that lived there.
- (11) "White Woman Rock" is located a few miles northwest of the present city of Coshocton, Ohio.
- (12) Father Lamy was transferred to St. Mary's, Covington, Ky., which at that time was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Cincinnati. He remained there until appointed Vicar Apostolic of New Mexico in July, 1850.
- (13) University of Notre Dame Archives.
- (14) Father Christopher Grandeler was born ca. 1788, and ordained 1821-1822. He entered the Diocese of Cincinnati in 1848. He died March 20, 1863, in Philadelphia. See History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati by Father John K. Lamott, p. 359.
- (15) St. Michael's was the mission in Jefferson Township, Knox County, and about six miles northwest of St. Joseph's. It preceded the present parish of St. Peter's in Loudonville, Ashland County.
- (16) It is evident that Father Lamy left in the Fall of 1847 and that Father Grandeler arrived at that time.
- (17) Father Grandeler was sixty years of age at the time.
- (18) There is no record of a deed in Father Grandeler's name in the Deed Books of Holmes County, Millersburg, Ohio.

- (19) St. Michael's, already mentioned.
- (20) The records of St. Joseph's Mission are now preserved at St. Peter's, Millersburg.
- (21) Catholic Directory, 1851, p. 82.
- (22) Letter (French) dated Jan. 22, 1849, from Bishop Rappe of Cleveland to Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati, now in the university of Notre Dame Archives. By agreement between the two Bishops, Holmes County, although almost entirely within the Diocese of Cincinnati, was to be administered by the Bishop of Cleveland. Cf. "Catholic Telegraph," Cincinnati, January 11, 1849.
- (23) The present Calmoutier.
- (24) The present Glenmont.
- (25) Letter (French) dated March 26, 1852, from Bishop Rappe of Cleveland to Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, now in the University of Notre Dame Archives.
- (26) Father Augustine Berger. See Register of Baptisms of St. Joseph's, Holmes County, now at St. Peter's, Millersburg.
- (27) There is presently no known explanation for this statement. The church at St. Joseph's was built before 1847. Where in Knox County was this new church? St. Michael's, Brownsville, was already built. Could this have been at Alum Rock, across the border into Knox County, where tradition tells something of a Catholic Cemetery?
- (28) Letter dated Nov. 4, 1858, from Bishop Rappe of Cleveland to Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati now in the University of Notre Dame Archives.
- (29) Possibly by this time the boundary between the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Diocese of Cleveland had been officially changed from the 40 degree-41 minute line to the appropriate county boundaries, with all of Holmes County remaining in the Archdiocese.

TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS
ST. JOSEPH, MOHICAN (GREER),
HOLMES COUNTY, OHIO

(The cemetery is located in Richland Township, on Township Road 16, more than three miles west of Glenmont.)

1. Josephine F. wife of Louis Gaume, d. May 20, 1855; aged 41 Y & 6 M.
2. Jon (Jos?) Acorn, d. Oct. 13, 1856; aged 59 Y, 6 M & 25 D.
3. Andreas Schaab, b. May 21, 1807; d. Sept. 1, 1857.
4. Valentine Schaab, d. Oct. 29, 1854; aged 81 Y & 6 M.
5. John Schaab, d. Dec. 10, 1850; aged 49 Y.
6. _____, daughter of J. & M. Daess, d. July 20, 1860; aged 11 M., 25 D.
7. Lary H. son of A. & M. Shop (Schaab?), d. Sept. 11, 1860; aged 1 M, 15 D.
8. Mary F. daughter of G. & S. Orthoefer, d. Sept. 6, 1847; aged 3 Y.
9. Footstone: M.S.
10. Footstone: G. T. D.
11. Footstone: L.H.S.

Five of the above inscriptions are included in a list of Knox County Cemeteries at the Ohio Genealogical Society, Mansfield, Ohio. (The cemetery is not in Knox County.) The remainder of the list at the Ohio Genealogical Society follows:

12. Channing, William E. d. Jan. 21, 1856.

13. Greer, Ann Jane, d. April 24, 1840; aged 24 Y.
14. Greer, George, d. Jan. 8, 1861; aged 56 Y.
15. Greer, Mrs. James, d. Sept. 2, 1816.
16. Greer, Jane D., d. Oct. 10, 1843; aged 8 Y.
17. Greer, Jeanne, d. Jan. 18, 1858.
18. Greer, Lydia, d. April 11, 1900; aged 85 Y.

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CHILDREN IN THE FIRST COMMUNION CLASS OF 1850

ST. JOSEPH'S, MOHICAN (GREER)

(It is presumed that the following is a list of the First Communion Class of 1850 at St. Joseph's, Mohican. Written in the register book in German script, the word designating the purpose of the group in German is not clear.)

1. Nicholas Joseph Hosfelt
2. Heinrich Scharp
3. Jacob Gundne
4. Alexander Mixner
5. Phillip Schmitheisler
6. William Reichman
7. Philip Ginder
8. Ephrean Gaellen
9. Joseph Milles
10. Katharina Armbrust
11. Magdalena Ernst
12. Madgalena Phillips

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The Bulletin's First Bound Volume

Volumes I, II and III of the Bulletin for the years 1975, 1976 and 1977 will soon be available in a red buckram binding with gold lettering. Anyone wishing this bound volume should place the order as soon as possible. The supply will be limited. The approximate cost will be \$7.00. Those who have preserved all the issues of the Bulletin may wish to send them to the office of the Catholic Record Society, 197 East Gay Street, Columbus, Ohio, 43215. However the cost will be the same. This will make the supply greater.

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Meeting

The next quarterly meeting of the Catholic Record Society will be held at 3 p.m., Sunday, August 27, at the Catholic Center, 197 East Gay Street, Columbus, Ohio, 43215. Visitors are welcome.