



REV. SERGIUS DE STCHOULEPNIKOFF, 1819- ?
A MAN OF GENIUS AND A SOURCE OF MYSTERY

The Rev. Sergius de Stchoulepnikoff, a priest of the diocese of Columbus from 1869 to 1874, was something of a genius in the game of chess, more in the study of it than in the playing of it. His interest prompted him to write about it. One of his efforts was a large hard-back book of more than 600 pages. His note on the fly-leaf states: "This volume was ruled and bound for me in Columbus in November, 1871 - and in the latter part of that month I commenced to record in it all my notes on chess knight tours and magic squares, residing at that time in Circleville, Pickaway Co., Ohio." The last entry in the book was made in March, 1874, while he was pastor at Millersburg, Holmes county.

Father Stchoulepnikoff evidently selected the paper which he had bound into book form. The pages, 8½ x 11, are faintly lined vertically and horizontally, being thus a great aid to the author in making the numerous drawings of the book. The whole text was done by hand, very carefully written, the drawings almost perfect. This amazing manuscript is now preserved in the diocesan archives.

Pasted inside the front cover of the book is the following note by Bishop Hartley:

Dec. 6th 1943. Note. This book came from the library of Rev. Sergius de Stchoulepnikoff - a son of a noble Russian family. He was stationed for awhile in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. In 1869 he was placed by Bishop Rosecrans in St. Joseph's church, Circleville - and remained there until 1872. In 1872 he was sent to take charge of Millersburg and missions.

In 1873 he attended the priests' retreat at St. Aloysius Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. After the retreat he started for home. A short time thereafter his valise and boots were found in the railroad yards - just outside the old Union Station. He was never seen or heard of after that. There was a rumor that he may have been done away with by Russian spies. + James J. Hartley, Bishop of Columbus. P.S. I was a student at the time in St. Aloysius Seminary.

The mystery of Father Stchoulepnikoff's sudden disappearance has more recently been emphasized by research. The copy of two more manuscripts on chess by this genius are in the public library of Cleveland. One of them, dated 1885, eleven years after his disappearance, was written in San Francisco and dedicated to the one who won a chess championship there that year.

Sergius de Stchoulepnikoff was born in St. Petersburg, Ruthenia, March 5, 1819 (1). He was of a noble Russian family. His father was Romano de Stchoulepnikoff; his mother, Alexandra de Astafieff. The Stchoulepnikovs were a Russian aristocratic family, in a line of descent from the beginning of the 17th century. A noble line of the family was of later origin. That there was some German influence in the family tradition may be surmised from the spelling of the family name, Stchoulepnikoff, instead of Stchoulepnikov (the Russian ending).

We do not know of Sergius' education. He was ordained May 25, 1850, by the Most Rev. Alesio Basilio Manjard, Bishop of Nancy, France (2). His diocese was in northeastern France next to the western border of Germany.

Not long after his ordination the young Russian priest obtained permission from his bishop to come to the missions of America. Already in the annual Catholic Directory of 1850 he was listed as stationed at Lancaster and Allen, Erie county, in the diocese of Buffalo, New York. What brought him to Buffalo? Perhaps Bishop Timon, C.M., of Buffalo, who had been the first provincial of the Vincentian Fathers in the U.S. (3), was acquainted with people in Nancy, France. In a letter of November 20, 1858 (4), Stchoulepnikoff wrote: "Bishop Timon knows my intimate friends in France, since my emigration, and saw them this year..."

The Catholic Directory does not list Father Stchoulepnikoff in 1851, but he is still at St. Mary's, Lancaster, Erie county, N.Y., in 1852. In 1853 he was given as at Pendleton, Erie Co., N.Y., and for the next two years he was at St. Mary's, Lancaster. The following year, 1857, he was at the Cathedral in Buffalo.

Father Stchoulepnikoff was inclined to join a religious community. This inclination remained with him as is evident from a letter of Bishop Rosecrans of 1874 (5). It was doubtless the reason for his leaving the diocese of Buffalo and presenting himself at the novitiate of the Dominican Fathers, St. Joseph's Priory, Somerset, Ohio. He must have left the Cathedral in Buffalo about the middle of 1857. Records of the Dominican Fathers (6) show that he received the Dominican habit at Somerset on Nov. 17, 1857. The record reads in part: "November 17, 1857...In our church of St. Joseph, before the assembled community...the Very Rev. Fr. James Whelan, Prior Provincial of the Province of St. Joseph, solemnly invested with the habit Rev. Sergius de Stchoulepnikoff, priest....ordained March 25, 1850, by Most Rev. Alesio Basilio Manjard, Bishop of Nancy in France." He was given the name, Louis. The record was signed by Father Stchoulepnikoff.

He remained a novice only a few months. In a letter of Feb. 22, 1862 (7), he explains his move. Writing to Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, he states: "When in 1858 I came to you, Most Reverend Sir, you will please consider, that my action was perfectly regular. I was a priest of the diocese of Nancy, not yet legally dismissed, and at my leaving the Dominican novitiate it was my duty to attach myself to a diocese, and I did so by offering myself to the Ordinary of the diocese wherein Providence placed me for the time being, you accepted my services, and obtained for me an exeat from my then canonical authority, from the bishop of Nancy."

After presenting documents in April, 1858, to the archbishop at Mt. St. Mary's seminary, Cincinnati, he was sent to St. Mary's, Chillicothe. He signed the register of baptisms there for the first time on May 1 of that year.

Father Stchoulepnikoff looked upon his stay at Chillicothe as temporary; he was taking the place of the pastor, Rev. John Nicholas Thisse (8), who was visiting in France, his native land. A number of letters to Archbishop Purcell (9) reveal the devotion to duty of the young Russian priest. On May 2 he wrote to ask permission to have Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament at May devotions each Sunday evening. He regrets the distance which separates the pastor from the church and school, and the necessity of depriving the people of daily Mass in the church (10). On May 11 he wrote of administration problems. On June 7 he wrote that he was happy to learn that the archbishop would be visiting the area and would spend several days at Chillicothe as a center for visitation of parishes.

He continued to consider his stay at Chillicothe as temporary. On August 26 he expressed his thoughts on the matter in a letter to Purcell (11): "In your last letter an expression implied that perhaps I am destined to remain permanently stationed in Chillicothe. I believe it best to reduce myself to possible indifference on the matter, and in preserving silence to leave you perfectly free to decide by yourself - yet on the other hand I cannot but confess the repugnance I feel at the idea, that perhaps I am to remain here. I have labored to reason away and to silence this repugnance, but until this moment I did not succeed; on the contrary this repugnance grows with every day. Perhaps it is a relief to me that I have opened it out." He was nevertheless prepared to abide by the decision of the archbishop.

A few months later he was in Hamilton, C.W. [Canada West?] from where he wrote to Purcell on November 20, 1858, requesting the two original documents he had presented to the archbishop at Mt. St. Mary's seminary on his arrival in Cincinnati. That he is now in Canada needs some explanation. His letter (12) contains the answer.

"Your Lordship," he wrote, "has been pleased to write to the bishop of Buffalo; had you done so, my Lord, before speaking to me on the subject, you would have spared me many a painful moment.....As to the novel accusation of fratricide with which Providence has been pleased to try me, my first intention was to write to the ecclesiastical authorities at St. Petersburg, with the request to testify to the condition of my family affairs; but after reflection, I gave up the idea, considering the author of the accusation not able to injure me effectively; but if Your Lordship for your own satisfaction desire to have certitude that you have not employed in the service of your diocese a runaway from justice, I would suggest that the bishop of Buffalo can give you sufficient information on the matter, since the news seems to have come from France, where it is said the alleged crime is given as a general reason of the motives of emigration from Russia. Bishop Timon knows my intimate friends in France, since my emigration, and saw them this year, and nothing of the novel report or anything of that sort has ever come to his ears.I beg Your Lordship to excuse me for making this suggestion; my reputation being the only riches I own upon earth, nothing but the fear not to be able to protect it effectively from impending injury forced me to leave your diocese which I considered an honor to serve..."

Father "Serge" went to Canada "to the only Bishop, to whom personally I was known" (13). He was "not at home" from the first in Canada. However, not long after his arrival in Canada he received a letter from Purcell. In it the archbishop revealed that he had received a letter from Bishop Timon saying he would receive Father Stchoulepnikoff back in Buffalo. And the archbishop also stated he would receive him back. After some difficult moments he decided to return to Cincinnati.

He could not have spent many months in Canada. At any rate he was at St. George's, Coshocton, Ohio, by August 16, 1860 (14). In his history of the Catholic Church in the Coshocton area (15) Father Slattery gives us a survey of Father Stchoulepnikoff's pastorate there. "In 1858 (16), Coshocton and her missions having grown steadily, the bishop appointed Father de Stchoulepnikoff, a Russian (known locally as Father Serge). The little congregation of Coshocton, and the missions, thrived under his charge. In fact the growth was so rapid that the old, recruited building was too small. The second year of his residence in the town, in 1859, he purchased a lot on Third Street, between Chestnut and Locust, and here he erected the first Catholic Church in Coshocton, which he dedicated to St. George. The building of this church was the coalescing of the Catholics of Coshocton and the faith took on a new hold. Father Serge labored earnestly and

diligently with his flock and in 1862, when the country was in the first throes of Civil War, he was succeeded by Father Andrews."

Missions attended by Father Serge while at Coshocton included St. Nicholas and St. Mary's in the southern part of the county; St. Elisabeth's, Killbuck Creek, in the north, and St. Ann's, Dresden, in Muskingum county. He was the first first to celebrate Mass at the Killbuck mission.

On May 17, 1861 (17) responding to the archbishop's expressed intention of visiting Coshocton, he said he hoped to have the candidates for Confirmation in all missions come to Coshocton.

But his attachment to his position at Coshocton was not as pleasant as Father Slattery's account would seem to indicate. "I will be happy to welcome you in my half savage home," he wrote the archbishop (18). "I do not know how I could receive you in Killbuck, where my ostrich stomach rebelled against the food I find there." He was not keeping house himself. He explained to the archbishop that during three years he received a total of \$469.99 from Coshocton and the missions together. This was for the maintenance of the places and for his salary. It did not leave much for personal expenses, let alone for keeping a residence. Perhaps his aristocratic upbringing had some influence on his estimate of the food and for his not keeping house. It is not surprising, then, that he again desired to be moved, and said so in December, 1861 (19).

Father Stchoulepnikoff presented another motive for moving to the archbishop. He felt that he had not succeeded with the people and that, more than personal suffering, urged him to move. "I have moral certitude that I am not the man to improve the congregation," and wrote to the Bishop of Buffalo about returning there (20). At the same time he asked for dismissal from the archdiocese.

His action seems to have prompted Purcell to write to him that he had been irregular in his proceedings. No doubt the archbishop had Father Stchoulepnikoff's several moves in mind. After all, he had been in Buffalo, then with the Dominicans, in Cincinnati, to Canada, back to Cincinnati, and now he wants to go back to Buffalo. He wrote a long letter (21) on Feb. 22, 1862, defending all his moves. But the archbishop was not convinced, and there was another long letter (22), and a request for his personal documents.

There are no records of his stay in Coshocton. All sacramental registers of the period are missing. However, such records at other stations which he served show that he was careful in keeping them.

Father Stchoulepnikoff did leave Coshocton and go to Buffalo again. The only evidence at hand for this is found in the annual Catholic Directory. Giving statistics in 1864 for the previous year, the Directory places him at both St. Patrick's and St. Michael's in Danville, New York. It was the same in 1865. He was not listed in 1866, but he was at St. Louis (German) in Buffalo in 1867. The following year, 1868, he was at St. Patrick's, Java, Wyoming county, N.Y.

Again, for reasons unknown, he moves back to Ohio, this time to the new diocese of Columbus. It was while he was in Danville, New York, that he wrote the first of his manuscripts on chess. It was entitled, Twenty Solutions of the Problem of the Knight's Tour. An 8vo sewed manuscript, it had 40 pages with 42 diagrams. It was dated 1865, Buffalo, N.Y. There was another copy, in cloth, a neatly written manuscript of 18 pages with 42 carefully drawn diagrams.

His first duty in the new diocese seems to have been temporary. He was at St. Genevieve's, Calmoutier, a French settlement in northern Holmes county, for the first half of May, 1869 (23). Bishop Rosecrans then sent him to St. Joseph's, Circleville. He was there for three years during which time he began his 600-page monumental work on chess knight tours and magic squares. A short history of the Circleville parish (24) states that he was "a Russian nobleman and a convert to Catholicism." No other indication has been found that he was a convert.

In the latter part of June, 1872, Father Stchoulepnikoff was sent back to St. Genevieve's, Calmoutier. In his report to Bishop Rosecrans (25) of January 25, 1873, he stated that he had as missions Napoleon [Glenmont], Millersburg, Oxford and Holmesville. All were in Holmes county. There was a pastoral residence at Calmoutier and at Napoleon. There had been 28 baptisms, 8 marriages and 6 deaths in 1872 in all his charges. Calmoutier was his "residence at present." It was not long before he moved to Millersburg, the county seat.

There are little or no records of him while at Millersburg. He attended the second diocesan synod in Columbus, August 22, 1873. It was preceded by a three-day retreat. He signed sacramental records in the missions under his care from June 30, 1872, to April 12, 1874. After he moved to Millersburg Father Joseph Zoegel came to Calmoutier in the spring of 1873, and was there until February, 1874. No further information has been found about him.

A short hand-written history of the Millersburg parish, prepared about 1907, states that Father Stchoulepnikoff bought property in the town and gathered funds for a church. He sacrificed large sums of his own. Things seemed to be prospering when he suddenly disappeared. No deeds of property in his name are found recorded in the Holmes county court house.

He was having difficulty early in 1874 with the priest who replaced him in Calmoutier and with one of the parishioners there, one J. B. Roussel. The Holmes county "Republican" of Millersburg, under date of April 16, 1874, published this report: "On Friday last Rev. Father Serge, Catholic pastor of this borough, was arrested and then taken before a Justice of the Peace, in Middletown, on a peace warrant issued on an affidavit of the notorious rumseller Russel, of Salt Creek [Calmoutier area], who for the last forty years, has been a pest of the whole neighborhood, and who in September last plead guilty to keeping a nuisance. The chief witness against Father Serge was a certain Rev. Joseph Zoegel. who, unfortunately, is the present pastor of the French Catholic congregation at Salt Creek, and seems to be too great a friend of the whisky seller Russel."

The paper was a "dry" publication. In the same issue it had a rather sarcastic statement about the treatment of Roussel. "J.B. Russel had been fined in January, 1873, for the illegal selling of whisky, \$25 and cost; again, in September, 1873, he was fined \$50 and cost, which amounted to \$39.95. Last January term he was again indicted, and on that indictment he plead guilty at the April term, and was fined to the exceedingly heavy amount of \$20 and cost. As at the same time he plead not guilty to an indictment found against him by the Grand Jury of the present term, it is hoped that when he will be convicted next October term, he may be punished by a fine at least as heavy as five dollars."

Although Father Stchoulepnikoff "disappeared" in Columbus on May 1, 1874, in the Common Pleas court journal of Holmes county in Millersburg, it was recorded on October 23, 1875, in the case of John B. Russel vs. Serge de Stchoulepnikoff, that "This day came the parties by their attorneys and the defendant accepted a

judgement for the costs of his prosecution." Would this indicate that Father Stchoulepnikoff was still living and had instructed his attorney in the matter?

At any rate the Russian priest disappeared in Columbus on May 1, 1874. Bishop Hartley was mistaken in his note in giving the year as 1873. After his disappearance Bishop Rosecrans sent the following letter under date of August 1 to Archbishop Purcell (26): "Father Serge de Stchoulepnikoff was put on board the train in good health, and apparently sound mind in Dresden at 11 p.m. for Columbus on Friday May 1st. His satchel containing Ritual, altar breads, Ordo, Breviary, etc. was picked up by a R.R. man at a switch in the corporate limits of this city on Saturday, May 2nd, and sent by express the next Tuesday to his address in Holmes county. He has not been heard of since. I write this in order that you may be able to understand any rumors that may reach you, and to make use [of in] any correspondence with Religious Houses to obtain information of him if he is alive.

"He had a bitter fight with certain parties in Calmoutier; and his friends there think he has been murdered. The Columbus detective who has the matter in hand thinks he cannot be dead. I have his books and papers removed from Millersburg to the Seminary to await the result.

"He told a brother priest several months ago that he was very much inclined to abandon the world and seek a retreat in some Benedictine monastery.

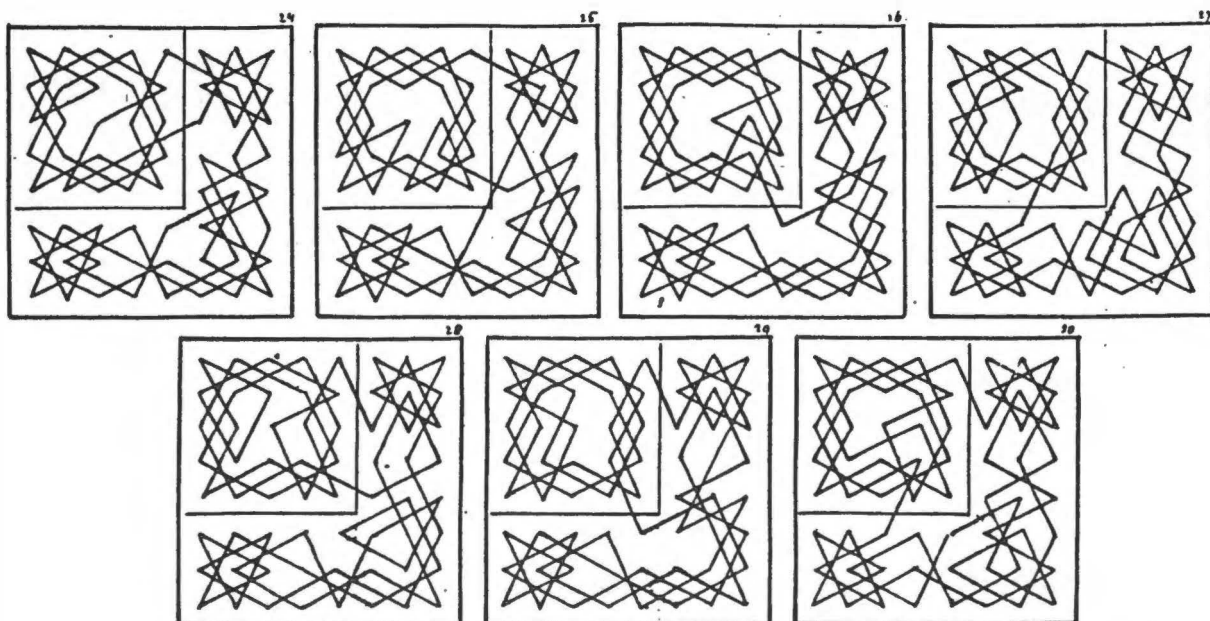
"I have written to Gethsemani and sent inquiries to Milwaukee."

Among the books of Father Stchoulepnikoff's library which Bishop Rosecrans had brought to St. Aloysius seminary in Columbus was his lengthy 600-page manuscript on chess knight tours and magic squares. The book is divided into quite a number of sections each with its own heading. A number of these reveal his familiarity with authorities on chess. Some such headings are: "Approximate of calculation of all possible tours over an ordinary board"; "Some remarks on the method of solving the problem of the knight's tour as given by von Schinnern"; "Investigation into the mode of solving the knight's problem as given by de Chambure"; "Balliere de Laismont and his mode of arranging magic squares of 24 numbers."

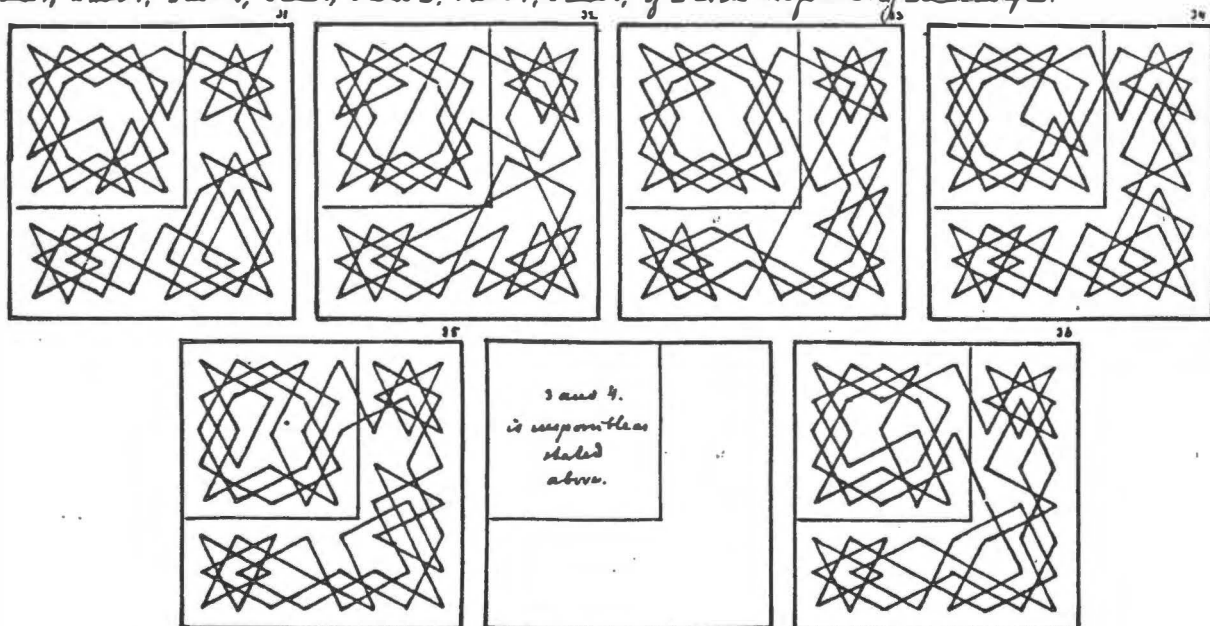
Research by the Catholic Record Society has uncovered a third manuscript in the Cleveland public library prepared by Father Stchoulepnikoff. This besides the one of 1865 prepared in Buffalo, and the large monumental work done while at Circleville and Millersburg. This third one is dated 1885, eleven years after his "disappearance," and was done in San Francisco. It was dedicated to Herman Heyneman, who was the victor in the chess tournament played in 1885 at the Mechanics Instutue in San Francisco. On the title page he had written: "Numerate tables of all symmetric tours arranged with quarts, a record of an investigation in search of magic squares by Rev. Serge de Stchoulepnikoff. 1885. He still used the title "Rev."

In his introduction to the work, Father Serge wrote, "Situated as I am this winter, I have occasionally much liesure, with no opportunity for an acceptable manner of spending the time which weighs on my hands. Consequently I have again taken up for an amusement a subject which in former years had much engrossed my attention. I mean the problem of the Chess Knight tour." The wording would seem to indicate that the writer is indeed our Father Stchoulepnikoff.

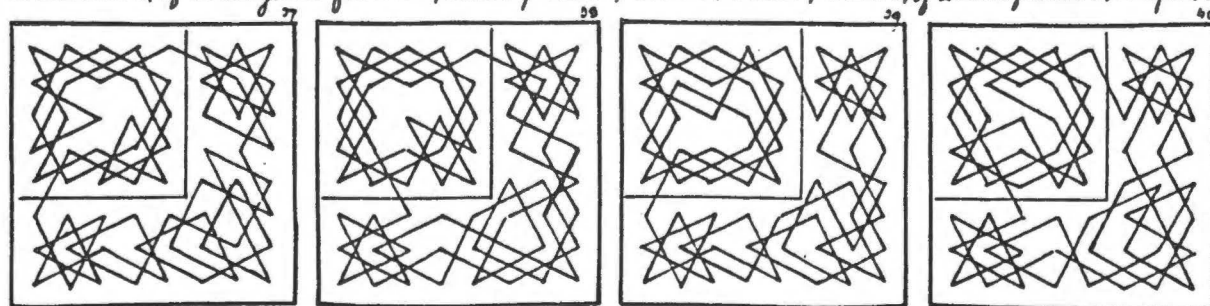
This 1885 manuscript in the Cleveland public library, however, is a copy. It was made page for page, line for line, by a careful person interested in chess. It gives every reason to believe that it is a copy of an original manuscript



In Diagram 4 - one termination of the 5×5 tour connects above with points 1 and 3, and the other with point 1, 2, 4, 5. Likewise result again seven possible combinations of terminations for the other phlegma fraction, namely 2 and 1, 2 and 4, 2 and 5, 3 and 1, 3 and 2, 3 and 4, 3 and 5, of which the following are examples.



In Diagram 5. the terminations of the 5×5 tour are such that there are only four possible combinations of terminations of the irregular fraction, namely 2 and 1', 2 and 3', 3 and 1', 3 and 3', of which follows examples.



definitely done by our Russian priest. Be it noted again that it was done eleven years after his "disappearance" in Columbus.

The Catholic Record Society is making every effort to locate other evidence of Father Stchoulepnikoff's having been in California after his disappearance here in 1874. The man of genius continues to be a source of mystery.

- (1) Record of investiture. Dominican Fathers Archives, House of Studies, Washington, D.C.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Dictionary of the American Hierarchy by Joseph Bernard Code, Joseph F. Wagner, New York, 1964, p. 283.
- (4) Stchoulepnikoff to Purcell, Letter, Nov. 20, 1858, Archives, Cincinnati Archdiocese.
- (5) Rosecrans to Purcell, Letter, Aug. 1, 1874, Notre Dame University Archives.
- (6) Dominican Fathers Archives, op. cit.
- (7) Stchoulepnikoff to Purcell, Letter, Feb. 22, 1862, Archives, Cincinnati Archdiocese.
- (8) Rev. John Nicholas Thisse, 1823-1873, died Springfield, Ohio.
- (9) Stchoulepnikoff to Purcell, Letters, Cincinnati Archdiocese Archives.
- (10) Ibid., May 2, 1858.
- (11) Ibid., August 26, 1858.
- (12) Ibid., Nov. 20, 1858.
- (13) Ibid., Feb. 22, 1862.
- (14) Ibid., August 16, 1860.
- (15) "History of the Catholic Church in Coshocton and Vicinity," by Rev. John J. Slattery, privately published, 1917.
- (16) Father Slattery places the beginning of Father Stchoulepnikoff's pastorate in Coshocton much too early.
- (17) Stchoulepnikoff to Purcell, Letter, May 17, 1861, Cincinnati Archdiocese Archives.
- (18) Ibid.
- (19) Ibid., letter of Dec. 2, 1861.
- (20) Ibid., letter of Feb. 16, 1862.
- (21) Ibid., letter of Feb. 22, 1862.
- (22) Ibid., letter of March 1, 1862.
- (23) Baptism register of St. Genevieve's, Calmoutier, Holmes county, Ohio.
- (24) "Golden Anniversary Celebration, St. Joseph Church, Circleville, Ohio. 1960," Booklet, p. 12
- (25) Columbus Diocese Archives.
- (26) Rosecrans to Purcell, Letter, August 1, 1874, Notre Dame University Archives.

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Gifts and Acquisitions

Stephen T. Badin, Priest in the Wilderness, by J. Herman Schauinger, Bruce Publishing Co., 1956. Gift of Donald Schlegel.

A New Life of St. Dominic by Blessed Jordan of Saxony, trans. by Rev. E.C. McEniry, O.P. Columbian Press, Columbus, Ohio, 1926. Gift of Anthony J. Lisska.

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