



# Barquilla del Santa Maria

## BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society - Diocese of Columbus

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THE MYSTERIOUS FATHER SERGE - AN UPDATE

The mysteries surrounding the life and priestly career of Rev. Serge de Stchoulepnikoff, an immigrant Russian who served in this diocese for a time, were the subject of the September 1983 issue of this BULLETIN. "Father Serge" was an expert in the field of magic squares and chess knight's tours and wrote three manuscripts on these subjects, one large volume of which remained in the archives of this diocese after his disappearance in 1874. The signature above, taken from the register of baptisms of St. Joseph's Cathedral in Buffalo, New York (other specimens exist in this diocese) may aid in distinguishing between originals and copies of Father Serge's manuscripts. The photograph of Father Serge was taken at "Coddington's Catholic Photographs, 366 Bowery, New York" and was in the archives of this diocese. It had been mislaid when the earlier article on Father Serge appeared.

During the last year or two of his life, Rev. Herman Mattingly, late Chairman of the Society and editor of this BULLETIN, became intrigued with the mysteries surrounding Father Serge de Stchoulepnikoff, who from all appearances was a brilliant, if perhaps unstable, man. The results of Monsignor Mattingly's research were presented in the September 1983 issue of this BULLETIN. Father Mattingly continued to collect information on Father Serge after that article appeared and at one point threatened to read the entire census of 1880 for the city of San Francisco, California to prove that Father Serge lived there for some time after his disappearance here. Monsignor also corresponded with Rev. Walter Kern, assistant archivist of the Diocese of Buffalo, and was sent copious data on the Buffalo phase of Father Serge's career. This update is based largely on the data sent by Father Kern.

#### RECAPITULATION

The story of Father Serge as presented in the earlier BULLETIN may be summarized as follows. Sergius or Serge de Stchoulepnikoff was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1819; nothing more is known of his life until his ordination on May 25, 1850 by the Bishop of Nancy, France. That same year he came to America and settled in the Diocese of Buffalo, where he was stationed in Erie County and later in Buffalo at the Cathedral. About the middle of 1857 he left New York and came to St. Joseph's priory near Somerset, where he joined the Dominican Novitiate. He stayed there only a few months and in April of 1858 he offered his services to Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, who accepted him and obtained an exeat from his canonical authority, the Bishop of Nancy.

Beginning in April of 1858 he served at St. Mary's in Chillicothe, but he suddenly betook himself to Hamilton, Ontario, apparently as a result of an accusation of fratricide, whence he wrote to Archbishop Purcell that November. The charge was groundless and both the bishop of Buffalo and Archbishop Purcell were willing to have him back. How quickly he returned is not clear, but supposedly by 1858 he was appointed to Coshocton and its missions. In 1862 he requested permission to go back to Buffalo, where he appeared in the annual Catholic Directory for 1864, 1865, 1867, and 1868. By May of 1869 he had returned to Ohio, where the Archbishop sent him first to Calmoutier in Holmes County and then to St. Joseph's in Circleville. He was sent again to Holmes County in June, 1872. While stationed at Millersburg in that county, he had serious difficulties with his successor at Calmoutier, one Father Zoegel, and with one of the leading laymen of that parish. It was at that time that he disappeared while on the railroad between Dresden and Columbus on May 1, 1874, amid rumors that he had been murdered.

Records at the Holmes County Court of Common Pleas indicate that Father Serge appeared by his attorney to settle a suit there in October of 1875; in addition, his manuscript of symmetric knights' tours and magic squares apparently was written in San Francisco in 1885. No later record has been found.

#### SERVICE IN BUFFALO

According to records and historical accounts of the Diocese of Buffalo, Father Serge was appointed by Bishop Timon of Buffalo as the resident pastor of St. Mary's parish in Lancaster, New York, effective July 28, 1850, just

four months after his ordination in France. Father Serge replaced the Redemptorist priests who had been serving Lancaster. To him belongs the honor of having started the first brick church on the hill where the present parish church stands and of seeing it dedicated in 1851 under the title of "St. Mary's Church of the Assumption." (1)

Father Serge left Lancaster on December 27, 1851 and was next assigned to the Church of the Good Shepherd at Pendleton, New York, which had about sixty families; to Pendleton in those days was also attached the care of nearby Transit. Pendleton had a small frame church, built in 1840, and to this Father Serge added a brick parochial residence. The history of Pendleton makes it clear that Father Serge left some time before August of 1853. (2) In November of 1853 he returned to Lancaster.

According to traditional accounts, as pastor of Lancaster Father Serge was accused of interfering in the work of a neighboring pastor, which came about in the following way. The sailing ship carrying a German immigrant named Joseph Batt on his way to the New World ran into a winter storm on the Atlantic which snapped the masts of the ship and almost sent it to the bottom. Mr. Batt prayed to Our Lady, Help of Christians, and vowed to erect a chapel to her if the ship landed safely. The Gulf Stream washed the vessel to the southern shore of Ireland. Mr. Batt finally reached America and in 1837 settled in the Diocese of Buffalo, at Cheektowaga, between the towns of Williamsville and Lancaster. Mr. Batt eventually fulfilled his vow and the corner stone of the shrine "Maria Hilf" was laid in 1853 by the pastor of Williamsville. At this shrine, which was in the parish of Williamsville, Father Serge is said to have said Mass for the thirty or so local families while he was pastor at Lancaster. (3)

In 1856 Father Serge was transferred to St. Joseph's Cathedral in Buffalo and was appointed Pro-Vicar of the Germans in the Diocese. (This position is also described as "Vicar-General for the Germans and French" of the diocese.) The only documented evidence connecting Father Serge to the "Maria Hilf" Chapel is a set of "Regulations regarding the Cheektowaga Chapel" promulgated by him as Pro-Vicar in October, 1856. These made it quite clear that the chapel was a part of the Williamsville parish and came under the care of its pastor. (4)

Soon after this, Father Serge interested himself in the small colony of "colored" people located in Buffalo. He "rented a small house on the East Side, which he used as a chapel and catechetical school for the colored people of the city. A sizable number of Catholics were found and many converts were gained... When he left Buffalo, there was no one to take his place. The work was neglected, and the colored Catholics either lost their interest or returned to their territorial parishes." The work was not taken up again until 1912. (5)

By November of 1857 Father Serge was at Somerset, Ohio. In March of 1862 he was at Coshocton, Ohio and was asking Archbishop Purcell for his documents so that he might go back to Buffalo.

In 1863 he served at St. Patrick's and St. Michael's in Danville, New York and from January 1864 to August 1867 he was the pastor of St. Louis' parish in Buffalo. Nothing remarkable is known of his work in these parishes.

From September 1867 until February 1868 he was pastor of the Irish parish of St. Patrick's, at Java (now Java Center), New York. There, it is said, he "accomplished much." His short stay there does not reflect badly on him, for he was one of a series of fifteen pastors who served there an average of just over fourteen months each and some of whom stayed only one week! (6) It was noted by a later pastor that "He preached most of his sermons on the Old Testament. One anecdote concerning him is that he frequently referred to his Russian origin and to the nice warm reception his ancestors prepared for the great Napoleon in 1810. Perhaps the fact that he, a Russian, succeeded LeBreton, a Frenchman, helped him to recall those things." (7)

In 1868 and 1869 he continued his service in the Diocese of Buffalo, at St. John's German parish in Elmira. In May of 1869 he appears at Calmoutier, the French parish in the new Diocese of Columbus. His service in this diocese from that time until his disappearance in 1874 is documented in the pages of the 1983 BULLETIN.

In surveying the records left by and of Father Stchoulepnikoff, one finds a man of great intelligence. He apparently knew five languages at least: his native tongue, Latin, French, German, and English. His works on chess knight's tours and magic squares indicate an active intellect which could pursue a subject to extreme lengths. His baptismal registers show the great care he took with his work. Where traditions of his pastoral work survived, as a Coshocton, Ohio and at Java, New York, his efforts were highly praised. He was a pioneer in efforts to evangelize the black community. He seems only to have suffered from an instability, so that he could face neither the unfounded accusation of fraticide in 1858 nor the troubles with the "certain parties" in Calmoutier in 1874.

Efforts to locate any later record of Father Serge have failed. These have included searches of San Francisco directories and the Catholic Directory for the 1880's and clues left in his 1885 manuscript on magic squares. One possible hint of his whereabouts after 1874 was found by Father Kern in a letter written in 1944 by Rev. George Zimpfer of the Historic Commission of the Diocese of Buffalo. Father Zimpfer briefly described Father Serge's career in Buffalo and added, "Left the Buffalo diocese for the diocese of Columbus, Ohio. Returned to Europe." (8) Directories of the Catholic Church in France for the 1880's might turn up more clues on the elusive Father Serge.

#### NOTES

- 1) St. Mary's Church, Lancaster, N.Y., 1850-1925 (booklet), p. 20.
- 2) Donohue, Rev. Thomas, D.D., History of the Diocese of Buffalo; Buffalo: Buffalo Catholic Publication Co., 1929; p. 341.
- 3) Letter from Rev. Walter Kern to Rev. H.E. Mattingly, Feb. 6, 1984, reciting information found by Rev. George Zimpfer.
- 4) Niagara Frontier, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer 1976), p. 53.
- 5) Logal, Rev. Nelson W., A History of St. Joseph's Old Cathedral; (Buffalo?): Turner & Porter, 1947; p. 112.
- 6) Donohue, op. cit., p. 298.
- 7) Cahill, Rev. David, Notes on transcription of the Register of Baptisms of St. Patrick's Church, Java, N.Y.
- 8) Letter from Rev. George Zimpfer to Mr. Jos. D.Griffin of Buffalo, Dec. 28, 1944; Archives of the Diocese of Buffalo.

THE SPINDLER DESCENDANTS  
AND THE CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS  
by Donald M. Schlegel

(Continued from Vol. X, No. 2.)

The Zettlers

Maria Cornelia, the second of the Spindler sisters who immigrated to Columbus, was born in Molsheim and was baptized there on September 3, 1796 by Rev. J. Von der Lohr, the pastor. The record of this event does not give her birth date, but it does provide the information that her god-mother, for whom she was named, was Mrs. Maria Cornelia Herschel of Westhoffen. About the year 1816 Cornelia Spindler married Jacob Zettler, who had been born in the neighboring village of Zell around May of 1795. The sacramental registers of Molsheim mention a Franz Zettler who died in Zell in 1804, an infant aged one year, who may have been Jacob's brother; they also mention as sponsor in 1819 an Anna Maria Zettler of Zell.

Jacob and Cornelia lived in Zell for a short time and then lived in Molsheim, where six of their nine children were born; about 1831 they moved a few miles east to Monsheim. Jacob was an extensive dealer in wines and also had large milling interests, but business reverses in 1835 and 1836 caused him to come to America, where he and Cornelia and their children arrived in August of 1837. In Columbus, Jacob was a tanner and later ran a grocery. The family home was on the northeast corner of Main and Fourth streets. Jacob died on February 26, 1858; Cornelia died on June 1, 1865. Both were laid to rest in the old Catholic Cemetery and later were removed to Mt. Calvary.

Cornelia Spindler Zettler born nine children: Maria Magdalena (born in Zell in 1816; died 1901), wife of John Seidensticker and ancestor of a large and still active Catholic family of Columbus; John (1817-1892), a Columbus merchant; Anna Maria (1819-1892); Maria Anna (1822-1885), wife of Florenz Weisz of Columbus; Jacob Zettler jr. (1826-1911); Matthew Zettler (1827-1894); Peter (1830-1850); Louis (1832-1907); and Susan (1836-1908), wife of James Ryan of Columbus.

Louis Zettler, the youngest son of Cornelia and Jacob, was born in Monsheim on February 29, 1832. His business and political activities are thus summed up in Lee's History of Columbus:

Louis Zettler...was educated at a private school in Columbus, and in May, 1844, started in the retail grocery business in company with his brother Jacob. In 1856 they went into porkpacking and the grain trade. They conducted all three of these branches of business until 1861, when they quit porkpacking, but still carried on the trade in grain, and also a wholesale and retail grocery business. In 1868 Mr. Zettler dissolved partnership with his brother and went out of business. In 1870 he again resumed the grocery business in company with his brother-in-law James Ryan. This firm continued until the death of Mr. Ryan, in 1875. After the latter event Mr. Zettler still continued in the grocery business, to which he admitted his son, J. Bernard, as partner, in 1885, and his son, Edmund, two years later. At present [1892], Mr. Zettler is engaged in the wholesale

and retail grocery, the wholesale and retail hardware and the retail chinaware business, with his five sons as partners. (32)

Among his interests on the secular scene was the Columbus Maennerchor, which on December 2, 1872 "moved its headquarters to the magnificent Germania Hall, built expressly for its use by J. & L. Zettler, corner of Friend and Fourth streets, and leased to the society for ten years." (33) The site is still occupied by Zettler Hardware.

Throughout his life in Columbus Louis Zettler was a prominent member of the Catholic Church and contributed generously to every religious and charitable undertaking. Though he was a nearly lifelong member of Holy Cross parish, he was in 1865 a member of the first building committee for St. Mary's parish. When Bishop Rosecrans organized the St. Vincent Orphan Society in December 1874, Mr. Zettler was one of the twelve elected trustees. (34) His home, a two-story house of about six rooms at East Main street and Rose avenue, along with about seven acres of ground, was purchased by the Bishop as the orphanage for \$25,000, of which amount Mr. Zettler himself donated \$10,000. (35) In his will he left another \$5,000 to the orphanage but, his estate not being as large as he had anticipated, Bishop Hartley as president of the asylum's trustees agreed to take just half of that amount. (36)

Louis Zettler and his wife, Catharine Rose, a native of Aachen or Aix-la-Chapelle, had ten children, whose descendants include the owners of the present Zettler Hardware stores in Columbus.

The historical record speaks of Susan Zettler Ryan (1838-1908) and Mary Alice Ryan (died 1944), mother and daughter, only twice, with an interval of nearly one hundred years between; both records, however, connect these ladies with the pastors of the Church.

When Holy Cross Church was dedicated, around 1846, the outside and inside walls were sprinkled with holy water and the prayer of dedication was said. The bishop (Purcell) prayed that God's holy angels would protect this hallowed place and that God would hear the prayers of all who would pray with faith and devotion there. There was a solemn procession around and into the church, as a part of which Susan, the little daughter of Jacob and Cornelia Zettler, carried the keys of the church. The keys were then given to the pastor, Father Schonat, as a reminder of his obligation to safeguard the house of God and the Blessed Sacrament. (37)

Nearly a century later, Susan's daughter Miss Mary Alice Ryan departed this life, on September 19, 1944. By her will Mary Alice left the bulk of her estate to the Church in one aspect or another: her property at 266 East Rich street she gave to her lifetime parish of Holy Cross. In addition she gave \$500 to Mt. Calvary Cemetery; \$500 to Rev. William Kappes for Masses; \$3,500 to Holy Cross Church; \$200 to St. Theresa's Shrine; and \$4,000 to Rev. Henry J. Grigsby (of the Diocese of Steubenville). The remainder, some \$14,000, she gave to St. Charles Seminary in Columbus for the education of priests for this diocese. (38)

(To be continued)

## NOTES

- (32) Lee, op. cit., Vol. I, page 914.
- (33) Studer, op. cit., page 441.
- (34) BULLETIN, Vol. VIII, page 138.
- (35) Hartley, op. cit., page 584.
- (36) Franklin County Probate Court, estate # 21691.
- (37) Hakel, Rev. Joseph A., historical notes, Holy Cross parish Sunday bulletin of Feb. 19, 1978.
- (38) Franklin County Probate Court, estate # 112373.

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## ST. MARY'S PARISH, MINERTON, VINTON COUNTY BAPTISMAL REGISTER, 1868-1873

Several years ago, while on vacation, Fathers Michael Ellifritz and George Schlegel of this diocese visited the parish church of St. Louis in Gallipolis, Ohio. The pastor, Rev. William Meyer, pointed out to them a back room in his rectory which contained many old books and other items. Among these they noticed some books from St. Mary's parish in Minerton. Since Minerton is in this diocese and Gallipolis is now in the Diocese of Steubenville, Father Meyer was kind enough to allow the vacationers to bring these books back to Columbus with them. The books apparently had come to Gallipolis while Minerton was under the care of its pastor, from 1902 to 1904 and again from 1922 until the formation of the Diocese of Steubenville in 1945. A history of the parish was presented in Volume V of this BULLETIN.

Among the books brought back from Gallipolis was a baptismal register, the only one known to exist for this now-defunct mission and parish. It is a large volume, measuring 10 by 15 1/2 inches and originally containing 301 pages. Of these, 27 leaves in the back have been cut out, probably without the loss of any record, for only eleven pages in the front were used to record the baptisms. The register appears to be a transcription from an older book or books, for although the baptisms by four pastors are represented, the book is written in only two hands. In fact, both of these could have been written by one person, for one is script and the other is block lettering. Another indication that the book is a transcription is that the last page stops in mid-name, as if the transcriber had been interrupted and never returned to the work. One hundred seventy-one baptisms are recorded in the register as it now stands.

The priests whose names appear in the register are Rev. Michael Ahern, Rev. D. B. Cull, Rev. William T. D'Arcy, and Rev. C.B.A.E. Doherty.

## BAPTISMAL REGISTER

Francis S., of Andrew KECK and Sarah J. Sweeny, b. 20 Aug. 1867, bapt. 12 Jan. 1868; spons. Thomas McGovern and Elizabeth Keenan. M. Ahern

Maria, of Owen RIORDAN and Jane Whelan, b. 16 Nov. 1867, bapt. 12 Jan. 1868; spons. George Cook and Catherine Duffy. M. Ahern

Ella, of Thomas FITZPATRICK and Bridget Murphy, b. 24 Dec. 1867, bapt. 14 Jan. 1868; spons. John Karr and Ellen O'Reilly. M. Ahern

Patrick, of James DONOHOE and Mary Duffy, b. 3 Jan. 1868, bapt. 18 Jan. 1868; spons. Francis Fitzsimmons and Rosanna Duffy. M. Ahern

Edward, of Edward FERRY and Mary Mahaffey, b. 23 Dec. 1867, bapt. 18 Jan. 1868; spons. John Lawler. M. Ahern

William, of John MAHAFFEY and Elizabeth Potts, b. 5 Oct. 1867, bapt. 18 Jan. 1868; spons. Jerome Mahaffey and Elizabeth Mahaffey. M. Ahern

Emily, of Michael MURPHY and Emily Harman, b. 29 Dec. 1868 [sic], bapt. 18 Jan. 1868; spons. Jeremy Ring and Bridget Ring. M. Ahern

[In the next record, the names of the child and father and date of birth have been sliced out of the register. Probably a child of Daniel RYAN, who appears as Mary Whelan's husband in two later entries.]

----, of ---- and Mary Whelan, born [30 or 31] --- ----, bapt. [18 or 19] Jan. 1868; spons. John McCormack and Sarah Moran. M. Ahern

James Almond, of James MAHAFFEY and Jane Buck, b. 26 June 1866, bapt. 20 Jan. 1868; spons. John Mahaffey and Elizabeth Mahaffey. M. Ahern

William Ed., of same, b. 10 Jan. 1868, bapt. 20 Jan. 1868; spons. Edward Ferry and Mary Ferry. M. Ahern

Anna, of John RAFFERTY and Jane Carr, b. 6 Feb. 1868, bapt. 8 Mar. 1868; spons. James Lawler and Mary Lawler. M. Ahern

Catherine, of Cornelius GLACKIN and Elizabeth Shelton, b. 22 Jan. 1868, bapt. 8 Mar. 1868; spons. Patrick H. Quinn and Bridget Shelton. M. Ahern

Timothy, of Patrick MAHAFFEY and Elizabeth Allen, b. 3 Nov. 1867, bapt. 9 Mar. 1868 at home, in danger of death; spons. Daniel Lawler. M. Ahern

Sarah Frances, of Redmond McKENZIE and Sarah H. McKenzie, b. 20 Feb. 1868, bapt. 15 Mar. 1868; spons. James Stanton and Susan McKenzie. M. Ahern

Margaret, of John McGOVERN and Catherine Keck, b. 10 Mar. 1868, bapt. 5 Apr. 1868; spons. Thomas McGovern and Sarah Jane Keck. M. Ahern

(To be continued)

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