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Rev. Joseph M. Wehrle
(1865-1924)



Sister M. Eulalia, O.P.
(1867-1959)

THE SPINDLER DESCENDANTS AND THE CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS

(Continued from Vol. X, No. 7.)

Rev. Joseph Wehrle and Sisters

"Almighty God was indeed good to us children in giving us such a gallant, Catholic soldier, as Papa, for a father, and a saint for a mother. It shall always be our aim in life to illustrate in our lives the beautiful lessons that our parents have taught us, and prove ourselves worthy of the noble parents with which God blessed us." Thus wrote Father Joseph M. Wehrle to Sister Vincentia, Mother General of St. Mary's of the Springs shortly after the death of his mother, Philomena Morath Wehrle. (69) It is obvious from the actions of his brothers and sisters that he truly spoke for the entire family.

Father Wehrle was born in Newark in October of 1865. The record of his baptism at St. Francis de Sales parish, on November 11, lists his birth date as October 26, but all sources derived from the family agree on October 24 as his birthday, which must be accepted as the correct date. He attended the parish school at St. Francis de Sales in Newark and in 1879, at the age of thirteen, went off to the Benedictine St. Vincent's College, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. There he completed the commercial course and after a short sojourn at home returned to study the classics, in which he earned his B.A. in 1886. He received his M.A. degree in 1888 and completed Theology at the same school in June 1889. (70)

He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Watterson in Newark on the Feast of the Assumption, 1889 and was appointed to St. Peter in Chains parish in Wheelersburg, where the large frame church sat "on the bluff of a hill, with the valleys smiling around it." He also had the care of St. John, Lilly, in the same county. Little is known of his work there. In 1896 he was named successor of Father Richard Fitzgerald as pastor of St. John parish in Bellaire. His accomplishments there included the purchases of a parish cemetery and a residence for the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, who taught in the parish school. He directed the organization of St. Michael parish there for the Slovak residents. (71)

On October 12, 1913 Father Wehrle arrived at St. Mary's parish in Columbus as the successor to the late Father Specht. Father Wehrle had the difficult task of replacing "a greatly loved priest who had been pastor for forty-five years." He won the respect and devotion of the people by doing always what he thought was right, without regard for what effect it might have on his popularity. In assessing the needs of the future of the parish, he determined that a high school was needed; despite much opposition, but with the backing of Bishop Hartley, in 1914 he purchased property to the north of the church and began the first four-year parish high school in the diocese there. His wisdom in this was soon apparent and the school became one of the finest in or near Columbus, with full accreditation gained in 1918. The school was expanded in 1921 and 1922.

Father Wehrle died suddenly on April 24, 1924, which was a great shock to the parish which had learned to love him. The following sketch of his character is extracted from the 1925 Golden Jubilee booklet of St. Mary's parish, where it is ascribed to "S.J."

For a little more than ten years he labored among the people of St. Mary's with Christ-like zeal, charity and heroic self-sacrifice. Distinguished for brilliancy of intellect he was one of the most unassuming of men and one of the most simple. To those who knew him intimately he was known as a man of principle, uncompromising whenever there was question of duty or obligation. He never believed in going around a difficulty. The shortest way with him was to go through it. The labor might cause him heart-ache and anguish, but it was his nature not to yield when he knew that he was in the right. And his convictions of right were the result of long thought and intensive prayer. One of the trials of his years in the parish was the opposition to the High School. He determined to have a High School, but there were many who thought otherwise. But he stuck grimly to his determination and his efforts were crowned

with the most spontaneous ovation that has ever been given to any man.

If Father Wehrle had a hobby it was Catholic education. And well might many members of the priesthood of the Catholic Church follow his example in this regard. Father Wehrle talked Catholic education in season and out of season. His zeal in this regard was especially manifested by his daily visits to his schools. Not a day passed when he was able to visit his schools that he was not found going about the classrooms from the highest grades to the lowest. There is not a boy or girl who attended school during the years of his pastorate who will forget the fervent and tender greeting he gave each day when he stepped into the room: "How are my little boys and girls this morning." And who of them will ever forget the whole-souled blessing with which he left the room: "God bless my little boys and girls today."

His indifference to his personal needs was a characteristic that caused his assistants and friends great concern. Few men have had so few personal needs. He believed and lived the belief that one of the surest ways to happiness and contentment consists in not creating a great many personal needs. He had no desire for luxuries although his early days at home were characterized by all the luxuries that money could furnish. But when he left his father's home for a life of self-sacrifice and labor suffering in the ranks of the chosen followers of Christ he followed the mandate of the Master: "Be not solicitous for the things of this world." He could have had luxuries but he chose the better part in imitation of the Master whom he loved with the tenderest affection of a devoted son.

A priest's efficiency is measured by the degree of his piety. He may not be a brilliant man but if his piety is noteworthy his life and his works will be far above the ordinary. In this regard Father Wehrle was remarkable. His personal sanctity was recognized by all men. Not one could say that his piety was not above the ordinary. Four o'clock every morning found him in the church kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament where he remained for two hours in intensive prayer preparing for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. And it was prayer that came welling up from the burning depths of a heart that was on fire with the love of God. The sanctuary was his home. His one delight was to kneel before the Silent Prisoner in the Tabernacle praying for his beloved people and asking God's protection upon them and upon all their concerns.

Here it was that he gained his strength and the wonderful command he had over the hearts and the love, especially of the children, of the parish. He spent hours daily in the church. If he could not be found when wanted, as often happened, recourse was always had to the church and invariably he would be found there kneeling in silent prayer or making the Stations of the Cross...

His death was noteworthy and blessed more than ordinarily. Though sick not an hour he received all the sacraments of the Church before he breathed his last and had the consolation of dying in the arms of

his two assistants. The hour before he was stricken he spent with his Father Confessor discussing matters pertaining to the sanctification of his soul. What a blessed death.

Father Wehrle's character can be summed up in the following words. He was gentle, extremely so, manifested a more than ordinary sympathetic understanding of the troubles and trials of those who had recourse to him for comfort. He was always an eager listener and never showed boredom when some importunate caller sought him out. But the greatest praise that was ever meted out to him is couched in the words of one of his parishioners: "Father Wehrle was always a priest." God took him to Himself while he seemed to have many more years of usefulness left, but he was ready for the welcome that must have been his: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

On September 12, 1966, a new consolidated Catholic high school was opened on twenty-five acres of land at Williams road and Parsons avenue in southern Columbus, to serve the parishes of St. Mary, St. Ladislaus, St. Leo, Holy Rosary, Corpus Christi, St. John the Evangelist, Groveport St. Mary, Our Mother of Sorrows Chapel, and Lockbourne Air Force Base. The freshman class was provided by St. Mary and Holy Rosary High Schools, which were phased out over the next four years while classes were added at the new school. It is named, quite appropriately, the Father Joseph Wehrle Memorial High School.

Fifty-four years earlier, another building on the outskirts of Columbus and bearing the Wehrle name was dedicated. In June 1912 the Wehrle Art Memorial was completed and dedicated on the campus of St. Mary of the Springs. It was built with the inheritance of the second child of Captain and Mrs. Wehrle, who was a member of the Dominican community there. Mary Elizabeth Philomena Wehrle was born in Newark on May 1, 1867 and was baptized at St. Francis de Sales church on May 12. She attended the parish school, after which she apparently studied and practiced various art forms in the rich environment provided by her mother. She entered the Dominican community at St. Mary of the Springs in 1891 and professed her final vows on July 18, 1892, taking the name of Sister Mary Eulalia. At the Springs she taught art for the next thirty-three years. (72)

The Art Memorial was devoted by Sister Eulalia to the promotion of religion through Christian art, as stated on the memorial tablet, "for the honor and glory of God, and in loving memory of my father and mother, Joseph and Philomena Wehrle, of Newark, Ohio; to perpetuate their love of Art and to benefit the Institution of St. Mary of the Springs, and all others who delight in the beautiful." It contained a picture gallery, sculpture hall, museum, art library, studios for china painting and water colors, additional studios and work-rooms, dark room, and a kiln for firing china and glass. It displayed from the start a grand collection of art curios and masterpieces donated by Sister's brothers and sisters. (73)

Sister M. Eulalia spent the four years from 1925 to 1929 at the order's house at Ossining, New York, after which she returned to the motherhouse. In her declining years, much of her time was devoted to the maintenance of the Art Memorial. She died on October 21, 1959 at the age of ninety-two years, of which sixty-eight had been spent in the Dominican order.

Of the four sisters of Father Joseph and Sister Eulalia Wehrle, only the youngest survived childhood. This was Cecilia, the wife of Dr. Willard C. Rank. On this couple the late Monsignor Mattingly remarked that when the Doctor married a Catholic lady he was cut off by the well-to-do social set of Newark but that, when one is rich, such things do not hurt one too much. The Ranks had no children. Cecilia's generosity during her life is attested by a letter dated Vatican City, January 18, 1953, in which Rev. Domenico Tardini remarked that "Mrs. Cecilia Wehrle Rank is worthy of a pontifical recognition for her goodness and generosity. I will do what I can do to this end." (74) Such an honor was prevented by her death on Feb. 4, 1953. Her estate contributed to the charitable works of the Wehrle Foundation.

"The Wehrle Boys"

The lives of the two younger Wehrle sons ran parallel courses for many years. William W. Wehrle was born in 1870 and his brother Augustine T. (Augie) was born in 1876. Both attended the school at St. Francis de Sales parish and then St. Vincent College, Latrobe, where William was enrolled from 1884 to 1887. Upon William's return to Newark he worked in the various departments of the Moser and Wehrle foundry. Within a few years Captain Wehrle had purchased Mr. Moser's share of the business, which became the Wehrle Stove Company. The Captain died a few months later while "the boys" were still too young to handle the business. Mr. Moser was asked and agreed to stay on with the firm to manage the manufacturing department for a few years. (75)

In 1894 William became manager of the foundry. Over the next years he and Augustine worked to expand the business, which soon moved to the west side of Newark. By 1909 William was president and Augustine was vice president and general manager of the company. The west side complex had over six and one half acres under roof, a payroll of over \$100,000 per month, and employment of 2,000 persons. In 1906 the brothers began leasing several thousand acres in the Newark area; they began drilling for gas and soon several wells were supplying the energy needs of the factory, which was regarded as the largest stove manufacturing company in the world. (76) In 1936 the company was sold to eastern interests and its name was changed to the Florence-Wehrle Stove Company; in 1939 the name was changed again to the Newark Stove Company. After the sale of the company, the Wehrle brothers devoted their energies to the development of their gas, oil, and real estate interests.

William Wehrle died on November 1, 1938 at the age of sixty-eight years. On May 31, 1906 he had married Laura May Williams, adopted daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Eli Hull of Newark, who survived him. Their only child, named William August, had died within an hour of his birth in 1907.

The charitable causes supported by the Wehrles were no doubt extensive, but since many donations, if not most, were made anonymously, no record survives. William and Augustine were both honored by Pope Pius XI by being named Knights of St. Gregory in June 1928. In 1940 Augustine formed the Wehrle Foundation, "for the sole purpose to take care of some of my many charities after my death in a way most pleasing to my Lord and my God who has given me all. I wish to return all to Him in a way that will glorify Him most." (77) In 1948 he was named a Knight Commander of St. Gregory by Pope Pius XII. He would not consent to an announcement of this honor by the



William W. Wehrle
(1870-1938)



A. T. Wehrle (ca 1948)
(1876-1955)

Vatican, for he knew that he would receive a deluge of requests for charity, which he could not answer but also would not have been able to ignore. Among his last charitable works were donations to the Vatican for war relief in 1948 and contributions toward orphanages and seminaries. In 1955, through the Wehrle Foundation, he donated the 555 acre site for the PIME (Order of Saints Peter and Paul Missionary Priests) seminary near Newark. After his death on September 7, 1955 the bulk of his estate went to the Wehrle Foundation.

Throughout the years after Augustine's death, the Wehrle Foundation continued to make charitable contributions in the Wehrle name. Assets as high as \$18 million were listed. Locally, the Foundation for many years made up the operating deficit of the Diocese of Columbus and made large donations to the Pontifical College Josephinum. The Foundation was dissolved in 1977, at which time \$1.2 million was given to the City of Newark for the Wehrle Primary Care Center; \$1.0 was given to the Josephinum; and \$8.3 million was given to the Diocese of Columbus. The gift to the diocese was kept intact for six years, with half of the generated income going to the diocese and half to the Pope.

Concluding Remarks

The venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich, German mystic and visionary, said that many saints come from the same families, the antiquity of which often extends far back into the Old Testament; she saw a strong link between holy souls in heaven and their descendants here on earth, lasting even centuries.

The story presented here has described a family, not over centuries but at least for several generations, which consistently exhibited a remarkable holiness and love for the Church. The story presented, which indeed is but a brief survey in the case of some of the family's members, and does not include all branches of the family, included three nuns and a priest; supporters of Catholic education; care of orphans, support of religious vocations, and the foundation of new parishes; contributors of talent in the areas of architecture and construction, as treasurers and financial experts; public servants and providers of employment and improved lives for thousands; and private charities, usually anonymous and of unknown extent. All of these gifts flowed to the Diocese of Columbus from the marriage of that young couple, Johann Spindler and Maria Helena Battberg, celebrated at the Catholic church in the tiny village of Molsheim in Rhein-Hessen in 1776 when Ohio was but a wilderness.

Another connection can be made in the spiritual sense, though no worldly documentation exists for such a tie: From her burial record we know that Maria Helena Battberg, ancestress of the family, was born about 1757; her husband was undoubtedly born a few years previously. Their births and baptisms took place just a few short years after God's blessings were first drawn down from heaven to the present southern Ohio and Diocese of Columbus, in 1749, when the Holy Sacrifice was offered by the French priest Rev. Joseph Bonnecamps at the mouths of the Muskingum and Scioto rivers on the feasts of the Assumption and St. Louis the King. (78)

NOTES

- (69) Letter dated Oct. 28, 1907, courtesy of the Archives of the Motherhouse, St. Mary of the Springs.
- (70) Catholic Columbian, Aug. 24, 1889, p. 4.
- (71) Hartley, op. cit., pages 190-191, 323, 342-343.
- (72) Archives of the Motherhouse, St. Mary of the Springs.
- (73) Marynotes, St. Mary of the Springs, 1917-1918; courtesy of the Archives.
- (74) Letter of Domenico Tardini to A. T. Wehrle, Jan. 18, 1853; courtesy of same.
- (75) Memorial Record, op. cit., pp 258 and 350.
- (76) Brister, op. cit., pp 523-524.
- (77) Will of A. T. Wehrle (quoted in the Columbus Monthly magazine, Sept. 1978, page 68).
- (78) Mattingly, H. E., "The First Mass in Southern Ohio" in the Bulletin, Vol. 1, pp 75-78.

PHOTO CREDITS

The photograph of Rev. Joseph M. Wehrle appeared in the 1925 Golden Jubilee booklet of St. Mary parish in Columbus. Photographs of Sister M. Eulalia Wehrle and A.T. Wehrle (who was averse to having photographs taken) were supplied by Sr. Mary McCaffrey, archivist at the Motherhouse, St. Mary of the Springs. The photograph of William W. Wehrle is taken from a copy of the 1894 Memorial Record of Licking County, Ohio, courtesy of the State Library of Ohio.

ST. MARY PARISH, MINERTON, VINTON COUNTY
BAPTISMAL REGISTER, 1868-1873
(Continued from Volume X, Number 7)

Charles, of John McCARTNEY and Catherine Fagan, b. 24 Dec. 1870, bapt. 27 Dec. 1870; spons. Richard McCartney and Catherine Fagan Conly. M. Ahern

Celina Ann, of John HAWKER and Catherine Biens [Bieus?], b. 2 Nov. 1870, bapt. 15 Jan. 1871; spons. John Doherty and Rosanna McClory. M. Ahern

Sarah Jane, of Timothy HOCTER and Mary H. Murphy, b. 14 Jan. 1871, bapt. 22 Jan. 1871; spons. James Carey and Bridget Ring. M. Ahern

James P., of James DOHERTY and Martha Moran, b. 30 Apr. 1871, bapt. 14 May 1871; spons. Richard McCartney and Rosanna McClory. M. Ahern

Patrick Joseph, of William CONDRON and Ann Smith, b. 14 May 1871, bapt. 18 May 1871; spons. Patrick Murphy and Ellen Ring. M. Ahern

Thomas, of Michael CARPENTER and Marg. Simmons, b. 14 May 1871, bapt. 18 May 1871; spons. John Rafferty and Isabella (Simons) Sweeny. M. Ahern

Catherine F., of Andrew SIMMONS and Henrietta Gallagher, b. 21 Apr. 1871, bapt. 18 May 1871; previously baptized in danger of death; spons. Ignatius Stanton and Mary A. Carpenter. M. Ahern

Thomas, of John COONEY and Mary Marg. Moore, b. 20 May 1871, bapt. 27 May 1871; spons. Bernard McClory and Ann McClory. C.B.A.E. Doherty

Margaret H., of George Michael WEIS and Catherine B. Seibert, b. 9 May 1871, bapt. 30 May 1871; spons. John Donnelly and Mary Donnelly. M. Ahern

Angela, of Henry THACKER and Josepha McKenzie, b. 14 June 1871, bapt. 21 June 1871; spons. George E. Cooke and Sarah Jane Keck. M. Ahern

Hannah E., of Joseph CAREY and Elizabeth Long, b. 10 May 1871, bapt. 9 July 1871; spons. James Carey and Valerie Black. M. Ahern

Charles, of Charles MULHOLAND and Catherine Leach, b. 18 Aug. 1871, bapt. 20 Aug. 1871; spons. Richard McCartney and Rosanna Leach. M. Ahern

Thomas, of James DONOHOE and Mary Duffy, b. 22 Aug. 1871, bapt. 8 Sept. 1871; spons. Martin Duffy and Cecilia Duffy. M. Ahern

Philip, of Franklin KECK and Caroline Campbell, b. 18 Sept. 1871, bapt. 28 Sept. 1871; spons. David Keck and Ann McGovern. M. Ahern

(To be concluded)

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197 E. Gay Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215 Donald M. Schlegel, Editor

