

Barquilla del Santa Maria

BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society -
Diocese of Columbus

Volume X, Number 11

November 1985

NOTES ON THE PRE-FOUNDATION HISTORY OF ST. JOSEPH PARISH NEAR SOMERSET

by Donald M. Schlegel

On December 6, 1818 St. Joseph Chapel in Perry County, Ohio was opened and blessed by Rev. Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P., the "Apostle of Ohio," in the presence of the Pennsylvania-German Dittoe and Fink families, the McFadden family from Ireland (1), and others. Jacob Dittoe and his wife Catherine had signed a deed for the land on which the chapel stood on the preceding May 23, giving it to "Rev'd Edward Fenwick of St. Thomas Colledge in Washington Co., Kentucky...in consideration of the friendship and confidence which they entertain for and in the said Edward Fenwick...for the use and benefit of the Roman Catholic Church in the said county of Perry near Somerset..." (2)

The story of the foundation of this first parish in Ohio has been told often from the long historical perspective: Jacob Dittoe's letters asking Bishop Carroll to send a priest to the little Catholic band; the providential meeting in the woods between Dittoe and Fenwick at the sound of the settler's axe, ever after related by Fenwick with tears in his eyes; the purchase and donation of the property by Dittoe; the opening and subsequent rapid growth of the parish. Many facts are still to be searched out, however, if the story is ever to be told in its detail as experienced by the early settlers who took part in it.

It has been well established that the first Catholics of St. Joseph parish came to Ohio from the vicinity of the Conewago Chapel in Adams County, Pennsylvania. (3) An account by one of the Dittoe grandchildren states that they came "to Ohio" in 1802, but does not specify where they were at that time. (4) Anthony and Jacob Dittoe both entered various half- and quarter-sections of land in the present Fairfield and Perry Counties in the spring and summer of 1804.

The family of John and Mary Fink came west shortly after the Dittoes. They were still in Pennsylvania on April 28, 1803 when their daughter Sarah was baptized at the Conewago Chapel; she was the last of their children baptized there. (5) This agrees with statements made by three of their grandsons in the 1883 Perry County history. According to Joel Fink, his grandfather came to Somerset in 1805. David Fink places the family's advent at 1804 or 1805. Judge James E. Finck stated that John Fink jr. was eighteen years old when John senior came to Ohio. This works out to a date around the year 1808,

which must be discounted as much too late. The judge also gave the telling information that John Fink cut much of the road for his wagon from Zanesville to Lancaster and returned the next year to the Somerset vicinity. (6) This part of Judge Finck's story agrees with the dates given by his cousins, for Zane's trace, the "road" from Wheeling via Zanesville and Lancaster to Maysville, Kentucky, was laid out as a pack-horse trail in 1797 but was not widened for several years. On February 18, 1804 the Ohio Legislature appropriated about fifteen dollars per mile to make a wagon road over Zane's route. (7) If John Fink were employed in this work and passed through the vicinity of the later town of Somerset in 1804 and returned to settle in 1805, then all of the statements of the grandsons are reconciled except for the age of John jr.

One would expect the Fink and Dittoe families to have come west at about the same time, for the two families' heads were brothers-in-law. This is another facet of the story not yet told in detail, for the exact nature of this relationship has never been explained. Mrs. Fink was born Mary Sneeringer, as is shown by her grandson David's story in the Perry County history and by the baptismal register at Conewago Chapel. (Cf notes 5 and 6) Much research on the Fink family has never turned up a daughter who married a Dittoe. It appears that the only way that Dittoe and Fink could have been brothers-in-law would be if Mrs. Catherine Ann Dittoe had also been born a Sneeringer and was a sister of Mrs. Fink. This is hinted in a history of Adams County, Pennsylvania, according to which one Joseph Sneeringer had a daughter Catherine who married and went to Ohio; her husband's name is not given. A son of this Joseph Sneeringer, Joseph jr. (1761-1839), married Margaret Fink, who may have been a sister of John Fink. The Sneeringers were fervent Catholics, this Joseph jr. having been a carpenter and mechanic who planned the addition of the wings to the Conewago Chapel. (8)

Another unresolved issue is whether Mr. Fink was a member of the Catholic Church at this time. Rev. Nicholas Young's account in Graham's history makes no hint that Mr. Fink was not a Catholic from the start. Some later histories, including O'Daniel's life of Fenwick, state that he was not but give no evidence or source for the statement. The family which appears to have been his origin traces back into Colonial times in the sacramental registers at St. Paul's Chapel, Goshenhoppen, Berks County, Pennsylvania and followed the Catholic migration west to Conewago Chapel after the Revolutionary War. (9) No baptismal or other record of reception into the Church appears in the register of St. Joseph Church, though "Old Mr. Finck" does appear as a sponsor on June 12, 1825. (10) The presence of a Catholic Fink family in Goshenhoppen and Conewago, the lack of any source for the claim, and the lack of any record of reception of Mr. Fink into the Church in the registers at St. Joseph, make it difficult to credit the story that John Fink underwent a late-in-life conversion to the Catholic faith.

In March of 1804 the United States Congress passed an act regarding the public lands whereby they could be sold in parcels as small as quarter-sections of 160 acres. Previous to this time, the smallest parcel sold was the 320-acre half-section. The minimum price was two dollars per acre. Settlers or speculators for land in the Perry County area were to enter their names in the record books at the Chillicothe land office, at which time they were to pay one-twentieth of the purchase price. The remainder of the first one-quarter of the price was to be paid within forty days. Three additional

payments, each of one-quarter of the price plus interest, were due two, three, and four years from the date of entry. If full payment were not made within five years of entry, the land would revert to the government. (11)

In 1804 and 1805 Jacob Dittoe "entered" at least eight quarter-sections and two half-sections in the Perry County area. (12) The two half-sections, both of interest as possibly intended for the Church at different times, were both entered on June 4, 1804. One was located near the north-east corner of the present Rush Creek Township in Fairfield County, one half mile north of Rush Creek and the Lancaster-Junction City road (S.R. 37). (13) The other was the present site of St. Joseph Church in Reading Township. (14) That Dittoe at first intended neither of these parcels for the Church is made clear by his letter to Bishop Carroll written at Lancaster on January 5, 1805. In it he urged that the Church should make its own application for the whole or the south half of Section 21 in Township 17 of Range 17, in the vicinity of the present Rushville in Fairfield County. This suggestion was not followed and the next we hear is that Dittoe, determined to bring the Church to the area, was taking the acquisition of a site upon himself. He wrote to Bishop Carroll again from Lancaster on February 1, 1808, saying that he had purchased land for the Church but that \$480 plus \$58 interest was due on June 4 next. (15) Thus by this date we can be sure that the intended site was one of the two 320-acre half-sections which had been entered on June 4, 1804, on which the final payment would be due June 4, 1808.

Research in local records has failed to indicate when purchase of the half-section near Rush Creek was completed. The only information available is that Jacob and Catherine sold all their interest in it in 1822. (16) That the payments on the Reading Township land were not made on time is made clear by the re-entry of the tract by Mr. Dittoe in 1809. An act of the federal government, passed on March 2, 1809, allowed two additional years for payment on lands previously entered but not yet actually sold or reverted to the government, and on which the time for payment would expire before January 1, 1810. (17) These conditions exactly fit the situation of the half-section in Reading Township. Father O'Daniel in researching the life of Bishop Fenwick found records in Washington indicating that Dittoe received title to the tract on August 19, 1809 (18); this is the same date as the re-entry shown in the books of the Auditor of the State of Ohio. Between June 1808 and August 1809 Dittoe had raised or collected the money to complete payment for the property.

The source of the money is another uncertainty. Dittoe's letter of 1808 states that he was circulating a subscription list among his Catholic kin and acquaintances in Pennsylvania and western Maryland for this purpose. Many years later, however, Rev. N. D. Young, O.P., who knew these settlers and their stories well, gave the credit for the purchase to Jacob Dittoe "with the assistance of his two brothers, Messrs. Joseph and Anthony Dittoe, and his brother-in-law, Mr. John Fink." (19) It is also certain that Jacob could have made the payment himself by the sale of some of his other land.

Whichever half-section might have been intended for the Church in 1808, there is almost no doubt that by 1812 the Reading Township site had been selected. On October 9, 1812 Father Fenwick arrived at Dittoe's tavern accompanied by Rev. Stephen T. Badin. Father Badin noted in his diary that Jacob Dittoe had purchased 320 acres, which he intended to bestow on the Church, and had built a house for a parochial residence. (20) This was

probably the same log house (two rooms in length and 1 and 1/2 stories high with attached kitchen) which was occupied by the Fathers in 1818. The eighteen by twenty-two foot log chapel, built as the hard-working pioneers could spare time from their other tasks, was completed in 1818 and was joyfully dedicated that December.

NOTES

- (1) Schlegel, Donald M., "An Irish First Family of St. Joseph's, Somerset," BULLETIN, Vol. III No. 3 (March 1977), pp 207-209.
- (2) Perry County Deed Record, Vol. A, page 22.
- (3) Schlegel, Donald M., "The Pennsylvania Homes of the Fink and Dittoe Families," BULLETIN, Vol. II No. 3 (March 1976), pp 107-109.
- (4) Graham, A.A., History of Fairfield and Perry Counties; Chicago: W.H. Beers & Co., 1883; page 386 of Perry County section.
- (5) McGough, Rev. Thomas J. (transl.), The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus "Conewago Chapel" Baptism Records 1790-1890; McSherrystown [Pa.]: John Timon Reily Historical Society [1981?]; pages 51-52.
- (6) Graham, op. cit. pp 402-404.
- (7) Schneider, Norris F. and Clair C. Stebbins, Zane's Trace; Zanesville: Mathes Printing Company, 1973; pp 12-13.
- (8) History of Cumberland and Adams Counties, Pennsylvania; Chicago: Warner, Beers & Co., 1886; Adams County section, page 396.
- (9) The sacramental registers of Goshenhoppen or Bally were first published by the American Catholic Historical Society in its Records series, in 1888-1891. These were re-published again by Mr. Warren J. Ziegler of Milford, New Jersey in 1981 and by the Genealogical Publishing Company of Baltimore in 1984.
- (10) BULLETIN, Vol. I No. 8 (August 1975), page 57.
- (11) Hibbard, Benjamin H., A History of the Public Land Policies; New York: Macmillan, 1924.
- (12) Ohio Auditor of State Land Office, Tract Book & Entries, Congress Lands 22 Ranges and U.S. Military Lands, Vol. I.
- (13) The west half of Section 1 in Township 16 of Range 17. (This was erroneously placed north of Rushville in the earlier article (note 3).)
- (14) The west half of Section 23 in Township 16 of Range 16. The entry book examined when the previous article (cf note 3) was written shows a date of August 19, 1809. However, Thomas A. Burke, a Society member and employee of the State Auditor's Land Office, searched further and found that that book was a transcription. The original book shows the June 4, 1804 entry date; the 1809 date is a re-entry.
- (15) O'Daniel, Very Rev. V.F., O.P., Edward D. Fenwick, O.P.; Washington: The Dominicana, 1920; pages 195-196.
- (16) Fairfield County Deed Record N/65, Jacob and Catherine Dittoe to Abraham Clemens for \$1,000, March 13, 1822.
- (17) Statutes at Large, Vol. II, page 533. (1809 Ch. 26, Mar. 2, 1809)
- (18) O'Daniel, op. cit., page 217.
- (19) Graham, op. cit., page 290.
- (20) O'Daniel, op. cit., p. 206. One might suspect that "Dittoe's tavern" was an error for the well-known Fink's tavern, on the later school house lot in eastern Somerset. However, the earliest minute book of the Perry County Court of Common Pleas indicates that Jacob Dittoe was issued a tavern license for one year on July 3, 1818. (page 11) Fairfield County records might verify the existence of Dittoe's tavern in 1812.

ST. JOSEPH OLD CEMETERY
NEAR SOMERSET, PERRY COUNTY
TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS

The above exposition on the facts and uncertainties regarding the foundation of St. Joseph parish grew beyond the original intention, but still serves that purpose. That is to confirm that the property was intended for the use of the Church at a very early date (probably 1808 or 1809 but certainly by 1812) and so probably was the site of two early interments which are listed in the parish burial register. The register appears to have been started in 1829 or 1830 but it lists many earlier dates, including two in 1815. These, the only known interments preceding the dedication of the chapel, are given as John Oharra, May 28, 1815, and Jacob Dittoe [jr.], age 26, Aug. 10, 1815. The next dates in the register are from 1821. Rev. Joseph F. Gilsenan, O.P., the pastor, has given the Society permission to publish this register, which we hope to do during 1986. Unfortunately, the keeping of this register was inconsistent. Some years' entries appear to be complete, some are apparently only partial, and other years' are entirely missing.

The existing tombstone inscriptions are valuable in filling some of the gaps in the register. The earliest existing tombstones are those of Mrs. Mary McDonald, which has been dated to about 1819, and Edward Crosson, dated 1823. The latest date on any inscription is May 1882 when the remains of Margaret Dittoe were laid to rest. The new graveyard, seven hundred feet to the north of the old one next to the church, has been used since that time.

The inscriptions were copied by the late Monsignor Herman E. Mattingly on several trips to Somerset, beginning in 1976. A few corrective notes have been added by the editor, based on the parish burial register and on earlier research on some of the families and earlier readings of the inscriptions.

Hugh C. CONLY, son of J.J. & M.L. Conly, died July 16, 1880 aged 2 yrs 9 mos 6 dys.

Joseph FINK died Nov. 10, 1876 aged 79 Y 5 M 22 D. May he rest in peace, Amen.

Magdalen, wife of Joseph FINK, died Oct. 31, 1863, aged 75 Y & 4 M. May she rest in peace, Amen.

Anthony DITTOE, Sr. died June 27, 1854, aged 88 years 8 mo's & 27 D's. May he rest in peace.

Margaret DITTOE died May 23, 1882 aged 85 Y 11 M 13 D.

Ellen wife of A. FLOWERS died Nov. 16, 1875 Aged 37 y.

Bridget FLOWERS wife of ----

John STINE died Oct. 20, 1857 Aged 77 Yrs 1 Mo 5 Da.

Magdalen, wife of John STINE died Jan. 28, 1857 Aged 76 Yrs & 7 M.

George J. RIFFLE died Aug. 10, 1863 Ag'd 37 Y 2 M 10 D. May he rest in peace.

Catherine RIFFLE died June 13, 1860 Aged 26 Yrs.

Margaret wife of G.J. RIFFLE died June 11, 1859 Aged 79(?) Y - M 5 D.

Sacred to the memory of Henry WALKER born 1789 died 1864; & his consort Amelia WALKER born 1786 died 1861. RIP

Lydia Mary NOON born May 9, 1809 died Dec. 4 1878.

John NOON born Aug. 10, 1804 died Feb. 6, 1881. May they rest in peace. Amen.

Peter SAYTON(?) died Jan. 11, 1873 Aged 63 Y 5 M 6 D. My soul to God My body to (earth) Never to rise until undying day.

William TALBORT died Apr. 21, 1877 Aged 43 Yrs. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.

Mary M. FLOWERS died May 21, 187-, Aged 73 Y 3 M 10 D.

In memory of Mary wife of James McARDLE died Dec. 18, 1862 Aged 51 years.

John SWEENEY died July 11, 1870 Aged 67 Years. A native of Co. Donegal Parish of -----dock Ireland. Whilst in this tomb our Father lies/His spirit rests above./In realms of bliss he never dies/But knows a Savior's love.

Mary SWEENEY died Sep. 22, 1879 Aged 68Y.

Margaret daughter of James & Mary McARDLE died March 20, 1868 Aged 26 years. May she rest in peace.

Philip ---- [McArdle] died Nov. -- 1870.

James HIGGINS Born ---- 1817(?) Died May 19, 1871.

Martin ----

Bernard GRIMES, died Apr. 28, 1865 Aged 71 years. A native of County Tyrone, Ireland.

Jane wife of John FLOOD & daughter of Bernard & Mary Grimes died Dec. 8, 1864 Aged 38 years. May their souls rest in peace.

In memory of John McGINLEY died Aug. 20, 1851 -----

In memory of Peter McKEEVER son of James & Mary McKeever who died Nov. 15, 1840 Aged 9 months.

Thomas FITZSIMONS died Sept. 1848 aged 60 years. A native of County ----id Ireland. May he rest in peace. Amen.

Thomas BENNETT who died July 7, 1848 Aged 21 years 10 mons & 26 ds. May he rest in peace.

In memory of Cecily wife of Robert BENNETT who died October 7, 1855 aged 67 years 1 month & 4 days. A native of ----shire England. She emigrated to the United States in ----. May she rest in peace. Amen.

In memory of Robert BENNETT who died Aug. 12, 1842 Aged 67 years & 26 days. Native of ---- Lancaster, England. He emigrated to the United States in 1819.

In memory of Elizabeth daughter of ----- & Elenor CASSELLY, died July 27, 1839(?) aged 11 months & 2 days.

[Frances, daughter of] Thomas & Mary HORAHAN departed this life Mar. 6, 1842 Aged 21 years 2 mo. 26 ds. May he rest in peace.

John W. son of George & Ellen SAUNDERS died March 30, 1842 Aged 4 ---

Children of G.W. & H. SAUNDERS

Cecily died Aug. 9, 1838 aged 3 Y 3 M & 17 D.

Cecely H. died Aug. 31, 1854 Aged 11 Y & 13 D.

John W. died May 30, 1842 aged 4 Y 1 M & 25 D.

Sarah wife of Owen MARTIN died Nov. ----

John son of Neal & Mary OCANE died Feb. 13, 1851 Aged 19 Ys.

In memory of Mary consort of Neail O.KARN who departed this life August 29th 1834 Aged 26 years 3 months and 11 days. May she rest in peace. Amen.

In memory of Joseph Dittoe died March 29, A.D. 1831 Aged 72 years, and 10 months. May he rest in peace Amen.

Catharine J. Daughter of J. & S. DITTOE Died Oct. 31, 1858 Aged 23 Y, 9 M & 5 D. May she rest in peace Amen.

Barbara L. wife of Michael DITTOE died Nov. 4 (or 14?), 1863 aged 73 Y 7 M & 23 D.

Michael DITTOE died May 3, 1858 Aged 67 Y 2 M & 10 D.

Jacob DITTOE Sr. died Jan. 30, 1826 aged 66 years.

Catherine Ann wife of Jacob DITTOE, Sr., died July 30, 1853 Aged 89 Years. First Benefactor of St. Joseph's. May they rest in peace. Amen. 1897.

In memory of Jefferson son of Joseph & Magdalene FINK who died May 6th A.D. 1838 Aged 18 years 6 months & 26 days. May he rest in peace. Amen.

Maria R. daughter of Michael & Barbara DITTOE died March 22, 1832 Aged 14 yrs 6 mo 15 ds "Calm on the bosom of thy God"

Children of George & C. DITTOE

Clement F. Dittoe died Nov. 6, 1877 aged 6 y 2 m 5 d.

Charles P. Dittoe died Nov. 1, 1877 aged 3 yr 8 m 19 d.

John DITTOE died Aug. 10, 1856 aged 68 yrs 3 [2?] m 11 days.

Catharine M. died July 30, 1858 aged 10 yr 4 mo & 20 ds.

Emily J. died Sept. 3, 1868 aged 10 yr. 4 mos.

Daughters of T. & M. Scallan.

Catharine wife of Miles CLUNEY died July 24, 1830 aged 46 yrs 8 m & 5 ds.

In memory of James SCALLON departed this life Nov. 31, 1836 aged 51 yrs 4 m & 10 days. A native of Ireland County of Wexford, a brother to the Bishop of Newfoundland. May he rest in peace.

Aloysius son of J. & M. MUTER, died June 9, 1835 aged 1 year & 4 mos.

Mary wife of Patrick REDMOND died Apr. 25, 1851 aged 84 yrs. A native of Ireland.

George REDMOND who died Feb. 15, 1854 aged 39 yrs & 9 mos. A native of Wexford County, Ireland.

Patrick REDMOND died Mar. 29, 1852 aged 82 years.

Bridget daughter of Thomas & Mary Harahan departed this life Nov. 10, 1844 aged 13 yrs 1 mo. R.I.P.

In memory of Elsy consort of George HOY who departed this life April 26, A.D. 1841. Aged 31 years 9 mos. & 4 days. May she rest in peace. Amen.

In memory of George BEAVER who died April 1 A.D. 1842 Aged 68 yrs. & 3 months. May he rest in peace. Amen.

Elizabeth, daughter of Isaac & Margaret CLARK died Nov. 17, 1848. Aged 6 yrs 8 mos & 6 days. Sleep on sweet babe & take thy rest For such as you our Savior blest.

Catherine wife of Henry MARTEN, died June 8, 1852 Aged 32 yrs.

Thomas N. son of Anthony & Wilhemina SUTTER died Aug. 18, 1852, aged 1 yr 7 mos. 24 days.

Arthur F. son of A. & W. SUTTER, died June 8, 1852 (or 1857) aged 4 yrs 27 days (?)

Infant daughter of A. & W. SUTTER, died Jan. 15, 1856.

Elizabeth wife of George BEAVER, died June 9, 1859 Aged 80 yrs & 11 mos.

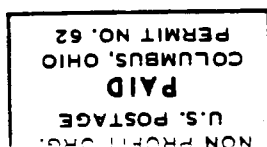
Hester (?) G. wife of A. SUITER, died Feb. 15, 1861 aged 39 yrs 4 ms 21 days.

Pius P. son of A. & H. G. SUITER died Apr. 14, 1864.

In memory of Sarah E. GREEN, wife of Joshua Green died May 26, 1865 aged 65 years.

[To be continued]

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