

History of the Catholic Church in Town of Callicoon

Mrs. Joseph Seibert First Mover in Its Organization—Walked to Newburgh, Then Took Boat to New York City to Procure Services of Priest—First Building Erected by Francis Breiner.

By Charles S. Hick
Town Historian.

The influx of German Catholics to the lands of Callicoon (as much of the western part of Sullivan county was known at the time) in the late 1830s and early 1840s placed a large number of the people far from the location of a Catholic church or the residence of a Catholic priest. This colonization was promoted by the big land owner, Solomon Royce, who owned nearly all these lands and was agent for much of the remainder. Quinlan, in his History of Sullivan County, published in 1873, relates how this German emigration to his lands was promoted by handbills printed in the German language, and distributed among the Germans arriving at the New York port of entry. Nearly all of the German immigrants coming to Sullivan county as a result came to the lands of Callicoon. The state census of 1855 showed that of 2649 Germans in the county, 1924 lived in the land of Callicoon. A large portion of these came from Bavaria and other Catholic states in Germany, where previous to coming to America they had seen the church functioning every day. In the wilds of Callicoon they had none of the solace and comforts of religion they had previously known and these were sorely missed. One of these early German settlers, Joseph Seibert by name, came to the section in 1836, acquired a parcel of wild land in the section known as "Sixteen" (the name came from the number of a division lot in the survey), and on this land built himself a log cabin. Mr. Seibert brought with him from Germany considerable wealth for that day and never had performed manual labor—for he was a gentleman by birth and breeding. The log cabin he erected had two rooms on the ground floor. Those of other settlers had but one. Clearing the land and the other work in his fields was very burdensome to him and the end of the day found him with sore back, arms and fingers. These pained him severely and often caused him to shed tears. His muscles and hands had not been hardened to the toil he needed now to perform. Mother Seibert finally decided to make an effort to bring the ministrations of her religion to the settlement. She and her neighbors had been in the wilderness for some years now and had been unable to attend mass; the babies had not been baptized or marriages performed by a priest; no opportunity had come to her or her neighbors to receive the sacraments of the church. In desperation she started off to make an effort to bring a priest to the settlement. Her journey took her on foot to Newburgh almost seventy miles away, where she went aboard a sailing vessel that took her to New York city, where she undertook her quest for the priest she was seeking. I have no way of knowing upon whom she called, but she returned to the settlement with the promise that a priest would arrive to say mass and otherwise bring the ministrations of religion. Some of the older persons with whom I have talked have been under the impression that this priest was a Jesuit, but about this there is no certainty. Neither is his name remembered. I learn from other sources that the Redemptorists were working among the German immigrants at that period, and likely this priest was one of that order. Both Redemptorists and Jesuits wear black habits. This may account for the tradition that this priest was a Jesuit. Supporting evidence is supplied by "The Redemptorist Centenaries," a volume of 628 pages, which was written by Rev. James F. Byrne, a member of this religious order in 1932, and which gives a record of the labors of the Redemptorist Order. Quoting from this volume: "As early as 1843 the priests of the Church of Most Holy Redeemer (New York city) began to take

care of mission-stations scattered throughout New York and New Jersey.

"Among other mission-stations listed in 1845 are Poughkeepsie, Verplanck's Point, Ellenville, Round-out, Callicoon, Wurtsboro, Woodburn, Bloomingdale, N.Y. On some of these missions, owing to lack of railroad or stage coach connection, the priest had to walk for miles with a pack on his back."

"Besides these places the Catholic Almanac for 1849 (F. Lucas Jr. Baltimore, P. 161) mentions Bridgeville, Fallsburgh, Neversink, North Branch, Otisville and Stephen's Factory, N. Y., which were visited every other month or occasionally by a German priest from the Church of the Holy Redeemer, New York city."

Father Byrne states that "in the Diocese of New York Almanac for 1850 about the same statement is made as given above and adds that in 1851 all the above stations were attended by diocesan priests, who in 1854 took charge of that place also. All these labors were performed without any pecuniary compensation whatever."

The names of the Redemptorist priests who worked in these mission-stations are given as Krutil, Tschenhens and Nagel.

The first mass was said in the house of Joseph Seibert, located near the present home of Mrs. Anna Wilson, about one and a half miles north of Jeffersonville. At this date there was no Jeffersonville, but the section near the Seibert home had several settlers and the main road across the town passed nearby. Word had been passed out to all the Catholic homes throughout the Callicoon lands that a priest had promised to visit the settlement, and these settlers awaited his coming with an eagerness that probably has never been equalled since.

Upon the arrival of the missionary word was dispatched by messenger to all these Catholic homes distributed many miles apart in the great forests that then covered the land, to make known to them the place, day and hour of the mass. The gathering at the home of Joseph Seibert on the day of this first mass must have been a great spectacle. Would that posterity may have been left a picture of it! One of these Catholic families lived where Mrs. Boyle now lives in the town of Delaware. He was Ludwig Hemmer. He and all his family walked to the Seibert home, five or more miles away. These people came fasting, for they were availing themselves of the first opportunity of years to go to confession and communion. Mother Seibert had provided a supply of food to feed these people after the mass, and they need not be obliged to walk back home fasting. Against this many had provided by carrying some bread in their pockets to eat before returning.

The missionary priest arranged for regular or irregular visits to the Seibert home to say mass, though other homes served at times. No home was large enough to accommodate the crowd that came to worship. Many had to remain out of doors, despite the weather. As a solution, Francis Breiner offered a proposition whereby each settler contributed some lumber to be used to erect a hall large enough to house everybody. This building was of plank and batten construction, in which the worshippers knelt on the floor and sat on planks laid on blocks of wood. No provision was made for heat. Thus came into being the first Catholic church in Sullivan county, and more specifically at Jeffersonville, though it was located nearly two miles out of the present village. This building was sometimes referred to as Breiner's church because Francis Breiner was instrumental in having it erected.

On page 128 of Hamilton Child's Gazetteer of Sullivan County is stated:

"The Saint George (German Catholic) church located at Jeffersonville was organized by Rev. Ranfeisen in 1843 with thirty members." This volume was published in 1870, and the data was collected over a period of some years previous to this date. This would place the date of assembling the data about 25 years after the organization of St. George's church.

An old map prepared by C. Gates & Son, published in Philadelphia in 1856, shows the location of this first church on the Breiner property.

Matthews' History of Wayne County, Pennsylvania, records that a Father Shanahan, as a young missionary, visited settlements in Sullivan county, New York, along the Delaware river as early as 1830. The number of his baptisms, marriages, etc. are on record at St. Peter's church, Troy, N.Y., a church he erected. Another missionary named in this history, Father Walter Quarters, laboring out of Utica, N. Y. also visited this section. Other Catholic missionaries, working out of Buffalo, then headquarters for Catholic missionary endeavors in up state New York, also made visits here. The records of Father Quarters are on file at St. John's, Utica, and those working out of Buffalo are on file at St. Louis, Buffalo.

I find that a great many persons now living in the town of Callicoon do not know the location of this first Catholic church. To these I desire to direct to its location. Roughly it is about half a mile north of the county road leading from Jeffersonville to North Branch and on a dirt road that crosses this county road at the very top of the hill. The foundation stones and the cemetery remain to mark the spot, opposite the turn in the road between the homes of Carl Topp and Alfred Wahl. Topp lives on the farm once owned by Henry Schaefer, and Wahl owns the farm formerly owned by his father-in-law, George Hemmer. The lands of the late Peter Weber join this church property. In fact, Mr. Weber acquired the Breiner farm from which the church lot came, and the Weber lands surround the church lot. The title to the church lands remains in the church authorities.

The cemetery connected with this early church has in it forty-five graves—only three of those have markers. One stone erected by Mr. Breiner in memory of his son Francis has the feminine spelling of the name—Frances. I am told that several of these forty-five graves contain the bodies of children that died during a diphtheria epidemic that hit the section. Very likely these forty-five graves were used by persons who died nearby the cemetery. It was not the custom in those pioneer days to take bodies any great distances for burial. The lack of roads and conveyances on which to carry the bodies was responsible for this. Hearses were unknown in these pioneer days. Burials were made in the cemetery nearest the home and often upon the home lands. A great many farms have graves of some members of the earlier families that lived on them. Particularly is this true of children of the family that may have died. It seems that the father or mother or other adult often was taken to a cemetery (or burying ground, as they were called), while a young child was very often buried under some tree, near a stone wall or some other sheltered spot, and two flat stones used to mark the grave. The Nicholas Hermann family—Mrs. Elizabeth Griebel of Oberburg is a remaining member—buried nine members of his family on his farm, later known as the Griebel farm. This farm was less than one-half mile from the Catholic cemetery connected with the first church, and Nicholas Herman was among the number that helped organize this first church.

The location of the Seibert home was among a group of German Catholic settlers. We find the following Catholic settlers in the proximity of the Seibert home in addition to Seibert: Michael Jaeger (Yager), Francis Breiner, Nicholas Hermann, John Kneemm, Bernhard Gabel, William and Jacob Bardenstein, Frederick and Philip Frey, Anton Glasser, Adam Imhoff, and Peter Hopkins, a lone Irishman.

The location of the first church on the lands of Francis Breiner was centrally located, at the time, to serve the scattered settlements, where these German Catholics had located. Theodore Koenig—who was called "Chetter"—told me once that he and his brothers were baptized in the little church on the hill. His parents at the time lived near where Louis Bayer lives today, on a farm until recently owned by Baiser Urban. A Wegman family that lived in the same section has been designated to me as also being among those that came to this early church.

(Continued next week)

CANNED FRUITS.

There are predictions that there will be a shortage of canned fruit, since so large a part of the crop is being sold fresh instead of being sent to canneries. We may miss some of the luscious products that have usually been saved for us through the skillful canning process.

It seems pitiful to read of large quantities of fruit wasted because labor cannot be found to gather or preserve it. Great quantities of early ripening apples usually fall to the ground as one instance, and very frequently rot because of lack of workers to pick them up. All these supplies are needed by the country in wartime. People who do anything to preserve them are entitled to warm public thanks.

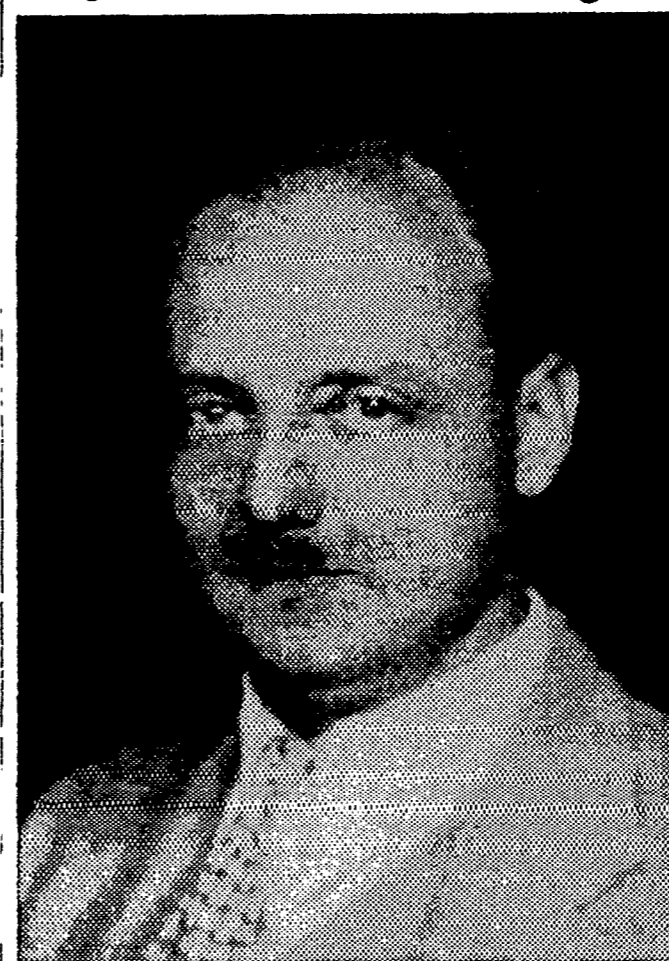
Soldiers Can Soup.

Fifteen hundred soldiers from Fort Knox were assigned to the Campbell Soup Co., at Camden, New Jersey, recently when shortage of manpower at the plant resulted in 700 trucks each loaded with four tons of tomatoes being lined up before the plant waiting to be unloaded.

There will be plenty of people complaining about their indignation as long as they wear out automobile tires faster than shoes.

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IN THE CHURCHES

(Notices should be in by Monday night to ensure insertion)

Methodist Churches.

Rev. William Harvey, D.D., Pastor.
Fosterdale — Morning worship, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:30.
Jeffersonville — Sunday school, 10 a.m.; morning worship, 11.
Cochecton Center—Sunday school, 2:30 p.m.; worship service, 3 p.m.
Kenosa Lake—Sunday school, 10:30 a.m.; evening worship, 8.

Presbyterian Churches.

Rev. Joseph Kovach
Jeffersonville—10-11 a.m., Communion service, 11-12 a.m.
Ladies Aid Oct. 6, 2 p.m.
Young People, Oct. 6, 8 p.m.
Youngsville—Communion, 9-10 a.m. Sunday school, 10-11 a.m.

First Lutheran Church.

Dr. Fred Forster, Pastor.
Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, Oct. 3—9:30 a.m., Sunday school; 10:30 a.m., Divine service.
Tuesday, Oct. 4—8 p.m., quarterly Church Council meeting.
Wednesday, Oct. 5—2 p.m., Ladies Aid meeting.

St. George's R. C. Church.

Rev. Leonard Perotti, Pastor.
Sunday mass at 10 a.m., and 8 a.m. Confessions before each mass.

First Church of Christ, Scientist.

Liberty, N. Y.
Sunday—11 a.m., services; 12:15, Sunday school. 8:15 Wednesday evening. The reading room in the Sarles building is open from 3 to 5 on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

The old proverb "Laugh and grow fat" was once popular. That was before the girls were trying to reduce.

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