

History of St. George's R.C. Church in Jeffersonville

Organization Begun by German Immigrants Has Interesting Life After Meager Beginning—Priests Who Have Served the Church—A Collection of Oats for Early Priest's Horse—Father Delveaux's Physical Prowess.

By Charles S. Hick
Town Historian.

The most complete record of early baptisms and marriages for St. George's R.C. church are found in the registers of St. Mary's church at Oberburg. These extend to 1863. They were written by the painstaking Father Joseph Roesch, an Austrian priest, who came in the summer of 1854 to serve Jeffersonville and Oberburg as pastor. Father Roesch served Oberburg until 1880, and is buried in the cemetery there. Over this period of twenty-six years he kept his records with extreme care to include every detail. Records previous to 1854 were assembled from the entries Father John Ranfeisen had made at Ellenville, but Father Roesch's contain more data. Father Roesch always wrote down the birthplace of the father and mother, as well as the present place of abode of each child baptized by him. These facts were also given for the parties he joined in marriage. If there had been any varying from the original spelling of a family name, a note by him gave the proper spelling. These records would be valuable to a genealogist. The following is written on the fly leaf in the front of the baptismal register:

"Very Reverend John Raffener, Vicar General for the Germans. Rev. John Ranfeisen, missionary for these regions, dwelling in the city of Ellenville, Ulster County, New York." The appointment of Father John Raffener by the archbishop as vicar general for the Germans was deemed necessary to provide wisely for the religious needs of Germans who were arriving in New York in large numbers, due to internal unrest in the German states in Europe. No record exists to show that Vicar General John Raffener ever visited Callicoon. Since early records list this section as one where the German Catholics settled it may be supposed that he did. No community in the archdiocese of New York city had a greater congestion of German Catholics.

The extent of the territory served by the first Catholic church on the hill of necessity spread out over this section wherever Catholics had settled. We find Killians, Weinmans and Homers north of Youngsville, and still later Buchman, Menges, Martine, Ellmauer, Quinn, Eagin, Keough, Fitzgerald and McGraw. At Sand Pond were Biffar, Schloemer, Kramer and Tempel. At Purvis (near where Livingston Manor now is) lived Philip Schmidt and other Germans named Killian, Husch and Blum. Schminndt's grandson is Monsignor Charles E. Fitzgerald, now of New Rochelle. In Bethel were Hais, Brandt and Backes, and later the O'Mearas. In Pike Pond and Fosterdale were Busch, Theiss, Grotten, Ulrich, Demar, Heidt, and later Carey, Torney, Fitzpatrick, Keegan, Sullivan and Dalley. In Callicoon Center were two Klein families, Hartmann, Koellstadt, Junele, and near North Branch lived Behringer, Stenger, Heichlinger and Schonger.

A village came into existence in the valley below the church and was named Jeffersonville. The tannery attracted many who worked in or around it. Large numbers of these were Catholics. Among these were Scheidell, Erdmann, Christ, Schuhman, Wagner, Schaefer and Hick, and a large group of Irish—Shanly, Collins, Foley, Lawless, Scott, King, Gilleran, Kilroy, Cartey, McDermott, Dudgeon and Sheridan. It now seemed that the church should be in the village, and Frederick Scheidell contributed a part of his farm for a new site for the church. The deal for this site is dated 1859, but a tombstone on it bears a date of 1856, which would indicate that it was in use as early as 1856 as a burying ground. During 1860 the new church was erected. I have been told that the lumber in the old building was used in the construction of the new. It

stood where the present building stands today. A dug way road was constructed along the steep sidehill to the location of the church. On both sides of this and in front of the new church Jacob Bardenstein planted small native pine trees. Nearly all of these were killed by horses tied to them. Three of them, near the church, grew to be tall, towering pine trees, and until they were cut down in 1912 were an impressive sight with the white church spire pointing skyward among them.

In 1860, with a new building overlooking the new village of Jeffersonville, St. George's church entered upon a distinct epoch. It had ceased to be composed of Germans but had come to have among its members a great many Irish. A local agreement came into existence whereby the church was to have five trustees—two Irish, three German. Another practice I have heard of nowhere else came into being. Father Roesch lived at Oberburg and had no horse. On the Sunday he was to be at Jeffersonville some one from Jeffersonville drove to Oberburg to bring him and return him. The parishioners took turns at this duty. Some members had no horse and wagon. My grandfather Hick was among this number. He had broken his cow to the yoke and did his farm work with her. At a meeting of the members it was agreed that a better and more equitable way was to arrange to buy the priest a horse and provide him with oats to feed it. This came into existence by one of the strangest of church collections—an oats collection. Each family agreed to raise an extra bag of oats, which was delivered after the harvest. This oats collection existed down to my time and I'm sure many will remember it. I remember driving away from home with the family contribution of oats in the fall of 1899. The sack slipped off the back of the buckboard and I, a lad of twelve, had a difficult job to reload it.

Difficulties and hardships that involved upon the Catholic immigrant of a hundred years ago can hardly be understood and not likely appreciated by his great-grandchildren of today. Automobiles, good roads and telephones make time and distance trifles today in comparison. No bells announced Sunday. When a priest finally began to visit the settlement mass was said "every other month or infrequently." Notices in the local paper I have state that even in 1890 there was mass on the third Sunday of the month. The infrequency of mass did not promote the habit of going to church. At least three Sundays each month there was no mass to attend. The immigrants themselves had a background of religious teaching and Catholic atmosphere brought with them from the land of their birth. Their children and grandchildren grew up in a far different environment. Oftentimes the parents failed to realize this. In their own lives in Europe the teachings and practices of the church were constantly impressed on them. In their new home in America this was not true, and the home needed to supply what the children now lacked of old country environment. Not all parents are competent teachers, however good their intention. In spite of all these handicaps, many parents did a good job of ingraining their religion into their children. The German Catholic came from a homeland in Europe where the church had been state supported and he had not needed to contribute to the support of the church. In America he needed to support his church by contribution from his meagre income. On the contrary, the Irishman had in his European home been compelled to foster his clergy and church under obstacles provided by the state.

Callicoon has always been fairly free of prejudices against Catholics and their religion. It has existed, but in comparison to many other places it can be said to have been negligible.

One mass a month brought the worshippers to the church where they waited often for the priest to arrive. This has been related to me often by old persons. My grandfather Hick, I am told, would lead the people in saying the ros-



Rev. Ignatius Delveaux.

ary during the waiting. Sometimes, after a long wait, the priest failed to appear, possibly because he was ill. Today a telephone call would have corrected this.

The fast from midnight for those who desired to receive holy communion was often a severe strain. They were all early risers, and breakfast was a big meal for them. Often they needed to walk as many as ten miles to reach the church. It meant a fast until noon for many, and unless they brought something to eat with them (which they usually did) some were sick before they reached home. No blame rested on the priest. Father Roesch's territory was so immense and his charges so scattered—from Beaverkill on the north to Narrowsburg on the south; from Liberty on the east to French Woods on the west—it is a wonder he ever found time and strength to care for them as ably and as well as he did. His records show that he baptized from seventy to a hundred babies each year, and performed marriages accordingly. Travel was difficult, roads poor; yet he needed to cover the entire area going on sick calls. He found time for religious instruction of the children, and his records show the names of adult converts he received into the church. To instruct these made additional demands on his time. With these duties it seems quite impossible to see how he could have used his time to better advantage.

St. George's church, with its new building, became the mission church with the greatest number of members. Tanneries at Jeffersonville, Youngsville, Pike Pond and Thumanville were busy enterprises and additional settlers had come to these areas. The Catholics among these had swollen the lists at St. George's, which was the Catholic church for all these places. In 1863 Archbishop McCloskey (later a cardinal) established a pastor at Jeffersonville and made him the head of three additional missions—Ellenville, Woodbourne, and Ulster Heights (then called Drowned Lands). This new pastor's name was George J. Vaith. The census of 1865 showed him living at the home of John Schaefer, grandfather of Wm. L. Huff, our former mayor. A house and lot fronting on the turnpike through the village was bought of Gutzell and became his rectory in which he lived and administered the church mentioned above. June 22, 1865, must have been the banner day in his pastorate, if not in the history of St. George's parish. On that day the archbishop visited the church, consecrated the church edifice and confirmed 105 persons.

Father Vaith is remembered by some of the oldest persons here and in the three missions. Others have heard their parents or others speak of him. These recollections picture him as a kindly, pious and able man whose only interest was caring for his people. The building he used as a rectory was in 1938 bought by Dr. Arch Freer and moved to a new location to serve as a laboratory and small animal hospital.

Clearwater, in his history of Ulster county, recites that the German Catholics in Ulster county were served by Rev. George J. Vaith, a Catholic priest, residing at Jeffersonville, from 1863 through 1868.

Father Vaith left St. George's in 1868 and Father Roesch of Oberburg was again assigned to care for the parish and did so for a few months, when he resigned his mission here. St. George's was then served by Fr. James Nilan out of Port Jervis until 1871, and from 1871 to 1875 by Father F. Hoch-

spiel, a missionary out of New York city, until Father George Huntman came to Callicoon Depot in 1875 as pastor of Holy Cross parish there. Father Huntman's trips to Jeffersonville were on horseback. His horse also took him to the Protectors that the Christian Brothers had established in the hills between Youngsville and Livingston Manor, there to say mass for that community and the boys in its charge. Father Huntman lived to an old age in New York city, where he was pastor of a city parish.

Father Ignatius Delveaux, stationed at Oberburg, followed Father Huntman in 1879 as pastor of St. George's. Father Delveaux was a man of exceptional accomplishments. He ranks as one of the best preachers the parish has enjoyed. In his day the use of English sermons had begun and it is said of him that he would preach a sermon in German and follow it by one in English. He knew French equally well. He was much interested in sports and athletics and possessed unusual strength and skill. St. George's church building had no spire when he came to take charge. He planned for a spire and arranged a bee to which he invited the many non-Catholics who come to be his friends. They came all turned out and the work was completed before the end of the

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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—Sunday school, 10-11 a.m.; church service, 11-12 a.m.
Catechetical class forming. Names of all eligible children requested by pastor.
Youngsville—Church service 9-10 a.m., Sunday school, 10-11 a.m.
Church supper Oct. 7; 5:30.

First Lutheran Church.

Dr. Fred Foerster, Pastor.
Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 10,—9:30 a.m., Sunday school; 10:30 a.m., Divine service.

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.

Flag on Rhine

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