SAINT PIUS CHURCH, SOUTH FORK
PLEASANT TOWNSHIP, PERRY COUNTY, OHIO
1852 - 1908

St. Pius' church, above, known as the "Old South Fork Church," was located in Pleasant township, Perry county, a mile and a half northwest of the present Moxahala. It was not far from a stream called the South Fork, a branch of Jonathan's creek. Built of brick, the church was begun in 1853 and completed in the fall of 1854. It was used until the new church was built in Moxahala in 1908.

Not only does Perry county enjoy the distinction of having the first Catholic church in Ohio (St. Joseph's, south of Somerset, built in 1818), but it is the cradle of the Faith in the state for another reason. It had in the early years more churches and missions than any other county.

Bishop Hartley in his history of the diocese of Columbus (1) states that there was a log chapel as early as 1825 at Chapel Hill in Monroe township; the church was built there in 1840. In 1827 Holy Trinity church was built in Somerset, and a
log chapel, St. Patrick's, was erected at Clover Hill in Clayton township that same year. This latter mission became St. Louis Bertrand, Rehoboth, in 1832, and still later, in 1851, it was St. Dominic's, McLuney, in Harrison township. St. Patrick's, Clarksville, south of the present Junction City, Jackson township, came into being as early as 1830. Another early church in the county was St. Peter's, known as the "Old Stone Church," near Shawnee, in Salt Lick township. It was built in 1842.

Although other Perry county churches came later, there was another started in the early years. Joining the list of the pioneer missions was St. Pius, South Fork, in Pleasant township, erected in 1854.

Catholics began settling in Pleasant township quite early. Colburn (2) in his history of Perry county, states that a William Fowler was perhaps the first settler. After him came the Biddisons, who were probably Catholics. A tombstone in the little cemetery which surrounded the church, is inscribed to Margaret Biddison, wife of William Biddison. She died in 1833 at the age of 73. This was twenty years before the church was built. Another death before the church was erected was that of Patrick Mackan who died May 1, 1851, in his 70th year. Perhaps these two were buried elsewhere and transferred to the St. Pius cemetery after the church was built.

"One of the Biddisons," according to Colburn, "built a saw-mill where Moxahala now stands, which run only about ten years and went down. . . . West of Moxahala, William Biddison, Jr., built a saw-mill about 1842, which was kept in use until 1880 when it was finally abandoned." (3)

Colburn also gives the names of some of the first members of the church: "James Sheeran, Owen Slevin, Michael Riley, Jno. Riley, Mr. O'Conner, Edward Meloy, Peter Carroll, James Carroll, Thomas Craddock, S. W. Dillehay, William Bennett, Robert Bennett, William Forquer, Washington Hillis, Edward Hillis and others. There is now about sixty families belonging to this church. Father Heery (4) is now pastor." (5)

In the early 1850's the Catholics of the area felt the need for a church of their own. When they were able to go to Mass it meant a drive of six or seven miles north to St. Louis Bertrand, Rehoboth, in Clayton township. The church at Chapel Hill, Monroe township, was a little farther. They could also go to St. Peter's, the "Old Stone Church," near Shawnee.

To provide a place for a church two small parcels of adjoining land, totalling two acres, were donated in 1852. The property was on the south side of the road which went eastward to Oakfield and westward across the county, with connecting roads northward to New Lexington. Today this road is known as the Marietta road, and the town of Moxahala has grown up where it meets State Route 13, one mile west of Oakfield.

On August 2, 1852, Patrick Gaughran and his wife, Catherine, for the sum of one dollar, sold one and a half acres in section 25 of Pleasant township, near the east border of Pike township, to the Literary Society of St. Joseph "for religious purposes and for the benefit of the neighbourhood. . . ." (6) On the same day Peter Carroll and his wife, Ann, for the sum of one dollar, sold to the same Society 80 perches of land adjoining Patrick Gaughran's donated parcel. (7) Father D'Arco (8) was the pastor at the time. The St. Joseph Literary Society represented the Dominican Fathers at St. Joseph's, Somerset. It was thought best to register the property in the name of a society instead of an individual.
The "Old South Fork was built in 1853," wrote Bishop Hartley in his history of the diocese of Columbus. (9) "It was built of hand-made brick on a stone foundation. The brick were made by members of the congregation on the farm of the late John O'Connor. The church was abandoned in 1908 for a more suitable location in Moxahala. . . The Church at South Fork, however, though abandoned, was not destroyed, but allowed to remain standing as an old landmark, surrounded as it was by Old South Fork Cemetery, still in the use of the parish, where rest the remains of the pioneer Catholic residents of Old South Fork parish." The church has been razed since Bishop Hartley wrote his history in 1918.

Bishop Hartley also recorded the names of some who were members of the parish when the church was built. Among them we find names not given by Colburn. "The old family names," wrote the Bishop, "most prominent in the building of the Old South Fork Church were Owen Slevin (uncle of the late Father Thomson), (10) James Sheeran, John Riley, Ed Malloy, Peter and James Carroll, John O'Connor, William, Robert, George and Richard Bennett, Michael Brady, Owen Grannon, Edward and Washington Hillis, William, John and Michael Forquer, and R. J. McGonagle."

"Charles Flowers, of New Lexington, Ohio, still living and a nonagenarian, in company with a Mr. Kintz, had charge of the work.

"The building was completed late in the fall of 1854, and was dedicated in 1855 by the late Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati, the diocese of Columbus, not yet having been established." The church was placed under the patronage of St. Pius V by Archbishop Purcell. "It fell to the lot of the late Bishop Rosecrans, however, the first bishop of the newly created diocese of Columbus, to be the first bishop to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in the church of Old South Fork.

"For many years after its establishment, the parish remained a mission in charge of the Dominican Fathers who attended it from St. Joseph's and Somerset, visiting the mission about once a month, to offer up the Holy Sacrifice of Mass, and administer the sacraments. Owing to the uncertainty of the time of arrival of the priest, on account of the distance to be traveled and the varying condition of the roads, the faithful in those days, on 'Church Sunday,' were used to going to Church at an early hour to await 'the coming of the priest.' Thus, automatically, the Church and its grounds became the social center of the parish where the people met, exchanged their views on the 'doings,' and happenings, of the preceding month.

"But their minds soon turned to spiritual things and, one by one, in family groups, you would see them kneeling about the headstones that marked the last resting place of their loved ones who had died fortified with the sacraments dispensed by the very Church that stood in the midst of this burial ground, pouring out their souls to God in suffrage for the souls departed! After that, having satisfied themselves in prayer for the dead of their own household, the priest not yet having arrived, they would gather in the Church or, as for many years, about a large mission cross, erected by one of their missionaries and later removed by Father McNally (11), and there, in common prayer, recite the rosary for all the faithful departed. The Hon. James A. Kiener, of Moxahala, was wont to 'give out the beads' in those days, and proudly mentions the fact that he was one of the altar boys the day confirmation was administered for the first time in South Fork Church by the late Bishop Rosecrans."

Bishop Hartley tells us that Father D'Arco organized the parish and saw to the building of the church. Others attending the mission, wrote Bishop Hartley, were "Fathers Bokol, Kehoe, Heeney, Cady, Noon, Lynch, Rourke, Collins, Roach, Adams,
The South Fork mission was not listed in the annual Catholic Directory until 1865. It was then given as attended from St. Joseph's, Somerset. The next year Father R. P. O'Rourke, O.P., was in charge. In 1868 the Dominican Fathers were given as taking charge of it; in 1869, Father Leo Adams, O.P.; in 1870, the Fathers of St. Joseph's; in 1871 and 1872, Father J. S. Collins, O.P., and in 1873, Father J. O'Rouke, O.P. From 1874 to 1879 it was attended from New Lexington, according to the Directory. Records of the Columbus diocesan archives show that in 1874 Father J. A. Moroney, McLuney (St. Dominic's, Harrison township) was attending South Fork. Beginning in 1881 it was attended by Father Heery of St. Dominic's. It continued under the care of the pastor there until 1897 when it became the charge of the pastor of the Church of the Stonement, Crooksville. From that time onward it remained under the care of the Crooksville pastor. After it was abandoned in 1908 the new St. Pius, Moxahala, was also under the same priest.

According to records in the diocesan archives, Father Heery, who was pastor of St. Dominic's, McLuney, and had charge of South Fork, reported in 1881 that at the latter there were 38 families. Parish activity was indicated by the existence of a number of societies: St. Mary's Married Ladies society; St. Joseph's Married Men's society; the Purgatorians; the Sodality of the Children of Mary and a unit of Father Matthew's Total Abstinence society. Two years later, in 1883, Father Heery reported that there were 25 families at the South Fork mission. From 1892 to 1896 Father J. J. Cahalan was living in the "old parsonage at McLuney" and taking care of South Fork. There were 25 children in the catechism class at the latter.

In 1897 Father J.J. Banks was at Crooksville and had South Fork as his mission. He reported 70 families as the total for both parishes. The next year he gave 32 families as attending South Fork, with only 12 children in the catechism class there. Father Edmund C. Richards came to Crooksville in 1904 and was succeeded two years later by Father E. Mattes. It was two years after his arrival that the South Fork mission ceased to be, and the new St. Pius, Moxahala, was dedicated. Thus the title of the area parish remained that of St. Pius.

Mrs. Genevieve Finnen Frison, Columbus, great granddaughter of R. J. McConagle, one of the pioneer members of the South Fork parish, writes the following account of the cemetery: "The cemetery fell prey to time and vandals. It was full of weeds and broken headstones. Shortly after 1950 the descendants of R. J. McConagle started a campaign to clean it up. A chain link fence was installed around the cemetery, the weeds and trash were cleaned up; and the tombstones were put in the places where they belonged. Many stones were unreadable and many were so broken they could not be repaired. These were put together and made a base for a statue of the Blessed Virgin which had been in the sanctuary of the Old South Fork church. The township trustees keep the grass cut regularly.

"Many people come to South Fork looking for family graves but cannot find them. They do not know what happened to the headstones, though the graves are there somewhere."

"I doubt if any Catholic has or will have as much love and respect for a church as our ancestors had for Old South Fork. They have instilled that love in us, their descendants, down to the fifth generation."
Some biographical data of a few of the early pioneer Catholics of the Old South Fork parish is found in Colburn's history of Perry County.

Robert Bennet (died in 1842) and his wife, Cecilia (died in 1855), emigrated from Lancashire, England in 1819, and came to Perry county in 1826, finally settling in Pleasant township. Two sons were born to Robert and Cecilia before they arrived in Perry county. Robert, born April 26, 1821, and R.P., born in 1824, were both born in Gallia county. The older was married to Mary O'Connor, daughter of Morris O'Connor and Catharine Collins. They were the parents of 13 children. The other, son, R.P., married Elizabeth McDonald, daughter of John and Margaret McDonald. They were the parents of 12 children.

George Bennett and his wife, Anna Carroll, were natives of England and came to America in 1822. They settled in Perry county about 1822. Apparently they lived for some time in Pike and in Pleasant townships, finally settling in Bearfield township. They were the parents of 11 children. One Albert, was born in Pleasant township Oct. 30, 1859. Philip, another son, was born in Pike township March 21, 1856. He married Sarah Deaver in 1880, and had one child, James.

William Forquer and his wife, Rose Dugan, both natives of Ireland, came to America in 1795. After some time in Philadelphia they moved to Butler county, Pa., and from there to Pike township, just west of Pleasant township, Perry county, Ohio, in 1823. A son, William, born Oct. 25, 1822, in Butler county, Pa., married Catharine Donahoe in 1845. Their children were George (married Mary Bennett), Peter (married Cecilia Bennett), Mary (married F. B. Bennett), Sarah (married John A. McGonagle, Rose (married Thomas Bennett), William and Loretta.

Washington and Edward Hillis, given by Bishop Hartley as members of the South Fork parish at the time the church was built, were sons of a pioneer Hillis family that settled at North Ferrara, not far from the future site of the South Fork church. Edward, born May 13, 1833, became prosperous and well known in the county. He married Miss Ellis Ferguson October 26, 1852. They were the parents of Richard, John (deceased), Mary (married Celestine Mattingly), George, Edward and Charles.

(1) Diocese of Columbus, the History of Fifty Years, 1868-1918, by Bishop James J. Hartley, p. 474.
(2) History of Perry County by E. S. Colburn, 1883, p. 257.
(3) Colburn, op. cit., p. 257.
(4) Father Patrick M. Heery, died March 5, 1924.
(5) Colburn, op. cit., p. 259.
(8) Father Marnes D'Arco, O.P., 1818-1899.
(9) Bishop Hartley, op. cit., p. 474.
(10) Father David A. Thomson, died at Steubenville.
(11) Father John McNally, died December 16, 1923.

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Tombstone Inscriptions, St. Pius Cemetery, South Fork, Perry County, Ohio.

Bennett, Ellen Frances, dau. of George and Mary, d. Sept. 13, 1939.
Bennett, George M.O., son of R. & M., d. April 3, 1873. Aged 1Y 3M 5D.
Bennett, John, d. Dec. 18, 1893. Aged 84Y.
Bennett, Mary Ann, d. Nov. 20, 1857. Aged 36Y.
Bennett, Isabelle Agnes, d. July 21, 1861. Aged 14Y.

-197-
BENNETT, Robert, d. July 16, 1861. Aged 7Y.
BENNETT, Mary A., wife of F. R. Bennett, d. Dec. 24, 1886. Aged 36Y.
BENNETT, Mary, wife of William, d. March 23, 1869, in her 51st year.
BENNETT, Rose, wife of Thomas Bennett, d. Mary 6m 1879. Aged 24Y 6M.
BENNETT, William, d. April 29, 1886 in his 80th year.
BENNETT, William, d. 1870(?), aged 27 Y —M —D.
BIDDLESON, Margaret, wife of William Biddleson, d. May 31, 1833. Aged 73Y 3M 8D.
BRADY, Mary, wife of Michael Brady, d. May 31, 1862. Aged 19Y.
CARROLL, Delores, June 4, 1904 - May 9, 1972.
CARROLL, William, 1906-1908.
CARROLL Peter, 1859-1935.
CARROLL, Peter, d. May 23, 1877. Aged 56Y 3M.
CARROLL, Charles, 1864-1934.
CARROLL, Catharine, 1868-1947.
CARROLL, Catharine, d. Feb. 27, 1878. Aged 49Y 18M 19D.
CARROLL, James, d. Dec. 28, 1869. Aged 51Y.
CARROLL Ellen, wife of James Carroll, d. Sept. 13, 1883. Aged 61Y 2M 20D.
CARROLL, Francisc, 1857-1946.
CARROLL, Mary, 1850-1931.
CLARK, Julia, wife of John G. Clark, d. ------. Aged 31Y 5M 29D.
CLIFFORD, Michael, d. Oct. 12, 1897. Aged 56Y 3M 12D.
CLIFFORD, Margaret, d. Oct. 26, 1902. Aged 55Y.
CUMMINGS, Sarah, wife of John Cummings, 1819-1856. Formerly of Scranton, Pa.
DEAN, Barbara, Dau. of Hugh and Teresa Dean, d. Aug. 21, 1889. Aged 21Y.
DEAN, Joseph, 1849-1913.
DEAN, Julia, 1859-1929.
DEAN, Winnie, 1886-1911.
DEAN, Leo, 1898-1911.
DOKTOR, John, 1860-1924.
DOKTOR, Mary, 1876-1943.
DONNELLY, Desadarius, 1863-1909.
DONNELLY, Elizabeth, wife of J.J. Donnelly, d. Aug. 12, 1864.
DONNELLY, Charles, 1874-1878.
DONNELLY, James A., son of J.J. & E.G. Donnelly, d. March 27, 1868. Aged 10 M 27D.
DUFFY, Josephine M., 1876-1905.
DUFFY, Nicholas, 1845-1921.
DUFFY, Sarah A., 1846-1934.
FABINY, Joseph K., 1884-1944.
FABINY, Justina K., 1890-1938.
FARRELL, James, d. Oct. 26, 1897. Aged 61Y.
FARRELL, Catharine, d. Sept. 19, 1915. Aged 75Y.
FARRELL, Michael, son of Catherine Farrell, d. Jan. 7, 1887. Aged 18Y 7M 18D.
FLOWERS, Marjory, d. Dec. 2, 1899. Aged 29Y.
FORQUER, William S., d. Jan. 8, 1901. Aged 78Y.
FORQUER, Catharine, wife of William Forquer, d. Nov. 24, 1870.
FORQUER, Loretta, d. Dec. 25, 1889. Aged 28Y 5M 28D.
FRIEL, James, d. April 12, 1869. Aged 51Y 1M 20D.
GOHOHAN, Patrick, d. May 10, 1871. Aged 67Y. Native of County Cavan, Ireland.
GOODMAN, Patrick, d. March 31, 1852, in 25th year. Native of Ireland.
GORDON, Vingie, son of Basil A. & Mary F. Gordon, d. Nov. 4, 1888. Aged 5Y 5M 4D.
HAWKINS, Julia S., 1894-
HAUGHAN, Elizabeth, wife of John Haughran, d. April 28, 1867. Aged 70 Y.
HEIDE, Martha E., 1877-1913.
HILLIS, Susan, dau. of John & Mary Hillis, d. April 28, 1867.
HINES, Patrick, d. Jan. 11, 1883. Aged 84Y 10M.
HINES, Sarah, wife of Patrick Hines, d. June 7, 1877. Aged 59Y 2M.
HINES, Margaret H., dau. of P. & S. Hines, d. March 24, 1871. Aged 14Y.
HINES, Patrick, b. March 31, 1849; d. June 28, 1888. Aged 39Y 2M 28D.
HONG, John F., d. Oct. 28, 1892. Aged 72Y 7M 23D.
HONG, Charles, d. May 23, 1869. Aged 103Y 7M 22D.
HUDAK, Karol, 1878-1960.
HUDAK, Agnes, 1877-1938.
HUDAK, Mary E., 1910-
KERNAN, Hannah, wife of Peter Kerman, 1850-1928.
KERNAN, Jon A., son of Peter Kerman, 1891-1927.
KERNAN, William F., 1877-1946.
KIENER, Bridget, wife of John Kiener, d. Dec. 18, 1892. Aged 75Y 6M 10D.
KIENER, Frank, 1855-1866.
KIENER, John, d. Sept. 14, 1871. Aged 70Y 5M 13D.
KIENER, Caroline M., b. Feb. 18, 1848; d. March 24, 1933.
KIENER, Mary, d. Jan. 28, 1867; Aged 4Y 9M 21D.
KIENER, William, d. (?). Aged 15Y 5M 18D.
KIENER, Mark B., d. 1889.
KIENER, Joseph, d. 1890.
KIENER, Mary, d. 1890.
KIENER, Mary E., d. April 21, 1896. Aged 28Y 28D.
KIENER, Paul Damaskus, son of Joseph and Elizabeth Kiener, b. Nov. 23, 1891; d. Aug. 19, 1892.
KIENER, Walter, son of J. & Ella C. Kiener; 1898-1899.
KIENER, Mary E., d. April 21, 1896. Aged 28Y 28D.
LAWRENCE, William, d. March 26, 1855. Aged 66Y 10M 20D.
MACK, Charles A., 1862-1921.
MACK, Margaret, 1865-1928.
MACKAN, Patrick, d. May 1, 1851, in his 70th(?) year. Native of Ireland.
MACKIN, Catharine E., dau. of E. & C. Mackin, d. May 27, 1876. Aged 2Y 1M 6D.
MACKIN, James E., son of (?), d. Dec. 26, 1876. Aged 7M 3D.
MACKIN, ----, wife of James Mackin, d. ----.
MALLOY, James V., corporal Co. F., 57th Ohio Inf.
MELLOY, Bridget, wife of Edward Meloy.[Stone illegible.]
MCDONALD, John, d. Dec. 17, 1855. Aged 62Y 7M 8D.
MCDONALD, Margaret, wife of John McDonald, d. April 3, 1881. Aged 79Y.
MCGAGE, John W., son of John and Ellen McGage, b. April 15, 1877; d. April 5, 1878.
MCGONAGLE, Albert J., d. Nov. 16, 1902. Aged 22Y.
MCGONAGLE, B.P., 1837-1928.
MCGONAGLE, Mary, dau. of John & Deborah McGonagle, d. June 17, 1887. Aged 18Y, 1M 27D.
MCGONAGLE, Mary C., 1861-1886.
MCGONAGLE, Michael J., b. Sept. 31, 1832; d. ----.
MCGONAGLE, Richard J., 1826-1908.
MCGONAGLE, Lydia Ann, his wife, 1844-1922.

-199-
McGONAGLE, Jane, wife of R. McGonagle, d. March 16, 1879. Aged 80Y Native of County Derry, Ireland.

McGONAGLE, Richard F., d. June 9, 1890. Aged 29Y 13D.

McGONAGLE, William, d. Aug. 6 1876. Aged 54Y 10M.


McGONAGLE, Charles T., son of William and A. McGonagle, d. Oct. 12, 18—. Aged 14D.

NELSON, Margaret, wife of George Nelson, 1843-1918.

O'BRIEN, Daniel, 1840-1929.

O'BRIEN, Bridget, his wife, 1847-1922.

O'BRIEN, John, d. Aug. 6, 1902. Aged 25Y.

O'BRIEN, William, 1804-1956.

O'BRIEN, Katherine, 1861-1928.

O'CONNOR, Mary, wife of John O'Connor. Aged 68Y. Native of Ireland.


PADOULINSKY, Edward, 1880-1942.

PADOULINSKY, Agnes, 1880-1953.

REELLY, Cecily, wife of Michael Reilly, d. April 14, 1858. Aged 45Y.

REELLY, Cecily, dau. of M. & C. Reilly. [Stone illegible].


REELLY, Susanna, wife of John Reilly, d. June 20, 1872. Aged 23Y.

REELLY, ----, d. Feb. 10, 18(5)4.

SAPPO, Joseph, 1894-1909.

SHEERAN, Thomas, d. Oct. 6, 1878. Aged 10Y.

SHEERAN, Helen, wife of Pius Sheeran, d. April 7, 1885. Aged 34 (or 84)Y 9M 7D.

SHEERAN, Hugh F., 1839-1880.

SHEERAN, Catharine, 1841-1919.

SHEERAN, John N., 1876-1902.

SHEERAN, Lydia M., 1880-1904.

SHEERAN, James, b. March 1, 1809; d. April --, 1875.

SHEERAN, Mary, wife of James Sheeran, d. June 27, 1870. Aged 55Y.


SHEERAN, James, [No dates].

SHEERAN, Mary [No dates].

SHEERAN, Jimmy, d. 1860. [Stone illegible].

SMITHE, James, d. July 17, 1885. Aged 95Y.

SPENCER, John C., d. Nov. 21, 1886. Aged 73Y 2M 6D.

SPENCER, Mary E., d. Dec. 1899.

TAGUE, Annie Maud, dau. of George & Margaret Tague, d. May 7, 1895. Aged 8M 14D.

TEAL, Henry J., Jan. 2, 1881 - July 12, 1881.

TEAL, Rosa A., July 2, 1831 - Aug. 1, 1881.

TRUNKO, Karol, 1869-1967.

TRUNKO, Julia, 1871-1943.

TRUNKO, Lawrence, 1901-1919.

WELCH, Michael, d. July 8, 1857. Aged 78Y 9M 9D.

WILLIS, George, March 3, 1824 - Feb. 2, 1875.

WILLIS, Nancy, his wife, Jan. 15, 1830 - Aug. 31, 1897.