THE SLAVIC CATHOLICS OF GUERNSEY AND NOBLE COUNTIES
by Lorle Porter, Ph.D.
(Concluded, from Vol. XVII, No. 9)

Part 4
The Slovak Roman Catholic Parishes

Father Soukup at Byesville

In February of 1917 Rev. Alois Soukup was sent to Byesville by Bishop Hartley to replace Father Berry. He was to spend nearly thirty years with the impoverished Slovak miners there. Father Soukup was a concert quality violinist, an acquaintance of Anton Dvorak, and a linguist of distinction who spoke Czech (his native tongue), German, and many Slovak dialects. It was a lonely life for such a priest, and there was a touch of the Czech-Slovak disdain: "Czechs are the princes, Slovaks the workers," but he wrote the "lingua hungarica" and he filled his life with incredible energy and dedication -- what other Slovak parish had a children's chamber orchestra! (83)

Father Soukup energetically canvassed his parish and built miners' missions at Dogtown Switch, Harryette, and the Chapel of St. Mary at Walhonding. The parish burst at the seams. Although he mixed Czech theological terms with Slovak in his sermons, he still "talked like us." Soukup became what all good pastors of immigrant national parishes became, the community leader. As the immigrants slowly became citizens and a huge block of votes was at stake, local politicians applied for his support. Soukup was famous for his position: "I don't tell them how to vote, but I tell them how I'm going to vote." (84)

The work load was crushing. The Church was the center of Slovak existence. The saying among the people was that one was only "a good Slovak when one was a good Catholic." On Sundays, families walked to Holy Trinity in Byesville from Walhonding, Lore City, and Dogtown, some without shoes, their "Sunday shoes" carefully wrapped in a paper sack to be worn only when one approached the church. Father Soukup visited all the mining towns, blessed the Easter baskets, visited the sick, and during Epiphany chalked the doors with signs of the three kings: K for Kaspar, M for Malkeor, and B for Baltazar. The priest blessed the day a prosperous parishioner bought a car and drove him on his rounds! Soukup was a supreme theologian who regularly wrote to a parishioner-seminarian in Latin. He was the epitome of a priest-leader and he made some unpopular decisions. The notation of his death in the
Holy Trinity records, April 26, 1960 speaks to his life: "Roses for you; and hidden thorns; God's priest, not the people's." The sum of his life was the firm establishment of Slovak Catholics in Guernsey County.

Rev. Alois Soukup

Lore City

Most of the kids playing on the slag heap in King's Mine would end up working in mines and factories, but not Andy Beros. Even when his family moved to Belle Valley in the caravan of miners opening up that mine, Andy was different -- he wanted to be a priest. Like Steve Pekalla of Mingo Junction, he would be one of the first of the immigrant children to serve the Church. Beros was in seminary at St. Vincent's Archabbey, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, when Bishop Hartley sent for him. The work load at Holy Trinity in Byesville was overwhelming; Fr. Soukup had to have relief, so Beros was ordained at St. Joseph Cathedral in simplex (without the final year of study) and when he offered his first Mass at Ascension Parish in Belle Valley, June 18, 1922, five thousand people showed up to express their pride -- one of their own would serve their Church. (85)

Father Beros lived at Holy Trinity rectory while preparing for his assignment -- he was to begin a daughter parish in the eastern half of the existing parish. Beros walked daily to Lore City and began to build a rectory on land that Bishop Hartley had purchased. (86) The Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on the property next door. The Slovaks had seen that sort of thing before and they placidly ignored it. Men came in from Black Top and King's Mine to help. George Yanico and his father had no sooner washed the soot off their faces than they walked, shovel in hand, the half mine into the English town toward Slovak Hill. They were building their church next to the one the Russian Orthodox had erected the same year.

From April to September, Father Beros offered Mass in the rectory on weekdays and in the movie theatre (later the high school gymnasium) on Sundays. On September 23, 1923 the new church was finished. It was built with immigrant sweat, but many fellow Catholics had helped. The pews were donated by Sacred Heart Parish in Columbus, the altar, stations of the cross, and baptismal font came from St. Benedict's in Cambridge. The people burst with pride. One hundred families, six hundred people, composed the new parish and all of them, and hundreds more, came to the dedication on May 28, 1924. People from King's Mine, Kipling, Old Orchard, Goodyear, and Black Top had their church, and as the mines began to close in the dark years of the strikes, people who did not join the northern migration moved into the English town to be close to their sanctuary. Father Beros laid a firm human foundation. He taught catechism during the summer with children clustered
under trees and singing beloved Slovak songs, ones still used in special services at the church today. The church was a social service organization, "The good mother of Fr. Beros used to prepare lunches for the men who would come and offer their services for the church" during the strikes; Father Beros made work for the unemployed and still paid off the debt. (87)

Three Slovak Roman Catholic Parishes

The Slovak immigrants now had three churches in their cocoon, namely Holy Trinity at Byesville, Ascension at Belle Valley, and Sts. Peter and Paul at Lore City. When Father Beros was sent off from Lore City to found another Slovak parish, St. Joseph's in Toronto, he was succeeded by two European priests. Fr. Valentine Mihelic, who remained a year and then returned to Slovakia, and Fr. Stanislas Szadzinski. Fr. Szadzinski as a Pole (ordained in Poland in 1910) did not really fit and moved two years later to the Polish church of Five Martyrs in Chicago. Bishop Hartley was able to provide a native son of America, Father Stephen Pekalla, born at Mingo Junction on December 22, 1902. Fr. Pekalla was educated at St. Agnes School in Mingo and St. Vincent's Archabbey, but the bishop, significantly, sent him to St. Mary's, Emmittsburg, for final preparation. It was clear to the bishop that at least his Slovak priests had to be able to step out of the cocoon. Fr. Pekalla was ordained in Columbus on May 29, 1930. He served Sts. Peter and Paul for fifteen years and then finished his career and life at Caldwell. (88)

The Lore City church was very active. In 1945 it had only seventy-five families in the parish, but it was mother to many families in the northern exodus. In the first twenty-five years of its history, priests had performed 327 baptisms and 117 weddings, and 116 funerals; 438 had received first communions and the bishop had confirmed 469. Of the 116 dead, 101 had Slovak surnames and the remainder were the familiar Irish names of the railroad era. The Belle Valley parish was active too. In 1923 a mine foreman's house was
deeded to the parish as a rectory and Fr. A. Gross became the first resident pastor, followed in a year by Fr. Horak. The great trauma for Ascension Parish was the devastating fire which destroyed the church just after Mass on January 4, 1914. But "an old friend" (Bishop Hartley) replaced the structure for the Depression devastated parish and it was renamed Corpus Christi. All three parishes began to contract with the out-migration in the 1930s. (89)

The people served by Holy Trinity, Ascension, and Sts. Peter and Paul parishes were poor immigrants. The Byesville banker used to greet Father Soukup with the jest that he was waiting for the Monday morning deposits to secure his supply of pennies for the week! They were poor, and they were peasants, but they found in their parishes an anchor for their lives, and in the parish schools, an avenue for advancement. These churches were three of the two hundred forty-one Roman Catholic Slovak parishes in America in 1930. Catholicism was indeed an overriding characteristic of the Slavic immigration, but the simple adage "a good Slovak is a good Catholic" ignored the large Byzantine and Orthodox populations and the very large Slovak Lutheran population in their midst. There were forty-eight Slovak Lutheran parishes in America, three in the Guernsey coal fields and there were even eight Calvinist Slovak churches in Ohio. The history of Slovak migration had many textures.

The outward migration forced the local Roman Catholic parishes to contract; added to that was the shortage of priests obvious in the newly created Diocese of Steubenville (1945). Belle Valley was a mission of Caldwell from 1945 to 1958 and, after a series of resident pastors, is today a mission of Lore City. Father Rudolph Wargo, nephew of Fr. Beros, served at Belle Valley from 1970 until his death in 1973. Pastors at Belle Valley have been Revs. J. J. Herman, Clement Crock, Carl Gross, Frank Horak, John C. Matysiak, Connie Superfisky, S. J. Karwowski, Mieceslaus Dzihowski, Stephen J. Pekalla, James A. Dirker, and Alex Raab. Pastors at Holy Trinity have been Revs. Anton Gracik, E. Richtartsik, E. E. Berry, Alois Soukup, Celestine Drexler, O.S.B. (administrator), Stephen A. Laca, and Msgr. William Yontz.

The three parishes are still active today. Holy Trinity in 1973 built a new church and uses the old edifice as a social hall. At Lore City, St. Peter and Paul parish purchased the property of the defunct Orthodox congregation of the same name and it is now part of the parish parking lot. (90)

NOTES

83. Msgr. William Yontz and Mrs. Mary Burtik, oral history interviews.
84. Msgr. Yontz.
86. Bishop Hartley had purchased lots 73, 74, 75, 81 through 84, and the west half of lot 76 in Richey's Addition to Lore City from Benjamin Hart and wife on April 23, 1921. The price of $1.00 was paid by "Slovak Roman Catholic Saints Peter and Paul's Church of Lore City."
89. McCarthy, History of Corpus Christi Parish, Belle Valley.

Koenig, Joseph, born Oct., 1844, Columbus, son of Anton Koenig and Maria Amalia Dichtmüller. Wife Maria Koehler, born 5 Oct., 1846, Union County, Ohio, daughter of Francis Joseph Köhler and Maria. Married 1867 at Holy Cross. (three children)


Kremer, Jacob -- see Frick, Matthaeus.


Lampert, Fidel., from Triefsenberg(?), Fürs, Lichtenstein, born 10 Sept., 1881. Wife Elisabetha Jordi, from Cham, Kanton Zug, Switzerland.

Lang, Cornelius, born 23 Sept., 1821, Erbesbüdesheim, Hessen Darmstadt, son of Peter Lang and Maria Anna Kronenberger; died 14 Apr., 1897. Wife Gertruda Daudt, born 17 Feb., 1815, daughter of Wilhelm Daudt and Anna Maria Monschauer; died 28 Jan., 1897. To Columbus 1848; married 3 Aug., 1848. (three children)


Lang, Jacob, born Jan., 1827, Erbesbüdesheim, son of Nicholas Lang and Sophia Kronenberger. Wife Adelaide Schluemberger, born Feb., 1829, in Brasilien, daughter of Jacob Schluemberger and Margaretha Zimmer, Kaisersl., Würtbg; died
1908. To St. Mary's Church. (seven children)


Lang, Mathias, born 21 Sept., 1825, Würzburg, Bachenau. Married Petronella Göbb, widow of Ignaz Trott. (six children, including two Trott children; see Ignaz Trott, below)

Lang, Nicholas — see Scheidel


Lauber, Joseph, born ca 1840, Switzerland. Wife Elizabeth Abel, born 7 May, 1847, Werblin, Trier, of Georg Abel and Catharina. To St. Mary's Church. (Three children)


Laufersweiler, Heinrich, born 29 Sept., 1839 in Derrebach, Coblenz, son of Peter Laufersweiler and Anna Maria Friedrich from Hilwersheim; died 28 Oct., 1916. Wife Elizabeth Hock, born 14 Feb., 1840, Columbus, daughter of Leonard Hock and Elizabeth Stahl; died 1899. Married 7 Nov., 1861. (ten children)


[Kathleen Lind Swint, a descendant of the numerous Lind family, has provided the Society with a copy of the passport belonging to Christian Lind, father of the above Christoph and Jacob. According to her documents, Christian was from the town of Weinheim, near Alzey, Rhein-Hessen, emigrated in 1836, and died in Chillicothe about 1838. The passport, dated 20 April, 1836, lists Christian's
age as 41 years, his height as seven shoes, hair blond, eyebrows blond, eyes brown. His wife was Elisabetha, age 33. Their seven children were Katharina, 18 years; Elisabetha, 15 years; Anna Maria, 14 years; Maria; Christoph, 7 years; Anna Hilar, 3 years; and Jakob, 1 year.]


Luckhaupt, Johann A. -- see Henry Wingendorf.


Lunz, Michael, born 29 Jan., 1828, son of Andreas Lunz (b. 19 Dec., 1801) and Anna Maria Dennert (b. 28 Feb., 1806) in Thüngfeld. Wife Anna Maria Eisel, born 19 June, 1825, daughter of Nicholas Eisel and Anna Mar. To Columbus in 1840. (two daughters)

Maas, Johann (Mound St. Scioto), born 6 Jan., 1825, Hostenbach, Sarlouis, son of Peter Maas and Barbara Klein. Wife Maria Weiland, born 1823, Walpershofen, Sarbrück, daughter of Johann Weiland and Cath. Maas. Married at Watgassen, Sarlouis. (five children)

Maeder, Frank, born 1861, Columbus, son of Daniel and Carolina. Wife Mary Acker, born 1867, Lockbourne, Ohio, daughter of James and Mary. Married 1889 at St. Mary's. (one son)


Jan., 1828 in Düningen, Amt Donauösterreich, Baden, daughter of Christoph Buhri and Maria Anna Hilt; died 2 March, 1904. In Columbus 1849. Married 3 Jan., 1855. (twelve children)

Mehling, Frank, born 1 April, 1822 in Steinfeld, Würzburg. Wife Cunigunda Müller, born 7 May, 1837, Schertlitz, Bamberg; she married secondly Machold J. Fraas; died 12 May, 1914. (six children)


Mehling, Barbara, sister of Valentin, born 1817, died 1901.

Meinhard, Henry, born Niedermoos, Hesse Darmstadt. Wife Margaretha Rieg, born 9 Oct., 1846 in Columbus, daughter of Franz Rieg and Sidonia Leibold, from Brucknau. Married in St. Louis by a squire. (four children)


Merkle, Lucas, born Endingen, Baden; died 7 Dec., 1866, aged 52 years. Wife Margaretha Ury, born 19 Dec., 1821, Telei, Trier, daughter of Peter Ury and Johanna Notat. Married in Chillicothe, 7 Jan., 1840. (eight children)

(To be continued)

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