

The Growth of Faith in Scioto County 1830-1842 (Part 2)

“The first move toward establishing a [Catholic] church [in Portsmouth] was in 1831, while the Ohio Canal was building in this place. Many of the laborers were of foreign nationality and members of the Catholic church.”ⁱ By 1831, Portsmouth and Scioto County was thriving with a population of 8,740. Portsmouth was a river town with regular steamboat traffic serving travelers and freight moving in all directions. Though no direct records still exist, priests did occasionally come through Scioto County and stopped to tend to the needs of Catholics in the area. Mass was said in the faithful’s homes and in rented public halls.ⁱⁱ

In 1832, Europe and the United States were experiencing a cholera epidemic. At that time science had not yet identified the cause and because of lack of sanitary conditions, many people succumbed. Many clergy and religious cared for the sick and also lost their lives. Priests were especially vulnerable as they expended their strength as they were called frequently to give last rites to many of the dying. That summer Bishop Edward Fenwick (1768-1832) of the Cincinnati Diocese began his usual visit of his large diocese, in particular the Indian missions in the Michigan territory. On his trip by steamboat from Cleveland to Michigan, Bishop Fenwick contracted cholera. He recovered enough to be able to continue his journey through Michigan back to Ohio and then on to Pittsburgh with Father Henni. Returning to Canton, Ohio, he left Fr. Henni there and began his journey back to Cincinnati. Bishop Edward Fenwick became severely ill at Wooster and died there at the age of 64 on September 27, 1832.ⁱⁱⁱ He is buried in the Cathedral at Cincinnati. Though no documented record has been found, it is very possible that Bishop Fenwick would have made several visits to the Portsmouth area either as Bishop or earlier when he was a Dominican missionary in Ohio. The next Bishop of Cincinnati certainly knew about Scioto County Catholics.



Bishop E. Fenwick



Bishop John B. Purcell

The second bishop of Cincinnati was Rev. John Baptist Purcell (1800-1883). At the time of his appointment, he was in charge of the seminary at Emmitsburg, Maryland. He was consecrated Bishop of Cincinnati at Emmitsburg, Maryland on Oct. 13, 1833. He arrived in Cincinnati on November 14, 1833, accompanied by three seminarians, one of whom was Joseph O’Mealy^{iv}. Six months later, Bishop Purcell began a trip through his diocese in Ohio. He traveled from Cincinnati by steamboat and his first stop was Portsmouth on April 22, 1834. “In Portsmouth he found twenty families visited at stated times by a priest from Cincinnati.”^v The following article from the Catholic Telegraph tells of his trip and his message to the Catholics of Portsmouth.

...we left Cincinnati on Monday, 21st of April [1834]. On Tuesday morning, we arrived at Portsmouth and were conducted from the Steamboat to the residence of the worthy Mr. Keough, who has been during a long term of years an upright and respected citizen, and a zealous and fervent member of the Catholic Church.

On Wednesday, the Bishop said Mass, baptized some children^{vi} and preached to a small congregation. The subject of his discourse was the necessity and importance of ascertaining and

professing the true faith and living according to its maxims. Before concluding he took occasion to turn the attention of his hearers to the necessity of making steady and persevering exertions to erect, at least a small church, where they may have consolation of meeting together to worship their God, receive the holy sacraments, be confirmed in the faith of their ancestors, and afford an opportunity to the sincere enquirers for religious truth to hear the doctrines and tenets of the Catholic church explained and fairly represented. It was, he observed, a source of most poignant regret, to him to learn that there were, in and around Portsmouth, many families which ought to be Catholic and who now have none, or only an erroneous faith; their defection, or rather falling off from the religion of their youth, being mainly attributable to the want of instruction. In this, as well in every town in the state, there are, sectarian free-schools, which the purpose of learning to read, and where, under pretext of Charity and to the grievous abuse of that sacred virtue and name, the fountains of spiritual life are poisoned and those unsuspecting children have tracts placed in their hands, insinuating the vilest and most malicious slanders of our real principles and thus literally receive for bread, a serpent. Knowledge purchased at so dear a rate reminds us of the price first paid for it in Eden.^{vii}



Bishop J. M. Henni

Rev. John Martin Henni visited Portsmouth during the 3rd week of Lent in 1835 as part of a series of missions which included Portsmouth, Chillicothe, Columbus, Springfield and Dayton, Ohio. Father Henni spoke English, German, and French which meant that the faithful in these areas would have “an opportunity of attending to the urgent percept of the Pascal Communion, which is earnestly hoped that they will not fail to observe religiously.”^{viii} One of the early difficulties for the Catholic church in Ohio was finding priests who could meet the language needs of Catholics in the mission areas. Though Latin was the language of the Church in the 1800’s, hearing confession was difficult when there was a language barrier.

Father Henni published a German Catholic Catechism in 1835 and became editor of a German language Catholic newspaper in 1837. Father Henni was born in Switzerland in 1805 and was ordained by Bishop Fenwick in Bardstown on February 2, 1829. Father Henni was consecrated Bishop of Milwaukee in 1844. He became Archbishop of Milwaukee in 1875 and died there in 1881.^{ix}

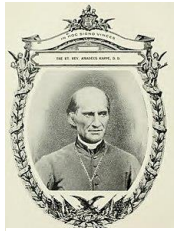
In 1837, Rev. Henry Damian Juncker (1809-1868) arrived as the first resident priest of Chillicothe. He was ordained in Cincinnati on March 16, 1834. He immediately purchased the Episcopalian church on Walnut Street, and it became the first St. Mary’s in Chillicothe. Father Juncker was assigned all the missions in the Scioto Valley from Marion to Portsmouth including Scioto, Lawrence, and Gallia Counties. Several Scioto County baptisms before July 1842 were recorded in the Chillicothe records. Father Juncker was consecrated Bishop of Alton, Illinois on April 26, 1857^x.



Bishop H. D. Juncker

The first baptism at Portsmouth recorded by Father Juncker in the Chillicothe records was for Crescentia born Nov. 29, 1837, daughter of John Fecter [Fecker] and Crescentia Buckmeyer. She was baptized Dec. 6, 1837. On August 29, 1838, Fr. Juncker records three more baptisms at Portsmouth. On April 24, 1839, at a location listed as “near Portsmouth” [Lick Run, Little Scioto, and Wheelersburg] he records five baptisms. One child was a daughter of Eberhard Frische who was an early settler on Lick Run in Wheelersburg. In July of 1839, Father Juncker baptizes another seven children in Portsmouth.^{xi} More Scioto County baptisms are recorded in the Chillicothe records through

July 1842 showing that priests from Chillicothe attended missions at Pine Grove, Portsmouth, Little Scioto and Lick Run, Wheelersburg.^{xii}



Bishop A. Rappe

During the 1837-1842 time period, three other priests worked as missionaries from Chillicothe for Scioto County and its surrounding missions. Father Amedeus Rappe (b. February 2, 1801 – d. August 9, 1877) recorded the first baptisms found in the records in the St. Mary/Church of Nativity Records in Portsmouth. Father Rappe recorded baptisms in April and August of 1841. Father Rappe became the first bishop of Cleveland in 1847. Bishop Rappe was born in France and was ordained there in 1829 before emigrating to the United States in 1840 to work in

the diocese of Cincinnati for Bishop Purcell whom he had met in 1839. Bishop Purcell sent him to Chillicothe during 1841 to learn English and to fill in for Fr. Juncker who was busy elsewhere.



Fr. T. R. Butler

Father Thomas Roche Butler (b. April 21, 1802 – Feb. 9, 1869) recorded baptisms during the first week of February 1842. Father Butler would eventually move to the Covington diocese and built the first cathedral in Covington where he served as pastor of the cathedral from 1851-1857.^{xiii}

On June 9, 1842 in Portsmouth, Father Joseph Ferneding,^{xiv} baptized George Glass born March 23, 1842, son of Jacob Glass and Anna Maria Schafer.^{xv} The baptism was recorded at St. Mary's Chillicothe. Father George Glass would become the first priest born and baptized in Scioto County when he was ordained in the Cincinnati Diocese on November 21, 1865.^{xvi}

The growth of the Catholic faith in Scioto County is closely linked to the growth of the faith in Lawrence County especially in Pine Grove and Ironton. Many of the early missionaries and later resident priests at St. Peter's in Wheelersburg and St. Mary's Pine Grove cared for both parishes. St. Mary's at Pine Grove Furnace was the first mission congregation established sometime before 1837 in Lawrence County. Baptismal records are found in Chillicothe records in 1837. By 1843, the first church structure was in use at Pine Grove.

Many of the early missions in southern Ohio were located at the iron furnaces where German and Irish Catholic immigrants came to work at the furnaces and in the charcoal industry. In 1827, Franklin Furnace was the first furnace to be put in operation in Scioto County. In the following years, eight more furnaces were constructed in Scioto County. Union Furnace was built in 1826, and was the first of seventeen furnaces built in Lawrence County, Ohio.^{xvii} Pine Grove Furnace was started in 1828. In 1844, Pine Grove Furnace owner, Robert Hamilton, tried something new. He closed his furnace on Sundays so his employees could attend church and school and refused to sell alcohol to his employees. Dire predictions were made about the furnace's future profitability, but Pine Grove became one of the most productive furnaces in the area. This change attracted a better class of workers and proved to be profitable. Several other furnaces later adopted this system. John F. Steele, a partner in the Pine Grove Furnace, died suddenly in 1850 and was buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery at Pine Grove.^{xviii}

ⁱ *History of Lower Scioto Valley, Ohio*, (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1884), p. 217 [Note: This part of the article states that Rev. D. Rapp came and held meetings two times in 1831. This probably refers to Rev. Amadeus Rappe who was in Chillicothe in 1841 and he did come to Portsmouth twice in 1841.]

ⁱⁱ Local church histories, St. Mary Portsmouth archives

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- iii Edward Fenwick was born August 19, 1768, in St. Mary's County, Maryland.
- iv Rev. John H. Lamott, S.T.D., *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Mountel Press, 1921) p. 76
- v Mary Agnes McCann, M.A. of The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Ohio, *Archbishop Purcell and The Archdiocese of Cincinnati, A Study Based on Original Sources*, (Washington, D.C, June 1918) p. 17
- vi Before 1837, no direct documentation can be found for these baptisms. Father O'Mealy, pastor of the Church of Nativity, on Feb. 15, 1844, requests in a letter to Bishop Purcell that Catherine Bouvier and her younger half-sister be accepted in the orphanage in Cincinnati as their mother has just died in Portsmouth and their stepfather could not care for them. In that letter Fr. O'Mealy reminds Bishop Purcell that he had baptized Catherine.
- vii *The Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 16, 1834, p. 6
- viii Missionary Visit, *The Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 20, 1835. P. 5
- ix Rev. John H. Lamott, S.T.D., *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Mountel Press, 1921), p. 352
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- x Rev. John H. Lamott, S.T.D., *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Mountel Press, 1921), p. 353
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- xi St. Mary's Chillicothe, Ohio, Records from the Columbus Records Society May 1987
- xii St. Mary's Portsmouth, Ohio, Church Records
- xiii Diocese of Cincinnati Website, Stephen Enzweiler, Cathedral Historian 2019
- xiv Old St. Mary's website, Cincinnati, Ohio, <https://www.oldstmarys.org/about/our-shepherds/fr-joseph-ferneding/> Fr. Ferneding (1802-1872) was ordained in Bardstown, Kentucky in 1833. He was named Vicar General of the Cincinnati Diocese in 1844.
- xv St. Mary's Chillicothe parish baptismal records, Columbus Record Society newsletter, May 1987
- xvi Rev. John H. Lamott, S.T.D., *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Mountel Press, 1921), p. 359
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- xvii Website for Lawrence County, Ohio Furnaces
- xviii Sharon M. Kouns, *Pine Grove Furnace*, *The Lawrence Register*, <https://lawrencecountyohio.com/furnaces/pine-grove-furnace-2/>