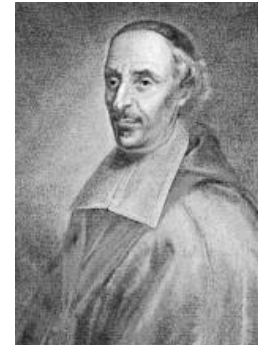


## The Beginning of the Catholic Faith in Scioto County before 1830 (Part 1)

Prior to 1632, Scioto County before it was Scioto County was part of the mission territory north of the Ohio River which was under the direct jurisdiction of the Holy See in Rome. The first Catholic missionaries who made their way into the northern territories of the new world were mostly from France. In 1632, when the Jesuits from the Rouen Diocese in France were the only missionaries left in the northern territory, the Bishop of Rouen claimed jurisdiction of the territory that contained the area of southern Ohio. In 1658, Bishop Francois de Laval of Montmorency (beatified 1980) was appointed vicar-apostolic of French North America returning jurisdiction to the Holy See in Rome under Pope Alexander VII. The Diocese of Quebec was erected in 1674 by Papal Bull issued by Pope Clement X and covered all the territory claimed by France in North America. This included what would later be known as the Northwest Territory (all of Ohio) and the Louisiana Purchase. Blessed Bishop Francois de Laval<sup>i</sup> (1623-1708) became the first bishop of the new Quebec Diocese.<sup>ii</sup>



*Bishop Francois de Laval*

...in 1749 Captain Pierre Joseph Celoron de Blainville made an expedition down the Allegheny and Ohio River, up the Miami, across to Fort Wayne, and down the Maumee River to Lake Erie. He placed lead plates at various locations to renew the claim of France to the Ohio watershed. With him was Rev. Joseph Pierre Bonnecamps, S.J., who probably offered the first Masses in what was to become the Diocese of Columbus, when the lead plates were buried at the mouths of the Muskingum and Scioto rivers.<sup>iii</sup>

The French expedition set up camp somewhere just east of the mouth of the Scioto River August 21, 1749. That location was about a mile west of the current mouth of the river. The expedition spent several days in camp, and it is assumed that Fr. Bonnecamps (1708-1815) took advantage of the stop and said the first Mass in Scioto County.

The Diocese of Quebec continued to care for the area north of the Ohio River even after the American Revolution. This included Scioto County which had become a part of the new United States. On November 25, 1784, the Holy See in Rome, appointed Rev. John Carroll, S. J. (1735-1815), as Prefect Apostolic in charge of the Apostolic Prefecture of the entire territory of the United States. Six years later, on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1790, Rev. John Carroll, S. J., was appointed the first bishop of the new Diocese of Baltimore and was officially given charge of the full land mass of the United States and what is now Scioto County.

In 1808, Pope Pius VII erected the new diocese of Bardstown which included Kentucky, Tennessee and temporarily the newly opened territory north of the Ohio River to the Canadian border. The first bishop was Rev. Benedict J. Flaget (1763-1850).<sup>iv</sup>

Settlement in the Ohio territory began in the early 1790's. French Catholic settlers were coming to the French Grant in Green Township beginning in 1795. Early settlers were finding homes at the mouth of the Little Scioto River. Scioto County was officially formed May 1, 1803, when Ohio was admitted as a state. The first town in Scioto County, Alexandria, to the west of the Scioto River on the flood plain was platted in 1799. Portsmouth was platted in 1803. Most of the residents of Alexandria after several

floods moved to the new site of Portsmouth. By 1810, Scioto County recorded a population of 3,399 individuals.<sup>v</sup>



*Fr. Stephen Badin*

As Catholic settlers came to Ohio, missionaries began to seek them out. Catholic families on the frontier sent many letters to Bishop Carroll asking that he send priests. One of the earliest letters came from Chillicothe. Some of the first known missionaries in southern Ohio were Father Stephen Badin, Father Edward Fenwick, O.P. and Father Nicholas Young, O.P.

In May 1793, Bishop Carroll ordained Rev. Stephen Badin as the first priest to be ordained in the United States. Father Badin was sent to the mission field of Kentucky near Bardstown. In late 1793, traveling by flatboat down the Ohio, he stopped at Gallipolis and spent three days with the French Catholics there. According to local St. Mary's Portsmouth history written in the 1890's, Father Badin said the first Mass in Portsmouth about 1812.<sup>vi</sup> In the next years, Father Badin made several visits to Portsmouth with his last visit and Mass said in spring of 1835.<sup>vii</sup>



*Rev. Benedict J. Flaget*

In 1808, Pope Pius VII erected the new diocese of Bardstown which included Kentucky, Tennessee and the newly opened territory north of the Ohio River to the Canadian border. The first bishop was Rev. Benedict J. Flaget (1763-1850).<sup>viii</sup>

Father Edward Fenwick, O.P. made his first trip into Ohio in 1808. He traveled along the Zane Trace from Limestone (now Maysville) through Chillicothe, Lancaster, and Somerset. At the request of Bishop Carroll, he located the family of Joseph Dittoe near Somerset.<sup>ix</sup> Fr. Fenwick would continue to visit this area of the state almost every year until 1817 when he and his newly ordained nephew, Father Nicholas Young, O.P. moved permanently to establish a house for Dominican friars in Somerset.<sup>x</sup> Dominicans from Somerset began to travel throughout Ohio looking for the many scattered Catholic families in the wilderness and the growing communities.

At the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Scioto County and Portsmouth located on the Ohio and Scioto rivers was a growing community and commerce center. By 1820, the county had 5,750<sup>xi</sup> residents and there were Catholics in Scioto County. Priests passing downriver or through the area would sometimes stop in Portsmouth and minister to Catholics according to local history. The first missionaries in Ohio, Father Edward Fenwick and Father Nicholas Young made many journeys throughout the state of Ohio and may have come through Scioto County looking for "Fenwick's stray sheep."

On June 19, 1821, Pope Pius VII erected the Diocese of Cincinnati which encompassed all of Ohio, but the appointment also included the pastoral care of Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and parts of Indiana. The first bishop was "the Apostle of Ohio" Rev. Edward Fenwick<sup>xii</sup>. In 1823, the new Bishop Fenwick made a trip to Europe to get help for his new diocese. After he lands in Bordeaux, France, he writes to Fr. Stephen Badin who is in Paris at the time. "When I first came to the State of Ohio, nine years ago, I discovered only three Catholic families from Limestone to Wheeling. Now the State contains not less than eight thousand. [...] The population of Ohio,



*Bishop Edward Fenwick*

according to the last census, is six hundred thousand souls. **Catholics can be found in every county**<sup>xiii</sup>; and I have met with many Germans and Swiss.”<sup>xiv</sup> By this time Bishop Fenwick and Father Young had traveled to every corner of the state many times as the only missionaries in Ohio since 1808 and very possibly had been in Scioto County more than once as noted in local history. While Bishop Fenwick was in Europe in 1823, Rev. John Hill, Rev. Stephen H. Montgomery, and Rev. Daniel J. O’Leary were three Dominican missionaries centered in Cincinnati who attended the Catholics scattered through the southern and the western half of the state of Ohio as far north as Lake Erie and into southern Indiana. At the same time in Somerset, Ohio, three more Dominican missionaries: Rev. N. D. Young, Rev. John B. V. De Raymaeker, and Rev. Thomas Martin were traveling through central and eastern portions of the state of Ohio in every direction including the Cleveland area.<sup>xv</sup>

Travel was becoming easier in Ohio as the nineteenth century grew older. Roads and turnpikes were being built and in 1811 steamboats were introduced to the Ohio River travel. By 1817, steamboats were beginning to regularly move passengers and freight up and down river. Bishop Fenwick boarded the steamboat Putnam on route to Wheeling to start his trip to Europe in 1823.<sup>xvi</sup> Steamboats made regular stops at both Portsmouth and Ironton. Catholics in Lawrence County were known to travel to Cincinnati each year to fulfill their Easter duties.<sup>xvii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Photo of Bishop Laval, [https://sanctoral.com/en/saints/francois\\_montmorency\\_laval.html](https://sanctoral.com/en/saints/francois_montmorency_laval.html)

<sup>ii</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913)/Archdiocese of Quebec, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Encyclopedia\\_\(1913\)/Archdiocese\\_of\\_Quebec](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Archdiocese_of_Quebec)

<sup>iii</sup> Donald M. Schlegel, *The Catholic Church in Ohio before 1868, Illustrated History of the Diocese of Columbus*, (Strasbourg, France: Editions du Signe, 2001), p. 7

<sup>iv</sup> Donald M. Schlegel, *The Catholic Church in Ohio before 1868, Illustrated History of the Diocese of Columbus*, (Strasbourg, France, Editions du Signe, 2001), p. 8

<sup>v</sup> Census Bulletin No. 41 Washington, D. C., January 28, 1901

<sup>vi</sup> The 1812 Mass has not been possible to document from a second source. Fr. Badin often traveled on the Ohio River. Sources do document that Fr. Badin traveled past Portsmouth on the Ohio River in 1793, when he stopped at Gallipolis; in 1808 when he returned from a trip to Baltimore; and in 1813 when he and Bishop Flaget returned from a trip to Baltimore. The more likely time for Father Badin saying a Mass in Portsmouth is 1813. Bishop Flaget’s diary for 1812, notes multiple discussion encounters with Badin in Kentucky during that year leaving little time for Fr. Badin to make a trip as far as Portsmouth. Their trip through Ohio on their way to Baltimore in 1812 did not take them through or by Portsmouth but along the Zane Trace through Maysville, Chillicothe, Lancaster, Somerset, and Wheeling. One history claimed that the 1812 date was used because it was documented that Father Badin was in Chillicothe in 1812. Bishop Flaget’s daily diary of this 1812 trip clearly shows that they did not go through Portsmouth.

<sup>vii</sup> Wel. Har., *St. Mary’s Church, Historical Sketch, Official Service Book*, (Owensboro, Kentucky: Church Publishing Company, 1907) Note: This historical sketch was written by “Wel. Har.” about 1899 for the Portsmouth Times. It appears to have been compiled from church records, oral history, and reports from local memories. The 1835 Mass by Fr. Badin in Portsmouth is documented by personal though unnamed witnesses and matches Fr. Badin’s travels at that time.

<sup>viii</sup> Donald M. Schlegel, *The Catholic Church in Ohio before 1868, Illustrated History of the Diocese of Columbus*, (Strasbourg, France, Editions du Signe, 2001), p. 8

<sup>ix</sup> Donald M. Schlegel, *The Catholic Church in Ohio before 1868, Illustrated History of the Diocese of Columbus*, (Strasbourg, France: Editions du Signe, 2001,) p. 8

<sup>x</sup> Mary Nona McGreal, O.P., *Dominicans at Home in Young Nation 1786-1865, Volume 1*, (Strasbourg, France: Editions du Signe, 2001,) chapter 6

<sup>xi</sup> Census Bulletin No. 41 Washington, D. C., January 28, 1901

<sup>xii</sup> Photo of Bishop Fenwick: Dominican Friars Province of St. Joseph website opeast.org

<sup>xiii</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>xiv</sup> M. J. Spalding, *Life and Times of Bishop Benedict Flaget*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Webb and Levering, 1852) p. 222

<sup>xv</sup> O’Daniel OP, S.T.M., V.F., *The Right Reverend Edward Dominic Fenwick OP*, 1929, p. 295

<sup>xvi</sup> Rev. John H. Lamott, S.T.D., *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Mountel Press, 1921), p. 54

<sup>xvii</sup> *The Catholic Telegraph*, January 14, 1843, p. 6