

## CHAPTER VII

### EARLY PAROCHIAL MINISTRY

#### § I. ST FERDINAND

A contemporary memorandum in the St. Louis archdiocesan archives records that "St Charles, St Ferdinand, Dardenne and the other missions were given to the Jesuits on June 3, 1823" Later, in September of the same year, Father Van Quickenborne informed the Jesuit superior in Maryland that Bishop Du Bourg approved his taking charge of St. Charles and the other parishes <sup>1</sup>

The assertion, a gratuitous one, may be met with that Father Sébastien-Louis Meurin, last survivor of the eighteenth-century Jesuits in the Mississippi Valley, was the first priest to exercise the ministry in the Creole settlement known as St Ferdinand de Florissant, but more generally as St Ferdinand or Florissant. Thirteen years after the passing of Father Meurin (1777) the church records of Florissant open with the interment in the parish-cemetery, November 9, 1790, of Hyacinthe La Mere (Lamaire), the ceremony taking place "*en presence de plusieurs de cette paroisse*" Very likely the organization of the parish was due to Father Bernard de Limpach, Capuchin pastor of St Louis, whence he withdrew to another field of labor in the November of 1789 <sup>2</sup> Already in 1789 a church and presbytery had been erected <sup>3</sup> On August 5, 1792, the Benedictine, Father Pierre Joseph Didier, then resident at St Charles, baptized Claude Pallot, this being the first entry in the parochial *Registre des Baptêmes*. Father Didier was followed in the care of the parish by the Recollect, Leander Lusson, the Capuchin, Thomas Flynn, and the diocesan priest, James Maxwell None of these clergymen, however, with the probable exception of Father Didier, made their residence at any time at Florissant <sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Van Quickenborne to Neale, Florissant, September 23, 1823 (B)

<sup>2</sup> J. Rothensteiner, "P. Bernard von Limpach und die Anfänge der Kirche in St. Louis," *Pastoral Blatt* (St. Louis), 52:113

<sup>3</sup> The first St Ferdinand's church, which continued to stand after the erection of the second church, the present one, was destroyed by fire in the summer of 1836

<sup>4</sup> According to testimony given by Hyacinthe Deshetres, builder of Florissant's first church, before Recorder of Land Titles Theodore Hunt in 1825, Dunand owned and cultivated a lot in Florissant about 1795 Hunt's *Minutes*, 1:6 (Library of Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis)

first resident pastors appear to have been the Trappist monks who arrived there in the spring of 1809, but departed thence some months later for Illinois where they settled at the well-known Big Mound on the outskirts of East St. Louis. From there Father Dunand and his brother priests made periodical visits to Florissant, Dunand continuing them after the departure of the Trappist group from Illinois, at which time he went to reside at St. Charles. In 1814 he took up his residence in Florissant. Here, endeared to the village folk, to whom he was familiarly known as the Father Prior from the circumstance that he had filled that post in the Trappist community, he continued to discharge the duties of pastor until April, 1820, when Father Charles De La Croix took charge of the parish.

Dunand's pastorate at Florissant saw the erection there under his superintendence of a convent of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. The building, which stood on an out-lot of the town between two creeks and on the line of St. François Street prolonged, was first occupied by the nuns in December, 1819. Two years later was built a new church, which adjoined the convent on the southwest. On February 19, 1821, Father De La Croix laid the corner-stone, which was a gift from Mother Duchesne. Florissant's second house of worship, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus under the invocation of St. Ferdinand and St. John Francis Regis, was solemnly blessed November 21, 1821.<sup>5</sup> With the church of red brick that thus arose under Father De La Croix's enterprising direction, Mother Duchesne had intimate associations. "During my illness," she wrote in her journal, "I felt sorry to die before I had erected a public oratory in honor of the Sacred Heart. I spoke of it to the Bishop and he decided that the church he is going to build at Florissant should be dedicated to the Sacred Heart, and to St. Ferdinand only in a secondary manner." The fervent nun had taken to heart the words Mother Barat had spoken to her on her departure for America. "If in the country where you are going you were to do no more than erect one altar to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it would be enough for your happiness in eternity."<sup>6</sup> The choice of the Jesuit saint, John Francis Regis, as one of the patrons of the new church, was likewise made in deference to Mother Duchesne, who had solicited this favor of Bishop Du Bourg.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that devotion to St. John Francis Regis had appeared at a still earlier period in the American West. Father Gravier, seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary

<sup>5</sup> Garraghan, *St. Ferdinand de Florissant*, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> Baunard, *Life of Mother Duchesne*, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> The history of Mother Duchesne's devotion to St. John Francis Regis is traced by her in a letter to Mother Barat, 1818. Marjorie Erskine, *Mother Philippine Duchesne* (New York, 1926), p. 346 *et seq.*

in the "Illinois country," found a relic of the saint the most potent of preservatives against malignant fever.

The transfer of St. Ferdinand parish to the Jesuits was effected as soon as circumstances allowed. Father De La Croix administered his last baptism in the church on June 4 and Father Van Quickenborne his first on June 19, 1823. On June 12 De La Croix noted in the baptismal register that after paying out six thousand dollars for the new church he had still three hundred and fifty-five dollars in debts, "which Mr. Van Quickenborne has the goodness to assume." Moreover, there were owing to the church some three hundred and eighty dollars which were to be paid in the course of the following year. "Mr. De La Croix left the affairs of the parish in good order," witnessed Van Quickenborne in the first letter sent by him from Florissant to Father Rosati, vicar-general for upper Louisiana. De La Croix must have left Florissant about the middle of June. He carried with him to the South a letter from Van Quickenborne announcing to Bishop Du Bourg the safe arrival of the Jesuits at Florissant.<sup>8</sup>

The parish of St. Ferdinand's was not conspicuous at this particular period for fervor or regularity of Catholic practice. The testimony of pioneer ecclesiastical observers points to no high level of Catholic life in most of the Creole settlements of upper Louisiana.<sup>9</sup> A nonchalant attitude towards the prescribed observances of the Church coupled with the almost total spiritual neglect in which the settlers were left through long periods of time owing to scarcity of priests had borne their fruits. Within a year after his arrival at Florissant the scholastic, Van Assche, wrote to his friend, De Nef, in Belgium that the manner of life led by the Catholics of the neighborhood was not in harmony with the faith they professed. At the same time there were many conversions and a better state of things could be hoped for. In particular, the Creole passion for dancing had considerably abated as a result of the severity with which Father Van Quickenborne had inveighed against it.<sup>10</sup> That the priests of the Jesuit community were beginning to make an impression on the villagers is further witnessed to by Mother Duchesne. "The revivals preached by the Fathers bring into the Church and then to the sacraments almost all the village. One hundred and sixty men have made their Easter Communion [1824]. On the feast of Corpus

<sup>8</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, September 8, 1823 (C)

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Flaget on his visit to St. Louis in 1814 was painfully impressed with the religious apathy of the people. Spalding, *Life of Bishop Flaget*, p. 134.

<sup>10</sup> Van Assche à De Nef, Florissant, 1824 (A). Balls and dancing, the favorite diversions of the Creoles, met with general disfavor from the clergy of the period. Bishop Flaget preached vehemently against the practice at Ste. Genevieve, September 21, 1814. Spalding, *op cit*, p. 138.

Christ; the procession followed by all the parishioners went along the streets and through the fields. The Blessed Sacrament rested on an altar erected in our oat field. These Fathers would convert a kingdom.”<sup>11</sup>

A contemporary account of the Fête-Dieu or Corpus Christi procession of 1825 in Florissant was penned by Mr. Van Assche

The following was the order of the procession. One of the Indian boys carried the cross, and then came four in surplices carrying little bells, and after them the rest. The Indians were followed by the boys of the Sunday schools and these by the women, next came the girls of the Sunday schools conducted by the nuns, then the boarders followed by their teachers and the other nuns, then the clergy, our Father Superior carrying the Blessed Sacrament and attended by deacon, sub-deacon, two chanters in copes and a master of ceremonies. To add to the beauty of the procession statues were carried by the children, who scattered flowers along the way while sacred hymns were sung alternately by the nuns and the scholastics. In the midst of a field adjoining the church an altar was fitted out with the finest decorations we could procure. It was guarded by more than twenty soldiers, several of them Protestants, who discharged their muskets before, during and after the Benediction. During the High Mass Rev. Father Superior explained the significance of the ceremonies and proved the doctrine of the Real Presence, at the same time exhorting the Catholics to show by their conduct the reality of their faith in the Blessed Sacrament. So moved were the Catholics by the preacher's words that they would have thrown a Protestant over the fence for not taking off his hat, had the fellow not taken to flight. That day our church was altogether too small. Some of the Protestants were so captivated by our ceremonies that they assured one of the Fathers they would never fail to be present on similar occasions. The procession would have marched through the village were it not that we feared some act of irreverence on account of so many Protestants living here. For this reason it took place on the property of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, all Protestants being required to uncover their heads before the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>12</sup>

Eight years later, on the Sunday within the octave of Corpus Christi, July 12, 1833, another Fête-Dieu procession took place, the details of which have come down to us. Father De Theux, superior of the Missouri Mission, was celebrant of the Mass, with Father Van Lommel, deacon, and Father Van Assche, sub-deacon. De Theux preached a French sermon and Van Lommel one in English. “I preached in English,” the latter informed a friend, “for almost an hour, proving the Real Presence (1) from the promise in John, VI, (2) from the promise fulfilled, (3) from the faith of the primitive church and of all

<sup>11</sup> Baunard, *op cit*, p. 261

<sup>12</sup> Van Assche à De Nef, Florissant, September 1, 1825 (A)

centuries down to the sixteenth, which I confirmed by the words and admissions of Luther (4) This faith is still that of all Christians, except the seventh part Mass began at ten o'clock It was two o'clock when we returned to the church. All of course were tired, but we did not mind the fatigue, so glad were we that everything passed off in so orderly a manner" <sup>13</sup>

An incident of note in the early church history of Florissant was the consecration of Father De La Croix's brick church by Bishop Rosati on September 2, 1832. The building of the edifice in 1821 had exhausted the slender resources of the parish and it was not until about eleven years later, in the spring of 1832, that the work of plastering was taken in hand It was due largely to the efforts of Father De Theux, when superior of the Missouri Mission, that the church was brought to completion He informed a friend in Europe

The church of St Ferdinand was built almost twelve years ago, but except for its windows and doors, altar and pews, it was more like a barn than a church It has just been plastered and solemnly consecrated on September 2nd last by Mgr. Rosati, our venerable Bishop It has cost us to finish it \$760, of which \$580 was furnished by a subscription made up by the Bishop, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart and the people, the remainder of the sum was paid by the Jesuit Fathers Unfortunately the weather on the day of consecration could not have been worse, still, everything was carried on according to the Pontifical and in the best of order Quite a number of people were in attendance, but we are convinced that more than two thousand would have been present had the weather not been so unfavorable <sup>14</sup>

The ceremony of consecration was complete in every rubrical detail It began at eight in the morning and ended at three in the afternoon. Despite a steady downpour of rain which lasted all day, crowds had come for the occasion from St. Louis and St Charles All the priests of the Missouri Mission were present with the exception of Fathers Van Quickenborne and Verreydt, who were absent on missionary duty, and Father De Smet, who remained in St Louis to look after the students of the college A decorative device much in vogue at the period was utilized by Fathers Elet and Van de Velde in their efforts to beautify the newly finished church They hung the walls with scrolls displaying Scripture texts, conspicuous among which was the one, "It is written, my house shall be a house of prayer" Father Van Lommel had been announced as the English and Father Verhaegen as the French preacher for the occasion, but the length of the ceremonies made it

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<sup>13</sup> Van Lommel ad Dziezozvinski, St Louis, July 12, 1832 (A)

<sup>14</sup> *Ann Prop*, 7 120

necessary to omit the set sermons. But Van Lommel at Bishop Rosati's request made a brief address, pointing out, with his customary fondness for orderly presentation, that the solemn dedication of a church is conformable to reason, to the precepts of the Old Law, and to the practice of the primitive church.<sup>15</sup>

The first Jesuit pastor to take up his residence at Florissant was Father Van Assche. He began to attend the parish in 1829, the first baptism there registered by him being dated April 19 of that year. At first he resided at the Seminary, walking to the village on Sundays to conduct the services and then walking back to the Seminary for breakfast, only to return on foot to the church for Vespers. This trying routine, which seems to have been insisted upon by Father De Theux, when superior of the mission, was done away with in 1832 by the Visitor, Father Kenney, and thenceforth Father Van Assche resided at Florissant.<sup>16</sup>

The presence of a pastor in their midst did not forthwith awaken the village-folk from their spiritual nonchalance. The mission chronicler for 1836, after observing that the truth of history demands that the failures as well as the successes of the ministers of religion be faithfully recorded, declares regretfully that the spiritual harvest gathered in at St. Charles and St. Ferdinand falls short of the harvest which the missionaries are blessed with at stations visited only at rare intervals during the year. In 1836 Bishop Rosati confirmed at Dardenne with great splendor of ceremonial and display of faith and piety among the people. The two following days he confirmed at St. Charles and St. Ferdinand, "but owing to the usual indifference and tepidity of the people the same pomp of ceremony and splendor of divine service had very few spectators."<sup>17</sup>

In September, 1835, Father De Theux opened a school for boys, which was taught by Brother De Meyer. At the same time the Religious of the Sacred Heart were providing education for girls, both boarders and day-scholars, the school for boys which they opened about 1824 having apparently been discontinued. Wetmore's *Gazetteer of Missouri*, 1837, refers to the boarding-school as "tastefully and beneficently managed by nuns, whose peculiar fitness for the pursuits to which they

<sup>15</sup> Van Lommel to Dzierzynski, September 20, 1832 (B)

<sup>16</sup> Hill, *Historical Sketch of the St. Louis University*, p. 40

<sup>17</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1836. The annalist deprecates especially the religious indifference of the male members of the parish, who associate with non-Catholics and spend nearly all their lives "*utmerando et navigando*." However, Houck, *A History of Missouri* (Chicago, 1908), 2: 279, gives a rather favorable view of the morals of the French Canadian *voyageurs* and *coureurs des bois*, saying that few of them drank to excess. Alvord adverted to the civic virtues of the early French habitants of western America "Cahokia Records" (*Illinois Historical Collections*, XIX)

have devoted themselves has secured to their institution well-deserved celebrity” The contemplated withdrawal of the Religious of the Sacred Heart from St Ferdinand in 1836 led De Theux to pen a protest to Bishop Rosati

Permit me, Monseigneur, to commend to your consideration an affair of very deep concern to the parish of St Ferdinand Madame Barat, so it appears, wishes to suppress the house of her Ladies at St Ferdinand, but, according to what I have been told, she would first know your sentiments on the subject I believe it accordingly to be my duty, seeing that the village is committed to the care of our Society, to observe to you that the suppression of the house would work very serious harm to the village of St Ferdinand unfortunately perverse enough already, and yet destined by its situation to develop shortly into a place of importance We should lose beside the prayers and good example of these Ladies and the day-school, which they decided to keep up regularly for the future and which, together with the boys’ school that I opened last September, ought to give the Father Missioner a great ascendancy over the whole parish In fine, who will keep up the church as neatly as they do? And what will their house be used for if they go? A tavern? I will not insist further *Fiat voluntas Dei et superiorum* <sup>18</sup>

Meantime, religious conditions in the village continued to be unsatisfactory as late as 1837. Father De Theux wrote in that year

In St Ferdinand there were twenty-six first communicants, of whom three were converts—but unhappily, First Communion over, the boys gradually leave off, at least in the course of the second year, approaching the Holy Table and even hearing Mass Hence your Reverence may easily draw the consequence, unless a miracle of grace takes place I see no means of reclaiming these unhappy people Thank God things go better in every way in our other parishes <sup>19</sup>

The *Annual Letters* of 1837 corroborate the account given by De Theux

Florissant in its pioneer days had long been without a resident priest Abuses accordingly crept in and the education of the children was totally neglected People grew to adult and even to extreme old age with scarcely a trace of religion about them Such fathers of families cannot be expected to have the religious education of their children at heart Unless the mothers, for the most part pious enough, bring the children to church, the bad example of the fathers will spoil them At the same time all are glad enough to receive the last sacraments The reformation of the parish must therefore begin with the children As to the Madames’ school, its pupils are easily distinguished from the other children by their perseverance in virtue.

<sup>18</sup> De Theux à Rosati, Florissant, March 15, 1836 (C)

<sup>19</sup> De Theux à ———, Florissant, July 16, 1837 (A)

The school for boys taught by a lay-brother might have more pupils, but the families live at a distance from the church, while the children are often without decent clothes and are needed for the farm and housework. Hence, after making their First Communion, they stay at home. "God commanded of old that Jeremias, the prophet, should stand at the gateway and harangue the people, saying to the sons of Israel, 'Hear ye the word of God.' Alas, in this place the preacher must needs issue forth from the church and visit taverns and houses and even explore the woods to find an audience."<sup>20</sup>

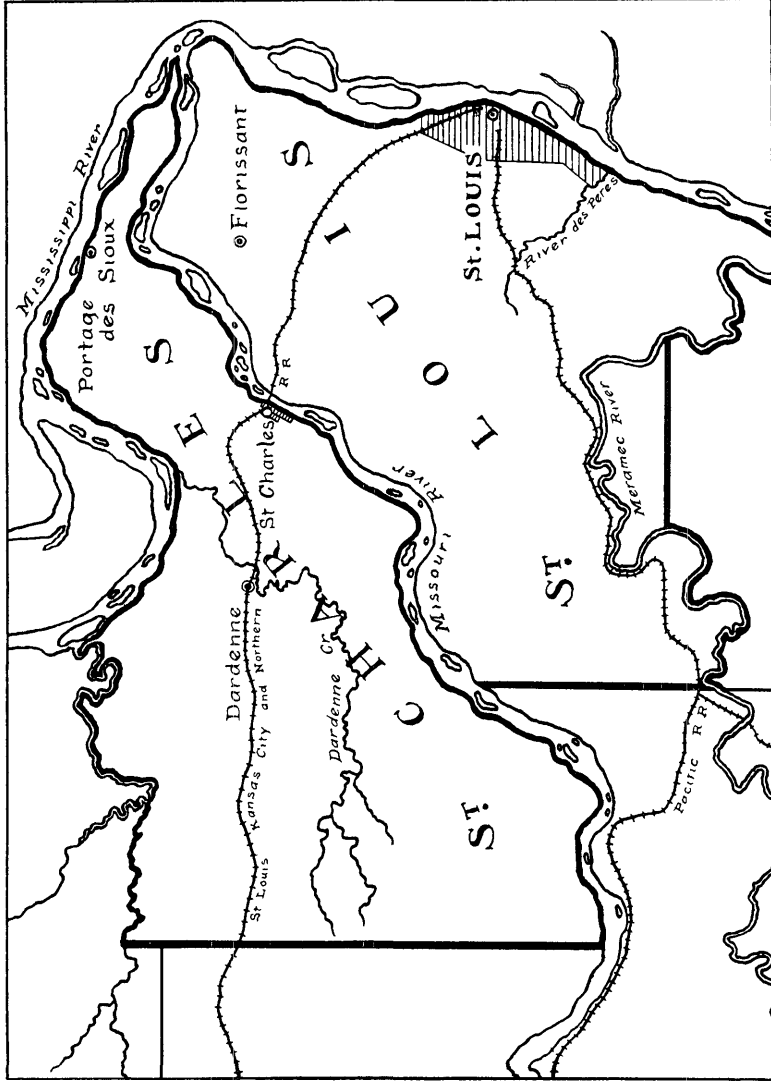
During the period May, 1835, to August, 1836, Father Van Assche was pastor at St. Charles, his place at Florissant being taken by Father James Busschots, S. J. After a stay of fifteen months at St. Charles he returned to Florissant, where he remained in charge of the parish until April, 1838, when he was called to be rector and master of novices at the novitiate. Meantime, the pastorate of St. Ferdinand's passed into the hands, first, of Father Victor Paillason (May, 1838-September, 1838) and then of Father John Gleizal (September, 1838-September, 1840).

Under Father Gleizal, who at this period was still a novice, having entered the Society as a priest in 1837, St. Ferdinand's parish felt within itself the pulsations of a new spiritual life. A two weeks' mission preached by him and a companion Jesuit in the course of 1838 marked the turning-point. "Father Gleizal," wrote Bishop Rosati in his diary, June 24, 1838, "gave a mission and quite a number returned to the practice of religion." Confessions were heard in large numbers and the dancing craze (*furor chorearum*), a typical Creole weakness, subsided notably. Among the results of the mission was the establishment of a Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel as also of a Sodality of the Blessed Virgin for the pupils of the convent school. At the reception of the sodalists on the first Sunday of Lent Bishop Rosati himself presided. In 1839 another mission was preached with similar success. In former

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<sup>20</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1837. "A critical sense will keep one from making strictures such as these the basis of unwarranted deductions. One can easily understand the unfavorable impression made by the parishioners and their nonchalant ways upon men like Fathers Van Quickenborne and De Theux, by whom the robust religious practice of the Catholic peasantry of their native Belgium was taken as a matter of course. Circumstances, while not excusing, often palliate the moral fault involved in neglect of the Church's commandments, in regard, for example, to the reception of the sacraments and attendance at Mass, and it is mainly in this connection rather than for serious breaches of morality that the parishioners are called to task. As regards the social virtues that make for security in life and property, for freedom from crime and general civic happiness, Florissant was at this period as at others an exemplary a community as could be found in the state." Garraghan, *St. Ferdinand de Florissant*, p. 222.





The four Missouri parishes, Florissant (St. Louis County), St. Charles, Portage des Sioux, and Dardenne (St. Charles County), with outlying stations, were taken over by the Jesuits in June, 1823. The railroads indicated on the map came only in the fifties. Compiled by G. J. Garraghan, drawn by J. P. Markoc



years scarcely two hundred made their Easter duty, this year the number of Easter communicants reached eight hundred. The Congregation of Mount Carmel a year after its inception numbered six hundred. In 1839 a Lady's chapel was built into the church on the southwest side, the five hundred dollars or more needed for its construction being contributed by the women-folk of Florissant and St. Louis. Thus did the parish awaken to a new life. As evidence of the increased concern of the parishioners for their religious welfare, the annalist for 1840 points to the circumstance that when in that year the pastor of St. Ferdinand, Father Gleizal, was assigned to the college about to be opened in Cincinnati, they were eager to retain his services and promptly signed their names to a petition to that effect addressed to the vice-provincial. Gleizal was succeeded at St. Ferdinand's in September, 1840, by Father James Cotting. In the following December Father Van Assche, who in the meantime had been transferred from the rectorship of the novitiate to the post of pastor in Portage des Sioux, St. Charles County, Missouri, returned once more to Florissant. Here, except for an intervening four-year tenure of the pastorate of St. Charles, he remained in charge of St. Ferdinand's parish until his death in 1877.<sup>21</sup>

#### § 2 ST. CHARLES

Of the Missouri parishes which the Jesuits took over in 1823 that of St. Charles was the most considerable. St. Charles, then a growing frontier town on the left bank of the Missouri twenty-one miles from its mouth, was founded at some unascertained date by a colony of French trappers and traders under the leadership of Louis Blanchette, known as *Le Chasseur*, "the hunter." For some years it went by the name of *Les Petites Côtes*, "The Little Hills," modified later into *Village des Côtes*, the "Village of the Hills," from its location on rising ground a short distance back from the Missouri.<sup>22</sup> At least as early as 1792 it was known as St. Charles, which name had become general by the time of the American occupation in 1804. As in the case of most French and Spanish settlements in America, the religious history of the place reaches back quite as far as its civil history. It has been conjectured on no very solid grounds that Father Meurin, last survivor of the eighteenth-century western Jesuits, exercised his priestly

<sup>21</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1838, 1839, 1840 (A)

<sup>22</sup> The census of 1787 calls the village "*establecimiento de las Pequeñas Cuestas*," "establishment of the Little Hills." Houck, *History of Missouri*, 280. A note of November 7, 1791, at the beginning of the burial register refers to the place as "*Village de St. Charles, paroisse de St. Louis aux Illinois*." Archives of St. Charles Borromeo Church, St. Charles, Mo.

functions in *Les Petites Côtes*<sup>23</sup> At a later period Father Gibault, "patriot-priest of the West," in all likelihood included St Charles in the wide-sweeping circuit of his ministry Then came a succession of Capuchins, Fathers Valentine, Hilary or Hilaire de Genevaux, and Bernard de Limpach, of whom the first and third resided in St Louis but made periodical visits to the outlying posts During Father de Limpach's incumbency, which extended, at least in St Louis, over the period 1776-1789, was probably built (c 1780) the rude structure of upright logs that was the first chapel in St Charles<sup>24</sup> In 1789 Father Le Dru *dit* Jacobin succeeded him in the care of the parishes of St Louis and the neighborhood After Le Dru came Father Pierre Joseph Didier, the first Benedictine to exercise the ministry in the United States. Appointed prefect-apostolic of a vast district, which was to include the French colony of Gallipolis on the Ohio River, he retired after a short residence at Gallipolis to the West, probably to St Charles It was apparently about the time of Didier's arrival in the West that the commandant of the village, Blanchette, replaced the first church, built some eleven years before, by a new church, also of logs, which stood on the west side of Main Street near Tompkins<sup>25</sup>

Before the end of 1793 Didier had shifted his residence to St Louis where the withdrawal of Le Dru had left a vacancy in the local

<sup>23</sup> J J Conway, S J, *Historical Sketch of the Church and Parish of St Charles Borromeo, St Charles, Mo*, 1892, pp 17, 18, discusses the evidence for Meurin's presence at St Charles

<sup>24</sup> Conway, *op cit*, p 23

<sup>25</sup> Conard (ed), *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri*, 5 421 But the church built by Blanchette c 1790 seems to have been only an enlargement of the original one Father Verhaegen says in a ms account (A) that Blanchette renewed and enlarged the original church three times and that the original church was still standing in 1825 Though Didier in the first baptism entered in the Florissant register signs himself *Curé de St Charles*, in the baptismal entries immediately following in the same register he signs himself *Curé de St Ferdinand* The writer has met with no conclusive evidence that Didier on his arrival in the West took up his residence at St Charles and not at Florissant The *St Charles Baptismal Register* opens with the baptism by Didier of Peter Beland, July 21, 1792 The first Catholic church in St Charles stood on block 28, between Jackson and Tompkins Streets, about twenty-five feet west of Main Street The church lot, which was a grant from the Spanish civil authorities, measured one hundred and sixty by two hundred and seventy feet The cemetery, west of the church on the same block, was dedicated December 7, 1789, by Lieut Governor Manuel Perez

According to Conard, *op cit*, 5 422, the Blanchette chapel was of frame Verhaegen in his account cited above says distinctly it was of logs Very probably the logs were clapboarded Lot 15 immediately east of lot 28 and bounded on one side by the river was also included in the grant of land made to the Catholics of St Charles for church purposes The original grant was confirmed by public record, May 18, 1825

pastorate In 1798 St Charles again received a resident pastor in the person of the Recollect, Father Leander Lusson. He was to be one of the twenty-three priests laboring in Louisiana who preferred to retire with the Spanish forces on the cession of that territory to the United States After his withdrawal St Charles had no resident priest until the arrival there about 1813 of the Trappist, Father Dunand During the nine or ten years that intervened the spiritual needs of the village were supplied successively by the visiting priests, Father Maxwell of Ste Genevieve, Missouri, the Capuchin, Father Thomas Flynn, of St Louis, and the Trappists, who from Florissant and later from Cahokia Mound in Illinois visited St. Charles during the years 1809-1813 Dunand did not accompany the main body of Trappists on their return to the eastern United States in 1813, but took up his residence in St Charles where he remained a year or two, subsequently moving to Florissant, from which place he made periodical visits to St Charles. Father B. Richard was resident pastor there in 1819, retaining this charge until about 1822, when he was transferred to Louisiana

Bishop Du Bourg, when he first came to St Louis, which was in 1818, thought St Charles had a great future before it "He put before us," said Mother Duchesne in August of that year, "the great advantages possessed by St Charles, which he expects will become one of the most important cities of North America, as it is situated on the Missouri River whose banks become daily more populated and which is about to give the name to a new state of the Union" The following month Mother Duchesne was writing from St Charles in a similar strain "The Bishop, whose gaze is ever on the distant future, considers this place as important, since it is the largest village on the Missouri and some miles from the junction of this river with the Mississippi. The Americans, who flock here from the East and are a restless people, hope that St Charles will be a great link of commerce between the United States and China, because the Upper Missouri is near another river which flows into the Pacific Ocean at a place whence the crossing to Asia by sea takes only two weeks" This dream of commercial greatness for St Charles never came true and the place is today less important relatively than it was in the days of Bishop Du Bourg and Mother Duchesne <sup>26</sup>

The first Jesuit to officiate in St Charles, apart from Father Meurin, whose connection with the place is highly problematical, was Father Peter Timmermans, who attended the place from Florissant two Sundays every month He baptized for the first time in St Charles on July 29, 1823, William Manly being the recipient of the sacrament.

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<sup>26</sup> Erskine, *Duchesne*, pp 166, 180

On January 19, 1824, he married Jean Baptiste Magdelaine and Susanne Corbeille. On Sunday, May 30, 1824, after conducting services in Blanchette's little chapel, Timmermans returned ill and exhausted to Florissant and on the next day was dead. The only Catholic priest now remaining in the immense territory west of St. Louis, Father Van Quickenborne, heard confessions and baptized twice a month at St. Charles and Portage des Sioux, not, however, on Sundays but on a week day. As a consequence, for almost eighteen months or until the ordination in 1826 of Fathers Verhaegen and Smedts, the people of these two parishes were without Sunday Mass. During the interval Messrs. Verhaegen and Elet, not yet priests, took turns in visiting St. Charles on Sundays, where they recited the Mass-prayers in French and delivered a short instruction to the congregation. Baptisms and funeral rites were often performed by laymen, while as for sick calls Van Quickenborne held himself in readiness to answer every summons.<sup>27</sup> Ordained to the priesthood in March, 1826, Father Verhaegen was immediately assigned as visiting missionary to the parishes of St. Charles and of Portage des Sioux and to three stations besides. His new duties were neither light nor pleasant. To cross the Missouri in a fragile skiff and ride over the country sometimes for a distance of thirty miles in answer to a sick call was an experience which he found it hard, so he declared, to describe adequately in words. In a letter to the Father General, Van Quickenborne sets forth the reasons why two of the young Jesuits shortly to be ordained should be stationed at St. Charles.

From a letter of Rev. Father Superior I infer that our scholastics, who are now theologians of the fourth year, are to be ordained about the end of the year. I venture again earnestly to beg your Very Reverend Paternity, as I have done before, to allow two of our men to be placed at St. Charles. St. Charles is a town situated on the left bank of the Missouri River, nearly all the inhabitants being Catholics. There are three other congregations at a distance of 10 or 12 miles from St. Charles. These congregations contain about 300 souls. Our seminary is situated off at one extremity, we are separated by a river, the roads are very bad for six months of the year and it is dangerous to cross the river. At St. Charles we are in the center with respect to the other congregations. A church will be built, the pew-rent will amply

<sup>27</sup> For data on Catholicism in St. Charles prior to the advent of the Jesuits cf. Conway's above-cited monograph. The burial-register of St. Charles Borromeo's Church records burials conducted by laymen between August 2 and November 7, 1824. In 1824 Father Van Quickenborne had contracts at fifteen dollars a year with Pierre Le Compte and Louis Bordeau (Borda), the latter of St. Charles, by which they engaged to ferry him across the Missouri in his ministerial trips, which service they were also to render to all such as had to cross the river to summon a priest.

suffice for the support of two priests and from this place, furthermore, the smaller congregations to be organized can be visited from time to time. The priests now lose all their time in making trips to bring the sacraments to the sick, and also ruin their health for they often have to go through deep water. For the same reason the children in those families cannot be properly instructed. The people complain that they have to come so far to call us for the sick and crossing the river makes these trips expensive both for them and us<sup>28</sup>

As to the spiritual condition of St Charles at this period, both Mother Duchesne and Father Verhaegen are one in deploring the careless, irregular ways of the townsfolk. The holy nun was shocked during her first stay in the place at the sight of drunken Indians, with their starving squaws and children, and of dissolute women parading the streets. The mixed bloods united in themselves the frailties of both races. The Creoles were nonchalant and pleasure-seeking, often leaving their children unbaptized and without religious instruction. "A few years ago," Mother Duchesne wrote in 1819, "the scenes this country presented resembled the Bacchanalian orgies of pagan days. Men and girls spent their time in dancing and drinking whiskey. Now appearances are improved, but the lives they live are as immoral as those of the savages."<sup>29</sup> "I do not hear regularly more than twenty confessions a month," wrote Father Verhaegen in 1827, at a time when the Catholic population of St Charles was about five hundred, "and I do not see how, without a change in circumstances, this number will increase. The French spend the spring, summer and fall on the river, finding thus their only means of support. During their absence, their wives almost perish of hunger and are often without decent dress, while the children are in a miserable state. When the voyageurs return, a mass of debts contracted during their absence has to be paid. I am convinced it will require a miracle for our missionaries to gather in anything like a spiritual harvest. For if, according to the old saw, occasion makes the thief, here navigation makes the devil. There are few men of genuine piety in this locality. So general indeed is the corruption among the river-men, that there is little room left for the good seed."<sup>30</sup> Even in 1836, thirteen years after the arrival of the Jesuits, the *Annual Letters* deplore

<sup>28</sup> Van Quickenborne ad Fortis, October 24, 1826 (AA)

<sup>29</sup> Baunard, *Duchesne*, p. 182

<sup>30</sup> Verhaegen ad Dzierzozynski, Florissant, November 7, 1827 (B). Verhaegen's account of the loose morals of the voyageurs or river-men finds corroboration in other sources. Thus John M. Peck, *New Guide for Emigrants in the West* (Boston, 1836) "The boatmen were proverbially lawless at every town and landing and indulged without restraint in every species of dissipation, debauchery, and excess." See, however, for a different estimate, Houck, *History of Missouri*, 2: 279, cited *supra*, note 17

the fact that the ministry of the fathers in St. Charles results in a smaller spiritual harvest than those gathered in remote stations, which they visit only at intervals during the year. The perverse disposition of the inhabitants is assigned as the chief cause of this spiritual barrenness. The men spend their time "in journeys by land and water" (*itinerando et navigando*). The preaching of a mission, especially in the winter, when the men are home, is suggested as a thing which may bring them to their senses, though unfortunately no such remedy can be applied on account of the small number of the fathers

Among the means employed by the Jesuit pastors to raise the level of Catholic life in St. Charles was the erection of a new church. Blanchette's log chapel, which stood near the corner of Main and Tompkins Streets and was the second Catholic church in the town, dated from about 1792. When Father Timmermans began to hold services in it in 1823, it was falling to pieces as were also the parish-churches of Portage des Sioux and Dardenne, though the last two were of comparatively recent construction. The poverty of the early settlers, Van Quickenborne commented in explanation of the fragile character of their early churches, did not permit of their erecting more solid and lasting structures. The scholastic Van Assche wrote to his friend, De Nef, in September, 1825

The churches of St. Charles and Portage, to put the matter as briefly and accurately as possible, are barns, not of stone but of wood, without foundation of any kind except a few stones placed under the joists to keep them from rotting. Our Superior has begun to make preparations for a new church of brick, but being still alone, he has so much to do that it will take him long to finish it, for the church will have to be built with alms, which at present he has not time to beg. It is, however, a real necessity as we fear that some fine day the old church will come down on our heads. I do not think that Messrs. Verhaegen and Elet will preach in it during the winter on account of the cold, for the windows are now without glass.<sup>31</sup>

Early in January, 1825, Van Quickenborne signified to Bishop Rosati his desire to build a new church at St. Charles

If I receive money from Europe, as I expect, I shall buy in the town of St. Charles a piece of property nine acres in extent, together with the house in which the Ladies of the Sacred Heart formerly resided. In that case I will build a church there and lease the land on which the old church now stands, if your Lordship approves the plan and the parishioners consent.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Van Assche à De Nef, September, 1825 (A)

<sup>32</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, January 9, 1825 (C)



Some weeks later Van Quickenborne was able to report to the Bishop that the consent of the parishioners to his new plan had been obtained

I have the pleasure of informing you that at a parish-meeting in St. Charles the trustees and all present named me sole administrator of the property of the church, to lease or rent it, the income to go to the curé, without there being any trustees in the future. The materials of the old church will be utilized in the construction of the new one, which will be built on ground belonging to Mme Marie Louise Duquette and purchased by me. They have all promised to subscribe. The church will be in brick or stone 70 feet long and 40 feet wide. May the Lord bring this to pass. I propose to go today to get their subscriptions<sup>33</sup>

Not long after his ordination to the priesthood in 1826 Father Verhaegen was commissioned by Father Van Quickenborne to superintend the building of the new church at St. Charles, a task which he took in hand without delay. The circumstances attending the erection of this, the third Catholic church in St. Charles, which before the building of Bishop Rosati's new cathedral was reputed the most imposing sacred edifice in the diocese of St. Louis, are set down in an English narrative by Father Verhaegen.

The old church made of logs was much too small for the Catholics and so rickety that it was unsafe to sit on the floor, which was rotten, and neither the roof nor walls could protect the interior from the rain and snow. The necessity of constructing a new church was of course most urgent. But how could the means be raised? The Catholic families, mostly French, were poor and we were equally so. Rev. Father Van Quickenborne, full of confidence in Providence, called a meeting of the Catholic families. He reminded them of the ruinous condition of their church and promised them to purchase a site for a new one on condition that they would cede to him the ground granted by the Spanish Government for church purposes at St. Charles, and contribute their respective mite towards the erection of the new sacred edifice. This proposition being accepted and carried into effect, he purchased the eligible property where the church now stands. The work of the building, to be eighty by forty feet exclusive of the Sacristy, was soon

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<sup>33</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, February 28, 1825 (C). Marie Louise Duquette conveyed to Father Van Quickenborne four squares or nine arpents which her husband, François Duquette, had acquired by grant from the Spanish Commandant, Zenon Trudeau, December 22, 1795. This property, now city blocks 64, 65, 94, 95, is bounded by Second, Fourth, Clark, and Decatur Streets. On the Second Street frontage of the property, about midway between Clark and Decatur Streets, Van Quickenborne built his stone church, which faced the river. Adjoining the church on the south the Religious of the Sacred Heart built their second convent in St. Charles.

after commenced. The Catholics and even many of the Protestant population made contributions in money and time and labor, but their combined subsidies did not amount to one thousand dollars, and the church was to cost upwards of five thousand. Strange to say the money came in proportion as it was needed, and in 1828 it was so far ready that it admitted of the divine service being celebrated within its walls and being solemnly dedicated by the Right Reverend Bishop Rosati. Whence Father Van Quickenborne received the funds is a secret, but it is supposed that he devoted to this undertaking a considerable portion of his patrimony, and was much aided by Belgian benefactors, so that he was enabled to pay off all the debts he had contracted. While the building was progressing towards completion he purchased a lot with a two story frame building situated on the banks of the river and about two hundred and fifty steps from the hill on which the church stands.<sup>34</sup> This dwelling was partially at least prepared for the dwelling of two of our Fathers. The disagreeable mission of Father Verhaegen was brought to an end and he returned to the house of St. Stanislaus.<sup>35</sup>

It needed a man of Verhaegen's resourcefulness to overcome the difficulties that beset the building of what was for that period so elaborate a structure. First, there was the question of funds, to secure which he begged in St. Louis, collecting in one day sixty dollars. He "cast aside all timidity," so he wrote to the Maryland superior, with the added comment, "these and similar experiences are a poor missionary's recreation and delight." Governor Miller of Missouri, then residing at St. Charles, the seat of the state government, subscribed ten dollars with

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<sup>34</sup> "All the consultors thought it was better to buy a house at St. Charles for Ours than to build one. In consequence, I bought one through Father Verhaegen. The house was examined by men of the profession. They said it was built of the best of materials, well framed and the mason's work in good order. Stone wall three feet above ground all around. The under story is plastered, the upper story is not finished, for it is only eight or nine years since it was built. Lot is 150 x 60 or 70, title indisputable, (and such is the one of the college lot.) It stands opposite the new church and is not farther from it than the old college [Georgetown] is from the house where Father De Theux used to live. It cost \$300. I have paid them. The house has six rooms and a very fine garret." Van Quickenborne to Dzierozynski, November 27, 1827 (B). July 25, 1828, Van Quickenborne acquired two strips of property making a frontage of one hundred and thirty-three feet on Main Street and running back three hundred feet to the Missouri River between Lewis and Decatur Streets. This tract (city block 6) apparently included the lot of which Van Quickenborne speaks in his letter cited above. In later years a house and school, both of brick, were built on the property. The priests' house stood about twenty feet from the curb of Main Street and ten feet from the line of Lewis. The school, twenty-five by sixty, stood on the N. W. corner of the same block. The site of both priests' house and school was later covered by the shops of the American Car and Foundry Company.

<sup>35</sup> (A)

a promise of more.<sup>36</sup> Besides the collection of funds, there was the problem of securing labor for the completion of the work Verhaegen, physically robust man that he was, worked with his own hands on the construction The Jesuits were indeed to a great extent their own architects, masons and builders<sup>37</sup> The difficulties that are wont to hamper building operations in our own day were not unknown to Verhaegen, who wrote to Father Dzierzynski November 7, 1827

The church is to be roofed in a few days No one who has never gone through the experience would believe how beset with difficulties is building in the State of Missouri Now one is without workingmen, now without wagons, now without materials I bespeak a stock of patience for one who undertakes a similar task in the future When I think, however, how much this little church is going to do for this town, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, I make light of past unpleasantnesses and by anticipation rise superior to those which are to come

The energetic pastor witnessed at length the completion of his task The church, begun in 1826 and roofed in 1827, was ready for occupancy in the fall of 1828<sup>38</sup> "It was built of stone and was very beautiful for the place. The façade was of cut stone, surmounted by a pretty cornice, which rested upon four handsome pilasters. The structure was

<sup>36</sup> Verhaegen ad Dzierzynski, Florissant, November 7, 1827 (B) In the fall of 1827 Bishop Rosati made his first episcopal visitation of St Charles The old church on Main Street was renovated for the occasion and the walls decorated with scrolls and scripture texts The Bishop administered confirmation to seventy-two persons, some of them adults Verhaegen ad Dzierzynski, Florissant, November 27, 1827 (B)

<sup>37</sup> Baunard, *op cit*, p 293 Patrick McKay and Hugh O'Neil, the latter the builder of Bishop Du Bourg's cathedral in St Louis, had contracts with Van Quickenborne for part construction of the church

<sup>38</sup> Even as late as March, 1828, Van Quickenborne was in doubt whether the church could be finished before the end of that year "They have begun to work on the church at St Charles, but I don't know whether it can be finished even this year unless aid comes from some quarter" Van Quickenborne à Rosati, Florissant, March 22, 1828 (C) The cost of the church was reckoned by Van Quickenborne at \$6455 and was met as follows

Contributions in cash from the Missouri Mission	\$3597 00
"      "      "      "      "  laity	858 00
Money value of labor rendered by the fathers	1500 00
"      "      "      "      "      "      parishioners	500 00

A munificent donation from friends of the Missouri Mission in France came at an opportune moment through Father Godinot, a French Jesuit "I received the \$1559 00," Van Quickenborne wrote to Dzierzynski, November 17, 1828, "just at the moment that I closed up the accounts of the church at St Charles Therefore there is a fine and solidly built church and a fine house bought, and no debts, but \$272 00 ahead" (B) Cf., however, the letter cited below of Van Quickenborne to Fortis, December 3, 1828

eighty feet long, forty wide and twenty-nine feet high, and the only church in the diocese which was plastered" <sup>39</sup>

On September 1 Father Van Quickenborne requested Bishop Rosati to fix a day for the consecration

The two paintings together with the precious gift of the body of the holy martyr Adeodatus reached us safely. The paintings will make a fine appearance. They will be abiding tokens of your kindness and of the obligations we are under in your regard. I have delayed writing to you so as to have the pleasure of announcing to you that the church of St. Charles will, without fail, be ready for consecration four weeks from now, the workmen tell us two or three weeks. The old church will be moved today and placed alongside our house where it will serve as a school. Fathers Smedts and Verreydt will be stationed at St. Charles and open there a free school for externs, in which Brother Henry [Reiselman] will teach catechism, reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic and some little geography. P. S. We should be pleased to have your Lordship fix the day for the consecration so that we may be able to publish it at least two weeks in advance <sup>40</sup>

The consecration of the new edifice by Bishop Rosati, October 12, 1828, was celebrated with all the splendor of ceremonial. The infant church in the West could command. Nine priests from the various missions, two seminarians, six Jesuit lay-brothers and a large concourse of the laity were in attendance. Mother Duchesne, who was present with Mothers Berthold, Mathevon and O'Connor, was deeply impressed with the event and sent news of it to Bishop Du Bourg in France.

On the 12th of October, the day your Lordship appointed to honor the Holy Angels, I assisted for the first time in my life at the consecration of a church. It was that of St. Charles, built by the Jesuits, who have consumed in its erection all the funds which they had received for their own support. It looks upon the Missouri and is built upon the site of your former garden, and just over the spot, from which you helped with your episcopal hands to pull up a young sapling. Mgr. [Rosati] performed the ceremony, assisted by all the Jesuits, two Lazarists and several young seminarians. Fathers De Theux and Dusaussay preached, one in English and the other in French, to a vast concourse before the church door. I never saw so grand a spectacle. Your beautiful dalmatics were used on the occasion. The following day his Lordship confirmed sixty-six persons and preached with wonderful fruit among the Protestants who listened to him <sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ann Prop*, 4 582

<sup>40</sup> Van Quickenborne to Rosati, Florissant, September 1, 1828 (C)

<sup>41</sup> *Ann Prop*, 3 572. Father Dusaussay was a nephew of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

With the idea, as he avowed, that his success at St. Charles with nothing to begin on might lead the Father General to authorize him to begin the long-delayed mission among the Indians, Father Van Quickenborne informed Father Fortis of what had been accomplished

At St Charles we have the prettiest church in the whole diocese It is made of cut stone . . . and is the first and only consecrated church in this diocese It is built on our property and everything is ours The Trustees have no claim to it They exercise their duties, but dependently on us in all things The place is very healthy Across from the church we have a roomy house, the finest in the whole city. Next to this house and also on our property, a school-building has been put up With the consent of Rev Father Superior I have stationed there two Fathers and one Brother . . . No doubt it will not be unpleasant news for your Paternity to hear how Divine Providence came to our aid When we began we did not have a penny I bought the very large piece of property on which the church is built On returning home the same day from St Charles, I found on my table almost the full amount of money needed to pay for the property. Of course I knew where it came from I let the contract for the building of the church and again I received on the same day a good sum of money as I also did still again from France and Belgium When the work was all finished, I found on casting up my accounts that I was \$1222 in debt and just at that very time the Bishop came with the news that he was going to receive exactly that sum from France from the Society of the Propagation of the Faith instituted there under the auspices of our illustrious benefactor, Bishop Du Bourg <sup>42</sup>

With the completion of the church Father Verhaegen retired to Florissant, and on August 15, 1828, Father John Baptist Smedts was installed as the first superior of the St Charles residence Some subsequent incidents of interest in the parish are detailed by Verhaegen in his manuscript narrative

Fathers J B Smedts and Felix Verreydt were the first permanently stationed at the St Charles Residence The former attended the St Charles congregation, and the latter was principally employed in visiting the remote missionary stations, being absent on sacerdotal duty, at a distance of from twelve to twenty miles from home, during several weeks many times in the year Father Smedts with most laudable zeal perfected by degrees what had been commenced at St Charles He improved the interior of the dwelling by providing it with decent furniture and he made a handsome vegetable garden, embellished by the planting of fruit trees and flowers in many species In process of time, after causing the usual pews to be made and elegantly painted, he adorned the altar by having stately pillars erected three on each side to support a wooden architrave and super-structure in the center of which a radiating black polished plate contains the word, Jehovah, in gilded

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<sup>42</sup> Van Quickenborne ad Fortis, December 3, 1828 (AA)

Hebrew letters. He also caused a beautiful pulpit and baptismal font to be constructed and among other improvements which it would be too long to mention, he procured an excellent organ. The logs of the old church were conveyed to the lot where the dwelling stands, and with them were made two apartments, one to serve for a kitchen, and the other for a school room. The school from that time on until now has been generally taught by one of our Lay-brothers. Father Van Quickenborne saw the necessity of providing for the religious education of the girls of the parish. Having obtained three members of the Society of the Sacred Heart, he gave them the use of the large but old frame house which stood on the north of the rear of the church, and there they commenced their humble but useful labors. With his usual energy he soon after commenced collecting means for the construction of a large two-story brick building, and when ready, he made over to them not only the building but enough ground necessary for a flower garden in front, a spacious vegetable garden by the side and an extensive garden in the rear, and adjoining to it an orchard and a field of about two acres. To the first building the Ladies of the Sacred Heart afterwards added another two-story brick building, connecting their establishment on the south with the sanctuary of the Church. Their community has increased to twelve members, their boarders are upwards to forty in number and their day scholars have averaged almost from the beginning sixty per year. To their care, under God, must be ascribed in a great measure the existence of the pious mothers of pious female children that are found in the parish and as they take care of the cleanliness of the church and sacristy, they have considerably promoted the beauty of the house of God.

In 1828 the Religious of the Sacred Heart had resumed their work in St. Charles after an interruption of nine years. Mother Duchesne, then at Florissant, records in her journal, March 25, 1828, that Father Van Quickenborne, just prior to his departure for his second excursion to the Osage, sent her a deed of donation of the house formerly occupied by the nuns at St. Charles, which he had recently bought for them, and which he now invited them to occupy.<sup>43</sup> The Mother General, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, anxious over the unpromising outlook for her society in France, accepted the invitation. She wrote, June 6, 1828, to Mother Duchesne: "We are threatened with great calamities. In case they overtake us, we shall send you subjects. This is an additional reason for accepting St. Charles." On June 15 Bishop Rosati, Father Van

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<sup>43</sup> Baunard, *op cit*, p. 293. The house and "two lots" deeded to the Religious of the Sacred Heart by Father Van Quickenborne were purchased in the first instance with money furnished by them for the purpose, so he informed his superior in the East. Hence there was no question of a donation in the proper sense of the term. The real nature of the transaction, however, remains somewhat obscure. Van Quickenborne to Dzierozynski, August 10, 1826 (B).

Quickenborne, and Mother Duchesne met in St Charles to arrange for the opening of the new residence. In October Mothers Berthold and Mathevon of St Louis joined Mother Duchesne at Florissant, whence the three nuns proceeded to St Charles in company with Bishop Rosati and his party, which included Van Quickenborne with some other Jesuits, and three diocesan priests. On the twelfth of the month the Bishop consecrated the church and on the Sunday following he blessed the new home of the nuns<sup>44</sup>

In 1833 Van Quickenborne, while superior of the St Charles residence, undertook to collect funds for a new building of brick to replace the old one of frame which the Religious of the Sacred Heart had been occupying since their return to St Charles in 1828. Father Verhaegen said in a letter "Our good Father Van Quickenborne is stationed at St. Charles. He is active as a bee. Madame Lucille's building is going to rack and ruin and he is determined not to prop it. He will have another house for this very useful community."<sup>45</sup> In August of the following year, Van Quickenborne acknowledged to Bishop Rosati the receipt of fifty Mass stipends to go to the building of the new convent. "They arrived just in time for we hadn't money enough to pay the bill for the scantlings. We now have the brick on the ground and have the lime, sand, boards and large timber all paid for. I have been dangerously ill for a week and have not succeeded yet in throwing off a little fever, which seems to be quite malignant."<sup>46</sup>

The building of a new convent at St. Charles now raised the question whether colored girls might be admitted as boarders in the institution. In September, 1834, Van Quickenborne, on behalf of the nuns, laid the matter before the Bishop.

[Rev.] Mr. D'hauw, curé of Natchitoches, offers to do all he can to send some colored girls to the convent of St Charles, and according to what he says and what Father Elet has told me, there is no doubt that he can succeed in getting them in numbers large enough to fill the house of Madame Lucille [Mathevon]. I take the liberty of proposing the question to your Lordship: would it be prudent to receive them and shall the offer be accepted? Madame Lucille desires nothing better. Madame Eugenie [Audé], when she was here, gave her approval (but she made no definite arrangements as regards St Charles). Madame Lucille assures me that Madame Barat will send some subjects and a little money. If the colored girls come, there will be no question of getting any white girls. The house would be exclusively for the former. However, the school for day pupils could be kept up separately. Moreover, they say you can scarcely notice anything

<sup>44</sup> Baunard, *op cit*, pp 293, 294.

<sup>45</sup> Verhaegen to McSherry, October 16, 1833 (B)

<sup>46</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, August 7, 1834 (C)

peculiar about these girls, as mulattoes have very little color Your Lordship's decision in the matter will relieve me of some embarrassment <sup>47</sup>

The education of colored girls by the nuns was not attempted, probably because Bishop Rosati did not lend his approval or because more mature consideration of the plan showed it to be impracticable The Religious of the Sacred Heart, having thus resumed educational work in St Charles, where they had opened their first American house in 1818, have continued it there down to our own day.

Among the contributions made by Van Quickenborne to the progress of Catholic education was the opening of a parish school in St. Charles, probably the first west of the Mississippi Catholic primary education in Missouri is of eighteenth-century origin St. Louis since 1774 had its private elementary school, for all purposes a Catholic institution, which as late as 1818, when Bishop Du Bourg opened his academy, was still under the management of its first teacher, Jean Baptiste Truteau <sup>48</sup> The Religious of the Sacred Heart opened in St. Charles in 1818, besides an academy and boarding school, a free school for girls. At Florissant, whither they removed in 1819, they had in 1824 two free schools in operation, one for girls and the other for boys About this same period the Jesuit scholastics, then pursuing their divinity studies at the Seminary, appear to have conducted something like grammar-school classes for the boys of Florissant. Wrote Mr Van Assche in September, 1825 "Only three of us can attend the High Mass on Sundays, two to teach catechism and conduct the Sunday School and one to accompany the Indians The Sunday School which is taught by two of our number is free to all the lads of the village on all Sundays and feast days of the year. Instruction is there given in reading, writing etc "

A free school for boys as an adjunct to the new church of St Charles was a project long cherished by Father Van Quickenborne Now that the church was finished, he solicited from Father Dzierozynski permission to open the school, at the same time suggesting Brother Henry Reiselman as a suitable teacher <sup>49</sup> Brother Reiselman was a member of the pioneer Jesuit group that came to Missouri in 1823. He had belonged to the migratory Trappist community settled in 1809 in Florissant, but had withdrawn from it at Cahokia Mound and made his way to Maryland, where he became a Jesuit Under his direction, accordingly, the parish school of St Charles Borromeo opened its doors

<sup>47</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, September 11, 1834 (C)

<sup>48</sup> J Thomas Scharf, *History of St Louis and County* (Philadelphia, 1883), 1 823

<sup>49</sup> September 1, 1828, Van Quickenborne informed Bishop Rosati that Brother Reiselman was to teach in the proposed school



with some thirty-five pupils. It was in successful operation as early as November, 1829, according to a report made by Van Quickenborne to the Maryland superior.

Our dearest Brother Henry began to be troubled again with his old complaint, so that he was unable to teach the boys. This lasted, I think, three months, during which time the Brother was with us at Florissant. Father Verreydt thought himself unqualified to teach the boys English. If the school had been interrupted, all of the boys would have gone over to the Protestant teacher or preacher. I ordered him to teach. He obeyed with alacrity to the great satisfaction of the pupils, and their remarkable progress. Now our good and zealous brother is restored to health. The average daily attendance of his school is never less than twenty-six.<sup>50</sup>

Father Van Quickenborne, touching on the situation in Portage des Sioux in 1829, expressed his mind to the Maryland superior on the subject of Catholic elementary schools. After saying that the people in Portage desire the same advantages as those enjoyed by St. Charles, to wit, a new church, a community of nuns, a school and a resident pastor, he proceeds:

All of our Fathers are of the opinion that schools like Brother Henry's are of the greatest importance, and without them the young in this poor region cannot be raised Catholics. Father De Theux has urged me almost to vexation to arrange with you for a school at Florissant, which I should like to do by all means, but cannot without your permission. In Portage two priests with a Brother for the school could subsist. Two Fathers in St. Charles would visit the parishes in Missouri, and two in Portage the parishes on the Mississippi. There are Irishmen who could be admitted as brothers among you and sent here after their novitiate to teach school. These schools would be for the smaller, the colleges for the larger boys, and all the youths would be instructed. I saw somewhere in the history of the Society that one of our Generals declared this to be in accordance with the spirit of the Institute.<sup>51</sup>

The success of the parish school at St. Charles encouraged the fathers to open a similar school in Florissant in 1835. These two institutions, the first, taught by Brother Michael Hoey with an attendance of forty pupils, and the second, by Brother Cornelius O'Leary

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<sup>50</sup> Van Quickenborne to Dzierzynski, November 13, 1829 (B) *Ann Prop*, 5:574. The new school-house at St. Charles was not quite finished in November, 1828. It was a "solid frame building" thirty-five by twenty-five feet and one and a half stories high. Van Quickenborne to Dzierzynski, November 17, 1828 (B).

<sup>51</sup> Van Quickenborne to Dzierzynski, November 13, 1829 (B).

with an attendance of twenty, were, it would seem, the only parochial schools for boys in 1836 in the diocese of St Louis <sup>52</sup>

With the building of the new church, the opening of the parish school, the return of the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the resumption of their educational work, religious conditions in St Charles began to improve. At Christmas, 1829, there were one hundred and fifty communicants. "A great part of the good done there," Father Van Quickenborne reported to Bishop Rosati, "must, under God, be attributed to the schools." <sup>53</sup>

### § 3 PORTAGE DES SIOUX

The physical aspect of the region in the vicinity of St Charles in Missouri points to the fact that at one time the Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers met much closer to that town than is the case today, the junction of the two streams having since gradually shifted to its present position. As a result of this change there has been left between the two river-channels a long narrow strip of land, the soil of which, ever since man began to cultivate it, has been notably fertile. The view that may be obtained of this low-lying bottom-land from the two conical mounds which rise on the outskirts of St Charles and were named by the fanciful Creoles *Les Mamelles* or "The Breasts" is one of panoramic sweep and beauty. Mention of it is frequent in early gazetteers and books of travel. Timothy Flint, Protestant clergyman and author of frontier travel-books, who resided in St. Charles before 1820, wrote of it "Here is presented an imposing view of the course of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers with their bluffs and towering cliffs, their ancient meandering banks, the Marais Croche lake, the mouth of the Illinois river and the vast prairie dotted here and there with farm-houses" <sup>54</sup> According to a standard gazetteer of the thirties, a traveller in the West who did not visit the *Mamelles* was considered "unfashionable" <sup>55</sup>

On the right bank of the Mississippi in the tongue of land between that river and the Missouri and about twelve miles northeast of St Charles is located the village of Portage des Sioux. Eight miles below on the opposite or Illinois side of the great waterway is the town of Alton

<sup>52</sup> *Catholic Almanac*, 1836 Cf also *Ann Prop*, 8 285

<sup>53</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, January 5, 1830 (C) Between 1827 and 1839 there were three hundred and forty first communions and three hundred and eighty confirmations in St. Charles. As late as 1839 preaching was both in French and English, while there was a German sermon once or twice a month.

<sup>54</sup> Flint, *Ten Years Residence in the Mississippi Valley*

<sup>55</sup> Cf Alphonso Wetmore, *Gazetteer of Missouri* (St Louis, 1837), p 249, for a description of the Mamelles. A glowing account of the country between St Charles and Portage des Sioux may also be read in Flagg (Thwaites [ed], *Early Western Travels*, XXVI, 272 et seq.)

while a few miles below Alton the Missouri empties its muddy tide into the Mississippi. Originally a Creole settlement, Portage des Sioux came to lose most of its Creole characteristics, American, German and Irish settlers having supplanted to a great extent the pioneer stock. Tradition connects the name of the place with an incident of early Indian warfare. A band of Sioux, who were at war with the Missouri, having come down the Mississippi in their canoes on a pillaging expedition, the latter lay in ambush at the mouth of the Missouri River expecting the invaders would pass that point. But the Sioux by a clever manoeuvre landed on the site of Portage, carried their canoes across the narrow tongue of land, a distance of about two miles, launched them in the Missouri, descended it and surprised the Missouri Indians in the rear. The attack met with success and the Sioux laden with spoils returned, as they had come, by way of Portage. The date of the occurrence, if indeed it be historical, cannot be ascertained, though it has been placed shortly before the founding of St. Louis in 1764.

The village of Portage des Sioux dates from the early spring of 1799 when François Saucier at the instance of Lieutenant-Governor Trudeau had the village laid out and fixed his residence therein with a colony of Creoles, who secured land grants from the Spanish authorities. François Saucier, who had been a resident of St. Charles, was appointed commandant of the new post, a position he held until the cession of Louisiana to the United States.<sup>56</sup> His daughter, Birgitte, whose birth took place in 1800, was the first white child born in the settlement.<sup>57</sup> Few data concerning Catholicity in Portage during the period prior to the arrival of the Jesuits are available. The first church, a rude wooden structure, was built in 1813 or more probably some years later, apparently through the efforts of Father Dunand, the Trappist pastor of Florissant. Father Gabriel Richard, the well-known pioneer priest of Michigan, visited Portage in 1821 subsequent to a stay of some days in Chicago, whither he had gone on behalf of the Potawatomi Indians to take part in the treaty proceedings under General Cass. Wishing to return to Detroit, but hearing that no boat would leave Chicago for that point before forty or fifty days, he determined to make the journey by way of the Illinois, Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. "I hoped to reach Detroit sooner by this route than by waiting for a boat. They sometimes descend the Illinois river in six or seven days, it took me seventeen and I arrived at Portage des Sioux only on October 4 at eight in the morning. I found there an excellent missionary, an Italian Lazarist, M. Acquaroni, who made me sing High Mass and preach the panegyric

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<sup>56</sup> Houck, *Missouri*, 2 89

<sup>57</sup> Conard, *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri*, 5 195. Elliott Lusby was the first white child born in Portage according to Houck, *op cit*, 2 91

of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron, I believe, of his newly erected church?"<sup>58</sup>

Immediately on their arrival at St. Ferdinand the Jesuits assumed charge of the congregation at Portage. The first baptism they administered there was that of François Rive, on June 13, 1823. The officiating priest was Father Timmermans, who on the same day married John C. Evans and Thérèse Saucier. Timmermans during the single year of his ministry in Missouri said Mass at Portage every other Sunday. After his colleague's death Van Quickenborne was accustomed to visit the place once a month on some day other than Sunday, so that the congregation was left without Sunday Mass until Father Smedts, the first Jesuit ordained in Missouri, was able to serve it, first from the Seminary and then from St. Charles. With the opening of the St. Charles residence in 1828 the mission of Portage des Sioux was served regularly from that quarter until in 1835 it received its first resident Jesuit pastor in the person of Father Verreydt.

Though the Jesuits took spiritual charge of the Portage congregation from the first days of their arrival in Missouri, it was not until 1827 that they were given possession of the church and presbytery. "I go to Portage once a month," Van Quickenborne informed Bishop Rosati early in 1825. "Things there go very slowly, but I do not despair."<sup>59</sup> Reluctance of the trustees to allow the temporalities of the parish to pass out of their hands appears to have been at the root of the trouble. But a settlement was reached in February, 1827. "The people of Portage, of their own accord," Van Quickenborne was able to report to the Bishop, "have all submitted to the propositions I made them. They agree that we take possession of the church, presbytery and cemetery."<sup>60</sup>

The mission annalists, who often deplore the lack of religious spirit in other Creole parishes, are unanimous in recording its presence in Portage. Father Van Quickenborne described the place in 1829 as an entirely Catholic settlement, its inhabitants excelling in religious fervor and scarcely one of them failing to discharge his Easter duty.<sup>61</sup> "Here

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<sup>58</sup> *Ann Prop*, 3: 347, 5: 575. Father Richard's words indicate a date for the building of the Portage des Sioux church not long before 1821. "The people of Portage still speak of him [Acquaroni] with the greatest praise. The effects he has produced by his instructions and his edifying ways must convince any one that he was a man of God. He must have taken particular care to instil piety into the hearts of youths for we had no mission in Missouri where the now old people of Portage were as well instructed in their religion and as pious as they are." Verreydt, *Memoirs* (A).

<sup>59</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, Florissant, November 9, 1825 (C).

<sup>60</sup> Van Quickenborne à Rosati, Florissant, February 6, 1827 (C).

<sup>61</sup> Van Quickenborne à Dzierzynski, November 13, 1829 (B).

if anywhere in Missouri," witness the *Annual Letters* for 1837, "the life of the first Christians is reproduced None can be called rich and there are few who do not have to toil for a living. Perhaps it is this circumstance which prevents vice from entering in and preserves the innocence of the inhabitants A Father attended by a lay-brother is stationed here He is poor among the poor but he is fortunate for all that seeing that those committed to his charge are rich in virtue" <sup>62</sup>

The priest of Portage des Sioux must have been hard put to it at times to provide even for his physical wants Referring to conditions in the parish in 1835, Father De Theux said that its pastor lived for the most part on the charity of benefactors, as the annual revenue of the church did not amount to fifty dollars Under such circumstances it is surprising that any attempt should have been made to build a new church, which a contemporary account describes as surpassing in beauty almost every other sacred edifice in the diocese of St Louis <sup>63</sup> The first church, a structure of frame, had outlived its usefulness in a few years <sup>64</sup> In 1825 Mr Van Assche had this to say about it in a letter to De Nef

The churches of Portage and St Charles are barns, not of stone, however, but of wood, without other foundation than a few stones placed under the joists to keep them from rotting The appointments of the Portage edifice consist of some benches, a hole in the wall between the sacristy and the choir to serve as a confessional and behind the altar a picture, the meaning of which I cannot make out for you, it is so badly disfigured The choir was at one time entirely hung with paper, at present, however, scarcely half of the paper remains on the walls There is no pulpit and so you must preach from the altar steps So shabby are the vestments, that you would not be allowed to use them in Flanders, and, to conclude, there is no chalice <sup>65</sup>

Already in 1829 Van Quickenborne in a report to his superior, Dzierozynski, was commenting on the desire of the people of Portage to have a new church and a resident pastor <sup>66</sup> By 1835, the old church had so fallen into decay that it had to be demolished and Mass was thereupon said in the presbytery Meanwhile Van Quickenborne, installed as pastor of St Charles, August 15, 1833, with the mission of

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<sup>62</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1837 (A) According to Father Van Assche, Portage surpassed in piety all other places in the neighborhood and would serve as a model for the villages of Catholic Flanders Van Assche à De Nef, Florissant, September 4, 1828 (A)

<sup>63</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1836 (A)

<sup>64</sup> *Ann Prop*, 5 575

<sup>65</sup> Van Assche à De Nef, Florissant, September 1, 1825 (A)

<sup>66</sup> Van Quickenborne ad Dzierozynski, November 13, 1829 (B)

Portage to attend, began to gather the materials for a new edifice, a task he soon relinquished into the hands of Father Verreydt, who on April 6, 1835, was appointed the first Jesuit resident pastor of Portage des Sioux.<sup>67</sup> On May 1 of the following year the cornerstone of the new church, dedicated like its predecessor to St Francis of Assisi, was solemnly blessed by Bishop Rosati, the Mass on the occasion being celebrated in the open air.<sup>68</sup> Work on the edifice, which was of brick and forty by eighty feet in dimensions, was at first delayed owing to the lack of carpenters and masons, but church and parochial residence, both of which were started at the same time, were practically finished in 1839.<sup>69</sup>

Father Van Assche in a letter to Belgium described in glowing terms the Holy Week and Corpus Christi services of 1828 at Portage, where he spent the Lent of that year in company with Father Smedts. The Holy Week services were in imitation of those at the cathedral of Mechlin. On Holy Thursday and all through the night till Good Friday morning, there was adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the pious parishioners taking their turns before the altar. Voyageurs, years away from the sacraments, returned to their religious duties, won over chiefly by the example and solicitations of their wives and children.<sup>70</sup> The Fête-Dieu or Corpus Christi procession of 1828 was another notable affair at Portage. Three altars richly decorated were erected for the occasion, a thing entailing much labor and, as Van Assche observes, supplying proof, if any were needed, of the piety of the people. A sermon by Van Quickenborne on the Real Presence made a deep impression on the Protestants who were present.<sup>71</sup> Noteworthy also in the annals of Portage was the reception given by the inhabitants to Bishop Rosati on the occasion of his first visit to the village, September 26, 1827. On the outskirts of the place a platform was erected and here the people gathered to greet the prelate as he approached. They welcomed him with salvos of firearms, a usual accompaniment of public religious celebrations in the early Creole villages, after which one of the parish boys mounted a platform and delivered an address of welcome in the form of "French verses elegantly composed." Father Smedts with two other ecclesiastics then offered the customary rubrical homage tendered to a

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<sup>67</sup> *Ann Prop*, 8 284. "For the last six weeks I have been staying here in the old presbytery, rather uncomfortable quarters indeed, superintending the erection of the church." Van Quickenborne ad Rosati, February 19, 1835 (C)

<sup>68</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1836 (A)

<sup>69</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1839 (A). The brick church in Portage des Sioux erected by the Jesuits, 1836-1839, was destroyed by fire in 1878.

<sup>70</sup> Van Assche à De Nef, Florissant, September 4, 1828 (A)

<sup>71</sup> *Idem* (A)

bishop on his visitation of a parish, whereupon the Te Deum was intoned and the procession moved towards the church. Here the parishioners had spent their best efforts to make the decorations worthy of the occasion. Festoons and garlands of wild flowers hung on all sides, while Scripture texts placarded at intervals suggested the sentiments of respect and loyalty due to the successors of the Apostles.<sup>72</sup>

Father Felix Verreydt was succeeded at Portage des Sioux in the summer of 1837 by Father Van Quickenborne, who had returned from his Kickapoo mission in a state of declining health.<sup>73</sup> The latter, of whom much still remains to be told, was but a few months at his new post when he died, August 17, 1837. He was succeeded by Father Aegidius Debruyn. Like his predecessor, Debruyn was to see only a brief incumbency at Portage. He was a Belgian by birth and a man of lively apostolic zeal. He had entered the Society of Jesus in Switzerland, but circumstances made it necessary for him to withdraw from its ranks. Coming to America, where he made most of his studies in a diocesan seminary, he was admitted to the novitiate at Florissant in 1832 and ordained a priest in 1837. He had long been a sufferer from a chronic intestinal disease, which his superior hoped might be relieved by the horseback riding and plentiful outdoor exercise of a missionary-priest. But his condition did not improve at Portage. On September 5, 1838, while in the throes of a severe attack of his ailment, he was summoned to a sick person five miles away from the residence. Wretched as was his own condition, he started off in the oppressive September heat, attended to the call and was returning home when increasing illness forced him to dismount. He tied his horse to a tree and lay down on the ground, where he was found by a man driving a cart in the direction of Portage. For some unaccountable reason, the man refused Father Debruyn's request for a seat in the cart, though he engaged to let the people of the town know of the father's condition. Some friends soon hastened to the priest's relief and brought him home in a conveyance. He lingered five days, preparing with edifying fervor for the end, which came on September 10, 1838. On the morrow he was buried at St. Charles alongside of his predecessor, Father Van Quickenborne.<sup>74</sup>

Father Debruyn's place was not permanently filled until the following summer when Father Van Assche, who on June 15, 1839, was succeeded as rector and master of novices at Florissant by Father De Vos, took up his residence at Portage. In the matter of health the

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<sup>72</sup> Van Assche à De Nef, Florissant, January 3, 1828 (A) Rosati's Diary Kenrick Seminary Archives

<sup>73</sup> Van Quickenborne had lived a few months at Portage in the first part of 1835 preparing the materials for the new church

<sup>74</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1838 (A)

experience of the Jesuit pastors of the place had not been a happy one Van Assche's two immediate predecessors at Portage had died there not long after their arrival, while he in turn, as well as his companion, Brother Donahoe, were in constant ill-health Father Verhaegen wrote to Bishop Rosati in August, 1839

I have just received a letter from Reverend Father De Vos, who informs me that the health of good Father Van Assche is so unsettled that there is great probability he will not be able to resume the exercise of the ministry for several weeks This circumstance puts me in a very embarrassing situation I have no one to replace him at Portage and Alton Besides, it is certain that this Father has conceived prejudices against a place where two of our men have died and two others are frequently sick I dare not send him back there and I think that this parish can be attended from St Charles This can be done conveniently enough by stationing another Father at the latter place But as for Alton, Monseigneur, I shall have no one at all And yet this is one of the most important posts in your diocese The inhabitants desire to have a priest among them and will provide for his support Permit me, then, Monseigneur, to recommend the place to you in a very special manner.<sup>75</sup>

Father Verhaegen's plan to close the residence at Portage des Sioux and have the parish attended from St Charles was carried out in the course of 1840 To meet the expenses of the priest who was to visit them twice a month, the Catholics of Portage stipulated to pay annually one hundred and fifty dollars<sup>76</sup> The parish of St Francis of Assisi was thus attended from St Charles until in 1875 it passed out of Jesuit hands into those of the diocesan clergy.

#### § 4 DARDENNE

The village of Dardenne, situated nine miles west of St Charles, takes its name from Dardenne Creek, a small tributary of the Mississippi<sup>77</sup> The name has been explained as being a corruption of *Terre*

<sup>75</sup> Verhaegen à Rosati, August 4, 1839 (C) Alton and Grafton in Illinois were both visited from Portage, the first-named place once a month Verhaegen wrote to Rosati, August 19, 1836, "It seems the work I began at Alton proceeds very slowly Some of the Catholics discouraged at seeing themselves without a church have left the town I regret it—but shall do for Alton everything I can" (C)

<sup>76</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1840 (A) Father Peter De Meester was sent to take charge of Portage September 3, 1875 Two weeks later a diocesan priest was appointed resident pastor, holding services for the first time on September 26, 1875

<sup>77</sup> Wetmore, *Gazetteer of Missouri*, 1837, lists Dardenne as a post-office in St Charles County, Mo, but does not enter it in a list of settlements or indicate its position on the accompanying map From Van Lommel's account cited below, one gathers that there were very few houses in proximity to the church Most of the parishioners were scattered along Dardenne Creek, on which, according to



*d'Inde* (*d'indon*?), "Turkey-land," from the circumstance that wild turkey was at one time plentiful in the neighborhood. More probably the name is derived from the Dardenne family, early pioneers in upper Louisiana.<sup>78</sup> The first church, which was of wood and dedicated to St. Peter, was built in 1819 at the instance of Father Dunand, the Florissant pastor, and, like those of St. Charles and Portage des Sioux, was after a few years of service badly out of repair.<sup>79</sup> The *Annual Letters* for 1827 note that one had to pick one's steps carefully from the doorway to sanctuary as so many boards of the flooring had fallen through. The Jesuits took charge of the parish in succession, though not immediate, to Father Richard, resident pastor at St. Charles, where his priestly virtues met with the admiration of Mother Duchesne.<sup>80</sup> Father Timmermans, whose energetic ministry was cut short by premature death, May 31, 1824, visited the place as often as a fifth Sunday occurred in the month and also on festivals of obligation not occurring on Sunday. He was the first Jesuit to serve the parish of Dardenne. The name of Father Felix Verreydt occurs more frequently than that of any other priest of the Missouri Mission in connection with the parish. As second *operarius* at St. Charles, he made bi-monthly visits to Dardenne during the years 1828 and 1829 and later from 1832 to 1835, and it was largely through his efforts that a new church was erected in 1835 to replace the old one, which was in a ruinous condition.

A letter of Father De Theux's touches on the new church in Dardenne.

Father Verreydt has succeeded in finishing his church of St. Peter, at least to the extent of being able to say Mass in it on the 29th of last March [1835]. A great number of persons assisted at the services. Ten children, very modest and well-prepared, made their First Communion, while two grown-up children, brought up in negative infidelity, together with a Protestant child were baptized on the same day. Since then the church has continued to be highly useful to a population scattered over five square miles (almost two of our leagues). The Holy Sacrifice is offered there once a month. It is possible that with time the needs of the people and the growing number of Catholics will require that a resident priest be stationed there. The church is of wood, but well constructed and when plastered will be a very handsome one for Missouri. It is strongly built too, and has already cost more than \$700. I suppose \$300 more will finish it.<sup>81</sup>

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Wetmore, the best timothy in the state was made. De Theux in 1831 speaks of Dardenne as "*ce petit village*."

<sup>78</sup> Houck, *op cit*, 2 97

<sup>79</sup> *Ann Prop*, 5 575

<sup>80</sup> Baunard, *op cit*, p 184

<sup>81</sup> *Ann Prop*, 8 285. In 1836 Dardenne was being visited twice a month from St. Charles.

Among the few incidents of the early history of the Dardenne parish that have been left on record is that of a three days' mission preached by Father John Van Lommel. This promising young Belgian priest, whose premature death was a deeply felt loss to the Missouri Mission, arrived in St. Louis in 1831. In the summer of the following year he gave evidence of his zeal by asking Father De Theux to assign him some missionary task, preferably in the most forlorn and spiritually destitute corner of the diocese. Whether De Theux meant the appointment which followed to be a literal response to the father's petition, one cannot say, but at all events the latter was directed to conduct a three days' mission in Dardenne. The exercises began on Saturday evening, August 13, as had been announced. Van Lommel never saw a more dreary spot. A few cabins scattered here and there made up the settlement, while the church had the appearance of a stable rather than a place of worship. But there was compensation in the circumstance that the fresh air coming in freely from all sides tempered the oppressive August heat.

After picking out a cabin in which to lodge, I entered the church. There was no need of a key for the door was wide open. Spying a small bell I began to ring it to see if I could summon one or other person. Father Verreydt had announced that the triduum would begin Saturday evening. After ringing the bell at intervals I gathered about fifteen hearers, partly French and partly Americans. I said to myself, this will never do. But remembering St. James' experience in Spain I took courage and began to preach in English, and as well as I could in French, a thing I never attempted before. I announced the regulations of the triduum, firmly resolved to speak three times a day in French and English even though there should be but a single hearer. But God, who does not place too great a strain upon the weak, came to my assistance at once. The next day there were about seventy, among them many Protestants, this was not so remarkable, but it was remarkable that on Monday and Tuesday the same gathering of about seventy should be present at the three exercises. There were thirty-eight communions (never so many before in Dardenne), fifty confessions and three baptisms of converts. I need not say that I returned from the excursion in high spirits.<sup>82</sup>

The population of Dardenne during the years that followed Van Lommel's mission went forward quickly. In 1831 there were scarcely ten families in the place, in 1837, there were sixty, numbering about four hundred souls. The increase was due chiefly to the tide of emigration, chiefly German, which rolled over St. Charles County during the thirties of the last century. The need of a better and larger church for the people of Dardenne was met, as recorded above, by the erection in

<sup>82</sup> Van Lommel to Dzierzynski, September 20, 1832 (B)

1835 of a new frame edifice surmounted by a steeple. Towards the cost of it the Missouri Mission contributed nine hundred dollars. In 1840 the interior of the church was finished and new pews were installed. Two years after its erection the church was found too small for the crowd of worshippers who flocked to it. The Catholic settlers in the Dardenne district were indeed a church-going people, and it was a matter of regret to Father Verhaegen, superior of the Missouri Mission, that he could not for lack of priests accede to their petition for a resident pastor. The piety of the parishioners is a matter of frequent comment in the *Annual Letters* of the period. In the Corpus Christi procession the men carried torches before the Blessed Sacrament as it was borne through the fields, while the roads were swept for the occasion and strewn with wild flowers and leaves.<sup>83</sup> Dardenne continued to be served by the Jesuit priests of St. Charles until 1850, when it was taken in charge by the diocesan clergy.

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<sup>83</sup> *Litterae Annuae*, 1836-1840 (A). A visit paid by Bishop Rosati to Dardenne in 1838 is recorded in his diary: "We arrived at Dardenne where Father De Bruyn had also gone from Portage. Some of the parishioners came three miles from the church on horseback to meet us and conduct us thither, the company formed near Mr. Frindley's house, welcomed us with salvos of cannon, led us to the church and there the cannon saluted us again. Mass was sung by the pastor, Father Walters, at the end of which I preached in English and after the singing of the hymn *Veni Creator* I confirmed twenty-three faithful of both sexes. Then I preached in French and gave the [usual] admonitions. We dined at Mr. Frindley's and returned to St. Charles after visiting Judge Spencer." A Jesuit, Father Frederick Hubner, was resident pastor in Dardenne for some months in 1849.