



# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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May 15: St. Dymphna

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*May crowning in the 1940s, at the Columbus State School*

## **In the Service of God's Little Ones: The Chaplains and the St. Dymphna Guild at Columbus State School**

by Donald M. Schlegel

[This article is not intended to be the complete story of the chaplains or the St. Dymphna Guild. It is based largely on the files of the Guild, which recently came into the possession of the Society. The full story awaits further investigation.]

### **The Columbus State School**

In 1857 an "asylum for the education of idiotic and imbecile youth" was established by the Ohio legislature. Using these terms, which we would

not use today, the legislature conceived the State Institution for Feeble Minded Youth. The institution opened in a large house on East Main Street in Columbus in 1857. In 1864 a permanent site stretching from West Broad Street to Sullivant Avenue at the edge of what became the Hilltop was purchased. "The site selected for the building is near the brink of the elevated plain, on the west side of the Scioto valley. The situation is a beautiful one, overlooking and presenting a fine view of the

city, while it is in plain view of the Capitol." A building to accommodate a maximum of 300 students was first occupied in 1868. By 1872 there were 288 students there.

Additional buildings were constructed and the population grew to 852 by the year 1890. By 1945, both the capacity and the number of residents had grown to about 2,200. That year the name of the institution was changed to the Columbus State School. The activities of the patients included school work (academic training, industrial training, occupational therapy, music, and physical education), recreational work, training in domestic work, and religious training (by both Catholic and Protestant clergymen and others).

### The Children

By the 1940s there were some 500 Catholic children at the school (this may have included the State Hospital, where the chaplain also served, and whose patients, because of their mental age, sometimes were referred to as children). Children as young as six years old were sent to the State School. Though the development of their mental or nervous systems was not up to normal standards, nothing was necessarily wanting in their spiritual development. Several statements of chaplains and parents survive that attest to their simplicity, but also to their growth in this area.

Parents, if distraught, might be advised not to despair over the child's condition. "Remember God made him that way, and God's ways are always right. When you pray, pray that God's will be done. If you accept the crosses He sends with a prayer you will find the crosses will always turn out to be blessings. As in the case of your son. You have much to be thankful for. You know when God sees fit to call him he will go with a clean mind and a clean heart. He will be pure in His sight and who of us can hope to equal

his position.... Many mothers with normal children have seen them go to penal institutions for some great crime.... How many mothers would gladly exchange sons with you. So be thankful for the many graces and blessings that He sends you. Keep right on praying that He will grant you the grace and courage to carry on and do His will." Another chaplain wrote, more simply, "Certainly we know that because of his mental ability it is doubtful if he would ever even have the ability to commit a mortal sin. In his Baptismal innocence the Gates of Heaven will open wide to receive him."

The children's understanding of God could be very good; some would love to go to Mass and were faithful in prayer and close to God. As a result of this spirit, they were very affectionate, extremely appreciative of even the smallest gift, and acutely conscious of right and wrong. Father Karl said of the children, "Their hearts are as big as they are. They live up to Christian ideals more than others. They overlook deformities or handicaps. They're wonderful. ...The kids are spiritually wealthy whether they're six or 85 because they are unselfish and live with the idea of 'how can I help.'" Because of their awareness of their faults, according to Chaplain McConville, some of the students often made better Confessions than those on the outside.

### The Parents

Once a child was admitted to the School, communication between child and parents was not always easy. The staff apparently did not communicate with parents concerning the children, or at least not frequently. All letters going into or out of the school were censored, and children were not permitted to write unless they received a letter, and then only every thirty days. For some families, the admission of the child to the School represented the first real separation and was very difficult to accept. Some parents felt a sense of guilt that they could

not raise their child at home. Many times, however, the children were "put here and forgotten" and the chaplains would urge parents to write often to the children to keep up their spirits. The gift of a prayer book and rosary from a parent could make a child feel very happy and proud, though of course it hurt for those whose parents had not sent a gift. (The latter would be supplied with little gifts from a fund built up of small donations to the St. Dymphna Guild.)

It seems that, while many were from normal families, many others were from broken homes, homes with mixed marriages, homes with other troubles such as health problems and no money or means of transportation to make visits to Columbus. The School rules did not make it easy for working parents who lived in distant parts of the state, for visiting hours were every day *except* Sundays and holidays, except that visits were allowed on the last two Sundays of June. Special arrangements had to be made for parents to visit on the Sunday of First Communion.

Most parents were very grateful for and comforted by the work of the chaplains and their helpers. Religious training was on the minds of many of them and they were glad that special training would be available. In some cases, religious training had already been provided, but in others the special needs of the child had been beyond the capabilities of the parents and parishes.

There even were religious conversions within the School. Sometimes, families outside the institutions became Catholics and wanted their children inside to make the same change. In other instances, the child was attracted to the Church by the chaplain, the services, or the Catholic children. In some of these cases, coincidentally, a conversion was also taking place in the family at home and the child's conversion was facilitated. Sometimes a child would claim to be Catholic, but if he had been

long institutionalized or under foster care, great difficulty was had in finding any record of Catholic baptism and sometimes conditional baptism was necessary.

The child, or even adult in the condition of many of the residents at the Hospital, could not be baptized without the permission of parents or guardian, along with some assurance of their moral support and continuous interest, in case he would be released at some future date. Sometimes the parents were overjoyed that the child had expressed an interest in any religion and readily gave permission for baptism as a Catholic. Others, approached by letter by the Catholic chaplain, responded vehemently in the negative.

In at least one instance, the family was of the Greek Orthodox Church. They spoke to their priest, who "explained...that since our religions are so similar, that we would appreciate your giving her the courage and spiritual guidance she seeks & needs. [The priest] is writing to the Orthodox Priest in Columbus to see her & give her the Communion of our church, but as for literature & guidance, please do not deny her, for I'm sure her faith is what keeps her from day to day."

It was the policy not to baptize until at least a year of instruction was given and the person had proven sincerity. Up to four years might be needed to give a child sufficient doctrine.

### The Chaplains

Many of the chaplains of the State School also were chaplains for the Columbus State Hospital, which was located on the north side of Broad Street, having been established there in 1877 to house the insane.

The earliest chaplain we know of was Rev. Ambrose W. Schilling, who was chaplain at least

from May, 1931 until March, 1939. He kept his records at St. Aloysius Parish. He lived at St. Charles Seminary from 1930 until 1939. In 1939 he was appointed pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Ironton, and in 1955 he moved on to St. Bernard in Beverly. He died March 21, 1968.

The next chaplain was Rev. Francis J. Schwendeman, who signed the baptismal register from 1939 until 1947. He likewise lived and taught at St. Charles and, beginning in 1945, served the diocese as Vice Chancellor. His burial register is titled, "St. Aloysius Mission (State Institution Feeble-minded)." The "kids" were "crazy about" Father Schwendeman. (Msgr. Schwendeman is now retired and lives near Marietta.)

Father Schwendeman was followed by Rev. Robert M. Harwick (1912-1993), who was chaplain of the School from March of 1948 until August 31, 1951. During that time he also was Superintendent of Diocesan Schools and chaplain at Grant Hospital and made his home at Holy Cross parish. The proportion of younger children (from six to fourteen years) admitted to the School increased in the 1940s and Father Harwick began the practice of admitting these younger children to baptism there.

In addition to the normal priestly duties, the chaplaincy placed other burdens on these men that were not carried by pastors of parishes. The chaplain functioned as intermediary between parents and children, when other lines of communication failed. He would write letters for patients who had not heard from parents, or tell parents how little ones were, when the parents could not come to Columbus and no one else had bothered to tell them.

The residents at the School presented special problems to the chaplains in determining their sacramental status. Investigations of this nature form a large part of the surviving records of the

St. Dymphna Guild. Despite vigorous efforts, sometimes a child "fell through the cracks." One Catholic boy's record erroneously said he was a Protestant. No sacraments were provided and he did not receive the last rites when he died there in 1970. The chaplain apparently was very upset when he found out "that someone denied him the rights and privileges of his faith," and at least provided a Catholic burial for him.

#### The St. Dymphna Guild and Religious Education

It apparently was Father Schwendeman who formed the Guild under the protection of St. Dymphna, the saint of Ireland and Belgium who is patroness of the mentally ill, to assist the work with the residents at the State Hospital and especially with the children at the State School. The purposes of the Guild included providing the necessities of the chapel, the articles for divine services, religious articles such as rosaries, prayer books, and medals for the children, and gifts for them at Christmas and Easter. The members, or at least the secretary, also assisted the chaplain with his correspondence and in tracking down the sacramental records of the children. The Guild was supported by the redemption of Ohio sales tax stamps and by the dues of the associate members, who were parents and friends of the students, of one dollar per year. Mention was made in 1946 of a "booklet to St. Dymphna" but no copy has come into the Society's possession at this time.

The only members of the Guild of the 1940s whose names are known to us are Miss Mary E. Bentz, the secretary, and Miss Susan Price. Miss Bentz helped with the correspondence, ushering, catechetics, etc. at the School for many years. In 1950 she donated a chalice to the School chapel in memory of her mother.

Some of the children, though Catholics, had never attended church regularly nor received any



religious training, because of their condition. At the School they received the attention of the chaplains, the volunteers, and a small band of Sisters. This religious education helped the children even when everything else would fail. "Everyone tries to help the mentally retarded: mother and father find a child does not fit into the family picture so they help him out by putting him in an institution. Social workers and counselors help out by getting him in the institution. The kid feels rejected. The church is the only place they find help. Religion gives them the opportunity to see how they ought to be."

Beginning in the 1930s, four Sisters of Mercy who taught at Holy Family School worked with the volunteers and children on Sundays. The names of two of these, Sister M. Prisca and Sister M. Joachim (now Sister Therese Marie), have been documented, and Sister Prisca mentions that Sister Mary Edwin also was regularly assigned to teach at the School. Someone would

arrive at the convent, on Skidmore Street behind Holy Family Church, and take them to the School. The attendants would bring the children in to be taught and after about twenty minutes everyone would file in for Mass. After Mass was over, the attendants were there to take the children back out. During the summers, the Sisters were away and the Sunday school was suspended.

About 1949 a new program of instruction was instituted and smaller classes were formed in which the slower students, it was hoped, would learn sufficient knowledge to permit their receiving Holy Communion. The educational process usually was slow. According to one of the chaplains, "You must say the same thing many times before the youngsters grasp the idea. If you succeed in teaching them one prayer a month -- then that is real progress." And yet, four boys learned the Latin responses for Mass and served at the altar regularly until they went home.



*Christmas, 1949 in the State School "chapel"*

## Religious Services

As a result of these efforts, a complete round of religious services was provided for and participated in by the students. The School had a Saint Dymphna Chapel in the 1940s. Mass was offered every Sunday and all the Catholic children who were able were permitted to come. They participated in the Mass with congregational prayers and singing. When it was decided that a child had a sufficient knowledge of his religious beliefs, he or she was admitted to the Sacraments once a month or more often. Those children who were not able to attend Mass were given the same care and attention. The chaplain was always on call in case a child got sick and the School cooperated with him very nicely in this regard. At various seasons of the year the traditional Catholic devotions were conducted, such as the May Procession, Way of the Cross, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

May 7, 1944 the School experienced perhaps its finest hour of Catholic liturgy, when for the only time in the history of the institution the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered there. Bishop Hartley had always insisted that the children be taken to the Cathedral or a parish church for this ceremony, but the class of 1944 was so large, numbering 109, that Bishop Hettinger consented to come to the chapel. The small chapel was so crowded that the parents could not be invited. Bishop Hettinger did not shirk the normal procedure, and asked the students questions, "and he asked some hard ones, too." The children never faltered and in the end the Bishop said the class's ceremony "was the most perfect he had ever conducted." Needless to say, the chaplain and secretary of the St. Dymphna Guild were overjoyed.

The May procession of 1945 also was quite a production. In a letter to a friend in Toledo Mary Bentz wrote, "We had our May procession and crowning of the Queen on the lawn at the Institution yesterday. The weather was perfect

after a week of rain. There were between three and four hundred children in the procession. ...one of your girls from Toledo did the crowning assisted by eighteen other girls in her class all dressed in full length dresses and wore flowers in their hair. All dresses were donated and they were beautiful."

(To be concluded)

## SOURCES

We are extremely grateful to Miss Kitty Bentz and Patti Bentz, who supplied the photographs used with this article, and to Sister M. Prisca, R.S.M., who wrote to us concerning the service of her order at the School.

In addition to the St. Dymphna Guild files, these sources were consulted for this portion of the article:

Studer, Jacob, *Columbus, Ohio: Its History, Resources, and Progress*; Columbus, 1873, pp 363ff.

Lee, Alfred, *History of the City of Columbus*, 1892, II/619

*The Columbus Dispatch*, Sept 7, 1974)

*The Catholic Times*, July 9, 1954

*State of Ohio, Department of Public Welfare, Twenty-fourth Annual Report for the year ended December 31, 1945*; pages 431 and 434.



## St. Luke Parish, Danville, Ohio Baptisms and Marriages, 1829-1842

(Continued, from Vol. XXII, No. 4)

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10 March, 1837, Noe Sylvester [Boyle] s/o Daniel Boyle & Anna Boyle or Edgington Sps: David Boyle. Alleman

same day, Maria [Boyle] d/o Daniel Boyle & Anna Boyle or Edgington Sps: Jacob Boyle. Alleman

18 January, 1837, Rebecca Maria [McKenzie] d/o Moses McKenzie & Hester McKenzie or Sapp Sps: Daniel Logue & Honora Logue. Alleman

same day, Lewis [McKenzie] s/o Gabriel McKenzie & Anna [Nancy] McKenzie or Logue Sps: Moses McKenzie & Esther McKenzie. Alleman

same day, Joseph [White] illeg s/o Joseph White & Susanna Sapp Sps: Daniel Logue & Anna Blubaugh. Alleman

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18 January, Rachel Margaret [McGough] d/o Henry McGough & Margaret [Arnold] McGough Sps: Benjamin Blubaugh & Eliza Blubaugh. Alleman

16 March, Joseph [Logue] s/o Richard Logue & Catherine Logue or Sapp Sps: Stephen Blubaugh & Honora Blubaugh. Alleman

same day, John Valentine [Porter] s/o John Porter & Rachel Porter or Arnold Sps: Nathan Majors [Magers] & Winifred Majors [Magers]. Alleman

same day, Phillip [Dial] s/o George Dial and Margaret Dial or Logue Sps: George Sapp & Maria McKenzie. Alleman

19 March, John Baptist [Spiker] s/o Jacob Spiker & Eva Spiker or Winebrenner Sps John Baptist Durbin & Catherine Durbin or King. Alleman

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20 March, John Baptist [McKenzie] s/o Nathan McKenzie & Eliza McKenzie or "Magers" Sps: John Durbin & Anna Sapp. Alleman

30 July, Sara Agnes [Durbin] d/o Basil Durbin & Abigail [Aparilla] Durbin or Buckingham

Sps: John Durbin & Sara Buckingham. Alleman

same day, Rebecca [McKenzie] d/o James McKenzie & E.[Elsie] McKenzie or Arnold Sps: Thomas Porter & Maria Porter. Alleman

same day, Maria Catherine [Durbin] d/o John Durbin & Maria Durbin or Winburner [Winebrenner] Sps: Nathan Magers & Winifred Magers. Alleman

18 August, George [Logsdon] s/o David Logstone [Logsdon] and Rebecca or Uhl Sps: Nathan Magers & Winifred Magers. Alleman

22 August, Ann Joan [Porter] d/o David Porter & Lydia Sapp. Sps: Martha Sapp. F.J.H. Clarkson

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23 August, Edward Landon [Welker] s/o Solomon Welker & Elizabeth Richardson Sps: Anna Sapp. J.H. Clarkson, O.P.

same day, Edmund Virtue Brent. JHC

### 1838

14 January, John Arnold s/o John Arnold & Christina Sapp Sps: Simeon Sapp & Sara Durbin. Mich. M'Aleer

15 January, Martha Frances Ecke[n]rode d/o Henry Eckenrode & Maria Case Sps: Basil H Durbin & Apperilla Durbin. MM'A

same day, George Trellinger [Trullinger] s/o George Trellinger & Honora Durbin Sps: John Durbin & Maria Durbin. MM'A

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15 January, Solomon Sapp s/o Levi Sapp & Maria Colopy Sps: E. V. Brent & Mary Ann Sapp. MM'A

16 January, John Magers s/o William Magers & Margaret Sapp Sps: Nathan Magers & Winifred Magers. MM'A

fragment 4 [in hand of Father M'Aleer]  
Sarah Margaret Bricker born 7 June 1837 d/o  
Christopher Bricker & Nancy Buckingham  
Sps: Absalom Buckingham & wife

George Durbin born 21 November, 1837 s/o  
Elijah Durbin & Margaret Longston [Logsdon]  
Sps: Benjamin Durbin & wife Roseann.

Esther Jane Buckingham born 24 February  
1838 d/o Absalom Buckingham & Nancy  
Murphy Sps: Levi Sapp & Mrs Pratt.

Delila Sapp born 2 March 1838 d/o [Simon]  
Hartley Sapp & Rachel Sapp Sps Delila  
Colopy & Jacob Colopy

Joseph Valentine Shaffer born 13 March 1838  
s/o Peter Shafer & Nancy White Sps: Elijah  
Durbin & wife Margaret.

page 37, continued  
20 May, Emma Brent born 21 June 1815 d/o  
Samuel Brent & Anna Vertue. MM'A

20 May, William James Bayles [Bailes] born 5  
November 1837 s/o John Bayles & Allison  
Hopkins Sps: Elijah Durbin & Mrs Trullinger.

fragment 5  
4 September, Elizabeth Ann Pyatt Logsdon,  
born 1 February 1838 d/o John Logsdon &  
Elizabeth Hardy Sps: Nath Magers & wife.

4 September, George [Jerome] Logsdon born  
26 July 1838 s/o John Logsdon & Elizabeth  
Hardy Sps: Benjamin Blubaugh. [in Father  
Michael M'Aleer's rough hand]

### 1839

May 19-20, 1839  
[The following notes were made on what is  
now labeled fragment 5. This sheet of paper  
contains a subscription list for St. Luke's  
Parish, dated May 19, 1839, to which is added  
the list of twenty-three baptisms and one  
marriage. The latter says, "Thos McGough &  
Drusilla Losh were also married by me today  
the 20th of May 1839, having been formerly  
married by the squire." The hand is that of  
Father M'Aleer, and he notes himself as  
baptismal sponsor for Sarah Catherine  
McGough.

Catherine Devise w/o Jas. [John] Jones born  
1819.

Dennis Durbin born 8 September, 1838 s/o  
Joseph Durbin & Elizabeth Leiberger  
[Lybarger] Sps: Benjamin Durbin & wife.

Mariann Shultz born 6 October, 1836 d/o  
Jacob Shultz & Mary Breckler Sps: Francis  
Breckler & Mariann his mother.

Rebecca Durbin born 7 December, 1837 d/o  
Elias Durbin & Mary Gosack [Gorsage] Sps:  
Benjamin Durbin & wife.

(To be continued)

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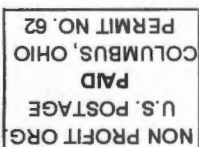
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