

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION**

Many years prior to the time that there were any members of the Catholic Church--or members of any other church--in Maries County a colony of German Catholics was established at Westphalia, then in Gasconade and now in Osage County. The first settlement was likely made in 1835, and the place takes its name from the fact that most of the colonists--if not all of them--were from the present province of Westphalia, in Germany, then an independent kingdom. Six or seven families made up the first arrivals, but a large number came the next year; still more in succeeding years until by 1840 the settlement had a considerable population. Many of them were of considerable wealth and social standing.

The population being exclusively Catholic, the services of missionaries of that faith were furnished to the people at such intervals as conditions permitted, but the population was large enough that within three years or so a permanent priest was assigned to the place. It soon became a base from which missionaries traveled in every direction, ministering to the scattered Catholic families over a couple thousand square miles of territory. These missionaries, sometimes several, sometimes only one or two, spent their entire time traveling from one Catholic home to another. They christened children, heard confessions, performed marriages, and in general brought the church to the people where the people could not come to the church. These rites were held wherever the need existed, generally in the homes of the people. Sometimes when a group of families could be gathered together they were performed in some central place in the neighborhood. The big spring on the old Brink place, six or seven miles west of Vienna on the farm-to-market road, was one of these gathering places. A brush arbor was provided near the spring and services held there from time to time as the needs of the people or the missionaries' time would permit. The Brunnert home, just west of the present town of Argyle, was another gathering place for communicants, mostly of German descent, on the lower creeks, but most of the services were held in the homes of the members.

Maries County continued to be served by missions and missionaries some time after parishes began to be established out of the original Westphalia territory. Richfountain was first and Vienna probably second, preceded or shortly followed by Koeltztown, since which time all the Catholic population of the county has been served from regularly established parishes with the exception of Brinktown, which remained a mission under the name of Viessman's Station for many years after the Vienna parish was established and during that

time was served by the priest resident at Vienna.

The honor of being the first permanent German Catholic settler west of the Gasconade River in this county lies between the families of William Brienck (Americanized into Brink), Clemens Juergens, and Andrew A. Weidinger. All came to this county in 1855, but from the fact that Weidinger cleared and cultivated a small tract of his land that year, he was likely the first to arrive, because the others make their first record appearance in the fall. All came through, or were in some way connected with, the Westphalia Parish in Osage County, already noted in this chapter as having been founded some twenty years before by immigrants from Germany. All these men, Brienck, Juergens, and Weidinger, lived the remainder of their lives and died in this county, fully content with the freedom accorded them in the country of their adoption, which was quite different from the conditions in their native land. Weidinger in particular had refuged out of Germany after stopping an army officer's insults with a horseshoer's hammer and doing a very effective job of it.

During the year 1855 a settlement that amounted to the planting of a colony was made in the territory between the present town of Summerfield and old Pay Down. Between April 1st and November 15th of that year the following, among other persons, either entered land in that territory or bought from entrymen: Mathias Zimmerman, William Ziegemeyer, Johann G. Weller, Gottlieb F. Mueller, Henry Robyn, Christian Kretzer, Emil Menz, John Mees, Anton Siegler, Johann August Pohl, Frederick Krammer, Johann Martin Nagel, Joseph Kunz, John D. Jost, Wendelin Joos, Johann Schlosser, Anton Baumgaertner, and Arnold Mengwasser. In every case except one or two, all the above persons acquired land in April and May of that year.

Some of these people are known to have been Catholics and from the fact that all the land acquisitions

seem to have been closely related, it is at least a safe assumption that all the original settlers were members of that faith. Their names indicate Bavarian origin, and likely show that they attended church at that place. Richfountain was a center of Bavarian immigration and had been established as a parish some years before this settlement was made. It is reasonable to suppose that the new settlers of that nationality were located here in order to be near their fellow churchman and countrymen who had already taken up most of the better farming land closer to the Richfountain settlement.

Just east of and adjoining the Bavarian colony a group of families of French descent entered land about the same time, the list including the Delauney, Chenoist, Tourpanay, Badaillot, Dupiech, and Deda families. These families were also Catholic and worshipped at Richfountain, the nearest--in fact the only accessible--church. With a few exceptions, the descendants of these French settlers have entirely disappeared from the county.

The first Catholic population west of the Gasconade in this county, dating from just about the time of its organization in 1855, was as overwhelmingly Irish as the one on the east side was Bavarian. The people here in 1855 or very shortly thereafter include the Doyles, Patrick and James C.; the Connors, John Senior (Jackie) and Thomas; Patrick McManamy; Walter Birmingham (the county's first shoe and harness maker); the Donahues; the Fitzpatrick's; the Owens, and Stevenson families; W. S. Grant; the O'Briens and Bradshaws; the Haggertys; the Fennesseys and Neil McKeever; one of the Kerrs; and likely others whose names have not been preserved.

These people were in far worse situation in so far as their church duties were concerned than were those in the Bavarian colony. The latter were in a reasonable distance, for that day, of an established church with a

resident priest. The Irish settlement was from twenty-five to thirty-five miles from such a church and for many years depended on such missionaries as came along. These latter were of the society of Jesus (Jesuits) then in charge of the Westphalia Church. From Westphalia they made trips of varying length over the territory south and west of that town for distances up to forty miles, baptizing the children, performing marriages, hearing confessions, and generally as the situation would allow. It was on one such trip that the marriage of Walter Birmingham and Miss Ellen Haggerty was solemnized at Vienna April 17, 1861. Another record cites the baptizing of an infant child of one of the Fitzpatricks about the same time.

This condition continued to exist for a few years, during which time sentiment grew rapidly for a place of worship for their own faith nearer to their homes than the ones then in existence. To this end Michael Owens and Anne, his wife, on June 4, 1858, conveyed to the Most Reverend Peter Richard Kenrick, then Arch-bishop, three acres in what is now the Mike Connor farm for a church site, to be called the Immaculate Conception, and four acres half a mile north of it, in the farm now owned by Herman Wieberg, for a cemetery. Owing to reasons that will be set out later in this article the church site was never utilized, but the cemetery became the burying ground for most of the old settlers of Irish descent. It is still used for their descendants.

While it is likely that other members of the Catholic faith lived in the county before the Civil War, aside from the Irish and Bavarian settlers, the only record of any such settlers is the purchase of land near Weidinger by Frederick Dauk in 1859. The land bought by him at that time is still in the possession of the Dauk family. The Brock and Terry families, from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and in no way connected with the

settlers from Westphalia, moved to a farm some four miles south of Vienna at the very beginning of the Civil War, since and yet known as the Terry Place. Descendants of the original settlers still own it.

The war put a stop to any immigration, or almost put a stop to it, for until its close very few transactions involving German names are noted. Henry and John Wansing (then spelled Wensing) bought land in the neighborhood of the Renneke schoolhouse in 1862 and 1863, and probably lived on the land then or shortly after. Henry Wansing had lived in Osage County a number of years before this, during which time he had made two trips to California in the gold rush of the early fifties. He amassed quite a sum of money the first trip with which he returned to Osage County, but a later trip cost him almost as much as he had made the first time. Anton Dauk owned land prior to 1864, and the Bushoff brothers, Francis and Henry, were landowners prior to 1865. Anton Otto, whose wife was a Hagenhoff from the present site of Argyle, lived at the farm long known as the Otto Place during at least the latter part of the Civil War, for his home was raided and robbed during his absence by outriders from Price's Army during his raid in 1864. Part of the loot was recovered by Mrs. Otto, who demanded the return of her mother's shawl from the raiders, and having received it back and emboldened by her success, demanded and received their only horse which was also being taken.

As was the case with the Irish Catholics, the German settlers soon desired a place of worship nearer to them, and a ten-acre plot on the Weidinger farm was selected by them as a church site for some time in the future. Again as was the case with the Irish, events occurring shortly afterwards rendered planting a church at this site inadvisable, and the deed was not made.

At the close of the Civil War the German Catholic settlement in Maries County, west of the river, consisted

of some eight or ten families living near each other a short distance east of the Maries River and within a few miles of the Osage County line as it now runs. All of them had come from or through Westphalia and were in some way connected with that place. The Westphalia Parish was by this time solidly established. The generation that settled it were mature men, acquainted with American ways, used to American business methods, and most of them speaking the American language.

Many of them had made the 'trek' across the plains in the gold rush, and some had returned the same way, while others returned by way of Panama, or even 'round the Horn. The John Felker and Holtschneider families, husbands and wives, were in one of these expeditions in 1853, accompanied by many other Westphalians. The band numbered about sixty adults, and their principal article of commerce was six hundred head of cattle which they drove across the plains for sale in California. Several different ownerships were represented in the herd, and each owner had used his own judgment in buying the kind of cattle for which he anticipated the best sale on reaching the coast. So some interesting-- and noisy-scenes developed en route as the various owners took account of their stock.

Felker and Holtschneider elected to bring their wives home by way of Panama after disposing of the cattle. They were shipwrecked in the Pacific and spent some months on a small island, to which they had made their way, before being rescued. Two full years were required in making the round trip.

Felker started from and returned to Vienna; Holtschneider had always lived at Westphalia and returned there, but had many interests in Maries County, including a store at Stony Point below the forks of the Maries at the Weiberg place, and another near Venus on the farm now owned by John Dill. His manager at

both places was William Krone of whom more will be found elsewhere.

Westphalia had contributed a large number of men to the Union Army during the war, far more than the average town of its size. Most of the men returned to their homes after the struggle. The damage done by Price's Army in its raid through this section had been repaired and the town was prosperous, except that there was not enough land to go around. In the thirty years since its founding most of the farming land in a reasonable distance of the town had been taken up; even before the war the descendants of the first settlers were reaching farther and farther up the Maries after the good bottom land along that stream. The added impetus of a couple hundred more buyers in the form of returned soldiers caused a land boom of fairsized proportions. In addition, circumstances favored the new land buyers in the fact that most of the original colonists of Tennessee stock who had settled the lower Maries originally had passed away during or shortly after the war.

With the condition, then, that two hundred or more homeseekers were looking for land with money in their pockets to pay for it--or with credit with the monied men of Westphalia; with many Maries County settlers having trouble with their feet and wanting to go to Texas; and with a number of estates owning good land along the creeks, the solution was obvious--the Westphalians began buying the properties of the first settlers.

J. H. Luebbert settled on the Little Maries in 1867; Joseph Reinkemeyer, one of a large family but the only one living in this county, came to the same creek in 1867 or 1868; Joseph Wieburg lived at Stony Point soon after the war, having bought out Jesse Boone when the latter moved to Polk County. The Renneke and Steinmann families settled on the Big Maries just about the same time, buying out the Martin and Copeland estates. Joseph Buschmann and Meinnolf Kuensting moved to the

Big Maries in this county in 1867 or 1868. August Koeltz, founder of Koeltztown, in 1868 bought land in this county now owned by Herman Kampeter, but never lived on it. Koeltz died March 6, 1907.

Then by 1870 the Catholic population west of the river consisted of most of the Irish families who had been the first settlers, with some additions, the McKeown, O'Boyles, McKenneys, Duggans, and others, and twenty to twenty-five German Catholic families who had settled here under the influence of the Westphalia colony, exceptions being the Brock and Terry families. Koeltztown had been organized into a mission and church services were held regularly at that point, which was convenient to the communicants on the lower creeks and to the Ottos. But the site conveyed by the Owens family for church purposes was too close to Koeltztown to accommodate any great number of members who were not in reach of the latter place.

Thomas Anderson and his wife had conveyed to Most Reverend Peter Richard Kenrick a four acre tract of land immediately north of and adjoining Vienna in 1859, the deed reciting that it should be 'used for church, priest's residence, schoolhouse or cemetery, and for no other purpose.' A small log building was at least partially completed on the tract, Andrew A. Weidinger being one of the builders. It was shortly after partly destroyed by fire and was not rebuilt because the site was not convenient to the town,

A small building was erected in the town itself as early as 1867 where church services were held. The land on which the building stood was owned by John Felker, who had bought it at a sale of town lots in 1866, and who deeded it to the archbishop in 1872. The site is the one on which the present church stands. The parish school property was acquired from Miss Bathilde Boudreaux in 1897.

In 1866 John Wolfgang Viessmann settled on the land on which Brinktown (formerly Viessmann's Station) now stands. The present Brinktown Parish first began to take form in 1874, when John Wolfgang Veasman and wife deeded four acres of land to the archbishop for church purposes. It was a mission for several years under the name of Veasman's Station, and was usually supplied by the priest resident at Vienna, but has been an independent parish for many years. More settlers from the Richfountain vicinity are represented in its membership than are found in Vienna. The Catholic Church also owns property at Belle, and occasional services are held there.

The German Catholic immigration, which largely began in 1866 as overflow from the Westphalia colony, has resulted in German Catholic ownership of both the Big and Little Maries for most of their lengths through the county, as well as large upland holdings. The Bavarian colony, as measured by land ownership, owns about as much land as when it was first planted in the county, but the Irish membership, first the preponderant one, has been reduced by death and emigration until the present population of that descent now represents only a small percent of the members of the Catholic Church in the county.