

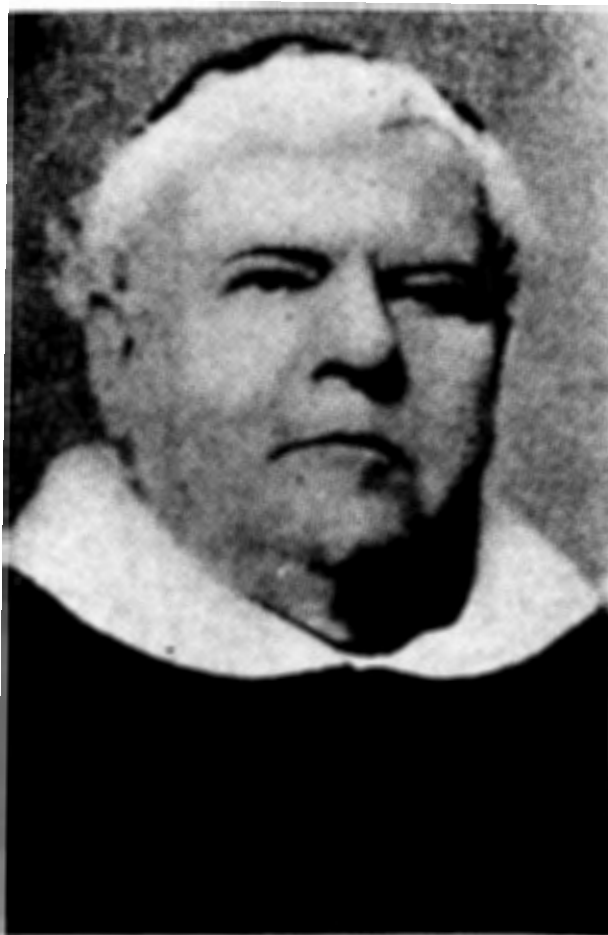


# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society -  
Diocese of Columbus

Volume XIII, Number 4

April, 1988



FATHER GEORGE AUGUSTINE JOSEPH WILSON  
(1807-1884)

Temperance Preacher, Parish Missionary, and Church Builder

by Anthony J. Lisska  
Denison University

In the discussion of the second Catholic church in Zanesville published in last December's Bulletin (1), it was shown that the Dominican historian Rev. V. F. O'Daniel suggested that Father George A. J. Wilson, O.P. when pastor of St. John's parish in Zanesville changed its patron from the Evangelist to the Baptist. Whatever the status of O'Daniel's charge, Wilson

proves to be one of the more colorful characters associated with Catholicism both in Ohio and on the national scene during the middle part of the Nineteenth Century. As far as this author has been able to determine, no biography of Father Wilson has been published. Nonetheless, in various places both O'Daniel and Coffey provide sufficient information about Wilson's life for a rather accurate portrait to appear.

Born in Morgantown, West Virginia on January 1, 1807, this native of what was then the Appalachian highlands of western Virginia managed to arrive in Zanesville in the middle 1820's. He was a Methodist in religion and a stonemason by trade. O'Daniel provides a particularly colorful account of Wilson's first interest in both Catholicism and the Dominicans. Wilson, practicing his stonemason craft, was working on the construction of the second Zanesville church. According to O'Daniel, Wilson, while perched high on the scaffolding, expectorated a large wad of chewing tobacco which landed right in the eye of Father Stephen Montgomery, the pastor, who had been walking below. Montgomery reacted with the proverbial patience of Job, not getting angry but walking on in peace and solitude. Wilson was amazed at this patient and unruffled response on Montgomery's part. He reasoned, so O'Daniel suggests, that any religion and religious congregation which could produce such a person as Montgomery merited his further investigation. Investigate he did, becoming a Dominican novice at St. Rose Priory in Kentucky in 1830 followed a year later by his religious profession of vows on June 12, 1831. (2) Wilson was ordained in 1837 and became the pastor of St. John's early in his priestly career. There he began the building project which resulted in the construction of the beautiful Gothic church of St. Thomas Aquinas. (3) Wilson was to return to Zanesville often during his priestly career which lasted well into the late nineteenth century.

At an early age, Wilson was appointed leader of the American Dominicans. Even though he had been ordained for only six years, and was a convert of less than fifteen years in the Catholic Church, in 1843 Wilson was selected Provincial of the American Dominicans and served a four year term in charge of Dominican life in the United States. During the first two years of office, he journeyed to Europe, which continent would draw him back often in his later days.

Wilson seems to have been attracted to a more strict observance of the Dominican monastic life. He traveled to Europe as often as possible in order to live among the more established Dominicans in their larger priories. Once he tried unsuccessfully to join the English Dominicans. Coffey notes that Wilson would return to America and try to implement here European Dominicanism. This appears to have produced an unpleasant self-righteousness which made him a hard person to live with. In fact, he was quite unpopular as a religious superior and appears never to have learned how to be firm yet compassionate in this role. Writing to the Dominican authorities in Rome in 1865, a European visitor noted that Wilson, as prior of St. Rose Priory in Kentucky, was "a truly religious man who is zealous for the good of the order, but he cannot live in peace with his brethren when he is superior." (4) Wilson's first term as prior there seems to have led to a minor rebellion by those under him, culminating in a petition to remove him from office as superior, especially for his extreme rigor regarding "the minor points of religious observance." (5) Even the Dominican Master General mildly rebuked Wilson for his "unreasonable and Jansenistic rigorism." (6)

Coffey is rather hard on Wilson, especially Wilson's later days. Coffey writes that Wilson never lived up to his potential as an ecclesiastical leader. "He never lived up to the early promise he gave of becoming one of the nation's truly great religious leaders." (7)

Father Wilson was an energetic church builder in his early days as a Dominican. In the 1850's, he built St. Dominic's Church in the southwestern part of Washington, D.C., which was the Dominicans' first venture into the eastern United States, away from their frontier missionary activities in Kentucky and Ohio. Wilson not only built the churches but raised the necessary funding for these projects. In The Catholic Mirror for March 5, 1853 we find the following reference to Wilson's work in Washington: "The Rev. Mr. Wilson is at present busily engaged here making collections for the purpose of erecting a new church in the Island part of the city." (8) That Wilson was successful with his Washington project is noted approvingly three years later in a letter to Rome by the new Dominican provincial, Rev. James Whelan:

Washington City the Capital of the nation, about 400 miles from St. Joseph's, has a beautiful new church and house erected by the indefatigable exertions of Very Rev. Fr. Wilson, ex-provincial, a very large congregation and an immensity of good is accomplished there. There are two Fathers to attend to a great deal of labor. Father Wilson is attempting to collect from the faithful the means to pay all debts. His zeal will accomplish all that can be done. (9)

Later on, Wilson was assigned to New York to begin the project leading to the establishment of a Dominican church there which later became the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer on Lexington Avenue. Hence, three of the most impressive churches the American Dominicans built in the middle part of the nineteenth century -- St. Thomas Aquinas in Zanesville, St. Dominic's in Washington, and St. Vincent Ferrer's in New York City -- were under the direction of Father Wilson, the former mountain Methodist from West Virginia.

In addition to this "bricks and mortar" characteristic, Wilson was a noted and fiery preacher, whose services were much in demand. Throughout his life, he conducted parish missions all over the eastern and mid-western parts of the country. In 1873, when Wilson was in his late sixties, we find his name on a list of Dominicans assigned to undertake the task of preaching the parish missions. And when he was sixty years old, he led a team of Dominicans preaching a mission at Lawrence, Massachusetts. Writing about another mission conducted in April, 1867 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in New York City, one of Wilson's companions, Father Hubert Pius Ralph, provides some fascinating insights about the amount of effort and energy these zealous missionaries expended preaching missions during the time immediately following the Civil War.

I avail myself of a free moment today to drop you and the Fathers a line. We have commenced business here, Wilson Daly and myself leading off yesterday (Sunday). I believe the evening preaching is confined to Dad [Wilson] and myself entirely. There are four sermons every day. The congregation is immense and the people are thoroughly waked up about the mission.... I am worked to death

preaching every other night and hearing confessions all day besides.  
(10)

This account is important historically in that it gives information about the strenuous life of the parish missionaries during what was probably a Lenten mission preached in New York City.

Wilson was also an innovator in his preaching style. In 1845, he introduced a dialogue type of open-air preaching at Springfield, Kentucky. One suspects that this was in response to the many camp-meetings taking place in Kentucky and Ohio at this time. (11) The Catholic Advocate of Bardstown on November 4, 1845 notes that Wilson preached from the court house steps in Springfield at a candle-light service conducted for the area Protestants. (12) O'Daniel wrote that Wilson was a gifted cleric in bringing persons into the Catholic Church. In particular, Wilson was an avid temperance person and his sermons against "demon rum" were legendary. Recalling Wilson's temperance crusades, Mr. Harkins, in the 1893 essay to Father O'Daniel, wrote the following rather vivid account:

He became at one time almost a monomaniac on the subject of temperance, and he did everything in his power to bring all the congregation of St. Thomas's to the same view of that subject he had. His views were very radical, claiming there was little hope of future salvation for one who indulged in intoxicants, and their only safety was "total abstinence." (13)

O'Daniel goes on to note that "in these efforts to put down drink he had the earnest support of Bishop Purcell." (14) Purcell himself, it seems, was a committed temperance man and a teetotaler. There are many references in Coffey's The American Dominicans to Wilson's vigorous pursuit of the ideals of the American Total Abstinence Movement.

The temperance issue was hotly preached in the Nineteenth Century and Wilson was not the only Catholic to speak on the subject in Zanesville. A passage from the 1844 journal of John Gilruth, a Methodist circuit rider, describes a sermon he heard in St. Thomas Aquinas Church on Sunday morning, September 1, 1844.

At 11AM, I and Br Nelson went to the English Catholick Church (for there is also a dutch Church of their people here). The priest was celebrating mass when we went in. We set and looked on: for I considered it folly to attempt to conform to all the bowing and gesticulations of their mode of worship -- after the mass was gone through with, Mr. MtGomery (the Catholick priest) delivered a discourse on temperance to which cause he bound his people by the strong (care?) of Catholick superstition such as the benefits of the mass as well as the sober truths of the Gospel. (15)

This is one of the few passages found in which a Methodist minister reflects upon his visit to a Roman Catholic liturgical service. It is interesting that his occurred in Zanesville, where several years earlier the former Methodist Wilson, as pastor and builder of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, launched a temperance crusade much like those so central to Nineteenth Century Methodism.

This former Methodist who helped build St. John's Church, constructed St. Thomas Aquinas Church and preached many a fiery sermon, played an important part in the development of Catholicism in Zanesville. On his return from Europe in 1861, he again resided in Zanesville and in 1877, when he was seventy years old, he once again lived at St. Thomas Aquinas rectory. Wilson died on February 20, 1884 at St. Rose Priory in Kentucky.

#### Postscript

One interesting connection with the construction of the first Catholic church in Newark by Rev. Jean-Baptiste Lamy in 1842 is found in Paul Horgan's Lamy of Santa Fe. Horgan discovered a letter written by Lamy to Bishop Purcell discussing plans for the Newark church. Lamy wrote that he would be able to buy windows and an altar from the church at Zanesville. The second church in Zanesville, St. John's, was razed in the early 1840's to facilitate Father Wilson's construction of the Church of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lamy probably dealt with Wilson on purchasing the windows and the altar. Horgan notes that Lamy told Purcell that he intended to get them "very cheap." (16) Whether he succeeded in bargaining with Wilson is not known. Nonetheless, this letter suggests that these two important nineteenth century American churchmen knew one another in their common task of building houses of worship in the Ohio frontier.

#### NOTES

1. "The Second Catholic Church in Zanesville: Some Historical Puzzles," in the Bulletin, Vol. XII, No. 12 (December 1987).
2. Reginald M. Coffey, The American Dominicans, footnote 11, page 192.
3. In his The First Two Dominican Priors in the United States, O'Daniel gives this colorful account of Wilson's conversion. O'Daniel repeats this account in a long footnote in his published version of Harkins's essay noted above.
4. Coffey, p. 368.
5. Ibid., p. 351.
6. Ibid., p. 348.
7. Ibid., p. 309.
8. Ibid., p. 286.
9. Ibid., p. 303.
10. Ibid., pp. 384-385; this letter is dated April 5, 1867.
11. Ibid., p. 252.
12. Ibid.
13. Victor F. O'Daniel, "The First Three Catholic Churches in Zanesville, Ohio," in Records of the American Catholic Historical Society, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (Sept., 1914), p. 212
14. Ibid., p. 213, footnote 23.
15. From the Journal of John Gilruth: 1844, "Columbus to Marietta Trip," transcribed by Professor Tony Stoneburner, Denison University, used with the kind permission of Professor Stoneburner.
16. Paul Horgan, Lamy of Santa Fe, p. 39. On page 459 of his notes, Horgan provides a reference for five letters written by Lamy to Purcell discussing the planned construction of the Newark church, which Lamy named after a modern French hero-saint of his, Francis de Sales. Lamy named the Mt. Vernon church he built about this time after another French saint, Vincent de Paul.

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MT. CALVARY CEMETERY, COLUMBUS  
CATHEDRAL DIVISION LOT RECORDS, 1867-1926?  
Transcribed by Mark R. Gideon  
(Tombstone readings by the editor)

[continued from Vol. XIII, Number 3]

page 17, Michael Shea, north half of lot 50-B, purchased Sept. 28, 1870;  
graves: Oct. 18, 1913; May 20, 1918.

Son of Michael & Bridget Shea, died July 23, 1865, aged 1m 28d.  
Shea: M. J., 1842 - [blank]  
Bridget his wife, 1839 - 1913

page 18, Nicholas Roche, west half of lot 64-B, purchased Jan. 30, 1871;  
graves: Mar. 8, 1905; Feb. 6, 1906; Oct. 10, 1914.

Bridget, daughter of Phillip and M[ary ?; stone broken and weathered], died  
March 7, 1853, aged 5 years.  
Nicholas Roche, born Wexford, Ireland 1837-1914  
Margaret Roche, 1853-1906  
broken stone, only the base remains.

page 19, Mrs. Catherine Cahill, south [correctly east] half of lot 64-B,  
purchased Mar. 15, 1871; graves: Mar. 14, 1889; Apr. 23, 1893.

William Cahill, died Oct. 3, 1869, aged 23 years  
Catherine Cahill, died Mar. 13, 1889, aged 77 years (illegible verse)

page 19, Andrew Murphy, lot 69-B, purchased Jan., 1867; graves: Nov. 27, 1880;  
Mar. 28, 1918.

Bridget, wife of Andrew Murphy, Native of -----, died March 1-, 1870,  
aged 74 years  
Andrew Murphy died Nov. 28, 1880, aged 86 years

page 19, Patrick A. Egan, lots 71 and 72-B, purchased Jan. 1867 and 1878;  
graves: May 2, ---- (Mrs. Ryan); July 20, 1889; Oct. 13, 1890; Feb. 1, 1904;  
Aug. 25, 1905; July 1, 1912; May 13, 1913; Apr. 17, 1926.

(Brother) John, Aug. 22, 1869 - Jan. 8, 1892  
(Father) Sept. 14, 1820 - Oct. 12, 1890  
(Mother) May 1, 1839 - Oct. 22, 1879  
(Sister) Mary, Oct. 14, 1865 - Jan. 8, 1892  
(Sister) Margaret, Oct. 29, 1867 - Aug. 24, 1905  
(Brother) Joseph A. Egan, born Aug. 26, 1871, died June 29, 1912  
(Sister) Hannah Egan, 1863-1913  
(Wife) Katharine Egan Connors, July 1, 1876 - Dec. 25, 1930  
Joseph Gordon, infant son of Robert and Alice Gordon, Apr. 4, 1949

page 20, John Joyce, E. Broad St., lots 73, 96, and 97-B, purchased Jan.,  
1867; graves: Sept. 22, 1891; Dec. 24, 1901 (child); Dec. 28, 1907; Feb. 1,  
1908; May 29, 1911.

Frances Byrne Suneson, 1890-1936  
William J. Byrne, 1859-1918  
Mary Joyce Byrne, 1859-1927  
(Father) John Joyce, born July 14, 1830, County Kilkenny, Ireland, died Jan. 31, 1908, aged 77 years.  
(Mother) Eliza Joyce LeBrunmiller, born Apr. 5, 1840, Harrison Co., Ohio, died May 28, 1911, aged 71 years.  
John Joyce Byrne, 1886 + 1963  
Frances, 1865-1891  
Harry, 1873-1883  
Lucie, 1870-1872  
Thomas M., 1861-1863  
Kate Nolan, died July 30, 1868, aged 19 years 26 days May she rest in peace.  
John Joyce Jr. Nov. 9, 1868 - June 23, 1916  
Caroline R. Joyce, Jan. 8, 1905 - May 26, 1978  
John Beatty Joyce, Oct. 27, 1901 - Oct. 16, 1968  
Albert Green Joyce, Nov. 14, 1874 - Nov. 7, 1918  
Albert Green Joyce jr., Nov. 8, 1903 - Dec. 28, 1907  
Thomas William Joyce, Feb. 6, 1965 - June 19, 1970  
Infant son of John & Hattie Joyce, Dec. 23, 1901

page 20, Francis Howard, E. Long St., lot 74-B, purchased Jan., 1867; graves: Oct. 14, 1890; Feb. 16, 1903; May 6, 1910.

[adjacent lot, with monument central to both lots and with matching stones:]  
page 23, John G. Howard, lot 95-B, purchased Jan., 1867; graves: Jan. 30, 1878; Feb. 20, 1878; June 25, 1878; Feb. 22, 1888.

(Son) Michael J. Howard, 1861 + 1940 (on front: Columbus Oct. 12, 1861)  
(Mother) Catherine Howard, 1831 + 1910 (born Christmas Day, died Ascension Thursday)  
(Father) Francis Howard, 1822 + 1890  
(Daughter) Nellie J. Howard, 1865 + 1933 (Lisieux)  
(Aunt) Ellen Howard, 1818 + 1903 (Kilmallock)  
(Son) John J. Howard, 1860 + 1884  
(Daughter) Catherine Howard, 1872 + 1874  
(Father) John G. Howard, 1814 + 1879  
(Mother) Mary P. Howard, 1818 + 1878 (Chillicothe)  
(Son) John G. Howard Jr., 1852 + 1878  
(Son) Nicholas Howard, 1860 + 1895

page 21, Thomas Bergin, lots 77 and 92-B, purchased 1867; graves: Oct. 21, 1892; May 7, 1907; July 17, 1915; Dec. 17, 1928.

Mary Curran Bergin, Apr. 14, 1863 - Dec. 16, 1928  
Thomas J. Bergin, Sept. 28, 1862 - Sept. 1, 1943  
Catherine M. Murphy, 1903 + 1983  
In Memory of Bridget Kavanagh, Native of CarrowM'Connolly (?), Queen's County, Ireland, died May 11, 1870, aged 43 years.  
Alice Caren Hasbrook, July 9, 1889 - July 15, 1915  
Margaret Kelly, 1854-1933  
Mary A. Kelly, 1852-1934  
Paul Bergin Murphy, Apr. 23, 1907 - June 8, 1978  
Margaret J. Murphy, May 14, 1911 - June 24, 1972

Josephine B. Murphy, 1901 + 1986  
Mary Bergin Murphy, June 10, 1871 - Aug. 3, 1952  
(Mother) died Oct. 21, 1892, aged 60 years  
(Father) Thomas Bergin died Dec. 24, 1897, aged 68 Y, 1 M, 20 D.  
Marguerite Caren, June 27, 1885 - May 7, 1907

page 21, John Dundon, 458 Morrison Ave., east half of lot 79-B, purchased Jan. 15, 1869; graves: Jan. 14, 1897; Mar. 23, 1902 (child); Dec. 9, 1904; Nov. 3, 1910; Nov. 24, 1910; Apr. 20, 1916.

Edward Dundon, 1859-1893  
John Dundon, 1862-1897  
(Father) John Dundon, 1822-1904  
(Mother) Mary, wife of John Dundon, 1831-1910  
Nellie Dundon wife of Joseph Neutzling, and children Cecelia, Lucille

page 21, Timothy Lawlor, south half of lot 82-B, purchased Sept. 16, 1870; graves: Dec. 13, 1882 (child); Jan. 7, 1883 (child); Jan. 8, 1883 (child); May 10, 1889; Aug. 24, 1885; June 4, 1918.

Mary E., born Oct. 26, 1869, died Sept. 16, 1870  
Ellen, born Jan. 18, 1877, died Dec. 13, 1882  
Children of T. & M. Lawlor

page 22, Patrick Shea, west half of lot 90-B, purchased Aug. 4, 1868; graves: Aug. 18, 1887; July 26, 1894; Aug. 25, 1903; Sept. 13, 1905; Oct. 23, 1911.

James son of P. & M. Shea, born May 1, 1865, died July 25, 1894  
Patrick Shea (Father) 1828-1903  
Margaret Shea (Mother) 1843-1911  
Shea: sons John J. & William H.  
daughters Anna & Mary  
(Aunt) Bridget Flood

page 22, Philip Brady, lot 91-B, purchased Jan., 1867; graves: Jan. 22, 1889; May 11, 1886; Nov. 2, 1891 (child); Dec. 18, 1894; Sept. 20, 1900; Feb. 13, 1914; Apr. 16, 1915. [no stones]

page 23, Thomas Brennan, lot 93-B, purchased May 30, 1868; graves: May 30, 1868; June 20, 1889; Mar. 4, 1895; July 24, 1917. One grave transferred to Alphonse Capretta, Mar. 18, 1942.

Winfred, wife of Thomas Brennan, died May 29, 1868, aged 36 yrs, May she rest in peace, Born in Co. Tipperary, Ireland.  
Clara Lilley, 1869 + 1944  
(Mother) Albina Centofanti, Sept. 10, 1888 - May 3, 1942

[To be continued]

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197 E. Gay Street Columbus, Ohio 43215 Donald M. Schlegel, editor  
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