

German Catholics in Ontario

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The tide of German Catholic immigration to Ontario began in 1827 and continued to flow in till about 1860. The immigrants came from Alsace, the Palatinate, Baden, Bavaria, the Rhine district, and Austria and Switzerland. Difficulties of travel were great. They travelled from their home towns by stage coach or down the Rhine to one of the channel ports, e.g. Havre. From thence sailing boats brought them, after a long voyage, to New York. At times it took almost three months to cross the Atlantic. From New York the route was the Hudson River and the Erie Canal to Buffalo. By covered wagon or on foot they traversed the distance from Buffalo to Waterloo County. The first German Catholic settlers came from Alsace and took up land in Waterloo County and the surrounding districts. German Mennonites had settled in Waterloo County at an earlier date along the Grand River, and these German Catholic settlers took up land adjacent to this Mennonite Colony. There seems to have been no systematic colonization. The early settlers writing to their friends at home induced others to come. As they came they settled in nearby districts and so gradually five or six German Catholic Settlements sprang up in Waterloo County. Father Theobald Spetz, of the Congregation of the Resurrection, collected the historical fragments of these settlements, and in 1916 published the History of the Catholic Church in Waterloo County. It contains a fund of historical information, gathered from far and near with great effort and perseverance. Having completed this work he proceeded to gather notes for the history of the parishes of Bruce and Grey Counties, but unfortunately these historical notes have gone astray.

Waterloo County and the southern part of Bruce County are the two principal German Catholic settlements in Ontario. There were smaller settlements in other places, as, for instance, one a few miles south of Niagara Falls, Rainham, Hamilton, Zurich and Hesson. Naturally, too, these colonies extended beyond the boundaries of these counties, and a few Catholic families are found here and there in the neighboring counties. Whereas the early German Catholic settlers in Waterloo County came from Europe, most of the German Catholic settlers in Bruce County came from older German Catholic settlements in Waterloo County, principally from New Germany and from near Schmidsville, now Wellesley village. The exodus from Waterloo County was caused by the prospect of cheap land in Bruce County and this attraction was called the Saugeen fever. All this northern district was commonly called Saugeen. These German Catholics from Waterloo County were accustomed to pioneer life and made good settlers. Bruce County

settlements date back to 1851 and 1852. Pioneer life was hard; the trees had to be felled and burned to, make a clearing for crops; roads were but a trail through the forest and even the government-opened roads were rough. The early settlers in Bruce County moved up from Waterloo County by way of Garafraxa road running from Guelph to Durham. From Durham they travelled west on the newly opened road running from Durham to Kincardine. In Bruce County the German Catholics took up land in Carrick, Culross and Brant Townships. Soon villages like Formosa, Mildmay, Karlsruhe and Neustadt sprang up, which became centres for Catholic parishes.

MISSIONARIES

The first missionary to visit the German Catholics in Waterloo County was Father John Wiriath in 1834. He was sent by Bishop Macdonell of Kingston. For three years he attended the Catholics in Waterloo County and also went as far as Goderich. He visited the Catholics and had services for them in their homes or in the nearby school houses. Missionary life was a strenuous life and ill health forced him to return to Europe. On leaving he sent the Bishop a letter giving the number of Catholic families and souls in the district. After Father Wiriath came Father Peter Schneider, also a zealous and devoted missionary, continuing the good work alone from 1838 to 1844. These two early missionaries deserve special mention on account of the hardships they had to endure and their zealous labours under great difficulties. Bishop De Charbonnel, in his notes about his priests, says of Father Schneider, "This man has kept the torch of faith burning alone for many years throughout the Huron tract and far beyond." Bishop Power sent Father Simon Sanderl to help Father Schneider in 1844. He first resided at St. Agatha and afterwards in Guelph. It may be of special interest to note that during the epidemic of ship fever here in Toronto, Bishop Power and his few priests were unable to meet the emergency alone and so Father Schneider and Father Sanderl were called in from the mission to help to attend the sick and dying. The labours of these missionaries were not restricted to the German Catholics but extended to all the Catholic settlers, even as far as Goderich. In 1847 the Catholic population of Waterloo county was estimated at from eight to ten thousand. In 1847 two Jesuit priests (Caveng and Fritsch) came to St. Agatha and also attended New Germany. They stirred up the faith by giving missions in these German parishes, which were well attended and were a great power of spiritual good. Father Messner, a Capuchin, came to St. Clements parish in 1852, and when the Jesuits left St. Agatha, also attended St. Agatha. Father Holzer, a Jesuit, was at New Germany. Early in 1852 the Jesuits withdrew to Guelph on account of the scarcity of priests and to be able to take care of the district north of Guelph and of Bruce county settlements. These missionary trips to Bruce county, undertaken by the Jesuits from Guelph, started in 1853. Father Gaspar Matoga, S.J., did this work for three years. He

travelled mostly on foot and it took him six weeks to make the circuit and then he started on the next trip. He suffered all kinds of hardships, even his life was threatened. Near Allan Park, east of Hanover, while staying with a Catholic family a over night, a bullet crashed through the window and hit the candlestick beside him. This candlestick with the bullet mark is now treasured in the parish of Hanover. After three years of missionary labour Father Matoga died and his mortal remains rest under the Guelph church. Father Blettner, S.J., and Father Laufhuber, S.J., continued the work of Father Matoga. The early frame churches in the Bruce district were built in 1860, under the direction of Father Laufhuber.

These German Catholic Colonies are in the diocese of Hamilton, which was established in 1856. Bishop Farrel had to get priests from Europe to attend the German Catholics. In 1861 we find Father Gstyr, a Franciscan, residing in Formosa and attending the neighboring missions of Carlsruhe, Neustadt, Deemerton, and other missions. In 1865 he returned to Europe and Father Schmitz, a scholarly man, succeeded him. He died in 1872. Father Rassaerts came to Bruce county in 1866, residing in Carlsruhe. The church in Formosa, erected during the pastorate of Father Elena and consecrated over fifty years ago, a monument to his zeal, attracts visitors from far and near.

Reverting to the German settlements in Waterloo County, where the growth of the Church called for more priests, Bishop Farrel of Hamilton was alive to these needs and tried to meet them. Among the priests who were induced by him to come to this country were two brothers, Father Eugene Funcken and Father Louis Funcken, both belonging to the Congregation of the Resurrection. Father Eugene Funcken arrived in 1857 and took charge of the parish of St. Agatha and attended outlying missions. Two other priests of the Congregation of the Resurrection, Fathers Francis Breittkopf and Edward Glowaski, came a few years later and at various times attended Berlin, St. Clements and New Germany. Father Louis Funcken arrived in 1865. To these two priests, Father Eugene and Father Louis, as they were affectionately called, the German Catholics owe a debt of gratitude because they not only provided for the present needs but for the future, laying the foundation for the education of a native clergy, recruited from the sons of these early settlers. Father Louis Funcken, in 1865, founded St. Jerome's College in St. Agatha and in 1866 transferred it to Berlin. For years he conducted the college besides attending the Catholic congregation at Berlin, now Kitchener. The story of St. Jerome's College, its foundation, its progress and its attainments are well known throughout the province. Father Louis Funcken fostered vocations to the priesthood and for years the majority of the graduates of this college entered the priesthood. The diocese of Hamilton is especially indebted to St. Jerome's College, for most of the priests of Hamilton diocese received their classical education there. Among the earliest graduates were Fathers Stephen Wadel, George Brohman, John Gehl, Theobald Spetz and William Kloepfer, followed by many others who took up the torch of faith, kept

burning by the early missionaries from the old country. They valiantly continued the good work of their predecessors. The Culturkampf in Germany in 1874 brought a few priests from Germany, notably Father Bergman and Father Stephen Foerster, who was pastor of New Germany for over forty years. With few exceptions, the priests attending the German Catholics in Ontario were recruited from these same parishes, born in Canada and educated at St. Jerome's College and the Grand Seminary at Montreal. The priests belonging to the Congregation of the Resurrection, after finishing the course at St. Jerome's College, studied Theology at Rome.

There are at present about 25,000 Catholics of German descent in the province of Ontario, with about ten parishes in Waterloo County and seven in Bruce County. The people of the country parishes are nearly all distinctly German, while in the city and towns there is a large percentage of other nationalities, notably in Kitchener, Waterloo and Preston. Most of the German immigrants arrived before the year 1860. Since then many of their descendants emigrated to Michigan around the year 1880, and in the nineties many went to North Dakota. The cities, like Detroit, Michigan, Buffalo, Chicago, attracted many by remunerative employment. About thirty years ago the Canadian West with its cheap land and abundant crops enticed many from Bruce and Waterloo to the vast expanse of the Prairie. Always enough remained at home to till the soil and continue farming on the lands cleared by their ancestors. The parishes are still thriving and are not dying out. The larger parishes all have a church of brick or stone, a rectory, a separate school and a convent, a complete parochial plant.

Since the close of the war, in the year 1920, German immigrants have come to Canada and at present there are about 2500 German Catholics here in the city of Toronto. They constitute a parish, with Rev. Daniel Ehman as pastor, and attend St. Patrick's Church.

EDUCATION

Education was not neglected. Schools were built in the German settlements as early as 1836. In fact schools were built before the churches and were used for services on Sundays. Teachers who had come from Germany taught these schools as efficiently as could be expected. Every parish had a Catholic school or at least a school taught by a Catholic teacher. In 1871 the School Sisters of Notre-Dame were invited to take charge of our orphanage at St. Agatha and also took charge of the school. As time went on the School Sisters of Notre-Dame took charge of the schools, in the other German parishes. The mother-house of these sisters was in Milwaukee. At present they not only have charge of the Separate School in the larger German parishes but also several other parishes. They have done much good work and have been blessed with many vocations. Twelve years ago a Canadian mother-house was established by the School Sisters of Notre-Dame at

Waterdown, to meet the needs of an ever increasing community. A great many of the vocations were from the German parishes in Waterloo and Bruce Counties. The schools in the German parishes were bilingual schools where the same subjects were taught as in the public school and also German was taught. The German Bible History served as a German reader and the pupils learned German and the Bible at the same time. Catechism, too, was taught in German. Since the war of 1914, German is no longer taught in the schools and the German papers ceased publication. At present the German language is gradually dying out in Ontario and there is hardly any need in the churches for German sermons, – in fact the younger generation does not understand them. German is still spoken in some of the homes and among the older people. There has been no national agitation, nor any attempt to suppress the language, and as a result time has solved the language problem.

The German Catholics have, to a great extent, preserved their national traits: they are frugal, work hard, are thrifty and orderly. Travelling through these settlements you will notice good farm buildings in a good state of repairs and everything looking tidy and in place. Many have stuck to the farm, and parents encourage their sons to do so. They are interested in the work on the farm and are progressive and anxious to employ up-to-date methods in agriculture. Parents give their sons financial aid to get started on a farm and the many young families on these farms continue the traditions of their parents, who retire to a near-by village or town in their old age to be near the church. Though many have lost, or are losing, their knowledge of the German language they have not lost their faith. They have preserved their religious customs in the German country parishes. The processions on Rogation days are well attended. The Corpus Christi processions are faithfully held and are a source of edification to all.

NATIONAL QUESTION

As far as the German Catholics are concerned there never was a national question in these communities. Although they liked their own language and customs, the Germans saw the need of knowing the English language in order to take their part in the social and business life of the country. They have helped to develop the country as farmers and many had a large share in the industrial development of the cities and towns in their districts. They have been and still are an asset to the material and spiritual progress of their adopted country. They have taken an interest in the government of the country, local, provincial and federal. They are home-loving and do not easily fall a prey to subversive agitators because they have a stake in the country and are interested in preserving their liberties and their rights, content to live peaceably under the flag which protects them.