

Barquilla de la Santa Maria

BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society - Diocese of Columbus

Vol. XV, No. 5

- May: Month of our Lady -

May, 1990

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION MISSION BUENA VISTA, NILE TOWNSHIP, SCIOTO COUNTY ca1859 - ca1902

The story of the Catholic Church at Buena Vista, Ohio is that of a constant struggle to reach out from the more populous and accessible centers to the small group of Catholics who lived in this remote location in the southeastern corner of Scioto County. Unlike the story of the first Catholic parish in Ohio, where the establishment of the parish attracted great numbers of settlers, the Catholics of Buena Vista settled in that vicinity to find work and the Church came to them. The work was in the stone quarries in the hills behind the town, whose sandstone was found to have a certain beauty and ease of working under chisel and saw which made it popular for use in buildings, especially in Cincinnati. The quarrying began about 1814 using primitive methods. By the 1870s the industry had developed to the point that railways had been built and locomotives were used to haul stone from the quarries to the top of an incline, down which they were lowered to Buena Vista by endless cables, the weight of the loaded cars pulling up the empty ones. Hoisting machines lifted the largest stones from the docks at Buena Vista onto the riverboats and barges for delivery to the customers. (1)

The community in reality was a split one. The dock-workers, tradesmen, professionals, and shop-keepers dwelt at Buena Vista, while the quarrymen and their families lived at the other end of the half-mile railway, in a village called California. The latter, in fact, was across the line in Green Township, Adams County. A few Catholic families were in the area by 1860. Those at California were Edward and Margaret Burke, Thomas and Susan Burke, Martin and Ellen Flanigan, Michael and Mary Foley, John and Catherine Frawley, and Patrick Fallon, all natives of Ireland, and Andrew and Franceska and Joseph Hornbach, all natives of Baden. The only Catholic family in Buena Vista itself in 1860 appears to have been that of Michael Wolf, a German-born butcher, and his wife Maria. (2)

The first visit of a priest to these families was recorded by Rev. James J. O'Donohue of Portsmouth Holy Redeemer parish on May 12, 1859. The same year is noted in the 1903 county history as the year in which the Catholic community was organized. (3) Father O'Donohue and his successor, Rev. Michael M. Ahern, visited an average of three or four times in each of the next seven years. The hard-working priests could give Buena Vista only those few days each year, for in addition to their parish in Portsmouth they attended other Catholics scattered in an incredible number of missions: Scioto Furnace, Washington Furnace, Jackson, Pond Creek, Pioneer Furnace, Gallia Furnace,

Monroe Furnace, McCullough, Harrison Furnace, Junior Furnace, Cross Roads, Little Scioto, Olive Furnace, Portland, Jackson Furnace, Piketon, Daniel Furnace, Boone Furnace and Clarksburg in Kentucky, Latrobe Furnace, Eagle Furnace in Vinton Co., Athens, Cincinnati Furnace, and Wilkesville. (4)

The congregation at Buena Vista did not have a church building for several years. In April and July of 1864 Father Ahern performed baptisms at the house of Michael Reinhard. On the latter visit he also baptized the child of Philip and Bridget Reilly at their house in California. In September of 1864 he baptized at the house of Michael Reinhard in Buena Vista and offered Mass at the house of one of the O'Brien families in California. Surprisingly, by the middle of 1866 the congregation had both a church, of sorts, and a resident pastor.

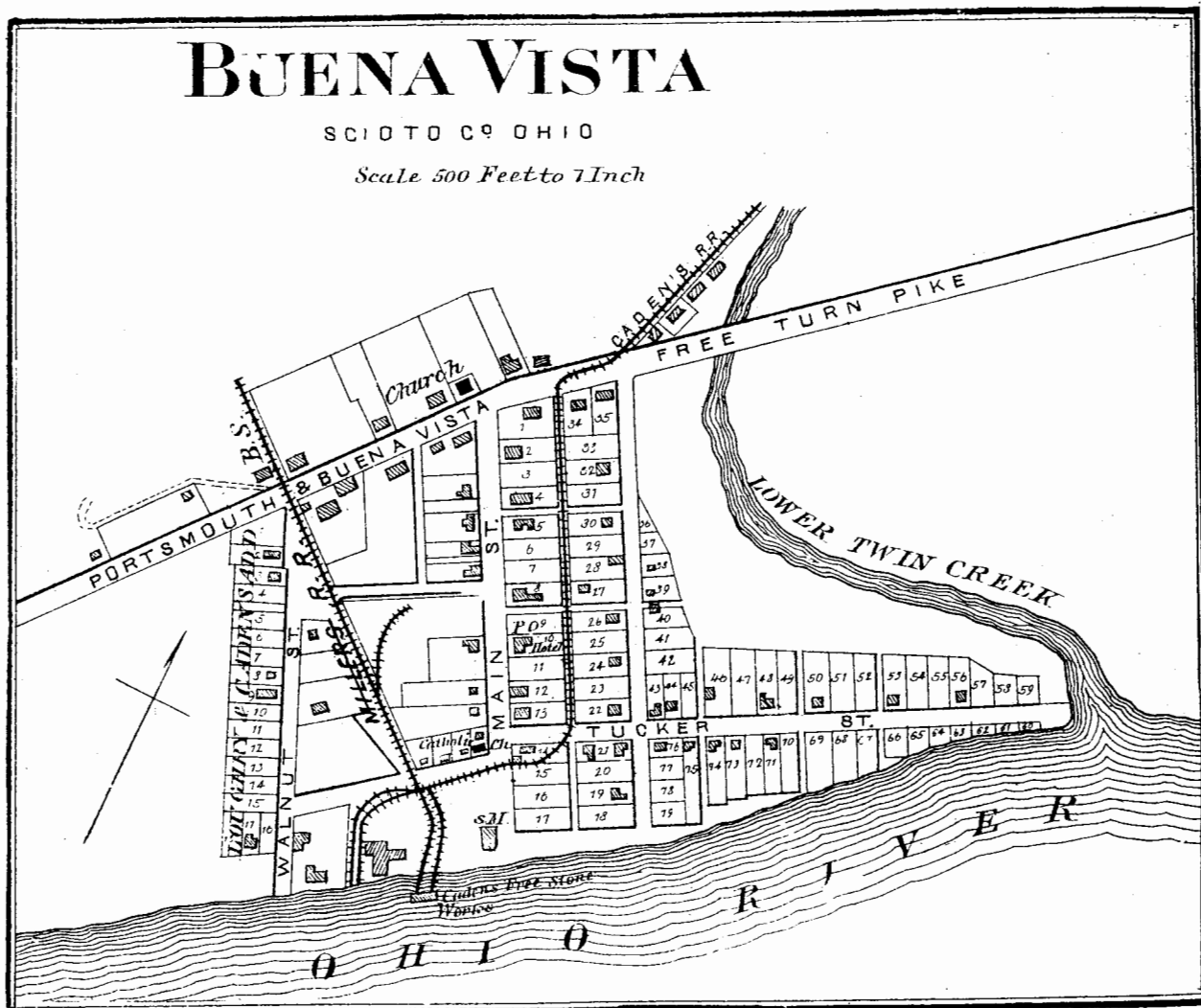
Rev. Louis J. Schreiber was a young German priest, having been ordained for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati on October 24, 1863. (5) He was sent as pastor to St. Peter Church at Lick Run near Wheelersburg, up river from Portsmouth in Scioto County, and to this charge were added the missions of St. John (Lilly, five miles away), Little Scioto, and Ironton. About the autumn of 1865, at the request of Father Ahern, Father Schreiber was also given charge of the Germans at Buena Vista, who claimed not to know enough English to make their confessions to Father Ahern. (6)

Father Schreiber's mission at Ironton St. Joseph was a thriving one. There were 120 families, who within a short time had built a church and a school and had purchased a graveyard. In March of 1866 the heads of these families signed a petition to Archbishop Purcell asking for a resident pastor and specifically mentioning Father Schreiber. (7) Instead of acceding to their wishes, that August the Archbishop sent the young priest to Buena Vista, where there was "No Church, no school house, (8) no parsonage not an inch of ground, no chalice, no Missale no tabernacle; only and alone...were prospects to get all that."

The people of Buena Vista did their best to give Father Schreiber a fine reception. When the riverboat Telegraph, on which he was expected to arrive, came into sight on August 9, 1866 they shot off heavy guns. A good many members of the congregation were assembled and he addressed them with a few heart-felt words.



In the upper right of this portion of a map of Green Township, Adams Co. can be seen John Mueller's land and the end of the incline railway. This is the site of the California. J. A. Caldwell's Illustrated Atlas of Adams County, Ohio, 1880.



The only evidence found for the waterfront site of Immaculate Conception Church is the above plat of Buena Vista, taken from page 198 of the 1877 Illustrated Atlas of the Upper Ohio River Valley by Titus, Simmons, & Titus. Courtesy of the State Library of Ohio.

A letter which Father Schreiber wrote to the Archbishop in September contains the first notice of the church building at Buena Vista and we are given a hint of at least one reason that the priest was sent to poor Buena Vista rather than to Ironton. "The owner of the largest establishment here, Mr. Miller, with whom your Grace is acquainted, granted the Cath. Congregation here the use of his store and wareroom for church and school purposes. On the outside you could yet read 'cheap cash store'. This building, which is of frame, we now use, as church and school in one room, the second story being occupied by your humble Servant." (9) The 1884 history gives the name of the donor of the church as Mueller. (10)

There were two men named Miller or Mueller associated with Buena Vista. John M. Miller, a native of Hesse-Cassell, lived lived in Buena Vista with his family. In 1870 he was an overseer of the stone works and in the 1880s he ran a general store in the village. (11) He does not seem to have been the donor of the store-room for one must consider both how Archbishop Purcell might have

become acquainted with him and for what reason he might be so generous, when there is no evidence that he or his family were Catholic. The second "Miller" associated with Buena Vista was John M. Mueller, who was born in Bavaria about 1826. He was one of the proprietors of the Buena Vista Freestone Works in Cincinnati and was proprietor of the John M. Mueller or Buena Vista Freestone Company in Buena Vista. He owned the quarry at California and one of the incline railways. His residence was in Cincinnati and he was a member of the Church. (12) It seems much more likely that it was Mr. Mueller with whom the Archbishop would have been acquainted and who made the building available for the church in Buena Vista. He may have influenced the Archbishop to send Father Schreiber there to his employees.

The waterfront site of the church is shown on the plat of Buena Vista on page 239. Its name, in honor of our Lady's Immaculate Conception, is provided only by the Catholic directories of 1867 and later years. Father Schreiber described the conditions at Immaculate Conception in these words:

...The room, where we have church and school in, is not more than about 7 feet high, very damp and unhealthy and on Sundays, when it is crowded, extremely hot, so that I must change clothes every time, as soon as the Service is over.

The first thing what I did here, was to get the most necessary articles for the holy Mass: chalice and Missale. On account of not having a ciborium and monstrance I cannot, neither give the benediction, nor keep even the blessed Sacrament.

The Congregation consists of about 45 families, the majority of which are Irish and all, with 4 or 5 exceptions, laborers in the quarries. All of them attend the Services to my satisfaction... I am obliged to say two Masses every Sunday; I preach two Sermons every Sunday one in English and one in my native tongue; likewise I have instructions in catechism for adults and children every Sunday after noon; moreover Vespers as many times; which I have (by the way) to sing myself... Every week I also spend a couple of hours in teaching Singing to adults; besides the Singing we have in school every day. Every morning at 7 1/2 o'clock we have Mass, whereat all the school children have to attend. ...the School...is in a hopeful condition. It comprises exactly 50 children, Irish and German, girls and boys...they are a very wild and rough set; I entertain however the most sanguine hopes for them, at least that they may become as good (or as bad) as their teacher...the manner of teaching is very difficult on account of the 2 languages. - 3 Protestant children are also attending, as there is no other school here but mine. (Cf. note 9)

The people of Buena Vista never had it so good again. Not seven months after his arrival, Father Schreiber was asking to be moved away from Buena Vista. The now "32 families" were not able to support him; the two employers of the men had not paid their hands for over five months and all, including the pastor, were running up large debts at the company stores; he had performed only three baptisms, two of them adults, and no weddings and received no stole fees. Adding to his poverty, his mother and sister had arrived and depended on him for their support. The church building was still owned by Mr. "Miller" and the congregation had no resources to buy any property. A telling blow in the Archbishop's mind, may have been the statement that Mr. "Miller...neither can nor will do anything" to accomplish the "promises" he had made. (13)

By December of 1867 Father Schreiber had been reassigned to St. Michael Parish in Ripley, some fifty miles down the Ohio River. For the next six years the Catholics at Buena Vista were cared for by the pastors living at Ripley, who came to them on the riverboats. Father Schreiber died in

Cincinnati St. Mary's Hospital in 1868. The next priest was Rev. Heribert Thien, followed quickly by Rev. Bartholomaeus Schmitz. Rev. Peter Geyer came in 1871.

Letters written by Father Geyer to the Archbishop in October of 1873 tell of some of his problems with the mission at Buena Vista. The river was often either so low or so full of ice that the boats could not run. When they did run he sometimes could not get a room and lost a night's sleep. On the most recent occasion when he had gotten there, the people did not all come to the church. The priest from Portsmouth had just been there, but he had not had much of an attendance either. "What kept the people there somewhat together, was that they had a Catholic teacher for the Free School, who used to catechise and pray for them on Sundays. They have none now, and consequently the children, whom the Protestants are trying to entice to their meeting houses, will run wild. And some Catholics even, I was told, said that when the Lutheran preacher would come, he would be their priest just as well as of the Lutherans. It is a Pity to see them thus grow cold and fall away." (14)

Father Geyer also attended McCullough Settlement and Pond Creek in Scioto County. McCullough was even harder to reach than Buena Vista. The Archbishop told him, and he announced to the people, that "these upper missions" would soon have their own priest, (15) but the Archbishop was not immediately able to carry out his intention.

Late in the winter of 1873 Father Geyer received a telegram directing him to go to a dying person at McCullough. The pathos of the story he subsequently related to the Archbishop, of a type rarely heard today, makes it worthy of presentation in its entirety:

...I took the first boat to go to Portsmouth. For a while I thought that no boat would come on account of the river running with heavy ice. I arrived in Portsmouth Friday morning, and as no one called for me, I took an ---- carriage and drove slowly over a road that had not, with one exception, been as bad, they said, all winter. No one in McCullough knew anything of anybody being ill. Next morning, however, Mr. Joyce unraveled the mystery. His only surviving boy, that had also had the small-pox but recovered, was chopping down a tree. The tree, instead of falling, lodged in another, and the boy sat down on a stone beneath the very tree to rest himself. No doubt he thought of his eight brothers and sisters who were now lying in the grave, and whom but a short time he had seen every day, but was never to see no more, when he saw (or, imagined he saw) a being coming to him, and telling him that he should prepare for death. He told his father, and the father, whose eight children had died without a priest, wanted to see the priest to save, if possible, his child. Of course, I did not scold the man for bringing me so far to see a boy that was well; the case was too sad.

I had to stay in McCullough over Sunday, although I ought to have been in Ripley in account of the pew-renting. Altogether 68 persons received Holy Communion. They are intending to build a house for the priest that your Grace promised them. On my way home I visited Buena Vista, but as my letter had not arrived there, not even when I departed, one day was lost; but on next day 34 persons made their Easter duty. Mr. Wolf assured me that he could guarantee \$200. a year to the priest if he would visit them monthly on a Sunday. (16)

The life of this kind priest came to a tragic end in June of 1873 when he and his younger brother both drowned while bathing in the Ohio River.

Buena Vista was left without even a missionary priest until late in 1873 when Rev. Joseph Mertian was sent as the first resident pastor at McCullough, with Pond Creek and Buena Vista as missions. (17) Father Mertian was a Frenchman, which was ideal for the old French settlers at Pond Creek, but this still did not answer for the Germans at Buena Vista.

The garbled history of the congregation given in the 1884 history may indicate that Immaculate Conception Church was given to the Church by Mr. Mueller about the time Father Mertian took over. (Cf. note 10) No deed for the property has been found in the County records nor in the Archdiocesan archives. (18) The 1884 history gives the membership as twenty families and names those of Peter Klein, Leonard Dambach, Michael Wolf, and Nicholas Neusas as early members.

Communicating with Buena Vista was still difficult and matters had become complicated when in 1868 Portsmouth and its two parishes had become part of the new Diocese of Columbus. Father Mertian often walked the twenty miles from McCullough to Buena Vista, accompanied by fellow-Frenchman Gregory Weppel, who was known as Brother Godfrey. (Without Brother Godfrey's assistance, the use of his horse, etc., Father Mertian once remarked, he could not have lived at McCullough.) When the Archbishop visited in 1881, his route was from Cincinnati by railroad to Chillicothe and then to Portsmouth; there Father Mertian met him in a buggy to drive to Buena Vista. For several families in the missions it was easier to journey into Portsmouth to church than to Pond Creek or McCullough, and in case of sickness it often was easier and faster for the Portsmouth priests to visit than for Father Mertian. In addition, the County poor house was on the west side of the Scioto near Portsmouth and the authorities there were willing to send a buggy into Portsmouth, but not all the way to McCullough, to bring a priest to the old people there. These problems were amicably settled by the Archbishop giving faculties in the missions to the priests of the Diocese of Columbus who lived in Portsmouth. (19)

By 1893 Father Mertian was 63 years old and his health was becoming poor at times. That January he remarked that he had not visited Buena Vista "last spring" (did he visit only once a year?) for he had had a large wound on the back of his head and neck. He mentioned that four of the Buena Vista people would not be able to make good confessions in English and would therefore keep away from the sacraments, and he said that the mission would be more easily attended from Ripley. (20) By 1896 the Archbishop had made arrangements to transfer Buena Vista back to Ripley's care, but the transfer probably was not effective before the spring of 1897. (21)

With the transfer of Buena Vista back into the care of Ripley St. Michael, we confront a veritable dark age in its history. The pastors at Ripley were German Benedictine priests from the Abbey of St. Bernard at Cullman, Alabama. During the early part of this period the pastors were Rev. Dennis Holz, O.S.B., (1896-1897), an experienced, good pastor, Rev. Bernard Menges, O.S.B. (1897-1902), and Rev. Fridolin Meyer, O.S.B. (1902-1904). In the early 1900s the congregation had thirty to forty communicants and a Sunday School of fifteen.

It seems to have been during the pastorate of Father Meyer that Immaculate Conception Church came to its end. The 1903 history indicates that

the original building from the 1860s was still in use in Father Menge's time. In 1903, however, the annual Catholic Directory begins calling Buena Vista a station rather than a mission, indicating that there was no church building. The status did not change back to "mission" until the 1918 directory, when it was called St. Ann's. There is solid evidence that this new church was in existence by 1913. The continuation of the story of the Church at Buena Vista, though still a "dark age" as far as records go, will be explored in the July Bulletin.

NOTES

1. Evans, Nelson W., History of Scioto County; Portsmouth: Nelson W. Evans, 1903; pp. 384-386 give a fair description of the business.
 2. Federal census of 1860: Green Twp., Adams Co., houses 172-210; Nile Twp., Scioto Co., house 1016.
 3. Evans, op. cit., page 383.
 4. Noted in the Portsmouth Holy Redeemer baptismal register in the years 1860 through 1865.
 5. Lamott, Rev. John H., History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati; New York: Frederick Pustet Co. Inc., 1921; appendix.
 6. Ahern to Purcell, Sept. 18, 1865 and Schreiber to Purcell, Nov. 6, 1865. All of the letters noted in this article were graciously supplied by the Historical Archives of the Chancery, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, thanks to the former and present archivists, Rev. Jerry Hiland and Mr. Don Buske.
 7. St. Joseph Congregation, Ironton, to Purcell, March 20, 1866.
 8. According to a letter from Father Ahern to Purcell, Oct. 30, 1865, there was then a school at Buena Vista, which he feared would be lost unless the Irish and Germans would be reunited.
 9. Schreiber to Purcell, Sept. 20, 1866.
 10. History of the Lower Scioto Valley; Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1884; page 427.
 11. Federal census of 1870, Nile Twp., house 58; same, 1880, house 149. History of the Lower Scioto Valley, page 426. Willard, Eugene B., ed., A Standard History of the Hanging Rock Iron Region of Ohio; The Lewis Publishing Co., 1916; II/933. Adams County Genealogical Society, Adams Co. Green Township Cemeteries, page 47.
 12. Federal census of Cincinnati, Ward 7, family 443. History of the Lower Scioto Valley, p. 426. Evans, op. cit., page 386. Goss, Rev. Charles Frederic, Cincinnati - The Queen City; Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912; III/767-768. The Cincinnati city directory for 1873.
 13. Schreiber to Purcell, Feb. 26, 1867.
 14. Geyer to Purcell, Oct. 11, 1872.
 15. Same to same, Oct. 18, 1872.
 16. Same to same, March 15, 1873.
 17. For a short biographical sketch of Father Mertian, see the Bulletin of December, 1983 (page 284).
 18. The only clue found at the Scioto County Recorder's office appears to be a compound of two errors. When the property of the Diocese of Columbus was transferred from Bishop Watterson's estate to Bishop Moeller in 1900, a general deed lacking a list of the properties was written. In the tract-by-tract Recorder's index, however, the Recorder indexed lot 57 in Buena Vista as being transferred by this deed. The first error lies in that Buena Vista lies west of the Scioto River and was not within the Diocese of Columbus until 1945. The second error is that lot 57, lying on the western edge of the village, was owned not by the Church but by John Likens. As noted in the text, the water-front building which was the original Immaculate Conception Church was still being used in 1902.
 19. Mertian to Purcell, Sept. 3, 1881 and Jan. 19, 1885.
 20. Mertian to Elder Jan. 5, 1893.
 21. Mertian to (? Archbishop Elder or his chancellor), Dec. 23, 1896.
- Special thanks to Rev. George J. Schlegel for his assistance in researching this article.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION MISSION
BUENA VISTA, NILE TOWNSHIP, SCIOTO COUNTY
BAPTISMS, 1859-1867

The following records were taken from the baptismal register of Holy Redeemer Parish in Portsmouth. All of them were noted "Buena Vista". Following these will be a few recorded at Wheelersburg in 1865 and 1866 by Father Schreiber.

1859

May 12 Jacob, son of Andrew and Frances Hornbach, born March 24; spons. Jacob Heyho(?). James J. O'Donohue
same Helen, daughter of Martin and Helen Flanagan, born Apr. 2; spons. Richard (?) Fallon and Bridget Hanley. JJO
same Honora, daughter of Thomas and Jane Gorman, born Apr. 20; spons. Edward Bourke and Mary Foley. JJO
Sept. 8 Mary, daughter of Lawrence and Honora O'Brien, born Aug. 14; spons. Patrick Fallon and Bridget McGuier. JJO
same Andrew Francis, son of Charles and Josephine Lemont, born Apr. 12; spons. Andrew Francis Zebellenain and Sidonia Peregura. JJO

1860

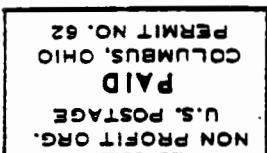
March 9 Thomas, son of Thomas Ryan and Bridget Lally, born Feb. 15; spons. Patrick Kelly and Victoria Charbout. JJO
same Owen, son of John Dugan and Bridget Sweeny, born Dec. 24, 1859; spons. Arthur Carey and Mary Ryan. JJO
same William, son of Michael Foley and Mary O'Neile, born yesterday; spons. John Frawley and Helen Noonan. JJO
June 7 Philip, son of Martin Flanagan and Helen Reilly, born May 22; spons. Philip Reilly and Helen Corbett. JJO
July 30 Benedict Alexander Louis, son of Claude Francis Dempsi and Mary Rose Pairmentur, born Feb. 10, 1859; spons. Benedict Charbout and Mary Dempsi. JJO [The Irish priest used a nearly Irish spelling of the name. The German priest used a more French spelling, DeMesy, at Aug. 15, 1862.]
same Mary, daughter of Michael Fallon and Mary Frawley, born June 17; spons. Michael Fallon and Catherine Frawley. JJO

1861

March 5 George Bernard, son of ---- Hornbach and Frances Vernheep, born Oct. 20, 1860; spons. Thomas Bernard and Caroline Bodick. JJO
Apr. 16 Bridget, daughter of Lawrence O'Brien and Honora Gavan, born March 10; spons. ---- Forde and Mary Frawley. JJO
May 30 John, son of Thomas Burke and Mary Corbett, born March 31; spons. Edward Noonan and Helen Flanagan. JJO
Aug. 15 Helen, daughter of Thomas Gorman and Jane Landrigan, born Aug. 1; spons. Philip. Reilly and Bridget Frawley. JJO

(To be continued)

Copyright 1990, Catholic Record Society - Diocese of Columbus
197 E. Gay Street Columbus, Ohio 43215 Donald M. Schlegel, editor



CHANCERY OFFICE
DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS
198 EAST BROAD STREET
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215