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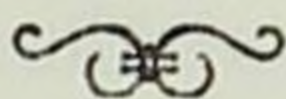
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Iowa's Early Catholic History

The first white men who gazed upon the wooded hills of eastern Iowa — or any part of Iowa, for that matter — were Catholic Frenchmen. It is possible that in 1655 the explorers, Radisson and Groseilliers, first beheld Iowaland from the mouth of the Wisconsin River near what is now Prairie du Chien. Of certain historical record is the fact that Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet passed down the eastern shore of Iowa in 1673. From that time on various missionaries, along with explorers and traders, passed up and down the Father of Waters, but none tarried in Iowa. In the late 1700's French and Spanish soldiers and traders paddled past the western shores of Iowa on the Missouri River. French military leaders like Des Noyelles and Marin made incursions into Iowa in pursuit of warring bands of Indians, but there are no records of any chaplains accompanying them.

The earliest settlers of Iowa were Frenchmen, and one of them, Jean Marie Cardinal, estab-

lished himself in the 1770's at the mines where the city of Dubuque now stands. Here occurs the first connection of Iowa with the Church: in 1776 Cardinal took his Indian wife and eight children, at least some of whom were probably born in Iowa, to St. Louis where they were all baptized in the little church of that village. Four years later, in the course of the Revolutionary War, Cardinal was killed during the British and Indian attack on St. Louis. Cardinal might well be called the only Iowan to give his life in the cause of American independence.

Following his father's death in 1783, Julien Dubuque, a daring young French Canadian, came west from the district of Three Rivers in Canada to Prairie du Chien. He soon took over the old Cardinal mines at Catfish Creek and became the first permanent settler of Iowa. He confirmed his right "to work at the mine" first by a treaty in 1788 with the Fox Indians, and later, in 1796, through a Spanish grant from the governor of Louisiana. Although Julien Dubuque's mining, trading, and farming operations were conducted on a huge scale, there is nothing to indicate that his settlement was ever visited by priest or missionary. At his death in 1810 the white residents of the "Mines of Spain" erected a large cross over his grave at the top of a bluff overlooking the Mississippi at Catfish Creek, the first public Christian symbol to be set up in Iowa.

The first appearance of a priest, or of any Christian minister in Iowa bent on missionary and evangelizing work, occurred many years later. That fact is more readily understandable when it is recalled that as late as 1830 there were probably not fifty white men in all Iowa. Just two weeks after the Black Hawk Treaty was signed in 1832, and many months before Iowa was thrown open to the settlers, Father Charles Felix Van Quickenborne, a Flemish Jesuit, coming up from his missionary labors along the Mississippi in Missouri and Illinois, arrived in the Half-breed Tract. This spot, where he tarried a few days, was usually called up to that time "The Foot of the Rapids," but Father Van Quickenborne marked it in his records as "Keokuck."

It was here among the French and Americans and half-breed Indians that this first Christian missionary suddenly appeared during the early days of October, 1832. And on October 6, 1832, the first Christian baptism was performed when Father Van Quickenborne christened Maria Louise, the year-old daughter of Joseph Fraiser, a Catholic, and Margaret, "a Folle Avoine Indian" (a Menominee). Two days later two little Negro slave children, Mary Jane, three years old, and Andrew Jackson, six months old, both belonging to Isaac R. Campbell, famous early river-man of Keokuk, were baptized. After giving the marital benediction to six couples at this locality, all of

whom bore French or Scotch names, Father Van Quickenborne returned shortly thereafter to St. Louis.

The following summer this redoubtable priest — the founder of St. Louis University and the teacher and inspirer of another great missionary of the West, Father Pierre Jean De Smet — appeared in Iowa again, coming over from Galena, Illinois, to the village of "Dubuque's" as he spelled it. The first baptism in Dubuque occurred on July 10, 1833, and was conferred upon Henry, the eight-month-old child of Patrick and Mary Sullivan Monaghan. At "Catfish near Dubuque Mines" (the location of the Fox Indian village and Julien Dubuque's establishment) two days later, the missionary baptized five children, two of them half-breeds, and the other three, grandchildren of Dennis Julien, a widely known French Canadian trader of the Northwest who had supported the British in the War of 1812. While in Dubuque Father Van Quickenborne gave the nuptial blessing to four couples and said his daily Mass in the home of a Mrs. Brophy.

Before leaving the village, however, the indefatigable missionary made arrangements for the construction of what should have been the first church of any denomination in Iowa. A meeting was called and the following remarkable document, later found at St. Louis, gives a detailed account of the transaction:

July 19, 1833

Memorandum left with James Fanning at Dubuque:

At an aggregate meeting of the Roman Catholics living at the Dubuque Mines on the 14th of July, 1833, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

1. That, as it is the general wish that a Catholic Church should be built in this vicinity, the permit shall be obtained in the name of the Right Rev. Joseph Rosati, Bishop of St. Louis.

2. That as a majority of four have declared the town of Dubuque or its vicinity to be the most suitable neighborhood for the contemplated church, the designation of the precise spot shall be left to the decision of the committee to be appointed, or a majority of these.

3. That the following gentlemen do form the said committee: viz., James Fanning, James McCabe, Patrick O'Mara, N. Gregoire, and Thomas Fitzpatrick. Mr. James Fanning was unanimously chosen treasurer, into whose hands the subscriptions and donations shall be paid; of which moneys received and expended an account shall be given by the same treasurer to the clergyman appointed by the Bishop to the congregation.

4. That the said committee shall have power to nominate a president out of their number, and he or two of its members to have power to call for a meeting of the committee, and a majority of them to be a quorum to transact all the business relative to the building of the church.

5. The building to be raised by the subscriptions of the Catholics at this place and to be as follows: A hewed log building, 25 feet by 20 feet and 10 feet or 12 feet high, with a shingle roof and plank floor, with four windows, each having 28 lights of 8 by 10 and shutters, the door to be 8 feet by 5 feet.

Here is a momentous document, revealing the

formation of the first Christian congregation in Iowaland. Although this was also the first church parish of any denomination to be established in Iowa, the church edifice, planned by the above committee, was not completed until 1835. During the intervening year of 1834 a log house of worship was built by the Methodists in Dubuque by means of subscriptions from Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. The original subscription paper is owned by the State Historical Society of Iowa and it states, "when not occupied by said Church, shall be open for Divine service by other Christian Denominations; and may be used for a common school." Among the various Catholics who contributed to the erection of this chapel were two who are mentioned in the above document of Father Van Quickenborne's — James Fanning and Patrick O'Mara. The listed name of another contributor, "John Regan," was that of the father of the first Iowa child to become a priest of the Roman Catholic Church and who was ordained in Rome in 1863.

Toward the erection of their own church building, "the Catholic inhabitants of Dubuque Mines" subscribed in 1834 some \$1,100 to Father Charles Francis Fitzmaurice, who in that year alternated on Sundays between Galena and Dubuque, and then fell a victim to the dread cholera.

Meanwhile there were also missionary activities in southeastern Iowa, which were laying slowly

and patiently the slender foundations of what was soon to become the diocese of Bishop Mathias Loras. Father Peter Paul Lefevre, in later life to become the bishop of Detroit, followed in the footsteps of his illustrious Belgian countryman, Father Van Quickenborne, in this part of the state. In a letter to Bishop Rosati of St. Louis, dated July 3, 1834, he tells of his visit to Iowa:

Then I returned to this side of the Mississippi among the Half Indians and in the New [Black Hawk] Purchase where the Catholics are increasing very fast. The difficulties and hardships I had to struggle with were great; but in all this I had the consolation of baptizing several adult persons, and of seeing many Catholics, who until then had been cold and indifferent and had never made any use of the Church for many years, take a new start as it were, in the way of their salvation and devoutly approach the sacraments.

Three years later, in March of 1837, he again wrote about Iowa: "In the Wisconsin territory [of which Iowa was then a part] I attended the stations at Keokuk, in Half Indian tract, between the river Des Moines and the Mississippi, and the station on Skunk River, ten miles west from Fort Madison."

Another and most successful missionary in this part of Iowa was the Rev. Augustus Brickwedde, for years pastor at Quincy, Illinois. The son of a judge of the Royal Court of Hanover, and a graduate of the universities of Munich and Bonn, he

devoted much of his time to ministering to German Americans and German immigrants. In the early days of May, 1838, he said holy Mass in the log houses and even in the barns of the early settlers at Fort Madison and on the banks of Sugar Creek in Marion Township. Under his direction the Catholics of this community built a little church of the best sugar-maple trees of their timbered valley, which was then the only building material within reach. It was dedicated to St. James. To the bishop of St. Louis, Father Brickwedde reported for 1838 of Sugar Creek near West Point: "Fifty-eight persons, all Germans, four baptisms, thirty-four Easter Communicants, two marriages, and three interments."

Western Iowa, along the banks of the Missouri, was also visited by missionaries in the very year preceding the advent of the first bishop of Iowa. The federal government had removed a number of Potawatomi Indians to Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. On May 31, 1838, two Jesuit Fathers and two lay brothers commenced their missionary establishment among these Indians. The priests were the eminent Pierre Jean De Smet and his companion, Felix Verreydt. It was, however, Father Van Quickenborne who had originally planned this venture and who had tried, but in vain, to obtain in Washington appropriations for a projected mission school. Wrote Father De Smet of the arrival of the missionaries:

Nearly two thousand savages, in their finest rigs and carefully painted in all sorts of patterns, were awaiting the boat at the landing. I had not seen so imposing a sight nor such fine-looking Indians in America; the Iowas, the Sauks, and Otoes are beggars compared to these. Father Verreydt and Brother Mazella went at once to the home of the half-breed chief, Mr. Caldwell, four miles from the river.

Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, in command of the troops at "the Bluffs," turned over to Father De Smet and his associates the blockhouse fort he had previously erected, and Chief Caldwell gave them three cabins. The blockhouse was turned into a chapel and surmounted with a small belfry. Father De Smet's sense of humor led him to make this note in his journal: "On the day of Corpus Christi I put up a cross on the roof, and while I climbed the ladder to put it in place, Father Felix beheld the devil clap his tail between his legs and take flight over the big hills."

In the spring of 1839 two Catholic gentlemen of great renown, engaged by the United States government to make an exploration of the Far West, were members of the Jesuit congregation at Council Bluffs. One was Jean Nicolas Nicollet, the geologist, and the other Lieutenant John C. Fremont, who became famous in the Mexican War and later was the first Republican party candidate for president of the United States.

The mission so bravely begun soon faced a

hopeless future. Scenes of debauchery followed the arrival of every shipment of liquor by the American Fur Company. The first anniversary of the Jesuits' arrival at Council Bluffs was commented upon thus by Father De Smet: "May 31, drinking all day. Drunkards by the dozen. Indians are selling horses, blankets, guns, their all, to have a lick at the cannon. Four dollars a bottle! Plenty at that price. Detestable traffic."

Despite these terrible handicaps the mission school prospered for a time and drew praise from the Indian agent. In the first three years 308 Indians and half-breeds were baptized, many marriages were blessed, and the sacraments were given to numerous others. But conditions continued to grow so bad that they compelled the definite abandonment of the mission. In August of 1841 Fathers Verreydt and Christian Hoecken, together with the brothers, bade farewell to Council Bluffs.

In the years that followed the Potawatomi Indians in western Iowa were visited only occasionally by Father Hoecken. In 1842 and in 1844 he returned to the mission and administered a number of baptisms. In May of 1846 he was again with the Indians and baptized on this occasion thirty-eight infants and a dying squaw. This was the last visit of a Catholic priest before the closing of the Indian reservation. The blockhouse church was still standing in 1852 when the first priest sent

out by Bishop Loras of Dubuque arrived in Council Bluffs to organize a parish there among the white settlers.

In the meantime, during the 1830's and 1840's, Dubuque had quickly become the focal point of widespread Catholic activities in Iowa. In 1835 there arrived in that little city a Dominican friar, extraordinarily gifted with versatile talents. Had Bishop Rosati of St. Louis done nothing else for the faith in the Northwest than appoint his fellow Italian, the gentle-born Milanese, Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli, to its missions, this region would owe him a debt of eternal gratitude. Mazzuchelli was a saint and a scholar, architect and artist, priest of God and gentleman of the frontier world; he personified physical and spiritual courage; his tongue was a fire of eloquence; his brain was a vehicle of the wisdom of the Lord.

Before the arrival of Bishop Mathias Loras at Dubuque, Mazzuchelli was the only priest in the wilderness for hundreds of miles in all directions, aye, a thousand miles in some. He was at the same time probably serving under three ecclesiastical jurisdictions, that of Vincennes for a part of Illinois; that of Detroit for Wisconsin, and that of St. Louis for Iowa and another part of Illinois. Half-breeds and traders, miners and landseekers composed his far-flung flock. A trip of hundreds of leagues on foot over ice and snow never dismayed him; the tepees of the savage and the huts of the

hard-drinking frontiersmen were his home. Precursor of the faith, pathfinder in the wilderness, under his magnetic influence he saw churches and chapels spring up from Michigan and Wisconsin to Illinois and Iowa. In Iowa he formed or helped to form every early mission along the Mississippi from Dubuque almost to the Missouri state border, and inland as far as little Maquoketa and Iowa City.

In 1835, taking over the lots and the money and materials secured by Father Van Quickenborne and Father Fitzmaurice in the previous two years, Father Mazzuchelli rapidly added to them contributions secured from Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. He decided to build the church much larger than was originally intended — for the growth in the number of Catholics demanded this — and he abandoned the idea of building it of lumber or logs in favor of stone. He himself worked in the nearby quarries to secure the stones, just as he worked later with his hands in the quarries of Prairie du Chien for the Church of St. Gabriel in that town. Wrote Eliphalet Price, one of Iowa's early historians:

The first Catholic church erected in Iowa was commenced at Dubuque in the spring of 1835, under the direction and management of an educated and gentlemanly little French [*sic*] priest by the name of Mazzuchelli. This was a stone edifice. We never transacted business with a more honorable, pleasant, and gentlemanly person

than the Rev. Mr. Mazzuchelli. We left him seated upon a stone near the building, watching the lazy movements of a lone Irishman, who was working out his subscription in aid of the church.

In the following year, while visiting the scattered Catholics at Rock Island and Davenport, Father Mazzuchelli offered up the first Mass in Davenport in the home of Antoine Le Claire, one of the founders of the city of Davenport. Trader, land speculator, and town builder, Le Claire, a half-breed French American, acted also as interpreter-in-chief of the United States government in its treaties with the Sauk and Fox and with other tribes. His mother was the daughter of a Sauk chief. Father Mazzuchelli found "about 40 Catholics" in Davenport. Antoine Le Claire donated four city lots of the value of \$2,500 for a newly projected church for them, and later donated \$1,000 toward its erection. Father Mazzuchelli and Le Claire laid the first stones in April, 1837, and the structure was entirely completed in 1838. It was built of two stories, so that the building could serve as a residence for the priest, and later as a school. It was called St. Anthony, in honor of the patron saint of Antoine Le Claire.

When the ubiquitous Italian missionary arrived in Burlington in December of 1839 he found in that prosperous little city of almost two thousand population only twenty-seven Catholics. Among these were the wife and children of General Au-

gustus Caesar Dodge, at that time the Register of United States Land Office for Iowa, and later one of the first two United States Senators from the state. In the following year, because of a recent influx of Irish and German Catholics, Father Mazzuchelli was encouraged to purchase a piece of land and commence the building of St. Paul's church in Burlington. Remaining there for a short while as pastor, he commenced the mission-parishes of Fort Madison and the Half-breed Tract — Keokuk.

In 1840 he went into the woods of Jackson County to what was then known as "Makokiti," now called Garryowen, where many Irish families had settled since the opening of the Black Hawk Purchase. He directed the building of a large log church which was sufficiently finished by summer to permit the holding of divine services. One hundred persons were present at its dedication at that time to St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland; three years later, in 1843, the parish contained six hundred souls and possessed a crowded school.

In 1840 and 1841 the seat of the Iowa territorial government was transferred from Burlington to Iowa City. A population of almost a thousand — of whom a considerable number were Catholics — had settled in and around the new capital. The legislature had decreed that several lots in the new city were to be set aside for church purposes, on condition that the religious bodies which desired

to obtain them should build upon them churches of not less than a thousand dollars in value. Father Mazzuchelli hastened to Iowa City in December of 1840 with \$2,000 in securities given him by Bishop Mathias Loras of Dubuque. Posting the securities with the government, he obtained several choice lots. On the 20th of that month he celebrated the first Mass in Iowa City in the house of Ferdinand Haberstroh, a German mechanic, not far from the State House, in the presence of twenty-eight Catholics; after Mass the first dogmatic sermon was preached in Johnson County.

Work on the church structure was immediately begun, and on July 12, 1841, Bishop Loras arrived in Iowa City to lay the cornerstone of "the first church of Iowa's capital, dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Father Mazzuchelli addressed the large gathering on the subject of the religious and political advantages resulting from the practice of divine worship. A pile of earth left by the workmen after digging the foundation served as a pulpit for the speaker.

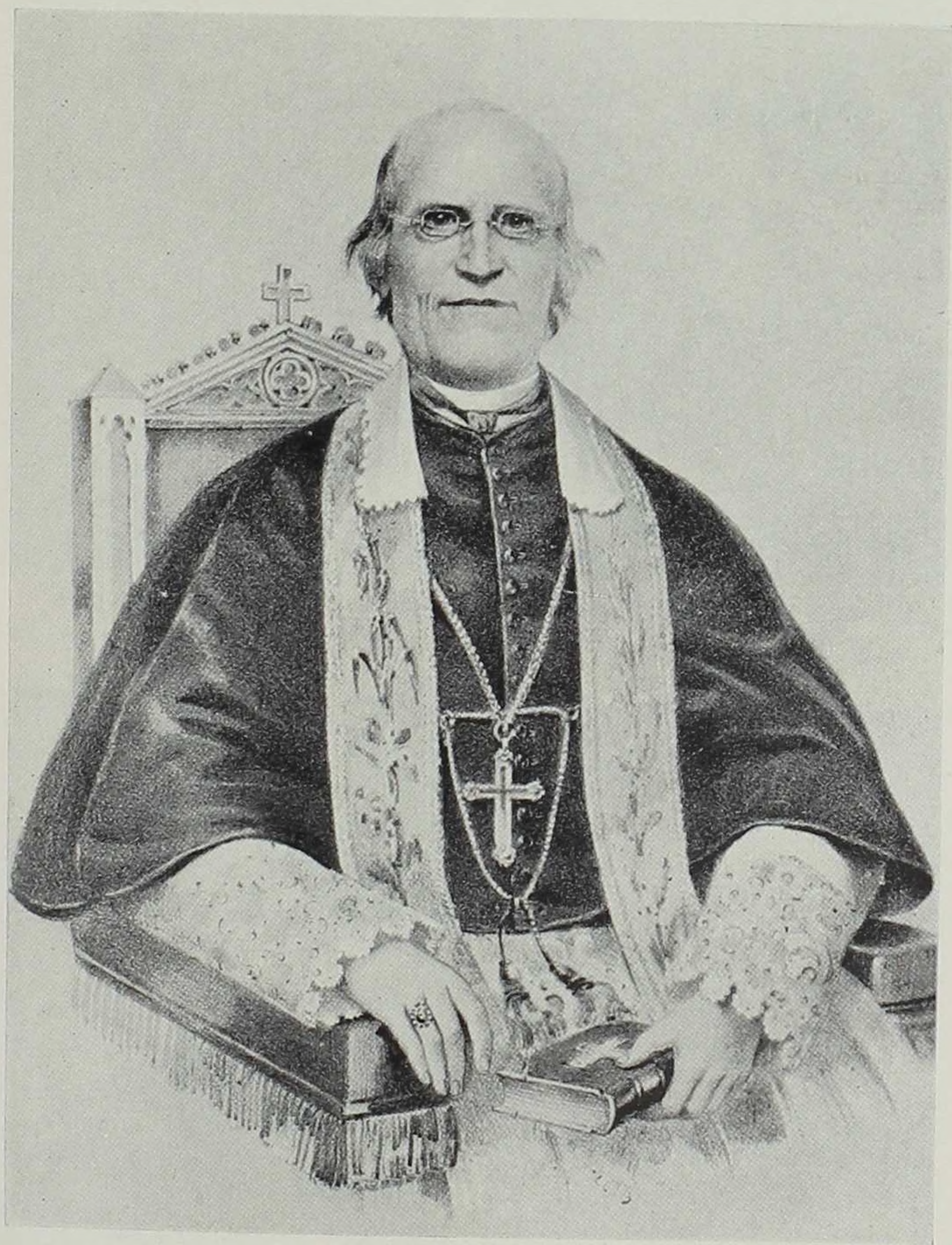
Besides the many churches erected by this remarkable Dominican missionary up and down the Upper Mississippi Valley, other grand monuments emanating from his artistic mind and fashioned by his clever hands were: the Dubuque diocesan college built in 1839 and whose lineal descendant today is Loras College; the Galena, Illinois, courthouse; and the original Sinsinawa col-

lege building at Sinsinawa, Wisconsin. Both of these latter structures are still standing today.

Of all the traditions that have added color to the history of the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City, none is more fascinating or persistent than that of the architectural planning of Old Capitol itself by Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli. Certain writers even attribute to him the plan of Iowa City. In his scholarly volume, *The Old Stone Capitol Remembers*, Professor Benjamin F. Shambaugh devotes an entire chapter to the claims of the Mazzuchelli design, and sums up the matter:

The sympathetic and scholarly biographer of Father Mazzuchelli [does not] find any substantial documentary evidence in support of the authenticity of the tradition as factual history. . . . In the years to come, while the Old Stone Capitol will remember the name of John F. Rague as architect has been preserved in the cornerstone, the spirit of Father Mazzuchelli will live to inspire reverence and loyalty in the hearts of men.

In his *Memoirs*, first published in Italy and later in America, Mazzuchelli refers deferentially yet guardedly to the other sects in Iowa with whose members he was constantly thrown into contact. The Italian Dominican had been extraordinarily successful as an Indian missionary in Michigan and Wisconsin. Clever linguist that he was, speaking English, French, and Italian with fluency, he became a master of several difficult Indian tongues. In 1834 he published an almanac in the

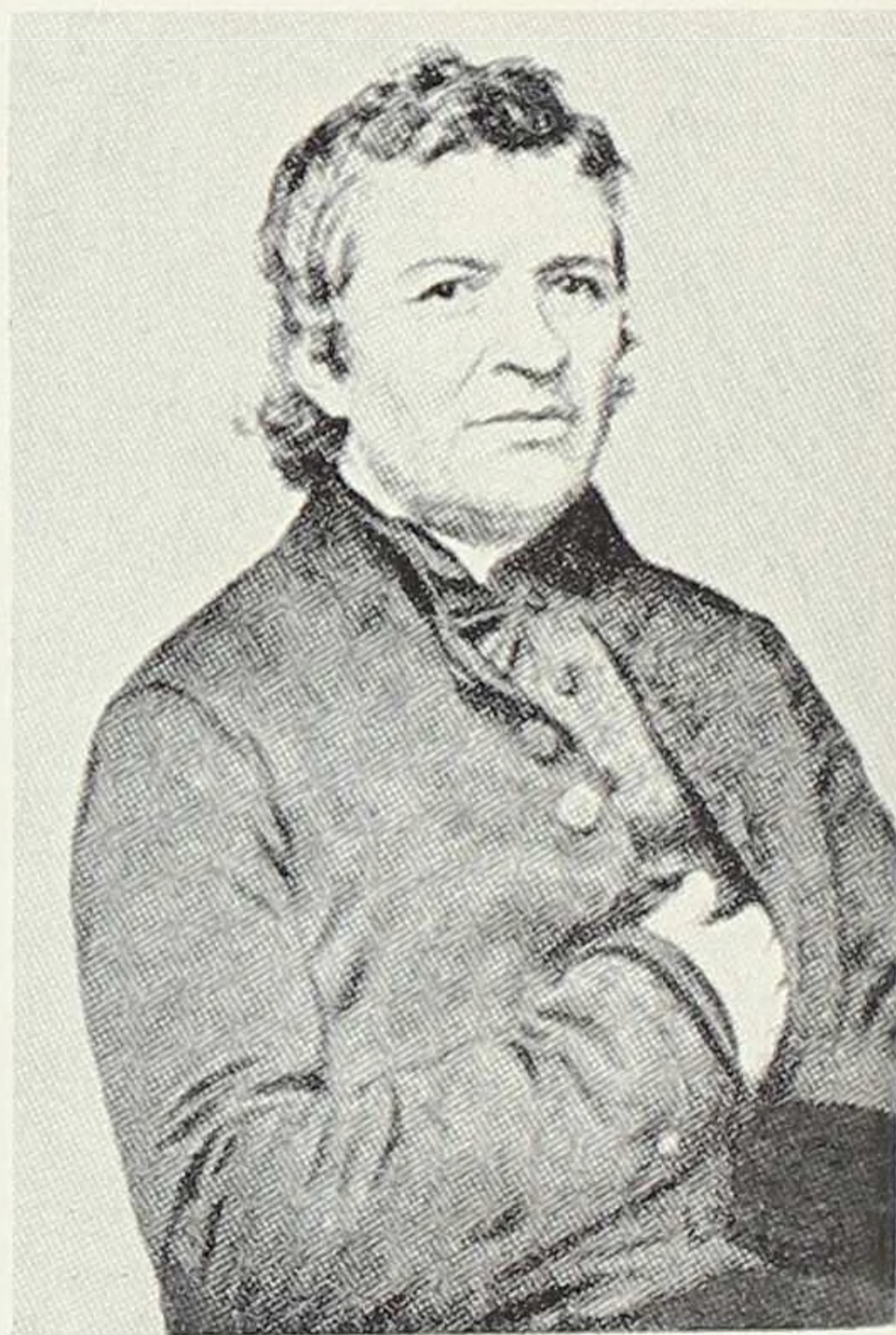


BISHOP MATHIAS LORAS
(1837-1858)

IOWA'S EARLY MISSIONERS



Father Jacques Marquette



Abbé J. A. M. Pelamourgues



Father Pierre Jean De Smet



Father Samuel C. Mazzuchelli

Menominee speech and this booklet, printed in Green Bay, is thought to be the earliest known printed work in the state of Wisconsin. Previously to that he had published a prayer book and catechism in the Winnebago tongue, which was printed in Detroit. It was among the Winnebago tribesmen that he had made a great many converts, and when the United States government in 1835 opened up a school for the Winnebago children on the Yellow River in Iowa, near present-day McGregor, Mazzuchelli had hoped because of his eminent qualifications to be appointed as superintendent. The Indian agent, Joseph M. Street, however, invited the Rev. David Lowry, a Cumberland Presbyterian divine, to come up from Kentucky and accept the appointment.

This precipitated a bit of a storm. Mazzuchelli's friends, and they were numerous both among his Christian Winnebago communicants and among the whites, pressed strongly for his appointment in view of the fact, as they alleged, that the Rev. Mr. Lowry, unacquainted with the Northwest, was totally ignorant of the Indian ways, habits, and language. But the case for Father Mazzuchelli became hopeless when Colonel Zachary Taylor, commander of Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, a soldier who was later to become President of the United States, stepped into the fray. He attacked the missionary in an offensively worded letter which he sent to General William Clark of St. Louis, the

Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He called the Dominican "a Foreigner, an Italian Catholic Priest," and referred to his "superstitious feelings." He even suggested that Father Mazzuchelli would "no doubt" be a tool of scoundrels for stealing school funds.

It was in Iowa, while watching the immigrants crossing the Mississippi, that Father Mazzuchelli first beheld the (to him) strange religious camp meetings and heard the shouting of the revivalist gathering, and his *Memoirs* contain his philosophical reflections on what he witnessed. He was very interested in the Mormons, and in February of 1843 descended the Mississippi on the ice for ten miles from Fort Madison to Nauvoo. Here he was the personal guest of Joseph Smith, the Mormon leader.

Mazzuchelli took an active part in the territorial beginnings of Iowa. Reared in the polished society of Old World capitals, he was impressed by the vigor and freedom of American political institutions, and he eulogized them at length in his writings. At Dubuque, for the patriotic celebration on July 4, 1836, his new stone church "was used by the people of the town to hear the *oration* delivered by a lawyer." Mazzuchelli himself was chosen chaplain of the occasion. And, in the following October, he was elected chaplain of the first legislature of the newly created Territory of Wisconsin, at its first capital, Belmont. Although

only two of the thirty-nine members were Catholics — Messrs. Patrick Quigley and John Foley, his parishioners of Dubuque (Iowa was a part of the Wisconsin Territory) — the Dominican was chosen to the office without opposition. He gave a formal address to the combined houses before the reading of the governor's message, and, for one week, opened the daily sessions of the legislature with prayer.

In the late fall of 1840, at Burlington, the temporary capital of Iowa Territory, Father Mazuchelli rented his new church to the government for sixty days, until the close of the Third Legislative Assembly. It was used by the Council for its sessions, while the House of Representatives gathered in the Methodist Church. Thus two new church structures — St. Paul's Roman Catholic, and "Old Zion" — served together as the "Capitol" of Iowa Territory.

M. M. HOFFMAN