

Mazzuchelli's Memorie

Born in Milan, Italy, in 1806, of a wealthy family, Charles Samuel Mazzuchelli deliberately gave up his comfortable prospects to come to America as a missionary of the Dominican order. After a few years of preparation, he was assigned to the midwestern wilderness where he first worked among the Indians and later with the white settlers. At Green Bay and Prairie du Chien in Wisconsin, at Galena in Illinois, at Dubuque and Davenport in Iowa, and at other places along the upper Mississippi, perhaps as many as twenty, this slender, pink-cheeked, white-robed Catholic priest designed and superintended the erection of churches. To hundreds of pioneers he brought the solace of religion — baptizing children, sanctifying marriages, preaching the gospel, and administering extreme unction to the dying. For fifteen years he studied and labored on the frontier, enduring the hardships of life among the Indians and early settlers.

Having suffered a serious illness in 1842, Father Mazzuchelli returned to Italy in the following year for the first time since he had left the country in 1828. While recuperating he wrote

and published in 1844 the story of his adventures in America, partly to satisfy the curiosity of the Italians and partly to give permanent form to important details of American ecclesiastical history, for he had shared in the establishment of the dioceses of Detroit, Milwaukee, and Dubuque. Yet with characteristic modesty, he described his experiences in the third person, referring to himself as "our Missionary". Not even on the title page of *Memorie Istoriche ed Edificanti d'un Missionario Apostolico* does his name appear.

Mazzuchelli hoped that his book would incidentally procure missionaries for the great expanses of America, but there is no trace of suggestion that Italians would have an interest in coming as ordinary immigrants. Strangely, too, since Italians are prone to floridity, his language is sober, in contrast to the style of promotional guides such as John B. Newhall's *British Emigrants' "Hand Book"*. He had much to say about the appearance of the country, the character of the people, and the enterprising towns, but spiritual affairs received more attention than natural resources.

The Iowa State Historical Society's copy of the *Memorie* is in excellent condition showing only a normal foxing of the paper. Color has rubbed off the dark green board covers in spots, but the gold

of the letters and the decorative tooling gleams brightly on the leather spine. There is a frontispiece, showing the wigwam of Christianized Indians, and three maps — one of the Indian country between Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, one of the upper Mississippi Valley in 1839, and the other of the United States in 1844 with the various Catholic dioceses indicated. Fortunately, for general use, a complete translation of Mazzuchelli's *Memorie* was published in 1915. The original illustrations were reproduced and a biographical introduction by the late Archbishop Ireland was added.

The second part, pertaining to Mazzuchelli's missionary work in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois, is most directly related to Iowa history. On July 4, 1835, Father Mazzuchelli arrived in Galena with the intention of ministering to the Catholic settlers of the surrounding region. Across the Mississippi he found Dubuque to be a town of about 250 persons, with perhaps three times as many living in the vicinity, some farming, but more engaged in the lead mining which David Dale Owen's pencil was to illustrate four years later.

Small as the settlement was, Mazzuchelli anticipated that Dubuque was destined to become a city and he decided to form a parish and build a

church there. As at Green Bay and Galena, he designed the building himself and on August 15, 1835, the cornerstone was laid. Nearly all the inhabitants, Protestant as well as Catholic, were present because "all without distinction were satisfied and happy to see in a country which was a-borning, a monument destined for the propagation of the Christian faith." In time this building became the first cathedral in Iowa, and was referred to by Newhall in his description of Dubuque as "a neat structure of stone".

Father Mazzuchelli was so distressed by the extent of drunkenness that he formed the "Catholic Society of Total Abstinence in Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin." Within a cross-shaped space in the center of the certificate of membership, appeared the pledge: "I, _____, promise to abstain from every intoxicating beverage except when used medicinally upon prescription of a physician." Appropriate quotations from the Bible were printed above the cross, while on the left seven fruits of temperance and on the right seven evil effects of intemperance were listed.

Mazzuchelli was apparently not much impressed by the location of Dubuque, but the site of Davenport appealed strongly to him. It was "one of the most beautiful and gracious positions on the western shore of the Mississippi. . . .

Nature herself seemed to have formed this regular and verdant slope surrounded and protected by hills in order that man might here build a city". He referred to a map, presumably one prepared by Antoine LeClaire, which showed "straight streets of impressive width" with squares left for parks and civic buildings and "a spacious and unencumbered boulevard along the river for business"; but the conglomeration of wooden buildings which his eyes actually beheld presented a rather different picture. However, it was not the rudeness of the early village, but the amazing growth within a period of seven years which he wished to impress upon his readers. Having grown up in the old cities of Italy, he was awed by seeing a virgin land become so suddenly a settled country.

The reason for the rapid settlement of Iowa was obvious and could not be omitted from the missionary's memoirs. Though the lead mines were important, the soil was recognized as the greatest resource. All kinds of grain flourished, domestic animals found boundless meadows upon which they could feed during seven months of the year. On the other hand, fruit-bearing plants were scarce and those imported seldom matured, only apples seeming to be suited to the climate. Corn, potatoes, and hogs were the principal prod-

ucts. From Burlington alone, in 1843, steamboats had loaded 30,000 hogs raised in the vicinity. Pork, salted in barrels, was exported to the markets of the world.

Woodlands, often ten miles in width, bordered the streams and the Iowans held these in great esteem because timber was needed as building material, fencing, and fuel. Mazzuchelli called particular attention to the use of the rivers in winter when they formed "most solid pavements not only for men, but indeed for horses, and trips of hundreds of miles were made upon them". He had a kind word for the summer, too, when there was generally a fresh breeze in the great natural meadows no matter how high the temperature went.

Burlington, then the Territorial capital, was one of the scenes of Father Mazzuchelli's activity. His initial experiences there were not encouraging due to the small proportion of Catholics in the population and "because a bitter dispute between the inhabitants of the Territory and those of the state of Missouri with regard to the line which separated those two independent governments, had filled the town with soldiers from the northern counties of Iowa. The government's activity was suspended and the preparation necessary for maintaining so many persons along

the disputed line during a cold winter, resulted in general confusion."

Mazzuchelli was amused by the outcome of the Missouri boundary war. "All, however, was amicably adjusted for the Missourians abandoned their attempt allowing the Territory to exercise jurisdiction in the part of the country it claimed. Civil wars in the United States generally are produced by the press, which also concludes the peace; the newspapers are the battlefields upon which, at most, the honor of some citizens is sacrificed. If only the Lord would grant that all the horrors of war should be reduced to simple typographical battles like these."

In the following year, 1840, he bravely undertook to erect a church at Burlington despite the small number of Catholics in the community, which contributed to the financial risk of the venture. But Father Mazzuchelli had good luck. The Territorial legislature in session that fall had been meeting in the Methodist church, and the missionary "through the friendship of some Senators secured their holding the sessions of the Senate in his church, not yet dedicated to divine services". The rent paid for use of the little church went a long way toward extinguishing the debt contracted for its erection. Father Mazzuchelli also regarded the use of his church build-

ing as another proof of the complete neutrality and absence of favoritism on the part of American government toward all religions.

In 1839 the Territorial legislature located the capital of Iowa in Johnson County on the very frontier of the settlements in order that it might presently be near the center of population. Father Mazzuchelli used this episode to impress once more upon his readers the phenomenal rapidity of development in the Territory. When the site was chosen, the hills beside the Iowa River were covered with a forest of oak and walnut. Less than three miles downstream was an Indian village. Within two months, a town was laid out with spacious streets, squares, grounds for the capitol, churches, and public gardens. Eighteen months later, in December, 1840, "there were nearly 1,000 inhabitants, hotels, postal service, stage coaches, merchants of all kinds, laborers, brick or stone houses, law courts, lawyers, doctors, Protestant ministers with churches, schools, a weekly newspaper, etc."

The legislature had ordered certain lots in the prospective capital to be set aside for churches. To obtain such a site, however, a congregation had to erect a building worth at least a thousand dollars. In December, 1840, Mazzuchelli hastened to Iowa City to make selection of land for a

Catholic church, giving the authorities a bond of \$2000 to guarantee that the stipulation of the law would be fulfilled. He was delighted with the lot secured at the corner of Jefferson and Linn streets facing the city park. Work was started at once. By July 12, 1841, the foundation walls were ready and Bishop Loras came to lay the cornerstone. Father Mazzuchelli was the chief speaker at this ceremony, having as his rostrum, the pile of earth which had been excavated for the basement of St. Mary's. In the spring of 1843 the church was ready for use. About that time, when public lands on the outskirts of Iowa City were put on the market, Bishop Loras acceded to Mazzuchelli's wish that he buy eighty acres to serve as a Catholic cemetery as needed, and meanwhile to provide both church and pastor with wood.

After Bishop Loras came to take charge of the newly created Diocese of Dubuque, the activities of Father Mazzuchelli were confined chiefly to southwestern Wisconsin, where he busied himself founding schools and churches, preaching, and ministering to the sick for nearly a score of years. Though he continued to serve his fellow men with zeal and versatility until his death in 1864, his labors were less arduous and exciting than during the period of his *Memorie*.

JEAN PHYLLIS BLACK