

*I sought my God but God I could not see.
I sought my soul but my soul eluded me.
I sought my brother and I found all three.*

catholics in cleveland

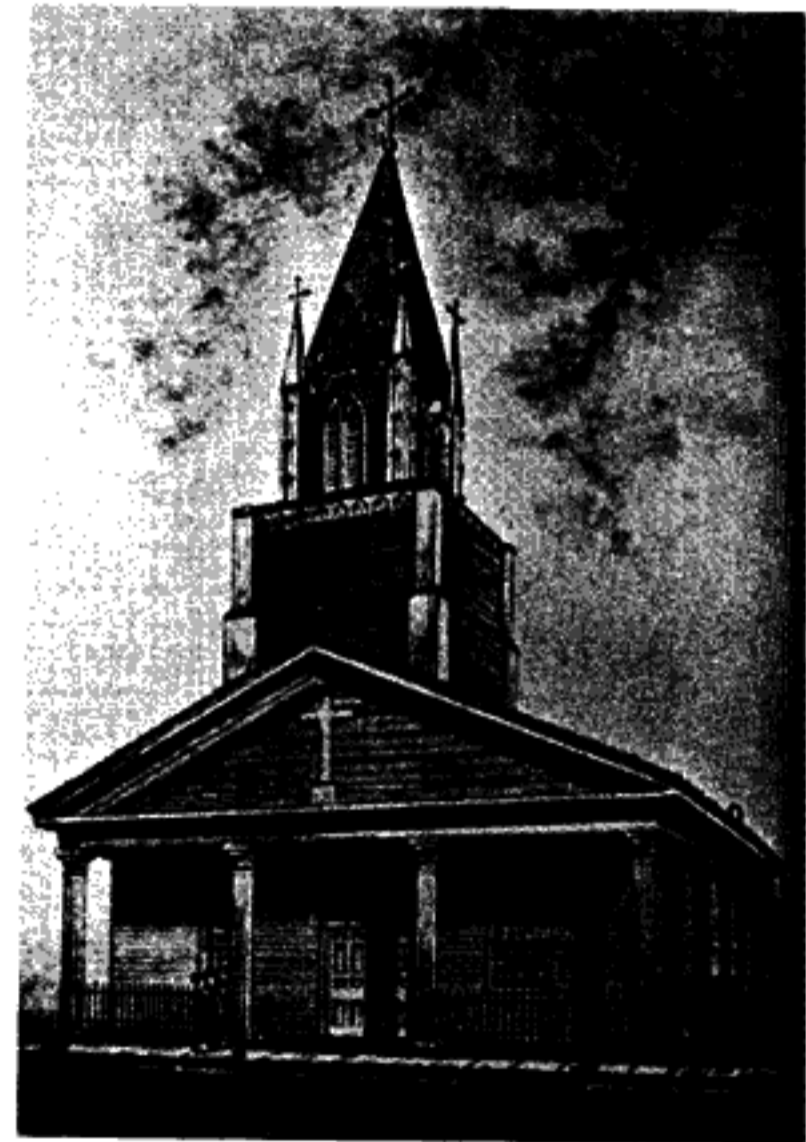
There were few Catholics among the early Cleveland pioneers. The real influx did not begin until 1825 when ground was broken for the Ohio Canal which would connect Cleveland with the Ohio River. The project required hundreds of laborers and the Irish flocked into Cleveland which then had a population of 500. With the coming of the Irish immigrants, the population doubled in a year.

When the spiritual needs of the Irish became known, Bishop Edward Fenwick of Cincinnati sent an appeal to the missionaries in Perry County to minister to them. There were no churches so the priests offered Mass in the shanties of the workers. The first resident priest of Cleveland, Father John Dillon, came in 1835. Masses were said in a meeting place called Shakespeare Hall near the end of Superior Street. Dillon began collecting funds to build a church but died of cholera the next year at the age of 26.

The next resident priest, Father Patrick O'Dwyer arrived in 1837 and immediately took up the plans of Father Dillon for the construction of a church. Three businessmen and bankers, all non-Catholics, gave Father O'Dwyer two lots in the flats on which to build the church. Construction began in 1838 and the first Mass was said in 1839. The dedication of Our Lady of the Lake Church known affectionately as St. Mary's-of-the-Flats, located on the west shore of the Cuyahoga River almost directly opposite Superior Street, took place in 1840.

Cleveland of the 1840's was a lusty town whose settlers were a pretty unreligious lot, numbering among them a fair share of drinkers and gamblers, when Amadeus Rappe who later became bishop of Cleveland came upon the scene. There was a whiskey distillery flourishing here before the first church or school house was built. There was instance after instance of whiskey-fumed rowdies heckling itinerant preachers who paused in Cleveland to conduct services.

Small wonder Bishop Rappe, sizing up this hard living lakefront town, quickly became an ardent foe of drink, and spent much time organizing total abstinence societies. Bishop Rappe, whose impact upon the Cleveland Catholic Diocese is still noted



St. Mary's-of-the-Flats (or Our Lady of the Lake), the "mother church" of Cleveland, was built in 1839. Torn down 1886.



Statue of Bishop Rappe, located in St. John Cathedral courtyard



Ohio Province, 1976

today, was 39 years old when he arrived in Ohio from his native France in 1840. He was Father Rappe then and spent his first six months in Chillicothe before moving on to Toledo where he founded that town's first parochial school.

Heralded as the *missionary of the Maumee* he arrived here in 1847 after the Pope granted a request by Bishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati to establish a Diocese of Cleveland with Bishop Rappe at its spiritual helm. The new bishop found only one church in Cleveland when he arrived in October of that year, St. Mary's-of-the-Flats. It served as the cathedral church for the diocese. He found many citizens who had left New England to journey west in the late 1700's and early 1800's to improve their economic lot - to get away from the puritanical restraints and church taxes imposed by congregations in Massachusetts and Connecticut - a citizenry holding general distrust of organized religion.

Rappe found the Catholic population of Cleveland now numbered about 4000 and saw a pressing need for more ample church facilities. He returned to France to get funds for a cathedral. Land had

already been purchased at the corner of Superior Street and Erie Street (now E. 9th Street). On Sunday, October 22, 1848, the cornerstone for St. John Cathedral was laid. It was a day of great rejoicing and of disgraceful scenes. The venerable Bishop Le Fevre of Detroit preached at St. Mary's in the morning. In the afternoon a large procession started from St. Mary's-of-the-Flats, to the site of the new cathedral. Whilst passing up Superior Street, those in the ranks were derided and insulted by non-Catholics. The disgraceful scene of bigotry was repeated after the impressive ceremony had begun. But in spite of the rude interruptions on the part of the rabble, the cornerstone was laid and the sermon was preached.

The cathedral, a plain brick edifice with a seating capacity of 1500, was completed four years later and consecrated November 7, 1852. When Amadeus Rappe assumed office of bishop, there were 42 churches in the entire northern diocese. At his retirement 23 years later, there were 137 churches, four educational institutions, five orphanages, four convents, a monastery, a home for the aged and a hospital. He died in 1877.