

*It is better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness.*

early ohio catholic history

When the Revolutionary War ended in 1786, Ohio was an isolated frontier wilderness. A wave of Easterners poured through the Cumberland Gap across through what is now West Virginia and along the Ohio River. The northern sections of the state developed more slowly, at least until the building of the Ohio Canals.

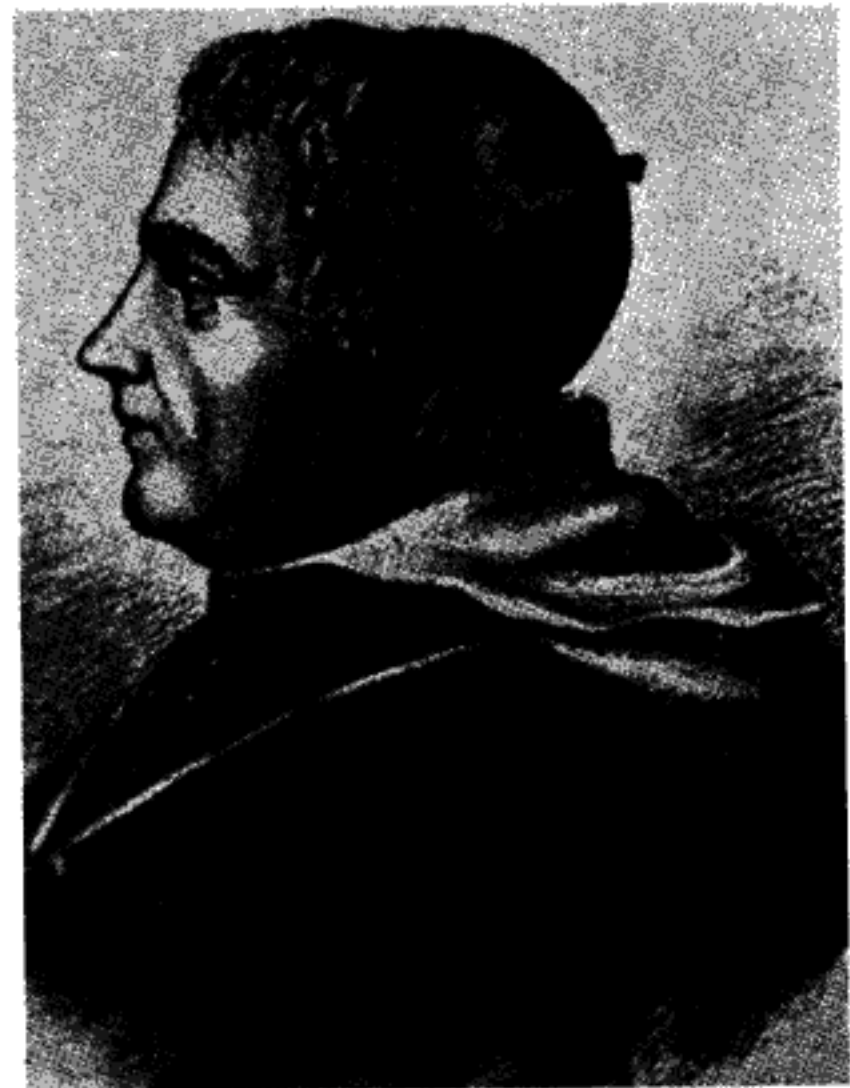
Early settlements in the state near Cincinnati, Marietta, Cleveland and Toledo were inhabited mostly by Scots, Germans, Englishmen and Marylanders. After the very early pioneer days, religion continued to play an important part in the history of Ohio. Religious freedom was always a part of the lives of our citizens. The Catholics, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and Disciples of Christ flourished, while there were also important groups of Quakers, Shakers, Mennonites and Mormons. Each group made its contribution to this period of Ohio history.

Jacob Dittoe, the *father* of Ohio Catholicism arrived at Middleton, between Zanesville and Lancaster, in 1805. The town was renamed Somerset. Dittoe requested to Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore that a priest be sent for the people.

In October, 1808, the Dominican priest, Rev. Edward Fenwick, from Bardstown, Kentucky, visited the Somerset settlement. He identified about twenty Catholics in the area and founded St. Joseph's Parish. At that time, the nearest Roman Catholic Bishop, Bishop Flaget, resided at Bardstown. The Catholics of Cincinnati appealed to him to have their very own Catholic church. In 1817, Christ Church was opened at Liberty and Vine Streets, then slightly out of town, where St. Francis Church is now located.

In 1821, Father Fenwick was sent to the city to become a permanent part of its history. He was named bishop of the new diocese based at Cincinnati which included 10,000 Catholics scattered over Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin. In 1823, he went to Europe to raise money and returned with \$10,000, and a trunk full of valuable articles. He built the first Ohio cathedral in 1826, St. Peter-in-Chains in Cincinnati.

In June 1832, Bishop Fenwick traveled to Somerset, Lancaster, Canton, Cleveland and Michigan.



Dominican Edward Fenwick, a missionary on horseback, visited the scattered Catholics of Ohio before becoming the state's first bishop in 1821. He died in 1832.



The first Ohio cathedral, dating back to 1826, was St. Peter-In-Chains in Cincinnati. Attached to the cathedral (at left) were the pastoral residence and the Athenaeum of Ohio (right). The Athenaeum, founded in 1829 as the diocesan seminary, became the parent institution not only for Cincinnati's present seminaries (Mt. St. Mary's of the West and St. Gregory's), but also for Xavier University.

Catholic
Telegraph

He was fighting cholera and died in Wooster, Ohio, in September 1832. He was succeeded by Bishop John Purcell.

The growing interest in education at that time was shown by the opening of many church-supported and private colleges. Western Reserve University was begun as a non-sectarian school in 1826. The year 1831 saw the beginning of Dennison University, a Baptist school and Xavier University, a Catholic school in Cincinnati.

“.. this is a protestant country”

During the year 1844 one of the blackest pages was written in the history of our country, in the city of Philadelphia. The most intense and violent religious and political bigotry was fomented by a group of Protestant fanatics in that city under the guise of the Native American Party. They

probably were the offspring of a religious revival begun by the Presbyterians of the United States during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The propaganda disseminated by that group consisted chiefly of anti-Catholic literature, among which were inflammatory and scurrilous books and articles such as *THE REVELATIONS OF MARIA MONK* and other stories of so-called *escaped nuns*.

These texts were made the substance of sermons against the Catholic Church as a *foreign power and a propagator of wickedness* and incited the burning of convents and churches in several places, particularly where there were concentrations of immigrant Irish Catholics.

The purpose of the Native American Party was to prevent a union of church and state, but they became bolder and bolder in their assertion that *this is a Protestant country*. At that time the Constitutions of the States of New Jersey and



John Carroll, a native of Maryland, was the first American Catholic bishop in 1789. As bishop of Baltimore he was responsible for Catholics in all of the United States, including the territories west of the Appalachian Mountains. The Diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky, was erected in 1808, and from this, in 1821, was carved the Diocese of Cincinnati.

New Hampshire still provided that *"no person shall be capable of being elected Senator (or Governor) unless he be of the Protestant religion."*

The anti-Catholic movement became more and more strident through the editorial coals heaped on the fires of prejudice by a number of secular newspapers in Philadelphia and throughout the country. The final spark was set at a rally held on May 3, 1844, on an open lot next to the public school at Second and Market Streets.

By the time a week had passed, the city of Philadelphia was an armed battleground, with the district of Kensington devastated, St. Michael's and St. Augustine's churches and their rectories and convents burned to the ground by cheering mobs, homes and businesses destroyed and finally the entire city placed under martial law. During that week in May sixty persons were seriously wounded, forty lives were lost, two hundred families were rendered homeless and forced to become refugees outside the city in fear for their lives, and hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage were inflicted upon churches and city property.

The violence resumed the following July after an Independence Day parade of the Native Americans, when an attack was made on St. Philip Neri Church. A cannon, loaded to the muzzle, was drawn up to the door of the church and the plan to open fire into the church was narrowly thwarted by one of the city's aldermen. Subsequently, the

mob, after breaking all the doors and windows, swarmed into the building where they were addressed by the local leader of the Native Americans, Lewis C. Levin, standing upon the altar. Five thousand troops were brought into the city, but by that time another fourteen persons were killed and fifty wounded.

The final result was that the Native Americans became known as *the church burners* and were henceforth treated with scornful contempt, but many of their philosophical tenets did not die so easily, and newspaper articles frequently echoed the emotional bigotry that had ravaged the great city of Philadelphia.

bishop john carroll

American Roman Catholic prelate, first Catholic bishop in the United States, was born in Maryland, January 8, 1735. He was educated in Flanders and ordained priest in 1769, becoming professor of philosophy and theology at the Jesuit colleges in Liege and Bruges, Belgium.

In 1776, at the request of the Continental Congress, he accompanied Benjamin Franklin on a mission to secure the aid or neutrality of Canada during the Revolution. In 1786 he induced the Church to authorize a Catholic academy, now George-



The Ohio canal system, some twenty years in the building, began in 1825. Many Irish immigrants were employed for construction.

Maumee Valley Historical Society



town University. On September 14, 1789, he was made bishop. With George Washington's aid, Bishop Carroll secured federal funds for Catholic missionaries to the indians of the west. Together with Benjamin Latrobe he planned the Baltimore Cathedral, whose cornerstone was laid in 1806. A staunch patriot, he tirelessly defended religious liberty from the pulpit and in the press.

