

# **An Ecological TimeLine of St. Anthony Parish In the Community of Madisonville, Ohio**

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*(Editor's Note: parishioner Dave Kappesser wrote this paper as a part of his Masters program at the College of Mount St. Joseph)*

Since St. Anthony's parish is about to celebrate its 150th anniversary, I have decided to devise a timeline in a pattern of three fifty-year segments. From an ecological standpoint, the surrounding community of Madisonville is also about to celebrate a similar milestone. The year 2009 is not only 150th anniversary of the parish, but it is also the 200th anniversary of the community of Madisonville.

For the timeline of St. Anthony's parish, I have the use of a timeline that was developed in 1984 for the 125th anniversary of the parish in a booklet co-written and edited by Mr. John Bange, a previous parish council president and the parish historian. (1) For the timeline of Madisonville, I made use of a timeline that was created in conjunction with the 2002 dedication of the new Madisonville Community Center. (2) According to the Madisonville Historical Society, this ecological combination of both timelines is the first such project of its kind.

Both of these timelines reflect the collective consciousness of both a group of older parishioners at St. Anthony and the group effort of the Madisonville Historical Society. Combining them together and adding other information to fill in some of the gaps, is a reflection of my own consciousness as a student and teacher of history. However, it is important to note at the outset that many questions or observations can be made pertaining to the facts here presented. Although some of them are quite tempting to pursue, it is not the purpose of this essay to rationalize or explain the facts presented. It is my hope that the sharing of this information might lead others or I to further investigate or unearth some of the unanswered questions. For instance, the middle fifty-year period included the period of the Great Depression. There seems to be a correlation between those hard economic times, and the observation that fewer timeline items are recorded during this period on both scales.

The first fifty-year timeline segment is perhaps the most detailed as representing the most amount of hindsight. However, to properly position the formation of St. Anthony's parish, I have included some facts from the first sixty years of the community of Madisonville. Madisonville started as a rural farm community in 1790. Although many of the site references are made using current city streets, the distances in terms of foot travel were considerably much further apart. The first Christian church in the Madisonville community was a Methodist church that was first built in 1801. The Methodists were here before Ohio was made a formal state of the union in 1803, and before the community was organized as Madison, Ohio in 1809. (3)

In the next twenty years several community foundations came into place. For instance, it was documented that there was a small community of African-American former slaves living in Madisonville around 1811. Many of these former slaves had to swim across the Ohio River to get their freedom. (4) While the story of this sub-community might well be the seed of other research, the mere presence of twenty houses as homes to former slaves does raise the inference that there must have been a degree of tolerance in the early Madisonville community.

The name of Madison, Ohio was changed to Madisonville by the Post Office because another community of Madison elsewhere in Ohio predated the local community formed here. (5)

Another trend amongst the people of Madisonville was their passion for education. In the year 1824 the second school in Madisonville was constructed. (6)

The Methodists also built their second church. It was an edifice that would grow with the community and which still can be seen today, one hundred and eighty years later. Also, important with this new church structure is the reality of the first formal cemetery, a Methodist cemetery set up just outside of the church on Madison Road. This correlation between communities and their burial grounds is another key element in this community, and a fact that invites further research elsewhere. (7)

During this same time period in nearby Cincinnati, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cincinnati was established in 1821. (8) Nine years later four Sisters of Charity came from Emmitsburg, Maryland to Cincinnati. Sixty years later four Sisters of Charity would come to Madisonville to take over the responsibility for teaching the children of St. Anthony's school. (9)

In the years just prior to the founding of St. Anthony's, I have inserted into the timeline the trend of German Catholics pouring into southwest Ohio. The 1830's and 1840's were a time of a tremendous influx of Catholic German immigrants to the area. Most of the Catholics already here were of Irish descent. The German immigrants brought their own culture, their own priests, and their own system of church government. The Irish Archbishop John Purcell gave the German Catholics lots of autonomy in establishing their own parishes and he encouraged laymen to take the responsibility of being wardens in the management of the church properties. (10)

The Historical Society makes particular notation of the establishment of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in 1839. (11) Also known as the "Three Link Fraternity," (the three links were Truth, Friendship, and Love) IOOF was a 17th century English secret society of men founded to do good deeds, give aid to those in need, and pursue projects for the good of all mankind. (12) Later on, during the Civil War, this group would purchase a large area of property for the establishment of Laurel Cemetery, which remains the largest cemetery in eastern Cincinnati today. (13) Again, there is the correlation between the IOOF and the early Methodists both being of

English descent. Yet there is no documentation of a direct connection between the two groups.

In 1859, an organization of a small group of German Catholic farmers organized the Catholic Society. Michael Buckel was their leader. Their work led to construction of the first Catholic Church of Madisonville. Originally, the parish was named St. Michael's in honor of the group leader's patron saint. Later, it was renamed St. Anthony in honor of the enterprising Father Anthony Walburg, who, fifteen years later, established a larger church on its present site, built a new Catholic schoolhouse, and like the Methodists, established St. Michael's Catholic Cemetery in 1865 about a half mile from the church near a brook now called Duck Creek. (14) During this same period the Methodists were growing in new ways too. Gaines Methodist Church became a church whose congregation was solely made up of African Americans. (15)

The rest of this period saw growth in the church community and the public community. A new rectory, a new school, another new pastor, and a small group of Sisters of Charity were additions to St. Anthony's. Madisonville took on a new identity with the development of more Christian churches, commuter trains to Cincinnati, new businesses, a town hall, and its own prehistoric village site with a local scientist to study it. (16)

Starting with the year 1890, the Madisonville Historical Society made a small change in the presentation of their timeline. They listed the census numbers as in previous years, but now, they started to number the whites and the blacks. Here again, is another example of a peculiarity that merits further study. The 1890's also saw the documentation of social literary groups for men and for women, a further dissection of the population. (17)

St. Anthony's community went through a major tragedy and was reborn again. On Sunday morning, January 24, 1891, a fire destroyed the entire church except for a brick shell. Eight months later the community completed a larger building on the same site incorporating the brick shell from the original church. Later on, new bells were hung and a clock was added to the steeple. When Pastor Father Charles Hahne retired from the parish several years later, he received a huge vote of thanks from the parish and a representation of the civic leaders. His individual efforts in fundraising accounted for most of the \$16,000 plus dollars that was needed to rebuild the church. (18).

The next fifty years were not told in much detail by either timeline covering the years from 1909 to 1958. Notations for the parish were sparse and more personal like the passing of the original lay founder, Michael Buckel. Father Joseph Meyer was remembered for his snuff, and stern-faced Father Martin Molloy was noted for his beef dinners, raffles and cigar smoking. Father Henry Westerman celebrated his forty years of priesthood, and he put together a ceremony for the burning of the church's paid mortgage certificate. These were the recollections of parishioners and not facts from history books. One recollection had particular importance, but was mentioned only in passing. It was the memory that in the late 1930's that the first African American

students were enrolled in the parish school. Again, a strange occurrence by today's standard that leaves the unanswered question haunting in the readers' mind, "Why did it take so long?" (19)

Besides the mention of a few war memorials, it seems that the life of the local community was overshadowed during these fifty years with events on the larger scales of city, state and country. While the recording of the census numbers for this period was missing, it began again in 1950, numbering the whites and the blacks.

The last fifty-year period is more detailed on both scales perhaps reflecting the more recent consciousness of the groups that put together these timelines. The last fifty years for the Madisonville community was a story of decline. Education peaked and schools were closed. A daycare center replaced the high school. The elementary school was razed for the building of a new church. Some new community-based civic groups were formed while others split. New voices would rise from the Community Council and Urban Redevelopment Corporation. The main business district declined to boarded-up windows and doors. Meanwhile the Eastwood industrial Park would thrive with the arrival of US Shoe and Coca Cola. Later on, Fifth Third Bank would move into US Shoe's former building and bring more promises of further development as their prosperity grew. Red Bank Road became a new development zone. Towards the end of the century, new businesses would return to parts of the old Madisonville business district. A half of a century that began on a road downward is finally starting to see a rebirth. (20)

The history of St. Anthony continued to be mainly focused on the pastors. Father James Byrne brought in a new chapel in the Sister's convent, the Legion of Mary, and a new Novena to St. Anthony. Father John Campbell kept the school going while his young assistant, Father James Shappelle, taught the people the changes of Vatican II - saying Masses in English and turning the altar around. Eventually, Father Campbell had to close the school and Sister Mary Colette Hart SC was the last principal. During Father Patrick Bascio's short stay he made the school available to the local community and made it a Community Center. Then, the scholarly Father John Civile came along in the late 1970's, and suddenly, things began to change. (22)

Was it the choir or was it Father Civile's scholarly contemporary sermons? Whether it was either or both, the shrinking Mass numbers began to grow again. Even more significant, the new parishioners were coming from different parts of Cincinnati than just Madisonville. Father George Jacquemin followed Father Civile. This farmer turned priest continued to draw new numbers with his homespun homilies and commitment to good worship and singing. Father George would eventually be replaced by Father Len Wenke, and the trend of new parishioners would continue despite the fact that he was a new pastor with a different style of leadership. (23)

Father George would be the first to reach across the timelines and involve himself with the happenings of the community. He joined the Madisonville/Fairfax Pastors Association and was a founding member of MEAC, a new social services outreach

program. He leased the old St. Anthony's school to the YMCA, and turned the former sisters' convent into a parish center. Father Len would continue this level of community involvement except that he found that the Lighthouse Youth Services Outreach School was really a better tenant in the old school than the YMCA. Father Len established new concepts of ministry and invited Sister Jeannie Masterson to be a pastoral associate. Finally, Father Len reached across the timelines one step further and started a twinning relationship with the Church of Our Lady of Health and Father Herman Sharplis from the West Indies island of Dominica. Over the last year people have traveled between the two parishes sharing new ministry experiences. (24)

The new Madisonville Community Center, for which the community timeline had been commissioned, is one of several new happenings in Madisonville in its slow rebirthing process. There is even a new cross-community festival between Madisonville and the neighboring community of Mariemont, and that relationship is definitely a whole other story.

In conclusion, the timelines placed side-by-side raise new questions that invite answers. There are gaps and historical events not mentioned that need to be identified and brought in from the shadows. For instance, in the last fifty years, St. Anthony's Church was renovated and painted. The old statues and communion rail were removed to the church basement, and a more contemporary interior was set up. It was a time of great upheaval, as many people did not want the changes to happen. For whatever reason, the history groups putting together the parish's 125th and 140th anniversary booklets missed that event.

When I moved to Madisonville twenty years ago, I was told of an earlier period of racial unrest that destroyed the spirit of the community. Again, the community timeline writers also left out the mentioning of that particular period.

However, the timelines are not meant to be the official record of these communities. They are only the reflections of two commissioned groups who pooled their respective consciousness and told the story of a church and the community wherein that church can be found.

#### Footnotes:

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11. Community of Madisonville, Panel 2
12. Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Homepage Statement of Purpose,  
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15. Community of Madisonville, Panel 3
16. Ibid, Panel 3
17. Ibid, Panel 3
18. John Bange, "Our Pastors," Pages 11-13,  
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19. John Bange, "Our Pastors", & "The Steuer Family", pages 13-16  
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