

The Catholic Register.

"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest."—BALMEZ.

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SANDWICH.

The Story of Its Church and Its People.

A Western French Colony.

In our last issue in the course of an account of the labors of the Rev. Edmund Burke in this Province during the last years of the eighteenth century, incidental mention was made of the French Canadian colony at L'Assomption or Sandwich. It will be



Mr. T. GIRARDOT, P. S. I.

remembered that Father Burke's work with this portion of his flock was limited by the necessity he was under of traversing the length and breadth of the Province. Father Burke took leave of this his earliest missionary field in 1800.

Meanwhile the Catholics were progressing rapidly in numbers and in wealth all along the western frontier of this Province. From the township of Malden on lake Erie to Goderich on the northwest, letters were being constantly received at Quebec bearing most urgent requests for more priests.

French Canadian voyageurs had taken up land and established themselves in secure homes all along the northeast coast of lake Huron, and on the banks of the St. Clair and Detroit rivers. They were very numerous in the county of Essex and built churches and school houses in several townships. As early as 1802 two French Canadian priests, Marchand and Gation, were in charge of the Sandwich district, where they resided. They journeyed also to Malden, or Amherstburg, in the south, and to St. Ann's, Belle River, Stoney Point and Tilbury in the north and eastern portions of the same county. Father Marchand's death is recorded in the parish register of Sandwich as having occurred in April, 1816. He was succeeded by Rev. Joseph Crevier. All the names found in those valuable parochial records of baptisms, deaths and marriages are still borne by the industrious God-fearing Christian families, that yet fill the churches each Sunday, and form some of the most crowded and most pious congregations in the Province of Ontario. The Ouellettes, the Reaumes, the Jeannisses, the Marins, the Marenettes, the Babys, Beaubiens, Langlois, Kevils, Odettes and others quite too numerous to mention, are the names of the best families in those districts and they are all found in the parish records of Sandwich, Amherstburg

and the intervening parish, Riviere aux Canards.

After the consecration of Rt. Rev. Alex. McDonald, Bishop of Kingston, 1826, the parish of Sandwich was attended by priests of Scotch and Irish descent, who spoke French fluently and who by their zeal and energetic action in parochial administration became extremely popular with the "habitants." These were Rev. Angus McDonald, who was afterwards Vicar-General of Kingston; Rev. Father Hay, who became Archdeacon of Toronto and Hamilton, also Fathers Kelly and Foley, whose names appear frequently in the parochial registers—the Jesuit Fathers had charge of the parish from 1810 to 1860—during which time they erected the magnificent church of Our Lady of the Assumption and the front wing of the College whose turrets and tapering spire may be distinctly seen by those on pleasure bent who pass up and down the Detroit River in those moving palaces that in summer glide so majestically between Erie, Huron and Superior.

The Jesuit Fathers who wrought so successfully in the western mission were Father Duranquet, afterwards a noted missionary in the Manitoulin Islands, Fathers Vervais, Joffre and Mainguy also Father Point, the only survivor of all those saintly pioneers of faithful service in the west. Father Point, now over 90 years of age, lives in St. Mary's College, Montreal. He is still in enjoyment of good health and although quite deaf, attends all the exercises of the monastery from grey dawn till dark.

The Jesuit Fathers were changed, some to Montreal, some to Chatham, when the late Bishop Pinsonneault who took charge of the Diocese of London in 1856, transferred his see three years later to Sandwich.

One of the most highly respected residents of Sandwich, and one who has for many years labored unceasingly in the cause of Catholic education is Mr. Theodule Girardot, now Inspector of Schools in the county. When upon the accession of Bishop Pinsonneault in 1859 the much beloved Jesuit Fathers removed from Sandwich, an effort was made by the Basilians, then only recently established on this continent as detailed in a recent paper, to continue the work of the school they had founded. Fathers Maloney and Malbos went to Sandwich, but soon returned to Toronto.

To Mr. Girardot is due the credit of having maintained the good work until the coming of Father O'Connor. He assumed the management of the school and under his regime it was both efficient and prosperous. He was assisted by a staff of competent teachers among whom were the present Vicar-General Laurent of Lindsay and Dean O'Connell of Mount Forest. Even in those early days the school had as many as sixth resident pupils.

During those ten years in which he did the work of the Church in the education of her children, Mr. Girardot was ably assisted by his estimable wife, who was endowed with excellent judgment and great facility in imbuing her pupils with something of her own remarkable attainments and culture. When the Basilians took over the work of the College, Mr. Girardot became teacher of a new school in Sandwich, being again assisted by his wife and afterwards by two other members

of his family. Mr. and Mrs. Girardot came from old France, but most of their large family were born in this country. Mr. Girardot has always held an enviable place in the esteem of his fellow citizens and has been more than once Mayor of Sandwich. He is now, as has been said, the inspector of schools.

The late Monsignor Bruyere administered the parish of Sandwich during Bishop Pinsonneault's occupancy of the See of London. He had for coadjutors Rev. Joseph Bayard, now parish priest of Sarnia, Rev. Joseph Gerard late P.P., of Belle River, deceased, also at different periods, Fathers Desaulniers, Villeneuve and Duprat.

Windsor was erected into a new parish at that time with Father Wagner as its first pastor. There are very few in Canada who are not familiar with Dean Wagner's zeal and successful career. He has built a very fine imposing church edifice, costing 40,000 dollars, which being free from debt, was consecrated about ten years ago, several Bishops and Archbishops being present. The beautiful Convent in charge of the Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus and Mary, also the Hotel Dieu Hospital, with its commodious and lofty proportions, are monuments that will long keep the memory of Dean Wagner's name and works fresh in the minds and hearts of future generations.

Right Rev. John Walsh, our present venerable Archbishop, was consecrated on the 10th, Nov. 1867. He remained but a few months in Sandwich. Judging from the central position of London, and the rapidly increasing population and importance of the Forest city, he had the See of the Diocese once more transferred thereto from Sandwich.

Mgr. Bruyere accompanied Bishop Walsh to London—where he continued to act as rector of the Episcopal Cathedral and Vicar General of the Diocese—offices which he fulfilled with much dignity and profit under both administrations.

After year's incumbency by Dean Laurent, the Parish of Sandwich, with its church and college, were given over to the Basilian Fathers, who, under the Presidency of Very Rev. D. O'Connor—now Bishop of London—erected two important additional wings to the college and beautified the church at a large expense, which has been fully met, and which leaves the Parish of Sandwich in a more satisfactory and flourishing condition to day than perhaps any other in the Province.

To Archbishop Walsh belongs the merit of having negotiated successfully for the invaluable services of the Basilian Fathers—for the building up of solid parochial work in Sandwich, and for the establishment on a permanent basis of a grand Catholic seminary that has already been fruitful of untold blessings to all Western Canada and to more than one diocese in the Border States.

The parish of Maidstone, ten miles in the interior from Windsor, boasts a very fine Gothic church in brick with accommodation for 700 worshippers, erected by the late Father De la Prunty and a beautiful parochial residence built by Father Molphy, now of Ingersoll. This parish is unique in the county, its inhabitants being all of

Irish descent, whereas all the surrounding communities are of French Canadian origin. It has, however, produced fruit in abundance and worthy of mother church, viz. one priest, Rev. Father Tiernan of London, about a dozen nuns, Sisters of St. Joseph, and one Catholic Judge, Judge McHugh of Windsor. The late Justice O'Connor was but six years of age when his pious parents came from Ireland to secure a permanent home in the township of Maidstone. In respect of children who have come to the front or have risen to comparative eminence, it may be fairly stated that the little Irish colony of Maidstone holds its own against all the other townships in the county of Essex.

Sandwich however gave two priests to the Church, the Very Rev. Remi Ouellette, Principal of the justly celebrated College of St. Hadinth, Quebec, and Rev. Ferdinand Ouellette, his younger brother, who was the first priest to receive orders at the hands of our present Archbishop, after his consecration as Bishop of London. Amherstburg and Riviere aux Canards also supplied one priest each, Rev. Father Renaud C.S.B., and Rev. Father Semande, C.S.B., who is now acting parish priest of Sandwich. Father Valentine lately ordained is a native of Windsor parish. There are several Catholics adorning professional life as well by their superior talent as by their civic virtues. In these districts Senator Casgrain has no superior in the medical profession; his many noble traits of character and robust Catholicity have long established him in the loving esteem and gratitude of his fellow citizens of all denominations. His son, also an M.D. gives fair promise of being a worthy successor to an honored and honorable father. Dr. Reaume of Windsor and Dr. Park of Amherstburg, although but a few years in practice, have already earned distinction as able physicians and earnest practical members of the Church.

Mr. James Cleary, solicitor, of Windsor, and Mr. Peters of Essex Center, in the same profession would reflect credit upon any church or any community. The former contested the seat of Parliament in the Reform interest at the last general elections, and well nigh succeeded in achieving a splendid victory. Mr. W. J. McKee, last though not least of those I will mention—one of the most conscientious attendants of St. Alphonsus Church—has been for some years Grand Treasurer of the Catholic Mutual Benevolent Association. At the last Provincial election he defeated all his opponents at the ballot box, and notwithstanding all the wily schemes and fanatical desperation of the I. P. A., was elected by a handsome majority to represent the north siding of Essex at the next parliamentary sessions of Toronto.

It may be seen at a glance how the seed of divine faith sown broadcast along our western frontier one hundred years ago, has borne fruit, and abundantly. There is every probability that, had the advice of the saintly pioneer and explorer, Right Rev. Edmund Burke, been taken and put in practical operation, when given, the Province of Ontario would be more evenly divided to-day between Catholics and the opposing denominations.

DIOCRUS.