

News from Old Mines

The Newsletter of the Old Mines French Project
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From the Editor

It was a tremendous pleasure to be able to stop by the May rendez-vous hosted by the Brigade à Renault on the St. Joachim Catholic Church grounds in Old Mines. There was a great crowd and a lot of activity at the event, and it was great to see people being able to get together and participate in an event that celebrates the rich history of the region and allows people to indulge in their interest in the past. Some images from my trip to Old Mines are included below. Hope you enjoy all of the material included in this issue.



History of the Parish of Old Mines written for the *Western Watchman* St. Joachim's Church, Old Mines, Washington County, Mo.

The corner stone of this church was laid in 1838; finished in 1830 and consecrated the 9th of October 1831 under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joachim, by the Right Rev. Joseph Rosati, Bishop of St. Louis, assisted by ten priests, among them we find the names of John M. Odin, afterwards Archbishop of New Orleans.

This church is built of brick, having a frontage of 30ft. with a depth of 110 ft. and a steeple rising to a height of 30 ft. Over the door of the church is a slab of Italian marble with the following inscription

D.O.M.

In Honorem Sancti Joachim

B. V. M. Patris

The church is built in the form of a Latin cross, having an interior porch of 14 ft. wide, divided into three parts. In one of these there is the Baptismal Font, one of the finest and best ornamented ever built for the purpose.

This parish gave three Bishops to the church of America: John M. Odin, Archbishop of New Orleans; John Timon, Bishop of Buffalo, and John Joseph Hogan, Bishop of Kansas City.

The interior of the church is 75 ft. long, with a sanctuary 21 ft. long. The two chapels which form the cross of the church are 22 ft. long by 12 ft. wide.

This parish is one of the oldest in the archdiocese of St. Louis after Ste. Genevieve, for the parish priests of Ste. Genevieve were coming down to visit Old Mines when inhabited by a few French families. This was in 1793.

The oldest book of the parish begins on the 20th day of April 1820, when Father Henry Pratte, parish priest of Ste. Genevieve, visiting Old Mines, built a log church and made it a regular station attached to Ste. Genevieve, till Father John Boullier, C.M., from Ste. Genevieve, seeing the necessity of a larger church and of a resident pastor, built the present brick building not very far from the old one, and at that time he formed a new parish, and he was the first resident pastor of Old Mines. This was in 1828.

From 1820 to 1841 the parish was served by the Lazarist Fathers, the number being 16; pastors and assistants. From 1841 to the present day the parish was served by secular priests numbering 25, pastors and assistants, including the present pastor, Rev. Nazareno Orfei [editor's note, written Nazaveno Ovfei in the type-written text from which present version is copied]. The Rev. Father James Fox, who was pastor from 1852 to 1868, enlarged the church by adding two chapels, the Sanctuary, the porch and the steeple as it stands at present. The church to be again consecrated. This was done on the 15th day of November, 1857, by Right Rev. James Duggan, Coadjutor Archbishop of St. Louis, assisted by Father Patric John Ryan, now Archbishop of Philadelphia. Father Henry Meulsihepen, Vicar General, and five other priests, namely, O'Brien, Rice, Scallan, Honridge and O'Regan.

The present pastor, Rev. Nazareno Orfei, took charge of it on the 22nd of April 1883, and on the 3rd day of March, 1885 celebrated his Silver Jubilee.

On the 19th day of August, 1883, Archbishop Ryan, then Coadjutor Bishop of St. Louis, visited Old Mines and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to 400 persons, 100 of them being adults and far advanced in age. On the same day two Societies were formed, ie., the Society of St. Joseph for the gentlemen and another of the Children of Mary for the young ladies. The following year another Society was formed for the married ladies under the title of the Sacred Heart of Mary. The Society of the Most Holy Rosary existed in the church since 1836.

The census taken in the beginning of 1885 gives the number of families as 500 with over two thousand souls. The area of the parish is between 50 and 60 miles.

In a parish like Old Mines three resident priests would hardly suffice for the spiritual wants of the parish[i]oners for they are good and practical catholics, but their poverty can hardly supply means of existence for one priest. The population being exclusively catholic, the parish was, therefore, always kept in high esteem for all the religious services, especially processions in the public roads, where they can march without fear of being insulted and laughed at.

The language of the people is, mostly, French, but the new congregation is bound to speak the language of the country, namely, English, and within a short time their mother language will be dead.

Rev. Nazareno Orfei, Pastor of Old Mines, May 25th, 1885

Early Old Mines Church Records

Some of the most fascinating documents linked to the history of Old Mines are the early records kept by those priests who served the community even before there was an actual church built. The first baptisms and marriages were recorded by Father Henry Pratte of Ste. Genevieve, who visited Old Mines beginning in 1820. It is easy to detect that his visits were not regular, as there were several baptisms in the space a few days in April of that year, and then no more until August. Below are two documents, one of a marriage, the other of a baptism (including both the original French and the translation into English). We will certainly include more in the future, taking a look at some unique features of these priceless documents.

Le 25 aout mil huit cent vingt nous pretre soussigné après avoir accordé dispense de trois bans de mariage entre les partis comme il est marqué ci après qui étaient déjà marié devant quatre temoins je veux dire entre Pierre Moreau fils majeur de Jean Moreau et de Louise Randé ses père et mère de Agènes departement de la haute Garonne et Catherine Gagnon veuve de feu Louis Milhomme habitant à la vieille mine depuis longtemps nous leur avons fait renouveler leur consentement de mariage en présence de Jacques Bonne de François Bourassa de François Thibeault Alexandre Samson ami de Epous [sic] et en présence de plusieurs autres les épous et les témoins ne sachant signer ont fait leur marque ordinaire.

Translation :

On August 25, 1820 we, the undersigned priest, after having granted dispensation from the three marriage banns between the parties indicated below who were already married in front of four witnesses, that is to say Pierre Moreau, adult son of Jean Moreau and Louise Randé, his father and mother, from Agènes in the Haute Garonne department and Catherine Gagnon, widow of the late Louis Milhomme, living in Old Mines for a long time, we had them restate their agreement to marry in the presence of Jacques Bonne, François Bourassa, François Thibeault, and Alexandre Samson, friends of the husband and in the presence of several others, the couple and the witnesses not knowing how to sign their name have made their ordinary sign.

Some notes:

- The priest uses what we might now call the “royal we” in referring to himself. This is typical language throughout the records that were consulted, not only for Father Pratte but for subsequent priests as well.
- Given the distance between Old Mines and Ste. Genevieve (the nearest parish church), it was not unusual for one or more of the publication of “banns of marriage” to be waived.
- Nearly every record of marriage refers to the status of both the bride and groom (of age, a minor, widowed).
- The priests, like many of those who were able to write at the time, were not always consistent with their use of capitalization and punctuation! Their use of accents in the original French was also indicative of a lack of knowledge or practice regarding the written language!
- Rather unique to this record is the mention of the origins of the groom’s parents, from Agen (which Pratte writes as Agènes) in southwestern France.
- Not at all uncommon is the fact that nobody in the wedding party know how to sign their name (« n’ont su signer »). Instead they would sign with an X or cross. One of the few who could write their name was Madame Marie Louise Lamarque. In fact, she is mentioned in the very first record, dated April 20, 1820, as is the fact that she was able to sign her name:

Le 20 avril 1820 je soussigné ai baptisé Edouard né le deux décembre 1819 de Louis Robert et d’Eloise Colman son épouse, parrain Francis Colman, marraine Marie Louise Lamarque qui a signé avec nous.

Henry Pratte ptre

Translation: On April 20, 1820, I the undersigned priest, baptized Edouard, born on December 2, 1829 to Louis Robert and Eloise Colman his wife, godfather Francis Colman, godmother Marie Louise Lamarque who signed with us.

Interesting to note that Father Pratte begins by referring to himself in the first person, but switches to “we” at the end!

Announcements

The **Center for French Colonial Studies** will be holding its annual conference in October via Zoom. Given the uncertainties associated with trying to organize an in-person event so far ahead of time, the Center board decided early on to hold a virtual event. Information about the conference will be available on the CFCS website once it becomes available at www.frenchcolonialstudies.org.

A regular feature of this newsletter is a list of new (or newly-found) publications that might be of interest to readers. This list will return to the newsletter in the future. For the time being, if you are looking for a fascinating and brilliantly-research work on the French colonial experience in the American Midwest, you could do no better than Margaret Kimball Brown's **Reconstructing an Eighteenth-Century Village. Chartres in the Illinois** (Belleville, IL: Village Publishers, 2020). An exhaustive study of the often-neglected village that grew around Fort de Chartres, Kimball Brown's book provides us with a fresh perspective on the French settlements on the east side of the Mississippi River, the people within these settlements, and their way of life. Now just a memory, the village of Chartres is brought to life in Kimball Brown's stunning work. More information at: <http://www.villagepublishers.com/chartres.html>.

Upcoming Events

June 12

[French Heritage Festival](#), Ste. Genevieve

August 14-15

[Jour de Fete](#), Ste. Genevieve

September 11-12

[Fort de Chartres Rendezvous](#)

September 18

[History Conference](#), Ste. Genevieve

September 25

Milice de Sainte Genevieve Encampment

October 3

[Annual Fete d'Automne](#), Old Mines

October 9-10,

[Fort de Chartres French and Indian War Encampment](#)

(By no means intended to be an exhaustive list; readers should check each source regarding event status.)

The Old Mines French Project

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