

GERMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES IN MARYLAND DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Maryland, the "Land of the Sanctuary" had, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, lost much of her original Catholic imprint. Only about one-tenth of the population was Catholic, while three-fourths of it was Protestant. English Jesuit missionaries in New York and Maryland in their reports to their superiors in Europe, in the eighteenth century, do not mention German Catholics in Maryland until about thirty years before the American Revolution. Anti-Catholic sentiments in Colonial times did not fail to discourage immigration of German Catholics to America, and to daunt the spirit of many Catholics, yet, about 1750, there were quite a few German Catholics in the Middle Atlantic States.

In Maryland, also, there remained scattered over the province some Catholic Germans, although shunned and isolated, on farms, without religious guidance and without the comfort of church services. It must have been humiliating to them, that they could not even own, in their own names, the soil they were tilling. The acts for naturalization passed in the years 1700-1742 limited this privilege to Protestants. At this time, religious gatherings of Catholics could be held only in private. Often Catholics were not permitted to worship at all, nor to have schools.

The history of German Catholics in Maryland begins 200 years ago. The German Catholic colonists were mostly ordinary folk, farmers, servants, poor tradesmen, who were often in need of charity, but they were capable in their humble positions, honest, pious, conservative, energetic, peace-loving, respecting authority and public order, and thus contributing to the common good.

When Father Henry Neale, S.J., arrived in Maryland from London, in

1740 (we learn from one of his letters, dated April 25, 1741, Philadelphia), he wrote of German Catholics in Maryland as being rather numerous, but poor, and engaged in agriculture. According to this letter, their frugality was expected to guarantee the support of a priest whose salary was to be twenty pounds annually. This salary should enable the priest to keep a horse for riding from one farm to another over the country. That was a little after the time when Baltimore was founded (1730). Father Neale met several German Catholics in person, but deplored his own ignorance of their language. He therefore asked his superiors in Europe for priests for them, and wrote impatiently: "The German gentlemen (two priests) are not yet arrived. Their presence is very much wanted: My heart has yearned when I've met with some poor Germans desirous of performing their duties, but whom I have not been able to assist for want of language. . . ."

In 1741 there finally arrived in Maryland two learned Jesuit fathers, Theodor Schneider and Wilhelm Wappeler. These were the "German gentlemen" to whom Father Neale referred in his letter. *Father Theodor Schneider* was born in Germany, in the Palatinate, near Speyer, in 1703. He was about thirty-eight years old when he came to America. After he had held the chair of Philosophy and Apologetics at the Jesuit school at Liege, he became rector of the Jesuit house of studies in the city of Heidelberg. The faculty of philosophy of the University of Heidelberg was in charge of the Jesuit Fathers since 1716. Rev. Schneider was a member of this faculty and in addition to being a preacher and university professor, commanded respect as a physician. He was elected to the highest office of the university, that of Rector Magnificus

for the school year 1738-1739. This rapid rise to important positions proves that he was an unusually gifted and able scholar. Physically he was described as a strong man, and this was to his advantage in Colonial Maryland and Pennsylvania. On September 19, 1740, he was ordered to go to America. A few days later he departed from Heidelberg, going by way of Cologne and Aachen to Liege, and thence to London to leave for Maryland in March 1741.

Why was such a brilliant, scholarly man sent to Colonial America? The answer probably is this: first of all, Theodor Schneider wanted to go. He had studied medicine with a view of using that knowledge in foreign missions. There was, moreover, the possibility that many Catholic Germans in America in the "Age of Enlightenment" were falling away from the Catholic religion. The so-called "Great Awakening" of 1740-42 under Whitefield, Tennent, and others, had its counterpart also among Germans. The famous Lutheran minister Mühlenberg, writing from America to a theologian of the University of Halle, Germany, on August 12, 1743, stated: "There is no lack of Atheists, Deists, Materialists, and Free Masons. In short, there is no sect in the world that is not cherished here."

The English Jesuits were not blind to this serious crisis for German Catholics, for whom they could not do much on account of the lack of knowledge of their language, and therefore they appealed for help and called for a man of ability and eloquence. Thus Rev. Dr. Schneider was selected, and he proved himself a splendid man in his new field of labor which was in Pennsylvania and in Maryland. He was especially welcome, of course, as a medical doctor, in any settlement. Being a priest, he had to travel through the country in disguise. He visited every farm and settlement, and despite his extensive travels, he found time to copy two complete missals of seven hundred pages each. He died in 1764, after twenty years of hard, eager toil in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and is buried at Goshenhoppen, now Bally,

near Philadelphia. Archbishop Carroll praised Father Schneider as a person of "great dexterity in business, consummate prudence, and undaunted magnanimity."

His friend, *Father Wilhelm Wappeler*, was born in Westphalia, Germany, in 1711. When he arrived in America, in 1741, he chose as central location for his labors, a place called Conewago. Tradition has it that German Catholic priests came quite early to the Germans settling in the extensive Conewago-Mission, close to the Susquehanna River, after the "Digges-grant" of ten thousand acres was made in 1727. Father Wappeler, of course, travelled all over the land, from York to Lancaster, to Cumberland and to "Bohemia Manor." Conewago Chapel was the parent church from which the Catholic religion spread over Southern and Western Maryland and along the frontiers of Pennsylvania. Broken in health, Rev. Wappeler was forced to return to Europe in 1748, and died in Bruges, Belgium, in 1781.

The gap made by Father Wappeler's departure was filled by another able German, *Father Mathias Sittensberger* (1719-1775), whose name in America was anglicized into "Mr. Manners." He was born in the old city of Landsberg-on-the-Lech, in southwestern Bavaria, twenty miles south of Augsburg, in 1719. Coming to America in 1752, thirty-three years of age, he went to Conewago and into Western Maryland. In 1764 he appears to have been appointed superior of "Bohemia Manor," Cecil County, Maryland. In his capacity as superior here, he paid 260 pounds to Rev. Mosley to cancel the debt on the land in Talbot, Md., in 1765. His labors in Maryland were of course similar to those of other missionaries in the colony, like those of Father Mosley himself at Tuckahoe, and Father Lewis at Newton, St. Mary's County, Maryland. He died at Bohemia Manor, in 1775, of dysentery, which then reached epidemic proportions on the Eastern Shore.

Another German pioneer of the eighteenth century in Maryland was *Father Ferdinand Steinmeyer*, who was born in Württemberg in 1720. For a time he was professor at the University of Frei-

burg in Breisgau. He arrived in Maryland in 1751 or 1752. His name was translated (from Meyer) into "Mr. Farmer." He, too, labored not only in Maryland, but also in Pennsylvania. In Lancaster, in 1756, he had a flock of 285 Germans and 109 English-speaking Catholics scattered in the counties of Lancaster, Chester and Cumberland, Md., and in thirty years of travel his fleet horse carried him over hill and dale, over swamps and rivers to Delaware and Maryland, to "Bohemia Manor." He was in "Bohemia Manor" in 1766, deputed to meet Father Mosley on February 2, according to the latter's own words. He, too, was a physician and devoted to science, and in 1768 was made a member of the American Philosophical Society, which surely was a great distinction for him at a time so hostile to his church. He corresponded with Father Meyers in Germany, who was astronomer to the Duke of Bavaria, and a celebrated mathematician. He dared to visit the battlefields, the military camps and hospitals, during the war of the Revolution, since there were Catholics also among the so-called "Hessians" and those Germans who were serving under the French flag of the Counts of Pfalz-Zweibrücken and under Lafayette. His sympathies were on the American side as he took the oath of allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1779. Meanwhile, he was honored by the University of Pennsylvania when in 1779 he was made a trustee of that institution. After the war, he was instrumental in inducing Father Graessel to come from Germany to the United States. Father Graessel became the first coadjutor for Bishop Carroll in Baltimore, the first of the hierarchy of the United States. In 1747 he went to the "Bohemia Manor School" at the time when Father Wappeler made frequent visits there. Father "Farmer's" (i. e., Steinmeyer's) name heads the list of subscribers of the address of thanks to George Washington. He died in 1786 in Philadelphia at the age of sixty-six.

Father Jacob Frambach was born in 1723 at Nideggen, near Jülich (Rhine-land), Germany. He came to America

in 1757 or 1758, at first to Lancaster, Penna., and York County, but in 1773 he seems to have gone to Frederick, Maryland. From there he is reported to have made missionary excursions southward into Maryland and Virginia. Near Winchester there lived (in 1743) a German Catholic by the name of Stefan Schmidt; several others had settled in the neighborhood. There was no way of knowing where German Catholics might be found in the fertile valleys of Western Maryland and Virginia. Father Frambach was on the lookout for these, of course, and tradition has it that he was pursued and shot at several times by bigots. One of the well-known localities visited by Father Frambach from his church in Frederick was Hagerstown. Jonathan Hager deeded a Catholic graveyard over to him in 1786. Father Frambach was also in Cumberland, Md., in 1780. He must have been of powerful physique as the radius of his missionary labors was not small in the mountainous country. His assistant was Father Sewall. As pastor of "St. Stanislaus" of Frederick, Father Frambach took part in the "White Marsh" meetings of Catholic clergymen in 1783 and 1784, in Maryland. ("White Marsh" Church is between Washington and Annapolis.) He was also at the first Catholic National Synod. He was in some financial difficulties which were, however, settled at "White Marsh," in 1784. He retired from Frederick, Maryland, about 1788 and was placed on the invalid list, was allowed thirty pounds annually, and went to Bohemia Manor; after 1790, he acted as Vicar General of Bishop Carroll; in 1794 he is mentioned as pastor emeritus of Frederick, Md. He died in 1795 of fever, after having spent 37 years of his life amidst hardships in the missions of Maryland. Three or four other Catholic German pioneers of Maryland and the East should be mentioned. *Father Jakob Pel-lentz*, born at Nesenich, near Trier in the Rhineland, in 1727, who arrived in America in 1758, and was stationed at Conewago until 1764, and afterwards in Lancaster, Penna. In 1786 he figured in the establishment of Georgetown College and was appointed one of its direc-

tors. In 1789 he appears as a promoter of the first Catholic Bible to be printed in the United States. Seeing the need of German-speaking priests, he wrote to Germany with the result that three priests arrived in the year 1787. In 1795 he went to Port Tobacco, Maryland.

Other missionaries are *Father Lukas Geissler*, in America from 1769 to 1786, born at Ehrensbreitstein-on-the-Rhein; *Father Frederick Leonard*, in this country from 1760 to 1764, who died in Port Tobacco; *Father J. B. Diederick*, a Luxemburgian. The latter came to Maryland in 1771, and was stationed in Baltimore and Elkridge from 1775 to 1784. He died at Notley Hall, Maryland, in 1793.

The work of the Catholic Church in the English Colonies in America during this period was almost exclusively carried on by English Jesuits. When the Revolutionary War broke out, ecclesiastical relations between Bishop Challoner of England, and the Catholic Church in the Colonies came to an end. After the Treaty of Paris in 1783, it was recognized that it would be impossible for the Vicar-Apostolic in London to exercise his jurisdiction over the Church in the new republic, and accordingly, a General Chapter of the American Clergy was called at "White Marsh," Maryland. In 1784, John Carroll was appointed Prefect-Apostle, and in 1789, first Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Baltimore, thereby becoming the first Bishop of the United States. Born at Upper Marlboro, Maryland, in 1735, he, too, was a Jesuit, and a missionary in Maryland (1779-1789). As a boy he had attended the Bohemia Manor

School in 1747-1748, where he met German missionaries. He died in Baltimore in 1815.

Many historians have not been aware of the fact that there were several able, highly educated priests among the early Catholic missionaries in America, and especially in Pennsylvania and Maryland. It is no exaggeration to say that the history of the Catholic Colonial Church in Pennsylvania and Maryland is incomplete without mention of the Catholic Germans in those regions. Chief centers were: Philadelphia, Conewago, Bohemia Manor, Lancaster, Reading, White Marsh, and Frederick. There were few Catholic parishes in Maryland and Pennsylvania which did not have Germans among the worshippers, as can be seen from Church registers of Father Schneider, Father "Farmer," and Father Ritter which contain 4,500 entries.

Little is known about the life of the lay German Catholics. A number of names of German families is, of course, recorded in the larger parishes. No doubt they brought along their German prayer books and songbooks from Germany. German religious books were, however, also printed very early in America, among them "*Die Nachfolge Christi*," (Imitation of Christ). German Catholics increased rapidly. Fearlessly they professed their religion; later they even held processions. They needed places of worship and priests, but had little money to pay for them and to build churches and schools. In the nineteenth century they turned to Europe for financial help and were often successful in obtaining necessary funds. Yet, most of their splendid achievements have been due to their own resources.

For further information see:

Lambert Schrott and Theodore Roemer, *Pioneer German Catholics in the American Colonies, 1743-1784* and *The Leopoldine Foundation and the Church in the United States 1829-1839*. (Monograph Series XIII, U. S. Catholic Historical Society, two parts in one volume, New York, 1933).

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W. T. Russel, *Maryland the Land of Sanctuary*, (Baltimore, 1907).

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Peter Guilday, *Life and Times of John Carroll*, (2 vols. New York, 1922).

Peter Guilday, *The Priesthood of Colonial Maryland*, in *The Ecclesiastical Review*, (January 1934).