

Saintly Priest N.Y. Missioner

By REV. JAMES J. GAVIN, C.S.S.R.

This is the second of five articles on Venerable John Nepomucene Neumann, saintly pioneer priest of the 1800's, who preached his first sermon, heard confessions and baptized for the first time in Rochester. His suggestion that German speaking Catholics needed a parish of their own led to the founding of St. Joseph's Church, this year marking its 125th anniversary.

Venerable John Neumann was ordained in June of 1836 at St. Patrick's Cathedral for the Diocese of New York. He was 25. Within a fortnight he had for his parish practically all of Western New York, a territory extending from Lake Ontario clear down to the Pennsylvania Line, and from Batavia to Niagara Falls.

There were no paved roads in his parish, no neat blocks of homes. In 1836 the Niagara Frontier was a vast primeval wilderness dotted with small clearings here and there to let the light of day in on farm or log cabin.

Yankees owned the big red barns, the white-fenced apple farms. The immigrant thickets, hiving mules between a crude log cabin, and the smoke of chimneys, for his happy to have a patch of virgin timber five and 10 miles apart.

Frontier Priest
A sick call often meant a day's journey, and when he reached the place, hungry and exhausted, it was a question of whether he had more need of a sign than of a patient or priest. There were times when he slumped in the woods for lack of food.

Priest of Williamsville
In Buffalo there was one Seneca brave found him, and Catholic priest in 1836. He had quietly carried the Blackrobe to a log-church at the corner of home on a blanket of deer hide. Edward and Main, the present Father Neumann had given site of St. Louis' gothic edifice, their chief Big Kettle, a silver. The remainder of the territory rosy at the Reservation down on Buffalo Creek.

"I'm a sturdy Bohemian. Every Sunday there were two Masses to be said, often in the woods. I like walking places 10 and 15 miles apart. He made his headquarters in a modern car 15 miles takes the village of Williamsville 10 a few minutes, but Neumann's little hamlet had a log mill and boots over marshy wagon trails a tannery on Elliott Creek. It through the woods, over a had a two-story hotel, the Eagle-shed, roads to get to the Tavern and all its houses facelike at St. John the Baptist one another with Main St. be at North Bush, to St. Michael's, Williamsville, of 1836, at Cayuga Creek, to St. Mary's looked not unlike "Dodge City" down in Eden, to St. John of "Gunsmoke" fame!

Williamsville had a Catholic Church. It had no roof. No floor. The first Sunday that Father Neumann said Mass in the roofless church, local rowdies lobbed stones over the wall, almost knocking the chalice from his hands. Yankee Every nationality in every Williamsville was not elated of color and costume. There have a live Papist priest in its were strapping Irishmen who midst. Bigotry ran high in 1838, walked from some settlement "Maria Monk" was a current along the Canal, boatmen with best seller. Those who had read their wives. There were wily "Maria Monk" looked with grim French Canadian woodsmen suspicion on every Catholic and trappers galloping in or amounts of every description.

Lived in Rented Room
Father Neumann had no room of their own in a rolling in a tory at Williamsville. He lived in a rented room in the garret of a tavern, owned by one of brace of hours on foot. There of the four Catholics in town confessions, Mass, Catechism. From here he tramped off on again, that was Father Neumann's 200-mile parish.

"I go from place to place," there was school. It rent he wrote home to Bohemia, young priest's heart to hear "carrying my gear along with the hodgepodge tongue the child — like Charlemagne with bad English! Some hardly deed! A disarming comparison a prayer. So Neumann taught

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Rochester Interlude

Father Neumann on his way to the Buffalo area stopped in Rochester Tuesday, July 4, 1836.

St. Patrick's the "Irish Church," was the only parish in Rochester at that time. On Sunday, July 10, the young priest heard confessions, baptized and preached to German immigrants who told him they wanted a parish of their own.

That same evening, a Redemptorist priest, Rev. Joseph Probst, arrived in Rochester, met Father Neumann and stayed to organize St. Mary's parish in a former Methodist church on Ely Street. A year later the church was named in honor of St. Joseph.

Parishioners built a new edifice on Franklin Street in 1843 — present St. Joseph's Church still very much in use in the heart of downtown Rochester.

And because there were few doctors on the Niagara Frontier Neumann put his botanical talents to work. He brewed medicines from herbs; secrets learned from the Senecas and the Tuscaroras; botanical remedies acquired by dint of long hours at study in his garret room over the tavern, and later, in his little log cabin in the woods of North Bush.

Revered and Rebuked
How did his flock look on this young priest? Was Father Neumann universally revered and loved? Did his inner holiness gleam forth in his simple deeds? Many held him in sacrosanct regard. Many hoarded little keepsakes he gave them for the rest of their lives, and passed them on as family heirlooms.

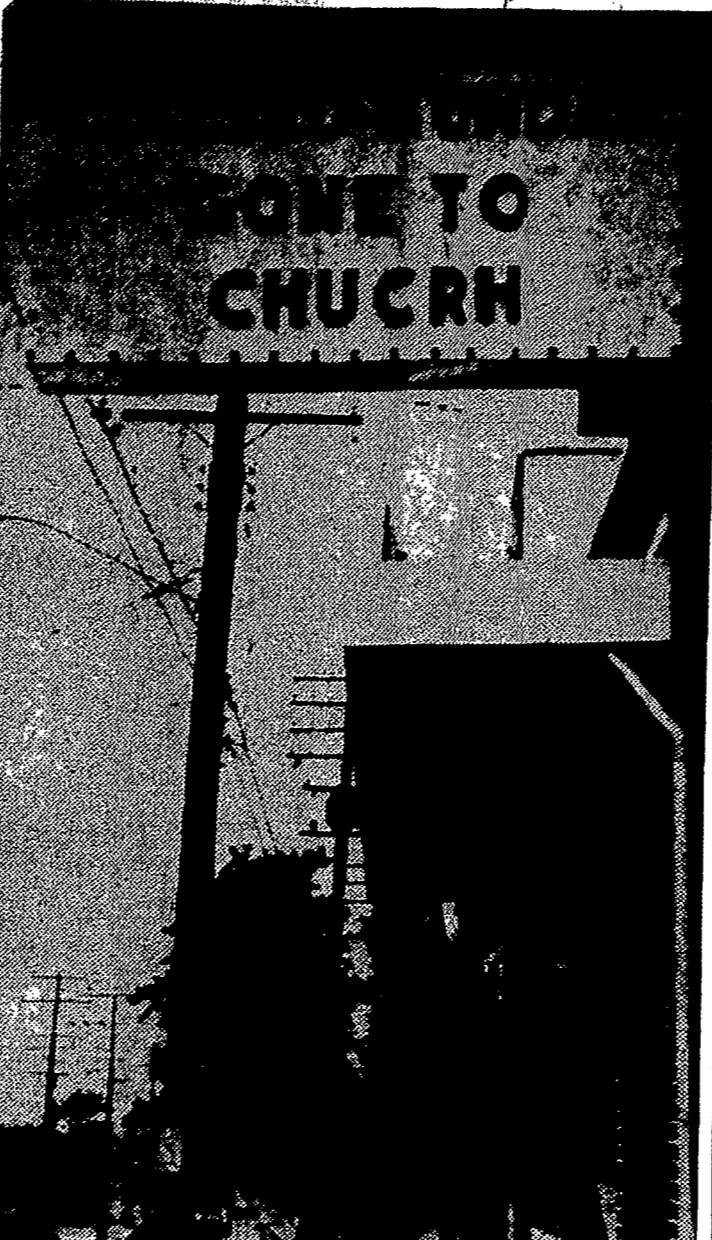
But not all! There were others — for instance, the tipsy cattle drover who saw Neumann walking down the road to Cayuga Creek "Verdammt Pfaff! You damned priest!" the drunkard shouted, "one more step and I shoot you for the fox you are!" As the man spoke, he took weaving aim with his long-barrelled rifle. Neumann paid no heed to the threat. He kept walking.

These were times when some of his piqued parishioners pulled him with mud. Once he was almost lynched by masked men in the lonely woods. Derisively non-Catholics dubbed him "the little priest." Often, as he went his rounds, there were cat-calls from young ne'er-do-wells.

North Bush today is the pretty suburb of Kenmore, just north of Buffalo on the way to Niagara Falls. The frog and turtles of the soggy swamp land have all vanished, and the ravenous mosquitos too. The swamps have been drained. The tall trees have been felled for canal-berm, and homes, and railroad ties.

All trace of the three-room single cabin that was Neumann's rectory has been effaced. In its stead there stands the beautiful red brick colonial-style parish plant of St. John the Baptist. But the memory of the young priest who lived there in a log cabin in 1836 still lingers on The New York State Historical Society has erected a bronze plaque to his memory on the spot.

Land Reform
Santiago — (NC) — A group of priests from rural areas in Chile have sent a joint letter to Jorge Alessandri Rodriguez asking for "early and basic improvement in the condition of the Chilean farm workers."



No Matter How You Spell It

Parma, Ohio — (RNS) — The word is scrambled, but the idea's there: the Funk Food City Store is closed on Sunday and the staff has gone to Church — oops, c-h-u-r-c-h. The Parma store closes down for Sunday and its closing sign is put up each week to remind passersby to go to church. In this case, the proprietor must have been rushed on Saturday night. How else can we account for the spelling?

'Constructive'

One Man Peace Corps

Ribera, Bolivia — The of Vallejo, Calif. At La Belgia, a complete set of building plans for Father Michael O'Connell, M.M., of San Francisco, California.

Then Di Bernardo moved into the snow-capped Andes where he erected a catechetical center at Las Penas mission and designed a building for the new centerhouse in La Paz in Cochabamba, after building a rectory for Father Joseph F. Gribbs, M.M., of Detroit, he encountered his most formidable challenge — Maryknoll's "Green Hell" jungle mission.

At Blanca Flor — a jungle cooperative development started by Maryknoll to raise living standards among rubber and Brazil nut workers — the Bayonne engineer built a 36-foot trailer with a few pieces of steel and a set of airplane wheels. The immense capacity of the trailer immediately reduced the harvest time for Brazil nuts from three months to two weeks.

In a recent letter from "Green Hell" to friends in the U.S. he wrote: "The work here moves at a fast pace, but I enjoy every minute of it. The jungle heat has whittled me from 168 down to 140 pounds but I feel great. Then too, with the terrific cooperation of the padres here, I think I'm accomplishing a little in the right direction."

The feather in Di Bernardo's cap is a 200-family housing project for Blanca Flor workers constructed with local materials. The rubber workers and their families occupy the houses while paying off a five-year mortgage obtained through their own credit cooperative. Next month, an airfield which he designed to handle large cargo planes (B-17 and B-24 size) will go into operation.

Upon his return to the States the versatile engineer will not be idle — he is bringing back some homework. He has promised to mail Father John A. Dietrich, M.M., of Detroit, a complete set of plans for a 400-seat church for the padre's Blanca Flor mission.

Where Our Lady Went To Heaven Shrine Draws Pilgrims

Ephesus, Turkey — (NC) — Ten thousand pilgrims from all over the world are expected to visit the ruins of this ancient biblical city in honor of the Feast of the Assumption, Tuesday, Aug. 15.

Principal object of their pilgrimage is a chapel called Panaya Kapulu, the House of the Holy Virgin. It is said to stand on the site of the house where, according to one tradition, the Virgin Mary died, and near the site of her burial and Assumption.

A large percentage of the pilgrims are Catholics. Others are Greek Orthodox, Protestants, Jews and tourists, are local Turkish Moslems who also venerate Our Lady—to whom an entire chapter is devoted in the Koran.

While at Ephesus they also visit the ruins of one of the oldest churches in the world, dedicated to her, the cathedral of Saint Mary, where the third ecumenical council defined the dogma of her divine maternity as the Mother of God in 431 A.D.

Their pilgrimage includes prayers and religious services at what is believed to be the tomb of St. John the Evangelist, the Apostle in whose care Mary was placed by Christ and with whom, according to an ancient tradition, she came to Ephesus.

THE EPHEBUS tradition is referred to by St. Epiphanius of Salamis as existing among a Christian group called the Agapetai in the year 400 A.D. It is thought to be based on indications in the Acts of the Apostles that St. John—and therefore Mary with him—may have departed from Jerusalem and even from the Holy Land at the time of the persecution led by Saul.

It is also generally accepted that St. John lived in his last years and died at Ephesus, then the capital city of Asia Minor and the chief of the Seven Churches addressed in his Apocalypse. Biblical scholars believe he wrote his Gospel there.

His traditional tomb at Ephesus, now being restored by an Ohio businessman, was one of the most famous pilgrim shrines of Christendom until its destruction by wars and earthquakes in the Middle Ages.

The tradition of Ephesus was revived 80 years ago by the discovery of the so-called House of the Holy Virgin on a mountain near Ephesus overlooking the Aegean Sea. The dramatic find was made by a French priest-scholar, Julien Gouyet, who used as his guide a description of Our Lady's last earthly home as seen in a vision by the stigmatic German nun, Anna Katharina Emmerick.

In 1896 Pope Leo XIII blessed the first major pilgrimage to the ruined chapel. In 1905 his successor, St. Pius X, sent encouragement to "the valiant searchers for the tomb of the Blessed Virgin" at Ephesus. Mary's tomb had been described by the German visionary as a cave located in the mountains near the house at the end of a Way of the Cross with 12 stations. The stigmatic, who died in 1824, is reported

as saying she thought "it will one day come to light."

World-wide interest in Panaya Kapulu was aroused by Pope Pius XII in 1950. In 1951 the Turkish government built a road up to the hitherto inaccessible site and the ruined building was restored. On August 19, 1951, it was consecrated as a Catholic church with the special privileges and indulgences attached to Holy Places.

In 1954, George B. Quatman, president of the Telephone Services Co. of Lima, Ohio, heard about the House of the Virgin after making a Marian Year pilgrimage. He had previously suffered from serious heart disease and believed he had obtained a miraculous cure at Loreto, Italy, not only for himself but also for his eight-year-old polio-stricken grandson.

In gratitude he undertook to support permanent clergy at Panaya Kapulu and also founded the American Society of Ephesus to raise funds in the United States for the restoration of neglected Christian shrines. The first project in his million-dollar agenda is the rebuilding of the great basilica built by Emperor Justinian at the tomb of St. John at Ephesus, actual work on which began last year.

Next, he hopes to restore the ancient cathedral of St. Mary, where the third ecumenical council was held. Originally a pagan Greek university called the Musaeion, or Hall of the Muses, it is believed to have been converted to Christian use about 350 A.D.

According to some scholars the existence of this church at Ephesus supports the tradition of Our Lady's last earthly residence there. At that early period it was not customary for churches to be dedicated to saints except in places made sacred by their actual presence or death.

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(Courtesy Philadelphia Standard and Times)
(Continued Next Week)

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Santiago — (NC) — A group of priests from rural areas in Chile have sent a joint letter to Jorge Alessandri Rodriguez asking for "early and basic improvement in the condition of the Chilean farm workers."

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