

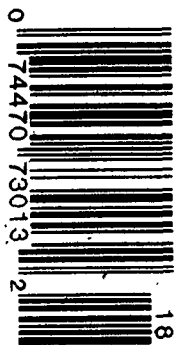
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## of Heaven and Earth

### Priest's art pays fealty to St. Mary

No authentic portrait of the Blessed Virgin Mary has come down to us; but this seems more providential than regrettable. With no prototype to restrict them, artists have been free to depict Mary however their nation or race perceives her. Thus she has become the "Glory of All the World."

Particular images of Our Lady have been venerated in certain European localities, and emigrants bound from there to America often brought copies with them as religious and nostalgic souvenirs.

Apparently this was not the case with the Germans who settled in Dansville. Their second pastor, Father Aloysius Somoggi, made up for the lack, however. A talented amateur artist, he painted for their church a monumental altarpiece (8 by 12 feet), picturing Mary and the Child throned in heaven and inspiring the faithful on earth.

"Heaven and Earth - God and Man" - the title the painter gave his work - is thus a decorative and doctrinal icon. Few Catholics outside the boundaries of St. Mary's Parish are aware of its existence, however. What better time than May, Mary's own month, to acquaint a wider audience with its fascinating story?

That story began in the years between 1832 and 1838 when several hundred German immigrants settled in the village of Dansville, Livingston County, and in

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Father Aloysius Somoggi painted the Marian altarpiece for St. Mary's Church, Dansville, in 1851 during his pastorate.

Donald Saylor

Story by Father Robert F. McNamara, Guest Contributor