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ABSALOM MARTIN: SOLDIER, SURVEYOR, SETTLER  
by ANNIE C. TANKS

In a far corner of a pioneer graveyard preserved four blocks from the business district of Martins Ferry, Ohio, is a flat granite marker of recent government issue. It reads:

"Absalom Martin
New Jersey
Capt. 1 New Jersey Regt.
1758-1802"

This is proper reverence for a city founder and war veteran, but of necessity the stone does not list other distinctions. Martin was one of the original nine men who came west to survey the Northwest Territory, the first surveyor to go to work, and in time, the first legal settler in Ohio.

The stone commemorates seven years' service in the Revolutionary War which began in late November, 1776, when eighteen-year-old Absalom Martin left his studies at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) to enlist in the 4th Regiment, 2nd Establishment, New Jersey Continental Line, commanded by his father, Colonel Ephraim Martin, and was promptly appointed paymaster. Colonel Martin had been invalided home after the battle of Long Island in August, 1776, but by November was fit to take over a re-organized regiment. The Martin clan was committed to the American side; at least five men attained officer's rank in Line or militia duty in a state where loyalties were so divided that organized regiments fought on both sides. Line service was notable because many men preferred militia duty near their homes while armies were marching, camping, and fighting across their state.

The 4th Regiment was probably not ready for the Christmas and New Year's assaults on Trenton, but it skirmished with the British to the east before joining the American army in winter camp at Morristown in January 1777. Young Martin had already discovered that war could be painful by breaking an arm during a clash at Elizabethtown. The Martin's record for the next two years was a roll call of the army's memorable actions near Philadelphia: Brandywine, Germantown, Valley Forge where Absalom Martin was a newly-promoted lieutenant, Monmouth. Before the American army left winter camp near New York City in the spring of 1779, Congress authorized reduction of the New Jersey Line to three regiments. Colonel Martin went home to join the militia and Absalom was transferred into Colonel Mathias Ogden's 1st New Jersey Regiment.

The New Jersey and New Hampshire brigades, Edward Hand's Pennsylvanians and some of Daniel Morgan's riflemen were assigned to General John Sullivan of New Hampshire for an unusual expedition. No British army had threatened the northern states since Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga, New York, in 1777, but the Iroquois "Six Nations" under Chief Joseph Brant were British allies who were reinforced by Loyalist forces under Sir John Johnson, Colonel John Butler and his son Walter. They were burning and killing through upstate New York and as far south as the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania. In an effort to give some protection to an area that was staunchly American and supplied from its rich farms much of the Continental Army's needs, Washington instructed Sullivan to devastate the Iroquois country. The expedition started northward from Easton, Pennsylvania, in May 1779. For part of the way they had to cut their own road through a dense, uninhabited forest where forbidding mountains towered over the narrow valley, a landscape ungnerving to the men from the "Garden State" of towns and orderly farms. Above Wyoming they burned their first Indian town, Chenumg. From there they marched to Tioga, New York, where Sullivan met General James Clinton with four New York regiments, and on to the Finger Lakes. Behind them smoked Indian village after village.

The soldiers were not happy with their duty. The Six Nations' Indians lived in villages where houses were solid structures built of wood or stone, some with stone chimneys and glass windows. Each village was surrounded by thriving fields of grain, vegetable plots or chards, laid out neatly. Burning houses, tearing up gardens and fields, and cutting down trees with fruit still on the branches was too much like destroying their own towns.

The Iroquois and Loyalists made their only stand at Newtown (near Elmira), New York, where the Indians laid a trap. Sullivan and many of his officers and men were too familiar with Indian warfare to be fooled. The army avoided the ambush and swept around it to hit the enemy so hard that they fled in complete disorder. The Loyalists were never again able to put together an attack on the New York settlements. From there the army scurched its way westward to Genesee, aiming for Fort Niagara, but the season was late, supplies running low, and the fields either stripped or not ready for harvest. Sullivan turned back through the ruined countryside and the wild Pennsylvania valleys to rejoin the main army at the end of October. His report to the Continental Congress counted 40 Indian towns, some of them numbering from 80 to 100 houses, destroyed.

This expedition was a new experience for the Jersey soldiers who had never seen anything like Pennsylvania's towering mountains and dense forests or the broader, seemingly endless miles of central New York. They had never tramped for days through apparently empty country, conscious that unseen eyes were watching all their moves. The Indians' sudden attack and their war-whooops were like nothing they knew of the tribal remnants at home. The campaign may have sparked in Lt. Martin a desire to see more of the western lands; at least he had some ideas of what he would face in the Ohio country some years later.

Back with the main army, Absalom Martin was assigned to a familiar duty, paymaster for Colonel Ogden's regiment. Through a bitter winter in Morristown (1779-1780) when temperatures dropped to record lows,
through campaigns of tedious watches and small engagements, Martin had the thankless task of doling out what little money his state sent its troops, turning men away when no funds had come in, and recording what was owed each man according to how many days he was present for duty. The wound that sent him home to Basking Ridge from May to August was possibly as much blessing as misfortune.

The winter of 1780–1781, again near Morristown, saw pent-up grievances explode into mutiny by the Pennsylvania Line, one of the largest and most dependable units in the army. Joseph Reed, president of the Pennsylvania Council, met the mutineers’ representatives at Trenton and reached agreement on their most important demands. General Washington was strongly opposed to negotiating with malcontents, but he accepted the successful result because so large a force was involved. When the officers feared, the smaller New Jersey Line mutinied in the middle of Pennsylvania’s talks, a force of New Englanders appeared, surrounded the huts of the mutineers, arrested the ringleaders, and had two of them shot by a squad of their regimental companions. The mutiny was squelched, but misery remained.

It must have seemed like further punishment when, a few weeks later, the New Jersey men were ordered south along with New England troops like those which had put them down so quickly. They were united only in their aversion to marching into the alien world of the South as represented by the state of Virginia. The reinforcements who caught up with them were Wayne’s Pennsylvanians, reduced in number but paid and better clad after their revolt and ready for business again. It was a tribute to Lafayette’s and the senior officers’ ability as leaders that they were able to weld the three groups into a competent fighting force that contributed its full share at Yorktown.

Once the troops were back in a more familiar setting near New York City, the war became eighteen months of waiting and boredom as rumors of a peace treaty drifted into camp at various times. At least Lieutenant Martin had his paper work to keep him busy. His promotion to captain came on Jan. 6, 1783.

When the provisional treaty was ratified in April, Captain Martin was posted to the command office in New Jersey to serve until the close of the war.5 His duties included keeping regimental records up to date as officers resigned and men stranded home. The last man was discharged on Nov. 5, 1783, and Captain Martin was free to go home as soon as he had filled out and filed the last paper.

The tedium of headquarters duty had been relieved in June by the organizational meeting of the “Society of the Cincinnati in New Jersey.” In each state Continental officers were forming chapters of the Society, of which Washington was president, to keep up their wartime companionship, set an example to soldiers by returning quietly to civilian life, and establish a fund by contributing a month’s pay to help needy members and their families. Captain Martin was a charter member.

During the war the Continental Congress had often debated matters other than military, like the disposition of the land beyond the Ohio River which was attracting a steady stream of migrants from the east. Several army expeditions went down the river to dispossess illegal settlers who returned as soon as the soldiers were back at Fort McIntosh at the Pennsylvania border.

The Northwest Territorial Ordinance of 1785 provided that the land should be laid out in “ranges” or strips, six miles wide, running north and south from a base line. Each range would be divided into townships six miles square, and each township subdivided into 36 one-mile-square sections or lots, all numbered. The combination of range, township, and section number would locate any land purchase exactly. Section 16 in each township was reserved for the support of its schools. George Washington, who had scouted the land along the Ohio before the war, convinced Congress that the area along the river from Pittsburgh to Wheeling would be most attractive to settlers (as the squatters were proving) and that surveying should begin there. When seven ranges south of the base line had been laid out, sale by the section would bring funds into the nation’s empty treasury. Thomas Hutchins, a New Jersey man and former British Army officer who had explored widely in the Northwest, was named Geographer of the United States and ordered to arrange the survey. Thirteen surveyors, one from each state, would assist him.

However, when Hutchins reached Pittsburgh on Sept. 2, 1785, only eight men were waiting. One was Captain Absalom Martin, who had been recommended for his state’s appointment by Governor Livingston and other prominent citizens before the Ordinance was actually passed.4 His crew was already hired and outfitted. The party moved to Little Beaver Creek, a few miles east of the spot where the Pennsylvania west boundary crosses the Ohio River. Hutchins ran the required base line west from this intersection, marked it on the Ohio’s west bank and worked four miles into the forest before news of Indian raids alarmed him. Some tribes had ceded the land he was to survey and some had not, particularly the Iroquois who had been forced westward from New York State and who were being quietly prompted by the British in northern forts like Detroit.5 He had tried to arrange protection from hostile Indians by asking friendly Delaware chiefs to accompany his surveyors, but they had declined. He applied for a military escort from Fort McIntosh at Little Beaver Creek, but every soldier who could be spared had already floated downriver to an Indian treaty conference at the mouth of the Great Miami River near the present Indiana boundary. Left without any protection, Hutchins suspended operations. By mid-October the surveyors had started for home, and Hutchins was trying to frame an impressive report to accompany the combined expense accounts of an expedition that had laid down four miles of base line at a cost of $1,673. One of the two itemized accounts shows how the money was spent and gives some idea of the conditions faced by the surveyors:

“An Account of my expenditures while endeavoring to execute Surveys in the Western Territory of the United States agreeable to
the Ordinance of Congress of the 20 May 1785
Sundry disbursements on my journey to Pittsburgh Vizt.

My expenses on the Road from 25th July to Aug. 15th 21 Days at 1 1/3 dol. pr. Day 28
Supporting 2 Chain men & 1 Marker on the Road the same time at 11/2 dol pr Day 31 45/90 59 45/90
Boarding while at Pittsburg for myself & the above mentioned 3 Men from Aug. 16th to Sept. 10th 35 days 93 80/""
Flour & other necessaries purchased for the support of myself & 5 Men while encamp. at the Mouth of Little Beaver 50
Wages of 2 Chain men from Aug. 15th to the 20th October 86 Days at 2/6 each pr Day 35 18/"
Wages of a Hunter 17 Days at 2/6 5 60/"
Wages of a Marker & 1 Pack Horseman 17 Days at 2/6 each pr Day 9 6/"
Hire of 2 Pack Horses 66 Days at 1/6 each pr Day 26 36/"
Boarding for myself and 3 Men at Pittsburg after our return from Little Beaver Days 14 302 15/90
My time spent on this Expedition not including the time it will take me in going Home 92 Days

The above is a true Account of my Expenses which is not exhibited as a demand, but only submitted to the equity of the Honorable the Congress of the United States

Absalom Martin

William Morris of New York submitted the highest expense account. Martin's was second highest but most detailed, as might be expected of a former paymaster. Others hired men in Pittsburgh, bought fewer supplies, or joined another man who had already outfitted his party.

Thomas Hutchins returned to the Ohio River in June, 1786. Twelve surveyors — none from Delaware — were present: six of the original eight, two replacements and four new appointees. Troop protection against Indians, demanded by the surveyors, did not arrive until August. The 150 soldiers were so poorly supplied that only 30 could venture into the forest; the others camped on the river bank to wait for a summons. Hutchins picked up his base line on August 9, and on August 11 Absalom Martin turned southward to survey the First Range. Three surveyors chosen by lot started their ranges in the same month and three more began work in September. Hutchins was continuing the base line for an eighth range, or another six miles westward, when he found one morning a hostile Indian sign in his camp. Soon afterward a messenger came in from the army camp with a warning that the Shawnees, always dangerous, were gathering a war party to attack the surveyors. Hutchins recalled his men — Adam Hoops of Pennsylvania, working on the Second Range, had already left for home because of ill health — and the party retreated to Esquire McMahar's house immediately below present-day Follansbee.

As the group waited for the Indians to quiet down and fresh supplies for the soldiers to arrive, the surveyors decided to finish four ranges by going out, two to a range. Since Absalom Martin had finished the First Range, which contained only three small isolated sections before the river's southwest course cut it off, he and a companion went to the abandoned Second Range. When the men reconvened in mid-November, Hutchins wanted to complete the other three ranges he had marked, but night temperatures were already below freezing and the soldiers were not in any condition to camp out.

Martin, Isaac Sherman and a new man, Ebenezer Sproat of Rhode Island, settled down at Esquire McMahar's to transcribe the field's notes for transmission to Congress while the other surveyors started for home. Hutchins stayed to draw the plats from their notes. For some reason Isaac Sherman of Connecticut left McMahar's after a few days and went down to Charles Wells' house (Wellsburg) to draw the Third Range plat in solitude. Late in January, Hutchins packed up the completed work and left for New York. Martin and Israel Ludlow, a New Jersey man representing South Carolina who intended to stay in Ohio, set off to winter in the woods. Where they stayed was not recorded by John Mathews, a young man in the vicinity who noted the surveyors' movements in his journal and next year became one of their chairmen, but they probably boarded with some illegal settler who had ignored the order to leave. After Valley Forge and Morristown, a frontier cabin was comfort indeed.

Meanwhile a dismayed Congress was contemplating the surveyors' work of their second set of expense accounts. At this rate it would take years to lay out the entire territory and the cost would be unthinkable. The last of the required seven ranges could be completed next summer and land sales could begin, but from there on, selling large tracts to land companies who would arrange their own surveys seemed to be the only practical way of handling so huge an enterprise. When Hutchins learned that Congress intended nor more surveying in Ohio after completion of the last three ranges, he took another assignment and left the ranges to be com-
pleted by anyone who cared to work on them.

Martin and Ludlow came out of the woods to get an early start on the survey before the trees were in full leaf. By April 10th, 1877, they had made up their party and started for the Fifth Range in the western part of the present Belmont County. James Simpson, a Pennsylvanian who represented Maryland, arrived two weeks later. He had scarcely caught up with them when Ebenezer Zane sent a warning the Indians were raiding in the vicinity and had killed three men at Fish Creek. The surveyors reached Wheeling on May 5 and proceeded upriver to the newly-established Fort Steuben to ask for a military escort. Isaac Sherman and Charles Smith of Virginia had returned by this time, but either they gave little help or decided that three men could finish three ranges and left. Nothing in the completed papers can be attributed to either man.

The three surveyors were camped at Indian Wheeling Creek (Bridgeport) on June 1, 1877. As soon as 60 soldiers arrived from Fort Harmar at Marietta, which could spare them better than Fort Steuben could, they headed into the forest again. Absalom Martin finished the Fifth Range and moved over to help James Simpson with the Sixth. Israel Ludlow laid out the Seventh until he struck the river about seven miles above Fort Harmar. By mid-July the three were back on the riverfront, settling down at McMahan's to put their notes in order and draw the plats. The Seventh Range was completed, but some of the necessary notes for the Fifth and Sixth had been taken east the year before and left there. Two months later the surveyors delivered their work to Hutchins in New York.

Congress was ready to realize some return on the land by proclaiming a "coffeehouse" sale in New York City, starting September 32, 1877. Land could be bought in sections in the first four ranges for one dollar an acre plus surveying costs, one-third down and two-thirds in three months. A patent or deed was issued when the second payment was made. Hutchins and some of the surveyors would be present to answer questions.

One surveyor was definitely there, for the second and third patents were made out to Absalom Martin. Doubtless he had chosen his sections as he laid out the Second Range: Township III, Section 18, 36⅔ acres, and Section 23, 293 3/4 acres, both on the river immediately above Wheeling Island. The cost was 356 and 73/90 dollars and 1321 and 79/90 dollars, a total of 1678 and 62/90 dollars. Since he was able to pay the entire price in three months and receive his title for recording at the newly-opened Steubenville land office in the following spring, he must have had financial resources to draw on, probably his father's money. Certainly it was not his surveyor's pay.

William Pattison [see Notes] thought that Martin held up publication of the complete survey returning west to finish the Fifth and Sixth Range drawings because he was annoyed by Congress' refusal to allow extra pay for some extra work. Martin had a more practical reason for his action. John Mathews noted in his journal entry for Nov. 30, 1877, that he had been helping Capt. Martin and Mr. Simpson to survey land bought at the New York sale. Martin built his cabin near the junction of his two sections (now the middle part of Martins Ferry) and became the first legal settler in Ohio. Here in his own home he finished the paperwork and delivered it to Thomas Hutchins in the spring. The finished survey of the Seven Ranges in Ohio was turned over to Congress in July, 1788.

These first surveyors had proved that they could not possibly lay out even a small part of such a vast territory with the speed demanded by circumstances. They did set a precedent for laying out the new lands in a regular grid, which was easier to maintain as the land flattened out beyond the Appalachian foothills. They also instituted a system of
marking lines and corners and of drawing plats and making notes which provided usable references for their successors. The surveyors refrained from giving names to geographical features but preserved any local names they heard (Martin noted that what he called “brook” was a “creek” in Ohio), and described forests, waterways and soil types so that later historians could have some idea of the original terrain.

Though the Seven Ranges were finished, there was still work for surveyors to do. The land companies who bought several million acres at a time had to know exactly what their purchases included, Rufus Putnam of the Ohio Company engaged Thomas Hutchins in 1788 to mark the boundaries of their immense tract in the Muskingum River area. Hutchins wrote to Martin and Ludlow, both now living in Ohio, to engage them as assistants. They met at Fort Harmar in September and traveled down to the mouth of the Scioto River (Portsmouth) where Hutchins determined the latitude of its junction with the Ohio and surveyed twelve miles up the larger river. There, discouraged by bad weather, lack of military protection against still unapacified Indians, and his own poor health, Hutchins turned over the work to his assistants and went home. Ludlow continued up the Ohio; Martin surveyed up the Scioto for eighty miles, not far from present-day Columbus, before Indian threats and the onset of winter made further progress impossible.

The next spring Ludlow finished the assignment alone. Absalom Martin had just married Catherine Zane, second daughter of Ebenezer Zane (he was thirty and she was twenty) and they were settling into his enlarged and improved cabin. They had to make numerous trips across the river to Wheeling to buy whatever they could not produce for themselves, as did an ever-increasing number of families who were moving in. Rowing across the wide river was hard work, so on December 28, 1789, Martin received his license to operate a ferry from his property to the Virginia shore. 10 His was a strategic location, for the ferry could make a single crossing by avoiding Wheeling Island and still land its passengers within walking distance of the Zane settlement.

Martin stayed at home for several years. He must have had tenants on his land who did the actual work of ferrying, farming, caring for livestock, building and blacksmithing. Later a small distillery to use farmers’ surplus fruit was built. Organizing all these operations until they were established and running smoothly required much supervision. A son, Ebenezer, was born in 1791 and a daughter, Martha, in 1793.

Absalom Martin was recalled to surveying in 1795. A group of French fleeing the Revolution had bought land on the Ohio from an agent in 1790 and crossed the ocean to find unbroken forest on the site and not the shadow of a deed. Rufus Putnam and the Ohio Company settlers helped them to build cabins, make gardens, and cope with the winters while Putnam tried to arrange a way for them to purchase the land. Congress finally made a grant which was to be parcelled out among the heads of households. Putnam asked Martin to come down to Gallipolis, as the French named their town, and make the necessary survey. According to Putnam’s report to Congress the next spring, Martin began his survey on November 2, 1795, and completed it on the 25th, apologizing for taking so long because he had not been well. He worked another 34 days to draw up duplicate plans and certificates so that each landholder had official proof of his or her holding.

Rufus Putnam was named Surveyor-General of the United States on October 1, 1798, and was empowered to hire deputy surveyors for government work at two dollars or three dollars per completed mile, out of which they were to pay their own expenses — no more expense accounts. One pressing task was to survey the Military District, west of the Seven Ranges and north of the Ohio Company’s tract, which the Continental Congress had set aside ten years ago as pay for war veterans. Hutchins had found it too dangerous to survey at the time since it lay even deeper inside the disputed Indian territory that the Eighth Range which he had given up. The first two men to go to work in this district were Absalom Martin and Zacheus Biggs. Martin followed the same pattern as that used in the Ranges, but on order reduced the townships to five-mile squares to make allotments of one hundred or multiples of one hundred acres easier to lay out. He himself had received a land warrant in 1790 for three hundred acres, but Land Office records in the Auditor of State’s office did not show whether it was ever used. 11

After this assignment, Martin was kept busy on the riverfront. He bought land himself, some to the south along McMahon’s Creek, west of present-day Bellaire, and some to the north in Jefferson County, which was surveyed July 29, 1797. At the third meeting of the Common Pleas court’s first session, about November 5th Martin was named one of three commissioners to divide the land of Ephraim Kimberly, who died intestate, among his three children. On August 15, 1798, he was one of five justices of the peace who took official possession of the deed to the land on which the Jefferson County courthouse was to be built.

Absalom Martin was agent and surveyor of numerous land transactions. He was acquainted with government requirements and procedures, with county and federal officials, with influential men in the area. His name appears on a number of deeds in Jefferson and Belmont Counties, often as representative for an absentee owner or buyer. Unfortunately these transactions produced small commissions or he was over-extending his own purchases, for on November 2, 1901, the Jefferson County sheriff was empowered to seize property worth $110.46½ to pay a debt owed to a Robert Woods.

One story repeated in every history of the area and credited to family papers says that Absalom Martin laid out a town called Jefferson
on his land and sold lots. When the town was not chosen for the county seat, he bought back the lots, thinking that only a county seat could exist as a town near Wheeling's large commercial area, and farmed the land for the rest of his life. This story, which presents Martin as a disappointed or embittered man, has not been substantiated so far by any primary source material. None of the sales recorded in deed books involved his original purchase of two sections. Only one lot, sold to Elizabeth Judah in 1790, was bought back; that was in May, 1796, and adjoined his first purchase. He would have been looking far into the future if he was thinking of a county seat in 1795, for Belmont County was not proclaimed until September 7, 1801. It seems peculiar that Putney, founded on the riverfront near Bellaire in 1799, would have been chosen as county seat over Jefferson (1795) if that town existed. And finally, Absalom Martin died four months after Belmont County was proclaimed.

His grave was the first in a half-mile long grove of black walnut trees, still virgin forest, on the plateau that overlooked the river bottom where his cabin stood. If any marker was erected, it soon disappeared. One hundred and seventy years later some historically-minded residents arranged to have a small marker donated by the United States Defense Department placed on the spot, but his enduring monument is every deed whose boundaries go back to the Seven Ranges survey.

NOTES


7. Pattison, pp. 138-139.


9. Ibid. p. 50.


11. Martin, Joseph. Statement from a chronology and other papers prepared after research in records at Columbus, Marietta, Steubenville, St. Clairsville, and other cities. Mr. Martin is a descendant of John Martin, Ephraim Martin's brother.

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GEORGE KOSSUTH, MAN OF SPIRIT, 
MAN OF VISION, MAN OF TALENT 
by IRENE C. SMITH

In order to tell accurately the story of George Kossuth, one must 
tell of the determination and vision of which he was made. During 
the time of the Hungarian Revolution against the autocratic Hapsburg Mon-
archy of Austria-Hungary, all of the Kossuths in Hungary made for the 
nearest border. Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, was the leader of 
the Revolution, and it was not safe for anyone with that name to remain 
in the country.

George Kossuth's great-grandfather Sebastian Kossuth fled to Chur, 
Switzerland. Mr. Kossuth's family believed there was a relationship with 
Lajos Kossuth, but they were never able to establish it definitely. In 
1927 Mr. Kossuth went to Chur, where the great-grandfather had fled, 
to search for family records but found the City Hall had burned down, 
and no records remained. Louis Caspar Kossuth, Mr. George Kossuth's 
son, twice searched for someone in or near Chur who would have known 
the ancestors, but to no avail.

Peter Caspar Kossuth, the father of George Kossuth, was only 
fifteen years old when his family fled the suppression of the Haps-
burgs. This family of craftsmen, cabinet makers and cooperers, left 
Switzerland to emigrate to America in a sailboat, finally settling in Mt. 
Olive, Kentucky. Legend has it that Sebastian was swept from the deck 
of a boat as they were traveling via the Baltimore and Ohio Canal. The 
family, kept together by a strong grandmother, later moved to Pomeroy, 
Ohio. Here George James Sebastian Kossuth was born on April 12, 1886. 
Six months later the family came by boat to Wheeling where they lived 
in a house on the Ohio River for many years.

From his father, Mr. Kossuth learned the beauty of a well turned 
fabrication from wood, and the beautiful picture frames he made are very 
valuable today.

From his earliest years, Mr. Kossuth was interested in the arts. 
At the age of twelve he acquired a simple box camera from one of the 
Fathers at the Catholic school which he attended. Thus began a lifetime 
dedication to and love of photography. His formal education terminated 
with the eighth grade, but his catholicity of interests and curiosity 
impelled him to learn widely in many fields. Of this, more will be told.

He was apprenticed to a photographer Frank Giffin for the ten-
year period from 1899 to 1909. During this time there arrived one day for 
an appointment one of the town's most prominent women. For a time 
Mr. Kossuth could not find Mr. Giffin, but after a considerable search 
he located him, sound asleep, and deeply drunk, in a coffin in the under-
taker's establishment next door.

Mr. Kossuth took photographs of the lady; she was extremely 
pleased with them; consequently she and many of her friends returned
many more times. When Mr. Kossuth died at the age of seventy-four, he was photographing the fourth generation of these families.

His friends thought of him first as a music and nature lover. His talent for music was from his Hungarian heritage, and his love of nature from his Kentucky-born mother. She was a great influence on him, the youngest of five children, he having three sisters and one brother. Always during his later life he was extremely protective toward and solicitous of his sisters.

His first studio at 1219 Chapline Street which he had opened in 1909 was a haven for the art and music world. An Eastman Kodak representative, on his first visit to Mr. Kossuth’s studio, had these comments, which later appeared in 1933 in Eastman Kodak Company’s publication Studio Light:

Mr. Kossuth’s establishment is almost as much a music studio as it is a studio of photography. He has a beautiful music room with grand piano and music racks in which one can find scores of all of the operas and songs of practically the whole world — songs in French, German, Italian and English.

In the course of my visit, someone began to play the piano, and soon a wonderful voice was heard. I couldn’t understand why all activities in the studio didn’t cease, but business went on as usual. I was told it was not uncommon to have the most distinguished musicians drop in and practice or look for an unusual song. And in between sittings Mr. Kossuth chats with these kindred spirits, for he is one of them.

Music was probably Mr. Kossuth’s second love. He was a board member of the Frazier Concert Society, this Society has been established in memory of Zou Hastings Frazier, an ardent supporter of fine music. His being on the Board undoubtedly enhanced his acquaintance with many famous people. His camera captured the faces and features of such notables as Jerome Hines, John Philip Sousa, Enrico Tamberini, Richard Strauss, Jascha Heifetz, Roberta Peters, Mary Garden, Fritz Kreisler, Eleanor Steber, Leopold Stokowski, Karl Muck, Fritz Reiner, Siegfried Wagner, John Jacob Niles, Moriz Rosenthal, and David Bishpham, his first “Name” portrait. Mr. Kossuth considered his portrait photograph of Karl Muck to be his greatest photograph.

Of Mary Garden he said:

“She was a beautiful woman and one with the most personality of any woman I have known. The artist wore a dress hung with a thousand miniature mirrors like beads which reflected the light.”

When he was making the picture, he noticed a big button on the left shoulder. “What is that for?” he asked. To which Miss Garden replied, “If it wasn’t for that button, I would face disaster, for it is the only thing holding my dress up.”

His photograph of her was used extensively throughout the world. “She called me her nice young man,” Mr. Kossuth said. He attended many parties upon invitation of Miss Garden when she appeared for concerts in Pittsburg and Cleveland.3

Other immortals captured in portraits by Mr. Kossuth include lawyers Clarence Darrow and Henry Pendleton, painter Leon Dabo, Richard Nixon, then Vice-President of the United States; poet Carl Sandburg; broadcaster Lowell Thomas and Fred Moore Vinson, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He was the personal photographer of Leopold Stokowski for six years. Dr. Perry Gresham, during the years he was president of Bethany College, arranged for Kossuth to take photographs of all the dignitaries who came to the college.

Many young artists were greatly assisted by Mr. Kossuth, including Eleanor Steber of Wheeling, who has had an outstanding career with the Metropolitan Opera. A concert at the old Capitol Theatre in Wheeling helped finance her beginning.

Kossuth had a fine baritone voice and enjoyed singing. He even considered switching his efforts from photography to music, but singer David Bishamp advised, “Kossuth, the world has many famous and talented singers but very few really good photographers.”4

When Siegfried Wagner, son of Richard Wagner, came to Kossuth’s studio, he looked at the photograph of Dr. Karl Muck, walked over to it, and said, “Hello, Karl,” then sat down and played from the score of Das Rheingold that was on the piano. Mr. Kossuth started to sing the part of Wotan, and Wagner said, “The wonders of the world will never cease finding in a small town a photographer who can sing my father’s operas.”5

It is said that he photographed every great artist in the world of music from 1908 to 1959. His special skill was in finding the inner personality and the qualities of his subject. His collections of these photographs became “Fifty Years of Photographs of Famous People.” For printing these photographs he used Gravalux paper which he imported from Belgium.

Mr. Kossuth’s philosophy of photography was like his interest in music:

“Someone once said that a singer doesn’t need to know all there is to know about music to be a great singer — he needs to know more about life, and that’s the way with professional photography. I don’t think we need to know more about photography, but we do need to know more about people. Great portraits are made by photographers who bring out the greatest in those who sit for them.”

Mr. Kossuth may have been most widely known for his portraits which hang in the Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia. He was the creator of the Memorial Shrine Room in this Memorial. He was also national chairman for Shrine memberships. His interest in and dedication to the Shriners led him to become a 33rd degree Mason. His portraits
of Masons are reminiscent of early Dutch painters. In 1953 the Shrine group arranged with him to make individual portraits in 8 x 10 Ektachrome of each of the twelve members of the august Masonic body. Each successive year he photographed the new member of the Imperial Divan who in ten years would be the Imperial Potentate. He participated in fund raising throughout the United States for Shriners’ Crippled Children’s Hospitals.

The pastels in the Shrine Memorial Building were handpainted by Knight Smith, a Wheeling artist. Mr. Kossuth made the blow-ups and Knight freed-handed in the color.

Mr. Kossuth’s interest in color photography began in 1952 when Photographer Paul Linwood Gittings said he wanted to do Kossuth’s portrait in direct color. The dye transfer print that Gittings produced prompted Kossuth to begin offering dye transfer prints as a part of his service. Earlier he had tinted some of his own photographs.

In 1953 he began working with color photography and found it such an intriguing medium that he adopted it exclusively in 1958.

“Color opens new horizons for all photographers,” he said. “Especially is this true for the older ones for whom the light may have gone out of the job. But it seems to me that it holds the entire future for young men in the business. No one should deny it, for it brings boundless pleasure to both those who buy it and those who make it.”

His color photographs have a vitality and individuality that set them apart from other photographs.

Mr. Kossuth wrote a series of articles for the Wheeling News-Register concerning some of the personalities he had photographed. Of David Bispham, the first American man to sing with the Metropolitan Opera Company and a man who was also a song recitalist and actor, he says, “The recital was a huge success, and we became impresarios over night. If the concert is not a success, you are called the local committee.”

Wheeling at that time was considered one of the most exciting cities anywhere. It was Wheeling’s Golden Age. The women were beautiful and the men elegant. The per capita wealth was great, and the patrons of the arts were active. Edward Bates Franzheim, who died in 1951, built the Court Theater. In 1902 stage shows were given here. Wheeling was considered an important theatrical town. If the show pleased the Wheeling audience, it could go anywhere.

Besides Mr. Kossuth’s connection with the Frazier Memorial concerts, he was vice-president of Wheeling’s Civic Music Association and developed a new approach to local recitals by appealing for greater local community interest in and support for solo artist recitals. In the 1950’s he and Judge Harold Brennan were responsible for the University Concerts which brought the world’s greatest musicians to Wheeling. He was also instrumental in founding in the 1920’s the Little Theater of Wheeling which presented its plays at the Virginia Theater; the building no longer stands.

With George Stroble he was instrumental in establishing the first broadcasting studio of WWVA in Mr. Stroble’s living room on National Road. They reported the news and probably created the first radio show for children, namely “The Old Gray Goose.” Mr. Charles Gruber, who learned and worked with Mr. Kossuth for many years, remembers the program and a reference to him on one of the programs. Mr. Gruber was with Mr. Kossuth from 1938 until World War II and then with him again until 1951 when he opened his own studio. Mr. Eddie Martin was with him from 1944 until Mr. Kossuth’s death in 1960. They commented that he had a supreme confidence in his own ability and a fierce pride in his workmanship.

Mr. Gruber and Mr. Martin were apprentices for seven days a week. When they expected to have a Fourth of July holiday, for instance, Mr. Kossuth would enthusiastically remark, “I’ll see you tomorrow at Park View Lane, and we will work on the porch and see what we can do with the dahlias and the azalea bushes.” An expert gardener, he grew prize specimens of irises, azaleas, peonies, roses and rhododendron.

Before the World’s Fair opened in 1936, Mr. Gruber accompanied Mr. Kossuth on a trip throughout West Virginia while they took pictures of various scenes in the state so that from them murals could be made for the Fair in the West Virginia pavilion.

He was also a mechanic of considerable skill. In the mid-twenties he worked on the restoration of cars of the 1910-1920 period because he felt that they were of classic design. He regarded these as works of art, beautiful of line, marvelous of performance and truly monuments to the artist craftsmen who designed them. In the late twenties he had a 1911 Locomobile Touring car, a 1915 Peerless Touring, a 1915 White Runabout, a 1915 Franklin sedan, a Baker Electric Brougham and a 1911 Stanley Steamer, all undergoing restoration. He had a half dozen helpers, mechanics who could duplicate parts. The 1929 Crash forced an end to this restoration.

His skill as a craftsman with wood was evident when he single-handedly completely restored the old Stifel house at 807 Main Street which was a shambles when he bought it. This was his home and studio for many years. He had also carried out much renovation and remodelling in the home he had earlier owned in Park View Lane.

Mr. Kossuth was responsible for restoring the canvas of a painting of Mrs. Moses Shepherd. Also, at his own expense, he restored a number of the paintings of early Wheeling artist Jeannie Caldwell Daugherty. These now hang at Bethany College. He also restored Mr. W. C. Brown’s photographs of early Wheeling which had been stored in Wheeling for many years. Mr. Brown was one of Wheeling’s most active photographers before the turn of the century. As was not the case with other photographers generally, Mr. Brown took many pictures of street scenes and happenings in the daily lives of residents. The collection is considered an exceptional example of photographic technique. In the early days of photography
it was necessary for photographers to prepare their own plates, take the picture and develop the plates before they became dry, a space of about two hours.

For twenty years Mr. Kossuth collected reprints done from the original lithographic plates of Toulouse-Lautrec. His one original “Moulin Rouge” was executed as a unique form of poster art. An exhibit of these was held at Oglesby Mansion Museum in 1958.

Mr. Henry Schrader commented concerning his interest in many people of the Wheeling area, including Alma Henderson and “Bill” Lies; Mr. Schrader told of Alma Henderson’s asking Mr. Kossuth to make one hundred prints of a photograph of her taken au naturel so that she could give them to her “close friends.”

He took all of the photographs for Union High School in Benwood, West Virginia, said Mr. Schrader, and one time when he was called to take pictures of the Nature Study Club, he suggested to members, “Let’s go to a yard with lovely shrubbery which will make a good background for the photograph.” Mr. Kossuth posed them in Alma Henderson’s yard.

When “Bill” Lies’ son was a student at Wheeling Country Day School, he was elected King of the May. After the ceremonies, when he was still dressed in his kingly robes, his mother called Mr. Kossuth and asked if, on short notice, he could photograph the son. There were several people in the room when Mr. Kossuth asked him to stand for one of the photographs. The boy commanded, “When the king rises, all rise.” Mr. Kossuth ducked under the hood of the camera to hide his laughter.

Then there was the tale of the bedraggled little stray dog Peppy which Mr. Kossuth took in. When he was endeavoring to get a photograph of a dog executive and was having difficulties getting him in a relaxed mood, Mr. Kossuth suddenly said, “Oh, you will have to excuse me; I’ve run out of film.” He dashed to the basement and sent Peppy upstairs. The man relaxed and patted him as George commented, “Isn’t that a cute dog?” The dog became thoroughly relaxed, and while he was patting Peppy, Mr. Kossuth, being ready to do so, snapped a very fine photograph.

Mr. Kossuth had a degree as a Master Craftsman and a Master’s Degree of Photography. He was required to earn twenty-five merits by lecturing and exhibiting around the country, but he earned two hundred and twenty-five! The cover photograph of the January 1952 Keystone Photographer was that of Mr. Kossuth. The following comment appeared on page 11:

Mr. Kossuth can always be depended upon to do his part, either large or small, and the State Association recognized his stature at the Philadelphia Convention when he was made an honorary life member.

“But Triangle and Pennsylvania cannot hold claim to Mr. Kossuth, for his reputation is of national scope and his name is synonymous with the country over for all that is good in photography. He was the first to be presented the George Harris award in August, 1951 for having contributed the most in outstanding service to the profession during the year.”

His memberships include the following: St. Luke’s Episcopal Church; Oglesby Institute; a director of the Wheeling Symphony; a member of the board of the Frazier Concert Series; Ohio Lodge No. 1, A.F. and A.M.; 33rd degree Scottish Rite Mason; Royal Order of Scotland; Knights Templar; Vice-Chairman of Wheeling Landscape Commission; Fort Henry Club; Twilight Club; a life member of the Photographers Association of America; past president of the Triangle Photography Association; director of the Winona School of Photography.

In conversation among the men at the monthly meetings of the Twilight Club his quality of earthiness revealed itself. Dr. Paul Elkin describes this as a healthy, unashamed sexuality. He once commented on the love life of the male bee, saying, “What a way to go!” He is the only member of this club who has not been forgotten.

His home at 807 North Main Street was the meeting place of The Blue Pencil Club for many years. At a meeting of the Club held at Wilson Lodge on November 27, 1973, Dr. Phillips told of his ancestry and his great ability in black and white photography and color.

It was hard to believe that George Kossuth had been dead over thirteen years. Blue Pencilers who know and loved him spoke as if they had seen him just an hour earlier. Several of the younger members and newer members to our community had not known George Kossuth but commented that after the paper and discussion of the evening, they felt they had been life-long friends.

Records do not show when he was elected to the Blue Pencil Club, but a program of the July 28, 1909, meeting at the Wheeling Country Club indicates that Mr. Kossuth spoke about Richard Harding Davis. Incidentally, instructions said members should leave Wheeling on the 5 o’clock trolley; that the omnibus leaves Woodsale at 5:30, with chicken and waffles at the Country Club at 7 o’clock.

A review of his papers shows the catholicity of his interests. On July 17, 1929, he presented a paper on “Talking Movies’ which was just about the time of the first sound motion pictures.

His knowledge of art spans a 1956 paper on ‘The Court of Henry VIII,’ continued Dr. Phillips, “to a 1957 paper on ‘Modern French Art.’” Both of these were accompanied by prints which George produced. In 1958 he presented a paper on ‘Back Stage at The Met’ in which he recounted stories of his knowledge of the stars, including Eleanor Steber.

One of the members referred to him as a universal man; another as
a true intellectual. He never ceased to broaden and deepen his channels of knowledge. He never seemed hurried or tense. “Every day I’m in control of myself,” said Mr. Kossuth.15

Another facet of his musical curiosity is evidenced by his picking out on the piano some Bach Motets. He had learned that Bach had composed a motet for each Sunday in the year, and despite the fact that Mr. Kossuth could not play the piano, he laboriously worked out each melody because he wanted to experience the sound of the melodies.

Married twice, Mr. Kossuth was the father of three children by his first wife: Louis, a physician with a specialty in Public Health in the Air Force, from whom he retired as a colonel. Then he became Commissioner of Health for the State of Arizona.

Mary Kossuth Shumate (Mrs. Stuart) of Virginia has been voted by the Photographers Association of America one of the ten best photographers of children.

Jane Kossuth Smith (Mrs. Wyn) is associated with personnel administration and journalism with a major electronic corporation with national and international markets.

Mr. Kossuth loved the Ohio River. After World War II he became acquainted with the men at the locks at Warwood and McMechen. He arranged that they would blow their whistles as they passed his home, and he made a tape recording of these. In accordance with his request, he was cremated, and his son Louis strewed his ashes on the Ohio River.

The following editorial appeared in the Wheeling News-Register of September 15, 1960:

“He wasn’t the sort of person you associated with death. He didn’t look his years. He was too vital for that, too young in his outlook, too much interested in life and his fellowmen.

“More than an artist in his profession of photography, one who won wide acclaim in his field; he was more than an enthusiastic, public spirited citizen who contributed immeasurably to every cultural movement in the city for the past fifty years. He was a warm, friendly human being who loved and was loved by his neighbors; a man who will be mourned by thousands and missed sorely in the community to which he gave so much of himself.”16

On November 1, 1960, a Frazier Memorial Concert was held at the Virginia Theater in Mr. Kossuth’s memory, with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Mr. William Steinberg. The heading of the program was as follows:

Souls of the Righteous in the hands of God To eyes of men unwise they seem to die; They are at peace.”

This tribute appeared on the program:

“Much could be said about the rich, full and dynamic life of George Kossuth whose passing has left a void that will never be filled. He was an enthusiastic individual who contributed untiringly to every cultural movement in this community for nearly fifty years. His wealth of knowledge on many subjects was immeasurable. Few people at the age of 74 possess the forceful humanistic qualities affecting both young and old, probably because so few are the warm friendly human beings who love and are loved by their fellow man.

“Although a photographer and artist by profession, the seeds sown by him in other phases of life will cultivate and reflect in the life of the city for many years to come. Indeed few communities ever had a citizen so devoted and so sincere.

“Frazier Concerts lost a Board Member and a true friend, and the City of Wheeling its most famous music devotee. It is with deep sadness that this evening’s concert is dedicated to the memory of this honorable man.”17

Mr. George Kossuth was elected to the Hall of Fame on April 25, 1979. The quotation names him “Renaissance Man.”

“His avocations covered the spectrum of the arts. His assemblage of knowledge was the result of his own curiosity and boundless enthusiasm. He moved with confidence in the realms of music, art, the written word, theater, the garden, and the wood-working shop.”18

FOOTNOTES
1. Letter from Mr. Louis Kossuth, April 15, 1982.
2. Studio Light, 1933.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Author’s conversation with Mr. Gruber and Mr. Martin, February 16, 1982.
9. Author’s conversation with Mr. Henry Schrader, February 23, 1982.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
“THE WAY WE WERE”: 125 YEARS OF ST. ALPHONSUS PARISH, WHEELING . . .
by REV. STEPHAN MILTENBERGER, OFM

The first Catholic Church in Wheeling, called St. Mary’s, was built around 1822 at the south east corner of 11th and Chapline Streets on a lot donated by Noah Zane. Itinerant priests administered to the people as they made their rounds to various communities. Gradually the population of Wheeling began to expand, and with it the number of German Catholics grew. The Redemptorist Fathers of Pittsburgh were instrumental in establishing a separate parish for the German inhabitants of the region. Bishop Richard Vincent Whelan of Richmond came to Wheeling in 1846 to administer to the people in this end of the diocese. He was aware that the expanding community was in need of a new house of Catholic worship. He procured property at the corner of 13th and Eoff Streets, the site of the present Cathedral. He built the Church and dedicated it in 1849 in honor of St. James. In the following year, 1850, Wheeling became the seat of the new Diocese of Wheeling and Bishop Whelan was transferred from Richmond to become the first Bishop of Wheeling. He changed the name of the Cathedral to St. Joseph.

During all these years, the German-speaking people were at a great disadvantage because of the language barrier. By 1850 when the Diocese of Wheeling was created, they were having their own services at the cathedral. From all appearances, they formed a parish within a parish. Bishop Whelan showed great interest in these people and spared no effort to supply German-speaking priests for them. The Redemptorists of Pittsburgh filled that need. They were instrumental in establishing a separate parish for the German people. The Bishop was hesitant about creating two separate parishes. He feared that would work serious hardship on both groups.

By 1854, however, there were approximately one thousand German Catholics in Wheeling, very anxious to establish their own parish in which they could foster their own cultural values. The bishop gave his consent. Most of these people were artisans who settled in the city; a small number took to farming. By a house to house collection, they acquired the money to buy property in Centre Wheeling on Market Street. A church was built under the supervision of Bishop Whelan. It was begun in 1856 but, because of a two-year delay, it was not completed until 1859. It was built of brick, in a simple style, 112’ x 50’, with a capacity of seven hundred. The basement was fitted out for a school. Because of their determination to preserve their cultural heritage, they were willing to put up with great inconveniences until such a time when they could build a school. The Redemptorists, who cared for the spiritual needs of the people during the years, declined the bishop’s invitation to assume permanent charge of the parish. However, because of their great service to the people of the parish, the church was dedicated in honor of St. Alphonsus, the founder.
of the Redemptorist Community. Father Stephan Huber was appointed pastor during the erection of the church but there is some doubt if he ever lived at St. Alphonsus. Father Peter Kreusch was then named the first pastor.

John Peter Kreusch was born in Lonwich, in the Diocese of Treves, Germany, on December 2, 1818. He received his early education in his home town but the early death of his parents forced him and his brother, Matthias, to seek employment as farm hands. Eventually their pastor learned of their interest in the priesthood. He made arrangements for them to pursue their education at Maria Einsideln in Switzerland. Peter was twenty-six years old when he joined a group of students traveling to America with Precious Blood Fathers. They arrived in New Orleans on New Year’s Day, 1844. They continued their studies at the seminary of the Precious Blood Community in Ohio. Matthias persevered and spent his life as a priest with that community. Peter left because of ill health. He taught school in Cleveland and ran a small religious goods store. With his health restored, Bishop Amadeus Rappe encouraged him to continue his studies for the priesthood. He was ordained by Bishop Rappe in 1848 and for the next ten years he lived the very strenuous life of a zealous traveling missionary through Ohio and Indiana. Then he beggled his bishop for a more stable life in a German parish.

Bishop Whelan was seeking such a man for St. Alphonsus Parish in Wheeling since German-speaking people accounted for the greater number of Catholics in his see city. Father Kreusch transferred to the Diocese of Wheeling, took up residence at St. Alphonsus in 1849, and remained for twenty-four years.

It was Bishop Whelan’s intention that the parish to be served only German-speaking people. To say that Father Kreusch’s parish took in the whole of Ohio County is only part of the truth. He was called upon to offer the Mass at St. Joseph Settlement in Marshall County four times a year besides caring for the sick which took him away from Ohio. He was the only German-speaking priest in the neighborhood. The census of St. Alphonsus Parish in 1849 was 1500 souls with 145 baptisms recorded in 1849. It was a gigantic task for one man in those horse and buggy days but Father Kreusch seemed to have been a man of strong determination for whom the impossible just takes a little longer to accomplish. He equipped his new church with all the paraphernalia necessary to carry out the liturgy in all its beauty. The parish co-operated with him in making special events memorable with processions and beautiful singing. Piece by piece, as money was available, he added to the interior equipment and beauty of the church — tabernacle, communion rail, confessionals, statues, organ, storage closets in the sacristy. He also had the interior of the church painted. One cannot fail to notice a wonderful spirit of unity in the parish.

On November 23, 1873, the parish celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the pastor’s ordination. At 8:00 a.m. that morning, a large delegation of the parishioners came to the rectory to offer the congratulations of
parish on January 1, 1884. Father Felix M. Lex was appointed Pastor and Father Angelus Baumgartner was named Assistant Pastor. These two, with Brother Bonaventure Weber were to form the first Capuchin community in Wheeling. They arrived in time to help the people celebrate the feast of Christmas in 1883 and were given a joyful and enthusiastic welcome by the congregation. Their coming was considered "the greatest Christmas gift the Lord could have sent us." Only the future could give validity to that statement but it gave encouragement to the little band of Capuchins.

Their first order of business was the spiritual renewal of the parish. Father Felix thought the best approach was through the young adults. Bringing the young people together in the Sodality would foster more faithful attendance at Mass and obedience to the laws of the church. Sermons were preached inviting the young to join the Sodality but they fell on deaf ears. The next approach was made to the young ladies alone and it proved successful. On April 1, one hundred fifty of them joined the Sodality, promising frequent reception of the sacraments, faithful attention to religious instruction and good example, helping to instruct their younger brothers and sisters, cheerfully and diligently performing their assigned duties at home.

Results were quick in coming. During the first Lenten season, many who had neglected the sacraments for years returned with new fervor. People came from far and near so that scarcely a day passed without a request to receive the Sacrament of Penance. On the weekends, the fathers spent eight to nine hours in the confessional.

To strengthen this new spirit, the fathers introduced the Third Order of St. Francis. The Third Order was founded by St. Francis of Assisi for the laity, and at the insistence of the laity, who wished to bring the Franciscan ideals into their daily life in the world.

Special attention was devoted to reviving the St. Alphonsus Society, once the most flourishing society in the parish (four hundred members — all members) until it ran counter to the authority of the bishop and was suspended. With patient effort and encouragement of the priests, the members renounced their defiance of the bishop. All obstacles removed, the bishop reinstated the society to the status of a church society. That proved to be a giant step in the reunification of the parish. The feast of St. Alphonsus that year (1884) was celebrated as a festival of peace. Bishop Kain celebrated a Solemn Pontifical Mass, assisted by Father Hyacinth Epp who came to Wheeling for the occasion. After the Mass, the bishop gave the Papal Blessing. The church observance was followed by a banquet prepared by the parishioners in the hall for about seventy guests. The list included the bishop, visiting clergy, members of the society and prominent citizens of the city.

It is of interest to note that during all the unfortunate happenings of the past, one society survived. At the time of the Civil War (c.1864), several women of the parish banded together to establish what they called the Poor Souls' Society. Their purpose was to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass and Prayer for each member who died. They taxed themselves ten cents at the death of each member to have Masses offered for the deceased. In 1884, the society still had three hundred eighty members. That society still exists in St. Alphonsus. The profound change that had come about at St. Alphonsus during the previous six months gave every indication that it was not a matter of personalities but of deep faith. The Capuchin superiors were so convinced of that they decided to use Father Felix's talents in other localities. In August 1884, he was transferred to Pittsburgh as superior of the local community and pastor of St. Augustine Church. He never returned to Wheeling. After serving the church and his community in various positions of responsibility, his health was impaired. In the hope of regaining his strength, he sent out for his homeland in Germany but died came at a hospital in Yonkers, New York on July 10, 1901. He was buried in the friars' plot of St. Mary's Cemetery in Herman, Pennsylvania.

In his replacement, the congregation at Wheeling discovered it had a staunch friend and supporter in Fr. Hyacinth Epp. Besides his duties as provincial of the Capuchins, he took upon himself the added duties as pastor of St. Alphonsus to carry on the work begun by Fr. Felix. If there was any parish under the jurisdiction of his province that held first place in his heart, it was St. Alphonsus Parish.

Conscious of the fact that the future of any parish lay in the hands of mothers, Fr. Hyacinth established the Confraternity of Christian Mothers. At the first reception, he enrolled two hundred fifty mothers in the confraternity. Their purpose was to promote the welfare of children through prayer and instruction. He also entrusted them the care of the sanctuary and the vestments for divine worship.

By this time, the church building was thirty-five years old and was giving cause for serious concern. The northern wall began to lean toward the roof. Fr. Hyacinth had the building inspected from foundation to the tower by experts in the building trade. They reported that the building was in bad condition but could be preserved for a while by the installation of tie rods to hold the leaning wall from further deterioration.

In March of 1885, Fr. Hyacinth received permission from the bishop to appoint eight prudent men as church trustees to assist the pastor by council and deeds in temporal. The tie rods were installed in the church as a temporary measure and the pressing problem, created by the lack of playground for the school children was taken up. It was decided to buy a piece of property with a little house on it, adjacent to the school on the north side for the price of eight hundred dollars.

After eighteen months, the spiritual renewal of the parish seemed well on its way. Temporal concerns were making more and more demands on the pastor's time at St. Alphonsus. Financial support of the parish had increased from four hundred eight dollars a year in 1883 to well over one thousand dollars in 1884. In August of 1885, Fr. Hyacinth was re-elected provincial of the Capuchins. He felt he could not do justice to the increasing demands of the parish. He removed himself from the administra-
tion of the parish — but only temporarily, as we shall see. His heart remained in Wheeling. The new pastor of St. Alphonsus was Fr. Anthony Schuermann. He was a man held in high esteem for his charity, prudence, fervor and managerial ability — a man to suit the needs of St. Alphonsus. He was born on December 8, 1834 at Rorup in Westphalia, Germany, became a Capuchin in 1856 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1859. He too, left Germany because of the Kulturkampf of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

Fr. Anthony came to Wheeling with great hope and courage. No doubt, Fr. Hyacinth had briefed him about his new assignment with emphasis on the need to plan for the replacement of the church. As he became familiar with the situation, his concern for the weakened structure was increased by the sight of so many people who were compelled to stand during the Mass and sermon on Sunday mornings. If he only had room and money to build! The thought gave him no peace day or night. His concern and enthusiasm soon inspired others. The Christian Mothers collected $1200.00; the Young Ladies, another $250.00. A fair was held that netted $2700.00. Enthusiasm was running high. In the midst of it all he was able to concern himself with small matters. During the time before Christmas, he built a Crib and painted a backdrop to show the Crib to better advantage. It would seem that the Crib was not as common in the churches at that time as it is today. Catholics came from far and near to see the Crib. He was in frequent consultation with the bishop concerning the building of a new church. The bishop was reluctant to grant permission because of the financial burden on the parish. He relented, however, and gave his permission in February, 1886. Fr. Anthony appointed eight prudent but enthusiastic men to procure the money while he, himself, drew up the plans.

On April 8th, the priests moved into the little house on the playground. The last Mass was said in the old church on April 11th. The school auditorium was fitted out for church services and on the following day, seventy-two men began the demolition of the old church. The work was completed by the end of April. Fr. Anthony had completed the plans and let the contract for the foundation. He served as general contractor for the construction. Working every day and far into the night, the effort was bound to take its toll of his health but he was not a man to spare himself. He maintained his cheerful smile and everyone experienced his friendly word on the job as well as in the confessional. On July 16, he let out the contract for the brickwork. By July 21, his confreres feared that had so overworked himself that his life was in danger, yet he made the necessary arrangements for the laying of the cornerstone which was scheduled for August 1st. Finally, his doctor insisted on complete rest and a change of climate as soon as possible. It was a hard blow for the zealous man but he accepted it with this customary cheerfulness.

August 1st was a festive occasion. In the absence of the bishop, his vicar general, the Right Reverend J. F. Sullivan laid the cornerstone and spoke in English. Fr. Gratz from St. Joseph Settlement spoke in German. Despite the intense heat, it was estimated that ten to twelve thousand people attended the ceremony with banns to enhance the occasion. Fr. Anthony was on the speaker's stand to greet the guests. A special train brought eight hundred from Pittsburgh. It turned out to be his farewell to the congregation. On the following Tuesday, several members of the parish accompanied him to the railroad station. They were convinced that he would never return. With good care and rest, however, he began to recover his strength. Hope of recovery was strengthened when he spoke at the Silver Jubilee Mass of Fr. Hyacinth. He spoke again at the dedication of St. Fidelis College at Herman, Pennsylvania for which he had drawn the plans. That proved to be his last public appearance. He suffered a relapse and died on July 30, 1887. He was buried in the friars' plot of St. Mary's Cemetery in Herman, Pennsylvania. Tears greeted the news of his death on the following Sunday at St. Alphonsus — so deeply had he entered the life of the parish and the hearts of the people in so short a time.

Once more Fr. Hyacinth came himself to fill the vacancy at St. Alphonsus. He brought Fr. Martin with him to organize the parish for the Catholics of Bridgeport, Ohio and to serve as their pastor. That offered a measure of relief for the pastor of St. Alphonsus but to step into the task of building the church without the skills of a Fr. Anthony was no enviable situation. (It is not unlikely that, with such a task, he came himself.) Wisely, he procured the services of Kliever and Kraft, with their experienced architect, Mr. Wells, to take over the building of the church. Many of the details that Fr. Anthony would have had on his fingertips had to be worked out now as the building progressed. One change of considerable importance was made in the plans — steel pillars were substituted where Fr. Anthony had specified wood.

While these building problems were being solved, Fr. Hyacinth had other matters to deal with. Money was running short. During the third and fourth weeks of October a special collection netted the surprising sum of over six thousand dollars. It was another demonstration of the continuing good will and co-operation of the parish with their pastor.

The renewed spirit of the parish was demonstrated on March 23, 1887 on the occasion of the pastor's silver anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. The bishop joined in the festivities and also preached in English at the Solemn High Mass. Fr. Maurice, who was later to become pastor at St. Alphonsus, preached in German. Many diocesan clergy and visiting religious joined in the celebration. It was a warm tribute to the pastor but, without doubt, the visitors were also paying tribute to the members of the congregation who had joined forces with the pastor to renew in so short a time, the spirit of the parish. After the solemn services in church, there was a reception in the basement of the new church. The various parish organizations presented gifts in the form of new equipment for the church. The children presented a program and Fr. Hyacinth responded by pledging his continued efforts for the welfare of the parish.
People of German ancestry have established a great reputation in this country for the care of their orphans. It was strange to discover that this matter was the cause of some friction between the people of St. Alphonsus and those who had charge of the orphans in the diocese. A shifting population, however, often had no ties strong enough to care for its orphans. The Germans in Wheeling were a stable population so that the establishment of an orphanage in Wheeling by Bishop Whelan in 1857 was of little concern to them. The orphanage was a temporal arrangement associated with Wheeling Hospital for a few orphans until other accommodations could be made. By 1887, there were sixty orphans to care for — making the establishment of the orphanage a necessity.

The bishop set up St. Vincent’s Orphan Association. Membership was on a voluntary basis and each member was to contribute one dollar a year for the support of the orphans. The project, apparently, received little support from the Germans since the orphanage of German origin were cared for in the homes of the parish, in case the orphanage was patronized, relatives paid for the support of the child. There were denials of this claim. Some thought the people of St. Alphonsus Parish were shirking their responsibilities to the orphans. Membership in the Orphan Association dropped.

In 1887, Bishop Kain, who had succeeded Bishop Whelan as Bishop of Wheeling, ordered a special collection in all the parishes of the diocese for the support of the orphanage. This collection was to be taken up annually on Rosary Sunday. In a special letter to Fr. Hyacinth, the bishop stated that should the members of St. Alphonsus decide that they would take care of the orphans of the parish, they would be exempt from the collection. Fr. Hyacinth answered that the parish “gratefully accepted Your Lordship’s permission to support the orphans of St. Alphonsus congregation.”

St. Alphonsus Orphan Society (Weisen Verein) came into being under the direction of the pastor and a Board of Directors. The organization meeting was attended by two hundred men. A certificate of incorporation was issued by the Court of Ohio County on October 20, 1890. There were only three or four orphans at the beginning for whom the Society found homes with Catholic families and paid for their support. In 1891, five hundred forty two members paid their pledged contribution which was set in the by-laws at ten cents per month or one dollar twenty cents yearly.

Though there was no real necessity for establishing an orphanage at the time, other considerations brought it about rather quickly. The Sisters of St. Joseph had been teaching at St. Alphonsus School. They travelled back and forth from their mother-house on Eoff St. by horse and buggy. The lack of German-speaking teachers in their community made it necessary to retire from the school. Fortunately, a German community, the Sisters of Divine Providence, had established headquarters in Pittsburgh in 1875. They were willing to come to Wheeling but the parish had no convent for them.

Fr. Hyacinth feared that the early enthusiasm for the care of the orphans would not last unless there was a home established for them. The Board of Directors took up his suggestion that an orphanage be established which would be administered by the Sisters and, at the same time, would furnish a home for the teaching Sisters. The Sisters agreed to the proposal and the parish orphanage was begun with the purchase of the Handian property (Lot 139) on Market Street. The Sisters of Divine Providence moved into the building on August 30, 1891. Because of the small number of orphans, the building also served as an academy for several years as well as an orphanage and day nursery. The children lived in a home-like atmosphere and joined other children of the parish at church services, in school and on the playground. The building was enlarged in 1899 to provide more room for the orphans and more privacy for the Sisters.

The number of orphans fluctuated from time to time. The number of children from broken homes throughout the city increased as the number of orphans diminished. Of the children in the home in 1955, only one was from the parish. It seems that, since its founding, there were never more than thirty children in the home at one time. In the summer of 1955, the Board of Directors decided there was no longer a need for a parish orphanage and it was closed. When St. Alphonsus was established in 1856, it was designated as a National Parish as compared to a Territorial Parish with defined boundaries. It was to care for the German-speaking people of Wheeling. At that time there were fifteen hundred such people in Wheeling but, German-speaking people of surrounding areas considered St. Alphonsus as their parish and depended on the priest of St. Alphonsus for all spiritual needs. That entailed travel by horse and buggy into surrounding counties to care for the sick.

In 1986, Fr. Martin Muellers was sent to St. Alphonsus with the assignment to care for the people of Bridgeport, Ohio in the Diocese of Columbus. That Mission developed into the full fledged Parish of St. Anthony and is administered by the diocesan clergy. In the same year, Bishop Patrick Donahue of the Diocese of Wheeling, aware of the great distances many people had to travel for religious services, established a new parish in the Edginton Lane area of Wheeling. The people of this new parish were for the moment parishioners of St. Alphonsus. It is now the Parish of St. Michael.

The census of Wheeling in 1900 set the population at 34,522. It is estimated that fifteen to twenty thousand professed the Catholic faith. Lacking actual census figures, the growth of the parish by 1900 may be deduced from the fact that three priests were sent to St. Alphonsus to assist the pastor, Fr. Joseph Anthony Ziegelmyer, in caring for the spiritual needs of the people. Three assistant priests was quite an unusual thing in those days. Further indication of growth were the five hundred ninety children in the parochial school. The parishioners of St. Alphonsus always had a variety of activities to suit their individual interest. Not all of them survived due to changing circumstances. They were religious,
beneficial or social in nature. (Several deserve special mention in this short history.) In 1884, the Third Order of St. Francis was organized at St. Alphonsus. It is now known as the Secular Franciscan Order. It was the third order founded by St. Francis of Assisi almost eight hundred years ago. It is of interest to note that it was founded at the insistence of lay people, living a normal life in the world. It enjoyed the official approval of the Catholic Church. Because of their family obligations, these people could not join the First Order which was for men alone, living in community; nor the Second Order which was for women living in community. Its purpose was to help them live their lives in closer conformity with the gospel of Christ after the example of St. Francis. It still exists at St. Alphonsus in 1982.

The Confraternity of Christian Mothers was introduced at St. Alphonsus in 1885, the second confraternity of its kind in the United States. Its purpose was to strengthen the Christian home, and to further the Christian education of children through the influence of Christian Mothers. It still exists under the name, The Ladies Guild and Christian Mothers.

The St. Vincent De Paul Society was established in 1931 to care for the needs of the poor during the time of the Great Depression. The society's continuing service to the poor may be judged from the fact that Frank Paul, a self-employed tailor by trade, was awarded the coveted title, Citizen of the Year in 1954 by the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Wheeling.

The people who founded St. Alphonsus Parish considered faith their most cherished possession. It was the inspiration for the life they led, and the foundation of the Christian homes they established. The physical compound they built, comprising the church, school, convent, rectory, and orphanage, is a visible monument to their Catholic faith and to the sacrifices they were willing to make to preserve it and their country.

Men of the parish served in the Civil War and in every succeeding war, including the Vietnam War. The parish contributed valiantly to the American cause in World War One and World War Two. In the Second World War, two hundred forty two answered the call of their country. Eleven made the supreme sacrifice. During the War, the women of the parish banned together to furnish hospital supplies for the Red Cross. This is an admirable record when it is recalled that many were fighting against their former homeland or the fatherland of their parents.

Another sign of the great faith of the people of the parish is the large number of young men who joined the priesthood as a result of the religious life which developed in the Christian atmosphere of their homes. Thirty-one young men were ordained to the priesthood. Six other men became lay brothers, three of whom became Capuchin Franciscan lay brothers, and three joined communities of teaching brothers. Seventy-nine young ladies joined various religious communities of women and dedicated their lives to the education of children.

Recent years have brought many changes to the church and to the neighborhood. A most dramatic change came about on August 14, 1949 when a decree from the Bishop, John J. Swint, was read at all the Masses. The Decree stated that St. Alphonsus was no longer to be considered a National Parish, but, henceforth it was to be a Territorial Parish with defined boundaries. All people living beyond those boundaries, regardless of their ethnic origin were to affiliate with the parish of the territory in which they lived.

The neighborhood was changing. The Library moved, the high school was abandoned, the area was rezoned and State Route 2 came through. Families have been uprooted and moved out, and housing units have been demolished.

St. Alphonsus is still alive but not as large a parish as it once was. The characteristic German names are heard less frequently, such as Schiffer, a name that brings back memories of Professor A. J. Schiffer, an accomplished musician, organist, and choir director at St. Alphonsus, or Achermann, that will recall to people's mind the eminent physician and surgeon, Dr. Gregory Ackermann, or Bleifuss, which people will remember as the family name of Sister Rita Bleifuss, who spent her life, dedicated to the education of children, such names have gradually been replaced by McGreal, Malatsinski, Simonetti, Sase — a true melting pot such as America is today.

St. Alphonsus Parish celebrated its 125th Anniversary on October 18, 1981. The Mayor of Wheeling, the Honorable William H. Muegg, proclaimed October 18 as St. Alphonsus Day. On that date, Harry Hamm, Editor of the Wheeling News-Register, and a former member of the parish, devoted his "Editor’s Corner" to the parish in an article entitled "Remembering St. Al’s." He concluded his long list of fond memories with these words "...as one mellowed in life, memories of long-forgotten places and people are nourished, and it is a nice feeling once in a while to recall the way we were."
BOOK REVIEW


Larry Bowman has written a work dealing with British policy regarding treatment of American captives. They were held primarily in New York, a British stronghold, in New Bridgell on land, on a ship converted into a prison and two places in Britain, Mill and Forton. The focus is on British policy toward these captives and Washington's response to their position statements. The British exchanged prisoners without recognizing the American side as representing a sovereign power. Ultimately a complicated formula for such exchanges was worked out: one lieutenant general for 1,044 American privates or combination of various ranks; or nine colonels (100 ea) 9 x 100 = 900 plus two lieutenants colonels (2 x 72 = 144) would equal the necessary toll of 1,044.

The condition of captives held by the British Navy particularly is described carefully and poignantly as our men suffered in the dank, dark, almost waterless quarters under the decks of the twenty-six vessels converted into "floating" prisons. Conditions were frequently cruel as we understand it but nothing is going to compare with Andersonville, Libby Prison, not to mention Dachau. They were bad enough aboard these places to induce escape attempts, but it took a desperate and determined individual living on two-thirds rations to try a watery flight. Since this was virtually impossible, naval prisoners gladly joined work parties ashore to temporarily escape the noxious smells and gain extra rations.

In context the prisoner problem became troublesome because of two factors: (1) the British belief that the war would be brief making a long run plan unnecessary and: (2) London's desire to avoid regularizing policy for fear of this being interpreted as recognition of American sovereignty. In negotiating for prisoners, Washington's requests with this in mind were always turned aside.

Considerable discussion is offered regarding the British attempts to provide adequate food supplies and a modicum of medical care. This was not always possible particularly after large hauls of prisoners were taken as at New York (1776), and Charleston (1780). By the latter date a system had been worked out and conditions were not quite so desperate with exchanges made generally without policy. The British agreed to accept an American commissary general for prisoners one of whom Joshua Loring, who in passionate concern for his fellow Americans allowed his wife to become General William Howe's mistress in order to cut corners relative to his duties.

A number of cavils must be mentioned however. While the scholarship is generally sound, derived as it is from captives' diaries and an assortment of British collections, there is a bit too much repetition of basic information, which after several rounds becomes wearying. At other times he seems a bit more involved in administrative procedures, so that the
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Noted Wheeling Photographer George Kossuth, compliments of Gruber Studios.