

French missionary priests in the USA in the 19th century (4): Abbot Antoine Deydier (1788-1854)

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For a week or so – from August 11 to 18 – I will be away from Paris for a perhaps undeserved vacation but made necessary by the accumulated fatigue (and not only because of this blog...). I therefore offer you a small “summer series” which will be devoted to French missionary priests in the United States in the 19th^{century}. This is a subject that I have worked on a lot, but it is a task made very difficult by the very large number of French priests, religious men and women, hundreds and hundreds, who have left their homes, it is that is to say from home, to go and help build Catholicism there. The book that I have been devoting to them for years may well never appear due to the enormity of the work it requires. But I have already written numerous notices. You might as well make the most of it! In this series, I will limit myself to 19th century priests^{and} lesser-known personalities. I wish you a pious discovery of these French priests in the United States.

Abbot **Antoine Deydier** (1788-1864): founder of the **Assumption Church** in Evansville (Indiana)

Born in France (perhaps in Alsace or Lorraine where this surname is common), in 1788, he entered the Seminary of Saint- Sulpice where he probably followed the courses of Abbot **Simon Bruté de Rémur** , future bishop of Vincennes (Indiana) who taught theology there since 1808. In any case, it was with Abbots **Bruté** , **Guy Chabrat** , **Jacques Derigaud** , **Julien Romeuf** and Mgr **Benoît Flaget** , the brand new bishop of Bardstown (Kentucky) who came to France to recruit priests and seminarians, whom he took to Bordeaux for the United States on June 10, 1810. Ordained deacon in 1812, he refused the priesthood and taught, for four years, at **Mount St. Mary's** in Emmitsburg (Maryland) where Father **Bruté** also taught . After these four years, he was found in Albany (New York) as a tutor. But, undoubtedly, the discussions he had with Father **Bruté** at **Mount St. Mary's** , made him reconsider his refusal of the priesthood since, on March 25, 1837, he was ordained priest by Bishop **Bruté** , first ordinary of Vincennes (since 1834), in the **St. Francis Xavier** Cathedral of this city. Upon his ordination, this late vocation, was sent, in November 1837, to Evansville (Indiana) where he remained until 1859, except for a tour he completed, in September 1838, in order to collect money for the diocese, accompanying a young **Ann (Nancy) Brown** to the novitiate of the **Sisters of Charity** of Emmitsburg, and an itinerant ministry in Gibson County (Indiana) from 1838 to 1840. In 1838, he undertook the work of construction of the **Assumption Church** , the first Catholic church in Evansville, even going so far as to

supervise the making of the bricks – and today, on the Feast of the Assumption, was the occasion to report it (*the photo below taken around 1860 and quite mediocre, of this church is the one that Father **Deydier** had built: it was razed in 1872*) .

In this city, his ministry consists mainly of caring for the workers who work on the **Washbash and Erie Canal** , a canal connecting the Great Lakes to the Ohio River. His living conditions in Evansville are even more precarious to read what Saint **Mother Theodore Guérin** , who knew him well, writes: “*His poverty was so extreme and his misery so complete, that I would risk being accused of exaggeration in describing it .*” This exhausted septuagenarian retired to Vincennes in 1859 where he died five years later. Evansville has a **Deydier Place** , named in memory of his twenty-one years of ministry in that city.

