

How They Have Largely Developed from Father Bacquelin's Small Beginning.

On the 23d day of next February Monsignor August Bessonies will celebrate his semi-centennial as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, thirty-two years of which time he has been pastor of St. John's parish. Naturally enough, the approach of this great anniversary disposes the good Father to reminiscence, and he talks very entertainingly of things that were, and now and then is disposed to prophecy of greater things that are to be.

"The first priest to come to Indianapolis," said the Monsignor, yesterday, "was Father Bacquelin, who was stationed at St. Vincent's, near Shelbyville. He performed the first mass here in 1834, in private families, for there were few Catholics in this place then. I was at Vincennes, and present, when Father Bacquelin paid a visit to Bishop Hailandiere. 'Bishop,' said he, 'we must have a foothold in Indianapolis; it is the capital of the State.' The Bishop asked how much would a lot suitable for a church building cost, and the father told him \$300. 'Here,' said the Bishop, giving him the money, 'is \$150; now collect the other \$150 and buy a lot.' That was in 1833. A lot was bought on the northeast corner of Washington and California streets in 1840, and a small frame church was built. It was a place for worship for ten years, until 1850, when Father Gueguen built a little brick church, which was called St. John's, on the site of what is now the Bishop's house on the north side of Georgia, between Illinois and Tennessee streets. The first church, the little frame on West Washington street, was called the Church of the Holy Cross. Father Bacquelin was killed between this city and Shelbyville, being thrown from his horse while out on a pastoral visit. The next priest was Father Murphy, who was here about a year and a half, and who also met a violent death, though after leaving Indianapolis, as he was run over by the cars at Vincennes. Then came Father McDermot, who died in the State of New York, and then Father Gueguen, who is yet living, at the age of seventy-six years, and is chaplain at St. Mary's of the Woods. My immediate predecessor was Father Moloney, who was here from 1833 until I came, Nov. 4, 1857."

"How many who were in the first congregation at St. John's are yet there?" he was asked.

"Very few. I think I can name all, though I may happen to omit one or two. There is Mrs. James H. McKernan, James B. Ryan, Patrick Kirland, Michael Lonergan, John O'Connor, James Broden and Michael Doherty. When I came here I found a congregation of seventy-five families. There are fully one thousand families in St. John's Church now, after it has sent out as daughters St. Mary's, St. Patrick's, St. Joseph's and St. Bridget's. The Sacred Heart, formed from St. Mary's may be called a granddaughter, and then there is St. Francis's Church at Brightwood.

"How many Catholics are now in this city?"

"There are between 15,000 and 16,000, including all our children, even to the babies, as we do. When I came here there was a school of thirty pupils, made up of Irish, French and German children, and taught by the late Miss Lucy Keating. We now have about 2,000 children in our schools, 50 or 500 of whom are in St. John's parish. Besides that we have four academies, St. John's, St. Mary's, St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's, and we have Sisters of Providence, Sisters of St. Francis, Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Little Sisters of the Poor, Sisters of Charity, Brothers of the Sacred Heart and the Franciscan Fathers."

In the great parish of St. John's there are four priests, with Bishop Chatard at their head—Monsignor Bessonies, Father Frank H. Galisk, Father B. F. Dowd and Father Joseph Weber.