

# Priest Walked From Mexico To Found Church That Stood on Second Street 60 Years Ago

## Father Deydier Found Only Two Catholic Families Here When He Established Assumption Parish

By CLIFTON BROOKS

IT IS JUST 96 years since a French priest, footsore and weary, arrived in the unprepossessing but flourishing village of Evansville, Ind.

Rev. Anthony Deydier, for that was his name, had a right to be footsore and weary. He had walked nearly all the way from Mexico City to Evansville.

He had been charged with establishing a Catholic church in Evansville—the first in Indiana, south of Vincennes.

Despite his happiness at the responsibility placed upon him by the church, and at having come to the end of his arduous and hazardous journey, it must have been something of a shock to discover upon his arrival that Evansville boasted only two Catholic families.

These two families, so Joseph P. Elliott informs us in his history of Vanderburgh County, were those of Francis Link, a hotel keeper, and John Walsh, a merchant tailor.

But the Bishop of Vincennes had picked the right man. Within two years after Rev. Deydier arrived, a lot for a church was purchased at a cost of \$1200.

The site of this lot and the church that was built upon it is the link which binds this story of Rev. Deydier and Assumption Parish to this story about Evansville as it was 60 years ago.

The lot selected was on the east side of Second Street between Main and Sycamore, and it is this part of Second Street that we are going to try to recall as it was in 1873.

REV. DEYDIER arrived in Evansville in 1836. In 1838, the lot was purchased and four years after his arrival, in 1840, the corner stone of Assumption, the first Catholic Church in Evansville, was laid on the site of what is now the Mercantile-Commercial Bank Building, or, as it was called

when it was built, the Evansville Business Men's Association Building.

The corner stone was laid by Msgr. Forbin Jeanson, the French bishop of Naney, who was at the time on a visit to the diocese of Vincennes. Rev. Stephen Badin, the first priest ordained in Indiana, delivered the discourse.

Rev. Patrick McDermott, who became assistant to Rev. Deydier in 1849, succeeded the church's founder when Rev. Deydier retired in 1859. Rev. Deydier died in 1864.

Sixty years ago, in 1873, services were still being conducted in the Second Street church, but the church at Seventh and Vine, which still is being used, was already in the course of construction.

The Second Street property had been sold in 1871 for \$50,000 to Charles Viele, banker and business man, and the Seventh Street site purchased.

Rev. McDermott, who was still at the reins of Assumption parish 60 years ago, died in 1882, three years after he had left Evansville to become pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Indianapolis.

MR. VIELE, when he acquired the Second Street property, converted it into a temperance hall, called Viele Hall.

"Viele Hall, said R. B. "Doc" Goodge, 719 Bellemeade-av, was the home of the Red and White Ribbon Temperance Clubs, red for the men and white for the women.

"Viele Hall thus was the fore-runner of Evans Hall, which, how-

THIS IS Father Patrick McDermott, as Irish as his name and the man who was responsible for building the present Assumption Church, at Seventh and Vine Streets, which, altho 60 years old, still is one of the most beautiful Catholic churches in the country.

Rev. McDermott was the second pastor of Assumption Church, taking over the parish from Father Deydier, founder of the church, in 1859.

The church then was located at Second and Sycamore Streets, where the Mercantile Bank Building now is.

William Gorman, secretary of the Knights of Columbus, and member of a pioneer Vanderburgh County family, well remembers Rev. McDermott and recalls, too, the old church building after it had been sold and the new one built.

"My father often used to say," Mr. Gorman said, "that I helped build the new Assumption Church. When I was about two years old, he took me to the site where they were excavating and

had me throw two or three handful of dirt into a hole!"

The picture of Father McDermott reproduced here hangs on a wall of the Knights of Columbus hall.

ever, was built a few years later."

The old building was razed when the E. B. M. A. Building was put up.

In this same block, 60 years ago, but nearer Main Street, was the retail dry goods store of Francis Hopkins & Co. The partners were Francis Hopkins and John S. Hopkins, Jr., sons of the John S. Hopkins who was at that time president of the First National Bank. Mrs. John S. Hopkins still lives here, on Second Street.

Francis, called Frank, and John S. Jr., were uncles of J. Stuart Hopkins, 509 S. E. First-st.

The old Hopkins home, which was razed three or four years ago, stood on the site of the parish house of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

The Hopkins store was known

far and wide as the "Cash House."

The same building was occupied in later years by the William Hughes store, which at this time was on First Street.

The corner now occupied by the Southern Indiana Gas & Electric Co. offices, must have either been a vacant lot or the site of a small residence, at the exact time of our story, altho it was shortly afterward occupied by the Parsons & Scoville grocery store.

FOR MANY years, the building now housing Vickery Brothers grocery store, was a livery stable. At the time of our story, it was being operated by Joseph Setchell, alone. Earlier, it had been Setchell & Bowles and later it was known as Setchell & Green.

"I can see old Joe Setchell, yet,"

## New Church Was Completed In 1873

said Mr. Goodge, "sitting out there in front of the stable, wetting down hogs with a hose, on a hot day. That was in the days when hogs were permitted to roam the streets."

Between the livery stable and the corner, there were either small residences or vacant lots. Neither Mr. Goodge nor Charles A. Geupel, 416 Washington-av, could recall anything there.

"In the brick building, on the northeast corner of Second and Vine, now owned by the Evansville Press, was Fred Lederer's saloon—maybe not exactly 60 years ago—but, anyway, shortly afterward, said Mr. Geupel.

Between this saloon and the corner of Division Street, were a number of residences, most of which still are standing as they were at that time.

"One of these," said Mr. Geupel, "was the home of Henry Gumberts, whose daughter, Francis, now is Mrs. Joseph Brentano.

"Another was the home of Herman Fendrich, father of John Fendrich, cigar manufacturer."

THE CORNER building, now the General Cigar factory, was, 60 years ago, the Allen House, considered a fairly good hotel. F. D. Allen was the proprietor.

From Division to Ingle were empty lots, with the exception of the residence of Dr. Adolphus Wulkop, whose house was near the corner of Division.

In 1873, there also were only empty lots from Ingle on down to the point at the intersection of Clark Street, but Mr. Geupel recalls that Evansville's first Turner Hall had stood on the site of the present Geiger warehouse.

"It was a big frame building, and it made a tremendous fire when it burned," Mr. Geupel said. "I was not more than 6 or 7 years old, but I can remember it."