

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

SOME EARLY GALTIER LETTERS

THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION of the founding of St. Paul is causing the city itself and many of its constituent churches and societies to turn their thoughts back to the obscure beginnings of the city. All too little is known of the humble origin of St. Paul, but the part played by one man is noteworthy. Father Lucian Galtier, a French priest from Dubuque, reached St. Peter's, now Mendota, on April 26, 1840, as we know from a letter of his written on November 8, 1843. As a priest of the diocese of Dubuque he immediately began the organization of a Catholic church and parish on the Iowa side of the Mississippi River close to Fort Snelling. On the other side of the river lay Wisconsin Territory, where Bishop John Martin Henni held spiritual jurisdiction. Nevertheless, Galtier was not confined by diocesan boundaries. The records of baptisms, deaths, and marriages now filed among the archdiocesan records in St. Paul show that by October, 1841, he was signing himself as "the priest serving the parish of St Peter's and its neighborhood"; and that on August 3, 1842, he was calling himself "the priest serving the parish of St Peter's and St Paul." Thus almost from the start of Galtier's ministry, St. Paul, though in Wisconsin Territory, was served by Galtier and became a distinct locality in his mind. He mentions it as such in two early letters from St. Peter's, excerpts from which are translated below.¹

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¹The originals of these and other letters by Galtier are in the chancery office of the archdiocese of Dubuque. The Minnesota Historical Society has photographic copies of several of them. The society also has photostatic copies of the early parish registers kept at St. Peter's and St. Paul.

EXTRACT FROM FATHER LUCIAN GALTIER TO BISHOP MATHIAS
LORAS, December 26, 1843

The Christmas celebration and the end of the year have supplied me with the material for this present letter. As usual I celebrated midnight mass. A great crowd filled the church. Before the Holy Sacrifice began, all seats were taken, and it was with difficulty that one could make his way through the midst of the crowd. Officers, soldiers, Protestant gentlemen of the vicinity, and a great number of Catholic Canadians from St. Croix, Lake Pepin, St. Paul, and the Falls of St. Anthony were present at the ceremony. Some musicians had come from the Falls of the St. Croix, about sixty miles from St. Peter's, to add to the festive spirit of the celebration. The sanctuary was lighted with a great number of candles, which gave a charmingly radiant light; it was heightened by the draperies . . . and a garland of greens, in the form of a triumphal arch, which extended from the entrance of the sanctuary to the communion table. In the center hung a chandelier surmounted by twelve tapers representing the twelve apostles. On one side in the front row were the musicians with their instruments; on the other the children who were making their first communion, each holding a lighted candle and wearing a white veil. Everyone paid good attention and derived much benefit. The singing began at half past eleven and did not stop. It ended with the mass of thanksgiving, which Mr. Godfert celebrated. Immediately after the first [communion], solemnly celebrated, he gave us an excellent lesson. The number of communicants was very satisfactory. I had three who came thirty miles in order to have the blessing of approaching the holy banquet. The feast was beautiful and made us forget many difficulties, setbacks, and sorrows experienced elsewhere.

EXTRACT FROM GALTIER TO LORAS, January 6, 1844

A large number of soldiers have become members of the temperance society; but to offset that good, since a few days before Christmas, there have been saturnalian orgies, or drinking bouts, almost continuously, particularly on the St. Paul side. Tomorrow I expect to threaten them with God's anger, if they do not return to their duty. A priest is absolutely necessary at that place. Monseigneur can assure himself of that by the details already given. The Bishop of

Milwaukee ought to be notified. I will undertake to write him. . . . I am anxious to no longer have charge of these men. . . . Otherwise I must always be among them, studying them and examining them, resisting them, and altering them by the grace of God. But the work is hard — it would be easier to work a miracle and raise the dead than to convert drunkards. But one cannot always choose, and one must endure opposition.

SUPPLIES FOR THE NICOLLET EXPEDITION OF 1838

On June 18, 1838, a "hot and muggy" day, a picturesque caravan left Traverse des Sioux, westward bound. It was the Nicollet expedition, which was sent to the Northwest by the United States government to explore and map the vast region between the upper Mississippi and the Missouri. The leader of the party was the French explorer, Joseph N. Nicollet, and his assistant was John C. Frémont, then an unknown young lieutenant. Among the Nicollet Papers in the Library of Congress is an account in the explorer's own handwriting of the departure from Traverse des Sioux a hundred years ago this month. He and Frémont, he records, rode "in the wagon of Joseph Rainville and his wife," bringing "up the rear of the train to superintend the march." In front they could see "8 voyageurs, each at the head of his heavily loaded cart," led by La Framboise "with his wife and Eugene in the Barouche." Many of the supplies carried in the eight carts doubtless were obtained in the East. Evidence that others were purchased at the post operated by Henry H. Sibley for the American Fur Company at New Hope, or Mendota, is presented herewith. The following list appears under date of June 8, 1838, in a daybook kept by Sibley at Mendota, and now among his papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

B. L. H.



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