



For our 150th Anniversary in 1982 our parish published a comprehensive History Book by Catherine Bicknell PhD. Now In 2007 for our 175th Anniversary we are still making new discoveries as we research historical documents. Vince Rengers and George Ertzbischoff brought up the possibility of Fr. William Corby originating from our parish and handed me a copy of his diary, published by Fordham Press, under the title: *Memoirs of Chaplain Life - Three years with the Irish Brigade in the army of the Potomac*. I was intrigued with the possibility. Fr. Corby lived a dedicated priestly life during the civil war with zeal and prudence that brought great comfort to the soldiers on the battlefield. Chaplains like officers

won the respect from their men by their bravery under fire. Frequently under fire, Fr. Corby moved among the casualties on the field, giving absolution to the dying and assistance to the wounded. His diary will be available for purchase in the Gift Shop for those who are interested in life during the civil war from a parish son. The diary indicated that Fr. William was born in Detroit in 1833 and his father, Daniel Corby, was born in Kings County Ireland in 1798. Daniel arrived in Detroit around 1826 from Canada after marrying Elizabeth Stapleton. He became one of the wealthiest land proprietors in the country at that time.

In order to say that Fr. Corby had a bond with our parish family. We needed to find documentation proving that Daniel Corby his father was active in the early parish. The Corby family like the Trombleys were prolific. There were many branches in Ireland, England and the east coast the names of Daniel and William were popular Irish family names and appear often in the Corby genealogies. Once we cleared what Daniel and William belonged to what branch of the Corby family we would be able to solve the mystery of the Corby monuments in our cemetery. Sadly, our early parish records are incomplete, some destroyed in the fire that burned the church, so this was not going to be easy.

The Corby family has a sizeable plot on the right side of the Grotto in our cemetery. We know that some Corby's were here but we needed to document if these Corby's are the same line that Fr. William belonged too. There is only one monument and 2 unmarked stones on all that land. Church documents indicate that there are at least 4 Corby's buried in our cemetery. Some records were lost after 1876 there may be others that we do not know. The Corby monument bears the name of William Corby from Kings County Ireland. Who was this William? The only other Corby stone was to the right of the Grotto, a marker for Adelaide (Tremblay) Corby. Was she related to the Corby branch that Fr. William Corby belonged to? We would latter discover that Adelaide (Tremblay) Corby was the wife of John Corby, Fr. Corby's brother. And the monument to William Corby in the cemetery to the right of the Grotto was Fr. Corby's uncle. To confuse matters even more William and John both had sons they also named William. It was imperative that the genealogies be researched accurately in order to locate Fr. William Corby's branch.

The Corby family also left their mark on the Grotto; there is a John, Thomas and William Corby and each of them donated stones to help build the Grotto. Who are they and are they related to Fr. William Corby? Divine providence sent us an expert on family genealogy Bonnie Leone who obtained the documents that solved the Corby family mystery and shed light on the three stones in our Grotto with the Corby names on them. We discovered that 2 of the stones were also sons of Daniel brothers to Fr. William. John, who married Adelaide (Tremblay) and Thomas, who married Anna (Soppin). The other stone was from William who married Marie (Foley). William was the brother of Daniel (sr.) and Fr. William's uncle. He probably arrived in Detroit from Ireland with Daniel.

Bonnie spent long hours going through Micro-Film of early church records at The Burton Historical Library. She located census records from 1834 that traced the Corby Family line with Fr. William's name and date of birth. Daniel Corby was his father and was married to Elizabeth Stapleton. He had 6 children with her. Fr. Corby was their 4th child he was born in 1834. John, who was born in 1832, donated money for one of the stones in the Grotto. The records show all of John's eight children were baptized at our parish. Another son Daniel was born in 1839 and he is distinguished in the early records with an A. After his name Daniel A. Corby. There were also 2 girls Elizabeth (1826) and Mary (1829). Daniel's 1st wife Elizabeth would die in 1842 shortly after giving birth to one more son Michael.

After the death of his first wife Elizabeth, Daniel had a new baby to care for. He married Margaret McMannan around 1843. Daniel would have 5 more children with Margaret; Thomas 1844, Theresa 1845, Peter 1847, Stephan 1849 and Winifred 1850.

Other documentation, would cement the relationship between Daniel Corby (sir) and our 1st pastor Fr. Amandus Vandendriessche. In 1852 there is a document showing

Daniel Corby making two donations of \$100 & \$25 towards the construction of our 1st brick church. There may be other contributions we do not have records for. His was the largest contribution towards its construction. Later in 1858 Daniel and his 2nd wife Margaret would donate the land for the new mission attached to our parish Sacred Heart in Roseville (also called the Junction). The new mission church would be completed and dedicated on June 16- 1865. Sacred Heart Mission would remain attached to our parish until Fr. Francis Hendrickx was named as their 1st resident pastor in October of 1873.

How did Fr. William and two of his brothers end up in Indiana and the fledgling University of Notre Dame? We believe it was through the advice of Fr. Michael Edgar Shawe who was received into the Diocese of Detroit on February 1, 1848. Fr. Shawe before coming to Detroit was invited to be an English professor by Fr. Sorin the founder of Notre Dame. Fr. Shawe spoke three languages, English French and German, and latter with Fr. Sorin's blessing Fr. Shawe left for Detroit in 1848, to resume the duties of the priesthood in a city where his language abilities were sorely needed. He served a few months in Trinity parish where he ministered to the English speaking Catholics who were mostly Irish. Latter, when the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul was completed in 1848 Fr. Shawe was appointed there. On the 1876 Map of Grosse Pointe Twp. the Corby Family owned a substantial plot of land in the Connor's Creek area. Daniel Corby likely attended Holy Trinity Parish until a regular Mass was said at the Chapel of the Assumption around 1851. He would then attend Mass here because it was much closer. Fr. Shawe would meet with a tragic accident while enroute to the dedication of our 1st brick church in May of 1853. He was thrown from his horse and suffered injuries that would lead to his death 2 weeks latter; May 14. There is a memorial stone inside the Grotto in honor of him.

Latter in 1853, Daniel Corby would end up sending three of his sons to Notre Dame and was most likely influenced to do so by Fr. Shawe who spoke highly of the school and Fr. Sorin its founder. Daniel's son William would continue on to the priesthood under the tutelage of Fr. Orin who saw the budding of a religious vocation and in 1860 he would be ordained a Catholic Priest.

In 1861 the Civil War broke out and Father Corby offered himself as a chaplain. He was accepted by the governor of New York and appointed to General Thomas Francis Meagher's famous Irish Brigade. Fr. Corby would be known for the General Absolution he gave before the Battle at Gettysburg. Gettysburg was the battle with the largest number of casualties in the war. The second day was the bloodiest with 20,000 casualties in fighting that lasted only a few hours, from around 4 p.m. until shortly after dark. The casualty rate at the peak of the fighting has been estimated to be faster than one casualty per second. By his speech and actions, in the midst of the Catholic soldiers, Fr. Corby would manifest zeal for their spiritual welfare that greatly comforted them. His influence was so profound that all the officers of his brigade relied on his assistance. A statue of Fr. Corby raising his hands aloft in Blessing is the only statue of a non-general on the Gettysburg battlefield. After the war ended Fr. William Corby would be appointed president of Notre Dame University two times from 1866-1872 and again from 1877-1881.

In 1875 Fr. William Corby returned to Detroit and was the celebrant for the funeral of his father Daniel. Fr. Vandendriessche and Fr. Laporte assisted at the funeral Mass held at Our Lady Help of Christians Parish near his home on Elmwood Avenue where he lived since 1872. Realizing his time on earth was nearing completion he divided his substantial real estate holdings outside the city among his family and moved into the city. The press noted that Daniel was a lifelong temperance advocate and lived his faith with scrupulous exactness. In 1888 Fr. Corby was invited to attend the reunion of the Irish Brigade Veterans it was a sentimental and emotional reunion as Fr. Corby addressed the men holding back his tears: " Here is what is left of us, Where are the others?" After a solemn period of prayerful silence the men tearfully embraced their old chaplain and were reminded just how important he had been to them.

Fr. Corby was called to his eternal reward in December of 1897. His casket, wrapped in the flag of his old regiment, was carried by six aging civil war veterans, an unusual sign of respect for a military chaplain honored for his devotion to the physical and spiritual well being of the men he served. No spot was too dangerous or too much exposed to the fire of the enemy for him to abandon them. He was a man whose unflinching courage and faith on the march and under fire, whose valiant conduct at Gettysburg became a historical event and one of the very few beautifully picturesque incidents in the drama of the civil war. We here at Assumption Grotto can take pride he was associated with our parish family. (Lrd-2007)

