

IV. Elisha J., son of John J. Durbin and Patience Logsdon, born February 1, 1800, left home at the age of sixteen to enter the seminary of Saint Joseph in Bardstown. While living with his family in Madison County, where he was born, Elisha attended Mass at St. Francis Church in Scott County.

Elisha spent over six years in his studies; half of his time was spent in manual labor, the other half in learning from books. He was ordained by Bishop David, in Bardstown, September 21, 1822. In 1824 he was given the western and southwestern portions of his state as his parish. His headquarters was Morganfield in Union County, and his parish ran from the Jefferson County line west to the Mississippi River. In 1832, this area was expanded to include Nashville, Tennessee. It is estimated he rode over 500,000 miles, on horseback, serving the people of this vast area.

Father Durbin was not known for his preaching ability, but his devotion to the people he served endeared him to all who knew him. In order to reach the people he was assigned to serve, Father spent a part of almost every day in the saddle. He was not a big man, unlike his mother's people, but stood only 5'10" tall and weighed only 160 pounds. Yet he was able to continue serving the people of Kentucky, Illinois and Tennessee for over fifty years, while most of the early missionaries served for no more than twenty or twenty-five years.

In 1873 Father Durbin was relieved of his mission, and he was given the chore of serving the Catholics living along the Elizabethtown to Paducah Railroad. Father Durbin was forced into retirement at St. Joseph Seminary by the Bishop. At the age of eighty-five, after being a priest for sixty-two years, he asked to be sent back into the missions. Father Durbin died in 1887 and is buried at St. Louis Cemetery in Louisville.

In the death records of St. Vincent in Morganfield, Union County, Kentucky, written and kept by Father Elisha Durbin, are these notations:

Henrietta, servant of Rev. E.J. Durbin, 1842.

Nace, servant of Rev. E.J. Durbin, 1852.

Betty, wife of Nace, servant of Rev. E.J. Durbin, 1853.

Basil, servant of Rev. E.J. Durbin, 1855.

This indicates to me that Father Durbin owned slaves, but perhaps that it not what it meant.

John J. Durbin and his second wife gave Father Durbin the land surrounding Saint John the Evangelist Church in Sunfish. From the deed books at Brownsville:

This indenture made and entered this 17th day of Feb. 1851 between John J. Durbin and Elizabeth his wife, and the Rev. E.J. Durbin of Union County, Witnesseth that the party of the first part wishing to grant a favor to his son Rev. E.J. Durbin of the second part, has bargained and sold in consideration for the sum of one dollar, a certain parcel or tract of land being in the County of Edmonson on Sunfish, a branch of Bear Creek, and bound as follows: beginning at a corner made for Elisha L. French in the line of John Durbin, running West with said French's line ? poles to another corner made for French, then South through and down a drain to a larger drain, and down said drain to the original line with said line N 40 West to Cissell's corner, and with Cissell's line to another of the original lines to a branch known as Lick Branch, then down said branch to the mouth, then down Sunfish on the South side to a corner made for John Durbin Jr., thence with his line to the beginning. Supposed to contain 175 acres by the same is less inclusive of the ten acres deeded to the Rt. Rev. M.J. Spaulding, Bishop of Louisville Catholic Church, which this ten acres is excepted and not intended to be included in this deed.

The said party of the first part reserves to himself and his wife Elizabeth the said tract or parcel of land during their lifetime, and doth bind himself and his heirs to defend the land against the claims of all persons claiming through or under him and all other claims whatever.

The family of John and Elizabeth Lawler arrived in Shawneetown, Illinois in 1819, but it wasn't until May, 1824 that a priest visited them to say Mass. In that month and year, Father Elisha J. Durbin said Mass in their cabin. Father also baptised a four year old daughter of the Lawlers, and that would indicate it had been four to five years since they had seen a priest. Father's visits were days of celebration for the Catholic community, and no work was done for three days. The first day was for preparation, the second for the Mass, and the third day was in thanksgiving.

The sacred vessels of Father Elisha Durbin, called Daddy Durbin by his frontier people, and the ones he carried in his saddlebags for all those years, are now the property of St. Mary Parish in Shawneetown. They include his paten, chalice, monstrance and altar stone containing the relics of a Saint.