

Maryland was admitted to the Union on April 28, 1788, becoming the seventh State. In 1631, William Claiborne established the first white settlement in what was to become the State of Maryland, on Kent Island in Chesapeake Bay. In 1632, King Charles of England granted the Maryland region to George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore. Before the King signed the charter, George died. King Charles then gave the land to Cecil, son of George Calvert.

The second Lord Baltimore was Catholic but, realizing that it would take time to settle the area with Catholics, he opened up his lands to all people, giving religious freedom to all. Claiborne was not Catholic and refused to recognize the authority of Lord Baltimore; in 1654 he led a successful revolt against Lord Baltimore and set up a protestant government. Claiborne was forced to return the government to Lord Baltimore in 1658. A group led by John Goode took control of the colony in 1689, and the English Crown took control in 1691.

During this period, the Catholic inhabitants of Maryland lost their religious freedom. Under Maryland law, Catholics could not run for public office, and if anyone wanted to get ahead in politics or business, he could not be Catholic. It came about then that sons followed the religion of their fathers, and the daughters followed the religion of their mothers. It was almost unheard of for a male child to be Catholic, but some of them did follow in the faith of their mothers, despite the obstacles.

The Catholic families of Maryland started seeking lands where they could follow their religion without harassment, and the cheap lands of Kentucky called. Despite the dangers of frontier life, families floated down the Ohio on rafts, while others came through North Carolina, the Cumberland Gap, and then spread all over Kentucky and Tennessee.

The first Catholics to enter Kentucky, as far as we know, were a Doctor Hart and the family of William Coomes, who floated down the Ohio on a raft to Limestone (Maysville) and settled close to Harrod's Station. Doctor Hart was the first physician in Kentucky, and Jane Coomes, wife of William, was the first school teacher when she started a school for children at Harrod's Station. Jane Coomes was also (so we are told) the first white woman to come

to Kentucky with the idea of staying with her husband, and the first white woman to make salt here. William Coomes was with the group that first spotted the band of Indians who came across the Ohio River to lay siege to Harrod's Station in 1776-1777. The man standing next to him was killed, and William narrowly escaped with his life. William was one of the defenders of Harrod's Station during the siege.

The first real Catholic settlement came in a body of twenty-five families from Saint Mary's County, Maryland, in the spring of 1785. They settled at Pottinger's Creek, about ten to fifteen miles from Bardstown. In the spring of the following year, Captain James Rapier led another group from Maryland, and they also settled on Pottinger's Creek. In 1787, Thomas Hill and Philip Miles led a group, which was followed in 1788 by a group led by Robert Able. In 1790-1791, Benedict Spalding and Leonard Hamilton came in with their families and friends, and settled on the Rolling Fork of Salt River in Marion County. In 1785 or 1786, William Coomes and family moved from Harrod's Station to near Bardstown so they could be with their Catholic brethern. Most, if not all, of these groups rafted down the Ohio River to Limestone, then went overland to their destination.

Father Whalan, the first priest sent to Kentucky by Bishop Carroll, came in 1787. He stayed for three years, then returned to Baltimore by way of New Orleans. The Catholics were without a priest until Father Stephen Theodore Baden was sent by Bishop Carroll in 1793. He was joined by Father M. Fournier in February, 1797, and by Father M. Salmon in 1799. In 1805, after the deaths of Frs. Fournier and Salmon, Bishop Carroll sent Father Charles Nerinckx to assist Father Baden. Fr. Nerinckx was probably the most active and efficient of all the priests sent to Kentucky. At least ten churches were erected, with Fr. Nerinckx helping with the manual labor. He also spent much of his time traveling around the State on his horse, Printer, sometimes traveling sixty miles in one day. He often traveled at night, leaving one mission at sunset and riding all night to the next, even in winter. He often had to swim swollen streams, and on one occasion, in the present County of Grayson, he was encircled by a band of wolves and saved himself by staying in his saddle all night while shouting at the top of his voice. Father Nerinckx died in 1824 while on a mission in Missouri.

Father Baden visited the Durbin and Logsdon families in Madison County, and often said Mass in the home of Christopher Durbin, elder. He estimated there were three hundred Catholic families in Kentucky in 1793.

A small group of Catholics settled on the Green River, south of Grayson County, and Fr. Baden mentioned finding eighty families there on his way to Nashville in June, 1810. According to Fr. Baden, "a projected Catholic settlement for the area began in 1796". In 1805, he wrote that ten or twelve Catholic families had migrated to this area from Madison County.

The mission churches of Grayson County were among the first in the State. Saint Augustine, at Grayson Springs, and Saint James, near Iberia on the old Dickie's Mill Road, were probably started by Fr. Nerinckx between 1805 and 1810.

A history of Edmonson County states the VanMeters, Brooks, Logans, Skaggs, Hazelips and Merediths settled west of Nolyn River. West of Bear Creek was settled by the Durbins, Nashes, Millers, Woosleys and Davies families, with most of the latter settling on Reedy Creek. The first named men I have found in the vicinity of Sunfish were John and Thomas Durbin, brothers, and sons of John Durbin and Ann Logsdon. The first mention of Sunfish was in 1819 when John Day paid taxes on 200 acres of land located on Sunfish Creek.

From the original three counties of Jefferson, Fayette and Lincoln, we now have 120 counties. Hardin was formed in 1793 and took in all the area from the Ohio to the Green River. Warren County was formed from Lincoln County in 1797, and the Counties of Barren and Ohio were formed in 1799. Grayson County was formed in 1810, and Edmonson County was formed in 1825.

Nineteen men from Philadelphia formed a company in 1783 and bought up all the land grants north of the Green River. At one time, they owned a total of 580,000 acres. The land east of Nolin River was surveyed in April, 1784, with the land between Nolin and Bear Creek being surveyed for Benjamin Wyncoop. A segment of land west of Bear Creek was surveyed for John Handley, and John paid the tax on 65,501 acres on the Green River in Ohio County in 1809. Sunfish was in Ohio County in 1809, and since this area was private property, no settler was allowed in. It was probably close to 1820 when the first settlement occurred, and since the records of Grayson County were burned, we have no idea how the settlers acquired the land. The family of John J. Durbin and Patience

Logsdon were living in Scott County in 1816 when their son, Elisha, entered the seminary at Bardstown. In 1822, when Fr. Elisha was ordained, almost all of his family lived in Sunfish.

The first church built in Sunfish, according to Jesse Durbin of Christian County, Illinois, was built in 1830 on the east side of Bear Creek, to the rear of the present church. There were sixteen Catholic families living in Sunfish at the time. John J. Durbin sold ten acres of land to Bishop Flaget in 1849, and a new church and cemetery were established on this land. The present church of Saint John the Evangelist is still standing on that ten acres.

Father Degauquier, born in Belgium, was ordained a priest at Bardstown on November 24, 1834. In September, 1835, he was given the missions of Central Kentucky, which included the church at Sunfish. His mission took three months to circuit; when he finished one circuit it was time to start all over again. Fr. Degauquier served this area for thirty-five years, and during the Civil War found time to administer the sacraments to the Federal troops stationed along the railroads in Hardin County. Shortly before his death, Fr. Degauquier found he could no longer stand to say Mass, and was forced to sit in a chair at the side of the altar while another said the Mass. On the morning of January 23, 1870, while he was attempting to light a lamp, Fr. Degauquier's clothes caught fire and he was horribly burned. While awaiting death, he never complained about his pain. He died January 30, 1870.

Fr. Degauquier made a list, circa 1845, of the heads of household in the church of Sunfish. His list included the following names: John Durbin, Jacob Durbin, Richard Durbin, John Durbin, Jr., Robert Durbin, Daniel Painter, Joseph Logsdon, Thomas Hill, Simon Sales (Silas Simon), Austin Jenkins, Christopher Durbin, Nicholas Durbin, Dr. John Durbin and John Skees. Dr. John C. Durbin and John Skees moved to Hardin County before 1850, Joseph Logsdon and Nicholas Durbin moved to Grayson County before 1850. Austin Jenkins and Jacob Durbin moved away from Sunfish before 1850, but I have no information as to where they went.

There was a mass exodus from Hardin, Grayson and Edmonson Counties in 1829. Most of the people, all related, migrated to Sangamon County, Illinois, with some of them moving into Missouri by 1835. A trickle of Sunfishers continued to migrate to Illinois and Missouri well into the 20th Century, with most of them going to Missouri. Several families also moved to the western portions of

the State, to Daviess and Graves Counties. Before 1850, some of those who had migrated to Illinois moved on into Iowa, and today there are descendants of families which at one time lived in Sunfish in almost every State of the Union. Many of the descendants are searching for their roots, and I hope I have helped by making this effort.

The priests of pioneer Kentucky carried small notebooks in their saddlebags, and in these made notes of marriages and baptisms. Since their circuit covered many miles and many stations, and since there were but few churches, many of these books are scattered over the State. Several of the early baptisms are found at Saint John the Baptist at Rineyville, others are found at Saint Vincent in Union County, at Saint Joseph in Leitchfield and, probably, in places that I have never looked. Even when baptisms and marriages have been found, it is sometimes impossible to determine the parents of those baptised or married, for the priests used nicknames, or in some cases initials only, and seldom used the maiden name of the mother. In some of the books the ink has faded so badly that it is almost impossible to read, and the penmanship is so bad in others that they are unreadable. Some of the priests used Latin only, and since I am no Latin scholar I have had to guess at many of the names.