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Jan. 25: Conversion of St. Paul

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To Find Rest and Peace amid the Storms of the World: Henry Livingston Richards

by Theresa Overholser

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH—Divine service may be expected, as usual, in St. Paul's Church, on Sunday morning, the 30th instant, at 11 o'clock.

—*The Ohio State Journal*

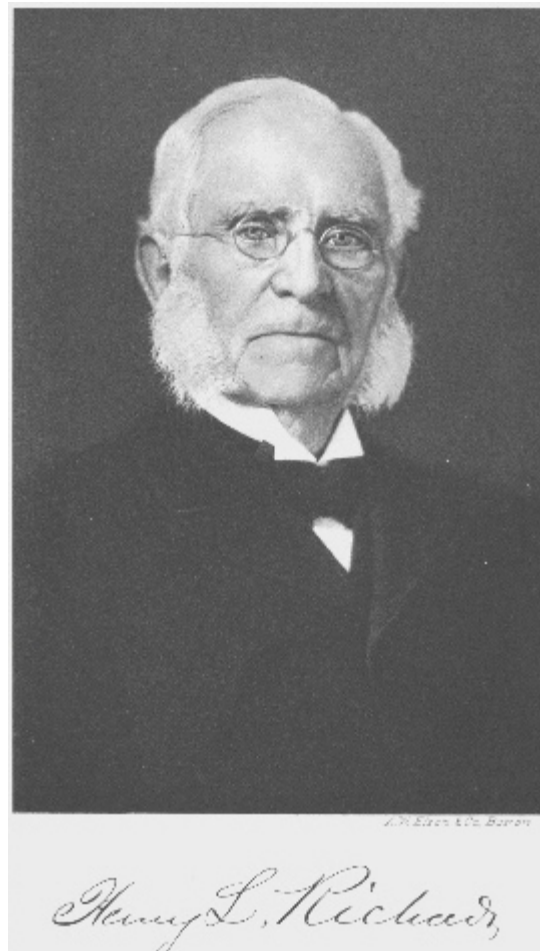
November 29, 1851

To the casual newspaper reader, the announcement above would have seemed straightforward enough. But to the members of the Episcopal church at Third and Mound Streets in Columbus it meant that they would be able to worship as usual, even though their popular, on-again-off-again rector was ill with an infection of the brain, and, even more troubling, was known to be on the brink of becoming Roman Catholic.

The Reverend Henry L. Richards had for several years seen the logic and the beauty of the Roman faith, and as he lay in his sick bed, his life in danger, he berated himself for failing to join what he had come to know was the true Catholic Church. He well knew that such a move would meet with disapproval and condemnation from friends, parishioners, and, most worrisome, his beloved family.

The Youth from Granville

Henry was perhaps most anxious when he anticipated the reaction of his father, Dr. William



S. Richards, in the little village of Granville in Licking County. Dr. Richards, of old New England Puritan stock, concerned himself not only with the physical health of his loved ones, but also with their spiritual well-being. Henry

knew very well that his father would be beside himself with worry about his oldest child.

Dr. Richards had arrived in Granville from Connecticut in 1811, not long after his medical studies had been completed. The young physician endeared himself to the villagers quickly, especially to the daughter of a well-to-do businessman, Miss Isabella Mower. She was, in William's words, "tall, large and well-proportioned, of a noble and elegant figure, modest and unassuming countenance, easy and graceful in her manners, possessed of a comprehending and well-cultivated mind."¹ They were married and together had four children. Henry, their eldest, born in 1814, was only seven years old when Isabella died.

William married for a second time, choosing as his companion Tryphena Bushnell. She was evidently a sweet and gentle step-mother, whom Henry remembered as very pious and firm in her religious beliefs. She ensured that all the Richards children observed the Sabbath from sunset on Saturday to sunset on Sunday, and studied the catechism and Bible diligently. Like most of the church-going citizens of the town, the Richards family attended the Congregational church.

When Henry was a teenager, the Congregational community was split into factions when their pastor allowed workmen to lay bricks for his own house on a Sunday morning. Dr. Richards and several other influential men of the town eventually gathered into an Episcopal congregation, with Dr. Richards as Senior Warden. Young Henry stayed within the Congregational (later Presbyterian) fold, where he attended services and Sunday School without much enthusiasm, all the while desiring the intense conversion experience that many of his friends were having at that time. After months of longing, the change in his spirit came about, not with a great emotional upheaval, but quietly and peacefully during a Sunday service. He became what he called "a man of prayer," a professing Christian. In his old age, he

remembered vividly his official examination by Reverend Jacob Little, and the question put to him that day. " 'Well now, Brother Richards, suppose it were revealed to you that it was God's will that you were to be damned, do you think you would be willing to submit to the will of God?' I dared not say no for I knew what was expected of me. I could not say yes to such an awful question, so I simply mumbled out rather incoherently that I hoped so, or something to that effect."²

Once Henry joined the church, he became a zealous member, leading prayers, teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, attending Bible class, and practicing total abstinence from alcohol. In fact, this latter habit helped set him on the road to the Episcopal priesthood. He had been clerking in the general store owned by his Mower uncles, where he routinely avoided selling liquor, resorting to all kinds of excuses and dodges when customers asked for it. Finally the uncles asked Henry to either make the sales or leave the store. Although they soon asked him to return on his own terms, Henry had already decided that he had a religious vocation and must be about the business of preparing for the seminary.

He was fortunate that in the small town of Granville there was already a college which he could attend. Although it was affiliated with the Baptist Church, the Granville Literary and Theological Institute (now Denison University) made a good starting point for his preparatory studies. He attended for two years, then left home to go to Kenyon College, an Episcopal school in Gambier, near Mt. Vernon, Ohio, where three years before he had spent one rather lackluster year. This time, a few years older and with a goal in mind, Henry was able to graduate at the top of his class in 1838.

While in Gambier, he took part in the religious societies, devotional meetings, and acts of zeal expected of the students, taking special pleasure in one, the teaching of Sunday School in the area. The Sunday Schools were held in

homes and public school buildings, often log buildings with puncheon floors and barely working chimneys. “Summer and winter we went regularly, faithfully and punctually to our work. Cold or hot, wet or dry, blow high, blow low, under the burning sun of summer, and the piercing blasts of winter, through snow and slush and sleet, we trudged our four, five and six miles, to impart instruction to these poor children and to preach to these, in many instances, benighted souls.”³

Episcopalian Ministry

After graduation with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Henry decided to take a year’s break before beginning theological studies. He spent some time traveling in the East, to Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. He even was able to take the partly-completed Baltimore and Ohio railroad for a few miles in Maryland. He remembered the near-terror which some of his fellow travelers felt when they first saw the steaming engine. Upon his return home he was employed at the Granville Female Seminary teaching vocal music. One of his students, best friend of his sister Isabella, was Cynthia Cowles of Worthington, Ohio. Cynthia’s “bright eyes had begun, he confesses, to shed upon his heart a mild, sweet radiance as attractive as it was dangerous to his peace of mind.”⁴ The attraction and then gentle courtship continued through the winter and spring, until Cynthia returned to Worthington at the end of the term. Henry proposed to her by letter soon after, and her eventual acceptance spurred him on to his final years at Kenyon.

Theological studies and lay reading of his own sermons in various parishes took up the time until ordination. Also, Henry joined many discussions of fundamental questions and doctrinal fine-points among his fellows. He was an excellent student, devout and zealous, and so was permitted to be ordained after a shorter-than-usual time. In the spring of 1842 Henry Livingston Richards was ordained by Bishop

McIlvaine at St. Luke’s Church in Granville. He and Cynthia were married in May, and by December he held the first formal service in the new Columbus parish of St. Paul. There were 21 communicants and 50 Sunday School scholars. The building was only a roofed-over basement.

Reverend Richards was a popular young rector; he was pious and sincere in his loving care for all, and was an ardent and persuasive speaker. Like his father, he concerned himself with both the moral and the physical welfare of his neighbors. In the course of his pastoral duties, he often came into contact with the German Catholics of the south side neighborhood. He was somewhat surprised to find that even their young children were well-versed in the Catholic catechism, and were not able to be induced to attend Episcopal church services. They “were able to teach me most important truths and to answer my objections to various Catholic doctrines, in a manner that quite astonished me.”⁵

Towards Rome

It was during these early years in Columbus that Henry’s faith began to progress, too. He read various Anglican publications which discussed the movement of many prominent thinkers in Britain toward the Roman Catholic Church. He found himself writing sermons on subjects which naturally suggested the sacraments as a means of grace. He unnecessarily worried that his own baptism as an infant had not been sufficient, so had himself rebaptized by Bishop Whittingham during a convention in Philadelphia. Yet he remained persistent in his loyalty to the Episcopal church.

One incident suggests that perhaps Henry’s Roman leanings were becoming apparent. The brick gothic church building was finally completed in 1845, and the parishioners awaited its consecration by Bishop McIlvaine. Unfortunately the architect, in keeping with the rest of the design, had included an altar table featuring a marble slab top and side panels with

gothic arches. McIlvaine, who, it was said, “was most keen sighted in detecting tendencies to Rome”⁶ sent a letter in which he refused the consecration unless the altar were removed and a good honest table substituted. The church vestry met and passed a resolution stating in essence that even though they doubted the importance of the altar’s design, they would follow the Bishop’s demand. However, instead of substituting a table, the gothic side panels were sawed out, and the corners finished to look like pillars. The building was duly consecrated in August of 1846.

Life for Henry and Cynthia and their growing family might have gone on satisfactorily in Columbus except for one problem. Since he was a young man Henry had been subject to severe bouts of indigestion, which became worse when he was most studious and better when he was active, especially when he traveled. A calling such as his meant many hours of thoughtful study and writing, so the problem persisted and strengthened. On April 24, 1848, Henry officially resigned the charge of the parish. Unsure of what his next path should be, he embarked on a trip to New Orleans, undertaking several business errands for friends. He had some thought of settling in the South with his family and so observed the countryside and people with interest.

After arriving in New Orleans, Reverend Richards met several of his fellow Episcopal priests, and preached in their churches. And yet he still was hungry to learn more about the Roman Catholic Church. Almost by accident he found a Catholic bookshop where the owner allowed him to borrow any material that interested him. The first book which he read was a catechism. The clearly presented statements of doctrine made a strong impression on him. He began attending Mass on Sunday after preaching at an Episcopal service. He was surprised and pleased to see that rich and poor, master and slave, worshiped with equal devotion in the same congregation. He described his

feelings on seeing in practice what he had been trying to accomplish in his own parish: “But here in the Catholic Church (it was the same in all their churches) was the realization of all that I had hoped and longed for, but never yet found. It made a great impression upon me. I felt that that was the place for me, that there I would like to be. It was entirely in accordance with my ideas of the true spirit of Christianity, and I was conscious of a strong impulse to cast in my lot amongst them.”⁷

Yet when Henry returned to Columbus it was to a series of secular jobs, such as selling insurance and collecting bills for a large company. His former parishioners asked him frequently to preach for them on Sundays and to officiate at weddings and funerals, which he was happy to do. For two years after his trip South, he hesitated to take the final step of breaking with the Episcopal Church, even though his leanings had become apparent. Then in November of 1851 he was struck by near-fatal illness followed by a long time of convalescence.

During those weeks in bed, Henry was finally able to realize that he was certain about his conversion. He begged his family to send for a priest, but they hesitated. Cynthia decided that if he appeared to truly be dying, she would do as he asked, yet she hoped that as he got better his anxiety would subside.

News of his intentions began to circulate in the parish and the rest of the city. Rumors followed closely: his conversion was the result of his brain fever; he was about to separate from his wife to become a priest; Cynthia would be put in a convent. The local newspapers even joined in the attacks. But by now Henry was determined. In January of 1852 he wrote to both Bishop McIlvaine and his own father informing them of the final step he was about to take. Both of these men reacted with pain and regret.

Dr. Richards expressed his grief in his diary: “Besides the death of my wife and son [Rev. George Richards of Ashtabula, Ohio] I have lost two grandchildren within the year, & my oldest

son has been dangerously sick so that his wife and friends around him strongly feared he could not recover; & now that he has regained his health I am greatly grieved & mortified to hear that he has come to the determination to leave the P.E. Church & join the Roman Catholic. This will be to me a matter of grief & lamentation for time to come. Yet I know that God in his good Providence can lead him to see his errors & bring him back to the simple truth of the Gospel, and hope that I may never cease to pray that this may be done.”⁸ On January 25, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Rev. Caspar Borgess, pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Columbus, received Henry Livingston Richards into the Catholic Church.

Mr. and Mrs. Richards began to plan almost immediately to move away from Columbus, where life had become anything but congenial. A relative offered Henry a job in New York City, which he accepted. Cynthia and their four children were entrusted to old Dr. Richards in Granville while Henry made his way East on his own.

A series of jobs in the city followed, including clerking and sales. Finally a permanent position permitted him to send for his family, and after nearly three years apart they took up residence in Jersey City. All the while, Henry remained cheerfully confident that God would provide whatever was needed. Not long afterward, Cynthia too was baptized and joined her husband in the practice of their faith. The children likewise joined the Church, to their father’s everlasting joy.

The new Catholic man was as zealous and pious as he had been in his “old” life. He took to the customs of Catholicism readily, carrying a rosary with him everywhere, reciting the prayers on the train or the ferry. He continued to teach Sunday School, and was a leader in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He helped to bring the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to New Jersey to minister to the needy and sick. He carried on with these good works when his company

promoted him and transferred him to their Boston office. Eventually, he took the job of Visitor to the Poor for the Board of Charities of the City of Boston. For 23 years he used this post to see to the physical and spiritual well-being of the city’s lowest inhabitants.

The final years of Henry’s long life were filled by his writing for many publications, including the *Sacred Heart Review* and the *Catholic Columbian*. He contributed a summer-long series of letters to *The Granville Times* in which he told charmingly of the town’s and his own early days.

He died on November 8, 1903. He was ministered to on his deathbed by his own son Joseph Havens Richards, a Jesuit priest and former president of Georgetown University. His funeral was at St. Mary’s Church in Winchester, Mass. At his request there were no flowers, only a palm of victory upon his coffin.

Oh, come with us, dear friends, and we will do you good. The Catholic Church is the true home of the soul. If you desire to find rest and peace amid the storms of the world, the “changes and chances of this mortal life,” you must take refuge in the Bark of Peter...which is destined, at last, to glide into the haven of eternal rest and peace beyond the shores of time. —H. L. Richards⁹

NOTES

- 1) Letter of William S. Richards to his sisters, March 29, 1813; Ohio Historical Society
- 2) *The Granville Times*, May 16, 1901
- 3) Richards, J. Havens, S.J., *A Loyal Life*; St. Louis: B. Herder, 1913, p. 75
- 4) *ibid.*, p. 81
- 5) *The Catholic Columbian*, Feb. 4, 1882
- 6) Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 81
- 7) *ibid.*, p. 213
- 8) diary of William S. Richards, 1852, Ohio Historical Society
- 9) *The Catholic Columbian*, Feb 4, 1882

BAPTISMS AT WILLS CREEK, COSHOCTON COUNTY, 1837-1900

(Continued, from Vol. XXXII, No. 11)

1853, continued

Same [July 28], Mary Theresa, born March 13, daughter of Raphael Hechsen and Lucadia Weisenbörger; spon. Martin Heinrich and Theresa Wällersdorf. W. Deiters
Same, Joseph, born June 30, son of John Aschbacher and Mary Bordenkircher; spon. Jacob Lenni and Margaret Heusser. W. Deiters

1854

March 24, between Dresden and Coshocton, Matilda, born March 16, daughter of Joseph Günther and Walburga Wagener; spon. Roman Rapp and Mary Günther. W. Deiters
March 29 in Wills Creek, Bernard, born Feb. 29, son of Bernard Fechter and Catherine Aschbacher; spon. Joseph Fechter and Regina Aschbacher. W. Deiters
May 30 in Wills Creek, George, born May 3, son of George Beier and Barbara Heinrich; spon. Jacob Klein and Regina Doll. W. Deiters
Same, Ann Christine, born Apr. 28, daughter of Stephen Keier? and Ann Sarram; spon. Stephen Sarran and Christine Keier. W. Deiters
Same, Nicholas, 1 1/2 months old, son of Stephen Coujon and [blank]; spon. Stephen Porte and Christine Rei? W. Deiters
Same, George, born Apr. 25, son of Jacob Krather and Anna Maria Kobel; spon. John Weber and Ann Scherer. W. Deiters
Same, Ann, born Jan. 14, daughter of John Nicholas Devi and Ann Groschiras; spon. Dominic Devi and Ann Devi. W. Deiters
Same, Thomas Joseph, born Apr. 21, son of Samuel Geist and Mary Wollen?; spon. William Trinet [Trenor?] and Margaret Kalope [Colopy]. W. Deiters
Aug. 22 in Wills Creek, Joseph, born June 26, son of Sebastian Dollick and Regina

Scherer; spon. John Scherer and Mary Heaffer? W. Deiters
Dec. 12 in Wills Creek, Barbara, born Dec. 4, daughter of John Aschbacher and Catherine Mather; spon. John Mather and Magdalen Fechter. W. Deiters

There were no Wills Creek baptisms recorded at St. Nicholas in Zanesville after 1854. This is explained by a letter written by Father Deiters to Archbishop Purcell, in which he states that he met Father Bender of Newark, apparently accidentally, who informed him that the Archbishop had assigned the Coshocton County missions to him. Unfortunately, if Father Bender kept any sacramental registers at Newark they have not survived for the years 1855 through 1860.

Recorded at St. Francis de Sales Church, Newark, 1862

1862

May 12, Magdalen, born May 7, daughter of Daniel Winter and Anna; spon. Michael Hausser and Mary Kräter. Rev. F. Bender
May 13, Mary Clementine, born April 20, daughter of Stephen Salerin and Christina; spon. Prosper Royer and Mary Salerin.
Same day, Julia Melinda, born April 26, daughter of Prosper Royer and Mary; spon. Dominic Royer and Julia Trainor. Rev. F. Bender

The next pastor was Father Serge de Stchoulepnikoff, first resident pastor at Coshocton, but his and his three successors' registers likewise are missing. The next records we have are those kept at Coshocton by Father John M. Jacquet, beginning in 1869. Father Jacquet entered the place of the baptism in most cases. Some, but probably not all, of the baptisms

of Wills Creek family members that were administered at St. George in Coshocton or in the homes of the parents have been transcribed here.

Recorded at St. George Church, Coshocton, 1869-1900

1869

April 4 at Wills Creek, Andrew Hiser, son of John and Rachel, born Feb. 4; spon. Nicholas Salrin and Caroline Aschbaker. John M. Jacquet

April 6, in the church of St. Nicholas, Wills Creek, Augustine Royer, son of Denis [Martin written above] and Ann, born March 3; spon. Christopher Royer and Ann Sarrin. JMJ

Same, John Stephen Berton, son of John and Mary Jane, born Jan. 14; spon. Justin Berton and Laura Sarrin. JMJ

Same, John Stephan Royer, son of Dominic and Elizabeth, born March 27; spon. Denis Royer and Mary Dole. JMJ

April 25 in the church of St. Nicholas, Wills Creek, Alice Jane Royer, daughter of Adam and Susan; spon. Prosper Royer and Malinda Ashbaker. JMJ

May 23 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Rachel Helen Scherrer, daughter of Francis Joseph and Anna Maria, born May 9; spon. Adam Henrick and Rachel Dolick. JMJ

June 6 [no place named], Mathias Wimmer, son of Anthony and Malona, born May 19; spon. John and Elizabeth Philipps. JMJ

June 29 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Whendle Bodenkercher, son of Whendle and Elizabeth, born May 3; spon. Benjamin Bodenkercher and Rachel Salrin. JMJ

July 25 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Henry Edward Ashbaker, son of George and Catherine, born June 29; spon. John Henricks and Mary Schweizer. JMJ

July 27 in the church of St. Nicholas, Wills Creek, Justin Constant Bigelow, son of Francis and Mary, born July 3; spon. Justin Berton and Ann Royer. JMJ

August 24 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Rose Ann Lahna, daughter of Jacob and Sarah, born Aug. 15; spon. David and Ann Boddenkercher. JMJ

Sept. 5 in the church of St. George [Coshocton], Flora Catherine Bodenkercher, daughter of James and Elizabeth, born August 30; spon. Joseph and Catherine Schmitt. JMJ

Nov. 1 in the church of St. Nicholas in Coshocton County, John Macht, son of Rinehart and Catherine, born Aug. 21; spon. Joseph and Veronica Macht. JMJ

Same, Catherine Ann Aschbaker, daughter of James and Malinda, born Oct. 23; spon. Joseph Aschbaker and Ann Royer. JMJ

Nov. 21 at Joseph Boyer's, Ann Mary Boyer, daughter of Joseph and Mary, born Nov. 11; spon. Benjamin Boddenkercher and Ann Boyer. JMJ

Nov. 23 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, conditionally, James Wilber Martine, son of Francis and Elizabeth, born Oct. 13; spon. Michael Martine and Christine Martine. JMJ

Dec. 8 in the church of St. Nicholas, Elizabeth Ann Pirard, daughter of Eugene and Mary, born Nov. 5; spon. Joseph Wagoner and Ann Royer. JMJ

1870

Jan. 23 in the church of St. Nicholas, Wills Creek, Catherine Elizabeth Davier [Father Jacquet consistently spelled the name Davied as Davier in these records], daughter of Joseph and Victoria, born Dec. 6 last; spon. Martin Royer and Catherine Schwiezer. JMJ

Jan. 26 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Francis Edward Martine, son of George and Helen, born Dec. 20 last; spon.

Francis and Elizabeth Mortar. JMJ
 April 24 in the church of Mary Most Holy,
 Wills Creek, John Dole, son of Mary, born
 March 26; spons. John Sweitzer and —
 Pauline Dole. JMJ
 June 26 in the church of Mary Most Holy,
 Wills Creek, John Augustine Boyer, son of
 John and Mary, born May 30; spons. Augus-
 tine Salrin and Elizabeth Boyer. JMJ
 Same, Sara Ann Martine, daughter of Michael
 and Elizabeth, born Apr. 6; spons. George
 Martine and Sara Lahna. JMJ
 July 24 in the church of St. Nicholas, Adam
 Edward Henricks, son of John and Mary,
 born June 24; spons. Adam Henricks and
 Barbara Dole. JMJ
 Aug. 28 in the church of Mary Most Holy,
 Wills Creek, Frederick Peter Bowers, son of
 John and Louise, born Jan. 2; spons.
 Frederick Leiser? and Rebecca Egler. JMJ
 Same, William Henry Egler, son of Wenzel and
 Rebecca, born Jan. 17; spons. John and
 Louise Bowers. JMJ
 Oct. 23 in the church of St. George
 [Coshocton], Louis Franklin Hizer, son of
 Martin and Frances, born Oct. 14; spons.
 Anthony Wimmer and Mary Philipps. JMJ

Oct. 25 in the church of St. Nicholas, Francis
 Joseph Dole, son of George and Susan, born
 Oct. 2; spons. Joseph Wagoner and Mary
 Pierrard. JMJ
 Same, Mary Ann Swietzer, daughter of John
 and Mary Magdalen, born Sept. 29; spons.
 John Cognon and Ann Davier [Davied?].
 JMJ
 Nov. 29 in the church of Mary Most Holy,
 Francis Sylvester Bodenker[cher], son of
 Wenzel and Elizabeth, born Nov. 6; spons.
 Sebastian and Rachel Dolick. JMJ

1871

Feb. 25 in the church of St. Nicholas, Mary
 Celina Beuguste?, daughter of Francis and
 Mary, born Feb. 2; spons. Frederick Prince?
 and Ann Berton. JMJ
 Feb. 28 in the church of St. Nicholas, Isabell
 Royer, daughter of Dominic and Elizabeth,
 born Feb. 17; spons. Prosper Royer and
 Barbara Dole. JMJ
 Same, Sara Ann Wagner, daughter of Joseph
 and Rose Ann, born Feb. 13; spons. Martin
 and Ann Royer. JMJ

(To be continued)