

2014-8

Brother Francis Xavier Patois: Carpenter-Mortician

by Brother George Klawitter, CSC

Brother Francis Xavier was born René Patois at Clermont (Sarthe) in France on July 27, 1820, the year that Father Jacques Dujarié founded the Brothers of Saint Joseph in Ruillé-sur-Loir.¹ We do not know who his parents were or what they did for a living or how many children they had. He may have been an orphan like his long-time confrere Brother Vincent Pieau. He came to Sainte-Croix, Le Mans, in the autumn of 1840 on September 6 when he was twenty years old, perhaps arriving as a skilled carpenter, the craft at which he would labor in America for over half a century. On the other hand, he may have come to Holy Cross as a poor farmer who would learn his craft from the Brothers in Le Mans. The latter case is doubtful since he was there less than a year before he was professed on July 25, 1841, and shipped out for America ten days later with Brother Vincent, Father Sorin, and four other Brothers: it would be difficult to learn the carpentry craft in so short a time as René Patois enjoyed at Le Mans. We know that he was apparently an impressive and promising religious man, being the most recent of the America-bound émigrés to enter the Community, arriving at Le Mans even later than the adolescents Anselm (aged 16) and Gatian (aged 15) who rounded out the group chosen by Father Moreau for the Indiana mission.

René Patois left for America under the religious name Brother Marie, the sixth man in Holy Cross to be given that name. In the first century of the men's Congregation of Holy Cross, it was customary to recycle religious Brothers' names as

men died off or left the Community. In assembling the General Matricule for Holy Cross, Brother Bernard Gervais carefully noted with Roman numerals the place each Josephite assumed in the line-up of each name. Thus René Patrois, on assuming the religious Marie, became the sixth Josephite to be given this name, his predecessor with the name (fifth in the line-up) having left the Community October 21, 1840, three months before René Patrois became Brother Marie on February 2, 1841, when he began his novitiate training. Thereafter, the name “Marie” drops out of the Holy Cross matricule, except when used in combination: Marie-Joseph, Marie-Constantien, Marie-Julien, Marie-Augustin. There is a further Holy Cross Marie, but he was received in Canada (247). Religious names could be duplicated, however, if the religious involved lived in different countries. Thus when Brother Marie Patois changed his name to Brother Francis Xavier (August 21, 1848), there was already a Brother Francis Xavier in France, who was born Joseph Ménand in 1824, came to Holy Cross in 1838 (two years before Rene Patois), and died at Neuilly in 1888 (eight years before René Patois).² Once Marie changed his own name to Francis Xavier in 1848, there thus would have been two Francis Xaviers at the same time in Holy Cross, but since they lived on distant continents the matter was not considered a nuisance that would lead to confusion.

To add to the confusion of his religious name, whereby he is sometimes confused in histories and archives with the contemporaneous Le Mans Francis Xavier and even the Sister of Providence Francis Xavier (O’Connell 726 has index errors in this regard). René Patois may not have been born René at all: four matricules give his name as “Renault,” two give it as “René.” His family name is

variably spelled as “Patois,” “Pattois,” “Patoy,” and “Pattoy.”³ For this paper he will be referred to as “René Patois.”

As a novice in Le Mans, Brother Marie would have come under the direction of Basil Moreau, the founder of the Holy Cross Community, but he would not have had any contact with the great patriarch Brother Andre Mottais, who had shipped out for Algeria on the Community’s first foreign mission in May, 1840, months before René Patois arrived at Saint-Croix. Moreau was a very astute judge of character and knew his men well. He undoubtedly sensed in Brother Marie a stability of character that would serve the young man well in rough missionary circumstances and whose carpentry skills would be valuable in the pioneer Indiana territory. We know nothing from Marie himself about his experience on the Atlantic crossing in 1841, but details of the voyage have survived in an important letter by a Sister of Providence who accompanied the group. Sister Francis Xavier arrived at Le Havre for embarkation less than a month after her first vows (Klawitter, *After Holy Cross* 85). All eight missionaries (one priest, one sister, six brothers) left France aboard the *Iowa* on August 8, 1841. It took over a week just to get out of the English Channel because of the rough water. Seven of the group got seasick: only Vincent, the oldest member, stayed on his feet and could nurse the others. Sister Francis Xavier herself was cared for by Sacred Heart Sisters on board and a black American (Klawitter, *After Holy Cross* 86). Once on the open sea, however, the weather improved, and the captain let the group out of steerage on occasion to use a small room on the cabin deck for prayers. All was not bleak on the voyage:

Our packet is one hundred and fifty feet long...The doors of our rooms are of citron and mahogany, the locks of silver...You would see on board some beautiful birds that the passengers are taking with them; also a large cow, some sheep, pigs, ducks, chickens and rabbits, which serve us for food. You would enjoy yourself climbing up the masts, but you would also see some little boys of your own age in the steerage, carrying water, cooking, and obeying their parents promptly. [Corbinière 85, qtd. Klawitter *After Holy Cross* 86]

Sister Francis Xavier was obviously writing to one of her younger siblings, given the charming details of climbing the masts.

The *Iowa* docked in New York harbor on September 13. Then Sister Francis Xavier parted from the Holy Cross men, and the men spent three days with a Byerly family before pushing on for Indiana, a trek that would take almost a month, almost as long as their sea voyage.

When the group arrived at Vincennes on October 10, Sorin chose one of two settlements offered by the local bishop, Celestine de la Halandière. The place had a small church and three cabins. Not exactly a paradise, it was deemed by saintly Mother Theodore Guerin unsuitable for human habitation, and she was aghast when she heard that the men would spend the winter there (Klawitter, *After Holy Cross* 88), but it was, of course, just the sort of fixer-upper that would have challenged the creative instincts of a carpenter like René Patois. In fact, he soon made a bed for each Brother so they would not have to sleep on the floor (O'Connell 84).

The first letter written by a Brother in Indiana was written by Brother Francis Xavier and posted to Basil Moreau on October 1, 1841. As one might expect of a carpenter, his first thoughts concerned wood:

I am happy at having made the sacrifice of leaving and am very well adapted to the atmosphere of the woods. It's rather natural because I am in my element: we don't lack lumber, and we don't even have to leave the woods to return home. I'm sure that not one of the three Brother carpenters would want to return to Sainte Croix. We've measured oaks 20 feet around, straight as candles, and as high in proportion. These poor oaks die standing. You can't take a step without encountering a rotting tree. If they fall in the road, instead of removing them, people make a new road.

I'm working at things for the house. I have a carpenter with whom I wouldn't know how to chat because we don't understand each other, and all I can say is, "Yes, very well." (Klawitter, *Adapted 1*)

The sweetness of this letter to Moreau is evident in the simple, almost childish delight Francis Xavier finds in his new surroundings. He is becoming "adapted to the woods," as he puts it so charmingly, and he does not lack for basic materials living, as he does, in the middle of an old-growth forest. His reference to "three Brother carpenters" is curious in that he was supposedly the only Brother carpenter to arrive from France: Vincent, Anselm, and Gatian were teachers, Lawrence was a farmer, and Joachim was a tailor (pressed into service as a cook). There were, however, many young men who joined the fledgling group in Indiana, so they might

have included a carpenter or two. But Francis Xavier would not have been referring to any of them because although his letter is dated October 1, 1841, from St. Peter's in Montgomery, Indiana), in the chronology of events (Klawitter, *Adapted* 343), the band of seven from Le Mans did not arrive at St. Peter's until October 14, and they would not have had any novices on that date other than Charles Rother who was waiting there for them when they arrived. On October 1, 1840, Francis Xavier should have been in Fort Wayne, en route to Vincennes. Thus the reference to "three Brother carpenters" is enigmatic. He may have, however, included Lawrence the farmer and Joachim the tailor as possible carpenters. After all, Lawrence was a man of many talents and Joachim seemed fluid in his trade. Francis Xavier's reference to "working at things for the house" suggests that the letter was indeed written from Montgomery as the locale of the letter ("St. Peter's") indicates. Obviously, datings will have to be further checked for the chronology of these early days.

A year later, however, the local bishop had proved himself more than obnoxious, and Edward Sorin jumped at the chance to escape north to a larger piece of property the bishop offered him. The trip was made in two contingents three months apart, Brother Francis Xavier being included in the first contingent on November 16, 1842. Francis Xavier, Gatian, and Sorin, along with three novices, took eleven days to cover the 270 miles at the outset of one of the worst winters on record for Indiana. The trip has been most wonderfully related by Brother John Steber, with delightful details concerning their dog Azore (Klawitter, *Adapted* 21-

24), and their first impressions of Notre Dame were captured rapturously by Sorin in a letter to Basil Moreau:

Everything was frozen over. Yet it all seemed so beautiful. The lake, especially, with its broad carpet of dazzling white snow, quite naturally reminded us of the spotless purity of our august Lady whose name it bears, and also of the purity of soul that should mark the new inhabitants of this chosen spot. Our dwelling struck us as being just about the same as St. Peter's. We just glanced at it, though, because we were in a hurry to enjoy all the scenery along the lakeshore of which we had heard so much. Though it was quite cold, we went to the very end of the lake, and like children, came back fascinated with the marvelous beauties of our new home. May this new Eden be always the refuge of innocence and virtue! Here I could willingly exclaim with the Prophet: "The Lord ruleth me...He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment." (letter to Moreau Dec. 5, 1842 qtd. Moreau I, 60)

Needless to add, Brother Francis Xavier at age twenty-two would have shared in this exuberant reaction to the new home for Holy Cross in America.

Late in his life, a year before his death, Francis Xavier himself recalled part of this journey from St. Peter's to South Bend for the *South Bend Times*:

We came through from Vincennes in an old stage coach, which the Bishop [de la Halandière] who sent us here picked up somewhere. It was too small a conveyance to hold us all and our baggage, so we

took turns at walking. When we arrived at South Bend we stopped for several days at the home of the first Alexis Coquillard as there were no accommodations for our party at the mission. We did not ford the river, ferry it, or go over it in row boats, but crossed it on the old bridge north of the brickyard. Alexis Coquillard, Jr., might have gone with us, but he was a small boy then.

There was nothing at Notre Dame but the old log house seen in the drawing. Additions were soon made to it for the accommodation of our party and in a short time the brick house now standing beside the lake was built by Benjamin Coquillard. The picture made under my direction will be found in the Golden Jubilee book. (*SBT* June 22, 1895, 1, qtd. Bierne 30-31)

The elder Alexis Coquillard was not only an important figure in early South Bend history, he was also instrumental in helping the Holy Cross pioneers adjust to the Indiana territory. When Francis Xavier arrived with Sorin and four others from Vincennes in November, 1842, and stayed their first nights in the area at the home of Alexis Coquillard, they were enjoying his hospitality just thirteen years before the kindly fur-trader died while inspecting the ruins of his burned out flour mill: the beam on which he was walking collapsed and he fell sixteen feet to his death. He is buried in the north wall of the little chapel on the grounds of Cedar Grove Cemetery undoubtedly in a coffin made by Brother Francis Xavier.⁴

As the Brother-carpenter settled into life at Notre Dame, he found his talents well used not only in construction projects but also in instruction. The Manual

Labor School was chartered in 1844 (*Scholastic* 19.1, 7), and Francis Xavier's work in it is documented several times in the student newspaper: "The Manual Labor School is a great charity, which is sustained by the Brothers of St. Joseph unaided by anyone else. Under the solicitous care of Mr. Sheerer, CSC, Bros. Constantine, John, Xavier, Francis Joseph, Charles, Alfred, and others, the students receive that instruction which will fit them for those stations in life they will hereafter fill" (*Scholastic* 10.13, 91). Although there is a touch of condescension on the part of the student-writer (himself undoubtedly not from the Manual Labor School), it is evident that industrial arts was thriving at Notre Dame alongside the classical and commercial curricula that catered to sons of the upper crust. Sadly, the industrial arts buildings burned to the ground in 1849, but Sorin resolved to rebuild them immediately, and with his customary bravado oversaw a resolution in the Minor Chapter that "no lightning rod shall be placed over the college at least for the present, by a reason of confidence in God's Providence" (Minutes April 22, 1850, qtd. O'Connell 252). One wonders if it were really a mortal shaking his fist at the divine in this instance or simply a lack of funds to pay for lightning rods, which can be a huge expense for rare usage.

In 1850 Brother Francis Xavier received an obedience to work in Rome at an orphanage that Sainte-Croix had opened at the invitation of Pius IX (Aidan, May 24, 1850), but the obedience was revoked, probably much to the relief of both Francis Xavier and Sorin. As a skilled wood worker, Francis Xavier would have been an asset to the orphanage, but his craftsmanship was much needed in Indiana. In 1847, for example, he enhanced the chapel of the Holy Cross Sisters in Bertrand

(Michigan) by carving for them an altar and making frames for their Way of the Cross (Aidan, April 3, 1847). In 1851 he made steeples for the St. Joseph Church in South Bend (Aiden 1851). There is no evidence that Francis Xavier ever made a trip back to his native continent. He was content with his life in Indiana.

We have precious few letters by Francis Xavier, but the 1863 crisis between Notre Dame in America and Sainte-Croix in France affords us a very beautiful letter from the carpenter to Basil Moreau. The letter is dated January 27, 1863, and is posted from Notre Dame:

Please excuse me for not writing since our difficulties began. You perhaps interpreted my silence as a mark of respect for the Congregation. But let me say first of all that nothing would be less true than to believe me lacking love for her! She is my mother, and I'm attached to her from the bottom of my heart. Everything that concerns her concerns me, and my happiness here couldn't be greater.

If therefore I have not told you sooner the pain caused me by our sad divisiveness, and if I had not asked for advice from the Motherhouse, as a member of the Administrative Council, it's because I always believed that our misfortunes would end and we would end up working through them. But seeing the letter Brother Lawrence [Menage] just received, I urge you to consider the profound regret I feel over the state of things and my wish to see our union flourish again. Without this union our days are incomplete. We would not prosper, scandal would result, Religion would be dishonored. Notre

Dame du Lac would collapse undoubtedly succumbing to the first, but a House of this importance couldn't fall without a shock to other parts. The Motherhouse, the Congregation, would receive, I believe, a fatal blow. But if you tell me, very reverend Father, "All this comes from you, from your Council; it's you who caused this state of affairs; it's the administration of Notre Dame [du Lac] who is totally at fault; it's she who refused to obey my orders," may it please God, my good Father, that we could complain to you and put an end to dissension, which we are suffering from, and bring about order and peace. Now, the administration of Notre Dame du Lac, not knowing what will happen nor how to act, throws itself into your arms—do with us what you will.

God alone knows how much I love the Congregation and its superiors and also how much I am attached to the Motherhouse, but I can't think without crying about the possibility that Notre Dame du Lac could fall into ruin.

The thing which most surprised and pained the Brothers (and undoubtedly also the Priests) is to see the Rev. Father Visitor [Charles Moreau] begin the Visit and leave without finishing it. What are we to do about the Sisters? Is it necessary to accept the consequences because of the difficulties? Thus we remain upset. Brother Vincent just fell sick, and I think our difficulties caused his sickness. May they not worsen! Heavens, let them end. If we have acted imprudently,

pardon us, we will make honorable amends, but let us have peace and goodness!!

I beg God to have pity on our unhappy Congregation, that things will work out safe and sound, that the darkness will dissipate, and that we'll enjoy happiness, security, and peace before eternal happiness.

I also beg the Lord, with all the fervor I'm capable of, that He will deign to give us, very reverend Father, long and peaceful days, in the bosom of our large family—henceforth united—all children, united in heart and soul, with no other desires or aspirations than to do God's will as shown in that of the Superior General.

I am with the deepest respect and affection, my very reverend Father, your very obedient son in JMJ,

Brother Francis Xavier, formerly Mary⁵

The squabble between France and Indiana during the American Civil War precipitated from many problems fomenting over many years and included machinations of a treasurer sent from Le Mans (Brother Amédeé Dayres) and failed foundations in New York City (see O'Connell 470-472). Moreau decided an official Visit was warranted, but his choice of official Visitor could not have been more infelicitous: his own thirty-nine year old nephew Charles, an honest but brusque priest. Sorin, by the summer of 1862, had threatened to resign from both Notre Dame and the Congregation. It was in this context that Brother Francis Xavier sent

his letter to Basil Moreau, pleading for understanding. He was not afraid to finger the exact areas of conflict between Notre Dame and the Motherhouse.

Very late in his life, Francis Xavier sat down with a Professor Edwards at Notre Dame to talk about earlier days. The interview notes are dated October 26, 1897, according to Brother Bernard (Gervais?) in marginalia dated April, 1943. Edwards must have written them down the year after Francis Xavier's death. Edwards asked Francis Xavier about the 1863 fight with Le Mans. Francis Xavier replied that France kept asking for money, and when Francis Xavier told the Visitor, Charles Moreau, that the Lake could not continue to send money ("We would have to sell out"), Charles Moreau said, "Who cares if you do?" Francis Xavier pointed out that they had many old Irish religious who had brought money with them to Notre Dame: "We can't sell out and let them starve." He also noted that Charles Moreau wanted some of the money Propaganda Fidei had given the Lake, but Francis Xavier replied that if they did give Le Mans some of that money Propaganda Fidei would drop them from their list.⁶

We should not be surprised that Brother Francis Xavier was secure enough in his position at Notre Dame to presume a direct appeal to the eminent founder in France, but in the twentieth-century, one item attributed to his incompetence during that turbulent time has proven false. In the 1864 Congressional elections the Republican candidate Schuyler Colfax leaned on Edward Sorin to have the Notre Dame religious vote for him since it was his party that let Notre Dame keep its post office and it was his party that continued to exempt the Brothers from military service. At the local council, Sorin raised the issue and the matter was discussed for

one or two hours, according to Hope (134). Hope writes that Brother Francis Xavier was chosen to warm up the religious to vote Republican, but he “either forgot or neglected this most important matter” (134) and the Irish vote swung against Colfax. Infuriated, Colfax did nothing to prevent immediate draft proceedings against five members of the Notre Dame community. Happily General Philip Sherman’s wife intervened in Washington⁷ so the draft motion was suppressed. Hope’s citation on this matter (Hope n. 134) is not helpful since it points out that Sorin in his *Chronicles* imputed inactivity or worse to Francis Xavier, actions that turn out to be untrue: nowhere in his *Chronicles* does Sorin write that Francis Xavier forgot his duties or neglected them. Sorin wrote: “it [the mandate] was badly carried out, or rather was not carried out at all, the member to whom it had been entrusted foolishly relying on a third party who did not understand the consequences and took no steps in this matter” (288-89). What Hope failed to conclude is that the unnamed third party was culpable and not Francis Xavier, whose only fault may have been the poor selection of a person to spread the word about voting for Colfax or to convince members to do so.

However, there is more. The actual Notre Dame Council of Administration minutes for this election episode are quite interesting. The Council met four times that month (October 5, 11, 17, 24) and the Colfax matter was brought up in two of these meetings. The minutes for October 17 note that the minutes for October 11 made no mention of “actions which the Council had taken on the 5th inst. respective of the elections that were to take place here a few days later” (in the week of October 5). Thus the October 17 minutes fill in the lacunae:

On the 5th day of October the members of the Council assembled determined that owing to the many works of friendship and good will we had received from Mr. Colfax of South Bend and other officers of the Government, the Community, that is, all such members of it who can vote, should vote for Hon. Colfax as a representative in Congress and for other Nominees of the said ticket. And Bro. Lawrence was specially directed by the president of the Council to carry out this resolution which (as it was afterwards discovered) he failed to do.

There is no mention of Francis Xavier at all in the document, and the culprit, Brother Lawrence Menage, is named as simply having failed to do his commission, not that he delegated it to a third party. Thus, Arthur Hope spun a citation out of context, substituting Francis Xavier for Lawrence and creating copy for his book that may make for interesting reading but is hardly historically accurate. Of course it may be that Sorin knew that Lawrence had elicited Francis Xavier as that unnamed “third party” to do his dirty work for him, but such a scenario makes little sense. Lawrence was an outgoing and popular figure in the Notre Dame community so deputing him to sway voters makes some sense, but gentle little Francis Xavier was hardly the kind of person who would chat up voters: he was too honest a man to compromise his principles for any political reason. Acting as a political barker was hardly in character for Francis Xavier. Could it have been that the assignment was so distasteful to Lawrence that he passed it along to the gentle Francis Xavier knowing that it would die the death it deserved? Sorin does not say, and we can only guess,

but one thing we must do is clear up the facts: Francis Xavier was not chosen by the Council to spread to his colleagues the good word on Colfax.

By the 1870's Francis Xavier had expanded his work at Notre Dame with the opening of a store on campus where he sold "pious pictures" (*Scholastic* 8.18). The student newspaper notes that "all persons desiring pictures of the late Rev. Fathers Gillespie and Lemmonier can be accommodated by him" (251). According to a later issue of *The Notre Dame Scholastic*, the "picture-store" was located "in the Franciscan building, opposite the College" and was open every Wednesday afternoon at one o'clock (10.13, 202). In June of 1876, Francis Xavier was also selling sacred vases and church candlesticks so his clientele must have reached beyond the campus: college students would have little need for such items. *The Scholastic*, however, hawked the merchandise: "Such articles can scarcely be found in the country at the prices at which they are to be sold by him" (9.40, 634), and six years later Francis Xavier's inventory had expanded to "religious articles of every description." The store was by then located across from the post-office, "and those who require anything in his line can be supplied with the best and the cheapest" (*Scholastic* 26.13, 203). The Notre Dame Bookstore is born! As if the man did not already have enough to do working in the Manual Labor School and burying people who died in the South Bend vicinity.

We do not know how Francis Xavier came to be the designated undertaker at Notre Dame, but as the master-carpenter of the pioneer group, he would have been the obvious choice to make coffins. His first client may very well have been Brother Joachim, who died within two years of the group's arrival at Notre Dame. From

coffins to undertaking it was just a matter of getting a hearse and a reputation. He acquired both soon enough, and by the time of his death he was an accepted part of the South Bend burial scene. We do not know how many dead he buried a year. The nineteenth-century records for Cedar Grove Cemetery name no undertakers. But we know he buried non-Community people because Cedar Grove was his bailiwick (in addition to the Community cemetery, located first near the present day Columba Hall and later moved up the St. Mary's Road to its present location). He built the beautiful little chapel in the Cedar Grove Cemetery, and he even gave the place its name, according to Bishop Alerding—Francis Xavier's favorite trees in the cemetery were the cedar trees (Alerding 201). Francis Xavier expanded the cemetery in the spring of 1878 (Scholastic 11.31, 490). We do have extant two sheets of his accounts book for Cedar Grove, and they give evidence that he was successful: the sheets are printed with his name prominent. Since these two sheets chronicle a return customer (Mrs. Dignan buried two daughters and a husband with Francis Xavier's services), we can presume he was effective in his mortal ministry.⁸ In 1882 Francis Xavier's coffins cost ten or twenty dollars, and use of his hearse cost five dollars. Grave digging was two dollars.

On Memorial Day in June, 1882, Francis Xavier attended a special ceremony at Cedar Grove: "In the morning, a delegation visited the cemetery at Notre Dame, where a number of departed braves await the last trump. Prof. Howard, who was a soldier during the late war, led the procession. B. Francis Xavier, the amiable guardian of God's acre, was in attendance, and expressed himself much pleased that his silent braves had not been forgotten" (Scholastic 15.38, 591-2). Not only is this

notice touching for its proof that early on Notre Dame was cognizant of the poor Miami and Potawatomi who had been forced off their land, it also shows that Francis Xavier took a personal interest in “his silent braves.” It is this kind of personal note that would impress young Scholastic journalists before they would leave their idealistic academic world and head out to live in the cold reality of an industrial America on the move.⁹ Folklore has, however, colored some of Francis Xavier’s dealings with Native Americans. On March 14, 1891, he buried a Miami Native American named Chippa, reputed to be one hundred and fifty years old (*Scholastic* 24.26, 412).

Eventually Death caught up with Francis Xavier, Death’s main adjutant at Notre Dame. According to Bartholomew Crowley, on November 12, 1896, Francis Xavier “dropped dead on the steps of his office this morning at seven o’clock. He had just eaten a hearty breakfast and was on his way from the dining room when stricken with apoplexy” (Aidan 1896). Apoplexy was the nineteenth-century term for what today we would call a stroke. The South Bend Tribune noted wryly that an anonymous writer who had written earlier that Francis Xavier “has made coffins for all who have died at Notre Dame and most likely will do the same kind office for many more yet before he drives the last nail in his own” was actually himself buried by Francis Xavier in November, 1874 (Aidan 1896). When he died, Francis Xavier was but 76 years old, yet he had outlasted all the other six Holy Cross pioneers: Sorin by 3 years, Vincent by 6, Lawrence by 23, Gatian by 36, Anselm by 51, and Joachim by 52. The United States Provincial at the time of Francis Xavier’s death,

William Corby, remembered the old carpenter-mortician in a circular letter dated one day after the man's death:

Brother Francis was a model religious, regular at all the exercises, industrious to the very last, devoted to the Community, and who led a life of great self-denial. He was a cabinet-maker by trade. From the very earliest history of his life in America, in 1841, he was employed as an undertaker, and he was frequently called up at night, and had to go eight or even twelve miles to attend the dead. Hundreds of times he was exposed in rains or snow-storms; perched upon an uncovered hearse, slowly making his way to the church or cemetery. The most remarkable fact in his history is that he came with Very Rev. E. Sorin in company with five other Brothers in 1841. He survived every one of that devoted band who founded Notre Dame. It would be hard to find in history a more devoted band of missionaries than the band of which Brother Francis Xavier was the last survivor. [qtd. Bierne 32]

Of course it would be difficult to write an obituary for Francis Xavier without mentioning the pioneer band that arrived in Indiana in 1842, and Corby touches nicely on that part of Francis Xavier's history.

The student newspaper, *The Scholastic*, also had its say on the Brother's death. Two days after his death, a full page with a centered picture appeared in the middle of the November 14, 1896, issue:

Another link between the present and past of our Alma Mater has been broken; the last of the silken strings that bound the Notre Dame of '42 to the Notre Dame of '96 has been snapped in twain. Brother Francis Xavier is dead! and with him passes away the last survivor of that little band of heroes who changed the bleak forest into a bright fairy-land, and reared on stones cemented with their blood the domes and turrets of our noble college home.

They were hard and painful, the days when Notre Dame was founded. That winter when they broke their way through the fallen trees and the drifted snow is set down in history as one of the coldest since 1607. Even the Indians, accustomed as they were to the rigors of winter, were almost exterminated. Many of them were frozen to death. It was impossible to carry needful provisions with them, and the pain of hunger was added to the pain of cold. South Bend was hardly a small village, and when a pound of coffee was wanted a messenger was dispatched—ah! the irony of that word!—all the long journey to Detroit.

The work of the religious at Notre, Dame in those hard, early days was a continuous crucifixion. Health they had and eager appetites, but the merest comforts—even the merest necessities sometimes—were absent. But Providence fitted the back to the burden. The founders of Notre Dame were stalwart and rugged as the Norsemen. Like, giants they exulted in their strength, and the

continuous struggle with primeval nature inspired and strengthened them. Trials they knew, wrestlings within and without; and sometimes it seemed that the favor of Heaven itself was withdrawn from them, and the labor of months and years destroyed. But they toiled on undiscouraged and undismayed, and at last they hewed their way to the light.

Brother Francis Xavier was one of these brave pioneers. The days of his stewardship were longer than those of his early companions, but not till the hour of his death did he relax his tremendous energy and zeal. He was the local undertaker from the very beginning—he buried all who have died at Notre Dame. Many times in a week he was roused from his sleep at night, often to ride far into the country in the rain and the cold, but a word of complaint was never on his lips. "As cheerful as an undertaker," is not, we believe, a proverb; but it would soon become one if all the craft had as much sunshine in their hearts as he. His life was full of labor, done in a spirit of duty and with no eye to earthly reward, and in the consciousness that he was doing God's work he found his solace and his recompense. From his fellow religious he won a peculiar veneration, and from the poor, whom his ministrations assisted, a very special love.

Since Father Sorin died, Brother Francis has been the Patriarch of Notre Dame; but no stranger who saw the silent, unobtrusive

Brother, as he moved actively about his work, would have guessed it. He wore his honors gracefully, and to the end he remained the prayerful, laborious, amiable, humble religious that he was in youth. Such men never die. They live again in every life which their example has helped to sanctify. The days of the founding will seem ancient now that Brother Francis has passed away, but the memory of his good, long life, and the fragrance of his Christian virtues, will never depart from those who knew him. God grant his noble spirit rest!

(30.10, 155)

And so Brother Francis was laid to rest at a ripe old age for the times. And who dug his grave? Two days before Francis Xavier died, there arrived at Notre Dame a young man to join the Brothers of Holy Cross. His name in the Community would be Brother Bernard Gervais. He was told by his novice master on November 12, 1896, to go to the cemetery and help dig the grave for Francis Xavier. So those of us who knew Bernard and lived with him at Dujarie Hall half a century ago had daily contact with a man who helped bury the last of the pioneer Brothers at Notre Dame.

But an indignity remains for Francis Xavier: his tombstone at Notre Dame uses the name "Reynault Patois" for this pioneer Brother, continuing even after his death the matter of multiple names. Was his first name "René" or "Reynault"? Was his family name "Patois" or "Patoy"? For the pioneer Brother who changed his name from "Marie" to "Francis Xavier" early in his career at Notre Dame, perhaps he is today finding playfulness endemic in what historians would make of his chameleon name changes.

Notes

1 Special thanks for the preparation of this paper are due to the archivists William Kevin Cawley (University of Notre Dame) and Christopher Kuhn, CSC (United States Province).

Today Clermont is part of Clermont-Créans, a union effected in 1842, a few years after Brother Francis Xavier left town. Today the combined towns have a population of just over 1000, so in 1842 each would have had only several hundred people. Clermont can trace its roots to the twelfth century and is located at the foot of a hill on the road between Paris and Nantes. The Clermont church is St. Lambert, named for a bishop of the eighth century. René Patois was undoubtedly baptized in this church soon after his birth in 1820.

2 The Le Mans Francis Xavier's signature is similar to Brother Marie's, with similar flourishes, but such a phenomenon is not unusual, given the importance of hand-writing pedagogy at the time. Brother Marie's handwriting is quite beautiful, even on documents written in his old age.

3 The following matricules from the US Province Archives list Brother Francis Xavier with the name "Reynault":

a) *Brothers buried in Community Cemetery*. Typescript by last name: n.a., n.d.

b) *Obituary Register of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Province of the United States 1844-1941*. Typescript by month: n.a., n.d.

c) Handwritten ledger with names listed by date of entrance (somewhat)

d) Handwritten ledger of Josephites listed by entrance (somewhat)

The following matricules list Brother Francis Xavier with the name "René":

a) *French Brothers who Labored in Whole or in Part in the United States.*

Typescript by religious name, n.a., n.d.

b) *Matricule Generale.* Compiled by Brother Bernard Gervais, CSC.

Typescript, n.d.

His family name is given as "Pattoy" in *Table Analytique des Lettres Circulaires des Superieurs Generaux (1836-1976)*. Rome: Holy Cross Generalate, 1977.

He is listed as "René Patoy" in the French obituary compiled in France by Jean Proust, CSC.

A "last will" Francis Xavier wrote in 1847, leaving all his possessions to Brother Lawrence Menage to be distributed as Lawrence saw fit, is signed "René Patois dit frère Marie" (Holy Cross General Archives). A French genealogy site lists the following variants for the family name "Patois":

PATOIS | PATOUA | PATOY | PATOI | PATTOIS | PATOIT | PATOUEIL | PATOIL | PASTOIS

There is no Patois family living today in Clermont, but according to the mayor's secretary (July 2013), there is a Patoil family living there. That family has a long history in the area but not for the year 1820:

PATOIL Clermont (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1698 - 1740

PATOIL Créans,72084 (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1687 - 1694

PATOIL Mareil sur Loir 72200 (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1569 - 1619

PATOIL Clermont-Créans,72200,Créans (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1642 - 1724

PATOIL Villaines sous Malicorne (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1664 - 1768

PATOIL Créans (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1665 - 1724

PATOIL Clermont-Créans, 72084 (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1665 - 1676

PATOIL Mareil-sur-Loir, 72200 (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1562 - 1699

PATOIL Clermont-Créans, 72084 (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1668 - 1759

PATOIL Pdl, Villaines sous Malicorne (Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France) 1699 - 1722

The Patois family for Sarthe includes only the following ancestry:

depn3244 1 PATOIS 1699 - 1699 Cures Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, France

The Patoy search includes significantly more hits for the Sarthe region:

<http://en.geneanet.org/search/?name=PATOY&country=FRA&ressource=arbre>

There was a Patoy living in Clermont-Créans in 1835. I am going to conclude tentatively (until we can find Francis Xavier's baptismal record) that the proper spelling of Francis Xavier's family name was Patoy. Basic French genealogy source:

<http://www.geneanet.org/genealogie/fr/patoil.html>

4 On the outside chapel north wall is a large white commemorative slab for the pioneer Coquillard family. It reads:

Alexis Coquillard

First Permanent White Settler

Co-founder of South Bend

September 28, 1795

January 8, 1855

Wife

Frances Comparet Coquillard

April 9, 1805

October 11, 1880

Son

Alexis Theodore Coquillard

February 13, 1836

January 2, 1884

The wife and the son would have known Francis Xavier for most of Francis Xavier's life. The son was the little boy referred to in Francis Xavier's notes to Professor Edwards (See n. 6).

5 Letter trans. George Klawitter, CSC.

6 These notes by Edwards were written in pencil, and the manuscript is fading fast (United States Province Archives). The notes also contain a charming story Francis Xavier told Edwards about Charles Moreau's trip to Kalamazoo. When a storm came up and Charles sought shelter under a tree, Charles sat down and prayed all night. Unfortunately, the horse "lay down and squash [sic] the cup of the little relic chalice flat." There is also a story about church bells destined for Notre Dame.

7 After Mrs. Sherman begged Sorin for another army chaplain, Sorin sent Father Carrier in 1863 (McAllister 259). Later Carrier proved to be the perfect emissary from Sorin in 1864 to intercede in Washington for military exemptions for Notre Dame's Brothers after the election debacle fomented by Schuyler Colfax.

8 Three well-worn tombstones twenty feet south of the Cedar Grove Cemetery chapel are the stones of the Dignan family. Two are still legible: one in the center reads "FATHER" and the one to its immediate right reads "MARGT MARY DIGNAN" but the one on the far left of the three is illegible. The spelling of the family name on the Margaret Mary tombstone does not agree with the spelling of Dignan on the accounts document in Francis Xavier's hand: he wrote the family

name as “Degnan.” The tombstone, however, agrees with the typescript cemetery records held in the Notre Dame Archives (see MCEM reel #2, HIST040D). On this alphabetical typescript, there are seven entries for “Dignan”: Annie (March 1901), Catheran (April 1875), Francis (April 1940), Frank (n.m. 1900), Frank (December 1880), Margaret (October 1881), Mary E (September 1881). The three tombstones have no dates. The record by Francis Xavier for Francis Degnan [sic] is dated 1881. Francis’ tombstone is the center one of the three in Cedar Grove Cemetery. The puzzle remains for Margaret (d. 1880) and Mary E (d. 1881). Since the one tombstone has the name Margaret Mary, she must be the daughter of Francis. The worn tombstone (illegible) must then be that of Catheran (d. 1875) or possible Mary E (d. 1881). But who is Mary E? And is this her stone? If it is her stone, why isn’t it as legible as the stone for Margaret Mary?

9 Francis Xavier would not have known the apostle to the Miami, Benjamin Petit, who died ministering to the Native Americans in 1838, just four years before the first Holy Cross men arrived at Notre Dame, but he would certainly have known Petit’s poignant history. (For letters written by Petit in his last days see McKee.)

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Chronology

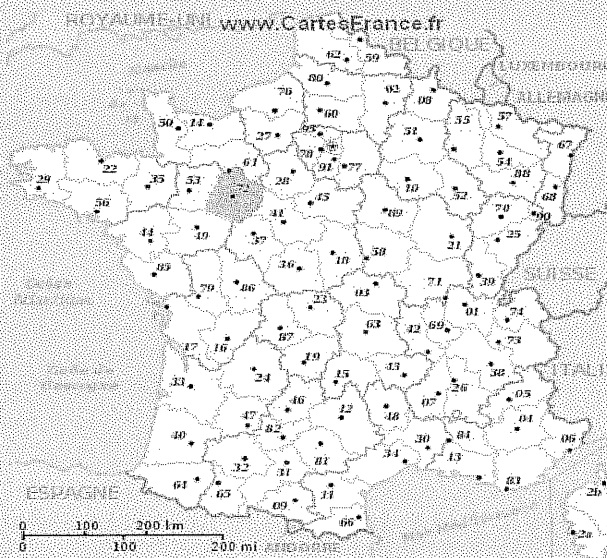
- 1820 July 27 René Patois born at Clermont (Sarthe)
- 1841 Sept. 6 René Patois enters Holy Cross
- Aug. 8 René Patois leaves for American aboard the *Iowa*
- Sept. 13 Arrival in New York City
- Oct. 10 Arrival at Vincennes
- Oct. 14 Arrival at St. Peter's, Montgomery
- 1842 Nov. 16 Leaves Montgomery for Notre Dame with Sorin and Gatian
- Nov. 27 Arrives at Notre Dame
- 1848 Aug. 21 Marie changes his name to Francis Xavier
- 1850 Feb. 25 Named assistant to novice master at Notre Dame
- June 3 Receives obedience to go to Rome, soon rescinded
- 1864 July 18 Replaces Brother Felix as commissioner for Notre Dame
- Aug. 15 Named sacristan
- 1866 Mar. 5 Council allows Francis Xavier a hearse
- 1880 Sept. 17 Allowed to have hearse painted
- 1890 Mar. 21 Brother Willibrode appointed to assist in undertaking
- 1896 Nov. 12 Francis Xavier dies at Notre Dame

Brother Francis Xavier

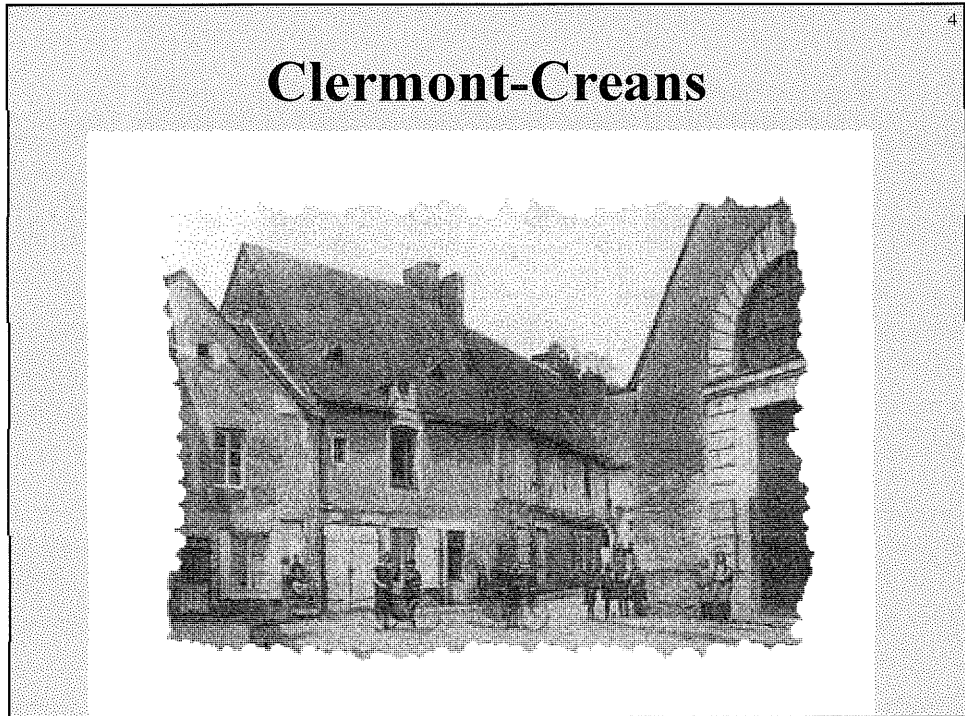
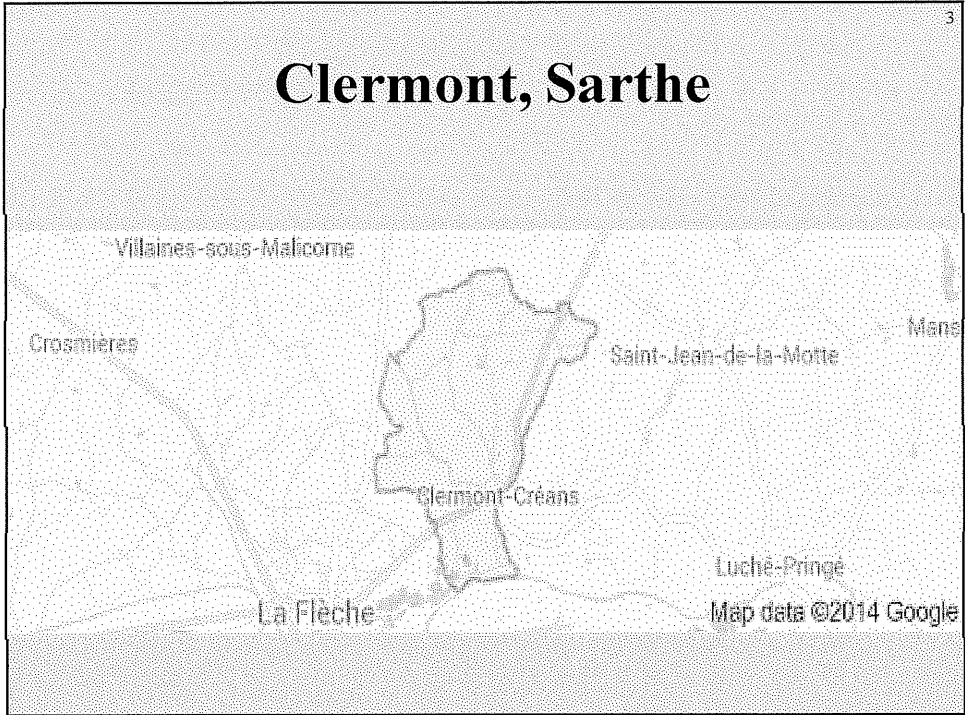
1820 - 1896

Pioneer
in
Indiana

Sarthe, France



1



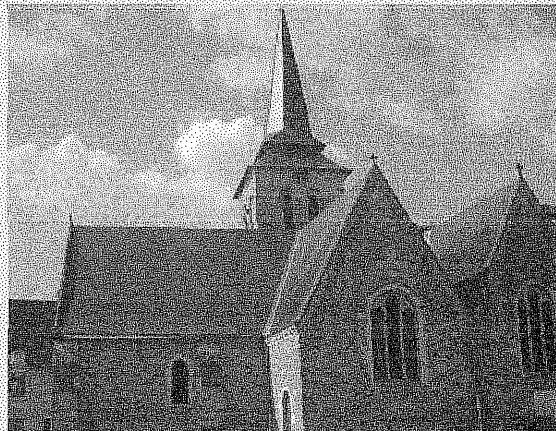
5

Clermont Today



6

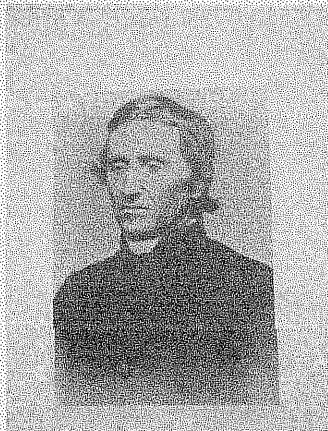
St. Lambert Church



Reynault or René ?



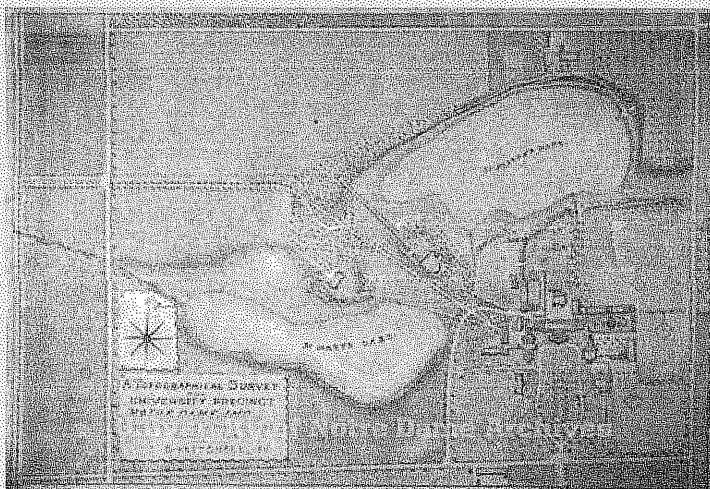
Brother Francis Xavier



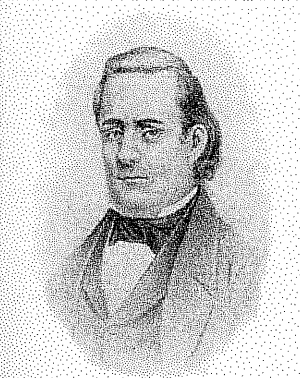
Edward Sorin



Early Notre Dame

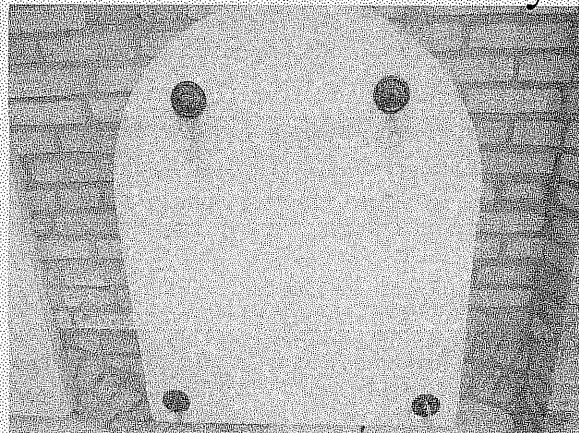


Alexis Coquillard



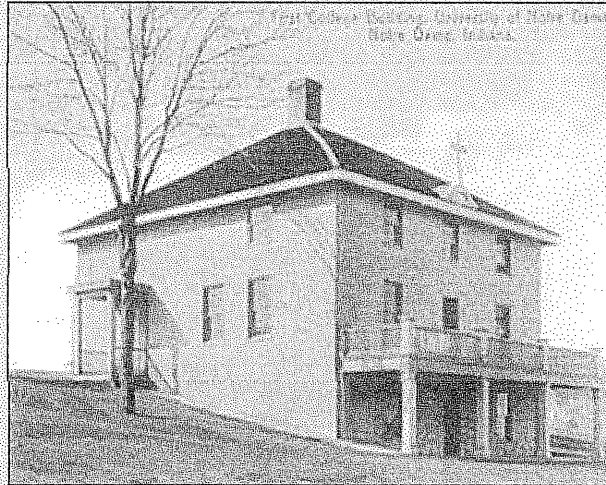
ALEXIS COQUILLARD.
First white man who settled with his family in
St. Joseph County. One of the
founders of South Bend.

Alexis Coquillard in Cedar Grove Cemetery



13

First Building, Notre Dame



14

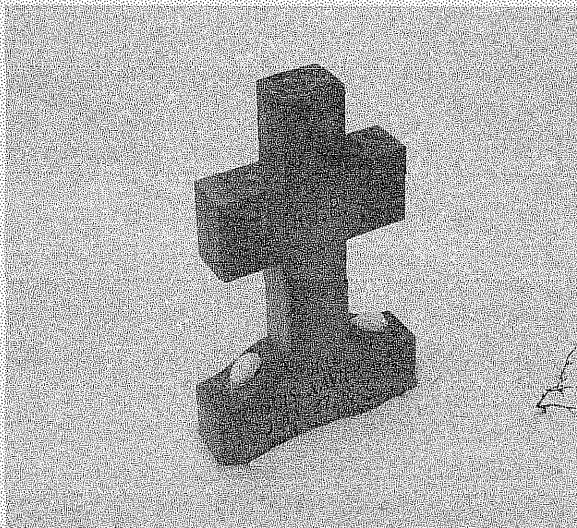
Schuyler Colfax



Dignan Stones Cedar Grove Cemetery



Community Cemetery



Brother Francis Xavier

