

HOPE FOR A *Better* LIFE : CATHOLICS

Hopes and Dreams

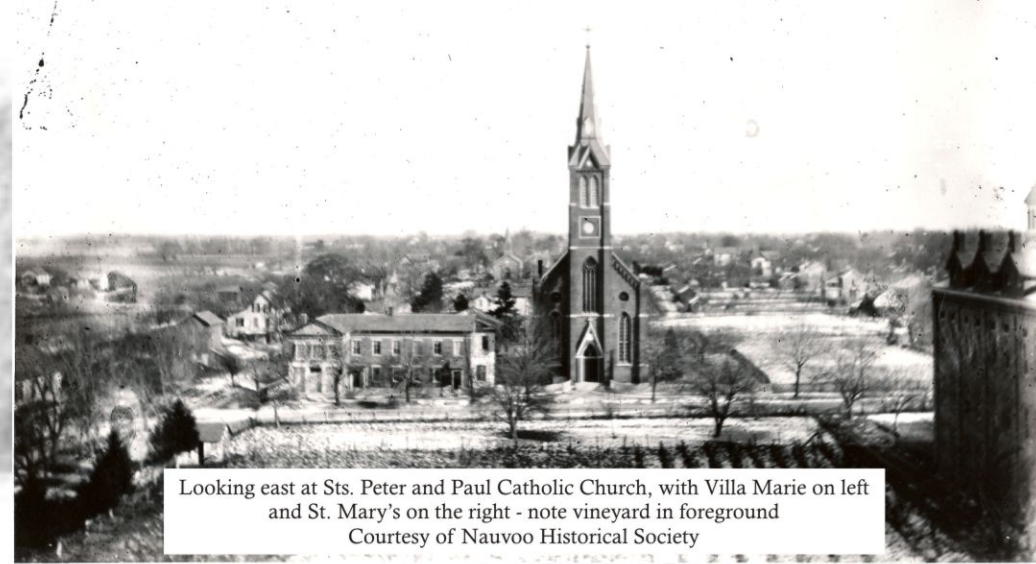
Irish Catholics came to the Nauvoo area hoping to find good land and jobs. Potato blight in Ireland led to mass starvation in the 1840s; almost half of all immigrants to the U.S. during this decade were Irish. Many German Catholics also came looking for land; some fleeing Germany after the failed German Revolution of 1848. They came to the American Midwest looking for freedom and liberty.

"I made a vow of poverty, and another to establish missions. With God's grace, I will keep them both...I will plant, let others water. I leave it to God to increase."

The legacy of the Catholic missionaries described by Fr. Alleman.



Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, 1933
Courtesy of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Nauvoo, Illinois



Looking east at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, with Villa Marie on left and St. Mary's on the right, seen through telegraph tower.
Courtesy of Nauvoo Historical Society



Full view of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, ca. 1910
Courtesy Mary Loggin, Nauvoo, Illinois

Brief History:

In June of 1673, Father Marquette and explorer Louis Joliet paddled past the Nauvoo peninsula as part of the French Jesuit effort to bring Catholicism to Native Americans. By 1820, Father St. Cyr offered Mass in the area and, by 1830, Father LeFevre wrote of the need to establish a parish because of the number of Catholics at the "head of the rapids." Father Griffiths accomplished that goal in 1848, and in about 1851, Father Alleman helped to purchase the former home of Mormon Parley P. Pratt, which was converted into St. Patrick's Church. Father Alleman was French with a flock of parishioners that were mostly Irish, including the Moffitt clan. The Irish were soon outnumbered by Germans, and when a new church was built in the early 1870s, the name was changed to Sts. Peter & Paul. The history of friendship and cooperation between the churches in Nauvoo is largely based on the efforts of Catholic priests and their relationship with pastors and people of other churches.

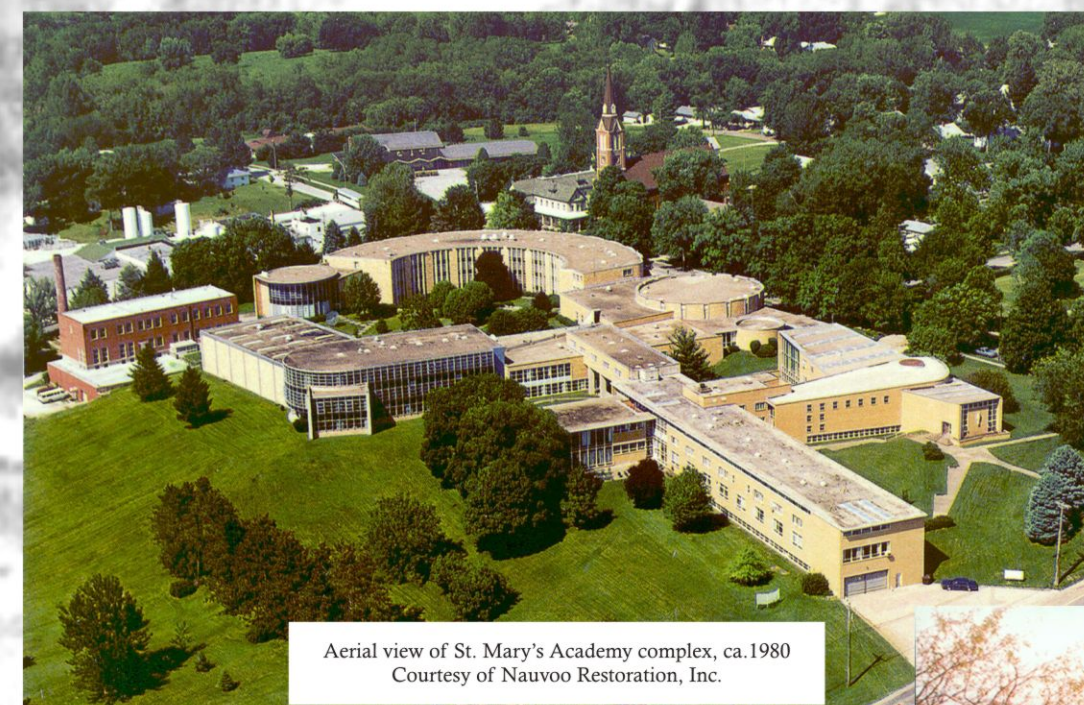


Photo bottom row (L. to R.) Casper, Gertrude and Father Reimbold and Reimbold brothers (top row)
Courtesy of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Nauvoo, Illinois

The Reimbold Family

"The reason for the stability and enduring presence of the Catholic faith in Nauvoo rests with the forty-eight year pastorate of Father John Reimbold."

Fr. Anthony J. Trosley



Aerial view of St. Mary's Academy campus, ca. 1980
Courtesy of Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.



120th anniversary of the 1873 founding of St. Mary's Academy
Courtesy of Mary Loggin, Nauvoo, Illinois



Anna Moffitt right side 2nd row, 1st girl, First Communion class with Father Reimbold, 1902
Courtesy of Anna Moffitt, Nauvoo, Illinois

Father Tholen

"Fr. 'Leo' Tholen would be no ordinary priest; to compare his priestly ministry with that of his predecessor, Fr. Reimbold, is to marvel at how two different priests lived an identical story of dedication and accomplishment."
-Fr. Tony Trosley

Upon his ordination in May of 1915, Fr. Leo Tholen was assigned to Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Nauvoo to serve as chaplain for the Nauvoo Benedictine Sisters and to assist an ailing Fr. Reimbold. Fr. Tholen served the parish for thirty-two years. Like Fr. Reimbold, he renovated the interior of Sts. Peter and Paul Church and he deftly defied creditors to rescue school and convent from foreclosure and loss of property. Fr. Tholen advanced the cause of Catholic education, and he enjoyed the love and esteem of his parishioners and the greater Nauvoo community. He was extensively involved in the life of the Nauvoo community, especially the "River Road" on Highway 96. He saw his parish through two world wars and the Great Depression. As Fr. Reimbold did on horseback and carriage, Fr. Tholen travelled the countryside in his automobile that took him where he needed to be with his people - road or no road.

Father Tholen of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church



Courtesy of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Nauvoo, Illinois



Sister Ottilia Hoeveler

God bless them all who come no more,
From North or South, or East or West,
On land, or on the deep blue sea,
May all the girls I love, be blessed,
From Mother Ottilia's *The Happy Girls of St. Mary's*

In 1874, when Sister Ottilia Hoeveler disembarked from a steamer at Nauvoo with four other Sisters from St. Scholastica's Convent in Chicago, little did she know she would soon be founding a new Benedictine motherhouse. Working with Fr. Reimbold, Sister Ottilia would establish and oversee a Catholic school in Nauvoo. The Sisters purchased the Fredrick House home, where they set up their convent and St. Scholastica School. Originally the Morrison owned, St. Scholastica School began with seven students. Since 1874, more than two hundred Sisters of St. Benedict followed to Sts. Peter and Paul. Hundreds of students were educated at St. Scholastica, which became St. Mary's Academy for girls. For some, they were educated at the Happy Girls of St. Mary's, a book of verse about the school's earliest students. In 1997, the sisters closed the Academy, but the tradition of Catholic education in Nauvoo continues with Sts. Peter and Paul School.



Sisters of St. Benedict, 1907
Courtesy of Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, Illinois

Three Reimbold brothers - Peter, John Baptiste, and William - migrated to Nauvoo in 1848. Peter Reimbold became a doctor in the community. His daughters married into the Kirschbaum, Schenk, and Rheinberger families. Peter's son operated a hardware store on Mulholland Street for 50 years before passing it down to his son and grandson. John Baptiste Reimbold's oldest son, John, attended Notre Dame University in 1857 and seminary in Chicago. Father John Reimbold returned to his hometown to serve as a pastor. He spearheaded the building of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church. He also began the legacy of Catholic education in Nauvoo and the surrounding area, and helped to found the Spalding Academy for boys and St. Mary's Academy for girls. Fr. Reimbold also worked to establish a motherhouse of Nauvoo Benedictine Sisters.

William Reimbold, built a stone arched wine cellar and grew eight acres of grapes. His grandson bought the ferry boat City of Nauvoo, which ran from Nauvoo to Montrose until the ice storm of 1947 destroyed it. William's descendant purchased a building on Mulholland Street and named it the Oriental Hotel; it later became the historic Hotel Nauvoo.

Blessing of the grapes at the old Wellner Farm by Father Tholen, 1941
Courtesy of Allaman Council 1853 Knights of Columbus, Nauvoo, Illinois

Nauvoo is sometimes thought of as a "Mormon" town, but Catholics have been the largest single group here for over 140 of Nauvoo's 171-year history. Catholic schools towered over the Nauvoo flats for more than a century. Across the street and north of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church stood Schenk's brewery, built of Nauvoo Temple stone. Down the street from the Catholic church stands a reconstructed Nauvoo Temple. On the southwest corner of the Temple Block stood the Icarian Schoolhouse, also built of temple stone. Mormon, Icarian, German, and Catholic journeys intersect in Nauvoo. They came here hoping for a better life, a dream we share.

Background image of the aerial view of Nauvoo showing buildings and churches, ca. 1940
Courtesy Brigham Young University Library, L. Tom Perry Special Collections