

# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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Diocese of Columbus

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May 17: F. X. Specht

May, 2011

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## **One of Nature's Noblemen: Msgr. Franz Xaver Specht (1840-1913)**

Monsignor F. X. Specht, pastor of St. Mary's Parish in what now is known as German Village in Columbus, often appeared to be a formidable figure, striding down Third Street, at six feet, one and a half inches, wearing a tall silk hat. But he always had a smile and a word of praise for each one he met, no doubt reflected by a twinkle in his gray eyes. Wherever he went the children gathered around him, both Catholic and non-Catholic, for they knew well his open heart.

According to Bishop Hartley, "His kindness, his charity, his benevolence, his tender sympathy, made every one look up to his majestic figure with

the confidence that is always inspired by love and friendship." In the early days of his pastorate he was the most popular of the clergy among the young men and maids, and hundreds of them came to him to be married. In time their children came to him to be married. Under his care St. Mary's Parish was in splendid spiritual condition; the people went to the Sacraments and attended the divine services in great numbers. By 1913 the parish was the largest in the diocese, with over 800 families, over 2,000 communicants, and over 600 children in the school. He was the founding pastor of the parish and served it nearly fifty years.

### Early Life

Franz Xaver Heinrich Specht was born on November 4, 1840, in Osnabrück, Hanover, Germany, to Mathias Conrad Specht and his wife Bernardine. Mathias had been born in Gesmold near Osnabrück and was a tailor. There were at least two other sons and a daughter. Bernardine had gone to her eternal reward before Franz left for America.

Franz was educated in the *Gymnasium* in Osnabrück. It was in 1857 that V. Rev. Joseph Fernending of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati met young Franz who, “with a view to offering his services at some future day in some of the poorly attended missions in the United States of America, ...came over to this country.” He landed on August 2, 1857 and immediately entered Mount St. Mary’s of the West Seminary to study for the priesthood for the Archdiocese. In the seminary’s college course for 1859/60 he took honors in Greek and Modern History. He received his degree, with honors in Rhetoric, on June 24, 1861.

He received tonsure and minor orders from Archbishop Purcell on Dec. 18, 1862 and was ordained Subdeacon on May 28, 1863. He was

ordained to the priesthood by Rt. Rev. Sylvester H. Rosecrans, Auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati, on March 12, 1864 in St. Peter Cathedral. Rosecrans had taught Specht at Mt. St. Mary’s and would be his bishop in Columbus beginning in 1868.

After his ordination, Father Specht was sent to Columbus to assist Father J. B. Hemsteger, pastor of Holy Cross, the only German Catholic Parish of Columbus. The number of German Catholics was growing and in 1863 under the direction of Father Hemsteger, with a committee of laymen, the present St. Mary’s parish property had been purchased as a site for a second German parish. Early in 1865 Father Specht was assigned to organize the parish. A contract to build the schoolhouse was signed on March 17, 1865. It was completed in short order and contained, downstairs, a chapel and classroom, and, upstairs, a room for Father Specht that served as drawing room, study, and bedroom.

### Parish Plant Development

On Sunday afternoon, May 13, 1866, the cornerstone of St. Mary’s Church or *Marienkirche* was laid and was blessed by Archbishop John B.



*Father Specht with girls of the parish school, a Sister of St Francis, and Father Horny.*

Purcell, Bishop Josue M. Young of Erie (who had visited Columbus while pastor at Lancaster) and Fathers John Albrinck of Reading, Louis Cartuyvels of Newark, John Schill of Dayton, and the clergy of Columbus, namely Fathers J. B. Hemsteger and F. X. Specht of Holy Cross, Edward Fitzgerald of St. Patrick Parish, and Benedict Pius of St. Francis Hospital along with soon to be ordained Bernhard Hildebrandt. It was an elaborate affair that began with a procession from St. Patrick's to Holy Cross and on to the new church site. The clergy assembled where the altar was to be built and the ceremonies were explained. They then proceeded to the southwestern corner of the foundations, where they laid and blessed the cornerstone. A procession with songs and other ceremonies around the site was followed by speeches in German by Father Albrinck and English by Archbishop Purcell. The name of the church was to be "Mary, Mother of God."

The pastor and parishioners celebrated with great joy when the beautiful church was dedicated on November 29, 1868. Father Specht moved from the school to rooms above the sacristy.

On the last day of February, 1869, Stations of the Cross were erected in accordance with the regulations set by the Holy Congregation of Indulgences. The document in the diocesan archives recording this event, signed by Bishop Rosecrans, confirms the name of the church as stated in the 1866 *Catholic Telegraph* article: *Ecclesia St. Mariae Matris Dei*, Church of St. Mary Mother of God.

As time went on, Father Specht oversaw the continued physical development of the church and other parish buildings. In 1870 three bells were hung in the tower; the rectory was built in 1872; a pipe organ was installed in 1875. The spire was completed in 1893 and a clock installed there the following year. Meanwhile, a new school was erected in 1888 and a convent was built in 1875 for the Sisters of St. Francis who came from Joliet, Illinois, to teach in the parish school.

Under Father Specht's guidance St. Mary's Parish grew to be the largest in the diocese, much more than he could handle alone. A full-time assistant pastor was sent to the parish in 1886.

## Diocesan Work

Father Specht was highly respected by Bishops Rosecrans, Watterson, Moeller, and Hartley. Bishop Watterson appointed him Vicar General in 1885. In this capacity, in the absence of the bishop, he was responsible for some of the bishop's duties, the most common being to receive and pass judgement on requests for various dispensations related to marriages (mixed marriages and dispensation from public bans, for example) and to approve of some financial transactions of the pastors.

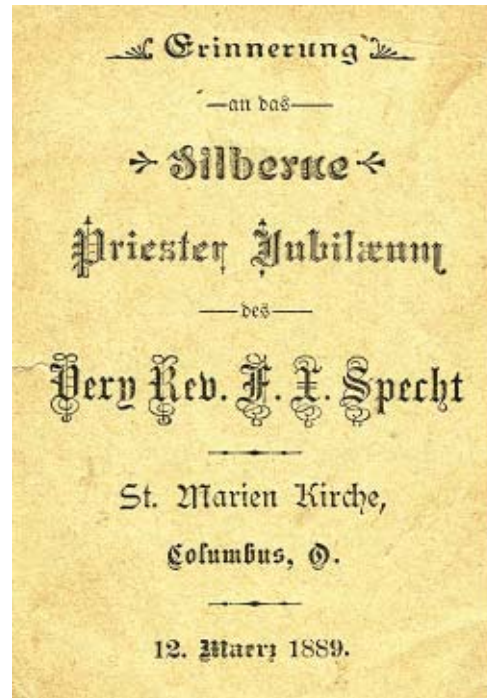
In 1887 after the close of a diocesan synod the clergy met to establish an Infirm Priests' Fund; they elected Specht to its board and the board elected him vice president.

On April 21, 1899, four days after the death of Bishop Watterson, Archbishop Elder of Cincinnati named Specht Administrator of the Diocese of Columbus. The archives file of the time shows the job of Administrator to be all nitty gritty work on finances, debt, bills, and insurance, but no glory—and the job was in addition to his duties as pastor. Under his leadership the diocesan debt was reduced from about \$180,000 in April of 1899 to \$176,000 at July 1, 1900. But there were joyful occasions: on Sept. 24, 1899 he dedicated St. John the Evangelist Church in Columbus and on November 5, 1899 he dedicated Sacred Heart Church in Pomeroy. In addition, on March 13, 1900 he approved the agreement that brought the Franciscan Sisters from Alverno, Wisconsin, to open Good Samaritan Hospital in Zanesville. As a result of his work as Administrator, it was said, he was named a Domestic Prelate, with the title of Monsignor, in a Pontifical brief dated May 13, 1902.

When Bishop Moeller was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Cincinnati, he was not sure whether he would be allowed to be both Bishop of Columbus and Coadjutor of Cincinnati, so on May 23, 1903 he appointed Specht to the position of Diocesan Administrator for a second term. By this time he had been named Permanent (or irremovable) Rector of St. Mary's Parish.

Bishop Hartley's first official appointment made after he became bishop was the reappointment of





*Souvenir of Father Specht's Silver Jubilee, 1889*

Monsignor Specht as Vicar General, on March 12, 1904. As such he consecrated a new bell for St. Stanislaus (Polish) Parish in Steubenville in 1905.

### **Personal**

Father Specht's father, Mathias Specht, came to this country in 1874 and lived with him in the new rectory at St. Mary's until his death in 1884. Father Specht's brother Karl or Charles Specht, a carpenter, also came to Columbus and lived on East Kossuth Street. In addition, some cousins migrated to Cincinnati.

Father Specht returned to visit Europe only once, in the late 1880s. In 1889 the silver jubilee of his ordination was observed with a Solemn High Mass and a banquet at St. Mary's, on March 12. Forty-five priests from across the state joined the people of the parish in this grand celebration.

It was said that Monsignor Specht had no great ambition for recognition and that higher honors than the few he accepted might have come to him if he had permitted. "There were no very exciting incidents in his career, but there was the faithful performance of high duties for almost half a century.

The altar, the confessional, the pulpit, the school, the hospital, the house of death—these were the round of his task." He was...widely known for his devotion to duty and his great love for his congregation... He knew his people and they knew him. In their service he spent himself.

He suffered from malaria for over twenty years, but his robust constitution always overcame this and other ills. He enjoyed a good cigar but was extremely quiet and careful about his habits.

Beginning about December, 1912, at the age of 72, he was able to say Mass only at times. He looked forward to celebrate his golden jubilee in the priesthood the next year, but was resigned to God's will in the matter.

Throughout his priestly career he liberally gave assistance to many people. He was known for his extreme charity and while never a rich man, gave freely of his income and earnings. He was a patron of St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum and was a friend to all orphans. After his death on Thursday, May 29, 1913, by his direction whatever worldly goods he possessed were given to the orphans and the other charities of the diocese.

Of him Bishop Hartley said, as part of his funeral sermon, “Monsignor Specht—Father Specht, as everybody loved to call him—was not only a grand true priest of God, but was also one of nature’s noblemen. He had those beautiful traits of character and qualities of heart and mind that endeared him to all who knew him.

“His kindness, his charity, his benevolence, his tender sympathy, made every one look up to his majestic figure with the confidence that is always inspired by love and friendship. No matter what the faults or human frailties which this old human nature of ours imposes upon us all, no matter what these were, towering above them all in beloved Monsignor Specht stood forth one of nature’s noblemen with a kindness and sympathy that knew no bounds....

“As ambassador of Christ he had only one policy, one aim, one ambition in life, and that was to unite all in the bonds of faith and charity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every day he knelt in this sanctuary to beg in prayer and silent meditation for the grace to know God’s will and the strength to go forth and carry it into execution....

“To his brother priests he was a devoted and noble friend. To his Bishop he was as loyal, responsive, and respectful as the bravest officer that ever stood on the field of battle, to all a model of humility and obedience.”

## SOURCES

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- Columbus *Express und Westbote*, May 29, 1913
- Columbus *Westbote*, May 17, 1866 and June 3, 1913
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## Abstracts from the *Catholic Telegraph*

(Continued, from Vol. XXXVI, No. 4)

December 25, 1858, continued

### Marion.

We were most agreeably disappointed [*sic!*] in the prosperous and promising condition of the congregation of Marion. The chapel was tastefully and edifyingly arranged, and it was filled with a healthy, well-to-do in the world and devout looking people. The large number of sixty-eight were Confirmed. The Archbishop gave an instruction on the Sacraments on Saturday evening, preached at Mass, and again after the Rosary at 3 p.m., and

delivered a discourse in the Court-house in the evening, to a very large, intelligent and attentive audience. A lot was purchased for a church five years ago, and the foundations laid; but the purchase money was not paid nor the taxes, and the lot was sold for the mortgage and the taxes, until it seemed to be irretrievably lost to its sacred destination. A wealthy Irish Catholic, Mr. Timothy Fahy, redeemed the original note, now amounting, with interest, to \$300, and generously presented it to the Archbishop for the benefit of the congregation. The balance due for taxes was paid off by the building committee, and a determination expressed by all to complete the good work in the course of the next year. This can be easily done if the Olean Railroad, as is

confidently expected, will be built in '59. The congregation have also purchased three acres for a cemetery, part of which has been paid. The flock has evidently gained much by the residence among them and the labors of Rev. Mr. M'Sweeney. There are several families of German Catholics residing about three or six miles from Marion, but very few attended church, as they were not aware that a German priest was in town.

...Bellefontaine...

The Archbishop preached to a large auditory in the Court-house [in Urbana] on the evening of his arrival, and next morning in the church. There is much want of a Mission at Bethlehem, fifteen miles from Delaware, which place was visited from Marion by Rev. Mr. Toebbe. He found that several German Catholic families—fifteen, it is said—had almost fallen away from the faith. It is only fifteen miles from Delaware, where there is a German priest. We call his attention to the statement; and invite some one of our zealous German missionaries to spend a week, or two, in that neighborhood. There is a certain class that easily fall away from grace and truth, when not near a church. Help the seminary to multiply good priests.

#### [Charitable Work in Columbus]

The *Ohio Statesman* of the 14th Dec. contains the following notice of a work of charity recently commenced in Columbus. The lady who has undertaken it is German, a convert, who founded, with the aid of the rich, a hospital in Dantzic, on the Baltic, for German Catholics, who conducted Cardinal Wiseman to the death-bed of the notorious John Rouge, and who came to this diocese, after one or two conferences with the excellent Mrs. Sarah Peter of Cincinnati, whom she met in Europe, in the course of the last year. We have already spoken of her zeal and charitable intentions in this paper. The field of charitable enterprise in this city being pre-occupied by the good Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy and the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, *Sister Felicity*, as this worthy lady is called, although she does not belong to any religious community, and three assistants whom she procured in this country,

are bound by no vow and wear no religious costume, was advised by the Most Rev. Archbishop to select Columbus, the State capital, for her benevolent projects. A charitable society of the German Church of the Holy Cross in that city, has assured the payment of one-half the rent of the house she occupies, and the citizens, generally, aid her to feed and clothe the orphans and the poor for whom she is interested. We do not think that the *Statesman* is quite accurate in representing the institution as exclusively German. We believe that such is not the intention of *Sister Felicity*, and we know that the orphans and the poor already objects of her care, are not exclusively German. Without regarding the incipient community as a religious one, or sanctioning it as such, the Archbishop grants it his cordial approbation, and hopes that it will accomplish much good.

#### THE GERMAN ORPHAN ASYLUM.

We have had much to say of late about an Orphan's Home establishment, which we are happy to say is now "in the full tide of successful operation," but we have not printed a line in regard to a similar establishment on Friend street, for the simple reason that we were not aware of its existence. So quietly and humbly has it progressed that doubtless many of our citizens are totally ignorant of there being an institution in this city called the German Orphan asylum, which has also been in successful operation for months. Yesterday afternoon we visited the asylum on the corner of Friend and Sixth street, and was [sic] not a little surprised by what we saw and heard... The house occupied by the orphans is a neat two story brick, near the corner of Friend and Sixth streets, and has been used by them for two months or more. The matron of the asylum is *Sister Felicitas von Fitz*, formerly a Sister of Charity in Paris, Vienna, and other great European cities. She came to Columbus about six weeks ago, for the purpose of establishing an orphan-trophy. She is a professor of medicine, having studied and attended medical lectures at the most celebrated institution in Europe, and this in connection with her vast experience in the management and conduct of similar establishments, well fits her to carry out the truly charitable designs to which she has devoted her life. And we should judge from appearances, that her efforts in behalf of

the poor and needy in this city have not failed to alleviate much misery and unhappiness.

The asylum now contains twenty-eight persons, including women and children of all ages, most of them, however, being children under ten years of age. These children have been picked up in the streets, at the County Infirmary and wherever they could be found; many of them found in such a state of wretchedness, filth and disease as would have prevented many a benevolent person from administering to their wants, even had they been aware of their condition. These children are all furnished with food, clothing and medical assistance by the kind Matron who is untiring in her attentions and exertions, and by no means penurious with her means in ministering to their physical or moral wants. The rooms of the house are not exceedingly well furnished, but they are kept neat and clean and comfortable at all times, and the little children enjoy as great a degree of comfort as they would in the homes of the most kind and indulgent parents. Their food is substantial and healthy, and they are always kept as clean and as neatly dressed as it is possible to keep children.

This is not merely a religious institution, for no inquiries are made whether the recipients of this charity are professors of this or that religious belief. All are treated alike. Every day a meal is prepared for other poor and destitute people, and many go there to get a

morsel of bread and a plate of palatable soup regular every day without charge or question. Burly beggars and destitute cripples, half starved children and poverty-stricken women, all go to the Orphan Asylum for food, and are never turned from the door cold or hungry, for the pious Sister would not turn the vilest of human creatures from her house even if she knew she was being imposed upon.

The friends of this institution, mostly Germans, have not been niggardly or remiss in their donations or attentions to the benevolent work, and most of the furniture the house contains has been voluntarily contributed. Even a crowned head of Europe has remembered a friend working in the cause of charity in the New World. The Matron contemplates a great surprise to her children on Christmas Eve. Some Christian and benevolent person presented the Asylum with a goodly number of well made children's shoes, while others have contributed shares of clothing, toys and other necessaries, with which the crowd of little ones are to be made familiar on that ever memorable holiday. They will doubtless have a happy Christmas!

Those who have interested themselves in this institution will continue their efforts in the charitable and Christian enterprise, and we hope they will meet with that success in all respects which they so eminently deserve.

(To be continued)

## St. Mary Parish, Lancaster Baptismal Register, 1834-1843

(Continued, from Vol. XXXVI, No. 4)

1840, continued

July 17 Mary Ann daughter of Michael Casey and Mary Grady spouses; spon. Garrett Keith and Mary Keelnan [or perhaps Kulnar?]. J. M. Young

July 19 Mary Louise, nine months old, daughter of the lawful marriage of Samuel D. Schlosser and Anna Margareta Bodenheimer; spon. Maria Rosa Bodenheimer. J. M. Young

July 21 Joanna, daughter of Thomas Ogden and Mary Cooney, spouses; spon. Thomas Coony and Helen Fitzpatrick. Joshua M. Young

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August 2, 1840, Dennis son of Edward Keenan and Anna Gilbride; spon. Jos. Brophy and

Mary Burns.

Same, Ellen, daughter of Timothy Maher and Katharine McMany; spon. Michael Welch and Helen Shehan.

Same, James, son of Mr. McNaughton and Bridget Foley; spon. Timothy Gravy and Marg. Foley.

Same, Thomas of Henry McGeogh and Margaret Arnold; spon. Joseph Malone and Joanna Lee.

Same, the 4th, Edward, whose sponsors were Edward McGlin and Catherine Foley and Ellen whose sponsors were ——— [over written] and Anna Manahan, children of Edward

Lynch and Ellen Early, spouses. J. M. Young

August 5, Mary, adult, wife of Thomas Carr



(formerly Parker), happily converted from the camp of the heretics; spon. Michael Collins and Mary Hanlan. J. M. Young

Same, John, son of Edward Sheridan and Ann Monahan; spon. Bernard McCool and Ann Monahan. J. M. Young

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August 5, Elizabeth daughter of John Kelly and Sara Gilliland; spon. K— Brice and Susan Denman. J. M. Young

Same, Mary Ann, daughter of Michael Kenny and Ann Riley; spon. Hugh McTeague and Mary Sheridan.

Same, Ann, daughter of James Duffy and Bridget Haunney, spouses; spon. Patrick Brennan and Ann Riley. Josue M. Young

Aug. 9 Anastasius, son of Landolin Maasbarger and Genevieve Gunkler; spon. George Shetzler and Walburga Kellen.

Same, Wilhelmina, daughter of Conrad Pletz and Margaret Miller; spon. John Schoenberger and Wilhelmina Schur. J. M. Young

Aug. 12 Frederick Valentine, born Oct. 31 of the previous year, of the lawful marriage of Frederick Iegler and Catherine Janivet; spon. Valentine Starck and Caroline his daughter. J. M. Young

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August 12, 1840 Eugenia Angela born May 26 of this year, from the lawful marriage of Valentine Starck and Catharine Jamvet; spon. Louis Blair Sen. and Agatha Triolese. Joshua M. Young

Aug. 18 at Delaware, John Adam son of John Getreu and Catherine Haik, spouses; spon. Adam Mueller.

Same, Elizabeth daughter of Gregory Pfeifer and Anna Maria Beck, spouses; spon. Maria Anna Kricher?

Same, Anna Catharina daughter of Andrew Edelmann and Christina Rolhop, spouses; spon. Catherine Getreu.

Same, Emma Ann, daughter of Adam Mueller and Lucy Ann Janes, spouses; sponsor Maria Krecher. J. M. Young

August 23, Margaret Elizabeth daughter of Stephan Ward and [page 49] Sara McGeogh; spon. Hugh Montague

25th, ceremonies of baptism for Joseph son of George Wyland and Catherine Schroeder; spon. Joseph Kessler and Marg. Wyland.

Sept. 11 George son of Joseph Shetzler and Catherine Wagner, spouses; spon. George Shetzler and Frances his wife. Jos. M. Young

Sept. 13 Samuel son of Joseph Welcher and Frances Ottiney, spouses; spon. Matthias Welcher and Magdalen Ottiney.

Same, Francis son of Patrick Ganon and Bridget Quin; spon. Dennis and Ann Hurley. Josua M. Young

Sept. 20 Joseph son of Joseph Raugh and Regina Phillip, spouses; spon. Joseph Phillips and Anna Maria his sister.

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Sept. 20, 1840 Rosina daughter of Laurence Beck and Mary Ann Wilson, spouses; spon. Francis Brown and Rosina Beck.

Same, Mary Ann, daughter of Francis Langhol; spon. the mother of the infant through great ignorance!

Same, Susan daughter of George Schenck and Barbara his wife; spon. Laurence Schur. J. M. Young

Sept. 22, George, born August 30, son of lawful marriage of Minrad Neuninger and Barbara Shetzler; spon. Conrad Weaver and Mary Magdalen Shetzler. J. M. Young

Sept. 30, Jerome, son of Francis Carr and Catherine Chorister, spouses; spon. Daniel Cush and Ann Haw. J. M. Young

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Sept. 30, 1840, James Bernard, son of Daniel Cush and Catherine Carr, spouses; spon. Wm. Burke and Margt Carr

(To be continued)

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