

# Rev. George Thomas Montgomery (1847-1907)

By Jerry Long



Rev. George Montgomery (1847-1907)



**The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1995, p.296:**

**Montgomery, Right Rev. George, D.D.**, Bishop Montgomery, when he became bishop of Monterey and Los Angeles, was physically in the prime of life. Born in Kentucky, Dec. 30, 1847, he was in his 49th year. He had been ordained to the priesthood in Baltimore, Dec. 20, 1879. When he came to Los Angeles as coadjutor, he virtually took over the administration of the diocese because of Bishop Mora's precarious health. Earnest and energetic, with a particularly kindly personality, Bishop Montgomery from the very beginning of his residence here became a power in the life of Southern California, not only in his position as a churchman, but in his ready willingness to assume the burdens and responsibilities of a civic leader. His popularity was great with all classes of our citizenry, as may be seen from an editorial tribute in the *Los Angeles Times* at the time of his death in 1907.

It was fortunate for Catholic interests here that his merit as a public figure was so generally recognized, because he came to Los Angeles at a time when the county was passing through the

throes of a resurgent epidemic of anti-Catholic bigotry. The so-called American Protective Association, popularly known as the A.P.A. was engaged in a campaign to exclude Catholics from public office and from remunerative mercantile employment. A covert, and sometimes overt, boycott of Catholic businessmen was part of the program of intolerance. Unfortunately, Los Angeles was to a very large extent affected by this un-American movement. In 1894, the A.P.A. element made a considerable showing in the city elections. Absurd charges and fantastic stories of Catholic disloyalty to American ideals were made from many platforms and from some pulpits. In the face of this campaign of proscription Bishop Montgomery acted promptly and decisively. A branch of the Catholic Truth Society of San Francisco was organized a series of popular lectures on Catholic doctrine was given by able speakers, among them the late Father Peter C. Yorke, who had carried on a successful newspaper controversy in San Francisco with a whole bevy of opponents. Sermons appropriate to the demands of the time were preached every Sunday night in St. Vibiana's Cathedral. The Catholic schools of the city took a notable part in the Fourth of July parade in 1895 in defiance of cowardly threats made, so to speak, in the dark. In fine, the Catholics of the city and diocese were well organized to meet the onslaughts of the A.P.A., and in the end the whole movement ignominiously collapsed, particularly after its motives were repudiated in 1896 by the leaders of both our great parties. Bishop Montgomery had rendered a signal service, not only to his own people, but to the principles of good American citizenship itself. One of the results of the campaign against bigotry was the establishment of the Tidings, as already mentioned; and later in 1899, the founding of the Newman Club of Los Angeles (which, after 41 years, still holds its regular monthly meetings) helped further to strengthen Catholic social and intellectual life in Los Angeles. The Club had from the beginning the bishop's hearty approval.

It may therefore be fairly said that, in the long run, the A.P.A. outbreak reacted beneficially on the Church in Southern California. This was, indeed, the judgment of the daily press when good Bishop Montgomery regretfully left Los Angeles a few years later.

**Appointed Archbishop.** In September 1902, word was received of the appointment of Bishop Montgomery as coadjutor, with the right of succession, to Archbishop Riordan of San Francisco. He became titular Archbishop of Osimo. The archbishop was recipient of many testimonials of esteem from his fellow-citizens, and a large public gathering paid him merited honors on the eve of his departure. He left Los Angeles for his new post on the evening of Feb. 3, 1903. Very Rev. Patrick Harnett was appointed administrator of the diocese.

**Civic Tribute.** The following fine tribute was paid to the Archbishop by a non-Catholic editorial writer in the *Los Angeles Herald* (then a morning paper). It forms a fitting conclusion to this brief survey of his episcopal career in the diocese:

“Bishop Montgomery has been the central figure of at least two memorable and significant banquets given in this city within the last few years. At the first banquet there met around the board ministers of practically every religious denomination to listen to and discuss an address by Bishop Montgomery on ‘Religious Tolerance.’ On the second occasion last Wednesday night (Jan 29 1903), the bishop was greeted in sympathy and warm affection, not only by his hosts, the Newman Club, but by men of many creeds and various professions, who esteemed it a high privilege to be able to pay tribute by their presence to so liberal a thinker and ardent worker as the guest of honor had proven himself to be.

“Bishop Montgomery's place in Los Angeles and in the hearts of all sorts and conditions of men may not be filled; but, nevertheless, we welcome the fact that he has been preferred to a still more important post, where his devotion to humanity and his sound liberal judgment may wield a still wider influence. The agnostic may have received—we say it with all reverence—as

great a blessing from the life and example of George Montgomery as the most devout churchman, nor will the Protestant yield to the Catholic in the warmth of his admiration for the noble character of this remarkable man.

Whatever his future dignity, wherever he may be summoned by his church, Los Angeles will not forget her friend nor the lesson that Bishop Montgomery had ably demonstrated to this community, 'the greatest thing in the world,' and Christ's single law—Love One Another'."

Most Rev. George Montgomery was born Dec. 30, 1847 at St. Lawrence, KY. He was baptized and made First Communion, confirmation at St. Lawrence. He was ordained a priest on Dec. 20, 1879 in Baltimore, MD. Consecrated bishop April 8, 1894 in Monterey and Los Angeles, CA.

Appointed coadjutor archbishop of San Francisco, CA Sept. 17, 1903. Returned to St. William's, Knottsville, KY May 28. 1898 to ordain his first cousin, Rev. Lucien E. Clements to the priesthood in St. William Church.

Visited Daviess County, November 1905 as archbishop of San Francisco. Visited Mount St. Joseph Nov. 10, 1905, visited his three first cousins, Sisters Bernard, Columba and Mary Paul, all of Montgomery family.



**From “Diocese of Monterey and Los Angeles”, [catholic.org/encyclopedia](http://catholic.org/encyclopedia):**

Rt. Rev. George Montgomery was born in Daviess County, Kentucky, 30 December, 1847, and was ordained priest at Baltimore, 20 December, 1879. He held the post of Chancellor of the Archdiocese of San Francisco until his consecration as titular Bishop of Tumi, 8 April, 1894, when he became coadjutor to Bishop Mora. Two years later he succeeded to the see and at once displayed remarkable energy. At this period immigrants from the eastern States began to flock to southern California in great numbers. Los Angeles more than doubled its population. New needs arose which it was the endeavor of the bishop to meet by building churches and schools, and by calling to his aid more priests and religious. In season and out of season Bishop Montgomery insisted on the necessity of educating children in Catholic schools. It was his fearless attitude which compelled the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to recognize the right of Indian parents and guardians to send their children to the schools of their choice independent of the reservation agent. Subsequently this same view was adopted by the Government, and made the rule for all the Indians in the United States. The bishop thus in every way manifested a watchful solicitude for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the diocese. His personality won friends for the Church on all sides, whilst his vigorous defence of Catholic doctrine, as well as his clean-cut, outspoken advocacy of American rights and duties, gave to the Church in southern California a great onward movement and prepared the way for Bishop Conaty's administration. In 1903 Bishop Montgomery was appointed Archbishop of Osino in partibus and made coadjutor to the Archbishop of San Francisco. He died, 10 January, 1907, sincerely lamented by all classes, especially by the poor. During his administration the following congregations of religious were received into the diocese : Christian Brothers, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of the Holy Cross, Sisters of the Holy Names, Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of the Presentation, and the Ursuline Sisters.



In the baptismal records of the St. Lawrence Catholic Church, in Daviess County, KY it is recorded that George Thomas Montgomery, son of Pius Montgomery and his wife, was born 30 December 1847, and was baptized on 11 January 1848 by Rev. W. L. Coomes (Saint Lawrence Baptismal Records, by Anna Hamilton, McDowell Publications, Utica, KY, 1985, p.12). The following sketch of the St. Lawrence Church was published in the 1876 An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY., page 67:



George Montgomery was the son of Pius Michael Montgomery (1816-1897) and Harriet E. Warren (1819-1858). His parents were married on 28 December 1837 in Nelson County, KY. George was the grandson of Thomas Francis Montgomery (1791-1851), a native of Maryland, and Mary Clotilda Wathen (1795-1860), who were married on 16 January 1815 in Nelson County, KY. Thomas was named as an early settler in the St. Lawrence neighborhood of Daviess County, KY in the book, The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky (Hon. Ben. J. Webb, Louisville, KY, 1884, p.425):

.... From 1816 to 1830 there was an influx of Catholic movers, mostly from Nelson county, to the neighborhood from which was afterwards drawn the congregation of St. Lawrence. Among these were the families of John Payne, Charles Jarboe, Leonard Knott, from whom the town of Knottsville takes its name, Thomas Montgomery, John Bowles, Hilary Drury, S. McDaniel, Richard R. Coomes, Ben. All, Peter Higdon, and – Carrico.



Thomas F. Montgomery made his home in Daviess County, KY during 1827-1828. He is listed in the 1840 census of Daviess County, KY. Thomas & Clotilda have gravestones in the St. Lawrence Catholic Church Cemetery, near Knottsville, in Daviess County, KY.

George Montgomery is listed with his parents in the 1850 federal census of Hancock County, KY. Their family was enumerated as:

128	445	Thos Montgomery	34	M	Farmer
		Harriet "	30	F	
		Louisa J "	30	F	
		Charles W "	8	M	
		Monarchy "	6	F	
		Josephine "	4	F	
		George "	3	M	

George Montgomery's mother, Harriet, died in 1858. She has a gravestone in the St. Lawrence Catholic Church Cemetery, near Knottsville, in Daviess County, KY. George Montgomery, age 13, in the 1860 census is listed as residing near Knottsville, Daviess County, KY in the home of Mrs. Susan Coomes; she was Susan Howard, widow of Dennis Davis Coomes (1810-1845):

707	Susan Coomes	48	W	Domestic
	Alta	17	M	Hand
	Kemp	14	F	
	George Montgomery	13	M	

+

**The Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, MD, Monday, 22 December 1879, p.5:**

**Ordinations.**—The semi-annual ordination of students of St. Mary's Seminary, in Baltimore city, took place at the Cathedral Saturday, 40 candidates in all receiving the various orders, conferred by Archbishop Gibbons. Very Rev. A. Magnien, D. D., S. S., superior of the seminary, and Rev. A. S. Fonteneau, S. S., one of the professors, assisted the Archbishop. The following priests, Revs. Paulinus F. Dissez, S. S., Thomas S. Lee, Alfred A. Curtis, Peter McCoy and Owen B. Corrigan, were also present, and a number of friends of the postulants. Rev. James A. McCallen, S. S., was master of ceremonies. The ordinations were as follows:

Priests—Revs. Thomas J. Broyderick, John D. Boland, Stephen J. Clarke, John J. Dougherty, Baltimore; Rev. James T. O'Farrell, Richmond; Rev. John L. Gaddell, St. Louis; Rev. George Montgomery, San Francisco; Rev. Michael J. Lynch, Hartford; Rev. Patrick W. Daune, Chicago; Rev. Eugene P. Maloney, Brooklyn; Rev. John B. Drennan, Springfield; Rev. Willigisius Isle, of the Order of Capuchins, Cumberland.

Among the priests who were ordained was Rev. George Montgomery, from the San Francisco archdiocese



George Montgomery in his teens under the care of his uncle, Zachariah Thomas Montgomery (1825-1900) went to reside in California. His uncle had left Daviess County, KY in 1849 and went to California, where he became a prominent lawyer; he held several important offices; during the Civil War he published the newspaper, "Occidental", at San Francisco and was US assistant attorney general during the first term of President Cleveland.

George Montgomery immediately upon being ordained to the priesthood was assigned to a parish in San Francisco, CA. He remained in California the remained of his life. In the San Francisco and Los Angeles, CA newspapers during 1882-1907 there appeared thousands of references to Rev. George Montgomery. Some of his lectures were published in the editions.

In the 1886 California Voter Registration list "George Thomas Montgomery", age 38, born KY, clergyman, is reported to be a resident of 1122 Eddy in San Francisco County. The 1896 California Voter Registration shows George Montgomery, Bishop of Los Angeles, age 47, born KY, resident of 118 East 2nd in Los Angeles Precinct, and gives his description as height – 5 feet 6 inches, complexion – fair, color of eyes – blue and color of hair – brown. George Montgomery, born in Dec 1847, bishop, resident of 118 East Second in Los Angeles, CA, appears in the 1900 federal census. The 1904 California Voter Registration reports that George Montgomery, age 56, was a resident of 1100 Franklin in San Francisco County.



**The National City Record, National City, CA, 18 January 1894, p.2:**

—The announcement has been received from Rome that Rev. George Montgomery, chancellor of the archdiocese of San Francisco, has been appointed Coadjutor Bishop of the diocese of Monterey and Los Angeles. The recipient of this high honor is a nephew of the Hon. Zachariah Montgomery, of Fruitland.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 8 June 1898, p.6:**

Distinguished Citizens Who Were Born At Knottsville.  
Long Line of Ministers, Docors and Lawyers Who  
Drew Inspiration from Her Classic Hills.

The three days of family reunion, social and religious gatherings out at Knottsville last week recalls the face that the old red hills in the Eastern end of Daviess county form a large and influential precinct. The first settlers were families by the name of Smeathers, Duncan, Bell, Aud, Adams, Husk, Montgomery, Metcalf, Coomes, Winkler and Clements, from whom have sprung ministers, professional men and other good citizens of whom she may well be proud. Rt. Rev. George Montgomery, D. D., of Los Angeles, Cal., who spent last week at his old home, stands pre-eminently first. The bishop was born two miles east of Knottsville, fifty years ago, and is a grandson of "Sugar Tom" Montgomery, who came from Maryland. Young George Montgomery first attended school at old St. Lawrence. His mother died when he was a mere boy. In 1860 his uncle, Hon. Zach Montgomery, a '49er to California, returned home on a visit, became interested in his promising nephew, placed him in Cecilia college, Hardin county, and on graduating there, sent him to the seminary in Baltimore, Md., where he was ordained a priest twenty years ago. He located in California, was secretary to the archbishop of Sam Francisco until appointed bishop of Los Angeles four years ago. Doctor Montgomery is an able man, a splendid preacher, an earnest priest, as popular with all denominations as he is with members of his own church.



**Owensboro Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 3 January 1902, p.1:**



Above Is the latest portrait of the Right Reverend George Montgomery, Roman Catholic bishop of Monterey aid Los Angeles, who is about to be appointed bishop of Manila. His selection for the important post by the Vatican gives great satisfaction in this country.

Bishop Montgomery is a native of Daviess county, Ky., having been born in Knottsville precinct about fifty-two years ago. He Is the son of the late Pius Montgomery and went to California when about fifteen years of age, where he was educated for the priesthood by his uncle, the late Zach Montgomery. His aunt, Mrs. C. O. Clements, still resides at Knottsville and Bishop Montgomery visited his old home about five years ago to confirm his nephew, Father Lucien Clements, in the priesthood. The probability of Bishop Montgomery's appointment to the new post at Manila is not known to his relatives here. Daviess county is proud of this distinguished prelate she has produced.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 19 January 1902, p.5:**

Bishop Montgomery

Something of the Daviess County History of the Noted Prelate.

The Rt. Rev. George Montgomery, who has been appointed bishop of the Philippine islands, is a Daviess county man, having been born and reared at old St. Lawrence in this county, where he has numerous relatives. In the cemetery there four tombstones mark the graves of his mother and three sisters, who died within the space of three weeks, and who were buried, one on each of four successive Sundays. The fatal malady of which they died was known to the neighbors as "black fever."

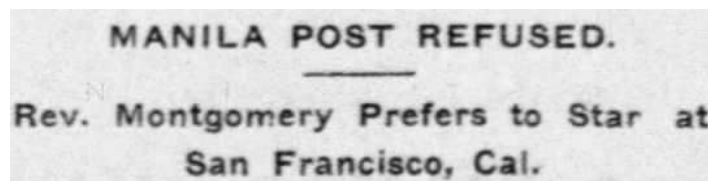
The bishop is about fifty years of age. He went to California as a young priest twenty-five years ago and was for several years in charge of the Catholic parish in San Francisco under Archbishop Riordan. He was in his charge seven years ago when he was made bishop of Los Angeles. He has always been an ardent advocate of total abstinence and as an organizer of boys' T. A. societies his record is unsurpassed. At one Father Matthew demonstration in San Francisco he had 6,000 pledged T. A. boys in line of march.

Four years ago he visited Owensboro and his old home. Knottsville, where he conferred the orders of the priesthood on his nephew, Lucien Clements, now a priest at Fancy Farm and preached the ordination sermon.

He is a nephew of the late Hon. Zach Montgomery, of California; of R. L. Montgomery, of Grayson county; of Mrs. Chas. Clements, of Knottsville, tend of Atha Montgomery, of Thruston. He taught a few terms in the public schools of this and of Hancock county and is well remembered by many of his former pupils.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 12 April 1903, p.9:**





Rome, April 11.—The Rt. Rev. George Montgomery, coadjutor archbishop of San Francisco, who recently was appointed archbishop of Manila, has refused that post. He prefers to stay at San Francisco, where he expects to become archbishop.

+

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 16 November 1904, p1:

**ARCHBISHOP MONTGOMERY**  
Administered Sacrament of Confirmation to a Large Class.

Hawesville, Ky Nov. 15.- Archbishop George Montgomery, of San Francisco, administered the sacrament of confirmation in the Catholic church here today to a class of boys and girls. Six priests assisted in the service and a choir from Cannelton sang in the mass. In the afternoon a reception was held in honor of the archbishop, who resided here for two years during his youth. Mr. W. S. Thomas, president of the Hawesville bank, and Capt. Frank Lander were among the many who called upon the distinguished visitor. A purse containing nearly \$100 and a letter commemorating his visit to his old home were presented to him in a few appropriate words. A drive was taken over the town and out over the suburban hills, where the house still stands in which he formerly resided with his parents.

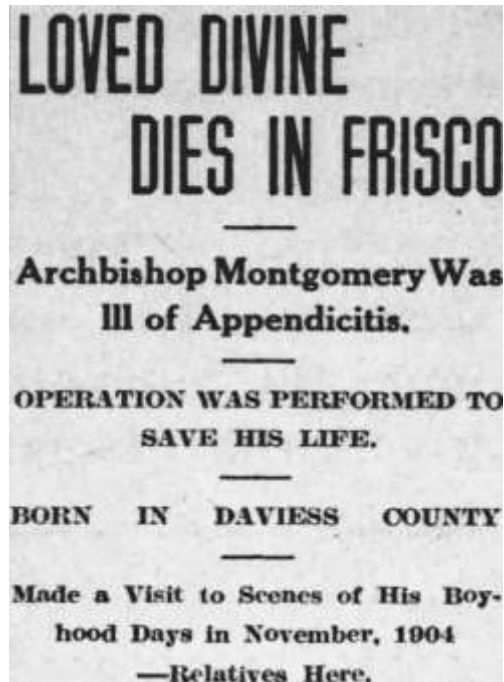
+

Boston Evening Transcript, Boston, MA, 11 January 1907, p3:

**Archbishop George Montgomery**  
Archbishop George Montgomery, who was operated on for appendicitis a few days ago, died in San Francisco yesterday. He was born in Daviess County, Ky., Dec. 30, 1847. After attending the common schools and Cecilian Academy in his native State he went to St. Charles College, Maryland, where he continued his studies with the view of entering St. Mary's Seminary. He was graduated at the latter institution in 1870. In the same year he was ordained to the priesthood and went to San Francisco, where for fifteen years he served as secretary to the archbishop. During his stay there he organized the League of the Cross. He was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Los Angeles in 1894, and in 1903 was made Coadjutor Archbishop of San Francisco.

+

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 11 January 1907, p.1:



Coadjutor Archbishop George Montgomery died following an operation for appendicitis at his home, 1100 Franklin street, San Francisco, Cal., yesterday afternoon. This information was received in a special telegram to the Messenger last night. The announcement of the death of Archbishop Montgomery will be received with universal regret in Kentucky, and especially in Daviess county and Owensboro, where he was known and loved by hundreds of people.

George Montgomery was born in Daviess county, near Knottsville, on December 30, 1847. He was a son of Pius and Harriet Montgomery. He received his early education in the common schools of Kentucky. He attended Cecilian college, Kentucky; St. Charles college, Maryland, and St. Mary's seminary, Baltimore.

It was in December, 1879, that he was ordained a priest in Baltimore. He spent about fifteen years in San Francisco as a priest. He was consecrated coadjutor bishop of Los Angeles on April 8, 1894. In April, 1903, he was made coadjutor archbishop of San Francisco.

Archbishop Montgomery was in Daviess county in November, 1904. He visited his old home at Knottsville and the scenes of his boyhood days. Archbishop Montgomery was a nephew of the Hon. Zack Montgomery, who was assistant attorney general under Cleveland. It was through his uncle that he received such an excellent education. He had several relatives in Daviess county. Mrs. C. O. Clements was an aunt of the deceased. Father Clements, at St. Lawrence, was a first cousin of Archbishop Montgomery.

In the death of Archbishop Montgomery the Catholic church has lost one of its most brilliant and highly respected men.

[Three thousand were reported to have attended his funeral. Obituaries and memorials in honor of him were carried in many national newspapers from coast to coast.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 19 January 1907, p.4:**

**Archbishop Montgomery's Death  
a Loss to San Francisco**

The following editorial appeared in the San Francisco Examiner, on the death of Archbishop Montgomery, who was born in Daviess county:

San Francisco suffered a loss that she can ill afford. The death of George Montgomery, coadjutor archbishop, takes from the city one of her strongest men, who has ever stood for what is best in the life of her people.

Of Archbishop Montgomery's work as a churchman, we leave those of the church to speak. His advancement to the second highest position in the archdiocese with right of succession to Archbishop Riordan, bears testimony to the esteem in which he is held by men of his faith.

George Montgomery was as great and true a citizen as he was a prelate.

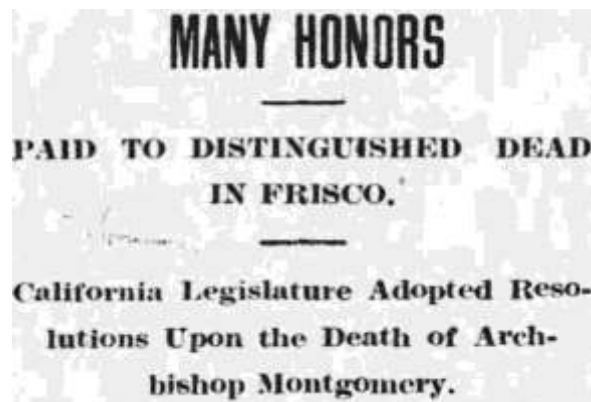
In his work as one of the people of the city and state, the archbishop has showed himself inspired by lofty aims and sound common sense. It was not alone that the movements for the civic betterment of the people looked to him for support. It is common to find the clergy coming to the support of movements to benefit the bodies as well as the lives of men. But Archbishop Montgomery has been more than a supporter of such movements. He has been a leader and has given to these efforts the same virile energy, the zeal and the sound sense that made him so strong a character in the church.

Especially is this true of the struggle against the drink traffic. As Father Montgomery, years ago, he was in the forefront of the fight for high license, and as archbishop he lived to see the fight won. But high license has been only one detail of the fight against intemperance, and with all the efforts to surround men with the incentives to decent living, he has been in the forefront of the battle.

San Francisco is not so rich in intelligent leadership that she will not feel sorely the loss of the wise, broadminded man who passed from us yesterday. It is a loss that falls not alone on the church of which he has been so distinguished an ornament. It is one that is snared by the good citizens of the whole city, and men of all creeds and races are sorrowing by Archbishop Montgomery's bier.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 25 January 1907, p.2:**



Perhaps not in years were such distinguished honors shown a dead prelate as to the Rev. George Montgomery, native of Kentucky and coadjutor archbishop of the diocese of San Francisco, Cal., who died in the Golden Gate city January 11. The body of the dead archbishop lay in state several days in the great cathedral in San Francisco, where dignitaries of the Catholic church paid homage to the distinguished dead. Honors were showered on all sides. Pontifical mass for the repose of the soul of the dead man was celebrated in which many of the distinguished prelates of California took part. Resolutions of regret were adopted by the legislature of the state at Sacramento, and all of the bodies in his home city adopted appropriate resolutions.

The eulogies pronounced on the man showed that he was recognized as a great and good man in his adopted state. He stood high in the councils of his church and is universally mourned.



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 19 February 1907, p.2:**



Like thunder crash from brightest sky,  
A message flashed across the west,  
"Kentucky, put your mourning on,  
A famous son has gone to rest!"

"Oh! what a loss!" the nation sighed;  
Kentucky wept her saddest tears –  
"Montgomery, my joy, my pride,  
My hope for twenty coming years!"

"Too young to die – we need him yet,"  
A loving people wildly prayed;  
But ah! alas! for human views,  
So far from those by heaven made.

"Too young to die?" He'll never die;  
The death of great men is their birth –  
While they be sleeping neath the sod,  
The passing ages prove, their worth.

Apostle; like, Montgomery was,  
Beloved by every. creed and. Race;  
He led the right – opposed the wrong,  
And won his cause with gentle grace.

And still his voice is sounding on,  
Through every land beneath the sun; –  
Around his bier all nations now,  
In praise and love and met as one.

The noblest of a noble race,  
No greater ever bore the name,  
His life, his deeds, his peerless self,  
Have won for it eternal fame.

So great of mind, so strong of soul,  
So rich in sweet simplicity.  
The magic charm of his grand life,  
Was deep, divine humility.

He never cared for human praise.  
And honors never made him vain,  
As student, priest, archbishop, too,  
We find him always the same.

The Church, the State, were his great loves,  
To both he gave heroic zeal;  
The poor, distressed, his brothers were,  
He robbed himself at their appeal.

He knew no self, when Duty called,  
And from his old Kentucky home,  
Beyond the Rocky's snowy cliffs,  
Where priests were few he went to roam.

But, mother-like, Kentucky's eyes  
Have ever rested on her son;  
He gave her naught but smiles and joy,  
And year by year, new laurels won.

Behold him there, nine months ago,  
With ruin and desolation round!  
A million hearts bow'd low in grief –  
A Moses in Montgomery found.

He led their hopes, their souls to God,  
And there before St. Mary's door.  
They all unite – (oh! sight sublime!)  
The will Divine to bless, adore.

"Too young to die?" Ah no! ah, no!  
The Master calls – his "work is done;  
Come faithful one, to wear thy crown,  
So rich and bright, so nobly won."

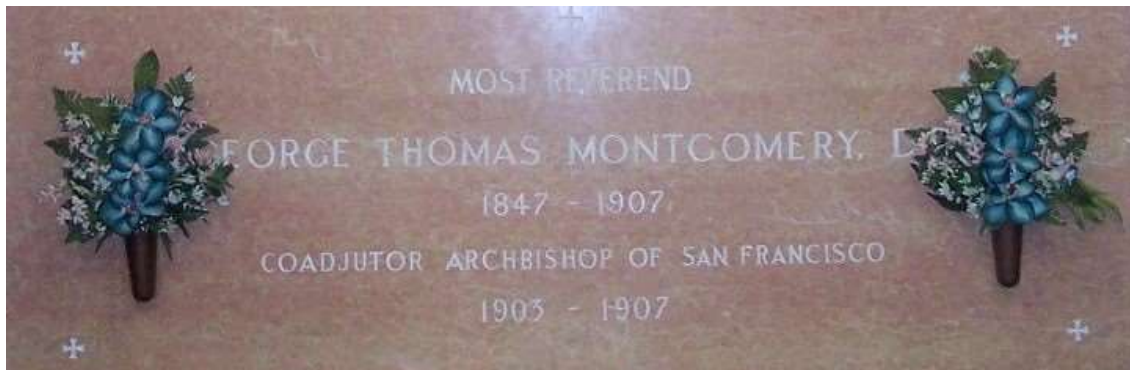


And still we cannot help but weep –  
Kentucky loved Montgomery so,  
But though we mourn, his dying words,  
Are truest solace to our woes.

To Heaven, I am going now,  
Sweet Savior, mercy on my soul!"  
Oh! cry of Christian, martyr, saint,  
The voice of faith from pole to pole!

And now, Kentucky, veiled in grief,  
Goes out to sorrow-laden West,  
To kneel with all his children there,  
Around his grave to call him blessed.

Mt. St. Joseph's Academy,  
St. Joseph, Ky.



**The Western Kentucky Catholic,  
Diocese of Owensboro, Owensboro, KY, March 2023, p.19:**

The first U.S.-born bishop of Los Angeles was born in Daviess County?  
By Edward Wilson, Archives



Coadjunct Archbishop of San Francisco, George Thomas Montgomery,  
born in Daviess County (1847-1907).  
COURTESY OF MOUNT SAINT JOSEPH ARCHIVES

God has blessed western Kentucky with many holy souls who have been called to religious life. Some become priest, some brothers, some nuns, and some religious sisters. Many of these remain and serve God in the land upon which they were born. Some are called elsewhere. There

have been many great stories of holy souls in our diocese that have been lost to history – but history whispers. If one listens closely enough, they can make out the words.

Very little seemed remarkable about George Thomas Montgomery on the day of his baptism, a January day in 1848. Cradled in his mother’s loving arms, beneath his father’s proud gaze, not even the holy pastor had any idea what a great plan God had in store for the little baby in St. Lawrence Catholic Church on the outskirts of Daviess County.

As George grew older, like many Kentucky boys of this time, he farmed. However, he felt a deeper calling. According to a family history, at age 19 he attended Cecilian College near Elizabethtown for three years. Deciding that the priesthood was his true vocation, he attended Charles College in Maryland, finishing his studies at St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore. He spent about five years at each college and was ordained a priest at the age of 32 on Dec. 18, 1879. After this, Fr. Montgomery moved to California.

The California that Fr. Montgomery arrived in was the wild west and remained so for more than a decade. A good amount of people didn’t take too kindly to religion, especially Catholicism. Fr. Montgomery tried to act as a mediator between the people of California and the ritualistic Catholic faith. A publication of his survives in which he tries to make peace and explain the purpose of the 5:30 a.m. Angelus bell on Sunday. Many of the local people demanded an elimination of the custom, preferring to sleep off their Saturday night libations.

After several years of laboring for Christ, Fr. Montgomery was rewarded for his holy grit. In 1894 he became the coadjunct Bishop of Monterey-Los Angeles, succeeding in 1896. He continued to be an influential presence and in 1903 was given the position of coadjunct Archbishop of San Francisco. He won the hearts of many for his crucial work in helping lead the rebuilding efforts after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the deadliest earthquake in the country’s history which destroyed over 80% of the city. However, he died shortly after, in 1907, following an emergency surgery. “He was perfectly oblivious of himself when there was a question of service to others,” read one tribute after his passing; a perfect quality for a frontier priest.

This article was prompted by a single photograph in Mount Saint Joseph’s old museum. I didn’t recognize him or his name and wondered why his photograph was sitting behind a stack of others. God calls all of us to be great saints; even those of us from little western Kentucky. We have to keep these tales in our hearts to remind us of God’s call to a profoundly holy life. We cannot let these stories of our great legacy fall into oblivion. History will always remember, but it is up to us to never forget.

Note: The Archives would like to offer a word of appreciate for Connie Lemmons, the bookkeeper at St. Lawrence, for providing Archbishop Montgomery’s baptismal date.

Edward Wilson is the director of the Diocese of Owensboro’s Archives and the Archives of the Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph. Comments and questions may be sent to [edward.wilson@pastoral.org](mailto:edward.wilson@pastoral.org).



### **Owensboro, Kentucky Newspapers:**

- Owensboro Messenger – 1902: 1/19 p.5 ("Bishop Montgomery: Something of the Daviess County History of the Noted Prelate", has been appointed bishop of the Philippine Islands; in the cemetery at St. Lawrence four tombstones mark the graves of his mother & three sisters, who were buried on each of four successive Sundays, their fatal malady was known

locally as 'black fever'; he had taught several terms in the public schools of Daviess & Hancock County; he went to California as a young priest 25 years ago, he had been pastor of the Catholic parish in San Francisco, seven years ago he was made bishop of Los Angeles; four years ago he visited his old home and conferred the orders of the priesthood on his nephew, Lucien Clements; he is a nephew of the late Zach Montgomery of California, R. L. Montgomery of Grayson County, Mrs. Charles Clements of Knottsville and of Atha Montgomery of Thruston)

- Owensboro Inquirer – 1902: 1/3 p.1 (to be appointed archbishop of Manila, Philippines), 1903: 4/10 p.1 (new archbishop of the Philippines, born in Daviess County in the Knottsville precinct, son of Pius Montgomery, nephew of Judge Zach Montgomery, who was assistant attorney general during the last Cleveland administration)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 11/11 p.4 (will deliver a lecture at St. Stephens Catholic Church in Owensboro this Sunday)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 11/11 p.5 (guest of his aunt, Mrs. C. O. Clements, at Knottsville; two items on page)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 11/14 p.1 (gives an address at St. Paul's Catholic Church in Owensboro)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1904: 11/13 p.9 & 12 (visits here, gives an address on need for separate Catholic schools)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1904: 11/15 p.3 (pleads for separate schools in address at St. Paul's Catholic Church in Owensboro)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1904: 11/16 p.1 (visits his old home in Hancock County, KY)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1904: 11/19 p.2 (conducts funeral for uncle, C. O. Clements, at St. William's Catholic Church in Knottsville)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 11/16 p.5 (guest of his niece, Mrs. W. S. Hazel, on South Frederica Street in Owensboro)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 11/17 p.5 (confirmed a class of children at Catholic church in Hawesville on Tuesday)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1907: 1/11 p.1 (died 10 January 1907 San Francisco, CA; born Daviess County, KY; Catholic priest, coadjutor archbishop of San Francisco; ordained in 1879; son of Pius & Harriet Montgomery; born near Knottsville; nephew of Zachariah Montgomery)
- (buried Holy Cross Cemetery, San Francisco, CA)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1907: 1/19 p.4 (“Archbishop Montgomery’s Death a Loss to San Francisco”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1907: 1/20 p.16 (“‘I Am Going To Heaven’ Were Dying Words of Archbishop Montgomery”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1907: 1/25 p.2 “Many Honors Paid To Distinguished Dead in Frisco”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1907: 1/25 p.2 (“Brave Death of Archbishop, ... The Deathbed Scene”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1907: 2/19 p.2 (memorial service for him at St. William's Catholic Church in Knottsville; memorial poem)



The San Francisco Call, San Francisco, CA, 30 November 1902, p.3:

