

Bro. Leo Willett, S. M. **(1925-2015)**

By Jerry Long



Bro. Leo Willett, S. M. – 1994
Delbert Leo Willett (1925-2015)



Delbert Leo Willett was born 11 August 1925 in East St. Louis, St. Clair County, Illinois. He was the son of James Alton Willett (1904-1970) and Teresa Gertrude Toon (1903-1993). His parents were from Fancy Farm, Graves County, Ky., where he spent part of his childhood. He attended Catholic grade schools in both towns before graduating from Central Catholic High School in East St. Louis (1939-1943). Central Catholic was operated by priests and brothers of the Society of Mary (Marianist) religious order, whose influence led Willett, following high school graduation, to enter in July 1943 the order's novitiate in Galesville, Wisconsin. He professed his first vows to religious life on 15 August 1944 and four years later made his perpetual vows on 15 July 1948. The Catholic order views Mary as the model of discipleship.

Willett, received a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Dayton in January 1947. He began his teaching career teaching American History to seniors at St. Mary's High School in St. Louis, Missouri in January 1947. He received a master's degree in History & Guidance from Saint Louis University in 1954. He has also pursued graduate study at Marquette University, the University of Chicago, Creighton University and the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

He has served at Marianist high schools in St. Louis, Missouri, Don Bosco High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1954-1962), Our Lady of Victory (now Nolan Catholic) High School in

Fort Worth, Texas (1962-1963), and Catholic Central High School in San Antonio, Texas (1963-1967) and Gross High School in Omaha, Nebraska (1968-1974) — both in teaching and in administrative roles.



On left: Delbert Leo Willett (on right), with his parents and brother, Eugene; Christmas 1942. On right: Leo's faculty picture from the Our Lady of Victory High School, Fort Worth, TX, 1963 yearbook.

During his time as an assistant principal (1954-1962) at Don Bosco High School in Milwaukee, he pioneered the use of computerized punch card systems for processing grades, then continued to push the use of technology as vice principal of San Antonio's Central Catholic High School when as vice principal he purchased surplus Univac systems from the U.S. Army.

Willett took on leadership roles whenever possible and was among the founders of the National Catholic Guidance Conference in 1955 and later on the Archdiocese of Omaha Board of Education in the early 1970s.



Bro. Leo with Senator Hubert H. Humphrey on a campaign stop at Gross High School in Omaha, NE

In 1968 he founded the Gross Catholic High School in Omaha, NE. Following his stay at Gross from 1968 to the Spring of 1974, he remained in education as associate principal, principal and guidance counselor at Chaminade College Preparatory in St. Louis until 1988.

From 1988 to 1999, Brother Leo worked at the St. Louis Provincialate as a staff assistant. In August 1999, Br. Leo was called to the novitiate at University of Dayton, in Ohio for a ministry

of presence as an “elder brother”, ministering to young men in formation at the Society of Mary’s novitiate.

In 2008, at age 83, Brother Leo moved to the Marianist Residence on the campus of St Mary’s University in San Antonio, TX. He was a joyful and popular participant in the university’s “Marianist Friends” program, which pairs elderly brothers with students to serve as their mentors.

Bro. D. Leo Willett, S.M., died of congestive heart failure on Saturday, 14 November 2015 in San Antonio, TX, where he was living with the Marianist community at St. Mary’s University. He was age 90 and had served 71 years as a Marianist brother. Interment was in Marianist Cemetery in San Antonio, TX. He was survived by a niece, Donna Willett of O’Fallon, IL and numerous cousins.

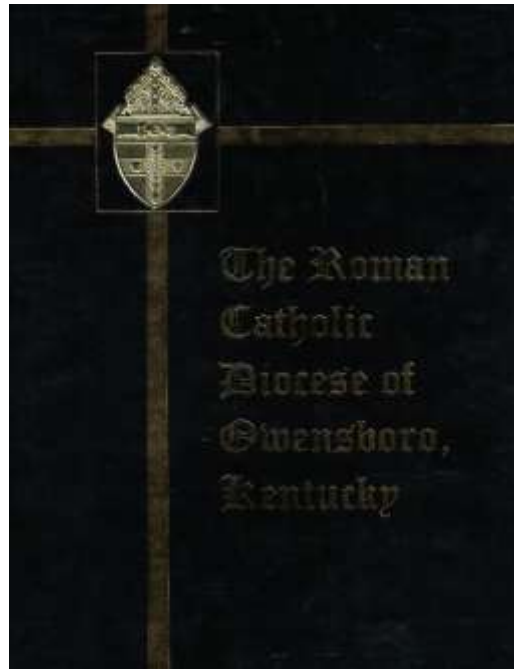
Bro. Leo in 1979 began researching the history of his family and the birth of Catholicity in Kentucky. In 1986 he completed a three-year project of compiling the sesquicentennial history of St. Jerome Parish of Fancy Farm, Graves County, Ky. This work resulted in the 261-page book, A History of St. Jerome, Fancy Farm, Kentucky, 1836-1986, by Leo Willett (St. Jerome Parish Community, Fancy Farm, KY, 1988). In 1998 he assisted Mary Louise Donnelly in revising and updating her book on the Willett family (Edward Willett: Colonial Maryland Pewterer, County Clerk, Plantation Owner: His Ancestors and Descendants (Ennis, Texas, c1999, 905 pages). He also wrote family sketches on the Willett and other ancestral families for the books: Pioneer history of Washington County, Kentucky (Orval W. Baylor & Michael L. & Bettie Anne Cook, Owensboro, KY: McDowell Publications, 1980); History of St. Clair County, Illinois (Volume I, St. Clair County Genealogical Society. Dallas, TX: Curtis Media Corp., 1988); and The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky (Diocese of Owensboro, Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1995. For the Diocese of Owensboro he worked as one of the five editors, who collected, organized and wrote articles for the latter publication. He helped on several of the Maryland to Kentucky Catholic Reunions.

This writer (Jerry Long) first met Bro. Leo Willett in 1990 while he was on a visit to the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library in Owensboro, KY, where I was employed. After learning he was a Marianist Brother I told him I had a relative, Eugene Adam Paulin, S. M. (1882-1963), who was also a Marianist brother, and who had been the family’s historian. To my surprise Bro. Leo said that Bro. Eugene was his mentor while he was at the St. Louis University. He had been his instructor and had influenced him to be a teacher. In 1994 Bro. Leo while on a visit to the Marianist Archives in San Antonio, TX copied for me family pages from a manuscript, “Memoirs of Eugene A. Paulin”. I had been told of the existence of the manuscript but had never located the original. In my 43 years as a genealogist this still ranks as one of my greatest discoveries. During 1990-2005 I met with Brother Leo several times at the Owensboro library and we corresponded.

Bro. Leo Willett did a great service in presenting and preserving history. He had an extensive book collection on Catholicity in Kentucky. Parts of his collection were donated to the University of Dayton, Dayton, OH; Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY; Nelson County Public Library, Bardstown, KY; and Graves County Public Library, Mayfield, KY. He was also instrumental in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library receiving a large donation of about \$3,000 to purchase Maryland books related to Kentucky pioneers.



**The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, Diocese of Owensboro,
Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1995, p.9 (Foreword):**



Foreword and Acknowledgments



(L to R): Bro. Leo Willett, S.M., Sr. Joseph Angela Boone, OSU, Sr. Rose Jean Powers, OSU, Sr. Mary Irene Cecil, OSU and Mel Howard.

[The editors of the “The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky” are hard at work in March of 1995 at the Catholic Pastoral Center in Owensboro.]

We are grateful to the many parishes, schools, institutions, and families who submitted their histories and family stories. In particular we would like to thank Brother Leo Willett, S.M. of St. Louis, MO (formerly of Fancy Farm) for his tireless efforts in working up the history of the Catholic Church in Kentucky prior to the founding of the Owensboro Diocese. Sister Rose Jean

Powers, OSU of Brescia College for writing the first 50 years of our diocese from 1937 to 1987. Sister Mary Irene Cecil, OSU for the history from 1987 to the present date.

We are indebted to the many writers of the history of the parishes and institutions. Their names known only by God. Sister Emma Cecilia Busam, OSU, Mount Saint Joseph, Carmel Wimsatt, and others who spent many hours gathering data, pictures, etc. from the archives of the Diocese and Mount Saint Joseph. Mel Howard for taking and furnishing many photos and for keeping the public aware of the status of the book via the Western Kentucky Catholic, Sister Mary Irene Cecil, OSU for the countless hours of editing-and re-editing the written word.

We make a special acknowledgment of Stephen Wall who designed and produced the map showing the 32 counties of the diocese with the Deaneries outlined, the churches, schools, institutions, hospitals inserted into the proper county. We thank Tom Lilly for his part in conning Stephen Wall to do this work. Also for the many other suggestions that Tom has given the writers.

Sister Sharon Sullivan, OSU of Brescia College, for portraying in cartoon the real production of this book as it happened. To all the nameless others for their contributions of time and talent. God bless you. We thank Turner Publishing Company who were the starters of this project and persevered to the end with all of our inexperience.

We appreciate your patience in waiting for this production. We hope you will find the wait has been well worth your time. May you enjoy reading your own history as well as the many others who were so kind to submit their stories for others to enjoy.

May God Bless All,
Sister Joseph Angela Boone, OSU
Project Coordinator

The Western Kentucky Catholic,
Owensboro Diocese, Owensboro, KY, January 2003, p.43:



Happy Anniversaries! Sister Emma Cecelia Busam, O.S.U., and Brother Leo Willett, S.M., will both be celebrating in 2003 their 60 year anniversaries living Consecrated Lives as a Sister and a Brother. They were at work here in late November, 2002, in the Diocesan Archives sorting through books about the history of Catholicism in Kentucky, including the Diocese of Owensboro. Staff Photo



Sister Emma Cecilia Busam (1921-2019) and Brother Leo Willett (1925-2015)
in November 2002 at the Diocesan Archives in Owensboro, KY



Bro. Leo Willett, S.M. celebrates 70th
anniversary as a Marianist in 2014



A History of St. Jerome, Fancy Farm, Kentucky, 1836-1986, by Leo Willett, St. Jerome Parish Community, Fancy Farm, KY, 1988:

General Introduction

In January 1947 I began my teaching career, and I taught three classes of American History, a favorite subject of mine. For years the story of American Catholicism has had a special interest for me, from the English Catholic settlers who embarked from the Ark and the Dove in 1634 to begin the Maryland colony with a commitment to the concept of religious freedom for themselves and all their neighbors; from the list of Catholic patriots in the cause of the American Revolution; from the appointment in 1789 of Father John Carroll of the famous Maryland Carrolls as the first Bishop of the United States, with his see in Baltimore; from the Maryland Catholic settlers, mainly from St. Mary's and Charles Counties, who in 1785 started a migration to what is now Nelson, Washington, and Marion - Counties the "Holy Land of Kentucky." In 1808 there were added to the Diocese of, Baltimore, the four new dioceses of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown in Kentucky, the oldest inland American Catholic diocese. Over thirty other dioceses would eventually be taken from the Bardstown territory. It was the story of the Catholic Church moving west, through Kentucky.

Although I had heard of our faith-heritage as a boy during my two years of living in Fancy Farm during the Depression, and my summers there until I graduated from high school in 1943, it only began to sink in when, starting in 1979, I became involved in the research of the pioneer families of Fancy Farm, named by Fr. Charles Haeseley in his historical article of 1911. Most of the founders of Fancy Farm came from St. Rose Parish, Springfield, Washington County in the 1830's. Family research renewed my interest in the story of American Catholicism as it moved from Maryland through Kentucky westward. The ancestors of the pioneer families of Fancy Farm who had come from "the holy land of Kentucky;" also had ancestors who, starting in 1785, had come from that part of Maryland, where English Catholics had settled, starting in 1634. And my Willett, Toon, Hayden, Carrico ancestors were definitely a part of this stimulating, intriguing and faith-sharing story. My interest in American History, the Catholic Faith, and the people of Fancy Farm, that town where my dear parents and grandparents had been born and raised, came together as one strong interest—the publishing of a book in which this fascinating story would be told in print. Thus my challenge became a gift for which I am very grateful, in this the twilight of my grace-filled life.

Around 1982, Fr. Walter Hancock, pastor of St. Jerome, started telling the people from the pulpit that "Bro. Leo was going to write the history of Fancy Farm." In January 1985, Fr. Jerry Riney, pastor at St. Jerome, asked me to serve on the Sesquicentennial Committee that was to make the necessary planning for the sesquicentennial celebration of the foundation of St. Jerome Parish in 1836 by Fr. Elisha J. Durbin. I remember well the meeting in which Joseph Carmen Curtsinger, Chairman, asked Pearls Curtsinger and me to write, a history of St. Jerome. And at another meeting, when I presented an outline of what we had in mind, Carmen and Bill Higdon instructed us to have as many pages as necessary to tell the story. Little did they or Fr. Jerry know that evening in 1985 the production that this book would become! Pearle and I worked together at Fancy Farm for about six weeks during both summers of 1985 and 1986, and Sr. Rachel Willett,

S.C.N., joined us for about eight weeks during the summer of 1987. Without the ideas and work of Pearle and Sr. Rachel, the Associate Editors, the book you have today would not be. We three worked well together with each bringing special skills to the project, and in a short time we meshed these skills together, with each accepting some general responsibilities and some particular responsibilities. And uppermost for each of us was as excellent a book as we could produce.

Starting with Bulletin #1 of the Sesquicentennial History Committee on July 13, 1985, we urged all parishioners to submit pictures for possible use in our book, especially those taken before 1968 (the year of the first St. Jerome Parish Directory). Pearle Curtsinger of Fancy Farm, Associate Editor, was the person "on the scene" to whom pictures were to be submitted. The more a picture was valued, the more we wanted it. Thus we arranged for negatives to be made of the pictures by professional photographers, Richard Elliott in Mayfield and Mary Somogyi in St. Louis, and the pictures usually were returned to the owners within a few weeks. Pearle handled this tedious, time-consuming, detailed responsibility with expertise, without a picture being lost or damaged, and with careful attention to names and information needed for captions. She also typed most of the captions for the pictures used. We will have 827 pictures in our book, 462 in the General Section, 308 in the Family History Section, and 59 in the Miscellaneous Section. And as Fr. Jerry Riney, pastor, told me often, "pictures will make our book." I worked with Mary Somogyi, in St. Louis, who printed a 3½ x 5 inch picture, after she gave careful attention to content and contrast in each picture. Thanks to all who submitted pictures for possible use in our book, and an award for excellence to Pearle, Rich and Mary. Thanks also to David Celaya of Wells Studio in Mayfield for his help in providing and printing pictures of some of the class composites of Fancy Farm High School graduates.

Sr. Rachel, with a Master of Arts in English from the University of Notre Dame, experience as teacher, principal, administrator, and recently as secretary to Bishop John J. McRaith, was, as Pearle expressed it, "an angel sent from heaven" for this project. First, she spent considerable research and time on the story of "Sisters of Charity of Nazareth at St. Jerome," a vital part of the faith story of the parish. Secondly, the St. Jerome/Fancy Farm High School Graduates, 1919-1985 section was of special interest to Sr. Rachel. With regret, but after diligent search, she came to realize that, due to a loss or lack of pictures, that section would be incomplete. Thirdly, all copy of the book has been carefully read by her; when necessary she revised parts of stories, making corrections as needed. Historical accuracy and clues she was able to contribute through her contacts and experience in the Diocese of Owensboro as well as from her mother, Mrs. Ida Stahr Willett, age 96, whom she called frequently to obtain or verify data.

In doing research for this project, I had the opportunity to visit most of the places that could be of help. (1) I had corresponded with and visited Fr. John A. Lyons in Louisville since 1980. He had been archdiocesan historian and archivist for over a generation. After his death in January 1984, his extensive and valuable resources, the Lyons Collection, has been housed at the Thomas Merton Studies Center, Bellarmine College, Louisville, where through the kindness of Dr. Robert Daggy, Director, I have done research. (2) I have visited several times The Filson Club in Louisville, which is a must to anyone doing early Kentucky history research. (3) I have used the excellent and varied resources of the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort. (4) I have visited several times the archives at Nazareth, near Bardstown, where I had the kindness and help of Sr. Agnes Geraldine McCann, S.C.N. (5) I have visited twice the Washington County Courthouse, Springfield, where I had the kindness and help of A.H. "Bubba" Robertson, county clerk. (6) I have used several times the resources for Kentucky history and family research at the Pogue Library, Murray State University. (7) The resources of the Mayfield Public Library were made

available to me. (8) The records of the Graves County Schools' Office were made available to me by Mattie Simmons. (9) When I needed books or microfilm from various places, I obtained same through inter-library loan by working with Edna Melnick, Adult Services, St. Louis County Library. (10) And to make it possible for me to do the required traveling, Joseph Hotze of Salem, IL, made available to me the use of a car, usually a new Ford, and the administration at Chaminade College Prep, St. Louis, allowed me to be away for the needed days, for both of which I am grateful.

At an early stage in my research I made the decision to be "a compiler" rather than "a writer." It seemed to me that it would be much better to read the original, in the words and the spirit of the times, than my version of the account. And my strength is in research, not writing, I readily admit.

Although this book has many more pages than we envisioned when we started in 1985, as we came to the finish of the book we realized we had not included topics that should have been included; for example, The St. Vincent de Paul Society Story; the short-lived Baptist Church in Fancy Farm; the chemical leak 1980 which caused the evacuation of the Fancy Farm School and 30 to 35 homes; the successful annual fundraisers of Jerry Carrico, who has suffered from cerebral palsy since birth. And in 1985, I thought we would include the St. Jerome Baptisms from 1843 to 1860 but there was a space lack. We had to stop somewhere and go to press!

Primary to the preparation and publishing of this book has been the interest, encouragement, support, and understanding of Fr. Jerry Riney, who became pastor of St. Jerome in the summer of 1983. I could not have had a better pastor with whom to work in this many-faceted project. During my several visits to Fancy Farm during the past three years, I have definitely felt at home in St. Jerome Rectory. It has been a joy to be with the people of Fancy Farm, many of whom are cousins. I hope this book is satisfactory in most aspects and helps many to better know and appreciate our rich heritage.

(Note: The Introduction to the Family History Section should be considered as an addenda to this General Introduction.)

Bro. Leo Willett, S.M., Editor

BRIEF HISTORY OF FANCY FARM COMMUNITY

By Bro. Leo Willett, S.M.

One of the questions on the United States Census 2000, the long form, was: "What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?" Most of the residents of the Fancy Farm, KY, community would have had to hesitate before answering this question. They know their roots to be from "COLONIAL MARYLAND," e.g., Edward Willett and Francis Hayden, mid-seventeenth century Maryland. However, the progenitors, Edward Willett (1657-1744) and Francis Hayden (1628-1744) originally were both from England.

In 1634 the first Catholics landed in ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND, "the cradle of catholicity" in the new world. In 1785 twenty-five Maryland Catholic families settled on Pottinger's Creek, Nelson County, Virginia. [In 1792, this was part of what became the 15th state, Kentucky, and Washington County.] One of these, was William (1737-1794) & Elizabeth (Thompson) Hayden's family, whose son, Thomas (1779-1850), was one of the pioneers to Fancy Farm, Kentucky in 1830s.

Father Charles Haeseley, pastor of St. Jerome (1888-1920), in 1911 wrote the historical article that is the basis of the early history of what was first called, "the Catholic settlement," in

Graves County, KY, beginning with the family of Samuel (1808-1892) & Elizabeth [HOBBS] (1810-1877) WILLETT. They had migrated in 1829 from St. Rose Priory Parish (Dominicans), Springfield, Washington County, KY. Samuel is listed as having purchased 12 October 1829 the Southwest quarter of Section 20 (160 acres) for \$40. This area became what is now named Fancy Farm. Samuel Willett's family appears in the 1830 Graves County Census. [Note: Samuel's uncle, Father William Thomas Willett (1790-1824), a Dominican, ordained in 1816, was the first native Kentucky priest.]

In 1830s "the Catholic settlement" included at least the following families: Stephen BALLARD; Charles BRIGHT; Cornelius & Henry CARRICO; James & John CASH; Thomas CURTSINGER; James ELLIOTT; George, Henry, John, Samuel, Thomas Jr., Thomas Sr., & William HAYDEN; Alfred, Horatio, Jerome, John, Joseph Mary, & Samuel W. HOBBS; John B. PIERCEALL; Solomon RILEY; Benjamin & John S. ROBERTS; Samuel & William THOMAS; Hilary, Stanish Lloyd, & William TOON and Samuel WILLETT.

Most of the pioneer families were from St Rose Priory Parish (Dominicans), Springfield, Washington County, Kentucky. Their ancestors were mainly Colonial Maryland Catholics.

FATHER ELISHA JOHN DURIJIN (1800-1887), the Patriarch of the Catholic Church in Western Kentucky, the Catholic circuit-rider, first came to this area in 1832. He supervised in 1836, the building of the first Catholic Church in Jackson Purchase, named St. Jerome. [Missions: St Joseph, Mayfield, 1887; St Charles, Carlisle County, 1891; St. Denis, Hickman County, 1913.] The third, and present St. Jerome Church, Fancy Farm, was solemnly blessed by Bishop George McCloskey 29 November 1893.

In 1843 the residents of this area asked for a post office. The postal inspector, a guest of John Peebles, whose farm was seen as neat and clean, suggested the name Fancy Farm. John Peebles, one of the few in this area not a Catholic, was appointed first postmaster 15 March 1843. Thus the beginning date of the unique name, FANCY FARM. to designate a particular area in northwest Graves County. The St. Jerome Church is at the intersection of Highways 80 & 339, about ten miles from Mayfield, the Graves County seat.

In the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, an act was approved 1 April 1880, that incorporated the town of Fancy Farm, with definite boundaries and elected officials. On 2 March 1959, at the regular meeting of the town council, Civil Action # 1439 was presented. It read: "Petition to Dissolve Charter of Fancy Farm. It was stated that there were 379 inhabitants residing within corporate boundaries of the city of Fancy Farm, 194 were legal voters, and 144 had signed a petition asking for the dissolution of the city of Fancy Farm." This action of dissolution was signed 2 March 1959 by Judge Elvis Stahr, Graves County Circuit Court.

THE ST JEROME SCHOOL opened NOVEMBER 1882, with three FRANCISCAN SISTERS from Shelbyville, KY. They withdrew in 1890, when the complete membership was transferred to Diocese of Dubuque, Iowa (now Franciscans, Clinton, Iowa). THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NAZARETH near Bardstown in 1892 began the long history of SCN presence in Fancy Farm. This excellent school of some size and staff, was one of the main reasons for several Catholic families moving to Fancy Farm, especially in the 1890s from Union County. It was said, "This may be a school in the country, but it is not a country school." The economic hardships during the depression years, resulted in the St Jerome School becoming state affiliated in 1933. For several years, after St. Jerome became a public school, there were no changes whatsoever in the operation of the school. In the fifties, the name of the school was changed from St. Jerome to Fancy Farm. In the sixties, religious objects were removed from the classrooms and Christian Doctrine was provided by a lengthened school day. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth relinquished

the administration of Fancy Farm School in August, 1968. In August 1975, the faculty was composed of all lay teachers. In August 1985, the new Graves County High School opened. The elementary Fancy Farm School remains, with the school buildings being leased from the parish during the school year.

A fire that began about 3:30 p.m. on Monday, 21 JANUARY 1951 almost completely destroyed the business district of Fancy Farm. It is believed that the origin of the fire, started in an electric pump that had been frozen, in the Mitchell residence. An electric bulb had been placed in the pump casing inside the insulation. It had thawed, and the bulb had not been removed. There was a high wind that spread the flames rapidly. Most of the buildings were all frame, real "fire feeders." The REA was quick on the scene, and all power was severed. The Mayfield fire chief was praised for his insights and the efforts of the Mayfield Fire Department.. A bucket-tub brigade was formed from the school to the fire truck pumper. The damage was estimated at \$150,000.

In THE MAYFIELD MONITOR 31 July 1880, the following notice appeared: "There will be a barn dance, picnic and 'gander pulling' at Fancy Farm next Thursday. Those that have never seen the latter should turn out for the occasion. It will be interesting." Although there had been community picnics at Fancy Farm before 1880 "down by the creek," this is considered the first public invitation to attend. (The 2000 Picnic is considered the 120th annual Fancy Farm Picnic.) Around 1902 the picnic was moved from "near the creek" to the school grounds so that if it rained, they could move inside the building. Then it was held on Wednesday of the last week of July just before the primary election, which at that time was held in early August. Candidates for county and state offices began to come and speak to the large gatherings and make their "last ditch stand" before the voters cast their ballots the following week. Former Governor, U.S. Senator (and Baseball Commissioner) A. B. "Happy" Chandler said at the Centennial Picnic 1980: "I guess I was one of the first candidates for statewide office to ever go to Fancy Farm. I ended my 1931 campaign for lieutenant governor down there. I won that election and thought Fancy Farm was good luck, so I kept going back." The General Assembly in 1956 changed the primary date to the fourth Tuesday in May. With the picnic now the first Saturday of August, it serves as the unofficial kickoff for fall election campaigns. In August 1992, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, AL GORE, spoke at the picnic. Also, the picnic has evolved into an annual homecoming for many Fancy Farm natives and their families, throughout the country, as they plan their vacations to coincide with the date of the picnic. Thus, on the first Saturday of August each year, a blend of politics, community spirit, homecoming, and home cooking, puts the Fancy Farm Picnic in Kentucky Headlines. BILL EVANS, who was fourteen at the time and one of the 4th generation of the Joseph Carrico Family in preparing meat for the annual picnic, wrote to the London firm that publishes the Guinness Book of World Records. In their 1984 edition on page 498 page under the listing of "LARGEST PICNIC" there appears the following: "At the 1982 holding of the annual Fancy Farm Picnic, Kentucky, (est. 1880) on August 6th, the consumption of lamb, pork and chicken meat reached 15,000 pounds."

Probably, because of its unique name, because it stems from Colonial Maryland and has remained mainly Catholic since its foundation in 1829, because the annual picnic serves as the unofficial kickoff for fall election campaigns in Kentucky, or a combination of these, Fancy Farm has been for many years the subject of many feature articles in Kentucky newspapers. For example, a full-page article by James Malone (Staff Writer), with pictures and statistics, appeared in The Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 2 August 1993, as one of OUR TOWNS. (The article on Fancy Farm is in OUR TOWNS. Vol 2.) Also there was an article entitled "Barbequed Politics," that appeared in THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, 7 August 1992.

With Pat Spalding and Dot Wilson, as editors, The St. Jerome Journal, published bimonthly by the parish, and mailed far-and-near, keeps the community, near and away, well informed of family happenings, past and coming.

"We, the Fancy Farm Community, will be grateful always to God and the pioneers, to our pastors and the Religious Sisters, to our ancestors, for our faith heritage, family spirit, community caring, and many blessings. May this always continue in our time, and forever, is our prayer to God. 'Somebody else' is now you and me."

In the 1986 Sesquicentennial Celebration of the first St. Jerome Church, there was included the publication, A HISTORY OF ST. JEROME. FANCYFARM, KENTUCKY 1836-1986 (hard cover, 9x12, 266 pages, 827 pictures), third printing (March 2000).

(The above article was researched & written by Bro. Leo Willett, S.M. 9-8-2000.)



St. Jerome Catholic Church, Fancy Farm, Ky.







Monument in St. Jerome Cemetery, Fancy Farm, Ky.



**SAMUEL WILLETT (1808-1892)
THE FATHER OF THE FANCY FARM COMMUNITY**

By Bro. Leo Willet, S.M.

In 1992 & 1993 there are five historical events that will be given some attention by the St. Jerome / Fancy Farm Community. "We Remember, Celebrate, Believe, with Gratitude and Hope." The first of these events was the 100th anniversary on June 10th of the death of Samuel Willett, The Father of the Fancy Farm Community,

The lineage of Samuel Willett is as follows:

(1) Edward (born about 1620) & Bridget, the earliest known ancestors of Samuel, resided (at least between 1645 and 1675) at Cirencester, Gloucestershire, England; Edward was "a clothier."

(2) Edward, the 6th of 12 children of Edward & Bridget, was christened October 7, 1656; admitted to the Pewterers Guild, London, September 22, 1681; removed to the Maryland colony before 1692; married about 1698 Tabitha d/o William Mills (1628-1676) & Tabitha Wright (ca. 1647 -. ca. 1700); his will was probated February 7, 1745 in Prince George's Co., MD.

(3) William, the 7th of 8 children of Edward & Tabitha, was born about 1715 in Charlestown, Prince George's Co., and was probably christened at St. Paul's Episcopal Church; married about 1737 Mary d/o George Griffith; he was a pewterer and grew tobacco (owned about

360 acres); his will was probated July 10, 1772 in Prince George's Co., MD. (Note: William's widow, Mary, married Richard Simmons on March 7, 1779; his will was probated in 1784; Mary Griffith Willett, Simmons moved to Nelson Co., VA(KY); she wrote a will in Nelson Co. on December 5, 1788, and it was probated in Nelson Co., KY on August 12, 1794.)

(4) Samuel, the 9th of 14 children of William & Mary, was born in 1754 in Prince George's Co., MD. In 1778 he signed the oath of fidelity in Prince George's Co. (Box 4:14, p. 2). (Note: This document allows his descendants to qualify for membership in the prestigious organization, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).) By June 1782 he was residing in Jefferson Co., VA(KY). On August 12 1786, Samuel married Ann d/o Philip Lee and Susannah Thompson in Nelson Co. Ann was a Catholic. He was a Captain in the Nelson Co. Militia. Captain Samuel wrote his will on November 22, 1792, and it was probated March 12, 1793. (Note: Samuel's widow, Ann, who was left with four infant children, married Wilford Hayden, a staunch Catholic, on June 6, 1793. Wilford was a son of William Hayden (died 1794, Washington Co., KY). William and Basil, brothers, were among the leaders of a group of Catholics that in 1785 migrated from St. Mary's Co., MD, to Nelson Co., VA, to what is now known as the Bardstown Region, "the Holy Land of KY." (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #1) Also, Wilford is a brother of Thomas Hayden, who married Mary "Polly" Willett on January 18, 1802 in Washington Co., KY, the aunt of Samuel Willett, the first Catholic settler in Graves Co. Thomas Hayden migrated with his Catholic family of ten sons and three daughters, some of whom were married already, to the Fancy Farm community in the 1830s.)

(5) John, the 1st of 4 children of Captain Samuel & Ann, was born in 1787 in what became Washington Co., when it was formed in 1792 at the time of Kentucky's statehood. On October 13, 1806, in Washington Co., John married Matilda, d/o Thomas and Mary Ann Summers. They were members of St. Rose Priory Parish (Dominicans), Springfield, KY. Ben Webb in his The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky (1884) names John Willett as one of the patriarchs of the Cartwright Creek settlement. John died in 1821, (Note: John's widow, Matilda, the mother of our Samuel, married Benjamin W. Simmons on January 19, 1824. Benjamin's will was probated in October 1825.)

John & Matilda Willett had eight children, the oldest being our Samuel, born May 30, 1808. (Note: In the year of his birth, four new Catholic dioceses were created, namely, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown, which became Louisville in 1841. On September 21, 1816, Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget, the first Bishop of Bardstown, ordained the first Dominicans in the United States, with one of the four being William Thomas Willett (1790-1824), an uncle of our Samuel. In a letter to Rev. Simon Brute, Bishop Flaget had this to say about him, "...and yesterday one of them (Fr. William Thomas Willett) preached his first sermon in my presence in the parish where he was born before a great concourse of people, where were found several of his relatives who are Protestants. He conducted himself very well and more grandly to his hearers because of his pronunciation which was to them more natural than that of the French priests." As three of the four ordained were born in Maryland, Father Willett is considered "the first native Kentuckian to be ordained a priest." (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #2.) No doubt, Samuel, who would have been eight, attended the ordination of his uncle at St. Rose Priory, Springfield.) Samuel's father, John, died in 1821, at age 34. Samuel's young brother, John William "Jack", was born September 6, 1821. (As John's estate was appraised on September 10, 1821, Jack was probably born after his father's death.) With Samuel being the oldest, at age 13, with six younger sisters and a baby brother, we can somewhat imagine what his life was like until he married.

On September 22, 1828, Samuel married Elizabeth (born July 16, 1810) d/o Jesse and Mary (Elder) Hobbs. Their marriage probably took place at St. Rose's, although there is no proof of this since the first recorded marriages at St. Rose's start in 1830. (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #3.)

The Census History of Samuel Willett (1808-1892) has been included in the Appendix as Exhibit #4. In the 1830-1880 Graves Co. censuses, Samuel was listed. (Note: The 1890 census burnt in Washington, D.C. in the 1930s, and was never available to the public.) There follows a few items worth special mention from the Graves Co. censuses: (1) In 1830 the female between 40-50, living in the household of Samuel and Elizabeth, was the recently widowed mother of Elizabeth, Mary (Elder) Hobbs, and the three females under 15 were probably sisters of Elizabeth; the male between 5-10 was Samuel's brother, John William. (2) In 1860 Samuel was listed as a Deputy Sheriff. (3) In 1870 & 1880 Samuel was listed as a Dry-Goods Merchant. (4) In 1870 a William H Kelly, age 14, and a black family, Peter and Mary Gobel and their infant son, Martin, were listed as living in the Samuel Willett household. (5) In 1880 Samuel was listed as having married Elizabeth M., age 49. (Samuel and Elizabeth M. Roberts were married at St. Jerome on April 3, 1878.) She was the daughter of John S. Roberts & Juliann Adams, who had migrated from Nelson Co. to the Fancy Farm community in the 1830s. Elizabeth M. was a sister of Cecilia Ann Roberts, who had married Samuel Thomas s/o Samuel & Elizabeth (Hobbs) Willett. She was born in June 1830, and she died January 30, 1910, with burial in St. Jerome Cemetery. (Note: Elizabeth (Hobbs), the first wife of Samuel, had died May 4, 1877.)

We are blessed by having an historical account of the early years of the Fancy Farm Community. In 1868 at the age of 13, Fr. Charles Haeseley had come from Switzerland with an older sister to live with his uncle, Fr. Peter Haeseley, pastor of St. John's, McCracken Co. Further, Fr. Charles had been pastor of St. John's, a nearby parish to St. Jerome, from 1883 to 1888. Fr. Charles Haeseley was pastor of St. Jerome from 1888 to 1920. In his article, written in 1911, he wrote: "In the following March (1829), he (Samuel Willett) and his youthful bride left their childhood's home and made their toilsome way on horseback to their future home in Graves Co. At Christmas of the same year, they were followed by Sam's brother, John Wm. "Jack".... These two brothers were the pioneers of St. Jerome's congregation, and remained identified with it as its foremost and most active members..... (Samuel) won the love of all who knew him by his clean, noble and Christian life and conduct.... Though broken down in health and enfeebled by old age, in 1890 and 1891 he strenuously urged the building of a new and larger church, to supply the needs of the growing congregation,..." (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #5.)

Samuel alone, of the early pioneers named by Fr. C. Haesely in his 1911 article, is listed in the 1830 Graves Co. census, The writer of this sketch believes Samuel & Elizabeth were in Graves Co. before the birth of their first child, John William, who was born June 24, 1829 (Note: Samuel named his first son after his younger brother, John William, who was called "Jack," This was the custom at that time.) If John William had been born in Washington Co., or in Union Co. where they had relatives and probably stopped on their way to Graves Co., he would have been baptized there. However, the records show that he and his sister, Susan Mary (born January 4, 1831), were both baptized on March 31, 1832, by Fr. Elisha John Durbin, the great circuit rider and Patriarch of the Catholic Church in Western Kentucky. (Also note, this is the basis of the writer's belief that Fr. Durbin first visited "the Catholic settlement" in March 1832, He was responsible for the building of the first Catholic Church in Jackson Purchase, named St. Jerome, in 1836, in the area that was named Fancy Farm in 1843.)

In Jillson's THE KENTUCKY LAND GRANTS, Samuel Willett was listed as having bought the southwest quarter of Section 20, which was 160 acres for \$40, dated October 20, 1829.

Two of his brothers-in-law, Ambrose and Alfred Hobbs, are listed as buying two of the other three quarters of section 20. From AN ATLAS OF GRAVES CO., 1880, it is known that Fancy Farm is a part of Township 4, North, Range 1, West (36 sections of 640 acres each or one square mile). St. Jerome Church appears in Section 20 of this township. (Note: There were at least 24 land grants of 160 acres each for a total of 3,840 acres for the pioneers of "the Catholic settlement" in the 1830s, who were mainly relatives and friends of Samuel Willett from St. Rose Priory Parish, Springfield.) (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #6.)

In the 1850 Agriculture Schedule, Samuel Willett was listed as follows: farming 80 acres, having 470 acres not in cultivation, and he valued his farm at \$880; having 4 horses, 4 milch cows, 2 working oxen, 14 "other cattle," 40 swine, and he valued his livestock at \$354; harvested 13 bu. of wheat, 5 bu. rye, 750 bu. corn, 100 bu. oats, 50 bu. Irish potatoes, 10 bu. sweet potatoes, 50 lbs. butter, 100 lbs. flax, 3 lbs. flax seed. (Note: A visit to "The Homeplace - 1850," in the Land Between the Lakes, would give more meaning and understanding to the above facts about the Samuel Willett household in 1850.)

In the 1860 Agriculture Schedule; Samuel Willett was listed as follows: farming 100 acres, having 200 acres not in cultivation, and he valued his farm at \$3750 and farm implements at \$1200; having 3 horses, 2 mules, 5 cows, 40 swine, and he valued his livestock at \$500; harvested 120 bu. of wheat, and 700 bu. of corn. (Note: There were 48 columns of information requested in 1860. The above items were considered the most important of the columns that were marked.)

In the 1870 Agriculture Schedule, Samuel Willett was listed as follows: farming 100 acres, having 180 acres not in cultivation, and he valued his farm at \$2500 and farm implements at \$50; he paid wages & board of \$150; he had 1 horse, 1 mule, 1 cow, 2 working oxen, 7 other cattle, 33 sheep, 11 swine, and he valued his livestock at \$850; he harvested 375 bu. corn, 100 bu. peas & beans; he made 20 gallons of wine, 200 lbs. of cheese, and grew 8 bu. clover seed. (Note: In the 1850, 1860 & 1870 agriculture schedules, Samuel Willett was not listed as growing any tobacco. This was a surprise to the writer of this article, especially considering the extensive growing of tobacco in Maryland by his ancestors.)

In a sampling of the Graves Co. Tax Lists, Samuel Willett was listed as follows:

1829: one white male over 21, with 2 horses;

1833: one white male over 21, with 2 horses, and acreage of 160 plus 80 plus 40;

1840: one white male over 21, with 5 horses valued at \$220, one cattle valued at \$10, and 208 acres valued at \$624;

1841: 210 acres valued at \$840, and as guardian for John Willett, who had 86 acres valued at \$160;

1850: 570 acres on the West Mayfield Water Course valued at \$1,567, plus 80 acres in Hickman Co. valued at \$150; 5 horses and mares with a value of \$150, 11 cattle with a value of \$35 over \$50; 5 children between 5 and 16 years old with a value of \$190 under the equalization law; for a grand total of \$1,942,

1863: 300 acres valued at \$2,400; one slave valued at \$400; 4 horses and mares valued at \$200, 2 mules valued at \$100, 10 cattle valued at \$20 over \$50; a total value of \$3,120 at 30 cents per \$100; a buggy valued at \$80, a metallic watch or clock valued at \$20, for a total of \$100 at 30 cents per \$100; 3 children between 6 and 18 years old; 30 hogs over 6 months old; 1,000 lbs. tobacco, 500 bu. corn, and 150 bu. wheat.

1869: 2967 acres valued at \$2,970; 2 horses valued at \$150, one mule valued at \$75, 9 cattle valued at \$75; a buggy valued at \$25, a metallic watch or clock valued at \$15; a total value

of \$3,310 at 30 cents per \$100; enrolled in militia; no children at home between 6 and 20 years old; 15 hogs over 6 months old; and 500 bu. corn.

Samuel & Elizabeth had twelve children, eleven lived to adulthood and were married. Their children are:

(1) John William (b. 1829 - d. before 1892) m. Mary Elvina d/o Cornelius Carrico & Theresa O'Bryan, 8 children;

(2) Susan Mary (1831-1917) m. Henry Jefferson s/o Cornelius Carrico & Theresa O'Bryan, 9 children;

(3) Samuel Thomas (1833-1893) m. Cecilia Ann d/o John Roberts & Julia Ann Adams, 6 children;

(4) Elizabeth Appolonia (1835-1912) m/1 James Philip s/o William James Hayden & Jane Elizabeth Mattingly, 2 children; m/2 Thomas F. Curtsinger (parents unknown), 4 children;

(5) Francis P. Kendrick (1837-1917) m. Sarah Ellen d/o Benedict Austin & Margaret Yates, 9 children;

(6) Josephine Matilda (1840-1926) m. Ignatius Francis s/o Cornelius Carrico & Theresa O'Bryan, 9 children;

(7) Elisha Joseph (1842-1911) m. Theresa Ann d/o Benedict Pierceall & Elizabeth Austin, 11 children;

(8) Eliza Jane (1844-1922) m. Francis Marion s/o Henry C. Carrico & Nancy Wethington, 8 children;

(9) Nancy Ann Elder (1846-1928) m. Samuel Abell s/o John William Thomas & Eliza Jarboe, 7 children;

(10) James Alexander Philip (1848-1926) m. Augusta Ann d/o Samuel Thomas Elliott & Theresa Jane Austin, 7 children;

(11). Charles Constantine (1850-1909) m. Anna Isabell "Belle" d/o Louis Cash & Sarah Tharp, 9 children;

(12) Frances Eugenia Willett (1852-1853).

(In Appendix, please see Exhibit #7.)

Samuel & Elizabeth's children, with their names, birth and death dates, and who they married, are listed on the back of a monument that was erected in the St. Jerome Cemetery to honor the first settlers of the Fancy Farm community. This monument was donated by George & Regina (cash) Robbins, in memory of Jimmy Carrico, and was dedicated by Father Walter Hancock on June 20, 1982. (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #8.) According to information that appears in the Willett book, Samuel & Elizabeth had eighty-nine grandchildren. (For more information on the ancestors and descendants of Samuel and Jack see THE WILLETT FAMILY OF MARYLAND, COLONIAL PEWTERERS, KENTUCKY PIONEERS, 1983, by Sr. M. Louise Donnelly, P.O. Box 97, Ennis, TX 75119.)

The post office at Fancy Farm was established on March 15, 1843, with John Peebles as the first postmaster. Thus, the first use of the name Fancy Farm to designate a particular area in northwest Graves Co. was in 1843. Samuel Willett was postmaster from May 6, 1856 to May 16, 1859. Francis P. Kendrick Willett, a son of Samuel, was postmaster from July 13, 1859 to November 2, 1866. Charles C. Willett, a son of Samuel, was postmaster from October 27, 1890 to April 3, 1893. Francis P. Kendrick Willett again was postmaster from May 23, 1903 to March 28, 1910. In addition, other descendants of Samuel Willett have served as postmaster at Fancy Farm.

In the Pogue Library at Murray State University there is a book of written reports concerning events that happened in the South during the Civil War. There appears on page 628 the

following report, with the heading, "March 22, 1864 - Affair at Fancy Farm, KY; Report of Col. William H. Lawrence, Thirty-fourth New Jersey Infantry, Headquarters of the Post, Columbus, KY, March 22, 1864." The report was as follows: "Julian Sanderson, mail carrier between Columbus and Mayfield reports that the postmaster at Fancy Farm, 10 miles south of Mayfield, was shot this morning; also the Catholic chapel at that place destroyed; that Willett & Boswell's store was entered, taking all their goods. They number about 50 men, and have taken off some 4 or 5 citizens as prisoners."

There follows a few facts related to the above, Civil War - Fancy Farm Story: (1) The Fancy Farm Postmaster in 1864 was Francis P. Kendrick Willett, son of Samuel, who died in 1917. (2) Father W. Patrick Bourke, pastor of St. Jerome from 1863-1869 had moved to Paducah during part of the Civil War. There may have been a fire at St. Jerome, but the church was not destroyed. (3) In the 1860 Graves Co. Census, the family of Samuel & Elizabeth Willett appears next to the family of George J. & Frances Boswell. In the 1870 Graves Co. Census, Samuel Willett was listed as a Dry-Goods Merchant, and George Boswell was listed as a farmer.

Samuel & Elizabeth's graves are near the cemetery road, across from the St. Jerome Parish Center. When in the vicinity, stop, say a prayer of gratitude, and read what is written at the bottom of his marker, "Remember young people as you pass by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now you are soon to be. So prepare for death to follow me." There lies the remains of Samuel Willett, The Father of the Fancy Farm Community, who had been baptized into the Hope of Christ's Resurrection, who died on Friday, June 10, 1892, and who was buried on Sunday, June 12, 1892, one hundred years ago. "We Remember, Celebrate, Believe, with Gratitude and Hope." (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #9.)

(Also, please note: In the Appendix, there are additional Exhibits, #10-13, that have significance as regards Samuel Willett, the Father of the Fancy Farm Community.)

Researched and written, in admiration and gratitude, by a great-great-nephew of Samuel Willett, Bro. Leo Willett, S.M., P.O. Box 23130, St. Louis, MO 63156. (In Appendix, please see Exhibit #14).

June 30, 1992



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, Diocese of Owensboro, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1995, pp. 355-356:

WILLETT, SAMUEL AND ELIZABETH (HOBBS) Samuel (1808-1892) son of John and Matilda (Summers) Willett, who was born the year the Diocese of Bardstown had been created, married Elizabeth daughter of Jesse and Mary (Elder) Hobbs in Washington County on Sept. 22, 1828, probably at St. Rose, Springfield. Samuel's uncle was Fr. William Thomas Willett (1790-1824), Dominican, who was the first native Kentuckian to be ordained a Catholic priest.

Samuel and Elizabeth were "the founders" in 1829 of "the Catholic Settlement!" in far Western Kentucky, the counties of Graves and Hickman. In the 1830s, several of their relatives and friends from St. Rose Priory Parish, Washington, County, migrated to "the Catholic Settlement." St. Jerome, the first Catholic Church in the Jackson Purchase, was built in 1836, under the leadership of Fr. Elisha J. Durbin, the patriarch of the Catholic Church in Western Kentucky (Owensboro Diocese). Fr. Charles Haeseley, the pastor of St. Jerome from 1888-1920, wrote in 1911: "These two brothers (Samuel and "Jack" Willett) were the pioneers of St. Jerome's

congregation, and remained identified with it as its foremost and most active members... (Samuel) won the love of all who knew him by his clean, noble and Christian life and conduct... Though broken down in health and enfeebled by old age, in 1890 and 1891 he strenuously urged the building of a new and larger church to supply the needs of the growing congregation ...

Samuel and Elizabeth had 12 children: John William (born 1829-died before 1892) married Mary Elvina Carrico; Susan Mary (1831-1917) married Henry Jefferson Carrico; Samuel Thomas (1833-1893) married Cecilia Ann Roberts; Elizabeth Appolonia (1835-1912) married first James Philip Hayden, married second Thomas F. Cataloger; Francis P. Kendrick(1837-1917) married Sarah Ellen Austin; Josephine Matilda (1840-1926) married Ignatius Carrico; Elisha Joseph (1842-1911) married Theresa Ann Pierceall; Eliza Jane (1844-1922) married Francis Marion Carrico; Nancy Ann Elder (1846-1926) married Samuel Abell Thomas; James Alexander Philip (1848-1926) married Augusta Ann Elliott; Charles Constantine (1850-1909) married Anna Isabelle "Belle" Cash; Frances Eugenia (1852-1853). Samuel and Elizabeth had 89 grandchildren.

Samuel married second Elizabeth M. (1830-1910) daughter of John S. and Juliann (Adams) Roberts at St. Jerome on April 3, 1878. Samuel died June 10, 1892; his first wife died May 4, 1877; his second wife died Jan. 30, 1910; all three are buried in St. Jerome Cemetery.

(For information on the ancestors and descendants of Samuel and Jack, see *The Willett Family of Maryland, Colonial Pewterers, Kentucky Pioneers*, 1983, by Sr. M. Louise Donnelly, Box 97, Ennis, TX).

WILLETT, JOHN WILLIAM "JACK," (1821-1909) son of John and Matilda (Summers) Willett was born after his father's death. He had an older brother, Samuel (see Samuel Willett biography) and six sisters. According to Fr. Charles Haeseley's article in 1911, Jack at age 8 joined his brother in Graves County around 1830.

In 1845 at St. Jerome, Jack first married Florida Anne "Rhody" (1823-1869) daughter of Cornelius and Theresa (O'Bryan) Carrico, nine children. Jack second married Elizabeth Gale Burgess prior to 1880, four children; Jack third married Angeline Mary Potter on Jan. 8, 1889 at St. Jerome, one child.

Fr. Haeseley wrote in 1911: "In 1888 'Uncle Jack' Willett left his beautiful country near Fancy Farm and moved to Mayfield, the county seat, where he resided, the friend of everyone, till his death on Oct 5. 1909." He was buried in St. Jerome Cemetery.

Thomas Jefferson (1846-1908), the oldest child of Jack and Rhody Willett, and their only son to reach adulthood, first married Frances Ann Pierceall (1856-1893), four children; married second, Emma Elizabeth Wilson (1864-1951) on July 15, 1895 at St. Jerome (see James Wilson Biography), five children.

James Alton (1904-1970) son of Thomas Jefferson and Emma, married Teresa Toon (1903-1993) on Sept. 28, 1924, at St Joseph, East St. Louis, IL (see William Hayden and Athanasius Toon Biographies). They have two sons: Delbert Leo (born Aug. 1, 1925) and Eugene Emmanuel (born July 31, 1927).

Delbert Lao professed his first religious vows in the Society of Mary (Marianists) at Galesville, WI on Aug. 15, 1944. He is known in religion as Brother Leo Willett, S.M. He has spent his years as a Marianist, mainly in high school teaching and administration.

Eugene married Dorothy Mae (born July 19, 1926) daughter of Emery and Mildred (Shepherd) Webb, four children: Michael Eugene (1951) married Nancy Sturgeon; Teresa Diane (1954) married Dennis C. Nizinski; Donna Marie (1955); and Marsha Ann (1961) married Mark Williamson. Eugene and Dorothy have two grandchildren: Dennis E. Nizinski (1973) and Robert

E. Williamson (1987). Eugene is retired from Benjamin Moore Paint Co., St. Louis, and he and Dorothy live in Trenton, IL.



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, Diocese of Owensboro, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1995, pp. 339-340:

TOON, ATHANASIOS AND THEODOSIA (MAXEY). Athanasius Hagen ‘Dock’ (1843-1915) was the sixth of the 10 children of Hillary and Cintha (Tharp) Toon. ‘Dock’s’ paternal grandparents were Stanislaus and Jenny (Blandford) Toon. Hillary and Cinthia were in the 1830s pioneer settlers of the ‘Fancy Farm Community’ in Graves County. (Note: St. Hilary and St. Athanasius were outstanding theologians in the fourth century, and both have been designated as Doctors of the Church. They were very close friends. The writer of this sketch believes that the above explains why Hillary named his son Athanasius and why Athanasius was nicknamed ‘Dock’. This May have been a suggestion of Father Alfred Hagan who baptized Athanasius on May 7, 1843, at St. Jerome, Fancy Farm, KY.) ‘Dock’ died on July 7, 1915, in Carlisle County.

Theodosia Ernest (1857-1948) was the sixth of seven children of Wade W. and Mary (McGary) Maxey. Wade and Mary were from Chesterfield County, VA. They are listed in the 1840 Graves County Census. Theo’s paternal grandparents were John and Nancy (Langsdon) Maxey. (John fought at Yorktown in the Revolutionary War.) Theo’s maternal grandparents were Thomas Duke and Polly (Rudd) McGary of Chesterfield County, VA.

The Hillary Toon farm in Graves County was next to that of the Wade Maxey farm. The Toons were Catholics, and the Maxeys were Baptists. Theo was baptized at St. Jerome on Oct. 31, 1891, at the age of 34.

‘Dock’ and Theo had eight children: William Peter (1882-1936) married first Ida Burgess, married second Marvis Stonner; Charles Milford (1885-1963) married Mamie Gore; William Claud (1887-1949) married Catherine Roberts; Robert Bernard (1890-1915) married Lillian Hobbs; Iva Gertrude (1893-1962) married James Everett Hobbs (see Jerome Hobbs biography); Clarence Harden (1896-1966) married first Ruby Pearl Burgess, married second Catherine (Wooley) Hayden; James Aubrey (1900-1925) married Eulah Mae Brower (Aubrey was killed in an automobile accident near Arlington); and Teresa (1903-1993) married James Alton Willett (see Jack Willett and William Hayden biographies).

Theo and ‘Dock’ had 45 grandchildren, with 37 reaching adulthood. It was always a treat going to and staying at grandma’s. Theo died on Oct 6, 1948. Theo and ‘Dock,’ with four of their children (Robert, Aubrey, Iva and Clarence), were buried in St. Jerome Cemetery.

TOON, STANISLAUS AND JENNY (BLANDFORD). Stanislaus Toon married Jenny, daughter of William and Joannah (Pidgeon) Blandford, on Jan. 19, 1801 in Washington County. They had nine children. They were members of St. Rose Priory Parish (Dominicans), Springfield, KY.

Although Stanislaus and Jenny never lived in western Kentucky, they were and are a considerable part of what became the Owensboro Diocese through their children and descendants, mainly in St. Jerome Parish, Fancy Farm. Five of their children migrated to Graves and Hickman Counties in the 1830s, and one, Matilda Goatley, migrated to Graves County after her husband’s

death. Another child, Elizabeth, migrated with her husband and family to Daviess County before 1840.

The six children of Stanislaus and Jenny Toon, who migrated to St. Jerome parish were: Theresa (born 1806), who married Alfred Hobbs, 10 children; William (1808), who married Perdella Carrico, 11 children; Hillery (1810), who married first, Cinthia Catherine Tharp, 10 children (see Athanasius Toon biography and accompanying picture of John Hilary Toon Family); Hillery, who married second, Mrs. Jane (Tharp) Gibson, three children; Sarah (1811), who married first, Ambrose Hobbs, one child; Sarah, who married second, Thomas F. Curtsinger, three children; Matilda (1812) who married William Goatley, 12 children; and Stanish Lloyd (1817), who married Jane Ryan, 10 children.

Another child of Stanislaus and Jenny, Elizabeth (1814), who married Joseph B. Mitchell, was living in Owensboro before 1840. One of their five children, Martha Ann (1842), married Freeman B. Eaton. Their seven children were baptized at St. Stephen, Owensboro. One of these, Anna (1873), married John W. Stout. Their four children were baptized at St. Stephen's. One of these, Mildred (1898), married Charles E. Field. Mildred and Charles were generous supporters of Mercy Hospital and Brescia College in Owensboro.

Rose (1858), another daughter of Elizabeth (Toon) Mitchell, married Vitus Higdon at St. Stephen's in 1877. Rose and Vitus moved to Fancy Farm in 1880s. They had six children.



Teresa Toon Willett (1903-1993) – Thanksgiving 1991

Teresa Willett, nee Toon, baptized into the hope of Christ's resurrection, on Monday, Dec. 13, 1993, at St. Joseph Hospital, Highland, Ill., age 90, of Trenton, Ill., a native of Fancy Farm, Graves County, Ky., formerly of East St. Louis, Chicago and Washington Park, Ill.

Beloved wife of the late James Alton Willett (April 3, 1970); dearest mother of Brother D. Leo Willett, S.M., of St. Louis, Mo., and Eugene Willett and mother-in-law of Dorothy Willett of Trenton; dear grandmother of Michael (Nancy) Willett of Indianapolis, Ind., Teresa Nizinski of Rochester, Minn., Donna Willett of O'Fallon, and Marsha (Mark) Williamson of Trenton, Ill. Dear great-grandmother of Denis E. Nizinski and Robert M. Williamson; dear aunt, great aunt, great-great aunt; and friend, especially of Flora (nee Willett) Tucker of Eden Village Nursing Home, Edwardsville. Teresa was a Mananist affiliate, Society of Mary.

Teresa was the daughter of Athanasius H. and Theodosia (nee Maxey) Toon, the youngest with six brothers and one sister (Peter, Charles Milford, Claud, Robert, Clarence, Aubrey and Ivie Hobbs), all deceased.

Funeral procession will leave at 11:45 a.m. Friday, from Moss Funeral Home, 105 S. Main St., Trenton, to St. Mary Catholic Church for a noon Mass of Christian Burial with the Rev. Robert Flannery, Pastor, Presider. Interment will be in Mount Carmel Cemetery, 10101 West Main St., Belleville.

Visitation will be held from 4 until 9 p.m. Thursday and from 9 until 11:45 am. Friday at the funeral home.

A vigil service will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Moss Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to Retirement Health Care, Society of Mary, P.O. Box 23130, St. Louis, Mo. 63156.

