

THE **150** year
HISTORY of

St. Elizabeth Fraternity Quincy, IL

This article originally appeared in The Franciscan Forum, the official publication of the Sacred Heart Province, SFO, Spg. 1991, it was written by Dan and Marg Andrews, SFO.

All photos in article credit: Therese Ream, SFO



Father Marion Habig, OFM, wrote in the *Franciscan Herald* for July, 1984:

“As far as I can ascertain the first fraternity of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis (as it was then called) was begun on Easter Sunday, 1861, in Quincy, Illinois... first fraternity... established in the United States of America after it became an independent country (following the Treaty of Paris in 1783).”

We in the St. Elizabeth Fraternity gratefully accept this honor, not questioning our good fortune and knowing that had it not been for the Very Rev. Herman Schaefermeyer, diocesan pastor of St. Boniface Parish, Quincy (himself a Third Order member), it might never have happened. Father Schaefermeyer had met nine Franciscan friars on the ship *Breman* from Germany to New York. As pastor of the German-speaking parish in Quincy—largest parish in the southern half of Illinois, Fr. Schaefermeyer needed help hearing confessions. In the spring he wrote to those Franciscan friends, who had traveled by immigrant train to Teutopolis, Illinois, where, according to Fr. Marion Habig, a fraternity would be canonically established two years later. One priest was spared to him for the Paschal Season.

To say the people in the “river town” liked the Franciscan was an understatement. One man, (Christian Borstadt and his wife) generously offered the site for a church and monastery if the “Friars would take up permanent residence in Quincy,” then the second largest city in Illinois. Only Chicago’s population was larger. The German provincial was contacted and his Chapter gave approval.

St. Francis Solano Church and monastery became a reality by December 1860, with Fr. Servace Altmicks, OFM, superior and pastor.

Father Servace was surprised that, besides Fr. Schaefermeyer, other “Franciscan tertiaries” — of both German and Irish origins—lived in Quincy, and he called a meeting of the Third Order seculars even before other societies were organized in the new parish.

What deep faith, courage, and farsightedness those Franciscans had! In little more than a year, a monastery with a dozen cells had been erected, a beautiful little church had been built on the sparsely settled prairie about 1.5 miles from the Mississippi River and from the other two Catholic churches.

The church, unfurnished but crowded, had been blessed for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Father Servace, then 32, had also been appointed to head a school and college, and college classes had begun, though that building had to wait because the summer of 1860, without rain, had caused a lack of funds.

The first meeting of the Third Order Seculars was held on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1861—

and it rained:

“A much needed rain to fill the cisterns.”

The noon temperature was 41 degrees, according to the careful records kept.



Father Servace was the only one of the German friars who could speak English fluently. His ability probably accounted for some of the names found among those invested before or during the first meeting: Helen Clancy, Mary Fitzgerald, and Margaret Donahue.

As a result, two branches of the fraternity were formed. The German-speaking branch met on the first Sunday of each month and the English-speaking on the second Sunday. This continued until 1925. In 1910 there were 500 members—

287 German-speaking and
213 English-speaking.

CLASSIC FRANCISCAN



Father Marion, in his 1984 article, found noteworthy “the fact that on August 15, 1863, another diocesan priest, Rev. John Janssen, joined the Quincy Third Order Fraternity. In 1888, Fr. Janssen was consecrated (ordained) first bishop of the diocese of Belleville, Illinois.

Father Schaefermeyer entered the Franciscan Order in 1875 and received the name of Fr. P. Liborius, OFM. He died at Quincy 12 years later, at the age of 68.

We pray that all those who’ve walked in the footsteps of St. Francis since the first meeting (130 years ago at the time of this article) may by their example and their intercessions help St. Elizabeth Fraternity grow and flourish for the next 150 Years.

POSTSCRIPT:

Since these words were written, we have been privileged to witness the following growth within the Secular Franciscan Order, as pertains to our fraternity.

Originally designated as part of the Sacred Heart Province, the Franciscans of the Prairie Region was formally established on October 20, 1994.

It is one of 30 regions of SFO’s in the United States. In this region (Illinois) besides Quincy, fraternities are located in Brussels, Springfield, Decatur, Edwardsville, Rock Island, Peoria, Streator, Teutopolis, and Bloomington.

Of these twelve fraternities, St. Elizabeth Fraternity sponsored both Our Lady of Angels in Edwardsville, (IL) that was Canonically Established as a fraternity on August 2, 2001; and Franciscans of the Tau of Calhoun County (Brussels, IL.) established on November 22, 2009. We also sponsor a cell group, Our Lady of Lourdes, which is currently re-forming in the vicinity of Burlington-Fort Madison, Iowa.

St. Elizabeth Fraternity now has approximately 99 professed members. Meetings continue to be held the third Sunday of the month at St. Francis Solanus Paris, 1721 College Avenue, Quincy, Illinois, 62301. We cordially welcome new inquirers.

On April 2, 2011, St. Elizabeth’s fraternity commemorated their 150th anniversary with a very special celebration at St. Francis Solanus in Quincy, Ill. Over 180 guests attended which represented almost every fraternity in the Franciscans of the Prairie region.

Those in attendance included Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM; Fr. John Sullivan, OFM; Sue Nelson, SFO, past regional

minister; and Marian Crosby, SFO, our current regional minister. Mass was celebrated at 4:30 followed by a reception at St. Francis School.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The TAU banner (*photo B*) was made from a discarded habit by the daughter of Roseann Bonebrake, SFO, one of our members.

Special thanks to Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM, the pastor of St Francis; Deacon David Ream, SFO, our spiritual assistant, and all the visiting priests. To the school children from St. Francis, who all colored pictures for part of our display of our archives tables, and to the oldest guest attending, Justina Peters, SFO, one of our own, who is 101 (*pictured below holding yellow napkin*). Our cake was beautiful—the pictures do not do it justice (*photo A*). Marg Andrews, SFO, (*bottom left*) gave an entertaining talk about the history of our fraternity; she epitomizes the spirit of our group. The lady (*the next bottom photo*) at the microphone is our current minister, Phyllis Maxwell, SFO.

EDITOR’S NOTE— Since this article was originally submitted, the fraternity uncovered that the oldest known active SFO National Fraternity is **BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA REGION’S—ST. JOSEPH FRATERNITY IN UTICA, NY**, who celebrated their 150th anniversary in 2010.

(See *TAU-USA Fall issue 2010 #68*)

