

HISTORY OF ST. FLORIAN

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INTRODUCTION

History is many things to many people. Garfield philosophized that history is but the unrolled scroll of prophecy. Napoleon asks, "What is history but a fable agreed upon?" A. Dumas believes truth is very liable to be left-handed in history, and R. Walpole candidly states, "All history is a lie." Cicero sees history as something necessary to man's progress, "Not to know what has been transacted in former times is to be always a child. If no use is made of the labors of past ages, the world must remain always in infancy of knowledge."¹

Possibly each of these men is correct to a certain degree. Each individual places his own set of values on the worth of history. It is my belief that, on the surface, each bit of history is a story, and all the fragments could be woven together to form a global story of all created things. Beneath the surface history is a cause and effect story. The circumstances surrounding man affect his emotions, opinions, behavior and very life. By studying man's behavior as affected by his environment, we can better direct our own lives.

History is most worth while when, through it, we learn to know and appreciate our culture, consequently we can give new depth and meaning to our lives.

Any history of St. Florian is but a microscopic dot in the story of the world, the nation, or even the state; but to me it is important because it is about my home town. I hope this History of St. Florian will give the reader a better understanding of the people who lived their lives on this land before us.

My efforts to gather information for this paper are very well summed up by Bacon who says:

Out of monuments, names, words, proverbs, traditions, private records and evidences, fragments of stories, passages of books, and the like, we do save and recover somewhat from the deluge of time.²

¹ Tyron Edwards, revised and enlarged by C. N. Catrevas and Jonathan Edwards, The New Dictionary of Thoughts (New York: Standard Book Company, 1955), p. 255-257

² ibid., p.256.

CHAPTER I

Antebellum Period

The community of St. Florian is located in that half-circle of northern Alabama that is a part of the great Tennessee Valley. This country of the Tennessee is one of the loveliest on the face of the earth. It has the majesty of a great simplicity. It is easy to believe that here could rise a benign and happy civilization.³

The soil is productive when properly cared for. The climate is favorable with an average annual temperature of 60°, with a low of 40° for January and a high of 79° for July. The annual precipitation is approximately fifty inches.⁴

St. Florian has a radius of about one and one-half miles. It is approximately twelve miles south of the Tennessee line, and six miles north of Florence.

Before the White Man Came

The beauty and strength of a land untouched by human hands is hard for twentieth century man to imagine. Sparkling streams, rolling hills, forests of oak, maple, poplar, and elm bathed in the warmth of the summer sun or being lashed unmercifully by the angry forces of nature. This land, the home of a variety of wild animals, was ready for human habitation.

It is believed that the first human explorers from Asia entered this unpopulated continent from 10,000 to 15,000 years ago.⁵ Those migrating to the southeast were the Muskogean-speaking people, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole. These people depended on the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash supplemented by gathering, hunting, and fishing. The settlement pattern seems to have been mainly one of villages. Family units were arranged in a square ground pattern with an open plaza in the center. Warfare played a destructive role in the life of these people.⁶

Alabama Indians located as a rule on a river or creek, or near an unfailing supply of water.⁷ They were naturally attracted to the land around the Tennessee River and its tributaries.

Indians probably lived, hunted and fought in the land that is now St. Florian. The greatest concentration of arrowheads and other remains are found along the creeks and branches. According to local legend there was once an Indian village by the spring now owned by Henry Stumpe; and this spring lot was the scene of an Indian battle. A man-made mound was on the hill south of the spring; this served as a burial ground. When, in

³ R. L. Duffus, The Valley and Its People (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p. 14.

⁴ Florence Chamber of Commerce telephone conversation, April 28, 1965.

⁵ Richard B. Morris (ed.), Encyclopedia of American History (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 3

⁶ Ibid., p. 11-13

⁷ Charles Grayson Summersell, Alabama History for Schools (Birmingham: Colonial Press, 1961), p. 4.

the thirties, the land on this hill was being leveled in order to build a small store, the horse stepped in a hole. Upon investigation the workmen discovered what must have been a small grave. Later, when the Church Road was being built, workmen found a similar hole. The ground was loose, the hole was about three feet deep, and in the bottom was found nothing but one-fourth to one-eighth inch of dark fine soil.

Another story tells of Indians getting flint from Shoals Creek, and bringing it to the spring to make their arrowheads. This can be substantiated by the fact that the majority of arrowheads found in this area are made from hard, blue flint like that common in the creek. Hundreds of tiny flakes of flint can be found along the spring, these being the waste when Indian craftsmen dropped the cold spring water in the hot flint to shape their weapons.⁸

There are very few facts to build our Indian stories on; possible graves, various types of arrowheads, a few items of stone that could have been used as hatchets or scrapers, and some other crude tools. I don't mean to imply that these people lacked culture. Theirs was a culture that we don't understand. They were a deeply spiritual inward-looking people. They looked on the earth and beasts and fruits as gifts from the Great Spirit. As Mr. Owl, a Cherokee, told a scout who was carelessly hacking at a tree, "Indian people have regard for trees the same way you regard me, I have life in me. That tree has life in it, too."⁹ The Indian's real story has slipped silently into the past. We can only gather a few fragments here and there so we can develop some understanding and appreciation of his way of life.

Early White Settlers

Recorded history of our state had its beginning in 1507 when a map was published in Europe which showed more information about Alabama and the adjoining coast than any other part of the American mainland.¹⁰ Then followed in succession Spanish explorations, French settlements, and British control. The great rush of frontiersmen came after the defeat of the Red Sticks and the end of the War of 1812. The settlers were farmers who were coming to the Alabama cotton lands. The Alabama territorial legislature had its first meeting in 1818, and Alabama became a state in 1819.¹¹

The first land sales took place in 1818. It was at this time John and Matthew Wilson purchased land from the United States Government.¹² St. Florian is located on part of the land that made up the Wilson plantations. At the same time, other landowners bought property in the surrounding areas.

Pruitton, about eight miles north of St. Florian, was settled by Tom Pruitt, who was the "big man of the place". Pruitt owned a flour mill, grist mill, saw mill and store.

⁸ E. Harold Peters, personal interview, March 7, 1965.

⁹ John Keats, "What Does the Indian Want?" *Catholic Digest*, vol. 29, No. 5 (March, 1965), p. 20.

¹⁰ Summersell, p. 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹² "Abstract of Title", No. 540, Lauderdale County Court House, p.4.

He had a big barn, even though he was not a plantation owner he worked lots of labor and had lots of mules.¹³

Cow Pen was another thriving settlement. Remains of the old water mill can still be seen. Probably the most important industry, other than farming, was a wool factory. People brought their wool from great distances, even from Waynesboro, Tennessee, to be made into cloth. During the Civil War, the confederate Government bought wool from this factory to make uniforms. Orders were written on any kind of paper they happened to have. Some few remember houses where the factory workers lived. In somewhat the same area was a gunsmith factory, but very little is known about it.¹⁴

About three miles north of St. Florian, along Military Road and Shoals Creek, was located the Baugh and Kennedy Company. On this land was situated a cotton factory, grist and saw mills. The firm was known as Lauderdale Cotton Mills.¹⁵

Our neighboring settlement to the south is Mars Hill. There, too, the first land was purchased in 1818. The purchase was made by three Moore brothers from Virginia: Mac, Pope, and Louis Capit. The Moores' plantation covered a large tract of land, and they worked quite a few slaves. Louis Capit, who was called Chris because he was born on Christmas, was the only one of the three who remained in Alabama.¹⁶ In 1853 Harnish and Margaret Kachelman purchased land in Mars Hill from Moore. Kachelmans had come from Bavaria in a sailboat; the trip took sixteen weeks. Mars Hill had a foundry, cotton gin and gristmill.¹⁷

A few miles east of St. Florian on Shoals Creek was Tate's plantation. John S. Tate purchased the land around 1818. The main house, which is part of the present house, was built in 1820. Tate married Eliza Ann Hough; they had three boys and two girls.¹⁸

Florence, incorporated in 1818, was already quite a settlement. Brokers bought from the plantations, cotton was the biggest item. Tobacco was raised, but for local use only.¹⁹

In this setting the Wilson's operated their plantations of two to three thousand acres. From all indications the Wilsons were good people. Their slaves always spoke well of them. Matthew evidently got along well with his neighbor, Kachelman. Wilson liked for Kachelman to do his garden work. One day Wilson told Kachelman his garden needed working; Kachelman told him he would not be able to help him because his corn had to be plowed. Wilson insisted, so Kachelman obliged him. In the meantime, Wilson sent some of his slaves around a back way and got all of Kachelman's corn plowed.

¹³ John Rasch, personal interview, May 5, 1965

¹⁴ Clara S. Stutts, personal interview, March 28, 1965

¹⁵ Deed, Dec. 31, 1873, Filed Feb. 9, 1874, Recorded Book 20, Page 637, Lauderdale County Court House.

¹⁶ Mrs. Dean Moore, telephone conversation, May 6, 1965

¹⁷ Louis Kachelman, personal interview, April 25, 1965

¹⁸ Mrs. Lake Tate, Sr., telephone interview, May 6, 1965

¹⁹ Richard Smith, personal interview, April 15, 1965

Wilson was a big farmer, had about forty mules and “no telling how many slaves.” They killed hogs for a week. Several houses are remembered being seen around the main house, but none of these buildings are standing now.²⁰

In the earliest days of St. Florian, some settlers remembered seeing stacks of cotton seed in the fields east of the Middle Road. There was, in that area, an old tread cotton gin, which no one here remembers being used. The gin must have belonged to the Wilson plantation.²¹ One can gain some insight into the lives of these people by studying the inscriptions on the monuments in their cemetery (see Appendix A).

This area, just like any other touched by the Civil War, suffered greatly because of it. Salt was very scarce; people boiled the salty soil from the floors of the smokehouses to get salt.²² When word came that Yankee soldiers were on the way, people even buried meat to keep it from being confiscated.²³ Kachelman was pulling fodder when some rough Yankee soldiers took him for Wilson and took all his corn. Later they discovered he wasn't a slave owner, and gave him a paper showing the government would pay for his corn. These soldiers camped by the Mars Hill foundry, and in an abandoned log house in the Matthew Wilson Plantation.²⁴

During the last part of the war, food was very scarce. John S. Tate, who was then a Colonel in the Confederate Army, took his slaves across the river to raise food for the Confederate Army. As soon as the war was over, he freed his slaves.²⁵

The chaos during and after the war can be captured, in a small way, by reflecting on the few stories that are told about that period. Lauderdale Cotton Mills was destroyed in 1867 by the “public enemy”. The Baugh and Kennedy Company took bankruptcy in 1876.²⁶ Renegades caused much of the disorder. A group tried to get one of Moore's Negroes to tell where his money had been hid. The Negro would not tell so he was hanged.²⁷ On another occasion, Tate was taking some cotton to Florence to be sold. On the way he saw two suspicious looking fellows watching him. When he sold his cotton and got paid in gold coins, he bored a hole in his ox yoke and hid the coins there. On the way home the fellows did stop him, but they did not find the money.²⁸

One incident that is close to the history of St. Florian is the murder of John Wilson and his nephew. Three men broke into the house where Wilson, who was ill, was being cared for by his nephew, Matthew H. Wilson. These men demanded to know where his money was. When he refused to tell, the outlaws tortured and murdered them

²⁰ Louis Kachelman, personal interview, April 25, 1965

²¹ John Rasch, personal interview, March 13, 1965

²² Joe Rasch, personal interview, March 7, 1965

²³ Mrs. Frank Henken, personal interview, April 11, 1965

²⁴ Louis Kachelman, personal interview, April 25, 1965

²⁵ Mrs. Lake Tate, Sr., telephone conversation, May 6, 1965

²⁶ Deed, Dec. 31, 1873, Filed Feb. 9, 1874, Recorded Book 20, Page 637, Lauderdale County Court House.

²⁷ Louis Kachelman, personal interview, May 2, 1965

²⁸ John Locker, personal interview, April 7, 1965

with hot irons. The nephew rolled out of bed and played dead; he lived to tell the story and identify the murderers. They were caught and shot in the area where Jackson Highway and Royal Avenue meet.²⁹

According to John Wilson's will, his wishes were that his farms be kept up and cultivated until his grandchildren (his two children had died) should marry or become twenty-one years of age. The executor was unable to carry out the provisions of the will due to the emancipation of slaves. The executor received permission to sell the lands at public auction. He advertised and sold some of the lands, but the remainder was not sold for want of a bidder. Permission was received to sell the remaining lands to J. H. Houser at \$5.50 per acre, amounting in aggregate to \$13,401.24, 5% down and the remainder in two equal annual payments.³⁰ The request was granted in the May term, 1873, and the land was conveyed to Houser.³¹

Houser also bought land from Matthew Wilson on October 18, 1872.³² Matthew died in 1874 and is buried in the Wilson cemetery. The remaining members of the Wilson family returned to Virginia.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Abstract of Title", No. 540, Lauderdale County Court House.

³¹ Decree of Court, May Term, 1873, Recorded Final Record Book "J", Page 499.

³² Report and Petition, Oct. 18, 1872, Filed and Recorded Oct. 31, 1872, Book 20, Lauderdale County Court House, Page 300.

CHAPTER II

Establishment of St. Florian Community

From the beautiful Abbeys of Bavaria which sometimes assume the roles of cultural and educational centers of the country, we American Catholics received many of our first priests and teachers. About 1840 Archabbot Boniface Wimmer came from Mettens, and ancient Benedictine Abbey in Bavaria. With a small band of brothers he founded the now famous Abbey St. Vincent at Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Although penniless upon arriving in this country, the Archabbot was able to start several other Abbeys and Priories, one of them at Cullman, Alabama. He was able to carry out this wonderful work through his trust in God and the generosity of his royal friend, King Louis I of Bavaria.

At nearby Innsbruck, in the Tyrol, J. H. Houser, a Catholic priest, received his Doctorate in Theology. He immigrated to America where he was a priest of the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Indiana, and director of the Homestead Society of Cincinnati, Ohio.³³

Together these two men, Father Houser and Archabbot Winner, played the most important roles in the story of St. Florian's successful establishment.

Land Purchase

Father Houser had brought Catholic settlements to Tennessee where he founded the colonies of Lawrenceburg, Loretto, St. Joseph and St. Marys. When he received the tempting offer to buy the Wilson plantation, he was happy to have the opportunity of starting a settlement of his faith and national origin in Alabama. Matthew Wilson sold Father Houser his land in October, 1872,³⁴ and the John Wilson's land was conveyed to Father Houser in May, 1873.³⁵

Possibly Father Houser thought of his new settlement not as just a small community, but a thriving town. He had it laid out in lots as small as two acres as well as farms as large as forty to eighty acres. He provided for a number of roads, the main ones being thirty feet wide and a secondary ones being twenty feet. This idea proved impractical, either because there was not enough business to be had, or because Florence was too near; at any rate, most of the new-comers turned to farming and only a few settled and followed trades such as black-smithing and wagon-making.³⁶

³³ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., Diamond Jubilee of Saint Michael's Parish, 1873-1848, St. Florian, Alabama, (no publishing company or date given).

³⁴ Deed, Oct. 18, 1872, Filed Oct. 31, 1872. Recorded, Book 20, Lauderdale County Court House, Page 300.

³⁵ Decree of Court, May Term, 1873, Recorded: Final Recond Book "J", Lauderdale County Court House, Page 499.

³⁶ Father Alphonse Klug, O.S.B., Letters to L&N From People Who Formerly Lived North About Lauderdale County, Alabama, Louisville, Kentucky: Louisville and Nashville Railroad Co., Mr. G. A. Park, General Immigration and Industrial Agent, 1913, page 31.

First Settlers

Father Houser placed on the lands Germans, Catholic families from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, New York, and other northern states. He sold the lands for \$8.00 to \$15.00 per acre owing to location and improvements. The colonists, many of whom had been in this country for some time, had experienced the hardships of the northern climate. Their industry so far had not availed them to any great extent. "It had taken all the fruits of their labor to sustain them up to this time, so that most of them were forced to go in debt for their land."³⁷

The first settlers were Florian Rasch, John Kasmeier, Sr., Frank Breidainger, Adam Zulauf, and Theodor Wolfering. By 1876, forty pieces of land had been sold to as many families.³⁸

Florian and Carolyn Rasch came from Centerline, Michigan, by train. There was a house on the land Florian purchased, the house that had belonged to John Wilson. It was a two-roomed log dwelling with a hall separating the rooms. Florian, a farmer, began clearing and cultivating his land.³⁹

Kasmeiers also came by train. They bought a place on the Middle Road. There was no house or water on their land. After building a small house and digging a well, they dug a pond.⁴⁰

Soon Grossheims came. They made the hard trip from Racine, Wisconsin, in a covered wagon. On the long, hard trip, which took eight weeks, they encountered many difficulties. They lost a horse and got beat out of twenty dollars in Paducah, Kentucky. Mr. and Mrs. Grossheim had six children when they made the trip. The family liked to tell about their mascot, a pet coon, that made the trip with them. Needless to say, the coon received a lot of attention, especially on the ferry at Paducah. When Grossheim arrived in America some years earlier, he got job with J. I. Kufts in Pennsylvania where he learned the wagon trade. When they reached their new home here, he became a wagon maker and blacksmith. He had bought forty acres behind the Kasmeier place. Because of his business, he preferred the land on the road; so in the true spirit of cooperation, Kasmeier simply swapped the land with him. Grossheim operated his blacksmith shop on the Middle Road for many years.⁴¹

The John B. Locker family came to this settlement from Ohio in 1873. A plantation house, similar to the one on the Rasch place, was on Locker's land. The house had been vacant during the Civil War and was in bad need of repair. Locker, whose farm was close to the Mars hill community, lived with Blalocks until their house was repaired.

³⁷ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., History of St. Florian Told to Florence Rotarians, reprint from Florence Times, June, 1940.

³⁸ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., Diamond Jubilee of Saint Michael's Parish, 1873-1848, St. Florian, Alabama, (no publishing company or date given).

³⁹ Elizabeth R. Macke, personal interview, May 8, 1965

⁴⁰ John Kasmeier, personal interview, March 13, 1965

⁴¹ Katherine G. Kasmeier, personal interview, March 13, 1965

John Locker worked a team of oxen the first year; their names were Ben and Lep.⁴² Their next team was one horse and one mule. When coming from town one day, the wagon hit a tree stump; one animal broke a leg and had to be killed.⁴³

Before the Schmildkofer family moved here from Wisconsin, the father came down and had a house built. Kasmeier dug their well. Iagner later bought the adjoining farm. One of the biggest adjustments these people had to make was learning to farm in the south. One day, during potato planting time, Mrs. Schmildkofer paid Mrs. Iagner a neighborly visit. Iagnwes were accustomed to planting Irish potatoes and were preparing sweet potatoes in the same way, by cutting them into pieces. Mrs. Schmildkofer explained that you have to bed the sweet potatoes and plant the slips.⁴⁴

John Matthew Stumpe and his wife were a young couple when they came. They made the overland trip from Wisconsin with wagons and five or seven horses. The trip was hard; they averaged one horse being sick all the way down. An old aunt came with the young couple. The Stumpe family lived with the Florian Rasch Family while neighbors helped them build a house. All their children were born here; they lost three when they were very young, one was buried in 1874.⁴⁵

William Mecke, a weaver by trade, brought his family from Germany in 1866 and settled in Poughkeepsie, New York. They came here in 1875 and bought land near the Locker farm. An old church building was on their land. Here, again, the Mars Hill neighbors helped out. The Meckes stayed with Kachelmans until the church was converted into a dwelling.⁴⁶

The Joe Buffler family came from Illinois to Memphis by boat. They brought six horses. A section in the bottom of the boat was reserved for livestock, here Buffler spent a lot of time caring for his horses. On the way down a man in the lower section of the boat was stricken with smallpox. Joe Buffler had been vaccinated, so he accepted the responsibility of taking care of the man. He didn't tell his wife until the man was well and the trip was over. Bufflers settled in St. Joseph, Tennessee, and stayed there one year. The community was named for him. They came to this community and moved into an old log house on the place.⁴⁷

Joseph and Ursula Eckl were some of the first settlers coming from St. Marys, Pennsylvania.

Wendelin Schaut moved here from St. Marys, taking the unattached members of his family with him. Of the remaining children, John married here and conducted a

⁴² John Locker, personal interview, April 7, 1965.

⁴³ Emma B. Eckl, personal interview, April 5, 1965

⁴⁴ Annie S. Eckl, personal interview, March 18, 1965.

⁴⁵ Joseph L. Stumpe, personal interview, April 30, 1965.

⁴⁶ Mary M. Henken, personal interview, April 11, 1965.

⁴⁷ Frank Buffler, Sr., personal interview, April 11, 1965

country store. Alex became a Secular Priest; when death terminated his ministry, he was buried in St. Florian. Peter married Kate Zulauf.⁴⁸

I have mentioned only a few of the forty or forty-five families that came during the first year. I regret there was not time to get more complete information.

It is evident these peoples' lives centered around the church. The first families arrived in the latter part of 1872. In spite of the numberless jobs waiting for them, they worked together to build a church, a simple building 50 X 25, and a two-story frame parsonage.⁴⁹ Surely they were looking to the future. At the time they didn't have a resident pastor, not even regular services except when Father Houser came from his Tennessee colonies.

Florian Rasch donated the first church bell, which still hangs in the present church tower. In gratitude the settlers named the colony for him, "St. Florian".⁵⁰

In the spring of 1873, Father Houser was able to secure an energetic, young, German priest, Father Michael Mertz, to be St. Florian's first resident pastor. He brought with him his niece, Annie Mertz, who had lost her parents and only brother in Germany. Evidently, no church records were kept before Father Michael came. The first birth recorded is Francis Joseph Gutter, born June 19, 1873. The first internment was a man named Riesgraf, who died of congestive chill in 1873.⁵¹

Some of the names recorded in the Church records are not familiar to the St. Florian people. That is understandable. St. Florian was the only Catholic community in the area with a resident priest. Many Catholics were among the immigrants who came to Florence to work on the canal. These people looked to, and were served by the St. Florian pastor.

After the hardships of travel and getting established in a different section of a new land, these people must have felt their greatest difficulties were a thing of the past; this, however, was not the case.

Coming of Benedictines

The people of St. Florian worked hard; however, they also enjoyed picnics, dances, and other types of social gatherings. This entertainment was not just for the young people, but for the older folks as well. Early in the year 1876, Zulauf gave a dance that was attended by at least one member of every family in the parish. A short time before he had supplied room and board to a drummer, the man became ill. Not long

⁴⁸ Charled J. Schaut, Early St. Marys and Some of Its People, 1838 to 1931 (Clearfield, PA: Kurtz Bros., 1952), page 207

⁴⁹ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., Diamond Jubilee of Saint Michael's Parish, 1873-1848, St. Florian, Alabama, (no publishing company or date given).

⁵⁰ Lawrence Buffler, "St. Florence, Alabama", (typewritten), [n.d.]

⁵¹ Church Records, St. Michael Church, St. Florian, Alabama

after, Zufauf's children also became ill. Almost everyone at the dance visited the children and expressed wishes that they would soon be well.

The tragedy became evident when it was learned the traveler had suffered from the dread disease, smallpox, hence it found its way into almost every home. Among its victims was the pastor. Father Michael Mertz suffered a relapse and died on February 12th.

During an epidemic it was customary to bury the victims at night, possibly to avoid a crowd. John Locker said his mother, Elizabeth Buffler, then a little girl about nine years of age, remembered watching the funeral. Bufflers lived on a hill overlooking the cemetery. The night was stormy; the flashes of lightning made it possible for her, and her brothers and sisters, to watch the proceedings.⁵²

You would think one such calamity in a year would have been enough, but these people had another trial to face. Father Houser was a learned man with good intentions and lofty ideals, but he lacked the foresight and shrewdness of a businessman. The lands he bought from the Wilsons amounted to over \$20,000. He had other obligations in other communities. The returns from all his colonies did not come in as he had expected. The St. Florian people had paid for all their land, besides they had loaned him about \$6,000. Father Houser's mortgage on the Wilson plantation still amounted to \$3,000, and he had other obligations in Tennessee. By the end of April the mortgage would be foreclosed. Naturally, the people in the community were very disturbed. On February 21, 1876, Lawrence Specker, Florian Rasch, and Joseph Buffler wrote to the Archabbot Boniface Wimmer, O. S. B., at St. Vincents, Pennsylvania, imploring him to take over the parish and cancel the debt. The Archabbot had already received a similar invitation from Father Houser. He was touched by the appeal, and wrote to the Most Reverend John Quinlan, Bishop of Mobile, for permission to enter the diocese. For some time there was no reply from the Bishop because he was on a confirmation trip.

The parishioners were becoming increasingly alarmed; they were indignant at Father Houser. From Covington, Kentucky, Father Houser wrote Bishop Quinlan again explaining the difficulty, and of the willingness of Archabbot Boniface to assume both the obligation and the parish. "Help to save St. Florian," he said, "I had the best intentions and suffered much in this undertaking, but now I am at the end of it; I cannot bear it any longer."

This was favored at once with a reply. Bishop Quinlan invited the Benedictines to take over St. Florian. They arrived April 23, 1876. Father Houser gave the Benedictines 800 acres in lieu of the mortgage. Reverend Gabriel Guerster became the first Benedictine pastor. Brothers Majolus and Fridolin came to care for the sacristy, house and farm. Father Gabriel taught school. He did his best to bring harmony, but the people failed to support him. After fifteen months he left, broken down in health.

⁵² Frank Buffler, Sr., personal interview, April 11, 1965

He was succeeded by Father Benedict Menges, who later became St. Bernard's first abbot. In his amiable way, he made the people understand their obligations toward the pastor. He told them he had not come to fight them about support, but to live in peace and seek to save their souls. This pleased the people, and each family promised to pay dues toward the support of their pastor.

The community continued to grow; between 1876 and 1877 twenty new families arrived.⁵³ St. Florian, served by the Benedictines, was an established community.

⁵³ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., Diamond Jubilee of Saint Michael's Parish, 1873-1848, St. Florian, Alabama, (no publishing company or date given).

CHAPTER III

Growth and Development to World War I

It was my intention in chapters one and two to present a brief background of this area, to relate circumstances leading to the establishment of St. Florian, and to present facts that had a strong influence on the first years. It was, also, my intention to introduce to the reader some personalities, both religious and lay persons, who contributed to the life of the settlement.

In dealing with the growth and development of the community, I will begin with the earliest years, 1872 and 1873. The way these people lived, spent their limited free time, and progressed economically was not peculiar to this community. These things reflect a time in history. The one way in which St. Florian may not be typical of the average American community at the turn of the twentieth century, is in their religious background.

Economic Development

On a visit to St. Florian in the early days, one would probably have paid particular attention to Zulauf's store. It was the first store in the community. Judging from the advertisement appearing on the back of a booklet printed in Nashville, it would have been a very interesting store in which to visit and shop. A copy of this advertisement is on the following page. The fact that the name is misspelled does not detract from its attractiveness. By 1881 Zulauf built a two-story, eight room brick building, with a shed type addition to provide a place for boarders to spend the night.⁵⁴

The first mail was delivered by a rider on horseback, known as the mail rider. He carried the mail in two bags, one on either side of the horse. The Zulauf store was the Post Office. The mail rider would blow a horn when he arrived at the store with his weekly supply of mail. If the individuals were not there to claim their mail, it was filed in boxes until it was picked up. Often, ladies would ride side saddle from Bailey Springs to pick up their mail.⁵⁵ Later the mail was delivered twice a week, and the carrier drove a two-wheeled sulkey cart.

John Schaut opened a general merchandise store in 1881. When Zulauf moved, the post office was transferred to Schaut's store. Another store was operated several years later by Edward Rasch.⁵⁶

Peter Stenz operated a shoe shop where the Kasmeier store now stands. He and his helpers, sometimes as many as five, worked in a two-story frame building. This shop was unique in that all the work of making and repairing shoes was done by hand.⁵⁷ Stenz,

⁵⁴ Emma B. Eckl, personal interview, April 5, 1965

⁵⁵ Annie S. Eckl, personal interview, March 18, 1965.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Buffler, "St. Florence, Alabama", (typewritten), [n.d.]

⁵⁷ Will Halter, personal interview, March 11, 1965

who died in 1889, was described by Frank Buffler as "a great Christian and a good old man."

ADAM ZULUNT,
ST. FLORIAN, - ALA.
-DEALER IN-

DRY GOODS, GROCERIES,
Hardware, Glassware,
Tinware, Table and Pocket Cutlery,
GARDEN SEED,
Drugs, Medicines,
Paints, Oils and Varnishes,
CIGARS & TOBACCO.

McCall & Sons, Inc., Nashville

As previously mentioned, Grossheim had a blacksmith shop on the Middle Road. Pete Hollander, also an excellent ironworker, had a shop in the community. Blacksmiths and carpenters worked together. John Beumer was possibly one of the first wood workers. George Locker, Henry Stumpe and John Ultsch followed in the same trade. Frank Peters did blacksmith work for Ultsch, then had a shop of his own, John Beumer also operated the funeral home that consisted of an extra room on his shop where he kept the coffins. He possibly made the first ones, wooden boxes with no handles, and later ordered them from Nashville. The coffins came to Florence by rail and he hauled them out on his wagon.

Aigner's brick yard must have been an interesting place. Since they had quite a few boys, all the work was done by the family. Clay was taken from the farm, the boys mixed it with their feet, and then it was put into wooden molds. When almost dry the bricks were taken from the molds and stacked outside in four large stacks, with an opening in the center and access to the opening. A huge fire was built in the center, and thus the bricks were dried. Mrs. Annie Eckl, who lived next to Aigners when she was a little girl, remembers going over to Aigner's at night and watching the flames come through the bricks.

There was no cotton gin in St. Florian for the first few years. Farmers took their cotton to the water powered gin at Mars Hill. In the Late eighteenth hundreds Tony Rasch set up a steam gin in the community. The cotton was unloaded in baskets, each farmer had a bin to keep his cotton in while he accumulated enough for a bale. The cotton had to be fed into the gin by hand and manually packed in the press. By hand they would screw pack the bale. Rasch said he did a good days work if he could bale ten bales a day.⁵⁸

The earliest settlers had to take their grain to Pruitton or Tates to be ground. Kasmeier remembers his dad taking him to Pruitton. They left with the grain about 3 A.M. and didn't get back until dark. At the time he was a small boy, and he says that was the longest trip he ever remembered. Exactly when Tony Rasch got his first mill is not known; but it was mentioned in a Florence Times Supplement printed in 1898 that he moved his mill to a more convenient location. Several years later Robert Kilburn went in the gin business with him. They bought a more modern gin which Rasch put up by himself with only factory directions to go by.⁵⁹ The mill and gin were located in the same area, and both were steam powered. They bought wood by the cord, four foot wood was \$2.50 a cord.⁶⁰

Before prohibition, Kilburn and Rasch operated a still. Representatives from the Internal Revenue Service came around periodically to collect a certain amount for each gallon of brandy made. The local farmers either sold or traded their apples and peaches at the still. During harvest time it was customary for the older boys to shake the trees before they went to the field, and toe small children would gather the fruit and put it in a

⁵⁸ Joe Rasch, personal interview, March 7, 1965.

⁵⁹ Carolyn R. Kilburn, personal interview, March 26, 1965.

⁶⁰ John Rasch, personal interview, April 25, 1965.

wagon to be taken to the still. Robert Kilburn operated a saloon in St. Florian for a time. When it closed, he converted to a dry goods store. He liked to tell how he got his pocket watch. A salesman told him he would give him a watch like the one he was carrying if he bought a certain amount of goods. Kilburn bought the goods and insisted on having the watch the salesman was carrying, not one like it. Kilburn got his way, but the salesman almost lost his job.

Joseph Eckl was the local butcher. He would go as far as Loretto for cattle and walk them down. He paid one and one-half cents a foot and sold it locally, and to Lock 6 for three cents per pound. Halter, who originally had a meat market in Florence, moved to St. Florian. He sold meat, butter and eggs to Lock 6 and Bailey Springs. He make the trip in a two horse spring wagon on Thursdays and Saturdays. Will Halter remembers how he and his brother, Ben, often made the trip with their father. They particularly enjoyed going to the Lock. The boys would go to the kitchens and fill their pockets with food to eat on the way home. The friendly, colored cooks would say, "Help yourself, boys." They would get cornbread, biscuits, and store bought bacon. Bailey Springs was different, they didn't fool around there. They just naturally took care of their business and left when they saw the fine ladies in their evening dresses.

After reading the various ways St. Florian people made a living, you probably wonder if this really was primarily a farming community. Let me assure you it was. Farming was the business followed by the majority of families.

One of the first natural resources the pioneer farmer considered must have been the water supply. Springs and branches were the main source for water for farm use. In most cases property lines were drawn to give as many people as possible access to the water. In one instance, Gazer had both sides of the branch and Aigner was without water. Gazer sold Aigner a strip of land to the branch.⁶¹ Most of the farms had wells, and many farmers supplemented their water supply with ponds and cisterns. Some remember hauling water from the branch in the dry seasons.

The lands that had been cultivated by the slaves were worn and left to grow up in grass and briars. Much new farm land was needed. The same fine trees that supplied timber and fuel left large stumps that had to be worked around until they could be cleared away. The new ground tools the farmer started with were the crosscut saw, ax, hammer, and wedge. When the trees were cut it was customary to invite the neighbors and have a log rolling. With many helping hands, the task of rolling the logs into piles and burning them did not seem too great. A log rolling usually lasted a day. Neighbor women would help prepare the meals, and a good time was had by all.

The problems of plowing around stumps had to be reckoned with until fire and time helped get rid of them. The bull-tongue plow was used on new ground. Its advantage was a blade in front of the shovel that cut roots. The first ones used had a short tongue; this caused the man to handle much of the weight. Julius Rasch designed a long tongue for the plow. He took his idea to Beumer and Hollander who fashioned the

⁶¹ Joe Rasch, personal interview, May 3, 1965.

plow according to the new tongue design.⁶² It proved successful, many of them were made in the following years. Julius Rasch also designed the V-harrow. The shape allowed it to turn rather than be stopped when it hit a stump.

I would like to bring out the importance of the wood worker and the blacksmith. All of the bull-tongue plow was wood except the shovel, blade, bolts and a couple braces. In the first years the blacksmith had to shape most of the bolts and things he needed. Through the local store he would order rod iron. These bars came in ten and twelve foot lengths. Later drummers came around selling iron goods. They worked the blacksmith shops rather than the stores. They could gradually buy more of the things they needed factory made. In one instance, they would order chains, the blacksmith handled them, but he made the hooks.⁶³

Although these German settlers had to learn to farm in the south, they were good farmers. They knew you had to care for the soil. John Locker made the first terraces in this community, they were called circle ditches. They were like the terraces today except there was a ridge of dirt along the edge that made it harder to work around. Some of the circle ditches on the Locker farm have been improved slightly and are still in use.⁶⁴

These farmers knew too well you must give something to the soil if you expect it to remain productive. There were no commercial fertilizers, so they had to improvise. One slow, but sure, way that was used was chopping up corn stalks and working them into the soil. To get lime they gathered a large pile of logs, covered them with limestone and burned them. The ashes were then scattered on the fields.⁶⁵ Before other uses were found for cotton seed, they were left in the fields to rot and then spread on the fields. Any crop of cow peas that could be spread, or field of weeds, was plowed under to enrich the soil. John Locker hauled manure from the livery stables in town to spread on his fields. Although these methods were not nearly as effective as those used today, they did help sustain the soil.

Commercial fertilizer got on the market about 1900. It was phosphate and the trade name was Guano. The first was put down in this was: they used a tin tube called a horn which was about four feet long and eight or nine inches in diameter. Fill the horn with fertilizer, place the small end close to the row so none is wasted. This job was often given to children.⁶⁶

St. Florian farmers could be considered diversified from the beginning. They never raised a lot of cotton. They were accustomed to raising Irish potatoes, not the sweet potatoes as well known in the south. It didn't take many bushels of Irish potatoes to flood the local market. So they were shipped to Memphis and Nashville.⁶⁷ At one

⁶² Joe Rasch, personal interview, March 7, 1965.

⁶³ John Rasch, personal interview, March 13, 1965.

⁶⁴ John Locker, personal interview, April 7, 1965.

⁶⁵ John Eckl, personal interview, March 17, 1965.

⁶⁶ Annie S. Eckl, personal interview, March 18, 1965.

⁶⁷ Richard Smith, personal interview, April 15, 1965.

time, nearly all the wheat that was raised in the county was raised in St. Florian. Farming without modern machinery was slow and hard. In caring for the wheat crop the farmer would break the land, sow the seed by hand, and cover it with a V-harrow. When the harvest time came, the husband usually cradled it and the wife went behind and tied. They used the checkerboard method of planting corn. Lay off furrows with a 2X6, drop seed by hand where the lines meet, step on the corn and cover it with a hoe.⁶⁸

Three farmers, Locker, Stumpe, and Wolfinger, raised dairy cattle. Cotton seed had been a waste product for many years. Animals that ate it became sick. John Locker started boiling the seed, then it was nourishing food for the cattle. Stumpe, as well as some other farmers, boiled everything he gave his stock; peas, pumpkins, hay, potatoes and cotton seed. These dairymen went to town about once a week with their products.

By 1913 the farmers seemed quite well established. When L&N Railroad asked Lauderdale farmers to write about farming in the south, these are a few of the things that were written: "We grow good crops and do not have to feed them all away to keep out stock all through the winter." Herman H Eck. "We are using improved farming implements and we get good results. The farm demonstration work in showing our farmers what they can do. The country is voting in the stock law and turning attention to stock raising." Ed Rasch. "We diversify our crops, many of them giving us two crops from the same land in the same year. We are turning our attention to raising poultry, horses, mules, cattle and hogs." Joseph Eckl.

These people applied the best available knowledge to their endeavors; they worked hard to achieve success. They were pleased with the progress they had made, but never felt for one minute they could say they had done enough. Tony Rasch wrote, "The man with small means can soon become independent if he will pay strict attention to his business."

Social and Cultural Development

Church

Poor transportation in the early days did not keep these parish people from attending religious services. Saturday night rosary and Benediction was well attended. Almost everyone went to church at least twice on Sunday, to one of the two Masses in the morning and Vespers in the afternoon. In good weather the people walked. Particularly in the summer time, that made Father's well always supplied with bucket and dipper, a favorite meeting place before services. In bad weather some came in ox wagons, others in horse wagons. Later on, spring wagons and buggies were the usual means of transportation. Families built sheds in the schoolyard to protect their animals and wagons or buggies from the bad weather. Each family cared for its own shed and hitching-post.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Joe Eckl, personal interview, March 18, 1965.

⁶⁹ Martha U. Rasch, personal interview, March 13, 1965.

The priest had a few fruit trees, garden, horse and cow. A brother was here to cook and help care for the farming operations. The Benedictines planted and cared for a vineyard on the land around the church. There were about ten acres in one section west of the present church, and another are east of the church. There were several buildings around the parsonage, and one was for making wine. The wine was put in barrels and taken to Florence in wagons where it was shipped to Cullman. From Cullman it was distributed to Benedictine parishes where it was used for religious purposes.⁷⁰

The priest rented some of the land around the church to local farmers. The rent was \$20 a year. Frank Buffler remembers one year Father had \$10 left after he had settled up; he was happy because he had \$10 to send to his abbot.

In those days, even as today, a visit from the Bishop was a special occasion. Joe Stumpe recalls his family talking about this incident. The first or second year the Stumpe farm was here, the Bishop paid his first visit to this new parish. He came to Florence by train. Some St. Florian parishioners rode horses to town to meet him. They led a white horse, supplied by Matthew Stumpe, for the Bishop to ride out.

A personality and circumstances can make an amusing story. Possibly this one teaches a small lesson in patience. St. Florian's pastor, Father Joseph, also offered Sunday Mass at St. Joseph Church in Florence. After Mass at his own parish he rode his horse, Charlie, to town. It was a usual two hour ride. Charlie didn't like to rush, he preferred eating grass to walking. Father would say, "Get up, Charlie", but no further persuasion was used. Mass was often at least an hour late. Father felt that some things just should not be rushed, among those things was his faithful horse, Charlie.⁷¹

The church building, itself, is most important to Catholics. There the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the center of Catholic worship, is offered. Our Lord, in the Blessed Sacrament, remains in the church day and night. Possibly the first act the parishioners performed together was building the first small church. About 1878 it was moved to the other side of the road. Lawrence Buffler wrote:

"I well remember the day the church was moved .. though only a lad of five years, my father permitted me (a special privilege) to go with him. My father, Joseph Buffler, and Mr. Goeser, who served as church trustee several terms, with the help of other men succeeded in moving the building."

A tower was added to the church. Again in 1889, another addition was needed. Some of the parishioners wanted to arch the ceiling at the same time. Another group fought it, saying the building was not worth it. A Cullman carpenter was called in; he thought the building would stand it. The argument got quite heated but Father Joseph was a great diplomat, he smoothed things over and the work was done.⁷²

⁷⁰ Will Halter, personal interview, March 11, 1965.

⁷¹ Will Halter, personal interview, March 11, 1965.

⁷² Frank Buffler, personal interview, April 11, 1965.

The people were beginning to want and need a new church. It was decided to start a building fund and make regular collections every month. The Wolfinger family willed about \$7,000 from their estate to the fund. With this sizeable amount of money, the people were able to go ahead with their building plans. Father Alphonse employed an architect to draw up the plans. In 1914, the parishioners began the excavation. Rock for the foundation was quarried at Shoals Creek; it was donated by Robert Kilburn. Charlie Lawson quarried the rock. He used a one-hole drill with a straight bit. The men did all the hauling. Some with small teams could haul only one rock at a time. Casper Heager, the stonemason, erected the foundation walls. Lime came by rail, the men picked it up at Jacksonburg. It came in lumps like rocks and was dusty and hard to handle. The men slacked it because they knew they wouldn't be needing it for some time. They dug a hole close to the new church, shoveled the lime in and poured water on it; this causes it to boil. It was then covered with dirt. After two years, when it was dug out for use, it had the consistency of dough.⁷³

It wasn't until 1918 that they were financially able to finish the walls, roof, and tower. Father Albert describes the interior of the church in his Diamond Jubilee of St. Michael's Parish in this way:

The interior, however, looked not much better than the stable of Bethlehem – the walls were without plaster, the subfloor showed many cracks and there were no regular windows, only canvas covered the openings. It must have been cold in the winter and damp during the rainy season, but the people put up with these conditions, until they were able to get such as would do honor to the house of God. They wanted no debts.

In 1924 representatives of European church window firms arrived to submit samples of ecclesiastical art. The firm of F. X. Zettler from Munich, Bavaria, received the contract. Father Albert, in his History of St. Florian Told to Florence Rotarians, describes the beauty of the windows as follows:

It would take an artist to do justice to our windows. Even the layman marvels at the variety of color and tints; that rich red, the golden hues, the tender green of foliage, as illuminated by the rising or setting sun. Masterpieces of art are the faces of the saints, delicately executed, lifelike in appearance. There is nothing loud, worldly, or offensive, but deeply imbued with a devotional spirit and of high artistic value.

See Appendix B

The Buffler family had the church painted in memory of their son, Edward, who lost his life while in the service of his country.

In 1957 the floor was covered and handsome pews were installed.

⁷³ Joe Rasch, personal interview, May 3, 1965.

Since the building of the church spans World War I, I have included it all in this paper. We are proud of the fact that our forefathers built a church worthy of any improvement we can make.

School

Education was important to the settlers. The fact there was no school the first year must have been a source of worry to them. When the first resident pastor, Father Michael, came he started a school with classes being held in the church. Annie Mertz was the first teacher, teaching grades one and two. She was succeeded by John Sauter and Father Michael until his death. When the Benedictines took over most of the teachers were lay people, with the priest or brother teaching part of the time.⁷⁴

At first all the lessons were taught in German, but even then they had a little English book.⁷⁵ Gradually more and more of the teaching was done in English.

The school was considered parochial, but there was no public school in the area so Protestant children also attended. The teacher received \$15 to \$30 a month from the local school board. The school soon outgrew the church, and a thirty by thirty building we erected. The curriculum consisting of the four Rs, religion was included, was expanded to teaching all regular elementary subjects. It was said that neither music nor the rod was neglected.⁷⁶

The children sat at rude, long benches which held about two dozen pupils. A box effect under the bench held the books. They used blackboard and chalk, and each child had a slate and slate pencil.⁷⁷

A few of the children went home for lunch, but most brought theirs in a gallon bucket. When there were several children in one family, they would pack all the lunches in one bucket; the smallest child would keep the bucket. In the winter the teacher would tell the children to loosen the lid on their lunch bucket a little so of the lunch had frozen it would not get soggy as it thawed out.⁷⁸

The school furniture must have been changed from benches to desks about 1902. One old gentleman said about this time they were getting rid of the benches. The desks had been ordered and had come in, but they were knocked down for packing. Since he

⁷⁴ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., Diamond Jubilee of Saint Michael's Parish, 1873-1848, St. Florian, Alabama, (no publishing company or date given).

⁷⁵ Annie S. Eckl, personal interview, March 18, 1965.

⁷⁶ Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., History of St. Florian Told to Florence Rotarians, reprint from Florence Times, June, 1940.

⁷⁷ Frank Buffler, personal interview, April 11, 1965.

⁷⁸ Agnes H. Eckl, personal interview, March 17, 1965.

was courting the young lady who would teach the following year, he took quite an interest in helping get the desks assembled.⁷⁹

In 1909 this one roomed, ungraded, parochial school was in session for nine months in the year. The state paid for seven months and the parish paid the other two. The school was using regular state required test books. Most of the children were from the parish, but a few were not. Three families that were not Catholic were Kilburn, Richardson and Clemmons. Of course, by now they had the desks and were using tablets instead of slates. Grades one through seven were taught; work was determined more by reading than any other one subject. The director of the training school at State Normal School often brought students out to observe; St. Florian parents sent their children as soon as they reached their sixth birthday, regardless what time of the school year it was.⁸⁰

Will Halter remembered the ungraded school very well; he said arithmetic was easy for him, he was in grade four in arithmetic. He liked history and did pretty well, about grade three, but he was not much good in reading; he was behind in that.

In 1913 John Beumer wrote in Letters to L&N, "Our schools are running seven months in the year and they have well trained teachers. They are not grading the County schools. When that is done, it will be just like the city schools."

The next big change came in 1917 when Father Alphonse added a room to the building and secured Benedictine Sisters from Cullman.

Family Life

The St. Florian people must have seemed somewhat set apart from the people in the surrounding areas. Their religion, language and customs were different. Most of the old generation never learned to speak English. Richard Smith worked for Milner's Drug Store in the late eighteen hundreds. He remembered these people coming in for medicine, particularly quinine. He said the second generation spoke English, but the older ones were very hard to understand.

Like their trades, most of their methods of cooking and food preservation came from Germany. The beef was pickled or brine cured. It was also cut into narrow strips and dried in the smokehouse. Pork was salt cured. Flour was stored in barrels. Beans, peas, apples and peaches were dried.⁸¹

In most homes the baking was done twice a week. A flour barrel had its place in the corner of the kitchen. Bread was mixed in a big brown crockery bowl and baked in large pans that held several loaves.⁸²

⁷⁹ Frank Buffler, personal interview, April 11, 1965.

⁸⁰ Emma B. Eckl, personal interview, April 5, 1965.

⁸¹ Mary M. Henken, personal interview, April 11, 1965.

⁸² Marie L. Mabry, personal interview, March 28, 1965.

Grossheims' had the only bake oven in the community. It was bricked up about three feet from the ground and rounded up to six feet high. The chimney in the front rested on the three-foot foundation. The structure was about four feet wide and six feet long with a big iron door on the front of the chimney. They would open the door and lay a fire using long logs. When all the logs were completely burned, they raked the coals out; the oven was heated. Next, they laid a newspaper in the oven; when the paper curled, but did not burn, the oven was ready for the bread. Several pans that held six loaves of bread each could be put in the oven. The door was closed and the bread baked about one hour. A frame shed was built over the oven, it was called the bake house shed. Many wedding cakes were baked in this oven, they never had any water streaks, or unbaked parts.⁸³

Shaut's store was a favorite meeting place for the people of the community. Young folks would gather at the store on rainy days when they could not work. They would enjoy talking, singing, and eating cheese, crackers, and stick candy.⁸⁴

As far as I know, the St. Florian people did not spin or weave cloth. They all had plenty of good heavy clothes, including coats and shawls, when they came south. Most of their other clothing was made at home. Good patterns were available. They made everything from the boys' work pants to the girls' pretty dresses. The dresses were lovely with tucks, ruffles and buttons. The petticoats were fancy, too. They had tucks and had crocheted lace insertions; the well-dressed lady wore two or three. They also made their own sheets, pillowcases and beautiful quilts.⁸⁵

In case of serious illness a good neighbor would ride to Florence for a doctor. Carolyn Kilburn recalls crying to go along with an older brother and sister to cut grass for the cows. She cried again until they let her carry the scythe. The story had a rather unhappy ending because she cut her foot badly, and she remembers sitting in the high chair while Dr. Henderson bandaged her foot. This notice appeared in the St. Florian notes of a church bulletin, "Mr. John Rasch, who was taken seriously ill with appendicitis, was operated on in his home by Dr. Jackson and is rapidly recovering."⁸⁶

Not all of the illnesses were serious. John Kasmeier, Sr., tells this little incident. Several children were sick so their daddy gave each of them a pill to take. He stuck his in a big crack in the log wall, and he got well before any of the others.

The Sunday that the boys and girls received their First Holy Communion was always a memorable one. Frank Buffler said on his Communion Day all the boys went to one home for dinner, and the girls went to another. They all met at church for the afternoon services. Frank Henken remembers being served dinner in Father's house. Two ladies took the responsibility of fixing it. Julius Rasch purchased their first linoleum

⁸³ Theresa Engel, personal interview, March 22, 1965.

⁸⁴ Anna Maria D. Schaut, personal interview, April 9, 1965.

⁸⁵ Mary Barbara Rasch, personal interview, May 14, 1965.

⁸⁶ Catholic Church Bulletin, Published monthly under the auspices of the Catholic pastors of Cullman, Florence, Sheffield, Tuscumbia, St. Florian and Brookside, Alabama, Vol. I, No. 5 (June, 1914), p. 39.

rug for their dining room before his son, Joe, made his First Communion. On that occasion, the whole class had dinner at the Rasch home.

Wedding celebrations could almost be considered a community affair. The bride's family, with the help of neighbors, served dinner and supper to friends and neighbors. They had music, and put down the community dance floor.

There are so many things that could be put in this chapter, but time does not permit. This quotation from Lawrence Buffler's paper expresses much about early life in St. Florian:

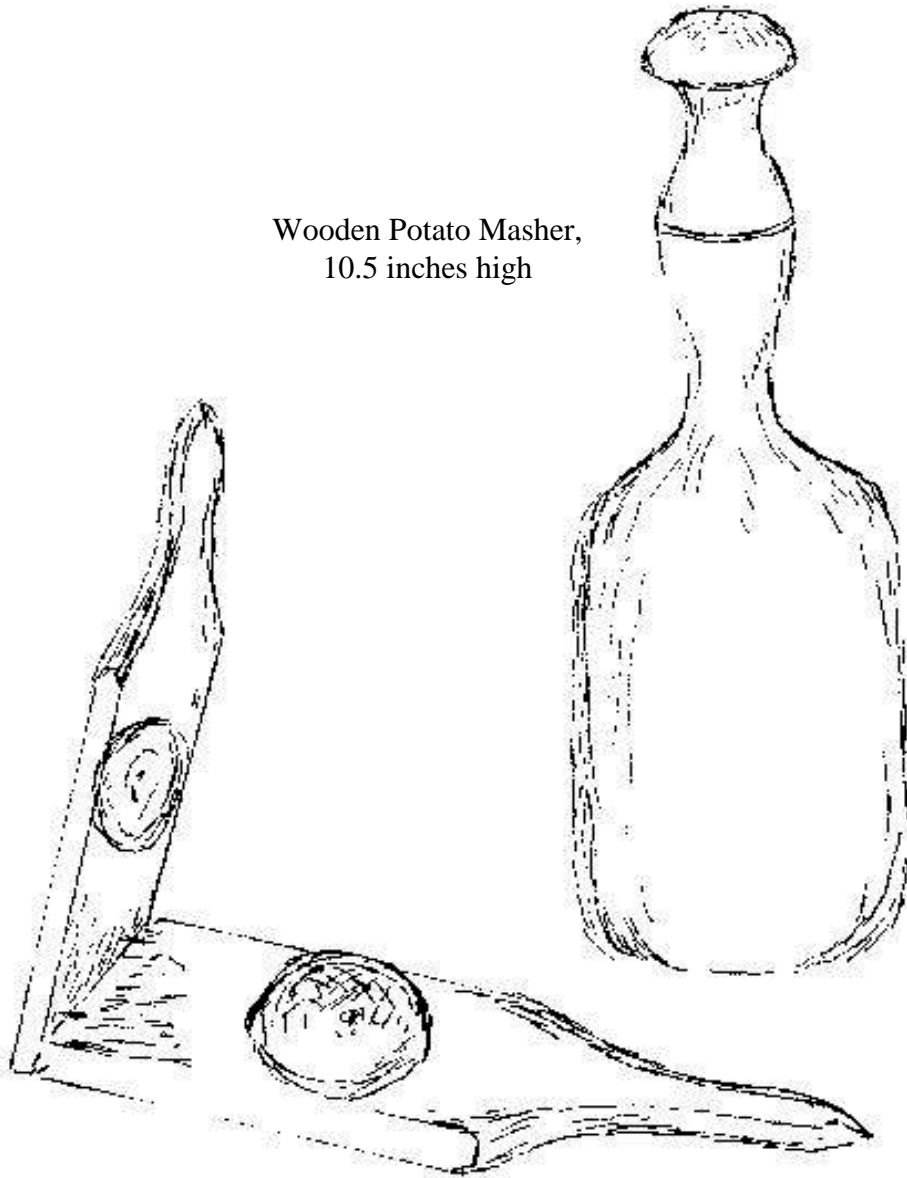
You will never understand what hardships, sicknesses, disappointments, poverty and denials were endured by the first settlers; and yet more loyalty, sociability, kindness and love was found among them than today. Contentment reigned among them, sharing each other's joys and sorrows; ever ready to lend with a helping hand at any time, in every need; despite their discouraging condition.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Lawrence Buffler, "St. Florian, Alabama", (Typewritten), [n. d.].

ILLUSTRATIONS

Kitchen Utensils

Wooden Potato Masher,
10.5 inches high



Wooden Lemon Squeezer,
9 inches high

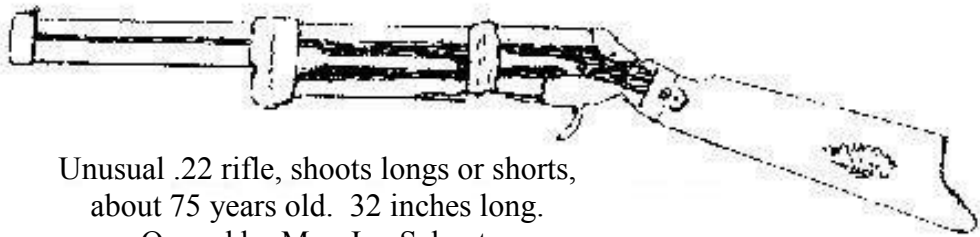
Owned by Mrs. John Rasch

ILLUSTRATIONS

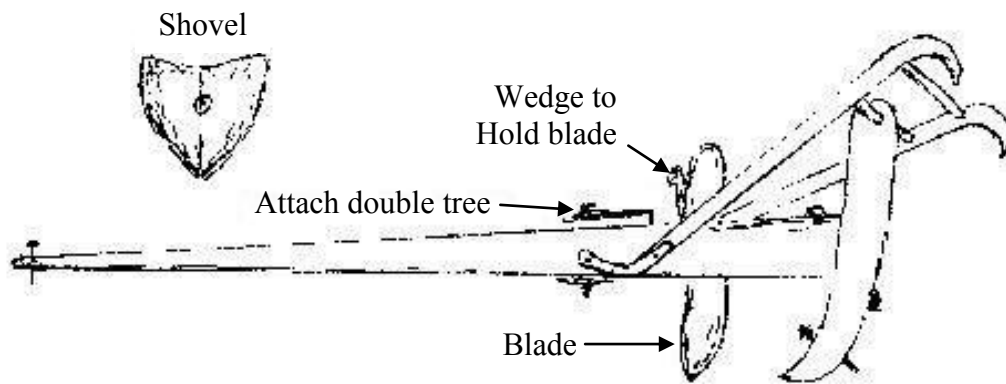
Objects of Interest



Wooden yoke for carrying water. 38 inches long.
Owned by Henry Stumpe.



Unusual .22 rifle, shoots longs or shorts,
about 75 years old. 32 inches long.
Owned by Mrs. Joe Schaut.



Bull tongue plow and shovel, about 12 feet long.
Owned by John Locker.

CHAPTER IV

Growth and Development after World War I

The war affected St. Florian as it did all American communities. A number of boys were in the service of our country. None of them, thank God, lost their lives. The people were very patriotic, farmers made an extra effort to produce food. Economically there was little change. When the boys got back from Europe, they again took their places in the community.

Economic Development

There were few changes in the community following World War I. Work was carried on in much the same way as before. Will Kemper opened a general store about 1922. L. J. Bernauer moved from Florence; he bought the lot on which Zulauf had his store and operated a store and mill. Frank Foster operated a garage from 1929 to 1955.

There were many side roads that were in constant need of repair. Each land owner in the county was taxed \$6 a year to keep the roads up. Instead of paying the cash, the farmer could work it out. A man was allowed 75¢ for a days work. And supplying a mule team for four days could cancel the tax for that year. The farmers reasoned that if they gave the work, they knew their roads would be repaired. At some time agreeable to all, they got the county equipment and cleared the ditches and smoothed the roads.⁸⁸

The Jackson Highway was being paved around 1927. Several of the local families boarded the road workers. A locally owned café was operated during this time.

The big change came in 1933 with Tennessee Valley Authority. Some of the local men worked for the government in clearing land that would be flooded. Everything in the path of the water had to be leveled, the height to which it was leveled depended upon the depth of the water. St. Florian, with this whole area, reaped wonderful benefits from T. V. A. This district was the first to make application for power. The first night the lights were turned on will live in the memory of those who experienced it.

Electricity affected St. Florian in two ways; it completely changed life on the farm, and it brought new industry into the area. With the industry, more and more people secured positions in the Tri-City area while living at home. Today only three farmers depend almost entirely on their farm income.

Possibly greater changes are in store for us. Let us hope and pray we can meet them with the same faith in God, and determination to progress that our forefathers had.

⁸⁸ Marie H. Rasch, personal interview, May 13, 1965.

Social and Cultural Development

Immediately after the war, life went on about the same as before. The work at home was essentially the same, wood stoves, flat irons, and wash boards. The same type of entertainment: Sunday afternoon get-togethers, socials, and dances.

Good roads, electricity, and automobiles are the things that caused the noticeable changes. Take the school for instance. Father Alphonse had secured the Benedictine Sisters of Cullman to teach school. As the years went on, several buses brought children from all over the country to St. Michael's School. Two buildings, with a total of nine classrooms, a cafeteria, and an auditorium were erected to take care of the growing enrollment. In 1954 it was decided that the parish children would benefit more from a parochial school, so the change was made.

St. Florian has benefited from the Home Demonstration Club for many years. We have active units of all phases of the scout program, both for girls and boys.

In spite of the many changes, a spirit of cooperation still exists. When a family is the victim of a tragedy, such as fire or storm can inflict, the people offer collective aid.

The community picnics are an excellent example of cooperation. The early settlers had their first picnic on July 4th on the second year they were here.⁸⁹ For years thereafter, various groups or individuals had picnics on that day. About forty-five or fifty years ago, St. Ann's Alter Society started sponsoring picnics. The first ones were held in the spring lot. They barbecued one or two hogs. The pit was simply a hole dug in the ground with a rack at ground level to hold the meat. They sold cakes, pies, homemade ice cream and lemonade. Today the picnic is held on the church grounds. Buildings designed for picnic use make the jobs much easier. Regardless of all the modern conveniences, cooperation is still the essential ingredient.

Many times the St. Florian School has been used as a meeting place for the whole area. During World War II, it was one of the food rationing centers. Father Albert came to help the group that was appointed to do the work. Among the people who had come to register was a certain elderly lady from Mars Hill. When she saw Father, she told him how much she enjoyed hearing the Angelus. She said she would have to admit she wasn't up early enough to hear it in the morning, but she heard it in the evening while feeding the chickens. Then she added, "It's such an inspiration." Father replied, "Yes, it is like the voice of God, isn't it?"

A place, like a person, is not all good or all bad. In reflecting on the lives of these people, let us try to draw inspiration from their good example.

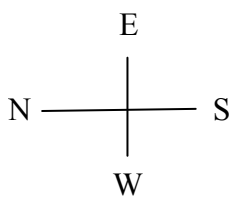
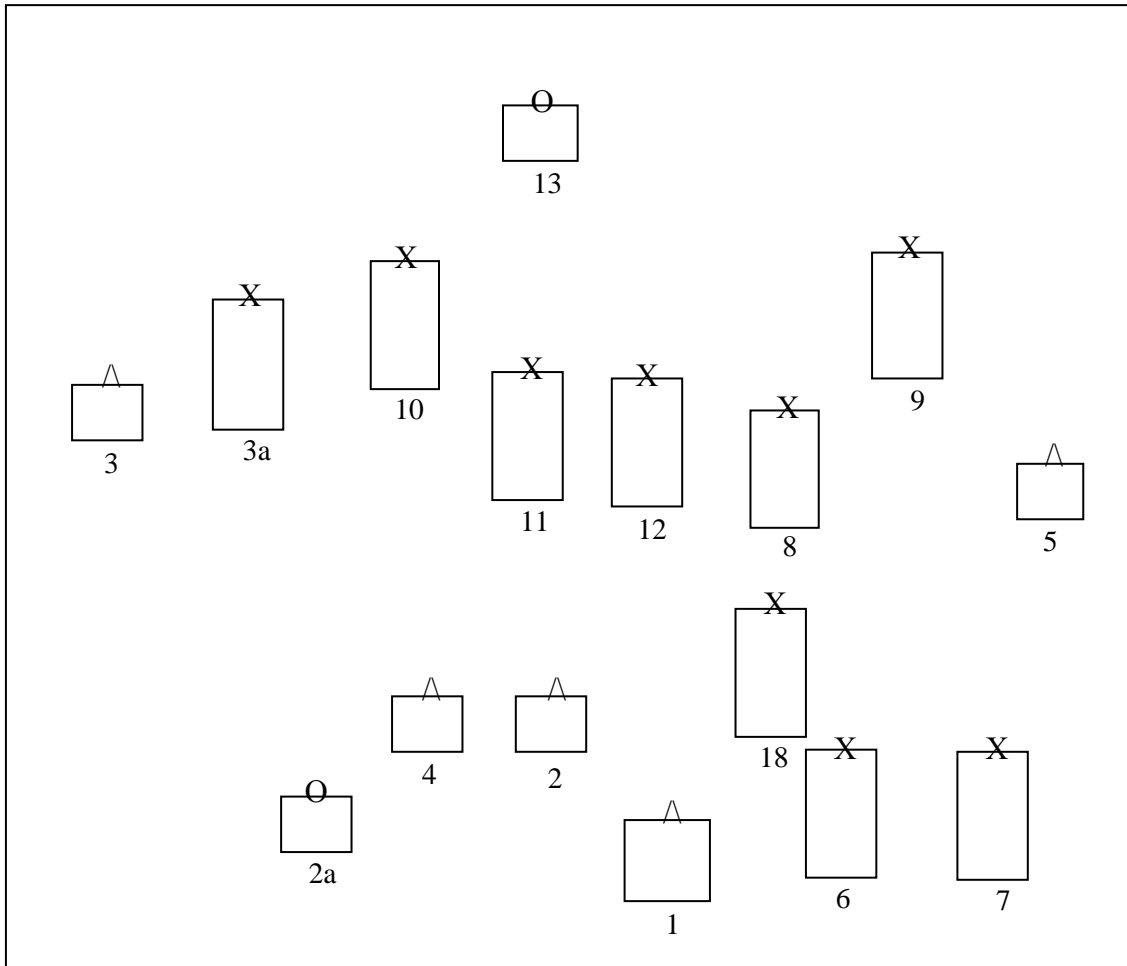
⁸⁹ Joe Stumpe, personal interview, April 30, 1965.

APPENDIX A

Wilson Cemetery

The cemetery is enclosed by a brick wall. The slaves are buried outside of the wall on the north side.

The numbers on this diagram correspond with the numbers of tombstone inscriptions on the next pages.



X Vaults above the ground

^ Tall monuments

O Average monuments

(1)
Sacred
In memory of
our
Beloved Father
who was born near
Fincastle Botetcourt Co. Va.
Born March 17, 1783
Died Aug. 16, 1874
The memory of the just
is blessed.

(1a)
Sacred
the memory
of
Eliza
wife of
Matthew Wilson
Born Mar. Died Jan.
2nd A.D. 1792 10th A.D. 1837
In her, loving wife and
mother was concentrated all
the virtues that adorn the
female character, in life
sincerely beloved, in
death deeply
lamented

(3)
In memory of
John S. Wilson
Born near Fincastle, Va.
Dec. 3, 1789
Died Sabbath night
April 30, 1865
while sick and nursed by his
nephew M. H. Wilson
they were cruelly tortured
& murdered by robbers.

(3a)
Beloved the memory of
Anna
Wife of John S. Wilson
& daughter of
R. & A. Brewer
Born in Westmorland Co. Va
May 29, 1793
departs this life
May 24, 1858

(2)
In
memory
of
Samuel Wilson
Born in Botetourt Co. Va.
14 March 1781
Departed this life
Nov. 27, 1827
was married
20th Feb., 1806
Not lost but gone before.

(2a)
Prescilla
Wife of Samuel Wilson
(inc.)

(4)
Sacred memory of
John C. Wilson
Born in Virginia
Dec. 25, 1808
Died in Florence, Ala.
June 29, 1856
The loss to the sight
to memory dear.

(5)
Sacred memory of
Matthew Harvey
Son of M. & E. Wilson
Born Liberty, Va. March 2, 1816
Sabbath night Apr. 30, 1865
while nursing his sick uncle
J. S. Wilson, they were cruelly
tortured and murdered.

(6)
Harriet
Daughter of
M. & E. Wilson
1812 - 1879
(inc.)

(7)
Frances
Daughter of
M. & E. Wilson
1814 - 1877
(inc.)

(8)
Mary Charolette
Daughter of
M. & E. Wilson
1818 - 1840
(inc.)

(9)
Anna Wilson
In every relation of life
as daughter, sister, wife &
mother, she left a perfect model
for the children to whom she
devoted her life & to whom her
last thoughts and words were given
Rest among them unto the care of
Our Savior with the words "For
He said suffer little children to
come unto me, for such is the
kingdom of heaven". Hear what
the voice from heaven declares
to those in Christ die
release from earthly cares
They will reign with Him on high.

(10)
In memory of
Matthew T.
son of John S. & Ann Wilson
Born in Lauderdale Co., Ala.
Dec. 19, 1854
Died Feb. 23, 1854

(11)
Ann Eliza
wife of
Forster Turner
daughter of
John S. & Anna Wilson
Born in Madison Co.
May 10, 1825
Died in Lauderdale Co.
Jan. 22, 1849

(12)
Sacred the memory
the devoted brother
John Randolph Wilson
Son of John S. & Anna Wilson
Born in Pike Co. Va.
June 25th A. D. 1823
Died at La Grange College Aug. 18 A. D. 1841
Possessed in every virtue he was
all his doting parents could
wish. Kind & affectionate
loving and beloved, a bright
ornament to his family
Universally and sincerely
is his early fate
deplored.

(13)
Matthew Richard
Pane
(1829 - 1908)
(inc.)

APPENDIX B

Church Windows

The purpose of Christian art is not simply to beautify, but to catch attention and to focus that attention on the idea expressed. These windows are examples of traditional art, the figures are spelled out as human beings, realistically presented. There is symbolism but not as much as in some art.⁹⁰

Very appropriately, the Evangelists whose gospels are read at every Mass, are pictured in the four small windows in the sanctuary. Each is holding a book and has quill in hand to represent his sacred writings. Each is also shown with his symbol.

St. Matthew is shown with a winged man beside him as he writes. His gospel begins with the genealogy of Our Lord, hence his symbol is a man.

St. Mark's symbol is a lion. He starts his gospels with the story of John the Baptist, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness!" This association was made because for centuries the lion in the desert had let forth his mighty roar to make known his presence.

St. Luke starts his gospel with the priesthood of Zachary. During that time the ox was offered as a sacrifice, so St. Luke's symbol is the ox.

St. John, in his later years, was banished to the Isle of Patmos. Here he received the heavenly visions described in the Apocalypse. His writings soar to heaven itself because the ecstasies he experienced. For this reason the mighty eagle is his symbol.

The first window on the left side of the church is the Immaculate Conception. This dogma was defined in 1864. The Queen of Heaven is pictured standing on the moon with angels at her feet.

Moses, in a window over the confessional, is possibly the most forceful figure pictured. The law giver is holding the tablets of stone in one hand and pointing to them with the other. His piercing eyes and muscular arms, along with the vivid colors in the background, make this small window very impressive. Instead of being shown with the usual halo, Moses is shown with rays of light, which is a type of halo.

St. Peter is shown with the keys, the book and the rock. He is pictured in exquisite robes to represent his being the prince of the Apostles. The dome of St. Peter's in the background indicated the direct succession from Peter to the present pope.

A German community, served by a religious order from Germany, would surely have a remembrance of St. Boniface. After the fall of the Western Empire, the popes sent missionaries throughout Western Europe. Boniface received permission from the pope to

⁹⁰ Fr. Damian Gusmus, O. S. B., personal interview, May 3, 1965.

carry out the slow and dangerous mission of converting the pagan Saxons in what is now Germany. Wherever possible he made objects of idolatry contribute to the glory of God. On one occasion he cut down a huge oak which was consecrated to a god, and built a church from the wood of the tree. He was recalled to Rome where he was consecrated Bishop. Upon returning to Germany, he continued his work and established religious houses. When he was advanced in age, he appointed a successor to his monastery and proceeded to convert a new pagan tribe. Shortly thereafter, he was murdered by a troop of pagans. He is known as the Apostle of the German people. In this window St. Boniface is shown with the symbols of his rank as Bishop, the miter and crosier. He is holding a book because he was a lawgiver to Germany, and the hilt of a sword represents his martyrdom.

St. Elizabeth, queen of Hungary, is always shown with roses in her cloak and a needy child before her. She loved to give bread to the poor. Her husband, a pagan, under his mother's influence, objected strongly. One day as she was leaving the castle on a mission of mercy, he asked what she was carrying; she answered, "Roses." She opened her cloak and it was laden with the lovely flowers. From that time on her charitable work had his full approval. He died not long after. She was put out of the castle, and no one in the kingdom was allowed to help her. She lived the rest of her days in a convent.

The first window on the right side of the church pictures St. Joseph and the boy Jesus. Joseph is shown with his carpenter tools, but is wearing royal robes as evidence that he was of the house of David. The facial expression of both Jesus and Joseph is one of sublime contentment.

The small window over the confessional on this side of the church is Mary Magdalene. She wears the brown of penance, and holds a vessel containing the perfumed oil with which she bathed the feet of Our Lord.

St. Paul holds a scroll and quill to represent his writings. The building in the background is the Basilica of Saint Paul in Rome. Because he was a Roman citizen, he couldn't be crucified. He was beheaded, the sword offers this reminder.

St Agnes holds a lamb in her arms and carries a palm branch for martyrdom. She wears a crown of white roses for purity. The fact that she was from a wealthy Roman family is shown in the clothes she wears. She was martyred at 13 years of age. She is one of the better known Roman saints.

St. Florian is dressed as a Roman soldier and is carrying a banner with the sign of the cross. He was martyred during the persecution of Diocletian. Since his protection is sought against fire and flood, he is pictured pouring water on a burning building.

The baptistery window shows Jesus being baptized by John. St. John holds a staff with a small scroll attached bearing the words "Ecco Agnus Dei," "Behold the Lamb of God." It was he who first voiced these beautiful words to a crowd when he saw Jesus

walking with his disciples. This picture also shows the Holy Spirit in the visible form of a dove.

By the stairs leading to the choir loft we have St. Cecelia. She is the patroness of music and is shown with a musical instrument; usually a harp, but here an organ. The story is, her pagan husband had told her he would be converted when he saw her guardian angel. Later, upon returning home from his baptism he heard beautiful music. Upon entering the house, he saw her singing in the company of her guardian angel. Both she and her husband were martyrs.

APPENDIX C

ST. FLORIAN'S BENEDICTINE PASTORS⁹¹

- 1876 Father Gabriel, O. S. B., tried to help the people forget the past. He taught school.
- 1876 Father Benedict Menges, O. S. B., worked with the people. In his amiable way he pointed out their obligations. Each family promised to pay dues, about \$300.00 a year. Secured Mr. Truemper as school teacher. Hundreds of Irish and Italian laborers worked at Muscle Shoals Canal where there was much malaria. Father held serviced in their camp and made sick calls. His health failed and he had to resign in 1878.
- 1878 Father Matthew Luvenburg, O. S. B., stayed during March and April.
- 1878 Father Joseph Keller, O. S. B., was a very saintly man who let by example.
- 1884 Father Henry Hohman, O. S. B., was here from December 1884 to July 1885.
- 1885 Father Joseph Keller, O. S. B., could not endure the climate in Georgia; the St. Florian Parishioners were very joyful at his return.
- 1891 Father Severin Laufenberg, O. S. B., was strict with himself and those under his care.
- 1892 Father Fridolin Meyer, O. S. B., was a very practical man.
- 1894 Father Severin Laufenberg, O. S. B., returned.
- 1900 Father Leo Mayer, O. S. B., stayed for only eight months.
- 1900 Father Placidus Becker, O. S. B., was an artist; he decorated the church with paintings.
- 1902 Father Dennis Stolz, O. S. B., was a student and a very good speaker.
- 1903 Father Joseph Lauth, O. S. B., was a linguist and a zealous missionary.
- 1903 Father Augustine Palm, O. S. B., came in November. He was newly ordained -- "a great singer before the Lord." Under his guidance both choir and Glee Club reached a perfection, thusfar unequaled in this country-congregation.

⁹¹ Fr. Albert Hilger, O. S. B., Diamond Jubilee of St. Michael's Paris, 1873-1948, St. Florian, Alabama, (no publishing company or date given).

- Father Albert Hilger, O. S. B., who became pastor of St. Florian in 1934, said his first High Mass here on April 2, 1905. It was a gala day for the whole congregation.
- 1907 Father Alphonse Klug, O. S. B., stayed longer than any other pastor, until November 1933. He built a new substantial church, and a modern brick-veneer school. He secured two Benedictine sisters from Sacred Heart Convent, Cullman, Alabama, to teach the seven grades.
- 1933 Father Vincent Hegel, O. S. B., who was surely one of the most humorous pastors. While he was here, the framed parsonage burned. The strain was too much; due to his failing health, it was necessary that he resign.
- 1934 Father Albert Hilger, O. S. B., a very learned man, could be referred to as a historian. He lived in the sacristy of the church while the new parsonage was being built. Under his direction, a new convent for the sisters and an additional school building were also constructed.
- 1953 Father Sylvester Fangman, O. S. B., could be described as a patient, fatherly man.
- 1960 Father Peter Diesel, O. S. B., was very devout, and interested in converts.
- 1961 Father Fabian Hoffman, O. S. B., a theologian and very spiritual.
- 1961 Father Damian Gusmus, O. S. B., was privileged to study in Rome and say this First Mass at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter, in the Basilica of St. Peter, Vatican City. A very energetic person, Father meticulously carried out his pastoral duties, both spiritual and physical.
- 1974 Father Gabriel German, O. S. B.
- 1976 Father Bernard Patterson, O. S. B.
- 1979 Father Roger Lott, O. S. B.
- 1984 Father David Morehouse, O. S. B.
- 1996 Abbot Victor Clark, O. S. B.

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