



# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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## ARTHUR VINCENT HIGGINS

PERRY COUNTY NATIVE  
FIRST NATIVE BORN AMERICAN DOMINICAN  
TO RECEIVE THE MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY DEGREE  
PROVINCIAL/FRIEND OF YALE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS  
CHAPLAIN AT MT. CARMEL HOSPITAL

by Anthony J. Lisska  
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The history of the American Dominican contribution to the foundation and development of institutional Roman Catholicism in Perry County has been recounted often. Under the watchful eye of Edward Dominic Fenwick and Nicholas Dominic Young, the early seeds of Catholicism sown near Somerset grew abundantly in the Perry County and Muskingum County environs. Some of the early results of the beginning work are witnessed by the number of Dominican clerics who were born in Perry County and also in Zanesville in neighboring Muskingum County. Strong in intellectual achievement and masters of what was then seen as theological rigor, these young men began their lives in the hardscrabble areas of frontier Ohio. One sees a growth and development in intellectual and scholarly rigor which one does not find so readily in other frontier areas. For instance, when considering the graduates of St. Thomas Seminary near Bardstown, Kentucky, one does not discover, on the whole, the same degree of intellectual achievement as one finds in the Perry and Muskingum County lads who began their academic work under the tutelage of the Dominican friars at St. Joseph's in Somerset. Arthur Higgins is an exemplary example of this sterling intellectual growth and scholarly zeal.



The Kid from near Rehoboth

A leap year baby, Arthur Higgins was born on February 29, 1848 at his parent's home on the Somerset Road near Rehoboth, which, in turn, is near New Lexington in Perry County. His parents were James and Eleanor (McMenomy) Higgins. James Higgins was a native of Washington County, Pennsylvania and emigrated to Perry County sometime before mid-century. Eleanor

Higgins was from Donegal, Ireland. It is unclear if Arthur's parents knew one another before coming to Perry County; nonetheless, they were married in the log church of Saint Louis Bertrand which was located in Rehoboth. This Church was a mission station for the Dominicans of St. Joseph Priory, which stood some eight miles to the west of Rehoboth. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were known, so writes the Dominican historian, Victor O'Daniel, as "among the best Catholics in Perry County." (1)

Young Arthur Higgins was the eldest of the eight children born to James and Eleanor Higgins. Another child, Mary Theresa, became a Dominican Sister at the community of St. Mary of the Springs and took the religious name of Sister Mary de Sales.

#### Student at St. Joseph's College

At an early age, Arthur began his studies at St. Joseph's College then located on the grounds of the Priory. Father O'Daniel notes that Arthur was there when the college unceremoniously closed in 1861 because of the beginning of the War between the States. According to one source, St. Joseph College had many students from the Southern states for whom travel was a real concern once the terrible Civil War began.

Exactly what young Arthur was doing as a student at the college when he was only thirteen years old in 1861 is unclear from the texts. Often what passed as collegiate work in Ohio colleges at mid-century was merely a form of preparatory education for later work at a college or university. Quite possibly this is the kind of study Arthur undertook at St. Joseph's College. The author of Higgins's obituary which appeared in the *Dominicana* suggests that because of his youth, Higgins was "...unable to enlist in the fight for the preservation of the Union..." and thus continued his studies at St. Joseph's Priory. (2) Arthur appears to have been a precocious student. How long he was there as a college student before the 1861 closing is unclear from the records. Nonetheless, he continued in residence at the priory embarking on a plan of studies so he could enter the Dominican Novitiate at the

appropriate time. Whatever course of work he undertook during this period had a great influence on his later life when the full fruits of his intelligence developed into a scholar deserving of the Master of Sacred Theology degree, which is the highest and rarely given degree conferred by the Dominican authorities on exceptional philosophers and theologians.

#### Dominican Novice and Student

Arthur Higgins joined the Order of Preachers at St. Joseph's Priory sometime in 1864 when he was sixteen years old. He completed his novitiate year and made his profession as a Dominican friar at St. Joseph's on November 9, 1865. The reform Provincial from Ireland, William Dominic O'Carroll, received Arthur's profession. The young Dominican student freshly professed probably thought he would be spending several years continuing his studies in Somerset near his family. However, on June 6, 1866, tragedy struck the Dominican Sisters, who had come to Ohio in 1830 and established a convent and staffed an academy, St. Mary's, in the nearby village of Somerset. Fire engulfed the convent, the chapel and the academy building. Valiant efforts to save the buildings were unsuccessful. Now homeless and academyless, the Sisters were helped by the Dominican priests and novices from St. Joseph's.

Two years earlier, on January 16, 1864, fire had struck St. Joseph's in a similar fashion, burning to the ground the Priory and leaving only a shell of the brick church, which had been built in 1840. This was a catastrophic event for the Ohio Dominicans, as they had spent much of their meager funds on building these structures, one now totally destroyed and the other damaged extensively. Fortunately, the college building remained, vacated three years earlier when St. Joseph College had closed. The former college building and the very compact 1837 priory structure, known as the "Old Convent," served as the Priory until another structure was built, but that event did not occur until 1882. The church building itself was quickly restored, but without the

sky-reaching steeple, and was rededicated by Archbishop John Purcell on August 5, 1866.

In an act of fraternal concern and generosity, the Dominican community of St. Joseph's gave the college building on the Priory grounds to the Sisters so they could maintain some semblance of continuity with their important work given to the education of young women. The novices and professed students, among whose number was Arthur Higgins, were sent to St. Rose of Lima Priory, the original foundation house of the American Dominicans, near Springfield, Kentucky. The Sisters stayed on the Priory grounds only a short time, for in 1868 they moved to the village of Shepard on the northeast outskirts of Columbus and established St. Mary's of the Springs.

Sent to Kentucky, Arthur continued there his studies for eventual ordination as a Dominican friar-preacher. Two years later, in 1867, Arthur was sent to the new Dominican House of Studies in Louisville founded by the reformist Provincial, O'Carroll, and placed under the patronage of St. Louis Bertrand, the same Dominican saint who served as the patron of the log church in which his parents were married in Rehoboth. In 1870, he appears to have returned to St. Rose Priory to complete his studies necessary for ordination.

#### Ordination as a Dominican Priest

Arthur returned to the area of his Perry County roots in the autumn of 1871. On October 18, 1871, in the priory church of St. Joseph's, Arthur was ordained a priest. The ordaining prelate was the Bishop of Columbus, Sylvester H. Rosecrans. Father O'Daniel suggests that it is highly probably that the young priest was ordained at St. Joseph's rather than in Kentucky so his parents could participate in the important ceremony. O'Daniel notes that Mr. Higgins had been in rather poor health, and as a favor to and in recognition of his parents, the ordination ceremony was celebrated in the birthplace of permanent Catholicism in Ohio.

After spending the first two years following his ordination in Kentucky at St. Rose's

priory, the young priest returned to St. Joseph's in 1873. There he undertook his teaching and scholarly life as a member of the Dominican Studium faculty. During this time, he also served several years as sub-prior of St. Joseph's and for a period of nearly ten years also held the important position of novice master. In 1881, the degree of "Lector in Sacred Theology" was petitioned for and granted to Higgins. A year later, Higgins was elected prior of St. Rose's Priory in Kentucky. The provincial declared this election void--the ecclesiastical term is "cassated"--because he claimed that Higgins was needed to continue teaching at St. Joseph's in Somerset. In 1883, however, at the young age of thirty-five, Higgins was elected prior of St. Joseph's, serving the customary three year term. The provincial confirmed this election because Higgins could both serve as prior and continue to teach in the House of Studies. His talents, it appears, were recognized early on and utilized appropriately by the American Dominicans.

One year later, on August 31, 1884, young Father Higgins became the first native born American Dominican to receive the prestigious degree of Master of Sacred Theology from the Master General of the Dominican Order. This degree is rarely given and requires exceptional intellectual acumen. The provincial, Father M.D. Lilly, petitioned the Master General of the Dominicans in Rome to confer this degree upon Higgins. Bishop John Watterson of Columbus preached the sermon at the ceremony conferring the STM degree on Father Higgins.

#### To New Haven, and the Yale Community

In 1886, the same year in which the Dominicans assumed control of St. Patrick's Church in Columbus (upon the invitation of Bishop Watterson) they also established a foundation in New Haven, Connecticut. In the last half of the nineteenth century, following nearly a century of apostolic work in Ohio and Kentucky, the American Dominicans were trying desperately to accept foundations in the eastern part of the United States. One reason for this direction in

expansion was to tap the rich lode of potential vocations from the freshly arrived Irish immigrants. The then Bishop of Hartford, Lawrence McMahon, offered the Dominicans the parish of St. Mary's on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven near the campus of Yale University. On May 10, 1886, the *Morning News* of New Haven contained the following announcement:

By the time this week is ended, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church will no longer be under the control of the Catholic clergy of the State of Connecticut.... There were many reasons which actuated the bishop to take his present course. One of the strongest...was the fact that in most cases where any priests belonging to any of the holy orders assume control of a parish, they generally establish along with the church, a Catholic college, an institution which Bishop McMahon thinks Connecticut sadly in need of just at present.

When the bishop had made up his mind as to what course he would pursue, he had to select the order which could best assume the spiritual charge of the people of St. Mary's Parish. The Dominican Fathers, an order composed of some of the most eloquent preachers in the country, men of untiring effort, of wide and broad views, were selected for the care of this large and important parish. (3)

Five days later, the same source notes that "The Rev. A.V. Higgins of Somerset and the Rev. H.F. Lilly of New York will arrive today." Higgins became superior of the St. Mary's community and pastor of the Church and parish. He remained in New Haven until he was elected provincial in 1893.

In addition to accepting parishes in the eastern part of the United States, the Dominicans were very interested in establishing their House of Studies in a major eastern city. The rural confines of Springfield, Kentucky and Somerset, Ohio were no longer seen as appropriate sites for the intellectual work to be undertaken by the Dominicans in the United States. Hence, the

urge to move to the east was strong, as noted by the then American provincial, Father F. A. Spencer, to be near "some center of civilization." Early in the last decade of the nineteenth century the decision had been made definitely to move to the east.

Originally, a site near the newly established Catholic University of America in Washington was accepted. However, some unwanted conditions were placed upon the projected House of Studies by the rector of the University, Bishop John Keane. Hence, the Dominican Chapter meeting in February, 1892 made the following recommendation: "We ordain that a new house of studies be erected in New Haven instead of in Washington where the Fathers of the Province formerly intended to locate it." (4) The minutes note that Father Higgins was one of the persons voting in favor of the move to New Haven. However, a minority group, including two former ex-provincials, were vigorously opposed to establishing a House of Studies in New Haven. They appear to have been concerned that the Dominican studium would be too close to Yale University which, as Coffey notes, "...these fathers feared would exercise a bad influence upon our students." (5)

The Provincial, Father Spencer, rejected this argument because historically it had been the Dominican tradition to establish their Houses of Study in the neighborhood of influential universities. Spencer, of course, had Oxford University and the University of Paris in mind, among other European centers of higher education. Spencer notes, as Coffey reports, that "our establishment in New Haven would be in line with this tradition: for Yale is one of the greatest universities in the United States." (6) This attempt to move the House of Studies to a major eastern city was delayed for over a decade and was not accomplished until another provincial, Father Lawrence F. Kearney, in 1902 established the studium in Washington; the dedication took place in 1905, fifteen years following the initial discussions of moving to the east coast from Ohio and Kentucky.

Even though Higgins seems to have favored the establishment of the House of Studies

near Yale University, nonetheless the failure of this to occur did not dampen his enthusiasm for establishing connections with the scholarly community at Yale. Higgins was particularly suited for such work, as Coffey writes that he "...was one of the most brilliant men ever to wear the habit of St. Dominic in the United States...." (7) A particular friend of Higgins was the president of Yale, Arthur Twining Hadley. President Hadley invited Higgins to lecture at Yale on occasion. On May 11, 1891, President Hadley invited Higgins to speak in the Yale chapel on the Roman Catholic teaching on marriage and divorce. O'Daniel notes that this lecture was "universally applauded" and was written in a style of "high literary excellence." In fact, Hadley is said to have considered Higgins "one of the most brilliant men in the United States." (8) The heading of *The Catholic Columbian* article announcing the death of Father Higgins notes that he "was a friend of President Hadley of Yale" and "an authority on the Classics." (9) O'Daniel writes that "...the greatest professors of Yale University held him in the highest esteem and admiration for his broad learning, his spirit of toleration, and his sound principles of morality." (10)

Father Higgins remained in New Haven until 1893, when he assumed the duties of Provincial of St. Joseph's Province. During this time, Higgins worked diligently as a pastor of souls and preached often and regularly. O'Daniel notes that Higgins was an "eloquent preacher, whose sermons and lectures never failed to draw large crowds because of their beautiful ideas and diction and delivery." (11)

#### Elected Provincial

On October 7, 1893, Father Higgins was elected to the position of Provincial of the American Dominicans. He served one four year term and lived at St. Vincent Ferrer's Priory in New York City during most of his term as provincial. His successor, Father Kearney, would serve three terms from 1897 until 1909; Kearney served admirably as Higgins's secretary. Coffey strongly suggests that Kearney in fact undertook most of the administrative duties and "virtually

ruled the province anyway" while Higgins served as Provincial. Coffey is rather critical of Higgins as an administrator, as he notes that Higgins, while an outstanding scholar and brilliant student, "seems to have been deficient in executive ability." (12) Coffey writes as follows:

Father O'Daniel, who knew Higgins personally, having had him both as a professor and superior, is unable, despite his great admiration for Higgins, to find anything of importance to say of his four years as provincial. The two pages O'Daniel devotes to the provincialate of Higgins in his "historico-biographical studies" are filled with a eulogy of the man and the scholar. There are only about three lines on Higgins as provincial. (13)

However, it must be noted that severe economic problems, known as the "Cleveland Hard Times," beset the United States at this time. A stock market collapse in 1893 was followed by a financial panic. Certainly Higgins would have worried about the financial status of his province. This probably accounts for the delay in any attempt to move the studium to the east coast, even to Higgins's favorite New Haven.

Always a scholar and promoter of the intellectual life, Higgins did succeed in having the House of Studies at St. Joseph's in Somerset constituted as a "formal studium" according to the constitutions of the Dominican Order. This was the first such recognition of a Dominican educational establishment in the United States. Coffey writes that this academic designation was "the greatest single achievement" of his provincial term of office. On the material ledger, Higgins had steam heat provided for St. Joseph's Priory. The Dominican parochial missions continued to grow substantially during Higgins's administration. In addition, during Higgins's tenure as Provincial, the ranks of the United States Dominicans grew from 115 in 1894 to 142 in 1898. Higgins seemed adept at public relations, especially with the American bishops. O'Daniel notes that early

in his tenure as provincial, Higgins wrote many letters both to bishops and to the major superiors of American religious orders urging cooperation and assistance for the many works demanding attention.

While Coffey is critical of Higgins's administrative abilities, nonetheless O'Daniel writes that there was strong sentiment to re-elect Higgins to the position of provincial at the elective chapter meeting in 1897. This would have been a first for the American Dominicans. Higgins, O'Daniel writes, stated strongly that he would not accept the office again; this prevented any re-election from occurring. Higgins appears to have supported strongly Father Kearney, his able secretary for the past four years, for the position of provincial. Kearney was elected and served as provincial for three terms.

In reading and considering the texts, it appears that Higgins was not well suited by disposition to be a major superior. His years as provincial seem to have been hard on him, both physically and mentally. He appears never to have recovered his health following his tenure as provincial. The position must have exhausted him. He was only 49 years old when his term was completed, yet he did not hold a major position of responsibility after that. There is some evidence that his leadership role as novice master, while importantly spiritually, was not totally successful. Higgins may have been too kind and gentle a person to undertake the arduous task of being a major superior which requires the rendering of difficult personnel decisions. Following the completion of his term as provincial, his successor, Kearney, sent Higgins to Rome for a much needed vacation. This seems to have been Higgins's first trip to Europe.

(To be concluded)

#### Notes

- 1) Victor F. O'Daniel, O.P., *Dominican Province of St. Joseph*; Somerset: 1942; page 468, footnote 9.
- 2) *Dominicana*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 1 (June, 1917), p. 38. The author of this obituary is John Welsh, O.P., who was probably a clerical theological student at

the Dominican House of Studies in Washington at this time.

- 3) Found in Reginald Coffey's *The American Dominicans*; New York: 1970; p. 503.
- 4) *ibid.*, p. 513
- 5) *ibid.*, p. 515
- 6) *ibid.*
- 7) *ibid.*, p. 525
- 8) *ibid.*, p. 545, footnote 3. Coffey refers to O'Daniel's book on St. Joseph's Province noted above, pp. 467-470.
- 9) *The Catholic Columbian*, April 13, 1917, page 8. Given the fame of Fr. Higgins and his Perry County roots, the brevity of this obituary is somewhat surprising.
- 10) O'Daniel, p. 469.
- 11) O'Daniel, *The First Two Dominican Priors in the United States*, pp. 240-241
- 12) Coffey, p. 525
- 13) *ibid.*

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**Chillicothe St. Mary's Church  
Baptismal Register, 1835-1846**  
(Continued from Vol. XIX, No. 6)

1843, continued

Oct. 7, John, born July 14, son of Joseph Schennings [Jennings?] and Ann Caroline Wills; spon. Sara Jane Wills. H. D. Juncker

Oct. 8, Maria Eva, born Sept. 29, daughter of John Leechler and Ann Gardner; spon. Adam Gardner and Eva Eichenlaub.

same day, Helen, born Oct. 3, daughter of John Baptist Diederich and Paulina Leister; spon. Andrew Leister and Dorothea his wife. HDJ

same day, William, born Sept. 27, son of Joseph Hemmerle and Rosalia Kroemer; spon. Michael Spitzer and Maria his wife. HDJ

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Oct. 15, Michael, born Aug. 27, son of John Lane and Ellen Welsch; spon. Nicholas Kaisy [Casey?] and Mary Murphy. HDJ

Oct. 23, George Henry, born Oct. 13, son of Henry Bauer and Mary Anna Jäger; spon. Friedrich Deger and Elizabeth Lind. HDJ

Oct. 29, Veronica, born Oct. 2, daughter of Xavier Bintz and Kunigunda End; spon. Peter End and Genevieve End.

same day, Catherine, born Oct. 20, daughter of Roman Gernen and Rosina Gernen; spon. John Schum and Catherine Mathis.

same day, Mary, born Oct. 23, daughter of Peter Carville and Margaret Hamilton; spon. James Carville and Mary Hurly. HDJ

Oct. 31, Received into the church, abjuring the errors of the reformation, conditionally baptized, Sara Dexter, widow, 48 years old; spon. Elizabeth Andersson [sic]. HDJ

Nov. 1, Anthony, born Oct. 25, son of Joseph Ebenauer and Barbara Müller; spon. Anton Kreutz and Eva Eichenlaub. HDJ

Nov. 5, Thomas, born Oct. 22, son of Thomas Henson and Bridget Marr; spon. Patrick Schirn and Bridget Kelly. HDJ

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Nov. 5, Joseph, born October 28, son of Joseph Schum and Magdalena Strohecker; spon. Joseph Schmitt and Catherine his wife.

same day, Helen, born Oct. 25, daughter of George Moll and Theresia Bomeyer; spon. Jacob Eichenlaub and Helen Barleon. HDJ

In loco communitatis dicto Bierer, Piqua Cy.--[No such place seems to have existed in Pickaway County, but considering the confusion in German pronunciation of the letters P and B, perhaps this refers to Perry Township; this is the location of New Holland, where a Catholic mission at one time existed. In 1850 Jacob Haas and family were living in Walnut Township, Pickaway County; and Francis J. Geil and family were in Chillicothe. None of the other persons mentioned in this series of records could be located in the 1850 census.]

Nov. 14 Martin, born Sept. 21, son of [blank, but see next record]

same day, James, born Nov. 20, 1841, sons of Michael Davis and Anna Maria Haas; sponsors for the first were Martin Haas and Barbara Adams, and for the second Jacob Haas and Margaret Adam.

same day, Magdalena, born Sept. 20 this year, daughter of Henry Muller and Magdalena Diebel; spon. John Diebel and Magdalena Diebel.

same day, James, born Aug. 7 this year, son of James Eckard and Elizabeth Scheer; spon. John Diebel and Magdalena Muller.

same day, Christian, born July 29 this year, son of Franz Jacob Geil and Catherine Barbara Teller; spon. Michael Adam and Christian Young and wife.

same day, Margaret, born May 24 this year, daughter of George Lauffer and Anna Maria Nagel; spon. Samuel Sudder and Margaret Sudder.

same day, Samuel, born June 6 this year, son of Barbara Kunzelman; spon. Samuel Sudder and Margaret Sudder. HDJ

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Nov. 19, Daniel, born Sept. 13, son of Jeremy Toohe and Fanny Murphy; spon. Thomas Henson and Ann Maar.

same day, Leo, born Nov. 3, son of Peter End and Francisca Bintz; spon. Xavier Bintz and Genevieve End.

same day, William, born Oct. 27, son of Augustine Baur(?) and Anna Maria Feer; spon. William Fliieger and Carolina Muller.

same day, Augustine, born Nov. 10, son of Rudolph Siegfried and Maria Elizabeth Hackmann; spon. William M. Anderson and wife Elizabeth. HDJ

Dec. 3, Franz Xavier, born Dec. 1, son of Erhard Boggenschitz and Magdalena Dieringer; spon. Erhard Stebel and Maria Hechinger.

same day, Elizabeth, born Aug. 28, daughter of Anton Muller and Elizabeth Spor; spon. Philip Gerdeisser and Josephine his wife. HDJ

Dec. 10, Maria Magdalena, born Dec. 9, daughter of Anton Kreutz and Judith Vunderle; spon. Martin Bauman and Helen Kirchner. HDJ

Dec. 12, Joseph, born Sept. 13, son of Peter Jarret and Agnes Delong; spon. William Wendel and Eva his wife. HDJ

Dec. 15, Charles, born Nov. 15, son of John M'Glen and Margaret M'Guire; spon. Bernard Rilley and Rosa his wife. HDJ

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Dec. 17, in Circleville, Ann, born Nov. 1, daughter of Patrick Coy and Ann Fargus; spon. James McQueen and Bridget Morun. HDJ

Dec. 23, She abjuring the errors of the reformation, I accepted into the bosom of the Church and conditionally baptized Helen Dexter, 18 years old, daughter of the widow Sara Dexter; spon. Henry D. Juncker.

same day, In danger of death, she abjuring the errors of the reformation, I received into the bosom of the Church and conditionally baptized Sara Dexter, 21 years old, wife of Henry McNally; spon. Rudolph Siegfried. HDJ

Dec. 24, John, born Dec. 13, son of Gerhard Verner and Elizabeth Kuhn; spon. John Kuhn and Anna Maria Lind. HDJ

Dec. 26, Mary Elizabeth, 10 weeks old, daughter of Arthur Brydaiw? and Salome Pennefather; spon. Christina Juncker. HDJ

Dec. 31, Margaret, born Nov. 14, 1842, daughter of Jacob Fundenberger and Catherine Weiset; spon. Michael Brendel and Eva Eichenlaub. HDJ

105 were baptized in the year of the Lord 1843.

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1844

Jan. 14, Seraphin, born Jan. 12, son of Seraphin Heideisberger and Anna Maria Schwetzler; spon. Peter Kern and Agatha Heideisberger. HDJ

Jan. 15, Anna Maria, born Jan. 13, daughter of Martin Buckel and Anna Maria Stoffel; spon. John Hirn and wife Theresia. HDJ

Jan. 20, Thomas, born Jan. 2, son of John McManus and Margaret Heary; spon. Thomas Dexter and Veronica Hiller. HDJ

Jan. 25, Rosanna, born Jan. 20, daughter of Edward Carville and Rosanna Cull; spon. John Cull and Margaret Cull. HDJ

Jan. 28, Jacob, born Jan. 20, son of Jacob Kellhoffer and Magdalena Besser; spon. John Merckly and Anna Bauman.

same day, Anna Maria, born Jan. 25, daughter of Michael Weiss and Elizabeth Engelhard; spon. Michael Kirch and Anna Maria Hechinger. HDJ

Feb. 4, John, born Jan. 19, son of Peter Schneider and Eva Mahr; spon. John Schreiner and [blank]. HDJ

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Feb. 11, Margaret, born Feb. 1, daughter of Adam Kesler and Catherine Saxe; spon. John Eck and wife Margaret.

(To be continued)

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