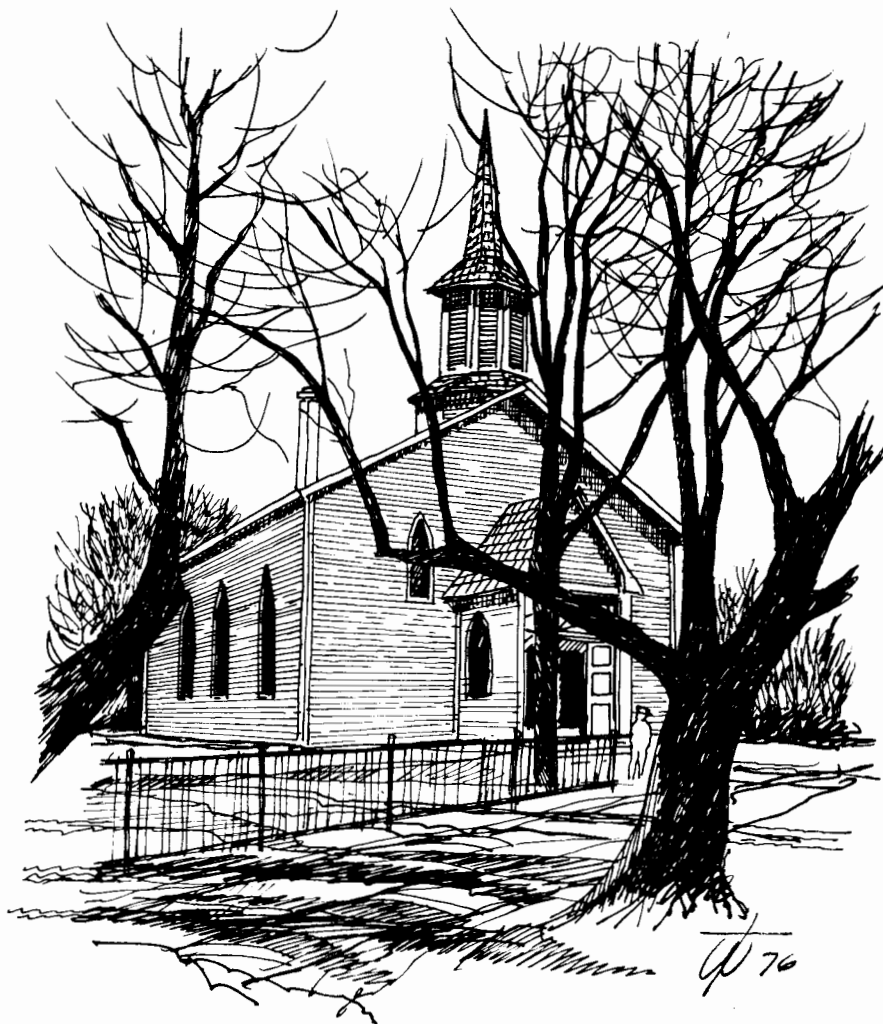


Barquilla del Santa Maria

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SACRED HEART CHURCH
GENEVA, RUSH CREEK TOWNSHIP, FAIRFIELD COUNTY
1856-1963

"I will build a church to His honor and glory in the New Country." So promised forty-eight year old Blasius Schmelzer on a stormy crossing of the Atlantic Ocean with his wife and sons about the year 1844. The result of the promise was the mission and some-time parish of the Sacred Heart at Geneva,

Fairfield County, Ohio, the third Catholic mission established in the Hocking hills between the towns of Lancaster and Logan. The first of these three missions was Our Lady of Good Hope at Pine Hill, Good Hope Township, Hocking County, for which property was donated in 1852; the church was erected by August of 1853. The second was St. Joseph (called the Philips Church), two miles east of Sugar Grove in Berne Township, Fairfield County, for which property was donated in May 1853; the church was erected that autumn. (1) These two churches and Sacred Heart, just east of Geneva in Rush Creek Township, Fairfield County, formed one pastorate from the time of their foundation into the early years of the twentieth century.

Rush Creek Township, where the Schmelzer* family ultimately settled, is thus described in the 1883 county history:

The surface for the first part is undulating, the most rugged portion being found in the northeastern part. The valleys along Rush Creek and Raccoon Creek are broad, considering the size of the streams, and all the land is quite fertile, and all arable but a small portion.

The valleys, environed by hills, and the monotony of the hill land, broken by the valleys, presents a beautiful landscape. Dotted throughout by farm dwellings and barns, school houses and churches, the scene is truly home-like and comforting, and the traveler is constrained that the bard of civilization and culture has not neglected its influence here.

The township had two villages, Bremen in the center and Geneva on its southern edge. Bremen was the larger and more prosperous village; a railroad giving it easy access to the rest of the state was built in 1855. Geneva was a much smaller village; in 1883 besides a few houses it had only one store and a blacksmith shop. High on a hill-top less than a mile from Geneva, Sacred Heart Church was built.

The following account of the early history of this mission and parish appeared in Bishop Hartley's 1918 Diocese of Columbus, The History of Fifty Years. It was probably written by Rev. Lucius Kessler, the pastor in 1917, based upon the traditions of the Schmelzer family.

SACRED HEART PARISH, GENEVA

In the year 1845, Blasius Schmeltzer, a weaver by trade, together with his wife, Walburga, and his family of seven sons and one daughter, were living in Munich, Bavaria. The father, in order to protect his sons from militarism, decided to leave his country and emigrate to America.

Before the family left Europe one son died and the family then proceeded to sail for the New World. They sailed in one of the

* The name is spelled Schmelzer by some, Schmeltzer by others; in German, the "z" is always pronounced as "ts," so the pronunciation is the same in either case. The simpler spelling is used in this article except in quotations.

sailing ships then used for travel and had a successful voyage until the vessel approached the shores of America, when nearing New York harbor, a storm and adverse winds arose, driving the vessel far out of its course. Not only were all hands in imminent danger of shipwreck, but provisions had run low, and the entire number aboard the ship were in danger of starvation and to add to their suffering, the long delay of the voyage had caused their scant clothing to be almost worn out. After being beaten about by the storm for some days they finally were driven on a rocky shore, from which position those on board were unable to release the ship.

Mr. Schmeltzer, then a man of very little means, but rich in piety and love of God, made the vow to Him Who stilled the waves of the sea of Gallilee, "I will build a Church to His honor and glory in the New Country" if the vessel was rescued and his family reached America safely. His prayer was speedily answered, for in a short time a steamship was seen approaching and after dragging the vessel from the rocks, took it in tow and in three days all arrived safely in New York harbor, after eighteen months spent on the sea.

Owing to the long voyage and mishaps the little means the family had were all spent and they reached New York City penniless, heartsick and hungry. Through the kindness of a lady who took pity on the unfortunate family, they were permitted to remain at her home, she giving up all the house to them save one room for herself. Mr. Schmeltzer soon obtained work at his trade, and by care and saving he was able to resume his journey to the West as originally intended after a stay of over a year in New York City. The family arrived in Mundy [Monday] Creek Township, Perry County, and purchased a small farm of forty acres, which in a short time they sold, and they moved into Rushcreek Township, Fairfield County, then known as Obern [Auburn] township. Here they finally settled, there the children grew up and married and most of them settled in the vicinity of their home, where their descendants still remain.

Like many other Catholic emigrants who, in the early days came to the Middle West, they were deprived of all religious consolations for a time, but at a later period the missionary priest, Rev. Father [Josue] Young, afterwards Bishop of Erie, came occasionally to celebrate the Holy Mass at the home of one Michael Myers. [This was on Marietta Street in Bremen, according to an account recorded by Father Nevin in 1915.]

Mr. Schmeltzer, now realizing that God had blessed him with means sufficient to carry out the fulfillment of his promise made while in danger of being wrecked at sea, purchased a tract of land situated in Fairfield County, about four miles south of Bremen, which is now known as Geneva, and here on the highest point, overlooking the surrounding country, he erected a frame Church, and in addition he donated the eighty acres of land for the purpose of helping to support a pastor for all time.

The little Church was dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus about the year 1856 by [Arch]Bishop Purcell.

Blasius Schmelzer's first home in Fairfield County was on a quarter-acre lot (no. 22) in the village of Geneva, which he purchase in July 1845. In November of the same year he purchased his first farm land in the area, 53 acres on the east side of Rush Creek. It was on May 23, 1848 that he purchased from Henry Binkley and wife the northeast quarter of section 34, containing 160 acres, for \$1,400, on which he build the Church of the Sacred Heart. (2) The frame church, measuring about 33 by 50 feet, was built near the southwest corner of the property on the north side of and facing the road running east out of Geneva.

Rev. Henry Lange, pastor of St. Mary Church in Lancaster, had charge of the missions southeast of that town, including Our Lady of Good Hope, St. Joseph, and St. John near Logan. When Mr. Schmelzer built Sacred Heart Church Father Lange added the visitation of this mission to his already heavy responsibilities. He managed to visit Sacred Heart only once each four months. Half of the quarter-section, about eighty acres in an "L" shape measuring a half mile on the south, 1650 feet on the west, and 990 feet on the east, was sold by Blasius and Walburga to Archbishop Purcell for \$15 on Nov. 10, 1857.(3) Three tombstones in the cemetery adjacent to the church testify to burials in 1855, indicating the Schmelzers' intentions for the property a year before the mission was organized. Among the first members of the mission, according to the 1883 county history, were Blasius, John, Jordan, Absalom (Anselm), and Anthony Schmelzer, that is, the founder and his sons and their families. The other two sons of Blasius and Walburga were Leopold and Otto Schmelzer, who also were residents of the area and members of the mission; Otto later moved to VanWert County, Ohio. (4)

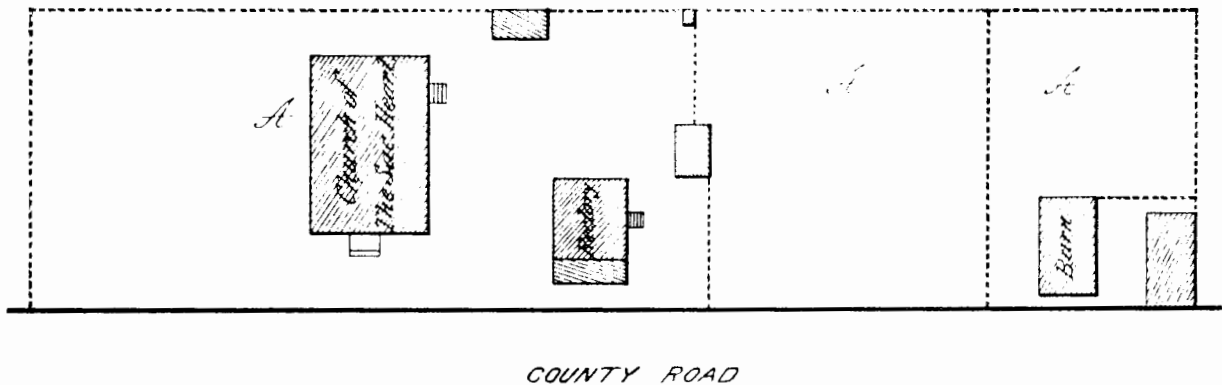
In 1861 Rev. Charles F. Hone became the first resident pastor at St. John near Logan and at the same time he took over the Sacred Heart mission; a distance of about seven miles intervened between the parish and the mission. In October 1863 Father Hone began the baptismal register of the "Schmelzer Mission of the Sacred Heart." This register was continued by the succeeding pastors of the mission up to the year 1894 and included records of St. Joseph and Our Lady of Good Hope along with those of Sacred Heart. [Most of this register (1863-1890) was published in Volume VIII of the Bulletin, but Monsignor Mattingly was working from the original, which had become brittle, torn, and illegible in some spots, so that some gaps occurred. Father Nevin while pastor at Sugar Grove in 1915 began a copy of the entire register and left it at Sacred Heart; it is now kept at Bremen. This copy supplies data now missing in the original and a portion therefore will be re-published in conjunction with this article.] Father Hone was succeeded as pastor at St. John parish by Rev. J. W. Brummer in 1864. About 1869 Father Brummer gave up the care of St. John parish and took up his residence at Sacred Heart, becoming its first resident pastor. He owned in his own name a three-acre parcel across the road from the church, which may have been the site of his residence. He left Sacred Heart in July 1871 and sold this property in January 1872 to John Schmelzer. (5) Father Brummer was succeeded by Rev. John C. Goldschmidt, who made his residence at St. Joseph and visited Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Good Hope at least once each month. Father Goldschmidt left St. Joseph's to take charge of St. Mary parish in Delaware for a short time and then moved to Columbus as chaplain at the new St. Vincent Orphanage. His successor was Rev. N. Gallweiler, who stayed for only a short time in 1874; he visited Sacred Heart every third Sunday during his short pastorate.

For most of the year 1874 there is a gap in the old parish register and in August two baptismal entries were signed by Rev. B. Hillebrand, whose only known assignments in the diocese were at St. Francis Hospital and St. Mary parish in Columbus. This may represent the period, mentioned in the 1918 diocesan history, when the mission was under the care of Father Specht (of Columbus St. Mary parish) and Father Hemsteger (of Holy Cross parish). From August 1874 until mid-1875 Sacred Heart and its sister churches were under the care of Rev. Charles L. Grimmer. Rev. Gabriel Volkert succeeded, having charge from September 1875 until April 1876.

Rev. Herman Heinrich Mayrose arrived in December 1876 and cared for the three churches for eleven years. At this time Sacred Heart had twenty-eight families. Some of the members of the mission sent small donations to support the work of their former pastor, Father Goldschmidt, at the orphanage in Columbus. Father Goldschmidt received the donations on November 20, 1877 and wrote these names in his receipt book with the notation "Geneva" beside them: Moran Bash, John Bash, Louis Schmelzer, Alphons Schmelzer, Anthony Schmelzer, Adam Boch Sr., and George Schorr. The county atlas of 1875 shows the farms and homes of Catholics M. Bash, P. Quirk, A. Boch, George Schorr, and B., W., P., and J. Schmelzer clustered around Sacred Heart Church. The new families appearing at the mission are generally from the other Catholic churches in the area. The essential unity of those from St. John, Good Hope, St. Joseph, and Sacred Heart and the flow of the families among these churches can be illustrated by the story of the Nicholas Kunkler family. The Kunkler family originally settled at the St. John mission near Logan, where Nicholas was born around 1844. Nicholas married Mary Kost, of another Catholic family of the area, and with her began raising a family while residing near Good Hope. Around 1882 they moved to Rush Creek Township near Bremen and became members of Sacred Heart. Their son John Kunkler a few years later moved to Berne Township and became a member of St. Joseph Church; his wife Annie Bash had been born at Logan, a daughter of Moran Bash who by the 1870's had moved to the Geneva area. (6) About 1882 Sacred Heart had some eighty communicants.

Father Mayrose left at the end of 1887 and for almost two years, until September 1889, the three churches were again under the care of the pastor of Logan St. John, now Rev. Thomas J. Cady. Sacred Heart received its second resident pastor when Rev. John Ritter arrived in September 1889 and made his home in the rectory next to the church. He also had a rectory at St. Joseph church, which he soon had moved into the town of Sugar Grove. It was probably about May of 1894, when Sacred Heart's baptismal register ends, that he set up his residence there, leaving Sacred Heart again a mission. A recent history of St. Joseph parish at Sugar Grove tells of Father Ritter's later years there:

...A former resident of that area relates that her parents told of Father Ritter's coming to Geneva by train. Parishoners took turns meeting the train [at Bremen] with horse and buggy to conduct the good priest to the Sacred Heart Rectory where a lady of the parish had a meal prepared and the rooms ready for occupancy. Oftentimes, the driver of the buggy would invite the honored one to be a guest at his home for a meal ere going on to the rectory.... Our informant also related that farmland was connected to the house and barn which composed the priest's residence - and when a priest was in residence, he tilled the land.



Father Ritter resigned in 1902 because of ill health. The next pastors of St. Joseph, who cared for Sacred Heart, were Rev. August F. Blum (1902-1904), Rev. John Beagin (1904-died 1906), and Rev. Patrick F. Ruane (1906-1913).

[To be concluded]

NOTES

- (1) Histories of St. Joseph and Our Lady of Good Hope were published in Volume 8 of the Bulletin (July and August, 1982). The primary sources for much of the common history of the three churches are listed there.
- (2) Fairfield County Deed Records 12/138; 13/251; and 18/31.
- (3) Ibid., 24/450.
- (4) Miller, Charles C., History of Fairfield County, Ohio and Representative Citizens; Chicago: Richmond-Arnold Pub. Co., (1912?). Biographical sketches of Philip Schmelzer and John N. Schmelzer appear on pages 761 and 766.
- (5) Fairfield County Deed Record 40/72.
- (6) Miller, op. cit., pp. 780-781.

SACRED HEART CHURCH GENEVA, RUSH CREEK TOWNSHIP, FAIRFIELD COUNTY SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

The sacramental registers at Lancaster St. Mary Church contain records of its missions, including Sacred Heart, but most of these are not listed as such. The following records were culled from the registers as probably having been performed at Sacred Heart, or at least being records of persons who attended Sacred Heart.

Marriages, from the marriage register at St. Mary, Lancaster:

- 1846, 3 Nov., Jordan Schmelzer and Barbare Shör
- 1847, 7 Jan., John Nepomuck Schmelzer and Gertrude Meisner
- 1847, 22 Aug., "Silverium" Schmelzer and Mariana widow Seevy
- 1852, 7 Jan., Anton Schmelzer and Catherine Seevy
- 1854, 30 Oct., Anselm Schmelzer and Margaret Keller
- 1858, 24 June, Joseph Otto Smelzer and Catherine Runzer

same , Joseph Kaellenberger and Barbara Smelzer
1858, -- ----, Leopold Schmelzer and Susan Speire

Baptisms, from the register of St. Mary Church, Lancaster:

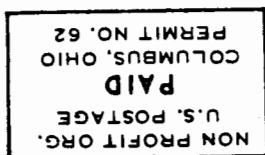
1847, 1 May, William, born 13 Oct., of Jacob Miers and Maria Ellen Hindsman,
spons. Catherine Miers. at Bremen
1847, 26 Sept. Anton, born 26 Aug., of Jordan Schmelzer and Barbara Schörr;
spons. Anton Schmelzer and Sophia Schörr.
1848, 28 Apr. John, born 22 Mar., of Jacob Myers & Maria Ellen Hindsman;
spons. Blasius Schmelzer & Gertrude Schmelzer. J. M. Young
1849, 30 May Juliana, born 28 Dec., of Jo. Nep. Schmelzer & Gertr. Meiser;
spons. Anselm Smelzer & Cath. Meiser. J. M. Young
1849, 5 Aug. William, born 27 June 1849, of Jordan Smelzer & Barb Shörr;
spons. Blasius Schmelzer & Marg. Wyland. J. M. Young
1851, 25 Apr. Louis, born 31 Aug., of John Nep. Smelzer & Gertrude Meiser;
spons. Blas. Smelzer & Walburga Smelzer. J. M. Young
1851, 8 Sept. Alphons, born 3 Aug 1851, of Jordan Schmelzer & Barbara Shor;
spons. Nich's Wyland jr. & Barbara Shor. J. M. Young
1852, 24 June Maria, born 3 Feb. 1852, of John N. Schmelzer & Gertrude
Meiser; spons. Blasius Schmelzer & Walburga do. Young
1852, 12 Dec. Joseph, born 25 Aug. 1852, of Anton Schmelzer & Catherine
Seevy; spons. Will Sevy & Anna Kunkler. [probably at Logan]
1853, 15 Aug. Francis Sal., born 7 June, of Wonibald Schmelzer & Rosanna
Fastensteinman; spons. Leopold Schmelzer & Briget Dugan.
1854, 2 Apr. Veronica, born 8 Jan. 1854, of Jordan Smelzer & Barbara Shörr;
spons. Nicholas Wyland & Barbara Shörr Sen. J. M. Young
[probably at Logan]
1855, 10 Nov., Mary Loretta, born 6 Oct., of Anselm & Margaret Smelzer, spons.
John & Melvina Wald.
1855, 20 Nov., Veronica, born 15 Sept., of Wunibald & Rosalia Smelzer, spons.
John & Gertrude Smelzer
1856, 19 Feb., Maria, born 18 Jan., of Anton & Catherine Smelzer, spons. Nic.
Zebe & Maria Zebe
1856, 3 Dec., Frances Philomena, born 22 Oct., of Anselm & Maria Smelzer;
spons. Ad. & Frances Bach.
same Philip Neri, born 24 Oct., of John & Gertrude Smelzer; spons.
Louis Feist & Josephina Gully
1857, 3 Sept., Alexander, born 10 Sept. 1855, of Jacob & Margaret Elizabeth
Myers; spons. Patrick & Elizabeth Quirk
same Jacob, born 25 May 1853 of same; spons. Anton & Catherine
Smelzer.
same Catherine, born 30 June 1849 of same; spons. Leopold & Walburga
Smelzer.
1857, 15 Nov., Mary Elizabeth, born 24 Oct., of Adam & Franciska Bach; spons.
Otto Smelzer and Helen Quirk.
same John Nepomuck, born 16 Oct., of Wunibald & Rosalia Smelzer;
spons. John & Gertrude Smelzer.
1857, 6 Dec., Rebecca Johanna, born 14 Dec. 1850, of Jacob & Maria Helena
Meyers; spons. Barbara Smelzer.
same Helena, born 27 Sept. 1852 of same; spons. Barthol. & Ellen
Lehy.
same Raymond Henry, born 8 Nov., of Anselm & Margaret Smelzer;
spons. Leopold & Walburga Smelzer.

- 1858, 28 Jan., Jacob, born 27 Dec., of Anton & Catherine Smelzer; spons. Bartholomew & Helen Leahy.
- 1858, 5 Dec., John Nepomucene, born 9 Oct., of John & Gertrude Schmelzer; spons. Joseph Wald & Antonia Hana.
- 1859, 16 Mar., Mary Elizabeth, born 19 Dec., of Anselm & Margaret Smelzer; spons. Joseph & Mary Elizabeth Keller.
- 1859, 17 Mar., Catherine, born 13 Jan., of Wunibald & Rosalia Smelzer; spons. Otto & Catherine Smelzer.
- 1859, 5 Sept. [among a group obviously at Logan] Daniel, born 1 Sept., of Otto & Catherine Schmelzer; spons. Wunibald & Rosalia Schmelzer.
- 1860, 26 Feb., Blasius, born 7 Jan., of Leopold & Rosanna Smelzer; spons. Jos. Spire & Francisca Steck. [probably at Lancaster]
- 1860, 19 May Henry Pius, born 4 May, of Anton & Cath. Smelzer; spons. Wunnibald & Rosalia Smelzer. [at Logan ?]
- 1860, 18 Oct. Joseph Henry, born 15 Aug., of Jacob & Mary Ellen Myers; spons. Blasius & Walburga Smelzer. H. Lange
- same Magdalen, born 12th, of Otto & Cath. Smelzer; spons. Joseph & Magdalen Gebhart. H. Lange
- 1861, 3 Apr. Susan Ann, born 6 Mar., of Anselm & Margaret Schmelzer; spons. Michael & Susan Keller.
- 1861, 12 Aug. George, born July 2, of Patrick & Elizabeth Quirk; spons. Edward & Mary Jane Quirk.
- 1861, 5 Nov. Maria Carolina, born 20 Oct., of Otto & Cath. Smelzer; spons. Walburga Smelzer.
- 1861, 17 Dec. Abraham, born 23 Nov., of Adam & Francisca Bach; spons. Blasius & Walburga Smelzer.
- 1862, Apr. 2, Francis Xavier, born Jan. 10, of Leopold & Susan Schmelzer; spons. Blasius & Walburga Schmelzer.
- same Joseph, born March 19, of George & Mary Ann Sherr; spons. Joseph Kellenbarger & Margaret Meyers.
- same Caroline, born Feb. 24, of John & Gertrude Smelzer; spons. Adam & Catherine Bach.
- same Mary Ellen, born Mar. 29, of Joseph & Magdalena Gerhart; spons. Otto & Catherine Smelzer.
- 1862, Aug. 11, Anna Joanna, born July 12, of Anton & Catherine Schmelzer; spons. John & Gertrude Schmelzer.
- 1862, Nov. 4, Mary Magdalene, born Sept. 16, of Wunnibald & Rosalia Schmelzer; spons. Anton Schmelzer and Magdalene Schoerr.
- 1862, Dec. 16, Margaret Helen, born 27 Nov., of Anselm & Margaret Schmelzer; spons. Leopold & Mary Sahn.

Recorded at Logan St. John:

- 1863, 8 Mar. Alfred, born 21 Jan. 1863, of Otto Schmelzer and Catherine Runser; spons. Leopold & Susanna Schmelzer. Rev. Chas. F. Hone

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