

Johann Baptist Gamber

John Baptist Gamber, the son of John Gamber, a hatmaker, and Katharina Müller, was born on Feb. 5, 1837 in Landstuhl, Kaiserslautern, Rhineland-Palatinate.ⁱ He came to the United States in April 1854ⁱⁱ and became a United States citizen in St. Louis on January 19, 1861.ⁱⁱⁱ John was ordained for the Archdiocese of St. Louis by Archbishop Peter Kenrick on August 24, 1859.^{iv} He was immediately appointed rector of the German parishioners of Ss. Mary and Joseph Parish, Carondelet MO and opened a German-speaking school there in rented quarters the following January. The group soon purchased land and began building a church under Gamber's leadership. The rudimentary building was dedicated by Kenrick on Dec. 26, 1860. Not long after Gamber demanded permission to return to Germany due to illness.^v He returned home via the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and left for Germany aboard the Ship Teutonia on May 3, 1862.^{vi}



He returned to the United States aboard the Steamer Allemania with Anna Müller, possibly a maternal relative, on October 29, 1866^{vii} and served St. Boniface Parish in Germantown WI from March 1868 to March 1870.^{viii} Here Gamber completed the stone church begun during the civil war, obtained relics of Ss. Fidelis, Otilia and Pinasae for the new altar and had two church bells named St. Maria and St. Catharine installed. Salzmann's frame church was converted into a multipurpose hall.^{ix}

After his time at St. Boniface, he moved to the newly established Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, where he served St. Peter in Chains Parish, Wheelersburg and St. Mary, Portsmouth, Dec. 1870-Jan. 1871;^x St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Morges in Carroll County, 1873-74; St. Joseph, Ironton, and station at Sheridan Coalworks, 1874-78; St. Henry Mission, Harriettsville, 1879; St. Louis, Gallipolis, 1880-81; St. Henry Parish, Harriettsville, and St. Patrick Mission at Fox Settlement in Washington County OH, 1882-87.^{xi} Gamber returned to Germany in 1888. He served in Grünwald and Pullach before retiring in 1891. John died on November 5, 1908 in Pleisweiler.^{xii}

Gamber's life followed a pattern typical of other German-speaking missionary priests. Following ordination, he worked among German speaking immigrants forming them into parish or school communities, securing land and building schools and churches.^{xiii} Then he returned to Germany to recuperate from exhaustion, came back to the USA for another missionary stint, and finally returned home to serve until dying in retirement.

ⁱ Civil Registry, Landstuhl (Bavaria) Birth of John Gambert, no. 5, p. 3, 1837. No record of baptism found.

ⁱⁱ *Katholisches Deutschtum in den USA*, p. 147; Emigrant Card File, Institut für pfälische Geschichte und Volksbunde, Kaiserslautern.

ⁱⁱⁱ Passport Application, July 1861.

^{iv} *Schematismus*, 1882, p. 4 – from the files of the Catholic Record Society – Diocese of Columbus.

^v Rothensteiner, John. *History of the Archdiocese of St. Louis: in its various stages of development from A.D. 1673 to A.D. 1928*; Patricia Richardson, *A Pictorial Record of the Faith and History of a People: Published on the occasion of the suppression of the Parish of St. Boniface, July 1, 2005, by order of the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 6 and 8.

^{vi} New York Times, May 4, 1862, p. 8.

^{vii} New York Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists: Ship Manifest, Oct. 29, 1866. and Customs Record, Oct. 29, 1866; Hamburg Passenger List, Departure Date Oct. 13, 1866.

^{viii} Sacramental Registers, St. Boniface Parish, Germantown WI.

^{ix} Schulteis, Donald Joseph, *St. Boniface Parish, Germantown WI (1845-1999)*, p. 15 and 16; Baptismal Register, vol. 1, last page.

^x Sacramental Registers, St. Peter in Chains, Wheelersburg; St. Mary, Portsmouth OH; Nelson Wiley Evans, *History of Scioto County OH: Together with a Pioneer Record of Southern OH*, 1903. (Thanks to Mary Theresa Boll for reviewing these records.)

^{xi} Sacramental Registers; Official Catholic Directories.

^{xii} *Katholisches Deutschtum in den USA*, p. 147; Emigrant Card File, Institut für pfälische Geschichte und Volksbunde, Kaiserslautern.

^{xiii} Mention of a contentious Gamber church building project at St. Patrick Parish, Fox Settlement, can be found in *Diocese of Columbus: The History of Fifty Years: 1868-1918*, p. 528.

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