FAIR & ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
The Little Red Church,
Destrehan, Louisiana
250 Years of Service—
Sunday, June 3, 1973

Destrehan, Louisiana, on the East Bank of the River in St. Charles Parish, is the oldest community in the area known as the "German Coast". St. Charles Borromeo Church, often referred to as the "Little Red Church", is proudly celebrated for 250 years of existence as the second oldest Catholic Church in the United States.

The Little Red Church was first constructed of logs about 1740. It burned and was rebuilt in 1808. It was a famous riverside landmark along the Mississippi River near New Orleans, where boat captains traditionally paid off their crews. It was again destroyed by fire and rebuilt about 1921.

An anniversary celebration is to be held on the Church Grounds on Sunday, June 3, 1973, to express thanksgiving and joy to celebrate 250 years in honor of our forefathers and in the pride of an illustrious history.

When I was a very young boy, I was privileged to know Father Francis Basy, who was pastor of the Little Red Church about 50 years ago. Between housekeeping chores, he painted over, once in a while kept house for Father Basy, and I accompanied him to Destrehan.

Father Basy came to this country from Jonzioux, in the Valley of Oise, France, about 1852 or 1853, and I was born there in 1882, one of the children of Pierre and Isidore Basy, two of my Frey grandparents, and, of course, anybody from the old country was welcomed, especially if they came from the same section.

When I was twenty, I was in the United States and worked in the fields as a farm laborer. I had never been to a church before that time, and I was very impressed by the beauty of the Little Red Church when I saw it for the first time.

The church was small, but its beauty was captivating. I decided then and there that I would become a priest, and I did just that.

On June 3, 1973, the Little Red Church celebrated its 250th anniversary, and I was honored to be the celebrant. It was a beautiful day, and the crowd was packed outside the church. Everyone was wearing their best clothes, and the air was filled with happiness.

Father Basy was a dedicated priest, particularly gifted with great perspicacity and ability to solve problems. He had a balanced culture, appreciated good food, and was very fond of good wine. He was noted for his charm and humor, and he always knew how to make people feel welcome. He had a special way of making people feel comfortable and at ease, and he was always willing to help anyone in need.

When Father Basy came, he laid out a plan and marked the aisles for the burials. Before and after the burials, the graves had been cleaned and the bodies were brought to the church yard by a team of horses, in a horse-drawn funeral carriage, and then carried to the church, where they were placed in the graves. The church yard was beautifully arranged, and the flowers were fresh and fragrant.

When I remember those early days, I think of the hard work and the long hours that Father Basy put in to keep the church running smoothly. He was a true gentleman, and I always admired his dedication to his work.

I remember the day when a young boy came to Father Basy's rectory and asked for something to eat. In those days, it was not unusual for a man to come walking up to a homestead and say, "I'm hungry. Give me something to eat and I will work for you until you have been repaid." However, the housewife would hide the food from the stranger at the gates. I made sandwiches for the tramp, who said he would stay there until he had saved up the logs behind the rectory. His name was Johnny Behazey, and Father Basy nicknamed me Johnny Behazey because I spent so much time listening to his stories of travels across the country.

At that time, being about 10 or 12 years old, Destrehan was the farthest I had ever been from home, and I knew it would be far out in the wilderness. I remember Aunt Pauline and I brought home a big red tomato or "minus" by the name of Minette. The Schematics, good friends of Father Basy, who lived in St. Rose, where the Mexican Petroleum Company was in operation at that time, I well remember the day of great rejoicing in the parish, when the Mexican Petroleum Company donated $20,000 (if my recollection is correct) to build a new church and priest's house.

In the early twenties, there were only two ways to get to Destrehan from New Orleans. One was to come out South Claiborne into Jefferson Parish and branch off to the River Road, and the other was to drive out Melonie Ridge, turn left at Shreve Road, past the Swift fertilizer plant between the railroad tracks and River Road, with its huge pile of ghastly white animal bones.

Although Destrehan was only 30 miles from Canal St. in New Orleans, in those days it was a long journey, because you could not make good time on the River Road—a narrow two lane road, snaky, gravelly and dusty, full of dead men's curves, where many people had lost their lives or been injured in automobile accidents.

Today, Destrehan is just a pleasant ride up the Airline. You will enjoy the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Little Red Church on Sunday, June 3, 1973.

YOU ARE INVITED
PLAN TO COME YOU WILL BE WELCOME
John Schwengmann
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