

Thousands Will Join 60th Pilgrimage To Robinsonville Shrine On Saturday

BY HAROLD T. I. SHANNON (GBPG Aug 13, 1925)

"Go on, Mother Pauline, tell us more about Sister Adele and the Mother of God." Innocent eyes bulged from the chubby little faces and the group of cherubs gathered even closer to the kindly old woman who was regaling them, on this festival day, with the very story we wanted to hear from her. For Mother Pauline, superioress of the little convent community which sprung up on the site where Adele Brice is believed by many to have seen and heard the Mother of God, is well along life's highway, and has lived the three score years and ten which are allotted to men. She is the last to have known Adele personally and to have shared the privations of the cloister with her, and daily this saintly old person, always believing, always enjoying a holy envy of one who had seen and spoken with the Queen of the Heavens, implored the devout Adele to repeat again and again the story of the apparition.

Ten Families Arrived

In 1853 there arrived in the country from the commune of Crez Doicean province of Brabant, Belgium ten immigrant families. In their native land for more than a year they had held frequent and regular meetings in each other's homes to plan the ocean voyage and determine where in America the greatest assurance of prosperity was to be found. This question was not settled when they left Antwerp on May 18, in the three masted sailing craft "Quennebec." And the discussions continued for the 48 days spent upon the sea. But until the little band had disembarked at New York the persuasive language of a Wisconsin leaflet had the definite effect. Without relatives or friends the Belgians continued west to Outagamie county where they made first payments upon tracts of land. A mere happenstance changed their plans entirely and located the first Belgian colony in the Kewaunee-Door peninsula.

Upon arriving at Kaukauna one of the children of the party, a favorite with all, died and the Belgians, yet practical in their religion, journeyed to Green Bay to the Catholic church of St. John the Evangelist for the burial. Here a Father Daems of Kewaunee county was visiting and met his fellow countrymen and persuaded them to forfeit their land payments in Outagamie county and settle the forlorn lands of the peninsula.

First Settlement

And thus began "Aux Premier Belges" or the first Belgian settlement. By 1854 and 1855 a steady stream of immigrants was pouring in from Belgium to Brown, Door and Kewaunee counties. Thirty Daems, La Rivere Rouge, and numerous other little communities were established. Times were hard. Where there was not a heavy stand of timber, logged off and cleared away only under the greatest difficulties, there was stone, great ledges of it making soil husbandry almost impossible. There was real suffering in the settlements. Many of the men abandoned farming and sought labor of any description that their families might keep body and soul together.

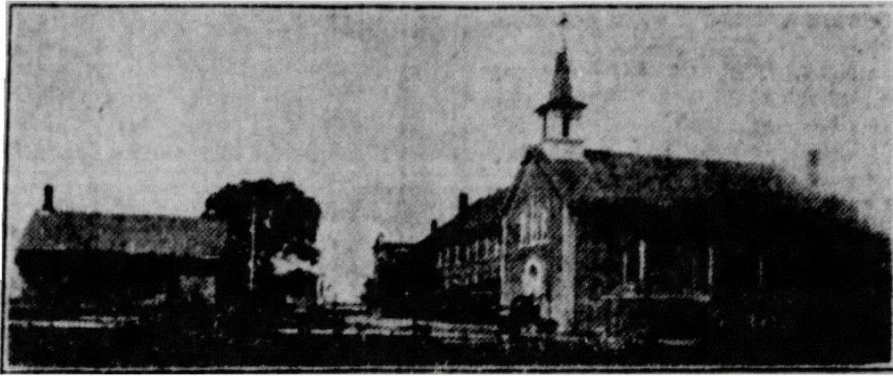
Among these settlers were the parents of Adele Brice, a simple and native country girl whose single ambition in life had been to enter the convent. When the little family joined the movement to America Adele implored her practical father to leave her behind that she might enter the cloister in her native land. But Joseph Brice, the father of the four daughters and no sons, saw work for the girls to do in making the new home in the land of their adoption.

Secretly at Mieux, in Belgium, Adele and a few girl companions vowed to keep themselves unspotted by the world that when the opportunity came they might be prepared to take the veil of the sisterhood, and after her vow she sought the counsel of her pastor and confessor who told her that there were times when "obedience was greater than sacrifice."

Prayed and Waited

Here we asked the good superioress of Adele's little convent to tell us the story of the simple girl who obeyed and prayed and waited and whom thousands believed was honored by an apparition and direct conversation from the Blessed Virgin to whom she had been so devoted and through whose mediation she hoped for all things to be well.

"How often good little Sister Adele would tell me." The serene countenance of one who has given all that she might win all and who is supremely confident that it will not be long before the reward for her labors will be left, lighted as she recalled thrice happy moments in ecstasy with the little sister who had spoken to the Mother of God.



General view of Robinsonville, where for 60 years devout pilgrims by thousands have gathered on Aug. 15 to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary and pray for her intercession on their behalf.



The tiny wayside shrine, locked throughout the year except on Aug. 15, marks the exact spot where the Mother of God is believed to have appeared and communicated with Adele, pious daughter of a Belgian pioneer.

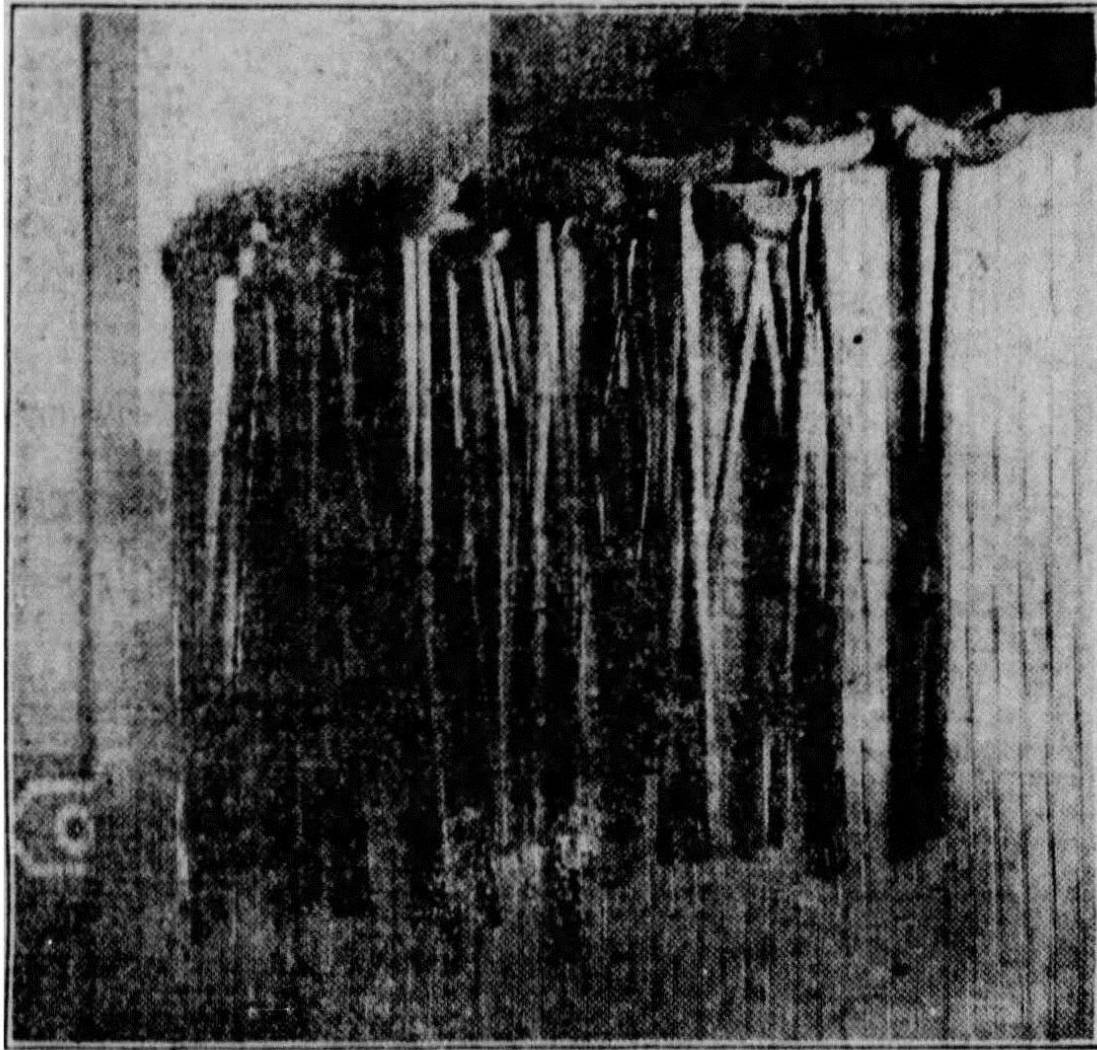
The Brices lived two miles east of Robinsonville. Adele walked ten miles to Bay Settlement to church following an old Indian trail, and almost as far to Dyckesville mill, bearing half bushels of wheat upon her head.

Feast of Assumption

On the 15th day of August 1858, the feast of Our Lady's Assumption, Adele was on her way to church. As she passed through the woodland where the shrine now stands there appeared between two trees, on a maple and the other a hemlock which stood for years after, a blinding white light which paralyzed the poor girl with fear. She cowered before it and prayed rapidly and breathlessly as the light took definite form and between the trees stood a marvelously beautiful lady, clothed entirely in dazzling white garments, with no touch of color save a wide yellow sash or girdle.

Her hair was auburn; her eyes deep and dark and she bore a radiant and kindly smile. Adele trembled with fear. The vision faded gradually away.

The poor girl told her mother who informed her that it might have been a departed relative who wanted prayers. The following Sunday, Adele still fearful, was accompanied on the long journey to church by Mrs. Van der Niesen and Isabella Brice. As she came to the little mound between the two trees she was about to describe her apparition when suddenly she screamed and fell to her knees turning to the death pallor in her sudden fright. Again she beheld the vision, precisely as she had seen it on Assumption Day. Reaching the church she confessed to the missionary of the order of the Fathers of the Holy Cross and told of the apparitions.



A few of the crutches and canes abandoned by cripples at the shrine as physical testimony of cures.

Father Daems Believed

Later the Bay Settlement pastor, Father Daems, seeing the earnestness of Adele and believing that the girl was in no wise misrepresenting what she had actually seen, counselled her to take courage and speak to the apparition if ever she saw it again and to say "In the name of God, who are you and what do you wish of me?"

On October 9th the dear girl wandered through the woodland again with the same companions, Mrs. Vander Niessen and Isabella Brice. They saw her drop to her knees again, and they did likewise though they beheld nothing, as it was given only to Adele to hear the word of the Blessed Mother. Adele took heart and slowly repeated the words her pastor had taught her. This her companions heard.

"Queen of the Heavens"

Our Blessed Lady spoke. How well do I remember the words Adele so many times told us. 'I am the queen of the heavens' she said in a soft and wonderful voice 'who prays for the conversion of sinners'. Adele grasped every word eagerly. 'I want you to do the same' the soft voice continued. Adele's companions watched her as she stared and listened. The Blessed Virgin instructed Adele to pray for 9 days for the conversion of sinners and then withdraw from the world and labor for the souls of the settlers who were falling away from their religion in the new country and whose children were being raised

without a Christian education or a knowledge of the mysteries of faith.

Adele's companions saw that she was weeping and wanted to disturb her. Later she told of the great hurt when our Lady censured here and asked "What are you doing, while your little companions toil in the vineyard of my Son? Teach the children. If your people are not instructed they will not believe." After a considerable pause Our Mother said softly to Adele "Blessed are those who believe; yet do not see" and the apparition faded again away.

And Adele took the message literally, whenever she received it, and she went about from home to home, from village to village, teaching the children the elements of the faith and the simple prayers, preparing them for their first communion and exhorting their parents to return to the church lest spiritual calamity befall them. Early she was joined by others, among them the eighty year old narrator if the apparition, Mother Pauline. Together they prayed with the little ones, sang French hymns and were finally made postulants in the Third Order of St. Francis.

Came in Numbers

People came in large numbers to the "sacred spot" and to listen to Adele who had changed from a bashful country girl, unlettered and unimposing, to a fiery preacher and teachers whose perseverance and enthusiastic obedience to the voice heard only by her converts at



Kneeling in front of the the three sisters who are standing near the cross is Sister Adele to whom "The Queen of the Heavens" is aid to have appeared three times. The above picture was taken 40 years ago when 100 orphans were given shelter at the home.

every turn. For several years she met with opposition from the clergy who declared her alleged apparition a myth. Adele persisted to tell of the vision, and the pilgrims to the mound between the trees increased in number. Finally repeating the fate of Saint Joan of Arc, Adele was refused the sacraments of the church and threatened with excommunication if she persisted in her stories.

But Adele's enthusiasm only increased. Mrs Dionne, a neighbor donated five acres of ground including the holy knoll and Joseph Brice, now reconciled to Adele's vocation built a little chapel shrine ten by twelve feet.

Adele prayed in her grief to the Blessed Lady of her vision to give external signs that the incredulous might know and believe. And the lame are said to have walked; the blind said to have seen; and those troubled long with wasting disease have sought the help of the "Help of Christians" and claim to have been made whole at little wayside sanctuary. Wheel chairs have been abandoned, the crutches and canes piled high in the chapel as mute testimony of alleged cures at Wisconsin's "Lourdes."

While the bishop has never officially recognized the story or the alleged miracles, yet pastoral sanctions was given to the erection of the larger chapel, the convent, the orphanage, and other buildings of the little community and a regular priest ministers to the village and has charge of the annual pilgrimage on August 15th.

Thousands of Pilgrims

Every year thousands of pilgrims from many states visit the shrine and participate in the devotions, tarrying too to visit the well kept grave of Sister Adele in the tiny white fenced churchyard. In 1924, despite a down pour of rain a crowd estimated at 15,000 made the pilgrimage from the open air altar in the community to the original shrine more than a mile away, and knelt in the field and lane and highway in fervent supplication.

Sister Adele died July 5, 1896.

Mother Pauline was born in 1846 and will enter her eightieth year, and he sixtieth year in the nunnery this winter. Her family name is La Plant, and she is one of eight daughters of one of the pioneer Belgian settlers.

Crowded on Aug. 15

So far as is known there has never been a year since 1864 when the first larger chapel was erected, that Robinsonville has not been crowded on Aug. 15 with pilgrims from near and from far seeking the aid of the Mother of God, whom they firmly believe appeared before the little Belgian girl and through her saved and tottering faith of the discouraged husbandmen who were concerned more with the physical necessities of existence than with the consolations of their religion. Accordingly the pilgrimage to Robinsonville on Saturday, August 15th will be the 60th journey to the place where the blinding light in the forest brought inspiration to Adele Brice and faith to her followers.