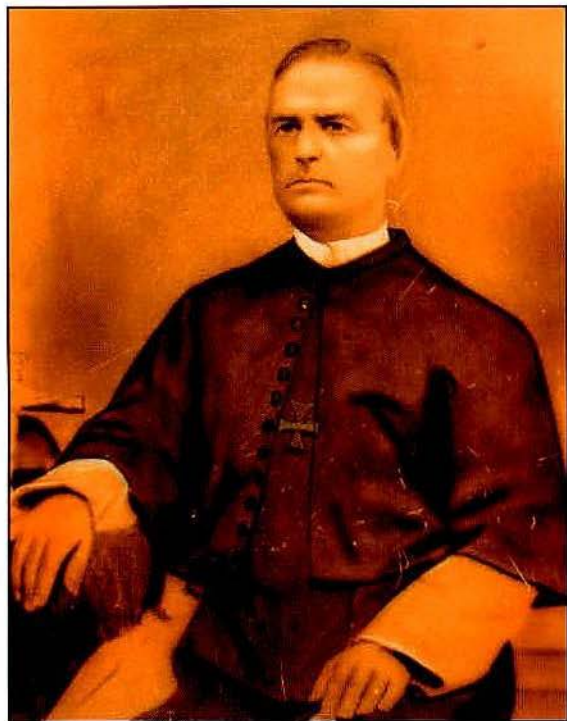


FATHER EDUARD DAEMS, O.S.C.

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FATHER OF THE COLONISTS IN WISCONSIN



by Father Willem Sangers, O.S.C.

Translated from the Dutch by  
Father James Remmerswaal, O.S.C.  
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**FATHER EDUARD DAEMS, O.S.C.**

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BY

FATHER WILLEM SANGERS, O.S.C.

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**T**he Crosier Fathers' and Brothers' celebration of our 800th Jubilee as a Religious Order in the Catholic Church naturally reminds us of our long and rich history. From our humble founding during the Crusades, to turbulent times during the reign of England's King Henry VIII who suppressed the Crosiers in the British Isles, to the French Revolution which diminished Church life all across Europe, eventually the number of Crosiers dwindled to a remnant of four aged men living in the Netherlands. Even there, Dutch King William I forbade the reception of novices in all Religious Orders, but when he abdicated in 1840, his son repealed this unjust dictate and a large number of secular clergy immediately entered our Order.

One of these was Father Henry Van den Wymelenberg, who had originally been ordained a priest for the Diocese of Mechelen in Belgium in 1823. Soon after joining the Crosiers, Father Van den Wymelenberg, OSC, became Master General of the Order, and in 1850 he sent Crosier missionaries to Wisconsin so that a more geographically dispersed Order might never again be subject to any one particular episode of history's suppressive movements.

Of the Crosiers sent to Wisconsin in 1851, Father Eduard Daems, OSC, was perhaps the most notable, both in his accomplishments and longevity. Daems had remarkable ability in his charism for priestly ministry as well as in his knack for administration and organization. Especially, we give thanks to God for the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Holy Cross of Bay Settlement who were founded by Father Daems. These sisters have kept the Crosier spirit alive all these years in their faithful dedication to God through their living the Religious Life and in their service to the people of Wisconsin.

**W**e Crosiers find much hope and inspiration in the exemplary dedication of the early Crosiers who came to the United States. May Father Eduard Daems, OSC, the great Crosier Missionary of the 19th Century, intercede now to God on behalf of the 21st Century Crosier Missionary efforts in our American Crosier Mission in Papua, Indonesia, as well in our other Crosier Missions in Indonesia, Brazil, and the Congo in Africa.

May the heroic life of Father Daems also inspire young men here in the United States and across the world to respond to the call of our current beloved Master General Father Glen Lewandowski, OSC, to "Start Afresh from a Place of Light" as we begin the next 800 years of living Crosier Religious Life.

With gratitude we remember in our prayers all living and deceased members of our Order and all those who will yet be inspired by Father Daems to follow in his footsteps to serve the Church as religious men and women in the 21st Century, even in the face of its own adversity and challenge.

*Brother Albert L. Becker, OSC ~ Director of Development ~ Crosier Fathers & Brothers*



**Fr. Eduard Daems, O.S.C.**  
**1826-1879**

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**E**duard Daems was born in Flanders and died in America. The same could be said of thousands of his contemporaries, for this is ordinary news about the people of that time. Dr. J. Van Ginniken, S.J., estimates in his book *Regenboogkleuren der Nederlandse Taal* (Rainbow Colors of the Dutch Language) that the total number of North and South Holland emigrants was around 250,000 during the middle of the previous century. Had Fr. Daems only made this difficult journey and life transition, which was a common event in his day, he would not have been exceptional among his contemporaries and with them would have already been forgotten. Yet it is exactly this journey to America and the life he developed there that made Fr. Daems memorable for us. For he whom God looks upon with pleasure can't remain hidden from people forever.

In Flanders people never knew him, but in America there is a little piece of land that people will not sell for any price, because it is the resting place of Father Daems, who once lived there as a saint. I once saw a photo gallery of famous Flemish missionaries, but his picture was not among them. However, in Bay Settlement, where he died over 60 years ago, his picture still hangs in a place of honor in many homes.

Fr. Daems never sought recognition for his work. The ideal of “*ama nesciri*” (*wanting to remain unknown*) was impressed upon him so often by his ancestors that it became a prominent value which he exhibited throughout his entire life. It was enough that God saw his achievement, and he was fully convinced that He did. Yet, after his death, people began to speak up. The fine veil, which the awareness of one's own insignificance had woven around this truly great life, was ripped apart. The

Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross, of which he was the founder, venerated him as a saint. The many schools and orphanages that he had established considered him now, even more than during his life, as their caring father to whom they had gladly entrusted their fate. Those whom he had made happy were of the opinion that they now had to stand up for him. That explains why now, after 60 years, people still speak of him. Father Daems has become the great Crosier missionary of the 19th century.

Eduard Daems was born on August 20, 1826, in Schaffen, near Diest, Belgium. His father, who died only a few years after Eduard's birth, was a farmer and belonged to one of the oldest families of the village. His mother was one of those soundly religious farm wives who really understood the art--without the knowledge of methods and educational systems--of equipping her children with all the things most important for their adult lives. It was she who gave Eduard his missionary heart. Eduard was a truly religious young man, meaning more than a mere "good boy"; he had an energetic will and an intelligent mind. Cheerful and optimistic, he quickly became a friend to everyone.

In regard to this last point, the following story has been told. During the summer, Eduard had to herd the cows every afternoon in the pastures of Schaffen. A whole group of school mates would go along with him. After they had fulfilled their task and wearily lain in the grass, they would ask Eduard to tell stories. And that he was able to do for hours, keeping them filled with suspense! He had a sunny, carefree youth; his life was a beautiful dream, which became more beautiful as he grew.



The Crosiers came to Diest in the year 1845. Only a year later, a young man from Schaffen knocked on the monastery door and asked to be accepted into the Order. He was 20 years old and he was Eduardus Franciscus Daems. When the required investigation showed a very positive result, Prior Van der Weyst was happy to accept him. On November 24, 1846, he received the Crosier

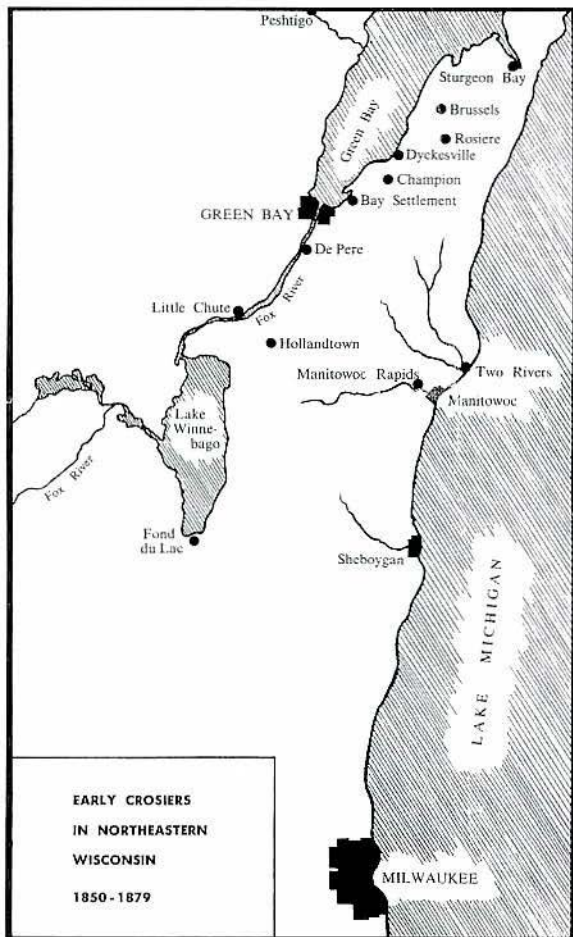
habit. He had taken the first step toward his ideal. After his novitiate, Eduard was sent to complete his philosophical and theological studies in Uden, the Netherlands, where he made his solemn profession on November 25, 1847. On September 21, 1850, he received the ordination to the priesthood from the hands of Lud Baron Van Wijckersloot, Bishop of Curium. Now he was a priest. The first part of his ideal had been realized. His next most fervent wish was to go to the missions as soon as possible.

After making the necessary preparations and saying goodbye to his dear mother and confreres, he traveled to the United States where just eight months after his ordination, he said his first Mass on American soil in Detroit, Michigan. He had made acquaintance with Peter Lefevere, Bishop of Detroit, who tried to recruit him for his own diocese. This was a vain effort, as is easily understood when one knows what inspired Father Daems. Life in civilized Detroit could not fulfill what he desired most dearly. He had made his journey seeking the difficult life of a missionary to the settlers and indigenous people of North America. In the forests of Wisconsin, he found them. After a short stay in Milwaukee, he arrived in Little Chute with his faithful companion, Brother Petrus Witvens, O.S.C. This was in September of 1851. Twenty-eight difficult years awaited him here. In all obscurity he would labor and toil here for his dear children. Here he would come to fully deserve the name of Father, that is, "Father" Daems.

The state of Wisconsin is bordered on the west by Minnesota, the present mission territory of the Crosiers; to the east, by the Great Lake Michigan. In northeastern Wisconsin, Lake Michigan points its long curved nose into the land, thus forming a bay, which, because of the beautiful green forest and fertile pastures surrounding it, but more so because of the green water, is called Green Bay. At the present time, this region is very fertile, with many farms. Industries too, especially paper mills, have seemingly risen out of the ground as if by a magic wand.

Near this Green Bay there is a beautiful little town that is

also called Green Bay. Little Chute, Holland, Manitowoc Rapids, Bay Settlement, Freedom, and other places in the area owe their present well-being to the Crosiers. For the Crosiers, this green region of Green Bay has special historical meaning. From 1850 until 1879, this was their mission territory in the United States of America. People have never forgotten these strong pioneers of the



past. Legends allow them to continue to live on among the present population. Their pictures have been passed on through the generations, and the names of many churches still remind us of their great accomplishments. Almost all the churches built from 1850 through 1879 in the Diocese of Green Bay were built by the Crosiers and are dedicated to the Holy Cross. Most of these churches are still owned and attended by Catholics today.

In 1832, when Father Peter Van den Broek arrived in Wisconsin, the indigenous people of that region had not yet been forcefully relocated to separate areas. Native people lived in communities and villages scattered throughout the vast woods and plains, especially in the western area of the state. Some heroic Jesuits and Franciscans had worked

towards their conversion two centuries earlier, but they did not focus their activity on any specific group or location. They sowed the seed of the Gospel, but left the refinement of this mission territory to others. From behind the present seminary in Bay Settlement one can still see the place where the world-famous Jesuit missionary and discoverer Father Marquette landed in 1673.

With reason we ask ourselves, how was it possible that the Crosiers could begin a mission in 1850, when we know that just ten years earlier the Order had only four members? To answer this question we must look at the close connection between the Crosier mission in Wisconsin and the desire of the Dutch who traveled to America around the middle of the previous century. It has been estimated that almost 2,600,000 Europeans settled in America between 1850 and 1860. The Dutch took part in this general exodus, especially the Catholic population in the south.

If we know the history of the Netherlands, then it will not surprise us that a large percentage of Dutch emigrants were Catholic. For although the persecution of the Church in the Netherlands had passed, fanatical and influential Protestants continued to harass Catholics, and it was many years before they were completely free of this persecution. Already in 1846, a "Commission to promote regulated emigration of Dutch Catholics to North America" was founded in Nijmegen. A pamphlet of this Commission summarizes the reasons why so many Dutch people left their land of birth to look for their happiness elsewhere. There were three important reasons: For more than 30 years they were deprived of the joy of their most precious liberties, their taxes increased daily, and their food became constantly more expensive. As Dr. A. Kuyper wrote in his little book, *Varia Americana*, "Our emigrants who went to America were not emigrants in the proper meaning of the word, but exiles--exiles because of religion: pious, faithful, strong men and women, whom the fatherland effectively banned by making their lives here unbearable because of their religion."

Therefore, we also understand why Father Van den Broek, when he once returned to the Netherlands from America and advertised the fertile state of Wisconsin, found hundreds of people willing to accompany him on his return journey. In Wisconsin they found all that Father Van den Broek had promised: rich soil, complete religious freedom, and a hopeful future. However, one thing was missing, and that was a very important thing: namely, the regular care of souls. This was especially needed here, when we consider that in America there was an abundance of Protestant sects, each of which had its own pastor. It was in those days that the British Bible Association developed its greatest activity. Especially of concern to Wisconsin Catholics was a fellowship of Dutch separatists: Under the guidance of a "Brother" van Raalte, these so-called Scholtians presented their opinions and considerations in shrewd and cunning ways, luring many colonists to their camp. Thus the missionary work was difficult, and the Catholic emigrants were placed in a position to question their faith.

One colonist wrote to his family, "Oh, if the Crosiers knew to which dangers our souls are exposed, they certainly would help us." A letter referencing this correspondence tells us that it was read in the monasteries of Uden and Hermans, and that the Crosiers considered it a "*digitus Dei*", a sign from God, who was appealing to their willingness to make sacrifices. For thus the letter continues: "Immediately the Canons Regular of the Holy Cross readied themselves to begin a mission there." From the small number of members of the Order, the generous Master General Van den Wymelenberg assigned nine to provide this urgent need. Since 1840, the number of members of the Order had increased greatly, but all available persons were needed at that time for the Colleges of Diest, Maaseik and Uden, which the Order had recently reopened. Those who keep this in mind will not call the number of missionaries at this time small. It should therefore not be surprising that the Dutch Press of those days spoke loftily about the unselfishness and loyalty of the Order, exemplified in the courage of the Crosier missionaries and their willingness to sacrifice.

In Wisconsin, the arrival of the Crosiers was awaited with joy, especially by the Dutch. They knew their white and black habit with the red and white cross on the breast. For them, the Crosiers were a living memory of their region of birth, where many had often sought them for assistance. For innumerable Catholics in the motherland, the final point of hesitation towards trying their luck in America was now resolved. The urgent desire to help was there, and the mission of the Crosiers in Wisconsin was founded.

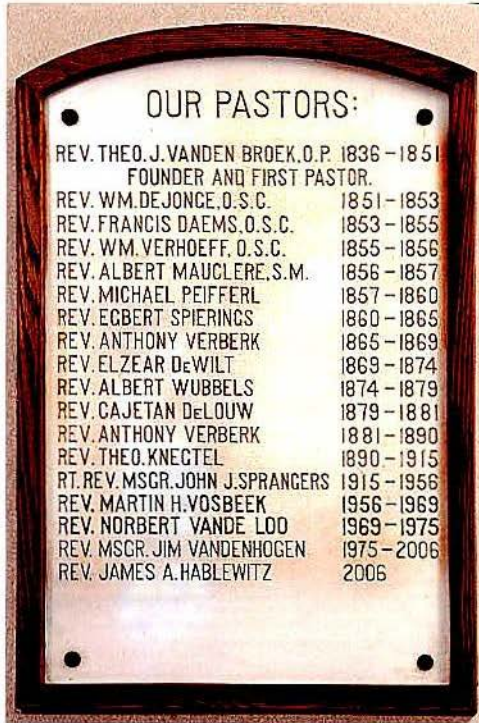


A few days after Father Daems arrived in Little Chute, he learned that the noble Father Van den Broek was dying. Nevertheless, in the next two months before his death, Father Van den Broek taught Father Daems many things. In later years Father Daems would speak numerous times about the first years of his missionary life and of how he considered it a special privilege to know, if only for a short time, the apostle of Wisconsin, Father Van den Broek. Father Daems obtained a treasury of knowledge from the rich experiences of this pioneer. He often spoke of his first encounter with this remarkable man:

*“We stood in front of the so-called rectory of Little Chute, and we were marveling about the poverty of the building, when the door opened and an even more impoverished figure appeared at the doorstep. It was an old, sickly man, still wearing a straw hat in this inclement season. His clothing consisted of a red baize smock and a worn-out pair of pants with a cord tied around his middle. Two mismatched shoes completed his not so spiritual outfit, which perhaps would have offended anyone else, but not us, for we knew that this priest had been born into a rich family, yet chose to not keep anything for himself and instead gave everything to the poor.”*

Father Daems' first stay in Little Chute was from September 1851 until May of the following year. It was a time of

great tribulation, when cholera took the lives of hundreds of colonists. Father Daems was in the right place. Day and night he was ready to provide help at the first sign of illness. One night he was called to come quickly to a dying woman who had come from the Netherlands shortly before the outbreak of cholera. Concern



A listing of the pastors who served the parish in Little Chute.

for her recently born child made her restless, and when she had received the Last Sacraments, full of fear she spoke about the future of her dear child. "Don't worry, dear Mother," the missionary consoled her, "I myself will care for your little boy." Shortly after the poor lady died that night, Fr. Daems, like a second St. Vincent, wrapped the child in his coat and went quickly home. Here another messenger awaited him. This time he had to go for an anointing in a remote region, miles away. Without first warning Brother Peter, Fr. Daems laid the sleeping child in his own bed and departed immediately. One

can only imagine Brother Peter's surprise when he was awakened by the crying of a baby and discovered the floundering infant in the bed of his Superior! In his embarrassment, he asked a neighbor lady for help with the infant until the missionary returned home and solved the puzzle. Father Daems looked for a good Catholic family, which, at his expense, took on the care and education of the little boy. When this story appeared in 1899, his foster son was still alive, and he was known in town as a worthy citizen and a zealous Christian. Many other incidents which Father

Daems experienced in those tumultuous days are still known to us. They all describe the sacrificing love of this zealous pastor.

With tears in their eyes, the colonists of Little Chute watched Father Daems leave from their midst when he, after the death of Father Van den Broek and at the request of the Bishop, departed for Bay Settlement. People had experienced that this man, with his stern, demanding appearance, possessed a compassionate heart. Among all the Crosiers, Father Daems was especially loved by the Dutch of north and south, and by the French, Germans, and Dutch, whose languages he spoke fluently.

## Plans for A Monastery

In 1855, Master General Van den Wymelenberg called Father Daems back to the Netherlands, probably because the Master General had come to the conclusion that there would not be any chance of founding a Crosier Monastery in Wisconsin. The sadness regarding his departure was general, and on October 1, 1855, Bishop John Henni wrote to the Crosier Master General, "I am very sad about the departure of the Reverend Daems from my diocese, more because of his fluency in languages and experience in business matters; he could be successful as the head of the mission." These and other matters made the generous Master General send Father Daems back to the diocese, but he gave him the task to found a monastery. For that purpose he appointed him as the superior of the mission and as the future prior of the monastery. Before Father Daems began his return trip, he paid a visit first to his Eminence the Cardinal of Malines, and then to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and thus he informed the Church and National Leadership about his journey. The Cardinal as well as the Secretary of State showed great interest in the work of this zealous missionary and recommended him to the Belgian Consul and the Bishop of Milwaukee. On Sunday, October 26, 1856, Father Daems, with another confrere, arrived in Manitowoc Rapids, where people sang the "Te Deum" during the Vespers. In a letter

of February 12, 1856, Bishop Henni thanked the Master General for his generosity, and he promised to do all he could to promote the founding of a monastery.

The Crosiers followed a certain method in their mission work in Wisconsin. Above all they wanted to found a monastery community in order to send their missionaries to all parts of the province from this cultural center. It even seems that the future of the mission in Wisconsin was made dependent on the founding of a monastery. When the Crosiers arrived in 1850 in Wisconsin, they chose the town of Little Chute for that purpose and established a temporary monastery there. It soon became clear that founding a monastery there was not possible, so they were forced to look for another location. After the death of Father van den Broek, they decided to move to Manitowoc Rapids, located on the shore of Lake Michigan

Based on the negotiations between Master General Van den Wymelenberg and Bishop Henni, we see that Manitowoc Rapids did not meet their expectations either. The new superior tried for the third time in Bay Settlement. Here he bought a hundred acres of land and quickly built a temporary monastery. In the spring of 1857, the work was already advanced far enough to invite the other confreres to occupy the new monastery. The whole community consisted of eight members. In the Church calendar of North America of the year 1857, the founding of this monastery in Bay Settlement is described as “Community of the Holy Cross”, monastery of the Holy Cross. It is a pity that this work that began with so much enthusiasm did not survive.

The causes for the failure of this third attempt, I have still been unable to determine with certitude. The “Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche in Wisconsin” solves this question too vaguely by saying that Bay Settlement, according to the general feeling, did not have any future. There is no doubt that the tremendous financial crisis, which began in the United States in 1857, had its impact here too. This disaster closed factories and mills and

caused unemployment for thousands of people. The Civil War (1861-1865), which was a result of this crisis and which called ministers as well as laity to military service, was likely another obstacle to the continuation of the monastery. In any case, after this third attempt, the plans for a monastery were given up, and most of the Crosiers returned to Holland.

Thus the noon meal on a day in 1861 in St. Agatha was interrupted by an unusual visit. The community was quietly at table. The youngest novice read from an inspiring article by Rodriguez, while the others listened attentively: "The sincere love of the one towards the others should not only be interior or remain only in the heart, it must also..." With a jerk, the door of the big dining room opened. Brother Porter appeared with a diffident look on his face and with downcast eyes walked directly to the Master General.

"Master General, there are three vagabonds at the door who insist on speaking to you."

"Let those vagabonds come in," was the laughing response.

Shortly thereafter entered three men with unkempt beards and covered in dust. To the surprise of all, they knelt down to receive the Master General's blessing, after which he welcomed them warmly. The so-called vagabonds were three Crosier missionaries, recently returned from America. Lack of money and the long journey explained their unusual appearance. They certainly would have forgiven Brother Porter his undignified announcement. Since their departure, and in spite of everything, only one remained behind in Bay Settlement, Father Edward Daems.

## **The Pioneer**

Bay Settlement literally means a settlement on the bay. When Father Daems arrived there, the town had the French name of L'Anse. The little culture, which the missionaries founded and

struggled to maintain since 1840 in Wisconsin, one now looks for in vain in Bay Settlement.

There was an unending loneliness, as being left by God, wide and far and quiet, scary and fearful, that seemed to be the definition of this area around the middle of the previous century. As far as the eye could see there was forest in which darkness rested impenetrably. Here the indigenous peoples lived according to their customs. They could be heard during the day as they communicated with one another with yells and whistling as they hunted wild game. At night, the few settlers who lived there were often intimidated and fearful of the sound of their wailing songs of ceremony and celebration as they danced around great fires.

The daytime in Bay Settlement ended in a deep black night, which bore heavy and pressing upon the earth. Nowhere could one find a trace of a road or path. There was no postal service in this area to keep connections with the outside world. To live here meant a total separation from all the comforts life can offer. By the time Fr. Daems arrived, the only remnants that remained of the European settlement were a few sod huts and dilapidated farms near the bay. Here and there some wild oats grew as a mournful memory of the despair with which former farmers had given up on the cultivation of this land. There was a small chapel of tree logs built by French Canadians, visited occasionally by a faithful few. Would he be able to sustain here? Or would he, like his predecessors, who had started here with so much enthusiasm, have to leave discouraged?

The immediate predecessor of Father Daems was the Reverend Florimond Bonduel, who came to serve in this place from Green Bay, where he had been the pastor of St. John's church. With energy and a hero's courage he had begun his work here, but he finally had to give up, and as a broken man he left this land. Father Daems proved to be the most courageous of all missionaries; for he not only came to Bay Settlement, but he

remained there! The word “remained” paints for us the whole character of this great missionary: his enormous trust in God, his energy, his steel will, and his inexhaustible patience. And does not the force of this word in this context command respect for this hero of Schaffen? From what is said above about Bay Settlement, one might conclude that only a few souls were entrusted to the care of Father Daems. When we check the Baptismal books of those years and see that they increase from 15 to 415, then we have to conclude that the pastoral ministry of Father Daems extended over the whole region.



From his first day as the shepherd of Bay Settlement, Fr. Daems placed all his talents at the service of the people who were entrusted to his care. No sacrifice was too heavy for him as long as he could contribute to the well-being of his poor flock. If we have read “The Great Silence” by Ole Edvart Rølvaag, then we have felt compassion for those unhappy colonists who were of the opinion that America was the country where the poor had a chance to move ahead. Just think about their first encounters with the indigenous tribes of the Prairie and their fiery hatred against the encroaching European settlers; the enormous plagues of locusts; the great storms; and the huge prairie fires. Father Daems, however, had a way to elevate again the sunken courage of the colonists. He would travel up to 60 miles around Bay Settlement to visit them. With his simple, friendly, and well-chosen words he renewed their cheerfulness and enthusiasm enough for them to carry on with the difficulties of life. Through conferences, missions, and retreats, he was able to again awaken the love for virtue and to bring to life the spiritual fire in his children.

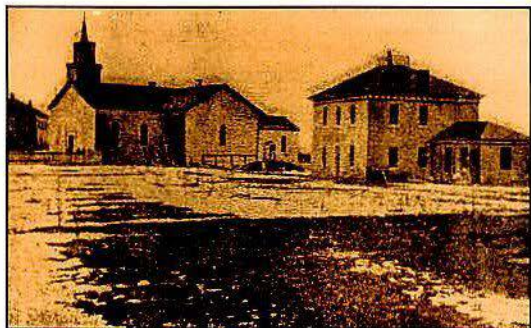
The faithful shepherd stood day and night among his people, available for anyone who needed his help. His practical knowledge and experience enabled him to provide good counsel and information, but more powerful than his word was his example. His own enthusiasm for work, his guts and spirit of enterprise, and especially his voluntary poverty, were stimuli for the faithful to carry on patiently and without complaining about the

hard life of colonists. And whoever saw Father Daems pray in front of the Tabernacle knew also where he himself went to find the necessary source to conquer all difficulties.



Thus Bay Settlement quickly drew everyone's attention. Many, who in the past had left this place in despair, returned again, now in firm conviction that their labor would also have success. Dutchmen from South and North, Frenchmen, Irish, and Germans settled down like a flock of migratory birds and shortly after, they would meet with representatives of eight different indigenous nations. Experience has proven that the amalgamation process of the different nationalities in America even today takes place slowly. In the days we are speaking of here, this was obviously a still greater problem, and it took many years before the sons and daughters from abroad were completely "Americanized."

Father Daems foresaw this danger and in order to satisfy everyone, he preached each Sunday in Dutch, English, German, French, and even in some indigenous languages. In 1850, there were approximately 3,000 natives in the region of the Diocese of Milwaukee. Almost all



Bay Settlement, Wisconsin  
Mid-nineteenth century.

were entrusted to the care of the Crosiers. Many colonists lived far away and very seldom were able to visit the little church on Bay Settlement; these he visited by horse. We are even able to say with certainty that there have been very few places in this large state of Wisconsin whose residents did not have at least one opportunity, if not more, to hear the eloquent words of this great apostle. To get an idea of such a mission journey, we must remember that there were no decent roads, and the missionary had to follow the paths of the natives through the forest and dangerous

swamps. When Father Van den Broek once went on such a journey, he sank, horse and all, into the swampy ground. The nearest house was 20 miles away. There could not be any saving help in this totally uninhabited area. The missionary entrusted his soul to God in an ardent prayer and began to cry out with all that was in him. And really, beyond all expectations, he heard a voice on the other side of the swamp. Help would be coming for him from that side shortly. Without this he would have died, but God took care of his laborers. On those mission journeys Father Daems was an especially welcome guest at these lonely log homes and sod huts. And when he saw the misery and poverty of those good people, he distributed everything he had with him, and poor as Job, he returned again to Bay Settlement. His generosity was so well known that even a non-Catholic newspaper (*The State Gazette*, February 20, 1879) praised him after his death for the consistent generosity he had shown to non-Catholics as well as to members of his faith.

Within the Diocese of Green Bay, there is a small village named *Thiry Daems*. It is certain that Father Daems is connected with the founding of this little village and more so yet because Saint Odilia, the patroness of the Order, is also the patroness of the little church. Still, it remains a question for us why this place is named after him and not Bay Settlement, which actually, as the parishioners have thankfully expressed, was also founded by him and has treasured the most beautiful memories of his generosity; and more so yet because it was renamed from the French name of "L'Anse" after Father Daems' arrival there.

Immediately after his arrival in 1852, Fr. Daems made plans to build a big church. In May people welcomed him, and on June 19, the contract for the building of the church was already signed. This was a busy time for Father Daems; all bills were addressed to him, and where could he find the money? His parishioners were very poor farmers. And was he himself not the poorest of all? Therefore he begged not only in Wisconsin, but also sent appeals to Belgium and Holland. And not in vain!

Besides financial support he also received liturgical supplies from friends and acquaintances. Like the many other churches which the Crosiers built in Wisconsin, this one too received the name of the Holy Cross.

Father Daems gave his permission for a bell tower to be built near the church. The beautiful silver bell was a gift from his thankful people. It consisted of three quarters silver and shone in the sun like a new dollar. It is a pity that this bell tower was destroyed in 1916 by a tremendous cyclone. When the people wanted to cast the bell again, there was much opposition. The newly cast bell would never be able to replace the old one, and it would not contain the same percentage of silver. Therefore, it was decided to have the pieces forged together, but for a long time no company dared to take on this delicate job. Finally a company in Chicago accepted the job, and thus Bay Settlement kept its old bell. It had lost its lightening glow through the fire, but it kept its



Still in use is the Rectory built by Fr. Daems

silvery sound and as before, it once again calls people to church with its well-known sound.

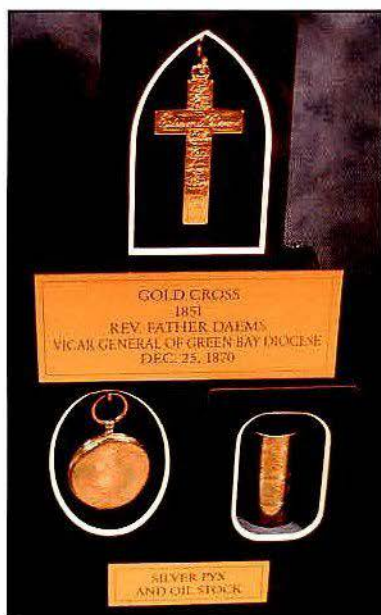
In 1860, after the completion of the church, Father Daems began to build the rectory, which became not only the residence of the pastor but a safe refuge for the poor, strangers, and the sick. This rectory was the center from

which the culture, in an unassuming way, found its way among the settlers. It is interesting to know that it carried a number of honorary titles, which still proclaim its praise in a short but beautiful litany. We find names like "Source of life; the cell of a real monk; the laboratory of the learned nature man; the seat of true science and virtue; a school of devotion, order, and regularity." No traveler knocked at the door seeking shelter in vain, no beggar was sent

away hungry, and, because Father Daems was very skilled in medicine, the sick found not only compassion and consolation but also soothing and healing. This rectory is still being used today. It remains a beautiful memory of those early days of the settlement.

## The Sisters of Saint Francis of the Holy Cross

Besides this rectory, Father Daems established innumerable schools and houses of charity, especially in more distant parishes. A lack of Catholic teachers gave him the idea to found a new religious community, whose rules and clothing would be simple. Education and the formation of poor children would be for the time being its most important activity. When he asked Bishop Melchior for the necessary permission, he advised Father Daems to use the Rule of St. Francis, approved by Pope Nicolas IV, for his congregation. On November 7, 1874, the first four girls of Bay Settlement entered, and they lived in a part of the rectory until 1880. Today, the congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross still exists and has grown tremendously. In Wisconsin they are well known as the Sisters of Bay Settlement, and many schools are under their direction.



Fr. Daems' Cross, pyx, and oil stock: a gift to the Crosier Fathers and Brothers on the celebration in 2010 of their 100 years of continued service in the USA and their 800th Jubilee from the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Holy Cross.

In this way, this man of God devoted himself to the spiritual and material well-being of Bay Settlement. Far beyond that, as we have seen, he also did the work of a pioneer. The Roman Catholic Church of northern Wisconsin can thank its expansion and growth to his "tireless ax labor," as *The State Gazette* expressed it. Both the Church and the State have expressed their appreciation innumerable times for the uncommon gain of this great Crosier.

In 1868, the Diocese of Milwaukee split, and Green Bay was elevated to an independent diocese with Father Daems as its first bishop, if he had wanted it. He was satisfied with the function of Vicar General, and Joseph Melcher became the first bishop of Green Bay. *The State Gazette* wrote, "Father Daems, if he had willed it, would have had a higher rank in the hierarchy, but he was satisfied with the task which he had set for himself." Twice Father Daems was administrator of the diocese; first, when Bishop Melcher attended the First Vatican Council in 1870, and a little later during the opening of the Episcopal See from 1873-75. He was again appointed Vicar General by the new Bishop, Francis Krautbauer. This task of course added to his work and care, when one remembers that the diocese of Green Bay was poor, it did not have enough priests, and its population spoke several different languages.

## **Father Daems Dies for His People**

In Schaffen, an old mother was sick in bed. She had yet one wish: "To die in the arms of my son." And really--what nobody expected--on the third day of her sickness, there was news, "On my way to Schaffen. Your son, Eduard."

The meeting of the sick mother with her dear child was heartfelt. From the hands of her own son the dying woman received the Last Sacraments and in his arms she gave up the spir-

it a few days later. God had granted her last wish.

The reason for Father Daems' arrival was the General Chapter of the Order in 1866 to which Master General Van den Wymelenberg had invited him. He received from his confreres proof of the great trust that people had in him when he was elected prior of the monastery in Diest. However in vain! Being prior meant for him the irreversible separation from his dear people in Bay Settlement, and he wanted to give the last years of his life to them.

His silver jubilee as a priest, held on September 21, 1875, was a welcome occasion for his many friends to prove to him again their love and appreciation. In the oldest houses of Bay Settlement a booklet printed for the occasion is still saved with great care. This booklet is a grateful remembrance of all his works of mercy: the holy tears he cried and which even early in life wrinkled his cheeks; the worries that bent his tall frame; the hardships that undermined his body; all his prayers, all the earnest desires of his large and generous heart.

Four years after his silver jubilee as a priest, Father Daems gave his life for his dear people. This was his last and greatest sacrifice. For, although he suffered for a long time from some serious ailments, he had, with superhuman effort, kept himself standing up until three weeks before his death and had tried to fulfill his pastoral obligations to the end. At the first alarming news Bishop Krautbauer went to the sickbed of his Vicar and friend and himself administered the Sacrament of the Sick. Father Daems passed away on February 12, 1879, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. He was 52 years old, 28 years of which he had spent in the mission. He died full of the faith for which he had lived and labored. His last wish was to be buried in the little cemetery of the Church of the Holy Cross. He wanted to rest among those from all languages and nations, who had once upon a time brought him trustingly to this place.

“His death,” the *Standard of Wisconsin* wrote, “brought about a general lamentation among Protestants and Catholics alike. For was there really anyone in this area to whom the praised deceased did not provide some service? Was he not a consolers of the poor, a doctor for thousands of sick, and above all, a zealous pastor of his flock? All of Wisconsin therefore has brought him the last honor on the day of his funeral and burial.” From far and near people came in groups of twenty, of hundreds, of thousands; yes, such a gathering attended the funeral of this beloved priest, the likes of which people had probably never seen before in this area! Bishop Krautbauer celebrated the Mass, and in spite of the limited means of transportation, approximately thirty priests were present, who with burning candles surrounded the officiating bishop. In the midst of an innumerable crowd, a bier was seen, which carried the white coffin of walnut, decorated with a black velvet cloth and silver memorial plaque. After the final prayers, three eulogies followed, one in English, one in French, and one in Dutch, which focused on the life and merits of this mourned priest. It may have been almost superfluous that the speakers called their listeners to not forget in their prayers one who during his life had thought only of them. Did this not prove already the value of his long and difficult journey, that people would never forget Father Daems and his generosity?

Accompanied by the ringing of bells and funeral music, the coffin was carried by the priests, heading a funeral procession in which the population of the whole region participated. It must have been impressive to see thousands and thousands of people following the coffin, solemn and bareheaded, giving no attention to the falling snow. The old solemn trees around the cemetery looked down silently on the quiet and peacefulness below. Still one more impressive moment followed at the graveside, when there for the last time the face of Father Daems was shown to those present. People would no longer be able to see those noble features on earth, but the image of this pious priest pressed itself deeper in the hearts of all who loved him.

**A**mong the many grave stones of the small cemetery of the Church of the Holy Cross there is one which will remain precious to the faithful of Bay Settlement. It is the grave of Father Daems; it is the resting place of their saint. From this heroic figure inspiration is still coming forth, shaping lives by the memory of his example. This life of heroic love for God and love for neighbor is an apology of Christianity. We average people feel so small compared to so much generosity. Our time of average people has great need for personalities like Father Daems. May Father Daems, also in the Flanders, where even now he is unknown, take a worthy place in the long gallery of our great Flemish missionary figures.



**Other Crosiers in the Wisconsin Mission,  
Years Served There,  
Date and Place of Death**

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Fr. William deJonge, O.S.C.  
1850-1856  
September 26, 1887  
Diest, Belgium

Fr. Hubert Nuyts, O.S.C.  
1850-1866  
December 23, 1868  
Uden, Netherlands

Br. Peter Witvens, O.S.C.  
1851-1854  
August 24, 1854  
Little Chute, Wisconsin

Fr. William Verhoef, O.S.C.  
1855-1878  
January 11, 1878  
Menominee, Illinois

Br. Henry Schoenmakers, O.S.C.  
1855-1861  
March 2, 1882  
St. Agatha, Netherlands

Fr. Anthony Aarts, O.S.C.  
1856-1861  
May 22, 1876  
St. Agatha, Netherlands

Br. William Van Vlijmen, O.S.C.  
1856-1863  
April 7, 1905  
Maaseik, Belgium

Br. Peter Huijgens, O.S.C.  
1856-1861  
January 6, 1892  
Diest, Belgium

## SOURCES

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Congratulatory to our beloved Pastor Very Rev. E. Daems, V.G.  
from his faithful Parishioners at Bay Settlement.  
Green-Bay, Advocate Press. 1875

The Crosier Missionary, jaarg. 1931-32.

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