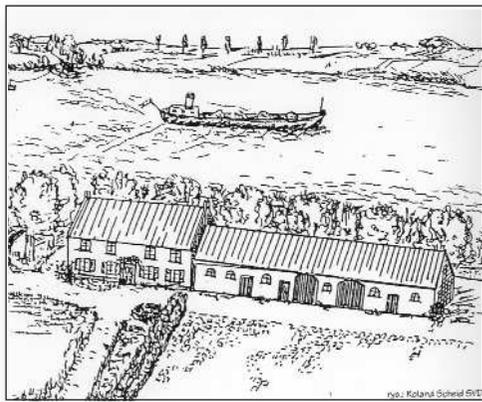


“In the first days of the current month of August a house for the first beginning of the mission institute will be bought near Venlo, that is in Steyl, municipality of Tegelen.

The work is very important and has a lot of consequences. It can only be directed by a priest who excels because of his humility, science and knowledge of the world and who has the confidence of his priestly confreres.

Until now the work does not have such a man; let us therefore pray that the Lord God in his mercy will soon send a suitable person” (Fritz Bornemann SVD, *Der Pfarrer von Neuwerk Ludwig von Essen und seine Missionspläne* [The parish priest of Neuwerk Ludwig von Essen and his mission plans], Steyler Verlag St. Augustin, 1967, p. 106). Bornemann commented on these words like this: “This he [von Essen] wrote about that priest whom he, through his signature under the letter of March 17, 1875 to his Archbishop had practically recognized as Rector of the mission house. A few days after the publication of this dismissive judgment in his parish magazine, the parish priest [Fr. von Essen] was to sign together with Fr. Arnold 25 letters to bishops in Germany and Austria and in that way he once again virtually recognized A. Janssen as Rector” (*ibid.* footnote 1).

On August 4, the feast of St. Dominic, the new mission house was finally bought. Fr. Arnold and Fr. Peter Bill, who in the meantime had come from Luxembourg to Kempen, travelled from Kempen to Venlo. There they were joined by the Austrian seminarian Francis Xavier Reichart who had come from Louvain; he also intended to join the new mission house. “In the presence of the notary, Clerckx, in Blerick, the house was registered under Fr. Bill’s name” (Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, Engl. edition, Arnoldus Press Manila, 1975, p. 65). At the same time the sale price was paid. Reichart went from the notary’s office to Steyl where the carpenter Erlemann was already living and working. Erlemann gave up his room in the village and Reichart and Erlemann “spent the night of 4 August on the new property, the first to sleep in the seminary. From that time on they also did their own cooking” (*ibid.*, p. 66).



Heinrich Erlemann



Franz Xaver Reichart



The Arnoldus Family Story

TOWARDS THE OPENING OF THE MISSION HOUSE – Further developments July / August 1875

July 26 – From Kempen Arnold Janssen writes to Fr. Peter Bill in Luxembourg

“Dear Father!

Yesterday, in response to my application, I was granted duty-free import of my belongings to Steyl, as well as of all other things which I hopefully will still get by begging. Today I started with that, in a local inn here I was able to buy rather cheaply a nice cooking stove together with 2 big copper kettles, and on Friday the first load will go “gratis for the love of God” to Steyl!” (Peter Bill, *Korrespondenz* [Correspondence], p.6)

Fr. Arnold then talks about his younger brother, the Capuchin brother Juniperus Janssen:

“My brother, up to now a Capuchin brother in Muenster, cook, gardener and experienced mendicant who has to move [due to the Kulturkampf] has offered his services as a domestic servant; I believe we could well use him. So I have accepted him, first for one year, and on condition that his provincial and my colleagues agree. Good and useful as he may be, out of consideration for the others I would prefer a stranger. So I added the last condition and intend to show him no special consideration, as I’ve already told him” (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 72).

Fr. Arnold’s remark that out of consideration for the others he would have preferred a stranger was quite justified as Fr. Bill himself proves. In his memoirs he writes that he thought that Br. Juniperus had spied on him. “It seems that the Capuchin brother was afraid that I would diminish the respect for his brother even more or I wanted to take his place... He (the Franciscan brother) never trusted me fully; unfortunately I then did not recognize it immediately (Peter Bill, *Erinnerungen* [Memoirs], p. 21).

Finally, Fr. Arnold informed Fr. Bill that August 4, the feast of St. Dominic, would be the date of purchase of the new mission house and he continued:

“Since the money had been transferred to me and after much consultation I know no better and no other course open to me, (since we three hardly know each other and therefore to register in the name of all three might lead to very awkward situations) I intend to register the house in my own name and immediately leave it to one of you in a will. Tell me if you agree with this course of action. Or maybe you will have some better suggestion” (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 72).

Having received Fr. Bill's answer Fr. Arnold wrote to him once again on **July 28**:

"I just received your letter. I am happy that you agree to come over here some time. There is still so much to deliberate on; and I don't like to have to decide everything on my own. On August 3 I would like to have a get-together in the mission house and to invite you, Mr. Reichart and Fr. Smorenburg [former Dutch missionary to China who had agreed to teach Chinese to future China missionaries]. There are so many agenda items. If it is at all possible leave [Luxembourg] on Monday and travel through to Kempen. Let me know immediately if you can come, for Fr. Smorenburg will definitely not come if he is not sure of finding a constitutive meeting here. – Mr. Anzer from Regensburg has not yet received the permission of his bishop. From Luxemburg Professor Hengesch of the seminary, a person who is most interested in the project, enrolled two boys for the apostolic school. I must stop here so that I can still post the letter ..." (Peter Bill, *Korrespondenz* [Correspondence], pp. 6-7).

Since Fr. Bill did not answer this letter immediately, Fr. Arnold wrote to him on **July 31**:

"Dear Father,

Until now I have not received any news in response to my letter of a few days ago. On August 4 (Wednesday) legal transaction will take place; please [come] immediately on Monday, Tuesday morning at the latest (departure from Ettelbrück to Pepinster 8:7 am), 1:4 pm at the outside if need be.

From Ettelbrück 1:4 pm. At Pepinster 4:6 pm. At Aachen 7:51 pm, from Aachen 8 pm. At Mönchengladbach 9:45 pm, from Mönchengladbach 10:5. At Anrath 10:25.

Anrath is a station between Mönchengladbach and Kempen, 1½ hours from Kempen, country road via Vorst" (*ibid.*, p. 7).

"I am up until 12 midnight. I now feel it would perhaps be best to register the house in your name and I will give you the money for it. You could be naturalized as Dutch. Come over so we can make a decision; write immediately and tell me if your are coming" (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, pp.72-73).

On July 26, Fr. Arnold had written that the mission house should be registered in his own name; five days later he had completely changed his opinion: the house was to be registered in Fr. Bill's name.

Fr. Bill did not know the reasons for this change, and so he commented on it in his memoirs with these words: "I always believed that through this [registering the house in my name] Rev. Janssen wanted to bind me closer to the house and the project, or did he begin to fear that I would not come, that I didn't like it anymore since I did not always answer and write punctually at the right time?" (Peter Bill, *Erinnerungen* [Memoirs], p. 22).

However, Fr. Arnold had different reasons for changing his mind, as Fr. Alt points out in his biography of Arnold Janssen: "He got information – exactly when is unclear – of an official letter of the Commissar of Limburg to the Mayor of Tegelen with reference to laws affecting foreign priests in Holland. That is probably the reason he changed his plans" (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 72). That could also have been the reason for his suggestion that Fr. Bill should take up Dutch citizenship. As we learn from a letter of Fr. Arnold to

the secretary of the Bishop of Roermond from August 1, he had also asked the Dutch priest Fr. Smorenburg if he would agree to let the house be registered in his name; however he refused. Janssen himself did not want to give up his German citizenship.

Fr. Alt also points out that Fr. Arnold experienced almost daily how quickly the State passed laws enabling it to take over monasteries or other church institutions. He wanted to prevent this from happening to the mission house, and so on **August 1** he submitted the following plan to the secretary of the Bishop of Roermond:

"It is clearly our responsibility to safeguard this property against possible secularization. Consequently it must be private property. I have thought out the following. I will have it registered in the name of my colleague, Fr. Bill, in whom I have the greatest confidence, especially because of his humility. He pays for it; however, I lend him the money, that is, the donations received; and he gives me a promissory note. To cover me, this promissory note will be deposited with his Lordship, the Bishop of Roermond or someone designated by him. At the same time, Fr. Bill will make a will and bequeath the house to me. If he dies, I will present the promissory note and show that the value of the legacy is absolutely zero and thus I will have no estate duties to pay. I then make a further will and the bishop's deputy will pass on the alms received to the future heir as his property. The latter lends them to whoever is the owner at the time, who thus becomes his debtor, but the promissory note will be deposited back with Monsignor [Paredis] or someone designated by him."

Fr. Arnold then asks the secretary to present this plan to Bishop Paredis to get his approval. "There is no question about the trustworthiness of Fr. Bill (in this respect please find enclosed a letter from the Bishop of Luxembourg); it is only a question of the procedure. I think Fr. Bill will agree. It is actually a sacrifice for him; he would become the owner of the estate but also owe, perhaps, a much higher sum. (Fr. Smorenburg has just refused). I also intend to ask Fr. Bill to become naturalized as a Dutchman in order to safeguard this holy undertaking even further. (I myself have to keep a foothold in Germany; for me to give up my nationality is out of the question.)"

In case Fr. Bill did not agree to the plan or did not show up, Fr. Arnold asked for a statement "whether it would be good if I perhaps register it [the mission house] in my own name" (see Alt, *Journey in Faith*, pp. 73-74).

On August 2 Bishop Paredis of Roermond "gave his approval for this procedure and required that the promissory note be deposited with the seminary administration" (*ibid.*, p.74).

Fr. Arnold had written his letter on August 1, and on August 2 the Bishop gave his approval. From that "it seems AJ himself took the letter to Roermond (1 August was a Sunday); otherwise the confirmation by the bishop on 2 August would hardly have been possible" (*ibid.*, p. 73 footnote 120).

That very August 1, the day on which Fr. Arnold had written his letter to the secretary of the Bishop of Roermond, the parish priest Msgr. Dr. von Essen published a new edition of his parish magazine in the parish of Neuwerk, the St. Joseph magazine. He reported the recommendations for the new mission house in Steyl by a number of bishops; however, he finally wrote words which show that he had neither faith nor trust in Fr. Arnold: