

## **Michigan Every Day** **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

*Sept. 13, 1832*  
*First priest in Congress dies in Detroit*

Father Gabriel Richard was born in France and was 31 years old when he arrived in Detroit to serve as a pastor at St. Anne's Church. In the years he spent in Detroit, Richard left his fingerprints over almost all of the significant events in the city after Michigan became a territory of the United States. He started the city's first-known news service, a town crier who read the news of the country and the world in a town square. He established the city's first library. He published the city's first newspaper, the ill-fated *Michigan Essay or The Impartial Observer*. He brought the first church organ to Michigan. He helped establish a road between Detroit and Chicago. He founded what became the University of Michigan. He gave Detroit its motto after the city was ravaged by a fire in 1805, "Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus," which means, "We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes." And he was the first priest to serve in the United States Congress.

No wonder he has been called the "second founder of Detroit," after the French explorer, Antoine Laumet de la Mothe, sieur de Cadillac. During the war of 1812, after the British took Detroit, Richard refused to pledge allegiance to the British, saying that he had already sworn an oath to the United States. He was held in British custody until he was released at the demand of Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, who recognized Richard's devotion to the spiritual lives of Indians. Richard was a beloved figure in Detroit and was elected to Congress as a non-voting member when Michigan was a territory. His campaign got a boost from the large French population of Detroit.

In the national capital, Richard was a figure of curiosity who enthralled the nation's leaders with stories of life with the Indians. He cut an odd figure, dressed in knee breeches, silk stockings, a long black coat with a gaping collar and a skirt that reached to his ankles.

While serving in Congress, Richard had some trouble at home. He excommunicated a parishioner who had divorced his wife and remarried. The act hurt the man's business and he sued, winning damages of just over \$1,000. Richard could not pay and was jailed, winning release only after friends posted bail. Word of the incident reached Rome and probably cost Richard the seat of Bishop in the church.

Richard died of cholera on Sept. 13, 1832, after he spent months caring for Detroit residents stricken with the disease.