



# *New Jersey* Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME 1 NO. 1

FALL 1979



*Statue of the Virgin Mary, desecrated in a Know-Nothing attack on St. Mary's Church, Newark in 1854. (Star-Ledger photo.)*

## What Is The NJCHRC?

In 1974, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a document urging residential bishops "to grant access to the diocesan archives without undue limitations when properly accredited historians request it." Newark Archbishop Peter Leo Gerety, recognizing in his chancery records a rich scholarly potential, and anxious "to have this valuable collection of materials stored and assembled in a manner conducive to its use as a historical source," transferred custody of the archives to Seton Hall University on January 6, 1977.

A New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission, composed of religious and lay scholars, was formed to coordinate the transfer and acquire other relevant primary documentation. In addition, the group envisioned an ambitious publications program to disseminate this newly available research material. Commission members currently include: Bishop John J. Dougherty (former Seton Hall president and scholar-in-residence) chairman; Joseph Mahoney (Seton Hall history professor) project director; Msgr. William Noé Field (Seton Hall library director); Carl Prince (New York University history professor); Peter Mitchell (president of Stockton State College); Fr. William Keller (Seton Hall history professor); Bernard Bush (New Jersey Historical Commission executive director); Sr. Margherita Marchione, M.P.F. (Fairleigh Dickinson University professor); George Reilly (Seton Hall history professor) Fr. Francis Seymour (Archivist of the Archdiocese of Newark); Fr. Edwin Vose Sullivan (Seton Hall sociology professor); Miriam Murphy (Executive Director, New Jersey Committee for the Humanities); Rev. Raymond Kupke (Archivist of the Diocese of Paterson); Sr. Mary Ellen Gleason (Archivist, Sisters of Charity); and Msgr. Theodore A. Opdenaker (Archivist, Diocese of Trenton).

Seton Hall quickly demonstrated its commitment to this pioneering project by providing storage space in the McLaughlin Library and engaging a full-time archivist (Peter J. Wosh) to administer the collection and other University holdings. After receiving a generous donation from the Knights of Columbus, the Commission began purchasing archival quality storage equipment to insure the proper care and preservation of this highly valuable collection.

Results have already benefited New Jersey's scholarly community. A wealth of previously untapped primary source material, tracing diocesan development from 1853, has been opened for research. Collections document the careers of several important prelates in the nineteenth-century Church hierarchy, including James Roosevelt Bayley and Michael A. Corrigan. In addition, sources illuminate the lives of thousands of less articulate urban, immigrant, working-class churchgoers who constituted the bulk of New Jersey's Catholic congregations. Bishops' diaries and correspondence, records of benevolent, charitable, and fraternal organizations, priests' biographical data, annual parish reports and sacramental records comprise the major portion of this material. Though more recent documentation (1930-present) is not presently available to scholars, its preservation and orderly transferral to Seton Hall is assured. The implications of this pioneering project for social scientists should be obvious, and many researchers have already taken advantage of Seton Hall's new acquisitions.

Other NJCHRC projects include an active, expanding oral history program, the publication of an introductory history of the diocese (*The Bishops of Newark 1853-1978*, Seton Hall University Press, 1979) and a concerted effort to collect individual New Jersey parish histories. Researchers, scholars, or individuals interested in the Commission and its workings should contact Peter J. Wosh, University Archivist, McLaughlin Library, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079, or phone (201) 762-7052.

## Publications

A primary NJCHRC priority involves publishing and encouraging scholarly works concerning New Jersey Catholic history. In the past year, several studies of note have appeared. The most comprehensive and ambitious is the Commission's own *Bishops of Newark 1853-1978* (Seton Hall University Press, 1979), which provides an introductory overview of diocesan development from its earliest beginnings to the present. Six scholars combined in this endeavor, with each bringing a particular expertise, perspective, and style to the project.

Though the book's title emphasizes the diocesan ordinaries, and each section focuses on a particular bishop's reign, several chapters exhibit a sensibility to the Church's social welfare

and charitable programs, parochial schooling controversies, and immigrant parishioner base. As the first attempt in 75 years to update and analyze the Diocese of Newark's history, this 184-page illustrated volume offers a useful introductory survey to secondary schools, introductory college survey courses, and the general reading public. Some outstanding individual chapters constitute highly professional works as well.

Copies of this volume may be obtained by mailing a check (payable to Seton Hall University Press) or money order of \$5.95 for the paperback, \$10.00 for the hardbound, or \$50.00 for a special gold-embossed edition to: The Librarian, McLaughlin Library, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

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Raymond M. Ralph's "The City and the Church: Catholic Beginnings in Newark, 1840-1870," *New Jersey History*, Autumn-Winter 1979, eschews conventional approaches to Church history and "drawing on the techniques of the new urban and social history" examines Newark Catholicism "from the bottom up." By examining such non-traditional historical data as parish reports, birth, baptismal, marriage, and death registers, Ralph paints a fascinating portrait of the city's mid-nineteenth-century Catholic population. The author concludes that these understudied Newarkers "overcoming the shock of immigration and the harshness of urban life . . . built their parishes, supported their schools, struggled with themselves and saw their leaders do likewise, and tried to maintain their identity in an often hostile environment."

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Robert Emmett Curran, *Michael Augustine Corrigan and the Shaping of Conservative Catholicism in America 1878-1902* (Arno Press, 1978) provides a new interpretation and perspective on the controversies which rocked American Catholicism in the late nineteenth century. Though dealing only briefly with Corrigan's tenure as Bishop of Newark, Curran explores the fascinating relationship between Corrigan and Seton Hall's first president and Bishop of Rochester Bernard J. McQuaid. Students of the period, anyone interested in the problem of adapting Roman Catholicism to American political and social institutions, and, more broadly, proponents of the role of the individual in history should find this a challenging and thought-provoking interpretation.

## From the Collections

In May 1879, Newark's second bishop, Michael A. Corrigan, recorded in the diocesan diary a visit to the nationally renowned resort town of Cape May. During dinner with the local pastor, Fr. Theophilus Degen, "the conversation turned on the great fire last November, which destroyed acres of houses in Cape May, when the fire alarm announced a new fire directly opposite the Church, in Mr. McCann's stables. For a time, the anxiety and excitement were intense. The wind was not strong, fortunately, and the fire was checked in half an hour or so. It was the work of incendiaries—the eleventh attempt of the kind since November."

More excitement lay in store for the Bishop, however. While he was taking an early evening stroll on the beach, "another fire broke out near the church, in an *ice-house*! It was like Pandemonium all that night, shouting, yelling & c...." Corrigan further noted that "on leaving the place next morning, I ascertained that all last winter there was no fire in the church, and no possibility of making one, there being no chimney, and that in the high winds, Father Degen also had no fire in his sleeping room, for fear of a conflagration! The cold is intense in winter, as the church is like a barn, unplastered, and with a hundred chinks. How the poor people could hear mass is a mystery."

This devastating series of fires which virtually leveled the isolated resort town in the late 1860's and 1870's obviously exacted great economic and psychological hardships on Cape May residents. Ironically, however, these conflagrations also planted the seeds of future community prosperity. The subsequent redevelopment of Cape



*Newark's second bishop,  
Michael A. Corrigan.*

May during the 1880's bequeathed an extraordinary legacy of Victorian splendor to subsequent generations of tourists and vacationers.

While most history students can readily recite the names of the former presidents and dignitaries who sunned on Cape May's beaches, very little is known of the town's year-round inhabitants. Living in virtual isolation and receiving minimal services during the long winter, these townsmen bore the heavy burden of severe climatic conditions and natural disasters. Perhaps by imaginatively utilizing parish records and other available demographic data, as well as travelers' accounts, historians might begin developing profiles of these less articulate shore residents. The Archives of the Archdiocese of Newark (which encompassed all of New Jersey until 1881) contain parish reports and bishop's visitation accounts for churches throughout the entire state.

## Parish Histories

A principal Commission activity during the past year involved collecting and cataloguing parish history booklets and commemorative publications. Responding to an appeal from New Jersey's bishops, 324 parishes have forwarded 389 histories to Seton Hall. Ranging from a booklet celebrating the "35th Anniversary of the Consecration of St. John's Church, Mulberry St., Newark," issued in 1893, to the Silver Jubilee book of Midland Park's Nativity Church (1978), these publications vary widely in content, bulk, and quality. Virtually all, however, provide valuable introductions to local church history. Cumulatively, they document a wide range of Catholic experiences and exhibit interesting perspectives on diocesan growth. Some older volumes, in fact, serve as primary source materials expressing the thoughts, attitudes, and concerns of earlier Catholic generations.

Unfortunately, many parishes have not yet forwarded copies of their histories. The success of our effort to create a comprehensive collection depends upon a large response. If you are aware of a commemorative publication not yet deposited with the Commission please send a copy through first-class mail to:

NJ Catholic Historical Records  
Commission  
McLaughlin Library  
Seton Hall University  
South Orange, N.J. 07079

If your volume is unique, please contact us at the above address and we will attempt to arrange for some form of duplication. Help us permanently record your church's development and make the record available to scholars.



*The first Catholic church in Cape May, St. Mary's and its companion rectory. The small wooden building served the community from 1848 to 1913.*

The Commission acknowledges with gratitude the generous grant from the Vincent and Anna Visceglia Foundation which made possible this publication.

# Archdiocese's 125th Anniversary Celebrated with Newark Museum Exhibit

Within six months of its creation, the Archives of Seton Hall University and the NJCHRC simultaneously received recognition and a challenge. The Archdiocese of Newark determined to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the organized Catholic Church in New Jersey, and the Newark Museum offered the privilege of an exhibition as part of that celebration. Both institutions turned to Seton Hall and the NJCHRC.

The archives proved a valuable resource in garnering the material and historical background necessary to support the exhibition. Papal bulls establishing the Diocese of Newark and naming James Roosevelt Bayley as its first bishop were located in a deteriorating scrapbook, restored, and properly matted and framed. Msgr. William Noé Field proved particularly adept at scouring archives from Baltimore to New York and uncovering valuable records and artifacts.

A wide range of material representing the extraordinarily varied experiences of New Jersey Catholics was presented to museum-goers between October 5 and November 5, 1978. Ecclesiastical vestments, including Bishop Winand Wigger's ornate, French-embroidered chasuble and Archbishop Thomas Walsh's black beaver hat, documented changing episcopal fashions. The evolution of ceremonial chalices was depicted from traditional "lily cups" to modern

pottery versions. Other individual highlights included a battered statue of the Virgin Mary, defaced during a "Know-Nothing" attack on Newark's St. Mary's Church in 1854; St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's fruitwood writing desk, a monumental silver and enamel cloisonné processional cross presented to Newark's first bishop, James Roosevelt Bayley, upon his promotion to Baltimore's Archiepiscopal see; an elaborate gold French monstrance presented to the diocese by Emmanuel, King of Sardinia; and a chalice presented to the pastor of Hoboken's Our Lady of Grace parish by his close friend, Napoleon III.

In short, the exhibit disclosed a wealth of unexpected treasures, unearthed many forgotten records and documents, and encouraged widespread participation throughout the Archdiocese. As a rather surprising side benefit, the Seton Hall archives

were enriched. Archbishop Borders of Baltimore, for example, presented Bishop Bayley's diocesan scrapbook (1855-1872) to Msgr. Field at the 125th anniversary Mass, and this valuable documentary treasure now resides in McLaughlin Library. The exhibit also prompted a northern New Jersey family to remove the birth, baptismal, and marriage registers of an early nineteenth-century Catholic parish from their resting places in the family attic and deposit them at Seton Hall.

The astounding Museum attendance, recognition received from historical and learned societies throughout the metropolitan area, and growing historical consciousness fostered among both clerics and laymen established the validity and worth of the NJCHRC project at a very early stage and served as an impetus for future growth.



*Grand Knight Joe Giuliani of the state Knights of Columbus (left) presents a check to support Commission activities to Bishop Dougherty, chairman, and Professor Joseph Mahoney, director.*



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