Digitizing the Pittsburgh Catholic  
by Thomas E. White

In recent years, the Gumberg Library at Duquesne University has been working to preserve the Catholic heritage of western Pennsylvania by digitizing the *Pittsburgh Catholic*, America’s oldest continually published Catholic newspaper in print since March 16, 1844. Almost as old as the Diocese itself, the paper documents the growth of Catholicism in the region and the challenges Catholics faced. It also provides the Catholic perspective on important social and political issues across the years.

Until now, researchers and interested individuals could only access the paper by tediously searching through microfilm or hard copies. The Gumberg Library simplified access to the paper by putting it online and making it keyword searchable. Anyone with an Internet connection can now access the newspaper anywhere and anytime.

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**The Story of the Local Catholic Community and the Diocese of Pittsburgh**

**Local Catholic News**

Local story about the Catholic Library and reading room that was located on the third story of the Third National Bank Building.


**Diocesan News**

Story about the administrative changes within the Diocese of Pittsburgh as ordered by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Michael Domenec.


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**The Story of National and International Roman Catholicism from a Roman Catholic Perspective**

**National News**

Reprints of two letters between Generals Grant and Lee discussing the surrender of the Confederacy.

*Pittsburgh Catholic*, Vol. 22, No. 08. 1865.

**International News**

International story about two questionable groups in the Catholic Church’s eyes: the Fenian Brotherhood and the Orange Order (Orangemen).


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**Protestants and Catholics**

The social dynamics of Ireland, as shown in the bitter struggles between Catholic and Protestant, were both in the North and in the South. These struggles were magnified by the English newspaper, and the sensational stories contained in these newspapers, although highly exaggerated and often not true, caused many to be misled and turned into religious zealots. The Protestant clergy in Ireland were often just as much to blame as the Catholic organization, and they were at least as responsible for the suffering of the people. The Irish, it should be noted, were not all as innocent as they were made out to be by the priests and bishops. Many of them were more or less involved in the political and social affairs of the day.
The digitization pilot project began in 2008 with issues dating from 1844 to 1864. Archival copies of microfilmed editions were scanned, uploaded and made available on the library website. The Gumberg then received a $20,000 Library Services and Technology Act grant to digitize additional years of the *Pittsburgh Catholic*. The grant made it possible to digitize the issues from February 27, 1864 through December 2, 1923. A third batch, which will cover 1924 up to 1950, is in the final stages of processing and will soon be added to the site.

The online version of the *Pittsburgh Catholic* can be accessed at [http://digital.library.duq.edu/cdm-pc/](http://digital.library.duq.edu/cdm-pc/)

Thomas E. White is archivist for Duquesne University and board member of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

**Digitizing the Pittsburgh Catholic**

The *Pittsburgh Catholic* documents regional and national history on a variety of levels. Since it dates back to the early decades of mass Irish and German immigration, the newspaper serves as an important record of the growth of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania and America as a whole.

Since the *Pittsburgh Catholic* is nearly as old as the Diocese of Pittsburgh, it is a valuable resource for studying the administrative structure within the region. Examples of articles that document this growth include:

- An article from February 27, 1864 that discusses the upcoming dedication of St. Peter's Church in Brownsville, PA. The church was heralded as an attempt to return to the "old Style" of Catholic architecture.
- The article also describes steamboat trips down the "recently improved" Monongahela River that one would take to attend the dedication.
- An article from March 17, 1864 discusses the need for a new Catholic cemetery near Pittsburgh. It explains that the existing cemetery in the Eighth Ward is already full because of the growing population of Catholics, and that a new and larger tract of land has been made available for purchase.

The newspaper also documents the Catholic perspective on the Pittsburgh community as well as the various challenges that the church faced from anti-Catholic activists (The Know-Nothing Party) in the arena of politics. For example:

- An article from October 5, 1860 that describes in detail the arrest of political opponents by radical Mayor Joe Birtner. Birtner was vocally anti-Catholic and was actually elected mayor while he was in prison.
- The loss of the Know-Nothings in state elections was covered in a small article in the October 13, 1865 issue. It points out that Allegheny County overwhelmingly rejected the party in favor of the Democratic Party. The article illustrates the speed at which Catholic voters were able to influence elections given that many had arrived less than a decade before.

**Library Standards Dublin Core and LCSH**

- Title: Pittsburgh Catholic
- Date: 1864
- Volume/Issue: Vol 2, No. 43
- Publisher: F. F. Bordon, Pittsburgh, PA
- Type: Text
- Format: PDF from TIF 300 dpi black and white
- Identifier: 18651125.pdf
- Source: Produced from microfilm of 15.5 x 23" newspaper
- Language: English
- Rights: All rights reserved.
- Subject: Catholic Church-Pennsylvania; Catholics, Catholic Church-Pittsburgh; Catholics, Pittsburgh; Catholic Church; Pittsburgh; Catholic Church; Western Pennsylvania; Catholic Church; Allegheny County; Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh; Pennsylvania-Catholic Church-Allegheny County-Pittsburgh;
- Summary: Includes information about the Petersen Inside Center, an agency serving families affected by domestic violence in Pittsburgh, six axles of the electrically operated express car on the Eighth Ward, and a scene by T. Burtner railroading in the town.

**Technical Details and Server and File Format Information**

- Digitization Partner – Backstage Library Works
- Digitization Platform – CONTENTdm
- Server Details – Windows 2008 Server VMware
  Duquesne University Data Center
- File Format – PDF Compound Object

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This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Tom Carter.