

The See of Allegheny

John C. Bates, Esq.

The death of Michael Cardinal Egan, retired archbishop of New York, on March 5, 2015, highlighted the fact that he was one of the few prelates to have held the **titular see of Allegheny**. Blessed Pope Pius IX created the Diocese of Allegheny (in Latin, *Dioecesis Alleghensis*) on January 11, 1876 by the papal bull *Quod Venerabiles Fratres* — splitting the see of Pittsburgh (*Dioecesis Pittsburgensis*) in two.¹

The Diocese of Allegheny comprised 6,530 sq. miles in eight and one-quarter counties: the City of Allegheny [today, the North Side of the City of Pittsburgh] and the counties of Allegheny (north of the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers), Butler, Armstrong, Indiana, Cambria, Blair, Huntingdon, Bedford, and Westmoreland. St. Peter Church served as the cathedral of the new diocese.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh retained 4,784 sq. miles in six and three-quarters counties: the City of Pittsburgh [which then included the central district and the South Side, but not the future North Side] and the counties of Allegheny (south of the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers), Washington, Greene, Beaver, Lawrence, Fayette, and Somerset.

Platted on a map, the boundaries of the two dioceses gave the impression of ecclesiastical gerrymandering.²

Statistics³ for the two dioceses were as follows:

1877	Pittsburgh	Allegheny
Priests	65	95
Churches	64	52
Colleges	0	2
Schools	3	2
Hospitals	2	0
Catholic population	approx. even split of estimated total population of 135,000-200,000	

Michael Domenec, C.M., a native of the Catalonian region in Spain, served as Allegheny's first and only bishop (1876–1877). Subsequent to Domenec's resignation as ordinary on July 29, 1877, the Diocese of Allegheny was administratively reunited to the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh Bishop John Tuigg (1876–1889) served as administrator of the vacant see of Allegheny until the latter was canonically suppressed on July 1, 1889 by order of Pope Leo XIII and the territory reunited to Pittsburgh.

Such suppressed non-functioning dioceses were termed "titular" sees and over time were assigned to auxiliary bishops and others. This practice preserved the memory of earlier sees.

Only five prelates⁴ have been named to the titular see of Allegheny:

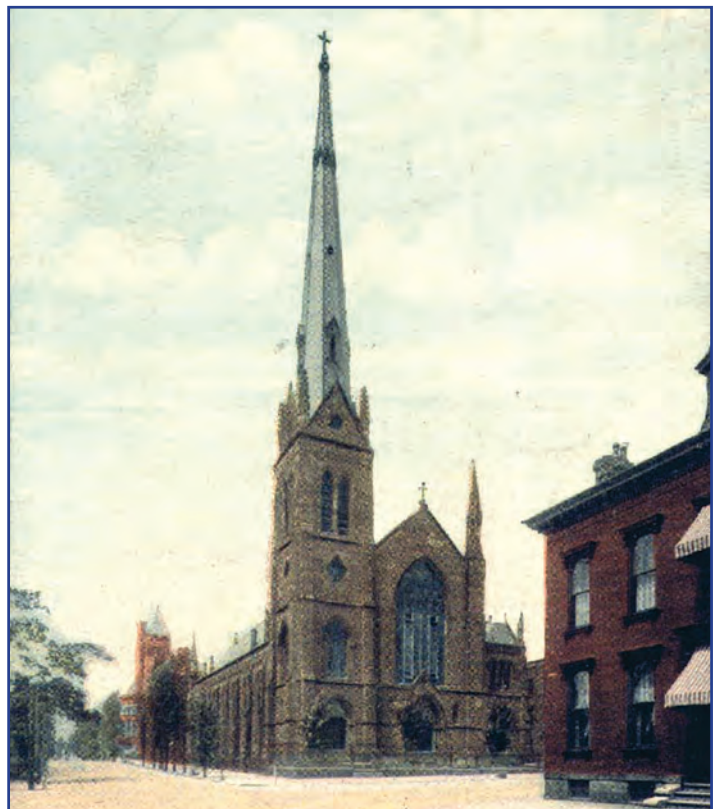
- **George Leo Leech** (Oct. 19, 1971–March 12, 1985), following his resignation of the see of Harrisburg in 1971. He held the titular see until his death at age 94.
- **Edward Michael Egan** (April 1, 1985–November 5, 1988), while serving as auxiliary bishop of New York. He subsequently

served as bishop of Bridgeport (1988–2000) and archbishop of New York (2000–2009) and was created Cardinal in 2001.

- **Patrick Joseph McGrath** (December 6, 1988–June 30, 1988), while serving as auxiliary bishop of San Francisco. He subsequently served as coadjutor bishop of San Jose (1998–1999) and bishop of San Jose (1999–to date).
- **Robert Joseph McManus** (December 1, 1988–March 9, 2004), while serving as auxiliary bishop of Providence. He currently serves as bishop of Worcester (2004–to date).
- **John Walter Flesey** (May 21, 2004–to date), who is serving as auxiliary bishop of Newark (2004–to date).

Endnotes

- 1 A copy of the bull appears in Donald C. Shearer, *Pontificia Americana: A Documentary History of the Catholic Church in the United States (1784-1884)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1933), 372-373.
- 2 Gerrymandering is the practice of establishing electoral district boundary lines to establish a political advantage. Some writers have questioned the motivations that led to the selection of counties comprising the new Diocese of Allegheny, which created administrative and financial issues for both sees.
- 3 Sister Cecilia Murphy, R.S.M., *A Reevaluation of the Episcopacy of Michael Domenec, 1860-1877, Second Bishop of Pittsburgh and Only Bishop of Allegheny* (Ph.D. Diss., Saint Louis University, 1974), 161-262, 274.
- 4 Additional information on these prelates appears at the website: www.Catholic-Hierarchy.org.



St. Peter's Cathedral, Ohio Street and Sherman Avenue, City of Allegheny

Courtesy of John C. Bates.