

JOHN BATES RECOUNTS HISTORY OF CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Blanche McGuire

I have had a birds-eye view of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Society) for three plus decades. I know firsthand how hard our members work... laboring diligently for no recognition except the satisfaction of helping to spread the gospel as lived by dedicated local Catholics...telling the stories of others but never their own. Until now.

John C. Bates, Society Board Member Emeritus, past President and past Secretary has just completed an extraordinary history of the Society, titled *The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania: Its Origins, Establishment, Decline and Resurrection*.

This history identifies and recounts the work of dedicated Society volunteers and their service throughout the decades. It clearly illustrates how the Catholic Historical Soci-

ety of Western Pennsylvania achieves its twofold objective:

- To promote the teaching and dissemination of the history of the Catholic Church in Western Pennsylvania and in the United States
- To preserve the records and artifacts documenting the history of the Catholic Church in Western Pennsylvania.

The book details an impressive range of Society activities: oral and written histories; a Catholic Writers Dinner hosted at Duquesne University; lectures by national and local historians; bus tours to Catholic sites; exhibits, essay contests for youth; radio publicity; books and other publications most notably our flagship journal, *Gathered Fragments*.

Historical narratives recounted in this book have also been



John C. Bates (right), author of recently published book on the history of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, pictured in 2015 with Dennis Wodzinski (left), current director of the Diocese of Pittsburgh Archives and Records Center.

Source: Dennis Wodzinski

conveyed through Society events and publications. These stories capture the imagination and stir the hearts of Catholics and others, bringing the Church alive and highlighting its contributions.

Examples include but are by no means limited to:

- Father Denys Baron offering the first Mass at Ft. Duquesne on April 17, 1754 with a congregation of French soldiers and Indians
- Monsignor Andrew Arnold Lambing, who first envisioned the Society, striding the streets of Pittsburgh during his long career as priest, pastor, teacher, journalist, influential citizen and widely noted Catholic and local historian. Father Lambing's family history gives a rich glimpse of Catholicism in early Pennsylvania...from York County to Greensburg to Sugar Creek to Pittsburgh.
- Prince Demetrius Gallitzin sacrificing a life of privilege to minister to Irish and German pioneers in the heart of the Alleghenies and laying the foundation for Catholicity in the Altoona-Johnstown diocese
- Father John Hugo fervently preaching the gospel on the streets, in prisons, in parishes and through retreats that inspired and sustained local Catholics as well as social activist and convert, Dorothy Day
- Religious congregations opening Catholic hospitals, serving as angels of mercy during the Civil War, founding schools and spreading the gospel in distant lands
- Architects and artists such as John Comes and Carlton Strong who gave glory to God through their creations
- Father Victor Koch ministering to German Catholics behind enemy lines in World War II and defending a German town from Allied retribution.

Bates especially notes the Society's extensive contributions to the 1943 diocesan centenary celebration culminating in the publication of *Catholic Pittsburgh's 100 Years 1843-1943*.

This book also details the role of the Society in micro-filming past editions of the *Pittsburgh Catholic* as well as the collection and preservation of Catholic artifacts and documents in our archives, presently located at Duquesne University.

The Society's achievements are especially noteworthy since the tasks were often accomplished by small groups who

gave their energy and resources to support its ministry not once, not twice, but for years on end.

John Bates, Esquire, is himself a noteworthy volunteer. A graduate of Duquesne University's School of Law, he retired as Associate Regional Counsel for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development after spending 35 years as Chief Counsel for HUD. Over several decades his volunteer activities included:

- Mentoring several hundred law students from two Pittsburgh law schools
- Belonging to the board of directors for Christian Housing, Inc., a Catholic non-profit that developed more than two-dozen housing projects for the elderly in Western Pennsylvania
- Serving on the Review Board of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy (Diocese) of Parma (also Board counsel)
- Volunteering on boards of directors for several non-profit housing corporations in the City of Pittsburgh and suburban Allegheny County, for a Catholic non-profit nursing home, and for a Western Pennsylvania Catholic services provider based in Pittsburgh.

Bates' work for Society is legendary. In addition to his Society offices mentioned above, he is a prolific writer of Catholic articles and book reviews, and former co-editor of our journal, *Gathered Fragments*.

The Society's history, the latest of Bates' accomplishments, is an invaluable reference for scholars, detailed and meticulously documented. As he traces the activities of the Society, Bates paints a portrait of Western Pennsylvania Catholicism throughout the decades, a history within a history. Its message of commitment and continuity is especially relevant as our diocese begins a new chapter with *On Mission for the Church Alive*.

Bates says that his book is intended "to stimulate interest in Catholic history and to provide a record of our Society history since so much is not committed to writing"

He hopes the book will also serve "as a springboard or model for others considering forming a similar society, helping them realistically see the challenges but also illustrating that a productive society can be formed and activated with just a few committed workers."

Bates' history of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania is available for purchase at Amazon.com.