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Submission Guidelines

The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania solicits and welcomes items for Gathered Fragments addressing the culture and history of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania.

Gathered Fragments publishes articles and primary sources relating to the parochial, religious, diocesan, and laical history of the Catholic Church in Western Pennsylvania. We also solicit book and exhibit reviews, news, and other items relating to Catholic history in Western Pennsylvania. Genealogical items are accepted, providing they relate to the broader scope of the Society’s mission. Articles previously published elsewhere will be considered with appropriate permission from the original publication. Submissions should pertain in some way to the broader theme of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania.

Research articles will be considered. Notation of sources must accompany each article. Submitters are urged to consult the most current editions of The Chicago Manual of Style or Kate Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations for guidelines on proper formatting. Upon acceptance for publication, authors are responsible for locating and obtaining permission for use of images.

Submissions are accepted both electronically and by mail. Instructions will be provided by contacting the Society at info@chswpa.org.

The opinions expressed in Gathered Fragments represent the views only of the individual contributors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the officers, the members of the board of directors, or The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Advertising in Gathered Fragments does not necessarily imply endorsement.

Membership Information

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The Society also welcomes donations to complete research, as well as to support publishing and preservation projects in local Church history.

Cover Photo


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A remarkable treasure of western Pennsylvania frontier Catholicism is found in St. Marys, Elk County, about 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. Decker’s Chapel, built in 1856 is known as “one of the smallest churches in the world” and “the smallest chapel in the United States.”

Sacraments celebrated at the chapel over its long history include many Masses, baptisms and weddings. Decker’s chapel remains open daily year-round and receives pilgrims from many states and countries as noted by the registrations found in the guest book.

The 216 square foot white clapboard building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1998, but the story of the diminutive structure is developed in the particulars of a nineteenth-century German Catholic immigrant family: Michael Joseph Decker, Sr. (1809-1877); his wife, Barbara Hierl Decker (1804-1879); and sons George Decker (1836-1885) and Michael Joseph Decker, Jr. (1839-1913). Michael Jr. — the future Monsignor Decker—would become widely recognized in Western Pennsylvania and in the collective history of the St. Marys religious community where he was always closely linked with the chapel.

1846: From Bavaria to America

Michael Decker and Barbara Hierl married in 1835 — “a union of most exemplary Christian lives.” The Deckers were a farming family in Parsberg, Bavaria, Germany. Five children were born of this marriage; of these, three died in infancy. The family came to America in 1846 when their sons were ten and seven years of age, arriving in Baltimore, Maryland, where “immediately after their arrival they trudged to the nearest Catholic church” and in “the true Christian spirit of that family manifested its gratitude to God for a successful voyage across the Atlantic at the Redemptorist Church of St. Alphonsus.”

Soon the family moved from Maryland to Pennsylvania where they joined other German Catholic families and settled in the Kersey area. Later, they crossed the hills to a settlement in Elk County that had been founded as a place for the German Catholic people. This settlement was named St. Marys in honor of the Blessed Virgin. Redemptorist Fathers had established a Catholic colony in St. Marys, but a few years after the arrival of the Deckers, the Redemptorists relinquished their possessions to the Benedictine Fathers of St. Vincent Monastery, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

The settlement, founded on December 8, 1842, began as a Bavarian Catholic farming commune comprised of German Catholic immigrants, including fifteen families from Baltimore, and four families from Philadelphia. They settled on a 30,000-acre tract of wilderness that had been purchased from the Fox Land Company by the German Catholic Brotherhood of Philadelphia and Baltimore. The purchase price was seventy-five cents an acre. St. Marys historians Charles Schaut and A.C. Brehm speculate that the families came to the area in an effort to escape the religious persecution that was emerging in the Eastern cities and sought a communal experience where they were free to practice their German heritage and their Roman Catholic religion.

At St. Marys, young Michael was known to have:

… obtained what schooling the labors of a farmer’s home permitted him to enjoy until, in 1850, feeling a vocation to the priesthood, he began his studies under the Benedictines at St. Vincent where a college course had just been established. With what desire he must have longed for the accomplishment of
God’s plans on his behalf can be judged from the fact Joseph with a few companions annually traveled the distance of 125 miles on foot to and from St. Vincent’s. These ambitious boys bore upon their backs the luggage containing the supply for the year’s schooling, sometimes finding no other shelter for the night’s rest than the firmament of heaven.12

1856: The Little Chapel Is Built
Young Michael continued these annual treks for nine years until his education at St. Vincent was nearly complete. During this time, in 1856, his father suffered an accident while working in an orchard, injuring his back in a fall from a tree. Following the accident, his father vowed that if the injury healed he would build and maintain a chapel in thanksgiving. The injury did heal and he built the chapel that has become a landmark of Elk County.13

Building a wayside chapel was a traditional practice in Germany continued by the Bavarian Catholics who settled in the area. Crosses, shrines and other chapels once peppered the countryside, but only Decker’s Chapel survived from this period.

Michael Decker, Sr. died on October 16, 1877 and Barbara on August 21, 1879. Their remains are buried in the Decker plot in St. Mary’s Cemetery. Care of the little chapel then rested with George Decker, who remained in the St. Marys area. Young Michael, when home from St. Vincent, often prayed in the little chapel14 and local history records that the priest-to-be practiced for his first Mass in his father’s chapel.15

1859-1868: From St. Vincent to Brooklyn and Back
In 1859, Michael left St. Vincent early to accept a teaching position at the parochial school attached to Holy Trinity Church in Brooklyn, New York where he also served as organist. Within two years, his desire for the priesthood rekindled and in 1861, he returned to St. Vincent to continue his studies.

While completing his studies at Saint Vincent he was a consultor in the Saint Boniface Maria Society. According to the Saint Vincent catalogue of that era, the object of the society was “to aid in the defense and propagation of the Catholic religion in America by demanding of its members an exemplary life and frequentation of the sacraments on the festivals of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and by assisting them, through means of religious and scientific discourses, to attain their eloquence and learning necessary for the promotion of this object.”16

Michael Joseph Decker, Jr., was ordained on September 20, 1862 by Bishop John Loughlin17 in Brooklyn’s St. James Cathedral. Father Decker returned home briefly to celebrate his first Solemn High Mass on October 5, 1862 in St. Mary Church in St. Marys.18 Returning to Brooklyn, he was assigned the curacy of St. James Cathedral.

In 1863, he was advanced to pastor of St. Margaret’s Church in Milledgeville, Long Island and in May of 1864, he became pastor of St. Boniface in Brooklyn, where he remained until his unexpected return to St. Marys in 1868. He would be remembered by the following:

Tireless in his labors, especially during the cholera epidemic, the health of this ambitious young priest was soon on the wane. With the loss of his health in 1868 he relinquished his pastoral duties. With the permission of his bishop he returned to his parental home at St. Marys, there to recoup his energy and his health, spent in the service of the Lord.19

At home, aided by his family, Father Decker enjoyed a swift return to good health. He soon recovered and during his
leave from Brooklyn, the Bishop Tobias Mullen of Erie adopted him for a period of five years. At the expiration of this term, Bishop Mullen, “impressed with the zeal of his protégé, permanently adopted Father Decker as a priest of his diocese.”

1869-1873: The Frontier Years
In 1869, Bishop Mullen assigned Father Decker as temporary pastor of St. Agatha in Meadville. During his tenure there, Father Decker undertook the construction of a new church to replace the original wooden structure built in 1850. Building went slowly as funding permitted, and at one point was halted for two years. The building was dedicated on August 10, 1873 and still serves the Catholic community of Meadville.

On December 20, 1871, Father Decker was assigned the pastorate of those Catholics remaining in the post-oil boom rural areas of Venango County. Residing in Shamбург, he traveled by horseback to attend to the missions in Pithole and Pleasantville. On May 4, 1873, after nearly two years of rustic ministry, Father Decker was appointed pastor of St. John Church in Erie; he would spend the next forty years there.

1873-1913: Builder, Preacher, Musician, Composer, Monsignor
When he arrived in Erie, St. John Church had been in existence for four years. A rural parish of fifty-five predominantly German families, the church building was a 1,800 square foot frame structure and a one-room schoolhouse stood nearby. For Father Decker, his first major project was the building of a new school, which was completed in 1883. While it was later replaced in 1951, the cornerstone is still preserved in the yard behind the rectory.

The congregation grew as Erie grew and Father Decker soon realized the need for larger accommodations. He undertook the construction of the church that stands today:

While fearful of the burden that he knew must be imposed upon his people, yet relying upon God's help, he determined upon the erection of the present large edifice, episcopal authority having been readily obtained.

The cornerstone of this beautiful edifice was laid in 1899 by Rt. Rev. Bishop John E. Fitzmaurice. The construction of the church is of the Romanesque style of architecture, massive in its proportions, yet simple in decoration; a real place of worship, where the devout adorer must feel in its grandeur the presence of the Divine Majesty.

It should be noted in this period in northwestern Pennsylvania that the Catholic Church imposed a rule on pastors that only so much building be undertaken as immediate funds on hand could support. In fact, there was an instance when only the prompt financial assistance of Father Decker's brother saved the church property from the hands of the sheriff, when George Decker mortgaged his Elk County farmland in order to aid his brother's efforts. In due time, the debt was paid.

During these years, Father Decker became widely known as a remarkable bilingual orator:

As one of the most eloquent speakers in northwestern Pennsylvania, Father Decker has filled on various solemn occasions the pulpits of the larger parishes within the diocese of Erie. Yes, his fame as

St. Marys Church, St. Marys, PA, 1895
a preacher, in both English and German languages, has forced him to appear as the preacher on occasions of most important celebrations in different parishes throughout the country. His ardent piety, his interesting delivery, his eloquent address, made him an orator that both Catholics and non-Catholics were anxious to hear.

His bilingual fluency and rhetorical skill led to what was likely a nostalgic moment for him, when in 1900 he was invited to preach twice at St. Alphonsus in Baltimore at the same altar where he knelt and prayed in gratitude a half-century earlier as a seven year old boy newly arrived from Bavaria. The occasion was a Solemn Triduum in celebration of the Centennial of the establishment of Baltimore’s first German parish. Father Decker delivered two sermons, in German and English, at the opening and closing Mass celebrated by Cardinal James Gibbons.

A man of many talents, Father Decker was an accomplished master of the violin, the viola bass, the French horn, and the flute. He held a deep interest in sacred music, promoting its practice and use, as well as composing his own:

Of his compositions which have been published, we have two Masses—“Missa Sanctae Maria” and “Missa Sanctae Elizabeth”, also a “Veni Creator.” His “Missa Sancta Michaelis” and “Missa Santa Clementis”, an “Ave Maria” and a hymn in honor of St. John the Baptist have never been given out for publication by him.

In 1903, in consideration of Father Decker’s pastoral contributions to the diocese, Bishop Fitzmaurice requested recognition of the long-standing pastor of St. John by the Vatican. On December 18, 1903, Father Decker was raised to the dignity of Domestic Prelate in the household of Pope Pius X. On February 14, 1904, he was solemnly vested in the purple robe of a Monsignor in the midst of a large gathering of admiring and jubilant friends.

**Failing Health, Golden Jubilee, and Passing**

In his 74th year, the Monsignor’s health began to fail. In 1911, he was advised to travel to Baltimore where he underwent an operation at Johns Hopkins University. While the operation “saved the Monsignor from an untimely death,” he never fully recovered “to comply with his duties.”

As his health declined, the parishioners of St. John Church planned a two-day celebration for now-Monsignor Decker’s Golden Jubilee. In honor of the jubilee, a Pontifical High Mass with Bishop Fitzmaurice as celebrant was held:

The great day, September 24, 1912 was marked by a celebration that demonstrated in glorious manner the affection in which he was held by the people of this community. It was on this occasion that the

Monsignor Michael Decker is buried in the family plot at St. Mary’s Cemetery.

Source: James K. Hanna
Monsignor addressed his parishioners for the last time. Those who were present at the Jubilee Mass will never forget the pitiable effort he made to show his gratitude for their faithfulness and the honors they had paid him. With tears trickling down his emaciated but still noble countenance, he spoke his valedictory to his parishioners. They had a presentment that those words would be the last that he, as their pastor, would ever speak to them.

Monsignor Decker died in Erie on April 10, 1913. His remains were brought to St. Mary's where on April 17 a requiem Mass was celebrated in St. Mary Church by Father Marinus Ferg, O.S.B. and the sermon preached by Father John Heibel. There were 2,000 in attendance, a number which included 600 school children, and members of the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association acted as a guard of honor. After the liturgy concluded, the coffin was opened and those present filed by for a last look at the remains before interment in the Decker plot in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Decker's Chapel and Monsignor Decker's Legacy
At the time of Father Monsignor Decker's death, the little chapel his father had built had stood for more than a half-century and was flourishing as a destination of numerous pilgrimages. Often pilgrims came in great numbers with umbrellas in their hands to pray for rain and abundant crops. On June 8, 1918, pilgrims came to pray for peace during the First World War, with nearly 300 people carrying lighted candles to pray for the safe return of American soldiers. This was one of many such peace pilgrimages.

In 1928, while the Chapel remained in the ownership of Decker descendants, the Knights of Columbus Council No. 567 began to share in the sponsorship, care and custodianship of the Chapel. In 1989, the family transferred the title to the Elk County Historical Society. In recent years, the chapel has undergone significant improvements including a major renovation that was completed in 2016, when the original stacked stone foundation was repaired and the floor reinforced to accommodate visitors in wheelchairs.

On September 23, 1928, the Knights of Columbus erected a monument on the property dedicating it to the memory of Monsignor Decker. Father John Heibel, successor to Monsignor Decker at St. John Church in Erie, recalled the moment and the sentiment seems a fitting closing tribute to Monsignor Decker, his family, and his father's little wayside shrine:

Life on earth for this great man was ended. It was a life so filled with action, so forgetful of self, so ambitious for the salvation of souls, that it is most fitting to say of him, of his sleep in the grave, 'May he rest in peace. May he at last know the sweetness and blessedness of those who die in the Lord.'
Many have breathed that pious request, and many will continue to pray it, because the influence of Father Decker is still known and felt. He leaves a glorious record of Christian fortitude, piously zeal, and Catholic fervor, which will long do him honor. When generations still unborn have forgotten about the deeds of this man, when no living person remains to sing his praise, then will his record written on granite and marble speak for him. In the hills of St. Marys there is a monument and there is a chapel which will perpetuate the name of Decker.9

Endnotes:
3 Ibid.
4 “Decker’s Chapel.”
7 Golden Jubilee Program.
8 Members of the German Catholic Brotherhood of Philadelphia and Ballwin arrived on the banks of Elk Creek on 8 Dec 1842 and due to it being the day of the aforementioned feast (Immaculate Conception) so named the area.” See: Elk County Genealogy Project, Benzinger Township, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.pa-roots.com/elk/townships/benzerger/len.html.
10 Golden Jubilee Program.
12 Golden Jubilee Program.
13 “Decker’s Chapel.”
14 Ibid.
17 On June 19, 1853, Loughlin was appointed the first Bishop of the newly erected Diocese of Brooklyn by Pope Pius IX.
19 Danielson, History of St. John’s, 12.
20 Bishop Tobias Mullen, D.D. (1818-1900). “Consecreated on 2 August 1868 at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; arrived in Erie as a bishop (having been previously consecrated in Pittsburgh) in 1868; served as third bishop of Erie from March 3, 1868 (following a nearly two-year interregnum when Vicar-General John Coady served as apostolic administrator) until he resigned on September 15, 1899.” Source: The Roman Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pa., accessed December 5, 2020, https://www.eriecatholic.org/bishop/pastbishopoverview.html.
21 Davis, email message.
22 “Roman Catholic immigrants from southern Germany began arriving in the early 1830’s, settling in Meadville and the ‘German Colony’ in neighboring Vernon Township. They were first served by missionary priests, sometimes from Frenchtown, sometimes from Erie. They were here in sufficient numbers by the mid 1840’s to warrant a Catholic congregation in the city. Permission to establish a parish was granted by the Bishop of the Pittsburgh Diocese, and St. Agatha’s was organized in 1849-50, with 25 to 30 families. The first church, a wooden facility on the corner of Pine and Liberty Streets, was dedicated on Aug. 10, 1850. The parish was served by a series of German priests, and as late as 1900, St. Agatha’s was still known as the congregation ‘for German Catholics,’ with sermons and sacraments delivered in German.” Source: “St. Agatha Church,” Catholic Community of Meadville, last modified May 14, 2019, https://catholicmeadville.com/st-agatha-church/.
23 Ibid.
24 An oil boom town. “The Titusville Morning Herald covered the development of the town of Shamburg in 1867. The town was the dream of Dr. G. S. Shamburg and lay 1.5 miles by stagecoach from the nearest railroad connection. It consisted of one church, two schools, one post office and three telegraph offices. The paper’s description of the town sought to enlist new investors and inhabitants. Those in the Pennsylvania oil fields, otherwise known as ‘Petrolia,’ speculated about the next frontier. New towns, like Shamburg, seemed to spring overnight, only to be abandoned during the 1870s when the supply of oil dwindled.” Source: “Striking Oil: Chapter 2 Boom and Bust,” Explorepahistory.com—stories from pa history, accessed December 2, 2020, https://explorepahistory.com/story.php?storyid=1-9-C&chapter=2.
25 An oil boom-bust town near Titusville. “Pithole City, the prototype boomtown community, rose from non-existence in 1860 to over 10,000 in 1865 then fell to 237 in 1870, and ceased to exist by 1880.” Source: Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
Beginnings

Stephen and Mary Lovasik celebrated the arrival of their newborn son, Lawrence George, on June 22, 1913, in the borough of Tarentum, some 20 miles northeast of Pittsburgh in the Allegheny Valley. Sharing their Slovak heritage in common, the couple had married two years earlier at St. Elizabeth Church, the first Slovak church within the city of Pittsburgh. In Tarentum where Steve had opened a small grocery, they belonged to St. Clement Church, a parish that had been formed in 1903 to serve the growing Slovak community. Bishop J. F. Regis Canevin blessed and dedicated the church in 1906. It was there that Lawrence — and his seven siblings — were baptized. St. Clement Church was rich in vocations. About 50 young women became sisters. Twenty-two men became priests. Among them was Lawrence G. Lovasik.¹

The road to ordination began early. In 1925, the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) accepted twelve-year-old Lawrence into its Sacred Heart Minor Seminary in Girard, Pennsylvania, located outside of Erie. St. Arnold Janssen founded the missionary order in 1875 in the Netherlands.² Twenty-five years later, its North American foundation was established in Shermerville (later known as Techny), Illinois.³ After 13 combined years of minor seminary (Girard, PA), novitiate (East Troy, WI), and major seminary (Techny, IL), the young man from Tarentum was ordained a priest on August 14, 1938, in the chapel of St. Mary’s Mission Seminary. The Most Rev. William D. O’Brien, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, presided over the ordination class of seven men.

Retreat Apostolate and Parish Missionary Work

After ordination, Father Lovasik completed theology studies at the Gregorian Papal University in Rome (1938-39). He was then assigned to St. Paul’s Mission House in Epworth, Iowa (1939-1941) where, as prefect and teacher, he helped prepare students for the priesthood. In 1941, Father Lovasik returned to Girard and embarked upon his lifetime calling — missionary work in the retreat and parish mission apostolate. In tandem with his apostolate, he began writing for the Catholic press. Girard, located in Erie County, served as his ministry headquarters through 1967. Father Lovasik transferred in 1968 to the Divine Word Society’s Pittsburgh House located in Oakland, the academic and healthcare center of the city. Bishop John J. Wright had approved the establishment of the
house eight years earlier with the proviso that the community would serve the local hospitals as chaplains. Father Lovasik lived alongside the chaplains, but continued his own retreat and writing ministry there until his death in 1986.

The retreat movement was a cherished tradition within the Society of the Divine Word community. The religious order was known for its early retreat work in Europe. It conducted its first retreat for laymen in the United States in 1906. Father Bruno Hagspiel, S.V.D., was such a retreat enthusiast that Pope Pius XI personally gave him a copy of his encyclical on the retreat movement (Mens nostra, 1929) and implored him to spread its practice in the United States. He did; and, it was into his symbolic shoes that Father Lovasik stepped. The priest did not have to travel far to his mission territory for he was assigned to minister in the coal and steel regions of the United States. As time went by, he would travel far beyond those boundaries. In a history commemorating the centennial anniversary of the establishment of the Society of the Divine Word in North America (1900-2000), author Ernest Brandewie recognized the success of Father Hagspiel as well as Father Lovasik, who, he wrote, “preached the Word of God in season and out of season…[and] gave as many as 36 retreats a year, each a week long, as well as parish missions.”

As a retreat master and mission director, Father Lovasik brought to the task excellent communication skills, theological depth, and fluency in Slovak — the latter being much in demand as the coal and steel regions often mirrored the influx of Slovak immigrants. To this day, Pennsylvania ranks first of all 50 states in having the highest percentage of people with Slovak roots. For the benefit of his flock, the young priest translated and published a standard prayer-book, New Testament, and brochure into their shared language.

In western Pennsylvania, there was no shortage of Slovak Catholics among the mill workers and bituminous coal miners, and this was true on the opposite side of the state. Beginning in the mid-1940s, many newspapers in northeastern Pennsylvania, the heart of anthracite coal, began publicizing Father Lovasik’s Slovak/English retreats and missions. While most press notices told of upcoming mission events, occasional reports surfaced describing their success. “Rev. Lawrence Lovasik, SVD missionary, closed a two-week mission last night in St. John the Baptist Slovak Church,” The Evening News of Wilkes-Barre reported. The English and Slovak retreat was described as having overflow crowds in which “nearly 4,000 Communions were distributed.” Father Lovasik was also a familiar face at the Slovak Girls Academy (later renamed St. Cyril Academy) operated by the Sisters of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Danville. He delivered commencement addresses to its graduates, preached the sisters’ annual retreats, and conducted days of recollection there for women of Slovak parishes from Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The 1950s and 1960s found Father Lovasik traveling throughout the country and as far away as California. He was a frequent retreat master, for example, at the Carmelite Sisters’ Sacred Heart Retreat House in Alahambra conducting general retreats as well as retreats for targeted audiences (e.g., married couples, young mothers, women converts and non-Catholics, teenagers, and lay catechists). His work also continued closer to home where retreats for “Working Girls” and “Business and Sodality Girls” at St. Emma Monastery in Greensburg reflect a different time. As the
years passed, his preaching ministry continued with much time committed to annual retreats for women religious. Despite the thousands and thousands of miles traveled in the course of his missionary work, Father Lovasik never learned to drive, relying instead on the kindness of others.8

A Writing Life
In his busy schedule of retreats and missions, Father Lovasik first carved out time in the early 1940s to write for publication. “I wanted to reach the hearts of people, but my voice could be heard only by those to whom I was able to preach,” the Divine Word missionary wrote explaining his motivation.9 Writing may, in fact, have been passed down through the DNA of his religious community beginning with its founder, St. Arnold Janssen. In 1878, Father Janssen praised the power of the written word in the religious community’s magazine for families, Stadt Gottes (City of God). “If anyone wants to accomplish some good and have a good effect on his fellows in these times, he must make use of those methods which seem to be most appropriate for the times,” the future saint wrote. “And right now the best means would be the press. The spoken word quickly fades away. The printed word remains.”10 Stadt Gottes became the top-selling magazine in German-speaking Europe. The assignment of the first Divine Word missionary who came to America was, in fact, to sell Stadt Gottes and other publications to German-speaking Americans. It was a way to spread the Word of God, introduce the Society, and raise funds for its missions. Soon after the establishment of the Society’s North American foundation in Shermerville, Illinois, Society members in 1901 set up a printing press. The presses hummed along until January 1960 when a fire destroyed what had become a large complex. Although the actual printing was no longer undertaken there, the religious order continued to publish mission-related materials off-site for years to come.

The words and spirit of St. Arnold took root in Father Lovasik. “I realized that one of the most powerful means God has given us for spreading Christian principles and combating non-Christian influences is the press,” he wrote in the 1960s echoing the founder. “Though I was not specially...
gifted with a talent for writing, I was determined to work at it till I was able to present our Catholic people with the teaching of Jesus Christ in print.”11 Work at it, he did.

Surviving nephew Michael Lovasik said he can’t ever recall his uncle leaving for a retreat or mission without taking along his typewriter. Father Lovasik used his time during and between missions and retreats to write. Over the course of his lifetime, Father Lovasik wrote more than 30 books and 75 pamphlets.

Pamphlets and booklets were the bread and butter of Catholic publishing throughout much of the early- to mid-twentieth century. Without a hard cover or binding, pamphlets included folded or saddle-stapled pages typically ranging from a few to 48 pages, but some nearly 100 pages in length. For many Catholics, pamphlets and booklets placed in the racks in the back of their church, offered affordable hope and inspiration. While Divine Word Publications printed Father Lovasik’s pamphlets, a review of the Guide to Catholic Literature and the index to the Rare Books and Special Collections of Catholic University Libraries, home to the largest collection of American pre-Vatican II pamphlets, reveal other publishers did, too. Among them were the Catechetical Guild, Radio Replies, the Benedictine Convent (Clyde, Missouri), Catholic Book Publishing, and the Christophers.

Pamphlets and booklets on Jesus and the Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels and saints, and prayers and devotions were, not unexpectedly, the staples of Father Lovasik’s offerings beginning in the 1940s and continuing throughout his lifetime.

During World War II, Father Lovasik published Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies. The booklet, 97 pages in length, was highly successful, but its success was anchored in tragedy. It is the story of U.S. Army Air Corps Technical Sergeant Leo E. Lovasik, younger brother of Father Lovasik, as told mainly through the letters Leo wrote while in training and serving overseas. An athlete and a natural leader, the 21-year-old soldier possessed what Father Lovasik described as a manly love for and devotion to Our Lady whom Leo called the Queen of the Skies. Sergeant Lovasik’s aircraft crashed on a mission over England killing all crew members on August 30, 1943. One hundred thousand copies of the booklet were printed, and, at the request of Francis Cardinal Spellman, then archbishop of New York and apostolic vicar for the U.S. Armed Forces, copies were sent to 25,000 Navy and Army chaplains stationed throughout the world. Father Lovasik later expanded the booklet into a book, Our Lady’s Knight, that included more narrative and family photos.12

Responding to concerns shared with him in confession and counseling, Father Lovasik’s pamphlet topics broadened in the 1950s and 1960s. Combining practical and spiritual advice, he wrote aspirational pamphlets on married life.
(e.g., *Making Marriage Click*), sex (e.g., *Sex Is Sacred*), the family (e.g., *Making the Family Perfect*), birth control (e.g., *Rhythm Practice*), dating (e.g., *Clean Love in Courtship*), and addiction (e.g., *What’s Wrong with Drinking?*) among other topics. Likewise, worries voiced by individuals who or whose family members suffered physical or mental illnesses stirred Father Lovasik to write a brochure series pairing saints with different medical conditions (e.g., *St. Alphonsus — The Arthritis Saint*) and to publish works on the spiritual graces of suffering (*So Gentle His Hand; Jesus, Joy of Suffering*). This writing apostolate to the sick, he said, was one of his most rewarding projects.13


In his zeal to reach more souls, Father Lovasik took a path less traveled for the times. He established his own nonprofit publishing operation in the late 1940s under the name of Marian Action Publications. Located in the same space in Tarentum that once housed the family grocery store and later a state store (with the family flat on the above floor), it was now a fulfillment center for his pamphlets, brochures, and books that he had printed locally and eventually for RCA Victor records and later cassettes of his meditations and reflections.14

Father Lovasik wrote dozens of prayer books and devotional guides. Before there was the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Father Lovasik introduced the *Vatican II Catechism Sketched: The Visual Catechism*.
(1976) with “chalk talk sketches” and New American Catechism (Catholic Book Publishing, 1980-1985) with four separate editions (Grades 1-2, 3-5, 6-8 and high schoolers and adults). Other catechisms would follow.

A large share of Father Lovasik's writing grew out of his experience as a preacher. A desire to convey God’s Word effectively and memorably and to help other priests to do the same resulted in his publishing two homily resources through Marian Action Publications. These were the five-volume Scriptural Homily Notes for Sunday Gospels — Cycles A, B, C; Sunday Baptism, Wedding and Occasional Homilies; and, Funeral and Lenten Homilies (c. 1971) and the three-volume Short Catechetical Sunday Homilies with a Story — Cycles A, B, C (c. 1980). Father Lovasik described the second series as an answer to St. John Paul II’s call in 1979 for homilies that were “carefully prepared, rich in substance, and adapted to hearers.”

Father Lovasik knew well the value of a story to enliven faith and understanding. He had already published Catechism in Stories — a three-part compendium of nearly 500 short inspirational stories about The Creed, The Commandments, and The Sacraments from which he drew.

Father Lovasik’s storytelling and writing expertise found a new outlet in 1978. Catholic Book Publishing introduced its full-color St. Joseph Picture Books for children including four written by Father Lovasik. Father Dennis Logue, S.V.D., who wrote The Pittsburgh House, 1960-2012, a short history of the local Divine Word Missionaries, recalled the devotion that Father Lovasik brought to the task of writing children’s religious literature, the popularity of which has endured.

Catholic Book Publishing affirms this. Over time, Father Lovasik authored more than half of the 101 St. Joseph Picture Books published, and every title remains in print today. The Catholic Picture Bible, written by Father Lovasik, is also still popular after its publication more than 60 years ago. “Father Lawrence Lovasik was a great evangelizer who used his gift of writing to teach and encourage people of all ages to know and love their Catholic Faith, God, the Holy Family and the Angels and Saints to this day,” editor Emilie Cerar says about ongoing interest in Father Lovasik’s books.

A Modern Sisterhood
In October 1954, the Associated Press sent a wirephoto around the world. Shown was a young woman dressed in an oxford gray flannel skirt, with a hemline just below the knee, and a loose-fitting matching box jacket. Completing the outfit was a white blouse with Peter Pan collar, nylon stockings, medium black pumps, and a flat, black felt hat. Newspapers in small and large towns in the United States and abroad carried it. What captured readers’ attention was that this was not just any young woman, but a member of a new American religious order, the Sisters of the Divine Spirit, modeling the proposed habit for professed members. “A new look in religious garb more sensational than the flat look proposed by Christian Dior,” ventured the New York Herald Tribune Service.

“Departs radically from tradition,” Australia’s Sydney Morning Herald reported, describing it as “revolutionary.” Revolutionary, it was, but, the founder of the new order — Father Lawrence Lovasik — said it was in harmony with the urging of Pope Pius XII. In an interview with The Catholic Standard and Times, Father Lovasik said that the new dress was in response “to the Holy Father’s plea to the Sisterhoods to simplify their habits” as well as their lives to adapt to modern times. In his book, The Sister for Today, he wrote:

The spirit of a religious community does not consist in detailed items: such as the number of pleats in the habit, the rules controlling enclosure, or the number of prescribed vocal prayers. Religious life can become

Modern garb for new American religious order founded by Father Lovasik in 1954
Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, October 3, 1954
a maze of minor technicalities which are of little value in the work of saving souls, but which demand of Sisters useless expenditure of time and energy.... Simplicity should characterize all directives for conventual living ... The apostolate of Sisters is not to the past but to the contemporary world.21

The Society of the Divine Word released Father Lovasik from his 1954-1955 ministry obligations so that he might establish the religious order. The new sisters would not only have a different way of dress than traditional religious, Father Lovasik said, but a less rigid way of life including a yearly vacation, driving privileges, and home visits if a parent should become ill. Social, educational, and hospital work would be their core ministry. Initial training began on the campus of the Bernardine Sisters in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania. After a plan for establishing a motherhouse in the Diocese of Greensburg failed, Archbishop John Mark Gannon agreed to sponsor the sisters in the Diocese of Erie. In August 1955, under the direction of Father Lovasik, 50-some candidates representing more than a dozen states, began their postulancy in a former dormitory of Gannon College.

Father Lovasik would later write that founding this modern American religious community was “one of the greatest experiences of my life.”22 The experience was, however, to be short-lived. Eventual differences in direction and vision shared among the stakeholders — Father Lovasik, Archbishop Gannon, and the sisters — brought about change. In June 1956, Archbishop Gannon founded a new Community, thereby, severing all ties to the earlier enterprise. The new Congregation of the Divine Spirit would carry forward the inspired goal of responding to Pope Pius XII’s appeal for modernization. However, Father Lovasik would no longer have a role in the sisters’ formation or a claim to their founding.

**Family Service Corps**

Father Lovasik did not surrender his vision of a ministry for women engaged more in the world than separated from it. Quoting from the 1965 Vatican II document, *Decree on Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (Perfectae Caritatis)*, the Divine Word missionary proposed a secular institute in which its members could “carry out effectively everywhere the apostolate for which they were founded, which is both in the world and, in a sense, of the world.”23 To that end, Father Lovasik founded the Family Service Corps in 1968, based in Pittsburgh where he was stationed. The institute was, he said, “for the Catholic woman who does not wish to join a religious order yet seeks a means of dedicating herself to a religious way of life relevant to our times.”24

The times of which Father Lovasik spoke were indeed “a-changin.”25 Remembered as “the year that shattered history” (*Smithsonian*) and “changed America forever” (*US News*), 1968 was marked by a divisive war, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, racial unrest, and student and political protests.26 Philip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history at Baylor University, reports that the religious landscape of 1968 was also changing. Mainline Protestant churches split over political activism; the release of *Humanae Vitae* sparked debates; and priests and religious continued their exodus from their commitments to the Church.27 Not mentioned by Jenkins but felt were the continuing aftershocks of Vatican II (1963-1965)
and, for women religious, the challenge to renew community life adjusting to the conditions of the times.

A spirit of volunteerism served as companion to the activism and upheaval of the Sixties. The decade that birthed the Peace Corps (1961) and Volunteers in Service to America (1965) reinforced the rising belief that individuals could make a difference without necessarily making lifetime commitments. Around the same time, the Catholic Archdiocese of Newark formed the Newark Liaison Foreign and Domestic Lay Apostolate, envisioned by its founder to be a “Church Peace Corps” for lay Catholics. It would grow to become the national Catholic Volunteer Network. In 1965, the organization published its first issue of Response, a directory of faith-based volunteer opportunities that continues to this day.28

With fewer women entering convents coupled with greater choice in ways to serve God and neighbor, the time seemed right for launching the Family Service Corps. Father Lovasik characterized its purpose as Christian social work and, specifically, preservation of the family unit. “They offer their services for the spiritual, social, emotional, and physical well-being of every family of any race or creed,” he wrote.29 Members would accomplish this, he said, by living in small groups in neighborhoods and witnessing to Christ there and in the various

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In addition to daily Mass and spiritual reading, Family Service Corps members met weekly with Father Lovasik to reflect on Scripture.

Source: Pittsburgh Catholic, January 1971

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Monongahela Family Service Corps Property for Elderly (1985) including residences (center) and projected chapel

Source: Robert M. Myers Archives, Chicago Province of the Society of the Divine Word
workplaces in which they were employed. Beyond work hours, Family Service Corps members would support families by visiting the sick, elderly and poor; caring for children during family emergencies; and teaching CCD. Members would make private promises each year, instead of binding vows, to live the virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Father Lovasik specified that the Corps was not for the few, but for the many, including those who might have been disqualified by more traditional religious communities in the past.

Sensible allowances are made with reference to education, health, age, and family background. Under certain conditions the following may be accepted as members of the Institute: Women over thirty-five years of age, those of limited good health but able to do some type of work in the community, former religious, those who must spend some time taking care of an elderly or sick parent, widows, divorced women in good standing, women of any race or creed, as long as they are willing to adapt themselves to the program of the Institute.

Four women made up the inaugural group of Corps members in 1968. By 1971, membership had grown to 15 women, most between the ages of 30 and 50. While local women were represented, Corps members came from as far away as the Philippines and Canada. Some were former sisters or novices who had met Father Lovasik in retreats that he had preached to their religious communities. Secular press headlines regarding the founding of the Family Service Corps revealed the novelty of the concept and some confusion (“Nuns, priests reject orders to join independent communes” / “New ‘Nun’ Originated” / “Commune over Convent”).

As president, Father Lovasik directed the institute assisted by a coordinator and two advisors chosen by a vote of the Corps members. “Shared responsibility” characterized the governance and routines of the Corps. He reported that its pioneer members confidently looked forward to papal approbation of their apostolate; however, it’s questionable if this was realized.

The women lived in the Brighton Heights neighborhood located at the northern edge of the city of Pittsburgh and within the boundaries of then St. Cyril Church. Family Service Corps purchased two comfortable homes on Northminster Street — dubbed Our Lady’s and St. Joseph Residences — for its members. Father Lovasik and his own brothers and sisters helped to ready the housing.

An enclosed porch at the rear of St. Joseph House was converted into a small chapel complete with a Tabernacle. As space permitted, personal care rooms were eventually rented to the elderly both at the Northminster locations and at another Corps-owned house in Oakland, the Holy Family Residence for the Elderly, providing not only a ministry opportunity, but funding for the fledgling group. For some, the opportunity to live in small, family-like settings in homes rather than institutions was valued. “I came to Family Service Corps because I felt there was more leeway here, more of a chance to be directly involved with people
without the isolation and regimentation of the convent,” Frances Billat, a former nun from Toledo, told the *New York Times*.35

Family Service Corps members dressed in ordinary clothes with the exception of a specific garb for worship. The early Pittsburgh Corps members were most often employed as nurses and nurses’ aides and teachers in public and parochial schools. Also included among the group were an inhalation therapist, a counselor, a legal secretary, and commercial artist. Taking fifteen dollars a week for personal needs, the women contributed what remained from their paychecks to a common pool from which the Institute paid mortgages, utilities, food, and other expenses.

What is known about the Family Service Corps comes primarily from early press stories and a promotional brochure. Beyond the founding years, Family Service Corps can be traced through classified advertising in the *Pittsburgh Catholic* that promoted either the group, availability of rooms for the aged, or both (e.g., “Family Service Corps, Secular Institute for Women, Social & CCD Work” / “St. Joseph Residence for the Elderly, Conducted by the Family Service Corps, A New Secular Institute Dedicated to Social Service”). Local advertising ran sporadically through the mid-1970s.36 Around that time, Father Lovasik was focusing on ministry opportunities in Monongahela, some 25 miles south of Pittsburgh. Mrs. Agnes McKinley, a widow, had donated a tract of land on the hillside above the Monongahela River in 1974 to the Family Service Corps for development of residences for the elderly.

In 1977, Father Lovasik celebrated an outdoor Mass and dedicated the Family Service Corps facilities, in memory of his parents. Meanwhile, by 1982, the Pittsburgh houses had been sold with the money applied to expanding the Monongahela facility to include additional housing with a chapel.37 The sale of the Pittsburgh houses suggests strongly that the membership of the pioneer Family Service Corps had diminished. There is scant evidence of members by this time in either Pittsburgh or Monongahela. Father Lovasik retired in 1982 from active ministry, but continued directing the Monongahela project. The Provincial Superior of the Chicago Province requested that he hand over
the operation of the Institute — including the facilities then caring for 35 elderly residents — to another religious group or organization. The Society of the Divine Word was unable to take under its wing the Family Service Corps, which had operated independently from the religious order. Father Lovasik informed the Society in January 1986 that the Vincentians Sisters of Charity would assume operation later that year. He would not live to witness the transfer in August or the completion of the final building with the anticipated chapel.

Death of Father Lovasik
On June 9, 1986, as was his custom, Father Lovasik jogged from his Oakland residence to the noon Mass at nearby St. Paul Cathedral. While attending Mass, he suffered a heart attack and died in Presbyterian-University Hospital, a few weeks shy of his 73rd birthday. He is buried in St. Clement Cemetery in Tarentum. Years earlier, Father Lovasik expressed the hope that his writing would allow him to continue teaching the truths of the Catholic Church and its wonderful means of salvation long after my mortal remains had been laid in the grave. That ambition has been fulfilled.

Footnotes:
1 Charles J. Culleton, Corpus Christi Carpets: Holy Martyrs Parish (Tarentum: Creighton Printing, 2004), 46. Holy Martyrs is the result of the 1992 merger of St. Clement and Sacred Heart-St. Peter Parishes. (Today this parish is part of Guardian Angels Parish.)
2 The society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) is the largest Roman Catholic order dedicated to missionary work, with more than 6,000 priests and brothers worldwide, and 250 assigned to the Chicago Province. The Chicago Province stretches from Nebraska to Massachusetts and from Canada to the Caribbean. St. John Paul II canonized the society’s founder and first missionary, Father Arnold Janssen and Father Joseph Freinademetz, in 2003.
5 Brandewie, In the Light of the World, 124.
8 Michael Lovasik, interview by author, August 3, 2021.
9 “Rev. Lawrence G. Lovasik.”
10 Brandewie, 111.
11 “Rev. Lawrence G. Lovasik.”
13 “Rev. Lawrence G. Lovasik.”
15 Emilie Cerar, email message to author, September 8, 2021.
20 “Rev. Lawrence Lovasik.”
23 Bob Dylan’s anthem of change, The Times They Are A-Changin’, was released in 1964 and captured sentiments of the decade.
31 Michael Lovasik, interview by author, August 3, 2021.
33 The first Pittsburgh Catholic classified advertisements appeared in June 1971 promoting only Family Service Corps—Secular Institute for Women — Social & CCD Work. Ads in 1972-1975 gave top billing to the residences for the elderly (St. Joseph Residence or Holy Family Residence) followed by the sponsoring organization (e.g., Family Service Corps—A New Secular Institute Dedicated to Social Service). Family Service Corps sold the Holy Family Residence on Lytton Avenue in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh in 1977 and Our Lady’s and St. Joseph Residences, both on Northminster Street in the Brighton Heights section of Pittsburgh, in 1983.
35 “Rev. Lawrence Lovasik.”
Introduction
Northwest Pennsylvania abuts western New York state. Pennsylvania’s Erie and Warren Counties border New York’s westernmost county of Chautauqua, which contains picturesque Chautauqua Lake. The Iroquois word “Chautauqua” means “moccasins tied together” — a description of the shape of the lake. In 1874, Methodist Episcopal Bishop John Heyl Vincent (1832-1920) and businessman Lewis Miller (1829-1889) organized the first Assembly on the shores of Chautauqua. It became the site of an outdoor summer school designed to train Sunday School teachers. Later known as the Chautauqua Institution (1892), “Chautauqua” symbolized an adult education and social movement in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — located not only at the “mother” site but also in many local Assemblies throughout rural America, including itinerant “circuit” Chautauquas. The Assemblies appeared in 10,000 communities to audiences of more than 45 million. President Theodore Roosevelt described Chautauqua as “the most American thing in America.”

Protestant religious instruction, preaching, worship, secular lectures, political addresses, social reform presentations, musical performances including opera, family entertainment, and social activities were integral parts of the experience. Every major Protestant denomination maintained an office at the mother site, reflecting the reality that the institution was an interdenominational Protestant summer camp.

There was no Catholic presence or participation. Indeed, the first Assembly included as a speaker a former Catholic priest who spoke about the evils of “popery.” Anti-Catholic lectures were generally met with warm applause. Chautauqua talks were published, and Catholic bishops and priests warned against Catholic attendance. While historic Protestant concerns about Catholicism abounded (non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic groups, fears of Vatican involvement in American politics, and theological differences), the real division between Chautauqua and American Catholics was over the “school question.” Chautauqua and its related Sunday School Movement desired one public school for all, replete with the King James Bible in classrooms, and were outraged by Catholic demands for public funding of Catholic schools or even an exemption for Catholics from school taxes. One regular Chautauqua speaker described parochial schools as “an enemy of civil freedom” inasmuch as the students were loyal papists, controlled by the Jesuits.

Chautauqua attendees, upon their return home from Assemblies, redoubled their proselytization of immigrant Catholics in Western Pennsylvania. These evangelization efforts were particularly strong, given that the majority
Protestant population was comprised primarily of Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans descended from immigrants from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and England—all of which had centuries-old anti-Catholic histories. Most Catholic priests in the western half of Pennsylvania had emigrated either from Ireland or the Catholic German States and were familiar with this religious history and the threat the Chautauqua Movement posed to the many Catholic immigrants who had an inadequate foundation in their faith given the dual realities of (1) centuries of British oppression of Catholics including prohibition of even secular education of Catholics in Ireland, and (2) centuries of religious wars in the German States that had culminated in Bismarck’s cultural war (Kulturkampf) against Catholics in the German Empire. The stakes for the survival and growth of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania were high indeed in the face of this evangelical challenge that was so powerful in the general American culture.

Pittsburgh’s Parish at “the Point”

In 1868, immigrant Irish Catholics in Pittsburgh’s First Ward at “the Point” (the juncture of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers that forms the Ohio River) purchased a house and converted it into a chapel called Our Lady of Consolation for the conduct of religious services. It was served as a mission from St. Paul Cathedral Church, then located Downtown at the corner of Grant Street and Fifth Avenue. Two years later, the mission became an independent parish. Father Andrew A. Lambing became pastor in 1872. The church building quickly proved inadequate. In May 1876, the parish purchased Ames Methodist Episcopal Church at the corner of Third Avenue and Ferry (today, Stanwix) Street. After renovation, the church was dedicated on September 24, 1876, under the name of St. Mary of Mercy. Father Morgan Sheedy became pastor in October 1885 and the future of the parish was assured. Given Father Sheedy’s skills as a visionary priest, educator, lecturer, author, and fundraiser, it was a certainty that he would not only address his parishioners’ needs but—understanding the broader American cultural challenge to those of the Catholic faith—would also initiate a national Catholic response to the Chautauqua Movement. His subsequent undertakings can only be understood as the cumulative product of his religious zeal, ethnic heritage, education, intellect, scholarship, determination, and civic commitment. Who was this extraordinary priest?

Father Morgan Madden Sheedy

Irish Immigrant

Morgan Madden Sheedy was born in the townland of Knahill, to the west of the village of Liscarroll in County Cork, in southwestern Ireland, on October 8, 1853. He was one of nine children (six boys and three girls). “Morgan Madden” Sheedy was named after his mother’s oldest brother, Very Rev. Morgan Madden, a priest of the Diocese of Ross in the southwestern corner of County Cork. Knahill was part of the Diocese of Cloyne, which encompassed the northern and eastern parts of County Cork and had its cathedral in the ancient seaport of Cobh (Queen-
been in the educational and literary fields.22 Young Sheedy attended the Latin School in the nearby town of Charleville for his elementary schooling.14 He then undertook three years of classical studies at St. Colman College in Fermoy, County Cork,15 under the direction of a seminary president who would later become bishop of the Diocese of Ross (Ireland). He then successfully passed a competitive examination entitling him to a free bursary at the national seminary, St. Patrick’s in Maynooth.16 The Maynooth Matriculation Register lists Sheedy as entering his studies in Philosophy I on September 27, 1871, as a candidate from the Diocese of Cloyne.17 He studied natural and moral philosophy for two years and took a three-year course in theology under several professors who would shortly be elevated to the archbishoprics of Dublin and Melbourne (Australia) and the bishopric of Down and Connor (Ireland). He graduated in 1876 but was too young to be ordained.

Sheedy immigrated to Pittsburgh at the invitation of Bishop John Tuigg who was, like Sheedy and Pittsburgh’s first Bishop Michael O’Connor, a native of County Cork. He took up residence at St. Michael’s Seminary in the Glenwood (today, Hazelwood) section of Pittsburgh, where he received final pastoral instruction from the rector and priest-professors. He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Pittsburgh by Bishop Tuigg in the second St. Paul Cathedral (Downtown) on September 23, 1876.18 His first assignment was as professor of history and theology at St. Michael’s Seminary.19 The Pittsburgh Catholic newspaper correctly observed that “Father Sheedy’s chief interest has been in the educational and literary fields.”20 He would later receive honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Notre Dame (1906) and Mount St. Mary’s College in Emmitsburg, Maryland (1908).

After the closure of St. Michael’s Seminary in January 1877, Father Sheedy served as assistant pastor of St. Agnes Church in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. After almost a year there, he became assistant pastor at St. Mary Church in Parker’s Landing (Armstrong County) for a year. Father Sheedy was then assigned as an assistant at St. John Church in Altoona in November 1878. During this time, he was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in July 1880.21 In March 1881, he was appointed pastor of St. Rose Church in Cannelton (an unincorporated community in Darlington Township, Beaver County) and the mission church of St. Mary in Clinton (also in Beaver County). While there, Sheedy was editor of the Pittsburgh Catholic newspaper.22

**Pastor of St. Mary of Mercy Church**

Four years later, in October 1885, Father Sheedy was appointed pastor of St. Mary of Mercy Church at the Point (succeeding Father Lambing), where he remained for nine years. His tenure at the Point church was aptly described: “during his nine years there he exercised a powerful influence in the community.”23 The Rev. Dr. James Allison, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, defined Sheedy’s efforts in the acknowledged “red light” district of the city, famed for its “underworld,” in these blunt terms: “The fight down there in the First Ward is between Father Sheedy and the Devil.”24

As pastor, the vigorous young priest undertook a number of initiatives:

† The original church on First Avenue was being used as the parish school. Father Sheedy promptly purchased a lot at 216 Penn Avenue and built a new three-story school which was dedicated in 1890.25 Sisters of Mercy staffed the school. After Sheedy’s pastorate, the district changed from residential to commercial. That demographic change led to the school’s closure. The building was leased for commercial use until its sale and demolition in 1938.

† Sheedy arranged to lease vacant classrooms in Duquesne School, a nearby public school at the corner of Second Avenue and Liberty Street, for his parish’s students who were overcrowding his parish school building. A “group of bigots” attempted to prevent this, and Sheedy fought the case successfully. The highly controversial arrangement of a single school — occupied by both public-school students and Catholic pupils, with the latter far outnumbering the former — lasted only one year.27

† The church then in use was the former Ames Methodist Episcopal Church which had been modified by Father Lambing. Sheedy razed that building and constructed a larger brick church on the site. Dedication took place on May 28, 1893. That structure would remain in use for over four decades until its demolition in 1935, when it was replaced by a larger church and rectory (occupying the block on Stanwix Street between Third Avenue and the Boulevard of the Allies) which are still in use today.

**Altoona**

Father Sheedy returned to Altoona on November 18, 1894, as irreremovable rector of St. John Church (where he had previously served as assistant)28 for the remainder of his
life. His appointment was a promotion, as noted in The Pittsburg Press:

To those who may inquire whether Father Sheedy has been promoted in going to Altoona, it should be stated that St. John’s Church, the new charge of Father Sheedy, is the largest in the diocese. It has 3,500 members, is absolutely free of debt, and in the performance of his duties his pastor has the services of two assistants. Altoona is one of the churches in the diocese which are irremovable or permanent pastorate — that is, the officiating priest cannot be removed against his will unless it be to accept a promotion….

In 1901, with the erection of the Diocese of Altoona from the original territory of the Diocese of Pittsburgh and the designation of St. John as the cathedral, Father Sheedy became rector of the cathedral church. In 1923, he saw to the razing of St. John Church and the erection of its successor under a new name: the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by a new rectory and convent. Sheedy was also involved in community improvement efforts in Altoona.

Literary Works
Among Sheedy’s many writings were Briefs for Our Times, Social Problems, and Christian Unity. He also authored the first history of the Diocese of Altoona. He was a member of the Writers’ Club of Pittsburgh, the American Catholic Historical Society, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, the American Academy of Science, and the University Club. He was also listed in Who’s Who in America, Who’s Who in the Clergy, and Thom’s Irish Who’s Who.

Sheedy was founder and editor in 1895 of the St. John’s Quarterly that he later changed into the Altoona Monthly in 1912; he continued as its editor until 1925. Sheedy was a frequent contributor of articles to Catholic newspapers and magazines, such as The Catholic World, Donahoe’s Magazine, Commonweal, and the American Ecclesiastical Review. He helped to organize and served as a director of the Columbus Club of Pittsburgh, a society devoted to literary and social exercises. Sheedy was an editor of the Pittsburgh Catholic for several years. He was also a scholarly contributor to the multi-volume Catholic Encyclopedia (1907-1912). In 1929, he established the Sheedy Scholarship at Seton Hill College, through which a yearly scholarship would be competitively awarded to a student member of the Altoona cathedral parish. Sheedy was also a contributor to the secular press and his articles appeared regularly in Pittsburgh newspapers. In short, the literary output from Father Sheedy was enormous — and this was only rivaled by the press coverage of his many lectures throughout the nation.

Acclaimed Lecturer
Sheedy enjoyed a well-deserved national reputation as a public lecturer and was a much sought-after speaker at Catholic fundraising events. Representative of his high profile was a memorable lecture given at the Montauk Theater in Brooklyn on March 3, 1901, for the benefit of the Convent of the Precious Blood. The Brooklyn Citizen devoted a half page to its coverage and in its opening paragraph stated that “the lecture delivered by the Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy was worth going miles to hear.” The paper printed the complete text of the address. The lecture was combined with a concert of orchestra and chorus. Brooklyn Bishop Charles McDonnell, clergy, religious, and laity jammed the
hall where Sheedy spoke on “The Religious Outlook.”

On the occasion of Sheedy’s lecture in Brooklyn, the Pittsburgh Catholic took the opportunity to explain the priest’s ability to draw large crowds to his public addresses:

Father Sheedy is very well known in the literary world and as a preacher and as a lecturer his name and fame are well established. He is in the prime of life, learned, cultured and eloquent, with a pleasing personality and an attractive manner that at once places him in perfect accord with an appreciative audience.47

Father Sheedy was as highly sought after as a speaker in Pittsburgh as he was in New York. The Pittsburg Press was enthusiastic in announcing the return of Sheedy from Altoona to Pittsburgh to speak at the St. Patrick’s Day festivities of the Ancient Order of Hibernians to be held in Carnegie Music Hall in March 1910. The paper described Sheedy as “one of the most popular clergymen in the state, and a speaker of rare ability.”48 Representative of the breadth of Sheedy’s oratorical outreach to all, regardless of religious affiliation or social class, was his address to the thirtieth annual convention of the Pennsylvania State Funeral Directors’ Association in 1912. Sheedy, the “principal speaker,” was received enthusiastically by the attendees who “were loud in their praises” and had the speech printed on the front page of the next day’s newspaper.49

Educational Initiatives

Sheedy’s efforts on behalf of Catholic education, especially higher education, were described as “incessant.”50 As the outgrowth of his interest in literary and educational work, he was one of the most prominent promoters of the Catholic Reading Circles, a founder and first president of the Catholic Summer School of America, and a member of the latter organization’s board of trustees for 48 years until his death in 1939. Sheedy’s work in those two organizations is the focus of this article and will be described in detail later.

Temperance Movement

While at the Point, Father Sheedy began his work on behalf of the cause of temperance, which became a conspicuous feature of his life’s activities.51 St. Mary’s was located in a district that “was dotted with saloons, many of them of a low and disreputable order, and Father Sheedy was indefatigable in his efforts to reduce their number and to lead his parishioners and other friends in paths of sobriety and good citizenship.”52 Sheedy was the affiant in a Remonstrance filed with the Liquor License Court that was considering 107 retail liquor applications for Pittsburgh’s First Ward in March 1892. The Pittsburg Dispatch reported:

Rev. Morgan Sheedy is the affiant and … signer to a general remonstrance to any increase in the number of saloons in the First Ward, Pittsburgh. The paper comes from the Father Mathew Association, connected with St. Mary of Mercy’s Church, and is signed by … Rev. Sheedy as spiritual director. The statement reads:

We do this in the interests of the hundreds of people living here who suffer from the effects of the liquor traffic; in the interest of good morals; in short for the peace and good order of this community in which we are specially interested owing to the fact that a number of our members reside here. On behalf of our organization, numbering 48 persons, we pray you to give this remonstrance your due consideration.53

Irish-born Capuchin Father Theobald Mathew (1790-1856) had led the temperance movement in the English-speaking world. In the years following Father Mathew’s death, Father Sheedy came to be considered by many to be one of the most prominent American leaders of the Catholic temperance movement.54 In the 1890s, the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America (C.T.A.U.A.) donated $25,000 to the Catholic University of America on the condition that public lectures would be given each year on the temperance work to which Father Mathew had devoted his life. Father Sheedy, who had served as national vice president of the C.T.A.U.A. (1888-1891), was chosen to inaugurate the annual lecture series in a public setting outside of the university by speaking from the pulpit of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York in March 1898.56 Appropriately, The New York Times headline of March 7, 1898 announced “Against Sunday Opening: The Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Denounces the Liquor Traffic.”57 He addressed a packed cathedral, with every seat filled and the crowd jamming the aisles. The paper reported that Sheedy’s lecture was an “official declaration” of the archdiocese whose archbishop, Michael Corrigan, presided from his cathedra in the sanctuary.

The Irish Independence Movement

Father Sheedy, Irish-born and serving Catholic parishes at the Point and then Altoona that were comprised almost exclusively of Irish immigrants and their children,58 keenly followed all political developments concerning his homeland that remained under British rule after several hundred years. His return trips to Ireland and the arrival of his younger siblings in the United States certainly intensified his views regarding Irish and American Irish efforts to seek independence for Ireland. Brothers John and Paul Sheedy were actively involved in, and Father Morgan Sheedy also did not ignore, the Irish cause.59
An Act of Union had been passed in 1800 to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Subsequently, Ireland had been governed by Coercion Acts which “made every expression of national feeling a crime.” Each effort by the Irish to secure basic human rights was met with new British legislation. Parliament had already legislated an Insurrection Act for Ireland (1796). The Coercion Act of 1833 (formally, the Suppression of Disturbances Act) was a reaction to Catholic tenant farmers’ resistance to paying compulsory tithes to the Protestant Church of Ireland — suspects were tried by military court martial, with penalties including whipping, transportation for life, and death. The Habeas Corpus Act (the right not to be arrested without charge) was later suspended due to Fenian (Irish Republic Brotherhood) agrarian agitation. A new Coercion Act (officially, the Peace Preservation Act) was passed in 1870, allowing magistrates to detain suspects without trial, detain witnesses, and imprison witnesses until they testified. By the 1880s, the Land League — led by Irish nationalist Charles Stuart Parnell and others — attempted to halt evictions and lower rents at a time of economic recession. Over 11,000 evictions were enforced by the police and British military. The “boycott” or social ostracism was the main weapon of passive Irish resistance. Another Coercion Act followed in 1881.

Events built incrementally to a crescendo after the assassination in 1882 of the two highest ranking British officials in Dublin in the “Phoenix Park murders.” Conservative Party leader Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister in 1885. In 1887, The Times of London published a sensational “Parnellism and Crime” series, which linked the Irish nationalist leader to the Phoenix Park murders. The government promptly...
sought enactment of another Coercion Act under which suspects could be imprisoned without trial by jury and “dangerous” associations such as the Land League could be prohibited — a promised “repression as stern as Cromwell’s.” Thus, the British view — described by one of its politicians — was that coercion was “the best machine that has ever been invented for governing a country against its will.”

The reaction among the Irish diaspora and others was immediate. In Pittsburgh, a mammoth rally was set for April 30, 1887 “to protest against the monster of coercion.” An estimated 10,000 jammed the spacious Grand Central Rink (in the 500 block of Penn Avenue near Sixth Street). Henry Gourley, president of Pittsburgh’s Select Council, served as president, with Father Sheedy as secretary. While the event was decidedly Irish, the audience was comprised of Protestants and Catholics, native-born and Irish-born, Scots-Irish and Catholic Irish, Germans and other ethnicities. After the president’s introductory remarks, Sheedy took center stage and read letters of regret from major politicians and other prominent persons who could not attend — including Pittsburgh Coadjutor Bishop Richard Phelan who wrote: “the coercion bill now before the British parliament, a bill the most outrageous enacted in modern times, even by that body, and calculated to crush out every vestige of freedom among the Irish people, and if enforced render them virtually a nation of slaves.”

Several speeches were given. A Resolution was then read by Sheedy attacking the proposed Coercion Act as suppressing constitutional liberty, suspending trial by jury, abolishing freedom of the press, and interfering with the public right to gather peaceably. The Resolution noted that such an Act was repugnant to principles of right and justice, unwarranted by the low crime rate in Ireland, and would impede settlement of the Irish question. The Resolution concluded with an expression of support for British opposition Liberal Party leader William Gladstone and Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Parnell in the struggle for justice. The meeting appropriately ended with the singing of “The Shamrock.”

After the meeting, Sheedy and Gourley went to the telegraph office and sent cablegrams to Parnell and Gladstone. Sheedy arranged for publication in the local press of an account of the meeting that included the speeches, the cablegrams, and the letters of regret. Sheedy wisely played a secondary role in connection with the meeting — allowing a Protestant to serve as president and for the participation of prominent non-Catholics as speakers on stage — thus avoiding criticism that the event was a purely “Catholic” one. Moreover, the role of secretary dovetailed perfectly with Sheedy’s writing talents. The enthusiasm of attendees at the meeting and the subsequent positive press coverage certainly benefited the cause of Irish freedom.

On St. Patrick’s Day 1891, Sheedy traveled from Pittsburgh to address a “Faith and Fatherland” assembly in a packed St. John’s Church Hall in Altoona where he assailed the “English-made famine of 1846-7” in which untold numbers died and a million emigrated. He criticized oppressive British coercion laws for Ireland and concluded that “agitation” rather than force or emigration was the only feasible method to achieve change.

Other Interests

Father Sheedy was quite active in the Maynooth Alumni Association, composed of the more than 60 graduates of the Irish national seminary who resided in the United States. He was elected president of the association at the sixth annual convention held in Cleveland on November 14, 1897. Father Sheedy was regularly mentioned in the Pittsburgh diocesan newspaper in connection with his activities in the temperance movement, parochial duties, participation in the funerals of brother priests, dedication of the nurses’ home at Mercy Hospital in Altoona, and participation in episcopal ceremonies. He received even more coverage in the secular press due in part to his novel and extraordinarily creative fundraising efforts for his parish and various Catholic charities and causes. One example will suffice: In order to raise funds for the construction of the new St. Mary of Mercy Church, Father Sheedy conducted an enormous bazaar in the former post office building which included “a gypsy tent with the weird fortune teller.” A veritable army of volunteers enabled this and Father Sheedy’s other fundraising events to reap “a goodly sum.”

Father Sheedy was also a founder of the Pittsburgh Polytechnic Society. The scope of his interests and his demonstrated accomplishments was breathtaking.

Relations with Protestants

Father Sheedy’s literary and oratorical exchanges with Protestant ministers who attacked Catholic doctrine and practices — including Rev. J. T. McCrory of the Third Presbyterian Church, whom Sheedy styled a “third-rate lucifer of the pulpit” — captured the attention of Pittsburghers of all faiths.

Sheedy also successfully exposed the lies of Rev. Mr. Bowlby of the First Presbyterian Church in Altoona who had asserted before both the latter’s Protestant congregation and the Altoona Ministerial Association that three prominent Catholic prelates favored “Bible reading in the public schools.” Sheedy obtained original letters from James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore and Archbishop John
Ireland of St. Paul denying the assertions and had both response letters published in Altoona’s leading secular newspaper — along with Sheedy’s comment that the third Catholic prelate did not even exist! But Sheedy’s most pointed attack was directed at the minister’s “source” of the alleged hierarchal position — a “five cent tract” from Pittsburgh — which Sheedy concluded:

… of course [it] was worthless, evidently prepared by the same class of people who get up and circulate the Jesuits’ and Knights of Columbus’ alleged oaths. His brethren of the Ministerial Association, the knowing ones among them, must have quietly smiled at this method of proof. And was it quite fair to the simple minded among them and to the unsuspecting public, who read the daily Tribune, to attempt to lead them astray in an important matter like this?74

But Father Sheedy did maintain excellent working relationships with other Protestant ministers, including Rev. Dr. George Hodges75 of Calvary Episcopal Church. The two together sponsored a series of sacred music concerts in Exhibition Hall in summer 1892. Sheedy was the closest friend of Hodges, who later became dean of the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This friendship and their cooperative works attracted national attention. The Burlington Independent (Vermont) described their friendship in these words:

Signs and wonders! Rev. Father Morgan Sheedy, Catholic, and Rev. George Hodges, pastor of the richest Protestant church in Pittsburgh, have been holding joint praise meetings for three last Sunday afternoons in the Pittsburgh Exhibition Hall with a total attendance of 16,000. The same clergymen have joined hands in a fair for the joint benefit of the Roman Catholic Roselia Foundling Asylum, and the Protestant Bethesda for Fallen Women the net profits for which were $20,000. And why not? Both clergymen worship the same God, and follow the same Christ whose life was largely devoted to good works.76

Unknown today is the fact that Father Sheedy collaborated with Dr. Hodges to establish the Kingsley House as a social settlement center at 1707 Penn Avenue in the Strip District in 1893.77 That area consisted mostly of factory and railroad workers who were predominantly Irish Catholic immigrants.78 Appropriately, these two clergymen established a settlement house that bore the name of a famed English clergyman and socialist, Rev. Charles Kingsley.79

Father Sheedy’s many friendships facilitated his positive reception by Protestant groups. In November 1909, he addressed the Church Club (an organization of laymen) of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh at a dinner in the Duquesne Club, which was the most exclusive private Protestant club in Pittsburgh. Announcement of the speech made the front page of The Pittsburgh Post.80 Little wonder that Father Sheedy was described by non-Catholics and secularists as “the most popular Catholic priest of Pittsburg.”81 He was well received in a stratified society where Catholics were virtually absent except at the very bottom.82

During Sheedy’s later years in Altoona, he became one of the founders of the Blair County Historical Society. And he was a founder of the Central Pennsylvania Humane Society where he took an active part in its work.

Zeal for New Initiatives

Father Sheedy’s enthusiasm was displayed in his seemingly boundless energy. For example, the Catholic Union and Times of Buffalo reported that at the 1904 Catholic Summer School at Cliff Haven, Sheedy said daily Masses, gave informal addresses throughout the day, delivered formal daily lectures, provided full evening lectures on such topics as “How and What to Read,” “Formation of Reading Circles and How to Conduct Them,” and “A History of the Summer School From Its First Inception” — while also participating in executive management meetings and officiating at social gatherings (including those at individual cottages)
during the day, in the evenings, and over the weekends.83

Father Sheedy’s work with the Catholic Summer School of America and the other organizations he actively participated in, led naturally to new undertakings of which he became either a principal figure, lecturer, or founder. For example, the 1897 Catholic Summer School identified the needs of Catholic school teachers in the public school system. That issue spun off into the organization of the first Catholic Child-Study Congress in New York City in December of the same year. Working with the Paulist Fathers, Sheedy organized a three-day Congress for teachers from throughout New York City.

Father Sheedy was selected to deliver the sermon at the Solemn High Mass inaugurating the Association of Catholic Colleges of the United States, held at St. James Church in Chicago in April 1899. This prominent role reflected Sheedy’s work to organize a complete Catholic educational system that would operate throughout the country. Delegates from several dozen colleges participated. This organization led in turn to formation of the Catholic Educational Association in 1904.84

**Almost a University Rector, Almost a Bishop**
The decades of Sheedy’s zealous work and scholarship culminated in his being a candidate for the rectorship of the Catholic University of America in 1902 when that position became vacant due to the promotion of his friend, Bishop Thomas Conaty, to the bishopric of Monterey-Los Angeles. The position of rector at that time led to the episcopate. As fate would have it, Father Denis J. O’Connell — a close confidant of Cardinal Gibbons and former rector of the North American College in Rome — was selected as the university’s rector, rather than Sheedy.85

In the view of some, Sheedy’s candidacy for the rectorship in 1902 was considered as a consolation prize for his having been passed over at the time of creation of the Diocese of Altoona in 1901, when Eugene Garvey of Scranton was instead selected as the first bishop of the new see. In 1908, Sheedy was considered for the position of coadjutor archbishop of San Francisco. Bishop Thomas Conaty suggested his old friend’s name to Archbishop Patrick Riordan, who wrote to Father Daniel E. Hudson, C.S.C., editor of *The Ave Maria* magazine at the University of Notre Dame, inquiring as to his knowledge of Sheedy and observing that he had heard a great deal about the Pennsylvania priest, all favorable.86 Edward J. Hanna of Rochester was instead selected as auxiliary bishop to Riordan in 1912, becoming archbishop of San Francisco after Riordan’s death in 1914.

By then, priests promoted to the episcopate were typically young (in their 40s) and increasingly American-born rather than foreign-born. For Sheedy, then in his mid-50s, the episcopal mitre and crosier were no longer within reach.

**Personal Side**
Father Sheedy was not “all work and no play.” He was an avid golfer and a member of the U.S. Senior Golf Association. His skill was reported by the *New York Herald* in 1920 in these words:

**Makes 11th Hole in One. Special to the Sun and New York Herald.**
Pinehurst, N.C., Feb. 24 — Father Morgan Sheedy of Altoona, Pa., holed out in one at the eleventh hole on the No. 1 course here to-day. The distance is 153 yards. This is the second time that an ace has been registered on this particular hole this season.87

Shortly thereafter, the press reported that Sheedy participated in a lecture series initiated by the Pinehurst Forum at Pinehurst, while simultaneously hitting the greens: “The United States Navy has furnished a golfing delegation in the persons of Rear Admiral Hugh Rodman and Commander Galwood, and the Church is efficiently represented by Bishop Joseph G. Anderson and Father Morgan Sheedy.”88

While he was known as an author and scholar, Sheedy’s secular obituary noted that he was a Catholic priest “known and beloved” by many in the Altoona community for his spiritual guidance and “his gift of the human touch.”89 His love of beauty was evidenced by his construction of the massive Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament which dominates the city where he labored for forty-five years.90

Father Sheedy was also an inveterate traveler, both domestically and internationally. His domestic travels were typically made in connection with his many lectures and convention addresses, given primarily but not exclusively in the eastern United States. He also travelled to Europe with priest friends,91 and returned to visit in Ireland several times in the early 1900s. By the 1920s he had become a yearly visitor to Bermuda in the Caribbean.92

**Milestones: Catholic Newspaper Recognition of Sheedy**
Western Pennsylvania Catholic newspapers recognized Father Sheedy’s significant contributions on the occasions of his major priestly anniversaries — 25th, 40th, 50th, and 60th. The *Pittsburgh Catholic* celebrated his silver jubilee of priestly ordination in its September 25, 1901, issue with a column devoted to the priest’s accomplishments. The article was accompanied by a rarity for the newspaper — a large photograph of Sheedy.93

Pittsburgh’s second Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Ob-
Sheedy’s golden jubilee as a priest was celebrated in 1926 by the *Pittsburgh Catholic*, notwithstanding the fact that he had left the city of Pittsburgh 32 years earlier and had ceased to be a priest of the Pittsburgh diocese 25 years earlier. In a lengthy editorial, the *Catholic* addressed the major themes in Sheedy’s life, recalling how his unending myriad activities had kept him in the minds of Pittsburghers as if he had never left the Steel City:

**Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, LL.D.**

On Thursday, September 23, a venerable and beloved priest, for many years affiliated with the diocese of Pittsburgh, and in the formation of the diocese of Altoona, ipso facto located in its boundary, the rector of St. John’s Altoona, the Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood. To our older members, particularly in the City of Pittsburgh, the name and memory of Morgan M. Sheedy is a precious and revered one. Among the candidates who on that day were ordained by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Tuigg, of sainted memory, none stood higher than this grand young man, who consecrated his life to the service of the Church. He brought to his high vocation the fullness of its riches; he gave a mind endowed with splendid intellectual attainment; his education was a finished one, complete, sound and flawless. It may be said of him that from the day he went forth clothed with the priesthood of Melchisedek, and in all the fifty years of his valiant, vigorous, strong ministry, he ever was true to his mission, a fearless, dauntless upholder of the Cross.

Father Sheedy was never a laggard. He was never in the background. To shirk a duty, to deafen to a call — were not part of his makeup. Wherever and whenever a work was to be done and he was of help: ever in the front he was found.

What a grand lover of Catholic education he was! How he strove to join our youth in circles, wherein combined in strength and union, they could reach Olympian heights — “*Ad Altiora Votis*.”

In his humble and unpretentious parish in the Point district of Pittsburgh, he raised it from coldness and apathy, by hard struggle, until he resurrected the old historic spot, and made it glow with a new-born life. When *THE CATHOLIC* passed from the hands of Jacob Porter, he was a sustaining force to the new management. In the halcyon days of the Columbus Club, he was the head and brains of the fine field in its literary and educative pursuits. For years in the Sunday edition of the *Pittsburgh Post* his erudite, thoughtful column on the current topics of the day was a rich treat and a mine of thought and resolve to the reader. The jewels of Father Sheedy’s mind were given lavishly, and to the one superlative end “*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* — to “The Greater Glory of God.”

A cardinal virtue is Temperance. Prohibition never accomplished so well and effectually, the work that in all his priestly years, enabled this follower of Father Mathew to raise the submerged wreck. It would take pages to tell the grand mission in this sacred career of Father Sheedy; and this, without disparaging his brethren coadjutors in the priesthood, and the faithful laymen at his back.

So might we go on, on this beautiful anniversary of fifty rounded out years and tell the fruitful story of a life which is a joy and pleasure to one who knew him well, from the days of his curacy in Parkers Landing, until the present one in the Mountain City. He was missed from our great city, but duty’s call exacts sacrifice. The mellowed years have come...
in dear Father Sheedy’s life. Like grains of a celestial rosary, they are recorded in the Book of life.

Dear Father Sheedy, until the victory is won, the crown gained, the shadow of earth’s pilgrimage deepened into the dawn of the celestial morn, and the reward of the faithful servant at the triumphant Cross stretched hands of the eternal High Priest — Christ the King.

Sheedy’s sixtieth ordination anniversary was celebrated in September 1936 with a front-page article in the *Pittsburgh Catholic* entitled “Father Sheedy to Mark Anniversary — Former Pastor of Point Church Will Be 60 Years Ordained on Wednesday, Sept. 23.” The years were passing and a long life was coming to a close.

Death and Legacy

Father Sheedy died on October 25, 1939, at age 86, having served as a priest for over 63 years. He is appropriately buried in a specially constructed vault midway in the courtyard between the Altoona cathedral and the rectory. The vault was originally covered by a large stone set at an angle so that passersby could read the inscription on the tablet which was engraved with a brief resume of Father Sheedy’s life. Later, the tablet was replaced by a tall Celtic Cross, inscribed with the verse “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings and that preacheth peace” (Isaiah, Chapter 52, Verse 7). At the base of the cross is inscribed the name of Morgan M. Sheedy, with the dates of his birth, ordination, rectorship of the cathedral, and death. The cross is illuminated at night.

A measure of the importance of Father Sheedy lies in the recognition that while few priests in his time received publicity in religious and secular newspapers, Sheedy did — and was unique in the extent of his biography and its dissemination nationwide. A bishop might achieve such recognition but rarely did a priest — which presents the question: had Father Sheedy remained in Ireland, would he not have entered the episcopate as did all of his Irish mentors? Sheedy’s disinclination for ecclesiastical preferment produced a priest totally devoted to the service of the Catholic laity — not just in Western Pennsylvania but also at the national level.

His death removed the last living link with the original seminary of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, St. Michael’s Seminary established by Bishop Michael O’Connor in 1843. The St. Michael’s Seminary Alumni Association kept the memory alive after the 1877 closing of the seminary, until death claimed its former students one by one. The next-to-last student, Father Robert McDonald of St. Thomas Church in Braddock, died in February 1939. The death of Father Sheedy, the last living student (albeit briefly) and seminary professor, just eight months later closed that chapter of diocesan history.
While the Altoona cathedral stands as a permanent visible monument in stone to this zealous priest’s industriousness, Father Sheedy’s other great contribution to the strengthening of Catholic life in the United States was his critical role in developing Catholic Reading Circles throughout the country, leading the growth of the Catholic Educational Union, and organizing the Catholic Summer School of America — all as a counterweight to Chautauqua and its national Movement. His roles as president and as board trustee in the last two Catholic organizations, coupled with his supportive literary publications, displayed the full range of his talents harnessed to the service of his fellow Catholics.

American Educational Developments in the late Nineteenth Century

The conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865 brought peace to the United States, enabling leaders to address the cultural, educational, and religious needs of a society that was encountering massive immigration, religious tensions, rapid industrialization, and widening economic disparities. Education was seen as the key to addressing the needs of the masses. As compulsory education was not yet required in all states, educational efforts were often a private matter. Philanthropy spurred popular education. Andrew Carnegie financed the opening of thousands of local libraries. Book salesmen appeared in house-to-house canvassing. Newspapers multiplied, especially those catering to the sensational. Lectures were a significant part of popular education. Learned societies, reflecting industrial development and research, were formed. Literary societies became an increasing feature of community life. In short, an “educational renaissance” was under way. These developments were seen as a cultural antidote to existing social activities such as saloons, pool halls, roller skating rinks, and secret societies.

There was Catholic interest in these new developments — for young men as well as for young women. Various Catholic associations developed. The Third Plenary Council of the American hierarchy in 1884 insisted upon a sound popular education, encouraged the opening of Catholic schools, and noted that education did not end with the termination of formal schooling. Catholics were urged to continue reading, especially history and biography, and to band together in societies to develop the faith.

The bishops saw the broader cultural developments and recognized the challenges presented by militant Protestant educational groups, such as Chautauqua, which had opened a decade earlier in 1874 and was already an established and popular Institution and national Movement. By the 1880s, the “mother site” was internationally famous and had spread nationwide, utilizing a four-year reading course that even addressed unschooled reader-students. Diplomas and other forms of recognition were an integral element of the Chautauqua plan. The Institution’s historian concluded that half of the students participated as individuals, while the other half were united in groups termed “local Circles.” Three-fourths were women. By 1892, one hundred thousand students were enrolled in the Circles, with half of those between the ages of 30 and 40.

Chautauqua invested in its own printing press and published The Chautauquan, a monthly magazine beginning in 1880 to supplement the regular reading courses and strengthen ties among the various “local Circles.” While the importance of Chautauqua and its existential threat to Catholicism will be addressed at a later point in this article, it is necessary to first present early Catholic educational developments.

Catholic Reading Circles — Early Developments

Chautauqua’s summer Assemblies and its Reading Circle Movement did not go unnoticed by Catholics. In the late 1880s, local Catholic Reading Circles came to exist in a small number of communities, organized by enterprising priests and laity. The estimated number was less than a hundred, and each operated on its own — in some instances modeling aspects of the Chautauqua-style Circles since there was no formal “Catholic” model to follow.

The spread of these Reading Circles among Catholics in that time period reflected the hunger among Catholics for basic Catholic literature since Catholic reading materials were excluded from the curriculum of public schools — which was the only educational system available to Catholics who lacked parochial schools or private academies. The existence of Catholic authors, books that included the Catholic contributions to history and culture, and texts with a Catholic point of view were unknown to most Catholic youth. Catholic Reading Circles were initiated to remedy
this critical religious and educational need.

In those days, the organization of Reading Circles among Catholics occurred informally — an announcement by a pastor from the pulpit or word of mouth among parishioners would prompt an initial meeting. Extant newspapers do not evidence significant publicity about Catholic Reading Circles until 1889.

Newspapers reported the organization of Catholic Circles in such disparate locations as Cincinnati [established personally by the archbishop] (July 1889), Buffalo (February 1890), Lima, Ohio (February 1891), women at St. Peter Hospital in Brooklyn (May 1891), and St. Paul (November 1891). New York City alone had several by December 1889: St. Patrick’s Cathedral library, the Ozanam Center, and the alunnae of Visitation Academy.104

Among these early local Catholic Circles was one established in Youngstown, Ohio by layman Warren E. Mosher. In fall 1885, Mosher had been invited by a friend to join a Reading Circle that followed the Chautauqua plan of instruction. Mosher remained in that Circle for four years, became familiar with the Chautauqua system, served as the group’s presiding officer, and in his own words — “from that time the desire took possession of me to institute such a system of popular education for our Catholic people.”105

At the beginning of April 1889, Mosher formed a Catholic Reading Circle called the “Home Reading Circle.”106 He planned to organize additional Catholic Reading Circles.

The Catholic Educational Union
A mere two weeks later, on April 16, 1889, Mosher — after having consulted with his pastor, Father James Mears of St. Columba parish in Youngstown — announced formation of a “union” of the existing disparate Catholic Reading Circles to be known as the Catholic Educational Union (C.E.U.).

From the period 1889-1890 forward, the initiation of Catholic Reading Circles and the growth of the C.E.U. — with the latter functioning as both an organizing entity and the developer of the framework that the Circles would adopt — occurred simultaneously. Keeping in mind that this was a dual process, this article shall nonetheless endeavor to present the distinct elements of each of these two developments separately.

Mosher’s latest action was promptly reported in Western Pennsylvania newspapers:

Catholic Educational Union.

Pittsburg, May 1. — A Youngstown, O., special says:

Leading Catholic divines and educators have formed

the Catholic Educational Union, the aim of the organization being to give those who find it difficult to pursue their studies after leaving school an opportunity to follow a prescribed course of reading which combines secular and religious literature, and in general to encourage individual study in an approved and systematic course. It is proposed to establish local branches in every city and town.107

The C.E.U., based in Youngstown, unsurprisingly elected officers who were local Youngstown residents: two priests as president (Father James Mears, aforementioned pastor of Mosher’s parish) and vice president, respectively. Two laymen were elected as treasurer and secretary, with the latter position filled by Warren Mosher. The organizers considered the group to be temporary, in light of their intended plan to place control in the hands of nationally prominent Catholic educators.108 In fact, the C.E.U. would last for more than two decades as a major force in Catholic educational efforts. It would come to conduct annual national conventions in order to bond the local Circles together, communicate a uniform message to all, and develop leadership talent at the local level.

By October 1889, Mosher had stimulated the formation of new Catholic Reading Circles under the umbrella of the C.E.U. At that point, those Circles entered upon a
reading program that Mosher prescribed. From then until January 1891, he maintained the connection between the Circles and the C.E.U. by means of monthly leaflets that contained the order of directed readings. In January 1891, Mosher initiated publication of a monthly journal as the official organ of the C.E.U. with respect to all participating Catholic Reading Circles. He modeled his approach on Chautauqua’s success: form Reading Circles, establish an organizational structure (the “Union”) and an instructional reading program, and work toward the ultimate objective of organizing a Summer School for Catholics. Mosher had correctly concluded that the historical pattern of earlier failed attempts to develop Catholic Reading Circles or to sustain them once formed, and the inability of a single small religious order (such as the Paulists) to reach the growing American Catholic population, necessitated the formation of a national organization that would promote development of Reading Circles and oversee a structured educational program for their participants.

Between 1889 and 1900 Catholic Reading Circles would come to be present in most cities and many towns. A family gathered in a midwestern farmhouse would be treated as a “Circle.” All the Circles would animate Catholics with a desire for self-improvement. The Circles themselves were an outcome of the general educational movement of the times in the United States. One historian described the phenomenon thusly:

The Reading Circles were largely a movement of the laity, led by able lay and clerical leaders. Through the Catholic Reading Circle Review … the members of the Catholic Educational Union … received a great stimulus to their own interests in self improvement. From [this] magazine the various members of the different circles learned of each other’s activities and developed an interest in their fellow Catholics and in their Church.

While the idea of a Catholic Reading Circle was Warren Mosher’s and the strategy to organize such Circles into a Union was also his, it fell to Father Morgan Sheedy to utilize his educational talents to formulate a detailed methodology to be used in the operation of Catholic Reading Circles. Let us now turn to the philosophical concept and methodological organization that Mosher and Sheedy would develop and articulate.

**Early Concept of the Catholic Educational Union in 1890**

Warren Mosher began to attract national publicity by 1890, when his name started to appear with some frequency. He began to address various Catholic groups outside of Ohio to encourage them to do three things: (1) develop local Catholic Reading Circles, (2) join the Catholic Educational Union which he had formed, and (3) promote development of a Catholic Summer School, akin to the Chautauqua Institution which most Americans were aware of if not actually participating in.

Mosher delivered a speech in May 1890 — just one year after his formation of a “union” of Catholic Circles — to his Youngstown Circle. The gathering was the first of what would become annual conventions for the C.E.U., albeit initially an assembly of the Youngstown Catholic Reading Circle along with representatives from some other Reading Circles.

Mosher's speech was published in several secular and Catholic newspapers throughout the country because it was the first comprehensive public statement as to the purposes of both Catholic Reading Circles and the Catholic Educational Union, and the relationship between the two. The Irish Standard in St. Paul-Minneapolis reprinted Mosher’s speech in its entirety, from which the following excerpts are taken:

This institution [C.E.U.] is called Catholic because it advocates strictly Catholic principles and aims to advance the interests of the Catholic church in lines consistent with her teaching and it is also called Catholic because it is universal. The scope of the plan is not restricted by boundary lines, nor is any Catholic who desires to aid the cause or who aspires to self-improvement debarred from participating in its fellowship. It is educational because it aims to improve the mind and instill into the hearts of its members a love of truth, virtue and intelligence. It is aptly termed a union because it aims to unite in communion the earnest young Catholics of the whole country who are ambitious to devote the spare moments of daily life to the pursuits of knowledge and the cultivation of the intellect.

Mosher then continued:

The Catholic Educational Union is, in fact, a co-operative educational institution in which each member contributes, according to his talents and ability, to the good of the society at large as well as to those with whom he is in approximate association. ... Definite courses of reading are indicated having unity and connection, arranged in progressive order and pursued in a systematic manner. These prescribed courses embrace entertaining and instructive readings in history, literature — secular and religious — and in physical, mental and moral science. They are
carefully arranged and prepared so as to be adapted to the average young man or woman as well as to the close student. The books used indicate the line of thought and serve to arouse an interest for more extended readings and study.\textsuperscript{114}

Mosher also explained how Reading Circles fit into the educational plan:

Reading Circles are the principal means of carrying out the general idea. They adopt the books recommended by the main organization, whose counsellors are experienced educators, and read them in the order and manner outlined. Their meetings are conducted so as to afford the greatest assistance to those interested. Literary and musical programmes [sic] are provided, consisting of papers, essays and talks supplementary to the reading, besides exercises of a social character. The formation of Reading Circles is urged because they afford mutual help and encouragement in the studies and form ties of pure social friendship.\textsuperscript{115}

Continuing, Mosher addressed why the Catholic Educational Union had been formed just one year earlier:

Just one year ago the Catholic Educational Union was organized, after having received careful and deliberate consideration by its projectors, who recognized the necessity of counteracting the evil influence of the sensational and pernicious literature of our times by fostering and encouraging a love of good reading, and also the great need of an institution that would help to check the growing tendency of rationalism, indifferentism and unbelief.\textsuperscript{116}

Thus, the contemplated effort was to educate the Catholic masses through the means of a popular plan. Mosher acknowledged that the Youngstown Reading Circle’s adoption of a plan had stimulated formation of additional Reading Circles throughout the country:

The first Circle to show its earnest and practical appreciation of the plan was the Home Circle of Youngstown, which now contains over 100 members. Other cities quickly responded to the suggestion of the Catholic Educational Union. When the regular course of reading was taken up in October last, the very first to send in his allegiance to the cause, with a roll of more than twenty members, was the Rev. Michael A. Lambing of Scottsdale, Pa. Then in rapid succession followed Meadville, Oil City, Derry and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania … New York … Ohio … Michigan … Wisconsin … Maryland … Georgia … Texas … Missouri … Nebraska … Kansas … New Mexico … California … Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{117}

Next, Mosher addressed an issue underlying the reluctance of some Catholic Reading Circles to join the Union since many Catholics had the erroneous idea that by joining Reading Circles and identifying those Circles with the Union presupposed “ignorance” on their part, while others would rather “remain ignorant” than to admit that they were in need of instruction. He termed such an attitude “foolish pride” and “absurd.” He went on to add:

Many educated Catholics have entered into the spirit of the plan … and have organized circles in which are found together professional men, business men, teachers, mechanics, and persons from every walk in life. Those who have … received opportunities of advanced education, sound training and good social and moral influence, could not do a more commendable act than to ally themselves with Reading Circles and aid in lifting up their less fortunate brethren…. Good example, fellowship, discussions and interchange of ideas are the elements which constitute the educational advantages of Reading Circles.\textsuperscript{118}

Mosher continued by noting that the Union did not conflict with existing Catholic associations such as lyceums, institutions, and youth groups.\textsuperscript{119} These entities maintained literary societies that existed in “name only” that could be reinvigorated by adopting the Union’s educational plan. Since many of these had libraries and meeting spaces, those resources should be shared through outreach that the Union would facilitate. Women should also be admitted to all-male groups. The speech concluded with recognition that the study of history, literature, art, and nature would lead all to acknowledge the divine presence in human life.\textsuperscript{120}

Mosher’s efforts at the national level were exemplified in one of his earliest public forays — a lecture delivered at the convention of the Catholic Young Men’s National Union\textsuperscript{121} in Washington, D.C., in October 1890. The press reported his address in these words:

The [Catholic Educational] Union has among its members a number of able orators not the least among whom is Mr. Warren P. [sic] Mosher, who made such an interesting address at the afternoon session yesterday on the question of the interest that is taken everywhere in Reading Circles and in other educational methods. Mr. Mosher is secretary of the Catholic Educational Union of Youngstown, Ohio. He has one specialty and is devoting all his energies to have it adopted by the [Catholic Young Men’s
National Union, viz., Reading Circles, somewhat on the Chautauqua plan. He is an eloquent speaker and will present his favorite theme with all the graces of oratory and the force of a profound conviction of its usefulness.122

Although newspapers did not mention Warren Mosher, or a Catholic Reading Circle in Youngstown, or formation of a Catholic Educational Union until spring 1889, thereafter and especially as of 1890, increasing newspaper coverage marked the arrival of Mosher and his ideas on the national scene. But Mosher did not arrive alone. Father Morgan Sheedy was with him — suggesting that the two were already acquainted at least by early 1890. The relative proximity of Youngstown to Pittsburgh, the fact that Mosher’s pastor and Father Sheedy were both Irish-born, and the shared interests of both men and their participation in other Catholic groups that would have enabled personal acquaintanceship and the recognition by both layman and priest that there was an overriding national need to evangelize Catholics in their faith in the face of a concerted Protestant effort to “Americanize” Catholic immigrants — drew Mosher and Sheedy together in work that would unite them until Mosher’s untimely death in 1906.

**The Methodology of a Successful Reading Circle**

Father Morgan Sheedy provided Catholic Reading Circles with a specific ten-point program to achieve successful results at each weekly meeting with participants limited to between thirty and fifty:

1. Open and close with a musical number
2. Respond to the roll call with quotations from classical authors
3. Employ “light” literary features where possible
4. Give a brief presentation on a current topic
5. Deliver a recitation or oration
6. Present book reviews of both a current novel and a Catholic book or literary masterpiece
7. Allow five minutes of readings from current magazines
8. Use a connected series of topics, or special books, for the core study
9. Use a question box, with the answers — devised by a committee — given to questions placed in the question box at the previous meeting
10. Include a social break of ten to fifteen minutes in the middle of a program or follow the meeting with a reception designed around a lecturer or prominent visitor.123

Father Sheedy articulated the benefits of the Catholic Reading Circle Movement in these words:

… there has been no movement that aims at doing so much for the intellectual and social advancement of our young people as the Reading Circle Movement. For its purpose is to awaken an interest in the rich heritage that is ours in the world of letters, philosophy and art; to create a love of good reading among our people to encourage the diffusion of sound literature; it aims especially to give those who desire to pursue their studies, after leaving school an opportunity to follow prescribed courses of approved reading; to enable others who have made considerable progress in education to review their past studies, and particularly to encourage individual home reading and study in systematic and Catholic lines. It is especially designed to meet the requirements of those who have had limited educational advantages and who are desirous of self-improvement. It aims to unite earnest young Catholic men and women of the land who are ambitious to devote some spare moments of daily life to the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of the intellect.124

Sheedy concluded with this observation:

Ten young men, it has been said, acting with a common and intelligent purpose and in earnest about it, can rock an empire. What, then, may not ten thousand Catholic Reading Circles throughout the different dioceses of the United States with a common intelligent purpose effect?125

**Mosher Initiates Publication of a Journal**

In January 1891, Warren Mosher — who was serving as secretary of the C.E.U. — initiated publication of a monthly magazine entitled *The Catholic Reading Circle Review*.126 A year’s subscription cost $2. This journal was the official organ of the C.E.U. and served as the guide for local Reading Circles. It would carry out an instructional plan and unite the local Circles into a national group. Like the *Chautauquan*, it publicized the activities of local Circles and provided supplemental readings and guidance. The magazine’s novelty was inclusion of a “Teachers’ Council” section consisting of articles designed to aid teachers with guidance on student behavior and other pedagogical problems. The counsellors were a “Who’s Who” of prominent educators, religious and lay, from New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, St. Paul, and New Orleans.127

It would shortly also become the official organ of the Catholic Summer School of America. This one publication thus integrated the educational plans of the Catholic Reading Circles, the C.E.U., and the Catholic Summer School of America.
Mosher’s new journal assured that his name would now appear regularly in print. He was the editor. Father Morgan Sheedy authored an article for the first issue; indeed, he would be one of the journal’s regular and most prolific contributors. Press releases containing extracts from the Review’s content provided an even broader dissemination of Reading Circle and C.E.U. information to both Catholic and secular newspapers nationwide. Typical was this article that appeared in the Catholic Union and Times of Buffalo:

The first number of The Catholic Reading Circle Review has just appeared. It is published at Youngstown, O., and Warren E. Mosher is editor. The Review is to be the special organ of the Catholic Educational Union, and judging by the first number, which is filled with good material, it will find a field large enough to ensure prosperity. Among contributors to the initial issue are Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy,....

The publication would subsequently change its title to Mosher’s Magazine (1898-1902) and then to The Champlain Educator (1903-1906). Mosher’s journal is indispensable in understanding the intertwined development of both the Catholic Reading Circles (as the phrase appears in the journal’s very title) and the Catholic Summer School of America (whose story is told not just through narrative text but also through photographs, illustrations, financial information, and building plans). The journal issues were:

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The toll upon Warren Mosher from his years of sole editorship of the journal, extensive travels, and the onset of heart problems did not escape notice by the officers of the Catholic Educational Union or the Catholic Summer School of America. Monsignor Michael J. Lavelle, president of the board of trustees of the Summer School and rector of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, drove the decision to (1) place the journal on a firm financial footing and (2) assure an uninterrupted editorial arrangement. Accordingly, Mosher’s Magazine carried a January 1902 announcement that it would incorporate in New York state as a capital stock company in the amount of $50,000, with shares to be sold publicly at $10 each. A three-person Editorial Department was formed with Warren Mosher as head, with two assistants. Pittsburghers, including Father Regis Canevin, were among the initial stock subscribers.

The journal was published in Youngstown until Mosher moved to New York state five years before his death. At that time, the Mosher Publishing Company was established at 39 E. 42nd Street in Manhattan. What began as a monthly...
publication evolved into a quarterly in its final years. The journal ceased publication following Mosher's death in 1906.

The Inter-Relationship of Reading Circles, C.E.U., and Summer School

The day after Mosher's second annual C.E.U. convention in July 1891, *The Pittsburg Dispatch* carried a brief article that evidenced the elision of three distinct concepts into one Catholic educational effort:

**A Catholic Chautauqua**

**The Young Educational Union of That Church Meets at Youngstown**

*Special Telegram to The Dispatch*

Youngstown, July 30.—The annual meeting of the Catholic Educational Union, organized here two years ago, and which now has branches in more than 100 cities, was held here to-day. The society is on the same plan as the Chautauqua L.S.C., and is designed for Catholics. It has the endorsement of Cardinal Gibbons, Bishop Keane and other high dignitaries of the Catholic church.

At the session this afternoon, Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, of Pittsburg, was elected President … and Warren E. Mosher of Youngstown, Secretary. Among those elected to serve on the Board of Councelors [sic] were … Rev. John Murphy, President of the Holy Ghost College, Pittsburg.…

The following course of reading was adopted: English history, English literature, History of the Church of England, contemporaneous Irish and secular church history, geology, and revelation. The following supplemental studies will be included in the *Catholic Review*, the official organ published here: English and Irish politics, studies in composition and oratory, and relations between science and the Bible. The term begins October 1 and closes July 12. Among other matter discussed was that of a summer educational retreat.

*The Kansas Catholic*'s coverage of the C.E.U. convention provided detail about the qualifications that Father Sheedy would bring to his new role leading the Union:

The Rev. Edward Mears [of Youngstown], who has held the office of president since the organization of the Union … has been succeeded by the Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, of Pittsburg, Pa. Rev. Sheedy has a national reputation as an able and zealous advocate of education and temperance, and now fills the important and honorable position of vice president of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America.

The Big Three: Sheedy, Mosher, and Laughlin

From the inception of these efforts, it was clearly recognized that success would depend on a core group of educators who would formulate, guide, and coordinate the efforts of the Circles and the C.E.U. in order to realize the capstone of their work: creation of a Catholic Summer School. The organizations, while separate and distinct, would collaborate through key shared officers. The history of the Catholic Reading Circle Movement authored by Father Sheedy in a 1904 article in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* confirms that this was the operative plan of Sheedy and Mosher.

What emerged in the progressive development of the Reading Circles, the C.E.U., and the Catholic Summer School of America was the collaboration of three men — Father Morgan M. Sheedy, Warren E. Mosher, and Monsignor James F. Laughlin — who worked to achieve three goals: (1) develop an instructional framework for Catholic Reading Circles, (2) design a structure to foster and unite local Circles through
a monthly educational journal and annual conventions, and (3) organize a Catholic counterpart to Chautauqua in the form of the Catholic Summer School of America.

A biography of Father Morgan Sheedy was provided above. A brief biography of each of the other two collaborators is appropriate at this point:

**James F. Laughlin** (1851-1911) was a native of Auburn, New York. He attended the Urban College of the Propaganda in Rome and was ordained in the Eternal City in April 1874. Incardinated into the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, he was assigned as a professor of canon law and moral theology at St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook. He became chancellor in 1892, was made a domestic prelate with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor in 1899, and was named pastor of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Philadelphia in 1901. With Father Sheedy and Warren Mosher, Laughlin was one of the few long-termers who served on the board of trustees of the Catholic Educational Union. Laughlin was a founder and trustee of the Catholic Summer School of America and its second president. A prolific author of church history, he was co-editor of the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*. Laughlin would die prematurely from rheumatoid arthritis at age 59 in 1911.136

**Warren E. Mosher** (1860-1906) was a native of Albany, New York. Moving to Youngstown, he introduced the Knights of Columbus to Ohio and became their first State Deputy there in 1898. Mosher was active in Catholic educational efforts, organizing a Catholic Reading Circle in Youngstown in early 1889. He was largely self-educated, though he had a private education in his youth. Mosher initiated publication of *The Catholic Reading Circle Review* in 1891. With Father Sheedy and Monsignor Laughlin, Mosher was one of the few long-termers who served on the boards of trustees of the Catholic Educational Union and the Catholic Summer School of America. He was the secretary of the Catholic Summer School of America and would be regarded as the “father” of the Summer School because he originated the idea for such an institution. His labor was purely unselfish as he received no salary for his Summer School work. Mosher returned to live in New York state in 1901, settling in New Rochelle (Westchester County). He died suddenly at his home in March 1906, at the age of 45 of heart disease with which he had struggled for the last four years of his life. He was survived by a wife and six children. Mosher’s journal did not survive his death.137

The background of each of the three would prove crucial to the accomplishments of the group, and the existing role of each would explain how their individual histories would help direct their future actions for the remainder of their lives. These were the “core” three of the few individuals who served virtually life-long terms as members of the board of trustees of the Catholic Educational Union and the board of trustees of the soon-to-be-formed Catholic Summer School of America.138

Father Sheedy would attribute the later success of the Catholic Summer School of America to the Catholic Reading Circle Movement — in which, as a movement, dozens and dozens of unrelated groups were shaped into the Catholic Educational Union. This reflects a two-step process, albeit occurring almost simultaneously in a dual development. Let us now turn in sequence to a further examination of the Catholic Educational Union and then to the Catholic Summer School of America — and explore further the roles of the three individuals who were key to the success of all these inter-related organizations.139

**The Second C.E.U. Convention — Father Sheedy Takes Control in 1891**

The C.E.U.’s second annual convention was held in Youngstown on July 29, 1891. Representatives of some 100 local Circles attended. Delegates elected Father Morgan Sheedy of Pittsburgh as president, while Warren Mosher continued as secretary. Sheedy’s influence was apparent in the election of Father John Murphy, C.S.Sp., president of Holy Ghost College [today, Duquesne University] in Pittsburgh, to the Board of Counselors. The convention concluded with discussion of the ultimate objective: “Among other matters discussed was that of a summer educational retreat.”140 One Pittsburgh newspaper’s account of the convention headlined its article as “A Catholic Chautauqua.”141 Catholic newspaper accounts provided much more detail than their secular counterparts. Buffalo’s *Catholic Union and Times* noted that at that meeting:

The Rev. Edward Mears, who has held the office of president since the organization of the union … has been succeeded by the Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, of Pittsburgh, Pa. Father Sheedy has a national reputation as an able and zealous advocate of education and temperance….142

The Catholic Educational Union adopted a four-year plan of reading. The enrollment charge was fifty cents, with the course running from October 1 until July 1, with an examination given at the end of the school year. It had the backing of Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore.

Thus, the stage was set for Father Sheedy and Warren Mosher to advance plans to enhance operations of the Catholic Reading Circles and to bring to fruition the dream of a Catholic Summer School. The objectives were two-fold:
(1) enlarge the Catholic Educational Union as the structural framework to stimulate the formation of, guide, and direct the nascent Catholic Reading Circles, and
(2) use the union of Catholic Reading Circles to organize a Catholic Summer School.

All would be accomplished within the brief span of three years — from the 1889 activation of Youngstown’s Catholic Reading Circle to the opening in 1892 of a Catholic Summer School.

Before proceeding to the actual organization of the Catholic Summer School, it is necessary to examine the early organizational development of Catholic Reading Circles and the Catholic Educational Union in Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.

A Catholic Reading Circle and the C.E.U. as Twin Developments in Pittsburgh

The first step in organizing a Catholic Reading Circle in Pittsburgh and joining the parent Catholic Educational Union occurred on September 29, 1891. On that date, the first Catholic Reading Circle was formed, and the group promptly decided to join the nascent union of other Circles in the United States. The Preventor Catholic carried a brief account of the evening meeting and the decisions reached by the participants:

Catholic Reading Circle.
The attendance at Duquesne Hall on the evening of the 29th ult., for the purpose of forming a Catholic Reading Circle in this city was largely attended. Mr. Warren E. Mosher of Youngstown, the organizer of these circles, was present and addressed the meeting. He explained the purpose and plans of the union, the advantages to be derived from membership therein, and gave our young men some excellent advice. A circle was formed under the auspices of the Father Mathew Association of St. Mary of Mercy. Too much praise cannot be given to the movement, and we hope it may succeed.

Secular papers provided a more detailed account of the meeting and the educational underpinning of the initiative. An excerpt from The Pittsburgh Post’s lengthy article gives a richer history of the September 29 event:

The Catholics of Pittsburgh have taken the first steps toward the formation of a literary and educational union in Western Pennsylvania. At a public meeting held last evening in Duquesne Hall, Penn Avenue, the aims and objects of the union were fully explained and the Father Mathew Association of Pittsburgh announced its intention of formal-ly adopting the code of the Catholic Educational Union of North America. … Rev. M. M. Sheedy, as president of the Catholic Educational Union, was unanimously elected chairman. … Warren E. Mosher, secretary of the union, delivered an address on the methods and results of reading circles among members of the Catholic religion. Incidentally, Mr. Mosher said that the aim of the C.E.U. was to educate the Catholic masses in a most Catholic manner. The methods by which the C.E.U. proposed to accomplish its object were carefully prepared reading courses and wisely selected books. … Where several persons in the same parish were able to assemble together they might form a local reading circle for mutual help and encouragement. At the conclusion of each year’s reading, printed books containing examination questions on the studies of the year were to be distributed among the members of the various unions. Every member answering 80 per cent of the questions correctly would receive a diploma. The annual fee would be 25 cents, except in case of clubs, when 10 cents per capita would be the fee required.

The Post also noted that at the meeting, Mosher explained the multi-year program:

• Year 1: classic history, literature, physiology, hygiene, Christian doctrine
• Year 2: medieval history, the Reformation, geology, astronomy
• Year 3: English and Irish history, English literature, electricity, art, general science
• Year 4: American church history, political economy, chemistry.

Mosher also stated that the Catholic Reading Circles were intended to draw Catholic young men from the saloon and the poolroom. His speech was “loudly applauded.” The secretary of the three-year-old Father Mathew [Abstinence] Association then spoke and noted that since more than half of its meeting time was devoted to literary study and discussion, his Association would join the C.E.U. The meeting closed with an address by Father Regis Canevin, cathedral rector and future bishop of Pittsburgh, who earnestly advised all in the audience to join a Catholic Reading Circle within the Catholic Educational Union.

This organizational effort in Pittsburgh was an initiative of Father Sheedy, pastor of St. Mary of Mercy Church at the Point, who would oversee the Reading Circle. In the 20-year period between 1891 and 1911, the Pittsburgh Catholic would carry 31 articles on Catholic Reading Circles — almost all of those appeared in print prior to 1899 during the period
of the Movement’s greatest activity.

In the ensuing period, Catholic Reading Circles were organized in the Pittsburgh area — some were based on geography (e.g., proximity to an available public school building in the city of Duquesne); others were established within a parish (e.g., St. Mary of Mercy parish); and additional Circles were organized within existing social, religious, literary, and ethnic societies for their own members. The Pittsburgh Post noted that Circles were formed at the Ursuline Academy in Oakland, St. Mary Convent (Motherhouse) of the Sisters of Mercy on Webster Avenue, St. Brigid Church in the Hill District, and two at St. Paul Cathedral (Downtown).

Father Sheedy and Warren Mosher continued their collaborative approach to grow the Reading Circles. The Pittsburgh Catholic would report that at the 1897 Summer School, Father Sheedy presided at a meeting of the Philadelphia Reading Circle. The paper noted that Sheedy remained chairman of the board of trustees of the C.E.U., which then comprised 460 Reading Circles with a membership of 15,000 — most of whom were in the United States, while others resided in Canada and in South America. Growth of the Circles and the Union was explosive!

The Reading Circles’ Objective: Establishment of a Catholic Summer School

These Catholic Reading Circles would grow into the Catholic Summer School, due to national events that had occurred in 1889 just as Warren Mosher was organizing his Circle and forming the Union in Youngstown. In that year, Cardinal Gibbons hosted the centennial celebration of establishment of the American hierarchy in Baltimore with the appointment of John Carroll as the first American bishop (1789). A Lay Congress accompanied the religious celebration. That was followed by the dedication of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. There was general agreement that Catholic educational efforts warranted a more extensive training program. Father Sheedy and other educators envisioned that the Catholic Reading Circle Movement would establish an intense summer educational program, as the next step in this progressive development.

By 1892, the success of popular Catholic education through Reading Circles and various lecture series was apparent. What was lacking was a summer assembly where educators could meet for intensive training, like the Chautauqua Assemblies.

An Historic Meeting in Pittsburgh and its Aftermath

One of the least known but seminal events in American Catholic history occurred on a cold afternoon in January 1892 in the rectory of St. Mary of Mercy parish, located at No. 48 Third Avenue, a few doors from the parish church at Pittsburgh’s Point. A meeting was convened with only three attendees: Father Morgan Sheedy who was the host, Monsignor James Laughlin who had traveled approximately 11 hours by train from Philadelphia, and Warren Mosher who had reached Pittsburgh after a two-hour train ride from Youngstown.

Mosher was on a mission to discuss with Sheedy and Laughlin whether and how to use the Catholic Reading Circles to form a Catholic Summer School. Sheedy was supportive, while Laughlin declared:

It will never do, our people will look upon it as a kind of camp meeting; the Bishops will crush it at the start, the thing can’t be done; it will strike our people as too strange and novel; better drop it at once.

After an intense discussion with the other two, Laughlin changed his mind. The three agreed that Laughlin would write a letter to be published in New York’s Catholic Review newspaper that would ignite a national movement to make the “idea” of a Catholic Summer School a “reality.” Laughlin had been brought around to acceptance of the belief that the Reading Circles and the Summer School would mean better informed Catholics, stronger in their faith. Catholic interests would be rooted and the bonds of Catholic fellowship in the United States would be cemented. Support from key bishops would forestall episcopal opposition based on the absence of hierarchical control of the Summer School. Selection of a school name that did not conjure up the image of Protestant-aligned Chautauqua and inclusion of Catholic literature and topics in the Summer School’s educational program would distinguish this Catholic Summer School from Chautauqua.

The project of a Catholic Summer School was thus announced in the January 17, 1892, issue of the Catholic Review newspaper and reprinted immediately in the February 1892 issue of The Catholic Reading Circle Review, which journal Mosher edited. Laughlin wrote a letter in his capacity as president of the Catholic Young Men’s National Union, and formally raised the question as to whether a national Catholic summer assembly might be convened. The Philadelphia priest’s letter read as follows:

A few weeks ago Mr. Warren E. Mosher, the secretary of the Catholic Chautauqua movement and editor of the Catholic Reading Circle Review, consulted with me [and Father Morgan Sheedy] as to the feasibility of choosing some desirable place where the Catholic educators of the country and those who are interested in reading circles might assemble during the summer vacations and devote some time
to the discussion of educational matters, listen to addresses from prominent and experienced teachers etc. ... a novelty, I answered bluntly that the “project was visionary” and yet when we take a second thought, what is there wild or impracticable about Mr. Mosher’s project? There has been an immense and widespread awakening of interest during the past couple of years in the improvement of Catholic pedagogy and the cultivation of Catholic literature. How to perfect our schools, how to interest our young men and women in mental culture are questions uppermost in the minds of clergy and laity. Why not hold a formal Congress for the discussion of such questions? And what better plan than a general assembly during vacation time?154

Laughlin then went on to state that Mosher had suggested that a “Catholic Chautauqua” might meet in upstate New York, since his own Catholic Young Men’s National Union would hold its annual convention in Albany. Continuing, Laughlin wrote:

Every Catholic interested in the improvement of self or of Catholic youth might be invited to attend. A special invitation might be extended to that valuable and much neglected body, the Catholic teachers in the public schools. Now dear Review don’t look to me as organizer of the movement. ... I ... will be glad to see the project succeed. And now let the discussion begin.155

The plan devised by Mosher, Sheedy, and Laughlin worked. The response to Laughlin’s letter came in the form of a tremendous outpouring of letters of support published in subsequent issues of The Catholic Reading Circle Review, and favorable publicity in many Catholic newspapers. And the letter placed firmly in the mind of all that the idea of a Catholic Summer School was that of Warren Mosher, editor of The Catholic Reading Circle Review and secretary of what was initially termed the “Catholic Chautauqua” Movement.156

The response was so encouraging that the C.E.U. announced and sponsored a meeting at the Catholic Club in New York City on May 11-12, 1892, to move forward on the proposal. Father Morgan Sheedy headed the select group of some twenty-five in attendance, primarily drawn from the northeastern United States. The name “The Catholic Summer School of America” was selected and The Catholic Reading Circle Review was designated as the Summer School’s official organ. “Under the provisional constitution the Reverend Morgan M. Sheedy was elected president.... Father Sheedy selected the heads of [all] committees....”157

A three-week meeting was planned for summer 1892 and the site selected was New London, Connecticut. Halls and boarding accommodations were to be made for the start of classes on July 30. The adoption of the Summer School’s name was intended to avoid introduction of the word “Chautauqua” — of which name many Catholics had a visceral dislike due to its strong Protestant, specifically Methodist, association. The Buffalo Catholic newspaper summed up the attitude of many:

Some of the most prominent educators among Catholics met in the Reading Room of the Catholic Club to arrange the program for the Catholic Chautauqua. Happily the enterprise escaped the name and has been christened instead the Catholic Summer School.158

Mosher and others would subsequently attend many meetings in various cities to acquaint Catholics with the purpose of the Summer School, accustom them to this innovation, and promote registration to attend. The Pittsburgh Catholic began to carry, as of 1892, articles and announcements about the Catholic Summer School of America. One of the first detailed articles entitled “Prospectus of the Catholic School Assembly” appeared in the June 30, 1892 issue of the Catholic.159

The Three Key Figures in the Formation of the Catholic Summer School

From this time forward, the organization of the Catholic Summer School was attributed to three individuals: Warren Mosher, Father Sheedy, and Monsignor Laughlin. But, over time, some Catholic publications would omit Mosher in favor of Monsignor Thomas Conaty of the Catholic University of America.160 That erroneous substitution reflected two facts:

1) Mosher died in 1906, effectively removing his name from people’s minds, and

2) a deep lay deference to clerics that translated into a simple conclusion that the first three “yearly” presidents of the Summer School (Sheedy, Laughlin, and Conaty) must have been the “founders” since they were priests — and only priests could assume a leadership position in a prominent Catholic organization!

Such a common but inaccurate conclusion ignored the complex history that produced the Summer School. Laughlin, like Mosher, died prematurely — in 1911, five years after Mosher died; and Laughlin’s increasingly debilitating rheumatoid arthritis effectively limited his ability to actively participate for some time prior to his death.

Of the three men, Father Sheedy would live another three decades, remaining nationally active in Catholic affairs and
thus guaranteeing that his name would survive in the later histories of these events that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even had Laughlin and Mosher lived longer, Sheedy’s volume of lectures and writings would have eclipsed anything that the other two might have produced. It is also clear that even had Laughlin and Mosher lived, Laughlin would certainly have entered the episcopate (assuming his health stabilized) — effectively removing him from the detailed activities of the Circles, the Union, and the Summer School. Mosher had endured four years of advancing heart disease prior to his death. Even had he lived longer, his health restrictions would have ended his national travel, lectures, and likely also the intense editing that his journal demanded. In short, Mosher would not have been able to continue immersing himself in the Summer School nor continue editorship of *The Catholic Reading Circle Review*. Regrettably, in an increasingly educated world — that the Reading Circles, the C.E.U., and the Summer School espoused — Mosher lacked the formal education that Sheedy and Laughlin possessed. And, while Mosher was a prominent lecturer, he lacked the polished skills that Sheedy so easily demonstrated in his lectures.

Given all this, it is not surprising that in the significant histories and in much of the secondary literature, Father Sheedy is given a lion’s credit for the Circles, the Union, and the Summer School — with some works citing him as a founder and sometimes as the sole founder of the Catholic Summer School of America because of his follow through on Mosher’s idea and his ability to bring Laughlin to support the Summer School cause. In this regard, it must be noted that Mosher’s limited formal education always placed him at a disadvantage when he was compared to Sheedy and Laughlin, both of whom had superior educations. And as noted earlier, Sheedy’s higher profile as writer and lecturer as compared with Laughlin, and Sheedy’s outliving Laughlin and Mosher by decades helped bring and keep Father Sheedy in the public’s eye for many years.

Another factor was also present in the prominence given Sheedy. He was for years the vice-president of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America. Increasing Catholic concern about the issues of alcoholism and family life, especially among immigrants, heightened Sheedy’s profile. His popularity among those seeking to manage or eliminate the consumption of alcohol carried over to any activity in which he became involved. This lionization of Father Sheedy was present to some extent in the positive public attitude about his work in other organizations — which would account to some degree for his elevation in the histories of the Catholic Reading Circles, the C.E.U, and the Catholic Summer School of America to the disadvantage of both Mosher and Laughlin.

While the idea for the Summer School was Mosher’s, his early death and the national prominence of Father Sheedy as the “survivor” of the original group of three collaborators virtually assured that Mosher would receive but passing mention in the future while Sheedy became embedded in the popular understanding of who had shepherded the three groups (Reading Circles, C.E.U., and Summer School) to a national prominence that enhanced the role and appreciation of Catholics in a majority-Protestant United States of America. Furthermore, Sheedy authored three of the five principal histories of the intertwined Catholic Reading Circles and the Catholic Summer School of America: (1) “The Reading Circle Movement” (1904), (2) “The Story of the Catholic Summer School” (1904), and (3) “History of the Catholic Summer School of America” (1916). These histories, written almost contemporaneously with the events described therein by a principal actor intimately involved in both Movements, are particularly valuable since only two later histories were written — almost twenty and fifty years later, respectively.  

**Father Sheedy: The Purpose of a Catholic Summer School**

Father Sheedy, in one of his published histories of the Reading Circle Movement and the Catholic Summer School as the outgrowth of the Movement, addressed directly the fundamental question as to the purpose of such a School. He framed the discussion in these words:

> The main purpose of the Catholic Summer School is this: to give from the most authoritative sources among our Catholic writers and thinkers the Catholic point of view on all the issues of the day in history, in literature, in philosophy, in art; in political science; upon the economic problems that are agitating the world; upon the relations between science and religion; to state in the clearest possible terms the principle underlying truth in each and all of these subjects; to remove false assumptions and correct false statements; to pursue the calumnies and slanders uttered against our creed and our Church to their last lurking place.

… And therefore the ablest and best equipped among our Catholic leaders of thought whether lay or clerical, are brought face to face with a cultured Catholic audience, and give their listeners the fruits of life-long studies in those departments of science or letters in which they have been eminent. They state in single lectures or in courses of lectures, such principles and facts and methods as may afterwards be used and applied in one’s reading for the detection of error and the discovery of truth. To achieve such work is the mission of the Catholic Summer School.  

**43**
This articulation of the Summer School's philosophy, educational mission, and religious objectives appeared in numerous Catholic publications and lectures in the early years — and can be directly attributed both to Father Sheedy and Warren Mosher. Their shared vision dominated publications' pages and enlivened the national Catholic lecture circuit.

The First Catholic Summer School — New London, Connecticut

Father Sheedy, who had been elected as the first president of the Catholic Summer School of America, would play a central role in the inauguration of this new American Catholic educational venture. Father Sheedy headed the elite group that toured upstate New York in spring 1892 in search of a location for the Summer School. On May 18, the site of the initial Catholic Summer School was selected — New London, Connecticut, which was midway between the two largest Catholic population centers of New York City and Boston.

The price of admission to the Summer School lectures was set at five dollars for the full course and two dollars for any one course. Fifty-one different lectures were to be offered in five areas: ethics, literature, science and religion, economics, and miscellaneous. The Summer School would operate for three weeks. Ten priests, a religious brother, twelve laymen, and three laywomen would deliver the lectures. When accommodations appeared to be inadequate, a steamboat accommodating 250 people was engaged. Attendance would reach between 600 and 1,000.

Summer School Publicity

Father Sheedy was a savvy businessman who knew how to attract an audience. He had had considerable success in the advertisement of novel fundraising ventures for his parish in Pittsburgh and press advertisements marketing his many books. As president of the Catholic Summer School, Sheedy would do no less in order to assure the success of this new venture, both short term and long term. He undertook a media blitz. Information was provided to secular newspapers large and small, resulting in broad dissemination of the details about the planned Catholic Summer School. This included complete listings of the courses to be offered as well as biographical information about the instructors. While some lectures were specific Catholic doctrinal or historical offerings, most were not specifically religious in title or content.

Thus, many non-Catholics — aware of the Chautauqua system of lectures and outings — were attracted to this Catholic offering. "Indeed, several Protestant clergymen have signified their intention of attending the school at New London." Sheedy also recognized the fact that existing Catholic newspapers reached only a small portion of the Catholic population. Hence, the placement of information about the Catholic Summer School in secular papers would assure that the maximum number of Catholics would be reached and apprised of this educational opportunity. An additional benefit to this approach lay in the general public's view that Catholics — many of whom were immigrants — were following the Protestant (Chautauqua) lead in bettering themselves through a structured educational program. It built upon Teddy Roosevelt's observation that such Summer Schools were "the most American thing in America." The Catholic Summer School program thus painted a truly positive picture of Catholic integration into the larger American cultural life.

To further encourage a large attendance at the Catholic Summer School of America, Sheedy and Mosher also negotiated favorable transportation rates with railroad companies and shipping lines. The Boston Pilot reported the following information:

Reduced fares will be made from all points in the country at the rate of a fare and a third to New York City [and return round trip, instead of two full fares], whence they can go to New London by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad at a similar rate. There will also be reductions of fares from local points in New England.

Father Sheedy's ongoing contacts with news reporters assured that a series of articles would appear in newspapers throughout the country. Coverage in Pittsburgh newspapers was regular and detailed, beginning with an interview before Sheedy's departure for New London. The Pittsburgh Post's first report stated:

Rev. Father Sheedy, pastor of St. Mary of Mercy's church, and a number of persons from this city have gone to New London, Conn., to attend the opening session of the Catholic Summer School. ...most of those who will attend come from the Eastern States. Before leaving Father Sheedy said that although this is the experiment of the Catholic Summer School idea, he had no doubt that it was going to be a success. The attendance of registered students is much larger than was at first supposed, and the committee of arrangements, instead of wondering if there would be enough students to cover the expenses of the distinguished lecturers, are now asking if they can accommodate the crowds ....
The first week’s session had not yet concluded before newspapers were labeling the Summer School as a success: “…every steamer and train bring new arrivals. The Summer School will soon be a friendly rival of its sister, the Chautauqua.” \(^{174}\) Reports noted that:

Rev. Father Sheedy, of Pittsburg, delighted his old friends and made many new ones during his days stay in New London. As President of [both the Summer School and] the C.E.U., he preached the first Sunday evening sermon of the course. His subject, “The Church and Intellectual Development,” brought a large audience to hear him and to be charmed with the truth of his statements and the grace of his utterances.\(^{175}\)

Sheedy not only attended the Catholic Summer School of America but tacked on a lengthy tour of Catholic educational institutions in the United States. Upon his return to Pittsburgh in late August 1892, Sheedy was interviewed by a reporter for The Pittsburg Dispatch about the future of the Summer School and, as its president, Sheedy offered these comments:

“I have no hesitancy in saying that it is the most gigantic and extensive movement that was ever started among the Catholic educational institutions of this country. Upon its floor, meeting upon a common level, we are to have the clergy, secular and religious orders, teachers of the public and parochial schools and the laity in general. … The Summer School may be termed a plan of university extension. There are three phases to this school life of which we are certainly very considerate. There is the intellectual, recreative and social phases.”\(^{176}\)

Sheedy’s interview with The Pittsburgh Post newspaper provided some additional insights into the summertime gathering at New London:

We made arrangements expecting an attendance of about 200 students, but there were over 600. The attendance at New London itself was greater than could be comfortably cared for. People came from as far West as Green Bay, Wis., and as far South as New Orleans.\(^{177}\)

Father Sheedy went on to state that it was the intention of the board of trustees of the Summer School to establish summer assemblies throughout the country, with the possibility that there would soon be one held in Pittsburgh.\(^{178}\) Regrettably, the initiation of “satellite” Catholic summer schools never occurred. The Pittsburgh Post noted that Father Sheedy had played a central role not just in the educational program, but also in the Summer School’s religious programs — Sheedy served as chaplain to the bishop who offered an opening Pontifical High Mass and he also preached the sermon at evening vespers. New London papers “speak delightedly of his sermon.”\(^{179}\)

**Initial Success Promises a Future**

The enthusiastic reception of the 1892 Summer School by both sponsors and attendees assured another would be held in 1893. Father Sheedy headed the large Summer School committee charged with examining the 50 proposals submitted for a permanent educational site. The committee visited a number of sites after conclusion of the first Summer School in New London. Four locations made the final cut: the Thousand Islands in New York state, Lake Champlain in New York state, Point Pleasant in New Jersey, and New London in Connecticut.\(^{180}\)

The Regents of the University of the State of New York sought to influence the decision-making process by offer-
ing to incorporate the Catholic Summer School and confer New York State degrees upon Catholic Summer School graduates — provided that the Summer School selected a site in the state of New York. This was most welcome news to Father Sheedy, as president of the Catholic Summer School.\footnote{182}

While a permanent site was preferred, no location was selected until a railroad offer decided the issue in early 1893 — Cliff Haven in the Town of Plattsburgh, New York. The site is located in Clinton County, which is the northeastern-most county in the state of New York, bordering the Province of Quebec in Canada. The town is situated on the northwestern shore of Lake Champlain in the northern Adirondack Mountains and contains a lakeside section known as Cliff Haven. The rural area was convenient to the large Catholic population centers of New York City and Boston.

The Delaware and Hudson Railroad, facing stiff competition, presented the Summer School with a 450-acre farm known as the Armstrong Homestead. It was an ideal site: three-quarters of a mile of lake frontage, a good beach, good drinking water, and a source of building stone. Adjoining the property was the Champlain Hotel with its wharf, a railroad station, tennis courts, and other attractions of a resort hotel.

Located in the state of New York, the Summer School could take advantage of New York’s laws favoring education. The Catholic Summer School of America was granted a state charter on February 9, 1893, as a regular teaching institution with the power to conduct extension courses and confer degrees.\footnote{183} These were the same rights enjoyed by Chautauqua, which was also located in New York state.

The Catholic Summer School at Its Permanent Site

On July 16, 1893, the Summer School formally opened with a Pontifical Mass at St. John Church in Plattsburgh, celebrated by Bishop Henry Gabriels of Ogdensburg. Thirty morning and evening lectures were given over three weeks. Receptions and excursions constituted the recreation. An estimated 600 to 1,000 persons attended, with most coming from New York and Massachusetts. The Summer School transformed a Lake Champlain farm into a site of popular education.\footnote{184}

The board of trustees selected officers for the ensuing 1894 School and Father Sheedy became the treasurer.\footnote{185} Sheedy, after conclusion of his presidential term, would continue to serve as a board trustee until his death in 1939, deliver lectures, and exert personal influence to assure the continued success of the Summer School. His continued role as president of the Catholic Educational Union facilitated a unique interplay with the Summer School. His lectures on labor and capital in light of Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical \textit{Rerum Novarum} established him as a regularly-sought-after speaker at the Summer School and at Catholic events throughout the country.\footnote{186} School attendance in 1894 soared to 1,500 students from 24 states and 169 cities.

The Expansion of Cliff Haven

Suitable buildings would now have to be constructed at Cliff Haven to meet the burgeoning attendance demands.
Lots would be sold to individual Catholics with the expectation that they would build cottages there. Lot sales, bond issuances, and the sale of memberships financed part of the building program. An Administration Building was constructed in 1894. The Auditorium, the Chapel, the Central Dining Room, and three cottages were erected in 1896. Macadam roads, electric lighting, trolley service, telephone, telegraph, and steamboat service followed. A post office, laundry, and barber shop opened. For some years, the Kellog Service managed the Dining Hall and the restaurant at the Champlain Club with both à la carte and table d’hôte service.187

Dozens of “cottages” were built — a colloquial term at that time but somewhat misleading in today’s terminology. The typical cottage cost approximately $10,000 and contained a dining room, kitchen, and twelve or more bedrooms distributed over three floors. Some were built collectively by groups from various cities. Larger cottages were barnlike with spacious porches, many windows, pillars, dormers, hipped roofs, and gables. Just twenty of these picturesque cottages cost over $400,000. The Washington cottage had 60 rooms capable of accommodating 100 guests; it joined other cottages named The New York, The Philadelphia, and The Boston — named after the places from which those who built them came. Monsignor Michael J. Lavelle, rector of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, assumed administration of the building program and proceeded to expand it rapidly in the years 1897 to 1903. By 1903, the buildings could accommodate 800 persons, and by 1905 the number living on the grounds was 1,100.188

Overall attendance at Cliff Haven rose above 7,000 in 1905.189 Later estimates took the summer attendance to a peak of 13,000 to 14,000 people.190 The tripartite combination of a high-end resort, an educational institution, and a vibrant Catholic community achieved this stunning result, which continued for several decades. The recreation program expanded to include many forms of entertainment and athletics for both men and women. Steamboat excursions, railway trips, and special tours to Montreal, Quebec City, and the Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré were an integral feature of the Summer School. Shorter trips were made in the afternoon and longer ones over the weekends. Dancing, singing, card playing (especially euchre), and receptions at the various cottages were normative. Plays, dramas, and recitations were given.

As American participation in sports grew, Cliff Haven kept pace with its facilities for golf, tennis, basketball, archery, bowling, baseball, track and field, croquet, boating, and bathing. Four o’clock in the afternoon was the established time for the daily “bathing hour” in the lake. Bicycles and horses were available for riding. Rowing races and shooting matches were part of the outdoor play. The humorous
touches of egg, sack, and obstacle races were also featured.

In 1924, the Knights of Columbus initiated a yearly program in conjunction with the Catholic Summer School at Cliff Haven titled the Annual Summer School of Boy Leadership, which offered a comprehensive training course to priests and laymen seeking to undertake boys’ work. In the first twelve years, more than 600 priests received instruction. Staff from the Knights’ Supreme Council Boy Life Bureau, assisted by representatives of major agencies for boys, conducted training.

The Cliff Haven facilities and staff soon attracted other conferences: teacher groups from throughout New York state (Teacher Institute), soldier-like camps for Catholic boys (College Camp), and a businessmen’s club (Champlain Club). An Alumnae Auxiliary Association was formed for women. As the Summer School approached its fortieth year of existence, Fordham University in 1928 inaugurated an extension course program at Cliff Haven for students and teachers, allowing credits toward undergraduate and graduate degrees.

In 1929, the Summer School opened the Father Duffy Camp for Boys, named after the famed chaplain of the Fighting 69th who was then serving as president of the Summer School. After Father Duffy’s death in 1932, the boys’ school would undergo changes in name and focus. It served those under age 18, often orphans or those in foster care in New York’s Catholic institutions.

To reinforce the existing bonds among Cliff Haven attendees and to assure their return, the Summer School held an annual reunion — sometimes as a grand dinner with dancing, other times as a theatre party. The annual reception in 1926 was held in the grand ballroom of the old Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on Fifth Avenue, the largest hotel in the world at that time. The 1929 gathering was built around the play Holiday at the Plymouth Theatre in Manhattan. Tickets were sold in advance at the Summer School’s business office in Manhattan.

Marketing developed to include the employment of golf professionals who offered special programs with championship play and medal awards at the Cliff Haven Golf Club. The popular golfer Peter Sheehan supervised the 1935 golf program. The 18-hole golf course was reserved exclusively for Summer School attendees during the season.

The number of luncheons, teas, bridge parties, and formal dances grew exponentially. Facilities for ballroom and “modern” dancing were provided. Private card instruction was offered. The Happy Days Club for younger children was established with a full range of arts and crafts activities.

The Summer School’s publicity program was quite advanced for that time. A Prospectus with the full program for each yearly session was printed. It contained all information about lectures and lecturers, and also provided detailed information about Cliff Haven for general vacation guests. There was a separate Bulletin for Teachers’ Courses and also a booklet entitled Vacation Paradise for Catholics. All were available at no charge by contacting the business office of the Summer School at 321 W. 43rd Street in Manhattan, New York City, which was open throughout the year.

Cliff Haven was visited by the celebrities of the time: Presidents William McKinley, William Howard Taft, and Theodore Roosevelt; Cardinals Gibbons, Satolli, and Martinelli; Spanish American War heroes, a U.S. vice president, senators, congressmen, a U.S. Supreme Court justice, and state governors. All of this tended to promote a better understanding between Catholics and their fellow non-Catholics. Postcards commemorating some of the visits by prominent non-Catholics were produced in order to present the Catholic Summer School as an “all-American” tradition.

The Broad Appeal of Cliff Haven
The popularity of the Catholic Summer School of America can be measured, to some degree, by newspaper reports of the School’s activities over the years. For example, the Pittsburgh Catholic carried over 300 separate mentions — some were front page articles while others were announcements, program offerings, and participant reports. At times, half a page in the Catholic was devoted to Catholic Summer School coverage. This coverage in the Pittsburgh diocesan
weekly continued through April 1941. Similar extensive press coverage appeared in other diocesan weeklies and in many secular newspapers across the country.

The Catholic Summer School Press was opened in conjunction with Fordham University to publish Catholic books that would service students at both the Summer School and in the local Catholic Reading Circles. This venture was funded by the Knights of Columbus. The publications were not lightweight fare, typically exceeding 400 or 500 pages. Two works became instant classics: (1) *The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries* (1907) of which 30,000 copies were printed at the expense of the Knights of Columbus, and (2) *The Centurie of Columbus* (1914). James Walsh, the author of both volumes, was a lecturer at the Summer School. Father Sheedy’s own volume, *Social Problems*, was issued in 1896 as a number in the Catholic Summer and Winter School Library series. Quite a few Summer School lectures were subsequently printed in various Catholic publications, such as *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*.

**The Winds of Change Affect Cliff Haven**

By 1910, the Catholic Summer School was firmly established as a center of Catholic popular education. Yet there were indications that the Reading Circle Movement had entered a decline. Warren Mosher had died in 1906, with several unfortunate results: (1) an end to publication of Mosher’s journal which had provided quality instructional guidance to the Reading Circles, leaving them with no future educational programs, (2) a halt to the sharing of ideas and reports of activities among the Reading Circles that Mosher’s journal had afforded, (3) a stop to the practice of a single dedicated person who would travel the country to reinforce existing Circles and stimulate the opening of new ones, (4) the elimination of a central contact person to whom the Reading Circles could turn for guidance, and (5) a stop to dissemination of media reports to Catholic and secular newspapers that had resulted in consistently positive coverage of Catholic Reading Circles and which in turn had attracted Catholic laity to join such groups. Mosher had done exceptional work in his devotion to the Reading Circles for a decade and a half, but after his death there was no one prepared to fill that truly unique role. Thus, the bonds within individual Circles and among the Circles within the Union began to fray and disappear.

There was a corresponding decline in the Summer School Movement, hastened by the disruption that ensued upon the entrance of the United States into World War I in 1917. Later, the Great Depression’s economic fallout depressed attendance at Cliff Haven. The growing popularity of the automobile provided new travel destinations for many and attendance at the Summer School noticeably decreased in the 1930s. The 1930s also witnessed Cliff Haven’s use of Fordham University’s extension program in a effort to rebuild shrinking attendance to fill the increasingly under-used buildings. The opening of World War II in 1939 cast a shadow over the next two years as Americans awaited the United States being drawn into the war.

In summer 1941, Cliff Haven celebrated its golden (fiftieth) anniversary, which proved to be its last. The *Brooklyn Tablet* carried an extensive report on the “Golden Jubilee Session.” Many former attendees, along with new patrons, attended the festivities. The celebration opened in the Auditorium with an energetic address by Monsignor Michael J. Splaine of Boston who recounted the spiritual, intellectual, social, and recreational achievements at Cliff Haven over fifty years. Two hundred and fifty Knights of Columbus held a banquet in the Champlain Club. The first Mass of
the season was celebrated by the summer chaplain, Father William Orchard, who had been an Anglican priest and pastor of one of the largest Protestant churches in London prior to his conversion to Catholicism. The Alumnae Auxiliary Association planned the annual Carnival for late July. Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., professor of theology at Woodstock College in Maryland, was slated to deliver five daily lectures. The speakers and the attendees read like a “Who’s Who” of the Catholic literati and establishment in the United States. All of the cottages were opened to accommodate the huge crowds in attendance throughout the Summer School.207

Thus, ironically, Cliff Haven lasted until Pearl Harbor in 1941; after the entry of the United States into World War II, Cliff Haven was all but abandoned. A few cottages were rented out, and an effort was made to open the Champlain Club, the School’s main social building, as a restaurant. Some buildings burned down while others were torn down.208

The Diocese of Ogdensburg brought the story of Cliff Haven to a conclusion with a report that the Summer School had functioned “in a very limited capacity” in the post-war years of 1946 and 1947. Indeed, the activity in 1947 consisted of a theater group conducting a workshop — “but there were neither lectures nor courses conducted under the auspices of a college or university as in former years.”209 Thereafter, the remaining buildings sat empty.

In 1955, construction of a new Plattsburgh Air Force Base (East Coast operations center for the Strategic Air Command during the Cold War) was undertaken along with activation of the 380th Bombardment Wing. To meet the housing needs of the military and their families, a developer acquired the Cliff Haven property. The first buildings in the new Cliff Haven Estates were constructed in 1955. The Boston Cottage was the last of the original School buildings to be razed by 1960. Housing construction was well under way by the early 1960s.210

Memorialization at Cliff Haven
A boulder with a tablet memorializing Warren E. Mosher and his role in both the Catholic Reading Circle Movement and the Catholic Summer School of America was placed on the Cliff Haven grounds in the period 1910-1919.211 The tablet reads:212

The Chautauqua-Catholic Relationship
But what of Cliff Haven’s “competitor” at the opposite end of New York state — Chautauqua? With the opening of Chautauqua, and the spread of its Movement, what was the Catholic reaction? Candidly, there was no direct Catholic response at first. Then several disparate efforts were initiated; some were intermittent and uncoordinated, and often came to naught. Chautauqua co-founder John Heyl Vincent wrote to Bishop James Ryan of Buffalo in 1885 inviting a priest to offer Mass. Ryan agreed. Catholics were invited to attend an organizational meeting at the Methodist House and 37 attended; but ten years were to pass before a Mass was held.

The first Mass was celebrated at Chautauqua by Father Edmund Gibbons on August 4, 1895, in the Moorish-styled College building with 50 persons in attendance — many of them curious Protestants.214 While Gibbons went on to became bishop of Albany, the Catholic “presence” at Chautauqua soon faded. A faint spark remained: there were occasional Sunday Masses offered in various locations by visiting priests, and later on a regular basis by priests from St. Mary Church in nearby Mayville.

Masses occurred in 1896 and the numbers grew to almost 100. Then, the new bishop of Buffalo, James Quigley, declined to continue sending a priest to offer Mass. He considered Chautauqua’s influence too threatening to any Catholic attendees and decided it would be preferable to
open a Catholic Chautauqua. Accordingly, he purchased property about six miles south of the Institution. A house with a chapel was constructed, but the camp never opened, with the building instead used as a vacation and retreat cottage for priests. The nascent Catholic competition soured whatever faint relationship existed with Chautauqua. The Institution’s gates were locked on Sundays, and no one was allowed on or off the grounds — rendering Sunday Mass fulfillment an impossibility.215

A further chill on attempts at accommodation ensued with the publication of Pope Leo XIII’s 1899 letter Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae, which condemned Americanism and was interpreted as putting a damper on Catholic-Protestant engagement. Only in 1904 was Paulist Father Alexander Doyle invited to lecture on the subject of Catholic schools. While Father Doyle argued passionately that Catholic schools posed no threat to public schools and reduced the tax burden, he was only politely received — and was not invited back for another ten years!

In 1912, a priest traveled to the neighboring village of Mayville — to offer Mass initially in a private home and then in the local opera house. Subsequent introduction of the trolley facilitated attendance. The small mission chapel of Our Lady of Victory (popularly known as St. Mary’s) opened in Mayville in 1926 despite fierce Ku Klux Klan opposition and burning of a cross on the chapel’s lawn. Only a few Catholics from Chautauqua attended. Introduction of bus service in 1929 was later cancelled due to lack of use. Nativism continued. Pope Pius XI’s 1928 encyclical Mortalium Animos restated Catholic opposition to ecumenical efforts to unite denominations by means of searching for “collective truth” to create a “new church” — further alienating the leaders of Chautauqua.

Priests began saying Mass regularly on Chautauqua grounds in 1942, but there were tensions and anti-Catholic suspicions surfaced after World War II. Publication of Paul Blanshard’s American Freedom and Catholic Power in 1949216 was perhaps the most successful anti-Catholic book ever published in the United States. It called for all priests to be registered as foreign agents and predicted that religious violence was unavoidable. Contemporary circulars at Chautauqua warned of a conspiracy to put the pope in the White House.

The Catholic Presence at Chautauqua Today
One of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was an opening of the door at Chautauqua to a Catholic presence. But only in 1984 was a Catholic priest — Bishop James Malone of Youngstown — invited to serve as a “week’s chaplain” at Chautauqua.

The spark reignited in July 1987 when a group of Catholics at Chautauqua began to meet — with the encouragement of the Chautauqua Department of Religion and the Institution’s president and board of directors — to establish a formal Catholic presence. To succeed at Chautauqua, it had to be a group effort.

This led in 1988 to formation of a Section 501(c)(3) corporation, the Chautauqua Catholic Community (C.C.C.).217 The goal was “to enhance the Catholic presence through an expanded Mass schedule, two priests in residence each week, guest speakers, seminars and in any other way that would benefit Chautauqua’s Catholics and Chautauquans in general.”218 In 2004, the C.C.C. opened its own residence, Catholic House, offering accommodations, a small chapel, weekly socials, and a haven for those immersed in the intense Chautauqua Institution schedule. By the 2010s, Catholics were among those holding paid positions in the central administration at Chautauqua and constituted a significant attendance group.

The Historic Role of Father Morgan Sheedy
It was left to Father Morgan Sheedy, alone of all the many priests and laity involved, to articulate both a philosophy and a program for the Catholic Reading Circle Movement and to then lead that Movement — using the strength of the Circles united through the Catholic Educational Union — to its logical objective: creation of the Catholic Summer School of America. As both the first president and a mem-

Historic Marker for Catholic Summer School of America

be the board of trustees of the Summer School for over four decades, Father Sheedy helped devise the philosophy and educational program of the Summer School. And he later authored a history of the Catholic Summer School of America — as well as histories of its feeder schools, the Catholic Reading Circles — thus preserving for future Catholics and historians a record of how he and his collaborators addressed the myriad challenges facing Catholics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States.

Subsequent educational and evangelization efforts undertaken by Father Daniel A. Lord, S.J., with his pageants and summer schools, were grounded upon Father Sheedy’s successful model. And the success of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine as designed and operated in the Diocese of Pittsburgh in the first half of the twentieth century clearly demonstrates the value of Father Sheedy’s work — which provided a model pedagogical, programmatic, practical, and operational approach that would be put to effective use within the Catholic dioceses in Western Pennsylvania and beyond. Both efforts targeted the professional preparation of Catholic instructors (laity, religious women and men, and priests) to enable them to educate youth and adults in the fullness of the Catholic faith in local parishes where the Catholic faith is lived out. The vision and work of Father Morgan Madden Sheedy initiated more than 130 years ago still shapes Catholic life in Western Pennsylvania and beyond.

Endnotes:


2. The Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1784 and had its roots in the evangelical revival movement within the Church of England. It was the largest religious denomination in the United States until the end of the nineteenth century when Catholicism surpassed it in numbers.


8. Ibid. Doubling down on its view of Catholics and their schools, Chautauqua invited Rev. Edward McGlynn (1837-1900) to deliver a lecture in 1891 — with full knowledge that McGlynn had been excommunicated by the Vatican. McGlynn was a vocal supporter of public schools and fused ecclesiastical discipline.


10. “Morgan M. Sheedy,” Priests Register, Vol. 3, 101-101A, Archives of the Diocese of Pittsburgh (hereinafter “ADP”). Diocesan archival records include Sheedy references appearing in the Pittsburgh Catholic, the Catholic Observer, and the first diocesan history by Andrew A. Lambing, A History of the Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburg and Allegheny from its Establishment to the Present Time (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1880). The present author is indebted to Dennis Wodzinski, Director of the Archives and Records Center of the Diocese of Pittsburgh for providing these records. Published biographies of Morgan Sheedy typically give his birthplace as the town of Charleville, rather than the village of Liscarroll. The present populations of Liscarroll (249) and Charleville (3,919) reflect historical statistics and the fact that Charleville was the central town serving the neighboring villages. Liscarroll and Charleville are located 17 km (10 miles) apart, in northern County Cork near the border with County Limerick. Each was and remains a separate parish within the Diocese of Cloyne. The area is approximately 60 km (37 miles) north of the city of Cork and 40 km (25 miles) south of the city of Limerick. The online parish baptismal registers of the Diocese of Cloyne do not list Morgan Sheedy in either Liscarroll parish or Charleville parish records, or those of adjacent parishes. See Cloyne — Catholic Parish Registers at the NLI, accessed August 9, 2021, https://registers.nli.ie/parishes/0035. Records appearing at Ancestry.com do not show a baptismal registration entry for Morgan Sheedy. This suggests either (1) a private baptism at the family’s home, possibly coupled with the baptizing priest’s failure to subsequently record the event in the parish baptismal register, or (2) baptism at another parish, where the baptismal registration record did not survive. A genealogical history of Morgan Madden Sheedy appears at the Ancestry.com website, accessed August 12, 2021, https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/39597645/person/19389829435/facts.

11. Mary Madden (1832-1910), mother of Morgan Madden Sheedy, had several brothers who became priests:

   (1) Very Rev. Morgan Madden (1811-1864) was ordained at St. Patrick’s College in Carlow (1835), served as vicar general of the Diocese of Ross, curate (1835-1847) and Parish Priest of Clonakilty (1847-1864); he was a candidate for the bishopric of Ross in 1857.
18 by the economic distress occasioned by the Irish famines beginning disruptions attendant upon centuries of British occupation, magnified (3) Ross — comprising the southwestern corner of County Cork. The biographical sketch of Father Sheedy must note the complex history Sheedys.


A biographical sketch of Father Sheedy must note the complex history of his native County Cork, which was divided into three dioceses: (1) Cloyne — comprising northern and eastern County Cork, (2) Cork — comprising western County Cork and the city of Cork, and (3) Ross — comprising the southwestern corner of County Cork. The disruptions attendant upon centuries of British occupation, magnified by the economic distress occasioned by the Irish famines beginning in 1845, produced both Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne (1864-1963) and Anastasius Joseph Muller, of the Capuchin order of this city. The school would evolve into the Christian Brothers' School, which produced both Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne (1864-1963) and Anastasius Joseph Muller, of the Capuchin order of this city. The role of the Presbyterian Scots-Irish and the Presbyterian Banner in Western Pennsylvania history is succinctly described in Allison's obituary: “Death's Calls: Rev. James Allison, D.D., Succumbs to an Accident,” Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette (September 22, 1900), 3.


Sheedy's appointment to the Altoona pastorate occasioned a lada- toury editorial in The Boston Pilot, which was reprinted as "Father Sheedy Appreciated," The Pittsburgh Press, November 18, 1894, 7.

22 “Father Sheedy's Farewell,” The Pittsburgh Tribune, December 2, 1894, 5.

23 “Altoona Cathedral is Dedicated by Cardinal Dougherty,” Pittsburgh Catholic (September 10, 1931), 1.

24 Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, Briefs for Our Times (New York: Thomas Whitaker, 1906). A master of marketing, Sheedy utilized a series of strategically placed ads in local, secular, and Catholic publications for his book. The ads contained endorsements from prominent reviewers, guaranteed to attract a reader’s attention and hopefully result in a purchase. See, e.g., the ad captioned “Briefs for Our Times,” Pittsburgh Morning Tribune [Altoona] (October 31, 1906), 4. The lengthy boxed ad concluded with the words: “These brief extracts selected from many others show to serve the public estimation of this little volume, which, if you have not already done so, you should lose no time in securing a copy.” A reviewer of this book began his review with the comment: “Father Morgan Sheedy is one of the most learned priests and solid theologians in the United States.” J.F.H., Briefs for Our Times, in The Irish Ecclesiastical Review, 20 (July-December 1906), 478.


31 “Father Sheedy Dies After Brief Illness,” Altoona Tribune (October 26, 1939), 4; “Father Sheedy Dies After Brief Illness,” Pittsburgh Catholic, September 30, 1876, 4. The Pitts burgh Catholic's identification of Sheedy as a student at St. Michael's Seminary comports with the existing diocesan practice that European immigrant seminarians who had completed theological studies prior to their arrival in Pittsburgh would nonetheless receive pastoral instruction from the seminary faculty, rector, and often the bishop prior to admittance of the seminarian to priestly ordination. As to the ordina-
Sheedy tells us that "the new century is a good time to begin." 


39 The Catholic World was a Catholic magazine founded by Paulist Father Isaac Hecker in 1865 as an intellectual journal for a growing Catholic population. It was published by the Paulist Fathers for over a century, renamed New Catholic World in 1972, reverted to its original title in 1999, and ceased publication in 1996.

40 Donahoe's Magazine was a Catholic-oriented general interest magazine that published from 1878 to July 1908, when it was absorbed by The Catholic World of New York. It was founded by Patrick Donahoe, an editor of the New York Pilot.

41 Commonweal, founded in 1924 by Michael Williams (1877-1950), is the oldest independent Catholic journal of opinion in the United States. Modeled on The New Republic and The Nation, the journal covered literature, the arts, religion, society, and politics — and in the process published the writings of a spectrum of national and international literati. The journal's title "Commonweal" refers to an important term in the political philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, who argued that legitimate leaders must prioritize "the common good" or "the commonweal" in making political decisions. As to histories of Commonweal, see: (1) Rodger Van Allen, Commonweal and the Catholic Church: The Magazine, The Movement, The Meaning (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), (2) Rodger Van Allen, Being Catholic: Com-

42 The American Ecclesiastical Review was established in 1889 as the first American Catholic journal dedicated to theological scholarship. It was published in Philadelphia until 1927, when it was relocated to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The journal ceased publication in 1995.

43 "Father Sheedy's Long Career Ends: Priest Famous as Literacy and Temperance Crusader Here Fifty Years Ago, Dies," Pittsburgh Cath-
olic, November 2, 1939, 16. For additional groups to which Sheedy belonged, see: Altoona Churchmen Have Anniversaries: Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy. Daily Educator and Writer, is Priest Forty-One Years, Altoona Tribune, September 24, 1917, 9.


45 See, e.g.: (1) "The Imperial Idea: The Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy's Thanksgiving Sermon Condemns Expansion," Morning Tribune, No-
very 25, 1898, 2; (2) "The True Gospel of Wealth: Not What a Man Has, But What He Is, All That Counts," The Pittsburgh Post, March 15, 1903, 6; (3) "Only Path to Usefulness and Happiness is Found by Obeying the Divine Law," The Pittsburgh Sunday Post, December 15, 1907, Editorial Section, 2; and (4) "Let Kindness Shine in the Home and Not Only to the Outer World," The Pittsburgh Sunday Post, October 9, 1910, 6.

46 "Drift Towards Catholic Ideals: This is the Present Tendency, Declares the Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy — Lecture at the Montauk," The Brooklyn Citizen, March 4, 1901, 3.

47 "A Diocesan Priest Honored," Pittsburgh Catholic, February 27, 1901, 9.


49 "Undertakers Close Annual Convention," Altoona Times, June 16, 1911, 3.

50 "Father Sheedy's Long Career Ends," 16.

51 As to the Catholic temperance movement, see John F. Quinn, Father Mathew's Crusade: Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and Irish America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

52 "Father Sheedy's Long Career Ends," 16. Sheedy's efforts to improve community standards were not always welcomed. In one case, he was sued for slander and defamation of character by a woman whom he reported to the alderman for keeping a disorderly after-hours house. "Father Sheedy Sued: Mrs. Schratz Was Too Indignant to be Mollified," The Pittsburgh Press, October 29, 1893, 9.

53 "One Hundred A Day. That is the Rate of Speed Scheduled by the License Court. Father Sheedy's Remonstrance," Pittsburgh Dispatch, March 16, 1892, 2.

54 Even the secular press recognized Sheedy for his years of work on behalf of the abstinence movement. He was one of three priests whose work resulted in the formation of a branch of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union in Pittsburgh in 1872. "Officers of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union," The Pittsburgh Press, May 20, 1906, 37.

55 The Catholic Total Abstinence Union was a national union of local Catholic temperance societies — an outgrowth of Father Mathew's temperance movement. Numerous independent temperance groups developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1872, a national union was formed at a convention in Baltimore: 177 societies (including those for men, women, juveniles, and even priests) from 10 states and the District of Columbia representing approximately 27,000 members created the Union. Over 500,000 people took the temperance pledge. See: (1) Morgan M. Sheedy, "The Catholic Total Abstinence Union," American Ecclesiastical Review, 2 (March 1895), 181-189; (2) Joseph P. Gillette, History of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America (Philadelphia, 1907); and (3) Sister Joan Bland, Hibernian Crusade: The Story of the Total Abstinence Union of America (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1951). The Union held its national conventions in Pittsburgh in 1890 and 1903; the Pennsylvania Union held its state convention in Pittsburgh in 1887. Pittsburgh Bishop J. F. Regis Canevin was elected president of the national union in 1904.

56 "Thirty Years Ago," Pittsburgh Catholic, March 15, 1928, 2.

57 "Against Sunday Opening: The Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, at St. Pat-

58 For an analysis of the Irish in Pittsburgh, see Victor A. Walsh, "Across 'The Big Water': The Irish-Catholic Community in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Pittsburgh," Western Pennsylvania Historical M-
azine 66, no. 1 (January 1983), 1-23.

59 "Troublesome Men: The Irish Nationalist Feud in Western Pennsyl-

60 Dorothy Macardle, The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a Detailed Ac-

sbury, was appointed by his uncle as Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1887. His ruthless enforcement of the Crimes Act earned him the nick-
name "Bloody Balfour." He became British Prime Minister in 1902.

62 Lord Morley, as quoted in Macardle, The Irish Republic, 53.

63 "Words of Cheer. How Voices Bravely Speak Out for Ireland. Stur-
dy Protests against Coercion. A Great Mass Meeting at the Central Rink," The Post [Pittsburgh], April 21, 1887, 1.

64 Letter of Coadjutor Bishop Richard Phelan to Father Sheedy, Allegh-
eny (April 19, 1887), appearing in "Letters of Regret," 3.

65 "Words of Cheer," 1, 3.

66 Ibid.

67 "Cablegrams Sent. The Expression of the Meeting Goes to Gladstone and Parnell," The Post [Pittsburgh], April 21, 1887, 3.

68 "Letters of Regret: The Post [Pittsburgh], April 21, 1887, 3.


71 "Another Bazaar," Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette, January 5, 1893, 1.

72 "In the Old Post Office: Father Sheedy's Helpers Are Now Camping There," The Pittsburgh Post, January 5, 1893, 8.

73 See: (1) "Sermon on Catholicism. The Roman Church Mode of Sal-


75 George Hodges (1856-1919) was an Episcopal theologian from New York who served as rector of Calvary Episcopal Church (1881-1894), co-founded with Father Sheedy the Kingsley settlement house for immigrant workers (1893), and then became Dean of the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge (Massachusetts). A prolific writer, he authored some twenty books. See "George Hodges (theologian)," Wikipedia, last modified December 26, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/George_Hodges.


77 Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, "Ten Years on Historic Ground: Early and Later Days at the Pittsburgh Point," Western Pennsylvania History 5, no. 2 (April 1922), 142-143.

78 St. Patrick's Church was located on Seventeenth Street between Penn and Liberty Avenues — a true indication of the ethnic composi-
tion of the neighborhood.

The Kingsley House would relocate more than once over the years. As to its history, see "Kingsley Association (Pittsburgh, PA)," Wikipedia, last modified September 28, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsley_Association_(Pittsburgh_PA).

"Priest to Address Protestant Laymen," The Pittsburgh Post, November 10, 1909, 1.

"Man of Zeal ... Fr. Morgan M. Sheedy is his Closest Friend," The Boston Daily Globe, November 17, 1893, 2.

See, e.g., "Society," The Pittsburgh Post, July 23, 1893, 5, which describes Sheedy as a registered guest among those vacationing at the exclusive Mountain House resort in Cresson Springs, Pennsylvania.

Hannah E. Looney, "Cliff Haven: Summer School of '04 Now A Delightful Memory—Impressive Closing Exercises," Catholic Union and Times, September 8, 1904, 1.


Letter of Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to Rev. Daniel E. Hudson, C.S.C., San Francisco (October 21, 1908), University of Notre Dame Archives.


"Father Sheedy [editorial]," Altoona Tribune, October 26, 1939, 4.

Ibid.

Monsignor Thomas J. Conaty — a native of Ireland who worked with Sheedy in the Catholic temperance movement and the Catholic Summer School of America and would later become rector of the Catholic University of America — was a traveling companion of Sheedy to Europe. Hogan, The Catholic University of America, 15-16.

For an overview of his overseas travels by ship from Europe to Ellis Island in New York, see the website: The Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island, accessed August 9, 2021, https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/. These records indicate some inconsistencies as to the year of his birth, which Sheedy listed on passenger manifests variously as 1854 and 1856.


"Morgan Sheedy — Marks 40 Years as Cathedral Rector," The Catholic Observer, December 6, 1934, ADP.

Father F. Smith [editor]. "Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, LL.D.," Pittsburgh Catholic, September 30, 1926, 2. The phrase "Ad Altiora Votis" may be translated as "I pray for the higher things."

Pittsburgh Catholic, September 10, 1936, 1, 16.

"Father Sheedy's Long Career Ends," 1, 16; "Noted Rector of Cathedral Dies Away," Altoona Mirror, October 26, 1939, 1-2; "Father Sheedy Dies After Brief Illness," Altoona Tribune (October 26, 1939), 1-2; "Father Sheedy Dies at 86 in Altoona," The Pittsburgh Press, October 26, 1939, 17; "Father Sheedy Dead at 86, Altoona Rector," Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph, October 26, 1939, 26; "Father Sheedy [editorial]," Altoona Tribune, October 26, 1939, 4; "Last Rites Prepared for Father Sheedy," Altoona Tribune, October 28, 1939, 1-2; "Father Sheedy to be Buried This Morning," Altoona Tribune, October 30, 1939, 1-2.

His survivors included a nephew, Rev. Edmund J. Sheedy (1895-1939), then stationed at St. James Church in Pittsburgh's West End.


Warren E. Mosher, "A Retrospective View," Mosher's Magazine 14, no. 3 (July 1899), 162.

Ibid.

"Catholic Educational Union," The Evening Republican [Meadville, PA] (May 2, 1889), 1.

"Learning and Literature: Both Are to be Encouraged by a New National Catholic Organization," Pittsburg Dispatch, May 2, 1889, 4.

Warren E. Mosher, "A Retrospective View," Mosher's Magazine 14, no. 3 (July 1899), 161-166. Mosher's history of the C.E.U. had originally appeared as "A Retrospective View of the Catholic Summer School of America," The Rosary 4, no. 5 (September 1894), 457-461, and was subsequently reprinted in his own journal in 1899.

Mosher's history of the C.E.U. as published in The Rosary and then in Mosher's Magazine recounts the earlier failed and ineffective Catholic efforts to organize or maintain Reading Circles.

White, The Founding of Cliff Haven, 57.

"Warren Moser [sic]'s Address — What the Catholic Educational Union Is, What It Has Accomplished and What It Promises," The Irish Standard, May 10, 1890, 1. This was also the first instance of a sketch of Mosher appearing in a newspaper.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. Father Michael A. Lambing was a younger brother of Father Andrew A. Lambing.

Ibid.

Included by inference were groups such as the Catholic Young Men's National Union, and a variety of parish, institutional, ethnic, and independent Catholic groups.

"Warren Moser [sic]'s Address," 1.

The Catholic Young Men's National Union was organized in 1875 to promote the establishment of Catholic young men's associations, libraries, reading rooms, and gymnasia — and the conduct of an athletic league. The group conducted an annual convention. See W. C. Sullivan, "Catholic Young Men's National Union," Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. X (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1913), 712.


Ibid., 339.

Ibid., 347.

The historic context in which The Catholic Reading Circle Review was established is presented in William L. Lucey, "Catholic Magazines: 1890-1893," Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, Vol. 63, No. 3 (September 1952), 133-156.


"New Publications," Catholic Union and Times [Buffalo], January 22, 1891, 8.

White, The Founding of Cliff Haven, 100. The series contained gaps in the numbering of volumes.


The journal became a quarterly publication with issuance of the January-March 1905 issue.


Edward Mears (1844-1923) was a native of Ireland, was ordained to the priesthood in 1869, and became pastor of St. Columba parish in Youngstown where he remained until his death in 1923. St. Columba's was the first and largest parish in Youngstown. Mosher was a parishioner of St. Columba's, which was then part of the Diocese of Cleveland.

"Catholic Educational Union: The Catholic Educational Union, Youngstown, Ohio — Objects and Aims," The Kansas Catholic [Kansas City], August 13, 1891, 8.

The Champlain Educator, 25, no. 1 (Janu-
ary-March 1906), 1-7.

Sheedy remained a trustee of the Catholic Summer School of America until his death in 1939.


“Special Dispatch to the Enquirer,” The Cincinnati Enquirer, July 31, 1891, 5.


“Combined for Culture: Pittsburgh Catholics Unite in Organizing a Local Reading Circle — Opening Meeting in Duquesne Hall — Objects of the Catholic Educational Union Explained — Speeches and Music for Intermingled Learning,” The Pittsburgh Post, September 30, 1891, 2.

“Catholic Reading Circle,” Pittsburgh Catholic, October 1, 1891, 5.

“Combined For Culture,” 2.

Ibid.


“Reading Circles Spreading,” The Pittsburg Post, October 12, 1891, 3.

“At Cliff Haven,” Pittsburgh Catholic, September 2, 1897, 2.


The Catholic Review was a weekly newspaper, published by P.V. Hickey, in Brooklyn and New York City in the nineteenth century.

The Catholic Reading Circle Review, 2, no. 5 (February 1892), 301.

Letter of Monsignor James F. Laughlin to the Catholic Review, as quoted in White, The Founding of Cliff Haven, 23.

Ibid., 24.

Ibid., 25.


New York Letter,” The Catholic Union and Times [Buffalo], May 19, 1892, 5. Appearance of the term “Catholic Chautauqua” in Catholic publications was rare, in contrast to secular publications which routinely employed the phrase. See, e.g., “Catholic Chautauqua — Summer School to Combine Health and Learning,” The Boston Globe, July 29, 1892, 10.

Prospectus of the Catholic School Assembly,” Pittsburgh Catholic, June 30, 1892, 3.

See, e.g., “Another Active Week at the Summer School,” Catholic Union and Times [Buffalo], August 15, 1901, 1, which stated: “Chief among those to whose zeal, labor and foresight the founding of the Cliff Haven Summer School is due, are the three distinguished presidents, Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, who has the honor of having been first president of the school; Rt. Rev. Msgr. James F. Laughlin [sic], his immediate successor, and Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Conaty, D.D., rector of the Catholic University of America.” Conaty would later become a bishop (1901) and then bishop of Monterey-Los Angeles (1903-1915). Bishop Conaty died at age 68 in 1915 — nine years after the death of Warren Mosher (1906), and four years after the death of Monsignor Laughlin (1911). Thus, Morgan Sheedy was left to dominate these organizations and to continue to shape their understanding of their historic importance to the Catholic role in American society for another two and a half decades until his death in 1939.

Indeed, Laughlin’s obituary openly stated that “Several times he was suggested for elevation to the hierarchy, but declined preferment which would remove him from Philadelphia.” “Mons. Laughlin Dies in Barbadoes [sic].” 6.

Morgan M. Sheedy, “The Reading Circle Movement,” The Champlain Educator, 23, no. 9 (September 1904), 600-611.

Morgan M. Sheedy, “The Story of the Catholic Summer School,” The Champlain Educator, 23, no. 9 (September 1904), 589-599.


White, The Founding of Cliff Haven, 27.


In this regard, see “Catholic Chautauqua — Summer School to Combine Health and Learning,” 10.


“Catholic Summer School. It Opens To-Day with Every Indication of Success,” The Pittsburg Post, August 1, 1892, 3.


Ibid.


Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, as quoted in “Catholic Summer School. Father Sheedy Says It is a Pronounced Success,” The Pittsburgh Post, August 22, 1892, 3.

Ibid.

“Catholic Summer School,” 3.

Ibid.


“Selecting A Location,” The Pittsburg Dispatch, November 17, 1892, 2. An inspection of the Catholic Summer School in 1902 by the head inspector of the University of the State of New York produced a report that concluded: “These courses will be accepted as the full equivalent of university courses in the same subjects by the school authorities of New York City.” “Catholic Summer School Wins Approval of the Inspection Department,” A New York State University, The Catholic Telegraph [Cincinnati], November 13, 1902, 1.

Warren E. Mosher, “A Retrospective View,” Mosher’s Magazine 14, no. 3 (July 1899), 165.

As to the 1893 Summer School, see: (1) William H. Thorne, “The New Home of the Summer School,” The Catholic World 57 (April 1893), 67-84 [the first photograph appearing in this article is that of Father Morgan Sheedy], and (2) John J. O’Shea, “The Catholic Chautauqua,” The Catholic World 57 (September 1893), 853-862.

White, The Founding of Cliff Haven, 37.

Ibid., 39.

“Summer School Has New Building,” The Tablet [Brooklyn], May 25, 1929, 6.

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188 The Library of Congress contains a collection of photographs of the Catholic Summer School at Cliff Haven; see “Catholic Summer School, Cliff Haven, NY” at the website: “Library of Congress.” The Library of Congress, accessed July 11, 2021, http://www.loc.gov/. The Clinton County Historical Association also maintains a collection of Cliff Haven photographs which is available in the Photo Gallery at its website: Clinton County Historical Association Archives, accessed July 13, 2021, https://diviner.clintoncountyhistorical.org/diviner-browse/?collection=CliffHaven&Page=1. A number of postcards showing Cliff Haven buildings are also extant. Catholic Summer School china plate bearing representative photographs of Cliff Haven were also created and are preserved in the collections of the Clinton County Historical Association.

189 White, The Founding of Cliff Haven, 45.


192 Francis P. Kilcoe, “Cliff Haven on Lake Champlain,” The Tablet [Brooklyn], May 2, 1931, 14.

193 “Summer School Has New Building,” The Tablet [Brooklyn], May 25, 1929, 6. Francis Patrick Duffy (1871-1932), a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, became active in the Catholic Summer School of America prior to World War I. He became a military chaplain during that war when the 69th New York Regiment (the “Fighting 69th”) was federalized and redesignated the 165th U.S. Infantry Regiment. Recognized for selfless service to his unit, Duffy emerged as the most highly decorated Catholic in the history of the U.S. Army. He authored Father Duffy’s Story (1919). A statue of Duffy was later erected in the Times Square district of Manhattan, New York City.


195 “Summer School Has New Building,” 6. Katherine Hepburn was the understudy to lead actress Hope Williams in the play.


197 “Summer School Has New Building,” 6.

198 See, e.g., “At Cliff Haven: Continued Success of the Summer School: Synopsis of Interesting Discourses — Current Doings Etc.,” Pittsburg Catholic, August 12, 1897, 1.


200 James J. Walsh, The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries (New York: Catholic Summer School Press, 1907). The volume was dedicated to the then-president of the Catholic Summer School of America, Monsignor Michael J. Lavelle.


203 The lecture content of Sheedy’s volume Social Problems is described in an extensive press release appearing in the Post: “Social Problems,” The Pittsburgh Post, October 5, 1896, 4. The published notice explained the national reputation that Sheedy enjoyed as a lecturer on “labor and capital” issues.

204 America 3 (July 2, 1910), 318.


207 “Summer School in 50th Year,” The Tablet [Brooklyn], July 5, 1941, 16.
Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, Catholic Action, and Human Relations in the Diocese of Pittsburgh in the 1940s through the 1970s

Kathleen M. Washy

Summary: In 1944, Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, CSJ, embarked on the task of developing a Christian Social Living (CSL) curriculum for middle school students as envisioned by the Pittsburgh diocesan school superintendent Father Thomas Quigley. Drawing upon her upbringing in a socially conscious household in a Western Pennsylvanian steel mill town, she saw her work culminate in the publication of the co-authored textbook *The Christian Citizen*, which brought the principles of CSL into many classrooms in the United States. Her CSL work in the 1940s through the early 1960s provided middle school students with the tools to carry out Catholic Action. As Catholic Action was evolving within the post-conciliar church in the mid-1960s, Sister Mary Dennis co-authored a new textbook, *The Responsible Citizen*, and created a program of educating the laity of all faiths on race relations. As part of an initiative to improve race relations, the Pittsburgh diocese adopted this Catholic Action program and, subsequently, hired her to implement it. By the 1970s, her work had broadened to human relations. This article examines the contributions of this woman religious to Catholic Action and human relations in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, from the late 1940s through the early 1970s.

On September 3, 1929, fourteen-year-old Patricia Donovan walked through the doors of the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, Pennsylvania, to enroll in their St. Joseph’s Preparatory High School. Two years later, Patricia entered the Sisters of St. Joseph and received the name Sister Mary Dennis. Coming from an anti-Catholic and anti-union steel mill town, Sister Mary Dennis would find herself drawn to social activism, human relations, and Catholic Action. Over the course of her life, she co-authored two civics textbooks; established race relations programs; served on executive boards; co-founded organizations; and became the first sister to serve on the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission. Her contributions to society did not go unnoticed, and her work was summed up accordingly: “Watch-dog, crusader, organizer, advocate, humanitarian, scholar, teacher, author—by turns Sister Mary Dennis assumed all these roles as the fissures and fractures in our social fabric became more visible.” From the late 1940s to the early 1970s, drawing from her life as a woman religious, Sister Mary Dennis brought Catholic Action not only to the Catholic laity but also to those of other faiths.

Shaped by life in the heavily industrialized, labor-focused Western Pennsylvanian region, Sister Mary Dennis found herself being drawn into the world of Catholic Action when she was tapped in the 1940s by her congregation to work on a Catholic Action civics textbook. Building on this pre-Vatican II work, she embraced the new opportunities made possible in the 1960s. Moving beyond her congregation, she took her ideas to a broader audience, channeling her energy into working as a department head within the...
diocese to bring people to understand race relations. By the 1970s, Sister Mary Dennis had fully shifted from race relations to the broader concept of human relations. Part of a generation of “new nuns,” Sister Mary Dennis Donovan and her work serve as an example of the way that Catholic Action inspired and empowered women religious to take on new roles and ministries from the 1940s through the 1970s. Additionally, during the ten years in which she worked within the structure of the diocese, Sister Mary Dennis’s contributions add to our understanding of the transformation of American Catholicism taking place within the Diocese of Pittsburgh during those years.

Foundations in Catholic Action
Sister Mary Dennis’s foundations in the region and her initial work within her congregation were the building blocks for her involvement in Catholic Action. Born in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, in 1915, Patricia Donovan was greatly influenced by her family. She was the oldest of eight children of second-generation parents of different ethnicities—a fact that impacted her childhood, as her father’s family “always felt [her father] married below … because he was Irish and [her mother] was German.” In addition to this exposure to family bias, Patricia was also affected by Aliquippa residents’ attitudes towards ethnic and religious diversity. These local prejudices were further orchestrated by the local steel mill, Jones & Laughlin Steel Company (J & L), as it devised housing plans to intentionally separate ethnicities, thereby creating an environment of division among the residents.

While Patricia experienced hostility towards her heritage and religion, she would later watch her father become involved with attempts to unionize the mill. During that period, her mother lived in fear of her father either losing his job or facing physical intimidation—especially after the Pinkertons beat up a neighbor. There was a reason that CIO organizers called Aliquippa the “Little Siberia.” In spite of this, her father continued with his involvement in union organization.

For the Donovans, the Catholic Church was very much a part of their lives. Patricia’s mother was a member of the Catholic Daughters of America and involved in their local parish; her father listened to radio-priests Fulton Sheen and Charles Coughlin. During her early childhood, Patricia attended public school where she encountered teachers who concealed their Catholic faith in order to gain employment. From sixth through eighth grade, she attended the newly opened St. Titus School where she encountered the Sisters of St. Joseph and subsequently made the decision to attend high school as an aspirant to this congregation.

In September 1929, Patricia packed a trunk and headed across the Ohio River to the Sisters of St. Joseph’s Preparatory School. Founded in 1924, this preparatory school was part of a “campaign for vocations to the teaching religious orders movement” and provided teenage girls with the opportunity to explore religious life. For Patricia, this would be a life-changing experience; in her own words, becoming a “Prep” …

… opened up a whole new world for me. I just fell in love with everybody. The Prep kids. The Sisters. Everybody. That … I knew was … my life. So, I had no problem making the decision to come from Prep to entering.

In September 1931, just two days shy of her sixteenth birthday, Patricia entered the Sisters of St. Joseph. Two years later, Sister Mary Dennis, as she was known now, found herself teaching 72 second graders at St. Raphael School in Pittsburgh. Her final profession was in 1937 and, like most sisters at the time, she served as a teacher. Teaching during the war years had a profound effect on Sister Mary Dennis, making her consider her role in the lives of students. Her reflections later demonstrated the depth of her thoughts: “When I had kids who graduated from eighth grade and were killed in the war and then I began to ask myself, ‘What have I taught them that would prepare them for that and for eternity.’ And that was the turning point in my life.”
These were also years when the Catholic Church was grappling with issues such as Communism and materialism. Consequently, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) placed a focus on Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which addressed the condition of the working classes, and on Catholic Action, which defined the laity’s role to defend the faith and spread social action, working as an extension of the Catholic Church in the world. Acting on these concerns, Pope Pius XI gave the Catholic University of America in 1938 “a mandate to provide a system of education … to better the teaching of Christian social thought.” Christian Social Living (CSL), as it was called, was to provide students with the foundations for applying “the Great Commandment given by Christ” in the real world, and to use as a tool for Catholic Action. Having participated in early conversations on CSL at conferences, Pittsburgh’s newly appointed diocesan school superintendent, Father (later Monsignor) Thomas J. Quigley, decided to establish CSL curriculum for middle school students.

Seeking a partner for this endeavor, Quigley found one in the Sisters of St. Joseph. In 1944, Sister Mary Dennis was summoned to the motherhouse where the mother superior informed her that she was to take over work on a CSL textbook. (Sister Rose Gertrude Martin, another Sister of St. Joseph from Baden, was originally to be the author but she removed herself from the project as she had considered the writing too theoretical for her.) Setting to work, Sister Mary Dennis spent the next couple of years reading and researching, ultimately establishing CSL teaching methodology through trial and error at Pittsburgh’s Holy Rosary School.

As part of her own CSL education, Sister Mary Dennis completed her undergraduate degree at Duquesne University. It was there that she met Henry C. McGinnis, a professor who taught social philosophy. “When I went to Duquesne, I took people; I didn’t take classes,” she later proclaimed; McGinnis was one of those “people” who greatly influenced her. As part of her course work, she examined her understanding of human relations, ideas that would be reflected in her later work:

> When we really understand the oneness of the human race, we lose our race prejudice, our desire to dominate others, to exploit others to win at the expense of others. Unless we regard the Negro, the...
In 1948, the year Sister Mary Dennis completed her undergraduate degree, the textbook *The Christian Citizen — His Challenge* was finally published. Although Quigley was listed as co-author, Sister Mary Dennis was in reality the primary author. She accomplished the bulk of the research and writing with help from her fellow Sisters of St. Joseph.24 The CSL curriculum of *The Christian Citizen* provided middle-school students with methods on how “to practice justice, mercy, and charity every day and all day…”25 Taking CSL on the road, Sister Mary Dennis gave workshops both locally and nationally.26 Twenty-three dioceses eventually adopted one of the editions of *The Christian Citizen* textbook, with the Archdiocese of Chicago ordering a specially revised 1952 edition for their teachers and students.27

Fittingly, the introduction to the first edition of *The Christian Citizen* written in the 1940s begins with a description of a soldier statue monument in Sister Mary Dennis’s hometown of Aliquippa. The statue becomes a metaphor: individuals act like “statues of Christianity” but instead should act like “soldiers of Christ.”28 Throughout the curriculum, civics lessons are infused with Christianity, in order to have students “become habituated to the Christian viewpoint of the civil order” and recognize “subtle attacks on democracy.”29 Beginning with the value of the individual, the curriculum builds to the family unit, the community, the government (local, state, federal, and church), the foundations for the democratic republic, and the world community. With this civics curriculum framework being interwoven with Christian social thought, the students would thus learn that “Christian citizenship is the putting into practice of God’s command to love our neighbor” and would gain the tools for Catholic Action for life.30

**The Responsible Citizen:**
**Foundations in Religious Life, Catholic Action, and Pittsburgh**

When Sister Mary Dennis entered religious life in 1931, she became part of a world that was shaped by the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which imposed new strictures on apostolic sisters and defined their work “primarily in terms of convent-centered prayer.”31 Educated before the advent of the Sisters Formation Conference, Sister Mary Dennis had spent fifteen years of part-time course work to obtain her bachelor’s degree, ultimately graduating alongside a person who had been one of her third-grade students in the 1930s.32 She was able to further her education on social philosophy with McGinnis at Duquesne University, completing her master’s degree in 1951. Throughout the 1950s, Sister Mary Dennis continued her ministry of serving as a teacher and a principal, while applying her knowledge by teaching history and CSL to junior high students in the Pittsburgh diocese.

As part of the Catholic Church in Pittsburgh, Sister Mary Dennis also was part of the region’s subculture. Bishop John Dearden, Pittsburgh’s bishop from 1950 to 1959, had set the tone for the area and, concurrently, its large immigrant population. Focusing on Catholic separatism and devotions, his emphasis was on closing ranks against the forces of anti-Catholicism, materialism, and Communism. In 1959, Dearden’s successor, Bishop John Wright, was transferred to Pittsburgh from the recently established Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts. Serving as the first bishop of Worcester for nine years, Wright had demonstrated his “ability as a spiritual leader and an intellectual”33 and placed a focus on the laity’s involvement in the church.34 When Wright became bishop of Pittsburgh, it was on the eve of major changes both in the Catholic Church and in society. While Dearden’s term was defined by devotionalism, Wright’s tenure in Pittsburgh would become defined in terms of social justice ministry.35

Social justice under Dearden had emphasized labor relations, with figures like Father (later Monsignor) Charles Owen Rice joining the efforts to protect workers in a diocese dominated by the steel industry. However, social justice under Wright focused on race relations. Indicative of the looming shift was the 1954 establishment of the Pittsburgh Catholic Interracial Conference (CIC), “an organization of laymen and clergy working to solve the problem of race relations.”36 Just like the first CIC established by Father John LaFarge in New York, the Pittsburgh CIC sought to end prejudice and promote equality for Blacks in Pittsburgh.

The substantial Black population in Pittsburgh had its roots in the Great Migration, with the numbers of Blacks living in the city more than doubling between 1910 and 1930.37
A 1939 New Deal WPA Federal Writers’ Project documented the early years of racial tensions and the need to establish understanding:

In spite of economic, political and social achievement, the Negro in Pittsburgh, as anywhere else, is made to feel that he is a member of a minority group, and he lives not only under the disadvantages of all such groups but also under the added one of having a black skin … Little has been done … to promote interracial relations, to explain Negro to white or white to Negro; to inform white students in schools of Negro history and culture.38

The numbers of Blacks in the city continued to increase while the white population decreased, resulting in a shift in Blacks as a percentage of the population from 12 percent in 1950 to 20 percent in 1970.39 The overwhelming majority of Blacks lived in “highly concentrated segregated ghettos,” with Pittsburgh’s Hill District being the primary location.40 After the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision Brown v. Board of Education, desegregation and the civil rights movement began to gain momentum in Pittsburgh.

The issue of race relations entered into public discourse at a time when Catholics in Pittsburgh were steadily moving away from their “separate cultural world” and becoming a part of the world around them.41 And as the Catholic Church entered the 1960s, Vatican II propelled the Catholic Church even further into the work of social justice and altered how Catholics—including women religious—viewed their role in the world. The changes within the church that were started by Vatican II impacted Sister Mary Dennis as she was striking out more and more on her own as an independent thinker, a trajectory that took her passion to educate out of the classroom and into the world.42 But her first major effort in the 1960s was still geared toward the school setting, which was a collaboration with Sister Thecla Shiel, OSU.

In the early 1960s, Pope John XXIII promulgated two encyclicals that would inspire both sisters: Mater et Magistra (1961), which focused on the duty to social justice, and Pacem in Terris (1963), which called all to a peace based on truth, justice, love, and freedom. When the two new encyclicals drew her publisher’s attention, Sister Mary Dennis was asked for a new revision of The Christian Citizen.45 She countered with the proposal of a new book and a collaboration with Sister Thecla. As she explained, “Mother [sic] Mary Isabel [Concannon] had made some kind of negotiations with the company about revising the book… And so I said no, we wouldn’t revise it but we would rewrite it completely if Thecla and I could work together we would.”46 The publisher agreed and the co-authors went to work. The two sisters were not only motivated by the two recent encyclicals but were also inspired by President John F. Kennedy’s challenge to “right the wrongs you see—not just complain about them” and from Vatican II’s promotion for “an understanding and respect for persons.”47 In fact, Sister Mary Dennis identified the two Johns—John Kennedy and Pope John XXIII—as heroes for both herself and Sister Thecla.48

The Responsible Citizen, as the new textbook was titled, was designed for junior high students. Influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas and drawing from Cardinal Joseph Cardijn’s “See,
Judge, Act” method for Catholic Action, the co-authors used “Observe, Judge, Act” as a tool for the students. This new program was in the vein of a “Social Problems course, a course which is rarely even tapped until high school level.” Basing the textbook on Social Action, Sisters Mary Dennis and Thecla addressed topics ranging from poverty and immigration to labor unions and government.

Taking on human relations issues, the sisters contended that racism denied “the unity and solidarity of the human race as God created it,” and asked students to “Act” by doing something specific “to correct false impressions about racial inferiority.” Quoting directly from *Pacem in Terris*, the sisters provided support for the equality of human beings: “It is not true that some human beings are by nature superior and other inferior. All men are equal in their natural dignity.”

The Responsible Citizen and accompanying curriculum material were used in the sisters’ home cities along with a few other cities, such as Hartford, Connecticut, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While *The Christian Citizen* had many iterations, the 1967 version of *The Responsible Citizen* was the only edition. Coinciding with the work on the textbook was the ever-increasing activity of Sister Mary Dennis in human relations within her diocese. This would eventually take over her life.

**Project Understanding:**
**Bringing Catholic Action Beyond the Catholic Church**
Race relations came to dominate the 1960s, with President Lyndon Johnson launching his Great Society program and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Within the Pittsburgh Catholic community, Bishop Wright guided his diocese on how to live out the documents of Vatican II, the recent papal encyclicals, and Catholic Action. Underscoring the importance of race relations, Wright used his homily at Pittsburgh’s 1966 Labor Day Mass to emphasize “the urgency of the racial question, particularly in terms of religion” and “exhorted union members to wage a ‘conscience crusade’ on behalf of civil rights.”

Responding to the race issues, diocesan programs took center stage. In 1964, the Pittsburgh CIC underwent reorganization, and the Pittsburgh diocese established its Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to administer federal funds through programs like Ready Five, Youth Leadership, and Project Breakthrough. This was also the first year of the federal Model Cities program in Pittsburgh, with the government encouraging “academics, blacks, labor leaders, civil liberties attorneys, and Roman Catholic clergy to work with the OEO to improve housing, job training, and education for the poor.” The National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice program Project Equality, which focused on racially-just hiring practices was yet another item introduced into the diocesan race relations dialogue.

In 1966, Wright established the Diocesan Human Relations Commission (DHRC) “to promote and maintain civil liberties, social justice and the general welfare of all people regardless of color, creed or national origin.” And in 1967 he established the Diocesan Pastoral Council as his advisory group “on how the Church can combat racism and
promote community harmony." It was the DHRC and the Diocesan Pastoral Council that would directly affect Sister Mary Dennis, who found herself increasingly involved with Catholic Action.

When the Pittsburgh CIC reorganized, Sister Mary Dennis became a member of its executive board. While she was nominated to serve as the first vice president of the reorganized group, she declined because “this particular organization at this particular time, when we are going to be in the position of exhorting the diocese to set up ‘Project Equality’ as well as other programs, that we would be in a better position with a lay person.” While she turned down the nomination, she did serve on the executive board until 1968.

Just as the CIC recognized Sister Mary Dennis Donovan’s knowledge on social justice, so did her congregation. In September 1965, the Sisters of St. Joseph in Baden announced their plan for a Human Relations Committee. This committee developed from a “‘grass roots’ movement that … received its vitality from several sources where the Holy Spirit has been especially active in impelling [the Sisters of St. Joseph] as a group to deepen [their] knowledge of and plan intelligent approaches to social problems.”

At the very first meeting of the committee, Sister Mary Dennis provided the momentum. She stated the committee’s purpose, which was to evaluate “personal, educational, and community attitudes, customs, and activities in the light of [their] constitutions, Christian social teachings, and the needs of [the] times.” Based on the resulting insights, the sisters would then integrate that knowledge in promoting social justice. With the blessing and support of Mother Superior Mary Isabel, Sister Mary Dennis advanced the committee and its work.

For this new internal committee, the sisters were to follow the format “To evaluate … To enlighten … To act,” a variation on the Catholic Action language used by Cardinal’s “See, Judge, Act,” and Sister Mary Dennis’s “Observe, Judge, Act” in The Responsible Citizen, which was in production at the time. Through this committee, Sister Mary Dennis sought to lead her own congregation to understand human relations and act in ways that followed the “Christian principles of social living in the encyclicals.”

This committee work evolved into a program created by Sister Mary Dennis that she entitled “Project Understanding.” As she explained,

... I did this proposal for a Project Understanding which would help our Sisters with race relations. And I take the proposal to [Mother] Mary Isabel and Mary Isabel says “Oh … I’ll have to show this to [Bishop] Wright to see if we could do it,” because in those days that was a no-no. I was going to involve non-Catholics and all the people in the areas where we lived.

Involving others would become a hallmark of her program. For the congregation’s human relations committee, she included not only representatives from throughout the congregation but also a CIC liaison and lay advisors “on invitation.” And now, the program had the attention of the bishop.

In the fall of 1966, the DHRC was asked to establish a special committee to review a project of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Sister Mary Dennis gave a report on this proposed “Project 67”—the name that the DHRC gave to Project Understanding—and in this way, took her first step in bringing this endeavor to a wider audience. After the DHRC heard the report, Wright weighed in on it, commenting that “if, in fact, it is a teaching project, a tremendous contribution can be made.” He recommended that the program be tested in six parishes and that “this Commission should approve the project, bless and commend it and co-sponsor the project with Sister Mary Dennis.” The DHRC readily adopted Wright’s recommendations and
Project Understanding became official.\textsuperscript{67}

For the next nine months, Sister Mary Dennis worked on launching her pilot program. At the same time, she was completing five years serving as principal for St. Joseph High School in Natrona Heights and participating in her congregation’s General Chapter on the renewal called for in \textit{Perfectae Caritatis}.\textsuperscript{68} Her work with Project Understanding began in earnest with a spring meeting of pastors and principals of the six pilot parishes. Shortly after, the headline in the \textit{Pittsburgh Catholic} proclaimed “St. Joseph Nuns Plan Race Relations Project,” with this news story juxtaposed with an article of the diocese refuting CIC claims of the lack of school integration within the diocese. With unanimous approval by the Diocesan Pastoral Council at its first session, Project Understanding was given diocesan blessing.\textsuperscript{69}

In their September 1967 newsletter, the Pittsburgh CIC placed the following announcement that gives an overview of the program’s approach:

\textbf{PROJECT UNDERSTANDING} is an ecumenical pilot project to train leaders in race relations in six local areas. It is being sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Diocesan Human Relations Commission. There will be eight weekly sessions on Thursdays from September 14 through November 2. The six project areas are: St. Bede’s, Point Breeze; Annunciation, North Side; St. Canice, Knoxvile; St. Bernard’s, Mt. Lebanon; St. Bernadette, Monroeville; Blessed Sacramento, Natrona Heights. Teachers and community leaders from these six localities are being invited to attend the eight sessions. Speakers will be national and local experts. Sister M. Dennis is Co-Chairman.\textsuperscript{70}

Daniel P. Beyer, associate director of the Diocesan Catholic Youth Organization, served as Sister Mary Dennis’s co-chair.\textsuperscript{71} Within her congregation, the sisters summarized the early beginnings of the program in an internal newsletter:

You have probably heard of Project Understanding, Sr. Mary Dennis’ brainchild, born of the Human Relations Meetings conducted last year. For the past eight weeks, sisters from the parishes involved have been meeting and discussing problems of Human Relations with civic leaders to develop leadership in attacking problems such as employment, housing, education, etc. Mother Mary Isabel, Sr. Mary Agnes, and Sr. Ursula have been attending from the Motherhouse.

Sr. Mary Dennis feels that the meetings are successful. The discussion groups which follow each lecture are most helpful, for here the people speak their minds and get ready for action. Now if the follow-up of these meetings shows that the campaign for action is successful, Bishop Wright will get more of the Diocese involved. He approved of the project as a much needed program to provide moral motivation for stepped-up involvement in civil rights programs.\textsuperscript{72}

From the onset, Bishop Wright placed his full support behind establishing this program as one way to address race relations concerns.\textsuperscript{73} In a July 1967, in a memo to the DHRC chairman Judge Harry Kramer, the bishop was adamant that there would be “early, effective and complete press releases”:

Publicity on behalf of the Project Understanding program … is absolutely indispensable to the success of the project. In a word, I would hope that a major story on Project Understanding, the plans for Thursday, September 14 in all their exact details of time and place, the subjects of the series, etc., etc., plus full credit to the Sisters of St. Joseph would be sent to the PITTSBURGH Catholic and to all other news media. I would hope that it would indicate that the program is under the patronage of the Human Relations Commission but under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The letterhead of Project Understanding … indicates the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Human Relations Commission as co-sponsors.\textsuperscript{74}

An August 24 press conference held by Sister Mary Dennis, DHRC Vice Chairman Monsignor Paul Bassompierre, and the Mayor’s Commission on Human Relations Executive Director David Washington supplied some of the publicity championed by Wright, who was intent on the program’s acceptance in the community at large.\textsuperscript{75} Additionally, Wright served as the first speaker for Project Understanding’s opening event, helping to draw further attention to the program. Joined by Pittsburgh Mayor Joseph M. Barr and Rabbi Walter Jacob of Rodef Shalom Congregation, Wright’s address was on “The Ecumenical Era and Human Relations.”\textsuperscript{76}

After the initial launch, Bishop Wright left Sister Mary Dennis to her work. The intent of the program was to encourage people “to examine and readjust their values in order to undertake the task of erasing the causes of racism” and to “initiate better communications among the various ethnic, religious and civic groups within urban communities.”\textsuperscript{77} The pilot program provided speakers such as civil rights activist James Farmer; chairman of Detroit’s Project Commitment Joseph L. Hanschanecht, Jr.; dean of Howard University’s
Graduate School of Social Work Dr. Mary Ella Robertson; and Roosevelt University’s Chair of Political Science Dr. Charles V. Hamilton—in essence, Blacks speaking to mainly white parishioners. Sister Mary Dennis’s enlistment of Hanschanecht as a speaker indicated a link to Detroit’s Project Commitment, which Detroit’s Archbishop John Dearden (former bishop of Pittsburgh) had established years earlier as “an educational program, with the assistance of Detroit-area parishes that would enlighten Detroit’s Catholics to the new realities of civil rights and equal opportunity in housing and employment.” While Dearden’s program was exclusive to Catholics, Sister Mary Dennis expanded her program to be inclusive of others, bringing Catholic Action beyond the church.

While Project Understanding’s pilot ended in November 1967, Pittsburgh’s Knoxville neighborhood continued a six-session workshop for both public and parochial school teachers. In January, the DHRC took time to assess Project Understanding, noting that five out of the six pilot groups had been active and organized. At the following month’s meeting, the DHRC’s recommendation to Wright was for Sister Mary Dennis not only to continue her work but to do so in a full-time capacity.

Wright’s decision was not long in coming. With the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the resulting civil disorders unfolding, Wright was quick to make a decision that would place an emphasis on human relations. Sister Mary Dennis and her program were officially brought onboard, and her appointment as the full-time director for Project Understanding was announced in the Pittsburgh Catholic. On the heels of the creation of this official diocesan department addressing race relations was yet another assassination, that of Bobby Kennedy on June 4.

In the shadow of these events, the Pittsburgh Diocese moved forward with its scheduled meetings on June 15 and 16 to discuss how to “combat racism and promote community harmony.” With Wright serving as chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Social Action Department and as one of the primary authors for the Catholic Bishop’s “Statement on National Race Crisis,” this meeting drew considerable attention. The results of the meeting were ten resolutions passed by the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Four of these would have direct bearing on Sister Mary Dennis: 1) Catholic junior and senior high schools civics course would include a study of the Kerner Report; 2) staff the DHRC with two full-time employees; 3) establish educational programs on racism for qualified teachers; and 4) establish a diocesan Urban Task Force (UTF).

Upon filling her new position within the diocese as an official departmental administrator, Sister Mary Dennis worked to expand the programming in earnest, and in the process, addressed four of the ten Diocesan Pastoral Council’s resolutions. By the end of the summer, she had initiated 35 parishes into Project Understanding; prepared a guide for the study of Blacks in history; conducted an orientation for diocesan teachers for the use of this guide; and developed discussion guides on the Kerner report for use with junior high students through adults. Her work in Catholic Action became focused on human relations, bringing the message of social justice to any who would listen. Over the next few years, Project Understanding programs were popping up all over the diocese, some with reportedly large numbers in attendance and with non-Catholics as participants. Sister Mary Dennis invited speakers versed on a wide range of topics, such as University of Pittsburgh’s Sociology professor Dr. Heroshi Wagatsuma speaking on “The Roots of Prejudice”; Pittsburgh Chapter President Byrd Brown on “Black Militancy … What is it All About”; and the national “Action Caravan on Race” workshop, which was headed by Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame from Chicago.

While initially taking place in church settings, Sister Mary
Dennis also took Project Understanding to more diverse audiences. She spoke to hospital employees and women’s groups and she even appeared on KDKA-TV.90 In 1969, Sister Mary Dennis teamed up with University of Pittsburgh’s Dean of Student Affairs N. Ronald Pease to put on what she called “mini-Project Understanding.”91 This university based program, titled “White to White: A Look at White Racism,” challenged white university students to take a hard look at themselves and the subject of racism.92 Sister Mary Dennis had expanded the program outside of diocesan venues.

In the fall of 1968, Sister Mary Dennis found herself with the additional charge of the Neighborhood Apostolate of the Sisters (NAS). The NAS was a relatively new program that included two initiatives—Adult Armchair Education and Operation Post Office—both of which received funding from the federal Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC). According to Sister Mary Dennis, the program’s overall goals were for the NAS and “their lay co-workers” to educate and communicate with the people that they served so to increase an understanding of those communities. The idea was for the sisters to hold regular discussion groups in order to “share the experiences and knowledge … gathered.” The sisters were provided tools with which to conduct a neighborhood study focused on the buildings, communication, ethnic groups, and the “black man’s situation.”93

In the case of NAS’s Adult Armchair Education, which had been initiated by the OIC and adopted by the NAS, the sisters focused on teaching secretarial skills to older residents of Pittsburgh’s Oakland neighborhood.94 The OIC recruited students while the NAS recruited teachers. As part of her search for sister-volunteers, Sister Mary Dennis reflected the period by relaying Wright’s safety requirement that the sisters “must look like Sisters” so that sisters would be afforded the protection of their clothing.95 In September 1969, Sister Mary Dennis turned Adult Armchair Education over to a Franciscan sister, Sister Margaretta Fischer, as the second NAS program—Operation Post Office—required more attention.96

Well under way by the end of 1968, Operation Post Office provided sisters with an opportunity to work with individuals to study for civil service exams. When Sister Mary Dennis requested volunteers, the response exceeded her expectations, with more than 100 volunteering when only 25 were anticipated.97 Over the course of four years, the sister-volunteers tutored 1250 individuals, of whom 751 took the exam, resulting in the employment of 331 in the post office.98

Sharing her knowledge and methodology with others was important to Sister Mary Dennis. Drawing from her work in race relations, Sister Mary Dennis was able to report on her efforts to other sisters during seminars in Chicago.99 Within the local NAS newsletter, she was able to promote her Catholic Action curriculum by highlighting her textbook The Responsible Citizen as an approach for educating others “to get to know the neighbor.”100

With her strength in education, Sister Mary Dennis found herself coordinating the summer training of teachers working within urban “ghetto areas.” She assumed this additional responsibility in her role as part of the diocesan UTF. Mirroring the National Urban Task Force, this local UTF focused on programs for the poor and minorities. Headed by Father James Spelman, the UTF worked with “existing departments, teaching communities and groups of priests and laymen to help them redirect some of their programs and priorities to meet new and pressing needs,” and Project Understanding now fell under its umbrella, a foreshadowing of the future for Sister Mary Dennis in the diocesan organizational structure.101

**Sister Mary Dennis Takes on Human Relations Education**

The 1970s were marked by the full shift of Sister Mary Dennis’s Catholic Action from race relations to human relations at a time when the Diocese of Pittsburgh was undergoing a self-examination. Intent on transitioning the diocese from the 1960s to the 1970s, Bishop Wright planned for a synod to be held in 1971. The establishment of the Diocesan Pastoral Council began the preparation for the synod. But just as planning was getting underway in 1969, Wright was called to Rome to serve as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy. Before departing Pittsburgh, Wright appointed John Hannigan as the assistant director for the UTF. With a background as a lecturer and program coordinator from the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, Hannigan was a source of knowledge and energy, and within a short amount of time, he became director of the department.102

In June 1969, the Pittsburgh diocese welcomed Vincent Leonard as its new bishop. Born in 1908 to an Irish family in Pittsburgh’s Hill District neighborhood, Leonard’s background was exclusively Pittsburgh-based. After being ordained in 1935, Leonard rose through the ranks and, by 1964, was serving as an auxiliary bishop.103 His social activist background was based on his role as a member of the Mayor’s Committee on Human Resources, a War on Poverty program. Leonard’s style was markedly different from Wright—Wright was considered a “hearty, ebullient man skilled in public relations,” while Leonard “maintained
a low profile.”

At the time of his appointment as bishop, Leonard had been serving as the general chair of the upcoming synod and so was well poised to lead the diocese into this meeting.

As part of the synod’s planning, input was requested from clergy, religious, and laity throughout the diocese. Questionnaires were sent to “the Sisters missioned in this Diocese” to give them “an opportunity to speak up on the issues which are of concern to the Synod.” In the survey results, there was a section entitled “Community Affairs” that focused on social justice. The sisters in the diocese were asked their opinions on items ranging from public speaking on social issues to individual parish commissions on community affairs. Ninety percent of the respondents felt the need for adult education programs to promote the “teachings of the Church regarding civil rights, poverty, family, etc.” The next highest ranking was an eighty-seven percent approval that a religious could speak publicly on social issues as long as it was understood that she was representing herself and not “the Church.”

These answers to the diocesan synod’s questionnaire by Pittsburgh’s women religious mirrored the importance of social issues in the Catholic Church. For northern cities in the 1970s, attention was expanded to include not only Blacks but also immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Sister Mary Dennis remarked on this shift in her approach to race relations:

As our Nation continues to struggle with its identity and purpose in the 1970’s, a new appreciation of our diverse ethnic history and cultural heritage will play an increasingly important role. The unfulfilled hope of the early 1960’s ended in the alienation of many young affluent students, the angry bitterness of the poor black and brown urban community, the economic, social, cultural, and political anxiety of the heavily ethnic working class.

Today’s challenge requires a new vision and perspective that will redefine America with a new sense of identity, a new sense of purpose, a new sense of unity. The painful process of developing a new awareness and self-image becomes personal as one struggles with the questions: ‘Who am I?’—‘Who are We?’

With a new bishop and a change in society, Sister Mary Dennis’s role within the diocese was also changing. Even though her Project Understanding programs continued as part of the UTF in the first half of 1970, Sister Mary Dennis’s days of contributions within a diocesan office were coming to an end.

In a March 1970 report to the DHRC, Hannigan related the breadth of activity undertaken by himself and Sister Mary Dennis as part of the UTF. Not only had they provided education on human relations through Project Understanding and other avenues, but they also supported and advised many organizations. Hannigan’s list of examples was lengthy and included: the city Commission on Human Relations; New Professionals Association of Pittsburgh; Community Action Pittsburgh; National Conference of Christians and Jews; Office of Community and Education Programs; University of Pittsburgh; the University and City Ministries; and the Office of Planning and Development of the Board of Public Education.

For Sister Mary Dennis, her position became more focused on diocesan schools. John T. Cicco, appointed as Pittsburgh’s first lay superintendent of diocesan schools in 1970, addressed the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference recommendation that each diocesan school system have a human relations study program. Establishing such a program, Cicco asked Sister Mary Dennis to serve as its head. Initially, Sister Mary Dennis hesitated, citing a “reluctance to accept the ‘job’ UNLESS we get support for some really effective programs for parents, teachers, and students without interference from pastors.” In the end, she agreed; one of her first jobs was to assess the curriculum and orientation programs for teachers.

In this new position, Sister Mary Dennis focused on multi-ethnic studies and intergroup relations. Based on her experience, she understood the challenge that she faced:

My planning activities to date have convinced me that we, the parochial school administration and teaching personnel, are uncomfortable with the concept of comparative ethnic studies and unready to incorporate them into our education system with any success. For that matter, public school and university personnel are not any more comfortable.

That November, in her explanation to school supervisors, she stressed the need to appreciate differences in the individual and not “homogenize students for citizenship.” For a resource, Sister Mary Dennis looked to Dr. Jaipaul, the director of the Nationalities Service Center of Philadelphia, and his work on a social studies curriculum that brought together parochial and public students. She piloted programs at three Catholic elementary schools, focusing on intergroup education that would “enable racial, religious and ethnic groups and individuals to work and live together democratically.” In spring 1971, Sister Mary Dennis directed and guided a nine-week pilot that incorporated socio-cultural perspectives into American history courses at
Lawrenceville Catholic High School. Reflecting the times, this multi-ethnic curriculum was seen by social scientists as a valid approach when combined with human relations to help pull together the American society.

Not mincing words, Sister Mary Dennis emphasized the need for multi-ethnic studies to the teachers in the diocese:

> English history, literature, and to some extent the social studies as presently taught from kindergarten through graduate school are to a large extent ethnic studies for those students whose ethnic origins are of the dominant Anglo-Saxon strain. Those Americans whose ethnic origins are in other cultures, especially the black and the brown child are being deprived. This inequity is overdue for correction. Ethnic studies are therefore presented as a valid and necessary expansion of the cultural offerings of an elementary and secondary school.

Working to convey her message to educators, she pulled together a two-week summer multi-ethnic institute for teachers to be held at Duquesne University; this would be the first major training program of the Human Relations Education (HRE) department.

To develop a pilot program in Pittsburgh’s North Side neighborhood, Sister Mary Dennis collaborated with Alice Carter, director of education for Pittsburgh’s Urban League, to expand an existing six-week junior high public-school program. This series was initially for seventh graders, and involved special curriculum material, guest speakers, special events, inter-school exchanges of students, and field trips. Annunciation and St. Peter parochial schools were to introduce the program to their eighth graders for the 1971-1972 school year.

While Sister Mary Dennis was organizing programs through the HRE Department, the Department of Social and Community Development was officially established in April 1971. Arising from a 1969 study completed by a management consultant firm on the structure of the diocesan administration, this new department was to oversee programs that advance the “understanding of human rights among clergy and laity.” Placed under Hannigan’s direction, this new department merged the activities on race relations and community action that had been covered under the Fund for Neighbors in Need, Human Relations Commission, Project Understanding, and Urban Task Force.

While the new department was being established, several organizations recognized Sister Mary Dennis’s impact through her work that same year—Teacher of the Year by the Ladies Auxiliary of Catholic War Veterans (Allegheny Chapter); United States Civil Service Commission Special Service Award; and Distinguished Woman Award in Human Relations by Kaufmann’s Triangle Corner. With greater freedom that came with Vatican II’s renewal of religious life, Sister Mary Dennis was able to bring her knowledge and skills to other organizations. The year 1971 could be considered a snapshot of her community involvement during this era. Along with her position in the diocese, the 55-year-old sister was serving on many boards, everything from local to national, from church to non-church, from executive to advisory—USCCB National Task Force on Urban Problems, Religion and Race Council of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County Women’s Political Caucus, Women in the Urban Crisis, National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN), Education Advisory Board for Ursuline Sisters of Louisville, Pittsburgh Public Schools Law Advisory Committee, and Pittsburgh Diocesan Council of Catholic Women.

Through her work in intergroup relations and multi-ethnic programs as part of the HRE, Sister Mary Dennis was also able to work on Jewish-Catholic relations through education. One of the established goals for the HRE was to promote the understanding between Christians and Jews by establishing shared values. In her first HRE bulletin, which was published in January 1971, she emphasized the multi-ethnicity, highlighting resources and teaching advice, with a focus on Blacks for several pages and ending with...
personal relationships not only with school personnel but also with many persons in the parishes and the civic community. I have been treated with the utmost courtesy and respect in my educational, civic and social action activities. I consider it a privilege that I was given the opportunity, not only to perform the usual work of the school department, but also to be involved in a number of original and far-sighted diocesan programs, i.e., the Urban Affairs Office under Father Spellman [sic], Project Understanding which involved community dialogue on racial issues in the sixties; and Human Relations Education work which involved me in numerous ecumenical and civic projects.

She goes further with her introspection, harkening back to the early days: “As a result of my work I have grown, been sensitized and been actively engaged in the ministry of social justice inspired by Monsignor Quigley long before it became the ‘in’ thing.”

Through her work, she married her two ministries—education and social justice—meeting issues head on through Catholic Action. From the 1940s through the 1970s, she resisted “the inclination to give up when giving up seems the only thing to do.” Her influence was felt not just within the church but in society at large, so much so that she was recognized for her varied contributions. And to what did she attribute her success? She responded: “an interest in people, politics and social justice … and willingness to spend long hours listening, learning and attending meetings.”

In 1976, Auxiliary Bishop John McDowell described Sister Mary Dennis with these words:

The impact she has wherever she goes is extraordinary… Sister Mary Dennis is scholarly, an able administrator, a talented writer, a gifted teacher; a sensitive, sincere, dedicated person with the highest moral values; a responsible, active, and involved citizen. She teaches what she believes, and she lives what she teaches.

**Afterword: Sister Mary Dennis’ Renewal**

After stepping down in 1977 from working in the diocesan school system, Sister Mary Dennis spent the next few years initially working in higher education within the diocese and then working in the admissions office at St. Joseph College in Rensselaer, Indiana. In 1982, her life would once again intersect with her good friend Sister Thecla—this time in Lompoc, California. Sister Thecla, who had been working with the poor in Morgantown, West Virginia, accepted a position in the Lompoc’s parish of La Purisma. Upon learning that the school required a principal, Sister The-
cla reached out to Sister Mary Dennis, who eagerly took on this new ministry, for to her, this was bringing “her career full circle back to its beginnings.”

After serving as principal for five years, the 71-year old Sister Mary Dennis retired from education and moved on to a ministry in the Catholic Charities in Santa Barbara. As always, Sister Mary Dennis took on her new role with vigor and within a short period, she and Sister Thecla started Santa Barbara’s first chapter of Older Adults Services and Intervention Service (OASIS), which was a volunteer organization to identify frail elderly and help them meet their needs. During these years, Sister Mary Dennis, who was coordinating OASIS, once again was acknowledged for her impact on a community by receiving several awards. In 1990, she returned to her motherhouse and lived out her remaining years researching and writing; volunteering with an adult literacy program; and active within her congregation. She died in 2014 at the age of 98.

Much of her life of ministry had been intertwined with the struggles within the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh to the pursuit of Catholic Action and human relations—whether working in the classroom or diocesan ministry, authoring books, or establishing organizations. Her impactful efforts were acknowledged publicly with awards and honors. Drawing from her years as a woman religious living and ministering in Western Pennsylvania, Sister Mary Dennis brought Catholic Action to the people by educating laity of all ages and religions on how “To Observe, To Judge, To Act.”

Portions of this article were delivered at the 11th Triennial Conference on the History of Women Religious (2019), St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana. The author thanks Sally Witt, CSJ; Patricia Byrne, CSJ; and Thomas F. Rzeznik, PhD for their input and encouragement on this article.

Endnotes:
1 Anonymous, Sister Mary Dennis Donovan Papers, Box 1, fl1, RG303.2, Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives (CSJBA).
3 Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, interview by Sister Sally Witt, January 18, 1993, transcript, Martha Smith, CSJ, Ph.D. Archives & Research Center, with a copy housed in CSJBA (hereafter SMD, 1993).
4 Kirstin Kennedy, “Aliquippa Housing Plans Show Journey of Immigrants,” The Times (Beaver, PA), February 25, 2015.
5 SMD, 1993.
7 SMD, 1993.
8 In the 1930s, Catholic priests such as Father Charles Owen Rice became involved with the unionization movement at J&L. See Kenneth J. Heineman, A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 123125.
9 SMD, 1993. According to the school’s ledger, the sisters did not charge Patricia with tuition. St. Joseph’s Preparatory School Collection, CSJBA.
10 Clipping, source unknown, 1924, CSJBA.
14 Ibid.
15 Kelly, Transformation, 10-12.
16 Paul A. Zimmerman, “Catholic Action,” (bachelor of divinity thesis, Con-


Monsignor Quigley’s first association with the Sisters of St. Joseph was during his grade school years at Annunciation grade school in Pittsburgh where the sisters taught.

SMD, 1993.


SMD, 1993.

Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, “Teaching Christian Social Principles in the Upper Elementary Grades,” Social Encyclopaedia Course 551, Mr. H.C. McGinnis professor, Duquesne University, August 1950, 14, Box 1, RG3032.2, CSJBA.

In the book, Sister Mary Dennis Donovan listed the names of sisters who developed the tests, questions, and activities for each chapter; sisters who prepared the manuscript for the printer; and Sister Mary Isabel Concannon, who reviewed the entire manuscript. See Monsignor J. Quigley and Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, *The Christian Citizen — His Challenge* (New York: Mentzer, Bush & Co., 1948), v-vi, 375.

Ibid, 3.


**“Nativity of Our Lord to Authors New Civics Text Book,” *Pittsburgh Catholic*, August 31, 1967.**


SMD, 1993.


Ibid, 122.


According to both Patricia Byrne, CSJ, and Sally Witt, CSJ, Sister Mary Dennis was a formidable individual, with a drive and an intellect to think that she stood out as a unique member within the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden. Patricia Byrne, telephone interview, November 8, 2020. Sally Witt, telephone interview, November 16, 2020.

Sister Martha Jacob, “A Coal Minter’s Daughter: Sister Thecla Shiel Served the Lord Well in Many Roles,” *Ursuline DOME*, Summer/Fall 2015, 14.

SMD, 1993.


SMD, 1993.


SMD, 1993.

Joseph Cardijn’s (1882-1967) model was applied in many social movements, including Catholic Action groups in the United States. For background on the transformation of Catholic Action from before to after Vatican II, see Bonner, Connolly, and Denny, *Empowering the People of God.*

Sister-Principal Writes Textbook on Citizenship” *The Record* (Louisville, KY), June 29, 1967.


Sister Thecla Shiel Collection, Ursuline Sisters of Louisville Archives.

Heinemann, “from City,” 136.


Other programs introduced during the 1960s included the Neighborhood Development Program, Interfaith Housing Corporation, Citizens-Clergy Coordinating Committee (CCCC), Upward Bound, Fund for Neighbors in Need, and Office for Black Catholic Ministries

Historical Note, Finding Aid for RG22 07A Records, Office for the Community Service Liaison, Diocese of Pittsburgh Archives (hereafter DPA).


Board of Director Minutes, Box 1, ff 3, CIC Records, AIS.1976.09, PITT Archives.

Community Circular, September 14, 1964, CSJBA.

“Memo to Superiors and Principals,” Community Meeting Records, October 18, 1965, CSJBA.

Human Relations Committee Purpose and Objectives, c. 1965, CSJBA.

Ibid.

SMD, 1993.

Human Relations Commission (hereafter HRC) minutes, November 11, 1966; December 9, 1966; January 13, 1967, Box 2444, RG 22 07A, DPA.

HRC minutes, January 13, 1967, Box 2444, RG 22 07A, DPA.


Durng her years at Natrona, Joseph High School in Natrona, Sister Mary Dennis continued to teach CSL. One of her former St. Joseph students stated that CSL affected their approach that she and her deceased husband, who also had been a St. Joseph student, took within their careers in the medical profession. Rita Ann Stanko, telephone interview, November 30, 2020.


“In-R-City Baden Borba, October 1967, Brazil Collection, CSJBA.

See Kelly, *Transformation*, 198-221, for further information on other race relations activities in the diocese. Project Understanding is mentioned on pages 208, 209, and 212.

Bishop John Wright to Judge Harry Kramer, July 29, 1967, Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA.


“Historical Note, Finding Aid for Archbishop’s Commission on Human Relations Collection, Archdiocese of Detroit Archives.

“South Hills Community to Sponsor First Project Understanding Results,” *Pittsburgh Catholic*, January 26, 1968.

HRC minutes, February 1968, Box 2444, RG 22 07A, DPA.

Headlines in Pittsburgh Catholic, April 12, 1968, edition: “Violence-battered nation mourns King,” “Churches are spared, launch relief efforts,” “Bishop Eulogizes Dr. King,” “Pope: King’s killing ‘cowardly, atrocious’,” "..."
“A Message Bishop Wright: Easter, 1968, USA.”


In February 1968, the federal National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders released its report (“Kerner Report”) on the causes of the 1967 race riots.


Study guide on Blacks in American history was per Bishop McDowell’s request. See Sister Mary Dennis to DHRC, September 6, 1968, Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA.

The Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and Pittsburgh Catholic have several articles announcing programs. According to the article “Lately Move into Human Relations,” Pittsburgh Press, February 15, 1969, “more than 700 lay leaders from Protestant denominations and Catholics in two of the 13 deanery areas of Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese will take part Thursday in a human relations program.”[n.b., the effectiveness of Project Understanding, the HRC, and the Urban Task Force caused the Pittsburgh CIC to debate its own purpose. See Minutes, August 27, 1968, Box 1, ff, CIC Records, AIS.1976.09, PITT Archives.]


CV Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, CSJBA.

CV Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, CSJBA.


“Neighborhood Apostolate of the Sisters Discussion Guide for Area Meetings,” c. 1970, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA.

On March 30, 1968, the Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale adopted the Adult Armchair program, which had been initiated by Lillian Jennings of St. Francis, who was asked to head it. See Bishop McDowell to Mrs. Julius Herman, February 25, 1970, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.

Emphasis in original. Sister Mary Dennis to “Sister,” November 6, 1968, Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA.


Human Relations Commission Minutes, January 10, 1969, Box 2444, RG22 07A, DPA.

CV, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA.

E.g., Sister Mary Dennis provided reports on apostolic works of sisters’ suburban apostolate to Chicago Urban Apostolate October 19, 1968 and February 11, 1969. See her presentation to Catholic Bishops in Chicago in November and December 1968; she also served on a panel at the Chicago Cenacle, May 29, 1969 SMD CV, CSJBA.

Newsletter for NAS 2, no. 3 (November 1969), Box 1113, RG22 07A, DPA.


Establishment of the Urban Task Force, July 8, 1971, Box 2404, RG22 07A, DPA.

Diocese Welcomes Bishop Leonard,” Pittsburgh Catholic, June 6, 1969. Bishop Leonard grew up in the Hill District at a time when that neighborhood was predominantly Irish.


Rev. Leo V. Vanyo to “Sisters,” May 14, 1970, Mother Mary Isabel Convenenon papers, CSJBA.

McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 262.

Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to Principals, July 13, 1970, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.

Presentation by John Hannigan to DHR, March 13, 1970, Box 2444, RG22 07A, DPA.

Father James Spelman and John Hannigan to Bishop Vincent Leonard, June 23, 1970, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.

Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to John Hannigan, August 7, 1970, Ibid. [n.b., The title for the Pennsylvania Human Relations Office meeting agenda was “Conference on Tension in Pittsburgh Public Schools.”]”

Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to John Hannigan, August 26, 1970. Additionally, she was asked to investigate the Ghetto Game, administrative meeting with John Cicco, Sister Mary Dennis Donovan, John Hannigan, September 17, 1970. Ibid. The Ghetto Game was a game devised in which students assumed roles of “slum dwellers” and was used by schools to “implement the state’s 1968 regulation on minority history.” See Larry Margasak, “Ghetto Game’ in Schools,” Evening Standard (Uniontown), August 6, 1970.

Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to John Cicco, October 23, 1970, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.

Presentation by Sister Mary Dennis to School Supervisors, November 6, 1970, Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA. Makel-Davis America was a textbook for Lawrenceville Catholic HS; Dr. Jaipaul did not use his first name. See Nels Nelson, “Indian Immigrant Lists City’sEthnics,” Philadelphia Daily News August 19, 1976; to read about Jaipaul’s approach, see Linda Loyd, “Public, Parochial Pupils to Alternate Racial Study Classes,” Philadelphia Inquirer, April 14, 1972; Curriculum Guides from the Nationalities Service Center for the joint public/parochial school program, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.

Pilot schools: one private—Mount Gallitzin Academy (Baden) and two parochial—Resurrection (Brookline), and St. Mary Magdalene (Home- stead) used The Social Sciences — Concepts and Values as textbook. Diocesan School Human Relations Education Program description, 1971, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.

Elizabeth Wolfskill, Director Programs of Social Education, to Sister Maria Goretto, Martin de Porres High School in Detroit, MI, March 13, 1972.


Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to Principals, July 13, 1971, Box 1112, RG22 07A, DPA.


Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to Members of the Advisory Committee to the Human Relations Education Program, April 7, 1971, Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA.


CV, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA. Kaufmanns Department Store sponsored Triangle Corner Ltd., which was a program to promote Pittsburgh professional women.

She was a charter member of NCAN and Women in the Urban Crisis. She helped lay the groundwork for Pittsburgh’s Diocesan Sisters Council and for Network, a social justice lobby in Washington DC. CV, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA.

Diocesan School Human Relations Education Program, 1971, Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA.

“Office of the Superintendent of Schools Diocese of Pittsburgh Human Relations Education — Bulletin #1,” Box 2443, RG22 07A, DPA.


John Cicco to Rev. Edward Bryce, Molly Rush, and Mary Winter, March 13, 1974, Box 2444, RG22 07A, DPA.

Sister Mary Dennis Donovan to Bishop Anthony Bosco, May 1, 1977, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA.

Ibid.

Anonymous, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA.


Auxiliary Bishop John McDowell to Mrs. Julius Herman, February 25, 1976, Scrapbook, Box 2, 303.2, CSJBA.


Sister Mary Dennis received Santa Barbara County Commission’s Woman of the Year for the fourth district in 1988, United Way Silver Award in 1990, and Florence Charleston Award in 1990, Box 1, RG 303.2, CSJBA.
The Legacy of the Journals
Started by Monsignor Andrew A. Lambing and Martin I. J. Griffin

John C. Bates, Esq.
In Pennsylvania in the late 1800s, Monsignor Andrew A. Lambing and Martin I. J. Griffin were the driving forces in research on the history of the Catholic Church in early America. The following chart presents the chronology of the two Catholic historical societies established in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia in the mid-1880s, and their historical journal publications that witnessed amalgamation of Monsignor Andrew Lambing’s Researches into a Philadelphia publication and the subsequent history, replete with several name changes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Society, Person, or Event</th>
<th>Date of Establishment</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society of Pittsburgh (Andrew A. Lambing)</td>
<td>February 1, 1885</td>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td><em>Historical Researches in Western Pennsylvania, Principally Catholic</em></td>
<td>July 1884 - April 1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Catholic Historical Researches</em> (name change)</td>
<td>July 1885 - October 1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Renamed in 1892: <em>Griffin’s I.C.B.U. Journal</em></td>
<td>Jan. 15, 1892 - June 1, 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Renamed in 1894: <em>Griffin’s Journal</em></td>
<td>June 15, 1894 - 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin I. J. Griffin</td>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td><em>American Catholic Historical Researches</em> (Vol. III, No. 3 et seq.)</td>
<td>1887 - 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Records</em></td>
<td>1887 - 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>American Catholic Historical Researches</em></td>
<td>December 1911 - July 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Records</em> with which is combined <em>American Catholic Historical Researches</em></td>
<td>September - December 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin I. J. Griffin dies in November 1911. William L. J. Griffin edits until July 1912.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td><em>American Catholic Historical Researches</em></td>
<td>December 1911 - July 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Estate settlement with The American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia in 1912</td>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td><em>Records</em> with which is combined <em>American Catholic Historical Researches</em></td>
<td>September - December 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Renamed in 1999: <em>American Catholic Studies</em></td>
<td>1999 - to date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to 1884, U.S. Catholic bishops had been urging parishes to educate their children. That year, meeting in Plenary Council, the bishops declared that every parish was to have a school within two years. Pastors and laity also saw the need to bring Catholic children, particularly the daughters and sons of immigrants, into the mainstream of American society, and U.S. Catholic education took off in earnest. The strength of that work dominated the church for over a century, and news of the attempts to educate Catholic children in other ways almost became lost to history.

Yet some prelates sought to initiate other types of educational plans. In Minnesota in the 1890s, Archbishop John Ireland backed an arrangement in two small towns where the public school board operated the schools, and religious instruction was given outside of regular class time. This was based on a plan already in practice in Poughkeepsie, New York. Efforts in both places were short-lived.1 Yet these were not the first attempts to arrange for secular and religious education outside of parish-run schools. Another early example was in the Allegheny Mountains of Western Pennsylvania. In 1881, Father John Boyle arranged for Sisters of St. Joseph from Ebensburg to be employed as teachers in the public schools of nearby Gallitzin, PA. Gallitzin Borough, which had just been incorporated in 1872, was drawing workers for coal mines and railroad construction, so much so that its population tripled between 1880 and 1890.2 Within a year the Gallitzin public school system consisted of three buildings, one four-room hall for upper grade students and two one-room schoolhouses for younger children. The school for the students of the upper grades belonged to the parish.3

By the 1893 fall term, the Gallitzin School Board consolidated all of the local public schools into a newly constructed school, which was located above the railroad tunnel. This image is from 1902.

This was at a time of increasing immigration, and accompanying it were the contempt and fear of immigrants known as nativism. The large number of Catholics among the immigrants became a particular target. In Gallitzin during the 1894 spring term, a nativist group, the Junior Order of United American Mechanics (JOUAM), filed charges against the sisters and the Gallitzin school directors, accusing them of promoting sectarian influence in a public school, a practice outlawed in the state. Particularly at issue was the fact that the sisters wore a religious habit, which was considered a sectarian symbol.

The school year was interrupted when the trial took place.
in Ebensburg, the county seat, in May. Among the witness- 
es were the six sisters: Sisters Colletta Cooney, Gonzaga 
Cunningham, Mary John Keenan, Marcella Kennedy, Se-
bastian McGrath, DeSales Walsh. Also, Mother Mary Dun-
levy, the major superior, was called to the stand to produce 
the by-laws and constitutions of the congregation.

That August, the judge ruled that the religious dress of 
teachers was not a sectarian influence and the sisters re-
turned to the schools for the 1894-95 school year. The rul-
ing did state, however, that the sisters could not teach the 
Catholic religion in a public school building even outside of 
school hours. The JOUAM made an appeal to the Penn-
sylvania Supreme Court which in November upheld the 
lower court. In their ruling, the justices noted that the State 
Legislature could enact a statute regarding the style of dress 
of teachers.\(^5\) JOUAM found a friendly member of the state 
legislature to sponsor what was known as the Garb Bill, 
and it passed the state legislature by a vote of 151-30. The 
governor signed it into law on June 27, 1895.\(^6\)

Immediately, sisters were barred from teaching in any public 
school in Pennsylvania, and the St. Joseph Sisters were no 
longer teachers in the public schools of Gallitzin or Lilly, 
another coal mining town some five miles away. The parish-
es then took on the responsibility of educating the Catholic 
children. In Gallitzin, sisters used space in their convent at 
St. Patrick Parish for classrooms. Before long, St. Patrick 
moved its school into the former church.\(^7\) This would serve 
as the parish school until 1958. St. Brigid Parish in Lilly built 
a school which was ready for use in 1901. Ironically, the year 
of the Garb Act, 1895, was the same year that education of 
children became mandatory in the state.\(^8\)

Even while it was clear that sisters could not teach in public 
schools in Pennsylvania, the matter persisted in other states 
well into the twentieth century. Religious women taught in 
rural public schools in at least twelve states.\(^9\) Opposition 
arose in a number of them between the later 1940s and the 
early 1960s. In 1951, New Mexico’s Supreme Court con-
firmed that religious garb was a sectarian influence.\(^10\) Two 
years later Missouri forbade women religious, regardless 
of dress, to teach in the state’s public schools.\(^11\) The most 
unique example might be from North Dakota which passed 
a garb law by referendum in June 1948. That fall, the sisters 
dressed in lay clothing and went back to their public school 
positions. Having expected passage of the law, the bishop 
of Bismarck, ND, had obtained approval from the Sacred 
Congregation for Religious for sisters to wear secular cloth-
ing while they were teaching.\(^12\)

Matters went differently for the Sisters of St. Joseph of 
Concordia, Kansas, who taught in public schools begin-
ning in 1889.\(^13\) Although there was speculation that a law 
similar to the Garb Act might be introduced in Kansas in 
the 1960s, this never occurred. Sisters remained in public 
schools in Kansas into the 1960s.\(^14\) By then, the state had 
required consolidation of the nearly 2,800 small public 
school districts. At the same time, fewer sisters were 
available, and congregations pulled back from long-term 
commitments to any schools. No legal case was ever filed 
in Kansas.\(^15\)

St. Joseph Sisters remained at St. Patrick’s School and 
Convent in Gallitzin until 1996. They left the school and 
convent in Lilly in 1970, but returned in 2001 to live in the 
convent, where they remained until 2021.

A Concluding Note
A number of forces came together in the Pennsylvania 
Garb Act episode. Among them were the growth of 
industry and the push to move goods westward from the 
port of Philadelphia. The Allegheny Mountains provided a 
barrier for transportation as industrialists set out to build a 
railroad across the state. They attracted workers to Gallitzin 
to dig tunnels through the mountains. In addition, a seam 
of coal ran through the area. All of this drew immigrants, 
who were poor and from traditionally Catholic countries of
Europe. They swelled the population of Gallitzin and other industrial towns, and the increase in the number of children presented a challenge for educators. Some who feared that immigrants would take their jobs were artisans, often called mechanics. They were among the groups who opposed acceptance of them in U.S. society.

The Catholic bishops, religious, and clergy sought ways to assist the immigrants. They feared a great loss if the children of impoverished and uneducated Catholics were not nurtured in the faith. Women religious dedicated their gifts and resources to the education of youth. These women gained experience as teachers through their life in community as they helped and encouraged another one another in their work. School directors in Gallitzin and other places saw the advantages of employing a congregation of sisters. They would have a steady stream of teachers who were well prepared and dedicated because of their vocation.

Schooling could not be neglected. Already states were beginning to make it mandatory, and that is just what Pennsylvania did in 1895, declaring that those between the ages of 8 and 13 were to be in school for four consecutive months of the year. At the same time, many of the nation’s public schools were Protestant-oriented in prayers and Bible reading, and generally did not welcome Catholics.

While Catholic schools in the United States proved to be successful, even at their height, they were educating not quite half the nation’s Catholic school children. Some church leaders had sought other means of educating the children, including the arrangement that was carried out in Pennsylvania’s Allegheny Mountains. It worked for over a decade before nativism raised its head. The mountain parishes then opened Catholic schools as the bishops had encouraged. The sisters moved into the new model, and they educated children in those parishes well into the twentieth century. Questions about education, nurturance in the faith, and immigration have remained in various forms throughout the nation’s history. Immigration in particular continues to evoke prejudice and division in the nation.

Another Concluding Note

The history of sisters teaching in public schools comes from somewhat hidden places like the railroad and coal mining towns of the Allegheny Mountains in western Pennsylvania and rural villages in the Midwest. The names of these towns and villages are not readily on the tongues of most of the U.S. population. They are nevertheless the locus of major historical happenings. Likewise, the people of these places, in living out their ordinary lives, have been part of a fiber of history they did not recognize. The sisters, students, parents and clergy in Gallitzin in the 1890s could not have known the historical importance of the events in the education of the youth of their area.

Sisters who testified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sisters:</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Year of reception</th>
<th>Year of death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colletta Cooney</td>
<td>1864 (Mar. 6)</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>1956 (Sept. 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonzaga Cunningham</td>
<td>1864 (Oct. 2)</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>1957 (Jan. 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary John Keenan</td>
<td>1858 (June 1)</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>1934 (Nov. 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcella Kennedy</td>
<td>1872 (Oct. 6)</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1951 (Feb. 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian McGrath</td>
<td>1873 (Apr. 3)</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1951 (July 3)</td>
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<td>DeSales Walsh</td>
<td>1874 (Dec. 21)</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>1966 (Oct. 23)</td>
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<td>Mother Mary Dunlevy</td>
<td>1854 (Dec. 20)</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>1932 (Mar. 6)</td>
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Endnotes:

1 James Hennesey, S.J., American Catholics (NY: Oxford University Press), 186-87.
4 Ibid.
6 Nomination Form. Whaley, 34.
7 Biter.
9 Kathleen Holscher, “Contesting the Veil in America,” Journal of Church and State 54, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 74-75.
10 Ibid, 75-76.
11 Ibid, 76.
12 Ibid, 67.
13 Sally Witt, CSJ. “Schools and Hospitals on the Frontier,” (paper presented at History of Women Religious Conference, Santa Clara University, 2016), 3-4. Sisters from Concordia accepted a public school in St. George, IL, in 1889. A number of the public schools where they taught in Kansas began as parish schools and became public schools during the Depression.
14 St. Joseph Sisters from Wichita and St. Agnes Sisters from Fond du Lac, WI, also taught in public schools in KS at the time. Ibid, 3 note 13.
Women religious in America are rarely given credit for the vital role they have played in founding and sustaining major institutions. These were women who built schools, hospitals, parishes, and nonprofits from the ground up. These were women pursuing educational opportunities and equal rights before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. These were women of the Catholic Church in America and they have had an incredible influence in our nation’s history.

It’s clear that the impact of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill reaches far beyond western Pennsylvania and the individual women who comprise the community have made significant contributions to local, state, and national history. The missions and individuals highlighted now represent only a portion of the great works of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill.

Founded in August of 1870, the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill initially settled in Altoona at the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains in western Pennsylvania. The Catholic Church in the region was young and ripe for expansion as Irish, German, and Eastern European immigrants flocked to burgeoning new cities. King Coal, Queen Coke, and Princess Steel were about to ascend the throne in Pittsburgh and its suburbs. As populations boomed and Catholic priests envisioned flourishing church communities and parish schools, women religious went to work — as they always do.

When Mother Aloysia Lowe and her six companions arrived in Altoona, the parishioners of St. John’s welcomed them with great fanfare. The sisters brought their expertise in education and their love of God to the people of the city. More and more young women became attracted to religious life.

Missions expanded to Blairsville and Pittsburgh. Mother Aloysia, recognizing the rapid growth of the region and of the community, began searching for a new, permanent home for the sisters. In 1882, she purchased the old Jennings Farm on a scenic hilltop view in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Positioned near the Pennsylvania Railroad, the farmland property benefited from the hustle and bustle of a growing Greensburg and provided convenient transportation for the increasing missionary work.

St. Mary’s School for Boys and St. Joseph Academy for young women were established as the sisters’ independent flagship schools in Greensburg. As the schools flourished, Mother Aloysia dedicated her remaining days to the building of a new motherhouse at Seton Hill. She hired and fired contractors. She measured door frames and assessed window glass. Mother Aloysia’s keen business acumen and attention to detail served the community well. St. Joseph’s Motherhouse and Academy became the crowning jewel of Greensburg.

By the time Mother Aloysia died in 1889, the community included 156 sisters and 16 different missions. Her protégé, Sister Anne Regina Ennis, succeeded Aloysia as Mother Superior. The congregation’s great work continued. Mother Anne Regina witnessed the expansion into healthcare in 1891 with the establishment of Roselia Foundling and Maternity Hospital. It was the first hospital in Pittsburgh to openly welcome unmarried mothers for convalescence and birth. More than 27,000 babies and children were cared for.

Editor’s Note: This article is an abridged version of the speech delivered by Archivist Casey Bowser at the August 21, 2021 dedication ceremony for the installation of a Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission historical marker in recognition of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill’s place in history.
by the sisters over the hospitals 80-year history.

Pittsburgh Hospital would follow in 1897. In addition to providing quality medical care, the sisters graduated more than 2,000 men and women from Pittsburgh Hospital School of Nursing.

Mother Josephine Doran brought the community into the 20th century. In 1908, the Sisters of Charity established two important missions, DePaul Institute, a school for deaf and hard-of-hearing children and Providence Hospital in Beaver Falls, the sisters’ third hospital facility. DePaul Institute was the first Catholic school for the deaf in Pennsylvania and the first to teach the deaf to speak in the state. DePaul is still open today.

The educational missions, particularly in neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, continued with steady growth into the 1920s. In a pioneering move, the Sisters of Charity volunteered to teach black Sisters of the Holy Family in segregated and racially-charged New Orleans, Louisiana in 1921. This secret school continued for more than 30 years and the sisters’ devotion to racial equality, and their friendship with the Sisters of the Holy Family, continues today.

St. Joseph Academy, which had forged an exemplary reputation for cultivating young women since 1883, offered Junior College courses in 1914. By 1918, Sister Francesca Brownlee, directress, earned the charter for an institution for higher education, Seton Hill College. The now university is a leading Catholic coeducational liberal arts institution with a yearly enrollment of over 2,000 students.

The Great Depression forced economic hardships on both the sisters and the missions in which they worked. The Mother Superiors accepted only one new mission between 1926 and 1940 and it was a providential one. Mother M. Eveline Fisher made the fateful decision to send the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill to the American Southwest in 1933. It was the first real missionary work of the sisters. They had charge for 12 schools in the West and they continued their catechetical, social, and pastoral work in the community.

The 1940s and 50s exhibited the growth of the Catholic Church in America as schools were founded from new and growing parishes. After the Great Depression and war years, the sisters developed social service programs to meet the needs of individual communities. The sisters also witnessed an influx of applicants to the novitiate of the community. For many Catholics, it was a great honor to have a “sister” in the family.

The second true pioneering effort of the Sisters of Charity began in 1960 when Mother Claudia Glenn made the fate-
ful decision to send four missionaries to Korea. Providence from God must have been at work because the Korean community now boasts over 200 sisters ministering to the lowest and yet, greatest, among us.

As society and the Catholic Church changed, so too have the sisters. The implications of Vatican II became real in the 1960s through the 1970s and beyond. The sisters, traditionally in black habit and cap, modified their dress. The liturgy was transformed. Community life redefined. For some sisters, change was due. To others, it was a shock. Nevertheless, the sisters persisted and continued the more traditional work in education and healthcare while also beginning to attend to other underserved communities. These diversified ministries offered nontraditional education to children in poor neighborhoods, opportunities to serve immigrants and refugees, the ability to help prisoners and those with devastating disease, and a means to express creativity or develop a professional career in an unconventional field.

The sisters’ work and missions continue today and these are just a few sister's stories:

Mother Aloysia Lowe, the foundress of the Seton Hill community, was an orphan left to the care of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati. She entered religious life at 15 and by the age of 33 was the foundress of her own community! Mother Aloysia solidified a strong foundation for the Seton Hill community.

Sister Ireaneus Joyce, a visionary healthcare administrator, initiated a hospital-based prepayment plan to assure hospital care in the Beaver Falls area during the Great Depression. She charged 50 cents per month and enrolled several thousand individuals. This was a health insurance prototype before Blue Cross!

Sister Rosalie O'Hara, a pioneer in educational broadcasting, founded the first radio-television school for teenagers in the world. She was a charter member of the American Film Institute, produced an award-winning documentary on Elizabeth Ann Seton, and testified before the U.S. Senate in support of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Along the way she befriended Charlton Heston.

Sister Cyril Aaron abandoned academia and her post as Dean of Seton Hill College to dedicate her life to the black community in the Hill District of Pittsburgh in the 1940s. She was an early advocate of racial and social equality.

Sister Florence Marie Scott was a scientist and professor at Seton Hill College. She was among the first women to study at and become a trustee of the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Sister Florence Marie would hike up her habit to collect specimens at Woods Hole. As a teacher, she began every class with the following prayer: “Lord, help me to understand the truth, and when I grasp...
the truth, fire me with the courage to use it…” Sister Florence Marie was considered one of the foremost Catholic women of science.

**Sister Mary Agnes Carey** fulfilled her lifelong dream of becoming a missionary when she went to Korea as the Sister Servant in 1960. For decades, she led the spiritual and temporal cultivation of the Korean Sisters of Charity. She is Korea’s Mother Aloysia Lowe!

**Sister Thomas Joseph Gaines**, who died in 2014, spent her first decade of religious life as a teacher. Like many of our sisters, she transitioned into new ministries. Trained as a skilled EMT, Sister TJ served the people of Wilkinsburg and was named Citizen of the Year there in 1981. Then she served as Chaplain at the Kane Regional Medical Center in McKeesport. Utilizing her experience as an EMT and Chaplain, Sister TJ served in the field after several of our nation’s natural disasters — including Hurricane Charley in Florida in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and after a devastating tornado in Mississippi in 2011. She was honored posthumously by the American Red Cross with the Lifetime Commitment Award.

**Sister Mary Janet Ryan**, a school teacher and professor at the college, imbued the love of history into thousands of students! Effervescent, engaging, and energetic are but three words to describe her. Sister Mary Janet was an advocate for social and racial equality and loved to dress up as a 1920s Flapper!

More than 1,200 women have dedicated their lives to service and God. More than 100 schools. An untold number of parishes and healthcare and social service institutions. 12 states. Several countries. The Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill have offered to the world more than 50,000 years of combined religious life. All of this history — of service — of achievement — of religious life — accomplished by incredible women. Of the 45 historical markers dedicated in Westmoreland County, only four, including this new addition, have been dedicated solely to the contributions of women.

These were, and are, women living the motto “Caritas Christi Urget Nos,” meaning “The Charity of Christ Urges Us.” From the classroom to the hospital bed, from the child’s first Communion to the adult’s need for spiritual guidance, from the prison cell to the refugee camp, from Pittsburgh to Korea, the sisters exhibit charity, humility, simplicity, and God’s presence in daily life.

Bishop Larry Kulick of the Diocese of Greensburg joins the Provincial and General Councils of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, including Sister Jane Ann Cherubin, Sister Mary Jo Mutschler, Sister Mary Norbert Long, Sister Carole Blazina, Sister Donna Marie Leiden, Sister Kwang-Shim Oh, and President Mary Finger of Seton Hill University at the dedication of the state historical marker on August 28, 2021.

Source: Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill
In 1994, parishes in the Diocese of Pittsburgh were merging, and it was not surprising that the five ethnic parishes of the Borough of Ambridge were formed into one. Ambridge, located some eighteen miles northwest of Pittsburgh, covers less than two square miles. The American Bridge Company, which bought land there in the early 1900s and provided the bulk of employment, had left in the early 1980s. The population had declined, and, as was ordinary in the mill and mining towns of Western Pennsylvania, young people had necessarily gone elsewhere for employment. The process carried its own pain, and the dissolving of ethnic parishes was one more proof that the flourishing parish life in the days of steel was not going to return.

The new parish was called Good Samaritan, and although its formation was not unusual, the parish did something that was quite unusual. It began a parish archives. Parishioner Maria Notarianni credits Father Sam Esposito, pastor at the time, with being the inspiration for the Good Samaritan Parish Archives. She recalls his sense of religious history and his realization, which parishioners shared, that the history of the dissolving parishes was the story of the interplay of industry, ethnicity, and faithful Catholic life. It was the history of Ambridge, and an important part of the history of the Pittsburgh Diocese and the church. The social service minister, Divine Providence Sister Marise Hrabosky, shared Fr. Sam’s vision, and he asked her to head the project. Sister Marise easily gathered a group of parishioners dedicated to the effort.

The five parishes were: St. Veronica, founded in 1904 for Catholics in Ambridge; Divine Redeemer, founded in 1906 for Slovak Catholics, joined in worship by those who were Polish, Croatian, and Slovenian; St. Stanislaus, founded in 1914 for Polish Catholics; Christ the King, founded in 1926 for Italian Catholics; and Holy Trinity, founded in 1929 for Croatian Catholics. Eventually these parishes had three elementary schools, St. Stanislaus, which opened in 1919; Divine Redeemer, opened in 1920; and St. Veronica, which opened in 1923, adding on a high school in 1924.

Members of the Good Samaritan Archives Committee knew that the unused buildings held a treasure of records and memorabilia. They took the needed time to gather what was valuable—whatever would tell the story of each parish, of its parishioners and their lives. At the same time, they painted and prepared a former classroom in the closed St. Veronica School building. Sister Marise called on the archivist from her congregation, Sister Sandra DeNardis, C.D.P., to provide professional advice. From Sister Sandra they learned about archival boxes and folders needed to protect documents. They learned about requirements of temperature and humidity in preserving papers, photos, and artifacts. They spent three years in careful preparation until the Good Samaritan Parish Archives was dedicated on May 20, 2007. It was one of Father Sam’s final services at Good Samaritan, as he had already received his next assignment and would leave shortly.
Today the Good Samaritan Parish Archives houses bulletins from each of the five former parishes, including those from St. Stanislaus that were printed in Polish until the 1950s. It contains St. Veronica High School yearbooks, and the contents of the cornerstones from all the parishes. It has a relic of St. Maria Goretti from Divine Redeemer School. The handwritten journal of Father Stanislaus Labujewski, pastor of St. Stanislaus from 1914-69, is part of the archives. Within his journal, at the close of every year, “Father Labby” wrote comments, and at the end of 1918 he remarked on the difficulty of the worldwide flu.

Just as history itself is living, so is an archives. Contributions continue to arrive, some from the former parishes and many from the present parish of Good Samaritan, which also has records in the archives. Just like all archivists, Notarianni and her staff have to delineate what belongs and what does not. One strong criteria is the fundamental question: Does this item help to tell the history of the parishes? Sometimes, for example, people have religious items that were significant to their families but were not part of the parish, like a family Bible or a statue that was important in their home. These are not items for a parish archives. On the other hand, people continue to discover photos from parish events, and these do belong in the archives. In 2019, the former St. Veronica Convent was demolished. A stained glass window from the chapel and a brick from the building are now in the archives. Some stained glass from St. Stanislaus, Holy Trinity, and Christ the King are in the renewed Good Samaritan Church, while other stained glass windows are in the archives.

Sometimes researchers ask about sacramental records, only to learn these are not kept in parish archives. According to the policy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, records of sacraments are kept in the offices of Good Samaritan and the other new parishes formed in the 1990s. The diocese, however, is in another phase of renewal at this writing, and parishes are in groupings that bring larger areas together. Good Samaritan is part of “The Great Grouping,” which also includes St. John the Baptist in Baden, Our Lady of Peace in Conway, and SS. John and Paul in Franklin Park. The final plan for these parishes is scheduled to be completed in July 2022. At that point, sacramental records will go to the Diocese of Pittsburgh Archives & Records Center.

However, genealogical researchers have found the Good Samaritan Archives helpful in a number of ways. They have discovered their family members’ names in parish bulletins or have found their pictures in yearbooks. Notarianni treasures a collection of thank you notes from researchers who have learned about the faith of their families from these records.
While an archives can provide records to clarify an event, it can also offer nuances. For example, Good Samaritan has continued the tradition of holding the St. Anthony Novena every year in June. The oldest parish record of the St. Anthony Novena is from 1932 in Christ the King Parish, where it originated. Thus, while it does not prove that it was the beginning of the novena, it is certain that the novena has been held since then. The parish itself was founded in 1926 and the church was built in 1927. As Jim Notarianni, volunteer and husband of Maria, pointed out, the novena could have started earlier. It is clear that it was in practice in 1932. Who knows what records might be found to clarify this or shed light on any aspect of parish life! Records of the past can have amazingly current implications.

The archives room and the walls of the hallway near it also have displays. An orange cassock with a red cape, once the liturgical dress for altar servers at St. Stanislaus, hangs in the room along with ethnic costumes. A flyer for the first Mass in Ambridge, offered on May 8, 1904, is framed and on display. It announces that Mass was set for 9:00 at the Ambridge Savings and Trust Building, with confessions scheduled for 8:00.

Jim Notarianni credits the parish ethnic festival, started in 1996, with keeping the awareness of tradition alive. The festival, held every Labor Day weekend, has been especially strong with Polish, Croatian, Slovak, Italian, and Irish tradition. The 2021 festival included Latino culture, with a Mariachi Mass at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday. This is the newest ethnic group to come to Ambridge.

The archives is open for visitors on certain days during the festival, on other special occasions, and by appointment. The Facebook page, which extends far past the boundaries of the Pittsburgh diocese, is always available, and Maria Notarianni updates it weekly.

As with many archives, the consistent work takes place outside of public attention. The staff for the Good Samaritan Archives is smaller than it was at first, but some of the original volunteers continue. Current volunteers include Angie Catanzariti, Dolores Harrison, Nancy Salopek, and Becky Homich. Their initial mission endures; it is “to preserve the diversity, history, heritage and traditions of our parish.” Working as all archivists do, Notarianni directs them in preserving, describing, and making available the record, in this case, of a bustling ethnic community that was once in the shadow of a major steel-making industry. As Robert Aloe, fundraising and accounting assistant for the parish grouping, noted, “Those who forget their past do not have a future.” Since being established in 1994, the Good Samaritan Parish Archives has held strong to the memory of the past. Its organizers know there is never a time when this or any parish is not making history.

Endnotes
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We are deeply grateful to the following donors for their generosity and support of The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and its publication *Gathered Fragments*.

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John C. Bates, Esq. is a graduate of Duquesne University (B.A., M.A., and J.D.). He is the retired Chief Counsel of the Pittsburgh Office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. He is a former president, a former secretary, and a present Emeritus member of the board of directors of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. He is the author of the Society’s recently published history.

Casey Bowser is the archivist for the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill and an adjunct professor of public history at Saint Vincent College. She holds a B.A. in History and Public History (minor) from Saint Vincent College, an M.A. in Museum Studies from Johns Hopkins University, and she is a Certified Archivist. Casey currently serves on the Board of Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR) as its President and is a member of the Mission & Heritage Committee for the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Kerry Crawford is the author of three books, each exploring a journey of faith. Her latest book awaiting publication traces the history of the Felician Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Province between 1978 and 2009. Lourdes Today: A Pilgrimage to Mary’s Grotto examines the heart of the modern-day pilgrim. And, her first book, In This Time of Grace, explores the calling to religious life and ministry among the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh. Kerry trained as a journalist (Penn State) and worked for many years as a focus group facilitator. She later returned to school, earned a graduate degree in education (University of Pittsburgh), and taught in a Catholic school.

James K. Hanna holds a B.A. in Social Sciences from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.A. in Theology from Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. He is an online instructor for the University of Notre Dame’s Satellite Theology Program (STEP) and a freelance writer whose articles have appeared in OSV Newsweekly. He is retired from St. Paul of Cross Parish in Castle Shannon where he served as Pastoral Associate and Coordinator of Social Ministry.

Michael T. Rizzi is Assistant Dean at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. He holds a Doctor of Education and an M.A. in Political Science from the University of Pittsburgh, and a B.S. in Foreign Service from Georgetown University. He is a Pittsburgh native and a graduate of Canevin High School. His articles have appeared in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the Journal of Catholic Education, the Journal of Catholic Higher Education, the Newman Studies Journal, and other publications.

Kathleen M. Washy is archivist for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, a position she has held since 2013. Prior to that, she served as archivist for Mercy Hospital/UPMC Mercy for more than twenty years. Since 1992, she has been a member of the board of directors of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, holding many offices. She also serves on the board of directors for the Allegheny City Society. She holds a B.A. in History and Anthropology from Gannon University, a M.A. in History from the University of Toronto, and a M.A. in History and Archival Administration, with a Certificate in Museum Studies, from Case Western Reserve University.

Sr. Sally Witt, C.S.J., is a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden. She was educated at Ursuline Academy, St. Raphael High School, and Carlow College (now University) in Pittsburgh. Her graduate degrees are from La Salle College (now University) in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh’s Duquesne University. Her background includes teaching in the Dioceses of Pittsburgh and Altoona-Johnstown, and editing The Bloomfield-Garfield Bulletin (now The Bulletin.) She ministered in the fields of communications and archives, and taught as an adjunct at local colleges. She has been privileged to write the history of three religious congregations, and has had poems published in local and national publications.

The 1960s witnessed not only the bulldozing of neighborhoods in the City of Pittsburgh under the guise of urban renewal, but also the exponential growth of Pittsburgh’s eastern and southern suburbs as research facilities proliferated. Westinghouse became the leader in the development of nuclear reactors for naval vessels and power plants. This book details how suburban life changed — including the years-long struggle over school desegregation that resulted in formation of the Woodland Hills School District in the eastern suburbs. Included in the story is the flight of white children from privileged public schools seeking refuge in St. Bartholomew School in Penn Hills and St. Colman School in Turtle Creek; this aspect alone makes this work a fascinating read about the complex interplay of technical advancement, renewal, and justice. The author is a native of Pittsburgh’s eastern suburbs and an assistant professor of geography at Eastern Connecticut State University.


Any Catholic seeking to escape from COVID isolation need only get into their car and start a vacation or pilgrimage to some of the 500+ holy sites listed in this new travel book. The penchant of the author (a freelance journalist and frequent writer on religious travel pieces) for the unique and unusual is on full display. Each site has its own story that includes architecture, religious history, artifacts, and the healing brought by prayer. Color photographs, Catholic trivia, websites, and other pertinent information are included. Sites in or near Western Pennsylvania include: Columbus Chapel and Boal Mansion Museum in Boalsburg (Centre County), The Ark and The Dove in Gibsonia, Old St. Patrick’s Church in Pittsburgh, St. Anthony Chapel in Pittsburgh, St. Nicholas Croatian Church in Millvale, the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel in Loretto, and Deckers’ Chapel in St. Mary’s (Elk County), which was built in 1856 by German immigrants and is considered to be one of the smallest Catholic shrines in the world. All of the sites are places where American Catholic history was made. Happy trails!


The academic dean/associate professor of church history at Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary of the West in Ohio has written a bicentennial history of the archdiocese of which he is a priest. This scholarly but readable volume presents selected vignettes of people and places that represent the Archdiocese of Cincinnati’s distinctive history. The author’s narrative is refreshing, complemented by a wealth of photographs. The archdiocese’s historic relationship with Western Pennsylvania is accurately presented through the inclusion of Monsignor Andrew Lambing’s published research and the groundbreaking work of Mercy Sister M. Eymard Poydock, who founded a cancer research institute at Mercyhurst College in Erie.


These are the memoirs of the first six years (1945-1951) of a native of Pittsburgh growing up in the city’s West End — which was a multi-ethnic and multi-racial neighborhood. The focus is the author’s extended family, which includes his Polish grandmother (a numbers bookie) and an Italian father (a classic “don”). Many readers will relate to the rough-and-tumble life of this Catholic family in post-World War II Pittsburgh. The author is a teacher in the School of Public Health at Capella University and has a multi-media consulting firm.


The histories of American historical societies that have been published typically take the form of brief journal articles. The book-length history of Western Pennsylvania’s Catholic historical society is a welcome exception to the norm. Several years of research enabled a former president of the organization to write its history in order to preserve for posterity the efforts of a small but dedicated group of Catholics to preserve the story of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania, and to provide a template for those in other dioceses who might consider forming a Catholic historical society. The book begins and ends with separate biographies of Monsignor Andrew Lambing, who authored the first diocesan history in the United States. Between the two biographical studies of Lambing, the author presents a comprehensive view of who and what shaped the religious and cultural lives of Western Pennsylvania Catholics from colonial times to the present.


This is the charming story of an Erie Catholic who, in his
mid-50s, meets up with his former second-grade teacher from Sacred Heart School in Erie. The initial reunion leads to a series of weekly meetings over seven and one-half years that provide the text of this volume. The nun, Sister Marie Therese Decker of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, is a woman with a life of experiences that are shared with the author and the readers. Her many stories make for a great read and provide a nostalgic flashback to life in northwestern Pennsylvania over many decades.


This work examines the twelve-decades-long history of government bans on religious garb by teachers in public schools. Pennsylvania was and remains at the center of this conflict. The debate began in 1894 when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, who had been dismissed for wearing habits while teaching in a public school in Cambria County (*Hyson v. Gallitzin*). The legislature responded by passing an anti-religious garb statute in 1895, which is still in effect today. The author, a constitutional rights specialist, examines the legal and policy issues in a comprehensive analysis — and challenges his readers to consider whether fundamental constitutional rights are advanced where restrictions impact religious practice.


This historical novel by a native of the old mill town of Braddock traces the story of three generations of the author’s Slovak family from its Austro-Hungarian roots to the post-World War II period. This family history is representative of the hundreds of thousands of European Catholic immigrants who settled in Western Pennsylvania. It is a straightforward but uplifting account of the challenges encountered by immigrants and their descendants.


Generations of Western Pennsylvanians have been passionate about baseball. This volume draws upon the local attractiveness of that sport and presents some of the “great” baseball players, managers, announcers, and even umpires from both the Major Leagues and the Negro Leagues who are buried in forty cemeteries throughout Allegheny County. Fourteen of these cemeteries are Catholic. The book is complete with grave photos and burial information. The creators of this volume are a teacher, a stay-at-home-mom, and a photographer.


This volume traces the development of the Cecilian School of Music from its origins in mid-nineteenth century Germany to Milwaukee and the establishment there of the Catholic Normal School, which produced hundreds of musicians for German-speaking parishes in the United States. Caspar Koch, an 1892 graduate, headed to Pittsburgh where he served as both organist at Holy Trinity (German) parish in the Hill District and organist for the City of Pittsburgh, giving weekly concerts at Carnegie Hall in Pittsburgh. His son, Paul Koch, continued the weekly concerts while serving as organist at St. Paul Cathedral for 40 years. Paul was responsible for the great von Beckerath organ in Pittsburgh’s cathedral. This work provides a history of American Catholic liturgical music, while offering the foundational history of organ music in Catholic Pittsburgh.


Bishop John Mark Gannon opened Cathedral College in Erie in 1933. The institution then evolved into Gannon College (later University), bearing the prelate’s surname. This latest volume in the publisher’s campus history series presents in pictorial and narrative form the history of Erie’s largest Catholic university, which now boasts of a branch campus in Florida. The pictures, drawn from the university’s archives, are exceptional. The author is a former university faculty member, member of the board of trustees, and president of the alumni association.


Freeport, located on the Allegheny River in Armstrong County, is the focus of this comprehensive history of a community that was laid out in 1797 when the area was still part of Allegheny County. The author devotes considerable space to the story of St. Mary of the Nativity parish, its school, its cemeteries, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden who served in the parish school. While the decline in the community’s population in recent decades has been reflected in a parish merger and closing of the school, this volume recounts the early years of Catholic growth and the continued Catholic presence in Freeport. The work features many historic photographs, maps, and charts. The author is a retired naval officer who did not grow up in Freeport, but his wife did; he devoted two and a half years to interviewing, researching, writing, and obtaining photographs that tell the community’s 225-year story.

Nancy E. Martin (Jerome F. Coniker, ed.), *Servant of God, Gwen Coniker: God Leads, Faith and Trust Follow*
(St. Louis: Enroute Books and Media, 2019), softcover, table of contents, illus., appendices, bibliography, 334 pp. Gathered Fragments has previously noted the cause for canonization of Gwen Coniker (1939-2002). This volume presents the definitive biography of the wife and mother of thirteen, whose life repeatedly brought her to Pittsburgh, where some of her large family lived. She and her husband Jerry (1938-2018) co-founded the Apostolate for Family Consecration, produced television shows for EWTN, and opened Catholic Familyland in a former seminary in the Diocese of Steubenville. Coniker's cause was opened in 2007.


A native Pittsburgher and journalist has authored a biography of his grandfather, William Diggin, who emigrated to Pittsburgh from County Kerry, Ireland. Diggin became a streetcar conductor and met an untimely end aboard a streetcar near St. Mary of Mercy Church at the Point in December 1941. The author’s meticulous family research presents a rich story of churches, people, and events that readers will recognize and warm to. This hard-to-find volume is available through Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Library. A true delight to read — even if you’re not Irish!


From the time of his establishment of St. Vincent Archabbey in rural Latrobe, Archabbot Boniface Wimmer envisioned the creation of satellite Benedictine monasteries in quiet rural areas. The one exception to his plan was the establishment of St. Benedict Abbey in the heart of urban Newark, New Jersey in 1868. In short order, the departure of the German-language speakers and later the white population left the Newark establishment as a fortress in the midst of an urban jungle with every known socio-economic problem. This volume traces the history of the monastery and its famed prep school, which overcame urban adversity to become a sports and academic center with a national reputation.


This volume by the now-deceased editor of the Catholic Register newspaper of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown chronicles the work of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in that diocese for almost one hundred years: educational institutions, a home for the elderly, and Mercy Hospital in Altoona. The research and writing of the volume consumed four years in the life of Stein, who was a former chaplain to the order.

Lisa A. Miles, Resurrecting Allegheny City: The Land, Structures and People of Pittsburgh’s North Side (Pittsburgh, 2007), softcover, table of contents, bibliography, index, illus., 275 pp.

The year 2007 marked the centenary of the annexation of the City of Allegheny into the City of Pittsburgh, with the former becoming Pittsburgh’s “North Side.” This volume, published in connection with that centennial event, draws upon the Allegheny City archives which had been located and catalogued. The author’s Introduction acknowledges the limiting focus of her book. Alas, much of Allegheny’s rich Catholic and ethnic history is not included — such as even an acknowledgement that Allegheny was once a separate diocese with St. Peter’s serving as its cathedral church. There is note of St. Clare’s Academy for Young Ladies on Nunnery Hill and passing mention of St. Boniface Church. Happily, other volumes tell the Catholic story of the City of Allegheny/Pittsburgh’s North Side.


This small volume presents a history of Catholicism in Beaver County, focused on one of the earliest parishes to be organized in what would later become the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The author, a freelance writer, is a life-long resident and historian of the town of Beaver.


The civil rights movement in the United States has produced a number of martyrs — one of the most controversial was Viola Liuzzo who was shot to death by KKK members during the 1965 voting rights campaign for Blacks in Alabama. Liuzzo was a native of Western Pennsylvania (the borough of California in Washington County) and a Catholic. By the time of her death at age 39, she was living in Detroit with her husband and five children. Liuzzo’s funeral was held at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Detroit with Martin Luther King, Jr., in attendance. More than 30 years after the murder, this volume is the first comprehensive biography of Liuzzo as a person — set against a backdrop of the civil rights struggle, the KKK, and J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI. While a statue of Viola Liuzzo was erected in Detroit, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission recently rejected an application for a State Historical Marker to honor her in Washington County.
Happenings

The former St. Mary Magdalene Church in Homestead re-opened in September 2020 as the Dragon’s Den. The 60-foot-high interior is now filled with wood poles and platforms connected by ropes, cables and planks, including a 160-foot zip line from the choir loft to the former high altar — as a twenty-first century community center for children. The church was built in 1896 and rebuilt after a fire in 1936, then closed in 2009. This is the latest in local church repurposing, which include: St. John the Baptist in Lawrenceville (now Church Brew Works brewpub); St. Helen in East Pittsburgh (Holy Grail Garage for high-end automobile storage); Visitation (Croatian) Church in Rankin (now Mary’s Vine wine bar); St. Michael (Slovak) Church in Munhall (now This Is Red ad agency and event space); St. Elizabeth (Slovak) in the Strip District (first as the Altar Bar and now a nondenominational church); St. Mary Assumption (Slovenian) Church on 57th Street (now 57th Street Studios housing several arts-related businesses); St. Ann in Millvale (now Mr. Small’s Funhouse, a recording studio); and St. Justin Church (now a 46-unit apartment building).

Recognitions

On October 6, 2020, Pittsburgh City Council approved designation of the Shrine of the Blessed Mother — also known as Our Lady of the Parkway — as a city historic landmark, following unanimous approval by the city’s Historic Review Commission and the city Planning Commission. The shrine, created in 1956 by the late Anna Cybak of Ambridge in memory of her deceased son Paul Cybak who was killed while fighting in the Pacific in World War II, occupies a cliffside perch in South Oakland overlooking the Parkway East traffic. The shrine was blessed in September 1956 by Rev. Thomas Hornyak, pastor of St. Joachim Church. The site, off Wakefield Street, is inaccessible by vehicle but reachable by descent on a long steep brick walkway. Fencing, lighting, benches, and additional statues now surround the grotto. A Wikipedia article on “Shrine of the Blessed Mother” provides a detailed history.

On March 10, 2021, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission announced approval of 23 new Pennsylvania Historical Markers, including two for prominent Western Pennsylvania Catholics: (1) Andy Warhol (1928-1987), a twentieth-century pop artist from Pittsburgh, and (2) Stan Musial (1920-2013), a famed St. Louis Cardinal baseball player from Donora in Washington County. Traditional blue signs with gold lettering will later be erected for both.

Preservation Pennsylvania, a nonprofit dedicated to the protection of historically and architecturally significant buildings, released its 2021 list of at-risk structures on May 28, 2021. The list included the former St. Agnes Church in Oakland. Designed by famed Catholic architect John Theodore Comès (1873-1922), the church was built in 1917, closed in 1993, and sold to Carlow University which is proposing to demolish the church for a new 10-story health science building. A Pennsylvania historical marker honoring Comès was unveiled outside the building in 2013. A biography of Comès was published in the 2013 Gathered Fragments.

On June 23, 2021, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museu-
The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden dedicated a Pennsylvania Historical Marker for Hysong v. Gallitzin School District, a famed 1894 court case that affirmed the right of garbed religious women to teach in public schools in Pennsylvania — a result undone the following year by the state legislature's enactment of the "garb law" which forbade public school teachers from wearing religious attire. The marker is located at the Gallitzin Tunnels Park in Cambria County.

In the past five years, Western Pennsylvania History, a magazine of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, published several articles pertaining to Catholic history in Western Pennsylvania: (1) Winter 2020-2021 issue — Sister Cyril Aaron of the Seton Hill Sisters of Charity and her decades of service caring for the poor in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, (2) Spring 2020 issue — a collection of 1960s photographs from St. Mary's High School in Sharpsburg, We had previously noted earlier articles: (3) Fall 2017 issue — Father James Cox of St. Patrick's Church in the Strip District and his many religious pilgrimages, (4) Fall 2016 issue — women conservators of the Maxo Vanka murals at St. Nicholas Croatian Church in Millvale, (5) Summer 2016 issue — the Maxo Vanka murals at the same church, and (6) Spring 2016 issue — architecture of the now-closed SS. Peter and Paul Church in East Liberty.

Research
Kristin M. O'Malley completed her doctoral dissertation in 2019 at the University of Pittsburgh: Performance of Faith: Post-Vatican II American Catholicism on the Professional Secular Stage, which treats the history of representations of Catholicism on Broadway and off-Broadway stages. A copy is available through ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Changes
The Carmel of the Holy Family Monastery in Erie closed in November 2020, and the three remaining nuns relocated to other Carmelite monasteries. The monastery had opened in 1957 on the grounds of St. Mark's Seminary at the invitation of Archbishop John Mark Gannon of Erie. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome issued a decree to suppress the monastery.

In November 2020, the Diocese of Erie announced that the all-male Cathedral Preparatory School and all-female Villa Maria Academy would combine at Cathedral’s campus in September 2022. The schools had merged administratively in 2010. The remaining campus is part of the St. Peter’s Cathedral complex.

On June 10, 2021, Yeshiva Schools — a Squirrel Hill-based Jewish day school for elementary and high school students — announced that it would close on the purchase of the former St. Rosalia School complex of elementary and high school buildings with convent in Greenfield for $1.2 million. The boys school will move from Squirrel Hill to the new site and serve the growing Orthodox Jewish community. The parish high school closed in 1971 and the elementary school closed in 2018. St. Rosalia Church is a worship site within St. Paul Cathedral parish.

Tours
Doors Open Pittsburgh sponsored several tours: (1) a February 1, 2020 tour of “Houses of Freedom: Black History Tour” that included St. Benedict the Moor Church in Pittsburgh’s Hill District; (2) a June 26, 2021 tour of Homestead and Munhall that included three former Catholic churches: St. Michael (Slovak) Church — designed by famed Catholic architect John Theodore Comès with Art Nouveau/Art Deco features — that is now “This Is Red,” an exhibition and event venue; St. Mary Magdalene Church — an Italian Renaissance structure rebuilt after successive fires in 1932, and 1977 — that is now an interactive community structure; and St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cathedral — a Renaissance Revival structure with soaring 125-foot twin towers designed by Hungarian-born architect Titus de Bobula (1878-1961) — that is now the headquarters of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society; and (3) an August 1, 2021 tour of the Strip District that included two churches that are part of the “Shrines of Pittsburgh” (St. Patrick Church with its Holy Stairs, and St. Stanislaus Kostka Church) and the former St. Elizabeth Slovak Church (now Orchard Hill Church).

Updates to Previous Issues of Gathered Fragments

The 2014 Gathered Fragments published a list of articles relating to the history of Western Pennsylvania Catholicism. That list is updated as follows:


Richard J. Purcell, “Missionaries from All Hallows (Dublin) to the United States, 1842-1865,” Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, Vol. 53, No. 4 (December 1942), 204-298 [Irish seminarians and priests who immigrated to the Diocese of Pittsburgh].


The 2014 Gathered Fragments (with Supplement) contained a list and the biographies of the prelates who were natives of, educated in, or served in Western Pennsylvania. Yearly updates have been provided for the list that now totals 154 prelates. The update for 2021 is:

David Joseph Bonnar
Born: February 5, 1962 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Diocese of Pittsburgh)
Ordained a priest of Pittsburgh: July 23, 1988 by Bishop Donald Wuerl in St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin Church, Whitehall (Allegheny County), Pennsylvania
Appointed Bishop of Youngstown: November 17, 2020
Ordained Bishop of Youngstown and installed: January 12, 2021 by Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr of Cincinnati in St. Columb Cathedral, Youngstown, Ohio

Kurt Richard Burnette
Appointed: October 20, 2020 as Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of Saints Cyril and Methodius (Slovak), Toronto, Canada

Gerald Nicholas Dino
Died as Eparch Emeritus of Phoenix (Ruthenian), Arizona: November 14, 2020 in Phoenix, Arizona
Funeral: December 3, 2020 in Phoenix, Arizona

William Regis Fey, O.F.M. Cap.
Died as Bishop Emeritus of Kimbe, Papua New Guinea: January 19, 2021 in UPMC Shadyside Hospital, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Funeral Mass: January 25, 2021 in St. Augustine Church (Our Lady of the Angels Parish), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Buried: January 25, 2021 in St. Mary of the Assumption Cemetery, Herman, Summit Township (Butler County), Pennsylvania

Larry James Kulik
Born: February 24, 1966 in Leechburg, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania (Diocese of Greensburg)
Ordained a priest of Greensburg: May 16, 1992 by Bishop Anthony G. Bosco in Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, Greensburg, Pennsylvania
Appointed Reverend Monsignor: May 21, 2014
Elected Administrator of the Diocese of Greensburg: September 15, 2020
Appointed Bishop of Greensburg: December 18, 2020
At some point in their high school or college careers, most students of American history read Alexis de Tocqueville’s 1835 masterpiece, *Democracy in America*. Part travel diary and part political philosophy, the book is full of Tocqueville’s sharp observations from his journeys across the antebellum United States, and remains one of our best sources of information about American life and culture during that time.

A full eighteen years before *Democracy in America* went to press, however, an Italian Jesuit beat Tocqueville to the punch. Father Giovanni Grassi, SJ came to the United States as a missionary in 1810, and from 1812-1817 served as the ninth president of Georgetown University, then one of only three functioning Catholic colleges in the country. Shortly after his return to Italy in 1817, he wrote a fascinating account of his experiences in America, largely to satisfy Italians’ curiosity about that “powerful and vast empire…rising across the Atlantic” (p. 1).

Grassi’s work is no less poignant than Tocqueville’s, but has languished in obscurity on this side of the Atlantic for more than two centuries simply because it had never been translated into English. Fortunately for students of early American Catholic history, that omission is now corrected. Roberto Severino, a professor of American Catholic history, that omission is now corrected. Roberto Severino, a professor emeritus of Italian at Georgetown, has finally made Grassi’s book accessible to American audiences with a sharp and readable translation published in 2021 by Georgetown University Press.

The book provides a rare and welcome Catholic perspective on early American history, full of observations about life in the United States as seen through the eyes of the country’s earliest Italian immigrants, Irish laborers, and others who are often overlooked in conventional textbooks. Grassi traveled extensively throughout the country, but his position at Georgetown gave him a unique vantage point from which to observe all aspects of American society, from the Protestant ruling class that dominated the federal government to the working-class Italian stone masons who were then helping to build the United States Capitol. He interacted with Native American ambassadors who visited Washington, DC and the slaves owned by many Catholic families, priests, and nuns in Maryland.

Some aspects of American culture offended Grassi’s European sensibilities. He was taken aback by the laxity with which Americans viewed their religious commitments and the frequency with which they switched denominations. He found it scandalous that some Americans attended different churches every Sunday, or even chose churches based on the wealth of the congregations and the business networking opportunities they provided. However, he also saw great potential for the Catholic Church (which then consisted of only five dioceses: Baltimore, Bardstown [that is, Louisville], Boston, Philadelphia, and New York) to thrive and gain converts in the religiously tolerant atmosphere.

Of particular interest to readers of *Gathered Fragments* are Grassi’s observations about Pennsylvania and Catholicism on the American frontier. As he explains the workings of the American economy to his Italian readers, Grassi points out that Pittsburgh used to be the starting point for shipping goods west, but thanks to the Louisiana Purchase, Americans could now ship from New Orleans and St. Louis much more cheaply. He also explains that the Diocese of Philadelphia (which included all of Pennsylvania at the time) contained a total of 13 priests. The entire Catholic infrastructure of the state consisted of four parishes in Philadelphia, a handful of mission churches in places like Conewago and Lancaster that were overwhelmingly German in character, and the distant mission outpost at Loretto.

Grassi gives special praise to Demitrius Gallitzin, the Russian priest who founded Loretto and forged Catholicism’s first foothold in Western Pennsylvania. Like many missionaries of his day, however, Grassi sees the greatest potential for frontier Catholicism not in western Pennsylvania, but in Kentucky, where many Maryland Catholic families were resettling as part of the push west.

Grassi also describes the various Protestant denominations and sects that he encountered in America, not always favorably. As an example of the dangers of “arbitrary interpretation of Sacred Scripture,” (p. 38), he makes a passing reference to the Harmony Society (which would eventually settle in Western Pennsylvania at what is today known as Old Economy Village). He criticizes the Harmonists for their insistence on universal celibacy, which did in fact lead to their extinction over time. He also identifies the Dunkers of Pennsylvania as an important Protestant group; that denomination is now the Church of the Brethren and is perhaps best known in western Pennsylvania as the church behind Juniata College in Huntingdon.

Professor Severino has done the country a great service by finally bringing Grassi’s words to us after more than 200 years. *Georgetown’s Second Founder* is a valuable window into early American culture from the perspective of Americans whose views have often been marginalized, both during that point in history and subsequent tellings of it. Any student of American Catholic history should own this important volume.
In 1864, eleven Sisters of the Humility of Mary arrived from France and began to live on an abandoned farm in New Bedford, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, now called Villa Maria. By 1870, they had established a school for young orphans in their care. They relied on farming and tending animals for survival. Thus, the loss of a mare put the sisters in a difficult situation. Due to their outreach to the needs around them, the sisters were often referred to as the “Sisters of Mercy” by their neighbors. There is no record indicating that Mother Anna’s mare was ever recovered.
Explore Catholic history. The Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

A free online repository with access to the Gathered Fragments journals, Spiritan Collection publications, Pittsburgh Catholic newspapers, and more.

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