The History of St. Michael’s Seminary in the Diocese of Pittsburgh

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As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishermen). And he said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
— Matthew 4:18-19

In 1843, Bishop Michael O’Connor, first bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, formally established St. Michael’s Seminary in his residence. This seminary existed for just thirty-three years and was only in operation for twenty-seven. Within that brief window, St. Michael’s Seminary proved to have a lasting impact on the Catholic Church in Western Pennsylvania, producing over two hundred priests. The history of this seminary is deserving of an in-depth study, which will be published in *Gathered Fragments* over the next three years. This is the first of the three-part series. In anticipation of later republication, this history appears in full page format.
The words above may be seen as the founding of the Catholic Church’s first seminary, for it was during the next three years after this event that the apostles received their education for the priesthood that Christ conferred on them at the Last Supper.

Clergy in the Early Church

From Apostolic times to the time of St. Augustine, there is no documented evidence of special institutions for the education of the clergy. One historian remarked on this period of the Church:

In the early days of the Church, the clergy were fitted for their office, not by a regular course of studies, but by exercise in those ecclesiastical functions which they would hereafter be called upon to discharge. An acquaintance with the history of the life and mission of the Son of God, and an ability to explain to the people the truths these implied, and their consequences, and awake in their hearts a lively faith in the coming of Christ, were deemed sufficient qualifications, if accompanied with exemplary conduct, for entering upon the discharge of ecclesiastical duties.¹

Thus, St. John instructed Polycarp and Ignatius at Ephesus and they in turn trained others as they themselves had been taught. In succeeding centuries, bishops saw the need of a thorough training of those destined to hold the office of priest.²

In the half-century before St. Augustine, there were a few instances of local bishops living personally with parochial clergy in common disciplined life — such as St. Eusebius of Vercelli (AD 283-371) and St. Paulinus of Nola (AD 354-431). Perhaps knowledge of these efforts influenced St. Augustine, following his return to northern Africa from Rome in 388, to gather men to his own house for the purpose of educating them under his supervision. His episcopal residence at Hippo became a model for the education of the clergy. From one perspective, it functioned more as a monasterium clericorum in which clergy lived together, than exclusively as a schola clericorum.

In the one thousand years that followed St. Augustine, clerical education underwent a number of changes that involved monastic schools, episcopal schools, and universities. Successive popes issued exhortations and commands to the bishops of their time about the necessity of exercising vigilance in admitting men to Holy Orders; yet there was little papal legislation of universal application on the matter. Much depended on the individual bishop. While monasteries afforded spiritual training to their members, there was no comparable institution for diocesan clergy. Laxity in admitting men to Holy Orders and the absence of formal clerical education contributed to moral laxity of the clergy and attendant abuses that were to stoke the fires of the Protestant Reformation. There were great differences in the condition of diocesan clergy: beneficed priests, clerical servants in the households of the great, poorly compensated parish priests, and priests unattached to a permanent position who said Mass for a stipend. It would take the strong reform spirit of the Council of Trent to comprehensively address the formation and education of the clergy.

The Council of Trent

On December 13, 1545, the Council of Trent convened under Pope Paul III. It would affirm the tradition of the sacraments, including Holy Orders. In a February 8, 1547 speech, Giovanni Maria Cardinal del Monte [later, Pope Julius III] addressed the purpose of the Council: “The aim of the reforming activity is the revival of the pastoral ministry — the cure of souls.”³

During the sessions of the Council of Trent, Reginald Cardinal Pole (1500-1558) undertook the restoration of Catholicism in England during the reign of Queen Mary Tudor and presided at a synod in England in 1555-1556. That synod took the tradition of the cathedral school and applied it to a program for the education of priests. Each diocese was to gather boys at the cathedral church to prepare them for priesthood; they were to be at least twelve years old, capable of reading and writing, and legitimate. The sons of the poor were to

Reginald Cardinal Pole (1500-1558)
Source: Frans Van Den Wijngaerde, via Wikimedia Commons
be given preference, although the sons of the rich were to be permitted to attend. The program was called a *seminarium* (seed bed). In a nation noted for gardening, it is not surprising that he thought in terms of a seed bed in a nursery. The English decree drawn up by Cardinal Pole stated:

> that in cathedrals there be educated a certain number of beginners, from which, as from a seed bed (*seminarium*), priests may be chosen who can worthily be placed in charge of the churches.4

This was one of the earliest, but not necessarily the first, occasion in which the word *seminary* was used in its modern sense to designate a school exclusively devoted to the training of the clergy.5

Unfortunately, the synodal legislation was not implemented before the deaths of both the cardinal and the queen. But the text of the English decree would have an important influence on the subsequent decisions of the Council of Trent regarding seminaries. The Council’s commission of bishops that drafted the seminary decree initially presented a text that was virtually identical to that of Pole’s synod. The commission’s report — *Canones super abusibus circa administrationem sacramenti ordinis* — was presented to the Council in May 1563.

As the 18-year-long Council of Trent drew to a close, it approved a final version on July 15, 1563 — *Cum adolescentium actas* — that stated:

> [T]he holy council decrees that all cathedral and metropolitan churches … shall be bound, each according to its means and the extent of its diocese, to provide for, to educate in religion, and to train in ecclesiastical discipline, a certain number of boys of their city and diocese … in a college located near the said churches or in some other suitable place to be chosen by the bishop. Into this college shall be received such as are at least twelve years of age, are born of lawful wedlock, who know how to read and write competently, and whose character and inclination justify the hope that they will dedicate themselves forever to the ecclesiastical ministry. It wishes, however, that in the selection the sons of the poor be given preference, though it does not exclude those of the wealthy class, provided they be maintained at their own expense and manifest a zeal to serve God and the Church. These youths … may be a perpetual seminary of ministers of God. … [They] shall be instructed in Sacred Scripture, ecclesiastical books, the homilies of the saints, the manner of administering the sacraments, especially those things that seem adapted to the hearing of confessions, and the rites and ceremonies.6

Thus, the Council called for a return to the method adopted by St. Augustine and decreed that every cathedral church was obliged to erect a seminary for the education of future priests. Candidates were to be taught scripture, theology, and the rubrics. Spiritual formation was prescribed. While the internal life of the seminary was sketched in general terms, the local bishop was at the heart of the undertaking. He was responsible for devising the content of training.

Pope Pius IV confirmed the legislation of the Council of Trent in his January 26, 1564 issuance of the papal bull *Benedictus Deus.*7 The pope set the example for implementing the seminary decree by opening a seminary in the Papal States at Rome on February 1, 1565, under the direction of Jesuits. The pope’s nephew, Charles Cardinal Borromeo of Milan, was to become the most famous and influential early seminary founder.8

**Post-Tridentine Seminary Development**

The Tridentine seminary decree provided the institutional arrangement for the seminary but not the model of the priesthood to inform the content of the seminary. Various European historical figures developed themes as to the character of the priest, espousing his separateness from the non-ordained while exhibiting a developed spirituality that identified with the priesthood of Christ. The *ordinand* was prepared to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders and to take on the supernatural work of imparting grace through the sacraments.

The decrees of the Council of Trent as to the education of clergy were gradually implemented. A dual approach developed: establishment of preparatory seminaries where candidates would receive formational training, and theological seminaries where specialized training would be given. The southern German states, the Italian city-states, France, and the English-speaking colleges9 established on the Continent (due to the active persecution of Catholics in England, Scotland, and Ireland) developed formal seminaries. It was from France, however, that the first seminary program in the United States would emanate.

The concept of education of young men for the diocesan priesthood was advanced in France by Jean Jacques Olier de
Verneuil (1608-1657), who had devoted his life to the work of forming diocesan clergy. In 1642, Olier became curé (pastor) of St. Sulpice in Paris which was the largest parish in the city and probably the largest in France. He installed a community of priests and seminarians at the parish. The Society of Saint Sulpice remained an organization of diocesan priests and was not a religious community bound by vows — it was a clerical community devoted to the training of future priests. Such a seminary was not Tridentine in the strict interpretation of the decree since it was not under the direct supervision of a bishop. But it was an innovative variation on the Tridentine model: a school for the training of diocesan priests operated by a clerical community under contract to a diocese. Enrollment was limited exclusively to candidates for the priesthood, with seminarians separated into younger and older groups — a foreshadowing of the development of minor (collegiate) and major (theology) seminaries.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the great upheaval of the French Revolution and the subsequent years of European warfare closed diocesan seminaries in France and in other parts of Europe. But as Europe’s patterns of seminaries came to a temporary halt, Catholics in the United States of America were beginning formal organizational life — including the establishment of seminaries that would rely on French models of training.

The Ecclesiastical Seminary
The history of diocesan seminaries in the United States, to which we will now turn, must be understood against the foundation established at Trent for ecclesiastical education. The word seminary has had different applications. England and the United States applied the word to young ladies’ academies, both Protestant and Catholic. But when qualified by the word ecclesiastical, seminary is reserved to schools instituted in accordance with the Council of Trent for the training of Catholic diocesan clergy. It differs from the novitiate and scholasticate in which members of religious orders receive their spiritual and intellectual formation. In an ecclesiastical seminary, both are combined. An ecclesiastical seminary is diocesan (sometimes interdiocesan, provincial, or pontifical), under the control of the bishop of a diocese (or several bishops, or the bishops of a province, or the Holy See). A preparatory seminary (petit séminaire) offers a collegiate course as preparation for entrance into a theological seminary. A theological seminary (grand séminaire) offers courses in Sacred Scripture, philosophy, and theology as immediate preparation for ordination to the priesthood. The word college has been applied by the English and the Irish, and in Rome, to ecclesiastical seminaries.
In 1788, American priests petitioned the Holy See for the formation of a diocese headed by a bishop. Pope Pius VI established the Diocese of Baltimore in 1789 and appointed John Carroll as its first bishop. While in England for episcopal ordination, Carroll was contacted by Father Jacques Andre Emery, superior of the Society of Saint Sulpice who proposed the opening of a Sulpician seminary in the Diocese of Baltimore.

The members of the Society of Saint Sulpice, which educated seminarians, sought to escape a France that was in the throes of the French Revolution and its attack on the Catholic Church. Following completion of negotiations with the first American bishop, five priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice and five seminarians landed in Baltimore on July 10, 1791 and proceeded to open St. Mary's Seminary (originally called St. Sulpice Seminary), the first in the United States. It produced its first priest in 1792 when Bishop Carroll ordained Stephen Badin (1768-1853). For many years, St. Mary's in Baltimore would remain the principal center for the education of candidates for the diocesan priesthood in this country.

But St. Mary’s Seminary would not be alone. In the seventy-seven years between establishment of the American hierarchy in 1789 and the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866, over half of the forty-three dioceses then existing in the United States undertook establishment of a seminary. These institutions were begun to satisfy the needs of a particular diocese. In the early years, little distinction was made between minor and major divisions in such seminaries, but ultimately students were divided into those studying classics and liberal arts (minor) and those studying philosophy and theology (major). Lay students were initially received alongside those preparing for the priesthood; indeed, the paucity of seminarians made it necessary to subsidize the cost of training seminarians by allowing laity to also study at the school.

A second type of American seminary soon developed — conducted by secular clergy and intended to educate students for the diocesan priesthood — but not established by any particular diocese. The best example of this was Mount Saint Mary’s in Emmitsburg in western Maryland under the auspices of the Sulpicians. The lay teachers were themselves seminarians progressing toward the priesthood.

A third type of seminary that developed before the Civil War consisted of a group of men assembled in the home of a bishop who were personally instructed either by the bishop or by one or two of his priests. This type of institution was established in 1832 in Philadelphia by Coadjutor Bishop Francis P. Kenrick and served as a forerunner of the present seminary there. This house seminary served Philadelphia until the diocese was financially able to support St. Charles Seminary that was occupied in January 1839 by ten students under the direction of Father Michael O'Connor, an Irish-born graduate of the Urban College in Rome. O'Connor had been professor of sacred scripture and vice rector of the Irish College in Rome (1833-1835) and subsequently immigrated to the United States, arriving in November 1838 to teach and later head the seminary in Philadelphia. He would later become the first bishop of Pittsburgh.

One seminary of the early nineteenth century bears particular mention. With the establishment of the Diocese of Bardstown (Kentucky), Benedict Flaget — its first bishop and a French-born Sulpician — started out with a party consisting of another Sulpician priest (the future Bishop John Baptist Mary David) and three seminarians traveling to Pittsburgh by stagecoach. On May 22, 1811, the group started down the Ohio River — which led one historian to describe the event as the institution of a seminary “on a flatboat at the Pittsburgh docks.”

A fourth category of seminary would develop: the national (ethnic) seminary. For German Catholics in the New World, the tradition of a close association of their religious faith with their mother tongue led to the development of a few seminaries intended to serve this rapidly growing number of Catholics. In October 1846, Benedictine Father Boniface Wimmer opened a monastery — St. Vincent’s — in Westmoreland County in Western Pennsylvania. By 1847, he had established a seminary and a school for boys.

A fifth category of seminary was added on December 8, 1859, when the American bishops opened the North American College in Rome to afford seminarians the opportunity to obtain advanced degrees in the institutions in the Eternal City — a project enthusiastically supported by an alumnus of the Urban College, Bishop Michael O’Connor of Pittsburgh.
The American bishops, meeting in 1843 in the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore, petitioned the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, which had jurisdiction over the “missionary” United States, to create several new dioceses, including Pittsburgh. The creation of those additional sees increased the number of American ecclesiastical jurisdictions to twenty-two. A new round of seminary foundings would then ensue.

On August 11, 1843, the papal bull Universi Dominici announced the creation of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, which would consist of 24 counties in Western Pennsylvania (the counties of Blair, Cameron, Forest, and Lawrence were not yet formed in this area), covering a territory of 21,151 square miles with 47 churches, 18 priests, and an estimated 30,000 Catholics out of a total population of 592,000. The document Dilecti Filii, executed the same day, named Michael O'Connor as first bishop of the new see of Pittsburgh.

O'Connor had been born in County Cork, Ireland in 1810. The bishop of Cloyne sent him at age fourteen to undertake studies for the priesthood, first in France, then in Rome where he was a student at the Urban College of Propaganda Fide. A brilliant student, he obtained a doctor of divinity degree following a public disputation. Ordained in 1833 at age twenty-two, he was appointed vice rector of the Irish College in Rome. Invited to teach in St. Charles Seminary in Philadelphia, he arrived in the United States in 1838, with his younger brother James. Michael O'Connor later became president of the seminary in Philadelphia. In 1841, he was appointed vicar general of Western Pennsylvania and pastor of St. Paul Church in Pittsburgh, which was then part of the Diocese of Philadelphia. Anticipating that he might be appointed first bishop of Pittsburgh, he traveled to Rome in 1843 to petition the pope to permit him to join the Jesuits. The pope refused, saying: “You shall be a bishop first, and a Jesuit afterwards. I will not let you rise from your knees until you promise to accept the Diocese of Pittsburgh.” O'Connor accepted the pope's will and was ordained a bishop on August 15 by Giacomo Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, in the chapel of the Irish College. O'Connor was only thirty-two years old.

While still in Rome, the new bishop requested that Cardinal Fransoni write to two of the three European mission aid societies that were the principal financial benefactors of the Church in the United States — the Lyon office of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and the Archbishop of Vienna in his capacity as president of the Austrian-based Leopoldinen Stiftung (Leopoldine Foundation) — to request money for the transportation to Pittsburgh of the bishop and three priests that O'Connor would need to staff the seminary he planned to open in Pittsburgh, as well as the cost of building and maintaining the seminary. The Society responded with 20,000 francs for the bishop. O'Connor then obtained the commitment of the brilliant young priest, Father Richard H. Wilson, of the Irish College to leave a promising professorial position in Rome to join the new bishop in the journey to Pittsburgh, where he would supervise the new diocesan seminary that O'Connor planned to open as soon as possible. Wilson had obtained his doctorate at the Urban College of Propaganda Fide and had been ordained in Rome in 1843.
The bishop then departed for Ireland to obtain priests, seminarians, and sisters to work in the new see. On his trip from Rome, O’Connor stopped in early fall 1843 in Marseille, the second largest city in France. There, he visited with Bishop Charles Joseph Eugène de Mazenod, who had founded a society of priests devoted to missionary work within France — the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The order had received papal approbation in 1826, and — reflective of de Mazenod’s training under the Sulpicians — had an apostolate devoted to seminary education. The seminary of Marseille had been re-established in 1827, following the French Revolution and its aftermath, and entrusted to the Oblates. Thus, O’Connor, who had served as vice rector of the Irish College in Rome and had been a seminary professor in the Eternal City, encountered a fellow bishop who was devoted to the formation of seminarians in France. Both recognized that a diocesan seminary was essential to development of Catholic life in their respective dioceses — Marseille, in rebuilding after the ravages of the French Revolution, and Pittsburgh, which was a new diocese in a new country that was beginning to experience the initial phase of a tidal wave of immigration from Europe, much of which would prove to be Catholic.

It was therefore fully appropriate and expected for O’Connor to request of de Mazenod some Oblates for the seminary that the bishop of Pittsburgh planned for his new see. But de Mazenod, as Superior General of the Oblates, responded in the negative to the request — due to lack of personnel. Five years would pass before O’Connor would again request Oblates for his seminary.

Arriving in Ireland, O’Connor went to the national seminary of St. Patrick in Maynooth (County Kildare) to plead his case. Twenty students responded favorably to the bishop’s plea for seminarians to commit to accompany him to Pittsburgh to work in the new diocese. But limited finances dictated that only eight could join O’Connor, and he chose those who were furthest advanced in their studies. O’Connor had received funds from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in France to pay transportation costs. The others were to follow him to Pittsburgh the next year.

This large group of seventeen travelers (including seven Sisters of Mercy) then departed on the Queen of the West from Liverpool on November 10 and arrived in New York harbor some four weeks and two days later. Traveling via Philadelphia, the party divided into two groups (due to stage coach capacity) and ultimately arrived in Pittsburgh on December 20, 1843. Father Wilson and the seminarians took up residence in the bishop’s home — a rented structure located on Smithfield Street at the intersection with Virgin Alley, in close proximity to St. Paul Cathedral, then located at Fifth Avenue and Grant Street in downtown Pittsburgh. This was the inauspicious beginning of St. Michael’s Seminary.
A Seminary in the Bishop’s Rental Quarters

Reflecting the decades-long tradition of itinerant priests who visited the scattered Catholics in Western Pennsylvania, the developing congregations had not yet begun to build rectories for resident clergy adjacent to the few existing churches. Rather, priests either stayed briefly in the homes of local Catholics or, for longer stays, rented quarters near a church. Thus, three entries in the Pittsburgh Directory for 1844 reflected this reality for the new bishop of Pittsburgh, his priests, and his seminary:

**SAINT PAUL’S CATHEDRAL**
Rt. Rev. M. O’Connor, D.D., Bishop
Residence of Clergymen, Smithfield and Virgin Alley

**CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**
Rev. R. A. Wilson, D.D., President
There are but eight students now in the Seminary. Arrangements are being made to erect a suitable building on the lot adjoining the Cathedral. At present the students reside in Smithfield near Virgin Alley.

**CATHOLIC CLERGYMEN.**
Right Rev. M. O’Connor, D.D., Bishop
Rev. J. F. Deane  Rev. R. A. Wilson, D.D.
Rev. T. Mullen  Rev. H. McCullagh
Dwelling house, Smithfield near Virgin Alley

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**Pennsylvania Catholic churches in the west (Diocese of Pittsburgh) and in the east (Diocese of Philadelphia) in 1850**
Catholics were aware of the history behind the street name. Virgin Alley ("The Way of the Virgin") had originated during the French presence at Fort Duquesne (1754-1758) when the French carried their dead through the fields by that path from the fort to a burial ground. By O'Connor's time, it had become a key twenty-foot-wide artery that extended from Liberty Avenue across Wood Street to the burial ground on land given by the Penn family in 1787 to two churches in the block between Wood and Smithfield Streets.

This seminary arrangement was of the domestic type, pursuant to the Tridentine concept. The seminarians were at slightly different stages near the end of their ecclesiastical preparations. Bishop O'Connor and Father Wilson would have been able to draw from their own ecclesiastical training in Rome to continue the seminarians' education aboard ship during the month-long trans-Atlantic crossing mid-November to mid-December 1843. Their arrival at the bishop's residence in late December merely returned the students' education to land after the period at sea. We can thus date establishment of St. Michael's Seminary from November 1843.

From the inception of the clustering of students intending ordination with Bishop O'Connor, the bishop identified the enterprise as a seminary; lay Catholics in Western Pennsylvania repeated the terminology immediately. For example, the first issue of the new diocesan newspaper — the Pittsburgh Catholic — on March 16, 1844, included an article on the history of Pittsburgh, in which it listed the three Protestant theological seminaries in the city, followed by a comment that “We could now add the Catholic Theological Seminary, though on an humble scale. We hope, however, that it will soon increase, and be provided with a suitable building.”

From the outset, the bishop, his clergy, and laity considered this arrangement to be a seminary. The name “St. Michael's Seminary” was in common usage by 1844. There was no formal episcopal announcement per se nor an explanation as to the
selection of the name St. Michael for the seminary — but an observer would correctly conclude that the bishop had selected the name of his patron saint, St. Michael the Archangel, as the name of the new institution. The Pittsburgh diocesan historian, Monsignor Andrew A. Lambing — who later attended the seminary — identified the use of “St. Michael’s Seminary” by early 1844, which accounts for subsequent writers dating the start of the seminary to that year, even though there was no separate building since the bishop’s personal residence served double duty to his ecclesiastical charges.

In subsequent years, most published references cite 1844 as the year of the seminary’s opening — with just a few instances where the date is given as 1846, when a separate building was designated exclusively for the housing and instruction of diocesan seminarians with a president and priest-professors. Yet St. Michael’s Seminary, as noted earlier, functionally began aboard the Queen of the West in November 1843 and continued on land with the arrival in December 1843 of the Irish seminarians (and an additional Irish seminarian who was accepted by the bishop upon his layover in Philadelphia) in Pittsburgh — with their priestly formation entrusted to Bishop O’Connor, Father Wilson, and other priests who would function as part-time professors while holding parochial assignments.

Monsignor Lambing, in assessing the accomplishments of Pittsburgh’s first bishop, said of O’Connor:

But by far the most important work undertaken by the bishop at this time and one which evinced his zeal, his judgment and his courage, was the founding of St. Michael’s diocesan seminary for the education of candidates for the sacred ministry. Its beginnings were indeed humble, but it was destined to be productive of incalculable benefit to the diocese and to religion.

The same alumnus of this seminary would later identify several obvious strengths emanating from a local diocesan seminary:

- Candidates are drawn locally, reflecting the belief that God gives among the people the vocations to sustain it; local vocations are not to be supplanted by those coming from another place.
- Youths labor more effectively in their own locality than can be expected of others — they are acclimated and people have confidence in their judgment.
- As the people defray the cost of ecclesiastical education of those destined to serve them, the laity are the first to benefit.
- Such a seminary positively impacts existing clergy:
  - It is a place of meeting for annual examinations, feast days, clergy retreats, and other events that foster a spirit of union in place of the previous isolated missionary nature of priestly life in Western Pennsylvania.
  - Clergy become acquainted with future local priests and neither group is a stranger to the other.
  - A priestly bond reduces transfers of priests to other dioceses, which plagued the early American Catholic Church.
  - Locally trained diocesan clergy more readily encourage additional vocations and parents are more receptive.
  - The diocese avoids the expense of sending candidates to distant educational institutions.

The Pittsburgh Catholic Newspaper

Bishop O’Connor established a newspaper, the Pittsburgh Catholic, in March 1844, just three months after his return to Pittsburgh following his episcopal ordination and just seven months after establishment of the see of Pittsburgh. In the coming decades, that newspaper would chronicle a number of the developments affecting St. Michael’s Seminary. While “local” news articles were pointedly brief, these vignettes of seminary history provide information, albeit incomplete yet sufficiently helpful, to identify the bishops’ actions regarding the seminary, as well as the seminarians’ activities and interface with the parochial community. The Catholic provides a limited “public” view of an institution that challenged the commitment and initiative of three successive bishops over thirty-three years, none more so than Michael O’Connor. Debt and the lack of sufficient financial contributions are considered to have caused the seminary’s closure. That is not untrue, but the story is more complex — and thus more intriguing. Let us turn now to the story of St. Michael’s Seminary as best we can recreate it almost a century and a half after its closure — identifying the different approaches of three bishops and examining other issues that were part of a larger story.

A Real Beginning

Less than two months after arriving in Pittsburgh as bishop, O’Connor ordained the first of his seminarians. On February 4, 1844, he conferred the sacrament of Holy Orders on Thomas McCullagh — a first for Pittsburgh. On March 3, four others
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were ordained: John C. Brady, Thomas B. O’Flaherty, Michael J. Mitchell, and Robert Kleineidam. The first three were from Ireland, while Kleineidam was from the Prussian province of Silesia.9 Six months later, on September 1, the bishop ordained Patrick Duffy, Peter Brown, and Tobias Mullen.10 These eight were the first alumni of St. Michael’s Seminary.11 One of the early immigrant Irish seminarians, Cornelius McGrath, who had entered St. Michael’s Seminary, transferred in March 1844 to St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, where he died of “consumption” [tuberculosis] on December 14, 1844.12

Financing the Seminary — The Cathedral Trustees and the Congregation

The arrival of almost a dozen seminarians presented immediate financial issues for Bishop O’Connor. The students had to be housed, fed, and educated — in some cases for years, until they could be ordained. As immigrants, the seminarians had no personal source of support and had to rely on the bishop and the diocese. This was a challenge to a newly formed diocese. O’Connor needed funds for ordinary expenses — faculty, food, books, clothing, and lodging. Ultimately, a system of collections would be needed to meet ordinary expenses and to provide for expansion of the seminary. But that solution would only be adopted a decade later, after the bishop exhausted several alternative methods of financing a seminary adequate to the needs of the diocese.

In April 1844, Bishop O’Connor — trying to accommodate Father Wilson, the original seminarians and several new local recruits in the cramped quarters of his own residence — turned to his own congregation of St. Paul Cathedral, of which he had been pastor since 1841, for financial support. He proposed to the cathedral’s board of trustees that the parishioners fund his purchase for $10,000 of over 100 acres of farmland in the borough of Birmingham — a community opposite downtown Pittsburgh, on the south bank of the Monongahela River. The plan entailed division of the acreage into lots that would be sold at a profit. The money raised would fund construction of the seminary. This was the first, but not the last, example of Bishop O’Connor’s enterprising approach to the seminary issue — he would become a real estate speculator in developing, at a profit, the virgin lands of Western Pennsylvania.13

But, just four months after his return to Pittsburgh as bishop, the bishop was to encounter cathedral trustees and members of the congregation with a different view. The congregation’s pew-renting members were entitled to vote on financial expenditures. The cathedral’s trustees, who exercised considerable influence within the congregation, balked. Discussions and meetings dragged on for two months. Now that Pittsburgh had a bishop, they became enamored of the idea of creating a cathedral complex of buildings on the European model with which they were familiar. The membership rejected the bishop’s request for approval of his proposal. They could not envision a seminary at a distance from the cathedral. Even the idea of an episcopal residence with space for seminarians was deemed inappropriate; a bishop warranted his own residence. They preferred to have the seminary next to the cathedral. Thus, a joint building project was decided upon: a new episcopal residence and a seminary — two separate buildings — would be built next to the cathedral.14 Subscriptions would be sought to finance the undertaking.15 The congregation’s view was parochial, while O’Connor’s was visionary.

O’Connor realistically concluded that he could not come to an agreement with the cathedral congregation, absent becoming completely financially dependent on them. The cathedral parish contained what little wealth existed in the local Catholic community, and functioned somewhat independently of its pastor, the bishop. This was a troubled period in early American Catholic history when conflict developed between bishops and parish trustees.

Trustees were the leaders of congregations of laity who had built or financed the construction of local churches. Canonically erected parishes in this missionary country had not yet developed; rather, Catholics grouped themselves into congregations and built their own modest structures, typically served by occasional visiting priests. As the Church in the United States developed and dioceses were created, the new bishops — who had been educated in Europe — introduced a hierarchical structure into a country where no ecclesiastical structure existed. Issues of authority, power, title, and the administration of ecclesiastical property surfaced. These issues typically arose when a bishop would require that the trustees deed property to him and his successors as a condition to dedicating a newly constructed church or assigning a priest. Control of finances to support the church also presented ongoing disputes. At times, independent-minded pastors added to the conflict. Collectively, this complex of issues was referred to as “trusteeism.”16

O’Connor, as a former priest of the Philadelphia diocese, was acutely aware of the conflict that issue had brought to his then-ordinary, Bishop Henry Conwell (1819-1842).17 Unwilling to push the issue of parish subsidization of St. Michael’s Seminary for fear of igniting a conflict with cathedral trustees and parishioners, O’Connor realistically worked around that potential problem.

The diocesan newspaper chronicled, in two articles, the cathedral parish decision regarding both construction of a seminary building and its financing at a June 14, 1844 meeting convened for that purpose. The first article succinctly noted:
We call attention to the resolutions in another column, expressive of the feelings and wishes of the Catholics of the city regarding a dwelling house for the clergy, and a building for a Theological Seminary, on the lot attached to St. Paul’s Church. We are glad to learn that the project is taken up with spirit. About $2000 have been already subscribed at the two meetings that were held for the purpose.18

But the rest of the money was not forthcoming.

That same newspaper issue provided a report on the meeting of the congregation of St. Paul Cathedral, held on Friday evening, June 14, 1844 in the school room, at which the following Preamble and Resolutions were unanimously adopted:

Whereas, The late formation of the Diocess [sic] of Pittsburgh, and appointment of the Right Rev. Dr. O’Connor to preside over it, has secured to us the gratifying advantages arising from the permanent residence of a Bishop amongst us, and whereas respect for our revered Prelate, as well as the interests of the Congregation imperatively calls upon us to provide a suitable residence for our Bishop and his clergy contiguous to his Cathedral, and whereas the Spiritual wants of the new diocess [sic] will also require a Theological Seminary for the instruction of ecclesiastical students, we the Catholics of Pittsburgh here assembled deem the present a fitting opportunity for taking such measures as prudence will dictate, for the prompt erection of appropriate buildings for the above purposes and impressed with the conviction that the ample space on the Cathedral lot as well as the peculiar conveniences of the situation affords valuable facilities for the successful completion of such an undertaking. We therefore respectfully and earnestly invite our fellow Catholics through the Diocess [sic] to co-operate with us in our efforts to effect an object fraught with such benefits to themselves, and importance to religion, therefore, be it

Resolved, That we deem it expedient to provide a suitable and permanent residence for our Bishop and the Clergy of St. Paul’s Cathedral, believing as we do the present system of renting houses for them, to be precarious, inconvenient, and must ultimately be attended with loss to the Congregation.

Resolved, That as an Ecclesiastical Seminary will be absolutely necessary, the residence of our Bishop amongst us, points out Pittsburgh as the proper location, and that measures be immediately taken for erecting such in conjunction with a house for the Bishop, on part of the lot of St. Paul’s Cathedral.

Resolved, That this meeting adjourn over until Sunday evening after Vespers. In pursuance of this resolution, an adjourned meeting was held in the School Room on Sunday afternoon whereupon it was unanimously.

Resolved, That an immediate subscription be opened under the direction of the officers of the meeting, and also that the Rev. Clergymen of the Diocess [sic], be each a Committee in their respective parishes, for the purpose of collecting subscriptions in aid of the funds required to defray the expenses of those buildings, and that the Rt. Rev. Dr. O’Connor be requested to appoint such of his clergy as he may think proper for the like purpose, together with two of the Laity in each Ward of the City and district to assist them.

Resolved, That the Bishop be requested to appoint a Building Committee for the purpose of taking such immediate steps as he may deem expedient for the erection of the proposed structures.19

In the space of just three months (April-June 1844), Bishop O’Connor would display a multi-faceted approach to obtain the necessary funds for the seminary — true evidence of the priority that the seminary program had in his plans for the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Role of the European Missionary Aid Societies

While continuing to pursue discussions with cathedral trustees and members of the congregation, the bishop sent a May 1844 appeal to the Paris Council of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith for financial support of a two-year budget (1844-1845) with over two-thirds of the monies allocated for (1) transportation of the remaining ten Irish seminarians to Pittsburgh — 9,000 francs, (2) seminary furnishings — 4,000 francs, (3) maintenance of existing and new seminarians that now totaled twelve — 7,500 francs. The Society partially met his request, providing him with 26,000 francs in 1844.20 For 1845, he requested 40,000 francs, of which more than 80% was allocated for (1) maintenance of seminarians — 7,500 francs and (2) erection of a seminary building — 25,000 francs.21 Elaborating on the final item, O’Connor stated:

he could not postpone construction beyond a year and, if necessary, he was willing to hold back on all else until the structure was completed. He admitted that it was an expensive undertaking; but, he also expressed the view that it would cost less to have a diocesan seminary, noting that this institution was the only one upon which he could rely as a source of clergy for the future needs of the diocese.22
The bishop then convened the first diocesan synod at St. Paul Cathedral over three days in June 1844 (Sunday 16th, Tuesday 18th, and Thursday 20th).23 Eighteen of his twenty diocesan priests attended, and the bishop openly discussed his seminary plans with them at that gathering.

Bishop O’Connor had initially hoped to rely upon the generosity of the three European aid societies. The French-based Society for the Propagation of the Faith was, as noted above, the first mission society to provide financial support to O’Connor. It would prove to be the one society that continued to provide funds each year and, of even greater importance to O’Connor, make those contributions exclusively to the bishop, rather than to individual priests, parishes, or institutions within his diocese. Support from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith continued in 1845 with a contribution of 30,000 francs, but the Society halved that amount in the following year (1846) when it appropriated only 15,872 francs for O’Connor. The Society’s contributions continued to decline: 8,800 francs in 1847, and 7,920 francs in 1848. This can be attributed to the group’s initial perception that O’Connor’s seminary proposal was extravagant. It was a perception from which the bishop never fully recovered.

The bishop’s requests reflected projects other than the seminary, such as the construction of churches — and reports to the Society had to reflect application of monies to those projects as applied for and as approved. Thus, in a fairly short time, specific European aid for the seminary ended. The Society’s *Annals*,24 published annually, recorded the yearly appropriations to Bishop O’Connor over his seventeen-year administration of the see of Pittsburgh:

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<th>ANNALS OF THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH</th>
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| TOTAL | 271,092 |
The value of the Society's total contribution to Bishop O'Connor would approximate $1,370,000 today. Functionally, the amount represented, in the mid-nineteenth century, less than one dollar per person per year in the Diocese of Pittsburgh — woefully insufficient to meet the growing needs of the truly missionary church in Western Pennsylvania.

The alms received from the other two European mission aid groups were lesser amounts, reflecting the fact that both the Bavarian Ludwig Missionsverein and the Austrian Leopoldinen Stiftung were focused on helping German immigrant communities in the United States, not the broader diocesan needs which reflected an ethnically mixed population that was predominantly Irish and English, with Germans in the minority.

The appropriations of the Ludwig Missionsverein to Bishop O'Connor came early in his episcopacy — 2,799.60 gulden (Bavarian coin) in 1845-1846, before the establishment of Boniface Wimmer's Benedictines. But O'Connor received no further assistance inasmuch as he was perceived as not friendly to Germans. Rather, that society's later assistance of 8,082 gulden went directly to German parishes within the Pittsburgh diocese, and Boniface Wimmer's monastery at St. Vincent's in Westmoreland County received a stunning 144,113.36 gulden between 1846-1868.25

Bishop O'Connor, in the very early years of his administration, relied upon the three previously mentioned mission aid societies in Europe for grants for the seminary. The aid societies' concerns with the size of the requests and the bishop's actual application of the funds (some of which was occasioned by complaints of disparate treatment of Germans in his diocese), quickly led to the end of much of this source of financial aid especially as to his desired seminary.

It soon became apparent that the mission aid groups would not provide all of the funds requested, would not approve the request for a large grant to build a seminary deemed extravagantly impractical, indicated that future aid would be reduced, and proceeded to reduce and ultimately end aid to Pittsburgh. The bishop correctly concluded that Europeans would not satisfy his financial needs and that a combination of foreign and local funds would be necessary.

O'Connor resolved upon a tripartite approach of (1) continued requests to European aid societies, (2) personal solicitations during his and subordinates' periodic trips to Europe, and (3) encouragement of small contributions from any parish, individual, or society disposed to contribute on an ad hoc basis.

Alternative Fundraising

O’Connor then resorted to an alternative source of funds: periodic trips — some personally and some by trusted diocesan priests — to recruit priests (with an eye to possible seminary faculty members) and solicit funds from bishops, royalty, and Propaganda Fide in Rome. He and his priest-designees visited Ireland, England, France, the German States, and Rome. Results from this alternate form of solicitation — as to priests, faculty, money, and goods — were uneven. But the bishop was persistent and creative.

The third element in his fundraising approach was undertaken primarily through his small, but growing, number of diocesan priests. The bishop made the case for financial support to the one group who clearly understood the need and would benefit directly — Pittsburgh diocesan priests. The bishop initiated this discussion at the first diocesan synod in June 1844, immediately after the cathedral congregation's rejection of his direct request to the laity. Thereafter, the bishop brought the subject of the seminary's financial needs to the attention of the clergy at periodic clergy meetings and the annual weeklong clergy retreats. The bishop also undertook regular visitations of all parishes in the diocese, which afforded additional opportunities to talk with both priests and laity in areas beyond the city of Pittsburgh. Moreover, the rotational assignment of parish priests to part-time faculty positions at the seminary personally invested those priests in the development of future priests and facilitated their communicating to others the needs of the seminary — food, fuel, clothing, books, furniture, and myriad items necessary to the proper functioning of an educational institution with a special mission. Using these forums, the bishop was able to enlist broader support among priests, laity, the parishes, and other Catholic organizations.

As Bishop O'Connor controlled the content of the diocesan newspaper, the Catholic began carrying periodic reports of financial contributions from individuals and parishes for the seminary. Parish contributions evidenced the initiative of local pastors who would announce from the pulpit that a seminary collection was to be taken up. Individual priests themselves took the lead. Within the first year, the newspaper published the first notice of the bishop’s receipt of monies toward the new seminary in August 1844:26

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<td>Ten Dollars for the Theological Seminary,</td>
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<td>Per Rev. Mr. Gallagher.</td>
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Published acknowledgments of contributed funds were sporadic in the first few years of O'Connor's administration, but later became more frequent. The amounts were typically quite small and clearly insufficient, sometimes just a quarter or half-dollar.

Competing financial demands upon the small Catholic population in Pittsburgh complicated seminary collection efforts. In October 1844, the congregation of St. Paul Cathedral was faced with the necessity of constructing walls to support the cathedral due to the city’s ongoing re-grading of Fifth Avenue and Grant Streets, which left the cathedral precariously sitting well above the reduced street level. The Catholic observed that:

when measures for the erection of the house for the Bishop and the clergy with the Seminary were already taken, it was not thought that the congregation could wish all to be suspended on account of this call for the protection wall which will not cost more than about $800 or $1,000 at most.27

This illustrates the intervention of uncontrollable events that served to redirect the contributions of the small number of Catholics in Pittsburgh, many living at the margins of society. In this case, critical work at the cathedral served to delay construction of the bishop’s residence that was to serve as the new residence for the seminarians.

There is no documented evidence that Bishop O'Connor, during his first decade as ordinary (1843-1853), undertook a comprehensive fundraising scheme for St. Michael’s Seminary, such as an annual collection. He would not pursue that approach until 1854, relying in the intervening years on the methods above identified.28 That is surprising in light of an initiative he had undertaken while president of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia — adapting the approach of the European mission societies, each pastor was named as a general manager for the annual seminary collection and became responsible to select parishioners as local managers. The latter group would then designate solicitors who had the duty to contact ten persons and collect from them one dollar per year in support of the seminary. A report was then made to the subscribers, solicitors, and managers. This plan was popular and productive in Philadelphia.29

At times, the various sources of funds provided just enough financial comfort to keep the seminary afloat. But as we shall see, at other times, facing the financial abyss, O'Connor would be forced to twice suspend his seminary and disperse his seminarians to other locations for the continuation of their ecclesiastical education. This stemmed from the bishop’s need to (1) construct or lease a building to house the seminary, (2) equip the structure with all the necessary and specialized equipment including a sufficiently large ecclesiastical library, (3) pay the travel costs of European priest-faculty and seminarians to come to Pittsburgh, (4) pay faculty, especially those without a parochial assignment, (5) cover tuition costs of students who could not pay for their own ecclesiastical education, and (6) retire principal and interest on loans taken out to buy property and buildings, and maintain the series of structures that would over time serve as St. Michael’s Seminary.

O'Connor never successfully resolved this fundamental issue of finance despite the sequential initiatives he took to obtain money in order to keep the seminary open. As we shall see, the bishop pursued a variety of alternatives including, finally in 1854, institution of an annual diocesan Sunday collection for the seminary. His two successors as bishop of Pittsburgh would also face the issue of the cost to maintain St. Michael’s Seminary — and decisions made by them ultimately led to the demise of St. Michael’s. Accordingly, this pervasive issue will be examined below in the history of the seminary during the administration of each bishop.

**Resignation of Father Wilson**

By June 1844, Father Wilson asked to be relieved of his assignment as supervisor of the seminarians.30 During this early period, it had become apparent to Bishop O'Connor that Father Wilson left much to be desired in his dual role as seminary rector and principal professor. O'Connor noted in a June 1844 letter that Wilson “was entirely too soft to take charge of young men, some of whom were older than himself. We managed to get on the best way we could for some time, but finally he gave up. He became very anxious to be entirely to himself and to get rid of all charge of students.”31

Wilson, for his part, may have concluded that his instruction was inadequate,
owing to the continued delay in receipt of his many books that had been shipped from Rome to Pittsburgh some four to five months earlier.32

**Turning to the Vincentians for Help**

The departure of Father Wilson prompted O’Connor to ask the Vincentians, whose principal task was the formation of candidates for the priesthood,33 to assume charge of the fledgling seminary in Pittsburgh. O’Connor wrote to his friend, Father Paul Cullen in Rome, as to his plan: “I am forced to try and get Lazarists (Vincentians) for the Seminary.”34 Father John Timon, the American Provincial of this congregation who had met O’Connor while preaching a mission in Pittsburgh in 1842, declined the bishop’s initial proposal of a minor seminary to be located in the countryside beyond the city of Pittsburgh, but did accept the bishop’s second proposal of a theological seminary in the city of Pittsburgh. Timon promised a staff.35 The attraction to the Vincentians was due both to their seminary apostolate and the fact that they did not necessarily require ownership of the property but were content merely to direct the seminary. But as no American Vincentian was available, the Vincentian house in Ireland agreed to release a member there for service in Pittsburgh. O’Connor then wrote to the Paris Council of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith for funds to cover the cost of travel of the Irish priest and the remaining Irish seminarians who had committed to service in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.36 The Vincentian Superior General, however, intervened to reverse Timon’s decision. O’Connor received word in September 1844 that the Vincentians would not staff the seminary.37

**Potential Relocation of the Seminary to Westmoreland County**

While discussions were underway with the Vincentians, O’Connor considered another option for revival of his seminary: use land available in Westmoreland County as a permanent home for the seminary. Dutch-born Father Theodore Brouwers, O.F.M. (1738-1790) had immigrated to Philadelphia, heard of the need for a Catholic priest in Western Pennsylvania, traveled over the Allegheny Mountains, and on April 16, 1790 bought 315 acres of land known as “Sportsman’s Hall.” Brouwers died six months later. His will bequeathed his properties to the Catholic priest who would succeed him, and his successors forever. Under succeeding diocesan priests, a church was built on the property and dedicated by Bishop Francis Kenrick on July 19, 1835 — and named “St. Vincent’s” after the saint of that day.38 During a July 1842 visitation of Western Pennsylvania, Bishop Kenrick and Father Michael O’Connor, his then-vicar general for the western half of the Diocese of Philadelphia, devised a plan to use the estate and its...
buildings for a seminary to serve the Diocese of Philadelphia that then included the entire state of Pennsylvania. Nothing came of that idea at that time.

O’Connor, now bishop of Western Pennsylvania, resurrected the idea of using the site for that purpose. The attraction of sizeable property was strong. He reckoned that the brick schoolhouse (located about 150 feet southwest of St. Vincent Church) could serve as the minor seminary. While preferring a seminary in his see city, the bishop saw the potential and wrote:

We are about to start a college also at Youngstown [St. Vincent’s]. After tomorrow I am to be there and I think I will then make arrangements for a beginning be it ever so small. It will be as a kind of preparatory seminary.

The bishop’s initial hope, developed in April 1844, was that the Vincentians would locate there. The Vincentian Superior General’s later decision not to send any Vincentian priest to Pittsburgh dispatched that hope.

In succeeding months, the seminary project at St. Vincent progressed. Father Michael Gallagher became pastor of St. Vincent’s in late 1844 and quickly proposed use of the land for farming that would financially support students in the planned minor seminary. He also proposed that a community of brothers be established there to work the land, reminiscent of the custom of some religious orders in Europe. Gallagher then gathered six young Germans and Irishmen who had aspirations to the religious life and attempted to establish a diocesan brotherhood. The community did not prosper, and the six novices soon left.

The Seminary as Joint Venture with Cincinnati

As O’Connor recognized that he could not supply the number of priests required to operate a seminary, he pursued the idea of undertaking a minor seminary with the cooperation of his close friend, Irish-born (and also a native of County Cork) Bishop John B. Purcell of Cincinnati. After two months of back and forth, the two prelates came to agreement to establish the seminary as a joint venture. Purcell agreed in June 1844 to release two priests for service at the proposed seminary.

O’Connor envisioned a minor seminary at the site, with a theological seminary to be housed in the still-to-be constructed building in downtown Pittsburgh. Purcell sent Father Joseph J. O’Mealy, a Cincinnati diocesan priest, to help organize the school and to work with Father Gallagher at St. Vincent’s. The choice of O’Mealy was promising. He, like O’Connor and Purcell, was a native of Ireland; like O’Connor, he had studied at the Propaganda in Rome and was the author of two books. Shortly after his ordination, he had been named rector in 1839 of St. Francis Xavier Seminary in Cincinnati. Resigning that position in 1842, he then served as a pastor in Portsmouth (Ohio) before returning to the Cincinnati cathedral. From there, he was sent to Pittsburgh. But the young priest’s efforts to reopen St. Michael’s Seminary came to naught. Aware of the two bishops’ inability to raise sufficient funds to open the seminary, O’Mealy abandoned his efforts after a year. By the end of 1845, O’Connor abandoned plans for a diocesan seminary at the St. Vincent site. O’Mealy remained in Pittsburgh until 1849, serving as pastor of St. Paul Cathedral and editor of the Pittsburgh Catholic.

Suspension of the Seminary and Dispersal of the Seminarians

The bishop faced an ongoing struggle to raise funds (both domestic and European) for construction of a separate seminary building, and he had to confront several realities: the Vincentians would not staff a seminary in Pittsburgh, a joint venture with the bishop of Cincinnati was infeasible, the Westmoreland County site lacked a nucleus of workers to render the site economically self-sustaining, and there was no available faculty since the small number of priests within the diocese was desperately needed for basic sacramental services for the growing Catholic population in Western Pennsylvania. O’Connor made the prudential judgment in 1845 to send his students to seminaries in other dioceses.

He turned westward to his friend Father Martin Spalding at the seminary in Louisville (Kentucky). Four Pittsburgh seminarians were then sent down the Ohio River to Cincinnati on their way to Louisville. In the interim, Spalding withdrew his offer of assistance, and the four seminarians — Michael Creedon, William Lambert, John Hoy, and Joseph A. Gallagher — remained in Cincinnati under the care of Bishop Purcell. There they attended St. Francis Xavier Seminary, adjacent to the cathedral in Cincinnati.

Three other seminarians — Terence S. Reynolds, Richard Gilmour (future bishop of Cleveland), and Edward McSweeny — remained in Pittsburgh and only in May 1845 were they sent to Loretto in Cambria County to be tutored by the pastor there, Father Hugh P. Gallagher. This marked the first of two suspensions of the formal seminary program. But this was only a partial suspension inasmuch as education of some seminarians continued within the Diocese of Pittsburgh — three were instructed by Father Hugh Gallagher and several others remained with Bishop O’Connor at his residence in downtown Pittsburgh.
Plans to Reopen the Seminary

Full reopening of the seminary was never far from the bishop’s mind. Both he and his brother, seminarian James O’Connor, traveled separately to Europe in the fall of 1845 to recruit faculty and obtain funds. The bishop, then in England, wrote to his younger brother in Rome:

You must do everything in your power to keep [Father George Henry] Backhaus [Prussian graduate of Propaganda, who was both scholar and missionary] for us. It will be impossible for me to get up the Seminary without calculating on him. I did not speak to others as I might have done. Speak to himself [Father Backhaus], to the Cardinal [Giacomo Fransoni, Prefect of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide], to [Giambattista] Palma [a notary of Propaganda Fide], to everyone about it.

Try to get them at the Propaganda to order something for us this winter from Munich [the Ludwig-Missionsverein]. The expenses of nuns, brothers, students &c. exceed by about $1,500 what I got at Vienna &c. There is no fair play for us at [the Propagation of the Faith Council in] Lyons.51

O’Connor intended to restart the seminary in 1845 upon completion of the building next to the cathedral as commissioned by the congregation of St. Paul’s. However, contributions to that project lagged, rendering completion contingent upon financial grants from Europe in the form of funding from the Paris mission Society for the Pittsburgh building program. Unfortunately, the Society considered his two-year budget request of May 1844 to be excessive and funds for the seminary were not forthcoming. O’Connor then wrote to explain where the initial funds had been spent, why additional monies were needed, and his continued commitment to a diocesan seminary:52

[T]he seminary building is contracted for. What I am yet to receive from Paris will be but a small portion of what necessarily must be paid for that object. This now is my most pressing want. I did not think that I could possibly defer the erection of a seminary. I may, by exertions, obtain a supply of priests from Europe, but it is under every point of view far more desirable that the wants of the diocese in that respect be supplied by persons educated in this country…. All these and other considerations made me decide on commencing a seminary last year; the building has been suspended during the winter but will now be resumed and be ready for the students before another year. I have contracted for it at a very low rate. When completed it will not cost much over 25,000 to 30,000 francs…. The furniture of this building and other expenses necessary for its commencement will have to be encountered before the end of this year. It will be my heaviest and at the same time the most important item of expense.53

Less than two months after O’Connor wrote this letter, Pittsburgh was to suffer a disaster. On the morning of April 10, 1845, a spark from an unattended fire to heat wash water — a quarter century before Mrs. O’Leary’s cow of Chicago fire fame — ignited a nearby shed on Ferry Street (Stanwix Street, today). The blaze quickly spread among the tightly packed wooden and brick structures that comprised the mixed residential, commercial, and retail heart of the city where its largely immigrant population lived and worked. Strong winds, warm temperatures, and the presence of cotton fibers and industrial dust in the air primed the fire. By the following morning, one-third of the city had burned to the ground. The fire destroyed 60 acres and 1,200 buildings and displaced 2,000 families (12,000 individuals) from their homes. Estimates of the resultant damages ranged up to $25 million (approximately $233 million today).54 Many were bankrupted. The Great Fire resulted in devastating economic losses to the many Catholics who lived and worked there and now lacked both homes and jobs.
This disaster placed the seminary project in extreme financial jeopardy. The bishop then wrote again to Paris, explaining that the fire had destroyed any hope of local financial contributions to both construction projects — the residence for the bishop and clergy, and the seminary building. He concluded with an appeal to the Society’s generosity and speedy assistance.55

Compounding the lack of European financial support was the conclusion arrived at by Propaganda Fide in Rome that the proliferation of small diocesan seminaries was unwarranted. Thus, recruitment of European priest-professors and grants from the mission-support societies proved to be increasingly elusive — despite O’Connor’s personal trips to Europe to arouse the necessary support.

In July 1845, construction of the new episcopal residence adjacent to St. Paul Cathedral — delayed by financial issues and the impact of the Great Fire — was resumed. Completion was set for spring 1846, with the bishop planning to move the seminarians into this new structure. But the bishop soon changed his mind.

Bishop O’Connor as Real Estate Developer: The Rapp Property as Seminary Site

St. Clair Township was one of the original governmental units established with the creation of Allegheny County in 1788. The township, named for Revolutionary War General Arthur St. Clair, included most of the county south of the Monongahela River. That enormous area was subsequently divided to form Lower St. Clair Township (the northern part with its lower elevation adjacent to the river) that extended from Chartisters Creek in the west to Streets Run in the east. The township would be subdivided many times in later years. One of the municipalities created from Lower St. Clair was Birmingham, which incorporated as a borough in 1828, comprising a section of the south side flats between today’s South 6th Street and South 18th Street. Several municipalities on the south side of the Monongahela River would later be annexed to the city of Pittsburgh on January 1, 1873, becoming part of the South Side.56 But three decades before the annexation, Bishop O’Connor had noted the availability of property suitable for a seminary, when in 1844 he tried unsuccessfully to convince cathedral laity to purchase 100 acres of farmland. Just one year later, in 1845, the bishop revisited his earlier plan and decided to make such a purchase there on his own.57

Bishop O’Connor — still desirous of a separate seminary building in a tranquil setting removed from the hustle and bustle of downtown Pittsburgh — decided to buy a 37-acre farm from George Rapp, a leader of the Economites. They were members of a Christian theosophy and pietist society founded in Iptingen (Germany) in 1785 by Johann Georg Rapp, also known as George Rapp (1757-1847). Due to religious persecution by the Lutheran Church and the government of Württemberg, the group immigrated to the United States, settling in Western Pennsylvania. On February 15, 1805, members formally organized as the Harmony Society. Their towns were typically named “Economy” after the spiritual notion of the Divine Economy and members were referred to as Economites. By 1825, the celibate group settled in Economy in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, where its decline in numbers later led to formal dissolution in 1906.58

Rapp was a real estate speculator with a sharp eye for undeveloped land and interested in a quick “flip” of such land to the next buyer who could divide a large tract of land into individual lots suitable for sale. Rapp realized the largest profit by purchasing properties, offered for public sale at auction by the county sheriff as a result of various court proceedings, at bargain prices. Backed by the Economites’ funds, Rapp ventured into Allegheny County where the “boom and bust” cycle guaranteed ample property for public auction, and the growing population produced both real estate developers anxious to “make a buck” in the resale process and buyers and renters (frequently immigrants) desperate for housing and small commercial space.

Buoyed by earlier auction purchases, Rapp proceeded in the summer of 1845 to purchase a farm of “about 37 acres” in what was described as “St. Clair Township” (often popularly referred to as Birmingham, disregarding municipal boundaries) at a sheriff’s sale of the property belonging to John D. Davis held on July 28, 1845.59 The sheriff of Allegheny County conveyed the farm to Rapp by a deed executed on August 1, 1845.60 The purchase price was $5,000. The property stretched from the southern edge of “the Flats” up the ascending hill (“the Slopes”) [where St. Michael’s Church complex would later be built] and included the top of the hill [where the St. Paul Monastery complex would later be constructed], and farther south [to
include the future St. Michael’s Cemetery on S. 18th Street. The land in 1845 lay across the Monongahela River from the rapidly developing urban center of Pittsburgh. The hilly topography was not conducive to farming, clearly indicating that Rapp’s purchase was an investment opportunity designed for a profitable resale.

Enter Bishop O’Connor. Rapp’s original asking price for the property was $16,000 but the bishop negotiated that amount down to $9,500. Rapp almost doubled his purchase price. The bishop’s purchase was concluded with execution of a deed on January 16, 1846. The property’s western boundary was Birmingham and Brownsville Plank Road; the eastern boundary was the future South 18th Street; the northern boundary was the beginning of the Slopes; the southern boundary included what would later become St. Michael’s Cemetery.

Pittsburgh diocesan historian Monsignor Andrew Lambing noted in *A History of the Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburg and Allegheny* that Bishop O’Connor sold “building lots” parcel by parcel. That would suggest that the entire tract was surveyed, a plat map created, and the plan publicly recorded. Indeed, recording of such a land plan might have been expected since recording of land subdivision plans in the Recorder’s Office of Allegheny County had commenced on October 27, 1809. The *Pittsburgh Catholic* noted in 1848, in a brief mention of Bishop O’Connor’s blessing of St. Michael’s new church, that:

> It is on Pius Street near Centre, in the newly laid out town of St. Michael’s, which adjoins the borough of Birmingham. The street on which it is built has received its name from Pius IX.

This statement suggests that Bishop O’Connor sought to model development of the Rapp property after Father Gallitzin’s successful creation of a Catholic settlement at Loretto in Cambria County. But the reference to “town of St. Michael’s” must be taken in an informal colloquial sense rather than as evidence of the creation of a land plan that was formally recorded in the Recorder’s Office of Allegheny County, to which reference would be made in deeds thereafter executed in connection...
CHAPTER IV

with the sale of lots located within that plan.

Some early nineteenth century land development plans were informally drafted, producing charts or maps. Other plans were professionally prepared by surveyors. Some of those land plans were not recorded, and some of those that were recorded are no longer legible or extant. A thorough examination of recorded lot plans in the Department of Real Estate of Allegheny County (successor to the aforementioned Recorder's Office) — covering the period of time from O'Connor’s purchase of the Rapp property (January 1846) until the prelate’s resignation of the see of Pittsburgh — found no such plan for O'Connor's property. Plan Book Indexes fail to reference any plans in the name of Bishop O'Connor or the town of St. Michael's or any name suggesting a connection to the bishop or the Roman Catholic Church. This has led to the present author's conclusion that Bishop O'Connor did not publicly record a plan of lots for the former Rapp property.

We may deduce that the thirty-seven acres was surveyed, and a plan of streets laid out for the entire tract, but the initial assignment of lot numbers was limited to the area closest to the Monongahela River that was most likely to be quickly developed as the population moved farther south. The next step of recording such a plan was apparently not taken. The following considerations are offered to explain why a surveyed plan of lots, likely lacking a detailed lot arrangement for most of the thirty-seven acres, was not filed of record.

A number of factors precluded a grid street pattern with streets intersecting at right angles to each other, with accompanying uniform-sized lots, for development of O'Connor’s property. A portion of the property had been undermined in the search for coal thus rendering construction atop somewhat risky; a considerable portion was unsuitable for farming; the steep terrain of the slopes and the lack of streets were impediments to quick growth. O'Connor wisely donated land on which to construct St. Michael’s Church in hopes that a Catholic population would be attracted and develop a community. The church was located on Pius Street, a small plateau halfway up the Slopes. This was what the Pittsburgh Catholic would later term the “town of St. Michael's.” This Pius Street area was the initial section to which lot numbers were assigned to the typical twenty-foot-wide lots (with varying depths). O'Connor’s initial land sales were limited to this area; later property sales on other streets generally lack lot number references, suggesting that both the bishop and his surveyor quickly concluded that the opening of “paper” streets and the assignment of lot numbers throughout the entire tract would be an incremental process over many years. The terrain determined the layout of streets and effectively thwarted uniformity in lot sizes. The bishop's donation in 1852 of land in his tract to the new Passionist Fathers for establishment of a monastery atop the hill reflected the reality of the times. The appearance of this religious order in Pittsburgh was unforeseen at the time of the bishop’s purchase of the Rapp property, and his ability to donate two acres to the Passionists evidenced the challenge of attracting anyone, let alone Catholic immigrants, to land that was not readily conducive to residential or commercial use. While the St. Michael’s church development on Pius Street would prove successful, the Passionist Monastery site was a different story — it was at that time truly a Catholic outpost in the wilderness.

A recorded plan with complete subdivision of the entire tract of land into individual lots would have restricted the bishop from later deciding to donate irregular-sized sections of land to religious orders that he sought to entice to Pittsburgh — such as the Passionists, the Presentation Brothers, and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to name but a few — whose land needs varied from order to order. The absence of legal constraints gave O'Connor maximum flexibility. He could locate a new parish or an institution, or place an incoming religious order on the best sites available, while retaining the ability to sell adjacent properties to generate money to meet pressing diocesan needs and the many demands made of him personally to assist the poverty-stricken immigrants arriving daily in his see city of Pittsburgh. Ideally, Catholic immigrants would be attracted to want to live in proximity to new Catholic churches and institutions, thus providing a stable local population that could financially support these initiatives. From a health perspective, such development on the south side of the Monongahela River would avoid further congestion in the overcrowded slums that then characterized “downtown” Pittsburgh on the northern side of the Monongahela River.

Could any other reasons explain why O'Connor would not have recorded a lot plan for the former Rapp property? It is possible that as head of a fledgling Catholic community, numerically a minority in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, he did not wish to use his name or a Catholic name due to Protestant antipathy against Catholics, which had been exacerbated by the influx of Catholic immigrants. Philadelphia had witnessed nativist riots against Catholics in 1844. From 1845 onwards, Joe Barker engaged in anti-Catholic street polemics in downtown Pittsburgh. Barker would later be elected mayor and would promptly arrest Bishop O'Connor in a dispute over Mercy Hospital. The bishop’s purchase of the Rapp property occurred in the midst of this nativist agitation. Perhaps O'Connor concluded that the absence of a recorded land plan identified with
the Roman Catholic Church would avoid adding to the anti-Catholicism that was increasingly exhibited in Pittsburgh, much of it directed personally against him.

The foregoing considerations are presented to explain in part the absence of a comprehensive recorded land plan for O’Connor’s property. Property descriptions in deeds O’Connor later executed to consummate sale of lots to purchasers contained a lot number only for Pius Street properties, but even those also included distance measurements in reference to the property boundaries of recorded plans or adjacent owners or natural monuments (trees, etc.) without reference to an “O’Connor Plan of Lots.” Deeds for lots that O’Connor sold in other portions of his 37-acre tract typically lacked lot number references and relied on a combination of measurements based on distances to other properties, plans, or natural monuments.

Likewise, legal actions involving the bishop’s property in Lower St. Clair Township employed references only to lot numbers and made no reference to a recorded plan either in the bishop’s name or a “town of St. Michael’s.” A case in point was a foreclosure action initiated by Bishop O’Connor against the estate of a decedent owner of two lots on Pius Street. The newspaper advertisement of this court case stated:

**ORPHANS’ COURT SALE.**

By virtue of an order of the Orphans’ Court of Allegheny County, dated the 2d day of April, 1853, will be exposed to public sale, at the Court House, in the city of Pittsburgh, on Monday, the second day of May, 1853, at 10 o’clock A.M. as the property of Bernhart K. Boehmer, late of the Borough of Birmingham, dec’d, — all those two several lots or pieces of ground situate on the South side of the Monongahela River, near the Borough of Birmingham, being marked and numbered in the plan of Lots laid out by Rt. Rev. M. O’Connor, as numbers 68 and 69; the said lots being continuous, and having a front of twenty (20) feet on Pius Street, in said plan, and running back between lines parallel with Centre Street one hundred (100) feet, preserving an even width throughout, on one of which a cellar was excavated and built. Said Lots to be sold for cash, and subject to the payment of four hundred and eighty dollars ($480.00), balance of unpaid purchase money, to Rt. Rev. M. O’Connor, with interest, thereon from the 22nd day of June, 1849.

ANNA ADELINE BOEHMER,
Administr’x of Bernhart K. Boehmer, dec’d.

As noted above, a number of O’Connor’s deeds make no mention of lot numbers. This is true of such significant conveyances as O’Connor’s May 27, 1852 deed of two acres to the Passionists for their development of St. Paul of the Cross Monastery atop the hill in the middle of O’Connor’s tract of land.

Thus, there is no extant plat map drawn at the time of Bishop O’Connor’s purchase that illustrates the boundaries of his large tract and lot division arrangement. In the absence of such a then-contemporaneous document, we are left to rely upon three sources to ascertain the bishop’s land plan: (1) the “Coal Hill Lots marked in the Plan of Sidneyville” — a much earlier generic plan for Lower St. Clair Township — that was referenced in the legal description of the thirty-seven acres in the 1835 deed from John McKee to John D. Davis, from which sequentially flowed the sheriff’s 1845 deed to George Rapp, and the latter’s 1846 deed to Bishop O’Connor, (2) a “Plan of Building Lots revised at the instance of Rt. Rev. John Tuigg” in December 1881 and filed in the Recorder’s Office in November 1882, and (3) later published volumes of insurance maps of Pittsburgh. The first provides a general picture of the parameters of the 37-acre tract; the second illustrates the effort of Bishop John Tuigg, Pittsburgh’s third bishop, to sell the remainder of the O’Connor tract that had passed successively from O’Connor to Bishop Michael Domenech in 1860 and then to Bishop Tuigg in 1876; and the third illustrates, decades later in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the lot arrangement and street locations as finally realized in the entire thirty-seven acres that had constituted the O’Connor property.

Bishop Tuigg’s “Plan of Building Lots” pointedly used the word “revised” evidencing that his surveyor worked from the original O’Connor plan, albeit unrecorded. It displays only the western half of the thirty-seven acres that remained undeveloped two decades after the departure of Bishop O’Connor from the see of Pittsburgh. The plan envisioned by O’Connor in 1846 has not survived and the failure to publicly record it has denied historians the opportunity to share the bishop’s vision for development. Like many others in that time period, O’Connor relied on the chain of title to land established by successive deeds, without reference to recorded land subdivision plans.

His real estate focus was the portion of the Rapp property closest to the city of Pittsburgh that was best situated to attract lot buyers, support the development of St. Michael’s Church and the Passionist Monastery, and produce an income stream from lot sales that would substitute for the decreasing financial grants from the three European aid societ-
ies. He properly concluded that further population growth would create a demand for the remainder of his property. An incremental or section-by-section development of the property afforded the bishop flexibility in his approach to generating income and spurring diocesan growth. While Bishop O’Connor realized an overall profit on total sales executed, the fact that approximately half of the original property remained unsold more than twenty years after he left Pittsburgh is emblematic of both delayed realization of anticipated benefits and the risks inherent in real estate speculation.

As noted above, O’Connor set aside property for St. Michael’s (German) Parish and St. Paul of the Cross Monastery. O’Connor retained a farmhouse residence on the former Rapp site for use by the Presentation Brothers (and later St. Michael’s Seminary). Parcels not needed for ecclesiastical development were sold to individuals, with prices in the $250-$300 range. Collectively, the sales represented a profit for O’Connor. Diocesan historian Monsignor Andrew Lambing concluded that $100,000 in lots was sold, with unsold lots valued at $162,000. But O’Connor’s buyers typically took between two and five years to incrementally pay the full purchase price. While the bishop sold parcels one by one, he retained the portion of land on which the farmhouse existed that would serve as the next location for St. Michael’s Seminary.

### The Seminary Relocates to “Birmingham”

The Brothers of the Presentation had arrived from Ireland in December 1845 and the bishop promptly housed them in the farmhouse on his newly purchased property in St. Clair Township (popularly referred to as “Birmingham,” disregarding municipal boundaries) in January 1846. They were to teach the boys at St. Paul Cathedral school in the downtown. When the bishop’s residence was completed later in 1846, the bishop decided to move the Brothers into his downtown residence, due to its proximity to the school — and move his seminarians to the desired rural setting of “Birmingham” where the Presentation Brothers had been living.

While the 1845 suspension of the seminary had occasioned dispersal of some seminarians to Cincinnati and Loretto, other seminarians (as many as seven) had continued to live with Bishop O’Connor in his rented quarters on Smithfield Street until 1846, when he established St. Michael’s Seminary in its own building in Birmingham. In the fall of that year, the seminary opened in the frame farmhouse at the foot of the hill near what would become the site of the original wood-frame St. Michael’s German Church in 1848. The seminary building sat on a parcel of 200 square feet, which had been part of the farm purchased by O’Connor and then subdivided. This marked the second location of St. Michael’s Seminary; in succeeding years, two additional changes in location would occur.

The seminary’s faculty consisted of Father Thomas McCullagh (who had been ordained by O’Connor a mere two years earlier) as president and Father John E. Mosetizh as a professor. Mosetizh (1797-1863), an ethnic Slovenian who had served as professor of Old Testament exegesis at the seminary in Görz (Austria) since 1828, had fortuitously arrived on October 30, 1846 — recruited by Father Peter Henry Lemke during his visit to the German States in Europe in 1845. O’Connor placed the priest in the bishop’s residence and appointed him prefect of studies and professor of dogma, moral theology, and scripture — teaching four hours a day. The bishop surrendered most of his own teaching duties to Mosetizh.

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There were initially fourteen students: seven in philosophy instructed by the president, and seven in theology instructed by Father Mosetizh. The building consisted of a kitchen, dining room, living room, a study that doubled as a chapel, two bedrooms that functioned as dormitories housing the seminarians, and a room that was divided in two to house the president and the one professor. Classes were held in the study, as well as in the living room, dining room, and in one of the instructors’ rooms.

A January 1, 1847 report, written by Father Mosetizh to the Leopolden Stiftung in Vienna provided a detailed description of the seminary building in Birmingham, with a nostalgic reflection on its earlier history in the vicinity of the downtown cathedral:

The seminary consists of a small farm house amidst an orchard, comprising 37 acres of land, extending along the slope of the hill on the other side of the Monongahela and fenced in by boards. The Right Reverend Bishop has bought the whole estate for 9,500 dollars, on credit, and hopes in the future to get the necessary financial means enabling him to erect a regular suitable building on this very healthy place, free from the smoke of Pittsburgh…. In the aforementioned small seminary building there are lodged fourteen pupils, seven of whom are studying theology and the other seven philosophy. I am presiding over the former in the capacity of a prefect and professor, and a young Irish priest is presiding over the latter in the same capacity. The whole house contains but four apartments: a study room which has to serve also the purpose of a house oratory, two sleeping apartments, and a room divided by a board partition into two chambers wherein the two teaching individuals are staying. There is no school-room proper; for, the one is giving instruction in his sitting-room and the other sometimes in the study room and sometimes in the refectory. The desks of the students are book-cases at the same time, but unfortunately almost without books; for the present it would be well, if they contained at least ordinary good text-books, but even these are yet wanting.

The nearby St. Michael's Church, after its opening in 1848, was used as the chapel for Mass and other religious services. Few details of the seminarians’ life in this time period have survived. But the Catholic made occasional mention of their participation in religious events — such as their marching en masse in the funeral procession of Sister Mary Aloysia Strange, R.S.M., in July 1847. She was one of the original Sisters of Mercy who had come from Carlow (Ireland) with Bishop O'Connor in 1843. While summer would today be considered “vacation,” at that time the seminarians lived year-round at the seminary, and their studies and responsibilities continued without interruption. Hence, they were fully available for participation in the funeral rites.

An Overture to the Benedictines

By late spring 1847, Bishop O’Connor initiated several months of negotiations with Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., seeking the latter’s agreement that the Benedictines’ St. Vincent Seminary would become the preparatory seminary of the diocese, with the diocesan seminarians paying the same as German students and being subject to a Pittsburgh diocesan priest who would be appointed prefect. O’Connor wanted to send seven English-speaking students to study in the monastic school. Wimmer recognized that

he had neither the faculty nor financial resources to open a German school at St. Vincent, much less an English one for the bishop’s students. He and his Benedictine clerics still lacked proficiency in English, and he feared that by accepting the Pittsburgh students and an Irish diocesan priest to take charge of them, he would irrevocably surrender control of the educational institution. ..
precluded a gratis arrangement in any event. One Benedictine historian adds a critical element to understanding the complexity of the issues at stake:

O’Connor wanted Wimmer to establish a seminary separate from the abbey, of which he, O’Connor, would act as rector. O’Connor wanted no distinction between German and English speaking students. Wimmer insisted that the seminary be a monastic school and that the German language be maintained.

The dispute reflected conflicting episcopal and monastic interests (including the bishop’s concern about St. Vincent becoming an abbey “exempt” from episcopal control) as well as growing rivalry between the Irish and Germans for dominance in the American Church. Wimmer rejected the proposal. O’Connor responded, proposing a written contract to avoid future misunderstanding that would include a provision requiring the Benedictines to open a minor seminary as soon as possible and accept diocesan candidates for the priesthood — initially at a reduced rate and later gratis, when the monastery had achieved financially stability. Wimmer would consider accepting the bishop’s English-speaking students on a case-by-case basis if the bishop were willing to pay the customary fees. Rather than lose the Benedictines to another diocese, O’Connor reconsidered his position.

As Benedictine control of the Sportsman’s Hall property had not yet been finalized, there was a concern that O’Connor intended to build a diocesan seminary at St. Vincent’s (with money collected by Father Peter Lemke during a visit to Europe 1846-1847), which the Benedictines would administer while providing “free” tuition and board. Wimmer described his rejection of the proposal thusly:

From an unexpected corner, I had some trouble, which for several months placed in doubt whether I could remain here or not. My most reverend bishop expected me to accept gratis in the seminary I am thinking of next year as many Irish boys as Germans…. With regard to the seminary, I made the concession that I would enroll and instruct free of charge those boys whom the bishop may want to send to us for training in the religious life, but that he must pay an annual fee for board that must at least compensate for their expenses. Concerning discipline and teaching methods, I reserved full freedom for the Benedictine Order, and I set the condition that we pledge to offer only as many courses as we have qualified professors in the house to teach, and that we could never be bound to call up or take professors from elsewhere whenever the most reverend bishop might want to send students to us.

A week after this letter was written, O’Connor realized that the success of Wimmer’s seminary and its German character was assured with the August 18, 1847 arrival of Benedictine Prior Peter Lechner and seventeen young men as candidates for the community. Yet, it was only in November that O’Connor withdrew his demand that a definite number of diocesan seminarians be educated at St. Vincent’s at a reduced rate, promising instead that such students (when accepted by the Benedictines) would pay full expenses. More negotiations ensued, and only in mid-February 1848 was an agreement drawn up between O’Connor and Wimmer that was acceptable to both. The operation of the St. Vincent’s Seminary was left to the Benedictines. In fall 1848, the Benedictines accepted a few of the bishop’s students at reduced rates, and tensions between O’Connor and Wimmer eased for a time.

The bishop had initiated the seminary proposal with Wimmer due to the fact that Father McCullagh had resigned his position as president and professor at St. Michael’s Seminary in late spring 1847. Father John Mosetizh had immediately assumed the presidency of St. Michael’s but expressed a desire to return to Europe as soon as the bishop could arrange for other priests to assume the administrative and professorial positions at the seminary. O’Connor’s overture to and protracted negotiations...
with the Benedictines ultimately proved fruitless. In need of a faculty, he now turned to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate

Back in 1843, while passing through Marseille, Bishop O'Connor had visited with Bishop de Mazenod, who was both ordinary of Marseille and founder and superior general of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, an order devoted to the education of seminarians. At that time, O'Connor broached the subject of the Oblates assuming direction of his new seminary in Pittsburgh — but nothing came of the discussion. The order had arrived in French-speaking Canada in 1841, ultimately establishing a province under the leadership of Father Joseph-Eugène Bruno Guigues.

O'Connor now renewed his request for Oblate priests during a June 7, 1848 meeting with Bishop-elect Guigues at the order’s headquarters and novitiate in Longueil, Quebec. The request was successful, Guigues agreed, and the details were arranged. Three Oblates were sent from Montreal to Pittsburgh to establish an Oblate community in Pittsburgh and to staff St. Michael’s Seminary: Father Pierre Antoine Adrien Telmon as superior, and Father Augustin Gaudet and scholastic Brother Eugène Auguste Cauvin as assistants. The three left Montreal on September 15, 1848 and arrived in Pittsburgh on September 30. Father John Mosetizh departed his position as president and professor at St. Michael’s Seminary.

Father Telmon was a prominent figure in French-speaking Canada. He is considered the founder of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, also commonly referred to as the Grey Nuns due to the color of their habit. Telmon was noted in an article in the Pittsburgh diocesan newspaper just two weeks after his arrival in Pittsburgh. The article, which was a republication of an original Bytown Packet news article, dealt with the episcopal ordination of Father Guigues as bishop of Bytown (Ottawa). Its inclusion in the Catholic was intended to recognize the superior who had agreed to send Oblates to staff the seminary in Pittsburgh, but also to introduce Pittsburghers to a religious order that would soon staff the most important institution in the diocese. A comment in the article presciently identified the possible frustration that Father Telmon felt at his lack of advancement within the Church, which may have played out in his relationship (or lack thereof) with Bishop O’Connor. The article’s comment was:

[T]he Rev. Mr. Telmon is distinguished as a man of uncommon talent, finished education, and untiring zeal. It was supposed that the Rev. Mr. Telmon would have been named first Bishop of this Diocese; but we suppose the present Bishop being his Superior, and a man of undoubted ability and great piety, was, as a matter of course, chosen instead.

The article went on to note the conflict between the French and English-speaking Irish over episcopal and ecclesiastical appointments. The French-born Telmon was about to leave the comfort of the overwhelmingly French-speaking Catholic population of Quebec for Western Pennsylvania where there were few French speakers and a small Catholic population — and the latter was comprised of many Irish immigrants, with almost all seminarians being Irish-born or of Irish descent and headed by an Irish-born bishop. The seeds of conflict between Telmon and O’Connor had been laid elsewhere, many years before. Telmon was an implacable foe of Protestants, having once in Canada burned Protestant Bibles in a public square, thereby bringing upon himself strong remarks from American newspapers.

Upon arrival, the three Oblates found only ten students in the farmhouse in Birmingham, that had until recently been occupied by the Presentation Brothers. Repairs were underway on the structure but the situation was frustrating. The Oblates’ history provides a stark picture of conditions at St. Michael’s Seminary:

Living conditions were difficult. There were only about ten seminarians housed in a building too small for their needs and which was undergoing repairs. In a January 3, 1849 letter, the superior (Father Telmon) with his flair for the dramatic wrote to Mother Bruyère:

“What have I been doing since I last wrote to you? Alas, the same thing I have been doing since my arrival here. I am building, doing framing work, doing carpentry, sweeping the floor, washing up, getting covered with dust, I am ruining my health, I am overwhelmed, I am ruining my clothes to enable us to make our house liveable, that is, to give us a place to sleep and some place to do our spiritual exercises. They would soon hustle me off to the hospital for immigrants to wash me from head to foot, to comb my hair, because lice do not fail to mingle with the dirt and would subject me to a complete overhaul in order to make me presentable. The difficulties of our founding sometimes remind me of what we experienced at Bytown [Ottawa] five years ago…”

While Father Telmon sent news to the Sisters of Charity in Canada, he wrote very little to the Oblates’ founder and superior
In a November 5, 1848 letter, de Mazenod reproached Telmon for not writing regularly and offered this fatherly advice:

By founding a house in Pittsburgh in the United States, you are laying the foundations of a new Province but you must act with moderation, without prejudice, without passion, not yielding unhesitatingly to optimism but neither assuming a pessimistic attitude, a detestable disposition with which one can in no way be enterprising and can achieve no good.97

This advice apparently fell on deaf ears, as Father Telmon informed Bishop O'Connor on March 12, 1849 that the Oblates would leave St. Michael's Seminary. The superior explained that if the Oblates were to stay it would be necessary that the bishop display more esteem and confidence. The bishop had delayed giving the Oblates permission to purchase land on which to establish a permanent house — on the pretext of getting to know the Oblates better.98

Less than two weeks later, on March 23, scholastic Cauvin wrote to Bishop Gigues of Bytown (Ottawa) that: “The establishment in Pittsburgh does not exist any longer.”99 Cauvin confirmed Telmon’s view that Bishop O’Connor displayed coldness and indifference to the three Oblates. Yet, he added:

In spite of all that, as far as was possible we did our duty. Things were in order and the exercises of piety as well; the seminarians received their formation according to the rule. They were happy with us, as witness the tears they shed at our departure. In a word, the bishop has nothing with which to reproach us.100

The Oblates left the seminary, accusing the bishop of coldness and indifference towards them and of having very little interest in the seminary. Their hasty return surprised Bishop Bourget of Montreal who wrote on June 11, 1849:

Father Telmon is here … awaiting momentarily a call from the United States in order to set out again. I could not judge whether his fiery talent was compatible with the stolid character of the Americans. I have to admit that I was sorry to see him fail in Pittsburg and I think he would have been wise to let the bishops of [Ottawa, where Telmon had previously worked] and Pittsburg sort out the difference which arose surrounding the founding.101

The founder of the Oblates, Bishop de Mazenod, described Telmon as hard to get along with and sometimes lacking a religious spirit — a continuation of the order’s early assessment of Telmon as having a rebellious and impulsive disposition. The bishop’s insight as to the nature of Father Telmon is best illustrated in his July 20, 1847 letter (written shortly before Telmon’s assignment to Pittsburgh) to the bishop of Montreal in which he pointedly states: “Father Telmon must take himself in hand. He is forty years of age with a lot of talent and zeal. Can it be possible that he would ruin so many fine qualities by his lack of moderation.”102

Thus, the Oblates did not remain long in Pittsburgh — less than six months.103 Their order’s history describes their departure thusly: “Because of the extreme poverty of the house and the little interest shown by the bishop, the Fathers soon returned to Montreal.”104 Yet Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal regretted this hurried departure by Father Telmon without consultation with his superiors, including the Superior General, Bishop de Mazenod.105

The Financial Support Issue Again Arises

The departure of the Oblates was indeed unfortunate. Bishop O’Connor was not unaware of the poor condition of the seminary building. At about the time the Oblates’ arrival in Pittsburgh was certain, he began working with the diocesan priests to raise funds to provide the seminary, and the incoming Oblates, with better living conditions and the amenities necessary for their successful conduct of the institution. That would take money.

Bishop O’Connor and his diocesan priests understood the trifecta of critical issues facing the new diocese: (1) an increasing wave of Irish and German immigration — driven by potato famines in British-occupied Ireland and political upheavals in the German States; (2) a dismal financial picture stemming from the endemic poverty of both native Catholic American farmers and penniless immigrants — with both groups unable to provide adequate support for priestly, parochial, and educational development in the diocese; (3) the challenge of ministering to a population scattered in small pockets over half a state — the isolation of which was compounded by mountains and rivers which impeded both travel and communication. O’Connor concluded that the solution to these challenges lay in a significant increase in the number of priests who could sustain and grow the Catholic faith in Western Pennsylvania and serve to lead poor farmers and impoverished immigrants
into a respectable place in American society where they could obtain employment with an income to support Catholic institutions to service the rapidly growing Catholic population. The bishop had come to conclude that there were two impediments to achievement of his goal of providing for the spiritual care of his diocesan flock and uplifting them within the larger community: financial means were limited and the small number of existing diocesan priests made it unlikely that any could be spared to educate those desiring to become the priests of the future. The imminent arrival of the Oblates would resolve the second problem. The bishop now turned to the fundamental issue of financing the one institution that would advance the progress of the diocese — St. Michael's Seminary.

During a two-week period in late November-early December 1848, the several dozen priests of the Diocese of Pittsburgh met in their respective two Districts (Western and Eastern) to publicly affirm the bishop’s efforts to sustain St. Michael’s Seminary. On November 22, 1848, the priests of the Western District assembled in conference at St. Michael’s Seminary in Birmingham. Priests in the sprawling wilderness of the eastern part of the diocese met on December 6, 1848 at St. Mary’s Church in Hollidaysburg (Blair County). Each group unanimously adopted the following respective preambles and resolutions, which were then published in the diocesan newspaper in order to publicize to the laity their need to provide financial support for the nascent seminary. The resolutions enacted at the two meetings bear a striking similarity in theme, but the wording reflects the emphases of the separately gathered groups of priests.

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<th>WESTERN DISTRICT</th>
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<td><strong>Whereas</strong>, the Ecclesiastical Seminary, established for some years, is the chief and almost only source from which this diocese can be supplied with efficient Clergymen, and that, consequently, its interests and prosperity are intimately connected with the eternal welfare of those precious souls committed to our care. And, whereas the Seminary has hitherto derived its principal support from the very limited resources of our venerated Bishop, we deem it our duty to use our best efforts that so important an establishment may not only be saved from failure through a deficiency of means, but that it may be placed on such a footing that its benefits may be more extended and its blessings better felt throughout the whole diocese; therefore,</td>
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<td><strong>Resolved 1st.</strong> That we have heard with great satisfaction, that the Diocesan Seminary is placed under the care of the Rev. Fathers, the Oblates of the B.V.M. Their well-known learning, piety and skill, inspire the fullest confidence in the permanent efficiency of the Institution.</td>
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<td><strong>Resolved 2d.</strong> That we deem it our duty, and an important duty, to create a fund for the support of the Seminary.</td>
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<td><strong>Resolved 3d.</strong> That as it is the duty of all the Faithful, both Clergy and laity of the diocese, to contribute, we shall, as soon as possible, bring it before our people, and urge them by our words and example, to be liberal in their donations; and for this purpose will adopt such means for collecting as may best suit our respective locations.</td>
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<td><strong>Resolved 4th.</strong> That we appoint the Rev. Mr. Telmon, Superior of the seminary, our Treasurer, with a request that he will hand over to the editor of the “Pittsburgh Catholic” a list of the names and amounts of the contributions, that it may be published for general satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resolved 5th.</strong> That the above preamble and resolutions be published for two successive weeks, in a conspicuous place, in the columns of the Pittsburgh Catholic, the organ of the diocese, that the faithful may know our determination, and be prepared to do their duty.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Signed in behalf of the Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.F. Garland, Sec.</td>
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</table>

**Resolved 1st.** That we consider the Diocesan Seminary lately placed under the charge of the Rev. Fathers, the Oblates of the B.V.M. as the only source to which we can look for a certain and sufficient supply of efficient Priests, to share with us the duties and responsibilities of the ministry.

**Resolved 2d.** That we will sustain the Diocesan Seminary by every means in our power; and that we feel confident, when the subject is brought before and understood by our Flocks, they will generously co-operate with us in sustaining an institution which, we earnestly hope, is destined to exert a salutary and powerful influence on religion in this diocese.

**Resolved 3d.** That we concur in and approve of all the resolutions adopted respecting this measure by our Rev. Brethren of the western part of the diocese, and that we will cheerfully co-operate with them in every measure calculated to promote the interests of the Seminary.

**Resolved 4th.** That the above resolutions be published in the Pittsburgh Catholic, that the Faithful may be prepared to respond to the appeal we intend to make in behalf of this interesting institution.

Tobias Mullen, Sec.

From that time, the Catholic intermittently published reports by the Treasurer of St. Michael’s Seminary as to financial contributions received from parishes, priests, and laity on behalf of the seminary. Each such report typically began with the words “The Treasurer of St. Michael’s Theological Seminary acknowledges receipt of the following sums, collected in the churches.
Individual amounts ranged from twenty-five cents (with four persons collectively contributing) up to $20, and the largest congregational collection submitted was $120 (the Summit in Cambria County). Individual contributions were typically fifty cents or one dollar; the frequency of “small sums” totaling a mere quarter or fifty cents indicated the pennies contributed by a mix of farmers, workers, and immigrants. Some of the largest collections were from congregations at a considerable distance from Pittsburgh — such as Erie, Mercer County, Loretto in Cambria County, and Clearfield County. Congregations headed by Fathers Tobias Mullen and Thomas Heyden were regular contributors. The published contributions for each year (reported further below) of O'Connor's episcopate (1843-1860) only exceeded $1,000 in four of those years. During this same period, Catholics were being asked to contribute toward the new St. Paul Cathedral and various local Catholic charities (such as the construction of Mercy Hospital, the St. Vincent DePaul Society, and St. Paul Orphan Asylum), the poor of the city of Allegheny, Irish famine relief, and to maintain publication of the Catholic newspaper itself.

A Benedictine Dissident Joins the Faculty

The bishop then appointed his younger brother, Father James O'Connor (like his older brother, a graduate of the Urban College in Rome) as president of St. Michael's Seminary. Father Mosetizh returned as a professor. However, in the fall of 1850, James O'Connor left his position due to health issues. Father Mosetizh became president and two priest-professors were appointed to train the twenty students. At this time, Bishop O'Connor accepted the teaching services of Benedictine Father Paul Lechner, O.S.B. — former prior of Scheyern Abbey in Bavaria and former novice master at St. Vincent Abbey — who had left St. Vincent's Abbey in a dispute with Abbot Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B. Lechner remained on the faculty at St. Michael's Seminary for only a year, departing in 1851.

Second (Partial) Suspension of the Seminary: 1851-1856

The year 1851 was to prove disastrous for the new diocese and the new seminary. First, St. Paul Cathedral caught fire on May 6, 1851 and was destroyed. Successive reductions in the street grade of Fifth Avenue and Grant Street had left this first cathedral church exposed. The structure’s entrance was some fifteen feet above the lowered street level and a support wall had been built. The building’s distance from street level only complicated efforts to fight the fire. Second, in the summer of 1851, Pittsburgh experienced another outbreak of cholera, in what had become an ongoing series of epidemics of the dreaded disease. The seriousness of cholera epidemics cannot be understated. During the cholera epidemic of 1849, seventy-five parishioners of St. Michael Parish in Birmingham — whose church was immediately adjacent to the seminary — died in the outbreak.

The financial demands necessitated by the construction of a replacement cathedral — the cornerstone of which was laid on June 15, just six weeks after the disastrous fire — and the cholera epidemic merely added to the other financial and health problems that Bishop O’Connor was confronting with respect to the seminary. Father Mosetizh was ill and wished to return to his native Europe for treatment. By mid-April 1851, the bishop asked his brother to resume presidency of the seminary. Although he did not want James to take any risks to his health, Michael O'Connor phrased his request quite pointedly, stating:

“If you cannot come to it, I will probably be under the necessity of breaking it up.... [T]o keep the seminary on its present footing would be little better than keeping up a nuisance.”

Unfortunately, there was no satisfactory resolution of these issues affecting the seminary. At the beginning of the summer
of 1851, the trifecta of financial woes, lack of faculty, and
the renewed outbreak of cholera combined to force Bishop
O’Connor’s decision to close St. Michael’s Seminary in Bir-
mington. While the seminary had increased its enrollment
gradually until 1851, its developing popularity could not
save it.\footnote{112}

As one historian concluded regarding this decision:

O’Connor had placed great faith in the sem-
inary as a means of providing clergy for
the diocese and val-
antly he tried to keep
one going. It was a premature, if not an unrealistic undertaking, however, and O’Connor realized the im-
prudence of retaining a poorly staffed seminary on a year to year basis that taxed the meager resources.\footnote{113}

By the end of summer 1851, most of the seminarians were sent out of the diocese to three seminaries: (1) St. Mary’s in Balti-
tomore — Richard C. Christy, James Treacy, John C. Farren, John B. O’Connor, and Richard Phelan; (2) St. Francis Xavier in Cincinnat-
i — Francis J. O’Shea, Thomas Walsh, Cornelius M. Sheehan, and Peter M. Garvey, and (3) St. Mary of the Barrens in Missouri — Peter M. Doyle (who subsequently joined his classmates in Cincinnati). Apparently, the location of these seminarians was in flux during this period of their ecclesiastical training, since the Catholic reported in December 1851 that Bishop O’Connor conferred tonsure and minor orders upon six of them at St. Mary of the Barrens Seminary (about eighty-
one miles south of St. Louis, Missouri): R. Barrett, Sheehan, Garvey, Cahill, Reardon, and Doyle.\footnote{114} Since Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati was O’Connor’s traveling companion, the two prelates may have taken some of O’Connor’s seminarians then in Ohio along with them to Missouri for the ceremony. Three others remained within the diocese, being sent to Father Hugh Gallagher in Loretto (Cambria County) for instruction.\footnote{115} Thereafter, there was a slight trickle of Pittsburgh seminarians to
seminaries outside the diocese; for example, Edward A. Bush was sent to St. Thomas Seminary that was located three miles
from Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1853.\footnote{116}

There is also evidence that other seminarians remained for an indeterminate time with Bishop O’Connor at his residence in
downtown Pittsburgh. In a March 4, 1852 letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Paris, Bishop O’Connor
recounted the bitter attacks on his flock based partly on their Catholic faith and partly on the anti-Irish prejudice prevalent
at that time:

The sects pursue us with a bitter hate…. Besides the sects properly so called there is a class of men risen
up here who call themselves “Preachers on the streets.” They do not care to claim any particular belief and
they do not belong to any sect…. Night and day they preach in the market places and on the street corners
where the public assembles. When I say they “preach” I am merely using their words. That which they call
“preaching” consists entirely in a series of insults the most infamous that one could say against us, against
the clergy, the religious, and Catholics in general…. That which gives power to these men is that in this city more than any other in the United States, we
have a great number of Orange Irishmen. They persecute Catholics with bitterness and without shame…. What I fear is that these things will end in a riot. I am sure that that is what they desire and what they try
to bring about. Up to the present time with the help of God we have succeeded in maintaining tranquility.
For some weeks they have come every Sunday afternoon to give their discourses near the windows of the
seminary. They are accompanied by a crowd of desperate men who have no religion or morals and who
wish for nothing more than an excuse to attack us…. It is the Mayor himself who preached on these occasions…. It will be necessary for me to strive to prevent a repetition of this scene, otherwise we will have a repetition of the bloody riots of Philadelphia of 1844.117

This statement ties to the fact that seminarian Richard Phelan, originally sent to St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore, returned to Pittsburgh by 1854 to complete his ecclesiastical studies while living with Bishop O’Connor.118

Thus, despite the dispersal of most Pittsburgh seminarians to seminaries in other dioceses with a few sent to private studies with a priest within the diocese, St. Michael’s Seminary still operated informally in Pittsburgh — with instruction again becoming the immediate responsibility of Bishop O’Connor, likely assisted by the few priests assigned to the cathedral parish. This conclusion would be consistent with the fact that several St. Michael seminarians were ordained between 1853 and 1856 in Pittsburgh and elsewhere in the diocese, while those sent outside the diocese did not always return to Pittsburgh for ordination. Accordingly, the “suspension” was not a true suspension, but rather a reassignment of seminarians so as to reduce the number to a manageable group who could be accommodated in Bishop O’Connor’s living quarters. This practice appears to have continued until 1856 when all seminarians (except for those in Rome) were again schooled under one roof.

The suspension of the seminary within the diocese did not alleviate the financial demand that the seminarians’ education placed upon the diocese.119 The former St. Michael’s Seminary building in Birmingham became a convent for two successive orders of religious women.

Pittsburgh seminarians continued their studies both within and without Pennsylvania during the entire five-year suspension of St. Michael’s. A July 15, 1854 report in the Catholic Telegraph on the enrollment at Mount St. Mary of the West Seminary (formerly named St. Francis Xavier Seminary) in Cincinnati listed five students belonging to Pittsburgh, as well as one former Pittsburgher now listed for the newly established (1853) Diocese of Erie. Those students comprised more than 25% of the entire Ohio student body.120

Interestingly, during this hiatus, the First Plenary Council of the hierarchy of the United States was held in Baltimore in May 1852. Its fourteenth decree addressed diocesan seminaries. Bishop O’Connor was the first of three prelates appointed by the Council to prepare a course of studies for ecclesiastical seminaries.121

The Bishop Departs — and Returns

The ten years that followed establishment of the Diocese of Pittsburgh (1843) witnessed a dramatic increase in the Catholic population in the western half of Pennsylvania. Bishop O’Connor’s two visitations to the northern half of his diocese in 1846 and 1851 convinced him that Catholic population growth and the enormous size of the diocese warranted establishment of a new see for the northern Pennsylvania counties. He recommended that the issue be discussed at the First Plenary Council of Baltimore. On May 13, 1852, the assembled bishops decided to petition the Holy See to erect a new diocese with Erie as its seat. In July 1852, O’Connor traveled to Rome to urge favorable action. The Diocese of Erie was established by the papal bull Ex Apostolici on July 29, 1853.122 The new see comprised eleven counties (Erie, Clarion, Crawford, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, Mercer, Potter, Venango, Warren) and two future counties (Cameron and Forest), with an area of 9,936 square miles. The new diocese had twenty-eight churches, fourteen priests, and an estimated Catholic population of 12,000.123

At the same time, O’Connor was appointed first bishop of Erie. He had personally requested the transfer. The archbishop of Baltimore transmitted the bull of appointment to O’Connor in September. O’Connor left Pittsburgh for Erie on October 14, 1853. Some priests and at least one seminarian followed him to the new diocese. Popular dissatisfaction among Catholics in Pittsburgh at the departure of their bishop, and second thoughts among the hierarchy in the United States, led to a restoration of O’Connor to Pittsburgh by a papal brief on December 20, 1853. The document did not arrive in the United States until February 1854, with O’Connor receiving notice on February 23. He departed for Pittsburgh the same day.124 Practically, the bishop had been away from Pittsburgh for some nine months, not counting his trip to Rome.125 In his absence, Father Ed-
ward McMahon, in his capacity as vicar general, had administered the Diocese of Pittsburgh. During that extended period, the seminary issue remained in limbo. Bishop O’Connor would now return to the issue of reopening St. Michael’s Seminary.

**Possible Seminary Relocation to Lawrence County**

Bishop O’Connor briefly considered reopening the seminary on a farm that had been donated by William Murrin in northwest Lawrence County. Using this property for the seminary was the idea of Father Cornelius Sheehan, a young priest stationed at the cathedral. However, an examination of the bequest indicated that such use was not permitted, as only a boys’ orphan asylum was specified. The Catholic later commented on this briefly considered site:

Mr. Murrin, who had so generously offered the farm in Lawrence county, would have gladly seen the Seminary established, and grow up under his own eyes, and was not a little disappointed at the change. He acquiesced, however, in an arrangement which is evidently for the greater good. This worthy man will have the happiness, however, of seeing another charitable institution spring up into existence as a fruit of his bounty. The Board of Managers of St. Paul’s R.C. Orphan Asylum, to whom the farm alluded to will be transferred, with the Bishop’s and Mr. Murrin’s concurrence, have resolved to establish there an Orphans’ Home.

For the five-year period 1851-1856, the Diocese of Pittsburgh was unable to reopen St. Michael’s Seminary. The reasons were several: the need to direct available monies to construct a new St. Paul Cathedral in place of the original building that had burned in 1851, a national financial panic that resulted in the closure of many banks with resultant negative effects on Catholics in Pittsburgh, the separation of the northern part of the Diocese of Pittsburgh to form the new Diocese of Erie with the attendant loss of income from parishes now separated from the see of Pittsburgh, and most importantly the extended absence of the one person totally committed to the seminary — Bishop Michael O’Connor.

**Initiation of an Annual Collection for the Seminary**

Finances had been a recurring issue for Bishop O’Connor, as noted above. In early spring 1850, the Catholic was enlisted to publicly endorse the efforts of one diocesan priest who had conducted collections among his several congregations for the support of the nascent diocesan seminary. The newspaper’s editor called attention to Father Tobias Mullen, one of Bishop O’Connor’s original Irish seminarians who had completed his ecclesiastical studies in the seminary as it then operated in the bishop’s residence. Mullen had collected $100 from his impoverished congregations in the Johnstown area — St. John Gualbert in the city, along with congregations at the Summit and Jefferson. That was a princely sum in its day. The paper noted:

In another column we give a report of the Collections for the Seminary, made by the Rev. T. Mullen in the congregations under his charge. It is encouraging to find the good work, for this year commenced, and commenced so well. We are authorized by the Bishop to request the pastors of the various churches throughout the Diocese to have the collections for the Seminary taken up as soon as convenient and to have all the returns sent in, if possible, before Pentecost.

There are now twenty students in the Seminary. It is most important that a strenuous effort be now made to sustain an institution in which the most vital interests of the Diocese depend.

But relying on the voluntary cooperation of the pastors was not producing the money needed for the seminary. The meager and sporadic results, as evidenced by the few published reports in the Catholic, ultimately led Bishop O’Connor to take another approach to fundraising.

In the fourth year of the suspension of the operation of St. Michael’s Seminary (1854), Bishop O’Connor held a third diocesan synod on May 19. During that assembly, bishop and priests decided that the solution to the financial woes of the seminary would be remedied by the institution of a mandatory annual collection to be taken up in all churches of the diocese on the Sunday within the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi.

The Catholic published the bishop’s directive, as issued by Father Edward Garland, secretary of the Committee of Priests and a staunch supporter of the seminary. Father Garland’s published letter read as follows:
SUPPORT OF THE DIOCESAN SEMINARY

It will be readily conceded by all reflecting Christians, that nothing is so vitally important to the maintenance and extension of religion as a properly trained and faithful body of Pastors. This also is the judgment of the universal Church expressed in her legislation on the subject. The Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session 23d, Chap. 18th, on reform, enacts, following out the constitutions of Pope Alexander the VII, and the second Council of Lateran that Seminaries for the training and disciplining of young levites for the Sanctuary, be maintained at all Cathedral, Metropolitan, and higher churches. And the comprehensive character of its provisions on this subject in the chapter already quoted, (the longest and most copious in details of all the 25 Sessions of the Council) afford sufficient evidence of the importance it attached to this subject. These provisions for the establishment of Ecclesiastical Seminaries under the control of the Ordinaries, have for their object the opening of sources of a definite character, from which a sufficient supply of laborers for the Lord's Vineyard might be derived. If, then, even in the ordinary condition of the Church, such institutions are required to supply the succession and increase of Pastors, how much greater is the need of them in this our own land where, in addition to the ordinary supply, provision must be made for the unparalleled and constant increase of population and Churches by immigration.

Wonders have been wrought hitherto by the wisdom and labours of our Bishops, aided by the generous co-operation of their religious and zealous Catholic people, to meet both the ordinary and extraordinary wants of their position. It is true that they were aided occasionally by the generosity of Foreign religious Societies. But, such assistance, though precarious hitherto, is henceforth liable and will probably cease altogether, thus rendering it necessary to rely on solely domestic resources against all contingencies.

In the Diocesan Synod, recently held in St. Paul's Cathedral our Rt. Rev. Ordinary of this See appointed a Committee of Priests to take into consideration the wants of the Seminary in this Diocess [sic], in order to devise and report some project that might be adequate to their nature and extent. The Committee so appointed, recommended as the result of their reflection on the subject, —

"That, in order to provide for the support of such a number of students for the sacred ministry, as the wants of religion in the Diocess [sic] required, either in the Diocesan Seminary, or elsewhere, as the Bishop might choose, a collection should be taken up in all the churches beyond the limits of the Cathedral city, for said purpose, on the Sunday, within the octave of Corpus Christi, annually; and that in the Episcopal city, the Parish Priest of each parochial district, should appoint collectors to visit the families and individuals of his parish for the same object; and, further, that should the proceeds from these sources by insufficient, the clergymen appointed by the Bishop, as a special Committee, should tax the deficit in an equal manner, and in proportion to the population on all the parishes and districts of the Diocess [sic]."

The Rev. Clergy have engaged to bring the matter properly before their congregations, and to use their exertions for its success. As the Sunday for the first annual collection under this system is very near, in the discharge of the duties of a position in which my Rev. and esteemed associates of the Committee have placed me, I feel it my duty to make this statement, in giving notice of the collection to be held on Sunday, the 18th of June next.

E. F. Garland, Treasurer

Pittsburgh, May 31st, A.D. 1854

Thus, for the first time in diocesan history, Bishop O'Connor and his clergy determined that a diocesan-wide collection would be taken up annually — with agreement that a subsequent tax, based on the population of each parish, might be implemented should the annual collection prove inadequate to fund seminary operations. The Catholic did not report the diocesan-wide results after the June 18, 1854 collection — nor was there a summary report published in any of the remaining years of O'Connor's administration. The same would prove true during the years of O'Connor's successor, Bishop Michael Domenec. Only after the seminary closed, did the diocese begin publication of an annual summary report in the diocesan newspaper. Perhaps the rationale for not publicizing the amount of the total annual collection — and continuing instead the existing practice of periodic publication of collection returns from a handful of parishes — reflected the bishop's desire to shield from public view the real cost of seminary operations and the total of monies collected. Publication of that information might have invited public scrutiny and discussion, possibly leading to reduced collections if the faithful concluded that the financial crisis had passed and generous donations to sustain St. Michael's were no longer needed; conversely, a woefully insufficient collection might have created a morale issue among both laity and clergy.
By early summer 1855, Father Garland again took pen to hand and wrote an article to stimulate contributions for the upcoming 1855 diocesan-wide collection. The appearance of the article suggests that the 1854 collection — the first of its kind in the diocese — did not produce sufficient funds. Garland argued his case persuasively:

**THE DIOCESAN SEMINARY**

In the Diocesan Synod, held in St. Paul’s Cathedral in May, 1854, the Sunday within the Octave of Corpus Christi was fixed on for making the annual collection, throughout the Diocese [sic], for the support of this important institution. The claims of the Seminary on the charity of the Catholic community is [sic] paramount to all others. Without an adequate ministry the precious harvest of immortal souls will be left to perish, religion and her institutions to inevitably retrograde and languish.

The time selected for making the collection is also appropriate, the festival commemorating the institution of the Christian Sacrifice, and the Priesthood of the New Law, whose chief office is the offering of this Holy Sacrifice, which is at the same time the supreme, only adequate and characteristic species of Divine worship, and the most facile means of access to the throne of God for mercy and grace. — The occasion itself should therefore, put us in mind of the duty of praying to God to send laborers into his vineyard, in worthy candidates to fill the ranks of His Holy Ministry. The late Provincial synod urges on us the performance of this same duty; but its fulfillment requires that we should co-operate by other means to secure the promotion of this object. The Very Rev. and Rev. Clergy do not require any argument or exhortation on a subject, the importance of which they so well understand, and of which they will be the zealous exponents to their flocks. The high rate at which the necessaries of life are procurable, should be an additional stimulus to the zeal and liberality of the faithful. Devoted young Levites merit all the sympathies, and encouragement of those to whose highest interests they mean to devote their lives and labors. A constantly increasing ministry can alone meet the wants of religion in the Diocese [sic]. The increase of small missions to congregations requiring the constant ministry of a Pastor, districts recently ministered to by a single Pastor requiring several, point conclusively to the necessity of such increase. This generous Catholic community have it in their power to secure this increase by their liberal and timely contributions, and such being the case, no doubt can be entertained of the result by.

E. F. Garland, Treasurer

The results of the first three years of the annual collection (1854-1856) were sufficient to permit O’Connor to finance the purchase of land (actually two sites, as detailed below) and reopen the seminary in 1856, and then purchase an even larger site and again relocate the seminary in 1857 — before he had sold the property purchased in 1856. This signaled a measure of improvement in diocesan finances. There was no subsequent financial crisis that threatened closure of St. Michael’s until 1876. Thus, the implementation of an annual collection in 1854 achieved the desired result: the seminary reopened two years later and remained open for another twenty years. Nonetheless, finances remained an issue — and the Easter Sunday collection for 1857 was designated for the seminary and characterized as necessary to pay off the debt created with purchase of property for a seminary in Glenwood (which is discussed below).

However, pastors and their congregations were faced with competing demands for limited funds: (a) *at the diocesan level* the expensive rebuilding of the cathedral, obligatory collections for the pope, and fundraising drives to maintain orphan asylums and hospitals and other charitable institutions, (b) *at the parish level* pew rent, the construction of first-time (and replacement) churches and rectories to serve local congregations, the opening of more parish elementary schools, and (c) *outside of the ecclesiastical structure* tuition demands for education in private academies operated by an increasing number of religious orders of sisters, ongoing collections for relief in Ireland as that country suffered a series of famines, and membership fees in a myriad number of ethnic, literary, and educational organizations with varying ties to the Church. Despite the seriousness of the
issue of adequate financial support for St. Michael’s Seminary, it is clear from surviving records that financial contributions were not being made by every parish. To bring everyone into line, Father Garland was again designated by Bishop O’Connor to pen another article on the subject for the August 6, 1859 issue of the *Catholic.* His statement was brief and pointed:

**SAINT MICHAEL’S THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

The Pastors of churches who have not taken up the collection, prescribed by the Statute, for this Institution, on the Sunday within the Octave of Corpus Christi, are requested to have it made as soon as sufficient notice can be given to prepare their congregations. The collection has been very successful in several congregations owing to the zeal with which it was urged on them by their Pastors. Pious Catholics will always act generously towards the institutions identified with their Church when the duty of so doing is properly understood and urged upon them. The spirit of their Pastor communicates itself naturally to Christian flocks. It is much to be regretted that, in several congregations, the collections bear no proportion to the number and ability of their members. In all cases the collection should be taken up by the Clergyman, and the names of contributors of one dollar, or even fifty cents, taken down by himself, or some other person by his direction. This the Bishop expects to be done by all Clergymen having charge of congregations. Where it has been neglected, the collections, with one exception, have been unworthy of the congregations. And thus the most important interests of the Church in the diocese suffer from negligence or apathy. The Seminary has been in very successful operation during the past academical year; 25 students, preparing for the sacred ministry, were supported at its expense. This involved an expenditure of not less than three thousand dollars, for which the annual collection is the principal resource, and should come fully up to this amount. With equal and proper zeal on the part of Pastors and their flocks, it is hoped that the annual collection will, in future years, cover the outlay, and keep the Seminary in an unembarrassed condition.

In all future collections the Clergy are requested to go among their congregations and take the names of persons, and amount of contributions of fifty cents or over. The collection, moreover, should not be made to give way to any other object, but to be taken on the day that, for obvious reasons, was appointed by our Rt. Rev. Bishop for that purpose.

E. F. Garland, Treasurer

The instructions to pastors were specific and designed to assure financial contributions by every adult lay Catholic. In light of the synodal legislation, why was this entreaty necessary? The answer lies in the unsatisfactory, and uneven, results of collections for the seminary during O’Connor’s administration. These summary results evidence an ongoing funding issue that was never solved in the time of Pittsburgh’s first bishop (1843-1860):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Collection Date</th>
<th>Number of Reports in the Catholic</th>
<th>Dates of Reporting</th>
<th>Number of Participating Parishes or Persons</th>
<th>Total $ Amount of Collection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>No established date</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aug. 24</td>
<td>1 person</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>No published report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>No published report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>March 6-Sept. 25</td>
<td>21 parishes &amp; 510 persons</td>
<td>1,455.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>No published report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jan. 27-Oct. 27</td>
<td>24 parishes</td>
<td>1,213.89</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1850</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>March 30-Sept. 1</td>
<td>3 parishes &amp; 2 persons</td>
<td>107.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dec. 27</td>
<td>2 parishes</td>
<td>26.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jan. 3-May 8</td>
<td>8 parishes &amp; 14 persons</td>
<td>196.05</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1853</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Jan. 1-Dec. 24</td>
<td>33 parishes &amp; 82 persons</td>
<td>1,212.33</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,221.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
May 1854 | Diocesan Synod establishes annual Collection on the Sunday after the feast of Corpus Christi
---|---
1854 | June 18  
(Corpus Christi: June 15) | 9 | Jan. 4-July 1 | 18 parishes | 819.67
1855 | June 10  
(Corpus Christi: June 7) | 10 | Jan. 13-Oct. 13 | 26 parishes & 2 persons | 747.39
1856 | May 25  
(Corpus Christi: May 22) | 8 | Jan. 12-Oct. 4 | 22 parishes | 886.46
1857 | June 14  
(Corpus Christi: June 11) | 10 | April 25-Dec. 10 | 42 parishes & 1 person | 1,250.45
1858 | June 6  
(Corpus Christi: June 3) | 5 | June 12-Sept. 4 | 36 parishes & 1 person | 1,509.41
1859 | June 26  
(Corpus Christi: June 23) | 10 | July 9-Nov. 5 | 42 parishes | 1,630.12
1860 | 1 | Jan. 7 | 1 parish | 35.00
| &nbsp; | &nbsp; | &nbsp; | **sub-total** | 6,878.50
| &nbsp; | &nbsp; | &nbsp; | **total** | 11,099.81

Resignation of Bishop Michael O’Connor

Administration of Father James O’Connor

| June 10  
(Corpus Christi: June 7) | 6 | Oct. 20-Dec. 1 | 48 parishes | 1,987.12

Administration of Bishop Michael Domenec

| 3 | Dec. 12-Dec. 29 | 6 parishes | 84.31

Based solely on reports published in the *Catholic*, the synodal legislation did not produce an immediate increase in parish participation and instead produced a decrease in monies collected for the first four years afterward. Many factors could account for this lackluster result. Only in 1858 did the amount collected exceed that of 1853, the year before enactment of the synodal legislation as to the seminary collection. It is apparent that Bishop O’Connor did not press his priests, as did his brother during his brief administration of the diocese,135 as regards the collection — relying on their self-interest in educating future diocesan priests. Both O’Connor brothers failed to utilize the *Catholic* to effectively publicize the results — in order to produce better results through the dual mechanism of public recognition through printing individual names and public shame through the non-appearance of a parishioner’s name or a small amount in relation to larger givers. Effective use of the diocesan newspaper would wait the arrival of Bishop Michael Domenec. What is not apparent from the *Catholic* and the few surviving diocesan archival records is the amount of money that may have been contributed other than from the annual collection for the seminary or that the bishop directed for the seminary from general diocesan income, neither of which would have been publicized.

Unbeknownst to most priests, and the faithful, was Bishop O’Connor’s plan to retire. The 1859 collection was the last that would be taken up during the administration of Pittsburgh’s first bishop. As we shall see below, he would resign the see of Pittsburgh in May 1860. Let us now return to the story of St. Michael’s during the last five years of O’Connor’s tenure as bishop of Pittsburgh.136

Revisiting the Seminary Issue with the Benedictines

At the end of 1854 and well into the spring of 1855, Bishop O’Connor undertook a multipronged approach to again providing a seminary within the diocese.

First, he reopened with Boniface Wimmer at St. Vincent’s the issue of inclusion in the Benedictine seminary of diocesan candidates for the priesthood.137 Pending in Rome was a petition for St. Vincent’s to be elevated from its existing status as a priory to that of an abbey, and to be made exempt from the jurisdiction of the bishop of Pittsburgh. Seeking to influence
the result, O’Connor wrote to Cardinal Fransoni that Wimmer should be required
to admit among the boys whom he accepts in his institute a fair number of diocesan students (one-half
or one-third, as the Holy See may deem proper) gratis or at a very low rate for board and tuition. These
students should be selected by the bishop.138

In April 1855, Propaganda Fide asked Wimmer to address three “seminary” issues in conjunction with Rome’s consideration
of elevation of St. Vincent’s: (1) maintenance of a school at the monastery for “students of the secular clergy,” (2) educa-
tion of some of these students “gratis or at a lower rate than other students” and (3) regular reports to Bishop O’Connor
“about the course of these students’ studies.”139 Wimmer believed that he had agreed to the first concession eight years
previously, the second matter was financially infeasible, and the third was conditionally possible but the bishop “could never
be rector of the seminary.”140 Wimmer compromised by agreeing to grant free room, board, and tuition each year to two of
the bishop’s students.141

The Holy See concluded these matters by issuing an Apostolic Brief on August 24 that raised St. Vincent’s to the rank of an
exempt abbey, but imposed an obligation:

We desire further that in the same monastery of St. Vincent a monastic seminary be maintained into which
secular clerics be admitted, provided that they meet the expenses of their education, and that the bishop, as
Apostolic Delegate, have the right to watch over the education and morals of these clerics.142

Each side could claim victory: O’Connor would have “equal rights with others in the admission of students”143 and Boniface
Wimmer became exempt from the bishop’s control — in addition to being appointed abbot.

O’Connor then became concerned with a provision in the Apostolic Brief — “In the monastery of St. Vincent itself, a
monastic seminary will be maintained into which secular clerical students should be admitted for whom only board is paid.”
The bishop, concerned that this concession was too general and not limited to only seminarians of the Diocese of Pitts-
burgh, asked Wimmer to submit the question to Cardinal Fransoni, prefect of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide.144 The
concern was moot, since O’Connor proceeded to reopen St. Michael’s Seminary and few English-speaking students attended
St. Vincent’s in the next twenty years.

Second, while discussions ensued with Boniface Wimmer, O’Connor also discussed with two of his closest friends in the
American hierarchy — Archbishop John Purcell of Cincinnati and Archbishop Peter Kenrick of St. Louis — the Purcell
proposal to make Mount St. Mary’s of the West Seminary in Cincinnati a provincial seminary serving the area stretching from the Allegheny Mountains to the Mississippi River. Cincinnati had become an archdiocese in 1850 and Purcell thought it opportune to combine resources as all three bishops had been encountering problems in operating a local seminary. The bishops petitioned the pope to make Mount St. Mary’s a pontifical seminary that would enable it to confer doctorate degrees in philosophy and theology. For a variety of reasons, neither idea came to fruition. But O’Connor was also pursuing a third approach to again having a seminary.

The Seminary Reopens in Cambria County: Folly on the Summit
By 1855, the seminary operation had been suspended for four years. Negotiations with the Benedictines were not progressing and would prove fruitless. O’Connor — in his earlier consideration of sites in Birmingham (Allegheny County), Westmoreland County, and Lawrence County — had indicated his preference for a rural setting, at least for a minor seminary if not also for a theological seminary in light of the financial necessity of housing both under one roof. His original desire to have a theological seminary in the see city, close to the bishop and episcopal ceremonies at the cathedral, appears to have yielded to fiscal reality. The bishop now turned next to another plan and another site for a revived St. Michael’s Seminary.

O’Connor continued to rely upon Father Cornelius M. Sheehan to find a site — other than St. Vincent’s — on which to reopen the seminary. Sheehan, like O’Connor, was a native of County Cork, Ireland. He had immigrated to Pittsburgh at age twenty in 1850 and entered St. Michael’s Seminary. When the seminary’s operation was suspended in 1851, he was sent to Cincinnati where he was ordained in 1853 for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Sheehan was stationed at St. Paul Cathedral, where he exerted considerable influence on the bishop. The failure of Sheehan’s previous proposal to use the Murrin farm in Lawrence County did not lessen the priest’s enthusiasm or O’Connor’s trust in his fellow Irishman.

The first diocesan priest-historian, Monsignor Andrew Lambing, writing more than 100 years ago (1914) described Sheehan as: recommending some of the most unlikely places that could well be imagined, till he finally succeeded in persuading the bishop to perch it on the top of the mountains at the Summit, the most objectionable place of all, in September, 1856, with himself as president.

This result was occasioned by the bishop and his agent, Father Sheehan, focusing their attention on the county with the second largest Catholic population in the diocese — Cambria County. Cambria was a rural county in the easternmost part of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. It had been created in 1804 and was given the name Cambria — the Latin form of the word Cymru, which is the Welsh word for Wales. This name reflected the ancestry of the county’s early white Anglo-Saxon Protestant population. Ebensburg was the county seat. Catholics identified the county with the settlement activities of both Captain Michael McGuire (a Revolutionary War hero) in 1788 and Father Demetrius Gallitzin, who had established Loretto in 1799 as the first English-speaking Catholic settlement west of the Allegheny Front. The county’s population was 17,773 by 1850 and had seven Catholic churches.

The bishop’s interest in Cambria County was not a secret. Father Thomas McCullagh, one of the original seminarians who had accompanied O’Connor to Pittsburgh and the first alumnus of St. Michael’s to be ordained a priest of the diocese, was serving as pastor to two adjacent congregations in Cambria County — St. Patrick in Gallitzin and St. Aloysius in Summit. The latter community, as will be discussed more fully below, was significant in the developing railroad transportation system replete with thousands of immigrant Irish workmen. McCullagh, desirous of resurrecting the dormant seminary, was instrumental in both raising some $4,000 in contributions from his flock and arranging the donation from a Summit parishioner of seventy-five acres of farmland to the bishop in June 1856.
The receptivity of Catholics in faraway Cambria County, the enticement of money, and the availability of land at no or minimal cost were factors that inclined O’Connor toward locating a revived St. Michael’s Seminary there. A less obvious but perhaps more significant fact was that Father Sheehan had a close family relative, Michael Sheehan, living and working at the Summit. Three Sheehans — Father Cornelius, his younger brother Patrick (who would serve as a seminary instructor prior to his ordination), and Michael — and Bishop O’Connor were all from County Cork, Ireland.

This first site — the seventy-five acres of farmland located in neighboring Washington Township just south of the Summit that had been donated by Ignatius Adams — was too far from Summit and transportation to be feasible and was accordingly dropped from active consideration. So Father Sheehan continued his search for a suitable site — reinforced now with money in hand.

Sheehan identified both a second site that could be repurposed as a seminary and — if we are to believe a locally published parish history — a third site that could be subdivided and sold as individual parcels for a profit that would provide financial support for the seminary. At this point, the telling of the story of St. Michael’s Seminary in Cambria County divides into what is reported only in ecclesiastical history and what can be documented in public records. The former makes for a better story, so it shall be presented first.

St. Augustine Parish in Dysart — a small town in Dean Township in Cambria County that developed along the railroad line during the period of timber and coal extraction — published its history in 1922. This volume is the sole published support for the story that a “third site” was purchased and later sold by Bishop O’Connor. The fact of that history’s publication — even in the absence of any publicly recorded deeds that would support its statements as to the purchase and sale of land pertinent to the bishop’s location and financing of the seminary in Cambria County — warrants inclusion in the full historical telling of matters relating to the seminary.
The St. Augustine Parish history contains this brief mention:

**Bishop O’Connor’s Projected Seminary for Boys.**


The land was heavily timbered with pine timber which was long since cut away; and the location being too far removed from railroad communication for a seminary, the land was sold to different parties, by John Wagner, agent of Bishop O’Connor, the purchasers having been Michael Sheehan, S. J. Luther, Wm. Dishart, Nicholas Wyland, John Wirtner and D. A. Luther.154

If factually true, this “third site” would be the third instance of Bishop O’Connor acting as a real estate speculator — planning to buy a large tract of land, subdivide it into individual parcels, sell them at a profit, and apply the sale proceeds to provide financial support for diocesan operations, in this case the seminary. This approach had worked successfully in connection with his earlier land purchases in Birmingham and Lawrenceville. Let us turn initially to this reported “third site” in Cambria County — the investment property.

Per the aforementioned parish history, Father Sheehan located a large site of 464 acres of land in White Township in Cambria County. The site was approximately 100 miles northeast of the see city of Pittsburgh and 20 miles northeast of Ebensburg. White Township in Cambria County directly bordered Clearfield County (in the Diocese of Erie) to the north and was only one county away from the westernmost part of the then-Diocese of Philadelphia.

This property was enormous — 25% larger than St. Vincent’s in Westmoreland County. But unlike the land at St. Vincent’s that could be farmed to support the residents of a seminary, this Cambria County site was heavily forested with huge stands of white pine trees, for which the township was named. The land in its virgin state would only be useful for logging purposes, rather than residential or farming purposes.155

Sheehan, in this scenario, may have received instructions to identify a property of considerable acreage whose trees could be logged for use by the railroad and mining industries in the area — or merely acted on his own initiative after recollecting Bishop O’Connor’s earlier land speculation in Birmingham. The rapidly expanding Pennsylvania Railroad was in constant need of wood in connection with the laying of new and replacement train tracks, the construction of tunnels, car barns and related needs. Ongoing mining in the Allegheny Mountains always demanded a ready supply of wood — as did the construction of businesses and homes serving the increasing population, especially the many railroad workers.

This site bore nothing in common with the idyllic farmland of St. Vincent’s in Westmoreland County. The bishop had learned from his Westmoreland County experience that farming demanded its own experienced workers and could not be accomplished part-time by students with an existing schedule of academic courses.

The reported land buyers from the bishop were Catholics, and all but one had roots in the settlements established by Father Gallitzin and Father Lemke; one (Michael Sheehan) was an Irish immigrant railroad worker. The land could and would be cleared — mostly for timber for railroad and mining purposes, and some for homestead farming.156 The number and prominence of these local Catholics would give credence to the parish history. Indeed, children of the identified land purchasers were alive and members of St. Augustine parish at the time of the history’s publication.157 It defies reason that such a statement would go into print if not true.
But the above-quoted excerpt from the parish history is subject to challenge on two grounds:

• First, its assertion rings false in light of the fact that Monsignor Lambing’s two histories of the Diocese of Pittsburgh158 make no reference to O’Connor’s purchase of the White Township acreage. As Lambing’s first history was published in 1880, just twenty-four years after the reported land purchase, and Lambing was himself a graduate of St. Michael’s Seminary, his omission of such a critically important historical fact is telling. Lambing’s second history, published in 1914, includes a history of St. Michael’s Seminary but makes no mention of these land transfers.

• Second, an exhaustive examination of the public land records in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds of Cambria County and other record offices, undertaken in July 2016, failed to locate any recorded deed from William Ryan (the land seller listed in the parish history) to Bishop O’Connor. Further, there were no recorded deeds from O’Connor or an agent of the bishop to the several persons identified as land purchasers. Moreover, there was no power of attorney of record from O’Connor to any person. Finally, the records search failed to disclose a recorded Plan of Lots that would evidence subdivision of the 464-acre tract of land in White Township.159

However, one must consider that recording of documents was not the norm in that period in Cambria County — as is evidenced by the absence in the county records of recording of land development plans that would otherwise be referenced in recorded deeds. It is therefore possible — and in the opinion of this writer quite probable — that O’Connor purchased the large acreage in White Township (the “third site”), divided the tract, and sold the lots — all without recording either a plan of lots or deeds. Deeds may have been exchanged between seller and buyers but not recorded, and this not-uncommon practice may have been repeated in subsequent sales. But the next generation of the families who purchased those lots apparently recalled those earlier events and included them in the St. Augustine Parish history published some sixty years later, in 1922.

Perhaps the deciding factor in support of Bishop O’Connor’s reported purchase of the large acreage in White Township is the incontrovertible evidence of his keen interest in real estate and his generally successful results from his earlier purchase, subdivision, and sale of property in St. Clair Township in Allegheny County relative to the seminary in its early years. The bishop would later, in 1857, again demonstrate his zealous pursuit of property for the seminary, by purchasing property near Pittsburgh at sheriff’s sale in order to relocate the institution from Cambria County. These successive actions support this conclusion.160

But a “second site,” some twenty miles south in a different part of Cambria County, was to accommodate a revived St. Michael’s Seminary. Father Sheehan’s search led him to the Summit, also known as Summitville. As its name indicates, this was a settlement near the summit on the western side of the Allegheny Mountains, which presented a unique challenge to westward travel and expansion. The town developed in the early 1830s due to its proximity to the intersection of the Cambria,
Huntingdon, and Indiana Pikes with their stagecoach traffic. Summit’s eastern edge approximately followed the crest of the Allegheny Front — the height of land between the Susquehanna River watershed to the east and the Ohio River watershed to the west.

Connecting Philadelphia and the east with Pittsburgh, almost four hundred miles to the west, was one of the greatest engineering challenges of that time. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, transportation into the interior consisted of a complex east-west system of canals, dams, locks, towpaths, and aqueducts that was collectively called the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal. The critical section in this canal plan was the thirty-seven mile stretch between Hollidaysburg and Johnstown, crossing the crest of the Allegheny Mountains.161

The Allegheny Portage Railroad was the first railroad to cross the Allegheny Mountains and got its name from the fact that the railroad was designed to carry (portage) canal boats on railroad flatcars over the mountains on a series of ten inclined planes. Each grade, or plane, had a stationary engine which operated a cable to which were attached the railway cars. The ascent from Hollidaysburg to the Summit (Plane no. 6) was 1,398 feet in 10.1 miles; the descent to Johnstown was 1,751 feet in 26.5 miles. The “Portage” opened in 1834 and marked the first time that there was one direct route between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, which took three to five days of travel at that time. The Portage Railroad operated from 1834 to 1854, until purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The rapid development of Western Pennsylvania was assured when the Pennsylvania Railroad devised an engineering triumph — a railroad line was folded around the ridge of a valley, into a half circle or horseshoe, linking the east with the west. The line was begun in 1851 and built entirely by hand. The 2,375-foot-long curve, at an elevation of 1,594 feet above sea level, opened on February 15, 1854. This was an all-rail route along the Horseshoe Curve, through the Gallitzin Tunnels, and over the crest of the Allegheny Mountains that cut travel time between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh from four days to eight hours.162

In its heyday in the 1850s, Summitville boasted a coal mine, newspaper, post office, three hotels, two breweries, general store and other businesses, a blacksmith, lumber mill, school, two churches, and the Portage Railroad Canal. Jenny Lind, famed Swedish opera singer, and author Charles Dickens were guests at the town’s Lemon House tavern, which served railroad passengers.163

The area was heavily Catholic. The successful colonization efforts of Captain McGuire and Father Gallitzin were followed by an influx of Catholic workers, brought to the area by railroad construction that began in the 1830s. Western Pennsylvania became a hub for the railroad industry because of its abundant natural resources such as timber, coal, and iron; railroad expansion made its raw materials and products accessible to faraway markets. This economic growth and population surge led to the opening of St. Aloysius Church at the Summit in 1838.164 Franciscan friars brought education to Cambria County in 1847, when they established what would become St. Francis University in Loretto.

But neither an identifiable Catholic presence, nor the prominence of the Summit as a railroad center, could justify the selection of the Summit as the site for the reopened St. Michael’s Seminary. The seminary’s location here was in the easternmost part of the diocese — 102 miles from Pittsburgh. The problems were many and immediate: virtual inaccessibility due to unpaved roads, accessibility dependent on a limited railroad system still in development, mountaintop location, poor building conditions, extreme winter cold, and the greatest possible distance from the see city and the bulk of the Catholic population of the diocese.

Nonetheless, ignoring such prudential considerations, Father Sheehan proceeded to identify a plot in the main district of the bustling rural community of Summit (then a part of Washington Township, but today a part of Cresson Township).
The lot provided 70-foot frontage on Turnpike Street and extended 175 feet to Chestnut Alley; it was part of a land plan laid out by Moses Canan, Esq. This "seminary" lot was centrally located. To the east, just two lots over, lay the intersection of Turnpike Street and Railroad Street, which served as the main road in the town and paralleled the railroad tracks. Even today, the area is referred to as “the mainline.” To the west, just four lots over, lay the “parsonage” of St. Aloysius Church in which the pastor resided.

Conditions in the existing building on the selected lot could only be described as “crowded” — given that some two dozen seminarians would be housed with Sheehan, a second priest-professor, and Sheehan’s younger brother Patrick who would also serve as a professor. Given the size of such dwellings in that period, the seminarians likely occupied a modest dormitory, with the two priests each having a small separate room. The building had to provide not just living quarters but also classroom space. In lieu of an incorporated chapel, faculty and students would have walked to the nearby St. Aloysius Church for daily Mass and other religious services. The conditions were truly spartan — characteristic of all American seminaries of that period. Such accommodations represented the poor living conditions from which the seminarians (be they immigrants to or born in the United States) had likely come and with which they were personally familiar. The housing also prepared these future priests to live out of small rented rooms while traveling endlessly to serve their flocks scattered in numerous small communities all over Western Pennsylvania.

Sheehan purchased Lot 41 on June 14, 1856 in his own name with $250 of his own funds. Again, this was not an uncommon phenomenon since, as previously noted, the common practice was not to title property in the name of either the diocese or the bishop, even though it would be used for ecclesiastical purposes.

Even before the seminary opened in Summit, the building purchased at Summit by Father Sheehan was put to diocesan use. The Catholic announced that the regular clergy conference for the Eastern District would be held there on August 12-13, 1856. The seminarians would arrive about two and one-half weeks later.

Thus, at the beginning of September 1856, the seminary reopened at this most unlikely of the sites considered by Father Sheehan — the Summit. The Catholic announced the seminary’s reopening:

**ST. MICHAEL’S SEMINARY.**

We are happy to be able to announce that this institution has been opened under most favorable auspices. Instead of Lawrence county, Old Cambria has been selected for its location. A house was purchased at the Summit, and fitted up for the reception of students, and studies commenced in the beginning of last month.

This Institution is intended, as yet, only for the preparatory studies, but none but those intended for the ecclesiastical state are received. To impress this more effectually on the minds of the students, the cassock has been adopted as the Seminary dress. The experience had, we may say, everywhere shows the advantage of educating those intended for the holy ministry in separate establishments. The ecclesiastical spirit is too antagonistic to that of the world to live when brought into close communication with it. As a general rule, ecclesiastical vocations are retained with difficulty, even in well-governed colleges, where most of the inmates are preparing for secular pursuits. Hence the Council of Trent, and in accordance with this Council, zealous bishops have everywhere, to the utmost of their power, encouraged the establishment of seminaries for the education of ecclesiastics exclusively.

St. Michael’s opened with every prospect of success. There are already twenty two students. Rev. C. M. Sheehan is President, assisted by Mr. P. Sheehan, who completed his theological studies in St. Mary’s Seminary, Cincinnati, but is not yet of age to be ordained priest. Another priest has been appointed to assist in the government and teaching department, so that an efficient faculty will enter on duty at once. After the students had assembled, and had become a little familiar with the place, a spiritual retreat was given by Rev. J. O’Connor, which closed on Thursday, the 16th inst. At the close of the retreat, four of the students, Messrs. J. C. Bigham, J. Holland, J. Keneven [Canevin] and P. Ward, received tonsors from the Bishop.

It is but right to remark here, that the change of location of the Seminary was adopted at the urgent solicitation of the Catholics of Cambria, particularly of those of the Summit, who showed the greatest anxiety to have this Institution in their midst, and contributed generously to the building. Those of the Summit alone subscribed nearly four thousand dollars, besides the handsome donation of one hundred acres of land by Mr. Adams. We trust that they will see the fruit of their generosity in the numerous bands of virtuous young men, who will there present themselves to minister at the altar. The presence of the institution in their midst will, no doubt, inspire many of their own children with the holy desire of consecrating themselves to God in the service of the sanctuary, and the “mountain” may, or rather will, no doubt, be the point from which the ranks of the Clergy of Western Pennsylvania will hereafter be recruited, as it was from there that the light of faith long shone most brightly. The conviction and the hope that this result would follow were amongst the chief motives that influenced the Bishop and those whom he consulted, in yielding to the request of the Catholics of the Summit, to place the Preparatory Seminary in their midst.
Father Sheehan’s judgment was flawed and his recommendation unsound. Unfortunately for the diocese, Sheehan was one of only two or three priests who were able to exercise considerable influence over Bishop O’Connor in situations that would prove to be financially and otherwise disadvantageous to the fledging diocese. Bishop O’Connor displayed poor judgment in accepting this recommendation of Father Sheehan — thereby abandoning his original belief that a seminary should be in the see city, close to both bishop and cathedral. O’Connor ignored the fact that his seminarians would have no affinity for the Summit — as students were almost evenly split between Irish immigrants and natives of Pittsburgh and its immediate environs. Moreover, Summitville was already beginning its decline — as Pennsylvania Railroad traffic was going through the town, not stopping there as a destination point.

Nonetheless, the bishop proceeded to reopen St. Michael’s Seminary in the fall of 1856, naming Father Cornelius Sheehan as president. Seminarian Patrick Sheehan, the president’s younger brother, was appointed a professor which reflected the prevailing custom of the time to have senior seminarians instruct younger students. Father Francis J. O’Shea was also appointed a professor. Their regime at the Summit would last only one year.

The listing of the seminary in The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity’s Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1857 (which reported 1856 data) stated:

**ST. MICHAELS SEMINARY**
Summitville, Cambria Co.
This institution situated at Summitville, about one mile from the Cresson Station on the Pennsylvania Rail Road, is intended chiefly as a preparatory college for youths who give signs of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state. Terms for board, tuition and washing, $100 per annum, payable half yearly in advance. There are now twenty-four students in the house.

Rev. C.M. Sheehan, President
" F. O’Shea   } Professors
Mr. P. Sheehan }

Despite distance and harsh weather, St. Michael’s Seminary survived its first year in Summitville. The Catholic published this brief but positive endnote to the scholastic year:

We are informed that St. Michael’s Preparatory Seminary closed its first year last week [July 3, 1857] with forty students. Due notice as to the opening of the next session will be given in the columns of the Catholic.

While enrollment of forty students was a record, one must question whether — given Father Sheehan’s desire to make a success of St. Michael’s — he admitted to the institution lay students who did not have the priesthood as an objective. In a heavily Catholic county such as Cambria, a number of families would have willingly paid the cost for their sons to receive a classical education. The only school in the area with which it was competing was the Franciscan school in Loretto. At some point, lay students were admitted; indeed, by the following year, the Catholic acknowledged that this was an existing policy.

The rapid enrollment increase at the Summit suggests that the change occurred during Sheehan’s administration. Indeed, given the preceding five-year suspension of the seminary, the adoption of an “open-doors” policy would have been considered a sound financial decision at the reopening of St. Michael’s.

Sheehan’s operation of the seminary at the Summit continued uninterrupted, given that Bishop O’Connor decided in November 1856 to undertake an extended trip to Europe, for reasons of health, on the recommendation of his doctors. Not surprisingly, the topic of seminaries remained uppermost in the bishop’s mind, as the forthcoming months in Europe were devoted to exploration of plans for American collegiate seminaries in both Louvain (Belgium) and Rome (the future North American College), as previously noted. Upon his return to Pittsburgh in late spring 1857, O’Connor focused his attention on his own diocesan seminary.

Within a few months of opening St. Michael’s at the Summit, Bishop O’Connor realized the folly of the Cambria County location. But the seminary continued to operate at the Summit until he could obtain a suitable new site in Allegheny County and prepare the necessary accommodations. A transfer of operation would not occur until the fall of 1857, by which time O’Connor had arranged the necessary details.
In the interim, the seminary situation appeared unchanged in the public view as classes continued and the school’s president continued to solicit funds for the institution. Indeed, even after completion of one year of operation at the Summit with another set to commence shortly, Father Sheehan journeyed to Pittsburgh in late August 1857 to collect on seminary pledges made previously by cathedral parishioners. The Catholic noted:

THE SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE PREPARATORY SEMINARY. — Rev. Mr. Sheehan, President of St. Michael’s Seminary, Summitville, desires us to state, that he has come to town, at the request of his ecclesiastical superior, for the purpose of collecting the subscriptions, that had been so generously made some time ago for the erection of the Preparatory Seminary. He has handed in a list of all the pious benefactors of St. Paul’s Congregation, which we will publish, as soon as he has realized the amount of the outstanding subscriptions. He speaks in the most grateful terms of the kindly and generous manner with which he has been invariably received by every member of St. Paul’s to whom he has appealed in his important undertaking, and he feels confident that there is not a single name on his long list whose owner would not indignantly spurn the imputation of refusing to substantiate his promise.173

This represented Bishop O’Connor’s desire to accomplish payment of the pledges made by Cathedral parishioners thirteen years earlier (1844) when the parish trustees and parishioners resisted the bishop’s plea to purchase land in Birmingham for the seminary and instead opted for a campaign to construct a seminary building adjacent to St. Paul Cathedral. That original campaign was unsuccessful and, apparently, a portion of the promised funds was not paid. Thus, Father Sheehan was entrusted with the task of obtaining the pledged funds, despite the passage of more than a decade.

The school’s second year at the Summit was set to open as scheduled, as the following announcement in the Catholic indicates:

Studies will be resumed in St. Michael’s Preparatory Seminary, Summit, on Monday, the 31st [of August] inst. It is expected of, and earnestly urged upon, the Students to attend on that day, that the classes may be organized and studies commenced immediately.174

However, St. Michael’s Seminary reopened in Glenwood at the beginning of September 1857, but without mention in the diocesan newspaper. What would appear initially to be conflicting information (Summit vs. Glenwood) likely suggests the conjunction of several developments:

- Financial pressures stemmed from the bishop’s purchase of the Glenwood site, his expenditure of funds to retrofit the site’s existing hotel to accommodate a chapel and classrooms, and his need for funds to reimburse Father Cornelius Sheehan for the latter’s advance of monies used to purchase the Summit site so that the latter could be closed as a seminary.
- The bishop assigned Father Sheehan to Pittsburgh in August 1857 to collect seminary pledges from cathedral parishioners made some thirteen years earlier — a true indication of the bishop’s critical need for funds.
- A stock market decline occurred in August 1857 that quickly morphed into the Panic of 1857, a worldwide economic crisis that affected Pittsburgh.
- The bishop needed to buy time in order to deal with the vexing issue of the faculty, principally Father Sheehan, who was owed money for his purchase of the Summit site. O’Connor had to settle with Sheehan since the bishop did not intend to transfer Sheehan with the students to Glenwood.
- The Catholic’s four announcements in August of the start of the seminary’s fall 1857 scholastic year at the Summit were a clever way to recall students there to count numbers, announce the bishop’s plan to move the students to Glenwood, and avoid the loss of any of the forty students who were enrolled when the scholastic year ended in July 1857. The fact that the announcement was printed in four consecutive issues of the diocesan newspaper suggests concern about students returning to the isolated rural site.
- Transfer of students who actually reported to the Summit could have been accomplished by use of the railroad station at nearby Cresson for a train ride to Pittsburgh. These students would most likely have been those living in the eastern part of the diocese.
- O’Connor, a practical man, would have considered avoidance of any action that would reduce the number of potential seminarians and the number of priests that would later be ordained from his seminary. The longevity and financial stability of the seminary would depend on the maximum number of students and their attendant financial contribution to “room and board.” This income would have figured in the calculation of the financing of the Glenwood purchase and attendant building renovations.
• O’Connor would most likely have instructed the appropriate pastors in Pittsburgh to advise their own seminarian-parishioners to report directly to Glenwood, foregoing a pointless trip to the Summit followed by a quick return.
• There is no indication that, even for a brief period, St. Michael’s operated simultaneously in two locations: the Summit and Glenwood. Simply put, Bishop O’Connor did not have sufficient priests available to staff two seminaries or pay dual building expenses.

Thus, while payment by O’Connor to Sheehan for the latter’s earlier advance of funds to purchase the Summit site was not concluded by September 1857 and would drag on until mid-October 1857, the seminary operation at the Summit was closed and reopened at the beginning of September at Glenwood in Allegheny County.

Since the bishop’s purchase of property complete with a suitable residential building in the immediate Pittsburgh area was a matter of general knowledge given the highly public manner of its acquisition, neither seminary faculty nor seminarians could have been surprised at the speed or the scope of the bishop’s decisions that were effected in early fall 1857. First, the bishop provided a new seminary close to Pittsburgh. Second, all seminarians transferred there. Third, he selected a new seminary president and some new faculty, transferring all but one of the Summit faculty to parochial assignments.

The two priests at the Summit (Fathers Cornelius Sheehan and Francis O’Shea) would not accompany the seminarians on their return to Pittsburgh; they were dismissed from their seminary positions, effective with the start of the new academic year. Since Father Sheehan had purchased Lot 41 in Summit in his own name, he now understandably wanted to be reimbursed by Bishop O’Connor for whose benefit the purchase had been made. That property was subsequently titled in O’Connor’s name by a deed from Father Sheehan dated October 16, 1857 and recorded two and one-half weeks later on November 4, 1857. The sales price to O’Connor was $250, the same amount that Sheehan had paid on his purchase of the property in 1856.

Another three years would pass before the bishop could sell Lot 41 in Summit that had operated as the seminary. On May 20, 1860, O’Connor executed a deed to Christian Reich, a shoemaker in Summit, for the lot. This stemmed from a defective legal description of the property in the previous deed from Sheehan to O’Connor. Sheehan’s release was recorded with O’Connor’s deed to Reich, thus clearing any title impediment and assuring Reich of “free and clear title” to Lot 41. The difference in the lot’s purchase price and sales price attests to (1) Sheehan/O’Connor’s apparently inflated purchase price reflecting their overvaluation of the property, (2) a subsequent reduction in property values in Summit by 1860 as that community declined in light of a shift in business development to nearby Cresson, (3) O’Connor’s lack of proper assistance from legal counsel and surveyors, and (4) the folly of assuming that investment in real estate is always profitable.

During the three-year interval between closure of the seminary at Summit (1857) and sale of the property (1860), the diocese continued to use the former seminary building for the clergy conferences held for the Eastern District, such as that conducted November 10-11, 1858.

The land transactions were inextricably intertwined with the Sheehan brothers. Severed from his presidency of the seminary and transferred to administer two rural parishes, Father Cornelius Sheehan remained in the diocese for only a year and then departed, never to return. By the time he was involved in the clearing of title to O’Connor’s Summit property in 1860, Cornelius Sheehan was residing in New York City. He would later relocate to Virginia, where he would die in 1875. The younger Patrick Sheehan was ordained in 1857 and immediately assigned as a professor at the relocated seminary — continuing the instructional role he had exercised at the Summit. That faculty assignment lasted but a year. Thereafter, his “career from that time was checkered, and unfortunately not always up to the standard of his sacred calling.” Father Patrick Sheehan left the diocese in 1870, later suing Bishop John Tuigg of Pittsburgh for salary in a highly publicized case that caused con-
considerable concern among the hierarchy. He ultimately lost in a decision rendered by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in November 1882. Thus, the Summit experience proved to be disastrous in almost every respect.

**Relocation to Glenwood in 1857**
Bishop O’Connor’s realization of the need to move St. Michael’s Seminary from remote Summit in Cambria County led to his decision to return the institution to the immediate Pittsburgh area. Purchase of an acceptable site was a prerequisite to planning the relocation and arranging sale of the Summit site and the remaining timbered property in northern Cambria County. Thus, while the seminary continued to operate in Cambria County, the bishop proceeded to purchase a suitably-sized site, with the preferred rustic isolation but as close to the city of Pittsburgh as possible — at the lowest possible price.

The 1850s were a period of rapid growth in the Pittsburgh area. Fortunes were made and lost. Many properties were offered, or became available for sale, through advertisement and word of mouth. The bishop had a keen interest in real estate and was an adept negotiator. He was willing to consider any source that might yield a useable property. Hence, it was no surprise that he was willing to entertain purchase of suitable property at a sheriff’s sale.

The site the bishop was considering for seminary use was situated about five miles upriver from the Point (junction of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers that form the Ohio River). It was part of a larger tract of woodland that had been purchased for $10,000 under the 1768 Boundary Line Treaty of Fort Stanwix with Native Americans. In 1784, John Wood built an estate there called Hazel Hill — a name derived from the hazelnut trees that flourished along the Monongahela River. Over time, “wood” supplanted “hill” in the public’s reference to the site as “Hazelwood.” Later, large farms were developed on some of the land. But much of the land remained virgin forest. This area, then part of Peebles Township, lay on the eastern bank of the Monongahela River.

The property under consideration consisted of two contiguous parcels comprising a little over nine acres and extended from the riverbank, with the topography gradually ascending all the way to the base of what today is Squirrel Hill. The property was one of the first tracts of land carved out of the Ross farm and sold to several wealthy men who erected thereon in 1852 a large clubhouse called the Glen Hotel. The building was sited at the mouth of a beautiful glen which would be reflected in that immediate area’s designation as Glenwood. The club members used their influence to have Braddock’s Field Plank Road constructed through the farmland, bifurcating the property into northern and southern riverbank sides.

While some other hotels were built along the road, the Glen Hotel was unique. Located on the north side of the road, it was a members-only club replete with a manager (Joseph F. D. Keating). The Glen Hotel, located about 150 feet from the road, was a very large building with a frontage of 200 feet. A ten-foot-wide porch extended along the entire front of the building with porches at both ends. Two wings extended back from each side of the main building, creating a perfect U-shape. There was an open courtyard between these two wings of the building. There were several outer buildings, reflecting the fact that club’s members conducted horse races at an adjacent racetrack. The club was discontinued by early 1856, but Joseph Keating
continued to operate the building as a summer hotel in 1856. The hotel was described as having the “most beautiful grounds and shade trees in front, and a most inviting lawn and grove in the rear, springs, arbors and swings have been supplied by nature and art.”

In fall 1856, a suit for partition between John W. Butler and Sarah T. Roggen and others resulted in issuance of an October 10, 1856 order from the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County for sale of the two Glenwood parcels containing the closed hotel. Pursuant to the court order, Allegheny County Sheriff Rody Patterson listed the aforesaid property for sale at public auction to be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Merchants Exchange on Friday, November 21, 1856. Bishop Michael O'Connor bid the winning amount of $6,600. The sheriff executed a deed to the bishop the same day. The property consisted of two parcels described in acreage and/or perches (a perch being a linear measure of 16 ½ feet). These parcels were: (1) 9 acres and 19.37 perches lying north of Braddock's Field Plank Road, and (2) 82.42 perches along the Monongahela River and south of the Plank Road, with the beginning point beginning at a sycamore on the riverbank, along with (3) “uninterrupted use and privilege of a certain spring of water” and the right to convey the water by pipes.

The secular press gave prompt attention to the purchase. The Pittsburgh Gazette noted:

“The Glen Hotel.” This fine building, which was sold by the sheriff, a few days ago, for the small sum of $6,600, is about to pass into the hands of Bishop O'Connor, who proposes converting it into a seminary for the education of such Catholics as desire instruction in the higher branches of literature.

The attraction of this property was its large acreage complete with an immediately usable building. Its attractive rural setting would assure quiet privacy for students and faculty. Its existing use offered sizeable accommodations for over one hundred seminarians and faculty members. Modifications to add a chapel and library would be minimal. The location was convenient, with accessibility to the see city of Pittsburgh via a plank road and riverboats. The price was quite reasonable and the bishop’s timing was perfect since the purchase was consummated shortly before the Financial Panic of 1857 roiled the Pittsburgh economy. Nonetheless, the continued financial problems facing the diocese were evident in the fact that Bishop O'Connor had to incur additional debt to purchase the new seminary site.

Bishop O'Connor, as noted throughout, had a keen eye for real estate. Just as his earlier purchase of the Birmingham farm was made prior to the rapid change of that area’s farmland into residential and commercial plots, likewise his purchase in Glenwood anticipated that area’s later real estate boom.

Benjamin F. Jones, Sr., of the Pittsburgh and Connellsville Railroad (and later of Jones and Laughlin Steel Company) built the first railroad track to service the area in 1861. It was constructed inland so as to respect the residents’ concern about maintaining the river’s aesthetic value. The railroad thus separated Hazelwood into two sections, coining the local terms “below the tracks” and “above the tracks.” The property purchased by Bishop O'Connor was located on both sides of the tracks, but the hotel that would serve as the seminary building was “above the tracks” — in an idyllic area termed “Glenwood” which would also become the name of the nearby railroad passenger station.

The bishop’s purchase anticipated population growth in the area, which later warranted annexation to the city of Pittsburgh on June 30, 1868 as the 23rd Ward (today, the 15th Ward). By 1870, the railway and annexation spurred iron and steel industries, boatbuilding and river trade in Hazelwood “below the tracks.” Only in the 1870s was Braddock’s Field Plank Road between Hazelwood and downtown paved and renamed Second Avenue. The seminary “above the tracks” remained a virtually undisturbed oasis of virgin forests — perfect for the quiet solitude needed for the mix of studies and recreation of the seminarians.

While seminarians reported to Glenwood, most of the existing seminary faculty did not relocate. Father James O’Connor was again named president of St. Michael’s, with Father James Keogh as vice president and professor. Father Thomas Ryan served as the second professor. Senior seminarian Patrick Sheehan who had functioned as a professor at the Summit did relocate to Glenwood where he completed his studies and was subsequently ordained.

While a physical move coupled with a change in the seminary presidency and the introduction of two new faculty members may have been disruptive to the students, that inconvenience replaced the existing disadvantages of distance, winter weather, and the need to sell the Cambria County sites to cover the acquisition costs of the Glenwood property. And there was another pastoral advantage — the Glenwood building’s chapel would soon double as the Mass chapel for area Catholics who would later organize as St. Stephen of Hungary Parish.
Another Overture to the Benedictines

By the late 1850s, Michael O’Connor had served almost two decades as bishop of Pittsburgh and continued to consider retirement and entrance into the Jesuit order. Anticipating such a move, he signed a contract with Boniface Wimmer (now abbot of an exempt abbey) on April 19, 1859, binding the Benedictines to receive and educate seminarians of the Diocese of Pittsburgh that O’Connor and his successors would send. The document read as follows:

This Agreement made this 19th day of April, A.D. 1859, between the Benedictine Society of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, of the first part and the Rt. Rev. M. O’Connor, Bishop of Pittsburgh, of the second part, witnessed that said Benedictine Society for and in consideration of sundry grants made to them by said Rt. Rev. M. O’Connor doth hereby bind itself to receive and educate in their seminary or college at St. Vincent’s Abbey, Westmoreland County, any students he may send them, to supply them with the same food and education received by other students in said seminary or college as their attitude will require for the sum of fifty dollars per annum. This sum shall be in payment of everything supplied by the Society itself but is exclusive of clothes and books. The students so received shall be bound to observe the rules of the college like all others and be liable to expulsion for misconduct for the same causes. This right so guaranteed to said Rt. Rev. M. O’Connor is guaranteed also to his heirs and successors, and to this the said Benedictine Society bind themselves and their successors.189

Given the tumultuous history of St. Michael’s Seminary, the bishop wished to provide a solid alternative for the education of diocesan seminarians in the event of future problems — whether finance, faculty, or location. To make his point, O’Connor then sent a number of seminarians from St. Michael’s Seminary to St. Vincent’s in the fall of 1859 for one year; they resumed their studies at St. Michael’s in September 1860.190

The future of the seminary became critically important to O’Connor in the final (but not yet disclosed to the diocese) year of his episcopal ministry in Pittsburgh. This is best illustrated by a declaration executed by the bishop on July 14, 1859, but not publicly recorded until December 15 of that same year. He had received $7,200 from the estates of Michael Tiernan and Thomas Cassidy “for the support of an Ecclesiastical Seminary or of Ecclesiastical students.” O’Connor had applied $5,000 of that bequest to purchase of the Glenwood seminary site. The bishop pledged property he personally owned between Fifth and Sixth Streets downtown in trust to cover his withdrawal of $300 yearly from the remainder of the bequest. Clearly, the latter yearly withdrawals would be applied for the benefit of the seminarians.191

To address the ongoing financial support needs of St. Michael’s Seminary, O’Connor had already agreed to admission of lay students who would provide necessary financial stabilization of the seminary. The bishop made this point clear in an article placed in the July 3, 1858 issue of the Catholic — at the close of the seminary’s first year in Glenwood:

The seminary, as our readers are aware, is not intended solely for the education of students in the higher branches of Theology and Philosophy, particular attention is paid to the Preparatory Department, in which those boys who by their good disposition, exemplary conduct, or otherwise, give hopes of their being called by God to the Priesthood, receive that elementary training, in the English and classical branches, which is commonly given in our best Colleges. We are pleased to be able to say that the number of students of this Department during the past year, is such as to afford well founded hopes of a permanent success.192

Clearly the prominent article was intended to serve as an advertisement to encourage Catholic parents to enroll their sons in the Preparatory Department of St. Michael’s Seminary. It would provide both much needed income for the seminary and an enlarged pool from which some students would opt for the priesthood.

Life and Community at the Seminary

There is minimal evidence available from which to reconstruct the educational curriculum of St. Michael’s Seminary. We know that the seminarians studied dogmatic theology, moral theology, scripture, church history and canon law. With two exceptions, we do not know what textbooks they used. Within days of his arrival in Pittsburgh with his first seminarians in December 1843, O’Connor requested “ten copies of the Bp’s. Theologiae Moralis and Theologiae Dogmaticae,” which he published between 1839 and 1843 as critical tools in the teaching of his seminarians. Kenrick, like O’Connor, was a graduate of the Urban College of Propaganda Fide and possessed one of the finest theological educations. The difficulty of obtaining suitable books from Europe led Kenrick to author texts that accommodated the American situation, since unchanging moral
principles need application to various circumstances. In short, he attempted to carry on a discipline developed in Europe in an American setting:

American seminaries needed texts suited to their needs, and [Kenrick] responded with the manuals of moral theology that followed a sketch laid out in the *Ratio Studiorum* of the Jesuits, included some questions from the *prima secundae* of Aquinas’ *Summa* and then attended to a wide variety of cases of conscience ordered according to the commandments, the sacraments, and censures.\(^{196}\)

O’Connor, who had served as rector of the Philadelphia seminary under Kenrick, clearly saw that these texts would be of enormous value in training “missionaries” to minister to both native Americans and immigrants.

The seminarians at St. Michael’s could not have studied these areas in great depth since the entire course of theological studies seems to have lasted for only two years generally. The students had one or two classes a day, and some of the more advanced students acted as teachers to younger students. They would be ordained to the priesthood when the bishop and the seminary president, who had been placed in charge of their training, decided that they had acquired the knowledge necessary for their future work. Published histories of American Catholic seminaries of that time note the absence of such documentation, reflective of the challenging efforts to open and maintain a seminary and to obtain and retain a faculty in a missionary country where daily challenges facing bishops and the small number of clergy did not facilitate historical record keeping.

Bishop O’Connor was a regular visitor at the seminary during its periods of location at Birmingham and Glenwood. This European-trained prelate (like his successor, Bishop Michael Domenec) lived out the directives of the Council of Trent with respect to his seminarians. While limited residential opportunities necessitated that seminarians stay initially in Bishop O’Connor’s own rented residence, later developments took the increasing number of seminarians to their own building(s), sometimes at a considerable distance. The Catholic mentions only one visit by the bishop to the Summit but describes several of the bishop’s visits to St. Michael’s in its Birmingham and Glenwood locations. Ordinations of seminarians to minor orders, subdiaconate, diaconate, and priesthood normally took place at St. Paul Cathedral. There are no mentions of such ceremonies — or of Benediction, Vespers, or Pontifical Masses — at the seminary. This can be explained by the lack of a true chapel in Birmingham and a modestly sized chapel in Glenwood. As will be noted below, this stands in sharp contrast with Bishop Domenec’s approach, especially following construction of an addition with enlarged chapel to the Glenwood building.

Interaction between seminarians and diocesan priests occurred naturally in the early period when seminarians lived at the bishop’s residence near the cathedral. Participating priests would have encountered seminarians during liturgical ceremonies and informally while visiting at the bishop’s residence. The two suspensions of seminary operations when seminarians were sent outside the diocese frustrated interaction with Pittsburgh priests. The isolation of seminarians at the Summit severely limited contacts with diocesan priests. Reopening of the seminary at Glenwood opened new possibilities for contacts. O’Connor, unlike his successor, did not hold clergy retreats at the seminary. The potential for interaction between priests and their future colleagues was stronger for those students who did not return home during the summer months — and that would have been the case for immigrant students.

Ecclesiastical events provided varied opportunities for interaction between seminarians and priests, of which the following are examples. Holy Thursday ceremonies in 1858 were held at St. Paul Cathedral with Bishop John H. Luers of Fort Wayne officiating (in the absence of Bishop O’Connor).\(^{197}\) Seminarian Frederick Seneca of St. Michael’s Seminary acted as sub-deacon, while “the students of St. Michael’s Seminary also assisted in the ceremonies.”\(^{198}\) Seminarians were present at the funeral of Father Thomas McCullagh, first priest ordained in Pittsburgh in 1844 after completing his ecclesiastical studies at the bishop’s new seminary (in the bishop’s residence), who died prematurely in June 1859 at age thirty-nine. McCullagh had served, beginning in 1846, as president of St. Michael’s.

The seminary’s president and faculty were frequently in demand as speakers, such as at the opening of St. Francis Academy in Loretto on February 12, 1857.\(^{199}\) Bishop O’Connor held a diocesan synod at the seminary, rather than at the traditional location of St. Paul Cathedral, on August 12, 1858.\(^{200}\)

The staffing of the seminary was not exclusively clerical. Bishop O’Connor appointed Mrs. Milburg Kean (1798-1878) as matron at St. Michael’s. She was the granddaughter of Captain Michael McGuire (1717-1793) of Revolutionary War fame, who was the first settler in Cambria County and the donor of land to Prince Demetrius Gallitzin for the establishment of the Catholic community of Loretto in Cambria County. Gallitzin officiated at her marriage, baptized her five children, and counseled her when she became a widow at age thirty. O’Connor had selected Mrs. Kean to manage St. Paul’s Orphan
Asylum in the interval between the departure of the Sisters of Charity and the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy. Her duties at the seminary would have been to provide administrative support to the president and oversee the domestic affairs of the seminary (the provision of food, medical, and laundry services, with attendant budgetary responsibilities). The term “matron” is derived from the Latin word *mater* (mother) and aptly describes Kean’s responsibilities as “mother” to hundreds of seminarians (and resident priests) over time.201

**Examinations**

Post-elementary education in the latter half of the nineteenth century was rigorous. The European format of lectures with written examinations and oral examinations by faculty, often in front of other academics or the public, was the norm. In ecclesiastical education, the developed Roman system of public disputation, where students were presented with certain theses in the subject matter (theology, history, etc.) and subjected to questioning by faculty — and at times by members of the audience in attendance — was carried over to the nascent American seminaries by officials such as Bishop O’Connor, who had been both a student and a professor in Rome. He introduced that teaching approach to St. Michael’s Seminary. Many of the seminary professors had experienced that system and replicated it at St. Michael’s.

O’Connor’s successor, Bishop Michael Domenec — who had also been trained in that system in Europe and had utilized it at the three American seminaries he supervised as a Vincentian prior to episcopal ordination — was quite comfortable with the system. Discharging their episcopal responsibilities as established by the Council of Trent with respect to seminary training, both bishops personally attended and participated in the examinations held at the end of each semester. All students (including the Preparatory Department) were subjected to written and oral examinations, but students in philosophy and theology were examined in the disputation fashion. Presented with certain theses, each student would be challenged by other students, who would contest the theses; clergy who were present (including the bishop) would then enter the contest to test the student’s knowledge of the subject matter and his ability to withstand oral challenges. The degree of mastery demonstrated would attest to both the quality of the faculty’s instruction as well as to the intelligence and educational application by the student. Medals would be awarded. Those students who demonstrated exceptional talent would typically be sent to Rome for continuation of ecclesiastical studies; this increasingly became the case after the opening of the North American College in the Eternal City in 1859.

An example of this approach was provided in a newspaper article that reported, but did not translate, the December 1859 examinations in Latin:

At the close of the Christmas examination, at St. Michael’s Seminary, the following theses were defended by Mr. P. Ward, Messrs. E. A. Bush and J. A. Canavin, arguing against them in scholastic form.

| I. Quae per intuitionem immediatam, vel semilem vel rationalem, cognoscimus, tanquam certa et vera omnino sunt admittenda. |
| Conclusionibus, quae per ratiocinia materialiter et formaliter recta derivantur, falsum abesse nequit. |
| Auctoritas humana, requisitis ornata conditionibus, in rebus facti persaepe veri nomina gignit certitudinem. |
| Falsum est omnia in philosophia esse demonstranda; aliqua enim sunt principia per se clara atque evidentia. Methodus tamen, qui Cartesius ex principio illo inconcusso, Cogita ergo sum, alias omnes veritates deducere valuit, non videtur probanda. |
| Judicia quaedam ad hominum vitam physicam vel moralem regendam tendentia, quae seper, ubique et ab omnibus admissa sunt, cum nonnisi ex natura rationali oriit potuerint, ceu vera sunt habenda; attamen, sensus naturae communis, tanquam instinctus rationalis mentum ad assensum impellens, sine ulla motovorum consideratione, respuendus eat prosus; multo etiam minus in consensu totius humani generis primum ac absolutum certitudinis principium reponi potest. |
| Certitudinis ultima ratio reponenda est in evidentia objectiva, quae ab intellectu apprehendatur. |
The December 1859 examinations lasted two days. Clergy attended the first day’s exams and one of the priests reported to the Catholic their collective satisfaction with the proficiency of the students. Answering in the Preparatory Department was not just “very good” but “admirable.” The reporter noted that:

The *thesis*, which we give below, were assailed and defended in regular scholastic form, with a free and fluent use of syllogism and distinction, for which we were not prepared. It was easy to see that the Theology classes at St. Michael’s are conducted on the plan of the best European colleges and, indeed, we have often heard worse arguing and a worse defence in some of the time-honored institutions of the old world, than were made at the Seminary, on Thursday. When the regular arguers had done their best, the clergymen present were invited to try a lance against the faith of the defendant. One entered the lists, and pressed the used-up middle term of one of the arguers, by two additional *subsumpta*, but only to be distinguished to death, like his predecessors. Mr. Ward defended on the occasion, and Messrs. Bush, Tobin, and Burke argued.

| I. | *Non uno in loco S. S. Litterae unicum divinam in tribus realiter distinctis personis subsistere doceut.* |
| II. | *Preclarum vero imprimit exsurgit argumentum ad hoc dogma capitale nostrae religionis firmandum, si Joh. x. 30 cum Joh. v. 7 conferamus.* |
| III. | *Vocabulum Trinitatus iam ab secundo rei Christianae saeculo adlibetur ad numerum Divinarum personarum significandum: tam areta vero est hujus Trinitatis in unitatem recapitulatio, ut licet Filius *alius* a Patre dicatur nullo modo eum *aliud* a Patre praedicare fas sit.* |
| IV. | *Cum, monente Apostolo, proprietas servanda sit sanorum verborum, statuimus cum Angeli-co Praeceptore, nomina substantiva essentiam significantia, de tribus personis singulariter tantum esse praedicanda, adjectiva, e contra, in plurali, nomina essentialia concreta pro persona supponere posse, non ita autem nomina abstracta quae ad essentiam pertineant.* |
| V. | *Septem sunt N. Legis Sacramenta a Christo Domino Nostro instituta.* |
| VI. | *Quae non solum gratiae significandae vin habent, verum eam non ponentibus obicem con- ferunt ex opere operato.* |
| VII. | *Inter haec numeros Ordinem, quo spiritualis traditur potestas, sacramenta conficiendi et conferendi, aesteraque munia Ecclesiastica rite obeundi.* |
| VIII. | *Haec praepice de Sacerdotio N. Legis asserimus quod solis Apostolis proprium, non omnibus fidelibus commune ritu externo in saeculi usque finem propagandum, a Christo fuit institutum.* |

**Seminary Stability at Last**

Location of the seminary at Glenwood brought stability to the institution. The existence of both preparatory and theological departments, the enlargement of the seminary faculty with its degree members, and the ease of access to the seminary in its new location on a river adjacent to the see city proved attractive to both bishops and seminarians in other dioceses. The bishops of Erie and Fort Wayne sent their seminarians to St. Michael’s for ecclesiastical training, and young men on their own came to the seminary for an education.

But the deciding influence was Bishop Michael O’Connor himself. His reputation as a Roman-trained seminary rector and educator, his assembly of a qualified faculty that included Roman-trained priests with pontifical degrees, and his role in drafting seminary legislation for the Provincial Council of Baltimore combined with the geographical accessibility of Pittsburgh...
(thanks to its rivers and the developing railroad system) attracted students from the eastern and mid-western United States to St. Michael’s.

Just as Pittsburgh was a major destination for immigrants, so it also proved to be a destination for those seeking to become priests. Some would receive their entire ecclesiastical education at St. Michael’s; others transferred from seminaries to complete their education; and some would study at St. Michael’s for a time before moving on to another of the few diocesan seminaries or before entering a religious order such as the Benedictines, Passionists, Redemptorists, or Jesuits.

The problems that Bishop O’Connor faced were not unique among the early American dioceses. Most bishops of newly established sees had quickly established seminaries in their own residences as had O’Connor at the beginning. All faced the same issues of physical accommodations, lack of faculty, finances, and the necessity of the bishop personally instructing students or drawing priests from parochial assignments to teach. Unlike Pittsburgh, most other dioceses operated seminaries for very small numbers of students.

**Resignation of Bishop O’Connor**

After almost two decades of further reflection on his original plan to join the Jesuits, Michael O’Connor finally acted. He left for Rome in mid-July 1859 to present his resignation to Roman authorities, leaving his brother Father James O’Connor as administrator of the diocese in his absence. After considerable lobbying, the bishop obtained papal approval on May 23, 1860, after signing a formal resignation letter dated May 20, 1860. Rome’s announcement of the bishop’s resignation was received back in Pittsburgh, to which he had returned, on June 15. Rumors of his impending resignation had been circulating in Pittsburgh for some time. O’Connor published a valedictory in the *Catholic* on June 18 — having already departed for New York.

The trustees of St. Paul Cathedral then proceeded to convene a meeting of the cathedral congregation and obtained approval of an address to recognize the heroic contribution of the first bishop of Pittsburgh — particularly as regards the establishment of St. Michael’s Seminary. That address read in pertinent part:

> St. Michael’s Seminary, too, the work of your hands, blessed with that success peculiar to all you have undertaken in the cause of religion, and now unmistakably promising to become the fruitful source of the Gospel to dispense the blessings of religion throughout the diocese.205

The laity clearly appreciated the importance of St. Michael’s Seminary and Bishop O’Connor’s continuous efforts over seventeen years to establish and sustain its ecclesiastical program.

At the time of O’Connor’s departure from Pittsburgh in June 1860, he wrote to the Paris Council of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and presented the results of the priority he gave to providing priests for his missionary diocese, to which the establishment and operation of St. Michael’s Seminary was key: he had increased the number of priests in the Diocese of Pittsburgh to eighty-two from the original fifteen — not counting those ceded to the Diocese of Erie upon its establishment in 1853, nor the more than twenty priests who left to enter religious orders or serve in other dioceses, nor the many priests who had died during his tenure. Moreover, he noted that many seminarians had left for other jurisdictions as they neared the completion of their studies at St. Michael’s Seminary, yet the number of seminarians had grown to 40 and were being educated in an excellent seminary.206 If Michael O’Connor had accomplished nothing else during his seventeen-year episcopate, this one achievement surpassed all others in importance.
Endnotes for Chapter I. The Rise of Seminaries:


3 Tradition held that St. John ordained Polycarp (ca. 69-ca. 155) as bishop of Smyrna, which position he held for some six decades, from the close of the first century to the mid-second century. Ignatius (ca. 35-ca. 108) later served as bishop of Antioch.


6 The statement frequently made (see Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 13 [New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1912], 695) that Pole’s decree was the first time that the word seminarium was used to designate a school exclusively devoted to the training of the clergy, is no longer held to be true.


9 Borromeo presented principles of seminary formation in his Institutiones ad universam seminarii regimen pertinentes, which would influence the conduct of seminaries.

10 The English and the Irish denominated their continental seminaries as “colleges.”


Endnotes for Chapter II. The Development of Seminaries in the United States:


3 This type of seminary included such institutions as the Philosophical and Classical Seminary of the Diocese of Charleston, which was opened in 1822 by Bishop John England.


5 John Baptist Mary David had been a professor and interim president of St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore.

6 W. J. Howlett, Historical Tribute to St. Thomas’ Seminary at Poplar Neck, Near Bardstown, Kentucky (St Louis: Herder, 1906), 26; M. J. Spalding, Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky from their Commencement in 1777 to the Jubilee of 1826-7 (Louisville: J. Webb & Brother, 1844), 189; J. Herman Schauinger, Cathedrals in the Wilderness (Milwaukee: Bruce Publisher, 1952), 1, 20-21, 42, 55; Dixie Hibbs, Basilica of St. Joseph Proto Cathedral Founded in 1816: St. Joseph College 1819-1889 Bardstown, Kentucky (New Hope, KY: St. Martin de Porres Print Shop, 2016). 3. Flaget was no stranger to Pittsburgh, having ministered as a priest to Catholics in the town in May-November 1792 due to travel conditions that prevented him from heading west to his destination at Fort Vincennes in Indiana. It was during this initial stay in Pittsburgh that the future bishop learned English.

7 The Benedictine plan for an American seminary to provide German clergy in the United States was presented by Rev. Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., prefect of the Hollandium (a boarding school under royal patronage) in Munich, Bavaria in an article entitled "Uber die Missionen," Augsburger Postszeitung, November 8, 1845.
Endnotes: Chapter III

Endnotes for Chapter III. The Diocese of Pittsburgh:

(1) The text of the papal bull appears in Donald C. Shearer, Pontificia Americana: A Documentary History of the Catholic Church in the United States (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1933), 216-218.


(5) Szarnicki, Michael O'Connor, 34.

(6) The Jesuits' Woodstock Letters recount the story of O'Connor's rise to the episcopate in these words: "Thus, the heavy honors of the Church were accepted through obedience, and instead of washing dishes at S. Andrea [al Quirinale, the Jesuit Church in Rome serving the Jesuit seminary novitiate], the would-be novice is crowned with a mitre at S. Agatha [the church of the Irish College in Rome, in which O'Connor was ordained bishop]. "Father Michael O'Connor," Woodstock Letters, vol. 2 (Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College, 1873), 62.

(7) Three mission aid societies had been formed in Europe:

(1) The Society for the Propagation of the Faith: Venerable Pauline-Marie Jaricot (1799-1862) founded the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1822 in Lyon, France as a charitable organization to support the missions worldwide. Her brother, who was a student at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris, spurred Jaricot's interest. A Council governed the Society in Lyon. A Council was short-ly thereafter organized in Paris — and these became the two French organizations to which missionary bishops such as Michael O'Connor would direct requests for financial assistance. The Diocese of Pittsburgh would receive from the Society $85,600 between 1843-1868 (comprising the entire administration of Bishop O'Connor and the first half of the administration of his successor, Bishop Michael Domec). The Society published its yearly Annales de la Propagation de la Foi (Annuals), which provided a record of its income and its expenditures.

(2) Leopoldinen Stiftung: The Leopoldine Foundation — named after Maria Leopoldina of Austria, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Empress of Brazil — was established, with the support of both the Church and the Austrian imperial family, in Vienna in 1829 for the purpose of aiding Catholic missions in North America. Its published reports were the Berichte de Leopoldinen-Stiftung im Kaiserthum Oesterreich.


Szarnicki, Michael O'Connor, 36.


(9) Biographical record of Richard H. Wilson, Archives of the Diocese of Pittsburgh (hereinafter cited as ADP).


14 The “Royal College of St. Patrick” was established by an Act of the Parliament of Ireland in 1795 to provide a university education for ecclesiastical and lay students. Until then, seminarians had been educated on the European continent due to penal laws against the Catholic Irish. The institution’s principal histories are: (1) Patrick J. Corish, Maynooth College 1795-1995 (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1994), (2) Jeremiah Newman, St. Patrick’s Col- lege Maynooth (Dublin: Eason & Son, 1984), (3) John Healy, Maynooath College: Its Centenary History 1795-1895 (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1895), and (4) Salvador Ryan and John-Paul Sheridan, ed., We Remember Maynooth: A College Across Four Centuries (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2020).

15 The visit to Maynooth and the ensuing developments are described in Tobias Mullen, Reminiscences of The Rev. Thomas McCullagh, of the Diocese of Pittsburg (New York: Office of the Metropolitan Record, 1861) [The greater part of the memoir had appeared in the columns of New York’s Metropol- itan Record in the summer of 1860]. The students who accompanied O’Connor to Pittsburgh were Thomas McCullagh, Peter Brown, Tobias Mullen (future bishop of Erie), Patrick Duffy, Thomas B. O’Flaherty, John C. Brady, Hugh Gallagher, Cornelius McGrath, and Michael J. Mitchell (who joined the party in Philadelphia). Few appear in the published matriculation records of Maynooth by Patrick J. Hamell, Maynooath Students and Ordinations Index 1795-1895 (Maynooth: Cardinal Press, 1982). There is some dispute as to the number of initial seminarians that accompanied O’Connor; the original history of the Sisters of Mercy gives the number as six. See Memoirs of the Pittsburgh Sisters of Mercy Compiled from Various Sources 1843-1917 (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1918), 10.


19 Until this present work, no comprehensive history of St. Michael’s Seminary has been written. Only three brief treatments of the seminary’s history have reached print: (1) “St. Michael’s Preparatory and Theological Seminary” in Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 324-325, (2) “St. Michael’s Theological and Preparatory Seminary” in Lambing, History, 470-473, and (3) “St. Michael’s Seminary,” Pittsburgh Catholic, September 22, 1910, 20. The Archives of the Diocese of Pittsburgh contain two manuscript histories: (1) Thomas S. O’Connor, “The Life of the Diocesan Seminary in Western Pennsylvania” of ten pages, and (2) James Sullivan, “St. Michael’s Diocesan Seminary” of eleven pages. Both restate Lambing’s published histories relating to the seminary.

Endnotes for Chapter IV. St. Michael’s Seminary — The Years of Bishop Michael O’Connor:

Statistics of the Catholic Church, in the City of Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” Harris’ Business Directory of the Cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, 1844 (Pittsburgh: A. A. Anderson, 1844), 60-61. Inclusion of Father Tobias Mullen indicates that the Directory was published after the latter’s ordination on September 1, 1844. The seminarians are not listed.

The remnant of the burial ground survives in the courtyard of Trinity Cathedral, in the block between Wood and Smithfield Streets. Virgin Alley was thereafter the city’s name was frequently omitted from its mas.


Other ordinations followed at irregular intervals: William Creeden on June 6, 1847. “Ordination,” Pittsburgh Catholic, June 19, 1847, 108. Many of these priests would in time leave the Pittsburgh diocese for other American dioceses.

12 Real estate investment ventures were integral to O'Connor's financing of the expansion of the diocese. In 1852, O'Connor sought to convince the newly arrived Passionists to accept as the location of their new monastery the twenty acres that he had set aside from his purchase of fifty acres in Lawrenceville for St. Mary Cemetery. That acreage was "set aside to be sold to defray the cost of the entire purchase." The Passionists declined the offer, and the bishop sold the twenty acres that would constitute Allegheny Cemetery. Cassian J. Yuhaus, Compelled to Speak: The Passionists in America — Origin and Apostolate (New York: Newman Press, 1967), 46.

13 Pittsburgh Catholic, June 15, 1844, 108.

14 Subscriptions produced only $2,000. The Account of Subscriptions towards erecting an Episcopalian residence and Ecclesiastical Seminary 1844 survives in the diocesan Archives. The 48-page ledger evidences that the typical financial commitment of a parishioner was $1 to $2, with some in the $5 to $10 range, and one committing to $300.

The following year, O'Connor would himself buy farmland in Lower St. Clair Township, with a portion set aside for ecclesiastical uses (St. Paul of the Cross Monastery, St. Michael Church complex, and a residence that would successfully serve the Presentation Brothers and St. Michael's Seminary); the remainder of the land was sold. Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 324. Those developments are detailed below.

15 The Annals of the Society include this entry in the Society's record of distributions to the missions in 1844: "To the Right Rev. Dr. O'Connor, Bishop of Pittsburg 26,000 fr. " Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, For the Year 1845, vol. 6 (London: Published for the Institution, 1845), 146.

16 Szarnicki, Michael O'Connor, 48.


18 Pittsburgh Catholic, June 29, 1844, 125.

19 Ibid.

20 For the years of O'Connor's episcopate (1843-1860), the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith: A Periodical Collection of Letters from the Bishops and Missionaries Employed in the Missions of the Old and New World, vol. 5-14, for the years 1844-1853 were published in English in London by the Institution. Beginning in 1854, the Annals were published in Dublin for the Central Committee of the Association for Ireland, with a renumbered volume series — which accounts for the difference in volume numbers in the accompanying chart.

21 Roemer, Ten Decades of Alms, 121; Roemer, The Ludwig-Missionsverein, 106-107, 62. Roemer treated the gold given to O'Connor as equivalent to $1,119. Alms from Bavaria resumed under O'Connor's successor; ultimately, the Bavarian society provided the Pittsburgh diocese with $9,000 (not including direct aid to German parishes and religious orders) during the first three decades of its existence (1843-1868). Roemer, Ten Decades of Alms, 121, 129.

22 "Acknowledged," Pittsburgh Catholic, August 24, 1844, 189.

23 "To the Congregation of St. Paul's Church," Pittsburgh Catholic, October 5, 1844, 237.

24 The legislation of diocesan synods prior to 1854 has not survived. While it is possible that a synod prior to 1854 directed an annual seminary collection, there is no surviving corroboration in the diocesan archives or the diocesan newspaper.

25 Szarnicki, Michael O'Connor, 24-25.

26 Father Wilson was also serving St. Benedict's Congregation for Colored Catholics, which he had started with a frame building on Smithfield Street (near Diamond Street) for their use. The Black Catholic population was estimated to total about twenty out of three thousand. This effort lasted less than one year and ended with Father Wilson's departure. Pittsburgh Catholic, October 23, 1941, 2.

27 Michael O'Connor to Paul Cullen, Pittsburgh, August 1844, in "Papers Relating to the Church in America: From the Portfolio of the Irish College at Rome, First Series," Records of the American Catholic Historical Society 7, no. 3 (September 1896), 360. Cullen (1803-1878) was rector of the Irish College in Rome, and later became rector of the College de Propaganda Fide, archbishop of Armagh, archbishop of Dublin, and Ireland's first cardinal.

28 Michael O'Connor to Paul Cullen, Pittsburgh, August 27, 1844, in Ibid., 354. Wilson took a brief parochial assignment in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and then left for the Diocese of Philadelphia. He died in Matanzas, Cuba on August 16, 1856. ADP.

29 The order was formally known as the Congregation of the Mission, and operated St. Mary of the Barrens Seminary in Missouri. For their history, see John E. Rybolt, ed., The American Vincentians: A Popular History of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States 1815-1987 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1980).

30 O'Connor, The Price of the Spirit, 12, 21. O'Connor emphasized that the bishop sold the twenty acres that he had set aside for the seminary, and one committing to $300.

31 Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 71-75. The 1969 revision of the General Roman Calendar transferred the feast of St. Vincent de Paul from July 19 to September 27.

32 Francis Patrick Kerrick, Diary and Visitations of the Rt. Rev. Francis Patrick Kerrick, Administrator and Bishop of Philadelphia 1830-1851, Later Archbishop of Baltimore, ed. Francis E. Tourscher (Lancaster, PA: Wickersham Printing Co., 1916), 18, 210. While at St. Vincent's, Bishop Kerrick wrote on July 16, 1842 to Father John Timon, superior of the Vincentians, about staffing the planned seminary. As noted above, O'Connor revisited the idea with Timon in 1844, but with the seminary to be located in Pittsburgh.

33 Michael O'Connor to James O'Connor, Cambria County, September 16, 1844, as quoted in Szarnicki, Michael O'Connor, 56.

34 John Baptist Purcell (1800-1833) served as second bishop and first archbishop of Cincinnati. See Sr. Mary Agnes McCann, Archbishop Purcell and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati: A Study Based on Original Sources (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1918).

35 Michael O'Connor to John Purcell, Pittsburgh, April 30, 1845 and December 16, 1845, cited in Szarnicki, Michael O'Connor, 63, 193.
By the late 1700s, the south side of the Monongahela River became known for its rich deposit of coal — the “Pittsburgh Seam” that stretched for

Father O’Mealy, while stationed at Portsmouth in Scioto County, also attended the towns of Ripley, Aberdeen, and New Richmond. Upon his return to the Cincinnati diocese, he was appointed pastor of St. Joseph parish in Dayton, Montgomery County.


Bishop O’Connor would later entrust the land to Boniface Wimmer, who took possession on October 24, 1846, and then opened a college-seminary on the site in 1846.

Miller, A History of the Athenaeum, 30. O’Mealy’s residence at the cathedral is confirmed by the Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laitly’s Directory. His stay in Pittsburgh is noted in all of the histories of the Cincinnati seminaries, but not in the published histories of the Cincinnati archdiocese or the biographies of Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati. O’Mealy’s service in Cincinnati following his return there in 1849 was relatively short, as he died on October 20, 1856. Biographical Record of Joseph O’Mealy, ADP.


Michael O’Connor to James O’Connor, Liverpool, November 19, 1845, appearing in “Papers Relating to the Church in America,” 361-362.

Szar nicki, Michael O’Connor, 56.

Michael O’Connor to Paris Council of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Pittsburgh, February 24, 1845, as quoted in Szar nicki, Michael O’Connor, 56-57.


Michael O’Connor to Paris Council for the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, Pittsburgh, May 9, 1845, as quoted in Szar nicki, Michael O’Connor, 56-57.


In this early phase of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States, property was typically titled in the name of a congregation with lay trustees, rather than in the name of the bishop. Bishops, like priests, could and did purchase property in their own name. The complex history of Catholic Church property in the United States is presented in Patrick Joseph Dignan, A History of the Legal Incorporation of Catholic Church Property in the United States (1784-1932) (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1932), and John A. O’Lesary, Mode of Tenure: Roman Catholic Church Property in the United States (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1941) [with 1954 supplement].


A Pennsylvania statute enacted in 1855 abolished the corporation sole and limited the status of the bishop to that of a repository of the legal title. Act No. 347 of April 26, 1855, P.L. 328, Sec. 7 [Act Relating to Corporations and to Estates held for Corporate, Religious and Charitable Uses, Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania, Passed at the Session of 1855 (Harrisburg: A. Boyd Hamilton, 1855), 328-333.]


Davis had purchased the property from John McKee by deed dated August 4, 1835 and recorded August 5, 1835 in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds of Allegheny County (now the Department of Real Estate of Allegheny County, hereinafter cited as DREAC) in Deed Book Vol. 49, 172. The purchase price was $8,800. That deed’s legal description identified the acreage as part of the “Coal Hill Lots marked in the Plan of Sidneyville.” Davis fell into debt and a subsequent collection action in the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County led to issuance of an order to the sheriff to sell Davis’s property at auction.

Deed from “High Sheriff” Elijah Trovillo to George Rapp dated August 1, 1845 and recorded on January 20, 1846 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 72, 344.

Deed from George Rapp to Michael O’Connor, dated January 16, 1846 and recorded on January 20, 1846 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 72, 346. Typical of real estate entrepreneurs of the time, Rapp only recorded the sheriff’s “incoming” deed to him (executed almost six months earlier) immediately before recording the “outgoing” deed to O’Connor.

Lambing, History, 64. Lambing described the bishop’s purchase of the Rapp property in these words: [T]he bishop had purchased a large farm on the side and top of the hill south of Birmingham, known at present as Mt. Oliver, for which he paid, I believe, $16,000. It was a profitable investment; for afterwards perhaps $100,000 worth of building lots had been sold, the balance was assessed before the panic at $162,000. St. Michael’s Church, the Franciscan Convent, and the Passionist Monastery stand on part of it. Ibid., 64-65. Lambing stated an incorrect purchase price; the cumulative sales figure was also likely inflated.


See deed from Michael O’Connor to Anthony Calandri et al. [in trust for the Society of Passionists] dated May 27, 1853 and recorded June 7, 1853 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 108, 102. The legal description opens with recital of the starting point between land of the Ormsby heirs and property owned by O’Connor. There is no mention of an O’Connor Plan or even mention of any lot numbers.

By the late 1700s, the south side of the Monongahela River became known for its rich deposit of coal — the “Pittsburgh Seam” that stretched for
miles. Mining of bituminous coal on “Coal Hill” began in 1762. A plan of lots for Coal Hill was mapped out in 1787. Later iterations followed: some were filed after recordation of plans began on October 27, 1809. See, e.g., these recorded documents in DREAC: (1) Coal Hill Lots Plan in Plan Book Vol. 1, 11, (2) Coal Hill Lots Plan executed September 5, 1851 and filed September 7, 1853 in Plan Book Vol. 2, 48, (3) Thomas McKee Plan filed August 6, 1857 in Plan Book Vol. 2, 103, and (4) Edward M. Yard Plan filed March 1, 1859 in Plan Book Vol. 2, 129, which includes part of the O’Connor land tract, particularly as to the Pius Street area.

The absence of any reference in these recorded plans to an O’Connor Plan substantiates the present author’s conclusion as to the non-recording of any plan devised by O’Connor. Rather, it appears that O’Connor sold sections of the Rapp property, leaving it to those purchasers to record plans that either conformed to the bishop’s survey lay-out of streets in the former Rapp property or to devise their own named plan for the property they purchased from O’Connor.

The first recorded episcopal plan for O’Connor’s property in Lower St. Clair Township was Bishop Tuigg’s 1882 “Plan of Building Lots” — but that included only the remnant unsold portion west, north, and south of the Passionist Monastery and St. Michael’s Church. Nonetheless, an “O’Connor Plan” survives in lore, and there are instances where nineteenth century legal descriptions in South Side properties contain references such as “line of other lots laid out by Right Rev. Bishop O’Connor” but contain no recordation reference to an O’Connor Plan of Lots. See, e.g., deed of Robert Duncan to John Henshaw recorded August 15, 1853 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 109, 489.

O’Connor conveyed the unsold remainder of the Rapp acreage to Boremene. Some atlases thereafter identified the plan area under Domenecc’s name. Domenecc conveyed the remaining acreage to Bishop John Tuigg, who revised the original O’Connor plan in December 1881 and filed a “Plan of Building Lots” on November 6, 1882 in DREAC in Plan Book Vol. 6, 295. DREAC incorrectly indexes Tuigg’s plan under “Tuigg.”

The Tuigg plan makes clear that O’Connor’s purchase from Rapp entailed “the Slopes” rather than “the Flats” and that O’Connor had sold large tracts of land to establish (1) St. Michael parish complex, (2) St. Paul of the Cross Monastery complex, and (3) St. Michael’s Cemetery, in addition to various individual lots around St. Michael Church. Tuigg’s plan encompassed the large undeveloped remainder, stretching from Amanda Street in the west to Winter Park in the east, to St. Michael’s Cemetery in the southeast. The irregularly shaped area stretched from South 18th Street in the south to Manor Street in the north at the base of the Slopes. The remainder tract included these streets: Manor (later eliminated for railroad development), Gregory, Shamokin, Crosman, Pius, Birmingham (now Broughville), Hooestown, Nusser, Magdalena, Welsh, Monastery, St. Leo, St. Paul, Regina, St. Martin, St. Joseph, St. Michael, Thomas, Washington (now Warrington), Sharon, Angelica, Mt. Oliver, Proctor, Quarry, Roscoe, Rugoff, Wachter, and South 18th.

Viewed from the perspective of the Flats, O’Connor’s acreage on the slopes and hilltop was on an approximate line with South 7th Street and South 18th Street in the Flats. None of Pittsburgh’s first three bishops lived long enough to see the O’Connor plan area filled with hundreds of wooden structures built for the later influx of Central and Eastern European immigrants who comprised the workforce in the mills, manufacturing plants, and railroad yards that later lined the south side of the Monongahela River.

Principal among these are the G. M. Hopkins Company Map of Pittsburgh 1872-1940 and the City of Pittsburgh Geodetic and Topographic Survey Maps 1923-1961. These and other atlases and real estate plat maps appear at the Historic Pittsburgh Maps Collection website: digital.library.pitt.edu.

St. Michael’s Parish was established as a German ethnic parish in 1848. The first parish church was a frame structure, whose cornerstone was laid on July 16, 1848. The church was dedicated on November 24, 1848.

The Passionists arrived in Pittsburgh from Rome in 1852. They selected, from O’Connor’s remaining property, the ridgetop south of the Monongahela River for their monastery. The cornerstone was laid on August 7, 1853 and the building was occupied in January 1854.


See, e.g., the deed from O’Connor to William Puder (for Lot No. 73 on Pius Street), dated July 23, 1849 and recorded May 17, 1861 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 151, 44; and the deed from O’Connor to Peter Jacobs (for Lot No. 41 on Pius Street) dated October 16, 1857 and recorded April 4, 1862 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 152, 593. The significant time gaps between deed execution and recordation (typically two to five years) suggest that O’Connor took back a mortgage on each property as security, only delivering the deed for recordation upon payment of the last installment of the purchase price.

In 1848, two of the brothers were struck and killed by lightning. The remaining members disbanded shortly thereafter. Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 325-326.

St. Michael’s Church and the Passionist Monastery, atop the hill, sat on plots carved out of the thirty-seven acres of farmland that O’Connor had purchased. Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 203-204.

The farmhouse was located on Pius Street, catcormner from what would later be the site of the second St. Michael’s Church in 1881 and which was dedicated in 1886. In 1851, the former seminary building became the residence of the Sisters of Mercy, who supervised St. Paul’s Orphan Asylum for boys in part of an adjacent school. The Sisters of Mercy were succeeded by the Sisters of St. Francis in 1868, who also used the building as a convent. The Franciscans’ historian described the wooden structure thus: “The small, one-story frame house was in a dilapidated condition, sadly in need of repairs, and almost destitute of furniture.” They purchased their residence, with adjoining property, from Bishop Michael Domenecc in 1870 for $10,000. See Memoirs of the Pittsburgh Sisters of Mercy, 78; Sister M. Clarissa Popp, History of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Diocese of Pittsburgh 1868-1938 (Millvale, PA: Sisters of St. Francis, 1938), 12-13, 16, 19; Yuhau, Compelled to Speak, 122; A Story of Seventy-Five Years: diamond Jubilee 1848-1923, Saint Michael’s Parish, Pittsburgh, Pa. South Side (Pittsburgh: J. P. Killeen, 1923), 12-13, 16, 52-54. St. Michael’s parish, established in 1848, was entrusted to the Passionists in 1853. See Passionists in Pittsburgh, 1852-2002: Sesquicentennial — We Remember, We Celebrate, We Believe — “The First Foundation,” St. Paul of the Cross Monastery (Pittsburgh: St. Paul of the Cross Monastery, 2002).

The four “formal” seminary locations do not include the use of Bishop O’Connor’s episcopal residence (as distinguished from his rented quarters) by various seminarians for periods of time.


Blied, Austrian Aid to American Catholics, 126. Mosetizh’s declining health led to his return to Görz in 1851. Ibid., 128. See also Lambing, History, 165-168.


Ibid., 73-77.


Michael O’Connor to Boniface Wimmer, Pittsburgh, May 8, 1847, and Boniface Wimmer to Michael O’Connor, St. Vincent, May 10, 1847, as cited in Oetgen, Mission to America, 74-76.


92 Michael O’Connor to Boniface Wimmer, Pittsburgh, November 2, 1847 and February 15, 1848, recounted in Oetgen, Boniface Wimmer, 75-76.


94 Father Guigues had been appointed first bishop of Bytown on July 9, 1847 but was not ordained bishop until July 30, 1848. O’Connor’s visit occurred shortly before the episcopal ordination. Bytown was established in 1826 and incorporated as “Ottawa” in 1855. The Oblate novitiate’s history is given in Normand Martel, O.M.I., “Longueuil, Québec, Canada (1842-1849),” Historical Dictionary, vol. 2, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, accessed September 22, 2017, www.omiworld.org.


98 The Oblate history gives the date of their arrival as September 30, 1848. Beaudoin, “Telman.” Lambing gives a date of November 22, 1847. Additional information on the three Oblates may be found in Gaston Carrière, O.M.I., Dictionnaire Biographique des Oblats de Marie-Immaculée au Canada, vol. 1-2 (Ottawa: Editions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1976).


101 Father Telmon to Mother Bruyère, Pittsburgh, January 3, 1849, as quoted in Beaudoin, “Telmon.” The letter’s recipient was Mother Elisabeth Bruyère of the Sisters of Charity in Canada. The cause for canonization of Mother Bruyère (1818-1876) was introduced in Rome in 1978.

102 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Telmon, November 5, 1848, as quoted in Beaudoin, “Pittsburgh.”

103 P.A. Telmon to Most Rev. M. O’Connor, March 12, 1849, Diocesan Documents AD 1730 to 1900, no. 567, ADP.

104 Eugène Cauvin to Bishop Guigues, Longueuil, Canada, March 12, 1849, as quoted in Beaudoin, “Pittsburgh.”

105 Ibid.

106 Beaudoin, “Telmon.”


108 Beaudoin, “Telmon.”

109 Beaudoin, “Gaudet.”

110 Beaudoin, “Pittsburgh.”


112 Tobias Mullen, “Diocesan Seminary,” Pittsburgh Catholic, December 16, 1848, 316

113 Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 67.

114 Oetgen, An American Abbot, 82.

115 Cholera epidemics in Pittsburgh occurred in 1849, 1850, 1851, 1854, and 1855. Cholera pandemics — linked to advances in transportation and global trade, increased human migration, and the prevalence of contaminated water — afflicted the United States in the periods 1827-1835 and 1839-1856. It became the first reportable disease in the U.S. due to its impact on health. The cholera outbreak in Pittsburgh caused St. Michael’s congregation in Birmingham to make a solemn vow to St. Roch that if they were spared further deaths, the parish would set aside a holy day within eight days of the Feast of the Assumption. The parish had no further deaths in 1849 and when other cholera epidemics struck metropolitan Pittsburgh, no parishioners died. The parish continued to observe Cholera Day every year until the parish closed in 1992. The 1849 cholera outbreak in Birmingham is chronicled in Lawrence Sullivan, “When Death Visited Birmingham,” USGenWeb Archives, accessed November 26, 2017, http://files.usgwarchives.net/pa/allgheny/history/local/birmingham01.txt.

116 Michael O’Connor to James O’Connor, n.p., April 13, 1851, Archives of the Archdiocese of Omaha, as quoted in Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 67.

117 Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 118-124, 139-146.

118 Ibid., 67.

119 “Religious Intelligence,” Pittsburgh Catholic, December 6, 1851, 309. St. Mary of the Barrens Seminary was the original center of the Vincentians in the New World and the first seminary established west of the Mississippi. For its history, see Richard J. Janet, In Missouri’s Wilds: St. Mary’s of the Barrens and the American Catholic Church, 1818 to 2016 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2017).

120 Lambing, History, 325.

121 Wm. J. Howlett, Historical Tribute to St. Thomas’ Seminary at Poplar Neck near Bardstown, Kentucky (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1906), 116. St. Thomas Seminary was established by Bishop Flaget of Bardstown (now Louisville) in 1811 and became a preparatory seminary in 1818; it closed in 1869.

pers, University of Notre Dame Archives, as quoted in Thomas T. McAvoy, “The Catholic Minority in Early Pittsburgh: The First Bishop: Michael O’Connor, Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia 72, nos. 3, 4 (September, December 1961), 79-80. These incendiary nativist harangues have been described as “insulting and obscene harassments.” Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 178. The mayor whom the bishop described was the notorious Joe Barker (1806-1862), who had earlier arrested Bishop O’Connor. The bishop requested that this letter not be published by the Society in its Annals.


120 John Tuigg to Thomas Heyden, Pittsburgh, October 27, 1851, Diocesan Documents AD 1730 to 1900, no. 643, ADP (“Though seminary suspended, yet students placed into other seminaries and must be supported by the diocese.”).

121 Hussey, A History of the Seminaries of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati 1829-1879, 16.

122 The text of the papal bull appears in Shearer, Pontificia Americana: A Documentary History of the Catholic Church in the United States, 278-279.

123 Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 140.


125 O’Connor’s many trips — to a variety of European countries to raise funds and recruit priests and religious, to Canada to recruit seminary faculty, to Rome to lobby issues for himself or other members of the hierarchy, to various countries including Egypt for medical recuperation, and to Rome to attend events such as the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854 — explain in part his delay in resolving the seminary issue. The bishop’s frequent trips, each typically spanning several months, increasingly generated negative comments by clergy and laity.

126 Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 278. As we shall see shortly, this was but one of several “unlikely places” that Sheehan would recommend to O’Connor.

127 Later, the property was sold to the Diocese of Cleveland, and is now the site of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary.

128 “St. Michael’s Seminary,” Pittsburgh Catholic, October 25, 1856, 4.

129 “Collections for the Seminary,” Pittsburgh Catholic (March 30, 1850), 20.

130 Chapter II — De Seminario of the synodal legislation provided, in relevant part: “Collectio autem pro seminario habeatur in unaquaque congregatio- ne Dominica infra octavam festi Corporis Christi, vel, hoc die impedito, quamprimum fieri potest.” Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis: Lata in Synodo Dioecesana habita A.D. 1844, cum decretis in allis synodis A.D. 1846, 1854, 1858, et 1869 promulgatis (Pittsburgh: James Porter, 1870), 13. The volume includes the decrees of the first through fifth diocesan synods. The reporting of the first three synods (1844, 1846, and 1854) is cumulative, and does not distinguish between the decrees of each synod.


133 See “The following returns of the collections made on Easter Sunday for the payment of the purchase money of the Theological Seminary….” in the Pittsburgh Catholic, May 16, 1857, 85.


135 See, e.g., Pittsburgh Catholic, June 25, 1859, 132.

136 The story of Michael O’Connor’s efforts to reopen St. Michael’s Seminary in the mid-1850s paints an incomplete picture of his role in the establishment of seminaries to meet the spiritual needs of the rapidly growing Catholic population in the United States. This missionary bishop was at the forefront of his parallel efforts to establish seminaries in Louvain (Belgium) and Rome for the training of priests to serve in America. O’Connor’s initial efforts with respect to Louvain stemmed from his presence in Rome for the December 8, 1854 definition of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. He also enthusiastically supported establishment of a college in Rome — an idea formally suggested by Pope Pius IX in the Brief Obsequentissimas Letteras of January 1, 1855; O’Connor would head the committee of three bishops established by the Eighth Provincial Council of Baltimore in May 1855 to pursue the pope’s wish.


137 Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 104-105.

138 Michael O’Connor to Giacomo Cardinal Fransoni, St. Vincent, December 1854, as quoted in Oetgen, Boniface Wimmer, 112.

139 Letter from Propaganda Fide, Rome, April 21, 1855, as quoted in Oetgen, Boniface Wimmer, 114-115.


141 Oetgen, Mission to America, 103.

142 “Apostolic Brief Erecting Saint Vincent as an Abbey, August 24, 1855,” in Oetgen, Mission to America, 513-515.

143 Apostolic Brief, July 30, 1855, as quoted in Oetgen, Boniface Wimmer, 117-118.

144 See the letter of Boniface Wimmer to Giacomo Cardinal Fransoni, St. Vincent, December 18, 1855, in Oetgen, Boniface Wimmer, 172-174. The provisions of the August 24, 1855 papal brief, including those relating to the “independent seminary” for religious and diocesan seminarians are detailed in a letter from Wimmer to Abbot Peter Casaretto, Carrolltown, December 11, 1856, in Oetgen, Boniface Wimmer, 187-190.

145 Roger Fortin, Faith and Action: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 147-148. Mount St. Mary’s was proposed as the regional theological seminary, with St. Thomas Seminary in Kentucky serving as the provincial preparatory seminary.

146 Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 278.

147 “Rev. Cornelius Sheehan” in Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 278.

The rural nature of the area is evident in the fact that more than thirty years later (1889), White Township had only 383 residents. J. A. Caldwell, in St. Aloysius Cemetery. Captain McGuire's Company per the Ebensburg War Memorial Plaque), and died in 1866 at the Summit at the advanced age of 100. He is buried Ignatius Adams (b. 1766) came to Cambria County at age eighteen and was the first settler in 1784 in what would later become Cresson. Here out of the "wilderness" and cultivated to make a comfortable home for himself and his family. See "Michael Sheehan (Cambria County, PA)," Find a Grave, accessed September 22, 2022, www.findagrave.com. Moreover, a grandson of land purchaser John Wirtner was famed historian Father Modestus Wirtner, O.S.B. (1861-1948), who was alive at the time

The Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburg and Allegheny [1880] and Brief Biographical Sketches [Foundation Stones of a Great Diocese] [1914].

Letter of Kevin Petak, Esq., to the present author, Johnstown, PA, July 18, 2016, confirming the negative results of the search of public records in Cambria County.

In addition, O'Connor's efforts to improve the Irish College in Rome and his role in the acquisition of property for the future North American College in Rome provide further evidence his aptitude in real estate transactions.

Sheehan was an Irish immigrant who worked on land in Cambria County and purchased a plot of ground in White Township that he cleared out of the "wilderness" and cultivated to make a comfortable home for himself and his family. See "Michael Sheehan (Cambria County, PA)," Find a Grave, accessed September 22, 2022, www.findagrave.com. Moreover, a grandson of land purchaser John Wirtner was famed historian Father Modestus Wirtner, O.S.B. (1861-1948), who was alive at the time of publication of the St. Augustine Parish history.

The Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburg and Allegheny [1880] and Brief Biographical Sketches [Foundation Stones of a Great Diocese] [1914].

The original St. Aloysius Church was destroyed in a windstorm in 1925. A succinct history of St. Aloysius Parish and the community of Summit appears in "Mark Centennial of Summit Parish: Mountain Church was Outpost of Faith During Pioneer Days of Pennsylvania," Pittsburgh Catholic, July 28, 1938, 13.

Reflecting both the times and the practice, that plan of lots was not recorded in the Cambria County Recorder's Office. Letter of Kevin Petak, 2.


Indicative of the primitive rural setting of the seminary structure is the information contained in a newspaper advertisement of the June 1, 1857 sheriff's sale at the Cambria County Courthouse of a lot immediately adjacent to the seminary:

"Sheriff's Sales," Democrat and Sentinel [Ebensburg, PA], May 27, 1857, 1. St. Michael's Seminary was in session at that time.

Deed from Michael J. Smith to Rev. C. M. Sheehan, dated June 14, 1856 and recorded on the same day in ORDCC in Deed Book Vol. 15, 222.

Pittsburgh Catholic, August 2, 1856, 172. The eastern clergy also gathered shortly after the seminary opening, participating in a conference October 14-16, 1856. Pittsburgh Catholic, October 4, 1856, 246.

St. Michael's Seminary," Pittsburgh Catholic, October 25, 1856, 268. There are no surviving diocesan archival records relative to Catholics in Summit petitioning for location of the seminary in Cambria County or of a collection of $4,000 for that purpose. As noted above, Ignatius Adams' donation consisted of 75 acres, not the publicly reported 100 acres; see the aforementioned Petak letter regarding the size of the property.


Pittsburgh Catholic, July 11, 1857, 149.

Pittsburgh Catholic, August 22, 1857, 196.

Pittsburgh Catholic, August 8, 1857, 180; August 15, 1857, 186; August 22, 1857, 196; and, August 29, 1857, 204.


The original building on the lot later burned. There are no known photographs of the building or the block during that time period.

Deed from Rev. Cornelius M. Sheehan to Christian Reich, dated August 18, 1860 and recorded August 28, 1860 in ORDCC in Deed Book Vol. 18, 581.

Pittsburgh Catholic, November 6, 1858, 282.
Endnotes: Chapter IV

179 Cornelius Sheehan died on November 18, 1875, in Amherst County (Diocese of Richmond), Virginia and is buried in the Priests’ Section of Holy Cross Cemetery in Lynchburg (Campbell County), Virginia. Sheehan’s obituary candidly acknowledged his failings: “he may have a heavy account to settle, for false pride, for insubordination to severe commands of superiors, for self-will, where self-will was out of place.” “Rev. Cornelius M. Sheehan,” New York Freeman’s Journal, December 4, 1875, as reprinted in The Morning Star and Catholic Messenger [New Orleans], December 12, 1875, 3.

This Father Cornelius M. Sheehan should not be confused with another Father Cornelius Sheehan, also a Pittsburgh diocesan priest, who was born in 1861 (after the Summit seminary days), died in 1903, and is buried in Calvary Cemetery, Pittsburgh.

180 Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 304.


182 See James H. Merrell, Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000). The treaty settled land claims between the Six Nations and the Penn family, proprietors of the lands, where lands acquired in 1768 were called the “New Purchase.” The Purchase Line in Pennsylvania was finalized five years later, separating Indian from British colonial lands.


184 Deed from Rody Patterson to Michael O’Connor, dated November 21, 1856 and recorded January 15, 1857 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 125, 397. The 1.5-month time gap between purchase and deed recording was likely due to the bishop’s need to obtain the full purchase price. Standard practice would have entailed only a nominal down payment on the day of bid. Tendering of the deed by the sheriff would have awaited submission of the balance of the purchase price; indeed, during the interval O’Connor journeyed to Rome which afforded an opportunity to raise funds. The history of the property purchase was noted at the time of its later sale, and afterwards, in “St. Michael’s Seminary,” Pittsburgh Catholic, May 8, 1901, 16, and “40 Years Ago,” Pittsburgh Catholic, May 8, 1941, 6.

185 Deed from Rody Patterson to Michael O’Connor, dated November 21, 1856 and recorded January 15, 1857 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 125, 397.


187 Edward McMahon to James Stillinger, Pittsburgh, 1857, Diocesan Documents AD 1730 to 1900, ADP (O’Connor ordered the next Easter collection to be used to liquidate the debt for buying property near Pittsburgh for theological seminary).


189 Agreement quoted in Szarnicki, Michael O’Connor, 106.

190 Ferdinand Kittell, Souvenir of Loretto Centenary 1799-1899: October 10, 1899 (Cresson: Swope Bros., 1899), 374. The seminarians included Henry McHugh and “several other students.”

191 Declaration to Ecclesiastical Seminary, dated July 14, 1859 and recorded on December 15, 1859 in DREAC in Deed Book Vol. 141, 490.

192 Pittsburgh Catholic, July 3, 1858, 140.


194 Francis P. Kenrick, Theologiae Moralis, concinnatae a Francisco Patricio Kenrick (Philadelphia: Eugenium Cummiskey, 1841-1843), 3 vol.


197 Luers (1819-1871) had been ordained a priest (1846) of the then-Diocese of Cincinnati by Bishop John B. Purcell (1800-1883), who as archbishop of Cincinnati later ordained the 37-year-old Luers as bishop of Fort Wayne in 1857. Luers became a fast friend of O’Connor through Purcell who was, like O’Connor, a native of County Cork, Ireland.

198 “Holy Week,” Pittsburgh Post, April 2, 1858, 2.

199 Pittsburgh Catholic, February 21, 1857, 405.

200 “Retreat and Synod of the Clergy of this Diocese,” Pittsburgh Catholic, July 3, 1858, 140.


202 Pittsburgh Catholic, January 1, 1859, 346. The Catholic did not provide a translation for readers who had not studied Latin. The Latin text appears as printed, including typesetter’s errors.

203 Pittsburgh Catholic, December 31, 1859, 348. The Latin text appears as printed, including typesetter’s errors.

204 Lambing, History, 79, citing the Diocesan Register.
