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New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

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March 21, 1981
Capturing the Usable Past:
Preserving and Interpreting New Jersey’s Social and Cultural History through Catholic Records
March Conference Planned

Seton Hall University will host a daylong conference on Saturday, March 21, 1981, entitled “Capturing the Usable Past: Preserving and Interpreting New Jersey’s Social and Cultural History Through Church Records,” which will bring together individuals involved in documenting the state’s heritage. Sponsored by the NJCHRC and Seton Hall’s History Department, and funded in part by a grant from the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, the program will explore the ways in which church records can be utilized to help explain the state’s social and cultural development.

The dialogue should serve to stimulate a greater interest in preserving church records and cultivate a greater awareness of their value. Though several encouraging signs have marked the development of religious archives in recent years, much work remains to be done. As historians seek to interpret the lives of less articulate Americans, they are faced with the problem of gathering relevant sources. Church records constitute invaluable and often largely untapped resources. Religious life and ceremony have affected countless individuals. Churches touch people (and record significant information) at critical moments in their lives. Their social welfare agencies and field workers have reached far beyond the pulpit. In short, religious records offer information and insights largely unavailable elsewhere.

Jay P. Dolan, Associate Professor of History and Director of the Center for the Study of American Catholicism at Notre Dame University, will begin the program with an address on “Writing Social and Cultural History from Church Records.” Dolan has utilized extensive Catholic parish and institutional records in constructing two major historical interpretations, The Immigrant Church: New York’s Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865 and Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830-1900. The format will allow substantial time for audience participation and discussion following Dolan’s presentation.

At lunch, Msgr. William Noe Field, Seton Hall’s Librarian Emeritus and Curator of Archives, Rare Books, and Special Collections, will speak on “Building Significant Catholic

In Memoriam

Reverend William Keller, a founding member of the New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission, died suddenly on Saturday, January 31, 1981. A 1943 graduate of Seton Hall University, Father Keller was ordained in 1947 and served in St. Patrick’s parish, Jersey City, until 1951. He then joined the faculty of Seton Hall University and was, at the time of his death, an associate professor of history. He wrote on the early history of Catholics in New Jersey, and in 1975 served on the committee which shaped the program that became the Catholic Historical Records Commission. Father Keller was a Fulbright scholar in Italy in 1959.

R.I.P.

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(Cont.)
panels anticipate considerable interaction with the audience as part of their presentation.

The program should prove especially helpful to those individuals who are about to begin writing local or institutional histories dealing with church records in the state.

To attend the conference, fill out the registration form and return it, with a check made payable to "N.J. Catholic Historical Records Commission," as soon as possible.

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Trenton Diocesan Centennial

"Alive in Faith" constitutes the Diocese of Trenton's centennial theme. Though the 100th anniversary celebration will culminate August 9 in a day-long Diocesan Centennial Festival and Mass of Thanksgiving at the Garden State Arts Center in Holmdel, numerous other events have been scheduled throughout 1981.

A traveling display, constructed by Lynch Industries of Pennsauken, will be exhibited at the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton, parishes, shopping malls, libraries, and town halls throughout the Diocese's eight counties. This audio-visual presentation includes segments highlighting Trenton's eight bishops, parish architecture, the ecumenical movement, and the diocesan seat. Adult visitors to the exhibit will receive a brief, printed centennial history; children will be given an activity book that illustrates diocesan development through drawings, puzzles, and pictures. Deacons Charles Paolino, Richard Kazimir, John Fitzsimmons, and Sam Sciarrotta are responsible for coordinating the display.

Other activities, corresponding with the Catholic Church's liturgical seasons, will stress communication between clergy and laity, a reaffirmation of religious faith, and reflection on the meaning of church history. Rev. Casimir H. Ladzinski and Rev. James J. McConnell will coordinate these phases of the celebration.

Msgr. John B. Szymanski, pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Old Bridge, chairs the committee that is planning the massive August 9 Festival at the Arts Center. Admission to this program, which will run from noon until 6:00 p.m., is free. Audio-visual displays relating to diocesan and parish history will be featured. Each parish has been invited to construct its own individual display, emphasizing its unique development through photographs, artifacts, etc. A concert-style musical program of traditional and contemporary religious music, in addition to ethnic songs and dances, will also be featured. Bishop John C. Reiss will serve as principal celebrant and homilist at a 3:30 p.m. Mass of Thanksgiving in the Arts Center Amphitheater. All priests of the Diocese have been asked to concelebrate.

August 11 marks the actual date of the Diocese's 100th anniversary, and a 4:00 p.m. Mass of Commemoration at St. Mary's Cathedral, Trenton, will mark the occasion. Limited seating necessitates that this event be by invitation only, and each parish, diocesan office, ministry, institution, and organization will be allotted a specific number of seats.

Another interesting feature of the celebration is a series of eight "Centennial Minutes of the Trenton Diocese," which will be aired on all radio stations throughout the eight counties between January and August. Prepared by Rev. Jerry J. Wieciek, in cooperation with John Anastasio and Jack Schuster of WHWH radio, these sixty-second radio spots discuss significant moments in the state's Catholic history.