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New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

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VOLUME III NO 3

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Residents of St. Joseph's Home for Boys, 1908, gather solemnly on the steps of their Jersey City residence for a group portrait. The Sisters of St. Joseph conducted homes for orphaned boys and girls in Jersey City, as well as the more famous Home for the Blind.

NEH Grant Received

The New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission has received a \$63,385 grant from the Research Programs division of the National Endowment for the Humanities to conduct on-site surveys of Roman Catholic parish and institutional (including educational, charitable, health care, child care, and fraternal) records in New Jersey's seven northern counties. Three surveyors, working under the direction of Seton Hall archivist Peter J. Wosh, will visit institutions in the Newark and Paterson dioceses, as well as the Eparchy of Passaic. In addition to recording the nature, scope, and value of Catholic records, the project will attempt to increase institutional awareness of valuable historical materials, initiate the rescue of physically endangered items, and offer participating institutions advice and assistance concerning records maintenance and preservation. Researchers will especially benefit from the preparation of a guide to northern New Jersey's Catholic records, which will be available at the cost of xeroxing upon the project's completion.

Bishops from the participating dioceses enthusiastically supported the proposal, with Newark's Peter L. Gerety hailing it as "a step toward our goal of producing a history of the Catholic Church in the State of New Jersey," and Frank J. Rodimer of Paterson commenting that "it is important that we do whatever we can to preserve the record of the faith-journey our people have made since the eighteenth century." Passaic's Bishop Michael Dudick also requested that all pastors "make every effort to cooperate with this project." Msgr. Francis Seymour, Rev. Raymond J. Kupke, and Msgr. Robert Moneta will help coordinate the survey in their respective sees.

Though ecclesiastical attempts to improve records maintenance and encourage historical interest at the local level date to the Catholic Church's earliest New Jersey days, few attempts match this project's scope and ambition. Bishop James Roosevelt Bayley, an amateur historian and avid manuscript collector, recognized the sound administrative and historical reasons for establishing good record-keeping practices shortly following his 1853 appointment to the Newark see. Consistent with Canon Law, Bayley instructed pastors to place "a Baptismal Register, a Marriage Register, a Register of Burial, and a

(Left to right) Peter Wosh, Congressman Joseph G. Minish, Bishop Dougherty and Seton Hall University president Edward R. D'Alessio look over the grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities which will enable the Commission to survey Catholic records in the northern counties of New Jersey.



Register of Confirmation" in each church safe. Further, he ordered parish administrators to "provide a proper Ledger and Cash Book" and "obtain a good strongly-bound Blank Book" to record Trustee minutes. Efficient diocesan administration also dictated that pastors submit annual reports, carefully account for pew rents and Sunday collections, and regularly inventory parish property.

Similarly, Michael A. Corrigan (Newark's second Bishop) shared his predecessor's historical interests and played an instrumental role in organizing the Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In fact, his biographer memorialized Corrigan as "theologian, legist, rubricist, he was also an archivist." Diocesan statutes codified these prelates' historical interests. Indeed, Newark's sixteenth synod in 1941 reinforced their strictures and even mandated the keeping of a "Parish History, in which the origin of the church, the name of the first pastor and time when it was erected, the date and title of dedication are to be related — the parish lines described and the principal facts relating to the history of the church are to be briefly noted."

Unfortunately, not all pastors heeded these meticulous directions, and church archives vary widely. Even merely ascertaining their scope and volume can constitute a formidable task. WPA surveyors visited Catholic parishes during the late 1930s to record this information, but they received spotty cooperation, utilized vague survey forms, and accumulated scattered data. Similarly, Msgr. Joseph Brady attempted a 1952 mail records survey in connection with his historical efforts in the Newark Archdiocese, but only a relative handful of the institutions queried provided useful responses.

The NJCHRC survey will send professionally trained archivists into the field to work with local administrators and gather data. Pastors and other record-keepers should begin receiving letters during the late summer to set up appointments with the field archivists, and surveys will commence during the fall and winter months. By next summer, the Commission hopes to have a temporary guide to the records prepared.

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Most Rev. John J. Dougherty, S.S.D., *Chairman*; Bernard Bush; John B. Duff; Rev. Msgr. William N. Field; Sr. Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C.; Rev. Raymond J. Kupke; Joseph F. Mahoney; Sr. Margherita Marchione, M.P.F.; Rev. Msgr. Robert Moneta; Peter M. Mitchell; Rev. M. Joseph Mokrzycki; Miriam L. Murphy; Rev. Msgr. Theodore A. Opdenaker; Carl E. Prince; George L.A. Reilly; Rev. Francis R. Seymour; Rev. Edwin V. Sullivan; Rev. Robert T. Wister.

Newsletter Staff: Joseph F. Mahoney; Peter Wosh

From the Collections

Nineteenth-century Long Branch conjures up an image of a glittery, slightly decadent seaside resort, where flamboyant gamblers like Diamond Jim Brady and tainted politicians like Ulysses S. Grant sunned, funned, and rubbed shoulders in the warm weather. Opulent hotels and Victorian mansions lined the bluff and housed the wealthy summer transients who fueled the local economy. Nearby Monmouth Park Jockey Club, local gambling houses, a justly famed beach, and a wide range of innocent and less polite warm weather delights lured increasing numbers of visitors during the late 1860s and 1870s, prompting one overly enthusiastic local booster to proclaim it "The Monte Carlo of America." Whether damning its illicit naughtiness or praising its infectious atmosphere, most contemporary observers communicated an impression of pleasure and prosperity which also permeates the twentieth-century historian's consciousness.

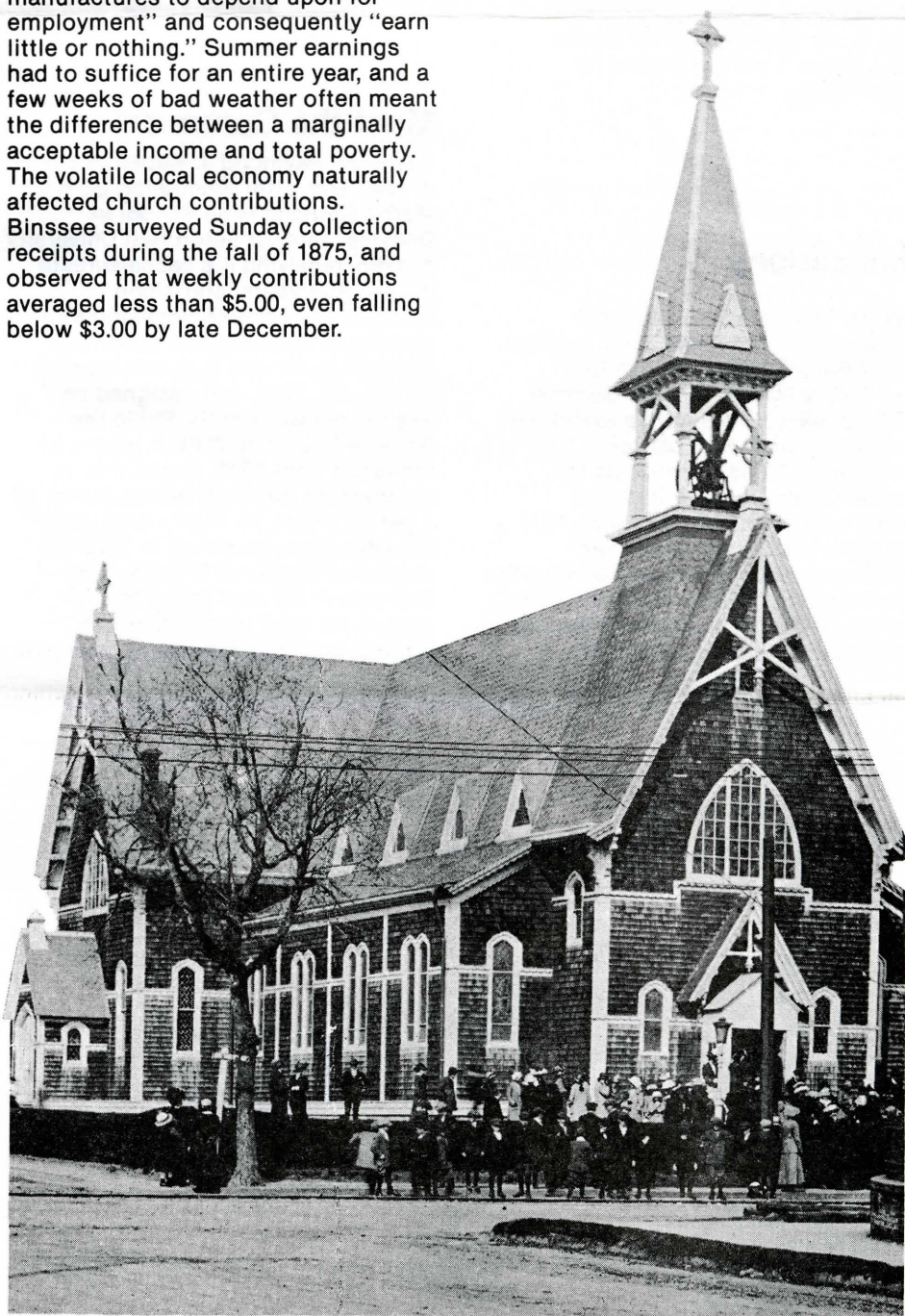
But another Long Branch, several worlds removed from this glamour and glitter, also existed, and Roman Catholic records in Newark's Archdiocesan Archives offer a frustratingly fleet glimpse of it. Actually, Newark's early bishops reinforced the city's popular reputation, and regularly conducted summer visitations/excursions at Our Lady Star of the Sea parish. Michael Corrigan, for example, enthusiastically reported during an August 1877 trip that "as many as a hundred carriages crowd around the church on Sundays" and pronounced the church fiscally fit. Corrigan especially enjoyed a June 1879 outing, when he "visited the new Pier, for which the President sent me a season ticket." Yet, the city's resident pastors and Catholics told a very different tale.

Until the mid-1870s, local parishioners received spiritual ministrations from the nearby Red Bank church. By 1876, however, Bishop Corrigan decided that "the Branch" had developed sufficiently to warrant a new church building and a resident pastor. Local Catholic attorney Louis Binssee questioned the Bishop's decision, observing that winters in the sea-side community hindered formal religious observance. While "summer transients" contributed handsomely to the parish during July and August, resident Catholics "consist of about 60 families, say 300 individuals" and barely earned sufficient income to achieve a subsistence existence. Unlike "the hatters in Orange Valley," Jersey shore workers "have no manufactures to depend upon for employment" and consequently "earn little or nothing." Summer earnings had to suffice for an entire year, and a few weeks of bad weather often meant the difference between a marginally acceptable income and total poverty. The volatile local economy naturally affected church contributions. Binssee surveyed Sunday collection receipts during the fall of 1875, and observed that weekly contributions averaged less than \$5.00, even falling below \$3.00 by late December.

Writing from his New York law office, Binssee observed that the depressed economy constituted only one reason against establishing a permanent church. The prosperous layman also painted a bleak, desolate portrait of winter on the Atlantic Ocean. The aging prelate assigned to Star of the Sea lived a depressingly stark existence. By October, most stores ceased their operations, the municipality offered few services, and the city resembled a ghost town more than a thriving resort. Buying a loaf of bread or a newspaper required a long

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Church of Our Lady, Star of the Sea, Long Branch. This structure, erected about 1870, was destroyed on December 5, 1926, by a spectacular blaze which also leveled a large department store and damaged sixteen other nearby buildings, including the parish rectory and convent.



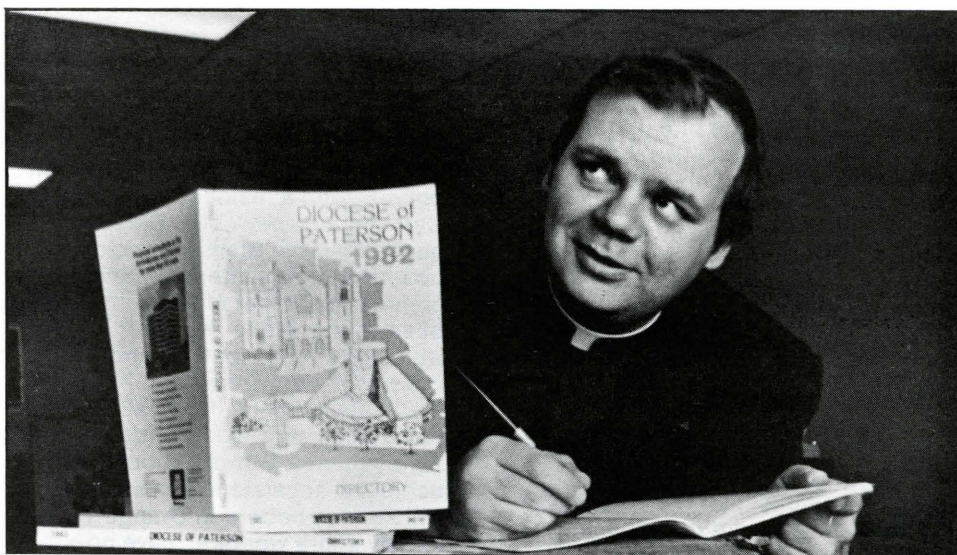
Collections *(continued)*

journey for the priest. Indeed, "there is no place in winter where he could get his meals, the Hotels are all closed." The parish's neighborhood was so deserted that he "might in his lonesome position, get very sick and be in great straits, even die without anyone knowing of it so as to come to his relief."

Binssee's remarks, and similar comments by several Long Branch pastors, hint at the social inequalities and poverty which underlay and supported this vacationers' summer playground. Most nineteenth-century moralists confined their criticisms and observations to the games and amusements which lined the boardwalk. Newark's Archdiocesan archives offer another perspective, raise some very suggestive issues, and suggest a fruitful avenue for further study.

Publications

Daryl R. Fair, "Remote From the Schoolhouse: The Passage of the New Jersey Parochial School Bus Bill," *New Jersey History*, Spring-Summer 1981, pp. 49-63. This article examines the political and legal battles surrounding several proposals to provide public transportation for private school children between 1937 and 1941. The author discusses legislators' motives, the role of several interest groups in promoting the bills, and the on-going debates concerning the legislation's constitutionality.



Father Kupke, with copies of the directory he edited.

Meet the Commission

Reverend Raymond J. Kupke was born in 1947 and, after graduation from Morris Catholic High School in Denville, entered Seton Hall University in 1965, receiving his baccalaureate degree four years later. Upon completion of theological studies at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Darlington, he was ordained a priest on May 26, 1973, and assigned as associate pastor at St. Philip the Apostle Church in Clifton, where he remained until 1979. In addition to discharging the multifarious duties of a parish priest, Fr. Kupke continued his education, receiving in 1976 the degree of Master of Divinity from Darlington. He also found time to pursue his long-term interest in history, both by undertaking graduate

studies at Seton Hall University and by serving from 1976 to 1979 on the City of Clifton Historical Commission.

Since 1976 Fr. Kupke has been archivist of the Diocese of Paterson and from 1979 to 1981 additionally served as vice-chancellor. In the latter year he became associate pastor of St. Pius X Church in Montville, New Jersey. He has also, since 1981, been editor of the Diocesan Directory of the Paterson diocese.

Fr. Kupke is a member of the New Jersey Historical Society, the Society of American Archivists, and of MARAC, the Middle Atlantic Regional Archives Conference. He has addressed archival conferences on the topic of religious archives.



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