

Summer 1989

New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter, Vol. 8, No.2

New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/njchc>



Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission, "New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter, Vol. 8, No.2" (1989). *New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission newsletters*. 27.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/njchc/27>



New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME VIII NO. 2

SUMMER 1989

Caring for the Orphan

Just recently a religious Sister working in the provision of social services in a midwestern diocese was quoted in the press to the effect that the Catholic Church had best pay less attention to family services, and start thinking more in terms of services to children. Her comment stimulated some quick research in the Official Catholic Directory, the results of which proved surprising. Almost the entire array of Catholic orphanages, which even 25 years ago was substantial, has disappeared from the New Jersey scene. Professional trends in social service work and changed perceptions of the best way to solve problems undoubtedly account for much of the change, but the operational problems involved also probably affected the decisions to close the facilities.

In December 1931, for example, the Diocese of Newark bought the property of St. Walburga's Orphanage in Roselle, New Jersey, which until then had been owned by the Benedictine Sisters of Elizabeth and operated by them, under the general aegis of the Associated Catholic Charities. The orphanage had been founded at St. Walburga's Convent in Newark in 1914, but by 1923 had outgrown the location. In 1924 a new facility was occupied on Raritan Road in Roselle, still under the guidance of the founding Benedictine Sisters. But mounting problems, some of them financial, led the Sisters at their Provincial Council meeting in September 1930, to ask Newark's bishop, Thomas J. Walsh, to take over the orphanage. Terms of the agreement provided that the diocese would

assume the total debt of the orphanage, which included a mortgage for \$33,500; notes to the National State Bank of Elizabeth amounting to \$129,000; and other current expense debts amounting to about \$5,000. Additionally, the Sisters were owed almost \$16,000 in back salaries.

The Diocese of Newark had already been negotiating with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, from Paterson, to assume direction of St. Walburga's, and the new religious moved into the orphanage early in December 1931. Their agreement with the Diocese of Newark provided that the orphanage building would include a separate area for the residence of the Sisters; that a chaplain would be provided; and that the annual salary of each Sister would be \$250, with the Superior receiving \$300. Well, it was the depth of the Great Depression!

The diocese tried to fulfill its promises, but money continued to be a problem. On November 14, 1932, Neil Convery, apparently the architect for the renovations, wrote to Father Ralph Glover of Associated Catholic Charities, apologizing for the costs incurred. He had stopped all work on the project, as Glover insisted, because the incomplete job had already exceeded the appropriations by the diocese. The original estimates had varied between \$17,000 and an unspecified low bid from a contractor who had, by the time of Convery's letter, gone out of business. Convery had reviewed the estimates, and concluded that \$12,000 would cover everything except painting.



Children in the dining room at St. Walburga's, about 1940.

continued on page 2



Front entrance to the orphanage, about 1940.

Orphans

continued from page 1

The diocese then appropriated \$15,000 for the complete job, only to find that the cost, except painting, would be more like \$25,700. Convery pointed out that most of the additional cost resulted from "unforeseen conditions at the building," but blamed much of the problem on unrealistically low initial estimates.

Just how the problem was resolved the available documents do not make clear, but some idea of the continuing difficulties can be gleaned from a letter of Sister Pacifica, Superior General of the Missionary Sisters, to the Vicar-General of the diocese, Monsignor John C. McClary. Writing in November 1943, she described the living conditions of the Sisters at the orphanage. When the community took over the facility in 1931, 10 sisters were sent on the mission. They had one dormitory, partitioned into 10 cubicles for sleeping, and a room across the corridor as refectory and community room. Because the orphanage had been transformed principally into a refuge for babies and children under six, the additional care required by approximately 120 small babies led the community to assign 14 sisters, who were helped by nine girls employed as aides. But the overcrowded conditions meant that some of the girls were sleeping in a former observation room, and the additional

sisters were sleeping in a one-time linen room.

McClary sent Father John Donnelly to investigate, and his letter confirmed Sister Pacifica in every respect. "When I was there (about 2 o'clock in the afternoon) two sisters who had been on duty the night before were supposed to be sleeping. Sleep with the babies' cries from one side and the children's yells from the other was out of the question. The lay help of the orphanage have very bad sleeping quarters in the basement. The sewerage is bad and, in any kind of storm, the drains back up and the basement floor is flooded." Within two months architect John G. Shaw had examined the building and suggested that the best solution was to build a new wing onto the building to accommodate the sisters and the lay help.

Again the documents do not make clear the response, but two years later a request to redecorate the tiny chapel was turned down by the Diocesan Sites and Building Commission. "A few years ago the matter of a new convent, including chapel, was discussed by the Commission and, owing to conditions [presumably World War II], the project was left in abeyance. Inasmuch as the present chapel is temporary in character, and as the new convent would include a new chapel, the Commission feels that the present chapel does not warrant the expenditure in question."

The records again do not make clear how, but by 1958 the Sisters had been

housed in an old two-story frame building on the property--with apparently a minimum of remodeling. The chapel, community room and dining room were still in the orphanage building. The hardy Father Donnelly, this time accompanied by Father Eugene Gallagher, inspected the residence in August 1958, and found a crumbling foundation, extensive dry-rot in the woodwork, water seepage in the basement, and the fresh water system clogged by "corrosion in the pipes." Moreover, "sometime late last winter, the steam pipes which apparently run under the second story floor, rusted through and destroyed a great deal of the plaster in the ceilings and walls of about half the rooms on the first floor," leaving much of the house without heat. By November the diocese had received bids on repairing the heating system and authorized its repair.

Still, in the following July Sister Eleanore, Superior at the orphanage, concluded a letter to Archbishop Thomas A. Boland with a brief recapitulation of the deplorable living conditions of the Sisters and expressed her confidence that he would do whatever possible to provide "normal living quarters."

The available records do not show Archbishop Boland's response, but the



A Sister treats one of the children.

extant files do document both the continuing problem of facilities maintenance on a tight budget, and the superb devotion of the Sisters who provided loving care to the infants at the orphanage under such long-continued personal hardships.

Recent Accessions

Items recently made available to researchers in the archives of the Archdiocese of Newark, located at Seton Hall University, include the following:

Papers of Thomas Joseph Walsh (1931-1952) 3 cubic feet. This addition to the papers of Archbishop Walsh includes personal papers regarding his coat of arms and faculties, installation as Archbishop, Silver Jubilee, Golden Jubilee, death, estate, will, funeral Mass and interment.

Meet the Commission

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Barbara Geller is the archivist of Seton Hall University and an active member of the Commission. She studied at New York University, majoring in history and in medieval and Renaissance studies. While there, she was the first recipient of the Marco Polo Travel Award given by the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Studies. After receiving her baccalaureate degree with honors in 1982, Geller continued graduate studies at New York University, combining her interests in both medieval and American history with NYU's innovative and highly respected program in Archival Management and Historical Society Administration. In 1984 she obtained both the M.A. in History and certification in Archival Management.

She has worked as an assistant archivist at Trinity Church, the Bowery Savings Bank and Chemical Bank, all in New York City. In 1984 and 1985, Geller served as archivist for the New York City Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives. In July 1985 she came to Seton Hall as archivist, and has been since then engaged in the expansion and reorganization of the archives at the University and in developing the University's records management plan.

Geller is an active member of several professional associations, including the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators, the Association of Records Managers and Administra-

Papers of Thomas Aloysius Boland (1934-1973) 41 cubic feet. An important addition to the Papers of Archbishop Boland, this accession incorporates the various series which comprise the files created by the office of the Archbishop. Arranged alphabetically by subject, the files cover a number of topics of interest to Archbishops Walsh, Boland and Gerety. Begun by Archbishop Walsh, continued by Archbishop Boland and adapted by Archbishop Gerety, this accession illustrates a transitional period in the history of the Archdiocese of Newark.



Barbara Geller

tors, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, and the Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York. She has given numerous papers on archival practice and archival use, including "Appraisal and Accessioning" at the Long Island Archives Conference (1985), "Catholic Archives: Documenting the Immigrant Experience" at the Symposium on Religious Institutions' Outreach to the Immigrant (1986), and "Preservation, Conservation and Common Sense" to the Association of Library Assistants Conference (1988). Most recently she addressed the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists in July 1989 on the topic, "Sacramental Records' Microfilming: Practical and Moral Concerns."

Christian Communications Apostolate (1945-1973) 7 1/2 cubic feet. Formerly called the Legion of Decency, the Christian Communications Apostolate Office has "continuously fought to maintain the moral ideals laid down by the Catholic Church in the media field." The accession is comprised of an alphabetical file on subjects ranging from the sponsorship of anti-obscenity legislation through the distribution of wholesome literature to youths and adults on the parish level, to the rating of specific films and an analysis of their distribution techniques.

Inactive Organizations (1937-1975) 11 cubic feet. This accession is comprised of an alphabetical series of folders regarding the operations and goals of various clubs, organizations and societies within the Archdiocese of Newark. Organizations include the Knights of Columbus, parish Holy Name Societies and the Junior Seton League.

Bishop's Relief Fund (1944-1966) 3 cubic feet. All parishes within the archdiocese were expected to contribute to this fund drive sponsored by the National Catholic Welfare Conference. Begun in response to the second World War, the Bishop's Relief Fund evolved into a yearly Thanksgiving Day clothing and fund drive for the needy overseas.

Charities and Social Concerns (1898-1977) 4 1/2 cubic feet. Arranged by city and name of institution, this accession includes material regarding schools, colleges, children's homes and orphanages, day nurseries, and retirement homes. Comprised of correspondence, memoranda, clippings and annual reports, the majority of material concerns physical plant and related insurance issues.

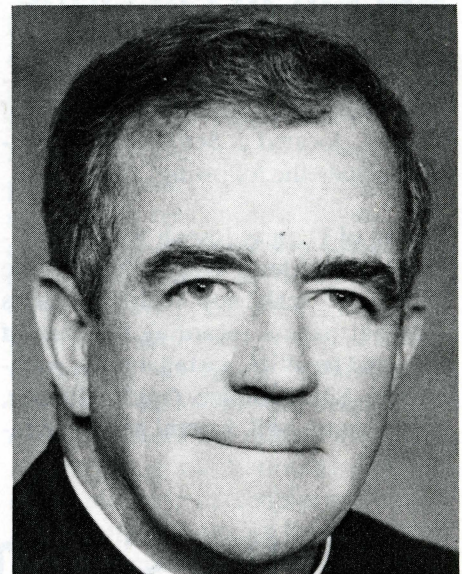
Sacred Heart Cathedral (1950-1954) 2 cubic feet. Contains material regarding the building of the cathedral. Includes receipts, assessments, expenditures, contracts and landscaping information.

For further information, researchers should contact Barbara Geller, Archivist, Duffy Hall, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2696.

Sullivan Named Prelate of Honor

Reverend Edwin Vose Sullivan, a founding member of the Commission, has recently been named by Pope John Paul II a Prelate of Honor with the title of Reverend Monsignor. Educated in the public schools of his native Maine, Monsignor Sullivan took his A.B. at Seton Hall University and studied theology at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Darlington. He has taught at Seton Hall since his ordination in 1946, earning as he did so his A.M. at Fordham University and Ph.D. at the University of Ottawa. From 1963 to 1970 he served as chairman of the sociology department at the university. Monsignor Sullivan also has been active in the civil rights

movement. He has served on the Advisory Committee to the National Commission on Civil Rights, the Community Service Council of the Oranges and the editorial board of The Catholic Advocate, the Newark archdiocesan newspaper. He has been state chaplain to the Sons of the American Revolution, president of the Montclair chapter, and is now chaplain to the South Orange Council of the Knights of Columbus. Monsignor Sullivan chaired the committee which prepared the Commission's Bishops of Newark, and wrote the chapter on the first bishop, James Roosevelt Bayley. He also has edited the diary of Bishop Bayley.



Monsignor Edwin V. Sullivan

Published by the New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2696. Bernard Bush, Rev. Mark Dobrovolsky, Rev. Msgr. William N. Field, Barbara Geller, Rev. Msgr. Charles J. Giglio, Rev. Raymond J. Kupke, Joseph F. Mahoney, Sr. Margherita Marchione, M.P.F., Rev. Msgr. Robert Moneta, Rev. M. Joseph Mokrzycki, Miriam L. Murphy, Rev. Msgr. Theodore A. Opdenaker, Carl E. Prince, George L.A. Reilly, Sr. Thomas Mary Salerno, S.C., Bernhard W. Scholz, Rev. Msgr. Francis R. Seymour, Rev. Edwin V. Sullivan. *Newsletter Staff:* Joseph F. Mahoney



**Seton Hall
University**

South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2696

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Seton Hall
University