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New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME X NUMBER 1

AUTUMN 1990

"PIRATE" CHIEFTAINS

No, not the stirring tales of Kidd, Morgan and Teach, nor the fictional exploits of Jim Hawkins and Doctor Livesey in foiling the dastardly plans of peg-legged John Silver. The Pirate chieftains of concern here are those who over the past 134 years have led Seton Hall College and University. The inauguration on October 13 of Reverend Thomas R. Peterson, O.P. as chancellor of the University occasions recollections of the University's past and some prophecies about its future. This essay will restrict itself to looking at some snippets from the careers of Father Peterson's predecessors in office, whether called president or chancellor.

The process of finding a president has over the years seen some changes. Apparently the University founder, Bishop James Roosevelt Bayley, merely appointed the first president, Reverend Bernard J. McQuaid, and McQuaid fully justified Bayley's expectations. But the bishop did later note in his diary: "It is more difficult to find a good college president than it is a good anything else in this world. All that the college needs to insure its permanent prosperity is a president. Everything else is there." Subsequent presidential appointments became a matter for the board of trustees, who were no doubt greatly influenced by the views of the board chairman, the bishop of Newark. Until 1977, all the presidents were clergymen of the diocese of Newark. The advent of Robert T. Conley marked the first time a layman headed the University, and his successor, Reverend Laurence T. Murphy, was the first priest not a member of the diocese.

The process of choosing a president was formally expanded to include

faculty, administration, student and alumni participation in 1969, with the creation of a search committee to find a successor to Bishop Dougherty. That process has been used several times since—and the members of the committees might agree with Bishop Bayley about the difficulty of the task.

The general tasks of a university president remain largely the same—leadership in establishing and improving the curriculum, in recruiting students, faculty and administration, and in fundraising, and allocating resources to meet needs. A university president is also responsible for alumni development, public relations and fostering a community of learning. The specific challenges of any presidency will be determined sometimes by circumstances external to the school, sometimes by those of its own development. And how the institution responds to the challenges will be shaped in large part by the philosophy and personality of the person at its head.

Father McQuaid, as the first president of Seton Hall, faced all of the challenges in perhaps their most extreme form. Recruiting students for a school that is going to begin must be more difficult than enticing them to a going concern. Bayley noted in his diary for August 31, 1856 that "Father McQuaid and the rest have been busy getting ready to open the College tomorrow. Will probably have twenty to thirty boys to start with." The next day, the president and his faculty (three more priests and five laymen) greeted the five enrolled students. Talk about faculty-student ratio! Recruitment continued, and by the end of the month another 11 students had appeared; by the end of the academic year, enrollment reached 44.



Reverend Bernard J. McQuaid when he was Bishop of Rochester, New York.

The bishop considered that a solid foundation had been laid, and wanted McQuaid full-time in Newark as Cathedral rector and vicar-general. Reverend Daniel Fisher, professor of English, now became the second president. Fisher had been a missionary among the Indians and scattered Catholics of Minnesota Territory, where his health had broken down and he had returned East to recover. He served at Seton Hall for two years, in which the college grew, but his heart was in the missions, and in 1859, Bayley released him to return to the West. McQuaid returned now for his second stint as president.

Because the facilities at Madison were becoming overcrowded and because Bayley considered the area too far from Newark for the seminarians to participate in Cathedral ceremonies, almost the first action of the new presidency was the removal of the college to a 60-acre site in South Orange. The property had a villa adequate for the seminary, but needed facilities for the collegians. McQuaid

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took title to the property on April 2, 1860. On May 15, the cornerstone of the new college building was laid, and on September 10 it was ready for occupancy. The late 20th century is unlikely to ease a college president's problems by improving on that timetable.

McQuaid was perforce a builder. In 1863 he initiated construction of the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, and of a large infirmary, which also contained the quarters of the Sisters of Charity, who were in charge both of the domestic arrangements of the college and of the infirmary. Despite the Civil War, enrollment grew. In July, 1862 the president wrote to Bishop Bayley not to accept any more students for September, because enrollment was full, at 75. By 1865 the size of the college building had to be doubled to accommodate the increase.

McQuaid's last construction on the campus resulted from a fire which broke out on January 27, 1866 and totally destroyed the marble villa which housed the seminary; only a few pieces of furniture, some books and some records were saved. Fortunately, no lives were lost. A week later McQuaid outlined plans for "something larger, grander, more suitable for college purposes." Construction of the new facility—now known as Presidents Hall—went forward rapidly and early in 1867 it was occupied. But the cost laid a heavy mortgage on his successors.

McQuaid's consecration as bishop of Rochester, New York in July, 1868 opened the way to the Corrigan decades. Michael Augustine Corrigan succeeded to the presidency of Seton Hall at

McQuaid's departure, and when he himself was consecrated bishop of Newark in 1873 remained the chief officer of the college until 1876 when his brother, Father James H. Corrigan, succeeded him. As is often the case after an era of intense building, the next administration saw little construction on the campus, but a great deal of facilities improvement—water and gas supplies, e.g., and the laying out of walks and gardens. It also focused closely on the development of student life.

In 1870 a clear distinction was introduced between the prep and college courses (although formal separation of the schools did not occur), the curriculum was reorganized to place greater emphasis on English and historical studies, and the first Science Society was organized. In the following year the first Junior Night was held; this was a festival of student performances held each year on the feast of St. Joseph, a tradition which lasted until the beginning of World War II.

In addition, the Bayley Debating Society, several library and reading-room associations, the Setonia Orchestra, the Dramatic Company and organized baseball, football and tennis associations made their appearance in these years. And in 1879, the alumni association was formed.

Major construction during this era was hampered in part by the generally poor economy—in 1877, the annual cost of tuition and board was reduced from \$450 to \$380 because of the effects of the Depression—and the college's debt situation, but in 1883 the cornerstone of Alumni Hall was laid, the building being

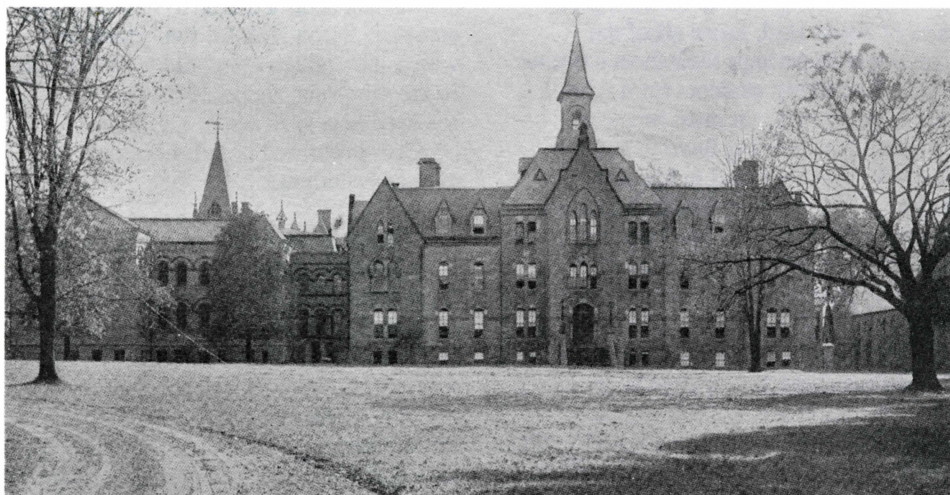


Reverend Laurence T. Murphy, M.M., the sixteenth president of Seton Hall.

paid for through contributions of the alumni. In 1886 the third major fire on campus gutted the college building. Though in failing health, Father James Corrigan did not retire until a replacement building began to function in 1888, but the insurance on the old building covered only half the cost of the new one, and the debt position worsened.

In this situation, the board of trustees turned to Reverend William F. Marshall as the new president. Marshall had become treasurer of the college in 1881 and retained that office when he was subsequently appointed vice-president; he now continued in both those offices while serving as president. The situation must have facilitated decision making at the top level, but his modern successors would probably find the triple task exhausting. The new president successfully concentrated on solving the fiscal problem by a combination of economizing measures and wider appeals for support. At the same time, the faculty was enlarged, academic programs broadened, and a program of instruction in military subjects was introduced by the assignment of an active Army officer. The latter program stirred controversy because some anti-Catholic circles perceived it as a violation of the First Amendment and one newspaper commented that the incident "has caused more excitement among the know-nothing element of the Protestant community than anything that has occurred in New Jersey for many years."

Marshall retired for health reasons in 1897, his principal contribution the improvement of the financial situation.

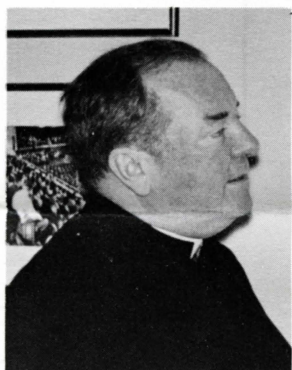


Pictured from left are the College and Library, Seminary and Chapel, circa 1900.

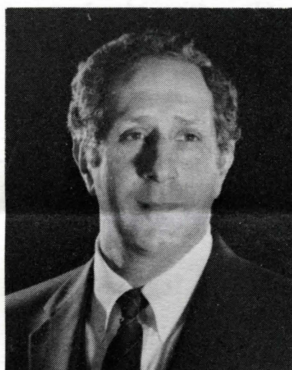
His successor, Reverend James J. Synnott, had only two years in office before his early death in 1899. In that period he reorganized the prep and college relations, and modified the preparatory program so that it was recognized by both New Jersey and New York. In his recognition of the accrediting agencies, both for the prep and the college programs, he was acknowledging the beginning of a process which in the

20th century would find college presidents increasingly concerned with the influence of outside agencies upon practices and decisions which the 19th century saw as internal concerns.

These 19th century predecessors of the University's 19th leader built well and positioned the college in South Orange to face the challenges of the 20th.



Reverend John L. McNulty, the twelfth president of Seton Hall.



Edward R. D'Alessio, the seventeenth president of Seton Hall.



Robert T. Conley, the first lay president of Seton Hall.

GERETY LECTURES SCHEDULED

Each academic year the Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University sponsors two lectures on church history by outstanding historians. Named in honor of Archbishop Emeritus Peter Leo Gerety, who established the fund which supports them, the sessions offer an opportunity to hear some aspect of church history discussed by an expert on the subject.

On October 4, Reverend James Hennessey, S.J., author of *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*, will

speak on "History, The Concept of Tradition, and Theology." On February 7, 1991, Reverend Michael Himes, formerly of the Immaculate Conception Seminary at Huntington, Long Island, and now teaching at Notre Dame University, will speak on a topic as yet undetermined.

Both sessions will be held in the Seminary Chapel at 8 p.m. and are open to the public.

COMMISSION ADDS NEW MEMBERS

At its meeting of September 19, 1990, three new members joined the Commission. Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B. of Newark Abbey, Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P., archivist of the Dominican Sisters at Caldwell and Reverend John F. Wrynn, S.J. of Saint Peter's College, Jersey City began three-year terms as participants in the work of gathering, preserving and publicizing the history of Catholicism in New Jersey.

At the same time, Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C., an archivist with the American Bible Society in New York City, returned to active service as a member of the Commission.

We welcome them all, and look forward to the strengthening of the Commission which their expertise and insight will provide.

Presidents of Seton Hall

Reverend Bernard J. McQuaid
(1856-57, 1859-68)

Reverend Daniel Fisher
(1857-1859)

Reverend Michael A. Corrigan
(1868-1876)

Reverend James H. Corrigan
(1876-1888)

Reverend William F. Marshall
(1888-1897)

Reverend Joseph J. Synnott
(1897-1899)

Reverend John A. Stafford
(1899-1907)

Reverend James F. Mooney
(1907-1922)

Reverend Thomas H. McLaughlin
(1922-1933)

Reverend Francis J. Monaghan
(1933-1936)

Reverend James F. Kelley
(1936-1949)

Reverend John L. McNulty
(1949-1959)

Reverend John J. Dougherty
(1959-1969)

Reverend Thomas G. Fahy
(1970-1976)

Robert T. Conley
(1977-1979)

Reverend Laurence T. Murphy, M.M.
(1979-1980)

Edward R. D'Alessio
(1980-1983)

Chancellor
Reverend John J. Petillo
(1983-1990)

Reverend Thomas R. Peterson, O.P.
(1990-)

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Most Reverend Peter L. Gerety, D.D., Chairman; Bernard Bush, Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B., Reverend Mark Dobrovolsky, Reverend Monsignor William N. Field, Reverend Monsignor Charles J. Giglio, Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C., Reverend Raymond J. Kupke, Joseph F. Mahoney, Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F., Reverend Monsignor Robert Moneta, Miriam L. Murphy, Reverend Monsignor Theodore A. Opdenaker, Carl E. Prince, George L.A. Reilly, Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P., Sister Thomas Mary Salerno, S.C., Bernhard W. Scholz, Reverend Monsignor Francis R. Seymour, Reverend Monsignor Joseph C. Shenrock, Reverend Monsignor Edwin V. Sullivan, Reverend John F. Wrynn, S.J. Consulting Member: Barbara Geller.

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