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New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

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# New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME XIV NO. 3

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## WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN NEW JERSEY

The innumerable contributions of women religious to the history of the Catholic Church are well-documented, if not as well known as they should be. The same may be said of the notable contributions of women religious to the growth and development of the Church in New Jersey. Even before his ordination as the first bishop of Newark, James Roosevelt Bayley recognized the need and arranged for several Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, from New York, to begin work in Newark, Jersey City and Paterson. Aware that dependence on outside sources would not meet the demands of the situation, Bayley convinced the superior of the Cincinnati branch of the Sisters of Charity to receive and train five young women: Margaret O'Neill of Paterson and Mary Linah, Bridget Daley, Mary A. Duffy and Margaret Plunkett, all of Newark. In September 1859, they returned to Newark and set up the first house of the new community with Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan as superior. This first motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity in New Jersey was located in the old Ward Mansion at the corner of Bleecker and Washington streets in Newark. In some ways it encapsulated the works which the members of numerous communities would undertake in the state. Small though it was, the mansion housed the motherhouse and novitiate of the new community as well as a select school for young ladies and a hospital. Thus, the Sisters provided aid to the needy, heralding the opening of organized Catholic efforts in the fields of education, health care and social work.

The Sisters of Charity did not remain for long as the only such community in the state. In 1863, Father Anthony Cauvin, pastor of Our Lady of Grace in Hoboken, brought the Sisters of the Poor of

St. Francis to that city to establish Saint Mary's Hospital. During the next four years, they established Saint Francis Hospital in Jersey City and, in 1867, Saint Michael's Hospital in Newark. Arriving in May 1867 to begin the latter facility, the five Sisters reflected in one particular respect the nature of the Catholic community: three were German immigrants and two were Irish immigrants, particularly appropriate for service to the poor, the laboring class of Newark being for the most part Germans and Irish.

Over the next decade or so other communities arrived to expand the work begun by these pioneers. The Sisters of Mercy arrived in Jersey City in 1872 and

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Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan

## Save The Date – Autumn Conference on Women Religious

The next in the Commission's series of conferences on New Jersey Catholic history will be held at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey on Saturday, October 28, 1995. The conference examines aspects of the life and work of women religious in the state from the 1850s to the present. Since the establishment of the diocese, the work of women religious has been an integral part of the effort of the Church in New Jersey. One of the first concerns of Bishop Bayley was to assure the diocese of the varied services of women religious; his efforts resulted in the founding of the Sisters of Charity of Convent Station. For 140 years they and their colleagues in other communities have been enriching the life of the local church. The range of activities and the variety of communities which have participated necessitates a broad approach in this first examination of the subject. Future conferences will explore other aspects of this topic in greater detail. Mark October 28, 1995, on your calendars, and look for details in the next issue of the newsletter.



# Women Religious

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in Bordentown in 1873. Their principal work was educational, but they also operated homes for working girls in Plainfield and Phillipsburg. The Sisters of Saint Dominic arrived in Jersey City in 1872 to take up educational work in Saint Boniface's parish there, and that same year the Sisters of Saint Joseph began their work at Saint John's in Newark. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd opened a home for troubled young women in Newark in 1875. At the same time, the Sisters of Christian Charity arrived as refugees from persecution in their native Germany. Three years later the Little Sisters of the Poor founded a home for the aged in Newark. The Sisters of Saint Benedict, the Sisters of Saint Francis and the School Sisters of Notre Dame were established in the state before the diocese of Trenton was established in 1881.

The new diocese witnessed large numbers of both Irish and German Catholics migrating to this country while the number of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe also was increasing. Both Sees now had to recruit clergy and religious who could understand and care for the newcomers and help their adjustment to the new world. The Daughters of Divine Charity arrived in Trenton in 1914 to minister to Hungarian immigrants, the Religious Teachers Filippini in 1910 to work among the Italian communities, and in 1901, the Felician Sisters to serve the

Polish-speaking immigrants. Also working in the state by the First World War were the Pallotine Sisters and the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Mother Cabrini's community.

It is evident, from what has been said, that each felt need in the Church obtained an appropriate response. Education at first meant primarily catechism and the primary grades in the parish school. Then it expanded to high school and prep school, and eventually college, as in Georgian Court, the College of Saint Elizabeth, Felician and others over the years.

Care of the sick meant at first home visiting, then simple in-hospital care, finally expanding to encompass complex medical centers, such as Our Lady of

Lourdes in Camden and Saint Joseph's in Paterson. Health services also have included special facilities for the blind and hospitals such as The House of Divine Providence for Incurables in Paramus.

Social welfare work began as simple visiting of the poor, then the establishment of orphanages, homes for the aged, homes for working women, and then guidance clinics, rehabilitation programs and related activities. Whatever the need, women religious stepped in and assisted in meeting it.

Nor should anyone forget the silent contribution to all this active work, the prayers and penances of the contemplatives in Bordentown, Paterson, Newark  
*continued on page 3*



*The first home of St. Joseph's Hospital, Paterson, in 1867.*



*Villa Victoria Academy, Trenton*



*The mansion of George Gould, now part of Georgian Court College.*



and elsewhere in the state. Not this side of Judgment Day will this commitment on behalf of the Church in New Jersey be properly assessed.

By 1960 the dioceses of New Jersey were benefitting from the devoted labors of more than 5,600 women religious, most of them engaged in teaching, but large numbers in health care and social service work. Then came the eruptions of civil society in the Sixties and thereafter, and “the opening of the windows” of the Church in Vatican Council II. The reassessment and re-orientation of its activities, which the Council meant for the Church, disturbed many and disrupted accustomed patterns. This was as true of the priestly and religious life as it was of the laity. At any rate, the period immediately after the Council saw a severe falling off in religious vocations, the withdrawal of many priests and religious from their earlier commitments and a striving to adapt the religious life to the post-conciliar world.

One superior, in explaining why she must withdraw from a long-standing institutional commitment, reported that the “younger Sisters prefer to do social work or work out in the communities. They often prefer to live outside the convents, sometimes living in apartments shared with one or more Sisters.”

A result has been the decline in



*House of Divine Providence in 1902.*

Catholic parochial schools, and the replacement of teaching sisters by laity in many instances. Work in hospitals has also seen a great decline in the number of Sisters involved. The 1995 Official Catholic Directory indicates that the number of women religious in the state is now just over 4,100. While those who recollect the way it had been tend to

deplore the change, civil society has changed greatly and the Church always makes needed adaptations when circumstances are warranted. Religious life is undergoing change, but it has certainly not died out and the Church still benefits from the devoted labors of women religious, even if the methods and manners are somewhat different.

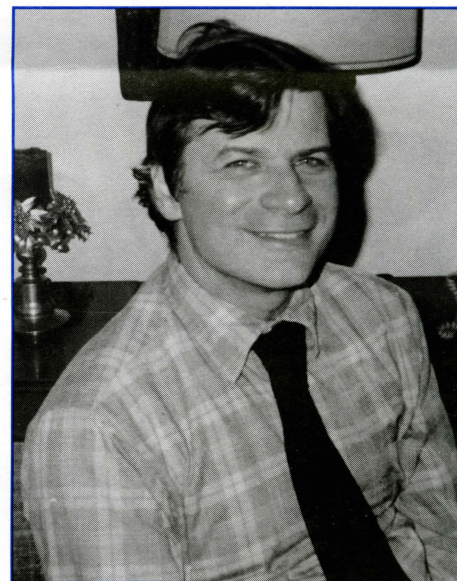
## Meet The Commission

The Commission recently has welcomed as its newest member Reverend Robert Carbonneau, C.P., Ph. D. Father Carbonneau, a graduate of Assumption College, was ordained in 1978. He earned his Master of Arts and Master of Divinity at St. John's University, and in 1992, earned his doctorate in American and East Asian history at Georgetown University. From 1990 to 1992 he taught courses in American and Chinese history at Trinity College, Washington, D.C., and is currently teaching at Iona College.

Father Carbonneau is very active in the preservation and publication of the history of the Passionists, both in this country and as missionaries in China. Fluent in Chinese, he has served as associate director of the Passionist China History Project and Archives since 1982. He is director of the Passionist Historical

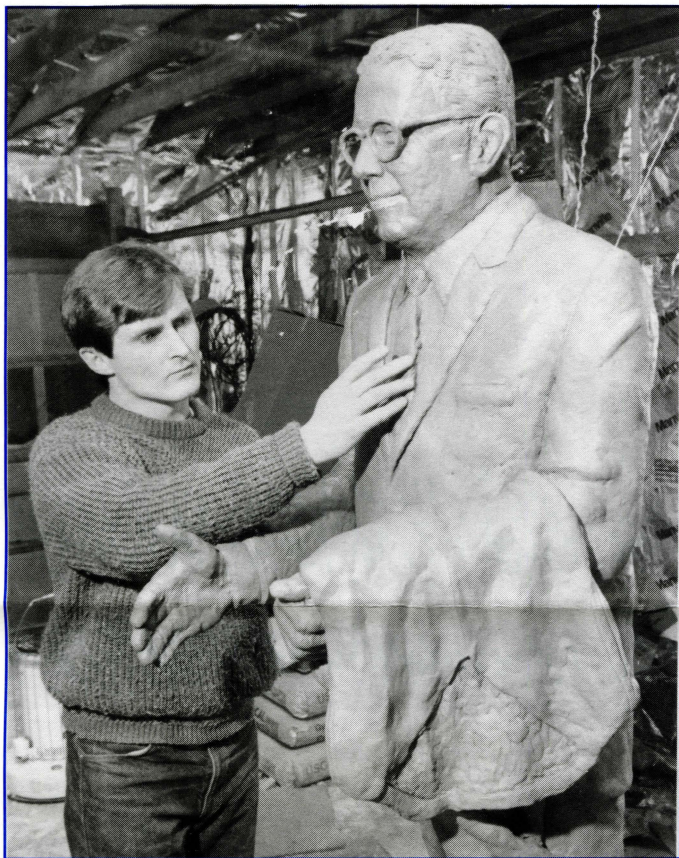
Commission, and co-editor of *The Passionist Historical Newsletter*. He has published articles on the congregation's efforts in China in numerous magazines and scholarly compendia. He has also considered the American workings of the congregation, as evidenced by his article, “Katherine Kurz Burton and the Quest for a Feminine Catholic Identity in *Sign Magazine* (1933-1969),” published in *The Passionist* last year.

Father Carbonneau also has participated in numerous scholarly conferences, lecturing frequently on aspects of religious history and serving his community at retreat houses in New York and Massachusetts. His varied skills and experience will aid the Commission immeasurably in its activities. Currently he serves on the oral history and publications committees.



*Reverend Robert E. Carbonneau, C.P.*





## Brian Hanlon Sculptures To Be Shown

On August 21, 1995, the Walsh Library Gallery at Seton Hall University will present an exhibit of the works of sculptor Brian Hanlon of Beachwood, New Jersey. The exhibit is open to the public and runs through October 20, 1995. Hanlon's work includes lay and religious figures, among them a life-size Saint Joseph, cast in 1993, for St. Joseph's Church, Toms River. He is shown here in 1994, working on the life-size bronze of the late Governor Richard Hughes, which is located at Seton Hall University Law School in Newark.

*Brian P. Hanlon at work.*

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Most Reverend Dominic A. Marconi, D.D., *Chairman*; Reverend Monsignor Joseph C. Shenrock, *Vice-Chairman*; Bernard Bush; Reverend Robert E. Carbonneau, C.P.; JoAnn Cotz; Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B.; Reverend Monsignor William N. Field; Reverend Monsignor Charles J. Giglio; Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C.; Reverend Michael G. Krull; Reverend Raymond J. Kupke; Joseph F. Mahoney; Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F.; Reverend Monsignor Robert Moneta; 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 Edwin V. Sullivan; Reverend Joseph D. Wallace; Barbara Geller, *Consulting Member*; Joseph F. Mahoney, *Newsletter Editor*.

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