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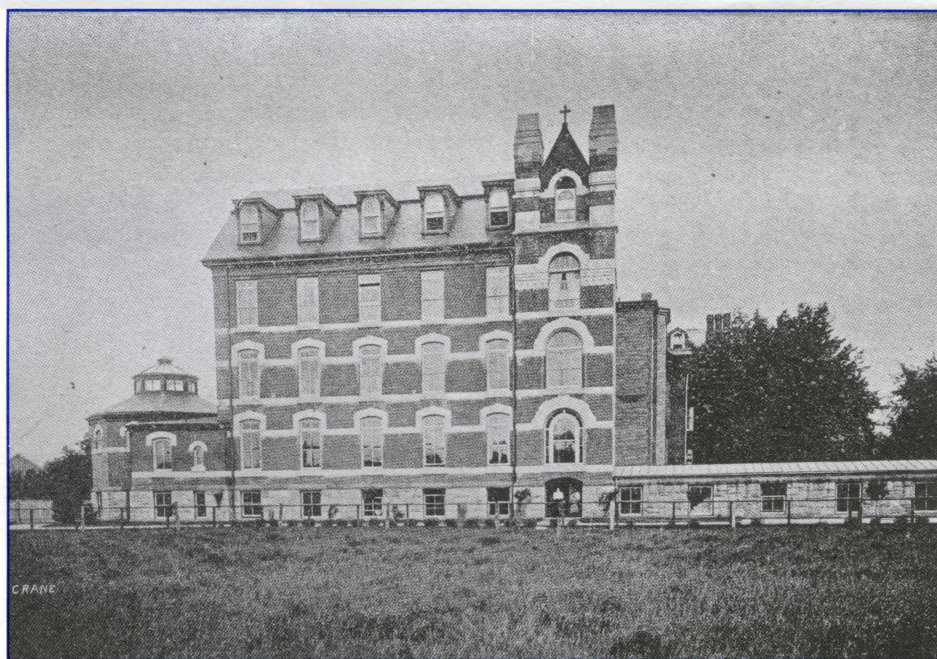
A Historical Review of Saint Francis Hospital, Trenton

Comments written down simply as a record of an event usually fail to reveal the difficulties and anxieties preceding the occasion. Such was the case with Bishop Michael Augustine Corrigan's brief entry in his journal for May 31, 1874:

"In the afternoon grand processions of the various Catholic Societies to [Saint Francis] Hospital. During the Ceremony of blessing this institution, F. Bonaventure preached in German, in the open air, and the B[isho]p succeeded him in English. A vast assemblage from the three Parishes, and outsiders."

Saint Francis, the first hospital in Trenton, had its inception in the observations of Sister Mary Hyacintha, O.S.F. She, along with two companions, arrived in Trenton from Philadelphia in 1869 to open a school for St. Francis of Assisium parish in the New Jersey capital. The Sisters quickly noted that the city's people needed a hospital and they began to seek support of every kind, including a house-to-house canvass for funds, and gained approval for the project from Bishop James Roosevelt Bayley.

The Sisters purchased some 2.5 acres of property at Hamilton Avenue and Chambers Street, and on October 15, 1871, the cornerstone for the new hospital was laid by Father Grasselli of the Conventual Franciscans, who preached in German, and Father John P. Mackin, pastor of Saint John's in Trenton, who preached the English sermon. In 1873 formal incorporation was accomplished.



Saint Francis Hospital, early years

Caring for the sick has long been recognized as one of the corporal works of mercy, so it was no surprise that the entire Catholic community of Trenton supported the hospital project. Indeed, much if not all of the non-Catholic community of Trenton helped build the institution which the priests of Trenton and the Sisters of St. Francis asserted would "serve all without respect to party, creed or color," to quote the Trenton *Daily Public Opinion* of April 13, 1874.

The surprise, then, was to find that the pastor of Saint John's parish in 1874 vigorously opposed the hospital project – or at least the collection of money for it.

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Save the Date September 28, 1996

The New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission will hold its next public program on Saturday, September 28, 1996, at Seton Hall University. The focus will be on "Writing Parish Histories."

The program is designed to assist those who are now or soon will be preparing anniversary

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Saint Francis Hospital continued from page 1

Father Mackin had died in March, 1873, and Bishop Corrigan appointed as his successor Father Patrick Byrne. A native of Ireland, Byrne came to this country as a youngster, attended Georgetown for a time and then St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. Ordained in 1860, he served briefly in Princeton, New Brunswick, Phillipsburg, Jersey City and Newark and in 1863 became pastor of Immaculate Conception in Camden. There he built a new church for the parish, laid the physical foundation for a new school building, and fostered a building and loan association for parishioners, a temperance society and other parish organizations.

When he came to Saint John's, Trenton, Father Byrne quickly decided that the parish needed a new school. Indeed, it probably did. But as Father Byrne was settling into his new sphere of activity, the Panic of 1873 struck the nation and plunged it into a depression which lasted through most of the decade.

As late as 1879 *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle* asserted that "Business since 1873 has been like a retreating army on the march." Deterred not at all by the collapse of the national and local economy, Byrne laid out plans for an extensive school building program. But when he sought to collect money for the construction, he discovered that the costs of Saint Francis Hospital drained

money from Saint John's parishioners, as well as from many others in the city.

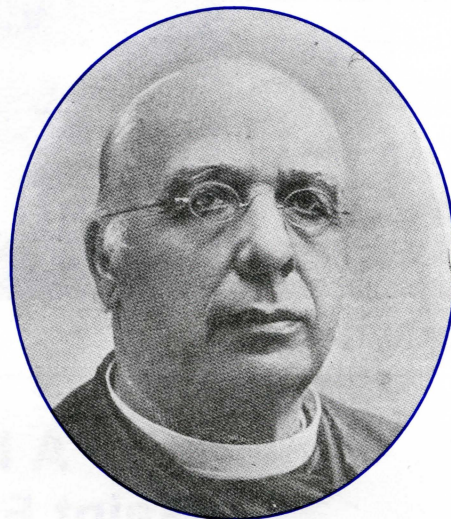
Why Byrne opposed the hospital appears nowhere to be clearly stated. Ethnic opposition between German and Irish elements within the Church seems not to have been the case here. The Irish-born Father Mackin, the German-born Father Anthony Smith, pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral, and the Italian-born Father Peter Jachetti, pastor of St. Francis, the German church, all heartily endorsed the project. The most logical explanation of Byrne's fervid opposition to the hospital seems to be tied to his desire to build the new school for St. John's. He forbade his parishioners to contribute money to the hospital and attempted to have them recall what they had already contributed.

In March, 1874, and again in April, Corrigan wrote to Byrne that the Franciscan Sisters had episcopal sanction for collecting the money for the hospital, that it was jointly supported by the parishes of Trenton and that Byrne had to cease his interference. On April 18, 1874, Corrigan met with the pastors of St. Mary's Cathedral and St. Francis of Assisium Church to discuss the situation, but their conclusions were not recorded.

On the following day the Bishop inspected the construction site, where the hospital was almost completed. The new building was of brick, 86 x 54 feet, and four stories high, with a mansard roof. Corrigan reported its total cost as \$36,000, with a remaining debt of \$19,000. In the course of this visit the bishop also received from the Sister Superior "a very modest account of the persecution raised against the Hospital" by Byrne and promised his protection.

Father Byrne's opposition was briefly an embarrassment when it became public and a matter of chagrin to Corrigan, but did not seriously hamper the work. By late May, 1874, the building was ready to be blessed but Byrne was not placated.

The June first edition of the *Daily Public Opinion* carried a brief article

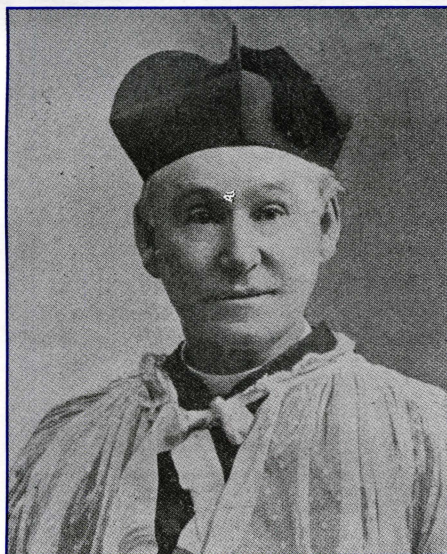


*Reverend Anthony Smith,
pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral*

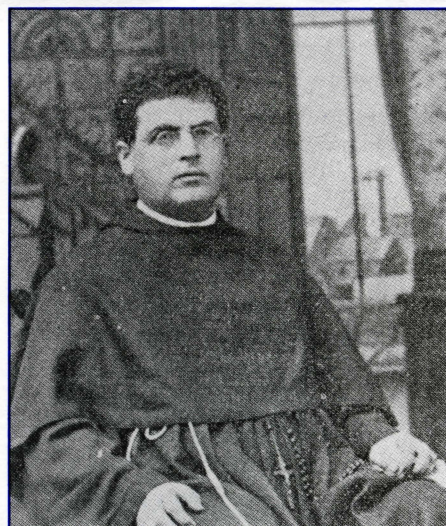
about the dedication of the hospital. Bishop Corrigan presided, with the assistance of Father Boneventure Frey, O.F.M. Cap. of New York City, and Father Anthony Smith and several Conventual Fathers. At 2:30 p.m. a procession formed in front of St. Francis Church. A cordon of police led the way, followed by Grand Marshal Joseph Wagner.

Next came one member of each parish society in the line of march, four abreast. Then the parish societies: The Young Ladies Sodality of St. Francis Church, Young Ladies Sodality of St. Mary's Church, Boys Sodality of St. Francis Church, Young Men's Catholic Association, carriage of the Bishop and

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Reverend Patrick Byrne in his later years



Reverend Peter Jachetti, pastor of St. Francis Church

Saint Francis Hospital continued from page 2

clergymen, St. Boniface Society, the Trenton Beneficial, St. Joseph's, St. Mary's Beneficial, St. Francis, St. Mary's Temperance and St. Peter's.

Notably absent from the newspaper account and from Corrigan's brief journal entry is any mention of the pastor of St. John's and any reference to a group from St. John's in the line of march. Corrigan's journal entry does describe the attendees as "a vast assemblage from the three parishes, and outsiders," and undoubtedly many parishioners of St. John's did join the celebration. No official representation, however, was recorded.

Corrigan described the controversy as "a strange illustration of the bad effects of

misguided zeal and honesty of purpose." In the end, even from Father Byrne's viewpoint, it was probably also unnecessary. On September 5, 1875, 15 months after the dedication of the hospital, the bishop was back in Trenton to confirm some 450 people at St. John's.

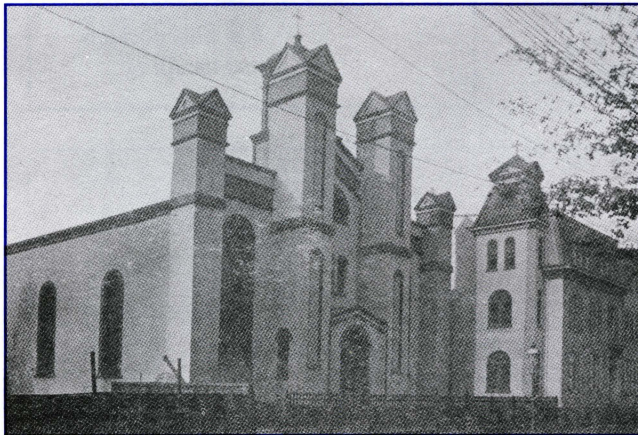
On the following day, his journal continues, "I assisted at the inauguration of the splendid school-house erected by F[ather]. Byrne, at an expense of \$50,000."

The new school could accommodate 1,200 children, and had residences for the Sisters of Charity and Brothers of the Holy Cross who taught there. It opened that month with 700 pupils.

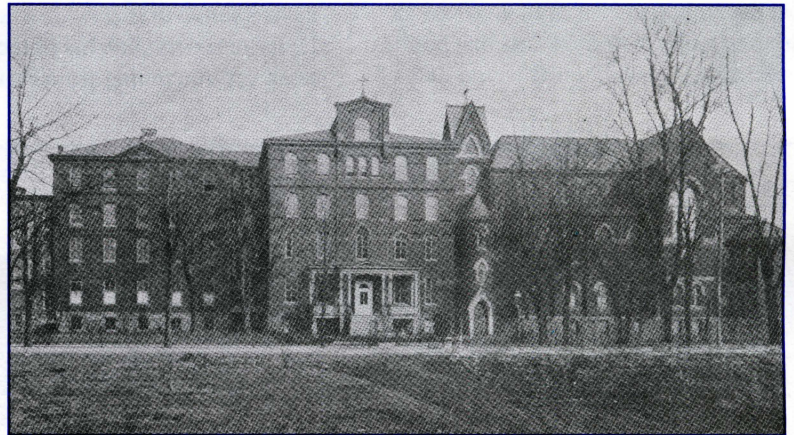


*Reverend John P. Mackin,
Byrne's predecessor at St. John's*

Saint Francis Hospital has grown into Saint Francis Medical Center and remains a leading health facility in Mercer County.



St. Francis Church, Trenton



St. Francis Hospital around the turn of the century

Save the Date continued from page 1



Reverend Raymond J. Kupke

histories of parishes, schools or other institutions to write interesting accounts of permanent interest. This is a particularly appropriate topic to examine at this time, because so many institutions are approaching a 50th anniversary. The decade after the end of World War II saw extremely rapid suburban development in New Jersey, and as people moved to new places, new parishes had to be established to serve them.

This next decade will see the golden jubilee of many institutions whose history deserves to be written. Through the program the Commission hopes to help those who will do the writing to do it well.

Father Raymond J. Kupke, author of *Living Stones*, a history of the Diocese of Paterson, will kick off the day's program at 10 a.m. The program also includes a panel of authors of parish histories offering the benefit of their experiences, some practical advice on organizing and using parish archives, and a concluding luncheon speaker. A tour of Walsh Library at Seton Hall University and the archives will be available to all who are interested.

So, save the date! A complete program and information about registration will be included in the next edition of *Catholic Records Newsletter*.

Commission Member Defends Pope Pius XII

Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F. has written *Yours is a Precious Witness: Memoirs of Jews and Catholics in Wartime Italy*. Described as an "oral history of Jews and Catholics" in Italy during World War II, the book examines the role of Catholics in helping save the lives of Italian Jews from the Nazis' "final solution." In so doing it addresses an ongoing controversy over the role of Pope Pius XII who, since his death in 1958, has been frequently blamed for not speaking out more forcefully against the Nazi policy of genocide.

Yours is a Precious Witness cites the work of Catholics in Italy to save Jewish lives and the role of the Pope in encouraging and supporting them as evidence that the Holy Father was as involved as circumstances permitted, and that public declarations by the Pontiff would only



Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F.

have resulted in more vigorous efforts by Hitler to accomplish his purpose. The book is forthcoming from Paulist Press.

Available for Sale

The following Commission publications are available from the Commission:

Sullivan, et al.,
The Bishops of Newark
hardbound \$10
paperbound \$5

Wosh, Peter J.,
Catholic Parish and Institutional Histories in the State of New Jersey: A Checklist
paper \$2

A joint publication of the Commission and the New Jersey Historical Society is available from the Historical Society, 230 Broadway, Newark, New Jersey 07104:

The Diocesan Journal of Michael Augustine Corrigan, Bishop of Newark, 1872-1880
\$35 plus postage and handling

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