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The Catholic College of Columbus 1883-1887

by Donald M. Schlegel
(Continued, from Vol. XXI, No. 9)

First College Site

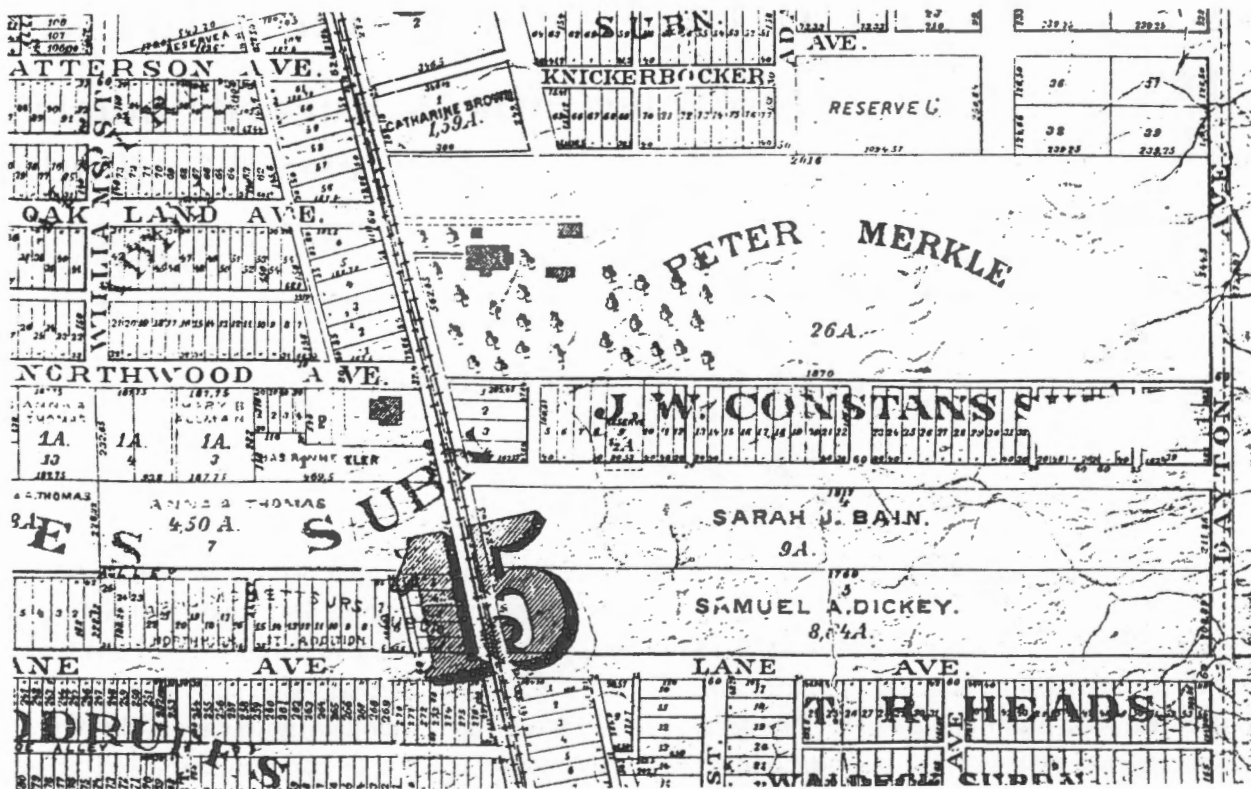
The Columbus city directories of 1884 and 1885 give the location of the school as the east side of High Street, north of Lane Avenue. No deed or lease transferring this property to the school or to Bishop Watterson was recorded on the Franklin County Recorder's books, but the original lease is preserved in the diocesan Archives. Signed on September 5, 1883, the lease was from Peter Merkle and Addie Merkle his wife to Bishop Watterson. The lease does not mention what use was to be made of the property. The land was in the City of Columbus, being part of the third quarter, first township, 18th range, U.S. Military Lands, running 582 feet along the center of High Street, having an average depth of two thousand feet, and containing 25 acres. The boundaries of the property today are North High Street, the alley north of Oakland Ave., Indianola Ave., and the alley south of Northwood Ave. The lease was for one year at a rent of \$250 per quarter and was renewable for a second year at the same rent. The bishop was to protect the buildings and trees and shrubbery from damage, "such as marking or defacing said buildings or breaking or injuring said trees or shrubs."

Peter Merkle had purchased the property from George Williams only on June 16, 1883, the price being \$21,800.00.⁸ The 1872 county atlas and

1889 Columbus map show that a large house was on the property, along with two or three out-buildings. The house apparently had been built by the famous Samuel Medary while he was editor of the Columbus newspaper, the *Ohio Statesman*. In 1853 he had purchased 162 acres running from the Olentangy River east to what is now Indianola Avenue and there developed a farm that he called Northwood, a name still preserved in the name of a subdivision and a street there. Medary went to Minnesota in 1857 and then to Kansas as territorial governor. Though he returned to Columbus after the election of 1860 and began his Peace-Democrat newspaper *The Crisis*, he never again lived at Northwood. The site of the school was the remaining core of the farm after he and subsequent owners had divided it, beginning about 1860.

The site was "conveniently near the city, and yet, far enough to possess all the charms and advantages of the country." It was not far from the Ohio State University and, though far from the homes of many potential students, could be reached via the High Street horse-car line.

The building and grounds were blessed by Bishop Watterson on Sunday, September 16, 1883. After some remarks, the bishop translated from the Latin the prayer of blessing. Then the



The first home of the Catholic College of Columbus was the Peter Merkle property, shown on the above section of the 1889 *Map of the City of Columbus, Ohio* by Ward Brothers. (Drawn by Thomas Mulloy, 1889. Courtesy of the Columbus Metropolitan Library)

crowd in attendance on the lawn knelt "and the prayer was repeated in Latin, and the entrance way was sprinkled with holy water from the vessel used for such purposes. Every room was visited, incense burned in it, its walks sprinkled with holy water and the blessing of the Bishop pronounced upon it. While the ceremonies were in progress within, Rev. Mageveny [*sic*] and his assistants passed the hat among the people for contributions and the response was quite liberal."⁹

The former Medary mansion contained twenty-eight rooms and was "well ventilated and perfectly adapted to its present use." One or two of the rooms in the school were the residence of Father Mageveny and another was a chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart. (Mageveny was devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and

sometime during 1883 he established a Society of the Sacred Heart in the Cathedral parish.)¹⁰

First Academic Year

In its first year, the college had about thirty boarders and twenty day-scholars. In March of 1884 the *Columbian* noted, "The capacity of the Northwood College is now taxed to its utmost, so far as the reception of boarders is concerned. The last bed was filled a few days ago by the arrival of a new student from near Lancaster. There is still plenty of room, however, for day scholars."¹¹

The students were a lively group who, during the first two years, were predominately of Irish extraction. In March of 1884 they decided to celebrate St. Patrick's day with an

"entertainment" in the evening, to which they invited all the priests of the city.

The celebration was held in one of the larger rooms of the institution and was described as "a most delightful treat as well as surprise to all those who had the pleasure of being present. The program rendered, especially the musical portion of it, included selections from the great composers, and was artistically interpreted by the various performers and elicited hearty applause from the appreciative auditors. ... In specially commending the musical feature of the program given, we would not, however, detract from the merit of the rest of the performance. The songs and choruses were also well rendered, and the recitations would have reflected credit on more trained and skilled orators. ... the recitation of Master Willia Devlin -- the smallest tot of the school -- which for naturalness and feeling we have never seen equalled, certainly not in one so young. He is a born orator, and if he does not make his mark in the world as years grow apace, we shall be greatly disappointed in our expectations. ... Master Josie Egan. This bright youth's brilliant performances on the piano in the rendition of the difficult selections of the program exhibited powers of execution and artistic conception far beyond the average of one of his years. ... Joe promises to be a grand musician."

The Program was listed in the columns of the *Columbian*¹²:

St. Patrick's Day.....Jos. Egan and Wm. Hanavin
 Oft in the Stilly NightChorus
 Declamation, 'Tis gone and forever.....Chas. Watterson
 Declamation, Erin thy Smiles and Tears...Flor. Sullivan
 Saratoga Polka.....Hugh McCue and Louis Seitz
 Santa Lucia.....Jos Egan
 Over the Stars.....Louis Seitz
 Erin's Flag.....Jos. Howard
 Oxen Waltz.....Jos. Egan and Louis Seitz
 Sonata in D.....Jos. Egan

In the Starlight.....Jos. Egan and Louis Seitz
 O, the Shamrocks.....Edward Jacobs
 Soldiers Home Polka.....Jos. Egan and Wm. Hanavin
 Les deux anges.....Jos. Egan
 Angels are Watching Us.....Jos. Egan and Louis Seitz
 The Exile of Erin.....Wm. Devlin
 Caliph of Bagdad.....Jos. Egan
 Adagio No. 2.....Jos. Egan
 Come Back to Erin.....Jos. Egan and Louis Seitz
 Dear Harp of My Country.....Eugene Byrne

Nor were the students only academically inclined. In the spring of 1884 baseball fever was sweeping the city and country. The boys, with the college's extensive grounds to enjoy, formed "no less than two clubs, fully equipped and officered."¹³

Meanwhile, the boys studied Philosophy, Arithmetic, U.S. History, Latin, German, French, English, Geography, and Botany and other physical sciences.

In the midst of this apparent success, Father Magevney became ill and had to resign the presidency of the college. In May, Bishop Watterson called Rev. John K. Larkin from pastoral work at Zanesville St. Nicholas parish to take the reins of the College. Calling on his previous experience as a professor at Mt. St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg, Father Larkin piloted the Columbus institution to a successful conclusion of its first year.

The school closed that first academic year on Tuesday, June 24, 1884 with an impromptu afternoon entertainment, "gotten up" by the students for themselves. "The Rt. Rev. Bishop honored the occasion with his presence, and at the close of the performance, addressed the students, complimenting them on the practical evidence of their advancement in knowledge as witnessed in the trying ordeal of the examinations they had undergone, and expressed the hope that he would see them all again at their

desks at the opening of the next term. He, however, thanked all who had in any way contributed to the success of the college, which had been so marked in the brief period of its existence as to give the most encouraging hope for the future. The announcement of the continuance of the school will be hailed with delight by its patrons. It has done a good work and has done it well. Few institutions have met with such unqualified success at their starting. This fact alone goes far to show the appreciation with which the venture has met, and encourages its originators to hope for a greater outcome in the future. Not only has the college met its expenses which were considerable at the opening, but by careful management has accumulated a surplus, which will be expended in increasing its facilities for the better accommodation of an increased number of students. The road to success is opened and the Catholic College, will begin its next term without any of the harassments that beset its way when it first threw open its doors. Rev. Dr. Larkin, the accomplished president is thoroughly up in College matters having had an extensive experience, and under his able guidance the institution will ever be able to give good account of itself."¹⁴

Second Academic Year

The second year of the fledgling college opened at the on September 8, 1884 in the Northwood building, with Father Larkin remaining in charge. Initial attendance was encouraging and was enhanced by Larkin's decision to reduce tuition and room and board charges. The *Columbian* reported, "good professors of experience have been engaged" to teach courses in the classical, scientific, and commercial branches of learning.¹⁵ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to learn anything of the professors who taught at the college that year. The usually chatty columns of the *Columbian* carried little news of the college that year. It may be that Father Larkin did not

communicate as effectively or often with its editor as Magevney had. After announcing the opening of the second session of the year on February 2, the diocesan newspaper was silent concerning the school.

At commencement time, two issues of the *Columbian* were filled with news of the exercises at St. Mary's of the Springs, St. Joseph's Academy, St. Aloysius at New Lexington, St. Peter's High School in Steubenville, many elementary schools around the diocese, and even St. Raphael's parish school in Springfield and the University of Notre Dame, but not a word about the Catholic College of Columbus. We know that the college closed its second year with a deficit¹⁶ and it may be that there was no money for closing ceremonies; it is possible the school even closed earlier than normal.

The priests of the diocese used the college as the site of their annual retreat, conducted by Rev. Father Wissell, C.S.S.R. They attended in two shifts, one beginning on June 29 and the other on July 5, 1885. This seems to have been the last use made by the diocese of the mansion and grounds on North High Street. The lease of the property expired at the end of the second academic year and either Mr. Merkle would not renew it or the Bishop, facing the school's deficit, did not ask to have it renewed.

(To be continued)

NOTES

- 8) Franklin County Deed Record 162/58
- 9) *Columbus Dispatch*, Sept. 17, 1883
- 10) *Catholic Columbian*, Feb. 9, 1884; March 15, 1884; 1884-5 Columbus city directory
- 11) *Columbian*, March 15, 1884
- 12) *ibid.*, March 15 & 23, 1884
- 13) *ibid.*, May 17, 1884
- 14) *ibid.*, June 28, 1884
- 15) *ibid.*, Aug. 9, 1884; Aug. 30, 1884; Oct. 11, 1884; Sept. 20, 1884.
- 16) *ibid.*, July 3, 1886

Rev. John K. Larkin

John Kyran Larkin was born in Limerick, Ireland on January 1, 1853. Little is known of his family, except that he had a brother, Thomas, who was a seminarian at St. Charles, Overbrook, Pa., in 1885 and served in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the 1890s. John was educated for the priesthood at Maynooth College and was ordained by Rt. Rev. George Butler, D.D. at Limerick, for that diocese, on July 1, 1877.¹

He came to America about 1881 and that September 1 was accepted as a member of the faculty at Mt. St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg. He was appointed professor of Moral Theology and Metaphysics that month and in the following year added Church History to his schedule. The college conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy upon him on June 28, 1882.

Meanwhile, it was necessary that he be adopted by some diocese in this country, and the college turned to its former president, Rt. Rev. John A. Watterson, Bishop of Columbus. Rev. William Byrne, President of the College, wrote to Bishop Watterson concerning Father Larkin, advising that the Bishop would be safe in adopting him unconditionally, on September 12 and again on October 4, 1881. Watterson's reply apparently is not extant, but we know that he accepted the Irish priest.

After teaching at the college for two years, Father Larkin tired of college life and on November 16, 1883 wrote to the college from St. Patrick's Church, Jersey City, N.J., "Preferring to engage on the work of the Mission, and thinking it better that my communion with the College should cease, I hereby tender my resignation as professor of Moral Theology and Metaphysics, to take effect immediately." This resignation was accepted by president Byrne, who then wrote to

Bishop Watterson that "Prof. Larkin is a good natured fellow but too soft for college life", and asking him to employ Larkin, as none of the eastern dioceses then needed priests.²

Bishop Watterson did agree to employ him and sent him to assist Father Epink at Zanesville St. Nicholas parish, during the latter's last illness, from December of 1883 until the following May. Larkin then was appointed President at the Catholic College of Columbus, which post he filled from May until July of 1884 and during the entire 1884/85 academic year. In January of 1886 he became the first resident pastor at Wellston Sts. Peter and Paul, where he remained until May of 1887.³

In 1887 he transferred to the Diocese of Nashville, where he served short terms at Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville. While stationed at Dayton, Tennessee, he became interested in work with the "colored" people and opened a school for their children, which he taught himself for a time until the services of some good sisters could be procured. None of the children were Catholics but he made a few converts among their families. In 1894 he was made pastor of St. Brigid's parish at Memphis, where he built up the school until it was one of the best in the city. In 1907 he was appointed chaplain of the soldiers' home at Johnson City, Tennessee. There, in addition to his duties, he wrote a history of the Church in Tennessee, unfortunately never published and subsequently lost. He died at Johnson City on July 13, 1910.⁴

"Father Larkin was an ornament to humanity, a faithful and brilliant soldier in the army of the church, and a man whose sole aim, thought and ambition was the glory and honor of the Catholic Church. Many of us thought he was too heedless

of the things of this world, but he built his temples to the Lord not in brick or marble, but in the hearts of the children of the church. ...His faith in prayer was so unbounded that in his ecstasy he forgot himself and those who heard him forgot themselves also. He was a man of infinite humor, a man who never complained of his trials or afflictions, and a man whose heart and hand were always open."⁵

SOURCES

1) Biographical sketch written for a parish history and provided by Ann Krenson,

Chancellor, Diocese of Nashville.

2) Letters and other data supplied by Barbara D. Miles, Archivist, Mount Saint Mary's College & Seminary.

3) Dates from parish sacramental registers.

4) Based on Catholic Directory listings and the biographical sketch mentioned in note 1.

5) From *The Mountaineer*, Mt. St. Mary's College, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (October 15, 1910); quoting from an unnamed source; courtesy of the Archives, Mt. St. Mary's College and Seminary.



Abstracts from *The Catholic Telegraph*

(Continued, from Vol. XXI, No. 7)

October 24, 1840

ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH

NEAR SOMERSET, PERRY CO., OHIO.

We have heard much of the beautiful church which the zealous Fathers of the Dominican order are building in the neighborhood of their monastery, in this State. Every good Catholic will rejoice to hear that an edifice worthy of the sacred object to which it is to be devoted, will soon stand on the site of the mother church, and cradle of Catholicity in this diocese. The design is of the pointed Gothic, and we have heard that in the plan and finish the building will not be exceeded by any in the Union. St. Joseph's is 122 feet long, and 29 in breadth, and the tower is to be one hundred and sixty feet high. As soon as completed we trust some of our friends at Somerset will furnish us with an accurate description.

November 21, 1840

DEDICATION OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, LANCASTER, OHIO.

The frame church, which was erected upwards of twenty years past for the use of the Catholic Congregation of Lancaster, having been

inconveniently situated, as well as too small to accommodate the constantly increasing members of our holy faith, it became necessary to construct a larger and more substantial building, on a more eligible site. This pious undertaking was commenced about two years ago, on a lot purchased for four hundred dollars (yet to be paid) from Mr. ----- Gargahty. This lot is 80 by 160 feet -- the building, of brick, is 30 by 48, being at an elevation of 35 feet, (including an excellent basement) from the ground to the top of the walls. Besides the organ loft, there is a gallery, extending along the sidewalls of the church to within a few feet of the Railing of the Sanctuary and capable of containing several hundreds of persons. The entire cost of the church when completed will not, it is estimated, fall short of nine thousand dollars. Of these one thousand has been already paid by the bishop; \$250, each, by three liberal citizens, and smaller sums, but fully equal to their means, in these hard times, have been subscribed by other friends of Religion, leaving the church still heavily in debt.

Notwithstanding these pecuniary difficulties, it was judged advisable to open the church for

divine worship before the commencement of winter and it was accordingly dedicated on last Sunday by the bishop, with the usual ceremonies of the Roman Ritual, for the blessing of Churches.

The High Mass was sung by Rev. N. D. Young, O.P. The Bishop preached after the Gospel and Very Rev. Mr. Henni, at the end of Mass, addressed the German population in his usual graceful, impressive and eloquent manner. The day was inclement, but the church was crowded, and a more orderly and respectful audience we do not remember to have seen on any similar occasion. There were several first communicants at the morning sacrifice, and seventy five persons, of whom twelve were converts, were confirmed in the afternoon, after discourses in German and English, by the bishop and Very Rev. Mr. Henni. the choir was very effective and occasionally powerful, reflecting much credit on the musical talent of Lancaster and evincing zeal, assiduity and success with which repeated rehearsals had been attended by all the members.

In this congregation there are upwards of three hundred Easter communicants, most of whom receive frequently throughout the year, the Bread of Life; and there have been sixteen Marriages and one hundred and twenty-two Baptisms since the 8th Nov. 1839. The congregation is much indebted to the "Ladies' Catholic Sewing Society" which has been zealously engaged for many months in preparing Fancy Articles for a Fair, the proceeds of which were to be applied towards the liquidation of the debts. The Town Hall was tastefully decorated, for the holding of this Fair, with evergreens and beautiful flowers, and an array of articles exhibited as the work of benevolent young ladies of all religious denominations who kindly united with their Catholic friends in rendering this grateful homage to the Almighty One. The citizens very generally patronised this amiable

and ingenious effort to obtain aid for the Holy Place and we believe that the young Ladies who presided last evening (9th Nov.) at the respective Tables, were well pleased with the influence exerted on the approbatory feelings and the purses of the Visitors. We took occasion to look at the Fair Scene and though fairly taxed at the "Post Office," the "Ice-Cream" and the "variety" counters, were exceedingly edified at the exhibition.

It may not be uninteresting to observe in conclusion, that of the two most aged and faithful members of the congregation, one a German, Mr. Shactzle, who had longed to live only to see the completion of the "House of God," at which he daily toiled, witnessed its dedication from the Temple not made with hands, in Heaven, to which all justly believed, he had sped but a few days previously for a better -- "a very great reward;" and the other, a true old Maryland Catholic, Mr. Lilly, Agent for your paper, was unable, from infirmity, to attend. May such examples never be forgotten by the churches! And may the more youthful members of the congregation continue, as the light of a bright and faultless example thus bequeathed to them by the aged!

November 28, 1840

DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE, KNOX CO., O.

It is now nearly eighteen years since the old church of St. Luke, a log building, was put up, on a lot given by Mr. George Sapp, a convert to our Holy faith, who moved thirty-four years ago from Allegany Co. Md. to this part of Ohio. This excellent man and family and numerous descendants, all faithful to their christian duties, assisted at the blessing of the new church, on a two acre lot, adjoining and including the grant formerly made. Nearly all the old settlers, and their children, who have at various times emigrated from the cradle of Catholicity in the United States, to this Diocese are true to their

character for loyalty to their Holy religion and kind-heartedness to their neighbors of other denominations. they too had aided in presenting this new monument of their unchangeable convictions to the god of their fathers. It occupies a beautiful eminence visible for a great distance, and is a substantial frame building, fifty by thirty-eight feet, with choir, gallery, handsome altar, altar railing and other appropriate fixtures. The plastering was remarkably well done by two good Irish Catholics.

At the early Mass, the first communicants prepared for that solemn and affecting Rite, by their pious and beloved Pastor, Rev. Mr. Lamy, were addressed by the 'bishop on the dispositions necessary for the reception of the most holy eucharist and fervently exhorted to preserve the baptismal promises, then renewed, until they were summoned to appear before the same God at his second advent -- to reward the good communicant! Three were 46 confirmed, at the High Mass, and about 100 received the Holy communion, of these there were ten fervent converts. The choir, under the instruction of Rev. Mr. Lamy, has greatly improved and their performance aided, we have no doubt, in the solemnity and impressiveness of the divine service, by which a very large audience, composed of Catholics and Protestants, appeared to be exceedingly edified.

Very Rev. Mr. Henni addressed the German portion of the flock with his wonted energy and zeal: and the Bishop preached, as usual two or three times in the day. His evening discourse, by special request of some of the friendly Protestants of Danville, was on the subject of the Trinity. Next morning, the High Mass was sung

by Very Rev. J. M. Henni, who also preached, and the Bishop addressed the congregation subsequently, taking for the subject of his discourse the fear of God. On Tuesday evening, the Bishop preached in Mount Vernon , at the solicitation of numerous Protestant, as well as Catholic friends, in the meeting house of the aged and liberal Judge Baming to whom he had been indebted, some years before for much kindness. His discourse was on the doctrine of praying for the dead, but he also took occasion, before commencing it, to dwell at considerable length on the injustice of our periodical literature and common place books to the Catholic religion and its professors. To illustrate this too notorious and humiliating truth, he read some extracts from Greenville Mellen's "book of the United States," than which it is impossible to conceive anything more rancorously illiberal and unjust to Roman Catholics. The church was well filled, notwithstanding a protracted meeting, which it is understood, is to last for 10 days, in the Presbyterian church, and in which the creed of Catholics is not much commended.

The following day, he proceeded in company with Very Rev. Mr. Henni to Marion, Finley and Ottawa, to visit the German Catholic settlements in Putnam, Mercer and Shelby counties. You will, therefore, please publish that he will be next Sunday, the 22d, at Rev. Mr. Horstman's, the Sunday following at Minster; during the ensuing week, at the French settlement, near Jackson, and Piqua and Troy; and on the second Tuesday of Advent, in Dayton, in all which places he hopes to find a numerous youth well instructed in the catechism and prepared to received the Holy Sacrament.

(To be continued)

Catholic Record Society -- Diocese of Columbus

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