

The Work of Education: The Franciscan Brothers in Ireland and Brooklyn

BY EMMETT CORRY, O.S.F.

When Franciscan Brothers of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis arrived in Brooklyn in 1858, they were first assigned to the new Male Catholic Orphan Asylum. However, their almost five centuries as successful educators in Ireland recommended them to pastors and parents, and they soon took up this work in their own St. Francis Academy and in parish schools of the Brooklyn diocese.

It is difficult in our ecumenical age to appreciate how suspicious and fearful Catholics were of evangelical Protestant efforts to proselytize their children. It is also hard for us to understand the conviction the well-funded evangelicals had that Catholic “popery” must be opposed at all costs. Nevertheless, much of nineteenth-century religion in Ireland is suffused with this mutual animosity and suspicion, especially in the phenomenon of “souperism,” which was used to induce Catholics, especially in the west of Ireland, to abandon their faith for food during and after the Great Famine.¹

This article focuses on the work of the Franciscan Brothers in Brooklyn, but it will first briefly discuss their history as educators in the five centuries before their suppression in Ireland; their re-emergence after 1818, first in Milltown and Dalkey in the Archdiocese of Dublin, and later in Mountbellew, Galway, and many other towns in the Archdiocese of Tuam in the west of Ireland. Their reemergence and success in the nineteenth century was primarily in response to Archbishop John MacHale’s and the other Irish bishops’ fears of Protestant proselytism of their Catholic children through the evangelicals’ creation and support of Hibernian Bible Society schools. The Franciscan Brothers emigration to Brooklyn in 1858 was in response to similar fears of New York City’s archbishop John Hughes, Brooklyn’s bishop John Loughlin, and other American bishops, that Protestant common schools would lead Catholic children to fall away from their faith.²

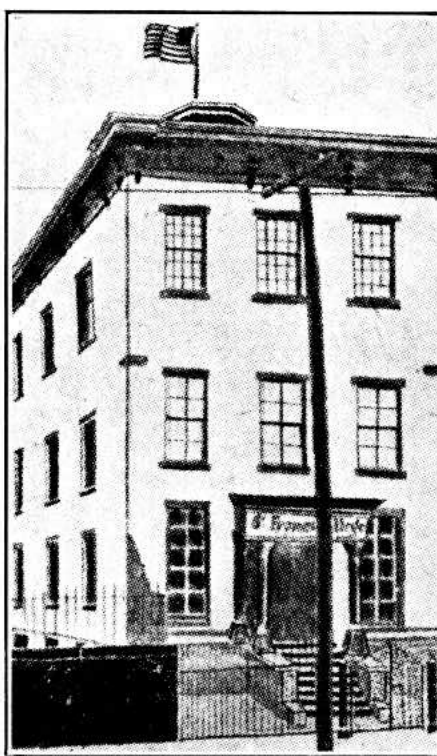


Illustration: St. Francis Academy on Baltic Street. Courtesy of Emmet Corry.

EDUCATORS IN IRELAND

The Franciscan Third Order Regular brothers were well known for the schools attached to their monasteries, from their founding in Killeenbrenan in the Archdiocese of Tuam around 1426, to the suppression of forty-seven of their houses during the two centuries of Penal Laws imposed by the English and Irish parliaments in the post-Elizabethan period (1558–1760). The brothers supported themselves by manual labor and by farming the fields around their friaries. Rather than Latin, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, which were taught to the sons of the rich and privileged in monastic schools in France, Spain, and Belgium, the free curriculum of the Franciscan Brothers’ schools “would have focused on native learning — the grammar, poetry, histories, and sagas of Gaelic Ireland, as well as the genealogies of important families.”³

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In Ireland, the Franciscan Brothers continued their tradition of working as skilled stonemasons, carpenters, and farmers in their monasteries. In this way, they supported the brothers who were offering free education in these useful trades for working-class young men, and primary education for poor children. It was a monastic tradition that they would be forced to abandon in urban Brooklyn.

The brothers who arrived in Brooklyn in 1858 at the request of Bishop Loughlin were sent by John MacHale (1791–1881), the famous archbishop of Tuam, County Galway, Ireland. Called the “Lion of the West,” MacHale was a fervent Irish patriot as well as the metropolitan of the Province of Tuam. Fearing his fiery Irish nationalism, the British government tried unsuccessfully to prevent his appointment to Tuam after the death of Archbishop Oliver Kelly in 1834. An independent and powerful speaker and prolific writer, MacHale was one of the most important prelates in Ireland in the nineteenth century. He was also very influential in the development of Catholic education for Irish immigrants in the Americas, responding positively to the requests of American bishops for religious teaching communities.

Because control of the education of Catholic children was the most significant issue in church-state relations in Ireland in the nineteenth century, MacHale’s solution to the Hibernian Bible Society schools was to offer strong support to the religious teaching communities in his province. Strongly recommended by Rome, the establishing of schools became the duty of the Catholic bishops of Ireland, and they came to realize that parish schools, taught by new religious orders created for this purpose, would serve as bastions against the work of the proselytizers.

This period saw the rise of the Presentation Sisters founded by Nano Nagle, who began work in Cork in 1777 and who had twenty-eight schools in Ireland by 1830; the Presentation Brothers founded by Blessed Edmund Rice in 1802 in Waterford, and later the Christian Brothers, which he also founded; the Franciscan Brothers founded in Dublin and Mountbellew, Galway, by Michael Dillon and Bonaventure Lee in 1818; and the Sisters of Mercy founded by Blessed Catherine McAuley in Dublin in 1831.

By the middle of the century, MacHale was able to boast that there were 13,500 Catholic children receiving a Catholic education in his archdiocese in the west of Ireland.⁴

NEW YORK CITY’S “COMMON SCHOOLS”

The system of education the Franciscan Brothers found in the city of Brooklyn when they arrived in 1858 was a combination of private, church and “common schools.” Many children were enrolled in schools attached to churches or in those conducted by masters and women in private homes and which charged tuition. In 1805, in New York City, a Free School Society was created by a dozen wealthy men, primarily Quakers from the highest levels of the New York gentry, to “establish a Free School in the City of New York, for the education of such poor children as do not belong to, or are not provided for, by any religious society.”⁵

The society’s Quaker influence made its schools strictly nonsectarian. In seeking state funding for their schools, this policy was both the society’s greatest strength and its fatal flaw. As a nonsectarian school system, the society eventually became the public school system of the city of New York. Its nonsectarianism was in reality nonsectarian Protestantism, which repelled Catholic parents and the Catholic clergy.

Protestants, conscious of a growing Catholic immigrant population, and convinced that the Roman Catholic Church subverted true Americanism, caused many states to become hotbeds of nativism. Newly arrived Catholics, seeing these common schools as reflecting the dominant Protestant ethos that permeated American culture, could not accept sending their children to schools conducted mainly by Protestant teachers, with a Protestant viewpoint, and with religious instruction and religious exercises of a decidedly Protestant character:

The Catholic clergy understood that they were in a Protestant society, surrounded by hostility. Their people were poor, and the Church could offer them little more than spiritual comfort....All they could do was to guard their flock’s faith and ward off inducements to assimilate, which they saw as Protestant attempts to destroy the Church. The clergy found that the only sig-

nificant way they could protect their people from Protestant propaganda was to discourage their followers from using the schools of the Public School Society. Of about 12,000 Catholic children in the city in the late 1830s, only a few hundred were enrolled in the public schools.⁶

American bishops, many of whom had been born in Ireland, were aware that religious teaching communities had been valuable in solving a similar problem in Irish education. They therefore sought the help of their Irish colleagues when they began to create Catholic parochial schools to protect their children from the influence of the common schools.

John Hughes (1794–1864) was known as “Dagger John,” not only for the cross he placed before his name as a bishop, but also because of his aggressive leadership. He emerged in 1829–1830, as a defender of the Catholic faith when, under the pseudonym “Cranmer,” he sent fake news reports on the “Catholic invasion of Pennsylvania” to *The Protestant*, a virulently anti-Catholic newspaper. In a subsequent article in a Catholic newspaper, on 3 July 1830, Hughes revealed his identity as “Cranmer,” proving that he had hoodwinked the anti-Catholic nativists.⁷ Hughes became the passionate and articulate defender of the Catholic position on the unacceptability of the “Protestant” common schools.⁸ By 1840, Catholics were seeking state support for “Catholic public schools” as a solution to their opposition to the Free School Society’s textbooks and curriculum.

In the same year, the American bishops met in Baltimore and directly attacked the Protestantism of the common schools by directing pastors to establish Catholic schools: “We admonish pastors that they must see to the Christian and Catholic education of Catholic children with all the zeal they have.”⁹

RELIGIOUS TEACHING COMMUNITIES FROM IRELAND

Most U.S. bishops took the recommendation seriously and sought help from religious communities in Europe. Each of the Irish communities mentioned previously sent members to North America. The Sisters of Mercy were the first, dispatching sisters to Pittsburgh in 1843. The Presentation Sisters went to San Francisco in

1854, and the Franciscan Brothers first sent members to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1846; St. John’s, Newfoundland, in 1846; Loretto, Pennsylvania, in 1847; and finally Brooklyn in 1858.

The Congregation of Christian Brothers (i.e., Irish Christian Brothers) sent brothers to New York City in 1906. Many other communities sent religious to the United States from all over Europe. In all, forty-four different congregations of women arrived between 1829 and 1884, and from 1841 to 1884, eleven communities of brothers emigrated.¹⁰

Archbishop Hughes succeeded in obtaining a number of religious communities to teach in the diocese of New York. The Jesuits took charge of St. John’s College (later to be Fordham University), and the Sisters of Charity oversaw teaching in a few elementary schools. Hughes’s efforts to have brothers teach the boys, however, was not immediately successful, because he seemed unwilling to pay them a suitable wage. In a letter to Rev. Edward Sorin, the president of Notre Dame, Hughes wrote: “Nothing can be more reasonable than that the priest requiring a Brother, should pay his traveling expenses, and I will not say forty dollars, which I think too little, but fifty dollars a year for clothing.”¹¹ However, this amount was not considered “a sufficient salary” by the De La Salle Christian Brothers, who recalled two brothers sent to New York in 1847 by Brother Philippe, the superior general.¹²

SAINT FRANCIS ACADEMY

Within a year of their arrival in Brooklyn the Franciscan Brothers opened St. Francis Academy in September 1859, at 300 Baltic Street, a three-story building that had housed a Protestant church and a public school. The brothers converted the building in the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn into a private academy, living in its damp basement until they were able to purchase a house in 1862, behind the academy, at 41 Butler Street. St. Francis College evolved from this academy to become an educational institution that was granted the right to award the bachelor of arts degree by the University of the State New York.¹³

Brothers John McMahon, Vincent Hayes, and a young postulant arrived in Brooklyn on May 31, 1858. Later that summer, seven other

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young men joined the young community. All had emigrated from Roundstone in County Galway, Ireland.

After spending the hot summer and part of the fall of 1858 with the French De La Salle Christian Brothers on Pearl Street, the brothers found the Orphan Asylum to be unsuitable as a monastery and novitiate. As a result, John McMahon, the first superior of the community,

*"Purchase [d] a building at 300 Baltic Street between Smith and Court Streets as early as 1859. This building was used as a residence and St. Francis Academy. Owing to the increase of novices and resident students, another building was purchased in [1862], on Butler Street, opposite and adjoining the Baltic Street property. From this small beginning grew the present flourishing Institute known as the Franciscan Brothers of the Diocese of Brooklyn."*¹⁴

It was actually John Loughlin who bought the three-story building at 300 Baltic Street in St. Paul's Parish on September 1, 1859. He assigned it to the brothers for use as a school and residence. Later that month, "with the aid of Martin St. Leger, a gentleman of scholarly attainment," who was the first American to join the young community, St. Francis Academy, with two brothers and three laymen, was opened as the first Catholic private academy in the Diocese of Brooklyn.¹⁵ Legal ownership of the property was transferred to the brothers, with their incorporation as "The St. Francis Monastery of the City of Brooklyn" by the New York State Legislature on June 2, 1868. As a "membership corporation," under chapter 851 of the laws of 1868, St. Francis Academy at 300 Baltic Street was finally deeded to the Community on October 27, 1868.¹⁶

In a little over a quarter century, the small community had increased from six to seventy brothers:

When the Franciscans first came to Brooklyn...they established the college in Baltic Street, beginning with thirty scholars and six Brothers. Now there are 406 students, of which 100 are boarders, and a community of 70 Brothers. It was first called Saint Francis Academy, and as such was incorporated in 1868; in 1884, however, it was chartered as a regular college,

*authorized to confer degrees. . . . The college is one of the largest institutions of its class in the city, and is well located, with spacious surroundings. It contains sixteen classrooms, two study halls, a museum, music rooms, gymnasium, and all the appliances of a modern school. It has always received a large patronage from Brooklynites, and a number of our well-known citizens were graduated from its walls. It has this year sent a large representation of candidates for the priesthood to the Seminary at Emmitsburg, Maryland."*¹⁷

Two years after the bishop deeded the school to the community, a school retreat for the students was reported at length in the *Brooklyn Catholic*. Its reporter enthusiastically described the flower-bedecked chapel and hinted that a number of the younger boys may have made their First Communion that day:

*"The good Father reminded the children that they were then truly the heirs of heaven—in fact, that they had a heaven on earth. He exhorted them to continue to be true to the good resolutions they had made. And we have no doubt that the impression made on their young minds will long continue; and in years to come their memory will flutter back with pleasure to them as the happiest event of their lives."*¹⁸

About five years later, the Brooklyn Citizen recorded a graduation exercise held by the college at the Old Academy of Music on Montague Street: "Bishop Loughlin conferred the degrees and diplomas, and the 'Saint Francis College Grand March' was played by the college orchestra. Five Bachelor of Arts and five Master of Arts degrees were awarded, while twelve students received commercial diplomas. Awards in excellence were presented in each academic area and the old Academy was crowded with standees in the aisles, exuding 'enthusiasm warmer than the weather.'" ¹⁹

From 1885 to 1897, about 130 students were graduated from St. Francis College. Eighty-six were from Brooklyn; the rest were from other parts of New York and from New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maine, California, Latin America, Italy, and Ireland. Of this number, about one-third became priests, and several others entered various religious communities.

In 1898, eight students were awarded the bachelor of arts degree, and three received the master of arts degree. The master of arts degree was awarded to any alumnus who requested it a year after he received a bachelor's degree. The Ph.D. was awarded to those alumni who requested it and who believed they had sufficient post-baccalaureate credits or experience to deserve such an honor.²⁰

The four-year course of instruction at St. Francis College included twenty-six hours of class from Monday to Friday each week, with a recommendation that students study five hours a day outside of class time.²¹ The yearly tuition in 1897 was \$60 for day students; tuition and board for resident students was \$250. Rules for resident students were somewhat monastic:

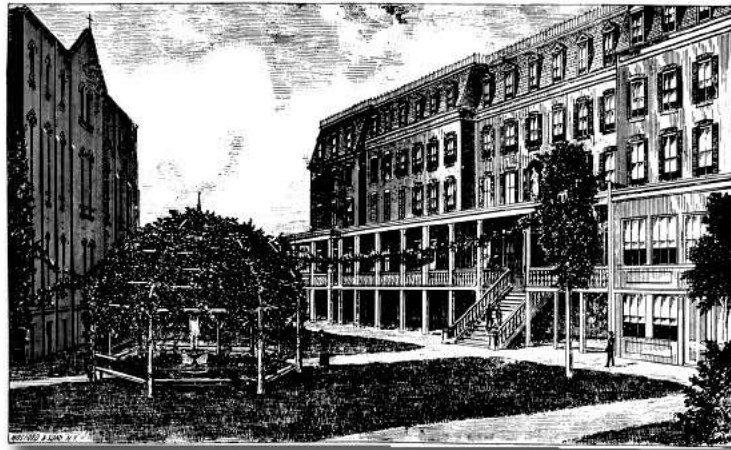
- *Students are obliged to accompany prefects on school days and other days appointed to Prospect Park or some other suburban resort.*
- *Students are not allowed to leave the premises without permission.*
- *Parents or guardians are permitted to visit the first Sunday of each month from 2 to 5.*
- *The use of tobacco is strictly forbidden as injurious to the health of youth.*
- *All letters written by students must be submitted for inspection.*
- *Every communication addressed to them shall be opened before they receive it.*

Resident students, whose families must have had some means, were asked to bring the following "necessary supplies": "6 dress shirts, 6 undershirts, 6 pr stockings, 6 pr. drawers, 3 suits of clothes, 3 pr. shoes, 6 towels, 6 napkins, knife, fork, spoon, goblet, with the name on each—hair brush, tooth brush, shoe polish, and soap."²²

Along with other alumni, Milo F. McDonald, a New York City high-school principal, fondly remembered his days at the old St. Francis Academy:

My mind is filled with pleasant recollections of the years I spent with the

Franciscan Brothers. At "Old St. Francis" I entered the primary class. I can vividly recall the teacher of this class, Brother Matthew [Flynn], who was one of the most gentle men I have ever met. His patience, as I view it through the long vista of years, was remarkable. He was an ideal teacher of children and did much to help all the boys in the class in achieving a



firm grasp upon the fundamentals of a good education.

I have seen many teachers in my experience, but I have never met one superior in his appreciation of the needs of adolescent boys than was Brother Cosmas [Burns]. He was a man, every inch of him. I loved him then and I love him now. Combined with my hope of the hereafter is the thought that I may have the opportunity of meeting him face to face and of talking over the pleasant times enjoyed together at "Old St. Francis."²³

In addition to graduation exercises at the Old Academy of Music, public exhibitions took place annually to show off the talents and academic abilities of the St. Francis Academy boys, who were considered the best public speakers in the city. At the end of each school year, these public examinations were advertised in the newspapers and attracted large audiences of parents, relatives and friends who cheered their boys when they successfully answered the difficult questions posed by members of the audience. Teachers from other Franciscan Brothers schools marched

Illustration:
Monastery garden
and College Buildings
in 1890. Courtesy
of Emmet Corry.

their pupils to these exhibitions to help cheer on the St. Francis boys.

The students at St. Francis also had a vivid interest in theatricals. They were able to present their plays at the Old Academy of Music, which could accommodate a larger audience than was possible within the school.

St. Francis Academy and College also served about a hundred resident students, who lived at



*Illustration:
Reverend Joseph
Fransioli, the
first pastor of
St. Peter's
parish. Courtesy
of Emmet Corry.*

the school on Baltic Street. Brothers assigned to their care saw that they were well fed in their own student dining room with food from the monastery kitchen.

Evidence from the Franciscan Brothers Archives suggests that Brother Louis Johnson was one of the men assigned to this task. The Brothers' Necrology presents this brief account of his religious life: "Brother Louis Johnson, a native of Ireland, entered St. Francis Monastery on July 18, 1892, and was admitted to the Habit on September 8th of that year. After his profession, October 4, 1893, Brother Louis filled many domestic assignments in the Monastery. His death occurred on November 19, 1910."²⁴

In recent years, a relative informed the community that Brother Louis was born George Johnston, not Johnson, the son of George Johnston

and Anne McManus Johnston, both of County Fermanagh. He remembers it was said that Brother Louis was so loved by the boys he cared for that they cried "on his coffin."²⁵ The account books of the monastery show that Brother Louis "filled many domestic assignments in the Monastery," and suggest he that was probably a cook who baked apple pies for the boys in his care.²⁶

A number of students who lived a distance from Brooklyn and boarded at the academy and college, went to the brothers' summer monastery in Centerport, Long Island, after it was purchased in 1889. Young men from Cuba, Mexico, and parts of the United States distant from Brooklyn did not return to their homes during the summer, but went with the brothers to their pleasant North Shore home in Centerport. Known as Camp Alvernia, it was the first Catholic camp in the United States.²⁷

BROTHERS IN THE PARISH SCHOOLS

Shortly after the Franciscan Brothers established St. Francis Academy, they also began teaching in elementary schools of the Brooklyn Diocese. St. Joseph's on Dean Street was their first parish school in 1859, followed by St. Paul's on Court and Congress Streets and Our Lady of Mercy on DeVoise Place in 1861. Subjects taught in these schools included many now found in the first two years of high school, with higher-level mathematics especially remembered by their graduates.

Some of the parish schools that the brothers ran were actually secondary schools as we know them today. Called "academies," the course of instruction included classical, scientific, and commercial subjects, which were distinct and separate from the courses in the elementary branches.

The first of these parish academies was St. Peter's on Hicks Street in 1870. It was followed by St. Patrick's, Kent Avenue, in 1871; St. Vincent de Paul's, North Sixth, in 1886; and Sacred Heart, Adelphi Street, in 1888. The only other academy in the diocese was St. James's on Jay Street, under the direction of the De La Salle Christian Brothers.

ST. PETER'S ACADEMY

St. Peter's parish was founded at Hicks and Warren Streets in 1859 under the direction of Rev. Joseph Fransioli, the great Swiss-born educator. He began

the school at the same time that he built his church. Through his financial skills, the finest school building in Brooklyn was completed in 1866, with a frescoed hall and with a great gymnasium supplied with the best European athletic equipment, at an estimated cost of \$100,000.

In 1933, Charles Webber, class of 1877, recalled:

"The curriculum, besides the usual courses, included geometry, plane and solid, trigonometry, and in the last year even calculus — differential and integral, surveying and field work. Physics with laboratory experiments, and debates with other schools, were also very popular."

Webber also discussed the quality of education at St. Peter's Academy, which had over six hundred boys:

There were no high schools in those pioneer days — public or parochial. When the first public high school was opened on Court Street, one of our boys sought to enter, but was told that he was beyond their courses! Yet, it was hard to convince our own people that our schools were so excellent. One method we tried at St. Peter's was public examinations held in our big hall at night with the public invited to come and quiz.... We were prepared. For several weeks before, the Brothers from St. Francis College — "Little Old Paul" and "Young Paul," Jerome, and Leo, as well as jovial "Little Bruno," had come to our classrooms in the afternoon and grilled us for battle. We welcomed them, always glad to demonstrate what we had learned.

*We were ready! A crowded hall and proud parents applauded as we proved our efficiency, each striving to be first with his answer. It was a real test — a trying one, but we enjoyed it, and showed the public what the Hicks Street Boys could do in those days. No public school of the day could have offered such an exhibition. We did it to convince our reluctant public that **it was not all catechism** [emphasis added]. We had need to do it in those days. Now examinations, open to the public, are unnecessary. The Regents stamp our efficiency.²⁸*

"OLD ST. PAUL'S"

The second parochial school the brothers opened was in the basement of St. Paul's Church on Court and Congress Streets, three blocks from St. Francis Monastery at 41 Butler Street. One of the students of that school was William T. Vlymen,



who became the principal of Eastern District High School. His memories of the brother who taught him algebra in the church basement went back before 1888, because the "new" St. Paul's was opened on Warren Street in that year:

The fundamentals of all I ever knew of Algebra I got there. The method used I afterwards adopted in P.S. No. 5 when I was its principal. The Brother in charge...gave us a large number of examples, short and simple. Well within our powers of execution. The constant repetition of easy problems fastened in our minds the fundamental principles so that they lingered while many other subjects, not so separated, are gone.

We used slates for the work. The Brother would read the problems and immediately the sound of scratching slate pencils would begin. As soon as a pupil had the answer he would rush, slate in hand, to the Brother and flourish it in his face. As many of the pupils finished about the same time, the Brother would be surrounded by a crowd of boys eager to be the first to get his attention. The first boy would get at the top of his slate a straight line, perpendicular, drawn in chalk. At the end of the period the Brother would call for

Illustration: Camp Alvernia on a Sunday morning in July, 1895. Courtesy of Emmet Corry.

the boy or boys having the largest number of chalk marks to stand. Every boy was eager to get as many of these chalk marks as possible, so that at times the Brother would find it hard to select the first one completing the example, so many boys rushing at him at practically the same moment, all eager to get the coveted chalk on the slate.

I imagine that I was not so pushing as some, as I recall that at times the Brother would make us all withdraw and then select some one boy who would get the mark. I was sometimes the one selected in this way, the Brother calling me from the rear in his kindness. This action on his part still renews my gratitude as he was keen enough to see that, though I might have finished first, I was too shy to thrust myself upon his attention.

The atmosphere was one of eagerness to do the work and to do it promptly. Many easy questions made it possible for even the dull boys to succeed and at the end of the lesson, as I remember it, every boy had more or less marks on his slate. These marks were carefully counted and any boy who would surreptitiously use a piece of chalk to increase the number would receive short shrift at the hands of his critical comrades.²⁹

ST. PATRICK'S ACADEMY: "HAPPY DAYS"

Mathematics was also a strong subject at St. Patrick's on Kent Avenue. Matthew J. McKenna of the class of 1876 recalled:

A feature of the Brothers' teaching was the attention they gave to Mathematics; they succeeded in developing so many accomplished students in this study that public exhibitions were given of their proficiency . . . and to these exhibitions were invited teachers from the public schools to examine our scholars. These public tests created considerable interest and the results were pronounced creditable to the students and their teachers.

Another activity of the Brothers was the presentation of one or two Dramatic Shows during the year — generally plays or dramas, with an occasional try at Shakespeare. They didn't shy even at the operetta for they

produced "Pinafore" a whole week. In the original production of this musical comedy the boys took the female parts. Joe Campbell, who afterwards taught music in the public schools, sang the part of "Josephine," and Michael Hayes the role of "Little Buttercup" or "Cousin Hebe." P. E. Callahan was the "Admiral" and Tommy Fitzpatrick, "Ralph Rackstraw."

They were the good old days — happy days, sunshiny days, care-free days, yet days

THE DINNER WAGON

From 1859, most of the brothers who staffed the parish schools, lived in St. Francis Monastery at 41 Butler Street and traveled each morning to their assignments. Because of the scarcity of funds, they would usually walk many miles back and forth to their schools. The brothers endured hardships in the cold, snowy, and wet weather, when they often had to tend to the heat in the schools before the students arrived. At lunchtime, however, they looked forward to the horse-drawn dinner wagon, which brought them a hot, midday dinner from the monastery.

For the brothers of St. Antony's in Greenpoint, dinner was sent by Mrs. Skelly on Oakland Street. Boys vied with each other to help carry the dishes back to Mrs. Skelly in hopes of sharing in some sweet leftovers.[†]

[†] "The Second Twenty-five Years," *Franciscan Brothers Newsletter*, February 1983, p. 11.

of work and preparation for the life ahead. What their pupils are today and such success as they have met within their various line of endeavor are due to their teachers' advice, to their solicitude, to their example of holiness, and to the training of heart and mind for which these sons of the great St. Francis are justly famous. I cannot speak too highly of the work of these great educators. . . . so kind and lovable men as Brothers Aloysius, Fidelis, Sebastian and Jerome."³⁰

Under the leadership of Brother Jerome Magner, superior general for twenty-seven years in

the nineteenth century and considered the second founder of the Brooklyn community, St. Patrick's Academy grew so rapidly that it could no longer accommodate all the boys of the parish. In 1876, when Brother Leo Wall was appointed principal, two classrooms were built on the second floor, which had formerly been an auditorium.³¹

SAINT MARY, STAR OF THE SEA

St. Mary, Star of the Sea, parish was founded in 1851, and the church was completed in 1855 at a cost of fifty thousand dollars. The parishioners were primarily from the Irish laboring class, and many of the men were away at sea for long periods of time. In fact, the stone for St. Mary's Church was carried from Europe as ballast in their ships, which docked at the Brooklyn piers of Red Hook.

Catholic education in St. Mary's parish began in what was known as Mrs. Daly's School, located in a small house on Nelson Street. It later moved to Smith Street. The first parish school was opened in 1856 under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of New York. The Franciscan Brothers arrived in 1869, having been invited by the pastor, Rev. Eugene Cassidy (1857–1876), to take charge of the boys' department in the new school completed that year. The average enrollment in the 1870s was over five hundred boys. The sisters continued to oversee the girls' department of the school.

Although St. Mary's was a parish school, not an academy, it was famous for its mathematics program. The curriculum covered the elements of simple and quadratic equations, plane and solid geometry, and trigonometry.

SAINT CHARLES BORROMEIO SCHOOL

Founded on Sydney Place in Brooklyn Heights in 1849 by Rev. Charles Constantine Pise (1849–1866), the first Catholic chaplain of the U.S. Senate, St. Charles Borromeo School was served by the Franciscan Brothers from 1870 until 1923. Dramatics, music, religion, and Bible history were subjects the brothers at St. Charles were known for. Public examinations in these subjects were held annually in the auditorium. They lasted for three days, and a gold watch was awarded to the boy with the highest rating in catechism and Bible history.

FIFTEEN PARISH SCHOOLS

Through the rest of the nineteenth century, the Franciscan Brothers taught the upper-grade boys in fifteen parish elementary schools in the dioceses of Brooklyn, New York, and Jersey City. They were:

- St. Michael's, Flushing, in 1864
- Immaculate Conception, Maujer Street, in 1866
- St. Mary, Star of the Sea, Court Street, in 1869
- St. John the Evangelist, Twenty-first Street, in 1870
- St. Charles, Sydney Place, in 1870
- St. Anne's, Front Street, in 1873
- St. Mary's in Roundout, New York, in 1875
- Assumption, York Street, in 1882
- St. Antony's, Greenpoint, in 1886
- The "New" St. Paul's, Warren Street, in 1888
- St. Bridget's, Jersey City, in 1890
- Visitation School, Red Hook, in 1890
- Our Lady of Lourdes, Aberdeen Street, in 1892
- Our Lady of Good Counsel, Putnam Avenue, in 1894
- St. Joachim's, Matteawan, New York, in 1896.

JOYFUL POVERTY

The poverty of the brothers through most of the nineteenth century was a condition they shared with most of their students, who were primarily first-generation Americans. But the quality of their schools and the unique joyfulness of their "examination days," when their pupils were cheered on by their parents and friends, is evident in the memories of their alumni. The brothers' own experience as Irish immigrants gave them the ability to relate well to the many immigrant families they served. However, their dependence on Ireland for religious vocations would change after the Great War, when American young men began to join the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn.

In 1907, the Franciscan Brothers were forced to withdraw from some of their schools after twenty-five brothers left the Brooklyn community to become priests in the Third Order Regular in Spalding, Nebraska, and Loretto, Pennsylvania. Today, the brothers teach or administer in St. Francis College, Brooklyn

Heights, and at five high schools in three states. They also serve in many ministries in the New York metropolitan area, including campus minister at St. Francis College, computer administrator at Stella Maris in Rockaway Beach, and assistant director of the office of the Propagation of the Faith in Brooklyn.

Notes

- 1 Irene Maria Whelan, *"Evangelical Religion and the Polarization of Protestant-Catholic Relations in Ireland, 1780-1840,"* (doctoral dissertation), University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1994. [Dr. Whelan's thesis is particularly pertinent to the history of the appearance of Catholic religious communities in the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century in Ireland.]
- 2 Excerpted from a chapter in Emmett Corry, *History of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn*, forthcoming.
- 3 Patrick Quinn, T.O.R., *"The Third Order Regular of St. Francis in Ireland,"* ANALECTA, TOR: xxiv/153 (1993), pp. 247-263.
- 4 Nuala Costello, *John MacHale, Archbishop of Tuam*, Phoenix Pub., Dublin, 1938, pp. 74-75.
- 5 Diane Ravitch. *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as Battlefields of Social Change*, Basic Books, 1994, pp. 8-9.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 31-32.
- 7 Richard Shaw, *Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York*. Paulist Press, New York, 1977, pp. 63-70.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 139-175.
- 9 Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, p. 45.
- 10 Harold A. Buetow. *Of Singular Benefit: The Story of Catholic Education in the United States*. Macmillan, London, 1970, p. 115.
- 11 Hughes to Sorin, 21 April 1844, Archives of the Archdiocese of New York.
- 12 An 1840 letter of Bishop Bouvier of Le Mans, France, to Pope Gregory XVI, stating that the Christian Brothers require \$120 annually for each brother before they will accept a school. In Angelus Gabriel, F.S.C., *The Christian Brothers in the United States, 1848-1948*, Declan X. McMullen, New York, 1948, p. 56.
- 13 Thomas Nagle (Brother Roger, O.S.F.), *"Historical Growth and Development of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn,"* M.A. thesis, St. John's University, 1943, p. 70.
- 14 *"Council Minutes and General Chapters,"* p. 1, Archives of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn.
- 15 *"Souvenir of the Diamond Jubilee of the Franciscan Brothers, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1858-1933,"* p. 24.
- 16 *"Deed Transferral Document, 1937,"* Franciscan Brothers Archives.
- 17 "Brooklyn's Friary, Medieval Monks in Modern Days: How the Sons of St. Francis Live and Teach," *Brooklyn Citizen*, October 24, 1886.
- 18 "Religious Exercises at St. Francis Academy, Baltic Street," *Brooklyn Catholic*, 18 June 1870.
- 19 *Brooklyn Citizen*, June 26, 1875.
- 20 The college awarded bachelor of arts and science degrees "in kind," and honorary master of arts and doctor of philosophy degrees from 1885 until 1906, when the board of trustees reassessed its "honorary degree" granting program.
- 21 The name "St. Francis College" was used for both the academy and the collegiate levels of the school through the nineteenth century.
- 22 "Brooklyn's Friary...", *Brooklyn Citizen*, October 24, 1886.
- 23 *Souvenir of the Diamond Jubilee*, p. 74.
- 24 Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, "Necrology," November 19, 1910.
- 25 Letter of Kevin F. Wolfe to Brother Thomas Grady, June 4, 1995, Franciscan Brothers Archives.
- 26 Monies to Brother Lewis: January 1, 1895, \$2 for "household expenses"; March 19, 1897, \$2.25 for "apples"; and December 15, 1897, \$2 for "pans." "Account Book," Franciscan Brothers Archives.
- 27 St. Francis Academy and College, "Student Account Books," Four volumes from 1896 to 1930.
- 28 *Souvenir of the Diamond Jubilee*, pp. 34-36.
- 29 Ibid., p. 58.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 42-46.
- 31 *The First Twenty-five Years, 1858-1883," Franciscan Brothers Newsletter*, January 1983, p. 13.