

THE HOLY CROSS HISTORY ASSOCIATION:
A RETROSPECTIVE AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

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by
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It was fourteen years ago that the first Conference on the History of the Congregations of Holy Cross met at Moreau Seminary, Notre Dame, Indiana. I think that I can fairly take credit for the idea of having such a conference. But it was the support and encouragement of a number of people that led me to think that it could be done and to attempt it. I remember particularly in this regard Richard Warner, my provincial, Thomas Smith, the rector of Moreau Seminary, Sr. M. Campion Kuhn, then the archivist of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, and Brother William Dunn, professor of history at St. Edward's University.

As I proceeded to set up that first conference, some of my expectations proved to be quite wrong. I thought that we might try it once and that if there was enough interest, we might try it again after a few years. I thought that it would be well to hold it at Moreau Seminary where there were so many young Holy Cross religious who could attend and learn something about the history of Basile Moreau's family. Finally, I thought that with luck and a certain amount of arm twisting fifteen or twenty people would come for it.

As it turned out, almost one hundred Holy Cross Sisters, Brothers and Priests showed up. There was enough enthusiasm among the participants that it was decided to hold a second conference the following year, in 1983. However, the seminarians and candidates at Moreau Seminary didn't do much more than look in from time to time and I came to realize what I am now so aware of as a history teacher, that the younger generation, for the most part, are not very interested in history; that you have to have invested yourself in something for a while before you begin to wonder about who and what went before.

The call for papers at the first conference was limited to topics about Holy Cross in the United States. The reason for this was that while the congregations in Canada had a tradition going back to at least 1947 of writing about their history, the American Holy Cross family did not. Among the Americans there was no extensive body of literature or monographs; few studies of personalities and accounts of limited topics on which to draw if you wanted to know about the history of Holy Cross in the U.S. As the years went by and this ceased to be the case, this limitation was dropped and we have not only had Canadian and overseas topics presented at the conference but we actually met in Montreal in 1994. Who knows but that we might meet in India or Bangladesh or France one of these years.

On March 19, 1983, the feast of St. Joseph, at the

conclusion of the second annual conference, fourteen participants gathered to talk about forming a Holy Cross History Association (HCHA) that would "promote the study of the history of the Congregation of Holy Cross."¹ I agreed to edit and publish a newsletter, Holy Cross History, and several weeks later the first issue consisting of two pages composed on a typewrite appeared. The main stories were the proposal to form the HCHA and the announcement of a third annual conference in Austin, Texas, on March 22-24, 1984.

The decision to hold the conference outside of the Notre Dame area where there was a pool of several hundred Holy Cross religious was a bold step, inspired by one of the most ardent supporters of the nascent HCHA, who saw from the beginning its ecumenical potential within the Holy Cross family, Sr. Mary Curran. Her warm support for a Texas meeting convinced the rest of us that it could be done, that it would be good for Holy Cross religious in the Lone Star State, and that it would generate even broader support for the HCHA. No one was more disappointed than Mary Curran when events conspired to make it impossible to meet in Austin at St. Edward's University in 1984.

By the fall of 1983, it had become clear that St. Ed's would not host the 1984 meeting. Brother Stephen Walsh, the president, had announced his resignation effective at the end

¹Letter from James Connelly, C.S.C. to All those interested in the study of Holy Cross history. March 5, 1984.

of the 1983-84 school year and a search was on for his successor. The top floor of the main building, the best meeting space, had been declared structurally unsafe and closed to the public. Housing for out of town participants would be hard to find if they were numerous.

The conference organizing committee agreed to look for another site, but where? At this point, an angel appeared in the person of Sr. Olivia Marie Hutchenson, the superior general of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, who offered the use of the facilities at the mother house at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame.² If the conference didn't move far from Moreau Seminary, its site for two years, at least it moved and the principle was established that it need not always meet at the same place.

The third annual conference met at St. Mary's, April 6-8, 1984. A draft constitution and by laws had been distributed to all those who had indicated interest in forming the HCHA and on Sunday, April 8th, thirty-one people, including Priests and Brothers from the U.S. and Canada, Sisters from all three Holy Cross congregations and one laywoman, Mary Blanche Boland of Cincinnati, met to approve the constitution and by-laws and to elect officers.³ The Holy Cross History Association was born.

²Holy Cross History, vol. 1, no. 2 (fall 1983), p. 1.

³Letter of James Connelly, March 5, 1984.

The HCHA was unique in that it was a grass roots endeavor founded with the encouragement of but not the control by any major superiors in any of the Holy Cross congregations. It brought together rank and file members of the four Holy Cross congregations and, as in the case of Mary Blanche Boland, relatives of Holy Cross religious to hear about their common heritage as sons and daughters of Basile Moreau. Some of the stories dealt, then as now, with issues that had been divisive for Holy Cross religious. Hearing about them at a distance of many years often allowed a new objectivity, corrected some misconceptions and sometimes promoted healing. Yours truly was elected the first president of the HCHA and Sr. M. Campion Kuhn was elected to the first of many terms as secretary-treasurer.⁴

The fourth annual conference, which met here at King's College in May 1985, was the first to be held outside of northern Indiana and it inaugurated the practice of holding the meetings in different places in North America, usually at one of the Holy Cross colleges or universities. In the last eleven years, the conference has met at eight different sites, from Oregon to Massachusetts and from Quebec to Louisiana, and several places in between. Although Mary Curran did not get to attend a conference in Texas in 1984, she had the satisfaction of doing so in 1986, when it first

⁴Holy Cross History, vol. 2, no. 1 (summer 1984), pp. 1-4.

in the issue of summer 1985 when the first book review was published. It was 200 words long and written by Sr. M. Campion Kuhn and it offered a critical reflection on Henri-Paul Bergeron's Leocadie Gascoin, 1818-1900, a popular 1980 biography of the first mother general of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross.

If book reviews had not been attempted before in the pages of Holy Cross History, it was not because they were thought to be too academic, but rather because there were almost no books being written about any of the Holy Cross congregations, Holy Cross religious or Holy Cross institutions. As this situation changed in succeeding years, the regular appearance of not one but two or more reviews of recent books on Holy Cross people, places and history has become a regular feature of the newsletter.

Whatever others' hopes and aspiration were at that first conference back in 1982, mine was that we could promote serious study of and reflection on the history of the Holy Cross family. Believing that we become aware of who we are, that we grasp our charism, not only by looking at our origins but also by knowing our history, I hoped that if we provided a forum wherein those who knew well a part of our story might share it with the rest of us, we would attract people to do just that. I like to think that this hope has been fulfilled. Neither words nor the time available will permit me to do justice to all those who have shared their knowledge of some

part of the Holy Cross story with us, but let me mention a few people who stand out in my memory.

Eleven years ago, the last time that we met here at King's, I was deeply moved by the late Fr. Robert McKee's account of the three and one-half years that he and other Holy Cross religious had spent as Japanese prisoners of war in the Philippines during World War II. After he had recounted all the indignities and suffering inflicted on the prisoners, I can still remember, indeed almost feel, Fr. McKee's telling a hushed audience of the conversion of a Japanese sargeant, himself condemned to death for war crimes, because of the example of the religious prisoners in the camp. Since then, two others, Sr. Olivette Whalen, one of the prisoners, and Sr. Gertrude Gagnier, have told the story from different perspectives adding details and enlarging our understanding of this traumatic event.⁵ Sr. Joel Sperrier has written an account of the Marianites who were German prisoners of war in France.⁶

Two people who became regulars at these annual

⁵Robert McKee, C.S.C., "Holy Cross P.O.W.s in the Philippines, 1941-1945." Holy Cross History Conference [hereafter HCHC], 1985. M. Olivette Whalen, C.S.C., and M. Caecilius Roth, C.S.C., "Round Trip to the Philippines," Fruits of the Tree, I, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1988). Gertrude Gagnier, C.S.C., "And Our Lady Guarded Her Own, The Four Sisters of Holy Cross Interned in the Philippines, 1941-1945." HCHC, 1995.

⁶Joel Sperrier, M.S.C., "Marianite Prisoners of War, November 1940-1944." HCHC, 1987.

conferences and whose careful reearch and writing has contributed much to our understanding of Holy Cross in the United States are Bro. Franklin Cullan and Fr. Joseph Kehoe. Franklin Cullen, prevented by illness from attending in recent years, likened himself to the family's Uncle Louie, who was always bringing up stories that the rest of the family wanted to forget. He insisted that he preferred to tell about the community's failures rather than its successes, because the story had an end and a beginning and because they were usually more interesting.

Over the years it was Franklin who gave us carefully researched accounts of the Brothers' Gold Rush expedition to California in 1850, the nineteen-year attempt to staff missions in the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory, the rise and fall of the University of the Sacred Heart in Watertown, Wisconsin, the ill-fated and short-lived attempt to make a foundation near St. Joseph, Missouri, and the Sisters of the Presentation who fled France because of the laws that destroyed religious congregations early in this century and found work and a home doing domestic service at several Holy Cross institutions in this country.⁷ If ever the annual

⁷Frankline Cullen, C.S.C.: "Holy Cross on the Gold Dust Trail," HCHC, 1986; "Holy Cross in the Black Hills: The Dakota Apostolates, 1878-1897," HCHC, 1987; "Sacred Heart College, Watertown, Wisconsin," HCHC, 1989; "Cordwood and Calumny: Holy Cross in Missouri, 1872-1874," HCHC, 1991; "Presentation Sisters in Holy Cross Apostolates, 1903-1963," HCHC, 1993. Bro. Franklin also wrote essays on Holy Cross in Iowa, the College in New Iberia, Louisiana, and the orphanage in Lafayette, Indiana, which

conferences may be said to have found and developed a talent, it is Franklin Cullen's.

Fr. Joseph Kehoe made his first appearance on the program of a Holy Cross History Conference in 1987 when he presented what was for me an enlightening paper on an often misjudged former provincial, Fr. Andrew Morrissey. In subsequent years Fr. Kehoe told the stories of St. Joseph's College in Cincinnati, Holy Cross Seminary, Columbia Preparatory School and Holy Cross chaplains in World War II.⁸ Although illness has slowed him down in recent years, Fr. Kehoe has left us a legacy from which to learn and on which to build.

Not a few members of the HCHA who started out to research and write something to present at the annual conference, ended up writing a book and finding a publisher. Sr. Georgia Costin made her debut on the program of a history conference at Austin in 1986, the same year as Franklin Cullen. She delivered a paper on the 98-year struggle by the Sisters of the Holy Cross, from 1874 to 1972, to provide a Catholic education for young women in central Texas.⁹ The

can be found in several provincial archives in the U.S.

⁸Joseph A. Kehoe, C.S.C.: "The Legacy of Andrew Morrissey," HCHC, 1987; "St. Joseph's College, Cincinnati, Ohio," HCHC, 1989; "Holy Cross Seminary, 1889-1967," HCHC, 1991; "Columbia Preparatory School," HCHC, 1992; "Holy Cross Military Chaplains in World War II," HCHC, 1995.

⁹Georgia Costin, C.S.C., "The Finest and Most Elevated Place," HCHC, 1986.

story featured log cabin schoolrooms, fights with pastors, run-ins with robbers and epidemics that carried off students and Sisters, all told with the dry wit that became Georgia's hallmark. As we came to realize, you not only had to read her papers, but also to hear Georgia's delivery to really appreciate them.

Since 1988, Georgia has been a regular on the program and her well reserached and engaging accounts of the Sisters of the Holy Cross were collected and published by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1994 as Priceless Spirit, A History of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1841-1893. It is another instance of the conferences uncovering and developing a talent that needed only the proper stimulus and forum to bloom.

Brother George Klawitter's research for the paper he presented at the 1993 conference in Austin on the early Holy Cross Brothers in the United States resulted in a published collection of more than two hundred letters from Brothers working in places other than Notre Dame. Adapted to the Lake: Letters by the Brother Founder of Notre Dame, 1841-1849 ¹⁰ is a rich source of information that has yet to be mined for the information it offers on the congregation and the Church in Indiana in the 1980s.

Sister Graziella Lalande has established herself as the

¹⁰New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

historian of the Sisters of Holy Cross in Canada with her recent volume, Les Soeurs de Sainte-Croix, 1847-1902: Une histoire à deux volets¹¹. Her interpretation of her community's history follows on the research reported in four presentations at Holy Cross History Conferences, beginning in 1989.¹²

Sister Maria Assunta Werner's interest in the life and times of Sr. M. Madeleva Wolff, the innovative and longtime president of St. Mary's College, antedated her presentation at the 1984 history conference. However, it ultimately resulted in her biography, Madeleva: Sr. Mary Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., a Pictorial Biography¹³, published shortly before her death in February 1994.

Brother Alberic Houle's 1995 biography of Bro. Godfrey Danis, a missionary in Bengal and South India for thirty-seven years (1924-1961), if not exactly the outgrowth of his presentation on Bro. Godfrey at the 1994 conference, was a preview of the book he was to publish the following year, A Giant of a Man.¹⁴

¹¹St-Laurent, Quebec: Soeurs de Sainte-Croix, 1995.

¹²Graziella Lalande, C.S.C.: "Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors," HCHC, 1989; "Mother Mary Leonie Paradis: Daughter of Father Moreau and of Holy Cross," HCHC, 1990; "French Foundations - Canadian Refoundations: The Sisters of Holy Cross," HCHC, 1991; "Mother Mary of Saint Basil," HCHC, 1994.

¹³Saint Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana: Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1993.

¹⁴Dhaka, Bangladesh: published by the author, 1995.

Brother Donald Stabrowski started out to tell the story of Fr. Valentine Czyzewski, the first of many Polish-American vocations to Holy Cross. He ended up giving us the story of the Holy Cross ministry to Polish immigrants and their children in a book that the Library of Congress saw fit to add to its collection on ethnic groups in America.¹⁵

Last but not least in this abbreviated review of members' publications is Bro. Philip Armstrong's biography of Bro. Ephrem O'Dwyer.¹⁶ In this, the fiftieth anniversary year of a major restructuring of the Brothers and Priests of Holy Cross into separate societies, each with its own provinces, it is time to review the course of events that led to that change and to reassess both its results and its viability for the future. Bro. Philip's study of Bro. Ephrem, one of the chief architects of that reorganization of the men's congregation, should be useful in that review.

The stream of publications and subjects for research shows no sign of running dry. As we have already been apprised at this conference, histories of two Holy Cross institutions, King's and Stonehill Colleges, are already being written and will appear in the near future. Might we

¹⁵"Rev. Valentine Czyzewski, C.S.C., Immigrant Pastor," HCHC, 1985. Holy Cross and the South Bend Polonia (Notre Dame, Indiana: Province Archives Center, 1991).

¹⁶A More Perfect Legacy: A Portrait of Brother Ephrem O'Dwyer, 1888-1978 (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

not hope to have something on the man whose name is linked with the establishment of both schools, Fr. James Connerton?

St. Mary's College at Notre Dame let its sesquicentennial in 1994 pass, as did the University of Notre Dame in 1992, without an updated history. Let us hope that the University of Portland will not do the same when its centennial comes around in 2001! We would welcome a history of Our Lady of Holy Cross College, now eighty years old.

While we rejoice that these educational institutions are healthy, all of us in that work know that the role of Holy Cross congregations in Catholic education has changed dramatically since World War II. Of the many high schools directed by the women of Holy Cross as late as 1955, only Holy Cross Academy in Kensington, Maryland, remains today. While the men of Holy Cross have done slightly better in holding their position, via-a-vis staffing and directing the secondary schools that they sponsor, Holy Cross religious are today more clearly than ever collaborators with the laity in the apostolate of education. The story of how this has come to be and why awaits its narrator and without the insightful account of a good historian, we may end up merely lamenting that things aren't what they used to be instead of glimpsing some positive meaning in the changes of the past fifty years.

Sister Campion Kuhn has broken new ground at this conference with her account of how the women of Holy Cross first got into the business in this country of running hospitals.

In a ministry that has literally spanned the continent over the past 130 years, the Sisters of the Holy Cross have created a network of health care institutions that is a credit to the Catholic Church in the United States. It is a story that we need to hear.

Those of us who frequent these history conferences have only begun to hear the story of what the Holy Cross communities are up to outside of North America. I welcome the presence of Dr. Syiemlieh at this conference and I congratulate Fr. Grimes for his initiative in inviting him. I thank Bro. Tom Sawyer and Sr. Mary David Hecker for their papers and I would like to note the financial assistance of the general administration of the Priests and Brothers of Holy Cross in the past in making possible presentations on the life and work of Holy Cross beyond Canada and the United States. It is a topic that we need always to integrate into our understanding of what the Holy Cross family is in the twentieth century.

Finally, it is more than thirty-five years now since freshly researched biographies of the founders of Holy Cross appeared: Basile Moreau, Jacques Dujarié, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors (Léocadie Gascoin) and Mary of St. Angela (Eliza Gillespie). Is it not time, in the light of all that we have learned since the 1950s, to revisit these pivotal figures in our history and see what a new look at their lives and work may tell us? We can look forward to the first biography of

Fr. Edward Sorin, currently being researched and written by Fr. Marvin O'Connell, professor emeritus of history at the University of Notre Dame.

I began with reminiscences and I have ended with challenges for the future. That is not inappropriate for a reflection on the doing of history. We do not expect that the study of history will help us to predict the future, but we do expect that it will remind us of God's providence in the past so that we might again trust that if we seek to make God's work our own, we can expect the Lord to guide and prosper our endeavors. King's College, whose buildings and campus surround us, is but one of many examples in the history of Holy Cross of great things being wrought from small and modest beginnings. Dare we forget that Alfred Bessette, the only one among us as yet raised to the honors of the altar, was almost turned away because of his poor health? And in January 1843, eight men huddled against the freezing cold of a northern Indiana winter in a log cabin beside a snow covered lake and dreamed of building a school and planting their young congregation in the four corners of this land.

Our resources today are many times greater than were theirs. But will our vision and our trust in God be the equal of theirs? Only time - and history - will tell.