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"On a Shoestring and a Prayer": The Foundation of Stonehill College

by

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The end of World War II brought a rising tide of optimism to the American people. The nation had met the challenge handed it by the world, providing leadership, war materials, and combatants which defeated enemy forces on two fronts and, in the process, brought a sense of accomplishment and pride to its people. American Catholicism rode the wave of optimism that existed in the country. Anti-Catholicism present in earlier generations seemed to enter hibernation; Catholics were more accepted than ever before. Catholic institutions, including schools and churches mushroomed.

The Church in Boston experienced this renewal with the arrival of Richard Cushing as archbishop in 1944, succeeding Cardinal William Henry O'Connell, who had held the episcopal reins of the archdiocese since 1907. Cushing brought a feeling of hope and opportunity to the Boston Church through his energetic approach to institutional building and his willingness to help sponsor those who promoted and initiated development of the Church. The Catholic renaissance in New England generated opportunities for the foundation of colleges and universities. Fairfield University in Connecticut and Merrimack College in North Andover, Massachusetts were both founded in 1947. Stonehill College, founded by

the Congregation of Holy Cross at North Easton, Massachusetts in 1948, was atypical of the period. The school's long-delayed, unexpected, and thus unplanned genesis created protracted problems for the College and its founding organization.

Foundations in North Easton

On March 2, 1935 Father Thomas Duffy, CSC, arrived at Our Lady of Holy Cross, a pre-novitiate seminary established at North Dartmouth, Massachusetts in 1933, to assume duties as superior of the eastern mission band, which used the facility as its headquarters. During the visit he and seminary superior William Doheny traveled to North Easton, about forty miles north, to tour the Frederick Ames estate, which was being offered for sale.¹ Both men "were more than impressed with its beauty and its suitability for our purposes."² Duffy, like James Wesley Donahue, Superior General of the Congregation, possessed a vision for the community in the east, including the foundation of a college. The Ames estate, built in 1905 at an estimated cost of \$1.5 million, consisted of approximately 600 acres, a fifty-room mansion, a glass-roofed clay tennis court, marble swimming pool with fireplace, squash court, garage, conservatory, and barns. The facility was perceived by Duffy as the ideal location and environment for the realization of his dream of a college

¹Frederick Lothrop Ames had amassed a fortune from his family shovel business and his prize Guernsey cow herd. The history of the Ames family is colorful and multi-faceted. For detailed information see: Winthrop Ames, The Ames Family, Privately Published, 1938 and William L. Chaffin, History of the Town of Easton, Massachusetts (Cambridge, Massachusetts: John Wilson and Son, 1886), 648-660.

²"Chronicles of Holy Cross," March 2, 1935, Archives Stonehill College (Hereafter ASC).

foundation.³

In May 1935 Edith Cutler, the widow of Frederick Ames, entered into negotiations with James Donahue for sale of her estate. Initially she asked \$75,000 for the house, garage, tennis court, greenhouse, and about 350 acres of the property. Donahue, on advice from James Cassidy, Bishop of Fall River, made a counter offer of \$40,000 in cash and \$10,000 to be financed on time. Negotiations were conducted through a series of letters for two months until on July 24, 1935 Cutler accepted Donahue's original offer.⁴

Transfer of the seminary in August from North Dartmouth to North Easton allowed Holy Cross to solidify its foundation by expansion of its holdings. The 1935 sale of the Ames estate included approximately 350 acres and two major buildings, but over 200 acres of the original estate remained in the custody of Edith Cutler. She offered to sell the remainder of the land to Holy Cross for \$30,000, stating, "I would let you have it for a little less than I would some of these other buyers as I know that you would take a real interest in preserving it."⁵ Donahue responded that the community was interested and offered \$5,000

³Ames Family History Fact Sheet, Ames Family Papers; Brockton Daily Enterprise, Clipping, March 5, 1937, ASC; Providence Visitor July 22, 1948, North Easton File, Archives Holy Cross Fathers, Indiana Province (Hereafter AHCFI).

⁴Edith Cutler to James Donahue, July 24, 1935, Superior General Papers, Archives Holy Cross Fathers, Eastern Province (Hereafter AHCFE). Donahue had to obtain permission from the Sacred Congregation of Religious to take out a \$40,000 loan in order to purchase the property. See Donahue to George Sauvage, CSC, August 1, 1935, Archives Holy Cross Fathers, Generalate, Rome (Hereafter AHCFG). Sauvage was the Congregation's Procurator General whose job was to interface with the Vatican on all matters requiring Roman approval.

⁵Brother Lambert to Daniel Buckley, October 19, 1936; Edith Cutler to Brother Lambert, September 2, 1936, Superior General Papers, AHCFE. Cutler mentions no other specific buyers in her correspondence.

cash and \$20,000 in a 5% mortgage. Although she claimed other buyers had offered more, Cutler eventually agreed to the Congregation's first offer. Brother Lambert Barbier, working with the attorney Daniel Buckley, completed the deal on March 4, 1937.⁶ The Brockton Enterprise prophetically announced:

In all probability the expansion of the order [Holy Cross] in the locality means that in the near future the estate will house an eastern branch of Notre Dame University and officials of the Congregation of Holy Cross express their belief that a "prep" school or academy will be built on the estate in a year or two.⁷

The Offer of a Boston Foundation--1946

The feeling of optimism and desire for expansion which coursed through the veins of Archbishop Cushing was manifest to the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1946 with an invitation to open a college in the heart of Boston.⁸ John Delaunay, CSC, professor of

⁶Donahue to Mrs. Roger Cutler, October 20, 1936, Superior General Papers, AHCFC; "Chronicles of Holy Cross," March 4, 1937, ASC.

⁷Brockton Enterprise, n.d. [1937], Clipping, History of Stonehill Papers, ASC.

Cushing's 1946 offer was actually the third time the archbishop had requested Holy Cross' presence in the archdiocese. In January 1945 George Benaglia, superior of the Our Lady of Holy Cross at North Easton, informed Thomas Steiner, provincial at Notre Dame, that Cushing wanted Holy Cross to staff a high school in Brockton. The initial idea was to renovate the old city infirmary, a 180 acre site, which contained several buildings. Benaglia suggested that someone should come east and consult with Cushing, who "is a fast worker and wastes no time." Steiner wrote the Archbishop and told him the Congregation would investigate the feasibility of the Brockton site for a high school. The trip east, however, was never made which caused confusion in the mind of Holy Cross as to precisely what Cushing wanted, although a day school appeared to be the proposed foundation. Nothing was settled during the year, although it seems that Steiner was not positive on the invitation. When the plans for Brockton never materialized a second invitation, more specific in nature, was extended by Cushing to obtain Holy Cross brothers to teach in a high school in Quincy. The General Council of the Congregation authorized that \$60,000 be spent to purchase property in Quincy for the proposed foundation, but Steiner, citing new foundations in New Haven and Cleveland for the brothers, refused to commit to a Boston area high school, although internal plans to support a Quincy foundation were initiated. Cushing, most probably out of frustration and lack of patience, withdrew his invitation deeming it "not to be acceptable ...

psychology and dean of students at the University of Portland, wrote to Thomas Steiner, CSC, provincial at Notre Dame, quoting the archbishop: "Whether Holy Cross can do anything or not, I want them to be on record as being authorized to start a college in Boston and that will stand whether I am alive or not." Delaunay, a friend of Cushing who felt the archbishop was disappointed in the Congregation's earlier lackluster response to invitations to establish educational foundations in Boston, encouraged Steiner to act favorably on the invitation.⁹

Steiner, who was cautious and worried about the lack of personnel to staff the commitments presently held by the Congregation, responded to Delaunay's appeal with restraint. Possible foundations of Holy Cross abroad in Australia, and domestically in Detroit and San Diego, plus the demands for people from the newly established King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania would severely strain the community's personnel resources and make other commitments not feasible. As a counter proposal Steiner suggested development of the North Easton property, where a boarding-school on the college level could be developed. Delaunay, however, expressing Cushing's displeasure with the Jesuits, whom he "doesn't want to open another school," continued to push for a Boston foundation. The archbishop pushed Delaunay for an immediate response in order to have a valid reason

at this time." See Benaglia to Steiner, January 5, 1945, Steiner to Cushing, January 19, 1946, John Wright to Brother William, CSC, January 25, 1946, Steiner Papers, AHCFl; Steiner to Benaglia, January 11, 1945, Stonehill History Papers, ASC.

John Delaunay to Thomas Steiner, September 11, 1946, Connerton Papers, AHCfE. Delaunay to Steiner, August 21, 1946, Steiner Papers, AHCFl.

to exclude Benedictines and Augustinians, who had petitioned Cushing for entrance to the archdiocese.¹⁰ Delaunay wrote, "The Archbishop would like to make it known publicly that the Congregation of Holy Cross will open a Catholic college in Boston." Delaunay suggested that Steiner send a team to "look over the field" and make a fair assessment of the offer.¹¹

Steiner, on advice from the provincial council, wrote to Cushing that the community was interested in the Boston foundation and that two priests, James Connerton, CSC, and Howard Kenna, CSC, would be sent to Boston to investigate fully the opportunity. Cushing was pleased to receive Steiner's more encouraging response and spoke of the "tremendous possibilities for additional colleges for men" in the area. Steiner's instructions to Connerton raised a note of optimism and emphasized the pressure which he felt to establish the Congregation in Boston: "It is a proposition that we do not want to turn down if we can possibly manage to take it, so we want to investigate it thoroughly."¹² Superior General Albert Cousineau, also optimistic on the project, increased the pressure on Steiner:

A day college in Boston would be a great opportunity for our apostolate and

Cushing held reservations about the teaching methods and course offerings at Boston College. Perceiving a need for another Catholic institution of higher education in the Boston region, the archbishop sought the services of the Congregation of Holy Cross with whom he felt comfortable. Cushing realized that Holy Cross would not be able to start an institution for five years, but without some commitment from the Congregation now he had no valid reason to say no to others who sought to enter the archdiocese. When Holy Cross eventually turned down his offer, the Augustinians were invited to start Merrimack College in 1947.

Steiner to Albert Cousineau, CSC, June 8, 1946, Superior General Papers; Steiner to Delaunay, August 26, 1946, Steiner Papers, AHCPI; Delaunay to Steiner, September 11, 1946, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCPE.

Steiner to Cushing September 19, 1946, Cushing to Steiner, September 23, 1946, Steiner to Connerton, September 19, 1946, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCPE.

for vocations also. It is true that we have to be prudent. We are anxious here to know the outcome of the visit of Father Kenna and Father Connerton.¹³

Steiner remained cautious despite the confidence of others. He believed, as did many at Notre Dame, that the Catholic colleges in the area (Boston College, Holy Cross, and Providence) provided adequately for the needs of the local Catholic population. He conceded, "Possibly another day college in Boston might work, but it does seem that there are plenty of them now." Steiner was also concerned about the attitude of Cushing, who was "telling everyone that Holy Cross is going to open a college in Boston."¹⁴

Connerton and Kenna, together with Thomas Duffy from North Easton, went to Boston and met with Cushing on October 9. The archbishop proposed that Holy Cross open an arts and letters day school in downtown Boston. The former Westminster Hotel, now used by the John Hancock insurance company, a nine-floor structure comprising almost one-half a city block, was the suggested site. The estimated purchase price for the building was \$700,000, although much more would be needed to finance the foundation. Cushing, who "criticized the Jesuits for not doing more," felt that competition with Boston College would be good. He was convinced that there was ample student population to support a second Catholic college for men in the city for no effort had been made to accommodate Catholics who attended Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Tufts. Cushing,

Albert Cousineau to Steiner, October 7, 1946, Superior General Papers, ACHFI.

Steiner to Cousineau, October 17, 1946, Superior General Papers, AHCFL. Speaking of the invitation to Boston Steiner told the General, "We in the west have never warmed up to the proposition."

however, could make no definite pledge of financial support.¹⁵

Connerton's and Kenna's contradictory recommendations in their report to the provincial added confusion to an already complicated situation. The pair wrote that the Boston opportunity on the surface appeared to be good but required further investigation by one who could spend more time in the area. However, in an addendum to the original report Connerton voiced a very different idea:

A College at North Easton would seem to be a better prospect in that we could go as far as the thing would justify itself and we would not be offending the Jesuits, whose long traditional training of Catholic Massachusetts deserves considerable regard.¹⁶

The North Easton possibility drew support from Bishop James Cassidy in Fall River, who told Connerton and Kenna that he "would be pleased if we [Holy Cross] decided to do anything to develop the North Easton property as we have simply encumbered the earth for fifteen years." He saw it as "an ideal spot for a college or boarding school." Cassidy

Connerton and Kenna to Steiner, October 31, 1946, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE.

Connerton to Steiner, October 31, 1946, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE. Connerton and Kenna had met with Father William Kelleher, SJ, President of Boston College, during their trip. Kelleher told them that "the Archbishop did not understand or properly appreciate college administration and policies." Although Connerton seemed to side with the North Easton foundation he did not want the Boston option precluded: "I have only one suggestion to make, namely, that the archbishop's offer not be rejected because of the freedom he has given us in regard to time in which to make a decision. Even though it is decided to start something at North Easton I do not feel that the possibilities of Boston should be precluded, especially if there is any thought of establishing an eastern province in the near future. See Connerton to Steiner, November 18, 1946, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE.

offered a gift of \$25,000 to equip a house for faculty.¹⁷ Even Cushing saw some possibility from the Congregation in North Easton, "for Holy Cross has missed the ball there."¹⁸

Steiner took the advice of his investigation team and sent John Lane, CSC to make a more thorough study of the possible Boston foundation. After one month Lane reported that there was a definite need for a college in the area and that there should be no concern for availability of students. He concluded, "A college should be established provided [that] the financial considerations involved in the acquisition of a suitable site make the project appear feasible." With respect to North Easton he reported, "Because of the remoteness of the spot from Boston, I feel that any consideration of North Easton as the location of a boarding school ought to be approached with the greatest caution."¹⁹

Financial demands, the uncertainty of support, and the timid approach of Thomas Steiner led to the Congregation's rejection of Archbishop Cushing's offer. Steiner told Albert Cousineau that since Cushing only expected a foundation within the next five years manpower problems would probably be solved, but without a commitment on how much support the archbishop would give, the financial risk was too high. Steiner thus wrote to Cushing, voicing concern over manpower and finances. He received the following dejected response from the Boston prelate:

In view of the fact that times have not substantially changed during the past twelve months I think you should postpone indefinitely any consideration

Connerton and Kenna to Steiner, October 31, 1946, Provincial Paper-Steiner, AHCFL.

Ibid.

John Lane, CSC to Steiner, January 8, 1947, Provincial Papers-Steiner, AHCFL; Jerome Lawyer, CSC, "James Connerton," Unpublished essay. Lawyer says that Lane also investigated a site near Boston Common for a community establishment of higher education.

concerning the establishment of a college in the archdiocese of Boston. ... Forget about the project for the time being. If and when conditions are more favorable I will contact you.²⁰

The timidity of Steiner and the resulting withdrawal of the invitation from Boston was a source of disappointment to the Superior General. He wrote to the American provincial,

It would be lacking in frankness with you if I did not tell you about your negative decision in all these proposals surprised me. I understand very well that you are now facing the most critical manpower shortage in years. We need not minimize that point. But it would be discouraging if we had to wait for new foundations till we had plenty of vocations.²¹

The Founding of Stonehill College

In February 1948 Albert Cousineau wrote to Steiner asking that financial data be gathered to examine the possibility for a new province in the east.²² James T. Connelly, CSC. "An Eastern Province in 1938." Paper presented at the Conference on the

Steiner to Cushing, March 6, 1947; Cushing to Steiner, March 8, 1947, Provincial Papers-Steiner, AHCFL.

Albert Cousineau to Steiner, July 10, 1947, Superior General Papers, AHCFL.

²²The change and adaptation found in Catholic higher education after World War II was also present in the structures of the Congregation of Holy Cross. While debate in the east focused on the possibility of founding a college in downtown Boston, the Superior General and others were considering expansion of the community through the establishment of a new province. Although the community was present in many different locations, administration of the American elements of Holy Cross was securely fixed at Notre Dame. As early as 1938, however, James Wesley Donahue, whose vision had brought Holy Cross east, made overtures to establish an eastern province in the United States. At the July 1938 General Chapter of the Congregation, held at Notre Dame, Donahue, citing the successful eastern foundation of 1933 to 1935, proposed the erection of an autonomous eastern province. Donahue was supported in his effort by James Burns, the American provincial, who believed that an eastern province would facilitate recruitment of vocations. The debate on the measure focused on finances, with Michael Mulcaire, CSC, vice president at Notre Dame, leading those who rejected the proposal. Donahue's bid fell short by one vote.

History of the Congregations of Holy Cross, June 17, 1989, North Easton, Massachusetts.²³

Albert Cousineau, CSC "Circular Letter," January 7, 1945, AHCFC; John Lucey, CSC, Interview with the author, 31 August 1995.²⁴ Steiner responded to the General stating that the Provincial Council was not opposed to a new province but felt that the timing was not good. The provincial was still concerned about money. If an autonomous eastern province were established Steiner wanted the new foundation to pay its share of the expenses, especially the education of seminarians and the debt incurred by the 1945 formation of autonomous provinces of priests and brothers.²⁵

On April 21, 1948, after Steiner was satisfied with the financial agreement, a vice-province in the "Northeastern States" was formed, with the decree to become effective on May 3. James Connerton was appointed vice-provincial with Thomas Duffy²⁶ and John

The 1938 effort to found an eastern province failed but the Chapter did elect Albert Cousineau, CSC, the first Canadian, as Superior General. Cousineau kept the concept of an eastern province alive through the war years, although the instability of the period was not conducive to new foundations. In January 1945, with vocations on the rise, Cousineau's thoughts again turned to "the question of dividing provinces." See James T. Connelly, CSC. "An Eastern Province in 1938." Paper Presented at the Conference on the History of the Congregations of Holy cross, June 17, 1989, North Easton, Massachusetts.

²⁵Steiner to Cousineau, February 16, 1948, Provincial Papers-Steiner; Meeting minutes Provincial Council, March 3, 1948, AHCFC; Steiner to Cousineau, March 13, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFC.

²⁶Duffy was unaware of the April 21 letter. He wrote to Cousineau frustrated at the inability of Holy Cross to grow in the east: "We should have a Provincial, or at least a Vice-Provincial, who could live here, or at least close by, and deal directly with our local problems as they arise. ... We cannot, we will not, advance in the work of Holy Cross, while our Provincial continues to live at Notre Dame. Understand me right--Notre Dame will continue to grow as we all want it to and as it has done in the past; the rest of the community will stagnate, as we have done here for fourteen years." Duffy to Cousineau,

Lane, CSC, as councilors.²⁷ The foundation was made with little fanfare and as little publicity as possible so as not to foment the ire of those in the west who continued to argue against eastern foundations.²⁸ Cousineau wrote to Connerton,

We may seem to be very much conciliatory with the Indiana Province. We had to be so. The success was not possible without that. And, according to my experience, we will gain more, in the long run, by our kindness and friendly relations, even if we have to make certain sacrifices.²⁹

An Eastern Vice-Province was now in existence but some catalyst was necessary to push Holy Cross off its seat of complacency in North Easton. The needed thrust came suddenly, unexpectedly, and coincidentally with the Vice-Province's foundation. Unknown

April 26, 1948, Superior General Papers-Cousineau, AHCFE.

²⁷Cousineau to James Connerton, April 22, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE.

²⁸Christopher O'Toole to Connerton, May 21, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE. Whether it was planned or coincidence, the announcement and erection of the vice-province was accomplished while Thomas Steiner and Howard Kenna were in South America visiting Holy Cross foundations in Chile. Maurus O'Malley, CSC, who says that Steiner and Kenna were never favorable to eastern foundations, calls the South American visit, "the most expensive trip they ever took." Conversely, Christopher O'Toole, who was assistant provincial to Steiner, referred to the foundation as "the finest pioneering move since the time of Father Sorin." See Maurus O'Malley, CSC, "The First Permanent Foundations of the Holy Cross Fathers and Brothers in the Eastern States." Paper presented at the Conference of the History of the Congregations of Holy Cross, May 26, 1985, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Bad blood between the Indiana and new Eastern vice-province developed nonetheless. In October 1948 O'Toole wrote to Assistant General Louis Kelley with complaints about the Eastern vice-province's request for economic assistance from the "mother province." "You can imagine what 'good' feeling toward the Vice Province this untimely request has stirred up in the Provincial Council. That is precisely the objection that those who objected to the Vice Province brought up--namely, that it would mean that the Mother Province would have to lay out a considerable sum of money. It is too bad that the administration of the Vice Province cannot go along modestly and slowly with the resources that are at its command [sic] and develop in the way that any other new Province or Vice Province develops in other communities."

²⁹Albert Cousineau to James Connerton, April 22, 1948, Connerton Papers, AHCFE.

to Holy Cross, Archbishop Cushing in February 1948 began negotiations with Franciscans of the Holy Name province, headquartered in New York, about establishing a college adjacent to North Easton in the Brockton-Avon area. On April 21, 1948 Father Mark Kennedy, OFM, President of Siena College in Loudinville, New York, met with Cushing, who outlined his plans for a college, and recounted Holy Cross's earlier refusal of the Boston foundation. Five days later Kennedy toured two potential sites in Brockton and was satisfied that a college could be built in the area.³⁰

In late April³¹ John Blunt, a Brockton lawyer and nephew of Monsignor Hugh Blunt, superintendent of Boston's archdiocesan school system, hosted a luncheon for Kennedy. George Benaglia, superior at Our Lady of Holy Cross, was also invited. During the meal Benaglia learned of Cushing's invitation to the Franciscans.³²

Benaglia immediately relayed this startling news to Thomas Duffy, who hastily wrote an impassioned plea to the Superior General requesting action and lamenting the Congregation's lethargic efforts in the east:

³⁰"Preliminary Summary on Proposed Brockton, Massachusetts College," May 3, 1948, Archives Franciscan Friars of the Holy Name Province (Hereafter AFFHN). Kennedy reported, "It would seem an opportunity to accept the offer of the Archbishop; [sic] especially in view of the fact that the Archbishop, once the offer is accepted, would leave it to the Order when to begin operations as long as it were [sic] begun within five years."

³¹Extant sources differ on the date. One says April 27, another early May. Based on subsequent correspondence, a date prior to April 27, possibly only by a day, is most probable. Both the Boston Globe and Brockton Enterprise on April 27, 1948 reported, "Prospects for the establishment of a new college in Brockton to be run by the Franciscan fathers were very favorable." This gives further evidence to an April 26 date or before.

³²George Benaglia, CSC "Recollections of Founding of Stonehill College," Stonehill College Papers, AHCPE; "Preliminary Summary on Proposed Brockton, Massachusetts College," May 3, 1948, AFFHN.

If it is true [the offer to the Franciscans], and it appears to be, then I think our development at North Easton is finished. We will have all we can do to survive. ... We have done little here in the way of growth, during the past fifteen years. ... We have tried, as you know, even from your first visit to North Easton, to develop our property here. We have constantly and consistently met with the opposition of the authorities at Notre Dame. This work of the East has been looked upon as Donahue's Folley [sic] and has never been encouraged.

Let us admit that we have all suffered a dire loss, in money, foundations, vocations and everything else, and build up the great University of Notre Dame. Perhaps Donahue and the rest of us here were all wrong, and have been mistaken down through the past fourteen years.

When in the name of God shall we ever rise from our lethargy and get going in a country where so many others have succeeded? ... If this [no action] is to be the case, then why bother about anything else for Holy Cross.³³

Duffy's letter initiated a flurry of activity. Connerton, after consulting with Duffy and Benaglia, decided that Holy Cross must move immediately in North Easton or lose the foundation as a site for a Catholic college. Discussions were held with the General staff of the Congregation, headquartered in New York. On May 16, two weeks after Duffy learned of the offer to the Franciscans, Connerton requested permission from the Superior General "for the erection of a college on the community property at North Easton, Massachusetts." The reasons given in support for the request were: (1) Because a partial college already existed, only science facilities at an estimated cost of \$25,000 needed to be constructed, (2) the local ordinaries, Cushing and Cassidy, had approved the project, and (3) the Franciscans were tentatively offered a school in Brockton, but Cushing said he would withdraw the

³³Duffy to Cousineau, April 26, 1948, Superior General Papers-Cousineau, AHCfE.

invitation if Holy Cross wanted to open a college.³⁴ As approval was readily granted,³⁵ Connerton instructed Duffy and Benaglia to proceed with all preparations to open the college in September. Stonehill, derived from the original name of the Ames mansion--Stone House Hill House, was the appellation given the College by Connerton as a way to "please many of the heirs still living and all the surrounding vicinity."³⁶

Community approbation having been received, it was necessary to secure episcopal and state permission before formal plans to open the college could proceed. Although only a small portion of the North Easton site lay in the archdiocese of Boston, Cushing was immediately informed of the Congregation's decision and approval was requested for the foundation. Cushing responded with congratulations but stated that since the site was located almost entirely in the diocese of Fall River it would be inappropriate for him to make a public statement. Most importantly, however, Cushing withdrew his invitation to the Franciscans:³⁷

I am afraid that our plans for Brockton have collapsed. The Holy Cross Fathers have formed a Vice-Province in the East and the Vice-Provincial called recently to tell me that they are planning on a college in Northeaston [sic].

³⁴Connerton to Cousineau, May 16, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE. This letter was backdated at the request of Assistant General Louis Kelley who wrote to Connerton on May 17 asking him to "confirm our conversation and state your reasons." Kelley to Connerton, May 17, 1948, Stonehill College Papers, AHCFE.

³⁵Connerton to John Lane, CSC, May 19, 1948, Founding File, ASC.

³⁶Connerton to Christopher O'Toole, CSC, May 18, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFE.

³⁷Richard Cushing to Connerton, May 21, 1948, Stonehill College Papers, AHCFE. Cushing at the same time wrote to John Delaunay, CSC at the University of Portland, "In view of the plans of your community, I will tell the Franciscans that there is no room for two colleges in that area." See Delaunay to Connerton, May 21, 1948, Stonehill History Papers, ASC.

That is the end of our plans for that area could not support two colleges.³⁸

Bishop James Cassidy in Fall River gave his assent readily to the project, praising Holy Cross for the higher order of its collegiate and university endeavors.³⁹

Before seeking approbation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Stonehill needed a charter to operate as a college. The charter granted to the Foundation of Our Lady of Holy Cross, the pre-novitiate seminary, had to be revised to allow Stonehill to grant degrees and operate as a college. Connerton placed George Benaglia, his choice as President, in charge of the effort to secure a charter. Benaglia, in turn, assigned Fathers Victor Dean, CSC, and James Moran, CSC, to the task.⁴⁰ Time was of the essence because the Board of Collegiate Authority was scheduled to meet on May 29 for the final time in academic year 1947-48. Through the assistance of Father Timothy O'Leary, assistant superintendent of parochial schools in the archdiocese of Boston, Stonehill obtained and then used as its template the charter of Merrimack College, which was founded in 1947.⁴¹ The more difficult and time dependent task was accumulating and organizing the data needed to accompany the charter request. Moran and Dean obtained financial data and records of the

³⁸Cushing to Mark Kennedy, OFM, May 29, 1948, AFFHN.

³⁹James Cassidy to Connerton, May 24, 1948, Stonehill College Papers, AHCPE; Cassidy to Joseph Duggan, May 29, 1948, Stonehill History Papers, ASC.

⁴⁰George Benaglia, "Recollections of Founding of Stonehill College," n.d. Stonehill College Papers, AHCPE.

⁴¹John Lucey, CSC to David Arthur, CSC, October 4, 1970, Stonehill History Papers, ASC. Father Philip Kelly, CSC claims that the Stonehill Charter was obtained from Regis College through the assistance of Frank Morrissey (who became a judge) and Fred Sullivan, Deputy Commissioner of Education of Massachusetts. Kelly's account, however, cannot be corroborated.

Congregation's previous educational foundations in the United States from Louis Kelly, CSC, at the Generalate in New York City. The material was organized and the application completed in less than ten days. Benaglia found a printer in Boston who could produce the fifty required copies and have them ready at 8:30 AM on May 29.⁴²

Brother Oswald Rumrill, CSC, and Benaglia picked up the application and supporting documentation and presented it on May 29 at 8:50 AM, only ten minutes before the start of the Collegiate Board meeting. The Board members read the petition with interest but decided that a special meeting would be necessary on June 29 at Deerfield Academy to review the application more completely and to hear testimony from the petitioners.

While Benaglia and his associates worked to gain state approval for the new college, Archbishop Cushing, who had been publicly silent about the North Easton foundation due to his need to settle the situation with the Franciscans, wrote in support of the Holy Cross effort. He described the community's "academic qualifications" and "record of achievement in the field of higher learning":

For a considerable period of time, I have been convinced of the need for such an institution in the southeastern portion of Massachusetts. It is obvious that the North Easton location in the Diocese of Fall River will serve a region presently lacking in collegiate facilities, and at the same time, a college site in a town immediately contiguous to the archdiocesan boundary line will also be advantageous to students removed from the center of the metropolitan area.⁴³

Officially Stonehill College did not exist and thus was not legally able to recruit students or advertise, but the time between the May 29 and June 29 meetings had to be

⁴²Benaglia, "Recollections of Founding of Stonehill College," n.d. Stonehill College Papers, AHCPE.

⁴³Cushing to Joseph Duggan, June 3, 1948, Stonehill History Papers, ASC.

utilized so that the College could open in September as planned. Connerton delegated to Thomas Duffy "all matters which he thinks need not be brought to me" concerning the foundation of the College. The Brockton Enterprise provided free advertising when it described Holy Cross's plan to establish a "Notre Dame of the East" at North Easton. Connerton, wary of possible fines for unauthorized advertising, believed there was no harm in providing information, especially to prospective students. Those who inquired were told of the College's planned opening. The General and Vice-Provincial Councils, in anticipation of a favorable decision from the state, authorized the expenditure of \$25,000 on the new Stonehill enterprise.⁴⁴

On June 29 the Board of Collegiate Authority reviewed the application and heard from members of the proposed corporation. Approval was granted for the new college to grant degrees in all fields except medicine.⁴⁵ The decision was hailed by the media as the beginning of the "Notre Dame of the East."⁴⁶

Approval by the Collegiate Board set in motion the monumental challenge of organizing a college in less than two months. The many tasks which required completion before students could be welcomed in September necessitated the cooperation of all. A spirit of service existed; religious were satisfied to do what was necessary to meet the needs as they arose. Leo Gorman, CSC acted as dean and registrar; James Martin, CSC, acted as

⁴⁴Connerton to Benaglia, May 29, 1948, Stonehill History Papers, ASC; Connerton to Duffy, May 29, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton; Vice-Provincial Council Meeting Minutes, June 21, 1948, AHCFE.

⁴⁵Certificate of Change of Purpose, June 30, 1948, Stonehill History Papers, ASC.

⁴⁶George Benaglia, "Recollections of Founding of Stonehill College," n.d. Stonehill College Papers, AHCFE.

secretary since there was no money to hire a professional. Informality was the rule of the day that summer. Student applications, which flowed in mainly from the surrounding communities of Brockton, Taunton, Fall River, New Bedford, and a few from Boston, were evaluated by Gorman. Selectivity was not stringent; 250 applicants were accepted. Admission requirements included three courses in English, one each in history, algebra, geometry, and laboratory science, and two courses in ancient or modern language.⁴⁷

Development efforts were necessary to assist the foundation, especially considering the fledgling status of the Vice-Province and its less than harmonious relationship with the mother province at Notre Dame.⁴⁸ Benaglia requested permission from both Cushing and Cassidy to canvas local parishes for contributions, with the hope that the bishops' approval would translate into economic support. Both ordinaries, however, refused to approve any development drive in parishes, a decision which contrasted sharply with other dioceses.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Bulletin of Stonehill College, 1948-1949, ASC. There are no extant records of the number of applicants for the class of 1952.

⁴⁸The Eastern Vice-Province had few economic resources and the Indiana Province believed that the financial status of the eastern foundation was not their problem. This became more clear in the fall when Connerton requested \$150,000 from the Indiana Province. Assistant Provincial Christopher O'Toole responded, "Of Course this is out of the question. First of all we haven't got it and secondly, the entire picture has changed since the chapter. Now the Vice Province is on its own. You can imagine what good feeling toward the Vice Province this untimely request has stirred up in the [Indiana] Provincial Council. That is precisely the objection that those who objected to the Vice Province brought up--namely, that it would mean the Mother Province would have to lay out a considerable sum of money. It is too bad that the Administration of the Vice Province cannot go along modestly and slowly with the resources that are at its command [sic] and develop in the way that any other new Province or Vice Province develops in other Communities." Christopher O'Toole to Louis Kelley, October 1, 1948, Provincial Papers-Steiner, AHCFl.

⁴⁹Cyril F. Meyer, "Financing Catholic Higher Education," America 78 Supplement (April 3, 1948): xvi. Meyer concluded, "To survive they [Catholic colleges run by religious orders] will need a well organized appeal launched on a diocese-wide basis, backed by

The construction of a new building to house both classrooms and laboratories was the principal new facilities requirement for the College. Plans were made to hold all classes in the mansion and the adjacent indoor clay tennis court, but the need for more space was recognized immediately. Emery LaLiberte, a Brockton architect who became closely identified with Stonehill College, designed the new building. His initial plan for a six-room one-story building was estimated to cost \$52,000. The design, with a per room cost of \$13,000, far exceeded the \$25,000 allotted by the Congregation to start the College.⁵⁰ Therefore, Connerton, asked Brother Josephus Schaub, CSC, who had come to North Easton in August 1945 and was serving as head of maintenance, to look over the plans and see if the structure could be built more cheaply.⁵¹ Connerton's idea was to construct a temporary building in order to cut costs,⁵² but the harsh local climate and promising enrollment figures demanded a more permanent structure from the outset. James Mullen, a North Easton

diocesan officials." In February 1946 a collection was taken in the Diocese of Syracuse for support of Jesuit-operated LeMoyne College and in 1950 St. John Fisher in Rochester, administered by the Basilians, was the benefactor of \$1 million raised in a diocesan development drive.

⁵⁰Duffy to Connerton, May 23, 1948; Connerton to Duffy, May 26, 1948, Provincial Papers-Connerton, AHCFC.

⁵¹Joseph Schaub, Interview with author, November 9, 1995, Stonehill History Project Papers, ASC. Later, when it became obvious that Benaglia could not adequately supervise the College's physical plant, Connerton appointed Brother Josephus as head of buildings and grounds at the College.

⁵²Connerton told Steiner, in an apparent effort to conceal what an adequate facility would cost, that a temporary building to meet the need for science labs was all that was envisioned. See Connerton to Steiner, June 4, 1948, Provincial Papers-Steiner, AHCFC.

contractor on the rebound from the Depression and alcoholism, was given the job of chief contractor.⁵³

Stonehill College--1948

On September 20, 1948 one hundred thirty-four⁵⁴ men started classes at Stonehill. The College bulletin informed the students,

The system of studies [at Stonehill] has been designed to produce a twofold result: to prepare the young man to meet the demands which are being made upon him by the increasing complexities of modern social and economic life, and to train him to live in conformity to the will of God.⁵⁵

The Bulletin also quoted Cardinal Newman's description of Catholic education as the reunion of the spiritual and intellectual aspects of human existence. Benaglia underscored this philosophy with his own ideas for education at Stonehill: "We seek not the development of mental giants--we desire to train young, healthy, intelligent men who have a genius in the desire and the defense of Truth, of Decency and of Justice."⁵⁶ Stonehill's first president believed that the College's role was to provide knowledge, but that proper moral guidance was equally important because parents and guardians had entrusted these young men to the

⁵³Mullen had a successful contracting business in Boston in the 1920s when effects of the Depression destroyed him financially. Suffering from alcoholism, he moved to North Easton and there met George Benaglia, who introduced him to Alcoholics Anonymous. Benaglia wanted Mullen to have the classroom building job to restore his confidence and return him to productive work. James Mullen, interview with the author, August 11, 1995, Stonehill History Project, ASC.

⁵⁴Figures differ in extant sources as to the precise number who started classes in September 1948. The 134 figure comes from the records of the Director of Institutional Research at Stonehill College and is the most accurate and official. The "Chronicles of Our Lady of Holy Cross" states that 140 entered that fall.

⁵⁵Bulletin of Stonehill College, 1948-1949, ASC.

⁵⁶George Benaglia, "Middleboro Speech Notes," n.d., Benaglia Papers, ASC.

school. Benaglia viewed students as charges who were to be encouraged to develop their talents and sense of moral responsibility.⁵⁷

The College's official opening, known today as Founder's Day, was celebrated on October 12, 1948. A Pontifical Mass was offered on campus with Bishop Cassidy as the celebrant; James Connerton preached the sermon. Many dignitaries were present for the event, including Bishops James Connolly and Russell McVinney of Providence, Merrimack President Vincent McQuade, O.S.A., plus delegations from Boston, Assumption, St. Anselm's, and Providence Colleges. Speaker of the House Joseph Martin, State Commissioner of Education John Desmond, Judge Harry K. Stone and Dr. John Kelly, President of Bridgewater State Teacher's College, were also in attendance.⁵⁸ In his comments Cassidy voiced a prophetic message about Stonehill's future:

Just as the oak tree, rising from a mere acorn, grows tall and powerful; so also will the influence of Stonehill reach out, from these humble beginnings, to enrich an area far greater than Southeastern Massachusetts.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Although the Congregation of Holy Cross came to North Easton in 1935 it took thirteen years and the threat of outside competition before Stonehill College opened its doors in September 1948. The College's hasty and poorly-financed foundation created many problems over the next several years. Beginning in 1954, however, Stonehill's initial dark picture began to brighten with the liquidation of a \$175,000 debt to King's College, incurred

⁵⁷Countering Catholic higher education's prevailing trend against in loco parentis, Benaglia strongly maintained his traditional view.

⁵⁸"Chronicles of Our Lady of Holy Cross," October 12, 1948, ASC.

⁵⁹"Dedication of College," n.d. Clipping, Benaglia Papers, ASC.

in financing the College's initial expenses. A string of events including the achievement of unconditional accreditation in 1961, the expansion of the College beyond a commuter school through the construction of men's and women's dormitories, and the development of a high quality academic liberal arts program brought Stonehill to its contemporary respected status in the academy. Acknowledged in recent years by Barron's, Money, and U.S. News & World Report for its total program of education, Stonehill has achieved the dream of its founders as it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary.