Chapter IV

CHEVERUS -- THE INVITATION TO RETURN TO MAINE (1937-1942)

The account of the acquisition, retention and financing of a Jesuit secondary endeavor in Maine is one of many and extended frustrations along with unexpected blessings. It began in earnest after some preliminaries in 1942 when the Society in New England was entrusted with instruction in a twenty-five year old diocesan school -- Cheverus in Portland. The venture eventuated, after having the original school in two locations (1942-46, Free Street; 1946-52, Cumberland Avenue), in a new structure on a third site, Ocean Avenue, by April, 1952.

This new school was owned by the Society in as much as the Society owns any educational institution. Hence, it was then free to charge tuition and, in controlling finance, to control admission, promotion, dismissal of students as well as to have authority over the curriculum. This process from a diocesan to a Jesuit high school took time. During these years, the school seemed at times to be guaranteed an utopian assistance, yet it found these pledges of aid whittled down and the situation almost bleak enough to withdraw.

Patience, hope, sacrifice, toil, prayer kept the Society there until its perseverance was blessed by an unexpected and anonymous gift of $500,000 toward a new school building. This gift in subsequent years was augmented by the widow of the anonymous donor. She paid off some, but not all, the obligations remaining from the costs beyond $500,000 of constructing the
school, and guaranteed a million dollars, payable in annual installments, to build a faculty residence. This residence, completed by 1967, replaced the two interconnected dwellings on Danforth Street which had housed the faculty from 1942 to 1967.

Memories of some Jesuits of the old Society (Pierre Biard, Ennémond Massé and Gilbert du Thet) and especially of the resumed work of the Maryland Province from 1847 to 1859, were alive among the people and clergy of Maine. Fr. Thomas J. Campbell, S.J., by his writings on pioneer priests, had helped to give flesh and blood to Fr. Pierre Biard and his associates, and also to Fr. Sebastian Râle, slain in 1724 at Norridgewock in the town of Madison, Maine. The basic documents on these early missions had been gathered in the collection of Jesuit Relations, edited in seventy-three volumes by Reuben Gold Thwaites.

For the nineteenth century, one name above all stood out. That was the name of Fr. John Bapst, later rector of the Jesuit national scholasticate in Boston (1860-63), rector of Boston College (1863-69), first superior of the New York-Canada Mission (1869-73) and first Jesuit superior at St. Joseph's Parish, Providence (1877-79). Bapst had been tarred and feathered on Saturday night, October 14, 1854, at Ellsworth, Maine. His labors among the Indians, and in and about Bangor had given a golden glow to the work of these Maryland Province Jesuits. This glow had remained, despite their recall in 1859 by the then provincial, Fr. Burchard Villiger, in protest against a policy of the First Bishop of Portland, David Bacon, whose diocese at the time embraced New Hampshire as well as Maine.
The name of Fr. Sebastian Râle, slain at Norridgewock in 1724 by a group of Indians and English colonists from Massachusetts, had been kept alive by a monument on part of the space of the Abenaki Indian village along the Kennebec. When Benedict Joseph Fenwick was Bishop of Boston (1825-46) and with territory including all of New England, he had procured a limited portion of the old Indian village on which he had raised a commemorative monument in honor of Râle. This was done in 1833. Time played havoc with it.

During his episcopate Louis Sebastian Walsh (1906-24) was able to procure the large field on which the old Indian village had stood, and he had Fenwick's monument refurbished. Preacher for the occasion was Fr. Thomas J. Campbell. Later the condition of even this repaired monument again deteriorated. In 1940, the Maine Council of the Knights of Columbus repaired the monument and added an inscription detailing Bishop Fenwick's work and their own. They made no mention of Bishop Walsh's share in adding more acreage and repairing the monument. This Râle Monument, now at one end of a Catholic cemetery, is on Sebastian Râle Highway, running left from the road in Madison which goes downhill past its post office. It is worth a visit.

There were a few possibilities of Jesuits returning to Maine during the episcopacy of John Gregory Murray (1925-37). On February 27, 1927 he proposed that one Jesuit be placed in charge of the boys' division of a new secondary school -- the John Bapst in Bangor -- while laymen did the initial teaching. Gradually a full complement of Jesuit teachers could be assigned there. This
plan was rejected by Fr. General (as some others were rejected locally or left hanging as has been seen earlier).

Some seven years later on May 17, 1934, Fr. William R. Crawford, then rector of Boston College High School and the Church of the Immaculate Conception, proposed buying for $15,000 an estate at Bar Harbor to serve as a Northern Missionary Center. The place would be bought by Boston College High and be placed under its supervision as a dependent house. The idea of a missionary center was approved by the province consultors, but some less remote place in Maine was deemed preferable. One consultor was to discuss a possible change in location with Father Crawford. No more is known of this project from extant available records.

It was only with Bishop Murray's successor, Bishop Joseph E. McCarthy, also a former Hartford priest and Vice Rector of St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Connecticut, that some serious negotiations were begun. On a visit in 1937 to New England bishops to solicit their cooperation toward the canonization of Fr. John Roothan, General of the Society from 1829-53, Fr. James H. Dolan found the enthusiastic support of Bishop McCarthy. Equally so were all the other New England bishops with the exception of Bishop Francis R. Keough of Providence and Bishop Joseph J. Rice of Burlington.

In one more year, further explorations on Jesuit activity in Maine were begun. Some weeks prior to August 15, 1938, Fr. Francis J. Dolan, President of Holy Cross, visited Bishop McCarthy with the announcement that Fr. Provincial was
prepared to supply a staff to administer and teach in his high school either in Portland or in Bangor or in both. Such a change would enable the diocesan priests, few in numbers, to concentrate on parish work.

On August 15, Bishop McCarthy responded enthusiastically that he had in mind a site for a projected college. Three days later, Fr. James H. Dolan, along with Fr. Zacheus Maher, the American Assistant who was briefly visiting in Boston, called on Bishop McCarthy. Both during this meeting and in subsequent correspondence, Fr. Dolan discouraged the idea of a college. On September 1, the bishop responded indicating his understanding of the problem involved in beginning a college, but did hope that some other possibilities would be opened up.

In the Spring of 1941, it was reported to Fr. Dolan that the bishop planned to ask Jesuit services to administer and instruct in Cheverus High School in Portland. In a very brief time after this hint was dropped, the bishop came to provincial headquarters at 300 Newbury Street to confirm this idea and to express hope ultimately for a college. As the school structure was then seriously aging, he promised a new one by 1943.

Matters seemed to lie fallow for the next few months. On November 21, 1941, Fr. Joseph R. N. Maxwell, the President of Holy Cross, had occasion to visit the bishop's residence. The bishop expanded on larger ideas if his invitation to Cheverus were accepted. The diocese owned a piece of property now leased out for a gasoline station and a parking lot. When the leases
expired, he planned to sell the land and set aside the money for a new high school site and structure. With this new school built, he could sell the original Cheverus and have even more funds available for the new school. It appeared to Fr. Maxwell that the bishop planned the new school as a gift to the Society, but this was not totally clear. All this information was conveyed to Fr. Dolan by letter. By the time this information was mentioned in Fr. Dolan's correspondence with Fr. Maxwell on February 26, 1942, the negotiations were well started.

On January 1, 1942, Bishop McCarthy visited Fr. Provincial on the project concerning a diocesan high school. Fr. Provincial along with Fr. Edward A. Sullivan, then Rector of St. Mary's in the North End and a province consultor, in turn visited the bishop on January 8. What transpired in these two meetings can be learned from the minutes of a province consultors' meeting on February 21, 1942. This meeting seems to be the first time that this current project appeared to have been brought to the attention of the consultors.

The first point dealt with the proposed faculty dwelling. Fr. Dolan had requested and received the blue prints of two contiguous houses on Danforth Street owned by the diocese. They were to be inter-connected on the first floor so that the double three-story dwellings could serve as a residence. One of these had been until recently the rectory of St. Dominic's parish; the other, after serving a variety of church purposes, had been vandalized, but was now to be refurbished.
The educational project in question was to be the teaching in the diocesan Cheverus High School up to this time managed and taught by diocesan priests for twenty-five years. In September, 1909, an old building, which was once the community residence of the Sisters of Mercy and the original location of their private academy, had been converted into a school for grammar school students. It was originally called "The Catholic Institute." In September 1917, this structure on Free Street, was converted into and, in 1924, given the name "Cheverus Classical High School." It was this school that the Jesuits were invited to teach as replacements for the diocesan priests.

Some guidelines were expected by the bishop as an aid in formulating an explicit invitation and in arranging financial terms for Jesuit service. Before any guidelines on financial arrangements could be expressed, the consultors deemed it best to await a report on the current operating expenses of the school. Students were supplied with books and school supplies by the diocese, and the parishes of the area were assessed by the diocese for their students in attendance. Some language was worked out to be proposed to the bishop on the purpose for which the Society was to undertake this and other work in the diocese. This language, later the subject of diverse interpretation, is found in the first full paragraph of Bishop McCarthy's invitation.

The official invitation dated March 2, 1942 and approved by the consultors on March 3 read as follows:
Very Reverend and dear Father Dolan,

This letter will advise the Very Reverend Provincial of the New England Province, Society of Jesus, together with the Board of Province Consultors, that the Bishop of Portland gives his approval and consent for the erection of a House of the Society of Jesus in the Diocese of Portland, Maine, in the City of Portland, for the usual works of the Society, and specifically at this time for assuming the educational direction and teaching of the Diocesan High School for Boys, known as Cheverus High School, and for the establishment of a College of the Society at some opportune future time.

Our approval of this plan is intended to be an official act of the Diocese of Portland, through its Ordinary, so as to make it evident the educational works outlined above shall, once established, become a permanent work of the Society of Jesus in the said Diocese of Portland, the permancy [sic] to be recognized throughout our own administration and by our successors in the See of Portland.

We wish to add to this letter an acknowledgement of our heartfelt appreciation, and expression of profound gratitude to the Very Reverend Provincial and his worthy associates for the auspicious coming of the Society into our Diocese. It has long since been our cherished hope, with prayer, that the Fathers of the Society of Jesus might be affiliated with our diocesan works of education and religion, so as to enhance with greater value the labors of our priests and people for Holy Mother Church and the sanctification and salvation of souls, "Ad majorem Dei gloriam."

With sentiments of profound respect and cordial best wishes, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Joseph E. McCarthy

Bishop of Portland
At the February 21 consultors meeting, some names, headed by that of Fr. William E. FitzGerald, were considered for the first superior. Fr. Maher approved his choice on March 3, 1942, with the understanding that Fr. FitzGerald was to be considered rector in petto. This was done since at that time there was yet no residence or community. Later there was some re-evaluation of Fr. FitzGerald's name due to his own personal request that some other choice be made. However, the original choice was adhered to.

Later in the spring, Bishop McCarthy, pleased with the public reaction of the news that the Jesuits were to return to Maine, sought for publicity purposes the name of the rector and the staff. He was informed that the naming of the staff would depend on the coming summer status but that, through an early personal introduction, the bishop would be the first to be apprised of the choice of rector. This visit of introduction occurred in later April. Again in May, Fr. FitzGerald visited Portland for a few days and had the opportunity to inspect residence and school and to learn more details on both. On this visit he submitted a report to Fr. Provincial.

Prior to the arrangements of financial details, Fr. Thomas McLaughlin, the province treasurer, had written an early memorandum for Fr. Provincial on March 3, 1942. He wondered if the current enthusiasm about expansion into Maine would evaporate in four or five years when it was evident that the school could not pay the annual province tax. Hence, he believed that, in any
financial arrangements, provisions must be made for the possibility of bazaars, card parties and penny sales to augment the revenue of the community. He pointed out that with the school being diocesan, gifts and bequests left to Cheverus would not redound to the Jesuits in Portland, but to the diocese. Some arrangements on such matters, he judged imperative.

The financial agreement hammered out during the late spring and early summer months of 1942 were agreed to and signed on July 31, 1942, the day when St. Ignatius Residence, the official title of the Danforth Street residence, was officially opened. Its text, though lengthy, is included here. In advance of the text, it might be noted that no provision was made for remunerating the services of Brother Thomas Meehan, or of the other brothers who in later times served there such as Brother Maurice V. Ahern, Brother Vincent L. Molinaro, and Brother W. Edward Stubbert.

In the operation of the Cheverus High School for boys, Portland, Maine, the following financial arrangement is agreed upon by His Excellency, the Most Reverend Joseph E. McCarthy, D.D., of the Diocese of Portland, and the Very Reverend James H. Dolan, S.J., Provincial of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus.

1. All expenses attached to the maintenance and operation of the Cheverus High School, such as for building, upkeep and repairs, equipment and furnishings, lighting, heating, water and gas, telephone, taxes and insurance, salaries of lay teachers and coaches, wages of extern help, all departmental and extra-curricular expenditures, and the like, will be sustained, as at present, by the Diocese of Portland, and accounted for by the Jesuit Rector of the School, in a monthly statement or in any other way that His Excellency, the Most Reverend Bishop, may
2. All expenses attached to the establishment, maintenance and furnishings of the buildings to be used as the Jesuit Faculty Residence on Danforth Street, known as the former St. Dominic's Rectory and the McGlinchey House, as also the taxes and insurance liabilities, will be sustained by the Diocese of Portland as the owner of this property.

3. All expenses attached to the operation of the Faculty Residence on Danforth Street, once established, such as for lighting, heating, water, gas, and for all living and personal expenses to be incurred by the members of the Jesuit Faculty during their occupation of this residence, such as food, clothing, telephone, transportation and travel, books for house library and personal use, medical service and all personal sundry expenditures, and the like, will be sustained by the Society of Jesus in Portland.

4. Those members of the Society of Jesus residing at the Danforth Street Residence and engaged in full-time teaching or administrative assignments at the Cheverus High School will receive from the Diocese of Portland, an annual honorarium of 1,200.00 dollars per man. All members of the Society assigned there on a part-time basis for work in the High School will receive an honorarium to be pro-rated for the time and service rendered there.

5. Any and all benefactions that may be received by any person or persons associated with the Cheverus High School, by way of gifts, donations, bequests, and the like, and specifically given for the uses and purposes of the School, are to be rendered, intact and as specified to the Diocese of Portland; any and all benefactions that may be received by any person or persons associated with the Cheverus High School, and are specifically given by the way of gifts, donations, bequests and the like, for the uses and purposes of the Society of Jesus, or of its members, individually or collectively, either resident in Portland, Maine, or elsewhere, are to be accordingly rendered to the Society of Jesus so specified; in the event that any such benefactions are received by any person or persons associated with the Cheverus High School without specification, and if the intention of the donor or donors cannot be ascertained, the disposition of these unspecified benefactions is to be
determined by the mutual agreement of the then Most Reverend Bishop of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, and the then Very Reverend Provincial of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus.

6. As a provision for the greater security and the mutual satisfaction of the contracting parties, the terms of this financial agreement, entered into on this 31st day of July, 1942, by the Most Reverend Joseph E. McCarthy, D.D., Bishop of Portland, in behalf of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, and the Very Reverend James H. Dolan, S.J., Provincial, in behalf of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus, are to be accepted and approved as subject to any feasible and equitable adjustment that may be found mutually desirable and necessary at any time during the period of the five ensuing years from the date of this agreement.

Signed:

Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland
By Joseph E. McCarthy
Bishop of Portland
James H. Dolan
Provincial of New England Province

Witnesses:

Clarence H. Coughlan
William E. FitzGerald

The official opening of the residence took place at Danforth Street on July 31, 1942. The chapel was the gift of the province for its house. The furnishings of the rest of the house came from the Portland diocese. Fr. Dolan was present for this opening event and the bishop came for the dinner.

The school opened on September 14, 1942, with seventeen Jesuits constituting its first group for 245 students. The first minister and treasurer was Fr. John M. Glavin. Initially, Fr. FitzGerald was principal assisted by Fr. Walter E. Kennedy, and later by Fr. Cyril F. Delaney. In 1946, Fr. Francis
J. Donovan became the principal and Fr. FitzGerald was more free to accept speaking engagements in varying parts of Maine. In addition to teaching religion in the school, Fr. John E. Welch long connected with Holy Cross, 1922-1926; 1927-1942 and later 1947-1956, served as spiritual father. The first teaching fathers included Fr. Daniel F. Dwyer, Philip A. Fuhs, John J. Galvin, Edmund J. Hogan, Gerald F. Hutchinson. The original regents were William F. O'Connor, John P. Rock, Francis A. Small, John Christopher Sullivan and Carl J. Thayer. Two members of the mission band were stationed there -- Fr. Joseph F. MacFarlane and Paul R. Power. Cloister was placed on the residence on September 24, 1942, the same day cloister was promulgated for Fairfield.

Perhaps something should be remarked about Portland as a choice in the expansion policy to which Fr. James H. Dolan was committed. As much as possible from his years as Socius, he had desired to end the "tale of the two cities" syndrome. A retreat house in North Andover and a private boarding school in Lenox were not enough. Hence, in late 1941 and early 1942, he did his best to acquire a Connecticut school site, and to accept an invitation to an exiting school in Maine. In his mind, the earlier days of Rôle and Papst were vivid and beckoning.

Fr. Dolan could overlook the more depressed economic situation in Portland and its conflicting strands of people if the new project aided the diocese and expanded the province ambit. Portland had been a port for exporting lumber, textiles, potatoes, fish. The port had come on meager days after World War I and its immediate aftermath, especially under the impact of the
depression and the moving of many mills to the south. The newer petroleum depot at South Portland compensated only in part for the other declines. The advent and early years of World War II gave the shipyards of South Portland a temporary boom.

But going to Portland in 1942 was a far cry from entering into the Bridgeport area. Bridgeport was surrounded by Fairfield County towns and cities, by the western and valley portions of New Haven County. The Fairfield area did have a polyglot population while Maine and, to a smaller degree, Portland had the Irish-French division. The Diocese of Portland had less of an indigenous priesthood than Hartford. Neighboring dioceses had supplied priests, especially Providence. There were also foreign-born Irish. There was some mistrust, it was said, between priest born in the south and those from the Bangor and Houlton area. All these factors made it more difficult to be received cordially by all elements.

Also, that Jesuits replaced diocesan priests in the school was not as welcome to many as it was to the bishop. Hence there was possibly some over-avidity in the name of needed expansion in accepting an unusual offer to teach in a diocesan high school and under an invitation that might have been more sharply drawn in view of later and differing interpretations.