Chapter VI

CHEVERUS HIGH SCHOOL -- BRIGHTER DAYS (1948-1967)

In the depths of the continuing disappointment concerning school facilities and financial status, Fr. Robert A. Hewitt first conferred on these urgent and continuing needs with Bishop Daniel J. Feeney. The Bishop asked that the situation of the school be put into writing.

On March 15, 1950 Fr. Hewitt wrote dealing specifically with a critical situation facing Cheverus for the fall term of 1950. The current student body was 300, of whom fifty seniors would be graduated in June. The normal current intake of new students was 100. Due to the newly introduced terminal course for students not bound for college, this number of 100 could be expanded. Cheverus had available no more than its eight classrooms for 350 or slightly more students. Moreover, the Sister Principal of the Cathedral schools had informed Cheverus that the two classrooms she had loaned to Cheverus would not be available in September.

What, therefore, asked Fr. Hewitt, was to be done? One possibility was to search for a temporary building to house some 125 students, preferably all the first-year high school students. To be unable to do that much would mean the intolerable situation of no new students in September, 1950. What was really needed was not a continued makeshift, but a new Cheverus for boys. Despite its reputation not only in Portland, but throughout the state, an accrediting agency could bear down heavily on a school
without space for laboratories, library and administrative offices. The expense of a new building was concedingly great, but equally great was the challenge to educate the youth of the area. Fr. Hewitt concluded by affirming that, with whatever were the diocesan plans for the future, the Jesuits would wholeheartedly cooperate.

Whatever formal response Cheverus received to this letter is not available. Bishop Feeney did send Fr. Hewitt's letter to Fr. Edward F. Walsh, Pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Yarmouth, Maine, a parish which included Falmouth Foreside. Fr. Walsh was a friend of Mr. Byron Miller, a non-Catholic gentleman of considerable means. Mr. Miller's wife was a Catholic. A postscript on an earlier letter of Mr. Miller to Fr. Walsh had indicated his continuing interest in some school project. Fr. Walsh, perceiving the need for a new Cheverus, urged Bishop Feeney to have Fr. Hewitt make specific suggestions on the needs of a possible school structure. This proposal was approved by Bishop Feeney.

Fr. Hewitt went ahead with such plans. By August 2, 1950 Bishop Feeney had received a document headed "Estimate of Cost of Cheverus High School Building, Ocean Avenue." The classroom section was estimated at $393,000. An auditorium was so devised that it could also serve as a gymnasium and chapel. This multi-purpose room and a kitchen came in cost to $119,000. Approximations were made for an architect's fee of $30,000, a coordinator's fee at $5,000 and equipment cost at $35,000. Hence the total estimated cost was $582,000. A detailed description of
the materials and construction was supplied to explain the $582,000 cost of the building. Comparative costs were added from recent school construction of the King Junior High School in Portland and of Boston College High School in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

Writing as early as four days after Fr. Walsh had been supplied with this school data, Fr. Provincial, John J. McElheney, informed the American Assistant to Fr. General, Fr. Vincent A. McCormick, that a "good Catholic" of means had informed Bishop Feeney that he would give $500,000 for a new Catholic High School explicitly for boys. The priest involved, as it came to be known, was Fr. Walsh who planned to introduce Fr. Hewitt to his benefactor friend. This was done, but the details are not available.

Before considering some further communication between Fr. Hewitt and Bishop Feeney later in 1950, some study is needed of correspondence between the benefactor and his lawyer, between a friend and his financial agent, and of correspondence between the friends and agents. The lawyer was Mr. Wadleigh B. Hammond, and the fiscal agent was the Scott Corporation of Portland. The benefactor had certain definite convictions.

The title deeds to the estate on Ocean Avenue were to be made over physically to the Society in Portland as a condition for any initial money to flow. It must be recalled that, on October 7, 1948, the Jesuit community had been incorporated by the State of Maine as St. Ignatius Residence of the Society of Jesus. Hence as a legal corporation, independent of the diocesan
school, it could receive the title deeds to the Winslow Estate. It was a further condition that the school, when completed, would be turned over to this corporation and the school would cease to be diocesan and become fully a Jesuit school and was to remain for boys only. Money, however, could be paid for necessary preliminary work such as architect's fees prior to construction. If the total cost of the school went beyond the allotted $500,000, the onus was on the school corporation to pay.

The donor had, after making modifications, proposed by Fr. Hewitt and himself, in the draft, made a final settlement which he believed corresponded to his agreements made in conversations with Fr. Hewitt. He also made provision that, should he die prior to the final payment of the pledged $500,000, his executors were bound to continue to pay the promised sum. These plans were approved in writing on January 15, 1951.

The donor was ill for a time but recovered. As time went on, his wife carried on some correspondence and showed her interest in her husband's project. In all these early years up to and even after the donor's death on May 18, 1960, the name of the benefactor was kept in a very limited circle, and only in later years was his identity more generally known.

When it is recalled what the Jesuits at Cheverus went through in promises, in tight and inadequate quarters and in the necessary counting of pennies to bring Catholic education to Portland and to other parts of Maine, there was reason to rejoice on June 9, 1952. On that day the new school building was dedicated. It consisted of a spreadout one-floor building and a
basement, much of which was well above-ground. There were, in addition to offices, also classrooms, the multi-purpose room, a library, a small chapel, athletic equipment rooms, showers and toilets.

The chief address on dedication day was given by Edward B. Hanify, the eloquent and learned partner in Gray & Ropes, a trustee of numerous corporations and a 1933 Holy Cross graduate. After a eulogy on Bishop Cheverus, he cited the Oregon School case of 1925, so removed in its philosophy from that inculcated by John Dewey, and that more recently advocated by President James Conant of Harvard. Jesuits were praised in the conclusion which cited the stalwart patience under suffering for Christ of the North American martyrs.

Even with this school structure, the financial situation of Cheverus was still precarious. Because construction costs had been constantly rising, Fr. Hewitt had been obliged to have authorization to borrow $100,000 beyond the $500,000 gift. On February 22, 1952, he had asked permission to borrow $50,000 additionally not only in view of rising prices, but in the hope of a further gift from the original donor. This permission was not granted by the province consultors.

For a secondary school, Portland was thus left with a large capital debt. The money seemingly promised to be continued by the parishes toward tuition fell into desuetude. Hence, there was a raise in tuition costs from $100 to $150 and this increase was really inadequate.
There were, consequently, more needs for parochial help by the faculty fathers and an increase, if possible, of the practice of conducting the novenas of grace. For this purpose, the winter vacation ordinarily scheduled for middle or late February, was put off until the days in March when as many as possible of the faculty priests took the vacation by giving novenas of grace, normally from March 4 to 12. This somewhat educationally unorthodox practice continued until the principalship of Fr. Thomas J. Grey. Dances in the school hall raised some revenue but with a toll on the energy of the teachers. Bingo and some associate memberships brought in some added money. These revenues belonging to St. Ignatius Rectory, Inc. served to supply money to the school.

A move in 1954 envisaged the possibility of a drive for funds for a double purpose. A faculty residence would be built near the school, and also a dormitory for boarding students. Mr. Lester L. Beal, the architect of the school building, had been initially retained for this combined venture. Since he had so much work, he could give little or no time to the needs of Cheverus. After waiting some six months to get what was promised for some next "indefinite" week, Fr. Hewitt, at Mr. Beal's suggestion engaged the Quincy, Massachusetts, architecture firm of Edward J. Shields Associates. The contractors who had built the new Cheverus school, Cunningham and Son, found no difficulty in working with an architect living in Boston.
By March 17, 1955, Fr. Hewitt could say that preliminary plans had been drawn and were in the hands of the provincial. Both of the new structures were planned for two stories plus an ample basement. There were to be thirty-two living rooms in the Jesuit residence along with the usual common rooms and liturgical facilities. The student dormitory was to house 100 with four students planned for each room. There were to be four prefects' suites. The estimated cost of both buildings was $1,060,000.

Both Mr. Miller and his wife were apprised of the plans. Mr. Miller acknowledged Fr. Hewitt's letter on the details, but gave no commitment on aid. Favorable publicity appeared in the local paper. Before Fr. Hewitt's seven-year term of office expired in August, 1955, a drive for $675,000 had been announced, considerably less than the estimated $1,060,000 needed for the buildings.

The new rector, Fr. John P. Foley, was former freshman dean at Boston College, a wartime naval chaplain and, at the time of his appointment, Principal of Boston College High School. He was to find the overall plans of the New England Province and divine providence as inhibiting factors in the plans so carefully laid out by Fr. Hewitt.

In the late summer of 1955, a three million dollar drive for a new Shadowbrook noviceship and juniorate was publicly announced. Since that drive was to cover all the territory in New England, and especially where there were Jesuit institutions with Jesuit alumni and alumnae, retreatants, parishioners and
friends, there could be the possibility of cross-purpose solicitations in Maine. To make the need for the success of the Shadowbrook drive more crucial, the original building at Shadowbrook, which was to be replaced, was burned literally to the ground on March 10, 1956. So in September 1956, the Cheverus drive was stopped. Danforth Street was to continue as the residence and there was to be no student dormitory.

In September of 1956, a year after the Cheverus drive was discontinued, Mrs. Miller, who many years before had known Fr. Kilroy as Pastor of Saint Ignatius Church in New York City, sent him a thousand dollar gift for his sixtieth anniversary in the Society. In a reply on September 12, 1956, he indicated that the gift would be used for the education of a younger Jesuit.

The next move to aid Cheverus came from Mrs. Miller, a year after the death of her husband. Mr. Miller, it might be pointed out, was on one day baptized, confirmed, absolved in confession, given Holy Communion and anointed. His funeral was held at St. Ignatius Church in New York City. Against the advice of her lawyers (and she underscored this plural), Mrs. Miller wrote to Fr. Foley on July 6, 1961, that she planned to pay whatever debt still remained on the school building over and above the $500,000 her husband had given. One debt was owed to the First National Bank of Portland. By July 7, 1961 it was paid off to its full amount of $15,012.17. She then urged that she be informed of the other remaining debts.
When Mrs. Miller learned that one of these debts on the school was for $40,000, loaned to St. Ignatius Rectory, Inc., by Bishop Feeney, she refused to advance any money toward its payment. Bishop Feeney, in her estimation, had spoken ill of her husband and herself. This particular debt continued to be paid with interest charges until the bishop's successor, Bishop Peter L. Gerety (1966-74), forgave all remaining interest charges.

When Fr. Andrew F. McFadden the former administrative assistant to the President of Holy Cross, became rector at Cheverus in the summer of 1961 and became acquainted with Mrs. Miller, a new possibility of a faculty residence began to take shape. It was her plan to guarantee $1,000,000 for the structure and its furnishings by annual sums of $100,000. On July 10, 1962, the province consultors were made aware that assistance would come in erecting a faculty residence. At a meeting on January 8, 1963, there was a study of a preliminary plan drawn up after the financial arrangement had been made. Plans for the building were drawn up. The first set proved too elaborate and expensive, so a second set of plans were devised and ultimately approved. They were so drawn and with such spaciousness that many features of the first floor could later in the school year of 1969-1970 be converted into president's and treasurer's offices and, both on the first floor and in the above-ground basement section, space could serve as classrooms and activity rooms for the school. In addition to parlors, common rooms, kitchen, there were living rooms for thirty Jesuits.
Since money beyond the initial grants were needed at an early stage, the province loaned the money required for construction and furnishings, and was repaid as the annual sums arrived. Mrs. Miller's will, it might be noted, had made provision for the payment up to one million dollars in the event of her death prior to the total payment. Prior to 1976, all of Mrs. Miller's gift had been paid. At a later time, when Fr. Joseph L. Shea was president of the school, Mrs. Miller gave a valuable jade collection which she wished to be auctioned off and the proceeds accrue to the school.

The generosity of Mr. Miller in his original gift and the continued generosity of his widow were not left unnoticed by the authorities of the New England Province. In the consultors' meeting on September 13, 1966, the proposal was approved that both should be declared founders of the Society by Fr. General. A formal reception for this announcement and the awarding of the commemorative material was held by Fr. John V. O'Connor, Provincial from 1962-1968, at Loyola House, 297 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston on February 10, 1967.

Mrs. Miller no longer makes the Falmouth Foreside area a chief dwelling since she sold it for a generous sum. In her home in Florida and on summer trips to Maine, she maintains her close relationships with Jesuits with whom she became acquainted earlier. These include particularly Fr. Robert A. Hewitt, to his death in 1978, and Fr. Urban W. Manning. They also included the late Forrest S. Donahue and Fr. McFadden who took up parochial and school work in Jamaica after leaving office at Cheverus in
1968. Not to be forgotten among the recipients of Mrs. Miller's thoughtfulness, was the late Brother Thomas J. Meehan towards whose retirement from Cheverus to Weston College (now Campion Center) she contributed generously.

The narrative must now return to the new St. Ignatius Rectory. There was more fanfare for its formal opening on July 31, 1967, than there was to the simple opening of the Danforth Street residence twenty-five years earlier on July 31, 1942. Bishop Peter Gerety blessed the structure, moving from room to room. Diocesan priests, many of whom had been teachers at Cheverus prior to 1942, were in attendance. So, too, were many Jesuits including former teachers and administrators. There was a reception and dinner in the dining room overlooking Portland's Back Bay and its cathedral.

Only Brother Thomas J. Meehan had lived through the twenty-five years of Jesuit service at Cheverus. There he remained until 1972 when, at his own request, he went to spend his last years at Weston College, where from 1927 to 1942 he had been in charge of the kitchen and of procurement. He died there on March 15, 1976, after Weston had been changed to Campion Residence.

During those years when question of a faculty residence was uppermost, one important change in curriculum had occurred. On February 13, 1962, the province consultors favored the proposal to discontinue the general course at Cheverus and thus allow a variety of programs, any one of which could lead to college acceptance. Shortly after the faculty residence was
occupied, a proposal was made by the diocesan superintendent of schools that there be some limited form of merger between Cheverus and the Cathedral High School for Girls. After a variety of meetings and discussions, however, the plan emerged whereby a new and independent girls' school was erected under the name of Mother McAuley High School.

The Sisters of Mercy who conduct McAuley High School were introduced into Maine from the Manchester, New Hampshire, Motherhouse by Mother Xavier Warde. In 1865, they had gone to Bangor and, in 1871, to North Whitefield. In 1873, they had come to Portland originally to conduct an orphanage. But, with the withdrawal that summer of French-speaking sisters from the Portland schools, the Mercy Sisters were assigned the care of the cathedral school of St. Aloyisius, of St. Dominic's School, and of an evening school. They also conducted an academy in their convent of St. Elizabeth at 100 Free Street.

These Maine sisters became a grouping independent of Manchester in 1883, one year before the division, in 1884, of the original Portland Diocese into one in Portland, and one in Manchester, N.H. It is interesting to note that this structure at 100 Free Street became the site in 1917 of what came to be known as Cheverus High School and was, as has been seen, still the location of Cheverus when the Jesuits came in 1942. Prior to its use by the Sisters of Mercy as an orphanage, convent, academy and parochial school, it had served briefly as the residence of Bishop David Bacon under whom the earlier Maryland Province Jesuits had left Maine in 1859. In this odd way, the educational
activities of the Sisters of Mercy and the Jesuits had intertwined.

Over the years, the size of the student body at Cheverus has fluctuated. In 1942, there were 250 students. The first full year of Cheverus on Ocean Avenue showed an enrollment of 323. In 1967-68, the first year that the faculty lived in its new residence, the registration was 396. The highest enrollment in the school came in the school year 1956-1957 when there were 449 students. Unless Cheverus has a dormitory to attract boarding students from other portions of Maine or elsewhere, it appears that its registration will hover about 300 or less. That Cheverus might attract boarders, if a dormitory were feasible, appears possible from the reputation that the school enjoys throughout Maine with its debating teams and its participation in key debating tournaments, and in the apostolic works of Jesuits in many parts of the Portland Diocese.

The Cheverus community in more recent years has sent out members to a variety of other works in Maine, and has attracted to it other Jesuits interested in apostolic works in Maine. Hence, the contribution to Maine on the part of New England Jesuits is only partly told by a recounting of Jesuit presence at Cheverus High School. These other activities include prison, hospital, convent, nursing home, and other educational institutions.

To such works directly from teaching at Cheverus have gone to Fr. Stanley Bowe, Fr. Edmund J. Hogan, Fr. Williamm J. Kennedy, Fr. J. Vasmar Dalton, Fr. James
P. Walsh, and Fr. Joseph Holland. Cheverus has attracted others who have found apostolic outlets either in Portland or elsewhere in Maine. Among these priests would be Fr. John L. Clancy, Fr. William J. Doyle, Fr. Benedict J. Reilly and Fr. Robert J. Sullivan.

The work of Fr. Stanley Bowe, from 1972 to the early winter of 1977, has been a return to the type of work which Jesuit priests of the original Maryland Province performed through Fr. Virgil Barber in the eighteen twenties and in the late forties and up to 1859 among Indians of northern Maine.

Fr. Bowe became Pastor of the Pleasant Point Indian Reservation in Perry, Maine. There he lived in a trailer and performed a variety of pastoral works for Indians of the Passamaquoddy nation. From 1974-1976, he had the assistance of Brother Lawrence Smith until the brother began to study for the permanent diaconate in 1976. On one occasion, for some months, Eugene F. Ortenau as a novice worked there as part of a noviceship experiment. Just as Fr. Bowe's serious operation took place, another novice, Robert Power, was scheduled as his assistant. Fr. Bowe's delicate and serious operation precluded this assignment. Fr. Bowe's activities were assumed by Fr. Joseph E. Mullen, S.J., a professional school and college recruiter. Despite a seeming recovery, Fr. Bowe died on May 30, 1977. By December 1977 Fr. Joseph Laughlin had assumed charge of a neighboring Indian reservation.
Both before and after Fr. Bowe's inauguration of this work, other members of the Cheverus community took up projects. Fr. Joseph F. Holland, a pioneer teacher at Cheverus and long a missioner in Beirut, Lebanon, was attached to the Bangor Counseling Service beginning in 1969. Here was a return to the place where Fr. John Bapst had erected St. John's Church and a residence to serve as a headquarters for the Maine missioners of the 1850's.

Also in 1969, Fr. Benedict J. Reilly, a native son of St. Denis Parish in North Whitefield, became Chaplain of Maine State Prison in Thomaston, Maine, with residence at the Rockland, Maine, rectory. In the fall of 1976 he became Administrator of St. Denis Parish while retaining his prison chaplaincy.

In 1972 Fr. Edmund J. Hogan became chaplain and director of pastoral care at what soon became the Seton Unit of the Mid-Maine Medical Center at Waterville. Fr. Hogan had been a pioneer at Cheverus from 1942 to 1948 and returned to its staff in 1967.

The year 1972 saw the assignment of Fr. William J. Kennedy, the guidance counsellor at Cheverus, to St. Joseph College at North Windham, Maine. At this college of 500 girl students, Fr. Kennedy served as chaplain, counsellor and supervised numerous spiritual and social welfare functions. His contact with students was aided by his living in a college dormitory and by taking his meals with the students.
Also from 1973 to 1977, Fr. James P. Walsh, who had been both a teacher and a guidance counsellor at Cheverus, made Cheverus his headquarters for retreat work not only in Maine, but especially in parts of Canada.

Fr. J. Vasmar Dalton after teaching history at Cheverus, assumed a similar post at St. Joseph College. At the present he is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of New Hampshire. Fr. Dalton has several master degrees — one in philosophy, one in guidance, two in history, one of them from the special program in liberal arts at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.

In 1978, Fr. Terrence W. Curry, a former regent at Cheverus, became the first full-time Jesuit chaplain at Mercy Hospital.

A few other Jesuits without previous Cheverus ties have joined the community and engaged in apostolic work. Since 1968 Fr. John L. Clancy commutes for this task among the homes for the aged and infirm. His work is ecumenical since it includes regular visits to one Jewish establishment. As a Civilian Conservation Corps chaplain in the years prior to U.S. participation in World War II, Fr. Clancy had some Maine assignments and came to know many of its people and clergy. After serving as a wartime chaplain, Fr. Clancy had long been a professor of ethics at Fairfield, as well as an administrator there and at Round Hills, South Dartmouth, Massachusetts.
Fr. William F. Doyle came to Cheverus in 1975 from an extended teaching assignment in mathematics at Xavier and Boston College High School. Fr. Doyle served as chaplain and spiritual director at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy in the Deering section of Portland. When the Mercy sisters in Maine became a separate group in 1883, they had as headquarters St. Elizabeth's on Free Street. There was once expectation of a new convent due to money given by Winnifred Kavanagh, but the money was expended to build the Kavanagh School connected with the cathedral. Only between 1906 and 1909 was a new Mercy motherhouse erected at Deering during the episcopacy of Bishop Louis Sebastian Walsh (1906-24).

To all of these apostolic works must be added the services to churches and convents which have long been generously given by members of the Cheverus administrative and teaching staffs. Notable among the part-time chaplains is Fr. Nicholas McNeil, who while teacher and librarian at Cheverus has said the daily Mass at the Precious Blood Monastery for endless years.

Long after these chapters on Cheverus had been written, the Society announced a return to the very parish, St. John's, in Bangor, exclusion from which had led to the withdrawal of the Maryland Jesuits in 1859. As first pastor for this venture Fr. Raymond P. Bertrand was appointed. He had as initial assistants Fr. James F. Morgan and Fr. Thomas Lequin. This new burgeoning of the province works in Maine will undoubtedly open a whole new chapter, including as well the detailed work on the few Indian missions and added apostolic work in Portland by such
a youthful diamond jubilarian as Fr. Joseph P. Kelly.