Chapter VIII

BOSTON COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL --
FROM JAMES STREET TO MORRISSEY BOULEVARD (1943-1957)

On September 9, 1943, is dated the first extant letter concerning a serious move of Boston College High School from James Street in the South End to some new location. Such a location, the letter of Fr. Robert A. Hewitt said, should preferably be close to the rapid transit system, and more south than north of the center of Boston.

The need of a new school was evident from the registration statistics. In 1943 the total registration of the high school was 1170, of whom 476 were first-year students. Even with that number of first-year students, constituting forty percent of the student body, there had been a turning away of satisfactory candidates. The old school building was bulging with this number of 1170, and the faculty quarters at 761 Harrison Avenue and its adjoining space on East Newton Street were crowded.

Fr. Robert A. Hewitt, who had been rector since the previous February 16, also raised the question in his September 9 letter to Fr. Provincial, James H. Dolan, as to whether a drive for a new school structure should be considered. The prosperity of wartime wages appeared to give grounds for hope. Yet it was believed that William Cardinal O'Connell of Boston was not sanguine about a wartime drive for a new school building. Whatever answer Fr. Hewitt received is not known. The topic
appears to have been dormant for another year which brought, after the death on April 22, 1944, of Cardinal O'Connell, the appearance on the scene of Richard J. Cushing first as administrator of the archdiocese from April to September and his promotion to archbishop on September 25, 1944.

On September 8, 1944 Fr. Hewitt again raised with Fr. Provincial the question of new construction. That year the registration had gone up 233 to a total of 1403 students. First year had 596; second year 386; third year, 238; and fourth year, 183.

In that school year, 1944-45, to relieve the overcrowding at James Street and to assist Boston College with its war-depleted classrooms, the senior class of B. C. High was meeting on the P. C. campus, and some fourth year teachers were in residence at St. Mary's Hall. Fr. Joseph A. McGrady was in charge of studies and taught fourth year. Fr. Joseph A. Murphy and Fr. James L. Foley were also fourth-year class teachers. Fr. Paul J. McManus and Fr. Thomas B. Feeney of the collegiate staff instructed in German and French respectively, as did Fr. Sidney J. Smith in mathematics. Two regents -- Charles M. Crowley and William G. Guindon -- assisted in the high school physics classes.

In his September 1944 letter to Fr. J. H. Dolan, Fr. Hewitt stressed the age of the South End school buildings, and the lack of presently required exits from classrooms. It appeared sensible to acquire some land, draw up a sketch of a proposed building and hope that these facts of land and a model
would attract funds without the fanfare of a drive.

Three locations, at least, had come to Fr. Hewitt's attention. One was in Allston near the Coca Cola plant; a second was on River Street in Mattapan. His letter stressed a third site near Columbia Station having 750,000 square feet of land with a frontage of 1400 feet on the then Old Colony Boulevard. It was also close to a city playground and a stadium. This property was assessed at $83,000.

While it was realized that the situation of the Immaculate Conception Church and residence would be affected by a school move, it was clear that the school faculty would have to reside in the Immaculate rectory for some time while commuting to the new school. Their services would still be available to the church. With time some use would be devised for the large rectory and the ultimately abandoned classroom structure. Although at this very time a reduction of the province tax by twenty-five percent gave extra hopes to Fr. Hewitt for the proposed project, there is no explicit answer extant to this letter.

On May 17, 1945 Fr. Hewitt relayed an account of a recent visit of his, along with Fr. D. Augustine Keane, principal of the high school, to Archbishop Cushing. The new archbishop cautioned against a formal drive but urged the quiet collection of money for a building fund. To the fund he pledged $50,000 and anticipated obtaining a gift of $200,000 in time. In the meantime, he favored the purchase and use of the Girl's High School Annex at 620 Massachusetts Avenue between Washington
Street and Shawmut Avenue to accommodate added students. This was the original site of the Academy of the Sacred Heart, prior to its move to Commonwealth Avenue and later to Newton. The cost of this property would be minimal. When its use had ceased, it could easily be sold. However, both he and many Jesuits at this time favored building on the South End site.

Things, it seems, moved along slowly in the hope of a consensus on a site. There was a reluctance to leave the South End for Dorchester or any place. There were suggestions for demolition of buildings on E. Newton Street, between Harrison and James, and the construction of a school there. By November 5, 1947, two years after the meeting with Archbishop Cushing and his $50,000 pledge, the house consultors (Frs. Arthur McCarthy, William H. Cusick, D. Augustine Keane and Louis R. Logue) had come to favor a location out of the South End. Now there was a genuine interest in acquiring some of the Calf Pasture Land on Old Colony Road (later Morrissey Boulevard) and near Columbia Station.

A realtor, John C. Kiley, was hired to buy ten acres of that land. At the time, all of the land made up of numerous parcels was under option until March 31, 1948, to a group of speculators allied with political figures. Prices on these parcels ranged from thirty-five cents a square foot on some portions down to eleven cents on others. When Mr. Kiley met with this group to have them sell some of the land for a new Boston College High School, they objected. Since they planned to use part of the land for a large restaurant with a liquor license and
more of it for a midget auto track, they did not want an abutter who might object to these other uses. As a matter of fact, Fr. Hewitt, at the request of the Archbishop, did object to the race-track plan, and Mayor James Michael Curley of Boston vetoed the proposal on December 29, 1947.

Permission to borrow $100,000 for the land purchase was requested by Fr. Hewitt, and by January 18, 1944 he learned he had such authorization from Fr. General. Fr. Provincial wished assurance that the purchased land, being filled-in land, would be able to support buildings erected on it. As the time approached when the land could be purchased, it became evident that the price would amount to $234,000. The province consultors, on April 16, 1948, approved of the purchase. It was bought during April and May, 1948. The most northerly portion of 1,743,835 square feet was purchased on April 21, 1948, from Mary E. Day and Walter Meadows, and the Williard Welch and Company, Inc., for $199,345. A further portion of some land, but mostly flats, was purchased from E.B. Badger and Sons Co., on May 24, for $39,668.

Fr. Hewitt realizing, that he would hardly be rector when the building was under construction, urged, on July 13, 1948, that a new rector be appointed soon when plans would be proposed to Maginnis and Walsh as architects. The province consultors having some other assignment (Cheverus, it will be seen) in mind for Fr. Hewitt, obliged by considering a large list of possible rectors on July 14. It was, however, only on September 14 that a terna was determined with Fr. James J. Kelley, Dean of the Boston College School of Business
Administration, as first choice. His name was approved.

By October 18 Fr. Hewitt was trying to convince Fr. Kelley to take over the position quickly. While it appeared that Fr. Kelley might defer the appointment until December 8, 1948, or even to January 1, 1949 (because of office business and time for a retreat), Fr. Hewitt's view of an earlier date prevailed and the change occurred on November 1, 1948. During his final days in office in October, Fr. Hewitt indicated to Fr. Provincial the desire of the archbishop that something be started by spring to show that serious business was meant.

On January 13, 1949 a request went to Fr. General to borrow $500,000 for the planned classroom building, the possibility of which he had been apprised toward the end of December 1948. By February 20, 1949, Rome had approved the plans. By the end of that year, on December 22, 1949, a new loan of $150,000 was approved. By the following summer, while Fr. James H. Dolan was acting provincial, Fr. Kelley requested permission to borrow another $200,000 for sewerage, grading and equipment. The province consultors approved in the course of a two-day meeting on July 20-21.

Shortly before he left his temporary office as acting provincial in October 1950, Fr. Dolan announced the General's approbation of the third loan. The permission, however, carried the proviso that $30,250, due for back province taxes, was to be paid out of this loan. In the previous July of 1950, Fr. Kelley had forwarded $10,000 toward province taxes. The additional $32,500 would complete payment on a sum needed in view of the
serious needs of the province. In all, the borrowings for the first unit came to $950,000.

The first school building on Morrissey Boulevard (McElroy) was essentially ready for occupancy for the opening of school in September, 1952. Juniors and seniors moved in. Now came an unexpected gift to make possible a second classroom structure to house the first and second year students who were still at James Street. Archbishop Cushing announced that he would give $500,000 toward a second building. Fr. General, in approving the gift, urged that the cost be kept to the amount of the donation. When plans were ready, the cost was estimated at $711,216. It was, therefore, necessary to make an additional borrowing though not immediately and all at once, but only as the necessity for payments arose. This need for more money led to statements on the financial situation of the high school.

As of July 1, 1953 there was a remaining mortgage on the first building of $435,000. This mortgage had been obtained at three percent for ten years on a sum of $550,000. (The authorization to borrow had been higher since it was $750,000.) In another year, July 1, 1953, it was estimated that the debt would have been reduced to $375,000.

As to expected income, $20,000 could come annually from church and school. The building fund was expected to bring in $10,000 annually. A contract with the Edison Company concerning fill could also bring $10,000. The current tuition of $180.00 plus $15.00 in fees was to be raised to a flat sum of $225.00 to help cut.
When the General was asked to authorize another loan of $250,000, he counterproposed that the school use the money which had been authorized in the earlier loans, some amount of which had not been used. There was some problem as to whether this sum was $200,000 or only $175,000. This matter was cleared up when in May, 1954, request was made for an added loan of $125,000 beyond the unspent $175,000.

But all these borrowings show how costly it is to build a new high school even with a large princely gift of $500,000 plus an original $50,000 gift from Archbishop Cushing. At this stage there was some talk of a parish on the school property, but instead St. Christopher's was established as an archdiocesan parish in the nearby and often troublesome housing project at Columbia Point.

Once again the Archbishop offered another large sum -- one million dollars -- to erect on the property a faculty residence. This was in June, 1954, as the second school building named after him was being completed. This offer, since it carried the possibility of costs beyond a million dollars, led to another detailed study of finances. It was estimated that the school could bear a debt of $700,000. This took for granted that an annual province tax of $50,000 could be met as well as in payment of $50,000 annually on the debt plus $21,000 in interest payments.

At this stage rather than have the school borrow money from a bank, the province loaned at interest the sum of $130,000. Attached was the proviso that current and back province taxes be
paid promptly and preferentially. Dated August 4, 1954, is a note of Fr. James J. Kelley expressing thanks for the loan which had been concluded while he was absent. It had been signed by Fr. William H. Cusick for the High School and by Fr. Thomas L. McLaughlin for the N.E. Province.

When, in the fall of 1956, the million dollar gift of the archbishop had been exhausted, the topic of a loan on this building arose. In early January 1957, the possibility of a loan of $400,000 from the Newton-Waltham Bank was proposed. This, it then was stated, could be had for four percent due to an arrangement whereby Mr. John Drummey, of the archdiocesan business office, would keep $300,000 of archdiocesan funds in a checking account which the bank would be free to use. It was from this bank that, in 1951, the mortgage of $525,000 had been made, and that mortgage was then reduced to $270,000.

Now the bank wished to make one mortgage for the amount of $670,000 to be redeemable at $50,000 a year plus the interest charge. In these early negotiations, the interest rate was set at four percent. Actually, when the mortgage arrangement was finalized, the sum was three and a half percent. Yet when the request for the loan was forwarded to the provincial on May 1, 1957, for authorization, the sum was indicated as $550,000 and the rate was three and a half percent. The province consultors on June 16, 1957 gave approval.

The beneplacitum was forwarded to Rome and, on June 28, 1957, Fr. James E. Coleran, the provincial, learned that the Sacred Congregation of Religious had approved. In conjunction
with this added debt, a tuition raise up from $225 was proposed. Suggested totals varied from the current $225 (no raise) up to $350. Fr. Francis J. Gilday, the rector from April, 1956, proposed $280 since he estimated the cost of educating each student at $276. If something were to come from the school and its Jesuit faculty besides four dollars of possible profit on each student, the Jesuit faculty would have to contribute as much as possible from the perquisites its members obtained from assisting in parishes, and in gifts received.

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to state that it was to this one school corporation that accrued not only the slight tuition profit, but all the sums which came from personal gifts and bequests, summer retreats, novenas, weekend and month-long parish service. If it were not for such sums, which required the labors of the Jesuit faculty, a school such as Boston College High School would never have made its progress.

As the faculty building was being constructed, there arose the topic of how and under what conditions the school and church personnel, finances and canonical position were to be arranged. Before leaving office in August 1956, Fr. William E. FitzGerald had indicated that someone at the two communities would need to be dependent on the other.

Fr. General, at this stage, had indicated his inclination to favor two separate communities. In that situation, an ecclesiastical problem would arise since there was at present but one ecclesiastical foundation. Boston College High School in the general's view would appear to be the one to
retain the official authorization as a religious community. Hence, a new apostolic indulgence would be required for the church community. Fr. General also believed that, at least for ten years the church should give an annual subsidy to the school, and that school men would be available for church service. After ten years, a new agreement should be drawn up and submitted for his approval.

Just before Fr. Francis J. Gilday, rector of the entire complex, had been informed of Fr. General's view, he had made a different proposal. In view of the overrun in costs of $380,000 on the residence beyond the million dollar gift, he recommended that the school and church continue to form but one religious community with the filial dependence of the church on the school. Church funds, in this view as in that of Fr. General's, were necessary to manage the debt on the new residence. Yet Fr. General, in commenting on Fr. Coleran's report on his 1957 visitation, indicated his continued favor for two separate communities.

Other matters also arose concerning how the old structures were to be used for housing and activities. A minor problem concerned the number of parish fathers to remain at the Immaculate.

The mission band appeared — needlessly, it seems — to have been an object of considerable concern. Twelve members were listed in the catalogues of 1956-57 (inuente anno 1957). Would its members reside together on one floor, or be scattered throughout the three floors of the residence? Some special
arrangements on charges, settled in advance, should be made. Possible uses for the classrooms were proposed. There might be a seventh and eighth grade school, and even a ninth in the event that the new buildings could not accommodate all satisfactory applicants.

To Fr. Coleran's suggestion that there be a Labor School, Fr. Gilday responded favorably, and proposed additionally a Woman's Labor School. One point seemed very important. The church must have its own treasurer.

Finally, as to the numbers of living rooms available, there were forty-five. Of these, twelve were on the second floor, fifteen on the third and eighteen on the fourth. The hospital chaplains preferred rooms facing Harrison Avenue on the third or fourth floors.

The status assignments for the 1957-58 years, gave some idea how these matters were settled in practice. There was but one religious community with one rector -- Fr. Gilday -- giving his attention both at Harrison Avenue and Morrissey Boulevard. If it were not clear before, Fr. Gilday began to be known and appreciated as a beneficent Napoleon who could do many things well, and outstrip others in energy and generosity and understanding.

In charge at Harrison Avenue was a minister, first Fr. Edmond J. Wolff (1957-59) and later (1959-62) Fr. Edward J. Whalen. There were six parish fathers (Thomas A. Brennan, George E. Hanlon, Louis R. Logue, John W. Lynch who was also subminister, Vincent de Paul O'Brien, and Timothy J. Phelan).
Two priests in residence represented the Shadowbrook Fund (Michael G. Pierce, Vincent P. Kelliher). There were four hospital chaplains (Laurence M. Prock, Jeremiah J. Hennessey, James D. McLaughlin, Thomas E. O'Lalor) and four fathers responsible for the Sacred Heart programs (Matthew Hale, Thomas R. Feeney, Joseph L. Murray, Francis L. Ryan). After all the preliminary discussion about the mission band, there were but two members in residence (Fr. John P. Flanagan, its director, and Fr. James J. Lyons). As regional director of sodality work, Fr. Edward S. Stanton resided at 761. Three coadjutor brothers (Maurice V. Ahern, Emil F. Fournier, Michael J. Walsh) plus a long-time lay associate (Frank O. Hayes) saw that things moved smoothly and expeditiously.

At the school community were forty-seven fathers, sixteen regents and two coadjutor brothers. One of these, Brother Joseph Erhard, then seventy-four, had long been the artistic sacristan of the Immaculate Conception Church. In the late winter of 1958, Fr. Coleran, at his visitation, planned a conference between Fr. Thomas L. McLaughlin, Treasurer of the New England Province, and the two representatives of the physically separated communities (Fr. Wolff and Fr. William H. Cusick). The results are not known. However, it is known that, in that particular year, the annual average receipts from five to seven thousand dollars in legacies were down to $1,800.

There had been earlier a sale of property which brought some revenue at a time before the two communities were physically separated. When the first building -- McElroy -- was ready at
Morrissey Boulevard, the pupils of the first two years could use
the James Street facilities. Hence the temporary use of the
Massachusetts Avenue property at numbers 616, 618 and 620 plus
their backyard was no longer necessary. Its value, chiefly in
land, was estimated by the realtor John Riley as ranging from
$20,000 to $25,000. In April, 1955 a permit to alienate this
property for $15,000 was granted by the Sacred Congregation of
Religious and approved by Fr. General. There was money realized
by the sale. Since there was then no form of separate
communities, such money went to the general funds.

In 1962, when Fr. Gilday at the end of his term as
rector of church and school, came to the Immaculate Conception
Church and residence, he became superior there. Even at this
time, there was no new ecclesiastical arrangement or a separate
incorporation for the Harrison Avenue establishment. By a decree
signed on February 27, 1962, by Fr. Joseph L. Swain,
Vicar-General of the Society, the Immaculate became, with its own
superior, a community with filial dependence on Boston College
High School. This arrangement had been regulated by Fr. Coleran
on February 17, 1962. While this arrangement has permitted those
in charge at 761 Harrison Avenue to raise revenue or good will on
the James Street property, and to keep up the property in a
continued satisfactory condition, and to house a myriad of
workers in disparate activities and to be influential in urban
affairs, it did leave some loose ends on financial relations with
the high school. This must be taken up in a later chapter.
A time finally came in the summer of 1957 when the school faculty could move to the new residence. The front area of the residence had been surfaced by the White Brothers who offered the work as a gift. Their company also supplied the curbing as a gift. Fr. Gilday preferred to pay for the surfacing, but accepted the curbing as a gift.

The foot-bridge overpass across Morrissey Boulevard was progressing, but not quite ready. When completed, it was named for Fr. James L. McGovern, the long-term and colorful prefect of studies at the High School (1920-36). The faculty house had been built to accommodate seventy-five residents. The preliminary plans had been reviewed by Fr. James H. Dolan, province counsellor on construction. He urged the inclusion of a garage, a more suitable basement location for library facilities, and less crowding in the rectory. From a proposed seating capacity of 108, he believed that an arrangement for ninety-eight would be a more humane one.

In addition to its living rooms, the residence had standard facilities of a Jesuit residence of those days. There was a main chapel in a separate wing extending out toward the boulevard. This chapel had its own sacristy arrangements, as well as compartmentalized side altars. An adjoining and spacious sacristy, conveniently entered from the house, as well as from the main chapel, served for these side altars. Other chapels were located strategically throughout the upper floors.
On the first floor facing the back of the building was a recreation room — now for all groups — with a convenient lobby of its own with generous bulletin board space, cloakroom and toilet. The recreation room has library shelving for both reference and contemporary books as well as a magazine nook. Adjoining this recreation room is a common television room. Beyond it is the refectory in which Fr. Dolan strove to keep commodious elbow room. The refectory is connected with the kitchen, and also has a coffee and snack room. As one enters the building from the side nearer to McElroy, there is a porter's lodge, mailbox arrangement, and a quasi-parlor waiting space. To the left and up a few steps is a corridor devoted to parlors, and offices for president and treasurer. An outside door allows easy access from the grounds to reach the treasurer's office. Just inside the main lobby is an elevator leading to rooms on the second and third floor.

Fr. Gilday had reasons for delaying the moving into the new residence until as late as August 12, 1957. In his lengthy letter in which he had discussed rooms available at Harrison Avenue, he had indicated that the furniture of the new residence was but ninety-five percent complete. There were also details to be cleared up on the sacristy, laundry and kitchen. Kitchen drainage problems would not be cleared up until early August. Prior to the general moving in, a shakedown period with but a few in residence was needed. When all these matters had been cared for, moving began with eagerness on the part of many, and wondering fears on the part of others. Commuting on school days
could end. With time, dangers from assault and thievery could parallel if not duplicate what might be experienced in the South End.

To allow others to see the new residence, two open-house occasions were scheduled. Jesuits were invited from 11:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. with lunch on September 4. Sunday, September 29, was set aside for an open house for relatives and friends. For this occasion there was some partial removal of cloister from the first floor arrangement. Thus, at last in 1957, the hopes of Fr. Hewitt, expressed in 1943, had come to considerable fruition.

One problem arose in 1955 and was still unsettled during the time of this narrative. In 1955 the Metropolitan District Commission had taken by eminent domain 50,000 square feet of land to widen Morrissey Boulevard. The problem of adequate recompense arose during the rectorship of Fr. James J. Kelley and was still unsolved when Fr. Frank Gilday became rector on April 9, 1956. Fr. Kelley was convinced that the sum of twenty-three cents a square foot was very inadequate. He held out for one dollar a square foot. Fr. Gilday was able to arrange some matters with Mr. Charles W. Greenough, the commissioner, such as the final determination of a location for the overpass.

Yet, the commissioner and two of his four colleagues on the commission held firmly to the lower sum for compensation. The first break in the impasse appeared to come when Mr. Louis F. Musco, a Boston College graduate and friend, was appointed (April 10, 1958) to the commission. Now there might have been a
three-to-two vote in favor of the view of the High School administration. However, at this juncture a new proposal was proposed by lawyer friends of the school. Instead of accepting even a better financial return, compensation was to be sought in the form of some adjoining land.

There was also an added complication. Directly below the land adjoining the school property which was sought as compensation, was a tract of land totally without continuing value to the N. D. C. but rounding off well the B. C. H. property. This second portion of land might be bought or even given as a gift. While this new possibility was still under consideration, John E. Powers, the state senator of the area in which the high school was located, proposed that he work through the state legislature to grant the tracts in question in part as compensations and in part as a gift. As a result, the requested land was decided on February 10, 1960 from the state to the high school.

It might be of concluding interest to note the statistics on attendance and tuition charges over these years from Fr. Hewitt's first serious raising of the issue of a new location for the school in 1943 down through the year of the opening of the faculty residence in 1957. In 1943 the registration according to the annual survey in the Jesuit Educational Quarterly, was 1170, an increase of 198 over the previous year. In the year of the opening of the faculty residence the enrollment was 1368. The highest enrollment was in 1947-48 when the registration was 1585.
During those years from 1947 to 1967, there had become available and better known a series of Catholic secondary schools, some limited to boys, others open to boys and girls. No longer was an extended journey to Boston College High School necessary from such places as Brockton, Lowell, Marlboro and Framingham to acquire a Catholic education. This difference is illustrated by a scholarship for boys nominated by the superior of the parochial school of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Marlboro. Once students commuted from there as they still did to Boston College. But after 1948 there were no more scholarships students from Marlboro enrolled at B. C. High. Other Catholic schools were closer to Marlboro. Jesuit education could then be had at Xavier in Concord which opened in 1962. The increase in tuition from 1943 to 1957 too, could be a factor even though all costs of living had increased in the meantime.

Curriculum changes by 1957-58 were relatively slight even if more courses might be available to those interested in science. That very autumn of 1957 came the year of Sputnik which colored curriculum in science offerings. Another gift of Archbishop Cushing was to expand scientific and mathematical facilities. There were efforts to expand modern languages to encompass Russian and also Chinese. An alert modern language department was to welcome Russian and to expand the oral and aural instruction in French and German. So much for the first steps toward a new B. C. H. in Dorchester (1943-57).