

Chapter XV

XAVIER SCHOOL -- ITS ORIGINS (1960-1962)

Xavier School at 570 Old Road to Nine Acre Corner on Route 2 in Concord, Massachusetts opened with 147 first-year students in 1962 and closed in June, 1971, when only a senior class of ninety-three was in attendance during its final year (1970-71).

During four of its nine years (1964-1968), the present writer, serving as province director of secondary education, visited the school annually and thus saw it at close range and as first rate. He also taught two sections in a junior-senior history elective from January through May 1970. This was just after the traumatic announcement that Jesuits were to withdraw from the school. As province director of special studies (1957-1968) he aided two provincials in preparing and recommending Jesuits for Xavier. All these tasks gave him a knowledge of the regular and special features of the Xavier curricular and extracurricular setup.

Perhaps this personal exposition will explain some warmth as well as conviction about an excellent school which came to an early end. This end, it will be seen, came from a dwindling number of applicants, higher tuition needed to maintain both standards and financial stability, fewer vocations to the Society for school or other work, as well as unusual numbers of losses of those accepted into the Society and initially or completely trained.

The first reference in the minutes of the province consultors to a school in Concord is found under the date of July 12, 1960. Listed among some observations of Fr. General was a reference to Cardinal Cushing's offer of a secondary school at Concord. In the minutes of August 9, 1960, it was recorded that Fr. General had approved the acceptance of this school as a gift. By January 10, 1961, a reference appeared to changes made in the school building plans. By February 28, there was approval of the project to purchase some adjoining land. By May 16, the need of someone to arrange for the opening of this school in 1961 was observed. On August 8, the appointment of Fr. John P. Foley for this task was announced. He took up residence at Weston. On September 12 he was asked to prepare articles of incorporation, a charter and by-laws. At the October 19, 1961 consultors' meeting, a terna was prepared. It was announced at the November 14 meeting that Fr. Foley was rector of the Concord establishment, still unopened and without a community. Such are the jejune details found in the minutes of the Province Consultors.

Fr. Foley came to this office with previous secondary school experience. He had been Prefect of Studies at Boston College High School (1951-55), Rector of Cheverus High School (1955-61). Prior to 1951 he had taught Greek as a regent at Holy Cross (1930-33), and Greek at Boston College (1937-39). He was Dean of Freshmen at Boston College (1939-42), then served with the United States Navy as a wartime chaplain (1942-46). On his return to Boston College he was again Dean of Freshmen and

Director of Admissions. Earlier as a philosopher (1927-30), he had studied at Heythrop. In all of these tasks, Fr. Foley had enjoyed success from his detailed and regular application to duty, and to his genial and (in view of his Scottish birth) bonny manner of conducting his relations.

There are, however, other sources of information available on the beginnings of Xavier in addition to the jejune minutes already catalogued. The Jesuits were not Cardinal Cushing's first choice to conduct this Concord school for which he was preparing both a school structure and a fully equipped faculty residence. A group of brothers (Xaverian) had found the project more than it could handle. The Congregation of St. Joseph in the Boston Archdiocese had likewise declined this offer. In fairly recent times, it had assumed teaching and administrative functions at Matignon on the Cambridge--Arlington line, Arlington Catholic and Marian in Framingham. So the presentation of a total gift of school and residence was made to the New England Province.

Although Fr. General had approved its acceptance, Fr. Coleran told the writer that, shortly thereafter, the general had sent a miramur type letter to Fr. Coleran. Fr. General was displeased at being called on to sanction even such a gift from a princely benefactor for a school in the Greater Boston area. He would have preferred expansion elsewhere in New England. He would have known of other possible, but usually not feasible, offers or hopes in other parts of the province.

During Fr. William E. FitzGerald's provincialate (1950-56) a request had come from Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan of Norwich to inaugurate a boy's high school in New London where a school structure with some residence facilities was already available. There did not appear a sufficient clientele in the lower Thames area for a Jesuit school. Later a school for girls was begun in that location by the Holy Ghost Sisters. In time it became a coeducational diocesan school in Montville, Connecticut.

Moreover, Bishop (later Cardinal) John J. Wright of Worcester (1950-59) had proposed the possibility of a high school on the Ellis estate along Salisbury Street in Worcester. Holy Cross authorities did not enthuse over what might seem a reinauguration of a Holy Cross prep school, which had been discontinued in 1914. Thus, the field for a Catholic secondary school for boys in the Worcester area was left to the Xaverian brothers at St. John's in downtown Worcester, which later became independent of diocesan control at Shrewsbury. That was the area where Fr. (later Bishop) Joseph Dinand, S. J., is reputed to have considered establishing a separate prep school when Holy Cross College gave up its secondary division. The declining also of Bishop Wright's offer enabled the Congregation of Notre Dame to establish a day school for girls on the Ellis estate.

Also, Fr. General would have known of one project long and in varying forms under consideration -- the project of a secondary school in Springfield or its environs. This project in one form or another had been considered from 1951 to 1962. While discussion would begin about a high school and be favorably

considered at that level, it was made clear that Bishop Christopher J. Weldon of Springfield (1950-77) wanted at the earliest date a college. A collegiate expansion did not seem feasible with a province having three colleges, all of which were expanding in numbers and functions. There were times when sites were selected, including the old Westfield State Teaching College until local feeling made this politically unwise, and an unused portion of the property of the Dominican Sisters in West Springfield. Finally, on the issue of starting a college as soon as possible, the project was abandoned.

Another possible venture concerned the efforts of a lay group to have a Jesuit school in or near Waterbury, Connecticut. The final upshot was the establishment of a school conducted by the Brothers of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. There was always some hope of a school in the Hartford Archdiocese but, when three archdiocesan schools were simultaneously established, they were coeducational and comprehensive and divided among a variety of religious sisterhoods.

When Bishop (later Cardinal) Lawrence J. Shehan of Bridgeport (1953-61) was planning a school in Norwalk, Connecticut, he invited the Society to manage it. Its close proximity to Fairfield Prep meant that both schools would be drawing in part on the same group of students. Perhaps, but only perhaps, an arrangement could have been made to have this school become a newly-located Fairfield Prep and thus leave all the land and buildings at Fairfield to the college and university. Presumably, the Norwalk school was erected to be comprehensive

and coeducational rather than a Jesuit type school for young men.

Finally, Fr. General was presumably pleased when a request could be made in 1962 to establish a school outside of Boston at Fall River, Massachusetts, where Bishop James L. Connolly (1951-70) had procured land and was building, at diocesan expense, a school and residence. Unlike the situation at Concord, this property remained in the ownership of the Fall River Diocese.

After a consideration of the other possible openings, this narrative now returns to Fr. Foley's projects. In keeping with his instructions to initiate legal groundwork for the school, a first meeting of the original trustees took place at Weston College, referred to legally as 319 Concord Road, on October 3, 1961. The original incorporators were the college's staff members with the exception of Fr. Foley, and none of them was later allied with the Concord school. They were Fathers J. Thomas Hamel, John V. O'Connor, Edward R. Callahan, Thomas F. McDermott, Philip J. Donnelly and James L. Monks.

On November 6, 1971, Kevin H. White, as Secretary of State for the Commonwealth, certified the school as a corporation under the name of St. Francis Xavier High School of the Society of Jesus. This was a change in name from the one originally planned when the school was to be conducted by some other group. The original name had commemorated Isaac T. Hecker (1819-88), founder of the Paulists, who had boarded at one time at Henry David Thoreau's home in Concord. Cardinal Cushing, in view of his many years as Archdiocesan Director of the Propagation of the

Faith, was agreeable to the name of Francis Xavier who was one of the two principal patrons of missions. Only on December 14, 1961 did Mr. Kevin White affix the great seal of the commonwealth and, by a waiver, considered the corporation meeting of October 3 as its official first meeting.

By a letter of March 15, 1962, the cardinal wrote that he was handing over the land and the school plus residence to the Society as soon as the deed was recorded. The property involved was valued at three million dollars and consisted of seventeen acres making possible, in addition to school and residence, a soccer field, hockey rink, space for other sports, parking plus roads.

In the school there should especially be noted an auditorium for 1000, a cafeteria for 685, a moderate-sized chapel, a language lab for thirty students at a time, in addition to the usual classrooms, laboratories, library and office space. All these elements came furnished except for the library books.

On the complete third floor were the faculty quarters, all completely equipped except for air-conditioning which proved an unexpected but genuine need. The faculty kitchen and dining room were on the second floor at the end of the building closer to Boston. In this same faculty area on the first floor were porter's offices, parlors, treasurer's office, garage and the student chapel.

In his March 15, 1962, letter the Cardinal affirmed that the property thus given to the Jesuits -- though it was received by the legal corporation -- would be hopefully a

tremendous asset to education in the archdiocese and a source of vocations. For the limited time of its existence, it was such an educational asset. Vocations were few.

At the time, students, partly on their own initiative and partly by indoctrination, waited for college experience before choosing a clerical vocation. Directly from the first graduating class in 1966, however, Edward Barron entered the Society. In 1968, Stephen White entered but left unvowed after some three years. In 1972, Paul D. Holland of the class of 1967, later a Harvard graduate and a one-year student at St. John Seminary, became a Jesuit novice. Charles F. Kelley, as a member of the Xavier class of 1972, had to transfer to Boston College High School when his class was not continued at Xavier. After graduating from Boston College High School in 1972 and spending two years at Fordham, he entered the novitiate in 1974. In 1975, a second man from the original graduating class of 1966 entered -- Michael Carlton McFarland. He was then a B. S. in Physics from Cornell, and had performed some years of apostolic service in the American southwest. On completing his noviceship, he began a doctoral program in computer science with a generous grant at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. The one diocesan vocation was David J. Chandonnet who was ordained in 1974 for the Archdiocese of Boston.

An early liaison man with the cardinal and his business staff on Xavier must be mentioned. His work concerned supervising building and furnishings. Fr. James J. Kelley, as Rector of Boston College High School (1944-51), had many dealings

with the cardinal who generously gave a million and a half dollars for two structures built at Dorchester when Fr. Kelly was rector -- the Cushing classroom building and the Loyola residence.

Fr. Kelley had been Dean of the B. C. School of Business Administration (1937-44), minister at old St. Mary's (1951-53), and was minister at Loyola House at the time of the liaison work. Especially in his capacity as B. C. High Rector, he had rapport on financial and building matters with the cardinal and his business team. One of Fr. Kelley's contributions was the elimination of a proposed walkway outside the windows of the third-floor faculty residence, and the consequent increase in the size of these rooms. Other facilities more suited to a sisterhood were also modified.

As has been briefly noted, one of Fr. Foley's tasks after incorporation was the drawing up of publicity literature and the arrangement of a curriculum. On this latter, he worked in conjunction with the province prefect for secondary schools, Fr. Joseph D. FitzGerald, Fr. Foley's predecessor (1937-39) as dean of freshmen at Boston College. Fr. FitzGerald was the Dean of Holy Cross College (1939-48), an assistant province prefect (1948-51), Rector of Fairfield University (1951-58), province prefect of secondary schools (1958-1964) and superior at St. Andrew House (1962-68).

The curriculum was a standard Jesuit one but with the options which were becoming more common. Latin was prescribed for two years and was elective thereafter. Greek was possible

for one, two or three years, or optional in a science sequence. Both English and mathematics were prescribed for four years as was theology. Modern language was a three-year affair. Provision was made to have some science for all in the upper classes and a fuller science sequence was available. The setup called for a selecting or winnowing of those with a scientific bent by prescribing a special form of general science for all in the first year. With this prescribed introductory course in first year, Xavier differed from those schools which normally made three sciences (physics, chemistry, biology) available in the three upper years.

It might be broadly observed that, although with modifications to meet contemporary times and views, in the subjects taught and, especially, in its efforts at growth and coordination, Xavier walked with a modern shoe in a philosophy of education stemming from the Georgetown curriculum once the school, located in the District of Columbia, was fully under the direction of the restored Society of Jesus. Hence, it bore the imprint of Fr. John Grassi, Fr. John Early and Fr. Bernard Maguire. It was their curriculum and thrust that influenced all Jesuit schools along the Atlantic seaboard and which was continued in the modifications made in the early twentieth century down to 1923 by Maryland-New York Province regulations.

All this phase of Jesuit continuity with its gradual changes had been excellently and luminously expounded by Fr. Michael A. Bernard in an unpublished dissertation for his Ph.D. degree in education at Yale in 1951. It deserves wide and

thorough reading. The document, in excellent bindery, is now part of the education collection which Boston College, under the aegis of Fr. Charles F. Donovan and Fr. Paul A. FitzGerald, has been gathering on higher education. This same collection has luckily obtained the files of the Jesuit Education Association so long directed by Fr. Edward B. Rooney. In later years he had as assistant director Fr. Paul FitzGerald. Since colleges in other days and even into the twentieth century conjoined in one institution what is both a college and a secondary school, this work of Fr. Bernard, although in an higher education collection, is most useful on Jesuit secondary school education from the time of Fr. Grassi at Georgetown down to 1923.

In addition to publicity and curriculum, Fr. Foley recruited the opening class. Some unspecified number took the Xavier-made entrance examination. Some unspecified number was accepted and 147 enrolled. This was the largest of Xavier's entering classes and in Xavier documentation it is rated, correctly or not, as generally poor. Yet, this first class was to have national science foundation awards and general mentions. If Xavier could have conjoined with its academic quality a similar high number of entering students in later years, it might not have been in so precarious a position in 1970. But this is hindsight. The initial tuition for this initial class was \$400.00 at a time when the tuition at Boston College High School was \$330.00.

The narrative now passes to the first faculty. The principal selected was Fr. John R. Vigneau who had just concluded a one-year task as assistant academic principal at Cheverus High School, Portland, when such an officer does not seem to have been needed or wanted in that position. Prior to this Cheverus assignment, Fr. Vigneau had studied a year at Fordham University acquiring a degree in education and having the benefit of the instruction and expertise in secondary school education of Fr. Lorenzo K. Reed, prefect of high schools in the New York Province from 1949-67.

The house minister was Fr. Francis J. Donovan with similar experience at 761 Harrison Avenue (church and school) and at Cheverus (1958-62) where he was principal (1945-51).

The treasurer was Fr. Edward J. Whalen, former treasurer at Weston College and Boston College, superior at old St. Mary's, minister at Boston College (1931-32) and Fairfield (1942-43) and a missionary in Jamaica (1933-1942).

Fr. Felix Talbot, who engaged in retreat work, was in residence for a year as spiritual father of the community.

Two experienced teachers were assigned from Boston College High School: Fr. Philip D. Moriarty, Latin and English, and Fr. William J. Doyle, mathematics.

From special studies at Boston College came Fr. James T. Sheehan, initially for general science and later for chemistry along with theology and counselling.

Fr. John B. Kerdiejus with a St. Louis master's degree in physics also taught physical science and was the original dean of men. Later, he added physics to general science.

After a brief internship in the Weston College library under Fr. William J. Connolly, Fr. Richard J. Olson was appointed librarian.

Stability was the key characteristic about these first teaching fathers as well as for those who came in subsequent years down to 1968. These subsequent priests from 1963 to 1968 were Joseph E. Mullen, Francis J. Murphy, James C. O'Brien (1963), Thomas F. Lyons, Louis M. St. Onge (1964), Harry J. Cain, James L. Greenler, Richard T. Griffin, Francis P. Sullivan, John H. L. Collins (1966), Francis Ennis and Leo J. Fahey (1967). Fr. William J. Sheehan, who returned in poor health from Baghdad mission, lived at Xavier for two years with a light teaching load in one year. After assignment to Weston, he died in the Glover Hospital on October 8, 1970.

After 1968 some less stability was seen in newly assigned priests. Fr. Edward X. Canning taught theology for one year (1968-69). In 1969, Fr. Edward F. Boyle came for one year. But with greater stability, Fr. Raymond J. Callahan, who was originally in 1969 the director of guidance, became the academic head of the school in its last year and one half, and kept the school on as even a keel as possible. Even after the closing, he kept his eye on the mail especially library subscriptions which were being phased out. In the final year (1970-71), to its

skeleton crew that opted to remain, was added Fr. Thomas J. Gallagher as a counsellor.

Stability was less evident in the treasurer's office. Fr. Whalen left in 1964 to serve in Jamaica as fiscal officer for the Diocese of Kingston. Until a new candidate was found, Fr. Donovan doubled as minister and treasurer (1964-65). Fr. John J. Collins held the position for one year (1965-66). In 1969, when Fr. St. Onge became minister, Fr. Donovan was full-time treasurer and so remained until the school closed (1969-71).

One must characterize the sticking quality of most of the regents differently. Of the original five regents, (Robert R. Dorin, Charles M. Hegarty, John B. Leonard, John F. Murphy, Richard G. Murphy), only Robert Dorin is at present (1969) in the Society. Two of this group (Charles M. Hegarty and John B. Leonard) left after ordination.

Of the later regents the vast majority left during regency or shortly thereafter: Winslow S. Durgin, Alan J. Pratt, William J. Davenport, James J. Loughlin, Joseph O'B. Monahan, John F. Mack, David A. Culliton (N. Y. Province), Robert J. Kelley, Michael C. Normile, Stephen M. Conner, Nicholas F. Finke, James F. Mulcahy. To this list of departing regents must be added all the New England Province scholastics who lived at Xavier while studying at Brandeis: Noel F. Brawn, Francis J. Doe, Robert J. Paradowski.

This loss of regents, when or after being stationed at Xavier, paralleled a similar loss of regents notably from Jamaica assignments. It was a manifestation of a spirit of unrest, a lesser sense of commitment and some strange immaturity which characterized many religious groups. Xavier just happened to have more than its share of these people. Religious discipline was as strong there as in any similar house, and small group masses and expressions of solidarity were perhaps more notable.

Despite this distressing situation, some Xavier regents have remained and are now priests. Robert Dorin, after his theology studied German abroad and taught German at Cheverus until there was no longer need for it. He then obtained a position teaching German at Xavier in New York City. Richard J. Stanley gave the Trappists a good try for a time. He is now a teacher at Cheverus, where and from where he gives highly prized directed retreats. Thomas J. Gallagher, a regent 1965-69, returned to Xavier as a priest 1970-71, then taught theology and counselled at Cranwell and Boston College High School. After studying both at Weston in Cambridge and at the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, he was appointed Associate Director of Novices.

The stability, which was manifest in the faculty fathers from 1962-68 and even after, means that those who in early 1970 opted to leave or to remain at Xavier had living experience with Xavier and were in a position to form judgments on the apostolic work in which they themselves had been engaged. There appeared two viewpoints -- the work was worthwhile and

should be continued as long as possible versus the view that the work had ceased to be for God's greater glory and that, hence, something else should be undertaken.

Stability and quality characterized two other parts of Xavier staff -- the teaching brother and the registrar-secretary. In 1967 Brother Michael L. Greenler began a distinctive career as a teacher of physical science where his patience, gentleness, expertise and concern had a profound and edifying effect. He was at Xavier to the end since physics was his major and chemistry a real possibility. Two coadjutor brothers - Robert J. Clifford (1962-63) and Maurice Ahern (1963-65) -- served the community for brief periods.

The other example of stability and excellence was Miss Margaret Sheehan, sister of Fr. William J. Sheehan of the Jamaica Mission, who was secretary and registrar during the lifetime of the school. The then pastor of St. Bernard's, Concord, Fr. John York, had recommended her to Fr. Foley and her work surpassed any reasonable expectation. She could pleasantly control students as well as efficiently and ahead of time aid staff members. If Xavier had continued, surely some place there should have been named for her.

During the years of Xavier's planning and existence the province made a special effort to have more secondary school Jesuits have, in addition to the usual Weston M. A. in philosophy or in place of it, a specialized degree either in some aspect of education or in an academic discipline or both. Where these could not be obtained by full-time study, use was made, as

has been shown elsewhere, of programs conducted with prestige only in the summer. Thus, Fr. J. C. O'Brien had pioneered for the province in the Harvard masters' program combining Education and English. James Laughlin studied at Wesleyan and Charles Hegarty at Bread Loaf.

There are other degree holders. From Fordham, Fr. Vigneau had an education degree, Fr. James L. Greenler one in mathematics. Richard Stanley had a master's in classics from Boston College and Fr. St. Onge one in education. Fr. Kerdiejus' master's degree in physics was from St. Louis. Fr. Richard Griffin had a certificate in catechetics from Lumen Vitae in Brussels. Joseph O'B. Monahan entered the Society with a Bread Loaf degree in English. Fr. Francis P. Sullivan was concluding a doctoral dissertation in theology at the Catholic Institute of Paris. Leo Fahey had a degree in ascetical theology from Catholic University.

Others had done special work in summer sessions. Fr. James Sheehan for example, had worked in the special summer liturgical program at Notre Dame.

Since declining enrollments were to prove an important factor for the Jesuit withdrawal from Xavier, some remarks on this matter in the early years are pertinent. Where figures on enrollment are used, they are drawn from the statistical tables appearing annually in the Jesuit Educational Quarterly.

The opening class has its figures commonly placed at 147 but in the Quarterly the figures are listed as 149. When there were two classes in 1963-64, the total enrollment was 230

with 118 new freshmen and 112 sophomores, down from 147 or 149. This total was 230 originally listed, erroneously, in the the Quarterly at 203 but corrected in a following listing to 230. In its third year the school had a 304 total with 110 in first year. In 1966-67, the year before the accreditation team came, the total was 399 with 113 in the first year. In the school year of the accreditation visit, 1967-68, there was a total of 410 students with 114 in the first year. That year had the highest total enrollment but, outside the first year, the highest year in first-year students, 120, came one year later when the total was down to 401.

One year after the first-year class had been graduated and practically all had spent one year in college, a formal attempt at accreditation was possible. In preparation, a self-study was engaged in and its results made available to the visiting team. The registration was the aforesaid 410 total. The school had a staff of twenty-four Jesuits, nine lay associates. It seemed to have viability. Yet some had wondered even then whether the school may have become too choosy in its acceptance.

Three hundred and seventy-four, a number never again equaled, took the Scholastic Aptitude Test entrance examinations for September 1965 and 178 were rejected, probably discouraging applications from the same families, school and local sites.

The tuition had reached \$575.00 to which had been added in most cases \$200.00 for bus transportation. That very November of 1967, four of the members of the executive committee of the

independent school unit of the New England Association had urged that Jesuit schools in New England charge \$900.00 a year tuition. So highly did they prize Jesuit secondary education that they did not wish it to be supplied too cheaply. The very thought of closing any of the Jesuit schools appeared to them incredible. Such analogous places as Belmont Hill and Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven could charge this amount and where there was excess, funnel it into scholarships for worthy but less affluent students. Following this advice in 1969 and 1970 was to prove tragic for Xavier. But at this moment of the accreditation visit and follow-up, the only thin cloud of sinister significance was the case that 120 was the largest number of enrolled freshmen when 150 might have been expected and were really needed.