The Bayley Diary: Notes From the First Years of the Archdiocese

by Deacon Al Frank

On becoming the first bishop of Newark, James Roosevelt Bayley began maintaining a record of his ministry in a diocese that then encompassed all of New Jersey.

He documented not only his comings and goings but also passing comments on current events between 1853 and 1872, when he was appointed Archbishop of Baltimore.

The existence of the 358-page, leather-bound notebook in the archdiocesan archives at Seton Hall University has been no secret. The late Father Edwin Vose O’Sullivan, a sociology professor at Seton Hall University, transcribed it 60 years ago for his doctoral dissertation.

But access was limited to those who made a trip to the South Orange campus and the New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission decided such a prominent document should be disseminated more widely. After a more rigorous editing than Father O’Sullivan could provide, the Commission hopes to soon publish the diary.

The effort has taken 15 years and involved commission members Alan Delozier, Peter Wosh, Fernanda Perrone, Carl Ganz, Passionist Father Rob Carbonneau and Benedictine Father Augustine Curley.

“You have to get used to his handwriting, although it’s actually pretty good,” says Father Augustine, who also updated the 134 pages of explanatory notes. “Certainly, as a major document in New Jersey and national Catholic history, it’s a phenomenal resource,” says Father Augustine, a Ph.D. who serves as prior and archivist at Newark Abbey and chaplain of St. Benedict’s Prep in Newark. “This is not a personal diary, although it obviously has personal comments,” Father Augustine says. The last diary with such extras was written by Winand Michael Wigger, Newark’s third bishop from 1881 to 1901. Those who followed left behind daybook-like listings of appointments, Father Augustine says.

Bishop Bayley's Diary
Notes from Newark’s first years as a diocese

1853

About himself

_In being named the first Bishop of Newark, Bishop Bayley traced his ancestry and recounted that he briefly studied to be a doctor, and for the Episcopal priesthood, before converting to Catholicism._

I was born the 23rd Aug. 1814. The oldest son of Guy Carleton Bayley M.D. and Grace Roosevelt, my father’s family was English from Norfolkshire, my Great Grandfather William Bayley, came from near Lynn Regis, in that county before the Revolutionary War....My grandfather Richard Bayley was a distinguished Surgeon and Physician....My father married Grace Roosevelt, the daughter of James Roosevelt Esq. descended from a family who came to New York in 1693; He was a Physician....I was educated at Mount Pleasant school near Amherst Mass. graduated at Washington (afterwards Trinity Coll.) at Hartford Conn. 1835. Studied medicine one year & then theology for ministry of the Episcopal Ch.... Resigned in the fall of 1841 & went to Rome, where I was received into the Catholic Church...Studied at St. Sulpice, Paris — was ordained Priest March 2nd, 1844 by Bp. Hughes (of New York)...Pastor of Staten Island till Dec. 8/46. Secretary to Bp. Hughes until 1853.
About the then-Diocese of Newark

The Bull of his Holiness (Pius IX) creating Newark into a Diocese is dated 29. July 1853, was received at New York 13. Sep. ’53; I was consecrated in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, Oct 30th, by Monsig.Cajetan Bedini, Nuncio and took possession of my diocese on the Tuesday following being All Saints day.

The ceremony at (old) St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Mulberry Street also saw the consecration of Bishops Loughlin (for Brooklyn) and De Goesbriand (for Burlington, Vermont). Bedini, returned to Rome three months later and died as a cardinal in 1864.

Newark was now the diocese of all of New Jersey, which was originally divided between the Philadelphia and New York dioceses, Bishop Bayley’s diary documents the shepherding of his far-flung parishes, including those now included in the Camden, Metuchen, and Paterson dioceses. There were blessings for corner stones for new parishes, the appointments of pastors, confirmations, dispensations for mixed marriages and presiding at Mass in churches throughout the state. He frequently remarked how he preached to “to a very large & attentive Congregation.”

The cathedral at the time was St. Patrick on Washington Street in Newark (now the Pro, or first cathedral) and the diary notes how he crossed the Hudson to attend the cornerstone laying of the cornerstone for the “new” St. Patrick on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan on August 15, 1858:

An immense crowd, at least 60 to 80,000 permanent & 40 or 50,000 going and coming. I never saw such a concourse of people. Weather intensely hot.

Five months later, Bishop Bayley took the first steps toward building a new cathedral for Newark although it would not be until 1870 that he launched an appeal for construction of “a Mother Church for the Diocese of Newark.”

Seton Hall

1854 Purchased the Chegaray Farm at Madison for $8000

With this brief entry, Bishop Bayley notes the beginning of Seton Hall College with the purchase of the “Seminary for Young Ladies,” formerly conducted by a Madame Chegaray. Here Seton Hall would be founded two years later; after moving to South Orange in 1860, the site would become the College of Saint Elizabeth.

Bishop Bayley was the nephew of Mother Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, who founded the Sisters of Charity and for whom he named Seton Hall. She died 33 years before he became bishop and the diary mentions her just once in a reference to the translation into French of an English biography of her life. But his regard for her may be inferred from this entry:

1859 Yesterday (Wedn. 24th Fest. St. Joann. Bap.) we held the first commencement of Seton Hall College, if it may be called by so dignified a name.

1863 Blessed the corner stone of the new college building at South-Orange. Large number of people present—made an address.

Civil War

1864 January - In Trenton where The whole City alive with soldiers. They are very anxious to march on Baltimore, and if necessary destroy it. There has never been such an excitement among the people & all political distinctions are forgotten and all united in defending the government. Lincoln himself is not spoken of—and is not popular.
July - Spent a few days in Washington where everything is in confusion on account of this miserable civil war. — Saw the President— Mr. Lincoln, Seward (dined with him)

_The notes explain Bishop Bayley was seeking the appointment of Catholic chaplains to the Union armies and Secretary of State William H. Seward gave him a letter of introduction to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton._

August - Affairs are going very badly with us in a political way. The abolition party in Congress by striving to make the present war, a war against Slavery, are breaking up the unity of North—

1865 On Good Friday Evng. President Lincoln was assassinated in the theatre at Washington. The crime has excited universal detestation. On Wedn. the Funeral Service took place in Washington and the day was observed in every City in the United States. I preached a discourse in the Cathedral on Authority, etc.

1872 last entries

_Newly appointed bishop of Baltimore in July, Bishop Bayley bids farewell._

On Sunday Afternoon blessed the corner Stone of the new Church of St. Michael— an immense concourse of people (the papers say 13,000) it being my last Episcopal visit to Jersey City.

The Priests of the Diocese presented me with a Magnificent Archiepiscopal processional Cross & a very handsome watch.

_His successor, Bishop Michael Augustine Corrigan adds:_

October 1872 - To this the Archbishop responded most feelingly, evidently much overcome in the beginning by the thought of a lasting separation from his old Diocese. But afterwards the words flowed more freely, and he spoke happily and eloquently for a long time. The Clergy were deeply moved, and we all felt painfully the greatness of our loss. _Fiat Voluntas Dei._ (God's will be done)