The Catholic Press in New Jersey: Historical Overview From Retrospective Titles to *The Recorder*

by Alan Delozier, Executive Director

With the re-launch of *The Recorder*, the Commission is once again following in a long and specialized informational lineage of Catholic-focused gazettes that have aided scores of readers and researchers on a wide range of Church issues over the last few centuries. The starting point for all typed print can be traced to the Catholic Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg (1398–1468), who invented mechanical metal type which revolutionized the art of communication and the publishing industry. From the time that the printing press was proven functional, the first rudimentary news bulletins made their way into the public sphere around 1493. From initial success in Germany, the appeal of published works expanded across the globe, but it would be years before regular and higher-quality texts could be accessible to the masses. Not only mainstream news, but articles about religion and history also became popular reading options and were present from the first.

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911), with respect to the evolution of the Universal Church in print circles: “The broadsides were later succeeded by the ‘relations’ and the title of the Jesuit ‘Relations,’ which has become almost a household word in American history, shows how early the Church authorities appreciated the possibilities of this new kind of periodical publication.” This foundation led to further evolution over the years as information was transmitted in print form from village to village in such strongly Catholic nations such as France and Spain beyond the fifteenth century. These early examples typically featured strictly religious topics and almost always involved ecclesiastical sanction before release to the world.

The lineal start of American Catholic publishing was on August 31, 1809 when the first faith-based newspaper printed in the United States was promulgated from the Detroit area (Springwells) under the title *The Michigan Essay* (or *Impartial Observer*), which was printed half in English and half in French on various topics of note to the burgeoning Catholic community of Michigan at the time. The inaugural Catholic magazine, christened *The Metropolitan* (or *Catholic Monthly Magazine*), emanating from the first American See at Baltimore, came out in January of 1830 and lasted a single year.

The next and closest parochial press effort to New Jersey came through New York City, where the first Catholic weekly entitled *The Shamrock* (or *Hibernian Chronicle*) commenced publication on December 10, 1810, and from here lasted seven years under its adopted titles. In the metropolitan area, it ushered in a number of other newspapers such as *The Truth Teller* (first issue in 1825), and throughout the American Catholic landscape expanding with Irish and German immigration, it helped to build upon a solid native readership for clergy and laity alike.

Although various Catholic press efforts may have not originated in New Jersey during the first half of the nineteenth century, individuals from the state and Church here had some influence on content. For example, in 1839, *The Catholic Register* was combined with the popular *Freeman’s Journal*, and by 1842 Bishop John Hughes of New York made his secretary the Reverend James Roosevelt Bayley (11 years later named the first Bishop of Newark) editor of this newspaper. Six volumes later, the paper encountered financial trouble; therefore, Bishop Hughes had contemplated relinquishing the leadership duties to Orestes A. Brownson, whose ties to New Jersey included a stint as trustee of Seton Hall College and who later made history in creating the first and arguably the most important Catholic quarterly of its age. *Brownson’s Quarterly Review* began during 1844 in Boston prior to his move to New York City eleven years later. A future transition included contributions by the Reverend Doctor Louis A. Lambert, who joined the Review in 1894 and served until his death at Newfoundland, New Jersey in 1910.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* further noted that beyond such famed papers as *The Catholic Telegraph* (Cincinnati) and *The Pilot* (Boston), for example, New Jersey’s neighbor, “New York City was during the first half of the nineteenth century, the leader in Catholic journalism. The pioneer papers devoted their space mainly to controversial articles explanatory of the truths of the Faith, and in defence of the teachings of the Church.” One of these that defended the rights of Irish Americans was appropriately entitled *The Irish American*, founded on August 12, 1849, by Patrick
Lynch whose step son, a New Jersey resident, edited this organ from 1857-1906 prior to his death in Jersey City that last year.

In 1870, the first attempt at an expansive periodical was made as the Catholic Men’s Institute sponsored the *Catholic Institute Gazette*, but this effort only lasted for a short period. Three years later, Bishop Michael Corrigan (second Bishop of Newark prior to becoming Archbishop of New York) began the German language *Katholisches Volkablatt*, which circulated from New York City and was later known as the *New Jersey Revue* (1879-92). During this same time, the first Catholic weekly newspaper attempted, *The Catholic Citizen* (Irish focused), originated in 1873. Additionally, Germans, Italians, Poles, and Ukrainians also started their own press relations during the 1880s-90s.

The latter nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time when many Catholic newspapers and journals were born, many having short to mid-range runs. These were printed either in or near the largest urban areas of the Garden State. Many ranged from 4-20 pages and cost ranged from a quarter to $2.00 per subscription. The center of Catholic leadership in New Jersey has remained Newark, the largest city in the state. Various publications featured such titles as *The Catholic Citizen* (changed to *The Irish Citizen*, 1873-76), *Catholic Ledger* (1893-1904), *Newark Ledger* (1898-1913), *Catholic Messenger* (1889-90), *New Jersey Catholic News* (1887-1952), and the popular *Monitor* during the early 1900s. The most detailed examples beyond the city limits of Newark featured among others: *Sacred Heart Union* (1880-1960), *Camden Church Appeal* (1866), *Prejaciul Ludu - Gazeta Niedzelna* (People’s Friend - Sunday Paper) (Camden, 1895-1934), *Catholic Messenger* (Elizabeth, 1898-1906), St. Mary’s Messenger (New Brunswick, 1883-98), *Catholic Press* (Jersey City, 1894-98), *New Jersey Revue* (German) (Jersey City, 1879-92), *The Orphan’s Messenger and Working Girl’s Friend* (Jersey City, 1898-99), *New Jersey Catholic* (Long Branch, 1897-1901), *The Sentinel and Bayley School Messenger* (Morristown, 1894-89), St. Mary’s Messenger (Hopewell, 1883-98), *New Jersey Catholic Journal* (Trenton, 1886-95), and *The Sacred Heart Columbian* (Vineland, 1891-94).

By the mid-latter part of the last century, the number of Catholic publications thinned out as competition from newspapers, periodicals, radio, television, and other media outlets made news more immediate. Otherwise, focus on local information was created and survived in parochial school newspapers and the diocesan press on a larger scale. The New Jersey edition of *The Catholic News* of New York City (and to a lesser extent the *Catholic Standard & Times* of Philadelphia) became the de facto official organ of the reconstituted Archdiocese of Newark, Diocese of Trenton, and the new Sees of Paterson and Camden during the early-mid twentieth century. However, it was not until the early 1950s that the Catholic publishing industry became very active. This new age began with the *Catholic Star Herald* (Diocese of Camden) which commenced with its maiden issue on May 11, 1951. This tabloid was followed by the *Catholic Advocate* of Newark (which also served Paterson for 16 years) in December of that year and *The Monitor* of Trenton on February 5, 1954. Later, the *Catholic Beacon* became the printed voice for the Diocese of Paterson in 1967, and the Metuchen-sponsored *Catholic Spirit* began publication in 1996.

The question of creation and subsistence was recorded on page one in the inaugural issue of *The Monitor* and is part of a thread expressed in various ways throughout each of the presses statewide to its readership.

The first edition of the diocese weekly newspaper... appears today in thousands of homes...after long study and careful preparation. It appears in response to what is a closely established and urgent need...there long has been a conviction that the best interests of the Church and its people required the establishment of a publication through which the cause of religion generally and the particular interests of the Church’s many institutions could be advanced more effectively...In consequence, the production...in all respects a professional operation, marked by a high degree of competence and with legitimate claims upon the respectful attention of readers.

*The Recorder* was published in 2008 and 2009 through the efforts of editor G. Greg Tobin. This publication followed in the tradition of the first Commission newsletter, entitled the *New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter* quarterly, which began during the fall of 1979 and continued publication under the guidance of professor and scholar, the late Joseph F. Mahoney, Ph.D., a founding member and first director of the then *New Jersey Catholic*
Historical Records Commission. More information on content and full-text versions of our past newsletters can be found here: [http://blogs.shu.edu/njchc/commission-works-and-activities/newsletters/](http://blogs.shu.edu/njchc/commission-works-and-activities/newsletters/), and more information can be found here: [http://blogs.shu.edu/njchc/the-recorder/](http://blogs.shu.edu/njchc/the-recorder/).
An early issue of The Monitor
Participants in the first Holy Name parade (ca. 1930) held by the Queen of Angels parish in Newark (a Black national parish). The NJCHRC recently accessioned an oral history interview with one of the parish’s founding members.

New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission Newsletter, 1980