This Venerable House
Part II: The Formative Years
1826-1858

Volume 1, Number 4
© 2003, Mount St. Mary’s College and Seminary

Written by Rev. Daniel C. Nusbaum
Designed and produced by the Office of Communications

Series Editor: Rev. Daniel C. Nusbaum,
A.A., Ph.B., Ph.L., S.T.B., Dip.L. En Mus., M.A., Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts, 1999

Analecta: A collection of literary excerpts or passages.
October 7, 1826, the Sunday morning following the departure of Father DuBois from his beloved Mountain, was a cool, somewhat overcast autumn day, glorious nonetheless in the colors displayed by the oaks, maples and chestnuts scattered throughout the campus. The new college building, replacing the one that had burned so unhappily a little more than two years before, appeared monumental against the vibrant mountainside, its gleaming white cupola giving a feeling of permanency that the Mountain had not enjoyed until now.

Ambiguities such as who made decisions for the school, who shouldered the burden of its debts, who, indeed, would administer her day by day, were all things of the past. Father Michael DeBurgo Egan, already being called “the little president” because of both his youth and his stature, had the burden squarely on his shoulders. However daunting the burden seemed, his love for the house where he had lived boy and man, and the determination to do well by her, set the tone for the whole community in those first days. Mount St. Mary’s would survive. In fact, she would do more than survive—she would flourish, a model for Catholic education and scholarship.

Sunday morning meant that the guns firing an echoing round of shot to rouse the sleeping students were a bit later than usual. The icy water of the wash house, even in this warm weather, was enough to awaken the sleepiest. Despite the chattering in the wash house, the climb up the mountain to the Church on the Hill was to be done in silence and reflection. The rustle of a rabbit in the woods or the sudden flight of a partridge would be cause for wandering eyes, but any word of exclamation or delight was met with swift reproof. By the time Mass was over and catechism class on the mountainside was completed, the smell of pancakes and gravy emanating from the kitchen in the old White House was enough to turn the descent from the mountain into an undignified footrace that even the seminarian proctors could not control, and indeed were inclined to participate in. The Mount was alive!

By afternoon, the students of the Mount were scattered across the countryside, some taking a walk into town accompanied by seminarians, a few of the younger ones playing marbles on the pathway leading from the old White House to the new college building, and some of the older students taking advantage of the permission to hunt in the surrounding forests. Father Parsons, the procurator, had purchased powder and shot for the young men, at “$4.50 and $8.50 each” for the coming year. He guarded the purse carefully, but did not regret parceling out shot and powder to the better hunters. If they were lucky, turkey, quail, rabbit, even squirrel, would be added to the evening menu by Sister Sally Thompson, who reigned over the kitchen with a generosity and a ferocity unequalled but clearly supported by her assistant, Sister Mary Magdalene Councell. Oh, the delightful smells emanating from that kitchen! By midafternoon dozens of meat pies would be baking, one for each student, with extras for those serving tables—provided the hunt was a success, of course. Since the autumn harvest had been good, the likelihood that apple tarts would grace the tables as well was high. The abundance of autumn would differ notably from the fare of mid winter, but Sister Sally managed well with whatever she had, and no student ever went away hungry. Fifty years later, alumni were still rhapsodizing over the skills of Sister Sally.

Her one regret, shared with Sister Magdalene Shirley who was in charge of the infirmary, was that no amount of care could put even a single pound on the fragile frame of Father Egan. Always delicate, the worries of the presidency weighed heavily on him. But this afternoon, he came from the dining room into the midst of the boys looking rested and ready for their company. If anyone had ever doubted that a new president could be as loved as the founder had been, the sight of Father Egan surrounded by dozens of students in perpetual motion soon set such doubt aside. “Our little president” was a term of affection probably never again matched in the history of this venerable house.

Father Dan Nusbaum, Ph.D.
College Historian
“The Little President”

The departure of Bishop DuBois caused some extensive changes at Mount St. Mary’s, not the least of which was his choice of two young men to be coproprietors of the institution, indeed co-owners and president and vice president, respectively. There were those, including the pious Father Bruté himself, who had expected that he would be the successor to Father DuBois. However, scholar and dedicated worker that he was, he was no administrator, and by passing him over, Father DuBois had saved both the Mount and Father Bruté a great deal of distress.

The need to make a rather hasty decision had not kept Father DuBois from choosing his successors carefully. Both the new administrators were well known to the founder. He had had both as students: Father Egan from 1809 until 1822, and Father McGerry from 1810 until 1820. They were young, enthusiastic and, all hoped, capable. These were necessary qualities, because life in Emmitsburg was still rugged, the establishment was overcrowded, and discipline, Father DuBois knew, could easily break down. The debt was enormous, and there would have to be much traveling to gather funds. The accounts were labyrinthine; not even Father DuBois knew for certain all the debts there were. He had made use of many agents to do purchasing for the college, and not all were absolutely honest.

Father Michael DeBurgo Egan was born in Philadelphia in 1802, the nephew of Bishop Michael Egan of Philadelphia. He was just seven years old when he first came to the Mount. The bishop, who as a young Franciscan had served churches in the Lancaster area of Pennsylvania, had had reason to visit Emmitsburg and was familiar with the work there of Father DuBois. Bishop Egan agreed to pay for the education of his young nephew, but by 1812, DuBois reported to the bishop of Baltimore that he was carrying the burden of educating several students without compensation, including young Egan. The boy was a reasonably good student and there was some hope he would follow through on his uncle’s conviction that he would make a fine priest. The class book of 1811-1812 speaks of him as “small—but healthy and lively—too careless of his clothes. Very good parts & emulation. Inclined to piety, speaking of his ecclesiastical vocation! But how far. Encourage at all events the study of Greek.”

In 1813, Michael wrote to his uncle that he was preparing for his first Holy Communion, with the date set for February 2. The letter begs the bishop’s blessing and forgiveness for past “trouble that I have caused you when I was at home.” In fact, Michael spent the summers at the Willing’s Alley residence of the bishop, and his youthful exuberance may well have been some cause for anxiety for the bishop. The residence was in the very heart of Philadelphia, and the activity of the streets was a constant source of interest for the youngster. During this period, Michael’s father, Thomas Egan, was in Louisiana, where he was pursuing his trade as a shoemaker. His mother was in New Jersey caring for the bishop’s mother, who had recently come from Ireland and had settled near the ocean for the sake of her health. The result was that young Michael and his sister, Mary Teresa, were in the care of the bishop, who was himself so busy that the youngsters were often left to their own devices. Nonetheless, they were good children and any trouble they may have caused was little indeed.

Bishop Egan died in 1814, after a brief illness, and from that point on, young Michael usually spent his summers in Emmitsburg rather than in Philadelphia. In fact, his father, returning from Louisiana about this time, requested permission...
to study for the priesthood at Mount St. Mary’s and was admitted. We have no record of the deaths of Thomas Egan’s mother and his wife and so are left to presume that both had died shortly before this. Thomas Egan’s studies for the priesthood were not to bear fruition, for he died on the 16th of April in 1815 and was buried in the little cemetery next to the Church on the Hill.

Now there was just Michael and his older sister. She was in the care of Mother Seton and being educated there. Mary Teresa was received into the community in 1817, receiving the habit in February of that year. After only four months of her novitiate, she too died, most likely of tuberculosis, on June 20th, being a model of holiness and dedication. Mother Seton recorded her last moments:

*The most pure, heavenly minded Mary Egan departing. I have been watching the little lamp these twenty-four hours, and when we thought it just out, to the last minute, all the Sisters gone, the last indulgence given, she turns suddenly to her poor Michael, her brother, with a smile, and tells him: ‘You know not how sweet it is to die in the arms of Jesus, or you would not cry. Rejoice with me Michael … thank Him. He takes me to Himself. Be faithful to God, the last words my father said to me. … I leave you in His hands, Michael, I go a little before you, to beg a good place for you, Michael.’*

It must have been very difficult for the 15-year-old student, and for the rest of his life he remembered to have Mass celebrated for his sister on that date. Now truly he was alone, and his only home was his beloved Mount.

On August 1, 1818, writing to her son William, Mother Seton noted, “Good little Michael comes for Mass-serving.” A certain air of loneliness clings to Michael Egan’s correspondence after that, despite the warmth and concern he obviously showed for others. In the years following this, he began his seminary studies and acted as one of the teachers for the younger boys, teaching them Latin as of 1819. That same year he founded an organization for the younger ones, The Children of Mary Sodality, to help form them in a strong spirituality that Michael saw as very important for young men who would enter into mainstream society and whose morals and character would have a strong influence on the nascent American church. The next few years flew by as he studied theology and prepared himself for ordination to the priesthood.

In August 1823, Michael was making his retreat in Philadelphia at the bishop’s residence, now occupied by his uncle’s successor, Bishop Henry Conwell. He had returned there at Father DuBois’ suggestion because there had arisen a dispute about where he would serve out his priesthood. Bishop Egan had clearly intended his nephew to be ordained for the diocese of Philadelphia, and that was also young Michael’s wish. But that spring, Archbishop Marechal of Baltimore had sent word to DuBois that since Michael had been resident in his diocese since 1809 and since his father, Thomas, had also resided there in his last year, the candidate should be ordained for that diocese. Michael had returned to Philadelphia to reestablish his links there and to have the backing of Bishop Conwell in the matter.

On August 1, he wrote to Archbishop Marechal:

> … I wish to be considered a subject of the Bishop of Philadelphia—for several reasons: 1st, I was sent to Emmitsburg by my uncle and there educated at his expense for this diocese & if he lived I could not have attached myself to another. 2nd, I was tonsured by that diocese with the permission of the Vicar Genl and can not, if I wished, join another without the consent of my bishop. 3rd My own inclination is in favour of this diocese; & if ever I wd be engaged on the mission, I wd prefer to devote myself to Pennsylvania & nothing but a desire of joining a religious community wd prompt me to quit it. I commenced my retreat the beginning of this week, and this morning the bishop informed me of the doubt existing concerning me — & he wished me to write to you immediately to make you acquainted with my intention & to request you to remove any obstacle which might prevent me from receiving the minor orders & subdeaconship. …. You would confer a great obligation on me, Most Revd Father, if you wd do me the honor to answer this as soon as possible—as I am entirely at a loss what to do. …
Although this letter is preserved in the archives of Mount St. Mary’s, Bishop Marechal’s response is not to be found. Clearly, Michael’s letter is a strong one, and the fact that he was indeed, on July 11th of the following year, ordained a priest for the diocese of Philadelphia, indicates that Marechal had acceded to his wishes.

It was only weeks since the newly completed college building burned on June 6th of 1824 that Michael was ordained. It was then that he, and his close friend, John McGerry, drafted the letter of condolence and commitment to rebuilding the college. Now that he was a priest and had rejoined the faculty at the college and seminary, he was intent upon carrying out his promise to see to it that the building rose again from its ashes. He asked permission to raise funds in Baltimore, and did so despite serious obstacles placed there by some members of the clergy who felt that the Sulpician claim to be the only seminary of Baltimore justified the demise of the Mount.

He was successful enough that Father DuBois decided to send him on to Montreal to seek funds there, with the help of the priests of the Grand Seminaire de Saint Sulpice. Once again, Baltimore clergy intervened and attempted to derail Egan’s mission. However, his graciousness and affability won the day and he was able to send sufficient funds to the Mount to assure that the rebuilding would be possible. After additional fundraising in New York, Philadelphia and in Emmitsburg itself, where the citizens were especially generous, he returned to his dear college, truly exhausted. DuBois immediately sent him to Philadelphia to seek medical help there. He returned after a brief stay, rested and determined to follow the regimen that the doctors there had given him to help restore his health. In fact, he would never again be restored to his full strength.

On December 16, 1825, the new college building was completed and dedicated. Whatever bit of peace and security that brought was often interrupted by the wrangling with the Sulpicians over the continued presence of a seminary in Emmitsburg. When, just eight months later, DuBois announced his appointment as bishop of New York and his approaching departure from the Mount, Michael DeBurgo Egan was the youngest member of the faculty. He was aware of the various solutions being explored for the future of the college and seminary and of the inability of DuBois to find a solution. It was then that he went to Father DuBois and offered his own solution, as he wrote in a letter to his friend from many years, Father John Baptist Purcell, who was completing his studies at Saint Sulpice in Paris.

The letter, dated August 12, 1816, reviews the various solutions that had been considered: asking the Jesuits of Georgetown to take the college—but they had financial problems that precluded their acceptance; asking the Sulpicians to accept it—but they too had financial problems; and even asking Mother Seton’s sisters to take charge—but that was obviously impossible. A group of laymen were briefly interested in taking it and making it a military school, but Bruté’s horror at the idea soon put an end to that consideration. Egan’s solution was to take charge of the institution himself, provided he was joined by others who would share the burden. Father Bruté and Father Joseph Wiseman had agreed to unite with Egan, and, of course, this letter was soliciting the help of Purcell.
With Purcell’s agreement, this was the solution Michael set before DuBois. The total indebtedness of the Mount was $22,000, and there was about $20,000 due it, if it could be collected. That was not insurmountable. Egan thought he could clear it in two to five years. It appears he was not optimistic about collecting the money due to the college, but thought he could raise funds among friends of the institution to offset the debt.

This offer to save the college, at first seemingly brash and perhaps even foolhardy, began to make sense. Egan was, above all, a man of faith, determination, and with excellent resources of personality. After all, his graciousness and affability had met with great success in the past. The founder may have spent more than one night in anxious reflection, but in the end, Father DuBois passed over the others of his institute to make the youngest member of his faculty his successor as president of Mount St. Mary’s. Michael DeBurgo Egan was just 24 years old.

**Articles of Agreement**

In 1826, Father John McGerry, 30 years old and just two years ordained, was pastor of Saint Peter’s parish in Washington, D.C. He had already established his reputation as an astute administrator, a little too firm, perhaps, but certainly not intractable, with the ability to maintain a rigid discipline. He was, in many ways, the direct opposite of Father Egan, despite the fact that the two were close friends. Father DuBois saw in him qualities sorely needed in Emmitsburg, and he set out to persuade him to return to the Mountain. He knew that Father Egan would have to spend much of his time away from the college and seminary seeking funds, and a strong hand needed to be at the helm in his absence. After some hesitation, Father McGerry left his charge in Washington, and with the permission of the ailing Archbishop Marechal, assumed the post of vice president and co-owner of Mount St. Mary’s.

The first need of the two young priests was to clarify the situation of the Mount as soon as possible. Accordingly, they drew up a set of articles with the intent of regularizing the position of Mount St. Mary’s. They submitted their articles to Father Tessier in Baltimore, who, along with Fathers Deluol and Wheeler of his council, sent a letter approving the document and noting that “the Society of Saint Sulpice will not take umbrage at it.” On September 25, 1826, Archbishop Marechal signed the articles, along with Fathers Egan and McGerry, and thus, in essence, granted the first formal charter to the foundation of Mount St. Mary’s.
young men called to the ecclesiastical state, the formation of “young men destined for the world of literature, to the knowledge and practice of the duties of their holy religion.” It states as a general principle that “there shall not be a permanent school of either Dogmatic or Moral Theology in the Institution of Emmitsburg,” but allows the proprietors to keep on as teachers seminarians from both the archdiocese of Baltimore and other dioceses “according to the rules of distributive justice.” An additional important exception is made to allow the teaching of theology for five years, noting that seminarians from the diocese of Baltimore “will be obliged to remain in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Baltimore for as long a term before ordination as the said Archbishop may think proper.” The Reverend Gentlemen of Emmitsburg are to endeavor “to provide that at the end of five years the teaching of theology will cease.” However, they will “make arrangements in the meantime that such cessation of Theology may not injure the interests of the Establishment.”

One personal item appears in the agreement. Father John Purcell, who had been sent to France to complete his studies by Father DuBois, would be allowed, on his return, to “devote his services to the good of said Institution.”

Appended to this document was a set of five articles agreed to between Bishop-elect DuBois and Fathers Egan and McGerry: Bishop-elect DuBois would send his seminarians from New York to the Mount for the next five years, not found a college nor seminary in New York during that period, not remove any of his seminarians from the Mount without the consent of the directors, nor ordain them without their testimonial, and that, after the five-year period, he would not receive any young man from the Mount into another seminary or college in New York without the approbation and recommendation of the president or directors of the Mountain establishment. That agreement, followed at least in the main by Bishop DuBois, was meant to help give a firm footing to the seminary. The exceptions to the agreement, made rather easily by Bishop DuBois, were many, but did little harm to Mount St. Mary’s.

The Mountain Family

John McCaffrey, then a young student at the Mount from the village of Emmitsburg, kept a diary that, for 1827, gives a fairly complete listing of the household. There were some 140 students in the college, and 28 seminarians. The faculty, in addition to Fathers Egan and McGerry, included Father Xaupi as professor of French and Spanish; Father Bruté as “spiritual director” of the seminary and professor of philosophy and theology; Father John Purcell, having completed his studies at Saint Sulpice in Paris, teaching moral philosophy, Hebrew and Greek; Father Pise in rhetoric and poetry; Father James Austin Lynch, who had been ordained in Philadelphia in 1826 (a classmate of the indomitable John Hughes), as professor of mathematics; and Father Francis H. Marshall, also from Philadelphia, whose teaching duties neither Father McCaffrey’s diary nor the records of the college indicate. Two lay professors are also listed in addition to the seminarian masters: Joseph Gegan, professor of music, and Cornelius Moynihan, professor of English and writing. Both were from Ireland. Father Hickey was pastor of Saint Joseph’s in town, and the house physician was Dr. James Shorb, a position the latter would hold for a quarter of a century. Though still a student, Hilary Parsons acted as procurator and agent for the college and seminary. The prefects for that year were Dennis Delaughry and Jacob Stillinger, and first prefect was Francis Jamison, later to be president of the Mount but then still a subdeacon. Sister Benedicta was superior of the Sisters of Charity who cared for the infirmary, kitchen and so forth of the institution. These, along with three staff workers and seven or eight slaves, constituted the rather large family under the direction of the new president and vice president.
The internal affairs of the college and seminary ran fairly smoothly during the next two years, except for the strain that financial difficulties put on the administration and faculty, who found themselves occasionally at odds. Father Bruté was hurt whenever actions were taken without his foreknowledge, or whenever the young administrators did not seem to measure up to his expectations. Fathers Egan and McGerry were particularly sensitive to his feelings, and the archives of Mount St. Mary’s contain several notes of apology and explanation from them to Father Bruté. The latter’s official position at the Mount is not quite clear, and his name was never signed to any formal document for his remaining years there. He seems to have been the second member, along with Father McGerry, of a council that worked with the president in overseeing the running of Mount St. Mary’s.

Such a council was mentioned for the first time in a letter of July 2, 1827, written by Father Bruté, and shortly afterwards, in a more formal manner, in a letter written by Father Egan to Archbishop Whitfield, who had succeeded Archbishop Marechal as ordinary of Baltimore. The archbishop returned that letter to Father Egan after having noted on it a number of questions concerning the make-up, duties, membership and so forth, of the council. Father Egan’s reply to the archbishop’s questions is not extant. After 1830, we find regular reference, in an official style, to “The President and Council of Mount St. Mary’s College,” but at the beginning it appears to have been an informal grouping, which, nonetheless, provided advice and stability for the institution and a solid backing for the decisions of the administration.

Father Egan was a good-hearted president, constantly encouraging the best from the students, seeing to it that the quality of education was of the highest, and that students were obtaining the particular education they needed for the future. It was almost a tailor-made education, with the curriculum carefully planned out for each individual. The files are full of letters from solicitous parents who sought out and received from Father Egan reassurances about their children. Unfortunately, many of these letters also indicate that the parents could not pay the tuition and board, either in full or in part; and almost without exception, Father Egan simply absolved the debt. He was so kind-hearted and forgiving of others that Father McGerry at times became impatient, writing to Father Bruté on one occasion that Father Egan had no idea of what real debt had befallen the Mount.

Life on campus was full of celebrations after the new college building, replacing the one built in 1824, was finally completed and occupied in 1825. Father Pise wrote a play, Montezuma, or the Conquest of Mexico, which was performed in the large study hall of the new building. It must have been an impressive presentation, for real muskets were used, fired out the windows off-stage for greater effect, and paper pallets filled with liquid carmine gave a bloody air to the conflict between Spaniards and Indians. The play was an immense success. It was probably the first such dramatic production at the institution, with the set design by Thomas Butler, a seminarian who was later to be president of the college. A crew working under the amiable direction of an excited and enthusiastic Father Bruté assisted Mr. Butler. Father Pise was disappointed with the final result, however, and quietly gathered all the copies of the script during the following vacation period and destroyed them all, leaving us with no knowledge of the play’s content.

That same year, the college also gave its first orchestra concert under the direction of Mr. Gegan. It too was a great success with the students, faculty and their guests. The father of one of the violinists traveled down from Philadelphia unexpectedly to attend the concert. Discovery of the presence of the gentleman brought terror to the heart of poor Mr. Gegan, however, for he had only recently dropped the lad from the orchestra because he was utterly incapable of playing the selections on the program. He could
not disappoint the father, and so hit upon the simplest scheme of greasing the young man’s bow so that he could assemble with the orchestra and scratch away to his, and his father’s, heart’s content, without actually making a sound. All were delighted and the father was none the wiser for this innocent deception.

Some of the students decided to form themselves into a military unit, and accordingly drew up a list of officers, designed uniforms and insignia, and began marching about with muskets (or broom handles, if muskets were unavailable). Father Bruté, recalling Father DuBois’ abhorrence at the thought of Mount St. Mary’s becoming a military school, protested to Father McGerry, and when that had no effect, carried his concern to Father Egan. The president at first saw the whole thing as an innocent pastime, but when the rhetoric of it became a little more than even he could tolerate, quickly brought the fantasy to a halt, and the college was restored to its civilian tranquility.

There were sad moments as well as celebrations. In those earliest days, it was the custom for the littlest boys to sleep on cots in the president’s room until they had grown accustomed to being away from home. One of the boys, a nine year old named Gabriel Duponceau Garesche, fell ill during the night, and Father Egan carried him in his arms to the infirmary. Before dawn, the child had died while Father Egan stood by helpless. It was All Souls’ Day, November 2, 1828, and Father Egan could barely bring himself to inform the community of the tragedy. Later that day, he wrote a grief-stricken letter to inform the parents, and asked Fathers McGerry and Bruté to send letters of consolation at the same time. The child was laid to rest in the corner of the mountain that had been set aside for a cemetery, and it was some time before the boy’s father could respond to the news of his loss. When he did, he asked only that a suitable marker be put on the grave in the college cemetery and that he and his beloved child not be forgotten in the prayers of the community. It was a moment of brutal reality for Father Egan. He was not merely an administrator, he was a father to this community, and from that time he seemed to be almost lost in a compulsion to secure the welfare of all.

Three days later, death struck again. Father Lynch, who had become renowned in short order in mathematics and science, died suddenly in his room. It was a sad procession that accompanied him to his resting place, the first priest of the faculty to be buried on the mountainside above the growing college.

Father Egan threw himself into the work of securing funds for the financially desperate institution. He began traveling about the country in search of benefactors and paying students. Father McGerry received letters from him in rapid succession from Washington, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York City again. In those days of difficult travel, the effort cost him dearly. At times he was so exhausted from journeying that he could scarcely write, but nonetheless kept up a continuing correspondence with his “dear brother” Father McGerry and the community at Emmitsburg, never forgetting to greet all by name, even when his handwriting was so feeble as to be nearly illegible.

When he finally arrived home for a brief rest, his health was so broken that his friends and confreres, along with Doctor Shorb, urged him to take a trip abroad in hopes of restoring his health. In late 1828, he sailed for France, and from there traveled overland to Rome. While there, he presented to the pope, the newly elected Gregory XVI, a brief history of the Mount composed by Father Bruté, and received the papal blessing on his endeavors. His health worsened, however, and he decided to begin his return to America. He reached Marseilles on May 29, 1829, in a state of complete collapse, and died there only seven hours after arrival. He was buried in the Grand Cemetiere in Marseilles, with a stone given by the bishop, Saint Charles Joseph Eugene DeMazenod, noting simply that he was “President of Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg.” Unfortunately, during the Second World War, bombs destroyed the site, and later a new train station was constructed over it, so the final resting place of this dear “Little President” is lost to us.

It was some weeks before news of Egan’s death reached the Mount, coming in the form of a simple letter from the American consul in Marseilles, Mr. Thomas P. Tappan:
Marseilles, 29th May, 1829

Gentlemen!

Altho' you may probably learn the event from other sources, yet I deem it a duty, as an American, to inform you of the decease of your President Rev. M. D. Egan; at 7 this evening. He had scarcely landed (at noon) 13 days from Leghorn in a Sardinian Brig e'er his soul took its flight, I hope to Heaven — Hearing at dinner a fainting man was landed sick, I called on him at 4, I presumed after a night's rest he would be better. The doctr (Cauvier) came too late, for he had gone “to that Bourne from which no traveler returns.” His immediate friend the late Catholic Bishop of Philada who was his fellow voyager from Leghorn will naturally more fully advise you.

I am Gentlemen!

Very respectfully,

Thomas P. Tappan

To the Vice President of Mt. St. Mary's Seminary! Mr. Egan's baggage is not yet landed. I understand he had 11 Napoleons in his pocket.

Word of Father Egan's death cast a pall over the whole institution. The archives of the institution contain no documents to indicate the sequence of events at the Mount, except for the many letters of condolence addressed to Father McGerry. How or when the presidency transferred to him is uncertain. He may have simply assumed the position since he was now the sole remaining owner of the foundation. At any rate, we find the letters coming to the college addressed to him as president after this period, and to Father John Purcell as vice president.

President Purcell

Father John Purcell was born in Mallow, County Cork, Ireland, in 1800 and had received his college education at Mount St. Mary’s. He was so esteemed by Father DuBois and Bruté that it was decided to secure the best possible education for him, with the understanding that he would return to join the faculty following his ordination. He was sent to Saint Sulpice in Paris, and in Issy, and was ordained on May 20, 1826, by Archbishop Hyacinth Louis De Quelen of Paris. He had been teaching at the Mount for less than two years when he became vice president.

Father McGerry found his new position extremely difficult. He lacked the warmth and gentleness of Father Egan, and constantly found himself the object of criticism. He soon found that he could not keep up the extensive correspondence that Father Egan had used to win so many friends for the institution; nor could he tolerate the traveling that had contributed to the breakdown of his predecessor. The debts of the college had not been appreciably reduced by Father Egan despite all his effort, and Father McGerry realized that he could do no more, not even as much, as his dear friend had done. In frustration at the impossibility of the task and the harsh criticism that he was getting from all sides, he resigned the presidency after just seven months, on December 10, 1829, and retired from the college. After a short respite in Europe, he returned to the United States to do mission work for a time. Later, when Bishop DuBois founded his first seminary in New York in 1833 in Nyack, it was Father McGerry, older and wiser and perhaps mellowed with time, who became its first president.

Shortly after the departure of Father McGerry from Mount St. Mary’s, Father John Purcell became president of the institution. He had been vice president for a short period before this, but the exact date of his assumption of the presidency is unknown. Even the manner of becoming president is a mystery. The council seemed only to be advisory, and it was not yet vested with the ownership of the institution. In fact, it was not until November 1830 that Father McGerry deeded the property over to Fathers Purcell and Jamison, the latter having become vice president.
at the same time, we presume, that Father Purcell became the president.

However and by whomever he became president, Father Purcell was an excellent choice. He had come to the United States in 1818 and had first taught in Maryland under a diploma granted by the Methodist church. After having met two faculty members from the Mount, he decided to dedicate his life to that work. He was 20 when he began his studies for the priesthood under the tutelage of Father DuBois, a course of studies that he completed in Europe. When he returned to Maryland to join the Mountain faculty, he was already a polished scholar. He quickly gained the reputation of being a wise and sound administrator, and, as president, soon showed himself to be thoroughly amiable in his dealing with students, parents, faculty and creditors.

Until this time, the Mount had continued in operation without a charter, and, indeed, without a clear separation between preparatory students for the college, college students and seminarians. Father Purcell undertook the task of sorting out the organization of the institution, and, perhaps for the first time, took the view that the college was an entity unto itself, not merely an appendage to the seminary or simply a preparatory school for the seminary. In his mind, both college and seminary had distinct purposes and organization, while they remained essential to each other in the daily conduct of the institution.

As regards the seminary, he wished to have the venerable Father Bruté formally appointed by Archbishop Whitfield as superior of the seminary. The archbishop, however, was unwilling to do so, since he considered the seminary only a temporary situation and that Saint Mary’s in Baltimore was the “true” seminary. Despite Father Purcell’s wishes, the permission to teach theology was given almost at the whim of Archbishop Whitfield. Father Purcell stalled as much as he could from sending his theologians on to Saint Mary’s, but inevitably they had to complete a final year there before they could be ordained.

Father Bruté was esteemed by everyone as the superior of the seminary, though that was only an “in-house” appointment. In fact, Father Bruté, in his own quiet and often exasperating way, kept a hand on all segments of the Mount, and usually had his own way. Despite that, and despite the fact that he had prime influence over the council, he was not a member of the council, nor was any official document of the institution ever signed by him, not even when every other priest of the house signed.

An Act for Founding a College: The Mount’s Charter

Father Purcell had to resign himself to the fact that he could not assure stability for the seminary. But he felt it was quite possible to regularize the college. Shortly after his becoming president, he prevailed upon Francis Thomas, later governor of Maryland but then speaker of the house, to propose a bill of incorporation, chartering Mount St. Mary’s as a college entitled to confer degrees.

The Maryland House of Delegates at that time was more than slightly biased against Catholics, and the bill had a difficult time of it. Amendment after amendment was added to the bill, until Mr. Thomas despaired of getting any worthwhile document at all. When it finally passed, it contained a number of oddities, including the state’s right to take from the college any property beyond a total value of $25,000, and annual income beyond $10,000, and the right to change the governing board of the college at will. Father Purcell asked for clarification on the matter from Edward Lynch, the college lawyer, and was told that he should under no circumstances accept the charter. The lawyer distinguished, however, between the fact of incorporation and the acceptance of the charter. The lawyer distinguished, however, between the fact of incorporation and the acceptance of the charter. It was perhaps a nebulous distinction, but sufficient for the college to grant degrees at the commencement of 1831. One graduate that year, Francis L. Higgins of Norfolk, Virginia, received his A.B. from Mount St. Mary’s College, the only one to be awarded a degree that year, and therefore Mount St. Mary’s “first” graduate.

The Act of Incorporation, granted on February 4, 1830, to “John B. Purcell, Francis B. Jamison, John McCaffrey, Alexander L. Hitzelberger, Hilary Parsons, Edward J. Sourin and Thomas
R. Butler,” the clerical faculty (with the obvious omission of Father Bruté), empowered them to establish a body to be known as Mount St. Mary’s Institute for Literary and Scientific Instruction. The corporate authority was vested in Fathers Purcell and Jamison, and extended to the above-named priests as members of the corporation.

A short time later, on February 27, 1830, the legislature approved the amended charter, entitled “An Act for Founding a College near Emmitsburg in Frederick County.” At Mr. Lynch’s advice, Father Purcell went to an old friend of Father DuBois, Roger B. Taney, later chief justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, to seek his help. Mr. Taney suggested refusal of the charter, and then pointed out the necessary changes. With his help, a new charter was proposed in Annapolis, and after much debate, was granted on February 21, 1834, without the noxious rights the state had held to itself in the former document. The second, acceptable, charter was amended in 1836 and several times more in the years that followed.

After the Act of Incorporation of 1830, the faculty drew up and adopted rules under the title “The Constitution of the Incorporated President and Council of Mount St. Mary’s College.” From that date, the council became the official governing body of the institution, electing officers and overseeing the properties. After 1838, the president and council also assumed ownership of the properties “in perpetuum,” thus eliminating the clumsy procedure of deeding properties over from president to president.

Once the college was incorporated, Father Purcell undertook a rigorous academic reform. On October 17, 1831, he announced that candidates for degrees had to possess a critical knowledge of the vernacular, and “Must prove themselves, on examination, to be masters of the most difficult Greek and Latin authors and well acquainted with mathematics and philosophy. Nothing less than a thorough course of scientific and classical studies shall entitle a student to his degree.”

New faculty members were added, including a replacement for Joseph Gegan, who had gone to Baltimore. Mr. William Andre took over the teaching of music, a position he held until 1843. To bolster the teaching of sciences, Dr. Anthony Hermange joined the faculty as professor of “natural philosophy and chemistry,” and the apparatus essential for the teaching of the various sciences was ordered from Paris and installed at the Mount in 1831.

A college journal was instituted, called “The Mountaineer,” which flourished only briefly, but re-emerged in 1893 as a student publication and continued until 1923, when the “Echo” replaced it. Other student organizations date from this period, some remaining in existence for only a short time, others living on to appear again and again throughout the nineteenth century in the documents of the college. They included the Carrolltown Debating Society (a musical organization), the Academus Society, the Philosophical Society and, finally, the Mountain Cadets, a military organization that lasted for many years, until the time of the Civil War.

The former notion of an education tailor-made to each student’s or his parents’ whim was gone. Now a strict course of studies was demanded of all. For the college students that included Latin, Greek, English, French, Spanish and German in the languages. The scientific curriculum embodied mathematics, surveying, geography, natural philosophy (physics), chemistry, geology, botany and astronomy. History, poetry, rhetoric, oratory, moral philosophy, logic and music rounded out the basic education. Drawing, Hebrew and musical instruments could be studied as electives. Music was a particularly popular choice, and a chorus and orchestra gained a considerable reputation.

However popular music was with students, it was often less enthusiastically embraced by parents, and the archives are full of complaining letters, including one stating that “my son is not to study flute or corionet (sic) as such things are unsuitable to a proper education.” The Mount was, at that time, considered a “French” school, and only after the election of Father McCaffrey as president in 1838 did it become accepted as an “American” school. In the meantime, the presence of such foreign-born and foreign-edu-
cated persons as Fathers Bruté and Purcell gave a decidedly continental air to the establishment.

From the beginning, the institution had maintained slaves. It owned a few; some were sent to work a determined number of years in lieu of tuition, and a few were kept to be hired out to other plantations as an additional source of revenue for the college. Father Purcell had serious difficulties condoning the use of slaves, and tried to alter the situation as part of his reform. On September 10, 1830, he wrote from the Mount to his vice president, Father Jamison, then in Baltimore on business:

…I am particularly anxious that something decisive be done regarding our negroes. Dan and Louis are gone off, and I can only say God’s peace be with them! Abraham, Nace and Peter I have told to look out for masters for themselves, but on second thought I sent them to their work as usual until you return. If you could get, or agree with me on the propriety of it, I can easily procure white men who will come as lay-brothers and work for us. I wish all colored gentry at a very respectable distance from the premises.

Father Purcell, however, could not get his vice president or his procurator, Father Hilary Parsons, or his council to agree with him. The issue of slaves at the college remained an unsolved one, and the institution would continue to make use of them until 1858.

The Know-Nothing Party and the Mount

While Father Purcell was attempting a sweeping reorganization of Mount St. Mary’s, with some successes and some defeats, a serious problem developed among the students as the college began to feel the effects of Protestant-Catholic tensions. The Reverend John Breckinridge was beginning his diatribes against the church that would culminate in the famous debates of 1832 with the Mount’s great alumnus, Father John Hughes, in Philadelphia. The Know-Nothing Party gained in strength and mobs were attacking and burning convents and Catholic churches.

There were a sizable number of non-Catholic students at the college, who were expected to attend religion classes with the Catholic students and began to smart over the superior attitude taken by their Catholic peers in the safety of a Catholic ambience. Urged on by the scurrilous articles of The Protestant, a defiantly anti-Catholic paper that was smuggled regularly into the college, they began to take the Catholic students and some of their teachers to task. Someone formed a mock-church that was dubbed “The African Church” and used its childish format to satirize the beliefs of his fellows. What began as a childish prank soon developed into hand-to-hand combat, with each side assured that God was with it. Father Purcell pleaded, cajoled, attempted mild discipline, but finally was forced into the position of expelling a number of students. Father Bruté bemoaned the president’s lack of force while all this was going on, and perhaps pushed Father Purcell into precipitous action.

Following a sarcastic and accusatory open letter circulated among the students after the supposed forced conversions of two of the Protestant students to Catholicism, Father Purcell attempted to quell the affair during his regular weekly conference. Eight of the students addressed a letter to the president in response to his remarks:

We had hoped that our worthy President would have given us an opportunity of repelling the accusations brought against us or at least of declaring the motives by which we were activated, before he thus publicly denounced us as Blockheads unable to comprehend dogmas we affected to ridicule.

Father Purcell met with the young men privately and attempted some sort of reconciliation. The leader of the group, Edward Tilghman, decided to carry the business to the public, and began by contacting a newspaper publisher. A handwritten copy of the letter in the college archives does not include the recipient:

Dear Sir.
I beg leave to present to you in the name of those gentlemen engaged with me in the late unpleasant business of our sincere tribute of gratitude for the solicitude and manly interest you still continue to feel for a party which you know of old is persecuted. We would not however wish that while we remain in
this house any of our proceedings should be published as we are confident that it would be the signal for our expulsion upon one pretext or another. Tis not however improbable that we shall in short time leave a place where we plainly perceive we are proscribed and then we shall consider ourselves at perfect liberty to make known to a candid public the motive that induced us to such a measure. Should this be the case, we shall deem ourselves happy to make use of your interest in Frederick for having them published. We should have parted before this but for the apology made to us by Mr. Purcell. We still however perceive that we are shunned both by boys and masters as if we were rather devils than human beings. This of course is not to be endured. Should matters come to extremities could you not secure the pen of a certain Mr. Nox? I have understood he is a bitter enemy to this institution and an able writer. I suppose you saw the Cowens in Frederick. James Hughes has not returned nor do I think it likely that he will. Enclosed I send you copies of the letter I could procure. They are but shabby, I confess but as I have not had time to take copies I hope you will excuse their appearance.

Yours etc. Edward Tilghman.

This copy, and others, all in the hand of Mr. Tilghman and preserved in his own copybook, were evidently confiscated by Father Purcell or another member of the Mount community and placed in the archives, where they still remain. In the face of all this, Father Purcell found it necessary to expel the students involved. Shortly thereafter, an article appeared in The Philadelphian, over the name of Mr. Tilghman, which attacked Father Bruté, went to Baltimore to work with the sick, as did Father Hickey. So many other Catholic clergy and religious also gave themselves willingly to service among the victims of cholera that The Philadelphian found itself publishing articles of gratitude rather than of attack.

The following year, 1832, Father Purcell again tried to convince Archbishop Whitfield of the importance of continuing the teaching of theology at Emmitsburg. After a visit to the Mount in April, the archbishop relented to the extent that he extended the former five-year permission by another two years. In a letter written on May 10, he said, “I add that were it absolutely necessary to continue Theology longer, that sooner than see the college fall to destruction, I would never prohibit its being taught.” Once again, by a piecemeal approach, the major seminary at the Mountain remained intact.

Father Bruté and President Purcell in Conflict

Father Bruté, in great fear of the $40,000 debt that had accumulated, continued to urge reunion with the Sulpicians in Baltimore. The Sulpicians, nevertheless, again refused to consider it in view of their own financial problems. Father Bruté then proposed that the priests of the house form their own religious community. Writing to Father Jamison in September of 1832, he finds the discipline in the house too weak, the lack of a religious community an opening for state interference, and the future generally bleak. He deplores the fact that Father Purcell will not conform to what he, Father Bruté, saw as the qualifications of a “good president.” Finally, the
following April, he wrote to Father Purcell asking his resignation:

As for your case as president—I think now, as the motive of my own wish that you remain so, was I convinced that you could be supported by certain limitations and regulations to which you cannot submit, but in fact you are too weak in your administration; it is better you resign and then, as you said, continue to apply earnestly your excellent talents to your great trust for the church here—You will find it no inconsistency and no real alteration of my perfect esteem and affection for my old friends here these 12 years and more.

Whatever Father Bruté’s motivations were, his view of Father Purcell was not shared by the rest of the community. The young president had brought the college to a level of academic integrity that it had never before known. It had moved out of the backwoods of Maryland into national view. Even physically, it was no longer so remote, for one of the projects that Father Purcell had engaged in was the running of a railroad from Baltimore to Frederick, joined to Emmitsburg by a regular stage run eight times a week. Father Purcell had established enough of a reputation that, as Father Bruté was writing his letter, the president was being considered in Rome for a bishopric. In due time, Father Bruté would plead for Father Purcell to remain at the college, but for the moment, he continued to belittle the efforts of the head of the college. It was not Father Bruté’s most charming moment.

A turn of events came when the diocese of Cincinnati fell vacant. At the same time, a coadjutor was being considered for New York to help the aging Bishop DuBois. Both Father Purcell and his long-time friend, Father John Hughes, were being considered in Rome for the positions. Father Purcell, educated in Europe, was considered the urbane, scholarly gentleman, while Father Hughes, at one time the gardener at Mount St. Mary’s before entering the seminary and being educated there, was considered a “self-made” man. Both had become important on the scene of the American church.

Bishop England, then in Rome, was consulted by the cardinal prefect of the Propagation of the Faith, the office then in charge of the United States since it was a mission country. The cardinal noted that the men seemed equally qualified and that he was having a difficult time deciding who should be bishop of Cincinnati. The pope was inclined to appoint “the gardener” since Cincinnati was then a part of the rugged northwest, still largely unsettled and untamed. Bishop England remarked to the cardinal, as tradition has it, that Father Hughes was a self-made man and therefore quite possibly the better choice. Within a few days, Bishop England again met the cardinal and was told that as soon as the pope had heard that Father Purcell was a self-made man, the decision had been made to name him bishop of Cincinnati. Though the error was placed before the pope, he declined to change the appointment, and the “urbane” Father Purcell went to the wild northwest, and Father Hughes became the future first archbishop of New York, succeeding his old mentor, Bishop DuBois.

The appointment was made on February 26, 1833, but it was not until July of that year that the official letter arrived from Rome. Father Purcell remained to open the school year on August 15. The only record we have of those last days is the diary of Mr. McCaffrey, which records that “about the 20th” of September, Father Jamison became president, and Father Hitzelberger, a member of the faculty, became vice president. With that, Bishop Purcell left the Mountain for his new duties.

Bishop Purcell’s departure from the college was undoubtedly sad for the community that had grown to love this gentle young man. Their sadness, however, was tempered by the arrival shortly afterwards of Bishop DuBois, on his way to a synod in Baltimore. The founder of Mount St. Mary’s spent four days renewing old acquaintances, visiting the graves of Mother Seton and her first companions, celebrating Mass at Saint Joseph’s, in the church he had built in Frederick, and in the Church on the Hill, also raised by his endeavors. At each church a huge crowd of students, sisters, townspeople and clergy turned out to greet him. After an absence of seven years, there were many new faces among them, but all felt as though a close and irreplaceable friend had returned among them. Concerts were given, speeches were made, gifts were exchanged, but nothing could quite match the unspoken joy that
Father Jamison and a Troubled Presidency

Despite the optimism, a period of dissension followed during the tenure of Father Jamison, fifth president of Mount St. Mary's. He was born and raised in Frederick, of old American stock, a descendant of the Calverts and a “child of the Mountain,” to use Father Brûté’s quaint phrase to indicate someone who had been educated at the college or seminary. The trouble began when Father Brûté took advantage of the change of proprietors to propose again a merger with the Society of Saint Sulpice, despite that group’s recent decision to remain out of the affairs of the Mountain. He wrote of his plans to the archbishop, who seconded his proposal, and drafted a petition that Father Brûté and four other faculty members signed, including Father Butler, vice president, Fathers Sourin and Whelan, and the young deacon, John McCaffrey. Father Brûté’s most recent proposal was essentially a restatement of earlier ones: rejoin with Saint Sulpice, form a new society or simply dissolve the institution and turn the property over to the care of the Sulpicians.

Fathers Deluol and Elder actually came from Baltimore to inspect the situation, but declined to accept the Mount under any conditions, nor would they act as a sort of protectorate. The most they would give was a brief statement of confidence in the future of the institution, which they and Archbishop Whitfield signed on February 20, 1834. The concept of beginning a new society was again toyed with and again abandoned. Father Jamison was opposed to any of these moves, and he and Father Brûté could come to no agreement. Finally, after just five months in office, he resigned the presidency and left the college. He had desired finally to put Mount St. Mary’s on a firm financial footing, but Father Brûté’s insistence on what had long been a dead issue frustrated all of his hopes. He was pressured to leave the Mountain immediately, so hastily that when he took a few moments to write out the financial statement for his successors, he was not even given access to the books of the college and had to make the statement from memory.

Father Brûté simply could not tolerate what he saw as an emerging American liberalism in the church. American ways seemed to be beyond his comprehension. After Father Jamison’s departure, the older priest wrote in his notes, “Alas! Liberalism must go round the globe. The Church certainly survives. But, as in France already, what results are to be expected everywhere? Spain, etc. Now our America!”

Archbishop Whitfield met with the small community of priests and oversaw the election, first, of Father Whelan to the presidency, who refused it, and then that of Father Butler. Father Jamison had deeded over the property already to Fathers Whelan, Butler and Sourin. Several other transactions took place under the archbishop’s guidance. Father Brûté and Mr. McCaffrey were added to the council along with the three proprietors, and Father Brûté was finally given the formal title of superior of the seminary, with that title extending in authority over all the priests of the house. Under the new arrangement, the superior was to be head of the council, but the president was to preside over the faculty. Father Brûté was content. The situation at the college was disastrous.

As superior of the house and head of the council, Father Brûté assumed to himself the right to veto the election of any officer. Accordingly, when it came time to choose a vice president, he bypassed the holders of deed, Fathers Whelan and Sourin, perhaps for fear that too much power would be in the hands of too small a circle. He excused himself from the council meeting and, after conferring with his preferred candidate, he indicated to the members of the council that he would favor the election of the young deacon, John McCaffrey, to the vice presidency. His subjects dutifully elected Father Brûté’s choice. It was the first time that someone other than a priest had held an office at the college, and if the council members were surprised, and perhaps hesitant, time would make it clear that John McCaffrey was an excellent selection.

Shortly after his election, rumors circulated concerning the abilities of Deacon McCaffrey, and
he resigned his office. Within days, however, he returned and again assumed his post. Events indicate that dissension did not cease at that point, but, for reasons known only to himself, Father Butler destroyed most of the documents pertaining to his administration, and all of his personal correspondence before leaving the college four years later. Thus we have little remaining to clarify the clouded years from 1834 to 1838.

Father Bruté Leaves the Mount

The first major crisis the new president had to face was news in a letter from Father John Hughes to Vice President McCaffrey that Father Bruté was about to be made a bishop. The Second Provincial Council of American Bishops had proposed a new diocese to be established in Indiana, and, despite the protests of some, Father Bruté was nominated as its first bishop. The priests of the college petitioned against his removal, and Father Bruté wrote to Father Wheeler in Baltimore that he had to find a way to “calm the panic and counteract the alarms of all….” It was a strange situation. The clergy at the Mountain were all young and relatively inexperienced; that had been the case ever since the departure of Bishop DuBois. The “aged and learned” figure of Father Bruté had been a symbol of stability throughout those years. It is true that he had often been querulous, even meddlesome, but no one doubted that he had always had the good of the institution at heart. Furthermore, he was venerated by the townspeople and by the sisterhood. It would be nigh unto impossible to replace him. As is true of many saintly individuals, he was difficult to live with, but he would also be very difficult to live without.

One of the vexations that surfaced with the departure of Bishop Bruté was the question of the library. There were some 3- or 4,000 volumes at the college, an impressive number for a small college in those days. But more than 2,000 of the books were the personal property of the new bishop. He wrote to the president asking for his books to be sent to Vincennes. It is understandable, but not justifiable, that the officers of the Mount delayed for several years, on one pretext or another, the shipment of the library to the west. It was only after the bishop’s death, in 1839, that the collection of books finally went to Vincennes. By that time, the college had managed to assemble a collection of its own to replace the lost volumes.
Bruté and the Threat of Liberalism

The acquisition of a suitable library solved just one of the college’s problems. Throughout his administration, Father Butler struggled with his own health. On several occasions he was thought to be close to death, and old friends of the Mount worried about what would happen to the foundation if he were to be lost to it. A Father Williamson offered to buy the college outright and pay off its debts. That offer, however, came to nothing, and Father Williamson is lost to history except for a few letters in the college archives. Bishop DuBois proposed that the Redemptorists take over the college. Father Butler resisted both offers. In the spring of 1835, he sent out a circular letter asking for donations to help pay off the enormous debt settled on the institution. Archbishop Eccleston, who had succeeded Archbishop Whitfield in Baltimore shortly before, set his signature to the petition, and the results were heartening. For the first time in many years, some hope of reducing the burden on the college was realized. Then in March 1835, Father Hilary Parsons, who had acted as procurator of the college for many years, beginning while he was still a student, died after a long illness.

After much negotiation, and with the help of Colonel Robert Annan of Emmitsburg and many others, a new charter was approved by the state of Maryland in 1836, replacing the unacceptable charter of 1830. The Mount was now officially entitled “Mount St. Mary’s College” and all legal rights were henceforth vested in the president and council of that institution.

Despite the security of this new charter, a number of articles appeared in the Truth-Teller and Green Banner, a newspaper published in New York that took particular delight in deriding the Catholic church. The newspaper attacked Father Butler on two grounds: that he had mismanaged the college, and that he was Irish! Bishop DuBois answered the charges, but the young president was so discouraged that he proposed to resign. Father John Hughes wrote from Philadelphia and convinced Father Butler to remain at his post. Archbishop Eccleston, in an attempt to clarify matters, asked Father McElroy, S.J., long a friend of the Mount and pastor of Frederick, to go with Father Whelan, formerly of the Mount faculty, to do an audit. They concluded that the college liabilities amounted to $22,986.16. Also, if all the debts due to the college could be collected, a wish that everyone knew was not about to come true, the college owed a mere $7,491.76. Accepting the more realistic higher figure, the archbishop could see no reason for alarm, and gave his endorsement to the administration of Father Butler.

For some time, Deacon John McCaffrey and his brother, Thomas, a tutor at the college, had been in disagreement with Father Butler over the management of the house. This audit and its acceptance by the archbishop seemed to cast them in a poor light. John McCaffrey resigned as vice president and went with his brother to Saint Mary’s in Baltimore to complete preparation for ordination to the priesthood. In his place, Father Patrick Corry, a member of the council and faculty, was elected vice president. Father Butler found himself more and more at odds with his faculty and council over the government of the college and less able to get their approval for his decisions. His last improvement to the campus was to extend the stone spring house, built in 1810, by an addition, and remodel it to serve as a chapel, dedicated to Saint Vincent, for daily services. That building now serves as the art studios of the college, a tribute to the solid construction demanded by Father Butler.

One event in January of 1838 heartened Father Butler. Father John Hughes, who had been successively gardener and student at the Mount, was ordained coadjutor bishop for New York by Bishop DuBois. It was a great consolation to Father Butler to see his old friend recognized, and he knew that the Mount had a continuing friend in this prelate.
Whatever consolation he had beyond the gates of the college, there was little consolation for the young president on campus. The opposition to his policies had become so strong among his council members that he finally decided to resign his office. On March 14, 1838, he met with the council for the last time; his resignation was accepted.

It was decided to hold the election for a new president on March 19, in the presence of Archbishop Eccleston. The result was a foregone conclusion: John McCaffrey would be elected, and the council was already making plans for his reception during that March 14th meeting.

Deacon McCaffrey had become Father McCaffrey on March 9, 1838, in Baltimore, already knowing that he was the archbishop’s and the council’s choice to govern Mount St. Mary’s. He had been born in Emmitsburg in 1806, and had entered the college at the invitation of Father DuBois himself in 1814. He had been ordained a deacon in 1831, but had delayed his ordination to the priesthood for seven years, for reasons unknown to us. He had been associated with the Mountain almost from its beginning, as student, faculty member, council member and vice president. Ten days after his ordination to the priesthood, he officially took his position as president of Mount St. Mary’s College. Few realized then that he would hold the position longer than any other person, remaining president of his alma mater for 34 years and seeing it through some of its darkest days.

Father Butler left the college shortly after the election, after having given an accounting of his stewardship. He had managed to obtain the new charter, improved the credit of the college, provided Saint Vincent’s chapel on campus, insured the buildings, reduced the debt by some $7,000, obtained a pledge of permanent protection from Archbishop Eccleston for the seminary (even if not a permanent charter for it), and maintained the college’s academic rigor. The rift that had opened between him and his confreres appeared to have been healed by the election of Father McCaffrey to be his successor. Father Butler served for two years as private secretary to Archbishop Eccleston, before going as a missionary priest to Ohio. He died in 1869 as vicar-general of the diocese of Covington in Kentucky.

Since 1826, when Bishop DuBois had left Mount St. Mary’s for New York, there had been five presidents. Each was young, without any real preparation for the task, laden with huge debts and great uncertainties, often without the support of their confreres and ecclesiastical superiors,
and each had left after a relatively short term in the office. Yet they had brought the establishment from log cabins to a handsome college of solid Maryland granite. They had drawn a stable and respected system of education out of the haphazard and makeshift beginnings. They had won recognition for the college they loved. Perhaps that is the key to their success. The foundation ought to have collapsed. But their dedication and love for it proved the salvation of Mount St. Mary’s.

President McCaffrey

When Father McCaffrey approved the council minutes for the 19th of March, 1838, the meeting that included his formal election as president, he signed himself “John J. McCaffrey, S.S.” The initials after his name signified membership in the Society of Saint Sulpice, but at no other time did he ever sign his name with those initials, nor did he ever indicate that he was in any way connected with that society. He may have indicated thereby the hope for an eventual association with the Sulpicians that did not materialize. In any case, the breach that had existed between the two institutions ceased to exist from the moment of his election, and for many years to come an amicable exchange went on between them.

Fr. John J. McCaffrey, fifth President

The superior of the Baltimore seminary wrote in April of that year that they could hardly afford to lose Father McCaffrey, but that they saw that the great needs of the Mountain could be met in no other way. Still, they refused to give up his brother, Thomas, to teach on the Mount’s faculty. We do not know what persuasive arguments were brought to bear, but nonetheless, Thomas joined the Emmitsburg faculty that very month, and the two Fathers McCaffrey would spend many years in joint activity at their alma mater.

The matter of transferring the property from Fathers Butler, Sourin and Whelan to the new president was a prime concern. Edward Lynch, still the college lawyer, suggested that the former system of deeding the property from president to president was not in the best interest of the institution and proposed that the property be made over to the corporation, “The President and Council of Mount St. Mary’s College,” and that the archbishop of Baltimore be made a member of the corporation “ex officio,” with the right to approve or veto all cases dealing with alienation or transfer of property. During the course of the following year, Father Butler made the necessary arrangements with Father McCaffrey, and for the next 130 years the properties were so vested.

The council itself became more organized after the election of Father McCaffrey, and minutes were regularly entered into the council book from this time forward. Father McCaffrey was president of the college, rector of the seminary (though that title was not in use) and superior of the priests, thus ending some of the difficulties that had arisen during Father Brute’s time as superior. Father Leonard Obermeyer was elected treasurer of the college, the first time that position was separated from the presidency. Father McCaffrey was still the ultimate authority, however, and he continued to keep a very close watch on the finances of the foundation. Within one year, Father Obermeyer was able to report that more than $6,000 had been repaid on the outstanding debt, and that more than $14,000 of credits existed, bringing the real debt of the house to a little more than $30,000. It was an auspicious beginning for the new president. At last there was some stability and a clearly defined framework of organization.

In May 1839, Bishop DuBois paid another visit to Mount St. Mary’s. There are very few records of his visit, but the letters seem to indicate that “the good old gentleman” was failing and that Bishop Hughes, his coadjutor, was having some
difficulties. Probably as a result of a stroke, his ability to speak English clearly was impaired and there were days when his spirits were very low. Still it must have been a joyful occasion for all concerned to have the father of the house in their midst once again.

On June 26, Bishop Bruté died peacefully in Vincennes. He had never been well in these latter days, and the exertions of his difficult mission were more than his tired body could bear. Word came to the Mountain after the students had left for the summer vacation, and it was decided to hold the requiem there after their return. On August 19, the community came from the college and the neighborhood to honor the venerable bishop who had been so integral a part of their lives. Father McCaffrey, in his eulogy, said of the gathering:

If there is something melancholy, there is also something beautiful in the spectacle before me. You have come together in obedience to the best feelings of the heart, as well as to the voice of religion. It is in the true spirit of Christian charity that you offer up united prayers to God, in behalf of one whose memory this congregation and this neighborhood must ever cherish and hold in veneration. For if the best endowments of mind and heart may claim our admiration; if illustrious examples of virtue and piety merit our tributes of respect; if the most active zeal and benevolence exerted in our favor demand the expression of our gratitude; then do we owe the fullest homage of our admiration, reverence and gratitude, to the memory of Bishop Bruté.

During the course of the summer, Bishop DuBois had suffered at least one more stroke, and his recovery from it was doubtful. The archbishop of Baltimore, Archbishop Eccleston, went up to New York to persuade him to hand over the administration of his diocese to Bishop Hughes. Bishop DuBois, in his confusion following the latest stroke, thought that Bishop Hughes was setting him aside without cause, and at first refused to accept the transfer. Only after Bishop Purcell, returning from a visit to Rome, persuaded the old bishop that he must be obedient to what had now become an order from the Holy See, did Bishop DuBois consent to the change of authority. Still, he could not understand what had happened, and he refused to refer to Bishop Hughes by any other title than “Mister Hughes” for the remainder of his life. Though the two lived in the same house, they met only rarely after that. Bishop DuBois passed the remaining years of his life in prayer and quiet, far from his beloved foundation in Emmitsburg.

A number of changes took place at the college during the next few years. Father Corry resigned as vice president in January of 1841 and left the college for the missions. In his place, Father John McCloskey was elected vice president, a position he would hold for the remainder of Father McCaffrey’s presidency. In fact, he would succeed Father McCaffrey in 1872. Three other priests also left the faculty: Fathers Borgna, Elder and Obermeyer. They were replaced by F.P. Giraud, Theodore Giraud and Father James Miller.

In May 1842, Bishop DuBois arrived for a prolonged visit. He presided over the commencement ceremonies that year, but his age and infirmities allowed him to take very little part in any other activities. Still, it must have been a great consolation to him to be in the midst of the college community that was the fruit of his labors. He returned to New York in July, and on December 20, he died quietly in his residence. An era had come to an end.

On January 24, 1843, the Mountain community again gathered to celebrate a requiem, this time for its founder and father. The eulogy, spoken by Father McCaffrey in the oratorical style of the day, matched the sentiments of all:
Now, my brethren, called together by a common feeling of gratitude towards a common benefactor, lift up your eyes, look round about, and tell me what you see! What but monuments of the pure religious zeal of Bishop DuBois, clearly marked with the seal of divine benediction? Who reared to the honor of Almighty God the temple in which you are assembled? Who set it beautifully on the Mountain’s brow, to crown our sacred hill as with a diadem of glory? From this lofty height, enjoying a prospect, which expands and elevates the soul, with half of Maryland stretched before you, and a large part of Pennsylvania, and something of Virginia too, tell me, who has done most for the welfare, above all, the spiritual welfare of those who have pitched their tents upon the mountain’s side, or in its fertile valleys, or on the plain below? Who adorned our neighborhood with that noble collegiate edifice? Who raised up, in tangled forest, that abode of science and letters? Who dedicated to the muses that crystal spring, gushing in cool, delicious waves from the rock? Who taught the wilderness to bloom as a garden, and converted the rude forest into a paradise in which study and piety might, like twin angels, walk hand in hand, and from which it might be hoped that the tempting serpent of worldly dissipation would be effectually excluded? Who established that nursery of the American Church from which so many Priests and Bishops have gone forth, pastors according to God’s own heart, men whose talents, learning, and piety have reflected luster on the Alma Mater, and rendered Mount St. Mary’s “a bright and enviable name?” Who gave a still more enviable celebrity to St. Joseph’s Valley, and like the Prophet smiting the rock at Horeb, caused a perennial foundation of charity to gush forth, that the poor orphan might not, for want of the well-springs of religious benevolence, perish of thirst in the arid desert of human society? Who gave mothers to the motherless, tender nurses to the destitute sick, meek-eyed, soft-toned sisters to calm the raving maniac, and govern by gentleness and sweet affection the darkened being of whom reason has ceased to rule? Who prepared and formed those Christian heroines, ready at any moment to fly to the seat of contagion, there to hover, like guardian angels, around the suffering and dying, soothing every sorrow, relieving every pain, inspiring confidence by their calm intrepidity, inspiring piety by the beautiful example, inspiring the guilty soul with contrition and the despairing with hopes of mercy, and breathing their own faith, and charity, and humble trust, into the spirit trembling on the verge of eternity? Who, in a word, nurtured the institution of the Sisters of Charity from helpless infancy up to a strong and flourishing maturity? What one man, I ask, has in this our day, and in our country, done most for the relief of human misery, most for the benefit of society? You are all ready with one voice to answer: It is Bishop DuBois, the father of St. Joseph’s, the founder of Mount St. Mary’s.

Expanding the College: Doric Hall

Bishop DuBois’ work in Maryland continued to flourish. During the first four years of Father McCaffrey’s presidency, the college had grown to the point that the buildings in use were no longer adequate. Some years before, Father Bruté had made sketches of a building to stand next to Father DuBois’ stone structure, and these were used to design a new edifice, now known as Bruté Hall. On July 11, 1842, the council voted to appropriate $12,000 for the construction, and the cornerstone was laid on May 2, 1843. The building contained a large study hall, dormitories, rooms for faculty and prefects, and a small area for a library. Because of its design, it was often called “The Doric Hall,” but more popularly it was simply referred to as the Study Hall Building. In 1908, the original building was officially named “DuBois Hall” and this later construction “Bruté Hall” by vote of the college council. During this mid-nineteenth century expansion, the northernmost log buildings were torn down, and the other primitive building was refinished in smooth siding and occupied by the sisters and domestics. For many years it was still used by the college and known as “The White House.”

Father McCaffrey continued a building program over the next several years. Porches were built to bridge the short distance between the College Building and the Study Hall Building; walks were laid, a carriage house constructed; new wash houses and privies were added, and the campus was generally beautified. The seminarians, some 30 in all, were given private rooms in their own section of the College Building. It was Father McCaffrey’s desire to create an orderly and spacious atmosphere.
By 1850, however, the college had nearly doubled its population, having grown to more than 200 collegians. The need for yet another building was apparent, and a three-story structure to contain classrooms, dining rooms and offices, as well as sleeping areas, was designed to stand where the old log houses had been torn down when the Study Hall Building had been constructed. The new building, known as McCaffrey Hall, was to have included a chapel on the third floor, but the architect convinced the president and his council that a separate building for the chapel would be more convenient. Accordingly, McCaffrey Hall was constructed in 1852 as a two-story structure, again from Maryland granite quarried on the mountainside, as were the other two buildings. The same Georgian style of architecture was employed.

This expansion of facilities allowed Father McCaffrey to begin an academic revision as well. Until this time, the college had followed a French model of education: a seven year program leading to graduation and the baccalaureate. An American model was adopted, and the college program was reduced to a four-year course of studies. The younger boys were given separate quarters and classrooms, and were now organized into a preparatory school with a three-year program. The faculty was enlarged, and the requirements for graduation intensified. In addition, the Master of Arts degree was conferred on those who had pursued their work for two years beyond the bachelor’s degree and were approved by the faculty for the advanced degree. Such a degree was conferred, for example, on the well-known painter John LaFarge in June of 1855, along with five others.

The college catalogue for the scholastic year of 1855-1856 gives a good indication of the state of education at Mount St. Mary’s. The faculty included Father John McCaffrey as president and professor of rhetoric. He was a doctor of divinity and was regularly addressed by the title “doctor” rather than “father” (in fact, the latter title was not in ordinary use at the college until many years later). Father John McCloskey, A.M., was vice president and treasurer; Father William H. Elder, D.D., who later became bishop of Natchez in 1857, was director of the seminary and professor of theology, church history and scripture. The professor of moral philosophy and history was Father Henry S. McMurdie, A.M. The other two priests on the faculty were Father William McCloskey, professor of Latin, and Father David Whelan, professor of English.

Caspar Beleké, who had published an important text for the teaching of German, was professor of that language and also Spanish. The sciences, chemistry and natural philosophy, were taught by Charles O’Leary, who also instructed in Greek along with Bernard Quinn. Augustin Van Schalkwyck was professor of French. That year Daniel Beltzhoover, A.M., a graduate of West Point Military Academy, as the catalogue proudly indicates, took over the teaching of mathematics and civil engineering. He was also in charge of the “Mountain Cadets” organization, which had come to its full strength despite the objections of Fathers DuBois and Bruté. James Hickey taught drawing and writing, and the great composer, Henry Dielman, reputedly the first American to receive a doctorate in music, took charge of that department, which had already gained a considerable reputation under his predecessor, Dr. Andre. Dr. Dielman continued to have an important impact on the cultural scene of America.

The prefects of discipline were David Walker, William Cook, John Koch and William Schmidt, all seminarians. Twenty-six other seminarians acted as tutors and teachers for the preparatory school. There were so many of them, in fact, that the council proposed reducing the number of lay professors that year, but Father McCaffrey wisely retained the solid corps of older and more experienced faculty members.

The preparatory school had by far the largest number of students, 167. Children under the age of 12 were no longer accepted. The “Minims,” as the preparatory students were called, were required to follow a difficult course that included Latin, Greek, English, arithmetic, spelling, writing, geography, history, French, Spanish, German, penmanship, drawing and music. The students were examined four times a year, and every Wednesday a public reading was given of their progress when the community assembled for the evening meal. Reports were sent home
twice each year. Classes began on August 24, and ended on the last Wednesday of June. The students remained at the college for Easter and Christmas.

There were 43 college students in 1855, and the course of instruction given by the catalogue was demanding indeed. The only elective courses offered were civil engineering, agriculture, geology and paleontology. Everything else was mandatory. According to the catalogue, that included:

**First year. Latin.** Cicero de Senectute and de Amicitia and Orations against Cataline, Virgil’s Eclogues and Georgics, Prosody, Latin Exercises. Greek. Xenophon’s Cyropoedia, Homer’s Iliad, etc. Mathematics. Young’s Algebra. English Composition, Reading and Declamation. Ancient History and Geography. Natural Philosophy.


**Fourth year.** Latin and Greek studies continued, Philosophy, Metaphysics, general and special, Ethics, Modern History, Rhetoric and Oratory.

In addition to these, studies in the modern languages and in music were prescribed, as well as studies in “civil, political and international law.” Candidates for graduation submitted to private and public examinations, and were expected to prepare and deliver discourses for the approval of the faculty on such diverse topics as “Social Equality,” “Patriotism, Pagan and Christian,” “Maryland, the Cradle of Religious Liberty” and “the French Revolution.”

The catalogue does not list the course of studies for seminarians in 1855, but correspondence and minutes from the council meetings indicate that they included moral and dogmatic theology, scripture, liturgy, patristics, sacred eloquence, Hebrew and Greek, and church law. Because the seminarians also acted as teachers, tutors or prefects, their studies were sometimes abbreviated. Father McCaffrey insisted, however, that seminarians be freed of any duties other than their studies for their last year in order to have as solid a preparation for ordination as possible.

Discipline was severe. Memorization of long passages of Latin or Greek was reserved for minor infractions such as John LaFarge’s exclamation of “Oh, look!” in response to the beauty of an ice-covered tree while walking to the Church on the Hill on a winter’s day. Father McMurdie pleaded for leniency from the president for this breach of the rule of silence, but Father McCaffrey’s only reply was, “Would you have such a thing be an excuse for the loss of discipline?” John LaFarge memorized his lines.

Floggings were given for such things as cursing and brawling, or for keeping a gun or gunpowder in one’s room. The janitor, Bill Welty, had the unwelcome task of holding the boys steady while Father McCaffrey wielded the switch. If a boy was caught talking or otherwise misbehaving in study hall, it was the custom for the prefect to send him immediately to Father McCaffrey to admit his guilt and receive his dole of the hickory stick. One alumnus, years later, recalls in a letter to Father McSweeny, historian of the college in 1906, that a student appeared at the president’s door with downcast eyes, saying, “The prefect sent me to see you, sir.” Without further conversation, Father McCaffrey applied the prescribed corporal punishment to the lad, only to be informed by the tearful recipient that he had been sent because he wished to become Catholic and the prefect had told him to speak to the president about it! Father McSweeney notes that, to his knowledge, that particular student remained firmly Protestant.

An alternative to the switch was “the jug.” A small room, not more than a closet, without windows, was next to the prefect’s room, and miscreants were obliged to sit in “the jug” for hours at
a time, in silence. It was dreaded even more than flogging, and students soon repented of their misdeeds in the dark and airless chamber.

Certain infractions called for even more serious punishment. Possession of tobacco for chewing or smoking was cause for immediate dismissal, as was the use of intoxicating liquors. Father McCaffrey’s judgment was swift and irrevocable. Though the council passed a resolution that “students ought not to be flogged for mere tricks in class,” they also conceded to the president the right to dismiss a student immediately and without consultation should he discover any student making use of either of the forbidden elements.

Father McCaffrey, a rather humorless man and a stern disciplinarian, faced occasional bursts of rebellion on the part of the students. None was so severe as the revolt of 1858, when a number of students, ostensibly in protest against the stern measures of the seminarian-prefects, but really upset by the president’s unbending sense of law, walked out of the college. They took refuge in the village of Emmitsburg, where Professor O’Leary met with them and tried some gentle persuasion and a little understanding to bring the revolt to an end. He had little success, but did convince one of the students that he ought to divorce himself from the movement and go home to Frederick until the matter could be settled. He gave him all the money he had, a dollar and a half, to pay his way, and the young man went off.

A short time later, Father McCaffrey appeared on the scene and ordered the students back to the college. A number returned immediately, but 10 of the older boys held out, hoping to reach some agreement regarding discipline. It was in vain. Father McCaffrey and his council met on the matter. Professor O’Leary was questioned concerning his dealings with the students, and he noted that he did not in any way support the rebellion. He did, however, admit that he had given one of the students money to get home and testified to the good character of three of them that he had had as students. The decision of the administration was absolute. Ten students were expelled, “excluded from the college for ever,” among them, John Lancaster Spalding, later Bishop of Peoria and one of the great figures in American church history.

Professor O’Leary was dismissed, being notified on February 18 that “your duties as a professor and teacher in our college cease from this day.” There was no appeal possible. It did not seem to bother Father McCaffrey that nearly one-fourth of the collegians had been removed. A bill “for expenses incurred” as a result of the rebellion was sent to each of them, and the matter was closed.

There was much criticism of Father McCaffrey’s stern management of the institution from parents and alumni alike. The council occasionally considered the matter, but the president had only to hint at resignation and all discussion ceased. He had, after all, brought stability, in fact prosperity, to the Mountain, and while Know-Nothingism erupted into church burnings and other violence in Philadelphia and New York, and Baltimore became unsafe for Catholics, the college continued in peace, an island in the midst of fanaticism. The many non-Catholic students found no reason to repeat a much earlier attempt, by Edward Tilghman under Father Purcell, to challenge the unabashed Catholicism of the institution. Father McCaffrey was master of the house. Of that, there was not the slightest doubt.

In the years 1855 and 1856 there had been rumors that Father McCaffrey was about to be made bishop of Charleston. In fact, the American bishops in synod had so requested, and the Holy See offered the mitre to him. Alumni and friends alike, their words echoed by faculty and council, begged the president to remain at the college, and he heeded their pleas. Once again, in later years, he was offered a bishopric, but again refused it in favor of his position at Mount St. Mary’s.

Among the good friends of Father McCaffrey was the well-known Orestes Brownson. They maintained a correspondence for many years, and Father McCaffrey’s letters reveal much about himself. His view of the task he had set before him is particularly enlightening. It was written in 1849:

*Engaged in the task of educating American boys, I find that very few have been taught by their parents...*
to obey and sacrifice self-will to duty. Parents generally tell me that their boys are honorable and will not lie: I find that one in a hundred never lies. I find that in three cases out of four the children rule the parents, and ultimately study what they please, and at home do what they please. Boys, I find, have two distinct and often contradictory consciences. I use the word for want of a better. A lad resists his teacher and defies authority — he is sure of the sympathy and applause of the majority of his companions. He most solemnly asseverates before me, before his parents, that he has done nothing but what he believed right to do. I know that if he goes to confession the next hour he will accuse himself of the same act of disobedience, make acts of contrition for it, and resolve never to repeat it, and that without any other promptings than those of his true Catholic conscience.

In all the evils, then, which prevail everywhere in society, in all the contradictions which shock us in the behavior of Christians, I behold but two causes at work, nature and grace. Any institution in which a large number of young persons are crowded together will become a sink of iniquity, a perfect hot-bed of vice for most of them, unless they be watched over with incessant care, unless authority be inflexibly maintained, and unless religion restrain and guide the young minds and hearts.…

The Brewing Storm

A year earlier, the president had written to Dr. Brownson: “I found all our clergy from Boston to Emmitsburg wrong in their politics except Father McElroy (pastor in Frederick). He was wrong four years ago, but I’m never wrong.…” Father McCaffrey’s own politics were strongly stated. To Brownson he wrote:

I have already agreed with you that constitutions grow, are not made….I have taught it in direct contradiction to the Declaration of Independence, that governments derive their power “from God,” not “from the consent of the governed.”…I have just read Bishop Hughes’ pronunciaciones. I thank you for his declaration that the cry for Liberty “is a nuisance.” I read in the People newspaper the words: “Republican institutions are the ultimate destiny of man,” and threw the paper into the fire.

In time, Father McCaffrey would find himself siding with the cause of the South in the Civil War that was already brewing on the horizon, a choice that would nearly ruin the college. Father McCaffrey was often right, sometimes incredibly wrong, but he was never in doubt.

The minutes of the council meeting of July 2, 1856, are perhaps typical of how the president dealt with his advisors. He had already decided that a new chapel was to be built:

The president proposed that we formally determine on the building of a new church. He informed the Council that the Most Rev. Archbishop had already given his consent in writing and under his seal. It was agreed that the President should consult architects about the style and plan: assuming the location to be on the north side of our college garden, the form to be clerestory, the dimensions to be about 68 ft. wide – 100 ft. length for the main body, besides a recess behind of 12 ft and a pediment in front of 6 ft.

A note bound into the volume of council minutes gives the one-word reaction of the priests: “Agreed.”

Construction of the new chapel began almost immediately. Moneys were solicited with the premise that the new building would be a monument to the two great figures of Mountain history, Fathers DuBois and Bruté. The architect of the cathedral of Pittsburgh was engaged. The stone from the mountain quarry was passed over in favor of a more elegant, in Father McCaffrey’s mind, brownstone, and the Georgian style of the earlier college buildings was set aside for a more popular gothic architecture. Over the next year the building rose quickly, up to the
windows of the main level. At that point Father McCaffrey discovered what his council may not have had the courage to tell him. People outside the college were referring to it openly as “Dr. McCaffrey’s folly.” With war talk abounding in the nation, and the economy at a standstill, contributors were not willing to fund a structure that they saw as unessential and out of keeping with the style of the rest of the campus. There the chapel remained, unfinished and undiscussed for more than 50 years. Finally, in 1903, the stone was salvaged for decorative use in the construction of a gymnasium, Flynn Hall, and the site cleared for a playing field. That area, known as “Echo Field,” has for more than 80 years resounded with the joyful enthusiasm of young people at play, a far cry from the lofty sound of organ and choir envisaged by Father McCaffrey. There is no evidence that he ever spoke of the project again, but the stark beginnings of his unfinished dream must have been a constant reminder to him through the remaining years of his presidency that he too could sometimes be wrong.

In 1852, Bishop Francis X. Gartland of Savannah, a graduate and former faculty member at the Mount, along with Father Thomas McCaffrey, the president’s brother, a member of the college community and pastor of Saint Joseph’s Church in Emmitsburg, jointly suggested that preparations begin for an appropriate celebration of the foundation’s golden jubilee. The actual date of foundation, as we have seen, was not all that clear, but Father John McCaffrey settled that question by opting for 1808, and plans went forward. Unfortunately, a cholera epidemic swept through Emmitsburg in 1853, and among its victims was the pastor, Thomas McCaffrey, who died on August 5, and was buried in the cemetery above the college. Bishop Gartland survived him by less than a year, so that neither alumnus was among the throng that gathered at the college on October 6, 1858, to celebrate the jubilee.

The Catholic Mirror of Baltimore gave an account of the two days of festivities that went on at Mount St. Mary’s. For two days beforehand, and on the Wednesday of October 6, carriage after carriage arrived, coming up from Frederick as far as Thurmont (then still known as Mechanicstown) on the new turnpike, and thence by the old toll road as far as the college. Archbishop Hughes arrived from New York, along with six other bishops, five of whom were alumni: Bishops Carroll, Elder, Loughlin, McCloskey and McFarland. Bishop Wood, long a friend of the institution, was also present. In its 50 years, 13 bishops had gone forth from the Mountain. Thirty-five of the more than 100 priests educated at the Mount were present, as were several hundred of the more than 2,000 lay graduates, including two from among the earliest students, Mother Seton’s son, William, and John Lilly.

The opening ceremonies were held in the great hall of the Study Hall Building, with the portrait of Bishop DuBois and a bust of Bishop Bruté placed in a situation of honor. Father McCaffrey addressed a few words of welcome, and then introduced Mr. James McSherry, lawyer-alumnus of the college, as the principal speaker. Mr. McSherry gave a beautiful history of the foundation, which was followed by orchestral selections under the direction of Professor Dielman. George Henry Miles read his poem, Aladdin’s Palace, composed for the occasion, and Father Constantine Pise, formerly of the faculty, read a Latin ode that he had composed to celebrate the jubilee. After the playing of Auld Lang Syne and a few words from Father McCaffrey and Archbishop Hughes, the invited guests, some 200 in number, withdrew to the dining hall of McCaffrey Hall, where a sumptuous dinner followed toasts to the pope, Pius IX, the president of the United States, James Buchanan, and to the memories of DuBois and Bruté.

In the evening, a concert by a group called “The Pyrenees Mountaineer Singers” was given. The cross, recently installed atop the cupola of the College Building had been outfitted with gas jets and was illuminated throughout the night. Also illuminated was the grotto area above the college, around the little shrine of the Blessed Virgin that had been a place of devotion from the earliest days. The students had given up their beds for the night in order to accommodate the many guests, but the joy of meeting old friends brought on remembrances that kept anyone from much sleep.
The morning dawned to heavy rain, which cleared by nine o’clock, and sun shone brightly on the autumn leaves as a long procession wound from the college to the Church on the Hill to celebrate a Mass of Requiem for Bishops DuBois and Bruté. Archbishop Hughes was to have celebrated the liturgy, but was unwell, and his place was taken by Bishop McCloskey of Albany, later archbishop of New York and the first American cardinal. Father Alexander Hitzelberger, an alumnus and former faculty member of Mount St. Mary’s, now a Jesuit and pastor in Frederick, gave the sermon.

That afternoon a second banquet was enjoyed by the large company, followed by music on the violin by Professor Dielman and vocal solos by one of his eminent predecessors, Professor Joseph Gegan. A student chorus offered selections concluding with Home Sweet Home. The whole gathering rose spontaneously to sing Auld Lang Syne one last time together. The writer from the Catholic Mirror said of it:

It struck responsive chords in every breast, awakened the memory of bygone days, opened the wellsprings of the affections, and made tears flow down many an aged and many a youthful cheek — from the venerable Archbishop to the youngest College stripling. The scene can never be forgotten by those present, and the warm hearts of all true “Mountaineers” were more than ever melted into one.

Once again, coaches and carriages of every description took the many guests back along the toll road and turnpike, away from the venerable college on the mountainside. As darkness fell, the illuminated cross above the College Building was the last sign of festival for the first 50 years of Mount St. Mary’s.

Later that year, President McCaffrey published the poetry, speeches and sermons of those days, along with the eulogies given by him in 1839 and 1843 upon the deaths of Bishop Bruté and Bishop DuBois respectively, in a bound volume that alumni treasured in their libraries for years to come.

After the jubilee, the Mount settled again into its ordered way. Few realized what terrible years were ahead. War, bankruptcy and near desertion awaited the venerable foundation of Father DuBois. But it would survive. It had already come through seemingly impossible days. The founder had had to brave years of turmoil and misunderstanding. The five young presidents who followed him had also shared his dedication and suffering, giving their lives figuratively, and in at least one case literally, to keep the institution going. It had risen, under Father McCaffrey, to a fame and stability that made it the foremost Catholic college in the country. Alumni and friends all over the nation looked to the Mountain as a source of strength and hope for the days to come.

None could see in 1858 the irony in the marching cadets, under the direction of Major Beltzhoover, doing their maneuvers on Echo Field in what seemed little more than a game. Too soon those young men would be dying on the battlefields of Gettysburg and Antietam, Mountaineers in blue and Mountaineers in grey, gone from the celebrations of unity to the division of a nation. Father McCaffrey would himself stand in tears over the graves of his students in the college cemetery, unwilling or unable to understand what had happened. The Mountain’s greatest test was still ahead.


Archives, Archdiocese of Baltimore, Baltimore, Md.

Archives, Mount St. Mary’s College, Emmitsburg, Md.

Archives, Saint Joseph Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Md.

Archives, Saint Mary’s Seminary, Baltimore, Md.

Archives, The College of Mount Saint Joseph, Delhi, Ohio.


Council Minutes, Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s, Emmitsburg, Md.


