

The Museum of Newport Irish History MNIH

July 29, 2000

Rev. Robert Hayman
Church of St. Sebastian
67 Cole Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Father Hayman,

Thank you very, very much for the two letters you have recently sent with information regarding the St. Joseph/Barney Street Cemetery and the old first church building.

I have spent many hours researching the matter of exactly what happened to the little old schoolhouse/church building, examining records at the Newport Historical Society, the Newport City land evidence records back to the early 1800's, and talking to the Dioceses of Boston and Hartford historians. Also, the 'Point' section of Newport has had an historical newsletter that goes back about 50 years, and they had looked into a small schoolhouse on Third Street that was converted into a house in about 1850. They 'guessed' that this building may have been the original church, however, I was never able to verify that. They based their idea on the fact that it 'may' have been on a piece of land once owned by the Trevett school teacher who had originally sold the first building to the Church in 1828. That property was in the Point section. As I said, I could not verify that.

As to where the first schoolhouse/church building stood, it was on the first plot bought, the middle of the three eventually purchased. The 'gothic', wooded St. Joseph Church, built in 1837 was, we believe, built on the corner of ^{MT} Vernon St. and Barney. I've sketched this below.

Your most recent letter of July 25th, I believe, points rather directly, along with the clippings from your July 11th letter, that the original building was, in fact moved to Spring Street. This seems to make sense, and I will try to verify it through City records. Frankly, I was not looking at that possibility when looking through the old land evidence records, as we had

P.O. Box 1378 Newport, Rhode Island 02840
Telephone 401-847-2890



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Been looking at a site on Sherman Street, next to Barney Steet, which the old St. Joseph's history booklet had suggested was the site of the moved old schoolhouse/church. That building is clearly not of the period, the Historical Society indicating its' age as about 1840-50. We were also trying to verify the 'Point' story.

At any rate, we'll proceed to try to verify this excellent lead, and I'll write as soon as we find anything positive.

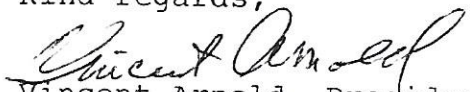
Regarding the convents built on Spring Street, member Pat Murphy had researched that previously, and indicates that there were two other buildings (beside the first 'cottage'), the first, as you show being moved to Lee Ave., the second, three story building, more recently moved to Thames Street, where it is now a large B&B. Pat is trying to identify the exact location of the 'fist' one on Lee Ave. (Which is some distance down Spring, and runs between there and Thames.)

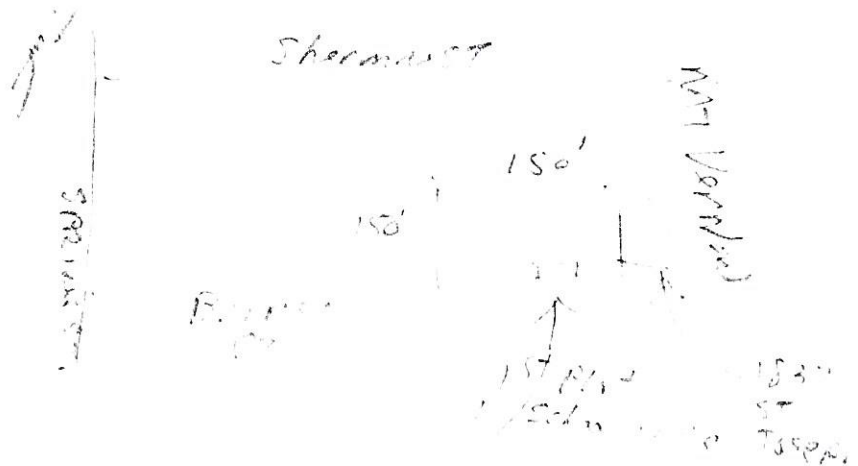
I would indeed like to look over your material and will call perhaps next week to set a time.

Again, thanks very much for your great information.

My sketch is very poor, and if you'd like, I can send along a copy of the City plat showing the three pieces of land.

Kind regards,


Vincent Arnold, President



Church of Saint Sebastian
67 Cole Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island 02908
401-741-0198

Vincent Arnold
P.O. Box 1378
Newport, Rhode Island, 02840

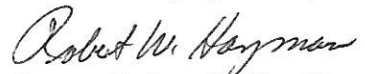
July 15, 2000

Dear Mr. Arnold,

I am sending along a few other pieces of information on the first convent in St. Mary's. It seems to me that the information shows that the old school house was moved to Spring Street for use as a chapel where morning mass was said while the new church was being built and then it was remodeled into a convent for the use of the sisters. Would you read the information in the same way or would you have a different view? I would value your opinion.

I would also appreciate it if you could draw a sketch for of where you believe the old schoolhouse stood and where the first St. Joseph's church stood. I stopped to see the site when I was in Newport recently. I think you have done a great job.

Sincerely yours,



Rev. Robert W. Hayman

ST. MARY'S, Newport

Newport Daily News

Tues, Aug 8, 1848

The foundation of the new Catholic Church was commenced in this town yesterday. It is to be built on the lot where the small chapel now stands in the south part of Spring St. and will cost when completed about \$30,000.

ST. MARY'S, Newport

Newport Mercury

Sat, July 3, 1880

A contract for the building of a three-story, wooden convent for the Srs. of Mercy has been awarded to John D. Johnston. The plans were drawn by Dudley Newton. Description of the proposed building. The building will be speedily begun.

ST. MARY'S, Newport

Newport Mercury

Sat, July 17, 1880

The old convent building on Spring street has been disposed of by lottery. Winning number was held by Miss Rosie Rogers in the employ of J. P. Kernochan.

ST. MARY'S, Newport

Newport Mercury

Sat, July 22, 1880

The Catholic Convent on Spring street bought by Michael J. Daly has been removed to Lee avenue where it will be made over into a tenement house.

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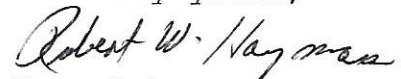
July 11, 2000

Dear Mr. Arnold,

I am enclosing with this note the copies of the materials I have found that might or might not throw some light on what happened to the schoolhouse first used as a church in Newport.

As part of doing some research on St. Mary's, Newport, I have assembled a folder of material on the Irish in Newport (some of which you might already have) which I would be happy to share. It concerns mostly the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in Newport beginning in 1861.

Sincerely yours,



Rev. Robert W. Hayman

tea by his housekeeper. This was the coldest reception they had ever had; but love makes all things light, and they went to work with a will to put the house in conventional order. The room selected for the chapel was soon decorated as handsomely as their scanty means would allow. Good Father Fitton was so pleased with their efforts that he gave them a valuable oil-painting of our Divine Lord with His hands bound as a prisoner, which they reverently placed over their humble altar. Matting covered the floor, scarlet drapery lent a sombre hue to the surroundings, and prie-dieux were received from Providence. On the following Monday the schools were opened with a very fair attendance. Every morning the Sisters heard Mass in the church across the street, "The Star of the Sea." The convent was styled St. Marie's of the Isle, in memory of the exquisite convent of that title built on the Lee by Mother M. Josephine Warde, sister to the more celebrated Mother F. X. Warde.

Mrs. Goodloe Harper was the donor of this property. To this gentlewoman and Miss Emily Harper, daughter and granddaughter to the renowned Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Newport owes a debt of gratitude. The cottage had been the first church. When the new church was finished Miss Harper suggested that the old could be modelled into a convent, and she gave it to reverend mother for that purpose. All the wealthy friends of Miss Harper came to visit this poor house, but she alone offered aid to make the necessary improvements. This zealous lady has always kept up her interest in the Newport convent. For many years she was accustomed to spend her summers at her charming residence, "The Rocks"; and while there she would frequently visit and encourage the Sisters. Although she has now no home at Newport, she usually spends a few weeks there every year. A fine convent and schools have since been built by Father Fitton's successor, Very Rev. William O'Reilly. It was thought that Newport would

make a delightful resort for sick and aged Sisters, but the cottage was subject to a nocturnal plague of fleas and rats which made it all but uninhabitable. The new house is said to be quite free from these distressing creatures.

In May, 1856, Mother Warde, feeling urgent need of experienced members, wrote a touching letter to her sister, then superior of St. Marie's of the Isle, Cork, begging her to give or lend a few professed members. When read aloud for the community it excited in many a burning zeal for the foreign mission. Two were selected for Providence—one a professed member of fifteen years' standing, highly educated, a brilliant musician, and very eager for the foreign mission. This lady was well known to Mother Warde. Of the other Mother M. Josephine wrote: "I send you Sister M——, to my own great loss. She is fully capable of doing any duty in the Order, most valuable regarding the management of the schools, and has a lively and most amiable disposition." The former came to labor among Indians and suffer martyrdom, but, as no chance then appeared of doing either, she returned to Ireland after seven months of missionary life. Absolutely without the slightest vocation for the foreign mission for which she had been sighing for years, she could not make up her mind, unless commanded, to live in the frigid regions of New England or labor among a people with whom she could never assimilate. The other at once adapted herself to the circumstances of the new country, and took an active share in every duty. Their labors were no longer in the bright, airy school-rooms of St. Marie's of the Isle, situated amid smiling gardens, but in close, crowded, dingy quarters, half-chapels, half-schools. Nor were their pupils like the bright, docile children they had known "at home." Anything to equal the roughness, rudeness, pertness, and insolence of the young people of that epoch the Sisters never encountered since or before. The Catholic children had all come from the common or, as they styled them, the "Yankee" schools. The process of education to

Previous to the erection of this building, the male children of the parish received their instructions in an old wooden building (since known as Wigenhauser's Hall) on the north side of Levin street, presided over by the late William K. Delaney, while the female school was in the old convent.

The number of scholars in regular attendance at this school during the past year was between six and seven hundred. The only persons employed in teaching this large number of pupils are the sisters from the convent, and their anniversary exercises at the close of the spring term have long been a marked feature of Newport's educational interests.

THE PARISHIONERS.

The parish numbers between four and five thousand souls, with the exception of during the season, when this number is considerably increased by the presence of summer residents whose servants are largely of the Catholic faith. There are also quite a number of the summer residents themselves who attend this church. Among the most prominent of these are, Gov. Carroll and family, of Maryland; Mrs. Havemeyer and family, Mrs. Gibert, Mrs. Isaac Bell, Mrs. Oelrichs and Mrs. W. R. Travers and daughter of New York; Miss Lyman of Boston; Col. J. N. Bonaparte and family, Mrs. Acosta and Mrs. O'Donnell, of Baltimore.

Father Grace at present has two assistants, Father Thos. P. Grace, his brother, and Father Thos. F. Doran. The officers of the church are, Messrs. Michael McCormick and Thomas Galvin, Trustees; and Andrew Quinn, Thomas E. Shea and Patrick Conheny, Collectors.

The parochial residence is an attractive two-story cottage, located on the William street side, toward the rear. At the time the property was purchased this building stood near the front of the lot and was the residence of the late Dr. David King.

THE CEMETERY.

The cemetery belonging to this parish is located on Spruce and Warner streets, just above the Island Cemetery, and comprises between three and four acres. The only grave within the enclosure reserved for the remains of deceased priests, is that of the late Very Rev. William O'Reilly, which is marked by a handsome monument. The entire grounds are well cared for, and costly stones and monuments designate the resting places of many who, in life, aided materially in bringing about to-day's results.

in East Boston. This left the flock with an unfinished church and a heavy debt on their hands, without a Father to guide them, but it was not for long, as the late lamented Bishop O'Reilly soon appointed his brother, the late Very Rev. William O'Reilly, to carry out the work which his predecessor had so bravely begun. Father O'Reilly took possession of his new charge in August, 1855, and not only carried out the work of completing the church, but made many other improvements, conspicuous among which was the erection of the handsome school building described below, at a cost of about \$65,000. This latter undertaking, of course, greatly increased the church's indebtedness, to meet which must have taxed the reverend gentleman's financial ability to the utmost. He would undoubtedly have mastered it, however, had his life been spared, but God, in his infinite wisdom, evidently wishing other devotees of the faith to perform a part in the completion of this great work, called him away quite suddenly on the 23d of December, 1868, leaving a heavy debt and a bereaved parish for his successor. Rev. Father O'Connor was appointed to fill the vacancy thus unexpectedly made, until September, 1869, when, through the appointment of the late Bishop McFarland,

REV. PHILIP GRACE, D. D.,
the present incumbent, assumed charge of the temporal and spiritual affairs of the parish. To an ordinary man, the charge of a parish of this size, with a

thoroughly renovated from bottom to top, the floor of cement replaced by one of tile, and steam heat introduced into the church and all the buildings belonging to it, and a new convent erected at a cost of about \$10,000.

THE CONVENT.

At the time the site for the church was purchased, the estate opposite, fronting east on Spring street 65½ feet, north on Fair street 106½ feet and south on Gidley street 107 feet, was purchased for a convent and used for such until 1880, when the building, being old and inadequate, was moved to Lee avenue, where it is now owned by M. J. Dealey as a private residence. Immediately upon the removal of the old building, a new one was begun on the same site, which resulted in the spring of 1881 in the completion of the present structure, a large square frame building, three stories in height, and supplied with all the modern improvements and conveniences for the purposes for which it was intended. Sister M. Borroméo is the mother of the convent, and at present has eight sisters under her care. In connection with this convent is an academy where the higher branches are taught by the sisters to day scholars only.

THE SCHOOL BUILDING PROPER

is a large, three-story granite block, situated, on an additional purchase of land, at the immediate rear of the church, fronting on Levin street at the north and on William street at the south, with the main entrance on the former street. This building was erected in 1865, under Rev. Father William O'Reilly, and is undoubtedly one of the best school structures in New England. On the west side of the building, next the church, appears the following tablet:

"Erected by the
Catholics of Newport,
B. I., A. D. 1865,
Very Rev. Wm. O'Reilly, V. G.,
Pastor."

Newport Mercury Sat, August 16, 1884