

*The Society of Jesus and Academia in Nova Cæsarea:**Robert I. Gannon, S.J. & the Re-Birth of St. Peter's College, 1930-1936***By Alan Delozier**DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i1.105>

Rev. Robert I. Gannon, S.J. - A Portrait (Peacock Pie, Jersey City, NJ: Saint Peter's College, 1934)
[Saint Peter's University Archives: Record Group (RG) 27, Visual Images: Gannon, Robert I., S.J.]

The rebirth of St. Peter's College during the early years of the Great Depression gave rise to an uncommon renaissance that took shape mainly through the handiwork of Robert I. Gannon, S.J., who became the first dean in 1930, spearheading reorganization of a college that had been closed since 1918. In the process, Father Gannon developed an academic curriculum that would not only accommodate Catholic tradition, but keep pace with the era of practical educational offerings that could help the local youth population advance in economic and social status. This included individual students who were recruited regardless of religious, ethnic, and racial origin, but based

solely on the promise of top level academic performance. St. Peter's had to overcome different tests from religious superiors and civic officials alike in order to serve a focused constituency that arose amongst the ranks of the poor yet academically inclined of Northern New Jersey. This vision of providing an opportunity for local students who thought higher education might be out

of their reach had an impact on the creation of St. Peter's College from its re-opening in 1930, and still bears the pedagogical, commercial, and diplomatic imprint of Father Gannon.

Robert I. Gannon, S.J. – The Formative Years and Educational Background

Robert Ignatius Gannon was born on April 20, 1893 in Staten Island, New York to a middle-class, Irish-American family.¹ As the son and one of nine children reared by a lawyer and railroad executive, Robert first studied at the Jesuit-run Loyola School of Manhattan prior to being sent to Georgetown University in 1909, where his studies focused mainly upon Greek and Latin. Upon graduation from Georgetown four years later, Gannon entered the Society of Jesus as a novice, completing six years of study and formation at Woodstock College in Maryland, followed by a teaching assignment at Fordham Prep in the Bronx. Thereafter, he spent a number of terms at the Gregorian University in Rome where he secured a doctorate in sacred theology before his 1927 ordination. A seminal event came when Gannon first abandoned “parochial” instruction and attended Cambridge University over the next three years.² It was mainly at Cambridge that Gannon developed his own philosophy about the proper organization of Catholic higher education in the contemporary world, a belief system that took into account the necessity of religious formation and made expansive room for the “secular” branches of knowledge that added to his already deep-seated classical blueprint.³ His educational viewpoint would prove to

¹ Thomas E. Curley, Jr., “Robert I. Gannon, President of Fordham University 1936-49: A Jesuit Educator” (PhD diss., New York University, 1974), 1; “Restored St. Peter’s, Fr. Gannon dies at 84,” *The Catholic Advocate*, 16 March 1978), A9. The official term for the Jesuit University of New Jersey is currently “Saint Peter’s University,” but most references over time feature the abbreviated “St. Peter’s College” designation. For the sake of consistency, “St. Peter’s College” will be used throughout this document except where a publication features the full spelling of “Saint” in the title or a quote.

² Curley, 14-17; “Robert I. Gannon – Honorary 1941,” Bowdoin College Honorary Degree Biographical Information Release (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 1941), 1; Wolfgang Saxon. “Rev. Robert I. Gannon Dies at 84; Former President of Fordham U.,” *The New York Times*, 13 March 1978, A19.

³ The original core curricular intent of the renewed St. Peter’s College based itself on traditional themes of pedagogy known to Jesuits such as the Classics, Theology, Philosophy, and even some exposure to the Natural Sciences and other like subject areas. Use of the word “secular” is a general one that refers to special courses and majors that were continually evolving, or newly coming into vogue and could benefit from an established foundation. For example, popular specializations in Business or Medicine were joined by such niche offerings as Home Economics,

be immediately influential when he returned as Dean at the Downtown Division of Fordham University in 1929 before arriving in Jersey City to guide St. Peter's College one year later.

Father Gannon's Georgetown and Fordham centered their educational system upon the Jesuit standard *Ratio Studiorum* (or "Plan of Study" dating from the sixteenth century), which featured a concentrated exposure to, and training in, Latin, theology, philosophy, modern language, and history along with related subject areas, as Father Gannon used this intellectual concept of multiple liberal arts classes to craft his desired vision of a well balanced curriculum.⁴ Within the Maryland-New York Province of the Society of Jesus (jurisdiction wherein St. Peter's operated), the purity of the *Ratio* in a more modern setting became even more challenging to maintain due to modern and commercial academic ideas that did not embrace a pure theological and philosophical foundation. This era often hosted a more liberal look at existing standards and in some cases, the Jesuit approach had to adapt to the "craze for pleasure" and "passion for earning money" focus that went with the spirit of the age.⁵ Part of this movement included the paring down of the seven-year curriculum (joint prep schools and colleges), institution of "unit" (or credit) hours along with more academic majors, electives, and flexibility on such required topics as Latin and Greek.⁶ These moves became a concession made by Society of Jesus schools to counter against losing prospective students, embracing the larger picture of core identity and fighting for their very survival.

Journalism, Musicology, Radio Studies, Physical Education, and others that appealed more to the masses appeared to be on the radar of Gannon as he looked towards both the present and future course of higher education and its practicality outside of the walls of academe alone. Robert I. Gannon, S.J., *Poor Old Liberal Arts* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1961). For more perspective on educational trends during the 1920s and 1930s please consult the following recommended works: Oliver C. Carmichael, *The Changing Role of Higher Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1949); United States Office of Education, *Accredited Higher Institutions* (Washington, D.C., 1922-1949).

⁴ Curley, 51.

⁵ Kathleen A. Mahoney, *Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America, The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 236.

⁶ Mahoney, *Catholic Higher Education*.

Father Gannon ultimately saw education in the classics model as a means of equating immigrant success not only with professional accomplishments, but also propitious growth on par with the middle-upper class Protestant majority. This viewpoint came in part from his own semi-patrician upbringing and powers of observation. Father Gannon also realized that money lay at the heart of education, sustainability, and even respectability. This combination became the basic circumstantial backbone from which St. Peter's College arose.

Gannon in the Garden State: Re-Birth of St. Peter's College and Jesuit Higher Education in New Jersey – Early 1930s

For many American Catholics, higher education more often than not was seen as the great leveler and provided a direct line to professional accomplishment. Even by the standards of the economically vigorous Jazz Age of the 1920s, the prospect of college attendance was somewhat rare for most Catholic youth, but opportunities existed for those who had hopes of secular reward through pedagogical means that did not conflict with their spiritual compass.

St. Peter's College had been originally chartered in 1872 and the school offered matriculation until its closure caused by dwindling enrollments due to the Great War in 1918. Within the broader world of American Catholic higher education, the place of the newly conceived St. Peter's came about in large measure with various handicaps such as finding a realistic and workable niche within this competitive sphere. Notre Dame, Georgetown and the Catholic University of America would remain in the forefront as larger institutions with substantial enrollments, prominent faculty, and national name recognition. Under the Reverend Joseph Dinneen, S.J. (who later became the first president from 1931-37), the collegiate division of St. Peter's had to co-exist with their larger and more well established Jesuit cohorts within the Maryland-New York Province on the Eastern Seaboard (including Boston College, Fordham,

Georgetown, and Holy Cross). Although each of these entities shared Society of Jesus-based sponsorship, and were physically situated within urban locales along with St. Peter's, these schools had been in operation much longer (ranging from the foundation of Georgetown in 1789 to Boston College in 1863), featured consistent leadership, and attracted a more middle-class student clientele. These, along with other intangibles, helped to solidify their existence well into the twentieth century.

In his ideal blueprint, Father Gannon foresaw the rise of a sort of an "Everyman's Cambridge" where high quality liberal arts academics could be obtainable for a select group of serious students regardless of socio-economic background with some professional course options. The closest Catholic equivalents to the new St. Peter's in size would be Loyola (MD) and Scranton. These modest-sized Jesuit schools shared the qualities of small enrollment and high academic standards situated in urban locales with ethnically diverse populations. Still, these schools also had overtones of Swarthmore [a small, highly respected Society of Friends (Quaker) college located across the Delaware River outside of Philadelphia], with an Oxford-style honors program in a small, religiously-affiliated liberal arts college during the 1920s.

Aside from St. Peter's, there were few Catholic institutions of higher education located in New Jersey between 1918 and 1930. Those in operation within the Diocese of Newark included Seton Hall College, founded in 1856, along with the College of St. Elizabeth for women (established in 1899) and the Immaculate Conception Normal School (later Felician College; instituted in 1923).⁷ The long established metropolitan area diocesan-run Seton Hall and Jesuit-operated Fordham University established during the mid-nineteenth century offered direct

⁷ Edward J. Power, *A History of Catholic Higher Education in the United States* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Company, 1958), 351. [CSE and ICNS were the lone post-secondary schools within the Newark See prior to the 1930s and Mount St. Mary's (later known as Georgian Court) located in Lakewood remains a part of the Diocese of Trenton. Seton Hall became a University in 1950.]

curricular and geographical competition. Seton Hall College, located in South Orange (Essex County), became the top competitor to St. Peter's from the beginning, especially for students from Hudson County and various parts of northern New Jersey as South Orange is situated under ten miles from Jersey City.

Simultaneously, the Jesuits posed a threat that cut into attendance at "Setonia" from across this region. For example, the overall attendance at Seton Hall during the 1929-30 academic year leveled to 326 and this number dropped consistently each year to 261 by 1933-34. The number of students from Jersey City, in particular, reached a high of 65 (1929-30) and decreased each year until the total was 31 in 1932-33. Inroads were also inevitable as Fordham University had a lock on the Jesuit market with its main campus in the Bronx and in later years when satellite sites came to New Jersey.⁸ Locales included Fort Lee, Newark, Hoboken, and Jersey City. These campuses, opened during the late 1920s, typically offered a wide field of study in accounting, business, sociology, education, and other areas as Father Gannon later recounted in his historical essay on Fordham as a case of an academic bazaar in that "... 'You name it. We have it or will get it for you.'"⁹ Poised down the road from St. Peter's, the New Jersey Normal School at Jersey City (later the New Jersey City University) provided a curriculum geared towards budding teachers and opened just a year prior to its Jesuit-run neighbor. As competition between admission departments and accessibility to train lines factored large in the Depression-era, college enrollment reach for students gave St. Peter's incentive to solidify its infrastructure right from the start.¹⁰

⁸ Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., *Fordham – A History and Memoir* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 138.

⁹ Robert I. Gannon, S.J., *Up to the Present – The Story of Fordham* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 178.

¹⁰ *General Catalogues of Seton Hall College, 1930-1935* (South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall College); *Seton Hall College Registration Figures, 1902-1951*, (South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall University, 1952), 1.

The Catholic citizenry of Northern New Jersey lived in one of the most densely populated areas of the nation. From a socio-commerce stance, this supply and demand situation for labor made for heightened competition in the job market and increased standing within the community overall. The Diocese of Newark (where Jersey City is located) had a strong parochial school system that helped prepare their charges mentally (and by extension spiritually) for post-secondary education in most cases.

Under the guidance of the Most Reverend Thomas J. Walsh, Bishop of Newark (1928-51), the Diocese of Newark hosted over 700,000 adherents living within its See by 1930. A total of 710 priests (470 secular and 240 religious, which included a substantial contingent of clergy from the Society of Jesus as part of this overall figure) and 235 parishes were bolstered by 15 parochial high schools with an enrollment of 1,628 and 35 two-year commercial high schools that hosted 1,314 pupils. All of these entities served in large measure as natural feeder parochial academies (as were Jesuit prep schools in nearby New York City) to St. Peter's although competition from other area Catholic colleges still remained.¹¹ The cultivation of faithful parishioners who also had access to educational resources became an important mission for Bishop Walsh who pointedly noted that these centers of academia became a preferred institutional force within the See: "I'd rather lay the cornerstone of one Catholic school...than lay the cornerstones of 10 Catholic churches."¹²

Despite the erudition endorsed by Bishop Walsh, he had a logical partiality as head of the Seton Hall College Board of Trustees, but retained perpetual support for the mission of St. Peter's College as one of their earliest off-campus sponsors. He further aided the school through

¹¹ George L.A. Reilly, "Thomas J. Walsh," *The Bishops of Newark, 1853-1978* (South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall University Press, 1978), 105 and 109; *The Official Catholic Directory 1930*, (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons Publishers, 1930), 507; *The Official Catholic Directory 1931* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons Publishers, 1931), 517.

¹² Reilly, *The Bishops of Newark*, 107.

its formative stage as a regular fixture at school commencement exercises. At the 1936 gathering he reiterated his stand on the need to stay with Church-endorsed educational standards. “It is rank disloyalty on the part of Catholic families not to send their children to Catholic schools instead of secular schools, when good Catholic schools are available.”¹³ Despite local edicts, when it came to judging the chances of St. Peter’s durability in relation to the overall survival of religious-oriented colleges at large, the odds were not favorable based on historical precedent. For example, approximately 30 percent of institutions founded between 1900 and 1955 have maintained operations to the present day and the Jesuit College of New Jersey became perhaps the only school to re-open a decade or more after a major military conflict.¹⁴ This phenomenon can be explained in part by financial problems; religious orders that operated colleges may have pulled out of an area due to a lack of teaching priests, fluctuating student enrollments, competition from state or trade schools where tuition was lower, and assimilation tendencies at secular institutions among other varied reasons. However, with the swelling pool of potential students in parochial grammar and high schools, the need for different types of colleges to cater to niche markets remained evident.

Mutual and intersecting support systems between the Society of Jesus and Archdiocese of Newark led to clues that the school might open as early as 1928. Bishop Walsh co-advocated approval for the college with the Society of Jesus via Vatican channels and this brought full success by 1930.¹⁵ Aside from local advocacy, the Very Reverend Vladimir Ledochowski, S.J., Father General of the Society of Jesus at the time, gave Society approval on June 9, 1930 for a

¹³ “Bishop Hits Parents Who Ignore Catholic Schools,” *Jersey Journal*, 15 June 1936; “St. Peter’s Plans \$750,000 College on Boulevard,” *Jersey Journal*, 2 February 1932.

¹⁴ Power, *History of Catholic Higher Education*, 47.

¹⁵ Richard J. Cronin, *The Closing and Reopening of Saint Peter’s College: 1918-1930* (Jersey City, NJ: Saint Peter’s College, 1983), 29.

college to operate in Jersey City.¹⁶ Counted among those who constituted the administrative ranks of St. Peter's College included personalities from the Order such as Joseph P. O'Reilly, S.J., who served as both President and Head of the Board of Trustees. In combination with knowledgeable Jesuits in roles of governance along with key scholastics and various lay teachers rounded out the teaching ranks, Father Gannon proclaimed that he would begin the fall semester of 1930 with 85 students, five professors, and 200 books with little to no capital reserves. He later prophesized that four years later there would be 400 students, 10,000 books, and 11 modern laboratories, but "still no money" as preached in his sermon at the beginning of the inaugural school year.¹⁷

Despite the fact that Father Dinneen served as chief executive (after Father O'Reilly), Father Gannon became the acclaimed second founder of St. Peter's when he was appointed de facto Dean of Students in 1929. The educational theories envisioned by Father Gannon were put to the test on a proverbial clean slate, but the modus operandi rested upon years of traditional Jesuit model they expected the student body to follow. Even during the interval between closing and re-opening, the Preparatory School thrived despite repeated efforts to re-visit the expired college division. Before operations officially commenced, Father Gannon arrived in Hudson County on August 16th with all bureaucratic issues of foundation settled. However, the lack of a physical plant for this new school posed the first practical concern he encountered. In tandem with securing temporary quarters in an office building for a campus, part of the first move

¹⁶ "Approve 11-Story Building for New Catholic College," N.C.W.C. News Service Press Release, 12 June 1933, 29.

¹⁷ Robert I. Gannon, S.J., *On Reopening St. Peter's – A Sermon* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's Church, 28 September 1930), 4. *Saint Peter's College Historical Timeline* (September 1953), 3. *St. Peter's College (College of Arts and Sciences) Announcements and Regulations*. (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College, 1929), 2. The first Board of Trustees at St. Peter's College consisted of Jesuits who also served in other capacities on campus. The 1929-30 edition included Rev. Joseph P. O'Reilly (President), S.J., Rev. Robert I. Gannon, S.J. (Vice-President and Dean), Rev. J. Charles Davey, S.J. (Treasurer), Rev. James F. McDermott, S.J. (Secretary), Rev. William S. Dolan, S.J., Rev. John J. Cassidy, S.J. and Rev. John P. Smith, S.J.

designed to spread the gospel of St. Peter's came with press mentions, parish bulletins, and word of mouth pronouncements to set a positive tone and rally potential applicants for admission.

Without a permanently fixed campus, Father Gannon expressed optimism in his selection of the "peacock" as the first symbol and mascot (also based upon the original 17th century Dutch settlements of *Pavonia* and *Communipaw* in Hudson County) of the renewed St. Peter's during mid-December of 1930. Jersey City once again became the home of St. Peter's and in the process mirrored many fellow Jesuit colleges (including St. Louis University, Loyola of Chicago, University of San Francisco, and others) in the sense that they are situated in the heart of densely populated urban Catholic enclaves in order to be nearer to the source of their prospective clientele.¹⁸

The first day of school also marked another milestone and as noted in the ceremonial program: "On Monday, September 22, the Collegiate Department will resume its activities with a Faculty of Jesuit and Lay Professors in full accord with the high standards and best traditions of the Colleges conducted by the Society of Jesus throughout the world...To meet the added and varied demands of the current educational trend, the scope of studies has been widely extended."¹⁹ The fourth floor of the Chamber of Commerce Building in downtown Jersey City served as site of the re-opening and representatives from 80 different institutions of higher education looked upon the scene (or sent advance telegraphed well wishes) and most expressed variations on the verdict that the "...little college had arrived."²⁰ The task of building from this point forward would involve further support not only by Father Gannon, but the entire St. Peter's community beyond the ceremonial opening alone.

¹⁸ Mahoney, *Catholic Higher Education*, 217; Alan Delozier, "Jesuit Higher Education in New Jersey, 1899-1900: Saint Peter's College," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 3:4, June 2000, 499.

¹⁹ *Reopening of St. Peter's College – Monday September 22, 1930* (Jersey City, N.J.: St. Peter's, College, 1930), 1.

²⁰ Gannon, S.J., *Poor Old Liberal Arts*, 102-103; *Saint Peter's College, Jersey City, N.J.- Historical Timeline*, 3.

The “Million Dollar Faculty” – The Jesuit Professori of St. Peter’s College



Rev. Robert I. Gannon, S.J. at work on college business, c. 1930.

[Saint Peter's University Archives: Record Group (RG) 27, Visual Images: Gannon, Robert I., S.J.]

The traditional Jesuit theme of spiritual edification for the greater good is emblematic in the motto: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* (“To the Greater Glory of God”), a carryover from the original St. Peter’s. This axiom remained a fundamental credo throughout the years, but variations still arose as secular circumstances dictated. As Jesuit scholar Raymond Schroth, S.J. noted, “Without saying how these guidelines were to be enforced, the general (Father Ledochowski) wanted limits on non-Catholic students and faculty and no non-Catholic deans... In 1930, he directed American Jesuits to learn from the procedures of

the preeminent colleges and universities and to get Ph.Ds., and most interesting, he urged Jesuits to eliminate petty rivalries, pool their resources, and cooperate with one another.”²¹ These “guidelines” became another factor that Father Gannon preached especially when it came to the work and qualities of scholarly interest possessed by his fellow instructors at the new college.

Father Dinneen in his role as public relations advocate laid out the special status of the Jesuit scholar whose dedication to instruction basics and high intellectual ideas is indicated in this press account:

The JESUITS supply the TEACHING STAFF. They receive no salary. For 53 years serving New Jersey gratis. If paid each \$2,000 annually since 1878, average staff of 13 Jesuits would have received in salaries \$1,378,000. At 5% this sum

²¹ Schroth, *Fordham – A History and Memoir*, 15.

represents an endowment of \$27,560,000. No boy ever turned away from St. Peter's because he could not pay tuition. These Jesuits are ready to teach in a tent, if necessary, to help deserving youth. Without money and without a building these Jesuit teachers have only their LIFE to give.²²

By 1935, a year before Father Gannon departed from Jersey City, St. Peter's featured a faculty roster that included 11 full-time professors, of whom six had doctoral degrees earned from such international universities as La Sorbonne and Leeds while various American institutions of higher education such as Fordham, Columbia, Holy Cross and the New England Conservancy of Music were represented at the bachelor's or master's degree level.²³ By the mid-1930s, most Catholic colleges had a similar type of faculty roster with clergy in the majority and some non-religious instructors. Father Dinneen in his fundraising appeals noted that Jesuit teachers as part of a community were not as prone to draining financial resources, though conversely each lay teacher had to be paid as per individual livelihood needs. On the other hand, attracting top talent, either lay or religious, also became a prime consideration.²⁴

Counted among the first tasks Father Gannon deemed necessary in the establishment of a quality academic dynamic was to assemble a solid faculty roster, monitor course loads, and handle administrative duties associated with the college. In honor of his Jesuit brethren, Father Gannon became the first to coin the economically ironic sobriquet: "Million Dollar Faculty." This phrase (with its ironic nod to lofty financial value) passed from the Dean himself through

²² "St. Peter's College Building Fund," *Jersey Journal*, 14 April 1932. (This pronouncement was made to show fiscal sacrifice and reassurance by caretakers of the school that there was no hidden agenda when it came to encouraging enrollment without the stigma of monetary debt. Awareness that budgeting became a major concern during the Great Depression years is at the heart of this particular sales approach. However, no financial ledger books have been discovered that either confirm, or refute that the salary figures outlined in this release are in fact accurate.)

²³ *General Report of Colleges and Universities – Higher Education Division, State Education Department* (Albany, NY: 1935), 1-5. As this report noted there were 11 full time professors (9 with equivalent training) and 6 held doctoral degrees. There were 28 staff lines altogether.

²⁴ *General Report of Colleges and Universities*, 4. In terms of other salary figures according to this report, a full-time instructor earned between the \$1,500 minimum and \$2,200 maximum, but the average rate hovered around \$1,800 during the early 1930s.

local press sources and became a designation akin to more famed football analogies attributed to fellow Catholic schools such as the “Four Horsemen” of Notre Dame and the “Seven Blocks of Granite” at Fordham. This cadre of teachers included (with their specialization) Reverend Thomas B. Chetwood, S.J. (Psychology), Reverend Atlee F.X. Devereux, S.J. (Philosophy and Theology), Reverend William J. Gleason, S.J. (Latin, English and Spanish), Reverend Arthur J. Hohman, S.J. (Organic Chemistry), Reverend George F. Johnson, S.J. (Greek and Latin), Reverend Richard “Rush” Rankin, S.J. (Senior Ethics), Reverend John P. Smith, S.J. (Mathematics), Reverend Paul J. Swick, S.J. (Latin, Greek and French), and the aforementioned Father Gannon.

Many of these teaching priests were assigned to the school from the beginning (aside from Father Johnson who came in 1931, and followed by Fathers Chetwood and Rankin two years later), with most of these individuals having been educated at the Jesuit Seminary in Woodstock, Maryland.²⁵ Regardless of discipline responsibilities, each teacher went into his respective instructional duties according to accepted Jesuit mental preparation and expected to fulfill educational objectives irrespective of personal ambition. This is a popularly accepted vision of what these priests aspire to, and is based on the vow of obedience (in addition to poverty and chastity) as the ideal model of behavior based on years of training and sacrifice towards the goal of upholding the traditions of the order.²⁶

²⁵ Gene King, “Million Dollar Faculty,” *Saint Peter’s, The College Magazine Commemorative Issue* (Winter 1996/97), 16-17; John LaMartina, S.J. Letter to Author, St. Peter’s College Jesuit Faculty Query, Baltimore, MD – Resident Archivist, Maryland Province Jesuits, 9 December 2008; Peter Schineller, S.J., Letter to Author, Archivist – America House, List of Degree Recipients – “Million Dollar Faculty,” 5 December 2008.

²⁶ William V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986). [The typical stages of formation for a Jesuit priest include the Novitiate (2 years), First Studies (3 years), Regency (3 years), Theology Studies (3 years), and eventually Ordination (Holy Orders), if the candidate meets all requirements. There is also what is called a Tertianship that takes place usually five years after ordination where a Jesuit priest reflects on their vocation and participate in a spiritual retreat before pronouncing their final vows to the Society of Jesus.]

The Immigrant College and Inherited Opportunities – The First Petreans

Aside from reconciling geography and facing debit sheets, the base rationale for St. Peter's came down to educating its charges and the constituency that Father Gannon reached out to first and foremost were the children of immigrants. He became a major advocate of first-generation Americans attending school, and he knew that the proverbial sense of entitlement remained a common factor among the select schools which make up the present Ivy League being polar opposite from Catholic-operated institutions in most respects.

As St. Peter's historian Richard J. Cronin, S.J., noted rather pointedly at least in regard to the earliest of New Jersey colleges, the social elite had advantages the immigrant populace (especially the prolific body of Irish-American laborers, domestics, and religious) did not yet enjoy in full. Prior to the 20th century in particular, both Rutgers (Dutch Reformed) and the former Presbyterian-administered College of New Jersey (later known as Princeton), founded during the 1700s, were located down state of St. Peter's via what would become known as the U.S. Route One corridor, but most importantly from an admissions standpoint were rather homogeneous in their search of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant sons of privilege.

“Old Nassau” and its Ivy League lineage became the prime symbol of this divide. In other words, as Father Cronin recounted in his historical treatment of how Petreans often saw the world beyond their own neighborhood pride and sense of ethnic identity: “Princeton was not aching to recruit the sons of Irish railroad workers into its student body... and the Irish would view the Orangemen of Princeton much as they would view the Orangemen of Belfast.”²⁷ Class structure, religious foundations, prominent alumni, and endowment factors often differed between Protestant-operated or oriented schools and those of Catholic affiliation.

²⁷ Cronin, *The Closing and Reopening of Saint Peter's College: 1918-1930*, 2.

Even though Princeton would remain financially more powerful than most colleges nationwide, including St. Peter's, on one issue Father Gannon equated that the fundamental and logical difference between the two schools came down not to quality of educational excellence, but that of faith. "...We Offer 'Something Different.' No. If we open our classes today in modest surroundings, if we hold up our heads and claim for our degrees a value second to none in this State, it is not that we hope to rival Princeton in all of Princeton's acknowledged excellencies, but that we know we have something to offer that is different...To those who understand, we call it – zeal for souls."²⁸

Father Gannon was therefore able to encounter many young men (St. Peter's did not become fully co-educational until 1966) with their own stories of how they arrived on campus and what they sought in the way of academic training, but while individual tales differed, their socio-economic backgrounds for the most part were quite similar. Most early Petreans were of staunch Catholic, blue-collar household stock where their familial ties arose directly from Europe (mainly Ireland, France, or Germany, to be followed by Italy, Poland, or the Balkans), and only a few years to decades removed from their home continent.

During the pre-World War II era, relatively few individuals went through their entire four-year stretch of college life and earned a diploma, but could only attend for a brief period. Many of their parents had to sacrifice fundamental needs to pay for tuition and affiliated costs; thus, a vast number of students could only attend for a semester or so before dropping out of school. Often times sending offspring to college came to be a joint enterprise as parents might be able to endorse their son not only through financial means, but also offered moral support. It was often seen as a point of pride and accomplishment to parents if their child(ren) attended

²⁸ Ibid.

college, a formal education they themselves may have never dreamed of such a chance to attain beyond the grade school level, if at all.

Father Gannon oversaw a student body that also remained geographically homogenous for the most part. The enrollment register for 1930 as an example showed hometown representation from Jersey City, Hoboken, Bayonne, and Weehawken, with Rahway, Montclair and Clifton (outside of Hudson County) along with some matriculation activity via the Bronx and Brooklyn (New York City). The Northern New Jersey and New York metropolitan areas became the major locales upon which college administrators focused their energies to secure additional registration. This made sense for all intents and purposes since St. Peter's began as a commuter school for those who could travel to and from campus because dedicated dormitory space had yet to be allocated.

By way of concrete figures, the first attendance register at St. Peter's in 1930 numbered just under the century mark and expanded to a gross tally of 345 students by the 1933-34 term and an increase of 71 by 1935-36 led to a grand total of 416 by mid-decade.²⁹ Despite its open enrollment policy for those of all creeds, ethnicities, and racial backgrounds, the college limited itself to male students alone, as did most Jesuit colleges of the day. However, when sister school Hudson College (further discussed shortly) held its first commencement on June 5, 1934, five female graduates received diplomas, but after this point no women were admitted.³⁰

²⁹ *General Report of Colleges and Universities, 1935*, 1-4; Schroth, *Fordham – A History and Memoir*, 173 and 179. The first documented African-American student at St. Peter's was Hudson Oliver, Jr. of New York City who enrolled in 1934 after being denied admission to Fordham, but this was an exception to the rule during the first decade of the school. Oliver left St. Peter's in 1939 without a diploma. More diversity exists today; in fact, African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and others dominate the student ranks overall.

³⁰ *Annual Catalog, St. Peter's College – A College of Arts and Sciences, 1931-1932* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College, 1931), 13. *Hudson College Bulletin, 1935-36* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College, 1935), 10. When it came to the admittance of women, Father Gannon had limited vision on this issue: "The Provincial would not ask Fr. General to let us help ourselves by continuing to teach women in Hudson College and, in general, taking over the work now being done in St. Peter's territory by Fordham." In addition, Dean Gordon F. Cadisch was concerned about the untapped potential of the female student: "How could we justify a radical change in policy, especially

Traditionally, the only direct and publicized female presence on campus since the re-opening of Saint Peter's in 1930 onward came when women from neighboring Catholic high schools or colleges visited the campus for special events such as dances, theater productions, or perhaps the occasional glee club concert. This was seemingly the only consistent interaction that men from the day session had with women at student functions for over nine decades.³¹ Otherwise, despite open enrollment and some exceptions, the first St. Peter's students were mainly 18-22-year-old Catholic males from Jersey City and neighboring communities, but they set a trend that would gradually change and diversify over time.

Enrollment figures on campus hovered between a handful at the start to a couple hundred on average during the early 1930s. Logically enough, any budding St. Peter's student had to first earn admission to the program before moving into a specific course of study. Those students who enrolled after the school re-opened had to endure the following measures to become full-fledged Petreans: "Candidates for admission to the Freshman Class must present evidence of their graduation with diploma from a four-year day high school course in a duly accredited school...must also submit a detailed record of their high school work...It is expected that such certification will not be given to those who have received a grade of less than 75% in their last year of high school. Students must also furnish certificates of good moral character, and of honorable withdrawal from the school they last attended."³² Such was the means of making the college both a success and a quality enterprise which would successfully endure. A total of four major areas of study that included Classical, Scientific, Educational and Pre-Medical, became more commonplace at other Catholic colleges and universities. Those who came from a Catholic

when we have already incurred ill will by our refusal to readmit women. About 200 were turned down this fall. Father Gannon started this variety of work himself..." St. Peter's did not become fully co-educational until 1966.

³¹ Alan Delozier, "Petrienne Power, The Women of St. Peter's College, 1872-1966," *Pauw Wow*, 23 April 1998, 4.

³² *St. Peter's College (College of Arts and Sciences) Announcements and Regulations 1929*, 4.

high school background had an advantage when it came to navigation of the curriculum, but others came from public school systems nonetheless.

In ideal circumstances the college student and his welfare were the primary considerations of the administration, especially when it came to offering a quality education. This goal was echoed in print literature along with a general overview of the benefits of retention. “1. A large STUDENT BODY is at hand. In two classes, Freshmen and Sophomore, 181 students. From 40 High Schools in 37 towns and cities in New Jersey and New York...Bridge from High School to Profession. TUITION: \$170 a year! (Compare with any College you know!)”³³ Otherwise, in terms of contemporary standards the breakdown of student expenses did not seem too imposing, but without factoring inflation and standards of living, St. Peter’s worked to charge fees that promoted affordability, yet maintained institutional solvency. All bills were to be paid on a half-yearly basis.³⁴ Keeping in mind that these figures did not include boarding fees, these rates were somewhat at odds price-wise with neighboring Seton Hall as their tuition ceiling of \$125.00; \$5.00 Matriculation Fee; \$15.00 Physical Instruction; and Athletic Fee; and \$15.00 Laboratory costs resulted in a long standing rivalry with their fellow cross-state Catholic college.³⁵

Despite local tuition wars, the fee structure for St. Peter’s remained relatively constant throughout the 1930s. Along with external fund-raising, one of the problems with maintaining a successful operation centered upon having enough tuition-paying students to keep a steady revenue stream alive. Sometimes this even became a burden to many parents and children so deferred payment plans were also implemented to help the cause.

³³ *Annual Catalog, St. Peter’s College – A College of Arts and Sciences, 1931-1932* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter’s College, 1931), 22.

³⁴ *Annual Catalog, St. Peter’s College – A College of Arts and Sciences, 1931-1932*, 18.

³⁵ *General Catalogue of Seton Hall College, 1930* (South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall College), 15.

The credit system applied to all students regardless of background and then, as now, became a standard means of tallying enough academic “units” to be applied towards graduation. St. Peter’s established both an “A.B.” and a “B.S.” degree option with 130 credit hours including 3-4 units of Latin with 3-4 of English, 2-3 of a modern language, and 1 ½ apiece for algebra, plane geometry, trigonometry, and history qualified one for graduation.³⁶ Father Gannon moved that the overall requirement called for 18 credits in some major field of study combined with a 3000-word senior thesis in philosophy and comprehensive examination as well to have each student show their intellectual comportment prior to completion of the program.

Electives were also offered on a limited basis, but only for those who belonged to the more advanced junior or senior classes. The school featured specialized course titles such as Organic Chemistry, Greek Lyric Poets, and Special Questions in Ethics, among other unique offerings. The Bachelor of Arts program in particular was designed to enhance cultural study and groom students for such professionally respected endeavors as teaching or legal or seminary studies, while the scientific track was for those who wanted to become doctors, dentists, or engineers.³⁷

Beyond the primer, employment options for these young Catholic students were often heightened with exposure to course offerings found within the pages of the school catalog(ue). This information ultimately guided scores of students on their way towards the promise of future opportunity in the aftermath of the first commencement exercises held during June of 1934 when 46 students received their diplomas from the new St. Peter’s.³⁸ Overall, the structure of the

³⁶ *St. Peter’s College (College of Arts and Sciences) Announcements and Regulations 1929*, 4-5; *Annual Catalog, St. Peter’s College – A College of Arts and Sciences, 1935-1936* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter’s College, 1935), 27-28. A maximum of 18 credit hours could be taken per semester. Quality points were awarded by final grades received to determine point average and class standing. A total of four papers for the end of the Spring semester were required in Greek or Mathematics, Latin or Chemistry, English Composition and French, German or Spanish.

³⁷ *St. Peter’s College (College of Arts and Sciences) Announcements and Regulations 1929*, 5.

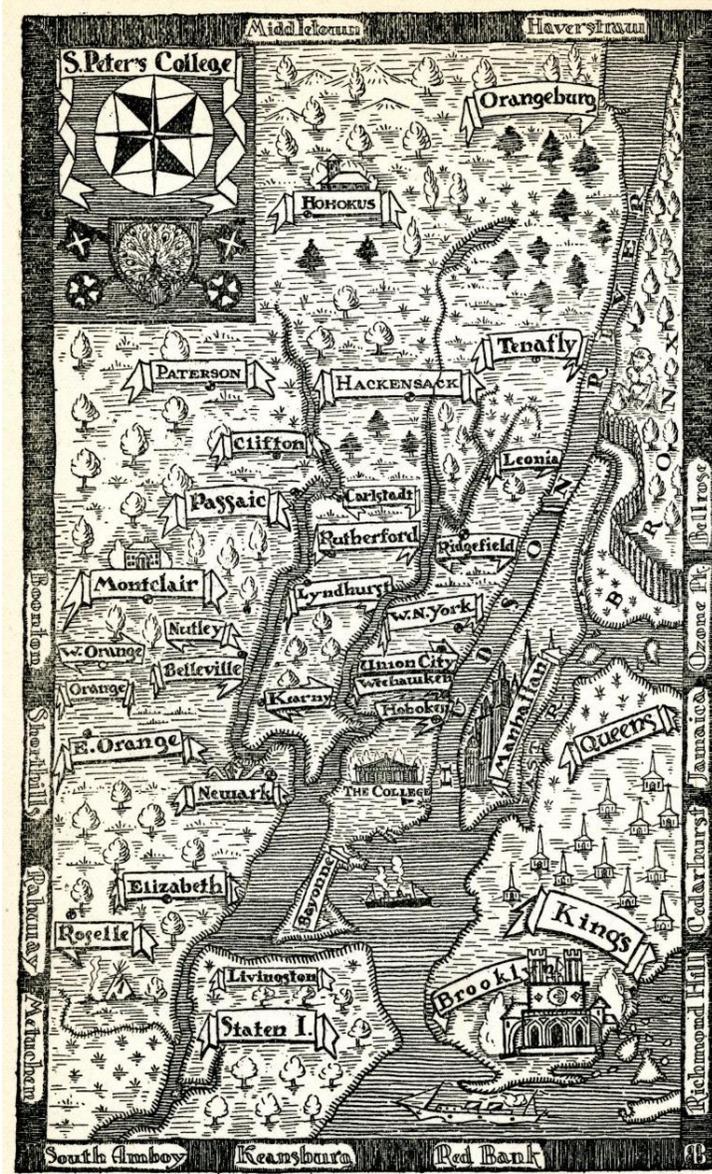
³⁸ *Saint Peter’s College, Jersey City, N.J. - Historical Timeline*, 3.

school curriculum was strict, but provided some room for wider appreciation of different cultural and practical applications beyond the classroom for Father Gannon. Due to the lack of alumni records from the 1930s, the post-graduation trail of new students is hard to track, but many found

life in middle management eventually and various priests arose from their ranks, according to later day alumni directories.

Hudson College – The Commercial School Division of St. Peter’s

The pragmatist in Father Gannon knew that to work with his vision of a utopian liberal arts college the intertwined realities of finance and survival had to be met immediately or his vision could vanish as quickly as it appeared. This resulted in a business school that would help pay the bills and simultaneously offer an education to those more predisposed to statistical analysis rather than Shakespearean sonnets. It also fulfilled his secondary mission of having a place for those



Map of the Metropolitan Jersey City area depicting "Where the Students Live" according to the original caption and graphic illustration found above. [Annual Catalog of St. Peter's College, A College of Arts and Sciences. Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College, 1933.]

who wanted to attend school regardless of background or choice of study path.

The creation of St. Peter's arose during a time when other Catholic colleges and universities tried to stabilize and even expand their operations in order to maintain and simultaneously enter the academic mainstream. Hybrid vocational schools that blended both the liberal and specialized arts were the latest innovation to counter deflection to non-religious institutions. The Society of Jesus had already been successful in professional spheres such as health care, engineering and law studies offered via Marquette and the University of Detroit, for example.³⁹ The field of commerce offered more immediate rewards without the high overhead of advanced professional schools, and as such, a new entity, christened the St. Peter's School of Finance Teachers College (or the more commonly referenced Hudson College of Commerce and Finance), came into being as an evening school with heavy emphasis on financial courses. Hudson College by extension signified the expansive nature of Catholic education into less theological-centered areas of study more than ever before. In response to economically pressed times, the need to lure new students and establish a more pronounced foothold in the secular education world were never lost on Father Gannon.

Although St. Peter's still functioned in the throes of the Great Depression there was still a steady stream of commercial enterprises that awaited college graduates despite the popular and oft-shown newsreel images that bread and soup lines, apple sellers and homelessness were the rule, especially in urban America. Business ventures such as insurance, banking, and even stock market trading, among other endeavors, still provided opportunities for those in Jersey City to work in their own backyard, or New York City right across the Hudson River. With Gotham being easily accessible via mass transit from New Jersey, this vastly popular path of travel during

³⁹ Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97.

the 1930s included nine railroad lines and four tunnels for two-way automotive traffic. As the college catalogue distinctly noted: “The City [New York] has eighteen banks with resources of \$330,000,000. The 1930 census showed that about \$375,000,000 of manufactured goods were produced.”⁴⁰ This weighed upon the school administration, who pondered whether they could somehow tap into this action.

The economic realities that made money an ever-present and important commodity became all the more important to the leaders of St. Peter’s who understood this pragmatic move to found Hudson as an attempt to broaden enrollment and train potential donors simultaneously. The New Jersey Commissioner of Education eventually granted Hudson its approval and the inaugural semester for this new school began during September of 1932.⁴¹ Like other Catholic colleges that had to compete with public universities, St. Peter’s and Hudson College were viewed as different entities in many quarters although they fell under the same umbrella and shared space in the same Chamber of Commerce Building. From an administrative standpoint, Father Gannon was tabbed Vice-President of Hudson along with teaching Apologetics while Father Dinneen served as the President for both institutions. Aside from the notion of a “trade school” designed to help promote the economic commonweal of St. Peter’s, the main push for the creation of Hudson College came in large measure via requests by various citizens within Northern New Jersey who wanted a business school opposite of New York City. A group of 41 students enrolled for one or more of the 11 courses taught by a faculty of seven.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Hudson College of Commerce and Finance Bulletin*, 1935-1936 (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter’s College), 8.

⁴¹ “Saint Peter’s College, Jersey City, N.J.- Historical Timeline,” 1-5; *Hudson College of Commerce and Finance Bulletin*, 1932-1933 (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter’s College, 1932).

⁴² *Hudson College Bulletin*, 1935-36, 4; Joseph Dinneen, S.J. “St. Peter’s College – Copy,” 5. (Among the space allocated for Hudson College extracurricular endeavors included a debate hall, faculty and student library, a private chapel along with office space for the president and treasurer. However, overlap often occurred between Hudson and St. Peter’s since they were both located within the Chamber of Commerce Building for a time prior to the movement of the parent school to their own campus.)

During the 1932-33 academic term, Hudson College unveiled its program for a degree candidate that entailed a four or six year course option. This first year provided the student with a course load that led directly to the B.C.S. degree, including specific entries as: Bookkeeping, Business Law, Principles of Economics, English, Elements of Accounting, Mathematics of Accounting, and Modern Languages, along with Fundamental Apologetics, which focused upon religious revelation.⁴³ The following year, the curriculum expanded to include History, Philosophy, Sociology, and Education. This showed the school had a serious commitment to business classes from the first and served as a link to the accreditation path sought by St. Peter's College of Arts and Sciences during the early 1930s. With competitive higher education in mind, around the five-year mark within the post-Gannon era, the validity and merit of Hudson motivated questions of *why* have this school in the first place despite its first flashes of success.

The answer often came down to the desire for a Catholic college for those who would only consider a religious-oriented institution, a rationale that held sway as per the dictate set down by Bishop Walsh about intra-faith loyalty even when it came to attendance at a business school. Overall, the justification and outreach for this new enterprise found its way into print as per a traditional institutional pitch of educational value at a low price, but posed in answer form as a counterpoint to an unstated, yet commonly held questions concerning ease of time and schedule. "...You can attend for 1 hour a week or 16 hours a week?...The faculty is of the highest caliber with Jesuit Fathers teaching Philosophy and Religion?...You can prepare for the C.P.A. or take the degree of B.C.S...The tuition is lower than any College near New York: viz. 1 hour a week for a half year: \$7.00?..."⁴⁴ The pragmatism associated with the promoting of

⁴³ *Hudson College of Commerce and Finance Bulletin*, 1932-1933 (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College), 9-11.

⁴⁴ *Hudson College Bulletin*, 1935-36, 7; Hudson College of Commerce and Finance Salesmen Sheet, 28 February 1932. (As the promotional literature reads: "Need for Business Training... Those with good business ability, judgment, foresight, and who have a knowledge of the fundamental principles underlying our economic system are

Hudson also came down to dollar value and an investment opportunity by training students for the business world, but the parallel goal of having middle to upper class alumni who could later contribute back to the school at a future date offered formal validation for Father Gannon.

Extracurriculars, School Spirit and Petrean Honor Societies

The value of stringent academic regulations had been established early on in its history, but Father Gannon also wanted to set the new St. Peter's apart from other colleges in some distinctive manner. Along with external fund-raising that served the purpose of maintaining institutional survival, the presence of student activities created some financial drain. However, on the positive side, extracurriculars typically came to be seen as a wholesome means of promoting advocacy, or artistic expression depending upon the type of organization joined. Pursuits such as this also facilitated school spirit and led to community visibility in providing an outlet for resume building, tangible training for vocational and life skills outside of classroom circles alone. Included were the Glee Club, Kilmer Society (Literary), Argus Eyes (Dramatic Society), Camera Club, St. Peter's College Collegians (Vocal Group), Pathfinders (Life-Work Group), and so forth.⁴⁵

There was an open (later mandatory) policy extended to all students who chose to join a particular group, or multiple alliances. When it came to the devotional aspects of Catholicism, expressions of religious passion were highly encouraged. Mental, spiritual, and creative exercises alike provided interwoven concepts in the new St. Peter's blueprint that made for a well-rounded individual. This often included participation in religious-centered organizations such as Catholic Action, Eucharistic, and Mission, along with the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin

the men most likely to be sought for these positions of business leadership...Our contact with the business world, made easier through our location is almost the center of the New York and New Jersey metropolitan area makes it possible to give a practical application to the knowledge gained in the school.")

⁴⁵ *Annual Catalog, St. Peter's College – A College of Arts and Sciences, April 1933* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College, 1933), 20-27; *The Peacock Pie* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter's College, 1937), 1-114.

Mary became extremely popular devotionals among those on campus. The first annual (entitled “*The Peacock Pie*”) saw print in 1934, and a year later the self-proclaimed “trendsetting” second edition became the first ever two-volume yearbook in American history, but afterwards reverted to the more traditional single tome format. However, the most prevalent chronicler of the St. Peter’s beat became the *Pauw Wow* which first appeared on November 9, 1933 and sold for \$1.00 per copy.⁴⁶

A balance between required classroom attendance and incentive for superlative schoolwork in an already tightly structured learning environment led to added personal recognition in various forms. Such traditions that rewarded due diligence and reflected the English and Jesuit traditions embraced by Father Gannon included the institution of the annual Michaelmas Convocation to showcase those who achieved high grades through the distribution of premiums such as medals, books, or other like prizes. In addition, regularly scheduled literature and philosophy essay defenses were presented in a public forum as a capstone display of academic attainment.

Like many secular educational traditions, the administration of St. Peter’s remained critical of Greek Letter fraternities that were popular at public college campuses as clannish and not living up to a higher ideal. Therefore, academically ordered societies were highlighted as a preferable alternative and goal of long term comradeship. An overview of the efforts in this direction as per the college *Custom Book* of the period noted that the spirit of St. Peter’s in essence is somewhat patrician and led by the “aristoi” or “best men” within the student body. These associations were seen as the crème de la crème of the student body who showed unusual attainment in their school work.

⁴⁶ *Pauw Wow*, 1:1, 9 November 1933, 1-3.

The most prominent included “The Order of the Cross Keys” (founded personally by Gannon in 1931 and open to the whole school) and “The Most Noble Order of the Peacock” that offered membership to those in the senior class who made the grade. Even those who did not quite earn inclusion within this latter order, but earned promotion to the senior class could don the sleeveless black gown that lent an air of Medieval University life and also fermented kinship on a visual and symbolic level.⁴⁷ This made for another visual reminder that students at St. Peter’s differed from many of their other colleagues at other schools not only across New Jersey, but across the nation as well.

Despite persistent reluctance, a purposely downgraded athletic program minus football (arguably the most widely identifiable of all collegiate extracurricular spectacles) had been nixed by order of Father Gannon. Despite its absence, the school did offer alternate sporting options, but on a limited and modest scale. Ironically, the St. Peter’s College Athletic Association (SPCAA) could be counted among the most democratic of organizations since each student was granted membership by virtue of enrollment, regardless of whether a pupil competed or not. This measure helped subsidize their budget and allowed for free admission to all sporting events. The student-athlete model adopted by the Peacocks during the 1930s is analogous to the present-day Division III, or Ivy League ideal that placed much more emphasis on the “student” part of the equation without the offer of sports-only scholarships. Basketball, baseball, tennis, and track were the main athletic offerings, as they did not require much capital for equipment and the

⁴⁷ *Saint Peter’s College, Jersey City, N.J.- Historical Timeline*, 1-3; *Custom Book of St. Peter’s College* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter’s College, 1930), 4 and 10-12; *Annual Catalog, St. Peter’s College – A College of Arts and Sciences, January 1934* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Peter’s College, 1934), 19-20 and 32. At graduation time, students who attained a general average of 90% or over their four years receive the following honors: 90-92% Cum laude; 93-95% Magna cum laude; and Summa cum laude 95% plus on a 100 point scale. The “Most Noble Order of the Peacock” was so prestigious that on average only two out of every 100 students were inducted. When it came to the Cambridge Gown, it was worn for the first time by a senior at the Mass of the Holy Ghost during the fall and set aside on Class Night at the end of his undergraduate experience. They were virtually unknown in the United States at that, or most any other time during the twentieth century.

number of squad members could be regulated. However, it would not be on the court or fields where St. Peter's achieved its most enduring success in competitive circles.

The most important and prolific of all extracurricular options was the Bellarmine Debating Society where success in the rhetorical arts became an early identifier for St. Peter's, and marked a strong presence on the inter-collegiate competition front. This forensics group (named for Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, confessor to St. Aloysius Gonzaga and noted debater) had a high winning percentage typically besting more established and well-known institutions across the Eastern United States and world alike. Founded in 1930, this society limited its membership to 40 orators and held weekly scrimmages along with 20 different public recitations and inter-collegiate debates per year.

Tangible evidence of their success came during the early 1930s when St. Peter's tested themselves against the University of Pennsylvania, New York University, The United States Military Academy, Swarthmore, Fordham, Holy Cross, Boston College, Rutgers, and Harvard. Topics that were to be resolved included whether "...Modern Advertising is Detrimental to the Best Interests of the American Public" (Penn, 1933), if "The Private Manufacture of, and...International Private Traffic in Munitions should be Abolished" (Swarthmore, 1934), and the pro and con merits of the National Recovery Association (Rutgers, 1934).

However, the highest point for this program came to the fore with the first international debate ever held in Jersey City on December 1, 1935, when St. Peter's beat Cambridge, their academic mentors, so to speak. This match included arguments between the American and English systems of government. About 1,000 individuals packed into Collins Gymnasium to witness the battle firsthand. Many proclaimed "mirabile dictum!" afterward in response to this

milestone in school history and mirrored the overall attainments made by Father Gannon during his time on campus from the early to mid-1930s.⁴⁸

The Future of St. Peter's College and Gannon's Swan Song

A practical and unyielding part of Catholic adaptation to American higher education came via the accreditation process. Those who did not conform to Middle States agents in some measure (en route to full compliance), or to the full extent of their recommendations often found themselves defunct as standardization of colleges and universities across the board became more wide spread. Catholic higher education, as noted, is an experience which relies on centuries-old traditions with heavy emphasis on theology and philosophy for example, but when it came to infusion within the American higher education system, the balance between church and state ultimately became a test of both wills and the art of compromise. Father Gannon proved to be in tune with growing trends, and even ahead of the curve in this respect. The importance placed upon securing accreditation from an acknowledged educational agency allowed respective colleges to rise above a tenuous existence and achieve recognition, success, validity, and a more solid chance for long-term success.

(Scroll for photo.)

⁴⁸ "Bellarmine to Meet Cambridge in First International Debate," *Pauw Wow*, 31 October 1935, 1; "Meehan, Johnson in Debate with Swarthmore Dec. 15," *Pauw Wow*, 12 December 1935, 1. The Dinneen Debating Society founded in 1933 was the "frosh" counterpart to the Bellarmine Society.



Rev. Robert I. Gannon, S.J. surrounded by fellow Jesuits and Diocese of Newark clergy wields shovel at the groundbreaking for Gannon Hall on the campus of St. Peter's College on March 27, 1936.

[Saint Peter's University Archives: Record Group (RG) 27, Visual Images: Dedications, Documents, Plaques]

With the requisite expectancy for accreditation looming, St. Peter's went through the ritual acts of official visitation, presentation of credentials portfolio, and subsequent evaluation to make their best effort stand out. Endorsement would come for St. Peter's in 1935 as recognition occurred when the College of Arts & Sciences was given approval to operate and offer courses leading to a bachelor degree (A.B.) in the liberal arts, or the B.S. in natural sciences.⁴⁹ Showing

⁴⁹ *Saint Peter's College Historical Timeline* (September 1953), 1-4. The Middle States Association granted this approval at their November 29th meeting held in Atlantic City.

the earnestness of its mission, St. Peter's also earned a place in history when they became the first college accredited that had part or all of its campus in "rented quarters" (during the evaluation phase) to attain a successful nod.

Throughout the post-World War II era, shifts in curricular preference from the liberal arts to more professional academic modules continued to change in regard to where the majority of students were placing their study emphasis. In addition, the solid Catholic core that made up St. Peter's was enhanced by an influx of African-American and Latino students who would enroll in larger numbers over succeeding academic terms onward until today. Natural sciences and "professional studies" were then as now being seen as prime study areas which often ran counter to the strictly intellectual nature envisioned by Father Gannon that lay at the core of his mission and carried over into their building plan and financial balance which remained a perpetual concern.⁵⁰ However, each found a place and purpose then as now within the St. Peter's model. Another factor Father Gannon had to contend with was the nature of academic whims and how education became more an issue of marketability than solely mental attainment in many respects. Within this context, Father Gannon was tapped to become the President of Fordham University in 1936, as he had put St. Peter's on a solid financial footing.

His work at Fordham has been the subject of various articles, but for the most part his track record resulted in a broader application of his vision as the campus at Rose Hill played host to the highest enrollment among Catholic schools of higher education in the nation and also worldwide. However, recruitment would change as Father Gannon purposely made student enrollments small and selective at St. Peter's (outside of their Hudson College Business School campus) and later Fordham would cut enrollment from 1,620 to 1,200 under his charge.⁵¹

⁵⁰ J.A. Burns. *A History of Catholic Education in the United States* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1937), 175-176.

⁵¹ Schroth, *Fordham – A History and Memoir*, 158-160 and 163.

Both St. Peter's (whose enrollment remained diminutive, but consistent through the remainder of the 1930s and early 40s) and Fordham succeeded as other Catholic schools did not. This happened because each had a strong support system based on a successful history of preparatory school training, the Jesuit system of education had solid cache, and a large population base lived within reasonable travel distances where convenient transportation links signaled the mounting prosperity found among Catholics in higher education during this time.

Post-Gannon St. Peter's and Conclusion

The success of St. Peter's along with the threat of losing ties to Hudson County led Seton Hall to open a Jersey City campus as part of its "urban" or extension division quartered at St. John's School on Hudson Boulevard near Journal Square by 1937. Competition for students would ensue for decades between the two schools as the two male only schools until full co-education occurred for St. Peter's in 1966. Ironically, during World War II, St. Peter's almost went out of business again due to dwindling enrollment, but the admission of female nursing students on campus insured its survival despite reservations expressed by the Jesuit hierarchy in Rome.

Fortunes reversed after World War II with enactment of the G.I. Bill as enrollment at St. Peter's College boomed from 194 in 1945 to 3,431 graduates by 1955.⁵² Further expansion occurred between 1940-60 expanded by 85 percent (from 13,142 to 24,255), and registrations almost doubled that percentage, zooming from just under 162,000 to just over 426,000, an increase of 164 percent.⁵³ From this point St. Peter's would retain its identity as the Jesuit College (University) of New Jersey.

⁵² Cronin, *The Closing and Reopening of Saint Peter's College: 1918-1930*, 36.

⁵³ Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*, 209.

The sustained growth of St. Peter's College and success based on the model of Father Gannon would remain the standard, but it had to expand in more professional directions as business, science, education, and other majors, as those who majored solely in the classics dwindled. The fundamentals of a focused liberal arts school remained intact, but the long-term test came through its very survival, growth, and adaptability over the years. Thus, St. Peter's can be deemed a success story since it remains in operation (having achieved university status in 2012) and serves a diverse student body based on the vision of an educational opportunity for those who sought its value.⁵⁴ In some sense, Gannon's "pragmatism" is replicated at the national level as many other schools move in the direction of professional training while also trying to keep a focus on liberal arts education. This has helped lead to a greater integration of Catholics into American society. Although St. Peter's College would grow beyond these initial expectations, the spirit of the school does endure and the legacy of Gannon lives on as her founding role model.

Alan Delozier, D.Litt. is University Archivist and Adjunct Catholic Studies Professor at Seton Hall University and Executive Director of the New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission. He earned his Doctor of Arts and Letters in Irish Studies at Drew University and was the former College Archivist at Saint Peter's College. Appreciation and thanks are extended by the author to Mary Kinahan-Ockay, University Archivist of the Guarini Center for Community Memory; Saint Peter's University for her assistance with the images and permission to reproduce.

⁵⁴ Saint Peter's University, "Facts and Stats" and "Jesuit Identity" <http://www.saintpeters.edu/> (As of the 2016-2017 academic semester, St. Peter's University hosts over 2,500 undergraduate and 800 graduate students and they also opened a center to support undocumented individuals as part of ongoing outreach and academic opportunities for their clientele and community.)