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Enshrining Memory: The Production of an American Catholic Past

Emily Arledge
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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ENSHRINING MEMORY:
THE PRODUCTION OF AN AMERICAN CATHOLIC PAST

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN U.S. HISTORY

BY

EMILY ARLEDGE

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2023
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A trip to Rome planted the seeds for this dissertation in May 2015. After graduating from Saint Vincent College, I joined the annual Campus Ministry pilgrimage to Rome, led by Rev. Killian Loch, O.S.B. Saint Vincent is a Benedictine institution, and our trip emphasized Benedictine history. As part of this, we took a day trip from Rome to the Abbey of Monte Cassino, where Saints Benedict and Scholastica are buried. We toured the shrine, and Father Killian celebrated Mass in the small space underneath the altar, generally locked due to its small size; but there are perks to exploring Benedictine history with a Benedictine monk, and this was one of them. We explored the museum after Mass, where I noticed how others rushed through the exhibit out of boredom. Somehow the moment we spent in the tomb of Saint Benedict possessed spiritual value, but objects belonging to the saints displayed in glass cases did not. That small observation eventually grew into this dissertation. I thank God for that trip and the last decade of study. The graduate school journey sometimes felt akin to the Order of Saint Benedict’s motto – ora et labora, prayer and work. Each shrine I visited to study was a place where I could offer a small prayer in thanksgiving for the many individuals who supported my graduate school journey.

The Loyola University of Chicago’s History Department faculty nurtured my intellectual growth through coursework and mentorship, making it possible to complete a dissertation during a global pandemic. I could not have accomplished this without the chair of my committee, Dr.
Patricia Mooney-Melvin, whose support and kindness went above and beyond. I am grateful for the advice from my other committee members, Dr. Suzanne Kauffmann and Dr. Christopher Cantwell. Other faculty at Loyola contributed to the scholar I became, especially Dr. Ted Karamanski, Dr. Kyle Roberts, and Dr. Elizabeth Tandy Shermer. Thank you.

Faculty from Duquesne University helped me navigate the graduate school process, especially Dr. Michael Cahall and Dr. Alima Bucciantini. Finally, the faculty at Saint Vincent College shaped my scholarship and personal growth. I am grateful to the Department of Theology, especially Dr. Christopher McMahon, Rev. Nathan Munsch, O.S.B., and Dr. Patricia Sharbaugh. The History Department remains close to my heart. Dr. Gilbert Bogner’s Medieval history courses inspire my own Western Civilization courses. Dr. Karen Kehoe introduced me to the field of public history as a freshman, and I would not be here without her guidance and support. I presented at my first national conference in January 2018, and I’ll never forget the sense of relief—and surprise—I felt when I looked up to see Dr. Timothy Kelly and Rev. Rene Kollar, O.S.B., walking into the room for my panel. Their continued support is greatly appreciated. As cliché as it sounds, there truly is something special about the faculty at Saint Vincent College. Thank you.

Shrines exist within communities. Thank you to Sister Bridget Zanin, MSC, and Sister Joan McGlinchey, MSC, for speaking to me about Mother Cabrini and her shrine. At the Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Scott Keefer, CA, generously scanned documents for me during the COVID-19 pandemic and offered assistance when I could finally visit in person. Thank you to the Seton Shrine’s Programs Director, Tony Dilulio, for chatting with me about working there. I want to thank Dr. Patrick Hayes of the Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province for his assistance and conversation while I visited Philadelphia. I met
Deborah Binder in the summer of 2022 when she worked as the Assistant Director of the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann. Although she has since passed away, I’m grateful for our conversation and her work on behalf of Saint Neumann. Thanks to Sister Lea Stefancova, FSJB, at the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Museum for our conversation. I want to thank Mike and Kathy Fulton for sharing their memories of Karen Fulte. I wish I could have met her myself. Finally, thank you to the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University of Chicago for their generous Hank Fellowship in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition for Graduate Students, which made much of this research possible.

I want to thank my colleagues at Belmont Abbey College, especially Dr. Patrick Wadden of the History Department and Dr. Jane Russell, O.S.F., of the Theology Department. Thank you for your encouragement over the last two years.

Not everyone is lucky enough to form great friendships in graduate school, but the Loyola Chicago History Department is exceptional. Thank you to the Dissertation Writing Group, especially Dr. Jenny Clay and Dr. Nathan Ellstrand, for being a source of comfort and productivity, especially during 2020. Lisa Hartman, Matt Labbe, Emily Muszynski, and Angela Rothman became dear friends through our shared coursework. I’m thankful for all the fun times and fond memories in Chicago. Finally, I could not have accomplished this without the support of my cohort. I never imagined forming lasting friendships in graduate school like those with Dr. Sean Jacobson and Dr. Cate LiaBraaten. It’s hard to find the words.

Thank you to the parishioners at St. James the Greater Roman Catholic Church in Charles Town, West Virginia, for your prayers and support over the years. I especially want to thank Rev. Deacon David Galvin for his continued mentorship.
Thank you to my Bearcat family for providing joy throughout the last decade. I promise I won’t bring homework to bridal showers or reunions anymore. Much love to Jules Bartko, Natalie Capito, Kate Dillon, Ben and Emma Grassi, Kathryn Klawinski, Joni Mulvaney, Sarah Riffon, and Kate Scanlon.

None of this is possible without my family. You’ve probably heard more about shrines than you ever wanted to hear and continued to support me. Thank you to the aunts, uncles, and cousins who supported me. Many thanks to Robert & Karen Baldry for hosting me while I conducted research in Philadelphia. To my in-laws, Gillian and Stan Arledge, and all of the Arledge siblings, thank you for accepting me into your family these last few years. Thank you to Maria Butcher for her love. To my sister, Melanie, I am immensely grateful for how our relationship grew over the last decade and for introducing the family to Aaron. The most unexpected part of my graduate school journey occurred when I met my husband, Taylor, in the fall of 2019. Thank you for keeping me well-fed in the final years of writing, distracting Minnie when I needed to type, and always listening when I needed an ear. I love you.

Academic acknowledgments save the most important acknowledgment for the very last spot. I have never doubted that this space belonged to my parents, Clifford and Margaret Davis, whose support has made everything possible. It’s hard to find the words, but sometimes the simplest will do: I love you. Thank you for everything.
To the memory of two saintly women,
Mary Lou Davis and Margaret “Peg” Lemmon
I am a Shrine…I have a heart that throbs in a dozen and more bodies. In these same bodies, I have eyes that beam a welcome day after day to a troubled world; I have ears that listen to grief-laden words; hands that reach out to steady tottering forms, and feet that lead along a pilgrim way to God.  

Author Unknown, “Pages from the Journal of a Shrine”

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1 “Pages from the Journal of a Shrine,” 1977, Box 16 Folder 14, Seton Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
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ABSTRACT

American Catholics throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries advocated for a canonized American. To promote a candidate, canonization supporters collected objects related to the person’s life and curated exhibits to educate Catholics about the candidate. American shrines became intertwined with creating museums or heritage tourism sites for Catholics to encounter their faith and learn about their place within the nation’s history. This dissertation argues that shrines create an American Catholic public memory by interpreting the lives of saints and potential saints through the American past, situating themselves into a national story, and reproducing a saint’s memory for future generations. It relies heavily on memory studies, public history, and material culture as a theoretical basis for understanding each site.

Five individuals and their corresponding sites form the core of this study’s research. The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini demonstrates how American Catholics navigated local and national history to commemorate the nation’s first canonized citizen. In Emmitsburg, Maryland, the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton became a heritage tourism destination and further legitimized an American Catholic memory. The National Shrine of Saint John Neumann in Philadelphia, PA, exemplifies the role of material culture in forming memory. The last chapter examines two individuals on the path to sainthood, Blessed Solanus Casey and Venerable Fulton Sheen. The Solanus Casey Center in Detroit, MI, remembers Casey by embracing a unified collective memory rooted in an ecumenical understanding of American Catholic history. However, Sheen’s disputed memory shows how creating a national Catholic
memory involves forgetting individual narratives through the history of two sites dedicated to Sheen, one in El Paso, IL, and the other in Peoria, IL. These shrine complexes provide spaces for American Catholics to negotiate the meaning of those two identities.
INTRODUCTION

“A shrine is a place of hope,” explained Deborah Binder, “because everyone walking through that door is looking for a miracle or praying for something that already occurred.”¹ Binder, the director of the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann until her death in 2021, mused about the museum operated at the site. “I do think that the holiness of being around so many of John’s items, and the atmosphere that was purposefully created there, it is a holy place. They are his personal relics and it does affect you.”² Visitors to America’s Catholic shrines encounter the physical remains of holy people, but also learn about their lives by exploring the museum often situated within the same building. These shrines produce a Catholic interpretation of the American past and sustain a Catholic memory in the United States.

American Catholics continue to build shrines as the Church approves new beatifications and canonizations.³ The Mass celebrating these events draw crowds of tens of thousands to commemorate the life of a deceased Catholic. This process often takes many years, occurring after clergy and laity tirelessly advocate for an individual’s promotion to sainthood, after awaiting miracles to prove the candidate’s sanctity, and after the paperwork is finalized at the Vatican. A candidate may also never reach sainthood. However, to avoid this, individuals

² Ibid.
³ The 2023 dedication of the Blessed Stanley Rother shrine is explored in more detail in the conclusion.
dedicated to a particular cause work tirelessly to keep their candidate at the forefront of people’s minds. American Catholics form prayer groups and host public events, even building museums dedicated to the life of their candidate. The size and structure of these institutions differ depending on the financial resources available. However, to explain the lives of saintly individuals, these museums interpret the candidate’s life through the broader context of American history.

Catholic shrines often contain more than a church. The grounds can include administrative offices, retreat centers, cafeterias, gift shops, historic properties, museums, housing for religious orders, and more. The phrase “shrine complex” refers throughout this dissertation to all aspects of the built environment at a shrine, not just the sanctuary or resting place of the relics. American Catholic shrines operate independently, although the designation of a national shrine requires the approval of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. American shrines tell the stories of their saints, foster faith, and contribute to a common American Catholic identity. Shrine staff and volunteers might not verbalize this goal, but shrines’ interpretations of the past reveal how Catholics understand it in the present. Shrines create an American Catholic public memory by interpreting the lives of saintly individuals

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5 The study of religious souvenirs and gift shops is outside the scope of this dissertation. See Suzanne Kaufman, Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine (Cornell University Press, 2005).

through the American past, situating themselves into a national story and reproducing a saint’s memory for future generations.

**Saints and Shrines**

Catholics believe that a saint is any person residing in heaven following their death, while a canonized saint is any person recognized by the Church as a living model of piety. These individuals’ souls bypass Purgatory (a place of “final purification of the elect…necessary to enter Heaven”) and ascend directly to heaven. Canonization occurs when “lives have been marked by the exercise of heroic virtue, and only after this has been proved by common repute for sanctity and by conclusive arguments.” Canonization occurs when “lives have been marked by the exercise of heroic virtue, and only after this has been proved by common repute for sanctity and by conclusive arguments.”

The early Church created saints either through the formal process of the church hierarchy or through the informal popularity of an individual after their death, known as an extraordinary case of exception or “cult.” As the Catholic Church grew throughout the Middle Ages, it redefined the process of sainthood by discouraging cults and encouraging a bureaucratic process. This included the creation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Its function included overseeing causes of saints.

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8 Ibid., 1030.


Centuries later, the Church introduced the 1917 Code of Canon Law to clarify the Church’s convoluted legal system. As part of these changes, the Code also clarified the process for canonization causes. The new canon law stated that the informative process began in the diocese where a candidate died. Individuals appointed by the bishop research the Servant of God’s life and written records. Among other things, the bishop and appointed researchers needed to prove that a cult did not already exist dedicated to the individual. The Congregation of Rites received this documentation and produced research about the candidate to reaffirm the legitimacy of the material sent from the bishop. If no issues arose, the candidate would move onto the next stage and receive the title Venerable.

Postulators, vice-postulators, and bishops searched for miracles at this stage. As Kathleen Sprows Cummings explained, “the number of miracles required for beatification varied: one for a martyr, two for most causes based on eyewitness testimony, and up to four if no such testimony was available.”

Vatican officials scrutinized miracles for any plausible explanation that might disprove it. If no issues were found, beatification occurred, and the cause now awaited two new miracles for canonization. The waiting period for miracles could stretch indefinitely, and human errors in paperwork might also hold up a cause. It was through this process that Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini became a saint. Causes for Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton and Rev. John Neumann also followed the 1917 Code of Canon Law protocol, although local investigations occurred prior to its codification.

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The complexities of this law made achieving sainthood a tedious, time-consuming process. Changes to the protocol occurred before the end of the twentieth century. During the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI split the Sacred Congregation of Rites into the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Congregation of the Causes of Saints. Pope John Paul II restructured the latter office fourteen years later “to make the canonization process simpler, faster, cheaper, more ‘collegial,’ and ultimately more productive.” The apostolic constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* outlined the new norms. It simplified the role of bishops “to inquire about the life, virtues or martyrdom” of potential saints. Now, instead of both diocesan and Vatican officials handling the research, it remained the responsibility of the bishop. He would send a description of the candidate’s life and copies of all written materials the Sacred Congregation for review. As Kenneth Woodward described, “no longer would the church look to the courtroom as its model for arriving at the truth of a saint’s life; instead, it would employ the academic model of researching and writing a doctoral dissertation.”

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16 Woodward, 91.
The Congregation for the Causes of Saints also released *New Laws for the Causes of Saints* later that year which provided a detail about the procedure. A petitioner “advances the cause of canonization” and can be “any member of the People of God or any group of the faithful recognized by ecclesiastical authority.” A postulator appointed by the petitioner remains in Rome to handle the investigations and funds of the cause. Individuals appointed as a vice-postulator do not need to remain in Rome. Pope John Paul II also changed the name of the Congregation in 1988 to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. Since Pope John Paul II, other administrative changes occurred in later papacies to streamline the canonization process.

The path to sainthood begins at the local level with an individual’s reputation for holiness. During the diocesan phase, a postulator is appointed to gather information about the candidate who receives the title of Servant of God. The bishop chooses whether to introduce the cause which can only happen five years after candidate’s death, a much shorter length than the earlier 50 years required before Pope John Paul II’s changes. Individuals appointed by the bishop continue to gather documentation and inspect the candidate’s life for signs of theological errors. Anything contrary to the Catholic faith would halt the canonization.

The bishop sends this documentation, or *positio*, to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints once the Diocesan Phase ends. This Roman Phase involves intense review of the submitted documentation, but if the bishops and cardinals of the Dicastery agree, the pope can declare the

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18 Ibid., sec. 1a.

19 *New Laws for the Causes of Saints*, sec. 9a.
individual as Venerable. The demonstration of an individual’s martyrdom or life of heroic virtues determines their sanctity. At any point in this process, the cause can end, and a candidate will not move forward.

Two things can happen next. If the candidate was martyred, he or she will immediately become a Blessed, but if a candidate’s cause rests on heroic virtue, a miracle is needed to move forward. During this period of waiting, the vice-postulators and other supporters often promote a candidate so that Catholics remain aware of the individual and ask for their prayerful intercession. If a miracle occurs and is proven to be “scientifically inexplicable,” then a beatification can occur.20 The Beatification Mass normally takes place in the diocese where the cause originated as a local celebration. Shrines dedicated to the Blessed may now operate.

Supporters await a final miracle. During this time, many of the American shrine complexes created new exhibits or organizations to boost their candidate’s reputation. The new miracle is examined by the Dicastery. The postulator advocates for the candidate’s sanctity while the Promoter of the Faith, formerly called the Devil’s Advocate, must try to find holes in this argument.21 If the miracle is found to be legitimate and the candidate withstands this trial, then the pope canonizes the individual. The saint is now an example for Catholics around the world and the canonization Mass occurs at the Vatican. Periodically, however, a pope can decide to canonize an individual outside of the normal process. This may happen due to a cult already

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20 Dicastero delle Cause dei Santi, “I PASSI DEL CAMMINO VERSO LA SANTITA,”
http://www.causesanti.va/it/i-passi-del-cammino-verso-la-santita/approfondimenti.html#fama-di-santit%C3%A0.

21 Ibid.
existing or a unique example of sanctity. However, this has never happened with an American saint.

Most literature related to saints, shrines, and relics focuses on the early and Medieval Church when devotion to the saints reached a highpoint. Martyrs killed for their faith comprised the earliest population of saints and were commemorated at their gravesites. These pilgrimages were “the original stimulus to the emergence of collective memories, group identities, and cultic practices.”\(^\text{22}\) Elizabeth Castelli demonstrated in *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* how this collective memory of executed Christians provided a foundation for identity within the early Christian community. However, with the legalization of Christianity and its growth, the number of people dying as martyrs diminished. Saints now included those who died to the world by embracing poverty and a life of prayer.\(^\text{23}\)

Catholics gather relics to commemorate the saints. These included the physical relics of the saint or items that touched those remains, referred to as contact relics.\(^\text{24}\) Relics also include items touched to a relic.\(^\text{25}\) Scholars and Catholics often use the colloquial designations of first-, second-, and third-class relics to distinguish the type of relic. A first-class relic is the saint’s

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body, a second-class relic is an object touched to the saint’s body, and a third-class relic is one that touched a second-class relic. These relics often attract visitors to venerate them.

Pilgrimage to shrines peaked in the Middle Ages. The Code of Canon law defines shrines as “a church or other sacred place to which numerous members of the faithful make pilgrimage for a special reason of piety,” stating that “votive offerings of popular art and piety are to be kept on display in the shrines or nearby places and guarded securely.” The bishop for the diocese a shrine is located within provides approval for it to operate. Modern shrines can also receive the designation of a national shrine from the country’s governing body of bishops, which for American Catholics is the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The USCCB outlined its process for designating a national shrine in 1992. The twenty norms described what a national shrine must do before outlining the application process. National shrines must have already spent ten years as a diocesan shrine, adhere to Catholic teachings, “nourish the spiritual lives of pilgrims,” and fulfill other administrative obligations as defined. The USCCB allowed shrines using the term “national” prior to 1983 to continue to do so, but later shrines needed to seek approval. Most shrines operate independently of each other and the formal Church hierarchy, although voluntary professional organizations like the National Association of Shrine and Pilgrimage Apostolate provide opportunities for enrichment geared

26 Ibid.

27 The Code of Canon Law, Vatican.va, 1230 and 1234.2.

towards shrine operators. Although pilgrimage looks different in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Catholics continued traveling to venerate the saints.

**Historiography**

As pilgrim sites and tourist destinations, shrines attract visitors interested in learning about their faith and its past. The decision of shrines to interpret their history for visitors means that they are engaged in public history work. During the public history’s earliest years as a defined field, Robert Kelly defined public history as “employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia.” However, public historians since the 1970s expanded the notion of public history. While there is no single definition of the term, most scholars agree that it is historical work designed both for and with public audiences. Put simply, “public history describes the many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world.” The exhibits, programming, and collecting happening at shrines is a form of public history since that work exists to engage shrines’ visitors, mainly Catholics, with their past through the lens of the shrine’s particular saint.

The staff and volunteers at most shrines lack formal training in public history but are deeply committed to their faith and their community’s history. Some, like former directors of the Seton Shrine, choose to receive professional training and attend workshops as their awareness of

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30 I often explain public history as empathetic history in order to demonstrate the field’s concern with incorporating individual and community experiences through shared efforts to understand the past.

the field grows. Others, like staff at the Neumann shrine, recognize their site’s limitations and hire outside professionals to create new exhibits. However, most shrines remain in the hands of “outsider history-makers,” a term coined by Benjamin Filene to describe individuals “unbound by professional affiliation” who “can break the rules about disciplinary rigor, form, and footnotes.” Their passion drives an individual to engage with the past, as chapter 5 will explore with Karen Fulte.

Public historians increasingly embrace projects created by outsider history-makers, especially since the notion of shared authority remains a cornerstone within the field. Although a term initially created in reference to oral history work, Michael Frisch’s phrase has turned into “something of a mantra” to explain how public historians recognize that although they are subject-matter experts in their area of research, the people living in the community possess memory and firsthand experience of the events, and are thus able to contribute knowledge of their own. These two groups, scholars and community members, increasingly collaborate in projects designed to share the past with the public.

However, for a field rooted in collaboration and a desire to help engage communities with their own pasts, it is shocking how little public historians engage with the work of the religious past. Devin Manzullo-Thomas aptly explained that “public history has a religion problem.” It exists because “the literature in the field often takes a reductive approach to religious ideas and subjects” and that “some public history literature altogether ignores religion’s

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role in shaping American historical memory—treating religion as if it has no power in contemporary life.”

Perhaps public historians fear upsetting religious audiences or worry their project might claim too much spiritual authority. American faith-based tourism is a growing market valued at over a billion dollars, and public historians interested in engaging new audiences should take religious public history seriously.

Albeit slowly, scholarship religion in public history and museum studies has grown over the last decade. Scholars often overlap in a small field. Crispin Paine, an emeritus faculty member of the University College London, wrote several books about the intersection of religion and museums. His book *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties* provided an introduction to the theoretical knowledge and practical issues museum professionals face in dealing with religious objects. He also coedited the foundational text, *Religion in Museums: Global and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, which provided case studies from scholars that survey the role of religion within museum studies. One of his coeditors, Gretchen Buggeln, later co-edited the only text providing practical information for public historians in the United States.


States, *Interpreting Religion at Museums and Historic Sites*.\(^{38}\) Oftentimes, however, work on religious archives provides the most insight to dealing with religious public history.\(^{39}\)

Scholars have turned with vigor to the examination of how American evangelicals and fundamentalists understood their past and the use of history. *Saving History: How White Evangelicals Tour the Nation’s Capital and Redeem a Christian America*, *Hijacking History: How the Christian Right Teaches History and Why It Matters*, and *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* are just three examples of scholarship from the last five years focused on evangelical production of history.\(^{40}\) In *Ark Encounter: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park*, anthropologist James Bielo conducted an ethnography at the Ark Encounter located in Kentucky to better understand how fundamentalists create their past. Another recent monograph, *The Old Faith in a New Nation: American Protestants and the Christian Past*, considered how nineteenth-century Protestants understood

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their history.41 However, Manzullo-Thomas’s work is especially crucial for providing an in-depth study of the development of evangelical heritage.

American Catholics lack a cohesive study about how their faith creates a lens to understand the nation’s past. However, using concepts from the field of memory studies, this dissertation will shed light on how shrine complexes contribute to a national identity and memory. Since the mid-twentieth century, Catholics added museums and expanded the programming offered at these sites. They share stories of Catholic sanctity through American history. When research for this dissertation began in the fall of 2019, plans included taking visitor surveys at Catholic shrines and producing a dissertation centering Catholic public history. The COVID-19 pandemic changed those plans, but with time and the nation’s gradual reopening, research shifted to examine a Catholic American memory. Sites of public history, like these shrine complexes, produce a shared identity and collective memory of the past.

Scholars in the early twentieth century formed the crucial beginnings of the memory studies. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs contributed one of the field’s most important works in 1952. He argued in the book *On Collective Memory* that memory was dependent upon social structures.42 Halbwachs explained how this occurred at the individual level and how memory transferred between generations. He argued that collective and individual memory are mutually dependent because society shapes how an individual remembers the past which reaffirms the collective memory. His chapter “Religious Collective Memory” examined how early Christians

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utilized the Jewish past to situate themselves as a religious group continuing from a remembered past, and how Church memory incorporated new traditions by arguing for the ongoing presence of Jesus. Halbwachs recognized that religious memory operated like collective memory, and that its development relied on clerical groups generations removed from the founding to approve and reproduce memory.

The 1980s and 1990s ushered in renewed focus on memory studies. Works by Jan and Aleida Assmann examined ancient Egyptian history and argued that cultural memory is rooted in a mythical past, thousands of years removed from the present. It contributes fixed symbols and rituals to reproduce memory act as an outgrowth of collective memory. Jan Assmann relied on mnemohistory as a framework for understanding the history of a particular memory in his work on Egyptian monotheism and the history of Moses. This “is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past.” Communicative memory enables the sharing of cultural memory through generations. It is an egalitarian process since it “lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years,

43 Ibid., 118.
44 Ibid., 98 and 101.
45 Travis B. Williams, History and Memory in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Remembering the Teacher of Righteousness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 58.
47 Assmann, Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western, 9.
the time span of three interacting generations.” Although American Catholicism is rooted in a larger and much older tradition, the Assmanns would consider the memory of American saints as communicative. Their ideas of mnemohistory have greatly informed this dissertation.

Meanwhile, Pierre Nora worked during the late twentieth century on his groundbreaking, seven volume series examining the creation of French identity and memory. Nora later worked to translate these ideas into English by distilling his crucial concepts into a three-volume series entitled *Realms of Memory*. At the heart of his work was the concept of *lieux de mémoires*, sites of memory that created a proxy for a past that no living individuals could remember. These tangible or intangible sites allow individuals to participate in a collective memory of a shared past. The material, functional, and symbolic dimensions of these sites contributed to their effectiveness and allow collective memories to transmit between generations. These sites provide a shared identity rooted in memory since no sites exist where “memory is a real part of everyday experience.” Nora’s work assumed a fracture between history and memory but that their interaction creates these sites of memory. The second volume, *Traditions*, included scholarship related to the memory of the Catholic Church in France.

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48 Ibid., 111.


51 Ibid., 2.

changed for the French people as their relationship with Catholicism underwent changes from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period, and the cathedrals’ symbolism in France changed as Catholicism’s relationship with the French government changed. Nora demonstrates the link between national histories and the study of memory.

American historians applied the study of memory to the meaning of American history. Michael Kammen’s book *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* examined the development of an American tradition and the ideological implications of it. Kammen’s study not only considered the intellectual origins, but also examined the production of tradition at heritage sites within the United States. Meanwhile, John Bodnar’s *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* considered how official memory and vernacular memory produced a shared public memory. Official memory derives itself from leadership and an “ideal” version of past events. Vernacular memory is diverse and reflects reality. For Bodnar, “public memory is produced from a political discussion that involves not so much specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the entire existence of a society: its organization,

53 Ibid.


56 Bodnar, 13.

57 Ibid., 14.
structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present.”

Official and vernacular beliefs coalesce at commemorative activities like parades or monuments. This mixture produces a public memory that enables a “society [to] understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.” Bodnar’s conception of public memory is utilized to create a basis for understanding American Catholic memory.

However, to understand the concept of American Catholic memory, it is crucial to examine the work of sociologist Barry Schwartz. His scholarship largely focused on individuals and events in American history, although he also considered memory in ancient Judaism. His 1991 article “Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington” provided a theoretical intervention to explain the stability and change within collective memory. He examined how Americans remember Washington as both a member of the wealthy elite and an imperfect, egalitarian individual. Schwartz demonstrated that the past is “a stable image upon which new elements are intermittingly imposed,” although the earliest version of the past limits the amount of change possible later.

58 Ibid., 14.
59 Bodnar, 15.
62 Schwartz, 232 & 234.
rooted in a “constitutive narrative” that is retold and reinforces their shared identity. This is often accomplished by utilizing notable individuals in the memory.

The growth of memory studies during the late twentieth century provoked public historians to consider its influence. A special edition of The Public Historian released in 1997 examined the relationship of public history and memory. David Glassberg’s “Public History and the Study of Memory” provided an overview of the field as it stood and suggestions for how public historians might utilize memory studies, including utilizing it to consider how “public history as political culture,” “public history as popular culture,” and “public history as place consciousness.” Since then, public historians regularly engage with memory studies in their work.

The study of American Catholic memory remains a small field. The most notable contributions come from religion scholar Robert Orsi. His 2003 article “‘The Infant of Prague’s Nightie’: The Devotional Origins of Contemporary Catholic Memory” considered the changing

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63 Schwartz, 222.


nature of Catholic devotionalism during the turbulent 1960s.\textsuperscript{66} Changes from the Second Vatican Council created a “rupture between past and present” with the Council’s new liturgical norms.\textsuperscript{67} Pre-Vatican II devotional practices now appeared outdated to modern Americans. Their processing of these changes demonstrates conflict within the meaning of Catholic identity and emotion.\textsuperscript{68} Orsi explored these ideas in more depth with his book \textit{Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them}.\textsuperscript{69} The work focused on the relationship between individuals and sacred figures while also considering the American Catholic understanding of a pre-Vatican II past. For Orsi, “the culture that tried to build so high a barrier against the past wound up creating an obsessive culture of memory. But because contemporary Catholic remembering and forgetting has its origins in the rupture between the present and the past that opened in the 1960s—in the wound between the present and the past—it is marked by trauma.”\textsuperscript{70} His focus on the change and continuity within Catholic devotional practices following Vatican II created a narrow window through which to view the American Catholic past.

This dissertation follows in the work of public historians, memory scholars, and others interested in the formation of religious identity and collective remembrance. As Elizabeth

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Orsi, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Orsi, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 157.
\end{itemize}
McKeown wrote, “Catholics have a memory of our own, sustained by the veneration of martyrs, the collecting of relics, and the conduct of liturgies in the imagined community of the Church.”71 American shrines provide a window into the American Catholic past and present, since both are shaped by ongoing dialogues about the meaning of American Catholicism.72 Not all American Catholics will visit a shrine during their lifetime, but these sites still provide the best opportunity to understand both official and vernacular Catholic memory.

The creation of saints and shrines begins with vernacular memory, as individuals recall the deceased candidate’s life and example of holiness. These vernacular memories possess the potential to shape a candidate’s official memory. This potential exists because the postulator and vice-postulators require miracles of the candidate’s intercession to submit to the Vatican. Supporters, especially the staff and volunteers at shrines and museums, solicit visitors for their personal stories of the candidate’s life and afterlife. However, when a candidate is approved for canonization, the opportunity for individuals’ vernacular memories to influence the saint’s official memory closes. Shrine complexes reproduce a narrative created by the positio and the Vatican approved miracles. To borrow Schwartz’s phrase, this “stable memory” becomes the basis for a shrine’s interpretation of a saint while the museum provides the clearest expression of a saint’s official memory. As a public space, individual Catholics still create vernacular memories of a saint during their visits to shrines by remembering a saint’s intercession into their own life, incorporating the memory of the trip into their understanding of the saint, or by sharing


72 This concept draws from ideas in Nuala Johnson’s 2003 book *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Remembrance* published by Cambridge University Press.
stories of private devotion with other visitors and staff. Some visitors even ignore the site’s interpretive decisions by interacting with objects on their own terms and breaking the facade of an official way to commemorate the saint, as chapter 3 explores in more detail. These interactions between official and vernacular memories at the shrine complex, as well as the site’s interpretation of a saint through the American past, creates an American Catholic public memory rooted within national and individual contexts.

No living person remembers Frances Xavier Cabrini, Elizabeth Ann Seton, and John Neumann. The shape of their memory is decided; shrines and programs merely reproduced a narrative legitimized as official memory. Visiting the shrine allows individuals to engage with this memory and incorporate it into their own understanding of the American past. However, the legitimatization of certain memories requires the erasure of other memories. This is best highlighted by Solanus Casey and Fulton Sheen. The memory of both men remains in production since neither have been canonized, and both shrines have undergone recent renovations or have some planned for the near future. Conflict over who can contribute to the memory arises with Sheen, although Casey’s memory takes a wider approach than any of the other saints featured in this dissertation. These five individuals provide a wholistic understanding of how American Catholic public memory is produced and reproduced at shrine complexes.

Deciding which saints to examine proved difficult. Initially, this research was focused on American Catholic citizens who possessed both a shrine and a museum, relying less heavily on memory studies but instead focusing on museum studies. The USCCB claims Saints Junípero Serra and Kateri Tekakwitha as American saints, but since both predated the creation of the
United States, I chose to exclude them. A saint cannot have a shrine until after beatification, which automatically cut any person of color since there are none yet. If a person must be beatified to have a shrine, than why is Sheen still included in this dissertation? The Vatican’s decision to indefinitely postpone his beatification and the history of competing Sheen museums compelled me to pursue Sheen as an example of Catholic forgetting. My research had shifted clearly into Catholic memory by the writing of chapter 4. When the Church incorporates a new American saint or a shrine updates its museum, the American Catholic public memory shifts to enshrine a new aspect of shared past.

**Outline**

Chapter 1: “Making Mother Cabrini” explores the history of the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini located in Chicago, Illinois. As the first canonized American citizen, Mother Cabrini’s shrine complex and memory demonstrated how American Catholics navigated the commemoration of local & national history within the broader official memory approved by the Vatican. Her shrine provides a clear example of how a traditionally outsider population is incorporated into the national narrative.

Chapter 2: “Sister Guides and Shifting Memory,” focuses on the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Maryland. It examines how the Sisters of Charity and other Mother Seton devotees created a heritage tourism destination that further legitimized American Catholic memory. Planning documents reveal how the shrine understood its place within

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73 My dissertation’s shift to focus on Catholic memory came too late to include those two individuals. However, I intend to explore this question in my future work.

74 In the last two years, there has been a greater push from American Catholics for a saint of color. Any future works would expand to include their memory.
American history and Catholic history, and how the shrine tries to promote itself for future generations.

Chapter 3: “NEUMANNIANA’: The Stuff of Sainthood,” examines the memory of the first American man canonized. The National Shrine of Saint John Neumann grew out of St. Peter the Apostle Parish in Philadelphia, PA. The chapter focuses on the role of memory and material culture by exploring how Neumann supporters intentionally collected Neumann’s belongings not as relics, but as historical artifacts, and the multiple iterations of a museum that the site operated.

Chapter 4, “Forging Memory,” examines the memory of two individuals on the path to sainthood. The first man, Blessed Solanus Casey, was beatified in 2017 and has a shrine in Detroit, Michigan. The second, Venerable Fulton Sheen, does not currently possess a shrine, although the Diocese of Peoria operates a museum dedicated to him. A laywoman operated her own museum dedicated to Sheen as well. Over the last twenty years, both the Casey and Sheen sites have taken vastly different approaches to interpreting the history of American Catholicism. The Casey Center’s creation demonstrates the formation of a unified collective memory, while Sheen’s memorialization shows how American Catholics forget when creating a shared memory.

Each shrine exists to encourage devotion to a particular saint and to deepen a visitor’s faith. Evangelization and education intertwine at shrine complexes as staff provide more opportunities for visitors to learn about their faith. Shrine complexes interpret the life of a saint by contextualizing the individual’s place within American history. This context produces a Catholic-centered narrative of American history that informs individual and collective memory of visitors. Shrine complexes reproduce an American Catholic public memory and provide a space for American Catholics to negotiate the meaning of these two identities.
CHAPTER 1

MAKING MOTHER CABRINI’S MEMORY

The West Park neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois in the twenty-first century is an affluent neighborhood. With walking access to Lincoln Park and Diversey Harbor, it attracts residents with an average household income of nearly two hundred thousand dollars.¹ One notable condominium building, the Lincoln Park 2550, towers over the park along N. Lakeview Avenue. Its units sell for millions of dollars since the building’s completion in 2012.² However, nestled at the bottom of the structure on the south end of the block is the entrance to the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, the first American canonized by the Catholic Church. The block once held the Columbus Hospital she founded and her order, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, operated the hospital until the end of the twentieth century. Cabrini spent much of her life in this neighborhood of Chicago, so although the current location might seem like an odd place for the patron saint of immigrants to be commemorated, it represents a vital part of her memory.

The order’s decision to close Columbus Hospital and sell its property also involved decisions about how to manage Cabrini’s shrine. Cabrini died in her room at this Chicago


property and devoted believers flocked to the hospital’s chapel to ask Cabrini’s intercession for their prayers. Closing the hospital meant finding a new home for Cabrini’s memory. Members of the order from around the world pondered the question. Sister Lina Colombini, the General Superior of the order from 1996 to 2008, expressed that she did not want a museum, recalled McGlinchey.³ A museum implied a stagnant space, and Mother Cabrini was anything but stagnant.⁴ A saint’s vernacular memory lives, acts, and changes through the belief that a saint intercedes in the lives of believers. As the following chapters demonstrate, museum and exhibit spaces at American Catholic shrines play a crucial role in preserving a saint’s memory for future generations rather than static records of the past. This chapter argues that Mother Cabrini’s canonization and the multiple iterations of her shrine gave American Catholics the chance to blend two identities into a joint American Catholic public memory.

The United States can claim nearly fifty Catholic saints and the number of potential saints grows each year.⁵ As the first American canonized, Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini’s memory is closely tied to the American identity she acquired following her immigration. Historians have considered how American saints project a notion of American holiness and Catholic identity.⁶ However, their shrines remain understudied, even as scholarship on European shrines and religious tourism continues to grow. The phrase “shrine complex” refers throughout this

³ Ibid.


dissertation to all aspects of the built environment at a shrine, not just the sanctuary or resting place of the relics. It includes the administrative offices, museums, and historic also present at the shrine. These complexes create and reinforce an American Catholic public memory. Cabrini’s official memory begins with the biographies produced about her following her death and grew into a canonization cause and national shrine.

**The Place of Memory**

The canonization process involves creating a narrative of a candidate’s life and virtues. Stories are collected by postulators and vice-postulators as they define the individual’s sanctity. As the cause moves forward, each step formalizes and reinforces a collective narrative of the candidate, or “how groups, small or large, recall and think about the past.” A saint’s memory originates in the local region the saint lived within and slowly expands outward as the person’s story passes from generation to generation. Not every story will be retold by the cause or by the faithful. The saint’s history, like the American Catholic public memory, will continue shifting as new memories are incorporated into the narrative. This occurs in two ways: when visitors create their own memories of the individual at the shrine, or when new saints are added to the Church’s calendar. Michael Frisch describes memory as “living history…the remembered past that exists in the present.” Since Catholics believe that the saints live eternally, then it follows that the story of a saint is living history.

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Oftentimes these individual memories do not build the public memory. However, they allow individuals to remake the saint’s narrative as part of their personal story. For example, during an interview with the current director of the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Sister Bridget Zanin shared the story of a family who traveled to the shrine for the intercession of Mother Cabrini in the health of their baby. The family received permission to lay the baby on Mother Cabrini’s bed within the reproduction of the room where she died. The family and the sisters prayed over the child. These parents later reported that the child put on weight and was declared healthy by the family doctor.⁹ This story is incorporated into the vernacular memory of Mother Cabrini but will never be part of the official memory approved by the Catholic Church since it occurred after the completion of her canonization.

The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini provides an example of American Catholic memory making. The canonization of Mother Cabrini demonstrates how an official memory was created that is then reproduced through the shrine, and how it allowed American Catholics to grapple with two sets of identities. The memory of Mother Cabrini shifts with everyone who visits the shrine, although their stories rarely become part of the public memory held in common by Catholics. The national shrine might be able to shift and incorporate their memories, but the official memory has long been decided.

**The General Memory of Mother Cabrini’s Life**

People retold the story of Mother Cabrini’s life since her death in 1917. These stories spread the woman’s memory and provided publicity for her cause. The biography below is the

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typical version expressed in hagiographies, movies, literature, and at the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini. This collective memory developed over decades and became formalized with her canonization. While the story below weaves key social demographics and historical events into the narrative, it is mainly the hagiography reproduced after her death and shared by the shrine. It also emphasizes the virtues associated with Mother Cabrini by those who knew her or her work. The extent of Mother Cabrini’s charity work is broad and not every moment can be discussed in this chapter. It focuses on stories central to the American memory of Mother Cabrini, which includes how Americans processed Cabrini’s Italian heritage.

Francesca Saverio Cabrini entered this world surrounded by miracles and devoted to Jesus. Born in the small village of S’ant Angelo Lodigiano southeast of Milan, her father was working in the field when Francesca’s mother went into labor. As Agostino made his way back to the house, he noticed the doves circulating above and found that his wife Stella had given birth. Christianity utilizes doves as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and those birds flying over the place of Francesca’s birth marked her with a holy mission. Her parents raised “Cecchina” as a devoted Catholic. She grew up hearing stories of missionaries in the evening when her father read from the Annals of Missionary Work to the family. These stories inspired Francesca. She made paper boats, filled the boats with violets, and floated them down the river. They represented Catholic missionaries on the way to China and she greatly desired to go west

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11 Ibid.

someday herself. This piety continued throughout her childhood. At the age of nine, Francesca received permission to celebrate her first Holy Communion when children at that time usually received Holy Communion first at the age of twelve. The desire to be a religious sister and missionary grew as Francesca became older.

Francesca’s initial attempts to join a religious order resulted in rejection. She eventually organized her own order of sisters and went through the tedious process of receiving approval from the Vatican. The Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus established their earliest missions in Italy and, after they proved successful, Mother Cabrini went to Rome for papal permission to go to China. At this time, Pope Leo XIII served as the Bishop of Rome. He became a crucial character in the life of Mother Cabrini and her hagiography emphasizes the relationship between these two individuals. Their relationship became a central narrative of her collective memory.

Pope Leo XIII shared concerns and devotions with Mother Cabrini. Both favored the Sacred Heart of Jesus, both appreciated the importance of missionaries, and both recognized the unique relationship of the Catholic Church to modern states. Leo XIII articulated social teachings for a modern Catholic Church, so the work of Mother Cabrini captured his attention in a particular way. Mother Cabrini approached Pope Leo XIII and spoke of her desire to serve as a

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missionary to China. “Not to the east, but to the west!” Sister Mary Louise Sullivan wrote in her dissertation that “the pope’s subsequent comment has not been cited often: ‘The institute is still young. It needs resources. Go to the United States. There you will find the means which will enable you to undertake a great field of work.’” America’s large Italian immigrant population needed assistance and the land’s wealthier citizens would have the financial means to assist Mother Cabrini with that work and other international activities. It would be difficult to find the same support in Italy since the country was in the midst of a recession and dealing with nationalistic tensions. Having the pope’s approval would also open doors for the order and provided Cabrini’s memory with an additional edge of legitimacy. As McGlinchey pointed out, Cabrini was “influenced by Pope Leo 13 to do a social good on a big scale.”

The United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century experienced a massive growth in the Italian immigrant population. Between 1876 and 1920, a little over 4.5 million Italians arrived in the United States. Many of these people were motivated by an agricultural crisis in Italy that affected the country’s already poor citizens. The Papal States’ role in the Italian unification struggles motivated some to leave their country and the Catholic

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16 Ibid.


Church. Those who remained faithful struggled to find Italian-speaking priests for Mass and other sacraments. American clergy worried about the Italian immigrants leaving their faith, and also worried about the folk expressions of their faith.

The Third Plenary Council in 1884 brought the American Catholic hierarchy together in discussions about issues facing the church, including concerns about Italian Catholics. Other topics of concern included Catholics place in America, parochial education, and the retention of laity. The council concluded that the best approach to retaining Italian Catholic believers was to emphasize the Christian elements of marriage, education, literature, and Sunday rest. However, these immigrants faced prejudice from members of their own church. One priest wrote that Italians possessed a “lack of what are known as the manly qualities that makes a profound difference between them and all the races who have hitherto contributed to the making of the American population.” He then described the state of their religious identity as “the worst off in religious equipment of, perhaps, any foreign Catholics whatever.” Cabrini, like other Italians, knew about the plight of their American counterparts and she desired to treat them with compassion.

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19 Sullivan, 83.


21 Ibid., 46.


23 Ibid., 70.
Having received papal approval, Mother Cabrini set off for New York City in 1889 to serve those immigrants. She also started to interact with Protestant Christians far more than she ever had previously. Protestants appeared in Mother Cabrini’s letters throughout her life as she tried to deal with their extensive proselytizing efforts. Like Cabrini, Protestants mixed religious instruction with charity. Her reaction to their faith developed throughout her life, but at this initial moment on the ship bound for America she desired to “convert all Protestants…a mission I have very much at heart.” Mother Cabrini and members of the Church’s hierarchy worried about the growing influence of Protestants and their ability to sway new immigrants away from the Catholic Church. Earlier works on her life reference this event more frequently than modern publications. Mother Cabrini also met the faith of Catholic immigrants with more charity than American clergy. “They believe with simplicity, and this is one of the wisest qualities of the true believer. They are ignorant, it is true, but they have good reasons for their belief. God has infused the faith into their souls, and they show every goodwill to become instructed. No! The faith of the people is not to be despised.”

Upon arriving in the United States, Cabrini worked to open orphanages, hospitals, and schools. She began in New York City but spread activities to other cities, all while creating international missions and traveling abroad. The constant stream of activity was a central part of

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26 Sullivan, 166.
Mother Cabrini’s life and offers a “consoling memory” to the order’s modern sisters who worry about the balance between prayer and work. In Chicago, Cabrini founded Columbus Hospital in 1903, as well as schools and orphanages. Like other Italian Americans, she chose to name her institution after Christopher Columbus to instill Italians with a sense of pride for their ethnicity, but also to remind Italian Americans of their duty to national patriotism. This hospital served the wealthy and poor, utilizing profits to maintain charity work. Like Pope Leo’s original advice to Cabrini about strategically locating missions for financial reasons, Cabrini knew building the hospital in the wealthy Lincoln Park neighborhood would result in paying customers who would fund charities for the poor. Chicago represented one of the few places Cabrini frequently visited and spent long periods of time living.

Mother Cabrini also spent time in Denver, Colorado and Seattle, Washington. Seattle holds a particularly important moment in the memory of Mother Cabrini. It was during a stay there in 1909 that Mother Cabrini became a naturalized citizen of the United States at the age of fifty-nine. Hagiographers and biographers emphasize her desire to be an American citizen. However, more recent scholars recognize that she likely became a citizenship to make her border

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27 Sister Joan McGlinchey, interview with author, Chicago, September 23.


29 Biographers with a preference for Chicago will say she loved the city, but I’m inclined to wonder if the city’s location made it easier for her to travel between projects on the east and west coasts.

crossings easier and to consolidate the properties her order controlled. Regardless of her motivations, this occasion would completely change the memory of Cabrini after her death. Her naturalization certificate describes a fair haired, blue-eyed petite woman—a far cry from the film representations of Mother Cabrini as a tanned, dark haired Southern Italian woman.

Mother Cabrini died on December 22, 1917. She felt ill while traveling in Seattle and decided to return sooner to Chicago than originally planned. Mother Cabrini worked until the end. She had stayed in her room that morning, an unusual occurrence, but continued to work on filling Christmas candy bags for children at the orphanage. Two sisters went to check on her later in the day and found that she had died in her rocking chair. A few drops of blood had dripped onto her rug. Even her death emphasizes the central components of her memory: hardworking, charitable, and devoted. Mother Cabrini’s memory formed through her own words, the recollections of those who knew her, and how her life was retold over the years. Some of those stories became a part of her official memory with the approval of the Catholic Church during her canonization.

Canonization and Americanization of Mother Cabrini

The canonization process begins after a person’s death as those who knew the deceased find ways to remember their life. This includes visiting the grave, sharing stories of the person, and, most importantly for potential saints, asking for the deceased to intercede on their behalf in

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32 Department of Commerce and Labor.

33 Wall text, “Description of Items in Mother’s Room,” *From Immigrant to Citizen-Saint: Frances Xavier Cabrini in Chicago*, National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Chicago, IL.
heaven. If the person continues to attract attention and if there are signs the deceased interceded in heaven by earthly miracles, then the canonization process moves into a formal sphere where the diocese prepares the paperwork necessary to approach the Vatican. Mother Cabrini’s memory underwent a formal transformation with the start of her canonization process as it transitioned into an official narrative. The memories selected for inclusion within her degree of virtue paperwork formalized her stories into a collective memory. The longtime chaplain for Columbus Hospital and the Mother Cabrini shrine described how “she also carries a mystique…There are so many stories…and she carries such a grand legend.”

Local organizers and vice-postulators had to choose from those stories what became part of her official memory. The canonization of Mother Cabrini formalized a narrative about her life which blended American and Catholic identities. This is the memory told at the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini.

Mother Cabrini died in December of 1917 and within a year the order’s successor, Mother Antonietta Della Casa, had collected memories and eulogies into a commemorative book about her. Mother Cabrini’s canonization cause fell into the pre-twentieth century formula since changes to the process occurred concurrently to her initial steps. There are still discrepancies between each cause. For example, Mother Cabrini’s cause received a dispensation to move forward with opening before the 50-year prejudicial stage required after a person’s death

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35 Cummings, 103.

ended. The prejudicial stage is an opportunity to organize spiritual and financial support for the cause. Vatican officials who knew Mother Cabrini and her international network of benefactors advocated for the cause to move forward. They knew Mother Cabrini and wanted to testify to her saintliness. Nuncio to the United States Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, the apostolic nuncio to the United States, advocated for the cause to open a mere thirty years after her death and continued pushing for her sainthood in the following decades. Although he was Italian, Cicognani emphasized the American ministry and wrote that she “understood the great future reserved to the Church in the United States” and that “she understood the American mentality.” The nuncio, however, cannot open a cause; it begins at the diocesan level with the bishop’s approval.

Cardinal George Mundelein of the Archdiocese of Chicago opened Cabrini’s cause for canonization in 1928 with the informative phase. This informative phase begins the Ordinary Process of canonization. The diocese and the cause’s supporters begin gathering testimony about the life of the proposed saint. Two miracles stood out from the rest. Sister Delfina Grazioli of Seattle, Washington, a member of Mother Cabrini’s order, recovered from several major operations unusually fast and received a vision of Mother Cabrini appearing to her. Peter Smith, an infant blinded shortly after birth due to a medical accident, received his sight when sisters working at the hospital rushed to place a relic of Mother Cabrini on his face. The Manhattan

37 Ibid.


39 Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Sanctity in America (Paterson, NJ: St Anthony Guild Press, 1939), 111.


While bishops in New York or Italy could have laid claimed to Cabrini’s memory, her death in Chicago permanently tied Mother Cabrini’s memory to the city and Mundelein acted quickly to promote it. Her sainthood elevated the city’s Catholic community and added to the prestige of the archdiocese. Mother Cabrini received the title of “Servant of God” while the diocese continued gathering documents written by Mother Cabrini, collecting testimony from those who knew her, and sorting through the paperwork required for the cause to continue. Between 1928 and 1933, the archdiocese held a series of hearings to gather testimony about Mother Cabrini.\footnote{Virginia Gardner, “Thousands Ask Beatification of Chicago Nun,” The Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1936.} Many of these stories would never be publicized outside of the Vatican and its bureaucracy. Although the cause came from Chicago where she died, her body was sent back to Upper Manhattan since she had expressed in life a wish to be buried there. Her body was
exhumed during this stage to check for incorruptibility, which would count as a miracle towards canonization, and to collect relics.45

The Vatican began reviewing paperwork related to Mother Cabrini’s cause in June of 1936.46 Two years later, on November 13, 1938, Cardinal Mundelein celebrated the beatification of Mother Cabrini in Rome and earned the distinction of having said a person’s funeral and beatification Mass.47 Pope Pius XI venerated a relic of Mother Cabrini in the Basilica of Saint Peter. The penultimate step to sainthood, Mother Cabrini could now be publicly venerated by Catholic faithful, and a shrine could publicly operate. Her beatification occurred during a moment when the world continued to grapple with the aftereffects of the Great War and could sense tensions rising that might lead to another war. Cardinal Mundelein noted that “When we hear about the heroes of the Great War, in the warlike preparations and in pre-war propaganda, we are apt to forget that peace has its heroes as well.”48 Mother Cabrini’s life could unify and remind the world to unify.

American Catholics celebrated the beatification with special Masses, including one at her tomb in New York.49 Americans had a particular reason to celebrate: it was the first American


46 “Vatican Renews Discussion of Cabrini Beatification,” Chicago Tribune, April 7, 1937.

47 Cortesi, 1.


49 Cortesi, 9.
beatified. Radio stations invited guests to discuss the purpose of a beatification.\textsuperscript{50} Cardinal Mundelein noted this during his address at the Vatican. “To further her work, to link her institutions more firmly to the country, to show her countrymen the road of opportunity for their children, she became an American citizen, and thus she belongs to us.”\textsuperscript{51} He continued to explain that Mother Cabrini represented a nation where many were still immigrants or children of immigrants.

The excitement of Mother Cabrini’s beatification did not end when the ceremonies ended in Rome. Upon Cardinal Mundelein’s arrival back in Chicago, Mayor Edward Joseph Kelly organized a parade of 10,000 people, largely Italian, to celebrate the beatification and the special role that a Chicago bishop played within it.\textsuperscript{52} The mayor arranged banners not in red and blue but in the papal yellow and white, declaring the archbishop as a “lamplighter of liberty and one of the great living Americans.”\textsuperscript{53} Cardinal Mundelein and the postulators work did not stop at the beatification. They continued working towards canonization. However, Cardinal Mundelein would not live to witness the canonization of Mother Cabrini.\textsuperscript{54}

On July 7, 1946, Mother Cabrini was canonized a saint. Many of the Catholic Church’s operations were halted by the outbreak of World War II. Mother Cabrini’s elevation to sainthood

\textsuperscript{50} “Roman Rites to be Told in Broadcast,” \textit{Cicero Life}, November 13, 1938.

\textsuperscript{51} Arnaldo Cortesi, “Mother Cabrini Beatified IN Rome; She is First U.S. Citizen So Honored,” \textit{The New York Times}, Nov. 14, 1938, pg. 9.

\textsuperscript{52} John Evans, “10,000 Welcome Mundelein Back Home from Rome,” \textit{The Chicago Tribune}, December 7, 1938.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} “Cardinal Mundelein Dies,” \textit{The Dispatch}, October 2, 1939.
was the first after the war ended. The Vatican initially announced plans to canonize the woman in 1943 but war prevented the ceremony from occurring. She represented papal hopes of uniting American and Italian Catholics after the Second World War. The pope’s homily on that day emphasized her charitable works to Italians, Americans, and those around the world.

Roughly 40,000 people gathered at Saint Peter’s Square to witness the ceremony, including Chicago clergy, American sisters, and beneficiaries of Mother Cabrini’s miracles. Over 30,000 people visited the body of Mother Cabrini and special Masses were again held around the country for American Catholics to celebrate. Chicago celebrated with a prayer service and Holy Hour at Soldier’s Field. One hundred thousand people turned out for the event officiated by Cardinal Stritch. Promotions for the event promised “a blazing altar and a procession of 1,000 priests, monsignori, bishops, and a cardinal.” Teenage girls formed a map of South America and the United States to demonstrate the places she worked, while the event culminated with a girl acting as Mother Cabrini and carrying prayer petitions to the altar. Choirs and an orchestra would accompany the event. Mother Cabrini’s order made its own preparations for the remembering their founder. Superior General Mother Antoinette Della Casa publicized a six-

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56 “40,000 Watch Colorful Ceremony in Canonization of Mother Cabrini,” *Lewiston Tribune*, July 9, 1946.

57 “2 N.Y. Masses Observe Mother Cabrini Elevation,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 1946.


59 Ibid.
story addition to Columbus Hospital and a shrine.\textsuperscript{60} It honored the saint’s desire to aid the poor while also providing the faithful with a place to remember her.

The canonization of Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini provided the United States with its first saint, and a clear example of forming a national Catholic memory. The celebrations reinforced the stories central to Mother Cabrini’s life including her charity, American citizenship, and industrious spirit. Books, movies, and art created utilized those same stories. One of the first books published after her canonization celebrated “the kindred spirit, a hustler, a go-getter.”\textsuperscript{61} These books about the recent saint emphasized her Americaness. One book stated bluntly that “[i]t would seem that God wished to give the Catholics of America a saint typically American. If Yanks are known throughout the world for getting things done efficiently and with the utmost dispatch, then Saint Frances Cabrini is indeed a typical American. She accomplished wonderful things, surmounted obstacles that would baffle ordinary persons. Even in reaching the supreme honor of sainthood she wasted no time.”\textsuperscript{62} Not only was Cabrini’s life uniquely American, but now even her canonization upheld American values.

**Forgetting Memories**

The memories formalized by Mother Cabrini’s canonization are not the only stories to exist. Some fall out of popularity, and others do not reflect the saintly woman produced through canonization. “The old-timers used to say she could work like a man…She worked with a pick

\textsuperscript{60} “Dedicate New Columbus Hospital,” *The Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1950.


and shovel and wheelbarrow. The old-timers say she even used to cuss like a man.\textsuperscript{63} Whether or not Mother Cabrini utilized profane language is unverified, but in the mind of this woman it links Mother Cabrini to a larger ability to transgress easily defined gender roles. It highlights that the stories within Mother Cabrini’s collective memory are not the only stories to exist about the woman. There were the stories selected for her collective memory and approved by the Catholic Church as the ones to remember her by. Other stories are told through books, recollections, movies, and art. Paul Connerton described seven different forms of forgetting, including “forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity” which includes “a set of tacitly shared silences.”\textsuperscript{64} In the case of Cabrini, the act of forgetting occurred as she neared canonization in the stories left from her official narrative and from those told at her shrine.

American Catholics grappled with Cabrini’s feelings towards Protestants. The earliest books about Mother Cabrini described her desire to proselytize. For example, a 1922 book depicted her experience meeting Protestants aboard the ship bringing her to America. Cabrini met other passengers during the 1891 journey and witnessed a Protestant meeting that encouraged spiritual growth, although she did not name a denomination. The Englishman in charge finished the service and collected money for the children of poor sailors. Cabrini wrote “It is really sad that so many follow the devil and not Christ. We are so cowardly, that, whether it be from human respect or some other motive, we fear to speak of Christ in public. We see virtue


derided, and we remain silent. Why are we so cowardly?”

Biographies published in 1927, 1944, and 1947 retold the same story. Cabrini’s later purchases of property from Protestants allowed them “now to be only of the holy faith,” according to another text. Mother Cabrini’s hope to convert Protestants would be an acceptable memory for Catholic audiences, but unacceptable to non-Catholic Americans. Producing an American Catholic public memory involved erasing aspects of Catholic memory to create one palatable to Protestant American audiences.

As Mother Cabrini’s fame grew, authors seemed unsure of how to frame her remarks about Protestants. It might cause her to lose followers or popularity among non-Catholic Americans. A 1947 edition takes on the tone of modern Cabrini memories when it deals with the subject of Protestants. Mother Cabrini was not yet a saint and her observations reflect growth in virtue. “The fact was that gradually she was coming to realise [sic] that very many of our separated brethren are [sic] not only attached but convinced and, living in perfectly good faith, attain also to lives of deep piety; and further, that only when this is grasped by the Catholic apologist will he make such an impression.” However, for the Cabrini who witnessed this Protestant service, she had not yet grown in “the true charity she advocated” and “express her

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67 Di Donato, 218.

68 Ibid., 68.
displeasure in somewhat repellent terms.”69 Thus Cabrini’s evangelization efforts are reframed into an acceptable story of personal growth.

This growth took time, and she also struggled to prevent Protestant proselytization of Catholics. She might not represent the only religion ministering to the same neighborhood. Protestant denominations had successful enterprises set up, especially in New York City with its long tradition of Protestant proselytizing.70 Italian Catholics faced a Catholicism in America much different from their faith experience in their homeland. While the Masses were still in Latin at this time and would follow the same pattern as at home, America’s churches had a tradition of a door tax unlike Italian ones.71 This turned away poor immigrants who could not afford to go inside. Moreover, the devotional life of Italian Catholics differed from American Catholics and Americans viewed those actions with suspicion.72 Protestants seized upon these opportunities to convert Catholics.

Cabrini combated this Protestantism was by linking the cultural traditions of their native Italy into the school programs she opened and in tying national heritage to religious heritage.73 Students learned the Catholic faith while learning about their heritage. Hagiographies balanced Cabrini’s love for her homeland by emphasizing that “it was not that she loved the land of the

69 Ibid.
71 A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey, 46.
73 Sullivan, 84.
past the less, it was that she loved America and its future the more.”74 Throughout her years in America, Mother Cabrini learned to work with Protestants and soon benefactors came from outside Catholic circles. After her death, the Mother Cabrini League dedicated to promoting her memory was founded by a Protestant profoundly affected by the nun’s life.75 Her later canonization also raised the status of America’s Italian population. The immigrants and their descendants could point to an individual who exemplified the best that Italy had to offer: a woman who crossed the Atlantic to work with the American poor.

Mother Cabrini faced other new situations as she met non-Europeans and indigenous people throughout the Americas. Several books written between 1945 and 1949, emphasized her reaction to native populations rather than her reaction to Protestants.76 Mother Cabrini took a second major journey in 1891 to Nicaragua. Writers usually emphasized only one trip, either her journey to America or her journey within the Americas. Those who chose the trip from New York to Nicaragua emphasized Mother Cabrini’s experience ministering to the local community. The phrase “native” and “local” were used interchangeably by these authors, so it is unclear whether or not the authors are referencing indigenous communities. As one children’s book wrote, “The dress of the native women—or, rather, the state of undress—was highly displeasing to the pure-minded Foundress.”77 The memory of Cabrini shifted as writers struggled over what

74 Di Donata, 165-166.


version of a saint to put forward: one who seeks to convert Protestants or one who seeks to convert the “gross immorality” of Central American natives. At least American Protestants and Catholics could unite against non-Christian people.

Mother Cabrini received increased press coverage in the United States as her cause moved forward in the 1930s and 1940s. Newspaper articles written in 1946 to announce her celebrate or canonization emphasized the charitable contributions that Mother Cabrini made to Americans by building charitable institutions. This created a saint palatable to American audiences regardless of faith. *The Washington Post* spoke of how Cabrini “won fame by spreading the gospel” throughout the world. The spiritual ministry central to the work of a missionary was excluded from the stories unless written by a Catholic paper. National memory moved Mother Cabrini to a safer neutral image.

Mother Cabrini was also a saint for Italians, and the pope recognized Mother Cabrini’s love of her home country in the canonization homily. “Nations and peoples will learn from her—who ardently loved her father land and spread the treasures of her charity and her labors even to other lands.” Cabrini’s Italian heritage was something that American audiences grappled to fit into their narrative, and the race of Italian Americans played an oversized role. As Robert Orsi explains, “Italian-American history began in racially inflected circumstances everywhere in the United States” because of the “racial inbetweenness” Italian Americans represented.

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stories sometimes referenced the complexion of Mother Cabrini. This is particularly important because a “fair-complexioned Italian nun” would be better received in the United States. \(^{82}\) This description is given on her naturalization paperwork. Portraying Mother Cabrini with a light skin tone made her more acceptable to white, Protestant Americans who still struggled with the large Catholic and immigrant populations.

While Mother Cabrini frequently spoke of her love of her home country, her decision to become a naturalized citizen permanently affected the way she would be remembered. The official memory of Mother Cabrini pushed believers to recognize both nationalities, but her cultural memory in the United States became distinctively tied to her American citizenship. Her heritage could be chosen or discarded at will to produce certain memories. News coverage emphasized the new American citizen saint. These articles articulated the way Mother Cabrini served Italian populations in the United States. Once canonized, the national memory of Cabrini as American overshadowed previous stories. Mother Cabrini’s memory is shaped by the stories included and the stories excluded.

**Creating the Mother Cabrini Shrine**

The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini is a “a place of devotion” in the words of its current director, Sister Bridget Zanin, MSC. \(^{83}\) The creation of shrines is often

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\(^{83}\) Sister Bridget Zanin, interview with author, Chicago, June 12, 2020.
spontaneous and then formalized as devotion grows. These are distinct spaces from museums, although similarities abound. Nonetheless, modern shrines increasingly incorporate elements of museums into their site’s design. Catholic shrines are unique spaces distinct from a museum, and yet distinguishing between the two remains a challenge for because of how shrines incorporate museum design and museums display religious objects. The Mother Cabrini shrine experienced several design iterations as it transitioned from a hospital chapel to a shrine complex throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Today, the shrine utilizes an exhibit to share the history and memory of Mother Cabrini.

Shrines are places where a relic or other holy object is displayed for special veneration. Relics are “the material remains of a saint or holy person after his death, as well as objects sanctified by contact with his body.” They might be fragments of hair or bone, clothing worn by the saint, or devotional objects that are touched to the relic by believers. The theology regarding Catholic shrines and relics expanded throughout the last two thousand years, and their existence predates the creation of modern museums. For example, reliquaries are special containers that relics are stored within, and their design developed as new materials became available. Modern reliquaries regularly have a clear window so that viewers might see the relic, while early medieval reliquaries are shaped like the relic since no clear material existed. Finally, as Sister Joan McGlinchey stated, “a shrine is supposed to have some direct connection


to the person that’s been memorialized” and for Mother Cabrini her national shrine grew out of the place she died.87

The shrine originated in Columbus Hospital following Mother Cabrini’s death. The hospital opened in 1905 and continued operation through 2002. The room Mother Cabrini died in quickly became a site of remembrance after her death. Hospital patients, families, and Catholics visited the space to ask for the saint’s intercession. During the canonization process, representatives of the Vatican examined the room in 1938 while meeting with Mother General Antoinette Della Casa.88 She was the immediate successor to Mother Cabrini, and they worked together while Cabrini was still living. Chicago was not the only site of a Cabrini shrine—shrines in Denver and New York City also remembered the nun. In New York City, Mother Cabrini’s body was on display behind a glass-enclosed altar after her beatification.89 However, it was the relationship between Mother Antoinette and Mother Cabrini that made Chicago the main shrine.

Mother Antoinette possessed the foresight to expand the hospital and build a formal shrine into it when Cabrini’s canonization was announced. In 1947, portions of the original Columbus Hospital were demolished, and a new structure was added to the remaining building. These additions included “a shrine in honor of America’s first saint.”90 These changes resulted in the dismantling of Mother Cabrini’s room and storing her belongings for when the construction

88 “Officials to Visit Scene of Mother Cabrini’s Death,” Chicago Tribune, September 17, 1938.
90 “Plan Columbus Hospital Wing, Cabrini Shrine,” Chicago Tribune, October 12, 1947.
was complete.\textsuperscript{91} Newspapers revealed the confusion over where or what the shrine was through their descriptions of the hospital. \textquote{The entire structure is the national shrine of Mother Cabrini,} declared the \textit{Chicago Tribune}, while others pointed to the chapel as the shrine.\textsuperscript{92} The relationship between the shrine and the hospital was \textquote{dual-purpose…the hospital used it they took care of it, [and] took care of staffing for the priest.}\textsuperscript{93}

Several months passed between the final cornerstone laying and a formal dedication ceremony, this time officiated by Samuel Cardinal Stritch. Again, the \textit{Chicago Tribune} headlined the article with a title about Columbus Hospital, but wrote that it was an \textquote{addition to the national shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini.}\textsuperscript{94} The article also shared a description of the lobby, chapel, and room where Mother Cabrini died. The renovated chapel became a \textquote{modern Romanesque} design in a cruciform, with a baldachin canopy and new fresco paintings on the ceiling.\textsuperscript{95} The frescos were created by an Italian artist over the span of a year and depicted key points within Mother Cabrini\textquote{s} life. The sisters had \textquote{an eye to the future} and wanted \textquote{something that would be worthy of an American saint.}\textsuperscript{96} They recognized the need for a central shrine to keep Mother Cabrini\textquote{s} memory alive.

\textsuperscript{91} Peter Kendall, \textquote{Mother Cabrini Shrine to Reopen at Hospital,} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, May 13, 1988.

\textsuperscript{92} \textquote{New Columbus Hospital Most Modern of All,} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, September 20, 1950.

\textsuperscript{93} Sister Joan McGlinchey, interview with author, Chicago, September 23, 2020.

\textsuperscript{94} \textquote{Dedicate New Columbus Hospital,} Chicago Tribune, September 22, 1950.

\textsuperscript{95} Genevieve Flavin, \textquote{Bless Chapel of St. Cabrini on Wednesday,} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, August 7, 1955.

\textsuperscript{96} Sister Joan McGlinchey, interview with author, Chicago, September 23, 2020.
Throughout the following decades, Cabrini’s shrine remained open to visitors. The shrine remained open to visitors every day from 9 AM to 5 PM. However, the 1980s were a difficult period for hospitals nationwide with cost inflation, more restrictive health insurers, and a push towards admitting fewer patients. These conditions directly affected Columbus Hospital’s finances as it attempted to balance labor costs with the need for an expanding staff. Moreover, the Missionary Sisters operated and funded three hospitals in Chicago: Columbus, Cabrini, and Cuneo, and the costs quickly added up. These institutions still emphasized medical care to the poor and spiritual care for their patients. Their local community commitment was not enough to prevent the healthcare inflation from happening in their halls. Columbus Hospital sought new ways to bring in paying customers.

In 1988, Columbus Hospital reopened Mother Cabrini’s death room to the public after four months of architectural restoration to make the room accurate to her lifetime. “Hospital officials hope the restored shrine to St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, which has suffered from flagging interest in recent decades, will again become recognized as one of Chicago’s most important religious and historical sites.” An organization dedicated to the promotion of Cabrini known as the Mother Cabrini League oversaw this project, it appears that hospital administrators hoped it might provide a new source of income from visitors. Devotees of Mother Cabrini expressed

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99 “The 3Cs: A Special Heritage.”

100 Kendall.
concern that after less than fifty years this saint had “become largely forgotten outside of Catholic circles,” and that people associated her work with the Cabrini Green Projects, a housing initiative created by the City of Chicago known for its crime. It had no tie to Mother Cabrini beyond what the city hoped would be an honorary name.\textsuperscript{101} The room’s restoration accurately reflected 1917 and additions dating to the 1950s were removed. A newspaper article listed the contents of the room: iron bed, dresser, kneeler, desk, and photos on the wall.\textsuperscript{102} The shrine could pull in visitors who might otherwise not need the services of the hospital, and those visitors might leave a monetary donation.

The shrine commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of Mother Cabrini’s death in 1992 with special events throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago. A crowd of two hundred gathered at the Cabrini Hospital in the West Side while the St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Chapel at the shrine hosted tours of the chapel and shrine.\textsuperscript{103} During the same year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released the Norms of the Designation of National Shrines since shrines reached out to the USCCB and they did not have a codified way of handling requests.\textsuperscript{104} Canon law only provided the information that bishops were to designate national shrines. The USCCB created guidelines in 1989. This document revealed how Catholics understood shrines: “places that have deep spiritual significance” and where “divine grace is

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103} Gregory.

manifested in a very special way—a place where the human and divine world intersect.”105 The Mother Cabrini Shrine recognized this moment and the rector, Father Theodore Ploplis, asked the USCCB to declare it a national shrine. This was done in 1993.106 None of the other Cabrini shrines, including the one with her body, were ever raised to the same level.

The 3Cs struggled to operate even with those changes and in 2002 Columbus Hospital closed. The Missionary Sisters had already closed the Cabrini Shrine in 1997 when they anticipated the changes.107 The land would be sold, and the money used to pay debts from the hospital as well as staff pensions. However, the buyer would have to develop a new shrine building as well since the chapel and the shrine would remain. Columbus Hospital’s location in Lincoln Park, right on the edge of the Park and with views of Lake Michigan, made it a highly desirable piece of land. Ricker Murphy Development, “wanted the property so badly that they spent a million dollars to preserve the chapel…of their own money to build scaffolding and then temperature control” for the art and artifacts inside.108 They thought the shrine might only be closed for three years, but it would take more than a decade before the space would reopen.109

105 Ibid.


109 Ibid.
The hospital building was torn down in 2007. The land turned into the Lincoln Park 2520, a condominium complex now ranked among the most expensive in the city.\textsuperscript{110} One reporter joked that “Mother Cabrini may have taken a vow of poverty, but—let’s be honest—she had a good eye for real estate.”\textsuperscript{111} The Missionary Sisters of Charity retained ownership of the chapel. The room that was used as a replica of Mother Cabrini’s sat in the portion of the building that was demolished. The Missionary Sisters recognized that the faithful still needed access to the saint’s physical memory, even if their site was no longer open to the public. While construction of the new condominium building and shrine office space occurred, the Sisters moved Mother Cabrini’s relics to the Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii in Chicago. In announcing this, then-bishop Raymond Goedert of Chicago stated that “every piece of Chicago was blessed by her presence. Chicago is where she lived and died.”\textsuperscript{112} This ceremony tied her more closely to the local memory.

The National Shrine remained closed until 2012. In the six months leading up to the shrine’s reopening in 2012, the Missionary Sisters and the Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii arranged for this relic and relics of other saints to travel throughout the diocese at various parishes.\textsuperscript{113} This again created publicity for the shrine and reminded Chicagoans of their special relationship with Mother Cabrini. It was this relationship between Chicago and Mother Cabrini


\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
that kept the shrine in Lincoln Park. The sisters considered moving the Cabrini Shrine, but Sister Bridget Zanin stated that “Together, we prayed and we discerned, and St. Frances Cabrini died in Chicago and is really a Chicago saint…Therefore, I think it was important for the people of Chicago and the people of the United States to have a place where they can come and pray and find inner peace.”

The Missionary Sisters seized the opportunity to reimagine what the shrine would look like. Sister Joan noted that previously there was not “a lot of room for the museum part” and they could now incorporate more history into the shrine. “We decided it would trace the history in Chicago, particularly the founding of Columbus Hospital.” The shrine reopened on October 8th, 2012 with Francis Cardinal George celebrating Mass. He expressed during the homily that he originally doubted the decision to keep the shrine at the same site but trusted in the sisters’ ability to manage the site. Missionary Sisters from around the world flew in for the reopening since the national shrine served “as a tangible reminder of Cabrini close to an area where she served.” There was a two-hour Mass and tours to explore the new space. The shrine’s separation from the hospital placed Mother Cabrini at the center. “It’s not like before where it was a hospital. This is for everybody,” explained Sister Bridget Zanin. Previously, the shrine’s location in the hospital made it difficult for visitors to come see it. The room that Mother Cabrini

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116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.
died in had long since been demolished and reproduced several times. This new National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini recreated the room once again, but the sisters and their staff were challenged to tell the story of Mother Cabrini. This new iteration of the shrine would remember Mother Cabrini in Chicago and demonstrate the sisters’ ongoing work in the modern world.

The National Shrine Today

Today, the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini provides a place for retreat, education, and administrative operations. It opened in 2012 and only closed briefly during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Mass is offered daily within the chapel and visitors can explore the museum exhibit to learn about Mother Cabrini. The addition of a gift shop provides the shrine with income and the local community with a small Catholic devotional shop. The entire space is designed around the chapel since it was the only part that survived demolition. The chapel’s artwork reinforces the official memory of Mother Cabrini with additional emphasis on her Italian heritage, while the exhibit teaches about the life of Mother Cabrini in Chicago.

The shrine complex sits on the corner of W. James Street and N. Lakeview Ave bordering Lincoln Park. The building’s exterior consists of a lightly colored concrete that blends into the architecture of the neighborhood. The developers, Ricker Murphy Development, did not have a history of working with religious architectural spaces. The restoration of the chapel was one of the last projects at the site since its interior was covered with protective scaffolding and canvas throughout construction. The architectural firm of Sullivan, Goulette, & Wilson

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119 “About,” Murphy Real Estate, http://murphyres.com/xr6mawugs3nxh8k547wdsuhyx1s2d.
oversaw this phase of the project. Not only did the firm restore the existing chapel art, but they also designed the narthex which links the chapel to the office space. Moreover, the firm designed the exhibit space and worked on the recreation of Mother Cabrini’s death room.120

A visitor who enters the building stands in a wide hall. To the left are administrative offices, to the right is the shrine’s exhibit, and straight ahead is the entrance to the chapel. There are also two side halls that lead to back entrances for the offices and exhibit, as well as the conference rooms and garden space. The space is reminiscence of a modern office building until stepping into the chapel. Having been built in the 1950s, the architecture and design does not match the rest of the shrine complex and visually queues a person to recognize that this space is meant for worship and for the spiritual remembrance of Mother Cabrini. The amphitheater design places the altar at the bottom center of the chapel. Pews surround it on four sides, although the pews between the altar and the entrance number far more than the other sections and is where most of the audience is meant to sit.

The physical relic of Mother Cabrini encased in glass beneath the altar provides a chance for pilgrims to familiarize themselves with the saint. The primary purpose of a saint is to exemplify the glory of God. In recent centuries, saints left behind written records of their spiritual lives or people familiar with the saint share stories of their faith. While that is somewhat true for Mother Cabrini, especially for members of her order who study her life in formation, much of Cabrini’s spirituality remains hidden. When her relic toured the city prior to the reopening of the shrine, one organizer comment that “there is a lot of myth in Chicago about her,

but her spirituality is less known; these six months helped us deepen our understanding.\textsuperscript{121} The altar is where Catholics can physically remember Mother Cabrini by touching the altar or the relic’s window. While the frescos above the altar might provide some insight into Cabrini’s life, this space is primarily a sacred one reserved for honoring the saint.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{The Shrine Chapel at the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini. Beneath the altar is a small glass window to view the relic of Cabrini, while on the ceilings murals depict important moments from her life. Photo by the author.}
\end{figure}

The ceilings above the altar reinforce the collective memory of Mother Cabrini. Large paintings depict various moments of her life that are central to her traditional narrative. There is no signage to interpret the imagery and their meaning is clear if a viewer already knows about

the life of Mother Cabrini. The first one depicts Jesus surrounded by angels as the child Francesca Cabrini gazes up at him. This central image is surrounded by other vignettes from her childhood: a baby held in her parents’ arms surrounded by doves, Francesca receiving a blessing, a young adult Francesca teaching, and Francesca receiving approval for her order. In all of these she is dressed as a lay woman. The other frescos reinforce her memory as well.

The second fresco depicts Mother Cabrini’s charity work in the United States. The central image shows Mother Cabrini in the Missionary Sisters habit, arriving in New York City as signaled with the Statue of Liberty in the background. The smaller vignettes depict Mother Cabrini serving the poor by providing water, education, and comfort to the imprisoned. She is a saint with a halo and people are knelt before her. Streamliners and sailboats provide the

Figure 2. Mother Cabrini depicted in a fresco above the altar. It shows Cabrini in the center providing comfort to fellow immigrants. The Statue of Liberty behind her reminds a viewer of her arrival to the United States. Photo by the author.
backdrop. The third panel continues to portray Mother Cabrini’s charitable works. However, these emphasize the centrality of Jesus in her life by depicting him as the main image surrounded by clouds, as Mother Cabrini directs a child upwards towards him. The remaining background scenes span a lifetime: Mother Cabrini with the pope, meeting with cardinals, receiving her American citizenship, and dying the rocking chair displayed in the museum.

Finally, the last fresco portrays Mother Cabrini being lifted to heaven. She stands in a cloud similarly to the depiction of Jesus in the previous fresco. The people painted into the background are the faces from other frescos, coming to celebrate her entrance into heaven. The pope and other clergy represent the canonization process. However, more importantly, two vignettes portray the miracles that led to Mother Cabrini’s sainthood. Each fresco depicts a story central to Mother Cabrini’s memory. Institutions like the shrine collect memories and reinterpret them for the public and perpetuates Cabrini’s memory for later generations. However, it is not just a collective memory shared but a specifically national one. Her citizenship and charitable works within the United States are emphasized. International ministry is limited to her home country of Italy.

The shrine’s museum exhibit chose a local frame through which to interpret Mother Cabrini’s memory. “From Immigrant to Citizen Saint: Frances Xavier Cabrini in Chicago” tells the story of Mother Cabrini in Chicago, her canonization process, and the creation of the shrine. Although museums are part of American commemorative practices, some of the Missionary Sisters expressed concern that it would become too much like a museum, although the exhibit

would allow visitors “to see what’s relevant in her [Mother Cabrini] life and holiness and journey.” Museums contribute to a reduction of spiritual power within religious objects and a decline in the strength of traditional religious imagery. Certain items that can be classified as religious relics might lose their devotional importance if interpreted through an exhibit, a concept explored further in chapter three. While the design included exhibit designers, various conservators, and a local historian, the Missionary Sisters ultimately decided how to portray their foundress.

One way the National Shrine combatted the “museumification” of relics was by splitting the exhibit into three rooms. The first room explains Mother Cabrini’s arrival and work in Chicago. The second room contains a reproduction of the space in which Mother Cabrini died, complete with her original belongings. Since the exhibit follows a linear structure, viewers are forced to walk through this space in the middle of their visit. It creates a contemplative space for visitors to pause and reflect as they learn. The third room moves a visitor back into a traditional exhibition space. To better explain the space, the following paragraphs walk a reader through the route of the exhibit.

The first room opens with a large image of Mother Cabrini seated, a book open on her lap, not long after she arrived in New York City. This room emphasizes the creation of her

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charitable organizations in the United States. A photograph of the first sisters in America accompanies it. This room displays the memory of Mother Cabrini has a hardworking, dedicated woman. The address book containing her business and clerical contacts is displayed, along with the promissory note signed for the building of Columbus Hospital. It demonstrates the variety of influential people that Mother Cabrini knew during her life and hints at the memory of her business acumen. Photos of Columbus Hospital illustrate the wall, as well as a large map depicting her travels around the world produced during her canonization process. Each item is both a historic artifact and a religious relic, and most of the space is dedicated to work done in Chicago.

No item more clearly represents the dual purpose of these objects than Mother Cabrini’s habit. Across from the entrance a large display case contains her habit dressed on a faceless mannequin. To lay visitors it might evoke memories of their childhood in Catholic schools or illustrate a stagnant past, but to the sisters who once wore the habit it provokes an affection for the object. This object is an example of one selected for museumification: a religious relic because Mother Cabrini wore it, yet the design team chose to display it within a traditional exhibition space rather than a spiritual one. The spiritual nature of the item has disappeared. Furthermore, the social norms of museums dictate that this object cannot be interacted with as a religious object. The shrine staff could share authority of this object by providing helpful signage.

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126 Chicagien. seu Lauden: beatificationis et cnaonizationis servae Dei Francisceae Xaverio Cabrini, findatrieiis et primae antistitae generalis Congregationis Soroum Missionariae a S. Corde Jesu, November 21, 1929, National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini.

to explain the dual nature of the object, which might make visitors more willing to engage with it.

Figure 3. A glass case with a life-sized mannequin is used to display Cabrini’s habit. To the right, a doorway leads a visitor into the second exhibit space with the reproduction of Cabrini’s bedroom. Photo by the author.

Visitors in a museum might anticipate that the next room follows a similar exhibit design. Instead, the second room features a recreation of the death room of Mother Cabrini as a place of prayer. It invokes the nature of a shrine rather than a museum, even though the room’s position behind a plexiglass wall might create the illusion of another display. A plaque provides information about the items in the room and states that “it matches the room’s former configuration, coloring, and detail and preserves the original furnishings and other items
belonging to Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini.”¹²⁸ Nineteen objects make up the room and were carefully preserved by conservators hired during the shrine’s remodel. Sister Joan noted that the sisters also cleared out items that had been added over the years: plastic flowers, devotional offerings, and any other item not consistent with the original room.¹²⁹ While the physical space is not the same space that Mother Cabrini lived in, the items belonged to her and are relics, which endow the space with supernatural meaning.

Several items draw a visitor’s immediate attention: a black wicker rocking chair that Mother Cabrini died in, the rolltop desk with smaller artifacts on top, and the religious artwork


that provides insight to Mother Cabrini’s spiritual life. The wicker chair is painted into one of the
chapels frescos. However, there are also relics on the visitor’s side of the plexiglass. A first-class
relic of Mother Cabrini is stored within a reliquary within a display case, like what one might
find at an art museum.130 A display class contains another first-class relic of Mother Cabrini, an
item which reminds a viewer of the woman’s corporal existence. It is the floor mat that once lay
on her bedroom floor and which Mother Cabrini bled on shortly before her death. This a first-
class relic and visitors can touch the case, much as they would a reliquary. The design of the
case’s top with its downward slant seems to imply that visitors will lean or rest against it.
Besides the arm bone in the chapel, this relic is the most accessible for visitors to interact with.

130 “Real (or first-class) relics include the skin and bones, clothing, objects used for penance, instruments
(Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003) Gale eBooks (accessed January 29, 2023),
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3407709421/GVRL?u=loyolau&sid=bookmark-
GVRL&xid=5a044163.
Figure 5. The visitor side of Mother Cabrini's bedroom space. Seating and kneelers are provided. The display case on the upper lefthand side contains a blanket with a drop of Cabrini's blood. Photo by the author.

This side of the plexiglass also provides benches facing the death room so that visitors can stop and rest. A kneeler positioned in front of the room provides visitors with a space to pray, and devotional cards are also available. The design reinforces the sacred nature of the space even as the recreated death room calls to mind a museum exhibit. However, further contributing to the space’s sacred nature are the two wooden boxes by the kneeler. One, made of wood with a decorative cross on the side, has a slot at the top for visitors to donate money. The second box has clear sides and a slot at the top for dropping written prayer requests into it. The shrine provides paper and pens for visitors. This moment is a crucial moment for visitors to contribute to the memory of Mother Cabrini as their prayers are collected by the Missionary Sisters. The Sisters pray for these intentions, briefly causing these vernacular memories to be incorporated into the shrine’s broader official memory.
The final exhibit room leaves behind the sacred atmosphere and once again reenters a secular museum format. This room is focused on what happened after Mother Cabrini died by teaching visitors about her beatification and canonization. The official memory of Mother Cabrini as hardworking is reinforced by quotes decorating the walls and the way her projects continued to function following her death. This space also ties Mother Cabrini’s death room into her memory by explaining that it “became a place of pilgrimage and prayer for men and women who sought her intercession. They wanted to be close to the Italian immigrant who made Chicago her home.” The relationship between Mother Cabrini and Chicago is emphasized throughout the site’s explanation of her canonization, demonstrating the exhibit’s commitment to interpreting Chicago and Cabrini although it is meant to be a national shrine. The excitement of the first American saint is conveyed through the images of celebration: sisters gathered to hear a radio broadcast and the beatification Mass are displayed. The exhibit ends on a note of continued mission: Mother Cabrini’s work did not end at her death or canonization but continues throughout the world.

The exhibit also ends, as in many museums, with a gift shop featuring items related to the site. There are also some informational panels in there about the development of the shrine itself. It includes images of her canonization celebration at Soldiers Field and of the newly opened chapel. It sells books, religious medals, rosaries, prayer cards, and other items associated with Mother Cabrini or just popular Catholic devotional materials. Just as medieval pilgrims collected souvenirs, modern pilgrims to Mother Cabrini’s shrine can acquire “tangible channels of

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connection with the sacred experience." These items reinforce the memory of Mother Cabrini by recreating famous moments from her life or providing a history of her life. The collective memory of Mother Cabrini travels from the shrine out to other Catholics by visitors who purchase a souvenir. While the National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini produces a collective memory of Mother Cabrini based in her local and national experiences, visitors from around the world travel to this site and thus take back an American version of Mother Cabrini.

Conclusion: The Future of a Shrine

Modern shrines function with a staff dedicated to the site’s continued operation and preserving a saint’s memory. Their objectives are like those of a museum: maintaining collections, fundraising to remain open, and finding new ways to live the institutional mission. The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini staff must consider its operation in conjunction with local parishes since the shrine is not part of the Archdiocese of Chicago and does not want to compete with other churches. Sister Bridget noted that “it is not the parish. It is a place of devotion. It’s a spiritual place where people come from good faith.” The shrine employs a permanent development officer to raise funds for its operations and charitable causes across the globe. For example, during the Advent and Lenten seasons, the National Shrine appeals to the local community for aid to help international enterprises rather than for the operation of the shrine. This giving exemplifies the spirit of Mother Cabrini.


134 Ibid.
The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini is a religious space dedicated to the memory of a saint and committed to her work. Since those who knew Cabrini or participated in promoting her cause no longer live, the memory of Cabrini is permanently rooted in the past. Visitors might possess a private devotion to Mother Cabrini, but her canonization closed the door to incorporating these new memories into her public memory. The shrine and its museum reproduce a collective memory for pilgrims who visit the site. Mother Cabrini’s canonization and subsequent commemorations reaffirmed to American Catholics how they could distinctively live their faith.

Mother Cabrini provided Americans with their first saint. She spent her life dedicated to charitable works worldwide, and this legacy continues through the work of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Their international ministry continues, and they educate about Cabrini’s legacy through their Chicago shrine. As Sister Joan McGlinchey described, a shrine is “a place that recalls the memory of a person who loved God and other people…and therefore remembers their journey to holiness…their journey through life and their contribution to the church in the world.” The shrine’s development from an early twentieth-century chapel hospital into a modern pilgrimage destination gave American Catholics multiple opportunities to remake their identity and solidify a public memory.

CHAPTER 2
SISTER GUIDES AND SHIFTING MEMORY OF SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON

Americans celebrated their past in the 1970s with the bicentennial of the American Revolution. American Catholics celebrated as well, utilizing the life of newly canonized saint Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton to link themselves to the nation’s early history. Seton demonstrated Catholic participation in creating a new nation, and even President Jimmy Carter recognized her importance during his visit to the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton during this celebratory decade. Mother Seton claimed the title of the first American-born saint with her canonization in 1975. A mother, widow, convert, and founder of a religious community, her life overlapped with the Revolutionary and Early Republic eras. This link to the early American past shaped the memory of Mother Seton, and the religious order running her shrine remade it into a vision of early nineteenth-century American heritage.

Raised in New York City, the Bayley family practiced the Episcopalian faith and mingled with well-established families, including founding fathers like Alexander Hamilton. Elizabeth married William Seton as an adult and converted to Catholicism after his death. The two had several children together, but Seton felt called to establish a religious order and pursued her calling. This vocation took her through several cities before settling in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s educated girls and operated orphanages. After Seton died in 1821, some communities formally connected their order with the Daughters of Charity in
France, creating a line of Seton-founded Daughters of Charity branches in the United States. Other communities remained as Sisters of Charity. Within the last thirty years, the branches reunited as the Sisters of Charity Federation, and these communities’ legacies are part of Seton’s memory. Resolving disputes between these branches and the Vincentian fathers enabled Seton’s cause to move forward in the late twentieth century.

Although Saint Cabrini gave American Catholics a holy example of an immigrant-turned-saint, they lacked an example of piety from the country’s earliest days. Mother Seton’s canonization and shrine legitimized national Catholic memory by providing a clear example of a native-born saint steeped in American culture. Moreover, Seton’s sisters in Emmitsburg linked American Catholics to the Civil War. Her religious order provided medical care to soldiers injured at the Battle of Gettysburg. The life and legacy of Seton expanded national Catholic memory to include two crucial events. The Daughters of Charity continued to use and modify the grounds in Emmitsburg after Seton’s death. They crafted Seton’s memory into a heritage tourism site by emphasizing her American identity, contributions to Catholic education, and her experience as a religious sister. These interpretations remade the site into an idealized image of Seton’s life and contributions as an American Catholic. Like other saints, Mother Seton’s story begins with her life and the memories of those who knew her.

**Biography**

Hagiographies, scholarly studies, and the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton reinforce a collective memory of Seton’s life. While individuals or sites might choose other events to include, the following is the biography commonly shared about Seton at the National Shrine and it is this narrative that shapes its programming. Over the last decade, the shrine
expanded its scope to include more on the history of the Sisters of Charity Federation after Seton’s death. The narrative focus remains on Seton as an American, educator, and foundress since these three aspects best defined her contributions to American Catholic history. This memory is reproduced later at Seton’s shrine. Her identity as the first natural-born American citizen saint overemphasizes the importance of her national identity, while her main contributions for American Catholics lies in the work she did to spread the faith.

Dr. Richard Bayley and Catherine Charlton Bayley welcomed “a true daughter of the American Revolution” Elizabeth Ann Bayley into the world in New York City in 1774.1 Catherine died a few years after giving birth to Elizabeth. Richard then married Charlotte Amelia Barclay. Elizabeth received a robust education and grew up in the Episcopal Church. Her family remained active in local society, and some literature even describes their celebration of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.2 However, Elizabeth experienced great sadness when her father and stepmother separated. Her stepmother rejected Elizabeth and she lost her second mother figure. Dr. Bayley traveled abroad to further his medical career, leaving the children with his brother in New York. A deep melancholy came over Elizabeth.

Elizabeth found solace during this time in her education and faith. She remained an active participant in the Episcopalian community. Her diaries reveal a rich spiritual life and a keen intellect engaged with writers and thinkers of her lifetime.3 Elizabeth eventually fell in love with

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William Magee Seton and found some marital bliss.⁴ They married in 1794 and by 1802 had five children, three of whom lived to adulthood. During those years, she kept herself busy with the duties of running a household, volunteering with her church, and creating the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children.⁵

The Seton family soon suffered misfortunes. William’s shipping business collapsed as his health began failing. Desperate to save his life, Elizabeth, William, and their youngest daughter, Rebecca, left for the warmer climate of Italy to stay with William’s business partners. William survived the Atlantic crossing but died while quarantined off the coast.⁶ However, Elizabeth and Rebecca stayed in Italy and during this time Elizabeth discovered an interest in Catholicism. She attended her first Catholic Mass and the experience remained with her upon her return to New York.

After exploring Catholicism in New York City, Elizabeth decided to convert to the faith. Her conversion experience forms a crucial memory of Seton. New York City, like the rest of the country, lacked a sizable Catholic population. Nativism and suspicion towards Catholics created tensions. Although Catholics celebrate Seton’s conversion, hagiographers remember how “Elizabeth and her children were now outcasts. She could not even support herself and her family because of bigoted friends and relatives. She saw that she must leave New York: her

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⁶ Ibid.
position had become impossible!” However, historian Catherine O’Donnell has demonstrated the inaccuracy of these sentiments. Seton continued to receive financial support from relatives even if they did not support her conversion. Hagiographies and other devotional materials produced before Seton’s canonization reinforce this misconstrued memory of Seton’s rejection. The National Shrine has distanced itself from this interpretation and focused on less controversial topics like her national identity, educational works, and the legacy of her order.

Seton attempted to run educational institutes in New York, but the ventures failed either from a lack of funding or moral support. She took her family and left New York for Baltimore. Its sizeable Catholic population needed a Catholic school, and Seton received support to start one from local Catholic clergy. She spent a year overseeing this while also founding a religious order. In 1809, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph formed. Seton served as both a mother to the order and to the children she continued raising. The order moved to Emmittsburg. This allowed Seton to send her sons to nearby Mount St. Mary’s College while her daughters lived with her and the new religious community. This location remains the site of Seton’s shrine.

The order quickly opened a school on their property. St. Joseph School took wealthy students as boarders to cover the costs associated with educating low-income students. From 1809 until her death, Seton taught at the school and guided the spiritual formation of her order. Two of her children, Anna Maria and Rebecca, died during Seton’s lifetime and were buried on

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8 O’Donnell, 128.

the property. She joined her daughters in a plot next to them when she died on January 5, 1821. The Sisters of Charity grew and St. Joseph School eventually became St. Joseph College. The Seton Shrine reinforced this narrative of Seton’s life for most of its existence, but in recent years, it expanded the scope of the site’s focus by including the adult lives of Seton’s children and the legacies of the Sisters of Charity.

**Sisters of Charity and Daughters of Charity**

The religious order Seton founded contributes a crucial element of her legacy. However, the order experienced drastic changes after her death. She originally founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph using the religious rule created by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac for the Daughters of Charity, but her community remained separate from the Daughters of Charity. After Seton’s death, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph debated uniting with the Daughters of Charity or remaining independent. Various religious communities claimed ownership of Seton’s memory, and this prevented her cause from moving forward throughout the nineteenth century. It also affected interpretive choices at the shrine.

Elizabeth Ann Seton began public ministries when she founded the order. She opened a school in Baltimore while writing a rule for her order. Priests in Baltimore encouraged her to model the institution off of the Daughters of Charity in France. Seton followed this advice and used them as a model, but did not establish a branch of the Daughters of Charity. Utilizing

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11 Ibid.
another order’s rule as a model to write a different version is not uncommon.\textsuperscript{12} Her institution took the name Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s once the initial members joined, and their rule was entitled \textit{The Provisional Regulations for St. Joseph’s Sisters}.\textsuperscript{13}

This awkward history between these orders frequently caused issues. However, over the next four years, Mother Seton directed her sisters to begin missionary efforts in Philadelphia and New York City. Seton learned about the Vincentian charism under the tutelage of a French priest, Father Simon Brute. In 1810, a new Sulpician priest assigned to work with the Sisters of Charity hoped to unite the two orders. Rev. John Baptiste David thought that the French Daughters would inspire the Sisters of Charity to better live a Vincentian life and desire incorporation into the Daughters of Charity.\textsuperscript{14} Seton fought these changes, but did amend her rule in 1812.

Debates about the rule continued after Seton’s death in 1821. The Sisters of Charity ran into issues regarding the care of male orphans.\textsuperscript{15} Seton’s rule explained what ministries the Sisters of Charity could operate, and it did not include running male orphanages. The growing number of young boys requiring care inspired some sisters to question whether the rule should be

\textsuperscript{12} For example, the Trappists utilized and also modified the Rule of Saint Benedict.


\textsuperscript{15} Regina Bechtle, “The 1846 Separation of the New York Sisters: Conflict over Mission or Clash of Wills?” \textit{Vincentian Heritage Journal} 20, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 66.
changed. Eventually, thirty sisters left Emmitsburg and founded the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of New York in 1846. The rule differed from the 1812 rule.

Conflict within the clergy could encourage new splits within an order. Like Seton, the current mother “was ultimately beholden to her [ordained male] superior and confessor…The structure of authority at Emmitsburg reflected a hierarchy that necessitated obedience but recognized the importance of collaboration. In addition to the appointed male superior, there was also a council of sisters elected from among themselves, so that decisions could be made in consultation with the superior when possible.” When the archbishop of New York and the Sulpician superior general of the Sisters of Charity disagreed over the type of charitable work they should conduct, the Sulpician superior general Louis-Regal Deluol worried this might create a pattern for the future.

Fr. Deluol decided to pursue a union between the French Daughters of Charity and the American Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s. The Sulpician leadership in France announced that they would withdraw American Sulpicians from any ministry not directly related to seminarian formation or other Sulpician ministries. This would mean the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph would lose their access to regular sacraments and be forced to find other priests who could replace the Sulpicians. The French Sulpicians hoped to force the American Sisters to

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17 Jacqueline Willy Romero, “‘Scheming and Turbulent’: An Analysis of Obedience and Authority in the Founding of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,” American Catholic Studies 130, no. 1 (Spring 2019), pg. 42.

merge with the French Daughters. In 1849, the Emmitsburg Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s finally agreed to merge with the French community.\textsuperscript{19} Vow renewal in 1850 marked the union between Emmitsburg and France. Communities initially founded from Emmitsburg in other parts of the United States, however, remained separate from the French merger.

These divisions stalled the canonization process for Mother Seton. Which community could claim her memory? The apostolic delegate to the United States, Amleto Giovanni Cardinal Cicognani, pushed the various communities to collaborate for Seton’s memory a century later. Sisters of Charity and Daughters of Charity began meeting in 1947 to pursue Seton’s canonization in unison.\textsuperscript{20} They formed the Federation of the Daughters of Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1965 and emphasized a shared heritage.\textsuperscript{21} The Federation promoted Seton’s canonization and work at the shrine founded in Emmitsburg. The leadership and organizational changes of the Federation directly impacted the shrine’s leadership in the twenty-first century.

**Memory and Canonization**

Friends and family of Seton moved swiftly after her death to remember the woman. Her extraordinary life stirred hope of a future canonization. The first chance to prove Mother Seton’s saintliness occurred in 1846 during the exhumation of her body. Those present at the exhumation

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hoped to see an incorrupt body and smell roses, both signs of sanctity but were disappointed by the unpleasant smell that hit their noses. Still, memory of Seton remained strong even if her body proved disappointing. Rev. Simon Gabriel Bruté, Seton’s spiritual mentor, published a book entitled *Memoirs* in 1865 which explored his life and work with Seton.\(^{22}\) One of Seton’s grandsons, Robert Seton, reprinted some of her letters in 1870, not long before another exhumation of her body.\(^{23}\) The coffin was opened again in 1873 when a nephew of Seton requested burial within the chapel. Yet again, the crowd watching experienced disappointment with the state of her body.\(^{24}\) An incorrupt body was not a requirement for canonization, merely an event that could expedite the process.

Devoted followers of Seton decided to open a cause regardless of the state of her body. James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, announced his intention to open an initial inquiry into Seton while celebrating Mass at Emmitsburg in 1882.\(^{25}\) Preserving Seton’s archival materials and relics provided one way for religious communities to reproduce Seton’s memory. Investigations into Seton heightened during the early twentieth century as diocesan officials met between 1907 and 1911 to examine her virtues.\(^{26}\) Disputes over whether Seton wanted unity


\(^{24}\) Cummings, 50.


\(^{26}\) Cummings, 50.
between her religious order and the French Daughters of Charity provoked infighting among the North American orders who traced their founding to Seton. Moreover, the Vatican repeatedly found errors in diocesan paperwork, which stalled the official opening of the cause further.27

As the American hierarchy and branches of Seton’s religious orders jostled for control, published works provided a route for Seton’s memory to spread to new audiences. Vincentian priests, Sisters of Charity, and Daughters of Charity wrote early biographies. Other early books focused on Seton’s role as the founder of the Sisters of Charity, sharing Seton’s life through her own words, or explaining her contributions to the American parochial school system. Late nineteenth-century authors included Seton in books about prominent American Catholics, and early twentieth century authors shared her life with American women.28 Other works over the next thirty years characterized Seton as an American or as a holy woman.29

Seton literature grew in the mid-twentieth century and continued to grow throughout the 1960s. In 1939, the Apostolic Delegate to the United States Amleto Giovanni Cicognani published Sanctity in America to showcase Americans on the path to sainthood.30 Works included biographical elements mixed with devotional ones. For example, Katherine Burton’s His Dear Persuasion: The Life of Elizabeth Ann Seton emphasized the author’s historical

27 Ibid., 51.


research in its foreword and included a bibliography, yet the book read like a novel with the plot centered on Seton’s growing sanctity.31

Finally, on February 28, 1940, Pope Pius XII signed the Decree of Introduction for Seton’s cause.32 The Vatican appointed a postulator and vice-postulators to oversee her process. Unfortunately, the Sisters of Charity and the postulator disagreed on matters, and these disputes now stalled progress. The Vatican’s apostolic delegate to the United States eventually mediated the conflict. Reverend Salvatore Burgio, C.M., made progress as Vice-Postulator for Seton’s cause. He created the Mother Seton Guild in 1940 to promote the canonization of Seton, make Mother Seton known through publications, and encourage devotion to Seton.33 The Guild’s newsletter reached thousands of readers each year and regularly shared Seton’s experiences, often related to the grounds in Emmitsburg.34 These were produced by religious sisters, clergy, or Catholics committed to Seton’s cause.

The first significant study on Seton undertaken by a professionally trained historian was published in 1951. Dr. Annabelle McConnell Melville began this research as a Ph.D. candidate under Monsignor John Tracy Ellis and turned her work into the book *Elizabeth Bayley Seton,*

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33 Typescript of “Notes on the Mother Seton Guild – Agenda Item 10” box 1, folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Her book highlighted an 1817 quote from Seton, “I am a citizen of the world!”36 She emphasized how Seton viewed herself as a member of a universal church working for the common good rather than just as an American Catholic, a different interpretation than earlier works. It continues to serve as the definitive biography of Seton for the National Shrine. In 2009, Sister Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., created an updated version of Melville’s book. Her epilogue stated that “Elizabeth Seton defined herself by faith, not by circumstances” and emphasized her roles as saint, mother, and foundress.37 Seton literature grew throughout the late twentieth century, especially after her canonization, and scholars incorporated her into survey studies of the Catholic Church in the United States.

The Church declared Mother Seton venerable in December of 1959, not long after the death of Fr. Burgio.38 The Emmitsburg sisters moved Seton’s body into a concrete vault because of this declaration.39 In less than a decade, the beatification of Seton took place on March 17, 1963. Seton’s relics were moved from the cemetery to above the altar in the College Chapel.

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36 Ibid., cover page.

37 Ibid., 412.


during April.\footnote{Typescript of “A Visit to the Basilica of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,” by Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., December 29, 2004, box 3, folder 3 Various Histories, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland, pg. 6.} A month later, Pope John XXIII issued a formal document stating that the corporal remains of Seton would remain in Emmitsburg.\footnote{Typescript of “National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton: Facts and Overview.”} With only a step before canonization, believers could now publicly venerate Seton in Emmitsburg. A shrine formally opened on the grounds of St. Joseph’s College. The Daughters of Charity hoped for a future canonization and made preparations for the anticipated increase of visitation to Emmitsburg.

On September 14, 1975, the Vatican televised Seton’s canonization and, for the first time, conducted the affairs in English.\footnote{Alvin Shuster, “U.S.-Born Mother Seton Is Declared a Saint,” \textit{The New York Times}, September 15, 1975, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/09/15/archives/us-born-mother-seton-is-declared-a-saint-pope-declares-mother-seton.html.} The affair broke precedents in other ways. Part of the ceremony involves the written cause being formally handed over to the pope. For the first time, women participated in this activity. Four women representing various nationalities and stages of Seton’s life approached Pope Paul VI. It was the first canonization Mass where a woman participated in the liturgy by reading one of the excerpts from the Bible. These actions emphasized her identity as an American and as a woman. Saint Peter’s Square at the Vatican burst with supporters to celebrate the canonization. A joint resolution introduced in the United States Congress asked that her day of canonization September 14 be known as “National Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Day.”\footnote{Salvator M. Burgio, “Foreword,” \textit{Mother Seton Guild Bulletin} 1, December 8, 1941, DePaul University Special Collections and Archives.} The Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg welcomed visitors to the new saint’s shrine.
Since Seton’s canonization, scholarship about the woman continued to grow. Some utilized Seton to consider how saints exemplify culture, create tensions within the Church hierarchy, or were affected by gender. The relatively recent nature of most American canonizations means that the historical field studying the topic remains small. However, Mother Seton has been at the center of several new works. Kathleen Sprows Cummings explored notions of gender and sainthood in the early 2000s. Cummings noted that “devotion to saints in the past can help us understand gender in the Church [and] Catholics’ relationship to American culture,” the latter theme of which she explored in a 2019 monograph. Saints and devotions to saints are becoming a more significant part of the field.

Catherine O’Donnell published a new biography of Seton in 2018. It examined Seton as a person and product of early nineteenth-century America. Seton’s sanctity is secondary to her experiences as a woman, widow, and religious founder—a dramatically different retelling of Seton’s life compared to works of the early twentieth century. O’Donnell’s biography fits into recent explorations of women in religion. This book positioned Seton as a figure worthy of scholarly examination to those without interest in Catholicism. The author spoke openly about writing a book focused on a notable religious figure when not religious herself, a marked

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departure from previous biographers. Perhaps most importantly, O’Donnell pushed back at one of the main stories within Seton’s life. Previous biographers and Church documents portrayed Seton as an outcast for her conversion to Catholicism. While the conversion was not an entirely peaceful experience for Seton, it was not met with the level of anti-Catholicism early Catholic writers emphasized. Even the National Shrine’s exhibits and programming have shifted from this focus since the 1980s.

The National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton uses these works to interpret Mother Seton for visitors. However, while the site does aim to educate guests, the shrine’s primary purpose is to support visitors’ spiritual development through education and evangelization. The principal lens used to view Seton at the site is faith, but the staff does not shy away from embracing new scholarship. The Seton Shrine works with scholars and exemplifies the Catholic belief that faith and reason are not at odds. With the canonization of Seton, and the continued growth of scholarship, the Seton’s shrine has developed into a heritage tourism site dedicated to the reproduction of American Catholic public memory.

**Changing Landscape**

Elizabeth Seton and her community were not the first people to live on the land in Emmitsburg. Some of the grounds’ history predates Seton, and the site remains active long after her death. The Sisters and Daughters of Charity modified the land and buildings. The grounds

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functioned as living quarters for the Sisters and Daughters of Charity, classroom space for
students, and later a college for young women. “In a very real sense the Seton Shrine began in
July 1809 when Mother Seton, her children, and her small community arrived at the Fleming
farm in Emmitsburg.” Initial development of the property focused on what best suited the work
rather than what best served the commemoration. Modifications in the late twentieth century
prepared the site for visitors to the new shrine.

Some of this property possessed historical value from the time before Seton’s arrival. The
Fleming House, known to Mother Seton as the Stone House, was built around 1750 and served
as the original residence for the community. In 1810, construction of the main living and work
space known as the White House was finished, and the community moved residences. These
two buildings formed the core of the community’s early life. The next significant landscape
modification occurred when Seton’s sister-in-law Harriet died. Oral tradition states that Harriet
selected the spot before her death in 1809 when the community went for a walk. Harriet threw an
apple core against a large tree and declared, “This is my spot!” When Harriet died four months
later, she was the first of their community to pass, and her earlier antics inspired the cemetery’s
location.

49 Typescript of “History,” box 3, folder 3 Various Histories, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis
Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

50 Laura V. Trieschmann and Laura Harris Hughes, "St. Joseph’s College & Mother Seton Shrine,"
National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior,
National Park Service, 1995), Section 7.

Seton joined Harriet in the cemetery in 1821, and over the next several decades, her religious community continued altering the grounds to meet their needs. A new chapel in 1839 became St. Joseph’s Chapel at its dedication in 1841. Other facilities and works spaces were added as needed. In 1846, the community built a new mortuary chapel, while renovations occurred at the cemetery to move Seton into the Mortuary Chapel. These construction efforts kept the memory of Seton alive by continuing her ministries, while the moving of her body demonstrated the religious community’s awareness of potential sanctity.

Changes continued throughout the nineteenth century. The now-Daughters of Charity expanded operations on the site after 1850, especially as they acquired new land. New buildings supported their ministries and living quarters, while the White House became an infirmary and residence for a physician. The outbreak of the Civil War halted growth. The Daughters provided aid and expanded their medical ministries, and the Battle of Gettysburg, only ten miles from the convent, meant soldiers trekked through their land. The war halted many of the order’s initiatives. When construction resumed, it primarily focused on expanding St. Joseph’s College. New buildings appeared as others disappeared. The most important heritage buildings remained the Stone House, the White House, the Daughters of Charity living quarters, and St. Joseph Chapel.

The beatification of Mother Seton in 1963 and the changing needs of the Daughters of Charity sparked the order to reconsider their spaces in Emmitsburg. Devoted followers of Mother Seton needed physical direction and spiritual guidance upon their arrival in Emmitsburg, and so

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52 Trieschmann and Hughes, Section 8.
53 Ibid.
the Daughters of Charity opened a pilgrimage office. Sisters repurposed a vacant building near the edge of St. Joseph’s College.\textsuperscript{54} Visitors began a trip there before walking through the grounds and praying at Mother Seton’s tomb in St. Joseph Chapel. The Daughters also opened a new Provincial House and began constructing a new chapel for the house.\textsuperscript{55} Once completed, the remains of Seton moved to the new chapel in 1968 and off the property of Saint Joseph College.\textsuperscript{56}

The late twentieth century brought changes for the Daughters of Charity. After years of declining enrollment, the order decided to close Saint Joseph’s College. The last class of students graduated in 1973 and the remaining students transferred to Mount Saint Mary’s College.\textsuperscript{57} The Daughters retained access to the college grounds and continued to use some of the buildings. However, like the previous generations, the land and spaces were modified for continued usage as the Daughters of Charity reconsidered the primary importance of the land. The end of 1973 also marked the exemption of Seton’s cause requiring a second miracle for her canonization.\textsuperscript{58} The looming canonization of Mother Seton gave a new purpose to the land.


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{58} Cummings, 196.
Sister Guides

The year 1974 offered hope of canonization and the celebration of the bicentennial of Seton’s birth. In February, the Seton Bicentennial Committee met to plan the bicentennial year “to honor Mother Seton in a special way.”\(^\text{59}\) Masses and events embraced an early American theme in line with the nation’s ongoing bicentennial celebration. These events provided the Daughters of Charity with a chance to prepare for Seton’s canonization. By the end of 1974, lay employee Valli Ryan organized a public relations strategy for the Daughters of Charity. It coordinated the message and information about Mother Seton across the United States. The media package included advertisements to “visit the home of America’s own Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton.”\(^\text{60}\)

The announcement of a September canonization in 1975 forced the Daughters to finalize preparations for increased visitation. In June, the Shrine Center began operation under the direction of Sister Anne William Rickle.\(^\text{61}\) The Center took “immediate responsibility to implement emergency plans for accommodating the increased numbers of visitors” at the grounds with the announcement of Seton’s canonization.\(^\text{62}\) Rickle worked with a team of other

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\(^{59}\) Valli Ryan to Houses in the Emmitsburg Province from the Seton Bicentennial Committee, February 19, 1974, Box 2, Folder 4, Daughters of Charity St. Louis Province Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\(^{60}\) Flyer for Seton Shrine, “Visit the Home of America’s Own Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,” Box 2, Folder 4, Daughters of Charity St. Louis Province Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\(^{61}\) Sister Anne William to Sister Jerome Nossell, September 3, 1975, Box 2, Folder 1, Administration-Reports-Various Reports, Daughters of Charity St. Louis Province Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

sisters to create an orientation program, slide presentation, gift shop, and pilgrimage packets. They set up a small museum within the White House and added signage to the grounds.

The Center created a self-guided walking tour which allowed visitors to explore the grounds at their own pace. Key to the tour’s success was the coordination of Sister Guides throughout the grounds. Sisters rotated through the White House, Stone House, Cemetery, Chapel, and Shrine Center to provide information, play tape recordings, and offer a living testament to Seton’s legacy. This interpretation technique loosely followed the open-air museum model where “a restored, re-created or replica village site…interpret a historical or cultural setting, period, or activity” The Daughters interpreted the site within the realms of Seton’s lifetime. They emphasized the cultural history of American Catholicism.

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63 Typescript of “History,” October 1993, Box 3, Folder 3 Various Histories, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

The “Tour Through the Shrines of Mother Seton” opened with a short paragraph on the history of Mother Seton’s arrival to the grounds. The text framed each stop as an individual shrine rather than the site as a cohesive whole. The tour began with the Stone House, followed by the White House, Cemetery, and Chapel of the Provincial House. It moved the visitor through Seton’s life, death, and heavenly legacy. Each point on the tour provided architectural information, Seton’s relationship to the place, and items of interest for visitors to note. For example, in the Stone House, the tour encouraged visitors to examine the fireplace that provided...
the heat for the whole building and the corner where the first Mass occurred. It is at the final stop where visitors pray with Seton’s remains and where “in this hallowed spot the Sisters of today, inspired by the memory of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, beg God to bless abundantly those who come to the valley to honor her.” The tour closed by reminding visitors that Mother Seton recognized the primacy of God in all things. The shrine’s interpretation of American history served as a vehicle to spread Mother Seton’s faith.

The newly minted Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton drew a crowd. The Shrine Center continued to expand offerings in the second half of 1975. A portable display brought Seton’s legacy to the faithful, a new book on chapel art provided visitors with further information, and the Center continued printing brochures for pilgrims. From 1975 until 2006, the Seton Center operated under the leadership of the Daughters of Charity. A Daughter of Charity served as shrine administrator while other sisters rotated in for temporary appointments as guides. A small staff of lay employees and volunteers worked behind the scenes. This era of “sister guides” began optimistically with development programs and plans for a new museum but closed with growing concern about the decline of the order’s numbers and the shrine’s future.

The shrine’s visitation continued to grow during its early years. By April 1976, a report on the Seton Shrine Center’s operation revealed that 79,136 visitors had visited the site since

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Typescript of “Seton Shrine Center Major Accomplishments June-December 1975” January 1976, Box 2, Folder 1 Administration-Reports-Various Reports, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
Seton’s September canonization. The Center maintained a gift shop, showed a ten-minute slide & cassette presentation, and provided visitors with a copy of the self-guided tour. Local historians recognized the site’s importance during this time. St. Joseph’s College & Mother Seton Shrine were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. The staff prepared to make the center accessible to visitors and efficiently organized for the employees. Not only did the site need new access ramps, signage, and tapes, it also required expanded public restrooms, a permanent museum, and reliable financial support. Rickle’s foresight laid the groundwork for later museum growth.

The shrine was not the only organization promoting devotion to Mother Seton and preserving her legacy. The Mother Seton Guild had promoted Seton’s cause and fundraised for expenses accumulated during the canonization process. The elevation of Seton to sainthood fulfilled the Guild’s purpose. Their organization was no longer necessary. The Guild’s leadership hoped to merge with the Seton Shrine Center and retain the integrity of their organization’s

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69 Typescript of “Seton Shrine Center,” April 11, 1976, Box 3, Folder 3 Various Histories, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.


71 Typescript of Seton Shrine Center, April 11, 1976, Box 3, Folder 3 Various Histories, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

72 “Notes on the Mother Seton Guild-Agenda Item 10.”
purpose. In 1976, the two organizations met to discuss options for the Guild’s future operation. This discussion carried on for more than a decade.

The Guild worried about the staff’s future and about the future of the newsletter. The Seton Causeway reached thousands of Catholics, and the Guild wanted it to continue. The most pressing concern involved the perpetual Mass obligations Guild members received as a benefit for joining. This membership benefit meant that the intentions of members were annually prayed for at Mass in perpetuity. Forgoing the obligation required a dispensation from the Vatican. The Daughters of Charity found this obligation unsustainable since they were not priests and would have to arrange for a priest to do this.

The Seton Center could not afford to leave the issue unresolved. For decades, the Guild successfully spread devotion to Mother Seton and had a large audience primed as potential donors. One suggestion proposed was to phase the Seton Guild out over three years with its official dissolution in September 1980. It would occur before the fifth anniversary of Seton’s canonization and give the Guild time to close out its business, including handing over the mailing lists and moving the staff. Inventory and archives would pass into the care of the Shrine while the Shrine bulletin would replace the Seton Causeway. The Provincial Council of

73 Typescript of “Notes on the Mother Seton Guild – Agenda Item 10,” Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

74 Ibid.

75 Typescript of “Mother Seton Guild/Seton Shrine Center Discussion of Merger,” May 22, 1980, Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

76 Sister Mary Clare Hughes to Sister Jerome Nossell, Memo regarding Mother Seton Guild and Shrine Center, July 11, 1979, Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
Emmitsburg closed this matter in 1977, promising to reconsider it in the future. The organizations continued to act separately to preserve Seton’s legacy.

The Daughters of Charity streamlined the administration of the shrine during the late 1970s. By May 1977, the Seton Shrine Center possessed an Associate Board of lay individuals and maintained its financial operation. Seton Historical Association, Inc., operated as “an educational, historical, and religious organization…sponsored and operated by the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.” The Associate Board increased the participation of lay within the shrine’s operation and advised the director. Daughters also outlined the responsibilities of Shrine Center staff and volunteers in a 1978 manual. This publication prepared the Daughters of Charity to serve visitors better. Sisters trained in the shrine’s history, Seton’s history, and other local information visitors might ask.

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77 Sister Camillia to Rev. Sylvester Taggart, April 21, 1977, Box 3, Folder 10, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

78 “Articles of Incorporation Seton Historical Association, Inc.,” Box 5, Folder 4 Legal-Bylaws & Articles of Incorporation, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

The Daughters of Charity understood the importance of Mother Seton to American history. On July 6th, 1978, the Daughters received an unexpected affirmation of the site’s national importance when President Jimmy Carter and his family visited while staying nearby at Camp David. Photos of President Carter laughing in a crowd of religious sisters made headlines across the nation. Carter visited other sites of national importance during this trip: Gettysburg National Military Park, birthplace of President James Buchanan, Antietam Battlefield Site, and Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. His decision to visit the shrine demonstrated its importance to the United States by including it among such distinguished sites.


81 Ibid.
Sister Joan Annette Fitzgerald, D.C., served as the development coordinator for the shrine in 1979. She presented to the Shrine Associate Board proposals to improve the site. “It now seems apparent that since the canonization, visitors and scholars have created a need to organize existing materials and provide better access to this unique collection.” The items that accumulated at the shrine throughout its existence were vital for those interested in studying Seton. Moreover, the site’s director Sister Alberta Beckwith contracted the services of public relations firm Martin J. Moran Co. to create a development campaign for the shrine. Money was necessary to complete the recommended changes. The company’s research would also reveal people’s conceptions of the shrine and sisters’ concerns regarding its operation.

A dramatic change to the landscape also occurred during 1979. The Fire Prevention and Control Administration bought the grounds of Saint Joseph College as the new site of the United States Fire Academy. In October, the Stone House moved from its location on government land to its current location at the shrine site. The Seton Shrine Center reopened in 1980 following its move into the Provincial House and rebranded as the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann

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82 Typescript of “Seton Shrine Center Museum Project Presented to Members of the Shrine Board” by Sister Joan Annette Fitzgerald, November 10, 1979, Box 19, Folder 10 Development Project Seton Shrine Museum Project, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

83 Ibid.

84 Sister Alberta Beckwith to Board Members and Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg Dec. 19, 1979, box 3, folder 19 Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.


86 Sister Jerome Nossell to Ms. Joan Barthel, Dec. 21, 1979, box 19, folder 10 Development Project Seton Shrine Museum Project, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
It began publishing a newsletter in the fall known as *Shrine News* to update the site’s supporters. The previous five years witnessed the creation of a saint, shrine, and burgeoning heritage site. Sisters spent the next ten years pursuing projects to expand the legacy of Seton further.

Figure 8. The Seton Shrine moved the Stone House from the property sold to the U.S. Fire Academy.

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In 1980, the Mother Seton Guild and Seton Shrine considered a merger again.\textsuperscript{88} The Guild had about 13,000-14,000 active membership, and neither organization knew if those members were also Shrine supporters. The Guild wanted reassurances that their members would be included as members of the shrine community. Accepting a merger meant that those individuals would provide a new audience for the Shrine to seek financial support from in the future.\textsuperscript{89} One Daughter of Charity noted that the phrase “phase out” was not the best description of what would occur. “The term had been used partially to convey the idea that two separate entities would no longer continue to exist doing the same thing, but that the Guild would not continue as such.”\textsuperscript{90} These questions remained in the background as the shrine developed.

While the shrine grappled with the guild, they also received initial feedback from the public relations firm contracted by Beckwith.\textsuperscript{91} In their paper, the company expressed frustration at their inability to properly conduct research because Beckwith had forbidden them from approaching members of the Church’s hierarchy or members of other religious orders. They confessed to being “singularly unsuccessful in putting together a Development program.”\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{88} Typescript of Mother Seton Guild, March 14, 1980, Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{89} Typescript of “Mother Seton Guild/Seton Shrine Center Discussion of Merger,” May 22, 1980, Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{90} Typescript of Mother Seton Guild, March 14, 1980.

\textsuperscript{91} “A Proposal to Conduct an Attitudinal Survey for the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton,” box 1, folder 10 Administration-Proposal to Conduct an Attitudinal Survey for the Shrine of St. E. A. Seton by: The Martin J. Moran Co., Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

of cooperation from sisters and a failure to reach out to their prospective subject pools hindered their work. However, the questionnaires that were completed revealed both successes and failures at the shrine. Respondents who knew of the shrine emphasized its outstanding work, frequently referencing the “historical sense of the grounds” and “beautiful setting.” 93 However, the lack of visitor facilities, strong marketing, and well-planned fundraising were among the most common complaints. The report concluded that the downward trend in visitation would continue unless the Daughters moved aggressively and suggested starting a fundraising program to raise $400,000-$500,000. 94

Staff moved quickly to undertake the recommendations. Fitzgerald created four objectives for the Shrine’s educational and research goals: “to organize existing materials, to provide better public access and services, to preserve existing materials, and to help secure long-term financial stability.” 95 Achieving these goals required outside assistance, and Fitzgerald wanted the board to support hiring a curator and museum management consultant. Federal grants would hopefully subsidize the costs through the Institute of Museum Services within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Endowment of the Arts, and National Endowment for the Humanities. 96 Those grants were largely unsuccessful, but this advocacy for professional museum services remained a goal throughout the 1980s.

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93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., 22.

95 Typescript of “Seton Shrine Center Museum Project Presented to Members of the Shrine Board.”

The applications shed light on issues faced by the shrine. The debt-reduction plan submitted to the Institute of Museum Services provided budgeting data for the 1981-1984 fiscal years.97 Debts acquired from restoring and adapting the site structures for the canonization contributed to the shrine’s financial insecurity. Moreover, the only income the Shrine received was through free-will donations and profits from the gift shop.98 The consulting company hired by the shrine believed that there would be no issues raising money, but that the lack of a coordinated fundraising plan meant the shrine needed outside expertise.99 Creating an extensive development plan forced the shrine to professionalize its operation and formulate its objectives.

In a letter to Bishop Walter F. Sullivan of the Diocese of Richmond, Sister Joan Annette outlined the three goals of the plan’s first phase. The shrine wanted to raise $400,000 to renovate historic sites, transfer the Visitor’s Center to a different building, and handle debt caused by moving the Stone House.100 The shrine hit its initial goal in 1981. The second phase focused on restoring structures and making new networking appeals to philanthropic foundations.101 Supporters could follow the progress in the shrine newsletter. Behind the scenes, Sister Joan

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Sister Joan Annette Fitzgerald to Bishop Walter F. Sullivan, Aug. 6, 1980, Box 3, Folder 15, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

101 Typescript of *Shrine News*, fall 1981, box 7, folder 1 Newsletters, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
Annette wrote Provincial Councillor Sister Mary Clare Hughes about the concept of a “fully comprehensive” museum about Vincentian history and Seton’s history.102

**Community Heritage Museum**

The shrine justified the need for this museum in its operation philosophy. The Daughters of Charity served as “apostolic witness to the Church” and could foster awareness of Christian charity.103 They were “guardians of the relics of Saint Elizabeth Ann” and wanted laity involved with commemorating the saint.104 While museums have a mission statement to guide the institution, the Daughters of Charity considered this museum as part of their apostolate—the mission worked by a particular order. The museum operated as part of a larger organization’s mission, and the order’s mission compelled shrine staff to improve the site for visitors’ spiritual needs. This work could not happen without money, and Sister Joan Annette recognized that no plan would move forward until the shrine received funds.

Referred to as the Community Heritage Museum, this project became the shrine’s priority in the early 1980s. It would place “Elizabeth Bayley Seton in the proper interpretive context in Church, Community, and American History.”105 The shrine’s board accepted several proposals from contractors and selected Lynch Exhibits to design the new museum. Christopher Ray,

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102 Correspondence from Sister Joan Annette to Sister Mary Clare, July 1, 1982, box 2, folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

103 Typescript of “Philosophy of the Seton Shrine,” April 1982, box 1, folder 12 Administration-Philosophy, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

104 Ibid.

105 Sister Joan Annette to Sister Mary Clare, May 5, 1982, Box 2, Folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
Director of Lynch Museum Services, wrote to Sister Catherine Norton after researching Mother Seton. “Her struggles and victory are paralleled by the victory and struggles of the new Republic. Both attain a new consciousness and spirituality through revolution, but of vastly different kinds”

Ray explained that the company worked in two phases, Planning and Design and then Fabrication and Installation. The first phase would work with scholars, Daughters of Charity, and other stakeholders to produce a script for the exhibits, A/V materials, and signage. It would also flesh out a design for the space. The entire project could be completed within seven months of commencement.

“The preservation of Community Heritage is a Provincial responsibility,” Sister Joan Annette explained in a letter to Sister Mary Clare. While the goal of a heritage museum had yet to be announced by the Provincial, the Seton Shrine “shares the responsibility of preserving the Seton heritage in a special way.” The Province could not handle the costs of such a museum at present, so the Seton Shrine set out to secure its funds. A capital campaign was needed but the sisters were unsure how to proceed. The Seton Guild was still in operation, and the Shrine thought that perhaps a joint project would unite the two organizations more closely. A development committee formed with the hope to raise $1,250,000. The first year would be spent raising the $250,000 to finance the campaign.

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106 Correspondence from Christopher Ray to Sister Catherine Norton, April 29, 1982, Box 2, Folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

107 Correspondence from Sister Joan Annette to Sister Mary Clare, July 1, 1982, box 2, folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

108 Correspondence from Sister Joan Annette to Sister Mary Clare, May 5, 1982, box 2, folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

109 Ibid.
Their initial outreach followed a formula and relied on some of the advice produced by the Martin J. Moran Co. The fundraiser explained in a personal letter that “...experience shows that visitors are not content with a simple tour of the Shrine buildings, but seek fuller explanation of not only the Seton history but also to know the entire Vincentian story and how it relates to our American Saint.”

Their donations would finance placing Seton into that larger narrative and providing a better experience for visitors. Donors could become a part of the American Catholic memory. Moreover, the Shrine was not waiting to receive the funds but had begun creating an interpretative plan.

The Mother Seton Guild and the Seton Shrine found a resolution to merger questions in 1983. The assets would be divided between the Shrine Center and Miraculous Medal Association, who agreed to handle the perpetual prayer obligations. The miraculous medal had a close history with the Vincentian fathers, so it was a logical organization for the Mass obligations.

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110 Correspondence from Sister Mary Clare Hughes to Rev. John A. Grindel, C.M., January 27, 1983, Box 2, Folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

111 Ibid.

112 Typescript of “Report to Executive Committee, Seton Shrine Center” by Rev. Sylvester Taggart, January 15, 1983, Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

113 Ibid.
Guild ceased all activities on Feb. 28, 1983, and directed the remaining funds to the Shrine Center.\textsuperscript{114} The legacy of Mother Seton now rested in the hands of the sister guides.

The Daughters of Charity continued day-to-day operations at the Shrine. They provided tours, updated brochures, and created programs for visitors. The 175\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Seton arriving in Emmitsburg coincided with the 350\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Maryland in 1984. Large festivities were planned and hosted on the grounds. The Provincial Council approved the decision to move Seton’s memorabilia from the White House to the Visitor Center and continue preparing for an educational display.\textsuperscript{115}

Lynch Industries designed and installed a museum exhibit for the Daughters of Charity. General themes included Seton’s childhood loneliness, the experience of early American Catholics, motherhood, and desire to follow God’s will.\textsuperscript{116} It also explained the development of Seton’s order, especially its relationship with the Daughters of Charity and the legacy the orders left for the world.\textsuperscript{117} The exhibit detailed Seton’s life, accomplishments, and the culture around her. The initial proposal entailed creating a family tree of Seton’s communities, but the Daughters instead pushed for language to describe “One Mother” with many “spiritual

\textsuperscript{114} Carmen E. Topper to Baltimore Federal Savings & Loan Association, Feb. 25, 1983, Box 1, Folder 3 Possible Merger Guild and Shrine, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{115} Typescript of “Shrine Center Provincial Council’s Response to Recommendations of Planning Committee October 1984 by Council,” October 1984, Box 2 Folder 2 Administration-Reports-Apostolic Assessment, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{116} Typescript of Sisters Exhibit Revised Outline, Aug. 20, 1982, Box 2, folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibit, box 2, folder 10 Museum Lynch Exhibits, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
daughters. The exhibit emphasized Seton’s place as an American, her role as an educator, and her life as a religious sister. This exhibit remained the primary mode of interpretation for two decades.

Figure 9. An exhibit proposal rejected by the Seton Shrine. Image of Seton Shrine Exhibit Family Tree Draft, April 29, 1982, box 2, folder 10. Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

The Seton Way

After years of fundraising and planning, the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton hosted a dedication ceremony in 1986 for the new exhibit created by Lynch Industries, Inc. The day included speeches, prayer, ribbon-cutting, and a reception for those who worked to develop

118 Typescript of Seton Shrine Exhibit Script Corrected Last Copy, January 1986, box 19, folder 9, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
the display or played an important role in the lives of the Daughters of Charity.119 The exhibit opened with a panel reading, “The Daughters of Charity welcome you to the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton…Walk with us in the Seton Way.”120 This terminology about the “Seton Way” predated the museum exhibit and was part of the site since its earliest promotional materials ten years earlier. The Seton Way reinvents the traditional religious pilgrimage into a short educational tour for guests at the Seton Shrine.

Christian pilgrimage dates to the earliest expressions of sainthood. Pilgrimage “involves the confrontation of travelers with rituals, holy objects and sacred architecture…is as much about returning home with the souvenirs and narratives of the pilgrim’s adventure.”121 Christians living within the Roman Empire remembered their loved ones and those important to their Christian community by visiting graves at the anniversary of their deaths.122 The walk to the grave developed into processions, and the expansion of the Church into the Medieval period corresponded with the dramatic growth of pilgrimage traditions. During the Carolingian period, the Catholic Church codified numerous beliefs, including the calendar of saints and the appropriate celebrations.123 Pilgrimage continued from the medieval period into the modern, but


120 Typescript of Seton Shrine Exhibit Script Corrected Last Copy.


122 Andre Vauchez and Jean Birrell, Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.

the last three centuries saw a rise of Marian apparition pilgrimages rather than saint-based ones.124

The Seton Way created a pilgrimage on-site that visitors could complete without difficulty in a day. Unlike traditional forms of pilgrimage, it did not matter how the visitors arrived at the grounds, but rather how they interacted with the environment upon arrival. This pilgrimage constructed a past about Seton using buildings and objects carefully arranged to share a specific narrative. The journey at the Seton Shrine included a trip through Seton’s life, beginning in the Seton Way Exhibit at her birth and moving through her death. Objects displayed in the exhibit “help to reconstruct the sacred journey in the imagination” while also illustrating the life of Mother Seton.125 Souvenirs of the

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pilgrimages and the saint are central to the pilgrimage experience, and visitors to the Seton Shrine can purchase their gifts there.

Figure 10. One of the new exhibit panels encouraged visitors to explore the grounds and the Seton Way. Photograph from the Dedication of Seton Shrine Museum, box 9, folder 11, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

The program interpreted these grounds as a chance to walk where Seton walked. “The public visits historic sites to see the evidence, to get in touch with history…The public implicitly accepts that what it sees is the real thing.”126 Diane Barthel notes that “authenticity can also be multilayered,” such as when a different time is displayed to share specific knowledge about change over time or that curators might choose to interpret one authentic moment in a structure’s history.127 The Seton Way approaches these layers of history by prioritizing certain moments


127 Barthel, 8-9.
over others. The White House is the work and living space of Mother Seton, not the home of a Civil War physician, and the Stone House is the first living quarters of the Daughters of St. Joseph rather than a building repurposed over centuries. Developments after Seton’s lifetime, like providing medical assistance during the Civil War or building a college, are handled in the museum’s exhibit space.

This event represented a high point for the sisters’ leadership of the shrine. Smaller projects undertaken from 1988 through 2000 supported the Seton Way exhibit. The reoccurring activities of the site involved raising funds, restoring property, and reopening to visitors. Sister guides continued rotating through for temporary appointments at the shrine in the summer months. Sisters recalled their appointments at the shrine with affection. “To watch the sun rise and set over the same horizons that she contemplated, to tread the same ground and seek shade from the same noonday sun and especially to experience the peace of this beautiful place makes me feel very close to her.”

The twentieth century at the shrine ended quietly, with the celebration of the Jubilee Year announced by Pope John Paul II and the recognition that the site would change.

The year 2001 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mother Seton’s canonization. A series of events were planned to celebrate the occasion, including a Mass, reception, speakers,

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and awards for those who exemplified the spirit of Mother Seton.129 Archbishop Harry J. Flynn of St. Paul and Minneapolis served as homilist at the Mass. He quoted Bishop Simon Brute, who knew Seton personally, and closed by stating that her “gifts of compassionate concern, of respect for others, and of service are also noted in those who follow the example of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton.”130 These aspects of her personality continued to be exhibited at the National Shrine as it experienced new directors and strategic planning initiatives to combat declining visitation.

The excitement of these events did not overshadow the reality Sister Mary Clare Hughes, D.C., faced as the Seton Shrine Administrator. She wanted it to be “a welcoming place of pilgrimage recognized for prayerfulness and visitor-friendly hospitality.”131 Sister Mary Clare understood the reality of the shrine’s future as the Daughters of Charity experienced declining membership due to an aging population passing away, as well as the lack of new members. Her administrative report in October 2001 expressed those concerns.

In the Emmitsburg Province of the Daughters of Charity is currently assessing the ministries (in the light of its decreasing numbers) it sponsors. It is expected that we will need to prepare more of our dedicated lay collaborators to assume the roles the sisters now fill. We feel the laity are trained and ready to do so. We need only guarantee that they are fully inspired with the spirit and heritage of Vincent de Paul and Elizabeth Ann Seton. This will require that the Shrine is financially viable.132

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130 Ibid.


132 Typescript of “Administrator’s Report,” October 6, 2001, box 2, folder 1 Administration-Reports-Visitor Reports, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
The report continued that the lack of docents forced closures of the shrine. Sister Mary Clare pleaded with provinces to send more sisters. The shrine also increased its participation in a local docent program meant to train and recruit volunteers. Sister Mary Clare knew the shrine needed to expand its lay participation to continue operating.

The Emmitsburg Province of the Daughters of Charity met later that same month to discuss the Heritage Ministries and set goals for the next three years. They would prepare the site to run without financial support from the Daughters of Charity, consider expanding collaboration to other provinces, and begin actively recruiting lay employees. The Daughters hoped that a new lay assistant director would work alongside the religious director for two years before eventually taking on leadership of the shrine.\footnote{Typescript of “Description of Heritage Ministry,” Box 2 Folder 2 Administration-Reports-Apostolic Assessment, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.} Hughes accomplished significant improvements during her time as the director. She improved the shrine’s technology, refurbished rooms, expanded resources for Spanish-speaking visitors, and oversaw creating a new video about Seton’s canonization.\footnote{Harding, 1.} Working alongside Sister Mary Clare was assistant director Karen Harding, the laywoman selected by the Daughters of Charity to carry on Seton’s legacy.

Following Hughes’s retirement, Karen Harding became the first lay director of the shrine. She knew “that there is far more to the shrine than meets the eye! Many casual or first-time visitors equate the Shrine with the Basilica itself. The Shrine comprises so much more; and there are many ways in which the visitor can experience a trip here.”\footnote{Karen Harding, “Fresh Viewpoint/Observations of a Shrine,” \textit{The Seton Way} 14, no. 3 (Summer/Fall 2005),} Only four of the full-time staff
were Daughters of Charity; the other twelve were laity, a trend that demonstrated the site’s transition. Harding expanded programming, updated the shrine’s virtual presence, and modified the shrine’s newsletter. The newsletter and website became colorful, “sporting the brilliant red, white, and blue colors that symbolize Saint Elizabeth Ann’s place in history as the first native-born saint of the United States.” The shrine hired a Director of Communications and a Director of Development. Staff prepared a new education packet for teachers to use during field trips.


136 Typescript of “Seton Shrine Center Organization Chart 7-31-07” July 31, 2007, box 1, folder 6 Administration-Organizational Chart, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Harding expanded the projects of her predecessors as well. The twenty-year-old Seton Way exhibit remained the core of the shrine’s museum. While some items were added or removed over the years, the exhibit essentially remained the same. Sisters and staff wanted to update the exhibit, so the Daughters of Charity Heritage Ministries hired a consultant for the shrine. The consultant reported that the shrine’s mission and vision statements should reflect the multiple historical interests they wanted for the shrine. “The needs for a spiritual director and a youth outreach director were emphasized, as were vocations outreach, development of the PH grounds for outside activities to draw more visitors, and the expansion of shrine focus to include Vincentian legacy and American Daughters of Charity heritage.”

Volunteer and staff development became crucial to the shrine as well. Harding organized trips for them to visit other shrines in the region. These were fun outings, but the notes submitted by attendees revealed that the sites were scrutinized and critiqued. The trips informed Seton Shrine staff about how to improve their site. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, one pilgrimage to the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann involved a poorly trained docent who included personal details of his life into the tour rather than focusing on the saint. Seton Shrine’s staff heavily criticized this method and reflected on their formation. Harding participated in professional development programs in the museum and heritage sector while assistant director, and she

138 Typescript of “Consultant Report,” 2006, box 2, folder 1 Administration-Organizational Chart, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

139 Ibid.

140 Typescript of “Shrine Staff Visit to Philadelphia 7-2-07 Critique Results,” Box 1, Folder 20 Administration-Reports-Monthly Shrine Reports, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
continued to do so in her new role. The shrine experienced growth, but the Great Recession of 2008 forced a hiring freeze during employee turnover.\textsuperscript{141} The gift shop, still crucial to the shrine’s income, experienced a decline in revenue.

These setbacks did not stop the shrine from continuing exciting projects. Staff expanded its web presence, joined social media, and prepared for the bicentennial of the founding of Seton’s order. The bicentennial weekend brought in $14,000 to the gift shop, sold out the shrine’s programming, and welcomed over 1,300 visitors to the Visitor Center. Harding coordinated the filming of a Catholic travel show at the shrine. \textit{The Faithful Traveler} aired on the Catholic network Eternal Word Network Television (EWTN) and could be purchased on DVD.\textsuperscript{142} Now pilgrims could walk the Seton Way without setting foot on the land, although staff hoped it would increase visitation.

Harding and the Daughters’ Heritage Ministries applied for the Museum Assessment Program operated by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in 2009.\textsuperscript{143} This program began in 1981 to help smaller museums improve. Reviewer Edwin Watson coordinated self-assessments from the staff, toured the site over several days, and then submitted a final report to the shrine. The evaluation examined mission and institutional planning, governance, financial stability, interpretation and education, collections stewardship, marketing and public relations,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Box 2 Folder 1 Administration-Reports-Various Reports, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
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human resources, and facilities and risk management. Watson expressed admiration for the quality of the tour and the ability of the site to live its mission. However, his most significant concerns grew out of the shrine’s position as a ministry of the Daughters of Charity.\textsuperscript{144}

The museum’s role as a ministry meant that its staff lacked representation in the Daughters’ long-term planning. It relied on their financial support and was at the mercy of their decisions about the property’s future. Watson urged the museum to separate itself, focus on a long-range plan, and establish an endowment to rely less on the order’s financial support.\textsuperscript{145} These actions involved expanding and enhancing the role of the Associate Board, whose involvement had declined since the 1970s. Finally, Watson suggested the shrine establish a position to handle their collection and education while also beginning the planning process for a new permanent exhibit.\textsuperscript{146} These recommendations align with the AAM’s Code of Ethics but failed to understand the nuance of operating a historic religious site.\textsuperscript{147} The museum was an apostolate of the religious order. Although the Daughters would maintain canonical sponsorship of the site if switched to a new organizational structure, the religious community would lose a central core of its identity and purpose in the Emmitsburg Province.

Karen Harding’s tenure as Seton Shrine Director closed in late 2010 as the Province made structural changes. The Daughters of Charity of the Emmitsburg Province invited the

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 2.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, 3.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 5.

Sisters of Charity Federation to help operate the site.\textsuperscript{148} Each member’s past tied directly to the Vincentian and Setonian history at the site. Lori Stewart, the shrine’s Director of Development and Public Relations, became the new Executive Director. “The Seton Shrine will be focusing on breathing youthful life into the heritage given by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,” Stewart stated in a press release. “Our goal is to incorporate activities and programs to attract the younger generation to education, prayer, worship, and the celebration of God’s gift, the Eucharist. As executive director, I am here to serve others in sharing the Seton Shrine’s vision and inviting more people into our mission.”\textsuperscript{149} These goals involved the development of a hands-on, interactive learning area for children under twelve.

Within a year of Stewart’s appointment, the National Shrine announced a new strategic plan, Seton Heritage Ministries.\textsuperscript{150} The plan recognized that the grounds were already a “spiritual destination,” but the organization felt “Saint Elizabeth Ann is calling us to expand beyond the present boundaries in order to provide multi-level platforms of her mission to the future of the Church.”\textsuperscript{151} Seton Heritage Ministries would accomplish this by creating a new legal and financial structure apart from the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of Charity Federation. The


\textsuperscript{151} Karen Harding, “A Note from the Seton Shrine Director.”
federation would still provide canonical sponsorship. The shrine hoped it would be a fully self-sufficient nonprofit within five years and possess international reach. The changes incorporated the ideas of the MAP to resolve issues of the site’s governance while also resolving the issue of dwindling Daughters available to work.

Administrative adjustments continued in the background as the site introduced its first new significant addition to the museum in several decades. The new exhibit tied Seton’s legacy to the events of the Civil War and provided American Catholic public memory a link to a crucial moment in the nation’s past. Corresponding with the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, the New Charity Afire exhibit shared “how the Sisters not only endured the war, but tended to the spiritual and medical needs of soldiers from both armies.”152 Moreover, it explained how relatives of Seton fought in the war. An octangular room continues to hold the exhibit. Its walls display the main narrative with life-sized vignettes of sisters ministering to the wounded interspaced. Display cases shared stories of individuals impacted by the war, such as Captain William Seton, grandson of Mother Seton, who experienced an injury at Antietam, or Catherine Mary (Kate) Hewitt’s brief entrance into religious life after the death of her husband. The center of the room contained large maps of the sisters’ work throughout the United States during the Civil War. This exhibit fulfilled another recommendation of previous planning documents: to broaden the historical story told at the shrine and attract new audiences through the popularity of Civil War history.

152 Stewart.
Stewart did not remain in the director position for long. In April 2012, Rob Judge joined the staff as the interim executive director after serving as the development director. He eventually became the permanent executive director and continues in that role. Seton Heritage Ministries remained as the strategic plan guiding the organization and preserving the legacy of Seton. One striking change included the addition of a living history program that reenacted vignettes. In 2013, Frederick, Maryland, sponsored One Vast Hospital to showcase the Daughters’ role in Civil War medicine. Back from the Dead continued as a popular event.

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With a permanent executive director in place, the Shrine undertook strategic planning with Brampton Associations and announced a new plan in 2014.155

Three themes emerged from the planning process. The first theme was an “increased focus on the Seton legacy.”156 At the time, most of the site’s exhibitions emphasized the life of Mother Seton. The organization hoped to add additional information about the legacy of the Federation Sisters and broaden its reach through an expanded mission. The second theme was to equip the laity by teaching them about Mother Seton, providing devotional resources, and introducing them to the work of the Federation Sisters. This theme included the expansion of the museum. Finally, the third theme was a marketing & communication imperative. The organization wanted to revamp how it communicated with the public and find new ways to share the legacy of Mother Seton.

Since the strategic planning in 2014, the Seton Shrine has increasingly invested in its living history program. These included the “Walk in History Character Tours” which transported visitors to the grounds in 1846.157 The guide portrayed an individual living or working there during the period. However, this date occurred over twenty years after the death of Mother Seton. It meant that Mother Seton could not be portrayed by an actress. While saints are portrayed at other events, Mother Seton has never been a part of living history programs at the

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156 Ibid.

grounds. This alleviates pressure from the shrine to produce an authentic portrayal, while also emphasizing the reality that Mother Seton exists in the basilica.

The Junior History Interpreter Program provides girls in grades four through twelve with the chance to “tell the history and story of Mother Seton” through first-, second-, and third-person interpretation. The program fulfills the organization’s desire to increase youth involvement while expanding the historical programming available. For a small fee, girls receive classes, workshops, and special behind the scenes opportunities and work for the chance to participate in Junior History Interpreter Days when the Junior Interpreters provide the main tours. They participate in a colonial dance during Mother Seton’s Birthday celebration and interpret the school during St. Joseph’s Valley Days.

Conclusion

The National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton balances its role as holy grounds with its goals to be a heritage tourism destination. The early Sister Guides envisioned a place where visitors could walk with Mother Seton. A museum exhibit shared the history needed to understand this walk and Sister Guides at each building physically embodied legacy of Seton. The diminishing number of vocations to religious life forced the Daughters of Charity to expand the opportunities of the laity. Employees and volunteers contributed to sharing Mother Seton’s legacy by developing school plans, acting as docents, and later operating the site. As the people


changed, so, too, did the landscape as sisters sold or modified property. This changed the narrative of Seton’s legacy by placing the buildings into a walkable distance for visitors.

Faith has remained the central purpose of the Seton Shrine. Praying at Seton’s tomb, receiving sacraments, and hosting retreats are examples of spiritual opportunities for pilgrims. This sacred atmosphere is not contained to one part of the site. Instead, the grounds’ association with Seton provide the entire complex with a sense of heightened spiritual significance since at any moment a visitor could walk where Seton once walked. One tour guide shared that it is not uncommon for spontaneous prayer to occur. For example, when pointing out that the staircase and railing in the White House are original to Seton’s lifetime, visitors sometimes reach out to touch it and pray while the tour is ongoing.

The modern National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton is once again experiencing a transition. 2021 marked the two hundredth anniversary of Mother Seton’s death.\textsuperscript{160} This milestone provided a cornerstone for a year of religious celebration and new historical interpretations. While COVID-19 derailed some original plans, the Seton Shrine pivoted to offer digital commemoration for visitors. The new \textit{Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton: Seeker to Saint} film series portrayed Seton during her lifetime and explained her importance to the modern world.\textsuperscript{161} The shrine offered virtual tours and created an e-book to learn about Mother Seton.


with outside organizations like Salt and Light Media Productions or EWTN produced new specials highlighting the historical value of the Seton Shrine.

Behind the scenes, staff prepared for new construction at the site. The Seton Way exhibit displayed since 1986 will be replaced with a new interpretative plan. The museum and visitor center will be renovated so that visitors flow through the museum into the basilica. The grounds of Emmitsburg, MD, have possessed sacred meaning since the death of Seton and the start of her canonization cause. Planned renovations will integrate the experience of ancient pilgrimage and modern museum by starting visitors in the exhibition and moving them to the body of the saint in the basilica.\(^{162}\) Moreover, visitors can still walk the grounds to explore the buildings of Mother Seton’s lifetime.

Remembering Mother Seton’s life and work remains the purpose of the Seton Shrine. Saints, always alive in the beliefs of Catholics, gain new life at the shrine through living history programs. The National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton developed from a small organization run by a dedicated group of women into a prominent heritage tourism destination for visitors from around the country. It reinforced Catholic public memory by linking Seton and her legacy to crucial moments in the nation’s story. While interpretation techniques developed, the story remained the same: Elizabeth Ann Seton, mother, educator, and religious sister, changed the course of American Catholic history during her time in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

CHAPTER 3

“NEUMANNIANA”: THE STUFF OF SAINTHOOD

Introduction

“MEMORANDUM: Reasons Why Bishop Neumann’s Body Should Remain at St. Peter’s” is an unattributed document stored in the Redemptorist Archives located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Its blue, typewritten font describes the importance of Bishop John Nepomucene Neumann’s body to St. Peter’s the Apostle Parish in Philadelphia. It appealed to practical reasons, like hindering Neumann’s canonization effort, and emotional ones, like Neumann’s wish to be buried at the parish alongside his Redemptorist brothers. Neumann’s body rested in the church’s crypt following his unexpected death in 1860. The Redemptorists ran the parish, and although Neumann could have been buried with the other deceased bishops of Philadelphia, the diocese respected his wish to be buried alongside his Redemptorist brothers.

The order continued operating the parish after his death. Redemptorists scrutinized Neumann’s life and his afterlife to determine potential saintliness. Visitation grew as people stopped at Neumann’s tomb. Eventually, the Redemptorists removed all bodies to a cemetery except Neumann’s. Devotion to Neumann spread throughout the nineteenth and twentieth

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1 Typescript of Semi-Annual Report on Bishop Neumann Activities, March 1 to December 1, 1957, Saint John Neumann Collection, Box Unprocessed, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Suffix “-iana” refers to “a collection of objects, facts, stories, etc. connected with the person, place, period, etc. mentioned” according to Oxford’s Dictionary. The phrase was created by shrine staff.

2 Memorandum: Reasons Why Bishop Neumann’s Body Should Remain at St. Peter’s, Saint John Neumann Collection, Box Unprocessed, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA.
centuries. The lower chapel became part of the Neumann Center, later redesigned into the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann.

Upstairs at Saint Peter the Apostle, the Redemptorists ran a busy urban parish. St. Peter’s existed before Bishop Neumann arrived in 1852. Although this population would change, it initially served German Catholic immigrants in the city. The parish’s identity and place within Catholic memory also changed due to Neumann’s relationship with the church. Neumann never lived or worked at the parish during his lifetime, although he visited for recreational or pastoral purposes. “Those devoted to the cause of Bishop Neumann through the 100 years since his death have always been closely associated with St. Peter’s. They have associated his cause with St. Peter’s.” Parishioners and Redemptorists recognized that to make Neumann a saint, they must preserve his artifacts, collect his writings, publicize his biography, and promote prayer to the saint. St. Peter’s and the Redemptorists prepared their church to be a shrine by investing in Neumann’s cause, opening a museum to the public, and bearing financial responsibility. The cause and the church intertwined into a shared memory centered on Neumann’s life. Each shrine thus far relied on material culture to promote a saint’s memory, but the multiple iterations of a Neumann museum forced staff to categorize the role of each object and where on the property it belonged. This chapter explores the role of memory and material culture, arguing that the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann created a cohesive educational and spiritual experience that accounted for visitor agency.

3 Ibid.

Cultural Memory of John Neumann

Hagiography, scholarship, exhibitions, and devotionals reproduce a biography of Neumann, which forms the core of his cultural memory. There is no need to relist the growth of American saint scholarship produced over the last two decades, although much of it has related to the dynamics of gender and focused on women saints as discussed in chapter two. Writing about Neumann is generally hagiographic, although scholars have considered the importance of his episcopacy and spirituality to the United States. The Redemptorists require members to keep meticulous journals about their ministries. Neumann’s records contribute to such detailed biographies. Other works about Neumann emphasize his role in expanding the parochial school system or are theological texts. The following section shares the standard version of Neumann’s life as maintained by his cultural memory.

John Neumann’s life began in Prachatitz, then part of Bohemia and now part of southwestern Czechoslovakia. He was born to Philip and Agnes Neumann on March 28, 1811. They raised their children in a devout Catholic household where Neumann demonstrated a love of learning.

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from a young age. This love shaped his formative years and is emphasized throughout the shrine and within his collective memory. He initially hoped to study medicine, but Neumann felt a call to the priesthood as he got older. In 1831, Neumann studied theology in Budweis and learned languages on the side. By the end of his life, Neumann was competent in nine languages. Neumann’s passion for learning shaped later endeavors as a priest and bishop. Moreover, Neumann rooted these studies in his faith. A fellow student described Neumann’s devotion as having “sprang from the depths of his soul.”

Neumann completed his seminary studies at the same moment that the Diocese of Budweis put a hold on ordinations due to an abundance of priests. Catholics in the region knew of America’s need for priests through publications of missionary societies dedicated to supporting foreign endeavors, including the Leopoldine Society of Vienna. It publicized and financed missions to the young United States. Neumann’s desire to be ordained and pursue missionary work brought him to the Leopoldine Society. The Diocese of New York accepted him as a missionary. After a series of bureaucratic roadblocks, Neumann was able to leave for the United States with the support of the Society. Bishop John DuBois ordained Neumann a priest on June 25, 1836. Soon afterward, Neumann served small communities in upstate New York and along

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7 Byerley, 110.


9 Ibid.
Lake Erie, including Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Williamsville, Batavia, and North Bush. For the first time, Neumann lived in a world where Catholics were the minority.

Neumann felt the realities of ministering to a small Catholic population. The country’s dispersed Catholic population lacked enough priests to offer regular sacraments to believers. Rural priests often followed circuits, providing spiritual care for a large region with an inability to return regularly. These priests might offer five or six of the seven sacraments to a single person within a trip. Catholics in those regions sometimes ignored certain teachings due to the difficulty of enforcing them. Neumann served rural Catholics as a circuit priest for four years. It was a grueling assignment to traverse the region, especially in the winter, and Neumann’s health suffered because of his travels. He also discovered the loneliness of circuit life. Although he had briefly met Rev. Joseph Prost, C. SS. R., in Rochester years earlier, it was during recuperation from traveling that Neumann developed a deeper relationship with the Redemptorist order.

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer began in 1732 under Saint Alphonsus Liguori to serve people within the Kingdom of Naples as a domestic mission before growing into an international missionary society. The order’s spirituality emphasized that “holiness of life was directly connected to the unconditional love of God,” as inspired by St. Teresa of Avila.

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10 Byerley, 111.
Liguori valued time spent in prayer and visitation of the Blessed Sacrament, a spiritual exercise Neumann also felt drawn to practice. However, Redemptorists recognized that most people needed simple, concrete forms of prayer, so the order encouraged meditations about the infancy of Jesus (the crib), the death of Jesus (the cross), and presence of Jesus in the Eucharist (the altar). Redemptorists arrived in the United States in 1832 and ministered to German Catholics. This work and spirituality attracted Neumann, as well as the order’s sense of community. His recuperation allowed Neumann to contemplate entering the order. Neumann admired the Redemptorists’ work, religious devotion, and the fraternal relationships between brothers. He applied on September 4, 1840 and entered on in November.15

Neumann’s identity as a Redemptorist is central to his life and memory. From 1840 to 1842, Neumann served as a Redemptorist novice in Pittsburgh. His profession of vows in 1842 marked the first time a Redemptorist did that in the United States and the event took place in Baltimore. Life as a newly-professed Redemptorist meant Neumann completed various assignments depending on what the order needed. Initially he ministered to German Catholics in Baltimore, until 1844 when the order assigned him to St. Philomena Parish in Pittsburgh until 1847. Neumann brought his love of the Forty Hours Devotion to each assignment. For forty hours, a symbolic number within Christianity, a consecrated host is placed in a monstrance on the altar for the faithful to venerate. However, Neumann’s poor health as a result of his circuit-riding days never truly improved. His tendency to overwork, coupled with his poor health, forced Neumann to occasionally rest from his duties.

14 Ibid., 80.

15 Byerley, 111.
Neumann’s reputation as an intelligent, pious priest grew throughout the late 1840s and into the 1850s. This resulted in more leadership position for Neumann and a list of accomplishments. From 1847 to 1848, Neumann served as the Vice-Provincial of North American Redemptorists while living in Baltimore. He also took the time in 1848 to become a naturalized American citizen.16 As Vice-Provincial, he oversaw church building projects and the expansion of Redemptorist ministry as well as encouraged the growth of Catholic education. However, the job took a toll on his health, and he stepped down, occasionally serving as interim Vice-Provincial when the appointed one traveled abroad. Neumann continued to devote himself to academic pursuits by translating catechisms into German or creating manuals for the order’s confraternities.17

The American Catholic Church grew alongside Neumann’s responsibilities. Bishop Kenrick recognized Neumann’s abilities as a leader and his devotion since Neumann, as a member of a religious order, received permission from the bishop to celebrate Mass. Neumann had worked with Kenrick for years, so Kenrick suggested that Neumann be made the Bishop of Philadelphia as Kenrick left to lead the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1851.18 The 35,000 square miles of the territory contained nearly two hundred thousand Catholics, almost a hundred

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16 Biographies repeatedly use February 10, 1848, to as the date Neumann became a U.S. citizen. His passport records after this date show him identifying as a U.S. citizen. However, not much is made of the event in contemporary records.

17 Bryne., 45.

churches, multiple colleges, schools, and charitable institutions. Neumann, once a circuit priest overseeing a rural Catholic population, became the bishop of this large diocese in 1852. He hoped from the outset to create new dioceses out of Philadelphia’s territory. This would make Bishop Neumann’s duties more manageable.

The episcopacy of Neumann lasted about eight years. In that time, he built eighty-nine churches along with new hospitals, schools, and orphanages. Neumann continued encouraging the Forty Hours Devotion inside and outside of the diocese. Moreover, Neumann traveled frequently to visit all the parishes in his diocese, akin to Neumann’s early days as a circuit priest. Letters reveal the personal investment he took in his flock. For example, Neumann used his international connections to reconnect loved ones or track down living relatives for funerals he celebrated. In his humility, he continued to wear the Redemptorist uniform and expand the order’s operations. Although affectionately referred to as the “Little Bishop,” Neumann’s decisions and his expression of faith left a significant and lasting impact on American Catholicism. He died suddenly on January 5, 1860, at the age of forty-eight. Remembering

19 Boever, 50.

20 Ibid., 51.


22 John N. Neumann to Francis P. Kenrick, Fall 1859, pgs. 116-117

The Letters of Saint John N. Neumann to Archbishop Francis P. Kenrick, 1852-1859, ed. By Alfred C. Rush
Neumann’s life and declaring him a saint provided one way to commemorate his life. However, the more immediate concern was his funeral.

**The Material of Memory**

**Saint Peter the Apostle Parish**

While the stories of John Neumann’s life provide the crucial grounding for his cultural memory, the material objects Neumann left behind also reinforce the production of memory by showing visitors real, tactile expressions of the past. Material culture “might refer to objects, things, or artifacts, but also the methodological and epistemological debates about the nature of material culture and the role that materiality more broadly has played in the past.” Neumann’s clothing, books, and relics are parts of his material culture. However, the largest piece of material culture associated with Neumann is Saint Peter the Apostle Parish in Philadelphia, PA. His greatest association with this site occurs after his death. This section examines the creation of Saint Peter Parish and the effect Neumann’s death had upon the site.

Bishop Neumann’s unexpected death, coupled with his reputation as a holy man, drew a massive crowd to the funeral. Accommodating these crowds required his casket’s placement in a larger room for the viewing before moving it to the basement crypt. As a Bishop of Philadelphia, Neumann could have been buried with other deceased prelates, but he expressed before his death a desire to be buried alongside his fellow Redemptorists. His funeral liturgy remained ordinary,

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except for the large crowd and his choice of burial location. This crowd continued visiting throughout the following weeks.

Philadelphia’s German immigrant population aspired to build a church in this neighborhood decades prior to Neumann’s death. While he served a sparsely populated region as a young missionary, other areas of the United States experienced rapid growth during the 1830s and 1840s. The city of Philadelphia’s population rose by 300,000 people between 1815 and 1854. German immigrants lived throughout the city but dominated certain neighborhoods. These German-heavy communities lived far from the city’s existing Catholic churches, making it difficult for people to travel for Sunday Mass. These German Catholics desired a parish in their neighborhood by 1841. A group wrote the Redemptorist superior about having a priest sent to serve their community. The Redemptorists replied that a priest would be supplied if the Germans acquired property and prepared for their arrival. This led to the creation of a new German Catholic church home.

After a year and a half of work, German immigrants secured a piece of land in the city. Redemptorist Father Louis Cartuyvels became the first pastor. The property contained living quarters for the priest and chapel, which doubled as the parochial school during the week. These simple arrangements inspired plans to create a permanent structure. Bishop Francis Kenrick laid

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a cornerstone for the brick church on September 10, 1843.\textsuperscript{27} Kenrick arrived in Philadelphia in 1830 after serving in Bardstown, Kentucky. Like many in the diocese, Kenrick was an immigrant to the United States, and he keenly felt the tensions of American nativism.\textsuperscript{28} His tenure as Philadelphia’s bishop oversaw the growing Catholic population and attempted to maintain peace with organizations like the American Protestant Association. The German Catholics building their church knew firsthand these nativist dangers.

Tensions rose higher throughout 1843 Philadelphia as Catholic public-school teachers and students raised objections about using the King James Bible, a Protestant translation, in the classroom. Bishop Kenrick negotiated agreements in 1843 to allow the option of a Catholic Bible by arguing that the option to choose a different translation was guaranteed by the First Amendment. However, anti-Catholic sentiment peaked a year later when riots broke out in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{29} Anti-immigrant crowds attacked Catholic homes. Some Catholics fired weapons at the attackers, causing the death of a Protestant man and instigating further retaliatory violence.\textsuperscript{30} Protestants raided Catholic homes and damaged Catholic buildings. Bishop Kenrick dispensed Catholics from fulfilling their Sunday obligation to attend Mass in fear of congregants’ safety. A brief period of calm followed after May 1844, but riots began again in July. The governor brought in troops to end the violence.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 8.


\textsuperscript{29} Katie Oxx, \textit{The Nativist Movement in America: Religious Conflict in the Nineteenth Century} (Routledge, 2013), 64.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 65.
Although the riots concerned Philadelphia’s Catholics, the brunt of agitation occurred against Irish Catholics and no German Catholic churches were damaged. The German community continued building their parish, even standing guard throughout the riots against potential vandalism. Its dedication occurred on December 29, 1844. Saint Peter the Apostle Parish measured 166 feet long and 64 feet wide in the upper church. Its sanctuary could fit up to 1,200 people. German Catholics north of Vine Street attended this church, building community through parish events and sacramental celebrations. The Redemptorists utilized the lower crypt as their house chapel. This community of Redemptorists and parishioners maintained the church when Neumann died in 1860.

“Truly, our church has become a pilgrimage church,” remarked Redemptorist Father Lawrence Holzer two months after Neumann’s death. The order continued to utilize the crypt as their chapel, but streams of mourners now visited the site. Material religion considers how physical items and environments act upon and within religious systems. The built environment and material objects utilized by believers are not subordinate to other expressions of faith since they materialize belief. Visitors interactions with the physical tomb of Neumann reveals how Saint Peter the Apostle Parish’s cultural memory shifted. Rather than an urban immigrant parish, it became the site to venerate and remember Bishop Neumann and his tomb became the crucial expression of memory. The church continued to function as a bustling parish, handling over eight hundred baptisms for its twelve thousand members in just one year, but Neumann’s tomb

31 Ibid.
32 Hayes, 32.
increasingly defined the activities occurring at the site.⁴³ Redemptorists extended the property line and renovated the exterior of the building, all while visitors poured into the crypt.⁴⁴

**Making a Saint: Legitimizing Cultural Memory**

Initial inquiries into Neumann’s sanctity involved the work and memories of those who knew Neumann during his lifetime. This communicative memory is temporary, only lasting for a few generations, but cultural memory is legitimized through conscientious decisions of how to remember a person, how to commemorate a person, and how to pass on the memory to future generations.⁴⁵ The declaration of sainthood requires miracles performed through the intercession of the saint. Those miracles provide a further framework for the cultural memory of the saint. Rather than focus on the details of canonizing Neumann, this section demonstrates how the process legitimized his cultural memory and utilized material culture to affirm it.

The Redemptorists started exploring the possibility of sainthood for Neumann as they saw the gathering at his tomb. They conducted research to establish Neumann’s virtue throughout the 1880s, both in the United States and in his country of origin.⁴⁶ The introduction of Neumann’s cause to Rome occurred in 1896 under Pope Leo XIII.⁴⁷ This work kept the Redemptorists busy, along with their maintenance of a changing parish. They celebrated the first

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³³ Hayes, 11.

³⁴ Ibid.


³⁶ Boever, 72.

³⁷ Ibid.
English Mass there in 1901, and within two decades, most parishioners spoke English as their primary language. The old German immigrant community faded away, and membership declined. A growing number commemorating Neumann did so without personal memories from his lifetime.

Neumann’s physical remains provide further material support to his cultural memory. Like other potential saints, an exhumation and inspection of his body occurred in hopes that it might not have decayed since a lack of decay signals sanctity. “There was absolutely no odor and the skeleton was intact, the hands being tightly clasped across the breast, upon which rested the pectoral cross,” reported The Philadelphia Times. “The episcopal ring was in its proper place on the finger, and the postulator, as he discovered it, kissed it reverently.” Following the April 1902 exhumation, Neumann’s body was reinterred into a new zinc casket. A new marble slab covered the casket’s resting place. The Redemptorists expanded the lower church to accommodate Neumann’s crowds, while the other Redemptorists originally buried in the crypt were moved to a quieter resting place at the parish cemetery. Neumann’s body took precedence, and the crypt’s purpose changed to reflect what brought people to Saint Peter the Apostle.

Pope Benedict XV declared Neumann’s heroicity of virtues in 1921. Devotion to Neumann grew as Catholics awaited a miracle. It arrived in 1923 when Eva Benassi of Italy

38 Hayes, 43.

39 Hayes, 33.


41 Hayes, 33.
survived acute diffuse peritonitis thought to be fatal through the intercession of Neumann. A nun who knew the child prayed for Neumann’s intercession, and later that night, her symptoms disappeared. This event would become the first miracle towards Neumann’s beatification, although it took decades to establish the miraculous nature of Eva’s recovery. Redemptorists hired medical experts to study the details of this possible miracle.

Redemptorists actively promoted Neumann’s cause as they waited for the next miracle. Special events, parish activities, and even advertisements in the local Catholic newspaper drew attention to Neumann and encouraged people to pray for his intercession. If more people prayed to Neumann, then more people might experience a miracle. In August 1930, the Neumann League of Prayer was formed with that goal in mind. Redemptorists worked out of Saint Peter the Apostle to promote Neumann’s cause. At the same time, the demographics of the parish shifted and reflected the city’s growing Puerto Rican population. The neighborhood of St. Peter’s attracted these new arrivals and provided a new audience for Neumann promoters to evangelize.

A second miracle occurred in 1949 with a direct connection to Neumann’s tomb. J. Kent Lanahan, nineteen years old, survived a horrific car crash in Villanova, Pennsylvania. Doctors ceased medical treatment in anticipation of a quick death. Lanahan suffered broken ribs and a

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44 Hayes, 33.

cracked skull, among other injuries.\textsuperscript{46} Kent’s parents visited Neumann’s tomb to pray and were given a relic of Neumann to touch against their son. Kent made a complete recuperation.

Lanahan and Benassi’s recoveries provided the two miracles needed for the beatification of Neumann. However, like Benassi, it took years to verify the miraculous nature of Lanahan’s recovery. During the process of verification, this story further legitimized the place of Neumann’s tomb within his cultural memory. While Neumann lived and worked throughout the world, his tomb housed miracles.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Rev. Albert Waible, C. S.S. R., served as the vice postulator. His education at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome led him to teach at a Redemptorist seminary, but it also prepared him for the vice postulator position. It familiarized him with the intricacies of Vatican operations and politics.\textsuperscript{47} Waible promoted Neumann tirelessly. His tenure in the position overlapped with the hundredth anniversary of Neumann’s ordination as a bishop. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia celebrated it in 1952. A Mass at the cathedral commemorated the event. Waible also organized a traveling exhibit about Neumann. The priest usually spoke about Neumann at the location of the display. For example, the Catholic Philopatrian Literary Institution hosted the presentation of artifacts, photos, and maps related to Neumann’s life.\textsuperscript{48} These traveling exhibits remained a staple of Neumann’s promotion strategy. Unfortunately, Waible did not live to see Neumann’s canonization. His health declined enough


\textsuperscript{47}“Father Waible, Formerly At St. Peter’s, Dies at 64,” \textit{The Catholic Standard and Times}, volume 63, number 49, August 29, 1958.

that by 1956 a new vice-postulator was announced, and Waible spent the last years of his life in Baltimore as his health declined.49

Reverend Francis J. Litz, C.SS.R., arrived at the Neumann Center in 1956 as its new director and a vice postulator for Neumann’s cause. Litz wrote a letter to his provincial superior shortly after receiving the directive to “take care of Bishop Neumann’s cause.”50 In it, Litz described his connections to Neumann—Litz’s previous appointments were frequently at Neumann’s old churches—and outlined initial ideas about promoting the cause. He hoped to continue making Neumann’s “tomb here a place of prayer and pilgrimage.”51 The letter foreshadows the twenty years of service Litz dedicated to the cause of Bishop Neumann. He established initiatives crucial to collecting Neumann’s material culture, spreading Neumann’s cause outside of Philadelphia, and legitimating Neumann’s cultural memory.

Litz recognized the importance of building a Neumann collection and made it a priority during his first year as vice postulator. He received permission from the provincial “to collect from the communities of the province…any personal effects of Bishop Neumann: also copies of his catechism, bible history, books, writings, etc.”52 The intention was “to gather all these together in a Neumann collection displayed somewhere near his tomb.”53 Litz worried that there

49 “Father Waible, Formerly At St. Peter’s, Dies at 64.”


51 Ibid.


53 Ibid.
would not be many items to collect. After several months of gathering items in March, Litz opened the Bishop Neumann Exhibit with its display of “Neumanniana.” These material objects had the purpose of promoting Neumann. Since he was not yet beatified, they were not relics but important artifacts that might interest devotees.

A vice postulator’s primary role is to support the cause of a potential saint in the place it originated. Neumann’s cause still required a miracle to move forward. While Lanahan and Benassi’s miracles already occurred, the process of approving miracles often took years, and the decision had yet to be made. Supporters of the cause continue to search for potential miracles in case one of those under study was shown not to be a miracle. Litz educated visitors about Neumann with the exhibit, which supplemented the role of prayer at Neumann’s tomb. New railings protected the marble stone over Neumann’s resting place, and a new inscription taught visitors the basics of devotion to Neumann. Those additions highlighted the importance of Neumann’s tomb within the lower church.

Like other vice postulators, Litz kept meticulous records of the work he undertook as vice-postulator. Distributing prayer cards, answering literature requests, and regularly preaching about the life of Neumann spread his cultural memory. People invested in the process could receive a Venerable Bishop Neumann Newsletter by joining the Venerable Bishop Neumann Guild. Guilds were a popular method to elicit canonization support among Catholics, and other causes in the United States possessed guilds as well. The Venerable Bishop Neumann Guild

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54 Typescript of Semi-Annual Report on Bishop Neumann Activities March 1 to December 1, 1957, Saint John Neumann Collection, Box Unprocessed, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

55 Ibid.
intended “to unite and direct the efforts of those interested in the Cause of Bishop Neumann: to pool their spiritual and material help in furthering his great Cause.” Membership included Mass intentions and literature produced throughout the year, while the revenue supported the work of Neumann’s cause.

The newsletter also hoped to entice people into visiting the tomb. Visitors could see Neumann’s tomb, look at items Neumann owned, and enliven their faith in the process. Litz continued making changes to the space. A new, life-sized statue of Neumann appeared above his tomb in 1958. These cosmetic improvements occurred with the assistance of Saint Peter the Apostle’s pastor, Father Henry Missig, whose 1953 appointment meant he worked with the prior vice postulator, Waible. These changes complemented the Neumann exhibit. It was left of the crypt and contained “articles of personal and historical value, displays of his life-work, [and] documents relating to his Cause.” These additions might entice new visitors to the tomb or encourage previous visitors to return. The exhibit remained a permanent feature of the site.

Commemorative events provide a crucial moment to pass on cultural memory. From January 4, 1959, until January 1, 1960, events celebrated the 99th and 100th anniversaries of Neumann’s death as part of the Neumann Centennial Year. This special occasion opened with a Mass and blessing of Neumann’s tomb, its newest statue, and a tour of the Neumann exhibit. The

56 Typescript of Ven. Bishop Neumann Newsletter…, Saint John Neumann Collection, Box Unprocessed, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA. 1z

57 “A Tomb of Venerable Bishop Neumann,” Catholic Times and Standards, 63, no. 40, June 27, 1958, pg. 3.


exhibit contained a new portrait of Neumann donated by Cardinal John Francis O’Hara. Other items of note included photographs of churches Neumann founded and a map of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia during Neumann’s lifetime. The exhibit emphasized Neumann’s relationship with Philadelphia. These events and the exhibit highlight critical aspects of Neumann’s memory: his work as a bishop and his life in Philadelphia.

Redemptorists created new spaces to match the amount of work done in service of the cause. The new Bishop Neumann Center provided offices, retreat rooms, and flexible space for pilgrims. Two important pilgrims arrived in that same year. Beatrice and John Flanagan visited Neumann’s tomb to pray for their son, Michael. Their six-year-old child recently received a grave diagnosis: Ewing Sarcoma, a form of bone cancer, a condition which would result in his death within the year. John’s cousin knew about Neumann’s tomb and encouraged the family to visit. The Flanigans met Father Litz, who encouraged them to keep praying for the intercession of Neumann for Michael’s health. Litz also used a relic stored in a crucifix to bless Michael. Then he gave the Flanigans a first-class relic of Neumann’s bone in a small case to pin to Michael’s clothing. He could wear the relic throughout treatment. Only a few months later,

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60 “Bishop Neumann Centennial Year to Open with Ceremonies at St. Peter’s Church,” Catholic Standards and Time 64, no. 5, January 2, 1959, pg. 3.

61 Typescript of Bishop Neumann Activities for 1962, Saint John Neumann Collection, Unprocessed Box 4, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA. 5b


64 Holland and Goosenberg.
Michael’s cancer completely disappeared. Litz, always on the lookout for a well-documented medical miracle, recognized that this case could move Neumann closer to canonization.

The beatification of Blessed John Neumann on October 13, 1963, ushered in a new era for St. Peter the Apostle Parish, the Bishop Neumann Center, and the Redemptorists. Beatification allows public veneration, and while St. Peter’s had experienced visitors to the church before, nothing compared to these new crowds. A parish history described that “a conservative estimate of 50,000 people came to pay their respects to the new blessed (police records indicate the figure was between 80,000 and 100,000).” The excitement of beatification turned Neumann’s tomb into a shrine, but these events only pointed towards the hope of canonization. Litz needed Neumann devotees to remain conscious that there was still work to be done.

Father Litz expressed this worry not long after the beatification. “Naturally a period of recession is setting in now that the beatification celebration enthusiasm is over and special effort just now is helpful in keeping his newly acquired clientele Bishop Neumann minded.” Blessed Neumann’s cause required another approved miracle to push him into sainthood. Litz encouraged other Redemptorists to keep Neumann’s memory at the forefront of Catholic minds by sending letters to their parishioners or referencing him in homilies. These reinforced a standard cultural memory of Neumann’s life. More importantly, Litz encouraged parishes run by

65 Ibid.
66 Hayes, 35.
Redemptorists to incorporate a short prayer at the end of Mass “to keep them Bishop Neumann conscious” and to make sure that people prayed to him.\textsuperscript{68} Cities where Neumann lived, like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, or Buffalo, took special care to preserve this memory. He even floated the idea of renaming Saint Philomena in Pittsburgh to Blessed John Neumann Church, but this idea never took hold. Litz’s determination to spread devotion to Neumann also spread a shared memory.

A significant opportunity to promote Neumann came with the 1964 World’s Fair hosted in New York City and held through the fall of 1965. The Vatican maintained a pavilion that included Michelangelo’s \textit{Pieta}, early Christian sculptures, a replica of St. Peter’s tomb, and special exhibits throughout the year.\textsuperscript{69} From Sunday, October 4 through Saturday, October 10, 1965, the pavilion contained an exhibit about John Neumann.\textsuperscript{70} The sermon at daily Mass focused on Neumann’s life, and a relic was displayed for the faithful to venerate. There were some concerns about the project. Claiming sanctity before canonization by any person affiliated with the cause could risk Neumann never making sainthood. Organizers balanced celebrating Blessed John Neumann Week with careful restraint.

Neumann received substantial publicity from the World’s Fair and new audiences, even non-Catholic audiences, learned about the deceased bishop. Father Litz prepared 30,000 leaflets for visitors, while Redemptorist parishes within driving distance of New York planned trips to

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{70} Letter from Rev. Francis Litz to V. Rev. Ronald Connors, July 8, 1964.
the exhibit. People rushed to visit before it closed. Rev. Adam Otterbein, an assistant at the shrine appointed to help Litz promote Neumann’s cause, wrote to the provincial superior that about 50% of the over two million tourists

visited the Vatican Pavilion—passed beneath the Neumann banner that hung from the balcony, and most of them passed before his picture in the chapel. So one million people heard at least his name, or were reminded of Bl. John Neumann… Publicity is one phase of the work for the cause of Bl. John Neumann and I cannot imagine a better opportunity than last week.

Seeing Neumann’s images and his belongings made the memory of Neumann a physical reality.

The excitement of the World’s Fair exacerbated tensions between Otterbein and Litz regarding the best approach to Neumann’s cause. The same letter Otterbein used to relay details about the fair also contained his lamentations regarding the administrative strategies at the shrine. “I think that the relationship between the Neumann Center and the community at St. Peter’s has deteriorated further during the past year,” he wrote, adding that this was a result of poor communication between the two communities and the generally disorderly nature of Litz.

According to Otterbein, Neumann’s promoter frequently forgot to inform the parish of events. The rest of his letter complains about working for Litz, expressing frustration that Litz “is talking AT me and not TO me. It is not conversation-exchange of ideas. He lectures and seldom


73 Ibid.
converses.” His experience highlights the issues of maintaining a shrine in a shared space with another community. Each community possessed its own understanding of the church and its importance.

Otterbein felt that Litz gave the parish’s laity too much power in organizing events. When Otterbein did not know how to begin a new task, Litz directed him to the appropriate parishioner, usually a woman, who would know how to handle it from prior experience. “I do not believe in a dictatorship, but at the same time, I certainly do not believe in an absolute democracy of lay people when work is sponsored by the Redemptorist Fathers.” These gendered tensions existed at other shrines in the United States. In Chicago, the National Shrine of Saint Jude utilized men as the face of the shrine, although women in the background contributed to the spiritual labor of devotion and maintained the shrine’s Catholic identity. Both dynamics reveal the role parishioners held as stewards of a saint’s memory.

Day-to-day shrine work involved maintaining the physical site and keeping Neumann’s memory at the forefront of Catholic minds. Litz sent regular reports to Redemptorist superiors to either list accomplishments or requested further financial support. Requests for money stated the task and expected costs. They highlight the daily operations of a shrine and the large projects Litz undertook. For example, much of Litz’s time went to printing new prayer cards, pamphlets, and booklets. Annual reports throughout the 1960s and 1970s meticulously tracked the number

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

of slide presentations, parish talks, and audience size at each event. Neumann’s memory reached thousands of listeners each year. These two decades spent hoping for Neumann’s canonization were busy ones for the vice postulator.

The Redemptorists grappled with the future of Saint Peter the Apostle and the shrine as potential canonization loomed. The church needed a new pastor. The outgoing pastor, Father John Sullivan, supported Litz’s work “by not interfering with our various Bishop Neumann activities and devotions.” In a letter to the Superior of the Baltimore Province of Redemptorists, Litz explained the four primary interests at St. Peter’s Parish. The new pastor would need to juggle those interests. The local community, the declining parish population, the growing Puerto Rican apostolate, and the Bishop Neumann activities were the responsibilities of a new pastor. Litz noted the “tendency to consider these as extra parochial or as separated from the parish interests,” but given the declining parish membership and activities, “the future work of the C. SS. R. here seems to point to the Bishop Neumann shrine and apostolate.” The new pastor needed to “promote the combined interests of the parish and the expansion of the Bishop Neumann activities and apostolate…so that during the next three years genuine and prudent efforts might be made to adjust the parish life and facilities to the Bishop Neumann shrine activities and to pave the way for a future united front for all these phases of activities.”

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79 Ibid.
vice postulator of Neumann’s cause, Litz prioritized his own work’s importance and framed it as the future of Redemptorist activities at St. Peter’s.

The Neumann Shrine advertised itself as the place “where his clients gather” in a visit to “recapture the history of a great and holy man.” The shrine’s small museum contained rosaries, citizenship papers, chalices, manuscripts, books, and more from Neumann. The new pastor would need to support those activities. Litz encouraged the appointment of Fr. Bernard Krimm to the parish since he grew up there, spoke Spanish, and expressed devotion to Blessed Neumann. Krimm was a natural fit, and he worked closely with Litz to promote Neumann upon his appointment. Krimm became another vice-postulator and often traveled to speak about Neumann.

The Vatican Congregation of the Causes of Saints recommended Neumann’s canonization on July 13, 1976. The Philadelphia Daily News shared that Cardinal John Krol would meet with Pope Paul VI in the following days to set a date for the canonization. Saint Peter the Apostle Parish offered a Mass in anticipation, and supporters gathered at the shrine. “When they ordain him a saint, there’ll be thousands of people from all over the world come here.” This pending canonization of John Neumann stirred up activity among the Redemptorists and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. A Bishop Neumann Office opened under

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83 Ibid.
Rev. Adam J. Otterbein, who still worked with Litz to promote the cause. Otterbein was familiar with similar work as co-founder and president of the Holy Shroud Guild, which Otterbein continued to operate alongside his Neumann work. The office coordinated canonization activities and maintained the press coverage. Organizers recognized that Neumann’s ascension to sainthood was “not the end—but a new beginning” for those working to sustain his memory. Discussions considered how “to make this a great shrine of Faith, Prayer and Devotion...where people come to find peace.”

On June 19, 1977, Pope Paul VI officially canonized Neumann. His homily emphasized the love of Christ and service to man that structured Neumann’s life. The Little Bishop now claimed the title of America’s first male saint. Hundreds arrived at the corner of Fifth Street and Girard Avenue to celebrate the newest saint at his shrine. One visitor remarked that “I’m just overjoyed that someone from the hoi polloi finally got what they deserved,” although Neumann’s life took an unusual path in his role as bishop. St. Peter’s hosted a Mass to celebrate the canonization—there was simply no way for the shrine chapel to fit the over 1,300 visitors,

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86 Typescript of the Report for the Fall Seminar, Fall 1979, Saint John Neumann Collection, Box Unprocessed, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA.
87 Ibid.
although it served as overflow seating.  

Thousands more stopped into the church for a short visit. A procession began in the streets leading up to the church. This news was an extraordinary moment for Catholics across the United States but especially meaningful to the members of St. Peter the Apostle Parish. “This is thrilling to me. I was a parishioner here when I was born, and I am still a parishioner today.” Souvenir sellers offered buttons, ribbons, and crucifixes in the streets. Later that day, the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul celebrated Mass and religious orders founded by Neumann organized their own commemorations.

The largest event in Philadelphia took place on Sunday, June 26. A procession began at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and ended at Logan Circle. There, an outdoor Mass took place along with special Scripture readings and music performances. Archbishop John Cardinal Krol gave the homily to the roughly 7,500 people present. “A life of sanctity does not involve anything that is beyond the ability of a person of ordinary attainments,” Krol stated, relying on the image of Neumann’s humble origins. This Mass of Thanksgiving corresponded with the anniversary of Neumann’s first Mass as a priest. The hard work of devoted Catholics, shrine volunteers, and Redemptorists had succeeded. The canonization of Neumann legitimized his cultural memory. The shrine now had to maintain it for future generations.


91 The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 20, 1977, pg. 6.


93 Ibid.

Museums, Material Culture, & Visitor Agency

Parishes, shrines, and museums serve different functions and audiences. A parish is home to a local community that regularly interacts with each other and with the church. The parish provides the sacraments of initiation and funeral rites. These take place in the sanctuary, the parish’s most important space. Neumann’s shrine also contains a sanctuary and relics of the saint. Visitors utilize this space to pray, attend Mass, or participate in other forms of worship. The shrine does not provide the sacraments of initiation. It cannot replace a parish. These two spaces exist alongside the site’s museum. The following section examines how a modern museum developed at the shrine, reinforced Neumann’s memory through material culture, and how visitors utilize the space for their own purposes. Saint Peter the Apostle Parish and the Shrine of Saint John Neumann learned how to navigate three spaces and their audiences when all under the same roof.

The material environment of each space evokes a sacred nature. It builds the importance of the shrine complex and reaffirm Neumann’s memory. The museum’s religious artifacts contribute to its sacred nature, but those items are not the only factors. The size, lighting, and layout of a museum evoke intangible impressions. Gretchen Buggeln explores this concept in an essay about interpreting religion in museums.95 This “feeling” is often created by art museums’ displays of religious art. She explains that museums often rely on experiential learning for visitors but that “there can be fear that that experience will be too [sic] real.”96 Staff at a secular

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96 Ibid, 145.
institution worry that they will recreate a sacred environment. For example, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Portal from the Abbey Church of Saint-Laurent is an arched doorway that visitors can walk through into a room with a tenth-century altar displayed. The intentional decision to order objects in that fashion evokes the “feeling” of being within a church. Museums at shrines do not need to fear creating this experience since spiritual growth is the primary purpose of a visit.

Secular institutions that incorporate religious artifacts intentionally or unintentionally decenters and deemphasizes the artifacts’ spiritual value. An object incorporated into a museum undergoes a switch in its classification, often referred to as “museumification.” It no longer fulfills its intended purpose once cataloged into a museum collection, and its display as part of a museum obscures its spiritual value. Its nature changed to incorporate its place within a collection. The Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, NC, displays the former chapel of Charlotte’s Good Samaritan Hospital, a private black hospital. Wooden pews are available for visitors to sit in as Gospel music recorded by local congregations plays in the background. At the front, a wooden altar, chair, and an organ sit behind a wooden railing. Wooden beams overhead provide a decorative nod to the space’s character. Electric lights light the small stained glass


99 Thank you to Dr. James Bielo for feedback on my 2023 American Society of Church History presentation. His suggestions about “decentering” rather than “disappearing” were worked into this chapter.
It is part of an exhibit about the religious history of Charlotte. These areas create spiritual spaces designed for educational purposes. A visitor’s emotional reaction is outside of their control. This process occurs at Catholic museums, too, as staff decides whether items stay in a sanctuary or move to a display.

The individuals responsible for maintaining Neumann’s memory at the parish and shrine changed following Neumann’s canonization. The act of canonization makes a vice postulator obsolete. It forced Redemptorist leaders to consider the future of the site once again. It would also affect whether the small museum Litz created would continue at the site. The Provincial Council and the province’s Neumann Committee changed the organizational structure in 1978. They elected to appoint one pastor as the administrator of both the parish and the shrine. It united the parish more fully with the shrine in its basement, although the two organizations remained separate legal entities. This organizational model remains in place at St. Peter’s today. The John Neumann Center became the National Shrine of St. John Neumann by 1979.

In that same year, Pope John Paul II visited the United States. Part of his apostolic journey occurred in Philadelphia, where Pope John Paul II visited the National Shrine of St. John Neumann. This visit by the pope affirmed Neumann’s importance to American Catholic identity and later became part of Neumann’s cultural memory. The pope gave a short speech—not even

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100 Cotton Fields to Skyscrapers, Levine Museum of the New South, Charlotte, NC.


102 “Our New Name,” National Shrine of Saint John Neumann Newsletter (Summer 1979), Saint John Neumann Collection, Unprocessed, Redemptorist Archives, Philadelphia, PA, 2. 3n box
ten sentences—at Neumann’s tomb. “As I stand in this Church, I am reminded of the one thing which motivated Saint John Neumann throughout his life: his love for Christ.” The lower church that Pope John Paul stood in contained stained glass windows telling the story of the saint’s life. The shrine looked upon the visit with pride and referenced it in later publicity pieces or museum exhibits. It affirmed the place of Neumann within a national Catholic memory. The decision to visit the church was because of its relationship to Neumann’s legacy, not its broader parish community.

Redemptorists also reevaluated the use of space at Saint Peter the Apostle and the shrine. This brought changes to the museum. During the early 1980s, staff reorganized the crypt to hold more visitors by rearranging the display cases. These changes raised the question of whether Neumann’s body should be moved. Archbishop Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia argued it made no sense to expand the crypt if there was already a large sanctuary with plenty of space on the property. Redemptorists ignored this advice but did follow suggestions to emphasize Neumann’s body in the crypt. This decision to ignore the suggestion of Bevilacqua reveals the

104 Some staff members held onto a special souvenir—a slice of the red rug John Paul II knelt on while praying at Neumann’s tomb. That item is now a relic in its own right given the canonization of John Paul II in 2014.
106 Hayes, 31.
107 Hayes, 35.
Redemptorists’ understanding that even though Neumann dominated much of the church’s life, it was still a parish, and the sanctuary still remained a part of the local parish community.

Figure 13. Saint Neumann’s body is located at the front of the room, closed off from visitors by kneelers. Visitors can also sit in chairs located in the center of the room, while to the left display cases line the wall.

These extensive renovations required moving Neumann’s body out of the chapel during construction. The museum room became a temporary home for the body. Chairs and individual kneelers added seating and created a space for worshippers to pray. The glass cases and artifacts remained along the room’s walls. These cases were wooden with a glass top and glass front. A light blue cloth provided a backdrop for items. Some artifacts and framed images even rested on top of the displays, perhaps due to rearranging the space to fit the body. The room contained a miniature model of what the new chapel renovations would look like when completed. Neumann’s body would be placed under the altar in a glass case. A lifelike wax replica of his body would contain his physical remains and give the illusion that his body never decayed. Other items in the room included nun dolls representing the religious orders Neumann supported,
artifacts used by Neumann, and paper documents from his life or the canonization process. The display showcased a variety of items but provided minimal interpretation.

A front alcove contained the altar and Neumann’s body. This area was a tight space crammed with artifacts, votive candles, flowers, flags, and large frames resting on the ground to lean against the wall. A temporary altar rail separated this space from the other part of the room. While altar rails were no longer necessary in Catholic churches, this decision protected items from being knocked over by keeping visitors out. The effect of the renovation accidentally created a truly Catholic museum. The relics museumified through their display in cases and used to interpret Neumann’s history became relics once more through proximity with the body of Neumann. Moreover, they were the adornment of a chapel, not the sole focus of a museum. Visitors could learn about Neumann’s life, develop an understanding of his American identity, and begin emulating his virtue all in one room.

The shrine was rededicated in 1990 by Archbishop Bevilacqua after renovations ended. Its chapel was closed from June 1989 to June 1990.108 The end of the renovation meant separating Neumann’s body from his other relics. Education was relegated to the museum, sacred matters to the chapel. Dr. Margaret Kruesi, then a folklife dissertation researcher, focused on the National Shrine of St. John Neumann in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She outlined changes made to the shrine in the closing chapter of her dissertation. There were two motivations for the renovations: to make the shrine more appealing to Philadelphia’s tourists and to make

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108 Kruesi, 198.
practical improvements to the property, such as insulating the ceiling or adding a new wheelchair ramp.\(^\text{109}\)

The sanctuary area of the Shrine received the most radical renovations. The existing marble altar was blocked from view by the erection of a large mosaic depicting St. John Neumann in a heroic posture, dressed in his missionary robes, with the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul just behind him. The medical scenes of miraculous healings which once dominated the chapel as full-sized murals have been reduced to a tiny abstract scene depicting a patient in a hospital bed on the edge of the mosaic. Modern stained glass panels, simply colored glass with no images in them, flank the mosaic on either side and provide the backdrop for the glass casket with Neumann’s relics, which have now been reclothed and covered with a new wax mask.\(^\text{110}\)

Her dissertation examined the story of healings at the shrine, which meant that Kruesi’s attention focused on depictions of miracles that disappeared from the chapel. The museum received few changes. She concluded, “the Shrine has been modernized with the overall effect of ‘image’ replacing history.”\(^\text{111}\) The shift from emphasizing Neumann’s miracles to highlighting his life demonstrated the change in Neumann’s memory. For most of the site’s existence, it searched for miracles to prove Neumann’s saintliness. The shrine no longer needed to search for miracles and focused its efforts on the veneration of Neumann. The reproduction of a collective narrative passes memory to a new generation.

A room off to the side of the shrine still contained a museum dedicated to Neumann. The display cases were the same, although now the backdrop was red. Photographs, newspapers, and minor artifacts were packed into the cases. Small labels with white backgrounds and black

\(^{109}\) Ibid, 197.

\(^{110}\) Ibid, 198.

\(^{111}\) Ibid, 199.
typescript provided a simple identification of the object. Labels updated at the turn of the twenty-first century included decorative gold edges or a few sentences to explain the object’s importance better. Overall, little renovation occurred within this space. The museum also had large items displayed, such as the altar Neumann celebrated his first Mass on, then painted white. Large frames contained multiple images or newspaper clippings and hung on the wall like a collage. Light entered the space through the stained-glass windows illustrating the life of Neumann. The end of renovations meant that items were no longer squeezed tightly into a small space.

Tour guides were eager to show visitors the museum, but its size and location still made the space awkward, even with the removal of Neumann’s body. The dim light and lackluster interpretation made the room akin to storage space. This reinforced that the shrine chapel and the upstairs sanctuary were important while the exhibit was outdated and sequestered away. It was “Neumannania,” a room with minimum interpretation. No records exist about what was in each case during this time, but photographs that exist from the 1990s through 2015 lend insight to the items exhibited. Moreover, an unprocessed collection at the Redemptorist Archives saved some of the textual artifacts and labels used in the museum cases. These were not organized, and items were missing, but they provided some insight into the early exhibition of Neumann’s life. The cases underwent few changes over thirty years.

The transition from the parish church to the shrine complex found its fullest expression in the twenty-first century. Redemptorists updated existing structures like the parish, shrine, and parochial school by creating a capital campaign. It also added new spaces, like the new atrium that connected these spaces together and creating an entrance from the parking lot. The shrine’s new atrium could be a multi-purpose space, and its high wooden beams coupled with a flowing
fountain created an attractive atmosphere. St. Peter’s main entrance remained accessible, even as
the gathering point for the complex changed. Two organizations operate at the site, the parish
and the shrine, but the physical changes elevated the shrine’s status and Neumann’s memory.
The primary entrance to meet Neumann is no longer through St. Peter’s but through the atrium
and into the shrine.

The extensive construction meant that Neumann’s artifacts were reshuffled, much as they
were during the previous renovations. The most important design choice was simply to find a
place to put the items out of the way from construction. The cases and artifacts moved into the
parish office’s lobby, where plastic folding tables supported the cases. Tight space meant that
some cases were placed in the sanctuary near Neumann’s body, a space unrecognizable with its
protective drywall and folding chair rows. A visitor during this time could sit in one of the chairs
near the altar to venerate Neumann while glancing to their side into the display cases. Once
again, Neumann was reunited with his belongings for a moment.\textsuperscript{112} The artifacts were once again
relics, the museumification lessened by their proximity to the saint’s body.

\textbf{A Modern Museum}

Renovations remade existing structures while others created entirely new spaces. The
Neumann Center, a multi-purpose space and home of the Redemptorist Archives, replaced an old
parish hall. It could be used by pilgrims, parishioners, or for other special events. However, the

\textsuperscript{112} National Shrine of St. John Neumann, “While we await a new home for our museum, the exhibit cases
and their contents from the former museum area are in the hallways outside of our giftshop, and
office….,” Facebook, April 11, 2015, https://scontent-atl3-2.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t1.18169-
9/11138496_10153195541979410_6808929200478320339_n.jpg?_nc_cat=110&ccb=1-
7&_nc_sid=cdbbe9c&\_nc_ohc=dUnt0LssGPMAX80-i5V&\_nc_cat=100&\_nc_sid=
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=content-atl3-2.xx&oh=00_AT_aDXtNudaV__7rsQDdpbQ9843U2sQrmRessNtpgS1h0Q&oe=62BC8B42.
biggest change for shrine visitors involved the creation of a new Saint John Neumann Museum. A new wing of the atrium opened in May 2019. This new museum contained a modern exhibit complete with digital interactives rather than a dimly lit room filled with glass cases. The Gecko Group, a communications design firm in nearby West Chester, handled exhibition design. This new wing also included a gift shop, media room, and café, which were not original to the shrine complex. The new museum utilizes some of the originally displayed objects, especially large ones such as the walnut dresser, and focuses on the memory of John Neumann.

Neumann’s story, and the story of the Redemptorists, are linked throughout the exhibit to defining moments in American history. As the exhibit transitions through Neumann’s decision to go to the United States, it explains that the “Catholics were a part of the American story from the earliest days of European exploration.” A label explains that the Catholic population was small but grew in urban areas. Protestants worried that Catholics “would undermine national values and change the culture.” An image of nativist violence in Philadelphia provides the backdrop. Nearby, images of the Ursuline Sisters convent burning in Charlestown, MA, add further evidence of anti-Catholic tensions. Neumann “expected resistance and resentment” from Protestant Americans.


115 Ibid.

These images and labels reinforced Neumann’s place not just in Catholic history but in American history and reaffirmed Catholics’ experience in the country as American. Neumann experienced the trials of immigration because of anti-Catholicism. As a “frontier priest,” Neumann served “communities deeper in the wilderness.”117 This phrase holds a double meaning: Neumann worked on the fringes of American civilization, and he ministered to people spiritually distant from their faith. The reproduced stained glass image hearkens to an idolized American frontier. Two men, one holding an ax on his shoulder, look to Neumann for guidance. A log cabin decorates the background. This story of Neumann’s life excludes information related

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to the history of Saint Peter the Apostle Parish. The exhibit’s story is to make Catholic history American by interpreting Neumann’s experience as part of the nation’s civil religion.

A shrine museum promotes the spiritual growth of its visitors. The exhibit’s entrance emphasizes this goal before visitors step foot into the main room. The dead-end is painted a bold red with a white statue of Neumann bolted above the ground. Written in white over the sculpture is “Dearest God, Give me Holiness!” Beneath it is the stoop Neumann collapsed on before dying, unprotected from visitors’ touch by any ropes or signage. This text hints at the shrine’s ultimate purpose: to encourage visitors to grow in holiness. Inserting Neumann into the American past provides one way to do this. However, its interpretive choices also insert Neumann and the Redemptorists into America’s traditional origin story. The shrine museum must also provide occasions for interaction between visitors and religious artifacts. The Neumann museum accomplishes this through omission. By not including protective barriers on certain objects, like the stoop, visitors can interact with objects in a way that traditional museum culture discourages, such as touching the object to pray. A shrine museum both educates and evangelizes.

A large sign awaits a visitor once through the doorway. It orients people to the space. The “Saint John Neumann: A Saint for All” title is modified throughout the exhibit as a central theme.118 Sections emphasize how Neumann is a saint for certain communities, but here the introduction sign reminds visitors that “Neumann was a man of God” who possessed “heroic strength of conviction” and is a saint for all Catholics.119 Design elements took inspiration from


the shrine’s stained-glass windows by creating a decorative border around text similar to that found on the windows. Visitors walk forward into a chronological exhibit about the life of Neumann, beginning in Bohemia. Each section emphasizes faith and piety, but the underlying current of Americanism persists with increasing clarity as the exhibit unfolds.

Figure 15. The first sign of the Saint John Neumann Museum creates a template for the designs following it. Photo by the author.

Each section of the exhibit follows a similar design. Arranged thematically as well as chronologically, a viewer who walks through the exhibit without too much reading will grasp a basic outline of Neumann’s life. Closer viewing provides historical contextualization. Each
section has “A Saint For…” title and a matching stained glass window, which reaffirms the theme. For example, the image of Neumann’s baptism has “A Saint for Families” caption and is situated in the section containing information about Neumann’s early family life. “A Saint for Students” is paired with an image of Neumann studying in preparation for his missions and is in a section dedicated to his educational achievements. Rather than describe each section in detail, the following paragraphs focus on “Called to Holiness” before examining several key artifacts placed throughout the exhibit.

The museum immediately balances historical context with Catholicism’s belief in an omnipresent God actively participating in human existence. It explains that “God called him [Neumann] to holiness” and that “the experiences of his youth laid the foundation for a man devoted to God and to service to those in need.” Religious museums run the risk of going too far into historical context, legitimating the institution for scholars but losing appeal to believers, or writing each action as divinely ordered and thus risking the loss of non-believing visitors. A map of Europe during Neumann’s infancy orients visitors. The museum continues to balance these interests throughout the exhibit.

The first digital interactive is a recreated baptismal font, complete with a paschal candle to the side, which contains a touch screen tablet secured in the basin. The basin’s paint mimics water, and the digital screen invites a visitor to “Meet John Neumann and discover the early


years of his journey to sainthood” as water moves in the background. The tablet contains a slideshow of images and information detailing Neumann’s youth and family life. While this information is available on the exhibit’s signage, this digital format appeals to visitors seeking an interactive learning opportunity. However, while visitors control the pace of clicking through the show, they cannot zoom in on images or click on them for more information. The stained-glass imagery utilized in the digital content acknowledges the exhibit’s primary design.

![The replica of a baptismal font contains a touchscreen interactive program.](image)

Figure 16. The replica of a baptismal font contains a touchscreen interactive program. Photograph by the author.

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The shrine incorporates Neumann into a national memory through its material culture as well as its narrative. These accouterments demonstrate how Catholic objects are reused and repurposed to translate a cultural memory for visitors. Bill Brown’s thing theory explains that the “thingness” of a thing relies on human interaction with the object. When an object breaks, its “thingness” can be asserted.\(^{123}\) However, most objects’ functions are determined by their maker and their properties.\(^{124}\) This original intention disappears with the museumification of an object since an object added to a museum collection is now used to educate, illustrate, or preserve concepts rather than be used in its original form. For the sake of this dissertation, items within the Neumann museum fall into three categories: object, artifact, and relic.

An object is a thing’s state of being within the museum’s collection before designation as a religious relic or historical artifact. The words “relic” and “artifact” cannot be used indiscriminately to reference an old or historical object. The use of “relic” in this work utilizes it only in regards to its Catholic definition of an association object or physical remains of a saint. It is used when the museum interprets an object as a relic or when the visitors designate the object as a relic through their interaction with it. The confusion of the term relic is best explained by Teresa Barnett in her book *Sacred Relics: Pieces of the Past in Nineteenth-Century America*. She explains that association items are “objects, fragments of objects, and bits of nature valued solely


because they had been associated, however tangentially, with a prominent person or event.”

She traces how these association items became popular among collectors and antiquarians but lost credibility with the professionalization of museums. Barnett goes so far as to say that association items and relics never left museums but have been reused in different formats. In creating a Neumann collection, Litz sought association items related to Neumann, although he also sought relics. He produced a collection of both historically valuable and spiritually meaningful objects.

The word “artifact” designates an object as one interpreted for its ability to share historical or theological context to visitors rather than its ability to provoke spiritual growth. Everything at this site enters as an object, but its interpretation and visitor interaction designate whether it is a relic or artifact. The museum displays Neumann’s copies of various New Testament translations, Life of Christ, and Compendium of Mystical Theology, in a glass artifact case early in the exhibit. Next to the books is a period-appropriate microscope on loan to the museum and used to illustrate the variety of subjects Neumann studied. These objects illustrate Neumann’s studious nature, and some are even open to his inscriptions. These objects are interpreted as artifacts rather than relics. They contextualize Neumann’s life even though his handling of the objects made them Catholic relics. The object would become a relic if a visitor chose to interact with the object based on its spiritual meaning, even if the museum did not

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126 Ibid., 195.

interpret that meaning. The display case surrounding those items and their textual interpretation diminishes the visitors’ sense of spiritual value and prevents its movement into relic status.

Figure 17. Books used by Neumann to study. Photograph by the author.

The size and positioning of two artifacts invoke spiritual interaction more than others at the museum. The ability of visitors to interact with artifacts and relics allows them to make Neumann a part of their spiritual life, thus reproducing his cultural memory. About midway through the exhibit is the altar Neumann used to celebrate his first Mass on June 26, 1836. It originally belonged to St. Nicholas Church in New York, and when the church closed in 1960, the altar passed into the hands of the Redemptorists.128 Earlier Neumann exhibits displayed the altar, and photos reveal it once had a coating of white paint. The altar’s design is simple. Made

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of wood, scratched and chipped from age, a simple cross is screwed into the front and painted a matte bronze color that almost blends into the wood’s coloring. Two platform shelves are on top of the main surface along the backside, with a wooden tabernacle splitting the shelves in the middle. The tabernacle’s small door has a cross. When Neumann celebrated his first Mass, the priest stood *ad orientem*, facing away from the pews and towards the altar. This design reflects that stance.

Like the entrance’s stoop, this altar is exhibited without a physical barrier between visitors and the object. The only intervention into the artifact’s nature is a small sign hanging above its right side explaining its origin. Displaying the artifact without any visual or physical separation, coupled with it being the largest object thus far in the exhibit, causes the altar to capture visitors’ attention. This positioning and the artifact’s history convey its value more than its appearance or materials. It draws visitors to it, including a young boy who furtively glanced around for staff before gently laying a hand upon the surface of the altar. This action of pausing with the artifact demonstrates how it could transition into a relic through visitor agency.

An artifact of similar size and nature attracted visitors further into the exhibit. A walnut dresser in poor condition illustrates Neumann’s role as a circuit priest. The sign above it explains how this dresser “came from the family home of Philip Ignatius Kelly” when Neumann traveled to Lycoming County, PA, for Mass.\(^{129}\) Items of similar size to a Catholic altar were used for Mass, then returned to their original use after a priest’s visit. Chipped wood, missing handles,

and a broken drawer contribute to the artifact’s damage, but it is the burnt hole on the top that captures a visitor’s eye. It created an opening into the drawer below.

Figure 18. The walnut dresser used by Neumann to celebrate Mass. Notice the hole on the top of the dresser, which did not exist when Neumann utilized it. Photo by the author.

An observant visitor who peeks inside the hole will notice that the drawer contains small papers dropped in from above. The paper’s heading reads “Dear St. John Neumann, I Thank You for…,” while the space underneath is filled with written prayer requests. Those papers originated at the end of the exhibit, where a plexiglass box collects prayers from the visitors. Most visitors utilize the intended box for their prayer requests, but enough visitors drop theirs into the walnut dresser that museum staff regularly empty the drawer. This is the most striking example of visitors remaking an artifact into a relic. Prayers to a saint reproduce their cultural memory in the lives of visitors, and learning about Neumann’s American past allows visitors to now replicate his virtues in their own lives.
Figure 19. Prayer intentions dropped by visitors into the hole on the walnut dresser. Photo by the author.

One way visitors replicate this virtue is by praying with Neumann and the exhibit includes a space for visitors to pray. A large sign hanging near a plexiglass box asks a visitor “ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR ST. JOHN NEUMANN’S INTERCESSION? SHARE YOUR STORY!” [sic]. A digital screen hanging over it rotates through a slideshow of individuals experiences of Neumann’s intercession, further reinforcing the need to imitate Neumann’s devotion. Visitors can also “light a candle for all to see” from the electric votive candle display across from the prayer collection box. This combination of items demonstrates the designers’

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intention to dedicate spaces for spiritual use, but they could not have predicted visitors taking prayer requests back to the walnut dresser. Visitor agency diminishes the staff’s authority. The free will of a visitor—and the individuality of a person’s interior faith—means that no museum at a shrine is merely a museum; it is a crucial part of the shrine complex and of the cultural memory of American Catholics.

The museum includes relics from other saints, most notably the closing display about Saint Pope John Paul II. It is meant to demonstrate how individuals—like the visitors—can grow from the lives of saints since “holiness begets holiness.”131 This section highlights Pope John Paul II’s 1976 trip to Philadelphia through an episcopal chair and a pillow. The chair is displayed on a raised platform with a yellow rope stretched across its seat to prevent visitors from sitting in it. Both the rope and the elevated platform create a separation between visitor and display. The label is in-between the chair and the visitor, which adds to the subtle message not to touch the object. However, although the pillow is also a part of the elevated platform, it is inset within the display’s base and covered with glass. It is positioned in front of the chair and has no label between it and the viewer. It is a platform to kneel upon, a way for visitors to engage with the object. The physical cues hint at how a visitor might interact spiritually with the objects, and the labels reaffirm that both are “now a relic of the second class.”132 Design choices and visitor agency reaffirm the relic status of the items, and visitors can once again participate directly with a saint’s memory.

132 Ibid.
The National Shrine of Saint John Neumann interprets the life of America’s first male saint. In the process, it asserts Catholicism’s place within American history and demonstrates to visitors how Catholics can lead virtuous lives. Neumann, a man forged by his frontier days, accepted a leadership role and served his community. An inscription of Neumann’s words highlights these concepts for visitors: “My present position is indeed laborious as I have no one to help me, but such is the case with all Bishops in America. God will assist me, since He bestows so many blessings on the church in this country.” The shrine encourages spiritual growth, and visitors acquire Neumann’s cultural memory through their visit. The free agency of visitors creates a liminal space between shrine and museum as they accept or reject interpretation of objects. Neumann is a saint for Catholic Americans, and his shrine continues affirming this message.

**Conclusion**

Saint Peter the Apostle Parish and the crypt containing the body of Saint John Neumann provide clear examples of Catholic sacred spaces. The renovation of the John Neumann Museum in 2019 created a third site for pilgrims to engage with their faith. Previous iterations of the exhibit did this periodically, mostly when renovations forced the rearrangement of Neumann’s body. Deborah Binder, the former assistant director of the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann, describes the new museum as “a holy place” because of Neumann’s belongings and “the atmosphere that was purposefully created there.” Binder also recognized the importance

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134 Deborah Binder (assistant director of the National Shrine of Saint John Neumann), interview with author, July 23, 2021.
of allowing visitors to create their own experiences. “I love to see intentions stuffed in Jesus’s hands or put in that bureau. I want to see people interact with the shrine in a way that’s meaningful for them, and not everybody experiences it the same way.”

These individual actions reinforce the cultural memory of John Neumann: missionary, Redemptorist, bishop, teacher, and American. The canonization process legitimates his cultural memory. The National Shrine of Saint John Neumann interprets this version of Neumann’s life and legacy to its visitors. The objects selected for display, the stories a museum tells, and the freedom of visitors to interact with the space reaffirm Neumann’s sanctity. Neumann’s virtuous life of faith is the main story, but it is told through a distinctly American interpretation of the past.

135 Ibid.
CHAPTER 4

FORGING MEMORY: BLESSED SOLANUS CASEY AND VENERABLE FULTON SHEEN

During the twentieth century, two American men gained reputations for holiness that far exceeded the average person. Solanus Casey, born twenty-five years before Fulton Sheen, lived humbly as a Capuchin simplex priest unable to preach homilies or hear Confessions. Casey greeted visitors as the community’s porter and thousands sought out the advice of Detroit’s famous doorkeeper. Meanwhile, most people met Fulton Sheen through the airwaves. Sheen’s academic background and charismatic personality made him an early television star in Catholic and non-Catholic homes. He served as Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies and later as Archbishop of Rochester. The two men lived extraordinarily different lives, but their faithful devotion made both examples of holiness and candidates for sainthood.

Causes began for Casey and Sheen in the late twentieth century. Unlike Seton, Cabrini, and Neumann, these two men are not fully saints and the concurrent events provide an opportunity to explore the shifting landscape of American Catholic memory. A center dedicated to Solanus Casey opened in the early 2000s and his beatification occurred in 2017. Two years later, Pope Francis announced the approval of beatification for Fulton Sheen, but then in an unusual move the beatification was indefinitely postponed. Sheen’s tomb is open for visitors at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Peoria, Illinois. An official museum a few blocks from the cathedral commemorates Sheen today, although a small museum in Sheen’s birthplace of El Paso, Illinois preserved a different image of Sheen until 2019. Information about the causes and shrines
is tightly controlled as both causes unfold. Examining Casey and Sheen together creates a fuller picture of twenty-first century Catholic memory.

Casey and Sheen represent the forging of Catholic public memory at the local level. Although the men’s lives took different routes, their memories are rooted in Catholic communities trying to understand themselves within a national story. Traditional museum spaces partially fulfill those roles, but both sites also created new forms of Catholic memorialization. Public memory concerning Casey tells a cohesive story and integrates nontraditional voices through the Casey Center’s physical design, exhibits, and programs. It demonstrates the formation of a unified collective memory. Sheen’s memory is complicated given the two museums and unusual events that unfolded during the cause. A shrine is planned for the future.¹

The official museum run by the Diocese of Peoria continues operating today, while laywoman Karen Fulte’s Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Spiritual Center ceased operations. The inclusion of Sheen’s memory demonstrates how Catholics forget when creating a shared memory. Both Casey and Sheen illustrate the complexities of Catholic public memory creation in the twenty-first century.

Creating Cohesive Memories: Solanus Casey

Memory of Casey’s Life

Solanus Casey’s life began as Bernard Casey in Oak Grove, Wisconsin in 1870.² His parents, Bernard J. and Ellen Casey, immigrated to the United States and brought their devout

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² Several biographies of Casey contributed to this section, including James Patrick Derum, The Porter of Saint Bonaventure’s: The Life of Father Solanus Casey, Capuchin (Detroit, MI: The Fidelity Press, 1968), Catherine M. Odell, Father Solanus Casey: Revised and Updated (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday
Irish Catholic faith with them. The two had sixteen children, although not all survived to adulthood. Barney, as his family called him, experienced a desire for priesthood at several moments throughout childhood, including during his First Holy Communion classes or when attending Christmas Eve Masses. Family life sustained Casey’s young faith as well as nurtured his Catholic identity and he remained close to relatives throughout his life.

This faith centered the Casey family as they experienced personal and economic crises. Casey worked various jobs as a teenager to support his family. These positions ranged from logger to prison guard, and Casey’s charismatic personality and listening ear won people’s hearts at each employment venue. At the age of twenty-one, Casey moved to Superior, Wisconsin where he worked as a streetcar driver. An ordinary day of work became traumatic in 1891 when Casey and his passengers witnessed the violent assault of a young woman. The “experience shook young Barney Casey quite like nothing before,” and he began to seriously pursue a priestly vocation.3

Casey enrolled at St. Francis High School Seminary in Milwaukee the following year. Casey struggled academically and his instructors advised him to instead discern a vocation with a religious order. Although dedicated, Casey lacked the academic skills needed for seminary studies, a problem that continued to plague him as he progressed through his career. He explored several religious orders before receiving a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary telling him to “Go

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to Detroit!” where the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin ran Saint Bonaventure Monastery. Casey went and struggled about whether to stay and enter the order. A deeply moving Christmas experience with the friars provided clarity, and Bernard Casey entered the novitiate in 1897. He received the name of Francis Solanus.

As part of his monastic life, Casey again took seminary classes. The academic struggles continued but his desire for ordination never wavered. The order decided to ordain Solanus a simplex priest after some debate. Casey could not deliver homilies on doctrinal matters or hear Confession. As Michael Crosby, OFM Cap., stated, “he joyfully accepted the limitation as God’s will,” which for others might have been insulting. Casey demonstrated humility throughout his life as he received lowly duties not typically assigned to a priest.

Casey spent his first six years as a priest in Yonkers, New York. His roles at Sacred Heart Friary included serving as sacristan, doorkeeper, and adviser to local parish organizations. He worked briefly at a location in Harlem. People flocked to Casey for his kindness and wisdom at both places. These crowds attracted the notice of Casey’s superior, who made Casey record the “favors” received from people he enrolled in the Seraphic Mass Association. The Association supported the work of Capuchins throughout the world by offering Mass and prayers for those who donated. Casey urged his visitors to enroll themselves or loved ones within the organization when facing crisis.

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4 Wollenweber, 29.

5 Crosby, 39.

Casey kept this log when the order moved him back to Detroit. He spent the next twenty-two years as porter at St. Bonaventure Monastery. As in New York, people waited daily to hear Casey’s advice. The size of the crowds required an expanded office and administrative support for Casey, who spent long hours at his desk offering guidance or responding to letters. He also provided food when people came to him hungry. With the arrival of the Great Depression, Casey, other Capuchins, and lay members of the Franciscan third-order organized the Capuchin Soup Kitchen to feed the thousands coming by the monastery in search of a meal. The original ministry of this site now includes meal programs, as well as substance use disorder support, resource center, and an urban farm.

By 1946, Casey’s superiors recognized that the seventy-six-year-old priest needed rest from the spiritual and physical labor he performed. Casey went to Huntington, Indiana for a “semi-retirement” and lived there for eight years. As his health declined due to a skin disease, the Capuchins brought him back to Detroit for medical treatment. In 1957, Casey celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of his Solemn Vows. He offered Mass a final time on June 28th and died roughly a month later, uttering his final words, “I give my soul to Jesus Christ!”


9 “Biography,” Fr. Solanus Guild, last modified November 18, 2017, https://solanuscasey.org/who-is-father-solanus/biography. This short web biography is notable since it was originally read during Casey’s beatification.
Blessed Solanus Casey

Casey’s legacy grew as mourners remembered the beloved priest. Like earlier saints, initial devotion grew at his funeral and gravesite. Visitation of Casey’s body ran into the early morning hours as people flocked to queue at the monastery gates. The funeral took place on Saturday, August 3, 1957 and his body buried in the nearby cemetery. Roughly 8,000 to 10,000 people came to the monastery for Casey’s services, and photographs depict a packed church. The people unable to claim a seat inside stood out in the streets to watch his coffin journey to the monastic cemetery. His gravestone looked no different from his fellow Capuchins’ graves, although his resting place attracted visitors in search of intercession.

Initiatives to honor Casey’s memory appeared quickly. The Capuchins organized a fundraiser to dedicate a new seminary to Casey within a year after his death. James S. Pooler, a reporter with the *Detroit Free Press*, shared his memories of the Capuchin priest as he encouraged readers to support the fundraiser. “We won’t know what alchemy there was in his soul of wisdom and kindness that made him so beloved of many races, creeds – Protestants, Jews as well as Catholics – the poor and the rich. All we know is that his ‘God-gained insight into the thoughts and problems of others,’ – as the Council expressed it – brought to him the thousands of Detroiter who went away no longer hungry, fearful, worried.” Stories of Casey’s acceptance of non-Catholics appeared frequently in recollections about the man. A chapel in 1961 was also

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dedicated to Casey. However, devotees knew that these were small achievements compared to the prospect of sainthood.

By 1967, people spoke openly about the potential for Casey’s sainthood. The Solanus Casey Guild, an organization founded by laywoman Dorothy Fletcher to promote Casey for sainthood, “petitioned the Capuchin General in Rome” to open an investigation into his life. Capuchins assigned Rev. Father Paschal Siler of St. Bonaventure Monastery to research Casey’s life given the growing interest in canonization. Letters and interviews revealed positive memories of Casey, but Siler worried that there was not enough proof beyond his “popular piety.” The Catholic Church believes that “these expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it.” Devotion to Casey required a strong foundation to move the cause forward.

Vice-postulators Siler and later Brother Leo Wollenweber, O.F.M. Cap., worked to research and promote Casey during the 1960s and 1970s. The informative process officially opened in 1983 and Fr. Michael Crosby, OFM., Cap., a friar with a newly minted doctorate in theology, was asked to prepare the postitio published in 1989. Crosby remained the leading

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15 Ibid.


Six years later, theologians, cardinals, and bishops met to consider the worthiness of Casey’s cause and on July 11, 1995, Pope John Paul II declared Casey venerable. This made Casey the first American-born man to receive the title.

Twenty years passed as hope for a miracle continued. Eventually, in 2015, the Archdiocese of Detroit closed its inquiry into a miraculous healing and sent the information to Rome. A woman suffering a skin condition similar to Casey’s visited his tomb on a pilgrimage and received an unexplainable healing. According to Rev. David Preuss, O.F.M. Cap., who oversaw visitors to the tomb, “The medical doctors in her home country, Detroit and Rome all attested that there was no scientific explanation for the cure.”

Two years later, on May 4, 2017, Pope Francis announced Casey’s beatification, which took place on November 17, 2017, in the Detroit Lions Ford Field. The event’s program opened with a letter from Fr. Michael Sullivan, OFM Cap., the Provincial Minister for the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph at the time. “Rather than call attention to himself, he taught people to thank God for His blessings. And here we are…filling Ford Field to capacity; sixty years after Fr. Solanus’ passing; thanking God for Fr. Solanus.”

Hope for a second miracle for Casey’s canonization is kept alive at the Solanus Casey Center.

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20 “The Beatification of Fr. Solanus Casey, OFM Cap.,” Saturday, Nov. 18, 2017, Beatification event Pamphlet
Crafting Modern Memory

The Province of St. Joseph anticipated the need for a site dedicated to Solanus Casey. Tens of thousands of people already traveled to the monastic visitor center, but this structure could not sustain large crowds. The Province started fundraising to construct the Solanus Casey Pilgrimage Center at the turn of the twenty-first century and hoped that the $13 million center would open in early 2002.²¹ Planners expected a beatification would increase Casey’s publicity and the site’s visitation. Intentional architectural features and design choices coupled with exhibits and programming created a cohesive public memory rooted in Catholicism and American history.

The religious community approached this project with a unique vision when compared to other U.S. shrines. In fact, according to Rev. Lloyd Thiel, O.F.M., the Capuchin overseeing fundraising efforts, “this won’t be a shrine. We want people to come as pilgrims and get caught up in the spirit of Fr. Solanus. If they do, they will want to reach out and help other people.”²² The multimedia center and exhibits would guide a visitor through the center to culminate at Casey’s tomb and the chapel. Thiel hoped that inspired visitors would use their “computers connected to the Internet” as an “opportunity to learn about volunteer programs nationwide.”²³ Casey’s memory is a step towards individual spiritual growth and the promotion of a more just society. The center would promote Casey’s legacy by encouraging others to emulate his social justice orientation and grow in their own interior faith.

²¹ David Crumm, “Pilgrimage center will honor Father Casey,” Detroit Free Press, Oct. 13, 2000, pg. 5B.
²² Ibid.
²³ Ibid.
Building the center meant demolishing the original Capuchin Soup Kitchen that Casey founded and ministered in during his years in Detroit. The Capuchins then built a 42,000-square-foot complex on the monastery’s grounds. The new complex “include[d] a gathering space, quiet space for reflection, an auditorium, a museum, a learning center, dining and kitchen areas, a religious book and gift shop, hospitality, first aid and comfort facilities, and renovated living quarters for friars.”

In December 2002, several hundred people gathered for the dedication of the Father Solanus Casey Center.

As of early 2023, the Exhibit Room at the Casey Center has undergone few major interpretative changes since its original opening in 2002. The Capuchins intend to change that by raising $250,000 for a “complete remodel and refresh of the Solanus Casey Museum, including expanded displays” according to a shrine pamphlet. Until renovations occur, visitors walk through a chronological narrative of Casey’s life and text written to inspire individual contemplation of faith. It continues to be “a contemplative display about the friar’s life [which] reveals that Father Solanus enjoyed Detroit Tigers games and was a so-so fiddler,” as one reviewer described the site in 2004.

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25 “20th Anniversary Fund & Memorial Gift Opportunities,” Solanus Casey Center, pamphlet (Detroit, MI).

The exhibit begins with a phrase: “A life of simplicity and faith,” and this idea is carried throughout the space.\textsuperscript{27} Solanus Casey lived a humble life, growing up in a large family and working multiple jobs to provide additional financial support. Like many, Casey struggled to find his path in the world and faced educational roadblocks. The exhibit explains this by compartmentalizing Casey’s life. Color is used to delineate the various sections and moments. For example, his early life is outlined in a deep green color, his young adulthood in gray, and his Capuchin life in red. Keeping in line with the desire to create spiritual growth in visitors, the exhibit poses questions on its signage to promote personal reflection and to then explain an aspect of Casey’s faith.

Two design choices are worth noting. The exhibit contains few artifacts in the sections focused on Casey’s earliest years. This might have been a decision to reinforce the simplicity of Casey’s life, but it might also reflect the difficulty of finding artifacts related to someone who took a vow of poverty. The exhibit offsets the lack of objects by providing stations for visitors to sit and view photo albums of Casey’s family. Designers also refer to Casey by his birth name “Bernard” prior to Casey’s entrance into religious life. He is then referred by his religious name “Solanus.” These choices affirm the humbleness of Casey’s life and the dramatic moment of his religious entrance.

\textsuperscript{27} Wall text, “A life of simplicity and faith,” \textit{Blessed Solanus Casey Museum}, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.
Casey’s immediate and extended family life is a crucial aspect of his public memory. Family encouraged his vocation, sought advice from him, and their written correspondence provides insight to Casey’s interior life. Casey’s beatification also highlighted the importance of family. Over three hundred relatives from across the globe gathered at Ford’s Field to witness the event. A great-nephew of Casey’s described his decision to attend as “coming to be with the community of family and the larger Catholic community. When we talk about the communion of saints, it’s all of us around the altar.”28 The exhibit begins by describing his fifteen siblings and

28 Patricia Montemurri, “More than 300 members of Father Solanus Casey’s family headed to Detroit,” Detroit Free Press, Nov. 12, 2017,
parents, while encouraging visitors to ask “How can you make prayer a part of your family’s daily life?”

Three moments in Casey’s teenaged years and young adulthood profoundly affected his character. Biographies and promotional materials reference them, and the exhibit creates a dramatic visual for visitors to learn the stories. Large scenes along the back wall of the Exhibit Room illustrate three crucial moments in Casey’s discernment process. Visitors begin by viewing an oversized black and white sketch of Casey sitting outside of a prison cell as an inmate speaks to him through the bars. A metal grate between the visitor and the sketch invokes a prison setting, and the gray cinder block walls on either side reinforce it. Visitors are asked “how well do you recognize God’s image in everyone you meet?” The sign explains that Casey worked as a prison guard and formed friendships with prisoners. This experience stayed with Casey throughout his life, and he kept a wooden trunk made by inmate Cole Younger, a man serving a life sentence for working with Jesse James. It shows that Casey never shied away from engaging with vulnerable communities.

Visitors move to the next section and learn about Casey’s work as a logger. A black and white sketch of Casey is depicted as in the prior section. It shows Casey amid the logs as he unjammed their flow in the river. Metal tree limbs positioned between the image and the visitor


29 Wall text, “An immigrant family provides a cradle for faith,” Blessed Solanus Casey Museum, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.

30 Wall text, “The gunslinger,” Blessed Solanus Casey Museum, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.

31 Ibid.
create a three-dimensional effect. Casey worked in this job for a brief period. The dangerous work sparked Casey to contemplate death and eternity. He also pondered his vocation. Casey might have wondered why he was doing this work, and signage encourages visitors to remain confident in God’s plans.32

The last section in this display depicts a dramatic moment in Casey’s life. Visitors look at a much smaller sketch through the metal bars of a train car window. The shape of the back wall looks like the outline of a trolley with visitors on the inside looking out. Although Casey is not depicted in this particular image, visitors can imagine what his view as a streetcar driver looked like. His time in this role solidified his choice to enter religious life. Signage explains “the stabbing he witnessed that fall afternoon stunned Barney. It made him aware of violence, not only in Superior [Wisconsin] but throughout the world, and it pressed him to make a decision he had been avoiding for months. Two days later, he visited his pastor and announced that he wanted to study for the priesthood.”33 After walking through those displays, a visitor will understand three crucial spiritual moments in Casey’s life and perhaps contemplate their own faith experience.

32 Wall text, “The young logger,” Blessed Solanus Casey Museum, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.
33 Ibid.
Life as a seminarian and young Capuchin novice was not easy for Casey. Scholastic difficulties continued to plague him. The exhibit explains this through three large text panels.
with images of the schools Casey studied at and stories of his friendship with students. However, the replica of Casey’s bedroom immediately after these signs creates the most striking display of his religious life. Visitors peer through a square cut-out in the wall to view the space. The items within were collected from different moments in his life at Saint Bonaventure or Saint Felix in Huntington, Indiana. On the left beneath a mock window is a small wire frame bed with a simple knit blanket. A typewriter sits on a crate next to the bed, while the desk has a lamp, a letter box, and several books. Above the desk hangs a crucifix, while a white wooden wardrobe pushed against the right wall presumably held Casey’s clothing and other personal items during his lifetime. Through this sparse room, visitors again gain a sense of Casey’s simplicity.

The Exhibit Room’s artificial walls guide a visitor into the final section. Several display cases line the walls and a small table with a computer is tucked into the corner. A seat allows visitors to sit and view its program. The outdated slideshow provides information on the Beatitude statues from the front entrance of the Casey Center, a subject explained in further detail at a later point in this chapter. However, the most eye-catching item in the room is a simple wooden desk.

The desk sits in the center of the room with an artifact case on top. The front of the desk faces inwards toward the exhibit, while the artifact case and its label is read from the seated side of the desk. Casey used this desk and chair during his lifetime. Nothing prevents a visitor from sitting, moving, or touching this furniture. However, no sign encouraged a visitor to sit in the

34 Wall text, “Submission to Superiors,” Blessed Solanus Casey Museum, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.
chair. A misaligned drawer remained slightly open. This ambiguity is another example of a Catholic shrine museum choosing to neither encourage nor discourage visitor interaction with objects.

Figure 22. The desk of Solanus Casey. Photograph by the author.

Objects like this desk provide a physical gateway for people to engage with public memory. The “artifacts in this glass case are second-class relics…Fr. Solanus met the people

35 Unfortunately, although I lingered in the exhibit for a while, I did not see anyone else come in. I hoped to watch if people sat in it. I did not as the ambiguous signage made me nervous about whether I could or could not.
who came to see him at this desk and prayed with them.”

The sign does not define a second-class relic, but a visitor who understood the terminology would grasp that the desk was also a second-class relic. A visitor might pray with Casey by sitting in the same chair that he did. Pictures of Casey sitting at his desk, listening to visitors, or writing letters, are plentiful in literature about the man. This provides a climatic moment for visitors who contemplated their relationship to Casey and faith throughout the exhibit.

The Solanus Casey Center hopes to inspire inner change for visitors through the example of Casey’s life, and then create outward change in society. It provides context about Casey before they visit his tomb. However, visitors might pray before leaving the exhibit. One notable display case labeled “Treasures of a Capuchin” contained several of Casey’s most prized positions. It also included several bound copies of his collected writings which sat on the case’s floor. A seam on the front between glass doors is large enough for a piece of paper to fit through it. At least one visitor realized this, since resting gently on top of Casey’s collected writings was a folded note. Although the message is unreadable, it is plausible that a visitor brought their prayer request to Casey’s artifact in a similar way that visitors interacted with artifacts at Neumann’s shrine. Perhaps the symbolism of leaving their writing with his invoked the idea, or the notion that his treasured belongings might be favored relics. Individual memories of Casey often involved stories of receiving his letters or writing him for advice. In this moment, a visitor engaged with Casey’s memory and made it their own.

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36 Exhibit case, “Artifacts contained in this glass case…,” Blessed Solanus Casey Museum, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.
This engagement continues as visitors leave the Exhibit Room and walk down the hall into Saint Bonaventure Monastery Church. The Capuchins renovated the sanctuary several times following the death of Casey. Today it contains a large wooden altar at the front repurposed from side altars during 1983 renovations.37 A smaller altar on the side furthest from the shrine’s entrance is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A painting across from it and near the ceiling depicts Casey leaning out a window to play his violin. Prior to the renovations, a window connected that part of the chapel to the friars’ residential building. Casey was known to keep watch with the Blessed Sacrament and to play his violin for the Blessed Virgin.38 The Solanus Casey Center builds to a moment of interior change from the moment visitors set foot through the entrance doors and culminates with the chapel. Catholic public memory exists within a religious framework.

The body of Solanus Casey is not actually inside the chapel. The chapel connects via two entrances with the center, with the one nearest the main altar lading to Casey’s tomb. A black coffin rests beneath the surface of the floor. An inlaid sculpture of Casey’s face is at the top, while gold lettering provides key date underneath it. A red ribbon with several red wax seals encircles the casket. These are the seals of Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron, who oversaw the exhumation of Casey’s remains for the beatification process.39 A curved plexiglass dome covers

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the casket and rises several feet from the ground, or slightly above hip level for the average visitor. Wooden railings mark the four corners of the platform but do not fully enclose it. Baskets rest on two corners to collect visitors’ prayer requests. A wooden casket with a flat surface previously contained Casey’s remains, and photos reveal that visitors sometimes left notes or flowers on its top. The rounded plexiglass covering this coffin prevents visitors from leaving offerings in undesignated areas.

The hall leading from the chapel, passes Casey’s tomb, and into the main lobby. However, nestled in the center of the wide hall, is a small courtyard. Visitors pass several art pieces walking between these spaces. The Hall of Saints links an American Catholic memory to its international history. On the large windows looking into the courtyard garden are frosted glass paintings of famous saints. Ken von Roenn of Architectural Glass Art, Inc., created these images to show how “the journey into the Beatitudes does magnify us in sanctity” and that the light coming through “reflects the holiness of God in Jesus Christ.”40 A small label in the lower righthand corner provides information about who they were, when and where they lived, and how they modeled holiness in their lives.

The mosaic depictions of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy on the walls opposite the Hall of Saints demonstrate modern opportunities for visitors to enact change in their communities. Catholics believe that “the works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.”41 There are seven Corporal Works of Mercy and seven Spiritual Works of Mercy. The mosaics provide one

40 Foley, 31.

41 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2447.
interpretation of each work utilizing nondescript figures, although one portrays Casey. The mosaics also demonstrate the site’s commitment to its diverse community since the art reflects the people of Detroit. Rather than use traditional motifs, the artists utilized modern settings like urban streets. “Bear Wrongs Patiently” shows a man sweeping glass from his broken store window, an ATM sign and device visible in the background.42 “Admonish Sinners” shows a crowd holding signs and protesting in front of a building. Casey appears in “Give Drink to the Thirsty.” The Capuchin robes, long beard, and iconic glasses clue a visitor into recognizing Casey. The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy remain examples of work visitors can do in the present to change their community for the better.

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When a candidate achieves canonization, they are considered worthy of international veneration. However, after years of encouraging local devotion, cause supporters must reframe their individual for a much wider audience. The Solanus Casey Center encapsulates a public memory that takes visitors outside of the United States and even outside of Catholicism. The depiction of the Beatitudes near the entrance and exit of the Casey Center links visitors to a local, national, and international community by utilizing famous individuals from around the world as examples of each beatitude. In this way, the Casey Center demonstrates a belief that Casey is not just for a Catholic public memory but could be part of an international Catholic memory or simply an international community.
Everyone depicted in the life-sized bronze statues experienced an extraordinary life. Signage explains that “Within our time, unlikely heroes have embraced the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount and its eight Beatitudes which tell us what it means to be Christ-like. All of these Christian heroes are not saints, at least not officially, but they are examples to use of what it means to be blessed.” Behind the statues is a curved wall with plaques providing information about the individuals depicted and their paired beatitude. These statues challenge visitors to inspect their own lives for opportunities to mirror holiness.

Visitors might already be familiar with the well-known individuals. Seven of the eight individuals were Catholic, and four were American citizens. Civil Rights martyr Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a non-Catholic, is portrayed upright with his left hand reaching forward as his right is raised to the sky, lips open as if in mid-speech. His statue represented the beatitude “Blessed be the peacemakers,” and his corresponding plaque explained his “quiet courage to stand undefended against both physical and verbal attacks.” King’s addition to the exhibit unites Catholic public memory with American history by demonstrating how Catholics can learn from their Protestant neighbors.

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43 Wall text, "Within our time…," Beatitude Statues Exhibit, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.

44 E Wall text, "Blessed are the Peacemakers…," Beatitude Statues Exhibit, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.
Figure 24. Bronze figures of prominent individuals represent different aspects of the Beatitudes. Photograph by the author.

International examples illustrate how American Catholics exist within a global community. Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta hunches over a large bowl, wooden spoon in hand. She represents “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” The plaque describes her dedication to the poor and how Mother Teresa learned this from her biological mother. However, rather than simply venerate her as a Catholic saint, the plaque explains that she was
“sometimes criticized for being more concerned with love of the poor than solutions to poverty,” which might cause a viewer to pause. The sign does not provide any further context.

Two individuals are not easily identifiable without their signage. They embrace a common faith but lived this faith in different manners. The Casey Center created a unified American Catholic memory by placing Catholics of opposing viewpoints together and embraces varied expressions of faith. Jean Donovan represents “those who mourn” since she died as a martyr in El Salvador during 1980. The Center explains that “she was a loyal Republican…comfortably American, suburban, and middle-class” and in search “for a deeper meaning.” This ultimately inspired her work in El Salvador. Her conservative background is juxtaposed against Monsignor Clement Kern, a Detroit priest who “was an unabashed old-school liberal” who “opened his church to alcoholics, illegal immigrants, gays, and social protesters.” Desire for social change rooted in Christ drove both Americans to radically serve local and international communities.

The Solanus Casey Center situates itself in Casey’s memory not only by teaching it, but also through emulating his dedication to service. The final stop for many visitors is the Rise & Shine Café located in a large space alongside the center’s gift shop. The café is crucial to the center’s mission. Employees at the Rise & Shine Café, a storefront for On the Rise Bakery which operates out of the same space, are participants in the Reaching Our Potential Everyday (ROPE)

45 Wall text, "Blessed are the Merciful…," Beatitude Statues Exhibit, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.

46 Wall text, "Blessed are Those who Mourn…," Beatitude Statues Exhibit, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.

47 Wall text, "Blessed are those who Hunger and Thirst for Justice…," Beatitude Statues Exhibit, Solanus Casey Center, Detroit, MI.
Program. Formerly incarcerated individuals and graduates of sobriety recovery programs gain employment experience at the bakery before moving into a permanent career path. It reproduces Catholic public memory through social change and demonstrates to visitors Casey’s ongoing legacy.

The bakery originally existed elsewhere, but a twenty-million-dollar gift in 2017 allowed the Capuchins to expand the center. Construction will continue in phases into 2023. Bringing the café to the site was one initial goal. Local entrepreneur A.A. Van Elslander’s provided the money upon his death, and one of his sons, David Van Elslander, continued the work of his father through the A.A. Van Elslander Foundation. David described his father’s desire “to enhance the space for pilgrims, making the place comfortable to visitors… He wanted people to spend time with their families, so we have an expanded café.” The bakery provides a service to the local community and visitors, while also providing the Capuchins a way to practice the works of mercy depicted in tile near Casey’s tomb.

The Capuchins maintained their vision for a unique shrine complex throughout its twenty years of existence. When the initial plans were announced in 2001, one Capuchin described his hope “that everyone who visits the new center will be changed by the experience… We hope they

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ask themselves, 'How socially aware am I? How can I become more aware of the needs of my brothers and sisters?' The new center will share Solanus' life with future generations."\(^{51}\) The Center was meant to inspire change, promote faith, and encourage visitors to consider social justice within their own communities. The donation of Van Elslander provided additional resources to reach those goals.

The Solanus Casey Center broadens the scope of Catholic public memory to include non-Catholic voices. Visitors leaving must walk through the main entrance and into the Creation Garden, which reiterates this message. “Pilgrims are invited to slow their pace, quiet themselves, and breathe in the natural and artistic beauty of their surroundings. The Creation Garden is also meant to be a place of encounter, both with the God of all creation as well as with other travelers on the road to holiness.”\(^{52}\) The friars commissioned artists of a variety of backgrounds, ethnic and religious, to create the garden’s art. “Sister Mother Earth” by sculptor Johnny Contreas drew inspiration from Saint Francis’s Canticle of the Brother Sun and traditional Native American imagery.\(^{53}\) Woodrow Nash created “Brother Wind,” a windchime and example of African nouveau art.\(^{54}\) Perhaps most surprising to Catholic visitors will be the addition of “Sister Water.” According to the site’s guidebook, “Islamic artist Dr. Hashim Al-Tawil of the Hira Art Center” created a “ceramic pillar [that] depicts the four rivers of paradise and incorporates verses from

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\(^{52}\) Ibid.


\(^{54}\) *Journey to Holiness*, pg. 8.
the Qur’an in Arabic.”55 Visitors are reminded of Casey’s desire to welcome all, regardless of race or creed, prior to walking through the doors of the site.

The Solanus Casey Center redefines what shrine complexes look like. The people who designed, built, and led the institution captured Casey’s life through the exhibition space while the site’s various programs captured his spirit through ministry. Local residents, whether Catholic or not, can find a welcoming space dedicated to meeting visitors’ physical and spiritual needs. The Center reproduces Solanus Casey’s memory through a unified interpretation of his life and the need for ongoing social change.

No two causes unfold in the same way, and neither does memory. Blessed Solanus Casey and Venerable Fulton Sheen illustrate the complexity of Catholic public memory. The Solanus Casey Center shows how designers incorporated differing viewpoints and actively engaged with members of the local community. However, Fulton Sheen’s cause struggled to create a shared image of the man. While Casey’s memory grew to incorporate even non-Christians, Sheen’s memory divided devotees and the official memory erased unorthodox vernacular voices. Creating Catholic public memory in a nation of diverse backgrounds and a faith with different expressions leaves some individual memories out. These forgotten memories haunt the legacy of Fulton Sheen. After providing a biography of Sheen, the following section argues that conflict among Sheen’s devotees stunted the incorporation of Sheen into Catholic public memory and potentially foreshadows challenges of future causes.

55 Ibid., pg. 9.
Forgetting Fulton Sheen

Memory of Sheen’s Life

Peter John Sheen arrived on May 8, 1895 to Peter “Newt” and Delia Sheen in El Paso, Illinois. The small town sits thirty-two miles east of Peoria, Illinois. A colicky baby, Delia often sent him to her parents’ house, “where I got be known as Fulton’s baby,” and eventually simply as Fulton Sheen. The family business burned early in Sheen’s life, and after a brief stint living on a farm, the family moved to Peoria where Sheen attended St. Mary’s School. He quickly developed a love of learning. Sheen and his three brothers lived in a devout Catholic household. Following his First Holy Communion, Sheen volunteered as an altar server at the Cathedral of St. Mary.

At the age of eight, a dramatic mistake at Mass became a defining moment within Sheen’s life. Sheen dropped the wine cruet as Bishop John L. Spalding celebrated Mass. The noise shattered the cathedral’s quiet. Sheen feared Spalding’s rebuke after Mass. However, Bishop Spalding made two predictions about Sheen instead of admonishing him. Spalding stated that one day Sheen would study at the Louvain in Belgium and that Sheen would “be just as I am [a bishop]” one day. Spalding’s predictions later came true.

Sheen’s parents encouraged his intellectual pursuits, which turned into an academic career. He attended the Spalding Institute in his teenaged years before attending St. Viator College in Illinois. Studies next occurred at St. Paul Seminary in Minnesota followed by his

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57 Sheen, 14.
ordination in at the Cathedral of St. Mary in 1919. As a young priest, Sheen studied at the Catholic University of America before leaving to finish his doctorate at Catholic University of Louvain. After a year in Rome for his Doctorate in Sacred Theology, Sheen returned to Louvain for an agregé en philosophie. The story of his passing and how “the champagne tasted so good that night!” is often repeated in Sheen biographies, although Sheen emphasized in his autobiography the importance of his priestly calling over his academic one.58

The importance of his priestly calling is evident in his early ministry. For a few months, Sheen taught philosophy in England. He fielded teaching opportunities from across the globe. However, Bishop Edmund Dunne called the accomplished scholar back to the Diocese of Peoria to serve as a parish priest. Sheen obeyed and even enjoyed his time back home. When the year ended, Sheen left for Washington, D.C. to teach at the Catholic University of America. He taught at the university from 1926 until 1952. During this time, Sheen’s fame began to extend beyond the confines of academia. He served as a guest on a radio show for the first time in 1926, and by 1930 Sheen provided weekly talks on The Catholic Hour.59 Sheen’s humor and intelligence made complex theological topics palatable to American audiences. This skill translated to television as well. Sheen starred in Life is Worth Living from June 1951 until 1957.60

58 Ibid., 30.


only with a piece of chalk and his charisma, Sheen pulled in roughly thirty-million viewers each week and won an Emmy Award.

However, much of Sheen’s legacy formed off screen. For sixteen years, Sheen served as the National Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. This is a pontifical society that operates on a global scale, but Sheen oversaw American efforts to support missions. This money provided aid in other countries as well as the funds necessary to expand evangelization missions. For sixteen years he labored to raise money and even contributed millions of his personal earnings from the television and radio shows. This work enabled him to participate at the Second Vatican Council on sessions dealing with evangelization.

Sheen experienced a drastic change in his work during the final years of his active ministry. Pope Paul VI appointed Sheen the bishop of the Diocese of Rochester in 1966, where the new bishop eagerly started projects that reflected the ideas of Vatican II. However, Sheen spent little time in parish or diocesan ministry throughout his long career, and his lack of experience quickly became evident. Sheen struggled to retain supporters. His decision to encourage lay participation in diocesan decisions worried more conservative clergy. Sheen made headlines when he spoke against the Vietnam War. Finally, Sheen’s largest misstep occurred when he announced a parish closure without speaking to parishioners. The diocese possessed enough parishes that turning one into an urban development center would not keep Catholics from gaining access to a church, but people had long, emotional ties with the local parish.61 His

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approach quickly made Sheen unpopular in the diocese. He resigned after three painful years in 1969.

Sheen’s failure as a bishop shook his confidence. He spent his semi-retirement years leading retreats for fellow priests. In October 1979, just three months before Sheen’s death, Pope John Paul II toured the United States. While at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the two men embraced as Pope John Paul II told Sheen, “You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus. You are a loyal son of the Church.”62 Photographs captured the moment Sheen’s composure collapsed. Shortly thereafter, crowds again flocked to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, but now for Sheen’s funeral Mass. Joan Sheen Cunningham, Sheen’s niece, allowed his burial in a tomb within the cathedral.63 This decision later caused the first major rift in Sheen’s memory.

Foundational Memory

Initiatives to commemorate Sheen’s life followed quickly. New York City renamed a street “ABP. Fulton J. Sheen Place” a year after his death. Catholic leaders and local politicians joined the crowds for the Rosary, Mass, and proclamation.64 Events occurred in Sheen’s birthplace as well, like the one hundred and fifty people gathered to dedicate a marker at the site of Sheen’s birth.65 On a national level, radio and television networks reran Sheen’s programs. People across the United States connected to coordinate an organized approach to Sheen’s

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62 Sheen, 378.


memory and promote sainthood. They created the Archbishop Fulton John Sheen Foundation in October 1998.

The organization’s initial work focused on commemorating Sheen in local communities. Gregory Ladd of Highland, Indiana founded the organization along with Lawrence Hickey of New York City. Ladd worked in the documentary film industry and Sheen’s television career drew him to the priest. 66 The foundation’s goals reflected Ladd’s interests. It commemorated Sheen by promoting his life and “responsible moral guidelines” within the media. 67 The foundation hoped to organize a documentary film, book, and lecture series about the potential saint. The burgeoning association initially connected Catholics across the United States.

The foundation’s work grew in 1999 when it announced on the twentieth anniversary of Sheen’s death “that the archbishop of New York was opening a ‘cause’ for the sainthood of Sheen.” 68 John Cardinal O’Connor opened the cause and Rev. Andrew Apostoli, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, served as its postulator. Sheen had ordained Apostoli in 1967. 69 This stage of the process gathered information and started combing through Sheen’s copious written materials. The foundation raised money to support this research by producing and selling tapes of Sheen’s various public talks. 70 It also asked people to send stories of Sheen’s impact on their


67 Stanmar, 13.


70 Ibid.
lives and potential miracles to the foundation. Karen Fulte, a member of the foundation’s Board of Directors, told the local press that “this [process] is unfolding. I think it’s very interesting a phenomenal.”71 The foundation utilized these events to further publicize Sheen.

The people who advocated for Sheen’s canonization did so for various personal reasons, although many shared a sense of spiritual calling to the work. For example, Ladd claimed “his role in working to secure sainthood for Sheen was predestined.”72 Ladd explained in a 1999 interview that a “nun on the East Coast…had a vision two years ago…[that] I was destined to take on this cause and that I would be successful.”73 Like Ladd, Fulte also felt drawn to Sheen’s legacy. She moved to El Paso as an adult and discovered the town’s history with Sheen. The location of her insurance business near Sheen’s birthplace and her home next to one of Sheen’s cousins inspired Fulte to take “these encounters as signs from God and…create a permanent memorial to Sheen.”74 This work occupied the rest of her life, although her experience ultimately highlights the erasure of vernacular memory.

Karen Fulte worked to spread devotion to Fulton Sheen. Over time, her ideas began to differ from the official memory promoted by the Diocese of Peoria and this resulted in her work’s slow erasure from public memory. Fulte’s religious beliefs included non-Catholic ideas, and she lacked the financial backing and institutional power of the Catholic Church. These issues

71 Woulfe, 3.


73 Ibid.

grew clearer as Sheen’s cause progressed. However, during the earliest years of the foundation, Fulte remained active in the organization.

The organization’s growth brought new projects to its volunteers. Work included “a speaker’s bureau on Sheen’s work and writings, including scheduling seminars with guest speakers, archival material viewings or combined speaker and spiritual retreats.”75 Moreover, supporters donated items related to Sheen, like “a set of four mint-condition 78-rpm records recorded by the bishop in 1949, and a baptismal certificate signed by him in 1921.”76 The collection eventually grew large enough that the foundation needed a place to store and display the items. Fulte embraced the project and ran a museum dedicated to Sheen until her death in 2019.

The museum began as a single display in a local institution. Developers Dennis Schreck and Bill Prochnow created the Freight House Exchange as a museum and art gallery. It displayed work by local artists, as well as artifacts related to the town’s rail industry. They reached an agreement to provide space for Sheen. By October of 2000, the foundation ran a permanent display at the Freight House Museum in El Paso. It worked with the foundation to commemorate Sheen. Visitors could leave the train depot and walk the short distance behind it to Sheen’s birthplace.

This initial display outgrew its space at the Freight House Museum and grew into the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Communication Room, located in the same train depot but now in a


room solely dedicated to Sheen.77 Opened in July of 2001, “the room contains more than 150 books, plus magazines and videotapes. Some of the items can be read and/or viewed, depending on their sturdiness. There are 50-plus autographed pictures, including Sheen with Gandhi and Dwight Eisenhower.”78 Unfortunately, while some photographs exist online, those are undated, and no depository holds Fulte’s papers.

Figure 25. This train depot in El Paso, IL held Fulte’s museum until her death in 2021. Notice the train car located to the right of the building. Photographed by the author in June 2021.

Published interviews reveal Fulte’s unique collecting process that sometimes took her across the country. As an example of an “outsider history maker,” Fulte is one of many


78 Ibid.
“individuals working within the realm of history—heritage tourism developers, collectors, small-town museum founders—but who lacked professional training.”79 This lack of training meant that her museum sometimes took unexpected approaches. Fulte traveled to Mobile, Alabama in 2000 after reading in Sheen’s autobiography of his trip to the area. Fulte hoped to find artifacts from Sheen’s trip.80 Conversations with a local nun led Fulte to a nursing home that displayed an oil painting of Sheen. Fulte received permission to take it back for the museum.81 More than twenty years later, a friend of Fulte’s described her ability to make “connections” between each person or object and Sheen.82 These mental connections drove Fulte’s collecting practices and meant that museum’s interpretation of Sheen relied on individual memory.

As Fulte’s work at the museum grew, Sheen’s canonization cause made slow progress. John Cardinal O’Connor’s death in spring 2000 halted the informational stage of the canonization process he had announced. His successor, Edward Cardinal Egan, gave the foundation permission to speak with Bishop Daniel R. Jenky of Peoria about opening a formal cause since Jenky was invested in Sheen’s potential sainthood. Jenky took charge of the cause “as the bishop of the diocese where Sheen was born” according to changes in Church procedure. A press conference in September of 2002 announced that official documents were sent to the Vatican. The Foundation continued to “promote Sheen’s case by seeking information from those

80 Ibid., 21.
81 Ibid.
82 Mike Fulton, interview with author, Bloomington, IL, June 18, 2021.
who knew Sheen…and [keeping] a collection of Sheen memorabilia.”83 Hopefully, American Catholics would support the pursuit of a new saint.

Unfortunately for Sheen supporters, the news produced mixed reactions about whether Sheen deserved sainthood. An El Paso resident thought about it in practical terms, saying it would be good for the town, and one of the city’s employees recognized “we’ll all have fame for a few days.”84 Prominent historians of Catholicism reacted to the news with less enthusiasm. “It’s as silly an idea as I’ve heard in a long time, and you can quote me on it…My generation never associated him with sainthood or sanctity,” said the University of Notre Dame’s Jay Dolan. “We associated him with good oratory and preaching, but never with good works or apostolic zeal. He was a television preacher.”85 Historian Thomas Reeves challenged Sheen’s academic credentials, but “said the peccadilloes should not derail the canonization effort.”86 In the same news article, Rev. Richard P. McBrien explained tensions between “progressive Catholics” and “ultra-conservative Catholics” over Sheen’s potential sainthood and other tensions amid the Church hierarchy.87 This foreshadowed the difficulties that continue plaguing the canonization effort.

The article also revealed differences among the cause’s supporters and how they remembered Sheen. Reporter H. Gregory Meyer interviewed Fulte, who described witnessing

83 Ibid.


86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.
“strange coincidences involving Sheen almost weekly,” including her own last name.88 Fulte explained this as “synchro-destiny…a sign that we are in the spirit looking for guidance within.”89 The concept of synchro-destiny has no basis in Catholic thought, but was a term popularized at the turn of the twenty-first century by New Age thinker Deepak Chopra.90 Nothing unorthodox to Catholic teaching can be associated with an individual under consideration for sainthood.91 This interview may have hurt Fulte’s credibility with the foundation. Sheen’s life was not generations removed from his cause. Too many people with individual memories of Sheen participated in promoting him, and no single vision of Sheen existed.

**Challenging Memories**

For most of the twenty-first century, the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation made changes in its organization to solidify its hold on Sheen’s memory. This included leadership modifications as revealed by the organization’s Internal Revenue Service Form 990 for Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax.92 Gregory Ladd and Karen Fulte no longer held positions on the Board of Directors, although Fr. Andrew Apostoli continued to serve the

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.


92 Several websites provide access to nonprofit IRS form data. GuideStar, CharityNavigator, and Nonprofit Explorer are three popular websites.
organization. Sheen’s niece Joan Sheen Cunningham also served on the board, as well as Bishop Daniel Jenky and Monsignor Richard Soseman. People following these changes likely wondered why Peoria led the cause when Sheen spent most of his life elsewhere. Bishop Jenky acknowledged these concerns in an interview and pointed out that “his central Illinois Farming background makes him a role model for current parishioners.” Cracks in a cohesive memory deepened.

Like earlier causes, the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation set up an organization for supporters to join. The Prayer League of the Friends of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen encouraged laity to support the cause through prayer and financial assistance. Their webpage described it as “simply a connection of persons with the work of the Archbishop Fulton John Sheen Foundation which has the responsibility to promote the Cause. It is a ‘grassroots’ association.” The responsibilities were generally low cost: pray daily for canonization, pray for fellow members’ intentions, keep up-to-date with Foundation events, and volunteer time when possible to promote events related to Sheen. Individuals like Lo Anne Mayer of New Jersey collected “accounts of Sheen-inspired spiritual and physical healings” then passed them onto the foundation.


94 Ibid.


96 Ibid.

provided an outlet for people who wanted to contribute to the cause without requiring too much effort.

The Diocese of Peoria strengthened its hold on Sheen’s memory, although the cause still relied on the earlier work of lay volunteers. From 2003 until 2008, investigators collected testimonies about Sheen’s life. Some early supporters like Gregory Ladd passed away.98 Two crucial events in 2008 that furthered Peoria’s claim on Sheen’s official memory. First, the Mass for the postrema sessio in 2008 formally ended the Diocese of Peoria’s initial stage of investigation.99 A collection of documents were sent to the Vatican. It utilized “early materials…from the El Paso-based Archbishop Fulton John Sheen Foundation…The foundation donated a set of his books along with personal testimonies.”100 Although the documents were not public, the diocese now had a cohesive memory of Sheen’s life and spirituality. The second major development occurred when the Diocese of Peoria opened a museum focused on diocesan history and Sheen. Bishop Jenky approached the Franciscan Sisters of John the Baptist about creating and staff the space.101 Even though the Foundation needed Fulte’s work to promote Sheen for the initial stage of investigation, the opening of a new museum signaled an official desire from the Church hierarchy to collect Sheen artifacts. The institutions operated separately within the same building.


100 Ibid.

In 2010, the cause took a dramatic and unexpected turn: it stopped. After nine years, the Diocese of Peoria concluded the campaign with “great sadness and disappointment.” Bishop Jenky explained that the Archdiocese of New York would become responsible for the cause since his body lay in their cathedral. Cunningham’s earlier permission to bury Sheen at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral now created competition over which diocese could claim the cause. However, this pause remained short lived for reasons that remain unclear. Perhaps Bishop Jenky remained hopeful that the dispute between New York and Peoria would resolve while the cause remained ongoing.

The debate over Sheen’s remains cast a shadow over the cause. Although declared venerable by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, attempts to peacefully resolve inter-diocesan claims over the body came to a head in 2016. The Diocese of Peoria wanted Sheen’s body moved back to Illinois but the Archdiocese of New York refused, suggesting instead that Sheen’s remains be temporarily moved for the course of his beatification and then returned to Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. Joan Sheen Cunningham, Sheen’s closest living relative, filed a lawsuit against the Archdiocese of New York. The cause was suspended during the legal battle.

103 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
Whichever diocese won the lawsuit would remain in control of the canonization cause, and any money that promotion and tourism of Sheen might earn.

The case rested largely on memory—what did witnesses recall Sheen saying? Whose memory was the most important, family or friends? The petition court approved the request to move Sheen’s body since “Archbishop Sheen's stated wish to be buried in Calvary Cemetery was not followed, it would defer to the wishes of the family. In reaching its decision, the court stated that there were no conflicting accounts as to Archbishop Sheen's burial wishes and rejected as ‘unsupported speculation’ respondents' claim that Archbishop Sheen wanted his remains to stay in New York.” The Archdiocese of New York challenged this decision on the grounds that affidavits from witnesses about Sheen’s desires to be buried in the state were not properly considered, and that they demonstrated his desire to remain. The lawsuit lasted for several years.

The New York Supreme Court ruled in favor of Cunningham in June 2019. The Diocese of Peoria distributed a press release celebrating the decision. Now arrangements could be made to move Sheen’s body. Cunningham joined Church officials and funeral home personnel to have Sheen’s remains flown to Illinois. Before June’s end, Sheen’s body arrived in Peoria

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“without any solemnity” according to Church law.\textsuperscript{110} The diocese announced this after the fact to avoid any public gathering. New York City might have been Sheen’s home for most of his adult life, but Peoria claimed Sheen’s memory in his death.

Karen Fulte celebrated the announcement of Sheen’s transfer. “This is wonderful news because news likes this creates more awareness of Fulton Sheen and attracts more visitors to our museum and our goal is to get the word out about his life,” she told a local newspaper.\textsuperscript{111} Fulte had stayed busy at the museum as she awaited the outcome of litigation. She acquired a 1953 train caboose which sat next to the former train depot housing the museum. The train acquisition represented two interpretations. Fulte knew Sheen enjoyed train travel, but she also knew that Sheen met evangelical preacher Billy Graham riding a train from Washington, D.C. to New York City.\textsuperscript{112} It illustrated both Sheen’s love of travel and his spirit for ecumenicism. The museum’s caboose desperately needed renovations to make it “a place to just get together and talk and communicate,” said Fulte, describing how she hoped the caboose would spark conversations like the ones between Sheen and Graham.\textsuperscript{113} Sheen’s memory at Fulte’s museum encouraged visitors to engage with individuals who held differing beliefs.

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\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
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With litigation ended, the cause for Sheen’s beatification moved forward once again. The same press release announcing Sheen’s body interment at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Peoria also announced that the Congregation of the Causes of Saints in Rome would present a miracle to Pope Francis. The pope approved the decree on July 6. The foundation now focused on organizing the beatification ceremony and corresponding celebrations that would take place on December 21, 2019. Like other beatifications, celebrations would emphasize the local relationship of Sheen to the diocese.

Two and a half weeks after the decree, Karen Fulte suffered an unexpected medical emergency and passed away. The Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Spiritual Center’s operation presented a conundrum for its small Board of Directors: what could be done with her collection? The museum stopped operation in late 2019 and Fulte’s will forbid any portion of the collection from going to the Diocese of Peoria. Mike and Kathy Fulton joined the center’s Board of Directors in 2018. Kathy explained that Fulte “had been burned several times by [the] Catholic system,” and her husband implied that the foundation asked Fulte to step out of the way. The future of the collection remains unclear as of 2023. Small institutions often struggle with long-term planning and while Fulte’s passion carried the museum through its decades of operations, it

114 “Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen Remains Transferred to Peoria Cause for Beatification Resumes.”
118 Kathy Fulton, conversation with author, Bloomington, IL, June 18, 2021.
also meant that only she understood the impetus for collecting or displaying artifacts. Fulte wanted to show Sheen as a person available to anyone regardless of their religious backgrounds.¹¹⁹ The Diocese of Peoria and the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Foundation never responded to requests for information regarding their relationship with Fulte. Sister Lea Stefancova, the director of the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum, provided some information during the summer of 2022.¹²⁰

The interview largely focused on the history and design choices of the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum. However, the conversation turned to Fulte’s work. Stefancova admitted she never visited the center but knew of its collection. “I know that she had some items that belong to him, kind of smaller things…it was a very small place, like a couple of rooms…not really like a real museum.”¹²¹ Public memory survives when power, money, and collective support exist to promote it for future generations, and Catholic public memory is no different. Although it may never be clear what happened between Fulte and the Archbishop Sheen Foundation, her experience demonstrates the effects of erasure within American Catholic public memory. The train depot used for 20 years as the museum sold to new owners in 2021, Fulte’s collection was packed away and placed in storage.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Mike Fulton, conversation with author, Bloomington, IL, June 18, 2021.

¹²⁰ Sister Lea Stefancova, conversation with author, phone, June 1, 2022. Sister Lea generously provided time to speak over the phone with me, and the shape of this chapter made it difficult to capture her kindness and passion for Sheen.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Months after Fulte’s death in 2019, the Vatican made an unusual announcement: Sheen’s beatification was postponed indefinitely. According to the Diocese of Peoria’s press release, the postponement came “at the request of a few members of the Bishop’s Conference who have asked for further consideration. In our current climate, it is important for the faithful to know that there has never been, nor is there now, any allegation against Sheen involving the abuse of a minor.” This last line referred to unfolding events within American Catholicism as more dioceses received sexual abuse allegations and people pushed for transparency from Church leadership. Sheen spent several years late in his career serving as the bishop for the Diocese of Rochester and it was this diocese that expressed hesitancy about “advancing the cause for the beatification of Archbishop Sheen at this time without a further review of his role in priests’ assignments.” Bishop Jenky’s retirement meant that his successor, Bishop Louis Tylka, now leads the cause on behalf of the diocese. Tylka explained in an interview that he has “now power to make him [Sheen] a saint. What I can do, in my diocese, is hold him up as an exemplary


124 For an overview on this period, see Massimo Faggioli and Mary Catherine O’Reilly-Gindhart, “A New Wave in the Modern History of the Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church: Literature Overview, 2018-2020,” Theological Studies 82, no. 1 (March 2021), 156-185.

model of discipleship to Jesus Christ.” As of 2023, no beatification has occurred, and no future date has been proposed.

The Official Memory of Fulton Sheen

The Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Museum operates out of the Spalding Pastoral Center, the main office space for the Diocese of Peoria. Throughout its decade and a half of existence, the museum provided a permanent exhibit about Sheen but also had rotating exhibits about the diocese’s history. The religious sisters who staffed the museum quickly realized the continual work that a museum requires. Visitors to the museum leave with an understanding of Sheen’s life and work, but the design choices and physical layout create a confusing space. Additionally, there is no clear narrative created. This encapsulates the state of Sheen’s current public memory: muddied and lacking a concrete interpretation.

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127 Stefancova.
The pamphlet provided at the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Museum provided little guidance for visitors about how to approach the exhibit.

The exhibit’s nine sections contain some similarities. Five of those sections are inspired by Sheen’s character: “A Man of Prayer,” “A Man of the Church,” “A Man of Others,” “A Man of Media, and “A Man of Peoria.”

The museum provides little interpretation for the items included within the sections. A museum brochure outlines and provides a numbered order to the displays, but they are not actually numbered in the exhibit. Moreover, the brochure appears to

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count backwards through these numbers. This creates confusion, and the exhibit’s circular design adds to the disorientation. The exhibit opens with a large display case backed with a mirror. Inside are several items that capture a visitor’s attention: a gold stole, a crucifix in a red box, and smaller items on display tables. The mirror allows a visitor to see the back of these items. This is “A Man of Prayer” which “points to the essential quality of Fulton Sheen as a man who loved God and his Church more than anything else.” After looking at this case, visitors choose whether to go left or right. There is little direction provided.

Religious sisters serve as guides for visitors to the museum. They recommend starting a visit by walking to the right towards the back corner where plush leather furniture formed a sitting area around a large screen television. The television plays the 2010 documentary *Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen: Servant of All*, on a loop, although the sisters restart it for visitors who ask on slower days. The film’s content explains Sheen’s life and accomplishments. This provides important context for understanding the exhibit’s objects. However, after they watch the video, visitors are now situated partway through the exhibit. There is no information provided about where to go next.

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129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 The film was created by the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Foundation. More information can be found on their website: https://celebratesheen.com/movie/.
Unlike other shrine museums, designers did not utilize a chronological order to organize the exhibit. Visitors find information about Sheen’s childhood in Peoria halfway through the room. This creates disorientation. Although labels explain objects well, a visitor with little background about Sheen’s life would not be able to contextualize when or in what order events occurred. The fracturing of Sheen’s life reflects the confusion surrounding Sheen’s memory. No narrative interpreting his life clearly exists, although one notable premise appears throughout the museum.
Fulton Sheen’s fame is often linked to his identity as an American. Kathleen Riley’s 2004 book *Fulton J. Sheen: An American Response to the Twentieth Century* provides the best example of understanding Sheen through an American lens, while James Patterson’s 2019 *Religion in the Public Square: Sheen, King, Falwell* examines how Sheen engaged with American politics without actually engaging openly with parties or specific ideologies. Moreover, scholars now debate whether Sheen contributed to a strain of Christian nationalism.132 However, although beatifications promote local veneration, canonization elevates the saint as an example for the universal Church.

The exhibit attempts to balance Sheen’s international and local identity. His work as the director of the Society for the Propagation of Faith receives a display and visitors can even take a World Mission Rosary before they leave the museum based on a fundraiser completed during his lifetime. Another display explains Sheen’s ability to practice both the Latin Rite and Byzantine Rite “in order to be close to people in Eastern Europe who were being persecuted” by communism.133 Meanwhile, “A Man of Peoria” roots Sheen in the museum’s local community. It contains replicas of the ordination card distributed during Sheen’s ordination at St. Mary’s Cathedral. Photographs and artifacts share stories of Sheen’s childhood. Given the public controversy over Sheen’s remains, the museum appears to reiterate Sheen as a local figure.

Renovations to the museum during the summer of 2022 show that the museum still lacks a clear narrative of Sheen’s life. The new section, like the other displays, stands alone as its own

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segment within a larger exhibit. A large image of Sheen holding the Eucharist during Mass covers the back wall from floor to ceiling. In front of it, designers utilized new objects to recreate the sense of being in the space of the photograph with Sheen. A kneeler and chair point towards the pictured Eucharist, but also towards the statue of Mary and Jesus. It suggests that the most important element of Sheen’s life was his faith, not the fame or accolades. The question of how to remember Sheen remains unclear as devotees await another beatification announcement.

**Conclusion**

The El Paso Antique Mall is located off Illinois Highway 24 on the edge of town. Vendors rent booths within the building to sell their wares. Every available surface contains objects and collectibles. However, several cases display items not for sale. These display artifacts come from what remains of Karen Fulte’s collection. A 1967 magazine cover portrays Fulton Sheen in a gold miter and chasuble, while those photographed objects are displayed next to the magazine. Fulte organized her collection around connections between an object and Sheen, although those links disappear without her explanation.134 Her friends said these threads linked Sheen to “how he helped shaped the world” by encouraging conversions and building relationships with non-Catholics.135 An elaborate gold-framed painting of Archbishop Sheen hung over the cases containing Fulte’s items and served as the only direction to the display.

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134 Mike Fulton, conversation with author.

135 Ibid.
American Catholicism of the 2010s and 2020s faces numerous challenges. Declining membership, lack of support for Church teachings, and falling out from decades of covering up sexual abuse create an uncertain future. Casey and Sheen represent the crossroads in American Catholic public memory: do Catholics embrace the sense of community and change represented at the Casey Center, or do they accept a sanitized picture of Sheen with little room for individual memory within the Church? This simplified question highlights the challenges of a polarized

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136 Scholarship exemplifies this sense of unease. Recent histories of American Catholicism, like Leslie Woodcock Tentler’s 2021 *American Catholics: A History* ends with an examination of the changing American present. Panels about the sexual abuse crisis increase each year at organizational meetings of the American Catholic Historical Association. Moreover, a 2021 survey conducted by America Media in conjunction with Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University revealed the dissatisfaction many American Catholics feel towards their church.
American Catholic population. Public memory provides a shared identity for members of a community to draw upon and solidify their notion of the past. If Catholics are unsure who they are in the present, the question of what their past represents remains unanswered. Saints and shrines provide a space for Catholics to conceptualize their collective memory.

Karen Fulte embraced an expansive view of American Catholicism, and after decades of devotion, the antique mall cases contain the only public display of artifacts she collected. No one publicizes it, although word of mouth in the small community might lead a visitor to discover the display or intense internet searching.\textsuperscript{137} It captures a sad reality in the creation of public memory: not all memories are equally valued. As the cause for Sheen progresses, the memory of the Sheen Foundation will harden. Fulton Sheen’s memory continues unfolding as the Archbishop Sheen Foundation, the Archbishop Sheen Museum, and devoted believers await beatification. This experience differs significantly from the Solanus Casey Center. It embraced the vernacular memory of Casey and incorporated new voices into the Catholic public memory of an American blessed. Even in his death, the Capuchin doorkeeper continues to open the way for new voices.

\textsuperscript{137} I found out during my conversation with the Fultons.
CONCLUSION

In 2021, the Seton Shrine launched an exciting new website called “Seton 200 Years.” Its goal was to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Elizabeth Ann Seton’s death.1 In the midst of continued shut-downs and unexpected closures caused by COVID-19, the Seton Shrine created a virtual experience for visitors to participate in commemorating the anniversary. It included a video series called Elizabeth Ann Seton: Seeker to Saint which combined historic reenactments of Seton’s life with testimonies from shrine staff, Sisters of Charity, and scholars. The shrine offered live virtual tours of their grounds as well. Advertisements on the website encouraged teachers to consider this tour as an option for virtual field trips during COVID-19.

The Seton Shrine offered on-site celebrations for visitors able to travel. They could view “the biggest Catholic cultural event of the summer,” a new exhibit entitled Seton Family Treasures.2 “This special exhibition of the Seton-Jevons Collection” owned by the Sisters of Charity of New York “includes personal items rarely seen by the public: her wedding brooch, her daughter’s christening gown, and the only bonnet of hers known to have survived.”3 The shrine repurposed a room near the entrance of their main exhibit for this display. Other changes in the

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3 Ibid.
Visitor Center appeared as well. A new bronze statue across from the main entrance depicted Elizabeth Ann Seton smiling down at a girl holding a book open in her hands.

Staff displayed the objects in simple glass cases with black backdrops with minimal interpretation provided on an object’s label. Unlike the Seton Way exhibit, this room’s lighting was dimmed and created a quiet space. Among the most eye-catching artifacts included the display of Mother Seton’s bonnet and shawl, positioned on a cloth mannequin bust in a glass case at the center of the room. Wedding miniatures of Elizabeth and William Seton were used in promotional materials for the exhibit, and visitors paused to gaze upon the simple gold wedding ring belonging to Mother Seton. Somehow these treasures felt different from other Seton items displayed on site.

The 200th anniversary with its new exhibit and special events hinted at larger changes. Soon the anniversary website teased “BIG NEWS: An exciting announcement is coming this September from the Seton Shrine!” On September 14, the Shrine announced a $7 million anniversary capital campaign called “New Century of Charity.” The campaign’s goal included “modernizing and enhancing the Shrine’s Museum and Visitor Center to tell the story of Mother Seton and the order of sisters she created in inspiring and interactive ways,” as well as building a Sustainability and Innovation Fund to expand “Living History events, special exhibits, online

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4 I visited Emmitsburg during the summer of 2021 to conduct research at the Sisters of Charity Archives, but my trip overlapped with the Seton Family Treasures exhibit.

5 “200 Years.”

digital content and other outreach activities.”\(^7\) This campaign positioned the grounds’ importance as both holy and historic.

By 2023, the shrine had increased its goal to $10 million with nearly half going towards updating the museum and visitor center.\(^8\) The property contains numerous buildings, including living quarters for the Sisters of Charity, and one of those preexisting buildings would be renovated into the Visitor Center. Moving the entrance would allow visitors to walk in a straight line through the exhibits and into the basilica, without having to climb stairs or double back through rooms. The shrine hired the PRD Group to design this new museum. This company had previously worked on projects at national institutions, and even had experience designing religious museums like the Museum of the Bible located in Washington, D.C.\(^9\) The Seton Shrine broke ground on the project during the summer of 2022 and hope to open the new museum in 2023.

These changes at the Seton Shrine demonstrate that the creation of American Catholic public memory is a fluid, ongoing creation. Renovations are planned or underway at other American shrines. The Casey Center in Detroit is currently fundraising for an updated museum, and the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Museum displays a banner with a rendering of the future pilgrimage center the Diocese of Peoria intends to build if Sheen’s beatified. New shrines in the United States contributes additional history to the public memory. The Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine opened in Oklahoma City in 2022 and features not only a museum, but also a

\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid.
The church’s Spanish colonial design and inclusion of the Tepeyac Hill reflect the religious culture of Guatemala, where Rother died as a martyr in 1981. These ongoing or new projects demonstrate that American Catholics desire physical spaces to engage with their faith and learn about their past.

American Catholics throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries utilized shrines to both evangelize and educate about their faith. The saints existed not only as examples of sanctity, but also as American individuals worthy of national emulation. Mother Cabrini, as the first American citizen canonized, represented the experience of immigrants who made the United States their home. The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini legitimized Cabrini’s history as Catholic memory, reproducing it through the museum exhibit located within the shrine. Hundreds of miles away in rural Maryland, the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Shrine grappled for decades with how to share Seton’s memory with visitors. The Sisters of Charity arranged for historic properties to be renovated and even moved to better create an idyllic vision of the American past. The shrine’s staff encouraged walking the grounds in the Seton Way like Seton once had.

The creation of saint is not linear, and neither is the creation of American Catholic public memory since the approval of miracles determines the canonization of an individual. For example, Cabrini arrived in the United States long after the deaths of Seton and Neumann, but she preceded both in sainthood. Supporters of canonization candidates integrate the candidate

into an existing narrative about national and Catholic history. The National Shrine of Saint John Neumann’s current museum integrated Neumann into the experiences of other nineteenth century Catholics. Exhibit designers explained the struggles of Catholic immigrants and tensions regarding nativism to teach Neumann’s life. His experience as both a circuit priest and an urban bishop allowed designers to explain the growth of the Catholic Church during the antebellum period. Visitors receive a Catholic version of the American past built on interpretive choices and material culture.

Candidates on the path to sainthood demonstrate the ongoing formation of American Catholic public memory. Blessed Solanus Casey and Venerable Fulton Sheen are only two examples of current American candidates for sainthood. Casey struggled to pass seminary courses and received ordination only under the agreement he not speak on doctrinal matters or hear Confessions. He joyfully embraced the menial tasks assigned at his Capuchin friary and drew crowds of people seeking his wisdom. Sheen excelled in school and pursued an academic career, a decision which propelled him into fame as he taught American Catholics their faith on radio and TV. He received numerous high powered appointments throughout his life but remained generous, giving all the money earned from his television show to the Church’s missionary efforts. Their two starkly different lives both represent holiness for American Catholics.

Sites dedicated to both men represent different expressions of the Catholic faith and the complexities of incorporating such diversity into one shared memory. The Casey Center reflects Casey’s simplicity and interests in social justice issues, and, as chapter four revealed, friars specifically wanted to avoid calling the site a shrine. Casey’s site embraced non-Catholic and
non-Christian artists, centered social justice initiatives, and actively participated in the lives of local residents through outreach programs. Meanwhile, Sheen’s memory proved complicated. Legal battles over Sheen’s body played out in national newspapers, while in Illinois two museums shared their version of Sheen’s life. The work of Karen Fulte explored in chapter four disappeared as the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation tightened its hold on controlling Sheen’s memory. Creating a shared public memory led to the exclusion of some individual memory.

Visitors who travel to American Catholic shrines receive lessons in holiness and history carefully crafted to explain the life of a saint. Vice-postulators, clergy, members of religious orders, and devoted laity recognized that context was needed to appreciate the lives of the saints. Supplementary information about the American past provided a window into the saint’s world and created an American Catholic interpretation of national history. It reinforced a shared identity and public memory. For public historians and scholars of religion, these shrines reveal important information about how Catholics understand their place in the United States. The process of enshrining a saint also enshrined an American Catholic public memory.
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