Philadelphia's Catholic Herald: The Civil War Years

Little is known today about the weekly newspaper that catered to Philadelphia's Irish Catholics during the Civil War era. The Catholic Herald and Visitor, later titled The Universe, claimed to represent their interests and points of view, and for most of the war period was the "official organ" of the Roman Catholic bishop of the city. At the outbreak of the war it was categorized as pro-southern or a "secession sheet." But these descriptions were inaccurate. The paper was basically moderate in its opposition to Lincoln's Administration and in its support of the Democratic Party. It never became a Copperhead sheet. Indeed, after the local religious and racial upheavals of the 1840s and the nativist Know Nothing difficulties of the 1850s, which were largely aimed at the Irish Roman Catholics, this Catholic newspaper, as well as the bishop, labored during the war to keep the city from becoming involved in further racial or religious turmoil. Although complete files of the paper are not available, and although manuscript material dealing with it or its editors is scanty, it is possible to produce a study using those documents that have survived. What emerges is a newspaper that was suspicious of Republicans, unsympathetic to blacks, but always determined to support the war and avoid excessive partisanship.¹

The first Catholic Herald, properly titled The Catholic Herald and Register, appeared on November 30, 1822, and lasted for only

three issues. It was published to aid the Reverend William Hogan in his unsuccessful efforts to have trustees control local church property and policy. The next Catholic Herald, forerunner of the Civil War newspaper, appeared on January 3, 1833. At the end of 1856, it merged with the Visitor, another Catholic journal, and became the Catholic Herald and Visitor, a title it retained until December 1863.\(^2\)

The Civil War history of the Herald, as it was usually referred to, can be divided into three periods. From January 7, 1860, to October 12, 1861, the paper was edited by John Duffey, a conservative southern sympathizer who nevertheless considered himself a patriot. Following Duffey, from October 12, 1861, until November 25, 1863, the paper was anonymously edited and probably owned by the diocese of Philadelphia. It remained moderately Democratic. Finally, from November 1863 until its demise, most likely in 1870, the paper was owned and edited by James M. Spellissy. He continued the paper as a moderate Democratic sheet, but fell into trouble with the bishop by supporting the Fenian movement, an action that may have resulted in the downfall of the newspaper.

Beginning with the issue of January 7, 1860, the Herald enlarged its format to an eight-page paper subtitled “Devoted to Religion, Art, Science, Literature, and General Intelligence.” It contained serialized selections from a novel; a section on “Irish Intelligence” that included a long pastoral sermon by an Irish bishop; a section devoted to “Foreign Intelligence”; general church news; and advertisements. Charles A. Repplier was listed as publisher and proprietor, and John and John B. Duffey as editors. Although the January 7 issue contained no political news, subsequent issues supported the Dred Scott decision and the right of southern states to secede. These were the views of the senior editor, John Duffey.\(^3\)

In 1860 Duffey was sixty-eight years old, a long-time newspaperman who had supported Jefferson and Madison and the War Hawks back in 1813. Born in Philadelphia in 1792, he enlisted in


\(^3\) Catholic Herald and Visitor, Jan. 7, 1860, p. 1; Sept. 1, 1860, p. 4.
the Marine Corps in 1814 with the rank of sergeant. He was at Baltimore during the British bombardment of Fort McHenry and served under Stephen Decatur during the remainder of the war. Later, during the "Algerine" war in 1815, he was on the Guerrière when Decatur destroyed the Dey of Algiers' ships and imposed peace on the Barbary pirates. Duffey subsequently served on the Constitution, remaining in the service for fifteen years until his discharge in 1829. Next he lived successively in Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey down to 1860, when he joined the Herald. He was obviously never a very successful newspaperman and had to move from one place to another seeking employment. He was a conservative Democrat who tended to dislike President James Buchanan, an advocate "in his younger days" of a "strong national government school."4

Not only was the new editor of the Herald a conservative Democrat, he was also, as a Roman Catholic, suspicious of the Republican Party. Too many Republicans betrayed Know Nothing prejudices against Catholics. Duffey often reminded his readers of this Republican bias. He was concerned, for example, with the long and bitter debate over the selection of Speaker of the House of Representatives, a controversy that incapacitated Congress from December 5, 1859, until February 2, 1860. John Sherman, the Republican candidate for Speaker, had joined many of his party's leaders in endorsing the revised edition of Hinton Rowan Helper's The Impending Crisis of the South, a volume expected to become a Republican campaign document in the 1860 presidential election. While The Impending Crisis attacked slavery and attempted to demonstrate that it was uneconomical, it also attacked Catholics and Irish immigrants as loyal allies of the southern forces of evil.

Helper had complained that in one New York voting district, "almost exclusively inhabited by low Irish Catholics," James Buchanan profited during the presidential election of 1856 from "Jesuitical influence." In that district Buchanan received 574 votes, Frémont 16, and Fillmore 9. And this one district was fairly

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4 Pension file of John Duffey, War of 1812 pension application files, Records Relating to Pension and Bounty Land Claims, 1773-1942, Records of the Veterans Administration, Record Group 15, National Archives; Catholic Herald and Visitor, Sept. 1, 1860, p. 4; Apr. 20, 1861, p. 4; Aug. 3, 1861, p. 4.
typical of the Irish Catholic vote. Helper found little difference between slavery, popery, and “Negro-driving Democracy.” He was not surprised to see these three go “hand in hand in their diabolical works of inhumanity and desolation.”

Duffey warned his readers that Helper was a “firebrand” sent to “prepare the minds” of “fanatical thinkers,” not only for disunion but also for the “ostracism of Catholics.” Should the Republicans gain control of the national government in 1860, Helper’s writings suggested that “Catholics will be made, as far as possible, the first victims of their rage and vengeance.”

Again in June 1860, with Republican chances to succeed in the November elections noticeably improving, Duffey repeated his warning that a “fierce party” existed in the country determined to weaken the Constitution and “enslave and grind down Catholics” under the pretense of freeing the slaves. For evidence he cited the remarks of a leading Republican, Senator Charles Sumner. In his first major address to the Senate following Preston Brooks’ attack on him, Sumner supported the latest bill to admit Kansas into the Union as a free state. During his long speech Sumner referred to an old charge that 6,000 skulls of infants were once found in a lake near a nunnery. This disturbed Duffey who saw further evidence of Protestant persecution.

Duffey was quick to point out to his Irish immigrant readers insults by Republicans or their press. For example, the editor of Harper’s Weekly denounced the Irish-American 69th Regiment of New York for refusing to parade in honor of the visiting Prince of Wales, accusing the Irish of “ignorance and superstition” and a predilection to criminal activity. Such abuse was upsetting to Irishmen as well as to “their priests and their religion.” It was one more reason why a conservative editor of a Catholic journal was suspicious of the Republican Party. It had too many ties to Know Nothingism.

6 Catholic Herald and Visitor, Feb. 11, 1860, p. 4.
7 Ibid., June 9, 1860, p. 6; Charles Sumner: His Complete Works (New York, 1969), VI 172.
9 Catholic Herald and Visitor, Nov. 10, 1860, p. 4.
Duffey’s editorial labors gained the approbation of the new bishop of Philadelphia, James F. Wood. At about the time Lincoln was being elected president, Duffey bought the newspaper from Charles A. Repplier and received Bishop Wood’s recognition making the *Herald* the official newspaper of the diocese, or, as was described in a Philadelphia daily, Bishop Wood’s “official organ.”

The Bishop was a native Philadelphian, a convert to Catholicism, and coadjutor bishop since 1857. In January 1860, on the death of Bishop John N. Neumann, Wood became bishop. He was a conservative, determined as much as possible to avoid political controversy. However, making the *Herald* his official medium for “communications with the Clergy and Faithful” was eventually to expose him to embarrassing situations.

In assuming proprietorship of the *Herald*, Duffey acknowledged that he had been responsible for its previous editorial content and that he was pleased that his work had won the approbation of Bishop Wood. Although now the bishop’s official organ, the bishop would not be responsible for what appeared in its pages. The true meaning of episcopal approval, according to Duffey, embraced nothing more than “an expression of confidence in the discretion of the editor and in his prudence.” Nevertheless, the bishop’s support was necessary. Circulation of the paper was never large. The New York correspondent of the Cincinnati *Catholic Telegraph* once observed that eastern Catholic papers contained dull, stale news and never had a numerous following: “no Catholic paper in the East can afford to pay a living salary to an editor.” He also guessed, most likely an underestimation, that the three Catholic papers in New York City, serving a population of more than half a million Catholics, did not possess a combined circulation of 1,000 copies. Since Catholics were not loyal subscribers of these weeklies, the assistance of the bishop could be most helpful to Duffey.

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11 Biographical material regarding Bishop Wood is in the Francis X. Reuss Papers, Box 9, Folder 7, Ryan Memorial Library, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Overbrook, Pa. For Wood’s conservatism, see for example James F. Wood to John B. Purcell, Oct. 23, 1863, “Cincinnati Papers,” University of Notre Dame Archives (hereinafter cited as UNDA).

12 *Catholic Herald and Visitor*, Nov. 3, 1860, p. 4; *Catholic Telegraph* (Cincinnati), June 25, 1865, p. 3.
Before the election of 1860, even before he had taken over ownership of the paper, Duffey had assured his readers in an article titled "Party Politics" that he would not tell them how to vote. In another article he denounced both Republicans and southern extremists as serious threats to the country, the Constitution, and Catholics. He castigated Lawrence M. Keitt of South Carolina and William L. Yancey of Alabama for urging secession in the event of a Lincoln victory. But he also warned "friends of the republic" to allow "no mauler of rails to drive a wedge home to the heart of the political compact" between the several states. Both factions could disrupt the nation as Duffey knew it. He therefore made a special plea to Catholics to avoid any kind of revolution that extremists might bring, reminding them that this was "the only free country for Catholics on the . . . earth." They would have to protect the Constitution against extremes in order to preserve their freedom.13

When it became evident that Lincoln had won the election and that some southern states were planning to secede, Duffey argued that it would be best to allow them to leave in peace. He pointed out that there had been numerous instances of nullification in American history, "by states north and south." Personal liberty laws passed by northern states to protect runaway slaves had nullified federal fugitive slave laws which had been passed by Congress and sanctioned by the Supreme Court. Yet they were ignored by northern states. "If nullification of the laws," he asked, "is neither treason, nor revolution, nor disunion in Massachusetts, how can secession, or peaceable withdrawal from the compact, be rendered such a deep offence . . .?" Secession was not worth a "ten year's bloody civil war to punish and to atone for it."14

As an old-line Jeffersonian Democrat, Duffey accepted the theories of nullification and secession, and defended these rights during the secession crisis. "The American Union is," he argued, "a Government of delegated, and . . . restricted powers." It was "nothing more than an agency of the several states." When South Carolina seceded in December 1860, Duffey was satisfied that no

14 Ibid., Nov. 10, 1860, p. 4; Nov. 24, 1860, p. 4.
violence was involved. Since the second Jefferson administration the country had survived threats of secession, and Duffey was now relieved that the compact between state and federal government could be broken without calamity ensuing. "Let her go in peace!" he wrote on learning of South Carolina's ordinance of secession. He had always believed that secession could come about at any time in "the mildest, most constitutional, and peaceable manner possible," and was happy "to have lived to see the experiment tried in a manner so admirably pacific in its results." 15

But Duffey's hopes for a peaceful secession were shattered in April 1861, when the firing on Fort Sumter led to Lincoln's calling out the militia. With deep sorrow and reluctance, Duffey accepted the decision for war. "The voice of authority," he noted, "had declared war to be just and necessary."

Duffey reminded his readers of his own service to his country. He understood the misery of war and hoped in his old age that his country would choose "concession and peace" instead of "civil war and bloodshed." He had argued against civil war because he "loved his country more than he loved a section or a party." With these sad remarks Duffey submitted "to the decisions made by the proper authorities, still hoping and praying for peace and union." 16

Duffey accepted the war but objected strenuously when a mob visited the *Herald* office on April 15, 1861, the day Lincoln issued his proclamation calling for 75,000 men to put down the rebellion. In a spirit of patriotism a gang of boys and young men surged through Philadelphia, "visiting the offices, stores or houses" of persons suspected of prosouthern sympathies, forcing them to display the flag. Although flags were scarce, the mob persisted and threatened, "until through the friendly offices of neighbors, the suspected persons were able to show their colors." The *Herald* office was high on the mob's list and its demand was quickly complied with. Fortunately, the mayor and police were diligent and prevented any violence at the *Herald* office or anywhere else. Duffey commented that had he been present in the office he would have

15 Ibid., Dec. 1, 1860, p. 4; Dec. 29, 1860, p. 4.
16 Ibid., Apr. 20, 1861, p. 4.
informed the intruders that "long before they were born" he had been "a steadfast defender of the American flag."17

Duffey's conservative views gained him many enemies and embarrassed his patron, Bishop Wood. In July 1861, Duffey wrote an especially bitter editorial, "Power of Majorities," which supported political arguments popular in the South. Too many northerners, according to the article, were willing to permit a "consolidated military despotism" to triumph over the rights reserved to the several states. Their willingness was based on "mistaken patriotic motives." The South had a long history of fighting for the Constitution and against the abuse of power on the part of presidents. In an especially provocative section, Duffey noted that it was the South that had resisted the "Alien and Sedition laws" of the Federalist era. Again, it was the South, led by Jefferson and Madison, that had proclaimed "Nullification the rightful State remedy in cases of usurpation of power" on the part of the federal government. Indeed, the South had always been ready and willing to defend the country "against the enemies of Constitutional liberty, whether of domestic or foreign growth." As a veteran of the War of 1812 who remembered maritime Massachusetts' opposition to that war, Duffey contrasted southern patriotism to Massachusetts' recalcitrance in not permitting its militia in the earlier war "to go beyond her own limits."18

Praising southern defense of constitutional liberty and nullification doctrines in the midst of the war was at best unwise. Appearing in the official organ of the Catholic diocese of Philadelphia, such editorial views aroused the bishop who moved quickly. The next issue of the Herald carried a statement that he had no sympathy with Duffey's views on the war. Duffey temporized by stressing his devotion to the country. The article in question, he explained, was

18 Catholic Herald and Visitor, July 6, 1861, p. 4.
written by "an old man" who hoped to see his country "united, prosperous, and happy."\footnote{Ibid., July 13, 1861, p. 4.}

While Duffey's political views did not coincide with those of the government, they were certainly not traitorous. Historians have noted that Republicans were unfairly all too ready to label Administration opponents as unpatriotic Copperheads. Although Duffey had opposed Keitt and Yancey as much as he had Lincoln and Seward, many attacked the *Herald* as a secessionist sympathizer. The *New York Herald* termed it a "Secession Paper Yet In Existence in the North." Orestes A. Brownson, a Catholic editor often unpopular with his coreligionists because of his support of the Republican Party, included the *Herald* with other "secession sheets" as one "favorable to the Secessionists, that opposes the war, and clamors for peace." The *New York Tablet*, a Catholic weekly inclined to be sympathetic to Lincoln, also used such words as disunionist, traitor, and coward in referring to the editor of the *Herald*.\footnote{Richard O. Curry, "The Union As It Was: A Critique of Recent Interpretations of the 'Copperhead,'" *Civil War History*, XIII (1967), 25-39; *New York Herald*, Aug. 29, 1861; Brownson's Quarterly Review, 3d Ser., II (1861), 522-523. The *New York Tablet*’s disagreements with Duffey are noted in Catholic Herald and Visitor, Feb. 2, 1861, p. 4, and Aug. 10, 1861, p. 6; and *New York Tablet*, Aug. 3, 1861, p. 9.}

Such denunciations, especially following the bishop's public disassociation from some of Duffey’s views, led to rumors that the *Herald* was in even more serious trouble. In the summer of 1861 the Administration, after suspending the writ of habeas corpus, began confiscating copies of violently antiwar newspapers and jailing some editors. In August the *Christian Observer*, a Philadelphia Presbyterian weekly, was seized by the United States marshal. Even though it was a religious paper, "edited by a Minister of the Gospel," the *Christian Observer* was not immune from governmental interference. A persistent rumor now spread through Philadelphia that the *Herald* was next, because of its "Secession proclivities." However, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* concluded that it was not disloyal. "On looking over the file of the journal," the *Inquirer* noted, "we were unable to see anything which would justify the suspicion that the editor favored the Rebel cause." True, the
Herald opposed the Administration, but it was not "a disloyal paper."  

While the Inquirer handled the charges against the Herald with a fairness not common in mid-nineteenth-century journalism, such Catholic papers as the New York Tablet and the Cincinnati Catholic Telegraph frequently denounced its editorial views. New York papers attacked one another regularly, often in very bitter terms. The Republican New York Tribune and New York Times were on occasion severe in their denunciation of New York's Catholic press. Such animosity was notably absent in Philadelphia where there were fewer papers competing for readers. Newspaper editors in wartime Philadelphia managed to maintain a civility toward one another that resulted in fewer feuds. John W. Forney, editor of the Philadelphia Press, noted this esprit de corps and found it valuable in promoting courtesy and civility. He credited Morton McMichael, editor of the North American, as largely responsible for this attitude. The Inquirer's generous treatment of the Herald can also be attributed in part to the evident determination of Philadelphians to avoid a repetition of religious animosity that led to the riots of the 1840s and the Know Nothing movement of the 1850s. Those bitter anti-Catholic and anti-Irish articles that appeared on occasion in wartime New York Republican newspapers were not repeated in Philadelphia.

Editor Duffey dismissed rumors that his Herald was about to be suppressed. He had problems enough, but they were caused by readers, or lack of them. Not only did many cancel their subscriptions, but some "very harshly denounced the editors ... as traitors and enemies of their country." Other subscribers were not paying their bills. A month before he ended his association with the paper, Duffey noted that in Philadelphia alone more than $400 were owed

21 Philadelphia Inquirer, Aug. 23, 1861, pp. 3, 8.
the *Herald*. The paper was in deep trouble for Duffey had antagonized too many of his readers. Perhaps the policy of the Lincoln government in suppressing some anti-Administration newspapers also affected the *Herald*. From September 7 until October 12 the paper avoided political controversy, but even this move did not save its editor. The October 12, 1861, issue announced a new ownership. Duffey had sold out and retired.23

The *Herald* had obtained a “new publisher and editor,” but no names were given. Later, the issue of February 14, 1863, listed Peter F. Cunningham as the publisher, but he dealt only with business matters and was not proprietor. From October 12, 1861, to November 25, 1863, the editors remained anonymous. The paper continued as the official organ of the diocese and was evidently its property as well. The issue of January 11, 1862, for example, informed its readers that additional subscriptions were desperately needed and assured them that any profits from the *Herald* would be added “to the funds of the Diocese.” Bishop Wood was clearly the paper’s proprietor.24

During this period the *Herald* briefly acquired the services of a distinguished Philadelphia journalist, Joseph R. Chandler, who wrote a few articles. Reports that he became a principal editor were incorrect. Philanthropic activity, especially work in prison reform, occupied his attention rather than the editing of a diocesan newspaper with a limited circulation.25

When the editor in 1863 announced that he had doubled the circulation, he apparently had added only a few hundred subscribers, for he hoped that in the future he would “welcome not hundreds but thousands of new names. . . .” Along with low circulation was the difficulty of working with the newspaper’s patron, Bishop Wood, a man of very decided opinions. The paper referred to the special relationship between a diocesan newspaper and its

episcopal overseer in noting the problems Archbishop John J. Hughes of New York was then facing with his official organ, The Metropolitan Record. That paper was becoming increasingly anti-war at the very time Hughes was endorsing Administration policies. Ultimately Hughes was obliged to sever its connection with the Archdiocese. In self-protection the editors of the Herald argued that a bishop was not accountable for what might appear in his official newspaper “without his special direction.” Several months later the Herald found it advisable to repeat this sentiment.26

Actually, the power of the bishop over a diocesan newspaper was much greater than the editor suggested. Bishop Wood demonstrated his authority in the squabble between the Herald and Orestes A. Brownson. Brownson had become a Catholic in 1844 and a strong antislavery advocate by 1861. During the war he used the pages of the highly regarded Brownson’s Quarterly Review to denounce Catholic bishops and other leaders who did not support the Administration’s antislavery policies. When the war first broke out, Brownson complained that a large majority of the Catholic clergy in America possessed “Southern sympathies.” He later denounced the views of Archbishop Hughes on the moral rightness of the institution of slavery. When the Herald rebuked Brownson for these writings and hinted that he had been censured by ecclesiastical authorities in Rome, Brownson wrote a letter that appeared in the Herald denying any papal rebuke and insisting that his views on public issues were consistent with Catholic teachings. “Never was I more worthy of the confidence and support of Catholics than I am now,” he asserted. But Bishop Wood did not consider Brownson a reliable exponent of Catholic doctrine, especially when he attacked Catholic bishops. In a letter to the editor, titled “official,” and signed only by a cross (+), a device traditionally used by bishops, Wood denounced Brownson and his journal, and ruled them non grata in the Herald. Wood found Brownson’s writings “offensive” and ordered that in the future no reference to his Review, favorable

26 Catholic Herald and Visitor, Mar. 1, 1862, pp. 4-5; Oct. 11, 1862, p. 4; June 20, 1863, p. 4. For the Hughes-Metropolitan Record controversy see Joseph George, Jr., “‘A Catholic Family Newspaper’ Views the Lincoln Administration: John Mullaly’s Copperhead Weekly,” Civil War History, XXIV (1978), 112-132.
or otherwise, appear in the *Herald*. Upset with Bishop Wood's action, Brownson asked for an explanation, to which Wood replied that no personal affront was intended in his ban. The bishop was only doing his pastoral duty.

This incident demonstrates his fairly close supervision of the *Herald*. When the paper turned to political matters, it continued to demonstrate Democratic leanings but without the stridency of several anti-Lincoln newspapers, and without the conservatism of the Duffey era. It supported the war effort.

In its very first issue after Duffey retired, the editor reminded his readers that those “who can bear arms” had a “duty to the U. S. Government to perform.” Those who could not carry a musket could contribute money. In August 1862, the *Herald* supported the government's policy on conscription. In an article titled “The Drafting Order,” the paper predicted that with this new policy the rebellion would be crushed, that now there would be “war in earnest.” On another occasion the paper was satisfied that President Lincoln was “doing all he can to save the nation.” These sentiments illustrated the *Herald’s* patriotism. Nevertheless, despite support of the Lincoln Administration and the war effort, the *Herald* was a Democratic paper. It often condemned Republican policies, displayed a suspicion and distrust of blacks, and attacked anti-Irish and anti-Catholic slurs wherever it found them.

The newspaper supported General George B. McClellan against his congressional foes even before he launched his Peninsular Campaign. On March 8, 1862, it believed that McClellan was in the process of restoring the Union in the face of opposition of the abolitionists, who did not want the nation restored. “They want another one made.” A year later the *Herald* was still loyal to the Democratic hero. McClellan had been removed and had been followed by Generals Pope, Burnside, and Hooker. But the only result was that “fifty thousand men have found their graves.” It was time to win the war, to bring back McClellan.

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27 Brownson's *Quarterly Review*, 3d Ser., II (1861), 510–546; III (1862), 34–36; Catholic *Herald and Visitor*, Apr. 26, 1862, p. 6; May 3, 1862, p. 4. Brownson's original letter to the *Herald* is in the Martin I. J. Griffin Papers, Box 12, Folder 10, Ryan Library.

28 James F. Wood to Brownson, May 7, 1862, Brownson Papers, UNDA.

29 Catholic *Herald and Visitor*, Oct. 12, 1861, p. 4; Jan. 25, 1862, p. 4; Aug. 9, 1862, p. 5.

30 Ibid., Mar. 8, 1862, p. 4; July 4, 1863, p. 4.
As a paper with Democratic sympathies the Herald adopted an antiblack, antiemancipation editorial posture. It did so, however, in a mild tone by nineteenth-century standards. With Bishop Wood's oversight, it never became a violent Copperhead sheet as did its New York counterpart, The Metropolitan Record.

Nevertheless, it was unfriendly toward blacks. In the summer of 1862, it was relieved by a report that President Lincoln would not accept black troops. In an article titled, "The President and the Negro Question," the Herald supported the President's efforts to foster colonization of blacks in Central America. Lincoln was "an eminently practical man" doing "as well in his position as circumstances will allow" when he asked a delegation of black leaders to consider the possibility of emigration to the Isthmus of Chiriqui. But blacks were not interested in leaving and said so. The Herald was convinced that "officious white friends" helped influence their decision against emigration. Ironically for a newspaper whose readers were mostly immigrants, or children of immigrants, the Herald concluded that it would be better for both races if the blacks "would leave the country." 31

The Herald applauded Lincoln during his controversy with Horace Greeley over the issue of abolition. By the summer of 1862, Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, was impatient with Lincoln's seeming reluctance to use emancipation as a means of aiding the Union cause. He published an open letter to the President in the August 20 issue of the Tribune, urging the President to turn away from conservative advisers and free the slaves. Lincoln's famous reply, also an open letter, stressed that his paramount object was to save the Union, not to save or destroy the institution of slavery. The Herald reprinted Lincoln's letter which had "settled the matter of negro agitation." 32

One month later the President issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, satisfying Greeley and committing the Administration to a policy of abolition. The Herald reacted very carefully, demonstrating its determination to remain a moderate paper.

31 Ibid., Aug. 9, 1862, p. 5; Aug. 30, 1862, p. 6. Lincoln, Collected Works, V, 356-357, discusses the offer of black regiments made by Indiana citizens, not New Yorkers, as reported in the Herald. For Lincoln's "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes," see ibid., V, 370-375.

It merely noted that newspapers north and south, “not of a certain class,” printed the proclamation “without note or comment.” A year later, however, when the Cincinnati Catholic Telegraph jokingly observed that the Herald seemed to be more moderate in its views on slavery, the Herald responded indignantly, claiming that it represented the views of the majority of American Roman Catholics. It described Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation as a “fire brand lighted by intolerant New England Puritanism.” The Herald was antislavery but not “abolitionist in the Yankee, fanatical sense.” Extremism, as embodied in “this unfortunate proclamation could lead to murder, arson, robbing, rape. . . .” And the article concluded with the reminder that Lincoln’s proclamation had not as yet freed any slaves.33

The Herald’s opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation was based on traditional Irish and Catholic dislike of blacks. The paper contains ample evidence that this prejudice was in large part motivated by economic rivalry. Too often Irish immigrants and blacks competed for the same jobs. In April 1862, for example, the Herald reported that some “excitement” had occurred in Philadelphia over the arrival of several hundred “contrabands,” sent on from Washington. “What the object is of sending them to Philadelphia, where so many poor men are out of employ, our citizens are left to conjecture,” the Herald concluded. Later that year it reported “a serious riot in Brooklyn between Irish laborers” and “about one hundred negroes employed in the tobacco factory of Thos. Watson.” Competition for jobs during the war was often bitter. The Herald complained in 1863 that the “laboring population,” mostly Irish, were suffering from a pernicious inflation. In an article titled, “High Prices Having Their Effect,” the journal observed that conditions were bad enough among the poor to induce them to join the army, “to obtain the trifling $13 per month, for support of those dependent upon them.” A Philadelphian, unfriendly to the Irish, commented in October 1862 on Irish ani-

mosity toward blacks, and acknowledged that some economic motivation existed for this dislike.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet the \textit{Herald} on several occasions was able to moderate its traditional dislike of Negroes. In 1863 it deplored a riot in Detroit which destroyed at least thirty homes belonging to them. The \textit{Herald} understood that lawlessness could easily be turned against Catholics, "as it once was, instead of against the negro." "While we defend our own rights," the \textit{Herald} wisely advised Catholics, "let us take care that we do not encroach on those of our neighbor." As a further demonstration that its racism was muted, the \textit{Herald} also urged its readers to come to the aid of nuns belonging to the Oblates of Providence, a group of "colored sisters" who arrived in Philadelphia from Baltimore, and planned to open "a school for instruction of female children of color." The nuns were in desperate need of such basic things as furniture and bedding for their house at 430 Lombard Street.\textsuperscript{35}

After the native-born Duffey left the \textit{Herald} it significantly expanded its coverage of Irish affairs. To those readers who complained that even this expansion was not enough, the anonymous editor assured them of his interest in Ireland. "By our ancestry, and our love, we are prompted to be all for Erin," he wrote. As an even more pronounced Irish-Catholic journal, the \textit{Herald} increased its vigilance in denouncing what it considered as slurs against the Irish or their church.\textsuperscript{36}

Like other Catholic newspapers, the \textit{Herald} was outraged by an article in the \textit{New York Times}, "The Progress of Population," which appeared a few weeks after the war began. The article predicted that both slavery and popery, incompatible with liberty and civilization, were doomed to "speedy destruction." Such sentiments were enough for the \textit{Herald} to alert its readers in the autumn of 1862, as election time for Congress and local offices approached, not to vote for anyone tainted with Know Nothing antecedents. And, in 1863, during the bitter struggle for governor between Republican

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Catholic Herald and Visitor}, Apr. 5, 1862, p. 5; Aug. 9, 1862, p. 6; Nov. 18, 1863, p. 4; Fisher, \textit{Diary}, 439.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Catholic Herald and Visitor}, Mar. 14, 1863, p. 6; Aug. 26, 1863, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 18, 1862, p. 4.
incumbent Andrew G. Curtin and Democrat George W. Woodward, the paper came out sharply against Curtin, accusing him of being a Know Nothing. It warned its readers that support of Governor Curtin would prove dangerous to Catholics. It saw in the attacks of the "New York Times and its ilk," "surly and bigoted" articles, and in Curtin's failure to renounce his Know Nothing past unmistakable signs that "a day of trial may be coming" for Catholics. "Let us not be so blind," it concluded, "as to elevate an enemy above us. . . ." 37

When the New York draft riots broke out in the summer of 1863, the Herald again found it necessary to defend the Irish and Catholics against what it considered unfair attacks. It was most upset with the New York Times which blamed Irish Catholics for the riots and, in the words of the Herald, "indirectly stigmatized them as ignorant, debased and disloyal." The paper also printed a letter to the editor denouncing Brownson for writing that the Irish were responsible for the riots. 38

Yet, again, in the crisis over the draft riots the militancy of the Herald was muted. It could not be accused of stirring its readers to mutiny. Some people feared that rioting could break out in Philadelphia. When word of the New York violence was received, a state Supreme Court judge warned Lincoln that bloodshed could spread to Philadelphia, to those very areas where the riots of 1844 had broken out. He noted that in one area the "Irish and colored people" lived close together, "hating each other most bitterly." Almost a year before, Sidney George Fisher had also observed the implacable hatred between Philadelphia's Irish and black populations. Given this animosity, the relative moderation of the Herald, and other Philadelphia papers, helped insure that there would be no repetition of the New York riots. 39

38 Catholic Herald and Visitor, July 29, 1863, p. 4; Oct. 28, 1863, p. 4. Brownson's remarks appear in Brownson's Quarterly Review, 3d Ser., III (1863), 385. There is no doubt but that the Irish were mainly responsible for the rioting. See Adrian Cook, The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863 (Lexington, 1974), 196.
The Herald came under control of its last owner and editor with the November 25, 1863, issue. James M. Spellissy, for four years the anonymous editor of the Boston Pilot, a highly respected Catholic journal, had purchased the paper. "The energy and ability of this gentleman," predicted a Philadelphia daily, "will no doubt add to the influence the Herald now possesses, and make it still more worthy of the dignity of the Catholic Church, and the general support of its intelligent and numerous members." Under Spellissy the Herald had an interesting history. It attempted to become a prominent Democratic newspaper, lost the support of Bishop Wood over the Fenian issue, tried desperately to remain in circulation as an Andrew Johnson paper, and finally folded after Johnson left the White House. Unfortunately, little of this story can be told. No collection of Spellissy's personal papers is available, and very few issues of his newspaper after June 1864 survive.\(^{40}\)

The available evidence indicates that he tried hard to make the paper more than the bishop's house organ. He intended to make it a responsible Democratic newspaper. One of the issues with which he became concerned in 1864 was the local struggle between Peace and regular Democrats to control the party. The Peace Democrats were mainly aristocratic in leadership and upset with General McClellan when he repudiated the Democratic Party platform of that year. Philadelphia's regular Democrats agreed that the Copperheadish policies of the Peace faction in the party hurt its "chances for election victories." They seem to have been convinced that no elections could be won on the theme that the war was a failure. Although the evidence is incomplete, it does suggest that Spellissy went along with this view and attempted to move his newspaper, which he retitled The Universe: The Catholic Herald and Visitor, into the ranks of this faction.\(^{41}\)

As early as December 1863, shortly after he took over the Herald, Spellissy praised the President's Annual Message to Congress, in which Lincoln announced his generous Reconstruction policy. Seceded states, under his terms, could rejoin the Union when 10

\(^{40}\) Catholic Herald and Visitor, Nov. 25, 1863, p. 4; Catholic Telegraph, Dec. 2, 1863, p. 388; Daily Evening Bulletin, Nov. 27, 1863, p. 5.

percent of their voters accepted a special oath of allegiance to the
government. Spellissy described Lincoln's policy as "a weighty
blow to radicalism," but he also believed that "the people of the
South will still be contumacious." In January 1864, Spellissy re-
minded Democrats that Republicans had won the local elections in
the previous autumn and that the latest government loan had been
easily subscribed to. These two acts held a lesson. Both "the votes
and the money of the people sustain Abraham Lincoln in his manage-
ment of the Republic." Democratic talk about despotism and de-
struction of the Republic was "silenced by these two facts." A
month later he observed that prominent Democratic dailies were
accepting abolition as an accomplished fact, and urged his readers
to a similar view as necessary for the future peace of the country.
Although Irish Democrats did not like the trend, "abolitionism of
the most perpetual and sweeping kind" was "seizing the entire
nation." It would be futile "to resist the national current." As he
concluded, "let us at all events accept with grace what we cannot
undo."\(^\text{42}\)

He was shocked at the news that black troops had been massacred
by Confederates at Fort Pillow. "The colored soldier is as much
identified with the integrity of the Union as the white soldier," he
wrote. And when the President issued a call for 200,000 more men
for the army, Spellissy supported the move. "The integrity of the
nation" depended on the "success of his military plans." "His
victories," Spellissy wrote of Lincoln, "are the victories of us all.
His defeats are the defeats of us all."\(^\text{43}\)

Spellissy's support of Lincoln against the South did not cause
him to leave the ranks of the loyal opposition. He was Irish and a
Democrat, and, as he admitted, Irish Democrats had an "abomina-
tion for Abraham Lincoln" that was "unbounded." He was proud
that the Irish would vote in the 1864 presidential election for the
Democratic candidate. To Spellissy they had good reason. In his
four years in office Lincoln had had "the good will of the country,

\(^{42}\) Catholic Herald and Visitor, Dec. 16, 1863, p. 5. Lincoln's proclamation on reconstruction
is included in his annual message to Congress, Dec. 8, 1863. See Lincoln, Collected Works,
VII, 53-56; The Universe, Jan. 30, 1864, p. 4; Feb. 20, 1864, p. 5.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., Mar. 26, 1864, p. 4; Apr. 30, 1864, p. 4.
all the material resources of the nation, and two million five hundred thousand men to suppress the rebellion.” But nevertheless he had failed. The rebellion was not suppressed and Abraham Lincoln therefore did not “merit re-election.” In Spellissy’s adopted city the Irish were “the mainstay of the Democracy,” and it was Irish support that kept the party in that city “from extinction.” Spellissy, estimating that the Philadelphia Irish could poll 25,000 votes, used *The Universe* to help swing most of them to McClellan in the 1864 election. In doing so he used the same old arguments, reminding his readers that Republicans, like National Chairman Henry J. Raymond, editor of the *New York Times*, were Know Nothing abolitionists. He was satisfied that men like Raymond would draw no Irish vote to the Republican candidate.\(^{44}\)

Within his own party Spellissy showed no sympathy for the Peace Democrats. He approved McClellan’s repudiation of the peace plank in the Democratic platform. McClellan insisted that there must be union before there could be peace. He would, if elected, continue the war. *The Universe* thus supported the views of regular Democrats in urging McClellan’s election.\(^ {45}\)

Indeed, the 1864 issues of *The Universe* show that Spellissy had made the paper a responsible Democratic weekly, far removed from the party’s Copperhead element. Unfortunately, how *The Universe* reacted to Lincoln’s election and to the end of the war is impossible to determine. Issues of the newspaper for this period are scarce. He broke with Bishop Wood in early 1864 and thereby lost the designation of his paper as “Official Organ of the Philadelphia Diocese.” Once this happened those institutions that normally collected issues of the Catholic press apparently ceased preserving copies of *The Universe*.

Spellissy’s difficulties with Bishop Wood, which came to a head shortly after he assumed control of the paper, developed as a result of the editor’s support of the Fenian movement. Spellissy was either a native of Ireland or an Irish-American devoted to the cause of an Ireland free of English rule. Wood was a native-born American of English parents. He had a reputation, probably un-

\(^{44}\) Ibid., Jan. 2, 1864, p. 5; May 7, 1864, p. 4; June 18, 1864, p. 4.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., Sept. 10, 1864, p. 6; Sept. 24, 1864, p. 3.
merited, of being "unsympathetic to the Irish." These two men were soon involved in a struggle involving the Fenians that could only end in the demise of *The Universe: The Catholic Herald and Visitor*.46

The Fenian Brotherhood in the United States was founded in 1857 as part of a group originally established in Paris in 1848, and then organized in Ireland in 1853. In its dedication to ridding Ireland of English control the Society was willing to use violence. It required of its members a secret oath which it considered above any religious obligation. The Brotherhood was condemned by both the Irish bishops and their American counterparts.47

Spellissy got into trouble with Bishop Wood when he published an article, "Secret Societies," in January 1864, defending the Fenians. The article recognized that the Pope had condemned secret societies, but the Fenian Society was not a secret society with an evil design. The Brotherhood, according to Spellissy, was comprised of 80,000 Roman Catholic Irish citizens of the United States whose sole object was "the freedom of Ireland." No more secrecy was attached to the Fenians than to any legitimate society. "The Consistory of Cardinals has its secret transactions"; "Lincoln's cabinet has secret meetings"; "Catholic Beneficial Societies do not admit non-members to their sittings." "Secrecy," he argued, "is bad in no Society, except in the Society which has bad designs. . . ." The Fenian Brotherhood was a "great Society" with a "noble purpose," the regeneration of Ireland.48

Bishop Wood's response was not long in coming. Eventually, all American bishops would denounce the movement, but Wood was one of the earliest. Spellissy's defense of the Fenians appeared in the January 9, 1864, issue of *The Universe*. On January 19, 1864, Bishop Wood issued a "pastoral," an official letter addressed to the


48 *The Universe*, Jan. 9, 1864, p. 4.
“Venerable Clergy and beloved people of the Laity,” in which he condemned the Fenian Brotherhood, among others, as a secret society to be avoided by Roman Catholics. The clergy were directed to read the “Pastoral” during church services the following Sunday. Moreover, the Bishop withdrew his endorsement of The Universe. The January 23rd issue no longer advertised itself as the official paper of the diocese. Spellissy insisted, however, that his paper was not “the organ of the Fenian Brotherhood.” Instead, The Universe was now “the organ of Catholicity, of the Irish Catholic Race, of the American Constitution, and of nothing else. . . .” He also assured his readers that “the Editor is no Fenian.”

The Fenian movement was, nevertheless, strong among Irish-Americans, and Spellissy obviously wanted its Philadelphia sympathizers to buy his paper. As to the wide-spread support of the Fenian cause, The Press of Philadelphia reported that “Irish newspapers are quite generally in sympathy with the movement.” The New York correspondent of the Catholic Telegraph referred to the New York Tablet “as the only paper in these parts” that opposed the Fenians. “All the others,” he said, “are in favor of it or are silent. . . .” And in Philadelphia a resident noted in October 1865 that “the Irish part of our population” were “holding meetings to support what is called Fenianism in Ireland.”

Yet Fenianism could never prosper among Philadelphia’s Irish without episcopal support or neutrality. In his study of Philadelphia’s Irish Dennis Clark has rightly observed that they were consistently temperate, conservative, and clerical. They would follow their bishop, and this tendency doomed Spellissy’s Universe. In 1864 the paper enthusiastically supported the Reverend P. E. Moriarty, O.S.A., a well-known orator priest and supporter of the Fenians, and publicized his scheduled address at the Academy of Music, titled “What Right Has England To Rule In Ireland?” The Universe printed Moriarty’s long speech and commented on the approval of the large crowd in attendance. “Had Bishop Wood

49 A copy of Bishop Wood’s printed pastoral, dated Jan. 19, 1864, is in the Wood Papers, Philadelphia Archdiocesan Archives (hereinafter cited as PAA). The Philadelphia Press noted that Bishop Wood was “creating no little sensation” by his stand against secret societies. The Press, Jan. 25, 1864, p. 4; The Universe, Jan. 23, 1864, p. 4.

50 The Press, Jan. 25, 1864, p. 4; Catholic Telegraph, Feb. 3, 1864, p. 44; Fisher, Diary, 505.
been present,” Spellissy wrote, “he would have been carried away by the overwhelming Irish enthusiasm of the moment.” But the bishop was not present and had little difficulty in putting “things right again,” as he expressed it. He succeeded in getting Father Moriarty to print a public apology in The Universe for having delivered the speech.\

The following year Spellissy again supported the Fenians and annoyed the bishop. He published a false report that the Pope had requested American bishops not to interfere with the Fenian movement. Bishop Wood had a notice printed in the daily press denouncing this statement, calling it a falsehood. The Catholic Telegraph picked up the story and remarked that Spellissy had “an unhappy knack of jumping at conclusions, without thinking to what ends they may lead him.” Later, Bishop Wood asked Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati to publish in the Telegraph a copy of the official notice from Rome stressing that the account in The Universe was untrue. In this letter Bishop Wood made an ominous prediction: “You will remember that I have no Organ. The one I disposed of is sadly out of tune, and will soon probably give out not for want of, but by excess of wind!!” Not too long afterward another Catholic paper was established in Philadelphia to compete with and finally put an end to The Universe.\

Spellissy probably became aware of reports in 1865 that a new Catholic weekly was in the planning stage. The first issue of this paper, The Catholic Standard, appeared on January 6, 1866. Its anti-Fenian tone and its connection with Bishop Wood were unmistakable. The editor, the Reverend James Keogh, D.D., “Professor of Divinity in the Theological Seminary of St. Charles Borromeo,” assured his readers that his venture had “the Countenance and best wishes of the Right Reverend James F. Wood, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese, and that the editorial arrangements have his entire approbation.” He also announced that “political or secular

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52 Public Ledger, Feb. 28, 1865, p. 1; Catholic Telegraph, Mar. 8, 1865, p. 85; Wood to John B. Purcell, Aug. 13, 1865, “Cincinnati Papers,” UNDA.
questions at home or abroad” would not be handled by *The Catholic Standard*. Indeed, the paper would be “free from all political or other prejudices,” and would “correctly represent the Catholic interests of the Diocese of Philadelphia.”

Without the support of Bishop Wood and with a new journal to contend with, Spellissy tried to save his paper by supporting President Johnson in his struggle against a Republican Congress. In May 1866, he wrote Johnson, asking for a job and citing Major General Robert Patterson and Congressman Samuel J. Randall of Philadelphia as references. He claimed that he was both editor and proprietor of the “leading Irish American Journal in the country and that in every issue of it, President Johnson is upheld.” In July he again applied for a position, and later he sent the President a clipping from *The Universe* of August 4, supporting the Philadelphia Convention in which Johnson attempted to combine moderate Republicans and Democrats into a coalition against the Radical Republicans. The article noted that Johnson had succeeded in thwarting the efforts at revolution on the part of the Radicals. As a result, in the coming November 1866 elections, the “Radical Congress” would be replaced by a “National Congress” that would restore integrity to the nation.

In a letter to George F. Train, merchant, author, lecturer, friend of the President and supporter of the Fenian movement, Spellissy stressed that his paper spoke for Philadelphia’s Irish community, and that its members supported Andrew Johnson. When Train came to Philadelphia to deliver a lecture for the benefit of the wives and children of Fenian prisoners in Ireland, Spellissy used

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53 *The Catholic Standard*, Jan. 6, 1866, pp. 2, 4. Italics were in the original. A year later, Cincinnati’s Catholic newspaper stressed the fact that the *Standard* was the “authorized paper” of the Philadelphia diocese. *Catholic Telegraph*, Jan. 30, 1867, p. 5. The *Standard* was the forerunner of the present-day newspaper of the Philadelphia Catholic Archdiocese, *The Catholic Standard and Times*.

the occasion to seek his support in obtaining a position from the Administration. He assured Train that a huge crowd would attend his lecture, and that it would be enthusiastic, both for the cause of Irish relief and the Johnson Administration. He touted his paper as “the most successful Irish-American paper in the country,” one that was a loyal supporter of the President.\textsuperscript{55}

Train forwarded this letter to Johnson, and Spellissy also used the influence of Congressman Randall who recommended him as an emigration officer, but with no success. At the end of August Spellissy applied for a position as collector or assessor of internal revenue. In September, with the political campaign becoming more intense, he went to Washington and met the President. Johnson indicated that he would approve Spellissy’s application for government advertising in \textit{The Universe}. Spellissy’s claim that \textit{The Universe} was “the leading Irish-American organ in the United States” is impossible to evaluate because so few of its issues for this period have survived. The best that Johnson could do for him was the offer of a job in the Philadelphia custom house at four dollars a day, a position inappropriate for “the Editor of the strongest and most varied administration ‘weekly’ in the country,” as Spellissy complained to the President, while also protesting that the War Department Quartermasters were not giving their business to \textit{The Universe}. This lack of advertising was hurting the paper’s efforts to bring the President’s message to Philadelphians.\textsuperscript{56}

Spellissy’s complaints finally were heard in Washington. He was appointed a Philadelphia customs inspector, beginning December 1866, with an annual salary of $1,460. By June 1867, however, he found that producing a newspaper and working in the custom office were not necessarily compatible. He unsuccessfully requested an arrangement whereby he would have more time available for his paper, and by September 30, 1867, he was no longer with the customs service. Instead he was busy making ambitious plans for his newspaper. With the government advertising he was obviously

\textsuperscript{55} Spellissy to George F. Train, Aug. 10, 1866, Series 1, \textit{ibid}. An advertisement for Train’s lecture appears in \textit{Public Ledger}, Aug. 11, 1866, p. 2, and was repeated on Aug. 13, 1866.

receiving, he brought out The Universe twice a week, beginning in October 1867, and he planned to have The Universe become the first Catholic daily in the country. However, the twice-weekly schedule did not succeed, and within a month was apparently abandoned. In June 1868, Spellissy was again complaining to President Johnson that he was not receiving sufficient government advertising, despite the President’s orders to the contrary. By that time future prospects could not have been very promising. Johnson did not receive the Democratic nomination for President. In November the Republicans elected Grant. Faced with the loss of government advertising and with increased competition from the bishop’s “official organ,” The Universe could not survive. The end came in 1869 or 1870, certainly no later.57

Spellissy moved on to New York where he edited a weekly, beginning in January 1871, that lasted for only a few issues. His career after that is unknown. But the newspaper he edited in Philadelphia, The Universe, and its predecessor, the Catholic Herald and Visitor, had served Philadelphia’s Irish Catholic community adequately. As Democratic newspapers during the Civil War they tended to stress moderation. Given the background of religious and racial animosity in Philadelphia up to that time, moderation in newspapers opposed to the Lincoln Administration was of some assistance in furthering the war effort.58

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57 For Spellissy’s appointment, see General Records of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Register of Customs Officers, 1865-66, vol. 2, set 3, p. 65. Spellissy to Joseph W. Cake, June 3, 1867, Arthur C. Bining Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Catholic Telegraph, Oct. 23, 1867, p. 4, and Nov. 27, 1867, p. 4; Spellissy to Johnson, June 3, 1868, Johnson Papers. Gapsill’s Philadelphia: City and Business Directory For 1869 lists Spellissy as editor of The Universe, pp. 1391, 1656. However, the 1870 edition has no mention of Spellissy or The Universe.

58 A new Catholic Herald appeared in June 1872, edited by former staff members of the Catholic Standard, but this paper only lasted for a few issues. The Catholic Encyclopedia, XI, 693-694.