

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

SOME FINANCIAL RECORDS OF BISHOP MICHAEL O'CONNOR OF PITTSBURGH

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WHILE Michael O'Connor lived in Philadelphia from 1838 to 1841, he became acquainted with Mark Anthony Frenaye (1782-1873).¹ A Frenchman born on Santo Domingo, Frenaye had fled that island in 1806 because of the revolutionary upheavals there. After a few years working and traveling in the United States, Mexico, and South America, he settled permanently in Philadelphia. Although indifferent to religion in his youth, he underwent a conversion and spent the last forty-five years of his long life in service to the Catholic church as a financial advisor to the bishops and other clergy of the city. He developed an especially close friendship with the Reverend John Hughes who was then pastor at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Philadelphia's Catholic cathedral during the 1830s and 1840s; after his separation from his wife, Frenaye even lived at the cathedral rectory. His financial expertise proved very helpful in the building of the new Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul and in the development of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, and he was always very generous with his own fortune. Besides being a financial consultant and administrator of several religious funds, Frenaye also performed the tasks of a business agent for his clerical friends, who appreciated his understanding of the commercial and banking world and his willingness to do occasional favors for them.

An assortment of Frenaye's papers passed after his death into the possession of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia. These include the ten letters from Michael O'Connor that are reproduced here. They cover the years from 1843, immediately before O'Connor became bishop, to 1849. Undoubtedly these are only a fragment of a considerable correspondence between the two men, but

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1 "Marc Antony Frenaye — A Sketch," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 38 (June 1927): 132-43.

what remains is sufficient to reveal something of the financial activity and business acumen of Pittsburgh's first Catholic bishop. This small collection was overlooked by the Reverend Henry A. Szarnicki, the author of the recent biography of Bishop O'Connor.² These letters, however, do not seriously challenge Szarnicki's judgments. They afford an insight, albeit limited, into the bishop's financial dealings, an area of his labors for which relatively few other records exist. O'Connor is shown in these documents to have been somewhat careless in keeping track of his finances, but this was probably due to his trust in his agent Frenaye. The bishop appears in the correspondence as a decisive individual willing to take advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves, even when considerable sums were involved. The letters also reveal something of the financial support that the new Diocese of Pittsburgh received from the outside — especially from Philadelphia and France.

Information of another sort is also to be found in these letters insofar as they make mention of O'Connor's associates among the clergy and laity of Pittsburgh and elsewhere. Thus they amplify our knowledge of his attitudes and endeavors during the early years of his episcopacy. The first letter in the series, which is also the longest and least concerned with finances, is the most valuable in this respect. All the letters are handwritten and addressed in the same way: "M. A. Frenaye, Esq., St. John's Church 13th Street, Philadelphia." The first one was posted in Rome; the rest were written in Pittsburgh or its environs.

Rome

July 21, 1843

Dear Mr. Frenaye

I enclose you a note for the bishop.³ As he probably will be on his visitation when this arrives, I would request you to forward it to him immediately. Take care however that you direct it to a regular post

² Henry A. Szarnicki, *Michael O'Connor, First Catholic Bishop of Pittsburgh, 1843-1860: A Story of the Catholic Pioneers of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, 1975).

³ The jurisdiction of Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick (1796-1863) included the entire state of Pennsylvania until August 11, 1843, when the western counties were separated to become the Diocese of Pittsburgh. See Hugh J. Nolan, *The Most Reverend Francis Patrick Kenrick Third Bishop of Philadelphia 1830-1851* (Philadelphia, 1948). During 1843, contrary to his usual custom, Bishop Kenrick did not visit Western Pennsylvania, according to F. E. Tourscher, ed. and trans., *Diary and Visitation Record of the Rt. Rev. Francis Patrick Kenrick* (Philadelphia, 1916).

town and make sure of its overtaking him there by inquiring at the Philadelphia Post Office when your letter shall reach the place to which you will direct it. The Nunzio at Paris Monsignor Fornari⁴ expressed a great desire to have the bishop's Theology with a copy of his other works⁵ as also a copy of his brother's work on Anglican Ordinations.⁶ Would you be able to send them to him. He spoke of paying for them, but I told him I thought the bill would not be high. Send them at any rate *immediately* to him at Paris. I hope you will pray that an unworthy bishop may not be inflicted on Pittsburg.⁷ Your prayers may be in time to prevent it. Would you ask Fithian to send me the Herald⁸ regularly directed to the care of Thomas Cullen Esq, Harrington St., Liverpool.⁹ It would be a great comfort for me to see it. I wrote to him to make this request before I left America, but he has not sent me one copy. If you write me a line, which would be a great favor direct as above and write by Boston Steamer. Can I do any thing for you here or in France? I will be returning to U.S. about November or December. Compliments to all.

Yours sincerely
M. O'Connor

4 This letter was written while O'Connor was visiting Europe in 1843. En route to Rome he stopped off in Paris and saw the Papal Nuncio Archbishop Raffaele Fornari, a former professor at the Urban College in Rome who would have a natural interest in the theological writings of American bishops.

5 Francis Patrick Kenrick, *Theologiae dogmaticae tractatus*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1839-1840), and *Theologia Moralis*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1841-1843). For Bishop Kenrick's other writings, see Michael Moran, "The Writings of Francis Patrick Kenrick, Archbishop of Baltimore (1797-1863)," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 41 (Sept. 1930): 230-62.

6 Peter Richard Kenrick, Francis Patrick's brother, was coadjutor bishop of St. Louis. See S. J. Miller, "Peter Richard Kenrick, Bishop and Archbishop of St. Louis, 1806-1896," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 84 (Mar.-June-Sept. 1973): 3-163. The work referred to is *The Validity of Anglican Orders Examined* (Philadelphia, 1841).

7 At the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore in May 1843, the American bishops had endorsed the proposal to create the Diocese of Pittsburgh and to appoint Michael O'Connor its first ordinary. These recommendations reached Rome on June 26. O'Connor obviously knew of them. He went to Rome in hopes of avoiding the appointment by securing permission to enter the Society of Jesus instead.

8 M. Fithian published the *Catholic Herald*, the official weekly newspaper of the Philadelphia diocese since 1833.

9 This was the family of Reverend Paul Cullen, president of the Irish College in Rome and O'Connor's superior when he taught at that institution. He later became Archbishop of Armagh, Archbishop of Dublin, and finally a cardinal. Liverpool was the terminus of the steamship line from Philadelphia to England. In 1845, Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick also visited the Cullen household in Liverpool. Tourscher, *Diary of Kenrick*, 232.

Pittsburg
Dec. 30, 1843

Dear Sir

I have drawn on you at sight for \$3300 in favor of Warwick Martin & Co. Please honour the draft. Though I heard nothing as yet of the goods which had remained after us at St. Joseph's Asylum and which I requested you to forward by Burke's line, I take it for granted that they are on their way. If there should have been any mistake will you please look after it. Do not forget to send me on the parcel from New York that came by Hamden's line. The young men can bring it: they will be coming immediately.¹⁰

Yours truly
+ M. O'Connor
Bp. of Pittsburg

Please send word to the five young men at the seminary to come on immediately. You will please pay their expenses, etc. Among the five to whom I allude I count Mr. Kleineidam.¹¹ Would you please send by the young men ten copies of the Bp's. Theology Moral and Dogmatic. All that were here are disposed of.

Feb. 26, 1846

Dear Mr. Frenaye

Mr. Choiselat¹² writes that he sent you a draft for me of 6700 f. I am ashamed to say that I have again failed to keep up an account of our dealings and I must request you to send me an account from the last furnished. I drew on you the other [day] for \$500. As all parties are so well known I suppose it is unnecessary to advise you when I draw through Warwick Martin & Co. I draw at one day

¹⁰ On his way back to America from Rome, Bishop O'Connor visited Maynooth Seminary in Ireland and recruited several of the students to join him in his new diocese where they could complete their studies and be ordained priests.

¹¹ Robert Kleineidam was a German; the circumstances under which O'Connor recruited him for Pittsburgh are unknown. O'Connor ordained him in Pittsburgh on September 1, 1844. After serving in Erie and Butler, he left the diocese and entered the Redemptorist order in Baltimore. Subsequently he labored among the German Catholics of Philadelphia, New York, and Buffalo. See, Andrew A. Lambing, *Foundation Stones of A Great Diocese*, vol. 1 (Wilkinsburg, Pa., 1914), 221; and John F. Byrne, *The Redemptorist Centenaries* (Philadelphia, 1932).

¹² J. Choiselat Gallien was treasurer of the Council of Paris of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in France. He disbursed the funds which that organization contributed annually to the Catholic bishops of the United States and other missionary lands.

after sight giving you thus four days to avoid all charges of being unprepared.

I remain dear Mr. Frenaye
Yours sincerely in Xt.
M. O'Connor
Bp. of Pittsburg

March 20, 1846

Dear Mr. Frenaye

Tomorrow either I myself or M. McCullagh¹³ or Joseph F. Deane¹⁴ for me will draw on you for \$1000. Whichever name may be attached to the draft you will please honour. If Rev. Mr. Power¹⁵ should not have started for this place before you receive this letter get him to enquire at Mr. Head's, Youngstown when passing through that village, as there may be a message for him there.¹⁶

I remain dear Mr. Frenaye
Yours
+ M. O'Connor
Bp Pittsb.

Pittsburgh
Ap. 27, 1846

Dear Mr. Frenaye

Your account is correct every way, at least I take it for granted that it is. I hope that in furnishing it you do not mean to hint that I should square it. That would be impossible now, and what is worse is that I have drawn on you for \$67. in favour of Rev. J. MacKey of

13 The Reverend Thomas McCullagh (1819-1859) was one of the seminarians whom O'Connor recruited at Maynooth. O'Connor ordained him in Pittsburgh on February 4, 1844, at the Cathedral of St. Paul, the first priest ordained in and for the new diocese. His career is described in the pamphlet by Tobias Mullen, *Reminiscences of the Reverend Thomas M'Cullagh of the Diocese of Pittsburgh* (New York, 1861).

14 The Reverend Joseph F. Deane (d. 1860) was educated in Philadelphia and ordained on August 29, 1841. He came to Pittsburgh with O'Connor when the latter became vicar-general for Western Pennsylvania. After serving at the Pittsburgh Cathedral of St. Paul until 1847, he was transferred to Clarion County. See, Lambing, *Foundation Stones*, 93, 155.

15 The Reverend James D. Powers was ordained in Philadelphia on March 3, 1845, and volunteered to go to Pittsburgh where *The Catholic Almanac* for 1847 lists him as working at "Oil Creek."

16 This was Youngstown, in Westmoreland County not far from Sportsman's Hall, now St. Vincent Archabbey, on the road between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. I have not been able to identify Mr. Head.

Ogdensburg,¹⁷ N.Y., which I hope you will honour. Please ask Bp. Kenrick what vestments etc. *must* be taken to the council.¹⁸ Say whether mitre, crozier, cope, alb, stole or any thing else must be taken, whether one mitre be enough and whether that be the white one etc. In a word give me a correct list of what must be taken on.

Yours in Christ
+ M. O'Connor
Bp Pittsb.

May 6, 1846

Dear Mr. Frenaye

Three young ladies and a young man are coming out in the New York Packet Ship "Virginian" bound for Pittsburgh. Their names are Cartrite and Lombard.¹⁹ Will you please request some of your friends in N. Y. to be on the look out for them and send them on here. If they fall short of money please advance what is absolutely necessary, but it cannot be much. They had better come on by the canal.

Yours in Xt.
+ M. O'Connor
Bp. Pittsb.

Aug. 8, 1846

Dear Mr. Frenaye

I perceive by Thursday's Herald that you have a large amount of money to be invested in "good securities."²⁰ Would you allow me to make a bid? I purchased property lately for \$9,500 on which I paid \$3000. I have reason to know that I could get \$15,000 for it now. The remaining \$6,500 remain due with bond and mortgage security. Would you have any objection to invest \$2000 of your money which would be used for paying off so much of the present mortgage which must be paid on the 31st Dec. As I have a right to

¹⁷ *The Catholic Almanac* for 1847 confirms that the Reverend J. MacKey was living at that time in Ogdensburg.

¹⁸ The Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore convened in May 1846; it was the first such council that O'Connor attended as bishop, although he had convoked a diocesan council in 1845.

¹⁹ I have not been able to identify these individuals.

²⁰ *The Catholic Herald* for Thursday, August 6, 1846, published a report by Frenaye, treasurer of St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum of Philadelphia, announcing the receipt of legacies totaling \$3,729.42, which "are to be invested in good securities, the income to go to the support of the Institution."

pay it any time I please before that day, and can pay any portion of the remainder as soon as I am ready you would find this a very desirable investment for any portion you wish to invest. I would be peculiarly anxious about the \$2000 as it would give me a great deal of latitude not to be under the necessity of devoting to this purpose any forthcoming funds. I hold this property yet in my individual name so that the security can be made most satisfactory.

Yours in Christ
+ M. O'Connor
Bp. etc.

St. Vincent's
Oct. 23, 1846

Dear Mr. Frenaye

If Mr. Cullen of Liverpool should draw on you for money on my account I hope you will honour the draft. Let me know the exact amount and I will pay you immediately.

Yours
+ M. O'Connor
Bp. Pittsburg.

Pittsburgh
Ap. 28, 1849

Dear M. Frenaye

Will you have the kindness to send me the watch by Bishop Kenrick to Baltimore at the time of the Council.²¹ This will be the best means of getting it. A letter from you after the receipt of this will *not* find me home.

Yours faithfully
M. O'Connor

Pittsb.
Dec. 18, 1849

Dear Mr. Frenaye

Rev. J. McCann²² may draw on you for £41. on my account. If

²¹ The Seventh Provincial Council of Baltimore convened in May 1849.
²² The contemporary *Catholic Almanac* lists no American priest by this name. He was probably a resident of Ireland.

so you will please honour his draft. Pay it even it be more. He will probably advise you from Dublin. Put the \$20. below in my account. I gave my brother²³ [*illegible*] draft for \$100 which he may use.

Yours

+ M. O'Connor

M. A. Frenaye, Esq.

Please pay to Rt. Rev. Dr. O'Connor Twenty dols. and charge to my acct.

\$20—

Margaret C. McCredy²⁴

Decr. 17, 49

I will send you a Draft in a few days for Fifty dols. \$50—

M. O'C.

²³ Michael O'Connor's brother, James Charles O'Connor (1823-1890), was attached to the Pittsburgh diocese at this time, following his priestly ordination in Rome in 1848. Later he worked in Philadelphia until his appointment as Vicar Apostolic of Nebraska in 1876. In 1885 he became the first Catholic bishop of Omaha. See Henry W. Casper, *History of the Church in Nebraska*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee, 1966).

²⁴ *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory for 1849* lists Bernard McCredy and Son as "merchants" at 63 South Front Street. The family enjoyed good relations with the bishop of Philadelphia. In a letter dated from Philadelphia June 9, 1848, Bishop Kenrick wrote to his brother in St. Louis: "The McCredy girls, daughters of Bernard, will start tomorrow, accompanied by their brother, for a tour of the West. I will ask you to receive them kindly." F. E. Tourscher, ed. and trans., *The Kenrick-Frenaye Correspondence* (Philadelphia, 1920), 282. Apparently in December 1849 the party was in Pittsburgh on their way home from their extended tour.