

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

October 1996



INSIDE:

**The Emergence of Catholic High Schools in
Northern Kentucky 1914 -1940**

First of a four-part series

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Publisher of award-winning
Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine

Needed: Volunteers

Computer Skills KCHS has numerous handwritten research projects which we would like to publish. We need someone who can enter this data onto computer disk so that we can transfer them to publishing form. If you have the time and no computer, the Society's computer is available.

Do you have an interest in old photos? The Society wants to collect, label, preserve, and keep old photos, which may have historical significance, in our files for possible use in the magazine or other historical display events. We need someone who has ideas on how to publicize the need for old photos; someone to collect, label and file the photos.

If you have the skill or the interest for either of these projects, please call Karl Lietzenmayer, 261-2807 or John Boh, 491-0490 (H), or 292-2124.

K.C.H.S. MEETING

DATE	October 1
TIME	7 PM
PLACE	Diocese of Covington Archives 947 Donaldson Road
PROGRAM	Dave Schroeder, Archivist

Mr. Schroeder will discuss the history of the Diocese and give a tour of the Archives.

Education and Faith
Emergence of Catholic High Schools in Northern Kentucky
(First in a four part series)
by **David K. Schroeder**

Prior to 1914, Catholic secondary education in northern Kentucky was a limited affair. Few opportunities existed for graduates of the Catholic elementary schools in northern Kentucky to continue their education. In order to meet the demands of a growing Catholic middle class and to compete with the public school system, Catholic secondary schools quickly emerged and flourished in the 1920's. In 1921, 1,522 Catholic high schools existed nationwide. Seven years later the number had reached 2,169. Northern Kentucky experienced similar growth.¹

Young women had more options than young men in obtaining a Catholic high school education in Campbell and Kenton Counties. Girls' academies, operated by the teaching orders of sisters in the area, were reaching a limited number of middle and upper class Catholics. These academies offered both classical and commercial courses to their students. However, not being affiliated with any particular parish, the academies relied on tuition as their major source of revenue. The financial condition of many Catholic families in the area resulted in children obtaining employment at a very early age. In short, secondary education was a luxury few Catholic families could afford.²

Catholic boys in northern Kentucky had even fewer options than girls to further their education. In Campbell County, the only Catholic secondary school open to boys was Immaculata Academy. Immaculata, staffed by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, catered to a small co-education student body. In 1932, the school closed due to deterioration of the buildings and mounting financial problems. That year the high school program enrolled the small number of 53 pupils.³

The only secondary school for boys in Kenton County was Saint Joseph High School, located at 12th and Greenup Streets in Covington. Saint Joseph was founded as an extension of St. Jo-

seph Elementary School. The institution was taught by the Brothers of Mary of Dayton, Ohio, who came to Covington in 1885. The school consisted of a two-year commercial course and enrolled young men from neighboring parishes.⁴

St. Joseph maintained an excellent reputation and educated a number of Covington's leading men, yet enrollment remained low throughout the school's history. Typical graduating classes in the years before 1914, ranged from 5 to 11 students.⁵

Catholic secondary education in northern Kentucky slowly began to expand in the years prior to World War I. In 1914, Holy Cross Parish in Latonia completed the erection of a new 12 classroom, \$36,000 school building. The school housed the eight grades of the elementary course and the newly established Holy Cross Commercial High School.⁶

Holy Cross Commercial High School opened its doors in the Fall of 1914 to 18 students, boys and girls. The Sisters of St. Benedict, who taught at Holy Cross Elementary School, agreed to staff the new commercial high school. Sister Mary Leoba O.S.B. was the first teacher at the newly established school.⁷

Holy Cross Commercial High School was open to all students who had obtained an eighth grade diploma. The school offered a two-year program which primarily focused on business courses. The first year curriculum included classes in religion, English, word study, bookkeeping, stenography, civil government, commercial arithmetic, penmanship and typewriting. Additional courses offered in the second year included work in commercial law.⁸

Children attending Holy Cross Commercial School received an education that would enable them to find work in the business field. The school provided an option to the young Catholic men and women of the area who wanted a job on a higher scale than daily laborer or domestic. Tuition at HCCHS was five cents a day, a rate that many Catholic families could afford.

Holy Cross Commercial High School continued to advance and grow. In the 1918-19 school year, a second Sister of St. Benedict was assigned to the school. The success of HCCHS

encouraged a number of parishes to open commercial high schools for the benefit of their members.

St. Benedict Commercial High School, like Holy Cross, was established after a new elementary school was constructed. In the spring of 1922, the growing parish of St. Benedict in the Austinburg neighborhood of Covington, began the construction of a new school building. In May 1923, the new St. Benedict School was dedicated. The \$120,000 building contained 10 classrooms, gym, office, library, and sodality club rooms. The larger school building offered the opportunity to expand the educational program of the parish.⁹

St. Benedict Commercial High School was staffed by the Sisters of St. Benedict who taught in the parish elementary school. In addition, commercial high school programs were founded at Sacred Heart and Saint Anthony parishes in Bellevue. St. Benedict, St. Anthony, and Sacred Heart offered a two-year commercial course with a similar curriculum as that of Holy Cross.

Sacred Heart Commercial High School, and the other commercial high schools in the area, served a largely female student body. For example, Sacred Heart graduated a total of 28 students in the school years of 1930 and 1931. Of these pupils, 25 were female and 3 were male. Such unbalanced figures were not uncommon.¹⁰

The Catholic commercial high schools of northern Kentucky were successful in that they provided a hands-on business education to both boys and girls who wished to continue their education. The success of these schools is evident. However, they were still not reaching anywhere near the numbers that Catholic elementary schools were reaching. Also, their inability to educate a significant number of male students continued to leave a gap in Catholic secondary education. New secondary schools that would provide classical four-year educations to both female and male students continued to be lacking.

The economic prosperity of the 1920's ushered in a new period in Catholic education in northern Kentucky. A secondary school education was no longer seen as a luxury, but an opportunity for economic advancement. Fewer northern Kentuckians

needed their young children to work and supplement the family income. In addition, numerous Catholics had achieved middle-class status. Thus, funds were typically available in many families to permit the further education of their children. These social and economic changes facilitated the growth of the Catholic school system in Campbell and Kenton Counties.

Mr. Schroeder is archivist with Thomas More College and the Diocese of Covington.

Next month in the series: The Beginning of 4-year programs

¹James Hennessey S.J., American Catholics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 237.

²In 1914, the following academies were being operated in Campbell and Kenton Counties: La Salette, St. Walburg, and Notre Dame in Covington; Villa Madonna in Crescent Springs; Immaculata and the Academy of Notre Dame of Providence in Newport.

³Kentucky Post, 30 May 1932, p. 1.

⁴Rev. Paul E. Ryan, History of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky (Covington: Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, 1954), 380-381.

⁵Kentucky Post, 26 June 1897, p. 3; 17 June 1909, p. 3; 16 June 1910, p. 2; 15 June 1911, p. 2.

⁶Silver Jubilee Souvenir: 1891-1916: Holy Cross Parish, Covington, Kentucky (Covington: 1916), 39, 41.; Jim Feldman and Bev Lonneman, Holy Cross Church 1890-1990, (Covington: Published by the Parish), p. 26.

⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

⁸Ibid., p. 41, 43.

⁹ Kentucky Post, 26 April 1922, p. 1; 4 May 1923, p. 1, 38; Ryan, Diocese of Covington, 503.

¹⁰Kentucky Post, 20 June 1930, p. 6; Kentucky Times-Star, 24 June 1931, p. 3.

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