NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

“For the bodies and souls”:
Catholic Women, Works of Mercy, and Institution Building in the Ohio River Valley, 1855-1880

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ABSTRACT

The Ohio River Valley was the site of an intense rivalry between Protestants and Catholics in the nineteenth century, as members of each group vied to extend their control through the development of churches, schools, orphanages, and other institutions. This dissertation explores the process and analyzes the effects of Catholic institution building in Cincinnati, Ohio, focusing on the 1850s to 1870s. It places Sarah Worthington King Peter at the center of the story. Peter, a lay leader, brought members of three religious orders for women to the region. Through that work and other efforts, Peter and her allies embedded and extended the influence of Catholic ideas and practices in social and civic life in the area. This project sheds new light on the contributions of elite lay women in the nineteenth-century U.S. Catholic Church, specifically highlighting Peter's role as a transatlantic intermediary who gathered and directed American and European resources and personnel, expanding Catholicism in the United States.

After converting to Catholicism in Rome, Italy, in 1855, Peter returned to southern Ohio determined to cultivate the Catholic works of mercy. She recruited members of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, and the Sisters of Mercy to found hospitals and relief houses for vulnerable populations in the region. The sisters opened convents and constructed chapels that housed relics and religious art from Europe. In this way, Peter and the sisters fostered devotional Catholicism and claimed new spaces for the Church in the Ohio Valley. A member of a wealthy and politically-active family, Peter donated her own money and property and relied on established social networks at home, while also leveraging her elite status to enter—and fundraise in—exclusive Catholic circles abroad. The institutions Peter and the sisters founded in the late 1850s served the region through the Civil War. The postwar period

ushered in new social and political dynamics and brought economic crises that challenged the Catholic sisters, forcing some to suspend institutional growth and others to direct their energy to teaching in Catholic schools. As the nineteenth century ended, leadership in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati became increasingly centralized and bureaucratized, thus marking the end of an era in which Peter and the sisters managed much of the institution building in the region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Shortly after the birth of Clay, our second child, Kellie and I received a coffee mug, inscribed with "The days are long, but the years are short." The adage, in some ways, appropriately characterizes the experiences of parenthood. If you are reading this and you have kids or have helped raise children, you likely understand the feeling of long—sometimes quite challenging—days that seem to pass at a much more rapid pace when lumped together into months and years. Mina, our first child, arrived only months before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Kellie and I experienced many long days during that first year, but now, only a few months away from Mina's fourth birthday, we often wonder how her earliest years passed so quickly.

In terms of completing a dissertation, however, the adage could not be further from the truth. The days *and* the years are long. Many have felt very long. But having the opportunity to write an acknowledgments section means the task is done; the challenge completed; the journey finished. And I have many people to thank for pushing me across the finish line.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the direction and encouragement I received from my advisor, Dr. Kate Masur. Thank you for believing in my project and providing unwavering support, particularly during challenging times when I lost family members or welcomed new ones into the world. I also want to thank the other committee members—Drs. Robert A. Orsi, Susan J. Pearson, and Luke Harlow—who provided thoughtful and reassuring feedback during the writing process and the defense.

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Before enrolling at Northwestern, I studied history as a graduate student at the University of Louisville and as an undergraduate at Murray State University. Professors at both institutions deserve recognition for their support. I can say with certainty that I would not have pursued graduate school without encouragement from Dr. James Humphreys at Murray State. Thank you for believing in me at a very early stage in my career and for remaining a good friend during the last decade. Special thanks to Dr. Thomas C. Mackey at the University of Louisville for accepting me as a graduate student and introducing me to the world of historiography, scholarly research and writing, "intellectual tennis," and the many volumes published on Abraham Lincoln. I would not have succeeded at Northwestern without your guidance and support over the last years.

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I examined collections at several libraries and archives during the research stage of this project. Thank you to the staff at the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives (Cincinnati, OH), Mercy Heritage Center (Belmont, NC), Ross County Historical Society (Chillicothe, OH), and the University of Notre Dame Archives. And a

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Above all, I want to thank my family. To my sister, Courtney Creason Wright, thank you for always being there to talk about something other than my dissertation. Our shared love for sports began before I started this project and assuredly will continue on many years after its completion. (Go Big Blue! Who Dey!) From day one, Janet Creason, my mom, has always been my biggest supporter. Thank you for many years of encouragement and unconditional love. You sacrificed so Courtney and I could have great childhoods and receive a foundation for success as adults. Without you, this would not have been possible!

If anyone has shouldered the weight of completing this dissertation as much as me it has been Kellie Money, my wife. I owe so much to you! Thank you for watching our kids on weekends so I could write. Thank you for helping me cope with the anxiety that comes with finishing a dissertation. Thank you for being proud of me. In truth, I do not have enough space to thank you for everything you have done for me and our family. We accomplished this tougher. I love you.

To close, I dedicate this dissertation to our children, Mina Louise Creason and Clay Edward Creason. Mina and Clay, I encourage you to dream big, welcome difficult challenges,

and embrace every new chapter in your life, even the adventures and moments that feel overwhelming or seem impossible. Trust me, you will be glad you did. I love you.

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INTRODUCTION

"I was so fortunate as to have one of the best places," wrote Sarah Peter, "so [I] saw and heard all perfectly. No one present could ever forget the scene."[1] Peter, an American convert to Roman Catholicism, penned the lines to her son in December 1869 while attending the First Vatican Council in Rome. Peter described the opening scene of the council, noting how the "procession of bishops, archbishops, patriarchs, and cardinals" who donned "white vestments" proceeded down the nave of St. Peter's Basilica.[2] After one hour, Pope Pius IX emerged as the final member of the procession, passing by Peter in the front gallery—a space "reserved for ambassadors and dignitaries"—to claim his spot at the "extreme end" of the "Council Hall."[3] Surrounded by almost "eight hundred ecclesiastics," the pope offered a blessing and presided over the introductory ceremonies of the council.[4]

A few days before the event, Sarah Peter had enjoyed a private gathering with the "Holy Father, who," as she explained to her son, "always received [her] with an affectionate greeting."[5] The meeting in December 1869 marked Peter's fifth visit with Pius IX, the first of which occurred in January 1852, three years before her conversion to Roman Catholicism. Over the course of seventeen years, the relationship between Sarah Peter and Pius IX evolved from an arranged conversation between a Protestant-American tourist and the head of the Roman

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[1] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 16, 1869 quoted in Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 355.

[2] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 16, 1869 quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 355.

[3] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 16, 1869 quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 354-355.

[4] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 16, 1869 quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 355.

[5] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 8, 1869 quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 354.

Catholic Church to constitute a genial bond between an ardent devotee of Catholicism and an embattled pontiff who valued Peter's support as an influential American convert and honored her contributions to Catholic institutions in the United States.

Peter's connections with Church officials in Europe extended well beyond the pope, making her venture to Rome for the First Vatican Council as much a homecoming as a political exercise in support of papal initiatives. While in Rome for several weeks during the winter of 1869-1870, Peter reunited with Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Mother Cesari of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and Monsignor Gaspard Mermillod, who served as Auxiliary Bishop of Geneva. "My blessed friend, Monsignor Mermillod," Peter informed her son, "is by consent the leading spirit of the [council], and as he is so kind as to come to see me often, I hear much of what is going on."[6] Fourteen years earlier, when Peter converted, Mermillod had guided her preparation and presided over the ceremony that marked her abjuration of Protestantism and entrance into the Roman Catholic Church.

From Rome, Peter traveled across parts of Germany and France, where she collected paintings, statues, prints, relics, and other devotional items for Catholic sisters in Cincinnati, principally the members of three orders she had helped relocate to the region in 1857 and 1858. Peter concluded her fifth trip to Europe in the fall of 1870, returning to southern Ohio, where she resumed her position as a leading advocate of Church life and Catholic charity in the region. She had alluded to those plans during her conversion experience fifteen years earlier. On a retreat in Rome in March 1855, Peter had written to her son: "When I come home [to Cincinnati], I trust,

[6] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 16, 1869 quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 355. Sarah Peter also lamented the fact that several of her closest acquaintances were absent at the First Vatican Council, including Cardinal Lodovico Altièri, Cardinal Gaetano Bedini, Cardinal Karl-August Graf von Reisach, and Monsignor George Talbot. All had either died before the opening of the council or were too ill to attend. Cardinal Reisach died shortly after the opening of the council.

by the Divine aid to enter steadily upon the prosecution of some of those good works for the bodies and souls of men . . . which it has always been in my heart to do, if I could have had adequate assistance under the care of a church which provides food & work for all her children."[7] During the final two decades of her life, from 1857 until 1877, Sarah Peter partnered with members of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, and the Sisters of Mercy to found several new Catholic institutions in the greater-Cincinnati region, which profoundly influenced social and religious life in the heart of the Ohio River Valley.

In the records of nineteenth-century U.S. Catholic history, Sarah Peter stands out as an extraordinary and influential person. Few American Catholics, especially lay women, possessed the same wide-ranging social network as Peter, which incorporated prelates, priests, and the superiors of religious orders as well as leading lay intellectuals, writers, and philanthropists, both in the United States and in Europe. Moreover, in terms of American Catholic institution building in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, Peter represents a unique example of what an ambitious, inspirited, privileged, and well-connected lay person could accomplish, especially by collaborating with members of European religious orders for women. Though not completely unrestricted—she faced challenges and limitations as a member of a hierarchical and patriarchal church—Peter organized much of the institution building and development of Catholic life in Cincinnati by identifying specific religious orders with which she wanted to partner, donating personal assets to establish convents and purchase devotional items, and lobbying municipal authorities to provide new opportunities for Catholic sisters to shape public life in the area. Peter benefitted at first from her elite social status, which provided her with the means to travel and the

[7] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

opportunity to explore new interests. Once she converted, Peter also relied on support from Church officials as well as European donors, many of whom crafted letters of introduction to extend Peter's social network among Catholics. Undoubtedly, Church leaders in Europe, including Pope Pius IX, viewed Peter as a vehicle for expanding the presence and influence of the Church in the United States.

Peter's life offers a window into a number of dynamic processes that shaped nineteenth-century U.S. history. An examination of her partnership with members of three orders of Catholic sisters sheds light on the process of Catholic institution building in the United States, revealing how Peter served as an intermediary between the sisters and Church leadership in Europe, as well as with local officials in the Ohio Valley, to negotiate the sisters' relocation to Cincinnati and support their institutions in the region. Peter's story also underscores the transatlantic nature of the development of Catholic life in southern Ohio, as Peter took responsibility for brining European people, practices, and religious objects into the Midwest.

Overall, this dissertation argues that the Catholic institutions established by Sarah Peter in partnership with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, and the Sisters of Mercy shaped social and religious life in the nineteenth-century Ohio River Valley by expanding and embedding the influence of Catholic ideas and practices in the region. Peter and the sisters understood their efforts as Catholic works of mercy, a set of theologically-based practices that emphasized personal sacrifice and communal bonds. The Catholic women at the center of this study viewed their charitable work as a critical response to social issues fostered by increased industrialization and urbanization in the region. Cincinnatians witnessed a rise in the number of poor, homeless, and orphaned, many of whom were women and children as well as immigrants. Peter and the sisters attempted to respond.

The three orders that Sarah Peter brought to Cincinnati founded institutions that addressed both the corporal and spiritual needs of individuals. The charitable institutions Catholics built, starting in the late 1850s, contributed to urban development by implementing forms of systematized relief, efforts that provided an alternative to Protestant-led initiatives. The sisters also cultivated new forms of devotional life that characterized Catholicism's transition in the Ohio Valley from being a predominantly rural religion to one characterized by large populations of Church members concentrated in cities.

This dissertation also argues that the history of Sarah Peter and the institutions with which she was associated illuminates several defining themes and contexts of nineteenth-century U.S. history. Religious conversions—either choosing a new faith, identifying with a different denomination, or leaving one church for another—occurred often in the United States. Peter's story sheds light on the appeal of Catholicism to some nineteenth-century Americans, particularly elite or upper-class white women, thereby helping to explain why thousands of Americans joined the Roman Catholic Church during the mid-1800s.[8] Peter's conversion, however, came with social consequences, negatively affecting her relationship with family and long-time acquaintances, the majority of whom were Protestants. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, anti-Catholicism remained a dominant political and cultural force in the United States, especially in the Ohio Valley. The stakes of Peter's conversion appear even more meaningful when situated within the embittered context of competing faiths.[9] Once a member of

[8] Lincoln A. Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 223-227.

[9] As historian Bridget Ford wrote: "The friction between Catholics and Protestants in the Ohio River valley is not difficult to detect in historical records, despite their foreign appearance to the modern eye: crammed newspaper columns, old broadsides, and strange little pamphlets bristle with the era's religious slanders and calumnies. Interrogations of Catholicism also seeped into fictional writing that we might consider the highest art or literature representative of the period." Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 29.

the Church, however, Peter contributed to the rivalry, becoming a Catholic apologist and critic of Protestantism, sympathies which shaped her experiences as a nurse and relief worker during the Civil War. Furthermore, during the postwar era, the efforts of Peter and the three orders of Catholic sisters evolved as a result of financial crises, both at the national level, a consequence of the Panic of 1873, and at the local level, due to the downfall of the Purcell Bank. By the turn of the twentieth century, leadership in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati had ushered in new era of centralized control and adopted a bureaucratic approach to charity, marking the end of an era that provided ambitious laypeople, including Sarah Peter, opportunities to shape Church life in the region.

The institutions founded by Peter and the sisters addressed the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged populations in the region. Once they arrived in Cincinnati in 1857, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd founded the Magdalene Asylum to provide relief for neglected women as well as those involved in prostitution. Peter also lobbied local officials to turn over management of the City Prison for Women to the Good Shepherds, which eventually occurred in March 1863. Members of the Sisters of Mercy, who established a convent in Cincinnati in 1858, were involved in similar work, opening a House of Mercy for abandoned women and girls as well as managing a laundry that provided employment to dozens of Irish immigrants. By the 1870s, however, the Mercies began transitioning into a predominantly teaching order, eventually opening academies for girls all across the Ohio Valley during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In addition, Peter collaborated with the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to establish two hospitals in the region. St. Mary Hospital opened in Cincinnati in 1859, and two years later, St. Elizabeth Hospital began providing for the sick in Covington, Kentucky, which neighbored Cincinnati on the southern side of the Ohio River. The sisters offered care to

individuals who could not afford treatment at public hospitals. During the Civil War, they staffed military hospitals in Cincinnati as well as served as nurses on battlefields as far away as northern Mississippi.

Even before converting, Sarah Peter had demonstrated an interest in civic engagement and philanthropy. After becoming Catholic, she viewed the Church as the most effective means—providing financial resources, personnel, institutional support, and, in her opinion, a more effective approach—to accomplish her goals of improving life in the Ohio Valley. From a privileged family, Peter could afford travel expenses to Europe, where she witnessed life in predominantly Catholic regions. In her letters home, she often praised the charitable contributions of Catholic sisters in communities throughout France, Italy, and Ireland, and grew determined to create similar institutions in Cincinnati. Furthermore, Peter also partnered with the sisters to expand Catholicism in the region, both in terms of strengthening ties between already baptized Catholics and the Church as well as supporting evangelical initiatives to bring Protestants into the fold. The sisters guided public prayers, organized processions on feast days, prepared altars to display relics, and sponsored lay organizations, including sodalities, all of which contributed to a more active devotional life among Catholics in region as well as carved out new spaces for the faith in the urban environment.

Historiography

This dissertation contributes to a number of historiographic fields. First, it makes an important contribution to the history of women in the United States by focusing on a largely overlooked category: prominent lay Catholic women involved in the nineteenth-century American Church. Within the field of women's history, a large body of scholarship exists on the

experiences and contributions of Catholic religious orders.[10] Much of this work has juxtaposed the experiences of Catholic sisters with the lives of non-Catholic women. During the nineteenth century, opportunities emerged for both groups to create change in their communities as women formed benevolent societies or established charitable institutions. Whether Protestant or Catholic, women involved in philanthropy actively shaped their worlds and organized to support causes important to them.[11] However, scholars have also shown that, for Catholic sisters, convent life and their vows of celibacy challenged nineteenth-century ideologies about womanhood and understandings of gender roles in the republic. Although Protestant and Catholic women alike faced limitations due to the structural inequalities of a patriarchal society, Catholic sisters navigated those challenges in unique ways as a result of their status as single women who often owned property and managed sophisticated institutions.[12]

Lay Catholic women such as Sarah Peter have not received the same attention as members of religious orders.[13] In the 1970s and 1980s, when the field of women's history took form, scholars interested in Catholic women overlooked the experiences of lay members of the

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[10] For some of the best works on the influence of Catholic sisters in U.S. history, see Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Barbara Mann Wall, *Unlikely Entrepreneurs: Catholic Sisters and the Hospital Marketplace, 1865-1925* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005); Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Anne M. Butler, *Across God's Frontiers: Catholic Sisters in the American West, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[11] Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Christopher J. Kauffman, *Ministry and Meaning: A Religious History of Catholic Health Care in the United States* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1995); Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Catherine A. Brekus, "Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1-34.

[12] Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[13] A recent dissertation has taken up the subject of prominent American laywomen and their role in the development of the late-nineteenth-century U.S. Church. Natalie C. Sargent, "Peculiar Positions of Power: Laywomen as 'Good Americans' and 'Good Catholics,' 1854-1907," PhD dissertation (University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 2019).

Church and chose to study those involved in religious life. We still know relatively little about the experiences and contributions of lay Catholic women, especially those active in the Church as leaders and organizers. As a convert and affluent member of the Church, Peter represents a unique—and relatively small—category of the nineteenth-century laity.[14] However, in the story of Catholic institution building in the Ohio Valley, she played an important role as an intermediary among leaders of the U.S. Church, the Vatican, motherhouses in Europe, and non-Catholic officials in Cincinnati. As such, Peter's life helps illuminate intra-Catholic relationships as well as highlights the role of lay Catholic women within nineteenth-century transatlantic religious networks. Furthermore, her life sheds light on the unique experiences of Catholic women who worked closely with religious orders without taking officials vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Second, as a contribution to the field of U.S. Catholic history, this dissertation argues that the institutions founded by Sarah Peter and the sisters represented an attempt by Catholics to shape society on their own terms. Catholics and their institutions played a central role in the development of the nineteenth-century Ohio River Valley, especially around the greater-Cincinnati area. Numerous books and articles have been published about the evolution of the region and the rise of Cincinnati as preeminent city in the early American West.[15] Catholics

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[14] General surveys of American Catholicism and more specialized examinations of ethnic-Catholic groups have investigated the lives of the laity. Few of these studies have treated lay members as important contributors to the institutional growth of the Church in the United States. Generally, scholars have analyzed the laity as a collective, describing their disputes with clergy over control of Church matters—trusteeism, for example—or by narrating their shared experiences with anti-Catholicism. For more information, see James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 1985); James O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008).

[15] Most recently, historian Henry C. Binford has examined how Cincinnati evolved from the turn of the nineteenth century through the 1870s, tracing the transition from what he calls "irregular urbanism"—characterized by "ad hoc governance relying heavily on private actors"—to a new era of "engineered urbanism" with "persistent governance through formal public bodies such as city councils, boards, and commissions." Binford analyzes how

appear within the pages of those works, but generally as the "other," a concern in the eyes of Protestant leaders who worried about the expansion of the Church in the region, a minority group comprised mostly of immigrants, or a target of nativist and anti-Catholic movements. In short, Catholics were a problem to the majority, a foil to the mainstream, and a besieged population—one that, at times, offered convenient public services during crises, such as a cholera outbreak, or provided educational opportunities for the children of elite white Americans.

Viewing Catholics in this light has led some scholars to interpret Catholic institution building during second half of the nineteenth century as a form of "pillorization," whereby the Church created havens for members as they turned inward and attempted to seclude themselves from mainstream Protestant society. Catholics wanted to isolate themselves, serve likeminded believers, and preserve their religious values and practices. They founded new institutions to protect immigrants, laborers, women, children, and other vulnerable classes from Protestant intrusions. In short, as the argument goes, Catholic institutions served Catholics, creating a vibrant subculture across dozens of urban landscapes.[16] However, by focusing on the efforts of Sarah Peter and the orders with which she was associated, this dissertation takes the position that instead of retreating inward, Catholic women viewed their efforts as an outward claim on public life as they worked to promote their vision of society which often contrasted with the one

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Cincinnatians, particularly the prominent white residents who held much of the political power in the city, responded to social and economic changes over the course of the nineteenth century, many of which produced—in their eyes, at least—new urban problems that needed to be addressed by local leaders and elected officials. The results led to concerted efforts at urban improvement and, eventually, the rise of city planning. See Henry C. Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning: Spatial Management in Cincinnati from the Early Republic through the Civil War* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2021). For other works on the history of nineteenth-century Cincinnati, see Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Alan I. Marcus, *Plague of Strangers: Social Groups and the Origins of City Services in Cincinnati, 1819-1870* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1991); Walter Stix Glazer, *Cincinnati in 1840: The Social and Functional Organization of an Urban Community during the Pre-Civil War Period* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

[16] Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by S. Deborah Kang (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

advanced by Protestants and other groups engaged in urban development. Peter believed in the superiority of Catholic ideas, practices, and institutions and wanted to advance those in her city and region as well as throughout the entire United States.

I see my work more in conversation with a new generation of scholars working on nineteenth-century U.S. Catholic history who seem to be moving away from a focus on Catholics as victims of anti-Catholicism or as "others" bound to an insular subculture of their own making. Recent and forthcoming studies emphasize that Catholics were actively Catholicizing the United States. Prelates, priests, members of religious orders, and active laypeople were working together not to just survive and exist in the American nation but to embed their influence and shape it on their own terms. A forthcoming publication by William S. Cossen, for example, argues that "[f]ar from being outsiders in American history, Catholics took command of public life in the early twentieth century, claiming leadership in the growing American nation. They produced their own version of American history and claimed the power to remake the nation in their own image."[17] Cossen's work focuses mostly on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, while my dissertation covers Peter's life as a Catholic from 1855 to 1877. But, in many ways, Peter viewed—and imagined—her work with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, and the Sisters of Mercy as the means to accomplish the same objectives as the Catholics in Cossen's study.

The dissertation also makes a contribution to the relatively scarce literature on Sarah Peter, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, and the Sisters of Mercy. There are two published works on Sarah Peter, both of which were written before 1940.

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[17] William S. Cossen, *Making Catholic America: Religious Nationalism in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023). Quotation drawn from the press website. For more information, see https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9781501770999/making-catholic-america/#bookTabs=1.

In 1889, twelve years after Peter's death, Margaret Rives King, Peter's daughter-in-law, produced *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*. The two-volume set narrates Peter's life from her childhood in Chillicothe, Ohio, until her death in Cincinnati. Throughout the publication, King includes transcriptions of notes and personal letters written by Peter, as she describes Peter's six trips to Europe and her charitable work in the Ohio Valley. Five decades after the publication of the memoirs, Anna Shannon McAllister wrote *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877*. Similar to King's work, *In Winter We Flourish* provides a narrative of Peter's life interspersed with transcriptions of personal letters, some of which were not included in King's two volumes. Mary Ellen Evans's *The Spirit is Mercy: The Sisters of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1858-1958* and Mary Rose Agnes Kruthaupt's "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877" narrate the history of both orders in the greater-Cincinnati region. However, until this dissertation, no work had integrated an examination of all three orders with the life of Sarah Peter, analyzing the effects of their collaborative efforts on the nineteenth-century Ohio Valley.

Finally, while historians have devoted a great deal of attention to the activities of Protestant and secular reformers, they have spent less time on the role of Catholics in the history of charity, philanthropy, and social movements in the nineteenth-century United States.[18] Most

[18] For some of the most important works on social and reform movements in nineteenth-century U.S. history, see John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly* 17 (1965): 656-681; Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review* 78 (June 1973): 531-588; Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Ian Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Tyler Anbinder,

studies of American reform have focused on either evangelical Protestants or reformers rooted in the secular, enlightenment tradition of equality and individual rights. Both approaches tend to view reform as a "home-grown" phenomenon, evolving out of either the ideas of the Revolution or theological changes that accompanied religious revivals. For example, scholars have demonstrated how the messages of the Second Great Awakening inspired some Protestants to pursue a perfect society. During the antebellum period, reformers founded aid societies and charitable organizations or joined grass roots movements to create a godly kingdom on earth.[19]

By contrast, I argue that the work of Sarah Peter and Catholic sisters in the Ohio Valley constituted an alternative form of charity rooted in Church teachings about personal sacrifice and suffering. Peter and the sisters engaged in charitable practices derived from a theological tradition of "works of mercy" dating back centuries before the founding of the United States. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are seven corporal works of mercy, or works for the bodies of people (feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; shelter the homeless; care for the sick; visit the imprisoned; and bury the dead) and seven spiritual works of mercy, or works for the souls of people (instruct the ignorant; counsel the doubtful; admonish

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Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Julie R. Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); T. Gregory Garvey, *Creating the Culture of Reform in Antebellum America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

[19] Wendy Gamber argued in an essay on Protestant reformers during the antebellum period that "History textbooks usually describe moral crusades of the early nineteenth century as 'reforms' rather than 'philanthropies.' (Interestingly, reformers themselves often characterized their work as 'benevolence' or 'philanthropic.') Yet, philanthropy was a central feature of antebellum reform . . . antebellum reformers saw themselves as missionaries who could remake their world; as with other philanthropists, helping others and transforming oneself . . . were two sides of the same coin." See Wendy Gamber, "Antebellum Reform: Salvation, Self-Control, and Social Transformation," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, edited by Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 129-153.

sinners; bear wrongs patiently; forgive offenses; comfort the afflicted; and pray for the living and dead).[20]

In *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, Fr. James F. Keenan, a Catholic theologian at Boston College, defined an act of mercy as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of others"—with an emphasis on "mercy" as a distinctive feature of Catholic morality.[21] Keenan's work traced the history of the works of mercy from the early monastic communities of Europe through the twenty-first century, showing how the seven corporal works and seven spiritual works have provided the mechanism for Catholics to impact and influence their world. Most theologians and Catholic scholars view Thomas Aquinas as the first great expounder of the concept of the works of mercy. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas described the theological virtue of charity, which fosters both internal and external effects, such as mercy and almsgiving. Aquinas's writings on charity root the works of mercy in the teachings of the Four Gospels, especially the Gospel of Matthew. "Works," in particular, represents a key term that marked Peter's transition to a more-Catholic understanding of charity or philanthropy. As Keenan noted "if there is one dimension of the Christian tradition that differentiates Protestants from Catholics, it is, precisely, "works."[22]

Peter and the sisters were aware of the theological tradition of works of mercy, and they used it to ground their actions. In a March 1855 letter to her son, Peter referred to "works for the

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[20] The corporal and spiritual works sometimes overlap, constituting acts that effect both the body and soul of the recipient as well as the benefactor. See "The Corporal Works of Mercy," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-corporal-works-of-mercy.cfm; "The Spiritual Works of Mercy," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy.cfm; James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, third edition (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017).

[21] Keenan, *The Works of Mercy*, xv.

[22] Keenan, *The Works of Mercy*, 2.

bodies and souls of men," which I see as a direct reference to the Catholic works of mercy.[23] Peter and the sisters understood their projects as acts of mercy that embodied Christ's teachings about interpersonal relationships in the world. Rather than seeking to create a perfect society by morally improving or uplifting individuals, Catholic women such as Peter and the sisters wanted to establish a permanent network of institutions that would provide for the inevitable needs of Ohio Valley residents who faced, or would face, poverty, illness, or homelessness.

I consider my attention to Catholic theology—or what I am calling theologically-based practices or theologically-inspired action—a valuable contribution to the scholarship on nineteenth-century U.S. history, particularly to our thinking about reform or social movements, the process of urbanization, and the development of public institutions. We know a lot about the influence of Protestant theology on these subjects throughout U.S. history. I hope my project sheds some light on the influence of Catholic theology on some fundamental issues in a pivotal era of the American past.

Primary Sources and Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation relies heavily on the personal papers of Sarah Peter, both published and archival. Letters she penned to her son, other family members and friends, Church officials in the United States and Europe, and the leaders and members of religious orders provide critical information about the ideas, activities, goals, and imagined possibilities of Peter and the sisters. Furthermore, the archival collections associated with the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and Sisters of Mercy, including the original annals of each order, offer important information about the daily operations of the charitable institutions and devotional activities of Catholics in the

[23] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

region. Newspapers, both the *Catholic Telegraph* and non-Catholic periodicals published in Cincinnati, provided a different perspective of the women's efforts, offering both sympathetic appraisals and concerned analyses.

The first chapter sets the stage by examining the period before Sarah Peter's conversion to Roman Catholicism. Overall, it establishes the variety of contexts that made it possible for Peter to oversee the development of new Catholic institutions in the greater-Cincinnati region. Her background as a Protestant philanthropist and her involvement in public life in Philadelphia were important experiences that helped lay the groundwork for Peter's future in Catholic charity. Furthermore, the changing social and economic contexts of the antebellum Ohio Valley created a need for the type of relief work that Peter and the sisters specialized in for underprivileged and vulnerable populations, marking an important shift in the Church's commitment to "social work" in the region.

Chapter two focuses on Peter's conversion experience, analyzing the various factors that shaped her journey toward Roman Catholicism. Travel, in particular, paved the way, as Peter discovered elements of the faith outside the United States. Furthermore, Peter admired the Church's valorization of hierarchy and its links to social conservatism as well as its attention to women, especially the devotions to and ceremonies in honor of Mary and female saints. Most importantly, though, the chapter demonstrates how Peter's conversion involved more than just the fate of her soul or her quest for truth. She remade her life through conversion. Through her commitment to the Catholic works of mercy, Peter became a leading advocate of the Church in the United States and a prominent Catholic philanthropist in the Ohio Valley.

The third chapter examines how Peter and the sisters translated the Catholic vision of spiritual works of mercy into practice by sanctifying parts of the greater-Cincinnati region. The

women established convents, erected altars to display relics, coordinated processions on feast days, organized public devotions, such as praying the rosary, and sponsored pious associations for laywomen (known as sodalities), all of which expanded the presence of Catholicism in the public by laying claim to new spaces as well as enriching the devotional life of the laity in the region. Peter played a central role in the process by purchasing or receiving many of the objects central to sanctification—statues, prints, rosaries, and relics—during her trips to Europe. The exportation of relics, in particular, provided American Catholics with opportunities to pray in the presence of saints, creating links between the living and the dead as well as strengthening ties between members of the U.S. Church and the Vatican in Rome.

Chapter four analyzes how Peter and the sisters responded to the corporal needs of immigrant women and "fallen women," arguing that Catholic approaches to relief shaped city life, urban development, and reform efforts in the greater-Cincinnati region. In 1857, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd opened a Magdalene Asylum, and, a year later, the Sisters of Mercy founded a House of Mercy. Both institutions served women and girls who faced abandonment, homelessness, and poverty as well as those involved in prostitution, populations that many white middle- and upper-class Cincinnatians considered "dangerous classes." The Good Shepherds taught needlework skills to the Magdalens and penitents, making the asylum a self-sustaining institution, and the Mercies managed a laundry and a domestic servant placement program, providing employment for hundreds of Irish women and girls. Peter promoted their efforts as valuable contributions to addressing social problems in the city, eventually petitioning the municipal government to place the Good Shepherds in charge of the City Prison for Women in Cincinnati. In examining this episode and others, the chapter presents Peter's ideas as an

alternative to many of the leading voices associated with nineteenth-century urban reform initiatives.

The fifth chapter covers the Civil War, analyzing how the charitable institutions established by Peter and the sisters during the late-antebellum period intersected with new challenges presented by the war. As Cincinnati transitioned into an important training and transport center for the federal government, the Catholic women extended their works of mercy to new populations in need, including sick and wounded federal soldiers as well as Confederate prisoners of war. Within these new homefront and battlefield contexts, Peter and the sisters crossed paths with representatives of the U.S. Sanitary Commission and officers in the U.S. Army. Peter joined sisters to serve on hospital boats and battlefields hundreds of miles away from southern Ohio. At times, the groups collaborated to expand medical care to places as far away as northwest Mississippi. In other wartime exchanges, however, competing interests, perspectives, and commitments created rivalries and moments of tension, most notably regarding the treatment of POWs. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the limits of Peter's vision of wartime relief. Southern clergy urged Catholic leaders in Cincinnati to attend to the needs of African Americans, but records do not indicate that Peter and her allies offered aid to either freedpeople or displaced free African Americans.

Chapter six examines the postwar era, analyzing how financial crises and the late-nineteenth-century bureaucratic turn shaped the efforts and interests of Peter and the three orders associated with her. The chapter begins with a section on the impact of postwar financial crises, which forced the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to suspend institutional development and opened the door for the Sisters of Mercy to transition into a teaching order. The next section addresses what I see as a missed opportunity or a failed initiative by the leadership of the

Archdiocese of Cincinnati to support relief efforts among African Americans, both in the South and in the Ohio Valley. The limited response from Archbishop John B. Purcell as well as the lack of interest from Peter and the sisters speaks to the Church's problematic legacy of racism. Instead of expanding her charitable work at home, after the war, Peter demonstrated a stronger commitment to supporting the political interests of Pope Pius IX, both in the United States and abroad. She attended the First Vatican Council as an important American dignitary, placing her support in favor of the dogma of papal infallibility. Through those efforts and more, Peter promoted a papal-centric version of American Catholicism, tying the interests of the U.S. Church with leadership in Rome. The final section considers the consequences of the downfall of the Purcell Bank, which ushered in a new period of increased centralization and bureaucratization in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, closing the door on the era that made much of what Sarah Peter accomplished in partnership with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, and Sisters of Mercy possible.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Nexus of Sarah Peter's Charities in Cincinnati: Peter's Early Life, the Development of the Ohio River Valley, and the Roots of Urban Catholicism in the Region, 1800-1855

In the spring of 1853, Sarah Peter returned to Cincinnati. She had departed the city in 1836 following the death of her first husband, Edward King, and had lived the previous seventeen years in parts of New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Much had changed in her life over the course of nearly two decades. She grieved the death of two spouses and a son, helped establish the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, and traveled outside the United States for the first time to tour Europe and parts of the Middle East. At the age of fifty-three, having recently been widowed for a second time, Peter chose to settle in Cincinnati and establish an art academy. She expected to spend the rest of her life in the heart of the Ohio Valley, dedicating her time to the advancement of women interested in the fine arts.[1]

When Peter moved into her new estate at the corner of Third and Lytle Streets, she discovered a different Cincinnati—a more modern metropolitan center—compared to the developing "frontier" city that she had left in 1836. In less than two decades, the population had more than doubled to include over 115,000 residents, a variety of new corporations and manufacturers had begun operation in the region, new residential and commercial constructions

[1] During the summer of 1857, while traveling in Europe to raise money and recruit religious orders to serve in southern Ohio, Sarah Peter wrote the following to Margaret King, her daughter-in-law: "I shall work hard this summer to get my charities in motion, and then I think I shall feel at liberty to retire, while they do my work, as a capitalist retires on his revenues."[1] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Margaret Rives King, June 18, 1857 quoted in Margaret Rives King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 369. In many ways, the letter underscores the nature of Sarah Peter's role in the state of Catholic charity and religious life in the Ohio Valley from the late 1850s until her death in 1877. After converting to Roman Catholicism in 1855, Peter recognized an opportunity for herself within the structures of the Church to create meaningful change in her community by partnering with various orders of Catholic sisters to found institutions in the greater-Cincinnati region. Despite being a lay member of an international church, Peter viewed much of her collaborative efforts with the sisters as a means of achieving her own designs for social and religious life in the region and beyond.

had transformed the skyline, the city's boundaries had continued to extend with bustling populations, and the recent addition of railroads, turnpikes, and advanced river transportation connected the city to markets all across the nation. Peter selected Cincinnati as her new home, in part, because it had "come of age" during her absence, providing the same luxuries for a refined lifestyle that she had enjoyed in Philadelphia, which served as her home from 1840 to 1851. She also wanted to live in the same city as her only remaining child, Rufus King, who aspired to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and become an Ohio politician. As the center of the burgeoning Ohio Valley, Cincinnati afforded Sarah Peter and her son the opportunities to carry on an upper-class lifestyle as well as the possibilities of expanding their political and social influence in new ways.[2]

Sarah Peter first aspired to make a meaningful contribution to the city by helping found the Ladies' Academy of Fine Arts. A year after returning to Cincinnati, she partnered with a group of women to "aid in the cultivation of public taste—to afford encouragement to artists, and to furnish a source of intellectual recreation and enjoyment to the people by the establishment of Galleries."[3] Peter planned to use her new mansion as the primary site of the academy, setting up exhibits and workplaces throughout her home. However, the academy required artwork—or at least copies of renowned paintings and sculptures—to serve as models for students and to generate discussion among visitors. With these items largely unavailable in the Ohio Valley,

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[2] For a recent examination of how Cincinnati developed from the turn of the nineteenth century through the 1870s, see Henry C. Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning: Spatial Management in Cincinnati from the Early Republic through the Civil War* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2021). Binford analyzes how Cincinnatians, particularly the prominent white residents who held much of the political power in the city, responded to social and economic changes over the course of the nineteenth century, many of which produced—in their eyes, at least—new urban problems that needed to be addressed by local leaders and elected officials. The results led to concerted efforts at urban improvement and, eventually, the rise of city planning.

[3] Constitution of the Ladies' Academy of Fine Arts quoted in Sister M. Rose Agnes Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," MA thesis, University of Dayton, 1965, 24.

Peter volunteered to locate and purchase them from dealers in Europe. Her plans changed while she was abroad. Although she purchased items for use in the academy, Peter shifted her attention away from the academy to a new mission. While in Italy in 1855, she converted to Roman Catholicism and returned to Cincinnati devoted to charitable work in the region. Ultimately, over the course of the next two decades, Peter partnered with three orders of Catholic sisters—Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Mercy, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis—to found Catholic institutions and cultivate religious life in the central Ohio Valley. Guided by her commitments to the Catholic works of mercy, Peter helped make the Church more dynamic, altering social and religious life during a formidable era in the region. Overall, Peter and the sisters with whom she collaborated shifted the Church's focus, broadening out from education to include relief, especially for the vulnerable populations most affected by increased industrialization and urbanization in the region.

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This chapter analyzes the various dynamics—individual, regional, and institutional—that made it possible for Sarah Peter to begin developing a network of charitable institutions in the Ohio Valley in 1857. First, the history of Peter's family and her experiences as an adolescent and young adult provide important insights into her decision making after 1853, when she returned to Cincinnati. Second, an examination of the early transformation of the Ohio Valley from a "frontier" to an urban center in the American West addresses both the modernization process—or what many nineteenth-century Americans would have branded "progress"—and the social consequences of urbanization and industrialization. A significant increase in the poor, homeless, and orphaned populations in the greater-Cincinnati area, many of whom were women and children, convinced Peter of the need for charity and gave purpose to the work of three

religious orders that she helped relocate to Cincinnati. Third, a discussion of the early history of the Church in the Ohio Valley situates Peter's efforts within a larger history of Catholicism in the region. Catholic sisters operated schools and established institutions in the area before Peter joined the Church. Cincinnati also had a vibrant tradition of lay Catholic engagement in religious activities that dated to the period of the first Euro-American Catholics who settled in Ohio. Peter's efforts both built on the foundation of religious life that existed in the Cincinnati area before her conversion as well as represented a new direction in Catholic charity that focused primarily on social relief rather than education.

By weaving together these three stories, this chapter explains the foundation for Catholic charity and religious life in the region during the Civil War and postwar eras. This chapter underscores the role of the Worthington, King, and Peter families in the development of the Ohio Valley. The first generation of Worthingtons established Euro-American control of the West, stripping Native Americans of land in central Kentucky and southern Ohio. Thomas Worthington, Sarah's father, also helped establish trade, transportation, and communication networks that would lead to commercial development in the region. The Worthingtons and Kings served in state and federal governments as representatives and senators from Ohio, promoting the political and economic interests of region, and William Peter—Sarah's second husband—was a British diplomat stationed in Philadelphia. Overall, Sarah Peter belonged to three elite Protestant families deeply invested in the development of the Ohio Valley, particularly for white Euro-Americans. She established her own legacy by converting to Catholicism in 1855 and committing her life to the Catholic works of mercy.

Peter came of age in an era of urbanization. Over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, both the region and Catholicism in the area urbanized. By 1850, most

Catholics in the Ohio Valley lived in three cities: Louisville, Covington, and Cincinnati. Although the rural areas of central Kentucky had been the center of the Church during the early antebellum period, by midcentury, religion had largely moved into the cities. As a result, Peter and the sisters who worked with her operated at the forefront of integrating Catholicism into a modern urban landscape. They reshaped the environment of the greater-Cincinnati region through the charitable institutions they established and through the devotional life they cultivated among the laity, which took the form of public celebrations of feast days, directing lay women's organizations called sodalities, and sacralizing spaces with relics and the Blessed Sacrament.

Sarah Peter spearheaded the Church's decision to address the social problems that developed in the area, broadening the focus from education and the evangelization of Native American to include organized charity in cities. The religious orders that arrived in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky during the 1820s through the 1840s established parish schools and academies that served both Church members and Protestants. Catholics provided assistance to Catholic and non-Catholic Cincinnatians during cholera epidemics in the 1830s, and established orphanages for those who lost parents during these crises, but until the late 1850s, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati lacked an organized relief program to address the needs of immigrants, the poor, or less fortunate. Sarah Peter and the sisters who worked alongside her changed that. Their efforts represented the Church's most concerted effort to address the needs of those negatively affected by urbanization and industrialization. Peter identified European religious orders that specialized in the works of mercy most closely associated with responding to those issues. She witnessed their influence in cities throughout France, Ireland, and Germany, and determined to export those practices to the Ohio Valley. Peter and the Sisters of the Good Shepherds, Sisters of Mercy, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis offered a Catholic vision of

charity and urban improvement in the region. At times, the Catholic initiatives intersected, and even complemented, the efforts of non-Catholics. Other times, however, Peter and the sisters openly competed with Protestant organizations, often times claiming to offer superior resolutions to social issues. The partnership between Sarah Peter and the three orders of sisters greatly influenced life in the greater-Cincinnati region by advancing the influence of the Church and promoting Catholic ideas and practices, some of which continue to shape the region during the twenty-first century.

The Worthington Family and Sarah Peter's Early Life (1800-1830)

On May 10, 1800, Eleanor and Thomas Worthington announced the birth of their second daughter, Sarah Ann. Originally from Virginia, the Worthingtons had moved west in 1797 for economic opportunities in the trans-Appalachian region, specifically targeting the area north of the Ohio River where slavery had been outlawed by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. They settled in Chillicothe, a town on the Scioto River in present-day south-central Ohio and the first state capital. In April 1801, eleven months after Sarah was born, Thomas opened a federal land office in Chillicothe and soon began selling plots of the Ohio territory. Ultimately, his role as a register and surveyor-general of federal lands in the Old Northwest cemented his family's wealth and status in the region and helped propel his political career in Ohio.[4] Over the course of her life, Sarah Peter leveraged the privileges provided by her family, namely the access to wealth and education, to establish herself among the most prominent networks in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Europe, and beyond.

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[4] Gautham Rao, "Thomas Worthington and the Great Transformation: Land Markets and Federal Power in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1805," *Ohio Valley History* 3 (winter 2003): 21-34; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 7-9; Margaret Rives King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 7-8.

Within a few years after settling in Chillicothe, Thomas Worthington emerged as a key figure in the region's expanding economy as well as the movement for Ohio statehood. Early on, he generated most of his wealth through land speculation, owning over 18,000 acres at one point in his career. With the profits gained from surveying, holding auctions, and purchasing military land grants, he built Adena, the Worthington family estate in Chillicothe. The family converted the area around their mansion into farmland, growing a variety of crops and raising livestock. While Thomas was away on political trips to Washington or business ventures in the region, Eleanor managed the farm from their home office.[5] The Worthingtons also owned several mills—gristmills, sawmills, and woolen mills—as well as operated a distillery and slaughterhouse. Goods produced from these enterprises were shipped down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to markets in New Orleans. Furthermore, as a supplement to his many agricultural businesses, Thomas entered the banking industry, serving as a major stockholder for the state bank headquartered in Chillicothe. A few years later, he joined the board of the privately owned Bank of Chillicothe, and eventually became a director of a branch of the Bank of the United States.[6]

Thomas's rise in Ohio politics coincided with the development of his business and financial interests. In 1799, he joined the Ohio territorial legislature and allied with the faction

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[5] Born on September 22, 1777, Eleanor was the daughter of Josiah Swearingen and Phoebe Strode Swearingen, a wealthy couple who lived near present-day Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Both of Eleanor's parents died before her tenth birthday. As a result, she lived with her aunt, who provided Eleanor with a variety of educational opportunities. She learned reading, writing, and math as well as the "social graces of music, dancing, and needlework." Furthermore, she acquired knowledge of farming and raising livestock. As one biographical sketch noted, Eleanor, during the time she lived with her aunt, developed the "fundamental skills needed to manage an estate," which she put to use later in life managing the Adena Mansion and Worthington farm. Eleanor married Thomas Worthington on December 13, 1796, and the couple moved to Chillicothe, Ohio. She died at the Adena Mansion on December 24, 1848. Adena Mansion & Gardens, "Eleanor Swearingen Worthington," https://adenamansion.com/history-worthington1.htm

[6] Rao, "Thomas Worthington and the Great Transformation," 21-34; Adena Mansion & Gardens, "Thomas Worthington (1773-1827)," http://www.adenamansion.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Thomas-Worthington.pdf.

of fellow Democratic-Republicans who supported statehood. He soon became one of the foremost political enemies of Arthur St. Clair, a Federalist who served as governor of the Northwest Territory and opposed Ohio entering the republic. St. Clair and other Federalists wanted the Ohio Territory to be divided into two states, believing that the addition of more than one new state would secure Federalist control over the U.S. government. However, in 1802, members of the U.S. Congress, with a Democratic-Republican majority, passed the Enabling Act of 1802, setting in motion Ohio statehood. Worthington's role in lobbying for statehood earned him a spot on the Ohio Constitutional Convention in 1802. A year later, he began a four-year term as one of state's first United States senators. Following a brief tenure in the Ohio House of Representatives, Worthington rejoined the U.S. Senate in 1811, only to resign during his final year to become the sixth Governor of Ohio.[7] In describing his influence as governor, a Worthington family historian wrote that Thomas "recommended free education, state control of banking, pauper welfare, reformation of criminals, regulation of the liquor business, stimulation of home manufacturers, and construction of internal improvements."[8] Worthington's ambitious platform centered on social reforms and economic growth. His administration succeeded in advancing public education in Ohio and laid the groundwork for future accomplishments in the state, specifically the development of transportation and trade infrastructure.

Sarah Peter enjoyed the advantages that her family's wealth and political status provided for her as a child and young adult. Early on, the Worthingtons demonstrated a commitment to

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[7] Adena Mansion & Gardens, "Thomas Worthington (1773-1827)," http://www.adenamansion.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Thomas-Worthington.pdf; Ohio History Central, "Arthur St. Clair," https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Arthur_St._Clair#:~:text=Clair-,Arthur%20St.,St.; Kristopher Maulden, *The Federalist Frontier: Settler Politics in the Old Northwest, 1783-1840* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019), 89-150.

[8] Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 9.

education, sending Sarah to boarding schools in neighboring Kentucky. She first attended Beck's Boarding School in Lexington but ultimately settled in at Keats's Boarding School near Frankfort. Elite white women ran both schools, offering curricula designed for affluent families who wanted to cultivate the characteristics of refined womanhood among their female youth. Louise Keats, in particular, made a lasting impression on Peter. According to Margaret King—Sarah's daughter-in-law and editor of her memoirs—Peter often referred to the "early teaching and principles instilled by her revered teacher" from Kentucky.[9] After almost two years in the Bluegrass state, Sarah returned to Chillicothe to help care for her sick mother. During that time, Keats closed her boarding school, so Thomas moved Sarah to Baltimore, Maryland, to complete her education. As a U.S. senator, Thomas spent a significant portion of the year in Washington, D.C., putting him in close proximity to Sarah and to Mary, his oldest daughter, who also attended Haywards's Academy for Young Females in Baltimore.[10]

Sarah Peter's educational experiences, as well as the effects of her schooling, fit the pattern established by historian Mary Kelley, who examined the growth of academies for women during the early republic and antebellum eras. Following the American Revolution, young white women from elite families, similar to Sarah Peter, obtained new opportunities to attend academies or seminaries that offered rigorous curricula in line with many of the leading institutions for male students. Like other elite parents, the Worthingtons invested in their daughters' education as part of their commitment to an educated citizenry for the new republic. The young women continued to nurture their minds after graduating, joining book clubs and other intellectual circles. Later in life, Peter joined the Semicolon Club, a group of Cincinnatians

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[9] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 8.

[10] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 8-9; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 12.

who held regular meetings and exchanged essays for discussion. Kelley contended that education served as a springboard for women to enter civil society, where they influenced their communities as writers or reformers. Sarah Peter, in fact, joined benevolent groups everywhere she lived, often serving in leadership roles for those organized charities.[11]

Religion also played an important role in Sarah Peter's upbringing. While living in Virginia, Thomas and Eleanor were members of the Episcopal Church. However, without a parish established in the Ohio territory, they joined Methodist and Presbyterian churches during the era of the Second Great Awakening. Biographical sketches of family members suggest that prayer remained an important part of daily life in the Worthington household. Following a visit to Adena, Julius Field, minister of the Methodist Church in Ross County, Ohio, noted that Thomas often read his Bible and hymnbook.[12] Peter's time at Keats's Boarding School further nurtured her religious instruction. One historian described Keats as a "fervent Anglican" who "lamented the loss of its beautiful ritual."[13] Keats's may have connected Peter with the religious practices her parents had experienced during their early life in Virginia, particularly the Anglican liturgy. As her parents adopted the more popular frontier religions associated with evangelicalism, Sarah Peter was exposed to a high church tradition during the formative years of her life. Indeed, Peter's daughter-in-law believed that her experiences at Keats Boarding School "plant[ed] in the heart of the young child that love for a church of order and liturgical system,

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[11] Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1-15.

[12] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 25-26; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 10.

[13] Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 11.

which became more and more developed with her soul's growth," ultimately leading her to the Roman Catholic Church in adulthood.[14]

Sarah Peter returned to Ohio after completing her education at Hayward's Female Academy in Baltimore.[15] Around the same time that she headed west, Edward King, the son of New York senator Rufus King, finished his degree at Leitchfield Law School in Connecticut. Edward believed that he might find an opportunity to establish his career as an attorney in Ohio. Thomas Worthington and Rufus King had become acquainted during their time together in the U.S. Senate, so Edward left for Chillicothe with a letter of introduction addressed to Thomas Worthington. Within a short time after his arrival, Edward began a courtship with Sarah. The couple married on May 15, 1816, only days after the bride's sixteenth birthday. A year later, Sarah gave birth to Rufus King. The couple would welcome four more children to the family: Thomas (1820-1851), Mary (1821-1822), Edward (June-September 1823), and James (1828-1832). While she spent most of her time at home, Edward practiced law and served as Thomas Worthington's gubernatorial secretary before going on to a career as a state politician. The family eventually moved to Columbus, site of the Ohio state capital after 1816. Before they left Chillicothe, however, the Kings helped found St. Paul's Church, the first Episcopal parish established west of the Allegheny Mountains. Edward served as the church's first secretary and Sarah organized the female members of the parish to serve the local community.[16]

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[14] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 25-26.

[15] Sarah Peter's memoirs do not include much about her time in Baltimore. However, considering that the city included a large Catholic population and several Catholic institutions, Sarah Peter likely encountered Catholicism in a variety of ways. Indeed, her experiences in Baltimore might have set in motion an interest in Catholicism that developed more fully during her adult life in Europe.

[16] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 9-27; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 13-15.

Sarah Peter's Initial Stay in Cincinnati and Life in Philadelphia (1830-1850)

Sarah and Edward King, along with their two children, moved to Cincinnati in 1831 and soon gained social prominence, as Sarah became active in social and civic life. The Kings left Chillicothe so Edward could expand and develop his law practice. He quickly gained recognition in the city's legal circles, eventually joining a group of attorneys and scholars to found the Cincinnati Law School in 1835. The well-connected couple befriended several of the most distinguished families in the city. Sarah entertained these guests at parties in their mansion, where she often played music and welcomed critical discussions about literature and the visual arts.[17] She joined an exclusive network of Cincinnatians who held "Semicolon parties," where books and paintings were topics of regular conversation. Members took turns hosting meetings, giving them an opportunity to display their collections.[18]

As a member of the Semicolon group, Sarah Peter developed a reputation as an intelligent and active resident committed to advancing the arts in the region. For example, Edward Deering Mansfield, a member of the Semicolon Club, noted that she "'read a great deal, had a strong memory, and was remarkable for the fullness of her information. She wrote several essays for our circle, and was a most instructive member.'"[19] Mansfield published his memoirs in 1879, two years after Sarah Peter died. In an effort to highlight her many contributions in the region, he wrote that Peter had "become more widely known than her husband, for her great and active benevolence, and as the founder of institutions, and a leader in society."[20] "The activity,

[17] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 36.
[18] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 38-39.
[19] Edward Deering Mansfield quoted in Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 17; Edward Deering Mansfield, *Personal Memories: Social, Political, and Literary with Sketches of Many Noted People, 1803-1843* (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Company, 1879), 264.
[20] Mansfield, *Personal Memories*, 264.

energy, and benevolence of [Peter's] mind," Mansfield continued, "accomplished in the next forty years"—from time Mansfield first met Sarah in the late 1830s until her death in 1877—"probably more of real work for the benefit of society, than any one person, and that work has made her widely known both at home and abroad."[21]

Sarah Peter's initial stay in Cincinnati marked her first experiences with largescale organized philanthropy, specifically efforts to provide social relief for the suffering and less fortunate members of her community. In 1832, two major tragedies struck Cincinnati. In late February, the city flooded, and months later, a cholera outbreak swept through the region. Peter joined relief efforts during both crises. In a letter to her mother, she described her experiences during the flood, noting that "I was for a week much engaged . . . in making up and distributing clothing & food for the sick."[22] The dire effects of the flood were exacerbated when cholera began to spread. Death totals increased on a daily basis. One physician estimated that the city lost four percent of its total population due to the disease during the final months of 1832. The number of orphaned children reached an unprecedented level, creating the need for new institutions to house those who lost parents during the flood and cholera epidemic.[23] Sarah Peter's contributions to relief efforts during the early 1830s fit the pattern of elite stewardship during an era of irregular urbanism described by historian Henry C. Binford. As Binford explained, "[i]n the first half of the nineteenth century, governance [in Cincinnati] included a great deal of informal authority exercised by voluntary organizations and prominent individuals who considered themselves 'stewards' of the community . . . In times of crisis, men and women

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[21] Mansfield, *Personal Memories*, 264.

[22] Sarah Worthington King quoted in Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 16.

[23] Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 45-46.

of high social standing often exercised functions of relief or policing without waiting for government sanction."[24] Later in life, through her joint efforts with three orders of Catholic sisters, Peter continued to promote private institutions in matters of charity and relief, even when the majority of her contemporaries were turning to public entities to address urban problems.[25]

Sarah Peter took special interest in caring for orphans.[26] In January 1833, she partnered with five prominent women to open the Cincinnati Protestant Orphan Asylum. City officials awarded the founders approximately ten acres of land in the west end to construct a large residence with numerous rooms. Peter served on the board of the Asylum from 1833 until 1836, when she left Cincinnati for Pennsylvania. During those years, she helped manage the Asylum and participated in other charitable work sponsored by her church. According to her memoirs, Peter and other members of the Episcopal Church in Cincinnati spent considerable time "looking after the poor" and raising money for other philanthropic ventures.[27]

Sarah Peter's first five years in Cincinnati opened her eyes to the need and impact of charitable groups, especially in times of widespread crises. Her activities and experiences demonstrate that, from an early stage in her life, she valued philanthropy and drew connections between her work in the community and her religious life. Moreover, Sarah Peter recognized that charitable organizations provided her with opportunities to assume leadership positions and secure a sense of autonomy as well as influence in public life. She continued to join church-

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[24] Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning*, 11-12.

[25] In his work, Binford traces the transition from what he calls "irregular urbanism"—characterized by "ad hoc governance relying heavily on private actors"—to a new era of "engineered urbanism" with "persistent governance through formal public bodies such as city councils, boards, and commissions." See Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning*, 11.

[26] In her thesis about Sarah and the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, Kruthaupt speculated that the death of five-year-old James, the Kings' fourth son, made Sarah especially committed to providing aid for orphaned children.

[27] Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 16-17; King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 40-41.

sponsored organizations as a way to position herself as an influential philanthropist in Philadelphia and during her second stay in Cincinnati. However, as part of her transition to Catholicism, she came to believe that the Church provided women with more opportunities for active leadership roles, as compared to Protestant churches, fueling her desire to help found a Catholic charity mission in the Ohio Valley after 1855.[28]

Tragedy marked the end of Sarah Peter's initial stay in Cincinnati. On February 6, 1836, after almost a year of suffering with poor health, Edward King died. The couple's two surviving sons, Rufus and Thomas, lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they attended school. About six months after Edward's death, Sarah moved to Massachusetts to supervise her sons' education, spending the next four years in the greater-Boston area concentrating on "her own self-culture" and "intellectual growth."[29] Obtaining proficiency in modern languages, specifically French, German, and Italian, was her primary focus. In that moment Sarah Peter's studies might have seemed the activities of a well-to-do woman of leisure, but her language skills were critical during her life as a Catholic. She used them during trips to Europe, where she petitioned Vatican officials and other Church leaders as well as during her charitable efforts in the Ohio Valley, working alongside Catholic sisters of German and French backgrounds. Sarah lived in Cambridge until 1840. In addition to her scholarly pursuits, she participated in religious life at Christ Church, the Episcopal parish in the city. According to her memoirs, the members

[28] A number of scholars have examined the imagined, assumed, and real opportunities presented to women—especially those who joined religious orders—within the nineteenth-century Church. For more information see, Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Sarah A. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of the French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Hannah O'Daniel, "Southern Veils: The Sisters of Loretto in Early National Kentucky," MA thesis, University of Louisville, 2017. Clark's work, in particular, demonstrates how Catholic sisters found ways to assert control over their lives despite the challenges they faced within the structures of a patriarchal Church. The sisters autonomously managed their institutions and successfully lobbied for their interests in the public sector.

[29] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 53.

of Christ Church community proved far less committed to philanthropic outreach compared to her parish in Cincinnati. As Margaret King wrote, "[i]n no part of Mrs. King's [Sarah's] life do we find her less preoccupied by outward charitable work" than during her stay in Massachusetts.[30] The exact reason remains unclear. Perhaps she continued to grieve the loss of Edward, wanted to focus on her children's education, or felt less connected to the community in Cambridge. Regardless, her break from charitable endeavors was short lived. Once she moved to Philadelphia, Sarah Peter returned to her active lifestyle.

In 1840, following the completion of Thomas's degree, a family friend invited Sarah and her son to join them in Philadelphia. She immediately fell in love with the city, particularly "the cleanliness, the order, the cultivation, and high tone of everything in Philadelphia."[31] Sarah resided with a prominent woman connected to the upper-class circles of social life in Philadelphia, who introduced her to William Peter, a British consul living in the city.[32] A widower himself, William had come to the United States to start a new life. He and Sarah shared similar interests in literature and the arts, especially poetry. Their relationship began as a companionship centered on mutual interests but developed into a marriage. In October 1844, the couple exchanged vows in St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The Peters enjoyed a lifestyle similar to the one Sarah had with her first husband in Cincinnati. They lived in a luxurious home with fine furniture, enjoyed the company of the most well-known and influential Philadelphians, and

[30] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 54.
[31] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 61.
[32] Unfortunately, the woman's name was not included in Peter's memoirs. She is referred to as a "very refined lady." King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 63.

participated in leisure activities such as music, reading, and conversation clubs. The couple also remained active members of the Episcopal parish where they were married.[33]

While in Philadelphia, Sarah Peter renewed her dedication to philanthropy. She became especially focused on providing assistance to women in need, a charitable interest that carried forward during her years as a Catholic. Peter joined a group of philanthropists—most of whom were members of the Society of Friends—to found the Rosine House of Industry (or Rosine House of Magdalens), an "asylum for degraded women."[34] She served as the first president of the association that managed the Rosine House.[35] Peter also helped found the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. The art institute began in her home, where she "appropriated a room and engaged a teacher of drawing."[36] As the school grew with additional students, Peter required larger accommodations, so, in 1850, she moved it out of her home and into the Franklin Institute. The primary intention of the school was to help women find practical employment. According to F. Graeme Chalmers, a historian of design schools in the United States, Peter's experiences with the Rosine House likely inspired her vision for the Philadelphia School of Design. Peter believed poor women could gain middle-class status if given opportunities for respectable employment.[37] In addition to her role with the Rosine House and the School of Design, Peter also helped found an "association for the protection and advancement of tailoresses," but according to her memoirs, "its history is lost."[38] Sarah Peter's efforts in

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[33] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 61-69; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 18-21.

[34] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 69.

[35] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 69-70; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 21; F. Graeme Chalmers, "The Early History of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women," *Journal of Design History* 9 (1996): 239-240.

[36] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 70.

[37] Chalmers, "The Early History of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women," 240.

[38] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 71.

Philadelphia fit the model of elite Protestant women who sought to restore the respectability of poor, immigrant, or working-class women, many of whom were involved in prostitution or unemployed. Peter and other prominent Philadelphians believed that "degraded women" or "wayward girls" could achieve respectability by learning skills and obtaining employment, paving the way for self-sufficiency.[39]

Sarah Peter continued her charitable work in Philadelphia until 1851, the year her son Thomas died. Following that tragedy, Peter felt responsible for the care of her widowed daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. She initially invited them to live in her residence but then decided that it would be best for the family to cope in a different setting, arranging for the family to tour Europe. Though she planned the voyage to provide relief for her family, Peter's experiences on that trip played a central role in her journey toward Catholicism.[40] She returned to Philadelphia in the fall of 1852. Only months after her arrival, tragedy struck the family once again. Her husband, William Peter, died on February 2, 1853, returning Sarah to a state of grief. As a result, she decided to leave Philadelphia and return to Cincinnati, home of her only remaining son, Rufus King. In the time she had been away, Sarah Peter had gained important experiences with charitable work—particularly through the management of the Rosine House and the founding of Philadelphia School of Design—and she had demonstrated a genuine interest in Catholicism. These two aspects of her life would merge in a profound way once she resettled in Cincinnati.

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[39] For more on the relationship between women of different classes in nineteenth-century U.S. cities, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

[40] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 110-116, 135, 145-148, 164-168, 173-177; Kruthaupt, "Sarah Worthington King Peter's Influence on the Foundation and Growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in America, 1858-1877," 23.

Origins of Catholicism in the Ohio Valley and the Development of the Urban Church

Over the course of the antebellum period, immigration transformed the demographic and religious composition of the Ohio Valley. When Sarah Peter returned to Cincinnati in 1853, she would have noticed a significant increase in the German and Irish populations of city. Many of these newcomers, particularly the Irish, practiced Roman Catholicism. During the late 1830s and 1840s, Church members established new parishes, schools, and orphanages throughout the greater-Cincinnati area. Though Catholics had been established in the Ohio Valley for decades, beginning with the founding of the Diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1808, the early 1850s marked an important shift in the state of religion in the region. Sarah Peter's return to Cincinnati coincided with a period when Catholicism in the Ohio Valley was transitioning from a predominantly rural to a largely urbanized religion. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, Catholic leaders sponsored evangelization efforts among Native Americans as well as encouraged the development of parish schools, relying on itinerant priests and religious orders to accomplish much of this work. However, as the urban Church developed during the late-antebellum years, a new focus on social relief, especially for immigrant Catholics, took precedence. Sarah Peter helped usher in the new era centered on relief by identifying religious orders in Europe that specialized in the Catholic works of mercy, eventually supporting their relocation to southern Ohio.[41]

Catholic settlement in the Ohio Valley began during the late-eighteenth century. French missionaries entered the region by traveling south from parts of Canada and the Great Lakes region and by boating up the Mississippi River from New Orleans. Anglo-Catholics from

[41] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 9-124; Clyde F. Crews, *An American Holy Land: A History of the Archdiocese of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: ikonographics, inc., 1987; also published by Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 23-108.

Maryland also migrated to central Kentucky in the late 1700s. By 1808, enough Catholics had populated the area around Bardstown, a settlement located approximately fifty miles south of Louisville, to warrant the creation of an episcopal see, a term used to designate a religious territory administered by a bishop. Bardstown served as the first inland diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, and Church authorities there administered the entire Ohio Valley region until new religious boundaries were fashioned with the creation of the Diocese of Cincinnati in 1821. In 1812, four years after the formation of the Diocese of Bardstown, two congregations of Catholic sisters—the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Loretto—were founded in central Kentucky. Within a few years, both orders had opened orphanages and schools near Bardstown. During the 1830s, their work spread to Louisville and other parts of northern Kentucky, where they remained vital contributors in the state throughout the late-nineteenth century.[42]

The Church in southern Ohio traces its roots to the efforts of lay Catholics who moved into the region during the first decade of the nineteenth century, years before the establishment of the Diocese of Cincinnati in 1821. Catholic families, many of whom were Irish immigrants from Maryland, organized prayer meetings and welcomed Dominican circuit-riding priests from Kentucky into their homes to preside over religious services. As historian David J. Endres has

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[42] Crews, *An American Holy Land*, 85-91; Ben J. Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* (Louisville, KY: Charles A. Rogers, 1884; reprinted by Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, no date), 233-260; Mary Ellen Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006). For the experiences of Catholic missionaries in the frontier contexts of the early-nineteenth-century West, see John R. Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Michael Pasquier, "French Missionary Priests and Borderlands Catholicism in the Diocese of Bardstown during the Early Nineteenth Century" in *Borderland Narratives: Negotiation and Accommodation in North America's Contested Spaces, 1500-1850*, edited by Andrew K. Frank and A. Glenn Crothers (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2017), 143-167. For a recent graduate thesis on the Sisters of Loretto in early Kentucky, see Hannah O'Daniel, "Southern Veils: The Sisters of Loretto in Early National Kentucky" (MA thesis, University of Louisville, 2017).

explained, lay Catholics sustained religious activity in Cincinnati without an established clergy or a brick-and-mortar church. During this period, Catholicism in southern Ohio was more fluid than it was in cities with established parishes. The early lay Catholics of Cincinnati often attended Protestant services and, at times, participated in their rites of baptism. However, after Church members erected the first cathedral in 1822 and a group of clergymen permanently settled in the city, an increased level of order and orthodoxy came to define religious life for Catholics. As additional religious orders settled in Cincinnati, especially those associated with Sarah Peter, authorities gave an increased attention to fostering devotional practices among the laity.[43]

Edward Dominic Fenwick, a Dominican from Maryland, was a leader in establishing the Diocese of Cincinnati in 1821 and served as the first bishop.[44] In 1803, Fenwick had convinced Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore to support his mission to found a house for Dominicans in the United States. Carroll recommended that Fenwick consider Kentucky as the location, since a number of religious orders had already founded houses in Maryland. By July 1806, Fenwick had accumulated enough money to purchase 500 acres in Washington County, Kentucky. Fenwick eventually oversaw the construction of a church, college, and convent in the area. He also spent fifteen years serving alongside other Dominicans as circuit-riding priests in Kentucky and southern Ohio, as well as fostered the development of Catholic institutions near Bardstown. In

[43] David J. Endres, "'Without Guide, Church, or Pastor': The Early Catholics of Cincinnati, Ohio," *Ohio Valley History* 18 (winter 2018): 3-13; Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 15-21.

[44] Born on August 19, 1768, Fenwick lived on his father's estate in St. Mary's County, Maryland until he turned sixteen. At that point, he traveled to Bornheim, Belgium, where he enrolled at Holy Cross College. After graduation in 1788, he entered the Order of St. Dominic, or the Order of Preachers, advancing to the status of a friar by 1791. Over the next three years, Fenwick served as a professor and directed a convent in Ghent, Belgium. However, by 1794, the effects of the French Revolution had forced him to seek exile in England. During the late 1790s, Fenwick taught at a Dominican college outside of London and spent additional time studying theology among the leading Catholic clerics in England.

late 1821, Fenwick received papal documents announcing the establishment of the Diocese of Cincinnati and his appointment as the first bishop.[45]

Once established in southern Ohio, Fenwick encountered two primary obstacles. He needed money and more clergy, two common issues that Church leaders faced throughout the antebellum years. Prelates often sought additional funds to develop institutions in their dioceses as well as priests and nuns to establish new parishes and fulfill the religious needs of the lay community. Catholic residents of the greater-Cincinnati region provided some financial assistance from regular tithing and fundraising efforts. However, Fenwick relied primarily on European resources to supplement both the monetary and personnel demands in his diocese. Following his first year as bishop, Fenwick traveled to Europe, where he met with Vatican officials, archbishops, leaders of missionary societies, and monarchs. In September 1824, he returned to Cincinnati after collecting over $10,000 in donations and $1,000 worth of religious items for use in Catholic churches and schools. Fenwick also welcomed two priests and Sister St. Paul, a member of the Sisters of Mercy, all of whom he recruited in Europe. Decades later, Sarah Peter conducted similar missions, albeit as a lay member of the Church.[46]

Between 1821 and 1832, during his first years as bishop, Fenwick focused on the expansion of missionary efforts among Native Americans living in the Middle West. Fenwick sought money from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the Church's administrative body in Rome responsible for fostering evangelization in all parts of the world, and the French Society for the Propagation of the Faith. He also hoped to acquire additional Dominican priests from the Diocese of Bardstown. Fenwick planned to cultivate a group of

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[45] John H. Lamott, *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1921* (Cincinnati, OH: Frederick Pustet Company, The Mountel Press, 1921), 40-49.

[46] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 11-24.

Native American priests who would teach the faith among Indigenous peoples. He selected William Maccodabinasse and August Hamelin, two members of the Ottawa tribe, to enroll at the Urban College in Rome, Italy, where they would study for the priesthood and then return to evangelize other Native Americans.[47] Fenwick also concentrated on establishing schools, which he considered "the major instrument for the Christianization and civilization of the Native Americans," throughout the outer reaches of his diocese.[48] As a number of historians have explained, such initiatives represented the Church's role as an imperial institution that greatly contributed to the Euro-American colonization of Native Americans in the region. This era of "frontier Catholicism" featured wide-ranging missionizing efforts directed by itinerant priests and religious orders.[49]

When Sarah Peter began bringing religious orders for women to Cincinnati in the late 1850s, she entered a field that was already well developed. The first congregations of Catholic sisters arrived in the Cincinnati during Fenwick's tenure. They focused on founding schools and orphanages, though they experienced mixed results, largely because of a lack of organized support for their missions. For example, in 1826, Francoise Vindevoghel, Mary Victoria de Seilles, and Adolphine Malingie, all members of the Collettine Poor Clare Sisters from France, opened a school for girls. Despite a warm welcome from Bishop Fenwick and the local Catholic community, they were unable to sustain their operation. The school closed after fourteen months, and the three Poor Clares left the region. This initial setback was followed by the arrival

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[47] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 18-23, 28-30.

[48] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 30.

[49] For more information, see Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Furthermore, Gabrielle Guillerm has shed new light on how the Church, particularly French Catholics in the west, promoted white supremacist values as they colonized the region. Gabrielle Guillerm, "The Forgotten French: Catholicism, Colonialism, and Americanness on the Early Trans-Appalachian Frontier," PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2021.

of the Sisters of Charity of Emmitsburg, Maryland, who founded St. Peter's Academy and Orphan Asylum in 1829. Members of the Cincinnati laity played an important role in convincing the Sisters of Charity to come by making donations and appealing to the order. One layperson even traveled to the motherhouse in Emmitsburg to meet with the sisters; M. P. Cassilly, another Cincinnati resident, offered a house to the order where they could live rent-free. In time, that location became the home of St. Peter's Academy and Orphan Asylum. Within one year, St. Peter's grew from a group of five orphans to a community of over 100. Six years later, the Sisters of Charity relocated their academy and orphanage to accommodate more children. The Sisters of Charity remained a key contributor of Catholic charity in Cincinnati throughout the nineteenth century, eventually breaking away from their motherhouse in Maryland to establish a separate order, the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati.[50]

The demand for new Catholic educational institutions in the region drew more sisters to southern Ohio. Fenwick, along with a group of prominent laymen, led the efforts by encouraging orders to establish schools in the diocese. In 1830, the bishop invited a group of Dominican Sisters from Springfield, Kentucky, to open a boarding school in Somerset, Ohio, approximately 150 miles northeast of Cincinnati. The Dominican Sisters focused on expanding educational opportunities in the rural portions of the diocese, eventually founding schools in Canton and Zanesville. Following Fenwick's death in 1832, Bishop John Baptist Purcell continued dedicating resources to the growth of Catholic education in Ohio. He succeeded in appealing to a group of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from Belgium, who arrived in Cincinnati in October 1840. Within a few weeks, they had raised enough money to purchase a

[50] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 31-32, 38-39, 58-59, 130-132. By 1850, St. Peter's included approximately 300 students and orphans.

thirty-room mansion in the heart of the city. The sisters took ownership on Christmas Day and began to convert it into a school for girls. The Young Ladies Literary Institute and Boarding School opened in late January 1841, offering classes for girls from families who could afford the tuition as well as for those unable to pay. After several months of operation, the Notre Dame Academy served approximately 120 students, half of whom were considered poor. This trend continued into the late-antebellum years as the number of students educated in Catholic parochial schools increased every year. One scholar has estimated that, by 1864, over forty percent of the school-age population in Cincinnati attended Catholic schools. Developing new educational institutions remained a central concern throughout Fenwick's tenure as well as during Purcell's time as archbishop, even as new missions committed to social relief gained importance by the late 1850s.[51]

Religious orders also played an important role in serving immigrant Catholics, especially the German-Catholic community in the diocese. By the mid-1830s, southern Ohio had become a center of German immigrants in the United States. The German Catholics who arrived in Cincinnati wanted their own parishes, as they often faced discrimination from (or discriminated against) Irish or Anglo Catholics in the city. They also wanted to preserve German language and customs. Their efforts began in earnest in 1834 with the construction of Holy Trinity Church, the first German-Catholic parish in Cincinnati. Holy Trinity added a school where German—both Catholic and non-Catholic—students received daily instruction. In 1837, Fr. John Henni, the pastor of Holy Trinity, founded the St. Aloysius Orphan Society after receiving a number of appeals from the parishioners to create an orphanage for German boys. The Society raised money to purchase a nine-room residence in the city, and the first orphans moved in on June 21,

[51] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 40, 114, 133-135.

1839. Two laywomen managed St. Aloysius Orphanage until 1842, when German-speaking members of the Emmitsburg-based Sisters of Charity took control of the institution. The Sisters of Charity ran the orphanage for three years, until their superiors in Emmitsburg declared that they were prohibited from overseeing the care of boys. The Cincinnati group, in turn, severed ties with the motherhouse in Maryland, creating their own organization: the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. The German community hoped to attract a new German-speaking order to run the orphanage, but those efforts failed. Once the tenure of the Sisters of Charity ended, Henry Schulhof, a lay German Catholic, served as administrator of St. Aloysius. Schulhof and his wife supervised the orphanage, adding an additional location for German girls in 1850.[52] Throughout the antebellum period, religious orders in the diocese helped found new schools and operated some of the first orphanages in the region. Yet, as the urban population grew, opportunities emerged to widen the Church's operations, namely through founding charitable institutions that addressed social problems.

The organization and administration of the Church evolved as a result of population growth in the Ohio Valley. In 1841, Catholic officials transferred the diocesan headquarters in Kentucky from Bardstown to Louisville. In many ways, this move represented the broader transformations that were occurring in the antebellum Ohio Valley, as the area developed from a "frontier" region into a bustling industrial center.[53] Members of the American hierarchy relocated the diocese so that clergy and religious orders could serve the growing population and provide religious instruction in the urban setting. In 1850, Cincinnati was elevated to the status

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[52] John G. Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vo1. 3 (New York: John G. Shea, 1890), 349-355, 613-629; John G. Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 4 (New York: John G. Shea, 1892), 170-179, 541-554; Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 82-86, 133-134.

[53] For a more general history that describes why the diocese was transferred from Bardstown to Louisville, see Crews, *An American Holy Land*, 72-147.

of an archdiocese, creating an ecclesiastical province headquartered in southern Ohio. Prior to that year, all American dioceses fell under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. By 1850, however, the Vatican had created new archdioceses in Cincinnati, New York, and St. Louis.[54] Likewise, population growth in the Ohio Valley contributed to the development of the Diocese of Covington. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the entire state of Kentucky constituted one diocese. As Covington and other cities developed, Catholic officials decided that administration of the Church in northern Kentucky required its own diocesan structure. In 1853, Pope Pius IX issued a papal bull creating the Diocese of Covington and naming George A. Carrell as the first bishop. The Diocese of Covington, along with the Diocese of Louisville, fell under the ecclesiastical control of the Archbishop of Cincinnati. The hierarchy in Kentucky continued to hold diocesan councils but they also participated in provincial councils led by Church officials north of the Ohio River.[55]

Early institution builders such as Bishop Fenwick, Archbishop Purcell, and the orders of Catholic sisters who relocated to southern Ohio, laid the groundwork for the development of Catholicism in the region. Fenwick and many of the early Catholic leaders had come to the United States as missionaries devoted to evangelizing Native populations. Indeed, Catholic missionary efforts among Native American groups expanded the Church's presence in new areas. Meanwhile, the schools established by early Catholic institution builders helped the Church put down roots in a largely Protestant-dominated world. By the 1850s, however, the Cincinnati clergy shifted its emphasis away from educational developments and evangelization, as the social contexts of the Ohio Valley transformed with increased European immigration.

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[54] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 65-67.

[55] Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 4, 562-567; Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 769.

With the changing environments, the Church and its active lay members refocused resources and attention to the growing populations in the urban setting. Although education and evangelization remained part of their mission, providing for already baptized Catholics new to the region as well as for those negatively affected by the transformations in the region took on new importance by the late-antebellum years. Sarah Peter, and the orders she helped bring to Cincinnati, played a key role in expanding the Church's focus from educational development and missionary work to include a commitment to social relief in the region.

Development of the Ohio Valley and the Opportunity for Sarah Peter's Future Efforts

Between 1830 and 1850, the Ohio Valley developed into a region characterized by rapid industrialization and urbanization. Thousands of new residents, both native and foreign-born, relocated to cities along the Ohio River, leading to a dramatic rise in the population of the early American West.[56] In the eyes of many nineteenth-century Americans, the emergence of the Ohio Valley represented progress in the United States. Yet, at the same time, the development of the region generated problems associated with industrialization and urban development, including

[56] As production and profits rose in the region, the populations of Covington, Louisville, and Cincinnati increased. For example, Covington grew from a town of 743 residents in 1830 to a chartered city of nearly 10,000 inhabitants by 1850. The population of Covington continued to swell during the late-antebellum period as the city added over 7,000 more residents during the 1850s. In fact, by 1880, census publications referred to Covington as the most densely populated city in the United States. Down the Ohio River in Louisville, the population more than doubled between 1820 and 1830, rose to over 20,000 residents by 1840, and doubled again by 1850. The population continued to increase during the 1850s and the years of the Civil War, so that, by 1870, over 100,000 people called Louisville home. During the years between 1820 and 1830, Cincinnati's population nearly tripled, increasing from over 9,000 to almost 25,000. In the next decade, the population doubled, and the city added 68,000 new residents in the 1840s. During the next two decades, the population increased by 57,000, making Cincinnati the nation's sixth largest city. Population statistics of the nineteenth-century Ohio Valley drawn from the following sources: Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool, editors, *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 233-234; John E. Kleber, editor, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), xvi-xxi, 18; Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 57-58; Alan I. Marcus, *Plague of Strangers: Social Groups and the Origins of City Services in Cincinnati, 1819-1870* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1991), 1-2; "Population of Covington, KY," Population.us, https://population.us/ky/covington/ (accessed July 2019); Campbell Gibson, "Populations of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html (accessed May 2018).

increased poverty, housing issues, overcrowding, dire working conditions, inadequate or insufficient health services, child abandonment, petty crimes, and prostitution. Historian Steven J. Ross connected the rise of new social problems in Cincinnati to the advent of the "age of manufacturing" (1840s-1870s), a period that replaced the "age of the artisan."[57] Sarah Peter first arrived in Cincinnati during the final stages of Ross's "age of the artisan." She left before the dawn of the "age of manufacturing," only to return seventeen years later, in 1851, after substantial effects of industrialist capitalism had made their mark on the city and surrounding area.

Cincinnati, and other parts of the Ohio Valley, developed at a rapid rate during the early-nineteenth century due to the region's location near key waterways. The Ohio and Mississippi Rivers served as vital thoroughfares that linked the region with major trading and production centers, such as New Orleans, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh. The three largest cities in the area—Cincinnati, Louisville, and Covington—promoted industrialized sectors that converted the region's raw goods, including hemp, timber, wheat, corn, and livestock, into manufactured consumer items, such as rope, lumber, paper, flour, whiskey, and pork products. Cincinnati factories manufactured steam engines, cotton gins, and mills for export throughout the country. Many of the products produced in the region made their way south—either by river or rail—to New Orleans. The Ohio Valley was also home to a profitable shipping industry. Louisvillians, in particular, specialized in steamboat transportation, moving products down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to markets throughout the Ohio Valley and the South. In 1850, the

[57] Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). In *From Improvement to City Planning*, Henry Binford describes a similar periodization, though he primarily distinguishes between "irregular urbanism" and "engineered urbanism"—coined terms to denote two distinct eras of how Cincinnatians understood and responded to urban problems.

commonwealth of Kentucky chartered the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, further linking the Ohio Valley with southern markets.[58]

German and Irish immigration to the United States began in earnest during the 1830s, and increased substantially over the next two decades. The majority of immigrants in Cincinnati and Covington were German. Once they arrived from Europe, they tended to settle in the same neighborhoods as other immigrants, creating ethnic enclaves in the city.[59] The Irish who relocated to the Ohio Valley came to America for several reasons. Many wanted to escape the economic crises that plagued Ireland during the 1830s, and, during the following decade, the potato famine forced thousands of Irish families to leave their homeland for the United States. As a result, most of the immigrants who traveled to America during the 1840s were in dire conditions when they arrived. As historian Tyler Anbinder explained, "The famine immigrants were the most impoverished, destitute, unskilled group ever to arrive in the United States. Eighty to 90 percent of them were classified as unskilled laborers. Ninety percent were Catholics, as many as a third spoke only Gaelic, and few came with any savings."[60]

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[58] Steve C. Gordon, "From Slaughterhouse to Soap-Boiler: Cincinnati's Meat Packing Industry, Changing Technologies, and the Rise of Mass Production, 1825-1870," *The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology* 16 (1990): 55-67; Marcus, *Plague of Strangers*, 1-12; Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 130-141; Walter Stix Glazer, *Cincinnati in 1840: The Social and Functional Organization of an Urban Community during the Pre-Civil War Period* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), xiii-xx; Philip Scranton, "Diversified Industrialization and Economic Success: Understanding Cincinnati's Manufacturing Development, 1850-1925," *Ohio Valley History* 5 (spring 2005): 5-10; Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 46-55.

[59] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 82-84; Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 17-19; Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 44-45, 57-58; Gibson, "Populations of the 100 Largest Cities," https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html (accessed May 2018).

[60] Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

Year	Covington, KY (Population)	Louisville, KY (Population)	Cincinnati, OH (Population)
1810	N/A	N/A	2,540
1820	N/A	4,012	9,642
1830	743	10,341	24,831
1840	2,026	21,210	46,338
1850	9,408	43,194	115,435
1860	16,471	68,033	161,044
1870	24,505	100,753	216,239
1880	29,720	123,758	255,139

T1.1: Population statistics showing the growth of the three largest cities in the central Ohio River Valley during the nineteenth century.[61]

Although many hoped for a better life in the United States, immigrants often faced hardships similar to—if not worse than—their experiences in Europe. Indeed, the development of the Ohio Valley into an industrial powerhouse and a rapidly growing urban center generated many of the same social problems that immigrants hoped to escape: poverty, housing crises, and miserable living and working conditions. The dramatic increase in population led to overcrowded streets and inadequate housing. Carpenters and contractors could not keep pace with the growing population. For example, according to historian Christopher Phillips, by 1850, when the population of Cincinnati was more than 115,000, most of the city's "new row houses" were "filled to bursting."[62] Similarly, many immigrants worked in meat-packing, textile, or other manufacturing plants in the region, where men, women, and children faced dire working conditions.[63] "The rapid growth of industry and the influx of laborers to support it," wrote

[61] Campbell Gibson, "Populations of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html

[62] Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 44.

[63] Ross, *Workers on the Edge*, 72-78; Eileen Muccino, "Poverty and Fiery Death: Female Factory Workers in Cincinnati, 1877-1885," *Ohio Valley History* 13 (winter 2013): 43-44.

Eileen Muccino, "led to overcrowding, job competition, and lackluster increases in wages that did not keep pace with the cost of living."[64]

Ohio Valley residents also faced a number of health crises. Two cholera epidemics, one in 1832-1833 and another in the summer of 1849, ravaged the populations of the region. In July 1849, Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati wrote in a pastoral letter that, on average, more than seventy Catholics died per day. Many of the orphanages reached maximum capacity, prompting some Catholics to rent additional homes in the city to house children orphaned by the spread of the disease. The epidemics occurred due to poor living conditions and a lack of clean drinking water, primarily affecting the laboring and immigrant classes of the Ohio Valley. Although the outbreaks in 1832 and 1849 took the lives of approximately four percent of Cincinnati's population, the city government failed to respond adequately to the crisis. Catholic institutions in the region offered an important response to public health concerns as they provided relief for those suffering and offered a haven for children orphaned by the spread of disease.[65]

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Sarah Peter would play a vital role in leading the Church's efforts in the region to address matters of social relief in urban environments. For the first twenty-five years of the diocese's history, Catholic leadership and religious orders in Ohio had focused on developing new schools and on evangelizing among Native American groups. As Church leaders increasingly moved toward relief, Sarah Peter converted to Catholicism and dedicated her life charity. In doing so,

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[64] Muccino, "Poverty and Fiery Death," 44. For more information about the struggles of the working class in Cincinnati, see chapters five through eight in Ross, *Workers on the Edge*, 94-216.

[65] Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, vol. 3, 603-604; Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 45-46, 128-135; Megan Dunlevy, "Cholera and the Queen City," *The Irish in Cincinnati*, http://libapps.libraries.uc.edu/exhibits/irish-cincinnati/cincinnati-irish-births-and-deaths/cholera-and-the-queen-city/ (accessed August 2019). Similar problems occurred in Louisville during the period. See Kleber, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 272-273.

she drew on her stature as an elite woman from a prominent family and on her decades of experience in Protestant philanthropy.

CHAPTER TWO:

Sarah Peter's Path Toward Catholicism: Or the Remaking of Her Life Through Conversion

In the spring of 1855, Monsignor Guido, the official archeologist of the Vatican, guided Sarah Peter, a wealthy and civic-minded American Protestant, on a tour of the catacombs of Saint Alexander.[1] The Monsignor allowed the visitor to examine a number of relics and paintings from the era of the Early Church Fathers. "If the early Christians of the 1st three centuries were right," wrote Peter, "then are we wrong . . . the Romanists are nearer [to the truth] than we."[2] The "evidence" Peter uncovered that day "thr[ew] light upon some of the most solemn rites in dispute between Prot[estant] & Catholic."[3] As Peter spent additional time in Europe traveling to holy sites, visiting the houses of religious orders, and meeting with local clergy and Vatican officials, the evidence of Catholic truth only became clearer to her.[4] On March 11, 1855, she penned a letter to her son, Rufus King, announcing her decision to be received into the Church. "I soon found, as I believe any candid mind must find it that a mist of error surrounded me & that I had mistaken tinsel for gold," she confessed, "that like other

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[1] Interestingly, in 1854, a year prior to Peter's visit, the catacombs were (re)discovered after Pope Pius IX arranged for a wide-ranging archeological examination of key religious sites around Rome. In "Controlling the Sacred Past: Rome, Pius IX, and Christian Archeology," Jamie Beth Erenstoft examines the politics that shaped the Vatican's initiative. At a time when Pius IX faced challenges to his temporal authority, the pontiff deployed archeological evidence to tie his seat at the head of the Church to St. Peter. In short, the pope utilized the archeological evidence to legitimize his power and position in society. See Jamie Beth Erenstoft, "Controlling the Sacred Past: Rome, Pius IX, and Christian Archeology," PhD dissertation (State University of New York, Buffalo, 2008).

[2] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 4, 1855, document 1946.349.942a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[3] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 4, 1855, document 1946.349.942a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[4] The "evidences of Catholic truth" or the "evidences of Catholicity" were common phrases employed by Catholics during the nineteenth century to refer to the unique characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church which supposedly designated it as the one true church. For example, see Martin John Spalding, *The Evidences of Catholicity: A Series of Lectures Delivered in the Cathedral of Louisville*, seventh edition (Baltimore, MD: John Murphy Company, 1875; first edition published in 1857 in Louisville, KY).

Protestants I had boldly pronounced judgments upon things of which I was either wholly ignorant or deceived by false information."[5] Although she "had been brought up an Anglican, if not a Protestant," Peter converted to Roman Catholicism before returning to the United States.[6] In time, her conversion would have a profound effect on the nature of social and religious life in the greater-Cincinnati region.

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This chapter examines Sarah Peter's conversion experience, analyzing the importance of travel, politics, and personal discovery in her journey to Roman Catholicism. A number of push-pull factors led Sarah Peter toward the Church, some of which situate her conversion experience alongside other examples of nineteenth-century converts and highlight the appeal of Catholicism to other privileged Americans. The Church's valorization of hierarchy and its links to social conservatism attracted Peter. She also appreciated the Church's attention to women, especially the devotions to and ceremonies in honor of Mary and female saints. Peter drew attention to these elements of Catholicism in printed works she read, during conservations with priests and Church officials, and by experiencing Catholic life in Europe, especially in Rome, where she eventually made her conversion. Becoming a Catholic, Peter developed strong anti-Protestant beliefs, which, for the remainder of her life, she marshalled to defend the Church against critics and to promote the influence of Catholicism in predominately-Protestant spaces.

Peter's decision to link her conversion with public action—to spreading the faith and building Catholic institutions in the Ohio Valley—differentiates her from most other converts of

[5] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[6] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

the era, who largely viewed conversion as a more personal matter. Drawing on the recent work of Lincoln A. Mullen, this chapter shows how Peter's conversion experience constituted not only a change of faith but also a transformation of her identity.[7] Peter not only chose Catholicism, which represented an individual decision that broke with her family tradition, but she also transformed herself and her life through that change of faith, ultimately becoming a leading lay Catholic philanthropist.[8] That choice came with consequences. Peter's conversion complicated relationships with family and friends, most of whom reacted with shock and dismay over the news of her conversion. Letters she received from her son Rufus and others provide evidence of the stakes of Peter's decision, especially during a time of widespread anti-Catholicism in the Ohio Valley. Peter's conversion damaged familial ties and undermined her place within elite Protestant circles, but it also enabled her to establish new connections with Catholics in the United States and Europe, social networks that fueled her sense of social and religious mission during the final two decades of her life.

Peter's First Trip to Europe: Discovering the Faith in Rome and Jerusalem

Before Peter converted to Catholicism in the spring of 1855, she spent over a year, from the summer of 1851 until the fall of 1852, traveling through Europe and visiting parts of the present-day Middle East. The untimely death of her son, Thomas, set in motion the plans for her

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[7] Lincoln A. Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). For the chapter dealing specifically with Catholic converts, see "Repose: Catholics Converts and the Sect System," 221-269.

[8] The idea of "remaking" or "transforming" or "becoming something new" through conversion—beyond just a change of faith—was discussed during a meeting of the North American Religions Workshop at Northwestern University. I credit Aram Sarkisian for helping me develop the concept of conversion as constituting both a religious change and a social change. In the example of Sarah Peter, she transforms—in just a short time—from a bourgeois Protestant art collector into a transatlantic lay Catholic philanthropist. I want to be careful and not minimize the importance of conversion as a religious matter to Peter, and other nineteenth-century American Christians, who cared deeply about the fate of their soul and viewed changing faiths as a means to ensure their path to heaven.

first trip outside of the United States. In mid-January 1851, Peter received word that Thomas was suffering from a potentially life-threatening illness. He died within two weeks at the age of thirty-one.[9] Following his death, Sarah Peter, with the help of her husband, William Peter, planned a trip to Europe to provide relief for Elizabeth King and her three boys who continued to mourn the loss of their husband and father.[10] A close examination of the letters Peter wrote in 1851 and 1852 indicates that her first venture outside of the country sparked her interest in Catholicism and helped lay the roots for her eventual conversion.[11] Indeed, in mid-July 1855, over three months after officially converting to Catholicism, Peter admitted to her son: "If I had remained in America, it is not probable that I should have ever gained the great blessing."[12]

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[9] Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 150.

[10] Following Thomas Worthington King, Sr.'s funeral, Elizabeth and the three boys—Tommy, Willie, and Rufus (not to be confused with Sarah Peter's son)—left southern Ohio to live with Sarah and William Peter in Philadelphia. The Kings stayed in the home for the next four months, until the party left for Europe in mid-June 1851.

[11] In *Going Abroad*, author William W. Stowe addressed the scholarship of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, thereby showing how travel can have both conservative and liberal effects on individuals. According to Van Gennep's model, travelers—when exposed to new ideas and practices—often return home with a stronger appreciation for their own dominant values. On the other hand, Victor Turner's concept of the "voyage of discovery" contends that travel commonly transforms individuals. For more information, see "Travel as Ritual," chapter 2 in William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). I contend, and this chapter shows, that travel influenced Sarah Peter in a more liberal fashion, thus placing her experiences more in line with Turner's model than Van Gennep's. In fact, Peter admits in March 1855, the month of her official conversion to Catholicism, that she had conversed with her late husband, William Peter, about the "impressions" that the Catholic Church made on her in "Jerusalem & Palestine." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Furthermore, she informed Rufus of the following: "My extended travels have . . . greatly enlarged my powers of observation. I lament that you have not always been with me to obtain an equal enlargement of thought on the subject of the church established by our Lord." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855, [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[12] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, July 19, 1855, document 1946.349.956a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Peter penned this letter after her second voyage to Europe; however, as her March 11, 1855 letter to her son made clear, her first voyage outside of the United States, especially her time in "Jerusalem & Palestine," greatly inspired her to look more closely at Roman Catholicism. Travel, in general—both her first and second trips—played a key role in Peter's conversion experience.

The trip originated as a standard European vacation for wealthy Americans. The practice of upper-class, white Americans touring Europe during the nineteenth century has been previously examined by historians. William W. Stowe described European travel as a "kind of secular ritual"—especially for bourgeois Protestant Americans—"complete with prescribed actions, promised rewards, and a set of quasi-scriptural writings," a reference to the plethora of guidebooks that flooded the American book market during the years before and after the Civil War.[13] European travel linked members of the upper classes in the United States, a bond that developed from a shared sense of the benefits of visiting different countries. Most notably, overseas tours exposed Americans to new cultures, and many believed that they would return home as more refined and cosmopolitan citizens. Well-to-do Americans were encouraged to share their experiences through writing, which consequently made travel writing a "respectable" genre during the nineteenth century.[14] Furthermore, the mere opportunity to travel distinguished high-income Americans from the lower classes, who either never traveled outside of the country or, if they did, rode in steerage and predominantly traveled out of economic necessity, instead of as tourists.[15]

Sarah Peter departed on June 15, 1851 for her first trip abroad. Elizabeth, the three boys, and a family nurse joined her aboard the *Wyoming*, a sailing-vessel, en route from Philadelphia to Liverpool, England. The voyage lasted four days, during which time Peter penned a letter to her son Rufus King describing the conditions onboard the *Wyoming*. Most notably, her

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[13] Stowe, *Going Abroad*, 19. I first discovered the referenced quote in a review of the book by Pere Gifra-Adrober. See Pere Gifra-Adrober, review of *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* by William W. Stowe, in *Canadian Review of American Studies* 25 (1995): 156-159.

[14] Stowe, *Going Abroad*, 11.

[15] For a useful article that considers how class shaped European travel during the latter half of the nineteenth century, see Douglas Hart, "Social Class and American Travel to Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century, with Special Attention to Great Britain," *Journal of Social History* 51 (winter 2017): 313-340.

comments focused on social life, specifically the meals they enjoyed and their interactions with other travelers. Peter stated that she had chatted with some of the "second cabin passengers" and considered them "more intelligent than the '*upper ten*'"—presumably a reference to the most exclusive travelers.[16]

Once they arrived in Europe, members of the party, especially Sarah Peter, relied on their status and networks to shape their experiences, particularly during the first leg of the journey in England. According to Margaret King, Sarah's daughter-in-law, "Mrs. Peter was enabled to see objects of interest which [were] not usually opened out to travelers in England."[17] Prior to Sarah's departure, her husband had crafted a series of letters of introduction for her to use throughout the country. Educated at Christ Church, University of Oxford, William Peter had served as an attorney in London and a member of the House of Commons for four years before being appointed British consul in Philadelphia. Consequently, he enjoyed a "high social position in England," and traveling with his letters of introduction granted Sarah Peter "opportunities not usually afforded to strangers."[18]

From England, Peter traveled throughout Europe, eventually ringing in the new year in Rome. She penned her first letter from the Holy City on January 1, 1852. Her correspondence to Rufus mentioned, on several occasions, her favorable view of the Italian people. "You find no meanness [and] . . . they are graceful and beautiful in person," Peter noted, "I am beginning to have a very kindly feeling for them."[19] Furthermore, Peter enjoyed visiting the numerous

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[16] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, June ?, 1851, transcription in Margaret Rives King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 81. For more information about the class distinctions on nineteenth-century passenger vessels, see "Shipboard: The 19th Century Emigrant Experience," "Class Distinctions," State Library of New South Wales, Australia, https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/shipboard-19th-century-emigrant-experience/class-distinctions.

[17] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 82.

[18] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 82.

[19] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, January 9, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 168. In a later letter, after spending a full month in Rome, Peter wrote the

churches and houses of religions orders in the city, commenting on a variety of devotional practices around Rome, including the procession of the "miracle-working bambino."[20] Peter also wrote about viewing the "bones . . . of the martyrs of the Diocletian persecution" after entering a "subterranean apartment" in one of the "little churches."[21] Yet, at this stage, Peter expressed skepticism about the alleged relics of fourth-century Christians, noting in her letter that objects were "so they say" the bones of martyrs.[22] Years later, during her second trip to Rome, the "truth" she uncovered in the catacombs would play a central role in her conversion experience.

Pope Pius IX had the greatest influence on Peter during her first stay in Rome. She first encountered the pontiff on a return trip into the city. Their carriage came to a sudden stop to allow the pope to cross the street during one of his regular afternoon walks. "[W]e arose at his approach and bowed," Peter noted, and we "were rewarded by a kindly smile from the really benevolent face of this good man."[23] Desiring to have a private meeting with the pope, Peter petitioned McPherson, a Scottish acquaintance whom she had met in Rome. She believed McPherson had befriended a cardinal who could arrange the visit. On Sunday, January 25, 1852, at around three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter arrived at the Vatican for her scheduled appointment. She described the meeting in great detail to Rufus:

> I was left alone with the 'head of the church' . . . He smiled kindly, and said he was glad to see me, and asked if I was alone in Rome. I replied I was with friends who were to remain longer than myself . . . His holiness then remarked that he had heard of my works

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following about the Italians: "The people, too, seem far better than I expected. I met with none of the brutality of the English, nor the stupidity of the Germans, nor the polite selfishness of the French. They exhibit quick perceptions and kindly feelings." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, February 9, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 185.

[20] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, January 9, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 165.

[21] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, January 21, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 172-173.

[22] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, January 21, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 172.

[23] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, January 21, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 173.

> of charity and mercy [presumably a reference to her work in Philadelphia], and blessed me for it. He then spoke of several of the Romish dignitaries in America, especially of Doctor Purcell, of Cincinnati, and mentioned one after the other of the churches he had founded. He then gave me his blessing. I kissed the proffered hand, he rang the little bell, the doors opened, and, on passing through, I made another low bow, and the door was shut. I had purchased some chaplets to be blessed, as is the custom; and, on my coming out, they were sent in to receive the usual benediction.[24]

This exchange marked the first of six meetings between Sarah Peter and Pope Pius IX, as the two got to know each other well over the course of two decades. Following the event, Peter remained in Rome for only a short time. From there, she joined a travel party who ventured to parts of the present-day Middle East.

During her first voyage outside of the United States, Peter's time in Jerusalem, even more than Rome, had the most profound effect on her path toward Catholicism. "Her own conviction," explained Margaret King, Peter's daughter-in-law, "was that the divine Hand had led her on [beyond Europe], for it was on [the] visit to Jerusalem she became interested in the teachings of the Catholic Church as set for by the Roman missionaries in Jerusalem."[25] Upon her arrival to the region in early March 1852, Peter expressed some uneasiness, noting that she found "Egypt more barbaric than [she] expected. We had heard so much of the vigor of Mahomet Ali, that I thought to have seen some approaches toward European civilization among the people; but there seems to be none at all."[26]

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[24] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, January 25, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 175-177.

[25] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 168.

[26] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 6, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 201. Peter was also very critical of the view of women in the region. She often felt disrespected by her male guide. Furthermore, in her letters, she complained about how Egyptian women were treated in public. For example, on March 28, 1852, she wrote the following: "The poor women of Egypt are treated as if belonging to an inferior place in the scale of being, and I have secured obedience from our camel-drivers only by assuming a threatening and authoritative tone." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 28, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 201. A few weeks later, she offered the following remarks about the "Mahommedans": "I am beginning to think [that] . . . their accursed religion [is] . . . the vilest on earth. It is hardly possible to imagine how brutal their treatment is of their women." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 17, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1,

Peter arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and joined a group of Christian pilgrims at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where she visited the "place where it is said the Savior's body was prepared for the grave."[27] "The crowd was immense," Peter reported, "certainly not less than ten thousand pilgrims filled the immense area of the churches and quadrangle, and from China to America there were pilgrims . . . Doubtless there is much superstition, but I can not envy the caviler who disbelieves and rejects all, because certain parts are rendered doubtful."[28] Two days later, Peter joined a pilgrimage to the Plain of Jericho where they celebrated Christ's baptism in the Jordan River. On their return to Jerusalem, the party visited the Tomb of Lazarus, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the houses of Caiaphas and Pilate, and other holy sites.[29] The key moment, however, came on Good Friday in Jerusalem, when Peter spent the entire day at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. She described seeing the Good Friday procession: "At 7 in the evening, the crucifixion was to be commemorated in the Latin Chapel, which stands a little apart, and the Pasha was solicited to send a detachment of Turkish soldiers to guard the Christian rites . . . A crucifix, nearly as large as life, was borne by a priest, who was followed by others having incense."[30] "You will wish to know what I thought of all this," Peter remarked to Rufus, "and I cordially avow that all feelings of repugnance had vanished, and for

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227. In the late winter months of 1852, when Peter first proposed the idea of extending her trip from Europe, Rufus expressed some concern for her safety in Egypt, specifically because it was a predominantly non-Christian region. For an example of Rufus King's concerns over Peter visiting the region, see Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, March 25, 1852, document 1946.349.857, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. For a recent study of the practice of nineteenth-century Americans visiting the region, see Issa A. Saliba, "Travel Literature, Pilgrims and Missionaries: A Mid-Nineteenth Century Duel Over the Holy Land," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* vol. 20, no. 1 (2021), 83-99.

[27] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 4, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 217.

[28] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 4, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 217.

[29] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 6, 1852, document 1946.349.869, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[30] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 9, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 221-223.

the moment I was as good as a Catholic as the best . . . the historic realties which surrounded us were enough to warm the most philosophical of stoics." [31] As early as April 1852, three years before her eventual conversion, Peter revealed an appreciation for Roman Catholic ceremonies.

An Interlude: The Year between Peter's First and Second Voyages

In mid-July 1852, Peter and her traveling companions returned to the United States. Soon after, she and William decided to move to Cincinnati to be closer to Rufus. Before they did, William's health took a downward turn, and he died on January 6, 1853.[32] For a second time, Peter had lost her husband. Although her marriage with Edward King had been troubled, Sarah shared much in common with William, especially their love for reading and the arts. She was devastated at his passing, ultimately deciding that she could not remain in Philadelphia in the house they shared together. Consequently, in the spring of 1853, she left Pennsylvania for Cincinnati, where Rufus had purchased her a house on the corner of Third and Lytle Streets.[33]

Upon her arrival in Cincinnati in the summer of 1853, Peter returned to the social life she had enjoyed during her previous stay in the city. The home Rufus had purchased was, as author Anna Shannon McAllister explained, "well-adapted to the kind of entertainment Sarah liked best."[34] Peter hosted writers, painters, and sculptors, and often converted her three parlors into a

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[31] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 9, 1852, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 223.

[32] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 208.

[33] The following letters deal with the plans for Peter's move to Cincinnati: Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, February 22, 1853, document 1946.349.894, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 27, 1853, document 1946.349.900, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 8, 1853, document 1946.349.901, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 15, 1853, document 1946.349.902, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[34] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 209.

grand hall for musical performances. "Mrs. Peter's house became as near an approach to the literary and artistic *salon* as was seen in America," wrote Clara Longworth de Chambrun, an early-twentieth century resident of Cincinnati.[35] Peter, de Chambrun believed, "had a rare talent for conversation and social leadership, and had traveled all over the world, and knew most of the people worth knowing in many different domains."[36]

In a short time, Peter befriended a group of the most prominent women in the city, all of whom were dedicated to cultivating art and music in Cincinnati. As a result, she joined seventeen others to form the Ladies' Academy of Art (often referred to as the Ladies' Picture Gallery), with Peter serving as the president of the board of managers. According to their constitution, Peter and the managers established the gallery to "aid in the cultivation of the public taste—to afford encouragement to artists, and to furnish a source of intellectual recreation and enjoyment to the people by the establishment of Galleries of copies executed in the best manner from masterpieces of painting and sculpture."[37] The ladies also planned to incorporate a "training school wherein art may be taught as an occupation and means of obtaining honorable livelihood," especially for "women alone as are resolved by perseverance and industry to obtain from it the means of subsistence."[38]

The gallery received immediate support from the citizens of Cincinnati. Peter and the managers arranged for a small exhibition to take place during the early summer of 1854. Some local residents loaned their private art collections, allowing the women to raise nearly $9,000 in

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[35] Clara Longworth de Chambrun quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 210

[36] Clara Longworth de Chambrun quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 210.

[37] "Constitution," Ladies Academy of Fine Arts Papers, volume 1, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[38] Constitution quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 210. Surprisingly, I could not locate this portion of the constitution in the published version from the "Ladies Academy of Fine Arts Papers" at the Cincinnati History Library and Archives. However, I am confident that the quote from McAllister appeared in some version of the constitution because Peter alluded to her intentions to train women in other letters.

ticket sales and gifts. Charles McMicken donated $1,000 to purchase plaster casts for the school of design, a separate venture that the managers believed would complement the work of their new institution. With nearly $10,000 received, the managers decided to allocate a portion of that money for the purchase of new art for the gallery, which could only be obtained in Europe. Having experience traveling abroad, and desiring to return to the continent, Peter volunteered to make the transactions on behalf of the gallery.[39] A letter from Lucia A. Coleman, the secretary of the Ladies' Academy of Art, explains the agreement made between the managers and Peter:

> The managers of the Ladies' Academy of Art, in Cincinnati, highly appreciating the generosity and self-sacrifice which has induced you to undertake, at your own expense, a voyage to Europe, actuated by a noble enthusiasm for the advancement of the fine arts in our beloved country, hasten to avail themselves of this liberality, by requesting you, in becoming their agent for disbursement of the sum of five thousand dollars, to lend them the advantage of your cultivated taste in the selection of such copies, casts from fine statuary, engravings, etc., as your judgment and experience, gained in a former visit to the most celebrated museums, may suggest.[40]

With a promise of financial support from the managers, Peter planned to leave for Europe in the upcoming months. She would cross the Atlantic determined to either purchase works or commission artists to produce copies of the finest paintings and sculptures on the continent.

Peter's Second Voyage and the Failures of the Gallery: The Next Step Toward Conversion

Peter's second voyage to Europe began as a business trip in support of the Ladies' Academy of Art, but it ultimately became a pilgrimage that led to her conversion. In mid-August 1854, Peter—joined once again by Elizabeth King and her three boys—boarded the *Baltic* en route to England. Arriving in Canterbury, the party arranged for Peter's grandsons to attend school, while she immediately got started on her mission for the gallery. After a short stay in

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[39] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 209-211.

[40] Lucia A. Coleman to Sarah Worthington King Peter, no date given, transcription in Margaret Rives King, ed., *The Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, volume 2 (Cincinnati, Ohio: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 270.

England, Peter proceeded to France, where she received letters of introduction to tour the schools of design in Paris. She also met Paul Jean Étienne Balzé and Raymond Balzé, renowned artists and copiers whom she eventually commissioned to produce some works for the gallery.[41] While in France, Peter felt encouraged by her work and remained assured of the future success of the gallery.[42] "I am sure to succeed on this side of the water," she informed Rufus, "[i]f I can only get money enough to make a fair beginning, I am quite sure that as yet nothing has been done among us, as a nation, which is better calculated to raise us in the estimation of enlightened Europeans."[43] Full of confidence, Peter left Paris for stops in Lyons and Marseilles before arriving in Rome in late November 1854. Unbeknownst to her at the time, however, the gallery faced serious issues on the other side of the Atlantic.

Financial issues plagued the gallery from its outset. "You will have learned before this reaches you," Rufus King noted in mid-November 1854 letter, "that your female friends here have got you & themselves into trouble."[44] A financial crisis struck Cincinnati in the winter of 1854-1855, and the managers of the gallery had invested their money with George Milne & Co., a bank that closed during the crisis. Rufus was not surprised about the fate of Milne & Co., telling his mother that the banks in Cincinnati had for months promised high interest returns on

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[41] For more information on the relationship between Peter and the Balzé brothers, see the Ladies Academy of Fine Arts Papers, volumes 1 and 2, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. The collection contains a letter from Raymond Balzé to Sarah Peter as well as some receipts for the commissioned work.

[42] Margaret Rives King wrote the following about Peter's first leg of the trip in France: "After weeks passed in Paris in unceasing work, and successful in all its results, good copyists secured, bargains made, pictures selected and commenced, Mrs. Peter started on her further travels with a light heart, for she did not then know of the serious financial difficulties which were destined, if not materially to impede her work, certainly to give her great anxieties." King, ed., *The Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 282.

[43] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, not date given [but assumed late October or early November 1854], transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 281.

[44] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 19, 1854, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. When Peter learned about the fate of Milne & Co., she fell into a "very lachrymose spirit." Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, January 14, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

investments, promises which they could not fulfill.[45] The financial crisis put unexpected pressure on the family to fund Peter's European venture without the assistance of the managers. "I trust you have entered into no further engagements for pictures or other objects of Art," Rufus warned his mother, "above all that you have not pursued your idea of engaging for a copy of the School of Athens. I wonder how you could have thought of incurring such an expenditure as $1900 for it."[46]

By the spring and summer of 1855, it was clear that Peter's mission for the gallery had fallen apart. Rufus told Peter that her colleagues at the gallery owed her nearly $6,000 for commissioned art and shipping fees.[47] Peter realized that progress on the gallery had stalled,

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[45] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 19, 1854, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[46] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 19, 1854, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Indeed, Rufus was always worried about money matters. Almost all his letters to Peter concerned either the issues plaguing the gallery or the family's overall finances, or often both, since the two were explicitly linked while Peter continued her tour of Europe. While his mother was abroad, Rufus managed their affairs, and was responsible for ensuring that Peter's travel account—which she shared with her daughter-in-law (Elizabeth or Lizzie)—maintained good standing. By early February 1855, matters had worsened, as Rufus explained to Peter: "And now I may as well tell you something of my late financing . . . 'it never rains but it pours.' The history of the Milne Business you know already. I remitted $2000 to Brown & Bowen instructing them to pay the 'No 2 acct' and place the balance of the remittance to the credit of you & Lizzie equally. Some ten days ago I learned with great surprise that your 'No 2 acct' had run up as abovementioned to $1736 – leaving but a poor residue for you & Lizzie. Confound the Fine Arts! . . . Well! About the time of the Milne swindle I received notice from New York that the improvement of the 2d Avenue was completed & our share of the tax $1090!! . . . Imagine my consternation upon opening it to find a bill of some $1550 for improving 48th Street, the other boundary of our lots – making in all, you perceive, near $2650." The reference to real estate in New York concerned properties that Rufus and his mother had received as part of Edward King's estate. Rufus attempted to sell them after the Milne crash to relieve some of the financial pressure on the family, but they were unsuccessful in selling the lots until the 1860s. As a result, Rufus ultimately had to borrow $5,000 to make ends meet. For more information, see Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, February 4, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, August 31, 1856, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, September 5, 1857, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, February 4, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[47] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, July 29, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Two weeks later, Rufus continued to condemn the actions of Peter's colleagues, writing the following to his mother: "Confound them! If half of them or their lazy men had advanced each but half the sum for which they are still in debt to you and me, not to speak of the original sums advanced, your pictures would have been here long ago . . . Not one that I can hear of has advanced a dollar & yet there are half a dozen of them at least who with any good will at all in their work or in

perhaps even the potential for a failed venture overall.[48] As a result of the continued disheartening news, Peter channeled her energy in a new direction. She told Rufus in mid-March 1855 that once she learned from his "letters . . . that the object which brought me here [the gallery], was, for the present, at an end" she began "looking a little nearer into the workings of the Romish Church."[49] Her conversion involved a variety of factors, but without the financial issues associated with the gallery, she might not have pursued her interests in a new faith.[50]

An Intellectual Conversion: Catholic Apologetics, Conservatism, and Anti-Modernism

Once Sarah Peter began to explore more deeply the Catholic Church, several factors contributed to her eventual conversion. Throughout her life, Peter demonstrated an appreciation for learning. She valued discovery, rigorous examinations of texts, and lively conversations

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ordinary duty & courtesy to you ought & could have advanced $500 each." Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, August 12, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[48] In March 1855, Rufus wrote that as "regards the Ladies Academy matters . . . are evidently improving." Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, March 18, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[49] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[50] The evidence clearly shows that the financial problems associated with the Gallery—the Milne banking crisis, the inconvenience of financing the venture from family funds, and the lack of support from colleagues in Cincinnati—helped open the door for Peter to discover more about Roman Catholicism in Europe. However, it should be noted that, after her conversion in March 1855, she continued to support the development of the gallery, though in a much more limited way. For example, on April 10, 1855, Peter wrote the following: "I am rejoiced to find that the poor gallery is looking up. I thought all along that it was impossible for the financial crisis to continue very long among our 'rising' people." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 10, 1855, document 1946.349.945a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Despite her support after conversion, the management of the gallery continued to frustrate Peter, who noted in May 1855 that "I think that <u>I have done enough</u> - & it is come time for others to try themselves." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 28, 1855, document 1946.349.952a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. In particular, Peter grew to blame the husbands of her colleagues, believing that they did very little to support the Gallery. "What am I to think of the <u>men</u>," Peter asked Rufus in mid-July 1855, "who all this time do not seem to have lifted a finger in support of an Institution intended chiefly for their benefit?" "If <u>they</u> had been Managers," Peter quipped, "all these women would have given them their cordial support. Does their indifference arise from lethargy or jealousy of <u>female</u> success? Take it in any view, I have no reason to praise them." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, July 19, 1855, document 1946.349.956a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

about politics, literature, and art. Family, friends, and other social acquaintances often praised her intellectual attributes. In fact, Peter's conversion experience constituted an intellectual endeavor, as she found "truth" in Catholicism over time.[51] This element of Peter's conversion links her to other mid- or late-nineteenth-century Catholic converts who came to the faith through philosophical, theological, or political channels. The foremost example of the relationship between intellectualism and Roman Catholicism is the Oxford Movement, which took form in the first half of the nineteenth century under a faction in the Church of England who wanted to restore some of the traditional, or Catholic, elements of religious life. Some members of the movement ultimately converted, such as Cardinal John Henry Newman, while others sought only to reform the Church of England.[52] In the United States, a similar development

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[51] Peter often described her conversion as a discovery of the truth of Catholicism, and—at the same time—a realization that her Protestant upbringing had falsely portrayed the Church and its teachings as distortions of Christianity. See the following letters: Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 4, 1855, document 1946.349.942a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 19, 1855, document 1946.349.943a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 10, 1855, document 1946.349.945a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 28, 1855, document 1946.349.952a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[52] On the Oxford Movement, see Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Steward J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles, eds., *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World, 1830-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Peter alluded to the Oxford Movement multiple times in her conversion letters to Rufus. For example, on March 11, 1855, she wrote that Cardinal John Henry Newman—considered the principal leader of the movement—had worked diligently to disclose the fact that the English clergy had for years perpetuated false prejudices against the Catholic Church. Furthermore, she noted how the "movement in England towards the Catholic church [wa]s constantly increasing . . . Mr Palmer, a celebrated and eminent Professor . . . made his public adjuration [of Protestantism] now a few days [ago]." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. A week later, Peter posed the following question to Rufus: "We have been accustomed to hear the Catholic church spoken of as superstitious – as unworthy the confidence of intelligent people. If this were true how is it that the very finest minds in England are daily seeking refuge within the church?" Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King,

occurred among Episcopalians who joined the Catholic Church, primarily during the years between 1840 and 1870.[53] Overall, Peter's conversion letters reveal how her path to Catholicism was inspired by a combination of her intellectual interests in Catholic apologetics, her ideological or cultural commitments to anti-modernism, and her political beliefs, which can be classified as bourgeois and conservative.

Books, tracts, and works of theology, specifically those that fell within the genre of Catholic apologetics, played a central role in Peter's conversion. She referenced these works in her letters to Rufus, often times as suggestions for him to read, so that he might learn more about Catholicism and, at the same time, realize the errors of Protestantism. For Peter, the works nurtured her intellectually but, more importantly, they proved to her the validity of Catholic teachings and ultimately helped inspire her conversion. In her March 11, 1855, letter to Rufus, Peter mentioned three works that had recently influenced her thinking about Catholicism: William Henry Coombes, *The Essence of Religious Controversy Contained in a Series of Observations in a Protestant Catechism* (1827); August Nicolas, *Du Protestantisme et de toutes*

March 19, 1855, document 1946.349.943a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Peter's letters, dating back to her first voyage in Europe, contain much criticism of the English people, both in terms of their overall characteristics, especially the working and lower classes, as well as the majority population's general disdain for Catholicism. Indeed, she once wrote that "the English, especially, are the most brutal & degraded [population] in Europe." Following her conversion, Peter's criticism of the English increased, as she often accused them of spreading anti-Catholicism in the United States and for instilling her own family's anti-Catholic sympathies. Over the course of her time in Europe, Peter devised her own hierarchy of western European people and places, based largely on her experiences in those countries. The English ranked at the very bottom. Next came the Germans and Austrians, followed by the French. By far her favorite experiences came in Italy, especially Rome. For more on her descriptions of the English people, see Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 10, 1855, document 1946.349.945a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 128, 185.

[53] Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation*, 225-226.

les hérésies dans leur rapport avec le socialism [*Protestantism and all heresies in their relation to socialism*] (1852); and Archbishop Henry Edward Manning, *The Grounds of Faith: Four Lectures* (1852). Interestingly, two of the authors, Coombes and Manning, were English Catholics, and Manning had been a member of the Church of England until he converted to Roman Catholicism in 1851. [54]

Peter wanted Rufus to know that these books contained important evidence about the history of Catholicism and Protestantism. In particular, Manning's *The Ground of Faith* argued that the Protestant principle of "private judgement" had created "schism after schism" over time, thereby rupturing vital social and political links across the Christian world.[55] Given the limited room available for Peter in her letters, she trusted that Manning's work would "explain to [Rufus] much of what [she did] not [have] space to write."[56] Unlike Manning and Coombes, who were clergymen, Nicolas contributed to Catholic intellectual life as a member of the laity.[57] "Nicolas . . . will [prove] to you," Peter assured Rufus, "that the R. C. church is the mother of <u>light</u> & not of darkness."[58] Peter summarized Nicolas's work as a demonstration of how the

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[54] William Henry Coombes (1767-1850) was an English Roman Catholic who studied for the priesthood in France. During the French Revolution, Coombes escaped the country and returned to England, where he helped operate St. Edmund's College (Old Hall) near Hertfordshire to support Catholic education in England. Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892) was an English Roman Catholic priest who ultimately served as the Archbishop of Westminster from 1865 until his death in 1892. Before entering the Church in 1851, Manning served as a deacon in the Anglican Church, where he joined John Henry Newman in support of the Oxford Movement reforms (eventually, however, both would convert to Catholicism). In addition to being on the key proponents of the Oxford Movement in England, Manning is best known for his staunch support of the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council.

[55] Henry Edward Manning, *The Grounds of Faith: Four Lectures*, new edition (London: Burns and Lambert, originally published in 1852), B1-B2.

[56] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[57] August Nicolas (1807-1888) was a member of the French Catholic laity best known for his numerous works of Catholics apologetics.

[58] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

"Catholic church strengthens . . . every faculty of the intellect, by giving it a firm foundation [in] moral truth."[59] She hoped that his arguments would resonate strongly with Rufus, since both he and Nicolas were attorneys. Indeed, on multiple occasions, Peter employed the strategy of drawing a parallel between the law and the authority of the Church, noting in one letter to Rufus that if "[he] were drawing up legal documents, [he] would take the greatest care that they should be in strict accordance with legal enactments – not fanciful ideas of what laws should be – Even if you did not like the law, you would feel obliged to sustain it until a higher power could legitimately alter it."[60]

Peter also read books related to the contributions of Catholic religious orders. For example, in mid-April 1855, Peter mentioned that *Ein Buchlein Vom Geuten Hirten* [*A Little Book of the Good Shepherd*], a recent "work of Countess Hahn Hahn," had "greatly pleased [her]."[61] Countess Ida von Hahn-Hahn, a convert to Catholicism in 1850, had been known for her novels with prominent female characters, including *Gräfin Faustine* [*Countess Faustine*] (1841), but later turned to writing works of Catholic apologetics, specifically to encourage conversion.[62] Furthermore, once she became a "devoted Catholic," Hahn-Hahn "appropriated

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[59] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[60] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855, [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio

[61] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 17, 1855, document 1946.349.946a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[62] For more information on Ida von Hahn-Hahn, see Todd Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation, 1771-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gisela Argyle, "The Horror and the Pleasure of Un-English Fiction: Ida von Hahn-Hahn and Fanny Lewald in England," *Comparative Literature Studies* 44 (2007): 144-165. Author Gisela Argyle described Hahn-Hahn's life as "unconventional, even scandalous"—after being married to her cousin for three years, she joined Adolf von Bystram in a domestic partnership that lasted over twenty years. Hahn-Hahn and Bystram traveled the world together, while Hahn-Hahn wrote travel books as well as works of fiction. According to Argyle, Hahn-Hahn's fiction "criticized patriarchal gender barriers and portrayed [her] heroines' emancipatory aspirations sympathetically," though her work was often "limited to the plight of upper-class women's trivial and thus unfulfilled lives." After converting to Catholicism in 1850, Hahn-Hahn produced, as

her entire property to the foundation of a house of the good shepherd," where "she live[d] in the establishment that she ha[d] created at Mayence [Mainz, Germany]," Peter explained.[63] Peter herself eventually followed a similar path, both in terms of working closely with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to establish institutions in the greater-Cincinnati region as well as donating her home to Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to serve as their motherhouse in the United States.

News about local and national politics also commonly appeared in the travel letters between Peter and her son, shedding light on the family's conservatism. The letters include clear critiques of democratic movements as well as support for established authority, both opinions that married well with her conversion to Catholicism. As Ohioans, particularly southern Ohioans, Peter and her son largely fit the mold of the white, upper-class, middle west or border region resident who supported the Whig Party until its demise in the early 1850s.[64] By 1855, they found themselves politically orphaned, having to choose between the newly formed Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or the Know Nothings (American Party). That summer, Rufus expressed anxiety over which candidate he should back in the upcoming Ohio gubernatorial election, noting to his mother that Salmon Chase had been nominated as a "Candidate for Governor by a Grand consolidation of . . . political & social haberdashers."[65] Although he "like[d] Chase very well on account of old associations," Rufus could not forget the "unprincipled, obstinacy of . . . his little party of Malcontents that defeated Mr Clay, brought

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Argyle explained, "outspoken and profuse polemic in discursive writings and didactic novels in defense of Catholicism."

[63] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 17, 1855, document 1946.349.946a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[64] For more on the political culture of the nineteenth-century "middle border" region, see Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[65] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, July 15, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Texas, war, Slavery & all manner of Evil and disgrace upon us."[66] Alluding to the alliance between anti-slavery Democrats and Republicans in Ohio, Rufus said he loathed "the idea of voting the detestable ticket" in the forthcoming election.[67]

Sarah Peter and her son also expressed distaste at the growth of popular movements. Rufus criticized what he called the "glorious ocean of Topsyturveyism," in which "surges of popular frenzy . . . roll[ed] this, that or the other way."[68] Likewise, by the mid-1850s, Peter was an outspoken critic of democracy, nothing that it "was the course of the ill manners of our people . . . since it fails to check bad inclinations which ought to be restrained" leading to "moral deficiency."[69] "What is it," Peter once quipped, "with all these boasted freedoms?"[70] "All our maxims of government are wrong," she explained, "for they are all [built] upon the falsehood that men, if let alone, will do right when all history, all sound observation of our race, independently of revelation, itself, proclaim the downward tendency, and certain moral delinquency."[71] Peter's anti-democratic opinions can be explained as a product of her negative experiences with popular movements in Europe, especially those in Italy that challenged the temporal authority of Pope Pius IX and the broader Catholic hierarchy.[72] Peter consistently

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[66] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, July 29, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[67] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, July 29, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[68] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, July 15, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[69] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[70] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[71] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 10, 1855, document 1946.349.945a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[72] Peter's travel letters from both voyages contain commentary about popular or democratic movements in Europe. "Some intelligent [French] women who sat near us expressed their displeasure to me," Peter wrote in November 1851, "saying that each revolution made things worse; that men now neither feared nor respected any one, and the republic was a farce, proclaiming liberty which had no real existence, and sustaining it at the point of

argued that the Church provided a much-needed moral compass for the world. She also defended the interests of the pope in European affairs, a position she would uphold for the rest of her life. All in all, Peter's conservatism—in terms of opposing political movements at home and abroad that challenged the conventional modes of authority or encouraged radical change or advanced democratic measures—placed her alongside other prominent nineteenth-century Catholics, specifically ultramontane Catholics as opposed to Gallicanist or liberal Catholics.

Peter's Response to the Immaculate Conception and Her Views on the Place of Women in the Church

Sarah Peter's second voyage coincided with a key moment in Church history. On December 8, 1854, in front of a crowd of hundreds of clergymen and thousands of lay attendants at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which holds that Mary was free from original sin. The Immaculate Conception, then, avowed that Mary, like Jesus Christ, was born in a state of perfection, unlike the rest of humanity who shared a sinful fate derived from the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the fall of man. According to first-hand accounts of the event, the ceremony, which had been planned in advance and highly anticipated, captured the attention and emotions of the audience, as "the pontiff raised the question of Mary's conception, waited for confirmation by

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the bayonet." Later on, after spending some time in Paris, Peter informed Rufus that the French have an "extreme reluctance to wake up another revolution, and I think they would infinitely prefer the chances of peace under Louis Napoleon . . . than to take the risk of another revolution." In February 1852, Peter wrote the following about the Hungarian political activist: "I rejoice that the demagogue [Lajos] Kossuth is soon likely to find his level, and I doubly trust that our people may be preserved from the insane idea of intervention in European affairs." King, ed., *The Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 126-127, 148, 184. In a May 8, 1855 letter to Rufus, Peter criticized Giuseppe Garibaldi and the Risorgimento, the political movement to unite Italy under a republican government. Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 8, 1855, document 1946.349.951a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. For more information on Italian politics during the nineteenth century, see Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in American: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

the Holy Spirit, and then, with visible tears and a cracking voice" declared the Immaculate Conception as official dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.[73] The crowd erupted with applause, and devotees lifted Pius IX above the masses and carried him to the Chapel of the Virgin, where the pope placed a crown on the statue of Mary. Nearly six thousand candles and lamps illuminated St. Peter's during the night, creating a "scene of splendor probably nowhere equaled," and, over the weekend, celebrations of the papal announcement filled homes and piazzas throughout Rome.[74]

Of the nearly 50,000 guests who attended the ceremony, Sarah Peter was one of the first to arrive at St. Peter's that morning. She "set out at half-past six"—two hours before the start of the event—to "secure a good seat" at the basilica.[75] Though not a Catholic at the time, over the course of her travels in Europe, Peter had developed a genuine interest in the Immaculate Conception. Early on during her second visit to the continent, news regarding the dogma and its expected proclamation appeared in the pages of letters Peter penned to Rufus. While traveling from France to Italy in November 1854, Peter encountered several prelates and priests headed to Rome to participate in a council with other Catholic officials about the dogma. Peter wrote letters to Rufus during her boat ride from Marseilles to the Italian coast that indicated that she was in serious conversations with clergymen about the Immaculate Conception.[76]

After attending the ceremony on December 8, 1854, Peter offered a vivid description of the event to her son:

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[73] Elizabeth Hayes Alvarez referenced eye-witness accounts of the event published in European and American newspapers in her work *The Valiant Woman*. For more information, see Elizabeth Hayes Alvarez, *The Valiant Woman: The Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 17, 198n1-3.

[74] *New York Evangelist* quoted in Alvarez, *The Valiant Woman*, 18.

[75] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 8, 1854, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 293.

[76] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 286-297.

> The Pope performed High Mass, surrounded by the magnificent array of the princes of the church from every land in Christendom, and read the Decretal while the guns of St. Angelo boomed in the distance to inform the faithful outsiders of the promulgation within . . . At every corner where the picture of the bust of the Virgin had a place, unnumbered candles and mottoes were placed around her, and arches, illuminated, crossed the streets, with similar devices. Carriages thronged the streets, and moved slowly among solid masses of delighted populace.[77]

The declaration of the Immaculate Conception fascinated Peter, as did other Catholic celebrations and devotions. For example, when she first arrived in Rome, Peter joined in the festival of St. Cecelia, paying for a seat at the church of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere to watch "people enter with still reverence, approach the sacred tomb [of St. Cecilia], kneel a few minutes in prayer, and retire behind the draperies."[78] The story of St. Cecilia's martyrdom and especially the commemoration of how she suffered for her faith—which was embodied in the festival—moved Peter, who noted in a letter to Rufus that she envied "not the heart that can witness untouched the honors so sweetly rendered to this early and noble martyr."[79]

Peter's strong interest in the Immaculate Conception and her reaction to the Festival of St. Cecilia were products of both her growing appreciation for Catholic practices and her interest in the place of women in the Church. Peter, a Protestant American traveling through Europe to purchase art, initially encountered Catholic ceremonies as a curious outsider intrigued by the aesthetics of these unique religious practices. Although Catholics practiced the faith in the United States at that time, elements of the devotionalism she witnessed in Europe—especially the high volume of public devotionalism that she encountered in Rome—would have been new to her. For example, American Catholics might have celebrated St. Cecilia's life, but only

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[77] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 8, 1854, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 293-294.

[78] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, November 28, 1854, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 289.

[79] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, November 28, 1854, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 289.

Catholics in Rome could have conducted the festival on the site where she became a martyr, believing they were truly in the presence of the St. Cecilia. Once Peter became informed about the history of the festivals and the details of Church teachings, including the Immaculate Conception, Peter discovered something more meaningful: the elevation of women in both the Festival of St. Cecilia and in the declaration of the Immaculate Conception. In one instance, Catholics were acknowledging and celebrating the sacrifices of a third-century female martyr and, in the other, the Church was declaring that Christ's mother was born without original sin.

Creating a Catholic Apologist and Anti-Protestant: Peter's Preparation for Conversion

When Peter told her son about her intentions to convert, she said her experiences over "the last three months"—visiting the catacombs, living in a Catholic-dominant society, and attending religious ceremonies—had all combined to propel her toward joining the Church.[80] All of these factors converged in Rome.[81] Over the course of the next few weeks, in the spring of 1855, Peter made a retreat at the Trinità dei Monti, a church and convent for the Society of the Sacred Heart in Rome, where she studied the catechism in preparation for her reception of the sacraments. During that time, Peter acquired a strong understanding of the core Catholic teachings, information she later deployed in letters to Rufus, other family members, and

[80] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Peter would later admit that she had been struggling with her place in the Episcopal Church for much longer than the time she considered Catholicism, noting the following to Rufus: "I have for years, been restless and unhappy at . . . the views held and taught by our church." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 19, 1855, document 1946.349.943a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[81] During her first two trips to Europe, Peter spent time in multiple countries, but Rome became—*by far*—her favorite city. Likewise, Italy was her favorite country, as she spoke highly of other Italian cities, especially those in southern Italy. In July 1855, after leaving Italy for France, Peter wrote the following to Rufus: "But to live in Paris after Rome, is, as Wm Story expresses it after having lived on cake to come down to coarse bread." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, July 19, 1855, document 1946.349.956a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

acquaintances in defense of the Church. At the same time, Peter honed a sophisticated critique of Protestantism, which she continued to develop after she returned to the United States.

Once Peter announced her intent to be a candidate for conversion, Archbishop John Hughes of New York, whom Peter had befriended during her time in Rome, organized her retreat at the Trinità dei Monti.[82] Abbé Gaspard Mermillod, a Swiss priest, served as Peter's principal instructor, though Monsignor Gaetano Bedini offered assistance along the way. When not engaged in study with Mermillod, Peter spent time with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, whom she later described as "dear, good, sensible, & most lady-like."[83] According to Peter, the fifty women religious "beam[ed] forth" with the "beauty of holiness" as they cared for hundreds of children both at the Trinità dei Monti as well as in other houses and schools around Rome.[84] "Truly it is a gratification to any one favoring the idea . . . of women's rights," Peter explained to Rufus, "to see how great a part these ladies have to perform."[85] Peter's first time living in a convent was surely transformative, both for her ideas about the opportunities that the Church and religious life provided for women and for her view that religious orders could have positive

[82] In a March 26, 1855 letter to Rufus, Peter described the Trinità dei Monti as follows: "I have since been the occupant of a nice little dormitory in the convent of Trinita di Monti on the Piscana hill . . . It consists of an immense temple of buildings 3 stories high in the form of a quadrangle with a large court in the midst, surrounded by cloisters, or as we should call them wide porches having grand arches . . . On the walls and arches are many frescos some of great merit. A large and handsome church filled with fine pictures extends along one side – and looks across the Campo Margo . . . all built up, to St Peters and the Vatican – on the left . . . covered with vegetable gardens, and crowned with churches." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 26, 1855, document 1946.349.943b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[83] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[84] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 26, 1855, document 1946.349.943b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[85] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 26, 1855, document 1946.349.943b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

effects on society. In due time, Peter would look to foster the growth of similar institutions in the Ohio Valley.

After multiple weeks of rigorous study, Peter was prepared to join the Church. A private ceremony occurred on Sunday, March 25, 1855, in the Chapel of the Mater Admirabilis at the Trinità dei Monti. Monsignor George Talbot, Abbé Mermillod, and Monsignor Bedini presided over her baptism and abjuration of Protestantism. In addition to Peter and the three clergymen, Eleanor Leslie participated in the service as Peter's godmother. Years before, Leslie, an English woman, had converted to Roman Catholicism. Peter met her while studying at the Trinità dei Monti and the two became close friends.[86]

In the weeks surrounding her conversion, Peter penned a series of letters to her son that primarily focused on her ideas about Catholicism as well as her articulation of Catholic teachings, a stark departure from all her previous travel letters about places she visited and the people she encountered. The letters reveal Peter's development as a Catholic as well as her growing belief about the positive effects of the Catholicism in society. Peter defended transubstantiation, the Catholic doctrine that affirms the bread and wine are transformed—or become—the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, a common matter of contention between Protestants and Catholics. "People of sense and piety ought not to talk sacrilege about the evidence of bread & wine turning into flesh & blood," Peter explained, for "the 'Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' and who still remains, to assure the faith of His peculiar people and is daily offered for . . . those who really desire to obey His commandments as He gave them, but not as they chose them."[87]

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[86] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 230-233.

[87] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. In a similar letter, Peter described

Peter also filled her letters with evidence of the advantages of life in a Catholic society. According to her, the clergy and religious orders positively impacted their worlds by serving the laity and providing models of Christian piety. The "standard of Christian excellence is . . . far higher among the Catholic clergy here, than among our own at home," Peter explained, which created "'such nearness to God' . . . among all classes."[88] Peter added the following about the Italian clergy: "I see beauty of purpose – self-sacrifice – devotions . . . I see the poor priests receiving for themselves nothing but food & clothing . . . They are literally the servants of every body. They all live in communities of some sort, and the whole occupation of their entire lives is to live by the altar – and to serve at the altar."[89] The priests, according to Peter, helped foster a rich devotional life among the laity. She witnessed "kneeling – standing – or sitting at this altar or that – or lying prostrate on the floor – or choosing one [religious] house or another . . . or entering a convent"—all part of Catholic devotional life that Peter grew to value and, ultimately, participate in after she converted.[90] Indeed, one of her letters included a long description of her

her conversion as "being lifted out of a twilight and uncertain existence, into marvelous light . . . all revolving around one common centre [sic] – and illuminated and nourished from a common source, the blessed eucharist, God with us," thereby underscoring the importance of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist for Catholics. Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 17, 1855, document 1946.349.946a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[88] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 10, 1855, document 1946.349.952, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[89] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 8, 1855, document 1946.349.951a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. According to Peter, the Catholic commitment to self-sacrifice extended far beyond the parish priest and all the way to the top of the Church hierarchy. She informed Rufus that Pope Pius IX had sold a gift he received from the Queen of Spain to help found a "house of Industry for the poor." The tiara given to the pontiff was "covered with diamonds & valued at $100,000." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 10, 1855, document 1946.349.952, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[90] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

role in a "function" associated with a confraternity "formed among the higher classes, both men & women."[91]

For every page that she wrote about the joys of Catholic life, Peter devoted as much ink to the errors and falsehoods of Protestantism. "All Protestantism is practical infidelity," Peter warned Rufus, an argument that commonly appeared in her post-conversion letters, which typically included both a defense of Catholicism as well as scathing anti-Protestant charges.[92] A core component of her conversion had been an official abjuration of the "errors and heresies" of Protestantism, an oath that Peter took before the Office of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition on March 26, 1855.[93] "Believe your Mother . . . We have been deceived," Peter cautioned her son, "Protestantism . . . is human works – not God's work – and though not in our

[91] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 10, 1855, document 1946.349.952, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. For a full description of her participation in the event, see the following excerpt: "A few days since, I assisted at a 'function' which carried me back, beyond the early Christian times. There is a Confraternity called that of the [Viaticum ?] formed from among the higher classes, both men & women, who at certain periods went at the Church of S[t]. S[tephen], . . . built upon an ancient temple in the Roman Forum two of three grand old columns still standing on either side of the portal . . . . Their procession having formed, the ladies following, the Princess also carrying a cross & chanting, alternatively, they wound along the ancient Via Sacra – passing under the arch of Titus - & all along the line of ruins at the . . . Palatine Hills to the Coliseum . . . after chanting psalms, & prayers the procession returned again to the church . . . I was one of them, together with a number of ladies."

[92] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 8, 1855, document 1946.349.951a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[93] Sarah Peter Collection, folder 6, "Reception Into Catholic Church," Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. The folder contains the document that marked Peter's official abjuration of Protestantism, noting the following: "To all everywhere let it be open and known that on the 26 day of March in the year 1855, Sarah, daughter of Thomas and Helen Worthington, widow of William Peter from Chillicothe, Ohio and Cincinnati, Ohio in America, aged 54 years, has said thus: she has personally and voluntarily appeared in the Office of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition and declared on oath that she has held and believed the errors and the heresies of the Sect of the Anglicans in which she had been born and educated, and begged to be absolved and received and admitted into the bosom of Holy Mother Church. On said month and day, in the year 1855, the aforesaid Sara Peter in execution of the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has denied on oath the heresies and errors of the said sect of the Anglicans one with all and with any other errors and heresies whatsoever contrary to the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. She was successively by the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Cajetan Bedini, Archbishop of Thebes, special delegate of the Most Reverend Father Commissary of the aforesaid Holy Inquisition, absolved in the usual form of the Church from the sentence of excommunication thereby incurred, and was reconciled with Holy Mother the Church after the imposition of salutary penances, as can be seen in the pertinent documents etc. In witness whereof etc. Given in Rome from the Palace of the Holy Office on the above mentioned day and year. Signed by Paulinus Carlucci of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition, Substitute."

time it must come to naught . . . it is certainly little more than one vast negation."[94] Peter now felt the need to justify why she raised her son in the Episcopal Church, writing that "[i]t was not my fault that I brought you up a Protestant, for in my ignorance, I knew no better. It was my misfortune, which with God's blessing I would now repair."[95] Peter believed Protestantism elevated worldly individuals over a sacred institution—the Roman Catholic Church—that had lasted centuries. She often railed against the "pretended right of private judgment" that provided Protestants the means to set up "a creed of [their] own fabrication" as well as the "want of more freedom" that had led to "innumerable follies" in "Protestant nations."[96] Based on Peter's experiences in various European countries, she believed that the majority faith of the people—either Protestant or Catholic—had a profound effect on the quality of life in that nation. And, unsurprisingly, she believed Protestant nations had fallen far behind the countries where Catholicism flourished.[97] For Peter, the Church, with its body of clergy and religious, constituted the true heir of Christianity. "He promised that His spirit should ever remain to guide us in the way of truth," Peter explained, "& that He would be with us to the end of the world,

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[94] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 19, 1855, document 1946.349.943a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[95] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 17, 1855, document 1946.349.946a, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[96] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[97] In letters to Rufus, Peter expounded on her ideas about the differences between Catholic and Protestant countries. She suggested that the role of parish priests in Catholic countries helped elevate even the lowest classes of people, creating a more agreeable society. Peter wrote the following: "Why is it . . . [that] the Protestant population, the English, especially, are the most brutal & degraded in Europe? The Scotch are poor, but not brutal - & the Highlanders who have left so many beautiful tracts of self-devotion . . . are Catholics. Why is northern Germany more brutish than the Southern provinces? It is in Catholic countries only (Ireland is an exceptional case[)] . . . [that] the very poorest . . . must always stand in a more or less intimate relation with his priest, who as his superior, elevates him . . . [and provides him] a sort of self-respect." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 29, 1855 [the collection contains two versions of the same letter dated March 29, 1855], document 1946.349.944, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[therefore] it would be sacrilegious for us to say that He had been false to His promises, & had left us without a sure and certain guide."[98] The "sure and certain guide," according to Peter, was the Roman Catholic Church, whereas Protestantism rested on a foundation of "credulities and absurdities."[99]

The Cost of Conversion: Peter's Family and Acquaintances Respond to Her New Faith

Despite the close relationship she enjoyed her son, Peter worried about how Rufus would receive the news. "I earnestly desire . . . to hear your thoughts upon the change in my faith," Peter wrote Rufus in late March 1855, fearing that the news had "shocked" him.[100] Correspondence between Peter and Rufus reveals how her decision to join the Roman Catholic Church affected relationships with family and friends as well as discloses how the broader Cincinnati community responded to reports of her conversion. Most of Peter's close relatives remained staunch Episcopalians or Presbyterians, and many of them responded with amazement and alarm over her decision to abjure the faith of the family. Letters between Peter and Rufus also demonstrate how the growing wave of anti-Catholicism during the mid-1850s shaped how

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[98] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[99] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 8, 1855, document 1946.349.951a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[100] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 26, 1855, document 1946.349.943b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. At the time of writing the letter on March 26, 1855, Peter had not heard from Rufus since mailing her March 11, 1855 letter, which announced her interest in converting to Catholicism. Her letters written after March 11, 1855 include a clear sense of Peter's anxiety over how her children would respond to her new faith. For example, on April 10, 1855, Peter wrote the following to Rufus: "In the midst of all, I was thinking constantly about <u>you</u> – for I suppose, during that week, you would probably receive my letter of the [11th] of March, which I fear might cost you some pain – for I can hardly even hope that you could have understood how and why it was that your Mother had taken such a step. If I could but in any way convey to your mind, my dear, my perfect, and unflinching conviction, that I have only followed a duty so plain, that it would have been [a] mortal sin to have closed my eyes to the truth . . . and if I could but show to you the half of the comfort, the joy – the peace in believing, which this faith offers to all, and through which, for the first time I have fully learned to understand the glad tidings of Peace on earth, to men of good will, as you would fly towards it, to make it your own. Believe me my child, it is, in this sad . . . world, the ark of safety – and our only sure refuge." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 10, 1855, document 1946.349.945a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

the general public in Cincinnati reacted to learning that one of their most prominent citizens had become Catholic. Indeed, both in the immediate aftermath and for the remainder of her life, Peter's conversion created rifts between family members and other acquaintances, underscoring that her decision was not simply a personal one.

In March 1855, when Peter told Rufus she planned to look "a little nearer into the workings of the Romish church," she requested that her ideas remain private, noting at the top of the page that the "letter, my dear, is for you only . . . Do not, for the present, mention it . . . to Minnie [Rufus's wife], until you have taken full time to think, long, & deeply and to pray for instruction & grace from on high."[101] A month later, Rufus replied that he "was not all surprised" to learn of his mother's interests in Catholicism because he had noticed in her "letters of the last three or four months . . . slight expressions or allusions connected with [the] particular subject."[102] Indeed, Rufus understood her move toward conversion as a product of her time in Europe and, especially, her continued stay in Rome. "[A]mid such environments it must require a very cold impassive motive to escape the genius loci," acknowledged Rufus, "for there beyond any other spot in the world not even excepting the Holy Places, are concentrated the most powerful influences which the invention and imagination of Eighteen centuries have been conceiving and accumulating."[103] Yet Rufus cautioned his mother not to spread the news of her conversion too quickly. "If you become confirmed in the conclusions which you throw out in

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[101] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. A week later, on March 19, 1855, Peter reminded Rufus of the following: "I prefer that you should not speak of my changed views – but quietly pursue your own investigations" and "I repeat to you that I do not speak of these subjects among our Americans here, few of whom are intelligent people – because I desire to avoid being talked about." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 19, 1855, document 1946.349.943a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[102] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[103] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

your last letter," he wrote, "it would be better that your friends should discover it by degrees rather than by any sudden movement."[104] In particular, Rufus hoped that Peter would "have the good fortune to escape the newspapers," so that her conversion would not be subjected to the public scrutiny that so many other Catholic converts had faced.[105] Peter too hoped to keep her conversion a secret as long as possible. Eventually, however, news of her joining the Church spread across the Atlantic.

Other than informing Rufus, Peter initially withheld her plans for conversion from family, friends, and colleagues associated with the gallery.[106] In fact, those closest to her in Cincinnati learned of her conversion through an announcement from Archbishop John Baptist Purcell and other clergy in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in late April 1855. According to Rufus, the news generated shock and confusion. "The matter [of informing people] was not managed rightly," he explained, "I wish you had let me know sooner that you had written or were intending to write to Bishop Purcell. I might in this way have prevented some very unpleasant occurrences."[107] When Peter's friends and daughter-in-law found out that she had joined the Catholic Church, they "most indignantly den[ied]" it in public.[108] Rumors spread

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[104] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[105] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[106] The one exception being the Adamses, an American family living in Rome at the time of Peter's conversion. "As yet, I prosecute most prayerfully, my researches, both in the doctrines and practice of the church," Peter informed Rufus, "without however, communicating my impressions to my acquaintances, except the Adams—who are honourable people." Peter believed that members of the Adams family might "join [her] in the decision . . . and return with [her] to the faith of [their] forefathers." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[107] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 5, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[108] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 5, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

throughout the city. The "matter [wa]s duly embellished of course," reported Rufus.[109] Cincinnatians snidely referred to her conversion as a "special miracle" and announced "Nuncio Bedini . . . as the special means by whose interposition [Peter] ha[d] been saved."[110] Rufus's reference to Archbishop Gaetano (Cajetan) Bedini, in particular, linked the news of Peter's conversion to anti-Catholicism in the Ohio Valley. In 1853, Bedini had made a seven-month tour of the United States on behalf of Pope Pius IX, an event that prompted an outpouring of nativism and anti-Catholicism. Bedini culminated his American visit in Cincinnati, where his presence incited a mob of over 500 men and women, comprised mostly of anti-Catholic Germans as well as nativists and other opponents of the Church.[111] Rufus reminded his mother that Bedini remained "very savoury here," thereby suggesting the implications of having Peter's name tied to his.[112] In an effort to avoid facing more questions about his mother, Rufus "merely den[ied]"

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[109] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 5, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[110] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 5, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[111] For more information on the event, see Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 27-28; Andrew Mach, "'The Name of Freeman is Better Than Jesuit': Anti-Catholicism, Republican Ideology, and Cincinnati Political Culture, 1853-1854," *Ohio Valley History* 15 (winter 2015): 3-21.

[112] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 5, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. It remains unclear how much Rufus King, other family members, Peter's colleagues, or the general public in Cincinnati knew about Peter's relationship with Archbishop Bedini. Rufus's May 5, 1855 letter suggests that, as news spread of her conversion, members of the public mocked Peter's decision by linking it with, perhaps, one of the most well-known and lamented representatives of Catholicism in recent local memory. However, it appears that Peter mentioned Bedini only once to Rufus before Rufus's May 5, 1855 letter. In early 1855, Peter noted that Bedini had "called on" her for a meeting in Rome. She described him as "an extremely agreeable man, perhaps forty-five years of age, with a fresh complexion and decidedly handsome. His manners are frank and polished in the highest degree." When they met, Bedini discussed his American tour, or what he called his "mis-adventures in America." "I hear from all who know him," Peter explained, "that [Bedini] always mentions them with the greatest humor, and exempts Americans from all blame in the matter." Months later, in late May 1855, Peter penned a letter in response to her son's from May 5, 1855, in which she revealed that—in fact—Bedini had played a role in her conversion. Bedini had helped design a "plan for [her]" instruction in the Catholic faith, advised her to make her abjuration of Protestantism, and constituted one of the "three or four persons . . . present" during the ceremony. Furthermore, in the same letter, Peter offered a lengthy defense of Bedini, which included the following: "A word about the much abused Bedini. A fortnight since I accompanied several ladies to the studio of a Swedish lady artist who is employed by the queen of Sweden, to copy some of the great pictures of Italy . . . Bedini with whom she was well acquainted, some years since at Bologna while he was Governor, & where, she tells me he is universally beloved. She spoke with great surprise – of the monstrous fabrications that had been published against him in the U.S. & declared they were utterly destitute of

that he had "any positive statement that [Peter had] actually taken allegiance to the Pope."[113] In referring to his mother's conversion as "tak[ing] allegiance to the Pope," Rufus expressed a standard nineteenth-century anti-Catholic critique which held that Catholics owed their loyalty to a foreign religious leader. It is unclear how concerned Rufus was about his mother's new "allegiance," but the fact that he referred to her conversion in that matter suggests that he felt some reservations about Peter joining the Church.

Among other family members, reactions ranged from moderate support to outright anger and concern. "When I have your permission," Rufus pleaded after learning about Peter's increased interest in Catholicism, "I shall endeavor to prepare Aunt Mag's mind by degrees for the reception of the shock."[114] Rufus believed that Margaret Worthington Mansfield, whom he called Aunt Mag, was likely to "write [Peter] down as crazy."[115] This news, nevertheless, did not surprise Peter. Knowing that her sister would be weighed down by the "bitterness of Calvinism," Peter anticipated an unfavorable reception.[116] "She [Margaret] must not think that I have fallen into Babylon the Great, the Mother of abominations," Peter cautioned Rufus, for

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truth. She is a Protestant, & did not know of my acquaintance with M[onsignor] B[edini] & her testimony is reliable. In fact I have not yet met with a single person here who did not utterly deny the whole story. He is a very admirable & kind hearted man with great simplicity of character, combined with excellent abilities." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 28, 1855, document 1946.349.952a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 222-223.

[113] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, May 5, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. In fact, Peter took offense to Rufus's use of the phrase, noting in a subsequent letter: "What nonsense about 'allegiance to the Pope!' Worthy man, I pray for him devoutly." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 28, 1855, document 1946.349.952a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[114] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[115] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[116] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 8, 1855, document 1946.349.951a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. The same letter also mentions that Margaret Worthington Mansfield expressed fears about "Satan moving about in people," presumably in reference to Peter's conversion, thus suggesting that she believed Peter's abjuration of Protestantism had been influenced by the devil.

"that was heathen Rome, & she is dead long ago."[117] Despite Peter's appeals, Margaret continued to express her disdain for Catholicism and regret over her sister joining the church, until her death in 1861.[118]

Peter expressed anxiety over the implications of her conversion, but no family member concerned her more than Rufus.[119] Even though he remained a supportive son, Rufus's letters reveal a tone of continued frustration over time, particularly when Peter introduced the topic of conversion. The two often shared their divergent views on religious matters, an exchange which

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[117] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[118] Peter's conversion also negatively affected her relationship with Thomas Worthington King, Jr., her grandson. Following the death of his father, Thomas accompanied Peter during her first two voyages to Europe. As he grew into a young adult, however, Thomas developed strong anti-Catholic sympathies, which—as Peter explained in her letters to Rufus—caused Thomas to avoid his grandmother and ignore her requests for visits. In 1870, when Peter traveled to Rome for the fifth time, Thomas was living in Europe. Peter penned several letters to her son stating that Thomas refused to visit her in Rome because of his strong hatred of Catholicism. Four years later, during Peter's sixth and final trip to Rome, Thomas finally appeased his grandmother and agreed to spend time with her. Though he continued to express antipathy toward the Catholic Church, Peter was hopeful that she could "strengthen him to good purposes." For more information on the relationship between Sarah Peter and her grandson, Thomas Worthington King, Jr., see Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 5, 1870, document 1946.349.1170, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 20, 1870, document 1946.349.1179, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, June 21, 1870, document 1946.349.1184, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 29, 1874, document 1946.349.1202, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[119] Two weeks after officially abjuring her Anglican faith and joining the Catholic Church, Peter wrote the following to Rufus: "I earnestly hope that you have addressed yourself to [Archbishop Purcell], as I recommended you, and that you have commenced the study (the prayerful study) of this immense question. What happiness for you & Minnie, & for me, if we can think alike!" Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 10, 1855, document 1946.349.945a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Peter also hoped her daughter-in-law, Elizabeth King, would convert. Elizabeth provided clear evidence that she was not interested in joining the Church. For example, see Elizabeth King's letter from April 27, 1855, which included the following remarks: "The conversations we held at different times regarding the Church of your late adoption I shall remember & feel that it was a privilege to have had them – as I told you my dear Mrs Peter – I am a protestant of a rather strict order & feel like for years, had a most repugnant feeling toward any thing like Romanism for that I am as intolerant as the . . . Roman catholic can be. Yet I am happy to say that the conversations we had . . . & the ceremonies I saw [in Italy] . . . have tended to soften my feelings, & to awaken a kindlier sentiment towards it." Despite having her anti-Catholic sympathies tempered, Elizabeth still wrote the following: "Excuse me . . . but I think you are wrong . . . Yet God knows the heart. He sees your earnest endeavor . . . & He knows what is truth. Let us trust he will set us both right - & bring us to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus at last." Elizabeth King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 27, 1855, document 1946.349.947, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

remained civil over the course of two decades, but Peter never ceased raising the prospect of conversion for both Rufus and Margaret, his wife. "Really, dear Mamma," as Rufus so often wrote, "I know the . . . affection of your motive but I wish you would not consider me a subject for proselytism. I think you will make a very poor subject of the Pope & am inclined to think I should be much worse. At any rate I think the old gentleman will be quite content with but one of us."[120] Rufus, who, early on in their exchanges about religion, referred to himself as "a hard hearted Rationalist," politely engaged his mother in debates about the authority of the hierarchy, the history of the Church, and Catholic teachings.[121] To him, the matter would never be fully resolved, as he had no intentions of ever converting, though he remained an honorable son and indulged his mother in conversations about Catholicism.[122] Yet, to Sarah, their correspondence about religion was of paramount importance. In her view, the fate of Rufus's soul was at stake, and she—both as his mother and as a professed member of the Catholic Church—proved determined to bring Rufus into the fold. "My only regret in the matter," Peter affirmed, "is . . . that you have not been here, and dear Minnie also, to accompany me, step by step, in this my

[120] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, June 16, 1855, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[121] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[122] Indeed, the first letter Rufus penned to Peter after learning about her intentions to convert stated the following: "Whatever, my dear Mamma, be the result of your reflections upon the change you now contemplate it can never affect the relations between us because I know that your views will be formed with due reserve and allowance for some undoubted Errors of the Roman Church and that there is no danger that you will ever be a bigot or devotee." While clearly not a statement of unwavering support for his mother, Rufus's note was undoubtedly reassuring to Peter that her conversion would not sever ties between them. Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, April 15, 1855, document 1946.349.946, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. Nonetheless, Rufus also made it clear that he had no intentions of considering Catholicism, explaining to Peter that "it is not probable that you & I will ever agree at all in regard to some few cardinal dogmas of the Romish Church we can afford to differ with each other pleasantly enough. So far as I am affected in any way, shape or form do not feel in the least degree concerned—for it is infinitely more essential to me that you should enjoy your own judgment & course of life. When I differ with you in opinion I shall freely let you know—but shall nevertheless enjoy your enjoyment of your own peculiar views." Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, August 5, 1855, document 1946.349.957a, folder 45, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

progress towards 'a more excellent way.'"[123] Indeed, until her death in 1877, Peter lamented the fact that Rufus refused to join her as member of the Roman Catholic Church.[124]

Creating a Catholic Philanthropist

Conversion forever changed Peter's life. Her new faith complicated her relationships with those closest to her in the United States. Yet Catholicism also introduced her to new social networks, including the circles of priests, prelates, and religious orders from around the world as well as prominent lay Catholics at home. In the end, for Peter, joining the Church involved much more than just the fate of her soul or the fulfillment of her journey toward the truth. The process remade her life, transforming Peter from an elite Protestant lady into a lay Catholic philanthropist whose work influenced the nature of social and religious life in the Ohio Valley by strengthening the influence of the Church in the region. Most of the prominent American Catholic converts of the nineteenth century were writers or intellectuals, such as Orestes Brownson, who promoted and defended the Church through an exchange of ideas and attempts to (re)shape public opinion about the faith. By contrast, Peter propelled her conversion into a life

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[123] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 26, 1855, document 1946.349.943b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[124] To provide a general sense of Rufus King's thoughts on Catholicism and organized religion, see the following excerpt from an April 15, 1855 letter to Peter: "if popes & priests were not merely human and therefore constantly prone to pervert and abuse the best instrumentalities [they might] be justified as the means of subjecting society en masse to the immediate rule and direction of God acting through his chosen ministers. I will go so far as to say that in my humble judgment & observation the Catholic clergy are in every respect as good [as] . . . their Protestant confreres. But that curse of Man, the lust and pride of place and power, invades and depraves the Church, as it does the State, in every form and age and . . . under all circumstances . . . he who questions or criticises [sic] the priest is a disbeliever or infidel in the worlds Estimation . . . I trust and believe that though I belong to no Church and probably may never 'join' any, you will never have reason to be ashamed or (I would even hope) to reprove my creed in religious matters." Three weeks later, after reading his letter from April 15, 1855, Peter responded to his criticism of individuals corrupting the Church by stating the following: "Corrupt men there may & well be every where to the end of time. We have had sad examples enough . . . but this Roman church is pure and holy – and built upon the prophets and apostles." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 8, 1855, document 1946.349.951a, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

committed to charity and fostering Catholic devotional life in the United States. Even before converting, she alluded to her future plans in a letter to Rufus. "When I come home, I trust, by the Divine aid to enter steadily upon the prosecution of some of those good works for the bodies and souls of men," explained Peter, "which it has always been in my heart to do, if I could have had adequate assistance under the care of a church which provides food & work for all her children. I shall have helpers—and thus I shall have less need of money for my own use."[125]

Peter's intention to perform "works for the bodies and souls of men" was a direct reference to the Catholic works of mercy, a set of theologically-based practices that emphasized personal sacrifice and communal bonds.[126] According to Church principles, there are seven corporal works of mercy, or works for the bodies of people, and seven spiritual works of mercy, or works for the souls of people.[127] Between 1857 and 1877, Peter, along with members of three religious orders for women, employed the works of mercy in the greater-Cincinnati region by founding charitable institutions and cultivating devotional Catholicism among the laity.

In the weeks following her official conversion, Peter reminded Rufus of her future plans, noting that she intended to spend the "rest of [her] days" occupied "in some good work or others . . . chiefly of that which so long ha[d] been on [her] mind for the poor Magdalens."[128] Peter had

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[125] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, March 11, 1855, document 1946.349.942b, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[126] As explained in the introduction, I am defining the works of mercy as a "set of theologically-based practices that emphasize personal sacrifice and communal bonds," so I am drawing on Fr. Keenan's definition in *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*.

[127] See "The Corporal Works of Mercy," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-corporal-works-of-mercy.cfm; "The Spiritual Works of Mercy," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy.cfm; James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, third edition (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017).

[128] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

heard about the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Angers, France, where members of that order managed asylums for women in need. In fact, Monsignor Talbot had arranged for her to visit "the convent of the Good Shepherd, (for sinful women)," she explained, "[i]t is an immense edifice which includes female criminals of all ages & characters, and it seems to be excellently well managed."[129] "I now know that I shall have help enough in this or any other good work," Peter continued, "and I am quite willing to come back to Cincinnati."[130] Most importantly, with her new plans to engage in the Catholic works of mercy, Peter felt that she possessed a new role in society, meaning that she would "not [be] living in vain."[131] "One of the causes of my discontent," Peter explained, "was that I saw no means of living to any real purpose."[132]

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Before she left Rome in May 1855, Sarah Peter enjoyed a final meeting with Pope Pius IX, to whom she revealed her mission to foster the Catholic works of mercy in Cincinnati. Eleanor Leslie—Peter's friend, godmother, and fellow convert—described the meeting in her memoir, noting the following:

> [Pius IX] questioned [Peter] closely upon her future plans, and expressed satisfaction when she told him she intended to devote the rest of her life and fortune to the promotion of religion in the United States. She spoke of her admiration for the religious orders for women, and said that she would like to establish some of them in Cincinnati.[133]

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[129] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 23, 1855, document 1946.349.950, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[130] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[131] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[132] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 1, 1855, document 1946.349.951, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio.

[133] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 238. McAllister cited *Eleanor Leslie* (1898), a memoir of Peter's godmother.

Peter had departed Cincinnati in the summer of 1854 to support the Ladies' Academy of Art. Twelve months later, she left Rome as a spirited and avowed agent of the Church determined to shape social and religious life in Cincinnati and beyond. Not only had she chosen a new faith, but Peter had also forged a new identity. Her conversion concluded one chapter in her life characterized by involvement in elite Protestant circles in Philadelphia and southern Ohio and opened the door to new possibilities as a prominent lay Catholic philanthropist, whose influence would eventually span a large portion of the nineteenth-century Atlantic world.

CHAPTER THREE:

Sanctifying the Ohio Valley: Sarah Peter, Catholic Sisters, and the Process of Cultivating the Spiritual Works of Mercy in the Greater-Cincinnati Region

On May 5, 1861, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell and five bishops from the surrounding area gathered at Sarah Peter's home at the corner of Third and Lytle Streets in Cincinnati.[1] There the prelates conducted a ceremony, laying the cornerstone of the Provincial House of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis in America. According to the *Catholic Telegraph*, despite the onset of rain, a large crowd consisting of "Twelve of the Franciscan Sisters" along with "several ladies and gentlemen, Catholic and non-Catholic" gathered to witness "the scene" and express "their kindest sympathies with the contemplated objects of the pious Sisterhood."[2] With Bishop Spalding's final blessing, Peter's mansion became the Convent of St. Clare, the first novitiate and motherhouse of the Franciscan sisters in the United States. Within days, members of the order took up residence and prepared a small chapel in one of the rooms on the second floor formerly occupied by Peter, further marking the transformation of the structure from a secular residence to a sanctified space.[3] There the sisters welcomed the Blessed Sacrament, most likely in the form of a host, an edible wafer that Catholics believed was the true body of Jesus Christ.

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[1] Archbishop Purcell welcomed the following bishops, all of whom occupied episcopal sees that fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 1861: Bishop Martin John Spalding of Louisville, Kentucky; Bishop George Aloysius Carrell of Covington, Kentucky; Bishop Jacques-Maurice De Saint Palais of Vincennes, Indiana; Bishop Peter Paul Lefevere of Detroit, Michigan; and Bishop Frederic Baraga of Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan.

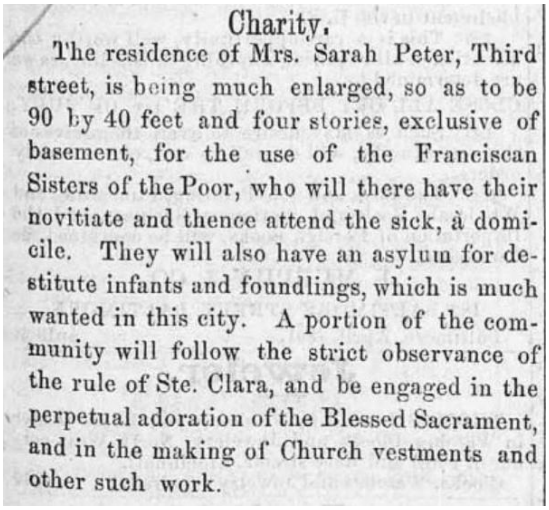
[2] "The Cornerstone of the Clarisses Chapel," *Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, May 11, 1861.

[3] In a letter to Isaac Hecker, Peter described the founding of St. Clare Convent, noting that "[s]everal of the Franciscan sisters have already taken possession of my abode. I retain the use of two rooms and relinquish the remainder for their use. They have already collected a bevy of motherless or neglected babies . . . Meanwhile the building in the rear goes on actively – and in September we hope to be ready for our Clarisses, and the 'Perpetual Adoration' – which I devoutly hope may indeed be Perpetual." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Isaac Hecker, June 9, 1861, copy of transcribed letter (original letter from the Hecker Papers, Archives of the Paulist Fathers, New York, New York) in Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

In this newly consecrated area, the sisters offered regular devotions to the Blessed Sacrament, which was displayed in a monstrance, a specialized vessel for holding the host. They displayed the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel and prayed, either individually or collectively, in the real presence of Christ, eventually extending the opportunity to the local laity to participate in the ceremonies of Eucharistic Adoration, Benediction, and the Forty Hours devotions.[4] In time, the sisters, with the help of Sarah Peter, renovated the convent, adding a larger and more permanent chapel for the devotional activities of the Franciscan community and other Catholics in the city.[5]

[4] The best work on Roman Catholic devotional practices in the United States during the nineteenth century is Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Eucharistic Adoration, or what was commonly called Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, provided opportunities for Catholics to be in the presence of Christ—in the form of a consecrated host or wafer—for prayer and reflection. Benediction, on the other hand, required the role of male clergy who used the Blessed Sacrament to bless a gathering of Catholics. By 1862, the priest at a nearby parish came to St. Clare convent every afternoon to offer Benediction. Lastly, the Forty Hours constituted a special devotion, in which prayer before the Blessed Sacrament occurred for forty hours uninterrupted, in order to commemorate the forty hours that Christ's body spent in the tomb. In *The Household of the Faith*, Taves discusses each of these devotions in detail, and also demonstrates that, by the mid-nineteenth century, devotions associated with the Blessed Sacrament gained popularity in the United States. For a recent work on presence, especially how ordinary Catholics experienced the presence of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints in their daily lives as well as how presence came to distinguish Catholic from Protestants, see Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). Orsi explained how, following the sixteenth century, the term "real presence . . . became more sharply delineated and ever more exclusively associated with Roman Catholics." This transition underscores the importance, as well as the stakes, of what Sarah Peter and the sisters with whom she was associated established in the Ohio Valley. As Orsi explained, by the seventeenth century, "'real presence' . . . *among non-Catholics* . . . meant the disgusting idea that Jesus's actual body was there to be crunched on in the Host, his blood guzzled from the chalice, and, *among Catholics*, it meant the reality of the Catholic supernatural as opposed to the empty simulacrum of the Protestant holy. Catholics became the people of real presence par excellence, in their Eucharistic theology and in their devotional practices . . . that included eating holy cards, rubbing holy dirt on the place where the body of a love one hurts, having the dead arrive back home, and so on."

[5] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 1858-1932, translation and transcription by Sister M. Pauline, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, 69-75; Margaret Rives King, editor, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 427-429; Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 302-305; "Charity," *Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, May 4, 1861; "The Cornerstone of the Clarisses Chapel," *Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, May 11, 1861.



Charity.

The residence of Mrs. Sarah Peter, Third street, is being much enlarged, so as to be 90 by 40 feet and four stories, exclusive of basement, for the use of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, who will there have their novitiate and thence attend the sick, à domicile. They will also have an asylum for destitute infants and foundlings, which is much wanted in this city. A portion of the community will follow the strict observance of the rule of Ste. Clara, and be engaged in the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and in the making of Church vestments and other such work.

I3.1: An article from May 4, 1861 in the *Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati's official Catholic newspaper, that announced the transformation of Peter's residence into the Convent of St. Clare for the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis.[6]

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The transformation of Peter's residence into a convent represented one key moment in a process that I am calling the Catholic sanctification of the greater-Cincinnati region. I am using the term sanctify to highlight change in terms of new spaces consecrated as well as the expansion of religious practices by three orders of Catholic sisters, with the aid of Sarah Peter, for Church members in the Ohio Valley.[7] In many ways, the sanctification of Cincinnati began in Europe, where Peter recruited members of orders and received financial support for her mission. Once in the Midwest, the women established chapels that featured the Blessed Sacrament and relics that Peter transported from Europe, and in doing so cultivated a thriving devotional life among the laity. I am not arguing that elements of sanctification were absent prior to the partnership between Peter and the sisters. Rather, this chapter demonstrates how the women expanded those

[6] "Charity," *Catholic Telegraph*, May 4, 1861.

[7] Dictionary.com provides the following definition for sanctify: "To make holy; set apart as sacred; consecrate."

aspects in the city, creating new opportunities for Catholics to participate in Church life outside of the liturgy.

The chapter also addresses Sarah Peter's commitment to the spiritual works of mercy, specifically the works to instruct and to pray for others, which she helped foster in the region through her relationship with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Mercy, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are seven corporal works of mercy, or works for the bodies of people (feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; shelter the homeless; care for the sick; visit the imprisoned; and bury the dead) and seven spiritual works of mercy, or works for the souls of people (instruct the ignorant; counsel the doubtful; admonish sinners; bear wrongs patiently; forgive offenses; comfort the afflicted; and pray for the living and dead). Offering instruction could be interpreted as promoting Catholic teachings among already baptized Catholics as well as spreading the faith to non-Catholics, especially in an effort to gain converts for the Church. Once they arrived in Cincinnati, the sisters sponsored lay organizations to promote Catholic teachings at the parish level, and Peter took a personal interest in spreading the faith among Protestants.

The chapter examines the various steps in the process of sanctifying the region. The first section introduces the three orders that are featured in the remaining chapters of the dissertation, explaining how Peter developed a relationship with members of each and how she negotiated their relocation to Cincinnati. The second section evaluates Peter's role as a fundraiser and benefactress, demonstrating how she successfully raised money throughout Europe to support her mission in the Ohio Valley. Peter leveraged her unique position as a prominent lay woman to gain the attention of the highest-ranking Church officials as well as some of the wealthiest

nobles in Europe. The third section analyzes how the sisters and Peter promoted practices and established lay organizations to cultivate devotional life in the region. Finally, the fourth section focuses on the materials central to sanctification—statues, rosaries, relics, and other religious items—most of which Peter had imported to U.S. soil.

"[T]he cause of piety and humanity": Peter's Plan for Catholic Sisters in Cincinnati

Before leaving Rome in May 1855, Peter enjoyed a private meeting with Pope Pius IX. In the presence of the Holy Father, Peter reaffirmed her plans for the future. She intended to dedicate the rest of her life to the growth of Catholicism in the United States, promoting the works of mercy for the benefit of social and religious life in the Ohio Valley. In order to accomplish her goals, Peter envisioned partnering with orders of Catholic sisters, whose charitable and missionary work she had observed in cities throughout Europe.[8] Rather than inviting just any order willing to relocate to Cincinnati, Peter identified congregations that specialized in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy that she believed were needed in the region. The next step in her mission involved convincing members of those orders, specifically the superiors of each, to support the founding of a convent in southern Ohio.

Peter's personal mission took form several decades after key developments in the history of religious orders for women, developments that helped make it possible for Peter to partner with European Catholic sisters and accomplish her goals in Cincinnati. Historian Sarah A. Curtis showed how, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, women founded dozens of new religious orders in France as part of their active role in restoring the Church after the French Revolution. Curtis associated this moment with the emergence of the "modern nun," in which

[8] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 238-239.

members of orders exchanged their lives of contemplative prayer for public roles in "nursing, teaching, and serving the poor."[9] Curtis also argued that religious life offered single women an opportunity to escape the limitations set by the ideology of domesticity and other gender-based social structures, thus helping explain why thousands of women joined Catholic orders in the early nineteenth century. Such women were energetic, inspired by their religious convictions, and committed to spreading the faith and improving the lives of others in their communities and beyond.[10] These developments meant that when Peter arrived in Europe in the 1850s, she encountered orders prepared for and open to the idea of supporting missions in other countries.

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[9] Sarah A. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of the French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5. In the introduction, Curtis described in detail the key differences between the new or "modern" orders and the ones that existed before the nineteenth century, writing: "In post-Revolutionary France, however, the active and apostolic model became the predominant one while contemplative orders languished. The new orders were distinguished from older ones in two important ways. First, they took up the active work of nursing, teaching, and serving the poor, which required that they leave their convents, breaking with traditions of cloister. Time devoted to these activities reduced the amount of time that nuns in traditional convents had devoted to prayer and contemplation. Second, they had a very different organizational structure. Instead of each convent being self-governing, the order was centralized under the direction of a *supérieure générale* (usually the founder of the order until her death) and an elected council. Members, who were trained in a common novitiate, joined the order with the understanding that they could be moved to any one of its establishments at any time—under the vow of obedience—to undertake whatever work was most needed. No longer would a young woman enter a convent knowing she would live and die within its walls. The superior general had responsibility for the personnel and the finances of the entire order. In admittedly anachronistic modern-day corporate terms, women's religious orders ceased being franchises and became national—or multinational—corporations run by the latter-day equivalent of a CEO. This centralized structure allowed for a far greater reach geographically and more unity of purpose."

[10] Curtis's work analyzed the lives of three missionary Catholic sisters from post-Revolutionary France: Philippine Duchesne, Emilie de Vialar, and Anne-Marie Javouhney. In writing about their efforts, specifically underscoring the unique opportunities experienced by the sisters in comparison to their contemporaries not involved in religious life, Curtis noted the following: "Few, if any, laywomen in the early nineteenth century had the freedom that Duchesne, Vialar, and Javouhney exercised as Catholic nuns to travel outside of France, negotiate with colonial agents and indigenous leaders alike, challenge church power, and evangelize among non-Christians, all roles more commonly ascribed to men. This freedom, in turn, was facilitated by changes in the nineteenth-century Catholic church, which became increasingly shaped by the evangelical energy of women. The female religious order of the nineteenth century underwent a radical transformation that allowed women religious to take up new roles in France and overseas. The innovative nature of this transformation, however, was camouflaged by the traditional nature of their calling. The very structure of female religious life and the respect it engendered in lay society allowed scope for experimentation not experienced elsewhere. Within the framework of one of the oldest institutions in French history, nuns carved out a space to pursue new and often controversial agendas, including evangelization on a global scale." Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 3.

Although Peter eventually traveled to Europe to recruit sisters, her project began closer to home. In December 1842, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd founded a convent in Louisville, Kentucky, about one hundred miles down the Ohio River from Cincinnati. Peter first targeted the Good Shepherds as potential candidates for her mission and organized a plan for the order to expand its work into southern Ohio. While the Louisville establishment marked the Good Shepherds' first missionary work in the United States, Peter had first learned of the order in Europe, where she realized that they could have a positive impact on social and religious life in the greater-Cincinnati region.[11] One month after her conversion experience, in April 1855, Peter visited the convent of the Good Shepherds in Rome. "It is an immense edifice," Peter wrote, "which includes female criminals of all ages & characters, and it seems to be excellently well managed."[12] Two months later, Peter ventured to Angers, France, where she met with Mary of Saint Euphrasia Pelletier, the mother superior of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Pelletier offered Peter a tour of the convent and grounds, where the American visitor witnessed hundreds of women—referred to as Magdalens—living and working alongside the sisters. At the

[11] Peter's memoirs and other related sources provide no indication of Peter having an association with the convent in Louisville, Kentucky before her conversion in 1855. While it is possible that she knew about the convent and the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd before 1855—especially considering her interest in charitable missions for women—the sources suggest that she first made note of the order while visiting their convents in Europe.

[12] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 319. The original letter from the Sarah Peter collection at the Ross County Historical Society contains the following paragraph about Peter's visit to the convent in Rome: "Monsignor Talbot at my request obtained from the Cardinal permission to see the convent of the Good Shepherd, (for sinful women) which is near by - & [???] we proceeded. It is an immense edifice which includes female criminals of all ages & characters, and it seems to be excellently well managed." However, the published version of her memoirs offers a different version of the letter with an added section: "Monsignor Talbot, at my request, had obtained permission for me to visit the Convent of the Good Shepherd (for degraded women), near by, and thither we proceeded. It is an immense edifice, which is occupied by female criminals of all ages and character, and it seems to be excellently well managed. I think much of this order, and of making an endeavor to plant the order in Cincinnati. I hope to occupy the rest of my days in this good work, which has always been near my heart, for the poor Magdalens; and, after leaving Rome, I think of passing some weeks at Angers, in France, where there is what is called a motherhouse." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, April 23, 1855, document 1946.349.950, folder 44, Sarah Worthington King Peter Manuscript Collection, McKell Library, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Ohio. It remains unclear if Margaret King, the author and editor of Peter's memoirs, added the section or if two versions of the letter existed. The Sarah Peter Papers at the Ross County Historical Society contains at least one example of different versions of the same letter.

conclusion of the tour, Peter laid the roots for the future Cincinnati community by requesting that the mother superior consider establishing a convent in her city.[13]

Peter fostered a relationship with members of a religious group whose history traced back about three decades. The origins of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd date to Pelletier's time as a member of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. While serving as superior of the convent in Tours, France, Pelletier formed a group of contemplative nuns known as the Magdalene Sisters who prayed to Mary Magdalene, the patron saint of women, converts, and penitents. The Magdalene Sisters worked closely with women who wanted to live a cloistered life but were not eligible to join a religious order. Their work spread to Angers, France in 1829, when the bishop requested that the Magdalens start a community in the city. Pelletier traveled with the sisters, and, six years later, they founded a separate congregation called the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, a community specifically devoted to the care and religious education of girls and young women.[14]

After seven years of serving in France, Pelletier took a group of six sisters to Louisville, Kentucky, where they arrived on December 1, 1842. There they established the first motherhouse of the order in the United States, eventually founding new institutions in the city and state to provide resources for women and girls in need.[15] By 1857, after nearly fifteen years in Kentucky, the Louisville community flourished, adding dozens of new sisters and serving hundreds of women. Peter petitioned Mother Mary Ignatius Ward, the superior of the Louisville

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[13] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 319-321.

[14] "History," Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, https://rgs.gssweb.org/en/node/11.

[15] In 2018, the Kentucky Historical Society erected a historical marker near the site of the original convent in Louisville. The marker includes the following inscription: "Here, the Sisters provided shelter and care to girls who found themselves shunned by society and without resources. By 1867, the Louisville City Court referred homeless and at-risk women to the Sisters, who could care for and find proper homes for them."

convent, to send some sisters to Cincinnati. On February 17, 1857, five sisters arrived in the city, where they obtained temporary residence at Peter's home.

Now, with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd secured in southern Ohio, Peter turned her attention to Europe, leaving on May 6, 1857, to recruit members of different orders. On this, her third voyage to the continent, she had two goals. First, having already established the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Cincinnati, Peter planned to convince other European orders to relocate to the Ohio Valley, specifically orders that specialized in different works of mercy. The Good Shepherds primarily worked with women and girls, so Peter hoped to identify orders who aided other populations in need. Second, Peter realized that the success of her charitable mission depended on financial support. She possessed some means to fund the work of multiple orders, but she knew that more money was needed for purchasing or renting properties in the area to house future religious and charitable institutions. Although wealthy lay Catholic benefactors lived in the Ohio Valley and were willing to support Peter's venture, more abundant financial resources existed in Europe, especially among missionary aid groups and monarchs eager to invest in the development of Catholicism across the Atlantic. Given the relationships that Peter had cultivated with Pope Pius IX and other leading Church officials in Rome during her first two trips to the continent, she left southern Ohio in the early summer of 1857 confident that she would receive abundant support from the leading Catholics of Europe.[16]

Peter's first stop was Kinsale, Ireland. In 1854, during her second voyage abroad, she had visited the convent of the Sisters of Mercy in Kinsale and had heard about the order's role as nurses during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Peter wrote positively about the sisters and had discussed with Archbishop Purcell the opportunity to invite a group of Mercies to found a

[16] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 351.

convent in Cincinnati. Purcell supported the idea and provided Peter with a letter of introduction to inform the sisters that she acted as his representative in Ireland.[17]

The Sisters of Mercy originated on June 22, 1824, when Catherine McAuley signed a lease for a lot at the corner of Herbert and Baggot Streets in Dublin, Ireland. McAuley, a lay Catholic, received $25,000 from the estate of William and Catherine Callaghan, a wealthy Quaker family for whom she worked. McAuley used the money to build a home in Dublin, where she provided food, shelter, and education for poor women and children in the city. Several locals assisted McAuley in the mission, and—over time—they began to embody the life of members of a religious order, even dressing like nuns and participating in daily contemplative prayer. Learning about their work, Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin encouraged the women to consider becoming a professed order of the Church. Four years after McAuley and her original two associates opened the House of Mercy in Dublin, the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy was founded, with McAuley and two associates, Anna Maria Doyle and Mary Elizabeth Harley, taking their vows and becoming the first members of the order.[18]

When Peter arrived at the Kinsale convent in the summer of 1857, the Mercies had expanded throughout Europe and had founded convents in New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and San Francisco.[19] Knowing that the Mercies were a thriving order, Peter felt confident that she could convince Teresa Maher, the superior of the Kinsale convent, to allocate a small number of

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[17] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 352-354.

[18] "Our History," Mercy International Association, https://www.mercyworld.org/our-centre/our-history/; "Who We Are," Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papa New Guinea, https://institute.mercy.org.au/about-us/catherine-mcauley/; Mary Ellen Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy: The Sisters of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1858-1958* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), 3-33.

[19] The order first expanded their works of mercy into New York and Pittsburgh, founding convents in both cities in 1843. Three years later, the Mercies added a convent in Chicago, and, a year before Peter converted to Catholicism, they established a convent in San Francisco. For a general history of the Sisters of Mercy in the United States, see Eulalia Herron, *The Sisters of Mercy in the United States, 1843-1928* (New York: Macmillan, 1929). The annals for the Cincinnati community mention that the sisters toured institutions in New York before traveling to southern Ohio.

sisters for a foundation in Cincinnati. Unexpectedly for Peter, however, Mother Maher rejected her first proposal, claiming that she did not have sisters to spare for a new American mission. The next day, Peter returned to the convent and the sisters agreed to her request, though they informed Peter that they needed time to prepare for the voyage. About a year later, on July 23, 1858, Mother Maher, accompanied by eleven other sisters and Peter, boarded the *Arago* for New York. After seventeen days of travel, they arrived in the United States, staying a week at the Sisters of Mercy convent in New York. By August 18, 1858, the Mercies had reached their final destination, where they accepted temporary residence at Peter's home. In early October, the sisters secured a permanent place near St. Thomas's parish on Sycamore Street, which they called the Convent of the Divine Will. From that location, the sisters began their work in Cincinnati, including founding houses of mercy modeled after McAuley's original location in Dublin.[20]

Peter concluded her 1857-58 recruiting expedition in Aachen, Germany, where the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis had established their motherhouse. In the months after leaving Kinsale, Peter traveled throughout Europe—carrying letters of introduction from Archbishop Purcell and other leading Catholics she encountered along the way—to raise money for her Cincinnati mission. While in Vienna, Austria, Peter met Augusta von Tietz, a recent convert to Catholicism who had dedicated her life to charity. Von Tietz had joined the Third Order of St. Francis, a lay organization for those wanting to live by the Rule of St. Francis of Assisi, and had

[20] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 59-68; Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will Established in Cincinnati, August 18, 1858, volume 1, box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 6-7. For more on their time in New York, where the sisters engaged in a brief retreat with Father Isaac Hecker of the Paulists before finishing their trek to Cincinnati, see Isaac Hecker to John Baptist Purcell, July 29, 1858, II-4-n, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Isaac Hecker to John Baptist Purcell, August 5, 1858, II-4-n, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

become known as Sister Felicitas (though she was not a fully professed member of the congregation). Her primary role involved public fundraising for the order, which explains how she met Peter. Once Sister Felicitas learned about Peter's desire to bring religious orders to the United States, she agreed to help the American recruit the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis by setting up a meeting with Johannes von Geissel, the Archbishop of Cologne. Acting on behalf of Peter's interests, Archbishop von Geissel petitioned Frances Schervier, the mother superior of the order, to lobby her for a mission in Cincinnati.[21]

The Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis specialized in a highly desired work of mercy: nursing. Schervier, the daughter of a prominent physician, planted the roots for the order during the 1840s, when she joined the Third Order of St. Francis and began providing medical care for the poor in their homes. After a few years of this work, Schervier formed a small community of fellow members of the Third Order who often joined her on house visits. On July 2, 1851, the lay community became a professed order of the Church, taking the name the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and electing Schervier as mother superior. Their work spread throughout Germany, as the sisters founded several new hospitals during the early 1850s. Thus, by the time Peter arrived in Aachen in the spring of 1858, the sisters were well-prepared to expand their mission to the United States. Peter spent several days at the motherhouse, where she and Schervier discussed plans for a Cincinnati community.

Schervier eventually agreed to send five sisters and a postulant, who left Germany on August 24, 1858. The group represented the first members of the order to leave Germany for the United States. After a brief stay in New York, where they lodged with the Sisters of Charity, the Franciscan sisters arrived in Cincinnati on September 11, 1858. *Der Wahrheitsfruend*—the

[21] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 1-11; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 283-285.

German-Catholic newspaper in Cincinnati—published an article welcoming the sisters and announcing their intentions to found a hospital in the city. They received immediate support from the German Catholic Orphan Society, whose directors provided the Franciscans with the former building used for the St. Aloysius Orphanage, which they converted into their first convent. In less than a year, the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis established their first hospital—St. Mary—and, two years later, they added St. Elizabeth Hospital in Covington, Kentucky.[22] Having already secured an Irish order of women religious (the Mercies), Peter had succeeded in bringing a German congregation, thereby providing sisters for the two largest ethnic Catholic populations in the region.

By late summer 1858, then, Peter had successfully negotiated the relocation of three Catholic orders to the Ohio Valley, where they each founded convents in Cincinnati. The "evangelical energy of women," which historian Sarah A. Curtis described as one of the defining characteristics of the nineteenth-century Church, fueled Peter's mission, both in terms of the sisters who agreed to partner with her as well as Peter's own commitments as a lay woman to developing Church life in the United States.[23]

"[T]he business of her holy mission": Peter and European Support for the Works of Mercy in Cincinnati

Peter's third voyage—from May 1857 to May 1858—underscores the European roots and transatlantic nature of the development of Catholicism in late-nineteenth-century Cincinnati. Historians have previously highlighted the importance of European religious orders and aid

[22] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 1-20; "McAllister Research Materials," large box, Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[23] Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 3.

societies in the development of Catholic life in the United States.[24] But scholars have typically written the history from the perspective of priests or members of religious orders, who left Europe to found American missions. In this context, Peter was distinctive as an elite American lay woman. As part of her efforts to develop Church life in the greater-Cincinnati region, Peter made four trips across the Atlantic.

Peter's relocation of religious orders to the United States and the founding of new charitable institutions in the Ohio Valley relied on European leaders (both secular and religious), aid societies, and longstanding institutions. Peter tapped into these networks to secure donations, recruit sisters, receive the necessary consent and support for American missions, and collect models of the works of mercy to replicate at home. Peter adopted a unique role in the process, operating as a lay American intermediary in the exportation of European people, practices, and financial resources to the Ohio Valley. Reports of her work appeared in letters exchanged among a variety of Church officials. "She was so busy the last days in Rome . . . with the business of her holy mission," wrote Abbott Dom Bernard Smith, an Irish monk who kept Archbishop Purcell informed about Peter's third trek across Europe.[25] Peter "has succeeded

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[24] Scholars of U.S. Catholicism during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries have narrated and analyzed the role of European people and institutions in the development of the American Church. For some of the best works on this topic, see Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); John R. Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Anne M. Butler, *Across God's Frontiers: Catholic Sisters in the American West, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012). For more on how the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith supported missions in the United States, see Raphael H. Song, *The Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1961; Luca Codignola, "Roman Catholic Conservatism in a New North Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (October 2007): 717-756; Giovanni Pizzorusso, "The Congregation of *de Propaganda Fide*, the Holy See and the Native Peoples of North America (17th-19th Centuries)," translated by James Nelson Novoa, in *Holy See's Archives as Sources for American History*, edited by Kathleen Sprows Cummings and Matteo Sanfilippo (Viterbo, Italy: Sette Città, 2016), 13-53.

[25] Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, July 16, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

beyond the expectation of all who have heard of [her mission]," Smith noted.[26] In fact, the monk said he had "never [seen] greater attention paid by the Propaganda [Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith]"—the administrative body of the Church responsible for supporting missionary work—"to any Prelate than was showered to your Grace's [Purcell's] representation in Madam Peter."[27]

Over the course of one year in Europe, Peter obtained the support of two religious orders; however, the majority of her time was spent "fishing"—the term she used to describe her fundraising efforts. "At least I was successful in engaging a community of nuns at Kinsale," Peter informed Rufus, after visiting the Sisters of Mercy convent, "[b]ut the most difficult part (the money) is yet to be secured."[28] Peter was a privileged woman from an influential family, and she contributed her own resources to establish orders in the United States. But she understood from the beginning that those contributions were not enough.[29] "Her own fortune," wrote her daughter-in-law, "she would gladly offer; but far more material means were required than she could furnish."[30] Peter had spent considerably and acquired additional debts during her second voyage, when she traveled on behalf of the board for the Ladies' Art Gallery. Furthermore, Peter possessed properties in New York that she had acquired from Edward King, her late husband. She intended to sell them to extinguish her debts and replenish her cash accounts, but Peter struggled for years to find a buyer who offered a price she would accept.[31]

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[26] Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, July 16, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[27] Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, July 16, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[28] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, no date [assumed May 1857], transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 360.

[29] Much of the secondary literature on Peter's life highlights her role as a benefactress or patron.

[30] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 351.

[31] For more information on the New York lots, see Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, August 31, 1856, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, September 5, 1857, volume 2, The King Family

By the summer of 1857, then, she turned to the "good Catholics of Europe" to fund her future ventures in charity and the development of Catholicism in the Ohio Valley.[32]

Peter began her fundraising efforts in the Holy City. On June 18, 1857, she told Rufus that her arrival in Rome was "more like returning home than visiting a foreign city."[33] Immediately, she received support from leading Church officials, including Cardinal Karl-August Graf von Reisach of the Propaganda and Cardinal Lodovico Altièri, who had recently been appointed Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, the papal administrator who managed the property and finances of the Holy See. Cardinals Reisach and Altièri, along with Peter Jan Beckx—the superior general of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits)—"pa[id] great attention to [Peter's] demands," leaving her confident that she would receive "as much money as will suffice for the foundations [she] so earnestly desire[d] to make."[34] Peter expressed great satisfaction over her reception in Rome, informing her daughter-in-law that she "[got] on better than could be expected, all say, in obtaining recommendations [for additional donations] and 'material aid.'"[35] "I shall work hard this summer to get my charities in motion," Peter explained to Margaret King, "and then I think I shall feel at liberty to retire, while they do my work, as a capitalist retires on his revenues."[36]

Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, October 2, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 13, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Peter successfully sold the lots during the 1860s; yet, we learn from her son's letter dated November 13, 1859 that the family had acquired over $25,000 in debts since her second voyage to Europe. Rufus hoped that money from the lots would cover the debt.

[32] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 351

[33] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, June 18, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 367.

[34] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, June 18, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 368.

[35] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Margaret Rives King, June 18, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 369.

[36] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Margaret Rives King, June 18, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 369.

Peter spent the next three months in Italy, visiting Bologna, Genoa, Milan, Florence, and Venice, among other cities. During that time, she received support from Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò, who served as the Prefect of the Propaganda. Barnabò "promised her money, a thing he often refused to Bishops," noted Abbot Smith.[37] Furthermore, he provided Peter with letters of introduction that she carried with her throughout Italy and into other parts of Europe. Peter, now with official support from the Propaganda—carrying physical proof of that endorsement in the form of letters—expected to be received favorably in royal courts and palaces.

Leveraging the endorsements of prominent Church officials, Peter networked with some of the wealthiest families in Italy to raise money for the development of Church life in the Ohio Valley.[38] In August 1857, Peter wrote about doing "'good business' in Florence"—collecting "nearly 1000 scudi"—before traveling to the Baths of Lucca, where Peter met the grand duchess of the Ducal family of Luxembourg who gave "as much money as she was able to give" along with "letters [of introduction] to the king and queen of Saxony."[39] During the same month, Pope Pius IX offered Peter "a very handsome gift in gold Napoleons," which Abbot Smith reported as totaling "2,000 fr[ancs]."[40] Next, Peter ventured to Turin, where she met Archbishop Luigi Fransoni, the Duchess of Melzi, and Princess Vidonia; the duchess "promise[d] to do all possible," and Peter organized a dinner with Princess Vidonia in an effort to convince her to

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[37] Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, July 16, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[38] In the late 1830s, following the death Edward King, her first husband, Peter moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to be with her two surviving sons, Rufus and Thomas. During that time, Peter obtained proficiency in French, German, and Italian. She benefitted from these language skills during her recruiting and fundraising ventures in Europe during the late 1850s.

[39] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, August ??, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 376-377; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, [no date; assumed August 1857], transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 378-379; Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, August 22, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[40] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, August ??, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 376-377; Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, August 22, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

contribute financial support.[41] "It is a thousand pities that I am not in the least inclined to write a book," Peter explained to Rufus, "for I fancy no foreigner has had the *entrée* into so many houses of high rank as my work opens to me."[42] Peter penned that line at the end of September 1857, as she completed her tour of Italy. Though she raised a considerable amount, Peter extended her tour into southern Germany and Austria, both prominent Catholic regions of Europe.

"Not until I get into Germany can I know fully of the success of my mission," wrote Peter in July 1857, "[i]f I succeed, we shall all have reason to rejoice; if not, I shall have done what I could."[43] In November 1857, Peter arrived in Graz, Austria, where she arranged a meeting with Countess Pascalis. (Peter traveled to Graz with a letter of introduction from Princess Clary of Venice, who knew the Pascalis family.) The connection with Countess Pascalis developed into new relationships with "Graf Furstenberg, and others," noted Peter, "who seem to regard me with much satisfaction . . . as they add liberally to my funds."[44] "Everybody gives something," Peter wrote glowingly about her time in Graz, where she gathered additional letters of introduction before traveling to Vienna.[45] In the capital city, Peter dined with Countess Esterhazy. She received a tour of the nearby churches and hospitals from Baroness Martini, and socialized with royalty including Princess Auersperg, Countess Festitich, and Archduke Maximillian Joseph. "I have gathered much here, chiefly from the imperial household," Peter

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[41] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, August 27, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 381-382.

[42] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, September 25, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 383-384.

[43] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, July 24, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 376.

[44] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, [no date; assumed late October 1857], transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 389.

[45] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, November 1, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 390.

informed her son, "I do not make *demands*, but insinuations. I show my papers, and leave my benefactors to the consequent induction that their purses should be open."[46] By this point, Peter looked to take advantage of the social pressure of the elites who wanted to contribute like their counterparts. Peter leveraged this approach, as she successfully accumulated more donations.[47]

Peter celebrated Christmas in Wenzburgh [Weinsberg], Germany, where she arrived after spending several days "fishing" in Dresden and Berlin. "Their majesties of Prussia were generous," she informed Rufus, "but not so much so as Prince Radzivil [Antoni Wilhelm Radziwill]" of Berlin.[48] Next, Peter visited Munich, the home of Cardinal Reisach, whose support Peter had acquired in Rome. While in Munich, she networked with Countess d'Ano of Milan, Countess Bassarer, Princess Luitpold, Count Siegfried, and Monsignor Chigi. "I owe these attentions [in Munich] to him [Cardinal Reisach]," Peter admitted, "[b]ut it seems to me a singular freak of destiny for me to be taking letters of introduction among royal circles."[49] From Germany, Peter extended her tour into France, where she expressed some dissatisfaction over the lack of donations. Writing from Paris on May 2, 1858, Peter proclaimed that "truly it kills me; there is such a hurry" among the French nobility and Church hierarchy that "nobody has time to

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[46] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, November 27, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 393.

[47] While in Austria, Peter received substantial financial support for her mission. For example, she wrote the following about her time in Vienna: "You will be glad, I know, to hear that the Leopoldine Society, – the Cardinal Archbishop being at the head – have today paid over to me for my mission 2000 florins – about on thousand scudi – and from other sources in Vienna I have collected perhaps 400 scudi – If I can continue in so fertile vein two or three months, I hope to get leave to return home. The people here do not give willingly, and I have to rely on the few rich families who help us, for the love of God . . . I have now collected in all about 3000 scudi." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Dom Bernard Smith, November 26, 1857, copy of transcribed letter (original letter from the Smith Papers, Archives of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota) in Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[48] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 24, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 404.

[49] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 28, 1857, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 405.

listen."[50] During the final few months in Europe, Peter's letters reveal only one significant donation. While on a visit to Amsterdam, Peter received "a thousand florins" from Louis I [Ludwig I], the former King of Bavaria (1825-1848).[51]

Peter completed her fundraising venture in the summer of 1858, traveling back to the United States with the group of Sisters of Mercy who had agreed to start a community in Cincinnati. She had succeeded in the "business of her holy mission," collecting thousands of dollars from elite Europeans across a number of countries. Two months before she left Europe, Archbishop Purcell reported that he had received almost $2,500 from Peter for use in the development of Catholic institutions in the region. "It affords me much satisfaction," Purcell explained to Rufus, Peter's son, "that . . . seeking only to accomplish her heroine task in the self-imposed service of God and the poor, She meets with many convocations and is greeted by many friends and not a few kindred spirits."[52] Indeed, Purcell had already set in motion plans to purchase land near Peter's home—which the prelate considered a "Site . . . most eligible for [a] proposed institution."[53] In the end, Peter's efforts to obtain financial support from European donors made it possible for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Mercy, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to found convents in the Ohio Valley and shape social and religious life in the region.

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[50] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 2, 1858, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 418.

[51] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, [no date; assumed spring of 1858], transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 415.

[52] John Baptist Purcell to Rufus King, May 11, 1858, volume 3, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[53] John Baptist Purcell to Rufus King, May 11, 1858, volume 3, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sodalities, Retreats, and Recluses: Catholic Women and Devotional Life in the Ohio Valley

Peter believed that religious orders were best equipped to foster the spiritual works of mercy, especially the works to instruct people and to pray for people. She was dedicated to enriching Catholic devotional life and committed to gaining converts for the Church.[54] Over the course of her life, she devoted as much time and energy to the spiritual works of mercy as she did to the corporal. The sisters Peter recruited for Cincinnati carried out much of the work, both individually as well as in collaboration with their lay benefactress. At the parish level, the sisters organized devotional life for women by founding pious organizations called sodalities and by organizing lay retreats. They also opened their chapels for Eucharistic Adoration, a ceremony of prayer that, unlike Benediction, could be sponsored by religious orders of women without the requirement of a priest. They organized celebrations for feast days and offered public demonstrations of the rosary, all of which incorporated the laity. Those efforts helped reinforce Catholic teachings among the laity, and strengthened the laity's ties to the Church. In expanding devotional life, the orders pushed Catholicism more into the public, which Peter believed would help draw converts to the Church. Likewise, for already baptized Catholics, opportunities to participate in devotions forged links between the living and the dead, or between Catholics in southern Ohio and, in the words of historian Ann Taves, their "supernatural 'relatives,' such as Jesus and Mary."[55]

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[54] For example, in November 1857, Peter underscored her commitment to gaining American converts by writing: "our Catholics [in Cincinnati] seem to forget their duties toward unbelievers – and to shut themselves up within themselves – It is my thought . . . by means of religious houses, which by the favour of God, I hope to aid in planting there, that . . . Protestants will be won by the good examples and conversations of our religious – and that conversions to the truth may follow. After all that our people try to hope and claim, it is lamentable that we have so very few conversions from Protestantism." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Dom Bernard Smith, November 26, 1857, copy of transcribed letter (original letter from the Smith Papers, Archives of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota) in Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[55] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, viii.

Peter and the sisters in Cincinnati were working in a context in which devotional practices that occurred outside the traditional liturgy were taking on new importantance for American Catholics. According to historian Ann Taves, "by the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the reception of the sacraments was overshadowed for most lay Catholic by devotional practices associated with Mary, Jesus, the Sacred Heart, and the Blessed Sacrament."[56] In general, a devotional practice was any prayer toward or act in reverence of a "sanctified individual, or historical event" central to or associated with the Roman Catholic faith.[57] Members of the Church performed such practices either individually or communally as well as both privately and publicly. Catholics generally expressed devotions in the vernacular, as opposed to in Latin. And most devotions occurred separate from the liturgy (mass).[58] Overall, as Taves explains, devotions "were central to the religious life of the laity" because they "presupposed the existence of social relationships between faithful Catholics and supernatural beings, and provided a means of interacting with them."[59] Through such relationships, "Catholics could expect to receive graces and favors from God through Jesus and Mary as well as indulgences authorized by the pope when they performed devotions," contributing to "both [the] spiritual and temporal" needs of Church members.[60]

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[56] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, viii. In particular, Taves argues that "mid-nineteenth-century Catholic missionary preachers . . . aggressively promoted an affectively oriented and sectarian, as opposed to ecumenical, form of piety intended to heighten the fervor of the laity and strengthen lay attachment to the institutional church." Regarding the title of her work, Taves uses the "image of 'the household of faith' to describe the network of affective, familial relationships between believers and supernatural 'relatives,' such as Jesus and Mary, presupposed by the devotions."

[57] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 22.

[58] Taves referenced the work of Donald Attwater in *A Catholic Dictionary* (1961) to define "devotion" and distinguish between the different categories: para-liturgical and extra-liturgical as well as popular and generalized. Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 22-24.

[59] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 42, 47.

[60] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 47, 51-52, 56. Regarding the temporal effects of devotions, Taves noted how Catholics believed that "miraculous cures and other temporal favors were attributed to the intercessory powers of Jesus, Mary, the saints, and other human beings."

Several broad-scale changes helped contribute to the rise and popularity of devotions among lay Catholics in the mid-nineteenth-century United States, including improvements in printing and a larger market for prayer guides as well as Pope Pius IX's "zealous promotion of indulgenced devotions."[61] At the parish level, missionary priests laid the groundwork for the rise in Catholic devotions by traveling around the country to sell books, rosaries, scapulars, and other devotional items as well as helping found lay organizations, such as sodalities.[62]

Sarah Peter, along with the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, played a central role in developing devotional life in Cincinnati, particularly among the Irish and German communities in the city. Once they arrived in southern Ohio, the sisters sponsored several new lay organizations, specifically sodalities for women, which they organized at the parish level. Closely related to confraternities—another type of lay group dedicated to pious or charitable work—sodalities have ties to the earliest years of Christianity, when associations of laymen gathered for prayer.[63] By the mid-nineteenth century, Catholics had a tradition of organizing sodalities devoted to Mary, and some sodalities were for women only. In American cities, Catholic sodalities contributed greatly to devotional life.[64]

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[61] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 27.

[62] Throughout the work, Taves featured male clergy—specifically missionary priests—as the primary facilitators of devotional life among lay Catholics in the nineteenth-century United States. In particular, see chapter one "The Popularization of Devotional Literature," chapter two "The Rise of Devotionalism," and chapter five "Orthopraxis and Orthodoxy," in Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 1-19, 21-45, 89-111.

[63] According to Church history, in 1208, Bishop Odo of Paris founded the first modern confraternity dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Over the next several centuries, between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, the number of confraternities expanded significantly, growing in number, the variety of devotion, and reach across the globe as a result of missionary work and European colonization. Though one would be hard-pressed to offer a clear distinction between confraternities and sodalities, the latter tend to be more closely associated with post-Reformation lay piety—specifically devotion to Mary—as well as groups for lay women, though the first sodality organized in the United States was for young men.

[64] The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1908) defines sodality as "a voluntary association of the faithful, established and guided by competent ecclesiastical authority for the promotion of special works of Christian charity or piety." W. Fanning, "Confraternity (Sodality)," vol. 2, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), available online: https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04223a.htm; Martin I. J. Griffin, "The First Parish Sodality of the Blessed Virgin," *The American Catholic Historical Researches* 18 (April 1901): 60-63; William D.

By 1861, the Sisters of Mercy, considered an order with a "special talent" for sponsoring lay associations, had established ten different sodalities in Cincinnati.[65] Starting with the Irish parishes in the city, including St. Patrick's Church, the Mercies identified women and girls interested in joining a sodality, providing opportunities for members of all ages, including young children. The sisters organized a variety of sodalities, some based on demographics—such as the Married Ladies Society for married women—and others related to a particular devotion—including the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception, which had a specific devotion to Mary. During weekly or bi-weekly meetings, the Mercies provided religious instruction to the sodalists, some of whom possessed only an elementary understanding of Catholic teachings. The additional religious instruction had widespread effects. As one author noted, "[a] better informed and more actively religious laity was able to achieve . . . what the Sisters because of their limited numbers were unable to do: that is, carry Catholic instruction into the lives of a sizable portion of the local community with whom the religious did not come in contact."[66]

Sodalities, such as the Married Ladies Sodality, Single Ladies Sodality, Young Ladies Sodality, and St. Anne's Society, among others, brought together Catholic women of similar

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Dinges, "'An Army of Youth': The Sodality Movement and the Practice of Apostolic Mission," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 19 (summer 2001): 36-37. For an examination of the role of sodalities among Indigenous and African populations in Spanish colonial America, see Rachel Sarah O'Toole, "Religion, Society, and Culture in the Colonial Era," in *A Blackwell Companion to Latin American History*, edited by Thomas H. Holloway (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 162-177. In particular, O'Toole argues that sodalities provided the Indigenous and enslaved-African populations opportunities to forge their own identities and religious lives as well as even profit from the colonial regime. In short, the sodalities served as modes of resistance defined by the colonized and enslaved populations.

[65] By 1861, the Sisters of Mercy sponsored the following ten sodalities: Married Ladies Sodality for married women; Unmarried Ladies Sodality (Single Ladies Sodality) for single women; Young Ladies Sodality (Young Girls Sodality) for teenaged girls; Sodality of the Holy Angles and of the Divine Infant for school-aged children; Sodality of the Immaculate Conception; Society of Our Lady of Mercy; St. Joseph's Association for the relief of the sick, poor, and dying; Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament for adoration to the Blessed Sacrament; St. Anne's Society for mothers of school-aged children; The Assembly for fifty of the most wealthy or elite Catholic women in the city (I found only one reference to this lay association).

[66] Sister M. Charlotte Wammes, "The Sisters of Mercy in Archdiocese of Cincinnati," MA thesis (1944) quoted in Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 73.

ages, interests, and lifestyles. As immigrant Catholics, many of whom had been in the United States only a short time, the organizations for Irish women and girls provided important support groups or social networks for the laity, especially at a time of increased anti-Catholicism and xenophobia in the region. Additional social bonding and advanced religious instruction for the sodalists occurred during annual retreats. Between three and seven days long, retreats provided opportunities for the sodalists to gather on consecutive days for an intense period of community prayer and bonding. The annals of the Sisters of Mercy includes notes about retreats for the Married Ladies Sodality and the Unmarried Ladies Sodality, both of which lasted three days in August 1860 under the direction of Father Borgess.[67]

Sodalities helped foster devotional life in the Cincinnati region by generating new opportunities for individual and communal piety. Sodalists performed public rituals—primarily processions—and wore badges, rosettes, or scapulars that marked their membership in the group. In May 1859, the Young Ladies Sodality "had a procession in the basement of St. Thomas where an altar was decorated for the occasion. The candidates [for admission] . . . formed the procession wore white dresses, carried lighted tapers in their hands and received the rosettes for the several sodalities from the Director Father O'Higgins who addressed the Candidates on the advantages of the Blessed Virgin's protection."[68] A year later, members of the Society of Our Lady of Mercy gathered at the chapel to welcome "46 candidates" who "made their acts of consecration and received form the hands of the most Rev. Arch Bishop [Purcell] the badge of

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[67] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 11. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd also organized annual retreats for the "penitents" under their care. On February 25, 1863, Sister St. Joseph David informed Archbishop Purcell that, at the conclusion of the retreat, "one hundred & eleven communicated in our little chapel," where "thirty three received the scapular of the Blessed Virgin, and five of our dear penitents made their first communion." Sister St. Joseph David to John Baptist Purcell, February 23, 1863, box 13, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[68] The Annals contains descriptions of several processions. Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 8-14.

their Sodality (viz) a silver cross & white ribbon. His Grace addressed the Sodalists on the occasion and recommended them to bring others to Mary's service."[69]

Sodalities also sponsored Benediction at their chapels, providing opportunities for the local Catholic community to receive blessings outside of scheduled liturgies. Benediction required the role of male clergy who blessed a group of lay Catholics with the Blessed Sacrament, typically preserved in a monstrance. Often times, at the conclusion of Benediction, the chapels were left open for twenty-four hours so that parishioners could participate in Adoration—a devotion that occurred when the Blessed Sacrament was displayed in a monstrance or the tabernacle was opened to reveal the Blessed Sacrament, allowing the laity to be in the presence of Christ.[70]

In addition to promoting the spiritual works of mercy and creating new opportunities to express piety, sodalities also provided the means for the Sisters of Mercy and other orders to regulate the lives of lay Catholic women as well as discipline them if they did not live up to the standards set by the order (or the Church as a whole) for what it meant to be a good Catholic, woman, wife, and mother. Sodalities operated with strict rules and manuals, often publishing them in pamphlet form for members and potential candidates. The sisters reviewed candidates who sought admission, kept attendance at weekly and bi-weekly meetings, and often removed members who broke rules or failed to participate fully in the lay association. For example, the register for the Married Ladies Sodality at St. Patrick's Church includes references to sodalists who were expelled for "non attendance" at meetings as well as "for sending [their children] to the P.[ublic] school."[71]

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[69] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 11.

[70] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 9-12.

[71] The Register for the Married Ladies Sodality notes the members who were removed from or denied full membership in the sodality. The following are representative reasons for a member's removal or a candidate being

The Mercies used sodalities to instruct the laity and to strengthen their ties to the Church by sponsoring devotions, while the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis specialized in promoting prayer. With the assistance of Sarah Peter, the Franciscans established a devotional practice known as the Perpetual Adoration of Blessed Sacrament—which, as the name suggests, meant "practically uninterrupted" veneration of the Blessed Sacrament at their chapel.[72] For Peter, instituting the practice was a personal mission. Not long after her conversion, Peter made a vow to establish perpetual adoration in Cincinnati, believing that the practice would contribute to the "extirpation of heresy and the propagation of the Catholic Church" in the Ohio Valley as well as increase the number of converts, especially her son and other family members.[73] In order to accomplish her goal, Peter turned to the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to recruit a group of Recluses, also referred to as the Poor Clares or Clarisses, from the motherhouse in Aachen to perform the devotion in a chapel in Cincinnati. The Recluses represented a lasting vestige of the pre-modern nuns who remained cloistered—meaning they did not leave the convent—and dedicated their lives to prayer and contemplation.[74]

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denied full membership: "Expelled" (the vaguest, yet most common entry); "not admitted for irregular attendance"; "Expelled for non attendance"; "For private reasons was dismissed from Sodality"; "Expelled . . . for sending her child to the P. School [public school]." For more information, see Register of the Married Ladies Sodality, 1859-1881, box 105.3, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

[72] The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1907) defines perpetual adoration as a "term broadly used to designate the practically uninterrupted adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The term is used in a truly literal sense, i.e. to indicate that the adoration is physically perpetual; and, more frequently, in a moral sense, when it is interrupted only for a short time, or for imperative reason, or through uncontrollable circumstances, to be resumed, however, when possible, or it may indicate an uninterrupted adoration for a longer or shorter period, a day, or a few days, as in the devotion of the Forty Hours, or it may designate an uninterrupted adoration in one special church, or in different churches in a locality or diocese, or country, or throughout the world." Joseph McMahon, "Perpetual Adoration," vol. 1, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), available online: https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01152a.htm.

[73] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 54.

[74] As a reminder, the members of the three orders that Peter helped relocate to the greater-Cincinnati region were, as historian Sarah A. Curtis labeled them, "modern nun[s]," meaning they were engaged in works of mercy in the public, thus their efforts were considered active and apostolic. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 5.

Peter possessed a clear plan and purpose for establishing the Recluses in southern Ohio. In her proposal to Frances Schervier, the mother superior of the Franciscans, Peter offered to purchase a plot of land near St. Mary Hospital to build a convent solely for the Recluses. She also requested that the Recluses be allowed "to converse with seculars through a grating."[75] Peter had observed that practice among some of the contemplative orders in Europe, particularly the Clarisses in Italy, and she thought that in Cincinnati it would further "the religious spirit, particularly among the higher classes."[76] After an initial delay, a group of three Recluses arrived in the fall of 1861, and, on January 19, 1862, they began perpetual adoration in the chapel connected to St. Clare Convent, with Peter joining in, at times, to offer the sisters relief.[77] Despite achieving her ultimate goal, Peter soon expressed disappointment with the Recluses over their refusal to interact with the public.[78] Having been inspired and influenced by her interactions with the Clarisses in Rome during her own conversion experience, Peter wanted the Recluses to support the conversion of non-Catholics, particularly elite Protestants from the region. But, in the end, the Recluses remained a cloistered group dedicated to contemplative

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[75] "Anna Shannon McAllister Notes," Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[76] "Anna Shannon McAllister Notes," Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio; Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 25-26, 66, 92-93.

[77] According to the Annals of the Sisters of Poor of St. Francis, Peter dedicated her role in the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to Rufus's conversion. Yet her son never officially joined the Church. As the annals explained: "Her whole mind was concentrated upon this one desire; for it were offered her prayers and sacrifices; and she expected his conversion to result from the establishing of the Recluses and the donating of her residence. Unfortunately, her desire was not realized, at least not from outward evidence. Yet we can scarcely think that this child of sorrow was not saved after more than twenty years of prayer and struggle by another Monica, when thousands of pious souls, priests, religious, and lay people united with her in supplication for the conversion of her beloved son." Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 100.

[78] Peter received official word of this decision from Mother Schervier, who informed Peter that "if . . . this element of our Congregation is still not satisfactory to you, because it does not correspond to the end which you have in view, then, my dear, respected Mrs. Sarah Peter, you will in no way offend us if you send our Recluses back to St. Mary's Hospital [thereby removing the Recluses from the chapel created specifically for them at St. Clare Convent, Peter's former home]." Frances Schervier to Sarah Worthington King Peter, January 7, 1862, Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio

prayer "for the spiritual needs of the country," rather than sisters engaged in public instruction geared toward widespread evangelization.[79]

By contrast, the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis sponsored public acts of devotion, practices that incorporated the laity in the advancement of the spiritual works of mercy in the region. On feast days, or solemnities, the laity joined the sisters to celebrate the lives of saints. For example, on October 4, 1859, the sisters opened their convent—with its "beautifully decorated chapel"—to celebrate the Feast of St. Francis.[80] Similarly, on August 2, 1860, the Franciscans welcomed lay members to their chapel for an exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on the Feast of Portiuncula. The Catholic papers announced the event, which involved a thirteen-hour devotion. "All those who, after receiving the sacraments on the day," reported *Der Wahrheitsfreund*, "visit the chapel and pray for the intentions of the Holy Church, will gain a plenary indulgence, known all over the Christian world as the Portiuncula Indulgence."[81] By 1862, once improvements had been made to St. Clare Convent, the sisters offered daily Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Augustus Toebbe of the Church of St. Philomena, which neighbored the convent, visited each afternoon around five o'clock to offer Benediction

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[79] Although Peter's plan never fully crystallized, the Recluses advanced Catholic piety in the region through their implementation of Perpetual Adoration. Indeed, as Mother Schervier noted, regardless of Peter's prerogative, the Recluses would "keep their hands and arms upraised in truthful prayer . . . for the spiritual needs of the country which supports them." Frances Schervier to Sarah Worthington King Peter, January 7, 1862, Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. Other evidence, however, suggests that the overall impact of the Recluses on religious life in Cincinnati had mixed results. Writing in 1881, four years after Peter's death, Sisters Paula noted to the motherhouse in Aachen that "[t]he people of Cincinnati are not concerned about the Recluses. I, at least, found no interest in them even among pious persons and priests, with perhaps five or six exceptions. However, Mrs. Peter gave her residence precisely as a convent for the Recluses . . . Mrs. Peter wanted prayer for America <u>in</u> America and, it was deemed necessary to establish the present place of intercessory prayer in America, nevertheless the intention of the foundress would be lawfully fulfilled by the establishment of continuous daily adoration by some Sister, or by some other plan that would redound also to the spiritual welfare of the community." At the time, the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis were considering suspending the activities of the Recluses and possibly returning the members back to Germany. For more information, see Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 362-365.

[80] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 42.

[81] *Der Wahrheitsfreund* (the German Catholic newspaper in Cincinnati), August 2, 1860 quoted in Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 62.

for the sisters and lay Catholics in the area.[82] Other devotional activities sponsored by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis included public demonstrations of the rosary, founding the Sodality of the Sacred Heart for German ladies, and creating altar societies comprised of lay women who sewed liturgical vestments for use in parishes throughout the city. Interestingly, one of the first vestments created was a cope, a loose-fitting cloak worn by a priest or prelate, made from Peter's curtains.[83] Overall, these activities further promoted forms of popular piety, strengthening ties between the laity and the Church in the Ohio Valley.

Relics and Religious Statues: The Material World of Catholic Cincinnati

"I received many precious gifts," Peter wrote from Venice in July 1867, "which I shall share with our sisters, in relics, books, and prints."[84] Cultivating the spiritual works of mercy and fostering devotional Catholicism in the region required the use of objects: sculptures, paintings, prints, rosaries, and, most importantly, relics. The majority of these items had to be exported from Europe to the United States, thereby creating a transatlantic exchange of devotional materials. Peter played a central role in such exchanges, either receiving or purchasing the items during her final four trips abroad. As a result of Peter's efforts, churches, chapels, and altars throughout the region provided Catholics with opportunities to be in the presence of saints. That is, for nineteenth-century Church members, welcoming the saints to U.S. soil represented a key aspect of the process of sanctifying their land, as contemporary Catholics believed devotional objects such as relics were the real presence of holy figures which had previously been absent from devotional life in the United States.

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[82] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 105-106.

[83] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 77, 99, 107.

[84] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, July 29, 1867, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 462.

Religious statues, carvings, and paintings fostered relationships between Catholics in southern Ohio and the communion of saints, helping create a union between the living and dead members of the Church. Historian Ann Taves noted that devotional items helped establish the relationship "between the inhabitants of this world and the next."[85] "Devotions thus provided a means of communicating with [the] supernatural," Taves argued, "while devotional objects served to remind devotees and those around them of their commitment to such relationships."[86] Catholics also believed that objects, particularly relics, possessed special powers, including the ability to produce miraculous cures and remedy other temporal issues. "Whether the object's power should be attributed to God, Jesus, Mary, or a saint . . . was not of central importance," explained Taves; rather, the "primary concern . . . was to witness to the action of the supernatural in this world."[87]

Peter played a central role in the process of bringing devotional items to Cincinnati by purchasing objects for the sisters and lay Catholics. In 1858, when the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis first moved into Peter's home, she gifted the Franciscans a large wood carving of the Stigmatization of St. Francis, which had served as an interior door at the Franciscan monastery in Rome. Peter had received the carving during her third visit to the Holy City. The sisters displayed the object on a marble mantel and placed it in front of the chapel altar, incorporating the object into their devotions to St. Francis.[88] Years later, in 1867, during Peter's fourth trip to Europe, she purchased a large statue of the Sorrowful Mother (Pietà) for the Franciscan sisters.

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[85] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 69.
[86] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 69.
[87] Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 62.
[88] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 25.

The statue eventually found a permanent home in the Recluse chapel.[89] Other devotional items that Peter brought to Cincinnati for the Franciscans included an oil painting of the Blessed Mother with an infant Jesus, given to Peter by Pope Pius IX; a print of the Stations of the Cross and a large crucifix, all of which the sisters incorporated into daily life at the convent.[90]

Although networks of exchange of relics had been established by members of religious orders, priest, and prelates before Peter got involved, she greatly expanded its reach in the Cincinnati region.[91] Peter obtained a majority of the relics she helped relocate to southern Ohio during her final two trips to Europe. In September 1870, about the time Peter returned from her fifth voyage, *Der Wahrheitsfreund*, the German-Catholic newspaper in Cincinnati, announced the arrival of the "bones of St. Aureliana, a virgin and martyr of the second century," relics

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[89] According to the Annals of the order, the sculpture had won the first-place prize at an art exposition in Paris. Unfortunately, during transport from France, the base of the statue was broken; however, Peter paid a local Italian craftsman to repair the piece. Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 215.

[90] The items included the following: "Way of the Cross" purchased from France (1858); oil painting of the Blessed Mother with Infant, which was a gift from Pope Pius IX (1874); 19" standing crucifix, which was a gift from Pope Pius IX (1874); Indulgenced Replica of St. Peter's Chair with forty days indulgence for kissing the toe (no date given); needlework of the Blessed Mother with Infant from a German priest's vestment that was framed by Peter (no date given). For more information on how Peter obtained these items, see "Anna Shannon McAllister Notes," Sarah Peter Collection, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, June 22, 1867, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 458-460; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, July 29, 1867, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 461-462; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 26, 1870, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 488-489; Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 282; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 358-359.

[91] For more on the exchange of relics, specifically American clergy requesting relics from European sources or asking about the authentication of relics, see Dom Bernard Smith to John Baptist Purcell, March 4, 1858, box 9, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio; Chatenay to John Baptist Purcell, box 11, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio; John McCloskey to John Baptist Purcell, September 20, 1861, II-5-a, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Francis Joseph Pabisch to John Baptist Purcell, December 8, 1861, II-5-a, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; John McCloskey to John Baptist Purcell, January 8, 1862, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Edward Sorin to John Baptist Purcell, February 11, 1862, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; L'Eveque to John Baptist Purcell, August ??, 1867, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Chatard to John Baptist Purcell, November 9, 1871, II-5-e, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; John McCloskey to John Baptist Purcell, September 18, 1873, II-5-f, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

which Peter gifted the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis.[92] Peter had purchased the bones, together with a vessel containing the congealed blood of the saint, from the religious at the Monastery del Giglio in Assisi. After obtaining the relics, Peter paid Modesto Scevola, an Italian artist, to create a wax effigy of St. Aureliana for public exposition of the relics. (The bones were divided into two boxes and placed inside the cavity of the effigy.) On September 14, 1870, Archbishop Purcell presided over a ceremony—which included a procession of the encased effigy through a crowd of spectators and devotees—honoring the arrival of the relics to the United States. At the end of the ceremony, the sisters placed the relics at the bottom of the high altar in St. Clare Convent where they remained for the community's devotional use.[93]

In 1874, during her final trip to Europe, Peter received a large reliquary containing over one hundred fifty relics. Canon Raphael Bertinelli arranged for Peter to receive the reliquary, which she wanted to give the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis in Cincinnati. Bertinelli agreed to the arrangements, and the reliquary arrived in southern Ohio in mid-April 1874. Peter commissioned a local craftsman to construct an altar to display the relics. Once the piece had been completed, Archbishop Purcell and Bishop Toebbe of Covington, Kentucky, arranged for a ceremony to bless the altar before the exposition of the relics. Furthermore, Peter requested that a triduum—a three-day period of prayer—be organized to commemorate the arrival of the relics. Over the next three days, members of a variety of religious orders in the area and numerous lay Catholics visited St. Clare Convent to be in the presence of the holy objects.[94] Out of the original one hundred and fifty items, the reliquary contained some hair of the Blessed Virgin

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[92] *Der Wahrheitsfreund* (the German Catholic newspaper in Cincinnati), September ??, 1870 quoted in Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 252.

[93] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 252-254; "Relics of St. Aureliana," Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (pamphlet provided by the archivist).

[94] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 277; "General Plan of Reliquaries," Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (pamphlet provided by the archivist).

Mary, a part of the True Cross, pieces of the Crown of Thorns, a particle from the Pillar of Flagellation, a piece of the sponge used to provide Christ with vinegar to drink, a sample from the table cloth at the Last Supper, and particles from the Holy Sepulcher, among numerous other relics associated with a variety of saints. Over time, hundreds of additional relics were added to the altar, which now contains approximately 569 pieces. Furthermore, in the early-twentieth century, the relics of St. Aureliana were incorporated, being placed below the altar.

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"We keep it covered," the archivist warned me, "it can be distracting to people who visit the chapel, but I'll let you take a look."[95] Then the archivist removed a large piece of wood to reveal the wax effigy containing the relics of St. Aureliana. "We're not exactly sure what's in there, if anything," she explained, "but they believed that the bones and blood were real."[96]

When considering the significance of the work performed by Peter and the sisters to foster the spiritual works of mercy in the Ohio Valley, over time, as a result of changing contexts, much of what the Catholic women established in the middle decades of the nineteenth century has been pushed to the shadows, concealed and covered, or completely eliminated. Reasons for the changes are varied, but undoubtedly, they are linked to reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which addressed concerns over the place of the Church in the modern world. In many ways, my conversation with the archivist concerning the relics of St. Aureliana captured the disconnect between Peter's time and now. In 1870, when the relics

[95] I am paraphrasing a conversation that I had with the archivist at the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio. When I visited the archives in the fall of 2021 for a research trip, the archivist gave me a tour of St. Clare Chapel—not the original one that previously served as Sarah Peter's home but the one constructed on Compton Road, where the sisters moved in the early-twentieth century. The reliquary altar, the relics of St. Aureliana, and the statue of the Sorrowful Mother are all preserved in the chapel.

[96] Again, I am paraphrasing our conversation. The archivist wanted me to know that several studies have revealed that the supposed relics of saints were really pieces of animal bone or hair, or a substance completely foreign to human bodies, like wood or a mineral.

arrived in southern Ohio, Catholic newspapers celebrated the story, describing the ceremony and procession that welcomed the saint to U.S. soil, where the remains of the second-century martyr were displayed in a chapel for Catholics to visit. Decades later, as I stood before the reliquary altar in St. Clare chapel, taking pictures of the effigy—the archivist *im*patiently waiting for me to finish so she could reposition the board to cover the objects—I got the sense that she wanted to say something like "we just don't know what to do with these things now."

But, for members of the nineteenth-century Church, the objects mattered, as did the efforts of Peter and the sisters to establish in southern Ohio the style of Catholic devotional life they had participated in or experienced in Europe. They promoted public devotions, organized processions on feast days, prepared altars to display relics, and sponsored lay organizations, among other activities, all of which contributed to the sanctification of the greater-Cincinnati region, nurturing relationships between living and dead and promoting Church life.

CHAPTER FOUR:

"The *heart* is more powerfully effective than the *head*": How Catholic Institutions Addressed the Corporal Needs of Immigrant and "Fallen" Women in Nineteenth-Century Cincinnati

On October 22, 1858, members of the Cincinnati City Council gathered to deliberate a proposition raised by Sarah Peter and Joseph R. Ross, a carpenter and council member from the Fifteenth Ward.[1] Several Sisters of the Good Shepherd accompanied Ross to the meeting, where they listened to Judge Andrew Jackson Pruden and Rufus King offer their views on the treatment of women in the City Prison. The *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* referred to the subject as one of "great interest and importance," especially since the number of "female criminals" tried by the Police Court increased each day.[2] According to the article, at that time, the City Prison contained approximately seventy incarcerated women. King, a local attorney and Sarah Peter's son, lamented that "[n]othing could be worse than the condition of the women . . . in our city prison," and Pruden claimed that he had not heard "of a single instance of a female being benefitted by an incarceration."[3] Ultimately, both men concluded that a "different course of

[1] Following her return to Cincinnati in the summer of 1858, Sarah Peter started making requests to the mayor and members of the city council to have the Sisters of the Good Shepherd put in charge of the women prisoners in the city. She noted the following in a letter to Enoch Cobb Wines, a leader of the prison reform movement in the United States: "Deeply impressed by what I had witnessed [in Europe, specifically France], I resolved, on my last return home in 1858, to make a strong effort on behalf of the hapless creatures in the wretched prison of this city, and addressed myself to the mayor [Nicholas W. Thomas, a Whig] and members of the council individually, endeavoring to persuade them of the great advantages to be gained by the reformation of their then apparently incorrigible delinquents, and also of the financial economy to result from the measures proposed." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in E. C. Wines and Theodore W. Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada* (Albany, NY: Van Benthuysen & Sons' Steam Printing House, 1867), 394. For a short biography of Joseph R. Ross, see Henry C. Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning: Spatial Management in Cincinnati from the Early Republic through the Civil War Decade* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2021), 277.

[2] "The Consultation Meeting," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 25, 1858.

[3] "The Consultation Meeting," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 25, 1858.

confinement should be resorted to—one that would have a tendency to make [the women] better."[4]

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd had attended the meeting to offer an alternative to the public prison system, suggesting that the city authorities house convicted women at their Magdalene Asylum, an institution founded by the order to provide relief for poor, neglected, and homeless women as well as those involved in prostitution in Cincinnati. Located on the convent grounds at the corner of Bank and Baymiller Streets, the Magdalene Asylum included dormitories for dozens of women and girls, whom the sisters trained in quilt-making and other needlework skills. Since its founding in February 1857, the institution had welcomed more than one-hundred-fifty "penitents" or "Magdalenes," the two terms commonly employed by the Good Shepherds to refer to the individuals under their direction.[5] According to King, "for the past year or eighteen months," the asylum "ha[d] been eminently successful" in "reclaiming abandoned women," thereby making it a proven and viable alternative to the city prison system.[6] Furthermore, King informed council members that the sisters agreed to receive the inmates without requiring any financial support from the city. The Magdalene Asylum was a self-sustaining institution, funded by donations and the residents' labor.[7] In 1857, the city council rejected the sisters' proposal, a move the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* attributed to the anti-Catholic prejudices of the Protestant-majority council. Nevertheless, five years later, in March 1863, the city assigned control of the female inmates to the Good Shepherds, a decision that resulted from Sarah Peter's persistent appeals to local officials.

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[4] "The Consultation Meeting," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 25, 1858
[5] "The Good Shepherd; Visit to the Magdalen Asylum," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 29, 1858.
[6] "The Consultation Meeting," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 25, 1858
[7] "The Consultation Meeting," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 25, 1858

The case of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and the city prison constitutes one example of the ways that the Catholic works of mercy—specifically the corporal works of mercy—shaped city life, urban development, and reform efforts in nineteenth-century Cincinnati. After their arrival in Cincinnati in 1857 and 1858, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Mercy, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis founded a variety of institutions and organized several charitable programs that addressed the needs of immigrants, orphans, and women and girls as well as the poor, sick, and homeless. The sisters conducted the work as part of their congregational commitments and vows to serve the less fortunate. Sarah Peter, however, presented the charitable work as a viable model of urban improvement, whereby—in her opinion, at least—Catholic ideas and practices offered a more effective alternative to many of the leading approaches to nineteenth-century reform.

The distinction between how religious orders saw their work and how Peter saw it is clear in the case of the women's prison. The Good Shepherds offered to accept care of the prisoners as part of the order's pledge to care for women and girls, the primary focus of the sisters since their founding years in France. Peter, on the other hand, petitioned the city officials to allow the Good Shepherds to manage the prison as part of her efforts as a prominent lay individual interested in improving city life by expanding the influence of the Church in the region. Peter competed with other prominent Cincinnatians—attorneys, ministers, physicians, engineers, and businesspeople, to name a few—who promoted various models and ideas for urban improvement and spatial management. In a period when reform-minded Cincinnatians increasingly put their

faith in public measures, Peter maintained a commitment to change through private entities—leveraging the role of the Church to address social issues in the region.[8]

Peter's vision of Catholic institutions serving the needs of both Church members and non-Catholics offers a new perspective of Catholic institution building during the nineteenth century. Historian Jon Gjerde argued that Catholics believed they needed to "fashion their own institutional structure" in response to pressures from the Protestant majority and described Catholic institution building as a commitment to the "creation of a pillorized society."[9] Gjerde grounded much of his argument about Catholic pillorization in the public-parochial school controversy that spanned several decades across numerous cities, including the so-called Bible War in Cincinnati.[10] Over the course of the second-half of the nineteenth century, the Church developed an expansive parochial school system, providing Catholic parents with places to send their children where they would receive an education that fostered the faith and shielded them from non-Catholic influences. But Gjerde also linked his notion of pillorization to institutions

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[8] Some of my thinking about how Peter leveraged the Church and how she imagined Catholicism as a dominant influence in public life was shaped by my reading of Vaneesa Cook's *Spiritual Socialists*, especially Cook's analysis of Dorothy Day. Vaneesa Cook, *Spiritual Socialists: Religion and the American Left* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[9] Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by S. Deborah Kang (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 159.

[10] The following quotations offer a sense of what Gjerde meant by Catholic "pillorization," especially in response to the school controversy, and its impact on nineteenth-century American political life. "The school crisis," Gjerde explained, "both represented and fostered an explicit secularization of schools and, by implication, of other state agencies as well. In response, the Catholic leadership set about to create a separate Catholic society. It would fall to Catholics . . . to build a wall of separation that effectively as possible barred their society and especially their children from undue interaction with those about them." In reference to the work of Isaac Hecker—a Church leader and missionary—Gjerde wrote that "he [Hecker] laid out a vision of a pillorized society, which, he argued, would not divide the citizenry so much as it would engender increased loyalty to the state." Gjerde, like Hecker, focused on how Catholic pillorization shaped notions of citizenship and belonging, writing that "the parochial school system and the pillorized societal structure of which it was part did not deny allegiance to the state. Indeed, Catholics argued that they were better Americans than those who lived in an increasingly infidel world . . . In this pillorized world, they fostered a segmented society based on a thriving institutional structure that was pluralist only insofar as it could be divorced from many Catholics' contention that their faith embraced true Christian belief." Furthermore, to link the notion of pillorization to other entities (besides the schoolhouse), Gjerde wrote that "Roman Catholics viewed the family as yet one more central building block of their pillorized community, and they became increasingly attentive to forces of the state that intruded on that community." Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, 159, 166, 168, 175.

beyond the schoolhouse, painting a picture of Church development in the United States as a process that allowed Catholics to isolate themselves, serve likeminded believers, and preserve their religious values and practices. He emphasized that clergy and lay leaders increasingly portrayed the Church in a defensive posture, founding new institutions to protect Catholic immigrants, laborers, women, children, and other vulnerable classes from Protestant intrusions. In short, Catholic institutions served Catholics, creating a vibrant subculture across dozens of urban landscapes. By contrast, Sarah Peter imagined Catholic institutions as a dominant—if not a mainstream—influence on life in the greater-Cincinnati region. Although Peter and the sisters with whom she worked founded a variety of institutions that addressed the corporal needs of a wide array of Cincinnatians, this chapter will solely examine the charitable work employed to meet the needs of women and girls.

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, officials and activists from Cincinnati ushered in a period of "engineered urbanism," as historian Henry C. Binford has explained, as the city witnessed a "shift from ad hoc governance relying heavily on private actors to persistent governance through formal public bodies such as city councils, boards, and commissions."[11] Binford analyzes the transition from "informal authority exercised by voluntary organizations and prominent individuals"—which characterized urban "governance" during the first half of the nineteenth century—to more formal "'state' activity," highlighted by "a larger, more powerful, and persistent government, wielding police authority to enforce regulations."[12] Overall, Binford considers the transition of urban governance in light of changing economic and social contexts, especially increased industrialization and population growth, as well as the

[11] Henry C. Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning: Spatial Management in Cincinnati from the Early Republic through the Civil War Decade* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2021), 11.

[12] Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning*, 11-12.

advent of new ideas about space and improvement, specifically "intellectual tools from engineering and medicine" that Cincinnatians employed to reshape their urban environment.[13]

As most reform-minded Cincinnatians turned to municipal bodies and employed the latest ideas in engineering and medicine to enact desired reforms, Sarah Peter advocated the use of Catholic orders and models of Catholic charity established in Europe to resolve urban problems. In many ways, Peter's approach to the challenges of the modern city were consistent with the era of "irregular urbanism," when, as Binford explains, "'stewards' of the community . . . [or] men and women of high social standing often exercised functions of relief or policing without waiting for government sanction."[14] As this chapter demonstrates, Peter placed her trust in Catholic sisters and their commitment to the works of mercy, rather than in hired professionals or elected officials, to improve conditions in Cincinnati, especially for vulnerable women and girls. This is not to say that Peter ignored public officials, as indicated by her work with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to house women imprisoned by the city. Instances such as that reflect a "hybrid" model that incorporated both forms of private and public governance.

Catholic Attention to "Fallen Women" and Administration of the City Prison for Women

Sarah Peter worked to establish a convent for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Cincinnati so members of the order could address the rising populations of abandoned and destitute women in the region, many of whom had turned to prostitution.[15] Throughout her adult

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[13] Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning*, 4.

[14] Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning*, 11-12.

[15] Historians have examined the expansion of sex work or prostitution in U.S. cities during the nineteenth century. In particular, recent work on the nature of brothel guides highlights the relative ease at which sex work was advertised to middle- and upper-class customers. For more information, see Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition*, specifically Parts I and II (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); Katherine Hijar, "Brothels for Gentlemen: Nineteenth-Century American Brothel Guides, Gentility, and Moral Reform," *Common Place: The Journal of Early American Life*, (winter 2018), http://commonplace.online/article/brothels-for-gentlemen/; Brittney Ingersoll, "The Influences of the

life, Peter demonstrated an interest in reform efforts for women prisoners as well as those labeled "degraded" or "fallen." While living in Philadelphia, in 1848, Peter partnered with a group of Quaker women to purchase a house for the Rosine Association of Magdalenes or Magdalene Society of Philadelphia, founded by members of the Society of Friends for the care and reformation of "wayward" girls, most notably those associated with prostitution.[16] Later, during her travels, Peter visited penal institutions in several U.S. and European cities, always commenting on the treatment of women and the effectiveness of the plans for reformation. For example, while in New York in the fall of 1859, Peter visited the Halls of Justice and House of Detention—commonly referred to as "The Tombs"—which she considered a "model prison" in comparison to the "infamous system of Porkopolis."[17] "The prison is well constructed, and tidy throughout," Peter informed her son.[18] Likewise, she wrote that the "cleanliness of the place is also to be praised – the cells for vagrants are white washed, floors as well as walls, every day."[19] Despite commending the conditions at the prison, Peter believed the institution suffered from "inferior management," including those "women [who] attended" to "their own sex."[20] Indeed,

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Underworld: Nineteenth-Century Brothel Guides, Calling Cards, and City Directories," *Common Place: The Journal of Early American Life*, (March 2022), http://commonplace.online/article/the-influences-of-the-underworld/.

[16] Margaret R. King, editor, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, volume 1 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 69-70; Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, 1939), 139.

[17] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, October 5, 1859, volume 1, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[18] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, October 5, 1859, volume 1, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[19] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, October 5, 1859, volume 1, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Despite Peter's general praise for The Tombs, especially when comparing the prison to the one in Cincinnati, she expressed disgust over the scene from the "drunkard's cell," writing the following about her visit: "The most shocking scene was, however, the drunkard's cell . . . The poor wretches reminded me of Dante's Purgatory – but the scene is much worse. Some lay flat on the floor, dead drunk – others began to writhe about . . . & vomit, and trembling and falling on each other, like maggots in a dead carcass! I can compare them to nothing else . . . the hapless creatures who are plunged into this abyss of misery. Alas! That the image of God should be thus defaced!"

[20] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, October 5, 1859, volume 1, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

when comparing American and European prisons, Peter often concluded that the "administration [in the United States] seems always committed to men inferior to those we find in similar institutions" abroad.[21]

Peter located the most effective prison administrators in Europe. In France, during her second trip abroad, Peter first encountered the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their programs for "fallen" women. In Angers, the Good Shepherds oversaw the care of approximately 800 hundred women and girls, many of whom were prisoners convicted by local or state authorities. Peter toured the convent grounds, where she witnessed the "penitents" engaged in sewing and other seamstress work, skills they learned from the sisters. The success of the institution in Angers led to other municipal governments in France—as well as policy makers in some neighboring countries—to adopt the model, thereby expanding the role of the Good Shepherds as administrators of women's prisons throughout various part of western Europe. Peter praised the twelve houses managed by the Good Shepherds in France, where, according to Peter, the women prisoners learned valuable trades, received quality care, and developed close bonds with the sisters.[22] "Women, in Europe, convicted of heinous crimes, and sentenced to imprisonment for life," Peter reported, "yield entire submission to the firm but gentle rule of the sisters, and become devotedly attached to them."[23] In Peter's view, the Good Shepherds were the ideal caretakers for women prisoners in the U.S. because they had a proven history and an effective

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[21] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, October 5, 1859, volume 1, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[22] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 343-351; Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, 1939), 244-245, 250-252; Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 393-396.

[23] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 394.

model of rehabilitating convicted women, "raising them to a better life, with habits of industry and a revival of self-respect."[24]

By late February 1857, the Good Shepherds had founded a convent and Magdalene Asylum in Cincinnati, providing a refuge for hundreds of women and girls and supplying them with important resources during difficult times.[25] The *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* covered their efforts, noting in February 1859 that, in regards to a "plan . . . [for] misguided and unfortunate women," the "Sisters of the Good Shepherd" were "efficient workers in the field."[26] In fact, the author expressed great confidence in the order, noting: "Outside of Papacy [the Catholic Church] I know of no institution in this country whose doors are open for the reception of the outcast, that is sufficient," underscoring his perception that the Catholic vision of works of mercy had become important in cities across the country.[27]

Cincinnati newspapers also drew attention to the women and girls who stayed with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Prior to 1863, the sisters aided two categories of women and girls: penitents and Magdalenes. As described by a *Cincinnati Commercial Times* reporter, penitents were "women of all ages, who ha[d] entered the convent for the purpose of becoming reformed," meaning they were short term residents.[28] Whether sent to the sisters by municipal authorities,

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[24] Margaret R. King, editor, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, volume 2 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 350.

[25] Lengthy articles appeared in two late October 1858 issues of the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*. In "The Good Shepherd; Visit to the Magdalen Asylum," the author, having been invited by Peter to visit the Good Shepherds, provided a thorough description of the convent, asylum, and activities of the sisters and women under their direction. See "The Good Shepherd; Visit to the Magdalen Asylum," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 29, 1858. In "The Good Shepherd—More Concerning its History," the author offered a detailed summary of the congregation's work in Europe, information that was likely provided by Peter. See "The Good Shepherd—More Concerning its History," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 30, 1858. In the fall of 1860, the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* reported that seventy women and girls, along with fifteen orphans or "preservative children," lived on the convent grounds. "The number of inmates of the Convent of the Good Shepherd," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, November 3, 1860.

[26] "The Burial of the Outcast," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, February 11, 1859.

[27] "The Burial of the Outcast," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, February 11, 1859.

[28] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

priests in the diocese, or family members—along with those who came on their own volition—penitents were expected to engage in the process of reform established by the sisters with the intention of leaving the convent grounds. Magdalens, on the other hand, were permanent lay members of the community. One reporter explained that "Penitents become Magdalens," generally after a period of three years, indicating that some of the women and girls who arrived at the convent with the expectations of a short stay ended up becoming long-term residents.[29] Though the "Magdalens [were] subordinate to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and [had] nothing to do with the administration of [the] convent," they served a vital function at the institution by producing most of the fine needlework that covered annual expenses.[30]

Public records demonstrate that, from the founding of the convent and relief house, municipal authorities sent vulnerable or problematic individuals there. For example, in the fall of 1858, public officials removed "Anna Hayes, Mary Vaughn, and Elizabeth Harris" from the city hospital and "placed [them] under the charge of the Society of the Good Shepherd."[31] Around the same time, a local judge ordered that "Celia Smith, a young woman, eighteen years of age" be placed with the "managers of the House of the Good Shepherd."[32] While being detained at the "Ninth Street Station House," Smith made "two attempts to take her life . . . by hanging herself," and was subsequently deemed "insane" by an affidavit.[33] These developments made Smith a "subject worthy the attention" of the Good Shepherds, and the city removed her from the custody of the police and placed her with the Catholic sisters.[34] A similar event occurred in the summer of 1861, when the Cincinnati "Police found a young female with a child

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[29] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.
[30] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.
[31] "Anna Hayes, Mary Vaughn, and Elizabeth Harris," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, September 8, 1858.
[32] "Attempt to Commit Suicide," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, November 23, 1858.
[33] "Attempt to Commit Suicide," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, November 23, 1858.
[34] "Attempt to Commit Suicide," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, November 23, 1858.

three years old on the street."[35] The officers transported "Mary McMullen," a recent immigrant from "Clemarken Chapel . . . Ireland," and her child to the "Sisters of the Good Shepherd on Bank Street."[36]

Victims of assault and unmarried women who became pregnant also found their way to the convent grounds. In January 1860, city authorities placed a "girl named Lawless . . . for safe keeping in the Home of the Good Shepherd," after the Police Court charged "Mark P. Tennison . . . with having committed an outrage" against her.[37] Archbishop John B. Purcell also received requests from priests in rural areas of the diocese who wished to place members of their parishes with the sisters. Prior to the founding of the Good Shepherds in Cincinnati, priests often inquired if the archbishop knew of a Catholic family in the city who would accept young women or girls. In the winter of 1856, for example, Father John Kraemer of Duck Creek, Ohio, informed Purcell that a "scandal [had been] given by an old man to a girl."[38] Father Kraemer, foremost concerned about how the "scandal" would affect the dynamics of his parish, asked Purcell to "get a place for her in a good Catholic house," noting that it "would do a great favor to our congregation."[39]

After the Good Shepherds established their convent and asylum, the priests referenced those institutions in their letters to Purcell.[40] "I write . . . in behalf of a girl of some seventeen or

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[35] "Night before last," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, August 9, 1861.

[36] "Night before last," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, August 9, 1861.

[37] "Police Court Saturday," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1860.

[38] John Christon Kraemer to John Baptist Purcell, December 8, 1856, box 7, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[39] John Christon Kraemer to John Baptist Purcell, December 8, 1856, box 7, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[40] In April 1869, a reporter for the *Cincinnati Commercial Times* visited the convent and provided the following description of the grounds: "The front of the convent, on Bank street, between Baymiller and Freeman, extends eighty feet on the north side, and is equal to four stories in height. Its depth is thirty feet. Midway of the front, stone steps lead up to the first story proper, beneath which is a commodious basement. In response to the bell a girl appears and ushers the visitor into an anteroom, on either side of which are reception rooms. Frame lattice-work separates the public rooms from a hall, and through the wickets the inmates may converse with those who are allowed to see them . . . Passing into the hall, and thence through one leading north, the visitor finds himself in an area inclosed [sic] on all sides by buildings and walls. To the north is a building of about the same size as that just left. On the west is the large church of St Augustine, on the east a wall running along the alley, and in the middle of

eighteen years," Father Michael Ahern of Portsmouth, Ohio, explained in April 1865, "and to ask certain whether she may be received, for a time, into the House of the Good Shepherd."[41] "She was seduced," the priest explained, "or persuaded, with promise of marriage, by a young man of the town, who, being underage cannot be legally compelled to make good his promises."[42] Ahern informed Purcell that—despite "being with child," which the priest described as the girl's "present trouble"—the individual in consideration possessed a "good natural disposition," making her the ideal candidate for the care and guidance of the Good Shepherds.[43]

As one reporter explained, life at the convent consisted of "religious devotions and hard work."[44] The convent and asylum contained a work room, kitchen, dining area, and chapel. A former residence on the convent grounds known as the Old Gano Mansion provided living quarters for some of the penitents as well as orphaned girls placed with the order. The Good Shepherds dedicated much of the day to "sewing hours," during which the penitents and Magdalenes sat "in a large workroom" and engaged in "needle-work" under the direction of the sisters.[45] This labor provided the main source of funding for the institution, helping make the

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the space the handsome new church edifice of the convent, with sittings for about 500 persons. A portion of the walks in this area are so much elevated as to be nearly ten feet above the street, and the others lend merely to the basements and to the alley gate. To the left, and near to the public Church of St Augustine, in a small chapel, in which a sister is kneeling and devotions that never cease . . . In the basement of the front building are the kitchen and bakery. In the latter, the lay sisters use about two barrels of flour at a baking, and from it produce wholesome white bread, the odor of which, as it comes fresh from the great ovens, is very grateful to the nostrils. The cooking ranges are of good size, as nearly three hundred mouths have to be supplied daily. In the first story, immediately above bakery, kitchen and cellars, are the reception and recreation rooms; and above these the sleeping and living apartments of the managing sisters of the Good Shepherd (fifty in number), who live by themselves." See "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[41] Michael Ahern to John Baptist Purcell, April 25, 1865, box 14, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

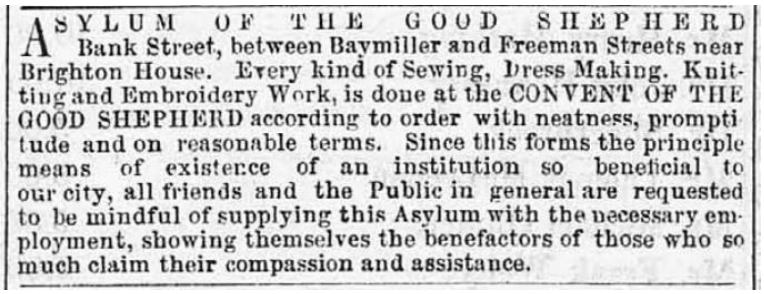
[42] Michael Ahern to John Baptist Purcell, April 25, 1865, box 14, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[43] Michael Ahern to John Baptist Purcell, April 25, 1865, box 14, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[44] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[45] A reporter for the *Cincinnati Commercial Times* offered the following description of the sewing and needlework produced by the penitents and Magdalens under the supervision of the Good Shepherds: "Most of the beautiful needle-work which has rendered this institution famous in the West, is done by the hands of the Magdalens

convent a self-sustaining entity. While the Magdalenes spent most of their time sewing or praying, penitents performed the cleaning, washing, and cooking at the convent. Both the Magdalenes and penitents wore "a plain . . . uniform of gingham dresses," but the Magdalenes donned black hoods while the penitents possessed white head coverings.[46] Outside of their sewing responsibilities and daily chores, the penitents and Magdalenes attended classes taught by the sisters and joined the order in daily devotional life at the convent. In line with the order's vow of strict enclosure, the sisters and the women under their care never traveled outside the convent grounds. Over time, however, most of the penitents reached the desired level of "reform" and were allowed to live on their own or with their family, or they were placed with a new family in the region. Many became house servants for prominent families. Magdalenes, on the other hand, never returned to life outside the convent, choosing instead to live permanently with the Good Shepherds.[47]


ASYLUM OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD
Bank Street, between Baymiller and Freeman Streets near Brighton House. Every kind of Sewing, Dress Making. Knitting and Embroidery Work, is done at the CONVENT OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD according to order with neatness, promptitude and on reasonable terms. Since this forms the principle means of existence of an institution so beneficial to our city, all friends and the Public in general are requested to be mindful of supplying this Asylum with the necessary employment, showing themselves the benefactors of those who so much claim their compassion and assistance.

I4.1: An advertisement in the *Catholic Telegraph* noting the work performed at the Magdalene Asylum in Cincinnati.[48]

in this room. Their embroidery-work is exquisite, and yields thousands of dollars annually . . . the house is thus made almost self sustaining, to the amount of $12,000 or $15,000 per annum. Many of our lady readers are familiar with this feature of the Good Shepherd, as they have hundreds of patrons among them. The materials are furnished by the customer, and the work is done in the house. Provided with linens and laces, the Magdalens produce garments that rival the finest ever seen in Paris." See "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[46] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[47] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[48] "Asylum of the Good Shepherd," *Catholic Telegraph*, January 14, 1860.

During the six years after founding their convent and Magdalene Asylum in Cincinnati, from 1857 to 1863, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd developed a reputation among both Catholics and non-Catholics, and among Church leaders and municipal authorities, for their willingness to care for women and girls who needed assistance or those categorized as "fallen." Employing their vision of works of mercy, the sisters provided Cincinnati women with vital resources while also training them in "industrial" skills. As a result of their commitment to serving the less fortunate as well as Sarah Peter's persistent appeals to the local government, the order ultimately obtained control of the prison for women in March 1863.[49]

Sarah Peter's efforts to have the Sisters of the Good Shepherd take over management of the women's prison in Cincinnati represents one part of a larger story about prison reform during the nineteenth century, specifically its focus on the treatment of women in the carceral system. During the first half of the nineteenth century, white Americans from the middle and upper classes expressed heightened concerns over the so-called "dangerous classes"—immigrants, transients, prostitutes, the poor or homeless, and African Americans, among other groups, whose populations continued to rise in cities. The desire to separate the "dangerous classes" from the public led to increased policing, prosecuting, and imprisoning in the decades before, during, and after the Civil War. In accordance with the dominant nineteenth-century concept of moral

[49] According to author Anna Shannon McAllister, Peter and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd received meaningful support from George Hatch (the Democratic mayor from 1861-1863) and Thomas Ward (City Solicitor of Cincinnati), along with Rufus King, to garner consent from the city council for the sisters to obtain control of the women prisoners. For more information, see McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 322-323; King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1, 343-351. In her biography of Sarah Peter, McAllister described the location of the prison—"the old school house" at the intersection of Front and Parson Streets—as follows: "The property given the sisters for the prison was a dismal two-story frame building. In an amazingly short time they had completely transformed the place. Behind the high walls that insured privacy to the sisters and inmates, was a garden laid out attractively in tree-shaded walks. Liberal application of whitewash freshened the gloomy rooms and halls; spotless curtains hung at the windows. The dormitories were partitioned off and each woman had her few possessions marked with her own name in a small chest beside her bed. A gem of a chapel afforded a refuge where the could retire at intervals." McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 322

improvement, reformers viewed prisons as spaces for rehabilitation, rather than simply for detainment. They argued that incarceration should have positive effects on society not only by removing the "dangerous classes" but—more importantly—by reforming criminals into upstanding and industrious citizens able to be returned to their communities.[50] However, as historian Estelle B. Freedman has argued, most nineteenth-century prisons "deteriorated rapidly into purely custodial institutions," despite the intentions of reformers.[51]

Beginning in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the concept of the "fallen woman," a term used to designate women considered immoral or unchaste, gained widespread acceptance among middle- and upper-class white Americans, creating an environment in which immigrant, working-class, and non-white women came under greater scrutiny, especially in cities. As a result, starting in the 1840s, the number of women arrested and incarcerated in the United States began to rise, creating what Freedman called the "problem of the woman prisoner."[52] In regards to the treatment of women prisoners, two dominant assumptions spearheaded reform efforts. First, policy makers argued that women constituted a unique category of prisoners, requiring a distinct style of rehabilitation as well as separation from male inmates. Second, reformers believed that women should oversee the carceral system for women, thereby creating opportunities for some middle- and upper-class women to serve as matrons, the equivalent of a modern-day warden.[53]

Not long after the Good Shepherds arrived in Cincinnati, Peter began advocating for their involvement in the care of women prisoners. Peter turned to the sisters after a series of visits to

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[50] Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keeper: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 7-21.

[51] Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keeper*, 10.

[52] Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keeper*, 7.

[53] Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keeper*, 7-21.

the City Prison, where as author Anna McAllister wrote, she commonly witnessed: "the women prisoners . . . in a common room with male criminals; their surroundings were indescribably dirty. They were confined without employment, and to [Peter's] intense indignation she saw the unkempt creatures waited upon by male attendants."[54] The description highlights the three common areas of concern regarding the treatment of women prisoners: poor conditions, the intermixing of both sexes, and the absence of women guards to oversee women prisoners. The model presented by the Good Shepherds in Europe addressed each issue and had a track record for success. Peter proposed that the Good Shepherds take over the prison, positing Catholic works of mercy as a viable approach to reforming the city correctional system.

Evidence suggests that Peter prepared her first formal petition—which was delivered at the council meeting mentioned in the introduction—in the fall of 1858, approximately sixteen months after the Good Shepherds had founded a convent and relief house in the city. According to the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, the council rejected the plan due to apprehensions about turning over a public institution to Catholic sisters. Nevertheless, Peter, with support from her son, continued lobbying municipal authorities, leveraging the scathing reviews of the city prison in the local newspapers as reason for a new administration. In fact, a year after the first petition failed, Rufus King informed his mother that the "City Prison is now attracting a great deal of attention, the Mayor being greatly stirred up & newspapers very indignant at the inhumane treatment of the poor women."[55] By the fall of 1859, city officials seemed prepared to put the

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[54] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 250. Later, while writing in fall of 1865, Peter recalled a visit to the City Prison in 1860, noting that she saw "a scene of indescribable filth, intemperance and obscenity, where the wretched half naked inmates roamed over the dilapidated place, engaged only in the brutal quarrels of inebriety." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 395.

[55] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 27, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Good Shepherds in charge of the women prisoners. Local residents, however, raised concerns about the location of the Good Shepherds' proposed location—"the old School House above Deer Creek," as described by King.[56] "The people rose in arms," King informed his mother, "& being in my Ward it became my duty to defend them from what evidently – if opposite your door or mine – would be an insufferable nuisance."[57] Indeed, King noted that a "number of nice and respectable people who dreaded the idea of being subjected to the noises & discourse" lived "[o]pposite the side and rear of the [old school] house," leaving King no choice but to advocate that the transition of management be put on hold until "the City . . . erect[ed] a proper house in the right place," suggesting that municipal authorities would have to build a new prison in a more agreeable location.[58]

The story of the women's prison remains a bit unclear from January 1860 to March 1863, when the Good Shepherds finally assumed control of a public building at the intersection of Front and Parsons Streets, where they housed the women sentenced by local authorities. Correspondence between Rufus King and Sarah Peter suggests that the Good Shepherds could have taken over a location as early as the winter of 1860. "The war against the 'City Prison,'" King explained to Peter in mid-December 1859, "has resulted in complete victory to your side . . . the Mayor has triumphed over their clamors and the carpenters &c are busily engaged in fitting up the old school house."[59] Yet the extant records indicate that the sisters waited until the spring

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[56] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 27, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[57] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 27, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[58] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, November 27, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[59] Rufus King to Sarah Worthington King Peter, December 18, 1859, volume 2, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Peter responded to her son's letter with the following: "You tell me the old-school-house is taken for the Prisoners - & that 'my side' has won a victory the only victory which I cared to win, was to put the wretched prisoners under the care of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd – the only means now known, which is at all likely to make them better . . . Why do you . . . my dear

of 1863 to begin their administration of the prison, perhaps a decision that resulted from administrative difficulties caused by the start of the Civil War.

A year after the Good Shepherds assumed management of the prison for women, the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* published a positive review of the institution, underscoring the contributions of the order in the region. The review, along with other newspaper reports, provide key information about the management of the prison. In many ways, the Good Shepherds managed the prison in the same manner as the Magdalene Asylum, which suggests that the sisters viewed and treated the inmates the same as the penitents and Magdalenes who lived on the convent grounds. Overall, the prison was a self-sustaining institution. The first floor contained a meeting room, kitchen, dining hall, and chapel. On the second floor, the women prisoners engaged in sewing and other needlework. Some sources suggest that the inmates produced items used by the federal army during the Civil War, referring to the labor as "army work."[60] Living quarters occupied the third floor, which contained a separate apartment for the sisters and approximately sixty beds for the women prisoners.[61] Six members of the order

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child, if it were only for your Mother's sake, advocate my plan, which you must see would bring about a change for the better which nothing else can accomplish? To bring up the religious prejudice into a question like this, is insane and wicked. When the Sisters are under the same laws as the Matron, where is the difficulty? . . . I shall say no more about it – but if I have not credit in Cina [Cincinnati] to bring about such a measure as this, I think I should 'shake off the dust of my feet' and go to live in some less heathenish place." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, December 22, 1859, volume 1, The King Family Papers, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[60] "The Female City Prison," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 2, 1864.

[61] For a full description of the prison under the direction of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, see the following report from the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* in May 1864: "In entering [the prison] from the noisy street, you are ushered into a scene of perfect order, neatness, cleanliness, and quietude. On the first floor are the hall, reception-room, chapel and sacristy; in the rear the kitchen and dining room. On the second floor you find busily engaged work—under the superintendence of one of the sisters, some sixty women. You strive in vain to discover in these quiet, busy workers, the unfortunates of the Police Court. Their decent garb has no resemblance to the gutter stained and ragged habiliments which contain the bundle of shrinking, cursing humanity you have seen in the Police Station cell. All is order and propriety. Under the kindly management of the Sisters, these unfortunates, whose reform is so desirable, are brought to feel that there is some trace of the human being left to them, and some chance of regaining a position of decency. In this work-room the inmates are engaged the great portion of the day, at army work principally, and through this work the institution is fast becoming self-sustaining. The third floor of the building is used for sleeping apartments, containing some sixty clear, comfortable single beds, and being divided into two rooms, in each of which is a small apartment which one of the sisters occupies, in order to keep watch over

permanently lived at the prison. As a sympathetic newspaper story reported, the "self sacrificing sisters devote[d] every moment of their time to the care of those under their charge, leaving the house very seldom, and that only on special occasions."[62]

Writing one year after city officials placed the Good Shepherds in charge of the prison, the reporter concluded that—overall—the decision had produced a "wonderful change for the better."[63] Similar praise appeared five years later in the *Cincinnati Commercial Times*. The "work of the Female City Prison has developed a field of reform that can not but be gratifying to those engaged in it," declared the author.[64] Through their "mild prison discipline" and program of reform, the sisters gained the "confidence and love" of numerous inmates, including some who refused to leave after their sentences expired, choosing instead to shut "themselves in from the bad influences of the world."[65] Readers likely assumed that those women had truly been "reformed," and chose to remain with the sisters instead of returning to city life.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of relevant sources, it is difficult to know what the women and girls—penitents, Magdalenes, and prisoners—thought about their time with the Good Shepherds.[66] A *Cincinnati Commercial Times* reporter, approving of the work of the order, wrote the following to summarize the experiences of the women who lived with the sisters:

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the inmates. Every department of this institution gives evidence of the most scrupulous order and neatness possible." "The Female City Prison," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 2, 1864.

[62] "The Female City Prison," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 2, 1864.

[63] "The Female City Prison," *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 2, 1864.

[64] "Good Work of Reform," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 4, 1869.

[65] "Good Work of Reform," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 4, 1869. In a letter to Archbishop Purcell, Sister St. Joseph David described their work in a similar way, noting how the Good Shepherds provided a "place of refuge for so many poor souls, from the deluding snares of this deceitful world." Sister St. Joseph David to John Baptist Purcell, June 24, 1863, box 13, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[66] During my research for this chapter, I consulted thirty different newspaper articles—published between 1858 and 1874—that covered the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their role in serving penitents, Magdalens, and prisoners in the greater-Cincinnati region. From those thirty articles, I uncovered one clear example of unhappiness or disgruntlement among the women placed under the direction of the sisters. In September 1868, the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* reported that seven girls escaped from the convent. Though the newspaper offered no reason for the "escape," readers can assume that the "seven young girls" left because they did not consent to life on the convent

> These penitents all show faces that tell of sorrow and suffering. Many of them appear like mere machines, who have nothing to hope for save to live on from day to day. Others have some cheerfulness of expression that indicates realization of the happiness of their change from the slum of the city to cleanliness, occupation and good food and lodging. Some of them are girls of fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years, whose contact with vice was not such as to completely demoralize them, and a few only have features fair to look upon. They work on, year after year, and appear contented, and they probably are more happy than they could be out in the world.[67]

Perhaps the reporter spoke with some of the women during his visit at the convent, and used those responses to craft his evaluation of the Magdalene Asylum. More than likely, however, the author compared what he witnessed at the prison with what he knew about the lives of women who appeared before the Police Court—a subject commonly covered in the local newspapers—leading him to conclude that the women "probably are more happy than they could be out in the world."[68] The reports were likely written for middle- and upper-class Cincinnatians who read the newspaper and worried about how such women influenced city life.[69] Such people believed the Good Shepherds offered an important service to that readership by seemingly reforming those of the "dangerous classes" and improving their lives.

Sarah Peter had an opportunity to explain her thoughts on the experiences of the inmates and the management of the prison when Enoch C. Wines and Theodore W. Dwight, both leaders of the prison reform movement in the United States, featured the "Female Branch of the City Prison of Cincinnati" in their 1867 *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*.[70] The authors included three letters by Peter that shed light on the management of

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grounds. It is possible that the girls rejected the program of reform, which included the needlework and other chores, the requirement to remain on the convent grounds, and the religious instruction. "Seven young girls escaped," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 23, 1868.

[67] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[68] "A Reporter Among the Nuns," *Cincinnati Commercial Times*, April 18, 1869.

[69] According to historian Henry C. Binford, nineteenth-century newspapers often constituted a printed dialogue "going on among people of standing." Binford, *From Improvement to City Planning*, 12.

[70] E. C. Wines and Theodore W. Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada* (Albany, NY: Van Benthuysen & Sons' Steam Printing House, 1867).

the prison as well as Peter's ideas about the contributions of Catholic ideas and practices to American reform movements. Peter believed she had offered something novel to prison reform efforts in the United States by advocating and implementing a European model, noting how the "ideas [were] all borrowed from foreign lands."[71] She took credit for importing the program of reform and the ideas and practices behind it, the Catholic works of mercy, as well as the individuals managing the prison. She explained how she had helped bring the Good Shepherds from Angers, France, to southern Ohio via a convent first established in Louisville, Kentucky.

The sisters, Peter argued, constituted the key improvement for women prisoners, as they were more effective administrators than women who were hired as guards or matrons. Matrons "are attracted only by the salary, without pretending to any capacity or peculiar adaptation to such as a charge," wrote Peter.[72] Why, Peter questioned, would the city expect them to be able "to perform duties for which they had no qualifications?"[73] Instead, as she explained to Wines, the "sisters were *devoted for life* [original emphasis] . . . with no ulterior views."[74] "The religious principle lies at the bottom of everything they do," continued Peter, "and their training, based upon their faith, and built by prayer, entire self-abnegation, and long experience, enables them to accomplish what they undertake through love for God and their neighbor."[75] Peter

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[71] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 394.

[72] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 394.

[73] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 394.

[74] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, October 25, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 394. In a subsequent letter to Wines, Peter stated the following: "I do not know whether I added my conviction that none but 'sisterhoods' could effect the results which are everywhere apparent in their work." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, December 10, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 396.

[75] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, December 10, 1865, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 396.

emphasized that unlike others who served as prison administrators, the Good Shepherds had taken vows to serve others. A vow, she argued, was a more powerful motivator than monetary rewards; religious principles were more effective than economic incentives; a life-long commitment to serving others through the works of mercy constituted a more meaningful approach to prison management than someone hired to fill a salaried position. Peter referenced the prisons in Europe under the direction of the Good Shepherds as evidence that her preferred model had a history of success.

Moreover, Peter argued, the sisters' prisons truly rehabilitated the women, rather than solely detaining them or removing them from society. And, in her opinion, the sisters were the key to creating a program conducive to genuine reform. "Will you allow me to repeat . . . what I think I mentioned in my last [letter]," Peter explained, "that the same system, if pursued by *paid* [original emphasis] matrons or stewards, however worthy, would be nearly or quite inoperative for moral reformation."[76] Peter described the difference the sisters made as a matter of "psychology"—whereby, in their "successful treatment of the transgressors," the Good Shepherds became "possessed of [the prisoners'] entire confidence," creating an environment in which the relationship between the sisters and prisoners constituted something more like a mentorship rather than a standard prisoner-guard relationship.[77] Genuine reform or rehabilitation developed, Peter wrote, because of who directed the program and how the program was applied—not simply because the idea of rehabilitation existed. The sisters allowed their "*heart*" to dictate their administration of the prison, rather than their "*head*."[78] Peter distinguished

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[76] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, January 8, 1866, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 397.

[77] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, January 8, 1866, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 398.

[78] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, January 8, 1866, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada*, 398. Emphasis in the original.

between "ideas" or models of prison reform—reference to the "head"—and what she viewed as the most important factor in effective prison administration: the motivations and commitments of the people in charge.[79]

Nearly all printed sources from the mid-nineteenth century cast the prison and the Magdalene Asylum in a positive light. Some historians looking into similar institutions, however, have underscored problems associated with such efforts. In the late-nineteenth century, the Good Shepherds founded "Magdalene Laundries" in cities throughout the Midwest, Ohio Valley, and Mid-Atlantic regions.[80] Although somewhat different from the Magdalene Asylum and the prison for women in Cincinnati, the laundries served as spaces for the sisters to direct "wayward" or "fallen" women. Between 1848 and 1888, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd established approximately twenty-seven laundries in more than twelve different states, and the laundries housed women and girls sentenced by local and state courts for prostitution. One scholarly article argues that the laundries should be considered the first private prisons opened specifically for women in the United States because the women and girls placed there were forced to stay against their will.[81] Historians Michelle Jones and Lori Record provide a grim portrait of life among the Good Shepherds, especially when compared to the positive evaluations

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[79] Peter's full quote is worth including: "Experiences proves that human laws and regulations are but fragile barriers against the torrent of human passions. Allow me to repeat, the *administration* [original emphasis] is of more force than the laws themselves. Besides in the sum of human action, the *heart* [original emphasis] is more powerfully effective than the *head* [original emphasis]. This lesson is taught by our Divine Lord. If a power can be found capable of coping with human passions, it must exist in *purified affections* [original emphasis], not by appeals to self-interest, or even to the reasoning or intellectual faculties." Sarah Worthington King Peter to Enoch Cobb Wines, January 8, 1866, transcription in Wines and Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada,* 398.

[80] As one article explained, Magdalen Laundries, "a term both functional and metaphorical, have their roots [in Europe] . . . as places for fallen women . . . Named for Mary Magdalene, herself an alleged prostitute, the laundries were supposed to be places of reform and repentance where women could 'wash away' their sins while scrubbing society's dirty laundry." Michelle Jones and Lori Record, "Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States," *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17 (2014): 170.

[81] Jones and Record, "Magdalene Laundries," 166-179.

provided by Sarah Peter and the Cincinnati newspapers. According to Jones and Record, in the laundries, women "were forced to perform hard labor without compensation and were subjected to cruel and sustained punishment, often for years."[82] Jones and Record crafted their descriptions of the American laundries largely from reports about the history of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. In the early 2000s, a widespread scandal broke out in Ireland, which revealed the dark histories of the laundries in the country. In 2011, the Irish state launched an official investigation that, as Jones and Record noted, "resulted in a report of more than a thousand pages exposing how the women were treated," leading the government to "call for reparations for the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries."[83] It is not immediately clear whether the grim portrait of the laundries provided by Jones and Record is accurate for the United States, much less whether it is relevant to the Good Shepherds' operations in Cincinnati.

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd managed the prison for seven years, ultimately returning the institution to municipal authorities in 1870. The explanation for the change remains unclear, though a September 1871 letter from Sister Gertrude to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell sheds some light on the "vexations endured" by the sisters, especially during their final years as prison administrators.[84] According to Sister Gertrude, the Good Shepherds had to "ward off the intrigues, machinations, and vile intrusions at all times of the would be city authorities, Evangelicals, and worse and more difficult to be endured than all others the Ladies of

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[82] Jones and Record, "Magdalene Laundries," 166-167. Later in the article, Jones and Record wrote the following: "Though [the women and girls] could enter a laundry on their own, more commonly, they were placed there by their families, priests, or courts. Once there, they were held for life, enslaved, abused, and unpaid as workers in the laundry." Jones and Record, "Magdalene Laundries," 171.

[83] Jones and Record, "Magdalene Laundries," 171.

[84] Sister Gertrude to John Baptist Purcell, September 23, 1871, II-5-e, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana. In the 1870 census for Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio, "O'Brian, Gertrude" is listed as a member of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. I assume this is the author of the letter to Archbishop Purcell.

the Christian Association."[85] More than likely, the changing contexts from 1863 to 1870 created a political environment in which the sisters were either forced to relinquish control of the prison or felt that it was in the order's best interests to move on from the role. Given what we know about the postwar period, when Protestant activists from across the nation mobilized and formed coalitions in support of reform efforts, Sister Gertrude's letter suggests that the Catholic sisters faced pressure from various Protestant groups interested in taking control of municipal institutions, changing the program of reform for the women prisoners, and limiting the influence of the Church in public life.[86] The postbellum era witnessed a renewed and strengthened wave of anti-Catholicism, as Protestant leaders infused notions of American nationalism with their religious beliefs and values, casting Catholicism—once again—as un-American.[87] Furthermore, the end of their tenure as prison administrators coincided with the opening of the Cincinnati Workhouse, located on six acres of land in the northwest portion of the city. Newspaper reports indicate that, soon after the new workhouse opened, city officials transferred the women prisoners under the direction of the Good Shepherds to the site.[88]

When the Good Shepherds obtained control of the women's prison in 1863, Sarah Peter succeeded in her goal of broadening the influence of Catholicism in public life in region. Yet, the changing political contexts of the 1870s put Peter in the minority, demonstrating the limitations of her desired ends. After 1870, the Good Shepherds continued to operate their

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[85] Sister Gertrude to John Baptist Purcell, September 23, 1871, II-5-e, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[86] For more on the efforts of Protestant activists and reformers during the postwar era, see Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[87] For more on the wave of anti-Catholicism after 1865, see John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), especially chapter four, "The Nation," 91-126; William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), especially chapter seven, "Post-war Anti-Catholicism," 129-143.

[88] "The School of Reform," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 27, 1871.

Magdalene Asylum on the convent grounds and added a new institution, which they referred to as the School of Reform. Sources indicate that the sisters maintained control of the building on Front and Parsons Streets, which had served as the prison, converting that location into the School of Reform. Unlike the Magdalene Asylum, where the Good Shepherds "receive[d] persons indiscriminately," the sisters established the School of Reform solely for those "who desire[d] to be converted."[89] In this way, the order continued to serve women and girls in the region, even if their role returned to operating purely private religious institutions.

The Sisters of Mercy and Their Program to Employ Immigrant Women in Cincinnati

In similar ways to the efforts of the Good Shepherds, the Sisters of Mercy founded institutions in the greater-Cincinnati region that served abandoned or "fallen" women as well as Irish women who had recently immigrated to the United States. Specifically, the Mercies opened a laundry on Fourth Street, where they employed individuals from the House of Mercy to perform daily washing duties. Furthermore, the Mercies operated a placement program for domestic servants, identifying households in the area where "respectable" women and girls could offer services, including cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Unlike the Good Shepherds, whose work in the prison intersected with the municipal government, the Sisters of Mercy operated purely private institutions that addressed the realities of a growing population of immigrant, homeless, poor, and unemployed women and girls, many of whom desperately needed assistance in an industrialized urban environment. Sarah Peter, who helped bring the Mercies to southern Ohio from Kinsale, Ireland, viewed their works of mercy as a necessary and vital contribution to

[89] Sister Gertrude to John Baptist Purcell, September 23, 1871, II-5-e, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

improving the quality of life in the region and restoring or instilling respectability among immigrant and lower-class women and girls.

In August 1858, upon their arrival in Cincinnati, eleven members of the Sisters of Mercy took possession of a house on Sycamore Street near St. Thomas Church. With the help of Sarah Peter, Reuben Springer, and other lay advocates, the Mercies converted the structure into a convent and House of Mercy, welcoming young women and children within days after moving in. For approximately two years, the sisters operated the House of Mercy as well as a day school for the children of St. Thomas parish and a night school for adults from the neighborhood.[90] Three months after the Mercies founded their institution on Sycamore Street, the *Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati's official Catholic newspaper, offered the following description of their contributions in the city:

> The number attending their night-schools is 175 to 200 grown girls, who are employed during the day in working for their support. The Sisters have paid three hundred and sixty visits to the sick and dying since their arrival; relieved them spiritually and corporally, as far as their limited means permitted. The Sisters regret these means are too limited for the wants of the distressed poor who daily, and almost hourly, meet their view. Eighty infant boys are registered in their day-school and they hope to have also a day-school for female children, when circumstances will permit. Fifteen young women, of good character, have received hospitality and shelter in their house of mercy within the last month many of whom have been provided situations.[91]

Although the order focused on the care of women and girls (the legacy and rule established by their foundress, Catherine McAuley), during their first two years in Cincinnati, the Mercies served in a hybrid role, both managing the House of Mercy on Sycamore Street and serving as

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[90] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will Established in Cincinnati, August 18, 1858, volume 1, box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina ; Mary Ellen Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy: The Sisters of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1858-1958* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), 59-72.

[91] *Catholic Telegraph*, November 20, 1858, transcription in Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 70-71.

instructors for the parish school at St. Thomas.[92] Over time, the sisters and Sarah Peter hoped that the order might find a new, and bigger, location for their convent and House of Mercy, allowing them to expand their ministry to more women and girls, and ultimately relinquish their parish-level teaching responsibilities. After a period of fundraising, in April 1860, the Sisters of Mercy put a deposit down for the buildings and lot comprising the former German Orphan Asylum. Constituting the entire block running east to west between Central and John Avenues as well as south to north between Third and Fourth Streets, the new campus of the Sisters of Mercy included buildings for their convent, House of Mercy, and other institutions, including a site for their future laundry.

Once established, the House of Mercy offered a place of refuge for women and girls in Cincinnati.[93] The original House of Mercy in Kinsale, Ireland, provided a model for those founded in the United States. As in her work with the Good Shepherds, Sarah Peter recruited the Sisters of Mercy to come to Cincinnati to serve the growing population of immigrant women, many of whom were Irish and lacked opportunities for work (outside of prostitution) or the means to establish themselves in a new city. With the House of Mercy and Convent of the Divine Will established on their new lot, the sisters shifted their focus to identifying ways of

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[92] When the Mercies arrived in the city, the *Catholic Telegraphy* published the following announcement, underscoring the works of mercy sponsored by the order: "The special mission of the Sisters of Mercy in this city is to give gratuitous instruction to young girls in all the ordinary useful branches of education, to teach them lace work and other branches of industry by which they may be enabled to make a respectable living; to take care of very young children while their mothers are out at work; to receive into their house orphan children who have left the Asylum at Cumminsville [located just north of Cincinnati], until they learn trades and are competent to provide for themselves; to harbor young girls while out of place; to keep an intelligence office where such girls may hear of good places, and where persons in need of good helps may obtain them; to visit the Jails and Hospitals, sick and destitute, in every part of the city, and to do all in their power to reclaim the intemperate females, of whom, unfortunately, too many in the lanes and alleys of Cincinnati, disgrace the Church, scandalize their neighbors and give bad example to their children." *Catholic Telegraph*, August 28, 1858, transcription in Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 60.

[93] Although the institutions served similar populations, the Magdalene Asylum of the Good Shepherds and the House of Mercy were located several blocks apart in the city, thereby allowing the Catholic works of mercy to impact various wards in Cincinnati, specifically those located in the upper-west and upper-central wards, as well as those near the riverfront.

employing the women, ultimately deciding on two options: a laundry and an agency that helped women and girls find domestic employment.

In August 1860, only months after the Mercies took over their new lot, the *Catholic Telegraph* ran an advertisement, titled "Work of Mercy," for a laundry to "benefit . . . unemployed females of good character."[94] Located on Fourth Street near the Convent of the Divine Will, the laundry offered "[c]oarse and fine washing" services each day of the week, except Sundays.[95] The advertisement appeared in each weekly edition of the *Catholic Telegraph* from August 1860 until February 1861.[96] The onset of the Civil War likely disrupted operations. In October 1861, the federal government leased the building that served as the House of Mercy, repurposing it as a barracks where it held prisoners of war awaiting transport to military prisons further north. Yet evidence indicates that the laundry remained opened during the war, despite not being advertised in the *Catholic Telegraph*. Perhaps the laundry operated in a more limited capacity compared to the months before February 1861. The annals note that, in December 1864, the Mercies contemplated whether income earned from the laundry could support the sisters themselves. In short, the sisters wondered if they could claim money from the work performed by women under their direction.[97] According to an October 1860 article in the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, the women received "current rates for their work," indicating that proceeds from the laundry went to the women, rather than the sisters.[98] By late 1864, the Sisters of Mercy, along with many others in the region, faced financial difficulties, which likely

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[94] "Work of Mercy," *Catholic Telegraph*, August 8, 1860.

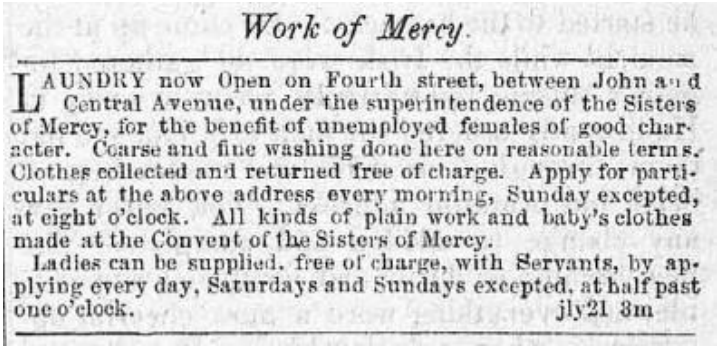
[95] "Work of Mercy," *Catholic Telegraph*, August 8, 1860.

[96] See volumes of *Catholic Telegraph* between August 8, 1860 and February 9, 1861. The advertisement for the laundry typically appeared on the seventh page of each issue.

[97] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 82-87; Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 17-18.

[98] *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, October 25, 1860, transcription in Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 83.

prompted their interest in claiming proceeds from the laundry.[99] The issue reached the desk of Pope Pius IX, who offered an answer in mid-January 1865. According to a Church official, who transcribed Pius IX's letter for the Mercies, the "Holy Father declared that there is nothing contrary to the letter or spirit of [the order's] holy rules to use, for the support of the Community, money earned in the House of Mercy by the laundry works, needle works, etc."[100]



Work of Mercy.

LAUNDRY now Open on Fourth street, between John and Central Avenue, under the superintendence of the Sisters of Mercy, for the benefit of unemployed females of good character. Coarse and fine washing done here on reasonable terms. Clothes collected and returned free of charge. Apply for particulars at the above address every morning, Sunday excepted, at eight o'clock. All kinds of plain work and baby's clothes made at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy.

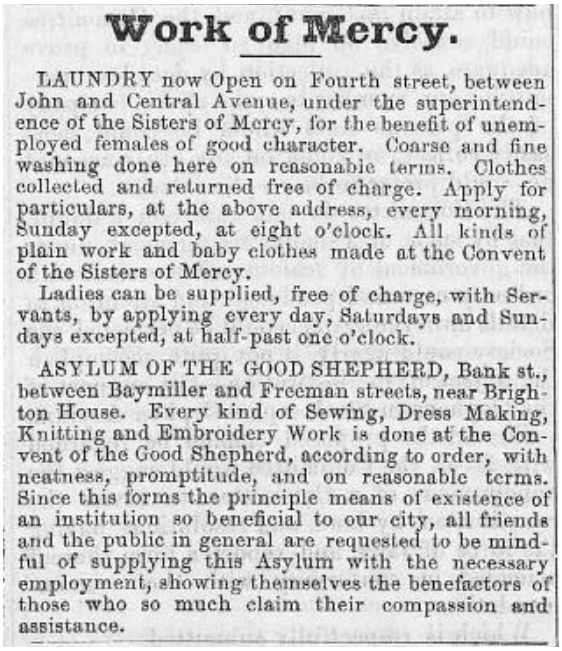
Ladies can be supplied, free of charge, with Servants, by applying every day, Saturdays and Sundays excepted, at half past one o'clock. jly21 3m

I4.2: An advertisement in the *Catholic Telegraph* noting the work performed at the laundry managed by the Sisters of Mercy.[101]

[99] According to the annals, the Mercies considered "whether money received for the work, Laundry, etc. earned by the inmates of the House of Mercy or the Strs could be applied to support of Com[munity]." To answer this question, the sisters sent a letter to the mother superior of the order, who ultimately laid the question before Pope Pius IX. The Mercies received his response in early 1865. Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 17, 71-72.

[100] Letter transcribed in Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 71.

[101] "Work of Mercy," *Catholic Telegraph*, August 20, 1860.



Work of Mercy.

LAUNDRY now Open on Fourth street, between John and Central Avenue, under the superintendence of the Sisters of Mercy, for the benefit of unemployed females of good character. Coarse and fine washing done here on reasonable terms. Clothes collected and returned free of charge. Apply for particulars, at the above address, every morning, Sunday excepted, at eight o'clock. All kinds of plain work and baby clothes made at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy.

Ladies can be supplied, free of charge, with Servants, by applying every day, Saturdays and Sundays excepted, at half-past one o'clock.

ASYLUM OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, Bank st., between Baymiller and Freeman streets, near Brighton House. Every kind of Sewing, Dress Making, Knitting and Embroidery Work is done at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, according to order, with neatness, promptitude, and on reasonable terms. Since this forms the principle means of existence of an institution so beneficial to our city, all friends and the public in general are requested to be mindful of supplying this Asylum with the necessary employment, showing themselves the benefactors of those who so much claim their compassion and assistance.

I4.3: An advertisement in the *Catholic Telegraph* noting the work performed at the laundry managed by the Sisters of Mercy and at the Magdalene Asylum under the direction of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.[102]

In addition to managing the laundry, the Sisters of Mercy also placed women and girls in homes throughout the greater-Cincinnati region, where they performed duties as domestic servants. Indeed, the final line in each advertisement for the laundry mentioned that "Ladies," a reference to the women of wealthy households in the area, "can be supplied, free of charge, with Servants."[103] The Mercy Heritage Center contains a "Register of Servants for whom Employment was provided, 1858-1870," which includes hundreds of entries. Each line in the register provides the name of the servant, the name of the woman who requested the servant, the address of the household where the servant worked, and the type of duties performed by the servant at each location. As the register indicates, the Sisters of Mercy began employing women and girls in domestic roles during their first year in the city, when they operated their convent on

[102] "Work of Mercy," *Catholic Telegraph*, February 9, 1861.
[103] "Work of Mercy," *Catholic Telegraph*, August 8, 1860.

Sycamore Street. The placement continued after the sisters opened the laundry, allowing the Mercies to employ individuals as washerwomen or domestic servants.[104]

Based on the extant archival evidence at the Mercy Heritage Center, much remains unknown about the role of the Sisters of Mercy in employing women and girls as servants in the greater-Cincinnati region. To begin, unlike the records associated with the laundry, which strongly suggests that the women laborers received wages, neither the annals nor the register indicate how the women and girls employed as servants were compensated for their work. Perhaps they negotiated their compensation on their own or received payment in the form of "room and board" with the family for whom they worked. Furthermore, it is unclear if, once placed in a household, the women and girls lived permanently with the families or if they returned to the House of Mercy. It was common practice for religious institutions to place orphaned or abandoned children with families for permanent residence. Women and girls under the direction of the Mercies may have received either short-term or long-term positions, providing them homes, other than the House of Mercy.

In an effort to shed light on some of these questions, we can turn to scholarship on Irish immigrant women in the United States during the nineteenth century. Although historian Margaret Lynch-Brennan's work focused on women who served in homes in the urban Northeast, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* provides important insights into the world of Irish domestic servants, including their daily routines, experiences as immigrant Catholics working in predominantly native-born Protestant homes, and role the American Church played in identifying potential employers and placing Irish

[104] "Register of Servants for whom Employment was provided, 1858-1870," box 105.5, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

women in households.[105] Lynch-Brennan described the efforts of the Sisters of Mercy in New York, where the order had founded a convent in 1843, in training Irish immigrants to become domestic servants. The sisters created a month-long program to prepare women and girls to labor in the city, helping identify employers for over 12,000 domestic servants by 1860.[106]

A majority of the Irish domestic servants who immigrated to the United States were young, single women from rural backgrounds who practiced Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, most had immigrated due to economic incentives, citing limited opportunities in Europe.[107] As Lynch-Brennan explained, "service work [in the United States] was attractive" to these "Irish girls because . . . the wages for domestic work compared quite favorably with wages for other female occupations."[108] Plenty of opportunities existed to serve in middle- and upper-class households, as most native-born American women and girls refused to work as domestic servants due to the "social stigma attached" to that work.[109] Likewise, by the mid-nineteenth century, middle- and upper-class women "enthusiastically embraced the idea of turning over the most onerous of their domestic chores to . . . their Irish servants," noted Lynch-Brennan, freeing up the ladies to pursue other interests, including reading and the arts, hosting social gatherings, political organizing, and philanthropic ventures.[110]

Once placed in the homes, the domestic servants faced difficult environments, both in terms of the expected labor as well as the realities of working in a private space. In 1857, Elizabeth F. Ellett, a prominent New Yorker, published a comprehensive guide to domestic life

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[105] Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009). In addition to Lynch-Brennan's work, see Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

[106] Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 96.

[107] Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, xvii-xxii, 1, 18-21.

[108] Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 90.

[109] Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 88.

[110] Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 67-69.

for middle- and upper-class Americans, including several sections on managing domestic employees. The following excerpt describes a proposed morning routine for houseworkers:

> A servant should be trained to rise about half-past five . . . pass into the kitchen . . . light the kitchen fire . . . and then proceed to prepare the room required for breakfast . . . [T]he scuttle containing coal, wood, &c., must be brought up . . . The stove must be polished . . . every morning, and thoroughly cleaned once a week. The fire may then be laid and lighted . . . [T]he sweeping comes next . . . Then comes the dusting . . . The street-door steps should be cleaned, the mats shaken, the passage swept, and the brasses polished before the family comes down. The breakfast is then to be prepared . . . The servant next proceeds to the bedrooms, opens the windows . . . empties the slops, cleanses and rinses all basins, ewers, bottles, &c. wipes up all slops, and brings fresh water to supply all wants in each room. The beds are then to be made . . . [and then] breakfast will have to be removed.[111]

Once all the above tasks were completed, the servant could then eat her breakfast. In addition to the long and busy days of work, domestic servants often faced anti-Catholic prejudice from their employers. Some employers encouraged the Catholic servants to convert to a Protestant faith. Others complained about servants who requested time off to attend mass on Sundays or feast days as well as those who insisted on practicing their devotions while living in Protestant homes.[112]

Though questions remain about the lives of Irish domestic workers in the greater-Cincinnati region, from the perspective of the Sisters of Mercy and Sarah Peter, their efforts constituted a work of mercy, specifically meeting the corporal needs of immigrant women by providing them a place to stay—either at the House of Mercy or in a household in the region—and by helping them find work. The Sisters of Mercy served a somewhat different population from the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Whereas the Good Shepherds primarily served women convicted of crimes, those involved in prostitution, or individuals deemed "less respectable" by

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[111] Elizabeth Ellet, *The Practical Housekeeper: A Cyclopedia of Domestic Economy* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1857) quoted in Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 101.

[112] Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 72-74.

society, the Sisters of Mercy provided employment opportunities through the laundry and domestic servant placement program for women considered more "respectable" or, as the advertisement for laundry stated, "females of good character."[113] In supporting everyday women in economic need, the Mercies sponsored more outward-facing initiatives. By contrast, the Good Shepherds, along with the Magdalens and penitents under their direction, were more isolated at their convent and asylum.

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Sarah Peter's vision of expanding the influence of Catholicism in nineteenth-century Cincinnati helped shape public life, especially by paying attention to women cast as "fallen" and to those new to the Ohio Valley who required assistance. As a member of the upper class, Peter took a special interest in improving her city and region, though her strategies as well as the ideas and practices that she promoted differentiated her from the majority of reformers from the era. In working with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and the Sisters of Mercy, Peter helped establish new institutions in the region that targeted poor, abandoned, unemployed, and convicted women and girls, extending the corporal works of mercy to those populations to meet their daily needs as well as provide a path for individual renewal. To Peter, the primary advantage to Catholic institutions centered on the sisters who managed them, as they interacted with the women and girls each day, lived alongside them at the Magdalene Asylum or House of Mercy, and took vows to serve populations deemed "dangerous" or "outcasts" by the more-privileged classes. Peter believed the sisters' heartfelt approach was superior to any scientific, professional, or public response to reform or improvement.

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[113] "Work of Mercy," *Catholic Telegraph*, August 8, 1860.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Works of Mercy in Wartime: How Sarah Peter and Catholic Sisters Shaped the Homefront and Battlefield in Southern Ohio and Beyond

One morning, during the fall of 1864, Sarah Peter boarded a carriage, leaving St. Clare's Convent for the headquarters of the Northern Department of the U.S. Army, which had been established in Cincinnati under the direction of Major General Joseph Hooker. According to an early biography of Peter, she intended to meet with Hooker, who administered federal hospitals and military prisons throughout the Ohio Valley and Midwest. After arriving at the location, Peter prepared a note that a staff officer transferred to the general. Not long after collecting her request, however, the staff officer entered the waiting room and politely asked Peter to leave. He made it clear that General Hooker was not entertaining guests that afternoon. To his surprise, however, Peter refused to go. In fact, she prepared a second request that the staff officer communicated back to the general. But, once again, Hooker denied her appeal for a meeting. This standoff lasted for hours. Peter continued requesting meetings, only to be turned away by the general, until finally, Hooker shouted from his desk: "Send the woman in!"[1]

Peter had waited the entire day to confront the federal commander about his most recent orders concerning the treatment of Confederate prisoners-of-war (POWs). She complained to Hooker about the state of military encampments and prisons in the area, including McLean Barracks in Cincinnati and Camp Dennison, located approximately fifteen miles northwest of the city. Peter, along with members of the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, regularly visited these locations to care for soldiers and civilian prisoners accused of

[1] Margaret Rives King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 439-441; Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 326-328.

disloyalty to the United States. Peter believed that Hooker's orders were too harsh, creating an environment in which prisoners were treated inhumanely by federal guards. For example, during a scheduled visit to a local prison, Peter witnessed a U.S. sentinel brutally kick an emaciated Confederate detainee. According to her memoirs, Hooker listened attentively as Peter explained her concerns with his policies. Once she had finished, Peter allowed the general to defend his position on upholding discipline in the prisons. In the end, the two came to an agreement. Hooker pledged to modify his orders without compromising the security of the prisons, and Peter promised to work with the general's men to improve the treatment of prisoners.[2]

The meeting between Peter and Hooker constitutes one episode of a much larger story of how Catholic women from Cincinnati, both lay and members of religious orders, shaped the homefront and battlefield during the Civil War. The chapter examines relationships, rivalries, and run-ins between Catholic women and other individuals or institutions, including local Protestant relief groups, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Sanitary Commission (USSC), and the Cincinnati municipal government. In particular, the chapter analyzes how the course of the Civil War in the region—and in parts of west Tennessee during the Fort Donelson and Shiloh campaigns—intersected with the charitable institutions established by Sarah Peter and orders of Catholic sisters, particularly the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. During the three-to-four-year period before the outbreak of the Civil War, Sarah Peter had worked alongside the Catholic sisters to aid the poor, sick, orphaned, homeless, and abandoned, including neglected women or those involved in prostitution. This chapter examines how that charitable work, understood by Catholic women as works of mercy, mapped onto the context of

[2] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 439-441; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 326-328.

civil war, taking the form of operating military hospitals, caring for sick and wounded soldiers, visiting Confederate POWs housed in military prisons throughout southern Ohio, as well as continuing their work with the less fortunate civilian population. Those initiatives put Peter and the sisters in spaces alongside members of Protestant benevolent associations, the U.S. Army, U.S. Sanitary Commission, and the Cincinnati municipal government.

The results were mixed. Early on, Peter and the sisters partnered with civil and military authorities to provide relief during the war, even leasing some of their buildings to support military operations in the region. However, over time, competing perspectives, interests, and commitments between the groups created moments of tension and conflict. For example, the episode between Peter and Hooker centered on the treatment of POWs, specifically how members of the Church and officers in U.S. Army categorized the Confederate soldiers. The Catholic women viewed the Confederate prisoners as they did others who needed care, comfort, and provisions. Peter and the sisters considered it their responsibility to provide for those in need. In the context of a civil war, however, members of the U.S. Army viewed the POWs as enemies of the state who had taken up arms against the federal government. At times, as in the case of the treatment of POWs at locations throughout the greater-Cincinnati region, such competing perspectives created problems that had to be negotiated, which laid bare issues about wartime loyalty and raised questions about the extent of care for combatants.

The chapter also calls attention to the limits of relief during the war. Sarah Peter and Catholic sisters from Cincinnati answered the call to care for sick and wounded white soldiers from both armies. The women extended their works of mercy to battlefields as far away as southwest Tennessee and northern Mississippi. At home, they partnered with federal officers and the local authorities to convert their charitable institutions into wartime facilities, including

hospitals and barracks. Yet the records of their service contain no evidence of efforts to relieve the suffering of African Americans, despite consistent appeals from southern Catholic clergy for assistance. The absence of a concerted mission to address the needs of displaced African Americans affected by the war serves as an example of the Church's problematic legacy of racism in the United States.

As a whole, the chapter contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the history of women and the northern homefront during the Civil War. Over the last two decades, historians have analyzed how women shaped the war as well as how the war shaped women's lives, both during and after the conflict.[3] As historian Stephanie McCurry affirmed "[w]omen are not just witnesses to war"; instead, "women of many different kinds" made critical choices that "shape[d] their own destinies and their peoples' histories in the maelstrom of war," while also impacting "all the major dynamics, processes, and outcomes of the war."[4] Other recent works, including Thavolia Glymph's *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation*, have moved beyond the North-South dichotomy to demonstrate how matters of race and class as well as familial allegiances shaped the experiences of women, perhaps even more than traditional political commitments to the Union or the Confederacy.[5]

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[3] For some of the most important works, see Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2000); Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For a recent historiographic essay on the history of women during the Civil War, see Lyde Cullen Sizer, "Mapping the Spaces of Women's Civil War History," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (December 2011): 536-548.

[4] Stephanie McCurry, *Women's War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 203.

[5] Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

This chapter adds a new layer to the story of wartime divisions among women by drawing attention to faith-related conflicts between women relief workers in Cincinnati.[6] Sarah Peter and the sisters associated with her shared the same race and class positions as the white, middle- and upper-class Protestant women who served as nurses and supported the local branch of the USSC. Those women often criticized the quality of care provided by the other group or refused to work alongside their counterparts in hospitals.[7] Peter, furthermore, expressed a strong critique of the USSC, suggesting to her son that he investigate their operations for alleged fraud and corruption. Viewing these accusations and criticisms from Peter's perspective reveals her strong convictions about the superiority of Catholic charity as compared to Protestant efforts. Peter, even in wartime, remained fully committed to promoting the Church in the United States, and considered nursing and other relief initiatives to be work performed best by Catholics and managed by their institutions.

Questions about Catholic women's loyalty undoubtedly shaped moments when Peter and the sisters crossed paths with members of the U.S. Army or their charitable work intersected with military operations. Federal officials foremost wanted to preserve the security of their

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[6] In some of my previous work on Catholics during the Civil War, I have explored how religious differences shaped the wartime experiences of prelates and priests. It seems to me that Catholics, in particular, focused on these issues, offering some of their strongest anti-Protestant critiques between 1861 and 1865. See Carl C. Creason, "'Puritan hypocrisy' and 'conservative Catholicity': How Roman Catholic Clergy in the Border States Interpreted the U.S. Civil War," MA thesis, University of Louisville, 2016; Carl C. Creason, "'The whole world seems to be getting out of joint': The Catholic Response to the Election of 1860, the Secession Movement, and the Start of the Civil War in the Border South," *U. S. Catholic Historian*, special volume on "The Reformation in America," volume 35, number 3 (summer 2017), 21-46; Mark A. Noll, "The Catholic Press, the Bible, and Protestant Responsibility for the Civil War," *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, volume 7, number 3 (September 2017), 355-376.

[7] Though this chapter solely examines the conflict from the perspectives of Catholic women, highlighting their position toward Protestant relief workers and organizations, other works have noted the anti-Catholic sympathies expressed by non-Catholic nurses and reformers during the war. Dorothea Dix, the Superintendent of Army Nurses for the United States, held deep anti-Catholic prejudices, which shaped her relationship with Catholics, primarily the thousands of sisters who volunteered to serve as nurses. For more information about Dix, see Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 129-132.

encampments, prisons, and hospitals, therefore any individual—regardless of stated intentions—remained subject to questioning or the individual might have been required to subscribe to a loyalty oath, especially during the latter years of the war. In regards to the status of women, historian Stephanie McCurry has analyzed the impact of the Lieber Code—officially referred to as General Orders No. 100—on the "erosion of civilian immunity" and the "disjoining of women and innocence" during the war.[8]

Issued by President Abraham Lincoln on April 24, 1863, the Lieber Code primarily concerned women and civilians in the Confederate states, though it is worth considering how its impact spread beyond that region to influence decision making in other areas. Cincinnati was nestled in the heart of the politically contentious border region, which consisted of a mixed population of Unionists, abolitionists, Confederate sympathizers, and Copperheads, among other political factions. Furthermore, identities and affiliations sometimes changed over the course of the war.[9] And, to complicate matters even more, the political associations of Catholics in Cincinnati were inconsistent. In early 1863, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell publicly endorsed Lincoln and immediate emancipation. But most Catholics, particularly the Irish, were staunch

[8] McCurry, *Women's War*, 6. For more on the origins and implications of the Lieber Code, see John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln's Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

[9] For more on the politics of the border region, see Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). For the best work on the Copperheads, including several references to wartime politics in Cincinnati and southern Ohio, see Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For an impressive work that reveals the high volume of wartime dissent in the lower-Midwest as well as takes seriously the threat that Lincoln called the "fire in the rear," see Stephen E. Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War: Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in America's Heartland* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015). It is also worth mentioning that Clement L. Vallandigham, arguably the most infamous Copperhead of the era, was an Ohioan, even continuing to promote his anti-Lincoln platform as a Democratic candidate for governor in 1864, all while being exiled from the state. For more on Vallandigham during the war, see Thomas C. Mackey, *Opposing Lincoln: Clement L. Vallandigham, Presidential Power, and the Legal Battle over Dissent in Wartime* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020).

Democrats and possessed clear anti-Black sentiments.[10] In short, especially from the point of view of a federal officer stationed in Cincinnati, civilian loyalties were varied and, at times, ambiguous. Within the context of mixed loyalties and new laws calling into question the perceived innocence of women, the relationship between Sarah Peter, as well as the sisters associated with her, and members of the U.S. Army became more complicated, especially when the women requested access to provide relief to Confederate POWs.

Finally, the chapter contributes to the scholarship on Catholic nurses during the war by moving beyond the "Angels of the Battlefield" thesis popularized by historian George Barton in the late-nineteenth century. Barton propagated what became the standard view that wartime Catholic nurses took a non-political approach to serving soldiers on both sides of the conflict, as well as Catholic and non-Catholic combatants, and that such actions helped to erode some of the anti-Catholic sentiments so prominent during the antebellum period. In a time of civil war, the Catholic sisters, playing the role of "Angels of the Battlefield," rose above the national turmoil to offer "an example of true Christianity."[11] To be clear, Sarah Peter and the sisters who joined her to serve on battlefields in Tennessee and in military hospitals in Ohio viewed their efforts in this way. They vowed to extend the works of mercy to all soldiers in need. However, the Catholic

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[10] For more on Archbishop John Baptist Purcell and Cincinnati Catholics during the Civil War, see Carl C. Creason, "United, Yet Divided: An Analysis of Bishops Martin John Spalding and John Baptist Purcell during the Civil War Era," *American Catholic Studies*, volume 24, number 2 (spring 2013), 49-69; William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 140-156; David J. Endres, *A Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati: The Catholic Church in Southwest Ohio, 1821-2021* (Milford, OH: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2021), 87-106.

[11] David Power Conyngham, *Soldiers of the Cross, the Authoritative Text: The Heroism of Catholic Chaplains and Sisters in the American Civil War*, edited by David J. Endres and William B. Kurtz (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), 323. The "Angels of the Battlefield" thesis has reappeared in nearly all the scholarship on Civil War nurses since Barton published his work in 1897. For the most relevant examples, see Ellen Ryan Jolly, *Nuns of the Battlefield* (Providence, RI: Providence Visitor Press, 1927); Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); "Priests and Nuns in the Army," chapter 4 in Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union*.

women proved to be more than just passive nurses in the background of war. As this chapter will show, Peter and the sisters challenged military authority, criticized national organizations, and shaped relief efforts on their own terms.

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In the weeks following the Confederate assault on Fort Sumter, the people of Cincinnati braced for war. The Ohio state legislature voted to commit one million dollars and ten thousand men to support the U.S. war effort. Similarly, the Cincinnati municipal government allocated $200,000 for military supplies and manpower to defend the city. Within a short time, the streets and sidewalks bustled with soldiers, as enlisted men traveled to and from either Camp Harrison—established north of the downtown district—or Camp Dennison—located approximately fifteen miles northwest of the city limits. Church groups and other volunteer associations from across the city began planning for the impending conflict, identifying ways they could assist families disrupted by the war.[12] Peter and her Catholic allies would soon join the movement. They were committed to extending the works of mercy to those in need, particularly the sick, wounded, and imprisoned as well as the families of soldiers.

Sarah Peter and Catholic Sisters Help Prepare Cincinnati for War (1861-1862)

Much of the scholarship has analyzed how the war created an environment in which women—North and South; white and African American; poor, middle-, and upper-class—assumed new social or economic roles, either to support their families or the larger war effort. For example, some women took over the management of farms after male family members left

[12] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 306-308, 427-431. For more information about the Civil War in Cincinnati, see Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); David L. Mowery, *Cincinnati in the Civil War: The Union's Queen City* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2021).

for war, or others entered munition factories, becoming wage laborers for the first time. However, for the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, who, before the war, managed hospitals in Cincinnati and Covington, their roles as nurses essentially remained the same, though the skills they honed during peacetime took on new importance after 1861. A similar transition occurred for the Sisters of Mercy, who had specialized in serving less fortunate women and girls at their House of Mercy. After the war began, members of the order joined the Franciscans in wartime relief, both in Cincinnati and on battlefields outside of the state.

In the fall of 1861, public officials and civilian volunteers in Cincinnati began efforts to establish a network of hospitals to serve sick and wounded soldiers. In many ways, this constituted a key development in the city's preparation for the Civil War, as Cincinnati remained one of the principal transfer depots for soldiers as they returned from southern battlefields as well as Confederate prisoners being transported north to POW camps. Around this time, Sarah Peter returned from her summer vacation in New York. She had left the city shortly after a ceremony in July 1861 that marked the transformation of her mansion into St. Clare's Convent. Craftsmen labored throughout the summer to make alterations to the site, adding additional living quarters for the sisters and postulants as well as beginning work on a chapel. Peter decided it would be best for her to stay away during this process and return after its completion.[13]

Upon her return to the city, Peter desired to contribute to the preparation for war. In particular, she wanted to help the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, the order of sisters who specialized in nursing, assist in the care of sick and wounded soldiers. Peter turned to her social networks for opportunities to join the movement. Ultimately, Dr. George Blackman, one of the

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[13] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 1858-1912, translation and transcription by Sister M. Pauline, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, 89; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 308-310.

chief physicians at St. Mary Hospital in Cincinnati, helped negotiate an offer for the Franciscans to assume control of the U.S. Marine Hospital on Sixth Street, which had been completed in 1860 and was taken over by the U.S. Army shortly after the war began. The Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis obtained management of the hospital from "seculars," the term used in the Provincial Annals to describe the Protestant nurses who staffed the hospital before the Franciscans.[14]

Management of the U.S. Marine Hospital forged a rivalry between Protestant and Catholic women in Cincinnati. The Provincial Annals of the Franciscans sheds light on the Catholic perspective, painting the Protestant women as poor nurses and hospital administrators. As the Annals explain, "systematic control [of the U.S. Marine Hospital] was entirely lacking," as "visitors were allowed to smuggle to patients whatever they wanted; there were no restrictions regarding liquors; [and] those who had no friends to take an interest in them were often without the necessaries of life."[15] These widespread "improprieties," according to the Catholic sisters, prompted the physicians to search for new nurses. Sarah Peter's proposal, then, arrived at an opportune time. Dr. Blackman worked with the sisters at St. Mary Hospital and knew about their capabilities and organizational skills and could lobby his colleagues on their behalf. Blackman argued that the Franciscans would apply increased order and regulation to the management of the institution. The physicians would remain the same, providing the direct care to the patients, but the sisters would oversee the day-to-day procedures, including nursing, preparing meals, and providing laundry services for the soldiers.[16] As a result of these new arrangements, on October 22, 1861, five sisters moved into the hospital. They converted the second floor into a "convent-

[14] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 89.
[15] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 90.
[16] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 90.

like" space to serve as their living quarters, which included enclosing the beds with curtains and hanging devotional images on the walls. Cots for sick and wounded soldiers filled the first floor of the hospital. When the sisters took over management, approximately 100 patients sought care at the hospital.[17]

Despite the seemingly valuable collaboration between Sarah Peter, the sisters, and the U.S. military, religious-based disputes plagued the Catholic management of the U.S. Marine Hospital. The Protestant women refused to surrender their positions as servants and nurses. According to the Franciscan annals, the non-Catholic "ladies" worried about an "unwelcome interference by the Sisters."[18] Perhaps they expressed concerns about the intentions of the Franciscans, whom they likely feared were more interested in converting the soldiers than caring for them. Regardless, soon, the patients also turned on the sisters, complaining about the meals they prepared and the care they provided. The Franciscans attempted to standardize operations at the hospital by providing all the patients with "sausages" for meals instead of "beef" or "fine dishes," which the soldiers had become accustomed to under the care of "patriotic ladies."[19] The controversy regarding provisions can be explained, in part at least, as a product of Franciscan rule that encourages simplicity and poverty. Unsurprisingly, the sisters integrated those values into their plans for the hospital; however, clearly, all the patients did not accept the change.[20]

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[17] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 89.

[18] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 90.

[19] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 90.

[20] During my research, I uncovered other examples of Civil War soldiers rejecting the services of Catholic sisters, which adds a new perspective to the standard narrative that celebrates the sisters' universal appeal to all combatants. For example, in an October 1861 letter to Archbishop Purcell, Bishop Carrell of Covington reported that a regiment of German troops stationed in Paducah, Kentucky "protested against having Sisters of Charity" care for them. Carrell explained the issue as a product of the German "infidel[s]" refusing to associate with Catholics. See Bishop George Aloysius Carrell to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, October 9, 1861, II-5-a, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Franciscan control of the Marine Hospital lasted only three days. Peter attempted to smooth over the relationship between the sisters, patients, and Protestant ladies—but she ultimately failed to resolve the problems. Consequently, she searched for new opportunities for the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to offer their services to the city as it continued to brace for the consequences of prolonged civil war. Dr. Blackman, once again, aided in these efforts, leading to a quick resolution. On the same day the five sisters left the U.S. Marine Hospital, they moved into a new military hospital that had just been established in a house in the west-end of the city. Dr. McDermott, who served as superintendent of the hospital, warmly welcomed the sisters. According to the Provincial Annals, Dr. McDermott "showed especially that he placed great confidence in Catholic nurses."[21] After arriving, the sisters transformed two small rooms of the house into accommodations suitable for themselves. Then they got to work caring for the more than eighty patients occupying cots in two large wards, or rooms, of the home. Most of the soldiers suffered with tuberculosis and high fevers. The Franciscans, at times assisted by Sarah Peter, served as nurses at the west-end hospital for the remainder of the war, ultimately having to carve out their own spaces due to the conflict with Protestant relief groups.[22]

Serving on the Battlefield and Criticism of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (1862-1863)

After nearly six months of supporting the development of military hospitals in Cincinnati, the Catholic sisters turned their attention to the battlefield. In February 1862, following the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson, the Cincinnati mayor, George Hatch, asked Archbishop Purcell to provide a group of sisters willing to travel south to care for enlisted men from Ohio. Members of the Sisters of Mercy first volunteered for the job, when they answered the mayor's

[21] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 90.
[22] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 90-91.

request in late February to travel to northwest Tennessee. Once there, they partnered with physicians and volunteer nurses—many of whom were likely supplied by the USSC—to operate river steamers designed to transport sick and wounded soldiers back to Cincinnati.[23] Although their original mission focused on relieving the troops wounded at Forts Henry and Donelson, the Sisters of Mercy soon found themselves in the midst of another battle—and this one proved much bloodier. The Battle of Shiloh, which raged for two days in early April 1862, amassed over 20,000 killed and wounded, making it the bloodiest battle during the first year of the war.[24]

The outcome of the Battle of Shiloh prompted Sarah Peter and other Catholic sisters to join the Sisters of Mercy in Tennessee. Although the battle lasted only two days, responding to the needs of thousands of sick and wounded soldiers required weeks; furthermore, skirmishing continued in the region, increasing the overall casualty totals.[25] Thus, on May 12, 1862, Peter joined Dr. Blackman and a group of Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis on a mission to Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, where they operated the *Superior*, a hospital boat associated with the Cincinnati branch of the USSC. The steamer, as described in the Franciscan records, "was provided with several large barges for the reception of soldiers. The barges were furnished like barracks, three stories high; the upper story served as deck and was screened from wind and rain by a large canvas covering."[26] During their journey down the Ohio River to Tennessee, Peter and the sisters made bandages and organized straw mattresses throughout the barges. Some sources indicate that Peter fully funded the expedition with personal assets, meaning she

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[23] According to Mary Ellen Evans, the river steamers were closely associated with the U.S. Sanitary Commission: "The Commission had long since discovered that these immense, broad-decked, perfectly ventilated, smooth-cruising river ships made ideal hospital transports." Mary Ellen Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy: The Sisters of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1858-1958* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), 89.

[24] James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, paperback edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 405-414.

[25] The First Battle of Corinth (or the Siege of Corinth) constituted the next major conflict in the region. Located in the north-east corner of Mississippi, Corinth is approximately fifteen miles south of Shiloh, Tennessee.

[26] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 112.

purchased the supplies used on the ship, even though the *Superior* was linked to the Cincinnati branch of the USSC.[27]

Peter's memoirs contain transcriptions of four letters she penned to her son during the nursing mission in Tennessee. Those documents, along with the information included in the Provincial Annals of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, offer a window into the activities of the Catholic women on the *Superior*. After three days of travel, the party arrived at Hamburg, Tennessee, a small town on the Tennessee River near the Mississippi border. Peter reported on May 15, 1862, that the area around Hamburg was "covered with hospitals" and that the sisters had "been busy . . . fixing on the floors the beds destined for our patients."[28] The *Superior* steamed up and down the river as Peter and the sisters looked to aid soldiers on both shorelines. "Now there was work enough," as the Franciscan Annals explained, "hundreds of victims of the war were brought on board from the miserable barracks at different landing-places on the Tennessee River or from smaller hospital boats."[29] Once all of the straw mattresses on the three barges had been filled, the *Superior* would head back down the Tennessee River on its way to Cincinnati, where the sick and wounded would be placed in hospitals in the city.

At times, Peter and the sisters anchored the steamer to visit camps in the area, where they expressed mixed opinions regarding the treatment of soldiers. For example, on May 19, 1862, the *Superior* docked at Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, providing the women with an opportunity to visit the hospital encampment. "The hospital tents are full," Peter wrote, "and under lofty

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[27] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 112; King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 430-436; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 312-314.

[28] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 15, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 432.

[29] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 113.

trees, and I think as well attended as the circumstances will allow."[30] In particular, she thought highly of the commanding physician, Dr. Le Count, who "seem[ed] to be an intelligent young man, with very kind feelings. I like him better than any of the hospital surgeons I have met with," Peter explained.[31]

Over the next few days, the women spent time at the hospital distributing food and provisions to the soldiers. Despite Peter's positive description of the camp, both she and the sisters complained that the patients lacked food, water, and other basic necessities. According to Franciscan records, Peter eventually purchased those supplies for the soldiers.[32] Overall, Peter estimated that the Catholic party visited over 1,000 men in camps and welcomed approximately the same amount on the *Superior*. During the end of her time in the region, however, Peter alluded to the dire conditions that many combatants faced, regardless of the care that she and others provided, writing: "Ah! it breaks my heart to see so many poor fellows, who left home full of hope, now wearing away with fever and dysentery, who may reach home, but have not life enough left to survive the summer."[33] In the end, though, she took pride in their efforts, particularly when comparing the work of Catholic women to the operations of the USSC.

From the beginning of her experiences in combat, Peter complained about the USSC. Her correspondence from mid-May references the *Tycoon* and *Silver Moon*, two hospital boats managed by the organization. She referred to the *Silver Moon* as a "wretched-looking place."[34] Other evidence from her correspondence suggests that she grew frustrated working with the

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[30] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 19, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 433.

[31] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 19, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 433.

[32] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 113.

[33] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 25, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 435.

[34] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 15, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 432.

USSC and U.S. Army. For example, on May 19, 1862, she stated: "I would willingly continue to take care of the poor soldiers, but the want of authority in the right place, and consequent want of order, disgust me."[35] Overall, Peter complained about the lack of supplies received from the USSC, ultimately accusing the organization of fraud and mismanagement of resources. She wrote to Rufus King on May 19, 1862:

> there is one atrocity which should be published and guarded against. The myriads of things provided by the kindness of the people, and placed in charge of the Sanitary Commission to be forwarded, rarely reach the camp. They may be in the boats sent by the Commission; but our boat gets scarcely anything . . . I wish you would tell the Sanitary Commission for me that somewhere there is an enormous fraud. Out of every hundred edibles and garments sent, I am convinced that not more than ten reach the soldiers . . . I think much might be saved, if the distributors would direct them to the Surgeons of the regiments, and notice given—no difficult task.[36]

Six days later, Peter added the following accusations:

> In the hundreds of huts I have visited, officers as well as soldiers declare they get none of the supplies sent by the Sanitary Commission. I have visited at least a thousand soldiers in camp, besides the more than thousand we have nursed on this boat, and not one has gown or slippers. Sometimes they get shirts, and that is all. The sisters and I have spent all our money—except five dollars, all that remains to me—in purchasing things which the sick must have to be kept alive.[37]

What explains Peter's views of the USSC? Was there merit to her allegations? Of all the collections housed at the Cincinnati History Museum, the "Great Western Sanitary Fair" collection is one of the most extensive. It contains approximately sixty boxes of documents related to the Cincinnati branch of the USSC. One folder dedicated to the history of the *Superior* includes documents from April 1862 that note the large quantity of supplies reserved for the hospital steamer. Clearly, officials at the Cincinnati branch intended to supply the vessel on

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[35] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 19, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 433.

[36] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 19, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 433.

[37] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, May 25, 1862, transcription in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 435-436.

April 12, 1862, a month before Peter and the sisters took control. However, another note in the same folder from April 23, 1862 simply states: "Transferred to Steamer 'Tycoon.'"[38] This document suggests that the supplies reserved for the *Superior* ended up on a different hospital boat. This type of administrative decision could account for the issues that Peter describes in her letters to Rufus. She accused the USSC of "fraud"—but the documents in the folder suggest that members of the organization had intended to supply the vessel—in April, at least—but later determined that the supplies were needed on the *Tycoon*, though it is not exactly clear why. Regardless, Peter insisted that her son, an attorney and public official in Cincinnati, launch an investigation into the activities of the Cincinnati branch to uncover the alleged corruption.

The collection also contains several letters addressed to Charles Fosdick, secretary of the Cincinnati branch of the USSC, that raise concerns about potentially fraudulent activity in the organization, thereby giving merit to Peter's claims. Most of this correspondence originated from members of local aid societies in Ohio who donated supplies for federal soldiers in need. The following letter reached Fosdick's desk from H. Schooley, a resident of New Jasper, Ohio:

> Again we sent you two boxes of articles for use of the sick and wounded soldiers hoping that you will send them where needed and with persons who are fit to be trusted if such are to be found for almost daily we hear of neglected sick and wounded soldiers dying for the want or care of food that they can eat while doctors, cooks and nurses feast on the delicacies that are donated expressly for the sick and wounded, articles of food have been sold to wounded soldiers at exorbitant prices[.] I have heard of as much as one dollar being asked for a cup of tea or coffee or a slice of toasted bread . . . These things are outrageous, is there no way to put a stop to them?[39]

In addition to Schooley's letter, several other notes penned to Fosdick requested that acknowledgement of receipt and use of the supplies be provided to the aid societies. The men

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[38] Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[39] H. Schooley to Charles Fosdick, May 26, 1862, box 2, folder 5, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

and women from Ohio who donated time, money, and materials in support of the U.S. war effort wanted to ensure that they were not being deceived by members of the USSC. Like Peter, they expressed reasons for concern.[40]

Peter's faith-based commitments also shaped her negative opinions of the USSC. By the early 1860s, she had become more critical of Protestantism, turning into a staunch defender of the Catholic Church. Knowing that a majority of the USSC workers belonged to Protestant churches, Peter likely viewed the organization as a rival to her efforts with the Catholic sisters. Part of her conversion experience and decision to commit her life to Catholic charity was shaped by her belief that Catholicism provided the most efficient and sincere mechanisms for charity. Peter envisioned the Church leading the way in relief work during the war, rather than partnering with other private or public organizations.

Indeed, evidence suggests that Catholics in Cincinnati withheld support from the USSC, choosing instead to focus on their own initiatives. In the "Great Western Sanitary Fair" collection, researchers will find few references to Catholics. The box that contains donation invoices from churches and other aid societies in Cincinnati that supported the organization includes documents from a variety of denominations and voluntary groups—but not from Catholic parishes, religious orders, or lay societies. So, even though Peter and the Catholic sisters served on an official USSC vessel, fundraising and other organizing among Catholics to support relief efforts and meet the needs of wounded soldiers operated separately from the USSC. The Great Western Sanitary Fair, which occurred in December 1863, represented the Cincinnati branch's most ambitious efforts at fundraising. Catholics are not well-represented in

[40] For more examples of letters similar to Schooley's, see folders 1-5 in box 2 of the Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

the documents related to the fair, other than the Cincinnati officials renting the Catholic Institute to house part of the fair.[41] Instead, Catholics—especially religious orders—conducted their own fairs to raise money in support of soldiers and their families. Advertisements for those fundraisers often appeared in the local and regional Catholic newspapers.[42]

Documents in the "Great Western Sanitary Fair" collection also indicate that Catholic sisters involved in relief work saw their wartime activities differently from the women who volunteered to support the USSC. Letters penned by female volunteers commonly included patriotic messages or political commentary about suppressing the rebellion, and women commonly framed their actions in terms of "civic responsibility"; in short, they made it clear that they wanted to do their part to preserve the Union. Furthermore, USSC volunteers expected to be acknowledged in newspapers for their donations, and wanted to ensure that readers knew where the money and supplies originated. For example, in May 1862, Fosdick received the following note from the leader of a local aid society in northeast Ohio: "I send you to-day by express, one hundred and four live chickens collected by Mrs. Brown. Please report them as from 'Brown's neighborhood near South Salem O[hio]."[43] Letters to Fosdick commonly mentioned that the aid societies preferred that their donations be given first to troops from their city or county. Similarly, a few letters sanctioned that no supplies could be used for Confederate soldiers; others, however, prescribed that rebels could receive aid only after the needs of all U.S. troops had been satisfied.[44] Overall, the letters underscore how Protestant women viewed their

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[41] See boxes 27-29 in Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[42] See examples in various issues of *The Catholic Telegraph* from 1861 to 1865, available online through the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library, https://cdm16998.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16998coll73.

[43] J. A. Lowes to Charles Fosdick, May 10, 1862, box 2, folder 2, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[44] I spent several days at the Cincinnati History Library and Archives reading through numerous letters, notes, and other documents related to the various aid societies established throughout Ohio. For more information

relief work through a political lens, doing all they could to support the Union war effort. Furthermore, they demonstrated a strong commitment to the soldiers from their city or county, hoping to preserve familial and communal ties between the homefront and battlefield through their relief work.

The Catholic sisters, on the other hand, viewed their wartime relief work as a continuation of the efforts they had begun during the antebellum period. The context and environment in which they provided the aid had changed by 1861, but they did not view their work as part of a larger political objective. The sisters might have responded to the mayor's call to serve Ohio troops in Tennessee, but, once they arrived on the battlefield, they extended services to all soldiers in need.

Limits to the Works of Mercy during Wartime

During the war, southern Catholic bishops petitioned their northern colleagues for financial support as well as volunteer priests or members of religious orders to serve in their dioceses. Most of these requests came during the final three years of the war, after Sarah Peter and members of the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis had left Cincinnati to care for sick and wounded soldiers in Tennessee and Mississippi. The Catholic women received support from Archbishop Purcell to answer requests from local, state, and federal officials to extend their charitable enterprises for the benefit of soldiers, mainly white enlisted men from Ohio. Yet the archival records associated with each order lack any indication that the Catholic women took interest in responding to the corporal or spiritual needs of African Americans.

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on their contributions to the Cincinnati branch of the USSC and for examples of the letters referenced above, see boxes 1-6, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The absence of a wartime mission for African Americans organized by Peter and the sisters, along with other white Catholics from Cincinnati, mirrored a larger trend that characterized the Church's attitude toward African Americans before 1861. As historian David J. Endres has noted, "[o]n the whole, Catholics were not welcoming to blacks—before, during, or after the war—but there were sporadic efforts at evangelizing."[45] For example, during the late 1850s, Father Johann Van den Broek, a Dutch priest from Mercer County, Ohio, baptized over fifty African Americans, making St. Mary's Church in Philothea home to several African American Catholics. However, white Church members from that region soon forced their African American coreligionists out of the parish, requiring many of the newly-baptized members of St. Mary's Church to move or join other churches, though some remained in the area. In this instance, the white laity refused to share religious space with African Americans, and the clergy either condoned or failed to eliminate that behavior.[46]

The experience of African American Catholics in Philothea being socially excluded proved to be the norm for African Americans in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati during the nineteenth century. The archives of the archdiocese includes several documents that speak to the history of white Catholics—whether native-born or of European descent—refusing to interact

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[45] Endres, *A Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, 101.

[46] Endres, *A Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, 101. For more information about the efforts of Van der Broeck among African Americans in Mercer County, see Patrick Hennebery to John Baptist Purcell, October 8, 1857, box 8, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. In the letter, Father Henneberry noted that "It will certainly be agreeable to Your Grace [Purcell] to hear, that the colored people of Mercer Co. are coming over to the Catholic Church." Over two years later, Henneberry noted in a letter to Purcell that "The colored people [of Mercer County] do pretty well. George Evans will commence school there for them in two weeks. It is thus better; both boys and girls may attend . . . I will spend a day or two every month in future there to visit the colored people, and have catechism." Patrick Henneberry to John Baptist Purcell, November 26, 1859, box 9, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. However, it seems that, over time, Father Henneberry's efforts were insufficient to meet the religious needs of African American Catholics in the county. Instead of a traveling clergyman, the community required a resident priest. Henneberry expressed these sentiments in a March 1861 letter to Purcell, noting that in regards to "the colored Catholics of St. Philothea, it seems to me almost necessary, that Rev. Vanderbroeck be sent back to them. One visit in the month by me (I can do no more) will scarcely keep them in the faith." Patrick Henneberry to John Baptist Purcell, March 22, 1861, box 11, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

with African Americans as coreligionists. For example, in March 1862, Father Michael Kennedy, an Irish priest from Chillicothe, Ohio, informed Archbishop Purcell that "the Custom observed between whites and Negros" had not been followed in his parish, despite his best efforts.[47] The situation had involved Martha Chapman, "an Irishwoman, who got married out of the Church, to a Negro Man."[48] Father Kennedy considered her an "intemperate [and] shameless woman" and a "well known character" in Chillicothe.[49] Recently, Chapman's "Negro child was drowned in a barrel of rain water."[50] Following the death, Chapman's father approached the priest and requested that the child be buried in the parish cemetery. Kennedy agreed since the child had been baptized, but reminded the grandfather that the burial plot "should be in a place apart from the white children."[51] According to Kennedy, he ordered "Mr Finn . . . to dig a grave in the Consecrated ground but at some distance from the other graves."[52] After the burial site had been prepared, Chapman and the rest of her family arrived at the cemetery to bury the child. However, once they reached the cemetery grounds, they refused to "inter [the body] in the grave prepared for it nor in any part of the Cemetery but with the white children," so Chapman, her husband, father, and sister "went to work and dug a grave in spite of the grave digger."[53] Father Kennedy, fearing the "objections . . . by many of the Congregation in having a Negro child

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[47] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[48] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[49] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[50] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[51] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[52] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[53] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

burried [sic] beside their children," pleaded with the family to lay to rest the baby in the original location, but they refused, giving the priest a "pretty good supply of abuse" for suggesting that they adhere to the Church's "Custom" of racial segregation.[54] Ultimately, Kennedy worried about the fallout from the event, and sought advice from Archbishop Purcell on how to resolve tensions in the parish.[55]

Racial violence engulfed Cincinnati in the summer of 1862, further fueling white Catholic animosity toward African Americans. Tensions boiled over in early July after dozens of German and Irish dockworkers went on strike for higher wages. The war had stymied trade on the Ohio River, and Cincinnati, in particular, suffered greatly from the economic decline. Ethnic white workers who relied on the jobs centered around the waterfront felt the effects and organized to secure fair wages. During the strike, African Americans filled the positions for less pay, and the German and Irish protesters responded with violence. Historian Nikki M. Taylor described the race riot that began on July 10, 1862:

> African Americans along the levee were stripped naked and run out of their places of employment and homes by a vengeful mob. The violence continued through the weekend. Innocent African Americans hid on steamboats; others left the city; and some struck back.[56]

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[54] Michael Kennedy to John Baptist Purcell, March 20, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[55] Regarding the Church's practice of segregation, it is worth noting one exception that involved the Sisters of the Precious Blood. In 1862, the religious community allowed an African American woman to join their convent in Mercer County as a postulant. Historians assume that the woman was one of the African American converts baptized by Father Van den Broeck. The news of her joining the order was shared by Father Andrew Kunkler of Minster, Ohio in a letter to Archbishop Purcell. "The sisters at Himelgarten will accept the young colored girl," Kunkler noted, "she may come here with the next opportunity, if she only is willing to observe the rules of the convent." Andrew Kunkler to John Baptist Purcell, September 30, 1862, box 12, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. According to David J. Endres, "ill health forced [the woman's] departure [from the convent]. It would be decades before another African American sought admission, and the black Catholic community [of Mercer County] diminished. The Precious blood priests and brothers would not again minister to African Americans until the 1930s." Endres, *A Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, 101.

[56] Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 197-198.

The riot lasted for seven days, extending well beyond the riverfront into other parts of the city. Although it had begun "over the issue of strikebreaking," explained Taylor, "the spirit quickly transformed into an antiblack mob" because the "lower-class, ethnic white immigrants resented the relatively equal social and economic relations."[57]

As racial tensions shaped the Cincinnati homefront, African Americans in the South suffered without care. The wartime correspondence between Archbishop Purcell and southern bishops reveals that African Americans in Mississippi would have greatly benefitted from the relief work provided by Sarah Peter and the Catholic sisters from southern Ohio. In the fall of 1863, Bishop William Henry Elder of Natchez wrote Purcell in hopes of receiving from the Cincinnati diocese "a few zealous Priests of the right spirit" to visit Mississippi, where they would "work for the welfare of those poor negroes."[58] Elder informed Purcell that only he and the pastor of the local parish in Natchez "ha[d] been laboring" and "[were] laboring still—but . . . a great deal more could be done," as "Many of those negroes [were] dying."[59] The bishop and his colleague had "baptized some 150 of their infants in danger of death,—& prepared for death a considerable number of adults," though Elder noted that a "great many die without our seeing them" because "it [was] a slow process" to instruct each person in the "necessary truths & the essential dispositions."[60] Elder's letter suggested that even more assistance was needed in Vicksburg. In fact, the bishop had sought the assistance of a Catholic surgeon in the U.S. Army to petition Purcell in hopes of sending "some Religious . . . down to take charge of the colored

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[57] Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 198.

[58] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, September 14, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[59] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, September 14, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[60] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, September 14, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

children left orphans around Vicksburg & other places."[61] According to Elder, the "mortality [rate] among the negroes" in Vicksburg "[was] said to be exceedingly great," yet only one priest served the area, meaning he could do "very little" to provide for all in need.[62]

Bishop Elder appealed to other colleagues besides Purcell, including Bishop James Wood of Philadelphia. In a letter to Purcell, Wood revealed a sense of skepticism regarding the African Americans in Elder's diocese. His letter further highlights a general lack of concern from northern white Catholics to the needs of African Americans affected by the war. "I wish good Bishop Elder joy with his negro Converts," Wood wrote, "hoping they may persevere, but fearing at the same time that they may turn out vice Christians! If they do not, they must be of a very different caliber to their black brethren in the North."[63] Despite Elder's numerous appeals, neither priests nor Catholic sisters from Cincinnati answered the call. Three months later, Elder expressed his frustrations in a letter to Purcell, noting "I am sorry indeed that the poor negroes after all find so few friends who are willing to labor for their true welfare."[64]

Sarah Peter, Catholic Sisters, and the Management of POW Camps (1863-1865)

Soon after Confederate POWs began arriving in the Cincinnati area in 1861, Sarah Peter and members of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and Sisters of Mercy requested access to the prisons or military camps. When the Catholic women arrived at these locations, officers almost always welcomed their efforts to care for fellow sick or wounded U.S. soldiers; however,

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[61] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, September 14, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[62] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, September 14, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[63] James Frederick Wood to John Baptist Purcell, October 23, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[64] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, December 30, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

at times, when Peter and the sisters attempted to extend their charitable work to POWs, they were accused of disloyalty or rumors spread about them serving as Confederate spies.[65] Overall, this section explores the relationship between Catholics and other authorities, both military and civilian, concerning the operations of prisons and prison barracks during the war. In particular, it focuses on the tensions between federal officers and Church members, specifically Sarah Peter and the sisters who worked alongside her, that developed around the treatment of Confederate prisoners and the policies associated with federal military encampments.

Catholic involvement with Civil War prisons and the experiences of prisoners of war centered on two main interventions, one by the male clergy and the other by sisters and lay volunteers. First, the male clergy, particularly the highest-ranking members of the hierarchy, were often asked to intervene on behalf of a prisoner. Archival collections associated with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati contain several letters written to Archbishop Purcell by family members or associates of Confederate soldiers imprisoned in Ohio or by fellow prelates writing on behalf of a parishioner in their dioceses. For example, in February 1864, Mrs. M. T. Cantfried of Lexington, Kentucky thanked Purcell for his "influence" on behalf of Colonel Basil Duke, a member of John Hunt Morgan's Confederate raiders who had been captured and imprisoned at Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio.[66] Cantfried also hoped that Purcell would comfort Duke, stating that "a word or two from your Paternal heart would be a Boon to him."[67] Similarly, Purcell received letters from Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin of New Orleans who

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[65] According to Anna McAllister, Peter never "Never . . . encounter[ed] opposition [from federal authorities] while at work in the hospitals; but in the prisons it was different, though it would seem that no one would have questioned her absolute loyalty to the Union cause." McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 320.

[66] M. T. Cantfried to John Baptist Purcell, February 8, 1864, box 13, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[67] M. T. Cantfried to John Baptist Purcell, February 8, 1864, box 13, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. The letter also suggests Purcell served as Duke's godfather (the letter refers to Duke as "your 'God Son'").

requested the Ohio prelate's assistance regarding Louisiana soldiers held in his state. "Mrs. Martin . . . has just been informed," wrote Archbishop Odin on August 26, 1863, "that her son, Emile Martin, has been made a prisoner of war . . . Knowing your great charity, she begged of me to address you in behalf of her unfortunate son."[68] In particular, Martin wanted Purcell to "recommend" her son "to the special attention of the clergyman [Father Edward Fitzgerald]" of Columbus.[69] We know Purcell took seriously these requests, even petitioning President Abraham Lincoln in October 1864. Purcell wrote the White House on behalf of "Miss Kitty Tod[d]," the president's sister-in-law, who begged that the Catholic prelate "intercede with [Lincoln] for the exchange of General William Beall," a Confederate POW from Bardstown, Kentucky, imprisoned at Johnson's Island in northern Ohio.[70] "Surely," Purcell argued, "it is time to show him, at least, so much mercy, when much more has been extended to many others."[71]

Male clergy—primarily parish priests—also administered sacraments in Cincinnati's military prisons. For Civil War POWs, four sacraments remained most important: baptism, confession, anointing of the sick, and the Eucharist. Priests often visited the prison hospitals to

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[68] Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, August 26, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[69] Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, August 26, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana. For similar letters from clergymen to Archbishop Purcell regarding the interests of a Confederate POW, see Father Henry David Juncker to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, April 30, 1863, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana (note: letter is in French); Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, May 4, 1865, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[70] John Baptist Purcell to Abraham Lincoln, October 18, 1864, box 14, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (note: this is a copy of the original from the Lincoln Manuscripts, Library of Congress). In the second portion of the document, he informed Lincoln: "I am going to vote for you, so is my Auxiliary Bishop, Rosecrans; my brother & all of our oldest priests in my family are all going to vote for you also—So do, good Mr. President, grant me this favor and let me feel that we have a President who has some little regard for the old Archbishop of Cincinnati."

[71] John Baptist Purcell to Abraham Lincoln, October 18, 1864, box 14, Archbishop John Baptist Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (note: this is a copy of the original from the Lincoln Manuscripts, Library of Congress).

hear confessions or anoint dying soldiers.[72] Some held regular services for the POWs, providing them with an opportunity to receive communion.[73] For prisoners facing an imminent death, either by illness or execution, priests helped prepare the men for their fate by absolving them from sins or baptizing them in the final hours of their lives. In a January 17, 1865, letter to Archbishop Purcell, Father August Bessonies described his role in administering the sacraments to "four Northern Bounty Jumpers sentenced to be shot" at Camp Morton in Indianapolis, Indiana.[74] "Three of the men were Irish & Catholics," Bessonies explained, but the fourth "of German decent, had never been baptized, until he received the sacrament at my hands, as well as the Holy Eucharist together with the three others the day before the Execution."[75] "I believe they died penitents," he assured the archbishop, as "their last word before the officer commanded fire was: 'Lord have mercy on us.'"[76]

Catholic sisters and lay volunteers, on the other hand, labored to provide for the daily needs of prisoners. Their efforts took the form of works of mercy, including both the corporal and spiritual works. By the fall of 1863, the number of POWs in Cincinnati had increased significantly, which drew the attention of Peter and others. In response, the Catholic women entered prison barracks and hospitals around the city with care packages and offered medical

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[72] Father Edward Fitzgerald to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, April 29, 1862, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Father Edward Fitzgerald to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, November 10, 1864, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[73] Father August Bessonies to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, January 17, 1865, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Father Murphy to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, January 24, 1865, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[74] Father August Bessonies to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, January 17, 1865, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[75] Father August Bessonies to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, January 17, 1865, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[76] Father August Bessonies to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, January 17, 1865, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

services for confined Confederates. The "paper packages," in particular, were popular among the POWs. Peter and the sisters provided pens, paper, and envelopes to the men so they could write letters to family and friends. Furthermore, the food, clothing, and medicine they carried into camps fulfilled the corporal needs of the soldiers.[77]

Perhaps the more difficult effects to measure involved the spiritual works of mercy, but we have examples of how Peter and the sisters comforted the prisoners, prayed with them, and instructed them in the Catholic faith. Peter's memoirs mention the impression she made on a member of John Hunt Morgan's band of guerrillas. Members of Morgan's group were captured in the summer of 1863 and sent to Cincinnati, though some of the enlisted men were transferred to Camp Chase in Columbus. One of the Confederate prisoners transported to Cincinnati suffered from depression brought on by "disease and captivity," and Peter took special interest in his recovery.[78] Following the war, the former Confederate entered the seminary and became a Catholic priest.[79] Other evidence speaks to the treatment the Sisters of Mercy provided to Confederate prisoners. On October 21, 1861, the federal government finalized a lease to rent the sisters' House of Mercy on Third Street—where the order offered relief services to women and girls in need during the prewar period—and converted the building into a military space, which was renamed McLean Barracks. The War Department records indicate that McLean Barracks operated as a "receiving depot for prisoners of war and state prisoners; [it] also received deserters, stragglers, etc."[80] With their convent neighboring the barracks, the Sisters of Mercy

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[77] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 326.

[78] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 438.

[79] According to her memoirs, Peter also had a strong influence on George St. Leger Greenfell, a British soldier who came to the United States to fight for the Confederacy. However, I have not uncovered any of their correspondence. I located letters penned by Grenfell at The Filson Historical Society, but the documents do not mention Peter or his experiences as a Confederate POW in Cincinnati. King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 438-439.

[80] Records of the War Department, "Ohio Post and General Index," quoted in Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 87, 310n7.

often visited the prisoners and contributed to the overall maintenance of the site. Indeed, a January 1864 report from a USSC committee assigned to review prisons in the city, under the direction of Dr. George Mendenhall, included the following remarks: "The McLean Barracks on 3 st for secesh prisoners" had been "kept in excellent order."[81] Much later, in 1904, a novice of the Sisters of Mercy claimed that, while working in the garden at the convent, a man "approached her to ask if he could revisit the old McLean Barracks. He had been . . . a Confederate prisoner of war incarcerated there, and had never forgotten the kindly treatment of the sisters."[82]

The efforts of Peter and the sisters to extend the works of mercy to Confederate prisoners sometimes created tension with federal authorities. According to the order's community records, the "military persisted in refusing nursing privileges" to the Sisters of Mercy at McLean Barracks; in fact, it took the influence of Peter to negotiate the terms by which the sisters could access the prisoners.[83] In other places, too, Catholics struggled to get access to Confederates residing in POW camps or prison barracks. For example, in April 1862, Father Fitzgerald of Columbus reported, "We are allowed to visit the Camp [Chase] Prisoners only by permit of Gov. [David] Tod."[84] His colleague, Father Hemsteger, had applied to see prisoners in the hospital but was told by the commanding officer that he could only "see dying catholic prisoners when they wanted to confess their sins."[85] Father Fitzgerald linked the concerns over accessing the

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[81] "Cincinnati Jan 16 [1864]," box 26, folder 10, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[82] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 310n8.

[83] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 87. Not a professional historian, Evans, in places throughout her book, provided limited citations. Based on the notes for her chapter that covers the Civil War, Evans drew on records—community records, not necessarily archival sources—associated with the Sisters of Mercy.

[84] Father Edward Fitzgerald to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, April 29, 1862, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[85] Father Edward Fitzgerald to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, April 29, 1862, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Confederate prisoners in Columbus to anti-Catholicism. "The rule excluding visitors applies to all," the priest explained, "but, as usual, works unfairly for Catholics."[86] He believed authorities gave Protestant ministers more opportunities to interact with prisoners, though they were more likely to reject requests from Catholic clergy.

Similar policies shaped POW camps and prison barracks in southern Ohio. In early 1864, federal authorities denied Peter and a group of sisters access to the prison at Camp Dennison after a group of guards complained to their superior officer that the Catholic women were gathering information to share with the enemy. [87] In short, the federal guards accused them of being Confederate spies. The episode reportedly occurred after Peter confronted a guard for mistreating a prisoner. Perhaps the guards reported that the women committed disloyal actions in retaliation and in an effort to have them banned from the prison. Or, based on the Catholics' treatment of the Confederate POWs, the guard might have believed that Peter and the sisters had developed too close of a relationship with the enemy. The charges that the women were spies may be explained, at least in part, by nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism, particularly the cultural stereotype of the mischievous and deceptive nun. A better explanation might be that the guards and the Catholic women possessed conflicting opinions of how the Confederate prisoners should be treated, fueling a confrontation between the groups. Peter and the sisters who visited the encampments believed that the works of mercy should be extended to *all* men regardless of

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[86] Father Edward Fitzgerald to Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, April 29, 1862, II-5-b, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[87] Although Peter's memoirs do not explicitly refer to the prison as Camp Dennison, based other information, I am confident that the prison mentioned was Camp Dennison, an encampment located approximately fifteen miles northwest of downtown Cincinnati. Narratives of Peter's work during the Civil War indicate that she often visited Camp Dennison to care for soldiers and prisoners. Constructed in the spring of 1861 as a recruitment camp and training site for U.S. soldiers, Camp Dennison housed Confederate soldiers during the war—though it primarily served as a training and hospital camp for federal troops. The majority of Confederate POWs in the state were kept at Camp Chase, the Ohio penitentiary, or Johnson's Island. For more information, see Robert Huhn Jones, "Camp Dennison," *Museum Echoes* 34 (June 1961): 43-48.

their status or political affiliation. As a result, they viewed the Confederate prisoners in the same light as U.S. soldiers, whom they also cared for and comforted.

Ultimately, Peter used her standing and social networks to resolve the issue of access to the prison at Camp Dennison. Prior to General Joseph Hooker's tenure in the Northern Department, General Johnann August von Willich, a German Republican from Ohio, commanded U.S. posts around Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. Willich and Peter were social acquaintances prior to the war. In 1861, he left for combat in Kentucky and Tennessee, returning to Cincinnati in early 1864, after being wounded in a battle in northern Georgia. Peter learned about Willich's return to Cincinnati and went directly to him after the guards accused the Catholic women of treason.[88] "I gave you my promise to do nothing disloyal," Peter reminded Willich, "I could not break it—this is all false, basely false."[89] After learning about what had transpired, Willich accompanied the women to the prison the following day. He chided the guards for accusing the women of disloyalty and ordered them to follow Peter's "wishes and efforts for the comfort of the prisoners."[90]

Catholic women's concerns for the treatment of Confederate POWs in sites around the region generated accusations of disloyalty and moments of tensions, including the anecdote that opens this chapter, in which Peter sought the attention of General Joseph Hooker. Investigations by the USSC suggest that Peter and the sisters had reason for concern. During the early summer months of 1863, physicians Cornelius George Comegys and David Judkins visited the prisons on Columbia Street and Vine Street in Cincinnati. The report contains the following passage:

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[88] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 437-438; McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 319-321.

[89] Sarah Worthington King Peter quoted in King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 437.

[90] King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2, 438. According to Peter's memoirs, the guard who accused the women of being spies grew very ill during the months after the incident. Learning of this development, Peter promised to serve as his nurse during his recovery.

> In regard to the condition of the Prison (Columbia St) we are pained to say, that such a scene of foulness, filth, and coarseness, has never before met our Eyes . . . In the first place it cannot be properly ventilated . . . . and the capacity of the building is only equal to about 260 while its present population is over 300, and we were told that at one time 900 had occupied it. The floors are never cleaned, and are thick with a conglutinate of dirt, saliva, excrement and fragmentary food; while heaps of loose sweepings are piled around containing large amounts of decaying vegetable matters. Barrels of dung and urine are standing about, indeed much of the same filth we saw in corners. Some idea may thus be had of the offensiveness of the atmosphere thus reeking with exhalations from so many sources of filth, and when we add to this the fact that most of the prisoners are without change of clothing and no means of washing, the probabilities of pestilence disease may be easily estimated. We left the place deeply humiliated with a painful sense of its squalor and wretchedness.[91]

The physicians ended their report by claiming that Columbia Street prison constituted "a crime against humanity . . . perpetrated in the name of our government."[92] In the section on the Vine Street prison, the inspectors stated that the "condition . . . is little less degrading than the Prison on Columbia street; a vast pile of filth is accumulating within the enclosure; the kitchens are filthy, the floors are dirty, and no condition of comfort or cleanliness exists for sleeping arrangements."[93] In their opinion, "no excuse" could be found to explain the condition of the prisons because "water is abundant, plenty of men are sitting idly around, who can keep every thing perfectly clean and healthy."[94] The two inspectors were convinced that the prisons

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[91] "Report of committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Military Prisons and Barracks on Columbia St between Main and Sycamore sts, and the Barracks on Vine st between 4th & 5th sts," box 26, folder 10, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[92] The doctors also added the following: "Let no one again open his mouth against the rebels on account of their dirty prisons and wretched food; None of their history which we have ever read equals what our eyes have seen of this prison in the midst of our city . . . [struck out lines that suggested a court martial to investigate the commander of the military post] . . . The honor and humanity of the nation should be vindicated against such horrible cruelties towards human beings." "Report of committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Military Prisons and Barracks on Columbia St between Main and Sycamore sts, and the Barracks on Vine st between 4th & 5th sts," box 26, folder 10, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[93] "Report of committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Military Prisons and Barracks on Columbia St between Main and Sycamore sts, and the Barracks on Vine st between 4th & 5th sts," box 26, folder 10, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[94] "Report of committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Military Prisons and Barracks on Columbia St between Main and Sycamore sts, and the Barracks on Vine st between 4th & 5th sts," box 26, folder 10, Great

suffered from neglect, rather than as a consequence of limited supplies or a lack of manpower. The same committee, in a later report, found the McLean Barracks—where the Sisters of Mercy worked—"kept in excellent order."[95] Overall, these reports offer important evidence that helps explain why Peter and the Catholic sisters either confronted federal officers about the treatment of prisoners or desired to gain access to the locations to relieve the suffering of POWs. The Catholic women would likely have agreed with Drs. Comegys and Judkins that Cincinnati was home to a crisis against humanity that required the attention of outside individuals, especially those committed to extending the works of mercy to all soldiers affected by the war.

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For the entire four years of the war, members of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and the Sisters of Mercy served as relief workers, either providing care on the homefront in the greater-Cincinnati region or extending their works of mercy to battlefields as far south as northern Mississippi. Sarah Peter joined the sisters as nurses and caregivers in makeshift hospitals, on medical transport steamers, and at military barracks or POW camps, where the women carved out spaces for Catholics to shape a variety of wartime processes and contexts. Within these spaces, Peter and the sisters remained active and influential participants, consistently asserting their beliefs and practices in opposition to Protestant counterparts and federal officials. Throughout all these episodes, Peter in particular, identified ways to promote their relief work as evidence that Catholics approached social problems more effectively and

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Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[95] "Report of committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Military Prisons and Barracks on Columbia St between Main and Sycamore sts, and the Barracks on Vine st between 4th & 5th sts," box 26, folder 10, Great Western Sanitary Fair Collection, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

with purer motives than Protestants and therefore that the Church should have greater influence in society.

CHAPTER SIX:

An End to the Era of Sarah Peter: Failed Initiatives, Financial Crises, and the Turn Toward Centralized or Bureaucratic Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati

In the late 1860s and 1870s, as Americans confronted the realities of emancipation and experienced financial crises on the national stage, Sarah Peter and the Catholic sisters associated with her faced questions regarding their roles in the postwar world. Would the Catholic women organize relief efforts in the South or extend aid to African Americans in the greater-Cincinnati region? How would the difficult economic conditions affect their work and charitable institutions? For Peter, developments in Europe, specifically those involving Pope Pius IX and the Church in Italy, seemed more interesting than events in the United States. Between 1867 and 1874, Peter made three voyages to Europe, spending much of her time in Rome. What do these excursions reveal about Peter's commitments after 1867 compared to her efforts during her first ten years as a Catholic?

This chapter traces the long decade after the Civil War—from 1865 until the late 1870s—and places the lives of Sarah Peter and Catholic sisters from Cincinnati within the changing social, political, and economic contexts of the era. The first section examines the financial impact of the war on the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and the Sisters of Mercy, highlighting how the orders looked for ways to find stability in a context of widespread economic downfall. While the Franciscans faced limited institutional growth, the Mercies transitioned into a teaching order. The second section considers the limited response from Sarah Peter, the sisters, and Church leaders from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to the realities of emancipation and the needs of African Americans in the South as well as at home, especially in light of Peter's commitment to extending the works of mercy before and during the Civil War. In many ways, this section

treats their tepid response as a missed opportunity for advancing their charitable work and, ultimately, an example of the Church's problematic history regarding white Catholic attitudes toward African Americans. The third section analyzes Peter's postwar journeys to Europe, particularly the time she spent in Rome. This section situates her devotion to Pope Pius IX—which took the form of private meetings and organized pilgrimages—in the context of the Risorgimento movement that challenged the temporal authority of the pope in Italy. In particular, the section demonstrates how Peter's role in the formation of a late-nineteenth-century American Catholic identity that emphasized loyalty to the pope. The final section examines the economic issues that plagued the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, most notably the downfall of the Purcell Bank. It situates the financial crisis within the broader context of the Long Depression, which began with the Panic of 1873, highlighting how Catholic sisters were affected by the poor economic conditions of the postwar period. In the end, the crash of the Purcell Bank rocked the archdiocese, leading to increased centralization and bureaucratization during the late-nineteenth century.

Financial Concerns and the Evolution of Catholic Sisters in Postwar Cincinnati

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the sisters associated with Sarah Peter faced financial concerns, forcing some orders to either suspend work in the region or transition into new roles. The sisters were often concerned about the financial security of their institutions and operations. For example, the annals of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis include evidence of how members of the order attempted to raise funds during the postwar period, when many throughout the nation faced financial difficulties.[1] "Every article of food had very much advanced in price,

[1] For more on the economic history of the mid- and late-nineteenth century, see Nicolas Barreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, vol. 10, no. 4 (October 2011): 403-423; Leon Fink,

in consequence of the war. Some cloth had almost doubled in price," a sister noted in late 1865.[2] The attention paid to the cost of cloth is especially noteworthy since the Franciscan sisters turned to crafting vestments and artificial flowers during the postwar years. The annals include evidence of this practice lasting through the late 1860s, noting how this "work was for a time a source of financial assistance."[3]

Selling manufactured religious items did not meet all the Franciscans' needs. In fact, a group of sisters embarked on two collection tours, one to St. Louis, Missouri, in the summer of 1865 and the other to Cuba in the fall of 1866. Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick of St. Louis gave the sisters permission to collect from parishes in his diocese, where they stayed for several months, returning to Cincinnati at the end of December 1865. According to the annals, "[w]hen the Sisters went to thank Archbishop Kenrick for his kindness, he was much pleased with the results, considering the unfavorable times."[4] The collection tour in Cuba, on the other hand, lasted much longer and proved especially beneficial. While abroad, the sisters roomed with French- and Spanish-speaking orders, and relied on translation assistance from German merchants in the Cuban markets.[5] Upon their return to the United States in April 1867, the cohort of sisters had collected "several thousand dollars" in gold and Spanish currency.[6]

The Long Gilded Age: American Capitalism and Lessons of a New World Order (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[2] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 1858-1912, translation and transcription by Sister M. Pauline, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, 185.

[3] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 177-179, 225. As the price of cloth rose in the U.S., the sisters looked for other sources of material to produce additional vestments and artificial flowers. Luckily, in 1866, Sister Dominica returned from a trip to the mother house in Aachen with "a large stock of embroidery material." The sisters established an "embroidery room" at the convent to increase production and meet the demands of orders. "Sister Magdalena had charge of the embroidery room for years," the annals state, where "she taught Sisters how to embroider and arranged all the work, prepared presents for benefactors, etc." Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 179.

[4] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 183.

[5] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 216-223.

[6] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 223.

The sale of vestments and the collection tours helped relieve financial burdens. However, the order's continued financial straits are evident in its lack of expansion compared with earlier years, when Sarah Peter helped the order found new hospitals in central Ohio, New Jersey, and New York. Between 1865 and 1878, however, only two new hospitals opened, one in Quincy, Ohio, in 1865 and the other in Dayton, Ohio, in 1878. By 1873, the sisters considered withdrawing from the hospital in Quincy because of financial issues.[7] During that same thirteen-year stretch, the sisters denied requests from clergy and local officials to establish additional hospitals in Ohio (Cleveland and a second one in Cincinnati), Missouri (St. Joseph and St. Louis), New Jersey (Patterson), and Indiana (Evansville).[8] According to the annals, the combination of an insufficient number of sisters to operate the hospitals and the financial difficulties of the postwar period forced the Franciscans to halt expansion of their works of mercy, setting in motion a trend of limited institutional growth that lasted into the early-twentieth century.

The Sisters of Mercy faced similar financial difficulties, which ultimately paved the way for their transition into a teaching order. During the antebellum period, the sisters established a network of charitable institutions to provide assistance to women and girls, many of whom were Irish immigrants new to Cincinnati. The order specialized in social work, operating relief houses and the "training of [women and] girls to industrial and domestic employments."[9] However, evidence from the Mercy Heritage Center suggests that by the late 1860s and early 1870s, as the Mercies faced financial issues, they increasingly accepted opportunities to serve as parish school teachers, rather than found new Houses of Mercy in the region. This constituted a significant

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[7] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 197, 271, 335.
[8] Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 179, 183, 194, 225, 261.
[9] "The Industrial School," box 115.1, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

transition for the order and caused some controversy among the sisters. Many Mercies believed the order should adhere to the original intentions of their founding mother, Catherine McAuley, who opened the first House of Mercy in Ireland in 1827. Indeed, Sarah Peter had helped bring the Sisters of Mercy to Cincinnati to conduct that work. Some members of the order saw the transition to teaching as a necessity, however, citing opportunities to earn a salary and expand the order's reach into new areas. The Sisters of Mercy, over the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, opened dozens of schools and academies throughout the state. As the number of their schools grew, the sisters' Houses of Mercy began to close. Eventually the Bureau of Catholic Charities of Hamilton County, an organization founded in the early-twentieth century to "organize, centralize and coordinate . . . charitable organizations and institutions" in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, took control of the work previously managed by the sisters.[10]

Questions about the financial stability of the Sisters of Mercy began during the Civil War. In January 1865, the sisters received word from Pope Pius IX that they could use "money earned in the House of Mercy by the laundry works, needle works, etc . . . as long as matters in America are, as they were stated."[11] Evidently, the sisters were unsure if they could apply profits generated from their institutions "for the support of the Community."[12] Despite the news from

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[10] Quoted from "History," Catholic Charities of Southwest Ohio, https://www.ccswoh.org/about-us/history/.

[11] Father Vincent of St. John and Paul Church in Rome to Mother Anastasia, January 17, 1865, letter transcribed in "Notes & Appendix to Typed Annals," box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 71-72. Later on, in 1869, the sisters petitioned Archbishop Purcell to allow them "to sell scapulars, Beads, etc. in the Cathedral Chapel" as means of raising money for the order. Purcell "cheerfully granted" the approval. John Baptist Purcell to Mary Baptist Kane, January 13, 1869, box 104.3, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

[12] The letter does not fully indicate the exact question the Sisters of Mercy posed to Pope Pius IX regarding money earned from the House of Mercy, the industrial school, and the laundry. However, it does seem to indicate that the Mercies were concerned about sources of income and desired to use profits generated from the institutions they managed to satisfy financial demands. Father Vincent of St. John and Paul Church in Rome to Mother Anastasia, January 17, 1865, letter transcribed in "Notes & Appendix to Typed Annals," box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 71.

the pope, it appears that the institutions failed to generate much income in the following year. By the end of 1866, Mary Teresa Maher, the mother superior of the Cincinnati community, reported that the "industrial department merely paid its own way without leaving any profit."[13] In fact, an examination of the order's financial records from 1866 to 1878, as well as the annals of the order for that period, suggests that the sisters essentially broke even each year managing their various institutions.[14] However, during the same period, the sisters were constructing their own parish, the Church of the Atonement, and therefore the majority of any additional money obtained through donations or from fundraisers went toward the church building fund. On June 20, 1869, the sisters purchased the house and lot next to their convent for $10,000, and, nine months later, construction began for the new church, which eventually opened for services on June 29, 1873.[15]

The Church of the Atonement became a subject of great concern for the sisters during the downfall of the Purcell Bank, a financial crisis that rocked the archdiocese in the late 1870s. In early 1873, as the church neared completion, Archbishop Purcell wrote Mary Teresa Maher, requesting that the mother superior "make over the deeds to [him], to be held as the other Churches" in the archdiocese.[16] "And in this case," Purcell reminded her, "I assume all the

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[13] Mary Teresa Maher to John Baptist Purcell, no day or month indicated, 1866, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[14] For more information, see "Account Books, 1874-1882," box 105.4, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina; "House Account Book – 1866 to 1882," box 105.4, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina; "Weekly Expenditures for Convent in 1876 and 1877," box 105.5, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

[15] In December 1869, the Mercies organized a fair to support the building fund. It lasted for three days and raised over $3,000. Two years later, in September 1871, the sisters received $850 in donations to honor the laying of the cornerstone of the church. (Sarah Peter had donated $100.) Furthermore, in December 1871, the sisters obtained $100 in donations to cover roof expenses. For more information, see Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will Established in Cincinnati, August 18, 1858, volume 1, box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 18, 20, 23.

[16] John Baptist Purcell to Mary Teresa Maher, January 13, 1873, letter transcribed in "Notes & Appendix to Typed Annals," box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 76.

present debt."[17] Though Maher responded with much hesitancy over relinquishing ownership, she deeded the Church of the Atonement to Purcell on March 5, 1873.[18] Six years later, when law suits were issued against the archbishop, John B. Mannix—the attorney representing the interests of depositors—suggested that church property deeded to the archbishop could be seized as a means of repaying debts. In the end, however, the courts ruled in favor of the archdiocese, claiming that Purcell held property "in trust" and that religious orders, including the Sisters of Mercy, were not responsible for the debt.[19]

Following the Civil War, the Mercies accepted new opportunities to direct parish schools. The Church of the Atonement allowed the sisters to start an academy that provided a consistent income. Even before their parish school opened, the sisters answered requests in 1869 from Father Mallon to provide instructors at St. Patrick's Female School and in 1872 from Father John Murray to found a school in Chillicothe, Ohio.[20] On June 24, 1872, Murray informed Maher that he had been busy "preparing the house for use of the Sisters of Mercy," investing "upwards of eight hundred dollars [for] improvements."[21] The pastor promised the mother superior that he would do all in his power to "see that the [state teacher] salaries are paid," and requested that Maher "send only the best qualified sisters to take charge of the schools."[22] At that point,

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[17] John Baptist Purcell to Mary Teresa Maher, January 13, 1873, letter transcribed in "Notes & Appendix to Typed Annals," box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 76.

[18] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 25-26. The issue of who owned the property—either the sisters themselves or the archbishop—tainted the relationship between the Mercies and Purcell, ultimately leading to Maher's resignation as mother superior of the Cincinnati branch on May 24, 1873. Mary Gertrude O'Dwyer replaced Maher as the new leader of the community.

[19] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 37-38; Mary Ellen Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1858-1958* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), 127-140; Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 167-171.

[20] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 20, 24.

[21] John Murray to Mary Teresa Maher, June 24, 1872, box 104.1, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

[22] John Murray to Mary Teresa Maher, June 24, 1872, box 104.1, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

however, the sisters had not fully committed to managing the school. A month later, on July 24, 1872, the Mercies "met, to deliberate, as to whether Sisters should be sent to establish a Branch House, in Chillicothe, or not. The Pastor, Father John Murray, promised a small salary to the Sisters, also, cooperation with them in the establishment of the schools and other work."[23] Ultimately, the sisters "decided by unanimous vote" to send five members, who left for Chillicothe on August 26, 1872.[24] A year later, in September 1873, the sisters opened a school at their home church in Cincinnati. Based on the scant archival evidence, however, it appears that the school failed to provide enough income for the sisters, who "plung[ed] heavily into debt."[25] In fact, the venture proved to be an ultimate "failure," closing in the summer of 1876, after less than two years of operation.[26] That setback did not prevent the Sisters of Mercy from pursuing additional teaching positions. Two opportunities emerged in 1878, one to open a school in Urbana, Ohio, and the other to provide additional instructors at St. Patrick's Church in the city.[27] Over the next four decades, from 1880 to 1910, the Mercies greatly expanded their network of schools and academies, opening fifteen throughout all parts of Ohio. The order would continue

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[23] "Minutes of the Corporate Body," box 105.14, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

[24] "Minutes of the Corporate Body," box 105.14, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina.

[25] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 28-29.

[26] Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 30. In addition to running the parish school and convent academy, the sisters in Cincinnati also charged tuition for music lessons, which—based on the consistent reference of these lessons in the annals—seems to be their most successful venture in education.

[27] According to the annals, at the close of the school year in 1878, Father Mackey expressed his displeasure with the performance of the Sisters of Mercy and informed the mother superior that he had replaced the sisters with members of the Sisters of Charity. Father Mackey fully expected the Sisters of Charity to take over the parish schools in the fall of 1878, when the new school year opened. However, Archbishop Purcell disproved of Father Mackey's decision and suggested that he reaffirm his commitment to the Sisters of Mercy, which the priest did in a letter from August 1878. Annals of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Divine Will, 34. In the letter, considered by the sisters as an "Article of Agreement," Mackey offered to support the work of nine sisters, providing them with "two hundred fifty dollars per year – house rent free – house properly furnished, Kept in good repair and provided with light and fuel – They are to have exclusive use of the Convent house – the front yard to be used as play ground." John Mackey to Mary Baptist Kane, August 13, 1878, letter transcribed in "Notes & Appendix to Typed Annals," box 105.8, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina, 77.

this trend into the mid-twentieth century, thus largely shifting their focus from relief work to primary and secondary education in parochial schools.[28]

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Role in the Church's Problematic Legacy of Racism

As the Civil War concluded, many Protestant relief workers from the Ohio Valley turned their attention to the needs of African Americans in the South, often by supporting the programs of the Freedmen's Bureau.[29] Peter and Catholic sisters from southern Ohio had demonstrated a commitment to aiding white soldiers and civilians in need, both in Cincinnati and beyond. However, by the summer of 1865, it was unclear whether the Catholic women would organize any initiatives to help southern African Americans. Archbishop John Baptist Purcell ultimately played a central role in directing postwar objectives among white Catholics from Cincinnati. Purcell had endorsed Peter's mission to extend the works of mercy to battlefields in southwest Tennessee and northern Mississippi. Yet the prelate proved unwilling to support any outreach to African Americans in need, other than sponsoring plans within his diocese to develop new parishes and schools specifically for African Americans. Peter and the three orders associated with her seemingly followed Purcell's lead. They looked for new ways to support white Americans whose lives were disrupted between 1861 and 1865. But they largely ignored the spiritual needs and corporal sufferings of African Americans affected by the war and its outcome. Their lack of action in that realm demonstrated clear limits to their works of mercy.

Scholars interested in the history of U.S. Catholicism during the Civil War era have treated the war and its aftermath as a moment of opportunity for Church members. For example,

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[28] For more information on the expansion of schools and academies, see the hand drawn chart of schools in folder 6, box 116.1, Sisters of Mercy Archives, Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, North Carolina; Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 141-168.

[29] For an example work on the topic, see Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1875* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992).

historians have shown how enlistment in the U.S. or Confederate armies provided lay members a chance to prove belonging in their respective nations. Likewise, the contributions of sisters who served as nurses allegedly helped to quell anti-Catholic sympathies.[30] Historians have also demonstrated how several prominent clergymen and laypersons considered the postwar era as a moment ripe for Catholic ascendancy in the United States. Primarily through immigration, the Catholic population had grown significantly during the antebellum period, making it the largest single denomination in the country by the 1860s. The addition of new parishes, schools, orphanages, and other Catholic institutions further cemented the expansion of the faith throughout the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Some Catholic apologists, moreover, interpreted the war as a direct consequence of Protestantism, or the inability of Protestants to avoid civil war, specifically the "theological crisis" over slavery that divided the mainstream denominations during the antebellum period.[31] Many Catholics leaders insisted that, having just experienced the dire effects of division, Americans would now turn to the "one true faith," thereby swelling the ranks of the Church through conversion during Reconstruction. Some Catholic leaders also viewed relief and missionary work among African Americans, especially the formerly enslaved population, as an important opportunity to grow the Catholic population in the United States, while also extending the influence of the Church in new ways to shape life in the postwar nation.

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[30] For example, see Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), see especially chapters 3 and 4; Gracjan Kraszewski, *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2020).

[31] Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Mark A. Noll, "The Catholic Press, the Bible, and Protestant Responsibility for the Civil War," *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 7, no. 3 (September 2017), 355-376.

In 1866, Purcell began efforts to develop an African American Catholic community in southern Ohio, though Peter and the sisters were notably absent from the initiatives. During the 1860s, the African American population grew in Cincinnati, largely as a result of emancipation. Most freedpeople who relocated to the region faced difficult social and economic conditions, forcing them to "live in the shadows of Cincinnati society," as historian Nikki M. Taylor explained.[32] Given their new circumstances, African Americans in Cincinnati would have greatly benefitted from Catholic relief efforts. Instead, leadership in the archdiocese focused primarily on establishing separate religious institutions for African American Catholics, instead of addressing their corporal needs. For example, a year after the Civil War ended, Francis Xavier Weninger, a Jesuit priest, founded St. Ann Church, making it one of the first parishes specifically for African American Catholics in the United States.[33] An October 1866 issue of Cincinnati's *Catholic Telegraph* included a plea for white Church members in the city, as well as other readers, to support the parish through donations, thereby alleviating the almost $3,000 of debt attached to St. Ann Church. "If for every hard word said against the colored people they could receive a cent in this community," the periodical asserted, "their debt would soon be paid."[34] In an effort to provide financial support for the parish and its school, Weninger created the Peter Claver School Society.[35] Purcell and his brother, Father Edward Purcell, promoted the

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[32] Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 186.

[33] For more information on St. Ann's parish in Cincinnati, see Joseph Lackner, "The Foundations of St. Ann's Parish, 1866-1870: The African-American Experience in Cincinnati," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, vol. 14, no. 2 (spring 1996): 13-36.

[34] The *Catholic Telegraph* quoted in David J. Endres, *A Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati: The Catholic Church in Southwest Ohio, 1821-2021* (Milford, OH: Little Miami Publishing Company, 2021), 101.

[35] During the Second Plenary Council in Baltimore, a group of prelates suggested that a proposal be sent to Rome to support the canonization of Peter Claver as the patron saint of slaves. A Jesuit priest and missionary, Claver (1580-1654) ministered to slaves brought to Columbia during the early seventeenth century. On October 21, 1866, the final day of the council, thirty-four bishops signed a petition to support the canonization of Claver. In 1888, Pope Leo XIII canonized Claver as the patron saint of missions to African peoples.

society, even establishing an annual collection for St. Ann Church. Yet St. Ann parish received minimal support from the local white laity.

Purcell outlined his support of African American Catholic parishes in an official circular or pastoral letter, calling on all the clergy and laity of Cincinnati to join him.[36] "The object to which we now call the attention of our dearly beloved in Christ, the Reverend Clergy and all the Faithful of the Diocese," Purcell pronounced, "is the religious condition of the colored people since their emancipation. It is a subject which appeals to the conscience of every Catholic, especially of every Pastor of souls."[37] In particular, the archbishop underscored the central issue affecting the state of African American Catholicism in southern Ohio: "As all know, the colored people are not favorably received in the midst of the congregations of whites," including the exclusion of African American children from white parish schools.[38] Around the same time, Father Weninger, the pastor of St. Ann Church, lamented that "'neither the Irish nor the Germans like to see their children mixed up with colored children in schools; adults, too, are neither

[36] The correct date of the circular is unknown. No date is printed on the circular, though the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives has it stored in a folder labeled "1864," along with other documents from that year and 1865. Two historians who have referenced the document in their scholarship have suggested or quite strongly asserted that Purcell issued the pastoral in 1877. Unfortunately, I have not been able to confirm this date with any other piece of historical evidence. I have attempted to locate the letter in a volume of the *Catholic Telegraph*, but I have yet to find it. I am certain, however, that Purcell produced the letter after 1866, since the archbishop mentions St. Ann Church, which Father Weninger founded in 1866. Dating the letter to the mid-to-late 1870s seems appropriate. Much of the document addresses the need for schools to serve African American children, which would have been a key concern following the Cincinnati Bible Wars, which lasted from 1869 to 1873. Furthermore, that event as well as the context of the second-half of the 1870s prompted the resurgence of Protestant-Catholic tensions and rivalries. Indeed, Purcell made sure to encourage support of the black Catholic schools to prevent Protestants from adding new members to their churches. "Circular Letter: To the Reverend Clergy and the Faithful People of the Diocese of Cincinnati," [dated 1864; assumed 1877], box 14, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[37] "Circular Letter: To the Reverend Clergy and the Faithful People of the Diocese of Cincinnati," [dated 1864; assumed 1877], box 14, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[38] "Circular Letter: To the Reverend Clergy and the Faithful People of the Diocese of Cincinnati," [dated 1864; assumed 1877], box 14, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

welcomed . . . in the churches of the whites. Nay, many whites have a natural aversion of the colored race.'"[39]

Rather than encourage white Catholics to welcome African Americans into their parishes, Purcell supported the practice of segregation by requesting that white Catholics financially support new parishes and schools exclusively for African American Catholics. He referenced the continued success of St. Ann's parish school, where each year the "colored children" proved their "proper training . . . by public examinations and exhibitions to the astonishment and delight of the citizens of Cincinnati."[40] To create an environment in which the Church could expand its presence among African Americans, Purcell urged white Catholics to support the Peter Claver Society and contribute to the annual collection "for the benefit of colored people in the diocese."[41] Purcell sought to bolster separate African American Catholic institutions while remaining silent on integrating African American Catholics into white churches as well as on white animosity toward African Americans in the diocese. His pastoral letter suggested that the principal concern of Catholics in Cincinnati was making sure that African Americans did not join the Protestant ranks. "This appeal," the archbishop reminded his flock, "is not so much an appeal to the good will of the Catholics, as to their *conscience*. Indeed, how can we remain inactive, when we behold such destruction of souls and such maneuvres [sic] on the part of Protestants?"[42] Ultimately, Purcell promoted a policy of adding African Americans members to the Church, but keeping them apart from the majority of Catholics.

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[39] Francis Xavier Weninger quoted in Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 239.

[40] Francis Xavier Weninger quoted in Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 239.

[41] "Circular Letter: To the Reverend Clergy and the Faithful People of the Diocese of Cincinnati," [dated 1864; assumed 1877], box 14, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[42] "Circular Letter: To the Reverend Clergy and the Faithful People of the Diocese of Cincinnati," [dated 1864; assumed 1877], box 14, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Purcell's objectives regarding African Americans in Cincinnati shaped his opposition to a plan proposed by Archbishop Martin John Spalding to allocate Church resources for an evangelizing mission in the South after the Civil War. Spalding, based in Baltimore, organized a plenary council in October 1866, bringing together seven archbishops, thirty-eight bishops, three abbots, and over 150 other clergymen from across the United States. Spalding hoped the council would demonstrate the unity of the Church in the aftermath of the Civil War, thereby offering Americans a symbol of hope after a time of crisis. "We have soared far above the region of storms and clouds into the pure atmosphere of God," he proclaimed, "where there is no controversy or contention stirred up by human passion."[43] The assembled clergy, he argued, had "lost sight of all differences of nationality and temperament" because they "had been blended in that beautiful unity and harmony which the Catholic Church alone can exhibit."[44]

Most of all, Spalding wanted the assembled prelates to unite behind his plan for the evangelization of African Americans. He trusted that the council, formally known as the Second Plenary Council, would mark the culmination of a movement he had begun fifteen months earlier. Within weeks of the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, Spalding began to organize a plan to convert freedpeople to Catholicism. In June 1865, Spalding wrote Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò of the Propaganda Fide in Rome to detail his design for a prefect apostolic—a clergyman in charge of a missionary territory—to oversee the evangelization of African Americans throughout the United States. Barnabò and Spalding agreed that the war had created an opportunity for the Church to add new souls to its American flock. No longer confined by the slave system, the four million freedpeople could choose their own churches. Spalding was

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[43] "Introduction," in *Sermons Delivered during the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, October, 1866* (Baltimore: Kelly & Piet, 1866), xxx.

[44] "Introduction," in *Sermons Delivered during the Second Plenary Council*, xxx.

confident that he and his colleagues could convince the formerly enslaved population to convert to their faith and believed the Church needed to provide aid and moral guidance to African Americans. In his opinion, the Civil War had produced a humanitarian crisis that only Catholics could properly resolve through the work of religious orders and other missionary enterprises.[45]

As the council progressed, however, it became apparent that Spalding lacked the necessary support from his colleagues to fulfill his objective. One of the chief opponents to his plan was Purcell. In many ways, Purcell attended the council as a representative of the interests of Catholics in Ohio and throughout the lower-Midwest. He sided with other prelates from the region, as well as those from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, who believed the Church should focus its resources—monetary and clerical—on serving the needs of the immigrant and urban populations, rather than taking a risk on evangelization efforts in the South.[46] Purcell's position at the Second Plenary Council might seem surprising, especially since years earlier he had stood out among Catholic clergy for his outspoken abolitionism. During the week of Thanksgiving in 1864, Purcell had issued a proclamation that prayed for immediate emancipation and condemned the editors of Catholic periodicals throughout the nation who criticized the Lincoln administration.[47] In reaction to the archbishop's stance, Reverend William Buell Sprague, a Presbyterian minister from Albany, New York, wrote Purcell to thank him for his "honorable

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[45] Thomas W. Spalding, *Martin John Spalding: American Churchman* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 219-229.

[46] James Hennesey, *The Baltimore Council of 1866: An American Syllabus* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, 1965).

[47] For more on Archbishop Purcell during Civil War, see David J. Endres, "Rectifying the Fatal Contrast: Archbishop John Purcell and the Slavery Controversy among Catholics in Civil War Cincinnati," *Ohio Valley History* 2, no. 2 (summer 2002): 23-33; Carl C. Creason, "United, Yet Divided: An Analysis of Bishops Martin John Spalding and John Baptist Purcell during the Civil War Era," *American Catholic Studies* 124, no. 2 (spring 2013): 49-69.

position" when "nearly all [the] Roman Catholic population in [that] part of the country [had] gone in the opposite direction."[48]

While Purcell did not openly oppose the idea of a mission to aid African Americans in 1866, he did argue that such work should be the principal concern of prelates and members of religious orders in southern dioceses. Purcell and other diocesan leaders from cities north of the Ohio River rejected Spalding's proposal of appointing a prefect apostolic to oversee the work as a national plan—which, in theory, could have required northern bishops to send resources to support missions far away from their ecclesiastical sees. At a time when most dioceses faced financial constraints due to the war, as well as a shortage of male clergy and women religious, Purcell and his northern colleagues preferred to safeguard their diocesan interests rather than inaugurate new missionary efforts in the South. Indeed, the majority of prelates who voted in favor of Spalding's plan came from states that had been part of the Confederacy.[49]

Despite his position at the council, Purcell continued to receive requests from southern Catholic clergy to send members of religious orders and donate money to support relief work among African Americans in their dioceses. For example, encumbered by financial constraints, Bishop William Henry Elder of Mississippi wrote Purcell in the winter of 1867 to "beg" for the "privilege of soliciting contributions in [his] Diocese—at least in those churches &

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[48] William Buell Sprague to John Baptist Purcell, November 21, 1864, box 14, Purcell Papers, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[49] James Hennesey, *The Baltimore Council of 1866: An American Syllabus* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, 1965), 12, courtesy of the University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Spalding, *Martin John Spalding*, 219-229; Randall M. Miller, "The Failed Mission: The Catholic Church and Black Catholics in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South*, second edition, edited by Randall M. Miller and Jon Wakelyn (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 169; Cyprian Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990), 117-122; David T. Gleeson, "'No Disruption of Union,'" in *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction*, edited by Edward Blum and W. Scott Poole (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 168.

congregations where the Pastors may give a cheerful consent."[50] In addition to facing a growing population of orphans and multiple debts due to crop failures, Elder needed "means to do something effective for the colored people—especially to establish a school for them—the only way to . . . rescue them from the miserable influence of the tract societies, which are teaching them the lowest kind of protestantism."[51] Elder suggested that if Catholics from Cincinnati and other northern dioceses did not send priests and Catholic sisters to work among the freed population, then Protestants would succeed in gaining thousands of new Church members. Even framing the appeals in this manner had minimal effects on Purcell.[52]

The evidence indicates that Peter and Catholic sisters from Cincinnati had opportunities to extend their works of mercy to African Americans in the South. Purcell's position during the Second Plenary Council and his silence in response to requests from southern clergy undoubtedly contributed to the fact that Peter and Catholic sisters from Cincinnati did not travel south after 1865. Had Purcell embraced Spalding's plan in the same way that he did calls during the war to provide nurses for white soldiers, it is possible that the Catholic women would have organized relief missions similar to those sponsored by their Protestant counterparts. Even so, archival records associated with Peter and the sisters lack any indication that they were interested

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[50] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, December 17, 1867, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[51] William Henry Elder to John Baptist Purcell, December 17, 1867, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[52] While reviewing the papers of Archbishop Purcell, I located only one example of a sincere response from Purcell to the requests of his southern colleagues. In November 1867, Father Napoléon-Joseph Perché of New Orleans thanked Purcell for his "charity toward our Catholic institutions." "We have here two colored institutions," Perché informed Purcell, "one of these . . . called 'the holy family' numbers ten or twelve colored ladies who for more than twenty years devoted themselves to the religious education of female slaves." The members of The Holy Family planned "to do the same with freed girls and women, preparing them for their first communion." "The other institution is the house of the sisters of Providence (colored sisters) who have come from Baltimore to establish a school for colored children," Perché explained. The New Orleans clergyman asked if he could devote $200 of Purcell's donation "to each of those institutions . . . which would be a great help to them." Napoléon-Joseph Perché to John Baptist Purcell, November 10, 1867, II-5-c, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

in supporting Purcell's plan to found new institutions to serve African Americans in their own diocese.[53]

Sarah Peter's Involvement in Church Politics in Rome

In the years following the Civil War, Sarah Peter shifted much of her attention to events in Europe and, in particular, focused on her rapport with Pope Pius IX. Over the course of her lifetime, she visited the continent six times. The first three journeys occurred before the Civil War, one of which included her conversion experience and another laid the groundwork for her commitment to Catholic charity. After a decade of cultivating the works of mercy in the greater-Cincinnati region, Peter planned a return voyage to Europe in 1867. Ultimately, she would make two additional journeys before her death, one in 1869 and the final time in 1874. Peter's letters and memoirs make clear that she enjoyed Europe, especially Rome. "Mrs. Peter's tastes were much more in accordance with past centuries and life in older communities, especially with the ages of faith and with old conservative European life," explained Margaret Rives King, Peter's daughter-in-law.[54] Traveling to religious sites, attending mass in a small village church, or walking the streets of a former medieval European city satiated her "tastes" for a world unavailable in the late-nineteenth-century United States. Over the course of several trips abroad, Peter developed a network of companions, religious mentors, and art or relic dealers throughout the western portion of the continent with whom she longed to reconnect.[55]

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[53] It is worth noting that records associated with the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis suggest that members of the order welcomed African Americans as patients at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Covington, Kentucky. For more information, see "History of St. Elizabeth Hospital, Covington, Ky., Under the Direction of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, From A.D. 1860-1880," box R8S5B1, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[54] Margaret Rives King, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), 523.

[55] For more information on Peter's travels to Europe, see Margaret Rives King, editor, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Peter*, vol. 1-2 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke & Co., 1889), specifically chapters 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 12.

During her trips to Rome, Peter often enjoyed private meetings with Pope Pius IX, getting a first-hand opportunity to demonstrate her devotion to the Holy Father. These opportunities occurred, in part, because, by the 1860s, Peter had gained international prominence due to her work in the United States with the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. Pope Pius IX, as well as other Church leaders in Rome, appreciated and respected her contributions to the development of Catholic institutions in America. Peter had placed herself in a unique position, unlike the majority of American lay Catholics, especially women, to have access to the pope and other Vatican officials. Peter's voyages to Rome also involved buying, receiving, and exporting relics, devotional items, and pieces of Catholic art, which she brought to Cincinnati to enrich Catholic religious practices in the Ohio Valley. Although she obtained some pieces from the German states, most of the items originated in Rome. Peter further nourished a Rome-centric Catholicism in the United States by creating links between American devotionalism and Rome through material objects.

Peter's final three voyages also constituted acts of devotion to Pope Pius IX at a time when the papacy was the target of intense controversy in both Europe and the United States. Historian Peter D'Agostino has argued that the struggle over papal authority in Italy shaped late-nineteenth-century American Catholic identity, as well as influenced how non-Catholic Americans viewed Church members in their own country. The question of the pope's temporal authority in light of the formation of the Kingdom of Italy became a highly-contested issue during the 1860s and 1870s. American Protestants celebrated the Risorgimento and the diminishing political power of Pius IX. By contrast, Catholic clergy in the United States, as D'Agostino showed, crafted an anti-Risorgimento or pro-Pius IX message. American Catholics increasingly expressed loyalty to the pope by denouncing liberalism and the modern-Italian

republic. Ethnic differences among Catholics became less important in the United States, claimed D'Agostino, as a more universal Catholic identity crystallized in support of the so-called "prisoner pope."[56]

Peter's fifth trip to Europe coincided with the opening of the First Vatican Council. The meeting in Rome, which opened in December 1869, placed the issue of papal infallibility front and center in Church affairs. The proposed dogma concerned moments when the pope spoke on matters of faith and morals, and, if approved at the council, would have deemed the pontiff's words "infallible" on those subjects, thereby entrenching a sense of papal supremacy within the Church. Although the subject of papal infallibility had been debated among Catholic leaders since the twelfth century, it took on new importance within the context of Pius IX's temporal authority being questioned by the Risorgiomento movement in Italy. Many of the strongest supporters of Pius IX, including laypeople such as Sarah Peter, believed council members should vote in favor of papal infallibility to show support for the embattled Church leader.[57]

While Peter attended the council as a guest of Pius IX and a supporter of papal infallibility, Archbishop Purcell arrived in Rome as leader of the American cohort of prelates who opposed the dogma. Purcell "feared that [an] assertion of the pope's infallibility," wrote historian Roger Fortin, "would impede the work of the American church, diminish the role of the bishops, and possibly revive anti-Catholic sentiments."[58] In the end, though, Purcell remained in the minority. The council members voted in favor of the dogma. Even after returning to Cincinnati, Purcell maintained his opposition to papal infallibility, which ultimately led to some

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[56] Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in American: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[57] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 122-124.

[58] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 122.

problems. After some strong words from colleagues and Vatican officials, Purcell eventually made a public declaration in favor of the council's declaration.[59]

In 1874, during her final trip to Europe, Peter joined a large pilgrimage of American Catholics in Rome. A group of prominent U.S. Church members had organized the event to demonstrate support for Pope Pius IX. Private correspondence suggests that Peter maintained close relationships with editors of leading Catholic periodicals in the United States, and that through her correspondence she influenced how Italian politics and news of the pilgrimage were presented to the American public.[60] European papers also covered the event, including references to Peter's role as a leader of the pilgrimage and strong advocate of the pope. "Mrs. Peter, one of the American pilgrims now in Rome, is a most remarkable woman whose name will be revered long after she has passed away," noted a London periodical, "Pius IX knows Mrs. Peter well and has always displayed marked regard for her."[61] Peter also shared her experiences as a member of the pilgrimage in a series of letters to her son, noting that the pope visited her two days after her arrival in Rome. On the following day, the "Holy Father" gifted Peter "a quantity of valuable gifts—statuettes, prints, rosaries, and medals, and a beautiful old painting."[62] The pilgrimage continued through the summer of 1874. Peter and other American

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[59] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 122-124.

[60] For more information about Peter's relationship with James Alphonsus McMaster, editor of the *New York Freeman's Journal*, a Catholic newspaper, see Sarah Worthington King Peter to James Alphonsus McMaster, February 20, 1874, I-2-a, James Alphonsus McMaster Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Sarah Worthington King Peter to James Alphonsus McMaster, February 28, 1874, I-2-a, James Alphonsus McMaster Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Sarah Worthington King Peter to James Alphonsus McMaster, March 7, 1874, I-2-a, James Alphonsus McMaster Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Sarah Worthington King Peter to James Alphonsus McMaster, March 16, 1874, I-2-a, James Alphonsus McMaster Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

[61] London newspaper quoted in Anna Shannon McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish: Life and Letters of Sarah Worthington King Peter, 1800-1877* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 372-373.

[62] Sarah Worthington King Peter to Rufus King, June 11, 1874 quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 373.

Catholics visited sites around central Italy, where they toasted Pope Pius IX in public demonstrations.[63]

A closer examination of Peter's postwar voyages to Europe, including her devotion to Pius IX, reveals evidence of her strong ties to the anti-modern factions of Roman Catholicism, particularly those associated with ultramontanism.[64] The fact that Peter seemed more at home in Rome supporting the interests of Pope Pius IX against Italian revolutionaries than in the United States speaks to her continued commitment to traditional political systems and hierarchical social relationships. As an elite and conservative Catholic, Peter perhaps felt disconnected and disillusioned with the changing social and political contexts in the United States during the Reconstruction Era and early Gilded Age, and viewed Pope Pius IX as a figure most representative of her interests and ideological commitments.[65]

Postwar Financial Crises and the Turn Toward Centralization in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati

"The archiepiscopal palace in Cincinnati has been the scene for a few weeks of excitement . . . Father Edward Purcell, the brother of the Roman Catholic archbishop, has been for many years a sort of private banker, receiving the money of hundreds, and perhaps thousands of Roman Catholics, mostly servants and other people in humbler walks of life, the large majority being women . . . Day after day has been presented the scene of poor people clamorous for their money, and of Father Purcell telling them that he could not raise it all, the total being a matter of many hundreds of thousands of dollars."
– "A Run on an Archbishop," *The Daily Constitution* (December 24, 1878)

In the fall of 1878, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati suffered a severe financial crisis. A bank founded and managed by Archbishop Purcell, known as the Purcell Bank, crashed,

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[63] McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 373-375.

[64] John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 12-13; D'Agostino, *Rome in America*, 24.

[65] For more on the "antimodern impulse" among upper-class Americans during the late-nineteenth century, see Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Andrew Seal, "'The Vanished Power of the Usual Reign': Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*, and the Struggle for Hegemony in History," *American Historical Review* (June 2021): 655-669.

humiliating the prelate and rendering numerous lay members destitute. Ultimately, the financial failure would set in motion a new era for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, specifically a move toward more centralization and bureaucratization regarding Church affairs, marking an end to an era in which ambitious lay people such as Sarah Peter could engage in institution building and shape Church life in the region. The financial crisis also directly affected the work of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and the Sisters of Mercy, forcing the Franciscans to suspend institutional growth and prompting the Mercies to consolidate their focus on providing teachers for Catholic schools.

The origins of the Purcell Bank can be traced to the Panic of 1837. At the time of the crisis, Purcell had been bishop for four years and had gained the confidence of lay Catholics in the city. As trust for private banks waned, several of the laity turned to Purcell to hold their deposits during the years following the Panic of 1837. Around the same time, Purcell designated his brother, Father Edward Purcell, as his attorney with full privileges to his financial affairs. Father Purcell became the chief operator of the bank, receiving deposits and, often times, promising to pay interest at a much more competitive rate than other banks in the city. The bank grew significantly over the course of the antebellum and postbellum years. In fact, based on the scant records available, Father Purcell received over $13,000,000 in deposits between 1847 and 1877.[66]

Purcell used funds from the bank to support Catholic institutional development, specifically the construction of St. Peter in Chains Cathedral and other parish churches in the

[66] For more information on the history of the Purcell Bank, see M. Edmund Hussey, "The 1878 Financial Failure of Archbishop Purcell," *The Cincinnati Historical Bulletin* 36 (spring 1978): 7-41; Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 150-156; Margaret C. DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2004), especially chapter six, "Archbishop John Baptist Purcell: The Continuing Dialogue, 1873-1883," 141-152

region. The archbishop often lent money to religious orders—including those associated with Sarah Peter—to support their convents and charitable institutions. Indeed, much of the initial growth of Catholicism in the region can be attributed to the financial assistance provided by the Purcell Bank. As financial issues mounted on the national level, the Purcell Bank profited. Indeed, during the Panic of 1857, deposits with Father Purcell increased. Sixteen years later, with the beginning Panic of 1873, more Cincinnatians put their faith in the archbishop and his brother. Despite some minor setbacks and moments of uneasiness among the clergymen, the bank survived the first five years of the Long Depression.[67]

The downfall of the bank in 1878, however, put "parish development at a standstill," as one historian has noted, ultimately affecting the role of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and the Sisters of Mercy in the region.[68] On October 31, the banking house of Hemann and Company—owned and operated by Joseph Anton Hemann, a German-born entrepreneur from Cincinnati who managed the publishing house for the *Catholic Telegraph* and the *Wahrheitsfruend*—failed for $386,000.[69] Rumors spread that Father Purcell served as the principal backer of the bank, thereby losing thousands of dollars with its demise. Two weeks later, Adae and Company, another banking house in Cincinnati, reported a loss of $740,000. "Again the rumor spread," noted author M. Edmund Hussey, "that Father Purcell was hit hard, but the fact was that he had never had any dealings with that firm."[70]

Regardless of the reality of the situation, rumors won the day. A run on the Purcell Bank ensued. Newspapers reported that crowds of disgruntled depositors descended on the

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[67] Hussey, "The 1878 Financial Failure of Archbishop Purcell," 7-41; Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 150-156.

[68] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 156.

[69] Hussey, "The 1878 Financial Failure of Archbishop Purcell," 12-14. For more information about the life of Joseph Anton Hemann, see Douglas Carl Fricke, *Joseph Anton Hemann (1816-1897): German-American Educator, Publisher, Banker in Nineteenth Century Cincinnati* (Martinsville, IN: Allodium Chase Publishing, 2015).

[70] Hussey, "The 1878 Financial Failure of Archbishop Purcell," 14.

archbishop's residence demanding to withdrawal their money. Over the next few weeks, Father Purcell paid out more than $100,000 in withdrawals, but he could not meet the demands of all the laity. He sank into a depression. On November 17, 1878, he wrote "'This dull, gloomy, day . . . makes me long for heaven.'"[71] As circumstances continued, it became clear that Father Purcell had tied up most of the deposits in investments or lent the money to support episcopal projects. Much of that money would never be recovered. Consequently, the lay Catholics who had entrusted the Purcell brothers with their weekly earnings and life savings as well as other, more financially stable, depositors would not recover their investments.[72]

With the bank's failure, the era of widespread institutional growth in the region ended, affecting the orders associated with Sarah Peter. The financial crisis itself was met with a mixed response. Much of the laity felt deceived by the archbishop and his brother, and, as one historian has noted, it would take decades before trust was restored between the laity and the Catholic leadership in Cincinnati. Fellow clergymen and some of the prominent business owners in the city, on the other hand, proclaimed their support for the Purcell brothers and immediately went to work to save their reputation and try to resolve the financial dilemma. In December 1878, a group of clergymen, including the president of St. Xavier College, formed a committee to address the issue. They recommended that Archbishop Purcell immediately issue a public statement in an effort to restore public confidence, as well as to make clear that "he [the archbishop] holds himself . . . responsible for all financial claims against his brother"—this

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[71] Edward Purcell quoted in Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 152.

[72] A variety of newspapers—local, national, and European—covered the fallout of the run on the Purcell Bank. Most of the articles addressed the outcome of the crash and the efforts to resolve the issue by creating a committee of trustees to repay the depositors and other debt held by the archbishop and his brother. For more information, see the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 24, 1878, December 25, 1878, December 31, 1878, February 25, 1879, March 2, 1879, March 6, 1879, March 12, 1879, May 26, 1879; *New York Times*, March 9, 1879, March 11, 1879, March 16, 1879; *New York Tribune*, March 10, 1879; *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 1879, March 6, 1879, March 8, 1879, March 11, 1879, March 16, 1879; *The Tribune* (Minneapolis), December 27, 1878; *The Daily Constitution* (Atlanta), January 21, 1879; *The Irish Times* (Dublin), May 9, 1879.

proved to be a critical move as the committee believed the archbishop could use diocesan property which had often been deeded to him, as collateral for all debts.[73] On the day after Christmas 1878, the following statement from Purcell appeared on the fourth page of the *Catholic Telegraph*:

> A Statement of the Financial Trouble of the Diocese: [Purcell began the note by detailing his humble beginnings before becoming the Archbishop of Cincinnati] . . . At that time [when Purcell arrived in Cincinnati] there was but one small church in Cincinnati. For so many others since erected he had to beg or borrow. He cannot accuse himself before God of having expended anything in waste or extravagance. A carriage and a pair of horses kindly presented to him by the congregation he found too costly to retain, so he quickly disposed of them. So it happens that for building lots, churches and asylums in which there are four hundred orphans, for seminary and its support to a great extent, and for various necessities he is now pretty heavily in debt, but with God's merciful aid he hopes in no long time to pay all the Diocesan debts; and if he will not be relieved from the heavy burden of the episcopate which he has earnestly entreated the Holy Father to relieve him from, he trusts in the charity and goodness of the clergy and laity to pay all.[74]

Three points stand out from the article. First, Purcell wanted to ensure readers that the money had been used for the benefit of Cincinnatians and the growth of Catholicism in the region. Second, he suggested that all debts would be paid, relying on the help of his colleagues and the laity for assistance. Thus, in his eyes, it became the debt of the entire archdiocese and a burden for all Catholics in the region rather than a weight that the Purcell brothers would carry alone. Third, if Purcell failed to resolve the issue, he trusted that Pope Pius IX would remove him as archbishop. The third point—the possibility of his resignation or removal—prompted the most widespread response from Catholics and non-Catholics from around the nation. The local clergy and laity, during the first few months of 1879, held several benefit concerts and fairs that raised nearly $40,000. Furthermore, money arrived from outside the diocese to help eliminate the debt.[75] For example, on May 29, 1879, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported that Purcell

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[73] Quoted in Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 152.
[74] "A Statement of the Financial Trouble of the Diocese," *Catholic Telegraph*, December 26, 1878.
[75] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 151-156.

received "more than $100,000" in checks from "Eugene Kelly, the well-known banker, James Lynch, Mr. Hoguet, of the Emigrants' Savings Bank, and others" from New York.[76]

Despite numerous efforts at fundraising, Purcell never settled the debt. Pope Pius IX issued a decision on the matter in the spring of 1879, refusing to accept Purcell's resignation. Instead, Pius IX promised to select a coadjutor bishop to assist Purcell with the crisis. On January 16, 1880, the Vatican appointed Bishop William Henry Elder of Natchez as the coadjutor. Elder would ultimately become Purcell's successor. By that point, Purcell had accepted his fate as a lame duck prelate whose reputation had been forever compromised. In November 1879, after a year of dealing with the fallout of the bank crash, Purcell left his cathedral residence for the Ursuline Convent in Brown County, Ohio, located approximately forty miles east of Cincinnati. His brother later joined him. "In reality," wrote historian Roger Fortin, "the financial crash and woes of the archdiocese undermined Purcell's administration, drove him from power, and retired both him and his brother."[77] Father Edward Purcell died on January 21, 1881, "suddenly before testifying about the loans and his role in the running of the bank," and three years later, on July 4, 1883, the archbishop died after a series of strokes at the Ursuline Convent.[78] By April 1880, Elder had taken over all Purcell's affairs; the new leader of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati would have to settle the crisis. Over the next twenty-five-year period—from 1880 to 1905—Elder and his successor, Archbishop Henry K. Moeller, faced a complicated legal battle in state and federal courts. In the end, over $400,000 was paid to creditors, though the majority were people of means who could pursue legal action against the archdiocese. Most Catholic families, however, lost all their savings and never recovered a cent.[79]

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[76] "Substantial Aid for Archbishop Purcell," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 29, 1879.
[77] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 155.
[78] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 155, 164.
[79] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 155-156, 159-171.

In addition to the dire effects the financial crisis had on the livelihoods of lay Catholics and the reputation of the Church leadership in Cincinnati, the bank crash also produced two long-term shifts in the operations of the archdiocese, both of which are directly related to this project. First, the financial crisis and its fallout impacted the works of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis and the Sisters of Mercy. The orders oversaw significant institutional development during their first few years in the diocese, largely through the assistance of Sarah Peter; however, during the postwar era, expansion became more difficult, requiring some of the sisters to transition into new works not directly related to their order. Deposits made to the Purcell Bank often found their way to religious orders as loans for new properties or to support their charitable enterprises. For instance, during the Civil War, the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis turned to Archbishop Purcell for financial assistance to support the establishment of a new hospital in Columbus, Ohio, expanding their presence into other parts of the state. Overall, the Purcell Bank helped fund the development of Catholic institutions throughout the region, a point which Purcell underscored in his December 1878 statement in the *Catholic Telegraph*. Although the sisters received donations from other sources—prominent lay Catholics as well as non-Catholic benefactors—and raised their own money through charity drives and industrial work, they greatly benefited from the existence of the bank. At the very least it served as a "safety net" when other resources were exhausted.[80] Historians have noted how the crash impacted

[80] The provincial annals of the Sisters of Poor of St. Francis also indicate that, during times of great financial need, the sisters allowed deposits to be made with them, promising to return the investments with a small amount of interest. For example, in 1874, when the sisters decided to extend the size of St. Mary Hospital in Cincinnati, they collected money from "many kind persons . . . for the payment of a low interest." Unfortunately for them, the crash of the Purcell Bank also created a run on St. Clare's Convent for money lent to the sisters. "[W]hen the insolvency of the Archdiocese became public," the annalist wrote, "people began to fear the same might occur . . . and applied for their money." The annals indicate how the sisters avoided the same level of unrest that plagued the archbishop and his brother at the cathedral: "To the prudence of Sister Joachim, the superior, and to the special protection of God . . . no real disturbance arose. Whenever anyone would demand payment, Sister Joachim would calmly remind him of the sixty days' notification prescribed by law, and at the expiration of that time she would have the money on hand. Usually this assurance would satisfy, and the individual would allow the money to be

institutional growth in the region, essentially halting the founding of any new churches, schools, and orphanages for the next two decades.[81]

The crash of the Purcell Bank also ushered in a new era of bureaucratization in the archdiocese. The Sisters of Mercy's transition to education intersected with this general trend, as well as the Church's growing focus on education. By the 1860s, and especially during the 1870s, the archbishop worked to expand an organized Catholic school system. To do so, the Church needed a large supply of adequately trained teachers, most of whom were drawn from the ranks of the religious orders. In 1863, the archdiocese issued a "detailed program" on Catholic education, which included the creation of a "diocesan school board of examiners" and a "standing school committee."[82] These policies were profound for the period. Prior to 1863, parish schools and other academies emerged through the combined efforts of the laity, clergy, and religious communities. Most were managed and operated by religious orders that specialized in education; however, other than oversight from members of the religious community or the pastor, the sisters largely had full control over the state of Catholic education. The Church's 1863 addition of a regulatory body and standards for teachers ushered in a new era of Catholic education. Among others things, the new policies meant that the sisters faced examinations to determine if they met the standards of a quality teacher.[83]

The Church's effort to standardize and centralize education represented just one example of how American Catholicism became increasingly centralized and bureaucratized during the

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further retained at the hospital [St. Mary]. Nevertheless, these demands so multiplied sometimes that Sister Joachim would become anxious and secretly come to St. Clara's for aid." Annals of the Provincial House of St. Clare, 338.

[81] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 167-177.

[82] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 158.

[83] Evans, *The Spirit is Mercy*, 157-168; Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 194-200. During their initial years in Cincinnati, the Sisters of Mercy extended their charitable enterprises among the poor, working-class, and immigrant populations. They came to Cincinnati with the intentions to minister to those groups. However, once they became teachers—especially in academies that charged tuition—the sisters primarily worked with middle-class families who could afford to pay for education.

final decades of the nineteenth century. As some historians have noted, the financial crisis of 1878 created a context in which Archbishop Elder, Purcell's successor, needed to assert more control over the operations of the archdiocese through a series of reforms. Even though evidence suggests that the trend toward centralization and bureaucratization began during the decade before the downfall of the Purcell Bank, it gained importance over the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[84] Most of the key changes, consequently, came during Elder's administration (1883-1904). Historian Roger Fortin noted that Elder required pastors and administrators to submit detailed annual reports covering "such items as the number of families and their ethnic and racial backgrounds, the number of teachers and pupils in the parochial schools, the parish debt, property holdings, and the parish's annul collections and rental pews."[85] Elder created new administrative offices and new standards for clergy, all in an effort to centralize authority over Church life in his archdiocese.

In the area of Catholic charity and social work, the changes set in motion by Elder ultimately culminated in 1916, with the establishment of the Bureau of Catholic Charities of Hamilton County, under the direction of Archbishop Moeller. The organization "served as the official representative for social work, interpreting the Catholic viewpoint to the community, identifying social needs within the Archdiocese and building programs to meet those needs while directing and organizing service projects."[86] In many ways, by the early-twentieth century, this

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[84] The shift towards increased centralization and bureaucratization in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati during the late-nineteenth century paralleled broader trends in U.S. history. For more information, see Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), which emphasizes the "organizing principles" of the late-Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Furthermore, scholarship on the U.S. Sanitary Commission has underscored the bureaucratic nature of that organization, attributing much of its success to the more modern approach that its members took to charity and reform. George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union*, revised edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965, 1993), especially chapter seven, "The Sanitary Elite: The Organized Response to Suffering," 98-112.

[85] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 159.

[86] "History," Catholic Charities of Southwest Ohio, https://www.ccswoh.org/about-us/history/.

new bureaucratic arm of the archdiocese had replaced the role that Sarah Peter, along with the Catholic sisters associated with her, had played during the late 1850s and 1860s.

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On the morning of Friday, February 9, 1877, eight pallbearers transported a "magnificent casket, covered with black broadcloth" from St. Clare's Convent to St. Xavier Church, where Bishop August Toebbe of Covington, KY presided over a solemn Requiem Mass. Prior to the beginning of the service, which had been scheduled to commence at 9:30 that morning, a "vast throng" of Cincinnatians filled "every inch of space in the capacious" church "almost to suffocation."[87] In addition to some of Cincinnati's most prominent citizens, dozens of Catholic sisters as well as members of lay sodalities from the region attended the funeral. They had all come to mourn the death of Sarah Peter.[88] Over the last two decades, as Archbishop Purcell reminded the attendants, Peter had "opened her hand to the needy, and stretched her hands to the poor . . . Never was Cincinnati endowed and blessed with the energy of a more remarkable woman."[89] Peter had left her mark on the city.

Peter's death coincided with the close of a distinct chapter in the history of Catholicism in Cincinnati, an era which began with her conversion and the arrival of Catholic sisters in 1857 and 1858. During the late 1850s, Sarah Peter recruited members of the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to address the social issues of the era

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[87] *The Catholic Telegraph*, February 8, 1877 or February 15, 1877—check the issue to confirm.

[88] On January 16, 1877, while returning from confession at St. Clare's convent, Peter tripped over a rug and broke her arm (and quite possibly some ribs). Records indicate that she struggled to breathe following the incident, either from the injury or from a worsening case of asthma or a combination of the injury and her asthma. Peter died at St. Clare's Convent on February 6, 1877. For three days, her body rested before the altar at St. Clare's before being transported to St. Xavier Church for the funeral. For more information about Peter's death and her final days at St. Clare's Convent, see Sarah Peter Collection, folder 1, Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Provincial Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[89] John Baptist Purcell quoted in McAllister, *In Winter We Flourish*, 380.

through their corporal works of mercy and to foster devotional Catholicism in the region. Peter selected those orders based on their specialized works of mercy, believing they could improve life in the Ohio Valley and further expand the presence of the Church in the United States. Once they arrived in Cincinnati, Peter worked alongside them and lobbied for their interests. In all, the network of charitable and religious institutions that Catholic women established in Cincinnati constituted the combined efforts of a prominent lay woman and European sisters, largely left alone to pursue their goals without the oversight of regulatory or administrative bodies.

EPILOGUE

"It is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West," argued Lyman Beecher in 1835.[1] Beecher, a Presbyterian minister and president of Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, printed the clarion call in *Plea for the West*, arguing that the region west of the Appalachian Mountains was "destined to be the great central power of the nation, and under heaven, must affect powerfully the cause of free institutions and the liberty of the world."[2] According to Beecher, the fate of the West centered on the impending struggle between Protestants and Catholics, particularly the "foreign emigrants whose accumulating tide [was] rolling in . . . through the medium of their religion and priesthood . . . as if they were an army of soldiers, enlisted and officered, and spreading over the land."[3] The stakes were high. "The Catholic system," Beecher charged, "[was] adverse to liberty, and the clergy to a great extent . . . depend[ed] on foreigners opposed to the principles of our government."[4]

Generations of historians have reprinted Beecher's claims and cited *Plea for the West* as key evidence of the pervasiveness of anti-Catholicism and nativism in U.S. culture. They have seen it as a model of an early evangelical worldview with its links to ideas about American exceptionalism and as a chief example of how Protestants employed religion as a justification for U.S. expansion and colonialism in this period. Scholars have cast *Plea for the West* as hyperbolic, xenophobic, and conspiratorial. Many have suggested that Beecher overstated the threat of Catholic settlement and institution building in the West; he exaggerated the potential effects of foreign influences that were allegedly anti-republican and anti-democratic; he falsely portrayed a scheme in which the pope dispatched prelates and priests, along with an obedient

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[1] Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West* (Cincinnati, OH: Truman & Smith, 1835), 11.
[2] Beecher, *Plea for the West*, 12.
[3] Beecher, *Plea for the West*, 56-57.
[4] Beecher, *Plea for the West*, 61.

laity, to shape American life and politics in ways that promoted the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church on a global scale.

But what if Beecher's characterization of events in the West was more prophetic than inflammatory? Perhaps he came closer to describing the realities of the struggle between Protestants and Catholics than historians have thought. Perhaps Catholics in the West were really trying to embed their presence in the United States through the development of new parishes and schools. In truth, as this dissertation has shown, the stakes were high for each faction, as both Protestants *and* Catholics considered the area ripe for institution building. Throughout the nineteenth century, American and European Catholics mobilized resources and joined forces to claim parts of the region for the Church. They might have been a minority in relation to Protestants, but Catholic clergy, members of religious orders, and ambitious lay leaders were not passive victims in the struggle for the West. Catholics, including Sarah Peter, raised financial resources, recruited members of religious orders to move from abroad, and constructed chapels, churches, and convents, all of which contributed to the process of Catholicizing the region. In *Plea for the West*, Beecher alluded to intense competition between Protestants and Catholics, stating: "Catholics have a perfect right to proselyte the nation to their faith if they are able to do it. But I too have the right of preventing it if I am able."[5]

Two decades after Beecher expressed his fears, Sarah Peter converted to Roman Catholicism in Italy and returned to southern Ohio. For the rest of her life, Peter represented much of what Beecher feared, dedicating her time, money, and property to advance the interests of the Church and establish Catholic institutions in the heart of the Ohio River Valley. The greater-Cincinnati region remained one of the principal sites of the clash between Protestants and

[5] Beecher, *Plea for the West*, 91.

Catholics in the United States. By the late 1850s, the religious rivalry intensified in the burgeoning urban centers of the West, as Protestant reformers and Catholic philanthropists jockeyed for control over social life in Cincinnati and other cities. Within the evolving urban landscape, the groups vied to direct the lives and respond to the needs of immigrants, the poor, "fallen" women, orphaned children, and other vulnerable classes.

Sarah Peter was among those who sought to ensure that Catholics were prominent in these efforts and defended what many Catholics saw as a unique and superior approach to charity. She partnered with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Mercy, and Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to bolster and broaden the Catholic cause in her city, state, region, and nation. Taking inspiration from Catholic women's orders she encountered in Europe, she sought to shape American life by establishing those orders and the practices associated with them in Cincinnati. She worked effectively with local members of the Church hierarchy. Archbishop John Baptist Purcell endorsed her recruiting and fundraising ventures in Europe, which provided critical resources for Peter's mission in the Ohio Valley.

As Peter competed with Protestant reformers and activists for influence in the region, she promulgated an anti-Protestant vision, which she deployed to underscore the importance of her objectives. The relics, art, and other devotional items Peter imported from Europe helped enhance religious life for Catholics and marked new spaces for the Church in the Ohio Valley, forging links between leadership in Rome and the United States and helping legitimize the authority of the pope. Indeed, Peter endorsed and embodied an elite-oriented and Rome-centric Catholicism. Her adamant support for Pope Pius IX, whose papal encyclical from 1864 condemned liberalism, placed her within the conservative and ultramontane circles of Catholicism.

Despite the challenges her religious faith and institution-building efforts posed to mainstream American Protestants, Peter executed her mission largely unscathed by the anti-Catholic prejudice that so often shaped the experiences of immigrant Catholics in the United States. A wealthy and respected woman before she converted, Peter, after she joined the Church, navigated networks of European nobles, the highest-ranking members of the Catholic hierarchy, and influential Americans, including her son, who was involved in Cincinnati's legal and political circles throughout his adult life. Peter worked to gain converts for the Church, but that was not her main goal. Instead, she focused on establishing institutions that would have a lasting impact. At times, Peter criticized the habits and activities of poor and working-class Catholics, particularly women and girls, who required the guidance of the Sisters of Mercy, and other religious orders, to direct them on how to live as respectable wives and mothers. The institutions Peter helped found fostered and sustained hierarchical relationships, most commonly with the Catholic sisters exercising control over the populations who sought assistance from them or were placed under their care.

Sarah Peter likely represented Beecher's greatest nightmare: a native-born, civic-minded, Protestant from a prominent family who eventually joined the Roman Catholic Church and employed her social status, philanthropic spirit, and wealth and property to relocate members of European religious orders to Cincinnati, where they established vibrant institutions in one of the most important urban centers of the American West. Peter successfully aided the Church in putting down permanent roots in the region, while simultaneously preserving her elite lifestyle and promoting her conservative and anti-modern worldview that married well with her new faith.

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