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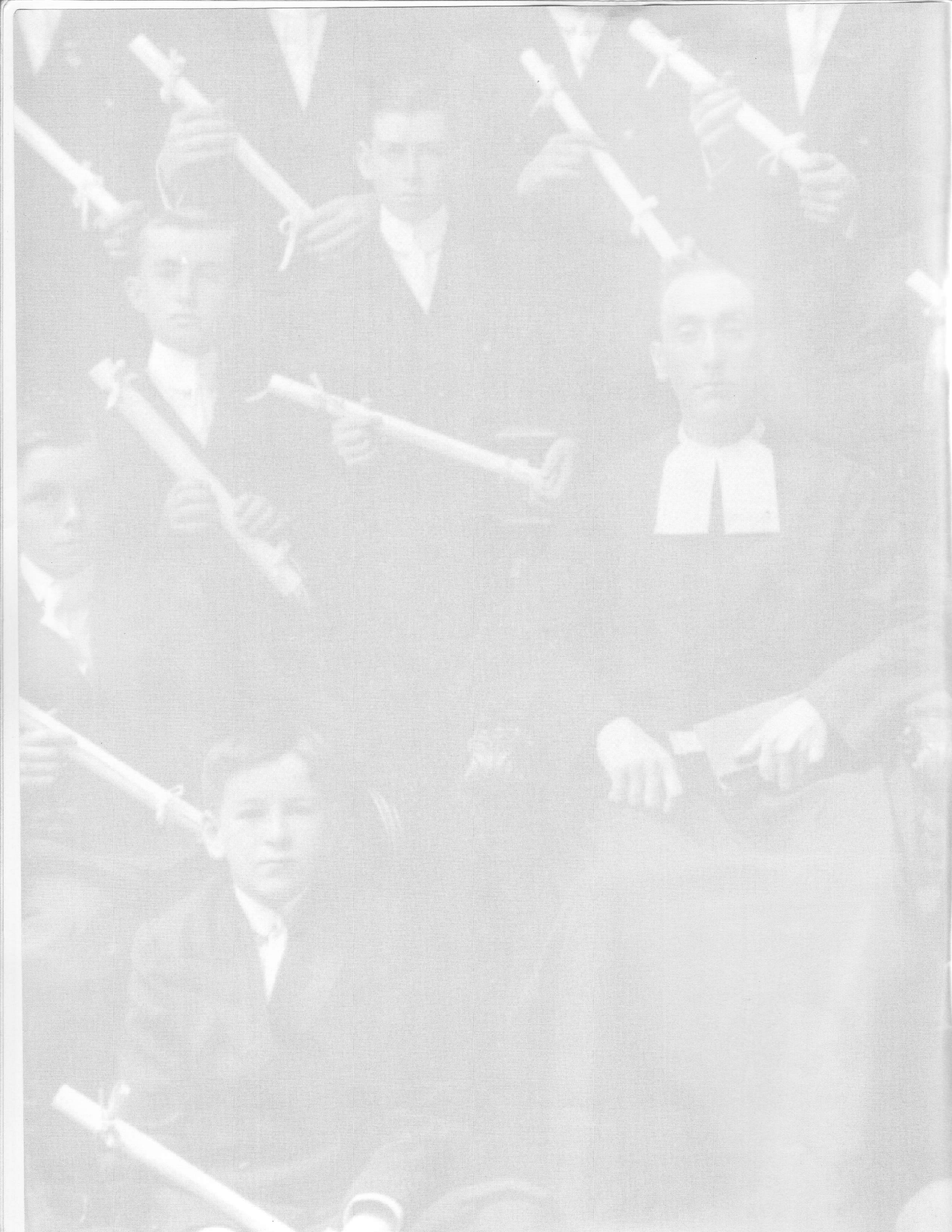
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Matthew Harkins: Catholic Bishop and Educator

PATRICK T. CONLEY

Matthew Harkins is an almost forgotten figure in the annals of Rhode Island history. His name does not appear in the multivolume *Dictionary of American History*, and amazingly he is not even a member of the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame. The reasons for his relative obscurity are many. He was neither a politician, an athlete, nor an entertainer. He shunned the spotlight, and he avoided the intrigues that were sometimes a part of his chosen career. He lived and presided in an era that has been largely untouched by Rhode Island historians. Laboring in a field that professional historians have slighted, he performed administrative tasks that were often unexciting and that appear impressive only when considered cumulatively.

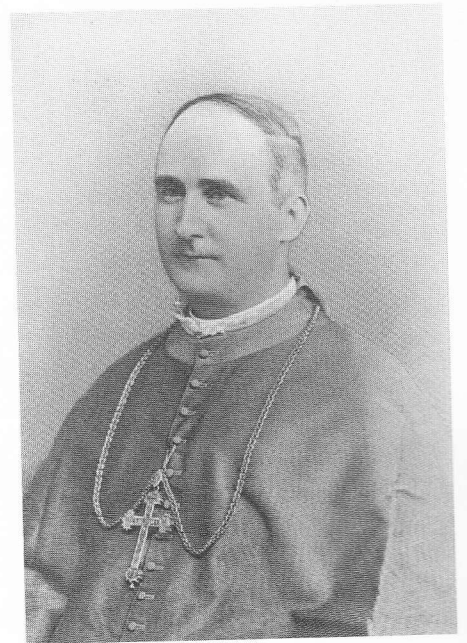
Bishop Harkins's episcopacy (1887-1921) coincided with the period of Rhode Island Catholicism's greatest growth. The state census of 1905, taken midway through Harkins's tenure, revealed that Roman Catholics had become a majority of Rhode Island's population. (RHic X3 8219)

Yet as bishop of the Diocese of Providence from 1887 to 1921—the years of Rhode Island Catholicism's greatest growth, and a time when religion played a much greater role in everyday life than it now does—Harkins probably exerted a stronger influence on the lives of Rhode Islanders than any of his better-known contemporaries. He is unquestionably the most significant figure in the history of Rhode Island Catholicism.

Matthew Harkins was born in Boston to Patrick and Mary Margaret (Kranich) Harkins on 17 November 1845. His parents had sufficient means to send him to Boston Latin High School and then to Holy Cross College, a Jesuit-run institution that had been

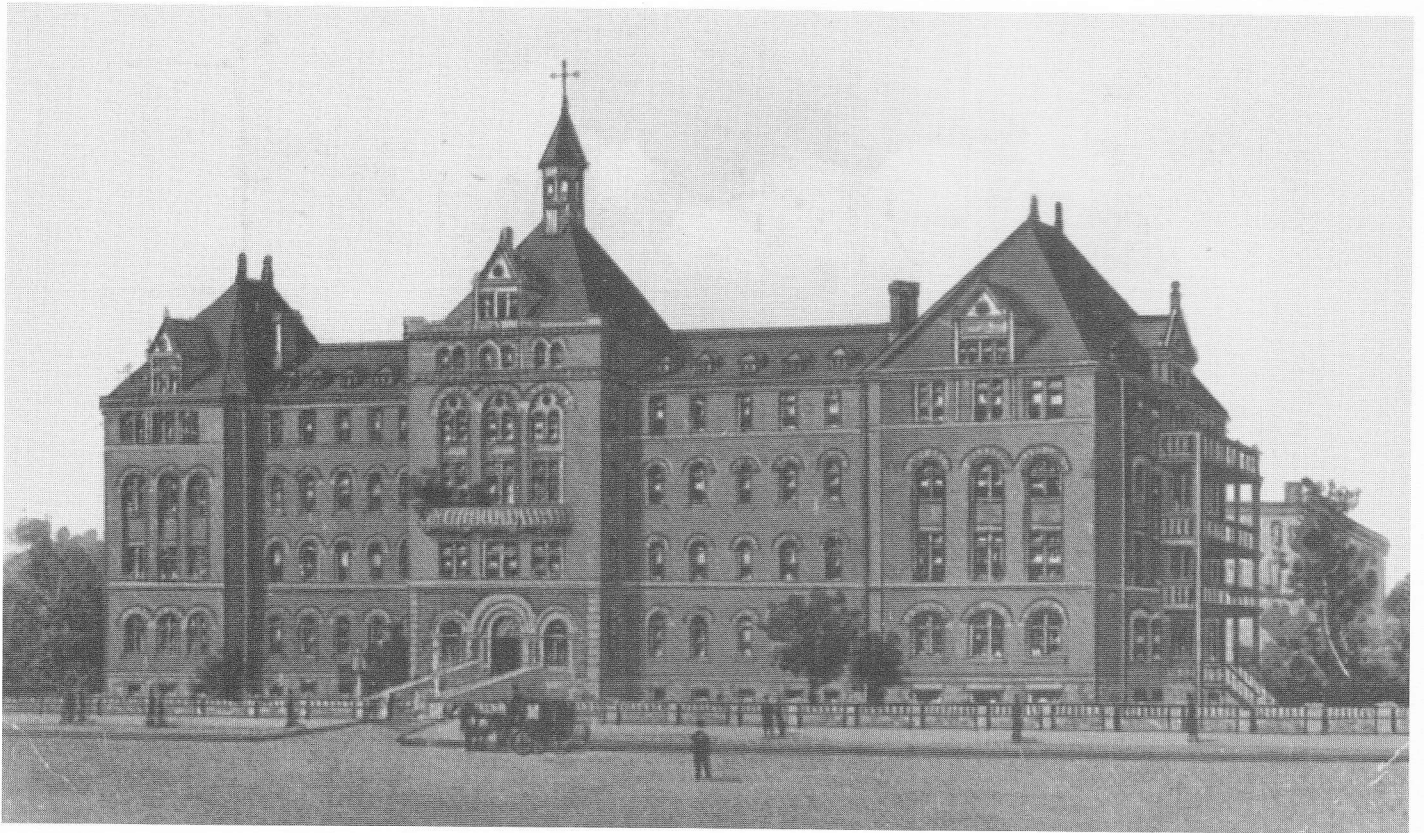
founded in Worcester two years prior to his birth. Like many promising Catholic seminarians of that era, Harkins was sent to France to study for the priesthood. Ordained in Paris on 22 May 1869, he spent over a year at the Gregorian University in Rome, where he engaged in further theological study, witnessed the First Vatican Council, and became conversant in Italian. In 1870 he returned to the Diocese of Boston and was soon assigned to the Immaculate Conception Parish in Salem.

Because of his French education and his fluency in the language, Harkins worked well with the newly arriving French Canadian immigrants. He even organized the French national parish of St. Joseph's in Salem in 1872. Later he served as private theologian to Archbishop John Williams during the famous



Opposite: Detail of a photo of the boys' grammar school graduating class at St. Mary's Academy, Broadway, in 1915. Courtesy of St. Mary's Parish, Providence.

Patrick T. Conley is an attorney-at-law and a professor emeritus of history at Providence College. He would like to thank the Reverend Robert W. Hayman, diocesan historian, for his valuable assistance in the preparation of this essay.



Among the many social agencies established by Harkins, one of the earliest and most enduring was St. Joseph's Hospital on Broad Street in Providence. Founded in 1892 on the old Harris Estate, St. Joseph's created a school of nursing in 1899 under the direction of the Sisters of St. Francis. Courtesy of Patrick T. Conley.

Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, an assembly that advanced, more than any other, the cause of Catholic education. Upon his return from Baltimore the young cleric was named pastor of St. James's Church in Boston's multiethnic Old South End, the most prestigious pastorate in the archdiocese. Then, in February 1887, he was chosen to succeed the recently deceased Thomas F. Hendricken as the second bishop of the Diocese of Providence.

With his consecration in Providence's new cathedral on 14 April 1887, Harkins began the thirty-four-year career that would make him the longest-tenured Catholic bishop in Rhode Island history. During this time he would become renowned for his administrative ability, his tact in handling immigrant assimilation, his establishment of ethnic parishes, and his manner of extending the social and charitable apostolate of the Catholic Church.

This "bishop of the poor," as he was sometimes called, found two diocesan social agencies when he came to Providence in 1887. When he died in 1921, there were more than twenty such agencies, including Hospice St. Antoine, St. Joseph's Hospital, St. Vincent de Paul Infant Asylum, St. Francis Orphanage, Carter Day Nursery, St. Margaret's and St. Maria's homes for working girls, St. Raphael's Industrial Home and School, St. Clare's Home, and the House of the Good Shepherd. These were his legacy to the poor and the socially deprived. Thanks to Harkins, the Diocese of Providence provided more social services than the state itself in the years prior to the New Deal. In fact, Harkins administered so effectively that in 1921 the visiting rector of the American College in Louvain wrote that "Providence is the pearl among the dioceses of the United States."

In addition to his social apostolate, Harkins made major contributions to Catholic education in Rhode Island, for one common thread interwoven

through the fabric of his episcopacy was education. From his farewell sermon in Boston just prior to his consecration to his final major public act, the opening of Providence College, Harkins vigorously affirmed the need for Catholic education. Motivated by apprehensions about the proselytizing of other religions, by a desire to acclimate immigrants to American institutions and to preserve their faith, and by a belief that religion was the “underlying principle” of all knowledge, Harkins endeavored to attain the ideal of “a Catholic school for every Catholic child, and every Catholic child in a Catholic school.” He never wavered from that goal.

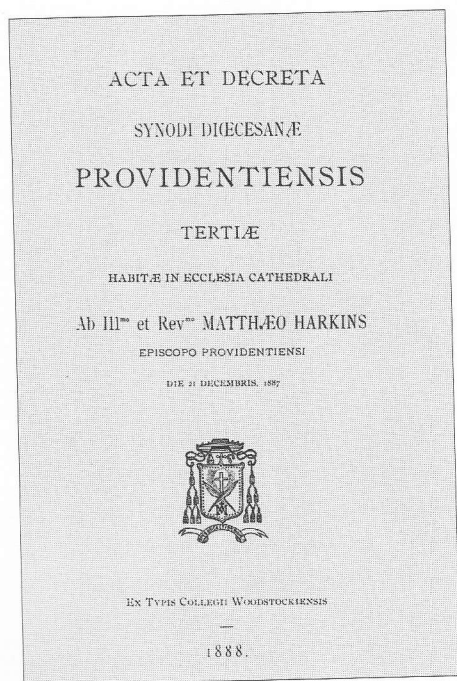


Harkins’s views on Catholic education were undoubtedly influenced by his attendance at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884. At this highly significant gathering, a catalyst for the Baltimore Catechism, great emphasis was placed on Catholic education. Fully a quarter of the council’s decrees dealt with this topic. Detailed regulations were laid down for improving clerical education in major and minor seminaries. The proper basis of instruction was declared to be the system of St. Thomas Aquinas, which Pope Leo XIII was then restoring to its place in the intellectual life of the church. The decision was made to appoint a commission to prepare for the immediate establishment of a “Principal Seminary” for the country, an institution at which priests and other clerics might undertake advanced studies. Out of this project grew the Catholic University of America, opened in Washington in 1889, where Harkins served on several committees and, eventually, on the board of trustees.

Of greatest direct impact on education and the laity, however, were the council’s decrees on parochial schools. Previous conclaves had exhorted on this subject, but Baltimore III issued precise commands. It required that within two years of the promulgation of its decree, a parish school be erected by every church that did not yet possess one, unless the bishop deemed that some delay should be allowed because of unusual difficulties. It commanded Catholic parents to send their children to the parish schools, unless they were clearly able to provide for the Christian education of their offspring at home, or unless, for a sufficient reason—approved by the bishop, and with all the necessary safeguards supplied—it could be proven justifiable for them to send their children to non-Catholic schools. To upgrade parochial school education, the council urged the appointment in each diocese of a board of examiners to test all candidates for teaching positions, and of one or more school commissions, which should periodically visit and inspect each parish school.

These landmark decrees were a great catalyst in promoting the growth of the parochial school system, and Harkins wasted no time as bishop in responding to this stimulus. In the opening year of his episcopacy he convened the Third Synod of the Diocese of Providence to explain the plenary council’s decrees and discuss them with his clergy. Then, by diocesan legislation, he attempted to implement these edicts, and through pastoral and personal letters he urged his clergy to provide “a good Catholic education” for the children of their parishes. His directives to priests and pastors invariably contained some admonition about this pressing need. Epitomizing his concern was his pastoral letter announcing the 1902 opening of the expanded LaSalle Academy (founded in 1871 as a high school for Cathedral Parish); no expense had been spared, he said, in making the academy “an ideal school for the sons of the citizens of

In December 1887 Harkins convened his first diocesan synod to set the agenda for his episcopacy. The acts and decrees of this gathering, published in Latin, showed the influence of the Third Plenary Council on his educational goals. At the beginning of his episcopacy Harkins's diocese included Rhode Island and all of southeastern Massachusetts. Courtesy of Patrick T. Conley.



Providence and vicinity.” Devoting most of the first week of his episcopacy to visiting parochial schools and academies, Harkins told Catholic students to “get all the education you can.” In a sermon entitled “What School to Choose For Children?” delivered at the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul on 14 September 1887, he stressed the advantages of religious over secular education. While acknowledging the existence of an excellent public school system in the state, and admitting the financial burden a Catholic school system would entail for the diocese, he left little doubt concerning his feelings about religion and the intellectual life:

Some will say we think best to send our children to the public school, they can learn their religion in the Sunday School and home. To this statement, I answer, it is not possible to give science in one place and religion in another. We cannot study science without finding that religion is the grand and underlying principle. There is no history in which it is not recorded the plan of Almighty God in the management of the world. All studies, even the so-called positive sciences, point out the limits of religion.

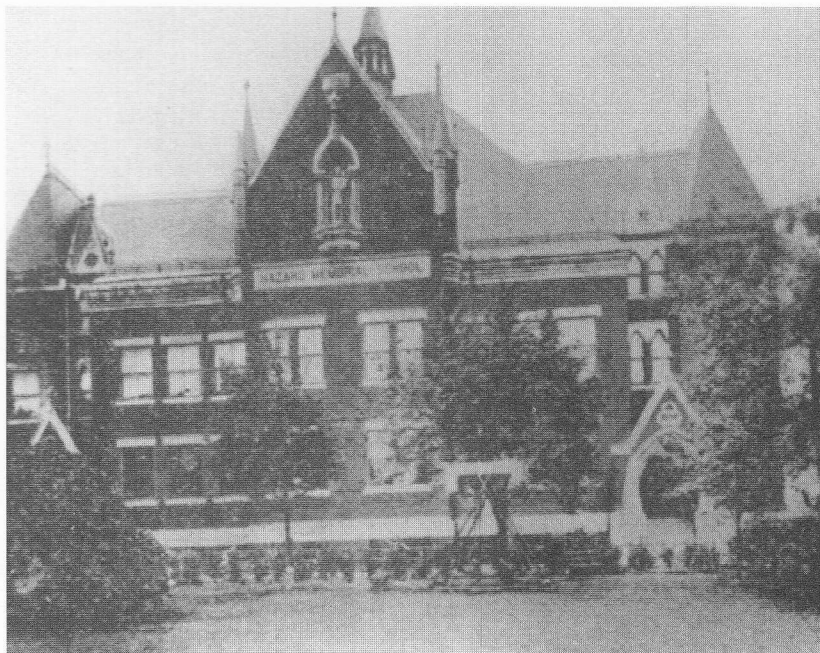
Harkins’s words were matched by his educational deeds. Primarily as a result of his efforts, twenty-nine elementary schools, five secondary schools, and Providence College were established during the period from 1887 through 1920. These figures do not include the schools founded at his behest in the Massachusetts portion of his diocese prior to the creation of the separate Diocese of Fall River in 1904.



Harkins placed his greatest emphasis on the foundation of Catholic education, the parochial elementary school. To assist him in this enterprise, he not only drew upon existing communities—especially the Sisters of Mercy—but also brought more than a dozen other religious orders to Rhode Island.

The first of the new teaching orders to be recruited for the elementary grades was the Sisters of St. Joseph, who came to Newport in 1889 to staff the new school in St. Joseph’s Parish. Founded in France in 1650, this order traced its American ancestry to the Most Reverend Joseph Rosati, the Italian immigrant bishop of St. Louis, who established its first American convent at Carondelet, Missouri, in 1836. During the academic year 1889-90 the hundred or so pupils of St. Joseph’s School were taught by four members of the order at their convent, the former Young estate, on Touro Street. The school’s instant success dramatized the need for an appropriate school building, and one was begun in 1890. The principal benefactor for this enterprise was George Babcock Hazard, a prominent and wealthy Newporter who subsequently converted to Catholicism. In recognition of his support, the new parish school—an imposing three-story brick edifice—was named the Hazard Memorial School when it opened in 1891. The previous year the sisters had expanded their operations to the new Sacred Heart School in Pawtucket. They have since remained within the diocese and staffed both elementary and secondary institutions in Newport, Middletown, Pawtucket, and Warwick.

Another order that began its teaching apostolate in Rhode Island under Harkins was the Congregation of the Presentation of Mary. This group, founded in France in 1796, made its North American establishment at Saint-Hyacinth, Quebec, in 1853. Its first assignment was at St. Ann’s School, Woonsocket, in 1893. In September 1900 the Presentation sisters came to the church school of St. John the Baptist, a Franco-American parish in West Warwick, where they



One of the first parochial schools established after Harkins's initial synod was opened in 1889 in St. Joseph's Parish, Newport, by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The school building, off Touro Street, was dedicated in August 1891 and named for George Hazard, a Newport philanthropist who paid for its construction. Hazard eventually converted to Catholicism. The building was demolished in 1973, and the site, which is to the rear of the Jane Pickens Theater, is now occupied by a parking lot. Courtesy of St. Joseph's Church, Newport.

replaced the Religious of Jesus and Mary. The order, whose specialty was bilingual instruction, went on to staff a dozen schools, most of them in the state's French national parishes.

The Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal was another French Canadian order that came to Rhode Island. Established by Blessed Marguerite Bourgeoys in the 1670s, it was one of the first religious communities founded in America. Pastor Robert J. Sullivan brought the nuns to St. Mary's Academy in Providence in 1890 to replace the Ursulines, who left the diocese because of their inability to maintain a novitiate there. The sisters of Notre Dame subsequently enlarged their educational efforts, but in territorial rather than French national parishes. Their other elementary foundations included St. Anthony's (1912) and St. Sebastian's (1929), both in Providence.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur also arrived in Providence during the early years of Harkins's episcopacy. This group, founded in 1804 at Amiens, France, was introduced into the United States by Bishop John B. Purcell in 1840 and came to Boston eight years later. Among its most notable educational establishments are Trinity College in Washington, D.C., and Emmanuel College in Boston. Pastor Farrell O'Reilly chose this congregation to staff St. Teresa's School in the Manton section of Providence when that school was opened in 1891. At first the nuns taught the girls and the Christian Brothers taught the boys, an arrangement that continued until 1931, when the sisters took over the entire operation. Although the order later extended its efforts to a few schools in Cranston and Warwick, its mainstay was the educational facility at St. Teresa's, where it presided over the education of four generations of students.

Another French Canadian congregation that came to the diocese during the early period of Harkins's administration was the Sisters of St. Ann. Founded in 1848 at Vaudreuil, Quebec, to provide "a thorough and Christian education for children living in the rural districts," the order arrived in the United States in 1870. In 1892 it assumed the teaching duties at Notre Dame School in the parish of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Central Falls, replacing the Sisters of Mercy, who had operated the school since its inception in 1880. Subsequent elementary-level assignments included St. James's School in Manville (1893), where lay teachers were replaced, and St. Matthew's School in Central Falls (1908). The order offered bilingual instruction in English and French at all of these schools.

After a lapse of a dozen years following the entry of the first religious orders, Bishop Harkins approved additional teaching sisterhoods for his diocese. One such group was the Sisters of St. Chretienne, founded in Metz, France, in 1807. The first settlement of this order in the United States occurred at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1904, following repressive actions taken by the French government against religious orders the preceding year. In 1905 the group came to Pawtucket at the invitation of Msgr. Joseph C. Bessette to staff the school of the French national parish of Our Lady of Consolation, which



The boys' grammar school graduating class of 1915 at St. Mary's Academy, Broadway, is shown, above, with diplomas in hand. The Christian Brothers (F.S.C.), who also staffed nearby LaSalle Academy, taught the boys of St. Mary's, while the Sisters of Notre Dame instructed the girls. The girls' grammar school graduating class of 1911 is shown at the right. Courtesy of St. Mary's Parish, Providence.



had opened a decade earlier under the auspices of the Sisters of St. Anne de Lachine. This remained the order's only school in the diocese, although the sisters subsequently established a house of studies in Newport.

The year 1905 also saw the arrival of another teaching order in Rhode Island, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This congregation was of Irish origin, having been founded in Cork by the Venerable Nano Nagle in 1775. It made its American appearance in 1854 in San Francisco. Following pastor Patrick Farrelly's invitation to the order to teach at the new Holy Trinity School in Central Falls, the seven sisters assigned to the project took up residence at Holy Trinity on 7 September 1905, and the school (which contained five grades in seven rooms) opened four days later. For many years this institution remained the sisters'

only full-fledged diocesan educational establishment. Recently, however, the order has undertaken several teaching assignments and has been active in the regional school movement.

In 1912 five schools were opened (the most in any year before or since), and a new order, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, came to the diocese to run what

eventually turned out to be the largest of them—Holy Name, in the Mount Hope section of Providence. The Notre Dame sisters, who had their origins in Munich, Germany, came to Baltimore in 1847 and established their principal American motherhouse in Milwaukee three years later. This order worked mainly in regions with a high German-American population, although its appearance in Providence indicates that it was by no means confined to such areas. For many years Holy Name was the order's only establishment, but in later years the group undertook educational work in South County as well.

CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ESTABLISHED IN RHODE ISLAND, 1860-1920

Year	School	Location
1860	Immaculate Conception	Providence
1874	St. Mary	Providence
	St. Mary	East Providence
1877	St. Edward	Providence
1878	St. Patrick	Valley Falls
1880	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart	Central Falls
	Precious Blood	Woonsocket
1887	St. Charles Borromeo	Providence
1889	St. Jean Baptiste	Arctic
	St. Joseph (Hazard Memorial, 1891)	Newport
1890	Sacred Heart	Pawtucket
	St. James	Manville
1891	St. Teresa	Providence
1893	St. Ann	Woonsocket
	St. Jean Baptiste	Pawtucket
1894	St. James	Arctic
	St. Joseph	Pawtucket
1895	Our Lady of Consolation	Pawtucket
1898	Our Lady of Good Counsel	Phenix
1903	Holy Family	Woonsocket
1905	Holy Trinity	Central Falls
1906	Our Lady of Lourdes	Providence
1908	St. Matthew	Central Falls
1910	St. Aloysius (later called St. Joseph's, then St. Louis)	Woonsocket
1912	Holy Name	Providence
	St. Augustine	Newport
	St. Cecilia	Pawtucket
	St. Anthony	Providence
	Mount St. Francis	Woonsocket
1915	St. Mary	Bristol
	Mercy Home and School	Newport
1916	St. Ambrose	Albion
	Our Lady of Good Help	Mapleville
1917	Sacred Heart	East Providence
	St. Ann	Providence
1918	St. Joseph	Central Falls

The final group of religious teachers to establish a parish school under Harkins was a Polish congregation, the Sisters of St. Bernardine (more formally, the Bernardine Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis), established in 1457 at Cracow, Poland. Originally the order engaged in exterior works of charity, such as care of the sick, but it added teaching to its range of activities as it grew. In 1894 it embarked for the United States to minister to Polish immigrants, who had begun a mass migration to the United States. The order's first American apostolate was concentrated in the mining areas of northeastern Pennsylvania, and it was from the motherhouse in Reading that the first Bernadines came to

St. Joseph's Polish Church in Central Falls to staff its newly opened school in 1918. A few years later they undertook their second and final full-fledged day school at St. Stanislaus's Parish in Woonsocket, but the school survived for only twenty years (1925-1945).

In addition to the aforementioned orders, which were recruited primarily for educational purposes, Harkins made use of several groups who had been imported to staff his social institutions. For example, the Sisters of St. Francis (Glen Riddle), who staffed St. Joseph's Hospital, were enlisted to teach at St. James's Parochial School in Arctic, where they remained from 1902 until 1952, when the Mercy order replaced them; the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary inaugurated an elementary school at St. Francis Orphanage, Woonsocket, in 1912; and the Sisters of Divine Providence, who staffed the St. Vincent de Paul Asylum, assumed the teaching chores at Our Lady of Good Help School in Mapleville (1916) and St. Joseph's School in Natick (1923).

Three orders that were already present in the diocese upon Harkins's arrival were also pressed into service by the bishop to fulfill his educational plans. The Religious of the Holy Union of the Sacred hearts, a French order established in 1826, had come to Fall River in 1886. In 1896 the sisters arrived in Rhode Island to staff the parish school of St. Jean Baptiste, Pawtucket, which had opened three years earlier, and in 1912 they undertook the teaching load at another Pawtucket Franco-American parish, St. Cecelia's.

The Religious of Jesus and Mary was another order that enlarged its sphere of educational activity. The group came to Providence in 1887 to teach in the city's first French Canadian parish, St. Charles Borromeo, and it performed the same function in Providence's second and final French parish, Our Lady of Lourdes, when that school and church opened in Mount Pleasant in 1906. In 1903 this French order also undertook the educational duties in the newly created Holy Family Parish in Woonsocket.

The ever-present Sisters of Mercy (R.S.M.) also expanded their efforts and solidified their position as the premier educational order in the diocese. Although they relinquished some schools in French national parishes in the 1880s and 1890s, these losses were offset by their new undertakings: St. Joseph's, Pawtucket (1894), St. Augustine's, Newport (1912), the Mercy Home and School, Newport (1914), St. Mary's, Bristol (1915), Sacred Heart, East Providence (1917), and St. Ann's, in Providence's North End (1917). This last-mentioned school is especially significant, since it was the first parochial school for Italo-American children in the diocese.

To provide for their own education and spiritual enrichment, the Mercys built larger quarters for their foundation program at Mount St. Rita's Novitiate in Cumberland. After a long search for a site to serve as a summer home for those of its members whose health had become impaired, in 1913 the community purchased the Fiske homestead at Diamond Hill. "The Mount," as it came to be called, was formally opened in 1917, and it gradually evolved into something much more than a summer retreat as it became the novitiate, the teacher-training school, and the retirement home for the local Mercy community.

In addition to these new foundations and assignments, the Mercy order replaced the Sisters of Charity of Mount St. Vincent, New York, at Immaculate Conception School in Providence's North End. With this change, the Sisters of Charity (who, ironically, had succeeded the Mercy order at Immaculate

Conception in 1867) permanently left the diocese, thus joining the Ursulines and the Jesuits as the only departures during Harkins's long episcopacy.

Another notable episode in the development of elementary education occurred with the expansion of the Cathedral Parish's school, founded by Bishop William Tyler in 1845. This school had been housed in the church basement during its early years, and then partly in the Mercy convent and partly in a school building on Lime Street. During the 1860s an additional facility was constructed on South Street to serve the needs of boys in the primary grades who resided at a

Monsignor Anthony Bove, a native of Italy, worked with Harkins to establish a comprehensive educational program at St. Ann's Parish in Providence's North End. In January 1917 Bove opened the first Italo-American parochial school in Rhode Island. His educational complex included a grammar school, an industrial school, a school of domestic science, taught by the Sisters of Mercy, and a nursery school (established in 1914), staffed by five nuns of the Maestre Pie Venerini. Here Bove poses with St. Ann's first graduating class in June 1921. Courtesy of St. Ann's Church, Providence.



distance from the Lime Street building. In 1890, under the guidance of Harkins and rector William Stang (later the first bishop of Fall River), the diffuse educational complex was brought under one roof with the opening of Tyler School on Point Street in South Providence. This institution, under the continuing control of the Mercys, introduced into its upper grades what educational historian Charles Carroll has termed "two novelties in elementary education in Providence—a manual training department for boys and a domestic science department for girls."



The growth of secondary schools during Bishop Harkins's tenure was also quite impressive. In the period from 1860 to 1920, a total of eleven "academies," or high schools, were established in the diocese. Six of these were created under Harkins: St. Joseph's, Newport (1891), Sacred Heart, Pawtucket (1892), St. Claire's, Woonsocket (1909), St. Jean Baptiste, Pawtucket (1907), Sacred Heart, Central Falls (1909), and St. Mary's, in the Olneyville section of Providence (1912). In addition, the bulwarks of Catholic secondary education, St. Xavier's and LaSalle, received expanded facilities, the former in 1897 and 1899 and the latter in 1901, 1917, and 1919. Because of their rapid growth, both of these Providence institutions discontinued instruction at the elementary level, LaSalle in 1907 and St. Xavier's in 1919.

St. Joseph's Parish high school in Newport was the first institution of its kind opened during Harkins's tenure. In 1891 the Sisters of St. Joseph, who staffed

the parish's elementary school, began an academy in the same building. This highly successful venture enrolled nearly three hundred pupils within a year of its founding, necessitating an expansion of its physical plant. Both boys and girls were admitted to St. Joseph's High School until the Catholic high school campaign launched in 1924 by Harkins's successor, William Hickey, brought about the establishment of De La Salle Academy for boys and St. Catherine Academy for girls.

Another venture in secondary education by the Sisters of St. Joseph was begun at Sacred Heart Parish, Pawtucket, in 1892, two years after the sisters had opened the elementary school there. Sacred Heart Academy had a less auspicious start than the Newport high school did, and only four girls and one boy were in the first graduating class in 1896. Because of a need for additional space to accommodate the parish's elementary grades, the fledgling high school was temporarily discontinued, but it was reactivated in 1910 in a renovated building at the corner of Park and Carnation streets. The academy admitted both sexes until Bishop Hickey's educational campaign resulted in the creation of Pawtucket's St. Raphael's Academy for boys in 1924. Sacred Heart then continued as a girls' high school until its closing in the 1960s.

Not until 1907 was the next high school opened. Its site was the French parish of St. Jean Baptiste, in the Woodlawn section of Pawtucket. The new facility was staffed by the Sisters of the Holy Union of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Union des Sacres Couers), the same order that taught in the parish's elementary school.

The next important secondary foundation occurred in Woonsocket in 1908. There the Religious of Jesus-Marie prepared for their twenty-fifth anniversary in the diocese by creating a convent or boarding school that evolved over two decades into St. Claire High School. This institution developed from a proposal in 1907 by the community's leader, Mother St. Etienne, that a boarding school be established in Precious Blood Parish. The pastor, Monsignor Father Charles Dauray, felt that the best way to implement such a plan was to convey the parish school property to the sisters and let them own and operate the educational facility themselves. In May 1907 the transfer was accomplished, and the title was vested in St. Claire's School Corporation. The sisters thereupon applied to Bishop Harkins for permission to inaugurate their girls' boarding school.

On 5 September 1908, while they were waiting for episcopal approval, Mother St. Etienne died. After attending the funeral, Harkins decided to approve the nun's final project. Once Mother St. Peter Claver succeeded to the office of superior, progress was rapid. On 27 November 1908, about two months after her appointment, Mother Claver was able to implement plans to admit a limited number of resident students to the school for secondary-level instruction. Only seven young ladies were enrolled at first, but by 1910 the number of boarders had increased to thirty-nine. Since the convent housing the entire educational operation in the parish had become inadequate, the sisters began construction of a new school on the Carrington Avenue slope of the premises. The Academie de Jesus-Marie was ready at the opening of the fall term in 1911, and it became the parish school for all the younger children. The convent was then occupied exclusively by the resident high school students and the sisters.

The boarding school, with its expanded facilities, proved to be very popular, and it attracted students from all over New England. Soon it was made avail-

In 1908 Mère St. Pierre Claver (Mother St. Peter Claver), of the Religious of Jesus-Marie, began a boarding school for girls in Woonsocket's Precious Blood Parish. Over the next two decades the school evolved under her direction into St. Claire's High School. By the time the high school was dedicated in 1927, Mère Claver had been elevated to the leadership of the entire order of Jesus and Mary in North America as its mother provincial. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8217).



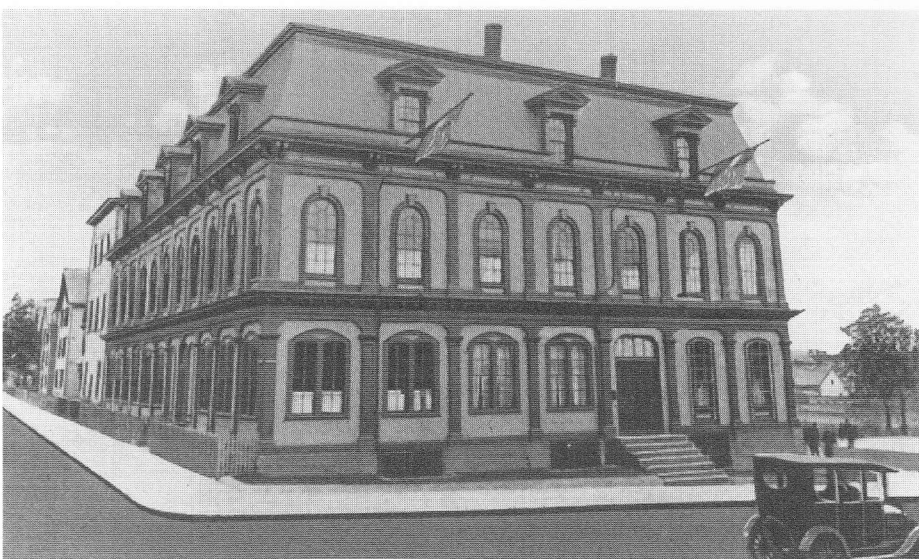
able to day students as well. By 1919 it had become so crowded that sixty students were denied admission. At this juncture the sisters inaugurated another building drive, a campaign that culminated in the dedication of St. Claire High School in November 1927—the flowering of the small but promising boarding school opened by Mother St. Peter Claver nineteen years before. Mother Claver's notable leadership in this educational venture was recognized in 1926 by her colleagues and superiors when she was appointed mother provincial of the entire order of Jesus and Mary for the United States and Canada.

During this era a French order for men, the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, made one of its numerous contributions to Catholic education in Rhode Island by establishing a boys' high school in the parish of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (Notre Dame de Sacre Coeur) in Central Falls. The brothers, who specialized in bilingual education, had made their first diocesan appearance in 1898 when Father Dauray brought five of them to Precious Blood, Woonsocket, to instruct the boys of the parish between the ages of eight and fifteen.

The brothers were so successful in their work at the College of the Sacred Heart (as Precious Blood's school for boys was called) that in 1901 pastor Joseph H. Beland invited them to Central Falls to teach the older boys of Notre Dame Parish (the girls and younger boys would continue under the direction of the Sisters of St. Ann). The parish school had approximately eight hundred students when the brothers arrived, but enrollment increased steadily over the next decade and reached twelve hundred by 1910. At that juncture Monsignor Beland constructed a new school, which was then the largest in the diocese.

The brothers expanded their operations in Notre Dame Parish by opening Notre Dame College (i.e., high school) in 1909. The first classes were conducted in a gymnasium, but after a year the operations moved to the old parish building on Broad Street, Central Falls. The college, eventually known as Sacred Heart College and then as Sacred Heart Commercial High School, conducted a boarding school for boys until the opening of Mount St. Charles Academy in Woonsocket in 1924, when it became a day school. Sacred Heart endured for half a century until outmoded facilities and the financial problems besetting Catholic education during the 1960s forced its closing.

Sacred Heart College, Central Falls, depicted on this 1920s postcard, was in reality a high school for the boys of Notre Dame Parish. The school was begun by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in 1909. This impressive three-story, wood-frame, mansard-roofed structure, which was located on Broad Street, has been demolished. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8218).



The sixth and final secondary school established under Harkins was St. Mary's Academy of the Visitation in Providence. Founded in 1912, this institution was the product of the Sisters of Notre Dame (Montreal), who had maintained the parish elementary school since coming to the diocese in 1890. Classes were initially conducted in the convent, where the study hall had been converted into two classrooms, but by 1914 a large brick building on Bainbridge Avenue was acquired to house the academy, which was popularly known as St. Mary's, Broadway. By 1916, when the first high school graduation took place, twenty-two Notre Dame sisters were engaged in educational work at various levels in St. Mary's Parish. Assisting them in their efforts were the Christian Brothers, who had come to instruct the boys in the upper grades of the grammar school in 1905 and would remain at the Broadway parish for more than half a century.

In addition to the traditional elementary schools and academies, a number of vocationally oriented educational programs were inaugurated under Catholic auspices during Harkins's episcopacy. Most of these were associated with social agencies or institutions. The more notable vocational projects included St. Joseph's Hospital's School of Nursing (1899); two schools for domestic arts, one in St. Mary's Parish, Pawtucket, maintained from 1899 to 1923 under the auspices of pastor John C. Tennian, and the other in St. James Parish in the Arctic section of West Warwick; a training program for delinquent girls at the House of the Good Shepherd in Providence, staffed by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; and three "industrial" schools for girls, all in Italian sections of Providence, operated in conjunction with nursery and day-care facilities at St. Raphael's Home by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (1909), at St. Ann's Day Nursery by the Venerini nuns (1913), and at St. Bartholomew's Day Nursery by the Pallottine Sisters (1913).

To keep the teachers themselves up to date, a rural summer retreat house was chartered in July 1914 "for the purpose of maintaining a place of study and recuperation for Religious engaged in the teaching and education of youth." Located in the Oaklawn section of Cranston, this institute, St. Matthew's Home and School, was short-lived, but it was the forerunner of later diocesan teacher-training efforts, and an example of the tremendous diversity of the Catholic educational system.



The vigorous strides forward in elementary and secondary education in Rhode Island under Harkins were reflected in rising Catholic school enrollments. For example, from 1888 to 1892—the first five full years of his episcopacy, when most of the new orders came—enrollment at the parochial schools increased from 7,223 students to 9,280, a percentage of gain almost four times greater than that at the state's public schools. By 1914 Charles Carroll was able to report that Catholic school attendance had risen to 17,000 and that 350 teachers (including some laity) were employed regularly in the system's thirty-five registered schools. In 1921, at the end of Harkins's tenure, 22,000 students were being taught in the Catholic schools of the diocese. Ironically, this prodigious effort fell short of the ideal; a nationwide survey of Catholic education published in 1917 revealed that half of all Catholic children in the state were attending public schools. Nonetheless, much progress had been made to implement the Baltimore decrees.

To keep pace with the expansion in parochial school enrollment and to observe the guidelines promulgated by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, Harkins took steps to centralize control of education at the diocesan level. Prior to the council, parochial schools were under the direction of their pastors, and private schools maintained by religious orders were directed by the orders' provincials or superiors. Both types of schools were ultimately subject to the bishop of the diocese. To achieve greater efficiency in the organization and administration of parish schools, Baltimore III decreed that a central school board should be erected in each diocese, with subordinate "district" boards to assist it. The chief function of the central agency (the "Diocesan Board of Examination") would be the certification of teachers and the inspection of schools. After the 1884 council, the board system became the accepted norm of diocesan school organization.

Harkins lost no time in implementing the council's educational scheme. In the third synod of the diocese, which he convoked in December 1887, Harkins established a central school board, headed by the vicar general and composed of priests who were "conversant with school affairs." It was this agency's duty to visit the Catholic schools of the diocese and report to the bishop on their status once or twice a year. No school was to be certified without the approval of Harkins, who was determined to make the quality of his educational institutions at least equal to those of the public schools.

In their school visitations the priests were equipped with a uniform questionnaire covering such diverse topics as textbooks, examinations, time devoted to Christian doctrine, discipline, lighting, ventilation, and toilet facilities. The standards were rather exacting, and the quality of the schools improved markedly. According to one contemporary Sister of Mercy, writing in 1889, "The venerable barns in which the truths of the Catholic faith were first taught to the youth of Rhode Island began gradually to disappear, and the priests seemed to vie with each other as to who would erect the handsomest structures for their children." By 1914 Charles Carroll could observe that "the parochial schools, generally, are housed in finely constructed and well-equipped school houses, comparing favorably with public school buildings of the same period." Two years later the diocesan school board was able to inform Harkins that the physical attributes of Catholic schools "compare very favorably, and in some cases, excel the appointments of the public schools of the same town or city."

Harkins was also interested in upgrading the quality of instruction. One of the decrees promulgated by his synod called for the appointment of a separate committee to screen prospective teachers—both clerical and lay—by means of a written examination covering the usual subjects of instruction. Before assuming positions in the diocese, all teaching personnel had to secure the approval and certification of the committee. This was an important safeguard, since private school teachers were not as yet certified by either the towns or the state.

In the area of curriculum, however, no uniform diocesan plan existed at this time. According to the diocesan report of 1916, "Not only the number of grades, but also the subject matter, and the textbooks in use are strongly influenced by the public school systems of the city or town in which the parochial school is situated."



Relations between private and public education and between private education and government underwent important changes during the Harkins era, when Catholic schools came under a considerable degree of public supervision. The existing trend toward separation between public and private schools was reversed by a state truancy law enacted in 1883. By permitting school attendance at "approved" private schools in lieu of attendance at public schools, this measure partially revived the pre-1876 right of school committees to inspect parochial schools. In 1884 the state board of education recommended that private and parochial schools "should in some way and by some legislation be brought under a system of supervision similar to that of the public schools." In 1889 the commissioner of public schools proposed that school registers be supplied to private schools and that reports be required from these institutions.

Such recommendations bore fruit in the period from 1892 to 1894. Under a law enacted in 1892, all private schools were required to register with the state board of education and to submit to the board an annual report showing the number of pupils enrolled, the average attendance, and the number of teachers employed. In 1893 local school committees were given permission to approve a private school "only when the teaching is in the English language, and when they are satisfied that such teaching is thorough and efficient, and then persons in charge of said school shall keep the record of attendance" in a diligent and faithful manner. Fortunately for the French parochial schools, the English language requirement was largely overlooked by the local school committees in areas like Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Pawtucket, where the French population was substantial. The controversial Republican-sponsored Peck Act of 1922 would upset this arrangement by substituting *state* supervision of instruction for local control, thus causing an uproar, with significant political repercussions, in the French community.

In 1894 another important educational measure was enacted: the pre-1876 tax exemption for private schools was restored by a statute that excluded from taxation private school buildings and the land occupied by them, not exceeding one acre, provided such schools were not conducted for profit. Like the truancy law of 1883, this measure gave public school officials the right to visit and inspect private and parochial schools.

The relation between the tax and truancy laws and the right of public supervision has been succinctly stated by Charles Carroll, a leading Catholic lawyer as well as the authoritative historian of public education in Rhode Island:

The exemption and truancy laws of the state effectually place matters under supervision of state and municipal school officers. On penalty of forfeiting tax exemption, a by no means inconsiderable item in school budgets, these schools are open to visit and inspection by state and city or town school officers. Attendance at them is accepted in lieu of attendance at free public schools only when courses of study and standards of instruction are approved by local school committees as substantially equivalent to public school standards.

It is probably more than coincidence, however, that the legislation of 1892-94 establishing closer supervision over Rhode Island's parochial schools coincided with the campaign of the American Protective Association (APA) to secure tighter controls over Catholic education in Massachusetts. Supervision of parochial schools by the state was, in fact, a general aim of the nativistic and anti-Catholic APA, and it seems likely that the organization influenced the

movement toward closer surveillance of parochial schools in Rhode Island, a movement that made gains as a result of the school laws of 1892 and 1893. On the other hand, the APA actively opposed the tax exemption law of 1894, but owing to the persistence of Harkins and the incessant advocacy of Charles E. Gorman, a prominent Catholic lawyer and politician, its protest was in vain.

Bishop Harkins was willing to concede the state's right to inspect Catholic schools, but he was cool towards further governmental controls. In 1900 he was asked by politician Hugh Carroll for an opinion about pending legislation that would establish closer state supervision over all schools. Harkins's response was typically candid. "I am certainly not in favor of the proposed state law," he told Carroll. "When the state makes an appropriation for the support of private schools it will be time enough to argue right of supervision."

Harkins did not succeed in obtaining direct public funding for his school system, of course, but he was able to reap some benefits from governmental programs. The bishop gave a strong endorsement to Dr. Charles V. Chapin, Rhode Island's superintendent of health, when this noted pioneer of public medicine offered to approach the state health committee concerning a proposal to include parochial schools in its medical inspection program. The plan was approved by the committee in April 1909, and it was legally enacted in 1911.

The bishop knew that despite his efforts at least half of the Catholic school-age children in his diocese attended public schools. It was of great concern to him, therefore, that public educational agencies be responsive and sympathetic to the needs of Catholic students. In 1892 he complained to Thomas Stockwell, the Rhode Island commissioner of public schools, that the state board of education lacked Catholic representation. Eighteen years later, when there was still no improvement, he expressed dismay to Brown University president William H. P. Faunce about the lack of Catholic representation on either the state board of education or the board of trustees of Rhode Island State College. Harkins pointed out that a majority of Rhode Island's school-age children were Catholic, yet "ostracism of Catholics in the educational boards of the state still continues."



Harkins's concern for education was not confined to the elementary and secondary levels. Just as his predecessor, Bishop Thomas Hendricken, had dreamed of building a stately cathedral, a dream brought to fruition with the construction of the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, Harkins dreamed of building a college.

That Harkins had an abiding concern for Catholic higher education was evident throughout his episcopacy. He vigorously supported the establishment of the Catholic University of America, which opened in 1889, and in 1903 his commitment was acknowledged by an appointment to its board of trustees. To maintain the fledgling institution, he inaugurated a very successful annual fund-raising campaign. The 1903 appeal resulted in a diocesan contribution of five thousand dollars, the largest sum raised for the Catholic University in any diocese in the country. This generosity, a source of great gratification for Harkins, continued for the remainder of his tenure as bishop. But despite his connection with the Washington institution, Harkins constantly and ardently desired a college for the people of his Providence diocese; and when he attained that goal in 1919, he hailed it as "the crowning achievement" of his episcopacy.

Actually, the idea of a Catholic college in Providence had existed for decades. In April 1877 Bishop Hendricken had invited the Jesuit order to Rhode Island for the purpose of establishing a men's college similar to those that the order had established in nearby cities, Holy Cross in Worcester and Boston College in Boston. During their period of preparation the Jesuits were given charge of St. Joseph's Church in the Fox Point neighborhood of Providence. Among those who staffed this parish was Patrick Francis Healy, S.J., a rector of Georgetown University and the brother of Harkins's friend and sponsor Bishop James A. Healy of Portland, Maine. When plans fell short of fruition, at least partially because of the proximity of Holy Cross and Boston College, the Jesuit fathers left the Providence diocese in January 1899.

But Harkins was determined to establish a college, and he communicated this goal to other members of the New England clergy. Bishop Louis Walsh of Portland, Maine, recalled that Bishop Harkins had the idea of a Catholic college "strongly entrenched in his mind, almost from the beginning of his episcopacy."

After the departure of the Jesuits, Harkins gave some consideration to the Christian Brothers as the order to staff his contemplated college. Encouraged by their success at Manhattan College, the brothers themselves assumed some of the initiative. In 1909 they requested that the charter of LaSalle Academy be amended to allow the school to award higher academic degrees, and they even purchased a tract of land as a potential college site; but the project was soon abandoned.

The bishop resumed his quest for a Catholic college in 1910, when he invited the Dominicans of the American Province of St. Joseph to Providence. Actually the Dominicans were no strangers to his diocese, for in Fall River (which, with New Bedford, was included in the diocese until 1904) French Dominicans of a different province had staffed St. Anne's and St. Dominic's churches since 1887. Harkins's initial overture to the friars to come as teachers, however, met failure when the order's grand master in Rome, Father Hycinthe-Marie Cormier, and his advisors expressed reservations because of "conscience trouble" occasioned by the order's recent establishment of Aquinas College in Columbus, Ohio. The primary educational role of the Dominicans, they claimed, was to prepare men for the priesthood, not to establish and operate full-fledged colleges for the laity.

Dominicans from the Province of St. Joseph did come to Providence in 1911 to establish a parish near North Main Street close to the site of the old "Halfway House," which the pioneer priests of the diocese had used as a base for their apostolate to Providence and Pawtucket Catholics early in the nineteenth century. This parish, dedicated to St. Raymond, was to be run by the Dominicans in concert with an entity called The Dominican Fathers School Corporation, which was chartered in November 1911 for "religious and educational" purposes. Father Cormier's opposition aborted the college venture at St. Raymond's, despite the wishes of Harkins and the preliminary work of Father Matthew L. Heagan, the provincial of the Province of St. Joseph.

In 1915 the proposed college was discussed in informal correspondence between Harkins and Father Raymond Meagher, the new Dominican provincial. In October of that year Meagher informed Harkins that a priest from Rome, who was analyzing the Dominicans' financial status, had suggested that "it would be advisable and most effectual . . . to have a formal invitation pre-

sented by the Bishop [Harkins] to the [Dominican] Fathers. . . . This document could then be sent to Rome with the petition of the chapter." Responding immediately to this advice, Bishop Harkins extended an invitation to the Dominicans "to found within the limits of the Diocese of Providence a college," and he further stipulated that he would give the order "a certain tract of land situated within ten minutes" of the center of Providence, "said land measuring eleven acres . . . and in a healthy location."

The urgency that Bishop Harkins felt about the need for establishing a local Catholic college derived in part from his fear of religious proselyting at Brown University. Extremely sensitive to the success enjoyed by that prestigious Ivy League school, he was anxious to minimize what he termed the "threat offered to the faith of Catholic youth in the diocese who are increasingly attending Brown."

The reaction of American Dominicans to Harkins's proposal was immediate and positive. "This is a wonderful opportunity for us in every way—but in particular from the standpoint of vocations," Father Meagher wrote. Referring to the order's requirement that those seeking admittance to the Dominican novitiate have completed at least one college course, and the fact that only one novice from the Providence area had met that requirement in 1915, Meagher declared that "we must do something to provide for this deficiency and Providence College can do it."

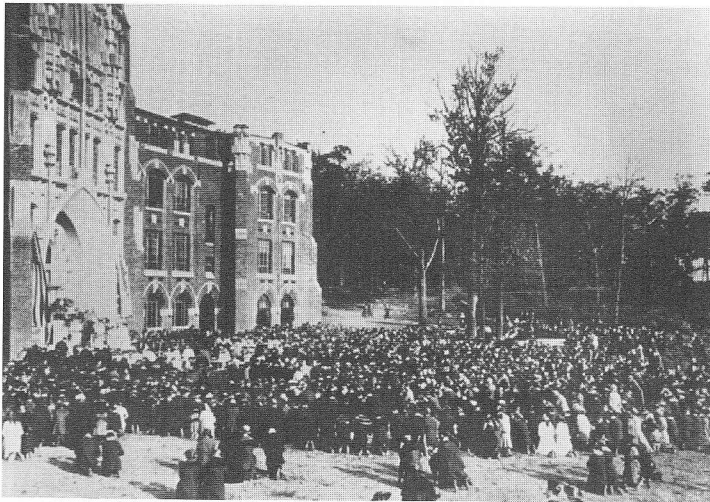
The cautious Father Cormier reluctantly acquiesced in the request of the American Dominicans, but the receipt of his response was delayed when the liner *Anacoma*, carrying the documents of approval, was sunk in the Mediterranean en route to the United States. A second copy reached Father Meagher from war-torn Europe at the end of January 1916.

Moving quickly, Father Meagher dispatched Aquinas College president Father Albert Casey to Providence in March 1916. Casey was given the responsibility for the construction of the new college on the eleven acres of land, at Eaton Street and River Avenue, that Harkins had acquired. (Later Casey would be given charge of the parish of St. Pius, which was created in 1918 to serve the spiritual needs of Catholics in the Elmhurst area, where the college is located.) In notifying Bishop Harkins of Casey's assignment, Meagher asked Harkins to discuss with Casey "all the possibilities of this new foundation, and to give him any ideas which you may wish to have carried out in this new college."

The legal and political machinery for the incorporation of Providence College was prepared in 1916 under the advice and direction of attorney Patrick P. Curran, Father Meagher, and the aging Bishop Harkins. When the 1917 General Assembly session began, events moved swiftly. On 18 January a bill to grant a state charter for Providence College was introduced into the Rhode Island House of Representatives by John I. Devlin, a Providence Democrat. The measure unanimously passed the House on 2 February, sailed through the Senate four days later, and was signed by Governor R. Livingston Beeckman on 14 February—ten days before Rome issued its formal approval for the college as a project of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph.

Beginning his quest for funds to build and staff the college, Harkins himself made the first donation to the building fund, a \$10,000 gift. The Dominican order responded with a \$25,000 donation and a proviso that "it may be possible to add to this amount." During the next six months, as construction of Harkins Hall was undertaken, the people of the diocese contributed generously;

On 25 May 1919 Bishop Matthew Harkins celebrated this mass of dedication at the portals of Providence College's first building, Harkins Hall. The original purpose of Providence College—to provide higher education with a Christian perspective to aspiring young men from Rhode Island's Catholic immigrant community—is captured in this photo. Courtesy of the Providence College Archives.



of the more than \$115,000 raised for Providence College between March and October 1917, over half (\$64,000) came from parish contributions.

The Right Reverend Peter E. Blessing, president-elect of the Providence College Corporation, set the tone and the theme for the fund-raising campaign. Addressing a group of prominent Catholic Rhode Islanders, he contended that Providence College “was to be primarily a layman’s school in which the citizens of the State were to be prepared to meet the responsibilities of life in the learned professions. . . . As such it naturally made its appeal for present support and future guidance, and counsel to the laymen of the State.” Over \$200,000 was eventually donated or pledged, and by May 1919 less than \$46,000 remained to be raised.

The formal opening of Providence College, under the presidency of Father Casey, was originally scheduled for 25 September 1918, but national wartime mobilization delayed the event until 25 May 1919. That day not only represented “the crowning achievement” of Harkins’s episcopacy but also marked Harkins’s golden jubilee, his fiftieth anniversary as a priest. With ideal weather prevailing, the seventy-three-year-old bishop of Providence pronounced his blessing on Providence College before a sizable and grateful audience.

Instruction commenced with a freshman class of seventy-five the following September. Included in this group was Vincent C. Dore, a man who would enter the Dominican order and rise to the positions of seventh president and first chancellor of the college. Father Dore came to exemplify the ideal of community service, a hallmark of

Providence College during the first half-century of its existence. The beneficial impact that PC has had on the state and the diocese has proven to be one of Matthew Harkins’s most enduring legacies.



Bishop Harkins’s energetic labors to expand the educational and social role of his church gradually lessened as age and illness overtook him. His diminished capacity prompted the appointment of a coadjutor bishop with the right of succession to function as administrator of the Diocese of Providence. On 10 April 1919 Harkins’s heir apparent, William Augustine Hickey, was consecrated in the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul.

The final two years of Harkins’s thirty-four-year episcopacy were relatively uneventful for him, as Bishop Hickey assumed actual control of diocesan affairs. The end for Harkins came peacefully on 25 May 1921, the fifty-second anniversary of his ordination as a priest.

When Matthew Harkins had first heard of his selection as bishop of Providence, his reaction, recorded in his diary, was characteristically humble but uncharacteristically apprehensive: “This news causes me a great sorrow. I feel utterly unworthy of such a dignity and incapable of properly discharging its duties. What shall I do? God only knows.” Time has proven that Harkins was a far greater administrator and educator than he was a prophet or prognosticator.

Historiographical Note

Information for this essay has been drawn principally from materials in the archives of the Diocese of Providence, especially Harkins's diary, the files of the Providence *Visitor* (the diocesan newspaper), miscellaneous parish histories, and histories of the religious orders that staffed Rhode Island's Catholic schools, especially Barbara C. Jencks, ed., *Christ's Own: A Descriptive Story of the Forty Religious Orders for Women in the Diocese of Providence* (1949), and *Seventy-Five Years in the Passing with the Sisters of Mercy, Providence, Rhode Island, 1851-1926* (1926).

Also of considerable value were Rev. Americo R. Lapati, "A History of Catholic Education in Rhode Island" (doctoral dissertation, Boston College, 1958), and the writings of historian and educator Charles Carroll, a contemporary of Harkins and a noted Catholic layman. Relevant information appears in Carroll's *School Law of Rhode Island* (1914), *Public Education in Rhode Island* (1918), and *Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy*, 4 volumes (1932), his fact-laden survey of Rhode Island history.

Background information on the development of the Catholic Church and its school system in Rhode Island prior to the Harkins episcopacy can be found in Patrick T. Conley and Matthew J. Smith, *Catholicism in Rhode Island: The Formative Era* (1976), a popularly written, illustrated history covering the period to the creation of the Diocese of Providence in 1872, and Rev. Robert W. Hayman, *Catholicism in Rhode Island and the Diocese of Providence, 1780-1886* (1982), a detailed scholarly analysis that began as a doctoral dissertation under my direction. Father Hayman, the historian of the Diocese of Providence, has written a second volume, soon to be published, surveying the Harkins years; hopefully this book-length treatment will give Bishop Harkins the prominence in the history of American Catholicism that this energetic prelate so richly deserves. At present, however, the fullest account of Harkins's life is contained in an anonymous and obscure booklet entitled *Providence, R.I., Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral: Official Souvenir . . . Containing . . . Sketches of the Lives of . . . Right Reverend Thomas F. Hendricks, D.D., Right Reverend Matthew Harkins, D.D. . . .* (n.d.).

Rev. Thomas F. Cullen, *The Catholic Church in Rhode Island* (1936), carries the story of local Catholicism to 1936. Although episodic, this volume contains important factual data on the parish schools and the religious orders that taught in these institutions. Similar in format and value is Rev. Austin Dowling, "The Diocese of Providence," in William Byrne et al., *History of the Catholic Church in the New England States*, 2 vols. (1899), 1:351-464.

Historians have not only neglected Bishop Harkins; they have also bypassed Rhode Island history for the years of Harkins's episcopacy. No scholarly survey of Rhode Island in the so-called Gilded Age and Progressive Era has been written, and except for two dissertations there are no book-length monographs on the major topics touched on by this essay. The exceptions are Donna T. McCaffrey, "The Origins and Early History of Providence College through 1947" (doctoral dissertation, Providence College, 1983), and Mary Cobb Nelson, "The Influence of Immigration on Rhode Island Politics, 1865-1910" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1954).

Scholarly articles relating to my topic are also scarce. The most useful was Donna Thomas, "The Providence *Visitor* and Nativist Issues, 1916-1924," *Rhode Island History* 38 (1979): 51-62. Two specialized studies of public education in Providence during Harkins's tenure were also consulted with profit: Barbara Tucker Cervone, "Rounding-Up the Children: Compulsory Education Enforcement in Providence, Rhode Island, 1883-1935" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1983), and Ari Joel Perlmann, "Education and the Social Structure of an American City: Social Origins and Educational Attainments in Providence, Rhode Island, 1880-1925" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1981).

Good general accounts of Catholic education in the United States include J. A. Burns, *The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the United States* (1912); J. A. Burns and Bernard J. Kohlbrenner, *A History of Catholic Education in the United States* (1937); Glen Gabert, Jr., *In Hoc Signo?: A Brief History of Catholic Parochial Education in America* (1973); Harold A. Buetow, *Of Singular Benefit: The Story of Catholic Education in the United States* (1970); Edward J. Power, *Catholic Education in America: A History* (1972); and Neil G. McCluskey, ed., *Catholic Education in America: A Documentary History* (1964).

On the educational significance of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, see Bernard J. Meiring, *Educational Aspects of the Legislation of the Councils of Baltimore* (1978); Francis P. Cassidy, "Catholic Education in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore," *Catholic Historical Review* 34 (1949): 257-305, 414-36; Peter Guilday, *A History of the Councils of Baltimore, [1791-1884]* (1932); and *The Memorial Volume: A History of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, November 9-December 7, 1884* (1885).

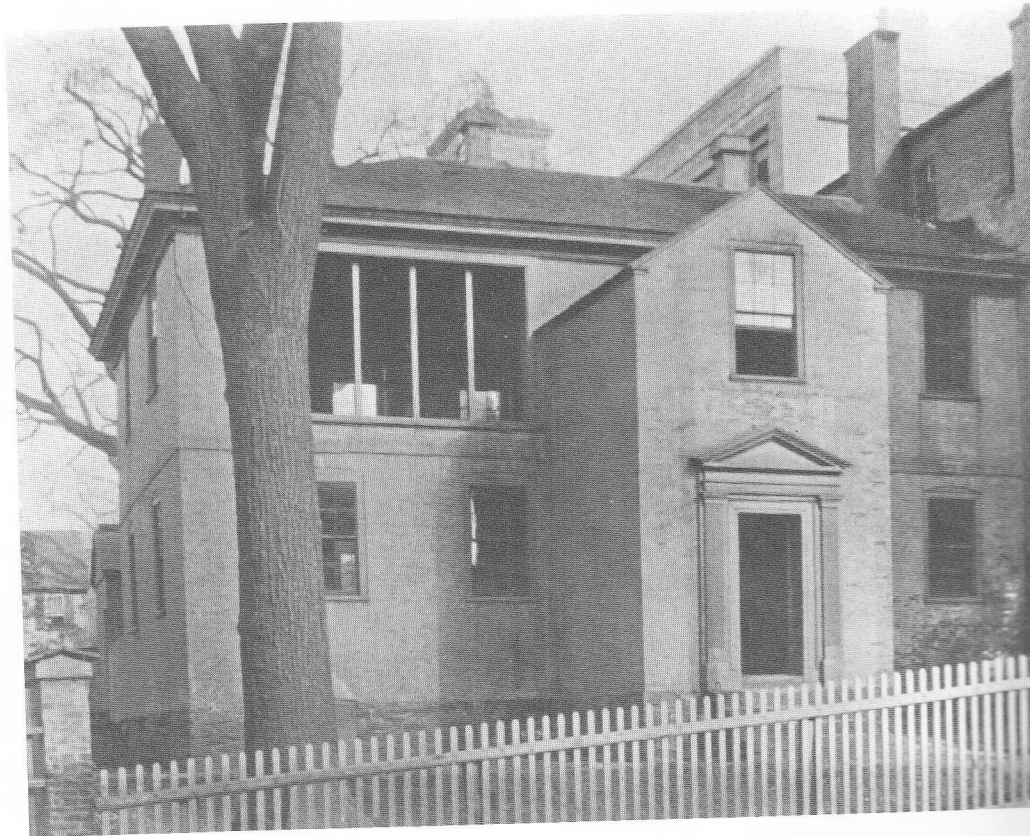


Combating Tuberculosis in Schoolchildren: Providence's Open-Air Schools

RICHARD A. MECKEL

In 1957 the Providence School Committee resolved to drop the name “fresh air rooms” for the classes in which it placed elementary-school children who required special education because of some chronic or temporary physical condition.¹ In so doing, it eliminated the last vestige of a program that Providence had pioneered in the early part of the century, a program for combating tuberculosis by providing a unique classroom environment and daily regimen for schoolchildren inflicted with or at risk of developing the disease.

The nation's first open-air school began operating in the old Meeting Street schoolhouse in Providence in 1908. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8196).



Opposite: Pupils at the Summit Street Open-Air School in Pawtucket, 1910. Courtesy of the Spaulding House Research Library Collection.

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That program began on a cold day near the end of January 1908, when the first open-air school in the United States began operating in the old Meeting Street schoolhouse on the East Side of Providence. Located in a large room on the second story of the building (now the headquarters of the Providence Preservation Society), this new school—actually an ungraded class limited to twenty students—had several novel features. Perhaps most striking was that the brick wall on the southern side of the room had been removed and replaced with a wall of windows, hinged at the top and capable of being raised against the ceiling by



A sitting-out bag and heavy outer clothing helped keep students warm during the winter months. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8200).

means of cords and pulleys. Except in driving snow or rain, these windows were kept wide open. At the other side of the room were two stoves, one for cooking and one for heating, though the latter barely kept the temperature of the room above freezing on the coldest winter days. Between the windows and the stoves were desks bolted to movable platforms. Here sat the children, outfitted in wool sweaters, mittens, caps, and felt overshoes and encased in "Eskimo" or "sitting-out" bags, which resembled present-day sleeping bags. Ranging in age from six to thirteen, the children had been selected for this special school because they were sickly, anemic, and undernourished, apparently suffering from the early signs of tuberculosis.

Although the curriculum was essentially that taught to other public school children, the work load was light and instruction was individual. Interspersed during the day were such untaxing exercises as arm raising and singing, and there were frequent periods of rest. A hot meal of soup, sometimes supplemented with eggs, milk, and pudding, was served at mid-morning and again at noon. Unlike regular classes, in this classroom the progress of pupils was gauged by physical as well as academic standards. Once a week the children were examined by a physician and a nurse, who weighed them, checked them for glandular swelling, measured their chest expansion, and drew blood to be tested for hemoglobin content.²

The novel features of the new school reflected its chief purpose: to build up the strength and vigor of schoolchildren who were in the early stages of tuberculosis or who were considered at risk of developing the disease, while also providing enough instruction so that they did not fall behind in their studies. The product of a joint effort by the Providence League for the Suppression of Tuberculosis and the Providence school system, the school had its genesis in an open-air camp for tuberculous children that had been conducted on a suburban estate during the summer of 1907 by two Providence physicians active in social welfare and public health work. One of these was Mary S. Packard, a tuberculosis specialist who had helped found the Providence antituberculosis organization. The other was Ellen Stone, the daughter of architect Alfred Stone, and one of the first female graduates of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Ap-

pointed a school medical inspector in 1904, in 1912 Stone would begin a long and influential tenure as the city's director of child hygiene.³

Concerned that the robustness gained from a summer of sunshine, fresh air, and hearty food would be lost when the camp children returned to their ill-ventilated homes and ordinary classrooms, in August 1907 Packard wrote to state medical examiner Jay Perkins, who was then serving as president of the Providence League for the Suppression of Tuberculosis:

Do you think it is too early to attempt to have a single, small school, necessarily ungraded, for those [tuberculous] children arranged so as to approximate an out-of-door school? It would, of course, be an experiment, and in all probability would not be undertaken by the public school authorities; but we have thought it might be run very inexpensively, and that possibly the Providence League for the Suppression of Tuberculosis or some other society would bear the expense of housing and heating, and that the city would supply a teacher. . . . We shall have about ten children in the camp who will soon have to go back to ordinary schools or would be at home in close rooms and you will know of many more who should have an out-of-door life. . . . Now that the general interest in the prevention of tuberculosis is so much greater than ever before, do you think that some such experiment might be started this fall?⁴

Increasingly convinced that preventing tuberculosis in children was a new and important direction in battling the disease, Perkins reacted enthusiastically to Packard's idea. At the league's general meeting in September, he was instrumental in having a committee of five appointed to propose to the Providence School Committee that such a school be created. Unlike Packard, the league's committee was optimistic that its proposal would be well received, perhaps because its members included Superintendent of Schools Walter Small and Frederick Rueckert, the school committee's chairman. The optimism was well justified. At the school committee's November meeting, its executive committee, chaired by Rueckert, secured passage of a resolution empowering it to "establish in the old Meeting Street schoolhouse a special school for such children whose health and physical condition require special care and treatment." The executive committee was also authorized to hire a teacher and to fund the necessary remodeling of the building.⁵

The school opened on 27 January 1908 with twelve children, some from Packard and Stone's camp and some selected by the tuberculosis nurses of the Providence District Nursing Association. Within a few weeks the number of pupils had increased to twenty. Most of the children were from the overcrowded tenement districts of Providence, and virtually all were tuberculous, though none were considered advanced cases or had open lesions. Emma H. Appleton was appointed to teach the ungraded class, and Stone was placed in charge of medical supervision.

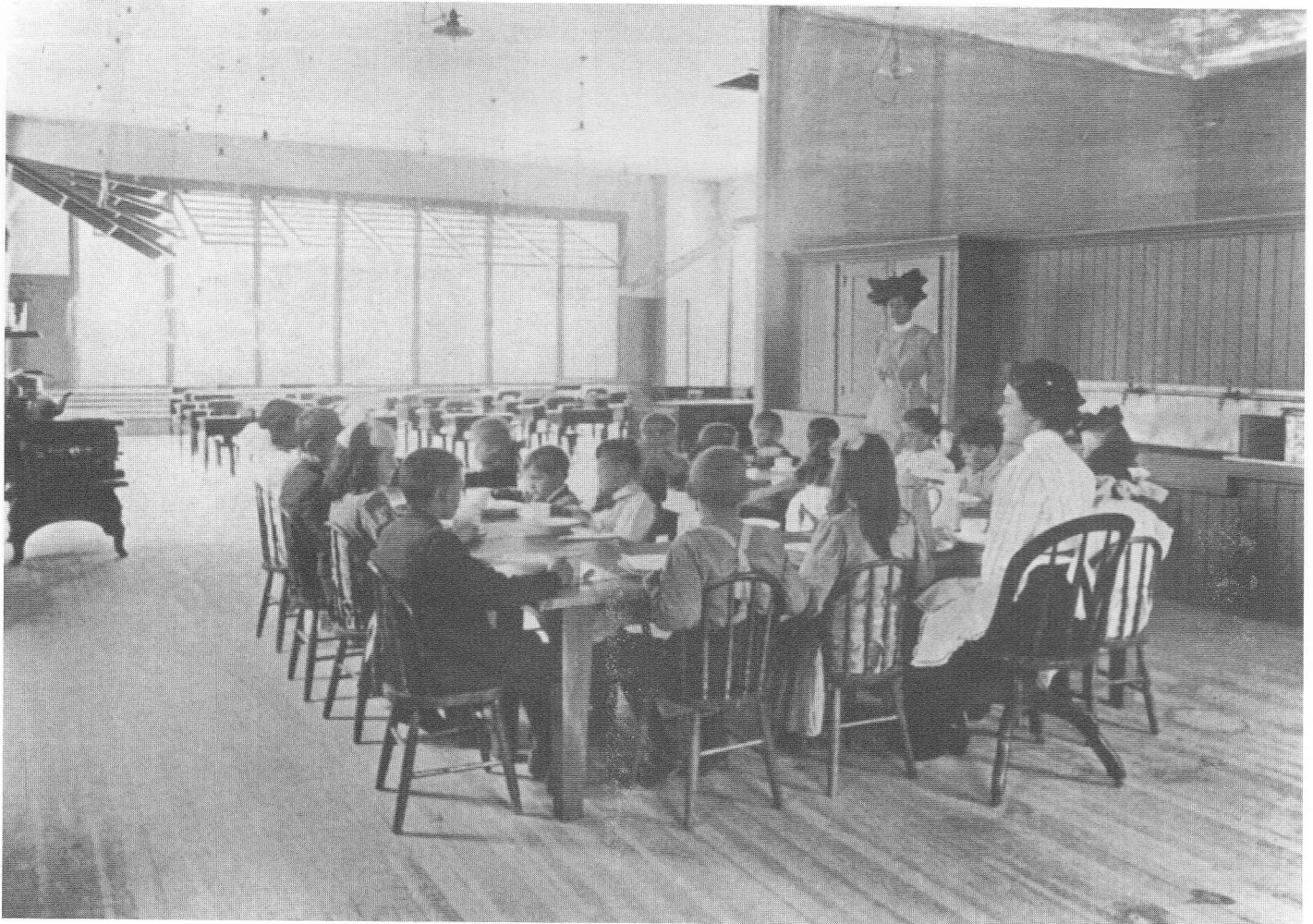


Providence's experiment in open-air schooling attracted considerable attention in the national press, and it was soon followed by similar schools in other places. In September 1908 the Boston Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis joined with the Boston School Board to establish the first open-air school in that city. The following year Hartford began an open-air school in a large army tent on the grounds of a night school, and an open-window classroom for tuberculous and delicate children was created in Rochester, New York; in Chicago, school authorities and the Chicago Tuberculosis Institute,

financed by a \$2,500 grant from the Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund, established an open-air school on the roof of the Mary Crane Nursery in the city's Hull House complex. In 1910 Pawtucket started an open-air class in an empty schoolhouse, and New York City created an open-air school on the roof of an elementary school in its congested Lower East Side.⁷

During the second and third decades of the century, the number of open-air schools in the United States increased dramatically, peaking in the early 1920s with the involvement of thousands of schoolchildren in over 150 American cities. In some cities school authorities and antituberculosis associations followed the Providence example and converted unused classrooms by knocking out walls or by installing large casement or double-hung windows. These came to be known as open-window or fresh-air classes. In other cities shedlike structures were constructed on the roofs of buildings, in accordance with a simple plan devised by Thomas Carrington, an officer of the National Tuberculosis Association and an expert on hospital construction. In a few cities specially designed buildings were constructed, or existing ones remodeled, invariably with private philanthropic funding, to house substantial open-air schools.⁸ Whatever shape they took, however, the basic regimen of the open-air schools was essentially the same. As it was popularly described by open-air school advocates, that regimen basically consisted of "double rations of air, double rations of food, and half rations of work."⁹

The success of the open-air classroom program in Providence prompted other Rhode Island cities to inaugurate similar programs. Pawtucket established its first open-air school on Summit Street in 1910.
RIHS Collection (RH*i* X3 8195).



As in Great Britain and on the European continent, the development of open-air schooling in the United States was inspired by an international antituberculosis campaign that took shape at the turn of the century. Particularly influential were that campaign's promotion of open-air prophylaxis and treatment and its gradual recognition of a critical link between childhood exposure to and infection with the tubercle bacillus and the clinical development of chronic pulmonary tuberculosis in older adolescents and adults. Prior to 1900 pulmonary tuberculosis—popularly known as phthisis or consumption, and the great killer of the industrial world—had been considered primarily an adult disease, largely because childhood tuberculosis usually developed in the cervical glands, in the bones and joints, or as a generalized disease. During the first decade of the century, however, this long-held view was altered dramatically when a series of comprehensive postmortem studies revealed that healed or latent lesions were present in many adults who had shown no clinical manifestations of tuberculosis during their lives, and that infection in the bronchial glands and lungs was far more common among children than had previously been suspected. On the basis of these findings and resultant theorizing on the relationship between primary childhood infection in the bronchi and the development of the disease elsewhere in the body, tuberculosis specialists increasingly came to believe that adult consumption often originated in a childhood infection that had lain dormant for several years before being fanned into full flame by physical trauma, debilitation, stress, or some other cause. Many in fact embraced the view of Franz Hamburger, a German specialist, who claimed that in the industrialized world tuberculosis infection was endemic and almost always contracted in childhood, especially during the early years of schooling.¹⁰

For those involved in the American antituberculosis campaign, the implications of this discovery of childhood infection were clear: children would have to be targeted if the battle against tuberculosis was to be won. As a Baltimore physician contended in 1908 in the *Journal of the Outdoor Life*, the official publication of the National Tuberculosis Association,

Many eminent authorities upon tuberculosis, especially in France and Germany, are firmly convinced, not only by their reasoning but by their laboratory and clinical experience, that all tuberculosis infections are made in infancy or in childhood, the disease lying latent, until from one cause or another the resistance of the individual is reduced and the disease becomes manifest . . . it is evident, therefore, that the ultimate solution to the problem of the eradication of tuberculosis rests largely with the coming generation, that is, with the school children of to-day.¹¹

For early twentieth-century antituberculosis activists, targeting tuberculous schoolchildren meant making available to them an open-air regimen. Developed in the sanatoria and tuberculosis day camps that had proliferated in North America and Europe after 1890, this regimen was organized around the conviction that a plentiful supply of rest, hearty food, and cold fresh air could not only prevent those infected from developing the disease but also help those afflicted effect a spontaneous healing of tubercular lesions, thus conquering the disease or at least rendering it inert.¹² Encouraged by the effects such therapy had on children in summer camps like the one run by Stone and Packard, activists argued that even better results could be achieved if children could continue to receive open-air treatment throughout the school year. Such treatment would remove children from what many health experts considered the debilitatingly overheated and noxious environment of the typical classroom, while providing them with sustained exposure to cold air, which was widely believed to



Attempting to strengthen the health of their pupils without depriving them of their proper education, open-air schools gauged the progress of children by both physical and academic standards. This is a class at the Meeting Street schoolhouse, circa 1909. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8197).

promote strength and vigor by increasing the appetite and stimulating respiratory and vascular activity.¹³

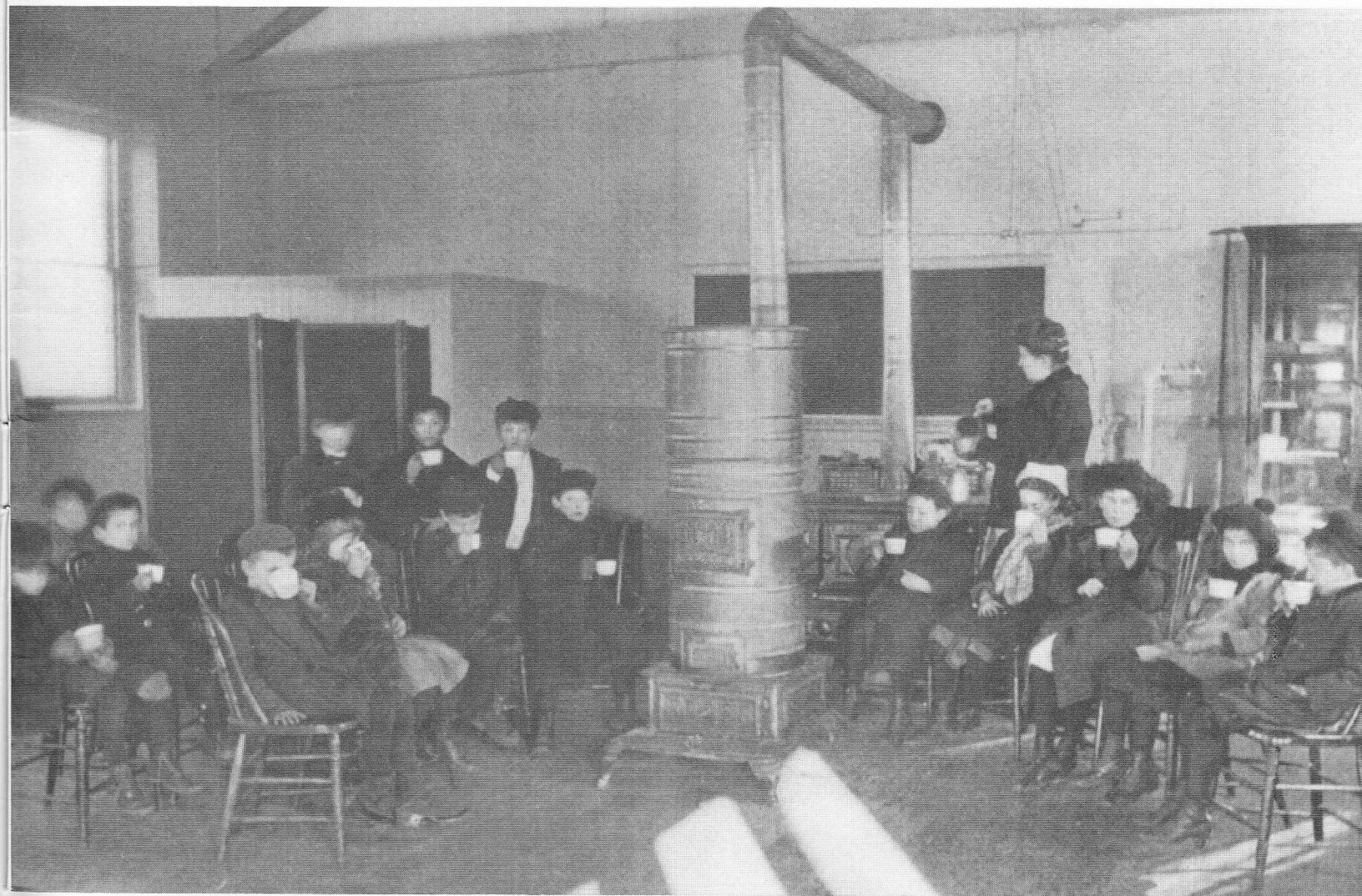
The Meeting Street school was thus initiated as an experiment in providing open-air therapy along with schooling. The children selected for the experiment would not be those obviously tuberculous and sick enough to require treatment at a hospital or sanatorium; rather, they would be incipient cases, those who might be infected but in whom the disease remained quiescent or in the earliest stage of development. Identifying such cases, however, was no easy task, for the diagnostic criteria for detecting incipient tuberculosis in children were anything but precise or commonly agreed upon. And although Providence early employed the von Pirquet skin test as a diagnostic aid, many tuberculosis experts, including Jay Perkins, believed that the reliability of the test was yet to be proven. Indeed, given the general obscurity of symptoms presented by incipient tuberculosis in children, diagnosis at that time was more often than not

guesswork, made on the basis of suggestive signs like subnormal weight, sickness, and anemia. As Stone noted in 1908, many children without specific tuberculous symptoms “are carrying about hidden foci of this disease, and is it not probable that those who are suffering anaemia, debility, etc., are likely to be the ones?”¹⁴ Moreover, convinced that the danger of infection was dependent on the efficacy of natural defenses, physicians pinpointed the frail and sickly child as most at risk.

As Providence embraced open-air schooling as a strategy for combating tuberculosis in children, it thus targeted those who were anemic, underweight, and delicate and sought to provide them a double ration of food and fresh air and a half ration of work in order to build up their strength and resistance without depriving them of their rightful education. The school committee report recommending the establishment of the Meeting Street school explained this rationale:

There must be and there probably are among the many thousands of school children some cases where the disease is lurking or has already gained a foothold, cases of a nature that hardly warrant the sending of the child to a hospital or sanatorium and thus barring it from all educational privileges, but such as would readily yield to properly prescribed treatment. If children of this class could be segregated, given regular studies of the school and at the same time fresh air, sunshine, exercise and medical supervision, they would be strengthened, made physically sound, while their education would not thereby be retarded.¹⁵

Pupils at the Meeting Street school were served hot meals at mid-morning and at noon. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8198).



After two years the school committee concluded that the experiment had more than met the expectations of its proponents. Virtually all the children attending the school had gained weight and improved in general health, and a few had even been able to return to normal classrooms. The only problem the committee saw was that the Meeting Street school could accommodate only a fraction of the number of children in need. In his annual report for the 1911-12 school year, Superintendent Randall Condon proposed as a conservative estimate that at least nine more open-air schools were needed, and he suggested that they might be economically established by remodeling rooms in existing school-houses. Others believed that the number of additional facilities needed was much higher. Perkins estimated that between 20 and 30 percent of all school-age children in Providence were tuberculous, though he noted that a significant number of these were advanced cases who could not attend school at all.¹⁶

Beginning with the creation of a second open-air room in the Public Street elementary school in 1913, the city's program gradually expanded. By 1926 Providence had eleven open-air classes in its primary and grammar schools.¹⁷ Although there was some initial opposition to that expansion, inspired by fear that establishing open-air classes in regular schools would endanger noninfected children, the program enjoyed relatively wide support, in part because of an unanticipated result: children placed in open-air classrooms not only gained weight and improved in general health but also made exceptional progress in their studies. This dovetailed with an early twentieth-century move within the Providence school system to increase educational efficiency and combat "grade retardation" by identifying and separating into special remedial-education classes those children who for various reasons were incapable of making adequate academic progress in regular classrooms. Thus, like their counterparts elsewhere in the nation, Providence education and health officials began advocating the expansion of the fresh-air program not only as a continuing strategy to combat tuberculosis in children but also as a means of facilitating the education of children whose physical frailty was impeding their academic progress.¹⁸ Indeed, the belief that an open-air environment, combined with individualized instruction, could promote improved academic performance among the delicate became so popular that it inspired the founding of a number of private open-air schools throughout the nation. Among these was the Gordon School in Providence, created in 1910 by Dr. Helen W. Cook.¹⁹

Also lending support to the expansion of the program was the increasing conviction of educators, in Providence and nationally, that undernourishment was a chief cause of academic failure. Convinced "that the reason there was such a large number of repeaters in the lower primary grades was largely due to a lack of nutritious food," the Providence School Committee began serving "penny lunches" in twenty-three of its elementary schools as early as 1909. In 1920, in conjunction with the Providence Cooperative Nutrition Bureau, the school system began a program which within four years was providing fifty-one "nutrition classes" in seventeen different schools.²⁰ With the provision of hearty food a central component of their regimen, open-air classes occupied an important place in this effort to combat malnutrition.

Having early established itself as a national pioneer in creating special classes for "backward children," Providence thus expanded its open-air program not only to combat tuberculosis but also to provide a remedial setting for the spe-

cial education of those physically impaired and backward students that it and other school systems came to classify as delicate. This second function of the program goes a long way toward explaining why fresh-air rooms continued to exist in a number of Providence schools long after tuberculosis ceased to be a significant health problem among the city's school population. By the 1940s most of the children assigned to fresh-air rooms were in fact not tuberculous but rather physically delicate because of such problems as cardiac irregularities.

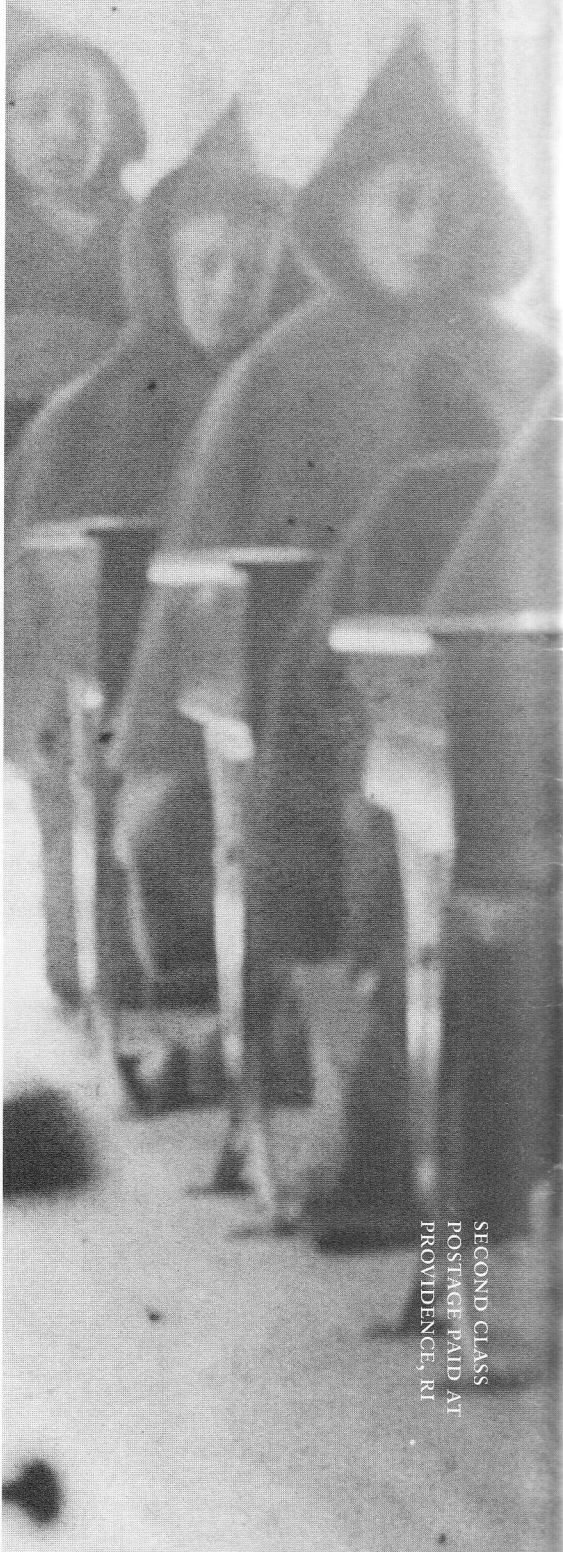
In the years after World War II, however, as the general health of the city's schoolchildren continued to improve, the need for special provision for delicate children decreased, and the school system began closing its fresh-air rooms. Only four were left in 1957 when the program was ended. Today only the bricked-up front facade of the Meeting Street schoolhouse remains as a reminder of the city's pioneering efforts in using its schools to help combat a disease that once ruled as the scourge of the industrial world.



Notes

1. *Records of the Meetings of the School Committee of the City of Providence from September 10, 1956, to August 25, 1958* (Providence, 1958), 160.
 2. For contemporary descriptions of the Providence open-air school, see *Report of the School Committee for the Year 1907-1908* (Providence, 1908), 10-12, 51-56; Ellen A. Stone, "A Fresh Air School," *Journal of the Outdoor Life* 5 (1908): 134-46; "First Open-Air American School," *Journal of Education* 67 (1908): 126; Walter H. Small, "The Providence Association," *Journal of the Outdoor Life* 6 (1909): 82-86; and Walter E. Kruesi, "The Providence Fresh Air School," *Charities and the Commons* 20 (1908): 97-99.
 3. *Report of the School Committee . . . 1907-1908*, 34; Sherman C. Kingsley and F. B. Dressler, *Open-Air Schools*, report prepared for the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917), 15-16; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Health of the City of Providence for the Year 1912* (Providence, 1912), 18.
 4. Mary S. Packard to Jay Perkins, 14 Aug. 1907, in Kingsley and Dressler, *Open-Air Schools*, 16-17.
 5. Small, "The Providence Association," 82-86; Stone, "A Fresh Air School," 134-35; "First Open-Air American School," 126; school committee meeting, 29 Nov. 1907, *Records of the School Committee, Providence, 1903 to 1908* (n.p., n.d.), 491-92.
 6. Leonard P. Ayres, *Open-Air Schools* (New York: Thompson, Brown, 1915), 47-48; school committee meeting, 29 May 1908, *Records of the School Committee . . . 1903 to 1908*, 573.
 7. Isabel F. Hymas and James J. Minot, "Boston's Outdoor School," *Journal of the Outdoor Life* 6 (1909): 187-92; Walter E. Kruesi, "The School of Outdoor Life for Tuberculous Children," *Charities and the Commons* 21 (1908): 446-49; Betty Godfrey, "An Inexpensive Outdoor School," *Good Housekeeping* 50 (1910): 670; Sherman C. Kingsley, "Tuberculous Children on a City Roof," *Survey* 23 (1910): 863; James L. Wheaton, "The Open-Air School: Its Development and Purpose," *Providence Medical Journal* 13 (1912): 33-34; Louise E. Dew, "Open-Air Schools for Abnormal Children," *World To-Day* 20 (1911): 557-64; Ayres, *Open-Air Schools*, p. 63.
 8. Thomas S. Carrington, "How to Build and Equip an Open-Air School," *Survey* 24 (1910): 144-51; Kingsley and Dressler, *Open-Air Schools*, 24-31, 175.
 9. Leonard Ayres, "Open-Air Schools," *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Education Association, 1911* (Winona, Minn., 1911), 902.
 10. For a detailed account of this transformation in medical thinking on the etiology and pathology of tuberculosis, see Richard A. Meckel, "Open-Air Schools and the Tuberculous Child in Early Twentieth-Century America," *Archives of Pediatrics* (forthcoming).
 11. Henry Barton Jacobs, "The Prevention of Tuberculosis Among School Children," *Journal of the Outdoor Life* 5 (1908): 85-86. See also John. H. Lowman, "Tuberculosis and the Schools," *Charities and the Commons* 18 (1907): 657-58, and Luther H. Gulick, "Tuberculosis and the Public Schools," *Charities and the Commons* 21 (1908): 253.
 12. For a discussion of the origin and development of sanatoria and the principles of open-air therapy, see Mark Caldwell, *The Last Crusade: The War on Consumption, 1862-1954* (New York: Atheneum, 1988), 67-97, and F. B. Smith, *The Retreat of Tuberculosis, 1850-1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 97-135.
 13. Sherman Kingsley, *Open-Air Crusaders* (Chicago: Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund, 1913), 48; Jay Perkins, "Fresh Air Schools: How They Accomplish Their Results," *Providence Medical Journal* 13 (1913): 35-39; Louis W. Termin, *The Hygiene of the School Child* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 155-57.
 14. Stone, "A Fresh Air School," 136.
 15. *Report of the School Committee . . . 1907-1908*, 52-53.
 16. *Report of the School Committee for the Year 1911-1912* (Providence, 1912), 21; Perkins, "Child Welfare and Tuberculosis," 164.
 17. These were in the Meeting Street, Public Street, Julian Street, Branch Avenue, Africa Street, Arthur Avenue, Jenkins Street, Regent Avenue, and Temple Street primary schools and in the Sackett Street and Summit Avenue grammar schools.
 18. Perkins, "Fresh Air Schools," 35-39; *Report of the School Committee for the Year 1925-1926* (Providence, 1926), 27.
- On the hope that open-air schools could combat grade retardation, see Ida Hood Clark, "Open-Air Schools," *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Education Association, 1909* (Winona, Minn., 1909), 894-901, and Kingsley, *Open-Air Crusaders*, 13-20.
19. "Open-Air School: Distinctive Private Institution for Girls and Boys," *Providence Magazine* 27 (1915): 369.
 20. *Report of the School Committee for the Year 1910-1911* (Providence, 1911), 84; Elliot Washburn, "Work with Undernourished Children in Some of the Public Schools of Providence," *Rhode Island Medical Journal* 7 (1924): 69-72.

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SECOND CLASS
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Cover

Open-air schooling, a program for combating tuberculosis in children, was pioneered in Providence, where the nation's first open-air school was established in 1908. By the early 1920s there were similar schools in over 150 American cities. The children in this 1910 photo were pupils at the Summit Street Open-Air School in Pawtucket. Courtesy of the Spaulding House Research Library Collection.