

Candidate for President... in 1872

By REV. ROBERT McNAMARA
St. Bernard's Seminary

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the first American Catholic to win the highest office in our republic.

Another great Catholic American, Governor Alfred Emmanuel Smith of New York, ran for the presidency on the same Democratic ticket in 1928, but lost to Herbert Hoover. Most people think that Smith was the first American Catholic nominated to the presidency. He was the first one nominated by a major party. But he was not the first one to receive the nomination.

That honor went to Charles O'Connor, a former resident of the Rochester diocesan area.

Charles O'Connor (1804-1884) was a prominent New York City lawyer. A brilliant man, Charles was admitted to the New York State bar in 1824 before he had even reached his 21st birthday. He soon rose into a place of distinction in the legal profession.

The outbreak of the Civil War disturbed O'Connor a great deal, and he was sympathetic towards the South. This known sympathy no doubt led to his appointment as senior counsel in the post-war treason trial of the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. Shortly afterward, O'Connor was a key figure in the prosecution of the notorious Tweed Ring for corrupt political practices.

Meanwhile, he was a leading light in New York Catholicism; and it was he who drafted the New York State religious corporation law of 1863 which furnished — and still furnishes — New York State Catholics with a legal method of incorporating parish properties that protects the Church's control of its real estate.

Samuel J. Tilden, then prominent political figure, went so far as to call Charles O'Connor the "greatest jurist among all the English-speaking race." It is not surprising that the "Straight-Out" Democrats (a minor Democratic group who were opposed to Horace Greeley) should have named him in 1872 to run as their candidate for the United States Presidency.

O'Connor was nominated, but really cannot be said to have "run." As a matter of fact, he refused to run. He had lost the race for the position of Lieutenant Governor of New York in 1848, for religious reasons as he always believed thereafter, so he sedulously avoided making a bid for any public office. He and the "Straight-

Out" vice-presidential candidate, John Quincy Adams (II), nevertheless received close to 30,000 votes across the nation, and 1,450 in New York.

Of what interest is this lawyer to the Rochester Diocese? Charles O'Connor, though not a native son, was a resident of Schuyler, then in Steuben County, for about five years.

His father, Thomas O'Connor (Charles later dropped one "n" from his name, in keeping with the old Irish practice) was an active politician and journalist in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. When the revolt of 1798 failed, Thomas, like many of the anti-British rebels, found it wiser to leave Ireland. He came to the United States in 1801, and in New York met and married an O'Connor girl (no relative). His first child, Thomas, was born in New York City on January 22, 1804.

A local tradition says that there was a move afoot during Kernan's later years to call the village "Tyronne" as well as the township. Kernan, who may well have given the very Irish name Tyronne to the township, was leader of the movement. Others wished to call the village Wayne. Kernan replied, with a chuckle: "The little frogs will croak: 'Wayne,' but the big bullfrogs will say: 'Tyronne, Tyronne!'"

Towards the end of his life, General Kernan left Tyronne and moved to Utica, to join his son Francis who had been there since 1839. Francis Kernan was born at Wayne to William and Rose Ann Stubbs Kernan, on January 14, 1816. He graduated from Georgetown College in Washington in 1836 and studied law. Admitted to the bar in 1840, he rose into legal and political prominence, although he played for lower stakes than the presidency. He was a member of the State Assembly; defeated Roscoe Conkling in Congress in 1862; lost as Democratic candidate for governor in 1872 (the same year that O'Connor "ran" for president); but successfully ran for the U.S. Senate in 1875 and served one six-year term.

Highly respected for his ability and good character by Abraham Lincoln, Horatio Seymour, Samuel J. Tilden, Thomas F. Bayard, and Grover Cleveland, Kernan also was uncompromisingly Catholic and noted for his benefactions. He married Hanna A. Devereux of Utica in 1843 (she was the daughter of Utica's leading Catholic financier, Nicholas Devereux). The Francis Kernans raised ten children, whose descendants are still prominent in the Utica area.

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SENATOR KERNAN
Native of Wayne, N.Y.

In 1804 Thomas decided to become a pioneer. He bought some 4,000 acres near the present Tyronne and built a log cabin on the shore of Little (now Waneta) Lake. A number of his Irish friends migrated there among them the Widow Kernan, her son William, and several other sons. Thomas' older brother, Dennis, who was also a member of the colony, opened a store. But the gentle Thomas O'Connor was not at home on the rough frontier, so he moved back to New York, along with his family and his brother, in 1810. He spent the rest of his life (d. 1855) as editor and publisher of the Military Monitor, the Shamrock, and the Globe. With Dr. William J. MacNeven, he shared the acknowledged leadership of the New York City Irish of their day.

We can scarcely say, therefore, that Charles O'Connor be-

came an important figure in the Tyronne neighborhood. He remembered little of that phase of his life.

The Irish colony itself broke up eventually, until the only one remaining was the oldest son of the Widow Kernan, William Kernan. The younger Kernan subsequently became what was a rare thing in western New York: a prominent and prosperous country squire who was at the same time a staunch Catholic. He bore the title "General" because he eventually held that rank in the militia. (He was a major during the War of 1812, but apparently did not see action.) He was held in high regard by the people of his locality, and was influential in his relations with them.

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CHARLES O'CONNOR
He ran for President

If, therefore, Charles O'Connor, the boyhood resident of our diocesan area, failed to be elected to the presidency of the United States, another member of the little Tyronne Irish colony, this time a native son, did succeed in a bid for the United States Senate.

Southern Tier Catholics can well be proud of having given to the nation these two superb legislators.

McQuaid Topic 'Christology'

Dr. John C. Meagher will deliver the second in the first annual McQuaid Jesuit High School Alumni Association Lecture Series to be held at McQuaid Wednesday, Feb. 22, at 8 p.m. The title of his talk will be "Early Christian Problems in Christology: the various approaches to the problem of stating the significance and role of Jesus."

Dr. Meagher was educated at Notre Dame (B.A.), Princeton (M.A., Ph.D.) and the University of London (Ph.D.), as well as l'Institut Catholique de Paris and the Sorbonne; at the latter two, he studied early Christianity particularly under the direction of Oscar Cullmann, Jean Danielou and Andre Feuillet. Currently, he is Associate Professor of English and, starting next year, lecturer in Religious Knowledge at St. Michael's College and the Graduate School of the University of Toronto. Tickets are available at McQuaid.

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New Orleans—(NC)—Parents in a true sense are "baby-sitters for God." Auxiliary Bishop Harold R. Perry, S.V.D., of New Orleans, said in his sermon at the annual Family Life Apostolate Mass here.

Bishop Perry described the role of parents and the difficulties of training children amid today's conditions.

"The blessed whom the Church will canonize 100 years from now will look a great deal like the parents you see before us today," the bishop said. "The great challenge of your profession comes from carrying out the bewildering, complex, yet wonderful role as mother or father.

"The sacrifices involved in

raising a family, living within a budget, and planning the children's education earn heaven for most men. In familiar words, the road to heaven is well paved with pabulum and baby oil, with vaporizers and band-aids, with measles and chicken pox," said the only Negro to serve in the U.S. hierarchy in the 20th century.

Two Mt. Morris students of D'Youville College have been placed on the Dean's List for the first semester. They are Anne Marie Randazzo, sophomore, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Randazzo, 8 Hopkins St., and Margaret E. Bezerlein, a senior, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. Frederick Bezerlein, 133 Main St.

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