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## Healys

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Cross, the oldest girl, Martha, was even educated and cared for by the bishop's sister.

Michael and Eliza Healy didn't live to see their sons as priests and their daughters as women religious. The two died within a few months of each other in 1850. After their deaths their second oldest son, Hugh, risked arrest by returning to Georgia to bring his three youngest siblings up north.

When Michael Healy's will was settled, records showed his land was valued at \$10,000, his personal property at \$8,000, and his slaves, at \$22,000. Proceeds went to his children.

For all his children's religious ambitions, Michael Healy's are not well-known. In his biography, the primary published information on the family, Father Foley wrote that Michael had become "master in his own domain" and "could scarcely bring himself to renew his connections with the Church of his boyhood," even after a small Catholic Church opened in Macon in 1841 for immigrants there.

Devoted as he was to his partner, Michael could not legally marry a slave, and the situation did raise complications. While at the Sulpician Seminary in Montreal, James agonized over finding records, including those of his parents' marriage, necessary for his holy orders. He was relieved when Bishop Fitzpatrick cleared the way with a letter.

Seminaries in this country were in slave states or otherwise restricted by lo-

cal laws from allowing blacks. "The mind set was that we weren't capable of doing any of that," Father McMillan, an African-American himself, noted. African-Americans weren't considered capable of handling celibacy and studies — especially in Latin — and "living in seminary situations," he explained.

After further study with the Sulpicians in Paris, James Healy was ordained there in 1854. He returned to the United States to be secretary and later chancellor for Bishop Fitzpatrick in Boston. After Sherwood also studied with the Sulpicians and was ordained in 1858 in Rome, the two experienced some brotherly rivalry for positions in Boston.

The future Bishop Healy from the beginning advocated for children, helping to establish in Boston homes for infants and for unmarried mothers. He also helped found — and became vice president of — the Association for the Protection of Destitute Roman Catholic Children, established for Civil War orphans.

On Feb. 12, 1875, James was appointed the second bishop of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, which he shaped during a period of extensive growth and conflict between French-Canadians and Irish-Americans. He celebrated his 25th jubilee as bishop there before his death in 1900.

One of his first accomplishments was completing the Cathedral parochial school. He then took on causes similar to those he championed in Boston.

He fought for years to return Catholic priests to the Maine State Reform School, which forced all its students to take part in "nonsectarian" Protestant

services and studies. In 1880, he had the honor of ordaining a class at St. Joseph's Seminary in Troy, N.Y. Father Foley wrote that three of the seminarians receiving various orders were destined for Rochester. (Father Robert F. McNamara, archivist of the Diocese of Rochester, believes the three were Msgr. Dennis J. Curran, and Fathers Michael A. F. Holmes and S. Rippin, ordained priests in Rochester.)

Father Foley noted in his biography few instances of racial prejudice against the Healys.

One story is often cited, however. The bishop was hearing confessions at the Portland cathedral, when a teenager reciting her sins stopped short.

"I said the bishop was as black as the devil" the distraught girl finally blurted, not knowing what to expect as penance. Father Foley's account continued.

"Oh, my child," the bishop said, "don't say the bishop is as black as the devil. You can say he's a black as coal, or as black as the ace of spades. But don't say he's as black as the devil!"

"Though he didn't identify with his African-American ancestry," Father McMillan noted, "others made the identification for him. He was much loved and liked, but some didn't care for him because of his color."

Various histories note that the Healys did not publicly identify with the African-American community, or use their positions to champion its causes.

Perhaps such stand-offishness contributed to their status in the church, according to Father Cyprian Davis, a Benedictine monk and author of 1990's *Black Catholics in the United States*. He wrote that the brothers enjoyed status not because the hierarchy tolerated blacks, but also

"because they were seen as exceptions." While one cannot judge later in history, he wrote, "one may still wonder how these good and upright men judged themselves in the silence of their own hearts."

Another historian, James O'Toole of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, noted the irony of remembering the Healys for several "firsts" as African-Americans. "I'm finding that was a part of their identity they very much wanted to de-emphasize," he said. He is completing a book on the Healys, with particular attention to the daughters.


O'Toole added that the Healys' desire to de-emphasize their ancestry is understandable. While they were flourishing in their careers, racial segregation was "hardening into place," he said.

In addition, "The church became kind of a defense for them," O'Toole observed. "Are they black or white, just exactly what are they? As a way of solving that dilemma, it was almost as if they weren't going to decide to be black or white. They were going to be Catholics — a completely other thing that sets racial aspects aside. The church gave them an out they otherwise would not have had."

Yet by 1968, when Father McMillan entered religious life, there had been only 150 priests of African-American descent in this country. Today there are 300, including one in Rochester (Father Michael Upson, administrator of Immaculate Conception Church in Rochester).

"There is a problem there somewhere, and the problem is the whole issue of dealing with racism," said McMillan, who has taught through St. Bernard's Institute.

And noting that the church as a body had been silent on slavery, he posed that had any of the Healy priests been captured during enforcement of fugitive slave laws, it would have presented the Catholic Church in America with "a very interesting dilemma."



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