

# The Jesuit Years: The War and Beyond

*This is the fourth in a series of preprints from The University of Scranton: A Centennial History by Dr. Frank X.J. Homer '64.*



*A portrait of St. Ignatius Loyola, received as a gift by the original Scranton Jesuit community, which they placed in a frame on the wall of the Estate library. Due to its fragility, it was not moved when the Jesuits moved into their new residence in 1987 and remains hanging in what is now the President's Dining Room.*

Following the departure of the Christian Brothers there was a brief interval of several weeks when the University operated with Frank O'Hara serving as acting chief executive, at Bishop's Hafey's request, until the members of the first Jesuit community in Scranton arrived.

Two hundred fourteen students began classes on June 16 as part of an accelerated three-year degree program which the University had adopted after Pearl Harbor. By eliminating a summer vacation and reducing other holidays during the regular semesters more students would be able to complete their coursework before being drafted into

the military. Seventy-three members of the Class of 1943 participating in the program were able to receive their diplomas in January rather than June of that year, and another fifty-one degrees were conferred at the end of a second accelerated summer session in September.

On June 24, 1942, the first two members of the Jesuit community arrived in Scranton, its rector, the Very Rev. W. Coleman Nevils, S.J., and its minister, the Rev. Ferdinand Wheeler, S.J. As rector Father Nevils would also serve as the University's president, and for the next twenty eight years the two offices of rector and president would continue to be combined, as long as the ownership

and control of the University were held directly by the Jesuit community. As minister, Father Wheeler was responsible for coordinating the provision of housing, food, and the other material needs of the Jesuits assigned to Scranton. Frs. Nevils and Wheeler met with Bishop Hafey, inspected the University's properties and made at least one significant decision — that the Jesuit community would establish its residence in the Scranton Estate mansion, rather than in the former Brothers' Residence on Wyoming Avenue next to Old Main, which they judged too small for a community that was expected to have twenty members by the beginning of the

University's fall term.

Following this brief preliminary visit in June, Frs. Nevils and Wheeler left Scranton to return on Tuesday, July 7, to formally assume control of the University. That evening Bishop Hafey convened a meeting of the trustees at his residence where the old board was dissolved and a new board of trustees, composed entirely of Jesuits who were to be members of the Scranton community, was elected. Many of the former lay trustees were later invited by the Jesuits to serve on an advisory Board of Regents. The bishop then turned over to Father Nevils title to all of the University's properties, along with the \$150,000 mortgage. Wishing all other University debts to be liquidated before the diocese relinquished ownership, Bishop Hafey had, only four days earlier, sent a check for \$20,000 to Frank O'Hara. Thus, the University of Scranton officially became the twenty-fourth Jesuit college in the United States.

The Jesuits did not begin actively directing the University's academic programs until the end of the summer and the start of the fall semester. Frs. Nevils and Wheeler, together with the rest of the initial community who arrived in Scranton over the next several weeks, were at first preoccupied with the renovation of the Estate residence into which they moved the day after the transfer of ownership. Father Wheeler, a forceful administrator who had been involved in the initial establishment of Jesuit communities elsewhere, supervised the formidable task of transforming a house that had been vacant for some seven years into a home for nineteen Jesuits by September. Drawing with considerable ingenuity from several sources, including other Jesuit communities and their benefactors, he soon assembled the necessary furnishings, ranging from bed linens to tableware, and from electric appliances to objects of religious art, including an early 16th century Madonna attributed to Bernardino Luini. One of the Jesuit brothers, Brother Clarence Mahlmeister, a master cabinetmaker, constructed several pieces of furniture throughout the residence, and provided an altar and oak panelling for the chapel which was installed in a first floor reception room. Over the forty-five years the Jesuit community remained in residence at the Estate they continued to devote great care to its maintenance, and when the community moved their residence to Campion Hall, a new facility erected on the Estate grounds in 1987, the University was able to convert the magnificently preserved old residence into administrative offices, meeting rooms, and a

much-needed faculty club.

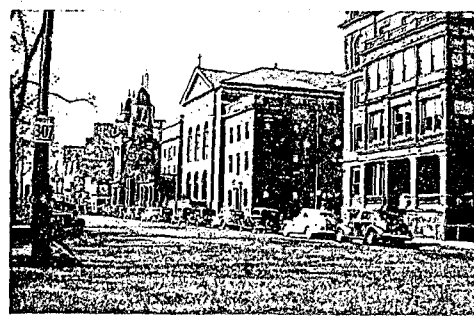
There is a long tradition among the Jesuits that when they first establish a new community, its initial members are chosen from among the Order's most accomplished men. Certainly, the first contingent of Jesuits at the University of Scranton represented some of the "best and the brightest" within the new Maryland Province, beginning with Father Nevils, a former rector president of Georgetown University, the flagship institution among all Jesuit schools in the United States which had already celebrated its first centennial only one year after St. Thomas College was founded in 1888. Joining Frs. Nevils and Wheeler as a third key members of the Scranton team was the Rev. Richard M. McKeon, S.J., who was appointed the University's dean of studies and whose mother was a native of Scranton.

Several other members of that first Jesuit community were to leave lasting imprints at the University, including the:

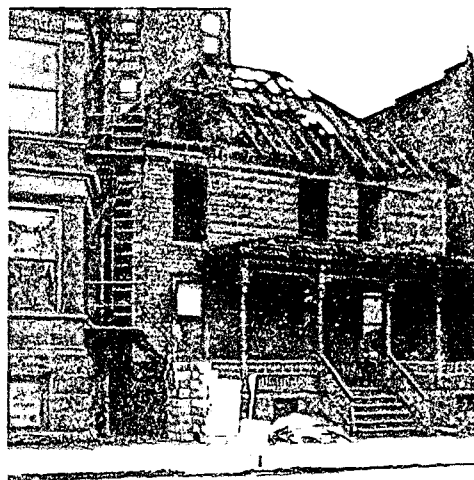
**Rev. J. Eugene Gallery, S.J.**, a sociologist who founded the Hazleton Labor School in 1943, later renamed the University's Institute of Industrial Relations. It offered adult education to local union leaders. Within a few years the Institute operated in several other cities in northeastern Pennsylvania. In 1947 Father Gallery was named to succeed Father Nevils as the University's second Jesuit president;

**Rev. John J. Coniff, S.J.**, who became the University's first dean of men, responsible for student discipline, a post he held for over a decade. Father Coniff, who had been at Fordham University before coming to Scranton, also was responsible for bringing to Scranton Peter Carlesimo, a young former football standout at Fordham who for over a quarter-century as head coach and director of athletics was to become synonymous with athletics at the University;

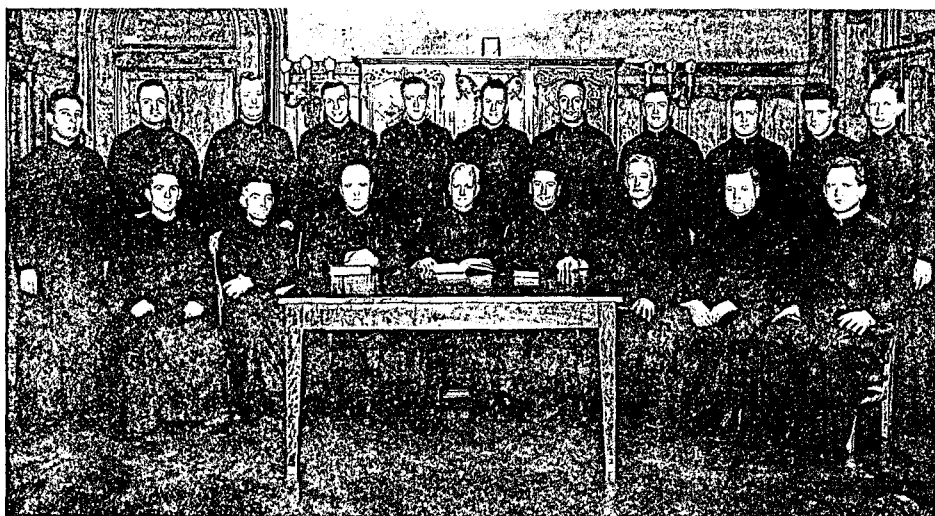
**Rev. Vincent Bellwoar, S.J.**, the first in a long series of dedicated student counselors, now known as campus ministers, who brought the traditions of Ignatian spirituality to the University. Fr. Bellwoar in particular won the affection of a host of St. Thomas and University students and alumni who were in military service as he painstakingly compiled lists of their names and sent them newsletters from the University. By the end of 1943 his list, published in the last wartime issue of *The Aquinas*, totalled no fewer than 1,331 names;



*The University's Wyoming Avenue properties at the time the Jesuits assumed control, from left to right, Old Main, La Salle Hall and the Annex which was soon to be damaged by fire and then converted into the Scranton Preparatory School.*



*A former nurses' residence next to the Annex on Mulberry St. which the Jesuits had razed along with the old Throop House on Wyoming Ave.*



*Members of the original Jesuit community at the University of Scranton, summer 1942 - shown in the library of the former Scranton Estate: Seated (left to right): Mr. Robert Springer, Fr. Joseph Durkin, Fr. Richard McKeon, Fr. W. Coleman Nevils, Fr. John J. Coniff, Fr. Ferdinand Wheeler, Fr. J. Eugene Gallery, Fr. Edward Baxter. Standing (left to right): Fr. Vincent Bellwoar, Brother Clarence Mablmeister, Fr. James Harley, Mr. Richard Neu, Mr. Vincent Lee, Brother William Haggerty, Fr. Charles Denecke, Mr. Henry Gruczyk, Fr. Edward Jacklin, Fr. Richard Grady and Fr. Charles McManus.*

**Rev. Edward G. Jacklin, S.J.**, professor of philosophy who was to serve as the University's dean before moving on to senior administrative posts at Georgetown and the presidency of St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia. Years later he returned to Scranton where he finished his distinguished academic career; and, not least of all,

**Rev. Richard F. Grady, S.J.**, who, except for his service as a military chaplain, would remain at the University until his retirement in 1970 after twenty eight remarkable years of service in which

he displayed the talents of a true Renaissance man as English department chairman, as the first dean of the Evening College, and as the driving force behind the University's FM radio station, WUSV, and the University Players, for whom he produced several original works, including a memorable musical tribute to northeast Pennsylvania, "Anthracite Amen," performed by the Players in the mid 1950s.

The University's debt of gratitude to all of the "pioneer" Jesuits is indeed great. In addition to their heavy teaching schedules, many gladly accepted parish

duty throughout the diocese on weekends and all took part in a sustained effort at community public relations in talks and radio programs, which redounded considerably to the University's image and reputation.

The Mass of the Holy Ghost, celebrated in St. Peter's Cathedral on September 23, 1942, not only marked the formal beginning of a new academic year for the University, it also served as the first public welcome to the University's new administration. Bishop Hafey and approximately 150 diocesan priests joined with the Jesuits, lay faculty and the student body in seeking God's blessing as the Jesuits took over direct administrative and teaching responsibilities. Among the Jesuits present at the Mass was the Rev. Patrick J. Quinnan, S.J., who as a newly ordained curate had been one of the first faculty members when St. Thomas College first began operations exactly fifty years earlier.

The impact of the Jesuits on the University's academic programs took place somewhat gradually, given wartime constraints. One area that was immediately affected by the change in administration was tuition policy, not in amount, which remained at \$100 per semester until after the war, but in an insistence that it be paid. Whereas under the Brothers at least ten full scholarships were granted each year, in addition to the informal tuition deferrals arranged by Frank O'Hara, the Jesuits required payment of at least \$50 before a student could be admitted to class, with the balance due before the end of the semester.



*Rev. John J. Coniff, S.J.  
Dean of Men 1942-1953*



*Rev. J. Eugene Gallery, S.J.  
Second Jesuit President*



*Rev. Edward G. Jacklin, S.J.  
Dean from 1945-1948*

Fr. Wheeler later recalled that this elicited no objection from students and that, for the first time in over a decade, the University had a positive balance in its operating funds after only six months of Jesuit administration.

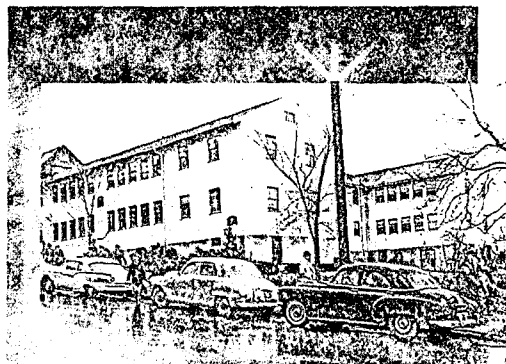
Once the Jesuits were able to reshape the University's curriculum along the lines of their *Ratio Studiorum* they gave particular attention to philosophy which, under the Brothers, had not only been heavily emphasized. In keeping with their long-established emphasis on scholastic philosophy, a prescribed sequence of courses covering logic, cosmology, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics was required of all students, regardless of major. Several of these courses came to be either 4- or 5-credit courses after the war, so that by the 1950s students commonly were taking twenty-four or more credits in philosophy alone. More emphasis was also placed on rhetoric and public speaking, and exposure to the classical languages, Greek and Latin, was actively encouraged. In January, 1943, a chapter of the National Jesuit Honor Society, Alpha Sigma Nu, was established at the University where it has remained preeminent among all other honorary societies ever since. Among the thirteen students inducted as charter members of the Scranton chapter was Charles J. Buckley, who returned to the University after the war to complete his degree and then to join its faculty. His twenty-one year tenure as dean of the Evening College, later the Dexter Hanley College, from 1963 to 1984 was the longest of any academic dean in the University's history.

Even as the Jesuits began to make their presence at the University felt, the war continued to drain away its enrollment. The 440 students who were enrolled for the fall term 1942 had dwindled to 268 by the end of that academic year. The number of incoming freshmen, who were now being accepted in either the fall, spring or even at the start of the summer sessions, fell to only fifty-two in the fall of 1943, although that number was doubled to 102 the following September. Since few of these could expect to complete their degree programs before being called into military service, there was no attempt to have them declare specific majors. After the fall of 1943 students were simply classified "science" or "non-science," with the former category far outnumbering the latter as most students seemed interested in pre-medical or pre-engineering programs that offered the greatest possibility of deferral of enlistment, along with opportunities for officer commissions.

With the decline in enrollment, extra-curricular activities gradually were curtailed. Early in the war travel restrictions and gasoline rationing put an end to intercollegiate athletics, and other activities, including debating, dramatics and even *The Aquinas*, which ceased publication altogether between December, 1943, and September, 1945, disappeared from the collegiate scene as the war continued.

The war did, however, bring one program that brought the University additional students and much-needed revenue at least for a while — the training of aviation cadets for both the Army Air Corps and the Navy. The program grew out of one initiated before the war in 1939 under which the University offered ground training in areas such as navigation and meteorology to students seeking civilian pilot licenses. Flight training was provided by personnel at the Scranton municipal airport located in Schultzville. Operated initially under the jurisdiction of the Civil Aeronautics Administration, once the war had begun the program was placed under the direction of the War Department which in the summer of 1942, just as the Jesuits were assuming control of the University, contracted with the University for the use of its faculty and facilities for classroom instruction of cadets preparing for reserve commissions as pilots in both the Army and Navy. The aviation programs, which were terminated by the spring of 1944, enrolled at their peak over 100 cadets whose instruction extended over either eight weeks in the Army program or sixteen for the naval cadets. Dr. Joseph Harper and Professor Edward Bartley of the Physics/Mathematics Department provided most of the classroom instruction.

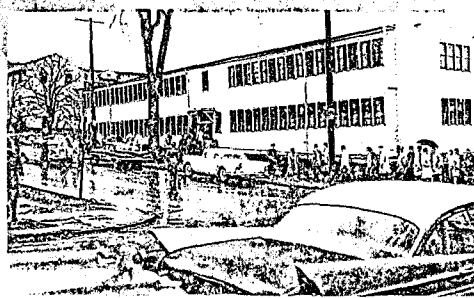
Given the constraints of wartime, any plans that the new Jesuit administration had for substantial modifications in the University's physical plant obviously had to be postponed for the duration. Nonetheless, they did manage to accomplish a good deal soon after they took over. Besides rehabilitating the Estate residence for their own use, they moved quickly in 1942-43 to carry out enough renovations in the Annex, the former Thomson Hospital which the Brothers had acquired before their departure. Several classrooms, faculty offices, a basement cafeteria and even residence facilities for the Army air cadets were in place by the spring of 1943. At the same, both the Throop House and a dilapidated wooden frame structure next to the Annex on Mulberry Street, once used as a nurses' residence were razed as fire



*The B ("Business") Building located on Linden Street, where the upper section of St. Thomas Hall presently stands, was erected on property donated to the University by Atty. Michael Martin who was the last lay chairman of the University's Board of Trustees under the Christian Brothers.*



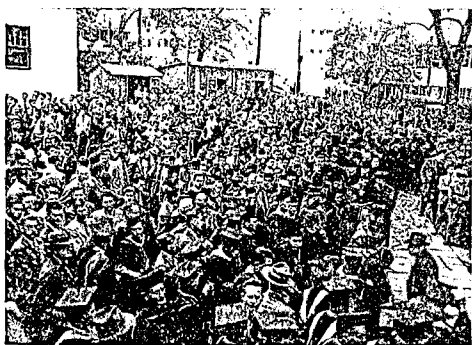
*The A ("Arts") Building located on a lot on the corner of Linden and Monroe donated by Worthington Scranton along with the Scranton Estate. Today Galvin Terrace stands here at the base of the University Commons.*



*The E ("Engineering") Building, erected on the corner of Linden and Monroe originally housed the Physics and Engineering department. After the construction of Loyola Hall in 1956, the E Building was used for a chapel, cafeteria and other student activities. Today St. Thomas Hall stands where the E and B Buildings were located. The presence of many students in uniform in this photo taken around 1959 was due to mandatory ROTC participation by freshmen and sophomores which was in effect from the early 1950's until the mid-1960's.*



*The Most Reverend Patrick A. O'Boyle, Archbishop of Washington who was later elevated to the College of Cardinals, was the principal speaker at the University's commencement in June 1948 held in the Masonic Temple auditorium. Also present on the stage was one of Archbishop O'Boyle's classmates at St. Thomas College 32 years earlier, the Most Reverend Henry Klonowski, Auxiliary Bishop of the Scranton Diocese, who is seated next to Bishop Hafey and the President, Father J. Eugene Gallery, S.J., to the left of the podium.*



*University faculty and students assemble in the courtyard of the A Building for the formal dedication of the University's three new buildings in September of 1947.*

hazards. A student chapel was placed in the former Brothers' Residence, which the Jesuits had renamed La Salle in honor of the Christian Brothers, and the ground floor of Old Main, which had for years housed the school's chapel, now contained an assembly hall.

The new facilities in the Annex proved to be short-lived. Early in the morning of December 23, 1943, the University suffered what has been fortunately the only serious fire in its history as the Annex went up in flames. The upper two floors were completely gutted and the rest of the structure was severely damaged. Since the University was in recess for the Christmas holiday, no one was injured. The building was well-insured, and the University was able quickly to envisage its rebuilding. With the end of the air cadet programs already contemplated and the University's regular enrollment still at a low ebb, Father Nevils and his fellow Jesuit trustees concluded that the University did not actually need the building and, therefore, they decided to have it converted into a high school which the Jesuits would open the following September.

Since they had arrived in Scranton there had been requests from both the diocese and Catholic parents in the Scranton area that the Jesuits establish a college preparatory school. The availability of a reconstructed Annex, which was returned to its original four-story configuration, made such a step possible. Thus the Scranton Preparatory School was born. From its start in 1944 until 1960 the Prep remained in the former Thomson Hospital, before moving out to its present location at 1000 Wyoming Ave. Although the Prep's staff and operation were for the most part distinct from the University, it was owned by the University and under its corporate control until the Prep became a separate corporation in 1978.

While at the time, the decision to turn the Annex over to the Prep was certainly justified (the Prep quickly became a major asset to the community at large, and to the University in particular where a legion of Prep graduates have gone on for their college education), the University soon found itself in need of additional space, once the end of the war brought an unprecedented flood of returning veterans in search of college degrees. The G.I. Bill gave veterans a virtual full scholarship and many, even if they had not seriously contemplated college before, now saw an opportunity too good to pass up. Moreover, many returning servicemen wished to complete degree programs interrupted by the war.

The University, like schools nationwide, saw enrollments mushroom after the fall of 1945. Matriculating students entered at the start of every semester or session, and between the spring of 1946 and the fall of 1947 no less than 1,527 students entered the University of Scranton. In order to accommodate them, classroom space was sought wherever it could be found, including a lease on part of the *Scranton Tribune* building on Washington Avenue. Not only space, but time itself was at a premium; in order to schedule the maximum number of classes within each day "twilight" classes, in between day and evening courses, were begun in the fall of 1946 and continued through the end of the decade.

The need for additional physical plant was alleviated finally by new construction. By the end of 1946 the University had renovated and expanded the old chemistry labs behind where the Throop House had stood, and at the same time was able to gain approval through the Civilian Production Administration in Washington for the erection of three new buildings using surplus military barracks. These were placed on properties on the corner of Linden St. and Monroe Avenue that had been part of the Scranton family donation in 1941 and on an adjacent lot further up on the southern side of Linden Street given in 1945 by Atty. Michael Martin. Construction was completed by the fall of 1947 and the three eminently utilitarian, but sorely needed, buildings were dedicated by Bishop Hafey on September 25. On the northwest corner of Linden and Monroe there was the "Arts" or A Building; on the opposite corner stood the "Engineering" or E Building, housing the Physics and Engineering departments. The "Business" or B. Building was built on the site donated by Atty. Martin.

While the new facilities were intended from the start as a temporary solution to the problem of space, the barracks, which were often the target of irreverent references to the University's "cardboard campus," served the school well for the next fifteen years. Moreover, their construction reflected a recognition that the University's future no longer lay on Wyoming Avenue where there was absolutely no room for growth. Even though Father Gallery, who had assumed the University's helm by the time the barracks were put into use, may not have realized it at the time, the University by the start of the 1950's was poised at the edge of a complete transformation. [5]