



Freshman Carole L. Doyle of Warminster, PA, has quite a heritage behind her. She is the great-great-great niece of Bishop William O'Hara, the first leader of the Diocese of Scranton and the founder of St. Thomas College. This portrait of Bishop O'Hara hangs in the Diocese's Chancery building on Wyoming Ave., across the street from the buildings that served as the University's "campus" from 1888 through the 1950s.

## In The Beginning

**T**his is the first installment of a series of excerpts from *The University of Scranton: A Centennial History*. The book, written by Dr. Frank X.J. Homer '64, professor of history, chronicles the life of the U. of S. in words and pictures.

### The Founding of St. Thomas College (1888-1892)

What was to become the University of Scranton first took material form on the afternoon of Sunday, August 12, 1888, in the shape of a single block of stone which Bishop William O'Hara blessed as the cornerstone for the college he intended to build adjacent to his cathedral and its rectory on Wyoming Avenue in Scranton's central city.

Ever since his arrival as the first Bishop of Scranton in 1868 when the diocese was created, Bishop O'Hara had hoped to provide the Catholic population of northeastern Pennsylvania, then largely composed of recent immigrants from abroad, with the opportunity for some degree of higher education.

Following his blessing of the foundation and cornerstone, the bishop preached a sermon, taking as his text Proverbs 3:1-7 which urges trust in God, rather than the wisdom of man.

Bishop O'Hara's theme when he spoke at the laying of the cornerstone for his College was perhaps more appropriate than his audience realized. He was himself trusting in Divine providence — and the generosity of his flock — to place a building above the foundation and cornerstone.

Even children in the parochial schools were enlisted to sell tiny brick crosses at ten cents a piece. By the summer of 1891 enough money was on hand to allow contracts to be let for the construction of a large three-story building that was to be the College's home through seven decades.

Although known initially as College Hall, the new red-brick structure came over the years to be referred to affectionately as "Old Main." It contained eight large classrooms on the first and second floors, a third-floor auditorium/gymnasium and a chapel dedicated to St. Aloysius located in the basement. Although Old Main no longer stands today, its cornerstone now rests at the base of St. Thomas Hall, the University of Scranton's main academic building, linking the modern-day University to its origins a century ago.

For the first four years of its operation the College was to be staffed by young priests and seminarians from the Scranton diocese itself. Appointed by Bishop O'Hara to be the first president was the Rev. John J. Mangan, a 29-year-old native of Cuba, New York, who had been serving as a curate of St. Peter's Cathedral where he had been ordained only three years earlier.

Sixty-two young men responded to announcements in the diocesan and local papers inviting initial enrollments at the annual tuition of \$40. They, together with Father Mangan and three seminarians who were interrupting their theological studies to teach in the new college, joined with Bishop O'Hara at 9 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, September 6, 1892 for a solemn high mass celebrated in the college chapel to mark the formal opening of the College of St. Thomas of Aquin, a rather clumsy formulation that soon gave way to the more familiar St. Thomas College. The seed of Catholic higher education had been successfully planted in Northeastern Pennsylvania.