



The Scranton Estate residence is shown from the rear as it appeared at the time it was given to the University. Except for the enclosing of the porch on the right, its appearance has not been markedly altered over the past half-century.

The End of an Era: 1940-1942

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

In August of 1940 the Rev. Brother Eliseus Leonard, F.S.C., assumed the presidency of the University of Scranton, unaware that he was destined to be the last member of his order to hold that office. He was to have no more success in dealing with the University's fiscal problems than his predecessor, Brother Denis Edward. The deficit which stood at \$99,500 when Brother Leonard took office nearly doubled over the next two years. Compounding the school's difficulties was the deteriorating international scene. The war, which began with Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, saw the Nazis extend their power over all of Western Europe by the following summer. As Britain's survival hung in the balance, many young Americans began to wonder how long the United States could remain out of the war. By the end of September, 1940, the Selective Service Act had introduced military conscription, prompting an *Aquinas* headline: "Tommy Get Your Gun!" Not coincidentally the number of freshmen entering the University that fall fell dramatically to 167, a 30 percent drop

from the 235 who had entered the previous fall. It was an especially ominous portent for a school whose sole source of revenue was student tuition.

Although the war in Europe was clearly a growing source of concern for students at the University as at all other colleges throughout the country, polls taken periodically by *The Aquinas* indicate that isolationist sentiment was strong at Scranton. In May of 1941 only 84 out of 356 students responded yes when asked if they favored the use of American vessels to protect convoys carrying aid to Britain across the North Atlantic. Only one out of seventeen believed the United States should enter the war even if the alternative was the fall of Britain to the Nazis. In another survey taken the following November (just weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor) University students expressed opposition to the use of American military force outside of the Western hemisphere by a vote of 237-78. At the same time, only 29 percent of those responding saw themselves as "isolationist."

In the midst of these concerns over

financial exigency and declining enrollment, the University found itself within the space of just a few months in 1941 the beneficiary of two significant additions to its physical plant. On August 23, 1941, Bishop Hafey purchased for the University the building that housed the Thomson Hospital, which had by then ceased operation. The price paid by the diocese, \$60,000, was less than half of what was asked when the University had first expressed an interest in acquiring this structure eight years earlier. The new acquisition, originally erected around the turn of the century as a four-story building, later had two upper floors added to it. While hardly an architectural gem, the approximately 24,000 square feet of new space did offer the prospect of relieving the crowded conditions in Old Main.

After the University took possession of the new facility that fall, it was referred to simply as the Annex. Initial plans for its use called for several classrooms and offices, along with additional living quarters for the Brothers; however, the necessary renovations were not to be

completed until after the Brothers relinquished control of the University the following spring.

The *Aquinas* unsuccessfully lobbied to have the Annex named "Hafey Hall," a suggestion discouraged by the Bishop. Two decades later the University provided a more suitable memorial to Bishop Hafey, naming one of the dormitories in the upper quad built in 1962 Hafey Hall.

Three months after the purchase of the Annex the University received a much more significant benefaction, one that would profoundly affect its future. On November 19, 1941, Bishop Hafey informed the University trustees that Mr. Worthington Scranton, grandson of Joseph Hand Scranton, one of the founders of the City of Scranton which took its name from his family, was donating to the diocese in trust for the University his family's homestead and other surrounding properties located in the lower Hill Section adjacent to the downtown area.

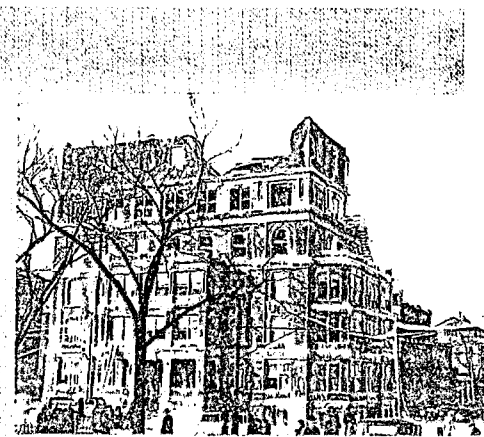
The formal transfer of ownership was quickly completed the following month. This bequest included the elegant Victorian mansion built by Joseph Scranton between 1867-1871 and almost all of the surrounding four and one-half acre estate bounded by the 200 block of Madison Avenue, the 800 block of Linden Street, the 200 block of Monroe Avenue and the unit block of Ridge Row. The residence, whose address was 4 Ridge Row, had been unoccupied since the death of Worthington Scranton's mother in 1935. The only part of the estate retained for the time being by the Scranton family was the portion along Linden Street, which included a fortress-like structure set into the estate wall originally used as the stables and later enlarged into offices from which Worthington Scranton directed his family's business interests, a greenhouse, and a small mock gothic building containing an indoor squash court.

In addition to the Scranton estate itself, the gift to the University included four adjoining lots along Platt Place, which connected Ridge Row to the point where Madison Avenue, slanting diagonally from its intersection with Linden Street, converges with Jefferson Avenue. Three of these lots contained houses. The construction of the present-day Spruce Street complex linking the central city with South Scranton and the Central Scranton Expressway subsequently eradicated all traces of Platt Place. Its location is today not easily visualized or described. Finally, Worthington Scranton included into his donation two other family-owned lots on the northeast and southwest corners of

Linden and Monroe. Both were vacant; however, the former had once been the site of a residence used by Worthington Scranton before his family moved to a suburban estate, Marworth, in the Abingtons north of the City.

The Scranton gift had an enormous impact on the University's status and image within the local community. In monetary terms alone it was by far the largest benefaction the University had received since its founding fifty three years before. At the time the Scranton gift was made, the appraised value of the donated properties for tax purposes was \$206,380. Four years earlier, when the Scranton family was considering the sale of these properties, they estimated their commercial value to be in excess of \$400,000, although the depressed state of the local real estate market undoubtedly precluded any hope of actually finding a buyer at that price. The significance of the University's acquisition of the Scranton estate, however, was much more than a matter of dollars and cents. For one thing, this substantial addition to the University's physical plant, together with the new Annex on Wyoming Avenue, was an important factor in finally convincing the State Council of Education that the school was worthy of its University title. But beyond even that, the fact that a man whose family personified the established wealth of the community and who had no sectarian connection to the diocese or Catholic education was willing to show such generosity to the University served to enhance the image of the University, its identification as a Catholic institution notwithstanding, as a unique asset and resource serving all of Northeastern Pennsylvania and deserving of support from all sectors of the community.

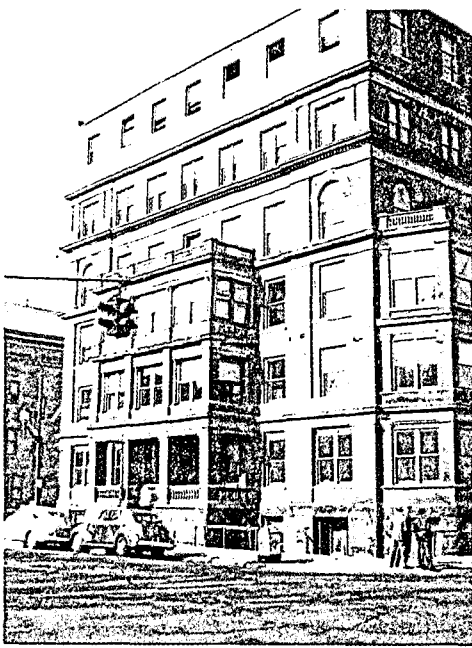
Public announcement of the donation of the Scranton estate to the University brought forth a flood of congratulatory messages and statements from a host of local civic, political and educational leaders. *The Scrantonian*, in its announcement of the donation, called it the University's "greatest advance in history" toward the realization of Bishop Hafey's efforts to "build an outstanding collegiate institution," one that would become a "university for the sons of workingmen" throughout the region, a dream that in fact began long before when Bishop O'Hara first founded St. Thomas College. The University formally expressed its gratitude to its benefactor at the June 1942 commencement exercises when Worthington Scranton was presented with the "University of Scranton Medal," an apparently unique award since there is no record of its conferral either before or after 1942. In June of



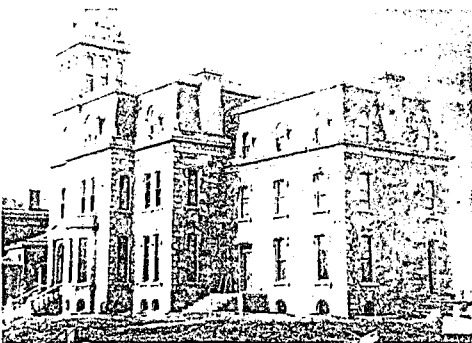
Two days before Christmas in December 1943, the Annex was severely damaged by fire — the only major disaster to any of the University's properties during its hundred year history. The upper two floors were gutted and subsequently eliminated. Since the sharp decline in enrollment caused by the war had reduced the University's space requirements, when the Annex was repaired the University was able to use it then to house the Scranton Preparatory School which the Jesuits opened in 1944. The Prep remained in the building until 1960 when the widening of Mulberry street required its demolition.



The Thomson Hospital Building is shown here in a photo from the turn of the century as it was initially constructed before two additional floors were added to it. Just visible at the far left is the roof of Old Main; the Throop House, used for decades by St. Thomas College and the University, is concealed by the trees to the left.



The former Thomson Hospital is shown here as it looked when the University acquired it. The two upper floors, added some years earlier, gave the building an awkward, top-heavy, appearance. Known simply as the Annex between 1941 and 1943 it housed a ground floor cafeteria and several classrooms and offices. The upper floors were used in 1942 and 1943 to house aviation cadets who were in residence at the University while they underwent training.



The residence built by Joseph Hand Scranton at 4 Ridge Row is shown here as it was approaching completion in 1872. Just visible at the left is the residence which it replaced and which was subsequently removed.

1953, when the University conferred its first honorary degrees, both Mr. Scranton and Bishop Hafey were fittingly to be among the very first recipients of the University's highest honor.

All indications are that the Brothers, as well as the Bishop himself, had little or no advance knowledge of Worthington Scranton's intentions; therefore, it is not surprising plans for the use of the Scranton properties were initially vague and ill-defined. Brother Leonard indicated that the mansion itself might be used as housing for "bachelor professors," and that a gymnasium might be erected on the grounds of the estate. Several months earlier fire had destroyed the only recreational facility available to University students, the gym at the Knights of Columbus clubhouse which University students had been using ever since the removal of the gym in Old Main back in 1933. As with the Annex, however, the force of events that would lead to the departure of the Christian Brothers from Scranton just six months later would preclude their being able to make any practical use of the Scranton Estate.

Save for a few meetings and for the Senior Class Dance held in the former Scranton residence prior to the June 1942 commencement, the University's newest facility was at first largely unused, although the Brothers did allow a couple of out-of-town students to live in the house to guard against vandalism or theft.

Acquisition of both the Annex and Scranton Estate, whatever their long-term consequences, did little to lift the growing uncertainty as to the University's future caused by the mounting deficits and dropping enrollment. If anything, the immediate situation only worsened as the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war. Even though the government encouraged college students to remain in school until drafted, and soon developed programs designed to allow qualified students to complete their degrees while serving in the reserves after which they would begin active duty as officers, many young men could not resist the patriotic urge to enter the armed forces immediately in defense of their country. The University, like schools throughout the nation, saw an almost daily drop in enrollment in the weeks and months after December 7, 1941.

By the end of 1941, Bishop Hafey was convinced that decisive action was required if the University were to survive, and he had no intention of allowing the diocese's investments in the University over the past century, as well as the

prospects for future growth raised by the acquisition of the Scranton Estate, to be lost. For 45 years the Christian Brothers had provided dedicated administration of a college and university owned by the Scranton Diocese; however, their order's resources had clearly been stretched to their limits and beyond by the beginning of the war. Under the circumstances, it was readily understandable why their Baltimore province felt the needs of La Salle College, their own institution which was itself burdened at the time by a million-dollar debt, must take first priority. Thus, Bishop Hafey concluded that the University of Scranton required the services of a new religious order that would be willing to invest the personnel and resources to enable the school to weather the stresses that the war would undoubtedly bring and to help it reach its full potential in the years beyond.

In January of 1942 the bishop made an initial overture to the Holy Cross Fathers at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, a school whose athletic as well as academic accomplishments had brought it nationwide fame. Their provincial politely declined the suggestion they consider assuming control of the University of Scranton. Bishop Hafey then quickly turned to the Society of Jesus, the Catholic Church's largest religious order and one whose name had been identified with excellence in both secondary and higher education since its foundation by St. Ignatius Loyola in the 16th century. As a graduate of the College of The Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and later as a first-year law student at Georgetown University prior to beginning his priestly studies, Bishop Hafey himself was a product of Jesuit training and had a deep-rooted respect and admiration for the quality of Jesuit colleges and universities, of which there were then twenty three in operation throughout the United States alone.

On Sunday, February 1, 1942, the bishop traveled to New York City, a step that suggests an element of urgency, where he met with the Rev. Anthony J. Bleicher, S.J., Vice-Provincial of the Jesuit's New York-Maryland Province. At this meeting Bishop Hafey indicated his willingness to turn over not only administration of the University, but its ownership as well to the Jesuits. The school's properties on Wyoming Avenue together with the Scranton Estate, valued at an estimated \$400,000, were no doubt an attractive inducement, although the school's debt meant that any transfer of ownership would not be unencumbered. The bishop's offer clearly found a receptive audience; the very next day, upon his

return to Scranton, Bishop Hafey sent Father Bleicher a group of photographs of the University's properties. Less than two weeks later, on February 13, Father Bleicher and his fellow Vice-Provincial, the Rev. Vincent L. Keelan, S.J., visited Scranton to see first-hand the University whose future their order was being asked to control. Given the remarkable development of the University that was to emerge over the next four and one-half decades, the fact that the first arrival of the Jesuits in Scranton, however preliminary, came on a Friday the Thirteenth should make the University forever immune to triskadecaphobia.

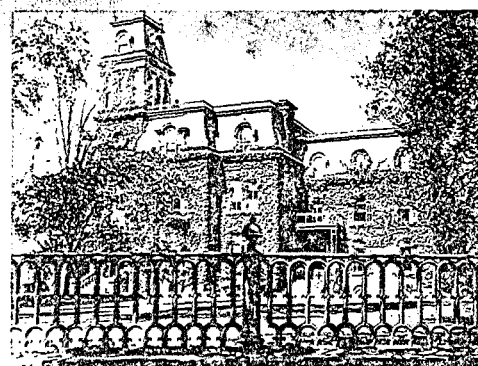
Events moved swiftly over the next three months. The New York-Maryland province formally sought authorization for their acceptance of ownership of the University of Scranton from the Jesuit Superior General in Rome. Once this had been obtained, the Provincial, the Very Rev. James P. Sweeney, S.J., officially notified Bishop Hafey in a letter of May 11, 1942, that the Jesuits were willing to take over the University. While the Society may have acted quickly in response to the bishop's offer, they were hardly unaware of the risk they were taking in assuming ownership of a University in debt only months after the nation had entered a global war whose duration seemed certain to extend over years. In this letter to Bishop Hafey, Father Sweeney noted that the "acceptance of your invitation is of course a challenge in these abnormal times, when all colleges are facing a crisis. Even the fate of well established institutions is in the balance and many smaller colleges may be pushed to the wall during the next six months. However, St. Ignatius was never one to run away from a difficult proposition and we are supposed to imitate his example." Father Sweeney noted that the Maryland-New York Province was then in the process of being divided and that Father Keelan would be assuming direction of the new Maryland Province under whose jurisdiction the University would come once the transfer to the Jesuits was complete.

Immediately upon receiving Father Sweeney's acceptance Bishop Hafey formally petitioned, through the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, for permission from the Vatican to transfer ownership of the University to the Jesuits. The specific terms of the transfer obligated the Jesuits to assume responsibility for a mortgage of \$150,000 on the University's Wyoming Ave. properties payable to the Knights of Columbus. The authorization from Rome was quickly forthcoming and on June 3, 1942, the

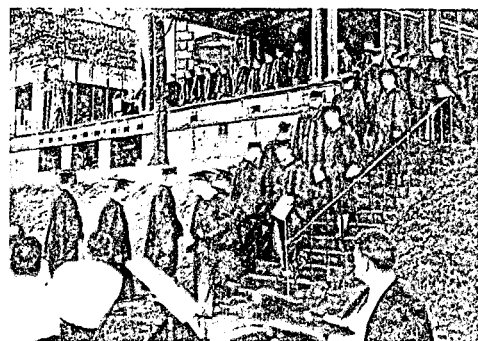
bishop gave Father Keelan canonical permission to establish a Jesuit community within the Scranton diocese. While these formalities were proceeding, Bishop Hafey also had to arrange for the withdrawal of the Christian Brothers. Although the bishop did not officially contact Brother Paul, the Brothers' Provincial, until after the Jesuits had accepted the invitation to come to Scranton, it is inconceivable that the discussions since February had been conducted without the knowledge of the Brothers. Certainly, Brother Leonard as University President was aware of the bishop's intentions. The fact is the Brothers were relieved to be able to concentrate their strained resources to the needs of La Salle College. Brother Paul readily agreed that the decision to bring in a new administration was unavoidable.

The process by which the Jesuits replaced the Brothers was not only remarkably swift, but was also carried out with a minimum of publicity. No public announcement was made by the diocese until June 12th, by which time most of the Brothers in Scranton had departed the city. The 1942-43 catalog, printed that spring, still showed the University as being under the direction of the Christian Brothers. On Sunday, June 7, 1942, the last commencement exercises under the Brothers were held in the Masonic Temple auditorium. No one that evening, including Brother Leonard or Bishop Hafey who presided as Honorary President over the conferral of 121 degrees, made any reference to what was by then an accomplished fact. To the faculty and staff, however, as well as to many of the students, the imminent departure of the Brothers was no secret.

A mixture of sadness and anticipation undoubtedly dominated the thoughts of those in attendance that evening. Even if it were not put into words, no one acquainted with the University's progress under the Brothers could deny the enormous debt of gratitude owed to them by the diocese and the Scranton community. In 1897 the Brothers had begun virtually from scratch with a mere eighteen students; forty-five years later they left a University with a growing body of loyal alumni, a strong reservoir of community support, and, not least of all, a singularly dedicated lay faculty already developing a solid reputation for teaching excellence. All of these were to provide the Jesuits with a secure foundation upon which to exercise their own unique talents for academic development and physical expansion during the decades that followed. [5]



The Scranton Estate residence is shown here as it appeared early in the century. The tower on the left was removed sometime before the Estate properties were given by Worthington Scranton to the University in 1941. The ivy covering the front of the residence, as well as the ornate fence in front, have all long since disappeared.



After the Jesuits took over the University the Estate grounds were frequently used for commencements. The photograph of a commencement of the mid-1940's shows Frank O'Hara, University Registrar, at a podium on the porch of the Estate residence distributing diplomas to the graduating class. The open porch through which the graduates are processing was subsequently enclosed in a fashion similar to the sun room on the other side.