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# The Many Births of Jesuit Education: 28 Current Schools, 4 Gone by, and a National Honors Society

Editorial Board

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# The Many Births of Jesuit Education

## 28 Current Schools, 4 Gone by, and a National Honors Society

Education has been a hallmark of Jesuit ministry from the Society's earliest days. But the stories of the 28 schools in the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States tell of a great variety of founding circumstances, local needs, challenges, struggles, and achievements. Still, they serve one mission: to educate young women and men for others, inspired by their own faith tradition, so that they have an experiential solidarity with the poor and are enabled to build a just and humane society.

### **BOSTON COLLEGE.**

Founded by the Society of Jesus in 1863 to serve the sons of Catholic immigrants, Boston College was the first institution of higher learning chartered in the city of Boston. On September 5, 1864, Boston College opened its doors to 22 students, providing a liberal arts education – with an emphasis on Greek and Latin classics, English, rhetoric, mathematics, philosophy, and religion – based on the *Ratio Studiorum*

(Plan of Studies) that had guided Jesuit universities in Europe and the Americas.

### **CANISIUS COLLEGE,**

founded in 1870 in downtown Buffalo by German Jesuits, originally served the city's growing German immigrant population. Today Canisius is located between the historic Hamlin Park neighborhood and Delaware Park. It offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies programs to regional, national, and international students.

### **THE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS,**

Worcester, Massachusetts, was founded in 1843, by the second bishop of Boston, Benedict Joseph Fenwick, S.J. Catholics were pouring into New England in great numbers, fleeing religious persecution and famine and seeking economic opportunity. On November 2, 1843, with six students aged 9 to 19, the first classes were held. At its first commencement in 1849, James Healy, the son of a slave, was the valedictorian.

### **CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY.**

The Creighton brothers, Edward and John, were prominent Omaha philanthropists and pioneering businessmen. The brothers married two sisters, Mary Lucretia and Sarah Emily Wareham. In 1876, Mary Lucretia bequeathed Edward's estate for a Catholic college, because few educational opportunities existed for the children of the newly arriving immigrant families. Jesuits moved to Omaha to create the school, which opened its doors in 1878.

### **FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY**

became the 26th Jesuit university in the U.S. in 1942, founded to educate men from underserved communities in Connecticut. The original charter provided for a preparatory school as well as Fairfield College of St. Robert Bellarmine, now known as Fairfield University. From a founding class of 303, Fairfield is now a coeducational university with five schools, serving over 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

### **FORDHAM UNIVERSITY**

was founded in 1841 as St. John's College in the village of Fordham by the Right Rev. John Hughes, Coadjutor-Bishop (later Archbishop) of New York. It was the first Catholic institution of higher education in the northeastern United States. In 1846, the college was strengthened by the addition of 28 Jesuits from the shuttered St. Mary's College in Kentucky. In 1907, the name was changed from St. John's College to Fordham University.

John Carroll, the first bishop in the United States, founded

**GEORGETOWN** in 1789 to serve the needs of the Church and the new American republic. Open to students of all faiths, Georgetown fostered a religious toleration such as Catholics had not generally experienced in the colonial period. Jesuits began staffing Georgetown in 1805 after the Society was reestablished in the U.S. in affiliation with the Jesuits in Russia.

### **GONZAGA UNIVERSITY**

was opened by the Jesuits of the Rocky Mountain Mission in 1887, six years after a small group of citizens from the frontier town of “Spokane Falls” wrote to Jesuit superior Joseph Cataldo pledging their support if he would establish a college there. While the Jesuits’ original intent may have been to serve the Native Americans, fiscal considerations quickly led to its opening to the broader community.

### **JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY**

was founded in 1886 as St. Ignatius College on Cleveland’s west side by German Jesuits of the Buffalo Mission. Negotiations with the bishops of Cleveland over the school’s nature – the Jesuits sought to protect German Catholics from dangers they saw in American culture; Bp. Richard Gilmour wanted to Americanize his flock – delayed its opening. The college always served the ethnically diverse Catholic community of Cleveland. In 1935 it moved to suburban University Heights. It has approximately 3,000 undergraduates and 700 graduate students.

### **LE MOYNE COLLEGE.**

By the end of World War II, Catholics in central New York, especially veterans funded by the G.I. Bill of 1944, felt that they could now obtain the higher education that had been denied to most of their parents. Bp. Walter Foery and the New York Jesuits collaborated in opening Le Moyne College in 1947 as a coeducational institution. It was named after Fr. Simon Le Moyne, S.J., who at great risk converted a large number of Onondaga of the Iroquois Nation in the middle of the 17th century.

### **LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY.**

In 1865 St. Vincent’s College opened its doors in Los Angeles, but by the early 20th century the

Vincentians, who sponsored the college, were experiencing financial difficulties and apparently did not share Bp. Thomas Conaty’s dream of a major Catholic university for the now thriving metropolis. So the bishop turned confidently to the Jesuits, who arrived in 1911 to launch the institution that would eventually grow into today’s Loyola Marymount University.

### **LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO**

finds its origins in a young, charismatic Jesuit missionary, Fr. Arnold Damen, S.J. In 1856, Father Damen offered a mission for three straight weeks to over 12,000 Catholics and Protestants in Chicago’s St. Mary’s Cathedral. The Society of Jesus soon after commissioned Damen to found a parish and a college. Thereby, the Jesuits established their first foothold in a burgeoning city with a growing, immigrant Catholic population.

### **LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND.**

Founded in 1852 by Fr. John Early and eight other Jesuits, Loyola College was the first college in the United States to bear the name of St. Ignatius Loyola. It became coeducational in 1971 following its merger with Mount Saint Agnes College. That same year, the college’s board of trustees elected its first layman chair. A decade later, Loyola established a separate business school to meet the demands of its growing undergraduate and graduate business programs.

### **LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS.**

Jesuit missionaries arrived in New Orleans in the early 1700s, but it was not until 1837 that the first Jesuit school was founded in Grand Coteau, Louisiana. As New Orleans grew dramatically in the late 1800s, the local bishop desired to have a Catholic school to educate Catholic youth, and the College of the Immaculate Conception was opened in 1849. In 1904 Loyola College, now Loyola University New Orleans, opened on a new site and received a state charter in 1912.

### **MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY.**

John Martin Henni, the first bishop of Milwaukee, came to the city in 1843 with two ambitions: to build a cathedral and to open a college like the one he had administered and turned over to the Society of Jesus in Cincinnati. He received the Jesuits’ help to open a boys’ academy – a grade school and high school – in 1857, but this failed after



The Jesuits of Saint Peter’s College.

two years. In 1881, when Bishop Henni was aging and infirm, the doors to Marquette College opened under Jesuit sponsorship.

**REGIS UNIVERSITY** was started by a group of Italian Jesuits who had been expelled from their home province of Naples during the turbulent period of the Italian civil war in the 1860s. They initially came to the mission territory of New Mexico to do parish work, eventually adding a school in 1877. In the 1887-88 school year, they relocated the high school and college to the university's current location in Denver, Colorado.

**ROCKHURST UNIVERSITY** was established in 1910 for the education of young men in Kansas City. The largest donor said, "Do not build small." Civic leaders wrote a public letter of support stating that "Rockhurst would appeal to all classes and that every shade of religious belief would be received on equal terms." Catholic education and the education of young people in general have always been part of the mission.

**SAINT JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY.** English Jesuits were a permanent presence in Philadelphia by 1707 and almost immediately began to consider a college in Philadelphia. A small school may have opened in 1734; for sure, Fr. Robert Molyneaux, S.J., established the oldest Catholic school in the U.S., St. Mary's, in 1782. Molyneaux maintained this work through

the first 15 years of the suppression of the Society of Jesus. He and four other former Jesuits joined the unsupported remnant in Russia in 1805, and the school continued expanding into a college in 1841.

**SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY** began in 1818, three years before Missouri became a state. Louis William DuBourg, bishop of Louisiana, opened an academy to educate young men so that "the pioneer settlement would benefit from higher education." In 1823, DuBourg turned the academy fully over to the Society of Jesus, which grew the fledgling academy into the full-fledged Saint Louis University it has become today.

**SAINT PETER'S COLLEGE** was founded in 1872 in Jersey City, N.J., to educate the Irish, Italian, and German immigrant laborers. Declining enrollment during World War I forced Saint Peter's to close, but it reopened in 1930 and moved to its present location in 1936. Changing demographics in the early 1970s prompted many to consider moving the college to a suburban location, but Jesuit leaders decided to remain true to the original mission. Today Saint Peter's University students represent over 60 national origins, with 65% from minority backgrounds.

**SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY.** Writing from the Pacific Northwest to Rome in 1849, Michele

Accolti, S.J., observed: "I think we ought not to show ourselves indifferent" to a place "that will not fail to offer considerable advantages." In 1851, hopes were realized when Giovanni Nobili, S.J., and a few displaced Italian Jesuits transformed a decaying Franciscan mission into what would become Santa Clara University. Serving students from the array of cultures that populated Gold Rush California, these clerical refugees established this initial outpost for Catholic higher education in the Far West.

**SEATTLE UNIVERSITY.** Jesuit fathers Victor Garrand and Adrian Sweere, aided by the Sisters of the Holy Names, founded Seattle College in 1891 as a parochial school for 90 boys and girls. Washington State recognized the school as a college in 1898. The first catalogue of 1901 stated the college's purpose: "As educators [Jesuits] aim to secure the gradual and just development of mind and heart together..." The college largely closed in 1919 but reopened in 1931. It became Seattle University in 1948.

**SPRING HILL COLLEGE.** Founded in 1830 by Michael Portier, first bishop of Mobile, the college was his first major project for the new diocese. From the beginning it was open to both Catholics and Protestants and also had a seminary division for the training of future priests. By 1840 the bishop was searching for a religious community to take charge of the col-

lege. After failed attempts by two small French congregations, the Jesuits of the Province of Lyons took over in 1847.

**UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT MERCY.** In 1877 Bp. Caspar H. Borgess realized his dream for Catholic education in Detroit, wooing the Jesuits by bundling a commitment to found what would become the University of Detroit with pastoral rights over the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul. In 1941, the Sisters of Mercy built Mercy College to train nurses and teachers for hospitals and schools. In 1990, their two boards created a female-male collaborative educational venture, the University of Detroit Mercy. The two charisms have grown together ever since.

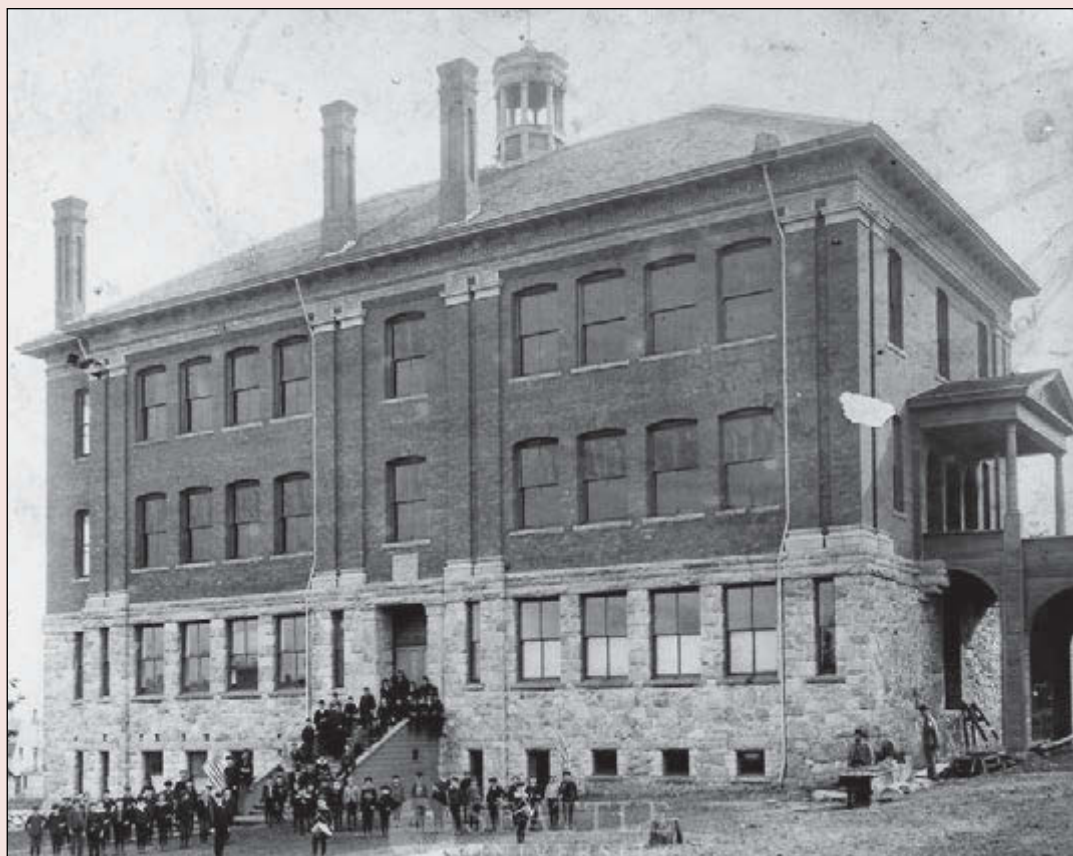
The **UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO** began on October 15, 1855, as a one-room schoolhouse named St. Ignatius Academy. Its founding is interwoven with the establishment of the Jesuit order in California, with European immigration to the western United States, and with the population growth of San Francisco following the California Gold Rush. Although only three students showed up for the school's first day of classes, today USF enrolls more than 10,000 students.

The **UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON** was founded as Saint Thomas College in August 1888. Diocesan priests and seminarians staffed it until 1896. From

1897 until 1942 the Christian Brothers administered the school, renamed The University of Scranton in 1938. In the late summer of 1942, nineteen Jesuits arrived to administer the university. They restructured and strengthened traditional and preprofessional programs emphasizing liberal arts. The university has grown from a primarily commuter school with fewer than 1,000 students to a broadly regional, comprehensive university with more than 6,000 students.

**WHEELING JESUIT UNIVERSITY.** “Will you accept responsibility for the Liberal Arts College I will build in Wheeling, West Virginia?” Bp. John J. Swint asked Fr. John Nugent, Jesuit provincial of Maryland, in 1951. Fr. Edward Bunn, future Georgetown president, urged acceptance: “No territory has as great a need....” In September 1955 Wheeling College, “a Catholic College of Liberal Education,” officially began with 90 students; 35 of the students were women, which was a first for the Maryland Province.

**XAVIER UNIVERSITY.** In 1831, Bp. Edward Fenwick founded The Athenaeum of Ohio in downtown Cincinnati; it was the oldest Catholic seminary west of the Appalachian Mountains. Nine years later, Bp. John Baptist Purcell, Fenwick’s successor, invited the Society of Jesus to assume responsibility for the school, and it became St. Xavier



Seattle University.

College. It was moved to its current location in 1912 and was renamed Xavier University in 1930.

The 28 schools profiled above are not the only Jesuit schools of higher education; others served their purpose and then changed course, others still fell to hard times and population shifts. Here are four brief stories. From the mid 1820s, successive bishops of New Orleans asked the Jesuits of the Paris Province to establish a school for young men in Louisiana. On July 31, 1837, ground was broken for **St. Charles College**, in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, which remained a boarding and day school for boys for nearly 90 years. It serves today as a Jesuit novitiate and infirmary. In Kentucky, various bishops sought Jesuit help for educa-

tion. Jesuits from New Orleans assumed responsibility for **St. Mary’s College** near Marion County, Kentucky, in 1831, but left in 1846 to take over St. John’s College in New York, now Fordham University. Not far away, in Bardstown, in 1848 Jesuits from Missouri took over running **St. Joseph’s College**, which had opened in 1819 and flourished until it became a victim of the Civil War. Its building was converted to a military hospital, and after the war the Society of Jesus did not have the resources to resume leadership there. **St. Mary’s College** in Kansas was founded in 1848 to serve Native Americans; in 1931 it suspended standard college activities and served as a Jesuit school of theology until 1968.

Another Jesuit work of higher education is the honor society that includes members from all 28 Jesuit colleges and universities. In 1915, Fr. John Danihy, S.J., founded **Alpha Sigma Nu** at Marquette University to promote excellence in Jesuit education. At this time, Catholic universities were systematically locked out of honor societies such as Phi Beta Kappa. Father Danihy’s purpose was to honor students not on the basis of scholarship alone but also for their commitment to the search for truth, to loyalty to the ideals of Jesuit education, and to serving others. Today, Alpha Sigma Nu encourages its over 74,000 members to be lifetime leaders with Ignatian vision and values. ■