The Presidents of Marquette University

There have been multiple histories written about Marquette University, but no organized review of the individuals who have led the institution. This, then, is the first detailed record of the 23 men who have through 2021 served as president of the institution first called Marquette College (1881-1907) and renamed as Marquette University (1907-present).

The Presidents of Marquette University builds on and uses as primary sources three Marquette history books:

* Milwaukee’s Jesuit University: Marquette 1881-1981, by Dr. Thomas J Jablonsky, Marquette University Press, 2007
* The Story of Marquette University: An Object Lesson in the Development of Catholic Higher Education, by the Rev. Raphael Hamilton, S.J., Marquette University Press, 1953  
  https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4007coll18/id/2032/rec/3
* Marquette College, a Quarter Century 1881-1906, 1906  
  https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4007coll18/id/2330/rec/2

Beyond those books, it is further built on a wide range of online resources including Marquette’s own Special Collections and University Archives within the Raynor Memorial Libraries (https://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/about\_univ\_records.php), vital Jesuit repositories containing the invaluable Woodstock Letters that are maintained at Boston College (Jesuit Online Library, <https://jesuitonlinelibrary.bc.edu/>) and the Jesuit Archives and Research Center in St. Louis (<http://jesuitarchives.org/>), many newspaper archives or companies archiving newspapers, and other websites that are referenced throughout the pages, including the very helpful (and appropriately named) Find a Grave website (https://www.findagrave.com/).

Reviewing these resources illustrate how the Ignatian concept that Jesuits should live with one foot raised, ready to move toward whatever comes next in their lives, is evident in the leaders of Marquette University. Twenty-two of the 23 men to serve as Marquette president were Jesuit priests, and all were or are on lifelong journeys to serve God that take them throughout the country and world. For more than half of those priests, their terms leading Marquette were relatively short – five years or fewer. Ten served no more than three years. Just three—Rev. Edward O’Donnell, S.J.; Rev. John P. Raynor, S.J.; and Rev. Robert A. Wild, S.J.) were Marquette president for more than eight years.

All but three Marquette presidents entered the priesthood while in their teens or early 20s, often soon after earning a bachelor’s degree at a college or university. The three notable exceptions:

* Rev. Stanislaus P. Lalumiere, S.J., who came to the Jesuits at age 27 after years as a lawyer. He had among the examiners who recommended his admittance into the practice of law the lawyer and future president Abraham Lincoln. Lalumiere had worked in the office of the law firm Lincoln and Herndon in Springfield, IL, after finishing college studies.
* Rev. Peter Brooks, S.J., who entered the Jesuit Order at age 28 after years working for a variety of companies and serving in the U.S. Army Coast Artillery Corps, rising to the rank of second lieutenant and serving in France during World War I. He is the only Marquette president to have served in the military.
* Dr. Michael R. Lovell, Marquette’s first lay president, who out of college worked for a small, private start-up company. When the company went public, he returned to academia at public universities before becoming Marquette’s president in 2014 at age 47. A Catholic since childhood, Dr. Lovell’s Jesuit education has been extended, on-the-job training throughout his years at Marquette.

So where else were Marquette’s presidents posted? The early presidents circulated throughout the Jesuit universities in the central United States (what was called the Missouri Province, with an enormous area described by the Jesuit Archives as “from the Alleghenies to the high plains”), also serving as presidents or teaching at Saint Louis College/University, St. Louis, MO; Xavier College/University, Cincinnati, OH; Creighton University, Omaha, NE; Saint Ignatius College/Loyola University, Chicago, IL; and/or several smaller Jesuit educational institutions that no longer exist.

Of the 22 Jesuits to serve as Marquette’s president, eight also served in the important position of provincial of a Jesuit province. A provincial is the individual who oversees a province’s mission and all Jesuits and Jesuit institutions within it. Six former or future Marquette presidents served as provincial of the Jesuits’ Missouri Province and, in more recent years, two were provincial of the Chicago Province. (The geographical boundaries of Jesuit provinces in the United States have changed over the past century. There is neither a Missouri nor Chicago province today.)

Even though it no longer exists, the St. Stanislaus Seminary, Florissant, MO, was the starting point of Jesuit education for nearly every Marquette president who led the university before 1990. Many would return to teach there, too. Just two of Marquette’s first 19 presidents did not receive at least some of their Jesuit education at Florissant, which is about 15 miles northwest of Saint Louis University. The seminary was founded in 1823 and its operations were relocated to Saint Louis University in 1971. While the Jesuits-in-training were responsible for some of the seminary’s operations, until January 1865 it relied on slave labor, an issue explained and addressed in the Jesuits’ Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project   
(<https://www.jesuits.org/our-work/shmr/what-we-have-learned/missouri/>). Four of Marquette’s presidents were educated at the seminary when slaves were present.

The St. Stanislaus Seminary property also served initially as the final resting ground for eight of Marquette’s presidents. When the seminary property was sold in the 1970s, the graves of hundreds of Jesuit priests were reinterred at Calvary Cemetery and Mausoleum, St. Louis, MO.

Geographically, Marquette’s presidents have come primarily from the central United States. Not surprisingly, the most-represented birthplace state for Marquette’s presidents is Wisconsin, with five being born in the state in which Marquette is located. Three were born in Ohio, two each in Missouri and Illinois, and one each from Louisiana, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Five were born in other countries, with two coming from Ireland and one each from Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

The current president of Marquette, Dr. Lovell, is referred to as the university’s 24th president. There have been, however, only 23 individuals to serve in the role. The Rev. Joseph Grimmelsman, S.J., served two distinctly separate terms, as the fifth president from 1889 to 1891, and two decades later as the 12th president, from 1911 to 1915. Father Wild also served two noncontiguous periods, from 1996-2011 and again from 2013-2014, but his second period has been clearly identified by the university as being as an interim president.

It is hoped this project will be accepted as both a useful reference about all who have served God by leading Marquette University and a potential starting point for further research about the presidents.

*About the writer/editor*

Brad Stratton retired from Marquette University in 2020. During his six years at Marquette, he was the senior editor for presidential communication in the office of President Michael R. Lovell. He previously served in a similar role for three chancellors and two interim chancellors at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This project was compiled between March 2020 and October 2021.