Beyond Boston: Catholicism in the Northern New Borderlands in the Nineteenth Century

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BEYOND BOSTON: CATHOLICISM IN THE NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND BORDERLANDS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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DISSERTATION

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................................................... iii  
ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... v  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: AN “AMERICAN” CATHOLIC CHURCH?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. CHEVERUS AND CARROLL: AMERICAN CATHOLICISM’S DIVERSE ORIGINS, 1800-1825</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. BISHOP FENWICK’S DIOCESE IN FLAMES, 1825-1846</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. EDWARD KAVANAGH’S MAINE, 1795-1844</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. FRONTIER MISSIONARY IN A CATHOLIC BORDERLAND: JEREMIAH O’CALLAGHAN AND THE VERMONT CHURCH, 1830-1853</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. AN INTELLECTUAL FRONTIER: VERMONT CONVERSION, 1825-1900</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. DEGOESBRIAND’S VERMONT, BACON’S MAINE AND FITZPATRICK’S BOSTON: THE CASE FOR A UNIQUE NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND CATHOLICISM, 1853 AND BEYOND</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION: NEW ENGLAND CATHOLICS, A RECONSIDERATION</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

BEYOND BOSTON: CATHOLICISM IN THE NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND BORDERLANDS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

Molly Burns Gallaher Boddy

University of New Hampshire, May, 2015

This study uncovers the religious and ethnic history of northern New England- Maine and Vermont- which has remained for too long on the periphery of scholars’ attention. In 1836, the Vermont Catholic missionary priest Jeremiah O’Callaghan warned members of the New England Catholic Church that “our own Catholicks (are) every where scattered in the woods,” writing not only of the hostile outside Protestant world faced by Catholics in Vermont during the nineteenth century, but also of the difficulty of ministering to such a geographically removed or “scattered” rural population.¹ Still today, the story of these northern New England Catholics that O’Callaghan found so hard to reach remains invisible to historians. The extensive literature on the history of the American Catholic Church maintains a strict geographic and ethnic focus. It rarely ventures into the northern borderlands, focusing instead on the more central city of

¹ Jeremiah O’Callaghan, The Creation and Offspring of the Protestant Church; also the Vagaries and Heresies of John Henry Hopkins, Protestant Bishop; and of other False Teachers. To Which is Added a Treatise of the Holy Scriptures, Priesthood and Matrimony (Burlington, Vermont: Printed for the Author, 1837), iii.
Boston, the apparent site of New England Catholicism’s “birth” with the arrival of Irish Famine-era immigrants.

Yet, I argue that well before Boston emerged as the powerful center of New England Catholicism, rural Catholics, independent missionaries, and struggling bishops built the Catholic religion in the northern borderlands despite a dire lack of resources and a crippling absence of central authority. In close proximity to Canada, French-Canadian, Native American, and English-speaking Catholics lived in a malleable religious world, one not divided by the firm parish, diocesan, or national boundaries that would later come to define the structure of American Catholicism. An Irish-led, urban-centered, geographically rigid model of “American Catholicism” was not a foregone conclusion. In fact, before this time, the very idea of “American” Catholicism was a fluid one. New England Catholicism’s expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century owed as much to the practice of the religion in Canada and the northern borderlands as it did to Irish immigration.

Drawing on frontier and borderlands studies, my dissertation is situated within an increasingly important historical framework that allows us to reconsider the rigidity of national boundaries and instead envision a broader idea of American history. Here, the story of the borderlands’ connection with Canada suggests that “American Catholicism” is more correctly “North American Catholicism.” This dissertation moves away from a limiting or “parish boundaries” concept of ethnic and institutional history, describing instead a transnational, open region where Catholic laity and clergy alike shaped their faith to fit their needs, despite (or even because of) living on the institutional and geographic margins of both the United States and the Catholic Church. Evidence in the form of personal diaries and correspondence between early
bishops and missionary priests shows that northern New England was home to many Catholics in need of sacraments long before the expansion of Boston Irish Catholicism.
INTRODUCTION: AN “AMERICAN” CATHOLIC CHURCH?

In January of 1811, the French émigré priest John Cheverus, the first bishop of the newly created Diocese of Boston, made Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis of Quebec his Vicar General. This allowed Plessis to function as “almost-bishop” of Boston when Cheverus was unavailable, giving the Sacraments and acting as an administrator throughout New England. Though Cheverus was now an American bishop, under the watch of Archbishop John Carroll of Baltimore, Quebec was Boston’s closest Catholic neighbor. Catholics outside of Boston were so few and scattered that the Diocese covered all of New England, and northern New Englanders often had more contact with French-Canadian missionaries than American ones. In certain regions, Catholics might not even consider themselves either “Canadian” or “American.”

Northern Maine was still contested territory, and its formal political border with New Brunswick would not be finalized until 1842.

As Cheverus explained to Plessis, the New England diocesan boundaries drawn by Rome made cooperation between the two bishops necessary. “I will try to obtain from Baltimore a copy of the Bull indicating the limits of the different dioceses, and I will try to have it sent to you,” Cheverus wrote to Plessis in French, the native language of both men. He went on to explain that the two regions were closely linked, noting “My diocese touches yours East by the district of Maine towards the frontier of New Brunswick, North by the State of Vermont, and in the Northwest of the district of Maine on the frontier of Canada. My diocese comprises the whole of New England, namely: Massachusetts and Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont.” To complicate matters further, “The Diocese of New York, which
also touches yours, embraces all the State of New York and New Jersey.”¹ For North American Catholics, America and Canada were bound together not only by geography and history, but also by religion and overlapping churches. Though New France received its first bishop, Laval, in 1658, the boundaries between Quebec and what would soon become the northern United States were less than clear.² New England Catholics grew up in the shadow of the Canadian Church, just as southwestern Catholics had found themselves in the orbit of the Mexican Catholic Church from the time of sixteenth-century Spanish missionaries.³

Before major European Catholic immigration to the United States, Catholics were sparse enough for dioceses to cover several states. Rome did its best to follow state and national lines when drawing up the new dioceses, but regions overlapped geographically, ethnically, and culturally. As Cheverus noted, American bishops were called to serve a large territory that did not always conform to the newly established diocesan boundaries. Cheverus administered the sacrament of confirmation to several Catholics in New York, outside of New England’s jurisdiction, because, he confessed to Plessis, “I have an immense field to cultivate, but, as you say it is fallow, and I have, at the present moment, only two-fellow laborers to help me clear it.” Cheverus also noted his huge responsibility and serious lack of resources, admitting that only his own signature appeared at the bottom of the letter to Plessis because he had no secretary to help him with such documents.⁴

¹ “Correspondence Between Bishop Cheverus of Boston and Bishop of Quebec,” The American Catholic Historical Researches 8.1 (Jan 1912): 10-20.
⁴ “Correspondence Between Bishop Cheverus of Boston and Bishop of Quebec.”
This letter exemplifies the state of the New England Catholic Church in the early 1800s, a church that bore little resemblance to the Catholic Church of the late 1800s which has captured the attention of historians. Cheverus’s Church was clearly not the well-organized, parish-based, city institution with its related orphanages, hospitals, and schools that urban Americans were accustomed to by the end of the century. Texts about New England Catholic history have a tendency to open with a brief sketch of the pre-1840 period, before turning to the institutional expansion of the Church after the arrival of Irish Famine immigrants. “Boston” and “Irish Catholicism” conjure up a familiar story of cultural struggle and success in the post-Famine era. New England Catholic history is often told as the story of Irish-Catholic arrival, and, eventually, institutional and linguistic domination over more recently arrived Catholic ethnic groups. But Cheverus would hardly have recognized the Boston that developed after the 1847 Famine. Cheverus’s New England was more complicated in many respects, despite being smaller. It was not organized neatly into recognizable parishes with individual parish priests. It was instead one huge frontier mission, and Cheverus tended to most New England Catholics by himself, with help from his association Father Mignault.

Yet, the historiography of New England Catholicism focuses on Irish institutional dominance rather than Cheverus’s humble beginnings. In most narratives, French-Canadian immigrants arrived in New England textile towns beginning in the 1880s to find an Irish-Catholic majority. After this, clashes between the French and Irish mushroomed in the workplace, city streets, and even church sanctuaries, reaching a high point in the 1920s. Historian Yves Roby offers what has become the master narrative of the history of French-Canadian New England. That story unfolds as follows: Separated by language and a specific Quebecois Catholic culture, French-Canadian arrivals in New England formed “Little Canadas”
in order to preserve their ethnic, religious, and linguistic traditions. Despite this effort at religious and cultural control, the English-speaking Irish usually won the struggle for dominance over the regional Catholic Church.\(^5\) “La survivance”, or the fight for cultural, linguistic, and religious survival of a French-Canadian identity in the United States, thus came to define the changing, generational concept of what it meant to be Franco American. Irish dominance over New England’s Catholic hierarchy was an especially difficult reality for multiple generations of Franco Americans as they struggled to have national, French-speaking parishes continue to serve their communities.\(^6\)

While both groups were Catholic, striking differences distinguished the Irish and French Canadians in northern New England, according to standard narratives. The Irish established a dominant position in the Catholic Church and the Democratic Party during the nineteenth century. They and their descendants achieved such power, historians argue, that, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the Irish dominated community institutions, the Democratic Party, and Catholic religious life in urban America. Jay P. Dolan, for example, writes that, “Their dominance increased over time, so much so that the Irish would soon define what it meant to be Catholic in America.”\(^7\) During the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the American Catholic Church—controlled largely by Irish-American bishops and Irish Americans in religious orders—thus pushed immigrants and their children away from the idea of national parishes and ethnic devotions, insisting instead on one, single “American” Catholic Church.\(^8\) Though ethnic churches did exist throughout New England,

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\(^7\) Dolan, *The Irish Americans*, 108.
\(^8\) James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, “The Irish and the ‘Americanization’ of the ‘New
especially for the French-Canadian immigrants who arrived from nearby Quebec, the ideas and influence of the Irish hierarchy were powerful. Irish religious control spilled over into social and political life, as the Irish also tended to be placed in more senior positions at work as time went on, managing more recently arrived Franco-American employees. At work and church, French-Canadian immigrants were often perceived by New Englanders as somehow “un-American” in comparison to the Irish. The Irish found that use of the English language helped them to achieve a certain degree of power over other immigrant groups, while also allowing them to assimilate into mainstream society at a more rapid pace than speakers of other languages; they thus became the leaders of a single American Catholic Church once more immigrant groups poured into the country.

Franco-American families, meanwhile, often moved back and forth between nearby Canada and the United States, and refused to give up the French language, making their adjustment far more difficult. This created generations of “in-between” Franco Americans who never felt quite at home in their church or their country. The great tragedy of the Franco-American Catholic experience was that their ancestral homeland was just to the north: Franco Americans became trapped between two worlds. French Canadians came to New England not only for work, but also in the hope that they could create a more perfect French-Canadian Catholic Church in New England, but this dream proved elusive. In religious terms, New Immigrants’ in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930,” Journal of American Ethnic History 24 no. 4 (Summer 2005), 18-23.


England was not the Promised Land, but instead a sort of perpetual Egypt, with America a difficult home, and the grandeur of the Canadian Catholic past always looming.

These themes emphasize ethnic identity and conflict as central to Catholicism, particularly in New England. In other regions throughout the United States, different ethnic competitions existed, but the story had a similar ending, usually with the Irish coming out on top. By the twentieth century, Americans were accustomed to urban, ethnic, and parish-based Catholicism. It could be said that scholars have adopted a “parish boundaries” model of Catholic history. Even beyond the specifically French-Canadian and Irish divisions in New England, there is a larger accepted narrative within the historical community about the importance of ethnicity and very specific geographical boundaries in defining the American Catholic experience. In 1985, Robert A. Orsi first published his dynamic *The Madonna of 115th Street*. Orsi showed that twentieth-century Italian Harlem was a Catholic “enclave” in which Italian traditions, language, food, and the *festa* of the Virgin Mary reigned supreme. This version of Catholicism was unmistakably Italian-American, and excluded Catholics of other ethnicities. In 1996, John T. McGreevy, though addressing a very different topic, came to the same conclusion about the importance of ethnic boundaries in twentieth-century American Catholicism. In his magisterial and aptly-titled *Parish Boundaries*, he argues that the parish was an all-encompassing world specific to certain nationalities. American Catholics were not only hostile to different races in their neighborhoods, but even to Catholics of other ethnicities who threatened to destroy their specific practices of “national” Catholicism. Though a critically important contribution to the

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current understanding of American Catholicism, this body of historical work focuses too narrowly on an urban version of Catholicism with hardened institutional, ethnic, and geographical lines, one that developed by the dawn of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, when American scholars discuss the Catholic Church, they conjure up an image of one of the most formal and organized institutions in human history. For nineteenth-century, American-born Protestants, Catholicism seemed the most formal and organized of any religious sect. Control over the faithful was thought to be so complete, worldwide, and ancient that for many Protestants it precluded “papist” American Catholics from free thought and participation in the country’s democratic government. Americans living in the period following the Civil War saw Catholics split into orderly parishes, where worship, family life, school, and community organizations all took place in the context of the Roman Catholic Church and its local representative, the parish priest. American Catholics themselves also became accustomed to this structure, living in territorial, national, or ethnic parishes that catered to both their spiritual and social needs while shielding them from an often critical outside culture. There is also an overwhelming trend in the historical scholarship which sees American Catholicism as an immigrant-created religion, popularized only in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

15 Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism, Past and Present* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 39. A common thread in the historiography of American Catholicism is the difficult circumstances Catholics faced socially because of the prevailing belief that their religion was inherently “un-American” and thus incompatible with America’s democratic structures. Gleason writes that from the colonial era forward, “innumerable earnest and well-meaning American Protestants believed the Pope was literally the Antichrist spoken of in the Book of Revelation. This organization over which the Pope presided was in no sense to be thought of as a branch of the Christian Church. His followers could never become good Americans because, in the minds of the Protestants, one of the things that defined Americanism was rejection of the Pope of Rome.”

16 One important example of this is John T. McGreevy’s *Parish Boundaries*. Though he looks at the exclusion of African-American Catholics—arguing that “parish boundaries” were racial and ethnic in nature—McGreevy’s text gives readers a good idea of how immigration and ethnicity defined parish neighborhoods and attitudes. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 7-28.
Important as such assessments are to understanding the difficulties Catholics faced with both other Catholics and their Protestant neighbors, they fail to acknowledge American Catholicism’s diverse backgrounds and origins well before the nineteenth century, and they ignore areas that did not conform to the visible, urban, parish model of ethnic Catholicism. Most Catholic scholars, most notably Jay P. Dolan, suggest that during the nineteenth century, Catholicism became increasingly immigrant (Irish) and urban in nature. While true in some cases, this broad view overlooks some complex local themes. Dolan further argues that by 1815, the Church could go in one of two directions: Europeanize or Americanize. The problem with this line of argument is that a single “direction” was never chosen by many Catholics. On both the Mexican and Canadian borders, Catholicism remained regionalized throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, connected to earlier versions of Spanish and French-colonial Catholicism, and influenced by groups of local congregants who straddled ethnic and national borders. American Catholicism was not simply transported from Europe in the mid-nineteenth century as a complete system, replete with neatly organized neighborhood parishes and strong leadership.

This dissertation argues, instead, that New England Catholicism had multiple origins and was deeply connected to Canadian Catholicism. To capture the particular history of northern New England Catholicism, I will draw upon the related concepts of “frontier” and “borderland.” Recent scholarship on French and Spanish-speaking Catholics in North America has employed both of these concepts to describe the interconnected, international, and often highly-contextualized, local nature of nineteenth-century Catholicism. The terms “frontier” and “borderland” are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to those areas on the periphery, often

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unsettled and largely unregulated. It is important to separate the two concepts and consider how they might be useful in elucidating the unique history of Northern New England Catholicism.

“Frontier” is a particularly difficult term to define. Frontiers can refer to places, the lands lying at the territorial edge of a settled polity, suggesting images of the Wild West. “Frontier” can also refer to a process, or an early stage of development, that period when socio-political institutions and practices have yet to emerge and take hold. Finally, “frontier” can also be used metaphorically, to refer to cultural rather than territorial peripheries. In this rendering, frontier can appear as progressive, rather than primitive, referring to cutting edge developments or at least challenges to the status quo.

Scholars, beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous “frontier thesis,” have used “frontier” in all of these ways. Turner imagined the frontier as both place and process, existing at the edge of white American settlement and rapidly vanishing as the wilderness yielded to white conquest and settlement. The repeated encounters with the ever-advancing line of the frontier yielded distinctive American institutions and characteristics, creating a nation of self-reliant democrats. Later critics re-imagined the frontier as a liminal place and space of cultural interaction rather than an inevitable stage in the process of American conquest and expansion. Western historians Stephen Aron and Jeremy Adelman, for example, define frontier as “a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly

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18 On the frontier as a stage, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988). Limerick argues against the “frontier” concept. She studies the West as a concrete place undergoing conquest, emphasizing that the frontier undergoes stages.

defined.” Similarly, David J. Weber in his pathbreaking work on the Spanish frontier in North America refers to frontier “zones” as potentially transformative spaces, responding to “a dynamic that is unique to time and place.”

Religious frontiers also existed. Historians have successfully applied the concept of “frontier” to understand unique features of American religious development, though they have focused particularly on Protestantism in the American West. John B. Boles recounts long-standing debates over whether a unique American Protestantism arose on the frontier, its untamed and individualistic congregations preferring emotional religious revivals and denominations with limited hierarchies. More recently, historians of American Catholicism have highlighted what they call “frontier Catholicism,” a phenomenon that they see at play in the trans-Appalachian West. John Ditchl, for instance, has argued that the “open wilderness of Kentucky and other peripheral areas to which Catholics migrated in the first years of nationhood fostered enthusiasm and optimism, as well as a more assertive and outward orientation.” In the trans-Appalachian West, a priest shortage and the slow development of the Diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky, meant that Catholics and Protestants had varied interactions; the Church did not exercise absolute authority. Ditchl argues that until 1830, the trans-Appalachian West might thus be considered a frontier church.

Michael Pasquier also argues in Fathers of the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870, that there was something specifically frontier-like about the South and trans-Appalachian

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West. Pasquier asserts that French missionaries in the South and the West were a unique group, subject to “unsettled physical and social environments,” spread out communities, limited resources, power struggles with bishops and ecclesiastical authority, miscreant fellow priests, and unruly parishioners.24

But “frontier Catholicism” was not limited to the trans-Appalachian West. I use “frontier” in my study to refer not only to territorial peripheries, but, more centrally, to a stage of development in the American Catholic Church. As the following chapters show, northern New England Catholicism had striking similarities with Pasquier’s frontier church in the trans-Appalachian West, suggesting that throughout most of the country, the entire American Catholic Church operated primarily as a “frontier church” during the first half of the nineteenth century. Rather than being peripheral to the dominant Catholic Church experience, frontier churches in the West, the South, and northern New England defined American Catholicism before mid-century and the arrival of Irish Catholics to urban areas. In northern New England, an era of “frontier Catholicism” predominated until the formation of separate dioceses in 1853. Maine and Vermont were considered underdeveloped and removed. They lacked the infrastructure—parishes, priests, bishops, archbishops, religious organizations, and clear hierarchies—associated with Roman Catholic practice in Europe. But American Catholicism also existed on a cultural frontier in the United States in the early nineteenth century. The United States was not a Catholic country (or as religiously open as some arrivals from Europe hoped), but rather one founded on an explicitly Protestant identity. On the periphery, culturally, the American Catholic Church worked to secure its acceptance and foundation.

24 Michael Pasquier, 

But “frontier” cannot completely illuminate the Catholic experience in New England. Even after the formation of the local Dioceses of Burlington and Portland in 1853, Maine, Vermont, and to an extent, New Hampshire (part of the Diocese of Portland), remained in a unique situation because of their French-Canadian populations and proximity to Canada. While the institutional church grew and moved Catholics out of an explicit “frontier” environment, this region remained a borderland, a place of interconnection and overlap between established entities. These Catholics lived between two countries, and among multiple centers of religious control. Although they had local bishops within their states by the 1850s, northern New Englanders also had access to French-Canadian priests. In this sense, the Canadian-American Catholic experience shares much in common with nineteenth- and the twentieth-century Mexican-American experience. Despite living in politically and religiously established areas, people in borderlands had complex relationships with multiple centers of control. Borderlands are ongoing, identifiable places rather than only stages of development. Even with institutional growth and formal political systems, borderlands can continue to exist because people can find themselves in between multiple centers.

Recent borderland studies treat race, ethnicity, religion, and place simultaneously because they identify political divisions or regions defined by overlapping influences, interconnected systems of interaction, and complex human identities. The study of the Spanish borderlands has a long history, beginning with Herbert Eugene Bolton’s pathbreaking work in the early twentieth century, carried on by David J. Weber and others.25 Many scholars prefer “borderlands” to “frontier” as a more subtle and complicated framework, able to capture regions

that were far from unsettled, yet existed at the periphery of nations and communities. As meeting places between peoples, at boundary lines that often became blurred, borderlands communities provide a particularly rich context to examine cultural exchange and institutional developments that reached across national divides.

Curiously, scholars interested in the connections between America and Canada have not embraced an explicit borderlands perspective to the extent that scholars of the Mexican-American experience have. Most works about the American-Canadian borderlands have a very modern focus. Key exceptions include the field-changing work of University of New Brunswick Professor Elizabeth Mancke, who has spent several decades making a case for including Canada in Atlantic-focused works. One of her monographs, Two Patterns of New England Transformation: Michias, Maine and Liverpool, Nova Scotia, 1760-1820 takes a directly comparative approach, looking at the differences in political and religious beliefs between two towns on either side of the American-Canadian border. Mancke’s 2005 The Fault Lines of Empire builds on this approach, comparing British colonialism and identity in Massachusetts to that in Nova Scotia. Stephen J. Hornsby and John G. Reid’s New England and the Maritime Provinces: Connections and Comparisons includes articles that focus specifically on the Maine-New Brunswick borderlands, looking at diverse topics such as immigration, economics, political development, and the role of the lumber industry in connecting

26 See, for example, Michael Behiels and Reginald C. Stuart, Transnationalism: Canada-United States History Into the Twenty-first Century (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010). In addition, many works on the Canadian borderlands are interdisciplinary texts, coming from fields like Canadian Studies rather than from an explicitly historical approach. See W.H. New, Borderlands: How We Talk About Canada (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 1998).
the two countries. In addition, Beatrice Craig and Maxime Dagenais have an important volume on the Madawaska region called *The Land in Between: The Upper St. John Valley, Prehistory to World War I*. This aptly-titled work suggests that northern Maine was a liminal space between two countries, two languages, and multiple political centers. The authors suggest that, “despite the Valley being split between different powers in the nineteenth century, its residents have done a remarkable job of behaving as if this division did not exist. As a consequence, they have developed a sense of being a people ‘in between’ and of being different.” The people of Madawaska are literally a product of the borderlands experience.

Contemporary religious scholars, such as sociologist Peggy Levitt in *God Needs No Passport*, have recently noted the transnational aspects of religion, but historical studies reveal that religion has long been practiced across borders. Anthony Mora’s work on the border parish of St. Genevieve in Las Cruces, New Mexico shows that the inner life of parishes on the United States-Mexican border reveal a bigger struggle in American and Mexican relationships, as well as along racial lines. Mora argues that parishes like St. Genevieve were “contested space[s] that signified larger struggles created by U.S. conquest.” Catholics also fought within their church over ethnic and racial leadership. Here, the border parish was a staging ground for a variety of hierarchies, cultures, and identities after the Mexican-American War.

Considered together, the concepts of frontier and borderland complement each other, and allow for a detailed look at Catholicism before Irish Famine arrival, as well as the continued

30 Beatrice Craig and Maxime Dagenais, *The Land in Between: The Upper St. John Valley, Prehistory to World War I* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 2009), xxi.
French-Canadian presence in northern New England after the 1850s. Much like the porous Spanish-American Catholic border, the American-Canadian border acted as a “space-between,” particularly for the French Canadians who existed between two languages and lived in close proximity to their original Canadian homeland once they came to New England. A borderlands perspective develops through comparison and interconnection, both of which are useful in telling the French-Canadian story. Historians of American Catholicism have failed to fully acknowledge American Catholicism’s Canadian connections even though the experience of being Catholic in a non-Catholic North America certainly tied American and Canadian Catholics together in profound ways. Canadian Catholicism was the great North American example of Catholic success in the Atlantic world; American laity and clergy could only hope their religion would achieve a similar status in the United States during the nineteenth century.

This reality must be examined from a more continental perspective, one that considers both northern New Englanders and their Canadian neighbors, much as scholars of the southwest have done with Mexican and American border Catholics. In his article “Roman Catholic Conservatism in a New North Atlantic World, 1760-1829,” Luca Codignola argues that the actions of the Holy See and the Propaganda Fide must be understood in a larger North Atlantic context rather than in purely national terms. American Catholicism was not only “American,” but part of a larger Roman administrative effort. The Propaganda was the organization that oversaw the establishment of the faith in countries where Catholicism was not the established state religion, thus giving it a hand in both American and Canadian developments. Despite this fact, as Codignola points out, American historians have made American circumstances seem special and isolated, with too much emphasis on the nationalism of the American Revolution and the apparent ignorance of Rome concerning conditions in the United States. Codignola asserts
that Rome was not “poorly informed” or “reactionary,” as these writers have insisted, but instead encouraged Canadian and American Catholics to get along with the governments in power so that Catholicism could be protected in all of North America.³³

In both America and Canada, the Holy See and Propaganda sought bishops who pleased government officials. Bishop John Carroll’s election as the first bishop of the United States, for instance, was not a special example of American power or democracy, but was based heavily on his endorsement from Benjamin Franklin. Catholic history in North America did not simply follow a nationalist, triumphant trajectory. In fact, for administrators in Rome as well as Catholics in the early colonies, it was Canada that represented success in North America. French-Canadian bishops enjoyed a high status and a good relationship with their British government. The relationship between Rome, the French-Canadian Catholic hierarchy, and the government of Canada became a model for the American hierarchy, marking Quebec as the “‘promised land, the land of milk and honey’ that all North American bishops, especially the American ones, tried to copy.” ³⁴ Catholic historians would do well to look at how the entire North American continent fit into a larger world of nineteenth-century Roman Catholic administration.

The chapters that follow thus attempt to use a frontier and borderlands perspective to show how Catholicism, though growing institutionally, still placed ordinary people between various political, religious, and ethnic entities. The chapters provide an alternative view not only of French-Canadian and Irish ethnic history in New England, but also of the roots of American Catholicism in the northeast. Rather than assuming that American Catholicism truly came of age in the mid-nineteenth century with the mass arrival of the Irish, this work considers earlier Irish

³⁴ Ibid., 747.
immigration, the importance of ongoing and early French-Canadian immigration just over the American border, the role of Boston’s early bishops, and the place of both converts from Protestantism and Native American Catholics in shaping what came to be the “American Church.” Individual Catholics, both laypeople and priests, held significant power and advocated for their religion in what has usually been considered a mostly Protestant, anti-Catholic region. The northern focus also draws attention to the role Canada played in shaping the New England Church.

Each chapter considers the regions around Maine and Vermont in comparison to southern New England, namely Boston. While this dissertation could be largely considered an institutional history in that it focuses on the writings of priests and bishops, it also attempts to look at often-ignored or peripheral areas. One of the most important primary source documents for this dissertation is the Bishop’s Journal, held at the Archdiocese of Boston Archives. In the journal, the difficulties of ministering to Maine and Vermont are clearly outlined. Notably, New Hampshire was largely absent from both the Bishop’s Journal and other local sources, owing to the small amount of Catholics in the state before the 1850s. Though New Hampshire became a part of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, New Hampshire nonetheless plays a smaller role in the following chapters than do Maine or Vermont. Present-day New Hampshire is often labeled as part of “northern New England,” but it had more similarities with neighboring Massachusetts during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century. While coastal New Hampshire Catholic communities became part of the Maine mission route, and parts of New Hampshire bordering Vermont shared important connections with convert communities in that state, much of New Hampshire resembled Massachusetts in its outright hostility to Catholics. In 1855, there were a meager three Catholic churches in New Hampshire, in part because, by this time, New
Hampshire was the only state to still bar Catholics from holding public office. New Hampshire was home to early nativist activity as well. The state’s first Catholic church in Dover faced attempted arson attacks in both 1831 and 1832.\textsuperscript{35}

Such stories figure heavily into how New England religious history has been written in recent decades. Until the Famine era, it is easy to forget that New England was home to any Catholics at all because of such widespread hostility toward the “popish” Catholic Church. Even scholars of frontier Catholicism have been quick to disregard any early New England Catholic character because the “East” was so fiercely anti-Catholic. The frontier-focused Dichtl writes that “Unlike the more populated East where Catholics might have been a minority easily ignored, in the sparsely settled countryside and small towns in the early West even small congregations of Catholics stood out.” Historians have thus neglected to see that Maine and Vermont were the ultimate frontiers because Catholicism survived and thrived there, despite the region’s reputation of being wholly unfriendly to the religion. The fact that Protestant New England was already well-established—unlike new areas out West where Catholicism was as “new” as other denominations—means that Catholicism’s survival in New England demands even more questions than it might in areas settled later, where all religions could compete on a more equal footing.\textsuperscript{36} Studying Catholicism on a local or regional level reveals that significant differences in attitude existed even within a region considered today to be one, single unit.

Taken together, the following chapters tell a story of northern New England Catholicism’s diverse roots and its lasting borderlands history. The first chapter introduces Cheverus’s New England, and shows that the entire American church was a “frontier” institution


\textsuperscript{36} Dichtl, \textit{Frontiers of Faith}, 2.
during the early nineteenth century. The second chapter argues that Bishop Fenwick’s Boston saw more institutional development than Maine and Vermont during the 1820s through the 1840s. The third chapter argues that Maine’s overlapping political and religious boundaries made it a bridge between the American and Canadian Catholic Church. The fourth chapter looks closely at missionaries in Vermont, and suggests they had a great deal of power before the introduction of local dioceses there. The fifth chapter considers “alternate” Catholic identities and argues that converts to Catholicism were just as important to northern New England Catholicism as Catholic immigrants from various ethnic backgrounds. The sixth and final chapter compares Bishop Fitzpatrick’s Famine-era Boston to the newly formed Dioceses of Portland, Maine and Burlington, Vermont in 1853.
I. CHEVERUS AND CARROLL: AMERICAN CATHOLICISM’S DIVERSE ORIGINS, 1800-1825

Northern New England was a borderland situated between two countries, but before the 1840s, all of American Catholicism had the qualities typical of a frontier: few priests, spread-out populations, and Catholics who maintained their faith outside of established parishes. Under the watch of Boston’s first bishop, John Cheverus (1768-1836), all New England Catholics lived through a formative period, attempting to build a Catholic Church within a staunchly Protestant region. Though the frontier setting that Cheverus described to Quebec’s Bishop Plessis in his 1811 letter was a common sight for eighteenth and nineteenth-century priests and bishops throughout the country, the Diocese of Boston also had its own unique French and Native American origins. New England was part of a larger American Catholic frontier, as well as its own transnational frontier.

Early American Catholicism has often been thought of as southern Catholicism because of the religion’s concentration in Maryland and Upper South during the colonial era. Several Catholic families in Maryland, the center of English-Catholic settlement in the colonies, were wealthy, owned slaves, and showed a “dramatic contrast” when compared to the urban Catholicism of the immigrants who would come to the nation’s shores over the next century.  

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Still, these early Catholics struggled in many respects. The institutional Church was severely underdeveloped in colonial America. And, despite, the financial security of the early Maryland families, they were still shut out socially and culturally by the larger Protestant society.¹ With few priests and a growing anti-Catholic sentiment, the Maryland Catholic community kept to themselves and worshiped privately, “politically defeated but spiritually undaunted.”² Catholics in colonial America worshiped in their family homes, centering their domestic religious observance on prayer, fasting, and the reading of devotional texts.³

By the early 1700s, there were about 3,000 Catholics in the Maryland colony, mostly within two counties. This Catholic population was made up largely of Jesuit priests, elite founding families, and Irish indentured servants.⁴ Born in 1768, the first American bishop, John Carroll, came from this insulated setting. Though he was from one of Maryland’s leading Catholic families, his job was a trying one, with all of the then-newly formed United States as his “diocese.” As a superior of the American mission during the 1780s, he oversaw with Maryland’s missions, a new church in Baltimore, a group of Acadian exiles, French-speaking groups, and a growing conflict between French and Irish parishioners in Philadelphia.⁵ Carroll was officially made bishop of the entire United States in 1789.⁶ This was not a seamless transition: The Vatican hesitated to promote Carroll from superior of an American mission to bishop of an official American diocese. American Catholics were in a difficult situation. They needed Rome’s support to make staffing decisions, but would have preferred that the young hierarchy in the United States be allowed to manage their own affairs.

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² Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 83-84.
³ Ibid., 88-91.
⁴ Hennessey, American Catholics, 42-44.
⁵ Ibid., 74.
⁶ Ibid., 89.
States make their own nominations, to ward off Protestant suspicions that all Catholics were simply “papists” who disregarded popular ideals like congregationalism and republicanism.

Despite his appreciation for traditional European Catholic ideals and papal authority, Carroll found himself frustrated by Rome’s relationship with America on several occasions. Because the United States was not an officially Catholic country where the Catholic Church and national government were linked, it was considered a “missionary” nation, and until 1907 was guided by the pope via his correspondents in the office of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, often referred to as the Propaganda Fide. And, because it was the “elusive prerogative of the people, through the Propaganda, to provide for the territorial organization of the church in the United States,” the conditions that leaders like Carroll observed were not always taken into account when creating new dioceses or elevating new bishops.7

Although Rome created four additional dioceses (including Boston) in 1808, the American hierarchy still could not choose new bishops on its own; American leaders were allowed only to “recommend” names to the Propaganda.8 Some scholars have suggested that Rome saw America as one single, sprawling frontier, and did not completely understand American circumstances or geography. Carroll probably would have agreed, considering the fact that he was initially made “superior” of one huge mission that included the entire country.9

Maryland gradually became the official center of the American Catholic Church after the Revolutionary War. In 1808, Pope Pius VII made Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown, Kentucky into new dioceses, thus raising Baltimore to the status of archdiocese.10

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8 Ibid., 13-14.
9 Margaret C. DePalma, Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004), 16-17.
10 Fortin, Faith and Action, 9.
Though the new divisions helped serve Catholics in more areas, these were still huge dioceses, each encompassing several states. Catholics near the bishop’s main residence felt the influence of centralization, but outlying regions remained largely untouched by the institutional changes. So, during the nineteenth century, development of institutional Catholicism was uneven. Catholics living on the peripheries were numerically scarce as were priests to serve their religious needs. They were often living hardscrabble lives on the borders of the United States, located in rural areas. These frontiers were generally home to small, concentrated numbers of Catholics, many with distinct ethnic characteristics, who escaped the notice (or, at least the limited resources) of both state and religious officials.

Take, for instance, the unique group of Catholic Scots in New York’s Mohawk Valley during the seventeenth century, numbering only about 300.\(^1\) Several scholars have also noted that the trans-Appalachian west was one of the most trying frontier landscapes to serve.

The diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky faced a number of challenging circumstances because of geography and the poor socio-economic situation of the Catholics within its territory. Roger Antonio Fortin, in exploring the origins of Cincinnati Catholicism, notes that “Catholics west of the Alleghenies would fall away from the faith because of the lack of priests. They also thought that that the diocese of Bardstown was too large to minister adequately to the needs of Catholics scattered throughout the diocese, which included approximately three hundred Catholic families in Ohio alone.”\(^1\)! The first bishop of Cincinnati, Edward Fenwick (cousin of Boston’s second bishop, Benedict Fenwick), found lack of money and priests to be continual problem in his region.\(^1\) According to historian Roger Fortin, the missionaries who were recruited to serve this

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\(^1\) Hennessey, *American Catholic*, 55.
\(^3\) Ibid., 17.
region had lives of “labor, trial, and self-denial. The missionary priest, often carrying vestments and altar supplies, at times fastened with a strap and tied on his back, forded streams and forded narrow trails and dusty roads to minister to the people. He frequently had to pass through vast forests wherein no trace of road could be seen.”

From the perspective of Rome, New England’s formal Catholic history began when it was made into its own diocese in 1808, separating it from Bishop Carroll of Maryland. Word of the new diocesan seat at Boston did not reach New England and the roughly 720 Catholics living there until two years later, in 1810. Although it was one of the first separate dioceses in the United States, Boston still had to function as one huge, severely understaffed mission. So, Bishop Cheverus’s role was not that of bishop as administrator, but bishop as missionary priest. This gave Cheverus a close look at the makeup of his flock, as well as the difficult religious situation Catholics faced in New England. Many Catholics, Indian and Canadian, must have addressed Cheverus in his native French language when they saw him. During Cheverus’s bishopric, Catholicism was not yet “American,” and “American Catholicism” was not yet English-speaking. New England bordered a land with a rich history of French Catholic missionary work, but, unlike Quebec, it was staunchly Protestant. Bishop Plessis reminded Cheverus that, politically, New England was a long way from Quebec, but assured him that he understood the difficulties the new bishop would find, “under a government of a different religion.”

Cheverus’s struggles in New England fit into a larger narrative of early nineteenth-century American Catholicism. His contemporaries agreed that lack of priests, capital, and

14 Ibid., 25.
16 Ibid.
churches, as well as large territories with dispersed populations, were the major challenges facing their individual dioceses. But, while Rome saw all of America as a giant frontier mission, New England was nonetheless a unique Catholic periphery because of its French Canadian, Indian, and early Irish arrivals; its long history with missionaries from Quebec; and its traditional identity as a Protestant, anti-Catholic stronghold. New England Catholics were situated between two countries, two languages, and two lands that had previously been the site of imperial conflict because of their vastly different religious heritages.

The Protestant heritage of the region led to a well-known intolerance of Roman Catholicism in New England, particularly in Massachusetts. As early as 1647, Massachusetts Bay banished any Catholic clergy who dared to remain in the state. Protestant New Englanders felt especially alarmed by Catholicism because they were next door to Canada, home to French Catholic missionaries threatening to spread their papist faith. By 1700, Massachusetts law provided that priests “who shall continue, abide, remain or come into this province, or any part thereof…shall be deemed and accounted an incendiary and disturber of the publick peace and safety, and an enemy to the true Christian religion, and shall be adjudged to suffer perpetual imprisonment; and if any person, being so sentenced and actually imprisoned, shall break prison and make his escape…shall be punished by death.” Clergy and even “suspected” clergy were arrested without warrants. New Englanders’ strong, negative reaction to the Quebec Act in 1774 (in which the British tolerated Catholicism in French Canada) also demonstrates an ongoing, long-term obsession with avoiding the “infiltration” of Catholicism into the colonies.

18 DePalma, Dialogue on the Frontier, 8-11. DePalma notes on page 11 that New Englanders commonly “imagined” Catholic threats involving the pope, “New Englanders in particular believed Catholics were part of a vast international conspiracy that sought world domination.”
Even in 1820, an observer noted the well-known Massachusetts history of “hatred” towards Roman Catholics. Though anti-Catholicism had somewhat “subsided,” the Catholic community of Boston had struggled and “it was not till after the peace of 1783, that any attempts were made to found a Catholic church in Massachusetts. A very few Catholic families are dispersed over the state, but the only regular church is in Boston. Their very first place of worship was a small chapel, since taken down; and it was a singular circumstance that this chapel was originally built by French Protestants who fled from Catholic persecution. In its commencement the congregation was small, and not very fortunate in its pastors.”19 In the early nineteenth century, the story of Catholicism in New England was one of struggle and persecution.

French-speakers were the sole reason Catholicism survived in the region. Before the Revolution, French and French-Canadian missionaries were responsible for bringing Catholicism to the New England Native Americans. After the Revolution, French exiles helped keep Catholicism alive in the Protestant stronghold. The movement towards Catholic Boston’s establishment as its own diocese began in earnest when Francis Matignon of France arrived in New England, to serve as missionary under Bishop Carroll, in 1792. Matignon was a tireless missionary who had been ousted from his home by the French Revolution. According to Bishop Fenwick, the second bishop of Boston, Matignon had faced an impossible situation when he arrived, as New Englanders “felt a strong impression of undefined and undefinable dislike, if not hatred towards every Papal relation. Absurd and foolish legends of the Pope and his religion were in common circulation, and the prejudice was too deeply rooted, to be suddenly eradicated.”20 In need of help, Matignon brought the future bishop of Boston, John Cheverus, to

America in 1796, after convincing him of the dire need for missionaries.\(^{21}\) It was especially useful that Matignon’s former student Cheverus could speak English, as several Irish Catholics already inhabited the region. Even the most faithful Catholics on the Maine coast were struggling in this remote setting. Some went to the local Congregational church in order to hear a service because they had been so long without a priest. Maine needed Catholic clergy desperately, and Cheverus was thus immediately sent to the District of Maine to minister specifically to the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot tribes.\(^{22}\)

During his tenure as bishop, the huge span of his diocese forced him to travel widely, with Maine being an important destination.\(^{23}\) While there, Cheverus also formed a long and lasting relationship with the leading Irish families of the region. It could be said, therefore, that the first bishop of Boston got his true training in Maine. While Cheverus and his associate Matignon were stationed primarily in Boston, the challenges of serving the Native Americans and the friendship of the Maine Irish introduced him to the racial and geographic complexity of the area.\(^{24}\) Though other dioceses had the same lack of priests and resources, New England’s long Canadian connection and a reliance on French-speaking clergy played a particularly important role in its development.\(^{25}\)

The French and French Canadians were the first “New England” Catholics. In Vermont, the early migration of French Canadians from just across the Quebec border accounted for most of the Catholic population within the state. French Canadian missionaries had traveled through in the area that would become Vermont since 1666, where French-speaking Catholics

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., 151.


\(^{24}\) O’Connor, *Boston Catholics*, 22.

\(^{25}\) Lord et al., *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, vol. 1, 697-698.
were largely without permanent priests. This became both an American and a Canadian concern.

Upon his installation in 1806, Bishop Plessis of Quebec took note of “the portion of the state of Vermont nearest our boundary, where I hear there are many Canadians and others destitute of spiritual aid.” 26 The Bishop of Quebec was aware that those near the border needed spiritual attention, and so his own priest, Father Mignault, visited the region periodically from 1819-1853. 27 In 1815, Father Mignault estimated that there were about 100 “Catholic Canadians” living in Burlington alone. 28 Their continued arrival during the Papineau Rebellion in the 1830s left missionary priests in the Vermont-New York region unable to attend to these Catholics so far-removed from the interconnected dioceses of New York, Boston, and Quebec. 29 Serving Vermont Catholics was thus a transnational issue during the nineteenth century.

Though they are often forgotten, the French also influenced southern New England and Boston. It is estimated that there were only eight to ten identifiably Catholic residents in Boston in 1687. 30 The French were the original bearers of the faith, both as laypeople and priests. Even after the famous 17th-century missionaries to the Indians, French priests continued to arrive in North America during the period around the American Revolution, in large part because some Catholic priests in France were exiled during the French Revolution. French exiles who left the country during the revolutionary period likely totaled between 150,000 and 200,000. 31

27 Ibid., 4-6.
28 Ibid., 6.
Influential missionaries from this group of exiles, such as Father Matignon and Bishop Cheverus, came to Boston and New England. Here, they found a struggling infant Church.  

Despite New England’s rampant anti-Catholicism on the eve of the American Revolution, independence actually increased the ability of French Catholics to settle in Boston: American reliance on Canadian help “brought an acknowledgement of the Canadians’ inherent right to religion freedom.” After the Revolution, religious freedom was proclaimed in the Massachusetts constitution, and the formation of a formal Boston Catholic congregation followed. From 1780-1788, French prelates provided services to both white Bostonians and to New England’s Catholic Indians. The French priest Abbe de la Poterie, a chaplain of the French fleet, arrived in Boston in 1788 and established the first permanent church there. Poterie was actually headed to Quebec, but was induced by a French merchant to stay in Boston in order to build the city’s growing Catholic population into a formal congregation. A French Protestant church sold to Poterie became a joint center for French and Irish-Catholic worship, as the two small groups could not afford separate churches. 

Irish Catholicism in New England was not only a result of the Famine era immigration; it existed in Boston from the Revolution. The French tended to be better off than the more numerous Irish during the decades following the Revolution. This led to cooperation between the Irish and French, long before the era of “separate” linguistic or ethnic churches at

32 James O’Toole writes that, for Matignon, “Change was swift and unexpected. Instead of a calm career lecturing students about theology, he was forced to flee his native country for America. There he would encounter not a long-established church was a detailed system of parishes and tithes.” See James O’Toole, From Generation to Generation: Stories in Catholic History From the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1983), 21.
33 Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 1, 267.
34 Ibid., 326.
35 Ibid., 375.
36 Ibid., 377-378.
37 Ibid., 329.
least among most priests. Poterie helped both ethnic groups before the arrival of a native English
speaker, and spoke English to reach his Irish congregants. In the 1790s, the American,
English-speaking priest John Thayer turned his attention to the Irish of Boston, ignoring the
French, and thus began a protracted fight with the new French priest, Father Rousselet. The
result was an Irish-French division. Still, conciliatory priests also managed to fix such ethnic
problems. Father Francis Matignon, the French missionary who brought Bishop Cheverus to
Boston, healed the Irish-French rift in the city and both groups “remained harmonious” until the
strain of Famine immigration in the 1840s, suggesting that the typical story of Irish dominance
and ethnic divisions among Catholics cannot necessarily be applied to the pre-Famine period.

In New England’s early history, it was often priests, rather than parishioners, who caused
ethnic strife as they carried out their own cultural and social agendas. In the United States,
Catholics knew that Catholicism could not take the nationalistic form it had in Europe: American
realities dictated that the Catholic Church would be multi-ethnic. John Carroll remarked that
separate Irish and French church wardens should not be needed because such ethnic splits would
“exclude(s) Catholics of other countries, who may be a part of the congregation and entitled to
equal rights as American, English, Spanish, etc.” and because such an arrangement “tends to
perpetuate a source of disunion.” At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the American Catholic
Church was too small for ethnic breaks. Everyone needed to share priests and resources.

Catholicism in Boston would not have survived if French speakers had not reached out
to the Irish, who did not always have the option to worship with priests of the same background.

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38 Ibid., 389.
39 O’Connor, Boston Catholics, 17.
40 Handlin, Boston’s Immigrants, 164-165.
This was especially true in northern New England, where Catholics were more reliant on French-Canadian priests. 42 Dennis Ryan’s service in Irish Whitefield, Maine beginning in 1818, was a rare luxury before Famine-era immigration provided Irish congregations with Irish priests. From the missionary phase onward, French-Canadian priests necessarily served Irish, Anglo-American, and Indian Catholics rather than only French-speaking Catholics. Missionaries were well aware that English-speaking priests were needed, but, as indicated elsewhere in this study, New England was struggling for priests of any language. Matignon warned Cheverus of “the need in America, and more particularly in New England, of priests who could speak English. He represented to him the great importance of this district and set before his view a new Church to be formed in this new country. He explained that there were Catholics scattered over this immense tract and exposed to the loss of their faith by the dearth of priests.” 43

Similar arrangements persisted throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Father Romagne, a native of France, for instance, served both the Maine Indians and a small group of Irish in Damariscotta, Maine from 1799-1818. 44 Romagne also assisted a congregation of two hundred converts in nearby Newcastle, and the Penobscot Indians were welcome to attend Mass here with their white counterparts. In fact, when a Penobscot woman became the first to be buried at the Newcastle cemetery, it was “God’s own history lesson…a perpetual reminder to the English-speaking Catholics of Maine that, under God, they owed to the

42 Several examples of this mixed ethnic trend have been discussed. Notable examples of Irish-French congregations include the Madawaska region of Maine, as well as parishes with mixed ethnic-Anglo converts throughout Vermont. O’Callaghan’s early charges in the Burlington region also included both French ad Irish, though he himself alienated the French. English speakers might also exhibit concern for the needs of French Catholics, as was the case with convert William Henry Hoyt.
43 Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 1, 525.
44 Lucey, The Catholic Church in Maine, 24- 25.
Indians the presence of a priest among them.” 45 During this early period, racial and ethnic lines could be blurred for religious unity.

Northern New England had a surprising degree of ethnic diversity during Cheverus’s day. The region was home to Anglo-American converts, French Acadians and Canadians, and in Maine, Abenaki Indians. James M. O’Toole argues that “The American Catholic Church of the twentieth century is so much a product of European immigration that we often forget what it was like in its early years. The flood of Irish, Italian, French, Polish, and other immigrants was so great that much evidence of the nature of the Catholic population ‘before the flood’ has been obscured.” O’Toole asserts that the Indians are a “frequently overlooked portion of the nineteenth-century Catholic people.” 46 The sources confirm O’Toole’s argument: despite a historical record that often casts native Catholics aside as New England immigration picked up, the Native American issue was not simply an “early” problem that went away as soon as the Irish poured into the state and Native American numbers diminished. The first bishop of the newly separate Diocese of Portland, Maine called for missionaries to help the Indians in their own tongue as late as the 1850s. 47 There were few white Catholics in New England when John Cheverus became the first bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Boston in 1808. He led a region that had been indelibly marked by French Catholicism nearly two centuries earlier. The Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples, both Abenaki, Algonquian-speaking tribes, were part of a larger population of devoted Catholic Indians in Maine that had been left without priests since the French missions had moved into Canada. French Jesuits came to the region in the early

45 Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 1, 614.
46 James M. O’Toole, “Bishop Fenwick’s Visit to the Passamaquoddy Indians,” The Boston Pilot, Friday, November 13, 1981.
47 “Bishop David Bacon to unknown recipient, undated, Bishop Bacon Papers, Archives of the Diocese of Portland, Maine. Bacon served from 1855-1874. This appears to be part of an unfinished letter composted to the Provincial Council of NY, asking for help in his Diocese. This likely comes from about 1856. Archives of the Diocese of Portland, Maine.
1600s. Maine was part of their larger mission throughout Canada and Acadia, putting the native peoples squarely in the middle of French-English land and power struggles. When Cheverus arrived in Boston in 1796 to help his countryman, missionary Father Francis Matignon, Bishop Carroll of Baltimore sent him to the Maine Indian missions to replace the French-Canadian priest stationed there. Cheverus couldn’t stay permanently— the lack of priests and amount of territory within New England forced him to travel— but the time he spent with the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy on several occasions endeared them to him. As noted Catholic historian John Gilmary Shea put it in 1888, Cheverus was impressed with the faith of the Native Americans who, in the wilderness, had only bark chapels for worship: "Mr. Cheverus found much to touch him in the firmness with which these children of the forest had clung to the faith taught to their ancestors by the Catholic priests from Canada." A Cheverus biographer also maintains that Cheverus had “affection” for his Native American charges and did not harbor the racial judgment that others did as he believed the Indians “had more character than the early historians had been willing to allow them.”

Racialized depictions of the Indians aside, a strong “character” was necessary to remain Catholic in nineteenth-century northern New England. If Bishop Cheverus found attending to the needs of Catholics throughout a huge region without a religious infrastructure overwhelming, it was more overwhelming to be a lay Catholic and attempt to maintain one’s faith in this setting. As the Maine historian Father William Leo Lucey notes, “Only souls strong

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in the faith can survive year after year on a monthly Mass, on little, if any, contact with a priest between these monthly visits, and in an atmosphere that frequently belittled the Catholic religion.”

North of Boston, the Catholic Church was literally made up of “the people” who had to function without regular priests or access to the Mass.

One of the best examples of the central role the laity played in the borderlands comes from early Irish immigrants to Maine. The Hanlys, Kavanaghs, and Cotrills were merchant families who arrived in the United States during the 1770s and 1780s. The family of Roger Hanly settled in Bristol, Maine, while James Kavanagh and Matthew Cotrill, from Country Wexford, went a bit further north to Newcastle, Maine, after a stay in Boston. From Newcastle and the town of Damariscotta, Kavanagh and Cotrill opened a general store and later two saw mills, creating a profitable ship-building business that linked them to the lumber industry and West Indies trade. They were able to give the early bishops financial backing while providing a foundation for Catholicism in Maine despite the fact that the state was largely Congregational and Baptist at the time of their arrival.

To rectify this situation, Kavanagh and Cotrill gave the necessary support to fund the construction of Newcastle, Maine’s first Catholic church. Though the wealth and influence of these Irish families was rare for their time and place in history, the characteristics they embodied as “frontier Catholics” were common among those who maintained their faith in northern New England’s borderlands. Living outside of Boston’s immediate reach, such men and women took their identity as Catholics into their own hands. Without the constant oversight of permanent

51Lucey, *The Catholic Church in Maine,* 60.
52 O’Toole, *From Generation to Generation,* 16-17; O’Connor, *Boston Catholics,* 22.
54 Ibid., 22, 51. See also Bishop Benedict Fenwick, *Memoranda of the Diocese of Boston from the arrival of Bishop Fenwick or rather from the day of his Consecration, viz. Nov’r 1, 1825,* vol. 1, entry for July 1, 1832, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston. Hereafter cited as Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal,* vol. 1.
priests or bishops, they maintained their faith the best they could on their own. While Cheverus and sometimes Matignon visited the Irish families during the summers, they were left most of the time without a priest to say Mass. It appears that the Kavanaghs, Cotrills, and Hanlys nonetheless tried to stay connected to their faith, especially through the use of devotional texts. Cheverus and the Irish families of Maine worked together to keep the faith alive, and, even without the good bishop, these early New England Catholics were ardent in the private practice of their faith. William Leo Lucey notes, “From the start they were book lovers, and their names appear on lists of subscribers found in books published by Matthew Carey and Bernard Dornin, America’s first Catholic publishers.”

It is likely that in the absence of regular Masses, the Irish Mainers were reading one of two versions of the Catholic Bible during Cheverus’s day. Matthew Carey, an Irish immigrant to Philadelphia, was largely responsible for standardizing American Catholic reading materials in the early republic period. He published two editions of the American Catholic Bible, one in 1790, the next in 1800; the popularity of the prints allowed him to then publish a quarto edition of the Bible each year until 1820.

Carey pushed Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore to start funding the printing of Catholic texts, aware that in a setting with few priests, private reading was an important source of religious education for American Catholics like the Hanlys, Kavanaghs and Cotrills.

James O’Toole aptly describes both Cheverus and his Maine Irish flock as pioneering Catholics, noting that while Cheverus’s role as bishop was “unglamorous,” the Catholic laity had

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to be “self-directed.” He writes that the experience of the Hanly family in particular represented not a unique arrangement, but one characteristic of the early missionary Church. As O’Toole describes it, “Lacking sustained contact with the institutions of their church, they took on the task of maintaining their faith on their own. Necessity had made them independent—not autonomous, for they still very much wanted to be part of their church.” He notes that they struggled to maintain “their religious identity as best they could on their own, guided only in the most general way by a distant clergyman. This is what it was like to be an American Catholic in the priestless church.”58 This was the true essence of being “Catholic” in nineteenth-century Maine. Adherents were independent, committed to the faith, and yet hopeful that the Church would expand and help serve the area with priests and sacraments. This was not an easy spiritual setting; to remain Catholic “required personal initiative.”59

This group of Irish settlers did not hesitate to determine their own destinies, based on their strong sense of cultural Catholicism which they were forced to maintain on their own. In proclaiming to be Catholic in the midst of a still weak church and a largely Protestant outside world, they took notable risks. James Kavanagh, in 1801, refused to pay taxes to support a local Protestant minister as required by Massachusetts law. The ordeal was a headache for Bishop Cheverus, who believed that “cheerful submission to the laws of the state” would eventually free Catholics from such prejudiced practices. Nonetheless, Kavanagh’s refusal to pay “every crazy fellow who takes up preaching” represented a strong sense of Catholic identity, despite the limited number of fellow Catholics around him, and a lack of institutional Catholicism throughout both Massachusetts and the then “District of Maine.” 60 This individualistic,

59 Ibid., 14.
60 Bishop John Cheverus to unknown, 17 April 1801, 1.3, Cheverus Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
idealistic, and at times daring realization of Catholic identity formed the basis of borderlands Catholicism.

In the decades that followed, Bishop Benedict Fenwick, Cheverus’s successor, had a great deal of success in expanding Catholicism in the greater Boston region. Yet, though he remained close to the Kavanaghs, he found the circumstances in northern New England trying. An 1826 journal entry revealed many of the same difficulties with the removed nature of Vermont that Cheverus expressed to Plessis about the region in 1811. The energetic Bishop Fenwick had too much work for even the most dedicated of administrators when he gained control of the diocese in 1825. The Diocese of Boston still included not only Boston and the state of Massachusetts, but also Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont. While Boston and southern New England transformed over the length of his bishopric into an urban, Irish-Catholic stronghold, several other areas, namely rural Maine and Vermont, remained home to scattered, rural Catholic communities. With a growing difference between city Catholics and provincial Catholics, Bishop Fenwick acted as both a smart administrator in the city and a hardy pioneer in northern New England, as he demonstrated in the summer of 1826. In August, Fenwick prepared to build a new church “forty feet longer & nearly 70 feet in its greatest width” to accommodate Boston’s growing Catholic population. 61 In contrast to this anticipated site of the expanded Holy Cross Church in the heart of Boston. Fenwick viewed a removed and less civilized site, proposed for a new religious school, on Asutney Mountain, Vermont with little enthusiasm. Just a few weeks earlier, Fenwick had found himself in unfamiliar territory, a rural setting with no road and “steep & craggy rocks,” reached only by “slow and fatiguing” travel. The portly bishop complained of his discomfort, noting that after the visit “Clothes from

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61 Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol.1, entry for August 17, 1826.
excessive perspiration were as wet upon his back as if he had been plunged into a river.”  

Fenwick soon turned down an eager convert’s request for the new religious school on Ascutney Mountain, hoping instead to find a more “convenient and practicable spot” to educate Vermont and nearby New Hampshire Catholics.  

Fenwick’s experience during his first summer as bishop of Boston outlined a simple truth that would become increasingly clear over the next three decades of Catholic development in the region: New England Catholicism was not monolithic. Despite the common assertion by scholars and residents alike that New England Catholicism is largely synonymous with “Irish Catholic” and has its roots in Famine-era immigration, early leaders like Fenwick noticed more uneven developments. Fenwick was a talented leader who excelled at expanding Boston’s infrastructure, but he struggled to find ways to properly serve northern New England, and even planned a largely failed agricultural experiment in northern Maine. In short, northern New England Catholics did not behave like those in the city.  

As Boston and the surrounding area grew, many areas of Maine and nearly all of Vermont remained populated by town and village communities. Much of the region remained rural, even after the “frontier” or formative period of American history passed and the process of urbanization began in seaboard cities. The 1800s were actually a time of outmigration rather than growth for many areas of Vermont. According to Hal S. Barron, “Numerous adverse features of Vermont country life induced a Yankee exodus between 1808 and 1860 as waves of out-migrants escaped cold weather, barren soil, and high taxes and pursued the belief that greener pastures lay just beyond the western horizon.”  

These areas also had a heavy French Canadian presence.  

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62 Ibid., entry for June 5, 1826.  
63 Ibid., entry for June 6, 1826.  
from the outset, and were located in regions that had long been served by Canadian priests.

During the bishopric of Fenwick, Boston became the center of New England Catholicism. Under his skilled administrative skills, the region ceased to be a complete, untouched frontier, but northern New England clearly remained a borderland, trapped between Boston and Canada, home to French, Indian, and Irish influences, and outside the immediate control of diocesan priests and bishops.

Though they belonged to one diocese until the 1850s, southern and northern New England looked vastly different well before the Famine. As the nineteenth century progressed, they took different trajectories. Gradually, as Boston centralized diocesan authority in the city under Bishop Fenwick, it became the epicenter of regional Catholicism. Even before 1830, Holy Cross Cathedral was expanded as the Irish population of the city increased, an orphanage opened, a convent was established, and a small seminary (later, Boston College) started. Catholic practice became institutionalized and regular under Fenwick, moving from a frontier stage to an ever-growing parish community staffed by the bishop and his clergy. Yet, as Fenwick regularized Catholic practice and introduced Catholicism to the larger Protestant society in Boston, it became clear that other areas of the diocese had different origins, traditions, and social settings. The more aggressively Fenwick handled Boston’s development, the more it appeared that northern New England (which included, depending on who was doing the assessment, coastal New Hampshire, parts of New York, Maine, and Vermont) could not be tamed. New England’s Catholic past needs to be reconsidered through a comparative perspective. The borderlands situated between Maine, Vermont and Canada, do not have the same origins or the same outcomes as Boston and the growing industrial centers of southern New England.
II. BISHOP’ FENWICK’S DIOCESE IN FLAMES, 1825-1846

On the night of August 9, 1834, nativists set fire to a Boston area convent, Mount Benedict, the site of a school staffed by Ursuline nuns. Benedict Fenwick, the second bishop of Boston, explained that the burning had happened because of widespread speculation that a nun there was mistreated and unable to leave. He wrote that, “In consequence of a rumor having been industriously spread abroad by malicious persons that Sister Mary John was detained in the convent against her will, & was subjected there to harsh treatment” the convent was burned.¹ The destruction that resulted from this rumor was immense. A Portsmouth, New Hampshire, newspaper recounted that, “The mob were deliberately smashing the windows, throwing out the furniture. They afterwards set fire to the whole concern—one very large brick building, the chapel, and two dwelling houses attached to the Nunnery.” During this rage, piano fortes, guitars, and harps were sent into the flames, without “the slightest resistance” from the assembled crowd.² When Fenwick visited the convent in the usually quiet Charlestown area the following morning, he found out about the horror that had taken place the night before.³

The bad news for Boston Catholics was not yet over, however. Two days later, on the night of August 11, the “herd of vagabonds of the worst description” came back to the convent to finish destroying the nuns’ farm and garden. Despite the fact that 55 girls were sleeping, the

nativists “pillaged” the entire property, as roughly a dozen resident nuns took the students to a nearby house for safety. By the next day, a “dreadful excitement” had spread throughout Boston, with the bishop and the religious getting little sleep because they all felt “similarly threatened” by the attacks. They worried not only that the Catholic center of the city, Holy Cross Cathedral, might be attacked next, but that the Irish Catholics might seek revenge and further fuel the violence. Luckily, the Irish did not respond as feared, but the Bishop’s journal entries nonetheless reveal lasting anxiety about the entire incident.

Fenwick had made good progress in Boston since becoming bishop in 1825. Fear escalated quickly among Protestants as Fenwick publicly expanded the visibility and infrastructure of the Catholic religion in the greater Boston area. In 1826, Fenwick moved the local convent of Ursuline nuns from the cramped house next to Holy Cross Cathedral onto a lovely farm and homestead in a nearby Charlestown neighborhood. Widespread nativist fears about the immoral behavior inherent in cloistered religious communities soon reached Boston. In 1832, a young convert from Protestantism who had entered the convent at Mount Benedict the year prior attempted to “escape,” implying she had been held there against her will by the Ursulines. Rumors about her mistreatment spread in the months before the 1834 burning and attack. The following year, the self-proclaimed “inmate” released a lurid account of her life in the convent, producing a sensational story of sexual promiscuity, Catholic ritualism, and the attempted conversion of Protestant students at the wealthy school. This woman, Rebecca Reed (Sister Mary John), claimed to have watched her religious sisters enforce “absurd cruelties”

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5 Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for August 12, 1834.
6 Ibid., entry for August 1, 1826.
against themselves and other nuns as penance. 7 Her memoir also fed into Protestant fears about the all-male, celibate clergy: she wrote that in her meeting with Bishop Fenwick he was able to know her “secret thoughts.” 8 Finally, she described for readers a cult-like, reclusive life at Mount Benedict, fueling popular assumptions that Catholicism was replete with authoritarian, ritualistic, mysterious and outright dangerous ways of thinking.

According to Marie Anne Pagliarini’s assessment of anti-Catholic literature during the antebellum period, Reed’s story fits into a larger nativist narrative where “the Catholic nun was also attacked for her deviant sexuality” as it challenged the “cult of domesticity.” 9 Here, the nunnery was likened to a brothel rather than portrayed as a holy place. 10 And, although Fenwick was aware that his diocese was strapped for resources, it also appears that economic and class perceptions contributed to the attack. The New Hampshire Scots-Irish men who made up a large part of the violent mob were wage workers living on less land than previous generations. They were angry that the “lush twenty-four-acre farm” and convent housed both Catholic nuns and the daughters of Boston’s elite Unitarian families “receiving an expensive European-style education” there. 11 Nancy Lusignan Schultz’s analysis of the Charlestown burning shows that public officials did little to stop the wreckage that took place at Mount Benedict. Many Bostonians saw the growing Catholic Church as a violation of and threat to New England’s economic, social, and gender norms 12

7 Rebecca Theresa Reed, Six Months in a Convent (Boston: Russell, Oriorne & Metcalf: 1835), 20.
8 Ibid., 59.
10 Ibid., 110.
11 Schultz, Fire & Roses.
12 Ibid.
Fenwick briefly noted the trial results a few months later, in December of 1834, with no justice for the Diocese. The massive amount of destroyed property was never reimbursed, and only one of the thirteen defendants in the trial was convicted. The feelings towards Catholics did not soon improve, either. The following year, the pope was carried in effigy through the city and fired at, in an attempt to “insult” and provoke the Irish Catholics. Luckily, Fenwick wrote, they “took no notice of it,” probably having become accustomed to such treatment.  

Anti-Catholic sentiment was palpable in the city even a decade before the massive Irish increase from the Famine. As Catholics clustered around Boston and the Church became more institutionalized through the establishment of an orphanage, convent, and seminary, it became a target of nativist attack. The success of Catholicism in Boston and the surrounding areas was the very thing that attracted anti-Catholic hostility. Bishop Fenwick was a shrewd administrator. As Schultz comments, he built “a high-priced school that would use Protestant money to help build the Roman Catholic mission in the area. The refined Ursulines would improve the image of the Church Fenwick was anxious to make mainstream, and the Protestant girls graduating from Mount Benedict would influence their husbands and sons to look benevolently on a growing Catholic presence.”  

Under Fenwick, Boston was swiftly becoming both the administrative and cultural center of the region’s Catholicism.

Meanwhile, outside of southern New England, Fenwick faced a different set of circumstances. Cheverus had overseen a diocese that was territorially large, but his successor had one that was both geographically expansive and growing in population. By 1825, Fenwick had, in effect, two separate dioceses to oversee, even if they technically remained one. In southern New England, urban Irish Catholicism was growing stronger. Before the end of Fenwick’s

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bishopric, in 1844, it was necessary for Rhode Island and Connecticut to become their own diocese, centered at Hartford. An 1848 report estimated that the Diocese of Boston (all of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont) contained about 80,000 Catholics, principally settled in Massachusetts. Rhode Island and Connecticut alone contained 20,000 Catholics.  

Maine and Vermont did not require their own separate dioceses, with New Hampshire a part of Maine’s diocese, until 1854. The first major nativist attack in Maine would not occur until 1854, a full twenty years after the burning of the Charleston convent. Catholics in this region were more diluted, as they remained spread out in small communities. And despite increased Irish immigration throughout all the New England states, Maine and Vermont would not lose their French Canadian flavor. The Native Americans in Maine, missionaries lent to the New England borderlands from Canada, and French speakers remained a constant Catholic presence. Fenwick’s records indicate that he was quite hopeful (usually overly so) about his astounding administrative expansion and centralization at Boston. Circumstances in Maine and Vermont, however, provoked an often frustrated response from both the bishop and his priests.

When Fenwick became bishop in 1825, a clear line of divergence was already in place. During Fenwick’s bishopric, Boston began its transformation into a model of Irish urban Catholicism, while northern New England maintained French-speaking populations and ties to Canada. Northern New England stayed in a “frontier” stage longer than Boston, and was subsequently transformed into a clear “borderland” as Boston became the center of New England Catholic development. In other words, the label “northern New England” was contingent on the existence of a well-established “southern New England.” Fenwick’s work in making Boston an

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efficient administrative center for the faith caused northern New England to appear backwards and difficult. Though the Catholic Church supposedly governed according to clear administrative units and boundaries, northern New England Catholics often evaded the reach of both Boston and the nearby Canadian dioceses, thus leaving a religious vacuum where missionaries and laypeople continued to have a great deal of control well into the nineteenth century. Of course, differences in sheer numerical density and urbanization accounted for part of this growing difference. In 1820, Vermont’s largest town, Burlington, totaled only 4,271. Boston and its connected wards, by contrast, were home to a staggering 43,940 residents. By the time of the 1840 census, Massachusetts employed roughly the same number of workers in agriculture as in manufacturing. Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire, meanwhile, continued to be overwhelming agricultural. In Maine, for instance, those employed in manufacturing and trade totaled 21,879, but those in agricultural work numbered about five times as many, at 101,630.

During his first weeks at his new job, Fenwick discovered this tension between center and periphery. Aside from the primary Catholic population around Boston, the other groups of New England Catholics who needed attention were located mostly to the north of the city. Nearby Salem, Massachusetts was in the process of building a church, and the only other established diocesan outposts were located in Maine and New Hampshire. Maine was already the site of much Catholic activity in 1825, but its population was small and spread out. It had four missionary stops or churches, the only state in New England to claim so many. Bishop Fenwick noted that there was a church made up “almost in entirely of converts” in Claremont, New Hampshire; “a small brick church” for a few Irish families in Damariscotta, Maine; another small

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church in Whitefield, Maine served by the same priest as Damariscotta; and two Indian churches in need of priests, the Penobscot church at Old Town, Maine, and the church for the Passamaquoddy in Eastport, Maine.\(^\text{18}\) Although Fenwick noted that “the Catholics reside principally only in Boston,” his mission needed to reach into more rural areas.\(^\text{19}\) Maine and Vermont occupied a great deal of his time, as detailed accounts in his daily journal of his visits to the northern New England region indicate throughout his daily journal. Small numbers of Irish Catholics and the Native American populations required several visits to Maine. Claremont, New Hampshire bordered Vermont, and was thus linked to the successful convert communities there. Vermont was quickly becoming a safe haven for Catholic converts from Protestantism and a site of religious experimentation as it was more religiously tolerant than other areas. Coastal New Hampshire towns that attracted Irish workers were often considered part of the nearby Maine missions, with one priest assigned to the whole region. With the exception of the city of Dover, New Hampshire was less friendly to Catholicism than its neighbors, perhaps because of its connections with nearby Massachusetts and its earlier history of both Puritan and established Scots-Irish Presbyterian settlement. Certain parts of New Hampshire, New York, and Canadian towns often shared linkages with these states. Together, this region of overlapping, interconnected places made up what can now be referred to as “northern New England” based on the records.

Fenwick was trained to be a modern administrator. He had origins quite dissimilar from Cheverus, suggesting the multiple influences on the American Catholic Church during its first decades. Fenwick, a Jesuit priest, was born to descendants of the leading Maryland Catholic

\(^\text{18}\) Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol. 1, entry for December 25, 1825.
\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.
families. Before coming to New England, he had served in New York, the Carolinas, and Georgia, and as president of Georgetown College. With his experience, he probably could have managed an even bigger city. On coming to Boston, “he found himself in charge of the smallest and weakest of the nine dioceses that existed in the United States at that time.”

In his records, Fenwick comes across as a dreamer and a builder, eager to create a seminary, a native supply of priests, and an orderly New England Catholic community. However, the diocese was vast and contained many removed areas like the “wilds” of Vermont. Often writing in the third person as simply “the bishop” (in his records, “the Bp”), Fenwick outlined his challenges upon arriving in Boston, describing,

a situation far from being enviable — in a section of the country to which he was a perfect stranger, without a single confidential friend of ancient acquaintance, and in the midst of a congregation wholly unknown to him and particularly devoted to their late Pastor, He found at his disposal only one Clergyman at Boston, and two at the distance of one hundred miles from it, who had each his own congregation to attend to. He had no other Priests for the various calls which might be made upon him from other parts of the Diocess.

Fenwick worked hard to overcome these obstacles, and in greater Boston, he had a great deal of success in expanding the Church’s institutional status. Boston already had the beginnings of a Catholic community when Fenwick arrived in 1825. One of the first things the Bishop noticed was that the Ursulines, who had been brought to the city in 1820, lived in tight corridors attached to the city’s cathedral, Holy Cross. They were “confined,” but in view of their

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22 O’Connor, Boston Catholics, 43.
23 See Fenwick’s comments in vol. 1 of the Bishop’s Journal, in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, for June 1826, as well as Chapter 3 of this dissertation, for a discussion of Fenwick’s trip to Vermont.
24 Fenwick, Memoirs to Serve for the Future, 182.
neighbors. Fenwick, finding this situation “unfit” for the order, moved them to a better location in the nearby town of Charlestown during his first summer in Boston.\(^{25}\) Here, they would have a farm, a chapel, and soon a house. This site was much more attractive, and became a reputable location for Protestant parents to send their girls to school. Fenwick’s attention to expanding Catholicism’s place in Boston meant that the religion became more visible and more prone to attack. Still, Fenwick’s purchase of the Charlestown location for the Ursulines also had positive results as he used the older residence to expand Holy Cross Cathedral. He tore down his old residence, and moved into the addition to the cathedral, which was now “forty feet longer & nearly 70 feet in its greatest width.” The basement of the cathedral now provided enough space to offer a Sunday School program to local children, and Fenwick rejoiced when three hundred boys and girls arrived there on the day it opened. Fenwick was aware that the physical growth of his institution might ignite a negative Protestant response, and, as a leader, he worked to create a respectable image for Boston Catholicism. In 1829, he began the diocesan newspaper, *The Jesuit*, with the explicit goal of fostering more favorable impressions of Catholics among local Protestants by explaining Catholic beliefs.\(^{26}\)

Fenwick also expanded the priesthood and Boston’s Catholic educational system. In 1827, Fenwick began a day school for Catholic boys so they would not have to go through the public school system. Parents paid $2 each quarter, plus the cost of materials. Fenwick emphasized the importance of this undertaking, as throughout the city all the schoolmasters were Protestant.\(^{27}\) Though Fenwick had no more funds, he also badly desired a seminary. The bishop decided to “live more frugally” and began training priests in his own home.\(^{28}\) By 1827, this little

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\(^{25}\) Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for March 13, 1826.  
\(^{26}\) Ibid., entries for August 1, August 7, and August, 1826; September 30, 1827; September 6, 1829.  
\(^{27}\) Ibid., entry for October 1, 1827.  
\(^{28}\) Ibid., entry for August 22, 1826.
“seminary” consisted “of four young men all of whom have received the minor orders & study theology.” 29 One of Fenwick’s trainees, John Fitzpatrick, would become the third bishop of Boston. Fitzpatrick’s parents were Irish immigrants who were early members of the Boston Church under Cheverus, and Fenwick later made sure Fitzpatrick was educated for the priesthood. 30 Even with such success stories, this training of native-born Catholics was time consuming and produced few quick results. Fenwick admitted that the easiest way to get “efficient & pious clergymen” would be to have a seminary in each diocese as recruiting priests from abroad was difficult. 31 But the bishop’s success as an administrator and educator was recognized: his dream of a seminary was realized in the form of Holy Cross College, opened in nearby Worcester, shortly before Fenwick’s death. 32

However, Fenwick encountered greater challenges in developing the Catholic Church in Maine, Vermont, and occasional New Hampshire spots. In Eastport, Maine, for instance, Fenwick’s 1827 visit revealed that despite being “few in number and these very poor,” area Catholics longed for a resident pastor and a “small church” so they could have regular access to the sacraments and attract other Catholics to settle in the region. 33 Besides the problem of a shortage of congregants and money, getting to Eastport in the first place was no easy matter. Fenwick had to take a steamboat past Portland to get there, making it a 4 day trip from Boston. 34

29 Ibid., entry for September 7, 1827.
30 For a rich and compelling sketch of Fitzpatrick and the changes that were happening in Boston during his bishopric, see O’Connor, Fitzpatrick’s Boston.
31 Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol. 1, entry for March 29, 1826.
33 Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol.1, entry for July 18, 1827.
34 Ibid., entry for July 10, 1827.
In this, northern New England resembled much of the country. Many remote areas outside of diocesan cities posited similar practical challenges during the early nineteenth century, and made it difficult for bishops to control their far-flung congregations. Being a priest in a difficult, “hardscrabble” environment was a job few would choose. James Hennessey writes, “The frontier was hardscrabble. Some Catholics clustered in the jumble of wooden shacks... Others eked out a hard living on lonesome farms. With mass vestments and alter supplies bundled into saddlebags, missionary priests rode narrow trails and dusty roads to minister to their congregations.” 35 Because of this, many of the priests employed in nineteenth-century America—especially in removed regions—tended to be of less-than-perfect quality. 36 In the borderlands particularly, lack of resources and scattered populations led to the formation of independent missionaries and laypeople, with, at times, little evidence of any centralized control. By the 1840s, the differences between city and country were becoming even more profound, with remote areas looking even more frontier-like when compared to the growing urban centers. For instance, while the famous Bishop of New York, John Hughes, had a “militant and autocratic style of leadership” that was “suited to the rapidly expanding Catholic community” of the diocese he took control of in 1842, bishops had much less chance to assert their authority so completely in other regions. 37

In New England, Fenwick had to build rather than simply oversee an already established Church infrastructure. In essence, lacking resident clergy, he was Boston’s resident parish priest. In addition to near daily Masses at the Ursuline convent and Holy Cross Cathedral, he was

36 Philip Gleason, Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism, Past and Present (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 44.
bogged down with the day-to-day responsibilities of a typical parish priest. Considering his drive to expand the Diocese, this must have been a frustrating situation. This lack of help limited Fenwick’s ability to give equal attention to all corners of New England, though he certainly tried. Fenwick noted that, “The Diocese of Boston comprehends all the New England states. The Catholics reside principally only in Boston. In other parts of these states their number is comparatively small; though latterly they are from various circumstances, beginning to become somewhat more numerous; & it is greatly hoped as soon as a sufficient supply of native proper clergymen can be had, they will become still more so.”

Unfortunately for Fenwick, the supply of priests would be only part of the problem he faced during his bishopric. The quality of the few missionaries he did employ was also highly variable.

Perhaps this was because of the level of difficulty missionaries faced. Missionaries were forced to cover nearly all of Maine and Vermont as their personal “mission.” These state boundaries were often malleable, with Maine missionaries being sent up the entire New England coast to attend to any small populations of Catholics. In Dover, New Hampshire, for instance, Fenwick had to turn down parishioners’ plea for a priest in 1832; though the Catholics there sent a note “earnestly soliciting” a priest and promising to pay to support him, Fenwick was “unable as yet to meet their wishes fully” and tried instead to make sure they had access to the missionaries serving Maine. While small numbers of French Canadians, Native Americans, and Irish inhabited Maine and Vermont from the nation’s inception, there were not substantial, central, or parish-sized populations until the mid-nineteenth century rush of immigration. William Leo Lucey notes that by the 1840s, Massachusetts was growing rapidly when compared to Vermont. Unlike other areas of New England, Vermont maintained rural characteristics. This

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39 Ibid., entry for September 21, 1832.
was in large part because the decline of the sheep industry sent Vermonters to the west. The only real population growth came from Irish and French Canadians, a fact which supports viewing Vermont as a unique, frontier Catholic community. As a result, the Diocese of Boston faced a situation in which there were a number of dispersed communities, yet not enough priests or centrally located parishioners to give each group permanent pastors.

Boston’s early bishops were compelled to take any help they could find recruiting missionaries for northern New England, often having to settle for priests of dubious quality or reputation. Not beholden to their bishops or even a stable parish community, “renegade” missionary priests could thrive in the Catholic borderlands. When immigrant priests or those discarded from other dioceses could not be employed, Boston turned largely to Quebec. French Canada gave Boston a supply of visiting priests to help in the borderlands region, especially among the French-speaking Catholics there.

From the outset, American Catholic leaders understood the importance of harnessing Canada’s religious resources. French Canada had laid the groundwork for northern American Catholicism over the past two centuries through a series of missions to regional Native American tribes; the introduction of French-speaking prelates to the region; and the residence of a continued body of faithful citizens, French-Canadian and Acadian, who relied on its resources through an expanding network of religious orders, schools, and seminaries. Many of these Native American and French Catholics would find themselves living within the boundaries of the United States (in places like Maine and Vermont as well as New York, Michigan and other northern frontiers) as America’s borders shifted and solidified. Thus, an early relationship between New England and Quebec was forged. John Carroll, the first American bishop stationed

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at Baltimore, “joyfully accepted” Canadian help in New England.  

This Canadian connection was likely accepted by the French-born Cheverus when he became the first bishop of Boston. The continued arrival of clergy ousted from their homeland by the French Revolution also added a decidedly French element to the young Church in the United States.  

Without Canada, the young diocese could not develop, train or sustain a native clergy. While dioceses already included huge amounts of territory within their limits, the boundary lines remained malleable. The entire northern region, including New York, New England, Quebec and New Brunswick, had to cooperate. Canada provided the cultural, educational, and religious resources that New England needed to grow because Quebec and Montreal were generally considered to be North America’s Catholic “capital.” At the same time, American Catholic dioceses like Boston sought to solidify control over their defined regions. Several visits to Canada recorded in Fenwick’s diary suggest that although the priest admired and appreciated Quebec and Montreal, he also bristled at the need to beg for priests and assistance. At times, Fenwick responded far less “joyfully” to Canadian help than his predecessors, a fact which can probably be accounted for by his hope for Jesuit support, his status as an English speaker, his larger-than-life personality, and his strong Maryland roots. Still, compromise was necessary during this formative period.

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42 It is estimated that nearly 100 French priests came to America between 1791-1815, with men like Matignon and Cheverus a part of this movement. See Leo F. Ruskowski, “French Émigré Priests in the United States: 1791-1815” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1940), v. It also appears likely that Cheverus would have been accepting of outside help because he himself stepped in and supported Catholics in the larger region, even outside of his huge Boston diocese. Ruskowski notes on page 123 that Cheverus “gladly” assisted in New York because the larger “territory” required his help while temporarily without a bishop.
Fenwick took two boys—Andrew Alexander and Nicholas O’Brien—with him to Montreal in 1831 to begin their training for the priesthood at Sulpician College. Fenwick told the *cure* about the need for priests in his Diocese, and, though he did not specify the exact terms, it appears that the College changed the admission cost in order to accommodate the Bishop and his struggling Diocese. 43 In addition to providing potential recruits for the priesthood with training, Quebec and Montreal also gave Boston temporary priests from their country on “loan.” This source of support, though it made Fenwick reliant on Canada, was absolutely crucial in the areas north of Boston. Smaller pockets of Catholics that Fenwick found during his time as bishop thus could not hope for a permanent or even a regular visiting priest.

Well before Fenwick’s administration, the region had been sustained by its proximity to Catholic Canada. This was especially true for Vermont, where Fenwick’s predecessor, Cheverus, had earlier noted the growing French-Canadian population, but was forced to leave the area to New York and Canada for lack of priests. While there was not an overwhelming Catholic population in the state until the mid-nineteenth century rush of immigration, Irish and French Canadians did inhabit the state relatively early. 44 In particular, Burlington Catholics needed attention; in Robert H. Lord’s classic account of the Diocese of Boston, he notes that:

The real cradle was to be at the rising village of Burlington, where in 1830 the Bishop (Cheverus) rather suddenly discovered that there were about one thousand Catholics. Obscurely, hardly noticed by anyone it seems, there had grown up in this remotest corner of the Diocese the largest agglomeration of Catholics then to be found anywhere in New England save at Boston and Charlestown: a Catholic colony five times the size of that in Hartford. 45

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43 Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for June 24, 1831.
45 Ibid., 104.
Before the creation of the Diocese of Burlington missionary or temporary priests from both the Diocese of Boston and Canadian dioceses ministered to Catholics in Vermont. Though Vermont had come under the control of the Diocese of Boston under Bishop Cheverus in 1810, the early and continued migration of French-Canadians just over the US border made cooperation with priests from Quebec desirable and, with such a shortage of New England priests, necessary.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, Bishop Cheverus received assistance from a newly appointed Vicar General in the person of a priest “borrowed” from the Bishop of Montreal. This priest, Father Pierre Marie Mignault of St. Joseph de Chamblay in Quebec, was sent to assist the French Canadian population of Vermont from 1818 until 1853.\textsuperscript{47} Agrarian uprisings in Quebec during the 1830s increased immigration and made the service of Mignault increasingly necessary. When Fenwick dedicated St. Mary’s of Burlington, Vermont’s first church, in 1832, the influence of French Canadians there was already palpable. While Jeremiah O’Callaghan, the parish priest, spoke in English, Father Mignault came to the city for the ceremony in order to preach in French.\textsuperscript{48} According to one Boston paper, the approximately 500 French-Canadian Catholics around Burlington in the 1830s were “spreading down (the) Champlain Valley and even in interior of Vermont…Far too many for one clergyman.”\textsuperscript{49}

Despite the history and necessity of this Boston-Quebec connection, Fenwick’s notes suggest that he was not entirely satisfied with the relationship, nor with having to rely on outside


\textsuperscript{47} Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 2, 104.

\textsuperscript{48} Boston Intelligencer (Boston, MA), 9 September 1832, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington. Burlington Free Press, (Burlington, VT) 21 September 1832, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.

\textsuperscript{49} William Byrne, et al., eds., History of the Catholic Church in the New England States, vol. 2 (Boston: The Hurd & Everts Co., 1899), 504. See also Boston Intelligencer, 21 September 1832, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
support for his Diocese. Often, the loaned priests and mutual understandings between Canada and the United States were not, in fact, so mutual. Fenwick was fiercely opinionated about the future of his Diocese, and he wanted his Diocese to be independent. The influx of French Canadians only put increasing pressure on Boston in the decades that followed. Fenwick was deeply concerned about the ongoing growth, and made it his mission to staff Boston with American-born priests, presumably so that such reliance on French Canada would not be necessary. It appears that, overall, Quebec exercised a slightly stronger hand over northern regions like Vermont than did Boston because of greater clerical resources and a long-standing hierarchy and history in that region. Historians of nineteenth-century Burlington have noted that “Vermont was far away from the seat of its diocese, Boston. When a priest came to Vermont from Canada to minister to the French Canadians, he was under the jurisdiction of Bishop de Cheverus of Boston or his successors but continued his correspondence with his canonical bishop in Canada.” Communication problems and power conflicts could arise, so the bishops were “careful not to trespass on one another’s area of authority.” Nonetheless, New England ultimately remained subject to Canadian influence as the missionaries were simply “on loan to the Bishop of Boston.”

With a lack of priests and an eye to develop the supply of native-born clergy, Fenwick seemed especially perturbed when the Bishop of Quebec kept from him one of his best recruits for the priesthood. On August 26th, 1826, Fenwick complained that, “A letter is received from the Bp of Quebec in reply to the one written on the subject of the Rev’d Mr. Holmes. The Bp of Quebec refuses to restore that Rev’d gentleman of the Diocese of Boston of which he is a native, on various groups, and especially on account of his (the Rev’d Holme’s) conversion in Canada

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from infidelity to Catholicity & his being there baptized.” Fenwick was taken aback by the bishop’s conduct, and tried to remind Panet that he owed the young Diocese of Boston Christian consideration Fenwick noted, “In answer the Bp refers his Lordship of Quebec to the Parable of David. He cannot but think hard of his lordship’s declining to send him this native clergyman, even admitting that he can canonically retain him in Canada, as he (the Bp of Quebec) is so well supplied with efficient and pious pastors, & his poor neighbourhood is altogether destitute.”

While acknowledging that, in terms of territory and official control, the bishop of Quebec was allowed to keep Holmes as his own, Fenwick was dismayed that his brothers to the north were not more sympathetic to the desperate shortage of priests in New England. Therefore, Fenwick was not willing to let the issue drop so easily. A year later, on a visit to Quebec in the summer of 1828, he expressed his irritation at not being able to meet directly with the Bishop of Quebec about the “ownership” of Holmes. After seeing Holmes at the seminary, Fenwick noted that, “I was desirous of having the matter discussed in hopes of still possessing that excellent young Clergyman & therefore regretted very much the Bp’s absence as nothing could be done without him.”  

Fenwick also noted that on his 1831 Quebec trip Bishop Panet “mistook” him for Bishop Rosati of St. Louis.

Bishop Panet’s unwillingness to return Holmes—and inability to even correctly identify Fenwick—suggests that Fenwick felt that New England was something of a junior partner to Quebec in the story of North American Catholicism during this time period. Fenwick seemed well aware of the established, powerful nature of the Quebec Church in comparison to that of New England, and took time during his Quebec trips to comment on the differences.

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51 Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for August 29, 1826.
52 Ibid., entry for July 3, 1828.
53 Ibid., entry for August 17, 1831.
between Quebec and Boston. Finances and resources weighed heavily on his mind. After his first Mass back in Boston’s cathedral following his 1831 trip, he complained that “The B’p cannot but remark how very small the Cathedral appear to him after seeing the large churches of Canada.”

He had been especially taken with the residence of the Grey Sisters (an order of Canadian religious women), and the overall support Catholicism received throughout the city of Montreal. He commented that, “I remarked that in general the chapels connected with these Convents are beautiful & highly ornamented with gold leaf even to profusion. The same may be said of all the churches even in the country parts throughout Lower Canada. The form of their churches & the style of building is everywhere the same. The interior never fails to present the form of a cross with three altars all carved & gilt.” From Fenwick’s perspective, Montreal Catholicism was far more developed and respected than Boston Catholicism.

In the borderlands of northern New England, Canada’s support was undeniably important. Still, Fenwick was also forced to turn to other American dioceses that were closer to some more remote locations than he himself was in Boston. Sections of Vermont were thus not only de-facto parts of Quebec, served by Quebec missionaries, but also de-facto parts of New York. In 1828, Fenwick admitted, that, sadly, Vermont Catholics at “Vergennes & Burlington as well as those living in their vicinity have hitherto been attended by a clergyman stationed by the B’p of New York at Plattsburg— the B’p of Boston having no Priest to send thither.” Fenwick also asked other areas for help, but, overall, the whole American Church during this period was strapped for resources. The United States, even in the mid-Atlantic where the Church was centered, was not yet in a position to exert control over its newly formed dioceses. Fenwick was

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54 Ibid., entry for August 28, 1831.  
55 Ibid., entry for July 1, 1828.  
56 Ibid., entry for December 28, 1828.
frustrated that he could not get American support to increase his meager resources. He griped that Philadelphia should have helped staff his growing Diocese. A plea to the Society of Jesus in Georgetown, District of Columbia told the story of Fenwick’s “distressed condition for want of other Priests, as well as the great loss of souls.” Fenwick could not “but deplore equally with the last the great inconvenience he labours under for the want of Priests.” He stated his case in “several letters to the Bp of Philadelphia urging him to let him have one or two priests for a few years to supply the wants of his Diocese, or until he can provide himself.”

In the northern borderlands, where national and ethnic boundaries were already blurred by transient Catholics and help from the New York and Canadian dioceses, this problem of a severe priest shortage was further compounded by the overall issue of geographical space. Fenwick was defensive about the boundaries of his diocese, as the northern borderlands were a sprawling, somewhat nebulous region. Rome did not have a firm understanding of where boundaries should be drawn to best support the growing American Catholic population, and the Vatican eventually decided that diocesan lines should, generally, follow state lines. As noted in, however, parts of Vermont bled into New York, and parts of the New Hampshire coast overlapped with Maine. Much of both Maine and Vermont had connections with Canada. Fenwick sought to maintain control over what he understood as his region of influence.

An 1832 disagreement over the Boston-New York boundary showed this attempt clearly enough. According to Fenwick, the Bishop of New York, John Dubois, had brought the issue of the border up to the Vatican, “stating that when in Rome he called the attention of the Prefect of the Propaganda to this subject, that he looked among the records of the Office & could find nothing relating thereto from which he concludes that no boundary had ever been settled at

57 Ibid., entry for March 28, 1826.
the partition of the Diocese of Baltimore by the Holy See.”58 This particular entry beautifully represents the organizational challenges and lack of communication that North American Catholics dealt with during this period. Information could be lost, misunderstood, or simply ignored in America, far removed from Catholicism’s European centers. Fenwick believed that the Bishop of New York was “mistaken” in his questioning of the boundary line, and that both Rome and Boston had finalized information about the official demarcation. His response to Dubois a few days later indicates that Fenwick felt his area of control had been intruded upon, because “it would be highly improper to change or alter the boundaries from what it is at present in consequence, among many other reasons, of the difference of Ecclesiastical discipline which prevails in the two Dioceses particularly respecting the publication of the Bans of Matrimony.” Fenwick concluded that he “cannot consent to any alteration.”59 In its discussions of Canada, New York, and the need for a native supply of priests, Fenwick’s journal evidences his great desire for better control over a vast, overwhelming territory and people.

Despite Fenwick’s struggle to consolidate his control over New England, the open, interconnected nature of the borderlands also offered many unique benefits. His successors seemed more resigned to the idea that they had to rely on Canada and other nearby dioceses for help, and cooperated closely with them. A close relationship with Canada was especially useful as more French-Canadian immigrants poured into places like Vermont. Although Father Mignault of Chambly had been a missionary in the state since 1818, more help was needed toward mid-century.60 The ever-observant convert William Hoyt reported to Bishop Fitzpatrick in 1847, a year after Fenwick’s passing, on the status of the faith in the region of Saint Albans,
Vermont (near the border of Quebec), stating that there was also a great need for French-speaking priests there unless the Bishop should like to lose struggling French-Canadians to the Protestant denominations. Hoyt informed him that, “The Catholic population in this section comprising many Canadians, it would be desirable that a priest resident here should be able to speak the French language as well as our own. I will add, both as showing the importance of this station, that the Protestant association has stationed here for several months past one of their preachers, a Frenchman, who is using every exertion to turn the poor Catholics from their Faith.”  

61 Tellingly, in 1850, Fitzpatrick composed a note to Bishop Bourget of Montreal, thanking him for the help he would provide to the French of Vermont, and suggesting that Mignault inform the Vermont missionary priest Jeremiah O’Callaghan of these missions in advance so the French Canadians in the region could be notified of upcoming visits from the Canadian Father Leveque.  

When French-Canadian parishioners split from Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan’s Burlington congregation to form a separate ethnic parish, Mignault sent them a new resident priest in the person of Father Quevillon, while Father Droulet from New Brunswick was sent to help at Montpelier.  

63 Even outside of Vermont’s larger cities, French-Canadian Catholics accepted Canadian assistance. In 1850, Fitzpatrick noted that Drolet was told to “visit Montpelier, Vergennes, and several other places in Vermont where there are large numbers of Canadians who for many years past have had but rare opportunities for a priest’s ministry.”

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61 William Henry Hoit to Right Reverend John B. Fitzpatrick, 22 May 1847, 2.11, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.

62 Bishop John Fitzpatrick to Bishop Bourget, 19 April 1850, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.


The Bishop later wrote that Drolet was assigned a wide area that included the counties of “Washington, Orange, Caledonia, and Essex” and furthermore was asked to tend “the Canadians generally throughout the whole state.” Even on the eve of the separation of Portland and Burlington into separate dioceses in 1853 because of their expanding Catholic populations, there were not nearly enough priests to staff them, and individual Canadian priests were responsible for the work of multiple parish communities.  

In addition to reliance on Quebec, Fenwick necessarily depended upon lay Catholics to expand the Catholic Church in northern New England. As neither he nor a cadre of qualified priests were regularly available, committed lay Catholics became responsible for the material and social expansion of the Church in their particular areas. Bishop Fenwick’s records point to numerous examples of the charity and influence of lay Catholics in Maine and Vermont, who shaped the faith there. Well-to-do Catholic settlers and more recent converts from Protestantism provided a financial base for the struggling Church. Fenwick noted, for instance, that a Mr. Kegan from Maine came to Boston each Christmas season in order to supply Fenwick with money to hand out to poor Catholics. He was, in Fenwick’s words, “a respectable Catholic.” In Vermont, in addition to the help provided by a convert from Protestantism, William Henry Hoyt of St. Albans, Catholicism was also sustained thanks to the efforts of other converts like Mrs. Nichols. Nichols, who had inherited her mother’s estate in Connecticut, decided to donate her wealth to the Diocese after her conversion. Fenwick noted, too, that the sale of the estate, which should amount to “13 or 14 hundred Dollars, might be immediately applied to the building of a Catholic Church at Vergennes (Vermont), where she (Nichols) hoped one day to see the Cath.

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65 Ibid., entry for May 2, 1850.
66 Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol. 1, entry for December 24, 1834.
religion flourish.” Nichols, Fenwick wrote, was “a most edifying & zealous member” of the Catholic church, and it seemed likely that her Protestant husband would also convert. Money, as well as political or social power, like that exercised by the Kavanagh-Cotrill cohort, could help the Church expand into places it otherwise would not have reached.

Relying on lay support to develop the Church brought its own problems. In northern New England, Fenwick dealt largely with poor, rural Catholics who refused to be properly “tamed” by the institutional church and steadfastly resisted control by their leaders. The poor economic standing of New England Catholics was one of the biggest obstacles for the Diocese of Boston. If the private wealth of Catholics like Kavanagh, Cotrill and Nichols built the Church in Maine and Vermont, the severe poverty of most other Catholics hampered many of these same efforts. Later, in urban settings, congregations would pay for the upkeep of their own parishes, priests, and buildings. Elaborate fundraising efforts would build beautiful steeples and statues, in which the immigrant population of the United States took great pride. Individual communities were responsible for funding their own churches and priests (albeit with some help from numerous collections taken up by missionary priests in Boston, Canada and elsewhere). But in the early nineteenth century there was no “parish” structure to speak of in Maine and Vermont. Communities were compact, and they were generally not in proper cities, but smaller towns. Few had the resources to build Catholic churches and institutions.

While the Damariscotta region was lucky to have the Kavanaghs and Cottrills, most Maine Catholics were poor. Eastport, only a few miles from the Passamaquoddy Indian

67 Ibid., entry for December 6, 1830.
68 Ibid., entry for December 4, 1830.
settlement at Pleasant Point, provides one example of the economic barriers that prevented Catholicism from flourishing. In 1827, the missionary Father French took up a collection in Boston “which is…to assist him in building a church at EastPort, in Maine; he states the poverty of the Catholics in that part of his Diocese, & their utter inability to provide themselves with a church.” Even once the initial funds were collected and construction was underway, the Catholics there were unable to easily complete the project. French informed Fenwick the following year that, despite the fact that the church was nearly ready to hold Masses, a decline in the region’s Plaister of Paris business was holding area Catholics back from finishing the construction.

The poverty of the Catholic population also frustrated the plans of Irish-born Jeremiah O’Callaghan and the other Irish priest soon sent to assist him, John Daly, in the state of Vermont. O’Callaghan was a headstrong, eccentric (some would say crazy) missionary who railed against immoral lending and banking practices in both Ireland and Vermont, and expected correct behavior from his faithful. Daly arrived to help shoulder the huge burden as O’Callaghan had, up to this point, been responsible for all Vermont Catholics. Letters from the two Irish priests to Bishops Fenwick and Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick was brought in to help Fenwick near the end of his life) highlight the difficulty of building new churches in Vermont, and the complete lack of cooperation from the scattered Catholic populations. Daly, though of the same ethnicity as his parishioners, was frustrated by an intractable Irish population at his mission in Middlebury. He complained to Fenwick in 1839 that, "I have, in some manner, to complain of the hardened and irreligious feelings of a few of the Irish Catholics. Nothing that I say or do can produce any good

71 Ibid., entry for September 30, 1827.
72 Ibid., entry for November 20, 1828.
effect. To me they never come to confession. And their presence occasionally at Mass, which happens about once a year, is more from accident than design." He warned the bishop that, "It would be in vain to expect any assistance for building churches; or for the support of a Missionary pastor. I often tell them that, if all Catholics were so, there would not be a Church on the earth, nor a priest, anywhere, to offer sacrifice to God." 73 Although Burlington Catholics were far more involved in church building according to records at the Archdiocese of Boston, funds were still short there as well. After Vermont’s first Catholic church in Burlington, St. Mary’s, was destroyed by fire in 1837, O’Callaghan sought to rebuild it. In 1841, in a letter to Fitzpatrick, O’Callaghan indicated that all sources of financial support had been exhausted. Although $400 was still owed on the new building, “the Catholics and the liberal neighbors have already (been) drained by our repeated demands for the edifice; so there remains no other source to which we could apply with any degree of confidence, but Your Paternity.” 74 Burlington was the center of Vermont’s Catholic community rather than a remote town; nonetheless, even here, finances weighed heavily on O’Callaghan’s mind.

In addition to financial difficulties, Boston’s bishops also struggled with a lack of social and religious control over its huge diocese, as frustrated letters like Daly’s reveal. Catholics knew that they held a certain power because of their sheer numbers in comparison to the paucity of priests. Though the whole country experienced the priest shortage, the rural settings of Maine and Vermont gave lay Catholics a greater sense of autonomy. Catholics were more in control of their decisions regarding family and social organization. Some also left the Church and went to

73 Father John B. Daly to Bishop Fenwick, 9 December 1839, 1.43, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
74 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop John Fitzpatrick, 20 November, 1841, 3.6, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
Protestant denominations because they were without physical church structures and priests. Lack of resources, priests, and other Catholics meant that marriage to Protestant spouses was accepted by lay Catholics as a numerical necessity. In an 1840 letter to Fenwick, Father O’Callaghan complained about the problem of mixed marriages in Vermont, where Catholics formed unions with local Protestants instead of choosing partners from within their own religious community. O’Callaghan found that, despite his urging, little could be done to stop such marriages, and the Catholics involved cared little about his opinion. In one particularly colorful case in Vergennes,

an Irish Catholic girl came with an English Protestant—a laborer—of one arm, to get married. He knew not one word of the Lord’s prayer, nor of the Creed, nor of the Unity, or Trinity of God, nor the Commandments, nor any one particle of the Christian religion. The disparity of religion in addition to the loss of his one arm shewed me the unfitness of the match. Consequently I argued with them both, face to face, against their intention, telling them that each would do well to choose a spouse of his and her religious way of thinking, but I labored in vain. The Irish girl simply told O’Callaghan in response, that, if he would not consent to marry them she was sure the local Squire would. The couple left, despite O’Callaghan’s threats to have her excommunicated. In the same way that O’Callaghan would come to express his non-conformist views on banking and politics in a manner that would not be possible had he been stationed elsewhere, so he was challenged by the very people who were supposed to be under his religious care, suggesting a type of open, malleable religious and social structure in nineteenth-

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75 James O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), 14. See also Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism, Past and Present* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 156. Gleason notes that the material resources the Church was missing were “not as serious as the lack of personnel.” Many Catholics abandoned their faith without priests, so the lack of clergy was the largest threat to Catholic growth.

76 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 2 January 1840, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
The sheer numerical domination of northern New England by Protestants also meant that the Church’s power was lessened, especially when it came to choosing marriage partners, giving disgruntled Catholics even more freedom to move away from their faith if they disagreed with local authority. Jay P. Dolan writes that it was not until the 1840s that American Catholics developed a “siege-mentality,” and began to insulate themselves from outside influences, especially nativism. Prior to this, Catholic and Protestant mingling—both socially and in marriage—may have been more common. Robert Lord also notes that, even by the late 1700s, intermarriage was already visible. In Boston, for instance, Francis Matignon saw a number of mixed marriages among the Irish and non-Catholic Bostonians. The French population of the city was decreasing and the Irish population increasing, but suitable partners of the same religion were nonetheless hard to find. Interestingly, sometimes the non-Catholic spouse would actually convert to Catholicism. While from the beginning of the American Catholic Church bishops and priests looked down on mixed marriage, the situation, especially in regions without a significant or concentrated Catholic population, was largely unavoidable.

If a Catholic outside of Boston, who did not regularly see a priest, disagreed with the missionaries, they might leave the Catholic Church entirely. Religious lapses or conversion to more widely practiced Christian sects was, unsurprisingly, an ongoing problem. This stemmed from a lack of priests to administer the sacraments, but also a northern New England population made up, during the first half of the nineteenth century, of mostly Anglo-American Protestants.

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77 Ibid.
79 Dichtl makes this point beautifully about the trans-Appalachian west, noting that though Bishop Carroll did not, from the start, support Catholic-Protestant intermarriage, the trend continued as newly settled areas had “fewer potential Catholic spouses.” See John Dichtl, Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 129.
80 Chapter 3 covers conversion in detail, but it is important to note that Protestants, especially in Vermont, were often called to convert to Catholicism.
O’Callaghan complained to Bishop Fenwick in 1840 about several Irish immigrants to Vermont who had married Protestants rather than other Catholics. The biggest problems centered in Vergennes, a town near Burlington. O’Callaghan feared that the “scandal of such barefaced infidelity” would continue unless addressed, and he encouraged the Bishop to send him a document against mixed marriage that could be read to his congregants. Lapses from Catholicism were often far worse than just marriage to Protestants, however. Fenwick had already noted the immoral relationships between the Irish of Vermont and their Protestant neighbors, giving O’Callaghan the go-ahead to excommunicate a certain Patrick Carroll “who cohabited there with two Yankee wives” seven years earlier.\footnote{Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 2 January 1840, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.} Unfortunately for Fenwick and his small army of missionaries, the problem did not end with lost adult Catholics, but embraced also the next generation of potential Catholics who came from such unrecognized unions.

O’Callaghan complained of one case in which he had witnessed a Catholic wife and her Protestant husband enter into a protracted disagreement over the Catholic baptism of their child, rather than simply assuming the child should be raised a proper Catholic.\footnote{Ibid.}

Independent behavior of lay Catholics, with a degree of disregard for authority, was especially visible in rural regions where the Irish had settled relatively early. Missionaries to Vermont and nearby New York, for instance, found the Irish particularly troublesome to deal with. Ogdensburg, served by many of the same missionary priests that traveled to Vermont (again attesting to the limits of Church resources in this region), confronted ongoing problems with the Irish population. The Irish in the community of Carthage had a “liberal spirit” which resulted in their “reputation for turbulence disobedience, and poor faith, which remains to be
excelled. They had never possessed Catholic schools, nor wished for them, and their parish has been a hotbed of disorder to supply the neighboring parishes with similar growths.”

Father Daly, upon being sent to help O’Callaghan with the immigrant population in Vermont, told Bishop Fenwick that his field of ministry was full of similarly independent Irish Catholics, if indeed they were still “Catholic” at all. A shortage of priests and resources left many populations relatively free of clerical influence and control, and, thus, unwilling to comply with priests when they did see them. The Irish appeared little concerned for their eternal souls, Daly bemoaned: “Such persons generally despise sacraments and sacrifice; passing a heedless and indifferent kind of life, not concerned for anything apparently, except temporal gain and advancement. I am often disposed to suffer such persons to leave the world, should I get any sick call from them, in the same manner, as they have lived. That, in as much, as they despised all preaching and exhortation during life, they should not be attended when that life is drawing to a close.” These Irish were generally unconcerned about the formal organization, teaching, or “requirements” of the Church. Daly pointedly told the Bishop that,

I have often spoken on this subject and proclaimed the solemn and awful warning ‘that just as a man lives so he will die.’ As I have your Lordship’s instructions relative to such people, whenever, I am called, I shall attend. But I must own that, after all my exertions in which I have frequently gone beyond my strength, I have done no good. They are so impervious to truth, so heedless of impending danger, and so hardened with avarice that nothing can awaken them to a sense of their religious duties.

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84 Father John B. Daly to Bishop Fenwick, 9 December 1839, 1.43, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
85 Ibid.
The Irish may have been labeled as a particularly “difficult” ethnic group to deal with, but the practicable problems of northern New England life accounted for much of the struggle of priests like Daly. While the French-Canadian immigrants in the region were somewhat better behaved than their Irish counterparts, who were full of “ingratitude to Heaven,” they also faced similarly difficult circumstances, and their religious needs were, likewise, largely unmet. Thus, before the Diocese of Ogdensburg, New York, was established, “many lamentable apostasies from self-interest or indifference occurred” among the French-Canadian population in the New York-Vermont region because of Catholics unwilling or unable to function without the constant oversight of permanent priests.86 To be sure, the Irish Daly was himself “eccentric, impetuous, and blunt”, apparently “strikingly akin” to the problem-causing missionary Jeremiah O’Callaghan, so northern priests were very willing to complain of their sufferings with their intractable border populations. This combination of headstrong priests and difficulty laity was another reason why Maine and Vermont became an important battleground for institutional Catholicism.87 The qualities that made men like O’Callaghan and Daly suited to survival in the borderlands experience also made them prone to controversy and probably created many of the problems they had with parishioners.

Ethnic associations and geography made the northern region fundamentally distinct from the mostly Irish population of Catholic Boston. Northern New England had a complex French history, and priests often used the language of ethnicity when discussing their jobs, likely because they assumed that the “Irish” or the “French” came with certain definable cultural traits. But this did not obscure a larger reality: although ethnicity was frequently implicated in addressing “problem” Catholics, the poor behavior of the Irish in particular and the general

languor of religious practice among both the French-Canadian and Irish populations were almost inevitable given the limited resources and geographic removal of such groups. Contemporary priests, while critical of many ethnic Catholics in their notes to Fenwick, nonetheless admitted that location also figured heavily into cases of lost faith. The main theme uniting all the Catholic groups, after all, was not their ethnicity, but their distant location and the resulting inability of the Diocese to help them.

Catholics in Vermont were a liminal people, not close enough to Boston, Albany, or Quebec to be effectively served. According to one account by the nineteenth-century New York priest John Talbot Smith, Catholics near the Canadian-US border suffered special problems because of location:

Isolation has been the chief cause of many of the evils which afflicted the northern Catholics. Shut off by difference of language and nationality from Canada, and closed in by mountains from Boston and Albany, they shared in none of these impulses which moved the faithful in the fortunate centres. They were dependent, and yet independent, suffering the miseries of the former condition without enjoying the blessings of the latter.88

Smith wrote of one border town that the mixed Irish and French-Canadian populations were a difficult people without a permanent home because, “being close to the border a gypsy horde meanders uneasily from one country to the other to the disgust and detriment of the settled communities. The faith of these people is dead, often their morality too, and they are a source of annoyance to pastors.”89 Location near the border led to populations that northern dioceses later struggled to properly tame.

89 Ibid.
The most serious result of scattered communities, few priests, and limited resources was not, however, lapsed religious practice or poorly behaved groups of ethnic Catholics. The more difficult challenge was leveled directly at the concept of institutional, hierarchical Catholicism. In this era, and particularly in removed settings, lay Catholics had to be given significant control of church resources even when a church could finally be established under such difficult circumstances. Catholic priests and bishops throughout the country were struggling with the concept of “trusteeism,” or lay ownership of church property, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The existence of trustee groups did not mean that such lay boards completely disavowed papal or ecclesiastical authority; they only had legal control over “financial debts and other matters of temporal administration.” However, legal and “temporal” control often led to increased decision-making power at the parish level, as when lay committees attempted to select which particular priests served their churches. As early as the 1780s, Bishop Carroll found himself pitted against a church in New York over a priest the congregation wanted removed. It was a difficult situation to rectify: Carroll and other leading American Catholics, like Boston’s Bishop Cheverus, believed that the Catholic Church would have to adjust to the “congregational” or trustee-driven model of church life in the United States because of the limited number of clergy, and they worked to make sure the Church did not appear to be run by Rome and the papacy. Some aspects of church life had to be people-and parish-centered for American Catholicism to work. Yet, leaders like Carroll also believed that lay people should not make decisions about priests.

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order. Carroll refused to believe that American-born Catholics (that is, traditional Maryland descendants like himself) would bring such unorthodox ideas into the U.S. Church, but associated trusteeism and disrespect for Church authority with more recently arrived German and Irish immigrants, French revolutionaries, Deists, and drunkards. 94

These conflicting feelings aside, the Church hierarchy realized that, if the American church were to survive, it had to accommodate the American principles of individualism and localism. With a limited supply of priests and bishops, it was often necessary to leave property in control of lay Catholics. The American Catholic Church would have to merge traditional ideas about parish governance with the realities of the new American environment. Historian Margaret DePalma has convincingly argued in her study of Catholic and Protestant relationships “on the frontier” that perhaps the entire American Church should be thought of as a “frontier” of the European Church because of these new challenges and structures introduced in the United States. Catholicism did not allow for trusteeism, and, yet, in America, the practice became established in many locations as a result of both preference for power among “common” men, as well as the reality of a very limited supply of clergy. As DePalma notes, “due to the shortage of priests in America, the widely dispersed congregations, and the issue of republicanism, laymen came to play a significant role in parish affairs. This role was enhanced by the nature of American law, which created a distinction between the church; the spiritual entity; and the religious society, the temporal body of members.” 95

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95 Margaret C. DePalma, Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004), 18. See also John Buckley, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, and Trent Pomplun, eds., The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism (New York: John Wiley& Sons, 2010), 193. Despite the sometimes negative reaction of the clergy to so much lay control, the American use of trusteeism often “succeeded,” allowing the faith to grow during this period.
Given these complicated circumstances, leaders strove to regain some control and solidify authority by the nineteenth century while simultaneously accepting the realities of American parish life. Bishops had more impact in their home cities, where they could exercise direct control over the laity. The city of Philadelphia was, like Boston and Baltimore, a Catholic center of growing importance. Here, the trustee issue reached a boiling point in 1820, and the bishop was keen to control the problem and set an example for the rest of the country. A priest named William Hogan was excommunicated after a series of conflicts with Philadelphia bishop Henry Conwell, during which Hogan had called a group of lay trustees to his defense. The very public nature of the event alerted bishops like Fenwick of the need to avoid such power struggles, and thus halt the negative effects that Catholic infighting had on Protestant opinion of Catholicism.96

By 1826, Fenwick made it his personal mission to keep the Boston Catholics firmly under his rule despite his meager resources, sprawling diocese, and limited priest supply. In his journal, he referred to the situation in Philadelphia as an example of how lay trusteeism and too much control by parishioners led to chaos. Fenwick did not want his diocese to follow this path. He stated that he was “determined…with the blessings of divine Grace to resist every encroachment of this kind” in order to avoid being like the “long disgraced” Church in Philadelphia “where lay trustees rule & direct as they please.”97 Trusteeism led to strong lay communities that sought to choose their priests, and handle parish affairs beyond finances. Fenwick strove to make his Boston a very different city from Cheverus’s Boston. While the overtaxed Cheverus had avoided the “detail & drudgery” of managing accounts, pew rents and

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collection, rental of the church cellar, and other “temporal” issues by creating a group of seven trustees, Fenwick sought to govern Boston with a firmer hand, and wished that his predecessor had never allowed trustees so much power.98

Fenwick was especially incensed when members of his Boston congregation met to complain about their “supposed grievances” at a local coffeehouse.99 In this memorable instance, Fenwick explained that issues over pew ownership plagued the community, due to the influence of the lay “committee.” The problem began in September of 1827 when new pews were created, and the issue of moving seats arose. Several church members were unhappy with the new guidelines and prices set by the committee that had formed under Bishop Cheverus, and they aired their grievances to Fenwick. The pew owners opposed to the new regulations believed that they were being unfairly burdened by the changed pricing, but Fenwick held that pew owners were not contributing enough to church expenses, and explained that the new policies were “fair” and “very proper.”100 Still, the opposed pew owners continued to push Fenwick after their secret coffeehouse meeting, insisting that they had the right to move up closer to the altar without additional cost, though they would be willing to contribute something towards the church. When Fenwick held firm on the new regulations and would not commit to their decision, they were quite “dissatisfied.”101

Then, the storm worsened. The warring factions took the business of Holy Cross Cathedral into the streets of the city, publicly airing the internal problems plaguing the Catholic community. The pew owners complained of the “injustice” of the bishop and the trustee committee to “strangers;” Fenwick was quite unhappy to learn that the pew owners had spoken

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98 Ibid., entry for January 2, 1826.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., entry for September 10, 1827.
101 Ibid., entries for September 11 and 12, 1827.
with lawyers and that many in the city were “glad” to learn of the splits within the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{102} However, Fenwick steadfastly refused to be bullied by his angrier parishioners. He told them that he would not ever hire lawyers to defend himself if the issue was taken to civil court, and asked the committee to treat the upset pew owners in a “Christian” way so as to lessen tension. During Mass that Sunday, a few of the pew owners consented to the new guidelines, and moved up to their new, higher priced seats, signaling the beginning of a victory for Fenwick.\textsuperscript{103} Still, he discovered the following Sunday,

\begin{quote}
With much grief that three or four more violent of the dissatisfied Party of the Pew owners, had taken their cushions & moved up with them into Pews let to others & thrown out their cushions into the Aisle, claiming them as their right, etc. and that shortly after the persons to whom these same pews had been let by the Committee, had retaliated, & that many injurious words had been uttered by both parties. He laments it as one of the worst evils ever introduced into the Cath. Church.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

Despite the challenge, Fenwick held firm and used his homily that day to reflect on the sin of “pride” in the hopes of quelling the disturbance over the pews. Though he noted that “the state of fermentation still continues,” he appears to have had no further stand-offs with the pew owners.\textsuperscript{105} His journal returns to the busy work of building the Massachusetts church, with large projects in Charlestown and Lowell. Although Boston was faced with a difficult group of trustees who gained the support of two Irish priests in 1842, Fenwick was again quick to act. This time, he called a synod, and it was resolved that the bishop would hold all church titles so that the issue would be put fully to rest. According to religious historian E. Digby Baltzell,

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\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., entry for September 13, 1827.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., entries for September 16 and 17, 1827.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., entry for September 23, 1827.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Fenwick was an adept leader in Boston and ran a tightly-controlled diocese by the end of his life. He comments that, “Fenwick of course faced the same problem of trusteeism from within and anti-Catholicism from without that his Philadelphia counterparts faced. Nevertheless, partly because of the long tradition of ministerial authority within the Congregational church, but mainly because of Fenwick’s firm leadership, trusteeism never got out of control as had Hoganism in Philadelphia.”

While Fenwick wasted no time in letting his Boston congregation know that he had the ultimate authority, less central regions were an open theater for all sorts of misbehavior and disorganization by lay Catholics and their free-willed priests. While the Philadelphia issue was well-publicized, it is important to consider what trusteeism meant for frontier populations. John Dichtl notes that if nineteenth-century cities like Philadelphia and Boston could see this kind of discord, even more issues with authority could take place in open areas. Dichtl argues that, “What these crises in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia revealed was not simply the church’s great difficulty with ‘trusteeism’ or democratization and Americanization of the laity, but an organizational difficulty in asserting episcopal authority. Scattered and isolated priests on whom the church and lay Catholics were dependent, in areas far from direct scrutiny by church leaders, found themselves nearly autonomous representatives of Catholics.”

Northern New England offered a prime example of how location could further such problems because it remained a frontier location much longer than certain cities. Due to location and the fact that many churches outside of Boston did not see priests or bishops regularly, areas further away from diocesan centers were necessarily difficult to manage. Maine and Vermont were also particularly

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distinctive because both states were influenced, from an early date, by the presence of French-Canadian Catholics. While the practice clearly had diverse origins, some sources suggest that in Quebec, trusteeism was a common, accepted practice, and this structure seeped into nearby New England churches. The rest of the country transitioned away from lay trusteeism during the nineteenth century, in part because Irish Catholics were becoming the bulk of the clergy and tended towards “clerical authoritarianism.” However, the continued conflicts over authority in northern New England suggest the early and continued influence of French-Canadian practice there. While French Canadians coming into southern New England after the Civil War would have to contend with Irish control and an already functional “form of ecclesiastical bureaucracy” in place by that time, further north, French Canadian Catholicism had influenced the region for a century. Rural Quebecois were accustomed to lay committees in churches directing economic matters, and wanted to maintain such control.

The regions far beyond Boston distracted attention from the growth of the “center” at Boston, requiring time and resources beyond what the Diocese could afford. The missions and churches in Vermont and Maine were often without permanent priests, sometimes resulting in

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108 Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 169. See also John Buckley et al., eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, 193. The authors claim that trusteeism was apparently practiced in both the United States and Canada, noting that, “Canadian Catholics’ adaptation of trusteeism to establish parishes challenges any simple equating of trusteeism with American democracy. Trustees defended the practice by appealing to a wide tradition, inclusive of scholastic theology, canon lay, and American civil law.”

109 Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 179-180. Dolan makes a very important point about the uniqueness of French-Canadian trustee traditions, but he also argues the “normal” line about French-Irish relationships in New England. He suggests that French-Canadian Catholics “once they crossed the border… had to leave behind their tradition of a traditionally governed parish community. Many resisted abandoning this tradition for the good of la survivance, but they fought a losing battle.” However, this dissertation argues that further north, this was not necessarily a “losing battle” because French influence had come to the region before Famine-era immigration and Irish-Catholic sensibilities or numerical control of the priesthood. We don’t have much information about individual communities, but it is likely that the French-speaking priests and missionaries who traveled just over the border allowed for some degree of trusteeism to continue, because it was a necessity in these areas. The Native Americans in Maine also only saw priests occasionally, so these communities also had to run their own affairs and make decisions largely independent of a priest or bishop.

110 Ibid., 178.
even more fiercely independent lay Catholics. Removed from Fenwick’s close watch, trusteeism here could quickly take on a life of its own. In 1830, for instance, Fenwick sounded the alarm about a Board of Trustees election in Portland, Maine. With their missionary Father French temporarily gone, Portland Catholics decided to fill the gap by electing a lay board, “and to effect this had posted up a notice at the Church door whereby they called a general meeting of Catholics.” Fenwick was compelled to sacrifice another of his small staff, Fr. O’Flaherty, to go to Portland that same night in order “to put an immediate stop to so disorderly a proceeding.”

Unfortunately for Fenwick, problems continued for French in Portland even after he tried to exercise a firm hand there upon his return. Four years later, when French attempted to transition the area’s Catholic students into his own religious school, parents refused to send their children. In February of 1834, French had sent the "strongest mandate" to parents and acquired about 60 new students, but, a few months later, he admitted his defeat to Fenwick. He told the bishop by early May that “the pride and interference of many Parents of the children induced me to give up the school on week days.”

The strongest indication that northern New England Catholicism centralized more slowly than Boston Catholicism comes from an event in Vermont a full twenty years later. The tradition of lay control and disregard for clergy had far-reaching consequences. Even when Maine and Vermont were made into their own dioceses in 1853, the problems continued under the local bishops. Simply giving each state a more local bishop, and slowly increasing the amount of parish priests, did not immediately lead to an organized or hierarchical Catholicism. One incident in Highgate, Vermont exemplifies this fact. Though the conflict has been largely

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112 Father Charles Ffrench to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 18 February 1834, 1.59, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston. Father Charles Ffrench to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 9 May 1834, 1.59, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
described by historians as a result of strong-willed Irish opinion towards their French-speaking priest (a “typical” catalyst for disputes in the history of New England Catholicism), it appears that the uproar in Franklin County was, more accurately, about what Catholic laypeople saw as their “right” to oversee their own church matters. In addition, the Catholic men who resisted Bishop Louis DeGoesbriand, Vermont’s first Bishop of Burlington, took him to civil court, suggesting Catholics in this region believed the power of a bishop was tightly circumscribed, and financial issues could be solved publically. In 1848, Highgate parishioners had organized themselves into the “Catholic Society of Highgate” in order to raise money to renovate a Congregational Church so it could more resemble a Catholic structure. According to the account of DeGoesbriand biographer Lance Harlow, the Irish priest stationed at Highgate began a fundraising effort that would later be called into question: “Fr. McGowen had promised that whoever had donated the most amount of money would have his choice of pew. The other parishioners could buy their own for $3. He informed them that it would be their property forever.”

When the French-Canadian Father Lionnet replaced Father McGowen, he reported this “ownership” of pews to the newly established Bishop of Burlington because it went against Canon Law, in which the Diocese actually owned all parish property. Those who had contributed funds would thus need to return their pews, despite McGowen’s earlier statement.

To describe the rest of the conflict succinctly, a group of parishioners, led by Nicholas Hanna and Thomas O’Heere refused, even after a visit from DeGoesbriand, to give their pews back. As such, DeGoesbriand ordered the pews to be taken from the church. In response, Hanna and O’Heere turned to the civil authorities, suing the Bishop for trespassing on their “property”.

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114 Ibid.
Though DeGoesbriand lost the case in civil court and had to pay O'Heere, he was still the spiritual authority, and so placed the parish at Highgate under indict “until 1865 when O'Heere and Hanna renounced their rights to the property and made their apologies.” Evidence is too sparse to make any sort of conclusive statement on why McGowen originally promised his flock ownership of the pews, but it is likely that weak oversight of places like Highgate before DeGoesbriand became bishop made it unlikely that anyone would interfere with parish affairs; the priest was the leader, and free to do as he chose. Now, unfortunately for those who had “purchased” the pews, the new priest Father Lionnet had a person to whom he could actually report this violation of “official” Catholic law. Doctrine and correct practice could be better enforced.

This event was largely about questions of diocesan control, despite the fact that Vermont historians have argued for its basis in ethnic problems between Irish parishioners and their French-speaking priest and bishop. Harlow speaks to Irish identity, commenting that, "This news was not well received by the staunch Irishmen who had renovated the building and put up the money." The most well-known published account of the affair, by Ronald C. Murphy and Jeffrey Potash, also suggests that the conflict was largely ethnic in nature. While the authors do touch on the issue of authority, Murphy and Potash argue that the appointment of the French-speaking Bishop DeGoesbriand angered Highgate's Irish Catholic community. However, an understanding of what Catholicism in Vermont looked like before the establishment of the Diocese of Burlington—heavily controlled by individual priests, laypeople, and scattered communities—suggests that the incident was more likely a reaction to the Bishop’s sudden

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115 Ibid., 71.
116 Ibid., 70-71.
interference in local affairs than simply an ethnic dilemma. In fact, Highgate started as a mission church that only had “occasional masses,” suggesting that the Irish and French-Canadians had to worship together, or at least form a mixed community that was “a marriage of convenience.” 118

Furthermore, the fact that McGowen was the Irish priest at a largely Irish parish does not make it a forgone conclusion that a “corrupt” practice like pew selling would take place. The Irish-born missionary priest O’Callaghan, the first full-time Vermont clergy member, actually believed that this practice was not ethnic or Irish in nature, but instead an evil “American” institution. 119 If anything, the French tended more towards trusteeism and local control.

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, a lack of clergy, a large territory, and a tendency towards trusteeism and lay control throughout the entire American Catholic Church suggested that American Catholicism itself was a pioneer enterprise, rife with internal problems and weak organization. However, in centralized regions, the Church became institutionally stronger during the 1820s. A masterful administrator and idealist, Fenwick expanded Boston Catholicism with an improved convent and cathedral; opened a day school, orphanage, and Sunday school; and trained recruits in his home, all before 1830. He also made a firm stand against trusteeism, instilling a sense of hierarchy, leadership, and control in the minds’ of Boston Catholics. The 1834 attack on the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown certainly suggests that outsiders recognized the growing centralization and success of the Boston Church.

Yet, as Boston grew into an Irish-Catholic center, northern New England continued to face a unique set of challenges even for the committed bishop. Its French Canadian history and linkages made direct control over the region difficult, as a long line of Canadian missionaries

118 Ibid.
119 Jeremiah O’Callaghan, The Maladies and the Remedies of the American Church (Published for the author, 1860), 38.
shows. Populations were on the whole smaller and more rural than Boston’s community, and church formation, under regular parish priests, was difficult. While Boston and the surrounding region transformed into parishes with associated organizations and activities for local Catholics in the 1830s, Maine and Vermont remained missionary territory. As one contemporary observer of the area between New York and Vermont stated, this region of the country was “a natural appendage of Canada” which needed a “surveyor's line and customs officials to distinguish it from the diocese of Montreal.”

Referring in particular to the French speakers, the author notes that Catholics living between the Diocese of Albany and the Diocese of Boston, “shared in none of these impulses which moved the faithful in the fortunate centres. They were dependent, and yet independent, suffering the miseries of the former condition without enjoying the blessings of the latter.” As the nineteenth century progressed, the religious dynamics of northern New England would look more and more remarkable when compared to other regions of the country.

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121 Ibid., 30-31.
III. EDWARD KAVANAGH’S MAINE, 1795-1844

In the 1790s, a group of Irish immigrant families settled in the area around Damariscotta, Maine. When Bishop Cheverus made his first trip to Darmiscotta in 1793, he noted seven Irish families and a rude chapel there.¹ Three decades later, Bishop Fenwick’s experience was entirely different. On an 1827 visit to the Kavanagh mansion in nearby Newcastle, Bishop Fenwick took a trip to a nearby church with business owner and merchant James Kavanagh’s eldest son, Edward. The Irish-Catholic Cotrill and Kavanagh families had replaced the rude chapel with the state’s first Catholic Church, St. Patrick’s, completed in 1808 at the cost of $3,000. Fenwick commented on how pleasant the sight of the structure was, noting that it was “a neat, well finished decent Brick Building and well worthy of its principle Founder, his respectable Father. It is situated on an eminence within sight of his house and not more than few hundred yards from it. A better situation for a Church could not have been found.”²

This was not the last time Fenwick would note with pride the work of the Kavanagh family. Edward Kavanagh gradually took on the task of protecting Catholic interests in a state with a complex Catholic history and Canadian connection. As evidenced by a large collection of Kavanagh letters in the Archdiocese of Boston and frequent mentions in Bishop Fenwick’s journal, Kavanagh was crucial to the development of Maine Catholicism and became deeply involved in state politics, giving the Church an official voice in the government in addition to material resources. Kavanagh was trained as a lawyer and eventually rose to the governorship of

Maine. This was dramatic given the scarcity of Catholic representation in New England’s government. In 1826, he was elected to the Maine House of Representatives; to the State senate in 1828; and to the US Congress in 1831. In 1835 he was appointed to the post of Chargé d’Affaires to Portugal. He then went on to serve as one of the most influential members of the northeastern boundary commission, president of the State Senate, and briefly as governor of Maine after the previous governor’s resignation. ³ Robert Lord’s classic account of the Archdiocese of Boston’s history suggests that Kavanagh represented a great departure from many of the notions Mainers held about Catholics. He describes him as,

The scion of a well-to-do and respected family; educated, cultivated, and traveled far beyond most Maine politicians of the time; handsome, dignified, affable, tactful, intelligent, and high-minded; staunchly attached to the Democratic Party, then normally dominant in the State, he was admirably fitted for a political career, in spite of the fact that he was known to be an ardent Catholic. ⁴

Furthermore, in Lord’s opinion, “Unsullied purity and loftiness of character were his outstanding attributes, and he deserves to rank as not only the first, but as one of the ablest and noblest, among the Catholic statesmen of New England.” ⁵

Initially Boston’s priests hoped that Kavanagh might become a Catholic priest. When he dropped out of St. Mary’s College in Baltimore during the War of 1812, he studied under the missionary Francis Matignon, Bishop Cheverus’s closest associate, in Boston. But Kavanagh was called back to Maine to help his father with the business that was left “bankrupt” by the war,

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⁴ Ibid., 351-352.
⁵ Ibid., 354.
and his political endeavors instead formed his contribution to Maine Catholicism. 6 Upon Maine’s separation from Massachusetts, Kavanagh took a letter from an anonymous author (perhaps Bishop John Cheverus) to the state convention in order to dissuade Maine from upholding a clause from the Massachusetts constitution which prohibited Catholics from office-holding. 7 Kavanagh’s Maine also stood in stark contrast to Bishop Fenwick’s developing Boston because of both ethnic and geographic differences. The most numerous Catholic population in Maine was made up of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes, whose needs were often ignored by the State. When Kavanagh was a senator, Fenwick sent petitions to the government for greater funding through him in order to help the struggling tribes rebuild their churches, receive permanent priests, and open schools. 8 Just as Cheverus had maintained a lifelong relationship with James Kavanagh, so Fenwick kept in regular contact with Edward, who continued to see the bishop when he returned from Washington, DC to New England. 9 Kavanagh had a deep, personal attachment to the faith, and managed to use his professional position to expand acceptance of Catholicism in Maine. In one letter written to Fenwick while in Vienna, Kavanagh thanked the bishop for his updates about “the State of our Church in the State of Maine,” adding that he was working even while in Europe “to foster the seed of our holy Faith sown in N. America.” 10

9 Ibid., entry for July 9 1834.
10 Edward Kavanagh to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 7 July 1837, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
Yet, Edward Kavanagh was realistic about Catholicism’s place in his society. Kavanagh was direct and honest with the ever-hopeful Fenwick. Fenwick’s writings were littered with references to his desire for a native clergy, rather than relying on French, Irish or other immigrant priests to serve the spread-out faithful. But Kavanagh reminded the bishop that he must accept the priest shortage for the time being. Not only did priests have a long period of training and education but also, by the 1820s, some areas in the “middle and western” states were seeing a rapid increase in the number Irish and German Catholics, and had even fewer priests to help there. The situation in rural New England, Kavanagh conceded, would have to wait.¹¹ So comfortable was the relationship between Kavanagh and the New England “hierarchy” that he gave his bishop advice, even when it conflicted with Fenwick’s dreams.

Kavanagh’s Maine was one of ethnic complexity and social peripheries. Maine became its own state in 1820 after its separation from Massachusetts, but its northern border with New Brunswick was not formally established until 1842, allowing the lumber industry to flourish. Maine was also an entry point for those leaving Quebec and the Maritimes for southern New England. Because of this liminal position, Maine was home to a few diverse groups of Catholics in Kavanagh’s day. The Acadians settled in the St. John River Valley, located between Fort Kent, Maine and New Brunswick, Canada. The Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians were converted by French Catholic missionaries during the 1600s, but were located close to Protestant communities and constantly sought permanent clergy members from Boston to help bolster their faith. Maine was also home to several pre-Famine Irish-Catholic families, like the Kavanaghs and the Cotrills.

¹¹ Edward Kavanagh to Bishop Fenwick, 7 July 1837, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
The early arrival of Irish Catholics to the region calls into question the idea that New England Catholicism “took off” with Famine immigration. According to Lord’s history of Boston:

The history, therefore, of the Catholics in New England during the period 1780 to 1788 is almost exclusively French. Nevertheless, behind that French factor was also another, whose history is more or less unknown, and yet very important. The Irish immigrant—the Catholic Irish immigrant—was likewise present and eager for the consolation of religion as well as for industrial opportunity. Lack of a priest, and lack of the social and political prestige which might have furnished one, prevented the satisfying of that desire. 12

Though traditional accounts of nineteenth-century Irish America suggest that nearly all pre-Famine Irish were Ulster Scots—and thus Protestants—this may obscure some important subtleties about Irish arrival to America. A closer look reveals that Irish Catholics were probably hidden in early waves of British, Scottish, and Irish immigration during the first two centuries of America’s history. While better-off, Presbyterians from Ulster made up the majority of immigrants before the Famine, as much as one-fourth to one-fifth of the Irish immigration to North America before the American Revolution was Catholic, largely in the form of indentured servants. 13

It is apparent that Irish Catholics arrived with these groups, and either attended Protestant churches or married Protestants because of the dearth of Catholic institutions available. Catholics who could have been brought back into the religious fold are hidden in the record because the structure of the Church was not strong enough to bring them back in. The small population of Irish Catholics in New England before the nineteenth century may have been considerably larger

12 Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 1, 327.
if the American Church had only been more mature and able to minister to them. Many Irish Catholics arrived in North America, but stopped practicing because of lack of priests, churches, and acceptance. The well-to-do Kavanaghs were an exception in this regard: despite the status of Catholicism in Maine, they earned prominent social places and continued to fight for the Church. But for many others, due to social and economic reasons, as well as because of the little “religious instruction” available, leaving the faith, at least temporarily, was an obvious choice.  

Basic numerical realties also meant that some Irish Catholics married non-Catholics and might convert as a result. 

For Irish Catholics who remained Catholic upon their arrival to North America, Maine provided an opportunity to live in a community of believers. The Damariscotta and Whitefield settlements, around the Kavanagh and Cotrill homes, expanded significantly before the Famine. While land in Damariscotta was hard to come by as these leading Catholic families owned much of it, nearby Whitefield (situated less than 15 miles from the Damariscotta/Newcastle center) was home to many less affluent Irish-Catholic immigrants.  

In 1804, Cheverus estimated that there were over 200 Catholics in the Whitefield-Damariscotta area. By 1818, when an Irish priest, Dennis Ryan, was sent to serve the region, it was home to between 400-500 Catholics.  

By 1832, the Whitefield congregation had grown to around 1,200 as Irish immigrants knew they “would be welcomed there.” Unfortunately, Whitefield did not have the backing of the Kavanagh-Cotrill cohort like Newcastle, so the church was poorly maintained and nothing short of an embarrassment to the diocese. Fenwick described it as “old and dirty,” “the out houses in

15 Lord et al., *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, vol. 1, 503.
17 Ibid., 28, 33.
18 Ibid., 49.
bad repair,” with a ‘burying ground suffered to be visited by cattle.” The Bishop told some young men to bring in branches to “to try to cover…the deformity of the interior of the Church.” Still, small groups of Irish settlers, even here in the dilapidated Whitefield church, attracted more Irish settlers because there was the promise of joining a Catholic community.

Pockets of Irish immigrants were already scattered throughout Maine by the time Fenwick became bishop. He could sometimes find the Irish in towns where there was no publically recognized Catholic population. During his 1827 Maine visit, Fenwick “met an Irish woman” in Belfast. Not knowing the bishop, the woman was reluctant both to answer whether she was a Catholic, and to lead Fenwick to the Irish community. However, after following the woman to "Paddy McGan's," Fenwick discovered a poor group of Irish with "little better covering than rags" and "8 or 10 sickly looking children scattered around." In total, Fenwick noted 22 Irish Catholics here. He encouraged them to leave for Whitefield, where the missionary Dennis Ryan was already taking care of a Catholic parish. While the bishop later poked fun at the original Irish woman for hesitating to take him, a Catholic bishop, to the Irish group, the example is an illuminating one. Not immediately recognizing Fenwick, the Irish woman was not even sure she should admit to being Catholic, suggesting that these small communities could easily be “hidden” within larger towns.  

Unlike his Irish contemporaries in Boston, Edward Kavanagh also interacted with numerous French and Native American Catholics. Maine Catholicism had important French and Native American roots, which were memorialized through stories of the region’s Jesuit past. When John Cheverus became the first bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Boston in 1808, he came to lead a region that had been indelibly marked by French Catholicism nearly two centuries more.

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19 Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol. 1, entry for July 14, 1832.
20 Ibid., entry for July 22, 1827.
earlier. The Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples, both Abenaki, Algonquian-speaking tribes, were part of a larger population of devoted Catholic Indians in Maine that had been left without priests since the French missions had moved into Canada. French Jesuits came to the region in the early 1600s; Maine was part of their larger mission throughout Canada and Acadia, putting the native peoples squarely in the middle of French-English land and power struggles. However, the French missionaries practiced accommodationist religious policies with the Abenaki people of Maine, showing an ability to adapt to their spiritual and political needs and learn their language.\(^{21}\) Cheverus and Fenwick both commented positively on the particular style of song and dance the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot maintained despite their European Catholic conversion.

The Jesuits remained in Maine until the death of Father Sebastian Rasle in 1724. Rasle’s story held an important source of identity for Catholic Boston, despite the fact that it was “French.” A skilled linguist, Rasle came to the Norridgewock, Maine, area in 1689 and helped the Indians there resist growing English control. His closeness with the Abenaki people disrupted trade between them and the English, and strengthened already existing native ties to the French in northern New England. Massachusetts Bay tried unsuccessfully to install Protestant missionaries here, but was refused by the Abenakis who showed allegiance instead to the French priests. Rasle was so popular among the Native Americans, in fact, that the government of Massachusetts several times sought his death. When Rasle was finally found and killed, his body was badly mutilated and scalped. Rasle thus went down as a martyr for the faith, and maintained a kind of mythical place not only with French Catholics, but with New England Catholic leaders who sought to follow in his footsteps as they built the Church from a series of missions to an

\(^{21}\)Sister Mary Celeste Leger, “The Catholic Indian mission in Maine: 1611-1820,” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1929), 1, 16.
American institution.\textsuperscript{22} After Rasle’s death, the Maine missions had been largely abandoned by the Jesuits for Canada, so Cheverus and later Fenwick both attempted to reach out to the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot, who had long been without regular priests. \textsuperscript{23}

Rasle’s sacrifice made him an important Catholic cultural figure in Maine because the Maine Indians displayed a long-term loyalty to the Catholic faith even without regular permanent priests. As early as the American Revolution, the Maine Indians had used their in-between status as a way to enhance the practice of their faith. In return for offering Massachusetts their support following the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Penobscot got both a priest and, later, religious freedom in the state constitution.\textsuperscript{24} In 1790-1791, the Penobscot and others petitioned both Bishop Hubert of Quebec and Bishop Carroll, the first American bishop, for priests. Though they now resided within American borders as Maine was formally a part of Massachusetts until 1820, the tribes would rely on continued missions from America (the Catholic center was located at Baltimore until 1808) and Quebec, cementing the transnational nature of the region’s Catholicism.\textsuperscript{25} American or Canadian, they sought a priest. When the French-born Cheverus arrived in Boston in 1796 to help his countryman, missionary Father Francis Matignon, Bishop Carroll of Baltimore sent him to the Maine missions to replace the French-Canadian priest stationed there. Cheverus could not stay permanently—the lack of priests and amount of territory within New England forced him to travel—but the time he spent with the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy on several occasions endeared them to him. As noted Catholic historian John Gilmary Shea put it,

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 487.
\textsuperscript{24} Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 1, 280, 324-325.
“Mr. Cheverus found much to touch him in the firmness with which these children of the forest had clung to the faith taught to their ancestors by the Catholic priests from Canada.”

Later, Fenwick and Kavanagh worked to memorialize the Jesuit who helped the Native Americans maintain this strong Catholicism. In 1833, Fenwick constructed a granite monument near Rasle’s grave in Norridgewock, Maine (appropriately 190 miles north of Boston), to commemorate his service to Native American Catholics and his subsequent martyrdom, going to great lengths to buy the land and get the funds for a proper memorial. Kavanagh coordinated all these efforts in Maine so Fenwick could bless the site on August 23, 1833, the 109th anniversary of Rasle’s death. Fenwick was pleased with the events of the day, noting that an hour after his nine o’clock arrival at the site of the monument, there were at least 500 onlookers, and the roads surrounding the area were packed with more excited attendees. The event was so popular that visitors arrived from throughout the entire state. Several people climbed into a nearby tree to see the celebration of the Mass, and, when the tree snapped, got tossed into the crowd. Despite the fact that many Protestant onlookers, the “very descendants of the murderers of F. Rasle,” attended, Fenwick noted their “peaceful behavior.” The monument was built over Rasle’s grave, “in the form of an Obelisk,” and was a full twenty feet high with the cross at the top. The place stood as a constant reminder of the French presence in Maine, and “proved to be a very imposing affair for the Catholics. The monument now stands on the spot where Rasle is supposed to have fallen, facing death manfully.”

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wanted to have a native-born clergy, but his monument to Rasle showed a deep appreciation for the role that French Catholics had played in the region. Fenwick’s New England still owed more to “French-Canadian Catholicism” than “Irish Catholicism.”

Together, the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot comprised the largest population of Catholics noted in Fenwick’s diary. In his first entry as bishop, Fenwick, determined to get a sense of his sprawling mission, recorded the various pockets of Catholic activity in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont. The Passamaquoddy church near Eastport, Maine was made up of about 300 members, while the Penobscot church at Old Town was made of up close to 400. This large group did not have a pastor but, Fenwick noted, “they anxiously desire one.”

The Indian tribes continued to grow over Fenwick’s bishopric, with Edward Kavanagh estimating the combined Passamaquoddy-Penobscot population to be closer to 900 by 1833. As they had done with previous leaders, the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot did not hesitate to petition Fenwick for help when he became bishop. Fenwick chose his trusted friend and recent convert, Father Virgil Barber, to visit the Passamaquoddy and the Penobscot tribes in 1826. On the way, Barber was charged with stopping at other places “destitute of pastors,” namely Dover, New Hampshire and Bangor, Maine. Barber soon sent back word that all was well, but he regretted that neither tribe had a priest to help them. The Indians, too, regretted the absence of a permanent clergyman, and sent a Passamaquoddy leader “Saccho Bason” to solicit Fenwick’s help in Boston just after Barber’s departure. Bason, who could speak English, asked Fenwick for a priest for both local tribes who would respect their “manners & customs.” In return, he

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31 Edward Kavanagh to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 21 January 1833, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
32 Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for November 22, 1826.
33 Ibid., entry for December 11, 1826.
promised the Bishop that the faithful themselves would give 400 dollars “for support.” Bason was “very urgent” in his request.\textsuperscript{34}

While Fenwick could not quickly send a priest, he commented the Bason was a “well informed, pious man—he speaks English remarkably well and can read and write which no other in the Tribe can do.”\textsuperscript{35} He soon wrote the tribe that he would do his best to get a priest for them, as well as for the Penobscot, because their request was “just & reasonable;” Fenwick vowed to answer their call “as soon as I am able to procure one.” In the meantime, Fenwick told the tribe that he wanted “to see you happy” and promised them, “I shall come to you myself.”\textsuperscript{36} Though unable to immediately grant Bason’s request for a priest, Fenwick kept good on his other promise and made a trip to Maine the following summer, in 1827. He found Saco Bason in the town of Eastport, along with a few other natives “dressed in the full costume of the nation & in their gayest apparel.” He needed Bason to let the rest of the tribe know he was in the area to “begin the Mission with them.” The Passamaquoddy’s actual settlement, named Pleasant Point, was only about six to seven miles outside of Eastport proper, but it was, for Fenwick, a different world. Fenwick describes in rich detail the celebratory atmosphere that informed the group’s practice of Catholicism. From the moment he stepped into the canoe to reach the settlement, he was surrounded by smoking and merriment. The bishop noted that, “So great is their love of the pipe,” the bishop wrote, “that they often declared, they had rather for a time be deprived of their food then of their tobacco.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., entry for December 15, 1826.  
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{36} Bishop Fenwick to the Passamaquoddy Indians, December 19, 1826, Archives of the Diocese of Portland, Maine.  
\textsuperscript{37} Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol. 1, entry for July 14, 1827.
Fenwick had much work to do with his associate, the missionary Father French, during his visit. The next day, Fenwick confirmed all children over eight years old, as well as adults, while the Passamaquoddy sang in “their own tongue.”

The following day, he confirmed several more. Fenwick’s presence was clearly appreciated: that evening, the tribe played a native game for him, married versus unmarried participants, “both men & women in full dress” that “surpassed every thing I had ever seen before of this kind. The exercise lasted about two hours.” This was followed by an elaborate dance. Fenwick seemed enraptured with the evening, recording it in detail. And, once again, the Passamaquoddy also used this time of celebration to ask their bishop for a permanent priest. Fenwick realized that a missionary for the Indians would find support in the neighboring community of Eastport. When Fenwick ventured back towards Eastport, he found very few white Catholics there, and those who were there were quite poor. However, Fenwick was approached by a few town leaders—presumably Protestants—who let him know that the few area Catholics needed to hear him preach, and invited him to use a Protestant church to do so. On July 19th, he thus said both morning Mass in a local home, and evening Mass at a Unitarian church, with a mixed audience of American Catholics, Native American Catholics, and local Protestants. This was apparently a peaceful, positive experience where the bishop was welcomed by the diverse crowd.

When he went to see the nearby Penobscot tribe, the bishop was equally impressed with their devotion to the Catholic faith. When Fenwick arrived on their island near Old Town,

38 Ibid., entry for July 15, 1827.
39 As O’Toole notes, “Unlike many later accounts of Indian ceremonies, Fenwick wrote in a straightforward manner, without any condescension.” See James M. O’Toole, “Bishop Fenwick’s Visit to the Passamaquoddy Indians”, The Boston Pilot, Friday, November 13, 1981. Copy at the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., entry for July 19, 1827.
Maine, “all knelt down & received my blessing.” He was pleased that although they had only occasionally seen a priest over the past four or five years, they remembered the Mass, and put on a good choir service. Surprisingly, most were also “pretty well instructed in their Catechism of prayers.” He describes the Penobscot as a docile, model group of Catholics whose thirst for the Sacraments was great. For several days, Fenwick heard their confession because “So great was the desire of being heard among both great & small...” Here, as with the Passamaquoddy, the Penobscot had maintained a firm hold on their faith without the support of a permanent priest.

Fenwick’s account shows how thoroughly the Maine Indians wanted the help of the Diocese, and how thoroughly the Diocese appreciated them as model, abiding Catholics in return. Boston attempted to step in to support and protect the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot when possible. Fenwick and his team worked against the anti-Catholicism and anti-Indian feelings of many white, Protestant Mainers in order to assist the tribes. While Fenwick noted the friendliness of Eastport’s local community towards him, he still had to face Protestants in the region who were not as comfortable with the racial and religious differences within their borders.

The federal government had been sending the Passamaquoddy a “school master” in the form of a Congregational minister by the name of Elijah Kellogg since 1824. Fenwick had been aware of Kellogg’s role as “teacher” for some time, but hoped he was not proselytizing the Catholic Indians. In an 1826 note to the tribe, Fenwick warned them that, “If Mr. Kellogg should continue to come among you, you can send him your children to learn to read +to write; but he must not meddle with your religion or teach them catechism.”

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43 Ibid., entry for July 24, 1827.
44 Ibid., entry for July 25, 1827.
45 Ibid., entry for July 26, 1827.
47 Bishop Fenwick to the Passamaquoddy Indians, December 19, 1826. Archives of the Diocese of Portland, Maine.
While in Maine, Kellogg visited Fenwick. Fenwick was angry to find, after the meeting, that Kellogg was actually a member of a Calvinist Society in Cambridge. Father French, who had been on a temporary mission with the Passamaquoddy, warned Fenwick that while Kellogg “exhibited himself altogether as a School Master” he was actually a Protestant missionary. Fenwick wrote that, then, “I left Kellogg (sic) abruptly; for I could not bear to remain any longer in the presence of a man who could practise such glaring imposition.” 48 Fenwick was right to be worried over the issue of state-sponsored Protestant instruction as limited resources prevented him from sending a permanent priest. Though the Passamaquoddy had resisted sending their children to Kellogg, that resistance was fading among some in the tribe. Kellogg had not wasted any time in getting Bason, the same English-speaking leader and son-in-law of the tribal head who had approached Fenwick, to support him. Through coaxing, Kellogg got Bason to agree to send his children to his Protestant school and to demand that others in the tribe do the same. 49

Edward Kavanagh stepped in to help Fenwick handle this education debacle, and, eventually procured funding for a Catholic priest. None too pleased with Kellogg—or Bason’s quick allegiance to him—Kavanagh noted that the two had “really defrauded the government in the basest manner.” 50 Bason interfered with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Eastport, and the Church as they tried to sort out the complexities surrounding the issue. Bason also misused some

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50 Edward Kavanagh to Bishop Fenwick, 15 January 1833, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
funds, and Kavanagh complained to Fenwick that the unfaithful Indian was a “very awful man.”

While many were faithful and continued to desire both permanent priests and Catholic teachers, the work of a few leaders, combined with the Protestant powers in the area, threatened to unseat the Catholic Church. When Bason did not get the support he wanted from Fenwick, he turned to Kellogg. Father Bapst, future president of Boston College, one of the most devoted nineteenth-century priests in the diocese, and another in a long line of French missionaries, later noticed these rifts when he came to serve the region. Though by all accounts patient and sympathetic to the Indians, Bapst revealed that by 1848, the tribes were not “little saints” but “chronic drunkards.” The issue of Protestant teachers, it turns out, was not resolved with Barber; the tribe had by this time divided into “Old” and “New” parties, with the Old Party insistent on maintaining a Protestant schoolmaster. Bapst eventually washed his hands of the issue, and simply told the faithful “New” party to move to Canada, away from the dangerous influences of the Old Party. The borderlands, then, might be understood as a staging ground between Protestant interests and the emerging institutional Church, as well as a battleground for simply keeping Catholics firmly “Catholic.” At the same time, the borderlands also represented the long-term success of French conversion in the region, and the resulting diversity of Catholic practice. When he became the first bishop of Boston, Bishop Cheverus was “struck” by this diversity, noting the way the Indians chanted Catholic hymns, and kept their own religious music.

51 Edward Kavanagh to Bishop Fenwick, 31 January 1835, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
53 Ibid., 109-110.
54 Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol.1, 593.
The success of Catholicism among Native Americans came in the face of scrutiny from the local community. Fenwick described how several white people from nearby Old Port came to the Penobscot Indian site where he was staying before Mass on July 29, because they had a certain “curiosity”; many, he notes, were “uninvited” and to his “very great annoyance & inconvenience” stuck their heads through the windows of the building where he was trying to gather a list of those to be confirmed and receive communion. These men were “chiefly of the lowest order of society,” mainly lumberers. Fenwick worried that these anti-Catholic agitators might pull down the house in which he was staying, or “preoccupy” the nearby church before the Penobscot. Fenwick and the Indians went on to suffer a hot, difficult morning. The day was “uncommonly” warm, but Fenwick was forced to keep all the church windows closed to keep the “rough white men” from interrupting the baptisms, communions, and confirmations taking place. Later that evening, when Fenwick finally had a chance to address the white community of Old Town, he called attention to their “mean, unmannerly, disgraceful behaviour,” comparing it to that of the docile Penobscot. He went on to ask the local Protestant agitators, comparing the whites and the Indians, “which of the two gave the greater proofs of civilization?” Fenwick’s account is full of loathing for the angry crowds who “gazed at me as if I had been a Bear or some strange wild beast” and threatened the Indians for their faith.55

Fenwick ended his summer 1827 visit determined to find a priest for the Penobscot as well as the Passamaquoddy, and to intercede for them with the governor of Maine. He wanted to “better their condition” and make sure that the Indians were allowed to abide by their own customs and laws. Fenwick left the “poor, good, innocent harmless people” of the Penobscot tribe worried by the whites who “shewed no regard” for them and were known to beat them. He

was convinced that it was the white locals who were “semi-savage,” and when he met the Indian agent Cole, he complained about the past weekend’s events. 56 Fenwick eventually sent the one-time missionary to the Indians, Virgil Barber, to serve as a more permanent priest to both the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy the following May. 57 Fenwick hoped that Barber’s assignment would take care of the Kellogg-Bason issue. Meanwhile, over the next several years, Kavanagh helped the Bishop gain funding for a priest and a Catholic school from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. 58

Kavanagh was also concerned with the status of French-speaking Catholics within his state. Northern Maine was home to the Acadians, a group of French political and religious exiles who had settled on the Maine-New Brunswick border after their expulsion from the Maritime Provinces by the English. In 1831, the Maine-New Brunswick boundary line had not yet been finalized, and the state selected Kavanagh and fellow member of the state legislature, John Deane, to survey the northern part of the state. Interestingly, though Deane and Kavanagh had been sent on a political mission, the trip provided a great deal of information about the Acadian as well as French-Canadian and Irish Catholics settled in the region.

Catholics in northern Maine were not accustomed to belonging firmly to the American Church because they had long relied on French-speaking missionaries from Canada, and, because of their physical isolation, had become used to controlling their own local parish affairs. In fact, the political history of the Madawaska region was tied deeply to a sense of an

56 Ibid., entry for July 30, 1827.
58 Jackson, The Papers of Andrew Jackson: 1829, 558. Kellogg’s funding ended in 1829 because most of the Passamaquoddy identified as Catholic. Instead, the Passamaquoddy would get $300 each year, “half for Kellogg’s school and half for a priest of their choice.” Also, Kavanagh tells Fenwick that the instructions will be given directly to him in the letter. See Kavanagh to Fenwick, 15 January 1833, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston. Fenwick received a note of the $300 allowance in a letter from the War Department. See Herring to Fenwick, January 1833, 2.24, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
independent, Catholic identity, perhaps the best example of borderlands Catholicism in all New England history. The result was that Catholic life in the region remained just that: regional. It never quite fit into the diocesan format of organization, and it maintained a highly local flavor that moved beyond typical ethnic and geographic boundaries. The Church in Rome may have recognized that the Diocese of Boston could not accommodate the needs of this population. Although the Saint John River essentially divided the Madawaska population easily in half, marking the Maine and New Brunswick sides in 1842 with the passage of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, the Church boundaries did not match national boundaries. The Church had already decided in 1829 that the Diocese of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, should oversee Madawaska. Once the Maine-New Brunswick boundary was finally drawn thirteen years later, the Vatican did respond to the new division, but not by handing the Maine side to Boston and the New Brunswick side to Quebec, or to another diocese that could actually meet the needs of the largely French population. Instead, the Church put both sides of the River—despite the fact that the people were now different “nationalities” —under the care of a new diocese, the Diocese of Fredericton, New Brunswick.59

By 1860, the American side of the diocese was part of the diocese of St. John (still the New Brunswick diocese; the location was moved from Fredericton), and the British part of the Madawaska was put under the control of another new seat, that of Chatham, New Brunswick. 60 As William Lucey comments, "This arrangement, of course, offered all sorts of troubles and in the end the Bishop of Chatham became the Vicar-General for American Madawaska and

59 Lucey, The Catholic Church in Maine, 42-44.
60 Ibid. Also, see Beatrice Craig and Maxime Dagenais, The Land in Between: The Upper St. John Valley from Prehistory to World War One (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 2009), 113. Even when under the dioceses of Fredericton and St. John, priests from Quebec were still sent to Madawaska.
ministered to the entire district. All this confusion could have been solved in 1842 by assigning American Madawaska to the diocese of Boston." He concludes,

The Catholics in American Madawaska were in a strange position. It seems that they were not under the jurisdiction of Bishop Bacon, although the Bull establishing the diocese declared that the States of Maine and New Hampshire comprised the diocese. Rome, however, had included the Madawaska district, both Canadian and American, in the diocese of St. John, established in 1842, and did not transfer the American Madawaska to Portland when this diocese was established. It would take some years before this odd situation was rectified.

The Maine side of the settlement did not become part of Bacon’s Diocese of Portland until 1870. The Diocese of Boston had struggled to minister to several northern outposts, and although the Diocese of Portland was an attempt to better reach removed Maine Catholics, the Acadians in the north were not really built into the diocesan framework. The removed French Catholics had just been in their “hiding place in Maine” for centuries. An added problem was that French and bilingual priests were needed for Madawaska. Geographically and politically it had made little sense for the Catholic Church to ignore the new national lines in 1842 and Maine’s claims to Madawaska. The long reliance on Quebec for the area’s missionaries suggests that, culturally and linguistically, perhaps the Vatican assumed that Madawaska continued to have more in common with that region than with either the United or British Canada. Or, as others have argued, perhaps the Vatican didn’t quite understand the political and geographical divisions between the United States and Canada.

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 152.
63 Ibid., 44.
64 Ibid., 143.
65 Ibid., 44. Lucey, makes the interesting point, that, "It is rather obvious that the administrators in Rome were weak on American geography, and there remains a strong suspicion that they were following the advice of those who did not want to see the Madawaskans under the spiritual jurisdiction of an American diocese."
In practice, this arrangement led to confusion at the parish level. And, it revealed another peculiarity of the ethnic makeup of the region: Catholic practice remained tightly connected to the Canadian Church. Maine, as Bishop DeGoesbriand found in Vermont, would need to acknowledge that the Church here could never be completely “American,” but had deep ties to Canadian Catholicism. The history of missions in the region connected it to Canada. Although St. Basil’s, the first established Church in the Madawasaka region, ended up on the New Brunswick side of the boundary, it gave birth to the churches on both the American and Canadian sides of the St. John River. The people of St. Basil’s "had had a resident priest since 1808 to provide them with spiritual care, and this was the factor that linked them to Canada and New Brunswick long after the international boundary had been established."66 In an important display of Canadian Catholic diversity, their first priest was Jean Baptiste Kelley, born to an Irish father and a Canadian mother, who could speak both English and French with his congregants. 67

Local Acadian identity was an important regional trait, but such ethnic complexities became more pronounced during the nineteenth century. In what would soon become Van Buren, Maine, both diversity and transnationalism were evident. When St. Bruno’s was established as a permanent parish in Van Buren in 1838, Father Gosselin from Rivière–Ouelle, Quebec became the first priest there. 68 Gosselin was qualified to serve not only French-Canadian families (that

66 Ibid., 40.
67 Martine Pelletier and Monica Dionne Ferretti, Van Buren History (Madawaska, Maine: St. John Valley Publishing Company, 1979), 34. See also Lawrence A. Violette, How the Acadians Came to Maine (Maine: 1951), 42.
68 There seems to some disagreement over whether Father Antoine Gosselin was from Rivière-Ouelle, or from St.-Laurent de l’Île d’Orléans Since there were two Father Antoine Gosselins serving Rivière-Ouelle during this time, it is likely that there was some confusion existing because of the common name, and one of these Antoine Gosselins was, in fact, a priest who the immigrating families had known in their native Rivière-Ouelle, and then again in their new home, Van Buren. See Adolphe Michaud,Généalogie des Familles de la Rivière Ouelle: Depuis L’Origine de la Paroisse Jusqu’a nos Jours (Quebec: Imp. H. Chasse, 1908). According to The Church World, Gosselin was in fact from St.-Laurent de l’Île d’Orléans. See Fr. Marcel Lajoie, “St. Bruno’s 150th: First St. John Valley Parish was Established in 1838,” The Church World (June 16, 1988), Part 1, 6. Found at the Acadian Archives Collection, Fort Kent, Maine.
is, Quebecois rather than Acadian) from his own town who had recently moved to the area, but also a more diverse parish population. According to one source, “One reason for appointing him was his knowledge of English. St. Bruno included 125 Acadian families, 20 Indian families, 30 Irish families.” 69 This parish community included substantial numbers of English-speaking parishioners, despite the fact that Acadians and newer French speakers from one of the oldest areas of French-speaking settlement predominated.

The Catholic Church in Van Buren was transnational in nature, too: Although St. Bruno’s parish was established in 1838, it was at first a mission served by priests from across the St. John River in the aforementioned parish of Saint Basile, New Brunswick. While the United States received the territory that is today northern Maine after settling the boundary dispute with Great Britain in 1842, St. Bruno’s was still under Canadian control. 70 The Holy See created the diocese of New Brunswick in that same year. The Saint Basile parish and its missions had been under the Diocese of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island and Quebec previously. So, political boundaries did not necessarily decide parish boundaries; the New Brunswick Diocese became home to churches on both the American and Canadian sides of the formal political line. 71 Antoine Gosselin had a past in French Quebec, but the local Church did not seem to be either clearly American or clearly Canadian. Though it had a certain “French Canadian” character, it was also distinguishable from the growing number of French-Canadian national churches throughout New England that were made up of Quebecois immigrants because the Madawaska church was instead a local, regional creation that existed in a geographically liminal space. In

69 “Over the Years…Through the Decades”, St. John Valley Times, February 18, 1976, copy at Acadian Archives at University of Maine Fort Kent.
70 “St. Bruno’s 150th, Facts about Saint Bruno’s Parish (on record),” Acadian Archives at University of Maine Fort Kent.
71 Lajoie, “St. Bruno’s 150th: First St. John Valley Parish was Established in 1838,” 6.
one such display of local Irish-French cooperation, Gosselin’s first duty as pastor was to baptize Nazaire Deveau in October 1838; her godmother was Mary Farrell.  

For Kavanagh, politics and religion intersected because the state of Maine wanted to know about the region as a boundary settlement with New Brunswick would soon result in part of Madawaska being on the American side of the river in 1842. The population of population of the Madawaska region was assumed to be backwards and difficult to work with. Maine perceived the settlement as two interconnected (and, one would imagine, negative) things: French and Catholic. One Maine official complained to Kavanagh (the then governor of Maine) about the French inhabitants of the region in 1843, saying that, “I need not describe to you the kind of population there, their ignorance of our language and laws, and of almost everything else, you are aware of as well as I am.” Views on the Canadian side of the St. John River, meanwhile, tended to be similar. Canadian Edward Winslow commented that New Brunswickers weren’t entirely upset about losing “quelques misérables Français,” to the United States with the boundary settlement.  

Almost unfailingly, nineteenth-century accounts of the geography and population of the Madawaska region include a picture of the inhabitants as French, Catholic, isolated, and—whether directly stated or simply implied—unfit for political participation. While accounts are sometimes accusatory—and sometimes sympathetic—to the lot of the French population, the

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72 Pelletier and Ferretti, Van Buren History, 39.
73 In a letter to Kavanagh, then the Governor of Maine, in September of 1843, Levi Bradley makes the point that the French were likely to make law enforcement difficult. See Communication of Governor Kavanagh, to the Legislature of Maine, Transmitting Report of the Agent of the State at Washington, and Other Documents Relating to the North Eastern Frontier of Maine, Together with the Message of the Governor Relating to the Town Court Bill (Augusta, Maine: Wm.R. Smith & Co, Printers to the State, 1844), 83.
74 This description of Winslow’s reaction is recounted by Jacques Lapointe in his history of Grande- Rivière. Lapointe actually suggests that New Brunswick was even less interested in integrating the French speakers of the region into their country than was the state of Maine. See Lapointe, Grande-Rivière, 70-71.
general feeling on both the American and Canadian sides was that the French needed to be “looked after.” Peter Fisher’s *Notitia of New Brunswick* in 1836 described the people as deeply Catholic, living an ordered lifestyle consistent with their religious values:

They are with very few exceptions Catholics, and pay an affectionate and sincere reverence to their priests, and an implicit obedience to their spiritual and temporal instructions; their settlements are generally so formed as to have a Chapel, to which the whole may resort, and neither distance nor other slight impediments prevent them from assembling for worship on Sundays.  

Fischer also notes that because of these religious convictions, marriage with the English was rare, and the Madawaskans were thus still “almost a distinct people.” On the Maine side of the soon-to-be boundary, Maine Land Agent Charles S. Davies echoed this sentiment of “removed-ness,” suggesting in his 1828 report that, “The Acadians had retired with the Indians from the presence of the population, which took possession of that ancient part of Nova Scotia, after it was yielded to Great Britain and settled by emigrants from the United States, who adhered to the British government; and have always lived in great harmony among themselves, as a distinct race, preserving their own language, habits, and manners.”

The general opinion of American administrators was that the largely French-speaking population of Aroostook was politically disinterested, and, unless carefully instructed on the basics of Maine government, incapable of being good Americans. As several commissioners complained to Governor Kavanagh in 1843, the “unbroken forest” of the region had led to a

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75 Peter Fischer, *Notitia of New Brunswick for 1836 and Extending into 1837, Comprising Historical, Geographical, Statistical, and Commercial Notes of the Province* (Saint John: Henry Chubb, Market-Square, 1838), ix.

76 Ibid.

backwards, difficult, and politically uneducated population: “The people are generally unacquainted with our laws and customs, unable to read and write, and but a few understand our language. Their business intercourse has been wholly with New Brunswick and Canada—they have heretofore lived under British laws, and are too ignorant to be at present capable of self-government.” Without proper school and instruction, the commissioners warned, “very little dependence can be placed upon them for discreet and intelligent assistance in the enforcement of the laws.” This sense of “backwardness” was of course heightened by the fact that people were Catholic. Maine land agent Davies commented that the Acadians and their neighbors considered the Church their “government.” He suggested that their religion and civil affairs were deeply mixed, saying: “It has been customary for them to settle their civil affairs of every description, including their accidental disputes and differences among themselves, by the aid of one or two arbiters or umpires, associated with the Catholic Priest, who is commonly a missionary from Canada.” In the end, the state of Maine conceded that to fully incorporate the margins into the state it would be necessary to recognize the fundamentally Catholic character of the Madawaska region. While Edward Kavanagh was sent on the initial fact-finding mission, the state sent the Irish-Catholic, French-speaking James Madigan “to initiate the settlers into the intricacies of the American system” in 1843.

The settlement was not only in a political borderland, but a religious borderland. Even after the establishment of St. Basile’s and the introduction of some regular pattern of Church life,

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79 Ibid., 85.
81 Ibid., 69.
the settlers challenged the control of Church leaders sent to them. Bishop Plessis of Quebec, disliked the Acadians’ persistent petitions to him for a permanent priest. In addition, even when Father Jean Baptiste Kelly was sent as the first resident priest of St. Basile, Catholics continued to struggle with alcohol and the remote setting. In one incident at St Basile’s, resident Pierre Duperre and his neighbors challenged the control of their priest in 1820. According to one account, “Although very devout, the Madawaska French were also unruly. The priests complained they dragged their feet to pay the tithes or to make necessary church or rectory repairs. The people wanted their priests to say mass, teach catechism, and administer the sacraments, but otherwise stay out of their business.” Men often left Mass to drink nearby, and their behavior went unchecked. Even when one “exasperated” priest locked the doors at the beginning of Mass in 1820, he was arrested for sequestration and forced to pay a fine.

Just across the St. John from St. Basile, at the Parish of St. Bruno (the area that would become Van Buren, Maine) Father Antoine Gosselin also struggled with a difficult population in 1838. He complained to Bishop Signay of Quebec that the Irish settlers in the area had married New Light Protestants, and that one of the Catholics he baptized was eighteen years old but had never before seen a priest. This pattern of local control would continue throughout the nineteenth century, with drinking during Mass; the population on the Maine side fighting to formally join the Diocese of Portland; and a struggle by Madawaska Catholics (which only the northern reaches of Maine won) with the state to keep Catholicism in public schools.

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83 Craig and Dagenais, *The Land in Between*, 114.
The mixed ethnicities and diverse languages of the region would become the main concerns of Catholic authorities and Maine state authorities alike. When Maine sent a committee to the region to survey the population, they decided that the Catholic politician and French-speaking Edward Kavanagh (after all, Fenwick had him trained in Canada, hoping he would become a priest for the Diocese of Boston) was just the man for the job. Along with his partner John Deane, Kavanagh’s 1831 report gives a sense of an ethnically unique community that was becoming ever more diverse, French rather than Irish-led, it was deeply rooted in local practices. Deane and Kavanagh found what has been described as a “melting-pot” of ethnicities and nationalities.86 As William Lucey writes of Deane and Kavanagh, “The two commissioners found a healthy, cosmopolitan community flourishing on the banks of the St. John…the river was alive with pioneers, but not the pioneer type of the western frontier. The St. John was outside the current of what we know as the American frontier.”87

The ethnic layout of the region comes across strongly in the document. As a whole, the report actually provides a good deal of support for some sort of cooperative relationship between Acadian, French-Canadian, and Irish Catholics. Specifically, the Deane and Kavanagh survey shows that French-speakers were not unwilling to sell land to English speakers, and that, in some areas of the Madawaska region, Acadian, Quebecois, and Irish were neighbors. Of course, certain areas were largely Acadian, Quebecois or Irish, adhering to traditional ethnic and regional separations that one might expect to see in any Catholic town or city. For instance, the South Bank of the area that Deane and Kavanagh surveyed on July 28th was almost exclusively Quebecois, most of the lots owned by members of the Michaud, Ouellette, Saussier, and Chasse

86 Lucey, The History of the Catholic Church in Maine, 37.
families. The bank across from D’Aigle Island, meanwhile, seems to have been comprised of Irish and some other English speakers. Other areas of the Saint John River Valley were significantly more mixed, suggesting that even as early as 1831, ethnicity and language were not necessarily barriers.

The original assignment of Deane and Kavanagh was to assess the value of the lots along the Saint John River Valley to provide the State of Maine with more information about what they could hope to acquire once they settled the boundary question with New Brunswick. Deane and Kavanagh recorded the size and upkeep of many of the family residences they visited. The notes available on the Irish-owned lots suggests that Irish and French-Catholic families supported one another. The Irish did not simply come and dominate local New Brunswick or Maine commerce because of their language and ethnicity. Actually, the Irish in this region were not necessarily well-off, and did not necessarily own more land than their Acadian and French Canadian counterparts, suggesting that in many cases, the Irish settlers probably relied on their neighborhoods for help adjusting to the community. By the same token, a few of the English speakers in the area considered seem to have established themselves in the area very quickly. Irish men may have been considered smart marriage choices for the existing French-speaking families because of their connections with British New Brunswick or the Anglo New England States. So, overall, the Deane and Kavanagh report shows that the Irish—much like the Acadians and Quebecois settlers—had varying degrees of success, making it difficult to argue that any ethnic group completely controlled the other

89 Ibid., 427.
during the nineteenth century. Leading families and better lots existed in all of the communities along the River, but this does not seem to have been determined by only language and ethnicity.

There was only one official parish when Deane and Kavanagh came to Madawaska—St. Basil’s—but there were two missions on the Maine side of the St. John. In the parish of St. Bruno (here, spelled in the French, St. Bruneau) Irish immigrant Michael Farrell’s land grant is discussed. Farrell purchased his land from Joseph Sausfacon, suggesting that French families were not unwilling to live near Irish ones, or to sell to “outsiders.” Additionally, Farrell had both French and English-speaking neighbors. He lived near Irishmen William McRae and James Hagan, but also the Acadian family of Francois Violette. On the Madawaska River, Deane and Kavanaugh also recorded that French and English-speaking families lived near one another. The French-Canadian L’Eveques (Levesque) and Plournes, for example, lived next to the McDonalds and two other unidentified Irish families, as well as the Scottish Dalls.

It is also important to note the location of church lots in Deane and Kavanagh’s report. Farrell’s lot was in the area that would become Van Buren, and the report notes the lots in this section were near the parish of St Bruno’s. As discussed above, this area was a mix of Irish, Acadian, and French-Canadian. However, later in their trip, Deane and Kavanagh also noted the existence of the parish of St. Basil’s, located on the opposite—what would become New Brunswick—side of the St. John. While there were no Irish-owned lots near this church property, the men note that several of the properties next to St. Basil’s were “taken up by the Indians.”

Pierre Lisotte, one of the community’s founding Quebecois members and a Captain of the Militia in York County, suggested to Deane and Kavanagh that the Catholic Church had long recognized

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90 Lacey, The Catholic Church in Maine, 40.
91 W.O. Raymond, State of Madawaska and Aroostook Settlements in 1831, 421.
92 Ibid., 444.
93 Ibid., 442.
the importance of attending to the Native Americans in Madawaska. When Lisotte first arrived, “The Indians were of the tribe called Marcichites and consisted of 250 families, but are now reduced to 5 or 6 families. A Catholic Priest used to visit and spend six weeks with them annually.”\textsuperscript{94} Although it is difficult from land and census records to get exact details about how Catholicism helped different groups cooperate, the evidence helps to paint a picture of the religious layout of the community. The very physical presence of the churches in the region that some Maine officials still took to be “wilderness” may have encouraged many groups, even dwindling numbers of Native Americans, to move into the original Acadian communities.

The notes on the report show that the Irish lots were of mixed quality, and that the Irish themselves had varying success in the area. Cyprian Grace, the Irish man that Deane and Kavanagh encountered on August 2, had not made much progress on his farm. The commissioners describe Grace and his land, noting he was “Irish, began 5 years ago, claims 40 or 60 rods front. Has 4 acres cleared, no buildings and lives on the North Bank.” However, on the opposite bank that same day, the Irish William McRae and John Keaton (from Nova Scotia), who had bought their lot only three years earlier maintained “40 rods front, have an house, distil-house, and malt-house, and 30 acres cleared,” suggesting these English speakers might have access to profit, especially if Keaton brought with him Anglo-Canadian economic connections.\textsuperscript{95} Next door to the Irish Farrell, James Hagan seems to have made progress in a short amount of time and had a

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 355, 440.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 421.
“new house” despite only having “8 or 10 acres cleared.”*96 After living on the lot for ten years, Farrell claimed “80 rods front, has a house and barn and 50 acres poorly cleared.”*97

The Deane and Kavanaugh report thus gives readers a sense of the ethnic composition of the Maine-New Brunswick border. W.O. Raymond, editor of the Deane-Kavanagh published volume, writes, “The setters are chiefly from Canada, New Brunswick, and Brunswick, and the United States, some few are from Ireland.”*98 Raymond also makes the important point that Catholic families on the Maine-New Brunswick border eventually became so well integrated that it was difficult to draw the line between Acadian and French-Canadian families. While more French-Canadian family names are visible in the report, the established, extended Acadian families—Cyr, Thibodeau, and Violette, for instance—were quite large in contrast to the smaller, newly arrived families from the Quebec area. The author writes that by the early twentieth century, “By intermarriages the community has in the course of time, become inseparably blended,” Raymond wrote of the early twentieth century, but in 1831 “When Deane and Kavanaugh visited Madawaska a distinct line of cleavage was in evidence.”*99

Sometimes, Irish Catholics who could speak both English and French took up the task of representing their poor, Catholic counterparts in public positions, much in the way the Edward Kavanagh was able to serve as a link between the government of Maine and northern Catholics. In the eighteenth century, the Protestant, Scottish Thomas Costin converted to Catholicism after marrying Marie Chenard and raising Catholic children with her. He held the important positions of justice of the peace and schoolmaster, where his interest in Catholicism as well as native English tongue allowed him to communicate effectively to the larger Protestant government the

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96 Ibid., 422.
97 Ibid., 421-422.
98 Ibid., 453.
99 Ibid., 452.
needs of Madawaska Catholics.\textsuperscript{100} Another notable example from Van Buren, Maine, is Peter Charles Keegan, the son of an Irish immigrant who had come to the region in 1826. As a child, his academic ability required him to cross the river daily to go to schools in Grand Falls, and later at the University of New Brunswick at Fredericton. When he became a lawyer and a Democratic representative, he served Catholic locals faithfully in the state legislature. Ridiculed by state Republicans for his small-town heritage, Keegan campaigned throughout his life for the land rights of long-settled families whose claims were not recognized after the 1842 boundary settlement.\textsuperscript{101}

The government of Maine realized that it needed to take into account the religion of the region if they hoped to successfully incorporate the people of Madawaska into their state. It sent James Madigan, a French-speaking Irish Catholic, to educate the new US citizens.\textsuperscript{102} The Deane-Kavanagh survey resulted in a unique political and religious connection between the original Damariscotta Catholic settlement in Maine and the northern Madawaska settlement. When Kavanagh saw the need for the Catholic French-speakers on the St. John to learn about being American, Maine responded by sending the grandson of Matthew Cottrill, James Cottrill Madigan, to the region to educate the new U.S. citizens. The Kavanaghs and the Cottrills—two of Bishop Cheverus’s original Irish families in Maine wilderness, responsible for the birth of Catholicism in that region of the state—thus prepared northern Maine Catholics to become politically American.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{100} Melvin, \textit{Madawaska: A Chapter in Maine-New Brunswick Relations}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{101} Pelletier and Ferretti, \textit{Van Buren History}, 143-144. Keegan was born to Lucie Parent and James Keegan.
\textsuperscript{102} Melvin, \textit{Madawaska, A Chapter in Maine-New Brunswick Relations}, 69.
\textsuperscript{103} Lucey, \textit{The Catholic Church in Maine}, 44.
Even while Fenwick consolidated control in Boston, in northern Maine, the Madawaska Catholics Kavanagh came across remained a “rough lot” who “sometimes asked the impossible from their priests.” Missionaries only lasted around three years here.\textsuperscript{104} And, well after the death of both Kavanagh and Fenwick, the religious boundaries of the region were still unclear. Bishop Bacon of Portland (Maine) did not inherit Catholic Acadians on the Maine side of the St. John River Valley until 1870. Although diocesan boundaries finally matched international and governmental boundaries when the Maine side of the settlement finally became part of the Diocese of Portland in 1870, the decision on how churches in the region should be controlled was largely made by the residents themselves.\textsuperscript{105}

As the case of Madawaska shows, nineteenth-century Maine’s ethnic makeup and shifting political and ecclesiastical boundaries created both unique opportunities and struggles for local Catholics. While they did not have the benefits of regular priests or city-based Catholic institutions until the second half of the nineteenth century, Catholics in Maine did not yet suffer many of the problems—severe nativist violence, discrimination, urban poverty—of city Catholicism that Fenwick was beginning to complain about in Boston, which was home to 7,040 Catholics by 1828.\textsuperscript{106} Madawaska had long had a French, Catholic character, unlike southern New England cities suddenly beset by massive numbers of Irish arrivals. Despite the struggle of seeing a priest regularly, Irish arrivals from Canada had also come through Maine for decades. “That many of these incoming Irishmen took the trek down the St. John Valley towards Boston is evident by the chain of farms, lumber parties, and pioneer Catholic churches in Maine, which clearly

\textsuperscript{104} Pelletier and Ferretti, \textit{Van Buren History}, 33.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
defines this southward-bound route,” observes Marie Nicknair. Catholics who stayed in Maine, Bishop Fenwick noted, found easy employment because of the lumber industry. In Bangor, he wrote that financial circumstances were “highly favourable” for Irish arrivals.

Farming also provided an opportunity for the Irish to live as they had in their home. Using the findings from the survey that Edward Kavanagh and his partner, John Deane, had completed for the state of Maine in 1831, Fenwick sought to relocate struggling Boston-based Irish Catholics to a diocesan-funded experimental community in Benedicta, Maine. In Aroostook County, the Irish could farm and live a peaceful, virtuous existence in a Catholic community. Benedicta was over 100 miles south of the New Brunswick border and the Acadian Madawaska settlement Deane and Kavanagh had described, despite being in the same county. After his 1832 visit to Maine, Fenwick purchased 11,258 acres “for the low sum of $13,597.50 or about $1.20 an acre” in this southern part of Aroostook County, with the colony’s formal establishment coming in 1834. The burning of the Ursuline convent a year earlier must have weighed heavily on Fenwick’s mind as he encouraged the Irish to seek a simpler, safer life in Benedicta. While the small community grew to include about 500 Irish Catholics during the bishopric of Fenwick’s successor, John Fitzpatrick, it never became the long-running utopian Catholic colony that Fenwick had hoped. More and more, “mainstream” Irish Catholicism in New England was centered in the greater Boston region. Worcester, Massachusetts became home of Holy Cross College at the end of Fenwick’s life, and he never opened a college at Benedicta. Parish

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107 Ibid., 26.
108 Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for December 27, 1832.
Catholicism grew increasingly different from borderlands Catholicism as the Irish identified as urbanites in cities like Boston. They preferred to settle near other recent immigrants, where they could find industrial work. In her monograph on Benedicta’s origins, Sister Marie Nicknair notes, "Most of the drawbacks to the complete success of the enterprise as a community-farm can be obviously inferred from what is already known. The gift of the academy at Worcester and the favor given it by the Jesuit Society prevented the organization of the college at Benedicta. The remoteness of the place and the extreme difficulty of travel and communication were the fundamental reasons for the partial failure. The reported conditions of hardship discouraged many from going to Benedicta."^{110}

Though it never appealed *en-masse* to the Irish, Benedicta held promise for Fenwick because it offered a potential escape from the mounting problems in Boston. Despite the fact that the Maine experience could be an isolating one, Fenwick noticed that there was something virtuous about the removed nature of Aroostook as he looked at Irish struggle in southern New England. After his experiences with the Maine Indians and Madawaska settlers, Edward Kavanagh surely would have agreed. Several occasions—the decision to let Catholics hold political office, Kavanagh’s political successes, the dedication of the Rasle monument, interactions between the Passamaquoddy and their neighbors—revealed the possibility of Protestant-Catholic and intra-Catholic understanding in Maine.

Maine Catholicism during the nineteenth century did not fit easily within the “American Catholic” story, but was instead transnational and a product of the American-Canadian borderlands. Though the Irish were an important part of the state’s Catholic history, Kavanagh’s endeavors also proved that the Irish were connected to French speakers and Native Americans

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^{110} Ibid., 64-65.
through their religion. In the St. John River Valley, the French and Irish might even occasionally marry one another, or at least live as neighbors. Furthermore, lay Catholics of all backgrounds had a great deal of responsibility in the day-to-day maintenance of their faith. The experiences of the Kavanagh family in Newcastle were not unlike those of their contemporaries in Madawaska, who were not sure where to look next for institutional or priestly support, and often had to survive without a permanent priest.

Maine Catholics had to navigate life between two countries and multiple religious or governmental centers. For instance, with the passage of the Webster-Asburton Treaty, the once unified families of the Grande-Rivere region found themselves now split between the parish of St. Bruno which fell on the Maine side of the line, and the parish of St. Leonard, which now fell firmly on the New Brunswick side. Madawaska historian Beatrice Craig argues that this new boundary was ignored by locals, however, and many continued to live as they had before, doing as they pleased. In the case of commerce, before the railroad finally reached the region in the 1870s, “People did their business wherever it suited them, and the lumber interests particularly ignored the boundary.”

Even in the midst of moving national, economic, and ecclesiastical boundaries, the Madawaska region maintained an independent, Catholic character. Boundaries were fluid in the borderlands. This was a different world from Fenwick’s Boston, and very few urban Catholics

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volunteered to relocate to the rural yet deeply interconnected colony up in Aroostook County.¹¹³

¹¹³ Beatrice Craig writes, “Although distant from other settled areas, Madawaska was neither isolated nor insulated from the outside world. It was not an island in the wilderness, but a way station on a major communication artery.” Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 45.
IV. FRONTIER MISSIONARY IN A CATHOLIC BORDERLAND: JEREMIAH O’CALLAGHAN AND THE VERMONT CHURCH, 1830-1853

In 1829, the first of several Catholic provincial councils was held in Baltimore. Here, American bishops were joined by Propaganda Fide representative Cardinal Caprano.¹ These meetings marked an important moment for the American Catholic Church because the bishops established a series of common rules and a sense of hierarchy that led to a more organized and unified church. At this first meeting, Bishop Fenwick and his colleagues heard the appeal of New York’s Bishop John DuBois. DuBois, especially in upstate New York, faced many of the same circumstances that Fenwick had in northern New England. DuBois asked the bishops assembled to pass a resolution that would curb the power of immigrant priests (in his diocese, largely from Ireland) and put an end to their “erratic” behavior. Dubois outlined three types of problematic priests: the first, the “ignorant”; second, those “of clouded reputation”; and third, “ones who had fled their native land because of a ruined name.” Though the final recommendation of the Provincial Council was stated less harshly than DuBois’s original categories so as to soften the response of American priests, it nonetheless passed because the bishops needed to address the recurrent problem of “vagabond” clergy.² Several other decrees passed by the Council further expanded instructions for handling miscreant priests, specifically addressing how to keep missionaries within a specific diocese rather than losing them to another region soon after gaining employment, and how to punish priests who supported lay trusteeism among their parishioners.

² Ibid., 58.
The Provincial Council’s attempt to solve the problems of mission-style Catholicism marked the movement into a phase of centralization. As Fenwick’s success in Boston also demonstrates, American Catholicism passed from a formative, frontier stage into a more organized, institutional stage during the 1830s. When new dioceses were established, individual bishops began to exert greater control over their flocks as well as the clergy they managed. Yet, peripheral areas remained difficult to reach, and the growth of urban, parish-centered Catholicism in diocesan cities amplified the differences between center and periphery. Bishops struggled to keep an eye on their clergy in geographically remote locations. To further complicate this problem, priests were in especially high demand but short supply in difficult-to-reach locations, and so exercised a great deal of power without clergy nearby to check their power. In the Diocese of Boston, the problems described by the Baltimore Council were further exacerbated by New England’s unique relationship with Canada and nearby dioceses. The priest shortage placed communities in Vermont and Maine in the orbit of other centers that might be more able to help them. Missionary priests and the Catholic people they influenced had a great deal of latitude in northern New England because they were located so far from the diocesan center of Boston, where their activities could be more closely monitored.

In addition to its geographical remoteness, northern New England possessed social conditions that gave priests a great deal of control over massive amounts of territory. As the story of Kavanagh’s rise to the governorship of Maine suggests, the northern borderlands were not just geographical frontiers, but also social frontiers where Catholics had relative freedom of expression when compared to nativist-stricken Boston. During this frontier period, Vermont in particular provided a perfect space for “misfit” priests with radical ideas to roam freely. From its inception, Vermont was not only a Catholic frontier but also a liminal borderland with a
multitude of overlapping connections and boundaries. It maintained both Canadian and American linkages, and was quite literally the product of the land grant contests between colonial New Hampshire and New York.\(^3\) Settlers who had opposed New York along with the famous Allen family and their Green Mountain Boys, for instance, showed a “philosophical disdain for New York’s undemocratic, county-based government” and tended to be of New Light or separatist religious denominations that had broken away from older, more traditional forms of New England Protestantism.\(^4\) Vermonters also governed their own way, and were happy to negotiate with Canada when the Continental Congress failed them by refusing to recognize Vermont as its own independent state.\(^5\) Even after formally joining the United States, Vermont continued to attract radical, diverse religious and political viewpoints. It possessed a kind of openness that allowed Catholicism to exist there in the 1820s and 1830s without Boston-style conflict. Despite the conclusion by academics that New England Catholicism did not exist until Famine-era immigration, French-Canadian itinerants, Irish workers, and free-thinking converts from Protestantism already called Vermont their home during this early part of the nineteenth century, and they needed to be visited by a priest.

In his desperation to find missionary priests who could travel great distances and live in difficult circumstances, Fenwick accepted the services of men who had been discarded as unfit by other American, Irish, and Canadian bishops. It was under these circumstances that one

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\(^3\)One historian who has noted the rural character of Vermont—and its liminal status between Canada, New England, and New York—is T.D. Seymour Bassett. Bassett’s work makes clear that there was a frontier period before the Civil War, which gave way to a more nationalized, urbanized Vermont after the Civil War. Though Bassett shows that even rural areas were affected by industrialization and became “agents” of the city, he points out some of the differences between country and city while painting a good picture of what Vermont looked like in 1840. See T.D. Seymour Bassett, “A Case Study of Urban Impact on Rural Society: Vermont, 1840-80,” *Agricultural History* 30, no 1 (Jan. 1956), 28-34, accessed April 19, 2015, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/3739968](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3739968).


\(^5\)Ibid., 37.
particular Vermont missionary, often called “eccentric” by his contemporaries, found employment in the Boston Diocese. Born in Ireland, the Reverend Jeremiah O’Callaghan’s radical views on money lending and banking, as well as his frequent, public attacks on those he disagreed with, earned him the ire of Catholic and Protestant Vermonters alike. However, Fenwick continued to rely upon O’Callaghan’s help despite the fact that the missionary had caused his superiors a well-documented series of problems in the past. O’Callaghan’s career in Vermont captures the unique challenges the Catholic Church faced in reining in “frontier Catholicism.” O’Callaghan had all the characteristics he needed to be an outspoken “frontier priest” in a Catholic borderland.

Throughout his life, O’Callaghan instigated fights with the Catholic hierarchy about “correct” official practices. Born in a small village in County Cork around 1780, O’Callaghan was first stationed at an island off Cape Clear, near the coast of southern Ireland. Here, at a conference with local clergy, he first became aware of varying Irish Catholic opinions about usury, or the collection of interest on loans. With increased reading and study of the topic, O’Callaghan became convinced that charging interest on loans was a “deviation from the law of God.” O’Callaghan became so obsessed and impassioned about the issue that his clerical functions were suspended by an Irish bishop angered by his unwillingness to stop ranting against usury. O’Callaghan then left for Paris for a time. When he arrived back in his native country in 1820, the bishop offered to restore his priestly powers if O’Callaghan would sign an agreement stating he would not preach about interest. O’Callaghan defiantly retorted “that I had much

6 Jeremiah O’Callaghan, *Usury, funds, and banks; also forestalling traffic, and monopoly [&c.] ... are all repugnant to the divine and ecclesiastical laws, and destructive to civil society. To which is prefixed A narrative of the author’s controversy with bishop Coppinger and of his sufferings for justice sake* (Burlington, Vermont: Printed for the author, 1834), 4-5.
7 Ibid., 6.
rather undergo all privations and indignities for the rest of my days, than succumb to a practice that is contrary to every rule of faith.” The bishop, O’Callaghan recalled, “became greatly excited and threatened vehemently that he would neither restore me, nor allow any Bishop in Ireland to grant me sacerdotal faculties.”

O’Callaghan’s strong opinion hampered his career as a priest in the United States as well. When O’Callaghan sailed for New York in 1823 in the hopes of finding a more accepting Catholic audience for his views, Bishop Connolly refused to employ him. Connolly told him that most New Yorkers considered the collection of legal interest on loans to be an acceptable practice. O’Callaghan next turned to Canada, believing the French Canadians to be a moral, Catholic people who might better understand him. However, Bishop Plessis of Quebec also refused to hire O’Callaghan, worried that Connolly’s rejection of O’Callaghan signaled a serious problem. Plessis told the priest, “It is notorious that the Bishop of that city, Dr. Connelly, being an Irishman, is remarkably partial to Irish clergy, and that he is always in need of several missionaries for his extensive diocese. As he gave you no encouragement, nor even allowed you to celebrate mass, I do not see how you could expect it from me.” As if rejection in three countries was not enough for the fiery O’Callaghan, he further made his views on usury known by twice bringing up his dismissal by his former Irish bishop to the attention of the Vatican during the 1820s. O’Callaghan complained to the cardinals that the Irish bishop had cut off his pension because of O’Callaghan’s views on lending. The bishop, meanwhile, argued that O’Callaghan had published enough on the subject, and did not need Rome’s money to survive. The cardinals refused to reinstate O’Callaghan’s pension, but the missionary, undeterred,

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8 Ibid., 15.
9 Ibid., 15-16.
10 Ibid., 21-22.
returned again to restate his case in 1829. Unsurprisingly, Rome ruled against O’Callaghan once more.  

By 1830, O’Callaghan established a reputation for extreme views, and a well-known disregard for the wishes of his superiors. But, in a fortuitous turn for O’Callaghan, he returned to America and met Boston’s Bishop Fenwick who happened to be visiting New York. Fenwick’s diary suggests his desperation for priests by this year, and he thus “kindly” invited O’Callaghan to come serve in Boston, notwithstanding the rejection of the priest by so many other bishops. In July of 1830, Fenwick dispatched him to the underserved, forgotten Vermont. O’Callaghan recalled, emphasizing the perilous state of Catholicism in the largely Protestant state, “Here was the harvest great and the laborers few. Catholics, principally Irish emigrants were, as sheep without shepherds, scattered through the woods and villages, amidst the wolves in sheep’s clothing—amidst fanatics of all creeds, or rather, of no creed; all enticing them by bribery and menaces to ‘protracted meetings,’ ‘camp-meetings,’ ‘Sunday schools,’ and so forth.” O’Callaghan counted himself as their savior, noting that, “As I was the very first Catholic pastor that was sent to them, their joy seemed to know no bounds on my arrival.”

While his service was clearly needed in this northern region, O’Callaghan’s new responsibilities did not stop him from continuing to fight very public, controversial religious and (what he perceived as) moral battles. Once in Vermont, O’Callaghan entered into new debates with local Catholics and Protestants alike. Not only did he frequently publish books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and editorials on the subjects of lending and banking, but he also publicly attacked well-known Anglo-Vermonters, seemingly unconcerned about how this might affect the status of the New England Catholics there. One of O’Callaghan’s favorite targets was Vermont’s

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11 Ibid., 39-41.
12 Ibid., 63.
first Episcopal bishop, John Henry Hopkins, who also happened to be a fellow native of Ireland. Hopkins was politically active and staunchly opposed to the expansion of “popery.” While Hopkins’s work expressed an appreciation for the traditions of the ancient Catholic Church, he worried that contemporary, corrupted European Catholicism—based, he believed, heavily on Roman leadership and the figure of the pope—might spread to America. Much of his mission in Vermont was dedicated to training Protestant students on the dangers of popery and the authority of the Catholic Church, and he published pieces to this effect.  

O’Callaghan scoffed at Hopkins’s idea that Protestant churches of various denominations were preferable to one unified Catholic Church. In 1837, O’Callaghan gave a defense of the Roman hierarchy, responding to Hopkins’s two anti-Catholic tracts, *Primitive Greed* and *Primitive Church*. O’Callaghan’s stated purpose for publishing a response was to expose to the people of Vermont religious “facts and truths” hidden by those like Hopkins. O’Callaghan was especially angered that New England Protestants attacked the single, unified, hierarchical Catholic Church while New England was split into many competing Protestant sects. O’Callaghan believed that Hopkins taught not spiritual truths but “VAGARIES; that is, fickle and contradictory notions” in a New England “where there is no Spiritual Head or Standard of opinion but the News Papers and Periodicals; where all persons promiscuously roll from one Meeting house to another.” Essentially, O’Callaghan held that Hopkins had to cater to all

13 See especially John Henry Hopkins, *The Church of Rome in her primitive purity, compared with the Church of Rome at the present day: being a candid examination of her claims to universal dominion* (London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1839), accessed April 19, 2015, https://books.google.com/books?id=lyo8AQAIAAAJ&dq=The+Church+of+Rome+in+her+primitive+purity,+compared+with+the+Church+of+Rome+at+the+present+day:+being+a+candid+examination+of+her+claims+to+universal+dominion&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

14 *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), February 17, 1837, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont. O’Callaghan announced here that he would publish this response to Hopkins in *Harrington’s Press*.

15 Jeremiah O’Callaghan, *The Creation and Offspring of the Protestant Church; also the Vagaries and Heresies of John Henry Hopkins, Protestant Bishop; and of other False Teachers. To Which is Added a Treatise of the Holy Scriptures, Priesthood and Matrimony* (Burlington, Vermont: Printed for the Author, 1837), 122.
Protestant sects and thus, unlike the unified Catholic Church, could not uphold any fundamental or “true” doctrines, like the Catholic Church could as one unified body. He also believed that Hopkins’s occasional support for the existence of organized Protestant sects that had clear, established priesthoods and hierarchies was simply preposterous. Finally, O’Callaghan argued that, cumulatively, Hopkins’s wavering, contradictory, interdenominational views led to an ever-increasing movement away from all organized religion because people “know not, in the perpetual conflict of sects, what to believe.”\(^{16}\) Although O’Callaghan was an outspoken frontier priest, he defended the authority of the Catholic Church because it was good for the common people; Protestantism, meanwhile, encouraged people to live without faith because they had no clear moral, religious authority to follow. O’Callaghan held Hopkins partially responsible for the dangerous religious lapses he perceived in New England.

O’Callaghan had similarly harsh words for Burlington’s Calvinist preacher and pastor of the city’s First Congregational Church, J.K. Converse, who referred to Catholicism as “fierce fanaticism,” while instilling hatred for Catholics in his own Calvinist congregation. O’Callaghan resented the idea that Protestantism, for men like Hopkins and Converse, was associated with “true” Americanism and religious liberty. On this point, the Catholic priest mockingly refuted comments made by Converse, sarcastically exclaiming, “What! No Christian in the whole world for fifteen hundred years knew what civil liberty was; or cared about it until Calvin sprung up, in the year 1509; or until the arrival of the worthies, who hatched the Blue Laws of New England.”\(^{17}\) Left out of the long history of religious freedom and Protestant Americanism in Vermont, O’Callaghan fought back in defense of Catholicism, sparing no criticism of Vermont’s

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 136.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 4.
Protestant religious leaders. Converse was a staunch anti-slavery proponent. While his popular texts blame both Protestants and Catholics for human trafficking, it is possible that a local or personal comment aimed at Burlington Catholics angered O’Callaghan.

Unfortunately for Bishop Fenwick and his successor Bishop Fitzpatrick, O’Callaghan had a rare talent for stating all of his views in the most extreme of terms. In doing so, he excited his followers and provoked his critics. As Vermont in the mid-nineteenth century became a site of religious experimentation and openness, the Catholic missionary condemned the state as the embodiment of “free whoredom.” He took issue not only with competing Protestant sects, but, as he noted in his anti-Hopkins tracts, also with the growing class of Vermonters who belonged to no church at all. O’Callaghan portrayed the state as a type of moral wasteland, home to too much personal freedom and a disregard for organized religion. In one text on the sacredness of Catholic baptism and marriage, O’Callaghan warned readers that “Infidelity is grown rampant; people calling themselves free lovers, rushing forth from their brothels, openly proclaim in public conventions of men and women, that the Bible is a humbug, divine worship useless, religion a delusion, and matrimony ruinous to society, for which, they would substitute free whoredom.”

18 For more on these issues, see Vincent Edward Feeney, “Pre Famine Irish in Vermont, 1815-1844” in Vermont History, 74 (Summer/Fall 2006): 101–126. Feeney offers an excellent summary of O’Callaghan’s attacks on the Protestant community, especially on pages 117-119. Feeney also discusses the idea that, despite O’Callaghan’s rejection elsewhere, Fenwick desperately needed his help because there was, in fact, a substantial Irish immigrant community (largely via Canada) in the state before the Famine.


Beneath O’Callaghan’s inflammatory words lay a kernel of truth: Vermonters were open to religious variety. Ironically, though Vermont was something of a safe haven for O’Callaghan to promote Catholicism, he did not concede to others the freedom to discuss what he considered more radical expressions of religious or atheistic thought. Vermont had long been associated with openness of religion and political opinion, as demonstrated at the 1858 Rutland Free Convention, where “friends of Free Thought” and reformers gathered. The convention attendees discussed reform topics such as slavery from a diverse variety of viewpoints, agreeing that religious and political affiliations often obstructed true social progress. Catholics were, as a group, uninterested in abolitionism, if not actively opposed to it. The coming of the Civil War often caused further rifts between struggling Catholics and reform-minded Protestants. This was particularly true of the staunchly Democratic Irish Americans. Between 1854 and 1860, around ninety-five percent of Irish Catholics supported Democratic candidates. But, the now-retired Father O’Callaghan was not the only one upset by the proceedings: Newspapers around the country published vivid accounts of the convention, proclaiming the entire proceeding was “scandalous,” especially in its strong abolitionist message. One Ohio paper noted that Vermonters were even “more extreme than our Ohio fanatics” on the topic of abolition, declaring that “A gang of fanatics lost to all sense of moderation, virtue and decency assembled in Vermont.” The paper hoped that their state would be “spared” from the political “disease” that ravaged Vermonters obsessed by dangerous ideas like “fanatical Black Republicanism.”

Religion was also a major point of discussion during the July meeting. The convention hosted both male and female thinkers, many of whom expressed disdain for authoritarian religious practice; one speaker noted that he “alone with God” must decide “what is true or false in principle.”\(^{23}\) This disregard for organized religion did not sit well with O’Callaghan. In a condemnation of what he called the “Free Lovers, Socialists, and Spiritualists, and other infidels” gathered at the convention, O’Callaghan cried that such people “discard the whole of Christian religion.”\(^ {24}\) His critique then compared the Protestant and Catholic bibles, holding Catholic texts up as definitive religious truth. But in Vermont, religious truth held little sway, and O’Callaghan boiled over his belief that the state was full of irreverent nonbelievers but quick to support its apparently Protestant foundations. O’Callaghan seethed that although half the people of the state of Vermont claimed to be unbaptized and without a “home” church, communities wasted money on Protestant support. Though publicly mandated church taxes had been repealed in Vermont with disestablishment in 1807, O’Callaghan still seethed that money was spent on:

Bibles, Tracts, Missionaries, at home and abroad, Temperance Societies, and so forth, to build and repair the 'Meeting houses,' feed four Preachers with their four wives and sixteen children; that is to say, twenty four persons; and, as the small state of Vermont contains, if my calculation be correct, 247 townships, and feeds, for religion sake, 247 times 24 persons; that is, 5928 persons, the twenty-five states of the Union, have in pay, a fine troop of preachers, Priestesses, and little Evangelicals — a troop, if ordered out into the field, more formidable than the legions that were led by Bonaparte, into ill-fated Moscow.\(^ {25}\)

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\(^{24}\) O’Callaghan, *The Holy Bible Authenticated*, 119.

\(^{25}\) O’Callaghan, *The Creation and Offspring of the Protestant Church*, 4.
For O’Callaghan, Vermont Catholics stood against an army, “more formidable than the legions that were led by Bonaparte,” and he was determined to fight back. O’Callaghan’s often outlandish criticisms of social and religious conditions in Vermont spelled trouble for the already struggling Catholic population of the state. O’Callaghan’s constant denunciations of the immorality of Vermont residents frequently provoked negative reactions from local Protestants, who, in turn, condemned Catholics and, in particular, Irish Catholics. One Vermonter complained with bitter sarcasm and distaste for the Irish that a local paper, the Sentinel, gave O’Callaghan too much space to publish his inflammatory views in the first place, noting,

We ought not to overlook the unobtrusive modesty of this reverend Paddy, who according to his own showing, has thrice been spewed from the church and his native country as a scatter brained disorganizer. That such an individual should find our religion, our laws, our institutions and the whole frame-work of society wrong, is certainly not wonderful; and that he should content himself with simply denouncing our businessmen as cut-throats, our clergy as imposters and our statesmen and legislators as bribed and venal orators, indicates a degree of modest charity, equaled only by the liberality of the Sentinel in affording him an opportunity of proclaiming these sentiments to the world.26

Less than a year after this letter of complaint to the Sentinel appeared—and soon after O’Callaghan’s 1837 publication of the tract that railed against Converse and Hopkins—St. Mary’s of Burlington, the state’s first Catholic church, was destroyed by flames. In the early morning hours of May 9, 1838, a fire ruined the building beyond repair. 27 O’Callaghan informed Bishop Fenwick that “no particle of the edifice, or of the contents is saved, except your chalice

26 Burlington Free Press (Burlington, Vermont), 8 October 1837, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont.
27 Burlington Sentinel (Burlington, Vermont), 10 May 1838, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont.
and *patena*” that were stored not in the Church, but with the priest. 28 The fire was apparently not accidental, and local papers as well as O’Callaghan noted that a meeting was held and a committee formed to discover the perpetrator(s) of the crime. 29 A few short weeks after the incident, Fenwick’s diocesan paper, the *Boston Pilot*, confirmed that the investigation had revealed that “Native Americans”—anti-Catholic nativists—were responsible. Tellingly, the criminals were never punished. 30 O’Callaghan’s attacks likely provoked negativity in Burlington, as some locals accused Fenwick and O’Callaghan of planning the fire and destruction of the church so that Catholics could have a valid chance to attack their Protestant enemies. 31 O’Callaghan’s public fight against these Protestant enemies led him to be perceived in a poor light by some native Vermonter, and put his Catholic flock in danger.

Yet, compared to the New Hampshire and Massachusetts men who burned the Ursuline convent in Boston down, the vast majority of Vermonters seemed tolerant of Catholicism in the aftermath of the Burlington arson. A small group of nativists committed the crime in 1838, but the rest of the community quickly came together to rebuild the church by 1841. The Protestant population, as if compensating for the poor behavior of a few anti-Catholic agitators, contributed generously to Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan’s fundraising efforts. 32 Given O’Callaghan’s unpredictable and often unexplainable behavior, it is also likely that much anti-Catholic feeling throughout the region, including the burning of St. Mary’s, was directed

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28 Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 12 May 1838, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
29 Ibid. See also Burlington Sentinel (Burlington, Vermont), 10 May 1838 and 14 May 1838, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
30 Boston Pilot (Boston, MA), 6 June 1838, copy in Archives of Archdiocese of Boston.
31 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 7 September 1839, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
32 Chauncey Goodrich, "Roman Catholic Church in Vermont" in History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical, in three parts with a new map of the state and 200 engravings, ed. Zadock Thompson (Burlington, Published for the author, 1842).
specifically at O’Callaghan, not Catholics in general. In fact, after the incident, some locals expressed little objection to Catholicism. On the occasion of the consecration of the new St. Mary’s building, the *Burlington Free Press* went so far as to proclaim that the Catholic Church was “American.” The newspaper praised O’Callaghan for his refusal to sell pews to parishioners, his alms giving, and general approach to erasing class distinctions in a place of worship. The *Press* believed that “the equality upheld in the new Catholic Church is in character with the principles of our Democratic Republic.”

Though certain Protestant leaders like the aforementioned J.K. Converse published announcements in the *Press* warning locals of the growing Catholic presence “poisoned by foreign allegiance,” reports of Catholic-Protestant relationships remained good as far as the Diocese of Boston was concerned. Even as Famine immigration increased, natives continued to be supportive, and, 1841, the *Press* praised the Irish Catholic “for industry and sobriety” and called for French-Canadian clergy to come into the state to assist French speakers as O’Callaghan had assisted the Irish. This piece followed other positive coverage of the growing temperance movement among the Irish Catholics of Burlington. Though O’Callaghan enjoyed playing the victim in his writings, he admitted that although the Irish were sick and poor, the native Vermonters took “every precaution consistent with the softness of the notice given them and with the great numbers in need, to make the necessary provisions” during the summer of “Black ‘47”. Nevertheless, O’Callaghan often ignored the good-will of many locals towards

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34 *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), 22 October 1841, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
35 *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), 21 April, 1841, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
36 *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), 19 November 1841, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
37 *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), 22 January 1841, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
38 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop John Fitzpatrick, 23 June 1847, 3.6, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
his minority religion, and used the religious toleration of the region as an opportunity to attack local Protestant leaders. His frequent attacks on Protestantism and Yankee social practices came across as inflammatory to Protestant observers like Hopkins and unsettling to Catholic observers like the well-to-do William Henry Hoyt.

Part of the issue was that O’Callaghan’s identification as Irish was often more important to him than supporting all Catholics. Because of this, he angered Anglo-American converts like Hoyt, and insulted French-Canadian Catholics who had previously worshipped with their Irish neighbors. Priests like O’Callaghan were part of the reason why the Catholic Church in America was forced to create separate ethnic parishes as the nineteenth century progressed. Early on in his mission, O’Callaghan showed an affinity for making “Catholic” problems “Irish” problems. On June 28th of 1830, Bishop Fenwick returned to Boston from a visit to Sandwich to find that O’Callaghan had come to him from New York, after arriving from his native Ireland.39 On July 4th, O’Callaghan gave Mass in the “Irish language”, making him a good addition to a city with a growing Irish population.40 Two days later, though, Fenwick put O’Callaghan to work, sending him to understaffed Vermont to “visit successively Wallingford, Pittsford, Vergennes, & Burlington, with such other places in their respective Neighbourhoods as may have Catholics abiding in them.”41 The territory was vast, and it was all left in O’Callaghan’s care.

It is tempting to conflate the desires of a few zealous clergy members who believed in religious-ethnic association with the wishes of the whole Catholic population, but, in the early

40 Ibid., entry for July 4, 1830.
41 Ibid., entry for July 6, 1830.
part of the nineteenth century, most Catholics were probably happy just to see a priest regularly and did not have the means nor the numbers to worry about ethnic or national parishes. While O’Callaghan did have a group of devoted Irish follows who equated their religious fervor with support for their Irish motherland, the situation “on the ground” suggests something more complicated: on a daily basis, Catholics living in Vermont had to get along with non-Catholics as well as other Catholics. They had to share resources before the dawn of specifically “ethnic” priests and churches, regardless of background. One good indication of this idea was the background of Vermont’s second bishop, John Michaud, who grew up during O’Callaghan’s missionary years. Michaud, as his last name suggests, was born to a French-Canadian father, but was raised by an Irish mother after his father’s early demise. Stephen Michaud married Catherine Rogan, and died because he contracted typhus after caring for Irish immigrants sick with the disease.\(^{42}\) While the Irish “were moving up the social scale more rapidly than French Canadians” in many cases, probably due to language, those who were able to simultaneously negotiate both Catholic cultures “succeeded better than either branch.”\(^{43}\)

O’Callaghan threatened such French-Irish cooperation. After being sent to the state by Bishop Fenwick, O’Callaghan soon told the bishop that he was “doing exceedingly well at Burlington & the adjoining places—that there are a thousand Catholics at Burlington & he is offered gratis a Lot of land for the Church.”\(^{44}\) Certainly, it appears that many Catholics in the region were fond of his outspoken and often dramatic personality.\(^{45}\) There were, however,

\(^{42}\) *One Hundred Years of Achievement by the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont* (Lowell, Massachusetts: Sullivan Bros. Printers, Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, 1953), 30.


\(^{44}\) Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol.1, entry for August 27, 1830. Fenwick had received a letter from O’Callaghan on his progress in Vermont.

problems. In part due to Father O’Callaghan’s inability to speak—and, it appears unwillingness to learn—French, Vermont French Canadians needed religious assistance. 46 When the missionary priest Father Amable Petithomme arrived, cultural differences between him and O’Callaghan developed into the eventual division of ethnic parishes.

When he arrived in Vermont, O’Callaghan was supposed to be serving both French-Canadians and Irish parishioners throughout the state, but apparently was uninterested in the needs of those more recently arrived from the north. Rather than paying attention to French-Canadian families, O’Callaghan built up an “Irish brigade,” butchered the spelling of French-Canadian names, and never learned French in order to help with understanding in confessions or homilies. 47 In addition, the far-flung nature of O’Callaghan’s mission meant that he had little oversight from Boston, nor much energy to minister to particular French-Canadian groups. He was not stationed anywhere, but frequently moved throughout the state. Although he lived in Burlington, he oversaw the northern reaches of the state. According to one source, "His field of labour extended from Rutland to the Canadian line, a distance of about 100 miles, and from the shores of Lake Champlain to the Connecticut River.” 48 He was not beholden to any one community, giving him more latitude to act as he saw fit.

Rather than focusing on learning French or serving a blended parish, O’Callaghan spent a good deal of his time railing against the unfair banking practices that the Irish faced in Burlington. In his 1852 tract against the supposed “atheism” of Orestes Brownson’s Quarterly Review, O’Callaghan found an opportunity to advance his cause of highlighting discrimination.

47 Ibid., 7.
against Irish Catholics. He failed to mention any discrimination that French-Canadian Catholics faced from their Yankee neighbors. O’Callaghan complained that the Burlington Savings Bank should not be used by anybody because of its corruption, but emphasized especially the bank’s unfairness to the unsuspecting, hard-working Irish, ranting: “It follows, then, that the thing was devised for catching the savings of the frugal hard working Irishmen; perhaps to grasp at the several sums daily remitted by our boys and girls to their poor parents in Ireland.” He accused the native-born Americans who “volunteered as our guardians” because they thought the Irish “too ignorant and simple to take care of our own trifles” of corrupting the economic system. O’Callaghan would not be taken advantage of; he told the native-born Americans that they could not “keep and count the purse, and the Irish, as the active bees, be doomed eternally to gather in the honey.”⁴⁹ O’Callaghan’s writings devoted much space to the plight of the “poor Irishmen,” when in reality both Irish and French-Canadian Catholics in northern New England struggled financially.

O’Callaghan also linked Irish Catholicism to political issues in Ireland. For instance, he was interested in drumming up local support for the repeal of the English Union in Ireland, as evidenced by an 1843 meeting that organized several Irish men to publically discuss the issue. Though one participant (perhaps sensing that furthering any idea of ethnic Catholicism would make Vermonters increasingly distrustful of the Irish) protested that as “Americans” those present should “support the Constitution of the US” and express “disapprobation” that Daniel O’Connell and his followers would seek to combine religious and political ideals, O’Callaghan

gave a “powerful” rejection of this point, clearly indicating his preference for linking religion and nationalism.\textsuperscript{50}

Thanks in large part to O’Callaghan’s unwillingness to focus on his “assigned” job of ministering to all Vermont Catholics, the French-born Picpus Father Amable Petithomme arrived in Burlington to assist French Canadians who hoped to permanently split from English-speaking, Irish Catholics. Petithomme not only found O’Callaghan lacking as a preacher, but also took issue with many of his practices. According to one local church history, the differences between the two priests were highly noticeable, with O’Callaghan sometimes wearing his “civilian” clothes in public to the horror of the French prelate. In addition, “Fr. Amable sang High Masses on Sundays and also sang Vespers, of which he stated that Fr. O’Callaghan had no knowledge. Fr. O’Callaghan charged a fee for baptisms, which shocked Fr. Amable. Fr. Amable rented pews, a practice Fr. O’Callaghan publicly condemned. Another Irish priest, Rev. John Brady, came to the parish that October, a man whom Fr. Amable had known in Paris, but his presence did nothing but emphasize the culture gap. Fr. Brady was in the area for only a short time.”\textsuperscript{51}

The basic issue of language further exacerbated the problem between the two priests. The Diocese of Boston hired Petithomme in 1834, knowing that he spoke only French and would specifically serve the “French Canadians in (the) Champlain Valley, Vermont.”\textsuperscript{52} Because O’Callaghan didn’t speak French—despite the fact that he had spent time in Paris—Petithomme complained that O’Callaghan could not hear his confessions.\textsuperscript{53} O’Callaghan agreed in 1834 that he struggled to minister to the French-Canadian congregants. Despite the recent arrival of two more Irish priests, O’Callaghan stated that,

\textsuperscript{50} Burlington Free Press (Burlington, Vermont), 7 July 1843, copy at Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
\textsuperscript{51} Kennan and Prive, History of Saint Joseph Parish, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{52} The Jesuit (Boston, MA), 24 May 1834, copy in the Archives of Archdiocese of Boston.
\textsuperscript{53} Kennan and Prive, History of Saint Joseph Parish, 12.
I have yet besides the congregation of my new church which swells from three to four hundred persons, to tend several other flocks from ten to twenty miles apart in the surrounding country. From my unacquaintance with the French language, I had the greatest difficulty with the Canadians, who are numerous in my district, until the arrival of REV M. PETITHOMME lately from France, who speaks their language fluently.\textsuperscript{54}

For Vermont’s French Canadians, the problem was not just the Irish co-religionists themselves, but instead an unfulfilled desire for the administration of the Sacraments in words they could understand. Furthermore, O’Callaghan’s focus on politicized Irish Catholicism proved divisive in the region. He was quick to defend the Irish, and characterize them not as part of a larger Catholic community, but, instead, a distinct ethnic group. When St. Mary’s burned down, he believed it to be not just the work of those who wanted to “burn the Catholic Church,” but sought instead to “banish all Irishmen.” He told Fenwick that “The Irishmen cannot be banished; ‘Old Father O’Callaghan’ is not afraid of their threats.”\textsuperscript{55} Yet, both French-Canadian and Irish Catholics attended St. Mary’s at the time of the burning.

Catholic historians have tended to tell the story of separate ethnic parishes as the story of warring ethnic groups, but the details suggest a more complicated set of factors were at play here: Petithomme’s and O’Callaghan’s debates over proper Catholic practice went beyond simple national lines.\textsuperscript{56} Pew-selling, for instance, was practiced in some Irish churches across the

\textsuperscript{54} Jeremiah O’Callaghan, \textit{Usury, funds, and banks; also forestalling traffick, and monopoly [&c.] ... are all repugnant to the divine and ecclesiastical laws, and destructive to civil society. To which is prefixed A narrative of the author’s controversy with bishop Coppinger and of his sufferings for justice sake} (Burlington, Vermont: Printed for the author, 1834), 64.

\textsuperscript{55} Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, June 6, 1838, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.

\textsuperscript{56} Generally, texts on American Catholic history highlight the importance of ethnicity in most divisions or arguments. The story of immigration and ethnic religious practice is the story of “American” Catholicism. Some important texts about racial/ethnic divisions are Jay P. Dolan, \textit{The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).
United States, but it was not a formally Irish tradition. O’Callaghan’s disdain for collecting pew rents was a personal one, but not necessarily an Irish one. The issues of High versus Low Mass may also have more to do with training and region of origin than nationality. It appears that Petithomme took issue with O’Callaghan’s less-formal Masses and his comfortable interactions (where perhaps he could be found in “civilian” clothes) with the community.

O’Callaghan acted with a conflict-provoking attitude, so general critiques of his choices would not be out of the question. Even Bishop Fitzpatrick eventually concluded that he was “crazy.”

Certainly, O’Callaghan was well-suited to this less-formal Vermont setting, where one-on-one interactions meant more than the pomp and circumstance of traditional European Catholicism.

Yet, as a frontier priest in a borderland region, O’Callaghan needed to be more willing to help all Catholics and move away from “Irish-Catholic” issues. Even Petithomme recognized this: The Frenchman subsequently became a “frontier” priest across North America, leaving for an Acadian parish in Nova Scotia in 1836, and then moving on to the Spanish-speaking frontier of San Bernardino, California. According to that diocese, Petithomme was assigned to a Hispanic parish of immigrants from New Mexico, serving first as the pastor at San Salvador in 1853 before moving to San Bernardino. Considering that he had also been a missionary to the Maine Indians before his Burlington jaunt, one might surmise that ethnic differences—and, in the case of California, even language differences—were accepted by Petithomme. Like

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61 Lucey, *The Catholic Church in Maine*, 107. Petithomme and his Picpus partner Demillier had originally been sent to the Maine missions because their superior did not want them apart.
northern New England, California was a developing frontier community for the faith, and showed many of the same ethnic and linguistic complexities as Vermont. Often, service in such areas required nuanced understanding of—and various approaches to—dealing with groups of ethnic Catholics. The Irish and the French did not previously have the luxury of separate priests or parish, but, in Vermont, O’Callaghan’s unwavering, direct assertions about Irish Catholicism polarized two groups which were otherwise forced to cooperate.

A figure like O’Callaghan was, in many respects, dangerous for the growth of the faith. Despite the fact that O’Callaghan focused his criticisms largely on Protestant leaders and lending practices that had little direct meaning for Vermont’s poor Catholic population, some Catholic figures in the state became increasingly concerned that O’Callaghan’s antagonistic demeanor and numerous publications were harming a population already fighting against prejudice. William Henry Hoyt, a well-known Vermont leader who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism—and later became a priest in the Diocese—warned Fenwick’s successor, Bishop Fitzpatrick, that O’Callaghan’s rash behavior, particularly his refusal to admit certain persons to both the Church and the sacraments, was hurting the reputation of the faith throughout the state. Vermont was a hotbed of conversion during the nineteenth century, leading several well-known, upper-class figures to become Catholics. The benefits of such prominent locals entering the Catholic faith were many for a population that was often misrepresented as a simple collection of impoverished French and Irish laborers. However, Hoyt argued that the Catholic Church would have received several more well-to-do, respected Yankees into its fold if

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62 “Ethnic Parishes”, Archives of the Office, Catholic Diocese of San Bernardino. In the 1890s, the community was largely Hispanic and Indian; later, these groups were joined by Italian and African American churches. It may be useful to reflect on the potential religious similarities between Hispanic groups moving just north of the border into California, and the French-Canadian Catholics existing just south of the Canadian border in Maine and Vermont.  
63 See next chapter for a detailed discussion of this idea.
not for O’Callaghan’s decision to bar them from entering, which led to “no little scandal and injury” for the Church. This was especially true in the case of Colonel Hyde, a local convert to whom O’Callaghan had recently refused a Catholic burial. 64

Hoyt worried that O’Callaghan’s very public treatment of respected men like Hyde, and his accompanying “peculiar notions respecting the use of moneyed property are beginning to impede very materially his usefulness.” Thus, Hoyt requested the help of a less controversial missionary and told Fitzpatrick that “attention to this quarter of your diocese” was needed. 65 Hoyt’s advice to Fitzpatrick was sound. The Catholic population at this time was spread-out, rural, and poor. O’Callaghan did not perhaps appreciate how thoroughly his success as a missionary depended on the charity of better-off Catholics and Protestants alike. The Church was in no way self-sustaining, and he would have done well not to agitate local Protestant leaders. Vermont was a state that generally held fast to its principle of religious freedom, and O’Callaghan was lucky that, after the burning of St. Mary’s, some area Protestants stepped in to help repair the damage caused by the more close-minded, nativist incendiaries. The Burlington Free Press noted that while Protestants contributed money and tried to uphold justice by finding the criminals, the Catholics “gave themselves but little trouble” about solving the issue. 66 In fact, Colonel Archibald Hyde, (the respected Protestant lawyer who had converted to Catholicism around 1835 but was later refused a Catholic burial by O’Callaghan) was one of the first to give money to build a new church after the fire. 67 Hyde had earlier given O’Callaghan and his flock the land for the original

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64 William Henry Hoit to Bishop John Fitzpatrick, 22 May 1847, 2.11, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
65 Ibid.
66 Burlington Free Press (Burlington, Vermont), 12 July 1839, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.
67 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 6 June 1838, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston. See also Ronald Chase Murphy and Janice Church Murphy, Irish Famine Immigrants in the State of Vermont: Gravestone Inscriptions (Baltimore, Maryland: Clearfield Company Inc. by Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 2000), 6, accessed April 19, 2015,
church as well, despite being Protestant at the time. O’Callaghan needed Protestant support, and Vermont afforded Catholics a chance for acceptance. But, rather than recognize this unique chance at freedom—and utilize the support of a larger community—that his people had on the Vermont frontier, O’Callaghan complained to his superiors about the persecution Catholics faced in the state.

O’Callaghan served Vermont for over twenty years, despite being a loose cannon and troublemaker. He went to Massachusetts only after Louis DeGoesbriand became bishop of the newly separated Diocese of Burlington in 1853. That O’Callaghan escaped removal for so long speaks volumes about the nature of “frontier Catholicism” in northern New England and the power dynamics between the periphery and the center. O’Callaghan was allowed to exercise what one Vermont lawyer, Lucius Chittenden, called his “peculiar opinions never entirely in harmony with Catholic principles.” Chittenden concluded that O’Callaghan simply had too much power until the installation of DeGoesbriand as Vermont’s first bishop. He surmised that the situation had been out of the Bishop of Boston’s hands: “Too remote for the personal supervision of that prelate, he had permitted the Rev. Jeremiah O’Callaghan to control it for so long a time that he had come to regard his authority as equal to that of the head of the Church.” Chittenden and his fellow lawyers may have appreciated O’Callaghan for the sole reason that his “combative disposition”

68 Archibald W. Hyde to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 1 November 1830, 2.52, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
69 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, 6 June 1838, 2.54, Fenwick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
and the loyalty of his Irish followers “produced numerous actions of ejectment, for assaults, batteries, and other proceedings disreputable to the Church and profitable only to members of the legal profession.”

The priest simply should have been happy just to practice Catholicism with the relative openness accorded by Vermont, rather than trying to defame, vilify, and unseat the larger Protestant culture.

Chittenden was not alone in his view that O’Callaghan exercised unique power because of the remoteness of nineteenth-century Vermont. Fenwick’s successor, John Fitzpatrick soon found out just how much freedom O’Callaghan had. In a letter to the bishop, O’Callaghan talked about the very large territory he covered with partner Father Daley, and offered Fitzpatrick suggestions for how management of the state should be divided. Then, perhaps responding to some irritation in Boston over his published attacks on Protestantism, O’Callaghan defended himself to the new leader, noting that Fenwick had given his blessing to the missionary’s work. O’Callaghan told Fitzpatrick that his tract addressing a number of Protestant and Catholic leaders (“O’Callaghan on Heresies,” 1837) had gotten Fenwick’s approval about and that, “when he had full time to peruse and digest it, declared in a letter to me which is still preserved among my papers: ‘That I had treated both Innovators as they deserved’” in his text.

A highly critical Bishop Fitzpatrick later summarized the many problems he encountered with Father O’Callaghan and his lengthy Vermont mission. Fenwick’s successor made very clear that the somewhat undereducated O’Callaghan was nothing short of crazy. Fitzpatrick further noted O’Callaghan’s difficult personality and predisposition to attack those he opposed with outright aggression. His journal entry upon the occasion of O’Callaghan’s death in 1861 leaves

72 Ibid., 79-80.
73 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop John Fitzpatrick, 23 June 1847, 3.6, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
little doubt that the Irish priest lived on the margins, both literally and intellectually. Fitzpatrick wrote that, “He was an eccentric and somewhat noted character, having printed…several books on the subjects of usury, banking, pew-leasing in churches, grave-yards, etc. etc.” Fitzpatrick further noted that “lacking both philosophical and theological training, he did not understand” the topics he took on and wrote with “great presumption,” “yet he seemed to believe that nobody in the world, except himself, knew anything about these books. He was very fond of attacking everybody who published any work or book and did it with great violence.” O’Callaghan also attacked a number of Catholic leaders personally and had been stopped from saying Mass during his final years of life. Fitzpatrick complained that, “Many prelates in the U. States have received from him denunciatory letters of the kind. But no one heeded him and he was considered crazy. In fact he was. During the last 3 or 4 years he has not been allowed to officiate publicly.”  

The frontier setting of Vermont created a place in which a non-conformist like O’Callaghan could minister for decades. Bishop Fitzpatrick insinuated that O’Callaghan would have done more serious damage to the Catholic cause if not stationed in a place like the backwoods of Vermont. O’Callaghan “labored most of the time in Vermont, where the Catholics, being all poor, gave him no chance to enforce his queer notions on what he called usury.”  

Fitzpatrick’s assessment that O’Callaghan’s ramblings had little effect on the population was correct: William Henry Hoyt had noted years earlier in his diary an occasion upon which O’Callaghan, unable to find a chalice to say Mass with while visiting St. Albans, used the time to instead hand out his “new pamphlet on Vermont banks.” Though a man named “McDonald” was “sent peddling throughout the congregation” with O’Callaghan’s work, the people “melted away

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75 Ibid.
and soon disappeared” apparently with little fanfare. O’Callaghan frequently complained about this apparent lack of commitment to Catholic thought, and to his bizarre social and cultural causes. Though he constantly stressed in his work the need to “recall the shepherds and sheep to the path of the saints, to the strict observances of the Catholic Cannons” so that “they will in bitter tears deplore their own apathy,” the Catholic population he served was so “apathetic” because they were focused on their own difficult reality, finding themselves most concerned with getting the sacraments from the missionary when he was available. So, Vermont allowed O’Callaghan freedom to indulge his particular religious and social causes, but simultaneously made his behavior far less destructive to Catholics than it may have been in a more central city where the Catholic population was concentrated and O’Callaghan would be permanently stationed. Struggling Catholics were too busy for O’Callaghan’s social diatribes, even if leaders like Hoyt and Fitzpatrick were well aware that O’Callaghan’s work irritated many prominent Protestant leaders and threatened Catholic unity.

Through it all, O’Callaghan remained largely unconcerned about the consequences of his written and verbal lashings, what Fitzpatrick termed “peculiar notions.” During his lifetime, the priest seemed fully aware of what he was doing. As he believed his criticisms about misuse of money and power to be morally correct, he did not shy away from provocation. O’Callaghan maintained that he had something of a duty to show society its wrongs. As he explained in 1858, “When any malignant disease has spread for years unnoticed by the public, the doctor who detects and exposes it has obloquy and opposition to encounter: he will be styled a visionary

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76 William Henry Hoit to Right Reverend John B. Fitzpatrick, 14 May 1854, 2.11, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
77 Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop John Fitzpatrick, 23 June 1847, 3.6, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
quack, and perhaps something worse.” O’Callaghan went so far as to envision himself as a warrior for Christ, fighting for “right” despite the opposition he faced. He was not, he maintained, a “quack,” but a defender of truth. He noted in one of his many publications on usury, updated through several editions, that he would carry on his fight despite “persecution” because “as Jesus said to him, No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of Heaven. I must persevere and endeavor to put the candle upon the candlestick.”

Persevere O’Callaghan did, until Louis DeGoesbriand became Vermont’s first bishop in 1853, curbing some of the free rein O’Callaghan exercised there, and leading to his prompt departure. Vermont had maintained its frontier characteristics longer than most places (and would continue, to some extent, to remain a huge mission under DeGoesbriand), but the arrival of a local bishop at least introduced more control over Burlington, a tendency O’Callaghan resisted. T.D. Bassett notes that O’Callaghan had a great amount of power, and this allowed him to provoke local Protestants. He writes, “Beginning at an age when most men of his period expected to give up control, O’Callaghan had traveled far and wide, served St. Mary’s parish in two Burlington buildings, bought and started a parochial school, and held the fort for twenty years. But his eccentricities and combativeness irritated Protestants predisposed towards nativism.” So, DeGoesbriand’s arrival limited O’Callaghan’s freedom to meddle in public affairs. O’Callaghan was transferred to the Berkshire region of Massachusetts, another

78 O’Callaghan, The Holy Bible Authenticated, 5.
79 O’Callaghan, Usury, funds, and banks, 3.
mountainous wilderness, serving Holyoke from 1854 until his death in 1861. 82 Here, as in Vermont, he would be less disruptive than in Catholic Boston’s growing center. 83 Of course, despite all his disruptions, O’Callaghan did have a long, rich career and was crucial to the development of Vermont Catholicism before the establishment of the Diocese of Burlington in 1853. He helped catechize the second bishop of Vermont, John Michaud, when he was a boy. Michaud wrote of the late priest, "He was an uncompromising defender of Catholic faith and principles, a firm believer in Catholic schools and education. And, after a sojourn of twenty-three years in Vermont, he left a name and a record which are held in loving veneration." 84 Without him, Vermont Catholics would have relied entirely on Canadian missionaries for their Sacraments. O’Callaghan’s outspoken public demeanor meant that Catholicism’s growth in Vermont was not kept quiet, but made its way into newspapers and Protestant pulpits. He might have been considered crazy by some, but O’Callaghan took his personal responsibilities seriously, and believed he was carrying them out when he spoke out against anti-Irish sentiment and economic issues like usury. As Vermont historian T.D. Bassett notes, “At fifty when he arrived in Vermont, O’Callaghan had the basics of what the Irish immigrant needed: credentials to administer the sacraments, willingness to cover the ground, and sympathy for the poor and outcast, as he had been an outcast himself.” 85


83 While O’Callaghan can certainly be described as free-willed and even disruptive, his story also suggests that only the hardest of souls could work as long-term missionaries in northern New England. Despite his social and political causes, he did fulfill his role as traveling missionary, and many throughout Vermont became familiar with him. To this end, William Leo Lucey argues that O’Callaghan’s behavior was actually helpful, and moved Vermonters towards accepting Catholicism by the time DeGoesbriand became the first bishop of Burlington. O’Callaghan, Lucey argues, was an ideal candidate to work in a frontier setting. He writes, “Although it took many years to realize it, Jeremiah O’Callaghan was born to pioneer in Vermont. By some mysterious way he was cut to live among the Green Mountain folks.” See William Leo Lucey, “The Diocese of Burlington, Vermont: 1853”, in Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia 64, no 3 (September 1953), 133.

84 Michaud, The Diocese of Burlington.

O’Callaghan was the most noteworthy example of the sometimes troublesome consequences of the Diocese’s extreme need for priests. But other missionaries under Bishop Fenwick were also of varying quality, having not been trained in Boston, but sent to the Diocese from afar. The Maine-New Hampshire coast in particular needed more priests because the route became one large frontier circuit as pockets of Irish immigrants settled in various communities along the water. After sending an otherwise unknown Father Boland to tend to the Irish flock in Dover, New Hampshire at the beginning of 1827 (Boland was assigned to take care of this growing New Hampshire population and the neighboring community of Saco, Maine), Fenwick realized he had made a grave mistake. He noted on March 2nd that, “Letters are received from Dover, N.H. of a most afflicting nature—communicating the sad tidings of the very scandalous & disorderly conduct of the Rev’d Mr. B. lately sent thither—The Bp laments his having imparted faculties to him & employed him at all in his the Diocese.”\(^{86}\) Boland’s behavior left Fenwick “more convinced of the necessity of having native clergymen educated for the supply of the Diocese, instead of depending upon foreign adventurers who are for the most part but little to be trusted.”\(^{87}\) No other references to the ill-fated Father Boland appear in Fenwick’s diary or his collection of letters, obscuring the damaging nature of whatever mistakes Boland made in Dover. A similar lack of evidence surrounds missionary Father Charles French’s character before coming to Boston. He may have caused ethnic troubles between the French and Irish (not unlike what the fiercely pro-Irish O’Callaghan would later do in Vermont) while in Quebec. He likely had his priestly faculties revoked there due to his “outspoken opposition to French bishops in America.” He was also forced to leave his post in New York after a dispute with fellow priest William Taylor. Though he left New York in order to be separated from Taylor, both men later

\(^{86}\) Fenwick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 1, entry for March 2, 1827.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.
ended up working for Fenwick in the Diocese of Boston, further cementing the fact that New England was desperate for priests, even priests who had caused uproar and tension in other nearby locations.  

Several more who joined Fenwick’s team were poorly qualified, or lacking in character and judgment. The priests with the most questionable records seemed to end up in Maine and Vermont, presumably where they could do the least amount of damage to the growing mission, or where Fenwick most needed missionary help and could not find anyone else hardy enough to stick with the job. But the happiness at finding new missionaries was often short-lived. Bangor, Maine—a few hours’ ride north of Portland—proved to be a headache for the Bishop on several notable occasions because of conflicts involving clergy. In September of 1835, after a drive to raise funds to build a church, Bangor’s priest, Rev. McNamee, decided to build a priest’s house at the back of the chosen lot before beginning construction of the actual church structure. A clearly irritated Fenwick commented in his journal that, “The B’p is highly dissatisfied with this proceeding on his part and considers it a gross misapplication of the funds of this Church. He cannot accordingly suffer it to be overlooked.” Perhaps because of his desperation for help, however, Fenwick did “suffer to overlook” McNamee’s transgression for a time: in his year-end summary for 1835, Fenwick recorded that the priest was still stationed in Bangor. 

Unfortunately for Fenwick, McNamee caused further trouble two months later, when 98 parishioners wrote to the Bishop concerned about their priest’s “disorderly conduct.” McNamee came to see Fenwick during the first days of April, after presumably being called to

89 Fenwick, Bishop’s Journal, vol. 1, entry for September 3, 1835.
90 Bishop Benedict Fenwick, Memoranda of the Diocese of Boston from the arrival of Bishop Fenwick or rather from the day of his Consecration, viz. Nov’r 1. 1825, vol. 2, entry for December 31, 1835, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
91 Ibid., entry for February 23, 1836.
Boston following receipt of the congregation’s letter, and, two weeks later, Fenwick temporarily replaced McNamee with a Rev. Michael Lynch. The Bishop’s worst suspicions about McNamee’s misuse of funds were confirmed when he found that the priest had incurred $800 of debt in building the priest’s residence on the Bangor church lot, an expense the struggling diocese could ill-afford. 92 It was, Fenwick noted “high time he should be removed.” 93

Missionaries like O’Callaghan, Boland, and McNamee were almost unavoidable in northern New England given the realities that early bishops there faced. This was one way in which Boston and northern New England began to look more and more distinct as the nineteenth century progressed. Bishops could control affairs closer to home, but had less power to influence daily events elsewhere, despite the fact that removed missionaries might be far less adept at handling controversy or division. Robert Lord’s classic account notes that during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, “Bishop Cheverus enjoyed a special advantage over the other dioceses in the country. The Irish congregation in Boston had no anti-French feeling. Whatever the sentiment in Norfolk, Virginia, or Charleston, South Carolina, the Boston Irish loved the French priests, respected and obeyed them. Nor was the small Boston congregation of Irish Catholics divided against itself, as the Philadelphia group was, and as the New York group would be.”94 This suggests that the dynamics of individual communities were thus not attributable only to issues like ethnic or trustee divisions, but to the actions of leaders. Cheverus and later Fenwick strove to expand the diocese while making Catholicism palatable to Boston Protestants, and kept friction between ethnic or divided groups of Catholics in the city to a minimum. The 1829 Provincial Council took some of these tenets to a national level—though

92 Ibid., entries for April 2, 1836 and April 16, 1836.
93 Ibid., entry for April 16, 1836.
achieving only minimal success compared to Boston—in seeking to limit the problems related to missionaries, ethnicity, and trusteeism in all the American dioceses.

Yet, even as the American Church as a whole began to centralize, O’Callaghan created a number of disagreements among the Irish and the French, and alienated local Protestants in Vermont. O’Callaghan had a special moment of importance within a unique frontier time and place. It is unsurprising that this “moment” ended when Bishop DeGoesbriand, the first bishop of Burlington, centralized control of the Church in Vermont. The social openness of Vermont and the transitional stage before strong institutional Catholicism in northern New England allowed O’Callaghan a twenty year opportunity to preach freely, even on the topic of usury that had previously left him unemployed in Ireland, New York, and Quebec. O’Callaghan’s departure signaled the close of Vermont’s frontier period, but his experiences would not be forgotten. Bishop DeGoesbriand would soon discover that the state was still very much a borderland for Catholics living between Canada and the United States, even if his presence ushered in an era of stronger institutional Catholicism.
V. AN INTELLECTUAL FRONTIER: VERMONT CONVERSION, 1825-1900

In 1826, Bishop Fenwick went to Vermont and nearby Claremont, New Hampshire to visit Father Virgil Barber, a convert to Catholicism from the Episcopalian faith. Barber lived on the Vermont-New Hampshire border with a small band of converts. Fenwick had been introduced to the one-time school principal and Episcopalian minister ten years earlier as Barber went through the conversion process. With an academic mind, Barber sought religious “truth,” and a series of meetings with Fenwick convinced him that the Catholic Church held the real roots of Christianity. Fenwick gave Barber a great deal of reading material to help satisfy his innate curiosity, and, eventually, on his own accord, Barber left Protestantism for Catholicism. Barber’s family was forced to leave their well-to-do society and live with Fenwick and his mother for a time because Barber’s Episcopalian students and congregation “turned against him,” forcing him to sell his land and give up his comfortable work in New York. But, his hometown of Claremont and the neighboring state of Vermont accepted him, and Barber formed a new community of Catholic converts there. ¹

Barber was only one of the many converts from Protestantism who made it into the records of the Boston bishops and those of the first bishop of Vermont, Louis DeGoesbriand. Before the words “Irish” and “Catholic” became synonymous throughout New England, some Catholics were not traditionally “Catholic” at all. In this environment, a different group of dynamic Catholics existed: converts to the faith from Protestantism. These outspoken advocates

for the developing Catholic Church occupied yet another borderland as they not only lived in between Canada and Boston, but crossed an important social boundary in making the personal decision to move from Protestantism to the under-staffed and resource-poor Catholicism. The unique geographical position and social conditions of nineteenth-century northern New England allowed for more fluidity than would later urban models of American Catholicism. While the story of American Catholicism is often told within the larger setting of nineteenth and early twentieth-century immigration, converts who were native to the country were vitally important to the formation of the Boston church in the moments just before the Famine-era immigration of Irish Catholics.

The converts were themselves the product of geographical, religious, and cultural peripheries where free thought about religion could develop. As already discussed, Vermont was a well-known hotbed of both religious and even atheistic thought during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Converts to Catholicism hailing from Vermont during the nineteenth century included Ethan Allen’s daughter, Fanny; William H. Hoyt; and the famous Orestes Brownson. Other prominent leaders—such as Colonel Archibald Hyde, the assistant US Collector of Customs, and DeWitt Clarke, editor of the *Burlington Free Press*—could also be named among Vermont’s Catholic converts. In a nearby New Hampshire town, an entire family headed by two former Episcopal ministers, the aforementioned Barbers, shared a similar story and became leaders in the Boston Church.

The conversion of so many notable northern New Englanders was assisted in large part by the region’s proximity to Quebec and Catholic Canada. As was the case with shared

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2 William Leo Lucey, “The Diocese of Burlington, Vermont: 1853”, in *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 64, no 3 (September 1953), 134. Lucey mentions these particular converts, among others. Throughout the article he points out, too, the variety of religious figures who called the religiously eclectic state of Vermont home.
clergy members, converts also bound nineteenth-century American Catholicism to Canadian Catholicism. In fact, of the ten churches in Vermont in 1853, four were less than twenty miles from the Canadian border. Even though Americans did not have strong city-based parishes with permanent priests to help them become part of a larger Catholic society, the individual converts from Protestantism, who were often interested in personal faith journeys, had access to the seminaries and priests of Canada. One notable example of this trend was William Henry Hoyt, a well-respected Vermonter, who, like Barber, had previously been an Episcopalian minister before converting with his family to Catholicism. He was so well-liked in his home state, in fact, that some have suggested that he converted about fifty others during his lifetime.

Hoyt’s diaries, detailing his conversion and life as a Catholic, suggest a close relationship not only with the Catholic hierarchy of Boston, but also with that of Canada. When Hoyt converted in 1846, he went to St. Sulpice Seminary in Montreal, to make his “profession of the Catholic faith” and took the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time. He and his family had a particularly close relationship with the Reverend Mignault, a Canadian curate, veteran of the Indian missions, and Vicar General of Boston who was initially “loaned” to Boston by Bishop Plessis of Quebec. Hoyt visited Mignault at Chamblay after receiving the Sacraments. A week later, he brought his wife Anne to him for her own conversion to Catholicism. A few months later, in October, he went again to see the clergy in Montreal. Perhaps because of his borderlands location, Hoyt, though a native-born American, did not seem to harbor the usual dislike for French-speaking Catholics. In fact, when his hometown priest was away on a mission

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3 Ibid., 140-141.
4 Ibid., 134.
5 William W. Hoyt, Diaries, University of Vermont Bailey Special Collections. Entries for July 24-26, 1846.
7 Hoyt, Diaries, entries for July 27-August 1, 1846.
8 Ibid., entry for October 23, 1846.
the following year, Hoyt recounted that the local community replaced Mass with prayer that included what appeared to be French Canadian practices: “at 10 1/2 am we had catechism and beads—and at 2 1/2 pm catechisms, and (in French) the *chemin de la Croix*—after which we practiced singing.”

Reinforcing the transnational Catholic ties between New England and Canada, the stories of these converts were deeply important to regional clergy because the converts entered the Church despite the social stigma attached to Catholicism, especially in Congregational New England. Though Bishop Cheverus and his partner Mignault discovered early on the perils of practicing their faith publically in New England, elite Vermonter’s still made the choice to become Catholic after studying the theology of Catholicism and becoming acquainted with its early local leaders. Their conversions sent an important message to northern New Englanders who were raised in a largely anti-Catholic tradition. Furthermore, Bishop Fenwick in particular relied on converts from outstanding Yankee families not only to become priests and serve the struggling Diocese of Boston in remote areas, but also to lead by example. Because of their personal conversion experiences and resulting belief that educated, established Yankee families could find salvation in Catholicism, converts attracted other native New Englanders to the growing faith. Towns such as Claremont, New Hampshire—overseen by the famous convert Virgil Barber—were made up almost entirely of other such converts.

Catholics were certainly influenced by nearby Canada, but also by the tolerance in Vermont towards a variety of religious and cultural forces. The state’s greater freedom may have allowed Protestants to feel comfortable enough to convert, and, in turn, the continued conversion of notable figures helped reinforce Vermont’s reputation as a religiously open state. Respectable

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9 Ibid., entry for July 4, 1846.
converts were even more important to the Church as the nineteenth century wore on and immigration increased. Because converts from Protestantism risked much socially in converting to the religion of a growing American underclass, Church leaders often portrayed them as heroic “model” Catholics. According to Christine Bochen in her study of nineteenth-century conversion literature, becoming Catholic had “serious” social consequences because of its association with immigrants. Bochen argues that despite a culture of nineteenth-century reform and evangelicalism, Americans who converted to Catholicism put their social standing in jeopardy: “Conversions to Roman Catholicism did occur and in considerable numbers and this, despite the fact that the social cost of conversion was high. Conversion to Roman Catholicism was more than a redefinition of ecclesiastical allegiance; social ramifications of this act were serious. Converting to Roman Catholicism meant identifying with a social minority and by the 1830s with the religion of the immigrants.”

A diocesan history of Vermont also notes:

There was no easy Road to Rome in Vermont in the nineteenth century. The communicants of the Church in those days represented pretty largely the disinherited exiles of Ireland or the poor struggling immigrants from French Canada, ministered to by a handful of priests, who could never solve practically the metaphysical problem of biolocation. The Catholics of Bishop DeGoesbriand’s day were quite literally the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the day laborers on farms and in quarries and the builders of the railroads. Any Protestant who dared to flirt with the “Scarlet Woman of Rome” was inviting social and perhaps even economic ostracism.

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11 *One Hundred Years of Achievement by the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont* (Lowell, Massachusetts: Sullivan Bros. Printers, Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, 1953), 34.
Nineteenth-century Vermont was a diverse, complex and interconnected border region where religious openness was more visible than in other parts of New England. Born from the land grant conflict between New Hampshire and New York, Vermont necessarily attracted counter-cultural thinkers and those hoping to leave town-sponsored congregations in places like Massachusetts and Connecticut, causing an “inherent instability” in which a wide range of groups—Old Lights, New Lights, Quakers, Presbyterians and others—settled in specific towns, free from state-sponsored religion. By contrast, Separatists also came to Vermont to live an even more religious existence as Protestantism in other parts of the region was becoming too lax, according to some Calvinists. Finally, to further add to this variety, other Vermonters abandoned such a religious worldview almost entirely. Green Mountain Boy and Revolutionary War General Ethan Allen was one such thinker: he was a deist (one who viewed God only through a reason-based, Enlightenment-driven lens) to some, but an atheist or unbeliever in the eyes of others who scorned and feared his views.

Though Vermont appeared progressive in its tolerance of non-traditional spirituality, it was simultaneously perceived as backwards and even dangerous in its lack of religious orthodoxy. As Vermont historian Michael Bellesiles notes in his discussion of outside reactions to Vermont’s religious diversity and tendency towards deism, “The frontier seemed to dissolve traditional cultural standards” to anxious onlookers. While Allen was considered something of a religious pariah even by Vermont’s wider cultural and religious standards, the state nonetheless

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14 Sherman, Sessions and Potash. Freedom and Unity, 82. Here, the authors suggest that some Separatists came to VT to “escape what they viewed as lamentable decline into secularism.” So, in some cases Vermont was more religious than the rest of New England.
15 Bellesiles, Revolutionary Outlaws, 219.
did continue to produce a few-well-known religious thinkers of diverse origins well into the next century, such as the famed Catholic convert and editor Orestes Brownson, Oneida leader John Humphrey Noyes, and founder of the Millerites, William Miller. In the borderlands, Catholicism was likely more tolerable to surrounding Protestants simply because they were so used to eclectic religious beliefs by the time the era of the Second Great Awakening drew to a close.

Families tended to make the major decision to convert together, as did the family of William H. Hoyt. In fact, whole families and communities within the early Boston Church were made of those who had left mainstream Protestantism. The most notable convert to bring a community of new Catholics with him was former Episcopalian minister, Virgil Barber, who went on to become a faithful missionary for the Diocese. Bishops Fenwick and Fitzpatrick relied heavily on him. As Barber came from New Hampshire and was comfortable with what Fenwick considered to be largely a vast northern wilderness, he was sent to Maine to serve the Native American population there.

Not only did Virgil Barber convert and offer his service to the Boston bishops: he brought his father who later became a priest, his then-wife, and his children into the Church as well. This was all the more notable because Barber and his father, Daniel, could claim to be “true” Yankee, Protestant, native-born Americans before their conversion. Rather than social

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16 Ibid. Bellesiles notes that even Vermont did not seem to have room for thinkers as “eccentric” as Brownson, and he thus remains something of a controversial figure. Sherman, Sessions and Potash, Freedom and Unity, 202-203. Although the authors argue that after the 1840s religious radicalism declined, Vermont nonetheless created a few notable figures. See also the volume’s earlier discussion of the Second Great Awakening in Vermont; the authors note the great extent to which Congregational churches in Vermont were touched by revivalism.

17 Lucey, “The Diocese of Burlington, Vermont: 1853,” 126. Lucey is clear about this point, stating that, “It could be that by 1853 Vermonters were immune to religious extremes; the western section of the State was the eastern hinge of the ‘burnt-out’ area where any religious fanatic could find plenty of enthusiastic supporters for awhile.” He continues, “Vermonters had long been conditioned to strange manifestations of religious feelings”, making them ready for the very public introduction of the first Catholic bishop of the state, Louis DeGoesbriand.
outsiders, they played exceedingly respected roles in their society. Daniel had served in the Revolution and became an Episcopalian minister after his conversion from Congregationalism, paving the way for his son Virgil to become interested in older, pre-Puritan forms of Christianity.\textsuperscript{18} A meeting with Boston’s first bishop, Cheverus, while he was on a mission in New Hampshire caused Daniel Barber and his son Virgil—who was working as an Episcopalian minister in New York—to first consider converting to Catholicism.\textsuperscript{19} Virgil made the decision to convert before his father, setting an example for the rest of his family.\textsuperscript{20}

Virgil Barber was eager to make inroads in northern New England for the faith. Barber led a population of converts at his church in Claremont, New Hampshire, and hoped to create a college as well. Convinced of the importance of this undertaking, Barber pushed Bishop Fenwick to visit a potential site for the school on June 5, 1826. Barber was apparently undaunted by the extremely unpleasant conditions on Ascutney Mountain in Vermont, but the Bishop was not convinced that the mountain was an appropriate place for a Catholic mission. The Bishop complained that, “Among the painful sensations which the travelling through this unbeaten tract provided, not the least was the continual apprehension of treading upon a rattle snake, which noxious animal Is said greatly to infect rocky lonesome places: but through the Providence of God this evil was escaped, whatever others had to be contended with.”\textsuperscript{21} The Bishop turned down Barber’s request for a school the next day, stating that “…the idea of establishing a College upon Ascutney mountain as a thing altogether impossible and even ridiculous.” Unless “a convenient and practicable spot” was to be found, Barber’s school for Vermont and New

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 299.  
\textsuperscript{20} Bochen, \textit{The Journey to Rome}, 161.  
\textsuperscript{21} Fenwick, \textit{Bishop’s Journal}, vol. 1, entry for June 5, 1826.
Hampshire residents would not be established. This was a fitting ending to Fenwick’s Vermont trip, which had begun with a ride into Burlington via New Hampshire’s White Mountains, during which his wagon had broken down.

As this sketch shows, Catholic converts could be the most tireless advocates for the faith, despite a lack of diocesan support and residence in what Bostonians like Fenwick perceived as absolute wilderness. Leaders like Barber were key to helping spread and maintain Catholicism in remote regions. Converts tended to be somewhat better-off than their immigrant counterparts, and might be able to help missionaries and visiting priests make inroads among their Protestant neighbors. As a testament to the “malleability” of borderlands converts’s identity, even Vermont missionary priest Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan, whose distrust of Protestants ran deep, attested to the importance of converts in making possible the open practice of Catholicism in Vermont. When Bishop Fenwick went to check on the progress that O’Callaghan was making in his Vermont mission in December of 1830, he found O’Callaghan living at the house of a Protestant resident married to a Catholic convert. At Vergennes, Fenwick wrote, “The wife of Mr. Nichols is a Convert to the Catholic religion & a most zealous & edifying member. Mr. Nichols himself is not yet a Catholic though he believes it to be the true Church of Christ.” The next day, Mr. Nichols allowed his home to be used for a Catholic Mass, at which Fenwick spoke in both English and French. The Nichols, apparently, had a Protestant-Catholic marriage, and, furthermore, opened their home to those outside of their social class, namely to French-Canadian immigrants. During their visit to this group of Vermont Catholics, Fenwick and O’Callaghan

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22 Ibid., entry for June 6, 1826.
23 Ibid., entry for November 30, 1830.
24 Ibid., entry for December 4, 1830.
25 Ibid., entry for December 5, 1830.
also went to see a potential church lot owned by a Protestant lawyer in Burlington. Dealing with the Protestant community was not only desirable, but, in the case of largely Anglo-American northern New England, necessary for Catholic success.

The bishops of Boston and their missionaries (and later, Louis DeGoesbriand, the first bishop of Vermont) thus needed the help of the often better-off community of converts to assist them in strengthening the New England Church, and to connect them with the larger Protestant society. The converts themselves were proof of Vermont’s more open religious views. The clergy seemed to face less opposition from local Protestants in northern Vermont than elsewhere in New England. Even two decades after Fenwick and O’Callaghan wrote about their experiences with leading Vermont converts, outright nativist attacks were not as common as they were in Boston. Bishop DeGoesbriand celebrated his very public installation as the first bishop of Burlington without incident, despite the fact that, by 1853, Know-Nothing activity was visible throughout the rest of New England. In addition to Vermont’s tradition of religious diversity, the dispersed nature of the small Catholic communities in mostly rural areas, the outmigration of native Vermonter, the limited number of churches and priests in the state, and the “respectability” of the converts all helped to make nativism less of an issue in the state than elsewhere.

Still, immigration affected Protestants’ receptivity to conversion to Catholicism. As the story of Vermont-born Orestes Brownson shows, a growing disagreement between Irish-American Catholic leaders and American converts to Catholicism helped usher in the largely

26 Ibid., entries for December 7 -8, 1830.
27 Ibid., entry for December 28, 1828.
29 Ibid., 125-126, 133.
30 Ibid., 127-128, 132-133.
immigrant version of Catholicism that became the fundamental American story. In the end, converts, who existed on the cultural and geographic peripheries of the Church, found themselves peripheral also in the overall conception of American Catholic identity. Nonetheless, the borderlands experience created a unique opportunity for a dynamic faith to flourish in those willing to take the risk of leaving Protestant society for the Catholic Church. While men like Hoyt came to guide and support the growing Catholic Church, free-thinkers like Brownson challenged their leaders, forcing them to address Catholic doctrine in new ways. Though on a national scale Catholicism became the religion of immigrants, the story of conversion in Vermont suggests a more nuanced regional variation, and indicates the complex nature of nineteenth-century Catholic identity.

The question of who was “truly” Catholic, and how to deal with those who were not “real” Catholics, loomed large for clergy members during the nineteenth century. Despite his reliance on Mrs. Nichols and a small community of Vermont converts in founding an early community there, the colorful Jeremiah O’Callaghan proclaimed a distrust of converts from Protestantism and life-long Protestants alike. O’Callaghan made no effort to hide what appeared to be pure hatred towards Protestants. While conciliation may have made existence in a largely Protestant state easier for his parishioners (and was largely the approach that Bishop DeGoesbriand later took) O’Callaghan took little interest in such a policy. Though his writings on usury and banking highlighted the plight of Irish Catholics, they simultaneously vilified Protestants as a group. In an atmosphere already filled with hostility towards the “popish” Irish, O’Callaghan suggested that the Protestants were really the evil threat to the good of society, returning to money, his favorite topic, O’Callaghan charged in 1837 that: "The science of plundering the poor is exclusively reserved for Protestant ministers. Protestants have indeed
liberty in every sense of the word—liberty for their ministers to plunder and destroy; liberty for the people to scatter and split into sects."  

O’Callaghan also blamed Protestants for “deluding” those they converted, while making false statements that included “fabricated pictures of Catholick rites and worship in ancient times and remote regions.”

Catholics in Vermont were likely to be lured into Protestant sects simply because Protestant missionaries outnumbered Catholic ones, and it was hard to receive the sacraments. O’Callaghan could not reach all Vermont Catholics despite his best efforts. During an era in which Protestant fear of Catholics ran high, O’Callaghan thought Catholics had much to fear from Protestants on the remote Vermont frontier. He worried that, “our own Catholicks everywhere scattered in the woods, far from a friend to advise, or a pastor to feed and protect them” might be likely to “to swallow any of the gilded, yet poisonous pills freely doled out to them; and being on the spot, as if in the very heart of the enemy's camp.”

O’Callaghan suggested that Protestants lurked everywhere in Vermont, seeking to protelyze unsuspecting Catholics, in large part because the clergy was so weak north of Boston. However, O’Callaghan, along (ironically) with many traditional Congregational ministers, also noted that northern New England was in danger of falling not only into divergent Protestant sects, but into complete, sinful atheism. He warned that, "Witness Germany, England and even our own United States and particularly, New England, where half or more, of the population declare, without fear of God, or

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32 Ibid.

33 Here, O’Callaghan discusses his inability to reach Vermont’s many Catholics, and notes his relief at the arrival of the Irish-American priests Simon Walsh and John Brady. See Jeremiah O’Callaghan, Usury, funds, and banks; also forestalling traffick, and monopoly [&c.] ... are all repugnant to the divine and ecclesiastical laws, and destructive to civil society. To which is prefixed A narrative of the author's controversy with bishop Coppinger and of his sufferings for justice sake (Burlington, Vermont: Printed for the author, 1834), 63-64.

34 O’Callaghan, The Creation and Offspring of the Protestant Church, iii.

35 O’Callaghan, Usury, funds, and banks, 63.
shame of man, that they were never baptized, that they belong to no Church, and that they know not, in the perpetual conflict of sects, what to believe.”

O’Callaghan urged Catholics to be suspicious of Protestant motives. In fact, O’Callaghan drew firm boundaries not only between Protestants and Catholics, but between Catholic converts and those born Catholic. O’Callaghan’s hostility was not reserved only for Vermont’s bankers and Protestant ministers, but also for those of his own religion whom he did not trust as “real” Catholics. In particular, he attacked the well-known, several-times convert Orestes Brownson, casting doubts about the motives of his conversion. Brownson argued that his conversion—much like that of Hoyt’s and the Barbers’—was the result of religious “truth.” In the introduction to his autobiographical work, *The Convert*, Brownson wrote that “Truth is not mine, nor my reader’s, and is the same whatever may be his or my opinions. It is above us both, and independent of us, and all that either of us should aim at is to ascertain and conform to it.”

Despite this apparently genuine religious conversion and the view that the Catholic faith represented the “true” Church, Brownson’s views earned him the ire of O’Callaghan, Boston’s Bishop Fitzpatrick, New York’s Archbishop Hughes, and several prominent Irish-Catholic leaders. Brownson’s identity as a Catholic was routinely challenged during the rest of his life.

Orestes Brownson was the product of both geographic and cultural peripheries. Born in 1803 in Stockbridge, Vermont, Brownson himself was part of a generation that had been touched by the Second Great Awakening and its associated reform movements. His interest in religious thought was in some ways characteristic of his place in history, as well as his geographical place. Born to parents from New Hampshire and Connecticut, Brownson’s widowed mother sent him to

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38 Ibid., 1. See also Sherman, Sessions and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 146-147.
live with a traditional, Yankee, Congregational couple in Royalton, Vermont during his early years. Despite this fairly standard New England upbringing, the area he lived in exposed him to a wide array of religious sects, many of them “New Light” in orientation, products of the Second Great Awakening and shifts in nineteenth-century American religious thought. Brownson was especially drawn to the emotional meetings of the Methodists. He grew up with a fair amount of local religious diversity, writing that: “In the town in which I lived we had Congregationalists, called in my young days, 'The Standing Order,' Methodists, Baptists, Universalists, and Christians, or, as they insisted on the word being pronounced, Christ-yans.” Brownson often went to the services of the Methodists and the Christians, whom he described as “more numerous” than orders like the Baptists and Universalists. These two sects were more vibrant in the practice of their faith then the typical, staid New England Congregationalists. Brownson noted of the Methodists and the Christians, “They differed, I was told; but the only difference I could discover between them was, that the Methodist preachers appeared to have the stronger lungs; they preached in a louder tone, and when they preached, the people shouted more.”

Brownson also spent a great deal of his time educating himself on religion as his upbringing was bereft of much formal schooling. By the time he became Catholic in 1844, Brownson could claim to have already been a Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Universalist, Unitarian, and Transcendentalist. Brownson’s unique and, at times, erratic, religious growth was chronicled in his somewhat controversial journal, *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*. The publication devoted most of its writing to philosophy.

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and religion beginning in 1838; after Brownson’s conversion, topics related specifically to American Catholicism were heavily emphasized.

Despite the fact that Brownson left Vermont in his adulthood, his eclectic religious philosophy suggests he was influenced by his northern New England upbringing and exposure to so many different forms of Protestantism. His emphasis on reason and human ability to access the spiritual realm seems especially to mirror thinkers like Ethan Allen. Brownson, like Allen, was sometimes accused of being a deist. Brownson’s most controversial ideas centered on his conception of the relationship between the supernatural and the natural realms. Convinced that with reason and the intercession of a supernatural being, men could be “in communion” with realms beyond their own, he found Calvinism increasingly difficult to comprehend because of its teachings about human depravity, “Grace is conceived therefore as opposed to nature, and revelation as opposed to reason.” Brownson’s journey through many different sects and eventually into Catholicism was thus, in large part, his journey to “harmonize nature and grace.”

Ultimately, this became apparent in his famous “doctrine of communion,” adapted from the French philosopher Pierre Leroux. Through the authority of the Holy Spirit, and the Catholic Church which God had ordained, man could live “in communion with God, and not only in a natural communion, as held by Leroux, but also in a supernatural communion.” All past and present, supernatural and natural were connected through the single Catholic Church. The always rational Brownson was comforted by the belief that a “transcendent” God could “intervene in human

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46 Ibid., 32.
47 Ibid., 273.
48 Ibid., 291.
affairs” through a supernatural communion without taking away any natural human rights or free will. 49

According to Brownson, Protestantism was incorrect because it “broke with Tradition, broke with the past, and cut itself off from the body of Christ.” 50 The Catholic Church, because of the doctrine of communion, maintained links with a Christian past. While the doctrine of communion was not “the whole of Catholicity,” it did nonetheless open Brownson to the possibility that the Catholic Church might be the single correct religion, because of the reasonableness of what he saw as “unquestioned historical facts,” truth, and reason. 51 Jenny Franchot, in her work on Protestant-Catholic relations in antebellum America, further argues that Brownson condemned the whole of Protestant history and its relationship to the American experience, writing “Brownson’s subversive reading of Protestant historiography on America accused it of a convert agenda: the celebration of man’s power over God, a celebration only faintly disguised by the historians’ habitual reference to Providence. The nation that understood itself as singled out for especial sanctity, as righteously triumphant over the diabolic and the savage, was in Brownson’s newly militant reality an atheist culture whose reformist essence was the true demon.” 52

Brownson’s bold new religious ideology did not necessarily ease his social transition to Catholicism. Brownson admitted that he had been raised with “few Catholic acquaintances” in Vermont and had before this discovery “formed but a poor opinion of Roman Catholics.” 53 His intellectual understanding of communion between the natural and the supernatural led him towards

51 Ibid., 354-355.
a religious option that, given his background, would otherwise have been nearly unthinkable. Brownson hoped to bring other Americans with him into the Church through his ideas about communion because it was far more difficult to enter the Roman Catholic Church than to move between Protestant sects. He noted that “to pass from Protestantism to Catholicity is a very different thing. We break from the whole world in which we have hitherto lived; we enter into what is to us a new and untried region.”  

54 In sum, Brownson believed that using Catholic doctrine to speak to non-Catholics would never be convincing enough to convert the great mass of American people, and that the Church must instead use explanations to “convince their reason.”

While Brownson sought to describe his own religious views in a way that would open outsiders to the possibility that the Catholic Church was the correct one based on reason and truth, O’Callaghan found Brownson’s attempts to intellectualize Catholicism and the nature of God—with no formal education on the subject—nothing short of blasphemous. O’Callaghan expressed outrage that Brownson would seek to understand the Trinity through the “thoughts of men.” He offers proof of his “heretical insanity” by pointing out Brownson’s use of “profane philosophy” to understand what was not knowable by humans.  

56 In a pamphlet condemning Brownson’s views, O’Callaghan warned readers that Brownson’s conversion would be the downfall of the Church. O’Callaghan portrayed Brownson as fickle in his religious faith, joining several different Protestant sects when, suddenly, “he wheels about in the year 1843, and joins the Catholic Church in Boston, Massachusetts.” O’Callaghan noted that Brownson’s “conversion is no gain, but a direful curse to us.” O’Callaghan called the convert a fraud and told other Catholics to be wary because “of all the wiles and devices of the heretics, for the destruction of

54 Ibid., 360.
55 Ibid., 390.
56 O’Callaghan, Atheism of Brownson’s Review, 29, 33.
the Catholic Church, not one is so treacherous and terrific as their insidious attack upon her under the mask of friendship; for when they put the ignorant and unsuspicuous watchmen off their guard, they freely belch out the inflammatory poison.”

O’Callaghan argued that Brownson not only published incorrect interpretations of doctrine in his *Review*, but that he openly used his position as a recent convert to bring Protestant ideas to malleable Catholic readers. Throughout his pamphlet, O’Callaghan criticized not only Brownson’s error in trying to interpret Catholicism through his own reason and nature, but also suggested that these attempts show that Brownson was still a “Protestant” in his words and actions. O’Callaghan was disgusted that someone could try, with no credentials, to understand Catholic theology, noting of Protestant “learning” that: "The Protestant rashness is visible throughout Brownson's whole career. They spend years at school, to learn the wordily arts…whilst the beardless youth, the stupid old man, the crazy maid, the cobbler and thinker, without tuition or mission, conceits himself a prophet, self-sufficient expositor of the sacred volume. The same Protestant rashness accompanies Brownson everywhere.”

Nobody could match the fiery O’Callaghan in his zeal for pointing out Brownson’s evil mistakes in construing Catholic dogma, but the convert also suffered mixed reactions from other clergy in New England and New York. Bishop Fitzpatrick of Boston, Fenwick’s successor, already had something of a complicated relationship with Brownson when *The Atheism of Brownson’s Review* was published by O’Callaghan. Brownson dedicated his autobiographical, *The Convert*, to "To the Right Reverend John Bernard Fitzpatrick, D.D, Bishop of Boston.” claiming, “This unpretending volume is most respectfully dedicated as a feeble mark of the veneration for his virtues, and the deep gratitude for his services to the convert, cherished by his

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57 Ibid., xxi.
58 Ibid., xxii.
spiritual son.” But Fitzpatrick questioned Brownson’s motives for converting. 59 Fitzpatrick was assigned, by the late Bishop Fenwick, to mentor Brownson in the faith both before and after his conversion, but their relationship was not as easy as the one Fenwick and Brownson shared. Brownson writes that “Bishop Fitzpatrick received me with civility, but with a certain degree of distrust. He had been a little prejudiced against me, and doubted the motives which led so proud and so conceited a man, as he regarded me, to seek admission into the Communion of the Church.” 60 In the hopes of gaining his acceptance, Brownson says he let go, at least for the time, his doctrine of communion. 61 While Fitzpatrick’s theology influenced what Brownson wrote in his Review, and Fitzpatrick acted as something as a censor for the journal, the Bishop did not come to Brownson’s defense at all following O’Callaghan’s release of The Atheism of Brownson’s Review. 62

Issues of sincerity and doctrine were not the only problems that clergy had with Brownson: His reactions to present-day political and social issues also put the new convert outside of mainstream Catholic America. This was largely due to the fact that Brownson focused heavily on making Catholicism acceptable to his Protestant friends and readers. Given his Vermont upbringing and early exposure to a number of religious options, it is unsurprising that Brownson, who existed, to many, on the periphery of normative American religion, advocated a particularly “American” form of Catholicism in the face of obvious resistance. In this, Brownson was not alone: the Vermont converts tended to focus on a few key areas when explaining their decision to leave Protestantism. Hoyt, the Barbers and the Barlows emphasized that they had converted because “reason” and “truth” moved them to do so. They were learned Protestant New

59 Brownson, The Convert.
60 Ibid., 374.
61 Ibid., 375-380.
Englanders, and thus discovered through their own reading and research why Catholicism was the single “true” Christian sect. It was important for them to show their acquaintances that they had come to Catholicism not through simple emotion or ideology, but through careful higher thought and deliberate decision. In Brownson’s case, the doctrine of communion spoke to this desire for a reason-based “American” Catholicism. Brownson biographers have noted his preoccupation with forming an “American” Catholicism that would not only encompass republican values and be attractive to Protestant Yankees, but one that would overcome the religious divisions of the nineteenth century by uniting Americans in one church. R.A. Herrera in particular has noted that when Brownson criticized Roman Catholics “for their responsibility in lowering the tone of public discourse and propagating religious indifference, he spoke as an American Catholic. When he lauded honesty and plain dealing over the deviousness of some clergy, he was employing positive American traits to counter what he believed were foreign habits of mind.”

As with other converts like Barber and Hoyt, Brownson became an outspoken proponent of American Catholicism, but he used his conversion story to show other Protestants the error of their religious affiliation. Though he began publishing Brownson’s Quarterly Review in 1838, after his conversion in 1844, the idea of developing a uniquely American form of Catholicism became a particularly important topic for him. Brownson sought to make Catholicism not only acceptable to Americans and compatible with its democratic tendencies, but also to encourage conversion in the hopes that Catholicism could “save” America from religious divisions. This did not sit well with a Catholic laity and clergy who were increasingly of Irish extraction. Already facing discrimination, the Irish preferred not to discuss the role of the

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63 Ibid., 188.
64 Brownson, The Convert, 195, 380.
pope, Catholicism’s place in a democracy, or other issues that melded politics and faith. Perhaps Brownson’s biggest faux-pas on the issue of religious identity and ethnicity came in his July 1854 article in *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, "A Few Words on Native Americanism.” Though now a Catholic, Brownson clearly distinguished between himself, a Yankee, and the growing number of Irish Catholics who were the object of attack for the nativist movement.

Brownson encouraged the Irish to understand nativism as a form of American patriotism, and to thus resist retaliation against these Americans. He wrote that Irish Catholics should have an understanding of American “nationality” because the Irish themselves had such a strong national identity. He pointed out, also, that, as the nation’s “founders” these native-born Americans—a category under which he included himself—deserved respect:

> To remember that we Americans, whose ancestors recovered our noble country from the wilderness and ferocious savage, founded its institutions by their wisdom and virtues, purchased its independence with their treasures and their blood, and sacrificed cheerfully themselves that they might transmit it as the home of rational freedom to their posterity, have ourselves, strange as it may seem to them, a strong feeling of nationality, a tender affection for our native land, and an invincible attachment to American usages, manners, and customs.\(^{65}\)

Brownson concluded that because of the sacrifices and achievements of native-born Americans, it was unfair for the Irish to expect full political rights immediately. They were “guests” in a republic that others had worked hard to create.\(^{66}\)

More problematic for readers, Brownson argued that the Irish were targets of nativism not because of their Catholic religion, but rather because of their ethnicity and their political

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\(^{65}\) Orestes Augustus Brownson, "A Few Words on Native Americanism,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, Article III (July 1854): 335.

\(^{66}\) Idid., 337.
views. The Irish had not, he thought, received “practical republican training.” Though Brownson wrote with the apparently upright attempt “to warn our foreign-born population against provoking a contest with native Americanism which most assuredly will not result to their advantage,” the piece reads as a critique of Irish ethnicity. To a nation already full of distrust for Irish immigrants, Brownson, intentionally or not, added one more voice. He encouraged the Irish to stop defending themselves against Americans, suggesting that, “Most of the books, pamphlets, discourses, and journals designed to vindicate the Irish character to the American public produce a contrary effect from what was intended or expected” and arguing that defense was, in any, case an exercise in futility: “Let the Irishman of today prove that he could be Brian Boru, win the battle of Clontarf, or restore those ruins, and strike anew the harp in Tara's halls, and the world will honor him. Till then, to boast or whimper is alike useless.” If the Irish could stop from inflaming the sentiments of native-born Americans, thought Brownson, perhaps Catholic identity could be more acceptable in America and nativist attention would turn towards eastern and southern European radicals, whom he considered to be the next wave of far more “dangerous,” irreligious immigrants. The Church was not to blame for Irish nationalism or outspoken manifestations of ethnic solidarity, as the religion itself was “conservative” and, for the most part, the clergy stayed out of public matters. Irish politics and ethnicity were instead the cause of all the nativist trouble.

The rest of Brownson’s story suggests that though the borderlands provided a unique setting for Protestant converts to shape their own ideas about Catholicism, such freedom was

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67 Ibid., 344-345.
68 Ibid., 339.
69 Ibid., 331-332.
70 Ibid., 343.
71 Ibid., 348-350.
harder to come by in Irish-Catholic, urban centers. Once abandoned by Fitzpatrick, Brownson took his ideas about American Catholicism to a more central location. Nearby New York was beginning to host, by mid-century, a solid, immigrant-based Catholicism. Brownson decided to try his luck by moving here as he continued preaching his ideas about an “American” Catholic Church and the doctrine of communion. But, even in a geographical move to the “center,” the Vermont-born, self-educated Brownson remained on Catholicism’s peripheries. Catholic life in New York was far different than in northern New England. Though New England Catholics in the 1850s had not yet begun to fight for separate Catholic schools, New York’s Archbishop John Hughes was already in the process of trying to secure public funding for Catholic schools.

Brownson disagreed with this idea entirely because he wanted an Americanized Catholicism. The bishop of New York, meanwhile, stood against both the extremes of separate ethnic parishes and the total “Americanization” of Catholicism. Hughes’s wish was instead to create one unified Catholic Church and walk a line that placated both proponents and critics of ethnic Catholicism, but his job was a complicated one in an Irish-American stronghold.

Hughes censored the convert on several notable occasions. If Brownson believed himself a representative for American Catholicism, Hughes had a different view of him. Born in Northern Ireland, Hughes arrived as a poor immigrant to early nineteenth-century America, where he later became part of America’s first-generation of Irish clergy. He replaced his largely unpopular French-speaking predecessor, John Dubois, in 1842, as Irish Catholicism solidified in the New York Church. Given this setting, it is likely that Hughes was gravely

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73 Ibid., 243.
75 Ibid., 115-118.
unhappy with Brownson’s judgment of Irish-American Catholics as they made up many of his flock. In the battle over the question of American Catholic identity, the terms “Irish” and “Catholic” appeared to be increasingly tied together. Although Hughes had plenty of contempt for extreme Irish nationalism, separate ethnic churches, and any attempts that undermined the unification of Catholics into a single group, he was not pleased with Brownson’s philosophizing on the meaning of American Catholic identity. Hughes, after all, “had to make a diocese of many different peoples live together, work together, and build up together one church.”

Twice at Fordham University graduations, Hughes publicly condemned Brownson’s ideas about Americanization. In 1856, Hughes used his closing remarks to respond to Brownson’s address about the association of natural law and America’s founding principles with Catholicism, irritated that Brownson was trying to make Catholicism “fit” America’s Protestant founding story and vision. The second graduation, in 1861, saw an angry Hughes disagree with Brownson’s proclamation that Catholic support for anti-slavery and Union efforts needed to be strengthened as he again attempted to suggest a political, “American” Catholicism. Such efforts to unite American Catholicism with American politics, and, in particular, Brownson’s ideas about the pope’s temporal authority, also earned him the dislike of Irish-Catholic lay figures like Thomas D’Arcy McGee, John Mitchel, and T. Francis Meagher who were trying to distance themselves from nativist claims that they were “Papists.” Mitchel went so far as to argue, after the 1854 article on Native-Americanism, that Brownson himself was the cause of much of the nativist fervor because of his position on the pope. Brownson believed that the pope had

78 Shaw, Dagger John, 305.
79 Ibid., 343.
81 Ibid., 221.
control over temporals—life on earth—rather than only spiritual matters. This angered Irish “who were particularly sensitive to nativist charges against Catholic political ambitions.”

If the openness of nineteenth-century northern New England’s religious thought helped Brownson accept Catholicism in a Yankee world, it also kept him on the peripheries of his new faith. R.A. Herrera suggests, in fact, that Brownson’s identity as a Catholic was never really solidified because he stood somewhere between the mass of immigrant Catholics and his native-born American neighbors. He concludes that, “Brownson was a Yankee, proud of his English heritage, a recent Transcendentalist associate, and somewhat ill at ease in his new surroundings. He was in an awkward position to become the champion of Irish Catholic immigrants but circumstance forced him into the role. He became a casualty of the Nativist controversy.” While Catholic New England—and, in Brownson’s childhood, particularly northern New England—offered wide opportunities for the formation of alternate Catholic identities, it appeared that the rest of the country was moving towards an ethnic form of Catholicism, led by Irish and Irish-Americans. This is where Brownson erred: in trying to push for Catholic unification as well as American acceptance of Catholicism, he alienated a growing group of Irish-Catholic leaders.

By contrast, back in Brownson’s native Vermont, Catholicism was not so monolithic and converts continued to hold an important place in the Catholic imagination. In addition, Vermont also maintained a certain reverence for French-Canadian Catholics. Louis DeGoesbriand, the first bishop of Burlington, both recognized and emphasized Vermont’s unique Catholic heritage. He portrayed converts as important models of faith, and also acknowledged the close connection that his diocese had to Canada. DeGoesbriand’s pronounced

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82 Ibid., 218.
83 Herrera, Brownson: Sign of Contradiction, 77.
presence as the clear leader of the diocese was a change of style from the rabble-rousing O’Callaghan.  

O’Callaghan rallied for Irish support against an apparently hostile outside world. DeGoesbriand’s writings, in contrast, show that he avoided involving Burlington Catholics in any further public conflict. While DeGoesbriand frequently used Canada as a model of Catholic piety, he was careful, as in his discussion of St. Joseph, not to exclude the Irish from such discussions. In Vermont, DeGoesbriand had the difficult job of dealing with two increasingly large groups of established Catholics, the Irish and French Canadians. His use of conversion stories proved established, respected American Protestants a useful, accepted model to present to these two ethnic groups, and to the larger Protestant community within the state. Throughout his bishopric, which spanned from the 1853 until nearly 1900, DeGoesbriand described Protestant converts as ideal Catholics who were willing to sacrifice for their faith.

For DeGoesbriand, as evidenced in his work, Catholic Memoirs of Vermont and New Hampshire, those living on social and cultural peripheries served as the best models of faith to lifelong Catholics who were more recently arrived in the United States. In this particular text, DeGoesbriand showed an interest not only in the converts themselves, but in the example of Canada, and the faith that Canadian Catholics gave to Americans. He used conversion stories from Vermont and New Hampshire to speak to area Protestants, as well as Catholics, who might be reading his work. The fact that Yankee leaders like Ethan Allen’s daughter, Hoyt, and the Barbers chose to convert because of the religious or intellectual “truth” of Catholicism sent an important message to critical Protestants who watched in horror as the state’s immigrant Catholic

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84 Lance W. Harlow, Vermont’s First Catholic Bishop: The Life of Bishop Louis de Goesbriand, 1816-1899 (Barre, Vermont: L. Brown and Sons Printing Inc. 2001), 62. Lucey, “The Diocese of Burlington, Vermont: 1853”, 153-154. O’Callaghan was not the only priest to leave because of new bishop; a total of five of Vermont’s “original” priest left shortly after DeGoesbriand’s arrival.
population grew. Between 1830 and 1853, when DeGoesbriand arrived, the number of Catholics in the state jumped from 1,000 to 20,000, largely due to Irish and French immigration. According to the 1850 census, there were 15,000 Vermonters of Irish birth and 14,000 of Canadian origin. \(^{85}\) For DeGoesbriand, converts comprised a positive—and, in fact, necessary—part of New England’s Catholic identity, making Catholicism truly “American” while simultaneously moving the United States closer to the Canadian Catholic model he so cherished. DeGoesbriand chose to deal with both anti-Catholicism and the conflicts between Catholic ethnic groups with Anglo-American converts. The idea that “real” Anglo-Americans would choose to become Catholic based on the merits of the faith provided the bishop with a way to push the growth of the Burlington diocese past the very public problems of the day: class, ethnicity, and “American-ness.”

DeGoesbriand’s wrote *Memoirs* to “clear up” some common misconceptions about the history of the Catholic Church in his diocese. Though his final project grew significantly, his original intent was “to increase devotion to St. Joseph by relating some of the favors obtained through his mediation, and also to correct some inaccurate statements which have been published, concerning Sister FANNY ALLEN, and the Barber family of Claremont, New Hampshire.”\(^{86}\) DeGoesbriand wanted to “clear up” some points about Catholic history for Protestant readers, but the book also directly asked Catholic readers to increase the practice of their faith. Vermont’s first bishop called his flock to spend more time in devotion to Saint Joseph as was the practice in nearby Canada and, of course, to be more like the brave New England

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converts to Catholicism. Veneration of St. Joseph came to Canada with the early French
missionaries, and was an important part of “back-woods” and Native American culture. 87
Though DeGoesbriand’s Catholic Memoirs are not all his own original work—in fact, most of
the text is a compilation of published, transcribed pieces—his reason for publishing the book, his
discussion of converts, and his push for devotion to St. Joseph drew American attention to the
fact that Canadian Catholicism was closely connected to US Catholicism. DeGoesbriand
recognized that there was something special, unique, and compelling about the Vermont and
New Hampshire borderlands. He wrote that, “We humbly, but firmly, hope that this work will be
read extensively, because it is connected with the history of the Church, not only in Vermont and
New Hampshire, but in all the states of New England, Canada, New York, and many other
places.” 88

In Fanny Allen’s story, DeGeosbriand highlighted the significance of Canadian
Catholicism. Fanny was educated and converted at the convent in Montreal at Hotel-Dieu as
Montreal was the closest Catholic educational center. Fanny, who grew up with her mother and
stepfather after Ethan Allen’s untimely death, came from a “respectable” New England home. In
fact, her parents, residing in Swanton, forced their daughter to come home from Hotel-Dieu
when she informed them she planned to enter the convent. Back in Vermont, Fanny was courted,
spent time with Vermont socialites, and kept the best company her parents could offer, to no
avail. Undeterred, she returned to Montreal to enter the convent. 89 DeGoesbriand emphasized
that Fanny, until she entered the Church, was a member of Vermont’s elite. 90 Her decision to

89 Ibid., 14.
90 Ibid., 16-17.
become Catholic and to enter religious life ran contrary to the lifestyles of her family, friends, and acquaintances in Vermont. DeGoesbriand noted that “When the time of her profession had come (1810) many of her acquaintances of the United States came to witness this solemn action. They filled the whole chancel, and the church itself was quite full. All the Americans could not but wonder at seeing this young lady of Vermont shut herself up in a convent for the rest of her life.” 91 Despite resistance from those close to her, Fanny spent the rest of her very short life as a nun, suggesting that faith alone could move one to join the Catholic Church despite New England’s strong anti-Catholic tendencies.

Like Fanny Allen, Vermont Episcopal minister William H. Hoyt became something of a spectacle to his Protestant neighbors and friends when he made the decision to convert, but he nonetheless gave up his place in society for his faith. Hoyt also came from an indisputably proper “Yankee” background, having been born in Sandwich, New Hampshire, and attending both Dartmouth Andover Theological Seminary and the Theological Seminary of New York. 92 DeGoesbriand emphasized the idea that converts left more prestigious religious communities to enter what was largely considered the faith of the underclass. The bishop wrote that St. Albans, on the Quebec border, where Hoyt served the Episcopal Church, had a congregation of “well to do in the world.” 93 In a letter from Hoyt’s wife to her sister, Anne Hoyt described the difficulties she and her family faced in their decision to convert to Catholicism:

With all the strong prejudices against the Catholic Church, with which as a Protestant, I have been brought up, and with a strong and devoted attachment to the Episcopal Church in which I was baptized, confirmed and received the Sacrament of the Lord’s supper, and in which was

91 Ibid., 19.
92 Ibid., 128.
93 Ibid., 130.
all my delightful associations…you may easily believe me when, I say, I have found it hard to determine to leave her communion.\textsuperscript{94}

Hoyt’s most important quality in DeGoesbriand’s eyes was the model of faithful sacrifice that he and his family provided to other Catholics. Even before his wife passed away and he entered the priesthood, Hoyt did an outstanding job serving his community as a family man and lay leader. Once confirmed as a lay Catholic, Hoyt worked hard to secure the priest Father George Hamilton for St. Albans in 1847, after letting Fenwick know “the spiritual destitution of that distant part of his flock.” According to DeGoesbriand, Hoyt’s influence was the main reason for the construction of the St. Alban’s Catholic church.\textsuperscript{95} Like Fanny, Hoyt’s residence near the Canadian border also seems to have played an important part in his decision to enter the Catholic Church. Not only was Hoyt able to travel the seventy miles to Montreal for his own baptism on July 25, 1846 (Boston, in contrast, was nearly two hundred and fifty miles away from St. Albans), but he brought his wife and children back just a week later to enter the Church as well.\textsuperscript{96} As described earlier, Hoyt recorded in his diary many trips to visit the Canadian clergy, making his conversion experience one unique to Vermont and the border region.

Finally, DeGoesbriand told the vivid story of the Barber family. As with his other tales, DeGoesbriand placed strong emphasis on the fact that, in their identification as Catholics, the Barbers suffered at the hands of New England society. Nonetheless, the theological and rational “truth” of Catholicism was evident to both Daniel and Virgil Barber, and so they had no choice but to convert after they learned of the necessity of being part of the one unified, historic Church. Daniel Barber was of “Yankee stock,” having been born in Simsbury, Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 132.
before coming to New Hampshire. However, attesting to the fluidity of New England Puritan thought, his father had left the Congregational Church to join an order called Sergeant Dewey’s Meeting.  

Barber explained that he thus considered himself a “Congregational Dissenter” of “the strict Puritanic order” until the age of twenty-seven as was common in Connecticut at this time. He then converted to Episcopalian, which was, next to Catholicism, perhaps the most hated Christian religion in New England, viewed as too distant from Congregationalism and too close to its Catholic roots, which prepared him for his later entry into the Catholic Church.

DeGoesbriand made extensive use of Barber’s own documents to show how difficult he found it to leave Congregationalism in New England society. Barber wrote that, “In becoming an Episcopalian, I will remember one popular difficulty I had to encounter. It was a religion which, from its very first introduction into New England, had ever felt the heavy hand of its enemies. To be a church-man there was at least a sort of disfranchisement in public esteem.”

However, Barber’s troubles were only to multiply because, as an Episcopalian priest, he realized that he was part of “a real branch of the Catholic Church,” an even less respectable religion by New England standards. Barber would go on to baptize Fanny Allen, and was moved by her subsequent conversion to Catholicism. His son Virgil’s conversion and a meeting with Bishop Cheverus, the first bishop of Boston, confirmed his belief in Catholicism.

Despite the social stigma attached to Catholicism, he eventually defended it because of its religious or theological “truth.” He made his views known to his many acquaintances, as evidenced by the letters that DeGoesbriand reprinted in Catholic Memoirs. In one letter, Daniel

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97 Ibid., 25.
99 Ibid., 28.
100 Ibid., 29.
101 Ibid., 33.
Barber wrote that preconceived notions needed to be abandoned to reach the true faith: “It is difficult, in most cases impossible, to arrive at the knowledge of truth, unless we divest ourselves of prejudices. You have heard much of the Catholic Church; and that much but very little indeed to induce you to admire and esteem it.” 102 Barber also noted that New Englanders were particularly close-minded to Catholicism, pointing out in another letter, written while staying in Maryland, that the more numerous Catholic population there was “wealthy and hospitable,” despite being the “people whom you put down as idolators.” 103

While Daniel Barber would go on to become a Catholic priest in his later life, the more profound impact for Boston would come from his son, the long-serving missionary priest, Virgil Barber. As a young man with a growing family, Virgil had even more to lose socially and personally by his conversion. DeGoesbriand again emphasized this, writing that, “Reverend Virgil Barber by becoming a Catholic lost not only his property and position in society, as he knew well he would, but he voluntarily separated from his accomplished wife, at the age of thirty-four, and from his children.” 104 Barber had to leave his position at a Protestant school due to public pressure. Entering the ancient, unified Catholic Church was, as with the other converts, far more important to Barber than his social standing. On this topic of the Church as the institution of the lowest class of Americans, DeGoesbriand made an interesting insertion in his Catholic Memoirs that was not found in Fenwick’s account of Barber’s conversion: DeGoesbriand wrote that Barber’s interest in Catholicism was originally piqued by his pious “Irish servant girl” and her constant use of her prayer book. 105

102 Ibid., 45.
103 Ibid., 54.
104 Ibid., 60.
105 Ibid., 78.
DeGoesbriand’s text displayed the most esteemed converts from nineteenth-century northern New England, all of whom, like the displaced Barber, underwent personal strain to join what was largely seen as the church of the underclass. DeGoesbriand, as is evident from his focus on Fanny Allen, was interested in telling not just the story of learned male converts who entered the priesthood, but also of “proper” Anglo-American girls who converted to Catholicism. In an additional volume, *The Young Converts*, DeGoesbriand told the story of three Vermont girls, Debbie, Helen and Anna Barlow, who, after a stay at the convent school of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal, were moved to convert despite the angry reactions of their parents and neighbors. While the original volume of *Catholic Memoirs* (which was published only for the purpose of “northern Vermont” local interest) seems not to have survived, the second edition suggests that because DeGoesbriand worried that New Englanders would not believe that a whole group of sisters would willingly convert to this much hated-religion, he commissioned a new version of the text which included large extracts from the actual letters and diary entries of the sisters.\(^{106}\)

Complied for the bishop by the well-known Vermont Catholic author, Mrs. Julia C. Smalley, *The Young Converts*, like DeGoesbriand’s other musings, emphasized that the girls converted because their faith was so strong, and they thus could not be deterred by the atmosphere of violent distrust surrounding Catholicism in their home state. The teaching of the good Canadian sisters in Montreal was also the impetus for Debbie, the eldest, to become Catholic, an example which her sisters followed. Yet, the hardship and loss of social status associated with being Catholic in nineteenth-century Yankee New England, the girls converted.

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\(^{106}\) L. DeGoesbriand, *The Young Converts: or, Memoirs of the Three Sisters, Debbie, Helen and Anna Barlow*, ed. Z. Druon, arranged by J.C. Smalley (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Co., 1908), 4. The first edition no longer seems to be in existence, but Smalley notes that originally this particular text was published only locally, because it was assumed that it would attract the attention of only northern Vermon ters.
Debbie risks the anger of her parents and Helen loses the affection of her Protestant fiancé, ending her engagement. The text portrayed the sisters as upstanding and educated, eloquent in their defense of their new religion rather than merely prodded by the examples shown to them in the convent school. As with the male converts, reason guided them to the faith. Debbie wrote in a letter that she has read extensively about both Protestantism and Catholicism, and despite American opinion, will convert because of the truth of the Church: “I have read and conversed with many; and have at last decided to be guided by faith and my own reason. I have heard the Catholics ridiculed and assailed in every possible manner, not by own relatives more than by others.”

The truth of the Church, the atmosphere of anti-Catholicism in New England, and the example of Canadian Catholicism once again played a significant role in the Barlow sisters’ story, emphasizing the unique nature of northern Vermont.

DeGoesbriand’s publication of the Catholic Memoirs—as well as the other works he had a hand in creating—provide an important model for understanding an alternate nineteenth-century Catholic identity. Northern New England was unique in that it produced so many well-known Yankee converts from admirable families, and that it bordered Canada, providing an opportunity to compare American success in establishing the Catholic Church to success in nearby Quebec. Through his discussion of this region and the men and women who became Catholic there, DeGoesbriand called into question the typical understanding of Catholic identity held by nineteenth-century New Englanders. In his description of Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen’s daughter entrance into a Canadian order, multiple tales of learned, Protestant priests who made the educated decision to enter the Catholic Church, and the grand Canadian Catholic past, DeGoesbriand challenged nativists who likely, by the time this text was written, considered

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107 Ibid., 53.
American Catholic identity to be largely that of foreigners of Irish stock. By making the converts a clear part of Vermont and New Hampshire’s (and, with Canada, North America’s founding) history, DeGoesbriand created an important category of identity that was not limited to only immigrants or lifelong Catholics. Perhaps he understood that, in doing so, his developing church might attract more Protestant Americans. The Bishop noted that the converts did inspire one another; after baptizing a reluctant, unbelieving Fanny Barber in 1807, the then-Episcopal minister Daniel Barber was deeply moved by her stunning conversation to Catholicism. DeGoesbriand wrote that “It has been repeatedly stated that he was also present at her profession at the Hotel-Dieu, and that he visited her, that he was much impressed with her heroic determination so that his conversion to the Catholic faith was due in great measure to her influence.”

In his work, DeGoesbriand thus portrayed the converts as outstanding Catholics, willing to go to great lengths to support their faith. He also noted Vermont’s complex interconnections, focusing especially on the importance of Canadian Catholicism as an example to struggling New Englanders. Perhaps most importantly, DeGoesbriand avoided speaking to any specific ethnic group. This approach suggests that the Bishop understood that the borderlands held a unique opportunity for identity formation that was not available in centers like Bishop’s Hughes New York, or for those who, like Brownson, chose to engage in the increasingly controversial discussion of ethnicity’s link to American Catholicism. One of the most published historians of New England Catholic history, William Leo Lucey, argued that the uniqueness of Vermont in terms of ethnicity, identity, and nativism, the mix of French-Canadian,

\[108\] Ibid., 33.
Irish, and Anglo-American converts in such a rural setting created an atmosphere more receptive to Catholicism, or, at least, less prone to outright nativist attacks:

The surprisingly large number of prominent Vermont Yankees converted to the Catholic faith in the decade preceding the arrival of DeGoesbriand gave Catholicism a tone of respectability that certainly shielded the bulk of Catholics, ‘foreigners and natives,’ from organized opposition. These Irish and Canadian Catholics were no doubt soon told that Fanny Allen, daughter of the famous Ethan, was converted and died a nun. 109

DeGoesbriand was aware that nineteenth-century Vermont provided a space where the formation of an Irish-led, ethnically divided form of Catholicism was not a foregone conclusion. The stories of native converts from Protestantism suggest a deeply malleable idea of identity both within and outside of the Catholic Church. In Vermont, proximity to Canada, removal from the population centers of Boston and New York, a mix of French and Irish parishioners, and the conversion of several key Vermonters led to a unique landscape where, as Brownson sought to show the rest of the country, Catholicism was not necessarily incompatible with American values. Although O’Callaghan and Hughes’s reaction to men like Brownson suggests the shape that American Catholicism would most commonly take by the twentieth century— that is, an Irish-led, ethnically divided, hierarchal model where the voices of thinkers like Brownson would be silenced—the story of the northern borderlands provides a look at an alternate identity that was native American rather than ethnic in its composition. At the same time, DeGoesbriand was careful not to alienate French-Canadian Vermonters for the sake of appeasing a strengthened Irish constituency because he understood that Canada was crucial to the state’s Catholic identity. Native-born converts from Protestantism were a safe model to present to all Catholics, and gave

109 Ibid., 133-134.
nineteenth-century leaders hope that Catholicism could become favorable to a largely Protestant society.
VI. DEGOESBRIAND’S VERMONT, BACON’S MAINE AND FITZPATRICK’S BOSTON: THE CASE FOR A UNIQUE NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND CATHOLICISM, 1853 AND BEYOND

During the 1850s, the American Catholic Church in the northeast largely left the frontier or developmental stage, and moved into an era of Irish, urban, and institutional development. Yet, in the newly formed dioceses of Portland, Maine and Burlington, Vermont, Catholics were still subject to some of the same frontier conditions—spread out populations, rural churches—of the previous decades. Moreover, Bishop David Bacon of Maine and Bishop Louis DeGoesbriand of Vermont still ministered to borderlands Catholics. French-Canadian Catholics were particularly aware of their borderlands position as they came into the United States in substantial numbers during the Civil War era. Living in the United States but still close to their Canadian home, French Canadians made a concerted attempt to live in separate ethnic neighborhoods and parishes during the second half of the nineteenth century. The French-Canadian experience in Maine, Vermont and, to an increasing extent, New Hampshire, separated DeGoesbriand and Bacon’s work in northern New England from that of Bishop Fitzpatrick’s work in Boston. As the mainstream Catholic historiography argues, ethnicity became more important to defining Catholic identity following the arrival of the Famine Irish and their growing influence on the American Catholic hierarchy. Irish immigration changed the face of American Catholicism throughout the country, but New England Catholicism did not become only Irish.
Boston had become a marked stronghold of Irish Catholicism by the 1850s. Bishop Fenwick’s successor, Boston native Bishop John Bernard Fitzpatrick, watched the Irish Catholic position in New England expand during the 1840s, in large part due to the rapid pace of Irish-Catholic immigration. By 1845, the Irish made up almost a fourth of Boston’s total population. In 1847, the year of the Great Famine in Ireland, an estimated 37,000 Irish arrivals made their way to Boston.¹ When he took over in 1846, Fitzpatrick had a good idea of the challenges he faced. Several years earlier, Bishop Fenwick reported that the difference between the size of the Diocese in 1825 and 1840 was vast. With only two priests in 1825, the Diocese had twenty-nine priests just fifteen years later. Though Fenwick was ministering to a growing flock, he believed that “The Catholic religion has already begun to assume a firm and flourishing position, not only in the metropolis, but in all the six States of New England.”² As immigration and the need for priests increased, the 1840s witnessed the establishment of Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. This was the realization of Fenwick’s dream of a diocesan institution to train native clergy, an effort he had single-handedly begun in his own home years earlier. By 1846, there were 90 boarders at Holy Cross with “more expected.” Just a few months later, Fenwick handed the institution over to his order, the Jesuits, so they could train new recruits for the New England priesthood.³

Fitzpatrick focused his attention on the Irish immigrants around Boston because their needs were so great. While Cheverus and Fenwick produced lots of writing about the pockets of Catholics throughout their diocese—they maintained close relationships with the Maine Indians,

the early Maine Catholic leaders like the Kavanaghs, the Vermont convert communities, and even the growing communities of Catholics in places like Hartford, Connecticut and throughout Rhode Island—Fitzpatrick focused on the greater Boston area out of necessity. While the College of the Holy Cross was created to serve a growing need for priests, this alone did not solve the need for resources as the Irish poured into the greater Boston area. In 1847, the year of the great potato famine, the diocese would enter a particularly difficult period. Fitzpatrick noted early that year that the Christmas confessionals had seen heavy traffic, and even six priests could not meet the needs of the city in this regard.\(^4\) The Irish overwhelmed the confessionals again during the Easter season, and many who arrived to confess their sins had “to go away unheard.”\(^5\)

In addition to the sheer volume of Catholics, many who arrived during the 1840s were both poor and sick. Fevers and epidemics had created terrible circumstances for the struggling Catholic population during the previous months. Cholera struck the city as well as the greater New England region violently in 1846, taxing the strength of the priests of the Diocese. By July there was “much sickness in Boston. Every Priest busily engaged in attending upon them. Many are taken down in consequence of drinking cold water.”\(^6\) In August of that year, Fitzpatrick reported that, "The heat is still excessive. Many cases of Violent cholera morus causing death in a few hours have occurred during the last three to four days."\(^7\) The final weeks of the month gave way to an even more staggering death toll. After days “between 85&100” degrees with nights nearly as hot, “the deaths…averaged over 100 per week on a population of 115,000.” Fitzpatrick noted that his clergy could barely keep up with the need for sacraments from the sick

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\(^4\) Ibid., entry for January 9, 1847.  
\(^5\) Ibid., entry for April 17, 1847.  
\(^6\) Ibid., entry for July 10, 1846.  
\(^7\) Ibid., entry for August 17, 1846.
and dying, and thus “the Priests of the Cathedral as well as the other Church have been on foot
night & day almost incessantly.”

These problems were compounded by the loss of Boston’s beloved Fenwick.
Fitzpatrick’s bishopric coincided perfectly with the challenges of the late 1840s; the immigration
immigration and sickness hit Boston at the same time as Fenwick’s death. In 1846, Bishop
Bishop Fenwick fell ill due to long-term health conditions. His journal is filled with references to
his inability to celebrate Mass early in 1846, leaving his coadjutor and former student,
Fitzpatrick, to take over the affairs of the Diocese. Despite the exciting growth of the College of
the Holy Cross in nearby Worcester, the year started ominously for Fenwick. On January 6,
Fenwick wrote, again referring to himself in the third person, “The B’p hears Mass unable to say
it in consequence of medicine. Last Mass is celebrated by Rev’d Mr. Lyndon.” He later wrote
that he had “passed a bad night”, and, by the end of the month, was seen by three doctors for
swelling in his legs. Increasingly Fenwick wrote about more about Fitzpatrick’s actions than
his own as he became increasingly unable to maintain his normal duties. The hot, feverish
cholera summer of 1846 that killed so many Irish Catholic immigrants was also Fenwick’s last.
The overweight Fenwick suffered from heart problems for at least several months before his
death, though his contemporaries noted that his vivacious, humorous personality continued to
shine through until just days before his passing. Fitzpatrick wrote only three days before
Fenwick’s death that it was, “Excessively hot, thermometer 103 in the shade, the B’p is much
oppressed by the heat and suffers. Still cheerful & jocuse. He sits upon the piazza until after ten
in the evening entertaining us all with anecdotes and mirth. The night he passes without sleep or

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8 Ibid., entry for August 31, 1846.
9 Ibid., entry for January 6, 1846.
10 Ibid., entry for January 9 and January 30, 1846.
rest." Even the night before he passed, "The Bishop spoke several times… with calmness and too, with that playfulness so remarkable in his character." When Fenwick finally died after a week of suffering on the morning of August 11, the period of mourning that followed testified to his personality and the many undertakings he had overseen for the growth of his Diocese. It marked an important transition into the “modern” and immigrant phase of the Diocese of Boston. In the midst of the scorching cholera summer, so many Protestant and Catholic leaders came to see Fenwick’s body laid out at his home that it had to be moved to the church as the “crowd swells to such a degree that the avenues of the house are insufficient for their passage.” Though Fitzpatrick had to quickly get back to a state of normalcy in order to deal with the cholera epidemic, Fenwick’s presence was missed.

Boston thus entered not only a new stage of immigration, but a new stage of institutional leadership. Fitzpatrick was a very different man from Fenwick, and faced an increasing set of challenges. Fenwick, though he noted the difficulties of tending to his scattered flock throughout his journal, was often quite positive about the future of the Diocese. Boston was still in its institutional infancy, and Fenwick trusted that it could be built into a well-organized church full of native-born, well-trained, locally-educated priests. Fenwick was amiable in his correspondence and his entries, getting along with even the most difficult of his contemporaries; he supported men like O’Callaghan and Orestes Brownson, even while their non-traditional ideas won them much disdain from others. And, though Fenwick had faced anti-Catholicism at certain moments, such as the

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11 Ibid., entry for August 7, 1846.
12 Ibid., entry for August 11, 1846.
13 Ibid.
burning of the Charleston convent and during the construction of Holy Cross, he still had something of a clean slate to work with, because he became bishop just before the momentous momentous Irish immigrant shift of the late 1840s.

In contrast, the world that Fitzpatrick would oversee was increasingly complicated by the 1840s. Fitzpatrick biographer Thomas O’Connor has noted that the Fitzpatrick years were some “of the most complex, disruptive, and dangerous periods in the early life of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States.”\(^{14}\) Fitzpatrick saw not only an increase in the number of Catholics coming to the area, but an increase in negative reaction towards the Irish that would come to dominate the Catholic Church in Boston. Fitzpatrick continued to shoulder the typical duties of his predecessor, dealing with day-to-day lay and clergy struggles within the diocese. He had to remove, for instance, Father John O’Beirne of Chelsea for being an “incorrigible drunk” at the end of 1847. But, in addition to such “normal” duties, he now had far bigger problems than outspoken priests and parishioners begging for permanent clergy.\(^{15}\)

While the Maryland-born Fenwick spent his days dreaming of an American-born clergy, Fitzpatrick faced a surge of ethnic Catholic development. Fitzpatrick occupied a difficult position because he was both Irish in heritage, with immigrant parents, yet also American-born and Boston bred. Though he disdained “national manifestations” of Irish Catholic identity by immigrants, Fitzpatrick expressed deep disappointment with the behavior of native-born Americans towards these same Irish immigrants.\(^{16}\) During 1847, Fitzpatrick lost respect for the supposed freedom and toleration of his homeland. During a June parade with a “no Popery


\(^{15}\) Fitzpatrick, *Bishop’s Journal*, vol. 3, entry for December 22, 1847.

\(^{16}\) Thomas H. O’Connor, *Fitzpatrick’s Boston 1846-1866: John Bernard Fitzpatrick, Third Bishop of Boston* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), 37. O’Connor writes that Fitzpatrick wanted to avoid “artificial” displays of identity like shamrocks so he could “impress” Boston natives with “the sobriety and dependability of the Irish people”.
Banner,” he remarked caustically that such reminders of the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill were “emblems of Liberty no doubt.” 17 He appeared even more infuriated with the lack of care the city showed towards the sick Irish immigrants held at the Deer Island quarantine station. One of his priests, Father Fitzsimmons, was required to get permission from City Hall to enter the Poor House and Hospital on the island each time he needed to visit his flock.18 Priests were allowed to visit the sick and dying only twice a week, a decision which prompted the bishop to sarcastically remark, “This is religious liberty!” 19 Even a personal meeting with the mayor could not produce a permit for Fitzpatrick’s priests, which the bishop took as a city-sponsored persecution of the destitute Irish.20

Because of these challenges with the Irish and their reception, Fitzpatrick desperately needed everyone to work together for a single cause. Fitzpatrick was thus critical of both lay and clerical leaders who chose to disregard the hierarchical order of the Catholic Church. Whereas Fenwick had seemingly close relationships with sometimes eccentric public figures like O’Callaghan and Brownson, Fitzpatrick’s dealings with them, as noted earlier, appeared strained. Overall, Fitzpatrick can best be described as a more serious leader than Fenwick. Fitzpatrick had to be this way: during his bishopric, he was faced not only with the flood of Irish Catholic immigration into the city, but the increased nativism that followed such growth, the Civil War, and his long illness.21 Despite all these obstacles, he persevered during his rather short term as bishop.

18 Ibid., entry for June 14, 1847.
19 Ibid., entry for June 16, 1847.
20 Ibid., entry for June 26, 1847.
Fitzpatrick was an educated man, and had “the prudence and judgment” of a “mature” leader.\textsuperscript{22}

It would be misleading to argue that northern New England followed a completely different trajectory than Boston as several cities in northern New England also looked increasingly Irish and increasingly urban by the 1850s. But northern New England’s situation was complicated by its proximity to Canada. Industrializing cities throughout New England needed cheap labor, which could be found in the form of Irish Catholics, and, soon after that, Quebecois Catholics who took the expanding railways into textile cities. In several cities that flourished during the middle to late of the nineteenth century, a typical pattern ensued: the Irish would build the Catholic Church and its institutions, hoping to create an “American” or English-speaking Catholic Church. The French Canadians would then arrive, and, after a series of national and ethnic disagreements with the Irish-American leadership, move on to form their own churches.\textsuperscript{23} To most, it appeared that the Irish were “winning” the ethnic Catholic struggle, and, because their numbers overwhelmed New England, it was assumed that they had truly introduced Catholicism to the region.\textsuperscript{24} Boston, Fitzpatrick found, became a particular focal point of Irish Catholic activity. Here, a great influx of Famine-era Irish meant that Church leaders had to direct their focus inward rather than continuing to care for places like Maine and Vermont. This was likely part of Rome’s reasoning for deciding, in 1853, that the Dioceses of Portland and Burlington should be established as their own diocesan seats.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 397. See also O’Connor, Fitzpatrick’s Boston 1846-1866, xiii-xiv. As O’Connor says, “Disastrous famines and fatal epidemics in the late 1840s and early 1850s brought hundreds of thousands of people from their homes in Ireland to seek shelter and safety in American. Know-Nothings organized their political forces in the mid-1850s to prevent any further influx of foreigners and to limit the rights of those who were already here. And all the while, the bitter controversy over slavery was rising….These difficult years called for leaders of patience and courage.”


French-Canadian identity played an important role in northern New England Catholicism. French-Canadian workers may not have been able to challenge the Irish effectively in strongholds like Boston, but they made up such a large proportion of workers in textile cities like Lewiston, Maine and Manchester, New Hampshire that they did a better job of creating a French-Canadian milieu in northern New England cities. While some parts of Maine and Vermont would thus follow the increasingly typical pattern of ethnic, urban Catholicism (particularly in the textile areas of southern Maine) as the century progressed, other regions would instead continue to be more rural, and continued their identity as transnational borderlands.

Therefore, the 1840s and 1850s marked an important turning point for New England Catholicism, starkly separating religious practice in industrial or urban centers from that in less-developed or peripheral regions. As Boston was flooded with Irish immigrants, the growing mid-century immigration of Irish and French Canadians to the northeast actually reinforced some of the “borderlands” characteristics of northern New England by causing it to look increasingly different from southern New England’s centers. Here, the French-Canadian element remained strong and reliance on Canadian resources continued. Before Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont were separated into the dioceses of Portland and Burlington in 1853, with New Hampshire briefly falling under Portland’s control, Boston struggled to serve these areas effectively.

Northern New England possessed a certain duality by the time it split from the Diocese of Boston. Some areas maintained rural characteristics and a mixed Irish-French Catholicism, while manufacturing areas saw an increase in ethnic solidarity and ethnic Catholicism similar to that in Boston. Maine’s first independent bishop, David Bacon,
had to be both a city and rural administrator after his appointment in 1853. The Irish filled the
cities of Portland, Bangor, Lewiston, and Ellsworth as laborers, but the northern farm towns of
Eastport, Calais and Machias also became home to numerous Irish, showing the mixed urban-
rural makeup of the state. Some cities like Lewiston, Maine and Manchester, New Hampshire
followed the typical story of Irish-led, urban Catholicism told in the general historiography. But,
the arrival of French-Canadian workers during the Civil War period complicated Maine and New
Hampshire’s growth.

In Lewiston, Irish laborers, struggling for economic sustenance, were the first Catholic
arrivals to the manufacturing town during the 1850s. While some Irish moved up to better
positions during their first two decades in Maine, many continued to be part of the laboring class.
Thus, their jobs—and control of their churches—were challenged by French-Canadian arrivals
by the 1870s. As French Canadians arrived to Lewiston in greater numbers, the working-class
Irish Catholic population also competed with the new arrivals for affordable housing, but the
French faced an even harder adjustment to the English-speaking Catholic structure in New
England. This pattern was familiar: Irish-Catholic dominance at the expense of the later-arrived
French speakers became a common problem throughout New England manufacturing towns.

The first Mass in Lewiston took place in 1850, but, due to anti-Catholic sentiment and the
associated problems in obtaining the necessary land, St. Joseph’s Church was not built for the

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Publications, 1990), 21. Mundy shows, from the 1850 census, that while Portland, Bangor, Lewiston, and Ellsworth
were home to the most Irish—here, mostly in the form of laborers—“Aroostook County proves the exception to the
rule as far as occupation is concerned” with 59% of Irish working as farmers.
26 Margaret Buker Jay, “The Irish Experience in Lewiston, 1850-1880: Opportunity and Social Mobility on the
Urban Frontier”, in *They Change Their Sky: The Irish in Maine*, ed. Michael C. Connolly (Orono, Maine: The
27 Ibid., 207.
28 For first-hand accounts of this ethnic division at Manchester’s Amoskeag Mills, see Tamara K. Hareven and
Randolph Langenbach, eds, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory-City* (Hanover, New Hampshire:
Irish of the city until 1867. 29 Despite incidents of anti-Catholicism in Maine that might have unified the Catholic population, French speakers still desired separate national or ethnic parishes that would cater to their spiritual needs. In a situation similar to other New England cities, the French Canadians had to establish their own churches and schools in order to have their needs met as the existing structure was English speaking and dominated by the Irish. As the *Lewiston Journal* reported, “Parish schools were especially necessary for French-Canadian immigrants who settled in Maine and other New England states, because French was the only language they knew.” The first French-Canadian church was built in Lewiston in 1873, and followed by other institutions. 30

The Diocese of Portland—and priests from Quebec—were often willing to divide the population of Lewiston into separate, ethnic parishes. Throughout New England, the establishment of French-speaking churches and schools allowed the Diocese to avoid ethnic conflicts and give the French control of individual parishes while still leaving the Irish in leadership positions of control throughout the Diocese. In the case of Lewiston, Bishop Bacon’s choice of Pierre Hevey as the French-Canadian community priest resulted in separate schools, orphanages, and societies run with the help of French-Canadian religious orders. 31 Even Bacon’s successor, Bishop Louis Walsh, chose to establish a new French-Canadian church for the increasing immigrant families despite his misgivings about national parishes. 32

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32 Ibid., 28-29. It is also worth noting that conflicts over Irish priests in French-Canadian areas were fairly common throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.
Lewiston mirrored the pattern of separate ethnic churches (albeit with a continued Irish preference for assimilation) that was present in most large, southern New England towns. The French Canadians faced competition for diocesan resources as well as an economic situation in which their Irish counterparts were beginning to enter into higher-level jobs. Ethnic divisions spilled over into fights about Church authority, with French-Canadian residents in Lewiston reacting angrily to the appointment of the Irish Bishop Walsh in 1906. Church leaders thus vacillated between appeasing separate French parishes and moving towards a more unified “American” or Irish-led church. In either case, French Canadians faced a more difficult Church environment than the Irish because they had arrived later. They negotiated with officials and the Irish leadership in order to get the national parishes they desired because they were not the first-arrived nor were they English speaking. They were constantly reminded of their place. National or ethnic parishes were subject to the bishop of Maine’s approval. Bishop Walsh made this clear during the so-called Corporation Sole Controversy of 1906 to 1913 during which he put an Irish priest in charge of a largely French congregation. When Lewiston and Biddeford Franco-American Catholics protested in newspapers and withheld their tithes, he simply excommunicated the detractors. Walsh believed that, “in the Catholic Church, the people are not allowed to think and say and do as they like but they are to follow and obey the Church authorities.”

33 Ibid., 30-33.
New Hampshire was a part of the Diocese of Portland until 1884. Manchester followed a pattern similar to that of Lewiston, with the Irish maintaining leadership positions as the French moved into the city in the decades following the Civil War. Work and religious conflicts became conflated, with French speakers often subservient to their Irish bosses. In fact, a retired worker from Manchester’s Amoskeag Mills noted that, “If a Canadian got a higher job, it was because he had Irish friends. Like Omer, who became a boss, a second hand, because the big bosses liked him.”36 By the early twentieth century, the French made up half of Amoskeag’s workforce, with the Irish making up only 13 percent of workers, likely because they moved into other more lucrative jobs.37 It was this opportunity to work that brought Catholics into New Hampshire in the first place, as the state had been staunchly anti-Catholic from its founding. Boston historian Thomas O’Connor writes that before the creation of the Diocese of Portland in “New Hampshire, the number of Catholics had always been small and therefore had never required much attention until the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company began its textile operations in Manchester in 1839. After that, it was necessary for an itinerant priest to say Mass on a regular basis while the bishop of Boston figured out how to provide for New Hampshire's expanding Catholic communities.” Cities like Lewiston and Manchester were thus key reasons for the creation of a separate Diocese of Portland.38

However, this new parish, urban and ethnic-directed Catholicism did not simply take over the earlier characteristics of northern New England. The experience of

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industrial, ethnic Catholics who arrived in the mid-nineteenth century should not be considered monolithic. The new dioceses of Burlington and Portland did not mean an adequate supply of priests was suddenly available, or that all important Catholic groups were urban dwellers. When Bishop Bacon began presiding over his newly created diocese of Portland, he was forced to send out the same call for help that the Boston bishops did before him. Though creating state-based dioceses ushered in a period of institutional Catholicism instead of frontier Catholicism, struggles from the earlier period were still present. In what appears to be an unfinished letter to the Provincial Council of New York, he asked for help in Maine and New Hampshire, noting that 40,000 square miles of land was extremely difficult to staff. There were by this time, he estimated, “over this vast extent…scattered between 50 & 60,000 Catholics, some 2,500 whom are Indians.” He further lamented that he had only eleven priests for this whole area, with only two being “his.” The other priests were “borrowed” Jesuits like the Swiss Father John Bapst who had been “lent to the Maine missions” by Fitzpatrick of Boston.39 Father Bapst, along with only two Jesuits, covered an area of about 200 square miles, and served 9,000 Catholics.40 Bacon had the further problem of New Hampshire, noting that he could use 3-4 priests for the growing city of Nashua alone, but relied instead on a single priest, Father O’Donnell. 41 New Hampshire remained part of the Portland dioceses during its early years, and mill cities expanded, putting additional pressure on Bacon.

The borderlands characteristics of Maine persisted after the creation of the Diocese of Portland because the state maintained connections to Canada and remained a path for immigrants.

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39 Bishop David Bacon to unknown recipient, undated, Bishop Bacon Papers, Archives of the Diocese of Portland. Bacon served from 1855-1874.
41 Bishop David Bacon to unknown recipient, 2 October 1855, Bishop David Bacon Papers, Archives of the Diocese of Portland, Maine.
to enter New England. Some Irish who came to Maine were transplants from Boston and southern New England, but others came into the United States through Canada, and stay in Maine. Though the earlier Whitefield-area Catholic settlement (which had been an outgrowth of Damariscotta’s first prominent Catholic settlers like the Kavanaghs) was of farmers, industry brought Irish Catholics into the state as the nineteenth century This change happened quickly. In Bangor, for instance, there were few Catholics in 1830, but, by only 1836, there were 1,000 Catholics there, thanks in large part to the lumber industry. The Irish found their way into the state in increasing numbers by the 1830s via New Brunswick and Quebec. Taking inexpensive passage on timber ships into St. John allowed Irish immigrants to then quickly continue into Maine. According to James H. Mundy in his depiction of the sick, starving immigrants to Maine, “Whenever a surge occurred, Canada was the first to see the result. While only a small proportion of Irishmen lingered in the British Provinces, a large percentage landed there. A good barometer of the number and condition of immigrants to be anticipated in any one year was the quarantine station at Grosse Isle. Established during the cholera epidemic of 1832, it was totally overwhelmed by the flood that engulfed it.” Maine was again a borderland for immigrants “fatally situated” near Boston, the Maritimes, and Quebec. It gained Irish by the 1830s because of those who traveled south as part of the New

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43 See especially Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, 4, 196-197 and Margaret E. Fitzgerald and Joseph A. King. The Uncounted Irish in Canada and the United States (Toronto: P.D. Meany Publishers, 1990), ix, 3. For the importance of the Saint John River Valley Irish in particular, see Chapter 5, “The New Brunswick Irish: Uncovering their Roots,” 67- 82. Both of these texts are important in that they stress the concept of “North American immigration” rather than simply Irish immigration directly to the United States. The Irish came not only to cities in the eastern United States, but also settled in the west of the country, as well as in rural Canada.
44 Lord et al., History of the Archdiocese of Boston, vol. 2, 118-121. Lord writes that this movement largely took place between 1817 and 1842.
45 Mundy, Hard Times, Hard Men, 9.
Brunswick timber industry, as well as those who traveled north from Boston for work. This liminal geographic position meant that Maine’s borderlands character continued to exist, particularly in northern Maine even as urban settlement intensified in the southern part of the state.

This was particularly true in northern Maine. When Bishop Bacon inherited the region known as “Madawaska,” he faced a complex ethnic and national situation that had its roots in the culture of the American-Canadian borderlands. As the Deane and Kavanagh survey had found two decades earlier, Aroostook County was home to a strikingly diverse array of Catholics by nineteenth-century standards, and its rural character made it all the more unique as immigration to industrial areas continued further south. Even in 1850, most residents of northern Maine were farmers with little in common with their Lewiston counterparts. And, control over Madawaska was far from complete when Bacon became bishop in 1853. Despite the fact the Maine-New Brunswick border had been decided formally in 1842, diocesan lines did not match state lines until a Vatican meeting in 1870. Only then was Bacon given northern Maine as part of his jurisdiction.

The attitude of Catholics in the region was still "frontier-like" during Bacon’s day. Madawaska had been moved between different dioceses and different local priests for a century, so the Madawaskans were outspoken advocates of their own religious destinies. One local mission church on the American side of the St. John River petitioned Rome directly in 1865 so they could be moved into the Diocese of Portland instead of being regularly shifted between

46 Ibid., 10-11.
Canadian dioceses. Anger over the location of the region’s first parish, St. Basile, had emanated from those on the South Bank of the St. John since its founding. The actual for the “American” or South Bank of the River to join the Diocese of Boston—soon to be Diocese of Portland—arose from a group of Madawaskans called Carmelites who had mission church at Carmel, across from St. Basile. They “soon inspired their neighbors on south bank and formed an Association des Catholiques de l’Arroostook, commencing a vigorous campaign for separation.” Residents of the South Bank hoped to gain a resident priest and secure a location that was easier to access. The Aroostook Catholic Association garnered 1018 signatures on a petition to Pope Pius IX in 1864 because they were unhappy with the Bishop of New Brunswick as their primary administrator. They petitioned Rome directly to join the American Church. This pressure undoubtedly contributed to the Vatican’s decision to place the American side of the River under the Diocese of Portland in 1870.

Although the Carmel mission soon closed, a century after the establishment of St. Basile’s, Catholics on the South Bank had finally regained control of their ecclesiastical “boundaries.” Actually, those on the Maine side of Madawaska had endeavored to be part of Boston right after the new Maine-New Brunswick political boundary was drawn by the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty, long before the many signatures to the pope. In the end, linguistic, and ethnic differences did not divide the

50 Ibid., 72.
52 Ibid., 78-79.
Madawaska settlement: the people’s own convictions about religious control and ecclesiastical boundaries determined their national affiliations. Despite their apparent geographical marginality, the religious and local preferences of the Madawaskans finally led those on the American side of the St. John River into the Diocese of Portland.

Unfortunately for Bishop Bacon, the newly acquired American Madawakans were not satisfied even with their new diocese. They may have wanted to join the Diocese of Portland, but they did so expecting to make their own decisions. When he took charge of American Madawaska, Bacon replaced the current parish priest at St. Bruno, Father Philippe Beaudet, with the Quebecois Father Stanislas Vallee in 1871. Though he would need Canadian—particularly French-speaking—priests to help him, it appears that Bacon made a valiant attempt to quell the unruly atmosphere in Madawaska, and bring it firmly under its new diocese. He replaced the Holy Cross Fathers, who had been put there by the Bishop of St. John, with “his own diocesan priests.”

This change in leadership also brought a change in St. Bruno’s church location, to a place called Violet Brook in what would soon be Van Buren, Maine. Bacon wrote to the community regarding Vallee and the impending move that, “You will all help him with your temporal means, but especially you will not place any obstacle to this work, undertaken for the betterment of Religion as well as your own betterment. Without any prejudgment, and since it is a matter of building, we have decided that another location than where the ancient parish church is located should be chosen, and as faithful children of the Church, it is your duty to submit to our decision.”

Though Bacon cautioned the people of Madawaska to behave while St. Bruno’s parish moved to its new home, it appears that “an embittered parishioner” may have shot Father Vallee.

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in the arm as he tried to move the Eucharist to the new church in 1873.\textsuperscript{56} The new location was also vandalized on multiple occasions. \textsuperscript{57} Vallee did not last much longer after the move. The cold winter was too much for him, as was the daunting task: the rectory building was damaged on its way to the new Violet Brook location, and, once arrived, was “impossible to reasonably heat.” Vallee left in May of 1874 in poor health. As in other northern New England locations, the need for strong missionary-style leaders would continue. Madawaska was not brought under control until the arrival of Father Richer, a former Canadian missionary, a few years later.\textsuperscript{58}

Though the people of northern Maine were aggressive with their Church leaders, they also relied on them, and trusted them to help them in their unique circumstances when the state would not. The culture of the St. John River Valley remained French and Catholic well past its admittance into the Diocese of Portland. Though the state of Maine had some understanding of the situation in the region—they had, after all, sent Catholic men like Kavanagh and Madigan to attempt to “Americanize” residents—the Catholic Church in both Maine and Canada would continue to play a large role in supporting the Madawaskans. Maine did open a training school for teachers in Fort Kent, but it was run in English. Here again, the Catholics of St. Bruno’s took their own initiative to make their Church cater to them. They were able to get Bacon’s successor, Bishop Healy, to bring the Marist Fathers to the region.\textsuperscript{59} A Marist father was made parish priest at St. Bruno’s, and simultaneously became the principal at the newly formed St. Mary’s College when it

\textsuperscript{56} Pelletier and Ferretti, \textit{Van Buren History}, 40.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Lajoie, “St. Bruno’s 150th: Early Parish Borders: From Grand Isle to Presque Isle.”
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
opened in 1887. Appointed in 1875, Healy, Maine’s first black bishop, continued to work, as many before him, with the particular ethnic makeup of Maine, balancing French and Irish needs in his diocese. Although many of the students were French, Healy made a point to employ Irish teachers and tried to “make the classroom and the campus...the means by which the bonds of a common faith would unify the children of French-Canadians and the Irish immigrants.”

St. Mary’s soon became a mixed public-private institution, unique to the region. It continued to be owned by St. Bruno’s, but the teachers were paid by the town.

So, between Madawaska and cities like Lewiston, Bacon faced a mixed rural-urban state with a wide variety of challenges, many of which emanated from French-speaking Mainers. In contrast, all of Vermont remained rural by the time of the 1853 division. Vermont historian T.D. Seymour Bassett notes, “The difference between the hill country and New York, Boston, or Montreal in 1840 was obvious. Vermont had thirteen towns with between 2,500 and 4,000 people, with no cities. Four fifths of its breadwinners engaged in an agriculture poised between a past emphasis on wool growing and a new emphasis on dairying.”

Even by 1880, Vermont was the poorest New England state, with a “stagnant” population, and “meager growth in manufacturing towns did little more than offset rural decline.” In 1853, the year of Bishop Louis DeGoesbriand’s installation as the first bishop of Vermont, the state had a total population of only 314,120.
DeGoesbriand, a prolific writer and note-taker, realized early on in his Vermont career that the state had a special relationship with Canada and a unique set of challenges because of its rural character. His experience as bishop of Burlington required a difficult ethnic balancing act. DeGoesbriand’s love of French-Canadian Catholicism was realized in Vermont, but, at the same time, he recognized the need to put French and Irish Catholics on the same footing. When he arrived as the first bishop, he found that the French Canadians of Burlington had recently established a separate parish in Burlington. St. Joseph’s became the first French-Canadian parish in New England in 1851, before the factory city “Petit Canadas” hosted separate churches with Quebecois priests. While some American bishops worried that ethnic Catholicism, especially when practiced in another language, would preclude the development of a true “American” (or, perhaps, English-speaking Irish Catholicism), Bishop Fitzpatrick of Boston allowed the creation of the parish. Because of the realities of life in Vermont—early French arrival, O’Callaghan’s ethnically divisive actions, a local community of concerned converts—Fitzpatrick had set in motion a pattern that would later be repeated in cities where French-Canadian immigrants wanted their own church. 66 DeGoesbriand had a great interest in Vermont’s French-Canadian Catholics. His writings suggest a certain comfort with the fact that Vermont shared in Quebec’s heritage, as well as sharing their priests. And, he briefly became administrator of St. Joseph’s (or, essentially, the parish priest) when left without a French-speaking priest in 1857. 67 Still, when DeGoesbriand had to make crucial decisions for Burlington, he was careful not to favor any group despite his French background. When

67 Ibid., 45. See also Journal of the Very Reverend Louis de Goesbriand, entry for November 15, 1856. When the Oblat fathers left, DeGoesbriand noted that “I have to take charge of St. Joseph’s Congregation.”
deciding how to use land left behind by the prominent convert to Catholicism, Colonel Hyde, DeGoesbriand made sure it was consecrated for use by both the Irish at St Mary’s and the French Canadians at St. Joseph’s. 68

Vermont remained rural when compared to the other New England states. Fenwick estimated that Vermont was home to around 5,000 Catholics by the start of the 1840s, but these Catholics were spread out rather than contained in city centers. 69 When DeGoesbriand began his visits throughout the state, he traveled like a missionary. Within two months, in January of 1854, he had finally visited all eighteen points which were on Father Daly’s regular route. 70 Pockets of Catholics, rather than concentrated populations, continued to be visited over the next several years. In Richford and the surrounding towns in 1865, DeGoesbriand saw “no less than 174 families who never have Mass on Sundays. They are nearly all Canadians, and of them many have abandoned the Faith.” The next year he discovered another group of “fallen” Canadian Catholics in Stowe, this time totaling only five or six Canadian families. In addition to the missionary-style circuit, the added problem was that Vermont was home to both farmers and wage workers. Catholic employment in the mines and railroad industry meant that the Bishop had to keep a sharp eye on the movement of his flock. While he discovered “a good many Catholic families” in Lyndonville working on a temporary project for the railroad, they were “apt to go away any day.” Meanwhile, the bishop had visited for the first time a small community of more permanent Irish farmers in Barnard just a few days earlier. 71 The “parish boundaries” of

71 Ibid., entries for February 19, 1865, August 28, 1866, June 14, 1872, and June 18, 1872.
Catholic communities in Vermont remained in flux throughout DeGoesbriand’s era, and included Catholics with a variety of lifestyles.

Vermont experienced some of the same problems with immigration and illness Boston did, while simultaneously battling continuing problems left over from the frontier. The Vermont Church, with even fewer resources and an infrastructure far less capable of with the growth, continued to have small pockets of Catholics needing missionary mid-century. DeGoesbriand noted that, from the beginning, it was apparent his diocese was poor and strapped for priests. Even as the first bishop, he was forced to play the role of both parish priest and traveling missionary because of the lack of help. Of course, DeGoesbriand had some knowledge of how underdeveloped Catholic America was outside of diocesan cities. He originally came to Ohio from France because he was so moved by Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati’s plea for priests. But even he was surprised by the realities of being the first bishop of this northern outpost. Later recalling his arrival to Burlington in 1854, DeGoesbriand observed that, “The installation was quite unpretentious. The Revered Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan, for so long resident in Burlington, had come to meet me in Boston. It was from his humble dwelling that on Sunday 6 November the little procession advanced to the Cathedral, which was only sixty feet away.” Even if parts of Ohio were frontier-like, when DeGoesbriand arrived in Vermont, he realized that even the center of the diocese at Burlington was struggling. He commented that, “The contrast was striking between the beautiful Cathedral of Cleveland

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72 Lance W. Harlow, Vermont’s First Catholic Bishop: The Life of Bishop Louis de Goesbriand, 1816-1899 (Barre, Vermont: L. Brown and Sons Printing Inc. 2001), 11.
and the pro-Cathedral Church of Burlington.”\textsuperscript{73} Just months after this simple installation, DeGoesbriand was on his way to Europe for missionary help for Vermont.\textsuperscript{74}

But it was Canadian help that Vermont continued to rely on. While throughout his bishopric Fenwick had longed for a native clergy, DeGoesbriand, perhaps because of his experiences before coming to Vermont, seemed more accepting of the interconnected nature of his diocese. His work in Ohio prepared him for the task of handling ethnic Catholicism in the United States. Like Vermont, Ohio was a “frontier” for the Catholic Church. Here, DeGoesbriand was responsible for French, English, and German congregants, a population ravaged by diseases like cholera and Maumee fever, and the missionary layout of the region.\textsuperscript{75} DeGoesbriand was well-suited to take on the challenges of a large French-Canadian population. He believed American Catholicism could effectively use the example of Canadian Catholicism coming out of historic settings like Montreal. It was during his time in Ohio that he discovered the beauty of Quebec Catholicism.\textsuperscript{76} DeGoesbriand’s impressions of Montreal indicate that he was more than happy to make Vermont Catholicism resemble Canada, solidifying the idea that American and Canadian Catholicism were deeply linked in the borderlands. DeGoesbriand poured out his admiration for Canada, writing that in Montreal, “The contrast between this and American cities was quite striking. In Montreal one breathed a Catholic atmosphere. In all the streets there were priests in cassocks, nuns in the habits of their orders, churches always open; and in all the churches there were devout faithful on their knees before the Blessed Sacrament.”\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 24-25: 41.
\textsuperscript{76} See DeGoesbriand, Memoirs, 43, for background on his trip.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
Montreal, writing, "I was a stranger to New York; I was a stranger to Boston; I had never set foot in the state of Vermont. Thus I found in the thought of Montreal a consolation to my fears." 78

Unlike southern New England, Vermont had an early jump on French-immigration, with several populations settling in the state before the Civil War. They located primarily in the Burlington-Winooski area. 79 With agricultural and political problems on the rise in Quebec, French-Canadian habitants headed to Vermont in substantial numbers, with the hope of finding work in industries like lumber, by the 1820s and 1830s. 80 So, the added challenge for Vermont was that there was already a substantial French-Canadian population by the time DeGoesbriand arrived, and this would expand during the Civil War era. When DeGoesbriand came to Burlington in 1854, there were roughly 15,000 Catholics in the state (almost three times the number Fenwick had estimated a decade earlier), and about a third of these Catholics French Canadian. 81 Some estimates put the Catholic population of the state even higher, closer to 20,000. 82 No matter the exact population, there was a severe priest shortage, in no small part because French speakers were needed in the state. The new bishop estimated that at least twelve parish priests would be needed, but there were currently only five employed in the diocese. 83 Industries like mining, as well as the expansion of the railroad and textile manufacturing, brought Catholics into new areas of the state as

78 Ibid., 47.
80 Ibid., 14-15, 41.
81 Harlow, Vermont’s First Catholic Bishop, 59.
83 Harlow, Vermont’s First Catholic Bishop, 59.
DeGoesbriand’s bishopric continued.\textsuperscript{84} French-Canadian immigration picked up after the war, with over 100,000 French-Canadian immigrants coming into the United States between 1865 and 1869.\textsuperscript{85} In 1868, DeGoesbriand indicated that a priest from St. Hyacinth would begin working with the Burlington-area Canadians as there were “in Winooski Village alone as many as 850 Canadians.”\textsuperscript{86}

DeGoesbriand seemed to both accept and appreciate the influence of Canadian Catholicism in Vermont. When DeGoesbriand visited Vergennes, followed by the Swanton/Highgate area in 1854, he and Father Quevillon found close to 300 Canadian families in each location.\textsuperscript{87} DeGoesbriand continued to rely on missions led by Canadian religious. He commented a few years later of a successful run at the Burlington French-Canadian church of St. Joseph’s, “End of a Mission of eleven days preached by the Rev.Tissot & Durthaller S.J. to the Canadian Congregation. They had 1700 Communions & five abjurations. The Catholics of Burlington & vicinity were never so well disposed.”\textsuperscript{88} In 1869, a mission with Father Gagnier from Huntingdon, Canada, resulted in the confirmation of 63 adults at Brandon, with Gagnier soon installed as a permanent priest in Rutland.\textsuperscript{89} Perhaps most importantly, in 1883, a long-term arrangement was decided upon for Catholics living in Franklin, a town which directly bordered Quebec. DeGoesbriand noted that, "E.A. Rivard priest of St. Hyacinthe residing at St. Armand


\textsuperscript{85} Betsy Beattie covers several studies of French-Canadian immigration, noting that immigration increased substantially not during the Civil War, but after it. See Beattie, “Migrants and Millworkers: The French Canadian Population of Burlington and Colchester, 1860-1870,” 96.

\textsuperscript{86} DeGoesbriand, \textit{Diary of the Very Reverend Louis de Goesbriand}, entry for March 5, 1868.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., entries for January 17 and January 23, 1854.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., entry for 1858.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., entries for March 6 and April 20, 1869, 51-52.
P.Q. will, with the consent granted his Bishop, attend Franklin, every second Sunday.

The Bishop of Burlington will give him 100.00 yearly. This arrangement as agreed between the two Bishops is to last 3 years.” 90

In Quebec, there was a quiet realization that the movement of Catholics in large numbers would continue.91 Bishop Bourget of Montreal—though perhaps begrudgingly—worked to get a religious order, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to come to Vermont to serve the French-Canadian population. While they remained in Burlington for only two years, from 1854 to the end of 1856, it was another mark of the ongoing connection between Vermont and Canada: in reality, the French-Canadian population had never completely “left” home because parts of the Canadian religious establishment followed them south of the border.92 DeGoesbriand would continue to rely on Quebec for help as immigration of French Canadians picked up during the 1860s.93 His records abound with several more entries regarding Canadian missions and agreements with French-Canadian priests, but, simply put, the Diocese of Burlington could not have functioned without significant reliance on the resources of Quebec and Montreal, and this remained a fact well after midcentury. While there may have been a need for a separate diocese in Vermont by 1853, this did not mean that there would be a significant drop in the need for outside priests. Priests followed the faithful as they immigrated over the border.

The increase in French-Canadian priests and parishioners made national or ethnic churches (defined by heritage rather than geographical limits set by the Holy See) desirable in

90 Ibid., entry for October 13, 1883, 129.
91 Beattie has noted that the Quebec hierarchy was not entirely pleased to be sending priests to New England with the substantial Catholic emigration from Canada. While Fenwick “sympathized” with French-Canadians who needed or wanted their own priests, Quebec was hesitant to send priests and encourage this movement. Fenwick asked Bishop Bourget of Montreal for help in Burlington, but, “for a time Bourget balked at the idea, even suggesting that Fenwick request a priest from France rather than Canada.” See Beattie, “Emigres and Industrialization”, 76-78.
93 Harlow, Vermont’s First Catholic Bishop, 82.
some areas. The precedent of French-language churches was important in an environment where many American Catholics hoped for a unified English-speaking church. The story of northern New England complicates the notion that an Irish, English-speaking clergy limited French-Canadian control. Vermont’s history suggests that the development of ethnic or national Catholic churches had many important causes. These parishes were not simply formed in urban settings where newly arrived immigrants refused to be controlled by the more established Irish. Instead, it could be argued that one of the benefits of creating Burlington as a separate diocese is that the unique ethnic needs of that state would be realized. The frontier stage in the Vermont borderlands was the very thing that created the need for separate parishes: O’Callaghan’s free rein and the lack of other help left French speakers needing more spiritual support. DeGoesbriand went on to “clean up” the problems caused by unruly priests like O’Callaghan. One DeGoesbriand biographer has noted that it was thus rather unsurprising that established missionaries, like Daley and O’Callaghan, left the area soon after DeGoesbriand’s installation because they “may have found the zealous, young bishop too much for them.” When he arrived, DeGoesbriand set about creating an organized diocese.

It is notable that is was Vermont, not southern New England, that was home to New England’s first official French-Canadian parish. This speaks to the power dynamics in the state: the French Canadians of Vermont were an important part of the Catholic culture. The story of St. Joseph’s Burlington was not a simple tale of frustrated French-Canadian parishioners suffering under an Irish-American bishop. Burlington’s ethnic tensions stemmed largely from the fact that Jeremiah O’Callaghan could not speak French. There does not appear to have been any outright

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hostility between the French and Irish Catholics themselves. A priest from Montreal was brought to Burlington in 1842 "on loan" from the Canadian diocese. Montreal's Father Francois Ance oversaw New England's first French-Canadian church for only a few months: his reputation was tarnished after he hid Canadian criminals who had escaped to Vermont, pointing again to the interconnected, borderlands position of Vermont’s French-Canadian Catholics. At this point, the French speakers had to worship with their Irish neighbors for nearly another decade at St. Mary’s, Burlington. Finally, in 1851, a permanent structure was dedicated as St. Joseph's Church so that the French could have their own worship space. When DeGoesbriand arrived a few years later, he found that the existence of the French St. Joseph's meant he had a continued reliance on Canada for French-speaking priests. DeGoesbriand tried to staff the new parish with priests from a religious order, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in 1854. However, they returned to Canada soon after, leaving the bishop to act as a parish priest (in addition to his other duties) at the end of 1856.96

The French-born DeGoesbriand both admired and utilized Canadian Catholicism and its resources, but the precedent of ethnic parishes did not mean that Catholics of different ethnicities could not cooperate when necessary. DeGoesbriand did not harbor any ill feeling toward the Irish in his diocese, and realized they, like their French-Canadian counterparts, were in a difficult position. Actually, compared to the Irish, the French had the benefit of less nativist hatred and more unified communities as they came directly from nearby Quebec. DeGoesbriand noted that French Canadians were likely to maintain a strong hold on their Catholic faith because they were not “persecuted for their religion as the Irish.” The Irish worked largely in the marble and slate quarries, as well as in domestic service.97 Despite the fact that Vermont remained rural

97 Harlow, Vermont's First Catholic Bishop, 59-60.
compared to the rest of the nation, Irish immigration still strained the resources of the small state. In Jeremiah O’Callaghan’s records for 1845 and 1846 (statistics were recorded for two years at a time here), the city of Burlington saw 522 baptisms and 90 marriages; the Middlebury-Castleton-Claremont area covered by O’Callaghan’s associate Father Daley saw 274 baptisms and 30 marriages. While no church could match the sacramental numbers of the Boston Cathedral, Burlington and Middlebury saw sacrament numbers comparable to other regional churches despite Vermont’s smaller relative population.98 Furthermore, all of the eastern United States was subject, to an extent, to the disease and poverty of the newly arrived Famine immigrants. As typhus, cholera, and fevers swept the region during Black ’47, Father O’Callaghan reported to Bishop Fitzpatrick that the situation in Burlington was not much better than that in Boston. He apologized for leaving the city abruptly to get back to Vermont, writing, "As if foreseeing the vast influx of immigrants who are prostrate with fever in every Irish house, shed and barn in the village, craving for the sacraments, I left Boston abruptly, Friday evening, not having had your benediction…and reached Burlington Monday P.M. What awful sickness and destitution is visible on all sides among the dying and the dead!"99 He noted that although Burlington residents- Protestants included- had done their best to accommodate to “the great number in need” he had, during the morning alone, given Last Rights to seven Irish Catholics.100

When DeGoesbriand arrived a few years later, he was not an Irish or a French-Canadian bishop. Fitzpatrick’s biggest task was handling the Irish Catholic arrivals in Boston and nativist reaction to them. DeGoesbriand’s biggest task, meanwhile, was meeting both French-Canadian and Irish Catholic needs. What united both the Vermont Irish and the French

99 Jeremiah O’Callaghan to Bishop Fitzpatrick, 23 June 1847, 3.6, Fitzpatrick Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
100 Ibid.
was their economic struggle. The bishop noted many times the economic difficulties of his French-Canadian Catholics; DeGoesbriand also told one potential Irish priest that “the children of the Church are poor, so that our most common temples are their tiny cabins, our usual altars the table at which they sit.”

While evidencing a love for Canada and an appreciation for Vermont’s connections to a grand Canadian past, the French-speaking DeGoesbriand was always careful to serve all these poor Catholic Vermonters, both Irish and French Canadian, as he did when he consecrated a Burlington cemetery to both the Irish at St Mary’s and the French Canadians at St. Joseph’s. The French had paid for about 3/5 of it, with the Irish paying most of the remaining 2/5 cost.

Given the rural nature of much his diocese, this balanced approach made sense: not every area of the state could afford separate Irish and French churches. And, the French and Irish Catholics were both in dire straits outside of Burlington. This meant that they often worked together to achieve their religious aims. In Enosburgh, for instance, DeGoesbriand noted that the Irish and French worked together to build their own church. Although there were only four Irish families and the remaining Canadians were “very poor in every respect,” Patrick Shannon provided land, the Irish families purchased the lumber, and the French Canadians did the manual labor of putting it up. Still, the lack of resources showed: DeGoesbriand declined to take the deed for the church from Shannon because the church had “no floor, no windows, no chimney.”

After the establishment of the Diocese of Burlington, the Irish and French grew both

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103 *Journal of the Very Reverend Louis De Goesbriand*, entry for June 11, 1862.
together and apart, bound by rural poverty in places like Enosburgh, and separated by a growing sense of ethnic solidarity and difference in places like Burlington.

Vermont, then, did not become “Irish-run” at midcentury as places like Boston did. There was a special concern for French speakers. Local circumstance had to be dealt with in each part of the state. After it became clear that Father O’Callaghan could not help them, the French speakers in Burlington got their wish for their own parish, the first example of a separate French-Canadian parish in all the New England states. In other places, cooperation across ethnic lines was necessary. But, throughout the state, the French continued to play a large role in shaping the way Catholicism worked at the church and parish level.\textsuperscript{104}

DeGoesbriand did not live in a world where New England Catholicism was “Irish,” nor where American Catholicism was only “American.” The Vermont that he experienced upon his arrival as bishop in 1853 was a continual borderland, straddling two countries. Fitzpatrick’s Boston was in a state of rapid transition toward a larger, more institutionalized, and more ethnically-charged Catholicism, but northern New England continued to have scattered Catholic communities, an important French-Canadian element, and a close connection with Canada. The breaking of northern New England into separate dioceses made the importance of the French-Canadian population more, not less, visible. Even as Portland and Burlington left the frontier stage and became separate dioceses with local bishops, their unique borderlands characteristics persisted.

\textsuperscript{104} Oscar Handlin, \textit{Boston Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Story in Acculturation} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 166. Handlin notes of Boston “Thoroughly Irish in character, the Church nevertheless profited by its early quarrels and made special provision for worship by each new national group. By 1840 the French element was thoroughly insignificant, but there were enough German Catholics to require attention.” This was decidedly not the case further north, suggesting the continued need to look at New England not as one unit, but as a diverse landscape.
CONCLUSION: NEW ENGLAND CATHOLICS, A RECONSIDERATION

In 1853, Portland and Burlington, along with Hartford, Connecticut, became their own dioceses, and thus separated from Boston. In the early 1870s, Springfield, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island were also formed as separate dioceses. With these changes, Boston became an Archdiocese in 1875, adding a further layer of institutional control over New England Catholicism.\(^1\) According to most Catholic historians, in the decades following the Civil War, Irish-American New Englanders solidified control over a world of largely urban parishes, creating conflict with other ethnic groups in their unceasing quest to create a single, unified, English-speaking Church. It is often assumed that the rise of the Irish, the rise of the urban parish, the rise of the organized Church, and the rise of ethnically-divided Catholicisms was largely inevitable. In a story that became all too common, in December of 1885, the *Boston Daily Globe* published the account of French-Canadian parishioners in Fall River, Massachusetts, who resisted the appointment of an Irish priest to their parish of *Notre Dame des Lourdes*. Father Feron, an Irish priest, was not a French speaker and lived in a “house that he (has) rented” instead of the parish quarters. For his part, Father Feron complained that the French-Canadian protestors in the hall of *St. Jean Baptiste* “said that they came to protest against my appointment not because of anything personal, but because I was an Irishman. They claimed that they had spent too much money and that the affair had gone too far in the endeavor to insist upon their right to have a French Canadian priest to let it drop.”\(^2\)

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This quote from the *Globe* tells of a struggle that would come to typify much of late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Catholic life in immigrant New England. After their arrival to the textile cities of New England following the Civil War, French Canadians were at a religious and social disadvantage compared to their Irish counterparts because of language and tradition. Though they resisted Irish control at the parish level as in Fall River, they nonetheless found themselves at the mercy of Irish-American Catholics, who, by the dawn of the twentieth century, controlled the structure of New England’s Catholic Church. Yet, the experiences of Bacon in Maine and DeGoesbriand in Vermont suggest that, even after the formation of the separate dioceses in 1853, the above story did not completely define the New England Catholic experience. Northern New England’s Canadian connections; rich history of Native American, French Canadian, and Anglo Catholics; and its lay-focused Catholicism mean that American Catholic history needs to be rewritten as a series of diverse, complicated geographically-contingent experiences rather than the movement from English Maryland to a firmly Irish-American hierarchy.

The story of John Stephen Michaud, appointed the second bishop of Burlington in 1899, encapsulates the importance of considering the borderlands Catholic experience even after the closing of the “frontier stage.” Michaud was, quite literally, a product of Vermont’s unique Catholic environment. As his name suggests, he was born to a French-Canadian father. While living in Burlington, Michaud’s father, Stephen (“Etienne”), did not live in an isolated French-Canadian world. Instead, he, married an Irish woman, Catherine Rogan, and died early because he tended to sick Irish immigrants, contracting typhus from them.³ Rogan went on to raise her

³ *One Hundred Years of Achievement by the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont* (Lowell, Massachusetts: Sullivan Bros. Printers, Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, 1953), 30.
son with a strong Catholic faith, and he was baptized in Burlington by Jeremiah O’Callaghan in 1843 before growing up to become a priest.  

John Michaud’s father may have been comfortable moving between French and Irish worlds, but Michaud’s later election to bishop proved just how intricate ethnic and regional identity was. Bishop DeGoesbriand appointed Michaud as his assistant bishop in 1892, perhaps thinking he would be palatable to both Irish and French-Canadian Vermonters. But, after the Civil War, ethnic lines had hardened in the Burlington area due to fresh groups of French-Canadian arrivals who attempted to live in more cloistered Petit Canadas. Towns like nearby Winooski were home largely to post-Civil War arrivals, and French-Canadian identity was thus deeply entrenched here. Several regional French-Canadian priests were angered that Michaud was made DeGoesbriand’s assistant and future replacement, complaining that they wanted a “real” French-Canadian to lead them, and that Michaud was “French” in name only. Ironically, the French-Canadian clergy believed that another priest, an Irishman, was more likely to support their ethnic parishes and reliance on the French language, and thus preferred him to the half-French Michaud. DeGoesbriand, as evidenced by his even-handed treatment of both the Irish and French Canadians in his diocese, trained Michaud, Burlington’s own son, and thus must have been dismayed by the ethnically divided reaction to Michaud’s election to coadjutor.

The initial negative reaction to Michaud may have been informed by more fervent French-Canadian priests in southern New England who were used to parishes rigidly divided along ethnic lines and controlled by Irish higher-ups. A paper out of Lowell, Massachusetts, later

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issued an apology for their attack on Michaud. At first, *Le National* expressed “sorrowful surprise” that Michaud, “*etant un anglifié*” — an Americanized French Canadian — was to become coadjutor, or assistant bishop, to the aging DeGoesbriand. The writers knew that this meant that Michaud would become bishop upon DeGoesbriand’s death, and they wanted another who could speak fluent French to replace him. But, upon reflection, *Le National* later decided to recant and focus instead on Michaud’s half-French heritage. The paper then called Michaud “an ardent patriot” and extended to “him our apologies and also the assurance of our filial submission and our complete devotion, a devotion even more sincere now that we today know better him whom the Catholics of the Diocese of Burlington will soon acclaim as their new Bishop.” Still, one Vermont priest, J.F. Audet, claimed that the French Canadians in New England were not even responsible for the problems surrounding the Michaud appointment. A priest by the name of Proulx had asked at Michaud’s consecration that he support the French language and remember his French-Canadian brethren. Audet claimed that because of the Irish seated at the meeting, Proulx’s plea provoked a loud, angry response. Apparently, “a certain commotion broke out, strongly accentuated by the stamping of feet and grumbling on the part of a certain number of Irish priests, manifesting in a matter of which they alone are capable their contempt for all that is Canadian and French.” Michaud was to be bishop to both the Irish and French Canadians in Vermont, but it was priests of these ethnicities who fought over his role.

Michaud’s story is an important reminder of why borderlands studies matter, especially in the context of religion. Under leaders like Father Jeremiah O’Callaghan, Vermont

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6 "A Canadian Bishop,” *Le National* (Lowell, Massachusetts) 20 April 1892, copy and English translation in Archives of the Diocese of Burlington.

was a frontier in every sense of the word: home to free religious thought and conflict, removed from southern New England’s rampant anti-Catholicism, made up of mostly spread out communities, and housing no true cities by national standards. Even when the Catholic population increased and Bishop DeGoesbriand led the Diocese of Burlington out of the formative frontier stage, Vermont’s liminal position did not disappear. Vermont was still located between the United States and Canada, and still maintained a balance of French-Canadian and Irish Catholic traditions. Michaud was born to parents who clearly stepped outside of typical ethnic boundaries, but held their Catholicism in common. Michaud was not Irish, nor French Canadian; he was a Vermonter. To the Irish, he had a French last name, and to the French he was too Americanized. The fight over his election showed the strong influence of both New England’s recently-settled and highly-insulated French-Canadian communities like Lowell, and the quiet knowledge of an older generation of leaders who recognized that ethnic identity was more complex than nationalistic French-Canadian and Irish groups might believe. There were no easy answers about ethnicity in Vermont: Burlington was home to the first separate, ethnic, national French-Canadian parish in New England, but it was also an important site of previous Irish-French cooperation and earlier Anglo-Protestant conversion. While New England Catholicism certainly grew more ethnically divided and institutionally strong over the second half of the nineteenth century, this did not mean that “in-between” Catholics like John Michaud disappeared. It is fitting that Michaud, born in a Burlington where the Irish and French had worshipped together only a generation earlier, became bishop of that city. His very existence invites an ongoing discussion about the meaning of “Boston Catholic” and northern New England’s place in a regional history often focused on ethnically divided cities.
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