

“Mother and Servant of the Indian and Negro Races”



COURTESY THE AUTHOR

Philadelphia's

Sainted

Katharine

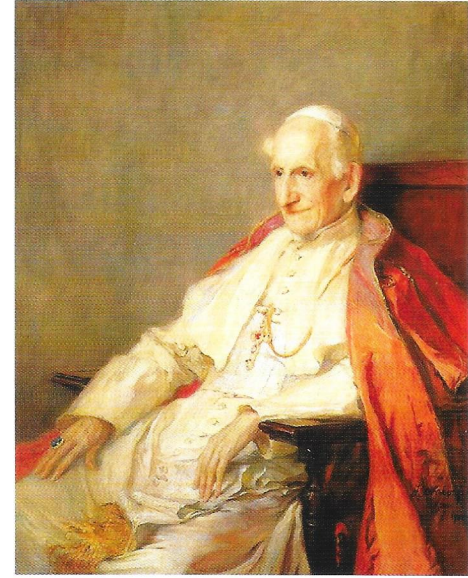
Drexel

William C. Kashatus

*O*n Thursday morning, January 27, 1887, the Drexel sisters of Philadelphia attended a private mass conducted by Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) in Rome’s fabled Vatican. As members of one of the wealthiest and most devout Catholic families in the United States, the three young women—Elizabeth, age 31, Katharine, age 28, and Louise, age 23—were also given a rare audience with the pontiff.

The unusual generosity the sisters had shown to orphans and church missions moved Pope Leo, a kind and benevolent individual known as the “Pope of the Working Man.” He had been briefed by his aides that the young women had recently lost both parents within a short time of one another and that the middle child, Katharine, was suffering deep spiritual despair. Advisors also informed him about the magnitude of the family’s generous gifts to far-flung Catholic charities.

After polite conversation in French and a papal blessing, Katharine asked to meet privately with the pontiff. Pope Leo granted her request. Having tried unsuccessfully to secure priests for the missions she sponsored, Drexel knelt before him and implored his help. “Why not, my child, become a missionary yourself?” he asked. Stymied by his response, Drexel hesitated. “Because, Holy Father,” she began, searching for words that would not make her appear brash or ungrateful, “sisters can be had for the missions, but no priests.” Impressed by her passion, Pope Leo smiled but offered nothing more. Instead, he blessed her, formally signaling the end of their visit. Confused, she returned to the United States and toured the Indian country, seeking a resolution to her dilemma. Her answer came in November 1888, when she felt called to become a contemplative nun and serve the African American and Native American missions of the United States.



FROM THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA

Katharine Drexel (left) at age 23. Five years later, Pope Leo XIII (above), impressed by Katharine’s benevolence, suggested a missionary life.

A wealthy and attractive Philadelphia debutante who might have easily enjoyed the glamorous life of a socialite, Drexel instead chose to devote her life to the Catholic Church, essentially becoming a one-person charitable institution. Consumed by a pious desire to submit her will to God and to take care of the poor, she established her own religious order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, and selflessly served both communities. She channeled twenty million dollars in income from her trust fund into the creation of 145 Catholic missions, 112 schools for Native Americans, and 50 schools for African Americans. Forty-five years after her death in 1955, Pope John Paul II canonized her a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.

Born on November 26, 1858, Katharine Mary Drexel was the second daughter of Francis Anthony Drexel (1824–1885), Philadelphia’s wealthiest banker and philanthropist, and Hannah Langstroth Drexel (1826–1858).

Just one month later, Hannah died from complications related to the birth. Francis Drexel's second wife, Emma Bouvier Drexel (1833–1883), whom he married in 1860, was devoted to her two stepdaughters and the daughter whom she had with Francis. A devout Catholic, Emma Drexel disdained the social milieu of the city's elite and exercised a strong influence on her three daughters, stressing the importance of service to others. Three times each week, she opened the family's spacious three-story brownstone at 1503 Walnut Street on Philadelphia's tony Rittenhouse Square as a dispensary for the poor. Katharine and her sisters, Elizabeth and Louise, helped their mother with record keeping and donated money from their own savings. Hailed as "Lady Bountiful of Philadelphia" for her care of the poor, Emma Drexel conducted a carefully planned philanthropy that catered to those who sought to help themselves.

"My mother knew the details beforehand," recalled Katharine years later. "She would try to devise a means of giving the needed help right then and there—a grocery



SISTERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Emma Bouvier Drexel (above) nurtured charity and piety in (from left) stepdaughter Katharine, age seven, daughter Louise, two, and stepdaughter Elizabeth, ten. By sixteen years of age, Katharine (top) knew she would not lead the life of a socialite.

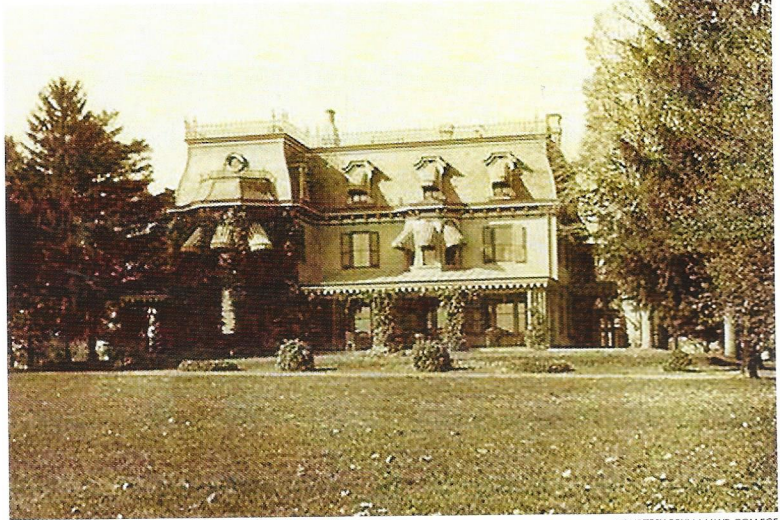


COURTESY CATHOLIC FORUM

The future saint at the age of seven and a half.

order or an order for coal or rent, or shoes—all according to their needs. Everything given out was written down in a book so that Mamma knew if the same need was brought to her again very soon it was because the right use had not been made of the thing given before. Or they might have sold it or traded it for drink." Encouraged by her husband, Emma acquired a keen business savvy. She was not likely to be exploited by local merchants who might try to overcharge for their goods, insisting that they be held to the prevailing market rate. Upon her death, the family discovered that Emma Drexel had been secretly paying rents for 150 poor families living in the city.

After Francis Drexel purchased a farm of ninety acres as a summer home in Torresdale at the northeastern edge of Philadelphia in 1871, the family opened a Sunday school for neighboring children and the Drexel sisters took turns serving as instructors. They also distributed self-help gifts to local families, including fabric and patterns to make their own clothing. Named St. Michel in honor of the patron saint of Emma Drexel's father,



COURTESY BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

Family summer home, St. Michel.



SISTERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Francis Anthony Drexel.

Michel Bouvier, the farm became a sanctuary for Katharine. Activities at Saint Michel were far less structured and rigid than at the family home on Walnut Street. She was given a reprieve from the private tutor her family employed and could enjoy horseback riding, often trotting to morning mass at Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in the nearby Bustleton section of northeastern Philadelphia. The Drexel family's parish of residence was St. Dominic's in Philadelphia's Holmesburg section, whose pastor, the Reverend James O'Conner, would play an influential role in Katharine's evolving spirituality.

The adolescent Drexel took little pleasure in the material comforts her

life of privilege accorded her. Although she swam in the Atlantic during family vacations at Cape May, New Jersey, and Newport, Rhode Island, attended parties, and traveled abroad, she treated these events more as obligations than pleasures. While other teenaged girls kept diaries, in which they confided their secret crushes and yearning for romance, Katharine, at the age of fourteen, made a startling revelation. "Men I abhor," she wrote. "I have recorded a vow before the shrine of an unmarried saint never to be aught but the purest celibate." A year later, she made an entry beseeching God to help her follow the instructions of her spiritual adviser, Father O'Conner (appointed, in 1885, the first Bishop of Omaha, which encompassed the present states of Nebraska and Wyoming).

"My spiritual father has told me that my predominant passion is scrupulosity," she had recorded in the 1876 entry. "His parting advice to me was always to pray fervently to God each day that He might aid me to know my vocation in life."

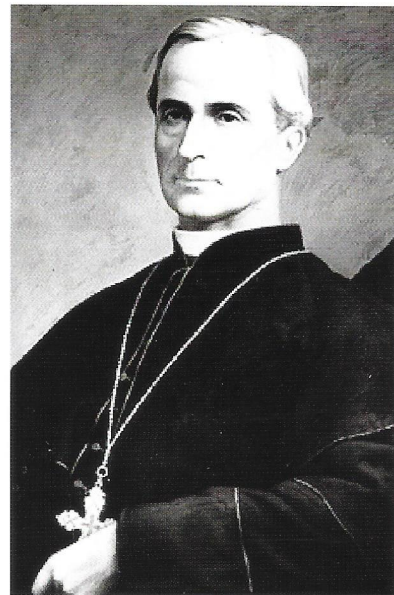
On New Year's Day in 1879, Katharine, at the age of eighteen, made her debut into Philadelphia society. For other debutantes, the glamorous coming-out ball would be the highlight of their young lives, but Katharine, in a letter to Bishop O'Conner, dismissed the occasion as a "little party" and never again made mention of it. As she entered her twenties, she began to con-

sider dedicating her life to the Catholic Church. Her writings suggest that she waged an earnest struggle between a cloistered existence and the desire to be near family and the luxury and trappings she enjoyed as a member of one of America's wealthiest families. On the one hand, Katharine admitted to a deep sense of guilt. "Jesus has given his life for me," she wrote. "It is but just that I should give Him mine." On the other hand, she feared "separation from my family" and the "poverty of a religious life." Throughout this period, Bishop O'Conner counseled her to continue her acts of charity as a layperson, discouraging further thoughts of entering

the religious life. Nevertheless, she became increasingly wedded to the belief that she was being called to serve God within the church, not outside of it.

Some historians interpret Katharine Drexel as a complex figure who shunned the riches of her birthright to bring Catholicism to poor, uneducated African Americans and Native Americans. Others choose to define her simply by her staggering wealth. Drexel's decision was not forged so much by her rejection of worldly place or money as by loss. When her stepmother was stricken with cancer, Katharine nursed her during the prolonged and agonizing illness until she died in 1883. Two years

later, on February 12, 1885, her father died of pleurisy. The loss of both parents in such a short time "shattered" the twenty-seven-year-old Drexel, who confided to O'Conner, "I am not happy in the world. There is a void in my heart which only God can fulfill."



COURTESY ARCHDIOCESE OF OMAHA

Bishop James O'Conner



On February 12, 1891, Mother M. Katharine celebrated her profession of vows and the founding day of her religious order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People.

Weak and fatigued, Drexel traveled with her sisters to Europe where she hoped to regain her strength by frequent visits to spas. While her health improved, her outlook on life remained bleak as she constantly pondered what good she had accomplished in her life. Initially, she sought to answer the question through philanthropy.

Upon his death, Francis A. Drexel left his three daughters a considerable fortune—fourteen million dollars in trusts generating for each about four hundred thousand dollars in income annually, translating to more than \$8,650,000 today. Having earned a reputation for generosity to Catholic charities, the three Drexel sisters were visited that year by Bishop Martin Marty, vicar for Northern Minnesota, and the Reverend Joseph Stephan, director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. The clerics were seeking financial support to restore Indian reservation missions and schools that the federal government had unilaterally



SISTERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Mother M. Katharine preferred portraits in prayerful poses. The white cloak was introduced in medieval times for praying in unheated chapels.

given to Protestant missionaries. Elizabeth, Katharine, and Louise contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Indian missions. Over the next six years, Katharine made several trips to the West where her financial support resulted in the building of fifty-seven Indian missions in fifteen states.

It was Katharine's strong commit-

ment to the Indian missions that led to her audience with Pope Leo XIII in 1887. Not long after her return to Philadelphia, she informed Bishop O'Conner of her intention to enter the convent. Once again, he discouraged her. "Are you afraid to give me to Jesus Christ?" she asked pointedly in a subsequent letter. "God knows how un-

worthy I am, and yet can He not supply my unworthiness if only He gives me a vocation to the religious life? It appears to me, Reverend Father, that I am not obliged to submit my judgment to yours, as I have been doing for the last two years, for I feel so sad in doing it, because the world cannot give me peace." The bishop immediately acquiesced and gave her his blessing. "God has put in your heart a great love for the Indian and the Negroes," he wrote. He suggested she establish her own religious order instead of giving her money to a mission fund administered by others.

Pleased by O'Conner's response, Katharine, on November 7, 1889, entered the Pittsburgh convent of the Sisters of Mercy as a postulant. Philadelphia society bemoaned the loss. "Miss Katharine Drexel, so well-known as the most attractive of the sisters of her branch of the family and one of the greatest heiresses in America," reported the *Philadelphia Times*, "will henceforth be dead to the world." A banner headline appearing in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* screeched, "Miss Drexel Enters a Catholic Convent—Gives Up Seven Million." Sixteen months later, on February 12, 1891, she took her vows and the name Mother M. Katharine and founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, promising "to be the mother and servant of the Indian and Negro races . . . and not to undertake any work which would lead to [their] neglect or abandonment."

Drexel embraced the philosophy of *noblesse oblige*—benevolence espoused by persons of high birth—and understood that the financial advantages she enjoyed demanded that she assume a share of responsibility for the plight of those less fortunate. As a result, she put her talents and education to use for the benefit of the dispossessed and, in the process, acquired keen business acumen. Although she was beholden to the same vow of poverty as all nuns, it did not mean relinquishing control of her inheritance. Her church rank of mother superior, and her wealth, financial skills, and status made her a pioneer in the Catholic Church. She emerged as a competent administrator in an international religious institu-



SISTERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Mother M. Katharine Drexel (far right), greets Adzan Yazzie at the Lukachukai Navajo Mission, Arizona, in 1920.

tion that had been dominated by men for centuries, and she selected her mentors and “followed” them where she wanted to go. After Bishop O’Conner died in May 1890 following a lingering illness, Philadelphia’s Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan (1831–1911) offered to “share the burden” with her and became a mentor. At the same time, Mother Katharine’s uncle, Anthony J. Drexel (1826–1893), who presided over the family banking firm, Drexel and Company, taught her the importance of investing and financial management that would benefit her philanthropic efforts in the future. It appears that she also exercised a strong influence on him as well. Within months of founding her order, her uncle established Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Technology (present-day Drexel University), to provide coeducational training for Philadelphia’s working-class.

As a newly-minted mother superior, Katharine supervised the building of a motherhouse for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament on a fifty-four-acre site in Bensalem, Bucks County, and

recruited and trained nuns for her fledgling order. She took seriously her responsibility to serve as a role model for self-denial as well. She managed to live on as little as forty-one cents a day by eating one meal daily—usually leftovers from the plates of other nuns. She wore shoes down to paper-thin soles and clothing until it was in tatters. She sharpened pencils until they were little more than stubs, and wrote much of her correspondence on the margins and backs of paper, scraps rather than using fresh stationery. She also sewed shoelaces together, rather than use new laces.

Convinced that God created all people in his image and likeness, Mother M. Katharine and her sisters established schools, catechetical institutions, and social centers on reservations so that Native Americans would themselves become leaders in the nation and in the Catholic Church without having to distance themselves from their own culture and heritage. Her commitment to Native Americans was refreshing and extraordinary,

coming at a time when the federal government was displacing tribes in order to “overspread and to possess the whole continent for the great experiment of liberty and self-government.” Implicit in this “manifest destiny” was the ethnocentric notion that white, Anglo-Saxon Americans were a “chosen people” destined for greatness because of their democratic institutions and that they possessed a divinely-inspired obligation to extend the benefits of those institutions to the inferior peoples who inhabited their borders. Using lofty language and routinely invoking God and Nature to sanction expansion, Protestant missionaries joined with federal policymakers and reformers to proclaim the divine mission of Americans to “Christianize” and “civilize” the Native American. They believed the creation of reservation schools in the late nineteenth century was critical to the assimilation of Native American children to white customs and values. Congressional legislation underscored their goal by providing educational funding for Indian children.

Mother Katharine was a bit of a contradiction herself. She used the archaic terms such as “the Indian and Colored Harvest” and “civilizing those poor pagans,” but she possessed a modern sensibility when it came to respecting culture and tradition. She once scolded children at a western mission who greeted her with green carnations pinned to their clothes on St. Patrick’s Day, reminding them they were not Irish but Native American. While she understood the need for assimilation, she also worked hard to respect the Indian culture and adapted her reform efforts to meet their specific needs. In 1894, she discovered that one of the boarding schools she had funded in Santa Fe, New Mexico,

had just closed, and so she traveled there to inspect it, supervise its repair, and reopen it. She learned one of the difficulties had been a communication barrier between the nuns, who found it difficult to speak Pueblo, and the students, who could not speak English. Mother Katharine directed the nuns to accommodate the students by learning Spanish, a language more familiar to the children.

She continued her journey west to explore other potential mission sites. In 1896, she purchased land in Window Rock, Arizona, the heart of Navajo country, and personally oversaw the construction of the St. Michael Indian School. St. Michael’s was under the care of a Franciscan mission that Katharine built and funded. Because the Navajo were opposed to academic education, she made sure that the school offered a variety of vocational training programs, including blacksmithing, farming, and carpentry. The school—which lasted for more than a century—eventually offered a more balanced curriculum, integrating vocational training, academic studies, and religious instruction.



Saint Katharine’s Hall in Carlisle, is among the several hundred religious buildings erected with the Drexel family’s wealth.

Over the next half-century, Mother M. Katharine would regularly visit the schools she established for Native American children in the West. During one of these tours, in 1902, she discovered that her schools in Oklahoma were attended by white children masquerading as part-Indian so their parents could lay claim to Native American land. Aghast and angered by the ruse, she dispatched a missive to her community in Bensalem, informing them of her desire to “bring the full-bloods—what is left of them—somehow to the church, to educate them so they may not be cheated out of their land . . . so that they may be fit to intermarry with good Catholic whites, and not the worst white element.” She prayed “they may be saved unto generation and generation, soul and body . . . so that future generations may not be able to discern differences of nationality, but that mingled into one Nation, all may serve God on earth and praise him eternally in Heaven.” Just as important to her was the plight of African Americans.

also accepted segregation as natural and equitable. Relegated to low-paying factory jobs, they and their families remained desperately poor. Living in ghettos, they tried to eke out a meager existence while their children were forced to learn in poorly equipped schools with little opportunity for educational advancement. Not until 1905 when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called for “restoring to [blacks] the right to vote, an end to racial segregation and complete equality in economic and educational opportunity,” did the struggle for racial justice begin. Even then, a racist white political establishment only begrudgingly agreed to reform. While northern blacks were enfranchised, many cities redrew their voting districts to limit their influence in elections. Black children were afforded better educational opportunities than in the South, but a “separate-but-equal” policy relegated them to inferior learning facilities and under-qualified teachers.

Louise Bouvier Drexel (1863–1945), married to Edward de Veaux Morrell

At the turn of the twentieth century, blacks in the South chafed under Jim Crow culture that barred their full participation in American society. The labor market was rigidly divided along racial lines with blacks being restricted to blue-collar jobs, while every state legislature enacted laws or constitutional provisions meant to eliminate the black vote. Trapped at the bottom of a stagnant economy and faced with disenfranchisement, blacks migrated in increasing numbers to the urban centers in the North for better political, economic, social, and educational opportunities. After they crossed the Mason-Dixon Line, however, they discovered the northern states

(1863–1917), who was elected four times a member of Congress from Pennsylvania, inspired stepsister Katharine's commitment to the education of black children. Morrell began a half-century committed to funding schools for Southern black children when, at the turn of the century, she built a training school for black boys at Rock Castle, Virginia. Soon after, Katharine purchased land nearby and built her own school for black girls. In 1904, when she learned that the city of Nashville intended to replace high school education for African Americans with industrial training, she expanded her missionary activities to the Tennessee capital. "If among our Colored People we find individuals gifted with [academic] capabilities," she wrote, "it is only proper to concede to the Negro the privilege of higher education." Through an agent, she secretly paid \$25,000 for a stately mansion in a white Nashville neighborhood and converted it into the Immaculate Mother Academy, a college preparatory school for black girls between the ages of eight and eighteen. Despite many racist threats to thwart the effort, the academy opened in autumn 1905 with an enrollment of twenty-nine students.

Mother Katharine experienced her most serious challenge by racists in 1922 when the Ku Klux Klan of Beaumont posted a threat on the door of a church mission she had established in the Texas community. Not long



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Mother M. Katharine's schools and missions helped countless Native and African Americans.

after, an elderly black member of the congregation was tarred and feathered. Since many of Beaumont's prominent citizens, as well as law enforcement

officials, belonged to the KKK, the sisters feared for their lives. Then, some say, God intervened. A storm damaged two of the buildings where the Klan was known to meet, and lightning struck another, killing one of the KKK leaders. Mother Katharine's mission experienced no further problems.

Mother M. Katharine at Xavier University's "Kiddies Day."



SISTERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Katharine Drexel was not a civil rights reformer in the modern sense of the term. She taught the white sisters of her order to "obey all authority as coming from God, including the civil laws of the South." Nor did she fit the description of an integrationist. She insisted on parallel seating for blacks in the Southern churches she established and, initially, prohibited black nuns from joining her order. To overtly challenge white authority in the South of her day would have jeopardized her cause. Her white nuns—known in the Deep South as "the n—r sisters"—working with southern blacks was barely tolerated, but an integrated group of nuns would have failed altogether.

Mother M. Katharine continued to actively guide her order well into her seventies. Nearly all the existing photographs of her show a camera-shy woman partly hidden by her habit. However, she did reveal a playful side, especially when in the company of children. Then, a smiling, engaging

mother superior could be found kneeling at eye level with them. With the assistance of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, she established many ministries, founded and staffed many schools for both African Americans and Native Americans, including Xavier University, the only predominantly black Catholic institution of higher learning in the United States.

At the age of seventy-seven, in 1935, Mother Katharine—at the apex of her career—suffered a debilitating heart attack. For the next twenty years she lived her life in prayerful retirement at the St. Elizabeth Convent in Bensalem until her death at the age of ninety-seven on March 3, 1955. Her body was entombed at the Saint Katharine Drexel Shrine, on the grounds of

the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Bensalem.

Katharine Drexel's call to serve the world's neediest led her to become one of the greatest philanthropists and missionaries of the twentieth century. She worked through the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to parlay her sizeable trust fund income into the establishment of more than three hundred institutions serving Native Americans and African Americans. In the process, she brought the gifts of education and faith to two of this nation's most needy peoples and earned consideration for sainthood. The identification and verification of two miracles of faith by the Catholic Church would secure that status in the late twentieth century.

The first of the miracles attributed to Drexel occurred in 1974 when fourteen-year-old Robert Gutherman of Bensalem suffered a painful infection that destroyed three bones in his inner right ear causing deafness. His family began praying to Mother Katharine for relief of his pain and the dissolved bones in the ear inexplicably grew back. As a result of this miracle, Pope John Paul II beatified Drexel in 1988, clearing her candidacy for canonization.

The second miracle occurred in 1994 when two-year-old Amy Wall, another Bucks County youngster, was diagnosed with incurable nerve deafness and enrolled in the Katzenbach School for the Deaf in Trenton, New Jersey. Her mother, Connie, obtained a piece of cloth worn by Mother Katharine Drexel and pressed it to her daughter's ears. The family began praying to Mother Katharine for a miracle. Later that year, a teacher at the school noticed a dramatic change in Amy's response to sound. Tests showed that she heard normally in both ears.

On December 20, 1996, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia opened the Catholic Church's official investigation for Mother Katharine Drexel's canonization. The following month an archdiocesan panel heard testimony from five doctors who insisted that there was no medical explanation for Amy Wall's cure. The young girl's case was brought before the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Subsequently, an Italian medical board also concluded that there was no medical explanation for her cure, opening the door for the Vatican to declare the cure "miraculous."

Four years later, on October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized Mother M. Katharine, making her the church's newest saint. "Blessed Katharine Drexel was a woman of lively faith," he said on the occasion, "deeply committed to the truth revealed by Christ. American Indians and blacks in the United States suffered great injustice as a result of racial prejudice. Seeing clearly the evil of this situation she set out with determination to combat and overcome it." And with that pronouncement, the pontiff elevated the socialite to sainthood.



Mother Katharine at her desk. The white knotted cord worn symbolized lifelong devotion to the Franciscans.

travel tips

Pennsylvania claims the final resting places of two American saints, canonized less than a quarter-century apart, and both of whom are intimately associated with the history of Philadelphia, and a papal countess who lived in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Saint Katharine Drexel (1858–1955) worked tirelessly to establish missions, schools, and churches for Native Americans and African Americans, which she funded through the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People. After she died at the age of ninety-seven, her legacy of munificence already well known, her reputation spread, and people began flocking to her burial place at the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament's motherhouse in Bensalem. They began urging church officials to canonize Mother M. Katharine Drexel, which led to her sainthood in 2000.

The **Saint Katharine Drexel Mission Center and Shrine**, on the motherhouse grounds, welcomes individuals to learn about Saint Katharine Drexel and her boundless charity. Objects and artifacts, in addition to furnishings, tell the story of this selfless Philadelphian and the sacrifices she made to make better the lives of both Native American and African Americans. Erected in 1949, the shrine holds her remains, and Saint Elizabeth Chapel memorializes her older sister, Elizabeth Drexel Smith. For more information, visit www.katharinedrexel.org/shrine.html.

Saint John Neumann (1811–1860), a missionary, Redemptorist priest, and fourth bishop of Philadelphia, arrived in the United States in 1836. Ordained shortly after his arrival, he accepted an assignment in upstate New York, but his fragile health—both physical and emotional—caused him to leave within four years. He moved between Pittsburgh and Baltimore until his appointment as bishop of Philadelphia in 1852.

Disdaining administrative duties, Bishop Neumann continued to act as a parish priest, hearing confessions, ministering to the sick, and teaching children. He spent his free time helping lay brothers with kitchen chores. He wrote and preached extensively. His indifference to personal honors and comfort proved legendary. At the age of forty-nine, he collapsed on a street in Philadelphia and died, apparently of a heart attack, on January 5, 1860. He was buried in the Redemptorist church of Saint Peter the Apostle at Fifth and Girard Streets. Pope Paul VI canonized him a saint on June 19, 1977. Visitors to the **Saint John Neumann Shrine** at the church can see his well-preserved body enclosed in glass. To learn more, visit www.stjohnneumann.org.

In addition to two American saints, the Keystone State also lays claim to a papal countess.

In 1888, just a year and a half after he met with Katharine Drexel and her sisters, Pope Leo XIII established *Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice*—the highest honor awarded by the papacy to a member of the laity for distinguished service to the church—to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of his priesthood. Forty years later, in 1928, Pope Pius XI conferred the honor on Annie E. Coroner Wills (1854–1935), widow of prominent Scranton, Lackawanna County, liquor dealer Robert C. Wills (1858–1924), for her generosity to a number of charitable institutions. The pontiff also bestowed on her the title of papal countess. She built **St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church**, (also known as the Wills-Coroner Memorial Church when consecrated in 1927) in the quaint Monroe County village of Tobyhanna, not far from her summer home, Sunny Breeze. The papal countess, her husband, son Joseph J. Wills, and brother, the Reverend Joseph J. Coroner, are buried in a crypt beneath the church—a highly unusual distinction for American Catholics.

Visitors to the Pocono Mountains wanting to make a stop at the historic church on Tobyhanna's Main Street should consult www.churchofstann.org. Sunny Breeze, now the museum of the **Coolbaugh Township Historical Association** and renamed the Wills Mansion, offers exhibits on local and regional history. For more information, write: Coolbaugh Township Historical Association, Wills Mansion, 5500 Memorial Blvd., Tobyhanna, PA 18466; or telephone (570) 894-4207.



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Mother Katharine, who traveled extensively to find new school and mission sites, visited Xavier University in New Orleans, a school she founded.

William C. Kashatus, Paoli, is a regular contributor to Pennsylvania Heritage. His most recent book is Money Pitcher: Chief Bender and the Tragedy of Indian Assimilation, published by the Penn State University Press in 2006.

FOR FURTHER READING

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