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BISHOP BENEDICT J. FENWICK
AND THE
ORIGINS OF THE BENEDICTA, MAINE COMMUNITY
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INTRODUCTION

Much has been said and written concerning the lack of Catholicity in Northern New England. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Catholic traveler could drive miles on its winding dusty roads before reaching a church of his faith to fulfill his Sunday duties. Today, however, few realize that more than one half of the inhabitants of Vermont and New Hampshire are Catholic, and that Catholics constitute about one-third of Maine's population.¹ This increase in Catholic population is indicative of the life and vigor of the present generation. In young America, modern developments are advancing with giant strides in the religious field as well as in many others.

True, this life and vigor are characteristic of New England and of America as well. In the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church of New England was still in its embryonic stage, struggling for existence among a hostile and bigoted, almost exclusively Protestant population. Any reader of the newspapers and books published in the 1830's instinctively sits back and wonders how such a rapid and flourishing growth of Catholicism in the northeastern part of the United States could possibly be explained. This section was, indeed, a strong kernel of the vigorous tree of Catholicism in America. In 1800, less than one percent of its population was Catholic; in 1870, nearly twelve percent!² Does not the European visitor marvel at the organization, the development, and the works accomplished by the young Church? For him, the answer is in keeping with the one he gives the progress accomplished in the fields of industry, commerce, education, etc., all down the production line: "You Americans rush all the time." And so it has been and is today! The tradition in America is a constructive one. To build and run the thousand mechanisms that make up this young, rising country remains its ambition. This ambition has led to the creation of a condition which might be summed up: "getting things" done in no time." It is almost a physical thing. Eight now, as it was then, most of our lives seem to be spent at a mechanized tempo. We live at eighty miles an hour.

But the energetic vein of the American people in general is a superficial answer to the development of the Church in America. A true-to-fact and more profound explanation can be offered by the New England historian. Just as the impulse given by a competent leader in any organization accounts largely, if not decisively, for its success, so it was with the birth and growth of the Catholic Church in New England. Had it not been for a Cheverus, a Fenwick, or a Fitzpatrick, the magnificent structure of Catholicism in America perhaps would not exist.

¹The Official Catholic Directory (ed., Thomas E. Kennedy, New York, 1960), 349 ff.

²Daniel-Rops, "Les debuts du catholicisme americain," *Ecclesia*, CXXXVI (July, 1960), 37.

A grandiose attempt of one of these leaders, namely, the colonization of Benedicta, Maine, by Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick, is the subject of this study. Most historians have already branded this attempt as Utopian or showing a lack of prudence, or have flatly stamped it "a failure." True, it never became what the Bishop wanted it to be, as we shall see in due time, but an examination of its details reveals the Herculean efforts the Church made in the last century. A patient study of the Bishop's endeavor will either satisfy the inquisitive European visitor, or will dispel part of our own ignorance concerning the "whys and hows" of the sturdy life enjoyed by the Church today. As the adage goes: "By his works, judge the man." So may we, through the analysis of the man, Fenwick, and his times, be prepared to understand the project of his Benedicta colony, its immediate results, and its lasting effects.

CHAPTER I

FENWICK, MAN AND BISHOP

Bishop Joseph Fenwick is but one of the many famous members of an old ancestral family whose roots run deep in the records of English, Irish, and American history.¹ An ancestor, Cuthbert, was a Catholic from the English county of Northumberland, a descendant of the proprietor of the Fenwick's Manor surveyed in 1651. The Fenwick's shared the fortunes of the two hundred families that originally came over in the Ark and the Dove under a charter from Lord Baltimore to settle St. Mary's in America. Cuthbert Fenwick became prominent in the political management of the young Maryland colony, and was often in contact with its famed governor, Leonard Calvert. He died about the year 1655. Four years later, his eldest son, his namesake, inherited through his mother's will the lordship of the Fenwick manor.

Cuthbert's great grandson was Benedict Joseph. Heir to his father's estate in 1789, Benedict was born on September 3, 1782, in the "Beaverdam Manor," a mile or two east of the historical Leonardtown, Village capital of old St. Mary's County. He was one of ten children of Colonel Richard Fenwick and his wife, Dorothy, daughter of Joseph Plowden of "Resurrection Manor." At the age of ten, Benedict was sent with his elder brother, Enoch, to the newly opened Jesuit school at Georgetown. He completed his course of studies brilliantly, and entered the Sulpician Seminary of St. Mary's at Baltimore, where he stayed one year. In 1806, the Society of Jesus annexed a novitiate to their college of Georgetown. There, Benedict began his career with the Jesuits by enrolling as one of the six American novices. Two years later, on June 11, at the age of twenty-six, he was received to the Holy Orders in the Holy Trinity Church by the Right Reverend Leonard Neale, Bishop of Gortyna.

His religious superiors soon recognized the qualities of leadership in the newly ordained priest, for the following year they assigned him and Father Anthony Kohlmann to the difficult mission of New York City, where the two took charge of St. Peter's Church. The diocese of New York had been erected in 1808, but its first appointed bishop, Richard Luke Concaven, died before ever reaching America. His successor, Bishop John Connolly, did not arrive until late in 1815. Fenwick's companion administered the diocese until that same year, and Father Fenwick took over during the year until Bishop Connolly's arrival. The Church was passing through a critical stage and the two priests were fully aware of it. Their devotedness and successful labors marked the rise of the young diocese. Soon they established and ably directed the New York Literary Institution - - a school for young men - - which enjoyed an excellent reputation among Catholics and Protestants alike. To bring back fallen-away Catholics to the Church, or to win Protestants to it, the apostle Fenwick, now acting as the vicar-general of Bishop Connolly, taught by way of the pen, pulpit, and better still, of patient charity on the streets of New York.

¹Sources of information on Benedict J. Fenwick's life: Richard H. Clarke, *Lives of the Deceased Bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States* (rev. ed., 3v., New York, 1888), I, 374-412; George L. L. Davis, *The Day-Star of American Freedom* (New York, 1855), 217; Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, Edward T. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston in the Various Stages of Its Development. 1604-1945* (5 v., New York, 1944), II, 7-49; James S. Sullivan, ed., *One Hundred Years of Progress; A Graphic, Historical, and Pictorial Account of the Catholic Church of New England* (Boston, 1895), 6-11

A most interesting episode, not void of poignant drama in its reality, which happened during this period of his life, was his visit he and Father Kohlmann paid to Thomas Paine. Feeling the approach of death, the American patriot presumably sent for them. Father Fenwick writes to his brother Enoch, then at Georgetown College, about his apprehensions: ". . . I knew from the great reputation of Paine, that I should have to do with one of the most impious as well as infamous of men."1 It was in a fit of fury and madness that the author of the Age of Reason received the priests. He ordered them out of his house. "I never, before or since, beheld a more hardened wretch."2 In spite of the calm attempt to bring peace to Paine's tortured soul, it seems that in 1809 he died in misery, in a state of rebellion against God and religion.

The vicar-general of the New York diocese was once more called by his Jesuit superiors to work in a field that henceforth was to mark his life and which he held in the highest esteem as bishop, namely, college education. In 1817, he became the ninth president of his Alma Mater. Georgetown College never flourished more than under his presidency, as Father Stonestreet, a faculty member, testifies.3

It seems as if the young cleric was to be put to all kinds of tests in the shortest span of time, for in 1818, as the school year ended, Fenwick was sent by Bishop Neale, at the request of Archbishop Marechal of Baltimore, to Charleston, South Carolina. There, all his reserves of tact and administrative ability were tested. Trouble and discord there were fomented by a certain Rev. Gallaher and a friend of his, Dr. O'Driscoll. Benedict and a companion, Father James Wallace, had been purposely commissioned to reestablish peace among the English and French-speaking parishioners then at odds; and decided, to discreetly send the two ringleaders away. The long-standing schism between the hostile linguistic parties was healed in a most comical fashion. Cognizant of the fact that each group was fighting to have sermons preached in its own language to the exclusion of the other, Fenwick ascended the pulpit and commenced his discourse in both languages, alternating French and English sentences in rapid succession. The effect was wonderful. The audience admitted the folly of its conduct and admired the man who could reprimand in such a pleasant and acceptable way.

While in the South, during the years 1818-1822, Fenwick found time to visit several missions there. In 1822 he became Minister of Georgetown College and Procurator-General of his Society in this country. In that same year, he also became president of the college for the second time, now as successor to his brother, Father Enoch Fenwick. Benedict Fenwick retained that office until 1825.

In 1823 the first bishop of Boston, Jean Cheverus, had been named to the See of Montauban by King Louis XVIII of France. The prelate's friends prevailed on the King for this appointment because they feared for Cheverus' health, then in bad condition.4 Boston diocesan affairs were left in the hands of the Very Rev. William Taylor, who acted as administrator until 1825. On May 10 of that year, Pope Leo XII appointed Benedict Fenwick as successor to Cheverus. Accordingly, on the following November, Fenwick, only forty-three years of age, was duly consecrated in the cathedral at Baltimore by Archbishop Marechal, assisted by Bishop Henry Conwell of Philadelphia and Bishop John England of Charleston.

1 Quoted in Clarke, Lives, I, 379.

2 Quoted in Clarke, Lives, I, 385.

3 John G. Shea, Memorial of the First Centenary of Georgetown College (Washington, D. C., 1891), 50.

4 For more information on Cheverus, see Annabelle M. Melville, Jean Lefebvre de Cheverus (Milwaukee, 1958).

Did Fenwick, young and newly mitred bishop, fully measure the deep loss made in New England by the departure of the great Cheverus? Was he aware of the great responsibilities he would have to assume in order to match his capable and holy predecessor? The years must have given a favorable answer for ". . . if Cheverus and Matignon may be called the founders of the Church in New England, Fenwick first placed it upon a solid foundation here . . ."1 Before accompanying this promising Prince of the Church to his new See, it would be enlightening to discern the inner motives which guided his actions.

In the eyes of one of his converts, Bishop Fenwick was ". . . perfectly unassuming, void of all pretension, and anxious to make himself of no account, he was ever the master-spirit, and would have been, place him where or with whom you might."2 This convert was no other than the illustrious author and philosopher Orestes A. Brownson, whose Quarterly Review the Bishop highly commended. Ever mindful that it is a friend speaking about a prelate to whom he feels much obliged and indebted, we are nevertheless impressed and possibly convinced by the flattering portrait Brownson depicts: "He used not a single unkind word, in speaking of Protestants; but with all our art, - - and we did our best, - - we could not extract from him the least considerable concession."3 If we are to believe Brownson, the soul of Fenwick was one of overflowing tenderness which manifested itself in multiple and ingenious deeds of kindness. To think ill of another was impossible. He had naturally inherited the wit and humor of his Irish ancestors. He loved company and entertained with grace and ease.

Children found a favorite in him. He was the best of fathers to his flock, especially to his beloved clergy.

To quote Brownson's laudatory panegyric once more where the picture just about touches perfection: Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick was an intellectual and scholar:

His mind was evidently of a practical, rather than that of a speculative cast. His memory was remarkably tenacious and was rarely at fault. He seemed to have read everything and to have retained all he read. He spoke several languages with ease and fluency. . . apparently familiar with the whole range of modern literature and science. That he was a sound divine, well read in dogmatic and moral theology, we suppose there can be no question; but his favorite studies seemed to us to be history and geography, in both of which, whether general or particular, he excelled. He was moreover, preeminently a business man. . . 4

Capable though he was, as this description reveals, the Bishop abhorred oratorical display in the pulpit. He seemed to have a special liking for humility, as many of his traits prove. With time and patience, he conquered his irascible character, the only defect mentioned in Brownson's sketch.

Another biographer who has studied and written more extensively about says: "He was over-sanguine. To judge from his letters, everything he undertook was to be the grandest thing of the kind ever witnessed. He was over trustful."5 He was also said to have been too

1 Robert H. Lord, The Organizer of the Church in New England: Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick (1782-1846), "Catholic Historical Review, XXII (July, 1936), 172.

2 Orestes A. Brownson, "The Right Reverend Benedict Joseph Fenwick, second Bishop of the Diocese of Boston," "Brownson's Quarterly Review, III (October, 1846), 521.

3 Ibid., 524.

4 Brownson, "Joseph Fenwick," 526-527.

5 Lord, "Joseph Fenwick," 185.

vigorous in counter-offensive against the slanders of Protestant journals and pulpits. Let it suffice to remark here that challenging and direct polemical methods considered out of taste and out of place today, were then quite the style, not only on religious issues but on political and business ones as well. "Some of his plans betrayed less than usual good judgment"; e.g., his plan during the years 1838-40 to build his diocesan college and seminary at Benedicta,¹ in the next chapter.

Just now, it can be asserted by inference that Bishop Fenwick possessed a deep love for his Church and dreamed to match its extension in other dioceses by much the same tactics as were being used elsewhere.² Some of these colony-schemes will be examined in some detail later. For the moment, it suffices to say that Fenwick followed the trend of his times in spite of overwhelming difficulties. These were numerous, and may partly explain his failure to cope with innumerable hardships, and to solve the momentous problems, which confronted him daily.

No great enterpriser or outstanding historical figure can boast of flawless attempts in the mapwork of his multiple projects. All in all, Fenwick was what moderns would call "a success." That he was favored by the immigration flood is true, but the swarming breadseekers perhaps impeded more than they enhanced the growth and development of such seaboard centers as Boston. That he did transform one of the weakest of dioceses into one of the strongest is undeniable. With him, Catholicism was brought into almost every part of New England. In the Fenwick's family's coat of arms appears a phoenix rising from the ashes with, in the upper part, the inscription: "A tous jours loyal," and below, "Perit ut vival." His whole life well fulfilled these symbols of which the Bishop was ever legitimately proud.

It seems superfluous to insist and indulge further in the analysis of this chapter, a great and historical one in the annals of New England. Death claimed him at the age of sixty-four, after occupying the See of Boston for twenty-one years. A man of robust constitution who knew the meaning of sickness only by the observation of its effects in others, he suddenly gave way to what his contemporaries termed "enlargement of the heart."³ Another example of his stamina will prove worthwhile and meaningful because it withstood the weakness of the dying man. For two years he struggled silently against the inroads of the disease that was to conquer him. His only place of rest during the nine months preceding his death was his armchair. It was there that the prelate breathed his last on August 11, 1846, after receiving the last sacraments and distinctly pronouncing the words: "In Te Domine speravi non confundar in aeternum."

The display of genuine fidelity which his mourners gave him is accounted for in the local news of the day. "The distinction between Catholics and Protestants seemed to be effaced, for all flocked with equal manifestations of veneration and love to view the remains of the departed prelate and on no countenance was seen the vacant stare of idle curiosity."⁴ A note of sincerity still prevails amid the flow of verbalism of which the journalist's pen is often guilty;

"Christians of all denominations will mourn the death of this truly good and venerable man, and to our fellow citizens of the Catholic faith the loss of his sage counsel, and bright example of purity and devotion will be a most severe calamity. . But his memory will be cherished by them, and his good influence this perpetrated as a noble monument of exalted worth." ⁵

¹ Ibid., 184

² James Fitton, Sketches of the Establishment of the Church in New England (Boston, 1872), 122, 177, 181-183.

³ Boston Daily Times Aug. 12, 1846; Bishop J. Fenwick, Memoranda, Aug. 7-11, 1846. MSS. Boston Archdiocesan Archives, Boston.

The funeral was a rare one for nineteenth-century Bostonians. The Mayor and City Marshall showed deep concern in their attempt to hush the noise of the crowded thoroughfare in which the Bishop resided, even during his illness. The loss was indeed a sad one to many, and such genuine sorrow had seldom been witnessed before.¹ His remains were interred in a spot close to Holy Cross College in Worcester, a place he had himself chosen for his grave. John Bernard Fitzpatrick, who had for some years been Fenwick's coadjutor, was now his successor at the early age of thirty-four.

It was precisely Benedict Fenwick, the man whose picture is now fairly clear, the Jesuit endowed with generous gifts of nature and grace, that Pope Leo named to assume the post of second bishop of Boston in 1825. His formal installation at the age of forty-three was to begin the annals of an illustrious office in the Episcopal See of Boston. It was his episcopate which marked the great turning point in the fortunes of the Catholic Church in New England. For two centuries, manifold and heroic effort had been made to implant Catholicism in the region, but the visible results had been extremely slight. In Bishop Fenwick's time the grain of mustard seed at last began to grow into a great tree. The diocese underwent a thorough change during his twenty-one years of zealous and persistent labors. To appreciate this change adequately, it would be well to inquire about the status of the diocese as the pioneer French-born Jean Cheverus bequeathed it to his native American-born successor.

Whom it was detached from the original See of Baltimore in 1808, the See of Boston comprised all of New England. The field was vast and the task confronting Fenwick of great magnitude indeed. The Catholics in New England were estimated at about four thousand, 720 of them in Boston.² Then Bishop Fenwick began his rule in 1825, Boston was well-nigh the weakest among the nine dioceses in the United States, as measured by the number of priests and churches. By 1828, however, the Catholics in Boston had increased to 7,040, and in New England, to fourteen thousand; Ten years later, the diocese had risen to seventh place among the sixteen dioceses then existing. The above numbers demonstrate with evidence that the fruits reaped by the Church were due largely to the tireless efforts of its great son, Fenwick.

In Fenwick's time, the historian can count only eight churches in New England, all of which, with the exception of the cathedral, scarcely deserved the name. There were four buildings opening their floors to white and Indian flocks in the state of Maine, which Father Dennis Ryan had ministered since 1818. Ryan was exactly one-third of the priests the Bishop could count as his helpers. Father Byrne resided at the cathedral, and Father Barber at his school and parish at Claremont, New Hampshire. In telegraphic style, here is the picture at one glance of the diocesan structure as Fenwick inherited it and over which he must have pondered anxiously on December 3, 1825, when he entered into his heavy episcopal functions:

The Cathedral:.....the Bishop and Fr. Byrne
Chapel of St. Augustine, South Boston:.....no priest -
Brick church, Claremont, N.H.:.....Fr. Barber (150 souls)
Church at Salem, monthly attended by some 150-200 Catholics
Church of Damariscotta, Me.:.....5 or 6 families visited by Fr. Ryan

¹Boston Courier, Aug. 12, 1846; Boston Sun, Aug. 14, 1846; Fitton, Sketches. 173.

²Statistics in this paragraph were compiled from the three following sources: Lord, et al., History. II, 178; Memoranda, Dec. 25, 1825; Sullivan, One Hundred Years. 3, 9.

Frame edifice at Whitefield, Me.:.....400-500 souls. Attended by Fr. Ryan,
 Old structure at Old Town, Me.:.....Penobscot Tribe of Indians: 400
 souls with no pastor.
 Building at Passamaquoddy, Me.:.....Passamaquoddy Indians; 300 in
 number; no priest.
 In all of New England:.....about 10,000 Catholics.¹

This picture is far from bright, and it would discourage any prelate who might be appointed to the district. But Fenwick was no man to fall into despondency. Thoroughly aware of the difficulties of his position, he took up the work of his episcopate with courage and energy.

The first problem which occupied his intelligent attention is obvious and logical; the need for a staff of clergymen. He made it his special endeavor to procure priests at once. In his own residence, he opened an informal and unendowed seminary and he himself instructed the candidates. He soon ordained his first pupils: Messrs. James Fitton, William Wiley, William Tyler, and Dr. Thomas J. O'Flaherty. This idea of propagating ministers for the Church was constantly on the Bishop's mind, and his projects to obtain them were ingenious and sometimes unthinkable. But because of this pressing need, his dream of an imposing and central seminary at Benedicta, Maine, was not a mere fantasy, though it met with disaster. Other enterprises enjoyed more success. His day school for boys in connection with his cathedral, which he significantly named Mount Benedict, was erected in 1827. This kernel of priesthood did yield many worthy priests, to who is due the flourishing growth of the Catholic Church under Fenwick and his successors to this very day.

Because his student candidates became too numerous for the exiguity of his modest wooden home on Franklin Street, Bishop Fenwick sent some of them abroad, to Canada, or to Baltimore. He finally managed to obtain some older assistants after persevering efforts and appeals. Some Irish priests who migrated to America also offered their help. Statistics will again be convincing of the fact that Fenwick's labors were crowned with considerable success. In 1833, the Catholics in the whole diocese numbered thirty thousand or more, two-thirds of them in Boston. From three priests, the Bishop's assistants had grown to twenty-four. In 1836, ten years before Fenwick's death, the diocese boasted the following proud numbers:

Easter Communicants:.....	8,153
Baptisms:.....	1,792
Churches	30
Priests	35

In Boston alone, there were 476 baptisms in 1830, 1600 in 1844. In Massachusetts there were 29,000 Catholics in 1835, 53,000 in 1845. The results were tangible and the picture, if compared with the one of 1825, had singularly brightened.

Bishop Fenwick's efforts were those of an untiring apostle. To cite but a few eloquent examples: in 1826, in spite of the shortage of priests, he boldly sent Father Charles French, a Dominican and a convert, to Eastport to build a church and work among the Indians of the Maine coastline. On his visit to Maine in July, 1827, he did not hesitate to lengthen his already long itinerary to call upon a certain Mr. O'Connor,

¹ Lord, Joseph Fenwick, 175-176; Sullivan, One Hundred Years. 8.

² Wm. Byrne, et al., History of the Catholic Church in the New England States (2v., Boston, 1899), I, 46-48, 68.

whose influence and wealth he sought to build a church for the people of Portland. At Providence in 1828, he urged the flock there to obtain a subscription for the erection of a sanctuary, from which later sprang the See of Providence. In the same year, he purchased the Episcopalian church which was to be the origin of the See of Hartford. In 1835, there seemed to have been a remarkable upsurge in the number of new churches: St. Mary's and St. Patrick's in Boston, the churches at Augusta and Bangor, Maine, and other at Lowell, Newport, Fall River and Providence.

By 1843, the Bishop was sixty-one and labors of his See had considerably increased. He therefore petitioned the Holy Father to erect Rhode Island and Connecticut as a separate diocese and asked a coadjutor for himself. Father William Tyler, one of the first he had ordained, was recommended for the See of Hartford, and Father John Fitzpatrick for the post of coadjutor. All these petitions were granted. In August, 1842, because the Bishop believed in maintaining and strengthening, if need be, the spiritual energies of his assistants, he called the first diocesan synod in Boston, attended by thirty priests. The Bishop was also an eminent figure at the Baltimore Provincial Councils held in 1829, 1833, 1837 and later years, conspicuous as he was ". . . by the weight of intellect and character, and by his native ancestry and training."¹

Before his death, the Bishop had effected considerable change in his records: thirty-one churches, thirty-six priests, seventy thousand Catholics. Compared with the national records, the Boston diocese now could legitimately boast of being a solid and valuable corner stone in the American Catholic Church structure. By 1846, in fact, the Church in the United States consisted of the following:

21 dioceses	737 priests
1 apostolic vicariate	560 stations or missions
25 bishops	740 churches

Historians note that it was in New England and more particularly in the confines of the Archdiocese of Boston that a more intolerant attitude was shown toward Catholicism during the early period of our history. It is enough to say perhaps that Massachusetts was the home of the Puritans.² Signs of the vehement hostility toward immigrants were seen in the political opposition to and discrimination against foreigners and religious denominations. This hostility took the form of calumny, riots, murders, and arson. Religious fanaticism was the strongest influence in this epoch of strife and stress. It heralded the days of the Native Americans, the Know-Nothings, and the Supreme Order of the Star-Spangled Banner.

It is not the place here to give a detailed account of the burning of the Ursuline Convent at Charlestown or of any riot. Mention will be made of those disturbances which affected in some way the bishop of Boston. That Fenwick's efforts to strengthen the Catholic position met with opposition, there is ample evidence in the editorials of his day. In the 1830's, a storm of fanaticism swept New England, and repeated attempts were made to assail residents in the Boston area. Fanatical mobs were inflamed by different means. To mention but a few: Congreg- Minister Lyman Beecher's attacks aroused the hatred of many. Rebecca

¹ Byrne, et al., History. I, 69.

² Byrne, et al., History. I, 50-53 and 54-63, about the Charlestown convent; Lord, et al., History. II, 179-265, for a full account of the Protestant revival against Romanism; Sullivan, One Hundred Years, v, for pertinent remarks on religious bigotry in New England.

Reed's slanders against the Ursulines of Charlestown, where she had been a probationer for six months, also attracted much attention. These and no doubt many other factors led to the burning of Mount Benedict on August 11, 1834, and the dispersion of its inhabitants.

On this occasion, Bishop Fenwick's moral suasion on his people was remarkably exhibited. That no retaliation followed was due to his influence.¹ The Bishop chose not to appeal to the State or to the municipality for reimbursement, which should legitimately have been given to the diocese for the destruction of the Convent. On the contrary, Fenwick had to pay the sum of over seventy dollars for the unsuccessful protection afforded by the Commonwealth! This payment the Bishop duly paid, thus proving himself a character of admirably restraint.

Other instances of prejudice took place. The builders of St. Mary's and St. Patrick's churches had to be protected by armed parties. The Bishop was shot in effigy in 1835. The "Broad St. Riot" on June 11, 1837, directed against the Irish quarter of Boston, and the mobbing of the Montgomery Guards (Irish-American Militia Company) on September 12, long left bitter scars in Massachusetts. On May 2, 1838, the church at Burlington, Vermont, was burned. By 1844, factions which were to merge into the Native American Party in the next decade, molested the Catholic population and foreigners in general.

Besides ministering to the spiritual and educational needs of his flocks, and protecting it from the snarls of prejudice, the Bishop dedicated his talents in many other fields. That the Bishop was a scholar is evident. Assisted by Father John Powers of New York, he edited the Catholic Laity's Directory of 1822. He is the author of his Memoranda, a precious source of information for New England historians because it recounts in detail his incessant activities. A Church Music Book and a Book of Ceremonies bear his authorship. Various Catholic books and tracts were published under his direction. He in one of the pioneers of Catholic journalism in this country. Due to him were printed the Catholic Press of Hartford (1829-1833), and the Expostulator for Young People (1830-1831). By far the most important publication begun by Fenwick was The Jesuit, which printed its first issue on September 5, 1829. Its major purpose was to explain the truths of the Catholic Church and to de-fend those truths moderately yet firmly. It underwent a series of changes in its title until it finally adopted the one it carries today, The Pilot, when Patrick Donahoe became its capable editor in 1836.

The Bishop's intensive zeal among the Protestants is noteworthy. He received many converts into the Church, among whom Virgil Barber, who was to become Father Barber, a fellow-Jesuit of Fenwick and founder of the first Catholic Church at Claremont, New Hampshire. Later, Samuel Barber joined his son's faith, abandoning his title of Episcopalian minister. By far, the most illustrious of the Bishop's converts was the philosopher and reviewer, Orestes A. Brownson's. ² "Brownson Weathercock" from the time of his conversion, in 1844, until his death, became the strongest mouthpiece of New England Catholicism under the guidance of his spiritual father, Bishop Fenwick. His channel was the publication which he named without excessive modesty, Brownson's Quarterly Review. Any one skimming through a few copies can readily understand how this passionate, philosophical character could be well understood by the Bishop. To both of them, the best and perchance the only means of defending the faith was to attack, to take the offensive. Brownson consequently pounded on the Protestants, and urged Catholics to struggle against quiet passivity

1 Sullivan. One Hundred Years. 10-11.

2 For more information, see Theodore Maynard, Orestes Brownson (New York, 1943).

and lazy lethargy. Quite prophetically, he announced America's successful "manifest destiny" some one hundred years in advance!

It is impossible to enumerate here the various schools, institutions and churches Benedict J. Fenwick opened.¹ The Bishop was an organizer and a builder, and there was nothing he enjoyed more than, building. Perhaps of particular interest is the steadfastness he showed in the erection of the monument at Norridgewock, Maine, where Father Sebastian Rale had been killed by the Indians in 1724. Several times the ferocious Indians succeeded in destroying the shrine, and obstinately the Bishop had it reconstructed in honor of the priest considered to be the first martyr of Maine and, incidentally, one of his Jesuit brothers.²

The Bishop of Boston, as the success of this memorial proves, was a man whose decisive spirit could challenge opposition and could over-come intricate difficulties which are part of any organizer's life. Fenwick took his episcopal life as he found it with a firm determination to build into it whatever he thought was to be beneficial to his people. His constructive energies were to concentrate at the end of his life on the settlement of a community-farm when he discovered that such a project would be the solution to many problems in his diocese. Where he got the idea and how it was carried out will be the topic of discussion in the coming chapters. The complete history of Fenwick's farm project thus comprises not only its actual founding but also what preceded and caused it; the conditions of life before and during the Bishop's episcopate.

1 See above, 20-24.

2 Memoranda, Aug. 23, 1833; The Jesuit. Boston, July 13, 1833.

CHAPTER II

BIRTH OF AN IDEA

Bishop Fenwick's activities and interests fanned out in many directions. The object of this study is the story of one of these interests which occupied the Bishop from 1833 until his death. The grandiose but rather Utopian enterprise, ideally visualized by Fenwick for a northern Maine agricultural community, namely, *Benedicta*, must have required long and careful thought prior to its actual founding. There must have been several reasons to incline and even to impel the Bishop to seek the northernmost point of his diocese as a haven for the choicest part of his flock. Just what, then, were the Bishop's reasons for establishing a colony in this remote section of the country? Certainly, the place could be alluring to the Lumberjack, the "Going-down-easter," the "Fox," or the "Pine Tree," as Maine folks have been nicknamed, but who would think of a permanent establishment in such a wild region? Not the comfortable city-dweller, of course. Yet such was Bishop Fenwick: a city dweller, a Bostonian. Should anyone look in retrospect and glean those events of Fenwick's life, which significantly prepared him for such a project, he may discover why the Bishop was drawn to *Benedicta*.

One clue is found in his own family background. He was born in an agricultural community, and in his childhood he experienced the benefits of farm-life. As an adult, he could see that country-life kept its inhabitants free from the evil influences of capitalism and city congestion. Then later, what Bishop Fenwick saw in Boston in the 1830's were exactly the bad effects of these evils on the Irish, who, by this time, were flocking by the hundreds from their native land and were dumped onto the shores of the Hub. From 1800 to 1829 the Irish Catholic population in Boston rose from one thousand to seven thousand!¹ Not only did the Irish stream into the port of Boston directly from Ireland, but also from Canada. Between 1821 and 1890, three million immigrants came through that country, with more than one-half from Ireland.² What attracted them was the prominence of two merchants, James Kavanagh and Matthew Cottrill, then engaged in extensive trade between the British Isles and New England. That many of these incoming Irishmen took the trek down the St. John's Valley towards Boston is evident by the chain of farms, lumber parties, pioneer Catholic churches in Maine, which clearly defines this southward route. In fact, the four-hundred-mile stretch came to be designated as the Irish Trail. Others again traveled on vessels carrying gypsum or "plaster of Paris" - - a fertilizer - - from Nova Scotia to Boston.

What would result from the tide of immigration to the city was to be foreseen: slum areas developed, and with them, disease, crime, and pauperism. Between 1833 and 1852, there were 14,388 state paupers in the Commonwealth. Of these, 11,321 were foreigners, and of that number, 9,788 were from New England and Ireland.³ Furthermore, the Yankees did not look favorably upon the unskilled immigrants. One writer even wondered why the Irish Catholics in particular were not expelled, as soon as they arrived, by the intolerant Protestants of New England.⁴ The situation became so serious that the Massachusetts General Court asked

1 Edith Abbott. *Historical Aspects of the Immigration Problem-Select Documents* (Chicago, 1926), 572-573.

2 Charles McNeill, "The Irish", *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VIII (eds., Charles G. Herbermann, et al., 15 v., New York, 1911), 135.

3 Abbott, *Historical Aspects*. 572.

4 Daniel Chauncey Brewer, *The Conquest of New England by the Immigrant* (New York, 1926), 92-93.

its senators and representatives at Washington to introduce a law against the dumping of paupers in America. To make matters worse, the country already felt in the 1830's the symptoms of an economic depression that was to culminate in the Panic of 1837. At the same time, a widespread choleric epidemic was raging in America, filling cemeteries, hospitals, and orphanages, a state of affairs not in the least helped by the rise of congested suburban areas full of immigrants.

All feeling was constantly growing against the Irish immigrants on social, religious, racial, and economic grounds. Many Irish societies were organized to cope with the needs of Irish incomers, but these organizations were not very successful. Bishop Fenwick also was anxious to help the Irish. The swelling membership in the Catholic Church, due to the influx of foreigners, steadily increased his desire to provide them with some suitable assistance. He could not turn to the social reform movements of the day, for many members of the Catholic clergy objected to their pecuniary concerns and their polemic Protestant leadership. Many influential people realized that the immigrant was helpless to shake off his low, cheap, miserable way of life, and that he needed a "good Samaritan" to begin anew. The role was played both by ". . . the clergy and laity who were in the midst of a nation-wide crusade to improve the lot of the Catholic poor."¹ Having now some idea of the Irish situation, it is easier to understand the Bishop's concern to change it. To break up in some measure the congestion of immigrants in Boston slum areas, then, was evidently a major reason for Bishop Fenwick's project of an Irish colony in Maine.

Beside his love of the countryside and his belief that it was a source of well being, both morally and materially, the Bishop was perhaps influenced in his decision to establish an Irish colony at Benedicta by the heritage of his Society. He was a Jesuit, and a fervent one at that. Who would not think it as being very normal for a member of a religious family to admire and perchance wish to imitate examples which its glorious annals had to offer? Although the Bishop evidently never mentioned them, it is safe to conjecture that he was familiar with the Paraguayan Reductions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²

The pattern for a "reduction" was a classic one: isolation, agriculture as the main source of livelihood, and civic and religious administration by two Jesuit Fathers. The center was the church, and spiritual exercises determined the natives' schedule and working hours, and not vice-versa. The reductions were founded in order to help the conversion of Indians in Paraguay, to preserve their faith, and harbor them from the Spaniards' dishonest methods of exploitation. From the extensive agricultural organization came productive commercial profits. Arts and trades were also part of the commercial pursuits of these reductions. Each village was self-supporting. All its land and workshops belonged to the community under the direction of the Jesuits. The Provincial of the Order closely supervised the subordinate superiors of each village (always two Jesuit priests), and had the last word in the administrations of the reductions. As will be seen, some of these features appear in Benedicta.

Other Catholic experiments may have also inspired Fenwick. In 1790 Father Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin, with the encouragement of Bishop John Carroll, had opened a colony for Swiss, German, and Irish colonists in Loretto, Pennsylvania.³ The colony had its own sawmill and tannery,

¹Aaron I Abell, *Origins of Catholic Social Reforms in the United States: Ideological Aspects*, "Review of Politics, XI (1949), 295.

²For a more complete account of the reductions, see R. B. Cunningham Graham, *A Vanished Arcadia, Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607-1767* (London, 1924); George O'Neill, *Golden Years in Paraguay, 1600-1767* (London, 1934).

³See Maurice F. Noonan, *A Catholic Colony in Pennsylvania: Loretto* (Washington, 1932).

and was located in a country district, so that most of the colonists lived on farms. By 1808 other missions had spread out from Loretto, and the Irish soon predominated in the area. Ten years later a Frenchman, James LeRay, established a series of colonies known as the Black River Settlements in northeastern New York.¹ The central settlement was known as the Catholic Society of Carthage, and had its own saw and grist mills. French, Irish, and German immigrants, under the sponsorship of Bishop John Dubois, flocked into the settlements, making them thriving industrial and commercial centers.

The success of these first Catholic colonies impressed Bishop John England, a friend of Fenwick, for he, too, proposed in 1822 to help the unemployed and poor Irish immigrants by creating colonies for them in the interior of the country. However, he lacked priests and financial resources and was never able to realize his plan.² A layman was to have more success. Michael Riddlemoser, a wealthy Catholic of Baltimore, founded a colony for all Catholics at New Baltimore, the first of the Pennsylvania Settlements. The site possessed plenty of water and timber; it was good farming land.³

The idea, then, of a farming community as a solution to the Catholic immigrant problem was widespread. Even after the founding of Benedicta in 1834, Catholic agricultural colonies were being organized in the West. The most important of these was the New Westphalia Settlement, located just outside St. Louis. Organized by Helias d'Huddeghem, a Jesuit, the colony was essentially an agricultural one, with a church and a school to provide for the spiritual and intellectual needs of the settlers. The development of this project was closely followed by Bishop Joseph Rosati of St. Louis, who corresponded regularly with Fenwick and may have exchanged ideas with him.⁴

The reduction of Paraguay and the Catholic colonies in America were located in isolated areas, in part because of the desire to preserve the religious integrity and morals of the faithful. The same thought motivated Fenwick. The Irish Catholics were living in a hostile Protestant area, and were exposed to many temptations. What was particularly disturbing was that the Irish immigrants in Boston were guilty of drunkenness. Irish names predominated in the lists of men and women arrested in Boston in 1833 and 1834 for drunkenness.⁵ The Boston Pilot was to report in 1836, "Intemperance hurts the Irish race."⁶ Temperance societies were not the answer, for the Bishop disapproved of the existing Protestant ones in the belief that the temperance crusade was simply another way for making money. He was not to sponsor a Catholic society until 1840.⁷ What perhaps impressed him more was that intemperance did not flourish among the Irish who had settled in small farming communities. Already predisposed to favor rural rather than urban life, his observations convinced him that temperance was engendered by healthier living and less worry over the necessities of life.⁸ For him, then, an agricultural community

1 See Talbot J. Smith. History of the Diocese of Ogdensburg (New York c. 1885).

2 United States Catholic Miscellany. Charleston, July 3, 1822.

3 Mary Gilbert Kelly, Catholic Immigrant Projects in the United States (New York, 1839), 29.

4 See Augusta Lebrocouy, Le Fondateur des Missions du Missouri Central: Vie du P. Helias d'Huddeghem de la Comagnie de Jesus (Grand, Belgique, 1878)

5 The Boston Morning Post, January, 1833 and March, 1834.

6 The Pilot, Boston, May 14, 1836.

7 The Jesuit, May 21, 1831, and The Pilot. April 4, 1840, show the change in the Bishop's attitude toward temperance movements between these nine years.

8 The Jesuit, July 12, 1834.

such as Benedicta was to become a sort of temperance reformatory. In a way, it was the first Keely Institute of the Country.¹

There are points of similarity between the reductions of Paraguay, the various settlements just discussed, and the community-farm of Benedicta which Fenwick founded. To point out the main features: the Bishop was to be the civic and spiritual leader of the colony. He called the Irish immigrants to an isolated agricultural spot with the hope of removing them from the vicissitudes of the metropolis and of providing them with the material and spiritual needs of a self-supporting community. Each settler owned his own property and was free to dispose of it. The Bishop did own the costly machines necessary for the lumber operations carried on in the colony, and he retained the site for the proposed college and the farm-lot adjacent to it. The only political administrator was the residing priest, the pastor, who as the direct representative of Bishop Fenwick, periodically reported to the Boston prelate on the civil and spiritual administration of the colony. The pastor was also responsible for all records in the community; he guided all activities, whether spiritual, social, or material. The Bishop, however, made the ultimate decisions, such as the decision to abandon the college and mill projects.

Differences in the realization of the Paraguayan and the Benedicta experiments were created by the disparity of milieu and era. For example, the military atmosphere necessary to prod the lazy Paraguayan to work, the exclusion of racial entities other than the native in the reductions, did not exist in Benedicta. The downfall of the Jesuit reductions was not the result of the Jesuit system but of the Portuguese raids and the brutal expulsion of the Society.² The partial failure of Fenwick's enterprise, as we shall see, was likewise not the result of his plan, excellent in itself, but of the lack of support from his Society, and of the need for funds and men with which to carry on the plan.

Possibly, then, Bishop Fenwick's dual (natural and religious) family background influenced his "back-to-the-land" movement in Benedicta. Product as he was of a Maryland plantation and admirer of his ancestral Jesuit brothers of the Paraguayan Reductions, simple peasant life quite normally appealed to him as a solution to the Irish problem in and around Boston. He was determined to attempt a colony scheme similar to that already begun in different parts of the country. The desire to relieve the plight of the Irish families in Belfast, Maine, upon his visitations there in 1827, at which time he persuaded them to take up farming, clearly manifested that desire to bring financial aid to the poor Irish. Cognizant of all the adversities facing them, it was then the Bishop's ambition to send a great number of settlers from the larger towns of New England into the woods of Northern Maine. There he intended that they should live away from the pit-falls of the metropolis and enjoy the count-less spiritual and physical advantages of the countryside.

Were there still other factors influencing Bishop Fenwick and inducing him to organize an Irish settlement in Maine? Did any impulse from the highest authority of the Church encourage the American clergy to ease the social ills of the times? An investigation on the interests absorbing the three popes contemporary to Bishop's Fenwick's term of office shows that Leo XII (1823-1829), Pius VIII (1829-1830), and Gregory XVI (1831-1846) were immersed in European matters. The Revolution of 1830 and the Catholic Emancipation of 1829 in England attracted papal attention more than the problems or remote America.³

¹In 1880 an American physician, Leslie Keely (1836-1900), opened at Dwight, Illinois, a sanitarium for the cure of inebriates. The treatment he gave became known as the "Keely Cure." See *The Source Book*, IV (eds., William F Rocheleau, et al., 12v., Chicago, 1924), 1542-1543.

²See Anthony Huonder, "Reductions of Paraguay," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII (eds., Charles G. Herberman, et al., 15v., New York, 1911).

³Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman, *Recollections of Four Popes of Rome in Their Times* (London, n.d.), 161, 329.

It is particularly through the National Pastorals, official organ of the American Hierarchy, submitted to the See of Peter in Rome, that summons were made to assist the distressed immigrants.¹ In these pastorals or letters, the American bishops expressed their concern for a solution to the Church's various needs. Fenwick sought to remedy identical ones in his own diocese. One of these needs (another reason for the founding of Benedicta) was a diocesan seminary.² It was imperative that Fenwick build one, and he did in the northern part of his diocese. Sylvan seminaries seemed to be the style. LaFargeville in New York and Emmitsburg in Maryland are but two typical examples which most possibly influenced Bishop Fenwick. The objective of LaFargeville, Emmitsburg, and Benedicta was to recruit candidates for the priesthood; all three were Jesuit institutions with a college and a farm to support it.

In addition to a seminary for the training of priests, there was a need for Catholic educational facilities. Education for the laity was the main concern of the Bishop when he was installed in 1825, for he then declared:

The thing I want most, (and until I attain it I am persuaded that nothing permanent can or will ever be effected in this quarter) is a Seminary and a College. And for my part, I have not a cent to build them with.³

Herein lies another motive for the Bishop's new colony. He wanted Benedicta to be the center of New England Catholic Intellectual life.⁴ In fact; the idea of building a suitable college-seminary alone occupied the Bishop from 1825 onward, the second idea - a farming colony - crystallized in his mind only in 1832.

To provide means for worthy worship of God and for better practice of morals and faith was another legitimate dream to be realized in Benedicta. Fenwick wanted to plant another center of Catholicism in his diocese.⁵ In fact, a promise he made to the first settlers of Benedicta was that a parish priest would reside among them and minister to their spiritual needs. He was determined, thus, to find practical means to contribute to the development of the Catholic Church in his country.

Fenwick's realization of his plans for a colony in Maine was made possible by the friendship of eminent Maine statesmen. Edward Kavanagh of Newcastle, who was to become Maine's first Catholic governor on the Democratic ballot in 1843, and who was the close friend of the Bishop of Boston, played an important role in the choice of a spot for the Benedicta colony. Kavanagh and a friend, John Gilmore Deane, had both studied the lands of Northern Maine in connection with the St. John Valley or Northern Aroostook County boundary dispute, and always therefore in a position to give the Bishop valuable information.⁶ Deane was the representative from Maine to the General Court of Massachusetts from 1816-1819; then, after the separation of his state from the Commonwealth, to the legislature of Maine from 1825 to 1835. He wrote many reports on the northeast boundary of Maine which he located. Besides, he

1 "Pastoral Letter of 1833," Peter Guilday, ed., *The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy, 1792-1919* (Washington, 1923), 61, 72-74.

2 "Pastoral Letter of 1837," Guilday, *Pastorals*, 113.

3 Memoranda, Dec. 31, 1838; *The Jesuit*, April 27, 1833.

4 Benedict Fenwick to Edward Fenwick, St. Louis, July 19, 1830, quoted in Lord, et al., *History*, II, 320.

5 *The Jesuit*, April 27 and Oct. 5, 1833.

6 Memoranda, July 31, 1827 and August 27, 1838. The Bishop tells of his friendship with Edward Kavanagh.

was well acquainted with the state's large tracts of land, many of which were lying in grants for the Commonwealth.¹

Through these two men, the investigation and purchase of the territory which the Bishop desired were facilitated. Fenwick bought a tract in the southeastern wedge of Aroostook County, an area of 11,258 acres for the low sum of \$13,597.50 or about \$1.20 an acre, but he could take six years to pay for it. Checking through the certificates of sale for lots through the years 1830 to 1840 in Massachusetts Register of Deeds, we find that the prices vary according to the proximity of those lots, or their remoteness to the cities. There were no tracts sold by the Commonwealth in the northern Maine section beside Bishop Fenwick's township in the 1830's, but the other tracts sold in New England were slightly higher in price. Out West, land was certainly cheaper. Father Nicholas Stein-backer, a Jesuit who founded Nippenoe's Valley Colony, a mission of New Baltimore, bought 1100 acres at fifty cents an acre.² He charged the settlers one dollar an acre, while Bishop Fenwick's prices were \$1.25 and above per lot, depending on the location of the land bought in the township.³ He told the settlers that he was selling the lots at exactly the same price he paid for them. Sometimes poor settlers got some lots either at a very reduced price or free.

To protect the farming interests of his little colony, the Bishop declared he would not let speculators bid on his lots. This was automatically closing the door to greedy prospectors at a time when the Maine woods were being traded in for low and unfair sums. This practice continued in Northern New England until the mid-nineteenth century.

While some immigrants joined the Bishop in his Maine experience, other bands of incomers left Massachusetts for the West to become clerks or mechanics in the city. By 1853, however, many had settled on farms where the only decent means of livelihood existed. It is evident, therefore, that the Irishman was not always impelled by an exterior motive to resort to farming. In fact, he often decided of his own accord to choose farming so that he could live a life much similar to that he had known in his mother-country. Was not the Irishman trying to recreate whether in Massachusetts, in Maine, or the West, the simple life of peasantry he had just abandoned in Ireland? The answer is clearly in the affirmative. The intimate atmosphere of family and village life, agriculture being the predominant occupation, these features were part of the Irish tradition, and were to prevail in Benedicta.

The Bishop realized that many Irishmen were moving west or southward to New York to establish in America their "new Ireland." He asked them to change their plans:

That Aroostook possesses, in many respects, decided advantages over the Far West, there can be no doubt. A healthier spot probably does not exist on the face of the earth. But in addition, to this, there is a beautiful and productive soil, all yet in its virgin purity. The winters are indeed long but their pure and bracing atmosphere gives to the inhabitants a robustness of constitution, and a vigor and vitality which Illinois cannot impart. The summers are short, as they are elsewhere in the greater part of New England, but vegetation progresses rapidly, and the husbandman in autumn finds his labors rewarded by an abundant crop. Add to this the important fact that they are not at all cursed by the yellow fever of the South, or the fever and ague of the West.

1 Llewellyn Deane, "John G. Deane," Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society. Second Series, I (1890), 179-196 passim.

2 Kelly, Immigrant Projects, 33.

3 The Jesuit, Oct. 5, 1833; Memoranda, June 23, 1834.

And should the prospective settler be afraid of loneliness, afraid of lacking the necessities of life in this remote region,

Let no man wait a single day for railroads communications.

"That may, or may not, be built at an early day. Its want for a while may deprive the settler of foreign luxuries, and compel him to rigid economy, and to look to his own farm for many of the products which money and railroad facilities might procure from abroad. Let the land be possessed for its intrinsic merits . . .1

And the pep-talk addressed to the Irish people continues.

While there were numerous factors that prompted Bishop Fenwick to experiment with a community-farm up North, the spark that set his enthusiasm afire was his visit to Whitefield, Maine, in July of 1832, during a tour of his mission outposts there.² So rapidly had the number of Catholics increased during the fourteen years that had elapsed since the coming of Father Dennis Ryan in 1819, that the church was filled to overflowing, some were even unable to gain attendance. At once the Bishop authorized the building of a new church at Whitefield. This incident proved to him the glorious possibilities that lay in the establishment of Catholic colonies in Maine. At the same time, his attention was called to Township No. 2, Range 5, which he visited carefully in June 1834. This was the place, he decided, for his colony, and by June 27th, upon his return to Boston, the first chapter of Benedicta's modest history opens. Before turning to that fascinating story, let us examine the site of the colony.

Aroostook took its name from a Maine Indian Tribe. Of Maine's six-teen counties today, Aroostook is its northernmost and biggest, with an area of 6,453 square miles or about one-fifth of the entire State. It is shaped roughly like a wedge and bounded north and west by the Providence of Quebec, and north and east by the Providence of New Brunswick. Washington, Penobscot, Piscataquis and Somerset Counties form its southern borderline. Most Americans can remember something about the Aroostook Bloodless War of 1838-1839 fought over the northern boundary lines. These were definitely settled by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842.

South of Fort-Kent situated on the northern borderline, lies a vast land of lakes and dense forest. Large tracts of this section westward of Aroostook County have remained untouched so that it still looks much like it did in Fenwick's day. Eastward, stretch the vast potato-fields, which are the greatest source of this county's income. Back in the 1830's, Maine's potato empire had not begun its business, so that this eastern section was but a wide area of virgin soil, very sparsely populated except perhaps along the St. John's Elver and the Atlantic coast.³

Aroostook County was incorporated on March 16, 1839; it then had but one city, forty-nine towns, and twenty-one plantations.⁴ Its entire population did not exceed 3,399; today, the number does not quite reach one hundred thousand. There are no definite statistics available for the period before 1860. The polls were then 2,098 and the estates were valued at \$1,105,796; at present, the polls reach 23,000, and the estates are valued at slightly below \$43,000,000.

It was on the southeast of that enormous wedge that Bishop Fenwick chose a spot for his colony.⁵ The half-township selected for

1 The Pilot. Jan. 29, 1859.

2 Memoranda, summary of the year 1832. The first time the Bishop mentions the Benedicta project in this diary is Aug. 30-31, 1833. The trip of 1834 is accounted for in detail, June 12 through 28.

3 Charles Morrow Wilson, Aroostook: Our Last Frontier (Brattleboro

the future town of Benedicta and named in honor of its founder comprises the western half of Township No. 2, Range 5. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts had previously sold this tract of land to William Howard in 1794 and, upon the latter's inability to meet his obligations, it was transferred in 1802 to John Lowell of Boston, who, in turn, gave up the contracts. Joseph C. Morris and Andrew McMillan surveyed the land in 1825, but it was most likely in 1831 that the Bishop, while visiting his Maine flock at Damariscotta and Whitefield, decided to ride 150 miles inland to inspect the rolling, wooded country where now stands Benedicta, 425 miles from Boston. Up wonder, henceforth, lay his ideal acres of rich loamy soil.

Benedicta-to-be was, at the time, nothing more than a densely forested region of hard birch and maple, soft furs, spruce, and hemlock. On July 7, 1834, when Fenwick signed his contract for the land, it was property of Commonwealth. The Bishop, however, did not gain legal title to the tract until March 31, 1846, when it was deeded to him by George W. Coffin, agent of the General Court of Massachusetts. The following note in Bishop Fenwick's diary partly explains why there was this gap of twelve years before the deed was signed:

The Bp. pays to the Treasure of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts \$2242 Dollars, the same being principal and interest on his last note given for the purchase of the half township in the State of Maine with the exception of \$10 still due by him. The reason why he left the ten dollars unpaid is that he does not wish to take out his note till it becomes due on the 7th of Aug. 1840, as the half township would be liable to taxation by the State of Maine the moment the note is taken up and he prefers to leave \$10 balance of principal and to pay the interest arising on it, than to subject himself to taxation. The entire sum, therefore, which he now owes for the half township No. 2 fifth range, is ten dollars and the interest on it from this day.¹

This note does explain the delay of the transaction until 1840. The interim 1840 to 1846 remains unexplained in the episcopal or state records. Why Bishop Fenwick bought the land from the Commonwealth and not from Maine is because, although Maine became a distinct and independent state in 1820, Massachusetts retained large tracts of land which were later sold in form of grants to speculators.

Benedicta is bounded on the northwest by Sherman and on the northeast by Silver Ridge. As a great backdrop, thirty-two miles away rises the summit of the mile-high Katahdin. The township stretched in the midst of an almost trackless wilderness, but it consisted of good land, and large lumber operations were being carried on in its vicinity when Bishop Fenwick visited it with Kavanagh and Deane. Northern Maine and Benedicta itself has maintained to this day its old tradition of farming even after concentrating on the more lucrative lumber trade as a means of livelihood. More than one scholar has traced the founding of New England settlements and discovered that it is probably no exaggeration to say that Celtic New England is the product of the New Brunswick trade.

Bishop Fenwick and his Maine-bound settlers boarded a trading ship for a two-day steamboat ride to Bangor.² There they took a stage for Wheeler's Tavern, which is seven miles beyond Mattawamkeag, on the road to Houlton, today's county-seat, no less than forty-four miles north of Benedicta. The Bishop's plantation began at the tenth mile on the Aroostook Road and extended to the seventeenth. Every mile, half mile, and even quarter mile was distinctly indicated by the side of the road, so that the traveler could not be mistaken. Some travelers walked the seventy miles from Bangor to Benedicta. It was a matter of some seven-to-ten daytrip, depending on the season and road conditions. Nevertheless, the undaunted colonists trudged on bravely, with the

connects all points from central to Northern Maine. It was partly built by the State of Maine in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, but hardly deserve the name of state road then, because it was in reality a mere trail cleared out to facilitate access to St. John's Valley. Benedicta's early settlers received freight or had to load it on stages which arrived at or left from nearby Patten or Houlton, both towns being located on that Road. Goods bound for the south were shipped from these towns to Bangor where, every week or so, steamboats or trading ships would leave for Boston. Today, Benedicta is eight miles from the nearest station, Sherman, so that it is yet comparatively in the background. Time has now come to read into the annals of its settlement.

CHAPTER III
FOUNDING OF BENEDICTA

On the evening of June 27, 1834, Bishop Fenwick announced that, as far as his project for a colony in Maine was concerned, his recent visit to Benedicta in the Aroostook had been perfectly satisfactory. A few days later, on the twelfth of July, the possibilities of a new Catholic settlement there were revealed to the Catholics of Boston, especially " . . . Those industrious Irish families who wish to retire into the country, from the noise and corruption of the cities, to devote themselves to agriculture. "1

It was not too difficult to sell the proposition to 134 Catholic families. In fact, the prospective buyers found the outlook so promising that the entire section of 11,258 acres of fertile farm land was contracted for before August 9, These were sold in fifty, eighty, and one hundred acre lots. By July 26, or in the short span of scarcely a month after the bishop's first announcement, seventy-three families had engaged to move to the new settlement. Of these, thirty-three had asked for farms on the Aroostook Road, twenty for farms back from the road, and seventeen for lots in the proposed village. The requests of three families are not known.2

Along the Aroostook Road, the land was sold at two dollars an acre. The lots were alongside this Post Road which the government had cut through the wilderness. It extended 115 miles from Slew Gundy to Fort Kent. Back from this route, lots were sold at a lower price of \$1.50 or \$1.25 an acre to suit the means of poorer purchasers. To settle in the village, where plots of ten-acre lots were laid out, the price was considerably higher, but there is no record to show the exact price of these ten-acre lots. The Bishop asserted that he would seek no emolument for himself, but sell the lots at the very same price he originally paid for them. The families were given a reasonable term of years to pay, free from all interest on the original sum demanded.

A vivid description of the beauties, resources, and natural advantages of this tract of land in the heart of the Maine wilderness appeared in the Bishop's official and main organ of propaganda, The Jesuit:

Thus has this little Catholic settlement risen in the wilderness, with a rapidity unparalleled in the annals of history; and we venture to assert that there will not be a happier or more contented and thriving colony in the State of Maine in five years more. The land is exceedingly fertile, and capable of maintaining a dense population; the individuals who have moved upon it, or are about to do so, have been principally bred farmers. Thus everything announces a successful settlement.3

1 Jesuit, April 27 and Sept. 21, 1833.

2 Memoranda. Sept. 1, 1834; The Jesuit, April 27. 1833. The Bishop draws a sketch of these first lots. See also, Roe & Colby, Atlas of Aroostook County, Maine (Philadelphia, 1897), for an outline of the lots sold. This atlas is a precious source of information concerning the first settlers' names and occupations until the end of the nineteenth century. It contains accurate road maps, gives a clear idea of the Bishop's colony and its geography.

3 The Jesuit, Aug. 9, 1834.

On August 9, it was announced that 134 families were to set out soon, making a total population of 536, including 402 children. The township was then given a destiny which seemed most promising. If all these people would have actually settled, Benedicta was to get a density of thirty inhabitants per square mile. These are the numbers filed in the records of the chancery desk. How many settlers did leave in 1834? The first group consisted of five families accompanied by the Bishop of Boston or Father Conway.¹ The pioneer band left by the end of the summer. These families have left their names attached to the very soil of Benedicta? Casey, Broderick, Millmore, Brown, and Burke. Their names can be seen on old tombstones in the cemetery, John Millmore being the first to die in the colony, the first in five years.

As was the custom for Maine-bound travelers, it is assumed that the pioneer group took a steamboat heading for Bangor.² The first part of the voyage was the easiest. At Bangor, seventy miles still lay before them and the prospective colony, a stretch that was then a mass of wilderness except for a narrow road laid out through the forest. The promised land came in view after a long and tiresome journey of about seven days. It may be conjectured that the group hired teams to take them to their destination. One thing is certain, however, that the trail was impracticable from the Molunkus Stream. So, walking about seven miles a day from that junction to the "paradise on the Molunkus," a distance of some thirty miles, was the only way to get there.

When the first settlers reached the spot that was to become their new home, they encountered a few squatters already dwelling in cabins in the heart of the vast forest. It is most probable that David and Joseph Leavitt were the first squatters and settlers on the section bought by the Bishop.³ This Leavitt family, along with the other squatters, were friendly to the newcomers and helped to familiarize them with the region, and to build their homes. Father James Conway then saw to it that the township was properly surveyed. This priest was the direct representative of Bishop Fenwick in this part of the diocese. His station was at Old Town, where he ministered to the Penobscot Indians as well as to the white Catholic families of the Bangor region. It was to him, therefore, that the first settlers applied for the identification of their lots and for their spiritual necessities, since records indicate he was a frequent visitor in the early days of Benedicta.⁴ But more will be said about the church organization later.

Life was made relatively easy for the pioneers when the Bishop granted lands on easy terms, as we have seen. Furthermore, the Bishop loaned them farm implements and the necessaries of life on condition that they maintain their sobriety and industry at all times.

1 Souvenir Program of the Centenary of Benedicta: 1834-1934, Benedicta High School Library. Other sources used in this chapter say that Father Conway went with these first settlers. The Bishop does not relate this trip in his diary.

2 Memoranda, July 10, 1827, date when the Bishop tells of his voyage to Maine; this trip of 1834 was doubtlessly affected the same way. Louise T. Mulherrin, direct descendant of the Millmores, now residing in Houlton, told the author on June 10, 1960, that the first settlers traveled in this fashion.

3 Ava Harriet Chadbourne, *Maine Place Names and the Peopling of Its Towns* (Portland, Maine, 1955), 436; Edward Wiggin, *History of Aroostook (Presque Isle, Maine, 1922)*, 213. These writers state the Leavitts' presence as "probable." The Bishop asserts that they had been there since 1832, in his Memoranda, June 18 and 21, 1834.

4 Baptism and Marriage Register of Benedicta and Houlton 1836-1861, MSS, Diocesan Archives, Portland, Maine.

He paternally followed the first steps of his young colony. He was diligent in giving instructions to those planning to set out and establish themselves there. They were told how to prepare for a prosperous life once they had reached their destination, by the Bishop himself:

"It is necessary that each family moving on the land should be provided with provisions in pork and flour, sufficient to last for one year. It is true that the forest through all this section abounds in deer, moose, and caribou; yet this mode of subsistence is always precarious and should not be depended upon. Besides, the time of a settler at his commencement is immensely precious, which should be employed in constructing his dwelling, in cleaning and fencing his land, and should not be wasted in hunting."¹

The first months at Benedicta reads like a story. Some settlers managed to get a cow and then a horse. Flint was commonly used to kindle fires. When darkness came, they retired in their homemade beds, for it was some time before they could buy candles to light their cabins. Wheat and barley were the first grains to be raised and sacked to Patten and Lincoln to be milled, a distance of some thirty-two odd miles, over a rough road. Thomas Currdan, a proverbial Irish schoolmaster, taught the village children, but the first hired teacher was Rebecca Geary of Patten; next to be in that position was Catherine McCarron. From the very beginning, then, Benedicta had its school, a colonial structure which served until 1921, when a consolidated district school was erected.

Catherine McCarron, a Catholic, was married to Chaney J. Patterson, a Protestant, by Father Eugene Vetromile, on October 25, 1855, when this priest was pastor at Benedicta. This suggests that the grown-up colony was open to all faiths and not exclusively to Catholics, as the Bishop had intended. After his death, examples of mixed marriages as they appear in the parish records are few but significant. Mary Lord and a certain Catholic Mr. Dougherty were also united; Father William Moran baptized her and her ten-month son the same day, September 28, 1845. A third such marriage existed between John O. Wedgeworth and Mary Anne Smith. These are the only mixed marriage entries, three in all, recorded in the Register for the years 1836-1861. It seems that the Protestants were an almost insignificant minority. In 1899 there were none at all. Available records indicate there was no non-Catholic family until 1928, when a Protestant family moved in from Patten and was heartily welcomed. The children were sent along with the others to the parochial school. A year after the foundation, that is, in 1835, the first child was born in Benedicta: Mary, the daughter of John Millmore. But the first birth on Benedicta's parish records is that of James Coates(?), on September 8, 1835. The baby was baptized by Father James Smith on July 8, 1836. James Bradley, son of Thos. Bradley and Mary Ryan, was born on July 31, 1836, and baptized by Father William Moran on August 3 of the same year. And the list of entries of births, baptisms, and marriages goes on, more or less regularly kept, because of the constant change of priests and pastors and visiting missionaries.

True to his intention and promise, Bishop Fenwick began the construction of a seminary building. The four-story hall was finished in 1835, but its doors never opened to welcome seminarians. No doubt the building was hastily set up, for no sooner was the future college finished, than it was ". . . in danger of caving in and the foundations falling into ruins. \$300 would . . . suffice to make the necessary repairs."² The money for the college and church buildings owned by the Bishop was furnished by the Jesuit Order. Other buildings soon followed: a gristmill, a brick kiln, and a dam on the Molunkus Stream. Stones for the mill were imported from France and hauled from Bangor through the thick wilderness. This saw mill was near the eastern line of the township, and was operated by the early settlers. It contained an up-and-down

¹ The Church World, Portland, Maine June 29, 1934, which gives an account of Benedicta's founding on the occasion of the town's centennial celebration. The editor of this diocesan newspaper quotes these words as being Bishop Fenwick's message to the settlers but he gives no reference to the quotation printed.

² John Bapst to Bishop Fenwick, Sept. 20, 1834, Benedicta, Old Letters "A", 1825-1871, MSS, Boston Archdiocesan Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, number 93 (herein cited as Old Letters "A"). Translation from French is mine.

saw and shingle machine. Transportation of materials needed for the good and steady management of this mill was, one can easily imagine, very slow, and for a time, no profits were made, to add to the detriment of the lumber enterprises, a freshet washed away the foundations of the mill. It still served for a few years as a source of occupation for the citizens of the township, especially lumbermen, but it was later dismantled when the nearby forests were depleted. Besides, western lumber was cheaper, making it unprofitable to continue running; the mill, and the Jesuits stopped sending contributions for the welfare of the colony. The Bishop, however, kept on almost single-handed, yet undaunted, for ten more years.

The other resources of the colony were profitable, and were developed intensively, especially after the tragic end of the mill. The rich soil was suitable for farming and the raising of dairy cattle. Wheat, barley, rye, oats, rutabaga, and turnips were among the best crops adapted to this soil. Grass and clover grew in abundance as well as Indian corn. Apparently, maple sugar abounded in the region and yielded from three to five pounds of sugar per tree in season; it was then selling at the good price of a shilling per pound. But by far the crop that ranked first, then as today, was the potato. Because it was a common food in Ireland, it naturally appealed to the Irish people of Benedicta. Potatoes, then selling at one dollar per bushel, became the main source of income for the town's farmers. Evidence that most of the inhabitants engaged in that type of work is found in the old Register and in other early records, for the pastors sometimes included the profession of the settlers in the parish records. But these annotations are rather scarce. The next main source of livelihood was lumbering. Many settlers became woodchoppers or carpenters. There were few other trades, such as store management and cattle and horse dealing. Fish abounded in the ponds, the Plunkett and the Flinn, and in the Molunkus River nearby.¹

Because of its importance, more must be said about potato raising in the Aroostook area. The Incas ate the wild potato which the Spaniards took back with them to Spain.²

Italy was the first country to give any worthwhile attention to the vine, and later it was grown extensively in Ireland. The potato returned to North America from Ireland when a group of Scotch-Irish immigrants in 1718 were forced to winter in Portland harbor because of the intense cold of the late season. They introduced the culture of potatoes the next spring, having brought some with them from Ireland. The most productive variety in Aroostook County was introduced from South America in 1810. From then on, the staple crop steadily increased in production. However, from the standpoint of commercial production and export, it did not become important until 1870, when the railroad entered Aroostook County.

Of particular interest here is the difficulty to conjecture the exact quantity of Maine potatoes marketed between the years 1822 and 1870. Potato-raising got some public notice abroad through the efforts of the prominent Kavanagh, who occasionally advertised the home product. Three ships of potatoes from Benedicta arrived at Georgetown, D.C., in 1842, almost ten years after the founding of the colony.³ Kavanagh recommended them highly. He was then member of the Senate standing-committee in Washington. The potatoes then sold for twenty-five, twenty-seven, and thirty cents a bushel on the boat, and for seventy and eighty cents in the retail market.

We would like to compare these prices with others of the time. Unfortunately, statistics are scarce. In 1833 one half million bushels of

1 Memoranda, Sept. 12 and 13, 1838.

2 On the history of the potato, see Clarence Day, *A History of Maine Agriculture, 1604-1860* (Orono, Maine, 1954); Samuel Deane, *The New England Farmer or Georgical Dictionary* (Worcester, 1790); Helen Hamlin, *Pine, Potatoes and People: The Story of Aroostook* (New York, 1848); Cora M. Putnam, *The Story of Houlton* (Portland, Maine, 1958); Wilson, *Aroostook*, 203-204.

3 William Leo Lucey, *Edward Kavanagh: Catholic Statesman, Diplomat from Maine, 1795-1844* (Francestown, New Hampshire).

potatoes were shipped from the Kennebec Valley at an average price of thirty-eight cents a bushel. In 1843 potatoes sold at twenty-eight to thirty cents a bushel.¹ Was the amount asked for in retail markets similar to that of Benedicta's in 1842? The answer cannot be given.

There is no doubt that for laboring people who wished to better their fortunes, the colony of Benedicta was a golden opportunity. In 1859 the following article was intended to induce the common man to enter the farming industry:

It is a fact which has been most successfully demonstrated, that any man in the possession of the strength and vigor of manhood, can, in the course of six years, make himself an independent farmer of Aroostook.² Editorials did not assert this as being true in 1833. The first years were hard, and it took some time before the land was sufficiently cleared to start large farms.

In 1836 the Bishop paid a visit to his pioneer flock. He revealed his contentment in a letter to the Propagation of the Faith headquarters, saying that there were actually thirty families well established and that an equal number were to join them in the next year. Another letter expressed his high hopes, almost childishly building "castles in Spain".

"But my Catholic settlement succeeds beyond my expectation. Not only have Catholics settled on my own land but they have already begun to extend themselves on the State's land adjacent. It is just as I wished and as I anticipated. We shall have a thriving colony of several thousand without any mixture of Protestants. I am now erecting a seminary and college which I hope will one day afford an ample supply of native clergymen for the wants of the diocese, in the center of the township. I have allotted for its support 500 acres of the first rate land, together with the proceeds of a saw mill and grist mill."³

The population of Benedicta doubled the next year, 1837, the turning-point, so to speak, of the little colony. The Bishop's own notes are very optimistic. He met 147 inhabitants in 1838, sixty-five grown-ups and eighty-two children.⁴ The produce of the twenty-four farms was 1128 bushels of wheat, 1882 of oats, and 327 of rye. There was plenty of hay, potatoes, turnips, and other vegetables.

The number of settlers apparently did not suit the expectations of the Bishop, for in 1839, The Pilot voiced his appeal for more settlers. Does not the following article resound with propagandist expediency? After enumerating a series of causes of discomfiture in Boston surroundings, the editor presents Benedicta as a haven for his Irish readers:

"To those who are not acquainted with the fact, we would state that there is in Maine a Catholic settlement, where there is a priest and a church, and where great improvements are going forward. It is a beautiful location, healthy and pleasant. The soil is fertile, and yields the husbandman a rich reward for his labors. Why should our countrymen go to the West, when they can find a retreat there, free alike from the dismal swamps of the West, and the Egyptian bondage of the metropolis. Let them go to the Bishop's settlement in Maine, where they can enjoy the society of their friends, worship God according to the customs of their gallant ancestors, and reap the reward of their toil in the yellow harvest, and all the rich bounties of nature."⁵

1 Day, Maine Agriculture, 163-164.

2 The Pilot, Jan. 29,

3 Benedict J. Fenwick to Rosati, Nov. 6, 1837, MS, Arch-diocesan Archives of St. Louis. Copy in possession of St. Benedict High School of Benedicta.

4 Memoranda, Sept. 24, 1838

5 The Pilot, Oct. 12, 1839.

Bishop Fenwick expected much from his colony and spared nothing to establish and the growth of its population and its production. He continued to visit Benedicts at least once a year. Throughout the year, however, he had many occasions in which to remember Benedicta. Each year there was a road tax, and a county tax to pay. Between 1841 and 1845 these taxes amounted to \$1,272.31.¹ In addition questions arose over the quality of the soil and the boundaries of the lots laid out in the new town. Although he was hundreds of miles away from the scene of conflict, the Bishop had to deal with them from his desk on Franklin Street. It is striking how clergymen were immersed in material problems and now they handled them effectively. The correspondence of Father James Conway and Father William Tyler with the Bishop is most revealing.

Things are getting along tolerably well, but the expenses are terrible. I thought the meal you sent should be more than enough for the oxen this season, or until the oats would come in, but I have to send off next week for more meal.

The mill and dam have been the greatest trouble and expense and I rejoice at the prospect of being able to discharge all the men tomorrow.²

This is but one example of the letters on record describing the material concerns of the pastor. In another letter, the over-burdened priest asked the Bishop to discharge him of his administrative responsibilities because he could not fulfill his ministerial duties properly.³ When Father John Byrne in turn wrote to Bishop Fenwick, it was to relieve himself of complaints: the lot is no good there is no decent church, no residing priest, no school or college, no grist mill, etc., as the Bishop had promised.⁴ Father Byrne added his disappointment at counting only 118 adults and 176 children in the colony.

Complaints of various kinds were also addressed to Bishop Fenwick, "father" of the little flock, by discontented settlers. For example, a certain Michael Dunne had a wagon stolen by a neighbor who has deserted Benedicta. Dunne asks the Bishop if he could take the robber's lot for reimbursement.⁵ In some instances the Bishop had to use rough manners to rebuke injustice. A certain P. Mulligan of Bangor had used bad language in a charge against the prelate. Just what the nature of this charge was, is not known. The tone of the episcopal letter is rather rude; it is clear that the Bishop expressed his determination not to let himself be unjustly accused.⁶

By 1841, the colony could count sixty families. This number still falls short of the seventy-three which had subscribed in August 1834. In all, there were three hundred persons, all of them Irish. If we are to believe a Bangor journalist, the number was kept small purposely because the settlers were not accepted indiscriminately or without due inquiry as to their character and capability. At this time the colony seemed to be thriving fairly well; it had made, wrote the editor, "a vigorous beginning in farming, and now makes quite an experience of thrift."⁷

1 Separate note in the Benedicta Letters, 1835-1865, no. 88.

2 William Tyler to the Bishop; Aug. 7, 1840, Benedicta Letters, 1835-1865, no. 66.

3 Ibid., July 26, 1840, no. 65.

4 John Byrne to the Bishop, June 1, 1846, Benedicta Letters, no. 51; see also James Conway to the Bishop, Aug. 21, 1839, *ibid.*, no. 31, where Conway asked to be dismissed.

5 Michael Dunne to Fenwick, April 10, 1843, *ibid.*, no. 11. It is impossible to locate the answer the Bishop gave him.

6 Fenwick to P. Mulligan, April 25, 1836, *ibid.*, no. 73.

7 Bangor Whig: Eastern Argus Weekly, Nov.30,1841.

A large two-story building now existed, and it was the Bishop's intention to erect wings to the main building, probably the next season. The young men who were educated in Europe and destined as teachers for the college were announced, but never came. Signs of hardship are mentioned for the first time by the Bishop in the summer of 1842. Up to this date, his diary notes on Benedicta read like an adventurous romance. But henceforth Holy Cross College seems to have absorbed the attention of the prelate. There are less and less comments about his Northern Maine enterprise in his Memoranda. Was not the Bishop also overtaken by bad health which rendered other preoccupations impossible? In fact, he became ill in 1845, an illness which ended in his death on August 11, 1846.

Special notice must be given to the church origination of the colony, because, in reality, it was the very core of its foundation and subsequent activity. The first church of Benedicta was a "pretty little one," according to the Bishop's statement. Father Conway was the first to celebrate Mass in this small cabin, while the first log church was being built. Yet, St. Benedict's Church was still crude and humble. It was built in 1838 from the territory's timbers, of hewed logs fitted in cobble style. Its timbers may still be seen today in the home of the Qualeys, direct descendants of the first pioneers. The Qualey house is a long, low-posted sturdy-looking structure, suggestive of church purposes. The second church was erected under the pastorate of Father Smith; it was afterward used for storeroom purposes. The present church is a wooden edifice of Gothic design and stands on the west side of the Aroostook Road, facing the east. On its western exposure rests the rectory constructed from the old college building, while on the left or north exposure stands the school building erected in 1922 under the super-vision of the rector, Father E. Fitzpatrick. This church was built by Father McCauley, a relative of Mother McCauley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. Members of the Sisters of Mercy were invited to teach at Benedicta in 1865, and are still there, providing eight years of elementary and four years of high school training.

In the beginning, Benedicta and Houlton formed but one mission, so much so that the two are sometimes combined and called "Benedicta-Houlton." The churches of St. Mary of Houlton and St. Benedict were erected at about the same time and attended successively by Fathers William Tyler, James Conway, and Manasses Dougherty. On the latter's departure, Father William Moran administered the parish. He was succeeded by the Jesuit Fathers Force, Moore, Vetromile, and Bapst, names that will linger, especially Bapst, in the memory of the members of the Church in New England. Once in a while, other priests signed the old Register. They were no doubt visiting or "Maine Missionaries," as some added to their signatures. Such were Fathers Flaherty, Sullivan, and Canavan. After the Jesuits left in 1851 Benedicta became a mission of Houlton under the pastorate of Fathers McIver, Henry Gillen, Daniel Murphy, John Brady, and L. J. Bartley, the last named being assisted in his work by Father James Cassidy. A resident pastor at last came to Benedicta in 1871 in the person of Father McFaul. His successors in the pastorate were:

John J. Cassidy.....	1874-1880
James Cairns.....	1880-1891
E. J. McCauley	1891-1893
Patrick Reardon	1893-1900
Henry J. McGill.....	1900-1902
Mortimer O'Connor.....	1902-1907
William J. Culbert ...	1907-1916
E. J. Fitzpatrick	1916-1923
C. J. Enright.....	1923-1936
M. Carroll	1936-1940
G. Dulac	1940-1953
L. White.....	1953-1955
J. Houlihan	1955-1959
John M. Anderson.....	1959-

It was from Benedicta that the faith radiated to the neighboring towns. An example is that of Houlton, which became a mission of the younger neighbor in 8 Silver Ridge, a second mission-post, was a township settled by families from Benedicts in 1857. A third was Winn, which had its church dedicated in 1877. Other mission-sisters, which grew in time from the Bishop's colony, were Danforth, Kingman, Lincoln, Medway, Molunkus, Island Falls, Patten, and Sherman. In fact, it was not uncommon that in some districts six or seven towns shared the ministrations of one priest. There were at times as many as ten to seventeen mission outposts or stations attached to a single central parish. Modern conveniences of communication were often lacking, and the various settlements could be reached only after long drives through the wild country.

What happened to Benedicta after its founder's death? His successor, Bishop John Bernard Fitzpatrick, continued the Fenwick Memoranda and tells of his own trips to Maine. A call for more settlers was issued in 1859. Apparently, Benedicts was not thriving enough to match the late Bishop's hopes for it. Glowing descriptions somewhat overdone, covering whole columns in the newspaper issues of the day, were meant to serve as bait to the readers:

HOMES ON THE AROOSTOOK

A good place for Emigrants

There is no question but public attention is at present largely turned towards the wild lands of Maine, and especially towards those of the Aroostook Valley. Multitudes, not only in our own State, but also in the rest of New England and New York, are contemplating availing themselves of the almost unequalled advantages which that grand and, fertile region promises to the hardy pioneer.¹

Ingenious tactics were used to entice the irresolute. An anonymous "Aroostook Settler" occasionally beckoned his southern New England friends to join him in his successful adventure. Detailed accounts to prove the growing prosperity of the colony were given. For example, flour had previously been selling at two dollars a barrel for freight from Bangor to Houlton. Freight from New York to Houlton, however, was but one dollar and six cents, and promised to be but eighty-one cents in 1860.² This applied to all articles of export and import, so that New York and Boston were in reality nearer to Aroostook than Bangor was. Furthermore, the year 1860 was to be a landmark in Benedicta's early history: a better road was to be built to facilitate trade with St. John Valley, Boston and New York. The prosperous farming and lumbering region called for a railroad to run "soon" from Bangor to Houlton.

By 1860, the price for the Bishop's land had been considerably lowered to the insignificant sum of fifty cents an acre! It was virtually, and many times actually, given to the settlers. Even more was offered to attract them:

. . . a home may be secured to the settler, such lot is, by law, exempt from attachment and levy on execution, and in the event of his death descends to his widow and children, and is safe to them, from any debts due to the deceased, until the youngest child attains the age of eighteen years.³

1 The Pilot, Jan. 29, 1859.

2 Ibid.

3 The Pilot, Jan. 29, 1859.

By this survey of the colony's early history, it must be admitted that families did not settle as numerous as the Bishop expected. A short sketch will make this fact clearer:

By the end of 1834.....15 families
1835.....12 more
1836.....15 more
1837.....double the total number or about 80 families in all
1838, 1839, 1840.....more came; no exact number is available
1840.....300 souls in all.¹

The greatest increase in population was between the years 1860 and 1870, when it neared the five hundred mark.

All the settlers were Irish immigrants with the exception of three German families from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Jersey: the Rush, the Smith or Schmidt, and the Rivers. There were, besides, a few French Canadians whose names appear in the old parish records. The progeny of the Teutonic pioneers have intermarried during the passing years with the children of the Caseys, the Brodericks, the Millmores, the McAvoy's, the Browns, the Burkes, the Donovans and the Qualeys who joined the exodus from the tenements of the original Old North End and Dort Hill sections of the Hub.

John D. Rush arrived in 1838 and settled the side opposite that of the present church building. He came from Paterson, New Jersey, but he still had many relatives in Steele, Germany, where life was hard. His young brother, Johann Bernard Rasche: said he wished to join him when he had grown up.² But conditions were difficult in Paterson, as the letters, sent from there to John Rush in Benedicta reveal. Money was scarce, factory jobs exhausting by dint of work.³ It is interesting to follow this family through Catherine Gantner, oldest resident of the town when it celebrated its centenary in 1934. She died on January 18 of that year and the town's officials paid tribute to her, one of its first settlers and daughter of the above-mentioned John Rush. He and his wife, Sarah, were German immigrants who left Providence with the little three-year-old Catherine and arrived in the colony after a hazardous journey by boat to Mattawamkeag, thence by team to Slew Gundy, and finally on foot over a trail of some fourteen miles. John Rush was a carpenter by trade. After clearing his own lot and building his home, he directed the construction of the church and college buildings.⁴

Even more fascinating is the following account of an octogenarian "Uncle Joe" - Joseph Rush - who tells of the hardships of the early settlers. He was the oldest living resident of the village in 1934. His remarks, which are rather revealing, are cited in full:

I was born in Benedicta, July 13, 1851 ... in a log hut where the residence of my nephew J. P. Rush now stands.

1 Memoranda, 1834-1840, passim.

2 Johann Bernard Rasche to John D. Rush, April 12, 1837, Steele, Germany. Original letter in possession of Ralph Rush of Benedicta and translated from German by him. The name of Rasche was anglicized to Rush in America.

3 Franz Schmidt to John Ross (sic), August 6, 1838, Paterson, New Jersey, MSS, Collection of the Rush Letters.

4 Arnold Hinrich Rasche to John D. Rasche, Feb. 7, 1838, Steele, Germany, MSS, Collection of Rush Letters. Arnold tells John he will send him shortly the tools requested. See also. Memoranda, Oct. 5, 1840, where Bishop Fenwick comments about the Rush carpenter in a favorable manner.

At this time, all the houses with one or two exceptions were log houses. The logs were mostly hewed out of the forest nearby and dragged to the site of building operations.

Many times when I was a boy, I can recall some of the older residents who were the early inhabitants here tell harrowing stories of coming to Benedicta by oxen-team. They all told the same story of privation and unknown hardships of their long trek here on foot or by ox-team from Bangor, Maine.

When I was a boy, fish and game were plentiful and around Benedicta, in fact, at times it (sic) constituted the chief food in most homes; oxen were then used on all the farms.

The road that now goes through Benedicta was in those days, the main highway between Bangor and Fort Kent. Over this road and through the town of Benedicta, came the regular trips of the stagecoach and also the freighters. These freighters were large cumbersome wagons drawn by 6 or 8 horses and carried all the freight that went into Northern Maine. At that time, one of the chief industries of the farms to make a little more money was manufacturing shingles by hand. On the return trip these freight wagons from Fort Kent back to Bangor, they would load up at the various towns and hamlets with these hand drawn shingles.

Candles were used entirely for light and were made of tallow. Sometimes when tallow was not available an ordinary piece of fat pork was used through which a sliver of pine was inserted. Later on, whale oil lamps became popular. The heat and cooking facilities in our old time log houses were crude and oftentimes unreliable. The came from the huge rock chimney fireplace. Tin ovens were used for baking and also ovens built into this chimney.¹

¹ The Church World, July 6, 1934. Ralph Rush assured me

CHAPTER IV

PARTIAL FAILURE OF THE ENTERPRISE

Such is the adventurous story, a rather depressing and exhausting experience for the twentieth century generation. But, and the fact can be read between the lines of Benedicta's chapters, the experience was a challenging one for the mid-nineteenth century Irish immigrant. He anticipated no doubt in this daring enterprise of settlement in Maine, an outlet for a new, promising life. But it so happened that those hardships he sought to escape in southern New England, he found in perhaps a greater degree in northern New England. Had Bishop Fenwick foreseen these difficulties? Did he ever ponder on the possibility that his colony might be a failure? The answer to the first query is yes. He knew from experience what the life of a Maine inhabitant was in those days because he had visited the early settlers there long before his own Benedicta was founded. He firmly believed, however, that the immigrants' new surroundings, if they were not to be comfortable, were propitious to the moral betterment of the settlers. He also hoped for a prosperous colony in the years to come, if only its settlers kept struggling to develop its material resources.

Concerning the second query: the first time the Bishop admitted his total plan for the colony as unrealizable, was on September, 1842, when the Jesuit, Father Fitton, offered him his embryonic college, later to become Holy Cross college.¹ This Worcester school, then Mount St. James, would be a nursery for future seminarians, so that Fenwick's main reason for the Benedicta colony found in it, its solution. The prelate, therefore, readily accepted Fitton's proposal because his Jesuit superiors consented to support and direct the new college. Only a lack of priests, of teachers, of funds could have determined the Bishop to abandon his long-cherished Maine project in favor of the Worcester College.

What became of the buildings at Benedicta? After serving as Parish Hall and town school for many years, the college building was dismantled in 1871, leaving only the ell, or wing, which served as a rectory for some time. This, too, was finally, demolished in 1927 to make room for the present rectory built by Father Cornelius Enright. Henceforth, Benedicta concentrated its efforts not on education, or on ecclesiastical training, but what it could effectively handle, namely, on creating a suit-able refuge for hardy immigrants. If the Bishop gave up his college and seminary plans in Benedicta, can it be consequently said that his colony was a "failure?"

It must be said that the settlement failed to attain the level or the ideal the Bishop desired for it. The map drawn and laid out in Fenwick's idealistic, utopia mind got just a little beyond the blueprint stage. He did contribute energetically to laying the foundation stones and to erecting the first school buildings. Because this part of the project never was completed, it cannot be concluded that the whole project was a failure.² We shall see how present-day Benedicta is actually a successful experiment.

Another aspect not yet considered is the limited population of the place. The Bishop expected "thousands" to flock to his Aroostook haven.

Proof that this account was authentic. Other details mentioned in this chapter, I got from him and Margaret F. Qualey, a schoolteacher and friend of the Rushes. It is through her that I access to the Collection of the Rush Letters.

¹ James Fitton to Bishop Fenwick, undated, Old Letters "A" 1821-1871, number 12.

These thousands never came. Why? What were the reasons that deterred so many who had subscribed to a lot in the township and then never actually settled it? Why did others leave the place after a few months' or a few years' experience? Why did so many others never move to Benedicta?

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. The severe winters to which Bay State emigrant was not accustomed, the long distance which separated him from his relatives and friends, these are some of the other reasons sometimes given.¹ The Bishop's purpose in choosing such an isolated location for his colony was ". . . to test the mettle of those who went."² In this way, it is true, he obtained the cream of the crop.

Tradesmen could not make a living amidst the sparse population of Benedicta, so they left for the city after they had finished their work in the colony. How can any business (even that of raising a family) thrive with no carpenter, mechanic, etc, around? If we read excerpts from the early settlers' letters or hear what they have to say through their living descendants, we find, once again, deterring currents against the stream of eager settlers that Bishop Fenwick dreamed about.

A Steever family of New Brunswick bypassed Benedicta to join its friends and relatives in Missouri. The claims for the change of course was a legitimate one: the family wanted to speak its native tongue which was alive in the western state.³ Father James Smith wrote to his Bishop how he was impressed by the poverty of some Benedicta homes.⁴ Why many did not come, or why they left, is also explained by the absence of a resident priest, of a village church, and school, which took sometime to appear.⁵ Another letter states that the flies ate Mr. Plunkett and his family, who resided near the Pond! Consequently, he wished to leave.⁶ A descendant relates that:

" . . . after a season with very poor crops, my grandfather buried in the orchard seed potatoes, knowing that if they were available they would have been eaten, and that those were the only potatoes in the community for the planting the next spring."⁷

Are not these few reports evidence of the stress in the young colony? One must admit that the picture depicted in the columns of *The Pilot* does not faithfully correspond to the reality.

Later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, another deterrent was the exodus of the younger generation toward the city. The tendency of young folks to heed the lure of the metropolis, is a drawback to farm life. Consequently, many families died out, or, at least, they did not grow, develop, and fructify as would have been the case had the young

1 Byrne, et al., *History*, I, 515; Kelly, *Immigrants Projects*, 44.

2 *The Church World*. July 6, 1934.

3 Steever to the Bishop, July 7, 1836, *Benedicta Letters, 1835-1865*, number 14.

4 James Smith to the Bishop, July 14, 1836, *ibid.*, number 13.

5 James Magee to the Bishop, June 12, 1838, *ibid.*, number 12.

6 Wm. Tyler to the Bishop, June 12, 1838, *ibid.*, number 62.

7 Margaret Qualey to the author, July 31, 1960. Her great grandfather was Martin Qualey, a Benedicta settler. I am indebted to her for valuable information and the gracious attention she gave to the present study. She resides in Benedicta, in the colonial homestead portrayed in *The Sunday Herald*. Boston, June 30, 1907.

anchored themselves to the soil. Still some people seem to have had no serious thought of settling the Bishop's township; they purchased lots only to encourage the prelate's project. Others again did not explain their change of mind or failure to pay for their land.

At about the same period, similar projects were undertaken elsewhere, and were also being abandoned. Such was true of the New England Land Company's enterprise in Iowa, in 1851, and the Buffalo Convention daydream of a new Ireland in Canada. It can be said, therefore, that the Bishop was perhaps not so much of an Utopian cast after all, if others likewise attempted all they could to help the miserable Immigrants. In times of crisis, is it not very human to try any method at hand to come to the rescue of the oppressed? Since it is now clear in what way Benedicta was a partial failure, how can it be said that the Maine helmet is presently a success?

CONCLUSION

In spite of many difficulties, Benedicta was far from being a complete failure. From many points of view, it must be considered a very successful experiment. Present-day facts would indicate that Benedicta is actually the most fervent Catholic settlement in the State of Maine, if not in the entire United States. There are today within its boundaries some fifty Catholic families and only one partially non-Catholic family. After the death of Bishop Fenwick, the church property and land were transferred by order of the Vatican to the diocese of Maine.

The only church in the town is the Catholic one, and this has now become the center of all activity, both civic and spiritual. Across from the church is to be found the general store. It is much the same as other general stores, its merchandise ranging from a paper of pins to a barrel of flour. It is decidedly different, however, from the rest in that it has a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hanging in a prominent place, facing the customer as he approaches the main counter.

Located next to the church is the Catholic cemetery, convent, and school. The teaching staff of Sisters are paid with the town funds. Besides, the entire church property as well as the resident pastor, today, Father John M. Anderson, are adequately supported by the people of the parish. The people are devoted adherents to the old faith who could rival with More's imaginative characters in his Utopia. The whole organization is more ideal than Bacon's New Atlantis. The town management comprises: the town manager and clerk, three selectmen and assessors, a treasurer and collector, an auditor, a school committee with the parish pastor as director and superintendent, a constable, a director of civil defense and public safety. From the selection of the school agent and tithing man to the choosing of the treasurer and tax collector, the will of majority is law. It is homerule in tabloid form.¹

As the traveler journeys about the countryside of Benedicta and views the rich land and prosperous farms, he cannot but regret that the plans of Bishop Fenwick did not reach their full fruition. But would not the founder's heart find satisfaction and reward in the following testimony of a Benedicta pioneer's descendant:

I think the church, Catholic school and general tenor of the community today attest to the success of the project. The people are not rich, but they are comfortable and there are few instances where any have to receive welfare. I feel that the people are very strong in their faith and we have been most fortunate in having pastors who have helped both spiritually and economically. As far as I know the parish has no debt.²

This reflects the general sentiment of Bishop's Fenwick's sons and daughters residing today in his tidy and hospitable community.

¹ Information on the present status of Benedicta was obtained mostly from Father John M. Anderson, who graciously gave me access to the records of his rectory. I am also indebted to the elementary and high school Principal, Sr. Mary Aquinas. Other aged descendants who helped by their kind cooperation are: Mrs. Lewis Qualey of Benedicta; Mrs. Fred Lewis of Sherman Mills; Mrs. H. Campbell of Brewer.

² Margaret Qualey to the author, June 6, 1960.

Some historians do not hesitate to affirm that Benedicta ". . .has amply fulfilled the hope of its founder . . ."1 The town has remained until now jailless, crimeless, pauperless, debtless, divorceless, graftless, and lawyerless, and no saloon or grog-shop exists in the "Catholic rural Utopia." Bishop Benedict J. Fenwick had and may have today every reason to feel satisfied that he worked sincerely to make for the better moral, mental, and physical conditions of the poor Irishmen of the 1830's and the generation that have followed them to this day. It can be said without exaggeration that Benedicta's past history is hardly more romantic than the story of its present condition. Few settlements can claim a character so unique. Discontent is unknown in this model community of thrifty husbandmen. The visitor inhales a wave of peace as he enters the seven-mile-wide town and as he talks to its friendly inhabitants. He is soon convinced, (as the Bishop would be were he living) that Benedicta has fulfilled its mission. In view of the Irish immigrants plight a century ago and of the whole world's tumult today, this blessed town opens, then as now, its portals to men and women in search of tranquility. The most important part of Bishop's Fenwick's dream did come true.

Chadbourne, Maine, 436; Lord, et al., History. II, 280; William Leo Lucey, The Catholic Church in Maine (Francetown, New Hampshire, 1957), 94; Wiggin, History. 214, are all of the same opinion.