

Celebrating a Century of *Salve Regina* and Mary's Shrine

By GERALDINE M. ROHLING, PhD, MAEd
ARCHIVIST AND CURATOR

The invention of the “Gutenberg Press” (movable metal type combined with a screw-type press adapted from the wine presses of the Rhine Valley) was revolutionary; it was the digital technology of the fifteenth century. This innovation replaced the costly illuminated manuscript or hand-written book and broadsheet, which necessitated a workshop of skilled scribes (usually monks) and months of effort. Affordable books and newspapers could now be mass-produced in less time and in a user-friendly, portable size. It was a new and powerful force for institutions of all manner and rank.

In nineteenth century America, the greatest “extra” (pun intended) of the newspaper was the sharing of viewpoints and positions in the growing republic. This was particularly important to the American Church, which was struggling for a broader acceptance. The Irish-born John England, the first bishop of the new diocese composed of North and South Carolina and Georgia (1820-1842), was a literary enthusiast and a zealous promoter of education among the faithful. Within two years of his arrival, Bishop England founded the first specifically Catholic newspaper in the United States, the *United States Catholic Miscellany* for the encouragement and instruction of his people. (The contribution of Bishop England to the American Church is remembered on a tablet in Memorial Hall.)

Another scholarly ecclesiastic of the American Church was Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, a church historian with an impressive academic pedigree. Following the example of Bishop England, then Monsignor Shahan launched his campaign for the National Shrine with the publication of a Catholic news magazine, *Salve Regina*. This would be the paper of record for one of the greatest and most colossal adventures ever undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church in America: the construction of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Consider the Roman Catholic Church in America without the National Shrine; then consider the National Shrine without *Salve Regina*. It would be like having toast without butter or jam – dry, without a calorific burst of flavor and sweetness.

The following condensed history of *Salve Regina / Mary's Shrine* tells of the strategic role that the magazine played during the nascent years of the National Shrine. This centenary story sets the stage for the series of centennials that will occur over the next six years, culminating with that of the laying of the Foundation Stone of the National Shrine on September 23, 2020. (Mark your calendars!)



In 1910, Very Reverend Thomas J. Shahan spoke of his dream regarding a National Shrine in honor of Mary. He then established a committee for the promotion of this cause chaired by Mrs. F. Burrall (Lucy) Hoffman of New York and Miss Fannie Whelan of Washington, DC.

Mrs. Hoffman, a woman well known and respected in the social and philanthropic circles of New York, began the National Organization of Catholic Women (NOCW) “to erect a church in honor of Mary Immaculate ... and to undertake such other Catholic works from time to time.” (NOCW By-Laws, 1911) All women were invited to join by sending a “\$1.00 Membership fee” either to the National Headquarters in New York or to a local chapter “organized, or to be organized” in their state.

The cause for the construction of the National Shrine received the verbal approval and blessing of Pope Pius X in a private audience on August 15, 1913. This was affirmed in an Apostolic Letter of July 8, 1914. The centennial of this seminal event was solemnly celebrated this past August 15, 2013 at the noon Mass in the Shrine's Great Upper Church.

The long held dream of Bishop Shahan was coming to life. Papal approval and benediction had been given, the site had been chosen, and the solicitation of funds had begun. Only one more thing was needed: a newspaper of record.

Salve Regina

The christening of the National Shrine publication occurred in the course of a collegial gathering. The first and most obvious name, “Ave Maria,” was quickly rejected by Bishop Shahan because of its use at Notre Dame, Indiana. When Monsignor

Sigourney W. Fay, a theology professor at Catholic University and mentor-friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald, suggested “Salve Regina,” (Hail, Holy Queen) Bishop Shahan replied, “Stop right there! That is the name to be chosen.”

The headline of the first issue said it all: “To All Lovers of Mary Immaculate.” This “little magazine” hoped “to make known ... the progress ... in collecting a fund for the erection of a National Shrine of the Blessed Virgin.” It was a gratis publication and readers were encouraged to pass the paper on to others so that “the good work” and Marian devotion could be further made known and new contributors could be found.

In the lead issue, Bishop Shahan restated his 1911 “Appeal to Catholic Ladies,” noting that through “small contributions bravely kept up, great civic monuments” were built. If the women of America could purchase and sustain Mount Vernon, the Catholic Women could do the same for a great American monument to Mary.

Salve Regina offered its readers an opportunity to participate in a great adventure: the first work of a national character undertaken by the Catholic Church in the United States of America. All necessary information regarding the collection of funds was advertised in the first and subsequent issues. The little magazine was “a bond of union between . . . collectors and contributors and the glorious work they [were] founding.”

Readers were encouraged to become collectors by selling booklets of coupons. The “one-dollar” book consisted of 10 pages of 10 one-cent stamps. The stamps were to decorate letters and packages; it was a form of advertising for the Shrine. (Photos right; note the location of the tower)

The “ten-dollar book” consisted of ten pages of “Ten Cent Subscriptions.” (Photos right) By January 1914, the collections and donations for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception amounted to \$22,000. Almost half came through the “little Ten-Dollar books.” *Salve Regina* reported, “We are very deeply touched by this evidence of a hundred thousand small

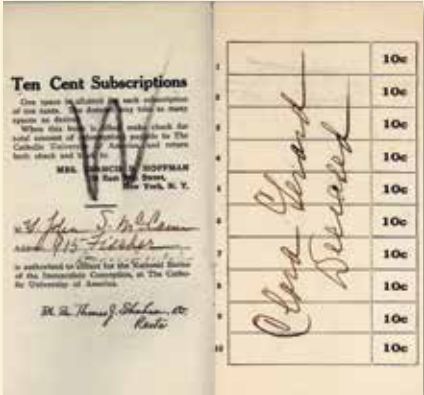
contributions to Mary's beautiful shrine. They represent much love and gratitude, many little sacrifices and self-denials.”

Salve Regina encouraged its contributors by lauding contributions both large and small. Excerpts from select letters and notes were published regularly. For example, a Colorado family of eleven sent one dollar and ten cents—a dime for each family member—with a note that read, “A grain of sand for the erection of a lovely National Shrine to Our Blessed Mother.” A man in Illinois wrote, “I take the liberty of sending you a small donation of ten cents. It is rather small and insignificant ... I am only a poor working man, and have lately buried my wife and my little daughter of eleven. Please enroll their names on the list of benefactors.” A donation from Maryland read, “Wish that I had diamonds to encircle the walls, but I must content myself with this small [one dollar] offering.”

Contributions were being received and *Salve Regina* was the cheerleader. The effective outreach made it the facebook page of its day.

A quick look at the buying power of the dollar will help to appreciate the actual value of each contribution. The average weekly wage in 1914 was \$12.50. Food consumed 43% of the budget. One loaf of bread was 6¢; one quart of milk, 9¢; one pound of coffee, 29¢; one pound of potatoes, 2¢; and one dozen eggs, 35¢. (US Bureau of Labor Statistics)

The gratis magazine functioned just as Shahan had hoped, circulating among current and “soon-to-be” subscribers and winning contributions for the building fund. “Your little paper quite accidentally fell into my hands. I do so want to contribute ... Please accept this little bill [one dollar] from ‘A Child of Mary.’” From New South Wales in “remote Australia” came a donation of sixty cents and



the news that the donor “heard of the undertaking” through a publication of the Paulist Fathers.

In April 1915, considerable space was given to the NOCW, which boasted of having circulated seven thousand copies of *Salve Regina*. The growth of the organization was “evident in the pages of ... *Salve Regina*,” which also served as the unofficial newsletter of the organization.

Father McKenna

The appointment of Father Bernard A. McKenna, of Philadelphia as “Secretary to Bishop Shahan with especial charge of the work of the National Shrine” was announced in July 1915. This assignment included all responsibility for the publication of *Salve Regina*, even though Bishop Shahan retained the title of editor. This appointment also created an administrative change in the handling of donations. Readers were now instructed to address “all correspondence concerning the National Shrine, gifts, inquiries,” and donations “henceforth ... to Reverend Bernard A. McKenna,” who had also been appointed to the office of national treasurer of the NOCW. This directive supplanted the responsibilities previously held by Mrs. Hoffman and Miss Whelan. The *Salve Regina* Office was now the national headquarters for all donations concerning the National Shrine.

Father McKenna took charge. He was a man on a mission, one for which he had hoped even as a student of Professor Shahan at Catholic University. In 1916, *Salve Regina* readers received a new and improved “sixteen-page periodical instead of the original eight.” It was stated, “Growing interest in Our Lady’s beautiful Shrine has compelled us to take this step.” Readers were offered the opportunity to participate in a “nation-wide subscription,” which is to say a financial pledge towards the construction of the National Shrine. *Salve Regina* was “gratis,” it did not require a subscription. As always, subscribers to the National Shrine fund were encouraged with the pledge of special spiritual benefits and the honor of having one’s name added to enrollment books that were to be blessed and sealed in the foundation

stone—when the time came. In addition, donors were reminded that “the holy work of the National Shrine” had been further advanced by “a Pontifical Letter and Blessing from Pius X.”

Begun as a quarterly publication, by 1917 circulation had increased to 100,000 copies eight times a year. The circulation grew even larger with the entrance of the United States into World War I (April 6, 1917). The magazine was even sent to the doughboys in the trenches of France. At home, the names of “soldier boys” who were members or who were enrolled by a loved one were submitted to the *Salve Regina* Office. Joyce Kilmer, the leading American Catholic poet, best known for the poem *Trees* (1913), was listed among the “deceased benefactors” in the September 1918 issue. A member of the Fighting 69th Infantry, Sergeant Kilmer was killed on July 30, 1918. (In the movie, *The Fighting 69th*, Kilmer is portrayed composing his poem, *Prayer of a Soldier in France*.) The issues of 1918 also included poems and writings honoring the Catholic faith of its soldier and sailor members.

On November 20, 1918, nine days after the signing of the armistice, the cause for the Shrine took a new turn. The American Church was “earnestly enjoined” with the construction of the national church as a national monument of gratitude to Mary and to commemorate “the gallant sailors and soldiers who laid down their lives for the Nation.”

A new “official organization,” *The National Salve Regina League*, replaced the NOCW. The cover page of the May and June issue featured the League’s Membership Card. (Photo on left)



Gone were the subscription books. Double post cards with a full color sketch of the Shrine (photo on left) by the newly chosen architect of Maginnis and Walsh contained membership applications to *Salve Regina*. The May issue listed fixed subscription or membership fees: \$1000, Endowment Membership; \$500 Foundation Membership; \$250 Memorial Membership; \$100 Life Membership; \$50 Family Membership; \$10 Sustaining Membership; \$1 Charter Membership. A “Testamentary Membership” was granted to

those who remembered the National Shrine in their last will and testament.

The beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century was filled with many firsts for the National Shrine. *Salve Regina* was almost giddy with delight, as it reported on the festivities.

The headline stories featured the Blessing of the Land by Archbishop Giovanni Bonzano, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, on Sunday, May 16, 1920 and the laying of the Foundation Stone on Thursday, September 23, 1920. After the offering of the traditional prayers over the granite stone, James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore and a great supporter of the Shrine, placed a metal container with the membership rolls of *The National Salve Regina League* in the stone. After the stone was sealed, it was lowered onto its base with the invocation, "In the faith of Jesus Christ, we place this first stone in the foundation."

Both before and after the dedication ceremony, Father McKenna arranged for the sale of the Foundation Programs through *Salve Regina*, "Every Catholic family should have a copy of the Foundation Program, I have arranged to have a considerable number of extra copies printed, and will continue to receive subscriptions until the supply is exhausted." For one dollar, a copy of the Foundation Program, billed as "a work of Art produced in 7 colors" could be purchased. The cover displayed a sketch of the proposed National Shrine in the Romanesque-Byzantine style, with the tower or campanile located at the southeast corner. (Photo on right)

There were still many donations to be solicited and much work to be done. *Salve Regina* continued to lead the campaign. From 1921-1935, *Salve Regina* expanded to a monthly publication and enjoyed a widespread readership. The somewhat sudden death of Bishop Shahan in 1932 was followed by the resignation of Monsignor McKenna in 1933. At first, *Salve Regina* continued under the new director. In 1936-1937, it suffered a setback and all publication ceased. This caused a problem in the solicitation of funds for the completion of the National Shrine. In 1938,

the Crypt or lower level was the extent of construction on the National Shrine. It was a construction site stalled in its progress.

Salve Regina resumed publication in 1938 as a quarterly magazine. It was sixteen pages and the size was the equivalent of a small greeting card. The only illustrations were the color reproductions of famous Marian paintings on the front and back covers. This was to promote the sixty-four page book *Our Lady in Art*. This book of fifty-five illustrations of well-known Madonnas, eight of which were in "full color," was an effort to rekindle interest in the National Shrine.

From 1941 to 1959, *Salve Regina* enjoyed some of its original luster and zeal. The publication remained quarterly but the size was enlarged to that of a magazine of eight pages. Most importantly, the publication faithfully served the clients of Mary and the cause of the National Shrine. During the Marian Year 1953-1954, the centenary of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, *Salve Regina* helped lead the campaign to finish the National Shrine.

Mary's Shrine

As construction on the Shrine moved towards completion, the May 1959 issue announced

a name change. *Salve Regina* became *Mary's Shrine*. The reason for the change was practical and was to translate the ardent devotion of Bishop Shahan. *Mary's Shrine* seemed the appropriate standard for the fulfillment of Bishop Shahan's dream. Hailed by the founder as the "great hymn in stone," the National Shrine now proclaimed its own meaning, which was echoed by the new standard of its official publication.



Mary's Shrine is a semi-annual gratis publication that continues to function as the paper of record for the National Shrine, carrying its message of Marian devotion to the world.

Come join us and celebrate with visitors and pilgrims from near and far as we begin our pilgrimage to the centennial celebration of the Foundation Stone 2019-2020.

Go on line at www.nationalshrine.com to read the January 1914 issue of *Salve Regina* and the Apostolic Letter of Pope Pius X and stay in touch at www.facebook.com/nationalshrine. ☛