

THE MYSTERIOUS TERRACE HOUSE OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE

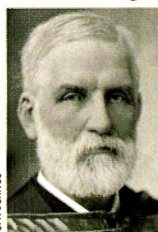
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Archivist-Curator

After a hiatus of thirty-five years, the National Shrine began its final phase of construction in July 1955. One of the first tasks was the demolition of a large house situated on what is now the south terrace (front) of the National Shrine. Visible in the photographs of the 1920s, including the Blessing of the Land and the dedication of the Foundation Stone, the story behind this spectral dwelling materialized into one laced with Americana and Church history.

plagued the university. It would be another generation before women would be admitted.

"The Cottage"



William Callyhan Robinson

The dean of the new School of Social Sciences was Judge William Callyhan Robinson. Raised in the Methodist Church he became an Episcopal minister but then converted to Roman Catholicism in the early 1860s. It is believed that if he had not been married, he would have

become a Catholic priest. Robinson entered the legal profession and became a distinguished professor and the dean of the School of Law at Yale University. In 1895, CUA offered him the position of dean of the Social Sciences but with an emphasis on establishing a School of Law. Robinson "took up the cross," as he termed it, left behind his beloved New Haven, and transplanted himself somewhat reluctantly but resolutely in Washington with its "roasting climate and half-civilized condition" (letter, 16 May 1896).

Within the academic world, the faculty of a university is the cause of its celebrity. In years past, institutions would woo distinguished professors with benefits such as housing, boasting of a self-contained, quasi-monastic campus, with a "faculty row" of residences. Robinson, after confirming his departure from Yale, applied to the CUA board of directors for such a residence. There was none. James Cardinal Gibbons, the archbishop of Baltimore and university chancellor, and Bishop John J. Keane, the first rector, considered the request reasonable. Upon further consideration, they also deemed it proper to provide other professors with suitable residences, should they ask. In addition to Dean Robinson, three other professors were "promised ... handsome residences," among them Rev. Dr. Thomas J. Shahan, a young professor of Church History, who would later become the 4th rector of CUA, and the founder of the National Shrine. A plan for three or four "professors' cottages" was presented to the board of directors. It was approved with the stipulation that the rent charged was to be equal to 6% of the cost and the occupants were responsible for "ordinary repairs." In the end, only one house was constructed and at a cost that exceeded the budgeted amount.



Crypt Church and "The Pines"

Divinity Hall

In 1789, Reverend John Carroll (S.J.), a cousin of the illustrious Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence, was named the first bishop of the United States. His See or Diocese of Baltimore included not only the city of the same name, but also the former thirteen colonies and the ten square miles that constituted the capital city of Washington, D.C. One hundred years and some 90 dioceses later, as a festive closing to the centenary celebration of the founding of the American hierarchy, Catholic University dedicated Divinity Hall (13 Nov 1889), its premiere school and faculty. Chartered as a pontifical graduate school in the "sacred sciences" for the clergy, Divinity Hall was the university. The landscape of a "true university" did not begin to develop until the dedication of a second building, McMahon Hall (1895), and the installation of two new lay faculties: the School of Philosophy (biological sciences, letters, mathematics, physical sciences, and technology) and the School of Social Sciences (economics, law, political science, and sociology). In addition to the expanding architectural landscape, the admission of lay male students helped to alleviate the financial woes that



Robinson Cottage

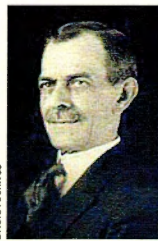
The “Robinson Cottage” was more akin to an estate house; it was a large two-story dwelling with several bedrooms, more than one parlor, and generous dining facilities. Private but not isolated, the house was sheltered in the southwest corner of the campus. The cottage was approached by a leisurely winding path from Bunker Hill Road (Michigan Ave.) and 4th Street, NE that continued towards the university proper. Today, this path is the entrance to the Shrine and its eastern thoroughfare. Around this time, municipal amenities such as sewerage, gas, and waterlines were introduced to the campus, the latter of which was a defense against the annual winter “water famine” or frozen wells. An electric plant was also added to provide heat and lighting. The house benefited from the water lines but required the installation of its own heating system, which never worked properly. Thus, Judge Robinson and his family vacated the house in April of 1899, taking up their new residence not far from the Capitol and the National Archives. Later that spring, “the cottage” underwent refurbishing and “fitting up” for its new occupant: Bishop Thomas J. Conaty, the second rector of the university, in order that he might have the “privacy and independence ... beneficial to his position.” The rector’s stay was somewhat short-lived. In March 1903, Conaty became the bishop of what was then the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles, a position he held until his death in 1915.

“The Pines”

In the fall of 1903, the Cain family moved into “the cottage.” Two of their eight children were born in “Mr. Cain’s residence.” While *The Washington Post* (1906) reported Cain residing in the “University Cottage” and at “the Pines [in] Brookland,” the university records still listed the residence as “the cottage.” To add to

the misperception, the 1910 U.S. Census listed the address of the residence as “Harewood Road,” with no mention of the university. Despite this fluctuation in names and addresses, the one conclusive fact was the house and the land it occupied belonged to the university and Cain was the distinguished tenant.

Exactly how or why Cain and his family came to live in “the cottage” is not certain. One thing, however, was certain: a residence such as “the cottage” begged for residents whose social standing would invite the elite of Washington to venture into what had been tagged “unavailable property” in the “northeast frontier.” (See “Blessing of the Land,” *Mary’s Shrine*, 2018, No. 2.) Anything that would help the profile of the university was welcomed.



J. Fendall Cain

J. Fendall Cain belonged to an old and distinguished Washington family. He was a recognized power broker within the banking and financial world of Washington, D.C. In 1866, he married Laura Cecilia Harvey, the daughter of George W. Harvey, one of the most successful restaurateurs in Washington. “Many well-known citizens and their families” attended the 4:00 p.m. ceremony (not a Nuptial Mass) at St. Patrick’s Church, the first parish in Washington (est. 1794). The newlyweds made their home in a custom built, spacious seven-room dwelling on New York Ave., NW (razed, c.1915).



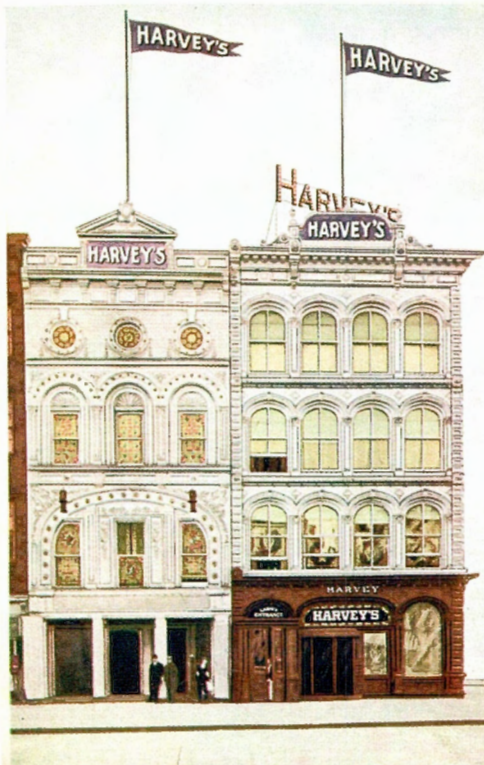
Harvey Caricature by Thomas Nast, 1890

The bride’s father, George Harvey, was known for his oyster restaurant, established in 1858. The original feature of this tidewater eatery was Harvey’s steamed oysters. In 1863, the restaurant

received its most winning endorsement when President Lincoln came to dine. For almost seven decades, every president from Grant to FDR dined at *Harvey’s Old Established Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Oyster Saloon and Restaurant* (11th and Pennsylvania, NW) which boasted exclusive accommodations for men (1st floor) and women (2d floor). Harvey, a Catholic

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entrepreneur, was well-known in both the civil and ecclesiastical inner circles. In fact, it was Harvey who “provided the lunches and banquets when the bishops first met with prominent people to discuss the plans for the university” (letter, 1930). Cain, who enjoyed a bedrock relationship with Bishop Keane and subsequently the university, attended these luncheons and banquets.



Harvey's Restaurant, c.1912

Life at “the Pines” was one of gentility and graciousness: pleasant gatherings, cotillions, and visits by distinguished guests, all of which were duly reported in the Washington newspapers. One such event reported in the *Evening Star*, was in honor of “Miss Mary Mildred Cain and ... [and her older brother] Joseph Harvey Cain,” who worked for “the isthmian canal commission, at Panama” (builders of the Panama Canal). “A string orchestra provided the music for dancing and a buffet supper was served at 11 o'clock. The parlors were tastily arranged and decorated with palms, flowers, and flags.” In keeping with the social etiquette of the time, the names of the guests and the chaperones were also listed.

In addition to social gatherings, there were the wedding receptions of three of the four Cain girls. In the spring of 1915, Mary Mildred Cain was married in the Chapel of Saint Paul,

in Divinity (Caldwell) Hall. The marriage ceremony, which was followed by the Nuptial Mass, was at 7:30 a.m. The early hour was due to the required midnight fast before receiving Holy Communion. Thus, the “wedding breakfast” was at “the Pines.” Three years later, Alice Erma Cain was married at St. Anthony of Padua, the parish church in Brookland, just up the street. The list of ten prominent clergymen who were present in the sanctuary included Bishop Shahan and his personal secretary, Rev. Bernard A. McKenna, future director of the National Shrine. According to the *Evening Star*, “An informal reception ... followed at the Pines.” In 1924, Laura Cecilia Cain also married at St. Anthony's with her reception also at “the Pines.”

The Cain residence was home to many a joyous occasion as well as the realities of life. On Wednesday afternoon, 30 September 1925, J. Fendall Cain died, unexpectedly, while at home. The wake was held at “the Pines,” which was now an active construction site.



17 March 1925

On Saturday, a Solemn Requiem Mass was sung by his close friend, Bishop Shahan, in the Crypt Church of the National Shrine, located directly behind the house. Representatives of the various faculties of the university and many students attended. After the absolution of the body, Bishop Shahan delivered a brief and touching eulogy, characterizing Cain, the “official accountant,” “treasurer,” and “auditor” of the university for almost 40 years, as “an exemplar of fidelity, prudence, and loyalty.” Within a year, the widow and family moved from “the Pines” to a row house on Newton Street in Brookland.

The Crypt Church

In photographs from the Blessing of the Land (16 May 1920) and the dedication of the Foundation Stone (23 Sept 1920) the house stands as a silent observer. During both events, the white-corded outline of the Shrine came



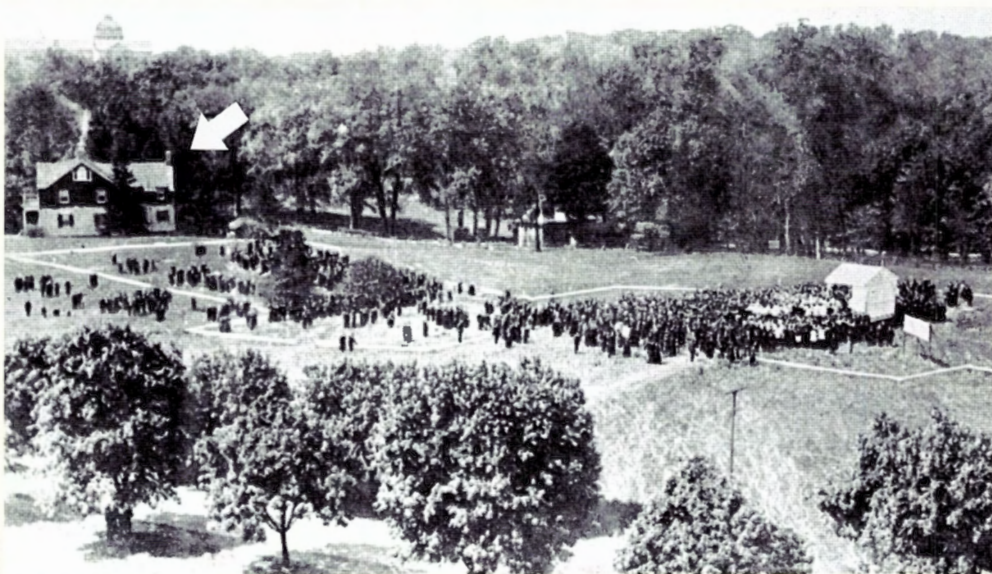
1925 Crypt Church

intimately close to the house, placing the church directly in the backyard of “the Pines” or placing “the Pines” on the doorstep of the Shrine.

From 1919, when the Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects, and Maginnis and Walsh, architects, submitted their plans and drawings for the National Shrine and its location, until the day it was razed, “the cottage” was living on borrowed time. Construction on the National Shrine caused “the Pines” to depreciate from an estate manor to an *ad hoc* university building. From 1929 to 1952, it was the Omega chapter house of the national Phi Kappa fraternity for Catholic students, after which, it became studios for the music department, all the while

sitting on the front doorstep of the National Shrine.

In 1948, the National Shrine incorporated as an institution separate and independent of the university; the land was deeded to the National Shrine making it the sole owner and proprietor. The resumption of work in 1954 declared an end to “the Pines.” In January 1956, the “tearing down and removal of the old frame Music Building” was completed. In time, the quiet, southwest corner where “the Pines” once stood, became the main or protocol entrance of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, welcoming pilgrims, popes, presidents, and distinguished visitors from around the world. 🌿



16 May 1920