

Michael Holland
HSTY 398
Professor Koll

Greatness Lost:
The Story of Cathedral Latin School

From the time of its inception in 1916 Cathedral Latin School was one of the preeminent sources of quality secondary education available in the Cleveland area. It was a school prided on academic excellence and it quickly rose to the forefront of quality secondary education in Cleveland. The 1925 prospectus lauded the institution as “a college preparatory school for arts, medicine, law, pharmacy, and the seminary”¹. By the late sixties students could enroll in classes at nearby Case Western Reserve University while still in high school. Successful alumni are numerous. Graduates have climbed high in the Catholic hierarchy, in the corporate world, in politics, in law, and in nearly every career and occupation imaginable. The list of prominent alumni goes on and on, but Latin’s triumphs were not limited to academic endeavors. The school won five state titles in football and once played in front of 70,000 spectators at Cleveland’s Municipal Stadium². Cathedral Latin was so popular that at one point the school enrolled 120 students more than its building was designed to hold³. This Catholic, all male, college preparatory school had a television production studio, state championship athletic teams, national merit finalists, a burgeoning student body, a wonderful location within University Circle, and nearly every other characteristic that would place it among Cleveland’s most successful high schools. In 1966 Rev. John Hardon, a professor at

¹ Plagemann, Bentz. *An American Past: an early autobiography*. New York, NY: Morrow, 1990.

² Hudak, Timothy. *When the Lions Roared: The Story of Cathedral Latin School Football*. Cleveland, OH, 2002.

³ “Cleveland Catholic High School Survey 1929” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland

Loyola University Chicago, wrote, “I consider education at Cathedral Latin on a par with the best in secondary schools throughout the country”⁴.

However, Cathedral Latin High School did not meet with a fairytale ending. The most intriguing part of this story is the thirteen years between 1966 and 1979. No one could have imagined that the school would meet its end so quickly at the time of the Golden Anniversary celebration in 1966. This was a time of celebration of past achievements and hope for greater successes in the future. The mayor of Cleveland, Ralph S. Locher, summed up the optimistic feeling permeating throughout Cathedral Latin in his 1966 letter to the school community: “In its 50 years of service to the community, Cathedral Latin School has developed and maintained a tradition for educational excellence and individual improvement...bearing in mind that the next 50 years will be marked with ever greater achievements for Cathedral Latin School”⁵. A number of factors seem to have come together to lead to the hastened demise of this institution. Rising costs, an increasing operating deficit, a rapidly rising debt, major demographic shifts in the nearby neighborhoods, mismanagement, poor publicity, and simple bad luck sent this powerful educational institution from the peak of its successes to its final closing in less than fifteen years. The Society of Mary was forced to close the school for good in 1979.

A 1929 Diocesan survey of Cleveland’s Catholic High Schools concluded, “St. Ignatius High School is in many respects a prototype of Cathedral Latin. It serves the same purpose on the west side of the city as Cathedral Latin does on the east”⁶. This observation sparks a number of questions. For example, why did St. Ignatius survive

⁴ *Cathedral Latin Golden Anniversary Souvenir Book*, 1966.

⁵ *Ibid.*

rising costs, the tumultuous sixties, and indeed continue to thrive, while its peer institution, Cathedral Latin, was forced to close? In the mid-60's Latin's enrollment peaked at 1200 students. Within a decade the number of young men attending CLS was hovering around 400⁷. The issues involved in this paper are not simply the problems of one school. The issues that confronted Cathedral Latin are many of the same troubles that plagued Cleveland's east side, as a whole, during the same time period. By examining the difficulties of this one school it is possible to learn about the urban troubles that challenged Cleveland's east side then and now.

Rise to Prominence:

Early in the twentieth century Bishop John P. Farrelly wished to establish the first Catholic diocesan high school, only the third Catholic high school in all of Cleveland. In 1916 Cathedral Latin School was created. This new college prep school for boys was modeled after the schools that grew up around older Cathedrals in Europe⁸. The school was originally located in Hitchcock Hall of what is now Case Western Reserve University's Thwing Center. At the same time, plans were in the works to construct a new Catholic cathedral for Cleveland on the site that currently houses Severance Hall. The other half of Cathedral Latin's name was drawn from Boston's Latin School. CLS derived its curriculum, which focused on the humanities, classics, and sciences, and its strong college preparatory persuasion from Boston's Latin School⁹. Awe-inspiring statistics indicate that Latin was largely successful with this focus, as eighty percent of its

⁶ "Cleveland Catholic High School Survey 1929" Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁷ *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (online); Cathedral Latin.

⁸ "Cathedral Latin Begins Its Second 25 Years." *Catholic Universe Bulletin*. 1941

⁹ "Cathedral Latin will mark its golden jubilee Sunday." *Catholic Universe Bulletin*. 22 April 1966.

8,535 alumni (as of 1966) had graduated from a four-year college¹⁰. Cathedral Latin, the first diocesan high school, caught on quickly after its founding. CLS quickly outgrew Hitchcock Hall, and in 1917 construction on a new building at 2056 E. 107th Street (currently Stokes Boulevard) began. This new building, which was directly across the street from John Hay High School, was designed by E.T. Graham and was supposed to capture the style of the Italian Renaissance¹¹. The building was formally dedicated during the graduation ceremony of the first class of Cathedral Latin alumni. Latin would remain in this location until its closing. The new school building allowed for a larger student body. The September enrollment in 1916 was 142; by September of 1922 the enrollment had increased to 750¹².

The early popularity and success that Cathedral Latin attained is best expressed in its skyrocketing enrollment numbers. The aforementioned statistic about the growth of the student body in the first six years demonstrates the immediate success that CLS met. A 1929 diocesan survey of Catholic high schools reported that Latin had an enrollment of 817 and a recommended building capacity of 700. Rooms were partitioned to provide adequate space for all classes. The report concluded that “additional facilities must be provided for Cathedral Latin School”¹³. This study also concluded that “Cathedral Latin should continue to serve as a college preparatory institution”¹⁴. Soon after this survey a new south wing was added to the main school building. The schools capacity expanded once again in response to an overwhelming demand. Even the Depression did very little to dampen Latin’s growth. Nineteen thirty enrollment was just over one thousand, and

¹⁰ *Cathedral Latin Golden Anniversary Souvenir Book*, 1966.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Education Statistics 1920-1950” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

¹³ “Cleveland Catholic High School Survey-1929” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

throughout the 1930's the CLS student body never numbered less than 900 students. Enrollment remained steady throughout the 1940's and 1950's, usually staying just over 1000 students. Enrollment in Catholic schools, diocese-wide, was strong. In 1948 the Diocese of Cleveland educated 60,000 students making it the 38th largest school system, public or private, in United States¹⁵.

Enrollment surged once again during the early 1960's. Numbers peaked during the 1963-64 school year when 1233 boys roamed the halls of CLS¹⁶. During this time period Latin turned down 300 to 400 entrance applicants yearly because of lack of room¹⁷. In 1962 the administration was mulling over a \$1,000,000 expansion that would allow 400 more students to be accommodated¹⁸. This expansion fit into the general trend of the rest of the diocese. A 1963 pamphlet entitled *The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Cleveland* stated that, "there are 10,000 more students in the Catholic high schools of the diocese than there were 10 years ago...if finances and teachers were available we could easily double—and possibly triple—the present enrollment"¹⁹. This optimistic, positive frame of mind was felt by the Cathedral Latin community as well as they gathered to celebrate their golden anniversary in 1966.

Cathedral Latin was originally staffed by both diocesan priests and members of the Society of Mary (Marianists). The thirteen parish priests taught classics and humanities classes while the five Marianist brothers taught science and mathematics courses. The Society of Mary took over complete control of Cathedral Latin in 1922;

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Educational Statistics 1920-1950" Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

¹⁶ "Education: Enrollment and Facilities 1949-1965" Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

¹⁷ Lilley, Paul. "Urban Renewal Bonds Are Key to Bigger Cathedral Latin." *Catholic Universe Bulletin*. 1962.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *The Catholic High Schools In The Diocese of Cleveland*. 1963. Western Reserve Historical Society.

Marianist brothers replaced all diocesan priests. The Marianists were to manage and maintain both the school's finances and operation, but the property and facilities remained the property of the diocese²⁰. Part of the agreement stipulated that the school was supposed to attempt to keep lay teachers from compromising more than 15% of the faculty. The diocese wanted the faculty to be composed of religious, either priests or brothers, in order to maintain a strong religious identity within the classroom. This practice was in keeping with the founding purpose. Bishop Farrelly founded the school “for the purpose of affording the Catholic boys of Cleveland...the advantages of a modern high school in which religious training is an integral part”²¹.

The richness of religious instruction at CLS is evident in the work of many of its graduates. A large number of alumni choose a life within the Catholic Church; many rose high in Church's hierarchy with at least two alumni becoming cardinals. Numerous alumni ascended to the head of major dioceses in the United States. Archbishop John J. Krol (Philadelphia), Bishop Floyd L. Begin (Oakland), Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan (Atlanta), Bishop Raymond J. Gallagher (Lafayette), Archbishop John F. Deardon (Detroit), and Bishop Anthony M. Pilla (Cleveland) are just a few²². In the mid-sixties fifty percent of the priests within the Diocese of Cleveland were Latin graduates²³. Over 100 Marianists came from CLS. Many graduates embraced religious vocations, yet the school was never a high school preparatory seminary²⁴. The number of graduates that climbed the hierarchy of the Church and committed to priestly or religious vocations is only one small measure of the impact of this school on its community and its Church.

²⁰ “Cathedral Latin – Agreement with the Society of Mary” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

²¹ *Cathedral Latin School Senior Annual*, 1922.

²² “Bishop-Alumni at Latin's Jubilee.” *Catholic Universe Bulletin*. 1965.

²³ “Cathedral Latin will mark its golden jubilee Sunday.” *Catholic Universe Bulletin*. 22 April 1966.

Latin's alumni achievements are by no means limited to the priesthood; graduates hold prominent positions in a myriad of professions. Two former college presidents (John J. Meng, Hunter College), the former editor of the *Cleveland Press* newspaper (Louis Clifford), mayors, judges, lawyers, educators, military leaders, professional athletes (Clinton Jones), Olympians (Paul Otis Drayton) and Ceo's (Jack Breen, Sherwin-Williams Company) are but a few of the positions that Cathedral Latin graduates have attained²⁵.

Academic stature aside, the one thing that probably gave Cathedral Latin a prominent place in Cleveland's landscape more than anything else was its athletic programs. The 1922 Senior Annual stated, "The school authorities are firm believers in the importance of physical training and in the educational value of school athletics"²⁶. This value was evident when in 1917, the year after the school's founding, Latin introduced football, basketball, and baseball as the first varsity sports. These teams met with almost immediate success. In 1918 the football team went undefeated, winning four games including a 65-0 triumph over Shaker Heights. In that same year the basketball team won thirteen, lost one, and took home the city championship; the first of many to follow. The third varsity sport, baseball, also went undefeated in 1918 with a perfect eleven and zero record²⁷. This type of success would be the hallmark of Cathedral Latin athletics for the remainder of its existence. Cathedral Latin still has the second highest winning percentage of any high school football team in Northeastern Ohio history. The gridiron Lions won five state titles, more than any other team in Cleveland during the

²⁴ "Some Fell on Good Ground." *Mary Today Magazine*. September-October 1966.

²⁵ *Cathedral Latin Golden Anniversary Souvenir Book*, 1966.

²⁶ *Cathedral Latin School Senior Annual*, 1922.

²⁷ *Purple and Gold*. 1979.

first 100 years (1890-1990) of high school football in Ohio²⁸. The basketball team experienced similar success winning numerous city and district championships. Even in the years of lean enrollment basketball was dominant. They won the 1977 state title²⁹ and during the last year of the school's existence (1979) they finished as the state runner up³⁰. Latin's athletic triumphs made the school renowned for more than academic excellence throughout Northeastern Ohio.

Latin's prominence in the local community can be demonstrated in the attendance records of the football team. Latin played in front of the six largest crowds ever to watch high school football games in Ohio. Each of these games had over 50,000 spectators in attendance. The largest crowd numbered 70,955 at Cleveland's Municipal Stadium for the 1946 Charity Game (Cleveland City Championship) in which Latin defeated Holy Name High School 35-6 (See attached PICTURE). During the 1946 season the Cathedral Latin football team played in front of more than 175,000 spectators. This attendance figure was thought to be second to only one other football team in the entire state, the Ohio State Buckeyes³¹. These astronomical athletic attendance figures make it clear that Cathedral Latin School held a prominent place in the educational and cultural landscape of the city of Cleveland.

Beginning of the End:

The troubles began in the mid-1960's. There are distinct links between the swift decline of CLS and the Hough Riots (1966) and the Glenville Shootout (1968). These disturbances were very close to Cathedral Latin. They polarized race relations and

²⁸ Hudak; pg. ix.

²⁹ Zunt, Dick. "Latin Bags AA Title" *The Plain Dealer*, 27 March 1977.

³⁰ Kaib, H. Thomas. "Lions Roar Their Last" *The Cleveland Press*, 26 March 1979.

³¹ Hudak; pg. ix.

quicken the movement of people leaving the city for the suburbs. Accordingly, Latin lost a large portion of its enrollment base while the surrounding neighborhoods were labeled dangerous.

On July 18th, 1966, a dispute over a cup of water at an east side diner set off the largest civil disturbance in Cleveland's history³². The white owned 79ers café was located on the corner of East 79th street and Hough Boulevard; what one source calls, "the geographic center of Cleveland's black community in the 60's"³³. The owners of the establishment were unpopular among east side African-Americans. It was reported that someone had tried to light their car on fire the previous summer. The details of the disagreement that started the violence are sketchy, but the effect was unmistakable; there was an eruption of violence, vandalism, random gunfire, arson, and looting, the likes of which Cleveland had never seen. The police were unable to control the situation; violent mobs roamed a thirty-block area around the Hough neighborhood. By the time the national guard restored order a week later four people had died, thirty had been injured, two hundred and forty fires had been started, and millions of dollars worth of damage had been done³⁴.

Racial tension caused violence to break out only two years later, again in a neighborhood very close to Cathedral Latin. On July 23rd, 1968, an African-American militant group, the black panthers, and the Cleveland Police Department became embroiled in a violent contest. There was a large amount of gunfire exchanged, and by the time the shootout was over the next morning three policemen, three members of the militant group, and one civilian were dead of gunshots while fifteen others were

³² *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (online); Hough Riots.

³³ <http://statenews.org/news/2001/july/opr-071801-04.html>

wounded. The National Guard was called in the next day, but even they could not quell the looting, rioting, and arson that consumed a six square mile region of the city; Cathedral Latin was within six miles of Glenville. Order was restored three days later on July 28th, but by that time 63 businesses had been damaged at an estimated cost of \$2.6 million³⁵.

These enormous civil disturbances took their toll on Cathedral Latin's enrollment almost immediately. As previously stated, CLS peaked at 1233 in the 1963-1964 school year. In 1967-1968, only a year after the Hough riots and the year before the Glenville riots, enrollment had already dropped by one hundred and fifty eight. By the 1969-1970 school year, numbers had dropped to 905, the lowest enrollment since the depression years. The numbers slumped in two different ways. First, the size of each freshman class, a true indicator of the school's popularity, dropped off every year after the riots. In 1966-1967 there were 370 freshmen at CLS. The next year there were 87 less new students, 283. By 1970-1971 the freshman class was reduced to a meager 180 students. The size of the freshman class had been halved in a five year time period. The school experienced a double whammy as transfer rates increased simultaneously. Between 1966 and 1970 three hundred and sixty four students transferred out of Cathedral Latin. One hundred and two boys left in the 1967-1968 school year alone³⁶. Cathedral Latin had begun a downward enrollment spiral that it would never fully recover from.

The effect of the riots cannot be overstated. A 1973 memorandum to the trustees of Cathedral Latin identified the "poor image" of the surrounding location as one of the

³⁴ *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (online); Hough Riots.

³⁵ *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (online); Glenville Shootout.

³⁶ "Enrollment 63-70." *Frank R. Borchert Papers*. Western Reserve Historical Society.

main obstacles that was hindering the school's success³⁷. This is an enormous understatement. The school hired the Marschalk Co., Inc. to survey potential students, and their parents, and to identify reasons why people had stopped sending their children to Cathedral Latin. An overwhelming majority of the responses identified the danger or racial make up of the neighborhood as the main reason for staying away from Latin. One parent was quoted as saying that he "doesn't wish his boy to associate with Negroes in a Negro school"³⁸. The location was often referred to as deteriorated, and there was a large fear of the "black element", probably resulting largely from the riots. One mother said, "Anywhere but Latin, because I'm not sending my kid 'down there'"³⁹.

The racial divisiveness had roots even further back than the riots. Demographic numbers make it clear that Cleveland was a prime example of urban flight and decay. Almost thirty percent of Cleveland's population left the city during the 1970's. At the same time the number of people in Cuyahoga County as a whole during this time actually rose⁴⁰. Some scholars claim that "the abundance of inexpensive housing, open spaces, and clean air" available in Cleveland's suburbs caused the population loss that began in the fifties, sped up during the sixties, and continued throughout the seventies⁴¹. Residents left at rates of 20,000 people per year⁴². Just over 300,000 residents left Cleveland between 1960 and 1980. The city that was once the sixth largest in the country was now nineteenth largest and quickly dropping. A majority of this urban flight took place on the

³⁷ "Memorandum to the Trustees of Cathedral Latin School." *Frank R. Borchert Papers*. Western Reserve Historical Society; pg. 2.

³⁸ "Why Students are not Coming to Cathedral Latin." *Frank R. Borchert Papers*. Western Reserve Historical Society; pg 2.

³⁹ *Ibid*; pg. 3.

⁴⁰ *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (online); Timeline.

⁴¹ Smith, Fred H. *From Sixth City to "Mistake by the Lake": A Portrait of Cleveland Ohio in the Twentieth Century*. Davidson College; pg. 9.

⁴² *Ibid*; pg. 10.

east side, reducing the potential number of Cathedral Latin students. Additionally, a “declining birthrate” among Catholics is another factor that contributed to the shrinking pool of potential students, according to the Bishop of Cleveland during the 1970’s. Most Reverend James A. Hickey back up his claims with numbers and believed that there should be a consolidation of Catholic schools. His statement reported that in 1958 there were 24,239 Catholic baptisms in the Diocese of Cleveland; however, in 1977 there were only 12,811 baptisms⁴³. This dramatic drop-off in baptisms was another dynamic of the numbers problems confronting Latin in the 1970’s.

Declining birth rates aside, urban depopulation trends were very real and acutely demonstrated in the enrollment trends of Catholic high schools. Between 1971 and 1978, the schools in central Cuyahoga County (eastern Cleveland) lost over thirty percent of their enrollment. During this same time period the enrollment in Catholic high schools in Lake and Geauga Counties increased by forty percent. Lorain county schools grew by five percent. It is also valuable to note that the enrollment numbers of Catholic schools in western Cleveland stayed constant during this time⁴⁴. These numbers make it easier to understand why St. Ignatius, Latin’s peer institution on the west side, survived this time period while CLS floundered.

Another issue central to the depopulation of Cleveland’s east side was race. The sixties were a time in which Cleveland’s east side was racially transformed. Again, the Glenville and Hough neighborhoods, both within blocks of Latin, can serve as prime examples. In 1950, Hough was, what economist Fred Smith called, a ‘working class,

⁴³ “Chancery: Educational Insitutions.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁴⁴ “JAH institutions: Cathedral Latin” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

white neighborhood'⁴⁵. Indeed, the Hough neighborhood was only five percent African-American at the time. Yet, only ten years later, in 1960, Hough was 78 percent black⁴⁶. Glenville experienced the same changes. Its African-American population went from seven percent in 1950 to eighty-eight percent in 1960⁴⁷. These demographic shifts were particularly problematic for CLS, because African-Americans are predominantly non-Catholic. Sister Frances Flannigan, the Secretary of Education for the diocese, was correct in claiming that “part of the problem with regard to Cathedral Latin was...population shifts have left many of our schools in areas where students no longer live”⁴⁸.

The racial tension eventually spilled over into Cathedral Latin community. The lead article in the October 31st, 1968 *Latineer* (CLS school paper) is titled “Principal attempts to halt incidents”⁴⁹. It is telling that the main story in the school paper covers after school “disturbances” between Latin students, and African-American John Hay students. The article never specifically states what happened, but it was serious enough that Latin and Hay administrators asked for, and received, increased police patrol of the area⁵⁰. Yet, the fear of the neighborhood did not subside. In 1969 a fence was put up around the parking lot to “add protection to the many students that drive to school”⁵¹. In 1971, the school changed the academic schedule so class would end at 1:15 for students in athletics and band so they could “get home before dark”⁵². Discomfort with surrounding neighborhoods was beginning to affect how the school functioned. The

⁴⁵ Smith; pg. 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid; pg. 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid; pg. 36.

⁴⁸ “Chancery – Educ. Institutions – Cathedral Latin Closing.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁴⁹ “Principal attempts to halt incidents; Hay exchange considered successful.” *The Latineer* 31 Oct. 1968.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Additions being completed.” *The Latineer* September 1969.

“dangerous” reputation that the location was forming was not lost on potential students and their parents. In the previously mentioned survey, an eighth grade student claimed that, “I wanted to go [to CLS] but my mother...doesn’t want to have to worry about me if I were to stay after for sports”⁵³.

These fears were not completely unfounded. Rising crime rates and economic downturns were very real. A 1972 article on University Circle in the *Cleveland Press* stated, “Widely publicized incidents of crime have hurt University Circle in recent years”⁵⁴. A number of efforts were made to stem the decay that had taken a hold of the east side. A public library was built near University Circle with the intention of fostering unity in the local community. There were hopes that the library would bring people of the area closer together⁵⁵. But no library or any other effort could fully overcome the damage that had already been done.

Not everyone believed that the largely black neighborhoods surrounding Cathedral Latin were a bad thing. Frank Stitts, the chairman of the Black Lay Catholic Caucus in Cleveland, voiced this opinion in a letter to Bishop Hickey in 1979. Stitts claims that the school is located precisely where it is needed, in the middle of the black community. He goes on to claim that the school offers African-American boys a chance to learn in an environment “where the students don’t feel they must lose or water down their own cultural identity in order to obtain a quality education”. He also claims that this opportunity works in each direction. Stitts claims that it could be beneficial for white

⁵² “New Year Brings Schedule Changes.” *The Latineer* 1 September 1971.

⁵³ “Why Students are not Coming to Cathedral Latin.” *Frank R. Borchert Papers*. Western Reserve Historical Society; pg 2.

⁵⁴ Weidental, Bud. “University Circle Radiates New Life.” *The Cleveland Press* 27 March 1972.

⁵⁵ “New Circle Library.” *The Latineer* October 1969.

students to partake in the “Black cultural experience”⁵⁶. He expresses the feelings of the many; there is no better place for a Catholic school to have a positive impact than in the inner city.

Father Richard K. Knuge, S.M., the president of CLS, responded to the critics of Latin’s location in a slightly different way. He wrote a scathingly reproachful ‘letter to the editor’ that appeared in an area newspaper. The following excerpt captures his argument well:

“To state that Cathedral Latin is located in one of ‘Cleveland’s most deprived areas’ indicates a total lack of appreciation of the realities of life. Education is where the best facilities can be taken advantage of...not necessarily in the cloistered setting of suburbia. It’s not the motives and support of Cathedral Latin that need rethinking...it’s the thinking and motivation of many of our Catholic people which needs rethinking”⁵⁷

However, not enough Catholics agreed with Fr. Knuge’s or Frank Stitts’ opinions.

Cathedral Latin had a number of large obstacles in the way of its future success and existence.

Things only got worse in 1969 when the school attempted to reach “academic fame” by being one of the first schools in the nation to institute modular scheduling. The modular system was designed to give students more academic freedom. Each day students were given large chunks of time that they were supposed to use to take advantage of the educational advantages of University Circle. Class enrollment was

⁵⁶ Stitts, Frank. Letter to Bishop Hickey. 28 February 1979. Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁵⁷ Knuge, Fr. Richard K. “Letter to the Editor.” Unidentified newspaper clipping. Archives, Diocese of Cleveland

flexible as students could “decide what they wanted to learn”⁵⁸. The system was supposed to emulate a university setting and put responsibility on each individual student. Creativity and individuality were to be stressed as students learned to “think for themselves and make decisions”⁵⁹. All of these progressive educational catch phrases sounded good on paper. Unfortunately, the theories behind modular scheduling did not translate into real world successes. Students were often found off task, the school’s excellent academic image was tarnished, and there was a perceived discipline problem. In 1975 Daniel J. O’Loughlin, chairman of the Board of Trustees of CLS, would lament that “it has taken the school five years to recover from the disaster of the modular academic program. The sad fact is that graduates of that time period received an inadequate education...as parents they were not satisfied with the education or discipline at Cathedral Latin School”⁶⁰. This curriculum misstep could not have come at a worse time. Shifting demographics, costs, and the poor reputation of surrounding neighborhood were already working against Latin. Now the school had to deal with a perceived dip in the rigors of its academic demands.

In the end, Cathedral Latin had to deal with Cleveland’s shrinking population and the increasingly bad reputation of its location. It was no longer possible to recruit the large freshman classes that the school had consistently brought in during previous school years. The student body could no longer support the school financially.

From Bad to Worse:

Inflation combined with increasing educational costs to make the situation even worse for Cathedral Latin. As early as 1955 Catholic schools diocese-wide were facing

⁵⁸ “Academic Innovations.” *The Latineer* September 1969; pg. 1.

⁵⁹ “An Educational Challenge; Prepared for Cathedral Latin School.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

budget problems from increased educational demands. The diocese procured a survey in 1955 that was designed to quantify “unmet educational needs” within Catholic high schools. Nearly every high school required intelligence testing, a counseling department, and updated audio/visual aids (educational television is cited as one example) to compete with local public schools. Furthermore, the curriculum had to be expanded as well to keep pace with the public schools. More modern languages had to be offered along with expanded programs in music, art, industrial arts, commercial/secretarial coursework, and home economics⁶¹. All the added needs become additional costs on a school soon to be strapped for cash.

Costs escalated even further as the number of lay staff members steadily rose. It became increasingly apparent that the Society of Mary did not have enough brothers available to adequately staff the school. Indeed, in Bishop Hickey’s letter informing parents of Latin boys that the school was closing, he stated that the “Marianist community has decided that it does not have sufficient staff for the school”. By 1976 the school’s staff was composed of fourteen marianists and fifteen lay teachers⁶². This is a far cry from the fifteen percent lay staff that was the ideal situation stipulated in the society’s agreement with the diocese. It is also a grave financial problem, as lay teachers demanded more than twice the pay of a religious brother. This was a further public relations fiasco because the Marianist staff was seen as the driving force behind the schools academic and religious success. Parents of potential students began to lose confidence in the school as the number of Marianists on staff dwindled.

⁶⁰ “Educational Institutions: Cathedral Latin Closings.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁶¹ “Education: Enrollment and Facilities.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁶² “Educational Institutions: Cathedral Latin.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

The costs kept piling up as building maintenance and repair expenses were added to the already ballooning budget. In 1966 a language lab was installed and the main offices were remodeled. In 1968 the school building was completely rewired, the school chapel was remodeled, and the principal's office was redesigned and relocated. The biggest changes came in 1969. The school purchased a parking lot approximately the size of an acre, installed a T.V. studio, radio station, remodeled all lavatories, and installed a new heating system. However, the biggest addition was the purchase of the Council of Jewish Women's Building on 105th Street. After renovation this structure would come to known as Darby Hall. This new building housed the music department, art department, and some athletic training equipment⁶³. All the changes listed are upgrades in educational facilities that undoubtedly made Cathedral Latin a more dynamic learning environment. Unfortunately, all of these improvements came at a cost, and these costs came at a time when Latin's enrollment and revenue were already on the way down for reasons previously mentioned.

By the 1970's the athletic department, while probably being the most successful part of the school publicly, began to add greatly to the rising costs as well. In 1974 alone the athletic department lost \$20,000⁶⁴. A "poor football season" was referred to as the main cause of this debt. It is also mentioned that there is uncharacteristically low morale in the Booster Club. In past years football had been a revenue generator; now even it was adding to the financial troubles of the school.

It has always been difficult for a private school to make ends meet. As the economic problems of the depression took hold, even Cathedral Latin, with a nearly full

⁶³ "Educ. Institutions: Cathedral Latin Task Force." Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

student population, went into debt for a couple of years. In 1937, the school spent \$2,500 dollars more than it took in. However, debt totals of this amount are more manageable than the debts that would come later on. Also, during the early years there were only a couple of sporadic years in which the school did not balance its books financially. For example, in 1938 the school came out approximately \$4,000 ahead⁶⁵.

It was a different story in the late sixties and seventies. As costs and inflation continued to soar ever higher, enrollment numbers continued to plummet. These factors forced the school to go continually further into debt. By the 1970-1971 school year Latin's operating budget exceeded its income by \$17,593; by 1973 the operating deficit was \$24,312. In 1970 the school was already over \$125,000 dollars in debt, and there was no sign of a fiscally optimistic future⁶⁶. The school was caught in a financial hole. Paying past debts with present funds became a necessary practice, and the vicious economic cycle of financial debt payment kept repeating itself while only getting the school further into the red. In 1978, the Marianist members of the staff were not paid in full and the future operation of the bookstore and cafeteria were in doubt. The financial situation became so dire that the Society of Mary had to pay over \$300,000 to meet the school's operating deficit between 1976 and 1979 alone⁶⁷. In the end, the Marianists realized that financial support of this scale was not possible on a long-term basis.

The financial troubles were not the burden of the Marianists alone. During the seventies, tuition was increased sharply to offset the expanding costs. In 1971 tuition was

⁶⁴ "Financial Losses in the Athletic Department." *Frank R. Borchert Papers*. Western Reserve Historical Society.

⁶⁵ "Agreement with Society of Mary, 1941." Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁶⁶ "CLS Finance Committee Meeting Agenda 9-22-1970." *Frank R. Borchert Papers*. Western Reserve Historical Society.

⁶⁷ "Educ. Institutions: Cathedral Latin." Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

\$567; by 1975 it was \$876, and in 1976 it was expected to be \$992⁶⁸. Increased tuition not only hurt recruiting, but because enrollment was so low, the school's income was still not high enough to cover all expenses. The Cathedral Latin Alumni Association, traditionally one of the most supportive in the nation, supplied nearly one third of Latin's budget during the seventies⁶⁹; but even this generous giving could not turn things around financially for the school. Cathedral Latin was in a financial hole that it could not get out of without a substantial increase in enrollment.

These fiscal problems reached the breaking point in the 1970's. In fact there was talk of closing the school as early as 1975. Fr. John Darby, the principal of CLS in 1975 was quoted as saying, "the days of Latin are numbered"⁷⁰. The diocese stepped in before the 1975-1976 school year to try to help the school turn around its fortunes. The Society of Mary and the Diocese of Cleveland reached an agreement whereby they both agreed to guarantee the operation of the school for the next two years. The educational and cultural resources of University Circle were incorporated into this plan. Latin students could take courses in computers, health sciences, law, zoology, and horticulture among other course offerings at nearby Case Western Reserve University. There would also be use of joint programs, staff, and facilities with John Hay High School to attempt to use resources more efficiently and ease the tension between the two schools. During this grace period, both the diocese and the Society of Mary would help to absorb any debt incurred while trying to get the enrollment back between 500 and 700⁷¹. This range was considered a

⁶⁸ Mikolajczyk, Sigmund. "Money, Enrollment Cloud Latin's Future." *Catholic Universe Bulletin* 18 April 1975.

⁶⁹ "A Fine School in Trouble" *The Cleveland Press* 11 April 1975.

⁷⁰ Mikolajczyk; pg. 1.

⁷¹ "5 Groups Save Latin for Now." *Catholic Universe Bulletin* 25 April 1975.

“safe zone” for financial feasibility. The school’s numbers would never again be that high.

By the time the guaranteed two-year grace period came to a close it was becoming increasingly evident that the school would not be able to continue. As part of the final decision making process, the diocese formed a task force of researchers to evaluate Cathedral Latin’s current situation and future prospects. The researchers, composed mostly of professors from the University of Notre Dame and Marianist brothers, were supposed to examine “enrollment profiles, enrollment projections, and financial trend analysis”, and come back with a recommendation for the future of the school⁷². After analyzing the data, the task force advised the Marianist Provincial office and Bishop Hickey to close the school in 1979. According to their numbers the enrollment of Cathedral Latin School had nowhere to go but down.

The Marianists, with the full support of the bishop, decided to close the school for good on February 17, 1979. The decision was made public a few days later. The school building and property were sold to the state of Ohio one year later for \$700,000. The profit from the sale was turned into tuition grants for students in the diocese with demonstrated financial need⁷³. The building was demolished in 1981. Small pieces of the infrastructure were preserved. The main entranceway to Cathedral Latin’s school building was incorporated into the building that was put in its place. Primo Vino, a restaurant in Cleveland’s Little Italy, constructed tables from Latin’s wooden flooring; the restaurant’s marble countertops were salvaged from CLS, and the mahogany entranceway to the restaurant is made of wood from the doors of Cathedral Latin’s school

⁷² “Educ. Institutions: Cathedral Latin Task Force.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁷³ “CL sale provides tuition grants.” *Catholic Universe Bulletin* 4 April 1980.

building⁷⁴. Other than these small remnants, all of the structural evidence of the once proud school's existence was destroyed.

Uproar over Latin's Demise:

The public unrest caused by Cathedral Latin's closing was palpable. Bishop Hickey's office was hit with a deluge of letters from alumni, concerned community members, mayors, senators, judges, state representatives, parents, local college faculty members (three from CWRU), college athletic coaches (OSU cross country), leading professionals (chief of medical staff at Warren Hospital), the superintendent of Cleveland schools, and concerned Catholics, among others⁷⁵. This uproar was one final testament to Latin's effect on the local community. Bp. Hickey undoubtedly felt the public pressure to keep the school open, but he stuck to his original decision. His letter of response to Cleveland Mayor Dennis Kucinich captures the sentiment of all of his responses. In it he wrote,

“Cathedral Latin is one of the great assets of the Diocese of Cleveland...By no standard of good stewardship can I now recommend that the Diocese take on an additional burden in the form of supporting Cathedral Latin. No adequate need for its continuation has been proven”⁷⁶.

It was assumed that “no adequate need” was present because the current CLS student body could easily be dispersed among other area schools, namely Benedictine High School, St. Ignatius High School, and Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School.

The end had become official, but some very motivated members of the community refused to stand by and give up hope. A group called the “Committee for the

⁷⁴ “A Little Bit of Latin.” *Catholic Universe Bulletin* 9 July 1982.

⁷⁵ “Chancery – Educ. Institutions – Cathedral Latin Closing.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

Continuance of Cathedral Latin School” quickly formed. This team of individuals registered the school’s name as a nonprofit organization with the state and petitioned the Bishop for the opportunity to operate the school as an independent, private institution with a Christian focus. The Bishop allowed the group to pitch their proposal in May of 1979. About a week later he rejected the plan, claiming, “the projected number of students is not realistic, the proposed budget is not feasible, and there are no specific Catholic goals which must characterize our secondary schools...(letter to Frank Vitale, chairman of Committee for Continuance) as your bishop I ask you to consider the good of the diocese over the specific good of one institution”⁷⁷.

Nonetheless, the tension between the Cathedral Latin community and the Bishop would not die easily. Bishop Hickey was scheduled to speak at the final Latin commencement services in the spring of 1979. His decision to close the school and reject the Committee for the Continuance of Cathedral Latin’s proposal caused such an uproar that an Auxiliary Bishop was called in take his place as the keynote speaker at graduation. He was quoted as saying it would be “less emotional” if someone else spoke⁷⁸.

Conclusion:

Cleveland stills bares many of the scars it received during the urban decay of the 1960’s and 1970’s. The city has yet to fully recover from this time period. Cleveland lost 27,213 people in 1990’s, and while this has been the city’s smallest population loss

⁷⁶ “JAH – Cathedral Latin.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁷⁷ “Educ. Institutions: Cathedral Latin Task Force.” Archives, Diocese of Cleveland.

⁷⁸ Peery, Richard. “Cathedral Latin Group Reaches end of the Line” *The Plain Dealer* 25 May 1979.

in any decade since the 1950's, it is still a negative trend⁷⁹. The experience of a single school gives an illustrative look into the problems that confronted Cleveland during this era; the city still has to deal with many of these issues to this day. Cathedral Latin is but one instructive example of the urban decay that enveloped Cleveland during the 1960's and 1970's. Closely considering the plight of this school gives the reader a lens that they can use to peer into the urban history of Cleveland's east side. Cleveland's academic community, Catholic community, and secondary school community are much poorer because of the demise of this once great institution. The Diocese of Cleveland still operates the largest school system in the state of Ohio⁸⁰. Cleveland Catholic schools serve over 75,000 pupils, but a large piece of the puzzle is now gone forever. Latin certainly left its mark on Cleveland during its time, but now the name and tradition only live on in Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin High School in Chardon, Ohio. The real tradition of Cathedral Latin's excellence now resides only in the memory of its 11,000 graduates.

⁷⁹ Bendix, Jeff. "University Area Has Experienced Population Increases." *CWRU Campus News* (online) 17 April 2003.

⁸⁰ Rutti, Ronald. "Semper Fidelis to school memory." *Catholic Universe Bulletin* 31 August 1986.

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