


ARCHIVE NEWS

Spring/Summer 2018

Vol. 20. No. 1

LE MOYNE COLLEGE

LETTERS & NOTES

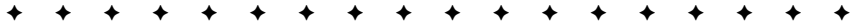


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LE MOYNE LETTERS AND NOTES

As the archivist appraises and files thousands of items to preserve the past and present goings-on at Le Moyne College, he frequently comes across letters of interest. Sometimes they are important historical documents; other times they reveal a sense of humor or, alternatively, a bitter antagonism. They all manifest the human side of Le Moyne.



On June 2, 1948, New York Provincial John J. McMahon, S.J., wrote to Le Moyne Rector William Schlaerth, S.J., condemning a policy that is now considered one of Le Moyne's greatest glories – the start of Le Moyne as a coeducational institution.



Father Schlaerth and his coed students

The letter read in part:

“Regarding coeducation at Le Moyne, we received a letter from the Very Reverend Father General dated May 15, 1948. He is amazed to hear beginning co-education was inaugurated at Le Moyne in the face of clear directives to the contrary.

However, he [the General] grants a sanation [forgiveness] for the past and an extension of the practice for the next five years, provided steps to remedy the situation during these years so that at the end of five years period, we may get back to the

Society's traditional type of education ... We must limit the number of girls to be received each year to 50.”



In 1949, another echo of gender problems from a former age is Father Schlaerth's letter to the dean ordering the implementation of a provincial's fiat. **The provincial wrote:**

“Since it is the policy of our colleges to have a man as registrar, please bring Le Moyne into line by taking on a man as registrar.”

Schlaerth suggested to the dean that “we make an effort to find a man for the position of registrar as soon as convenient.”



One of the earliest pillars of Le Moyne was Frank Fingerhut, S.J., who served as treasurer from 1950 to 1976. His great achievement was that, even during difficult times, he always kept the College in the black. **However, some considered him a curmudgeon, a view that could be supported by this note to his department:**



Frank Fingerhut, S.J., explains the financial fact of life to Le Moyne President Nicholas Sullivan, S.J.

“Note well!

It is presumed that all the members are by now acquainted with the system of fines inaugurated last month. Consequently, all found violating the rules of the office could no longer plead ignorance, no matter what their mental capabilities. If anyone, upon examination of conscience, finds that his knowledge of the rules is somewhat lacking, then it is presumed that he will satiate his want with one of the officers.

Yours truly, The Treasurer”



Also, members of the Le Moyne community did not always approve of Father Fingerhut's rigid accounting practices. **As one wrote to him:**

“The idea that you have a right to quiz me [on use of budget money] is a violation of my rights as vice president of student services. This has consistently

happened over the years, usually through one of your subordinates. I will no longer accept this type of tactic.”



In 1958, Provincial Thomas Henneberry, S. J., wrote a response to a report submitted by Le Moyne President Robert Grewen, S.J., that claimed that the College could not survive without an increase in boarders:

“The facts you give indicate that Syracusans are not flocking to the College. Perhaps the problem that should be given top priority is that: How can Syracusans be attracted? Your geographical situation may be such that you can count on sufficient boarders from North and Central New York to keep a full school, but the problems intrinsic to larger boarding schools [are] such that I would prefer not to have them.”



Some letters reveal the behaviors of the College's early students and administrators. From the beginning, students engaged in sometimes destructive pranks and flaunted violations of a strict dress code.

In 1963, a representative of the Thomaris Insurance Agency wrote to the dean:

“On the night of April 27, 1963, the baseball team from your school was the guest of the Arlington Inn, Potsdam, N.Y. ... It is alleged that on that evening, the group took out the fire hoses and wet down the walls, ceilings and carpet of the hotel, causing damage in the amount of \$175.00.”



Mandatory Proper Attire, 1968. (Please see the back cover of The Archives for an example of more modern attire.)

In 1968, Academic Dean Francis Fallon, S.J., informed the faculty concerning the proper Le Moyne dress code. It certainly differed markedly from today's attire [cf. back cover]. **He wrote to the faculty:**

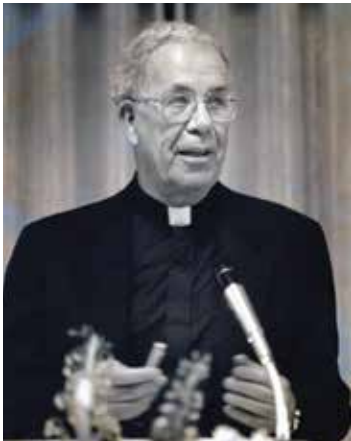
"Particular attention is called to the following excerpt from the Handbook [p.41]: Men must wear a suit coat, blazer or block-L sweater with shirt and tie. Seniors must wear the senior gown. Trousers should be clean and pressed but shorts, dungarees, work pants and fatigues are never permitted."

During the 1978-1979 academic year, the faculty published a "no confidence" vote against Le Moyne President William O'Halloran, S.J. When he stubbornly refused to step down, the ultimate recourse was invoked. John Canavan, S.J., newly appointed vice provincial for higher education, issued a command to him under holy obedience to leave. **He**

wrote to Father O'Halloran on July 3, 1979:

"As I told you in the course of our last meeting, the decision to ask you to resign as President of Le Moyne was not easy to make. It has been made, however, and I expect you to abide by it. I would like you then to send me a letter stating that at the next meeting of the board of trustees you will submit your resignation as president effective June 30, 1980.

"I must ask you to excuse the stern and peremptory tone of this letter. In a matter of this seriousness there can be no room left for a possible misunderstanding."



Robert Mitchell, S.J., not available in 1978. What an impact that had on Le Moyne history!

One correlative to the resignation was that Vincent Cooke, S.J., vice provincial for higher education, wrote a memorandum for his files on Jan. 19, 1978:

"Bob [Mitchell, S.J.] phoned me today to let me know that it looked likely that the Le Moyne board would eventually give a vote of no confidence to Bill O'Halloran. He wanted to know what to do if he is approached for the presidency.

"I said I had already discussed this with Emon [Taylor, S.J., Provincial]. Abstractly, we considered the directorship of the Woodstock Center more important than the presidency of Le Moyne. We also knew there would always be the possibility of a larger university presidency down the line. Perhaps that would be more important than Woodstock, but we did not think

Le Moyne was. I told him he could act on this understanding, i.e., he could tell Le Moyne that he was not available, if asked."

Faculty salaries have been a perennial source of friction between administration and faculty. **In 1984, Louis DeGennaro, Ph.D., the only person ever to serve for 60 years on the faculty, wrote to the President Frank Haig, S.J., about his distress that the professors' salary increases did not equal inflation:**

"Each year the situation seems to grow worse in so far as morale is concerned. We watch the increasing numbers of non-academic personnel, but realize few if any increase in faculty services. There are many who feel that teaching is not a priority it once was at Le Moyne. Unless I am completely out of touch, I perceive as vital the preservation of Le Moyne's well-deserved reputation for academic excellence ... For many of us, Le Moyne is, and has been, our only endeavor."

In an extremely unusual communiqué for a Le Moyne president, Father Haig admitted that he had blundered in his letter to the faculty on a proposed MBA program by not including the academic dean's role. **He wrote this apology to the dean:**

"What is to be done when a president does something that is dumb? Even when he has been warned? I suppose one moves into crisis management and damage control. That does not eliminate the frustration but at least it does not make it worse. Perhaps such may be the course of action in the present instance ...

"I am sorry for the malaise this event has caused you. I am afraid I have to take responsibility for it myself. I hope we can pick up the pieces without too many cut fingers."

In 1985, even an outsider, the front-runner candidate for academic dean, noted the hostility between president and faculty. **She wrote to the chair of the search committee:**

"I am writing to withdraw my candidacy for the position of dean at Le Moyne College. I do so with regret, because the work of education at Le Moyne clearly impressed me as providing an important service in the Syracuse area.

"On the other hand, the present circumstances surrounding the position, particularly in the area of governance and administration, require, in my judgment, the greatest attention at this time. While I feel capable of these challenges, I believe my best capabilities lie in educational and faculty development through strategies to enhance and lead growth; these presuppose a strong administrative back up and participatory [as against adversarial] governance."

In 1986, reflecting the rising issue of women's rights, a female professor had, on a page-long job description of the duties of the department chair, circled 11 patriarchal terms, such as "men," "man," "he," and "his" and sent it to Academic Dean James Finlay, S.J. She added a



James Finlay, S.J., the human side of administration.

note: "I feel I can perform all the duties listed on the enclosed sheets. However, is it necessary to have a sex change?"

Finlay replied: "Before contemplating a sex change, I think it would be prudent to check with Blue-Cross Shield to see whether such surgery is covered in major medical."

James Finlay had another side to his personality besides the jocular as the following letter indicates:

"Dear Professor,

You have reason to "submit with trepidation" a bill for \$512.34 for the semester of lunches you provided for certain students.

I am outraged. In years of involvement with the hiring of faculty I have never seen anything like this. Interviews with students are ordinarily arranged on campus.

Why does this statement come to us from Utica? It cannot be that you sent the students and the candidates off to Utica to have lunch.

Why I am faced with a bill that provides no details except the bottom line figure? I refuse to pay such a bill."

Finlay wasn't the only person who could use hyperbole when he disapproved of expenditure, as Vincent Ryan, S.J., apparently did of the costly swimming pool. After he had visited a number of colleges with pools, he concluded that there would be little use of the facility. The irony was that, despite his vociferous opposition, the pool was built and dedicated in his honor. **The following reflection was occasioned at that dedication:**

"This occasion has turned out to be no piddling project. Some have come out of the past and from considerable distance to baptize a spa, to give a name to an untided lagoon, a cabined spring – a selection process that can be as complicated as a christening. In a simpler season the poet asked innocently, 'What's in a name?' Little did he grasp the complexity of the question which is so multilayered if we leave out the mystagogy of name and nature in and before the Bible ... George Ade, the American humorist, picked up where Shakespeare left off. 'There is everything in a name,' he said. 'A rose would smell as sweet by another name – and cost half as much in wintertime.'"

Over the years, many letters indicate internecine conflicts in certain departments. **Professor Bea Robinson, Ph.D., after citing the need for curriculum revision and the search for a full-time tenure track member for her biology department, observed in a letter of April 10, 1991:**

"Our department does not always exist in harmony, honesty and cooperation. [That was a masterpiece of understatement.] In addition, it is no secret that two of the tenured faculty



would not select me as their department chair. I believe that we need outside help in creating the atmosphere to hand-grenade our existing curriculum, brainstorm about the resources we need to begin building a new curriculum in the fall, and-most important, learn how to trust one another and work with one another."

A faculty member, who was censured by the dean for using the "honor system" (in which teachers are not present) in exams, wrote a rebuttal:

"In truth, I have never felt I should function as a kind of prison warden whose duty it was to stand guard over my own particular yard full of incipient malefactor. But we live and learn, and I can only say that in times to come I will have to amend my supervision habits and bring them into line, with that official code of penal supervision which our students seem to expect and require."

To end on a spiritual note, which is, after all, essential to the foundation of a Jesuit college, Father Bill Richardson, S.J., one of Le Moyne's original faculty members, wrote a letter to the first graduating class that is still relevant today:

"No doubt in the last moments together there is a great deal of reminiscing and warm talk about the good old days and the Spirit of Le Moyne. But, you know, this Le Moyne spirit that is so easy to talk about, always puzzles me, and I used to wonder about what it really was. Certainly, it is not what it often seems to be – the noise of a rally, or the support of a dance, or keeping the tables clean in the cafeteria. These are, at best, the effects of it. Nor is it, I think, just the personal camaraderie, friendship or mutual loyalty among you, for these risk being but human things – and as feeble and fragile as man. I don't want to sound pious, but for my part I think the Spirit of Le Moyne is not so much a thing as a person – whom none of us created but all received – who is bigger and stronger than all of us because he transcends us all – who has grown in you because you have grown in him, the spirit of truth and love."



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