

A MONUMENTAL LEGACY

+ John Alb of N.Y.

ARCHBISHOP JOHN J. HUGHES  
THE BUILDING OF ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL

*Featuring a Selection of Paintings from the Brian P. Burns Collection of Irish Art*



THE CONSULATE GENERAL OF IRELAND, NEW YORK  
MARCH 7 - JULY 31, 2014

**THE IRISH IMMIGRANTS** who fled their famine-ravaged homeland during the 1840s made an immediate and indelible impact on their adopted country. Within a generation St. Patrick's Cathedral rose above Fifth Avenue as a living monument to their ascendance in America. The Cathedral soon became a New York City landmark. Today, "America's Parish Church" is visited by millions and known throughout the world.

Born in Ireland and educated in America, Archbishop John J. Hughes emerged as the visionary and driving force behind the Cathedral, which he considered a necessary sanctuary for his people and their faith. Focusing on his remarkable life, *A Monumental Legacy* tells the story of a diaspora for whom the Cathedral he envisioned became both a spiritual home and a symbol of their success as a community.

This year, the sesquicentennial of Archbishop Hughes's death, St. Patrick's is undergoing an historic restoration. *A Monumental Legacy* tells the story of the evolution of Irish America in 19th century New York. The exhibition features extensive original research and a selection of paintings from the Brian P. Burns Collection, one of the most important private collections of Irish American art. Narrative panels and rare images from the Archdiocesan archives further enhance the exhibition which runs through July 31, 2014.

Contributing historians: Dr. Terry Golway, Professor Christine Kinealy, Dr. Maureen Murphy and novelist Peter Quinn. Conceived and curated by Turlough McConnell.

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Hughes' family home in Co. Tyrone.



## 1797–1817 An Ulster Childhood

American democracy was still young when John Hughes and his family emigrated from their Ulster farmland in 1817. There was an Ireland where Catholics numbered 85% of the population, yet owned only 5% of the land. Whether it was the idealism of America that attracted them is unknown, but fleeing persecution and poverty to find a home was a driving factor in Irish emigration, and it animated Hughes as a leader of America's Catholics.

Even as a young man, Hughes possessed political skill and an innate ability to engage powerful people in his cause. Hughes had come to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania with his family, and soon left for Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, where he found work as a gardener. Some say it was Mother Elizabeth Seton who influenced Father Jean Dubois, head of the seminary and himself a refugee of the French Revolution, to finally admit Hughes. There he attended college and, in 1826, was ordained.

In 1826, Hughes accompanied Father Dubois to New York City, where Dubois was named Bishop, the only non-Irish Bishop in New York to this date. When Bishop Dubois died in 1842, Hughes became New York's fourth bishop and the leader of the city's Catholic population.

The impression of the "hereditary degradation" of Catholics in his native Ireland never left him. Hughes once wrote that, as an Irishman, he was "on social and civil equality with the most favored subjects of the British Empire" for five

days—the first five days of his life, before his baptism as a Catholic, upon which he became a second-class citizen. In the New World, Hughes sought justice for himself and fellow Irish Catholics tormented by persecution and degradation by the dominant majority and he found a perfect opportunity for the realization of his monumental destiny.

## 1820–1844 Educating Hughes, Educating New York

From his early days as a parish priest, "Dagger John" Hughes courted controversy. A fierce foe of injustice, Hughes was fearless and vocal in his collisions with entrenched, usually monied, Protestant interests. The Irish immigrants were predominantly uneducated and poor. Access to a free education and the freedom of worship were fundamental rights afforded every citizen and without that, there could be no advancement for the poor and no the cultural identity for Irish Catholic immigrants.

As New York's fourth bishop, in the early 1840s Hughes was at the center of the divisive debate with the Public School Society, a Protestant civic group that ran New York City's schools. Though nominally nonsectarian, the Public School Society alienated Catholic immigrants with Protestant (and therefore anti-Catholic) teachings; thousands of Catholic children felt



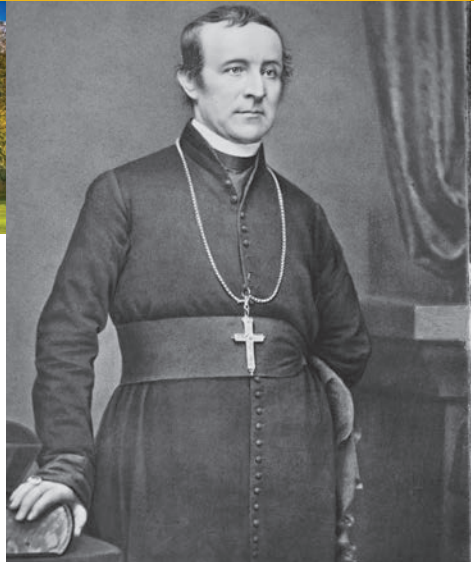
Mount St. Mary's Seminary.

demeaned and, worse, remained uneducated. The controversy over what version of the Bible to use in school inflamed nation-wide. To Hughes, public education was a right due every American, especially the poor and the voiceless.

Known for his keen intellect and sharp tongue, Hughes secured the support of New York Governor William Seward, who shared his commitment to equality of education who would go on to become Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of State. The battle over the funds of the Public School Society ended in 1845 with the founding of the New York City Board of Education. While the city rejected the idea of public funding for parochial schools, in 1850, as Archbishop Hughes used his considerable influence to build a national system of privately funded parochial schools, hospitals and orphanages which became the safety net for the thousands of Irish immigrants who flooded New York during the famine years.

## 1845-1853 A City Transformed

Irish Catholic immigration changed the character of New York from a city dominated by the Anglo-Protestant elite. The major influx came in response to the Famine of 1845-1853. The champion of those Irish who managed to escape the poverty and religious persecution in their homeland was Archbishop John Hughes.



Portrait of Archbishop John J. Hughes by Mathew Brady.

Hughes demanded an end to the persecution of these immigrants struggling to make their way in a nation dedicated to tolerance.

The anti-Catholic nativist movement grew more intense in response to the exploding numbers of starving, uneducated, and impoverished immigrant Irish arriving in New York beginning in 1845, swelling its population from 371,000 to 630,000 by 1855.

Archbishop John Hughes, a pragmatist who understood political realities, was also an agent of change. His deep and devastating critique of British economic policy led the way for challenges to the accepted order and to a fuller integration of Irish Catholic immigrants into American life. Hughes also recognized the need for the Irish to keep their financial house in order. He petitioned the Irish Emigrant Society to organize a safe deposit institution for the Irish community. In response, the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank was chartered in April 1850.



St. John's College, Fordham.  
Archbishop Hughes' Visitors Book.  
Façade of St. Patrick's Cathedral  
by James Renwick, Architect.

## 1853-1858 Vision for A New Cathedral



St. Patrick's Cathedral was called "Hughes Folly" when construction started in 1853, a comment on Archbishop Hughes' decision to locate the church on the rural outskirts of the city. The building cost twice as much and took four times as long as estimates had predicted. Here is what Hughes thought of the challenge ahead of him:

"Thoughts and reflections in regard to the New St. Patrick's Cathedral on the square of ground between 5th Ave and Madison Ave and 51st and 50th St..."

"The time for the erection and completion of the Cathedral supposed to be five years — the means for carrying on the work to be expected from the Catholics of the city — and hopefully from other sources. The work to be paid for as in subscription and contracts to be made in such a way that without violating the terms the work can be arrested whenever the funds are exhausted.

"It is supposed that there are above 200,000 Catholics in the city. That many of them may be able and willing to contribute generously and that we may say there is not one adult Catholic among them who will not be able and willing to contribute an average of from one to five dollars annually.

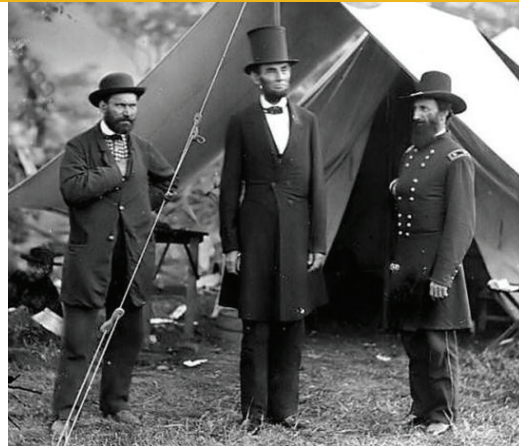
"If these views be correct there is not the slightest reason to be alarmed at the magnitude nor the costs of this great temple to be raised for the honor and glory of God and for the honor also of our religion and the Catholic name. Reliance must be placed upon the Catholic body themselves and there is very little doubt that many wealthy public spirited protestants will contribute from time to time as the work goes on nor with a wish to promote our faith, but from a natural pride growing out of the achievement of having at least one great Cathedral which as a public building, will be an ornament and a boast of the city of New York."

## 1861–1865 The Civil War

America's bloodiest conflict propelled Ireland's emigrants into the vanguard of U.S. citizenship. With 18,000 unemployed men in New York City, the Union was eager to enlist them as troops. "Irish-Americans rallied to the Union cause after Sumter fell," writes Terry Golway in *Machine Made: A History of Tammany Hall*. "By war's end, one hundred and fifty thousand natives of Ireland—thousands from New York—had answered Lincoln's call to defend the Union."

Archbishop John Hughes joined his countrymen in service during the Civil War. Though known as a firebrand, "Dagger John" Hughes was recognized for his diplomatic skills by President Lincoln, who named him special envoy to Europe. Sent to London, Paris and Rome, Hughes was successful in urging these heads of state to lend support to the Union by denying official recognition to the Confederacy.

The Irish volunteers were proud to serve and fought with distinction. They marched through the streets of Manhattan on their way to transports that took them to small towns in the South, places with names like Chancellorsville, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. They joined outfits like the Irish Brigade, commanded by the Irish-born Michael Corcoran, whose men gained a reputation for bravery and determination, charging into battle with the cry of "*Faugh a Ballagh!*"—an Irish phrase meaning "Clear the way!" One of the brigade's regiments, the



President Lincoln at Antietam, 1862.  
Photograph by Alexander Gardner  
The "Fighting 69th" at St. Patrick's  
Old Cathedral, 1861.

69th New York militia, so impressed Robert E. Lee with their courage under fire that he called them "The Fighting 69th."

The tragedy of Hughes' remaining days were the Draft Riots that erupted in New York in July 1863. Hughes, in failing health, spoke passionately to the violent crowd from his residence, "...If you are Irishmen, and the papers say the rioters are all Irishmen, then I am also an Irishman, but not a rioter, for I am a man of peace." The mob dispersed.



## 1879 The Legacy of John J. Hughes

Archbishop John J. Hughes died at the home of his sister, Margaret Hughes Rodrigue, on January 3, 1864. The funeral, which was attended by eight bishops and several hundred priests, took place at the Old St. Patrick's Cathedral on January 7th, the anniversary of his consecration as Archbishop. Bishop McCloskey of Albany, who would succeed as Archbishop and who later became America's first Cardinal, preached the funeral sermon. Hughes' remains were transferred 30 January, 1883 to their final resting place under the sanctuary in the new Cathedral on Fifth Avenue.

An early biographer, Henry Brann, who returned from Europe with Hughes in 1862 following his work for President Lincoln, called Hughes a Richelieu, a prelate with a profound political sense. The enduring legacy of his leadership was Hughes' stand for religious equality, the belief that Roman Catholicism was consistent with American patriotism.

Hughes' monumental legacy, St. Patrick's Cathedral, has been cherished by successive generations of New Yorkers as both a spiritual home and symbol of New York City. The Cathedral was formally dedicated by Cardinal McCloskey on May 25, 1879 with 7,000 persons attending.

In the early years, the Cathedral's location, three miles from the center of New York City, was described as "a rough and ragged track, ...hardly a thoroughfare, rich in mud holes, goats, pigs, geese, and stramonium" and ridiculed as "Hughes's Folly." Today the Cathedral graces its Midtown location, where it is visited by 5.5 million people annually.

"Aided by the graceful presence of its neighbor, Rockefeller Center," writes Brendan Gill in his Introduction to *St. Patrick's Cathedral, A Centennial History* by Leland Cook,, "...the Cathedral dominates Fifth Avenue as easily today as it has ever done...There it stands for our delight and, if necessary, for our consolation. It's front steps are assuredly a parvis, if not a Paradise, and young and old take the sun upon their faces there as a sort of benediction, while the scattered benedictions of a thousand rosy candles wink and twinkle within."



Jack Butler Yeats  
(1871-1957)  
Misty Morning 1942  
Oil on panel  
9" x 14"

## EXHIBITION MARCH 7 – JULY 31, 2014

Consulate General of Ireland, 345 Park Avenue, 17th floor, New York

The exhibition, *A Monumental Legacy, Archbishop John J. Hughes and The Building of St. Patrick's Cathedral*, is made possible with generous support from CapTrust.

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St. Patrick's Cathedral: Chris LaPutt; *The Tenant, Castle Rackrent* (1880) and *The Schoolroom (or Empty Pockets)* (1887) from the Brian P. Burns Collection of Irish Art



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RESTORE THE CATHEDRAL.

