COLLECTION OVERVIEW:

AUTHOR: Healy, Michael, d. 1840

SOURCE: Transfer from University Archives (original source unknown)
ACCESSION NO.: MS2004-01
ACCESSION DATE: Jan. 2004

QUANTITY: Approximately 1 linear foot, (1 box)

LOCATION: Level 2, Boston

INVENTORIED BY: Sarah K. Nytroe, Spring 2004

LANGUAGE: English

RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS: Collection is open for research.

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ABSTRACT: The bound manuscript contains fourteen handwritten sermons delivered by Father Michael Healy from 1835 through 1840. They were delivered at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and St. Mary’s Church. The sermons cover topics including the Festival of St. Patrick, repentance, communion, Nativity, obedience to parents, judgment and the love of God.

PREFERRED CITATION: Identification of item, Box number, Folder number, Michael Healey Sermons, MS2004-01, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Reverend Michael Healy was born in 1807 or 1808 in County Kilkenny in Ireland, and was described as a “pious and lovable youth.”¹ He studied in Montreal, Canada, before he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick in 1830. From 1830 until his death in 1840, Healy served in parishes of the diocese of Boston and New Hampshire. After his ordination, Healy worked with the Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine, from July through November 1830. Healy’s few months in Maine marked the culmination of tensions between the Boston diocese and the educational work at the school of Congregationalist minister, Elijah Kellogg. Because the tribe possessed the authority to pay Rev. Healy, Kellogg encouraged them to reduce Healy’s wages. Bishop Fenwick instructed Healy to inform the Passamaquoddy tribe that if Kellogg was not dismissed Healy would be removed. The Passamaquoddy refused to accept the ultimatum, and Fr. Healy returned to Boston.

From November 1830 through July 1831, Healy served at St. Aloysius Church in Dover, New Hampshire. He served most of his priesthood at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, from 1833-1838. Finally, Healy served at St. Mary’s Church in the North End of Boston from July 1838 to July 1840. Various editions of the diocese’s newspaper, The Pilot, praised Healy for his eloquent and “soul-stirring” addresses. In announcing the success of Healy’s appeal to the congregation of St. Mary’s for the school of the Sisters of Charity, The Pilot concluded by saying, “Few, if any, in the Diocese can surpass him in pulpit oratory. We congratulate the congregation of St. Mary’s on the addition of so valuable a pastor.”²

After suffering from a long illness, Michael Healy died in Montreal on July 8, 1840.

² The Pilot, 28 July 1838, 215.
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

This bound manuscript contains fourteen handwritten sermons delivered by Reverend Michael Healy over a six year period, from March 1835 to January 1840, at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in South Boston and at St. Mary’s Church in the North End of Boston. The unsigned sermons cover a variety of topics including the Festival of St. Patrick, repentance, communion, the Nativity, obedience to parents, judgment, and love of God.

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Please see the attached documentation for an examination of the research process determining the author of the sermons. The processing archivist conducted the primary research at the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.

INVENTORY:

The following list of the sermons gives the title, date, place, and page numbers of the bound volume:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGES:</th>
<th>TITLE OF SERMON:</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DATE:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>On Repentance</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>1835 Mar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-18</td>
<td>On an Unworthy Communion</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>1835 May 16</td>
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<td>19-26</td>
<td>On the General Judgment</td>
<td>Boston; St. Mary’s</td>
<td>1836 Mar. 6; 1839 July 14</td>
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<td>27-30</td>
<td>Nativity of Our Lord</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>[n.d.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>On the Love of Lord</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>[n.d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-49</td>
<td>Duty of Children to Their Parents</td>
<td>St. Mary’s</td>
<td>1840 Jan. 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Nativity of Our Lord</td>
<td>Boston; St. Mary’s</td>
<td>1836 Dec. 6; 1839 Dec.</td>
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<tr>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>Charity Sermon</td>
<td>Boston; St. Mary’s</td>
<td>1836 Oct. 30; 1838 July 17</td>
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<td>61-68</td>
<td>Festival of St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>1837 Mar. 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>69-73</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Boston; St. Mary’s</td>
<td>1838 Dec.; 1838 &amp; 1839 Dec.</td>
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<tr>
<td>74-76</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<td>77-81</td>
<td>On Charity</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<td>82-87</td>
<td>Festival of St. Patrick</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>1838 Mar. 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>88-91</td>
<td>On the Erection of a Church</td>
<td>St. Mary’s</td>
<td>1838 Dec. 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MICHAEL HEALY SERMONS – RESEARCH DOCUMENTATION:

The bound manuscript of the fourteen handwritten sermons in the Archives and Manuscript Division at the John J. Burns Library of Boston College were unsigned. The first step in compiling a finding aid for this manuscript was to identify the author of the sermons. The content of the sermons themselves offer little concrete evidence as to who authored and delivered them. Another archivist took steps to identify the author of the sermons as well, but this research process began from the premise that the author was unknown. Through a process of elimination, based upon research conducted primarily at the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, the processing archivist identified the author of the sermons as Rev. Michael Healy.

A previous researcher suggested that Rev. Patrick O’Beirne authored the sermons, while Dr. Thomas O’Connor, the University Historian of Boston College, raised the possibility that Dr. Thomas J. Flaherty authored the sermons. Both priests worked at St. Mary’s Church in the North End, which is the site where some of the sermons were delivered. Flaherty was known as a prolific writer and a fine preacher, and O’Connor thought the sermons resembled his style. While Flaherty did serve as pastor at St. Mary’s Church in Boston’s North End, the three-volume History of the Archdiocese of Boston indicated that Flaherty was on leave in Ireland from 1833-1840, which eliminated him as a possible candidate; the sermons were delivered between March 1835 and January 1840. Meanwhile, O’Beirne remained a possibility.

An examination of the 1837 Catholic Directory, at St. John’s Seminary Library, revealed two more candidates and a vexing question of identity. The directory listed William Wiley and Patrick Byrne as the pastors at St. Mary’s Church. The question of identity surrounded the confusion of Patrick Byrne and Patrick O’Beirne. Were O’Beirne and Byrne two different men or were they the same man with a misspelled last name. The History of the Archdiocese of Boston listed Patrick Byrne as pastor at St. Mary’s in Charlestown and Patrick O’Beirne as pastor at St. Mary’s in the North End. The publishers of the directory may have possibly misspelled O’Beirne’s name; a later edition also misspelled O’Flaherty’s name. Both Byrne and Wiley remained possible candidates for a brief moment. William Wiley did not serve at St. Mary’s during the entire period that the sermons were authored, but only from May 1836 to April 1837.

The research increasingly pointed to Patrick O’Beirne as the author of the sermons, however, upon further investigation at the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, one more candidate was revealed. The processing archivist first examined the Catholic Directories over a ten-year period from 1835 to 1845, which revealed that Rev. Michael Healy also worked at St. Mary’s Church from 1838 through 1840. Uncertain of where to proceed from there, the Archdiocese archivists pulled baptismal records for St. Mary’s for the relevant years in order that the researcher could examine the handwriting of the baptismal records and the handwritten sermons. With no knowledge of handwriting analysis, the archivists also pulled the Memoirs of the Boston Diocese, which are observations of the day-to-day events in the diocese and of the weather.

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The processing archivist proceeded to look up those dates in the *Memoirs* that corresponded with the dates of the sermons. On December 23, 1838, the *Memoirs* recorded the completion of the pulpit at St. Mary’s Church and its being preached from for the first time. While the *Memoirs* did not identify the priest who preached from the pulpit, the last sermon in the bound manuscript is entitled “On the Erection of a Church.” The author concluded the sermon stating, “I need not tell you… that the clergymen of St. Mary’s duly appreciate the zeal & generosity with which you have contributed towards defraying the late expenses of the new decorations of the Church.” Further evidence from the *Memoirs* indicates that Healy authored the sermons. On March 17, 1837 and 1838, the *Memoirs* recorded that Healy preached a Panegyric (defined as an “expression of praise”) of Saint Patrick, which corresponds to the dates and sermons in the bound manuscript. Two other dates in the *Memoirs* recorded that Healy preached; these dates correspond to the dates of the sermons including March 6, 1836, and December 25, 1837.

The most conclusive evidence from the *Memoirs*, however, surrounds the date of October 30, 1836. The *Memoirs* recorded that “Mr. Healy preaches a charity sermon on behalf of the Sisters’ school which yielded $144.” In the bound manuscripts, the author preached on a sermon entitled “Charity Sermon” on October 30, 1836. The author of the sermon began by stating that he was making an appeal on behalf of the Sisters of Charity and he indicated his fears that he would dampen their zeal rather than excite it because of the many other times when the faithful had been called upon to contribute monetarily. This sermon was recycled and given again on July 17, 1838, at St. Mary’s Church.

Having found the most conclusive evidence in identifying the author of the sermons, the processing archivist left the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston with an author to accompany the unsigned sermons. Wanting to find more suggestive evidence pinpointing Healy as the author of the sermons, the researcher continued by searching *The Pilot* for notifications announcing charity sermons. The three dates under investigation included October 30, 1836; July 17, 1838; and September 24, 1837. In the July 14 edition of *The Pilot*, the editors announced that a collection would take place for the school under the direction of the Sisters of Charity on July 15 at St. Mary’s Church on Pond Street. They stated, “We assure that many of the old admirers of the Very Rev. Mr. Healy will be present on this occasion, to listen to his soul-stirring appeals in behalf of the helpless and destitute orphan.” Rev. Healy opened his sermon for the charity appeal (dated as July 17) with brief remarks on the purpose of the talk: “It is not necessary for me to remind you of the object for which the contribution this day is intended: It has already been announced that it was to meet the emergencies that at present press upon that truly excellent institution conducted by the Sisters of Charity.” A few weeks later, the editors reported the results of the collection. In the July 28 edition of the paper, the editors announced:

> We neglected to mention in our last, that the collection in this church on the 15th inst., was very good, considering the badness of the times, and the consequent number out of employment. The very Rev. Michael Healy delivered an eloquent discourse in the forenoon, which was listened to with deep attention. His old friends, as we mentioned in

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5 *Memoirs of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 30 October 1836, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston.
6 *The Pilot*, 15 July 1838, 198.
7 “Charity Sermon,” (17 July 1838): 56, Archives and Manuscripts, John J. Burns Library.
a former paper, were not disappointed. Few, if any, in the Diocese can surpass him in pulpit oratory. We congratulate the congregation of St. Mary’s on the addition of so valuable a pastor.  

While the date, as recorded by the author of the sermons, is July 17, 1838, and the date, as recorded by *The Pilot* is July 15, 1838, do not match, a review of the content and style of the sermon as discussed by the paper corresponds with the sermon.

After a process of researching that included the *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, the resources of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, and the diocesan newspaper, *The Pilot*, the author was determined to be Rev. Michael Healy, who served as a priest at St. Mary’s in the North End from July 1838 through July 1840.

Sarah K. Nytroe, April 2004

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