

PROFILE

THE KELLY DIARY

VOLUME

JANUARY 24, -- MAY 21, 1858

Joseph Augustine Kelly, O.P. opens the four volumes of his diary with a description of his setting out on his first return to Ireland:

1853. May 1st. Departed from St. Rose's Kentucky, in company with Thomas Duffy for Europe. We drove to Louisville in a fine buggy, and made a grand appearance on the way, except that the seat was minus of cushions, thanks to the courtesy of our good Prior; but the defect was supplied with a grand quilt. We bid an affectionate farewell to the brothers, and the venerable spire of our convent was lost in the distance. Our spirits were high and joyous.... We wiffed away our segars and rolled to Bardstown.

Like many who were entering American religious communities in the mid-nineteenth century, Kelly was born in Ireland, in Dublin to be exact; and was baptized at Sts. Michael and John Church on July 12, 1827. He had one sister, Mary Ann. After the death of his mother the small family left for the United States, landing in Philadelphia in December 1837, but moving to Louisville, Kentucky, a few months later.

Daniel Kelly, the father, built up a thriving construction business and although apparently uneducated himself (he signed his will with an X), he sent his son to St. Joseph's College in Bardstown for a year, and then to the Jesuit college of St. Mary's. Shortly after completing studies there in February 1844, Kelly entered the Dominican Order. On June 13 he received the habit at St. Rose, Kentucky. While recording this fact Kelly left no clue about his reasons for becoming a Dominican. According to the diary, he continued his studies at St. Rose and at St. Joseph's in Ohio. On July 26, 1850, he was ordained to the priesthood together with his classmates James Edelen, Peter Walker and John Raymond Cleary. A few months later at the age of twenty-three, Kelly was appointed prior of St. Joseph Convent by the provincial Matthew O'Brien. From that time he was almost always in positions of responsibility in the province.

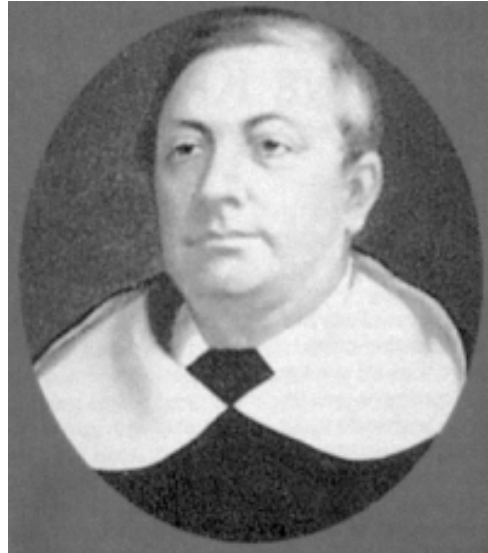
In 1856 the provincial James Whelan appointed Kelly president of St. Joseph College in Somerset, Ohio. The college was opened on September 2, 1851, at the site of the original Ohio convent of the friars in Perry County. The first president was James Whelan, who after his election as provincial, was replaced in 1854 by Philip Dominic Noon. When Noon's health broke down, Kelly was named as his successor. The Civil War, among other causes, was a factor in the closing of the college in 1861.

In October, 1858, at the age of 31, Joseph Kelly was elected by the friars to be their provincial. After completing his term of office in 1863, he became pastor at St. Peter's

Parish, Memphis. Thereafter he remained in Tennessee, where he was honored by his grateful contemporaries as "father of the orphans" and selfless caregiver among victims of the yellow fever epidemics.

Joseph Augustine Kelly, O.P.

The first of four volumes of Kelly's diary is devoted almost entirely to his trip home to Ireland; the second records part of his term as college president; the third, his years as head of St. Joseph Province. The fourth volume briefly covers many of his remaining years. The diaries, meant for his own remembering, are frank but discreet. Through them a human picture of the man emerges. Although most entries are brief and to the point, they reveal his enthusiasm and universal curiosity.



The diaries show that Kelly loved to be with people. Fairly abundant are such entries as "To bed tonight near twelve. FF [James Vincent] Daley, [Joseph F] Dunn, [Michael Dominic] Lilly, [John Antoninus] Rochford, and myself drawing out the time till then in social chat and amusement," (April 14, 1858). The diaries express his concern over occasional long evenings of "amusement and chat" with his confreres when he was college president. He worried whether socializing was a frivolous waste of time, but finally decided in the negative because the friars had to bear heavy parochial duties, teach college classes, and exist in what was virtually a boarding school of male adolescents.

Kelly also kept in close touch with his neighbors, especially parents of students or relatives of the friars. The second volume of the Diary contains many phrases like "visited Wade's family, dined with them and sleighed home through the mud" (February 29, 1858); "Called on some of my Zanesville friends" (March 18); "With Father Dunn drove to John Noon's this evening, had a pleasant time." (April 21). On April 28 he took the altar servers on an overnight picnic at Noon's.

The Irish-born friar delighted in meeting new people wherever he went, invariably making life-long friends. When provincial business caused him to go to Arkansas he introduced himself to Bishop Edward Fitzgerald of Little Rock; soon they became good friends, over the years exchanging correspondence and visiting. Kelly even introduced the friars to Little Rock and the healing waters of Hot Springs. He felt welcome in the homes of Bishops Peter Kenrick of St. Louis and Martin J. Spalding of Louisville. In the latter city he frequently visited his father.

Generally accepting people as they were, he was not blind to the faults of real trouble makers. Few ever spoke more honestly to the Master General Jandel than Kelly, who told him that those Jandel had favored were perceived quite differently by the friars.

Kelly loved to travel; while in office he took full advantage of the opportunities to be on the move. When Giuseppe Larocca, O.P., Master General, visited the country in 1881, Kelly was amazed that he could complete a convent visitation in less than two days. For Kelly such a visit took at least two weeks, and often more. He was not content simply to meet with the brethren and examine the account books. In Washington his visitation included seeing the historic sites, museums and public buildings with side trips into Maryland and Virginia to meet old friends and the relatives of his fellow friars. Visitation at Sinsinawa involved stops at many river towns and trips as far as St. Paul. His participation in a general chapter in Rome in 1862 led to a tour of several countries of western Europe. These are recorded in great detail in the related Diary.

Clearly Joseph Kelly preferred the active life. Although he was a college president and seminary professor, he was less a scholar than an administrator. Although he read widely he confessed to the weakness for newspapers shared by his fellow Americans. "I find that giving so much attention to papers is rather a loss of time, and yet I have so strong a passion for devouring them that I cannot overcome it" (February 28). The Irish preacher Thomas Burke was convinced that American friars read nothing else.

What appears most characteristic about Joseph Kelly was a devotion to duty that led him to do what had to be done, although he was repeatedly given difficult assignments. When conditions in wartime Nashville led to the withdrawal of Bishop James Whelan, Kelly became administrator of the Diocese of Nashville. He collected funds, built an orphanage and rescued sisters and orphans when the city was besieged. When federal armies destroyed the orphanage he had just erected, he persuaded the federal government to build an even larger one for the orphans. His "sick calls" in the river city of Memphis often brought him to barroom floors and back alleys to victims of violence. These were cared for with the same diligence and promptness as that given to prominent citizens.

Even when his position was of a stop-gap nature, as when appointed administrator of the Nashville diocese, he did not use the situation as an excuse for inaction. When he saw problems, he sought and found solutions. This was especially true regarding the orphans in Nashville and later in Memphis. Fittingly, the last item in his Diary for June 14, 1885, reads: "Baptized thirteen orphans today." He died in the following August.

Archivist's note:

This is the second of the four extant volumes of Father J.A. Kelly's Diary. It does not bear his name, but the handwriting is unquestionably his. Besides, other facts also prove that it is his. The presidency of St. Joseph's College is one of them. The Diary covers January 24, 1858, to May 21, 1858. There is every reason to believe that other volumes of his Diary recording events of other periods in his life were written. They have yet to be found. This volume was discovered at St. Patrick's, Columbus, Ohio, after the death of Father Kelly in Memphis on August 7, 1885.

PAGES FROM THE DIARY OF JOSEPH AUGUSTINE KELLY, O.P.

January 24, 1858, Sunday morning

My term of Presidency has so far run over a year and a half, and still continues. It is an office of some honor, but of trouble and difficulties more than enough to outbalance it. All is not gold that glitters, is an old proverb and a true one. My present position verifies it. It is said that it is great to be president of a College, but the greatness, according as we look at it may be in different lights. To the looker on it may seem a post of dignity; to the incumbent it is a post of endless annoyance. It seems to me that a president is a target, at which everyone, may hurl a lance with safety to himself, but not without danger to the said target. Prefects are not always disposed to follow a straight line, and sometimes wander into crooked ways, but on this head, I cannot complain much. A half a hundred boys are to be made to do their duty, and yet not to be offended; each one has his whims to be gratified. Some don't like so much study, others think there is too much recreation; some think their teacher is incompetent, partial, unjust &c; others look on the same individual as a paragon of perfection. Then there are the parents, more childish often than the children. One will have his child punished, another is opposed to it; one believes with Solomon that the rod must not be spared, another wiser stipulates that the jacket is not to be dusted in this free country. Expel a boy and he is an enemy of the college for life. Pa and ma discover on a sudden that the college is badly conducted, that other institutions are far superior; they invariably find that their boy has been ill fed, ill clothed, ill instructed, and totally neglected. Such are the beauties of expulsion. . . . Passing events of the day I will jot down from time to time, as an experiment in writing, and also to look over them hereafter with pleasure if not with profit. Distance lends enchantment to the view.

Jan. 28 Thursday

The Philopoedian Society today got up a new bookcase. It is 20 feet long, will hold a large number of books, looks well. It is the third case purchased since the formation of the society, each one being larger and more costly than the other. The other society now speaks of making an addition to their library. There is quite a rivalry between the two societies, each striving to outstrip the other. It is a laudable ambition and makes both prosper and flourish the more. The two libraries contain at present about fifteen hundred volumes of choice reading in history &c. The societies we may say have just attained the age of reason, being but seven years old and in this short time, the members have purchased all the books themselves with some assistance from the Faculty. Judging the future by the past, their prospects are really brilliant.

Jan. 31 Sunday

Finished reading the Book of Genesis today. I intend to read the Bible through this year, taking it up on Sundays and occasionally at other times.

Feb. 1

Last evening rode over with J. Crosson to his mother's and there passed a pleasant night. The old lady presented me with a pair of socks, the wool of which she spun and knitted herself, though eighty years of age. Rode to James Fink's, dined and enjoyed a few hours of social chat. Then returned home through a storm which now covers the ground.

Feb. 10

We received a newspaper edited and owned by P. Noon, Ebensburg Pa. A former student. V[?] Bennet, also an old student is now a member of the Iowa legislature. Thus St. Joseph's is beginning to be glorified in her children.

Feb. 11

Went from Somerset to Zanesville in a buggy with F. Edelen. Though cold we had rather a pleasant drive. Went to the depot with F Bokel in a carriage to meet Dr. Brownson and conduct him to the hotel. In the evening he lectured in Nerritt's hall to a large audience, for one hour, and three quarters. He is not an orator, but speaks like a philosopher, with calm and solid reasoning. His subject was: "Popular objections to the church." These objections he said were not at the present day scriptural, but social and worldly. Catholicity was objected to because hostile to civilization, because it restrains reason, investigation &c. He showed that reason is allowed full play; enquiry is allowed outside the church. . . . All were pleased with the lecture, and could have listened for longer time. It made an impression on the Protestants present.

Feb. 12

In Zanesville. Passed most of the morning with Dr. Brownson. He is quite large. Weighs probably 200 pounds, has a fine appearance; small piercing eyes, grey hair, grey whiskers and an imperial. He looks indeed as if he did not forget the feasts though he keeps the fasts. He is very conversable, very pleasant. He chews much tobacco, and has a singular way of working his upper lip when he has said a good thing or is about to laugh. The upper lip is thin while the lower is very thick and hanging. He speaks out plumply what he thinks of any person or thing. His father was an officer in the Spanish army; his mother from Scotland. He says Archbishop Hughes^[1] is no theologian.

Feb. 13

The circulation of Brownson's Review is about 1800. And I suspect pays pretty well. He complains of his lectures not being very well attended generally. Lately in Cincinnati he received but ten dollars for a lecture. I rather like Harper's; it has a great deal of trash, is very bigoted, but yet contains some good articles. The editorial article at the end of each number is generally worth the price of the magazine. I find that Catholic editors who strongly condemn it, are generally the first to purchase and read it. Our Fathers in Zanesville^[2] have discovered that Carrolton's Irish tales are immoral and have proscribed them.

Feb. 16

Listened with much pleasure to our boys practicing negro melodies; they do them in splendid style and will I am sure create a sensation by their performance. They have a banjo, bones, triangle, violin, &c. The songs are interspersed with conundrums, wit, &c &c. Having been thinking how well our boys agree together. Since I have been here, they have never had a fight, or a serious disagreement; minor differences sometimes arise, but are of short duration. This speaks much in their favor, and considering the number and diversity of characters and dispositions, is I think something very remarkable. Last week a large boy cut off a portion of the legs of his pants, hemmed and gave them to small boy (T.M. McCormick) who was new; another gave him a jacket, another a vest, and in the end he had a good suit of clothes. Their kindness and charity in this might even put their professors to blush. . . . But we are weighed down with heavy debts. Our debt this time last year was computed to be fifteen thousand dollars, and of course is still large though somewhat diminished. Often during one day we have half a dozen calls for money. People think we are a bank stashed with money.

Feb. 19

Quite cold; snow, and sleet falling all day; sleighing good. E Daly has just arrived from Memphis, he walked in upon us quite unexpectedly this evening. . . . He left St. Louis yesterday and reached Lexington at twelve o'clock today; this is fast traveling even in this fast age.

Feb. 23

Still very cold; sleighing is excellent, and horse flesh suffers in consequence. The boys; have been sliding down hill all day on home made sleighs, having fine sport. Witnessed their fun for some time, and trying it myself, had a glorious upset, and tumble on the snow.

Feb. 25

For the first time visited Wade's family, dined with them and sleighed home through the mud for half the way, the snow having pretty much vanished under a warm sun. Our conversation was all about Ireland and the Irish, Wade always addressing me as the gentleman from Dublin; he declared he would know me if he met me in Sockville Street &c. . . . It is strange and sad to think how fond our young men are of liquor; it is their ruin and their curse. Some are expelled every year for this cause, others know they will incur the same penalty, and yet their passion is so strong that they will blindly give way to it. In the excitement of the moment, they forget the sin, the shame and the disgrace it draws upon them. How the heart of parents must bleed over such children.

Feb. 26

Did not read a great deal today. I have a great many interruptions during the day, my room being a kind of public resort, where our folks come to chat and give in their experience. This robs me of much time which I think I could employ more profitably. It happens on some days, though not often. I cannot find time to say my office between the "calls" and have to defer it till night.

Feb. 28

Raining this morning, snowing all the evening. Preached today to a rather small Congregation; -- William came over this morning and gave me an apple saying it was for my sermon. There being seven [Friars] that preach, that duty devolves on each one but once in seven weeks.

March 1

Having written to Mrs. Beeson last week to send money to take her son home, as I designed to expell him, she reached here this evening. She came from St. Louis to intercede for him, and to beg that he may be forgiven. She pleads like a lawyer, and entreats as only a mother can for an erring son. Have been reading for the last three months from time to time Victor Cousin's history of Modern Philosophy. It is a very able and learned work, the language beautiful and eloquent, but it is in places so abstruse and profound, that I cannot fathom it He prefers modern to scholastic philosophy. Scholastic philosophy was fettered and tied down to religion; the modern is free and independent in all things.

March 2

I have yielded to the entreaties of Mrs. Beeson and consented to keep her son; tomorrow she starts home rejoicing.

April 1

All fools day. Enjoyed some hearty laughs at the pranks of the boys; some of them were rapping at my door before I got up, being sent on a wild goose chase, by their more wide-awake companions. . . .

April 2

There is much talk among ourselves right now about a college in Memphis; it is affirmed to be just the place, fine location, wealthy people, great facilities. The college could be built on some year's credit and would pay for itself at the appointed time. Must be built soon, or others will embrace the opening before us. . . . If St. Joseph's were out of debt, I should be in favor of closing the college, and the building could be used for our own brothers, establishing here one novitiate for the province.

April 4

The greatest and most general revival ever got up in this country is now being carried on. Preachers are daily holding forth in almost every town and hamlet from N. York to N. Orleans. Many so called conversions are reported, but no cases of restitution are recorded.

April 5

Some people are predicting the end of the world, on account of the religious revivals going on, the greatest it is said in the last hundred years, but their imagination runs away with their judgement. In N. York and other cities merchants close their stores for days to attend meetings, but the thing is rather overdone, many are making fools of themselves & sensible one's [sic] are disgusted.

April 6

This evening F. Lilly, Dunn, & Rochford and myself have just finished a two-hour game Resumed classes and studies today; boys nearly all back. . . Read two articles in Brownson's Review, for this quarter. One of Bishop Spaulding [Spalding] on mormonism and the poor, in which he reviews Mayhew's book on the poor of england. Shows that in London alone there are 30,000 who live in cellars in a state of sin and starvation. Proves english poor to be far more debased than the poor of france, spain, germany, &c.

April 7

Mr. Robinson of Cincinnati was here today; a fine portly looking man. Had a call from M. Scott and J. Crosson. . . . Finished reading Brownson's Review. It contains a long article on colleges, from a contributor, who is entirely opposed to our present school system. Some of his ideas I can endorse, the majority I wholly reprobate. He is in favor of having one high toned university, which would suffice for the whole country. Our colleges are he thinks, but boarding schools, not superior to common schools; would have them called grammar schools. He says they have too much of an ecclesiastical complexion, teachers being students of divinity, or priests who have charge of congregations. Thinks it's a mistake to suppose that teachers from this fact, have moral influence over the boys.

April 8

The gem it is said cannot be polished without friction, and man cannot be perfect without trials. In this view, the President of a college must be the most perfect of men. Job was never President of a college, had such been the case, he would perhaps have lost his patience occassionally [sic]. Bishop Spalding once remarked to me that being President, was next to being naked on a cross; don't know that it is so bad as all that, but it is something like it, at any rate. If my daybed be hard, I have a feather bed at night, which is some little consolation, as it gives me repose and pleasant dreams. Looked through "Nick Nap," a comic monthly of N. York. The pictures display taste and ability and the whole affair is pretty well gotten up.

April 13

E Shoulipnikoff, at twelve last night, left the convent, throwing off his habit, and returning to the world. All our brethren were glad of it, and he had the sympathies of none. Manus ejus contra omnes, et manus omnium contra eum; he thought everything Dominican wrong.

April 16

Received an invitation from Revd. N.R. Young to preach the panegyric on St. Dominic next August in Washington city. Hope to do so, as I am desirous of seeing the wonders of the capital city.

April 17

After supper E. Brooke arrived from Washington as a student; his father studied seven years at St. Rose's, in the days of the college there. Learned from him that a boy at

Georgetown College can advance in the English branches only in proportion as he advances in the classics; all are obliged to study Latin and Greek: boys juggled must always learn their lines in Latin.

April 18

A couple of hours with Chad Magruder in correcting his graduating speech on the influence of Patriotism; it is beautifully written. . . . Siesta after dinner; chat and amusement with FE Lilly, Dunn, and Br. Clement till supper.

April 22

Social chat and amusement with F. Daly, Dunn, Fr. Rochford, which was continued until eleven tonight. I have come to the conclusion that this is a waste of time, is paying too dear for the whistle, and I shall discountenance it hereafter.

April 24

With T. Sligar, drove to Zanesville in the buggy this morning; though somewhat cool, we had a pleasant time. . . . Heard confessions, which though once a familiar, is now almost a new occupation. Encountered some strange cases, illustrating the feelings of the Revd guides of souls here, who are more strict than the law itself. A woman told me she had never been a drunkard, but still was forced to take the total abstinence pledge before she was allowed to go to communion. Said she was forced to it, and did not intend to keep it at the time, and wants to know, if she sinned, in breaking such, a pledge. Thus great rigor often begets sin, instead of destroying it. Some of the people are kept on the stool of repentance for months at a time. Though the intention may be good, we cannot applaud the act. Our law is one of mercy, of gentleness, and of love.

April 25

E. Cubero stood at the church door to see if any lady entered with obvious hoops; he found one, and told her she had better go home, or some where else as it was no use for her to come to church. The preceding Sunday he preached on women's hoops and men's chewing tobacco, declared they were an abomination to the Lord, and would be turned out of church by physical force, if they came there. Comment is unnecessary.

April 26

I see that 100 short sermons, the creed, commandments &c translated from the revel of H. J. Thomas, a canon of Liege, by a professor of a western college (i.e. Sinsinawa) is just published. The sermons are brief, lucid, have great directness, and compression of argument, are very good for country congregations. It is rather creditable to our folks of the big mound and no doubt gives them a large opinion of themselves.

April 28

I have long promised our boys who serve mass a picnic; tomorrow is the day and they are all on tiptoe, as lively as a piece of old cheese able to walk. This evening we set out in the express, old Whitey heading towards J. Noon's and inclining his head every other step, approving of our trip. A malicious person might say Whitey did this on account of a

certain lameness of limbs, but those who can appreciate his worth know better. W. Rouelt, T. Murray, M. English, J. Hill, E. Flouston, T. Kehoe, T. Tiner made up the company, and a right merry set they were. Half the boys in college say they want to learn to serve mass in order to enjoy a future picnic. A dozen have offered themselves as drivers of our one horse carriage and all rejected. . . is well pleased with himself, thinks he is better looking than his fellows, our coach drives up and off we go at two miles an hour.

April 29

Thursday; a beautiful day, very warm. Last night at John Noon's, the boys had a glorious time. E Roch played the violin, they sung [sic] and danced, and talked, and laughed and were as merry as grigs. Had beds on the floor and slept twice two double. Went to McCluney church after breakfast, sauntered about awhile, then to Smith's, and saw the additions and improvements they're making, F. D'Arco being the architect. Back to Noon's, smoked til thirsty, remedied the evil by generous draught of port, and sat down to noble old gobler [sic], which soon was dissected and done for. Mustered our force and set out homeward, passing through Rehoboth and Lexington. Everybody talked while no body listened; fun, wit worthy of older heads, and songs shortened the road. The only regret expressed, was that the sport could not be prolonged for a week or two.

May 2

This evening with F. Rochford, went to J. Crossons. John was glorious and jubilant having another heir, which I baptized Thos. Joseph.

May 13

We begin to think of long office again, nine psalms and nine lessons; we have not devotion enough to make us rejoice at the prospect and the proximity of the time. Mr. Slevin called in the evening. Passed some time at Sr. Fanny's^[3] conversing with Mrs. Tiner and Lizzie and Georgie. Read Chateaubriand on the hierarchy.

May 21

Read Chateaubriand. The knights sometimes formed friendships among themselves, the blood of each was mingled in one cup, and as a pledge of the mutual fidelity, they wore either a golden heart, a chain, or a ring. Love of fair lady had in such cases but a secondary claim on their hearts. . . . The days of chivalry are long since over; mammon and money are the gods of our time.

NOTES

1. Archbishop John Hughes (1797-1864) was the first archbishop of New York.
2. Charles Pius Montgomery, O.P., (1806-1960) and Francis Cubero, O.P. (1807-1893) were good men but their narrow interpretation of morality was an affliction for the parish. The Diary will give several other instances.
3. Sister Fanny and Sister Teresa Naughton were Dominican tertiaries who spent their lives giving domestic service at St. Joseph's.