

**THE BISHOP HOWARD—THOMAS MORE COLLEGE
MENDEL COLLECTION**

2008

**COMPRISED OF DOCUMENTS IN THE
DIOCESE OF COVINGTON ARCHIVES
AND THE COLLECTION PRESERVED BY
DOCTOR EDWARD O. DODSON**

**COLLECTION HOUSED IN THE
THOMAS MORE COLLEGE LIBRARY
DIOCESE OF COVINGTON, KENTUCKY**

SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE BISHOP HOWARD— THOMAS MORE COLLEGE MENDEL COLLECTION

The Bishop Howard—Thomas More College Mendel Collection contains documents located in the Diocese of Covington Archives as well as those that were preserved in Ottawa, Ontario, by Doctor Edward O. Dodson. The Collection contains forty-five copies of actual 19th Century documents, referred to hereafter as the primary documents. These cover the span of Mendel's entire life from a copy of his 1822 baptismal certificate to notices of his death in 1884. There are copies of his academic records, letters of recommendation attesting to his moral character, spiritual development, and teaching skills, notices of his ordination to the priesthood and of his election as abbot, invitations to participate in biological/botanical societies and events, plus some of his correspondence as Abbot of St. Thomas Abbey, including controversies with the Austrian Government.

Most of the primary documents found in the Dodson collection have a number inside a square in the upper right-hand corner. It seems likely that it was Father Libert de Waegenaere who made them. These numbers were already in place in 1949 when Laryl Lee Lahrman used these materials for her thesis. Other numbers found at the top of the documents seem to be the numbers on the original German documents. After being returned to Covington in 2007, all the documents were processed in chronological order and re-numbered accordingly. (The sequence of original numbers in squares followed no logical order and some duplicate German documents have two different numbers). The numbers in parentheses at the end of each entry as listed in the Inventory are the numbers in the square, followed by the original German document number when one is given. All primary documents are found as both German copies and English translations unless otherwise noted in brackets. Except for the first five documents and a few subsequent exceptions, both the English and German documents have the same numbers. Most of the English translations are in Father de Waegenaere's handwriting.

The numbered German copies of the first five documents were in the Dodson collection with no English translations. The accompanying translations were found in the Diocese of Covington Archives. The rest of the documents were all in the Dodson collection, unless otherwise noted. Not all documents in the Dodson collection were numbered according to its standard sequence.

The Mendel Collection also contains numerous secondary documents written about Mendel from primary sources, accounts written by other scientists, plus newspaper & journal articles. These were found in both the Diocese of Covington Archives and in the Dodson collection.

Only the primary documents are processed and accessible online at this time. Select secondary documents will be processed eventually and put online when ready.

Thomas S. Ward, Archivist, Diocese of Covington, 2008

**BISHOP HOWARD—THOMAS MORE COLLEGE
MENDEL COLLECTION**

**INVENTORY OF PRIMARY MENDEL DOCUMENTS
IN GERMAN WITH ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS**

1. Sept. 12, 1834 copy of Mendel's baptismal record of July 20, 1822 (copied for his entrance into the k.k. Gymnasium in Troppau). (44)
2. Feb. 12, 1838 copy of Mendel's vaccination certificate of June 11, 1823. (45)
3. Mendel's academic record from Troppau, July 31, 1838. (46)
4. Aug. 7, 1840 [Latin only] (47; Nr.83)
5. Frederich Franz to "Esteemed Sir Colleague," July 14, 1843, recommending Mendel and another student as candidates to the monastery. (53)
6. Sept. 7, 1843 – [German only] (48)
7. Abbot Napp to Bishop, Sept. 27, 1843, announcing reception of Mendel and three others into the Novitiate. (15.6; No.392)
8. Sept. 27, 1843 – [German only] (87; No.396.)
9. Mendel's religious profession as a brother, Dec. 6, 1846. [Latin only] (15.6b)
10. Abbot Napp to Bishop, July 15, 1847, asking permission to ordain Mendel a subdeacon, deacon and priest. (15.7; z.269)
11. Abbot Napp to k.k. Landes - Prasidium, July 20, 1848 [1847], asking permission to ordain Mendel. (15.8; z.270)
12. Bishop to Abbot Napp, July 21, 1847, assenting to Mendel's ordination. (15.9; 390)
13. Mendel's exam grades 1846-1848, June 30, 1848. [Latin only] (15.10)
14. Summary of Mendel's Academic career, 1834-1848. [In Latin and German] (Not numbered)
15. Gov. Lasansky to Mendel, Sept. 28, 1849, appointing him as an assistant teacher at the Znaim Gymnasium. (16.11; Nr.35338)
16. Abbot Napp to Bishop, Oct. 4, 1849, affirming Mendel's appointment as assistant teacher. (16.11b; z.202)
17. Ambrosius Spallek, Director of Znaim Gymnasium, April 10, 1850, commending Mendel's teaching skills and zeal. (16.13)
18. Mendel's autobiography submitted April 17, 1850 at Znaim. [German and two English versions, the typed copy is from File of Rev. Libert de Waegenare, Diocese of Covington Archives] (Not numbered)
19. Znaim Faculty and Ambrosius Spallek to Mendel, May 25, 1850, attesting to his religious life and affirming his certificate of application. (16.12)
20. Dr. Schindler of the Board of the k.k. Technical School in Brunn to Mendel, June 6, 1851, stating that the teacher has recovered and Mendel is no longer needed. (16.16; No.211)
21. Certificate for Travel for four years, Vienna-Brunn, Oct. 27, 1851, including Mendel's biographical information to date. (16.14; No.249)
22. National: Enumeration of Mendel's studies, 1852. (17)

23. Report of the Zoological and Botanical Soc. Meeting in Vienna, 1853, at which Mendel reported on the attack of a butterfly larva. [in German and English] (19)
24. Report of the Zoological and Botanical Soc. Meeting in Vienna, 1854, at which Mendel reported on a dangerous insect. (18)
25. Anthony Mendel to Son (Gregor), Aug. 23, n.y., concerning Mendel's sister's wedding. (20)
26. Abbot's permission for clergy, including Mendel, to join the Society for Perpetual Adoration at the Bishop's invitation, April 13, 1860. (21)
27. Silesian Agriculture Society to Mendel, April 16, 1860, announcing his election as a judge for the plant exposition. (22; n.51/g.s.)
28. Tabulation of Votes showing Mendel's election as Abbot, March 30, 1868. [Latin only] (Not numbered)
29. Report on Mendel's election and installation as Abbot, 1868. (23)
30. Dean of Cathedral to Bishop, April 7, 1868, announcing Mendel's election as Abbot. (24)
31. Bishop to Baron, April 14, 1868, announcing Mendel's election as Abbot. (25)
32. Poche, m.p. to Bishop, May 3, 1868, announcing His Majesty's cognizance of Mendel's election. (26; Nro.1803./pr.)
33. Mendel to k.k. Administration, Jan. 31, 1870, asking cancellation of Religion Fund Payments due to the Monastery's hardships, especially under Prussian occupation in 1866. German: (43) English: (37)
34. Dec. 1870 – [German only] (64)
35. Itinerary of Mendel's trip to and from the Congress of German Cultivators of Bees in Kiel, Sept. 12-14, 1871. (27)
36. Brunn, Oct. 25, n.y., listing Mendel's accomplishments and praising him as a priest and scientist. (28)
37. "Read before the Chapter," 1875, listing changes dividing services. (29)
38. "Extract of one of Mendel's letters to the Governor's Office," Nov. 1875, dissenting from state laws regarding churches. (30)
39. Mendel to k.k. Administration, April 10, 1879, protesting coercive measures taken against him and monastery property. (42)
40. June 1879 – [German only] (65)
41. June 29, 1880 – [German only] (66; z.57)
42. Aug. 16, 1882 – [German only] (63)
43. Bishop Bauer, Jan. 7, 1884, on Mendel's death. [Latin only] (30)
44. Declaration of Death of Mendel, Jan. 7, 1884. (32; 477 St.76)
45. Allocution of Bishop Bauer to the convention before the election, 1884. [Latin only] (31)

PROVENANCE OF THE BISHOP HOWARD— THOMAS MORE COLLEGE MENDEL COLLECTION

Francis W. Howard, Bishop of Covington (1923-1944), took advantage of the presence in Europe of one of his priests, Father Libert de Waegenare, to obtain documents pertaining to the life of Gregor Mendel. Father de Waegenare visited St. Thomas Abbey in Brunn, Czechoslovakia, in 1935 and 1938. With the assistance of the Abbey's Procurator, Father Anselm Matousek, O.S.A., Father de Waegenare procured many documents concerning Mendel. These form the basis of this collection. It seems that the typed German documents are copies that Father Matousek or his secretary made of the originals. Father de Waegenare made the hand-written English translations, although a Professor R. de Maeght first translated the German into French for Father de Waegenare because he did not read German. Father de Waegenare then mailed the German and English documents to Covington. Apparently, no original documents were transferred.

Without the original documents, there is no way to attest to the accuracy of the German copies or the English translations. The accuracy of the German copies depends on the presumed integrity of Father Matousek, who seemed to want to preserve Mendel's true legacy. It would seem pointless for either translator to have changed anything since the German copies would have been on hand for anyone who wished to verify the translations. A few documents show discrepancies between the German and English versions, though it would seem likely that these were merely the result of error.

Bishop Howard asked three priests of Covington, Fathers de Waegenare, Paul Ryan and John Kroger, to collaborate on an English language biography of Mendel using these primary sources. When completed, the biography appeared in serial form (1938-1941) in the diocesan newspaper, the *Messenger*. Bishop Howard believed it was the first English language biography of the famous abbot. The documents collected for Bishop Howard were also used in 1949 by Laryl Lee Lahrman, a student at Villa Madonna College in Covington, to write a thesis on Mendel's life. Sister Julitta Bomkamp, S.N.D., of Villa Madonna gave most of the Mendel collection to Doctor Edward O. Dodson at the University of Notre Dame in 1951. He later took it to the University of Ottawa. This transfer was not discovered until 2006, many years after Laryl Lee (Lahrman) Delker had begun to search for the collection. In November 2007, Doctor Peter Dodson, son of the late Edward Dodson, visited Covington and transferred to Thomas More College the portion of the Mendel Collection his father had preserved.

(For a more complete story of Bishop Howard's interest in Mendel, the collection of the documents and their final disposition in Covington, see: "Gregor Mendel's 'Covington Connection'" by Tom Ward on page 5)

Gregor Mendel's "Covington Connection"
By Tom Ward, Diocesan Archivist
(Updated Version)

Everyone who ever had high school biology knows the name of Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), the famous monk geneticist whose nineteenth century experiments with the hybridization of peas in his Austrian monastery garden revolutionized our understanding of heredity. Although his groundbreaking work was virtually ignored during his lifetime, his achievements were finally recognized in the early twentieth century.

So what could the "Father of Genetics" possibly have to do with the Diocese of Covington? An obscure box of files in the diocesan Archives holds the answer to the disappearance of some long-sought documents concerning Mendel's life. The secret journey of these documents from Europe to Kentucky is an intriguing tale of a scholarly bishop, an anxious abbot and marauding Nazis on the eve of World War II.

The above-mentioned prelate was Covington's own Francis W. Howard. Even before becoming a bishop, Father Howard of the Diocese of Columbus had exhibited an abiding interest in Mendel's work, with a special focus on how his principles affected Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and its basis in the Darwinian idea of "natural selection," often popularly described as the "survival of the fittest." Father Howard was a very scholarly man and had done much research on Mendel and natural selection since the beginning of the century. At first he thought that Mendel's principles debunked evolution and natural selection. It seems that over time, however, he accepted evolutionary change, although drawing from Mendel certain crucial refinements to Darwin's natural selection. To his credit, he contacted scientists and professors in order to ascertain the current state of thought regarding natural selection before drawing his own conclusions.

Francis Howard became the fifth Bishop of Covington in 1923. The "Roaring Twenties" were a decade of prosperity and prohibition, flappers and gangsters, speakeasies and jazz, but also a time of clashes between science and humanism on the one hand, and religion—in particular, Fundamentalism—on the other. The most famous incident was the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee, in which teacher John Scopes was convicted for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution in violation of state law. To many believers, the Darwinian theory of evolution seemed to contradict not only the literalistic interpretation of the account of creation in the Book of Genesis, but also the very idea of God as creator of all that exists. Many Catholic theologians did not think that evolution undermined Christian belief, but others questioned its scientific validity.

In the 1920s, Bishop Howard's focus on evolution seems to have been to try to understand the underlying principle by which it operated to bring about changes in a species, without denying God's creative activity in the process. This required a comprehensive knowledge of heredity, of how genetic variations in parents are passed on to their offspring to create generational differences—hence, his desire to learn all he could about Mendel and genetics, which he thought would offer a fuller understanding of the mechanism behind evolution than natural selection alone did. (It has been remarked in regard to evolution that "Darwin explained what happens. Mendel explained how it happens"). He also hoped to open a scientific institute to teach and study genetics along with Scholastic philosophy.

Another controversial theory during this period was the pseudo-science of “Eugenics.” Proponents of this specious theory presented data with a veneer of scientific credibility that allegedly proved that “feeble-minded” or criminal individuals passed their defective genes on to their offspring, leading many Eugenicists to call for the sterilization of “inferior” persons. Eugenics was sometimes more broadly applied to show that not only individuals, but also some non-white races were genetically inferior; thus, some Eugenicists warned against any inter-breeding between the races that would dilute the purity of the “superior” race. Such ideas provided a distorted rationale for Hitler’s “final solution,” his attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe—the horrific example of the Nazis’ murderous excesses in the Holocaust led most people to abandon Eugenics in the aftermath of World War II. Even before the war, opponents of Eugenics, including the National Catholic Welfare Conference (and presumably Bishop Howard), thought that Mendel’s principles had the potential to refute this misapplication of genetics.

The bishop also hoped to answer anti-religious skeptics who accused the Catholic Church of “obscurantism” regarding scientific matters. He wanted to show that there was no inherent incompatibility between science and religious belief, with Mendel as a prominent example of a devout Catholic who had advanced the frontiers of scientific knowledge. In order to pursue this goal, he believed it would be necessary to access Mendel’s papers—documents proving Mendel’s religiosity were important to the bishop because some secular critics had questioned the depth of Mendel’s Catholic convictions. (Mendel was eventually made abbot of his monastery, a fact that in itself shows that his contemporaries recognized his spiritual side).

The Diocese of Covington had its own priest scientist. Father Edward Rohrer was pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Mayslick and a botanist who wrote a primer on the principles of botany for the Latin School. Father Rohrer shared the bishop’s admiration of Mendel. (Bishop Howard was president of the Mendel Society and Father Rohrer was its secretary). It was he who in 1928 first had the honor of visiting Mendel’s Abbey of St. Thomas in Brno, Czechoslovakia (in what is now the Czech Republic) at the request of Bishop Howard.

The bishop sent his priest off with a letter of introduction to the Abbot of St. Thomas. This letter sheds light on his motive for taking this unusual step. “So much harm” the bishop wrote “is done in our country by the false theories of evolution, and so much has been done to obscure the fame of Mendel and to place him and the Church in a false light before the American people...” The phrase “false theories of evolution” would seem—in light of the bishop’s opinions expressed elsewhere—to mean not that evolution itself was a false theory, but rather to refer to misapplications of evolution, presumably Eugenics being one of them. The mutual acceptance of evolution by the two men is clear in a letter Father Rohrer sent to the bishop before sailing for Europe. In it, he revealed his hopes for studying Mendel: “Perhaps the laws of Mendel may tell us how evolution operates...how differences arise among organisms...and by what means they are passed from one generation to another until they become part and parcel of the inheritance, thereby establishing a new species.”

By the time Father Rohrer departed for Brno, Bishop Howard seems to have accepted evolution in principle, while questioning the randomness in Darwin’s theory of natural selection as an explanation for its process; to him, Mendel’s work would explain the principles of variation within species in such a way that developments would follow

from their God-given essence (what he referred to as the “metaphysical question”), rather than result from “blind chance” as in natural selection, thereby giving a theistic basis for evolution that would still be in accord with scientific evidence.

During Father Rohrer’s visit, he studied many documents concerning Mendel and his life in the Abbey of St. Thomas, and even talked to some older monks who had actually known the eminent abbot. But the establishment of the “paper trail” that became the “Covington Connection” would have to wait for the next decade and another priest to visit Brno at the instigation of the same bishop.

Bishop Howard’s tenure in the Diocese of Covington continued into the 1930s, as America struggled through the Great Depression and warily witnessed the Fascist aggression of Germany, Italy and Japan. The most ominous development during this tumultuous decade occurred in 1933 with Adolph Hitler’s rise to power in Germany. Nazism, with its pernicious racial doctrines, alarmed Bishop Howard—it provided a new impetus to his study of Mendel and made his quest to find answers more urgent.

A fortuitous opportunity to renew the study of Mendel in Brno presented itself in 1933. Father Libert de Waegenare resigned as pastor of St. Paul Parish in Lexington in November for medical reasons and desired to return to his native Belgium for a period of recuperation. Bishop Howard granted him an extended leave of absence and later decided that this cleric’s residence in Europe would give him a chance to visit Brno. Father de Waegenare spoke French fluently and would use his hometown, Alost, as his base. Accompanied by a German-speaking professor, A. Dumon, from the University of Louvain, he visited the monastery in 1935 and 1938 to collect more data. It was during these visits that the “Covington Connection” was established.

That the Nazis were on Bishop Howard’s mind is evident from a letter he mailed in April 1935 to Father de Waegenare after he had arrived in Alost. The bishop explained that he would obtain a stipend for Father de Waegenare so that he could “continue the study of Mendel and the problem of race that has become so prominent in Germany and will soon come into public attention in our own country...” While in Europe, Father de Waegenare collected for the bishop articles on what the two men referred to as the “race problem” or the “race question.” The priest located articles disputing Fascist racial theories, some of which he thought could be used in the *Messenger* as part of Bishop Howard’s Mendelian project.

Bishop Howard’s main interest, however, was to obtain data for an authoritative biography of Mendel in English, something lacking at the time. He also hoped to counteract the influence of an earlier work in German that allegedly disparaged Mendel’s motives for entering the monastery; according to Father de Waegenare, this author, Doctor Hugo Iltis, claimed that Mendel “only became a monk to have an easy life, free from cares and worry.” This motivated the bishop to emphasize Mendel’s devotion to the religious life. While in Czechoslovakia, Father de Waegenare also interviewed people, like Abbot Barina of St. Thomas and one of Mendel’s nephews, who had personally known Mendel and could testify to his strong faith.

During his efforts to find relevant documentation, Father de Waegenare had the enthusiastic assistance of the procurator of the Augustinian Abbey of St. Thomas, Father Anselm Matousek, who had been collecting material on Mendel in the abbey’s archives for twenty years. Although the abbey had destroyed Mendel’s scientific research after his

death, Father Matousek had assembled a plethora of documentation on the abbot's life. Father Matousek was pleased to hear of Bishop Howard's interest in Mendel—he, too, wanted to dispel the notions of Mendel's "mercenary purposes" for being in the monastery, though he was doubtful that Father de Waegenare would find anything in the copies he was providing that would assist Bishop Howard in his criticism of Darwinian evolution. Even before he actually met the priest from Covington, the procurator of St. Thomas sent to Father de Waegenare in Alost numerous documents in German. According to Father de Waegenare's 1934 letters to Bishop Howard, most of the original documents concerning Mendel had been given to Doctor Oswald Richter, a German biographer of the eminent abbot. Upon completion of Richter's book, the documents were to go to a New York Augustinian, Father Gelasius Kraus.

The initial plan was to have Father de Waegenare collect and send whatever Mendel documents he could acquire to Covington where Bishop Howard had recruited two German-speaking priests (one seems to have been Father John Kroger, with whom Bishop Howard and Father de Waegenare often consulted) to translate them into English and write the biography. For some reason, these two priests were unable to follow through with this commitment. So Bishop Howard devised an alternate strategy—he asked his priest in Alost to write the biography himself. In order to do this, Father de Waegenare asked to have most of the copies he had already mailed to Covington returned to him as sources for the biography. He secured the services of a Professor R. de Maeght to translate the German documents into French for him. He then translated the French into English before mailing the papers and his own writings to Covington. Father de Waegenare returned all the Mendel materials to Covington when he was finished with them.

This roundabout method of acquiring sources did not seem to have greatly hindered Father de Waegenare. The result of his efforts was a biography of Mendel that appeared in serial form in the *Messenger*. The lengthy series ran in 31 installments from March 1938 through November 1941. (The *Messenger* was issued only monthly during most of that time). This biography was a unique publication of the diocesan newspaper and perhaps the first biography of Mendel in English. Back in Covington, Father Paul Ryan (who wrote the history of the diocese published in 1954) contributed to this series at the bishop's request. He used the Mendel materials and articles written and mailed by Father de Waegenare in order to complete the final work. Although authorship was never attributed to anyone in the *Messenger*, it seems that both men should be considered co-authors of the work.

When Father de Waegenare made his final visit to St. Thomas during April and May of 1938, events in Europe were moving inexorably toward another world war. In September, England and France surrendered the Sudetenland of western Czechoslovakia to Hitler at the futile Munich Conference, hoping that this had bought them "peace in our time." But the Nazi leader reneged on this agreement and seized the rest of the country in early 1939. It was fortunate that Father de Waegenare had finished collecting his data when he did—it would have been extremely difficult and dangerous to have made another trip to Brno after 1938 because it had become part of Germany.

Father de Waegenare remained in Belgium even after the war had begun. England and France declared war on Germany following the Nazi's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. The Belgian people then lived in fear that German armies would

soon sweep through their country to attack France as they had done in 1914 at the beginning of the First World War—which, in fact, the Nazis did. The Belgian-born priest noted in his letters the frenetic preparations being made for war in his homeland as the relatively small Belgian Army mobilized to meet the expected onslaught. But by that time, he had done most of the work he could have done in Europe and had sent many documents to Covington. The biography of Mendel was virtually completed, although he sent minor revisions to Father Ryan to be incorporated into the *Messenger* series.

As Belgium prepared for war, Father de Waegenare became concerned about his own safety and hoped to return to the United States while it was still possible. Bishop Howard, solicitous for the welfare of his clergyman, gave him permission to leave Europe whenever he thought it necessary. Yet as late as January 1940, the bishop still requested that Father de Waegenare “kindly continue to gather, if possible, material relating to Mendel, the Mendelian laws, and the problem of race.” In the end, he was unable to depart from Belgium before it was overrun by the Nazi blitzkrieg in the spring of 1940. From that point on, Father de Waegenare lived under Nazi occupation until the Allies liberated Belgium in late 1944. After Germany declared war on the United States following Pearl Harbor, he was unable even to communicate with his bishop and diocese. By the time he was able to resume correspondence, a new Bishop of Covington, William T. Mulloy, had succeeded Bishop Howard, who had died on January 18, 1944—it seems that Father de Waegenare was unaware of his death until nearly a year later. Father de Waegenare died in Alost in 1952.

It is not clear exactly what Bishop Howard intended the final end for the Mendel collection to be. But since he had only a few more years to live after the collection was completed, others would have to make the crucial decisions about what was to be done with the important documents now in Covington.

Bishop Howard had high expectations for the Mendel papers that were mailed from St. Thomas Abbey in Brno, Czechoslovakia. He lived to see part of his dream for the Mendel collection fulfilled with the publication of the English biography series that Fathers de Waegenare and Ryan wrote for the *Messenger*. He had other plans for the papers that were not realized before his death in 1944. Yet the Mendel collection would be put to further use in the post-war 1940s to fulfill his overall goal.

After Father Libert de Waegenare had finished using the Mendel papers in Belgium for writing his part of the biography, he returned them all to Covington. Once he had them back, Bishop Howard at some point entrusted the papers to the care of Sister M. Julitta Bomkamp, SND. Sister Julitta had earned a Ph.D. in Biochemistry in 1942 and taught at Villa Madonna College in Covington (the predecessor of Thomas More College) from 1941 to 1961. In accordance with the bishop’s wishes, she made the papers available to three promising science students who would write on three themes on which the bishop wanted to base a book he hoped to have published by the diocese. (No such book was ever published). The students chosen to do the research and writing were Laryl Lee Lahrman to write a life of Mendel, Fred Humphreys (later a Thomas More faculty member) to write on Mendel and evolution, and Dorothy Fitch to write on Mendel and eugenics. Their work, however, did not actually commence until after Bishop Howard had died. When the students completed their work in 1949, the bishop was no longer on the scene to select the depository for the Mendel collection, and the final disposition of

the papers he so avidly sought became something of a mystery—solving it would engage the attention of one of the three students for several decades.

Laryl Lee Lahrman, parishioner of St. Therese Parish in Southgate and Notre Dame Academy graduate, was a Biology major at Villa Madonna College. She wrote her paper on Mendel's life in 1949 using as her primary sources English and German documents from the collection Sister Julitta had. Gus Lahrman (no relation) translated the German ones for her. After she completed her thesis in 1949, Laryl Lee attained a B.S. at Villa Madonna. Her studies at the college helped her launch a career as an educator, biochemist and consumer representative for the Food and Drug Administration. She married Alfred Delker in 1952 and they moved to New Jersey in 1958. As early as the 1970s, she began seeking the whereabouts of the Mendel papers she had used as a college student. Over the course of many years, Mrs. Delker made enquiries of diocesan personnel and contacted other academic institutions that might have had an interest in obtaining the papers, but found no one who knew what had become of them.

It seemed to her that the most logical location for the diocese to store the records would be in the archives housed in the chancery next to the Cathedral. Sister Mary Philip Trauth, SND, was the diocese's first archivist as well as being a professor of History at Thomas More College. Since 1977 she had done an admirable job of organizing and maintaining the archives in the less than optimal conditions of the chancery basement. When Laryl Lee asked her to check the archives for a box containing the papers she had used, the diocesan offices were in the process of preparing to move from the chancery to the old St. Pius X Seminary building—re-named the Catholic Center—in Erlanger. But Sister Mary Philip was unable to locate the box (which might not even have been in the archives at that time) during the 1988 move. She did, however, find Laryl Lee's original 1949 thesis on Mendel at Thomas More and returned it to her.

Laryl Lee continued her search. She contacted the Augustinian-sponsored Villanova University in Philadelphia, whose administration had no information on these papers of its famous confrere from Brno, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which had some other Mendel documents retrieved from St. Thomas, but no knowledge of the particular papers she was seeking. She also communicated with the Abbey of St. Thomas itself and the Mendel Museum there to see if by some forgotten decision the diocese had returned the papers to them. But the curator of the museum did not have them and hoped to learn where this missing Mendel legacy might be.

After the collapse of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, the new Czech Government displayed more of an interest in highlighting the career of one of its famous sons. (Technically, Mendel's nationality during his life was Austrian). In 2002, the Abbey of St. Thomas opened the Mendel Center, and the Government of the Czech Republic officially recognized the Mendel Museum as a Czech charity. The "Brno Mendel Initiative" was established to have the Abbey of St. Thomas accepted as an important historic site and place of scientific education. The museum created an exhibit on Mendel and his work, "Gregor Mendel, the Genius of Genetics," and in 2006, a traveling exhibit, "Gregor Mendel, Planting the Seeds of Genetics," began an American tour at the Field Museum in Chicago.

Learning of the upcoming Mendel exhibit, Laryl Lee renewed her efforts in the twenty-first century to solve the nearly fifty-five year old mystery. In 2003, she made a trip to Covington from her home in Moorestown, New Jersey. She made an appointment

to meet with me, the diocesan archivist since 2000, to initiate a new search for the missing box of Mendel papers. I knew nothing about it, but checked the archives' inventory and looked around for the box with no success. With dwindling hopes, she left a copy of her 1949 thesis for the archives in case the box might yet be found.

After leaving her 1949 Mendel thesis at the diocesan archives in 2003, Laryl Lee Delker probably never expected to hear from me again. But on November 20, 2006, I surprised her with a most welcome phone call. About two weeks earlier, simply by chance, I had come across a box—not numbered as part of the archives' regular inventory scheme—in an obscure part of the archives' lower vault. The box had an archival label on it that listed its contents as “Materials on Mendel collected by Bp. Howard, Fr. Rohrer, Fr. De Waegenare” and its provenance as being from “Vault, 1140 Madison Avenue.” (This was the address of the old chancery in Covington). Recalling my visit with Laryl Lee a few years earlier, I took the box upstairs and eagerly flipped through the contents. One folder contained papers that seemed to be primary documents in German with accompanying English translations concerning Mendel's early life: his baptismal and vaccination certificates, high school records and a letter of recommendation to the monastery. I opened Laryl Lee's thesis and found that these documents were listed in her footnotes as sources. I knew then that I had stumbled upon at least part of the missing Mendel collection. The box also contained a 1913 edition of *Versuche uber Pflanzen-Hybriden*, Mendel's 1866 report on his hybridization findings, plus numerous secondary sources from the first few decades of the twentieth century: newspaper and journal articles on Mendel, Darwin, evolution and eugenics, as well as many notes and reflections in Bishop Howard's own barely legible handwriting.

When I found this box in the archives, I did not know the wide scope of the original contents of the Mendel collection and so did not realize that many of the papers sent to Covington in the 1930s were not in it. But the box contained a 1979 article from *Folia Mendeliana* that provided a crucial clue as to the possible location of some of the rest of the missing material. (Interestingly, the fact that the box contained an item from this later date shows that at least one person had known its location and opened it since 1949). In this article, Doctor Edward O. Dodson, an educator and prolific author on biology and evolution, reported that Sister Julitta had provided him with a collection of Mendel papers during his tenure at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. (Sister Julitta attended Notre Dame during a summer session in 1951). Using this Mendel collection, Dodson wrote an article entitled “Mendel and the Rediscovery of His Work” for the October 1955 edition of the *Scientific Monthly*. In 1957, he went on to teach at the University of Ottawa, Ontario, and took the Mendel collection to his new office in Canada. This was something previously unknown to Laryl Lee.

After being informed of this, Laryl Lee began doing some research of her own using a tool that had been unavailable to the earlier Mendel scholars—the Internet. By searching the Internet, she learned that Edward Dodson had died in 2002. But she also found the address of one of his sons, Peter, a professor of Anatomy and of Paleontology at the University of Pennsylvania. The younger Doctor Dodson knew nothing of his father's story about receiving the Mendel papers, but he responded to Mrs. Delker's email query. On his next visit to his parents' home in Ottawa, he searched for and located a box containing more Mendel documents in German and English. Peter Dodson sent

copies of his father's inventory of the 88 items in the box to Laryl Lee and me. Laryl Lee made comparisons and we were delighted to find that there were 75 matches with her thesis sources and that many documents were numbered following the same numerical system she had recorded in her footnotes; this indicated to us that much of what she had used in 1949 was in this box.

In November 2007, the saga of the elusive Mendel collection was brought to a happy conclusion. The papers that crossed the Atlantic three times, traveled from Covington to South Bend to Ottawa to Philadelphia, at last returned to Covington after an absence of more than 50 years.

On Saturday October 27, 2007, Laryl Lee Delker called from New Jersey to tell me that Peter Dodson was flying to Northern Kentucky the following week and was bringing his father's portion of the Mendel collection with him. Doctor Dodson, a practicing Catholic, had a speaking engagement at the Cincinnati Museum Center on a topic that would have pleased Bishop Howard—the compatibility of Christian faith and science. He wanted to present the Mendel collection to Thomas More College on his way from the Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport. By doing this, he was graciously following the suggestion that Laryl Lee, Thomas More President Sister Margaret Stallmeyer, CDP, and I made to him after we confirmed that he possessed the papers.

On Thursday morning, November 1, Peter Dodson and his host, Glenn Storrs from with the Cincinnati Natural History Museum, met with Laryl Lee Delker, Sister Margaret and other TMC officials—Library Director Jim McKellogg, Vice President for Academic Affairs Bradley Bielski and Director of Communications Kelly Marsh—and me at the College. After a cordial greeting, we went to the library's Thomas More Room to unpack the documents Peter brought. Among the many folders are some marked "Primary Sources," which contain copies of the nineteenth century German documents with their accompanying English translations—it seems that the typed German documents are copies made by Father Matousek's secretary and that the hand-written English documents are the translations made by Father de Waegenaere. There is also correspondence that sheds more light on the many twists and turns of the Mendel collection's convoluted journey to its final destination at the college.

The Mendel Collection is now being processed so that it will eventually be accessible by researchers in the TMC Library and online. It was certainly a fortuitous string of events that at last brought this special collection back to the Diocese of Covington where Bishop Howard undoubtedly intended it to be. It was also most fortunate that someone had the foresight to deposit that 1979 *Folia Mendeliana* in our archives' Mendel box—without that vital bit of information, the rest of the Mendel collection might never have been found.

There is no simple explanation for why Mendel's groundbreaking discoveries were overlooked for so long; as Edward O. Dodson wrote in 1955, "there have surely been few if any discoveries of comparable magnitude that have been so completely ignored in the time of the discoverer." Although Mendel during his lifetime never achieved the recognition for his work that he deserved, he believed that history would eventually establish his reputation. As Abbot Barina recalled to Father de Waegenaere, "Mendel was firmly convinced of the importance of his discoveries. He always said:

‘Meine Zeit wird schon kommen’—my time will come some day.” Those words proved prophetic when his fame was secured around the turn of the century after other scientists replicated his experiments and verified his principles. Interest in the monk and his work continues to this day, with the exhibit now in Chicago making him accessible to a wider audience. Thanks to Bishop Howard and Father de Waegenaere, Gregor Mendel will be remembered not only as a man of science but also as a man of faith.

(I would like to thank the following for their contributions and assistance for this series: Mrs. Laryl Lee and Mr. Alfred Delker, Dr. Edward O. Dodson, Dr. Peter Dodson, Dr. Fred Humphreys, Sr. Margaret Stallmeyer, CDP, Sr. M. Joan Terese Niklas, SND, Sr. M. Laurence Budde, SND, Ms. Anna Nasmyth, Mr. Jim McKellogg, Dr. R. Tod Highsmith)

(Special thanks to Doctor Peter Dodson for returning his father’s collection to the Diocese of Covington. See his 2008 article, “My Father and the Monk—In Praise of Venerable Men,” *American Paleontologist*, Vol. 16, No. 1: 24-28).

(This article originally appeared in four installments in the *Messenger*, the newspaper of the Diocese of Covington, in the following issues: February 2, 2007; March 9, 2007; May 4, 2007; May 11, 2007. The author updated it November 2007-February 2008 in light of new sources found in the Dodson collection. The narrative as of October 27, 2007 did not appear in the original 2007 *Messenger* series or in the November 16, 2007 issue that told of the return of the Dodson collection).

Addendum:

Thanks largely to the efforts of Laryl Lee Delker, the Mendel exhibit also visited Villanova University this fall. During a special Mendel Symposium at Villanova held September 21-23, Mrs. Delker made a presentation entitled, “Finding Gregor Mendel’s Original Documents,” thereby bringing Bishop Howard’s Mendel Collection to the attention of the assembled scientists and scholars.

Tom Ward, October 6, 2008