

Record Group I.03.01
Jean Lefebvre de Cheverus Papers, 1797-1836
Archives, Archdiocese of Boston

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Introduction

The Jean Lefebvre de Cheverus papers held by the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston cover the years 1797-1836. The collection begins shortly after Cheverus's arrival in the United States from England and continues through the final years of his episcopate as Archbishop of Bordeaux. The papers number 210 items and are contained in 54 folders arranged alphabetically by correspondent in two manuscript boxes.

The collection of Cheverus papers held by the Archives is extremely small and appears to have originated from several sources. The papers were first noticed and arranged in the 1930's when Fathers Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward T. Harrington were researching and writing their *History of the Archdiocese of Boston, 1604-1943*. At this time the original manuscripts held by the Archdiocese were placed in individual folders and arranged chronologically in file cabinets. One cabinet contained original material and another held typescripts, photostats, and other copies of documents held by other archives that were gathered as part of the research effort. The non-original Cheverus material is several times larger than the original material held by the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, but it is not included as a part of this collection.

The collection of Cheverus papers held by the Archives has increased since Lord, Sexton, and Harrington originally put them into some kind of formal order. Most of the items in the collection that are considered to be personal Cheverus correspondence were donated to the Archives by private individuals [one as recently as 1997]. It is probable that Cheverus destroyed a good deal of personal correspondence while preparing for his return to France.

There are several other repositories that hold a significant number of documents relating to the episcopal career of John Cheverus. The Archives of the University of Notre Dame holds correspondence from Cheverus' years in America, particularly his correspondence with Elizabeth Bayley Seton, foundress of the Sisters of Charity. The Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore holds correspondence relating to Cheverus as the first Bishop of Boston - he kept Archbishops Carroll, Neale and Maréchal regularly informed about the

state of Catholicism in New England. Finally, various repositories around the area of Bordeaux, France hold material dating from the time of Cheverus' return to France in 1823.

In preparing this collection of Cheverus material, a calendar was produced. This calendar lists the original manuscripts that are in the possession of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston. The calendar is arranged alphabetically by correspondent and a brief description of each document is included [except for the Bonneuil Family letters.] The description for each item includes: the two parties involved; the date [if known]; the number of pages; a notation informing the researcher if the document is in a foreign language; and a summary of the contents of the document. The summaries tend to be somewhat more detailed than those in the calendars, available in the Archives, for the papers of subsequent 19th century Bishops of Boston. This is due to the poor condition of many of the Cheverus papers. The small size of the collection also made the compilation of an index unnecessary.

The items in the collection are filed alphabetically by the name of Cheverus' correspondent. A few items written by Cheverus to no identifiable correspondent are filed under "Cheverus, Bishop John." It should be noted that Cheverus anglicized his name while in England during the years 1792-1796 and continued to do so throughout his stay in the United States. Most of the collection is in manuscript with the exception of several civil documents which are printed. The great majority of the collection is in French, with one document from the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide is in Latin.

The preferred citation to items in these files includes the names of both correspondents, the date, and an indication that the item is to be found in the Cheverus papers of the Archives, together with the box and folder numbers.

Examples:

Mary Murry to Bishop Cheverus, 15 September 1819; Cheverus Papers [Archives, Archdiocese of Boston], 1.18.

Bishop Cheverus to the Editor of the Anthology, 4 May 1807; Cheverus Papers [Archives, Archdiocese of Boston], 1.1.

Biographical Sketch

January 28, 1768	Born, Mayenne, France to Jean and Anne de Noyers Cheverus
December 31, 1779	Receives benefice
October, 1781	Begins course of study at the College of Louisle-Grand, Paris
October 7, 1790	Ordained a deacon, Paris, France
December 18, 1790	Ordained to the priesthood, Paris, France
June 20, 1792	Imprisoned with approximately 600 other priests, Laval, France
September, 1792	Arrives in England
March 19, 1794	Records first baptism, St. Francis de Sales Church, Tottenham, England
1796	Invited to come to America and minister to the Indians by Rev. Francis A. Matignon

October 3, 1796 1797	Arrives Boston, Massachusetts Mission to Newburyport and Salem, Massachusetts and Portsmouth, New Hampshire
June, 1797	Southern mission; travels at least as far as Plymouth, Massachusetts
July 30, 1797	Arrives in Pleasant Point, Maine
March 3, 1798	Subscription campaign to purchase land for church in Boston begins
Summer, 1798	Yellow Fever epidemic in Boston
March 31, 1799	Meeting of members of the Church of the Holy Cross, Boston, to consider purchasing land and building a church
December 24, 1799	Deed passed on land for Church of the Holy Cross.
March 17, 1800	Ground broken for Church of the Holy Cross
September 29, 1803	John Carroll, Archbishop of Baltimore, dedicates Church of the Holy Cross
August 3, 1807	Rev. Francis A. Matignon purchases land to be used for a school
April 8, 1808	Pius VII creates Dioceses of Boston, Bardstown, New York and Philadelphia; Baltimore becomes an Archdiocese; Cheverus named first Bishop of Boston
July 17, 1808	Dedicates St. Patrick's Church, Damariscotta, Maine
October 23, 1810	Arrives in Baltimore, Maryland
November 1, 1810	Consecrated Bishop of Boston in procathedral, Baltimore
December 22, 1810	Installed as Bishop in Church of the Holy Cross, Boston
April 30, 1811	Administers Confirmation, Salem, Massachusetts
September 8, 1811	Administers Confirmation to Penobscot Indians
November 15, 1812	Administers Confirmation, Portsmouth, Rhode Island
1813	Rev. Matthew O'Brien becomes first resident priest in Salem, Massachusetts
April 8, 1814	Confraternity of the Holy Cross established in Boston
November 6, 1814	Consecrates John Connolly, OP, Bishop of New York
1815	Dedicates St. Patrick's Church, New York, per invitation of Benedict J. Fenwick
February 17, 1815	Rev. John Thayer dies, Limerick, Ireland, leaves estate to establish an Ursuline Convent in Boston
September 24, 1815	Louis Duborg consecrated Bishop of Louisiana
October 15, 1815	Rev. Francis A. Matignon performs first baptisms in Vermont
May 31, 1817	Ordains Dennis Ryan, first priest for Diocese of Boston
July 26, 1817	Diocese of Montauban re-erected by Papal bull as suffragan see of Toulouse
December 10, 1817	Consecrates and installs Ambrose Marechal Archbishop of Baltimore
May 10, 1818	Ordains Philip Laristy, OSA
September 19, 1818	Rev. Francis A. Matignon dies, Boston, Massachusetts
July 4, 1819	St. Augustine's Chapel, South Boston, dedicated
March 18, 1820	Ordains Patrick Byrne for the Diocese of Boston
June, 1820	Accompanies Ursulines from Montreal to Boston
January 4, 1821	Elizabeth Baylev Seton dies, Emmitsburg, Maryland
April 18, 1821	Rev. William Taylor arrives in Boston
June 30, 1822	Dedicates St. Dennis Church, Whitefield, Maine
December 3, 1822	Ordains Virgil Barber
September 26, 1823	Leaves Boston to return to France
July, 1824	Installed as Bishop in Cathedral of Montauban
July 31, 1826	King Charles X names Cheverus Archbishop of Bordeaux
November., 1826	Elevated to the peerage
August 1, 1829	Rev. William Taylor dies
February 1, 1836	Proclaimed a Cardinal by the Vatican
July 19, 1836	Dies Bordeaux, France

Scope and Content

The Cheverus papers span the years 1797-1836. 15 of the items that are contained in the collection are of an official nature such as deeds, receipts, and documents relating to legal matters. Some of the collection reflects Cheverus' pastoral concerns more than the nature of New England Catholicism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Three quarters of the collection consists of letters to the Bonneuil Family, many of which were published in the American Catholic Historical Society Records [Philadelphia : XIV 1903 and XIV 1904.]

John Cheverus arrived in Boston on October 3, 1796. He had been asked by Rev. Francis A. Matignon to assist with the Indian missions in Maine as well as with the small Catholic population of Boston. Matignon was the only "resident" priest for the New England states at this time, with the exception of several itinerant missionaries. The only congregation of any note was the Church of the Holy Cross [later to become the Cathedral of the Holy Cross] that was housed in a former Protestant church located on School Street in Boston. In 1823, when Cheverus left Boston to return to France, he left several small Catholic communities that were beginning to flourish as well as several completed churches.

Anti-catholicism existed during Cheverus' stay in Boston, but it was not as virulent as the outbreak of nativism that was to begin in the 1830's and last throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Concerning this topic, the Cheverus papers contain two letters from the Bishop to the editors of the *Anthology* and the *Telegraph* refuting attacks on Catholic theology that had appeared in those Boston newspapers. Both of the letters are extremely tolerant and respectful of the Protestant point of view, while explaining the true Catholic theology behind the issues in question. Thus, these letters are also theologically valuable, for they can give the researcher an idea of what theological positions were held by the Catholic Church in the early nineteenth century. The letter written by Cheverus to the *Telegraph*, for example, refutes the Protestant charge that Catholics consider the Pope to be infallible.

Cheverus' pastoral inclinations are readily discernible in the papers held by the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston. In the group of letters from the Bishop to the Hanly family in Bristol, Maine; Cheverus' genuine concern for those that he ministered to is evident. He never failed to remind them that the presence of God in their lives was the most important thing for them to be aware of. In several of these items, Cheverus stresses that they are to be tolerant of non-Catholics at all times, but they are never to attend a non-Catholic worship service. He was especially concerned about this last point because it was fairly common for New England Catholics living in areas that were virtually never visited by a priest to attend Protestant services on Sundays.

It is evident from the Cheverus papers that people looked to him as someone to whom they could go for all kinds of purposes. At one point, for example, he sends a gravestone to

the Hanly's in Maine in compliance with their request. The collection also contains a letter from Mary Murry to the Bishop explaining that financial problems are making it impossible for her to educate her son.

The Bonneuil Family letters represent the freindship of Bishop Cheverus with a French emigre, Marquis Jean Vernou de Bonneuil, and his wife Felicitie. They are pastoral in nature from a period of twenty-two years.

Unfortunately, the Cheverus papers held by the Archives contain only one item from a member of the clergy to Cheverus. It is written by Rev. Philip Lariscy, OSA, to Cheverus when the Bishop is away on a mission [probably to the Indians]. The letter reassures Cheverus that everything among the Boston Catholic population is running smoothly. There is nothing in the letter to suggest anything of the personal dispute that developed between Lariscy and William Taylor, the two priests who served the congregation of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross during the Bishop's absences. Lariscy left the Diocese of Boston due to this quarrel. Taylor went on to become the administrator of the Diocese during the interim between Cheverus' departure for France and Benedict J. Fenwick's arrival in the Diocese in 1825.

It should be noted that this collection of material on the first Bishop of Boston is very small and does not provide a comprehensive overview of either the life of John Cheverus or Catholicism in New England during the early part of the nineteenth century. It can, however, provide the researcher with additional insight on Cheverus and his times if used in conjunction with published material and other collections.

Contents (A-Z)

Box &

Folder #

- | | | |
|--------|--|------------------|
| 1.1 | <i>Anthology</i> , Editor of | Boston |
| 1. | From C. | 4 May 1807 |
| | Responds to article by an "American Traveller"; requests that the letter not be published; acknowledges kind treatment that Catholics have received in Boston; states that as a Catholic he is not obliged to defend anything more than what the Church considers to be an article of faith; thanks the editor and the "American Traveller" for the compliments that they bestowed on him. | |
| | 2 pp. | |
| 1.2 | Baxter, Joseph Jr. | Boston |
| 1. | To C. | 5 October 1808 |
| | Document recording sale of land near Fort Hill to C. | |
| | 1 p. | |
| 2.1-27 | Bonneuil Family | Boston, Bordeaux |
| | From C. | 1814-1836 |
| | Letters of a pastoral nature to the French emigre and his family, over a period of 22 years. | |
| | 129 letters. | |

- 1.2a Burke, Rt. Rev. Edmund Halifax, Nova Scotia
1. From C. 23 August 1820
Introduces W.A. Shaw, librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, and asks Burke to aid him.
1 p.
- 1.2b Carlisle, Rev. Thomas Salem
1. From C. 13 May 1822
Sends a copy of "Milner's Letters" [i.e. Letters to a Prebendary, Baltimore, 1810], by John Milner, and wishes restoration of health. Carlisle was an Episcopalian clergyman.
1 p.
- 1.3 Cheverus, Bishop John Boston, Bordeaux
1. Coat of Arms of C. as Cardinal. Undated [1836]
1 p.
2. From C. [to no identifiable correspondent] 17 April 1801
Reports that Matignon is out of town and is not in good health; plans to spend the fall with this correspondent; hopes that the bishop [John Carroll] will visit him this summer; feels that Carroll will not visit C's "eastern flock" [Maine] because he is old and sick; states that Rev. Leonard O'Neal [sic] has been consecrated as Carroll's coadjutor; discusses the case of Edward Kavanaugh; the Court decided against Kavanaugh: Catholics must support the local Protestant minister even if there is a resident priest; when Maine becomes a state this fact will probably change; suggests that they submit cheerfully to the laws of the state; reports that his father is happy, but that he wants him to return to France; quotes excerpt from a letter written by the people of Mayenne asking him to return to France; states that he will not return to France, as long as his parishoners need him; asks to be remembered to Mr. O'Brien.
4 pp.
3. From C. [in French] 17 November 1828
Reports that Abbe Niel was born in the Diocese of Montauban but that he served as a missionary in Louisiana; states that Niel has been back in France for two years; Niel desires to receive a position at an ecclesiastical institution; states that he does not want to interfere with the American missions.
1 p. [appears to be written to the Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies]
4. Bishops of the United States to 15 November 1810
Bishops of Ireland [in Latin]
Concerns outrages committed against Pius VII; feel that special prayers should be offered up for Pius VII; state that Psalm 120 and a special prayer that is enclosed should be recited at every Mass for this intention; sent in the names of John Carroll [Archbishop of Baltimore], Leonard Neal [Coadjutor Bishop of Baltimore], Michael Egan [Bishop of Philadelphia], John Cheverus [Bishop of Boston], and Benedict Flaget [Bishop of Bardstown].
3 pp.

Cooke, Josiah. see: Taylor, William.

- 1.4 Cottrill, Anastasia Nobleborough, Maine
1. From C. 2 April 1816
Tells her that the only important thing is to be "truly amiable in the sight of God"; hopes that she is preparing herself for her First Communion; tells her that Louisa Stoughton will make her First Communion this summer; expects to see her in the summer; asks to be remembered to her family; reports that Dr. Matignon sends his compliments.
1 p.
- 1.5 Derby, John Boston
1. To C. 23 March 1819
Deeds land in the western part of Boston to C.
1 p.
- 1.6 Dowlin, Richard Boston
1. From C. 12 April 1822
Note stating C. has paid Dowlin \$43.13 for work done on Cathedral of the Holy Cross.
1 p.
- 1.7 Drouilbet., R. St. Lucie, [West Indies]
1. To C. [in French] 30 September 1820
Notes that M. Godefroy died in France at the end of 1817; reports that the will made by Godefroy was deposited at St. Lucie before his death; states that money was left to C to use for charitable deeds; reports that he does not have certain papers at his disposal because they are in France; states that he has found a copy of a letter that was written by C; states that there is a problem with the children receiving money that is due to them; reports that he is waiting for a response from the person in question; asks C to assist him in this matter.
4 pp.
- 1.8 Fenwick, Bishop Benedict Joseph Boston
1. From C. 4 October 1828
Deeds all property in the United States held in C's name to Fenwick; appoints Fenwick his attorney.
4 pp.
- 1.8a FitzGerald, John Waldoborough, Maine
1. From C. 24 December 1799
Since it is Christmas Eve, he is very busy and will not be able to see F's brother; hopes to visit Mr. [Edward?] Kavanaugh by 12 January and will visit F at that time.
1 p.
- 1.9 Godefroy, Jacques Cools Boston
1. To C. 23 August 1811
Gives C power of attorney.
3 pp.
2. To C. 9 June 1826
Letter stating that C was the administrator of Godefroy's estate; letter signed by John Icard.
1 p.

- 1.10 Hanly, John Bristol, Maine
1. From C. 7 December 1818
Reports that he has shipped the gravestones; encloses a bill for the gravestones; hopes that the engravings are appropriate; asks to be remembered to the other members of the family.
1 p.
- 1.11 Hanly, Mary Bristol, Maine
1. From C. 3 February 1817
Tells her that he is sorry she is not healthy; asks her to place her trust in God; reports that Rev. Romagne will be leaving for Maine soon and will stop and see her; asks to be remembered to her family.
2 pp.
- 1.12 Hanly, Roger and Family Bristol, Maine
1. From C. 4 August 1797
Instructions for having a fulfilling spiritual life; cautions them to always be prepared to receive Penance and the Eucharist; states that they are not to attend any non-Catholic worship service; note: this document is not specifically addressed to the Hanly's but was found in the other papers relating to the Hanly family.
3 pp.
2. From C. 20 July 1798
Asks them to remember the promises that they have made to God; tells them that they are to attend only Catholic worship services; discusses how and when they should pray, individually and as a family; asks to be remembered in their prayers; tells them to read the Gospels and the Epistles [this is a postscript dated 17 August 1798].
4 pp.
3. From C. 18 January 1815
Expresses sympathy over the illnesses of Hanly's son, John and daughter, Mary; offers them spiritual consolation; asks to be remembered to Hanly's niece, Sally and the other members of Hanly's family; asks them to pray for him.
2 pp.
4. From C. Undated
Discusses how Catholics should perform their devotions.
4 pp. [pages are fragments, but C's signature appears on p.4]

Icard, John. see: Godefroy, Jacques.

- 1.13 Lariscy, Rev. Philip, OSA [Boston]
1. To C. 24 June 1821
Reports that he is preparing the children for their First Communion; tells C. that he should try to visit Quebec before he returns; states that his health has been good; tells C. that someone from Martinique sent C. a turtle and that he sent it to Mr. Davice with C's compliments; reports that the Catholics of Boston are all well, tells C. that the nuns are well.
2 pp.

- 1.14 Lauréal, Madeleine de Clermont, [France]
 1. From C. [in French] 17 August 1818
 Reports that Rev. Matignon received her letter but is unable to respond himself; asks her to pray for C; tells her that Matignon is thinking of and praying for her and her husband; hopes that her husband is now with her and her children; asks her to pray for him.
 2 pp.
- 1.15 Ledwith, Peter Boston
 1. To C. 21 August 1820
 Makes C. trustee in his action against Thomas Riley.
 1 p.
- o/s McNamara, John Boston
 hist 1. To C. 28 April 1824
 mss Deeds land in the north part of Boston to C. 1 p. [stored in oversized box]
- 1.15a 1. From C. 26 July 1824
 Is on his way to Montauban, where he will be installed as Bishop on 28 July; expresses hope that William Taylor will be appointed to succeed him as Bishop of Boston; recalls M's kindness to him when he was leaving Boston; asks to be remembered to local Catholics; gives his address in France and asks M to continue to write to him.
 3 pp.
- 1.15b 1. From C. 7 October 1826
 Expresses sympathy on death of M's son and father-in-law; having been torn from his flock in Boston, he is now to be torn from flock in Montauban to become Archbishop of Bordeaux; is happy to hear that Bishop Benedict Fenwick is doing well in Boston; asks to be remembered to his Boston friends and asks them to pray for him in his new duties.
 2 pp.
- 1.16 Maddock, Marsden Boston
 1. To C. 20 April 1821
 Receipt for \$200 for work done on the organ in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross.
 1 p.
- 1.17 Mason, Jonathan Boston
 1. To C. 27 March 1819
 Deeds land in South Boston to C.
 1 p.
- 1.18 Murry, Mary Naas[?]
 1. To C. 15 September 1819
 Sends an account of the money that she has received; reports that she has carried out C's wishes concerning her family; tells C that her health is good; states that her son is bright but that there is no money to educate him.
 3 pp.
- 1.19 Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide Rome
 1. To C. [in Latin] 23 November 1817
 Faculties granted to the Bishop of Boston.
 5 pp.

- o/s Taylor, William and Cooke, Josiah Boston
 hist 1. From C. 25 September 1823
 mss Gives power of attorney to William Taylor and Josiah Cooke.
 3 pp. [stored in oversized box]
- o/s 2. From C. 25 September 1823
 hist Gives power of attorney to William Taylor and Josiah Cooke; p. 4 contains statement
 mss William Taylor dated 14 December 1825 appointing Benedict J. Fenwick the true
 substitute of John Cheverus.
 4 pp. [stored in oversized box]
- 1.20 *Telegraph* Boston
 1. From C. 20 May 1800
 Responds to anti-Catholic article that appeared in the *Telegraph*; states that Catholics do
 not consider the pope to be God or infallible; refutes the charge that priests sell licenses to
 commit sin; states that the Catholic Church condemns all forms of persecution; thinks that
 the writer of the article should be more concerned with the "rapid progress of infidelity"
 than with attacking the Catholic Church; C signs himself "A Catholick."
 10 pp.
- 1.20a Thompson 17 September 1799
 1. From C.
 Letter to an unnamed Thompspon ancestor [opening of letter is missing]. Comprised
 primarily of "Rules of Conduct for a Christian Life." Includes a transcription made from
 memory by a Thompspon relative.
 1 p.
- 1.21 Tilden, Bryant P. Boston
 1. From C. 24 February 1821
 Hopes Tilden's journey is successful; letter of introduction for Tilden to any of C's friends
 that he meets.
 1 p.
2. From C 19 February 1835
 Reports that the outcome of "the trial of the ruffians" has caused sorrow [the trial for those
 accused of burning the Ursuline convent in Charlestown?]; states that he is happy that
 people are upset with the outcome of the trial; feels that a war between France and
 America would be a civil war as far as C. is concerned; asks to be remembered to Tilden's
 family; tells Tilden that he is surrounded by difficulties; expresses his happiness with
 Bishop Benedict J. Fenwick; hopes that Tilden will be able to come and see him.
 3 pp.
- 1.22 Wales, Thomas B. Boston
 1. To C. 13 November 1820
 Deeds land in South Boston to C.
 1 p.
- 1.23 Whitman, Benjamin Boston
 1. To C. 9 December 1818
 Deed to land in South Boston.
 1 p.

- 1.24 Whitney, Silas Boston
1. To C. 31 December 1810
Deed to property on Copper Street "in the westerly part of Boston."
1 p.