

The Grand Old Man of the Port: Dean Martin Gessner, the American Catholic Church, and Parish Life in the Nineteenth Century

Mr. Carl Ganz Jr.

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Dean Martin Gessner's priesthood encompassed the history of the American Catholic Church during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Given that the historical consensus defines the nineteenth century, culturally and politically, as lasting from 1815 to 1914, his eight and a half decade life largely was the nineteenth century. Gessner's beginnings were humble. Born into an obscure farming community in Bavaria, he rose to become one of the most significant American parish priests of his era. This book narrates the life of Dean Gessner in light of the nineteenth century Catholic Church. It is as much a biography of him as a history of the American Catholic Church viewed through his eyes. This book will examine parish life in the nineteenth century, explore how pastors and parishioners related, and study the inside politics of the parochial organization. Gessner saw the Church at all levels, from the viewpoint of the parishioner in the pew to the highest levels of the American episcopacy. His two closest friends in the priesthood – Bishop Bernard McQuaid and Archbishop Michael Corrigan - were two of the most influential Catholic bishops in the United States. Dean Gessner saw and participated in so many of these events that his life provides a front row view to the most critical, fascinating, remarkable, formative, and exciting years in American Catholic history.



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