

The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. See also the Boston Herald, (The Columbian) Dec. XIII., Columbus, Susan Spatella, and

Annals from the Archives

Attempted Murder in East Boston



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Written by

Nancy Barthelemy

Archivist

nancy.barthelemy@sndden.org

snddenewarchives.com

Fr. Lawrence P. McCarthy

Image from the

Boston Globe

Oct. 2, 1900

—While the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur lived a semi-cloistered life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, occasionally something so surprising and shocking occurred in their parish that it became front page news for the evening edition of the *Boston Globe*.

Tuesday, October 2, 1900 was a normal enough day. The weather was pleasant and seasonable with temperatures hovering around 60 degrees. There were 55 sisters living at the Holy Redeemer convent in East Boston that year. As usual, they rose at 5 a.m. and went about their day, going off to teach nearly 2500 children at their three schools: Fitton, Holy Redeemer and Sacred Heart.

Next door, at the Holy Redeemer rectory, a Civil War veteran by the name of John Gleason, knocked on the door and asked to see Fr. Lawrence P. McCarthy. Gleason had formerly lived on Lexington Street in East Boston and had regularly attended Mass at the Holy Redeemer Church. For the past six years, though, he'd been renting rooms elsewhere in Boston and hadn't seen Fr. McCarthy for a long time. But a visitor at the rectory was not unusual and so, when Gleason asked to see the pastor of the church, Fr. McCarthy went to his office to welcome him. Gleason greeted Fr. McCarthy by asking if he had been born in Ireland. Somewhat surprised, Fr. McCarthy told Gleason that his parents had been from Ireland, but that he had been born in East Boston. At that point, McCarthy turned to take a seat in one of the chairs at his desk. At that moment, *"the man [Gleason] fired four shots at him, one of which took effect, the ball penetrating 7 inches; but fortunately no vital organ was injured as it deflected from the path it had at first taken, causing a flesh wound."* [East Boston Annals, 1860-1921] The other priests in the rectory, hearing the shots, rushed in only to find Fr. McCarthy on the floor, bleeding from his shoulder. Three of the bullets from Gleason's gun had missed their mark and gone into the rectory walls. One, however, struck McCarthy through his back shoulder. The other priests hurriedly sent word to the closest doctor to come. Doctors O'Shea and O'Keefe arrived soon after and were able to remove the bullet from Fr. McCarthy's shoulder without having to transport him to a hospital.

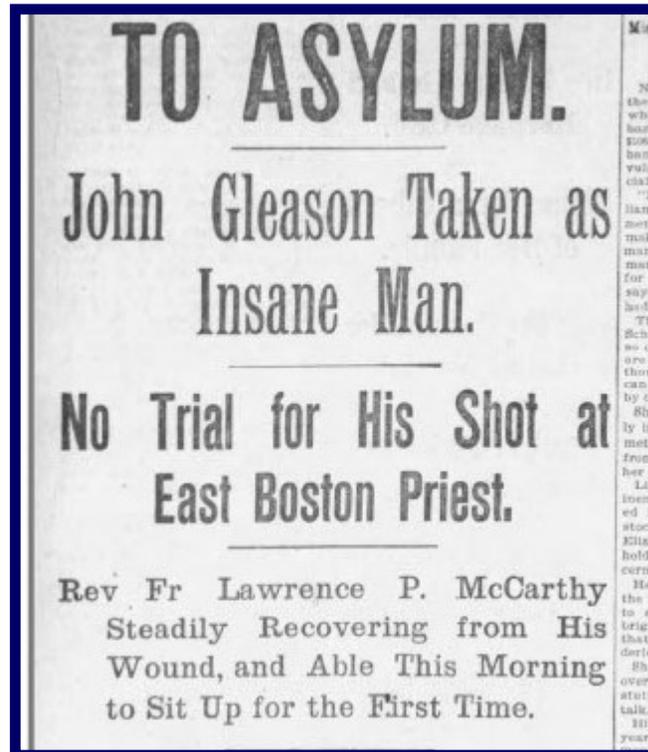
During the commotion, Gleason left the rectory and wandered the streets for a while, seemingly in a daze. Twenty minutes later, he entered the East Boston police station. Approaching the officer on duty, Lieutenant James Sergeant, Gleason held out the weapon. As the lieutenant took it to study with some degree of puzzlement, he saw that four chambers of the pistol were empty. Gleason then said, *"I'm liable to get into trouble over this."* As the lieutenant took that in, Gleason added, *"I'm a good Catholic and they tried to injure me."* Just then, another policeman rushed into the station to say there had been a shooting at the Holy Redeemer rectory. As officers were sent out to investigate, Sergeant guessed the culprit was standing right before him and quickly arrested Gleason.

The *Globe* reported that once Fr. McCarthy was tended to by the doctors, the police brought Gleason to the rectory to confirm that he was, indeed, the shooter. The Holy Redeemer Annalist wrote that, *"when about an hour after the occurrence he was taken by the police to the bedside of Father McCarthy to be identified, he expressed his disappointment at finding him still alive. 'Are you living yet?' he said; 'you ought to be dead.'* Later we heard that he [Gleason] had lived in Oregon, where a Father

McCarthy had corrected him for his bad habits and he had been imprisoned. He was constantly talking of the Bishop of Oregon and intimating that both he and Father McCarthy were trying to harm him. The Bishop alluded to had been dead some years and it is evident that the poor man was insane and could make no distinction between two priests of the same name. Gleason was charged with assault with intent to murder."

The sisters wrote that, "During one month he [McCarthy] was confined to his room during which time he suffered considerable pain from the wound, together with the consequences of the shock his nerves had received. He attributed his wonderful escape to the protection of his Guardian Angel whose Mass he had celebrated that morning."

Ten days later, the *Globe* reported that Gleason had been judged insane by the court and sent to the Westborough Asylum in central Massachusetts.



From the *Boston Globe*
October 10, 1900

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ East Boston Convent Annals, 1860-1921.
- ◆ *Boston Globe* Archives, 1872-2020.