

HONORARY GRADUATE

John Eugene Brady

Born in Birkenhead, England on 5 October 1905, John Eugene Brady was the eldest of four sons. His primary studies were at the local school, followed by four years at the Christian Brothers College in Liverpool, where he matriculated.

In 1922 he entered the novitiate of the Missionary Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Limerick, Ireland. He was ordained in Dublin on 21 December 1929.

In 1930 Father Brady was assigned to the Transvaal. He travelled by sea to Cape Town, a journey which in those days took twenty-three days. He then made the long, tedious train journey to Johannesburg. Bishop David O'Leary sent him to Pretoria 'to supply for the weekend'. It proved to be a long weekend - eighteen years, ending in 1948.

In 1931 Father Brady founded the Catholic History Bureau, which still functions today. Operating through the Bureau for more than sixty years, he has dedicated his life to identifying, collecting and preserving historical material relating to the Catholic Church in South Africa, as well as to the missionaries and other clergy, including brothers and religious sisters, who have contributed in any substantial way to this history.

In addition to documents, newspapers and periodicals, Father Brady has a collection of photographs taken all over South Africa and, in the case of portraits of clergy, overseas. Because of the accidental destruction of all the Johannesburg records prior to 1925 in a fire at Bishop O'Leary's house, this photographic collection is unique and irreplaceable.

When Bishop J C Garner was appointed as the first Bishop of Pretoria in October 1948, Father Brady returned to Johannesburg. His bishop, W P Whelan released him from parish work to research and write the history of the Oblates in South Africa in preparation for the Centenary in March 1952. Large-scale celebrations and an exhibition were held in the City Hall to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first Mass held in Ferreira's Camp. The exhibition was later moved to the foyer of the Public Library for ten days. These contacts with the public brought in many valuable memorabilia and made the History Bureau more widely known. It had developed so rapidly that it was impossible to carry its contents from place to place, parish to parish. The Wits University Library housed the collection from 1979 until August 1992, when it was moved to its permanent home in a building which was erected at the Provincial House in Victory Park.

Father Brady has written a number of books, pamphlets and journal articles on Catholic Church history, showing a rare ability to analyse, select and write a narrative account. His principal monographs include *'Princes of the People': The Story of Our First Sixty Bishops - 1818-1951*; *Trekking for Souls - The Story of the Century*; *The Life and Times of Bishop Charles Cox OMI of Johannesburg*; *An Apostle of Charity - Life of Father Louis Peron OMI*; and *From Garristown to Archbishopric: The Church of the Free State 1848-1957*. To these must be added over one hundred lectures and essays on various historical subjects.

Over the years, the pastoral work of Father Brady continued in St Patrick's parish La Rochelle, then in Edenvale and in Alberton. In these last two parishes there was a need for a large church and presbytery, with all the resultant worries and the raising of the necessary funds. In 1985, at eighty years of age, Father Brady retired from Alberton. Instead of spending his time in retirement, he was assigned to St Charles's parish in Victory Park where, in addition to helping in the parish he gave most of his time to furthering the work of the History Bureau.

It is due entirely to his efforts that the majority of the South African parishes and communities can trace their history at all, since no records were preserved and no interest was shown in the early years in maintaining a *codex historicus*. Canon law requires that such records be kept, but most parish priests and missionaries were too busy or too indifferent to do it. Had Father Brady not searched out letters and other documents, interviewed people who were involved in the early work and made copious notes, this information would have disappeared for ever.

Father Brady's works are splendid examples of persistence and perseverance, as he has maintained his interest and his work for more than fifty years. He has also shown generosity in assisting thousands of people who have approached him for factual information. His memory has always been phenomenal; he remembers the day and hour on which some event took place and brings the circumstances to life for the listener. Even when he was a parish priest and pressed for time, he never refused a request and made no charge for his time or the expenses incurred. Father Brady is a dedicated historian who has had to work alone, with very little support from his colleagues.

Father Brady has shown his scholarly capacity over a period of nearly sixty years in his writings, his curiosity about the past history of the Catholic Church, his ability to perceive the importance of material he has assiduously collected, and his persistent efforts to provide permanent and secure accommodation for his collection, for which he had to wait almost fifty years.

The University takes great pleasure in conferring the degree of Master of Arts *honoris causa* on so richly deserving and worthy a recipient as Father John Eugene Brady.