



# Mrs. Mattingly's miracle

Bedridden with breast cancer in 1824, American widow Ann Mattingly was at death's door. Her last hope was a German prince with a reputation for working miracles... BY NANCY LUSIGNAN SCHULTZ

PHOTO BY JOHN HOLLOWAY, COLLECTION OF GEORGETOWN VISITATION MONASTERY ARCHIVES, COURTESY OF YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

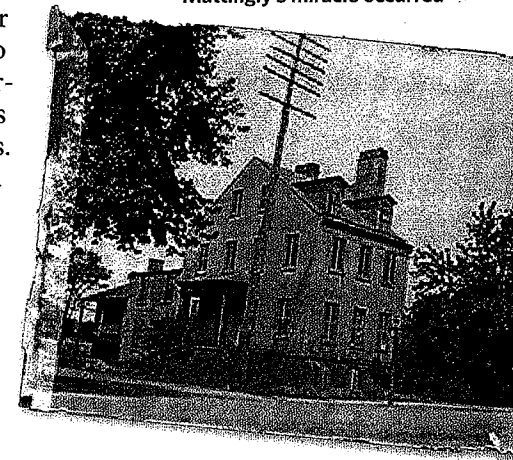
Ann Carbery Mattingly was oblivious to the heralds of spring in the nation's capital as she languished behind the shuttered windows of her sickroom. It was March of 1824, and the 39-year-old widow, sister of Mayor Thomas Carbery, lay bedridden with a cancer that had ravaged her for seven years.

End-stage breast cancer had spread to her internal organs and was consuming her from within. The tumor on her left breast had grown to such proportions that for some time she had been unable to move her arm and had lain partially paralyzed. Her back and legs were riddled with open sores. Mrs. Mattingly, though heavily sedated with a maximum dosage of 400 grams of laudanum, had moments of clarity when she knew these were to be her last days.

Her discomfort was accompanied by mounting anxiety over her two young children.

Susan was a kind, gentle girl and a dutiful daughter, but John had become increasingly willful and harder to discipline. On March 9, 1824, sensing death's approach, Mrs. Mattingly called John, 15, to her bedside in the spare room of her brother's house. John had been a reluctant visitor to his mother's sickroom. Ann wanted to find words that he might remember

OPPOSITE PAGE, Ann Mattingly's rosary bead box; BELOW, the house of Mayor Thomas Carbery in Washington, D.C., where Mrs. Mattingly's miracle occurred



that she could not. She appeared to be choking. Then she swallowed.

Silence descended on the room. The small ring of friends at the bedside still knelt and prayed. To Mrs. Mattingly's astonishment, her pain and sickness vanished. She moved her formerly useless arm and propped herself into a sitting position with her elbows, then stretched her arms forward, crying, "Lord Jesus! What have I done to deserve so great a favor?"

The room erupted in half-suppressed shrieks and audible sobbing. Hanna, the bondswoman who had lived with the family for decades and had been nursing Mrs. Mattingly, whom she called "Nancy," throughout her illness, cried, "I am afraid of you, Miss Nancy! I cannot believe this is you!"

Young John Mattingly, according to eyewitnesses, "looked as white as the wall [and declared] no revolution in the nation could have made a deeper impression on his mind."



A relic box owned by Mrs. Mattingly

Father Dubuisson stepped to her bedside and took Mrs. Mattingly's outstretched hand.

"Ghostly father," she addressed him in the custom of the day, electrified by the raw emotion in the room and the strange sensation of no pain, "what can I do to acknowledge such a blessing?"

"Glory be to God," Dubuisson shouted. "Oh, what a day for us!" Then he asked about her pain.

Only moments ago, she replied, she was certain she was dying. "I offered up a short prayer of the heart to Jesus Christ, and instantly found myself freed from all suffering."

Then Mrs. Mattingly swung her legs along the side of the bed. "I wish to get up."

Stunned, the small circle of witnesses saw her toes touch the floor and the arches of her feet fall upon the wooden boards.

"But can you?" Dubuisson asked.

"I can, if you will give me leave."

With Mrs. Mattingly still seated on the bed, they recited a series of prayers, including the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, and the Gloria. Mrs. Mattingly's now firm voice accompanied theirs. As the group finished, Dubuisson consulted his watch. It was exactly 4:22 a.m. Prince Hohenlohe would be just concluding his Mass in Germany.

Mrs. Mattingly's sisters brought over her stockings, and her friends surrounded her. She stood up. The small group regarded her with widened, startled eyes as she walked to the small table that served as an altar where the Eucharist lay. She bent her knee and clasped her hands in an act of adoration and gratitude. Her brother Thomas was hastily summoned to his sister's

chamber, where the mayor caught her joyously in his arms.

"See what God has done for me?" Ann Mattingly cried in delight.

Thomas felt her pulse. It was regular and healthful. The lump on her breast had vanished, and her skin had cleared of the ulcers, without a scar. Ann Carbery Mattingly had been miraculously snatched from the jaws of death.

**Epilogue:** Ann Mattingly was granted another 31 years of life, dying just before her 71st birthday. Her son, John, became estranged from his family. Suffering from a devastating illness and deeply in debt, John died at age 30, leaving his wife and two children. **CD**

Excerpted with permission from *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, the Widow, and the Cure That Shocked Washington City* by **Nancy Lusignan Schultz** (Yale University Press). The author is chairperson and professor of English at Salem State University, Salem, Massachusetts, and the author of three previous books, including *Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834*.

#### KEEPING IT SIMPLE

As a child my family's menu consisted of two choices: Take it or leave it.

■ BUDDY HACKETT

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## Those who loved Ann Mattingly had prayed for a miracle

later as making an impression, or even as transformative. She yearned to save him from the abyss into which she feared he would fall — as her husband had — one that involved debt and drink. But as John leaned forward to hear her whisper, everything went black, and Ann was unable to speak. She took his hand but then felt that, too, slip away. She could guess that he left the house and disappeared into the dark streets of the city.

Close to midnight, her aunt Sybilla joined a small group at the patient's bedside. Ann was able to take her hand, pulling her close.

"I am almost gone," she whispered. "If I die, Aunt Carbery, will you love my children and pray for me?" Her aunt nodded gently and tried to soothe the patient's heartache. By two in the morning, the march of death seemed to quicken. The family and friends by her side were aware that at this hour, a desperate last measure was being taken to save their beloved Ann.

Since the beginning of March, those who loved Ann Mattingly had prayed for a miracle. These were not private supplications but a novena, a scheduled set of prayers that had begun nine days earlier under the direction of a 30-year-old German cleric and miracle worker named Prince Alexander Hohenlohe. A novena typically consists of recitation of the Rosary, or short prayers offered throughout the day, and has been believed to bring miraculous answers to prayers.

Members of Mrs. Mattingly's parish at St. Patrick's had prayed at sunrise for nine days as a prelude to what they, too, hoped would be a remarkable event. Her parish priests — Father William Matthews, Father Anthony Kohlmann, and Father Stephen Dubuisson — had turned to Hohenlohe, who had promised that on the 10th of March, if the novena he prescribed was completed, he would offer his morning Mass in Germany for the sick person who had made the appeal. Prince Hohenlohe had already compiled an impressive list of cures, many of them prominent European nobility.

Mrs. Mattingly's priests began the novena in March and planned to bring her Communion on the 10th day. They dutifully calculated the time difference between

Washington and Bamberg, Germany, to begin their Mass at two hours past midnight in the nation's capital to coincide with the German Mass.

As she watched by the deathbed, family friend Anne Maria Fitzgerald confided to Ann's daughter, Susan, that she hoped for two Hohenlohe miracles that night: the cure of Susan's dear mother, and the cure of Susan's brother John's wandering nature and youthful confusions. John returned very late that night and joined his family and the elderly slave, Hanna, who had been caring for Mrs. Mattingly in the sickroom.

It was still a few hours before sunrise when Dubuisson hurried through the city's hushed streets to bring Communion to the mayor's home on the corner of C and 17th Street. A light knock on the door at about 4 a.m. announced his arrival with the Eucharist. Mrs. Mattingly's suffering, when the priest placed the Host on her tongue, seemed far greater than at any former time. The intensity of the agony she felt caused her to call out and beg God to either let her die or be mercifully restored to health.

"Lord Jesus," she cried, "thy holy will be done." For five or six minutes, she struggled to let the consecrated Bread pass into her throat, but her mouth was so parched

### THE STORY OF THE *NOVENA*

**Novena** is the feminine form of the medieval Latin word meaning nine. The sacred number nine probably dates back to at least the Roman Empire. The classical historian Livy described the Romans' nine days' solemnity of prayer and sacrifice to ward off supernatural portents, including a mysterious shower of stones (probably a meteor shower) that fell from the sky during the Punic Wars. The nine-day novena recalls the number of days the Virgin Mary and the Apostles spent praying between Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday.

