

'Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle' sheds light on Catholicism in early Washington, D.C.

"Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, the Widow, and the Cure that Shocked Washington City," by Nancy Lusignan Schultz. Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2011.

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Special to the Standard

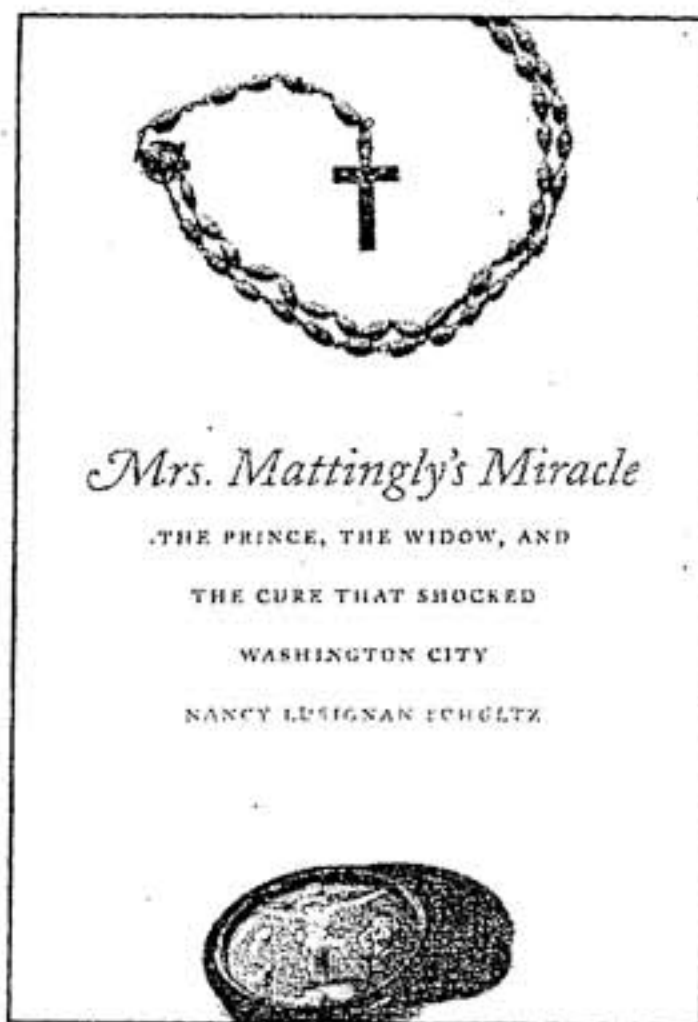
"Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, the Widow, and the Cure that Shocked Washington City" is an entertaining story that serves as a interesting backdrop to document the history of Catholicism in an emerging young nation, particularly in our own Washington, D.C. area.

After the Jesuits had arrived on the shores of Maryland in 1634, and Lord Calvert had declared Maryland the Catholic colony, Catholics began to take their place as builders of a new land. John Carroll, a member of one of the colony's oldest families, instituted Georgetown College along the Potomac the same year the young republic was inaugurated.

Catholics were beginning to prosper in the emerging nation, and were being accepted as equal citizens in the still young – and largely Protestant – republic of the United States of America. Proof of this acceptance was the fact that in its formative years, Washington, D.C. had a Catholic mayor, Thomas Carbery.

In 1822, Mayor Carbery took his sister Ann Carbery Mattingly and her two children to live with his family in his recently built home at the corner of Seventeenth and C streets, NW in the Foggy Bottom area of Washington. Ann's unfortunate marriage to the alcoholic and debt-ridden John Mattingly had recently ended with John's early death.

Ann herself was suffering with an advanced case of breast cancer that had



her paralyzed, vomiting blood, and covered with sores that exuded a vile odor. But on the morning of March 10, 1824, the 39-year-old widow was cured, apparently miraculously.

A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION

Those familiar with Ann Mattingly's situation prior to that morning in March would not deny that her cure was miraculous. Several onlookers had been there for the all-night vigil and Mass and prayers that supposedly coincided with the prayers of a certain Prince Hohenlohe, an Austrian priest with a reputation for healing powers and saw the sores disappear, and the vomiting stop. Ann would go on to

live for another 31 years.

Although Ann's cure was attributed to Prince Hohenlohe, the prince probably never received the request for his prayers that had been sent from Washington. The prince was a man who would seem to have shared a few of the characteristics of Ann's ne'er-do-well husband: often in trouble with debtors, considered by many to be living a wastrel life, and more importantly, from the standpoint of healing and miracles, not very well thought of by his religious superiors. At the time of the offered prayer, he was on an extended vacation.

Ann's miracle would be a sign of contradiction, for many of her fellow Catholics were frankly embarrassed by it. Critics of her miracle included Catholics who had won acceptance in the largely Protestant culture and had no desire to identify with devotional aspects of Catholicism that could be construed as superstition.

"Miracles" and the Catholic teaching and traditions about them were difficult for Catholics to explain to their Protestant neighbors, who considered certain aspects of her healing comic – proving the idiocy of the suspect and outdated "Popery."

The miracle also happened at a time when American Catholicism was on the cusp of change – within a few years of Ann Mattingly's cure, the various ethnic Catholic populations would begin to dominate the American Catholic Church. The Irish, German, and Italian immigrants that would come to the United States would bring customs and traditions that the older Catholic settlers could not identify with, and the Anglo-centric Catholicism of the old Maryland Catholics, a Catholicism that was beginning to fit in quite well with the other religious traditions, would soon be

left behind.

Author Nancy Schultz did much of her research with the cooperation of archivists at Georgetown University and Georgetown Visitation. She describes in depth the environs of the early Federal City and St. Mary's County, the background of the Mattingly family, and the questionable origins and motivations of the alleged miracle-worker Prince Hohenlohe. Her expository is one of meticulous detail that at times borders on the tedious, and her historical recounting of events is occasionally downright confusing.

TENSION FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH

Much would change in the remaining 31 years of years of Ann Mattingly's life, and the book's author seems to propose that her miraculous cure was a portent of future tensions for the American Catholic Church, with its tenuous roots in a Protestant culture.

This is a heavy burden to place upon an incident in our city's early beginnings that is all but forgotten. Nevertheless for those who love the peculiarities and nuance of history, the author Nancy Schultz offers us a thoroughly researched and sometimes very entertaining story.

Using a little known incident of American Catholic history, she reminds us that Catholics of Anglo-Saxon heritage have been here since the beginning of our nation, and have played a definite role in the cultural smorgasbord we call America.

But the likelihood is that Prince Hohenlohe never heard of Ann Mattingly, and her miracle merely proves what saints like Bernadette and Padre Pio have always told us: miracles are not performed by people, miracles are performed by God.