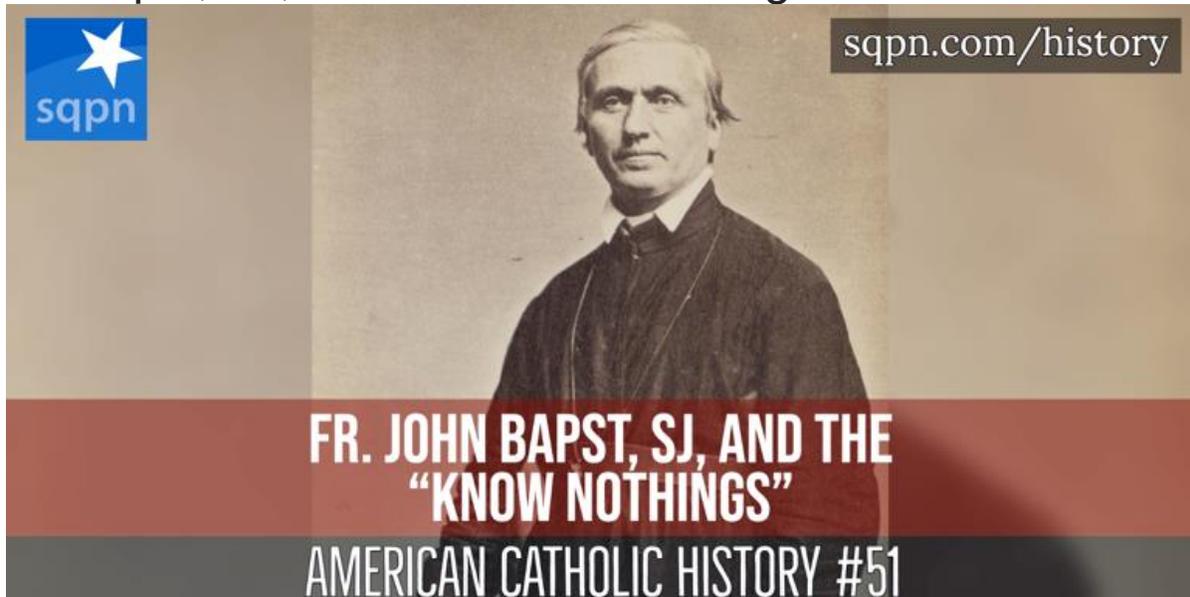


We hope you enjoy these messages that contain a little information about aspects of American Catholic history that are often little known and unexpected. We've also included links for you to find out more and to subscribe to the podcast, *American Catholic History*, which gives you a bit of history in about 15 minutes a week. Enjoy!

Fr. John Bapst, SJ, and the "Know Nothings"



Swiss-born **Fr. John Bapst** was a member of the Society of Jesus who came to the United States in 1848 because of anti-Catholic persecution in his native land. He was sent by his superiors to Maine, first to minister among the Penobscot natives, and then later to Irish and other Catholic immigrants in Ellsworth. Fr. Bapst served heroically among his people, bringing peace to warring factions, winning converts, establishing a rapport with local Protestants, and working tirelessly throughout the region when a cholera epidemic struck.

Meanwhile, the Northeastern US at the time was especially subject to the rise of an anti-Catholic group called the "**Know Nothings.**" This movement was alarmed at the influx of Catholic immigrants, especially the Irish, who were accused of being uneducated, unruly, and more loyal to the Pope than to their adopted homeland. They tried to limit the freedoms of Catholics by winning elections and passing new laws.

When Fr. Bapst arrived in Ellsworth in 1853, he built a new church and began organizing his parish and built a new Catholic school. The Know Nothings did not like that.

After a failed kidnapping attempt, they blew up the school and tried to burn down the church. They also issued a public warning that if Fr. Bapst appeared in Ellsworth again, he would be **tarred, feathered, and run out of town on a rail.** His bishop ordered Fr. Bapst to relocate to the city of Bangor. But Fr. Bapst couldn't just leave his flock untended.

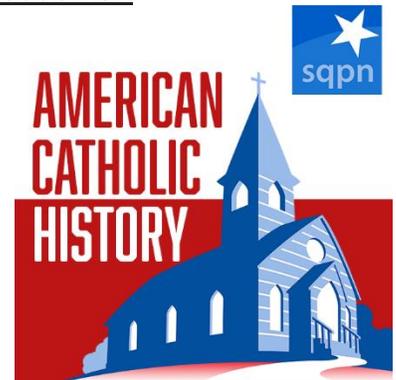
He tried to come to town quietly months later to hear confessions and celebrate Mass, but someone tipped off the anti-Catholic mob, who showed up at the home where he was staying. To keep the family who were hosting him from harm, Fr. Bapst surrendered himself, and he was subsequently

beaten, mocked, and tarred and feathered and left for dead.

Fr. Bapst eventually recovered, but the trauma stayed with him the rest of his life. He continued as pastor in Bangor for a time, then served at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts, and then became the founding president of Boston College. But when his mind and body began failing him, he reluctantly retired from ministry. He died in 1887 in Mount Hope, Maryland, finally at peace after receiving the last sacrament.

For more about Fr. John Bapst, listen to [American Catholic History, Episode #51](#)

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