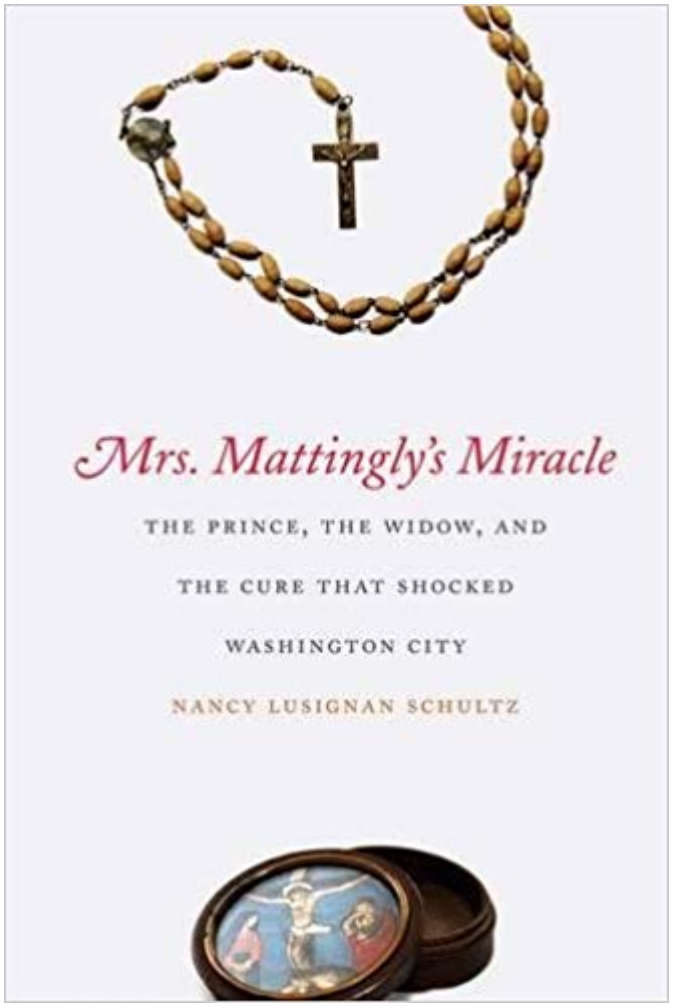
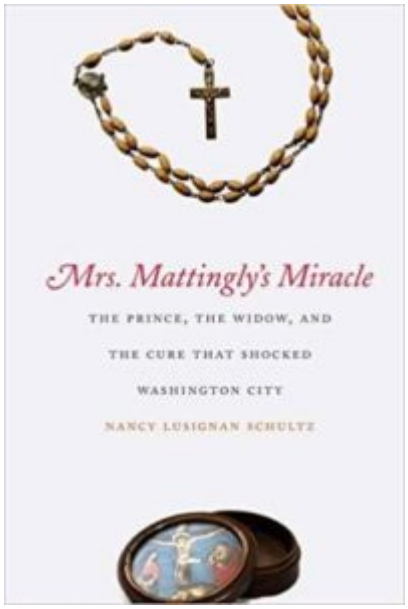
A Divisive Miracle





Nancy Lusignan Schultz, Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, The Widow, and the Cure that Shocked Washington City. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014. 288 pp., $30.

On March 10, 1824, Ann Carbery Mattingly, sister of the Catholic mayor of Washington, D.C., was miraculously cured of late-stage breast cancer, an event attributed to the healing power of Prince Alexander Hohenlohe, a European priest credited with healing individuals on both sides of the Atlantic, many of whom, like Mattingly, he never encountered in person. In *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle,* Nancy Lusignan Schultz, professor of English at Salem State University, investigates this miracle and the individuals involved, revealing that accounts of miracles were a divisive element in local and transatlantic conversations both about and within Catholicism.

Mattingly—a thirty-nine-year-old widow with two children—was in what all around her believed to be the last days or even hours of her life when the healing intervention occurred. After doctors, treatments, and the prayers of local priests failed to stall the deterioration of Mattingly's health, one of her priests turned to Prince Hohenlohe, whose growing reputation included being able to effect cures without having direct contact with the afflicted. In accordance with the instructions for participating in remote cures that had been distributed by Hohenlohe's representatives, local priests offered a novena (nine consecutive days of masses) dedicated to the healing of Mattingly and three other ill individuals in Washington and then timed a special middle-of-the-night mass to occur in unison with Hohenlohe's monthly mass in Bavaria for the healing of the sick in North America. (Interestingly, Schultz reveals that their careful calculations of the time difference were futile because Hohenlohe—who was likely unaware of the novena taking place 4,000 miles away—was actually on an extended leave of absence in March 1824.) Since Mattingly was too ill to leave her bed to attend the mass, a priest brought communion to her sickbed in the mayor's house. Upon receiving communion, the patient was immediately and entirely healed, to the amazement of those who had cared for her and watched her deterioration. Not only did the cancer itself disappear, so did the consequences of her long illness, such as bed sores and the sickroom's foul stench.

The story of this miracle forms the starting point for Schultz's investigative efforts, and much of the book follows her persistent efforts to track the individuals involved, undeterred by the spotty historical record. This quest, rather than an explicit line of argumentation, also drives the structure of the book, with each section serving to reveal an additional piece of information about the characters or context for their actions and beliefs. This structure invites the reader to become a vicarious participant in the research process, as stories that could otherwise feel like tangents instead become clues to understanding the religious beliefs, superstitions, and fears of early Americans and contemporaneous Europeans.

Schultz's investigations led her from the mayor's house in Washington to Europe, tracing Prince Hohenlohe's early cures. The most famous of these, and the one Schultz devotes the most attention to, was the cure that allowed

Hohenlohe's cousin, seventeen-year-old Princess Mathilde de Schwarzenberg of Bohemia, to walk again in 1821. Hohenlohe often worked in concert with a layman named Martin Michel, who had a longer-standing record of miraculous cures, and in Schultz's account of the princess' cure, Hohenlohe is merely the matchmaker, calling Michel to his cousin's bedside after receiving a divine message while saying mass. After the visit from Michel and the prince, the princess was immediately able to walk and her pain vanished. Hohenlohe's reputation as a healer grew rapidly. Thanks to this and other high-profile cures across Europe, he was continually thronged by the afflicted.

Much of *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle* is devoted to reconstructing the life stories of the individuals involved, but Schultz is also invested in addressing the significance of the miracle within its historical context. Anti-Catholic sentiment is not surprisingly one element of this story, which itself serves as context for Schultz's more novel findings about divisions *within* the Catholic Church. In particular, Schultz's research sheds light on the ways in which the church, both in the United States and abroad, was divided on the place of miracles in the public face of Catholicism, a debate shaped in part by concerns about Protestant perceptions.

Schultz paints a picture of an increasingly divided church in the United States, with miracles being only one of the issues on which the camps disagreed. These divisions took place within—and were influenced by—fears of anti-Catholic sentiment, but they were not entirely the result of this context. Most important to the story of Mattingly's cure was some Catholics' fear that too much public emphasis on miracles would call attention to religious differences between themselves and Protestants and jeopardize Catholics' social and political positions. In fact, Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal, the sole archbishop in the United States in 1824, urged caution in the Mattingly case, fearing that too much publicity would provoke or awaken anti-Catholic sentiments, and some ecclesiastical officials tried unsuccessfully to control the spread of news about the cure. In an extended section in chapter 5, Schultz dissects the discussion of the Mattingly miracle in the press, illuminating the divisions both along religious lines and among Catholics. While the divides between Catholics and Protestants centered on the question of whether a miracle had occurred, the tension and divisions among Catholics (particularly within the Catholic clergy) revolved around not theology or the miracle itself, but rather around how news of the miracle would be received and how to manage the public discussion of it.

While the American context contained its own particular concerns, Schultz also demonstrates that Europe was not immune to these questions. Prince Hohenlohe and Michel encountered civil and ecclesiastical superiors who worked to limit or even to suppress their performance of miracles and feared their effect on the public at large. Many local officials worried about large crowds gathering in search of a miracle while others were concerned about how the purported cures would be received in a climate with increasing focus on rationality and secularization. While many civic officials (with the notable exception of the

emperor of Austria) banned the prince from performing cures or placed tight restrictions on how they could be carried out, Pope Pius VII was more moderate, requiring only that Hohenlohe avoid publicity. These decrees were largely ineffective, but for Schultz's story, the importance lies not in whether such restrictions were honored but that such widespread efforts to suppress the performance or discussion of miracles were put in place at all.

This book focuses on Ann Mattingly and Prince Hohenlohe, following them, their relatives, and their close acquaintances as far as the sources allowed. In her quest to unravel the histories of these individuals, Schultz mines a broad and eclectic assortment of sources for clues. This is particularly notable in her quest to recover Mrs. Mattingly's life and the lives of her descendants, individuals who left few personal records. After exhausting census records, church records, and local histories, Schultz acquired family keepsakes and even asked a Mattingly descendent to take a DNA test to confirm her suspicion that Mattingly's son's estrangement from the family may have been the result of a marriage to a woman of mixed race. The result is that *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle* takes the reader on a journey through early national Maryland and the young nation's capital through the lives of the Carbery and Mattingly families and, with detours to Europe, provides insights into divisions among Catholics within the context of Catholic-Protestant relations.

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Sarah Mulhall Adelman is an assistant professor of history at Framingham State University. She has published on the political culture of American Catholic women religious and is currently working on a project about nineteenth-century orphan asylums in New York City.