

# *A Light on the Hill*

## *Founding the Parish*

**I**t was a sign of the times. Denny Hill was being sluiced into Puget Sound to make room for the new buildings and houses filling downtown Seattle. Those who didn't go along with the idea found their houses left high and dry, perched atop a hill of dirt with the surrounding land washed away.

Sacred Heart Parish sat on the north-east slope of what remained of Denny Hill at 6th and Bell. With the hill fast disappearing around it and the parish growing, three Queen Anne Hill residents decided the time had come to form a new parish. They circulated a petition which was signed by 40 families. Then they went to the bishop to ask for a parish of their own.

It was the spring of 1906. Seattle was growing and the parish was growing with it. The city's population had increased from 3,553 in 1880 to 42,837 in 1890. By 1900 it had nearly doubled to 80,871. By 1920 Seattle's population would reach 315,312.

Despite the boom/bust cycles that afflicted the frontier town, settlers still streamed into the area. The beauty of the city's natural setting attracted immigrants from all over the world. In the words of a popular song of the time:

*And now that I'm used to the climate  
 I think that if man ever found  
 A spot to live easy and happy  
 That Eden is on Puget Sound.  
 No longer the slave of ambition*

*I laugh at the world and its shams  
 As I think of my pleasant condition  
 Surrounded by acres of clams.*

Settled in 1851, Seattle's deep harbor and acquisition of a steam-powered sawmill quickly established it as a center of trade and industry. The busy harbor was flanked by a wooden "Railway Avenue" crowded with trains and trucks. To relieve some of the pressure, the Great Northern dug a railroad tunnel beneath the city, which terminated in a grand new King Street Station in 1906.



*The first St. Anne Church, completed in 1908, stood on the corner of Lee Street and 2nd Ave. W. Its stucco walls did not last long in the damp Northwest climate.*

The downtown expanded north from Pioneer Square to fill the University of Washington's former campus. Workers flattened towering Denny Hill, long topped by the empty Washington Hotel, and cleared a vast swath of land from Pine Street to Lake Union for future development.

The introduction of steel frame construction gave Seattle its first "skyscraper," the Alaska Building, in 1904.

Seattle doubled in land area in 1907 with the annexation of Ballard, West Seattle, and Southeast Seattle. The city hired the famed Olmsted Brothers in 1903 and 1908 to layout an ambitious system of scenic boulevards, parks, and playgrounds, including many on Queen Anne Hill, to serve the city's burgeoning population, which reached nearly a quarter million by decade's end.

Many of the settlers streaming into the city were Catholic. They wanted priests, parishes and new churches. But the Seattle diocese's coffers were

nearly empty. Money needed to build churches for the ever increasing number of Catholic immigrants in the area was in short supply. Further, a \$25,000 mortgage foreclosure threatened the old cathedral in Vancouver. Bishop O'Dea appealed to his priests for help with the mortgage at the first diocesan synod. The priests and their people responded and pledged enough money to wipe out the debt.

Such generosity boded well for the future. Despite these meager finances, O'Dea boldly went forward planning for the organization of new parishes, encouraging and overseeing the building of churches, hospitals, and schools, and stimulating the development of spiritual life through parish missions, retreats for lay-people, and a wide range of devotional practices. He was confident in his understanding of buildings and a skilled reader of blueprint designs, something he had learned from Mother Joseph, the pioneering Sister of Providence who had established numerous hospitals and orphanages.

In November, 1905, the cornerstone was laid for the new St. James Cathedral; it was dedicated on December 22, 1907. A raft of new parishes followed. From the beginning of his episcopate, O'Dea sought to "have churches within reach of all his people." So when the Queen Anne residents petitioned him to create a new parish on Queen Anne Hill, O'Dea responded.

The bishop instructed the Redemptorists to establish a new parish on the top of the hill under the patronage of St. Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A society of missionary priests founded by St. Alphonsus Maria Liguori, 9 Nov., 1732, at Scala, near Amalfi, Italy, the Redemptorists served in missions, retreats, and were especially devoted to the Virgin Mary. Their superior, Father Patrick Byrne, was assigned to found St. Anne parish.

### **Fr. Byrne, Founder**

A lawyer by training, Father Patrick Byrne was born on July 12, 1851 in Borris, County Carlow, Ireland. His father's name was William and his mother's name was Elizabeth O'Neil. His parents had six children: five boys and one girl.

Father Byrne was the youngest of the family. He was born two or three months after his father's



*Redemptorist Fr. Patrick Byrne, CSSR, purchased property on Queen Anne Hill and oversaw the construction of the parish's first church.*

death. A studious young man, he was educated in the Borris National School and at the Monastery in Tullow, County Carlow. At an early age he felt drawn to the priesthood. He commenced his studies, finished his philosophy and was about to begin his theology when for some reason he discontinued his studies. The most probable reason was that he wished to take care of his mother. Three of his brothers had gone to America and his mother was alone with only one girl at home. He was very devoted to his mother and he sought work to support her.

After his mother's death he came to America. He settled in Chicago and went to law school. He earned his degree and soon acquired a large practice. But at 45, he began to have second thoughts. He decided to pursue a vocation.

He applied to the Jesuits but was refused for the reason that the life would be too strenuous for him. In addition, they thought it would be difficult for him to obey his superiors after so many years of legal training. Even the Jesuits considered lawyers argumentative.

When the Provincial of the Redemptorists visited Chicago, Byrne went to meet him. The provincial accepted him into the order. He was ordained on July 25, 1900 and said his first Mass in Chicago. After finishing his studies he was stationed in St. Louis.

Then like so many others he moved west, to Seattle in 1904. In those days, the city must have seemed like a mission. Though he left the legal field to become a priest, his training informed his personality and priesthood. He loved a joke, especially if it involved lawyers. This was one he often told in his brogue:

“On the tombstone of a lawyer in a certain cemetery there was this epitaph: here lies a lawyer and a just man. Two men walking through the cemetery one day saw this inscription. Surprised, one turned to the other and asked, ‘Are there two men buried in that grave?’”

His legal training came in handy when he purchased the land for the parish. In 1908, he bought the block bounded by 2nd and 3rd West and West Lee and W. Comstock as a site for a church, rectory and a school. Father Byrne also bought two lots on the south-east corner of 2nd West and Lee for a convent, but plans changed. The large block was sold and the church was built on the two lots intended for the convent.

Shortly after he purchased the land, Father Byrne fell ill. Even as he became sicker, he dragged himself to the parlors to instruct his converts. He wore second-hand clothing and mended his own garments; such was the condition of his clothes that a lady once refused to try to mend his garments any longer; she could no longer fix them.

Finally, he became so weak he had to step down. But his efforts to found the parish will never be forgotten. As the founder of our community, the parish owes him an immense debt.



*Fr. Joseph Chapoton said the first Mass celebrated in St. Anne Church on Dec. 8, 1908. He was pastor from 1908 - 1910.*

## The Church Goes Up

Father Joseph Chapoton, another Redemptorist, replaced Father Byrne, and became the first pastor of St. Anne Parish. He took over a growing parish with plans to build its first church. He was well-suited to the job, having worked as a mechanic and carpenter before becoming a priest.

The Very Rev. Joseph A. Chapoton, was born in

Detroit, Michigan, Oct. 3, 1875, the fourth child in a family of 10 children. The first three died in infancy. After attending Catholic grade school, at 14 he wanted to enter the Redemptorist Preparatory College. But the family couldn't afford the tuition, so he worked in the car shops where his father was foreman. While there he learned about mechanics and carpentry, knowledge that would prove very useful later on. During the two years he worked as a mechanic, he continued to serve the 5:30 a.m. Mass every morning.

After he had saved enough for tuition, he attended the Preparatory College in Kirkwood, Missouri. He was ordained on July 25, 1899 in Kansas City. He served in Omaha for a number of years before coming to St. Anne parish.

As a pastor, he trusted in God for direction and strength. “So absolutely must we place our confidence in God as to be convinced we can do nothing by our own strength,” he said.

Slowly, the wood frame and stucco church rose toward the sky. By the time it was finished, it cost \$25,000. “My father attended the first Mass held at St. Anne on December 8, 1908,” said Bill Quinn, a St. Anne parishioner whose family was on the hill in the 1900's. “My father held that memory dear.”

On December 20, 1908, Bishop O'Dea dedicated the church. Father Chapoton said the first Mass. The church could seat 400 people and the rectory was a room at the back of the church.

### Seattle Hosts Its First World's Fair

Seattle celebrated its good fortune in the summer of 1909 by hosting its first “world’s fair,” the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, on the new University of Washington campus north of Portage Bay. Nearly four million visitors, including President William Howard Taft, paid a call.

Seattle continued to grow with the expansion of highways, streetcar lines, and neighborhoods.

Major department stores were established downtown around the busy intersections of Westlake, 5th, and 4th Avenues, and a complex of farmers’ stalls and specialty shops formed around the original Pike Place Public Market. Skyscrapers multiplied downtown, including the new 42-story Smith Tower, which opened on July 4, 1914, as the tallest building west of Ohio.

New heights were also reached on June 15, 1916 when William E. Boeing took off from Lake Union in his first airplane, the B&W seaplane. It is not recorded if he celebrated the event with champagne, but if he did, it was illegal; Washington had gone dry at midnight January 1, 1916, three years ahead of national Prohibition.

America’s entry into World War I fueled a temporary surge in ship building and orders for Boeing airplanes, whose production shifted from Lake Union to a former shipyard, “the Red Barn,” on the Duwamish River.

The private economy roared during the 1920s with expanding Pacific trade. Famed “silk trains” speeded Chinese fabrics from Seattle’s harbor to

Eastern mills, and Japan became an eager customer of American steel and resources. New Seattle City Light dams turned the rapids of the Skagit River, 90 miles north of the city, into electricity for new skyscrapers and factories. The potential for growth seemed infinite as the city census approached 365,000 residents.

### Building on the Foundation

As St. Anne’s continued to grow, it became less of a mission and more of a mainstream parish. The Redemptorists, after getting St. Anne’s started, relinquished control of it in April 1910. Bishop O’Dea then appointed Rev. M. J. Woods from Immaculate Conception parish in Mount Vernon as the resident pastor.

In the spring of 1913 Father Woods undertook the beginning of construction of the new rectory on 2nd West on the lot just south of the church.

Father Woods was then replaced by Rev. James K. Dunne on October 1, 1913. Father Dunne lived at St. James Cathedral until the rectory was completed in January 1914.

By this time, the parish had a lot to be thankful for—a church, a rectory and a growing community. But it also faced many challenges: how could it continue to serve a population that was sometimes poor and transient on a limited budget? Could the diocese find the right priest to lead the parish and give it the continuity and direction to keep up the momentum that had been established? These were some of the questions the parish faced as it sought to grow and become a blessed community on the hill. ■

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