

Spring 1991

New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter, Vol. 10, No.3

New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/njchc>



Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission, "New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter, Vol. 10, No.3" (1991). *New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission newsletters*. 34.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/njchc/34>

Patrick Charles Keely, forgotten architect

by Monsignor William N. Field



Patrick C. Keely, 1816-1896

Run through the list of architects whose buildings have made their names almost household words: Renwick, Upjohn, Hunt, McKim, Mead, White, Richardson, Cass Gilbert, Carrere and Hastings, Cram. They literally created a background of stone and glass, tower and spire, against which late nineteenth-century New York acted out its life. From Morningside Heights and the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, through Saint Patrick's at midtown, to the spire of Trinity and the confection of the Customs House in lower Manhattan, the architects who created them live on in memory.

Strangely enough, there is one name missing, little-known, almost ignored: Patrick Charles Keely, 1816-1896. It is almost incredible to find so accomplished and creative an architect completely forgotten. Son of an architect who had designed and built Saint Patrick's College at Thurles, Keely lived in an ambience of design and building from his earliest

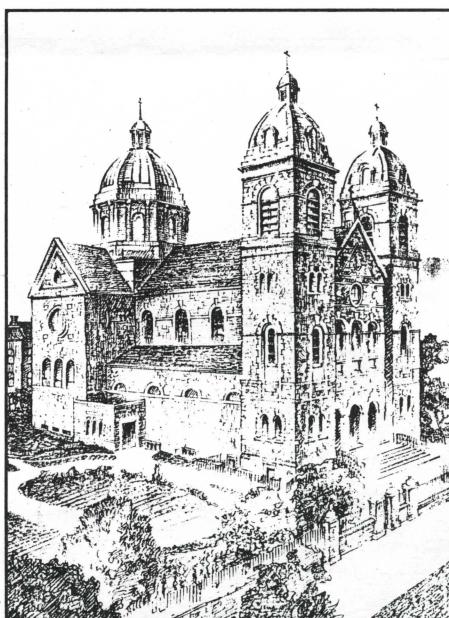
years. As a youth, he must have seen the vigorous work of Pugin, who was changing the ecclesiastical face of England and Ireland. Nonetheless, when he emigrated to the United States in 1842 and settled in Brooklyn, he earned his livelihood as a carpenter. Eight years later in 1850, he was engaged in building the Cathedral in Albany.

He had begun his architectural career only four years after his arrival, with the design and erection of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Williamsburgh, Brooklyn in 1846. It marked the beginning of an epoch in Catholic church building. Until that time, what Catholic churches existed were done in the Classical or Federal style; witness St. Peter's and St. Joseph's in lower Manhattan. Keely's first church was a harbinger

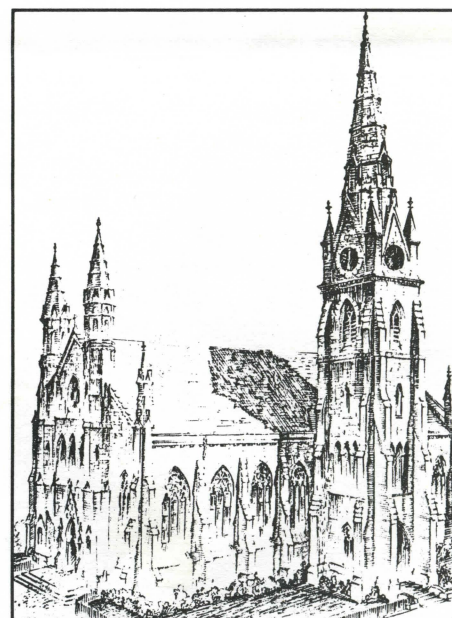
of St. Patrick's in Newark, which is obviously modelled on the church in Brooklyn. From that point forward, Keely became a favorite architect of the Catholic Church as it provided for the flood of Catholics pouring in from Europe, fleeing from famine, war and persecution. At times, it has been said, Keely was building three churches simultaneously to accommodate this huge influx. Funds were limited, and as a result brick and wood were frequently used, although wherever possible Keely used granite and marble.

At least 21 cathedrals are attributable to Keely. In New England alone, he was the architect for the cathedrals in Burlington, Boston, Fall River, Hartford, Manchester, Portland, Providence and

continued on page 2



*Church of the Passionist Monastery,
Union City*



*Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist,
Paterson*

Keely *continued from page 1*

Springfield. Add to these the cathedrals in Brooklyn; Buffalo; Charleston; Chicago; Cleveland; Erie; Halifax, N.S.; Newark; Natchez; Paterson; and Toledo, and there is good cause to wonder why he is not enshrined in the pantheon beside Renwick, Upjohn and Richardson. It is not impossible that other cathedrals will in time be attributed to him, as research uncovers the tales of bishops and cathedrals in the last century. Moreover, some of his parish churches are virtual cathedrals, expressing, perhaps, the dreams of the pastors who had them built.

Neither Archbishop Hughes nor Bishop Bayley chose this immigrant from Ireland for their major building. There is

some mention of Hughes finding him too costly in his planning, but it is difficult to think that he was more costly or extravagant than Renwick in his designs for St. Patrick's, New York. Perhaps the fact that Renwick's partner was Hughes' brother-in-law had some influence.

In the case of Bishop Bayley, who was determined to create a cathedral at Sacred Heart that "would be truly monumental," and "tower above the structures surrounding it," only conjecture can be used to explain why he ignored both Renwick, used by his mentor Hughes, and Keely, everywhere recognized as the architect for the growing Catholic population. He may have known of the financial contention

between Keely and Bishop McCloskey at Albany, or he may have wished to go back to Gothic roots in England and France without the intervention of American architecture.

Beyond the designing of cathedrals, Keely also worked on institutional buildings and churches for religious orders. So, for example, he is responsible for the splendid main building at Saint Elizabeth's, Convent Station, St. Mary's Benedictine Church in Newark, the Passionist Church in the monastery in Union City and St. Francis Xavier church and school in Manhattan.

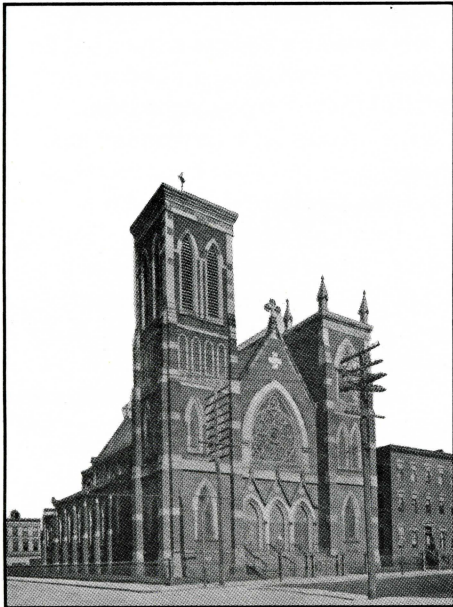
Keely was responsible for the building of at least 30 churches in New Jersey. Among the products of his fertile genius still cherished in the state are St. Bridget's, St. Patrick's and St. Michael's in Jersey City; St. Peter's in New Brunswick; St. John's (now the cathedral) in Paterson; and probably Our Lady of Grace in Hoboken.

The esteem in which he was held can be seen in the 250 carriages that formed his wife's funeral procession, and the emphy of bishops present for his own funeral Mass. Just two years before his death Keely received the second Laetare Medal, conferred first upon John Gilmary Shea, as an "American Catholic of the laity who has been distinguished for character and work."

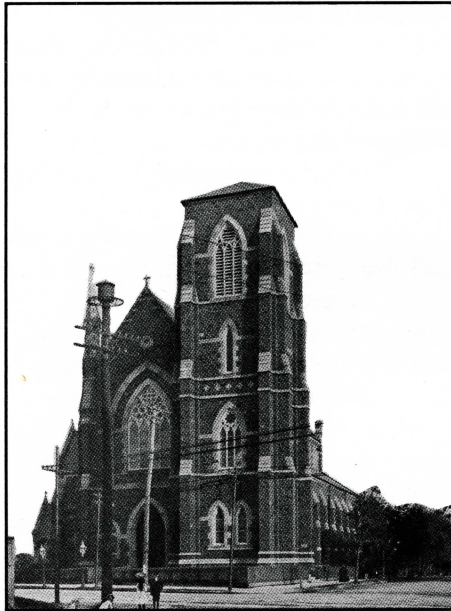
His first pastor declared him a man who "for 50 years honored and served God as fervently as a priest or a bishop at the altar. We would be unworthy of the Celtic race to let the memory of such a man perish."

The *American Architect* wrote of him: "The best known was probably Patrick Keely who is said to have designed and built more than 600 Catholic churches in this country and to have had plans for 50 of them in preparation in his office."

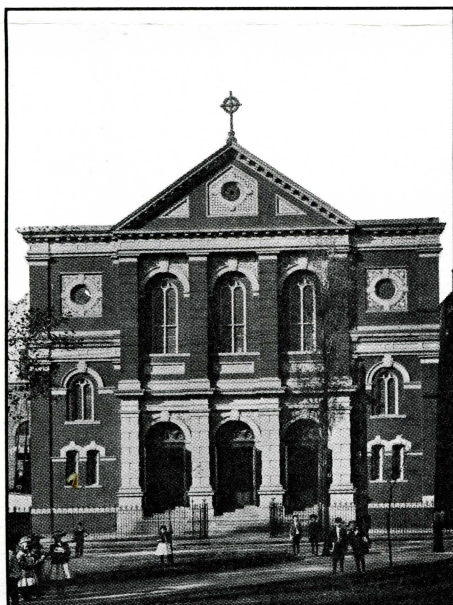
Cardinal Gibbons in a final farewell said it well: "While we admire the numerous and beautiful monuments of his genius that adorn our land, we feel still more deeply impressed by the greatness of that soul which is only reflected in these works of his creation, and which, animated by a love of the God of all beauty rather than by the love of money or praise, inspired the artist to labor from a motive of charity that the Church may receive edification."



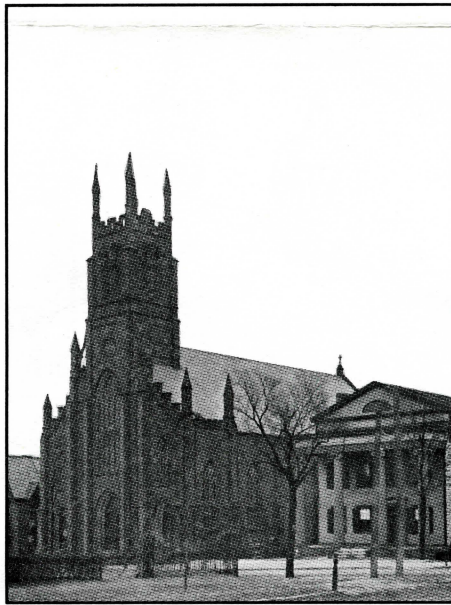
St. Bridget's, Jersey City



St. Patrick's, Jersey City



St. Michael's, Jersey City



St. Peter's, New Brunswick

Meet the Commission



Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P.

Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P. was born in Kings Park, Long Island, New York but arrived in New Jersey in time to attend grammar school at St. Aloysius in Caldwell and Our Lady of the Lake in

Verona. After completing her high school course at Mount Saint Dominic Academy in Caldwell, she obtained her baccalaureate degree, with a major in history, at Caldwell College. She also studied fine arts at Fordham University, and continued this interest in Washington, D.C., where she obtained the degree Master in Fine Arts at Catholic University. Sister Irene Marie continued her graduate education at Notre Dame University, the University of Perugia and the Academy of Fine Arts, Perugia, and with Frederick Thompson Studies in New York.

Sister Irene Marie's varied teaching career has spanned from grammar school to college level. She has taught in several grade schools staffed by the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell. At the secondary level, she has served at Union Catholic Regional High School in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, at Lacordaire Academy in Montclair, New Jersey and

at Mount Saint Dominic Academy in Caldwell, New Jersey. At the college level she has been a long-time faculty member at Caldwell College. Her principal fields have been world history, art and art history, and the old testament.

Within the community, Sister Irene Marie has served as superior and school principal at Hillside, New Jersey and as superior of the motherhouse at Caldwell. She has also actively engaged in spiritual direction, having conducted retreats and days of recollection and given workshops on the subject. She is currently archivist of the Sisters of St. Dominic at Caldwell.

Among her professional associations are the American Society of Archivists, the Mid-Atlantic Archival Association, the Dominican Archivists Association and the History of Religious Women. For the Catholic Historical Records Commission, Sister Irene Marie serves on the grants committee.

Commission co-sponsors Black Catholic Symposium



From left to right, George Brown, Lucille Foreman, Dr. Janice Stewart and Bishop Francis examine part of the exhibit on Black Catholic history.

On January 31, 1991, the Commission co-sponsored, with the Archdiocesan Office of Black Catholics and the Seton Hall University Library, a symposium on Black Catholic history in New Jersey. About 400 people, mostly students from area Catholic high schools, viewed the exhibit arranged in the library by JoAnn Cotz, of the University archives, and then participated in the symposium at 12:30 p.m.

After welcoming and introductory addresses by Bishop Joseph Francis and Dr. Bernhard Scholz, University provost, Lucille Foreman, director of the Archdiocesan Office of Black Catholic Affairs, described the Black Catholic Heritage Project. Over the next two years the project, co-directed by Dr. Janice Stewart, will search for documents and artifacts of Black Catholic history and engage in an oral history project to recover data in danger of being lost with the passing of the pioneer generation.

Dr. Giles Wright, director of the Afro-American History Program of the New Jersey Historical Commission, then

continued on page 4

Black Catholic Symposium

continued from page 3

discussed the nature and uses of oral history and illustrated his points by reading an excerpt from an oral history interview he had conducted several years ago with a Black convert to Catholicism, one of the members of the "great migration" from the South to the North in the 1920s.

Theodore Brunson, director of Jersey City's Afro-American Museum, concluded the formal presentations with a discussion of the importance of identifying, gathering and preserving the artifacts of Black culture.

The lively question-and-answer period which concluded the program evidenced the interest the speakers had engendered in the audience.



Dr. Giles Wright of the New Jersey Historical Commission addresses the Black Catholic History symposium.



**Seton Hall
University**

South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2691

New counselors appointed

In January Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety, chairman of the Commission, appointed six new counselors to the Commission's advisory board. They are Reverend Monsignor Joseph Devlin of Cherry Hill, Mrs. Paul C. Matthiesen of Trenton, Dr. Julia Miller of Montclair, Mrs. Henry Murphy of Trenton, Dr. Robert A. Murphy of Lumberton and Mrs. Holt Murray of Princeton. The Commission looks forward to working with them and to the benefits their help and advice will bring.

Published by the New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission,
Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2696.

Most Reverend Peter L. Gerety, D.D., *Chairman*; Reverend Monsignor Joseph C. Shenrock, *Vice-Chairman*; Bernard Bush, Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B., Reverend Mark Dobrovolsky, Reverend Monsignor William N. Field, Reverend Monsignor Charles J. Giglio, Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C., Reverend Raymond J. Kupke, Joseph F. Mahoney, Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F., Reverend Monsignor Robert Moneta, Miriam L. Murphy, Reverend Monsignor Theodore A. Opdenaker, George L.A. Reilly, Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P., Sister Thomas Mary Salerno, S.C., Bernhard W. Scholz, Reverend Monsignor Francis R. Seymour, Reverend Monsignor Edwin V. Sullivan and Reverend John F. Wrynn, S.J.

Consulting Member: Barbara Geller

Newsletter Editor: Joseph F. Mahoney