

*An Open Invitation to*  
*Explore the Legacy of Patrick Charles Keely*

Donald Martin Reynolds

Welcome to our twenty-third annual symposium on public monuments.

ILL.: 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Symposium...

Many people have made the symposium possible over the years. Some of them have been with us almost from the beginning.

Gwen Pier, the Executive Director of the National Sculpture Society, and her associate Elizabeth Helm, for example, handle the reservations, and help to staff the registration. Mary Lou Brady, a publicist for major personalities and organizations, prepares the press release and advises on media contacts. Rosemary DePersia, founder and head of Dependable Printing in New York does our printing every year. Linda Lauro-Lazin, Professor of Computer Design at Pratt Institute, conceived our website and designs it each year. A Fulbright Scholar, painting and photography have been the foundation for her work as a teacher and practicing artist in the digital arts, internationally, over the past

30 years. Time Inc. provides the Henry Luce Room and Restaurant Associates the coffee and sodas.

We hold the symposium at the beginning of spring each year, because spring, like public monuments, is symbolic of regeneration. The earliest monuments from prehistoric times, and many since then, deal with notions of rebirth and renewal. And they always help us to remember. It's in that spirit that we commemorate Elaine Zlobik Skinner, Joan Zlobik Gdosky, and John Leo Zlobik, whose bequests make this symposium possible.

ILL.: Elaine, Joan, and John

Elaine, Joan, and John were my wife Nancy's siblings, and over the years we shared a bond that enriched all of our lives enormously. The symposium is one way we commemorate their lives and that bond that continues to unite us.

Today, in exploring Patrick Charles Keely's legacy, our speakers will deal with his churches, those sacred and permanent structures all too often threatened with neglect and demolition, and the written and spoken record of his accomplishments, which has been sadly neglected. This is certainly not a new idea.

Wayne Dynes, Professor of Art History at Hunter College, in our first symposium in 1991, traced the meaning of the term monument to ancient times. He showed us that the term monument has a duality of meaning – not only permanent structure but also

written text. Thus, in 23 BC, when the great poet Horace was preparing to publish a series of odes, he looked about him in the great city of Rome surveying the many famous monuments in bronze and stone and declared, “*Exegi monumentum aere perennius,*” “I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze.” And 12 centuries before Horace’s declaration, an Egyptian scribe referred to the writings of the learned scribes who preceded him, when he wrote, “...their teachings are their pyramids.”

It’s that duality of meaning – permanent structure and written word – that has infused the symposium over the past two decades. We continue today, as our speakers explore the legacy of Patrick Charles Keely—the monuments and the man.

But how did all this get started?

ILL.: Rudolf Wittkower

The symposium began in 1991 as a tribute to the renowned art historian Rudolf Wittkower, when the Municipal Art Society of New York City was embarked upon a worthy project called The Adopt-a-Monument Program to save the city’s more than 800 major monuments from the years of neglect that was leading to their disintegration. I, along with other interested New Yorkers, was asked to help raise the public’s awareness of the program and the need to save what I had christened New York City’s “Monuments to Neglect.”

As it was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Professor Wittkower's death, no one's life, work, and career, it seemed to me, was a better witness to the importance of public monuments than his.

Professor Wittkower's work became not only "a standard for the finest art historical scholarship of the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century" but also for the third millennium, declared Columbia Professor and former student, protégé, and friend, James Beck.

In Professor Wittkower's obituary, another student, protégé, and friend, the late Professor Howard Hibbard, wrote, "Rudolf Wittkower was the ideal teacher. Perhaps his outstanding quality was faith. He saw talent where others did not, and carefully nourished it."

So, I proposed to the Municipal Art Society a symposium that would honor not only this great scholar but also the great teacher. As you'll see from my remarks this morning, I'm hoping for great teachers, in the spirit of Rudolf Wittkower, to lead young scholars to pursue the study of the subject of the symposium this year, Patrick Charles Keely.

ILL.: Patrick Charles Keely

I'm indebted to the expertise, experience, and generosity of a number of people for the information I'm going to share with you this morning---Ted Furey's pioneering work, for example, as founder of the Keely Society, and Ryan Smith's pivotal study of anti-

Catholicism and American church design in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Gothic Arches and Latin Crosses* (2006). Furthermore, Ryan Smith's study enabled me to find Kevin Decker in Brussels and his landmark dissertation, *Grand and Godly Proportions: Cathedral Churches of the Northeast: 1840-1900* (2000). It is the first, and up to now only, complete analysis of Keely's cathedrals as well as his style as an architect. Decker's study led me to J. Phillip McAleer in Nova Scotia and his analysis of Keely as the American Pugin, "P. C. Keely, 'The Irish Pugin of America,'" *Irish Arts Review*, IV (1987).

Phillip McAleer wanted to be with us today, but he had commitments in London this week. Nonetheless, he sent me a booklet he wrote in 1984 on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the construction of the first Catholic Church in the Maritime provinces. He describes not only the history of the church but also P. C. Keely's role in the final restoration of the church that still stands. Originally dedicated to St. Peter, it is today The Basilica of St. Mary, Halifax, Nova Scotia. You all have his article thanks to Martha Barnstead, Secretary of the Department of Architecture, Technical University of Nova Scotia in Halifax, where Professor McAleer taught for many years. The faculty's devotion to him is such that Ms. Barnstead sent by courier enough copies so that everyone here today would have one.

Phillip McAleer also sent me the copy of a letter he had received from Robert Murphy, of North Haven, Connecticut, who had spent 5 years studying Keely toward a Ph.D. at New York University, but for various reasons, he was unable to complete his studies. We are

fortunate, however, in that I was able to reach Robert Murphy, and he and his wife are with us today to celebrate Keely's legacy.

In his 1987 article, McAleer demonstrated how Keely was greatly influenced by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852) of England, the famous architect and theoretician of the Gothic Revival, whose writings had as much, perhaps even more, impact on the course of architectural history as his buildings. By 1860, however, Pugin had been dead for eight years and his writings had been succeeded by the publications of John Ruskin, who turned attention from the French to the Italian Gothic. Nonetheless, Pugin remained an influence on Keely's work. Actually, Pugin had designed and built several buildings in Ireland shortly before Keely left for America. So, Keely could well have been aware of Pugin's work, and might even have seen some of his buildings.

Keely, whose churches are evidence of his devotion to his Catholic faith, certainly would have met with Pugin's approval, as Pugin himself had converted to Roman Catholicism in order to bring his life into greater unity with his theories about architecture. Pugin claimed that "the beliefs and manners of all people are embedded in the edifices they raise." As Kevin Decker noted, for 19<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholics, their churches were not simply gathering places for the faithful, they were, and for many still are, sacred buildings which reflect the importance of their beliefs. Their churches were also vehicles to profess their faith and reproach its critics in an age when anti-Catholicism was prevalent, which Ryan Smith will explore this afternoon.

McAleer noted that Pugin and Keely also shared a work ethic. They both produced many large parish churches, which could be economical as well as efficient because they would re-cycle a basic plan and a set of details. No two buildings are exact copies or replicas, but a number are skillful variations of one set of ideas. In that way, their commissions did not have to be designed from scratch, which on occasion brought criticism to both Pugin and Keely. For Pugin it was the questionable use of carving, fittings, and certain application of color to interiors. For Keely, critics, cited his use of such *trompe l'oeil* devices as plaster in place of stone and wood in place of marble.

Keely, like Pugin, was prolific.

When Keely died in 1896, his obituary in *The American Architect and Building News* called him the designer of six hundred churches many of them of cathedral rank, making him the most prolific Catholic architect of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps it is true that Keely and his office were able to produce designs for six hundred churches over a space of forty or fifty years and that fifty churches might have been in hand at once. Pugin, for example, working alone, designed more than 100 buildings in a career at its maximum of 17 years, most of his work done between 1838 and 1846. Pugin's contemporary enthusiast of the Gothic Revival, George Gilbert Scott, is said to have produced more than 730 buildings, including at least 476 churches between 1847 and 1878.

McAleer expressed a view in his 1987 article that our speakers today may wish to update--that a definitive evaluation of Keely, if such is ever actually possible, is at the moment

impossible due to the lack of a complete list of the buildings for which he was responsible, and is more seriously hampered by the near total disappearance of all papers and drawings relating to his practice. Francis Kervick, who wrote the only biography of Keely (1953), lists only 104 buildings. According to Robert Murphy, who wrote the Keely entry in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* in 1982, when he was pursuing his studies of Keely at New York University, “explicit documentation has been found for approximately 150.” Some drawings were available to Kervick, but he did not mention their location and to date it has not been possible to trace them. He published eight drawings relating to five buildings and perspective drawings (presumably by Keely) of four others. It appears that Keely’s career has to be judged primarily on the basis of those buildings which have survived and which are currently attributed to him.

While it may be that the number of churches Keely is said to have designed is exaggerated, he was apparently excessively productive, for he was the favored architect of the Roman Catholic Church in the entire eastern United States. In fact, in 1884, Keely was the second recipient of Notre Dame’s Laetare Medal. Given annually, it is the oldest and most prestigious award given to an American Catholic whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences and enriched the heritage of humanity.

As Kevin Decker has shown, rapid growth of the Roman Catholic population and the institutional development of the Church necessitated the building of thousands of new churches together with the replacement of many older structures, which had become

dilapidated or too small for the parishes they served. While in 1800, there was one bishopric and fifty priests to serve the needs of 50,000 Roman Catholics, by 1900, there were 82 dioceses, 12,000 priests and 12 million Roman Catholics.

So why was Keely the favored architect of the Catholic Church?

McAleer believes the reason was twofold. First, he was particularly reliable at completing his buildings on time and within cost. Secondly, once his expertise as designer and contractor had been established, Keely had little competition – especially from those now regarded as the pre-eminent architects of the period 1850-90, who were, by and large, not Roman Catholic. His leading non-Catholic “rival” in the United States would have been English-born Richard Upjohn (1802-1878), who designed almost exclusively, as a matter of principle, for the Protestant Episcopal Church. Ryan Smith will tell us more this afternoon.

It must be kept in mind, too, that Keely’s patrons were unanimously attracted to the Gothic Revival style. And as Frank Greenagel will show us this morning, whether Keely and his firm designed 300 or 600 churches, his work was a highly visible exemplar of the best in Gothic Revival design.

Keely, then, was without question, the favored architect of the Catholic Church and the most prolific Catholic architect of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is therefore nothing less than amazing that this “Pugin of America” is today virtually unknown and, until recently almost totally forgotten. For instance, Keely’s name is omitted from all the survey histories of nineteenth century American architecture except W. H. Pierson, Jr.’s *American Buildings and Their Architects, Technology and the Picturesque, The Corporate and Early Gothic Styles*, 1978.

Part of the reason is that Kervick’s biography of 1953 was privately published and, consequently, had limited circulation, and Kevin Decker’s dissertation written in 2000, the only comprehensive study of Keely’s cathedrals and Keely’s style, lies unread in the stacks of four university libraries. On how many reading lists, required or even suggested, do Decker’s dissertation and Kervick’s biography appear in courses now being taught in Catholic universities in the departments of art and architectural history and the humanities?

As a result of the conservation and preservation movements of the 1980s, and even before, an increasing but short-lived respect for 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture attracted some local historians and students of architecture, who began to notice Keely’s buildings. Kevin Decker identified some of them: Two M. A. theses at Catholic University of America, 1934, and 1952, and unpublished manuscripts in 1950 and 1972. The 1972 manuscript should certainly have drawn attention to Keely’s significance. It was Father Barry Bossa’s analysis of the stained glass windows of Keely’s Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Burlington, Vermont. Father Bossa was a recognized authority on Catholic liturgy. Much of the stained glass was produced by a famous studio

in France, and other stained glass was designed by Patrick Keely himself and produced in New York. Father Bossa's analysis was written the year the cathedral burned down. Because it was the first church in New England designed, created, and dedicated as a Cathedral Church, the tragedy drew national attention, yet Father Bossa's analysis, at that time, was ignored and remains even today unpublished and unknown.

Two scholarly articles in the 1980s generated little interest in Keely and his work: J. Phillip McAleer's article of 1987, already discussed, and Leslie Larson and Kenneth Story's, "Boston Churches Designed by Patrick Charles Keely (1816-1896), *Society of Architectural Historians, New England Chapter*, May 3, 1986.

Ted Furey's establishment of the Keely Society, and its many functions since 1990, have meant that when we Google Patrick Charles Keely now, we open the doors and windows to an unprecedented array of information and sources heretofore unavailable to us. Yet, academe, and especially Catholic academe, remains manifestly oblivious of Keely's contributions.

It is worth noting that it was Keely's appellation as the American Pugin that caught the attention of Keely's biographer, Francis Kervick. Professor Kervick, who taught architecture at Notre Dame and headed up the university's architecture department for many years, designed several buildings on Notre Dame's campus in the Gothic Revival

style, the style of Keely's church there, the Church of the Sacred Heart (1868-88), which was raised to the status of basilica in 1992 by Pope John Paul.

Professor Kervick designed a master plan for the development of Notre Dame's campus, but the Kervick Plan, as it was called, reflecting his and Keely's preference for the Gothic Revival style, was never executed. Herein Kervick and Keely are united as kindred and forgotten spirits. I'm indebted to Elizabeth Newman of Springfield, Massachusetts, a Kervick relative, who provided me these and other useful insights into Kervick's dedicated tenure at Notre Dame and his interest in Keely.

I became interested in Patrick Charles Keely three years ago, when Father Thomas Kallumady, pastor of Holy Innocents, a Keely church, here in New York City on West 37<sup>th</sup> Street asked me what could be done about the mural above the main altar that was deteriorating. Because the mural was painted by Constantino Brumidi, America's foremost mural painter in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its importance is not only sacred but also historical. And because Brumidi's style was unique, I thought it should be restored by conservators familiar with the cleaning and restoration of Brumidi's work.

Barbara Wolanin, curator of the Architect of the Capitol in Washington, DC, and author of *Constantino Brumidi, Architect of the Capitol* (1998, reprinted 2005), the foremost authority on Brumidi, has, since 1985, been in charge of all restoration of the literally hundreds of Brumidi murals in the US Capitol building. So, we invited several conservators she recommended to make proposals, and from them we selected Christiana

Cunningham-Adams who brought in the award-winning conservators Elizabeth Kendall and Peter Schoenman from Chicago. They completed their restoration this January, which you can see in our website. The sanctuary also needed to be painted and a new lighting system was needed for both the mural and the sanctuary.

John Canning, experienced with Keely restorations, who you'll be hearing this afternoon, took paint samples, which revealed the original colors of the sanctuary when Brumidi painted the mural in 1870. John's color samples also revealed a stencil pattern that apparently extended throughout the church, a characteristic of many of Keely's churches. That information enabled Elizabeth and Peter and the lighting designer, Jason Livingston, to select the appropriate color for the architectural frame that surrounds the mural and the appropriate lighting for the mural and the sanctuary. In that way, the tones of the restored mural, the architectural frame surrounding the mural, and the lighting are all complementary.

Thomas Venturella, a specialist in the restoration of stained glass, who will discuss stained glass processes this afternoon, revealed still more about Keely. He identified the stained glass in Holy Innocents as by Franz Mayer, one of the foremost stained glass producers of the 19th century. You'll hear more about Keely and German stained glass this afternoon from Francis Green. And this morning, Delma Tallerico will tell us how it was characteristic of Keely to employ the leading painters, sculptors, and artisans of the period to achieve his designs.

In 2001, Father Barry Boss wrote a detailed analysis of how every aspect of Keely's design of Holy Innocents, which is true for all Keely's churches, draws the worshippers' eyes to the altar, because the altar is the site of the foundation of Catholic faith, the Eucharist. For the Catholic, it's on the altar at Mass that what is called the un-bloody sacrifice of Calvary takes place when bread and wine are changed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, called the transubstantiation. That is why Keely commissioned such depictions as the Crucifixion over the main altar as at Holy Innocents.

Thus, it is understandable why Keely, himself, as a devout Catholic, designed, or was intimately involved in the designs, of his altars, the focal points of his churches, as well as of all the architectural and decorative aspects oriented to those altars.

It is important to bear in mind that even though Keely is best remembered as a proponent of the Gothic Revival, his career of 40 to 50 years spanned the diverse and changing developments throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so he also designed churches that departed from the Gothic. Two churches for the Jesuits serve as examples, one early in his career, the other later. The Church of the Immaculate Conception, 1858-61, in Boston, and the church of St. Francis Xavier, 1882, in New York, are Early Christian basilica in plan, or like hall churches.

Two pamphlets by Patrick Brewiss illustrating architect Thomas Fenniman's 12-million-dollar restoration of St. Francis Xavier completed two years ago, reveal the magnificence of Keely's design.

Another multi-million-dollar restoration of a Keely Church in New York City, St. Brigid, was only recently completed. In the video link to our website, architect Michael Doyle's walk-through of his firm's restoration of the Church of St. Brigid illustrates Keely's characteristic attention to detail, even to the carving of the reredos by Keely himself.

This brings us to consider Keely churches still in peril.

Ted Furey brought several to my attention: Philadelphia's Church of the Assumption, the Church of the Holy Name in Chicopee, Mass, St. Augustine's in South Boston, and the Holy Trinity German Church in Boston, which, according to Ted, the Boston Archdiocese says has "no significant historical value."

Several months ago, when Tom Venturella returned from a business trip to Chicago, he told me of the plight of Keely's Church of St. James there. He learned that Chicago journalist, Lee Bey, had informed his readers of the fate of St. James, which the archdiocese reports is structurally unsound, beyond repair, and, therefore, to be demolished. Consequently, St. James's parishioners organized the "Friends of St. James" to try to persuade the Archdiocese to halt demolition. Duane Haggerty, a parishioner and active in architectural preservation in Chicago learned of the symposium and asked that I

share with you today what the Friends of St. James are doing. Here, in this five-minute video, is their story.

SHOW ST. JAMES VIDEO HERE.

It doesn't take a genius to understand that these threats to churches by America's foremost Catholic architect of the 19<sup>th</sup> century underscore the need of their historical recognition and the preservation of Patrick Charles Keely's patrimony for succeeding generations. That means there should be an academic component to any hope for that recognition and preservation—the serious study of Keely's contribution to our nation's built environment.

Ideally, great teachers, in the tradition and spirit of Rudolf Wittkower, would bring the weight of their own experience and commitment to the study and preservation of the world's great monuments to encourage young scholars to pursue Keely studies.

There are dissertations to be written and careers for young scholars to be made, which would generate the needed awareness and pressure to restore Keely's churches that are threatened and to preserve those that are vulnerable through neglect.

As a beginning, in Kevin Decker's *Grand and Godly Proportions: Cathedral Churches of the Northeast, 1840-1900*, we already have the prototype for a study to “find” Keely's

missing churches and church buildings, as Randall Gabrielan, Historian for Monmouth County, New Jersey, has proposed.

I am grateful to our speakers today, whose contributions, it seems to me, constitute an open invitation to make that happen.

Friday, March 22, 2013