

Patrick Charles Keely, Architect

Patrick Charles Keely (August 9, 1816 — August 11, 1896) was an Irish-American architect widely known both in the United States and Europe as the “pioneer Catholic architect of America” and the designer and builder of over six hundred churches and hundreds of other institutional buildings for the Roman Catholic Church or Roman Catholic patrons in the eastern United States and Canada.

He was born in Kilkenny, Ireland and studied architecture under his father. He had designed and built a number of churches in Europe before coming to America at the age of 26 where he met the Rev. Sylvester Malone, a Roman Catholic priest his own age. In 1846 Malone was sent to form a parish near the Brooklyn waterfront in the Williamsburg neighborhood. Together with Keely, he worked out a plan for a Gothic church possessing pointed arches, pinnacles, and a few buttresses. Working as a carpenter, Keely produced designs from which was built the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in 1847.

The Church of Sts. Peter and Paul was considered an epoch in Catholic building in America. The much-praised work (demolished in 1957) established him as a competent architect and builder at a time when a number of new Roman Catholic churches were being planned but a relative scarcity of competent architects of the Roman Catholic faith, and Keely's reputation for honesty and integrity quickly made him a popular choice among the hierarchy and clergy throughout the eastern United States.

Thereafter, Keely effectively became the in-house architect for the Roman Catholic archdioceses and was approached from all sides with requests for designs of churches and other necessary structures for an expanding religious life. He designed and built every Catholic Cathedral in New York (except for St. Patrick's in NYC), the Sacred Heart Basilica at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend Indiana, Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago, and all of the Cathedrals in New England built in the mid-19th century. He was also the designer of many of the altars in these churches and was known to have personally carved many of them, including Saint Joseph Church, in 1869 (which would later become Saint Joseph Cathedral in 1884).

Holy Trinity Church in South Boston

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In the early 19th Century, German immigrants landing in Boston faced the challenge of adapting to a new social environment, while striving to preserve their unique cultural and religious heritage. Foremost among their concerns was the fear that a rapid assimilation into American society would result in a loss of their cultural identity and even of their Faith.

While Boston's predominantly Irish pastors tried to be responsive to the needs of their German Catholic flock, none of them spoke German, and so they could neither preach nor hear confessions in the immigrants' native tongue. While secular clergy came from Germany at the request of the Bishop of Boston, that was not a lasting resolution. It was Rev. John Stephen Raffener from the Diocese of New York who recognizing the need for a permanent German parish and clergy who diligently worked for the establishment of a German national parish. Under his leadership, the cornerstone for the first Holy Trinity (German) Church was laid in June 1842 and the church building was completed and the first mass celebrated in June 1844.

As the German population grew, it became evident that a bigger church was needed. After many trials and tribulations, the cornerstone of the existing church was finally laid by Bishop John Williams on November 10, 1872 and construction began under the architecture of Patrick Keely. On May 27, 1877, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, Archbishop Williams (who became Boston's first archbishop in 1875) dedicated the new church, which was the only national German Catholic Church in all of New England.

What Does This Mean for Saint Joseph Cathedral?

In 2008, Holy Trinity Church in Boston was suppressed, and its patrimony assigned to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, another Keely church, as described above. The Rector of Holy Cross Cathedral has graciously offered to Saint Joseph Cathedral in Manchester the magnificent Reredos (or high altar), the Stations of the Cross, and several other sacred appointments of Holy Trinity Church to be incorporated into our Cathedral, should this prospect be feasible.

Reasons for this consideration are aimed towards the restoration of our Cathedral, and the preservation of the Keely legacy. Saint Joseph Cathedral, prior to 1969, featured such a Reredos in marble (see attached photographs). The renovation of the Cathedral in 1969 saw the destruction of the marble reredos with a wrecking ball and sledge hammers, as well as the stripping away of the Stations of the Cross and other sacred appointments. One could reasonably argue whether or not the Second Vatican Council truly called for such a radical transformation, wherein the magnificent patrimony of the Cathedral would literally be torn down and destroyed.

1. **The Reredos:** The re-introduction of the Reredos from Holy Trinity Church would be a point of departure for a true restoration of our Cathedral church, integrating into its interior architecture once again the grandeur foreseen by Patrick Keely. It is an historical work of art that would enhance the beauty of our Cathedral, and could be the impetus for the much-needed restoration work of the interior to continue. The Reredos would necessarily have to be modified to fit our Cathedral sanctuary, but it is feasible.

The reredos symbolizes God's presence in our lives and will help to direct our focus on the presence of God before, during and after liturgical services. By placing the tabernacle within the reredos, as originally intended, the faithful will be reminded that Jesus is the center of our lives.

2. **The Stations of the Cross:** Our Cathedral is the only Cathedral we know of that does not have Stations of the Cross. They were stripped out of the Cathedral in the 1969 renovation. The Stations of the Cross from Holy Trinity are in magnificent condition and are beautifully carved works of art. Imagine being able to walk, pray and meditate on the Stations of the Cross in our Cathedral once again!
3. **The Keely connection:** To have the opportunity to receive an Altar from a Patrick Keely church is a once in a lifetime opportunity. It replaces what we lost 45 years ago. It lends an historical importance to the architecture of our Catholic Churches around the country and to our Cathedral. Our worship spaces are meant to be beautiful and to have symbols that represent the greatness of God's creation so that we can worship more fully.

Michael S. Rose, Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2001 wrote:

"Church architecture affects the way man worships; the way he worships affects what he believes; and what he believes affects not only his personal relationship with God but how he conducts himself in his daily life."

In summary, this will be the beginning of the restoration of the Cathedral to its original architectural splendor, giving us a beautiful, yet reverent place to worship as the Mother Church for the Diocese of Manchester.