



150 Years 1859-2009

Historical Article

HOLY CROSS ↔ IMMACULATA
HONOR ↔ CHERISH ↔ INSPIRE

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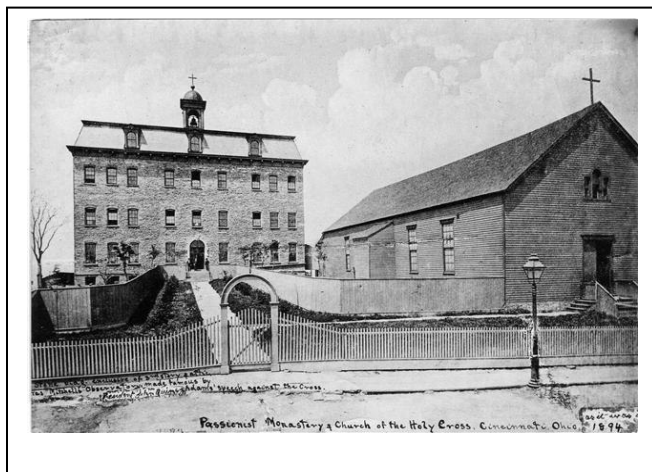
Edition VI

The Passionists Purchase an Observatory

Archbishop John Baptist Purcell invited the Passionist Order of Priests to accept the administration of Immaculata Parish in 1870. After exploring the possibilities involved in forming a new community in Cincinnati, they accepted Purcell's offer and took over the day to day ministry of Immaculata Parish in 1871, replacing the archdiocesan priests who had tended to the parish since its first mass in 1860.

The first Passionist Superior of the parish was Fr. Guido Matassi (Guido Street is named after him) who arrived at Immaculata, and was installed by Archbishop Purcell on May 23, 1871. Fr. Guido was no slacker. He immediately realized that the Immaculata Rectory was too small to accommodate him and the four Passionists who joined him in Cincinnati. He began to look for a suitable building that would accommodate a religious community which had designs on growing.

As luck would have it, the Mitchel Observatory, founded in 1843 and situated two blocks west of Immaculata had been abandoned in 1871. The Cincinnati skies had become obscured by coal and wood smoke from factories in the city basin and viewing the heavens was increasingly difficult. The Observatory was moved to Mt. Lookout and reopened in 1873 where it still resides.



The Passionist Monastery as it looked in 1894. The building on the right is the original Holy Cross Church, built in 1873, replaced in 1895.

The land that the Observatory occupied was donated to the Cincinnati Astronomical Society in 1843 by Nicholas Longworth, a very wealthy Cincinnati attorney who owned land on what was then known as Mt. Ida (Mt. Ida was renamed Mt. Adams to honor John Quincy Adams after he laid the corner stone for the Observatory). Mr. Longworth's agreement with the CAS stipulated that if the property were no longer used as an Observatory, it would revert back to him or his heirs. Fr. Guido diplomatically approached Longworth's heirs (Nicholas Longworth died in 1863) with an offer for the land and building. The heirs countered with terms that were unacceptable to Fr. Guido.

Enter Sarah Peter, the sixth Governor of Ohio's daughter, and an important figure in the growth and development of Immaculata and Holy Cross parishes. Sarah was a wealthy convert to Catholicism who worked tirelessly to bring religious orders to Cincinnati. She convinced the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, the Little Sisters of the Poor, The Children of Mary, the Franciscan Brothers, the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Passionist Fathers to send members to Cincinnati to establish communities.

Sarah supported the orders with generous financial contributions and used her influence to help them carry out their ministries. Sarah and her son, prominent Harvard-trained Cincinnati attorney Rufus King, took up Fr. Guido's cause and brokered a deal whereby the City of Cincinnati purchased the property from the Longworth heirs. The City then negotiated with Fr. Guido who signed a ninety nine year lease rental and acquired rights to the property on February 22, 1872. The annual lease was \$3000 with an option to buy for \$50,000. The Passionists picked up the option and made the last payment on April 24, 1889. All the proceeds from the monastery purchase and rent went to the endowment of the School of Drawing and Design at the University of Cincinnati.

The Passionists added a third story to the former observatory, remodeled the interior to accommodate their needs and occupied the space in June of 1873. Fr. Guido chose to name the monastery Holy Cross Monastery and had a cross placed on the belfry that was visible from most points in the city.

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Holy Cross Monastery - Continued from Page 1

On August 4, 1899, the City Building Inspector condemned Holy Cross Monastery as unsafe and the Passionists planned to build a new residence in the same location. The work of taking down the old monastery began on September 7, 1899 and the new monastery was dedicated on June 9, 1901. It was representative of the Italian Renaissance Revival style, matching that of the Church. The architects were Louis Piket and Sons, the same architects that designed Immaculata Church.

The Catholic Telegraph had this to say about the new monastery: "Towering as it does from the heights of Mt. Adams, it can be seen from all parts of the city, and is a structure of which not only the people on Mt. Adams and vicinity, but also those of the whole city, may feel justly proud."

~ Jim Steiner

St. Paul of the Cross and the Passionist Order

What do Babe Ruth and the Good Friday prayers on the Mt. Adams steps have in common? Both are said to reflect missions of the Passionist Fathers who established Holy Cross Church.

The Passionist Order was formed by St. Paul of the Cross in Italy. Born Paolo Francesco Danei on January 3, 1694 in the town of Ovada between Genoa and Turin, he was the son of a wealthy merchant family. While still a layman, in 1720, he retired to a narrow cell, barefooted and bareheaded, to write the Rules of his proposed new order of priests. In 1725 Pope Benedict XIII authorized him and his younger brother John Baptist to form the order according to the Rules. The Pope ordained the two brothers in the Vatican Basilica on June 7, 1727. They proceeded to establish their first community at Monte Argentario in the Province of Grosseto, Italy.

Pope Clement XIV later gave St. Paul and his companions the Church of Sts. John and Paul in Rome, which continues as the mother-house of the congregation. St. Paul of the Cross saw the Passion of Christ as the most overwhelming sign of God's love. The objective of the Passionists, therefore, was and remains to awaken in the faithful the memory of the Passion of Christ. To that end, to the usual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience they added the promotion of devotion to the Passion of Our Divine Savior. The Passionists wear upon their long black tunics the badge of the congregation shaped in the form of a heart surmounted by a white cross. Inscribed on the badge are the words "Jesu XPI Passio," the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Over time, after the death of St. Paul in 1775, the Passionists branched out from Italy to many other countries, including England, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium, France, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Australia and Bulgaria. They came to the United States in 1852 at the invitation of the Bishop of Pittsburgh. Within 20 years they had locations in Hoboken,

New Jersey, Dunkirk, New York, Baltimore, Maryland, Louisville, Kentucky and, of course, Cincinnati.

It was in Baltimore that George Herman Ruth was baptized as a boy in 1906 by a Passionist priest who was the chaplain at the St. Mary's Industrial School where the Babe was a student. The Babe received his First Communion there a week later and was confirmed the next year.

The Passionists have stressed over the centuries devotional experiences, such as novenas, stations of the cross, forty hours and the lighting of candles. They have long advocated the healing graces associated with the Catholic devotional life. In 2001 the Passionist Historian and Director of the Passionist Historical Archives, Fr. Rob Carbonneau, C.P., attributed "making the steps on Good Friday at Mount Adams in Cincinnati, Ohio" to the Passionists' enduring stress on devotions.

Another hallmark of the Passionists, since the example of their founder, has been an austere life style. The Passionists considered the American quest for prosperity a moral dilemma for U.S. Christians and a marked contrast to the Passionists' evangelical poverty.

The body of St. Paul of the Cross lies in the Church of Sts. John and Paul in Rome. St. Paul was canonized on June 29, 1867. Today there are over 2,000 Passionist priests and brothers and thousands of Passionist women religious in 52 countries.

~Ed Adams

Sources: *Catholic Encyclopedia*, *St. Paul of the Cross*; *Passionists Carbonneau*, *Passionists in the United States in 1852 Website*, *The Passionists*, *St. Paul of the Cross Province*