

The Bells of St Patrick's

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In 1900, the congregation of St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Glen Cove, on the north shore of Long Island, constructed a new church to replace a small, outdated wooden structure which they had outgrown. Two wealthy Gold Coast families – one from Glen Cove, one from Cold Spring Harbor – joined together to contribute a peal of bells to crown the new edifice.

The origins of St Patrick's Church can be traced back to 1849, when Father John McGinnis of Jamaica incorporated Glen Cove into his monthly itinerary of stops (which included Cold Spring Harbor, Hempstead, and eventually Westbury) to minister to the handful of Catholics who had settled in the small village and surrounding communities. The Glen Cove congrega-

tion initially consisted of a mere 17 members, 6 of whom came from Oyster Bay by stage to attend services. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1899a)

Initially mass was celebrated outdoors, beneath a mulberry tree near a large boulder at Garvies Point. Soon, the congregation was able to lease a small second story room in a block of stores and offices attached to the grist mill on Mill Street (now Pulaski Street) near its intersection with Glen Street in downtown Glen Cove. According to local tradition, they "made a small altar and used boards and barrels for seating. The ladies provided the linen for the use of the priest in conducting the service" (Coles and Van Santvoord, 1967)

With the establishment of the Glen Cove Starch Manu-



facturing Company (better known colloquially as the “Duryea Starch Works”) in the early 1850’s, many Irish immigrants who had fled the famine and poverty in their homeland were drawn to Glen Cove in the hope of finding work. The congregation grew rapidly. In 1857, then under the leadership of Father Patrick Kelly, they constructed a small, 60 foot by 30 foot wood frame church on a parcel of land which they had purchased for \$1800. (Mulrenan, 1871) The parcel was situated atop a high hill near the corner of modern-day Pearsall Avenue and Glen Street. St Patrick’s Church was dedicated by Bishop James Loughlin on Sunday, 16 August 1857. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1857). Father James McEnroe was named pastor on 27 October 1858, replacing Father Kelly. Born in County Cavan, Ireland, in 1832 “Father James” was popular with the congregation, and served St Patrick’s Church for forty years. (Riordan et alia, 1914)

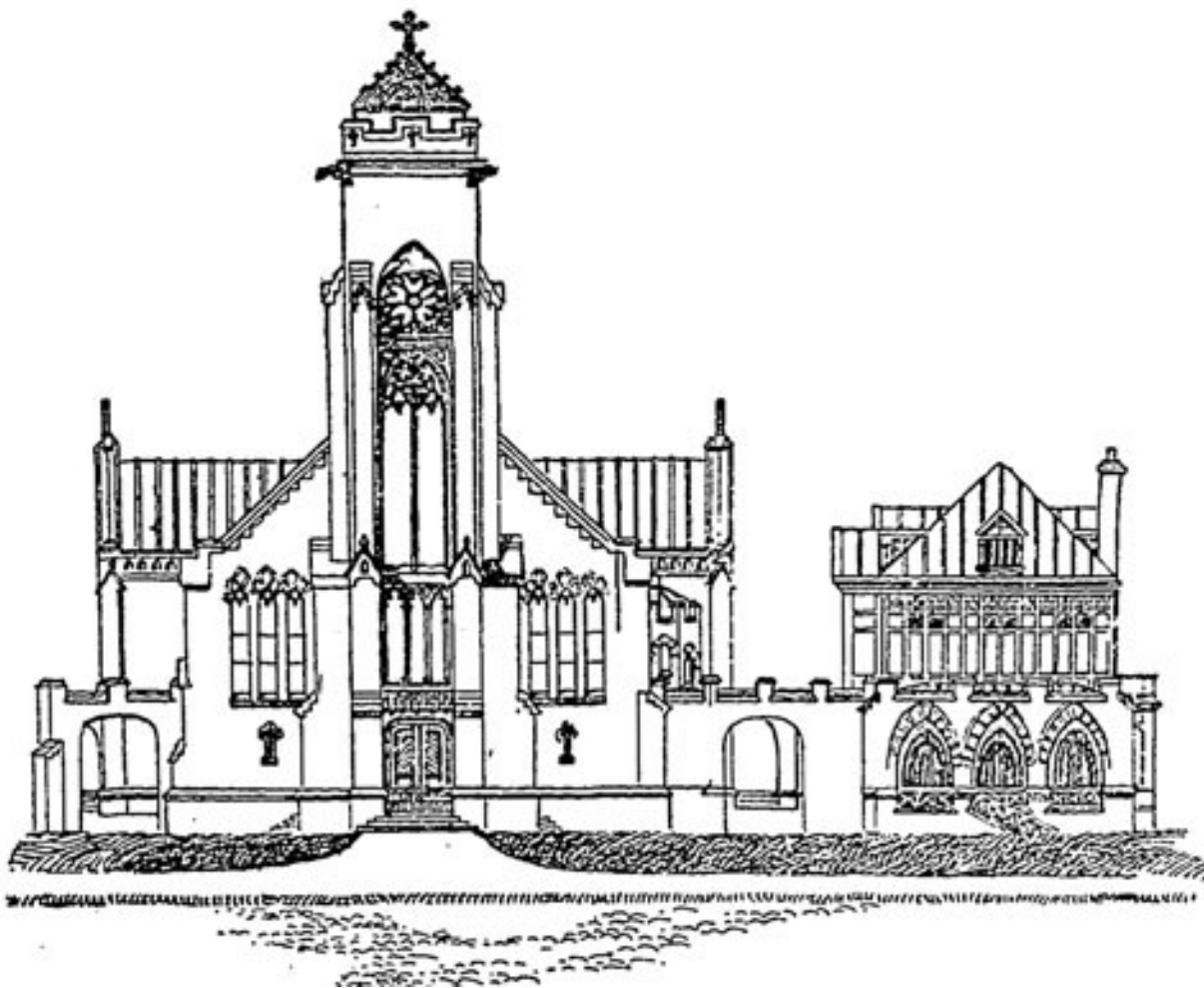
When Father McEnroe was promoted to the pastorate of the Holy Rosary Church of Brooklyn, Father Bernard J O’Reilly was appointed to fill his place at St Patrick’s. Like McEnroe, O’Reilly was a native of County Cavan in Ireland. He studied theology at All Hallows College in Dublin and was ordained into the priesthood on 24 June 1890, just before he emigrated to the United States.

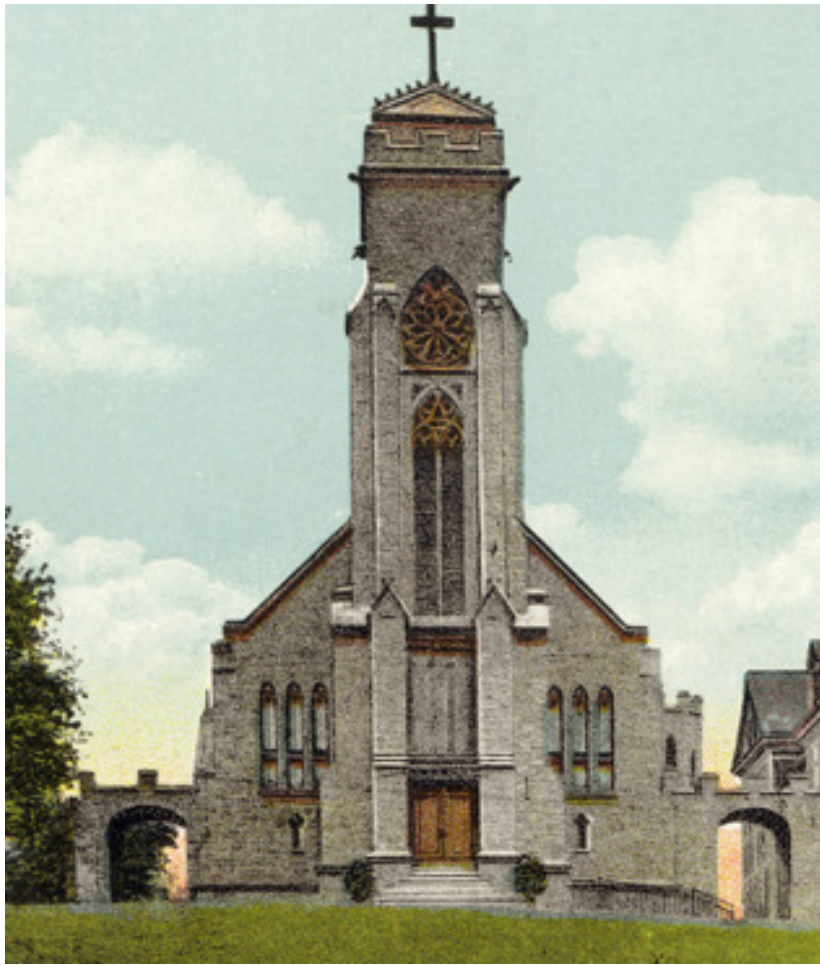
It was clear to Father O’Reilly that the small wooden

church, although enlarged since its original construction, was inadequate to serve the needs of 800 parishioners. A new church was needed. It was decided to construct the new building atop the same hill, which commanded a picturesque view of the valley in which the village of Glen Cove was nestled.

The new church was designed by Raymond Francis Almirall (born 1869, died 1939) of the architectural firm of Ingles & Almirall. A native of Brooklyn, Almirall had studied at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and Cornell University before attending the prestigious Ecole in Paris. After graduation from the Ecole in 1896, he partnered for a period with New York City architect John W. Ingles. The firm re-designed the Ormand Hotel in Ormand Beach, Florida for Arthur Flagler of Standard Oil, and designed the City Hall in Binghamton New York. Almirall served as consulting architect to the Brooklyn Public Library, and designed the library’s main library building as well as the Pacific, Eastern Parkway, Bushwick and Prospect branch libraries; he was also commissioned to design the Fordham Hospital in the Bronx and Sea View Hospital on Staten Island. (New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1985)

Almirall undertook many ecclesiastical commissions during his career. Even before graduating from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts he designed the altar at the Church of the Nativity in Brook-





lyn (NY Times, 1893). He was responsible for the design of St Patrick's Church in Long Island City, St Rita's Church in Ravenswood, in Queens, and Guardian Angel Church in Coney Island. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1900a). He designed St Dominic's Church in Oyster Bay (NY Times 1897; Hammond, 2009) He was also a member of Governor Theodore Roosevelt's "Tenement House Commission," a panel created to examine the plight of people living in the slum tenements of New York City, and recommend new laws that would prevent such inhuman conditions. (NY Times, 1900a)

One of the stranger episodes of Almirall's career, which occurred years after he completed the design for St Patrick's Church in Glen Cove was his service as foreman of a special Extraordinary Grand Jury empanelled to investigate communist anarchists in New York City. Under Almirall's guidance, the proceedings very rapidly spun utterly out of control. The grand jury was soon instead investigating the administration of New York City Mayor John Francis Hylan, interfering with criminal investigations of corruption related to the subway system that were being conducted by the District Attorney's office, attempting to investigate organized crime, attempting to censure elected officials, and, at its lowest ebb, its members took a field trip to the local jail to make general inquiries of the inmates to see if they knew anything about crime in New York City. While the "Almirall Grand Jury" generated salacious headlines, publicly demonstrated a profound inability to understand

their mission statement, and made wild speculative claims, when they were finally disbanded in 1922 they had not been able to generate any evidence worthy of an indictment. (NY Times, 1922) If nothing else, the "Almirall Grand Jury" amply demonstrated that anti-anarchists oft-times created more anarchy than anarchists.

After making himself into the subject of widespread ridicule, Almirall would redeem himself by accepting a posting to France to serve as agent for Bosworth Welles, the architect in charge of the restoration of the Palace of Versailles and the *Petit Trianon*, *Queen Marie Antoinette's private retreat palace grounds*. The two projects were both heavily subsidized by John D Rockefeller. Almirall would be made a chevalier of the Legion of Honor for his work on the restoration effort. (NY Times, 1928)

Almirall's design for the new St. Patrick's Church in Glen Cove consisted of a modern re-envisioning of classic Irish Gothic cathedral architecture. The building would be 60 feet wide facing Glen Street, and 165 feet deep. The elevation from the floor to the highest peak of the roof would be 60 feet, with an imposing 106 foot tall bell tower attached to the front of the west side of the building, overlooking the valley through which Glen Cove Creek ran. The facade of the new church would be made from rustic gray granite blocks from quarries near

Greenwich Connecticut, irregularly cut and shaped, reminiscent of Irish fieldstone walls. [While classified by the building industry as "granite", the stone is actually a mica diorite gneiss. Two quarries in the Greenwich area were producing this stone on a large scale during the period that St Patrick's Church was being constructed: the Voorhis Quarry, established in 1833, and the Ritch Quarry, established in the 1840's. Both quarries were located on the shores of Byram Harbor, making transportation of quarried stone blocks extremely convenient. These quarries both supplied stone for numerous churches in the New York and southern New England, as well as for Fort Schuyler in New York City (Dale and Nelson, 1911)] The decorative coping on the walls, the buttress caps, and the trimming and tracery work on the facade would be made from reddish-brown terra cotta, creating a rather stunning, yet earthy, contrast with the blue-gray stone.

About mid May, 1899, the old wooden church was demolished to make way for the new church. The congregation moved into temporary quarters in a rented hall on Glen Street in Glen Cove.

The laying of the cornerstone was held on Sunday, 24 September 1899. A special train was scheduled, leaving from the Flatbush Avenue station to carry friends and former parishioners of Father O'Reilly, a testimony to his popularity. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1899b)

The parishioners marched in procession to the church site.

The solemn parade was headed by some of the oldest men in the parish – Patrick Coughlan, Peter McGuire, John Callaghan, James McKenna, John McAlone, James Deasy, Peter Lamb, James Dunn, Peter Dailey, Andrew McGoey, Richard Lockwood, and Peter Martin. Some of whom had been members for more than 40 years. Following closely behind was the Young Men’s Catholic Club and the Holy Name Society.

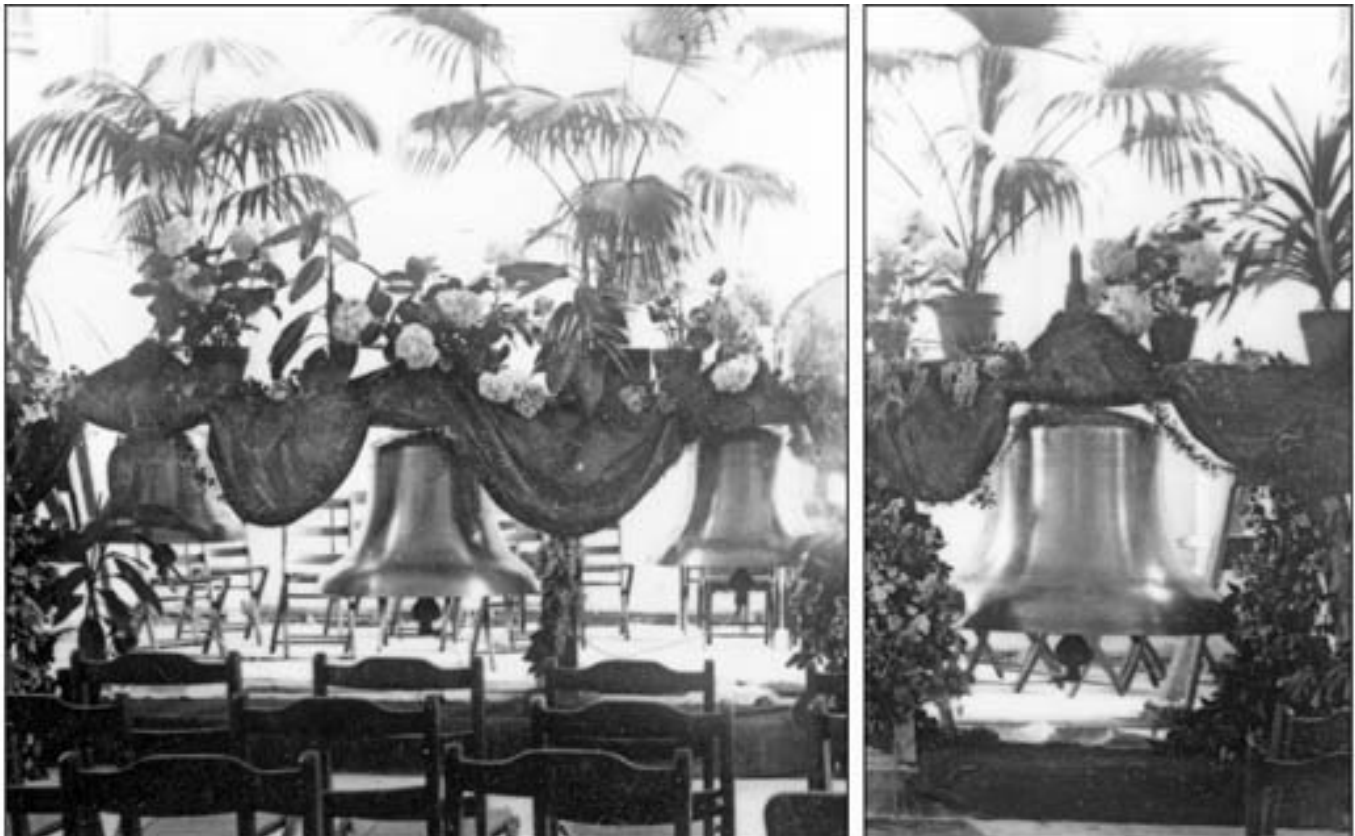
At the church site, more than 1,000 people gathered to witness Bishop Charles E McDonnell set the cornerstone in position using a silver mason’s trowel to place the mortar. Rev Edward McCarty of St Augustine’s Church in Brooklyn delivered a sermon. Miss Minnie Gallagher, of St Raphael’s Church in Manhattan, performed two solos: “Fear Not, O Israel” and “The Holy City.” Miss Rose Rogers, St Patrick’s own the church organist, was accompanied by the Glen Cove Orchestra to provide music for the occasion.

As work progressed on the church, it was decided that a peal of bells was needed for the tower. Two local men, James K O Sherwood and Louis V Bell, described by the New York Times as “two Protestant Summer residents of the town,” (NY Times, 1900b) offered to donate the bells. James Kilborn Ogden Sherwood had been a summer resident of Glen Cove since the 1880’s. Born in 1845, he went west in 1864 during the Helena, Montana gold rush. Sherwood intelligently decided that the real profit in gold rushes lie not in squatting in an ice cold mountain stream panning for flakes of gold, but in providing provisions to the miners. He co-founded a grocery jobbing business called Levy, Sherwood & Co., which he operated until 1874, then

became involved in railroad development in different regions of the country. Louis V Bell was the son of a successful New York City stock broker. He owned an estate in Cold Spring Harbor and devoted most of his leisure time to racing ponies.

The parishioners turned to the Meneely Bell Company, that nation’s premier producers of cast bronze bells, to cast the bells for St Patrick’s Church. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1900b) The Meneely Bell Co. could trace its origins to 1826 in the Troy, New York area, and supplied some of the finest bells, chimes and carillons to churches, government buildings, universities, public and private memorials, and even estates. The East Island estate of J P Morgan had a Meneely bell to announce the arrival of visitors; Charles Pratt’s mausoleum had a nine-bell set of chimes.

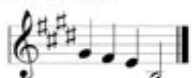
It was decided that the bells for St Patrick’s would be designed to ring the famous “Westminster Quarters” (also known as the “Cambridge Quarters”). The use of this chime originated at the church of St Mary the Great in Cambridge, England; while historians are not certain which of three men actually wrote it (Dr Joseph Jowett, Dr John Randall and William Crotch have all been nominated as author) it was created in the 1790’s to be struck by a clock at St Mary the Great, and was based on a variation of a musical notes from Handel’s *Messiah*. The Westminster Quarters are most famously connected with Big Ben and the clock tower at Palace of Westminster (the House of Parliament) in London. (Big Ben is actually not the name of the clock tower, but is merely the nickname for the largest of the clock tower’s five bells.)



Details of the bells for St Patrick’s Church at their dedication in May, 1900. From left to right, the 500 pound C bell; the 1200 pound A Flat bell; the 800 pound B Flat bell, and finally the 3,000 pound E Flat bell.

The notes of the Westminster Quarters are as follows¹ :

FIRST QUARTER:



SECOND QUARTER:



THIRD QUARTER:



FULL HOUR:



The words that accompany the tune are traditionally said to be:

*Oh, Lord our God
Be thou our guide
That by thy help
No foot may slide*

It was believed to be the first time the Westminster Quarters were used in a Catholic church on Long Island.

The largest of the bells cast for St Patrick's was a 3,000 pound bell which struck an E flat note. The next smallest was a 1,200 pound A flat bell, then an 800 pound B flat, followed by a 500 pound C bell. All told, 5,500 pounds of bronze went into making the new peal of bells for St Patrick's church. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1900b) In keeping with a tradition that dates back to early medieval Europe, the new bells were each given names: St Mary, St Patrick, St. Joseph, and St Anthony (the author has not been able to establish which was which). (NY Times, 1900b)

A writer on the staff of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle commented "Those who live, or pass, within hearing of these bells may expect a musical treat, for the donors spared no pains or expense in investigating bells and in placing their order for same." (Brooklyn Eagle, 1900b)

The formal blessing of the bells was scheduled for Sunday, 20 May 1900, at 3:30 in the afternoon. Monsignor Patrick J McNamara, a native of County Clare who had graduated from New York City's College of St Francis Xavier in 1867, was to officiate. (Riordan, Michael J. et alia, 1914; Brooklyn Eagle, 1900b)

The members of the Young Men's Catholic Society and the Holy Name Society gathered at Kirk's Block on Glen Street,

where their respective organizations rented rooms for their meetings. Dressed in their organization's regalia, they marched the short distance to St Patrick's Church. The parade was lead by a unit of uniformed cadets from the school ship *St Marys*. The vessel was a floating classroom operated by the New York City Board of Education. In winter it operated much like an ordinary grammar school; in the summer, the students were taught the practical aspects of the maritime service as the vessel cruised around the world. Traditionally the students were given several weeks shake-down at Glen Cove before heading out into the Atlantic.

The parade arrived at the top of the hill on which St Patrick's Church was perched. The structure was still incomplete. The bells had been temporarily suspended from strong beams supported by wooden trusses... the three highest bells from one beam, the heaviest bell from another. The beams were concealed beneath cloth drapery and tropical hothouse foliage and potted flowers were scattered around to frame the bells and conceal the trusses. [A photograph taken at the time of the dedication shows what may be a scale model of the bell tower sitting atop the largest bell, although the fact that the bells are back-lit obscures much of the detail.]

More than 500 people assembled to watch the bells being blessed. The Rev. Dr. William F McGinnis of Brooklyn's St Francis Xavier's Church delivered the sermon. The Glen Cove Orchestra performed, and several soloists from churches in Brooklyn gave recitals.

Sherwood's 20 year old daughter, Anna May, was permitted the honor of ringing the bells for the first time after the ceremony was concluded. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1900c)

The new St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church would not be completed for another four months. It was dedicated on 30 September, 1900, roughly a year after work was begun.

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Brooklyn Eagle 1899c	Church Cornerstone Laid Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 25 September 1899
Brooklyn Eagle 1900a	New Church for Coney Island Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 20 May 1900

1) The image of the musical notes for the Westminster Quarters is a composite of multiple images taken from Wikipedia's Wikimedia Commons, posted by user Antonsusi as public domain images. The files were located at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Westminster_Quarter_1.svg ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Westminster_Quarter_2.svg ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Westminster_Quarter_3.svg , and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Westminster_Quarter_4.svg .

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