

THE VIEW FROM THE BLUFF

MARCH 2018

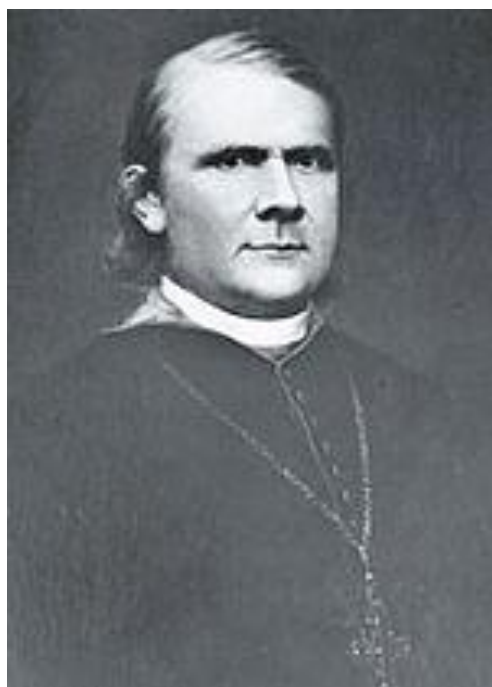
SISTERS OF CHARITY OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

I FOUND IT
IN THE ARCHIVES

Father Andrew Byrne

Ecclesiastical Superior 1832-1835



Andrew Byrne was born in Navan, County Meath, Ireland. The date of his birth is unknown though parish records note that he was baptized on December 3, 1802. He was a seminarian at St. Fenian's College, Navan, in 1820 when Bishop England visited seeking priests for the newly created Diocese of Charleston. Andrew volunteered and arrived in Charleston in the early 1820s.



St. Finian's College

He completed his priestly studies in the Seminary established by Bishop England who ordained him on November 11, 1827. After first serving in North Carolina, Father Byrne was named Pastor of St. Mary's Church, Charleston, in 1830.

In July 1832, prior to leaving for Europe, Bishop England appointed Father Byrne Ecclesiastical Superior of the Sisters of Our Lady of

Mercy. In January 1833 while Bishop England was in Rome, Father Byrne, with the unanimous approval of the Sisters, appointed Sister M. Benedicta Datty Mother Superior of the Community.

A handwritten account of the early history of the Community states that Father Byrne visited the Sisters' School daily, taught a class in Church music, prepared pupils for first Holy Communion and visited Catholic parents in the city to encourage them to send their children to the Sisters' School. In order to attract more students, he permitted the sisters to teach French, music and dancing. The following year, 1834, Father Byrne rented a house for the Sisters on Beaufain Street, one door west of Coming Street. There for the first time the Sisters had a small chapel with the Blessed Sacrament under their own roof.

For unknown reasons Father Byrne resigned as Ecclesiastical Superior in 1835. He left the Diocese of Charleston in 1836 and transferred to the Diocese of New York. After serving as Pastor of two Manhattan parishes, he founded a third which he named St. Andrew. [The Roman Catholic Church of St. Andrew was established in 1843 when Father Andrew Byrne transformed Carroll Hall into St. Andrew's Church. Built in 1818 for the Congregational Society of United Christian Friends, Carroll Hall was, in 1841, the site where Catholics rallied to fight denial of public funding for parochial schools. Father Byrne was the pastor until 1844.] One historian said, "He distinguished himself as a preacher-pastor being gifted with a rich, powerful voice, an imposing presence and a flow of language that rarely failed to move an audience."

When Pope Gregory XVI erected the Diocese of Little Rock on November 28, 1843, Byrne was named Bishop. He was consecrated as Arkansas' first Catholic Bishop on March 10, 1844 at Old Saint Patrick's Cathedral on Mott Street, NYC. He arrived in Little Rock three months later with just two other priests to minister to all of Arkansas.

Five years later in May 1849 Bishop Byrne wrote to Sister Veronica Cagney, General Secretary of the OLM Community, inquiring about the possibility of obtaining sisters for his diocese.

Philadelphia, May 18--1849

*To the Superior of the Council
The Sisters of the Society of Mercy*
Dear Sister Veronica

I have been speaking with the good Bishop of Charleston concerning a House of Sisters of Mercy for my Diocese and I do think that in his great zeal for the promotion of Religion his approbation may be obtained should your Council determine to favour this my petition and grant me a House. I can obtain many good Postulants but I have no Establishment to receive them. And a few good Religious Houses would do a great deal for the honour and glory of God in Arkansas. You will make known this my application to the Rev. Mr. Sullivan and the members of the Council and see if any thing can be done for an old friend. It would be, I must confess, the greatest gratification to introduce a House of Sisters from Charleston to Little Rock. May God grant that my prayer will be heard.

Kindest regards to the Sisters and write to me at St. Augustine's.

Your friend,

Andrew Bp. of Little Rock.

In June Mother Teresa Barry and Council Members, eager to aid their old friend, resolved to send three sisters to establish a house in Little Rock. However, when they attempted to select three sisters they found it impossible to do so without injuring the Academy, orphanage and other schools in Charleston. Sister Veronica had the unpleasant task of refusing Bishop Byrne's request. In a letter dated June 8, 1849, she informed the Bishop of the Council's decision.

Charleston, June 8, 1849.

Rt. Rev. Father:

I regret that various circumstances which would be too lengthly in detail, prevented me from replying immediately to your kind and valued favour of the 18th. ultimo--The purpose of which I made known to our Bishop and Rev. Superior who were both most anxious that it should be promptly attended to--and which would have been done, were it not for the indisposition of one of the members of our Council, so that it was only last evening your application was presented for consideration.

Allow me to assure you, Rt. Rev. Father, that all felt honoured by your special confidence in desiring a Branch of our Establishment for your Diocese. And our Council was unanimous in wishing to give Filiation to Little Rock.

But on endeavouring to select Sisters for the object proposed, it was found impossible to do so, without doing an injury to the Academy and to our other Schools. I feel convinced that this will be a disappointment to you. But, be assured, that you can scarcely feel it more sensibly than we do ourselves. Permit me to add, that every exertion was made to accomplish your desire in this regard, consistent with the interest of the Institution. Yet as such appears not to be the will of God, we do hope and earnestly pray, that your zealous endeavours in the promotion of Religion, may be realized in some more worthy quarter.

Assuring you at the same time that we shall ever cherish a grateful remembrance not only of your disinterested acts of kindness to the Institution from the first moment of its establishment, but more especially for the deep solicitude which you manifested for the spiritual and temporal welfare of its members while under your paternal care.

The Sisters unite with me in kindest regards, earnestly requesting that you will in addition to the many favours heretofore received--plead in our behalf when prostrate at the altar of our Common Father--beseeching Him to bestow on us his divine blessings, and make us worthy recipients thereof.

With sentiments of grateful respect and esteem.

Yours in Christ.

Sister M. Veronica.

While visiting Ireland in 1850 Bishop Byrne persuaded the Sisters of Mercy founded by Mother Catherine McAuley to send sisters to Little Rock. In 1851 the sisters opened Mount Saint Mary Academy, the oldest continuous educational institution in Arkansas.

Bishop Byrne died in Helena, Arkansas, on June 10, 1862. He was buried initially in the Mercy Sisters convent garden in Helena, but his successor, Bishop Edward Fitzgerald, had his remains placed in the crypt in his new Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock on November 30, 1881.



Cathedral of St. Andrew, 1846



Cathedral of St. Andrew 1877-present



Bishop Andrew Byrne's resting place, Crypt in the Cathedral of St. Andrew, Little Rock



Shamrock, the emblem synonymous with Saint Patrick, has a very long and colourful tradition. It means many things to different people and can evoke messages relating to national pride, religion, history, celebration etc. In horticultural terms what is Shamrock and why do we wear it on St. Patrick's Day?

Shamrock, Seamóg or Seamair Óg, the Irish for a young clover can be found growing wild throughout Ireland. It is worn on the feast day of St. Patrick, 17th March, to represent a link with Saint Patrick, the Bishop who spread the Christian message in Ireland. It is said Saint Patrick used the three leaved Shamrock to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity, (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit), to the pagan Irish during the 5th Century. The tradition of wearing Shamrock on Saint Patrick's Day can be traced back to the early 1700's.

Irish research in the late 1980's highlighted a number of plants that were traditionally considered to be Shamrock. The plant most widely considered to represent Shamrock was *Trifolium Dubium* (the lesser clover, Seamair Bhuí). Other plants that were used as Shamrock included, *Trifolium Repens* (White Clover, Seamair Bhán), *Trifolium Pratense* (Red Clover, Seamair Dhearg) and *Oxalis Acetosella* (Wood Sorrel, Seamóg).

The Story of Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick understood the Celtic people. Being a romanised Briton his real name was Magonus Saccatus Patricius. St. Patrick's father had been a deacon and a decurion and his grandfather was a priest. The Romans had not yet fully pulled out of Britain, so Patrick grew up in a world whose mores and Christianity were provincial Roman, in an area which never lost its Celtic identity and customs. St. Patrick had already become familiar with the Celtic festivals of the pre-Christian calendar before he was taken into Irish slavery. Even though Patrick's family had been ordained they did not seem to have a passion for their work. St. Patrick himself was described as being rather indifferent to it as a youth.

At the age of sixteen St. Patrick's life changed. He was abducted and taken into Irish slavery. During his six years of enslavement he developed a life of prayer. Patrick even credits God for his escape

from slavery. Patrick returned to Ireland as a missionary, whose main religious background was Roman. The story follows:

Around the year 400, Patrick was born in Scotland. When Patrick was sixteen years old he was captured as a slave by the high king of Ireland. He was sold in Ireland and was taken to the North east of the country to herd sheep. During his six years of solitude he found a life of prayer and pledged his life to God. One night Patrick had a vision and he escaped from slavery and found his way home to his family. Patrick studied religion for many years to become a priest and a missionary and at night he would hear in his dreams the call from the Irish. They called him to come and free them from paganism, “crying to thee, come hither and walk with us once more”. Finally Pope Celestine fulfilled Saint Patrick’s wish and ordained him as bishop to preach the word of God to the Celtic People. Saint Patrick then came back to Ireland to help teach the word of God. He helped to build churches and he baptised the pagans into Christianity, he also ordained bishops and priests but this did not come without difficulty. As legend tells us of Saint Patrick lighting the Easter bonfire at Slane hill, it portrays some of the difficulty which Patrick had to face. On Easter night long ago it was forbidden to light any other fire in Ireland until after the lighting of the High King’s own bonfire. When the High King saw that Saint Patrick was lighting the fire he sent a warband to kill the Saint and quench the fire. But the fire could not be quenched and Saint Patrick and his followers passed the warriors in disguise of a herd of deer and they went onto defeat the royal druids at Tara in a contest of miracle working. Many of the King’s court bowed down to Saint Patrick and were converted, even though the High King was not one of these he did grant the Saint free speech and the right to preach freely to the people of Ireland.

Another one of the stories told to us about Saint Patrick is the one where he went to the royal center at sunrise and here he found the King’s two daughters, Eithne and Fedelm. The two girls questioned Patrick about God and they listened attentively to what he had to say, Patrick recited the Holy Creed to them then they wished to be baptised and Patrick did so. Upon receiving the sacrament the two girls died and were buried there.

Another tale about Saint Patrick tells us of him coming to a Neolithic tomb thought to be a “giant’s grave”. To satisfy his followers’ curiosity, Saint Patrick raised the giant from the dead and baptised him, and then returned him to his grave.

As time past Saint Patrick and his followers spread the word of God around the country. They fasted and prayed at the top of what is now Croagh Patrick. Patrick made a promise to God on that day that the people of Ireland would keep their faith until the end of time and the day they did not keep their faith would be the day of doom.

When Saint Patrick died, several communities joined together for his burial. It is said that Saint Patrick's body was wrapped in a shroud and placed on a cart, which was drawn by two unreined white Oxen, it is said that the beasts wandered to Downpatrick where, today people believe he is buried. A granite boulder marked with a cross marked his grave and it is simply inscribed: PATRIC. It is also said that on the day Saint Patrick died that the sun did not set, but shone for twelve days and nights. Source: <http://www.livingshamrock.com>

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY FEDERATION VISITS OUR HERITAGE ROOM AND OUR LADY OF MERCY COMMUNITY OUTREACH NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE.



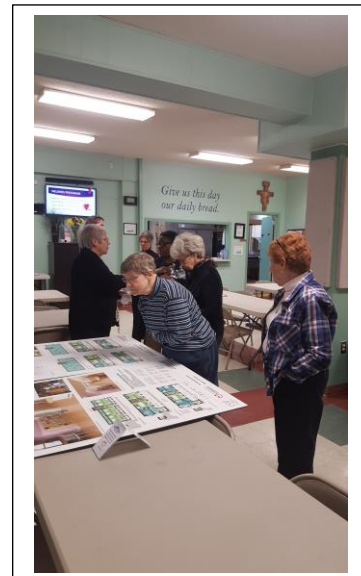
Sr. Mary Joseph Ritter, OLM, Sisters of Charity Federation Ex. Director Sr. Grace Hartzog, SC-SH, Sr. Judy Laffey, SC-SH, Sr. Anne Francis Campbell, OLM, Archivist.



Sr. Carol Wentworth, OLM, Sr. Mary Joseph Ritter, OLM, Sr. Judy Laffey, SC-SH, Sr. Grace Hartzog, SC-SH, Sr. Lisa Steigerwald, RSM, Vonceil Mitchell, Neighborhood House Staff.



Learning our story in the Heritage Room and at the Neighborhood House.





*We welcome
our new
Partners In Charity*



L-R: Debbie Howard, Debbie Shogry Blalock, Jacqueline Jefferson, Patricia O'Brien-Dorner, Fiona O'Brien, Catherine Park, Diane Brumley, Karen Rankine, Frances O'Brien Sheley



On Saturday, February 24, 2018, nine new Partners In Charity Associates were welcomed at a ceremony held at May Forest, the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy.

A Lenten program entitled, "Abiding in the Word, Praying with Scripture", presented by Srs. Barbara and Susan, Cenacle Sisters from Atlanta, preceded the installation of the new Associates.