

THE BARAT COLLEGE MAIN CHAPEL

ITS ORIGINS AND ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

This talk was given in the Barat College Chapel to the Lake Forest/
Lake Bluff Architectural Society: Sunday, March 16, 1986, by
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WELCOME, to the Barat Chapel, the heart of the college.

It was purposely designed to be its geographic and spiritual center,
as described by an anonymous Religious of the Sacred Heart in 1904:

^{QED}
"He is the Center of our Forest Home...

the Magnet who will attract many to Himself."

Accurately described, as the students, even now, term the chapel and
its perimeter of a narthex and long corridor outside it, "Sacred Space".

To emphasize this centrality and the college's founders, the
Religious of the Sacred Heart, five shields carry the Seal of the
Society of the Sacred Heart: one, carved high into the ceiling above
main altar. This golden seal with two intertwined hearts, representing
the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, circled with lilies, sends Rays of Light
out to the Cosmos. Two more Society Seals are high up on the side
walls of the Sanctuary; another crowns the door at the end of the
chapel nave, and the gates of the Communion rail bear another one, in
bronze.

My plan is to give you a brief story of the nuns and students'
first days in the chapel. This is necessarily brief, because the
chapel's history is mostly oral history, with but a few sketchily-
written notes in what was known as the "House Journal".

This chapel was built in 1924, twenty years after the completion
of the main building, by George Hellmuth, of St. Louis. His sister,
Sister Mary Hellmuth, was principal of the Academy at that time, and
had a reputation for getting commissions for her burgeoning young

Chapel cont.

architect brother. The inter-nationally-active firm of HELLMUTH, OBATA, KASSENBAUM is presently headed by his son, also George. Their post-modern architecture is well-known, especially the King Khaled Airport in Riyadh, Saudi; King Saudi University, Ridgway and Metropolitan Squares, and the recently-renovated Railway Station in St. Louis. (NIKKO Hotel in Chicago)

Although the Academy of the Sacred Heart opened in Lake Forest as late as 1904, the Chicago history of the Religious of the Sacred Heart is one of rapid moves and astonishing success in directing schools since 1858. This Chapel is, therefore, the culmination of many chapels in private and parish schools from 1858 - 1924;

First, on Rush and Illinois streets in 1858,

Taylor Street in 1863,

Dearborn Street in 1876,

North State Street in 1880,

Clark Street in 1904,

Pine Grove Avenue in 1907, and

Sheridan Road in 1927.

School numbers grew from seven (7) in 1858, to 400 in the Academy, and 1000 in the parish school in 1880.

In 1901, forty-five acres were purchased in Lake Forest because of "its beauty, its proximity to the electric train".

This was later named the North Shore train, one of whose stations was on the Barat campus, the "Sacred Heart" Station.

In 1904, school opened with twenty-six children; soon, there were ninety.

In 1918, the college was officially chartered, with Religious of the Sacred Heart and teachers from Loyola University. The B.A. was given for the first time in May 1920.

Chapel cont.

By 1924, there were 135 students in Academy and College, so Reverend Mother Fox, the provincial, "undertook the construction of the long-desired chapel."

THE CHAPEL'S BEGINNINGS

The nuns lived in a small cottage on campus...in its tiny parlor was celebrated the first Mass on December 8, 1903. On August 12, 1904, the nuns left the cottage for the convent wing of the new building. The chapel was located at the Southwest end of the second floor, moved once, to the eastern end of the same floor.

(From 1904 to the finishing of the construction of the chapel in 1924, no notes are available, so we jump to...)

August 21, 1924, when in late afternoon, the Tabernacle of the High Altar was blessed, the altar stone placed in it, with

"a great ceremony of nuns in solemn procession, slowly ascending the main staircase, then walking down the main aisle, each with a lighted candle, singing the "Pange Lingua"
(the church's traditional ceremonial hymn)
and the "Magnificat" and other songs of praise and thanksgiving.

The organ, which had been transferred from the convent chapel on State Street, resounded as soon as the nuns took their places in the stalls, while two nuns escorted the Eucharist to the Communion table, and the priest placed Our Lord in his rich and beautiful Tabernacle...

An Act of Consecration followed by prayers to Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Michael and other holy protectors followed...
A real Welcome Home was warmly sung..."

August 22, 1925, the first Mass was celebrated in the newly completed chapel. Holy Communion was received there for the first time...

"beginning a chain of the Eucharist to be received in future years."

On August 29, 1925, the Feast of the Sacred Heart marked the first Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

"in His brilliant glory of gold and light".

The chapel was much admired by visitors

Chapel cont.

"feeling a special atmosphere of love in it",
and commenting that

"it is a warm chapel".

On September 3, 1925, the lighting (from kerosene lamps) in the chapel was finished, and this was celebrated with an "illumination" ceremony of another procession, organ music, the nuns keeping a

"double prie-^D-dieu all day".

On September 12, 1925, the ceremony of the Consecration of the High Altar took place, by Monsignor Hoban, auxiliary bishop of Chicago, with four priests (un-named), beginning at 8 a.m., lasting two hours...

GIFTS OF ALUMNAE AND FRIENDS

are recorded in the Society archives, notably a gift of gold jewelry, melted to form the mosaics on the dome of the baldacchino; another, a gift of diamonds forming a cluster on the Tabernacle key; the first six chandeliers, which the alumnae wanted to "compatible with the chapel's design"; an ostensorium with twenty-four large diamonds and precious stones set into it; and a chalice with numerous jewels set in gold and silver.

The high altar and Communion rail are of Carrarra marble. The chapel benches and a statue of St. John Berchman's, special protector of the school, came from St. John Berchman's Academy in Chicago. The chapel windows from the West Taylor Street Convent.

(No other mention of gifts is cited)

THE CHAPEL WINDOWS

Their style is typical 19th century German, when glass became an easel or canvas for painting highly devotional figures. This is a change from much-earlier windows of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially in France, when windows, known as "stained", for the cathedral

Page five

Chapel cont.

were treated as two-dimensional forms, figures flattened, numerous symbols depicted on very small panes of glass which had organic colors imprisoned into it. Stained glass, besides being a teaching and devotional medium, was meant to have light pass through it, and explode into pointillistic color. One knows at evensong in a Gothic Cathedral of the 13th century, that it is still day, because the yellows and oranges still gleam; when the lavendars, blues and purples glow, the sun has almost set, and it is evening.

Here, in the Barat windows, the public life of Jesus is depicted. The ones to the right of the altar, His early years; to the left, His later years. For this, light and shadow (chiarascuro), a three-dimensional quality, some perspective, and realistic architectural elements are visible. Textures and draping, tender facial expressions, blending of many colors, devotional scenes attract one to the windows. The nineteenth century was the age of revival in stained glass, the age of Tiffany in the United States, of Gallé and Lalique in France, of William Morris and E. Burne Jones in England. Their history in the United States is one of many German immigrants making stained glass in the 19th century, especially in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, bringing here their heritage of window design, learned from the Milanese in the 16th century, the Swiss in the 18th century.

THE ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

The chapel style is Georgian, in keeping with the main building's style. "Georgian" is a name loosely given to the architectural styles of great country and city houses of England, and named after the four King Georges, who ruled in the 18th century. This chapel's decorations are a composite of several historical styles, pure Georgian, Palladian, and Pompeian. Hence, it should be classified as neo-Georgian, or the

Page six

Chapel cont.

Georgian-style. I shall explain each style later, pointing out special features of each, in the chapel.

PURE GEORGIAN

Proportion and decoration are the most noticeable characteristics of Georgian interiors, as well as a wonderful expression of space and light. Notice the asymmetrical balance of the chapel, its rectilinear proscenium arch, its balancing architectural motifs, its proportion. English Oak is a light-toned, architecturally unifying wood, carved lightly, and giving a horizontal thrust to an otherwise vertical chapel.

Georgian is pictorial architecture, highly, but subtly decorated. Even small rooms in Georgian architecture were so changed by rich plays of light on the smoothness of delicate stone, that rooms appeared much larger. Decorated ceilings in brilliant color, compensated for their lack of sunny skies.

This masterful use of space and light by Georgian architects makes theirs a fitting style for the Barat chapel, for, second to the Eucharistic presence, space and light are the strongest architectural signs of the presence of God in any chapel, -space, because God is limitless, Light because He is Light.

PALLADIAN STYLE

The Georgian architects, and others before them, were inspired by a 16th century Italian architect, Palladio, who transformed the skyline of Venice, with a pair of landmark churches: St. George Major and the Benedictine Church of the Redeemer. Their domes and facades of gleaming white Istrian stone, were like civic temples, and beautified Venice as did a 15th century Italian architect, Brunelleschi, Florence, with his magnificent Duomo, or Cathedral of Florence. Palladio wrote Four Books on Architecture, references to Italian neo-classical architecture,

Page seven

Chapel cont.

used ardently by English Georgian architects for the neo-Palladian movement. From this inspiration, they built large vaults, engaged columns in pairs, continuous entablatures, balanced wings and axes, - exercising the classical language of the Greeks and Romans in a clean, new-old architecture, refining the usable past.

THE POMPEIIAN STYLE

~~POMPEIIAN STYLE~~

Pompeii was destroyed in one night, in 79 a.d., and unearthed only in the 19th century. Peculiar characteristics are its murals in what are known as "Pompeian colors", rusts, greens, blacks, blue; colored stucco decorations of the "Incrustation Style", imitative of many-hued marble, combined with stucco. Perspective on smooth walls and panels produces an effect of a rich, decorative style.

Let us now discover these historical influences in the decorative details of the Barat Chapel:

First, the Pure Georgian

with its classical motifs:

Blocks or dentils; in continuous borders high around the nave, in the architrave

Miniature moldings; the fret, beading tangled ribbons (especially in the stained glass) meanders, festoons or strings

Columns and pilasters; the Greek Doric and Ionic on free-standing columns

Overmantels, cornices

Niches

Shells; above the statues and sanctuary niches

Delicate plaster reliefs; (originally stucco reliefs borrowed from the Italian Renaissance, especially from the church of San Pietro Casinese in Perugia).

Swirling, curling plant forms; combined with animals...griffins, lion-heads, etc., the honeysuckle draping itself in C-forms, from narrow-necked vases...

Chapel cont.

THE PALLADIAN STYLE
(In the Barat Chapel)

Strict balance and symmetry; observed in window and door placements

Careful study of scale

The flat, panelled ceiling

Tall pilasters; running through two floors, treated as a single, unifying, repeated style

Prolific but controlled ornamentation

Profiling of various moldings

Geometric flooring of marble and/or tiling, (The Chapel floor is probably of "battleship linoleum").

THE POMPEIIAN STYLE
(In the Barat Chapel)

Murals; the seven Sacraments painted in the octagonal cartouches in the ceiling

Tripod stands; (formerly also, the bases of ornate candelabra and canonicals of the Barat Sanctuary)

Salamanders, (depicted in the sanctuary pilasters) and fish

Encrusted candlesticks of bronze; (canonicals formerly on the high altar)

Embossed urns

Trompe d'oeil devices

Vines with heavy foliage

THE NEO-GEORGIAN STYLE
(In the Barat Chapel)

Proscenium arch

Roundels with delicate frames; originally designed for framing portraits, oil landscape scenes, sculptures...in the Barat Chapel, appropriately used to frame the sculptural Stations of the Cross.

Swags; sculptural interpretation of nuances of drapery and fabric hangings of rich damasks and velvets...

Amorini or cherubs or putti; everywhere in the chapel, especially in a border around the nave, the sanctuary, topping the stained glass windows. These are symbols of the presence

Chapel cont..

of God and the angels, of love, of the human spirit...

Frescoes; seen in the Litany of the Sacred Heart, painted under the ceiling on the wall's borders...in Latin...The most meaningful invocation is painted on the back wall above the exit door:

"Heart of Jesus, in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge",

Since the Religious of the Sacred Heart's principal work is education.

Curvilinear motifs

Brackets for sconces; in bronze, gold or brass, imitative of the "Barberini" vase of the noble Roman family, repeated in the Wedgewood vases...tall, beautiful, symmetrically, elegantly proportioned. The sanctuary decorates with these.

Wrought iron or bronze; seen in the Communion table gates, vents on side walls, originally used for carriage lamps, gates, balustrades.

Balusters; originally used for sweeping staircases in Georgian homes, fences, silver forms, chairlegs, etc. Here, seen in the Communion table...

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Generations of school children have looked upon these windows, worshipped at the altar, were nourished by the Eucharist. Many Religious of the Sacred Heart prayed ^{daily in it} for long hours, and for ^{70 years (1993)} ~~sixty-two years~~, in this chapel, chanted their Office here, three times a day, at daybreak, noon and evening, so, there is preserved here a "special atmosphere of peace", a felt strength and light, which radiate to the whole Barat family. This chapel is truly a manifestation of the Lord.

N.B. Quotations are credited to the National Archives of the Society of the Sacred in the United States (1904 - 1925), on file at the Villa Duchesne Academy, in Clayton, Missouri.