

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 21: SEDES SAPIENTIAE STATUE FROM ST. EDWARD'S SEMINARY

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Bishop O'Dea oversaw the building of dozens of Catholic institutions--new parishes, schools, and hospitals, not to mention a new Cathedral. But as he neared the end of his life, he had a dream which even for this building bishop seemed unlikely to be realized: a seminary for Seattle.

The dream seemed more unlikely than ever following the stock market crash of 1929. But even as the nation and the world tumbled into the depths of the Great

Depression, Bishop O'Dea's dream somehow came true: the cornerstone for St. Edward's Seminary was laid in 1930, and the work was

completed a year later. Bishop O'Dea was personally involved in every aspect of the project, from choosing the architect to selecting the Scripture passages to be inscribed above the entrances. With the help of his Chancellor, Msgr. Theodore Ryan, he arranged for the seminary to be staffed by the Sulpician Fathers who had prepared both of them for priesthood in Montreal.

In those days, seminary training could last up to twelve years. Students could enter "minor seminary" as young as 13 or 14, as first-year high school students. After six years of study, encompassing the equivalent of four years of high school and two of college, they would move into "major seminary" for six more years of philosophy and theology studies.

Entering seminary was entering a whole new way of life. The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* defined the purpose of minor seminaries as "to protect from the contagion of the world, to train in piety... and to foster... the seed of a divine vocation." In keeping with this mission, St. Edward's was a world unto itself. Located in Kenmore, on Lake Washington, it was a boarding school--no day students were permitted. Life followed a strict regimen. Each hour of the day was accounted for, with Mass (not once but twice each day), meals, classes, recreation, and study hours all carried out according to a detailed horarium. Interactions between students were also subject to codes of conduct: major seminarians were not to speak with minor seminarians, and vice versa. Students were allowed to talk on the first floor but not on the upper floors of the seminary. Roommates--sometimes crowded three to a room--were not supposed to talk to each other!

Meals (prepared by a group of semi-cloistered religious, the Little Daughters of St. Joseph) had their own regimen. Each



Left: Statue of *Sedes Sapientiae*, Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom. This statue (a smaller version of the marble statue that stands in the Cathedral courtyard) is from one of the student rooms at St. Edward's Seminary. The damage to her crown was sustained in an earthquake in 1965. *Courtesy of Father David Brant.* Right: Father Ryan with his dad on the day he left home for seminary—at the tender age of fourteen!



seminarian had an assigned seat according to his grade level. The main course would begin with the upperclassmen, and make its way down to the lowly freshmen, who had to hope there was something left in the dish! (Fortunately, the dessert plate started at the bottom of the table.) When a special guest came, students could chat with each other, but many meals were taken in silence, while a designated student stood at a podium and read aloud. The reading usually began with a Scripture passage and ended with the saints of the day from the *Roman Martyrology*. In between, the reading material varied--it might be the adventures of

Shackleton one week, history or a spiritual writer the next.

Family visits were limited to the third Sunday of each month. Women were not allowed above the first floor of the building, which meant that anxious mothers could not check on the state of their son's room or his wardrobe. Families often spent the visiting hours sitting in the car where they could have some private conversation!

For all its severity, there was room for fun at St. Edward's as well. Sports were especially important and the seminary had its own pool and athletic fields. Father David Brant, at 6' 4", was immediately approached by the priest in charge of athletics about joining the basketball team, but he played touch football instead. Music was also a big part of life at St. Edward's. There was a band, an orchestra, and a choir of some note--in fact, for many years, the seminary choir was bussed to the Cathedral to provide music for the Holy Week liturgies. There were also plays and musicals, from *Macbeth* to *Oklahoma*, complete with scenery and costumes--and with all the roles played, of course, by seminarians.

By 1957, St. Edward's was bursting at the seams and a new seminary, St. Thomas, was built nearby. From that point on, St. Edward's was strictly a minor seminary, and students moved to St. Thomas for their major seminary studies. But dramatic changes lay ahead. In the 1960s and 1970s, attendance began to decline, and the seminaries struggled to keep pace with Church renewal. Both St. Thomas and St. Edward's closed in the late 1970s. St. Thomas Seminary is now home to Bastyr University, and St. Edward's is a state park. The magnificent buildings still stand and are well worth a visit--they are an important part of the history of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest.

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