

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 30: POSTCARDS FROM THE PERRY HOTEL

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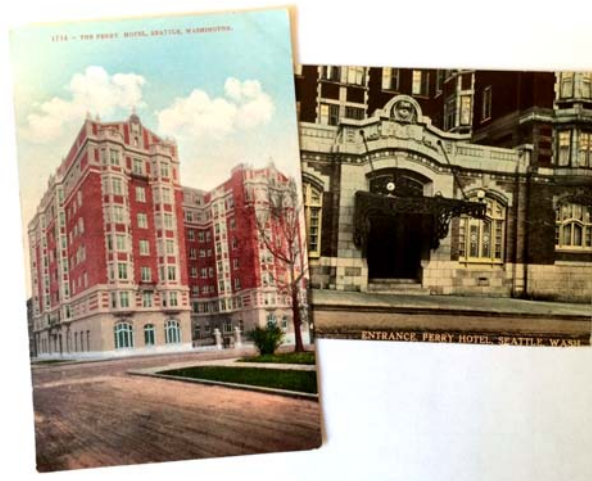
The Perry Hotel opened in 1907, just a few months before St. James Cathedral. It was the first multi-story building on First Hill. In keeping with the character of the neighborhood in those days, it had plenty of pretension. The Perry was not a hotel in the usual sense of the word. It consisted of apartments where single people or entire families could live permanently, with full laundry and dining services. Some of the units even had servants' quarters! The Seattle *P-I* described it as a "New York Apartment house transplanted to Seattle." The 250-capacity dining room was open to the public. A menu survives for a New Year's gala in 1911, with "Crème de Volaille, Marguerite" and "Imported Duck, Rouannaise" among the sumptuous offerings.

The model of a high-end New York apartment house did not thrive in Seattle, however. The building of the Sorrento the following year cut into the Perry's market, and by 1910, the Perry was a standard hotel, focused on serving short-term visitors to the city.

Mother Cabrini returned to Seattle in 1915 in hopes of establishing a home for foundlings. After three months of looking, she narrowed her search to two buildings: the Sorrento and the Perry, but ultimately chose the latter. Of course, neither hotel was for sale. But Mother Cabrini discovered that one of the Perry's stockholders, a Mr. Clark, lived in New York City, so she quickly wrote to her community there and asked the Sisters to follow up with him. Of course, finding one particular Mr. Clark in New York was a challenge, but the Sisters were up for it. They contacted every Clark in the directory until they lighted on the right person. Once they found him, they did not let go. Even though he assured them he was not a principal stockholder, the Sisters were persistent. "I continue to be annoyed with letters, telephone calls, and visits to my office and to my house," Mr. Clark complained in a letter to Bishop O'Dea.

Mother Cabrini entrusted the cause to prayer. In the chapel at Sacred Heart Villa there was a statue of St. Anne teaching the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mother Cabrini wrote the sum she needed on the open book Mary was holding, and set the orphans to pray as well. She supplemented these acts of piety with shrewd business sense, hiring a young Henry Broderick as her agent. Eventually, persistence paid off. Broderick was able to negotiate the sale of the Perry for just \$150,000 dollars. (He later waived his own commission and was "paid" by Mother Cabrini with a rosary, which was in his hands when he died many years later).

But purchasing the building was only the beginning of Mother Cabrini's troubles. The denizens of First Hill were not pleased when word got out that she was establishing a foundling home in their elegant neighborhood. Mother Cabrini suggested a hospital



Above: Postcards of the Perry Hotel from around 1907, when the Perry was one of the finest hotels in the city. Archives of St. James Cathedral.

instead—but that idea, too, was shot down. It was a poor location for a hospital, said some, and besides, Seattle already had Providence Hospital.

Bishop O'Dea was caught. He had encouraged the purchase of the Perry, even negotiating the loan on Mother Cabrini's behalf, but now he found many of his friends opposed to the plan for an orphanage and he himself was opposed to the idea of another hospital. He wrote to Mother Cabrini: "I feel it is my duty, for the best interests of the Church in this diocese, to forbid any departure from the original purpose.... In God's name, let it be a home for foundlings." The letter arrived on the Feast of the

Sacred Heart, a bitter blow to Mother Cabrini, who kept repeating: "today, the feast of the Sacred Heart!" But, confident that she was in the right, Mother Cabrini boldly questioned Bishop O'Dea's recollection of the conversation between them. "Your Grace approved in the presence of my sister, the proposal," she wrote. "After all this, I am very sorry, but Your Grace see clearly, I cannot go back no more." She then apologized for the quality of her writing, since she wrote and typed the letter without help from her secretary: "I think better and prudent not to show your letter and your changing of opinion to my Sisters."

Bishop O'Dea was not the only one opposed to the project. Many of Mother Cabrini's Seattle friends, whose generous gifts had made her previous projects possible, opposed her as well. In the midst of the struggle, Mother Cabrini prayed hard, at one point spending 18 straight hours in vigil before the Blessed Sacrament. Eventually clarity came. "It is I who have alienated the blessing of God," she told her Sisters in November. "When I shall have gone, everything will be better."

In spite of the Sisters' protests, Mother Cabrini departed for Los Angeles. Strangely, almost at once, Bishop O'Dea relented. Soon, all opposition to the project faded away. Columbus Sanatorium thrived. The old friendship between the saint and the bishop was restored. Within a few weeks of her departure, Mother Cabrini sent her Christmas blessings to Bishop O'Dea: "Are innumerable graces, heavenly embraces, that I am going to ask for your Lordship," she wrote in her characteristic broken English. "The sincere wishes of my grateful heart for a Merry Christmas and a bright, prosperous New Year."

Mother Cabrini's own life was drawing to a close. She died the following year, on December 22, 1917. Upon her death, Bishop O'Dea wrote: "She was the valiant woman.... Probably no daughter of Holy Mother Church in the present century has accomplished so much in so short a time for the honor and glory of God and the salvation of souls as Mother F. X. Cabrini."

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy
Mother Cabrini, Bishop O'Dea, and many more are featured in Journey of Faith, available in the Cathedral Bookstore.