

HILL YES!

A look back at Mt Adams

By Jim Steiner

Every year since the mid 1970s, the local St. Patrick's Division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians parade a statue of St. Patrick around Mt Adams in a pick up truck followed by pipers, drummers and lads and lasses of the old sod. It's become a tradition. The story of it's beginnings is a Hill legend that few remember. Fortunately there are a couple of old timers who have the details. Here's the story.

In 1873, Holy Cross Church was built on St. Paul Place. It was a small wooden frame building built to accommodate the english speaking catholics on the Hill. They were attending Immaculata Church, two blocks away, where all the Masses were done in german. Holy Cross became the Irish church. A new church was built in 1895 to accommodate the growing Irish population.

Sometime before 1926, a Holy Cross Parishioner by the name of Healy purchased a St. Patrick's statue and donated it to Holy Cross Church. Mr. Healy was a true Irishman and every time he passed St. Patrick, he genuflected.

When WW II ended, people began to move from Mt Adams. They could afford cars, had good roads and wanted to live in areas where they could have a yard for their children. That was the beginning of a slow exodus to the suburbs. The decrease in people began to affect both Holy Cross Parish and Immaculata Parish. In 1967, their administrative processes were combined. The hand writing was on the wall. One of the churches would close, but which one?

How the decision was made to close Holy Cross, no one knows. The faithful were told at the 11:00 mass on March 15, 1970 that the church was now closed. All Holy Cross Parishioners were to attend mass at Immaculata the following weekend. The new parish would be known as Holy Cross-Immaculata. There was anger, dismay and disappointment. The Irish had been baptized, did their first communion, got married and had their funerals at Holy Cross. It was a very emotional time for them.

Two women parishioners, Kathleen Scully Hueneman and Daryl Schroder got their heads together and came up with a way to soften the transition. They asked Jim Crowley, a Holy Cross parishioner who was tight with Holy Cross Pastor Fr. Wilfrid Flannery, to see if it would be possible to move St. Patrick to Immaculata. Fr. Flannery agreed to leave the front door ajar on March 16 so a group of men could "steal" the statue. They slipped in, put Paddy in a pickup truck and whisked him under cover of darkness to Immaculata.

Enter the Hibernians. They played off the original theft and began the annual tradition of

“stealing” the statue. Every February, about a month before the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, they pull off the heist. There is a mass said to honor the deceased men and women Hibernians, a blessing of St. Patrick who is then carried to a pickup truck and slowly paraded around the Hill accompanied by pipes and drums. The Hibernians follow along.

St. Patrick returns to the church after the parade. In the 1980s, before the Hibernians bought their own statue, they would take the statue with them and put him in the St. Paddy’s Day Parade. In those days, it took him a while to return to Mt Adams. One year he came back with pink shoes, much to the chagrin of the pastor. Another year he returned with a broken hand sustained in a bar fight. After those transgressions, the Hibernians agreed to purchase their own Paddy. But they still “steal” the original every February.

So there you have it. A simple act to soften the closing of Holy Cross Church has become a tradition. If you saw St. Paddy on his latest outing and wondered what was going on you now know why he was riding the streets in a pick up truck.

Thanks to Kathleen Scully Hueneman, a life time Mt Adams resident and former Holy Cross parishioner and Brian Sweeney of the ancient Order of Hibernians for providing background information for this article. The Jim Crowley mentioned above was a member of the Mt Adams Crowley clan, husband of Mt Adams resident Norma Crowley and brother of Chick Crowley Riesenbeck another Mt Adams lifer.