

Celebrating 150 Faces of the Parish

Telling the stories of our founders

DURING my tenure as The Basilica's archivist, we have celebrated a lot of anniversaries. We love to celebrate and love to embrace our history. But when we started discussing how we would mark 150 years of this parish, it quickly became clear that this is about more than beautiful buildings and charismatic priests. The parish is first and foremost about the people within it.

So over the course of this year, we will be introducing you to 150 parishioners who made the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary, and The Basilica their faith home. Some were prominent donors or contributors to the life of the parish. Others made their mark beyond the doors of the church.

For each year, from 1868 to 2018, we will tell the story of a parishioner. From December to July, we will share some of these stories through social media. In August, we will fill the Saint John XXIII Gallery and the Teresa of Calcutta Hall with tales of lives lived.

There is an intrepid team of volunteer researchers and writers assisting with this project. I would like to thank Mark Garcia for documenting the history of Master Jimmie Byrnes.

BY HEATHER CRAIG

YOU CAN HELP!

Do you have a good story to tell about your life here at The Basilica? Do you know someone who should be profiled? Contact hrcraig@mary.org.

MASTER JIMMIE BYRNES

Martin Byrnes was one of the early settlers of Minneapolis. He and his wife had five sons and one daughter. One of his younger sons was known as "Master Jimmie, Boy Soprano." Master Jimmie had been singing soprano solos at the Church of the Immaculate Conception and also played the organ for the children's Mass. He was in much demand around the Twin Cities.

In 1899, Gertrude Haynes, producer of religious vaudeville called the "Choir Celestial," came to the church and persuaded the fourteen-year-old boy to join her troupe, which, with his parents' permission, he did. He sang in 700 consecutive shows all over the country.

When he was older, he became manager, music director, and composer of the group. Byrnes would periodically come back to Minneapolis to visit his family. In 1917, a musical called "ODDS and ENDS of 1917" opened on Broadway; James Byrnes was listed as composer. ✚



James Byrnes in a photo from an article in the *Minneapolis Journal*, 15 June 1901.

Heather Craig is the archivist for The Basilica.



The choir of the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary on Easter Sunday 1917, with Fr. Cullen.