

THROUGH THE YEARS

Bishop Clement Smyth (1858-1865)

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If "class" really means the ability to exhibit grace under pressure, Clement Smyth, the second bishop of Dubuque, embodied that trait. He was an Irish Trappist monk from New Melleray Abbey, whom Bishop Mathias Loras had made his coadjutor (successor) in 1857, recognizing Bishop Smyth's education, leadership qualities and the fact that his Irish background would end some of the tensions between Irish immigrants and their French clergy.

When Bishop Smyth succeeded Loras on Feb. 19, 1858, seven very difficult years were in store for him. The country had entered a depression in 1857. Finances collapsed and Bishop Smyth and his advisors shied away from investing in educational establishments.

Mt. St. Bernard's, the brothers' schools, the hospital and other institutions had to close. A large number of priests left the diocese, and anti-Catholicism was again on the rise. Completion of the cathedral (begun in 1857, dedicated in 1861) drained diocesan finances, and the North and South fought the Civil War.

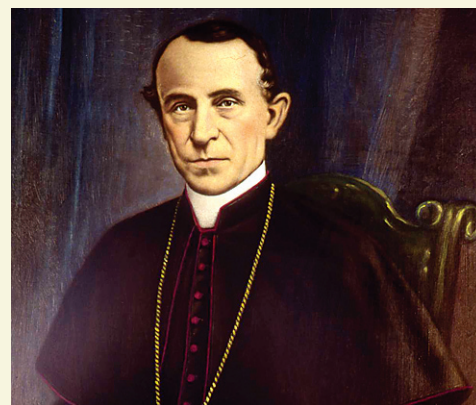
Through it all, Bishop Clement Smyth quietly and calmly carried on.

He had come from Ireland to Dubuque in 1849 as superior of the newly founded Trappist monastery, New Melleray.

His background was somewhat different than the average Irish immigrant who fled a starving, subjugated homeland in the mid-19th century.

As a boy he had shown academic promise, but the penal laws prevented Catholics from operating schools. So Bishop Smyth attended Protestant schools and graduated from the renowned Trinity College in Dublin.

The prejudice and stigma he must have borne in order to gain an education are largely unrecorded. But they produced a man of calm, rock-like determination, who also wanted to become a Religious.



At that time, the Trappists were the severest members of the Benedictine "family" and the privations of the early years in rural Dubuque made their lives especially difficult. Bishop Smyth was an able and kind superior, and by the mid-1850s, when Bishop Loras' health had begun to fail, he was the choice of the clergy to succeed as bishop.

Bishop Smyth was known for his kindness and tolerance toward all people. A severe disciplinarian toward himself, he, unlike Bishop Loras, overlooked many of his priests' shortcomings. And they loved him in return.

Nevertheless, Bishop Smyth had strong opinions on many ecclesiastical and state issues of the day, and he was not afraid to express them, even when it meant personal danger.

For a time he had to administer the vacant Chicago Diocese, and in that position was forced to travel to Kankakee to excommunicate a recalcitrant and immoral priest named Charles Chiniquy. After posting the notice of excommunication on the door of Chiniquy's parish church, Bishop Smyth returned to his train amid a hail of bullets from the priest's supporters.

Not a powerful orator, but an "honest speaker," Bishop Smyth brought controversial matters to the cathedral pulpit, including the denunciation of the local newspaper for printing an anti-Catholic "Pope's Prayer."

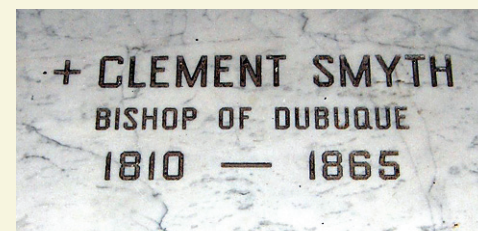
He was publicly pro-Union in a city of many Southern sympathizers, and his strong condemnation of Lincoln's assassination brought him anonymous threats.

One Sunday he replied to the threats and called for a rededication of the nation and city to Christian unity. The bishop's reward was the burning that night of his barn, horses and carriage by arsonists. The Protestant and Catholic people of the city soon replaced the barn and its contents.

Known for his "pleasing personality," Bishop Smyth could also be a real charmer. Upon returning from a trip to Europe, he spoke to the large crowd that had come to welcome him. The bishop told them about his trip and then concluded by saying, "After all, there was a vacancy in my heart, even in imperial Rome in the midst of its grandeur and sacred shrines, for my people were not there — Dubuque was not there." No doubt the faithful were eating out of his hand for some time thereafter.

In 1865, at age 55, Bishop Clement Smyth died after contracting sciatica and dysentery on a visitation of the diocese.

His obituaries commented on the general gloom over the community after his death and acclaimed him for his Christian virtue, qualities of heart and noble deeds. He is buried in the crypt of St. Raphael Cathedral.



Parishes formed 1858-1865 in the current Archdiocese of Dubuque

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Immaculate Conception, Cedar Rapids	1858
Assumption, Cresco	1858
St. Francis Xavier, Dyersville	1858
Immaculate Conception, Fairbank	1858
St. Patrick, Head Wapsie	1858
St. Mary, Lycurgus	1859
St. Clement, Bankston	1860
St. Michael, Guttenberg	1860
St. John, Lisbon/Mount Vernon	1860
St. Lawrence, Otter Creek	1861
St. Francis, Barclay	1862
St. Patrick, Colesburg	1862
St. John the Baptist, West Ridge	1862
St. Mary, Ackley	1863
St. Michael, Garber	1863
Immaculate Conception, North Washington	1863
Holy Trinity, Baldwin	1864
St. Joseph, Mason City	1864
Ss Peter & Paul, Springbrook	1864
St. Boniface, Toledo	1864
St. Mary, Dorchester	1865

Concurrent History

May 11, 1858	Minnesota admitted as 32nd US State
Feb. 14, 1859	Oregon admitted as 33rd US State
Jan. 29, 1860	North American College established in Rome by Pope Pius IX
Nov. 6, 1860	Abraham Lincoln elected president
Jan. 29, 1861	Kansas becomes the 34th state
Jan. 9, 1861	1st hostile act of Civil War; Star of West fired on, Sumter, SC
May 20, 1861	North Carolina becomes 11th & last state to secede from Union
Jan. 1, 1862	First U.S. income tax
May 20, 1862	Homestead Act provides cheap land for settlement of West
Jan. 1, 1863	Emancipation Proclamation (ending slavery) issued by Lincoln
Nov. 19, 1863	Lincoln delivers his address in Gettysburg
Feb. 21, 1864	1st US Catholic parish church for blacks dedicated, Baltimore
Dec. 16, 1864	Battle of Nashville ends after 4,400 casualties
April 9, 1865	General Robert E. Lee and 26,765 troops, surrender at Appomattox to US Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant
April 14, 1865	President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater
Dec. 6, 1865	13th Amendment is ratified, abolishing slavery