

*Dedicated to
Beauty and Excellence,
Now and Always*



**THE AGORA GRAND EVENT CENTER
AND THE INN AT THE AGORA**
Andrew F. Knight, J.D.

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AGORA
GRAND
EVENT CENTER

INTRODUCTION

THE AGORA GRAND EVENT CENTER was forged from the former St. Patrick's Church, one of Maine's most historic and awe-inspiring landmarks.

TAKING ITS NAME from the Greek word for "gathering place," the Agora Grand specializes in elegant weddings and events in which friends and loved ones gather in celebration.

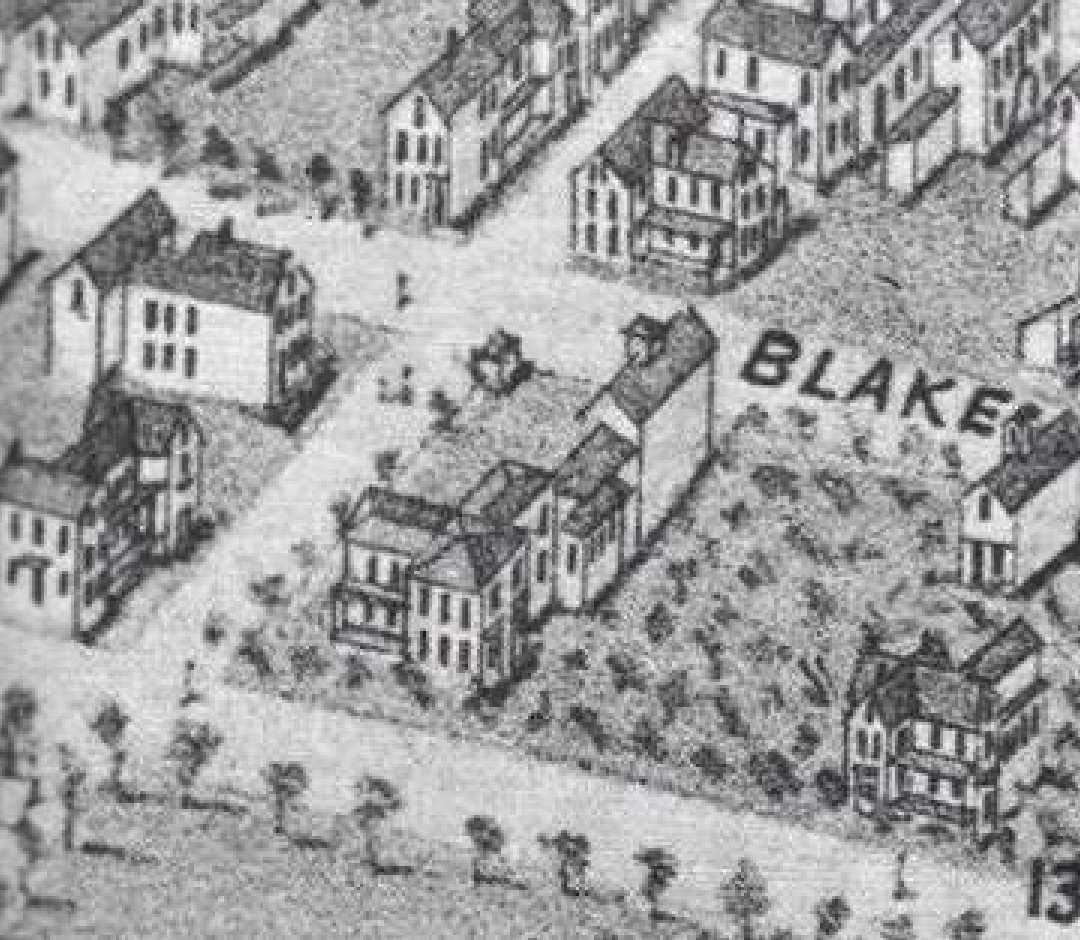
WE WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU the history and workmanship of this unique property. We recognize our role in preserving and elevating the heritage of this treasured building. We therefore only host events that complement our ideals of **Beauty, Excellence, Respect for the Past, and Openness to the Modern.**



RESPECT FOR THE PAST

HISTORY

POWERED BY THE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER, the mills and factories of 19th-century Lewiston thrived and attracted a growing immigrant population largely of French Canadian and Irish descent. One of the city's most successful industrialists was the famed Captain Albert Kelsey, both a distinguished architect and one of the city's original planners. Around 1850, he built a mansion in true Italianate style overlooking the downtown park at the corner of Bates and Walnut streets, now known as Kelsey Hall. The drawing below shows its original design.



IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY, a growing but culturally divided Lewiston had outgrown its first Roman Catholic Church, St. Joseph's on Main Street. In 1886, one of its senior pastors, Monsignor Thomas Wallace, purchased the gorgeous Kelsey Hall along with an adjacent plot of land and began construction on a new church to meet the needs of the growing Irish population. Wallace, who came from a wealthy family and was completely devoted to his congregation, financed nearly a quarter of the cost of the new construction himself. St. Patrick's

Church, which was to cost 6,250 ounces of gold – the equivalent of nearly \$10 million today – quickly became Wallace’s purpose, life, and love.



The new church was to implement a Neogothic architecture with two asymmetric towers. The project’s architect was Patrick Keely, a prolific church designer who also

designed Portland’s Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. On June 24, 1887, the cornerstone of the new St. Patrick’s Church was blessed by Bishop James Healy, America’s first Catholic Bishop of African descent. Construction on the church and chapel continued until St. Patrick’s Church officially opened on Christmas, 1890, with Kelsey Hall serving as the new rectory. The following excerpt is taken from an 1896 journal of the Diocese’s *Sacred Heart Review*:

St. Patrick's Church, a beautiful Gothic structure of brick, with rockfaced granite foundations, has an unsurpassed situation, as it faces directly on the public park and stands commandingly over the lower levels of the city, surmounted as it is by two graceful spires that rise to heights of 220 and 160 feet respectively. It is 180 feet long and 65 feet wide, and has a comfortable seating capacity of 1,000. It is a seven-bay edifice, its brick buttresses being doubly barged in cut granite; and

the side walls are further trimmed in white North Jay granite at the springs and tips of the window-arches.



GLOBALIZATION

Beginning in the late 1970s, the mainstay of Lewiston's prosperity – mills and manufacturing – yielded to the pressures of overseas outsourcing, causing an economic contraction that led to shuttered shops and a decreasing population. Coupled with sex abuse scandals and cover-ups that plagued the Roman Catholic Church and its adherents' good faith, the congregation of St. Patrick's Church dwindled through the turn of the millennium. Finally, the Portland Diocese closed the church in 2009, its final mass being held in October.

A NEW BEGINNING

In 2014, Andrew Knight moved to Lewiston from northern Virginia and purchased the former St. Patrick's Church and Rectory. He spent most of the year renovating Kelsey Hall into a boutique hotel, which opened in March, 2015, as the Inn at the Agora. In July, 2015, he began work on renovating and repurposing the church, which opened in May, 2016, as the Agora Grand Event Center. On May 21, he celebrated his love for his fiancée Annie by marrying her in the building into which he'd poured his blood, sweat, and very soul.

TODAY, this rehabilitated quintessential masterpiece boasts nearly 15,000 square feet of space, soaring 55-foot ceilings upheld by stately

columns, several restored 127-year-old stained glass windows, and the creative repurposing of many historic elements, most notably a modern bar built from parts of the pipe organ. Rich in history, this outstanding specimen has remained one of Maine's stateliest, most awe-inspiring, and best preserved.

The postcard shown opposite is postmarked Oct. 16, 1909, a thank-you note from one to another subordinated to an image of a building they loved and shared. This building is living and breathing, born in 1890 and teeming with human life, emotion, and memory.

RESPECTING THE PAST means understanding our origins and learning from our mistakes while maintaining an esteem for the path we've taken. The Agora Grand was born from a church with a rich history full of love, trouble, hard work, and reverence for the Divine.

AS WE MOVE FORWARD,
WE MUST NEVER FORGET TO LOOK BACK.



Lewiston, Me., St. Patrick's Church.

Dear Bertha :- This is a great day. I expect you are more than flying around. are you getting rested any? Thank you very much for the cards you have sent me. Especially the leather one. Maude has returned. with love.

EXCELLENCE IN WORKMANSHIP

PEDIGREE

The building formerly known as St. Patrick's Church was Man's tribute to the timelessness and magnificence of his Maker.

TO REFLECT TIMELESSNESS, this titan building was built of clay masonry on a solid foundation of granite. The bricks themselves were formed and fired directly on-site and only the best-known mortar mixtures were used to lay the bricks. Completed 127 years ago, this incredible structure was built to last. Today, the building bears the blemishes of maturity but, with continued and meticulous maintenance, will never feel the burdens of old age.



TO REFLECT MAGNIFICENCE, those who labored on this church built the structure as high as they could. The taller north tower rises majestically to 220 feet, designating this building as the tallest in Maine from its birth in 1890 until today. The asymmetric towers of the building's mighty façade offer an awe-inspiring and imposing view from Kennedy Park. The photo on the previous page was taken at a height of twenty stories during maintenance on the tower roof, showing an incredible vista of Lewiston.

PRIDE

The following excerpt, taken from an 1896 journal of the Diocese's *Sacred Heart Review*, describes in colorful 19th century language not only some of the building's sophisticated features, but also the incredible pride taken in their creation:

The church front is artistically broken in [the architect's] best architectural style. The great window, in a Gothic tympanum frame of finely arrayed stone, serves as a splendid centerpiece to the embellishment of the facade. Over this window is a triple Gothic lattice-opening, while below, the eye is delighted by an elaborated Gothic doorway framed in overlapping brick arches, these being separated from one another by intervening columns which are neatly capped and rise into arching pendants.

St. Patrick's Church has a splendid Gothic interior. With a spacious vestibule, a lofty nave, a dome-like apse, and thorough fidelity in its lines, it is exceptionally striking. As you enter the auditory, the harmony between the elaborately foiled capitals of the clustered pillars and the trebly columned and bracketted corbels on the clerestory walls, as well as between these and the double pendants springing up and forming embrasures in the triforium, becomes at once apparent.

The chapel of the Immaculate Conception, a five-bay brick structure with slight brick buttresses and granite underpinning, juts out at a right angle from the church on a line with the chancel. It has a pretty vestibule, neatly barged and buttressed, and is lighted by small double lancet-windows of stained-glass, these being in geometrical design with emblematic openings.

INTRICATE DETAILS

NO DETAIL WAS IGNORED in the creation of St. Patrick's Church.

Notice, for example, the woodworking in the pews, as shown in the photograph. While such woodworking is relatively easy today with Computer Numerical Control (CNC) milling, such capabilities weren't available until the mid 20th century. Each and every one of the hundreds of the



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church's pews was milled and routed by the hands and primitive tooling of skilled artisans of the past.

Also notice the woodworking in each of the pillars, shown below. The church's visionaries weren't satisfied with the pure functional attribute of columns – which was, after all, to support the massive weight of ceiling and slate roof. Instead, they imbued each column with beauty to complement its function.

To comprehend the excellence involved in such workmanship requires careful observation and consideration.



ALPHA AND OMEGA

The beautiful gilded canopy located on a raised platform in the apse – known by adherents as a *baldachin* – is 24 feet high and ornately depicts the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, representing God as both the beginning and the end.



MUSIC IS LIFE

In 1960, the church spent \$250,000 – about \$2 million adjusting for inflation – to upgrade the original 1888 pipe organ to a truly state-of-the-art instrument in the choir balcony. At the time, the St. Patrick’s Church Choir had an excellent reputation far beyond Maine, allowing the choir to perform before Pope John XXIII in Vatican City. In 1961 they recorded an LP record entitled “High Mass at St. Patrick’s.” A selection from this phenomenal recording was played at the May 7, 2016, grand opening of the Agora Grand.

Sadly, upon closing the church, the Portland Diocese chose to salvage some of the organ’s metal, rendering the instrument inoperable. As a tribute to the

church's history, the balcony lounge of the Agora Grand incorporates much of the original woodwork and some of the organ's pipes.

ARISTOCRACY

Captain Albert Kelsey was no stranger to privilege and wealth and he spared no expense in creating his enviable mansion, which is today the Inn at the Agora. With twelve-foot ceilings and unsurpassed woodwork and molding throughout, the home is today much as it was in 1850, excepting modern amenities. Photos on the next page show the parlor and its unique detailing, unchanged for nearly 170 years, as well as one of the inn's guest rooms.

CREATING EXCELLENCE requires a symbiosis between our minds (that marry function and beauty), our hands (that instantiate that marriage), and our souls (that breathe passion into that marriage). In other words, excellence is born of care, love, and hard work.

IF IT IS WORTH DOING,
IT IS WORTH DOING WELL.



BEAUTY IN SURROUNDINGS

BEAUTY INSPIRES APPRECIATION. Beauty is often pleasing, but need not be. Indeed, the very flaws that inhabit our surroundings are, in the right light, their most precious attributes.

STAINED GLASS

Nothing is more emblematic of Catholicism than stained glass windows. Using stained glass to depict a scene involves the extremely resource-consuming process of attaching thousands of precisely cut colored glass shards with lengths of lead that are soldered at joints. In other words, telling a story through stained glass just might be the most inefficient possible means of storytelling – and therein lies its beauty.

In 1927, a Munich manufacturer built and installed stained glass windows in the nave of St. Patrick's Church. Sadly, upon closing the church, the Portland Diocese sold many of these windows to a Japanese company in 2011. Nevertheless, many of the church's most priceless pieces remained, most notably the 26 original windows in the chapel and the breathtaking Rose Window penetrating the west façade.

The Rose Window was in poor condition in 2014, having suffered 124 years of the elements without maintenance. In 2015, the entire window was restored with the help of Maine Art Glass Studio as shown in these before-and-after photos.





ARTISTIC PASSION

Mother Mary is depicted in an original oil painting by celebrated Maine painter Harry Cochrane. The twelve-foot tall painting, created in the late 1800s, is both optically and spiritually dark, evoking a rich sense of religious reverence for some and intellectual curiosity for others. Retractable curtains are available for those couples who would prefer not to feel Mary's gaze during their vows.

GRIT

There is nothing so boring as perfection and nothing as wondrous as unpredictability.



Nothing could be grittier or more fascinating than the location of the Agora Grand. Located in the heart of Lewiston, Maine's second largest city, the Agora Grand overlooks beautiful Kennedy Park where Presidential nominee John Kennedy spoke on November 7, 1960. A few blocks away is the arena in which, in 1965, Muhammad Ali knocked out Sonny Liston in what is certainly the most infamous photo in boxing history.

During Lewiston's economic downturn in the latter part of the 20th century, poverty and unemployment skyrocketed and the crime rate hit record highs, lending the city's snide new nickname, "The Dirty Lew." Few understood the irony that Maine was then – and remains today – the nation's safest state.

In the 1990s, fueled by rumors of low cost of living, good schools, and low crime rates, groups of federally-sponsored refugees from war-torn Somalia started arriving in Lewiston. They opened a variety of businesses in the abandoned downtown storefronts, bringing their unique skills, cultures, and cuisines to an otherwise culturally homogenous city. Crime rates fell; high school graduation rates increased; city tax revenues rose. Nevertheless, given that Maine was (and still is) the nation's least ethnically diverse state, the Somalian influx wasn't without its detractors.

Lewiston today is a culturally and economically thriving city, with a pervasively funky and eclectic

art scene dominated by a multiracial youth that celebrates the city's richness and grit. Home to the prestigious Bates College, it is now the safest large city in Maine and on *Forbes Magazine's* 2017 list of top 25 places to retire.

Still, we hope that no matter how much Lewiston changes, it will always retain the grit – and ephemeral beauty – that has characterized it from the beginning.



APPRECIATING BEAUTY requires only looking. We need not love nor hate – nor pass any value judgment at all. We must merely look, and look closely. Looking quickly turns into experiencing, and experiencing is the precursor to emotion, indeed life itself.

BEAUTY IS EVERYWHERE;
WE NEED ONLY OPEN OUR EYES.



OPENNESS TO THE MODERN

LIFE IS MOTION. Change is inevitable. As a civilized culture, we look ahead while never forgetting our past. While respecting our origins, we can also welcome and embrace the world that is yet to come.

ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH *WAS*. THE AGORA GRAND *IS*. We cannot deny motion – that is, we can either progress or regress. We choose to progress.

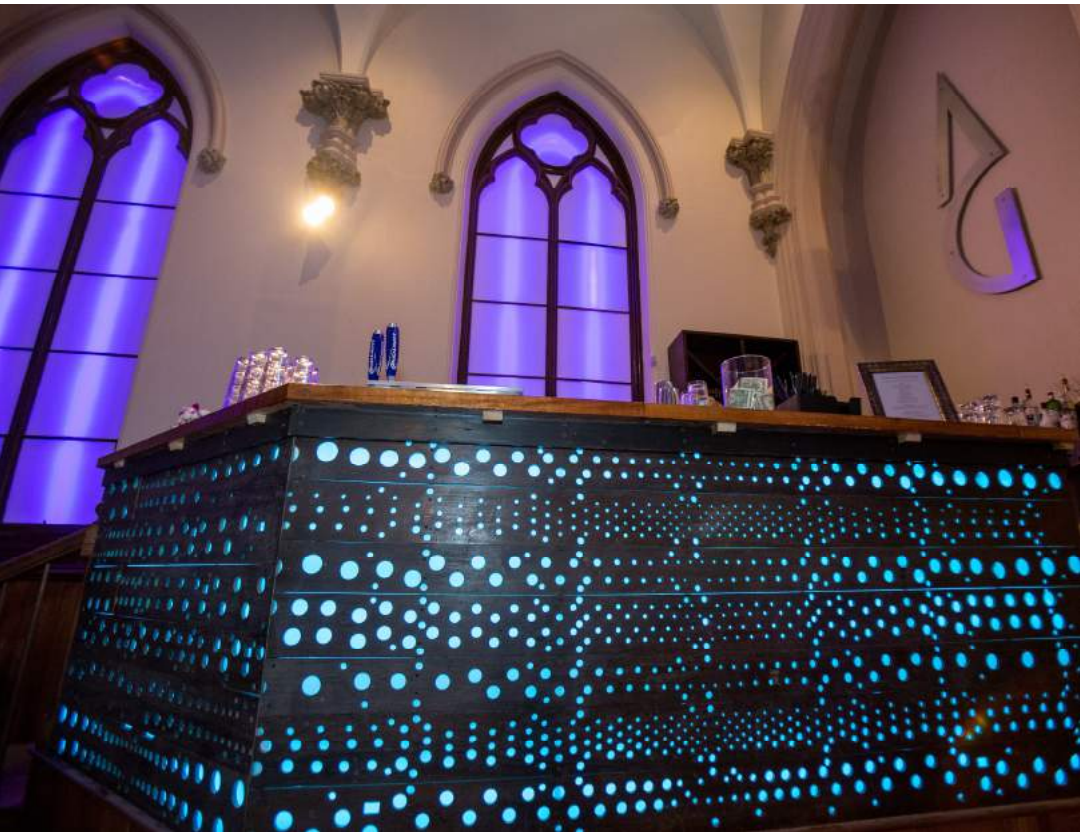
REUSE AND RECYCLE

We believe in sustainability. We believe in repairing instead of disposing. We believe in

reusing instead of discarding. We believe in giving new life to that which is on the brink of death.

Given that the Portland Diocese had rendered the pipe organ useless, we made the choice to reuse as many elements of the original structure as possible. This included, most notably, the bar and the balcony lounge.

THE MODERN FULL-SERVICE BAR, shown below, was created from the most interesting salvaged materials from the pipe organ, especially mechanical elements that served to direct air to the hundreds of differently sized copper pipes.



The Balcony Lounge, created in the former choir balcony, incorporates materials from the original pipe organ and includes two levels, a luxurious private bathroom, and plenty of couches for relaxing. The following is a birds-eye view from the upper viewing platform.



RENOVATING

While adding a professional sound system was a relatively straightforward process, incorporating unique and state-of-the-art lighting required some

brainstorming. Below is a photo, mid-renovation, showing the use of modern LED lighting to produce custom illumination.



REPURPOSING

Inside the north tower – directly below the highest structural point in Maine – was a tragically under-utilized room surrounded by stunning original stained glass. By adding a comfortable king bed and a variety of modern amenities, the room is now the Tower Honeymoon Suite, the only such suite in New England.



TODAY V. TOMORROW

In opening the Agora Grand Event Center and the Inn at the Agora, we have attempted to preserve the past by embracing the future. Today's people demand the creature comforts that weren't available 127 years ago. Therefore our renovations, we hope, have culminated in an elegant infusion of modern amenities into a picturesque historic landmark. We hope you enjoy the following photographs of some of our proudest moments.

WELCOMING THE MODERN means opening our hearts. We pay homage to our roots while accepting that change is inevitable; change is good; change is what keeps us on our toes.

We do not know how this wondrous building will look in 127 years from now. Nor do we fear that it will undergo an adaptive reuse at that time as our descendants in the year 2144 infuse it with whatever futuristic amenities exist then. Indeed, we *hope* this building will be adapted and reused, over and over, century after century, being loved and cherished and appreciated by many generations to come, all the while remaining, at heart, the church that was.

HERE'S TO THE FUTURE.











FUN FACTS

The church's cornerstone, laid in 1887, was blessed by Bishop James Healy, America's first Catholic Bishop of African descent, although his African heritage was not discovered until after his death.

Rising 220 feet to the tip of its north tower, the Agora Grand Event Center is the tallest building in Maine. In fact, not only is Maine the only state in which the tallest building was built in the 19th century, *all three* of its tallest buildings (including the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Portland and Lewiston City Hall) were built in the 1800s!

The builder and first priest of St. Patrick's Church, Father Thomas Wallace, loved his church so much that he asked to be buried there. Unusual for Catholic churches, a crypt was built underneath the mortuary chapel and his body remained there from his passing in 1907 to 2009, when his remains were transferred to Mt. Hope Cemetery in Auburn.

The Inn at the Agora was created from Kelsey Hall, a 12 bedroom, 7,500 square-foot mansion built in 1850 by Lewiston's principal city planner and architect, Captain Albert Kelsey.

During the 2015 renovation, approximately 50 "Indian head" pennies dating pre-1910 were found behind the wainscoting. Presumably having fallen out of parishioners' pockets not long after the church's opening, many are in almost uncirculated condition.

Acknowledgements

Many, many people are part of the resurrection of this historic property and the creation of the Agora Grand Event Center and Inn at the Agora. To name just a few, I feel especially heavily indebted to:

Annie Knight, Danielle Schill, my parents, Heather Woolsey, Jan Barrett, Ryan Rhoades, Gabrielle Russell, Sandy Marquis, and Laurie Ouellette.

Also many thanks to Russell Caron Wedding Photography, Rene Roy Photography, Focus Photography, SP Films, Dan Marquis, and Russ Dillingham (as well as the *Lewiston Sun-Journal*) for the outstanding photography utilized within.