ST. AUGUSTINE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

News for Donors & Friends

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243 N. Lawrence Street Philadelphia, PA 19106 https://StAugustineHF.org

St. Augustine Church Hosts Two Community-Wide America250 Events

The art-rich interior of St. Augustine Church welcomed parishioners and first-time visitors – history buffs, students, academics, various faith communities, neighborhood groups, cultural socieities -- to two outstanding programs referencing our historic church and prompted by America250.

Gripping is the word that describes the second of the two programs, the October 5 screening of the fifth episode of ***In Pursuit: Philadelphia and the Making of America***. The 10-episode *In Pursuit* documentary looks at 400 years of American history through the lens of Philadelphia, beginning with its founding by Quaker William Penn. Created by **History Making Productions** and executive producer and Philadelphia business leader **Sam Katz**, this series of enactments, portrayals, and scholars' comments animates a riveting story that prompts reflection and discussion.



Episode 5, "America," presents an especially dramatic account of the city's history from 1838 to 1876. It pulls no punches when describing the burning of Catholic churches — St. Augustine consecrated in 1801 key among them —by native-born Protestants in the anti-Catholic, anti-Irish immigrant 1844 Nativist Riots. It examines the tensions building between Irish immigrants and Blacks educated through the work of Octavius Catto; the seeds of a women's movement centering around Women's Medical College; the birth and public-spirited mission of the Union League; the Civil War; President Lincoln's assassination, and more.

A panel discussion immediately following the screening featured moderator **David Krueger, Ph.D.,** executive director of the Dialogue Institute, Temple University; **Patrick Hayes, Ph.D.,** archivist for the Redemptorist Baltimore Province; **Rev. Bill Wilson,** pastor of neighboring St. George's United Methodist Church; **Randy Duque**, deputy director, Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, and **Rev. Christopher Drennen, OSA**, St. Augustine parochial administrator. **The Dialogue Institute** co-hosted the program. (www.dialogueinstitute.org)

- Episode 5, "America," Trailer: www.inpursuit.tv/episodes and complete episodes: *In Pursuit: Philadelphia and the Making of America*: www.inpursuit.tv
- WPVI-TV (6ABC): https://6abc.com/tag/6abc-in-pursuit/; each episode available after its public screening
- History Making Productions: www.historymakingproductions.com

Several October 5 guests also attended the first America250-related event hosted by St. Augustine Church on June 7. **Interfaith Philadelphia** co-sponsored **"Religion and the Immigrant Experience: Building This Country Together,"** a two-hour panel discussion that provided historical, academic, and activist perspectives to the parish immigrant experience within the larger city context and up through today.

Foundation president **Kathy Rigby** moderated the program, which delivered multiple points of U.S. Augustinian history, scholarly reflections on the influence of William Penn and Ben Franklin, and opinions on contemporary immigration justice.

Rev. Michael DiGregorio, OSA, former Augustinian Provincial and historian, traced the parish from its founding in 1796 with the arrival of Irish-born Rev. Matthew Carr, OSA, its first church opening in 1801, its dynamic population growth through the 1830s, its burning to the ground in the 1844 Nativist riots, and its rebuilding and dedication three years later. Villanova University's **Catherine E. Wilson, Ph.D.** focused on William Penn's foundational principles that helped frame Philadelphia's character – "people came to Pennsylvania because of ethnic and religious pluralism"– and cited the late historian John A. Lukács' observation, "Penn gave Philadelphia heart," in laying the groundwork for immigrant aid societies formed decades later. Community activist and New Sanctuary Movement co-director **Peter Pedemonti** shared on issues surrounding today's "faith-rooted immigrant justice." He further commented on weekly prayer events he observes to "grieve for immigrants and pray for ICE agents."



The spirited Q&A session following the panelists' remarks surfaced points regarding Philadelphia's first abolitionist society, prospects for meaningful immigration reform, the rule of law, the distinctions of assimilation and integration, and the value that ethnic-based societies, such as the Friendly Sons and Daughters of St. Patrick, offered new immigrants. ***Event gallery*:** www.staugustinehf.org/america-250



Rev. Paul Galetto, OSA, former parochial administrator, Rev. Michael DiGregorio, OSA, Peter Pedemonti, Catherine Wilson, Kathy Rigby.

President Rigby noted that the foundation and the church were honored to participate in these two community-wide programs in this special America250 year. "Several visitors commented on the beautiful life-sized paintings of St. Augustine's life," she said, "and expressed interest in learning more about the church's intersection of faith, art, and American history."

Additional ***Religious Freedom: Then and Now*** sessions continue through 2026 and into 2027. **Interfaith Philadelphia** promotes the historical and cultural significance of the city's old and venerable historic congregations and promotes the principles of interfaith collaboration. www.interfaithphiladelphia.org

New and Repeat Donors Tell Us Why

Art Historian Praises Collection Unique to Philadelphia and Church

Diane Cole Ahl felt right at home as soon as she walked through the church doors.

Foundation president Kathy Rigby had invited Diane to a lunch followed by a tour of St. Augustine's, knowing her friend would enjoy the 19th century Italian art installed on its walls. Kathy had previously shared information on her top philanthropic interest with Diane, especially the Tito Troja (1850-1916) cycle of eight Augustine paintings created in 1897-98.

Diane retired last year from Lafayette College as The Arthur J. '55 and Barbara S. Rothkopf Professor Emerita of Art History. The Bucks County resident is an award-winning published scholar on Italian Renaissance art and is considered an authority on Augustinian iconography. Her students especially valued her directed instruction at the Accademia Gallery in Florence, Italy, over the years ***(right)*.**



Much as Kathy expected, Diane found the Augustine collection captivating. "Although there are numerous cycles of the saint's life in Europe, most notably Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes in San Gimignano (1464-5), this is the only one in North America," Diane later wrote to an arts funding organization.

"Installed along the church's imposing nave, the monumental canvases (12' x 6.08') comprise a narrative cycle unique among Troja's works. Stylistically," she adds, "they reflect the dramatic conventions and anachronisms of nineteenth-century history painting, while their iconography emerges from the rich traditions of Italian sacred art."



Each of the eight paintings depicts an important event in the life of St. Augustine (354-430 AD), venerated philosopher, theologian, and Doctor of the Catholic Church: his conversion; his Baptism; with his mother, St. Monica; bestowing his monastic rule; speaking of the Mystery of the Trinity; preaching at the Council of Carthage ***(right)***; the death of St. Monica, and his own death. ***View the eight paintings:*** **www.st-augustinechurch.com/photos-of-lunettes-of-st-augustines-life**

The only problem … Diane could not help but notice their deteriorating condition. In 128 years, these eight paintings have been treated only once, and not at a professional level that would restore their beauty, preserve their value, and extend their longevity. The result is what's visible to the eye — harm caused by decades of limited financial attention, followed by one restoration that left fine details unpainted, other areas attempted but poorly executed, and a good deal of flaking paint and canvas deformations.

Moved by the powerful but distressed images surrounding her, Diane asked Kathy how she could promote the collection's visibility in the art world, as well as support its professional restoration and preservation. Kathy didn't need to think long or hard to offer a suggestion or two.

Diane immediately wrote a check, designating her gift to the fund supporting the paintings' restoration, knowledgeable and confident in the expertise of the foundation's first-choice independent conservator, **Kristin deGhetaldi, Ph.D.** (www.dighetaldiconservation.com). What's more, she capped her generous financial commitment with a letter of support as a respected member of the arts community to accompany the foundation's upcoming proposal applications to two arts funders. One is a major corporate arts grant program, the other a new funding program designed to assist with the cost of a detailed assessment of each painting's condition.

Civic Leader Values Church's History, Community, Art

City history, community vitality, and historic preservation prompted one of Philadelphia's most respected elected officials to make her first and second gifts to the St. Augustine Heritage Foundation.

The Honorable Lynne M. Abraham served as Municipal Court Judge (1976-80), Common Pleas Court Judge (1980-91), and the first woman and longest-serving Philadelphia District Attorney (1991-2010) in modern Philadelphia history. She has been an attorney in private practice for the last 16 years.



Judge Abraham's interests in neighborhood and community renewal revealed themselves early in her career, as executive director of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. She expanded this interest through Urban Genesis Inc., a non-profit foundation providing grants for neighborhood improvement that she co-founded as DA and operated within her office. Her post-government community activity includes the Society Hill Preservation Fund, which focuses on capital projects to assist properties in and around historic Washington Square, one of William Penn's original five squares and located in the heart of the city's colonial landmarks and less than a mile from St. Augustine Church.

With its place in Philadelphia and U.S. history, its location in Old City, its architecture, its unique art collection, and its multiple outreach activities to diverse groups in the community, St. Augustine Church seemed like a natural for

Judge Abraham's interest. A law partner and long-time friend, who is also a parishioner, introduced her to the foundation and its mission. She quickly became intrigued.

Judge Abraham made her first charitable gift in September 2024, joining a treasured list of "charter donors" in the foundation's inaugural year.

"I am a proud supporter and contributor to the Saint Augustine Heritage Foundation," she says, "because I believe in its mission of preserving, maintaining, and restoring this historic property in a city designated a World Heritage Site." She adds that an interest in "strengthening and serving the needs of the church's diverse cultural and linguistic faith community" further drives her support.

We chuckled when she commented on our ***Report to Donors*** mailed last spring. "Your report was great info, but you didn't ask for money, you need to ask for money!" We agreed that standard fundraising practice is to 'always ask for the gift,' but the lack of a solicitation was a deliberate decision on our part. We intended our modest four-page report, our first communication, *solely* as a much-delayed public thank you to our first round of donors. Our mantra … thank sincerely and properly, first. Ask later.

Following through on her own recommendation, Judge Abraham made her second charitable gift this past summer and now takes the extra step of urging others to consider contributing, as well.

"The Foundation requires funding to conserve the impressive church exterior and grounds, plus its magnificent interior which showcases important religious artworks including frescoes, paintings, lunettes, windows, and life-size statues," she says. "I invite all to join us in saving this special sacred place by making a donation to enable the Foundation to continue its many tasks."

Commodore Barry, President Washington Visit Third Annual History Fair

Former board member **Jeff LaMonica** returned to St. Augustine Church on October 10 to roll out the foundation's third annual history fair, an event he conceived and created in the foundation's first year. The Delaware County Community College history professor, author, and South Philadelphia resident again recruited participating museums and historical societies, gathered historical documents and artifacts for display, and oversaw the day's volunteers and activities.



A special treat this year … **President George Washington** and **Commodore John Barry**, "Father of the American Navy," dropped by to chat with everyone, beginning with **Father Chris Drennen, OSA (*left*)**, parochial administrator. They joined volunteers dressed in representative uniforms who shared information on their organizations, which included **Fort Mifflin** and the **Civil Defense World War II Reenactment Group.**

The Hopeless Semantic Band trio, another new feature, welcomed history fair guests to Carr Hall and entertained passersby with "old time" music performed on guitar, mandolin, banjo, and fiddle.







We invite your comments and welcome your suggestions.
We'd love your charitable gift, too!

ST. AUGUSTINE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Dedicated to preserving an irreplaceable legacy … where sacred art, faith, and American history endure.

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