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Father Philippe de Carriere: Jesuit Pioneer on Florida’s West Coast, 1888-1902

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In the late nineteenth century, much of South Florida was still a frontier with isolated settlers living far from one another. Even as Tampa grew into a substantial city after the arrival of the cigar industry in the 1880s, its hinterland was sprinkled with sparsely settled communities. Ministering to the religious needs of South Florida’s residents proved a real challenge, especially in the case of Catholics who were a small percent of the population spread across the forbidding landscape, often in hard-to-reach locations. Moreover, Catholics living in the city of Tampa were increasingly Spanish-speaking immigrants. The challenge of sustaining the faith of Catholic settlers was met by Jesuit priests, especially Father Philippe de Carriere, who served for fourteen years on Florida’s West Coast.

St. Louis Parish (since 1905 called Sacred Heart Parish), Tampa, was established in 1860. From then to 1888, the parish had ten diocesan priest pastors. Omitting the total of 11.5 years when the pastorate of St. Louis was vacant, the average tenure of diocesan pastors between 1860 and 1888 was a short 1.7 years. The parish had five pastors from 1887 to 1888, three of whom suffered untimely deaths. In May 1887 yellow fever broke out in Key West and soon spread to Tampa with devastating effects. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, who had arrived in Tampa in 1881 and opened a school, kept a diary that reported on October 5, 1887: “...the epidemic has become alarming.... Many families left the place, fearing the disease.... Every afternoon the parishioners met in Church to pray.” About fifty percent of the local population caught the disease whose cause was unknown. Although only a small proportion actually died of yellow fever, it decimated the clergy.

Forty-three-year-old Father Charles Peterman, the much-respected pastor of Tampa’s St. Louis Parish since 1883, contracted yellow fever on October 24, 1887. Upon hearing the news, the Bishop of St. Augustine, John Moore, sent Orlando’s pastor, forty-year-old Father Felix P. Swemberg, to Tampa to tend Peterman and the parish. Swemberg, ordained for the Vicar Apostolic of Kansas in 1868, moved to Orlando in late 1885, and founded St. James Parish. Reaching Tampa by October 27, 1887, Swemberg discovered Peterman dead. Only four days later Father Swemberg too expired from yellow fever, but not before the experienced missioner Father Henry P. Clavreul, pastor of St. Joseph’s, Mandarin, arrived. After burying Peterman and Swemberg, Clavreul, who was immune to the disease, cautioned Bishop Moore not to send another priest to Tampa for the time being.

Almost a year later, on September 12, 1888, Father Clavreul was relieved by Father Denis O’Sullivan, a young Irishman of the Diocese of Newark and a former missioner in Africa, who had lived through several epidemics and who volunteered to help disease-ridden Florida. After only twelve days in Tampa, he, too, died from yellow fever. With no other Catholic clergy there from September 24 to October 17, 1888, Tampa was without the ministrations of a priest.
Meanwhile, another priest in Key West expired of the same disease. In one year Bishop Moore lost one-quarter of his priests to yellow fever, while fifty percent of them were infected with it, including the Bishop himself.\textsuperscript{3}

Moore begged for emergency help from the New Orleans Jesuits, a group he had turned to earlier in 1882 to care for Catholic settlers around San Antonio, Florida. Although they had refused him then, they responded positively now. Father James Duffo, a sixty-two-year-old French Jesuit who was fever-immune, was sent from Selma, Alabama, to Jacksonville.\textsuperscript{4} The New Orleans Jesuit Superior, John O'Shanahan, received a second desperate letter from Moore on October 5, 1888, asking for a bilingual priest to serve temporarily the growing Spanish-speaking population in the Tampa region; at 5 P.M. the next day Father O'Shanahan called to his room the sixty-three-year-old French-born Father Philippe de Carriere.

Born in Toulouse, France, on April 20, 1825, of an aristocratic family, de Carriere had entered the Society of Jesus in 1844. He went to Spring Hill College, a Jesuit school in Alabama, in 1848 and was ordained in Mobile in 1857. O'Shanahan chose de Carriere not only because of his Caribbean missionary experience and multilingual skills, but also because he thought that the older Jesuit was immune from yellow fever because of his long years in the tropics. De Carriere

Tampa’s St. Louis Church in about 1900. Built in 1859, the mission church became a parish in 1860, and in 1883 with the addition of two wings, its capacity was increased from 120 to 200 persons. The Jesuits built a larger masonry church in 1905, renaming both church and parish Sacred Heart.

Photograph courtesy of the Archives of New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus (ANOPSJ).
knew that this was not the case, since he never contracted the disease! Yet he said nothing and with obedience typical of Jesuits, de Carriere “accepted willingly” his superior’s “invitation” to serve Tampa. At 3:30 P.M. the next day, Sunday, October 7, 1888, with prayers, alms, provisions for the journey, and with $100 in his pocket, de Carriere left New Orleans by rail for Tampa, less than twenty-four hours after accepting O’Shanahan’s “invitation.” Given the disease-ridden reputation of Tampa and knowing the fate of three other priests there, the French Jesuit was sure that he was going to his death: “I pledged my life for the sake of that mission,” he later wrote.

After a long and arduous train trip, Father de Carriere arrived in Tampa at 10:30 P.M. on October 17, 1888. He was the first Jesuit on Florida’s West Coast in 319 years. Father Juan Rogel, a Spanish Jesuit, had been pastor of the Calusa at San Antonio de Padua Parish on Mound Key (Estero Bay) from 1567 to 1569. Disembarking the train in 1888, the French Jesuit discovered Tampa quarantined. “The city was almost deserted,” he observed; “I was the only minister dwelling in it.” However, it was not the epidemic that struck de Carriere as most discouraging, but rather what he called the “spiritual misery” of Tampa. He wrote: “It could not be remedied except through a crusade of prayers,” which he solicited from friends in the South and in France. “In a word,” he continued, “heaven had been stormed in favor of Tampa and of Florida.”

Meanwhile, Bishop Moore looked for a permanent solution to the pastoral needs of Tampa. He had no diocesan priest to send. Hearing of this, Father O’Shanahan, the New Orleans Jesuit Superior since 1888, sought to expand Jesuit apostolates into Florida. Through de Carriere’s mediation, Bishop Moore looked favorably on O’Shanahan’s offer of help.

The New Orleans Jesuits had their roots in France. In 1837 four French Jesuit priests, two brothers, and a novice traveled from France’s Lyon Province to New Orleans. From 1838 to 1884 the Jesuits opened four colleges: St. Charles in Grand Coteau, Louisiana (1838); Spring Hill in Mobile, Alabama (1847); Immaculate Conception in New Orleans (1847); and St. Mary’s in Galveston, Texas (1884). By 1880 the New Orleans Jesuits had become an independent mission from Lyon. At that time they had fifty priests, thirty-seven brothers, and forty-eight
On July 31, 1889, Father O’Shanahan met with Moore to propose that the Bishop hand over to the New Orleans Jesuits eight South Florida counties (Hillsborough, Polk, De Soto, Manatee, Osceola, Lee, Dade, Monroe) “exclusively and in perpetuity for sacred ministry and the care of souls.” This extraordinary arrangement gave to the Jesuits over one-third of Moore’s diocese permanently! On September 25, 1889, Father John Quinlan, an Irish-born Jesuit, arrived as pastor of St. Louis Parish, Tampa, thus officially initiating the 1889 agreement even before the formal document was signed by Bishop Moore and Father O’Shanahan on September 3, 1891.

Up to then, that is from October 1888 to September 1889, the aged Father de Carriere was pastor of St. Louis Parish and in charge of all its surrounding missions. During the summer of 1889, de Carriere began contacting Catholics scattered throughout the surrounding territory. On May 16 and 17 he journeyed to Lakeland. Returning to Tampa for the weekend, he left again on Monday, May 20, by steamer across Tampa Bay to Point Pinellas (St. Petersburg), where he was told that one Catholic family lived. Although Mass was said there as early as 1878, de Carriere found only a handful of Catholics, including the aged Vincent Lionardi and the Torres family. The next morning (May 21) de Carriere took the 6:30 A.M. train for Tarpon Springs. There he visited the family of Judge D. J. Murphy. Using a small chapel Murphy had built, de Carriere heard confessions and said Mass for ten persons. He returned to Tampa the same day via a six-hour ride by mule carriage. The following Monday, May 27, he left Tampa by steamer for Manatee and reached Fogartyville, visiting the home of Irish-born Captain Bartholomew Fogarty, who also had constructed a chapel near his house. The next day Bart Fogarty made his First Communion. The collection amounted to $4.15, noted de Carriere, who returned to Tampa by steamer on May 28.

The next Monday, June 3, de Carriere left Tampa again, this time for Bloomingdale (southeast of today's Brandon near the Alafia River). Staying three days, he heard confessions, said Mass, preached, gave a public lecture on “The True Church,” baptized, instructed converts, and gave First Communion to two adults. He also started a fund drive to build a church and appointed several laymen to serve as the building committee. On June 5 de Carriere left Bloomingdale by train for the six-hour trip back to Tampa, carrying a collection of six dollars in hand.

Father de Carriere’s missionary pattern was repeated by other Jesuits in the years that followed. St. Louis Parish was the base of operations for congregation-gathering and evangelization among the widespread Catholics on the West Coast. This parish-based missionary pattern, common throughout the South, was three-staged. First, a station was established, which served as a place where Catholics gathered, usually at the home of a prominent family. Before a station was founded, the priest-missionary had to search out Catholics. Once the station was established, the priest visited it periodically, which meant sporadically, briefly, and usually unannounced, but never on a Sunday since on that day he needed to be at St. Louis Parish in Tampa. Although Catholics in a locality often remained a station for years, as soon as practical the congregation was moved to the second stage. This mission stage demanded a concentration of Catholics and the construction of a church, however modest. The priest visited missions more frequently and more regularly than stations. But what separated the mission from the third stage of
Father Philippe de Carriere at the age of 82 on the occasion of his 50th anniversary as a priest.

Photograph courtesy of ANOPSJ.
development, the parish, was the presence of a residential pastor appointed by the Bishop. A pastor and his people, not the church building, constitute a parish. Whereas a station or a mission is often not self-supporting, a parish usually must be. From 1889 through 1919 Jesuits exclusively tended Catholics at all three stages of development on both coasts of Florida. It is a tribute to their diligence that by 1919 more missions were ready to become parishes than there were Jesuits to pastor them.

Besides overseeing rural stations and missions, de Carriere founded urban missions as well. On April 25, 1889, de Carriere visited Port Tampa for the first time; by the turn-of-the-century it had a mission chapel. Soon after his arrival, Father de Carriere went to Ybor City to continue negotiations for a site begun earlier between Father Peterman and Vicente Martínez Ybor, the cigar manufacturer. Settling on a lot, the purchase price was $5,000, a bargain thought Martínez Ybor, who supposed the land was worth $8,000. Although neither Bishop Moore nor Father de Carriere felt they were getting a bargain, they concluded the deal, aided by a $1,000 down-payment given by Henry Flagler, East Coast railroad magnate.10

Father de Carriere’s solitary posting came to an end with the arrival on September 25, 1889, of Father John Quinlan, a Jesuit who took over as pastor of St. Louis Parish, with de Carriere his assistant. Quinlan, a native of County Cork, Ireland, described his Tampa parish as 260 miles

Tampa’s St. Louis Church in about 1887.

Photograph courtesy of ANOPSIJ.
long and 150 miles wide, comprised of twenty small cities. Father Quinlan listed nineteen stations and missions which de Carriere had served from the parish when he was the sole priest. These far-flung locations included Arcadia, Bartow, Bloomingdale, Ft. Meade, Haines City, Jupiter, Kissimmee, Lakeland, Fogartyville, Bradenton, Manatee, Miami, Ft. Myers, Pinellas, Punta Gorda, St. Cloud, St. Petersburg, Tarpon Springs, and Ten-thousand Islands.

On April 19, 1891, Ybor City’s first Catholic church, Our Lady of Mercy Mission (named for a nineteenth-century Marian devotion of Cubans) began services. At a time when wood-frame churches of comparable size cost from $200 to $400, Our Lady of Mercy Church cost $1,665.79, signifying it was not a cheap or second-class building. Three years later the mission became a parish. In July 1892 Father Quinlan was transferred and replaced by another Irishman, Father William Tyrell. Three other Jesuits were assigned with Tyrell, including Father de Carriere.12

During the seven years of Tyrell’s leadership, the pastoral care in the area grew in complexity, largely due to his energetic efforts, which included the opening of a Jesuit high school in 1899 and the completion of a magnificent new church named Sacred Heart in 1905. When Tyrell left Tampa in 1899 for Spring Hill College, fifteen Jesuits were assigned to the Florida Jesuit Missions. Thirteen were based in Tampa, of whom three were full-time missionaries to the outlying areas. Tyrell’s successor was Daniel O’Sullivan, who served from September 1899 to April 1903 and under whose superiorship de Carriere was transferred from Tampa in 1902.13

From September 1889 to 1902 Father de Carriere, whose age, personality, and experience made him a sought-after advisor, had several pastoral responsibilities. In addition to serving as assistant pastor at St. Louis Parish and chaplain to the Sisters of the Holy Names Convent, Father de Carriere was keeper of the Jesuit house diary, a function that he fulfilled with such care that his records are a gold mine for historians. From his arrival in 1888 until his departure in 1902, Father de Carriere kept meticulous notes on the development of the Jesuit Florida Missions. After leaving Tampa, he wrote several recollections of his experiences on the West Coast. His writings are revealing, insightful, and refreshingly frank, more direct and colorful than any of his diarist successors. They also describe components of parish life from 1888 to 1902, among them clerical life and attitudes about Catholic schools and religious women.

One critical aspect of clerical life is the relationship of priests to the diocesan bishop. Bishop Moore maintained very good relations with the Tampa Jesuits, and Father de Carriere deeply respected the Bishop, as is shown by what he wrote when Moore died in late July 1901: “In him our Society lost a true friend and the Jesuit Fathers of the Mission of Florida their beloved founder, protector, and benefactor.”15

To be a Catholic priest in South Florida from 1888 to 1919 meant to be a Jesuit. Born in the turmoil of the Reformation, the Jesuits were action-oriented with a threefold focus as school masters, spiritual directors, and missionaries. As an international organization with a strict military-like chain of command loyal to the Pope and the Jesuit General, self-sacrifice and a willingness to take on any task was deeply ingrained in them. Jesuit personnel were interchangeable parts; no one priest had a monopoly on any one work to the exclusion of others. As Father de Carriere wrote of the ideal Jesuit in 1896: “He ought to be ready and willing at all
times [to allow] any other laborer [who] would and should come to facilitate him [in] the work of salvation [and] in the share of souls he has received for Christ and not for himself only.”

Beginning with the venerable Father de Carriere, one Jesuit was always assigned as the confessor and chaplain to the Sisters of the Holy Names in Tampa. Their Catholic academy, taught by themselves as religious women, was held in highest esteem by Catholics. Father de Carriere wrote in 1896 that the Catholic school was so essential to the work of the parish that it should be constructed even before a church building. However, he favored parochial schools, which were tuition-free schools, rather than academies, which were private institutions run by religious women and which took in boarders and demanded tuition.

Father de Carriere critically reflected in 1896 about parochial schools and the Sisters. He perceived a possible conflict between the educational needs of the parish and the purposes of the Holy Names Sisters’ Academy. An 1891 agreement between the Sisters and the Jesuits said that the Sisters were not to refuse any child who could not pay since the pastor would make up any serious school deficit. Yet five years after the agreement, Tampa still had no established “system of parochial schools.” The majority of Catholic school children went to public schools, wrote de Carriere, because Catholic families were too poor to pay the tuition demanded at the Sisters’ Academy. In short, de Carriere opposed the academy system because he felt it discriminated against the poor, whereas a parochial school was preferable because it provided free education.
paid for by the parish. The Sisters, claimed de Carriere, were formed in a narrow view of poverty in their novitiate, a very severe personal economy coupled with “a greedy instinct for getting occasionally all the petty gains they can make for their community,” even at the expense of the poor. He stated that the Holy Name Sisters opposed free parochial schools because they felt it undermined their income-bearing academies. On this matter de Carriere expressed himself in uncharacteristically strong terms, since in other matters he admired the Sisters and was their gentle devoted chaplain. In 1896 he even favored having them work in pastoral ministry rather than just teaching, a remarkably prescient suggestion; regrettably, he commented, the Holy Names leadership would not permit this.18

Just before Father de Carriere was transferred from Tampa in 1902, he looked back on the spiritual progress of the Tampa Missions and felt a sense of accomplishment. When he had arrived in Tampa in 1888, he was in agony, “at the sight of so much destitution and spiritual misery.” Yet by 1902 de Carriere saw the spiritual progress of Catholicism in Tampa. He pointed to the increase in the number of Communions (commented upon again and again by Jesuit diarists who followed him), the number of people at Mass, the fact that both men and women attended, the involvement of children and youth through the various Catholic schools, the proliferation of devotional Sodalities, all of which indicated the growing spiritual vitality of Catholicism on Florida’s West Coast. For de Carriere this spiritual deepening of parish life was not simply the result of his efforts or anyone else’s, but rather it was the product of intercessory prayer and Divine Providence, since for him nothing else explained Tampa’s spiritual transformation since 1888.

In 1902 at the age of seventy-eight, Father de Carriere, the father of the Jesuits of Florida, retired, leaving Tampa for the Jesuit novitiate in Macon, Georgia. During the last ten years of his life he wrote letters to his many friends, recorded his recollections of the early days of the South Florida Missions, and passed on his missionary experience to Jesuit novices. He died in Macon, on January 27, 1913, at the age of eighty-eight.20


4 James Robertson Ward, *Old Hickory’s Town: An Illustrated History of Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, FL: Florida Publishing, 1982), 167-69, 187; Margaret C. Fairlie, “The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1888 in Jacksonville,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 19 (Oct. 1940), 95-108. Father James Duffo, a Frenchman in the Society of Jesus since 1841 and in the U.S. since 1848, had served in several areas where yellow fever raged and was immune from the disease, hence he was a logical choice to send to Jacksonville. Unlike de Carriere, Duffo only served in Florida for a few months in 1888 until the health danger ceased. He later died on February 27, 1900. Thomas H. Clancy, *Our Friends*, 2nd ed. (New Orleans: Jesuit Provincial Residence, 1989), 21, 121.


6 De Carriere to Richard White, SJ, June 19, 1902, Supplement to House Records, vol. I, ANOPSJ; De Carriere to Slevin, May 15, 1908, ANOPSJ. Irish-born Father John O’Shanahan, SJ, was Superior of the New Orleans Jesuits from April 22, 1888, until November 14, 1891, when he was removed from office due to alcoholism. He died on July 6, 1913. Clancy, *Our Friends*, 123; Notebook on Provincials, ANOPSJ.


10 De Carriere to Slevin, May 15 1908; De Carriere Journal, April 20-June 5, 1889, House Diary, June 19, 1898, Supplement to the House Records, Tampa, Vol. I, 1888-1921, ANOPSJ.


The works of Father de Carriere at the ANOPSJ include: Tampa House Diary, 1888-1902; Supplement to the Tampa House Diary, 1888-1902; Personal Journal, April 20 to June 5, 1889; “Memoirs of Fr. de Carriere,” Sept. 21, 1899; “Notes for the Record,” Feb. 28, 1908; Letter to Richard White, SJ, June 19, 1902; Letter to Thomas Selevn, SJ, May 15, 1908. Another work of de Carriere’s is “Memoirs of Fr. de Carriere,” Oct. 4, 1894, Ybor City Missions, Scrapbook, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph, St. Augustine, FL.


Chronicles, Sept. 8, 1899, Feb. 2, 1900, July 30, Aug. I, 1901, ASNJM, L-S; House Diary, March 22, Sept. 7, 1896, ANOPSJ.


Clancy, Our Friends, 9, 121.