

The Founders of the Knights of Peter Claver...

On November 7, 1909, just four decades after the Emancipation Proclamation, four Josephite priests who ministered along the Gulf Coast and three laymen who resided in Alabama, founded our Noble Order. The priests were dedicated missionaries focused on ministering to the spiritual, educational, and economic needs of Southern Blacks - founding several churches and schools which still exist today. The three lay founders were devout Catholics, strong family men, and successful in their professional careers and personal lives.



REBESHER

REV. CONRAD F. REBESHER (1878 - 1938) was Pastor of Most Pure Heart of Mary, the church in which the Knights of Peter Claver and its first council were formed, He is credited with being the primary person to conceptualize and draw up the plan for organizing our Noble Order.



KELLY

REV. SAMUEL J. KELLY (1878 - 1949) converted to Catholicism and was ordained a priest September 29, 1905. Fr. Kelly was Pastor of St. Peter's Church in Pascagoula, Mississippi. He stressed the importance of education, individual improvement, and self-respect.



VAN BAAST

REV. JOSEPH P. VAN BAAST (1876 - 1916) was the Pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church on Mon Louis Island and St. Peter's Church in Chastang, Alabama. At the behest and funding of community members - three different Catholic chapels / churches were constructed to allow worship under his leadership. Fr. Baast was a frequent advocate for the economic welfare of his parishioners - voicing his concern for the financial hardships they suffered as the industries in which many of them were employed slowed. To this effect, he organized a shoe factory in order to provide jobs and skills training to the community.



DORSEY

REV. JOHN H. DORSEY (1874 - 1926) was the second Black-American priest to be educated and ordained in the United States. Known for his powerful preaching style, Fr. Dorsey was the homilist for the Solemn High Mass held in celebration of the founding of our Noble Order. He was also the first National Chaplain of the Noble Order.



FAUSTINA

HON. GILBERT FAUSTINA (1879 - 1941) was a successful entrepreneur and real-estate developer - owning and operating a cigar manufacturing business and Faustina's Beach, the only beach open to African-Americans in the entire Gulf of Mexico at the time. He was committed to substantially improving conditions among African-Americans - pushing for self-development along social, economic, political and cultural lines and advocated for Blacks to hold their jobs, live within their means and save money, take care of their health, educate their children, respect their race, support their churches, vote, buy Black, and own land. Faustina served as the Noble Order's First Supreme Knight.



TRENIER

HON. FRANCIS "FRANK" TRENIER (1875 - 1941) spent the majority of his professional career as an insurance agent, but also worked as a blacksmith, railroad machinist helper, and popular musician, affiliated with the Excelsior Band which was founded in 1883 and existed for over a century. He was selected as the first National Secretary of the Knights of Peter Claver and was the Editor of "The Shield", the first official publication of the Order.



COLLINS

HON. FRANCIS "FRANK" COLLINS (1859 - 1916) was a ship carpenter at Collins Boat Yard, his family's shipyard which constructed boats through the early 1950s. The Collins family were major property owners on Mon Louis Island. He was instrumental in promoting and informing fellow parishioners at St. Rose of Lima Church about the benefits of joining the Knights of Peter Claver.