

Sacred Art of Saint Mary of the Annunciation:

A Conservation Tour

April 24, 2026

Saint Mary of the Annunciation Roman Catholic Church has been a dynamic force in the history of the Catholic faith in Charleston for more than two centuries.

Established in 1789 by a state charter, it preceded the founding of the Diocese of South Carolina by thirty years. In 1787, prior to its incorporation, Charleston's Irish Catholic community purchased a lot and a wooden building on Hasell Street from a Methodist pastor, Thomas Hill.¹ The building that had served Hill's congregation became the chapel of Saint Mary of the Annunciation. In 1801 the Congregation began to erect a brick and stucco edifice on the site of the old

¹ The building site is depicted on Edmund Petrie's *Ichnography of Charleston, South-Carolina : at the request of Adam Tunno, Esq., for the use of the Phœnix Fire-Company of London, taken from actual survey, 2d August 1788* ([London:] E. Petrie, 1790) as the "Romish Church" (marked W) on Hasell Street cross the street from the "Jews Synagogue" (marked T). Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA dcu; <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3914c.ct000423>, accessed December 25, 2023, by Alexander Moore.

wooden church. No visual illustrations have been found of this second Saint Mary church; but Robert Mills, the distinguished American architect, reported in 1826 that the building was 60 by 40 in size and had a portico supported by four Tuscan order columns. Disaster struck in April 1838 when a massive fire burned through the city and destroyed the church. Public and private donations ensured that the church be rebuilt in a manner that imitated its predecessor. With its dimensions of 84 by 50 feet, the new building was larger in size but similar in design to the burned building. The distinctive portico with its Tuscan order columns make Saint Mary one of the city's best-known Greek Revival structures in a city that boasts many distinguished buildings. That fire also destroyed the first synagogue of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, the first Reform Jewish congregation in the American South. The new Greek Revival sanctuary superseded its first building just as Saint Mary superseded a wooden Gothic style church building.

Since 1839 the building's interior has undergone numerous renovations. Each renovation has supplied the community with sacred visual arts in styles and mediums that enrich Catholic worship. Paintings, stained-glass windows, and carved stone objects—altars, baptismal fonts, lecterns, memorial plaques, and statuary—adorn Saint Mary Church today.

From early 2022 until the end of 2025 Saint Mary sponsored a project to conserve and restore the paintings and murals that adorn the church's interior. The history of these conservation projects is the subject of my presentation.

The first major renovation was undertaken in mid-1884. On October 5, 1884, Saint Mary reopened for worship after having been closed several months to accommodate the renovation. New pews, new gaslight fixtures, and a completely new ceiling were the chief renovations. In addition, the exterior and interior were repainted with considerable decorative painting in the nave and sanctuary.²

John E. Dohen, painter and designer, received four hundred dollars (\$400) for painting floral, filigree, and other abstract patterns in the sanctuary and nave.

² "Special Services Yesterday," *News & Courier*, October 6, 1884, p. 8. The Diocese of Charleston contains a leather-bound "Receipt Book for Repairs, 1884" that contains receipts for payments to Dohen for his painting and to other Charleston craftsmen for their carpentry, brick and plaster work, and installation of gas lighting fixtures. Saint Mary's Records, Diocese of Charleston Archives, accession number 2009.002-02-08.

His work was described as fresco-painting but involved painting upon the surfaces of dry plaster walls and the use of stencils to create uniform designs.³

Many of Dohen's design elements were *tromp l'oeil* paintings on the sanctuary walls. Painted false "wainscoting" in the sanctuary imitated marble panels carved with bulls-eyes and floral patterns. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of the sanctuary and gallery walls reveal how extensively these patterns filled the church.

During 1895 and 1896 Saint Mary undertook to embellish the church's interior with sacred paintings, stained glass windows, statuary, and new marble altars. Church officers commissioned the Italian Cesare Porta, a professional copyist and interpreter of Old Masters church art, to paint a series of murals for Saint Mary's interior. Porta had a long career creating church interiors in his Rome workshop, starting in the 1860s until 1901. His Saint Mary murals are the largest known collection of his works in one building in the United States. He has been better known for the murals he created for churches in Quebec, Canada. The survival of so many of Porta's workshop copies and original works in Saint Mary

³ "Special Services Yesterday," *News & Courier*, October 6, 1884, p. 8.

add considerably to modern knowledge of nineteenth-century sacred art in North America.⁴

Porta created twenty three large paintings for Saint Mary. An article published in the *Charleston News & Courier* after all the renovation and refurbishment had been accomplished, itemized the payments to Porta for creating the works, shipping costs, and other expenses related to the 1896 transformation.

An article published in the *Charleston News & Courier* in November 1896, after all the renovation and refurbishment had been accomplished, itemized a payment of \$2,725 (\$94,822 in today's currency) to Porta for creating the works, with a shipping cost from Rome of \$79.55, and other expenses related to the project.⁵

The church celebrated its refurbishment on March 25, 1896, on the Feast of the Annunciation.⁶

Porta's works consisted of five ceiling paintings in the narthex; six paintings within the sanctuary; and depictions of the Twelve Apostles on the walls of the

⁴ Gilles Plante and Yvon Leclerc, *Cesare Porta, Peintre* (Quebec, Canada: Societe Scientifique Parallele, 2008), pp. 124–54.

⁵ Charleston, SC, *News & Courier*, November 30, 1896, p. 8.

⁶“Saint Mary's New Altars,” Charleston, SC, *News & Courier*, March 25, 1896, p. 3.

balcony and choir loft. Porta and his workshop painted the murals on canvas and shipped them to Charleston for installation. Charleston painter and interior decorator H. Mastin Batchelder affixed the murals with glue and hardware and painted frames for them “rich in color and gold.” Remnants of Batchelder’s filigree-style “framing” were discovered when portions of the high altar were removed in 2022. Mid-twentieth-century photographs of the sanctuary reveal that Batchelder’s work filled all the spaces around, between, and above the seven main paintings.

During early 2023 Saint Mary Church contracted with a consortium of art restorers to conserve and restore the sanctuary paintings. Catherine Rogers of Rogers Art Conservation, LLC; Craig Crawford of Crawford Conservation, Inc.; and Maho Yoshikawa, of Chicago, Illinois, have transformed not only the appearances of the murals but also knowledge of the history and evolution of these artworks. Every day that they worked they recovered forgotten aspects and revealed depths of color and sophistication of execution long obscured by time and circumstances.⁷

⁷Rogers Art Conservation LLC, Conservation Treatment Report, Altar Painting - “Crucifixion” by John S. Cogdell, 1814 St. Mary’s Catholic Church 95 Hasell Street Charleston, South Carolina 29401, January 31, 2023.

Their discoveries regarding Cogdell's *Crucifixion* merit the highest recognition. John Stevens Cogdell (1778–1847) was a talented painter and sculptor who earned his living as an attorney, politician, and public servant. In 1800 he traveled to Italy where his passion for the visual arts was ignited. For the rest of his life he was an advocate for the arts and an active painter of portraits and religious scenes and sculptor of busts of his friends and famous South Carolinians. He donated most of his works to local churches and to public and private institutions in South Carolina and the nation. Busts of famous British writers are found in the Charleston Library Society, and those of historical figures are among the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society, the Boston Athenaeum, and Connecticut Historical Society.⁸

https://www.sma.church/uploads/1/1/2/3/112306669/st._marys_catholic_church_conservation_report_documentation_crucifixion_by_john_s._cogdell.pdf,

accessed December 25, 2023, by Alexander Moore. By the end of 2025 Rogers and her crew submitted 11 treatment reports. All of them are available on the Saint Mary Church website.

⁸ See Smithsonian Institution Research and Information System (SIRIS) website, “Art inventories” for a listing of fourteen Cogdell busts and portraits. <https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=177NA020D4523.61047&menu=sear>

Cogdell's few oil-on-canvas portraits are in the collections of the South Caroliniana Library of the University of South Carolina, and the Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston. His two portraits of Bishop John England of Charleston are in the collections of the Vatican, Rome, and in Saint Patrick's Church, Fayetteville, North Carolina. Cogdell shipped his first version to Rome in November 1842. The second version was given to Saint Patrick's in 2014 by Bishop of Charleston Robert C. Gugliemone.⁹ Apart from his *Crucifixion*, Cogdell's most noteworthy

[ch&aspect=Keyword&npp=50&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=ariall&ri=&term=&index=.GW&x=0&y=0&aspect=Keyword&term=Cogdell&index=.AW&term=&index=.TW&term=&index=.SW&term=&index=.FW&term=&index=.OW&term=&index=.NW](#); accessed April 20, 2026, by Alexander Moore.

⁹ *Historic Furnishings in the Narthex, Grand Hallway & St. Patrick's Church, Fayetteville, N.C.* (no date), p. 2. For information on Cogdell's gift of the portrait of Bishop England to Pope Gregory XVI, see Finbar Kenneally, *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archive, A Calendar, First Series, Volume One* (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1966), items no. 2128, J.S. Cogdell to Gregory XVI, November 26, 1842 (abstract) and Kenneally, *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives, A Calendar, First Series, Volume Four* (1973), no. 731, Propaganda Fide to J.S.

painting in Charleston is his large (6 x 8 feet) depiction of *Christ in the Garden*, which is located at Saint Luke Chapel, Medical University of South Carolina.¹⁰

Cogdell, June 27, 1843 (abstract). In his letter Cogdell describes his gift of the Bishop England portrait and in the response on behalf of Gregory XVI, Propaganda Fide officials express thanks for the gift. An e-mail, dated June 3, 017, from Msgr. Luis Manuel Cuna Ramos, Archivist of the Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide, Rome, to Alexander Moore, stated that Cogdell's portrait of Bishop England was unlocated within their collections.

¹⁰ Anna Wells Rutledge, "Cogdell and Mills," *Magazine Antiques*, March 1942; Florence Marie Hennessey, *In the Beginning. Saint Mary's Church, Charleston, South Carolina 1789–1989* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, (1989), pp. 21–2; Anna Wells Rutledge, *Artists in the Life of Charleston through Colony and State from Restoration to Reconstruction* (Revised Edition, Columbia: USC Press, 1980), pp. 189–90, passim. Smithsonian Institution Research Information System, Art Inventories, "John S. Cogdell," <https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=J6K9115377O23.6923&menu=search&aspect=Keyword&npp=50&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=ariall&ri=&term=&index=.GW&x=0&y=0&aspect=Keyword&term=cogdell&index=.AW&term=&index>

Cogdell's *Crucifixion* (145 inches x 79 ½ inches) is his best-known artwork. He painted it in 1814 as a gift to the newly-built second Saint Mary Church. When that building was destroyed by fire in April 1838, the painting was saved from the conflagration but was so badly damaged that Cogdell repainted it on the same canvas. The oil-on-canvas painting was installed in the rebuilt church in 1839 and has been the building's most prominent adornment since then.

In returning the recreated painting to Saint Mary on June 4, 1839, Cogdell mentioned the condition of the 1814 version and described the changes he had made in his second version.

The painting and canvass [sic] however, were much

[=.TW&term=&index=.SW&term=&index=.FW&term=&index=.OW&term=&index=.NW](#). Accessed November 22, 2022, by Alexander Moore; *Catalogue of Books Added to the Boston Athenaeum, in 1830–1833* (Boston: n.p, n.d.), p. 74; “The Fine Arts,” *Charleston Courier*, May 20, 1841, p. 2; A.S. Salley, Jr., “An All-Accomplished Man. John S. Cogdell, Lawyer, Banker, Artist and Musician,” *News & Courier*, July 14, 1901, p. 9; *Christ in the Garden*, a brochure published by Saint Luke Chapel, Medical University of South Carolina [Charleston: MUSC, n.d.].

injured for want of skill in the taking down of the same.

It was brought to my house by some of the congregation

---again in my possession, feelings and a peculiar sorrow

were revived, and I *resolved* that if *spared*, I would make

to your Altar-place a new offering---but upon the [same]

canvass---under divine permission. I have done so; throwing

into the new picture all the experience that I have gained,

since the former was executed.¹¹

When a new main altar was installed in 1896 the altar obscured the lower portion of the mural. In 1994 a conservation company examined the painting and reported that at some point in the past the work had been relined and background scenes surrounding the crucified Christ had been overpainted to dramatize the painting's central image.¹²

¹¹ John S. Cogdell to Saint Mary's Vestry, June 4, 1839, published in *Charleston Courier*, June 10, 1839, p. 2.

¹² Olin Conservation Inc., Great Falls, VA, to Msgr. John Simonin, Saint Mary Church, February 4, 1994.

The latest Saint Mary conservation project has provided a wealth of visual information regarding Cogdell's *Crucifixion*. To provide the conservators the fullest possible access to the painting, the reredos and tabernacle of the main altar were removed, revealing the bottom portion of the painting not seen since 1896. Removal of dirt, disintegrated varnish, and overpainting revealed elements that Cogdell included when he repainted the work in 1839. Five of the most notable rediscoveries are as follow:

(1) The vertical motto "Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaerum" atop the crucifix was painted over an earlier horizontal motto that read "INRI." Cogdell painted the first motto in 1814 and the second motto in 1839.

(2) Varnish removal revealed the original whiteness of the Corpus as well as considerable redlining that depicts blood flowing from Christ's wounds in hands, side, and feet.

(3) Removal of varnish and overpainting revealed improvements regarding placement of the cross and of the Corpus upon the cross. Three-dimensional aspect of Christ's body on the cross was likely among those elements of increased skill that Cogdell mentioned in his 1839 letter to the church vestry.

(4) Perhaps the most remarkable discoveries related to images at the bottom of the painting, painted over and then hidden from view by the high altar.

Removal of overpainting discovered a “background” at the foot of the cross that depicted the city walls of Jerusalem a short distance from the summit of Mount Calvary. The nail that affixed Christ’s feet to the cross was painted with skill and even included a shadow. Blood flowing from the foot wound pooled at the foot of the cross, which was held in place by large wooden wedges.

(5) A legend had been painted on the lower right side of the painting that described the conditions regarding the original painting in 1814 and Cogdell’s 1839 repainting of it. The legend was overpainted some time prior to the 1896 installation of the altar. Although the legend’s legibility was compromised by damage to the canvas it told the story of Cogdell’s original painting and his recreation of it after the 1838 fire.

The six other sanctuary murals are the work of Cesare Porta. They include large-scale depictions of the *Adoration of the Magi* and of the *Resurrection* and four smaller images of angel musicians. The four angel musicians are direct copies of heralds found in Fra Angelico’s monumental triptych, *Madonna of the Linen Weavers* (1433), now in the Museum of Saint Mark, Florence, Italy.¹³ The angels

¹³ “Saint Mary’s New Altars,” *News & Courier*, March 25, 1896, p. 3; Virginia C. Raguin, *Census of Stained Glass Windows in America*, to Msgr. John Simonin, July 13, 1994. Rogers Art Conservation LLC, Conservation Treatment Report.

are among Fra Angelico's most-reproduced images. Copies of them are found in churches from every era since the sixteenth century and in numberless other reproductions.

It is possible but not likely that Porta used unidentified Old Master paintings as models for the *Adoration* and the *Resurrection* but the weight of evidence suggests that Porta created them from his own imagination, instead of copying another work. In 1896, when the murals was installed, a local newspaper stated that the *Adoration* and *Resurrection* were "faithful copies" of paintings by the Florentine artist Fra Bartolomeo (1472–1517) but no known Bartolomeo works correspond to the Saint Mary images.¹⁴

Altar Painting - "Angel #1" by Cesare Porta St. Mary's Catholic Church 95 Hasell Street Charleston, South Carolina 29401 Submitted by: Catherine Rogers February 5, 2023,

https://www.sma.church/uploads/1/1/2/3/112306669/st._marys_catholic_church_observations_report_documentation_angel_1_by_c._porta.pdf; accessed

December 25, 2023, by Alexander Moore.

¹⁴ "Saint Mary's New Altars," *News & Courier*, March 25, 1896, p. 3.

Work on the *Adoration* mural removed both varnish and considerable overpainting has revealed Porta's skill as a drafter and colorist. In December 1960 the Italian arts conservator Navino Natolini performed conservation on the sanctuary murals that involved inpainting.¹⁵ Forty two years later Porta's *Resurrection* received a cleaning and conservation work. Varnish removal revived a brighter range of color than had been known since the work had been installed. The signature phrase "C. Porta Fecit. Roma" was revealed in the lower left.

The removal of overpainting from the *Adoration*, whether from the early twentieth century or from Natolini's 1960 labors has revealed several features: stars in the sky above the scene, in particular, a Star of Bethlehem; a dais upon which the Blessed Virgin and Christ Child sit; and the inscription "C. Porta Fecit. Roma" at the mural's lower left corner.¹⁶ But, the recovery of the original shapes, colors, expressions in the face of the Blessed Virgin and Christ Child have worked

¹⁵ Charleston, SC, *Evening Post*, December 23-25, 1960, p. 10.

¹⁶ Rogers Art Conservation LLC, Conservation Treatment Report. Altar Painting "Resurrection" by Cesare Porta. St. Mary's Catholic Church, 95 Hasell Street, Charleston, South Carolina, 29401. January 24, 2022. Online source: sma.church/uploads/1/1/2/3/112306669/st._mary's_catholic_church_conservation_report__documentation.pdf. Accessed November 2, 2022, by Alexander Moore.

the greatest revolution in appreciation of this work.¹⁷ Taken together with the restoration of the *Resurrection*, the surmise is great that the two works are original paintings by Porta that draw upon Old Master paintings for inspiration but not imitation.

As part of his 1895 commission Porta created the five murals that adorn the ceiling in the nave. The four oval murals are of the Four Evangelists, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each Evangelist is depicted with his chief liturgical symbol—Saint Luke’s ox; Saint Mark’s lion; Saint Matthew’s angel; and Saint John’s eagle.

Porta took as his models four mosaic images that adorn Saint Peter’s Basilica, in Rome.¹⁸ The painter Giovanni de Vecchi (1536–1614) designed and

¹⁷ Rogers Art Conservation LLC, Conservation Treatment Report. Altar Painting, “Adoration” by Cesare Porta. St. Mary’s Catholic Church, 95 Hasell Street, Charleston, South Carolina, January 31, 2023.

https://www.sma.church/uploads/1/1/2/3/112306669/st._marys_catholic_church_conservation_report_documentation_adoration_by_c._porta.pdf, accessed December 25, 2023, by Alexander Moore.

¹⁸ Images of the Four Evangelists mosaics at Saint Peter’s Basilica can be found at: <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/photos/interior-dome-st-peters-basilica?page=2>.

created the cartoons (life-size working drawings) for the images of Saint John and Saint Luke. Cesare Nebbia of Orvieto (c. 1536–c. 1614) created the images of Saint Mark and Saint Matthew.¹⁹ Some working drawings and engravings of these artists' images as well as 19th-century engravings by Antonio Mannelli of Saints Mark, Matthew, and Luke exist in museums and libraries. During 1599 and 1600 the mosaic artists Paolo Rossatti and Ludovico Martinelli transformed the images

¹⁹ Giovanni de Vecchi (1536–1614)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_de%27_Vecchi; Saint John drawing (accession number 64.295.3),

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/340943>. For information on

Cesare Nebbi of Orvieto (c. 1536–c. 1614) see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cesare_Nebbia; his drawing of Saint Matthew

(accession no. 1992.29), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/340855>

The Wellcome Collection, London, England, contains 19th-century engravings by Antonio Mannelli of Nebbia's Saint John and Matthew

(<https://wellcomecollection.org/concepts/vydk56nt>) and of de Vecchio's Saint

Luke (<https://wellcomecollection.org/search/images?query=yj3aq72r>).

into the mosaics that now adorn the architectural pendentives (triangular components of the arches) that support Saint Peter's dome.²⁰

The *Assumption* mural was funded by an 1895 donation of two hundred and fifty dollars from former students taught by Reverend James A. Corcoran (1820–89) at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary in Pennsylvania.²¹ A Charleston native, Corcoran had a distinguished career as a theologian and editor of Catholic periodicals before and after the American Civil War. The banner at the foot of the mural reads, “In Memory of the Rev. Dr. Corcoran by Priests of Philadelphia formerly his Pupils.”

The present conditions and history of the ceiling murals are complicated by the conservation and restoration work that Navino Nataloni performed upon Porta's sanctuary and ceiling murals during 1945. Ongoing conservation of the ceiling murals reveals that Nataloni applied a considerable amount of overpainting

²⁰ Verifications of the mosaic works of Paolo Rossetti and Ludovico Martinelli in 1599–1600 are found at: Churches-of-Rome.info/ArtistBios/PROVENZALE.pdf; Stpetersbasilica.info/Docs/Msc/Chronology.htm; and romapedia.blogspot.com/2013/10/basilica-of-st-peter-second-part-3.html.

²¹ *News & Courier*, November 30, 1896, p. 8. “James Andrew Corcoran,” <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04356b.htm>.

to the ceiling murals, so much that when he completed his work he signed his name “Navino Nataloni” in block letters on each of the five murals. His inscription on the large Assumption oval read “Navino Nataloni, N.Y. 1945. Repainted.” This inscription was removed during the 2025 conservation. Unfortunately, no inscriptions by Porta or his contemporaries were found during conservation. The surmise that he may have painted the *Assumption* as an original work grows less convincing. Had he painted the work as an original he would likely have signed it as he did with the *Adoration* and *Resurrection*. Absent his signature it may be surmised that he or his workshop was acting as a copyist—the Apostles images serve as precedent—instead of a creative artist.

Navino Nataloni was born December 13, 1892, in Sassoferrato, Ancona, Italy. As a young man he studied art at the Academy of Fine Arts, Urbino, Italy. He immigrated to the United States at the age of twenty eight, arriving at the Port of Philadelphia on March 17, 1921. Upon entering the United States he recorded his profession as “artist.” He wed Maria Memmolini, also a native of Italy, on May 16, 1924, and became a naturalized American citizen in Brooklyn, New York,

on March 18, 1930. Nataloni died on February 15, 1976, at his home in Port Washington, New York.²²

During his more than fifty years' career as an artist, art conservator, and interior designer Nataloni worked throughout the United States. Among his early commissions were projects sponsored by the Public Works Administration, one of the federally-funded programs that President Franklin D. Roosevelt created to break the grip of the Great Depression upon the nation. The PWA funded and managed large-scale construction projects like roads, bridges, dams, airports, and public buildings that served specific communities. Among those latter constructions were theaters, auditoriums, libraries, and museums. Some of Nataloni's commissions were the Sumter Opera House, in Sumter, SC; the Bama Theatre in Tuscaloosa, AL; the Carolina Theatre in Hendersonville, NC; and the Palmetto Theatre in Columbia, SC.²³

²² An Ancestry.com search for Navino Nataloni discovered information from his United States immigration and naturalization documents and frequent citations to US Census information from the 1930s to the 1960s as well as addresses for his residences in Charlotte, NC, and New York City, NY. Accessed by Alexander Moore, August 26, 2024.

²³ Raleigh, NC, *News & Observer*, February 20, 1938, p. 4; Sumter, SC, *Item*,

With the completion of New Deal projects and the end of World War II in 1945, Nataloni found employment with Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston. In late 1956 the diocese hired Nataloni to refurbish the interior of the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist for the sum of \$75,000. The project was in anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the cathedral's consecration. Nataloni cleaned the abstract designs within the chancel and the fourteen Stations of the Cross that adorned (and still adorn?) the walls of the chancel. An article in the November 19, 1956, issue of the *News & Courier*²⁴ published a photograph of Nataloni at work on one of the stations. An anniversary pamphlet published by the diocese contained a photograph of one of the Stations of the Cross that Nataloni had repainted.²⁵ While in Charleston during the fall and winter of 1956–1957, Nataloni painted the ceiling of the Church of the Sacred Heart on King Street; and

August 28, 1936, p.

9; Hendersonville, NC, *Times–News*, March 7, 1933, p. 1.

²⁴ *News & Courier*, November 19, 1956, p. 19.

²⁵ Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina—*Fiftieth Anniversary of Consecration* [Charleston, SC: John J. Furlong, 1957], p. 33. Pages 32–33 describe Nataloni's activities.

redecorated Stella Maris Parish Church on Sullivans Island.²⁶ The cathedral reopened in the last days of 1956 and celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in March 1957. Articles in *Evening Post* described the redesigned interior and celebrated Nataloni's accomplishments.²⁷

Within three year of completing his work for the Cathedral of Saint John Natolini was hired to conserve and restore the twenty three Cesare Porta murals that adorn Saint Mary of the Annunciation Church. His second sojourn in Charleston was closely reported by the local newspapers. The diocese announced his hiring in September 1960, and the artist arrived in the city in October.²⁸

Rogers Art Conservation, LLC, commenced work conserving the five ceiling paintings during the summer of 2024. They commenced this phase of the general conservation plan by working on the oval portrait of Saint Matthew, depicted with books and his biblical symbol, an angel.²⁹ The result of their work

²⁶ *Evening Post*, November 19, 1956, p. 19; *News & Courier*, March 3, 1957, p. 7.

²⁷ *Evening Post*, March 2, 1957, p. 1; March 3, 1957, p. 15.

²⁸ *Evening Post*, September 27, 1960, p. 11; October 21, 1960, p. 14.

²⁹ Rogers Art Conservation, LLC. Conservation Treatment Report. Oval Painting, St. Matthew by Cesare Porta. St. Mary's Catholic Church. 95 Hasell Street, Charleston, South Carolina, 29401. August 31, 2024.

was the recovery and preservation of Cesare Porta's 1895 depiction of Saint Matthew. They removed Nataloni's block-letter signature but did not discover a signature by Porta. The absence of Porta's signature is consistent with the discoveries that Rogers and her coworkers made when working on the sanctuary paintings and the *Twelve Apostles* murals. Works that Porta and his workshop copied from other artists' works went unsigned while Porta claimed the sanctuary *Adoration* and *Resurrection* to be his original work by affixing his signature. Rogers and her crew completed their work on the ceiling murals in December 2025 and submitted five treatment reports that described their work on each of the ceiling's elements.

Porta and his workshop painted the murals of the *Twelve Apostles* that are installed in the choir loft and along the balcony on both sides of the nave. Starting at the Blessed Virgin side altar and moving counterclockwise around the nave the Apostles appear in this order, identified by their Latin names, which are translated as: Saint Simon; Saint Andrew; Saint Thomas; Saint James the Greater; Saint Thaddeus; Saint Paul; Saint Peter; Saint Bartholomew; Saint Philip; Saint James the Lesser; Saint Barnabas; and, lastly, Saint Matthias, in the front of the church nearest the Sacred Heart side altar. Each mural depicts some symbol that relates to the life and, often, martyrdom of each saint. Saint Andrew holds a saltire cross, upon which he was crucified. Saints Bartholomew, Matthias, and Paul are

depicted with the weapons of their martyrdom. As the first pope Saint Peter holds the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven while Saint James the Greater's staff identified him as a famous pilgrim.

Porta's *Apostles* were derived from images created by Johan Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869) that were highly popular and much reproduced during the nineteenth century. Overbeck was a member of the Nazarene School of painters. Overbeck's paintings and those of his fellow Nazarenes Philipp Veit (1793–1877) and Peter von Cornelius (1783–1867) are clearly recognizable in the present day. These artists stylized images in religious art and brought clarity and simplicity to church iconography.

Porta's *Twelve Apostles* are direct copies or are closely derived from a series of charcoal drawings that Overbeck created for a fresco in the chapel of the Villa Torlonia in Castle Grandolfo. They were reproduced as steel-engraved prints by Franz Keller (1821–96) and widely distributed throughout Europe and North America by the Verein zur Verbreitung religiöser Bilder in Dusseldorf (Association for the Dissemination of Religious Images), an organization in Dusseldorf, Germany, that promoted the Nazarene School of religious paintings.³⁰

³⁰ Virginia C. Raguin, *Census of Stained Glass Windows in America*, to Rev.

Msgr. John A. Simonin, Saint Mary of the Annunciation, July 13, 1994; "Johann

Porta's murals of Saints James the Greater, Barnabas, Peter, James the Lesser, Thaddeus, Thomas, and Bartholomew, are directly copied from the Overbeck images engraved by Keller. The mural of Saint Peter, too, is a direct copy but varies from the original by Porta's addition of a sixth toe (polydactyly) to the

Power Point Directory

April 24, 2026

- 1) Title Page
- 2) HABS photo of exterior
- 3) Sanctuary photo, ca. 1901–1905

General view of sanctuary images in place; detailed borders

- 4) Balcony schematic diagram
- 5) Sanctuary schematic diagram
- 6) Ceiling schematic diagram
- 7) Restored sanctuary photo

Overall image of the sanctuary with Cesare Porta's six images; Cogdell's crucifixion; and Craig Crawford's ceiling

- 8) Cogdell restored crucifixion

Friedrich Overbeck," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>; accessed December 25, 2023, by Alexander Moore. See also Walter Schulten, ed., *Religiöse Graphik aus er Zeit der Kolner Dombaus 1842–1880* (Cologne, 1980) and *Religiöse Graphik der Dusseldorfer Nazarener* (Dusseldorf, 1982).

Major restoration elements: sign; background; cleaning; blood flow

9) Unrestored Adoration scene

Workmanship issues overall; crudeness regarding faces

10) Restored Adoration scene

Cleaning varnish sharpened details; sophistication of faces

11) restored Resurrection scene: talk about “C. Porta Roma” signature

Same talk about clarity and then point out C. Porta Fecit Roma inscription in left lower corner

12) Sanctuary ceiling by Craig Crawford

2025 original design for ceiling: clouds, Paraclete

13) Stencil detail sanctuary

1896 H. M. Batchelder stencil details. Refer back to 1901 image no. 3

14) Saint Peter restored (six toes)

15) Saint Paul unrestored

Extensive damage from having been moved; considerable paint loss; extensive inpainting needed

16) Saint Paul restored

Reveals the complexity and difficulty of this conservation

17) Saint James the Lesser unrestored

18) Saint James the Lesser restored

Reveals how much an unmolested painting can survive well for more than a century

19) scaffolding for ceiling conservation

20) Unrestored Assumption

21) closeup of unconserved BVM

22) closeup of unconserved angel head

23) unconserved angels with hand (numerous tacks)

24) Restored BVM

Refer back to no. 21 for comparison

25) Restored oval scene

Refer back to no. 20 for comparison; mention the Natolini 1945 “Repainted” statement

26) Restored Saint John

Highlight tromp l’oeil elements

27) restored Saint Mark

Highlight tromp l’oeil elements

28) Crown stenciling

Uncertainty regarding the date of this stenciling; perhaps 1895

29) IHS stenciling

Uncertainty regarding the date of this stenciling; perhaps 1895