

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 62

THE HISTORY OF SUTTER CREEK PARISH Immaculate Conception Church

By Miss Rose Lawlor, printed in the May 15, 1919 issue of the *Daily Fair News*, Sutter Creek

The strong motive that led the most daring and adventurous spirits to brave the danger of the then unknown West was the lure of gold. It was the golden finger that beckoned Columbus to America, Cortez to Mexico, Pizarro to Peru, just as it led the early pioneers to California.

In 1848 when the cry went echoing throughout the world that the precious yellow metal had been discovered here, people came from every quarter of the earth. Many hardships were endured, they braved the monster desert, they climbed the rugged mountains, and they fought the savage Indians. Many fell by the wayside--the strongest reached the goal.

It was not until 1851 that quartz vein was uncovered in Sutter Creek, a part of what is now known as the Mother Lode. The village grew rapidly. Though the pioneer wandered into the west in search of adventure he did not forget his faith. His thoughts now turned to the spiritual.

As the town grew and prospered some of the prominent citizens realizing the need of spiritual instruction and guidance resolved to have a church. The funds were raised by subscription. The Mahoney brothers, of whom there were five, were very active in giving financial support. The first load of lumber for the building was donated by Mr. Jerry Mahoney.

The church was built in 1860-1861. Father Burns was the first pastor. The outside missions were Volcano, Jackson, Mokelumne Hill, Michigan Bar, Lone, Amador, Plymouth and Live Oak. Imagine the journey from Sutter Creek to Mokelumne Hill or Live Oak on horseback over almost impassable roads. We certainly owe much to the indomitable energy and foresight of the pioneer priests who in spite of difficulties and hardships fearlessly carried on the religion of Christ.

Much of the church property was donated. The lot upon which the Stibley house now stands was given to the church by Dan Mahoney. This was sold about twenty years ago. A school was built on this lot and here the Catholic children were taught. Before the school was completed, sessions were held in the church. The teachers in turn were Miss Hodges, a sister of Father Hodges, Miss Barry, Miss O'Connell, and Miss Nellie Mahoney who afterwards became Mrs. Joseph Fontenrose. It was the intention at that time to build a convent on this property but the plan did not materialize.

Father Cotter succeeded Father Burns and in 1864 Father Hodges was appointed. He died in 1865 and Father Walsh took charge.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Immaculate Conception Church, Sutter Creek Today

The first couple married in the church was Bob McClelland and Miss Duke, a sister of Mrs Fagan. Mr McClelland was the contractor who had charge of the building of the church.

From the time of its dedication until 1884 the church was known as St Mary's but was then changed to Immaculate Conception. The new cemetery was bought from George Allen in 1888. The rock walls around both cemeteries and the wall in front of the parochial residence were built by the late Father Moloney and remains a lasting monument to his memory. Father Moloney was in charge of the parish for seventeen years, this being the longest period of time for any one priest.

In 1904 Father James Dermody was appointed as pastor. He was with us but a short time when he was sent to Goldfield. He was succeeded by his brother, Father Thomas Dermody. It was during his pastorate that the lot adjoining the residence was purchased from the Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is quite an addition to the property.

Father Azevedo took charge of the affairs of the parish in 1908 and remained about a year when Bishop Grace called him to Sacramento where he became pastor of a Portuguese church. Father Taverna was then assigned to the parish community and served for nine years. Under his leadership the church was remodeled and now has an attractive appearance once again.

The stained glass windows were presented by generous parishioners as were also the Stations of the Cross.

For many years the Catholic ladies held a bazaar in the fall. The funds made were used for building purposes or necessary supplies for the church and residence. We have a splendid Altar Society consisting of more than one hundred members. The fund is used for altar purposes.

The entertainment on March 17, St Patrick's Day, has become an annual treat and is one of the events of the year, each being better than the last. The evening usually ends with a Grand Ball.

The children look forward to the Sunday school picnic which is held every year at Miss Sanderson's old home or some other place equally as attractive.

The present pastor, Father Michael O'Connor, was appointed in December 1918. He is a gifted and scholarly gentleman as well as a thoroughly progressive and patriotic citizen. He has under

his jurisdiction Amador, Volcano, Drytown, Live Oak and Sutter Creek. Though there is no Catholic Church in Oleta, services are often held at Mrs Pigeon's home. With better roads and the advent of the automobile it is not so difficult to reach these missions as it was in the early sixties. The Catholic people of this community feel highly honored in being assigned such an able leader as Father O'Connor and with their loyal support much may be accomplished to further the interest of the Church and Faith.



St Mary of the Mountains Mission, Plymouth



St Bernard Mission, Volcano