

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 17

BUILDING OF ST CANICE, NEVADA CITY Church in the Gold Dust Trails

By Father John Dwyer, printed April 22, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

Bishop O'Connell of Marysville was always anxiously awaiting the next supply of priests from All Hallows to come to his aid. But no one was anticipated to the same degree as was the first arrival, Father John Griffin. A native of the parish of Kilmacow, County Kilkenny, young Griffin had been ordained on August 11, 1861 at All Hallows for the Diocese of Boston. However, due to poor health, an arrangement had been made between Bishop O'Connell and Bishop Fitzpatrick of Boston that the newly ordained should serve in the Vicariate of Marysville. John Griffin left Ireland in November 1861, and arrived in San Francisco the day after Christmas. Bishop O'Connell was so overjoyed he wrote to All Hallows:

“Father Griffin arrived in San Francisco on St Stephen's Day and came by slow marches to Marysville two weeks after. He was the delight of the Marysvillians by reason of his sermons and personal appearance, as long as I could keep him. But alas, Father Dalton's brother George, having killed his adversary in Affray, I was obliged to send Father Griffin to Grass Valley, some thirty miles distant, in order to come to poor Father Dalton's rescue. The latter couldn't face the people in consequence of his brother's doings.”

This temporary assignment lasted from the end of January until the middle of March, as Father Griffin was present on St Patrick's Day when the bishop and Father Morris moved into the new Marysville rectory. At the end of the month, Bishop O'Connell wrote again: “when will you send me another missionary like Father Griffin who is giving great satisfaction as a preacher?”

Father Griffin remained on as one of the two assistants in Marysville through the rest of 1862, and through the summer of 1863. However, Bishop O'Connell had promised the Sisters of Mercy that if they made a foundation in Grass Valley, he would send an assistant there to ensure that the Sisters would have daily Mass. Therefore when the Sisters arrived in August 1863, Bishop O'Connell kept his promise by transferring Father Griffin to Grass Valley as its first regular assistant.

When Father Dalton left Grass Valley on September 3, 1863 to go to Ireland to recruit more sisters, Father Griffin found himself acting pastor and when Saints Peter and Paul Church in Nevada City burned to the ground in the fire of November 8, 1863, he found himself with all the burdens that went with the pastorate. He set about to rebuild. Thanks to his carefully kept accounting of the project we have an excellent picture of the building of the present church as it went up in September 1864.

BRICK WORK:

Amount of brick furnished by Mr. W. O'Donald 274,813 at \$90/thousand:	\$2,473.00
Expenses for lime bought and hauled: 29,000 lbs. from Wolf Creek, 5,000 lbs. from Auburn,	\$375.00
To John Duncliffe for brick laying according to contract,	\$1,200.00
For screening and hauling of sand,	\$120.00
For digging the foundation and other work	\$88.00

CARPENTRY:

Contract for work done by carpenter George S. Pierce,	\$710.00
Building 36 pews by George S. Pierce,	\$140.00
Gregory & Company, Nevada for lumber	\$667.29
For shingles to roof the church	\$135.00
To William S Swain of Marysville for windows	\$180.00
For painting pews and graining church doors	\$25.00

FOR PLANS AND SUPERINTENDENCE

\$225.00

Total

\$6,463.29

When Father Dalton returned in November 1864, the new church was finished and it had a new name. Father Griffin, following the custom of the time, disregarded the original names and named the church he built after the patron saint of Kilkenny, St Canice.



Father John Griffin, 1836 - 1872

Father Griffin continued on as an assistant to Father Dalton four more years. In the fall of 1867, Bishop O'Connell relieved the Grass Valley parish of many of its missions by cutting off Nevada City as a separate parish with Father J.J. Claire as the new pastor. It was about this time that Father Griffin began to agitate for permission to move on. Bishop O'Connell tells the story in a letter to All Hallows on October 29, 1868:

“Father Griffin is at present in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. However his health was partly the cause of his departure.”

Father Griffin was so popular in Grass Valley that a reception was held for him and he was presented with a burse in the amount of \$800. He promptly turned over half the amount to the Sisters of Mercy for the orphanage. Father Griffin left Grass Valley and on March 10, 1868, was appointed by the Archbishop as an assistant at (Old) St Mary Cathedral. However, on August 21, 1868, he was appointed the first resident pastor of San Leandro and Hayward. By the following May he was back at the Cathedral for a brief period. He then left in July for his diocese of origin but within three years, John Griffin was dead, a victim of tuberculosis. He died in Chicopee, Massachusetts, on May 2, 1872 at the age of 36. The church in Nevada City has stood as his monument for the past one hundred and twelve years.



Photo by John E Boll 2011

**Saint Canice Church, Nevada City, 2012
Built in 1864 by Father John Griffin**