

+ BISHOP THOMAS GRACE

Priest of the Diocese of Grass Valley 1867 – 1886

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento 1886-1896

Second Bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento 1896 - 1921

1841 -- 1921

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

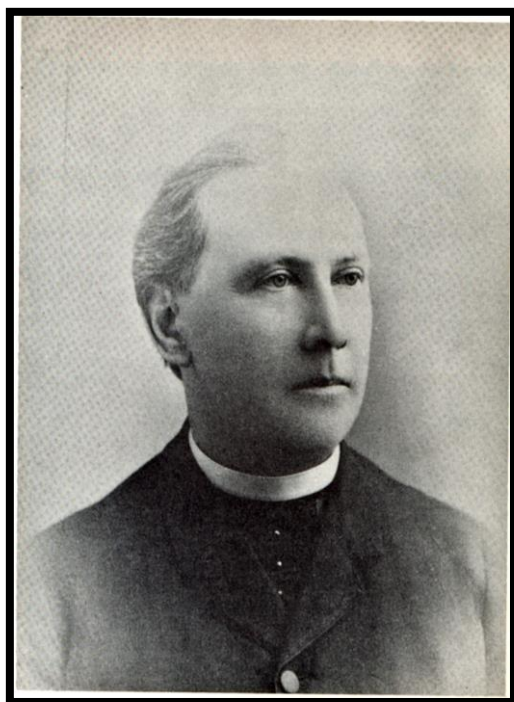
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Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

Thomas Grace was born in Wexford, Ireland and attended All Hallows College in Dublin. Shortly after his ordination to the priesthood in 1867 for the American missions, at the age of 26 he left the green hills of Ireland and traveled by ship to the vast lands of the new world in America. He made his way to the Vicariate of Marysville to report for priestly duty to Bishop Eugene O'Connell who himself had been a professor at All Hallows College. Fr Grace served the Vicariate of Marysville and then the Diocese of Grass Valley with a generous spirit. One of his contemporaries noted that he was "a universal favorite among his people" because anyone could see "that he has not the slightest leaven of selfishness in his nature."



The Young Father Thomas Grace

As a young priest in charge of various missions from Eureka on the coast to the mining towns of the Sierras for twenty-nine years, Fr Grace manifested the energy and capacity for hard work which resulted in organizing many parishes, building churches and bringing many converts into the Catholic community. One chronicler of that era stated that "it was no easy task to stick to the simple duties of a parish priest in communities of those rugged and lonely mining districts where men in their desire to acquire worldly riches were impatient of the restraints imposed by religion." The same writer goes on to say about Fr Grace that "it was a sign of a certain nobility of character for a man of his high ideals and personal endowments to humbly submit to the trials which the missionary life entailed, where labor was unending and results oftentimes discouraging and heart-breaking, the reward frequently being hunger, thirst, poverty and privation."

Among Father Grace's more successful pastorates was Carson City where he built St Theresa Church in 1870. Three years later he was reassigned to Marysville and put in charge of the cathedral there. When the Diocese of Grass Valley became the Diocese of Sacramento and the Episcopal see was moved to Sacramento, Bishop Manogue named Father Grace rector of the new Sacramento cathedral. It seems that Thomas Grace had the ability to win people over and was beloved by all who knew him and esteemed as a great priest and citizen by all who came in touch with his activities. One author felt that there was never a more popular clergyman on the Pacific coast than Fr Thomas Grace. When it was rumored that his name was prominent among

those submitted for episcopal appointment, a noted writer stated that if Grace were named as a bishop, "he will adorn it by his many virtues."

Founding Bishop Patrick Manogue died in his Sacramento home on February 27, 1895. By his side at the moment of death was Fr Grace, Manogue's good friend and cathedral rector. After the Funeral Mass and burial of Bishop Manogue, Fr Grace was appointed administrator of the diocese and a year later Pope Leo XIII appointed him bishop of Sacramento. He was consecrated on June 16, 1896 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament by Archbishop Patrick William Riordan of San Francisco. Co-consecrators were Bishop Lawrence Scanlan and Archbishop George Thomas Montgomery. In his new position as bishop, Thomas Grace showed great energy and capacity for hard work which had characterized his ministry when he was a missionary working along the Gold Dust Trails in the Sierra Nevada.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Bishop-Elect Grace Arrives at the Cathedral for his Episcopal Ordination in 1896

For 25 years, he guided the Diocese of Sacramento through a period of transition from its pioneer beginnings to a more modern period of American life and ministry. He was tireless in traveling the length and width of the diocese on pastoral visits to the priests and people of his diocese, even when advised by his friends against such extensive travel.

During his 25 year ministry as bishop, Grace dedicated St Joseph Church, Redding on April 30, 1905 and St Gall Church, Gardnerville on June 22, 1919. On October 30, 1906, the bishop was given a piece of property in Red Bluff with the provision that it remain a Catholic hospital

operated by the Sisters of Mercy. Bishop Grace also launched the *Catholic Herald* diocesan newspaper, endorsing its usefulness for the diocese on March 14, 1908.

He helped the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Christian Charity establish a day-care center to serve mothers working at a nearby cannery. This day-care center was named Grace Day Home in honor of Bishop Grace who helped found it and dedicated it on December 19, 1920. The State of California issued Grace Day Home a day-care license on March 22, 1922 making it the first licensed day-care center in California.

Bishop Grace was a careful student of the Scriptures and the Fathers of the church. He prepared his talks with great care and scholarly research. It was the bishop's custom each day at 4 PM to take a walk in Capitol Park to enjoy its beauty and greenery that must have reminded him of the green hills of his native Ireland.

After serving as a priest for 54 years and 25 of them as bishop of Sacramento, Bishop Thomas Grace died on December 27, 1921. At the time of his funeral, it was said that "the secret of his calm, gentle, constant and unostentatious character...was deep down in his religious soul."

According to the diocesan *Catholic Herald* newspaper which covered his funeral, "*Rich and poor, old and young, the strong and weak men, women and children, of all races and conditions in life – Catholic, Jew, Protestant, agnostic and pagan – united in a final act of homage to the memory of a truly great and good man, who labored so unobtrusively for the betterment of mankind, and by precept and example expounded the doctrine of Christian kindness and charity.*"

With the death of Bishop Grace, the great romance of the Golden Era of California, with its massive immigration of gold seekers from around the world, had come to an end. A new age was about to be born on the stage of California history.



Marker at Bishop Grace's Tomb, St Mary Cemetery, Sacramento



From the Diocesan Archives

Bishop Thomas Grace's Coat of Arms

"In You, O Lord, I Have Hoped"