

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Fr John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 10

ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH SADOC ALEMANY FIRST BISHOP OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Fr John Dwyer, printed March 4, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

When the Provincial of the Dominicans in Ohio and Kentucky, Joseph Sadoc Alemany, was named the Bishop of Monterey in California in 1850, he was the first to receive this title since California became an American possession. His jurisdiction at first included both Californias, but since Lower California was under Mexican rule, it was soon realized that it should not be under an American Bishop. American California was responsibility enough since it included the now declined 21 Missions of the old Franciscan regime plus the newly appearing mining towns and their supply ports cropping up almost evernight in many portions of northern California.

The Bishop of Monterey, as he was known from 1850 to 1853, fulfilled well his responsibility over the American portion of his vast diocese. His visits on route from Rome after his consecration to the Irish seminaries of All Hallows, Maynooth and Carlow quickly began to pay dividends in the matter of personnel to staff the many parishes that needed to be established in the mining towns.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

San Carlos Cathedral, Monterey, the First Cathedral in California

His first assignment was that of Father John Shanahan to the Nevada City-Grass Valley area in 1851. In 1852 he sent the Spanish-born Father John F Llebaria to Marysville to attempt to establish a parish but that effort was unsuccessful. In 1853 he appointed the Italian born Father Peter Magagnotto, the Passionist, and under his direction, the parish was established in Marysville and the present church built under his direction. To Sonora he sent the Reverend Henry Aleric who established a mission there and the French born Father Dominic Blaive was sent to the port town of Stockton.

On July 29, 1853, California was divided and the northern half became the Archdiocese of San Francisco, with Joseph Alemany as California's first Archbishop. The southern portion containing most of the old California Missions received Thaddeus Amat as its new bishop. It was in 1853 that the Austrian born Benedictine, Florian Schwenninger was sent to the mines of the Siskiyou and Trinity Mountains, with his base at Weaverville.

In 1854 further vocations made it possible to open new parishes in Columbia with Father Daniel Slattery as founding pastor and Father Thomas Dalton became the founder of the Grass Valley parish. Likewise, Placerville began to be the center of activity for Father William Kenny; and the huge Siskiyou-Trinity area was divided with Father Raphael Rainaldi at Shasta, and Father James Cassin and Thomas Cody at Yreka.

In 1855, Downieville became a parish with Father Cornelius Delahunty as resident pastor, while San Andreas received the German born Father James Motter as shepherd of the Calaveras County mines.

But setting up new parishes and finding priests to send to them was not his only involvement. Long and tedious were the trips he made to these northern outposts to visit the parishes and administer confirmation. The records show that he was in Grass Valley and Nevada City on August 28, 1853, while Father Shanahan was pastor.

Another missionary journey is recorded in 1855. On September 23, he confirmed seven in Grass Valley and two in Nevada (City) on the same day. On the 25th, he confirmed nine in Iowa Hill in Placer County, and two days later three in Cherokee. He reached Downieville on September 30 where confirmation was again given both in Goodyears Bar to five and in St Louis in Plumas County to two on the same day. He was back in the same missions in June 1856 and again in July 1858 and in October 1859.

On October 18, 1854, he laid the cornerstone of St Rose Church in Sacramento, the well-known church at 7th and Kay, which served until the present Cathedral was built. He also visited Marysville, for on September 16, 1855, he laid the cornerstone for the present St Joseph Church. He also made the long journey to Shasta for the laying of the cornerstone of the new church there on May 19, 1857, a church which was never built, and whose foundations still are evident and are marked for the curious sightseer. It seems the pastor Father Rainaldi got into some litigation with the contractor, and the work on the church simply ceased and was never renewed.

These journeys which often consumed weeks of his time away from San Francisco became longer each time he made a new parish. By 1859 there were 17 churches and 10 priests in this vast northern portion of California; and concerned about his long absences, Archbishop Alemany pleaded with Rome to divide the Archdiocese and set up a new diocese or at least a Vicariate Apostolic to the north

This request was granted on September 23, 1860, when the northern portion was created as a Vicariate Apostolic with the See at Marysville and Father Eugene O'Connell named the new bishop.

Archbishop Alemany could relinquish his jurisdiction over this area with the feeling that he had done a fine job of attending to the needs of the people. He had created parishes and staffed with priests all the principal areas in the mining country. He had personally visited them and given confirmation regularly in spite of the hardships of travel and the long weeks spent away from San Francisco. Our first bishop had set an admirable pace for his successors to imitate.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Interior of San Carlos Cathedral, Monterey, California



+ Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany (1814-1888)
Dominican Provincial of Ohio and Kentucky
+ Bishop of the Diocese of Monterey 1850 – 1853
+ First Archbishop of San Francisco 1853 - 1888