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FATHER JOHN QUINN BUILDER OF ST ROSE CHURCH, SACRAMENTO AND ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLSOM

By Fr John Dwyer, printed February 5, 1976 edition of the *Catholic Herald*



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

Father John Quinn, Rector of St Rose Church, Sacramento in the 1850s

The nineteenth century witnessed three priests named John Quinn giving service to the church in California. To distinguish them, one historian has designated two of them as "Sacramento John," and "San Rafael John." But even that does not really help as there were two "Sacramento Johns," the latter having at least the distinguishing mark of possessing a middle

initial, John F Quinn, the Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral from 1899 to 1907. The subject of this article is the first "Sacramento John," a remarkable young man of several distinctions.

Born in Ireland on July 1, 1825, John Quinn was still a theological student at St Patrick's College in Carlow in September 1850 when a small Spanish bishop, the newly consecrated Bishop of Monterey in California, stopped off for a visit en route from Rome to California. The appeal of Bishop Joseph Alemany hit a responsive chord in the heart of John Quinn as he was the first to volunteer for that difficult mission. Two years later, John Quinn was ready for ordination. Bishop Alemany sent for him and on the day after Christmas 1852 the bishop had the joy of ordaining John Quinn a priest in the tiny St Francis Church on Vallejo Street, the first fruits of his appeal in Carlow and his first ordination since he became a bishop.

Four months after John Quinn's ordination the Bishop of Monterey decided to exchange Father John Ingoldsby, the second pastor of St Rose Church, Sacramento, and Father John Quinn, bringing the one back to San Francis as assistant and sending the newly ordained to Sacramento as pastor.

When John Quinn arrived in Sacramento on May 1, 1853, he found a recently completed church, Sacramento's third, on the corner of 7th and K Streets. The first St Rose had been blown down in a wind storm in November 1850 and the second had burned down in a fire that swept through Sacramento on November 4, 1852. But Father Quinn also found that Sacramento, the principal port town for the mines, was becoming an important city with 10,000 inhabitants and a large proportion of them Catholic. Likewise he had Folsom, Placerville and Auburn under his care, a territory too large to care for by himself. Therefore the new Archbishop of San Francisco sent as an assistant the newly ordained Father William Kenny. St Rose in Sacramento continued to be the residence of the clergy of the area, for even when Father Kenny became the founding pastor of Placerville in 1855, and Father Joseph Gallagher, the founding pastor of Folsom in 1859, they seem to have continued to reside for some time at St Rose Parish.

It was during these years when Father Quinn had the help of Father Kenny that the two undertook the building of the fourth and most permanent St Rose Church, this time of brick, at 7th and K, 60 by 100 feet. The Archbishop came from San Francisco on October 18, 1854 to lay the cornerstone. By Christmas the basement story was completed and roofed over so that Mass could be offered in a building able to accommodate the crowds. When completed the following year, the new St Rose was a dignified house of worship, destined to serve the Catholics of Sacramento until replaced by the present Cathedral in 1887 at which time the church was removed to make way for the new post office at 7th and K.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

St John the Baptist Church, Folsom Built in 1857 by Father John Quinn

To Father Quinn likewise goes the credit for building the church in Folsom. When the new railroad was completed between Sacramento and Folsom in 1857, the community of Folsom boomed and Father Quinn saw the need for the building of a new church in Folsom which was named for St John the Baptist. It was also during Father Quinn's term at St Rose church that he was able to bring the Sisters of Mercy to Sacramento from San Francisco. The first five Sisters arrived by boat in the early morning of October 3, 1857. They settled in a small house at the rear of St Rose church and on Monday, October 5, 1857, opened a school in the church basement with 65 pupils, the number of which doubled by the following June.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Interior of the First Saint John Church of 1857 As it is today

At this time Father Quinn was aided by Father James Cassin after Father Kenny returned to Ireland. Within a year after the arrival of the Mercy Sisters, Father Quinn's health began to fail and the Archbishop decided to move him to a less strenuous climate. In February 1859, Sacramento's pioneer priest, Father John Quinn, left Sacramento and received an appointment as second pastor of St Mary Church in Oakland. But the breakdown in health was not curable by just a climate change. Father Quinn died on Christmas Eve, 1864, at only 39 years of age, a victim to the hardships of those pioneer days of long and tedious travel and lack of conveniences. Young as he was, his namesake in San Rafael died in 1876 at only 34 years of age.



Photo from the Diocesan Archives

**The Fourth Saint Rose Church, 7th and K Streets, Sacramento in 1855
Where Father John Quinn was Pastor**