

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 70

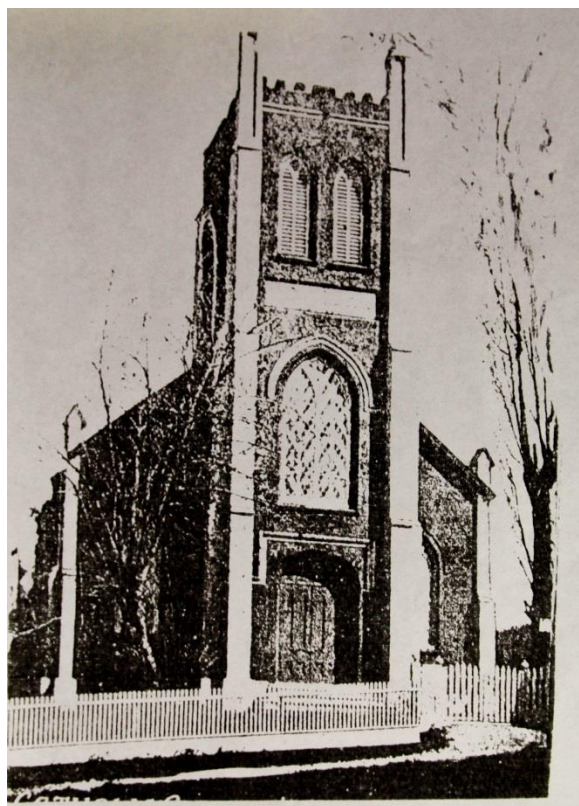
St Patrick Parish, Placerville

By Father Thomas J Hayes, Printed in the 1928 issue of the *Catholic Herald*

The Catholic Church came to El Dorado County right on the heels of the Argonauts, and since then has played its part in the religious and community life of the people, sharing the common joys and sorrows, the fat years and the lean, identified always with the vicissitudes of the more than 75 years since the yellow gleam in the mill stream at Coloma changed history, and sent the tide of empire flowing west.

The first record of the Catholic Church in the county dates back to the early spring of 1850, when Father Ingoldsby arrived from San Francisco and traveled on foot through the roaring mining camps saying Mass in miners' cabins, or out in the open, ministered to the spiritual needs of the gold seekers, visiting the sick and burying the dead.

Father Ingoldsby was followed by Father Woulfe (1852-57), a member of the Franciscan Order, also from San Francisco. After him came Father Riordan and later Father Handy (1857-60).



St Patrick Church circa 1850s

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered for the first time in Placerville, in a building constructed completely, walls and roof, of roughhewn logs. It was situated near Union Street, on the present McCune property. At that time the McCune property belonged to Ned Keegan, who came to Placerville in 1849.

In 1852 a substantial frame church was erected on Sacramento Street, where the present building now stands. Up to that time the priests had been traveling missionaries, visiting the mining settlements, not only of El Dorado County but also of Placer. With the erection of the church, however, a priest was stationed permanently in the community, having the country as his sphere of work.

The Fifties and on into the Sixties of the last century, witnessed one of those waves of anti-Catholic bigotry which break out periodically, like

the 17-year locust, and disgrace the intelligence of the country. This particular spasm was called, very appropriately, the Know-Nothing movement. Placerville was not immune from the plague, and the bitterness it engendered culminated on the night of the 4th of April, 1865, in the act of incendiarism which shocked the better feeling of the entire community.

News had come to town of the fall of Richmond and the practical ending of the Civil War. The church bells were ringing, but the one on the Catholic Church was silent, for the very good reason that the pastor, Father James Largan, was in San Francisco on business connected with the Easter celebration, then less than two weeks away. A number of men, whose names are known in history, but will not be mentioned here, seized on the incident, as a pretense to vindicate the peculiar Know-Nothing brand of Americanism, and on the morning of the following day, church and house were in ashes.

The outrage caused revulsion of feeling in the whole countryside. Father Largan started out immediately to raise funds for the erection of another church, and the responses of the people, Catholic and Protestant, was so generous and whole hearted, that before the end of the year, the present splendid brick edifice, a fine example of Norman-Gothic style, was completed and opened for services, Archbishop Alemany, the last of the Spanish Bishops in California, officiating at the dedication of the church.

The bell, the sweet yet sonorous tones of which still, calls the people to worship, was the special gift of the miners, a large portion of the metal of which it is composed is silver.

After Father James Largan (1858-69), there came to Placerville in succession Father Richard Nagle (1860-73), Father John Nugent (1873), Father Patrick O'Connell (1873-80), Father Michael Gualco (1880-84), Father R. Becker (1884-87), Father P.J. Clyne (1887-92), and Father Bernard McFeeley (1892-1902).

Father Dennis Horgan came to Placerville in the fall of 1902, and remained for 18 years. During his incumbency many improvements were made in the parish property, the present spacious parochial residence was built, and the beautiful memorial windows, of Munich glass were placed in the church.

During his pastorate the State penitentiary at Folsom was attended from Placerville and to help him with the work he had assistant priests, the first of whom was Father Michael McNaboe. He was followed in order by Fathers Molyneaux, Taverna, Coen and Cahir. Towards the end of 1917, Folsom was made an independent parish and Father Michael Cahir was appointed to be its first priest. To the deep sorrow of a host of friends to whom he endeared himself, in Folsom and in El Dorado County, Father Cahir died in February 1919, a martyr to duty during the influenza epidemic.

After Father Horgan came Father O'Flannagan, who gave place to the present pastor.



Photo from Diocesan Archives

St Patrick Church, Rectory and Hall in the 1950s

Within the past few years, extensive improvements have been made, amounting to about \$12,000, in St Patrick's Church. The building has been strengthened throughout, a new roof of multi-colored asbestos slate, replaces the old one. The entire outside of the edifice has been finished in cement, and the interior has been remodeled, plastered and frescoed. A magnificent life size bronze Crucifixion group, the gift of the late Mrs. Ellen Bailey, is set in the tower above the main entrance, and presents an impressive and inspiring spectacle to all who pass by the way.

Besides the parish church of St Patrick in Placerville, there were in the early days several missions scattered throughout the county. St James Church in Georgetown, and St John's in Coloma, survive to the present day. But Grizzly Flat, Green Valley, Aukum and Greenwood, also have had their places of Catholic worship, when the olden days were golden days and every creek and flat held a king's ransom and the population of the Empire County rivaled that of San Francisco.

The church at Coloma, just as in Placerville, had its start in a log cabin in the spring of 1850. The present church was built in 1857.



Photo by John E Boll 2010

St John Church, Coloma

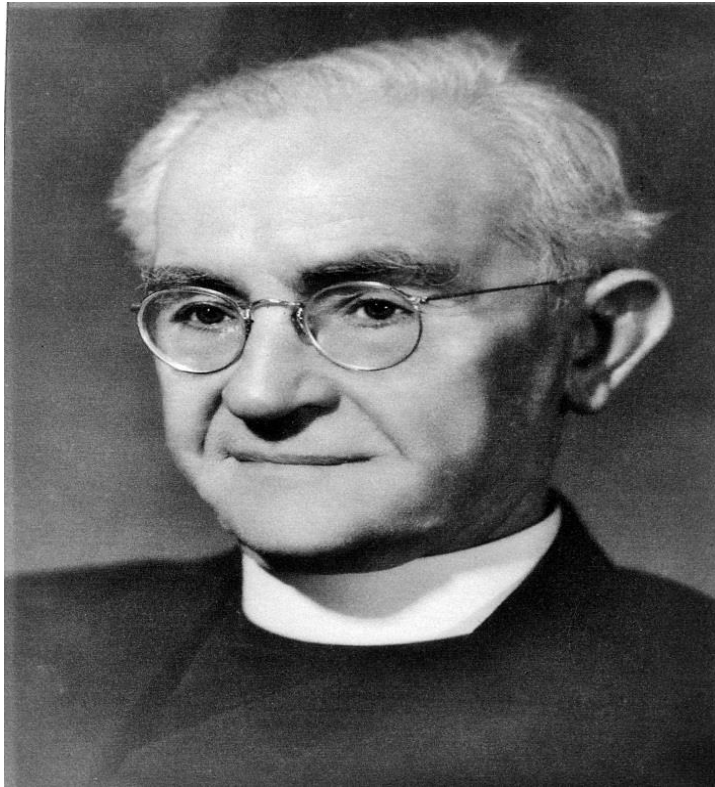
At about the same time, a Catholic church was erected in Georgetown, at the corner of Church and Placer Streets. It was destroyed by fire which swept the town in May 1869. From that time until 1882, there was no place of worship and Mass was said at regular intervals at Georgia Slide. In 1882 the congregation purchased a building on Main Street and it was used as a church until a few years ago, when the present beautiful little church of St James was built. It was dedicated by the late Rt. Rev. Bishop Keane in November 1923.



St James Church, Georgetown

Father Patrick Kane, Uncle of Bishop Patrick Keane, served as pastor of St James Parish, Georgetown for 25 years. He also celebrated Sunday Mass at St John Church in Coloma.

This church has been replaced by a new facility on the outskirts of Georgetown to meet the needs of a growing Catholic community in the Georgetown area.



St Patrick Parish Archives

Monsignor Thomas J Hayes

For about 20 years, beginning in 1895, Georgetown had a resident pastor, Father Patrick O’Kane. His memory will be green in the North Side for many years to come.

In closing this brief chronicle, it is a pleasure to pay tribute to the fine feeling of Christian fellowship that pervades the community. No religious rancor divides the people; no political or social lines are drawn based on race or creed, and there is the friendliest cooperation in all things that make for the betterment of the community as a whole.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Additional remarks by Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

I was born and raised in Placerville and Monsignor Thomas J Hayes baptized me in old St Patrick Church on January 17, 1943. My memory of him is that he was tall and slender with snow white hair. I remember one Saturday afternoon around 1949 when my family came to church for confession, I was playing outside running up and down the lawn next to the rectory. Monsignor Hayes came out of the house and chatted kindly with me. He went back into the house and in a few minutes came out with a large yellow banana for me. He was known for his kindness to everyone and was greatly loved by the whole community of Placerville. He was ecumenical, well ahead of his time and the new ecumenical attitude of Vatican II. He worked well with the other pastors in Placerville and was held in highest esteem by the Protestant community.

Monsignor Hayes died on February 19, 1952. With my parents I attended his Funeral Mass at our parish church with Bishop Robert Armstrong as celebrant. Monsignor was buried in the parish cemetery behind the church. During the pastorate of Father Cornelius O'Connor, the old church was torn down, the cemetery covered with dirt and the present church was built over the existing cemetery. The body of Monsignor Hayes now lies directly below the main altar of the church and an outside marker lists the names of the early pastors who served St Patrick Church since 1850 as well as the 92 parishioners buried under the church.

May God bless all the priests who ministered to the people of Placerville over the past 163 years.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Memorial to Those Buried Under St Patrick Church



Photo by John E Boll 2013

St Patrick Church in 2013



Photo by John E Boll 2013



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Monsignor Hayes' Chalice Gifted to the Parish