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THE HISTORY OF Saint John CHURCH, DUNSMUIR

This article is composed from historical material written by Monsignor James Casey, church records and area newspaper articles



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Saint John the Evangelist Church, Dunsmuir

“Before the railroad came to Pusher, later named Dunsmuir, there were no towns in Southern Siskiyou. Scattered settlers were in the Sacramento River canyon and in the Sisson area. For obvious reasons, churches did not exist, either on an organized or a parochial basis. Construction of the railroad brought in its wake a pioneering population.

“On June 13, 1888, the Reverend John Quinn came from Red Bluff to celebrate Mass in the home, presumably a section house, of a McCann family. Present for this first Mass in the locality were the families of Joseph Mott, George McInnenedy, Patrick Furlong, Charles Gill, Tim Ryan, plus single construction workers, and a few friends of other religious affiliations. Over the next three years, newspaper reports indicate, a priest (Father McGrath) came from Yreka perhaps once a month to celebrate Mass in various Southern Siskiyou communities. Catholic parishes had been established in Mother Lode and northern gold mining camps, including Sawyers Bar and Yreka, soon after the discovery of the precious metal.

“While in Red Bluff, Father Quinn was untiring in caring for isolated members of his flock in an extensive territory, in Old Shasta, in Dunsmuir to the north, and in Fall River Mills to the east. He would give public lectures, attracting virtually the entire population of a town. A man who heard him said that non-Catholics attended out of curiosity, at first suspicious, if not hostile. Father Quinn won their friendship by his genial personality, his powers of oratory, and his appealing presentation of the traditional faith. He was transferred to Yreka in 1894, and then to the Cathedral in Sacramento.



Father John F Quinn

“Father Quinn and the Most Reverend Patrick Manogue, Bishop of Sacramento, were in Dunsmuir in July of 1891, when Mass was celebrated in a local hall (Gonguer’s). On the occasion of this visit, reportedly, property was purchased ‘above town,’ that is, where St. John’s Church now stands. At this time also, a newspaper reports, the bishop inspected the ‘Catholic Ranch’ to the north of Dunsmuir. Some three years previously, the Red Bluff pastor and two associates envisioned a ‘Catholic summer resort’ on a forty-acre site just south of Hedge Creek. The property, owned by Father Quinn, was to have a large building, modern facilities, mineral baths, and landscaped grounds. Apparently, nothing came of the project. Perhaps it was too visionary for the time and place. At least one building was on the property. In August of 1891, the newspaper mentioned that Miss Irene Scott, who later married Dennis Freel, and two Miss Dawsons were running the hall at the Catholic Ranch.



Photo by John E Boll 2005

Interior of Saint John the Evangelist Church, Dunsmuir

“Bishop Manogue was in Dunsmuir again in August of 1891, encouraging local Catholics to open a subscription drive for a new building, to be called Sacred Heart Church.” Joseph Mott’s name and donation of one hundred dollars headed the list, and, before the evening was over, eight hundred dollars had been pledged for the church building. Evidently, construction began shortly, as the November 12, 1891 issue of the *Yreka Union* stated that Father McGrath had reported to the editor that the foundation of the new Catholic Church in Dunsmuir was completed, and that the contract for the wood work and framing of the church was for \$2000.

Father McGrath showed a great interest in the church, and he was down often to attend to the affairs of the church and to celebrate Mass. It was said that the “Reverend Gentleman” worked hard himself at the construction site. In January of 1892, he came to help with the plans for the altar and to build a fence around the lot. Mr. Maurice Harmon, a Southern Pacific section man, was Father McGrath’s assistant on the church work. Maurice was to be married soon and would have his ring blessed in the church. Father McGrath spent much of the month of October 1892 in Dunsmuir, supervising the construction and conducting services, which by this time were announced as being held in the church. By the end of the month, the building was nearly finished on the inside. There was a nice little altar furnished with all the symbols of the church, including very beautiful candlesticks.

No doubt, the rush was on to get the building ready for winter. By December, the public was being invited to attend the Christmas Eve services when High Mass would be celebrated. The newspaper admonished, “Come Christmas Day if no other day of the year. The sermon will be ‘Christmas – Myth, Mystery, or Miracle?’.”

The congregation and Father McGrath were still working on the building in February of 1893 when the indebtedness was only twenty-six dollars. There was sufficient lumber on hand to complete the sanctuary, but not the seats. Father McGrath was down again in March to help in casing the windows and in doing any other work that was necessary. Just how long it took to complete the work on the church is not known. Finally, the happy day came when in September 1894, Bishop Manogue dedicated the attractive little Church of the Sacred Heart. A large crowd attended the service. Many came from Sisson. The Roman Catholic community of the South Siskiyou area was grateful that at least it had a church to attend.

Apparently, Father McGrath and Father Quinn were the priests who continued to serve Sacred Heart Church until 1899, when a parish was established. “The Reverend Patrick Carr, appointed as pastor in Dunsmuir in 1903, saw the growth of Catholic congregations at the local level as well as in three developing neighboring communities within the parish boundaries, McCloud, Sisson, and Weed. They were termed missions of the Dunsmuir parish. The vigorous priest, a respected civic leader, would travel by stage or train to celebrate Mass and administer the sacraments, often spending several days, even a week, in each community.”

It was often said that the time of church services in the Southern Siskiyou area depended upon the arrival time of stage or train. “Advancing in age, Father Carr became ill and was admitted to a hospital in Oakland, where he died in 1919. He had relatives in the East Bay City.” Mrs. Mary Madden, his cousin and housekeeper, was named in his will. She died before he did. In the will he wrote in November 1918, he left his property to the Right Reverend Thomas Grace of Sacramento.

“During Father Carr’s time, his friend, Father Quinn, was granted a leave of absence, as it was termed euphemistically, and retired to his ‘ranch’ north of Dunsmuir. Conjecture had it that there was a lack of rapport between the urbane, progressive priest and the new Bishop Grace, reputedly a conservative, even a reactionary. Resuming an active role, Father Quinn was named pastor of Winters, California, where he died in 1921. He had sold the Dunsmuir property to a family named Wehrheim, from the Midwest, of Lutheran affiliation.

More than thirty years later, Mrs. Wehrheim, who had saved newspaper clippings and pictures, was pleased to supply information on the era for the local priest. She said that Father Quinn and friends would return for vacation interludes, camping in the apple orchard as guests of the family. Much of the Wehrheim place was purchased by the State of California when the freeway was built.

“Succeeding Father Carr were several immigrant priests, whose tenures were brief... The Reverend Patrick Cronin remained until May 1922. The Reverends James Grealy and Michael Myles filled in as visitors until October of that year, when the Reverend Thomas Molyneaux was named pastor. He departed after a few months.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Saint Joseph Church, McCloud

“The Reverend Michael McGoldrick, appointed to Dunsmuir in 1923, became well known in Southern Siskiyou over the ensuing nine years.” There was a rectory just behind Sacred Heart Church facing Spruce Street. When it was built is not known. After Father McGoldrick arrived, “the present parish rectory, facing Shasta Avenue, was built in 1926, designed to house two priests who would serve the large parish territory, then extended to the Oregon state line. The vigorous priest was also instrumental in the building of a church in Mount Shasta, and in

addition, the unique Shelvin siding, log-cabin style church in McCloud, dedicated in 1931. Father McGoldrick was restless, impulsive, and self-driven. Like many dedicated, over-zealous men, he was not always careful in regard to routine details... The onset of the great depression in 1929 led to a degree of financial chaos in the parish. Revenue dropped... The priest was transferred to Sacramento in 1932.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

Interior of Saint Joseph Church, McCloud

“Soon after the arrival of the Reverend Michael O’Connell in 1932, fire ravaged the church to such an extent that it had to be demolished. The fire was attributed to carelessness on the part of altar boys who neglected to extinguish lighted charcoal in the incense thurible. Since the unemployment rate was high, little or no trouble was encountered in recruiting men from the congregation to excavate the site for an entirely new structure, erected by Luigi Cosentino and volunteer workers at a cost of \$7000 which was completed in 1935, and dedicated to St John the Evangelist. No explanation can be found as to why the name was changed.

Despite hardships of the depression decade, the needs of Catholics in McCloud and Weed were met by the establishment of separate parishes in both lumber-mill towns. McCloud had its first resident priest in 1934; Weed, in 1935. Dunsuir parish, reduced considerably in the area, retained Mount Shasta as a mission.”



Assisting Father O'Connell in his work was the Reverend Patrick J. Lyons, brother of the present priest, Father Vincent Lyons. "Father O'Connell, departing in May 1947, was replaced by the Reverend James Casey... He responded to appeals by Mount Shasta Catholics, whose hopes had been frowned upon, by aiding in founding a new parish for them in November of that year. Later, noting that property adjacent to the Dunsmuir rectory, on the north side, was for sale, he secured a loan to purchase the house and lot, thus rounding out the parish real estate to include the whole city block.

Monsignor James Casey (left)

"During and after World War II, Dunsmuir was a bustling railroad center, headquarters of the Shasta Division of the Southern Pacific. As St John's congregation increased, the church was getting too small. A special feature was an enthusiastic choir, trained in and dedicated to traditional Gregorian chant. A Baldwin electronic organ was bought. For recurring festive observances, especially for Midnight High Mass at Christmas, the choir attracted non-Catholic friends. A savings account, increasing annually, was opened with long-range hopes for a more impressive edifice, liturgically functional, on higher ground north of the rectory, replacing the smaller building which was described as 'down in a hole.' Under subsequent regimes, these provisional hopes were abandoned."

The change to diesel-powered locomotives and the closure of railroad shops in Dunsmuir caused the population of the town to decline. Also contributing to the drop in population was the construction of Interstate 5 through the residential districts of the town. Many, many houses were taken out and not replaced.

"In 1954, Pope Pius XII named Father Casey as a Monsignor, a title of honor, the first of its kind in Siskiyou County. Aware of a growing concern, Father Casey invited Sisters of the Holy Family to conduct annual summer school sessions. This order of teachers was founded in California to provide adequate religious instruction for public school students.

After an interval of two or three years, with all four parishes of the area collaborating, the Holy Family Sisters instituted a foundation in Southern Siskiyou. Four of the Holy Name Sisters came to reside in a convent, with chapel, dedicated in Mount Shasta in 1959. Classes, tied in with the school year, were scheduled on a weekly basis in each parish. Frowned upon was the obsolete concept of 'Sunday School'." In recent years, failing to get the support for the foundation that they felt they must have, the Sisters withdrew all but one of their members from the southern area of Siskiyou County. The one remaining member lives in Weed.

"Appointed as Dunsmuir parish priest in September, 1963, was the Reverend William Broderick, who remained until May 1965 when he enlisted as a chaplain in the armed forces and saw combat service in Vietnam. He was succeeded by the Reverend Patrick Lanigan, during whose

term a parish hall was built and who, in 1973, was succeeded by the Reverend James Vaughn. Father Vaughn, while in a doctor's office in Weed for a check-up on December 17, 1974, died suddenly of a heart attack. Returning temporarily from Red Bluff, Monsignor Casey arranged for the funeral and was administrator of the parish until the end of February, 1975, when the Reverend Sean O'Leary came as pastor.

"A few months after Father O'Leary's arrival, an arsonist tried to burn down St John's Church." According to parishioner Pat Girard, only a chance visit to the church by Emma Martinez, now deceased, saved the church from complete destruction. "Though the edifice was saved by the fire department, sanctuary furnishings and alter were destroyed; also, extensive smoke and water damage were incurred. Securing an insurance settlement, the priest had the interior restored." James Cosentino, son of Luigi Cosentino, had built the main altar, two side altars, and two podiums for Sacred Heart Church, and it was he who again built these furnishings after the fire.

"The Reverend Vincent Lyons, succeeding Father O'Leary, was appointed as pastor of St John's parish in Dunsmuir on August 1, 1981."

Beginning with the time of construction of Sacred Heart Church and continuing to the present time, the Catholic women had been busy. They had held dinners and dances, fairs and bazaars, raffles and rummage sales, to help build churches and to help furnish and maintain them. They commenced holding the St Patrick's Day balls and suppers immediately, and they became annual affairs. Father Quinn came to one such event in 1896 when, at midnight, supper was served on shingles.

For Christmas 1892, they raffled two watches that were advertised as real gems. The gentleman's watch was a full-jeweled B.W. Raymond in a gold case; and the lady's, an elegant one in an engraved gold case of the latest style. There was forever some project for which money or time was needed.

Today, St John's Guild takes an active part in the life of the church. Members work hard and faithfully to raise money for the needs of the congregation and for the outreach programs of the church. The group lends support to the Foreign Missions and makes contributions to various funds, such as the Right to Life movement. For St John's, it supplies the flowers, candles, and fair linens. It brings solace and comfort to members in time of sorrow and distress. It contributes financially to the church when there is a need to do so.

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) program has its dedicated workers, also, who give willingly of their time to bring instruction in catechism to the youth of the church.

A more recently formed committee is the one which ran the Friday night bingo games. The profits from these games are used to purchase needed equipment for the church and the parish hall.

Following is a list of priests who are known to have served the Dunsmuir Catholic churches as visitors and those who have been resident priests. The years in which they served are listed as well.

PASTORS OF SACRED HEART CHURCH

Father D Meagher	1899-1903
Father John B Ruddy	1903
Father Patrick F Carr	1903-1916
Father Joseph A Sullivan (Visitor)	1919
Father Patrick J Cronin	1919-1922
Father James Grealy (Visitor)	1922
Father Michael Myles(Visitor)	1922
Father Thomas Molyneaux (Visitor)	1922
Father Michael M McGoldrick	1923-1932

PASTORS OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST – name changed

Father Michael J O'Connell	1932-1947	
Father Patrick J Lyons (Assistant)	1947-1948	
Father James Casey	1947-1963	
Father William Broderick	1963-1965	
Father Patrick Lanigan	1965-1973	
Father James Vaughn	1973-1974	
Monsignor James Casey	1974-1975	
Father Sean O'Leary	1975-1981	
Father Vincent Lyons	1981-1985	
Father Benedict DeLeon	1985-1992	
Father William Hold	1992-1994	
Father Cornelius O'Donnell	1994-1999	
Sister Nancy McInerney, RSM	1999-2006	Parish Steward
Father Aiden O'Reilly	1999-2004	
Father Michael Canny	2006-present	



Photo by Mary Paletta Jackson 1938

Sacred Heart Church, Weed in 1938



Photo by John E Boll 2012

**Sacred Heart Church and Hall, Weed in 2012
Were Destroyed by Fire on September 15, 2014**



Photo by John E Boll 2012