

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church History

From its humble beginnings to the present, the Catholic Church in Truckee, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, has always welcomed immigrants and travelers from all over the world.

The Church in Truckee was deemed necessary when the Central Pacific Railroad completed the grueling task of running the line over the crest of the Sierra, into Sierra and into Nevada. Many of the 9,000 workers for the company were Irish Catholic Immigrants. These immigrants as well as miners and residents of the neighboring communities, were served by a series of circuit riding priests who rode all along the summit of the Sierra, into Nevada and into north-easterly California.

The town of Truckee at the time was included in the Catholic Diocese of Grass Valley. Bishop O'Connell appointed Father John M. Mevel a Frenchman to become the first pastor of Assumption Church in 1869. He also became the first of many circuit riding priests to serve the Truckee area.

When the railroad and stage lines brought people to Truckee, many were apprehensive and in need of some kind of hope and solace. Once the Church was built in 1869, it was like a beacon for these people, whether they were Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or of no particular religious affiliation.

Prior to construction of the church, Mass was often said in the local school house. On March 28, 1869, the Truckee Tribune announced that Father Mevel requested the assistance of the townspeople during the coming week to build a Catholic Church. The paper later reported that on August 15, 1869, Mass was conducted for the first time at the new church. This church would serve Truckee and its surrounding areas until 1890.

Father Mevel served the railroad line the fledging town and had missions in various places in Nevada and California, until he left his mountain home for missionary work in Haiti. The first mission, according to the National Directory, was Crystal Peak in 1896, and was served once a month. Father Mevel also built the first Catholic Church in Reno, Nevada.

Early records show that in 1885, Bishop Monogue, first Bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, had carved a new parish in the vicinity, including Truckee, Verdi and the Sierra Valley. The new pastor was Father Michael Walsh. He served until 1889.

Father Mevel and the priests that followed found Assumption Church duty to be extremely taxing. Until 1912, the parish of Truckee embraced the entire territory lying east of the Sierra and north of the Southern Pacific Railroad, including the counties of Modoc, Lassen and Plumas. Thus, in making the circuit of his territory, the priest might traverse a distance of 600 miles by stage line, railroad, or horse drawn buggy.

The wood frame Church was completely destroyed by fire in 1890. With the assistance of townspeople, parishioners and others of good will, the church was rebuilt on the site of the original church. In 1907, it was moved to a new location which was, according to the 1907 Sanborn maps, just east of the large rock behind the Methodist Church. At this time the church was completely renovated. The church was moved to its present location in 1949 because of State Highway needs.

The parish now includes a mission church. Our Lady of the Lake, located at Kings Beach, California.

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On August 27, 1995 the Assumption Parish celebrated it's 125th Anniversary. A special mass was celebrated by Bishop William K. Weigand of Sacramento with the assistance of many priests, parishioners and friends. The Town of Truckee presented a special resolution to the Parish:

Whereas, the first Mass was celebrated in the newly constructed church on August 15, 1869; and

Whereas, during construction of the railroad, many of the 9,000 men employed on the project were Catholic; and

Whereas, the Town of Truckee at that time was included within the Catholic Diocese of Grass Valley; and

Whereas, the present church building is the second on the third site in Truckee; and

Whereas, 25 Pastors served Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish includes a large Hispanic population and many visitors;

Now, Therefore, be it resolved that the Truckee Town Council hereby extends its sincere appreciation for the dedication and accomplishments of the people of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish throughout the entire history of Truckee; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Truckee Town Council extends its sincere best wishes to the Parish and Father Stanley Poltorak on August 27, 1995, their 125th anniversary celebration.

Done this the 20th day of July, 1995

Embree B. Cross, Mayor

Attest:

Stephen L. Wright, Town Clerk

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Fr. Stanley Poltorak the pastor of the parish invited the parishioners to look into the future to meet the needs of the parish as he wrote on that occasion. "Today as we look into the future, we are faced with the challenge of the construction of a new church and parish facility. This is a tremendous undertaking, but I am confident that we will be able to realize this vision with prayer and sacrifice. Every church is an offering of the faith community to God; it is a visible sign of God's presence in our midst and a testament of God's blessings for His people. May all of us share in His blessing and grace."

Fr. Stanley Poltorak initiated the Parish Building fund for the new church and set up a land search committee for the new church site.

On October 5, 1997 the Our Lady of the Lake Community celebrated the 50th anniversary of the church in Kings Beach with a special Mass and reception.

In 2003 the Pastor Recognition Award. The Recognition Award was presented to Barbara Hunt and began a tradition of recognizing parishioners annually.

On August 24, 2006 with representatives of the Parish Pastoral Council, the Finance Council and the newly formed Parish Building Committee, Fr. Stanley Poltorak signed a document on behalf of the Parish. After an agreement was reached between the Diocese of Sacramento and East West Partners Inc. this document initiated the process of the transfer of land being donated on which the new church facility will be built in Truckee.

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The Succession of Pastors for Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, Truckee, California:

1869 -1872 John W. Mevel
1872 - 1876 Daniel Meagher
1876 - 1877 Charles Becker
1877 - 1878 William Maloney
1878 - 1879 Thomas Petit
1879 - 1882 P. Raffo
1882 - 1885 William Maloney
1885 - 1889 Michael Walsh
1889 - 1892 Michael Kiely
1892 - 1895 Daniel Gartland
1895 - 1900 James Claire
1900 - 1906 Patrick Gleeson
1906 - 1917 Thomas Horgan
1917 - 1918 Michael J. O'Reilly
1919 - 1923 Jerome Enright
1925 - 1932 Michael Miles
1932 - 1934 Thomas Morgan
1934 - 1945 William Daly
1945 - 1952 Jeremiah Boland
1952 - 1961 Patrick O'Neill
1961 - 1966 Patrick Coffey
1966 - 1973 Robert Connely
1973 - 1986 Patrick O'Connor
1986 - 1994 Joseph Ternullo
1995 - 2009 Stanley Poltorak
2009 - ---- Matthew Blank

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MILESTONES AND FIRSTS

The first Mass at the first Truckee Church was conducted on August 15, 1869.

The first priest was the Reverend Father John M. Mevel, a Frenchman, appointed by Bishop O'Connell. He served from 1869 to 1872.

The church bell was cast in 1878, by foundry owner W.T. Garrett, San Francisco.

The first choir on record sang at Midnight Mass, 1884.

The music was directed by Gus Owens, who played the organ and took the tenor part. Miss Charlotte O'Farrell sang soprano; Miss Lizzie Cornell, alto; and John Doughty, Basso, rounded out the Chorale group.

The organ for this service was "kindly loaned" by the local Methodists when the Catholic's new instrument failed to arrive on time.

On March 4, 1885, Right Reverend Bishop Monogue, first Bishop of the Diocese of Sacramento, carved a new parish in the vicinity of Verdi, Truckee, Sierra Valley, and across the summit.

"Records for this whole northern country, from Truckee to the Oregon line, prior to 1885, have been completely lost by fire in Reno." Signed: William Daly, Pastor, 1935

The first church was destroyed by fire in 1890.

On June 18, 1891, the Truckee Republican reported that on the previous Sunday night, some "low-down wretch, who has no fear of the hereafter" entered the local Catholic Church and stole the silver chalice from the altar. Reverend Garland offered a \$10 reward for its return.

The first record of a mission from the Truckee church was 1896. It was located at Crystal Peak, and services were held once a month.

Reverend Thomas Horgan (Pastor 1906-1917) was the first clergyman this side of the "mountain" to own an automobile. He purchased a model-T Ford in 1915 for \$497.10, delivered in Truckee.

He said, "That was the best purchase I ever made. I would have to stable my horses in the winter, when roads were impassable, and those animals ate their heads off. But the Ford, through the winter months when it couldn't be used, never cost a cent!"

Truckee's only Mission Church at present, is Our Lady of the Lake, located at Kings Beach, California. It was established in 1947.

The south wing on the Truckee church was added in 1954 to accommodate a growing parish