

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

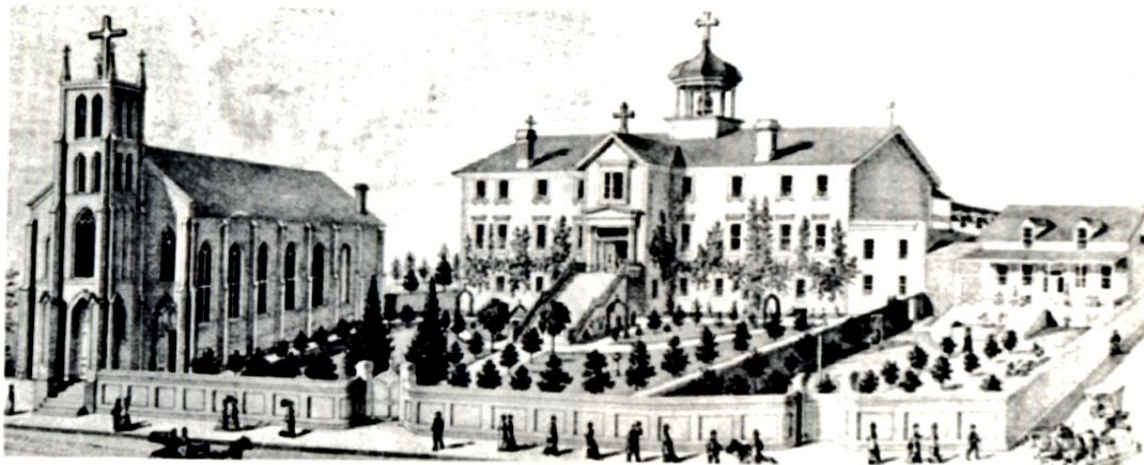
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No 18

## THE CARE OF ORPHANS IN GRASS VALLEY 1866-1932 Church in the Gold Dust Trails

By Father John Dwyer, printed April 29, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

When Father Dalton invited the Sisters of Mercy to come to Grass Valley, his intention was simply that they take over the already flourishing school of boys and girls which he had established. Between their taking over on August 29, 1863, and the start of their new building in March 1865, a new development had taken place. Everywhere throughout the mining region and along the route of the building of the transcontinental railroad, there were serious accidents. Quartz mining was still in its infancy and safety measures were only being developed. Dozens of families found themselves fatherless and others parentless. The big heart of Father Dalton saw a need and wanted to meet it. The generous Sisters of Mercy agreed to work with him.



A view of the entire block, showing St. Patrick's Church built in 1858, the Convent, and the Henry Scadden house, first used as an orphanage for small boys, later the Sisters Chapel.

Therefore when the new convent was planned it was to be a three storied affair. The ground floor contained kitchen, dining rooms, storerooms, laundry, lavatory and primary school rooms. The first floor contained more class rooms, the library, parlors, and a chapel for the sisters. The top floor contained dormitories, infirmary and sleeping rooms for the sister.

The cornerstone of the new "Holy Angels Orphan Asylum" was laid by Bishop O'Connell on May 2, 1865. The building was ready for occupancy on March 20, 1866. Although it was unfurnished, the sisters moved in.

On April 2, 1866, the sisters accepted the first orphans, four children from a family in Sierra County. A few days later a second group came from Shasta County, "four most miserable little creatures, blind and lame and poverty stricken in the extreme." Within the space of two months, the sisters had 30 children under their care. In June, Mrs Edward McLaughlin came to their rescue and provided the sisters with blankets and spreads for 30 beds, gas fittings and gas for the whole house, a kitchen stove and \$150 worth of utensils. Eight months later the sisters had 69 children. Meanwhile Father Dalton and his assistant had moved back to the rectory, thereby vacating the cottage located next to the new convent. The sisters quickly converted the 40 by 20 foot cottage into a residence for the boy orphans up to seven years of age. Of the 99 children in the orphanage at the end of 1866, 14 were little boys.

There isn't room to tell of the financial distress faced by the sisters and Father Dalton, of the pressure from creditors, the collections, the fairs held in 1869 and 1870 each of which netted \$3,500. Finally by the end of 1870 the original indebtedness was paid off. Meanwhile, in January and February 1870, the Superior, Mother Baptist Morgan bought two pieces of property, one on Pleasant Street for \$100 and eight acres on Brighton Street for \$140. In February 1872, a letter came from Bishop O'Connell telling the sisters that he and his Council had decided to send the girl orphans to the Sisters of Charity in Virginia City and that the Grass Valley institution was to take care of the boy orphans in the diocese. Mother Baptist wrote to inform the bishop that the Sisters of Mercy would take care of both the girls and the boys and that with his help she could build a suitable building for the boys. Therefore she promptly arranged for the construction of an orphanage for the boys in the Pleasant Street property, a wooden building at a cost of \$4,000 and \$2,000 for furnishings.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

### **Old Mount Saint Mary Convent and Orphanage in Grass Valley**

Two sisters and 17 boys occupied the new orphanage on June 6, 1872. The small girl orphans now occupied the cottage where the boys had been previously, thus relieving congestion in the main building. The National Directory of 1870 notes that: "Holy Angels Female Orphan Asylum had 60 orphans. St Patrick Male Asylum had 40 orphans."

In 1877, a new crisis caused further development. There was danger that the Brighton Street property might be lost unless there was immediate occupancy. Because of the crowding in the main building where there now were also boarders who were not orphans, Mother Baptist Morgan decided to build on the Brighton Street property. A new St Patrick's orphanage was built for the boys and the sisters and forty boys moved there from Pleasant Street. The 60 girl orphans were then transferred to Pleasant Street and the main building ceased to house the orphans and its name was changed.

An article in the Grass Valley Union in 1884 reveals the financial struggle and the sacrifices of the sisters. It was estimated that it cost 55 ½ cents a day for each child. Therefore, for 138 orphans, it would cost \$26,415 per year. Of this the sisters received \$9,000 in state aid. The remaining \$17,415 was up to the sisters to find through their own efforts and from donations of benefactors.

Another change in residence took place in 1886. Mother Gabriel Mulligan in cooperation with the new bishop, Patrick Manogue of Sacramento, built a new orphanage for girls on the grounds of Mount St Mary, one close enough to be able to use the one kitchen with the convent and boarding school. When the girls moved down from Pleasant Street the old site was turned over to the bishop who made it the Diocesan Retreat House for priests until the building disintegrated in the early 1930's.

In 1905 another newspaper article showed clearly how much the orphanages benefited the local community because \$13,372 had been spent locally for costs of maintaining the orphanages: \$9,735 had come from state aid, \$1,841 had been earned (and this included the \$500 bequest from William Campbell) and the balance, \$1,795, had been scraped together with difficulty by the sisters.

By 1927, when the sisters erected a new building to house their elementary school, their high school and their business school, "new orphanages" was already in the air. The 50-year-old St Patrick's on Brighton Street now housed 90 boys, and still there was not the kind of support forthcoming from the local community. Talk circulated of moving to a more metropolitan area where better support might be found. No one believed it would happen, but happen it did. The Bishop of Sacramento decided to build a new combined orphanage in Sacramento and to move the children there.

The Diocese of Sacramento rallied to the cause and the new St Patrick's Home on Franklin Boulevard was ready for occupancy. On August 22, 1932, Grass Valley witnessed busloads of children and weeping nuns headed for Sacramento and a new era in the care of the orphans in the Sacramento Diocese.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

**Site of the First Catholic Church in Grass Valley  
Across the Street from the Present Church  
Dedicated on October 25, 1853  
Reverend John Sheridan, Pastor  
Served as the Church until December 5, 1858  
Served as First Catholic School (1859-1879)**