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FR EDWARD KELLY – ‘THE WINDFALL FROM CHICAGO’ Church in the Gold Dust Trails

By Father John Dwyer, printed May 6, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

Bishop O’Connell of Marysville was prone to describe his priests in short epithets. His description of Edward Kelley was “the windfall from Chicago.” Edward Kelly had arrived in San Francisco, already a deacon and with all the necessary documents permitting him to work in the Vicariate. Because Bishop O’Connell did not have the personnel to carry out the ceremonies, most ordinations for his Vicariate took place in San Francisco. Thus on July 16, 1865, Archbishop Alemany ordained Edward Kelly a priest in (Old) St Mary’s Cathedral. Father Kelly’s first appointment was in the Cathedral in Marysville. The bishop soon referred to him as “a most prepossessing young man.”

When Father Kelly went to Marysville, he took the place of that great Nevada State pioneer priest, Father Dominic Monteverde whom the bishop transferred as an assistant to Virginia City. While there, Father Monteverde wrote to Bishop O’Connell that there was a prosperous mining region in eastern Nevada which had no priest and which was 180 miles from Virginia City. The bishop lost no time in responding to his appeal. He appointed Father Kelly as the founding pastor of Austin, Nevada, in September 1865.

In the following May, 1866, Father Kelly received a sick call to attend the sick and dying soldiers at Camp Douglas, some 300 miles east of Austin outside Salt Lake City. He reported this to Bishop O’Connell, who in turn checked with Rome to make sure Salt Lake was in his diocese. Rome answered that it was. Therefore in May 1866, Bishop O’Connell assigned Father Kelly as the first resident pastor of Salt Lake City.

In his own words Father Kelly told of the kind treatment he received from Brigham Young who invited him to officiate in his place of worship. Father Kelly bought a piece of property for a church and residence and was carrying out his mission there when he received a letter from Bishop O’Connell from Baltimore instructing him to leave Utah and return to Austin. Father Kelly therefore left Salt Lake City on December 27, 1866 and returned to Austin.

The bishop’s letter, although somewhat premature, was prompted by the fact that the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, the one which had decided to raise the Vicariate of Marysville to the status of a diocese, had also decided to erect a Vicariate in Colorado and to include Utah in the new Vicariate. Bishop O’Connell could have waited a whole year to withdraw Father Kelly, as the new Vicariate was not erected until March 1868. However, Father Kelly in obedience to his bishop returned to Austin and there a letter came from Bishop O’Connell assigning him as assistant in Gold Hill, Nevada, a post he held for only two months, for by April the bishop had recalled Father Kelly to Marysville.

Finally, when the letters came from Rome announcing that the Vicariate had been elevated to the status of a diocese, the bishop had to appoint someone else beside himself as pastor of St Joseph Cathedral, Marysville. His choice was Father Edward Kelly. He remained as pastor of St Joseph until the fall of 1869 when once again Father Kelly returned to Austin, Nevada. This was occasioned by the fact that Father Monteverde had discovered another cluster of new mining camps further east in Nevada in White Pine County. So when Bishop O'Connell created the new parish of Hamilton he transferred Father Monteverde there and sent back to Austin the ever obedient Edward Kelly. He remained at this post until 1872 when he was moved back to California, this time as pastor of Colusa – Grand Island.



Photo from the Archives of the Diocese of Reno

St Augustine Church, Austin, Nevada
Founded by Father Edward Kelly in September 1865

When the efforts of the Precious Blood Fathers to make a success of their College in Rohnerville failed due to lack of students, and the Precious Blood Fathers relinquished the pastorate of Eureka, California, it was Father Kelly who was assigned as the new pastor of Eureka, a post he kept for two years. In 1876 we find him back in Austin briefly and then a simple statement from

the bishop informs us that Father Kelly had retired from the diocese and entered a monastery. From that date on, nothing more is known of Father Edward Kelly.

But Salt Lake City can claim him as its first pastor and certainly his name, after that of the great pioneer developer of Nevada, Dominic Monteverde, is part of the history of Austin, Nevada and of several places in California as well.



Photo taken by John E Boll 2010

**Interior of Saint Bernard Church, Eureka
Father Edward Kelly served as Pastor from 1874-76**