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HISTORY OF THE WILLIAMS CHURCH Church in the Gold Mines

By Mrs. L.S. Reynolds, printed June 24, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

Checking into the history of the Williams Catholic church, it became necessary to go beyond the city of Williams. The life of this little church began in Marysville, the original See of the first episcopate in Northern California. The episcopate was later moved to Sacramento. It is known that as early as 1817, two priests, Father Duran and Father Abella, offered Mass in the area of Marysville. From then until 1852, an occasional priest visited Williams.

Bishop Alemany was not unmindful of the area and finally in 1852, he sent Father Peter Magagnotti to Marysville to build a church and to remain there. Father Magagnotti immediately turned his attention towards the erection of a church. Then, as now, there was no money. So borrowing the money, a little frame structure 32 x 43 feet was completed within a month at the cost of \$4,000. This building served the whole congregation for three years and was dedicated by Bishop Alemany on March 2, 1853. Marysville flourished, not only with the mining inhabitants, but farmers, business men and the professions. In 1856 the present Catholic Church in Marysville was erected.



Photo by John E Boll 2012

Interior of St Joseph Church, Marysville

The history of the little wooden church has two versions. One states that the building was used as the parochial residence for a number of years and was then moved aside and remained empty for a number of years. The other version says that the German Catholics remained aloof from the big church and continued using the little one until 1891, when they finally joined with the big church.

In 1856, an assistant was sent to help Father Magagnotti. Father Magagnotti then started exploring our area of Williams. It is only rumored that until 1856, an occasional priest, traveling from other areas to Lake County did go through here.

But in 1856, Jacob Myres went to Marysville and brought Father Magagnotti to Grand Island, where the first Mass in this area was said. Bishop O'Connell then began to make an effort to establish a parish or two in Colusa County. Finally in 1867, a Catholic church was built and consecrated in Colusa. From then until 1877, for the most part, a priest resided in Colusa. But the west side seemed to have had no one. In 1877, Father Michael Walrath came to Colusa from Weaverville. This man, whose efforts in building up the Church in Colusa County would form a volume of most interesting history, began to construct churches: "Long years o'er our valley ways he trod with messages of faith and God; bearing with love, like faithful friend, the Master's burden to the end."

In the 1870's, some of the most populous towns in Colusa County were Williams, Arbuckle, and Maxwell. Father Walrath, keeping to his building program, began to set up churches in these towns. In the early 1880's, according to one of his assistants, this tireless man devised a scheme whereby he might more speedily travel between the three towns. He got the railroad company to loan him a hand car. Operating it personally and on windy days supplemented by a sail rigged up by his own ingenuity, he practically sailed up and down the tracks. Once or twice he interfered with the time schedule of the overland trains. He was finally requested by the railroad company and authorities to discontinue this mode of travel. (From *Hallowed were the Gold Dust Trails*).

Deciding in 1892 that Williams needed a church and remembering that there was an unused church in Marysville, he negotiated to purchase it.

There are two versions as to the means of transportation to Williams. It is said that Father Walrath went to Marysville with two large spring wagons. He dismantled the church at Marysville, sawed it in half and brought it back to Williams in the wagons. The other version states that he placed the dismantled, sawed-in-two church on a flat car and had it brought to Williams by railroad. Under any circumstances, he did secure the first church erected in Marysville, brought it to Williams and re-erected it at the corner of 8th and F Streets.

The church of the Annunciation has more or less remained the same. The middle section where it was put back together was easily discernible. Sometime during the 1930's, the church did receive a new ceiling and floor, and a furnace was installed. Prior to that, the church was heated with a wood burning stove set in the center of the building. The little old altar was

replaced by a very large ornate, hand carved altar, gothic in style. This altar is also historically significant, as it was brought from the old stone church at Woodland.

Other than these renovations, this is the same little church, erected by Father Magagnotti in 1853, and served Williams until last November when it was pulled down to make room for a new church.

Father Walrath served the church from the Colusa parish until 1911. Father Michael Hynes then became the pastor of Williams, Arbuckle, and Maxwell. Following him were Monsignor John McGarry, Father Stephen Stack and Father Morgan. Father Morgan had as assistants Fathers Monogue, Bannion, Delahunty, Coffey and Phelan. Father Phelan then became administrator and is now our pastor and priest. Mrs. Reynolds is a parishioner in Williams.



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Original Church of the Annunciation in Williams