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FATHER WILLIAM MOLONEY 1842-1903 “The Old War Horse”

By Father John Dwyer, printed in the July 22, 1976 issue of the *Catholic Herald*

The fact that Bishop Manogue once referred to Father William Moloney as “the old war horse” would give no indication that he had been forced to leave All Hallows and go home to Listowell in County Kerry because of sickness in 1864. What happened after that is still unknown. We do know that he arrived in Marysville on April 18, 1869, already ordained a priest. His stay in Marysville was short because the young Father Charles Lynch of Downieville had contracted serious rheumatism and had to be brought down to Marysville for medical treatment. Bishop O’Connell transferred Father Moloney to Downieville to fill in for Father Lynch. One year later, when he had fully recovered, Father Lynch went back to his mountain parish and Father Moloney was sent to Nevada, which was to become his main field of missionary endeavor.



Archives of Reno Diocese

St Augustine Church, Austin, Nevada

During Father Monteverde’s days at Austin, he had felt that Hamilton in White Pine County needed its own priest. With Bishop O’Connell’s permission he had established the parish of Hamilton in 1869. It was now Father Moloney’s turn to serve this difficult mission but at the end of 1872 he advised the bishop that Hamilton and the White Pine County missions could no longer support a resident priest. Therefore he succeeded Father Monteverde as pastor of St Augustine’s and remained in Austin for three years.

Typical of Bishop O’Connell’s transfers, Father Moloney was now changed from the Nevada desert to the lovely mountain community of Forest Hill in Placer County. This assignment also was of three years duration. Once again the need of the White Pine County Missions in Nevada came to the attention of the bishop and the old war horse was asked if he would return. He not only did but this time made Cherry Creek the parish center, the only time this mining

community would ever have a resident priest. His missionary stay lasted three years, 1880-1883. It was during this stay that he built the church in Winnemucca.

In 1883 Bishop O'Connell transferred Father Moloney to Eureka, Nevada where once again he succeeded Father Monteverde. However, when Bishop Manogue succeeded as the second bishop of Grass Valley in 1884 on the retirement of Bishop O'Connell, the new bishop changed Father Moloney to Reno. But the two year stay in Reno did not change the pattern of Father Moloney's life. He still continued his constant travels to the various communities strung across Nevada along the railroad line – Lovelock, Winnemucca, Battle Mountain, Carlin, and Elk.



Archives of the Diocese of Reno

Saint Paul Church, Winnemucca
Built by Father William Moloney, the Old War Horse

After nearly 11 years of this difficult way of life, Bishop Manogue now found a new field of labor for Father Moloney, one which was to be his longest and last. The change of boundaries

from the old Diocese of Grass Valley to the new Diocese of Sacramento transferred some mountain towns of the Mother Lode to Sacramento from San Francisco. One of these was Sutter Creek. Bishop Manogue transferred Father Moloney to this community on March 19, 1887. He remained its pastor for the next 16 years. Then without warning on Saturday, August 8, 1903, a heart attack brought an end to the earthly life of the old warhorse at the age of 61. His remains were sent to Sacramento and the funeral and interment took place in that city.



Photo by John E Boll, 2011

Immaculate Conception Church, Sutter Creek

However, interest in Father Moloney was to remain at a high pitch for several months. After his death a holographic will was discovered and submitted for probate. The community was startled when the probate was denied on the grounds that the will was invalid. The local newspaper commented on the fact that Father Moloney, who was such a well-educated man, had made an error which it was hoped would have been of benefit to its readers. He had written out his will on parish stationery which had the name of the parish and the pastor printed at the top, which invalidated a holographic will.

The estate then went to court and a brother from Chicago and a niece from Sutter Creek who had been named executor of the holographic will submitted claims. The courts in those days were not so crowded and the case was settled by March 1904 to the satisfaction of all concerned.

While some may have remembered him for his error in this case, the people of the State of Nevada especially long remembered the priest who served them, riding his horse "Charley," for the many years he was the apostle of the railroad line in that State.



Photo by John E Boll 2011

Interior of Immaculate Conception Church, Sutter Creek Today