

**A HISTORY OF ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH
RAWLINS
1867-1928**

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The history of St. Joseph's Church in Rawlins has its beginning with the foundation of the town. From the years 1867 to 1869, the few Catholic Settlers were visited occasionally by the Rev. Wm Kelly, who resided in Cheyenne, and was at that time, the only Catholic Priest in Wyoming.

In 1880, the Rev. Michael F. Cassidy became the first Resident Pastor of Rawlins.

Fr. Cassidy remained as Pastor until the year 1886, when he was succeeded by The Rev. Francis J. Nugent. In December, 1887, The Rev. John T. Smith was appointed by Fr. Nugent, and remained until April 1888.

About December, 1890 Rev C.J. Quinn was appointed Pastor and remained until February 1892. From February 1892 until December 1893, Rawlins was attended by the Rev Hugh Cummiskey. Several other priest attended to Rawlins as well during the following years.

The Rev. Mathias Ternes took charge as pastor about December, 1893, and was succeeded by Rev. Patrick J. Lynch in 1902. The Rev. Peter Casey was appointed Pastor, and took charge in July, 1902, Fr. Casey, due to ill health, was assisted by Rev. J. Nolan. Fr. Casey died in Rawlins, February 1903, and was buried at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Rawlins. After his death, Fr. Nolan took charge for a short while, and was succeeded by the Rev. John Delahunty, who remained from May 1903 to April, 1904. The Rev. Joseph Conrath took charge, and was succeeded by the Rev. Peter U. Sasse, who remained until January, 1905. Fr. Conrath was again appointed Pastor and continued in that capacity until his death on September 3, 1920.

Suffering from tuberculosis, Fr. Conrath was incapacitated for work during much of 1919 and 1920, and off and on during this period, the care of the Parish was in the hands of the Revs. Henry Schellinger and Englebert Kusters, and William J. Short.

Fr. Conrath died at St. Joseph's hospital in Denver on September 3, 1920 at the age of 46. His funeral was held at St. Joseph's Church in Rawlins on September 6, 1920. In the absence of the Most Reverend Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., Bishop of Cheyenne, who was on his ad limina visit to Rome, the Right Reverend Hugh Cumiskey, vicar general of the Diocese, presided in the Sanctuary. The Rev. James A. Hartman, pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral in Cheyenne, preached the funeral sermon. The body of Fr. Conrath was shipped to Cincinnati, OH, and interred there on September 10, 1920.

The Rev. Gerald Schellinger, of Kemmerer, Wyoming, was appointed pastor and assumed charge on January 17, 1921; and the Parish its first Assistant Pastor in the person of the Rev. Bernard Gillick in March, 1923. Fr. Gillick remained until November, 1923, and was succeeded by the Rev. James McBride, and he remained until his appointment as Pastor to Pine Bluffs in July of 1925. He was succeeded as Assistant Pastor by the Rev. Edward P. McDonnell who remained until June, 1926, and he was replaced by the Rev. Walter Nicholson. On April 10, 1927, he was succeeded by the Rev. John F. Moreton.

In September, 1928, Rev. Gerald Schellinger, the pastor, was given a leave of absence to attend the Catholic University at Washington, D.C.. Fr. Moreton was in temporary charge of the Parish during his absence, and was assisted by the Rev. Daniel O'Doherty.

Fr. Schellinger returned the following year, and Fr. O'Doherty was transferred to another charge, while Fr. Moreton assumed the duties of Assistant Pastor.

In June, 1930 Rev. Moreton left for California on account of ill health. Fr. O'Doherty returned to assume his role as Assistant Pastor, and remained until September 1, 1930, when he was transferred to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church in Lander, Wyoming.. On August 1, 1931, the Rev. Phillip Krass was appointed Assistant Pastor.

In February, 1933, Fr. Schellinger, who had been Pastor for 12 years, accepted the appointment of Vice-Rector of the American College in Louvain, Belgium. He Left for Europe on June 26, 1933, and was succeeded by the Rev. William Short, formerly the Pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Kemmerer, Wyoming. He took charge of the Rawlins Mission on July 1, 1933.

On July 1, 1934, a year later, Fr. Krass, who had been assistant pastor, was appointed Pastor of the Thermopolis Parish, and was succeeded by the Rev. Peter O'Grady...who remained until his appointment as Pastor to Monarch, Wyoming.

Owing to a shortage of priests in the Diocese, St. Joseph's Parish in Rawlins remained without an Assistant Pastor after the transfer of Fr. O'Grady, however, the Assistant Pastor of the Rock Springs Parish, Fr. Charles Gormly would attend to the missions in Hanna and Saratoga, Wyoming. This continued until the middle of June, 1937, when the Rev. Paul Hellrung was assigned to St. Joseph's as Assistant Pastor.

Fr. Hellrung left Rawlins October 8, 1937, and was succeeded by the Rev. Patrick Hogan, on loan to the Diocese from the Diocese of Buffalo, NY. He stayed until September, 1938, and was succeeded by the Rev. Myles Kearney.

Currently, the Parish is in the charge of the Rev. Malcolm Reid.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH:

About the year, 1871, a small building was erected at the cost of about \$500.00, and was used as the Church and subsequently became the Pastor's residence. Before the Rev. Michael Cassidy arrived to take charge in Rawlins in 1879, the small frame Church had two rooms added to it as living quarters. The Rev. C.J. Quinn later enlarged the Church by adding transepts.

In the year, 1914, Rawlins had grown to such an extent that the influx of Catholics had stimulated the need for a new Church. A new location and residence was secured at the corner of Third and Pine Streets. The price paid was \$8300.00. A piece of property directly North of this was bought for the sum of \$4000.00, and was reserved for a future school (St. Joseph's Catholic School now stands in this spot). The old Church property was sold for \$5000.00.

The cornerstone of the new Church was laid by the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., on October 10, 1915, and the Church was dedicated by the same prelate on August 6, 1916. The total cost of erecting the new Church, exclusive of furnishings, was \$32,375.00. When the Church was completed, there was a debt of \$13,500.00, which was wiped out in 1921. In the latter year, the Church was decorated at a cost of \$3,000.00.

In May, 1917, the lot and the house adjoining the Church were bought for a parochial residence at a cost of \$3,500.00, (the property was bought in 1914, but clear title was not acquired until 1917). In 1921, an architect was engaged to draw up plans for a new Rectory.

In March, 1922, the old St. Joseph's Rectory was sold to Mr. L.E. Armstrong for the sum of \$651.00, and was moved by him the West part of town. Bids were received for the new Rectory in May, 1922, and the contract was awarded to Mr. M.J. Kenney of Denver, Colorado. The rectory was completed in December of that same year at a total cost of \$22,740.00, exclusive of furnishings. To finance this expenditure a loan

was procured from Thomas McDonald Co. of Chicago in the amount of \$15,500.00. This loan was completely repaid in 1927.

During the year, 1924, the Church grounds were considerably improved. In the Fall of the year, 1926, the choir balcony was extended and remodeled in preparation to install a new pipe organ. This improvement and the installation of the organ cost \$8000.00.

In 1927, the property in front of the Church was paved at a total cost of \$1538.00. The West side of the Church property on Third Street, was paved in 1934 at a cost of \$863.65. The property abutting on Spruce Street was paved in 1938, at a cost of \$326.86.

On the night of February 10, 1933, a fire of unknown origin practically destroyed the entire interior of the Church. The extent of the damage was placed at \$11,000.00, and was covered by insurance. While the work of reconstruction was in progress, Mass was celebrated in the Elks Hall on Sundays, and in the rectory on weekdays. A new marble altar was installed by the Daprato Statuary Co of Chicago, at a cost of \$4,000.00.

On Easter Sunday, April 16, 1933, Mass was celebrated in the newly rebuilt Church since the disastrous fire. On Tuesday, October 17, 1933, the new marble altar was consecrated by the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D, assisted by the Rev. James A. Hartmann, pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

The following year witnessed the interior decoration of the Church by Theodore Braasch, a very competent ecclesiastical artist. The work was of high artistic value and cost \$2,290.00.

In October, 1898, three lots were purchased and deeded to Bishop Lenihan for the purpose of erecting a school building. The cost of the

lots was \$2100..and a stone school building was erected in 1900, costing a little more than \$7000.

The Franciscan Sisters of Pendleton, Oregon assumed charge, and the school proved to be a success for three or four years. In 1906, Bishop Keane advised the Sisters to discontinue the school...the building was rented for a time and later leased as a hospital. It was sold in 1917 for a sum of \$10,000.00.

In January, 1928, Bishop McGovern initiated a new school program and ordered a special fund for the school. The Sisters of Loretto, of Nerinx, KY accepted the invitation to manage the school when built.