

Rawlins, St. Joseph Bishop McGovern

[165] The town of Rawlins dates its beginning from the spring of 1867, when the Union Pacific railroad was completed through Wyoming. The town was named by Major General Grenville M. Dodge, who was chief engineer of the Union Pacific during the days when the rails of the first transcontinental railroad were being laid across the plains.

The first record the bureau of census has of Rawlins, is when it was known as Rawlins' Spring, in the year 1870. The census for that year was 612. Ten years later the population had increased to 1,451.

The history of St. Joseph's parish 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. William Kelly, who resided in Cheyenne, and was at that time the only Catholic priest in Wyoming. At a later date the Rev. Eugene Cusson, who was appointed pastor at Laramie, made visits to Rawlins, from 1872 to 1879. In the latter year the Rev. Michael F. Cassidy became the first resident pastor of Rawlins. Pioneer Catholics who were in Rawlins before the coming of Fr. Cassidy were: Frank Blake, Lawrence Hayes and family, J.A. Brennan, James Burns, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Werne, [166] Thomas Finley and family, Patrick Sheehan, Thomas Wallace, John Wallace, James Wallace, Mrs. Catherine Daly Phelan, William McCarthy, William Smith, D.J. Murphy, Anthony Jordan, Patrick and Timothy Dorr, Bartholomew Egan, William Erret, Isaac Erret, Mary Helihan, Mrs. Margaret Gordon, Mr. and Mrs. John Quinlan and family, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Cantlin, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Scott and family, Mr. and Mrs. Dan Healy and family, John H. Lynch, John Hickey, Union Pacific foreman, Mrs. Catherine Hickey, and Mr. and Mrs. William Granger and family.

Fr. Cassidy >Fr. Cassidy died Dec. 1, 1933, having been pastor of O'Neill, Nebr., for 47 years.> 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 to succeed Fr. Nugent and remained until April, 1888, when he was succeeded by the Rev. James Ryan. About December, 1890, the Rev. C.J. Quinu was appointed pastor and remained until February, 1892. From February, 1892 to December, 1893, Rawlins was attended by the Rev. Hugh Cummiskey, who was pastor at Laramie. During the same period the following priests also attended Rawlins: The Revs. J.C. McCormack, C. Scollen, M.J. Carmody, J. Guinan, S.M., of Salt Lake City, J. Delahunty, and Thomas M. Conway.

[167] The Rev. Mathias Ternes took charge as pastor about December, 1893, and was succeeded by the Rev. Patrick J. Lynch in 1902. The Rev. Peter Casey was appointed pastor and took charge in July, 1902. Fr. Casey, an account of ill health, was assisted by the Rev. J. Nolan. Fr. Casey died in Rawlins, February, 1903, and was buried in St. Joseph's cemetery. After the death of Fr. Casey, Fr. Nolan had charge for a short time, when he was succeeded by the Rev. John Delahunty, who remained from May, 1903 to April, 1904. From April, 1904, to June, 1904, the Rev. Joseph Conrath was in charge, when he was succeeded by the Rev. Peter U. Sasse. Fr. Sasse remained until January, 1905. Fr. Conrath was again appointed pastor and continued in that capacity until his death 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 Revs. Henry Schellinger, Engelbert Kusters and William J. Short.

Fr. Conrath died in St. Joseph's hospital, Denver, September 3, 1920, at the age of 46. His funeral was held from St. Joseph's church, Rawlins, September 6, 1920. In the absence of the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., bishop of Cheyenne, who was on his ad limina visit to Rome, the Right Rev. Hugh Cummiskey, vicar general of the diocese,

presided in the [168] sanctuary. The Rev. James A. Hartmann, pastor of St. Mary's cathedral, Cheyenne, preached the funeral sermon. The body of Fr. Conrath was shipped to Cincinnati, Ohio, and interred there September 10, 1920.

The Rev. Gerard Schellinger, of Kemmerer, was appointed pastor and assumed charge January 17, 1921; and the parish received its first assistant in the person of Rev. Bernard Gillick in March, 1923. Fr. Gillick remained until November 25, 1923, when he was succeeded by the Rev. James McBride, who continued as assistant pastor until his appointment to Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, July 15, 1925. Fr. McBride was succeeded as assistant pastor by the Rev. Edward P. McDonnell, who remained until June 20, 1926, when he was replaced by the Rev. Walter Nicholson. On April 10, 1927, Fr. Nicholson was succeeded by the Rev. John F. Moreton.

In September, 1928, Rev. Gerard 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 the absence of Fr. Schellinger, and was assisted by the Rev. Daniel O'Doherty.

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

[169] In June, 1930, the Rev. John Moreton, on account of ill health, left for California. He was succeeded by the Rev. Daniel O'Doherty, who remained until September 1, 1930, when he was transferred to Lander. On August 1, 1931, the Rev. Philip Krass was appointed assistant.

In February, 1933, Fr. Schellinger, who had been pastor for twelve years, accepted the appointment of vice-rector of the American College, Louvain, Belgium. Fr. Schellinger tendered his resignation of the parish

to become effective July 1, 1933, and this was accepted by Bishop McGovern.

Fr. Schellinger left for Europe June 26, 1933, and was succeeded by the Rev. William J. Short, formerly pastor of St. Patrick's parish, Kemmerer. Fr. Short took charge of Rawlins and missions July 1, 1933.

On July 1, 1934, the Rev. Philip Krass, who had been assistant pastor since August 1, 1931, was appointed pastor of Thermopolis, and was succeeded by the Rev. Peter O'Grady. In November, 1936, the Rev. Peter O'Grady was appointed pastor of Monarch, Wyoming.

Owing to a shortage of priests in the diocese, St. Joseph's parish was without an assistant pastor after the transfer of Fr. O'Grady to Monarch. However, an arrangement was entered into with the Rev. Sylvester A. Welsh, of Rock Springs, whereby his assistant, the Rev. Charles Gormly would attend the missions at Hanna [170] and Saratoga. The Rev. Henry Schellinger of Green River agreed to assist Fr. Welsh at Rock Springs. This arrangement continued until the middle of June, 1937, when the Rev. Paul Hellrung was assigned to St. Joseph's parish.

Fr. Hellrung left Rawlins October 8, 1937, and was succeeded by the Rev. Patrick Hogan, a priest ordained for the diocese of Buffalo, New York, but loaned to the diocese of Cheyenne. Fr. Hogan stayed until September, 1938, when he was succeeded by the Rev. Myles Kearney, ordained in St. Patrick's college, Carlow, Ireland, for the diocese of Cheyenne, June, 1938.

About the year 1871, a small building was erected at a cost of \$500.00. This was used as a church and subsequently became the pastor's residence. Before the Rev. Michael F. Cassidy arrived to take charge of 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 for a church and residence was secured at the corner of Third and Pine streets. The price paid was \$8,300.00. A piece of property directly north of this was bought for the sum of \$4,000.00, and reserved for a future school. The old church property was sold for \$5,000.00.

[171] The corner stone of the new church was laid by the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., October 10, 1915, and the church was dedicated by the same prelate 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 completely wiped out in 1921. In this latter year the church was decorated at a cost of \$3,000.00.

In May, 1917, the lot and house adjoining the church were bought for a parochial residence at a cost of \$3,500.00, (the property was bought in 1914, but a clear title was not acquired until 1917). In 1921, an architect was engaged to draw 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 to the west part of town. Bids were received for the new rectory in May, 1922, and the contract was awarded to Mr. M.J. Kenny of Denver, Colorado. The rectory was completed in December of that year at a total cost of \$22,740.00, exclusive of furnishings. To finance this expenditure a loan was procured from Thomas McDonald Company, Chicago, for \$15,500.00. This loan was completely repaid in 1927.

[172] During the year 1924, the church grounds were considerably improved. In the fall of the year 1926, the choir balcony was extended and remodeled preparatory to the installation of a pipe organ. This improvement and the installation of the organ cost \$8,000.00.

In 1927, the property in front of the church was paved at a cost of \$1,538.00. 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, 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 week days. A new marble altar was installed by Daprato Statuary Company, Chicago, Ill., at a cost of \$4,000.00.

On Easter Sunday, April 16, 1933, Mass was celebrated in the church for the first time 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, Cheyenne, Rev. William J. Short and Rev. Philip Krass.

[173] 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 \$2,100.00. A stone school building was erected by the Rev. Mathias Ternes in 1900, costing a little more than \$7,000.00, and having a debt of \$5,000.00.

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 school building

was rented for a time and later leased for a hospital. It was sold in 1917, for the 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. It is the hope of the parish to have a parochial school sometime in the near future.

The church of St. Anne at Saratoga, together with the lots, was purchased December 7, 1912, from J. C. Kennedy. The property, including the building, which had been a library, was secured for \$600.00. The building was converted into a church building at small [174] expense. In 1922, the church was remodeled and painted. During the summer of 1938, the roof was repaired and painted, the ceiling replastered, and the whole of the interior painted.

The church property in Saratoga is incorporated under the laws of the State of Wyoming. The name of the corporation is St. Anne's church, and its duration is perpetual.

The church at Hanna, Wyoming, was erected in 1915, by the Rev. Henry Schellinger, of Green River, who at that time attended Rawlins' out-missions. The ground on which the church stands was leased from the Union Pacific Coal Company. A gift of \$500.00 was made through the Catholic Church Extension Society, and the donor requested that the church be dedicated under the patronage of St. Joseph.

About the end of July, 1936, lightning struck the church, causing some damage to the roof. The damaged part of the roof was repaired with asbestos shingles and the building rewired for electric current. The wires were enclosed in conduit. Insurance was collected for damage done.

The tract of land which is now owned by St. Joseph's church for cemetery purposes, and also the plot which formed the old city cemetery,

were originally in the possession of Mr. Henry Rasmusson, undertaker. The plot which is now St. Joseph's cemetery, [175] was set aside by Mr. Rasmusson for the burial of Catholics. In 1884, the cemeteries were incorporated under the title of the Rawlins Cemetery Association. There is no official record of burial in the Catholic portion of the cemetery previous to January, 1891, but from that date on a systematic record has been kept. The Rawlins Cemetery Association on June 13, 1910, gave a quit-claim deed to St. Joseph's church for a tract of land containing 3.6 acres for the sum of one dollar.

In the year 1926, improvement work on St. Joseph's cemetery was begun. An additional tract of land was added. In 1929 a priests' lot was established, and a monument erected over the grave of Rev. Peter Casey. The monument was donated by the local council of the Knights of Columbus. Curbing and fences around lots were removed, and the ground planted in grass. Since that date up to the present year (1940) additional improvements have been carried out.

In the fall of the year 1938, the Rawlins council of the Knights of Columbus, in accordance with the suggestion of the pastor, donated a new ornamental gate and arch for the main entrance. The gate, 14 feet wide, is made of heavy iron, and bears the inscription "St. Joseph's Cemetery."

While it is known that Bishop O'Connor and Bishop Burke each confirmed a class in Rawlins, the [176] first class recorded is one confirmed by Most Rev. Thomas M. Lenihan, D.D., June 6, 1897. There were thirty-two in the class. Another class was confirmed by Bishop Lenihan, May 29, 1898, consisting of nine candidates. In the year 1903, Bishop Keane confirmed a class of seventy-three, on June 11th.

The first class confirmed by the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., was on May 23, 1915. There were thirty in the class. Later Bishop McGovern administered the sacrament of confirmation on the following

dates: May 30, 1920, forty-four confirmed; May 7, 1925, forty-nine confirmed; March 3, 1930, seventy-eight confirmed; May 15, 1932, sixty-nine confirmed; May 17, 1936, forty-nine confirmed.

In the year 1917, there were 21 baptisms and 9 marriages performed in the parish. In that year the Altar and Rosary society had seventy members, and there were thirty members in the Young Ladies society.

From January 1, 1938, to December 31, 1938, the sacrament of baptism was administered to forty persons in the parish. Of this number, twenty-three children, and six adults, who were converts, were baptized in St. Joseph's church, Rawlins; ten children were baptized in the Hanna mission, and one child in the [177] Saratoga mission. During the same period thirteen marriages were performed.

There is no record of any mission given before the year 1905, although it is certain there were some. The Rev. J. Shea, C.S.S.R., conducted one in March, 1905, and the Rev. John Hecker, C.S.S.R., one in March, 1914.

The Very Rev. Edwin Ronan, C.P., head of the mission band of the Passionist fathers, Sierra Madre, California, opened a mission in St. Joseph's church, Rawlins, Sunday, March 18, 1934. Fr. Ronan gave a three-day mission at Hanna, and a three-day mission at Saratoga.

In the last week of September, 1936, a novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, was conducted by the Rev. Maurice G. Kennedy, C.S.S.R., of Whittier, California.

In October, 1937, another novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, was conducted by the Rev. Philip G. O'Connor, C.S.S.R., of St. Joseph's monastery, Denver, Colorado.

For the first time in the history of the parish a Religious Vacation school was conducted by two Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Casper, during the summer of 1935. There was an average

attendance of about 100 children, and the ages ranged from five to fifteen years.

[178] The vacation school is now an annual affair in the parish, and is conducted by the sisters from Casper. It has been well attended.

Diocesan changes made in January, 1940, brought Rev. Gerard Schellinger back to Rawlins as pastor, after an absence of several years.