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### Our Lady of the Redwoods Rectory

Susie Van Kirk

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# Our Lady of the Redwoods Rectory

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**Our Lady of the Redwoods  
Rectory  
Garberville, California**



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## **Introduction**

The parish of Our Lady of the Redwoods Catholic Church, 515 Maple Lane, Garberville, California (APN 032-135-017) is developing plans to build a new rectory adjacent to the church edifice. The proposal is to demolish the existing house, replacing it with one of similar architecture, but somewhat smaller. Because the rectory is well over fifty years of age, a Historic Resources Report was prepared to document its history and architecture in order to make a determination of historic significance per Section 15064.5 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

## **Findings**

1. The rectory was probably built soon after the church, circa early 1950s.
2. The rectory is not a historically-significant resource as defined by CEQA. Its demolition will not result in a significant impact on the environment.

## **Methods**

Property description and ownership transfers were researched in the Recorder's Office, Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka. Newspaper microfilm, primarily Garberville's *Redwood Record*, provided information regarding construction of the church and of the priests who served the parish. The *Record* is available on microfilm at the Humboldt State University Library. A site visit with Bill Rich was made on April 10, 2015, at which time photographs were taken. Parish member Joan Courtois provided a tour of the church and rectory, answering questions and providing information on the current situation and the proposed project.

## **Historic Context**

Garberville, the first town on the Redwood Highway north of the Mendocino line, takes its name from Jacob Garber, a latecomer to the area who arrived in 1870. Although others had established ranches on the surrounding prairies much earlier, Garber is credited with starting the town when he built a general store on a safely-located site above the South Fork Eel River (Cook 1940). A community developed around this first commercial venture, houses built and other enterprises established to serve the population. But Garberville families needed more than a place to purchase the basics; they needed schools, churches, social activities, and civic development. It is unclear when the first religious institutions were organized, but one that prevailed for decades was the Community Church, so much a part of Garberville that it was often identified as Garberville's church or simply the "church."

Garberville's Community Church was established by Missionary Rev. Harold Morehouse on September 1, 1928 with 20 charter members, followed four years later by an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church, USA. As the church celebrated its tenth anniversary, the membership roll contained the names of 63 active congregants. Its mission was to "work in and for the community" (*Redwood Record* 2 Sept. 1938). "The Little White Church" appears to be the only religious organization in Garberville until the late 1930s when the Seventh Day Adventists began to hold services (*Redwood Record* 12 April 1939). Garberville's two congregations were joined by a third in 1940.

....for the religiously inclined, there are church services—both Protestant and Catholic—in Garberville every Sunday....*Redwood Record* (27 June 1940)

That same issue carried the first notice that could be located regarding Catholic services.

Catholic Church. Mass will be said at Garberville in the Firemen's Hall at 10:30 a.m. every Sunday from June 9 to Sept. 8. (*Redwood Record* 27 June 1940)

This notice and ones in 1941 and 1942, all published in June, provided summer hours for Catholic services in Garberville, suggesting, perhaps, that Mass was said only during the summer hours for the fledgling congregation.

Catholic Church. Mass during summer at 10:30 a.m., Rev. Father J. O'Flanagan. (*Redwood Record* 5 June 1941)

Catholic Church. Mass will be said every Sunday at 10:30 a.m. during the summer months at the Firemen's Hall in Garberville, starting June 8. The services will be conducted by The Rev. Father J. O'Flanagan. (*Redwood Record* 12 June 1942)

Other congregations joined Garberville's list of churches and sometime before 1949, Catholic services were being held throughout the year with Father McGrath, resident priest at Scotia, saying Mass in the Fire Hall every Sunday (*Redwood Record* 16 June 1949). By this time, the congregation was large enough that the Sacramento Diocese agreed that the Fire Hall was no longer adequate—southern Humboldt Catholics needed a church.

### **Our Lady of the Redwoods Church**

Ground Broken for New Catholic Church—On Sunday afternoon, Oct. 9 at 2:30, a short ceremony will take place on the site of Garberville's new Catholic church at [the end] of Maple Lane to dedicate the laying of the cornerstone or Blessing of the Foundation Stone, with Father McGrath officiating. Everyone is invited to attend.

Ground was broken on Tuesday of this week as the preliminary step in the building of a beautiful Catholic church edifice on the recently acquired lot, the Wagner place, situated two blocks east of Highway 101. The building, the exterior of which will be finished in natural redwood, will measure 44 by 74 ground feet and will have a seating capacity of about 270. All local mills thus far contacted have been very generous in their co-operation, reports W.N. Nixon, who is chairman of the building committee.

Many individuals have contributed to the Catholic church building fund and others who wish to donate to the cause may do so by contacting Father McGrath at Scotia or the following at Garberville: Bill Nixon, Ed Warren, Tom Mealey, and Bernie Bush, and Guy Cloney at Myers Flat. (*Redwood Record* 6 Oct. 1949)

As the congregation awaited the new church building, Father McGrath held services on the first, third and fifth Sundays in the Civic Clubhouse, located just down the street from the construction site (*Redwood Record* 5 Jan. 1950). Three months later, Easter services were held in the new church, although the building was not complete—the pews had yet to be installed (*Redwood Record* 6 April 1950). In July 1950, Our Lady of the Redwoods was dedicated.

Dedication Ceremonies for New Church to be Held Sunday—Sunday, July 23, marks the official dedication of Garberville's Catholic church, "Our Lady of the Redwoods," with Bishop Robert Armstrong of Sacramento conducting the dedication service....

The new Catholic church measures 42 by 70 feet over all and will have a seating capacity of 270 to 300, when the pews are installed. Its beautifully designed redwood burl altar, built by Arthur W.N. Johnson of the Unique Log House in Garberville, is one of the only known two redwood burl altars in the world. The other one was built by Johnson in Nevada a number of years ago.

Labor for the building of the new Catholic church was contracted by Robert Douglas of Fortuna, and all materials were purchased by a local committee who were [sic] accorded all-out cooperation by local merchants and individuals contacted. There were a number of outright donations besides many considerations at cost, all of which added up to give Garberville another very fine church. (*Redwood Record* 20 July 1950)



Arthur Johnson's redwood burl altar. Photo April 10, 2015.

The redwood burl altar remains in the church today, front and center. Mr. Johnson, its maker, built Garberville's Unique Log House for which he received a U.S. patent and nationwide publicity in Ripley's Believe It or Not (*Redwood Record* 13 Oct. 1938, 9 May 1939). The altar was described as a "masterpiece of fine craftsmanship" (*Redwood Record* 27 July 1950).

High Mass celebrated the dedicatory ceremonies after approximately 350 people gathered outside the edifice where the Rt. Rev. Bishop Armstrong pronounced the dedicating blessing and named the church "Our Lady of the Redwoods." Among his assistants was Father Patrick McGrath of Scotia, who had guided the congregation throughout the planning and construction of Our Lady.

Arrangements of white flowers and forest greens adorned the beautiful redwood burl altar....The rustic type church is built along gothic lines with four massive redwood pillars supporting the front and gothic type windows of opaque glass throughout. The interior with high arched ceiling is sheathed with sheetrock decorated in soft neutral tones and graceful pillared arches have been set at intervals along each side.... (*Redwood Record* 27 July 1950)

Andy Genzoli wrote a long piece about the church and the dedicatory celebration in the *Times*. Replete with photos of the interior, Genzoli noted that the church accentuated the natural beauties of redwoods in the altar, interior structure and exterior materials.



Interior of Our Lady of the Redwoods Church. Photo April 10, 2015.

For many months the new church has been under construction, and every possible effort was made to keep the setting in theme with the surrounding countryside. In the heart of the redwoods, the new church is constructed entirely of redwood, with natural exterior finish being preserved with a stain. Topping the edifice is a hand-hewn cross, while the entrance features are pairs of natural finish redwood pillars, still bearing the natural bark.

“Our Lady of the Redwoods” is indeed unique among the churches in the Humboldt area. Even the beautiful altar is made almost entirely of redwood burl of a high quality, selected for its particular use. There is a touch of simplicity, combined with beauty in the new structure, for there are arches of a Gothic nature to be found, blending in with the use of fiber-board, throughout. The communion rail is of redwood, highly polished, with its two gates leading to the altar....

“Our Lady of the Redwoods” is, in itself, significant, for the church is dedicated in honor of the Mother of Christ, and is the first time that the name of Our Lady has been associated with the forest giants in this state....(*Humboldt Times* 30 July 1950).

Had the seating been in place at the time of the dedication, Genzoli could not have failed to describe the handsome wooden pews, built to last with heavy, solidly-anchored ends.

## Rectory

Early November brought the announcement that a resident priest had been assigned to the Garberville parish, which embraced all the territory from Myers Flat to the Mendocino line. Father Patrick Gleeson, appointed by Bishop Armstrong, was then serving as the assistant priest at Sacramento's Sacred Heart church (*Redwood Record* 9 Nov. 1950). A native of Tipperary, Ireland, Father Gleeson said his first Mass at Our Lady in late November 1950 (*Redwood Record* 30 Nov. 1950). For a congregation that had patiently endured many years with neither an edifice nor a resident priest, it was truly blessed when Father Gleeson arrived that fall, establishing an association with Our Lady that lasted sixteen years. (See Appendix)

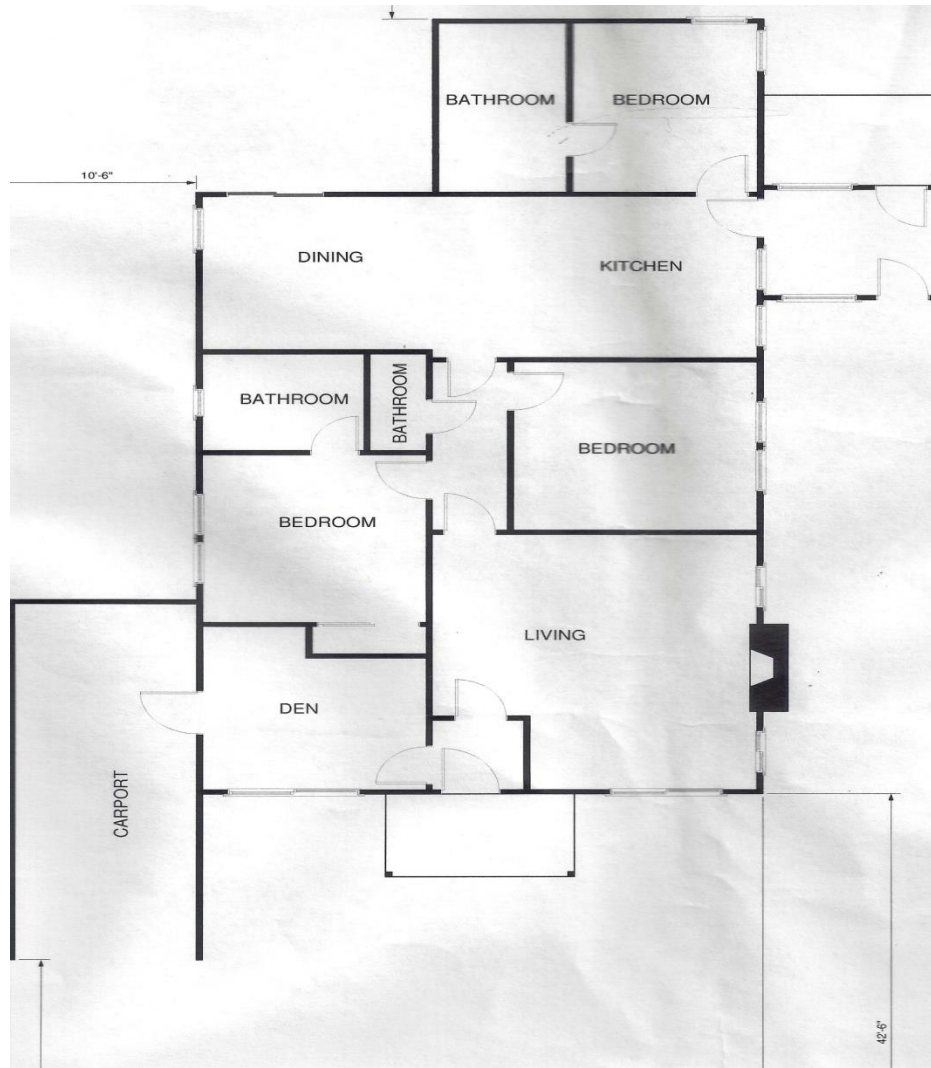
Although he had a large area needing his services, Father Gleeson's home base was on Garberville's Maple Lane in the Our Lady rectory, adjacent to the church. No references could be located regarding the rectory's construction, but it is reasonable to assume that it was constructed soon after the church. The property, purchased from Edward and Charles Wagner by the Bishop of the Sacramento Diocese in 1949, was described as lot 14 and the west half of lot 13 in Block 8, Wagner Addition (Official Records 99:218). The property was transferred to the Santa Rosa Diocese in 1962 (Official Records 698:164). With a 150-foot frontage, the property's arrangement is roughly: parking lot on the west half of lot 13; the edifice on the east half of lot 14; and the rectory on west half of lot 14.



Our Lady of the Redwoods Rectory. Photo April 10, 2015.

The rectory is a one-story, wood-frame house containing about 1600 square feet with exterior measurement of roughly 30 by 54 feet. It has a long-sloping gabled roof which faces the street, and a 10 x 6-foot open porch, also covered by a gable. The front of the house is low to the ground, only three steps needed to access the porch. However, the property slopes to the back, resulting in a significant height difference between the rear of the house and the ground. Siding is four-inch, horizontal v-rustic and original windows are wood and double-hung with small sills. An exterior red-brick chimney is located on the east wall. The center entrance was flanked on either side by picture windows, four-feet wide with 16-inch sidelights, aluminum-framed. The west window remains, but the east one which lights the living room is a modern, vinyl replacement. Windows on either side of the fireplace are also vinyl replacements. Trim for the replacements was altered to accommodate the new windows. A modern front door replaces the original door.

To the west and extending beyond the porch is a carport, accessible from the house. Off the kitchen is an enclosed connection to the church which allowed the priest direct access from the rectory to the sacristy. Exterior windows over the kitchen sink and siding indicate this connection was not part of the original construction. The connection, however, does have two sliding wood windows which were popular in the 1950s.



Existing Floor Plan. Manhard Consulting; Johnson Design. 1/14/2015

### **Determination of Significance**

CEQA's Section 15064.5 "Determining the Significance of Impacts to Archeological and Historical Resources" provides four criteria for identifying a historically-significant property. The criteria are those used in determining a resource's eligibility for the California Register of Historical Resources. Generally, a resource is historically significant if it

- (A) is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history and cultural heritage,
- (B) is associated with the lives of persons important in our past,
- (C) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual or possesses high artistic values, or.

(D) has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history. (CEQA 15064.5(a)(3))

A resource needs to meet at least one of these criteria, but it must also retain sufficient integrity to impart that significance. In other words, even if the Pope slept in this little house in the 1950s, but subsequently, the house was moved to an exit ramp off the freeway, turned into a gas station with new materials and workmanship, and so totally altered that it no longer had the feel or the association with the house where the Pope slept, then its integrity is gone and it is not historically significant. This is an extreme situation, but it does provide examples of the seven aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association) that must be considered in evaluating a property's significance. Unless a building retains its architectural integrity sufficient to convey its association with events and persons under Criteria A and B, then it fails the tests for significance.

The house is not associated with either events or persons important in California's history, and it is unlikely that the property will yield important information in prehistory or history, although that is always a possibility where there is soil disturbance.

The rectory has experienced some intrusive alterations, notably the new front door and three vinyl windows in the living room. This issue, however, is somewhat irrelevant, because the house does not meet Criterion C. It does not embody the distinctive characteristic of any particular architecture, its method of construction is not distinctive, nor does it represent the work of an important creative person or possess high artistic values. It was probably built by volunteer labor with donated materials, which should be acknowledged, but neither of these qualifies the house under Criterion C. Additionally, it is not an example of housing built throughout Humboldt county in the 1950s. Houses from that period generally have common design features that readily identify them, including horizontally-divided windows, scalloped decorations on the walls below the gables, and a wide-board cladding.

## **Conclusions**

The rectory is not a historically-significant resource as defined in CEQA Section 15064.5. Its demolition will not result in a significant impact on the environment. Elevation drawings for the new rectory are for a simple, very modest house. The proposed house will be one story with three street-facing gables, including a smaller porch, and two-sash windows. With one bedroom instead of

three, the house will be about 560 square feet smaller than the existing house. The new house is an appropriate replacement of the existing rectory.



Our Lady of the Redwoods Catholic Church. Photo April 10, 2015.

## Bibliography

Cook, Margarite. "Garberville History Reveals First Settler Came Here In 1853." *Redwood Record* 9 May 1940.

Genzoli, Andrew. "'Our Lady of the Redwoods' New Catholic Church Accentuates the Natural Beauties of Redwoods in Altar, Structural, Other Features." *Humboldt Times* 30 July 1950. On microfilm at Humboldt State University Library. MF 10.

Official Records, Recorder's Office, Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka.

*Redwood Record*. Garberville. On microfilm at Humboldt State University Library, 1935 to 1995. MF 1398.

## Appendix

Father Gleeson was a pivotal presence at Our Lady during its early years. In recognition of his contribution to Garberville and the Catholic community in southern Humboldt, the following tribute is reprinted.

Community Bids Fond Farewell to Fr. Gleeson. Photo—With more than sixteen years service in Southern Humboldt to his credit, the Rev. Patrick Gleeson, pastor of Our Lady of the Redwoods Catholic Church, has been notified of his reassignment to serve as pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Calistoga. He reports there on Monday, January 30. His duties will also include the pastorate of St. Joseph's Church in nearby Middletown.

Fr. Gleeson can truthfully be called one of the most loved and respected individuals in our community. The announcement of his transfer brought an immediate response of dismay from citizens outside the Catholic community, as well as among his own parishioners. Last week a delegation bearing scores of letters and testimonials asking that Fr. Gleeson be allowed to remain in his present post was received by The Most Rev. Leo T. Maher, Bishop of the Diocese of Santa Rosa. Bishop Maher was sympathetic to the feelings of the community and much impressed with the deluge of mail received in his office. However, he was adamant in his decision explaining that one of the key reasons for the transfer was to place Fr. Gleeson in a situation where he could have more help in carrying out his work. At Calistoga, he will be assisted by monks from a nearby Carmelite installation which will greatly alleviate the physical load which he has carried so long here in Our Lady's parish.

An open house has been planned in Fr. Gleeson's honor and will be held Friday Jan 27, 7-9 p.m. in the parish house of Our Lady's Church, Maple Lane. All friends are most cordially invited to attend.

It was in December 1950 [that] Fr. Gleeson arrived to assume leadership of Our Lady's parish. At 22 years of age, just two years from his native Ireland, he had been named a full pastor, the youngest pastor in the history of the diocese. (The local area at

that time was still a part of the Diocese of Sacramento with headquarters in the state capital).

And so he arrived in Garberville to take over his duties as pastor. But pastor of what? In a fifty mile radius, there were 18 adults and seven children, his flock. Today the parish numbers 125 families, or an approximate 350 Catholics and has come a long way in making a place for itself in local community life.

Just how much the situation has changed Fr. Gleeson knows full well. He remembers clearly the distrust and suspicion that surrounded his arrival a little more than fifteen years ago, when after only a few days in town, he heard a rumor that a local delegation would be calling on him to help him pack his bag and leave. They never did and it is hard to admit such a bigoted attitude could have existed. Perhaps an indication of how far we have come along the ecumenical road is emphasized by the service of Prayer and Witness sponsored by the local churches and held last night at Our Lady's church—a service of joint worship open to Christians of all denominations with the Presbyterian, Lutheran, [and] Episcopalian churches assuming active roles.

Through the years, Fr. Gleeson has been a source of strength not only to his parishioners but to all in the community in want or need who cried out for his help. This modest, hard-working man has a rare gift of understanding people. His work with youth of the area has been outstanding. He has on occasion been referred to as the unofficial chaplain of South Fork High. He is an ardent sports fan rarely missing a high school athletic event and is a devoted golfer. In recent years he has taken over the duties of chaplain at the High Rock honor camp of the state prison system and had been recently appointed for a similar position at the new Eel Rock Conservation Center near Redway. Since the establishment of the Redwoods Monastery at Whitethorn, he has served as Director of the Monastery and Extraordinary Confessor to the Cistercians stationed there. He has always given great effort to serve his scattered parish, making it his chore to bring the Church to the people. In the early days, he conducted a Garberville service then flew with pilot Lee Etter to Alderpoint for service and on his return drove to either Miranda or Myers Flat to hold services there. And his pace has never slackened through the years.

During the 1964 flood he seemed to be everywhere at once helping anyone who needed assistance. His telephone bill for that period ran into the hundreds of dollars because of the number of calls of reassurance to family members of travelers caught and stranded and local residents who had no means of communicating with outside areas.

Fr. Gleeson's first service was held in Our Lady's Church before the structure was completed. It had a roof and side walls, but no floor. It was soon completed and has been steadily improved through the years with the most recent innovation a newly-constructed parish hall.

On Sunday, Jan. 29, Fr. Patrick Gleeson will deliver his final sermon, officiate at his final rites in the parish he has called home for so many years. It will not be easy to say goodbye, but another parish needs his service, other people need his help and the call must be answered.

All friends of the area are most cordially invited to attend the open house Friday evening and if they wish, the final service on Sunday morning at 10 a.m. Our Lady's new pastor, the Rev. Gerard Fahey, formerly of Eureka, will take up his duties here immediately.... (*Redwood Record* 26 Jan. 1967)