



OLPH, Gambo (19...)



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OLPH, Gambo, (2020)

### **The history of Our Lady of Perpetual Help RC Church in Gambo by Bride Stead. (1987).**

The Roman Catholic (RC) Church was built in 1903 about half way between Mint Brook and Gambo on a grassy knoll close to the part of the Gambo River known as "The Steady". This site was chosen to enable people from both communities Gambo and Mint Brook to walk to Mass. Cars were unheard of at this time. Mint Brook boasted a saw mill industry which afforded employment to many of the residents. This mill was owned and operated by David Smallwood, the father of J.R. (Joey) Smallwood who was born at Mint Brook and later became Newfoundland's first premier.

The lumber for the church was sawn and planed by this mill. Most of the ground work and rough carpentry was done as free labor by the men of the parish. Money to pay for the materials and supervisory personnel was obtained by the ladies of the parish through social functions, concerts by teachers and school children, plays by adult groups and garden parties.

The walls of the church were finished with a high grade lumber known at that time as "beaded" lumber. Each board was approximately 1 ½ wide and the edge slanted so that it joined the next one forming a "V" and assembled in a triangular design, a unique and very beautiful design. The pillars at this time were more or less supports, just squared logs, no paint or varnish. It remained in this stage for many years. There were no pews, just rough wooden benches. The choir was also in a unfinished stage at this time.

In 1905 the mill at Mint Brook was totally destroyed by fire and the whole lumber industry was shut down. The residents were forced to move to Gambo which boasted a railway terminal and passenger depot owned and operated by Reid Newfoundland Company. Gambo also boasted a hotel owned by J.J. Murphy. The people still attended Sunday Mass at the church on this site and the parish was taken care of by a visiting priest, Rev Fr Babcock, and so the residents of Gambo decided to build a parish house in order to obtain a resident priest. In a very short time with the combined effort of all concerned, the parish house was erected and finished, ready for occupancy. It still stands today in excellent condition on the hill proudly overlooking the church and community of Gambo.

The first resident priest was Rev Fr Kavanagh, the housekeeper was Miss Maisie Burke and the domestic was Mrs. Traverse. Fr Kavanagh remained in the parish for several years.

In 1921, Rev Fr W.T. Cullen was appointed parish priest of Gambo. The parish housekeeper was Miss Mary Cullen (Mrs. Gregory Cashin) and assistant housekeeper was Miss Catherine George (Mrs. Cyril Cashin) For the next three to four years, Sunday Mass was celebrated at the Church on the original site (The Steady) and daily Mass was celebrated in the old school house.

In 1924, after several meeting of priest and the people a decision was made to move the church to the parish grounds where the parish house was already located. Once again the people made a big effort to succeed in this major undertaking.



OLPH, Gambo (Original)



OLPH, Gambo (Today)

First a man with experience in this kind of work was needed to supervise the job. Alexander Melvin a resident of Grand Falls locally known as Micky Melvin was hired to supervise the work.

Now the big question was how to launch the church successfully. In 1924 tractors and trucks would be a rare sight indeed so it would have to be horses. The A.N.D. Company a logging operation at Terra Nova was approached for help. The company very kindly supplied two very big horses which were used to haul logs at no cost to the parish. With these horses and the help from the men of the parish the work slowly but surely progressed to about half the distance in the first year.

Due to a shortage of funds work had to stop for approximately another year and the church was placed on a temporary foundation. During this time sufficient funds were again acquired to continue the project. In the summer of 1926 the work was restarted and in November of 1926 the church was successfully placed on the site it stands today.

Now came the problem of finishing and interior decorating. The outside was already finished in white painted clapboard and a red shingle roof. There were eight tall narrow windows on either side and one on each side of the main door at the front. The tower or belfry at the highest peak of the roof added greatly to its beauty.

The interior was then painted white with dark varnish wainscot and pastel blue was used in the sanctuary. The high vaulted Romanesque ceiling was also painted white. The back wall of the sanctuary behind the high altar was painted by a Newfoundland artist, James Power, in a mural effect. He also painted pictures of Saint Joseph and the Sacred Heart the same size as the stained glass window of the Blessed Virgin. Those two pictures were placed in matching round frames on either side of the Blessed Virgin's picture. These frames were made, installed and donated by George Pynn.

The pillars were in a cone shape design and finished in a marble effect. Following this the Communion rails and pews were installed. The Communion rails were built and carved from oak and were finished in a light and dark oak varnish. The rails were arranged in a semi-circular design from wall to wall with two gates that opened in the centre. The base of the rails was done in a marble design and white linen cloths lined the inside of the Communion rails and were thrown over the rails at the time of Communion.

The pews were made of a light hardwood and varnished in a light oak and are still in excellent condition today. The choir at the back of the church was also finished in a light and dark oak to match the Communion rails. The Stations of the Cross were very large figures with the frames finished in varnish to match the Communion rails and choir.

In later years it was decided to put a small extension on the church which added three windows to the length of the church bringing the total number of windows on either side to eleven.

The beautiful historic interior of the church including the Communion rails, the old style Stations of the Cross, the Romanesque ceiling, the circular pictures and the marble pictures, is long gone to give way to modern day décor. The End.