

HOLY BRICKS

By
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Four brick crosses recently imbedded in the rock masonry on the new storage shed at Guerneville's St. Elizabeth outdoor church have an interesting history.

The bricks came from the rubble left when San Francisco's seventy-one year old St. Mary's Cathedral burned to the ground in 1962. The Cathedral was originally dedicated by Bishop Patrick Riordan (b. 1841- d. 1914) and in the 1930s blessed by Vatican Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli who was later elected Pope Pius XII.

The same year as the fire, Dino Bongi moved to Guerneville and bought the cottage resort today known as Cottages on River Road. Bongi was born and raised in San Francisco's Excelsior District and graduated from Balboa High School. After graduation he went to work for Sunset/Savage Garbage Company. In those days, as many of us still remember, garbage men picked up 40 to 60 pound metal garbage cans, walked them to the truck, climbed a ladder and dumped the refuse into the vehicle. It was back breaking work. In 1962 having undergone a divorce, he decided to seek greener pastures—Guerneville. He bought the resort which he named Dino's for \$50,000.

At the time the resort hosted a bar and restaurant. One of his buddies from the city got the contract to haul the brick rubble from the Cathedral site to Candlestick Point where it was used as fill alongside the stadium built there in 1960 for the San Francisco Giants and later shared by the Forty-Niners. Bongi wanted to fix up the bar and restaurant and asked his buddy to bring him some of the bricks. And so it was, his buddy hauled the bricks up on weekends in his pickup truck.

Bill Cliver a Santa Rosa mason laid the bricks on the walls of the restaurant and bar.

Bongi remembers with fondness how many local Catholics eyeing the 'holy' brick walls made the sign of the cross when they ordered a drink at the bar.

Bongi owned the resort for twenty years and then sold it for a handsome profit. Eventually the bar and grill shut down.

In last year's flood some of the bricks fell and were piled outside the resort as flood refuse to be picked up and discarded. Local Catholics aware of the history of the "holy" bricks recovered some of them and included them as crosses in the rock walled shed at the outdoor church located behind the Guerneville Fire Department.

The local Catholic parish hosts two summer outdoor churches. The St. Elizabeth facility is located behind the Guerneville fire station and celebrates a 9: 00 AM Sunday morning Mass. St. Coleman's in Cazadero celebrates a Sunday morning Mass at 11: 00 AM—at its outdoor church on Cazadero Highway.

As to Bongi. Spry and alert at 89 he lives in Santa Rosa. Over his nearly nine decades he has owned over 100 race horses. Today he maintains a stable of five race horses.



Dino Bongi, 2019