

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS

ROOM 304: PATRICK FRANCIS CUMMINS

PATRICK FRANCIS CUMMINS, MARY DOYLE CUMMINS, AND FAMILY EARLY PIONEERS OF DURANGO

Patrick Francis (P.F.) Cummins was born in Dunmore, County Galway, Ireland, on March 16, 1855, the oldest of nine children. The years after the Great Potato Famine in Ireland held little promise for a young man like P.F., so like the millions of immigrants before him, he left Ireland for America to find a better life. He made his way to the newly incorporated town of Durango, Colorado, arriving in 1882. A skilled stonemason and bricklayer, P.F. found work right away. He worked hard, saved his money, and in 1888 built a fine brick home at 2051 Main Avenue. Then he returned to Ireland to marry his sweetheart, Mary Doyle, and brought her back to Durango to live, along with a sister and several of his brothers (Michael, Daniel, Mark and James). Mary Doyle was born in Rostrevor, County Down, Ireland in August 1861. It was hard for her to leave her family, but in time, P.F. and Mary were able to bring some of her siblings to Durango as well, to work, marry and establish families of their own.

P.F. and Mary helped the new town thrive in many ways, most notably by personally increasing the pop-

ulation by having seven children: Thomas Vincent (b. 1890), Marcus John (b. 1892), Cyril Patrick (b. 1893), Charles Daniel (b. 1895), James Doyle (b. 1897), Helen Miriam (b. 1900), and Marguerite Catherine (b. 1903). All were born at the family home on Main Avenue, built by their father.



Levey Bros. Store Ignacio, c 1920's.
Photo Courtesy of Dr. Ives Murray

The Cummins family contributed to the development of Durango in every imaginable way. The Cummins Rock Quarry at Horse Gulch supplied the materials that P.F. and his brothers used to build many of the beautiful stone and brick homes and businesses that still grace Durango today, over a century later. The Cummins brothers were instrumental in the formation of the Durango Building Trades Council which fostered good working conditions and fair rates of pay for the skilled immigrant workers from Ireland, Scotland and Wales who found their way to Durango. P. F. and Mary were devoted to St. Columba Church in Durango and counted Henry and Fred Strater, owners of the Strater Hotel, and many other leading citizens of the time as

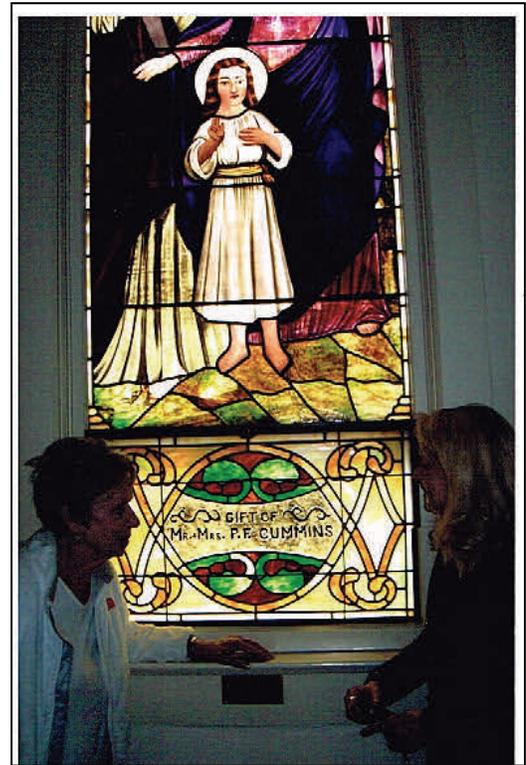
fellow parishioners. Light shines into the church through two stained glass windows donated by the Cummins family in 1908.

ALDERMAN FOR THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS PATRICK FRANCIS CUMMINS

The Cummins family helped form the Knights of St. John #53 with P.F. serving as President from 1904-1905. They were also active in forming the Knights of Columbus, Durango District #1408 in 1909, and in 1918 P.F. was elected Grand Knight. The history of Durango unfortunately includes a period when the Ku Klux Klan was active. The Cummins brothers would have none of that in their adopted home, and they set out to infiltrate, unmask and ultimately succeed in driving the KKK from Durango.

As his obituary stated, P.F. “was intensely and sincerely loyal to the land of his adoption, and, without fuss or feathers, was always a patriot.” P.F. was intensely involved in Durango’s civic life and in 1899 was elected to represent Precinct 11 in the Animas Valley. In 1909, he was elected Alderman for the Fourth Ward on the Democratic ticket. The ballot included a vote on whether the County would be “wet” or “dry.” Whether the turnout for P. F. was helped by Irish citizens of Durango who came to vote for “wet,” or the vote to make the County “wet” was helped by having an Irishman on the ballot will never be known. But the voters of Durango overwhelmingly elected an Irishman as Alderman and made Durango a place where an Irishman could have a “touch of the drink!” He served on committees for Electric Lights, Sewerage, Health and Police, and Cemetery and Parks, shepherding through many infrastructure projects that enabled the new town to live well and grow. “As a public official, he always reflected his private life – honest, industrious, thrifty, deeply religious, always tolerant, devoted through a long and useful life to his family, home, Church, and country.”

In September 1940, Mary passed away and Patrick Francis did not survive long without her by his side. He died a few months later on January 23, 1941, in the home he had built to welcome his bride so many years before. They are both buried, along with many of their descendants, in Greenmount Cemetery. At the time of his death, the Denver Catholic Register’s obituary described Patrick Francis as a “Colorful Durango Pioneer.” That he was.



Stained glass windows donated by the Cummins family in 1908



The home Patrick Francis had built for his wife