

Dumping the Bricks*

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(First United Methodist Church of Sunnyvale, California, celebrates its centennial this year of 1998. To celebrate this, I, as chairperson of the Administrative Council, will read this devotional at the beginning of today's meeting.)

1 Introduction

This year, the First United Methodist Church of Sunnyvale, California, celebrates its centennial. Two weeks ago, we talked about the prehistory of our church, i.e., the importance of the Church in the founding and settlement of Santa Clara County. When we ended, in 1876, Mrs. Murphy owned a huge piece of Rancho Pastoria del las Borrega and the Southern Pacific train stopped at Murphy's Station. The train station formed all of Sunnyvale. It would take the work of a real estate company named the Sunnyvale Land Company and the work of two pastors preaching in Mayfield to start the Methodist Episcopal Church of Sunnyvale, California. Today, we'll discuss the starting of the first church building, i.e., the dumping of the bricks.

2 The Village of Sunnyvale

To set the scene, I'll read from a sermon of Reverend Bernhard Anderson, later to be a professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. Presumably, the sermon was given in 1939.

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First of all, let us try to visualize in our imaginations what the present city of Sunnyvale looked like back in the so-called “gay 90’s.” Well, to begin with, it was not called “Sunnyvale” and it was not a “city.” It would better be described as a great hayfield, most of which was controlled by a certain real estate agent by the name of W. E. Crossman, and, in order that the engineer might not be unaware that he was passing through a village, the railroad christened it “Murphy’s Station.” Where the church now stands¹ there was only a waving sea of hay. The nearest house was the home of Mr. L. C. Price, the father of the present Mrs. W. K. Hooper, located, until recently moved, at 210 Arques and occupied by one of our own members—Miss Hazel Scott and her mother and father. There was an old two-story schoolhouse, located approximately where the present grammar school stands. Across from the spot where the bank now stands, there was a village blacksmith shop operated by Walter Hewitt. Further down and across from Wightman’s Lumber Company, Fred Cornell ran a country grocery-store with general merchandise and a post-office attached. Outside of a few scattered farm-houses on this side of the tracks and the magnificent Murphy home on the other side (which had been carefully constructed with wooden pegs and brought around the Horn in sections) this was the extent of the little hamlet, Murphy’s Station. Scarcely had this new infant-village been christened with its name “Murphy’s Station” than it was discovered that there was another post-office of similar name, whereupon it was changed to Encinal.

It was this village of Encinal that Rev. Charles F. Withrow, pastor of Mayfield Methodist Church in 1898, came to visit.

He started a Sunday school, but family illness soon ended his visits. Methodism in Sunnyvale would have to wait for another young minister from Mayfield (who also happened to attend Stanford University²).

¹Oldham writes, McKinley and Main (now called Murphy) Streets.

²The author is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Stanford’s Computer Science Department.

3 Founding the First Church in Sunnyvale

To continue the story, we turn to the 04 February 1935 letter³ of Reverend David Ralston, then a Methodist Episcopal Minister in Oak Park, Sacramento. Starting in 1902, he served both Mayfield (now a part of Palo Alto) and Sunnyvale, cycling there Sunday afternoon.

We heard that Mr. Crossman, a realty man in San Jose who owned most of Sunnyvale, said he would give four lots to the first church that would build in Sunnyvale, and they could pick the lots anywhere. I heard that when I was out there one Sunday afternoon. (I also heard that the Baptist minister had called a meeting of all the people in the school house the following Monday evening. My, I thought, there is very little time left.) I went home to Mayfield and preached that night and the next morning took the first train for San Jose. I went immediately to see Crossman, and he told me he was ready to give us the deed if we would build a church in Sunnyvale. I told him we would. He said, "Where?" I did not know. I then got hold of Dr. Evans who was pastor of First Church⁴ at the time, and he told me to get in touch with my D.S.,⁵ Dr. W. W. Case. I did and we went out and picked out the lots. I immediately phoned to Bro Brooks⁶ to go to Mt. View brickyard and bring a wagon load of brick and put them on a certain corner which he did. I then printed a sign and put it over the bricks. "This is the site of the New Methodist Church." There was not much community responsibility⁷ about this sign. It was purely the Methodist church with a young fellow as pastor that moved tremendously fast.

(You just think of what we did in one day. I sometimes laugh at it from this distance.)

Well, Bro Withrow knew more about things than I did so I got in touch with Bro Withrow and had him there that Monday evening. Here came the Baptist minister and quite a few of the people to see

³Myriad errors have been silently corrected.

⁴Oldham writes, presumably First Methodist Episcopal Church of San Jose.

⁵Oldham writes, District Superintendent.

⁶Oldham notes other sources say Mr. W. K. Hooper, Sunday school superintendent for fifty years brought the load of used bricks.

⁷Oldham guesses, response.

what was going on. Our people were there to a man. They never called the meeting to order at all. The sight of the new site was too much for them and they all went home and we proceeded with our Methodist church. . . .

However, we won out in the erection of our church. There ought not to be one discordant note about any of our methods. Everything was done in the open and in the daylight.

When I think of meeting with the trustees and riding a bicycle home to Mayfield and get home all tired out pumping against the wind at about twelve o'clock. Rush into bed and get a few hours sleep and then get up at 5 a.m. to study for Stanford. Then come home and visit around Mayfield and then have a business meeting of some kind that evening, day after day, keeping it up. How foolish I was to work so hard. Well, I had a good time.

That was how the church's first sanctuary at South Murphy and McKinley Avenues was started.

4 Opening Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the boundless energy of these young people who started our church. Will you please help us be worthy of following in their footsteps?

5 Closing Prayer

Given by Reverent Carl Thomas.

6 Acknowledgments

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