



THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Winter 2009, Vol.7 No.1

THE HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ST. HELENA

By Mariam Hansen

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church at St. Helena was organized August 17, 1863. Its building, an elegant 40 by 70 foot structure, was twice visited by arsonists. The first time, in July of 1873, bags saturated with coal oil were fastened to the belfry rope and lit on fire. Fortunately, the fire was discovered before the building incurred much damage. But later, in 1874, a second fire was set, completely destroying the church. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was never rebuilt.

May 30, 1874, the Presbyterian Church at St. Helena was organized by Rev. James Mitchell, under the auspices of the Home Missions in connection with the Presbyterian Church. During its infancy, it was housed briefly in the Cumberland Church. When that church was destroyed by fire, the Presbyterians used the Baptist building for services. In October 1875, they began to erect their own building on Spring Street, on the lot on which the Cumberland building had stood. This handsome structure is still in use today. The building is 34 by 52 feet and was built at a cost of \$4,000, with the lot and furniture adding another \$1,000. The new Bay State organ was purchased for \$325. At dedication, on January 30, 1876, all but \$61.60 of the total cost had been paid.

Rev. James Mitchell, an earnest and effective worker, and a graduate of one of the best theological schools of Europe, remained in charge of the church from its organization until 1917, when he became pastor emeritus. During his 43 year tenure as pastor, he baptized 75 and received into membership 154 people. Total membership in 1917 was 118. On one day, forty new members joined the church.

A Sunday school was begun under the auspices of this church at the time the new building was dedicated. Three years later, in 1879, it was said about the Sunday school that it "has ever since been in a very prosperous condition, having an attendance of 140 scholars." Mr. J. I. Logan was the first superintendent, and Mr. John. Mixon filled the position from 1876-1881.

In 1884 the lecture hall, now known as Westminster Hall, was built at a cost \$1,500. It included a kitchen. A white picket fence once followed the property line along Spring Street.

The church celebrated its Silver Jubilee in May 1899 and its 35 year anniversary in 1909.

A special service was held on May 30, 1909 with the Rev. Dr. John Hemphill preaching. He was the college friend of Rev. Mitchell who encouraged Mitchell to come to America from Ireland. Congratulations and words of appreciation from far and wide were read. On Sunday evening a special sacred concert was given to mark the occasion. The next day a reception was again held in the church with songs and speeches.

The Golden Jubilee was celebrated in May 1924. In 1926, Rev. Mitchell went to his reward.

At the sixty year anniversary on June 11, 1934, a special

service was conducted by the Rev. Thomas Allen, with communion by Rev. William Oxtoby of the San Francisco Theological Seminary. In the afternoon, a reception was held in honor of Sophie Mitchell, widow of the esteemed Reverend, which was a reunion of many friends and visitors. The celebration continued in the evening with a special service by Rev. Allen and an address by Dr. E.E. Ingram, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Santa Rosa.

The pastor's residence was built in 1938. By 1942 the congregation was able to retire the debt incurred for this building.



Photo courtesy of First Presbyterian Church

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

In our last newsletter I wrote of the St. Helena General plan process and the Historical Society's interest in securing some space on the city-owned Adams Street property for the purpose of building a St. Helena History Center. Since that time, several more meetings have been held and the city is rapidly moving toward a decision on the future of the Adams Street property.

After two meetings where members of the public were asked for their input on potential uses for this property, the MIG consulting group, hired by the city to direct this planning process, presented a "preferred" use plan for the site. This plan was an amalgam of three previous plans presented by MIG, and it included designated areas for library expansion, parking, a new city hall, housing, an outdoor amphitheater, open space, and most importantly to us, a Community/History Center on the corner of Adams Street and Library Lane.

This plan has been presented to the General Plan Update Steering Committee and to the Planning Commission and was scheduled to go before the City Council at its February 24 meeting. Because of a presentation regarding the proposed Pope Street housing development, the Council postponed consideration of the Adams Street plan until its March 24 meeting.

Prior to that meeting, we will be submitting to the Council a letter and other written materials outlining our proposal. With the time for oral presentations at these public meetings severely limited, we are hoping our written submission will better explain our plan, and perhaps lead to a meeting with the Council to more fully explain our position.

It's been made clear at each step of this process that nothing is written in stone, that this is very much a work in progress, and that some parts of the Adams Street proposal may be long delayed or may never happen at all. We would like to convince the City that the History Center is one aspect of the plan that, if they are willing to commit the land, could move toward implementation immediately.

While we are not certain what, if any, action the City may take at the March 24 meeting, we would encourage you to attend that meeting at Vintage Hall and support us in this endeavor.

Skip Lane

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Officers and Directors

Skip Lane, President
Susanne Salvestrin, Vice President
Mariam Hansen, Secretary
Kim Farmer, Treasurer
Donn Black
Frank Harrison
Mariana Olguin
John Sales
Tricia Westbrook

Committee Notes:

The **Collections Committee** coordinates and manages the acquisition of new materials. It generally meets on the last Monday of the month at 9:30am in the library meeting room. Current chair of the committee is Susanne Salvestrin. Email her at Susanne@salvestrinwinery.com

The **Program Committee** plans and presents programs and events to teach the public about our local history. If you would like to volunteer or want more information, please call Mariam Hansen, 963-5748.

Questions? Comments?

Call or email the Newsletter editor,
Kim Farmer, at 963-0630,
ksfarmer@seedgrain.com

I'd like to join the St. Helena Historical Society!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Individual \$30 Family \$50

Business/Organizaton \$150 Life \$500

I would like to: Volunteer _____ Make a donation to the Society _____

In Memory of Kathy Kernberger

We were saddened by the death of Kathy Kernberger in December, 2008. She was active in the Society as a former Board Member, researcher, and regular contributor to the newsletter. She'll be missed by all.



Antoinette Dwan, paper conservator, describes the restoration process.

Historical Society Unveils 1876 Map of Napa County

On January 11, 2009 the Historical Society hosted the unveiling of a 1876 map of Napa County donated by Marie Oliver. The event took place at Caldwell Snyder Gallery, where the map was displayed until the end of the month. It now hangs on a wall in the St. Helena Library, next to a reproduction of a 1881 Napa County map. Please come to the Library to see it! Color reproductions of the map, in different sizes, will be available for sale by the Society. Please call Susanne Salvestrin at 963-3036 for more details.

The St. Helena Historical Society thanks Marie Oliver for her donation of the map and funds to help with restoration. As restoration and framing costs exceeded estimates, the Historical Society welcomes additional donations for this purpose. They may be sent to P.O. Box 87, St. Helena. Many thanks to Calvin Baker for his generous donation to this cause as well.

Thanks to Karen and Oliver Caldwell for providing the beautiful venue for the unveiling!

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Seventy years of service to St. Helena was celebrated June 4, 1944. Presiding was the Rev. Charles Hulac, pastor of the St. Helena church. Rev. Chester Green, of the Presbytery Board of Missions was guest speaker. In the afternoon a reception was held in the pastor's residence for those who had been members for over forty years. Leo Martin showed slides of church history, some dating to 1874.

In 1946, an electric Hammond organ was given in memory of the servicemen from St. Helena who served in World War II. In 1952, chimes were purchased to attach to the organ.

Renovation of the sanctuary took place in the 80th year of the church in 1954. Ground breaking for the classroom, kitchen, and Fireside Room addition took place in 1958.

The 90th anniversary was in May 1964. Three years later, the two palm trees, which had long grown on the lawn, were removed. The large magnolia tree in the parking lot was planted with help from Lola Mixon Baldwin Mackinder when she was a girl in about 1882. Later, she became a Sunday school teacher and organist in the church. In 1970 the steeple was repaired and painted at a cost of \$3,000, with funds donated by the community.

The centenary was celebrated June 2, 1974. The Rev. Roswell Gordon welcomed six former pastors to the celebration. After the service, the congregation enjoyed a lunch out on the patio, followed by a slide show in Westminster Hall of church history. In the Fireside Room were artifacts of the early church, including the wedding gown of Mrs. Sophie Mitchell and the suit worn by Rev. Mitchell. The "Dance of Life" was performed by the new dance choir with accompanying musicians.

The beautiful Rieger organ from Austria was dedicated on December 15, 1985.

Since the organization of the church there have been twenty four pastors or student pastors serving the church. Today the church is led by the Rev. Jonathan Eastman, who has been pastor since 2004.

First Presbyterian Church is now in its 135th year of ministering to the spiritual needs of the St. Helena Congregation.

CALENDAR

Call our voicemail to reserve a space: 707-967-5502.

March

Mar 3: Program at Silverado Museum, 4pm. "Robert Louis Stevenson in the Napa Valley" with director Dorothy McKay-Collins. Reservations required.

Mar 17: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room (Open to all members.)

Mar 20: Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30am, Library Meeting Room

April

Apr 15: Chamber of Commerce Mixer co-sponsored with Silverado Orchards and Rianda House. 5:30 to 7pm at Rianda House, 1475 Main St.

Apr 21: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

Apr 27: Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30am, Library Meeting Room

May

May: Program to be announced.

May 19: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

May 25: Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30am, Library Meeting Room

June

Jun 2: Program at Holy Family Catholic Church, 4pm. "The History of Rutherford." Please RSVP.

Jun 16: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

Jun 29: Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30am, Library Meeting Room

Mission Statement

The St. Helena Historical Society is a public educational organization. Its mission is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and provide access to historical materials of all kinds from our community as well as to promote public awareness and participation in the collection of such materials.

ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

invites you to...

A Chamber of
Commerce Mixer

Wednesday, Apr. 15
5:30 to 7pm

Rianda House
1475 Main Street

Co-sponsored by St. Helena Historical Society, Silverado Orchard Retirement Center and the Jean Rianda Senior Activity Center. If you have an item to donate for the raffle, please contact Skip Lane at 967-6210. Event is free, no RSVP necessary.

St. Helena Historical Society
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