

## The First 100 Years ... The Teens



1912 was a big year for the West Valley. Lots went on sale in the new town of Owensmouth in March. The Red Line began operation in December. The future First United Methodist Church was organized in September and incorporated in October.

What was it like at the western end of Sherman Way in 1912 when the Truman A. Hull family moved here from Nebraska? Rev T. A. Hull was a second-generation Methodist minister, retired from Nebraska. He brought his second wife and his family of 3 boys and a girl.



In the 1880's the entire valley had been one great wheat and barley field. The Southern Pacific Railroad ran through the Valley to ship the grain to San Pedro for export to Europe. In 1890 the Southern Pacific opened the station at "Canoga." In 1912 many local residents were still raising grain, without the benefit of irrigation. A town well was drilled at Sherman Way and Deering and began pumping in 1911.

But great changes were on the way. William Mulholland was engineering an aqueduct to bring water from the Owen's Valley. In 1909, with this project underway, Harry Chandler paid Isaac Newton Van Nuys \$2.5 million for the southern half of the Valley, everything south of Roscoe Blvd. He had the area surveyed and laid out the towns of Van Nuys in the east, Marian (later Reseda) in the middle and Owensmouth (later Canoga Park) in the west. Owensmouth was called the

Baby Town because it was pictured as delivered by a stork in the publicity for land sales. The Janss Investment Company offered tours on the Pacific Electric train and began selling town lots in Owensmouth in 1912. The Hulls probably took a tour and selected the lot on the corner of Remmet and Cohasset.

The family arrived in 1912 and by September they had formed a small congregation of local folks who organized themselves into the Owensmouth Community Church. Although ostensibly a nonde-

nominal church, the ministers were always Methodists and the incorporation name was The First Methodist Episcopal Church of Owensmouth. There was no church building during the teen years. The church met at the train depot, where Guy Crowley was stationmaster, then at a temporary school site and moved with the school into the new Owensmouth School. That arrangement did not last long, and for several years they met in vacant storefronts and at least once in the Owensmouth State Bank.

Rev. Hull was appointed to the Van Nuys Church in 1913 and to Owensmouth again in 1914. The next appointee was James Blackledge, a Greek and Hebrew scholar and former missionary to Japan. He served the Methodist Church in Chatsworth in 1914 before coming to Owensmouth in 1915. He had also taught at the Maclay College of Theology in San Fernando and was appointed to the church there in 1887. Maclay College of Theology moved to USC and later became the Claremont School of Theology. Blackledge is listed as a professor at USC in his later years.

Rev. George Graff served our church from 1916 to 1918. Like Rev. Hull, George was the son of a Methodist minister. The senior Rev. Graff served churches in Pennsylvania. The younger Rev. Graff served a number of churches, including San Fernando, as his predecessor Rev. Blackledge had done. After leaving us he went to the Los Feliz church.

Rev. Horace T. Lewis is the last minister in the decade of the teens. It was under his leadership that funds were raised and the first church was constructed. He and his wife Lucy lived on Remmet in 1920, perhaps in the house built by the Hulls. He was born in Michigan and Lucy was from Illinois. In case you are wondering, as did Tom Roe, Warren and Merritt Hull, who founded Hull Brothers Lumber Co. in Canoga Park in the 1950's, were sons of our first minister, T.A. Hull.

Sharon Mountford

**The First 100 Years ... The Twenties** Last month we left our young congregation building the first church they could call their own. They were led in this effort by Rev. Horace T. Lewis, who had been appointed to the position in 1918 and was reappointed the next two years. (Keep in mind that appointments were probably made in June, as they are now.) A meeting of members and friends had been called in June 1919 to consider the matter of building a church at a cost of \$10,000. (By the time it was built, the cost was almost twice that amount.) The vote to build was unanimous. Money was collected, mostly in small donations, to start the building. It was a great occasion for the church on September 5, 1920, when the first church at the corner of Jordan Avenue and Wyandotte Street was dedicated. The speaker for the occasion was Bishop Adna Wright Leonard of



the then-Southern California Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. Lewis had most of a year to enjoy his new building, but in 1921 Rev. John E. Beery was appointed to the Owensmouth Community Church. (This is the spelling in our records. In the Conference records it is Berry.) He previously had a one-year appointment in 1914 to the National City Methodist Church. He was reappointed in 1922 for a second year at our church. He moved then to what is now Temple City First United Methodist Church, with appointments there

in 1923 and 1924. During his tenure here he had to lead the congregation through one of its most difficult challenges: the destruction of the building by fire. "For a little more than a year the congregation worshipped in the new church and worked hard to clear the debt, which was quite large. On January 30, 1922 the whole community was shocked and saddened to see this beautiful structure destroyed by fire. The following notice, which appeared in the local paper three days later, shows the great fortitude of the church at that time. "Church services will be held in the High School at the usual hours and all are urged to attend as plans for the new church will be discussed." (from the history in the 50th anniversary book) The Los Angeles School Board had given permission for the church to use the Owensmouth High School for services while the new building was being built. This was a convenient arrangement for the church. The Sunday School used the classrooms, and for the first (and only time) there was the use of a pipe organ. That probably explains why the April 1, 1923 list of choir members includes six organists! Work on the new building was started in August, 1922. On Sunday, April 1, 1923 a service was held at the Owensmouth High School for the "Corner Stone Laying of the Owensmouth Community Church." From 10:00 to 10:30 there was a "get-together-and-get-acquainted" half hour. Then began the "exercises preliminary to the laying of the corner stone." The program for these "exercises" is one of the few items remaining from the 20's. It began with a prelude by the Owensmouth Orchestra, followed by the hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers," a prayer by E. J. Inwood (District Superintendent of the Long Beach District, probably representing the

Conference), and the anthem "O How Amiable" by the church choir. The Shepherd's Psalm was then repeated in unison (from memory, presumably, because neither words nor reference was given) and the Gloria sung. There was then the first of three groups of greetings from local organizations. This set of speakers represented the Chamber of Commerce, Merchants and Manufacturers Association, Woman's Club of Owensmouth, and Parent-Teachers' Association. The First 100 Years ... The Twenties The Junior Choir then sang something not listed. The next set of greetings was from The Professions, The Newspapers, The Public Schools (represented by Miss Clara Rooksby, member of the church), The American Legion (represented by Ralph Goodall, a member of the church), The Chatsworth Chamber of Commerce, and Woman's Club of Chatsworth. The interlude before the next set of speakers was a trio singing "Praise Ye." The final set of greetings was from Weeks Colony (represented by Charles Weeks), Reseda Chamber of Commerce, Zelzah, and Long Beach District (represented by E.J. Inwood). There was then a response by the pastor (whose name does not appear in the program). Miss Ruth Wingert played a violin solo for the Offertory. The hymn "Blest Be the Ties That Bind" concluded the service at the High School. At 11:45 was scheduled the processional from the High School to the new church site for the laying of the Corner Stone at 11:50. That is a distance of 0.7 miles. Can you imagine our congregation moving itself that distance in five minutes? Archives from the 20's include lists of the members of the Ladies Aid Society and the Choir dated April 1, 1923, the Sunday of the Corner Stone laying. The Ladies Aid society had 58 members. The Choir had 13 members, a director, pianist, and those six organists. Both lists include Mrs. Arthur Hoefler. (The first names of married ladies were not used.) Our church library is dedicated to her as Emma Hoefler (using modern practice). The choir list also included her husband. The Ladies Aid Society members included Mrs. John Beery, presumably the wife of the minister. About the time the church was dedicated on June 24, 1923, Rev. J. A. Sutton was appointed as the next minister. He had a one-year stay and was succeeded by Rev. Clyde P. Metcalf, who was reappointed there the next three years. The bulletin for the Rally Day service on October 9, 1927 had the following announcement: "Mr. and Mrs. Metcalf were appointed to Owensmouth for the fourth year at the recent Long Beach conference. They like it here and chose to remain rather than accept larger churches offered them. They feel they belong here and want to help work out the splendid ideals of Christian unity held by our community church." (Note that the Annual Conference moved around in those days before it settled in Redlands.) The Rally Day bulletin is the other archive item from the 1920's. Rally Day was defined as enlistment day, the beginning of the Sunday School year. The Sunday School had four divisions, each with its own superintendent. There were three classes of beginners and primary, four classes of juniors and intermediates, two classes of young people, and an adult department. The bulletin covers the combined morning service at 10:30, Epworth Leagues at 6:30, and Evening Worship at 7:30. The order of worship for the evening service included singing of "The Way of the Cross" by the Young Peoples Vesper Chorus, and reports from the recent Conference. Another interesting announcement in the bulletin was "The Ladies Aid society will hold its next meeting Thursday afternoon at 2:30. The program will be in the nature of a musical tea with members of the Chatsworth ladies aid as guests." The rebuilt church met the needs for which it was built and membership of the



church grew. The congregation worked hard to reduce the debt of almost \$33,000. In 1929 the Depression years started and the church experienced financially difficult years. The minister whose lot was to lead into this period was Rev. W. W. Ralph, who was appointed in 1929. We look forward to the report on the 1930s to see how this turned out.

## The First 100 Years ... The Thirties

As we begin the 1930's our congregation, now known as the Canoga Park Community Church (March 1, 1931) with forty-four listed members, is struggling to meet financial obligations from rebuilding the church following the fire which destroyed the first building in 1922. A November 23, 1931 article in the Los Angeles Times stated, "The congregation of the Canoga Park Community Church will give a Thanksgiving supper festival on Monday, the 30th to which 100 families will be invited. Each family is expected to pay \$5 for its seat. Proceeds are to be used to pay interest of \$1,050 due on the church property, and \$500 owing to the pastor in back salary. Several of the wealthier members will be asked to pay \$50 for their seats."

Probably many of those attending the supper would have been the following prominent community and business leaders who were also dedicated members of our church, e.g. the Bechtelheimer Family (Pharmacy), the William Bird Family (Grocery Store), the Guy Crowley Family (Station Master), the Ted Knox Family (Rancher), the Praisewater Family (Funeral Home), Ernest and Hazel Merritt and Clara Rooksby (Teachers).

Agriculture continued to be the main source of income for our area in the 1930's. Walnut orchards covered what is now Fallbrook Square, then a ranch owned by Ted Knox. Looking west along Sherman Way, past former Canoga Park Mayor Francis Lederer's hillside property, is Castle Peak – known as El Escorpian in the early days – part of a 1,000 acre wheat ranch (El Escorpian Rancho) which extended south to Calabasas. Shadow Ranch Park, once an Indian settlement, part of a 47,000 acre wheat ranch with 70 barns, was owned by the Lankershim Family and managed by Alfred Workman. The original home, built in 1870 of redwood & brick using square nails, was surrounded by 75-year-old eucalyptus trees. An historic Blue Gum tree, a wedding present to his bride, still remains. The property was sold in 1934 to Hollywood screen writers Colin and Florence Ryerson Clements. Legend has it that stolen Wells Fargo gold is buried there!

As our nation endured the economic downturn of the Great Depression, crop prices fell and the lack of international trade impacted our agricultural community of Owensmouth. The growers of lima beans, grain, citrus and sugar beets needed workers, but manual labor was scarce and wages fell to \$1 a day. Equally devastating were major floods in 1934 and 1938.

To brighten everyone's spirits, Mary Orcutt and the Canoga Park Women's Club began a community beautification project in 1931. Land was cleared, wildflower seeds planted and "A Wild Flower Festival" was held. Auto tours brought people to see the flowers and have tea at the Women's Club. The event culminated with an afternoon garden fete and Cabaret Supper at Orcutt's Rancho Sombre Del Roble, surrounded by citrus orchards.

Aviation and entertainment industries had joined agriculture as primary employers in the San Fernando Valley, which helped to stabilize the region. The Los Angeles Grain & Milling Company provided local agricultural processing.

*"La Fiesta de las Flores de la Primavera"*  
**CANOGA PARK** (Formerly Owensmouth)  
 In the West End of San Fernando Valley  
 Invites You to Attend the Second Annual

## WILD FLOWER FIESTA

APRIL 22, 1933

The "Fiesta" will be preceded by the Easter Sunrise Service,  
 April 16, at the Greek Theater, Canoga Park High School

**SATURDAY, APRIL 22, "Fiesta Day"**

11 A. M. Parade—Cavalcade of horsemen, ancient vehicles,  
 and historic floats. Equestrian quadrille.

12 Noon—Spanish Luncheon, with Barbecued Turkey,  
 At Canoga Park Women's Club House. Price 50 cents.

2:30 to 5:00 P. M.—"Spanish Garden Fete," Rancho Som-  
 bra del Roble (Orcutt estate). Admission 50 cents.  
 Historic Pageant and light refreshments. "A Street  
 in Old San Fernando."

6 to 7:30 P. M.—Cabaret Supper served a la espanola, fol-  
 lowed by dancing, at Women's Club House. Price 50c.

Spring Calls You  
 To Canoga Park

The lure of a better life continued to attract Midwest families to come west and to develop businesses on the vast affordable land here. A "California Home" with two rooms, a fireplace BUT no bathroom was offered for \$400. Dial telephones were being installed; water and power were readily available.

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Zoning restrictions specified that the more expensive lands were for residences costing not less than \$2,000. Residences on land of lesser value were to cost at least \$500. People of Japanese, Chinese or African descent could not own property. Not excluded in the laws, but kept outside main-stream activities, were the Mexicans. Laborers were needed. Eight adobe houses along Hart Street were used for workers until torn down in 1936. A Mexican ghetto formed. Sadly, the schools and the theater were segregated until 1951.

Federal loans helped provide paved roads, power lines and community parks. Fire House #72 was built and the Madrid Theatre opened in 1926. Ralph Rousseau, son of Naomi and grandson of Rev. Ralph Chaffee, remembers, "the theater showed mature (not x-rated) movies on Sunday and Monday – western movies on Tuesday and Wednesday – family movies with extra cartoons and a serial on Saturday."

Life was easier now, with towns nearby having an airport, post office and city hall. Prohibition had ended, Social Security and the FDIC were initiated. Things were looking up! Guiding our church through these years were: W. W. Ralph (1929-32), Fletcher Homan (1933-36), Orris L. Enyeart (1936-38) and Harold E. Broughton (1938-41).

Mary Mackay



Interior of church member R. W. Bird's Independent Grocery Store

Thanks go to Betty Allen, Chet Cohen and Jean Jauck of the Canoga-Owensmouth Historical Society for their assistance in preparing this article.

## The First 100 Years ... The Forties

By 1940 the economy was rebounding from the depression; businesses were growing and tract homes were replacing the valley farm lands. Catalpa trees lined Topanga Canyon Blvd. from Ventura Blvd. to Roscoe Blvd. and a "Catalpa Festival" was being held each Spring to bring visitors to Canoga Park. It was a happier time – at least briefly.

Large ranches still existed. George E. Platt, a veteran dairyman, owned the 1,100 acre former El Escorpion Ranch and introduced the dairy industry to the area. Otto F. Brant's ranch, with walnuts, cattle and chickens covered the area bordered by Vanowen St., Ventura Blvd., DeSoto Ave. and Topanga Canyon Blvd. The ranch, run by his three sons, was eventually purchased by motion picture producer, Harry Warner. It is the site of Warner Center today.

The church, under Rev. Harold Broughton, continued to raise money to reduce the church debt. Parishioners were asked to put "A Penny A Meal" toward this effort, which netted \$50 a month. Many young people were put to work in the church as Rev. Broughton stressed the importance of ministry to the youth.

Rev. William Koehler became pastor in 1941. The Official Board voted to begin another debt-clearing campaign and on Sept. 17, 1943 the church mortgage was indeed burned! The \$90 remaining in the fund was later used to remodel the sanctuary.

The Canoga Park Women's Club, organized in 1914, was very active in our community. They used our church for their meetings and raised funds for the kitchen in the rebuilt church. Early leaders of the Women's Club were also active in our Women's Society of Christian Service: Clara Rooksby, Emma Hoefer, Viola Crowley, Vera Ferrin (mother-in-law of Pat Ferrin) and Polly Cates Dieckman (mother of Darold Cates). This group was instrumental in establishing a Well Baby Clinic, Guadalupe Youth Center, Lanark Park and the current Historical Society. Clara Rooksby chaired a committee to establish the first library in a schoolroom with 150 books. Later a formal library was built on Owensmouth Ave. The Pacific Lodge Boys Home (for youth 12-14) was also sponsored by the Women's Club. Ralph Chaffee of our church was principal.

Everything changed following the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. A watch tower and listening post to detect enemy planes was established on the Platt Ranch. Emma Hoefer, Alta Speer and Marion Bechtelheimer of our church, were some who stood watch nightly from 10 pm until 2 am. Men soon registered for military service. The aviation industry quickly converted to defense work. Bus lines were extended to get wartime defense production workers to work. Rationing of food and gas were part of everyone's life. Workers to harvest the crops and to work in the fields were scarce. Japanese families were sent to internment camps. It was an uneasy and difficult time.

As the war ended in 1945, and military personnel returned home, housing became a major issue. Spare rooms were needed and families were encouraged to provide housing. Major changes occurred

as a housing boom began. Dairy, poultry and agricultural businesses began to decline. Urbanization of our town had begun. The first major hospital for the valley was built (Valley Presbyterian); major markets (Safeway, Ralph's) and department stores opened. The Veterans' Administration Hospital was built and schools were added. Construction for Pierce Agricultural School began; quonset buildings were being used when the school opened in 1947. Jack Barlow taught at this school from 1949 until 1983.



Pierce College in 1947

Rev. Robert Cordell was appointed pastor in 1947 and served our congregation until 1950. His interest was in missionary and church service. A School of Missions and a Men's Club were established by him. Ralph Chaffee served as Chaplain for the Men's Club. New young families moved to Canoga Park and the church membership doubled. A new Hammond Organ was purchased and dedicated in 1946. The Official Board voted to purchase the lot north of the church on Jordan and presented it to the young people for a recreation center. A roller skating rink and stage were built on this lot. Betty Allen's son, John, helped provide music for the skating parties.

Brighter days were coming...