

1991
SECOND PRIZE
\$250.00

THE WILLOW GLEN
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:
An Integral Part of
The Willow Glen Community

An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County

by
Eileen Peters
1498 Padres Drive
San Jose, CA 95125
(408) 295-5498

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
BEGINNINGS AS A SUNDAY SCHOOL.	2
THE CHURCH'S FIRST OWN BUILDING.	3
CHURCH DAMAGED BY EUCALYPTUS TREE.	5
A SECOND CHURCH ON LINCOLN.	6
A BIGGER CHURCH FOR A GROWING CONGREGATION.	8
FIRE IN CHURCH SANCTUARY.	12
THE CHURCH IN THE 1970's.	13
THE CHURCH TODAY.	15
NOTES.	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	18

INTRODUCTION

An integral part of any community is its churches. The Willow Glen United Methodist Church is an important part of the Willow Glen community and has served the neighborhood in several capacities for well over one hundred years. The W.G.U.M.C. is an example of a neighborhood institution that has survived and prospered despite the many challenges a church must face such as growth and change.

Beginnings as a Sunday School

The Willow Glen United Methodist Church began in the late 1860's as a Sunday School for both adults and children. The members of the early congregation met for worship and study in a small Willow Glen public schoolhouse built in 1863 on the northwest corner of Lincoln Avenue and Malone Road. George Hare served as superintendent of church and Sunday school at the Methodist church, even though he was a member of the First Presbyterian Church. He had helped to start Methodist Sunday School in "The Willows," the name used at the time for what we now call Willow Glen.

The Church's First Own Building

Due to a growing number of people attending the Sunday School, the church was in need of its own property. Fortunately for the congregation, the Reverend John Sharpe, a retired pastor, donated property to the church at 1164 Lincoln Avenue. A small church was erected in 1870 to 1871 by the people of the church on the east side of what is now Lincoln Avenue on its 1300 block, about a half block north of Minnesota Avenue. The church remained there for the next forty-three years.

There were many good, dedicated leaders at the church during this time. Mr. O.C. Wills was superintendent in 1870, and his wife served as the church's organist. There was not a pastor at this time on record, but two men helped with the services regularly. These men, Mr. Walker and Mr. Paige, were students at the College of the Pacific, then in San Jose.

In its early years, the church was usually referred to as "the church in The Willows." The Willow Glen church was first mentioned in the Methodist Conference minutes when A.M. Bailey was appointed to the church in 1874. In 1877, the church was called "University Place and Willows."

G.H. McCrarken was pastor in 1877, after which no pastors are mentioned for fifteen years. From 1871 to 1909 the church had financial problems. At one point, the property was almost put up for sale. Various members tried to help out during this time from 1877 to 1892 when the church was weakening. In lieu of a pastor, Mr. Chittenden served as superintendent in 1880, followed by Dr. C.H. Hervey. Mr. George Flemming followed as superintendent in 1884. After A.S. Coe served as superintendent in 1888, there was not a Sunday School for a period of time.

The first known pastors, after such a long time without one, were mentioned in a Willow Glen Pastorate as H.C. Longley in 1892 followed by C.G. Milnes in 1893. In 1895, W.A. Kennedy became pastor. In 1897 Henry French became pastor and served for five years. His name was not mentioned in records, but he was influential and delivered strong services. The church was still weakening at this time, but Mr. French kept the church alive.

In 1902 the Sunday school was revived. Then, in 1908, the Reverend Mahlon B. Young was appointed. He was a student at the College of the Pacific as Mr. Walker and Mr. Paige were before him. Reverend Young played a key role in reestablishing the church. Under his leadership, the church was organized and recognized as Willow Glen Church in the conference records on February 7, 1909. Membership was twenty-nine with a Sunday school of fifty. The church was included in the Methodist Quarterly Conference Records from this time on.

While Reverend Young was there, there were so many Sunday School students that a tent was set up in the church yard for the boys' Sunday School. Despite all Reverend Young had done, a more full-time person was needed for the church, and in 1912 Charles W. Null was appointed to Willow Glen Church and became the church's first resident pastor.

Church Damaged By Eucalyptus Tree

In 1913, renovation and addition plans to accommodate the growing congregation were about to begin. Preparations for the remodeling included the removal of four large eucalyptus trees. Three of the four trees had been removed without problem, but when the fourth eucalyptus tree was being removed, it fell on the church, causing irreparable damage. This story received considerable coverage in the Mercury on November seventh and eighth.

After the church was damaged, the Willow Glen schoolhouse on the corner of Lincoln and Minnesota Avenues served as a meeting place until a new site could be obtained.

A Second Church on Lincoln

Following the disaster brought about by the wayward eucalyptus tree, a new church was built in 1914 at a cost of \$6,500. The proposed replacement was featured in the Mercury with an illustration on November 18, 1913. Ground breaking ceremonies were held on November 25, 1913. This new church was built on the east side of Lincoln Avenue like the previous one, and faced Brace Avenue. It served as the only church in Willow Glen for many years.

The first services in the new church were held in the new Sunday School rooms on April 12, 1914. The building was completed and dedicated on June 1, 1914, by the bishop, Edwin Holt Hughes. At the end of the service, the Bishop baptized Frances Rae Null, the pastor's baby daughter.

Charles Swithenbank was pastor in 1916, when an imitation pipe organ was purchased and installed for \$295. Following him were Oscar Smith in 1917 and W.H. Mills in the fall of 1918. Phineas T. Lynn was the pastor in 1920 with a church membership of eighty-five and a Sunday School with seventy-seven students. Reverend Lynn served for six years.

In 1923, a lot adjoining the church was purchased for \$1,020, and a five-room parsonage was built for \$3,750 in 1926.

The pastors in the following years were faced with financial problems including the debt of the parsonage. T.H. Grimshaw was pastor in 1927. B.F. Ray became the pastor the following year in 1928. The church started a Boy Scout troop and renovations were made around the church such as cement steps and a sidewalk. The

debt was cleared in August of 1929 and a party was held to celebrate.

A.B. Morton became the church's pastor in 1929 when membership was at one hundred and thirty and Sunday School was at one hundred and thirty-five.

In 1933, the Reverend Elliot L. Fisher became pastor of the church. Reverend Fisher was a noble person and cut his own salary to help with the current financial problems of the church. At this time the church property was valued at \$15,000, and the parsonage was valued at \$5,000. Reverend Fisher left in 1936 to add to his education on the study of rural churches. He had received a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin.

Reverend J.W. Byrd was pastor after Reverend Fisher left. Then Reverend Ezelle Cox was appointed as minister of the church in 1940. At this time the church had grown to include women's circles and youth groups, and was active in missionary work. During the Reverend Cox's tenure as pastor, many changes were made. A new pipe organ was purchased at the San Francisco World's Fair, and new hymnals were purchased. There were thirty-one new members. From 1941-42, the sanctuary was remodeled. The kitchen was remodeled and the church painted.

Despite the many renovations made, the size of the church building did not seem sufficient. It was still too small for its growing congregation. The rapid growth in the thirties and forties in Willow Glen and surrounding areas made it necessary to have a new, larger church.

A Bigger Church For A Growing Congregation

In 1944, during World War II, plans for a new church were passed unanimously. The San Jose Realty Board appraised the Lincoln property without its parsonage at \$26,000. Property was subsequently purchased on the southeast corner of Washington, now Newport, and Minnesota Avenues for \$5,350. The lot was one hundred and thirty-five by two hundred and forty-five feet and contained one small house.

In January of 1946, the Lincoln Avenue church, not including the parsonage, was sold for \$33,500. The parsonage was moved from its old site on Lincoln Avenue to the new church property.

The house at the new site was moved to property purchased on Fuller Avenue for \$1,282.25. The sale of the house and lot on Fuller resulted in a net profit of \$1,868.75.

With these preparations made, and the end of World War II, building plans could begin. Mr. Gifford E. Sobey was chosen as the architect, and the Fourth Quarterly Conference approved his building plans.

In the meantime, the Reverend Ezelle Cox wrote the following in regard to his health in his ministerial report for the Conference year 1945-1946:

God did not have anything to do with my handicap but it has required an adjustment in tempo and emphasis that has been difficult to make. First it was pleurisy in 1943 and 1944 with a cough and constant low temperature, and on top of that the diagnosis that I was to be afflicted with angina pectoris. But God has been abundantly kind to a wayward son who has been careless in following the medical advice which he sought. It has meant that often I have not been able to do all that I wanted to or that some thought perhaps I should.'

Nevertheless, the Reverend Cox was put in charge of the construction by the architect.

On Sunday, June 15, 1947, ground-breaking ceremonies were held for the church. In the construction of the new building, the social hall, the women's parlor, and the kitchen were the first to be completed. The social hall was used for worship until the sanctuary could be completed.

At the First Quarterly Conference on December 7, 1947, it was voted to continue building the church. Reverend Cox had written a letter saying he wanted the church to continue in its plans and construction. Following the reading of his letter at this meeting, talk began about "securing another pastor, a permanent one, or a temporary one to serve until Reverend Cox's health permitted him to return to the pulpit."²

In 1947, Reverend Cox was replaced by Reverend Chester Ham. Cox remained in the position of associate minister in charge of construction until September of 1948. Following the Annual Conference in June the following year, he left both the Willow Glen Church and the ministry and became Dean of Boys at the Pala School in east San Jose.

The cornerstone-laying ceremonies were held Friday, August 6, 1948, at seven o'clock p.m. for the new \$135,000 church. The ceremonies were the start of a city-wide fund-raising drive. Donald H. Tippet, the bishop, laid the stone. Reverend Chester W. Ham, pastor, and Reverend Ezelle C. Cox, former pastor, and Reverend R.E. Wilson, the San Jose District Superintendent, were also present.³

The cornerstone contained a Bible, a list of church officers, a list of the members of the building committee, and other documents. The cornerstone ceremony procession started at the church social hall and included Methodist officials, church

leaders, the choir, and the Boy Scouts of Troop 25. Following the outdoor ceremonies were a fellowship dinner featuring an address by Bishop Tippet, a gospel hymn sing, selections by a women's chorus, with the Reverend Ham as M.C.⁴

A long fund-raising drive began to earn the seventy-five thousand dollars still needed to make the property debt-free. Four hundred members were attending the Sunday services in the church social hall at this time since it had been dedicated the previous spring.⁵ A sheet requesting building fund pledges reminded parishioners that "for fifty years this church was the only church in Willow Glen." An article appearing in the Mercury News stated that the theme of the building fund drive was "Methodist in Name, but Community-Wide in Service."⁶

Reverend Ham told the Fourth Quarterly Conference on May 10, 1949, that finishing the sanctuary would cost \$27,084. The church property was mortgaged, and a building fund drive held.

The hard work and goodwill of the church members finally paid off, and on January 28, 1951, the first worship service was held in the new sanctuary. Cash donations amounted to \$99,000. At this time membership was at four hundred and sixty-one.

The dedication service held Sunday, February 18, 1951, was covered in the Recorder Times. The Times stated "Bishop Donald H. Tippet of the California-Nevada Conference held the opening ceremonies. The Reverend Chester W. Ham held services."⁷

The new Minnesota church contained sixteen classrooms, a recreational hall, a ladies' parlor, a kitchen, a patio, a chapel, and, of course, the sanctuary.

The church did well in its new location as Reverend Ham stated in his ministerial report for June 1951 when he wrote:

We have finished the church. We are achieving a reputation in the community as an effective church -- the beauty and worship values of our new sanctuary are impressing us more and more each Sunday with the fact that life contains more than that which can be comprehended only by the senses. We have received seventy-four new members this year. Our membership now totals four hundred and sixty-one of which three hundred and ninety-four are in the active category.⁸

The church prospered as the baby boomers added to its size. In January 1953, the Sunday School attendance was two hundred, and membership was at five hundred and sixty-eight. One hundred and seven new members had joined in only one and a half years.

In 1956 the pastor was Wesley Janzen. When he died in 1958, Reverend Ronald White was appointed. Ralph Fellersen became pastor in 1963. By 1964, membership had reached nine hundred and fifty.

Fire In Church Sanctuary

In the 1960's, the church owned some property on Meridian Avenue by Dry Creek Road. Once again it was decided to change the location of the church. A building fund drive was started and new plans begun. In the midst of this, before construction had started, a fire damaged the Minnesota church. The fire occurred after service one Sunday in 1966. It was started when a burning candle was left under a pulpit, most likely by an arsonist, as churches often are the target for arson.

After much consideration and serious thinking, it was decided to repair, remodel, and renovate the church on Minnesota rather than build a new church on Meridian. The whole church worked together on weekends and evenings as everyone worked to repair the fire-damaged Minnesota church. In the meantime, church services were held in the church social hall until the sanctuary could be repaired.

The majority of the damage was not caused by the fire, but by water damage and smoke that resulted from the fire. The sanctuary was remodeled and the offices were enlarged. These improvements probably would not have been made if there had not been a fire. The tragedy really pulled the people of the church together as misfortune often does. The Meridian Avenue property was sold when the repairs made on the Minnesota church were finally completed.

The Church in the 1970s

Wayne E. Williams became pastor of the church in 1973. While he was pastor, a Victorian house on church property on Newport was moved to make space for a parking lot.

The church grounds today include a unique property called Woodhaven which was purchased when the Meridian Avenue property was sold. Woodhaven is a two-story Normandy French-style house, with beautiful grounds and a carriage house with living quarters above it. It is made primarily of brick and redwood and is located next to the church on Minnesota.

Woodhaven is an enchanting place enjoyed by all the church's members and also used by various community service groups. A large, multi-paned window in a rock wall and tile settings containing early California history scenes add to its charm. Its grounds contain an elaborate garden with waterfall and ponds, now empty for the safety of the children who play there.

Woodhaven has not always belonged to the church, however. It was originally built as a house for the Oliver family in 1937. A plaque on the outside of Woodhaven lists those who contributed to the house building and their jobs. Tragically, in 1973, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver were killed when their cruise ship went down. The church purchased the building after this, and it is now used for meetings and social events. Many weddings are also held in the garden area of Woodhaven.

One of the things that makes the church so attractive are its many stained glass windows. There are some at the church today which were brought from the former church on Lincoln Avenue. The stained glass windows on either side of the sanctuary were actually made of plastic because it was less

expensive. It is impossible to tell, however, and they are just as beautiful as they would have been had they been made of glass. These windows were designed by Vance Smart. People of the church helped with making the windows.

The Church Today

In July of 1988 the Reverend R. Lee Hayward became pastor and still holds this position today. The church membership as reported November 14, 1990, was seven hundred and seven. Worship attendance for Easter Sunday was two hundred and seventy-nine at the 10:30 a.m. service, and one hundred and seventy-eight at the 8:30 a.m. service. Sunday School attendance for March 31, 1991, was forty-two.

The church has an active senior center as well as many adult fellowship groups such as T.G.I.F. and Primetime. The youth group, Sunday Night Live, has a regular attendance of about fifteen youth. The church-operated nursery school on the grounds has an excellent reputation and classes filled to capacity. A Boy Scout Troop meets at the church each Thursday evening and participates in church services every year on Boy Scout Sunday.

The choir at the church is large and active. From time to time, the choir visits convalescent homes. In recent years they have presented monthly singing services on Sundays at these convalescent homes.

The church celebrated its one hundredth anniversary a few years ago. The members of the church are very excited about the programs the church offers and the community services it is involved in such as serving meals at the San Jose Family Shelter and participating in FISH. The church also sponsors missionaries and recently sent one member, Mrs. Ruby Goodnight, to Bolivia.

For many years the Founder's Day Parade has been held each September in Willow Glen. The race that is part of the festivities goes past the church. Last year, the church decided to give out water in front of the church to the passing runners

as well as having a booth on Lincoln Avenue to inform the community about the church. These recruiting activities resulted in many new members.

The church is a beautiful building on lovely grounds with wonderful properties, all made possible by its dedicated members. Willow Glen United Methodist Church has been a unique and vital part of the community since its inception, and its contributions continue on both a local and an international level.

Notes

1. Don Buell's and Joyce Osborn's seventh grade Sunday School class, The Church in the Willows, 1965, p.7.
2. Ibid.
3. San Jose Mercury News, August 1, 1948.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. San Jose Mercury News, August 6, 1948.
7. Recorder Times, February 22, 1951, San Jose, CA, Volume 2, No. 51.
8. Buell, Op. Cit., p.8.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arbuckle, Clyde, Clyde Arbuckle's History of San Jose, San Jose: Smith McKay Printing Co., Inc., 1986.

Buell, Don, and Joyce Osborn's seventh grade Sunday School class, The Church in the Willows, Willow Glen, 1965.

Giarratana, Elizabeth, Old Willow Glen, Sunnyvale: Consolidated Publications, Inc., 1977.

Recorder Times, February 22, 1951, San Jose, CA, Vol. 2, No. 51.

San Jose Mercury News, August 1, 1948.

San Jose Mercury News, August 6, 1948.

Schlosser, Peggy, private interview held on Sunday, April 6, 1991 in San Jose, CA.

Willow Glen United Methodist Church Annual Report, November 14, 1990.

Eileen Peters
of
Willow Glen High School
at
Willow Glen Educational Park
Advisor: Mrs. Kathryn Philp