

Once Upon A Time in North Park

Plymouth Church

by Joan Campbell

Plymouth Congregational Church, at the corner of Pershing Avenue and University, is one of North Park's well known churches.

In 1908 a neighborhood Sunday school was established at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dick at 3755 Villa Terrace. As attendance grew, the Reverend Henry Miller started Sunday afternoon services in 1911. The next year, a small place of worship was erected on 28th Street near Wightman and incorporated on March 15, 1912. as "Park Villas Congregational Church of San Diego".

George Marston gave several lots on University Avenue to the Church and in 1922, plans were made to build a building with one room to be reserved for a branch library. The First Congregational Church at Sixth and A Streets and the Southern California Conference loaned money for the building. The congregation voted to change the name of the church to the "Plymouth Center of the First Congregational Church - the Community Church". This was accomplished on July 17, 1922. Between 1923 and 1927, George Marston paid off the major part of the \$6,500 loaned by the Conference and First Church canceled their loan.

A new social hall, Barbour Hall, and a new office building were built in 1956. In 1962, the church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. During this time the land to the south was purchased, where a one-story Sunday school unit was built and dedicated in 1967.

In 1960, the congregation instructed the Board of Trustees to consider whether it would be to the church's advantage to remain where it was, move to a new location or to rebuild. The results were presented to the congregation: it would be "Wasted money" (\$250-\$500) to have a professional survey made concerning moving. Remodeling would be "face lifting", with the minimum estimated at \$9,900. The likelihood was that more problems would be discovered during remodeling. Termite damage was also a problem in the structure.

The recommended alternative was to rebuild. partly on the basis that to buy land elsewhere in North Park and to build upon it would cost about the same as rebuilding (\$70,000) after investing in the land and materials the money that could be realized from selling the property on University/Pershing.

The congregation decided to rebuild. This included rebuilding the Sunday school structure to make it two stories, which would be the second phase of the project.

The next several years were taken up with fund-raising efforts of every kind. A contract was signed with the San Diego County Council of Churches: if the Council would raise \$20,000 for Plymouth Congregational, they would receive 6% of the money. A "new church" contract was signed in 1966. Twelve years of effort and fund-raising passed and the new church was finally ready for use. The dedication ceremony was on November 19, 1978.

Through the years, the church has had many groups formed within its congregation, reflecting the changing needs of the times. There was the Kupples Klub (1958-1964), Candlelighter (1956-1985), whose aim and object... "shall be to assist in the spiritual, social and financial life of the church". There was the Plymouth Club (1939-?), the Widows' Club (1952-1968), which was responsible for selling coffee during the social hour after church, the Women's Guild (1951-1958?), the Plymouth Circle (1960-1984). Some meetings, such as those of the Kupples Klub, were ice cream socials, card parties, or picnics. There was also a canasta club and a bridge club.

In addition to the meetings of church sponsored or organized clubs, Barbour Hall was host to meetings of some twenty-six local groups over the period from pre-war to post war. Included were the Howard Circle of Ladies of the G.A.R., the 1915 Club, Main Society, Railway Express Clerks, among others. Interestingly, the first meetings of the North Park Development Association were held in the hall in 1969-1971. Unfortunately, further information about these organizations is not in the church files.

The church has been active in missionary work both in the US and abroad. Friendship School Bags were sent to Mexican Children in 1929 and Dolls of Friendship to Japan. Small metal Friendship Chests "lithographed in eleven colors" and containing games, puzzles, paper dolls, handkerchiefs, and beads were sent to children of the Philippines as part of what was apparently a nationwide effort. Contributions were sent to missions abroad and in the U.S. and this involvement in good works and helping others continues to this day. During the eighties, the church sponsored a group of Marshall Islanders, and later a Vietnamese family. The church is a member, along with other North Park churches, of the North Park Christina Agency. It also works with other local missions.

Until three years ago, Plymouth Church was aligned with the United Church of Christ, which was founded in 1957. The church also merged with the Congregational Church and Reformed Church of America. Plymouth was aligned with both organizations for years, but found it difficult to pay dues to both, and resigned from the United Church of Christ.

Plymouth Church also continues its tradition of being very active in the community of North Park. The Head Start program uses the Sunday school unit during the week. The Fall Fair is often held on the same day as the North Park Toyland Parade. Large community meetings are frequently held in Barbour Hall and many of us go to the polls there to vote on Election Day. The church has been a valued and respected member of the North Park community for eighty-six years.