

# Old Church Structures

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Solano County has many old and revered churches. No one (or two, or three or more) columns could justly describe all of them. Some of these churches still serve large and growing congregations; some simply stand as markers of a gracious era a full century ago.

One of the churches little known to Vallejoans or to many county residents, either—is Shiloh Church. We believe this church is entitled to a California State Historical Marker. It is located on Shiloh Road, midway between Denverton and Birds Landing. This would be a pleasant Sunday afternoon trip—take the Rio Vista Road out of Suisun City, and turn right at Denverton.

We are indebted to Mrs. Edward L. Jenkins of Birds Landing, a member of the Solano County Historical Society, for some of the information on the early days of this Shiloh Church. An earlier structure was established in 1876 as the Cumberland Presbyterian congregation, and the first ministers were the Revs. Bushnell and Crawford. Shortly thereafter, on a Christmas Eve, the church burned. The present church was built a few years later. These early Solano pioneers were devout worshippers: they hitched a span of horses to their spring wagon, loaded their families into the vehicle and drove many miles to attend meetings—in all kinds of weather! Many early pioneer names are connected with Shiloh Church. Sunday School teachers included Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Bullard; John Bird served as clerk during the '70s. Early trustees included G. N. Daniels, J. B. Carrington and James Blacklock. A quaint old cemetery surrounds Shiloh Church, and many old timers of Solano County have their final resting place here. Like Tremont Church and the Rockville Church, Shiloh stands as a monument to the past.

## TREMONT AND ROCKVILLE

The old Tremont Church was built in 1871 by early settlers in this county. It is located some five miles southeast of Dixon, on the site of what was once the town of Tremont. Mrs. Lillian Rowe of Davis is the able historian of this quaint church and has spoken to the Historical Society and other groups on its interesting history, including the origin of the "Mite Society" here. Her husband, John O. Rowe, is a son of one of the founders of the church. Tremont Township was established by the Board of Supervisors on Aug. 11, 1855. Legend has it that Manuel Vaca, who gave his name to the City of Vacaville, and grantee of the Los Potos Rancho from the Mexican Government in 1841, is buried in an unmarked grave in the cemetery which surrounds Tremont Church.

The Rockville Chapel was built in 1856 by the Methodist Episcopal Church South with volunteer labor and donated funds from the pioneers. The site was supplied by Landy and Sarah Alford. The church deteriorated with disuse following the Civil War and in 1929 was deeded by the church to the Rockville Public Cemetery District. Through help from the district and the WPA, the chapel was restored by 1940 and is frequently used at the present time by the Solano County Historical Society. Wood Young of Suisun Valley has compiled the full history of this chapel.

## **VALLEJO'S EARLY CHURCHES**

In mid-fifties, through the enthusiasm and energy of Mrs. David G. Farragut, wife of the first Mare Island Commandant, the Methodists built their church on the site of what is now Staats and Bell Furniture Store.

Earlier Catholic churches were located in South Vallejo and one in North Vallejo on a site later occupied by the Horan Feed and Fuel Co., opposite the City Hall on Marin Street. The foundation for the present St. Vincent's Church was begun in April 1867, under the direction of the Rev. Father John L. Daniel, O.P., and the cornerstone was laid in August of that year.

The present Ascension Episcopal Church on Georgia Street was organized in August of 1867 by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Kip and meetings were first held in the old Masonic Temple. The present structure was under consideration all during 1868, and the first service was held in it on Sunday, May 16, 1869, with the Rev. Mr. Treadway as preacher.

The First Presbyterian Church was organized in October of 1862, and the first building erected and dedicated on Nov. 5, 1865, by the Rev. S. Woodbridge.

## **BENICIA**

Here is California State Marker No. 175, "Site of the First Protestant Church in Benicia," referring to the Presbyterian Church organized on April 15, 1849. It was disbanded in 1875. The site is now part of the Benicia City Park.

Old St. Paul's Episcopal Church was organized in Benicia in 1852, but prior to the completion of the structure which still stands at 1st and J streets, the early Episcopalians asked for and received permission to hold services on the second floor of the State Capitol. Benicia's enthusiastic historian, Stephen DeBenedetti, showed me the handwritten copy of the permission, signed by Chief of the Assembly, L. Strebbins.

In the early '50s Benicia had St. Dominic's Monastery, but the building has long since

disappeared. The present St. Dominic's Catholic Church was built in 1887. In the year 1852 St. Catherine's Convent was moved from Monterey to Benicia. This century-old structure still stands, but today is used only as a residence hall.

Other Solano cities have their cherished heritages of pioneer houses of worship. This is an interesting task, but unending.

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