

# Santa Cruz Yesterdays



**OLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 1892-1938**

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Although Presbyterians played an important part in forming the first Protestant church here in 1857—the First Congregational, it was not until 32 years later that the community's first church of the Presbyterian denomination was organized.

On June 2, 1889, the first Presbyterian service was held in the main hall of the new Y.M.C.A. building, which had been completed the year before. The service was called by Rev. F. D. Seward, who was the Synodical missionary at the time. Sent here by the San Jose Presbytery.

Services continued each Sunday. Wednesday evening, June 5, the first prayer meeting was held; June 9 was the first Sunday school. On June 20 the first women's meeting took place and with the aid of visiting ladies from San Francisco, a Ladies' Aid society was formed.

On June 30 the church was duly organized by authority of the Presbytery of San Jose. Thirty people were received and became its charter members. A month later a call was extended to Rev. S. A. Cornelius of Phillipsburg, Pa., who started his leadership in December, as first local minister.

By the time his successor, Rev. Jacob Boyd Andrews came late in September, 1891, church was being held in Masonic hall.

#### Buy Unity Hall

Several months later the Presbytery bought, for \$1000, an un-

used church building on Walnut avenue, moved it down Pacific avenue to the southeast corner of Cathcart street and there established their own church home. The structure had already had a varied career. Built in 1868 by members of the Grover family and dedicated to worship for the "Unity Spiritual" faith, it had become known as Unity hall. It was quite a pretentious building for those days. The location was at the present site of Wilson Brothers' offices and adjoining parking lot, back of the Santa Cruz theater.

Unity hall had flourished until the late seventies, then languished. The building came to be used for different events and its religious character all but disappeared. The Universalists, and also the Church of the Blessed Hope (now Advent Christian) had used it, before it came into various other activities, amusements and even dancing.

#### Forced Sunday Moving

Moving of the building had to be done on a Sunday. It was then or not at all, by decision of the Telegraph company, whose wires had to be cut. But it was accomplished, and the Presbyterian folk took up their church life in a historic building with a career quite at variance to its own theological background. In 1903 it was remodeled within, and following the earthquake of 1906, it was much enlarged and modernized.

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