

# Churches once a Santa Cruz attraction

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SANTA CRUZ  
*Historic Perspective*

## In early 1900s, tourists were churchgoers

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The evolution of Protestant denominations in Santa Cruz seemed to follow the pattern of the Pilgrim churches.

The Pilgrims were composed of several denominations, the majority being Separatists, followed by the Puritans, with a minority of Anglicans. Miles Standish was the sole Catholic.

On the Mayflower, fears that one group might dominate the others led to a Town Hall system of government where all ideas could be voiced, all the men had a vote, and no state religion could be imposed. Thus originated American democracy.

That democracy extended to the church, where all Pilgrim denominations worshiped together. Soon they each built their own churches, with the Separatists becoming Congregationalists, the Anglicans becoming Episcopalians, and the Puri-



Community activists saved the 1864 Calvary Episcopal Church from being demolished, and now it is the oldest church in Santa Cruz.

FROM THE COLLECTION OF ROSS ERIC GIBSON

tans forerunners of Fundamentalism.

It was a similar pattern as Protestant churches were established in Santa Cruz. Originally all Protestants worshiped together in the 1850 Methodist Church at Mission and Green streets. As the population grew, the congregation pooled their funds and voted on which denomination to make each subse-

quent church.

The Congregational Church was built in 1857 where the Sentinel parking lot is today, giving the name "Church Street" to that road. Yet never more than one church at a time has graced that street.

Pioneers viewed the number of churches as a measure of a community's civilization. Groundbreakings of most pre-

1915 churches were attended by clergy representing Catholic and Protestant denominations, sometimes including Jewish leaders.

In 1861, New Yorker and Episcopalian Eliza Bull, who came to Santa Cruz to improve her frail health, married Joseph Boston in the Congregational Church. The Episcopalians organized in 1862, worshipping in

meeting halls until Eliza pushed to get a church built, and the Bostons donated 1 1/3 acre of their farm, on the southeast corner of Lincoln and Center streets. Here in 1864 they built their church, after plans by New York architect Richard Upjohn, in the Gothic style of an English parish church. A belfry was added in 1874.

See *HISTORY*, Page 28



# Santa Cruz's era of historic churches ended in 1950s

## ■ HISTORY from Page 1B

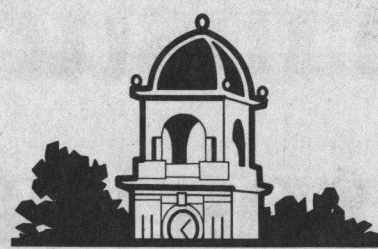
In 1867, at the corner of Lincoln Street and Pacific Avenue, the Young Ladies Seminary met during the week at Pioda Hall, and Jewish services were held on the weekend.

Behind Pioda Hall, at the northeast corner of Lincoln and Cedar streets, the Stick-Style 1868 Unity Church was constructed, then sold in 1881 to the Seventh-day Adventists. But after a schism, a rival Adventist church was built on Elm Street in 1884. It was an octagonal structure named Blessed Hope.

The African Methodist-Episcopal church met upstairs in the Farmers Exchange at Pacific and Soquel avenues. In 1884, the German Methodist church was built on Washington Street near Lincoln, and held German language services until World War I. After that, the building became Salvation Army headquarters, and is today a dance studio.

The Baptist Church organized in Santa Cruz in 1858 and built a beautiful church in 1867 at Mission and Locust streets. It was a major event in 1887 when the building was moved downhill to Center and Walnut streets. In 1890, the Methodists moved into the old Congregational Church on Church Street, and a new Congregational Church was built on Center Street opposite the Episcopal Church, in a Romanesque design by Warren Hayes. In 1891 the Adventists reunited in Blessed Hope Church, and the Presbyterians bought their old church and moved it to Cathcart Street and Pacific.

In 1894, Pioda Hall was moved to Center and Lincoln streets, where it served as a school and weekend synagogue. Then the Christian Church bought the site in 1898 and moved Pioda Hall back, to build a colonial shingle-style church on the corner. In 1902, All Souls Unitarian was built south of the Congregational Church, which



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Many of the denominations moved to the neighborhoods starting in the 1950s, and landmarks were demolished one after the other.

today, with an added steeple, is the Missionary Baptist Church.

By now the junction of Lincoln and Center streets became known as Churchside, a community of churches in a rural park-like setting. This prominent concentration of churches was attractive to the tourist economy, at a time when tourists attended church on vacation, and frequented the area's many religious retreats. The forested lot behind the Congregational Church, now known as Lincoln Court, began as a non-denominational religious campground serving Churchside.

Starting in the 1950s, many of the churches disappeared into the neighborhoods, demolishing their old Churchside landmarks one after the other. Calvary Episcopal was ready to follow suit in the late 1960s, when it encountered strong opposition,



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Three landmarks in the Churchside area of Santa Cruz, above, were the 1867 Baptist Church, left, the 1890 Congregational Church, center, and the 1864 Calvary Episcopal Church. The map, right, shows the location of landmark churches.

not only from its members, but from the community at large. Some brought cautionary tales of losing high-profile landmark churches, only to see then replaced with cinder-block churches resembling motels or supermarkets.

The Episcopal Church was saved and awarded a bronze plaque in 1972 by the California Heritage Council. It is now the oldest church building left in Santa Cruz.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.

