

# Santa Cruz Yesterdays



**GARFIELD PARK TABERNACLE, 1890-1935**

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Long before Sunday School was dismissed on the morning of August 31, 1890, carriages could be seen coming in from every direction, bearing people who were bent on attending the dedication of the Christian Church Tabernacle. Hacks operating from downtown were bringing others at half-hour intervals. The electric cars had not yet come to Garfield Park.

It was a big day. The 1500 available seats in the large auditorium were occupied when the main services were opened by E. B. Ware, who invited the congregation to join in the singing. The 25-voice choir toned the anthem, "Sing, O Earth, the Glorious 'Morning.'" Main sermon was by President J. C. Keith of College City.

## Local Men Gave Land

Rev. L. B. Wilkes of Stockton told of the raising of necessary funds to build the tabernacle and how the land was generously donated by Messrs. Hihn, Robinson, Bushnell, King and Hinds. Numerous other contributors of funds and other gifts were thanked publicly. Rev. T. D. Garvin of Santa Barbara offered the dedicatory prayer.

The state convention of Christian Churches thereafter met annually in their \$15,000 edifice for many years.

The large structure had been started early in April. It was built octagonal in shape from plans by Damkroger and Saunders. R. R.

Bixby had the contract for the building; L. L. Evans for the stone work.

On the north end of the tabernacle was a plain front, while the south end of the building was crowned with a tower about 100 feet in height, facing Garfield (now Woodrow) avenue. From front to rear was 111 feet; side to side at the widest point 100 feet. There were three equal sides on the east and west, each of 34 feet, connecting at both ends with the two entrances.

## Had 40-Foot Ceiling

Devoted almost entirely to a large auditorium, the interior with its 40-foot ceiling, was noted for the fact that the seating was so arranged that the rostrum could be easily viewed from any angle. The gallery had four tiers of seats with a capacity of 400. Under the pulpit was a baptistry. A series of broad glass doors, or windows, opened from the main floor, for ventilation.

The two main entrances were under the tower, where from the first floor, two staircases led to the gallery. A large tower room on the gallery floor was designed for use by the directors of the association. From the high tower a grand view of the ocean and surrounding country could be had.

Only a few months previously this entire area had been cow pastures, but now the great Tabernacle, with the greatest seating capacity of any building here for

years, was rung by the famous Garfield Park "Circles," each named for some prominent worker in the Christian church. Cottages were springing up throughout the area.

Ironically, in the same month just 45 years later (Aug. 5, 1935), early on a Monday morning, the great structure fell prey to flames. Flames that rose 200 feet in the air and burned rapidly, completely destroying the main building and by intense heat endangering nearby homes.

Building and wiring had been examined only two days before and declared "O.K."