

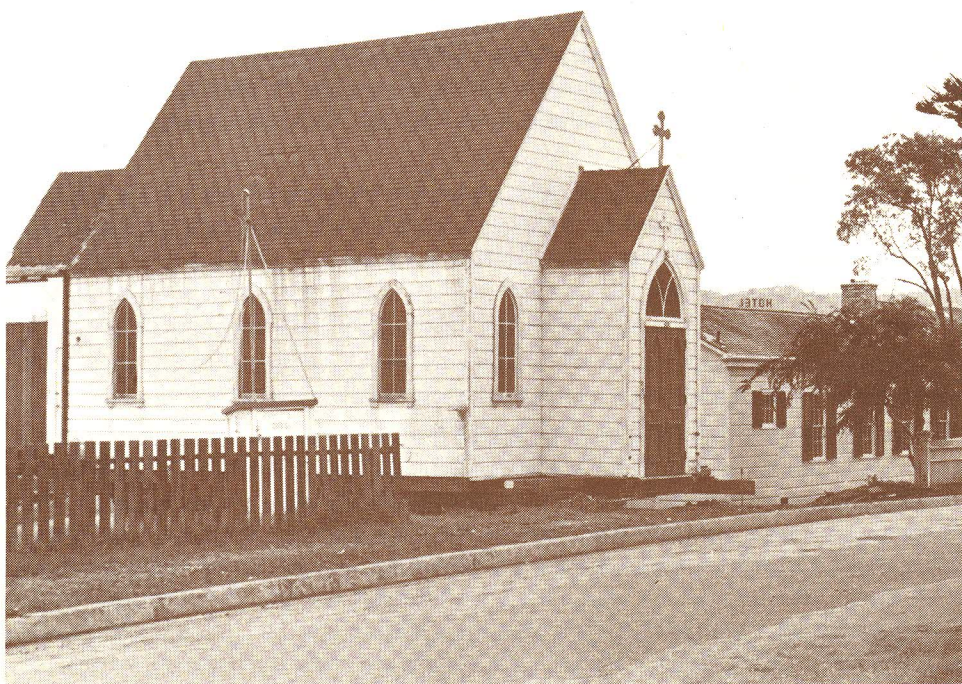
NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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St. James Church and its Builder



The old St. James church building resting on temporary supports after its move from Pacific to Van Buren street. The Doud House to the right, under restoration.

(courtesy Monterey Peninsula Herald)

St. James church and its builder

"My first service at Monterey was given in the dance hall of the old Washington Hotel on March 14, 1875 to a congregation of forty souls. At my next three appointments I had no congregation but I still continued the appointments and soon the service became an established fact". The zeal and determination of Rev. J. S. McGowan is epitomized in these lines of his memoirs. Three times he came to Monterey and "had no congregation" but still he came, and within just three years he stood beside Bishop Kip as a completed small church was blessed and dedicated to the glory of God on the sloping hill above the old town.

The little building has survived fire, pillage, and at times neglect during the years, and now is embarking on a new career — that of housing a library of Californiana under the ownership of the Monterey History and Art Association. It will have its doors open for inspection during the Bicentennial this coming summer although restoration will not be complete. Moved away from the path of Urban renewal, it will stand on Van Buren street next to the old Doud house. This time it will face west instead of east, and its rear sanctuary window will look out across the great bay of Monterey.

It is thus fitting that we compile a short review of the life and work of the remarkable Episcopal priest who led the construction of this — the first protestant church in Monterey; and also that we trace the development of the church.

Rev. James S. McGowan, Irish born, came to California from Platteville, Wisconsin in July of 1873, reaching his brother's home in Watsonville. There one of the first bits of local news he learned was that there had been a lynching in Monterey a few days previously. "This gave me a little shock, since I thought that I had come to a civilized state", he wrote in his diary.

His first pastorate was in Castroville and then he began services in Salinas. Rail fare took a disproportionate amount from the pockets of the struggling minister and several times he walked the railroad tracks from Castroville to Salinas — about twenty miles — to keep his promise of services.

Within not too many months St. Paul's church was under construction in Salinas, and before its consecration he turned to Monterey and started another congregation. He drove the twenty miles to Monterey after holding morning service in Salinas.

At one of the local services a Dr. Parker from Oakland told Rev. McGowan Mrs. Parker would donate fifty dollars if a little church was built in Monterey. This offer the good Rev. believed was providential. A subscription was started. Local residents, Catholic and Protestant alike, gave \$399.50. Donors included Thomas Abrego of the Abrego adobe, David Jacks the large land holder, S. B. Goron — owner of the frame house on Pierce street, Alberto Trescony who owned the Washington Hotel, Francis Doud, Milton Little who owned many acres in New Monterey, William and Ed Hatton of the Hatton ranch of Carmel Valley, Bradley Sargent — grandfather of many now living in the area, Ed Berwick of Berwick orchards in Carmel Valley — and friend of Robert Louis Stevenson, and others.

A festival was arranged by the ladies of Monterey and sufficient funds raised to purchase the lot for \$175.00. Solicitation among friends and groups in the San Francisco

area raised \$600.00. The church was finally completed at a total cost of about \$1200.00

Several years later the good minister became ill. One day he left his sick bed in his Salinas home to baptise the children of Claude Smith of Jolon in southern Monterey county. They had traveled some eighty miles to have the children baptised. Mr. Smith asked Rev. McGowan to visit them in the Jolon valley where he was sure the good air would improve the priest's health. McGowan accepted, and immediately began holding services in the Jolon school house. He was officially transferred to that area and took up a homestead claim of government land. While his house was being built the family camped under a large oak tree for three months.

McGowan then raised funds for two more churches — one for Jolon and one for San Miguel. He always used the same plan as established by St. Paul's in Salinas and St. James in Monterey. When these new churches were ready for consecration in 1885 Rev. McGowan met Bishop Kip at Soledad (which was then the end of the railroad) and they drove the fifty miles to Jolon.

Two years later as the railroad line was extended and King City began to develop McGowan started another congregation and church, that of St. Mark's. He also had a congregation in San Lucas, and San Miguel.

Roads at that time were often but cowpaths, and bridges nonexistent over most rivers. He had to cross the San Antonio river twice, the Nacimiento once, and also the Salinas river in making his journeys between Jolon, San Miguel and King City. A new crossing had to be made after each freshet from rain. It was dusk one evening when he came to the Salinas river. When he drove the horse in at the accustomed place he went down in quick sands. He threw himself on his side so that he had a broader base to rest upon.

"I at once divested myself of clothing and tramped the sands so they might sink and while the water washed over the horse's body, I unharnessed him, lifted one wheel of the buggy at a time — pulled it back from the horse, and tramped a solid foundation for him to rise upon. Dick (his horse) had been quiet all the time, waiting for his master to bring him some aid. I said 'Get up, Dick,' and true to the command, he was soon on his feet.

"With my clothing tied upon my shoulders by my suspenders, I tramped a path across the river and I and my good horse were safe but very much chilled. Well, we cannot always have our way and go to Heaven on beds of ease and roses."

Another time a seven day rain took out two spans of the new bridge across the Salinas near King City, and McGowan was forced to ride in a dry goods box pulled by a rope a distance of over one hundred yards suspended in midair, while an angry torrent rolled below.

When the three churches of Jolon, King City and San Miguel were built Rev. McGowan was called back to St. Paul's in Salinas and served there two years before he went on to a new field in the Sierras — Christ Church at Fresno Flats, and St. Thomas at Raymond near Yosemite Valley.

Thus this dedicated man developed all the above congregations and actually saw

them installed in church homes between the years of 1873 and 1894.

As the years took their toll Rev. McGowan returned to Monterey and for a while served again at St. James. In May of 1913 the local paper reported his death at the age of 82, and he is buried in the Monterey cemetery.

Rev. McGowan's son, Dr. James A. McGowan was a well known doctor of Monterey. His great-grandson, James Louis McGowan, died in Hawaii in 1951 while serving in the navy, and his body was returned to Monterey for burial here.

Returning to the development of St. James church, we must mention previous attempts to start a church by those of protestant belief.

We remind our readers of the services held in Colton Hall by Rev. Walter Colton, and Rev. Willey during the first years of American occupation and the Constitutional Convention. We believe that Rev. Willey was also planning for a while to establish a Congregational church here, as we found in the Bancroft Library the record in Larkin's papers of the sale on Feb. 27, 1850 of a lot on Larkin Street from Thomas O. Larkin to "Samuel H. Willey, Milton Little and James McKinley, as Trustees to hold the following hereinafter described property for and in behalf of the First Congregational Society hereafter to be formed in the said town of Monterey".

The State government was moved away from Monterey in 1850 and with it went most of the families that could have supported a protestant faith.

The first Episcopal services of which we have record in Monterey were in 1854. Bishop Kip wrote in his records of July 30, 1854, "On Sunday morning for our service we had the courtroom in Colton Hall, the room in which the convention which adopted the first constitution of the State held its meetings.

"The congregation numbered about 60 and at the Holy Communion four came forward some of whom had not for a long time enjoyed this privilege.

"In the afternoon the attendance was much larger as many of the Spanish ladies came in to witness the services though unacquainted with the language. After the second lesson I baptised five children.

"In the early part of the week I visited many of the Americans. They all expressed themselves as anxious to have the services of the church, but they were too few in number to take any steps toward this, nor is there any reason to suppose that Monterey will increase or strengthen its American population. In fact since my visit it has diminished, and the removal of Mrs. Boston's family has taken away the only one of any influence."

The Boston family mentioned by Bishop Kip was that of Mrs. Joseph Boston Sr., her sisters and their family group. Mrs. Boston's son, Joseph Jr. came to Monterey in 1848 on a troop transport as a civilian employee, and opened a general store in the small adobe still standing behind the Pacific Building which we now term Casa de Oro. The following year his cousin E. L. Williams joined him, and soon Mrs. Boston senior came with her two daughters; her sister, the mother of young Williams; her unmarried sister

Anna M. Wells; and another nephew, Charles Williams. The family had a home up on the hill just above present Van Buren. When David Jacks first arrived in Monterey his first job was that of clerk for Boston, and he obtained a room to rent in the Boston home.

The 1850s brought financial ruin to some, and a decline of all commerce in the Monterey area. So the Boston family moved to Santa Cruz and prospered there, altho young Boston continued his local store into the 60s as a small branch.

Monterey then struggled along without a protestant church developing, but services were held, and attempts made to keep a group active under various ministers of various denominations. We have found a few records indicating protestant services. In 1859 a subscription was taken up for a "Camp Meeting" to which David Jacks and M. C. Ireland contributed as well as William Curtis and Simpson Conover, storekeepers. The following month a Rev. W. N. Smith opened an account at the local store. His purchases included a bedstead for \$9.00, six chairs for \$13.00, a broom, candles, ink, Chamber pot, shoe brush, and cups and saucers. His account evidently ended by the end of December.

Starting in January of 1862 a Rev. Gaffney charged items at Curtis and Conover until June 14th. He made no further charges, but his account was closed out in September "By Cash".

Rev. Nims appeared on the local scene at the end of that same year of 1862. His account at Curtis and Conover's opened Dec. 11, 1862 and ran until August 20 of 1863. Rev. Nims was evidently a family man as his charges included yardage and binding, as well as a Spanish and English dictionary, six singing books, a purse, and a toothbrush. His account shows no payment was made at all until it was closed in August "By Settlement".

We wonder if there was another subscription taken in Monterey to clear the good man's bill, or whether Curtis and Conover assumed the loss.

The month after Rev. Nims left, another minister, Rev. A. C. McDougall opened an account which ran from September 17 of 1863 to December of 1864, for a total of \$119.36. Rev. McDougall was also a family man, as his charges included ladies gaitors, and hose, as well as a grammar, copy book, powder, shot, washboard, etc. Payments on his account include credits listed as "By salary of Wm. Curtis \$30.00" and "By salary of S. Conover \$50.00".

Services of Rev. McDougall were held in the Court House in Monterey according to the local Monterey Gazette, and the paper stated that Rev. McDougall gave talks to other groups aside from regular church services.

We also know that during these years in which Monterey did not have a continuing protestant church there were Sunday school classes being held under the leadership of concerned residents. Some years ago Miss Margaret Jacks told us that her father had been most anxious to have a protestant church in Monterey, and to that end had helped by teaching Sunday school himself. One of his early pupils was the daughter of J. F. Romie. Maria Christina Soledad Romie was four years old when her family came to California from Mexico in 1841, and she married David Jacks in 1861, so we surmise her attendance in the Sunday school was in the 1850s and early 1860s when ministers came and went in Monterey.

The good Bishop Kip was slightly mistaken when he wrote in 1854 that there was no reason to suppose that Monterey would be able to support a church in the future, as the zealous Rev. McGowan came to Monterey and held services in 1873 in face of no attendance three times in a row.

In the fall of 1876 the church building was erected. By July 14th, 1878 the church building was ready for consecration which was performed by Bishop Kip assisted by Rev. McGowan, the Rev. D. O. Kelly and Chaplain Lang.

St. James was organized as a Mission in 1879 according to Canon Law of the Episcopal Church, and was admitted into union with the Convention.

The Rev. McGowan shepherded his flock and started the records of the church. His first baptism (in the Washington Hotel dance hall) was that of Protessa Amelia Smith and her sister Sarah Ellen Smith on April 11, 1875. The first baptism in the newly built church was on December 25, 1876. Again two sisters were baptised, Fanny Elizabeth Bostrom and Mary Agnes Bostrom.

The first marriage recorded was that of L. B. Gallaway and Mary Hamel on July 28, 1878 in the church. The next year Edward Grimes and Ellen Post from prominent families of the Big Sur area were married by Rev. McGowan on Christmas day at the home of Mr. Gragg. Their daughter, Ellen Grimes Peace now resides in Pacific Grove.

The little church continued to shelter its congregation and had many attenders of protestant belief throughout the years. Among the worshippers was Princess Louise of England. Rev. McGowan wrote of her "she came not with imposing retinue as England's representative, but as the subject of a kingdom higher than earth".

Then on Feb. 1, 1901 memorial services were held at St. James for Queen Victoria, the church being draped in royal purple and white. Crews from several English vessels in the harbor attended.

A disastrous fire swept the church New Year's day in 1951. Much of the building had to be rebuilt, and during repairs new additions were made in the rear and to one side for needed space. Finally the congregation swelled until the walls were figuratively bulging. A new edifice was constructed on High street. Today the official St. James church has for its rector the Rev. George Ridgeway, and his congregation includes many descendants of the original worshippers of "old St. James".

The little building was used for a while by other denominations until Urban Renewal came to Monterey and the building had to be removed. Urban Renewal, mindful of the historic background of the little church offered it to any group that would preserve it.

At the December meeting of the Board of Directors of the Monterey History and Art Association, Mr. Ted Durein handed a single dollar bill to Mr. John Sullivan of the Urban Renewal agency in full payment for the church building.

Soon old St. James will open its doors again, and the library to be established there will continue the development of the historical values of Monterey. It will be termed the Mayo Hayes O'Donnell library.

Bishop Kip wrote of the actual consecration of the building in 1878 — and we repeat it — "May its light spread and its life abound with good work".