



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NAPA

Gold Diggers, Pioneers, and Pastors

DID YOU KNOW?

1847: The City of Napa was founded and Napa's status became official when California became a state in 1850. Napa County was the second county to be drawn up in the new state Legislature.

1848: Beginning of California Gold Rush

1851: The first bridge over the Napa River was constructed, followed by a second one in 1860.

1851: Napa's first courthouse was constructed on the corner of Coombs and 2nd St. A second courthouse was built on the downtown plaza in 1856. In 1878, Napa City's third and current County Courthouse was built.

1858: The first telegraph line was run from Napa to Vallejo. It was extended to Calistoga in 1867.

1865: The first rail lines began, providing a link from the Napa River up to Calistoga, stopping along Napa's Main Street. The Civil War ends.

1868: Gas lamps were installed in Napa City—the first street light system.

1870s: Steamer travel along the Napa River increased. A traveler from San Francisco to Napa had his choice of ferries to take.

1873: The state began construction of the Napa Insane Asylum. It was renamed Napa State Hospital in 1924.

April, 1853: Rev. J. C. Herron was sent as a missionary from Philadelphia to Napa Valley by the Board of Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church. During the summer and fall of 1853 Mr. Herron preached regularly at different points in the valley, holding services in the old courthouse, that building then serving as a hall of justice, a jail and a church. The Presbyterian Church was organized January 19, 1855.

In 1858 the congregation wanted to introduce music into the service, but Rev. Herron opposed the idea as his branch of the church, the Cumberland branch, didn't allow it. Rev. Herron resigned. Nineteen years later, a story in the Napa Register about an organ concert held at the Presbyterian Church reads: "Wise and good men, no longer regard the use of an instrument as a sin, or think they are worshipping God by machinery, when they invoke the aid of the mighty organ in praising the ever-living Father."¹

During the winter of 1858 the first Presbyterian Church building was built on a lot on Third and Randolph which was given to the church by Nathan Coombs. There are no photos of this church, but the present church is on the same site.



May 16, 1858: Rev. P.V. Veeder, from Sacramento, was hired as pastor and he remained until July, 1865, when he moved to San Francisco to take charge of the City College.

Aug. 19, 1866: Rev. Richard Wylie began supplying the pulpit at First Presbyterian. He was installed as pastor one year later, a position he held for fifty-five years, except for two years

when his father James served as pastor while Richard was resting and travelling due to a serious health condition. (His two brothers, James, Jr. and John, died of tuberculosis at ages 30 and 23 respectively).

Sept. 27, 1867: From Richard Wylie's diary "I write by the light of the newly inserted gas. Quite an epoch, the advent of gas in this quiet little study. Rode in the afternoon with Bro. Fraser to Vallejo to attend meeting of Presbytery."

Sept. 21, 1867: From James Wylie's diary "Richard rode down with Rev. Thos. Fraser to Presbytery at Vallejo. I went in the steamboat as Bro. Hammond, retiring moderator did not attend. Bro. Fraser preached instead of him. Richard and I went out to Bro. Klink's. Had brown bread for tea. Had pain in stomach during evening and night. Very low bedstead, hard straw mattress, very cold night -lots of savage mosquitoes. Had to go to privy in the dark (no matches) between 3 and 4 A.M. Was persuaded to take a sleeping powder which put me out of sorts for 36 hours."



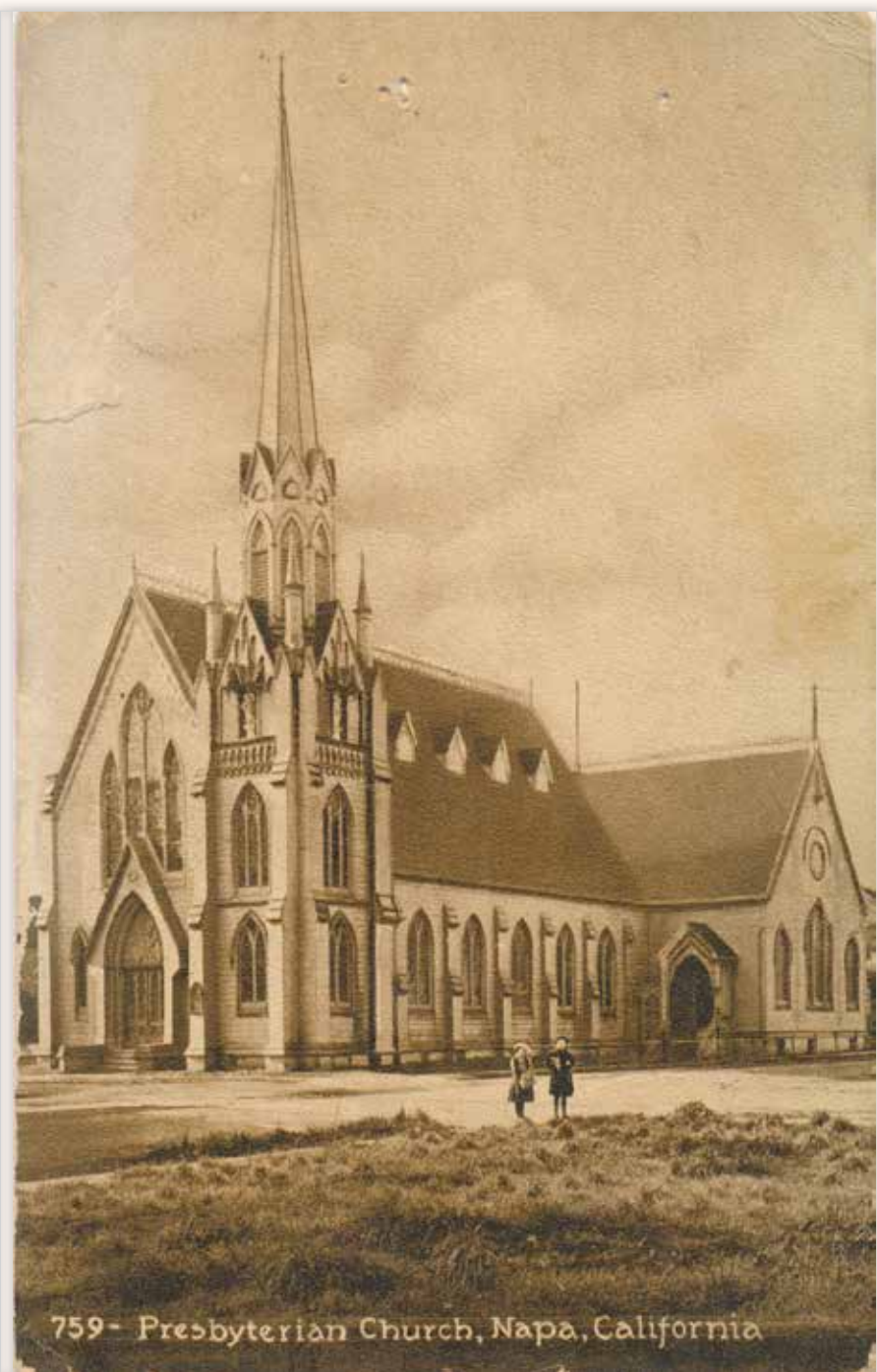
CREDITS & SOURCES

Photos courtesy of the Napa County Historical Society
1. Stone, Floyd. "Napa 125 Years Ago: 2000 Report"

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NAPA

Presbyterians Build Iconic Church

1874: The Victorian Gothic church was built at a cost of \$17,374. The architects were Daley & Eisen, and J.W. Batchelor of Vallejo was the builder. The original cornerstone, laid in 1854, was re-laid on August 20, 1874.



1880: Population of Napa City was 5,971

1883: Napa was one of the first cities in California to get telephone service. The first hookups numbered 18 residents.

1886: F.A. Sawyer opened Sawyer Tanning Co, introducing a new tanning process for leather.

1890: First electric lights switched on in Napa.

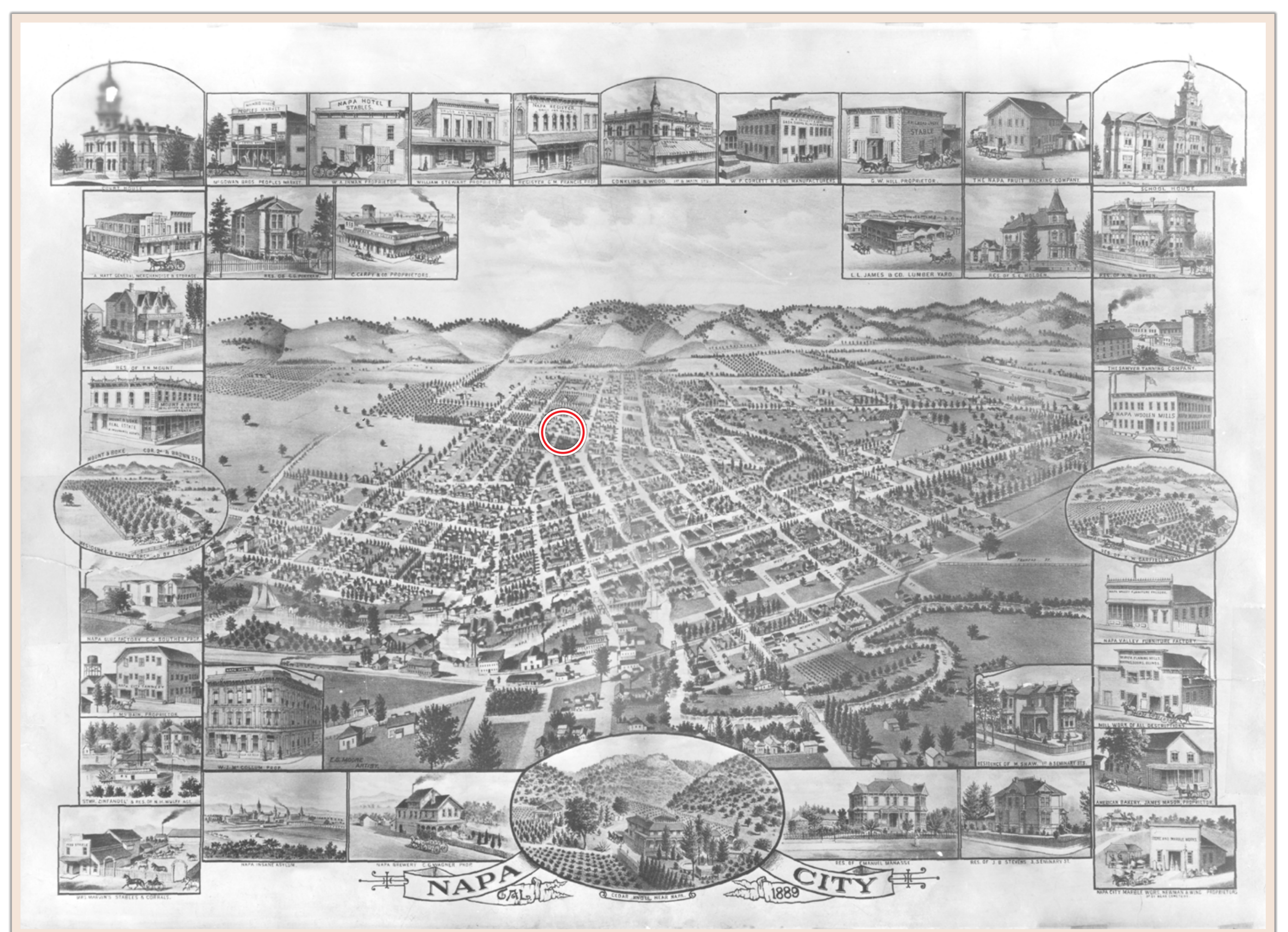
1901: The Goodman Library was built.



April 5, 1874: At a meeting of the members and congregation of the Presbyterian Church, at which R. Dudding presided, it was resolved to incorporate in accordance with the laws of the State, whereupon the following Board of Trustees were elected: W. C. S. Smith, David McClure, W. A. Fisher, David Emerson, G. M. Francis, J. N. Larimer and George E. Goodman. Articles of incorporation were proposed and the association was duly incorporated, under the name of "The Presbyterian Church of Napa." A charter to the association was issued from the Department of State, at Sacramento, April 7, 1874.



Mr. McClure had been in the Illinois legislature with Abraham Lincoln. He was on the session thirty years and was Sunday School Superintendent for twenty years. Mr. Goodman served as church Treasurer for forty years.



May Day 1875 found the town of Napa overflowing with visitors and citizens to hear a new organ, dedicate a new church (in red circle on map above), enjoy a new hotel opening, and to celebrate the coming of Spring in the old traditional way with May-poles, music, dancing, fun and games.¹

CREDITS & SOURCES

Goodman Library photo: courtesy of the Napa County Historical Society | Other photos from the First Presbyterian Church of Napa photo collection

1. Stone, Floyd. "Napa 125 Years Ago: 2000 Report"



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NAPA

The Legacy of Reverend Richard Wylie

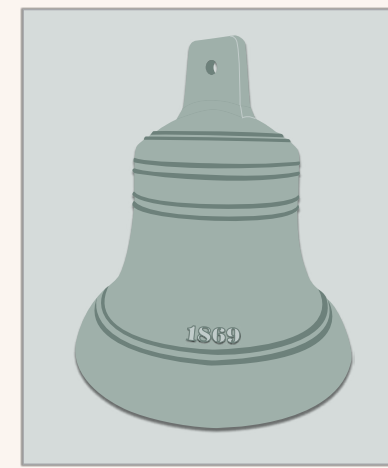
THE CHURCH



Built on a foundation of handmade bricks, the church was constructed of redwood and fir, and square nails were used to join the boards.

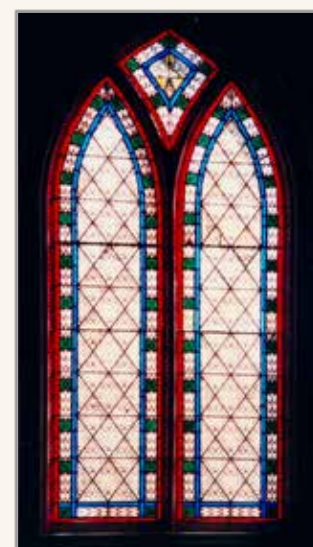
THE BELL

In 1869 Rev. Wylie and his father bought and gave the church the bell we still use today. From the diary his father James Wylie wrote: "April 9, 1869 – Richard went to San Francisco to order a bell, which will be sent to Napa on Friday week by steamboat, the makers to put it on board. Cost: \$550.00 gold, plus lading; to weigh 850 lbs. and warranted for one year."



THE PEWS

Pew rentals (\$25 to \$100) Application for pews and sittings were made to the treasurer Geo. E. Goodman at the Banking House of J.H. Goodman & Co., Main Street. It was said that so closely related were the financial affairs of the church and the bank to Mr. Goodman that farmers who were church members, settling their yearly accounts at the bank after harvest, had their pew rents automatically subtracted from the amounts due.



THE WINDOWS

The original geometric patterned windows were imported from Belgium. Others have been added as memorials.

"There seemed to be a kind of charismatic gentle majesty in the man. He was a notable figure in the City of Napa's history, the spiritual and cultural leader of the community."³

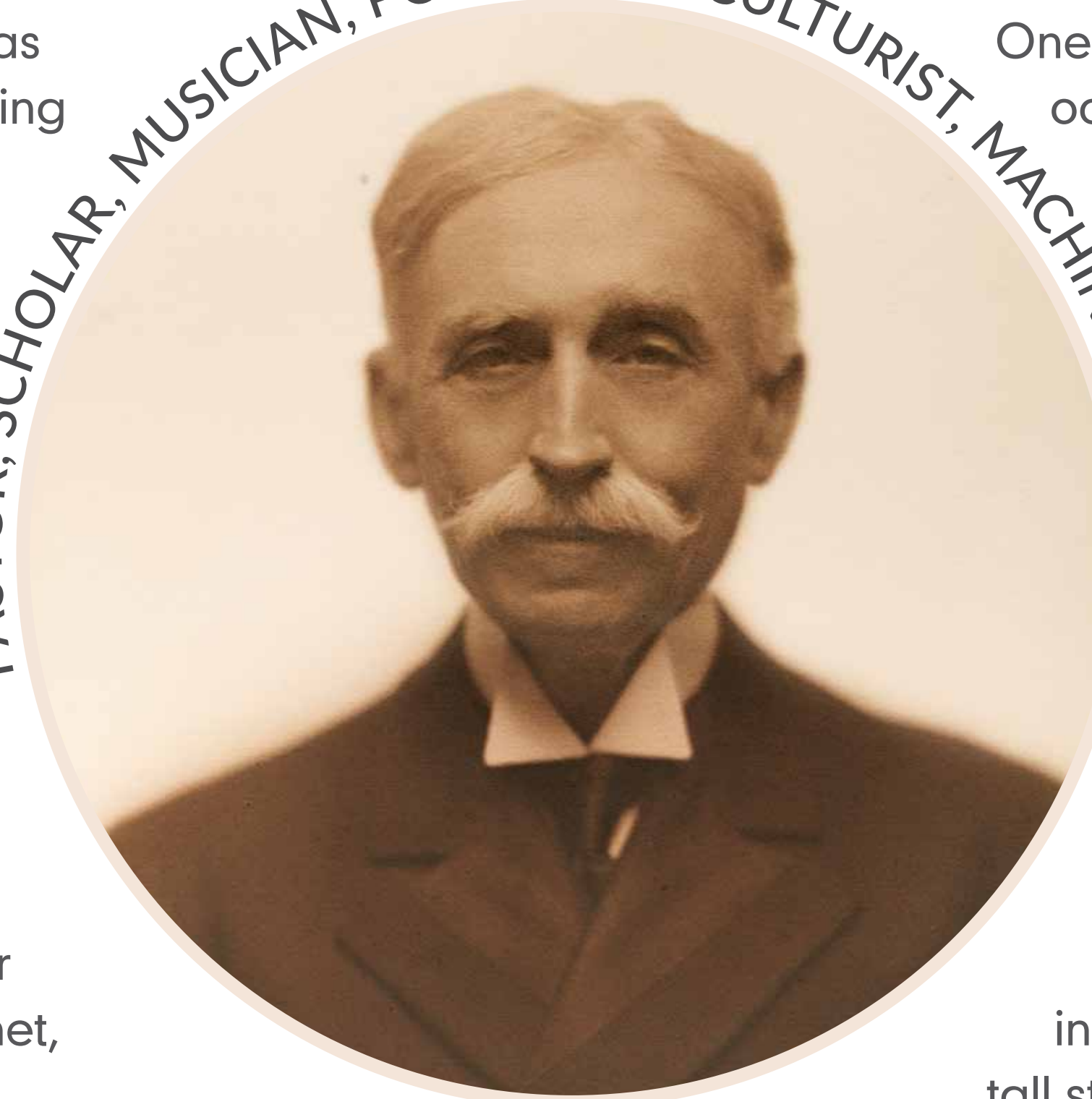
The Rev. Richard Wylie was Scottish and in Perth, Scotland, five of his ancestors had been Presbyterian ministers. He and his two brothers graduated from Princeton School of Theology in 1864, and they were all ordained as Presbyterian ministers that same year. Richard first preached in Napa in 1866 and was officially installed as pastor the following year, a position he held for fifty-five years.

In 1878 he married Mrs. Harriet Gibbs Smith. She was very musical and had come to Napa to take charge of the Music Department at the Young Ladies Seminary in Napa. After they married, she organized the Napa Ladies Choral Society. They held monthly recitals in the living room of the manse where they lived next door to the church. They had one child, Janet, who was also gifted musically.

Rev. Wylie wore a tartan scarf, the pattern being the one denoting the Scottish clergy. When preaching, he wore a clerical coat, fitted at the waist and falling almost to the knee, striped trousers, a stiff wing collar, and in cold weather a black cape the same length as his coat.

Wylie was an avid gardener and a good friend of Luther Burbank. He planted palm trees along Franklin St. and on Soscol Blvd. He grew locust, apples, osage oranges, honeysuckle, corn, beans, crabapples, yellow acacia, sweet violets, smyrna fig, tomatoes, and beans. He spent mornings in the garden, whistling opera tunes while he worked. Afternoons were spent in his study, meeting with people, writing in his journal or working on sermons.

PASTOR, SCHOLAR, MUSICIAN, POET, HORTICULTURIST, MACHINIST, INVENTOR



One young boy, whenever he had occasion to walk to town, would go out of his way to pass the old manse, hoping Mr. Wylie would be out working in his garden. "Mr. Wylie always had time to stop and talk to me, and I always went on my way a little happier with something to think about."³

One highlight of the Wylie years is the construction of the church, the foundation of which was laid in 1874. Built in the Victorian Gothic style, its tall steeple, pointed arches, doors, windows, and steeply pitched roof made it an architectural gem. Wylie also tutored San Anselmo theology students in Greek and Hebrew; he was proficient at violin and cello; he helped pay the salaries of the first employees of Goodman Library, built in 1901; he helped shelter survivors of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake; and he could be easily identified on the streets of Napa riding his signature bicycle.³

MISSION

In 1879 a mission relationship was established to the Napa Chinese settlement. At first classes were held in the chapel of the church, but in December 1881 an old brick building on Franklin that had been a Baptist church was rented for \$50 a year. Instruction was given in English and religion. Average attendance was sixteen during the week and thirty on Sundays.



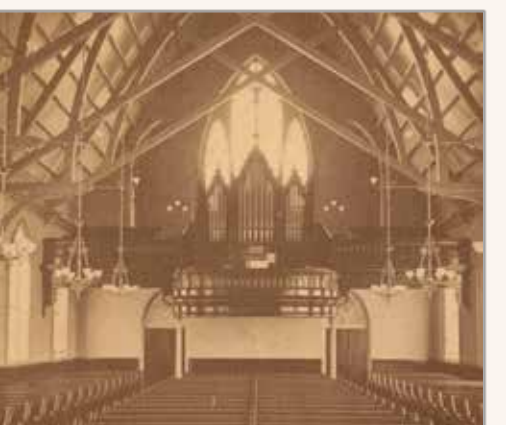
ORGAN-ORGANIST

Rev. Wylie arranged for a church organ to be shipped from San Francisco - "the builder to deliver it on the Napa Steamer for shipment and installed in the newly constructed church, \$2,700 plus the freight on the river steamer to Napa, plus board and room for a man while he was installing the organ." It was installed in the balcony of the church. A Bergstrom organ, it was originally powered by a hand pump, pumped by an "organ boy." Mrs. Watt Smith, a graduate of the Young Ladies' Seminary of Napa, served as organist for forty years, beginning in 1898.⁴



ELECTRICITY

In 1911 electric lights were installed in the church. "Rev. Wylie decided to dramatize the event a bit. A plan was made and accordingly at a Sunday evening service, begun without lights, he stood up in the pulpit, raised his hands and said "Let there be light." At this signal Earl Wilson threw a switch and momentarily, there was light; until a fuse blew out and the place was plunged into darkness."³





CREDITS & SOURCES: Scans from the First Presbyterian Church of Napa historical documents collection • Researched/written by Julie Worthington • Design/layout by Mario Chocooj



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The Church Through the Years

1908



1908 The large Memorial window on the north wall was given by Hugh Crawford in memory of his wife Judith. It is thought to be a Tiffany creation with its jeweled top, lack of a signature, and use of gray opaque glass to simulate marble pillars. Tiffany installed windows for the Mare Island Chapel in Vallejo about this same time.



1919 The first gym was built where *The Table* dining room is today. It extended out to the sidewalk, and during the 30s, 40s, and 50s, teas, roller skating parties and dances were held in this "Fellowship Hall." In addition, it was rented out to the local Intermediate School.



1922 Palm Sunday: the Rev. Richard Wiley retired this year.

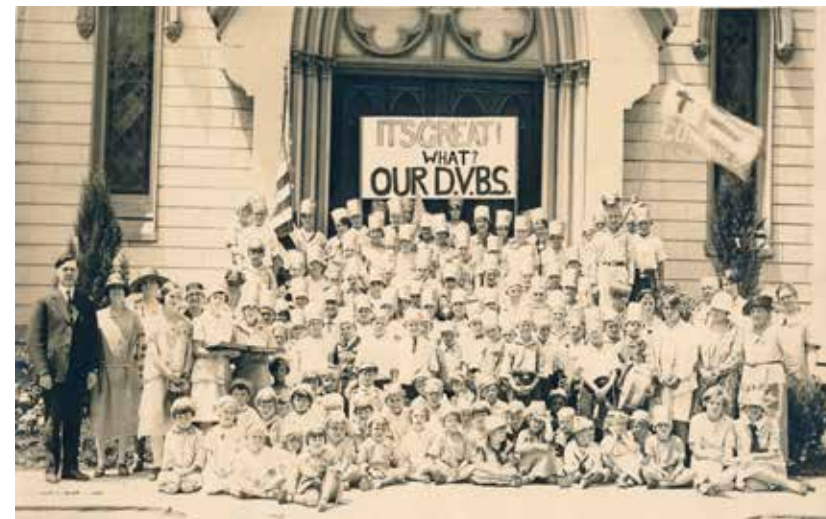
1920

The **1920s** and 1930s were hard times. The Great Depression impacted the lives of many local residents. As a result of economic hardships, the pastor, organist, and janitor all took salary cuts.

1922 The organ was moved from the balcony to the front of church. Organist Laura Pugh Smith retired in 1942, after 43 years. Dorothy MacLean became the organist and served 32 years.



1926 The Ladies' Aid Society held many fundraising activities to help support the general fund of the church. They chose themes such as May Day Breakfast, Daffodil Tea, and Ice Cream Social.



1928 A very successful Vacation Bible School was held this year.

Presbyterians Will Not Sell Their Old House of Worship

Will Keep and Improve Handsome 67-Year-Old Structure

The Presbyterians have decided to keep the handsome and inspiring old edifice that has stood for so many years at the corner of Third and Randolph streets, rather than to sell it and to build a new house of worship at some site in the residential section of the city further from the rear of traffic and the hum of business activity.

This decision was made at a big meeting of the congregation of the church last evening.

An offer had been made to purchase the property, now valuable at a business site, for the sum of \$80,000. And there were many anxious the congregation who believed that it might be well to dispose of the old building and to use the money in erecting a new structure more in accord with modern requirements and in a location more suitable to church purposes. There were many opposed to such a move. It was figured that a new church, with lot, would cost at least \$50,000. It was also figured that to properly repair the old one would cost approximately \$15,000.

The question was discussed pro and con and at full length. Finally a vote was taken and it resulted in a verdict in favor of keeping the old church. Immediately the result was made known it was moved and seconded that the decision be made unanimous, and it was so voted and so ordered.

It is believed that, from sentimental reasons, if for no other, the entire community will be pleased to know that the church structure which has stood for so many years on its present site, is to live on, and, refitted and re-vitalized, is to remain where it is during the years to come for future service to its congregation and the community as a whole.

BRIEF HISTORY

The late pioneer, Nathan Coombs, gave the lot at the corner of Randolph and Third streets, to the Presbyterians in 1807. The original church was erected thereon. Later in 1874 the original church was removed and the present church was built at a cost of \$17,500.

1930

1930 Gas burners were installed in the old coal burning furnaces in the basement of the church. It was no longer necessary to load coal into the furnace in the middle of the night to warm the church for Sunday morning worship.

1936 The Women's Association became official, replacing the 63 year old Ladies Aid Society. The new organization operated with five small groups named Circles which met monthly. In 1939 there were 148 members and in 1947 evening circles were formed for the convenience of working women.



1937 Inspired by Rev. Vernon, the church began collecting pledges and forming many new groups: a Men's Club, Mariners, Luprina Adult Bible Class, Merrymacs, and Drifters. Rev. Vernon worked with the Napa Ministerial Association and his enthusiasm was instrumental in acquiring Westminster Woods Conference Center for the Presbytery of the Redwoods. The Dining Hall is named after him.

1939 The years of financial difficulties during the last two decades left the structure in grave need of major repairs. During the 1939 annual meeting a vote was taken on whether to repair the building or dispose of it and find a new location.

1940



OLD



NEW

1941 Money was raised to begin extensive repairs to the sanctuary and a new roof was installed. The interior was completely re-decorated, the foundation strengthened, new light fixtures installed, and pews reupholstered.



1947 A set of tubular nickel plated Deagan chimes for the organ was donated to the church by Eliza Ann McMillan, in memory of her husband, Edmund H. McMillan. They owned the home next door to the church and had taken care of Rev. Wylie in his later years.



1949 The Sunday School tripled in size from 1944 to 1954. To accommodate this growth, the church bought the Annex, formerly an apartment house on the corner of Third and Franklin Streets. Church members built three modern classrooms in the basement to provide more church school rooms. It was named Clark Hall for Ray Clark, chairman of the project.

Approximately \$15,000 was spent on this restoration. Two years later the entire building was repainted and the stained glass windows in the sanctuary were re-leaded.

1950



1954 The church bought the McMillan house on Randolph, next door to the church, for \$20,000. In its place the leaders began planning for a new Christian Education Building and a small chapel. Members of the church tore down the old manse, removed trees, prepared the site, and began fundraising for the project.



1956 W.S. Bickford was granted a contract to build the new Christian Education Building and chapel at a cost of \$128,108. The building was dedicated June 23, 1957. The second floor interior was completed in July 1957 by a group of volunteers.



1959 The Austin Organ was purchased for \$26,438. The Church Organ Committee travelled around the country to hear various makes of pipe organs. After much deliberation, at the January 9, 1957 Congregational Meeting, it was determined that our church should enter into contract with Austin Organs, Inc. to purchase a new console pipe organ. This company has been in business since 1899 and only the best materials are selected for sound quality, durability and appearance of their organs.

1960

1966 Plans were approved for an extensive addition- renovation of the sanctuary interior, including the removal of the chancel rail, the addition of new offices, a library-conference room (preserving the gothic ceiling and stained glass windows), and the addition of a new Fellowship Hall/ kitchen-dining complex to replace the existing gymnasium and annex.



1967 The first gym comes down.

1968 The new Westminster Fellowship Hall (current gym) was completed and dedicated, providing social and meeting facilities for the church: seating 435, cost \$180,000. Mid-week "Happenings" was a program for grades 4-9 and it attracted hundreds of young people.



1970 A new roof, the third one, was installed on the Sanctuary.



Registered Historical Landmark plaque states the church is an "outstanding example of late Victorian Gothic architectural style."

1970

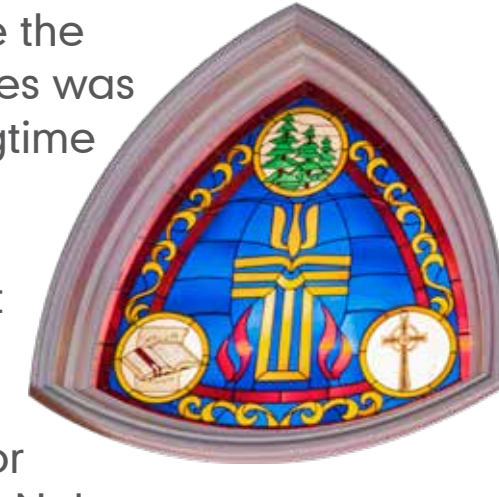


1975 The Centennial Celebration committee published a booklet, held a festive banquet, and honored Edith Imrie, who became a communicant before turn of century.



1980 The large Memorial Window on the eastern wall above the entry doors was given by Thomas Wright in memory of his parents, Thomas and Nellie Wright, longtime church members and supporters. Nellie was a charter member of the Ladies Aid Society.

1985 The Abbot Window above the chancel at the peak of the eaves was given by the Abbot family, longtime members of the congregation. The shape depicts the Trinity, and the circles within represent teaching, preaching, mission, music, the Redwoods, and the UPC Moderator's cross, in honor of their daughter Harriet Abbot Nelson, 1985 Moderator of PCUSA.



1986 The stained glass windows above the interior doors of the narthex were made by Kim Moore, daughter of Evelyn Price, in memory of her grandmother. She used 100 year-old hand painted kiln-fired glass discovered in the church basement.



1980

1988 A new roof was installed and copper was chosen due to its many advantages. Besides having a distinctive look, copper is very durable under extreme conditions, it's environmentally friendly, non-flammable, and a deterrent to squirrels and termites.



2006 The church purchased the apartment building at 720 Franklin in anticipation of future growth and space needs.



2014 The church suffered significant structural damage in the 6.0 August 24, 2014 earthquake which occurred on the West Napa Fault. It was the largest in the San Francisco Bay Area in over 25 years. The sanctuary was yellow tagged. Fortunately, the congregation was able to hold worship in the Fellowship Hall during the ensuing months of fundraising, repairs, renovations, and seismic retrofit before moving back into the sanctuary July 10, 2016.



2000

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NAPA **Serving God and Others**

