Judge Adna Hecox, Lay-Exhorter

Though one among several families within Cpt. J Aram's 1846 wagon train[1], the Hecox's record of the journey is probably best, giving us fixed dates for events important to Santa Clara valley methodism. Margaret (Magge) left behind the single largest memoir from among the entire Aram Party. Adna's significance is likely his role as a licensed exhorter, given by the Conference in Illinois. Both are important to establish Santa Clara UMC's early planting.

Adna and Margaret married in 1836 and two years later moved to Illinois before embarking on the overland trail to California. Migration in '46 was greatly spurred by Lansford Hasting's *Emigrant Guide to. Oregon and California* as well as letters published in Missourian newspapers. Hastings came to California in 1842, and in collusion with empire-builders, like Gen. John Sutter, attempted to redirect American settlement from Oregon to Alta California. Mr. Hecox admits it was by such writings that he was persuaded to go West.

We've already discussed the Aram Party and their role in the war with Mexico, the Armistice at the adobe corral, and founding of the California state. Much of this is colorfully relayed in Margaret's memoirs, *California Caravan,* but she also gives us a solid date for their arrival at the Santa Clara Spanish Mission, Oct. 16th, 1846. Other histories, including Adna's own biography, only speak generally.

Another date of significance for the methodists of the Santa Clara valley is Mr. Hecox's first sermon, entitled 'How Short My Time Is'. Sadly, the sermon was delivered at graveside of a young girl who suffered typhoid during their winter stay at the Mission. The sermon's date is Dec. 15, 1846, and it is usually reckoned the first Protestant preaching in California.

As a licensed exhorter—a lay office in Methodism--Mr. A. Hecox conducted public meetings and led burials. The December date has the added importance since it marks the beginning of regular worship in Santa Clara. From this December date until the Hecox's departure in mid-February, Adna kept weekly Sabbath worship with compatriots.

Upon better weather the Hecox's left for Santa Cruz. Margaret says her husband continued to preach throughout 1847. In July of the same year Adna and Margaret instituted a Temperance Society in Soquel which became the first Good Templar Lodge for the state. It's interesting they would form such a Society so quickly, but these endeavors were often fostered cooperation between Protestant groups. Temperance was aided upon Hecox's service as local civil Judge in 1849 and Justice 1852-54.

In Jan. 1848, the Rev. Elihu Anthony arrived in Santa Cruz. He refitted Hecox's itinerant preaching services for class meetings. Not surprisingly, the early class members came from the Aram Party, the Hecox's among them. The class was formally brought into the Methodist Episcopal Church as part of the Santa Cruz circuit by Bp. William Taylor in 1850. No regular supply existed for the initial two years, so both Anthony and Hecox filled the gap.

The evangelical work of Judge Adna shows the importance of lay agency in the Church. We would not have such early dates without Adna's initiative, especially when no ordained minister was nearby. Margaret's diary is a detailed narrative, and we'd know very little about early Santa Clara methodism without it. Margaret tends to give us set dates while Adna made continuity between them by keeping up methodistic practice. Today, both Adna and Margaret's headstones are found in Santa Cruz's Memorial Park. – Charles Bartlett

[1] Adna's Biography, published in 1879, lists the families composing the core company that departed Illinois—the Hecoxs, Arams, Imus, Shaws, and Taggarts.