California's First University

In previous articles we've considered Santa Clara Valley's methodist pre-Gold Rush founding fathers, namely, J. Aram, A. Hecox, W. Campbell, and E. Anthony (among others). These workers largely served an irregular capacity until their Labor was officially organized upon due Conference appointments. A logical progression would be Bishop William Taylor and Presiding Elder Isaac Owen's arrival, roughly in 1850. However, due to the familiarity of local street names, I'd like to skip ahead to the founding of our Seminary, California's first chartered College. Originally it was called the Wesleyan Institute but later Pacific University.

When the formal organization of the Church arrived by the appointments of Revs. Taylor and Owen, the obvious need for higher education, among other social reforms, pressed local methodists greatly. Consequently, in Oct. 1850 the San Francisco Quarterly Conference[1] sent Owen to solicit contributions among local members. Simultaneously, the General Conference sent the Rev. Edward Bannister for the same purpose. Locations at Vallejo, San Jose, & San Francisco were discussed but, the quietude of agrarian Santa Clara seemed best. The choice was further assisted by generous land & cash subscriptions. Thus, the College was located near Santa Clara's town square, in the Old Quad, next to our ME Church.

The name of the school, according to its first charter, was 'California Wesleyan College'. The charter's date of *July 10th, 1851* makes it the earliest in California, if not along the West Coast! Within the same year, Methodists petitioned the legislature, changing the name to Pacific University. The curriculum was typically New Englander. But, like progressive Oberlin College in Ohio, instruction was mixed, making Pacific the first coed College west of the Mississippi.

The University's proximity to the Santa Clara Church augmented the people, not only with a plentiful number of students but also exceptionally learned professors. Such made Santa Clara ME an obvious Mission Station for the District. Moreover, University offices were dominated by local Methodists, even with Bp. Taylor sitting on the Board for a time. Cpt. J Aram, the leader of the methodist wagon train in 1846, gave much stability, serving the Board for 13-yrs. Several Santa Clara pastors transversed both Board & Presidency—e.g., the Revs C Maclay, T Sinex, & MC Briggs[2]. Briggs was Pacific's first President and equal to Thomas Starr King in celebrity for banishing pro-slavery sentiment in the state.[3] Bannister supplied Pacific as an instructor and its first Principal.

By 1866 student enrollment exceeded capacity. Plans began to purchase of 400 acres in San Jose between Alameda Road and Guadalupe River. The intent was to sell most of the acreage for homes for an endowment fund. Hence, in the 1870's the College Park neighborhood was born! The streets about the University would be named after important Methodist personages like McKendree, Emory, Taylor, Asbury, & Hedding (we'll delve into these names later). Early neighbors conformed to the environ of the University since purchase of lots required adopting Temperance behavior.[4] While in San Jose the College boasted the first music Conservatory in the Far West.

Under pressure from rivals like Stanford University, even the nearby Teacher's College, Pacific University increasingly looked to the Central Valley for relocation. The Rev. Adam Bane, pastor at Central MEC, backed by the California Annual Conference, rallied funds for moving facilities to Stockton. By 1924 Pacific opened with an expansive 50-acre site on the Calaveras River. The San Jose property eventually was replaced by a Roman Catholic prep-school. The move to Stockton, together with President Knoles's 'professionalization' of staff plus incentives afforded by large private foundations, ultimately dissolved MEC's mission-station (and influence) in Santa Clara—marking the end of an era.

Pacific University is styled after the Eastern Ivy League. Upon entrance to the campus is Morris Chapel where a dignified bronze plaque displays gospel fathers once known to both the College and particularly our Valley—Revs. Bannister, Owen, and Taylor. Below it reads, "Methodist Pioneer Founders of the University of the Pacific, California's First Chartered Institution of Higher Education, 1851".

[1] Quarterly Conferences began in England, a common practice by 1753. They were introduced by itinerant J Bennet and likely borrowed from Quaker practice. Both Bannister & Owens belonged to the Santa Clara Quarterly Conference.

[2] Briggs did so twice, ministering at Santa Clara ME 1862-1863 & 1889-1892. Briggs was Pacific U's first President.

[3] Gilbertson, PN. *Pacific on the Rise* (2016), p. 9

[4] Gilbertson, p. 5. Benjamin Campbell did the same with his Lots near Saratoga. These were known 'dry towns'.