## William Campbell, A Critical Link

Previous articles have been short reviews of our local church founders-- so far, Cpt. J. Aram and Mr. A. Hecox. But Willilam Campbell is perhaps the most important personage due to his role in keeping continuous meetings for the methodists. From Mr. Hecox's last exhortation to the Rev. E. Anthony's first sermon, spanning eight months in 1847, Mr. Campbell filled a leadership gap, and without him our history as the first *organized* Protestant church in California might have suffered an interruption[1].

William Campbell is likely best known for the railroad station on his 160-acre wheat farm in 1878 which laid a basis for today's town of Campbell. Nevertheless, William and his oldest sons arrived in the winter of 1846 as part of Aram's wagon train. Upon the Spanish Mission's fortification, Willliam then served in Cpt Charles Weber's Rifle company, finally taking part in the Battle of the Mustard Stalks. These Mexican War volunteers have collectively been known as the San Jose Company, sometimes confusing historians as to Campbell's actual assignment since they enlisted in different companies.

As mentioned earlier, gold fever didn't seize Santa Clara methodists as it did with the bulk of '49ers. After the Mexican War, the Campbells largely consigned themselves to purely agricultural interests. This is important because it allowed Campbell to temporarily continue Hecox's charge, keeping bi-weekly prayer meetings[2] until a preacher arrived. The stability given by periodic gathering was crucial.

Rev. Bruner, in an 1870 interview with Mr. Campbell, explains the vital succession, "After Hecox went to Santa Cruz, William Campbell held the people together by having meetings at his home in Santa Clara. These continued through the summer of 1847. He was assisted every two weeks by an exhorter from Benicia named Jones, who continued coming through the summer. The meetings were then moved to San Jose, where they continued without being under the charge of anyone in particular".

Possibly spurred by the poor condition of the Spanish mission as well as the ongoing arrival of emigrants, William built a sawmill on Saratoga Creek in 1847. The supply of timber was likely conjoined to Mr. Campbell's surveying both Washington Square in San Jose and the Old Quad in Santa Clara since this happened the same year as the mill's construction.

Mr. Campbell seemed aware how temporal & spiritual labors worked together. Near the Mill was a site the early methodists used as an evangelical campground, and, likewise, in Santa Clara's old Quad, the first meeting house used by all denominations was erected. The 1850 meeting house was likely the same site of our old brick church on Liberty St., and surely William, like his nephew James, had a hand in its making.

By 1852 Campbell summoned the rest of his large family from Kentucky & Missouri to California. They were methodists, belonging to the Southern church, but in the early 1850's the split over slavery didn't mean much since Methodists of all persuasions were depleted ministers and worshipping together in California. The Campbells' homes proved frequent preaching points, and there's numerous evidence they kept serious Temperance convictions.

While the family never relocated past the mountains to Santa Cruz, like the Hecox's, they did get to the foothills, close to Saratoga. Once wheat farms gave way to fruit orchards, William's family formed the basis for the 1890 Campbell Methodist Church. A relic of Campbell's mill can still be found along the Creek, and his gravestone is at ~~Oak Hill cemetery~~. Without W. Campbell's constancy, our special link to the beginnings of California Methodism would be broken. – Charles Bartlett

[1] It says on the bronze plaque found at the back of our church nave, "*organized* October 1846".

[2] Earl Printz, The Methodist Church: 160 Years in Santa Clara California. (2006), p. 10-11