Our Cold-Water Methodist Roots

We discussed the importance of the Hecox family upon their arrival in Santa Clara in 1846, namely, being archivists & exhorters for our Church. Also, briefly mentioned was the Hecox's institution of a Temperance Society the next year in nearby Soquel. A brief review of Californian Temperance now follows and, in the case of the Hecoxs' activity, the coexistence of the Lodge with the Church.

Temperance movements began with Quakers and Methodists during the 18th century. Before dry-law campaigns, reformers limited themselves to private conversions. The 1784 American Methodist Rules forbade "Drunkenness; or drinking spirituous liquors." Commentary notes by Bps. Asbury and Coke explain drunkenness as a clear sin, particularly "the use of *distilled* liquors." Among Perfectionists like Wesleyans & Quakers, Temperance was a common cause.

But, the above qualifier, "distilled", is important because early Temperance usually made a distinction between *distilled* and *fermented* drinks. Fermented beverages were believed healthful, and light drinks were tolerated, e.g., wine, beer, and cider. But exceptions often proved too lenient, and by the 1850's Prohibitionism unsurprisingly overtook the older Temperance ethic.

For Prohibitionists, of course, cold-water was the only acceptable beverage. Within Temperance groups, mild abstainers tendered a 'short pledge' against riotous spirits while Prohibitionists had their 'long pledge'. These tensions spilled over into communion practices with Christian reformers either keeping a sip of wine or receiving non-alcoholic grape juice at the Table.

Though Hecox's 1847 Temperance Society is rarely recognized as the first of its kind in Alta California, he *is* credited for chartering the first 1854 Templar Lodge, *Pacific #1*. The Good Templars incorporated certain Masonic ritual and welfare aspects but, unlike older groups, accepted women as members & officeholders. Among older Anti-Liquor advocates this type of inclusion was sometimes frowned upon.

Nonetheless, the Hecoxs' passion for Temperance in 1847 had its own logic given both the absence and infrequency of regular ordained ministers. Comparatively, dry lodges ardently upheld Christian moralism, and their public admonitions was an equivalent to Adna's exhorting office. Lodges also had chaplaincies open to any rank. So, Templary was a franchise close to the methodist spirit, and among Perfectionist churches it promoted cooperation.

In 1855 Temperance political gains in California peaked with the failure of no-license referendums, in part, precipitating a withdrawal of clerical involvement. However, the Methodist church bucked this retreat, partly due to Hecoxs' dedication to Wesleyanism. In the San Francisco Bay area later methodist ministers, like Revs. Martin C. Briggs and Charles V. Anthony were high-ranking Good Templars as well as itinerant pastors, at times even presiding elders, for Santa Clara MEC plus the larger South Bay.

After the Civil War, Temperance found new roosts in national Reconstruction efforts. Henry Cogswell is illustrative of the period. A wealthy financier from San Francisco, Cogswell funded fresh-drinking water Temperance fountains around the nation. Topping each fountain was an iron statue of himself offering a cup of cold-water in one hand with pledge-scroll in the other. Sadly, San Jose removed its single Cogswell fountain in 1944 which stood before the old city hall, but Oakland's Mountain View Cemetery still has a large Temperance/ Cogswell memorial as a reminder of 19th c. society reform work.
-- Charles Bartlett

California-Nevada Conference Vision Statement

Following Jesus, Thriving in Community, Healing the World