

THE HISTORY OF METHODISM
IN
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND ARIZONA



Bishop James Chamberlain Baker

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Southern California
AND Arizona

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EDWARD DREWRY JERVEY

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA—ARIZONA CONFERENCE
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TO THE METHODIST LAY PEOPLE AND MINISTERS OF
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND ARIZONA—PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE—WHOSE LIVES HAVE MADE THIS POSSIBLE.

Preface

James Truslow Adams once remarked that "if America is to be regenerated it will not be by committees or resolutions, but by some subtle change in the hearts of individual American men and women." The Western movement in American history is in no small part the history of the Methodist circuit rider, who attempted subtly—and sometimes very directly—to make this change in the heart. The first Methodist of whom there is knowledge reached southern California in 1826. Twenty years later, when the Christian message was actually preached by a Protestant, it was by a Methodist. Since 1850 Methodism has spread slowly but surely over southern California and Arizona. Its achievements have been many, sometimes outstanding. It has had success and failure, has realized many hopes and has seen some bitter disappointments. This book presents aspects of that story. It is the record of no one man nor woman; for the history of Methodism in the far southwest concerns the work of thousands of people, lay and clerical. Many of these names are recorded in these pages, as are many churches. For every one which does appear in print, however, there are others just as worthy which do not. Space does not permit telling the entire history. Also for a more important reason it could not be related—for who can measure the full extent of lives and deeds by recorded words? This is necessarily a selective picture, yet framed broadly enough to show that Methodism in southern California and Arizona has been vigorous, forward-looking and heart-warming.

I am indebted to a great many people whose help has made this history possible. The portions to 1939 were originally developed in connection with a doctoral dissertation at Boston University in 1958 under the direction of Dr. Edwin P. Booth and Dr. Richard M. Cameron. To these scholars and genuine friends I am grateful for guidance, criticism, and the will to succeed. Bishop James C. Baker and Bishop Gerald H. Kennedy have especially given encouragement and suggestions. Heartfelt thanks are owed to Rev. John Gabrielson, librarian of the Historical Society of the Southern California-Arizona Conference, who spent countless hours in locating materials and preparing them for use. Appreciation is likewise due Dr. Earl Cranston, Dean of Southern California School of Theology, Dr. F. Thomas Trotter, Instructor in Religion and Fine Arts, Southern California

School of Theology, Rev. Elton E. Shell, librarian, Southern California School of Theology, Rev. Frank G. H. Stevens and Rev. E. J. Evans, two long-time ministers of the Southern California-Arizona Conference. John Gabrielson and these men, with Dean Cranston as chairman, served as an advisory Conference committee in the preparation of the manuscript. Mr. Shell and particularly Dr. Cranston and Dr. Trotter gave a special critical scrutiny of the manuscript in its various stages of preparation and made helpful suggestions regarding style and organization. During moments of frustration, which usually always come in writing, Dean Cranston was in large part responsible for the author's perseverance. Mrs. Pearl Sweet, curator of the Historical Society of the California-Nevada Conference, made available necessary material of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Librarians at the Methodist seminaries were most co-operative in locating needed source material: Donn Michael Farris of Duke, Arthur E. Jones, Jr., of Drew, Decherd Turner, Jr., of Perkins, Dr. Jannette E. Newhall of Boston, and Elton E. Shell. Numerous people gave of their time in interviews or letters. I hope I have acknowledged at least most of them in the bibliography. My wife, Thora Jo, and my boys, David, Warren, and Tommy, gave up many pleasures and were long on patience. Thora likewise took much time out from boys and housework to type the majority of the manuscript. Finally, and most of all, to my mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Louis P. Jervey, there is owed more than any words might express. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that they never doubted.

EDWARD DREWRY JERVEY
Jackson, Tennessee

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Introduction

FOR A NEW YEAR'S SERMON, I once looked at a newspaper ten years old. It was interesting to note what was taking place on the same day a decade past. I found, somewhat to my surprise, that the headlines were not very important. The real news was on the back pages and had to do with local affairs. We have learned that historians are prone to paint on too large a canvas and overlook the individual and the concrete.

Here you have a scholarly presentation of the story of one Methodist annual conference. Its importance is the same as an illustration in a sermon. It makes actual what would otherwise be only a general proposition. Since I agree with the brother who said he had never read a dull autobiography, so there is always a personal interest in any chapter of Methodist history. Of course, those who know the Southern California-Arizona section of the country will find more of particular concern, but for all Methodists this will be of interest.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to write this brief word of introduction. The author is a friend and his story is about my section of the Methodist vineyard. He has done his research faithfully and he has written well.

BISHOP GERALD KENNEDY
The Los Angeles Area
The Methodist Church

"DESTINED TO BE THE BIG END"

CHAPTER I

“Destined to Be the Big End”

I. TO THE FORMATION OF THE CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

In 1769, 227 years after Cabrillo touched land in southern California, the first Spanish settlers reached the state. In that year Father Junipera Serra and the civil governor, Don Gaspar de Portola, established a mission station at San Diego. During the next fifty years twenty-two such missions were set up along “El Camino Real” from San Diego to Sonoma. When Mexico revolted from Spain in 1821, California became a province under the Mexican government. In 1834 half the mission lands passed into private hands and the other half was soon lost to land speculators.

In November, 1826, Jedediah Smith, a Methodist layman but more fervently a fur trapper, arrived at San Bernardino, California. He and his seventeen fellow trappers had left Bear Lake, Utah, in August. They had crossed the fiery southern deserts and had thus become the earliest Americans to traverse the continent to California.¹ By reaching Oregon in 1805 Lewis and Clark had opened the first transcontinental door. Now Smith had pioneered a second route overland to California. Further pioneering and settlement, nevertheless, were spasmodic for some years throughout the territory and especially in the southern region. The Catholic Church remained the only denomination of any size and significance. The Mexican War of 1846, which resulted in the cession of California to the United States, began to awaken interest in the territory. The first considerable immigration occurred in 1846. That year Adna Hecox and his wife and three children reached Sutter's Fort and moved on to Santa Clara. Here at a funeral on October 1, 1846, Hecox, a licensed Methodist exhorter, preached the initial Protestant sermon within the boundary of California.^{2*} In the following month the first church in California was organized, the Community Methodist Church of Santa Clara.

The next year the General Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church appointed William Roberts as superintendent of

* Excluding Sam Brannan, a church leader of the Mormons, who do not consider themselves Protestants. See citation.

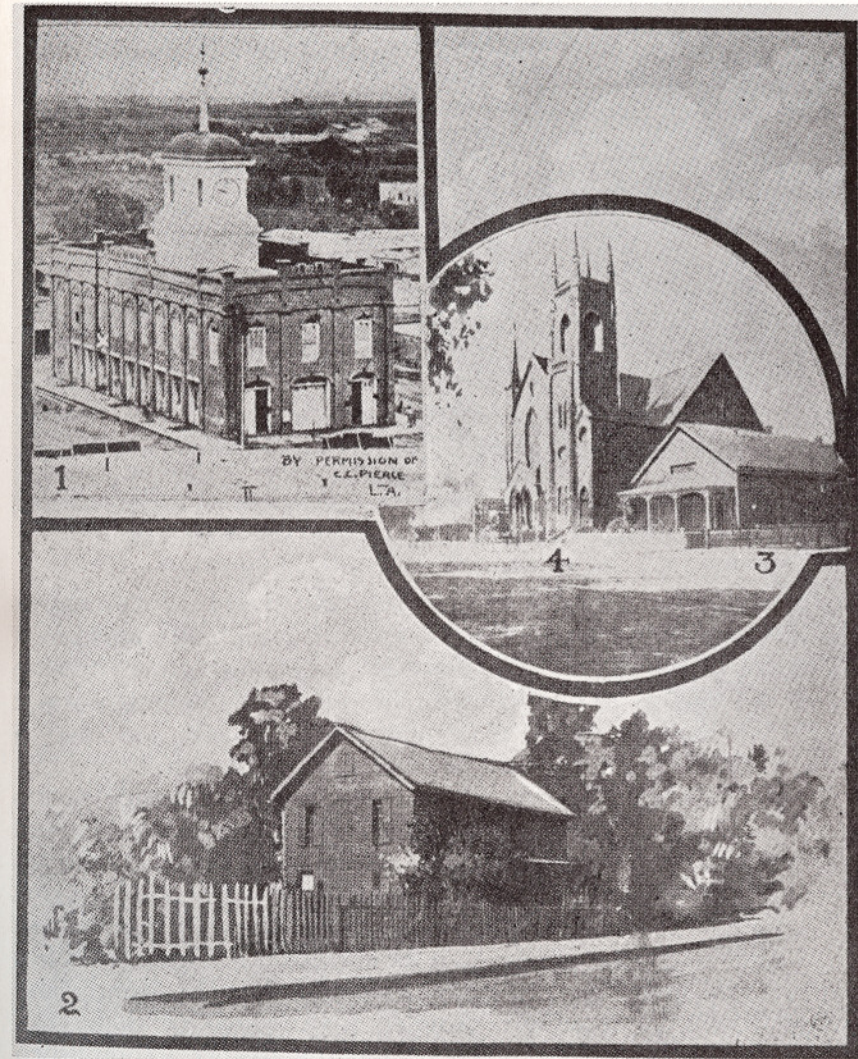
the Oregon Mission. Accompanied by James Wilbur, he landed in San Francisco in April. In 1848 there occurred both the formation of a church at Santa Cruz under Elihu Anthony and the inclusion of the organized work in California as a district of the enlarged Oregon and California Mission Conference. In September, 1849, young William Taylor and Issac Owen arrived as missionaries to California under the authority of the General Conference of 1848. These ministers may rightfully be considered the founders of California Methodism.³ Taylor was destined to become a world figure as a missionary in India and subsequently as missionary bishop in Africa.

2. WORK OF THE CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

California became a state in 1850. By 1851 the work had progressed within its borders to a point where it warranted its own Conference. Thus in August in San Francisco the California Conference was officially organized. During these early years and for some time thereafter the state's population concentrated in the region of San Francisco. It was not until the completion of the Santa Fe Railway Line from Kansas City to Los Angeles in 1886 that any great permanent influx to southern California took place.⁴ The ministers of the California Conference, nevertheless, were concerned that the Protestants in the southern California area were without a settled pastor. The Rev. Henry Kroh, missionary of the German Reformed Church, had been the first Protestant minister to visit Los Angeles,⁵ in November, 1849. The following year the Rev. J. R. Brier, a Methodist probationer of the Iowa Conference, preached the first Protestant sermon in Los Angeles.⁶ Brier's stay like that of Kroh was short, and his presence was not under a Conference appointment.

The California Conference, meeting in February of 1853, decided to remedy the situation. Bishop Edward R. Ames appointed the Rev. Adam Bland as a "missionary" to Los Angeles. Before he reached the city, it was reported that there was not a single Methodist within its environs. Bland now was almost four hundred miles from the nearest Methodist preacher. Shortly after his arrival he wrote to Issac Owen that he was doing his best but unless emigration increased, the territory was not going to be worth its salt. Then he continued:

But I suppose this part of California is destined . . . to be the big-end of California. It is a fine country—good lands, fine stock country, etc. But of all society I ever saw here is the worst.⁷



1—Old Los Angeles Court House

2—El Dorado Saloon

3—Second building occupied by First Methodist Church and by the Los Angeles Academy

4—The Fort Street Methodist Church, name of First Methodist Church until 1886



First Methodist Church, Los Angeles, present home

His optimism evidently sustained him. He leased El Dorado, a saloon located on Main Street near the town's Plaza, and transformed it into a chapel, while his wife conducted a school for girls.⁸ Because of lack of funds, plans for a church had to be abandoned. It was not until 1868 that a permanent structure was erected, the first in southern California for the Methodist Episcopal Church.

During the year Bland traveled about the region, mostly northward, getting as far as Ventura and Santa Barbara, preaching and attempting to find or make Methodists. Made a Presiding Elder at the next Conference, he left Los Angeles to work in the northern part of the state. The Conference, however, must have felt that he had sowed good seed because Los Angeles was made a district with five stations: Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego, El Monte, and Tulare (taken from another district).⁹ Only two of these, Los Angeles and El Monte, were filled, and the pastors accomplished nothing significant. The district was discontinued at the next Conference. For the following twelve years forty was the largest membership the Los Angeles Church reported to Annual Conference at any one time. Congregations met spasmodically without ministers at Santa Barbara, El Monte, and San Bernardino. They achieved very little, however, and the appointments continued to read "to be supplied." In 1858 the Methodist Episcopal Church withdrew its ministers from Los Angeles "because of the strong feeling excited against [them] by reason of their attitude on the slavery question."¹⁰

Furthermore, Los Angeles was not regarded as a paradise. Harry Carr, a popular writer on Los Angeles, has said of the city: "Our pueblo in the fifties was a vile little dump."¹¹ Gross immorality and violence were the rule rather than the exception. Add to this condition that of the growing sectional conflict in the ranks of these Methodist preachers, and it is easy to understand this religious retreat.

After the Civil War Adam Bland, then Presiding Elder of the Santa Clara District, returned to Los Angeles in 1866 to reorganize the work abandoned eight years previously. The 1866 Annual Conference left Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Luis Obispo, a new appointment, to be supplied. Since no minister was sent to any of these, the task of reorganization fell solely upon Bland. Before the next Conference he had succeeded in re-establishing the Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. The Rev. Columbus Gillet was appointed pastor. In the spring of 1867 thirty people attended a Quarterly Conference and Love Feast. This was the beginning of the continuous existence of the Methodist Episcopal Church in southern California.¹² The fall Conference of that year sent one minister each to Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, San Bernardino, and Santa Barbara. These were the only appointments in southern California. Using these towns as bases for operation, the pastors began to spread out across the southland. The central test of this first year of reorganization was passed successfully. Conference in 1868 heard the first full report from southern California as a whole. The four appointments reported a total membership of one hundred and twenty-eight. Churches had been formally organized at Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo.¹³ With a bridgehead established the Church pushed ahead. New churches were officially formed at Santa Barbara in late 1868 and at Compton and San Diego during 1869. By the next Conference it was clear that the future was bright.

Just at this moment the first of several land booms descended upon southern California. When the transcontinental railroad was completed to San Francisco in 1869, the expectation of extension into southern California brought thousands of people into the region. Los Angeles and San Diego especially became booming metropolises. In the latter real estate speculators had a field day, and advertising came of age in southern California. With the influx of such multitudes of people came the usual profligacy and vice of frontier towns. Happily the boom also attracted people of high character, many of whom were Methodist or receptive to Methodism, and the churches were quick to open their doors to them.

When the California Annual Conference met in 1870, the growth

of the Church in southern California and the increasing population caused by the land speculation made possible the creation of the Los Angeles District. When the collapse of the premature boom came, the sweet expectations of real estate salesmen turned into sour grapes. Definite settlement had occurred, nevertheless, and future potentialities were apparent. With a Presiding Elder and an increasing regularity of yearly appointments, the next five years showed a steady growth in membership, church valuation, and financial support. Churches were organized at Riverside, Santa Ana, and Santa Maria, while those already established strengthened their position. Many of these societies formed in early days were parts of large circuits embracing several communities. Indeed, by 1875 only six—Compton, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura—had what might be considered a full-time minister who worked only at one place.

3. FORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

At the California Annual Conference in 1875 many ministers proposed the formation of a new Conference for southern California. They cited the rapid growth of the churches as well as the increasing population. Despite the fact that the real estate boom had ended, by 1874 the population was holding steady. Los Angeles City, which in 1850 boasted 1,610 people, by 1875 had 8,453, and the population of the county in the same period had risen from 3,530 to 24,344.¹⁴ Since 1870 the churches had shown continuous advance on all fronts. Over the objection of a minority, who felt the proposal as yet premature, the California Conference took action whereby the new Conference could be established. The formal organization occurred in the following fall, September 6-10, 1876, with Bishop William L. Harris presiding. Since it was necessary to give the young Conference sufficient strength, the line of division was placed considerably north of the Tehachapi Range, the natural boundary. Thus eight churches of the Mojave and San Joaquin regions became part of the Southern California Conference. In the years to come until unification several of these were shuffled back and forth between the two Conferences. The Southern California Conference began with 13 church buildings, 9 parsonages, 1,257 members, 24 ministers in full relationship, and 3 men on trial.¹⁵

The original members of that organizing Conference session and their appointments were as follows: *Los Angeles District*: A. M. Hough, Presiding Elder; Los Angeles, George S. Hickey; East Los



Charter members, Southern California Conference

Angeles and Pasadena, Charles Shelling; Florence and Santa Monica, A. Bland and John Allen (On Trial); Compton, M. M. Bovard; Riverside, J. L. Mann; Orange and Anaheim, F. D. Bovard (On Trial); San Bernardino, to be supplied; San Diego, T. F. Houts; San Diego Circuit, Westminster, Julian, all to be supplied; Santa Ana, J. D. Crum; Pomona, I. M. Leihy; Principal of Los Angeles Academy, O. S. Frambes. Men on the *Santa Barbara District*: P. Y. Cool, Presiding Elder; Santa Barbara, Stephen Bowers; Goleta, C. W. Tarr; San Buenaventura, W. A. Knighten; Ventura Circuit, J. M. Campbell; Santa Maria, J. H. Hawley; Lompoc, J. B. Green; San Luis Obispo, F. S. Woodcook; Visalia, J. H. Peters; Plano, C. P. Stayton (On Trial); Grangeville, J. McKelvey; Tule Indian Mission, C. G. Belknap; Bakersfield, Kernville, Mojave, Cambria, all to be supplied.¹⁶

Since the appearance of Adam Bland in Los Angeles in 1853, the Methodist Episcopal Church had definitely advanced. Notwithstanding an interruption of eight years she had made up for lost ground and had extended her work in southern California from San Diego in the south some three hundred and thirty miles northwest to San Luis Obispo. Methodist influence was too new in the region to have exercised any leavening effect upon society. Methodism was still trying to establish itself, but with a bright future the minutes of that first Conference were cast in nothing but optimistic tones.

