

Looking Back

What Was Berkeley Like in 1891?

by Maizie Newman

Berkeley was an isolated village, with the new state university not long established. It was separated from Oakland by a train ride, with several other isolated villages in the farmlands between. South Berkeley was a village called Lorin. It was a long way from West Berkeley on the Bay. The streets were almost unpaved; electroliers came later (a tax item for the church, along with sidewalks and street widening).

Shattuck Avenue had two drainage ditches on either side, with boardwalks bridging them at the corners. Western Union was “manned” by an adventurous woman, an ardent suffragette, one of the original signers of our membership book, her desk at the rear of a Shattuck Avenue grocery store. The train ran on Shattuck in a deep cut north of University Avenue; there were grain fields on either side. Transportation was either by horse and buggy, shanks mare, or the railroads; and ferries joined Alameda, Oakland, San Francisco and Berkeley. Spenger’s Fish Grotto was a laundry basket of home-caught fish carried back and forth on the San Francisco–Oakland ferry by Paul Spenger’s father, who caught them himself.

This pretty well limited the membership of any Berkeley church to a homogenous Berkeley family who could arrive “the same day they started.”

Uncivil War—The Move Up the Hill

By Grace Ulp

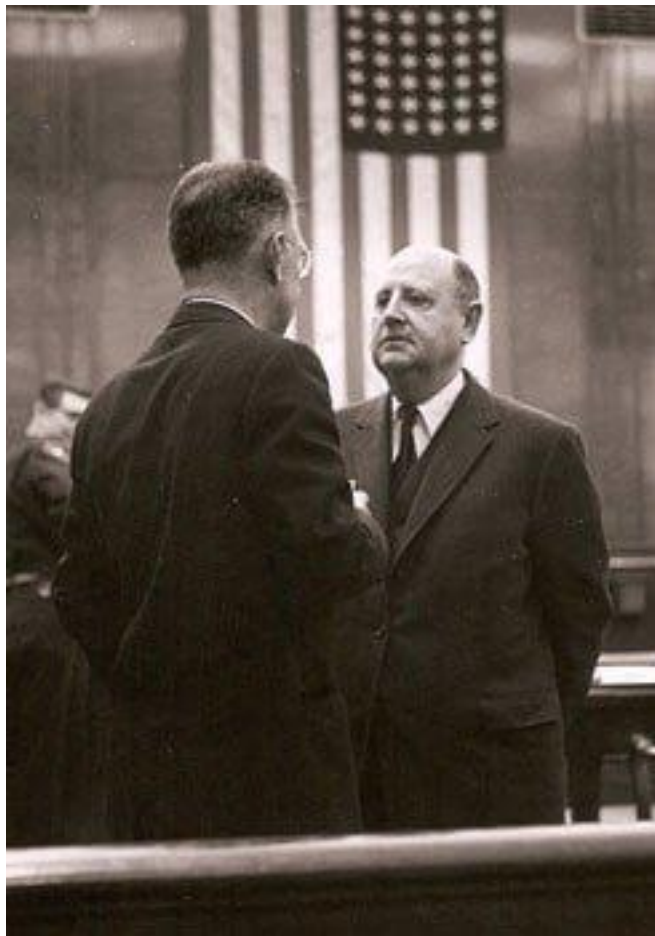
In the late 1940s as the church grew in activity, membership, and numbers of children in the Religious Education (RE) program, it began to burst at the seams. There was no way to conduct a children’s program for 400+ children in the buildings on the church property. Classes met in rented or donated spaces in many places in Berkeley including Stiles Hall, where the church had held some of its earliest meetings.

The University, as it had many times, warned the church not to do extensive repairs or enlarge its buildings, threatening eminent domain proceedings. Pressure of service attendance and RE grew until discussions with the University began to sound rather final. We had to look for some other space for our congregation. In 1949 we began the search for a suitable lot, near transportation, and big enough for some parking.

Around 1950 Bernard Maybeck offered a lot of approximately 7½ acres for 10 cents a square foot (which later turned out to be over 10 acres), on a hill in Kensington, to the church for the

new building. Intense discussions within the congregation began: Location? Room for parking? Move out of Berkeley? Church in the round? Church in the long with pews? Wood? Stone? Big windows? Cathedral windows? Slit windows? Was it more spiritual to look into the faces of other congregants, or to center oneself in quiet? How important would music be? What shape room has the best acoustics?

At the same time, tensions rose over the Levering Act in 1953, which required all teachers and college faculties to sign a loyalty oath—do it or be fired. In 1954 churches were told that their ministers also would have to sign such an oath or the church would be required to pay property taxes. No Communists in the congregation! We stood firm and paid the taxes for several years. Later, with several other churches, we took the matter all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the Act was declared unconstitutional; the taxes were refunded.



None of these actions were supported unanimously, and strong tensions in the congregation arose over the location of the new church buildings. Dissension grew so strong that a group of members formed a committee to “suggest to the minister that the welfare of the Church would be best served by his resignation.” A Conciliation Committee was appointed to “fairly and objectively study our Church problems and activities and to recommend constructive measures for solving the problems....” The committee

felt it had “no authority to assign blame, fix punishment or carry out curative measures.” They also knew they had to report to the congregation’s Annual Meeting in May. They knew that the congregation expected them to air all grievances—they had received 41 written communications—but legal and ethical principles adopted by the committee made that impossible. They decided to ignore all hearsay material and considered only personal experiences. The report to the congregation stated that some wanted the minister to resign, some wanted him to stay, and that both groups were acting in good faith with the best interests of the church at heart (no matter what somebody else thought). They recommended that each member work for increased respect for others by first looking at (his/her) own service to the church community, that church members study carefully the religious heritage of Unitarianism, that church members communicate directly with others holding differing opinions, that the church survey be carried out and report to the next Annual Meeting. We must be a strong unit if we are to move into a new location. The Committee did not “see that resignations on the part of any members of the staff, nor withdrawal from the church on the part of dissatisfied members is a solution.... We do not recommend the establishment of another Berkeley Unitarian Church by members now dissatisfied with the present leadership.” The Solomonic solution to this heated situation: in 1954 with a vote of 221 to 54, the congregation voted to purchase the Maybeck property. Sixty families stayed to maintain a Unitarian presence in Berkeley, and the rest followed their minister to build the church on the hill.

The history of the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists records the outcome in this way: “In 1960 The University of California acquired the land and the building which had housed [the church] since 1898. The Congregation had already begun in the 1950’s, to build a new church on a piece of land donated by Bernard Maybeck in the town of Kensington in the Berkeley Hills. It was during this period that sixty families left the First Unitarian Church of Berkeley and formed the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarians. Several reasons were named for the founding of this new fellowship, including differences of opinion during the planning for the new church building in Kensington and dissatisfaction with the church’s minister, who some at the time considered too authoritarian. Perhaps most relevant to the Berkeley Fellowship’s core values was the fact that the Berkeley Fellowship families shared a commitment to remain in the heart of Berkeley.”

What did the University do with the church’s buildings? An article in the Cal Alumni magazine in 2011 says, “A parish house and Maybeck-designed parish hall were demolished, but Schweinfurth’s church was preserved as ‘an important piece of regional architecture.’”

“The University converted the Sunday school room to an architecture studio in 1961, and two years later leveled the sanctuary floor for a dramatic-arts scene shop. In 1968, maple floors, mirrors, and dancer’s barres were installed for that department’s new program in modern dance.”

“Now within the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies, the church—rechristened the Bancroft Dance Studio—has fulfilled its new function for more than 40 years, interrupted only during structural renovation in 1998.

Name Change

by Grace Ulp

Along with the coming of the Hamilton-Holways to our church came the feeling that we really should reflect the name of the denomination in our church name. Previously it was the First Unitarian Church of Berkeley. Of course, there were many other proposals: “All Souls” was rejected as being a little too Episcopal. Should we really be a “First” in a town as small as Kensington? Did we want to include the town name in whatever initial identification was given us? Had we given up on “Berkeley”? What about the Fellowship? After a reasonable amount of arm wrestling, our Articles of Incorporation were amended on September 15, 1997 to read “Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley,” thus honoring the two sides of our corporate nature.

Mileposts from the Centennial Calendar, 1991

July 19, 1891	Rev. Thomas Van Ness gives “right hand of fellowship” to the 32 members
July 26, 1891	First Board elected and met: 7 men
August 2, 1891	Music Committee appointed, \$2.25 given to them for music
August 9, 1891	First 30 pledges received (called “subscriptions”)
October 18, 1891	Edward B. Payne called as first minister
February 11, 1892	Womens Auxiliary formed with 24 charter members
February 21, 1892	Oddfellows Hall leased for church @ \$25/month
April 11, 1892	Auxiliary spends \$50 for Church School Library books
May 28, 1893	Board asks Ladies Auxiliary for \$125 to clear deficit
December 17, 1893	Church’s incorporation papers approved
1893–1898	Church services held in Stiles Hall

March 19, 1895	Congregation votes to buy corner of Dana and Bancroft in Berkeley
October 24, 1897	William B. Geoghegan called as minister
January 30, 1898	Resolution passes to build church on Bancroft Way for \$3,500
November 20, 1898	Church at Dana and Bancroft dedicated
May 6, 1900	Frederick Lucien Hosmer called as minister
March 30, 1902	Mary Edith McGrew joins the church
March 2, 1904	Minister given permission to perform weddings and funerals
January 4, 1905	Board votes to protest paving of Bancroft Way
February 27, 1905	Board votes to get lock for front door
November 3, 1905	Two women elected to the Board
April 4, 1906	Pulpit Bible received from Hingham, Massachusetts
April 18, 1906	Church has no major damage from earthquake
January 8, 1909	Congregation votes to build a parish house
March 1911	Arthur Maxon Smith called as minister
October 1915	Harold Speight called as minister
September 1, 1916	25th anniversary celebrated
September 27, 1918 lost in World War I	Lieut. Charles Henry Thompson killed in action, only church member
April 12, 1922	Samuel French Leavens called as minister
September 17, 1923	North Berkeley Fire
September 3, 1924	Average summer church attendance: 337
January 19, 1926	Radio Station KRE broadcasts the church service

July 1, 1926	Eldred Vanderlaan called as minister
December 12, 1927	Board votes \$50 for Transylvanian Relief
May 13, 1929	Jacob Trapp appointed assistant minister
January 15, 1931	Annual Meeting reports liabilities 0, assets \$2.43
October 7, 1934	Horace Westwood called as minister
December 16, 1938	Alliance hears reports from its 15 committees
October 3, 1941	50th Anniversary of church celebrated
December 7, 1941	Pearl Harbor bombed
December 10, 1941	Board decides to provide for blackout of parish house
May 14, 1945	Membership Committee formed
December 30, 1945	J. Raymond Cope called as minister
May 24, 1948	Maizie Newman hired as Secretary
October 14, 1952	First Doctor of Durability Service
January 1, 1954	Plans for a new church building approved
March 8, 1954	Board votes not to sign Loyalty Oath
April 1954	Maybeck gives to church option to buy land in Kensington
October 1954	Board grants permission
February 1955	Transfer of land to First Unitarian Church of Berkeley in progress
March 1955	Transfer of land to FUCB complete.
May 15, 1957	Board agrees to take Loyalty Oath case to Supreme Court
July 3, 1958	Loyalty Oath declared unconstitutional by Supreme Court
June 12, 1961	Drama productions approved for new building in Kensington

June 25, 1961	Last service in old church at Dana and Bancroft
July 9, 1961	First church service in Kensington building, Rev Cope in pulpit
November 26, 1961	Church on Lawson Road dedicated
October 13, 1963	Plans authorized for church school buildings
March 10, 1969	Women may now be ushers
May 18, 1969	Howard Oliver called as minister
April 30, 1972	Maizie Newman, Executive Secretary retires after 24 years
June 11, 1973	Grace Ulp hired as Executive Secretary
July 29, 1973	Richard Boeke called as minister
December 1973	First Messiah Sing at FUCB
September 24, 1987	“Women’s” dropped from Alliance name; men welcomed
October 17, 1989	Loma Prieta earthquake
May 20, 1990	Freestone Retreat Dedication
January 13, 1991	Loomer Theologian Sermon
January 11–12, 1991	Loomer theologian Lecture & Workshop
May 17, 1991	100th Annual Meeting
July 12–13, 1991	100th Birthday Celebration and Picnic
September 29, 1991	Building Rededication Service