



## The Pioneer Story

As word spread of James Marshall's gold discovery at Coloma in January, 1848, those seeking their fortune began the migration to California. Up and down the "Mother Lode" towns were founded and grew. Among them, fifteen miles to the north of Sutter's Mill, was a place that became known as Auburn. Claude Chana discovered gold here May 16, 1848. Others followed him, many with a golden vision in their hearts.



Dr. John R. Crandall

Some came, though, with the dream of finding a new home. One such person was John Riggs Crandall. Born in Massachusetts, he had migrated, by way of New York, to Peoria, Illinois. From there in 1849 he organized a group of people to go west via what was then known as the "South Pass," reaching California in late 1849 or early 1850. Shortly after that Crandall decided that Auburn would be his home. By 1851 his wife, Harriet, had joined him, rounding "The Cape" on a steamer and bringing, among her possessions, a pump organ.

The Crandalls were Methodists. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ, their hearts desire for the people of Auburn was more than fulfilling the earthly needs and wants of the miners. No doubt the Crandalls began by forming a Methodist class meeting. By late 1851 Presiding Elder Isaac Owen had written in his journal that "Auburn and Ophir are near together, and disconnected with other points at which we have any supply-- They greatly desire a preacher, and promise a support in case they are supplied." The bishop responded by appointing the Rev. James Hunter to serve Auburn and Ophir. He took up residence in Auburn on June 6, 1852.

Gathering in a variety of places at first, including under trees, over taverns and in the county courthouse, the first Methodist church was built and dedicated on December 11, 1853. Its location was across the street from where the new, brick firehouse above old town on Sacramento Street now stands.

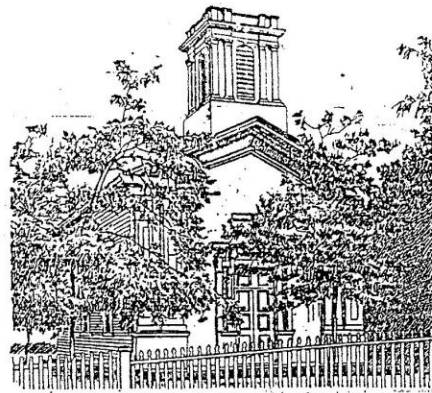
Early gold rush towns had few sources of entertainment besides their bars and taverns. Almost immediately the church became a social center for the community. Reaching out in the name of Christ, a "Ladies Sewing Society" was established on September 21, 1853. It included 17 women and 45 gentlemen as honorary members! By the end of the 1850's the congregation also

housed or sponsored political meetings, a variety of special speakers and the town's annual Christmas Eve experience, "The Christmas Tree." Besides these, it was a center for learning, being the site of numerous Placer County Teacher's Conventions. For a short period of time the church even sponsored its own "Live Oak School." From its beginning, the congregation wanted to offer the people of Auburn opportunities for meeting and growing in Christ.

In 1857 the church building survived one of the many fires that would rage through old Auburn. The congregation decided it needed to move elsewhere.

The present property, located on what was then known as "The Road to Illinoistown," was purchased (for \$50!) in late 1856 by John Crandall. His wife, Harriet, and another pioneer woman, Mrs. Brouse, set about raising the necessary funds to build a new sanctuary. Despite their Christian sensibilities, word has it that they procured most of the pledges of \$3,500 in the local bars and taverns. Within a week they had collected \$2,500. The project went out to bid, and James Munsell won the contract. On

*Thanksgiving* Day, 1858, the new church was consecrated by Bishop Jesse Peck.



THE OLD PIONEER M. E. CHURCH

The congregation always worked hand in hand with other Christians. In 1852 services were conducted on alternating Sundays by Rev. Hunter and Rev. Fulton, a Southern Methodist. In 1859 when St. Teresa's Roman Catholic Church was built and dedicated on the property up the street where St. Joseph's now stands, John Crandall donated the use of the pump organ for the service. Throughout Auburn's early years, as Episcopalians, Congregationalists and Adventists passed through town or made attempts at starting churches, they were invited to use the Methodist's building for worship and meetings. The congregation has continued that heritage by participating in a variety of ecumenical services during the year, as well as having hosted the dedications of both the Auburn Presbyterian Church and the Sierra Pines United Methodist Church.

Sunday School has always been an important part of the congregation's life. The first Sunday School in Placer County was Pioneer's, organized in the fall of 1852. John Crandall was its superintendent. Despite the usual problems and a sometimes spotty record, the line of those who have faithfully served the church in roles of Sunday School leadership, helping children and adults alike to experience God's love and learn about the

scriptures, has included Henson, Hazell, Robert Dahlberg, Clarence Ormsby, Martha Spooner, Eleanor Mayfarth, and our present superintendent Jean Pell.

The 1880's found the church struggling to keep its doors open. Then in 1885, John Crandall, for almost thirty-five years the driving lay force behind the fellowship, died. The congregation, however, persevered. During 1889 Harriet Crandall was on her deathbed. In her will, being childless, she deeded all of her assets to her "beloved church," an amount said to be valued at \$10,000. She wanted it used to build a new house of worship. But Harriet recovered! Over the next fourteen years she used up \$8,000 of her bequest, so that at the time of her death in December, 1903, the residual amount was \$ 2,000 .



Mrs. Harriet J. Crandall

This was not enough to erect a new church building. Instead the congregation decided to expand its facility for greater use, adding a bell tower/entry way and side room. These were dedicated in August, 1905. The members also sought to memorialize the Crandalls through the raising of funds and placing of "The Crandall Memorial Window" which was dedicated in November, 1908.

In 1898 California and Auburn celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of gold. In May of that year Auburn held picnics and reunions. When the "pioneers" remembered the area's early days, the word "pioneer" was first associated with the local Methodist Episcopal Church. Over the next thirty years it was used from time to time in reference to the congregation. It was not until articles incorporation were filed in the 1930's, though, that it became the official church name.



Pioneer Methodist Church, as it appeared between 1904 and 1908.

Even while the state of the congregation's membership and attendance fluctuated, ministry continued in a variety of ways. The Ladies' Aid Society, the heir to the original sewing society, held sales and suppers to raise money for the pastor, the conference and missions. This group became the Women's

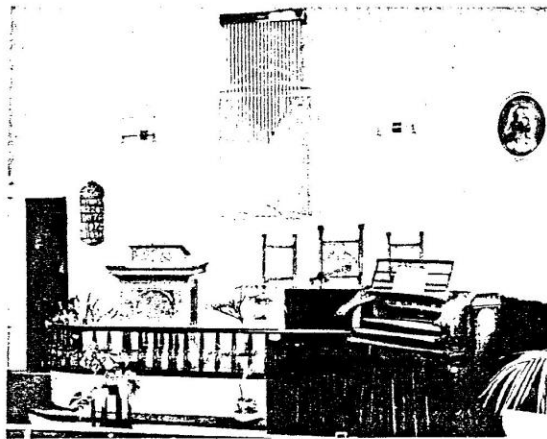
Society for Christian Service in the 1940's, and then the United Methodist Women (U.M.W.) in the late 1960's. Pioneer's women continue to assist the church in a variety of ways, by baking pies and making crafts, which when sold provide money for missions and congregational needs such as decorating the bathrooms and the new narthex.

In 1891 the Epworth League, the youth arm of the church, was established at the Auburn Methodist Episcopal Church. Following in the path of local groups such as the Bands of Hope and the Boy's Club, it met the needs of the young people for 50 years. In the 1950's its name was changed to the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and in the late 1960's to the United Methodist Youth Fellowship (U.M.Y.F.). The church continues to have a strong ministry to its youth under the leadership of Patti Mohr. At a higher level, Pioneer youth have participated in youth retreats and camps and have attended national youth events. Presently, Jason Mockford and Paul Geurts are members of the youth delegation to the annual conference and serve on the conference youth team.

March, 1929 saw the formation of the "Auburn Men's Club," a service organization sponsored by the congregation that met and dined in the old Pioneer Parlour of the church. Though it no longer exists, the men of the church are still active through a local unit of the United Methodist Men (U.M.M.) which meets monthly. They serve the church through their work days.

The post World War II years were boom times for the congregation just as they were for many others across the nation. On Mother's Day, 1946, Rev. James Phillips, announced a drive to purchase a new organ in honor of the mothers of member's of the congregation. The idea was greeted enthusiastically, and in February, 1947 "The Mother's Memorial Organ" was dedicated. A series of Sunday evening concerts, known as "The Melody Hour" were held to allow members of the community to hear

the new pipe organ. Rev. Maurice Cheek served the church from 1948 to 1953. Under his leadership the congregation celebrated its centennial and the interior of the church was remodeled to take on a "New England" feel. Maybe the greatest attendance and membership in the church's history occurred under the pastorate of Rev. Albert Raugaust from 1953 to 1961. Plans for expanding the



Sanctuary in 1947

congregation's facilities were made at that time, and they were brought to fruition during Rev. Hartzell Buckner's tenure, with Max Strawler chairing the project. The Education Building was constructed in 1962, while Fellowship Hall was completed in 1965.

From the late 1960's through the 1980's, with the help of its new facilities, the church continued its role in the Auburn community under the leadership of Revs. Clarence Freeman, John McMath, Richard Smith, Jerry Fox and John Jeffery. Notable among the church's work was the variety of organizations and groups, from Alcoholics Anonymous through the Boy Scouts, that continue to meet in the buildings of the congregation.

In the mid-1980's, when Rev. Jerry Fox was pastor, the congregation began to seriously consider the deterioration of the historic sanctuary. With retired pastor Rev. Sarge Wright helping to facilitate the process, discussions were held on what to do. These continued through 1990 when Rev. Wright was interim pastor for seven months and into Rev. Jeff Mohr's pastorate, begun on August 1, 1990.

The 1990's have seen a resurgence in the strength and activities of the congregation. There are presently 336 members of Pioneer United Methodist Church. The average weekly worship attendance is around 190, up from the 100 that the church averaged during the 1970's and 1980's. Over the last eight years there has been an influx of younger people and families. The church continues to grow younger, giving hope to those who look not only to the church's storied past but to its promising future!

The congregation reaches out to the community and the world through a number of programs. In 1990 the first "Music for Humanity" concert was held. Raising money for a number of ministries, especially Habitat for Humanity, it has been a success in drawing up to 300 community and church members. In 1997 and 1998 this program was co-sponsored with the Loomis U.M.C. The congregation also supports the Placer Food Bank through weekly offerings of canned goods and food items. We are represented on its advisory board. "Bucket Sundays" and special United Methodist offerings raise monies for a number of local and national needs. For four years the congregation has made 150 pounds of mashed potatoes for the community Christmas Dinner on Christmas Day. Members have also cooked 8-15 turkeys for the Thanksgiving Day dinner held at the fairgrounds. Through the Pioneer Emergency Relief Fund (PERF), we reach out to the transients and homeless in our own community. These are only some of the ways in which we care for each other and others.

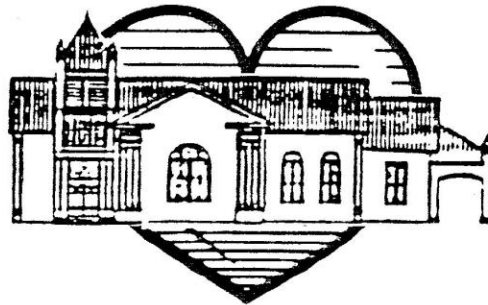
With new members joining those who had been active for years, and under the leadership of Barry Scott-Walton, plans were developed, funds raised, and decisions made that have led the congregation to the completion of a major building construction

and renovation project valued at nearly \$1 million. There is excitement about the future of the congregation that has served the Auburn area for nearly a century and a half. What will that future hold? No one knows? One thing is certain: Our Lord who began the process will faithfully use us to help Auburn's people to see God's face, share God's grace and run God's race into the new millennium!



Rev. Alfred Chandler leads benediction as congregation moves into Fellowship Hall for 13 months

THE HEART



OF PIONEER