



**191 W. Sierra Madre Blvd.  
Old North Church  
1890**

**By Maggie Ellis  
2014**

Photos: Maggie Ellis

*Compiled from information provided by Jim Constantian, Church Historian, with additional information provided by Pastor Richard Anderson and prior Church Administrator Ken Cromeenes.*

Background:

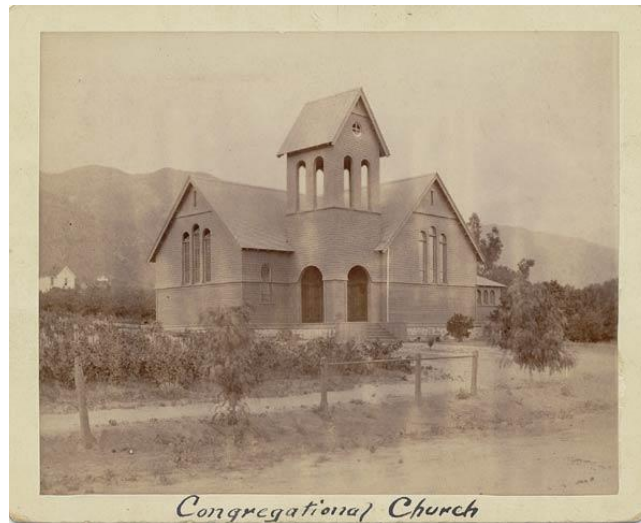
In 1882, the town's first Sunday school class, which was nondenominational, was held in Sierra Madre's first schoolhouse, located on the northwest corner of Orange Grove and Hermosa. (That building would later be moved elsewhere in town.) Each Sunday W.S. Andrews, one of the founders, would go pick up the minister and his wife in San Gabriel, and they would bring with them a portable pump organ, which she played.

The Congregational church formally organized in 1886. There were 13 charter members; the first pastor was M. Lafayette Gorden. The congregation began to meet at the town hall on northeast corner of Sierra Madre Blvd. (then called Central Avenue) and Baldwin, then later moved across the street to Sierra Madre School #2, which was located on the northwest corner of those two streets, set well back, about where the rear of the pharmacy located in Kersting Court is now. In January 1889, the congregation met at the public library, but their dream of having their own church was about to be realized.

Old North Church

According to Clerk J.C. Dickson, writing in 1921, two lots were donated by C.E. Cook and W.S. Andrews [Historical Sketch of The First Congregational Church, *Annals of Early Sierra Madre*]. Construction of the church, which would end up costing \$3,336 to build – a price that included the pews - began April 7, 1890. The first service was held August 17, 1890, though the church wasn't formally dedicated until December 14<sup>th</sup> of that year.

The original steeple was not the one we see now. It was built in Dutch-style architecture, and wasn't as steeply pointed as the present one.



Old North Church with original steeple  
Photo: Sierra Madre Archives

A bell, which has the date 1893 on it, was hoisted into the bell tower with the help of a team of horses. The late Rudy Hartman recalled that the bell was cast for the church by Mr. Bixby (possibly the famous Long Beach Bixby) and was inscribed "Let him who hears come." An undated church newsletter article states it was made by Meneely Bell Foundry, Troy, NY, and that the inscription is "He that hath ears to hear, Let him hear, and let him that heareth say, Come." It makes no mention of Mr. Bixby. However, Clerk J.C. Dickson in his 1921 history states "Mr. A.S. Bixby very generously presented the church with the bell...."

The bell also had a civic function, which was to alert the Fire Department, so it was rung for church purposes only for Sunday services and funerals.

It is believed that it was when an addition, which provided a kitchen and bathrooms, was built onto the back of the church in 1910 and 1911, a furnace was added to replace the wood-burning stove, and electric lights were installed. The lighting included a chandelier-like fixture and some smaller lights around the edges of the room. It should be noted that Rudy Hartman recalled the date of 1896 for the installation of electricity.

The new church was built across the street in 1927 – 1928 (for that history, see Sierra Madre First Congregational Church, 170 W. Sierra Madre Blvd). In 1942, The Old North Church was purchased by the Nazarenes, after which they changed the steeple to its present, pointier look. The Nazarenes owned the property from 1939-1976. The Nazarene congregation left to join their Pasadena congregation, sometime after 1968, and later the church was put up for sale. Perry Osborne and Dr. Robert Fry made a substantial donation to begin the purchase process, a special appeal was made, and the remaining funds were raised within a few months.

The Old North Church is now used as a teen center, and has children's classrooms. In addition, several foreign-language congregations meet there.

## Memory

Ray Martin, Nazarene pastor from 1970 – 1974  
2015

The pigeons loved the Church. When I was there I climbed up in the steeple and found it was 3 feet deep of pigeon droppings. We filled a dump truck full of droppings and still had a foot and one half left. I climbed in the steeple and captured and removed 75 pigeons. We wired the openings closed to keep them out but they roosted on the roof and had to be captured and taken to a man who raised pigeons in Apple Valley.