

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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Mayo Hayes O'Donnell Library, Monterey
(photograph by Robert E. Coffin)

“A BEACON UPON A HILL”

by Evelyn M. and William T. Butner¹

When the tiny Episcopal chapel was built on Pacific Street in 1876, the high-spirited vaqueros raced their horses at full gallop along the sandy paths below. Spanish was the predominant language of the town, and the only other church was the Roman Catholic San Carlos Cathedral. But the English-speaking Protestant population had been steadily growing.

In March of 1875 the indefatigable and dedicated Anglican missionary, Father James S.

McGowan, had been assigned to hold regular church services in the dance hall of the Washington Hotel. Forty persons attended the first service, but there were times when Father McGowan made the weekly journey from Salinas to find no one there. When asked how many were in attendance on such occasions, he would reply like the true Irishman he was, “There was me, myself, and brother Anthony and I.” That, for him, was a congregation.

But attendance gradually increased, and Father McGowan wrote in his journal, “Hope begins to brighten. It was considered advisable to erect a church building as there was no other non-Roman house of worship in town. All united in faithful and earnest work for the accomplishment of this purpose.” Financial support came from San Francisco through individual contributions amounting to \$651.00. Monterey parishioners contributed \$399.50; and \$175.99 was raised for the purchase of the church lot at a festival held by the ladies of Monterey.

The Gothic building was completed in the autumn of 1876 and was consecrated on July 14, 1878, by the Rt. Rev. William Ingraham Kip, D.D., Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California.² One year later, after the chapel was officially named “St. James Mission Church,” Father McGowan left Monterey to continue his missionary work.

With the opening of the Del Monte Hotel in 1880 and the completion of the railroad to Del Monte Station, elegant horse-drawn carriages brought rich Americans and notables from all over the world to the mission church. Royalty worshiped there when Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria, attended with her husband, the Marquis of Lorne. Father McGowan later wrote in his journal that she came “not with imposing retinue as England’s representative, but as the subject of a kingdom higher than earth.”

