

ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL MISSION FACT SHEET

St. George's Episcopal Mission was built in 1891 as a house of worship for English settlers recruited to El Toro by Dwight Whiting. Dwight Whiting was one of the founders of Aliso City (El Toro). Whiting traveled to England and recruited genteel English families to become fruit farmers. Today St. George's is all that remains of the English Colony which settled El Toro.

Note that the sign over the main door reads 'St. George's Mission'. In the Episcopal faith, a mission is a church which is not self-supporting. For a community to organize a mission, it must have a certain number of Episcopalians and request the bishop of the diocese to send a vicar. Vicar is an English word meaning 'in place of'. St. George's was served by vicars who traveled from churches in Tustin, Anaheim and Orange.

Before the construction of a church, congregations met in whatever buildings were available - public halls and even bars. El Toro Sunday service was held in the freight room of the Santa Fe Railway Station with more than fifty people in attendance.

The church was completed and dedicated to St. George, the Patron Saint of England on October 3, 1891. The church was built largely through the generosity of two families, the Keatings and Whitings, related by marriage. The Keatings' son, George James, had recently died and the naming of the church was also seen as a memorial to him.

Judge and Mrs. Keating donated a house with three acres for the vicarage and also thirty-six acres which were planted with olive trees to provide income for the church. In order to recreate the original setting, the landscape surrounding St. George's is planted with olive trees.

During the late 1920's and early 30's, successive seasons of torrential rains and extreme drought caused the exodus of many families from El Toro. This, plus the scarcity of clergymen, so depleted the congregation that regular services in St. George's were suspended, the remaining congregation joining Trinity Church in Orange. In 1940, permission was obtained to use St. George's on Sundays for non-denominational church school. By Easter of 1943, there were again a sufficient number of Episcopalians in El Toro to resume services in the church.

The continuing growth of the area and the influx of Episcopalians with the opening of Leisure World necessitated the construction of a new St. George's Church. This large new facility opened in 1969 near the intersection of El Toro Road and Interstate 5. The mission on El Toro and Whisler Drive was then leased for use by other denominations.

St. George's Church was donated for restoration and preservation to the County of Orange by the Episcopal Church in 1975 and moved to Heritage Hill in 1976.

When you tour the interior of St. George's you may wish to note the following:

Most of the furnishings are original.

Throughout the majority of its usage, the congregation of St. George's sat in plain wood-

seat kitchen chairs rather than pews. There were moveable kneelers placed in front of the chairs on which the congregation kneeled and cloth prayer book sacks were tied to the back of the chairs. The use of chairs was common in the early days of a mission. Chairs were less expensive and could be rearranged for dinners, Sunday School, meetings, etc. Pews were given to St. George's in about 1955 from another church.

In the rear of the church is an unusual carved oak Baptismal font whose basin is a South Sea Island clam shell. That area of the church where persons are baptized is called the Baptistery.

Notice that the current floor plan is in the shape of a cross (Latin cross). This building originally had just one room until 1897 when additions to the back and sides were added.

The altar is the most important piece of furniture to the church and is treated with much respect - - raised above the level of the rest of the church through a series of steps and railed in. The altar is the table upon which the Holy Communion is consecrated and administered and worship conducted.

The hanging lamps came from a sailing vessel owned by a Captain Huddy. Captain Huddy was one of the most interesting among the English settlers recruited to El Toro. Before coming to El Toro he was a sea captain sailing between English and Australian ports. In 1893, he and his family came to El Toro to farm. Being a devout churchman, the Captain became very active in the affairs of St. George's, serving as Vestryman, Senior Warden, Treasurer, Clerk and Lay Reader. In the side area (called a transept) is the pump organ which Mrs. Huddy played. She was active in church work and in addition to being the organist, organized the Sunday School.

The vestry (the wing of the church opposite the organ) is the room where the sacred vessels and vestments were kept and where the vicar and the servers dressed before the service.

It is also the room where the altar guild prepared for the service and cleaned up afterward. The altar guild would place linens and flowers on the altar and arrange the sacred vessels on the credence shelf (shelf in corner to the right of the altar).