

St. George's Mission

Transcript of Audio Tour Visitor Tape

The first church built in the valley was the St George's Mission, the Episcopal Church. In the Episcopal faith, a mission is a church that is not self-supporting. St George's did not have its own pastor but was but was serviced by vicars who travelled from other churches in Tustin, Anaheim, and Orange. A vicar was a clergy person who exercised a broad pastoral responsibility, travelling from mission to mission each month.

The church was built and founded through the generosity of Canadian immigrants Judge and Mrs William Henry Keating who immigrated to El Toro from Nova Scotia, Canada. Dwight Whiting met their daughter Emily while he was on vacation on Coronado Island in San Diego. He fell in love with her, married her, and thus the Whitings and Keatings became related by marriage.

Dwight Whiting, the co-founder of El Toro, planted and experimented with every fruit imaginable from apricots and walnuts to bananas and, of course, citrus. The El Toro Land and Water Company donated the original land to the mission and the Keatings donated a house for the vicarage, as well as 32 acres of land to plant olive trees as a source of income for the church.

The Mission was built and dedicated in November, 1891. The church, when first built, was in the middle of nowhere but slowly El Toro built up around it. Originally the church just included the main chapel and in 1897 the vicar's vestry, chancel, and choir areas were added creating the shape of the cross as you see it today. The vicar's vestry is the area you are standing in right now where the sacred vessels and vestments were kept and the vicars and servers dressed before the services. The chancel is the area where the altar sits and the choir is across from the vestry.

The Mission was in constant use until 1969 when the parish of St George built a new facility located near the 5 freeway off-ramp at Avenida de Carlota. Please notice that with the exception of the pews, most of the furnishings you see here are original. The pews came later. If you look to the rear of the church, behind the last row of pews, you will see plain wooden chairs with cloth sacks for prayer books tied to the back of the chairs. Throughout most of its use the congregation sat in chairs like these with movable kneelers placed in front of them.

Looking up, notice the beautiful stained glass windows. Emily Keating donated these. The Keatings donated most of the furnishings including the baptismal font with the South Pacific clamshell that held water for the baptisms. It's located to the rear of the church. This shell is not the original, but a replacement. The original shell was much larger.

The hanging lamps suspended from the ceiling came from a sailing vessel owned by Captain George Rooke Huddy. He was a sea captain who sailed between the English and Australian ports before coming to El Toro. Of the English settlers recruited to El Toro, he was the most interesting. Captain Huddy was a devout churchman, very involved in the activities of the Mission as vestryman, senior warden, treasurer, clerk, and lay reader. Before the restoration, the lamps hanging from the middle of the ceiling were suspended by a pulley arrangement so that they could be lowered, lighted, and pulled back into their original position. Now they are permanently attached to the ceiling.

The organ you see across the room is a pump organ, the same one that Mrs Huddy played every Sunday as the church organist. The reflecting lanterns on the wall are a unique result of the reflectors being double paned glass with a coating of mercury between the panes to give the brilliant reflective quality that you see.

The Episcopal Church donated St George's Mission to the County of Orange for restoration and preservation in 1975. It was relocated here from its original location in 1976. The Mission is no longer a house of worship but now sits as a historical museum.