

## ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL MISSION

St. George's Episcopal Mission was built in 1891 as a house of worship for English settlers recruited to El Toro by Dwight Whiting. The Mission was originally located on Whisler Drive and El Toro Road. It is the last remaining rural 19th century church in Orange County and all that remains of the English colony that settled in El Toro.

The church's vertical wood siding and its relatively tall building proportions suggest the strong influence of the Victorian "San Francisco Stick" style of architecture. The most prominent architectural feature of the church is the simple, low profile bell tower that is astride the ridge of the main roof over the double entry doors.

The church was built largely through the generosity of two families, the Whitings and the Keatings, who were related by marriage. Dwight Whiting married the daughter of Judge and Mrs. William Henry Keating whom he met while vacationing at the Hotel del Coronado. Whiting provided capital and material for the construction of the church. Judge and Mrs. Keating donated a house with three acres for the Vicarage and thirty-six acres that were planted with olive trees to provide income for the church. The Keatings also donated a hand carved altar, a reed organ, a bell, and a carved oak baptismal font with clamshell basin. Since St. George was the patron saint of England, and the Keating's son, George James, had recently died, the church was named St. George's.

Whiting made trips to England to recruit second and subsequent sons of the English gentry to El Toro. He published a hundred and eleven page promotional book entitled Fruit Farming for Profit in California (1893) and influenced a number of England's gentility to settle in the area.

During the late 1920's and early 1930'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 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. St. George's Mission was then leased by other denominations.

In 1976 the Mission was donated for restoration and preservation to the County of Orange by the Episcopal Church and moved to Heritage Hill.