BEGINNING OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN LONG BEACH

Presiding Elder R. W. C. Farnsworth of the Methodist Episcopal Church believed Willmore City would be an excellent site for the regular Methodist Camp Meeting which had been held in Compton, and in 1883 he conducted a tent meeting here "as kind of an experiment." During that first summer Judge R. M. Widney was superintendent of a "Sabbath School" which had been organized, holding its first meetings in a tent.

In 1884 "The Methodist Resort Association" was formed and the Long Beach Land & Water Company gave the Association an entire block of land between Third and Fourth Streets and Locust and American Avenues (Long Beach Boulevard). "In exchange the Association agreed to build a wooden tabernacle costing $5000 and to plant eucalyptus trees to shade the campers during religious meetings."

Methodists began worshipping in homes and holding cottage prayer meetings; being joined by Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Friends and others. With Methodist activity and interest increasing in the new townsite, Bishop Cyrus Foss, at the annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in September, appointed the Reverend George W. Elwood as Minister to "the charge of Long Beach." Soon thereafter the church was organized with a society of "eleven or twelve." "Worship was first held in the hotel parlor, then in an empty house lent by Brother M. H. LaFetra, then in a tent south of Dr. Williams' cottage on Cedar Avenue."

Reverend Elwood was put in charge of building the chapel and pavilion (or tabernacle, as it was called). On April 12, 1885, he preached the first sermon in the unfinished chapel in which there was no seating, doors nor windows. During 1886 about half of the main tabernacle was finished, under the direction of R. J. Craig, contractor and builder. Camp meetings went on while the sides of the tabernacle still consisted of crude canvas. In 1887 the remainder of the building was completed. It was this chapel and tabernacle, jointly seating about 1700, which served as Long Beach Methodists' place of worship for about 14 years.

The Reverend Samuel J. Fleming succeeded Rev. Elwood in September, 1885, and served two years, adding a number to the church membership amid many difficulties of a young, struggling church organization.
A LARGER CHURCH IS NEEDED

ceremonies. Bishop Edwin F. Hughes preached the dedicatory sermon. Presentation of the building was made by the President of the Board of Trustees, C. J. Walker, and the Board: Dr. F. D. Bishop, E. E. Buffum, R. J. Craig, E. M. Lyman, S. A. Stone, F. W. Stearns, Stephen Townsend and Charles F. Van de Water. The church membership was now 1300, and the new edifice with its seating capacity of 2500 was regarded as one of the finest on the west coast. On October 5, 1908, Mr. Harry C. Harter took the work of Pastor's Assistant and Financial Secretary until June, 1916, and then continued as Assistant to the Pastor until 1928. The church will always be immeasurably indebted to him.

THE REVEREND HENRY IRVING RASMUS exchanged pulpits with Dr. Betts in 1910, coming to Long Beach from Spokane, Washington. Edwin F. Hughes was Bishop of the Conference. Dr. Rasmus was a brilliant, active man, noted for his eloquent sermons and lectures. All organizations of the Church and Sunday School progressed under his leadership. These were years of great revivals, with James W. Patterson assisting the Pastor in evangelistic services held in 1912. The following year the Presbyterian Church joined the Methodists in conducting a series of special meetings. Bishop William O. Shepard presided at the Annual Conference which was held in this Church October 2-8, 1912. The 1913 Annual Conference session was also held in our Church, with Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes presiding. In 1915 all Long Beach church denominations joined in a revival series. The membership of the Church reached 1,600 in September of 1916. There was a marked unity among all the churches of Long Beach, and they worked successfully in combatting the temperance issue. The old Tabernacle was torn down in 1915 to make way for a business block.
LONG BEACH METHODIST CHURCH — BUILT IN 1899
Northeast Corner Fifth and Pine, Present Site of the J. C. Penney Company