

Pepperdine University

From the Selected Works of Jerry Rushford

December 4, 1979

The Old Forestville Meetinghouse 1879-1979

Jerry Rushford, *Pepperdine University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jerry_rushford/24/

The Old Forestville Meetinghouse 1879-1979 (1)

JERRY RUSHFORD

The oldest church building still in regular use among the Churches of Christ in California is located in the little Sonoma County village of Forestville (pop. 700). This village lies ten miles west of Santa Rosa in the scenic Russian River valley.

The historic Forestville meetinghouse recently passed its centennial, but no one seemed to notice. It has been many years since Forestville attracted attention in the church papers. But there was a day when the old Forestville meetinghouse was the home of the largest and strongest Church of Christ in the entire state of California.



The historic Forestville meetinghouse was erected in 1879. This photo was taken around 1905.

The origins of the Restoration Movement in California date back to the gold rush year of 1849 when Thomas Thompson arrived by wagon train from Paris, Missouri. This untiring evangelist preached the first sermons, baptized the first converts, and established the first churches in California. Stockton, Santa Clara, Woodland and Santa Rosa were among the first congregations.

Blessed with outstanding preachers like J. P. McCorkle, Robert Graham and Alexander Johnston, the church in Santa Rosa soon became a center of influence in the counties north of San Francisco. Johnston was also an editor and educator and through his efforts Santa Rosa became the home of *The Bible Expositor* and a fine school known as Christian College. The cause of Christ in Sonoma County was greatly strengthened when Christian College was launched in September, 1872.

The church in Forestville had its beginning exactly one year after the opening of Christian College. An old record book of this church contains the following original entry: "Church of Christ at Forestville organized by Elder James Logan, September 28, 1873." The names of the first 21 charter members are listed in the record book.

James Logan was a born orator who loved to preach. L. B. Wilkes later said of him: "Bro. Logan was not highly educated, but he was one of the most eloquent and effective preachers our cause ever had in this state. He organized many of our oldest, some of which are now our strongest churches in California." Logan baptized over three thousand persons in California in a ministry that spanned a little more than thirty years.

Between 1873 and 1879 the church in Forestville experienced very little growth. This changed in the summer of 1879 when W. H. Briggs, a student at Christian College, held a protracted meeting there. Alexander Johnston, president of Christian Col-

lege, called Briggs "one of our most promising young preachers." In a letter dated June 3 and sent to the *Christian Standard*, Briggs said: "I am conducting a meeting at a little town named Forestville, ten miles distant from Santa Rosa. Have had very good success. Ten additions so far—eight by confession, two by letter. Prospects good for more."

At the conclusion of the meeting, Briggs wrote to the *Standard* again. In this significant letter, dated June 27, he said:

The meeting continued for four weeks, resulting in 30 additions, as follows: 20 by confession and baptism, 3 by letter, 2 from the Methodists, 2 from the Catholics, 2 reclaimed, and 1 from the Baptists. A warm enthusiasm exists among the brethren and throughout the neighborhood. A united effort is being made to build a house at that place; I have been informed that nearly a sufficient amount is raised already.

We need a house very much, for we can meet in no place except a public hall, which the Methodists tried to close as soon as golden sheaves were reaped from their fields; but the right will prevail, and we still have the use of the hall.

There has been quite a change in the little village of Forestville; six weeks ago it was the stronghold of the Methodists, but now the Church of Christ, sixty strong, meets to break the loaf every Lord's day."

One month later Briggs reported to the *Standard* again. He was now preaching regularly for Forestville, and he wrote to say:

Last Lord's day was my regular appointment at Forestville. I preached at 11 o'clock and at night. The result was 5 additions—1 confession, 1 reclaimed, and 3 from the Methodists. At 3 in the afternoon we organized a Temperance Club of 86 members. There is only one saloon in Forestville, and for the last two months it has not paid expenses, and in two months more it will be closed up. The brethren at that place are very earnest. The lot has been purchased and the material is on the ground to build our new church house.

According to the old church record book, the congregation did not have to purchase the lot. It was a gift from one of the deacons, George N. Schaumberg. The record book also notes that the lumber for the meetinghouse was donated by Uriah Covey, a member of the church.

If the congregation was ready to begin construction at the end of July, they were most likely meeting in their new building by the early fall of that year. However, the precise date on which they first assembled for worship in the new meetinghouse cannot be established. For many years there was a sign on the building confirming that it had been erected in 1879.

During the decades of the 1880's and 1890's the Restoration Movement in California was engulfed in the missionary society and instrumental music controversies. The result was that a majority of churches supported these new developments, and by the end of the century the churches who had not adopted these practices were near extinction. The churches that favored the society and organ came to be known officially as "Disciples of Christ," and those that resisted the changes were called "Churches of Christ."

Like all of the other churches north of San Francisco, Forestville would probably have been carried away in the current of these new developments if it had not been for the arrival of G. W. Winter in 1890. In the next article we will highlight the life and ministry of this dedicated farmer-preacher who gave nearly forty years of leadership to the Forestville church.

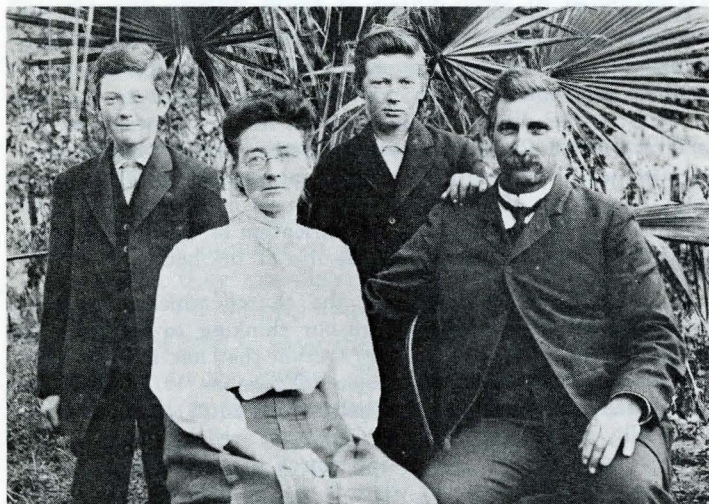
Pepperdine University, Malibu, California

The Old Forestville Meetinghouse 1879-1979 (2)

JERRY RUSHFORD

In the first article we described: (1) the beginning of the Church of Christ in Forestville, California in 1873; (2) the construction of the historic Forestville meetinghouse in 1879; and (3) the arrival of G. W. Winter in Forestville in 1890.

George Washington Winter was born in Claremont, Illinois on August 11, 1860. He obeyed the gospel when young and began preaching at the age of nineteen. When he was twenty-two years old, Winter moved to Boone County, Nebraska. While there he worked on a farm and preached for the church in Albion. During these Nebraska years he married Lizzie Davis.



The G. W. Winter family in 1905. Their two sons were Paul (left) and Dee (right).

In 1890 the Winters moved to California. They settled briefly in Madera, but soon moved to Forestville where they engaged in fruit farming. Upon their arrival, Winter began to preach for the Church of Christ. It was the beginning of a relationship between preacher and congregation that would last nearly forty years.

When the Winters came to California, the missionary society and instrumental music tensions were ravaging the Restoration Movement throughout the state. G. W. Winter was opposed to both of these developments, and his firm leadership kept both from being introduced at Forestville. A few years later when Winter was out of the state, the society made an attempt to gain a footing in the Forestville church; but the congregation retained its independence.

In addition to his labors with the Forestville church, Winter held meetings in Aromas and Madera. Apart from these three small congregations he was unaware of any others in northern California who had resisted the control of the society. In March, 1899, Winter sent the following note to David Lipscomb for publication in the *Gospel Advocate*:

Brother J. W. Shepherd closed a meeting of twenty-five days' duration at this place on Wednesday night, March 8, with four persons baptized into the one body as a result. The congregation was also greatly edified and encouraged. It was one of the best meetings I ever attended. There was some sickness in the community and much opposition to contend with; but Brother Shepherd proclaimed the gospel in kindness and love, until it became evident that it was the truth that caused the opposers to be so exercised. Brother Shepherd is now in a meeting at Aromas, Monterey Coun-

ty. Forestville, Madera, and Aromas are the only loyal congregations in this part of the state.

Winter might have erred in his knowledge of loyal congregations, but not by much. The missionary society concept of evangelism had captured nearly every church in the state. However, at the turn of the century a new generation of preachers from outside the state, many from David Lipscomb's Nashville Bible School, migrated to California. Among the first to come were L. D. Perkins, E. C. Love, J. A. Craig, J. B. Ellmore, G. W. Riggs, and E. N. Glenn.

When Glenn arrived in San Francisco in 1904, he immediately began gathering statistics on the number of congregations in the state. In one of his early reports to the *Gospel Advocate*, dated September 22, 1904, Glenn wrote:

As has been stated, there are now sixteen loyal congregations in California. Of this number, five have been started within the past year, which is quite encouraging to us who live on the Pacific Coast.

I had the pleasure of meeting with the Church at Forestville twice during August. The congregation there is the largest and strongest one in the State. Forestville is the home of Brother G. W. Winter, who has been in this State for several years laboring in the Master's vineyard. Most of the members of the congregation live some distance from the house of worship and the surrounding influences are anything but encouraging; but they are loyal.

A new day was dawning for the Churches of Christ in California. Never again would the cause be as weak as it had been in the 1890's when Forestville and G. W. Winter stood virtually alone. But in 1904, as Glenn pointed out, the largest congregation and the best known preacher were still to be found in Forestville.

In 1906, the wife of Texas preacher J. D. Tant thought a preaching tour in California might improve her husband's poor health. She noticed the name of G. W. Winter in the pages of the *Firm Foundation*, and she wrote to Winter asking if he would arrange such a tour. Winter responded favorably, and Tant came out in the summer of 1906. In one report of his California tour, Tant wrote:

From Madera I came to Forestville, the home of brother G. W. Winter. Forestville is in the northern part of the State, and perhaps is better known to the eastern brethren than any other place in California. Brother Winter is one of our ablest preachers. I think we have at Forestville the largest congregation in the state, there being over 100 members in the band there. Brother Winter baptized twelve people during April. Several others have been baptized since our meeting began, and the attendance is large.

Tant closed his Forestville meeting with fifteen baptisms, and he returned to Texas with his health fully restored.

In the following years, Forestville was instrumental in helping new congregations begin in nearby Santa Rosa (1908) and Graton (1909). However, within two years the numerical stronghold of members of the church had shifted from Sonoma County to Los Angeles County. By 1912, the Sichel Street church in Los Angeles, under the leadership of G. W. Riggs, had surpassed Forestville as the largest congregation of the Church of Christ in California.

When G. W. Winter died in January of 1929, G. Earl McCay submitted an obituary account to the *Firm Foundation*. McCay recalled:

He probably did more for the cause of Christ in California than any other man. I have known him for more than forty years, and believe he was as good a man as I ever associated

(Continued on page 5)

There Must Be a Better Way

IVAN STEWART

There is a shortage of elders and preachers and those now serving are "dropping like flies." What is the problem? What is the solution?

Elders and preachers constantly call this writer for advice and solutions. A common thread appears to be the lack of basic application of Christian principles such as failure to apply lessons of the following Scriptures to the business meeting and relations between elders and preachers:

1. "In everything, do to others, what you would have them do to you. . ." Mt. 7:12.
2. "... fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Ga. 5:22.
3. "... but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children . . ." 1 Ts. 2:7.

Recently, an article appeared in the brotherhood papers written by a preacher who was fired. The preacher's wife was sitting at home as she has many times deeply concerned about the outcome of the meeting. It is common knowledge among elders and preachers that many business meetings lack a non-threatening atmosphere. There must be a better way—the Scriptural way.

This writer has been blessed with more than 30 years of gospel preaching having worked basically with only three congregations during the past 24 years; thus, personal apprehensions have been minimized in business meetings and working relationships with elders. During the past seventeen years while working with many elderships directing campaigns for Christ around the world, much has been learned. This wide experience prompts these suggestions in looking for the better Scriptural way:

1. Elders and preachers would do well to have a written working arrangement.
2. Elders and preachers would profit greatly by having an Agenda before each meeting.

Elders should attend only those meetings by the preachers where the purpose of that meeting is known prior to the meeting.

Preachers should attend only those meetings wherein an Agenda is provided prior to the meeting. This should help bring about "peace" eliminating emotional apprehension in elders, preachers and their families.

Elders and preachers should feel free to be "open," "honest" without each other feeling the slightest threat to their position or job only to endure personal or family emotional disturbances involving great pain, money and ultimately cease serving as a gospel preacher.

Use scripture more often to handle problems and guide relationships. The basic problem may be called lack of love; however, fundamental to love is faith and "... faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Rm. 10:17).

That Gospel will help Christians as well as non-Christians.

Ministers are concerned with "preaching the gospel" and yet, while the gospel is being preached in local work, basically most

preachers are preaching to those who have already heard the gospel. Members do need edification and nothing is wrong with this; however, many preachers have worked themselves into other jobs such as: building buildings, administration, elders' work, etc. These trained brethren could "turn the world upside down" and bear greater fruit if placed in a position to become greater soul winners than in the "Hermitically sealed" congregations. The Holy Spirit in Acts 13 thought this was a good idea by sending forth the more experienced preachers, Paul and Barnabas. Preachers today would be much happier leading more souls to Christ. Send them forth for periods of three months—six months—one, two, or three years. Then a serious question may be asked: "who would then edify the saints?" This is work unto which they have been appointed. This would improve relationships because each would be producing greater fruits in the areas of work for which each has qualified and been appointed.

Work so all business meetings are non-threatening in every way to all involved.

Too often, brethren approach matters under the umbrella of "gentleness" only to witness fruit later that proved their procedures were anything but gentle as evidenced by emotional disturbances, resignations from elders and preachers, congregational problems, etc. It would be interesting to note medical costs by elders and ministers necessary to maintain "self-control" and keep the job as long as possible. It would be helpful if the lines of communication would be truly opened to facilitate love — joy — peace — patience — kindness — goodness — faithfulness — self-control and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. There must be a better way—the Scriptural Way.

2805 Tudor Rd., OKC, OK 73129

THE OLD FORESTVILLE MEETINGHOUSE 1879-1979

(Continued from page 4)

with. On January 14th he was suddenly called up higher. The writer spoke to the largest assembly of people he had ever seen at a funeral. Men from different walks of life showed their respect for the kind of man brother Winter had been.

G. W. Winter has been in his grave in the Forestville cemetery for half a century and more, but he has not been forgotten. In this centennial year of the historic Forestville meetinghouse, it seems appropriate to recall again the lasting contribution of this farmer-preacher and his faithful congregation. All of us who now labor among the Churches of Christ in California are building on the foundation they laid.

Pepperdine University, Malibu, California