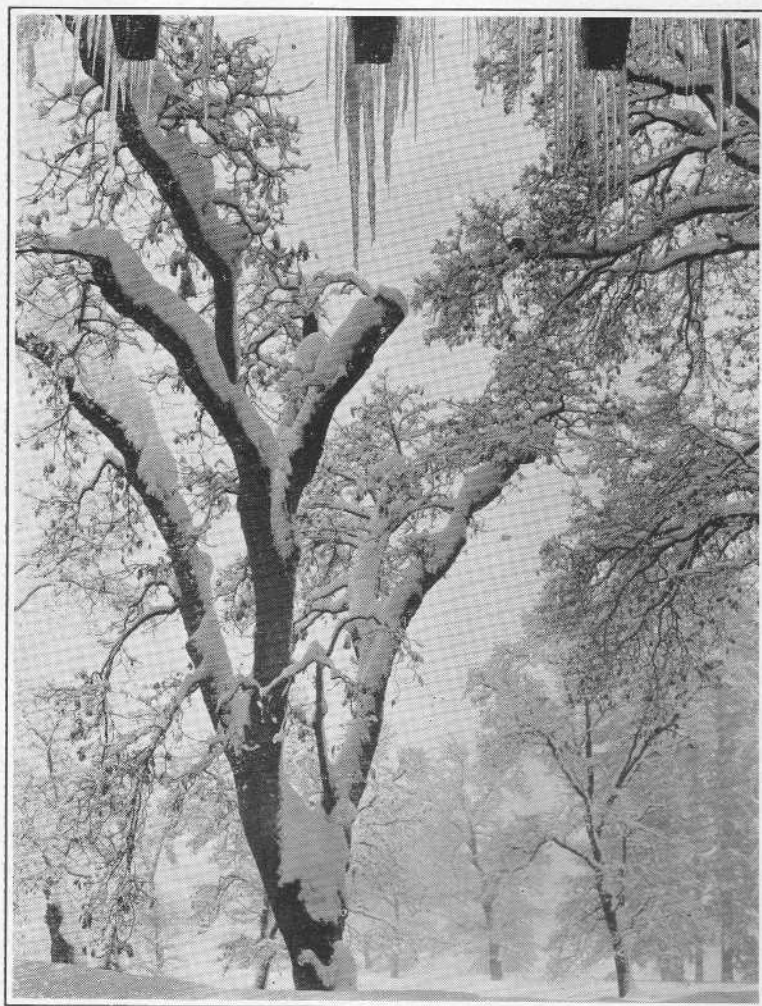


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

Vol. XXIV

December, 1945

No. 12



Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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GIFTS FROM YOSEMITE

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, NPS Staff

My gifts to you are the forest trees
That were last night trimmed with snow,
And all my domes and cliffs and spires,
In your figurative stocking go.
A Gray Squirrel with a bushy tail,
The saucy Blue-fronted Jay;
The Kinglets and the Chickadees
That sing on Christmas Day.
Yosemite Falls in frosty garb,
The does in the meadows with fawns;
A Water Ouzel that dips and dives
As the river stretches and yawns.
To these I add the peace of my deep
Eternal, that never departs;
My beauty and freshness of out-of-doors
To treasure up in your hearts



COVER ILLUSTRATION

Yosemite Oaks in Winter

(Photo by Ansel Adams)

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE CHAPEL

By Rev. Alfred Glass

In a quiet corner of the Old Village, virtually hidden by trees, stands a little New England style meeting house called the "Old Village Chapel." This simple building, resting harmoniously in its setting of meadow, trees, and gray granite walls, today is the last man-made guardian of the Valley's early history and the oldest relic still standing of those stirring days. With the exception of the Mountain House at Glacier Point, built but one year previously (1878), it is the oldest building in Yosemite National Park.

In the summer of 1879, in a little cluster of buildings grouped about the area which today is marked by the beginning of the Four-Mile Trail to Glacier Point, the sound of hammer and saw was the constant accompaniment to the normal activities of the Valley. In the open area between Black's Hotel and Leidig's place, a building was being erected; the first structure dedicated to the worship of God in Yosemite Valley which in itself is a natural outdoor cathedral speaking of the beauty and glory of God's handiwork. The work went on throughout the summer, until by late September, the exterior was finished and the new chapel stood ready to face the rigors of the winter season. Within a year or two the building was painted and a ceiling put in.

Who originally suggested the building of the church in Yosemite

Valley? The answer to that question seems to be lost in the passage of years but we have several clues as to those who might have shared in the beginnings of the enterprise.

The Reverend M. C. Briggs, a Methodist minister of Alameda, California, a friend of Galen Clark and J. M. Hutchings, was early connected with the chapel's history. Mr. Briggs was appointed to the Board of Commissioners of the Yosemite Grant in 1880 by Governor George C. Perkins. He served as Secretary and Treasurer of the Board and undoubtedly had a part in the appointment of J. M. Hutchings as Guardian of the area in that same year. We may surmise that Mr. Briggs' knowledge of the Valley and his acquaintance with Galen Clark and Hutchings implies that he had visited the region before 1880. As a fervent Methodist preacher we may assume that the absence of a place of worship in this magnificent setting with its colony of settlers and hundreds of visitors would arouse a determination on his part to forward the building of a church.

Mrs. George Fiske, wife of the pioneer photographer of Yosemite, evidently took an early interest in the chapel. Her husband's studio was diagonally across the road from the church. In a statement made some years ago she said: "It (the chapel) was erected in 1879, at a cost of \$2,343, but not completed.

The sum of \$1,511.70 was collected by subscription and the Sabbath Schools, leaving a debt of \$831.30, the last of which was paid September 25, 1882. Since then the money collected has been used for the current expenses of the chapel and having it ceiled and painted." This statement indicates that Mrs. Fiske took an active interest in the chapel from the beginning and it is possible that she may have originated the idea of a place of worship in the Valley.

The name of Florence Hutchings, first white child born in the Valley, occurs early in this story. This outstanding young woman, daughter of J. M. Hutchings, died at the early age of 18, only two years after the building of the chapel. Although her years were few, she left the indelible impact of a character marked by kindly courtesy, generosity, and unselfishness. The influence of her personality was so pronounced that one of the mountain peaks of the park was named "Mount Florence" in her honor.

It was through Florence Hutchings that the influence of the internationally-famed revival team of Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey reached even into this isolated section of the Sierra. During the year 1880, these famed evangelists held meetings in the First Congregational Church of San Francisco. While visiting in the city, Florence attended some of the meetings and was deeply affected in her religious life by the experi-

ence. She became acquainted with the leaders, especially with Dr. George Cole Stebbins, who wrote hymns and directed music for the famous evangelists, and his sister, Mrs. Ella S. Miller. Because of this friendship, Dr. Stebbins and his sister visited the Valley that same year as guests of Florence. We have no doubt that one of the points of interest visited would be the chapel, now just one year old. Florence's interest in the chapel as a result of her quickened religious life, found expression in her assumption of the duties of janitor and caretaker of the little church. She continued this loving service until her untimely death in September 1881. The first organ in the little chapel was given by Miss Mary Porter of Philadelphia in memory of Florence Hutchings. Miss Porter had visited the Valley in 1878 and had enjoyed Miss Hutching's friendship.

Although the beginnings of the idea of the chapel are shrouded in silence, the facts of the construction of the building are given by J. M. Hutchings in his well-known book, "In The Heart of The Sierras" (p.355). The California Sunday School Association conducted a campaign to raise money for the enterprise. Some of this money came from the Sabbath School pupils of the day, who donated many pennies to the cause. Most of the money, however, came from the voluntary contributions of leading members of the Association. "Charles Geddes, leading architect

of San Francisco, made and presented the plans. E. Thomson of San Francisco, erected the building at a cost of between three and four thousand dollars." This account of Mr. Hutchings agrees substantially with that of Mrs. Fiske's. Mr. Hutchings goes on to say that the chapel will "seat an audience of about two hundred and fifty." This evidently was an optimistic estimate. At the present time the chapel will hardly seat one hundred comfortably. The bell for the tower was given by H. D. Bacon of Oakland and, to quote Mr. Hutchings, "when its first notes rung out upon the moon-silvered air, in the evening of dedication, it was the

first sound of the 'church-going bell' ever heard in Yosemite."

Two of the men who worked on the construction were Charley Post of Sacramento who acted as foreman, and Al May who worked as a carpenter.

The chapel stood on rising ground on the south side of the South road, facing north, with a beautiful view of Yosemite Falls. The outline of the building site can still be discerned at the old location.

The first couple married in the chapel were Abby (probably a nickname for Abigail) Crippen, a step-daughter of Mrs. J. Barnard, wife of an old-time settler and hotel-keeper,



YOSEMITE CHAPEL IN WINTER (Photo by Ansel Adams)

and Walter Childs, who in the summer of 1880 ran a telephone line from Tenaya Lake down into the Valley. The marriage took place on October 24, 1880.

The visit of former President Ulysses S. Grant to the Valley on October 1, 1879, just at the time of the completion of the chapel, bears mentioning because of a later incident connected with this famous American. In 1885, on the death of President Grant, a memorial service was held in the chapel and the organist for the day, playing the Florence Hutchings memorial organ, was Sir Arthur Sullivan, famed composer and collaborator with Sir William Gilbert in the famous Gilbert and Sullivan light operas. Sir Arthur was visiting in the Valley at the time and was asked to assist in the service.

At various times the chapel was used for many different types of meetings. Old-timers remember lantern slide lectures and magician performances. For most of its early years, the chapel was used irregularly for religious services. There was no permanent minister in the Valley, and services were held only upon the appearance of some visiting clergyman.* It is probable that many famous preachers spoke within its walls, but no record of such

occasions has come down through the years. The "argument from silence" indicates the fact that too often the chapel stood empty and forsaken.

In the passage of the years, the old church, built in the midst of a busy community, lost one by one its companion buildings, until with the moving on of community activity to other parts of the Valley, it stood alone. Finally, it too left its original location, and in September or October of 1901 was moved to its present location near the community known as the Old Village. John S. Stevens, son of Otobine Stevens, supervised the removal.

With the coming of the twentieth century, the old Chapel found new life and activity. In 1906 the Roman Catholic group met there throughout the summer months and have continued to use the building, with some interruptions, ever since. Some years later, the Northern California Sunday School Association sent a minister into the Valley each summer to carry on religious work for the Protestant group, who met in the chapel.

However, the days of difficulty for the old chapel were not over. Evil days fell upon it in the latter part of the 1920s. The Supervising Executive of the Yosemite National Park Church, organized to supervise

* Since 1924, under the Yosemite National Park Church, the following ministers have served as permanent pastors:

Rev. A. J. Gunn (1924-1929)

Rev. Ralph F. Doescher (1941-1944)

Rev. James Asa White (1929-1940)

Rev. Alfred Glass (1944-)

all religious activities in the Valley, in the 1928 annual report made the following statement: "Last winter the theatre which we had used for three summers as a meeting place for worship, burned down. This left us with no place to hold our services except the Old Chapel. So early in the season we held our services there. But the Old Chapel is very old, delapidated, too small, and not in a desirable location for church services. In the winter it is very cold and though there are two stoves, these do not adequately heat the building; also, the stove pipes of the two stoves go through the windows but not always does the smoke go through the stove pipe." (!)

In 1930, under the leadership of the Reverend James Asa White, Executive Secretary of the Yosemite National Park Church, several hundreds of dollars were spent in repairs and improvements. Since that time it has been used regularly by both the Protestant and Roman Catholic groups, except during the summer months. In September, 1945, the present Board of Trustees of the Park Church, voted to spend some two hundred dollars in repairs and improvements. In addition, thanks to the United States National Park Service, to which the Park Church ceded title to the building in 1927, the building has been kept in good repair and made more usable with various improvements.

It is a testimony to the foresight of its builders and to those who labored

through the years, that the Old Chapel today is the center of more activity than in all its long history. As the second oldest building in Yosemite National Park, it is singled out increasingly for pilgrimages by those who visit this famed spot. All who enter its doors feel the spirit of its years and its devotion. Through the years it seems to have captured some of the timelessness of the mountain peaks towering above it, and it looks forward to the future with the serenity of that which is eternal.

Perhaps no one has expressed the spirit of the Old Chapel as well as the Reverend James M. Malloch of Fresno in the following poem:

Little Chapel in The Valley

By James M. Malloch

Little Chapel in the Valley,
 Mountain Chapel lifted high,
 Little Chapel shrined in granite
 And the high Sierra sky,
 Tell us of the many secrets
 You have whispered to the pines,
 Solemn secrets men have told thee
 As they've told to other shrines.
 Tell us of the prayers like incense
 You have often seen arise,
 Like the cedar's incensed branches
 Floating in the mountain skies.
 Tell us life's eternal secret,
 Chapel of Yosemite
 Little Chapel of the Valley,
 Hold us close to God and thee.

NOTES ON THE SHARP-TAILED SNAKE

By M. V. Walker, Associate Park Naturalist

The records of the Yosemite Museum indicate that the sharp-tailed snake (*Contia tenuis*) is probably one of the rarest reptiles either observed or collected in the Yosemite region. The herpetological collection contains but a single specimen and the records list only two others taken by Park Service personnel within the area.

Because of the above facts more than usual interest was shown when workers in the Wawona blister rust camp this past summer discovered two of these very rare and interesting reptiles. Unfortunately the larger specimen (approximately 15 inches in length) escaped, but the smaller snake (8 inches in length) was brought to the Yosemite Museum on August 12 by D. R. Swormstedt and Paul Jones. It was placed in a large jar and was kept alive for observation for over two months when it finally added to the alcoholic collection.

The sharp-tailed snake is of especial interest because the tail terminates very abruptly and the scales are modified into a rather sharp spine, hence the common name. Whenever the snake is picked up or handled it uses this sharp tail in a defensive manner. It will repeatedly attempt to "stick" the handler, and although the specimens observed were unable to puncture the skin, the larger specimen was able to produce the sensation of a sharp, quick pin

prick on numerous occasions. It is evident that this particular defensive adaptation is either now effective against certain enemies, or else it may indicate the degenerate nature of this particular species of snake. At any rate, this snake is no doubt partly responsible for the myth about the snake with a "stinger" in the end of its tail.

There is also some evidence that the sharp-pointed tail may be of still another use to this snake which is apparently nocturnal and burrowing. Recent observations tend to indicate that when this snake is held down in an attempt to keep it from moving, that it will thrust its tail down into the soil and proceed to push itself along, an adaptation which may be of some value in burrowing.

SPECIAL NUMBER IN JANUARY

The January 1946 number of Yosemite Nature Notes will be devoted entirely to the subject "Reptiles and Amphibians of Yosemite National Park." This booklet, prepared by Associate Park Naturalist M. V. Walker, will contain approximately 40 pages and will be profusely illustrated.

All regular subscribers to Yosemite Nature Notes will receive a copy of this booklet. Extra copies will be placed on sale in the Yosemite Museum at 25c each. (C.F.B.)

PARK RANGER "BILLY" NELSON RETIRES**By Frank A. Kittredge, Superintendent.**

Few if any National Park Service employees have had an opportunity to retire from active duty on **two** occasions. Thus November 30, the date of the second retirement of Park Ranger W. H. ("Billy") Nelson, was a rather unique date.

"Billy" has been associated with this area in one way or another for almost the entire period of his life. Born at Merced Falls, California on July 21, 1873 he first came to Yosemite when but three years old in company with his parents, sister, and Mr. and Mrs. Ingalsbe — friends of the family. This was during the days when the Yosemite Grant (including Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove) was administered by the State, and but two years after the opening of the first road into the Valley.

Later, in 1901, "Billy" returned to the Valley for a second time. In this instance he worked during the summer for Nelson Salter, who then operated the local store. His association with the National Park Service began on June 1, 1917. During that summer he served as a seasonal park ranger. The following year he received a year-round appointment as park ranger and continued in that capacity until his original retirement on July 1, 1936. Campers who frequented the Valley during the 20's

and early 30's will undoubtedly recall "Billy" and his white horse "Shiek."

After the beginning of the recent war, when many park employees left to enter the armed forces, "Billy" was prevailed upon to return to his old duties. In consequence, he again entered on duty for the "duration" as a park ranger on May 18, 1943.

"Billy" typifies the "old time ranger" who rendered such great service by assisting in the development of a sound foundation upon which the National Parks, as we understand them today, were built. He is one of the few remaining links between the past and the present in Yosemite National Park history. A host of friends, park visitors and all of his co-workers, will miss this genial gentleman of the outdoors, but the good work in which he had such a large part will live long in the appreciation of millions of Americans.

**BIRTHDAY FOR NATURE NOTES**

With this issue Yosemite Nature Notes completes its twenty first year as a monthly, printed publication.





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Dan Anderson