



## On My Mind These Days

By Glenn Lambdin

### Saving a Part of Our Forgotten History: Part 2

As I mentioned last week, I nominated the old City-owned Christian Science Church to the California Register of Historical Places since the City Council rejected my nomination to our local registry. Over the next few weeks, I will be sharing some of the history of the property and how Sierra Madre's contributions to the Christian Science and New Thought movements contributed to the overall cultural heritage at local, state and national levels. As far back as 1894, Sierra Madre had direct links with the Christian Science Movement and persons generally recognized and credited as pioneers in the Christian Science Movement and in the New Thought Era.

#### Local Historical Significance

The City of Sierra Madre, California was founded by Nathaniel Coburn Carter, a Christian Science member. Prior to Carter's move out west in 1870, he and his wife Annetta lived in Lowell, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, and the birthplace of Mary Baker Eddy's Christ Science. It was because of failing health that Carter moved to California. While there is no known public record that confirms that Sierra Madre's founding father was a Christian Science member prior to his move to California in 1870, it is well documented that Mary Baker Eddy was teaching, openly practicing, and publishing her new "prayer based" healing religion throughout the greater Boston area as early as 1866 when she discovered the religion. She formally established the Christ Science Church in 1879. It is very probable that due to Carter's geographic proximity to Eddy, and Carter's failing health, he may have very well embraced her prayer based healing doctrine while still in Massachusetts. Nonetheless, Carter and his wife Annetta were instrumental in the Christ Science movement in Sierra Madre. In 1904, a publication of "Southern California Quarterly," printed Carter's death memorial naming him a "devout believer in Christian Science" and stating that his burial service was performed by the Christian Science Society.

Over the next seven years after Nathaniel Carter's death, the Christian Science movement grew larger in Sierra Madre. In 1911, the first recorded meeting of persons interested in Christian Science was held at the home of Mrs. Minnie E. Kimball. The readers at that service were Annetta Carter, Nathaniel Carter's wife, and Mrs. Kimball. Later, the meetings were held in the town hall. By October of 1916, the group officially organized and voted to establish a Christian Science Society in Sierra Madre. A meeting place was secured at the Woman's Club House, now the location of the current Sierra Madre City Hall. In 1920, the Society purchased a lot at 186 W. Highland and started building their church edifice. The architect of record is A.D. Clough, a member of the Society. Clough was a local Sierra Madrean and lived at 44 W. Carter, across the street from Carter's estate. It is reported that Clough not only planned the building, but designed every aspect of the building including the furniture and electrical fixtures. The building contract was handled entirely by W. E. Walker. *"From the first design to the completed work, practically every step represents the work of members of the society, an interesting fact which the members are justly proud."* (Sierra Madre News, May 5, 1922) The entire building and lot represented a total valuation of about \$15,000 when completed. The first service was held in the incomplete chapel on Thanksgiving Day, 1921. The cornerstone was laid in January, 1922 and the building was dedicated in August, 1925 when the property was completely paid for. A charter was granted by the Mother Church, The First Church of Christ Science in Boston in 1929, and the Society officially became the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Sierra Madre. In 1973, the members of the church formally voted to disband. Shortly after, the property was purchased by the Gloria Dei Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 1995, the building was purchased by the City of Sierra Madre and has remained vacant with the exception of a few years when it was used as a temporary Youth Activity Center, commonly called, "The YAC."

Next week, I will discuss Sierra Madre's role at the national and state levels of these movements.