

CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

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The Chatsworth Community Church, built in 1903, was originally located at 10051 Topanga Canyon Boulevard. It was a landmark in the community for sixty years before it was moved to its present location within Oakwood Memorial Park, at 22601 Lassen Street, Chatsworth.



The Chatsworth Community Church is shown located on the west side of Topanga, when Topanga was still a dirt road. The parsonage house is shown on the left.

The Church was built by volunteer labor in 1903 and also served as a high school from 1904-1906. In 1914, the bell was added to the church steeple, acquired from the old Santa Susana School building when it was torn down. The bell had been ordered and shipped to the school in the 1890's.

In 1921, White Oak Hall was added adjacent to the church building. This became the first community gathering place. The church was one of the first Protestant churches built in the San Fernando Valley. Social activities, youth events and town hall meetings as well as church services were held in the distinctive white frame building. During fires, floods, and disasters, the conveniently-located church doubled as headquarters for the Red Cross and other emergency services. This Church was the center of community life until the 1950's when other churches were built in Chatsworth.

In 1958 the name changed from Community Church to Chatsworth Methodist Church. In 1962, it was sold and leased back from the owner until the structure could be relocated.

At that point in time, Los Angeles had a city rule prohibiting the moving of any building over 50 years old. However, on February 15, 1963, efforts were successful to have the church declared Los Angeles Cultural Historical Monument Number 14. This allowed the structure to be rescued from demolition so it could eventually be moved to a new location. To accomplish that goal, the Chatsworth Historical Society was formed on April 17, 1963. In November, Oakwood Memorial Park offered a site for the relocation of the building. In April 1964, one year later, John Spinks, owner, donated the building to the Chatsworth Historical Society, giving them title to move the Church.

In June 1964 a reception was held by the Chatsworth Historical Society in appreciation, to honor Mr. John Spinks and the Board of Directors of the Oakwood Memorial Park Association at the home of Mr and Mrs. Roy Rogers. Roy Rogers and Dale Evans,

early members of the Society, donated \$1000 to honor their daughter Debbie.

Chatsworth Historical Society founding members and officers at the time included Charles Janess, Bill and Lila Schepler, Keith and Sheila Watts, Virginia Watson, Arthur Honey, Katherine and R.L. "Kelly" Johnson.

An example of Victorian architecture, once commonly used in churches throughout the United States, it is one of the few remaining buildings of this type now preserved in California.



According to Virginia Watson, on January 27, 1965 television cameras ground away as the 60-year-old building creaked and groaned out onto Devonshire and turned toward Oakwood Memorial Park. Charles Janess was later quoted in The Daily News saying "We moved the Church up there and didn't crack a window."

The long, slow process of restoring the building was finally completed in time for the Chatsworth Bicentennial when Dale Evans Rogers and Dr. Carl Dentzel headlined the Re-Dedication Ceremony on April 25, 1976.



In 1981, the Rev. Noel Stipkovich, rector of St. Mary the Virgin congregation arranged for use of the Church for worship. In 1985, the Rev. Russell Fry became rector and he stayed until 1988. The Rev. Anthony Rasch became rector in 1989 and continues now as the Right Reverend Anthony F. Rasch, Bishop Coadjutor.

Over the years, repairs and improvements have continued. A new window and new bell were added for the 90th birthday celebration of the church. Roy Rogers attended and spoke mentioning that his parents were buried there at the cemetery. Funeral services were held for Monty Montana in the Pioneer Church and a Memorial Service was held for Roy Rogers after he died in 1998.

St. Mary the Virgin, Anglican-Rite Catholic Church currently holds worship services at 10 a.m. every Sunday morning. Call (818) 988-9740 for information.

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