

Heinz Rubel and “The Church that Love Built”

by Frank Boyd

If you spend a little time at Grace Episcopal Church or in the city of Glendora, you have likely heard the name Rubel. Most people in the city are familiar with Mike Rubel and his awesome castle; however, his father, the Reverend Henry “Heinz” Scott Rubel, with the help of his wife Dorothy, made Grace Episcopal Church an integral part of the Glendora community, and it was Heinz who coined the phrase “the church that love built.” Though his life was cut short at the age of 48, he lived an extremely full life, and his legacy lives on in our church.

Heinz Rubel became rector of Grace Church on November 15, 1935. He was 37 years old and had already lived an interesting life. He was born in 1898 and raised in a German neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a child he showed tremendous talent. Not only was he a gifted musician, but he also demonstrated incredible engineering prowess—at age nine he was an amateur broadcaster using a shortwave radio he had built himself. After high school, he attended the University of Wisconsin to obtain an electrical engineering degree. But in his freshman year, the United States had entered the First World War, and he was called into service as a radio operator in the United States Navy. While in the navy, Heinz utilized his talent in music. He organized the ship’s orchestra and began writing songs for the crew to sing. His song, *Force of Mine*, was made the official song of the North Sea Mine Barrage by Admiral Joseph Straus.

After the Navy, Heinz returned to the University of Wisconsin and worked his way through school writing a newspaper column. Once again, his musical talents began to shine. During his time at Wisconsin, he wrote comedic skits and composed original music for stage performers and orchestras, including the book, music, and lyrics for a production entitled *Kikmi* which was featured in the University of Wisconsin’s Haresfoot shows. After receiving his degree at Wisconsin, Heinz traveled to New York for postgraduate work at the General Theological Seminary. All the while, he wrote musical numbers for New York theatrical performers and served as chaplain to Broadway performers from 1925 to 1927.

Heinz’s work as chaplain would bring him to the love of his life, Dorothy Deuel, a musical comedienne and dancer who was headlining in George Gershwin’s *Music Box Review*. The two met at the Episcopal Actors’ Guild at The Little Church Around the Corner. By all accounts, Miss Deuel was extremely gracious and strikingly beautiful. When Dorothy entered the room, Heinz was talking to English actor George Arliss and insisted on being introduced to Dorothy. Not long after the introduction, the two began a courtship and were married in Pittsburg in 1928.

Heinz’s rector duties brought the couple to Milwaukee and then to Chicago. Because his modest minister’s salary was insufficient to raise his growing family, Heinz received permission from the church to work in broadcasting. For this work, he chose the pen name “Hal Raynor.” While in Chicago, he wrote and produced the *World Book Man Series*, a nationally known educational radio program that ran on 137 stations. After Chicago, Heinz became rector of St. Mary’s Atlantic in Highlands, New Jersey, which was not far from Manhattan. In 1932, he was called to head the National Biscuit Company radio programs and began to work with comedian Joe Penner in New York. The two men formed a friendship that would eventually take them to Hollywood. During 1935, Heinz traveled to California under contract with Paramount Pictures where he wrote material for Penner’s comedic movies and radio programs. He returned to New Jersey and, later that summer, moved to California, settling in the small citrus hamlet of Glendora.

On November 15, 1935, the Reverend Henry Scott Rubel became rector of the little church on Vista Bonita—Grace Episcopal Church—and “Hal Raynor” continued writing “crazy and tuneful songs” and comic antics for Paramount. In a 1937 Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine feature, Pat Stephenson dismissed the

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obvious “Jekyll and Hyde” cliché in describing the Hal Raynor/Reverend Rubel dichotomy. After spending some time in both of Heinz’s worlds, Ms. Stephenson recognized the power of his intellect and personality. She wrote:

He has that peculiar ability to drink from the springs of humor and touch the heart of poignancy—an ability that is recognized both in his writings and in his pulpit tasks.

By 1939, Heinz was convinced that the United States was headed into war. He used his talents and served his country by becoming Chaplain of the State Guard. A prolific typist and fluent in German, he volunteered his skills by listening to Hitler’s radio addresses from Europe using his own Zenith radio and typing every word of Hitler’s speeches verbatim, translating them into English as he typed. All the while he carried out his duties as rector of Grace Church. As a team, Heinz and Dorothy were instrumental in the exponential growth of the church by reaching out to the community and using their musical talents for the good of the church. Dorothy directed countless pageants and plays, and on Saturday mornings, they would turn over their living room for dance classes so that little girls could learn ballet and tap.

As the church began to outgrow the small building on Vista Bonita, Heinz started on plans to build a larger church. He wrote musical plays that raised funds for the new church, and Dorothy spearheaded countless fundraising events, including a Victory Bazaar celebrating the end of the war. The victory celebration included a parade with a record-breaking crowd between 3500 and 4000 people, followed by what must have been a fantastic church carnival (that included a raffle for a brand new Ford sedan), a luncheon, afternoon tea, evening dinner, music, and dancing. Heinz’s vision would eventually be realized with the building of our current campus on Mountain View Avenue. Sadly, he would not live to see it.

On November 23, 1945, the congregation celebrated Heinz’s 10th year as rector of Grace Church with a large barbeque at Rancho Carena, which was located down on Route 66. The printed program featured a caricature drawing of Heinz and Dorothy standing together under a large California Oak on a hill, with Grace Church in the background, settled in the orange groves. On the trunk of the tree, there are two hearts pierced together with an arrow—“Dorothy” is written on one heart and “Heinz” is written on the other. Heinz is smiling and Dorothy is nuzzled into his left arm and shoulder with her eyes closed. In this caricature, the artist captures the deep bond between the two, but the picture also seems to capture a sense of foreboding sorrow.

During most of his life, Heinz was a large man who carried some extra weight. At the anniversary barbeque, he was described as being thin and gaunt. The rector’s comments contained in the church bulletins during this time period were noticeably brief, and there were statements regarding Heinz’s absences from some Sunday services due to illness. In reading through all of these old documents, it appears that the parish was aware that their priest was gravely ill, and I believe the 10-year celebration was organized as a tribute to their beloved rector. My suspicions were confirmed when I came across a very poignant letter penned by Dorothy after Heinz’s death. In it she describes the events of July 17, 1946. She and several family members and friends were sitting in their back patio around an open fire enjoying the shadowed mountains and evening stars. Heinz was lying in a cot. A car drove up with Van and Mildred Van Denburgh from Grace Church. Van handed Heinz an envelope that contained the deed to the Rubels’ home, together with insurance papers paid in full until 1949—the Church had paid off their mortgage. Dorothy describes her appreciation in the following statement:

Suddenly, I was poignantly aware of the love these friends witnessing these hours together with Heinz, deeply aware of the firm, sure hand of friendship extended to us both so faithfully; gratefully aware of the diligence, commensurate with our love for Heinz, manifested through the years by each one present, in serving “The Little Church Love Built.”

Heinz died on December 5, 1946, and services were held in his beloved church. Eight years later, his dream became a reality—groundbreaking ceremonies were held for the new church on Mountain View Avenue. Dorothy continued her work for the church after his death and was instrumental in raising the funds to build The Reverend Henry Scott Rubel Chapel, a fitting tribute for “The Church that Love Built.”