

Grace Centennial

Introduction:

Because Grace Episcopal will be celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2012, your Centennial Committee is researching all facets of the history of our beautiful church. As we do so, we would like to publish articles in the Communicator highlighting the fascinating facts we have uncovered. Here is the first in a series of profiles of the founders of our church.

John Charles Henry Brunjes and Hilda Wilkins Brunjes

By Mary Ann Burkhalter and Zella Cramer

Among the faithful Glendorans who became founders of Grace Episcopal Church were John and Hilda Brunjes. In November 1910, when the first meeting was held to discuss starting a new Parish in Glendora, the Brunjeses were there!

Hilda and John were children of California pioneers. John Charles Henry was the firstborn son of Jacob and Meta Martins Brunjes, who had emigrated from Hanover, Germany in the latter part of the 19th Century. The couple had settled in San Francisco, where Jacob worked as a grocer. They lived on Vallejo Street in the city, where John was born on November 6, 1877.

Around the turn of the 20th Century, Jacob Brunjes, John's father, moved his family from San Francisco to Southern California. The 1900 census lists him as a farmer living in Rowland Township, Los Angeles County. This area (where much of Covina is now situated) was a cradle of the flourishing citrus industry. Jacob apparently had begun a new undertaking: citrus growing. The 1900 records show that the family now included John and three younger siblings.

John's future wife, Hilda Gertrude Wilkins, was born in England in 1879, and records show that the Wilkins family arrived in the United States in 1894, eventually settling in Southern California. Although we have no record of when and where Hilda and John met, we do know that they were married in about 1901. They became parents of three daughters: Phyllis, Gertrude, and Winifred.

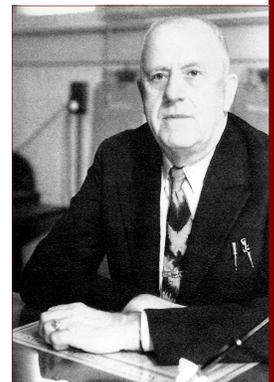
John Brunjes left school at an early age and went to work at one of the packing houses as a box maker. By the time of the 1910 census, after he and Hilda had been married about nine years, John's career had advanced significantly. The citrus industry was in its prime, and John was now manager of the Glendora Citrus Association packing house, one of the largest in the world. He was also an active member of the Glendora Masonic Lodge, and he and Hilda certainly possessed a strong Christian faith.

The family had lived in rented property for many years. However, by 1930, John and Hilda owned their own home at 301 Meda Street in Glendora. This handsome frame house still stands today - a landmark in the city's history.

By this time, Grace Episcopal, the little church on Vista Bonita which they had helped to found, was well established and growing. Throughout the years, the faith, loyalty, and service of the Brunjes family continued unabated. Hilda had been blessed with a beautiful voice and was devoted to the choir. Eventually, all three daughters sang in the choir, as well.

John Brunjes died on October 4, 1944. Unfortunately, he was not able to see a longtime dream of the church become a reality - the creation of a larger, more beautiful Grace. However, in 1954, Hilda Brunjes, as guest of honor, was photographed wielding a shovel at the groundbreaking ceremony for Baxter Hall. This occasion, of course, was the beginning of the church on Mountain View which we now cherish and enjoy.

Hilda lived to experience the dedication of the main sanctuary in 1957. Her life ended December 27, 1959. Today Grace Episcopal Church gratefully honors the memory of John and Hilda Brunjes.



John Brunjes.



Hilda Brunjes breaks ground.