

Christ Chapel

CHAPTER XXIV

On Boise State College's campus is one of the oldest and most notable historic buildings in the State of Idaho—Christ Chapel. In 1962, this oldest protestant church in Montana, Idaho and Utah was to be destroyed with a new building replacing it. This edifice had been the setting for many of the early civic and religious events that took place during Idaho's territorial history. It had had a long life and had at first been referred to as "The New Episcopal Church" as indicated by an advertisement in the *Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman* on Saturday, September 1, 1866, which announced that the first service would be held the following day.

For two years it had been preceded by some seven locations of worship, the first being a ". . . little adobe building opposite the *Statesman* office with a dirt floor and slab seats,"¹ when the Reverend St. Michael Fackler, with the aid of women members of what was to become his parish, decided that these inconvenient places were no longer suitable as places of worship. The first location for the new church was at 7th and Bannock Streets.

This founder of the first protestant church in Boise presents the financial story of Christ Chapel in his first sermon given in the new church on September 2, 1966.

The contract price for the building, as it stands, is \$2,000. Some additional work will cost about \$60 more. To meet this we have subscriptions to the amount of \$730, and the ladies of the Aid Association, with a commendable and praiseworthy zeal, have raised nearly \$1,000—that is to say, \$975. (This was earned mainly by ice cream socials, bazaars selling fancy work and quilts and home-talent shows).² We have the promise of more subscriptions, and doubtless there are others who have not yet been asked who will subscribe to an enterprise which ought to meet the approval and receive the help of all who are interested in the growth of the place and in laying the foundation of good society. We hope, therefore, soon to raise the balance needed—about \$355 . . . Here then, may our reverence be deepened, our faith strengthened, our hope cheered and our charity enlarged; and thus worshipping God acceptably in this His earthly temple, be prepared to worship Him in that "Temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."³

In October of 1866, Reverend Fackler took a ship from Portland to New York to join his wife and two children. During this voyage, cholera broke out and during his ministrations to the sick, he caught the disease and died. The Right Reverend Daniel S. Tuttle, first Bishop of Idaho, said of him, "He was a dear, faithful soul, a fine missionary, and a godly pastor."⁴

In an article published in 1961, the Reverend Thomas E. Jessett, historian for the diocese of Olympia stated, "The news of his death came as a sad blow to the Pacific Northwest. Many were the expressions of sorrow. To the hardy pioneers of Boise there was only one way that seemed suitable to them to mark their love and respect for St. Michael Fackler. Thus, it came about that the church in that city, now a beautiful cathedral, was given the name of St. Michael's Church."⁵

The church was officially named St. Michael's on August 29, 1867 during the time the Reverend G.D.B. Miller was rector. In 1902 when the present St. Michael's Cathedral was dedicated, the old church was renamed Christ Chapel and was moved to 15th and Ridenbaugh.

In September of 1867, the little church served as an educational institution for 15 students to supply the needs for a school in Boise. It had grown so large by 1870 (55 students) that an appendage was added which not only housed the school

but provided for such overcrowded days as Christmas and Easter. This little school served certain educational needs until 1892 when it grew into St. Margaret's School for girls which included not only academy students but grade school students as well. Forty years later, this academy grew into Boise's first college and thus Christ Chapel can appropriately be called "the grandfather" of the present Boise State College.

Here was a plain, little wooden building that was the starting point for not only man's religious needs but also his educational ones. Today the little chapel gives the public State college which grew out of this little academy, a religious shrine similar to those possessed by colleges in the East which have gradually been transformed from grade schools to colleges and universities. This shrine offers not only a place for Boise State College students to visit and hold devotions, but also for the citizens of our city and State to center their religious affections in Christ Chapel. This little church served church-going Boiseans for almost a century and now reminds the visitor who enters its doors, that the church is still interested in education and is responsible for the growth of some of the oldest higher institutions in the United States.

Let us tell how this little church appeared as it grew with the city of Boise.

In 1869 an organ, which had cost \$500 and had accompanied the altar around Cape Horn, was first used. The organ has since been replaced but the altar is the original. The following year the bell tower was added to the church. Its bell was the first to chime in Boise when it did so on February 27, 1870. Boise city was now a truly sophisticated place. It had a church bell like every other city and this gave its inhabitants a real lift. Visitors in the Boise Basin and the city had indicated as early as June 1863, that the ringing of a church bell was one cultural touch they missed.

The windows of Christ Chapel are particularly interesting though they did not become so until the renovation in 1876.

A portion of a clipping from the *Statesman* states: "Beautiful Gothic windows have taken the place of the old ones . . . On the central window is a magnificent picture of the great scene on the banks of the Jordan. The figures representing our Saviour and John the Baptist are life size and life like."⁶ This window is in memory of Reverend Fackler.

From the day of its first service on September 2, 1866 until 1963, the church was used with few interruptions. During many of those years, it remained near the focal point of a growing Boise city. When the city had a total area of 20 blocks, right in the middle of this area at 7th and Bannock sat St. Michael's Church. In 1902 when the new Episcopal Cathedral was named St. Michael's, the old St. Michael's was moved to 15th and Ridenbaugh, then fairly close to the residential center, and christened Christ Chapel.

By 1963, when the city had spread in all directions on Boise's benches and to the foot hills in the north and east, Christ Chapel was moved to its third location on Boise College's campus. This too was relatively close to the center of the city. It sits there today, a tribute to every period of the civic history of Boise.

Its present organization developed, as is pointed out in the first paragraph of this chapter, because of the threat of its destruction or abandonment. Dean William B. Spofford of St. Michael's Cathedral and the Sons and Daughters of Idaho headed by Mrs. Pearl Koontz, called a committee meeting of citizens potentially interested in preserving the little church. One of these people was Eugene B. Chaffee, President of Boise Junior College.

Among those who offered a real interest, but was not present at this meeting, was Mr. James L. Brown of the *Idaho Daily Statesman*. He made known his desire to assist in the preservation of Christ Chapel to the extent that he would bear the brunt of the financial cost that might be involved.

At this meeting, Dr. Chaffee suggested that the College might be interested in having this building on its campus. He later proposed this to his Board of Trustees on March 20, 1962. They unanimously supported his idea. Chaffee suggested to the Board and to the other interested parties that a little nook of land standing immediately adjacent to Boise's first air terminal at a point where Broadway crosses the Boise River, would make an excellent location for this historic building. This was approved by the College Board and by the newly created Christ Chapel Historical Society which had been organized in the summer of 1963.

Principally through the efforts of Mr. James L. Brown, \$20,000 was donated by the *Idaho Daily Statesman* to renovate and move this old building which had originally cost \$2,000 in greenbacks in a much less inflated era. Mr. Brown not only paid for the rejuvenation of the little chapel, but was responsible for the trees and lawns set up around it and the sprinkler system that keeps most of these plants green throughout the annual season.

The present Board of Trustees of the Christ Chapel Historical Society is made up of Eugene B. Chaffee representing Boise College; Pearl M. Koontz representing the Sons and Daughters of Idaho; and the Reverend George E. Ross representing St. Michael's Cathedral.

¹*Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman*, September 3, 1866.

²*St. Michael's Cathedral Centennial*. p.1.

³*Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman*, September 3, 1866.

⁴*St. Michael's Cathedral Centennial*. p.2.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid*, p.5.