

## #7 Nativity's Mission across the Snake River 1901—1929: St. Paul's Mission Church and Vicarage, Clarkston

Since the time of early **rectors** Rev. J. D. McConkey and Rev. D.J. Somerville, Nativity has been involved in missionary outreach. Among other missions, St. Paul's Mission Church in Clarkston, WA was established across the Snake River in 1901. Ferry boats had been the only means of crossing the river to Washington until the Lewiston Concord Bridge Company built a toll bridge for foot and wagon traffic.

There is a distinction between a **parish** and a **mission**. "A **parish** exists when the

congregation is self-supporting and contributes proportionally to the ministry of the diocese. A congregation that receives financial aid from the diocese is an **aided parish**, sometimes called a **mission**. Their clergy leader is appointed by the bishop and called a **vicar**...(from the Latin for 'substitute')"<sup>1</sup> Episcopalians parishes have **rectors** (from the Latin 'to rule'), "who are called by the vestry of a parish and approved by the bishop."<sup>2</sup>

We can speculate on why St. Paul's Mission Church, across the River in a different state, came into being and why the Vicarage and the church building were sold in 1929.<sup>3</sup> The town, later called Clarkston, had not been easily accessible or a very desirable place to live, for in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was referred to as "... a desert waste, the range of the coyote and jack rabbits and disrespectfully known as Jawbone Flat."<sup>4</sup>

A mission effort had been begun by Nativity's rector, Rev. J. D. McConkey (1881-1899.) Later Rev. Somerville (1908-1929) served the mission congregation named St. Paul's Mission Church as there was no appointed vicar or "substitute." After Rev. Somerville's death, Nativity assumed St. Paul's congregation.

Several factors influenced the combination of the two congregations. In early years, churches, like schools, served people within walking distance. Lewiston and Clarkston, separated by the Snake River, are in two different states and weren't within walking distance. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ferries were the only way to get to Lewiston, Idaho from Clarkston.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a mission. After Edgar H. Libby received the original franchise to build a cantilever bridge over the Snake River (later to be replaced with today's Blue Bridge) people could more easily take their families and their business back and forth across the Snake River. As for the diocese, new parish boundaries were established when Bishop Lemuel H. Wells oversaw boundary changes for the two different states. Considering transportation before the bridges, automobiles and trains, imagine the difficulties Rev. McConkey had in visiting Mt. Idaho and the Warren gold fields and the difficulties that Rev. Somerville had in visiting Orofino and Grangeville missions!!!

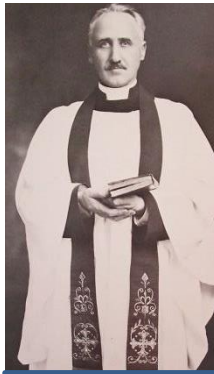
Below: Clarkston's canneries were located at Dustin's Orchard on First Street. Nativity member, Mrs. Cliff Wasem, was a Dustin daughter.

—McGuire p. 43.

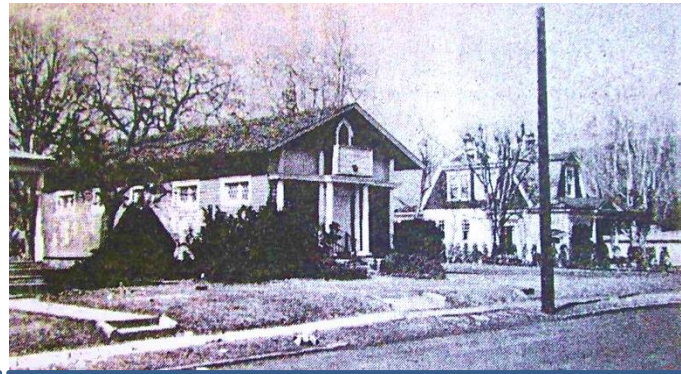


Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ferry owned by John W. Smith. A ferry was the only way to get to Lewiston, Idaho until the bridges crossed the River in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

—McGuire p. 11.



Rev. David James Somerville.



St. Paul's Mission Church, Clarkston, WA --1901-1929.

Clarkston would probably have remained Jawbone Flat, but for the irrigation water brought from Asotin Creek. By 1899, Clarkston's 25 homes were served by the water from an open ditch—to be replaced by a new well at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and 16th Avenue in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So Clarkston grew and the orchards grew. The bridges provided a way to get (walk) to church in Lewiston, and the new Camas Prairie Rail Road provided a way to ship the burgeoning fruit production to almost anywhere in the United States.

Today, there is an old Irish blessing appropriate for our mission for the next 150 years:

*May the road rise to meet you.*

*May the wind be always at your back.*

*May the sun shine warm upon your face,*

*And the rain fall soft upon your fields...*

*May you be held in the palm of God's hand.*

End Notes:

- 1 Westerhoff, John H. *A People Called Episcopalians* p. 34-35.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Nativity archives *The vicars of St. Paul's Mission Church, Clarkston* pamphlet Undated.  
From Nativity's archives we trace the following missionaries serving St. Paul's: 1901 to 1903, Rev. Charles Horne; Rev. Francis Vinton Baer, 1903-06; and Rev. Thornton T. Denhardt, 1906 to 1908, who transferred to the Missionary District of Utah. From 1908 there was no appointed vicar. Services were taken by the Rev. David James Somerville, the Rector of Lewiston, although the two churches were in different jurisdictions at that time. Rev. Somerville held services at St. Paul's until he was killed in an automobile accident and services ended at St. Paul's Mission Church, Clarkston, Washington.
- 4 McGuire, Jeri Jackson *Images of America Clarkston* p. 9.
- 5 McGuire, Jeri Jackson *Images of America Clarkston* p. 11.

**Works Cited:**

- McGuire, Jeri Jackson *Images of America Clarkston* Arcadia Publishing, Charleston South Carolina 2015 p. 9.  
Nativity Archives *THE VICARS OF ST. PAUL'S MISSION CHURCH, CLARKSTON* pamphlet undated.  
Westerhoff, John H. *A People Called Episcopalians* Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA and New York 1994.

--Deloris Jungert Davisson and Margaret Cole 2015