

#5.1 The Nativity story--into the 20's: A church for all seasons up Normal Hill

As we approached Easter, Nativity's liturgy, its vestments, and altar hues change with the season. There has been a rhythm of the day with morning prayers, mid-day prayers, evening prayers and Compline on Sundays. "The pattern of the day, of the year, and of the whole of life itself, was [is] lived out totally in the presence of God...Every moment of the day, every activity becomes a way to God....Life lived at two levels--the practical tasks of daily life done for their own sake carefully and competently, but simultaneously they become signs of god's all-encompassing love...our spirituality is deeply incarnational." ¹

The Irish grounding of Rev. David J. W. Somerville, who served the parish from 1904 to 1924, surely embodied such a way of life. He was called, "A Man for All Seasons." It was under the direction of Rev. Somerville that the first rectory, just east of the present church building was constructed and plans were made to move the beautiful sanctuary up to Normal Hill. A foundation and basement were built to receive the building when it was moved to our present location. As tractors were no-where on the scene yet, the building was pulled up the hill by horses or mules in 1920.

The church sanctuary's interior is clad in a beautiful and acoustical redwood. Its materials and construction reveal a strong respect for their aesthetic qualities. Architecturally the church building can be called American or Carpenter Gothic, a style appropriate for a parish church built in the late 19th century. The building's plan is the shape of a cross with a long nave and cross transept arms. Windows have Gothic pointed arches with stained-glass lites. The top lites of Nativity's north and south windows image a Celtic cross--depending how one looks at them.

Rev. Dr. John H. Westerhoff, in *A people called Episcopalians*, states that "While some traditions emphasize truth or goodness, Anglicans have made beauty the doorway into truth and goodness. We have a strong respect for the belief in the beauty of holiness and righteousness. Money spent on beauty, priestly and prophetic, is justified insofar as it is our way of revealing and advocating truth and goodness. Our churches are intended to be works of art and we make every effort to ensure that the arts used in our churches are of high quality. Artists have always been at home in our congregations and played a significant role in our worship and common life" ²

When Rev. Somerville and parishioners moved the sanctuary to its 8th and 8 location, there were scarcely any trees in the Normal Hill area with the exception of a few indigenous pine trees, hackberry trees in the ravines, or bank willows in riparian areas. None of the many trees on the church campus today were there: the linden trees along 8th Avenue, the beech tree on the east, the pin oak and red maple on the south east, the dogwood, the flowering plums on the east (by Somerville Hall) and west on 8th street. Church records show that in 1968 money was allocated for trees, with no mention of their species.

Trees feed body, mind, and spirit, give shade and several kinds of food. Even the gingkoes that have recently been replaced, produced food for humans--and squirrels. The Tuesday Morning Tree Hugging Committee is compiling a folder describing our food trees and their fruit: edible beech nuts, plums, gingko, linden nuts, acorns, Chinese Flowering Chestnuts or Yellow Horn nuts and maple syrup. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.* Isaiah 55:12

The story of the site would not be complete without mentioning the Mystery of the Flowering Ash, *Fraxinus ornus*, the Manna Ash, recorded by the Idaho Champion Big Tree List as an Idaho Big Tree. The story excited the Committee. The "Big Tree" was the South European Flowering Ash, indigenous along the Mediterranean. Symbolically, its bark yields a sugary sap called "Manna." The name Manna, as applied to the same tree found in the Scriptures and was thought to be the source for the Manna which fed the Israelites in the desert. Later research discovered another Manna source. The Manna tree was fabled to be the only tree in the garden of Eden that the serpent would not go near, for even if the shadow of the tree fell upon a serpent, it would die. In folklore ash staves were thought to protect walkers from snake infested places.

Well, our Manna ash proved to be a mystery. We couldn't locate it on the campus. Had we cut down a designated Idaho Big Tree? When we found a Lewiston Morning Tribune news article from 1996, it proved that the tree was a mystery because Nativity campus never did have a Flowering Ash. You see, the tree given by Sarah and John Vollmer was mis-identified when the Idaho Big Tree designation was awarded. The tree species in question was later keyed out by Professor Richard Naskali and again by Phil Shinn, certified arborist, as a Yellow Horn (*Xanthocerus sorbifolia*). That is a story we will tell when we do our tree walk on April 26, 2015. You can locate the tree in the corner by the bell tower in the photo in the 1973 centennial booklet.³ Also notice the Yellow Horn as it appears in a Google image.⁴

Today we celebrate our beautiful sanctuary and liturgy, our campus with its trees, plantings, changing seasons, our clergy and our people worshipping together for 150 years--feeding body, mind and spirit. And, welcome to the Meditation Garden for quiet time alfresco.

End notes:

- 1 DeWaal Esther *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition* page15
- 2 Westerhoff, Rev. Dr. John H. *A People Called Episcopalians* page 23
- 3 Boren and Campbell, *The Centennial Booklet*, back cover
- 4 Google Earth image 2013

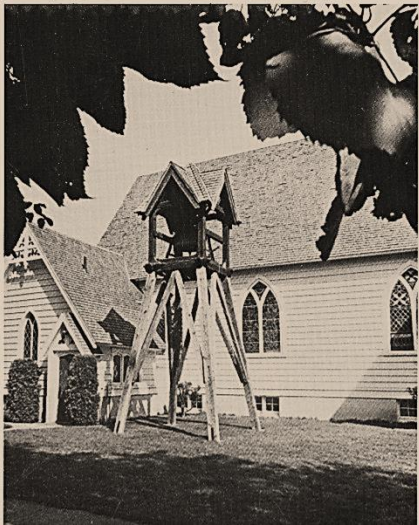
Works cited:

Boren, Charles P. and Thomas W. Campbell. *The Centennial Booklet* (1983):

DeWaal, Esther *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition* Morehouse Publishing reprinted 1999.

Google Earth image from World Wide Web

Westerhoff, Rev. Dr. John H. *A People Called Episcopalians* Morehouse Publishing 1998



1973 photo on back cover
of the Centennial booklet.
Notice size of the Yellow Horn
behind the bell tower.



Contemporary Google Earth image.
Notice the size of the Yellow Horn today.