

①

The San Luis Obispo Buddhist Church was officially established February 3, 1927, using as its quarters a remodeled residence on a ten-acre piece of property south of San Luis Obispo. Famous Madonna Inn is now located just across the road from this site.

Nyubutsu shiki was observed April 15, 1927. The Sunday School opened with approximately 60 students.

The Young Buddhist Association was formed that summer, and in September, the new organization became a member of the Beikoku Bussei League. A YBA baseball team was formed and the following February, a tennis team was also organized. The temple grounds by now had, in addition to a regulation baseball diamond, new tennis courts for the use of the young people.

Prior to 1927, the San Luis Obispo Church was affiliated with the Guadalupe Buddhist Church and records show that, as early as 1915, Reverend Issei Matsuura journeyed to San Luis Obispo to conduct services at various places. When the community had grown to a point where a temple building became necessary, the following committee was selected to purchase the property: Hisato Kurokawa, Tsunejiro Tanaka, Tameji Eto and Yoroku Watanabe. At the time of purchase, the size of the temple property was probably the largest of all the Buddhist Churches in the United States.

In November of 1927, the Church voted to become independent of the Guadalupe Church and welcomed Reverend Seikaku Mizutani as its first resident minister. Members numbered approximately 60. Records indicate that by 1935, this number had increased to over 100, drawing from residents in the outlying areas of Arroyo Grande, Pismo Beach, Pecho, Los Osos and Morro Bay.

The year 1927 also saw the formation of the Bukkyo Fujinkai, then known as "Haha no Kai." The young girls organized a Seinenkai Club, later changed to Kujo Club, in respectful memory of Lady Takeko Kujo. In January of 1930, this organization joined the newly formed Southern California Central Coast YWBA.

In 1929, a branch Sunday School, under the guidance of the San Luis Obispo Sunday School, was established in Arroyo Grande with 42 students attending. There were approximately 170 pupils attending the San Luis Obispo Sunday School by 1935.

In 1932, Paul Kurokawa organized an all-Japanese Boy Scout troop with Reverend Mizutani as Scoutmaster.

A Japanese language school was established in September of 1925, and in 1927 became an affiliated organization of the Temple, and was known as San Luis Nippongo Gakuen, with Reverend and Mrs. Mizutani as instructors. In April 1930, the Los Osos Japanese Language School, which was built on Mr. Eto's property, came under the Temple jurisdiction, with Reverend and Mrs. Chizo Kaku as instructors.

Of note is the fact that the local chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League was organized in January 1934 through the efforts of the Buddhist Temple and the Japanese Association, and had its first office in the Temple building.

The Church and its youth organizations continued to flourish through the 1930's. During Reverend Seijo Onoyama's tenure, the Church membership increased to 150 members. A kendo class was started by Reverend Onoyama with 50 students participating.

The Church was incorporated as a non-profit organization as of January 4, 1939. For the first time an all-Nisei Board of Directors was selected as follows: Tsuruichi Fukunaga, Hakaru Taku, Tom Nakaji, Imao Hori, Shuichi Kawaoka, Kingo Kawaoka and Masaji Eto.

In 1940, a new church and minister's residence was constructed; but in less than two years, the new premises had to be abandoned due to the exigencies of war when all Japanese were evacuated from the West Coast. The Church itself was used as a storage place for evacuee property and left in the care of Ernest Vollmer, Sr.

In 1946, after return from camp, three acres of the ten-acre parcel were sold to the State of California Division of Highways.

Only a small portion of the former residents returned to San Luis Obispo County and with this reduced membership it was not possible to have a paid resident minister. ^{In Aug. 1948,} Fully aware of this and of the hardships ahead, Reverend Kenshi Iwao volunteered his services and came to San Luis Obispo to re-open the Church. Since much of the Church furniture was vandalized and unusable, Reverend Iwao spent his spare time from his gardening work in making altar pieces. With the loan of a butsudan from the Nagano Family, Sunday School was ~~finally~~ started in August with just three families sending their children. The San Luis Obispo

Buddhist Church is deeply indebted to Reverend Iwao and his family for his dedicated services during the trying post-war years. During his ^{eighteen} years at San Luis Obispo, many students from nearby California Polytechnic College came and took an active part in the Sunday School program. He also counseled many war brides and short-term agricultural workers from Japan (Tan-no) and his home was a haven for the homesick and lonely.

In 1957, a new butsudan was donated by the following members of the Pioneer Kankodan to Japan: Keisaku Fukuhara, Eiji Hayashi, Fukuichi Nishimoto, Tameji Eto, Kanaru Nagano and Tatsumi Kawaoka.

Early in 1960, because of State plans to build a Highway 101 interchange on Church property, it became evident that the Church would have to relinquish its remaining seven acres. The committee appointed to seek a new location consisted of: Chairman Masaji Eto, Kingo Kawaoka, Mitsugi Fukuhara, Noriharu Kawaoka, Stone Saruwatari and Ken Kitasako.

In August 1961, 43 acres of land near the Avila Beach turnoff and hot springs were purchased. Sixteen acres were subsequently sold to pay off the mortgage.

The building committee, to whom great credit must go, included Chairman Mitsugi Fukuhara, Stone Saruwatari and Kingo Kawaoka. The new Temple was built in 1962 and the formal dedication ceremony with chigo procession was held June 22, 1963, with Bishop Shinsho Hanayama officiating.

Patterned after the traditional Japanese temple style by Architect George Nagano of Morro Bay, the present San Luis Obispo

Temple in its rustic setting of serene beauty has become a landmark of the area. As it is the only building representative of the Japanese style of architecture in the county, many groups, from fourth graders to University Women's clubs, visit the Temple each year. Volunteers from the Sunday School staff and Fujinkai help the minister to ^{HOST} ~~welcome~~ these groups.

In 1966, when Reverend Iwao became seriously ill, Reverend Charles Paulsen was appointed by Bishop Hanayama to assist in the ministerial duties. Reverend Paulsen, who first came voluntarily to San Luis Obispo in 1952, driving ¹²⁰ miles round trip from each Sunday, Lompoc/ took over the church duties upon Reverend Iwao's passing in September of 1966. He was assisted by Reverend Arthur Yamabe of the Guadalupe Buddhist Church who conducted the Japanese-speaking services during this period. Reverend Paulsen devoted many self-less years to the Church and was an inspiration to all who knew him. *Rev. Paulsen ^{HE} passed away Aug. 1970.*

In May of 1967, Reverend Koken Sakai came to San Luis Obispo as resident minister. In addition to his ^{regular} duties, he lectured on Buddhism at Cal Poly, and through his efforts the college World Religion classes held several meetings at the Temple. Reverend Sakai was instrumental in setting up services at the Men's Colony, state penal institution near San Luis Obispo.

One of the highlights during Reverend Sakai's stay was the 40th Anniversary Commemoration held October 28, 1967.

(6)

In September 1968, Reverend Hakushi Futaba was appointed ^{both} to the Guadalupe and San Luis Obispo Churches. Although he lives in Guadalupe, he commutes to Avila to officiate at all special services and visits the Sunday School twice monthly - once for the Family Night service held the second Saturday of each month, and once for the service on the fourth Sunday of each month. With the many responsibilities of two churches on his shoulders, Reverend Futaba gives unstintingly of his time and talents, and his efforts are appreciated by a grateful congregation.

Although the membership is small (35 families), the San Luis Obispo Church has a group of dedicated followers who work very closely together. The Church enjoys the support of the Caucasian public as evidenced most clearly by the success of the annual Obon Festival which is held at the local Veterans Memorial Building. From a small beginning in 1957, when it was first opened to the public, the festival has grown to where it now serves its popular teriyaki dinner to over 1,000 people. Besides the Obon dance, demonstrations and exhibits are presented, and the community welcomes the festival as one of the cultural highlights of the year. Because of the limited number of members, outside help from non-Buddhist friends and supporters is enlisted and in a spirit of universal brotherhood a great time is had by all.

Because of its central location and its secluded setting, the San Luis Obispo Buddhist Church has been selected as a possible site for a BCA Retreat Center. At the present time the Board of Directors is negotiating with the BCA to get this worthy project under way.