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# *Look at Order's History* <sup>1</sup>

**By DON RISOLO**

Oxnard was a mere youth, as cities go, when the Knights of Columbus, Council 750, was instituted March 22, 1903, by Territorial Deputy Joseph Scott.

Growth and prosperity have come to both the city and Council 750 in the years since then. The council, with a membership of over 500, has surpassed in size its only California predecessors, San Francisco Council 615 and Los Angeles Council 621.

Scott must have been blessed with outstanding foresight in late 1902 when he came to Oxnard to visit the Rev. John Laubacher, Charles Donlon and other community leaders with the idea of a third council in California.

The idea was applauded by 41 soon-to-be charter members, and, according to a story which appeared in *The Oxnard Courier* a few months later, "The Knights of Columbus dignitaries from Los Angeles and San Francisco de-trained in Oxnard, met the local delegation and marched in a body to the Masonic Temple where they were instituted, initiated and installed"

Thus began 98 years of service to God and country by the Knights of Columbus in Oxnard.

Officers of the 1903 council were Donlon, grand knight; Justin Petit,

deputy grand knight; Dr. A.A. Maulhardt, chancellor; Laubacher, chaplain; Thomas McLouglin, financial secretary; Henry Knapke, recording secretary; Thomas Carroll, lecturer; Louis Brennells, warden; Archie Connelly, inside guard; Hugo McGrath, outside guard; and Mark McLoughlin, Sol Gisler and H.W. Maulhardt, trustees.

The council's early membership growth didn't come easy. According to charter member Henry Borchard, "At that time, the population of the city was small, so most of the charter members were farmers.

"It took a great deal of persuasion and explaining to get the first group of charter members to sign up. They had never heard of Knights of Columbus or any other organization like it and only signed up reluctantly after much insistent persuasion by Father Laubacher."

Council 750 soon after established the Knights of Columbus Home Association which launched a drive for a permanent headquarters.

The Columbian Club, a corporation of the council, was formed to purchase a lot at Fifth and B street from the Lehmann and Waterman general store chain. Because most buildings in Oxnard at the turn of the century were hastily constructed tempo-

rary structures, the chain sold the parcel to the Knights of Columbus for \$8,900 in exchange for a long-term lease if the club would build a top-quality building on the site. Cost of the two-story structure was \$20,120.

The cornerstone was put into place on August 14, 1905, giving Council 750 the beginning of the first Knights of Columbus hall in the West. The Most Rev. Thomas J. Conaty, bishop of Monterey and Los Angeles, presided at the dedication.

Although the original lease was \$100 a month for 10 years, the Knights of Columbus did not require a rental fee from its downstairs tenant during the depression of the 1930s.

While the Knights were watching the hall's construction, their attention also was focused on Third and E streets as they initiated their support of the new Santa Clara Church.

The parish also recognized the support of the new council in a booklet distributed during its 1904 dedication: "The edifying example of 60 or more stalwart Knights marching in double file to God's Alter to receive the Bread of Life has been an inspiration to many a lukewarm soul and the means of bringing more than one stray sheep back to the true fold."

Council 750 also played a large role in the 1905 Supreme Convention in Los Angeles. The Oxnard Knights hosted the state convention in May to plan the worldwide gathering in August.

A highlight of the supreme convention was provided by the Oxnard Knights' "Rough Riders," who traveled to the event on horseback over 60 miles of narrow roads and trails. Wearing the garb of California rancheros, the horsemen led a parade at the conclusion of the exemplification of the Fourth Degree. They were followed in the Saturday night parade by torches and red lights through the streets of Los Angeles.

Among the Rough Riders that night were Adolfo Camarillo, Robert and T. Frank McGrath, Peter and Joseph Connelly, Ernest and Henry Borchard and Thomas Gill. All later served as grand knights of Council 750.

The early Oxnard Knights of Columbus Council had a knack for attracting other founding fathers of the area to its membership and through the ranks to grand knighthood.

With a firm foothold in Oxnard, the Knights helped to establish an Elks lodge in the city, beginning a tradition of dual memberships among the two clubs.

The Knights also came to the aid of the Free and Accepted Masons when a 1952 earthquake made the Oxnard temple unsafe. The Masons were invited to the Knights of Columbus Hall for their meetings, which they did after

covering a portrait of the pope with a drape.

A year later the Knights were visited by Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, archbishop of Los Angeles, for the council's golden anniversary. The cardinal was joined by Grand Knight Carl Borchard and about 500 persons at the Santa Clara High School auditorium for the 50th birthday party of the council. Those in attendance included 11 of the 41 charter members and Joseph Scott, the original catalyst.

Earlier in the day, Cardinal McIntyre was present at the dedication of the new, 75-bed St. John's Hospital in Oxnard... The task of raising the \$1.5 million for construction was headed by John Maulhardt, an Oxnard Knight

The Knights formed a second corporation, K of C Hall Inc., when urban renewal threatened the original hall in 1965. Headed by Grand Knight Dick McCarthy and Neil Heily, 1951-52 grand knight, the corporation sought to purchase property owned by the Presbyterian Church at Sixth and D streets.

Through the fundraising competition of two groups of Knights, the "Old Timers" and the "Whippersnappers," \$160,000 was collected to buy the property and provide for improvements and future expansion.

The church, rectory and a rented home on the lot were torn down to make way for a parking lot, while Sunday school classrooms were converted for office use.

In addition, two other classrooms were used to house the Columbian Room, a cocktail lounge which attracted \$200,000 from stockholder-members.

In 1972 the council further expanded its five-year-old quarters with the addition of new offices and a reception area. Under the direction, of Andy Kroneberger, 1966-67 grand knight and past district deputy, the addition was completed through work volunteered by members.