

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES IN BENDIGO (SANDHURST)

Early this century there were three Congregational church buildings in Bendigo - the central charge being at the corner of Forest and Mackenzie Sts (the original site) another on the top of the hill at the corner of Russell and Harkness Sts (Quarry Hill) and a third in ~~the~~ Calvin St (^{new} the Lutheran Church)(Calvin has now been quietly altered to ~~St John~~ ^{GALVIN} in honour of Bill Calvin a former mayor who lived in that street. He was also a very active politician in his day.)

The Annals of Bendigo record that 1½ acres of land were purchased on the above corner in June 1858 for £1200 .

The first church was erected on the middle section of this block in November 1858 (A.B. p.48 Vol.1)

This building was enlarged by adding a Transept across the front in May 1867 (A.B. p. 108 b) Now able to seat 500 persons.

At some time prior to this a prefabricated (?) teak (?) parsonage stood close to the fence facing Mackenzie St just below "Euroma" . This was demolished about 1920. I can remember the type of architecture - frame-work showing on the outside and the lining boards facing inwards. This served as a caretaker's cottage for some years before it disappeared.

In 1890 the foundation stones of a brand new church were laid (23/4/1890) Designed by W.C.Vakland - with tall tower and two gable crossings. (It was understood to have been foreshortened from 3 crossings to 2 to save money at the time. In addition to this, the back wall was left flat and plain. An arch was defined as a rudimentary 'chancel' but was not added until the St. John's Presbyterians took over the building in

This new church was opened on ~~XXXXXX~~ 26th February 1890 . It cost £2481. Contractor - H. Longstaff. .

The Congregational cause did not flourish and in they bought and altered the brick school complex in ^{OLINDA} ~~Olinda~~ St to be headquarters of their people mainly concentrated nearer the Quarry Hill area. The timber church on Russell St Hill was sold. Also the Calvin St property. Meanwhile, the valuable Forest St property was sold to a Mormon sect who used it for some years before it became an investment for the Methodist cause. They did not

develop it and by good fortune the congregation of St John's Presbyterian church were able to purchase it. They had had eyes on the property for years, and purchased it in the nick of time. Since then they have expanded their cause, building a brick hall at the rear, adding a Chancel to the Vahland church, and generally restoring the place to its pristine appeal.

(The vicissitudes of the St John congregation are very involved and the history is confused because at one stage, an earlier timber church was destroyed by fire along with many records.)

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~~FURTHER~~ FOREST ST. (NOW SOLD TO ANOTHER "SECT")

When the Congregational cause began to falter, they sold off the N/west corner of the 1½ acres block to Mrs Harrison (widow of Dr W.E.Harrison) who erected a private dwelling thereon. (Cedron block v-)

Then, in the 1920s they demolished the old self brick original building in the middle of the block, along with the transept added in 1867. Thus, the site of these first buildings is now the open yard beside the Vahland church, leading up to the side of the new Presbyterian hall.

(The old brick church and transept were quite charming. On the Forest St 'end' was a most attractive Rose window facing All Saints. The cedar pulpit at this end was also of note. The whole structure was deemed 'unsafe' (??) by one of the trustees, hence the demolition.)

It is said that the new Vahland Church was the cause of the decline at the time - the debt may have frightened people off and the cause languished.)