

Newspaper article, 1987

Rainier church expansion forces demolition of former city hall



A PIECE OF HISTORY — Workers hope to complete the demolition of the Rainier Assembly of God church building by today (Saturday). The 96-year-old structure once housed the city hall and a jail. The congregation's new church is located next door on "C" West Street.

Continued on next page

The last traces of a landmark in Rainier history will be removed today. The Rainier Assembly of God church building, on the corner of C West and Third streets, is being demolished now that the congregation is able to hold services in its new building next door.

The Rainier Assembly of God decided not to attempt remodeling the nearly 100-year-old building because "it wasn't worth it. Everything would have to be redone," said Lorene Olsen, a church member who helped research its history.

The congregation plans to construct a parking lot and an addition to its new building on the property, said Rev. Don Taylor.

Built in 1891 for \$373, the building originally served as the Rainier City Hall. A jail was added in 1893 at a cost of \$395, according to information in a pamphlet published for the church's 50th anniversary.

The first church to hold services in the building was the Church of God, which met there from 1902 to 1908. M. Ellis bought the town hall at a public auction for \$925 in 1909.

Apparently the building continued to house the city jail in 1912 although school classes were held in the building as well. Some Rainier residents recall hearing the inmates jailed over the weekend clammering to be let out as school convened on Monday mornings, according to Don Taylor, pastor of the Rainier Assembly of God.

The Christian Science Society purchased the building in 1920 and held services there until 1923.

The visiting Rev. John S. Jamison conducted the first services of the local Assembly of God church in Prescott in 1932. He later returned to found the church in Rainier. Before moving into the former city hall building, the congregation met at two other locations, according to the church's anniversary pamphlet.

After the earthquake on April 13, 1949 severely damaged the Rainier grade school, the church once again served as school. "The school was condemned. For two years, they used the Sunday school classrooms," recalled Olsen.

Construction of the new church building began in 1980. The congregation held its first service in the building on Aug. 15, meeting in what eventually will be the basement fellowship hall. Taylor hopes that they can move into the upstairs sanctuary next summer, he said.

The building process was so lengthy because the new church was built as funds were available. Over \$80,000 in building materials and other items were donated "to help get in the building debt free," said Taylor.

During the demolition, which began Aug. 21 with the removal of the windows, church workers found an old pulpit lantern which was used in the 19th century, before buildings were wired with electricity, to light the pulpit area.

"I'm not sure whether it was ever used in this building or not," said Taylor.

Discovered in a corner of the old church basement, the 3-foot tall

lantern is now quite rusted but has "beautiful glass on it," he said. Bill Lodgson, a church member, plans to refurbish the lantern.

Among the other items uncovered during the demolition are old coins, jars, and newspapers. "We have square-headed nails in the building," noted Olsen. Taylor expects to find more old items when the church's main floor is torn up, he said.

The Rainier Assembly of God encountered no organized opposition when it decided to demolish the old church building. "I've heard remarks like, 'You're sure getting rid of an old historic site,' but not really anybody was against it. They're all anxious to see the new one," said Olsen.