

How the Pentecostal Message was Established in Olympia, Washington

In 1861 a boy was born to a dirt poor family in Indiana. Four years later his father died, leaving a widow to raise three small children, a girl and two boys, Jacob Secrist being the middle one. Times were difficult in Indiana and Jacob had to leave school at the sixth grade level to help his mother feed the family. His sister Barbara went to work in a laundry. After many years of saving they pooled their money and bought a farm on the Vermilion River. Jacob became successful raising corn and hogs.

At age 30 he gave his heart to the Lord and felt the call of God to become a minister. He applied for entrance at North Manchester College and was accepted. This was a Dunkard Brethren College. Because of his lack of early education he had to really study, but he graduated with his class.

He started as an evangelist traveling through the western states. He settled in Myrtle Point, Oregon and sent for his mother and sister Barbara. A good church was established there. His mother soon died and was buried.

Then he caught the eye of a young lady, named Gertrud Michael. She wanted to work for the Lord and though there was a big difference in their ages she thought this was her chance. She accepted, and he and his sister Barbara came to Olympia in 1906.

Olympia had experienced a boom and a bust. Many people had defaulted on their taxes and he was able to buy six city blocks for the taxes owing. This was logged-off land with many 6- to 7-foot stumps. He cleared a corner and built a two-story house.¹ He sent for his wife-to-be and they were married in their new home December 24, 1906.

He then bought a piece of property to build a church on. He donated this and a significant amount of money to put up a Dunkard Brethren Church.²

About this time a man came to Olympia who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. His name was Mr. Pollard. He rented a building that stood on pilings over the bay. He made some benches and then he started preaching on street corners to get people interested. He got some followers. Then one evening some men came in, broke up the meeting and threw the benches into the bay. I am not sure if they threw him in the bay, but soon after he came down with tuberculosis. The only thing they knew to do for patients in those days was to give them fresh air. There was an open window by his bed and when his enemies found out where he was they came and through the open window, dumped garbage on his bed. There was little or no police protection in those days. They then found a house in a remote part of Olympia.

My parents visited him there and heard the Pentecostal message from his death-bed. I was a small boy when my father and I went to look for a vacant building to rent. We found one just north of the fire station on Capitol Way.³ The building was called the Green Tree. When father unlocked and opened the door a small bell rang to alert people that someone was entering. There were a number of small drawers to our right. I was curious and as I looked through them I found

a ball of opium that had been smoked. The second floor was partitioned into small rooms to accommodate prostitutes.

Father got some men to help. They took out partitions on the first floor and used the lumber to make benches. Then they made a sign that said Pentecostal Mission and hung [it] in front. They got permission to hold street meetings. Before long they had a good group of people.

But Satan was not happy. At night during services men would get on the top of the fire station and throw bricks against the side of the building. Then men from his home church came to spy on him. He got a notice to appear for a trial and answer to these charges:

1. He took communion with people who were not members of the Brethren Church.
2. He prayed for sick people who were not members of the Brethren Church.

At the trial he started to answer the charges and was interrupted two times. He saw the futility of trying to defend himself so picked up his Bible and stepped off the platform. I got up to meet him and we all walked out together.

It was about this time that God gave him a vision of a church building standing on pilings over a stagnant pool of water that was filled with moss and slime. The members were lying on the benches sleeping. Then the vision changed and he was beside a clear mountain stream flowing and sparkling. Then the spirit ask him where he wanted to drink. He answered, "Lord, let me drink at the fountain head." At this point his course was set for the rest of his life. A lady gave a piece of property for a church building.⁴

The men got together and built a good building. God was blessing. Then some ladies in the congregation found a very sick lady across the street. They went over on a Sunday afternoon and prayed for her. God instantly healed her. This was a healing that would rival any healing recorded in the Bible. I believe it did more to establish the Pentecostal work in Olympia than anything else.

The lady's name was Annie Norton. She had been cutting a ham and made a small cut in one of her fingers with the meat saw. The doctors did not have antibiotics as they do now, so to try to stop the spread of infection they amputated her right arm above the elbow. But the infection was all through her body. The doctors gave up trying to help her and gave her a prescription for morphine that did not have to be renewed. She became addicted. The infection took the skin and most of the flesh off of her left hand. Her fingers looked like bird claws.

The hospitals did not have single rooms as they do now. There were three or four patients in each room. One time a Catholic priest was called in to give the "last rites." After that she was considered a Catholic. Twice they pulled the curtain around her so the other patients would not see her die. But God had other plans for her.

I do not know how many years she suffered. Her hair had turned snow white but after she was healed, as her hair grew it came in black.

She moved into an upstairs room in a single lady's house that was a block from where we lived. One day she came home and found a loaf of home-made bread on her table. She felt warned in her spirit not to eat it. A few days later a cake appeared. She overheard the children of the Catholic family who lived next door say, "That cake had a long jitney ride." Several cakes were left in her apartment, and she brought one over to our house one morning. My father cut a piece, like you would out of a round cake. This was a two-layer cake. He separated the layers. The frosting in the middle was laced with ground glass.

Mother had been praying earnestly for revival in Olympia, but God had different plans. He showed her what it would cost. She saw my father being led away between two men to be executed. She recognized who they were. About this time he received two letters saying he should be burned at the stake, and they would like to light the fire.

Annie Norton moved to her sister's house, about a half-mile from where we lived. Their house was small, so they pitched a tent in the yard for her. One night an all-out attempt was made to kill her. She heard a slit being cut in the tent near her head. She saw a hand reach in with a can and pour kerosene on her head. Then a lighted match was thrown in to set her on fire. But she did not ignite. Then a fire sprung up by the tent door to close off her exit. But God protected her, and the fire self-extinguished.

Annie was then asked to travel twelve miles out into the country to visit an 87-year-old man she had known as a girl. She told him that she was going to heaven and asked if he wanted to go. He said if there was such a place, he wanted to go. She told him to confess his sins and ask God to forgive him. She said she never heard such a confession in all her life. He said that as a young man, he had run with a gang of highway robbers. They waylaid wagon trains going west. They killed every man, woman, and child so none could identify them. He had picked up babies by their feet and dashed their brains out on the wagon wheels. But upon his conversion, he became a real witness to the grace of God. This man's testimony, along with that of Annie's, did much to establish the Pentecostal work in Olympia.

*Handwritten in February 1998 by Hubert J. Secrist, son of Rev. Jacob S. Secrist
Typed by Rebecca Christie, February 13, 1998*

1 The original Secrist home is still standing. The address is 2200 Thurston Ave. N.E.

2 The Dunkard Brethren Church building is still standing on the southwest corner of Fourth Ave. E. and Sawyer St. S.E. It is currently occupied by the Risen Faith Fellowship. 2129 Fourth Ave. E.

3 The fire station was at the corner of Main and 3rd (present-day Capitol Way and State Ave.).

4 Mrs. Harriet E. Henderson deeded the property on the southeast corner of Puget St. N.E. to the Assembly of God on December 10, 1919 (Thurston County Deed Record, Book 101, p. 521). The original church building is gone. The Puget Street Assembly then merged with another Pentecostal church which was located at the approximate site of where the Olympian stands today. Eventually that group split over doctrinal differences, and, in 1930, the Puget Street folks built the church on Olympia and Pear (Assemblies of God), where my family attended.

5 The original Olympia and Pear building was located on the northeast corner of the present-day property. The first annex was built in 1955 through volunteer help. I supervised the work and stayed steadily with it until completion. The Olympia Assembly of God church occupied this building until 1977, when they relocated to Evergreen Christian Center on the west side of town.

6 The first Olympia and Pear building was sold to Capitol Business College, who, I believe, rented the first portion of the building to the Masons for a brief period of time. Capitol then began remodeling the building for their use, until its sale to Capital Christian Center.