

A RIDE TO REMEMBER: TO CHURCH IN A WHEELBARROW

One of the chapters in Beatrice La Force's book on Alpine History, *Alpine—History of a Mountain Settlement*, tells of Alpine's churches. Discussing the Alpine Community Church's pastor in 1950, Reverend Roger Larson, Mrs. La Force tells the following story about a couple of old timers.

“About this time an incident occurred that many people remember with pleasure. It involved two elderly men of the community, one a devout church member and old-fashioned persuader of the unchurched, Mr. Dave Sturdivant, Southern Baptist, gentleman. The other elderly man was old-time westerner, “Uncle” Gene Wetzel, whose nephew owned and ran the Log Cabin Café.

Uncle Gene Wetzel never cared much for church going. He preferred to sit on the bench in front of the Log Cabin and watch other folks dressed in their meeting clothes dodge the traffic crossing Highway 80 on their way to the church of their choice. He liked folks well enough and was pleased to have people stop and visit with him.

One of the people he enjoyed the most and who enjoyed talking with him was Mr. Dave Sturdivant, who was slightly younger than Uncle Gene at the time of this episode, though both were elderly men, Uncle Gene in his 90's and Mr. Sturdivant in his 80's.

Mr. Sturdivant was a tall dignified white-haired old gentleman with a courtly Southern air, while Mr. Wetzel was a small wiry oldster with a wry Western sense of humor.

Uncle Gene (Eugene Wetzel) had lived in Alpine for many years. He was the uncle of Clarence Foster of Alpine whose parents bought the Log Cabin Café in 1912.

Mr. Sturdivant was a very devout man who not only attended church regularly, but thought other folks should do the same. He worried especially about Uncle Gene's nonattendance at religious services, and tried frequently to persuade him to go along to church of a Sunday morning.

One day while Mr. Sturdivant was exhorting him, Uncle Gene said, “All right, I'll go to church with you next Sunday morning, if you'll come and get me and take me there in your wheelbarrow.”

“I'll do it!” said Mr. Sturdivant, “You be ready and meet me right here.”

The hour was set. Word got around and folks speculated about what would happen. Came the appointed time for the ride to church and Uncle Gene, dressed in his best, waited in front of the Log Cabin on that Sunday morning. A shout went up from watchers when Mr. Sturdivant, an impressive figure in his dark suit, strode up trundling his wheelbarrow. True to his word, Uncle Gene climbed aboard and was wheeled triumphantly to the Alpine Community Church by Mr. Sturdivant.”

The captions on the photographs in Mrs. La Force's book tell that Mr. Wetzel rode all the way to the church in the wheelbarrow pushed by Mr. Sturdivant, sat through the sermon and never went to church again! The pure joy this event brought to both men is evident in their smiles.

Copies of Beatrice La Force's history of our community are available at the Alpine Historical Society Museum. It is a gem of a book that provides much pleasure to readers. The museum is open the last Saturday and Sunday of each month between the hours of 2 and 4 p.m. and by appointment. You may call Carol Morrison at 619-445-2544 to make arrangements for a special tour.

Carol Walker and her husband Paul lived in Alpine for 19 years. Carol is the Membership Chairman of the Alpine Historical Society. She can be reached at cwalker@alpinehistory.org or 619-741-4629.



Dave Sturdivant makes sure that Eugene Wetzel gets to church, pushing him to the service in his old wheelbarrow.