



University Heights Historical Society

SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

Located in University Heights at 4144 Campus Avenue, the first wooden church was built in 1907 and named the San Diego Society of the New Jerusalem. It received its local charter in 1883.

The teachings of the church are based on the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, the son of a Swedish bishop. Swedenborg became a leading scientist and philosopher, an economist, inventor and prolific writer. At the age of 56 he gave up the study of worldly science and devoted the last 28 years of his life to giving the world a new religious philosophy, which gave rise to the founding of the New Jerusalem Church in London in 1787. The Arts and Crafts Movement in California had a close affiliation with the Swedenborgian teachings.

The University Heights congregation met in members' homes until a church building was completed in 1907. The present Spanish Colonial Revival church building replaced the original simple wooden frame structure in 1927. The adjacent assembly hall, facing Tyler Street, was added in 1933. Both were designed by the well-known local architect Louis J. Gill who combined scaled-down elements from his award-winning Sacred Heart Church in Coronado. The University Heights site is often referred to as the "Church of the Rock Garden" because of its award-winning gardens designed by Fred H. Wylie, a noted local landscape gardener.

An interesting note on past church activities: There once was an Alpha Omega Society, a young adult group that met regularly for social activities and study of the church doctrines. The Alpha Omega Players evolved from this group, and the wife of the minister became the director since she had some prior theater experience in the Palos Verdes Players. During the years of its existence (1948 – 1986) the group played to full houses two weekends each spring and fall. It became a Community Theater and joined the original San Diego Little Theater League, sponsored by the Park and Recreation Dept. The productions took place in the Assembly Hall at 1531 Tyler Street.

Rev. Carla Friedrich is the current Minister and is taking an active role in the restoration of the gardens.