

2014 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

The Wright Time: A History of the Pilgrim Congregational Church



Sunday worship inside the Frank Lloyd Wright designed church

The Pilgrim Congregational Church was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1957. The members of the church wanted a building that “preached” long after the minister and current congregation were gone. The church leaders’ pitch was so compelling that Wright said “Tell the people of the little church that I will help them out.” Parishioners broke ground on the project in 1960. The congregation, along with local community members, built the church from the foundations to the roof. The congregation had a broad cross section of skills such as engineers, masons, builders, heavy equipment operators, carpenters and more. Their resulting effort was a church building that became a symbol of pride and hope to the community of believers and to the community of Redding. That Redding, a town of only 12,000 people at the time, was able to attract an architect of Frank Lloyd Wright’s stature represented a significant story that deserved to be told.

The Shasta Historical Society undertook *The Wright Time* film project to document the history of the Pilgrim Congregational Church. The project’s objective was to document and preserve the story of the building of the church from those who were involved while they were still alive to tell the story. While it is important to preserve historic structures, the impact of the film project differs in that it preserves the human aspects that go along with a historic structure. The challenge of the project was to not only document what transpired in the 1950s during the design and construction of the church, but also to capture the feelings and emotions of those who made the dream of a Frank Lloyd Wright designed church a reality. The film was produced entirely by volunteers.

The film content was a combination of material from historic film footage, historic photos, and oral histories. Still photos of Frank Lloyd Wright were obtained with permission from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Arizona. Since the project represented such a personal pride for its participants, scrapbooks and home movies proved to be invaluable sources as well. A current board member of the historical society and videographer, Charley Williams, as well as Sue Lang, also a board member, embarked on obtaining interviews with those involved with the building and design of the church. Valerie Ing of Jefferson Public Radio donated her time to conduct the interviews. All video and audio content, as well as photographic images that went into creating the 35 minute film will be retained by the Shasta Historical Society. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation requested that the film be added to their archives for use by scholars and students.

The Wright Time premiered on March 16, 2014 with over 800 people in attendance. The film was well received by the press and the community at large. To date, more than 200 DVDs of the film have been sold. The film represents a creative way to preserve and share the history of the region.

Learn more about the Pilgrim Congregational Church in Redding: <http://pilgrimchurchredding.org/the-building/>

To see images and Frank Lloyd Wright's original drawings and scale models of the church: <http://www.steinerag.com/flw/Artifact%20Pages/Pilgrim.htm>