

Early-Day Oil Lab Will Make Way for Church

SANTA PAULA, May 30—A little brick building which once played an important role in the development of the Southland's oil and automobile industries is to be torn down soon, it has been announced by the present owner, the First Southern Baptist Church.

More than 50 years ago the first automobile ever to be seen on a Santa Paula street huffed and puffed its way from the front door of the little building on 10th St. a block and a half to the corner of Main, then known as Mupu St. A couple of barefoot youngsters, including Fern O. Pressey, still a resident here, raced it through clouds of dust to the corner—where, to the chagrin of its builder, it gave up the ghost.

The car and its owner, Fred Stewart, were towed ignominiously back to the little brick shop behind a team of horses.

City's First Auto

Stewart, somewhat of an inventor, built the city's first auto in the brick building on 10th St. after the oil laboratories run by Dr. Frederick Salathe, a Swiss oil engineer and chemist, moved out at the turn of the century. The chemist was brought to Santa Paula by the late U.S. Sen. Thomas R. Bard, first president of Union Oil Co. Union wanted to crack Standard Oil's monopoly of the kerosene market, and Bard thought Salathe was just the man to help them do it.

As it turned out, Salathe wasted a great deal of time turning out sewing machine oil—the last of the 300 barrels he produced, enough to oil every sewing machine in America for decades, was dumped several years later because no market could be found for it. But he also perfected the Union kerosene and helped crack the Standard Oil market.

Pipeline Department

When Union's refinery here burned to the ground around the turn of the century, the doctor switched allegiance to a competitor, Capitol Crude. Later he went back east. Many of his test tubes are to be seen in the California Oil Museum here.

With his departure, the little brick building became the pipeline department for Union Oil, and later the firm's first sales office on the Pacific Coast. Next door stood a frame house which served as a home for Union's shop superintendents, on the spot where the church

now stands. The nearby shops kept Union's drillers supplied with equipment, and also furnished the labor and materials to convert the world's first oil-burning locomotive from coal in 1894.

THE SOUTHLAND

Los Angeles Times^{2*}

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 1953—Part IA 23



PAST AND FUTURE—The Rev. W. H. Rosecrans and son, Dennis Ray, 3, hold conference in front of First Southern Baptist Church of Santa Paula which will be

expanded to take over site now occupied by old structure at left, which played an important role in the early days of the oil and auto industries of that city.

Times photo