

6.

FROM THE STEEPLE

One afternoon last week we upscoped the Steeple, swiveled it several degrees toward the 19th century and focused upon Palisado Avenue in the 1870s and 80s.

From within the covered wooden bridge that spanned the Farmington River at that time the plodding rumble of horses hooves foretold of a party in transit. Sure enough, a wagon emerged shortly with its passengers the Honorable Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hayne Rainey and their children. Mr. Rainey is a Congressman from South Carolina and when the House is not in session he and Mrs. Rainey (Susan) make their summer home in Windsor. They reside in the rambling 18th century dwelling that sits on the north corner of Palisado Ave. and Old Kennedy Rd.

The Rainey's like Windsor and Windsor likes them. On the 4th of July, 1876, the nation's centennial year, Mr. Rainey was one of three notables who spoke on the Town Green. The family also belongs to a church in the community; The First Congregational Church. Page 245 of the membership record, under the surname of Rainey, shows "Joseph H. and Mrs. Susan E. adm. ch. July 3, 1881 by letter from an extinct Baptist ch., Wentworth St., Charleston, S.C." The fact that a United States congressman is a part of First Church extended family is worthy of note. Ever more significant is the consistency with which the thoughts and actions of today's church family reflect those of Mr. Rainey, just about 100 years ago. He supported the rights of the Chinese minority in California and of the American Indians. He also presented civil rights petitions guaranteeing blacks their full constitutional rights as well as access to public accommodations. This was compassionate and liberating legislation mirrored by the every member ministry and, in a sense, the liberation theology now in action in the congregation. Today we are engaging in a program that will help to discover the gifts each and every one of us has. Mr. Rainey probably came as close to discovering the total self in the gift of life as anyone we'll ever know. His convictions and courage led him to enter and refuse to leave a segregated dining room in Suffolk, VA in a time when such defiance was dangerous.

...FROM THE STEEPLE...continued

On the other hand he had the empathy and communicative skills which allowed him to state "Social equality consists in congeniality of feeling, a reciprocity of sentiment and mutual social recognition among men which is granted according to desire and taste and not by any known or possible law."

Joseph Hayne Rainey, a man who cared about people, was a resident of Windsor, a member of this church, and the first black congressman in America. Born a slave, he secured his freedom and grew to serve five congressional terms in a career that at one of its high points found him presiding over the House of Representatives. This prompted a bold headline in the then mighty New York Herald: "A LIBERATED SLAVE IN THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR."

These words are the cornerstone to Mr. Rainey's legacy of inspiration because once he got himself UNSHACKLED he really SOARED!

*Ted Anderson*