

AZUSA STREET TIMELINE

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1905 : Joseph Smale, taking note of the Welsh revival, started forming home prayer groups. Smale was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Los Angeles. These groups prayed for existing revivals, and prayed that revival would come to Los Angeles. The groups became controversial, and Smale was forced to leave First Baptist with about half the members. At Second Baptist Church, some of the members were changing away from Baptist teachings and toward the Holiness approach to salvation. So, some of the members there were driven out. They formed a church at 9th and Santa Fe.

February 1906 : A Holiness church without a pastor decided to hear out a preacher which members Neely Terry and Julia Hutchins recommended: **William Seymour**. However, once Seymour got to Los Angeles, he raised the matter of speaking in tongues, which Seymour had come to see as the definitive mark of the entry of the Holy Spirit into a person. Result: Seymour was bounced even before he could get started. So, Seymour held his meetings at the home of Richard and Ruth Asberry ([214 North Bonnie Brae Street](#)). These meetings drew some of the Baptist exiles, and a few from nearby Holiness churches. These meetings already had some of Seymour's trademarks: they were **interracial**, involved women, and **lay people exercised [leadership](#) and [specialized gifts](#)**.

April 9 1906 : **Edward Lee** (who was housing Seymour) and **Jennie Evans Moore** (Seymour's closest associate) broke out in tongues. Others soon followed. Word spread -- Seymour's group was already getting noticed in the community, but this really stirred things up. So, they rented an abandoned warehouse building on Azusa Street that was previously used as a livery stable, and started the **Apostolic Faith Mission**. Things shifted into high gear on Easter when Moore gave her [testimony](#).

Mid-May 1906: The mission was already overflowing their new site. The Pentecostal movement was born. Visiting pastors came from everywhere,

especially from the South. Reporters from secular newspapers were sent to check out the scene. Charletans of all sorts licked their lips at a golden opportunity. All eyes were on Azusa in a matter of weeks. (Remember, this speed took place **before** there were modern media and passenger airlines, and the telecommunications revolution had barely begun).

Seymour was not what most people would think of as a Black pentecostal preacher. He was usually a meek man with a direct style that was rarely stylized or tricked-up; he could, however, become suddenly and volcanically emotional at times, in and out of the pulpit. He saw himself more as a teacher than a preacher, yet his mark was as a preacher and not as a teacher. He'd sometimes sit at the meetings with his head in a shoe box, to cut himself off from the hysteria surrounding him, apparently for two reasons: (1) to keep from becoming visually disoriented (he was blind in one eye); (2) so he could concentrate on prayer and thought, so that he would be most open to speaking in the Spirit. The people in attendance were already in a state of excited agitation long before Seymour spoke, thanks to what went on before him each night. If his thunder suddenly struck on such nights, it must've been more than most people could take.

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October 1906: **Charles Parham** was invited to speak for a series of revival meetings -- and was quickly dis-invited. Why?

1. Parham's **racist views** were hardening. By the 1910s he had become a full-fledged racist and Klan supporter; at Azusa he fumed against the very African-American style of loose enthusiasm which was the norm for even Azusa's whites.
2. **Personality conflicts**. Parham wanted status as the chief authority figure while he was there; meanwhile the Azusa elders would not make even reasonable adjustments to Parham's approach to revival.
3. Rumors were already circulating that Parham was committing **sodomy** with young males. In 1907, he was charged with it, but the charges were dropped due to lack of evidence.
4. While most of the elders and the pastor kept themselves relatively straight, the scene which revolved around Azusa was increasingly **under the sway of magicians, self-appointed preachers, self-styled prophets, and folk religionists** -- which would revulse any Holiness devotee such as Parham, or for that matter any sincere Christian. They also triggered most

of Seymour's biggest eruptions.

Parham stomped off to try to form a church nearby, which quickly became yet another of his failures. His rough personality, his demands to be in charge, his increasingly angry racism, and rumors of sexual misbehavior (spread far and wide by opponents) pushed him further and further out of the picture. Long before his death, Parham had become a marginal figure in Pentecostalism.

This water/oil mix of Parham and Azusa (more like gasoline) was the first sign of something that would plague Pentecostalism and become a part of its character: **divisiveness**. Two other problems that would infect Pentecostalism showed themselves here : **fraud** and the influence of **occultic mysticism**. Parham himself was an example of three other problems which would recur throughout Pentecostalist history : **racism, authoritarianism, and sexual scandal**. Also, one of the troubles with going by exciting experiences is that much of what went on was **not thought through** as thoroughly as was needed. So, not only were the glories of Pentecostalism born at Azusa, but also its most serious problems.

Before 1906 had ended, most Azusan leaders had spun off to form congregations, such as the 51st Street Apostolic Faith Mission, the Spanish AFM, and the Italian Pentecostal Mission. These missions were made up mostly of one or another immigrant or ethnic group. The US Southeast was a particularly fruitful area for them, since Azusa's approach gave a useful explanation for things that had already been happening there in fact or in rumor. Other new missions were based on preachers who had charisma or energy. Nearly all of these new churches were founded among the poor, the outcast, the newcomer, and/or the low-wage laborer.

The bad news : this meant that Azusa Street started shrinking. The good news was, once people had stopped paying attention to Azusa, those who were there for a piece of the action left there. (Why hang around the has-beens, why not go off to where the new action is?) Azusa was eventually able to straighten itself out and settle itself into being a Black Pentecostal church not all that different from others, doing a brief resurgence and then a slow fade. The bad thing is, the con artists found as many elsewhere to go as the Pentecostal movement had found, causing continued problems for the more legitimate leaders.

The congregation at Azusa continued at a reasonable size until Seymour's death in 1922, at which time Jennie Moore Seymour took over for several years of decline. The congregation folded soon after losing its building in 1931. The building was torn down and replaced by what became the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center in Los Angeles.

In a way, the congregation's demise was fitting, for the Pentecostal movement has thrived on temporary sites, storefronts, old warehouses, and on congregations that often would last not much past their chief preacher. The constant shifting has made it harder for rigor mortis to set in, and kept them open to new possibilities in changing neighborhoods.

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