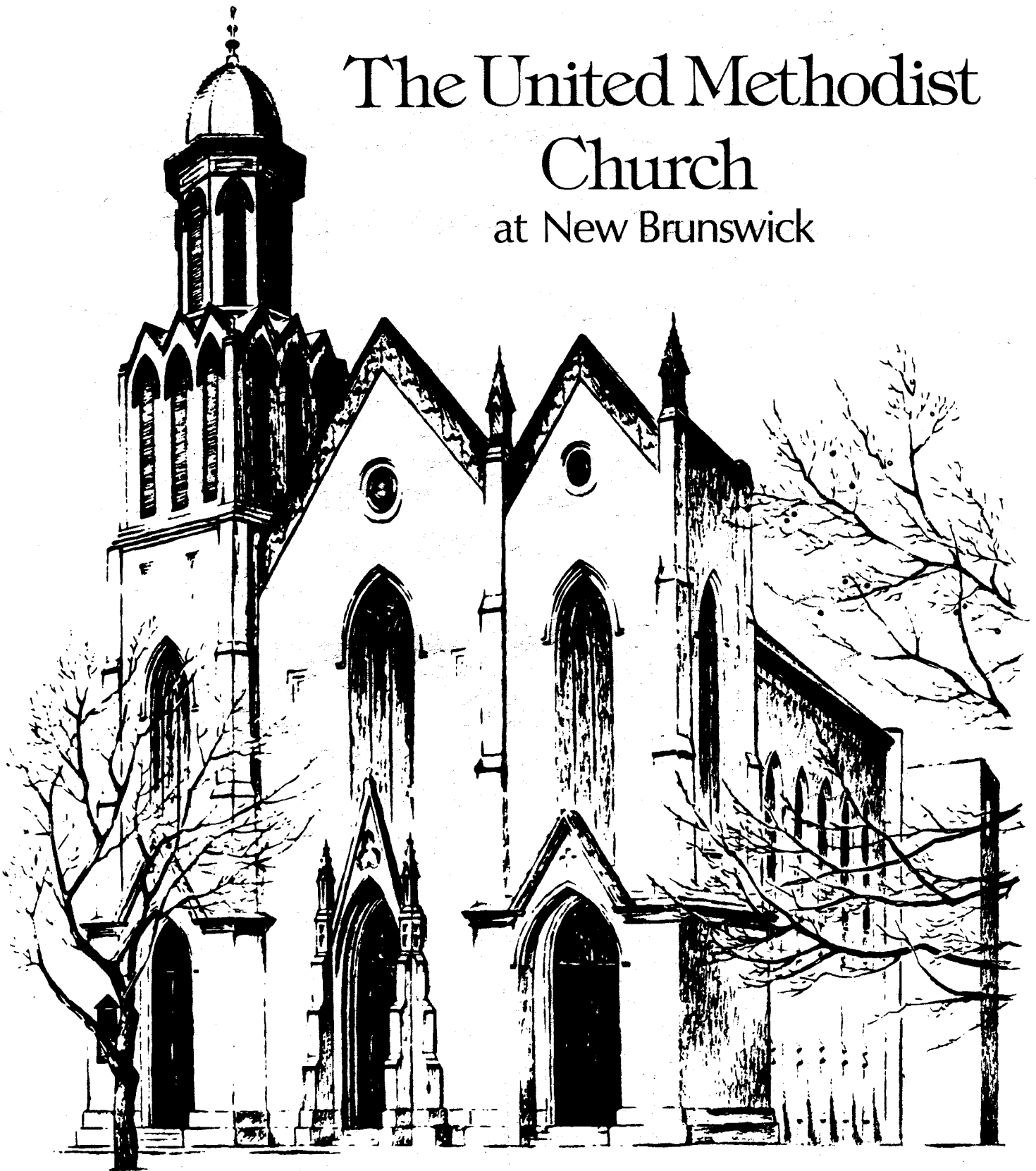


The United Methodist
Church
at New Brunswick

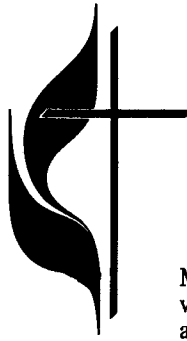


oreward

WE, as Methodists in New Brunswick, New Jersey are celebrating two important events in 1976—the founding of our nation two hundred years ago, and the dedication of our present house of worship one hundred years ago.

Since our nation was conceived and born on religious convictions and principles, and since John and Charles Wesley, along with George Whitefield and Captain Webb, brought their “dissenting” theology—Methodism—to the New World in the early 1700’s, the Christian denomination of Methodism has been an integral part of our nation’s history. Rev. George Whitefield preached Methodism in New Brunswick in 1739, and Methodism grew here in this tiny wayside “coach stop” between New York and Trenton to the extent that when Bishop Francis Asbury came in 1798 to start a congregation, he found there were already active Methodists meeting here.

In the year of our nation’s Bicentennial and our sanctuary’s Centennial—a sanctuary which grew out of those early beginnings and subsequently became the Mother Church from which the Saint James, and the Pitman churches in New Brunswick, the Milltown Methodist Church, and Trinity Methodist Church in Highland Park evolved—it appears appropriate to compile this short history of Methodism in New Brunswick.



The Methodist Church at New Brunswick 1811~1976

Earliest Beginnings of Methodism: Methodism was brought to this country very soon after its beginning in England, and "The Methodist Episcopal Church, Shiloh, New Brunswick" (as it was first incorporated) was the mother of Methodism in this area. The Reverend George Whitefield himself preached the first Methodist sermon in New Brunswick in 1739. Whitefield, the Rev. John Wesley, and his brother Rev. Charles Wesley were the "Triumvirate of Methodism", associated together in the beginning of the movement at Oxford University. As in England the spread of Methodism was largely the result of the itinerant preaching of George Whitefield and John Wesley, so in America the success of the movement can be credited to Whitefield's seven trips here.¹

Methodism in the New Brunswick Area:

On his first trip to Philadelphia and New Jersey in 1739, Whitefield read the Book of Common Prayer and preached in the Presbyterian Meeting House (there was no Anglican Church in the city at that time and it was "common . . . for the Dissenters and Conformists [Anglicans] to worship at different times in the same place").² Whitefield added in the same passage from his *Journal* a longing for ecumenicism: "Oh that the partition-wall were broken down and we all with one heart and one mind could glorify our common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."³ He visited and preached in New Brunswick several more times between 1739 and 1740, to as many as two thousand people.

When the famous Bishop Francis Asbury came to New Brunswick in 1797 he found that a preacher from Elizabeth had already been successful in starting a Methodist following in New Brunswick. In 1798 Asbury himself started a subscription for a house of worship and preached at the Court House in 1800 and 1802. The preaching of Asbury and others was very successful, since on May 27, 1811 "The Rev. Joseph Totten and the male members of the Methodist Episcopal Church of New Brunswick, N.J. did assemble at their usual place of meeting for public worship and did then and there by plurality of voices of the congregation

present elect Jacob Snyder, James Williams, David Oliver, Michael Pool, Joel Conger, Henry Goose, and John Vliet to be trustees of the same."

Ground had been purchased in 1803 on Liberty Street just below the site of the present Church, and in 1811 a two story brick structure was built.

A lamp was suspended on each side of the pulpit, and by this means a worldly light aided at the evening service the dispensation of the spiritual light by the missionaries, who for several years but occasionally visited the church, then in its infancy, struggling for a bare existence.

As the few Methodists here at that time were not as rich in purse as in faith it was not until nearly seven years had elapsed that they succeeded in paying off the debt on the lot.⁴

The church was without a regular supply of preachers until 1820, when Rev. Charles Pitman was sent from the Trenton Circuit, which then embraced one half of New Jersey. There were 16 members in the church, but "for over two years Rev. Mr. Pitman served faithfully, and firmly established Methodism in this community. He increased the membership from 16 to 60. . . Methodists in those days were subject to much persecution and made objects of ridicule. Hundreds of persons attended the evening services for the especial purpose of annoying the exhorters and others at the meetings. This was continued for years. . . ."⁵ "Unprotected females" were teased and annoyed, on at least one occasion a "scoffer" was forcibly ejected and a fight ensued, and another time a young bull was turned loose in the sanctuary, "He ran up the aisle to the altar rail, stared at the pulpit, bellowed, turned around alarmed at his predicament and ran out, while the female portion of the congregation, half terrified out of their wits, screamed and scrambled over the tops of the seats for places of greater security, the crowd outside half convulsed with most uproarious laughter, watching their terror-stricken victims. Fortunately, no one was injured."⁶

In spite of all these "persecutions", "the membership of the church continued to increase steadily, by ordinary rather

¹ For most of the material on the early history of Methodism and the early history of Methodism in the area we are indebted to the Rev. F. Elwood Perkins, former pastor of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick (1962-1966).

² George Whitefield's Journals, Banner of Truth Trust (London, 1960) p. 347.

³ Ibid.

⁴ From an article in an unidentified New Brunswick newspaper, January 1876.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

than by great spasmodic revivals, and many of the most violent scoffers became afterwards among the most useful members."⁷

About 1832 Rev. Mr. Hall and his wife came to the church from New York and organized the Sunday School. A few years later, in 1835, a tornado almost completely destroyed the building and the preacher, Rev. W.H. Bull, was fatally injured. A frame structure was erected on the same site in 1836.

In 1844 the first Methodist meetings were held in Milltown, with strong support given by a "First Methodist Episcopal Church of New Brunswick" family named Evans and the New Brunswick pastor who conducted worship there regularly. A society was organized and a structure built, thus establishing the Milltown Methodist Church. (In the 1960's many members of this church who lived in East Brunswick became the charter members of Aldersgate Methodist.)

Growth continued after the rebuilding of the "Liberty Street" church in 1836 to such an extent that 150 volunteers left the congregation to form a new church, "Pitman Methodist Episcopal Church of New Brunswick, N.J.", named after the Rev. Charles Pitman, in 1851. In 1857 one revival added 170 new members, and the next year another congregation was formed out of "Liberty Street", the "St. James Methodist Episcopal Church." Both new churches over the next hundred years built substantial congregations and facilities and performed much service in the community.⁸

In the summer of 1924 a Sunday School was started as a mission of the "Liberty Street" or "First Methodist Church" in the Masonic Auditorium in Highland Park. By the fall of that year a student from the Collingswood Church became the pastor, and a month thereafter the society was incorporated as the "Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church." Thus while the mother church continued to grow and serve, she produced children who were doing the same.

The Construction of the Present Church Building:

As part of the growth of the mother church, between 1865 and 1868 the present site at Liberty Street and George Street was acquired. The foundation for the present building was laid on the new site between 1869 and 1871, and the construction of the sanctuary began in 1876. The building of the church is described in the *New Brunswick Times* of Saturday, May 27, 1876:

To-morrow a new church is to be dedicated in this city, a church for which the congregation has long been waiting, and which they have regarded with anxious hearts since years ago the first stone was laid in promise and left to rot in hope. It will be a gala day for Methodism. That strong young church, called first in ridicule and now in honor the Methodist Church, which started later than her sister denominations, but now outstrips them all in numbers, is every year increasing her hold upon American Christians. She has an excellent foothold in this city, although we are under the shadow of a Reformed college and scarce without the arms of a Presby-

terian one; and the particular congregation which is to-morrow to dedicate to God its new home is the mother church of this vicinity and venerable throughout the State. Her children have left her and grown up beside her, and have taken her strength, so that instead as of yore being one of the most prominent in the State, she is now pecuniarily one of the weakest. But the history of this new church edifice proves that there is true blood yet in her veins. It has been a church of many prayers and much sacrifice. It has cost, we believe, some \$27,000, and all but \$8,000 or \$10,000 is expected to be paid—that sum remaining on mortgage. This

\$27,000 represents to this poor congregation much hard struggling and true Christian sacrifice. We are informed that some members who have no homes they can call their own, and who have families to support by their daily work, have given \$1,000; one of the mechanic bosses who have been engaged in the construction of the building, and is by no means wealthy, has given in money, labor and materials over \$2,500. Every member, nearly, has given liberally of means—not of the liberality of wealth, which does not know its gifts; but the liberality of straitened means, which is really sacrificial.

Bishop Matthew Simpson, who conducted Abraham Lincoln's funeral service, consecrated the new sanctuary.

A modern appraisal of the architecture of the church is found in "The Architectural History of New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1681-1900":

First Methodist Episcopal Church, George Street and Liberty Street. 1869, 95'x70', Augustus Hatfield.

Stephen deHart, a New Brunswick architect, was the builder for this church, though Hatfield was the designer. This Gothic structure was totally unorthodox in design and spirit, and it stood as a marked contrast to the highly symmetrical Second Presbyterian Church across the street, which was also built in the Gothic style.

Hatfield included the common vocabulary of the Gothic style, such as the pointed windows with tracery, the decorated verges, and the tower, but their

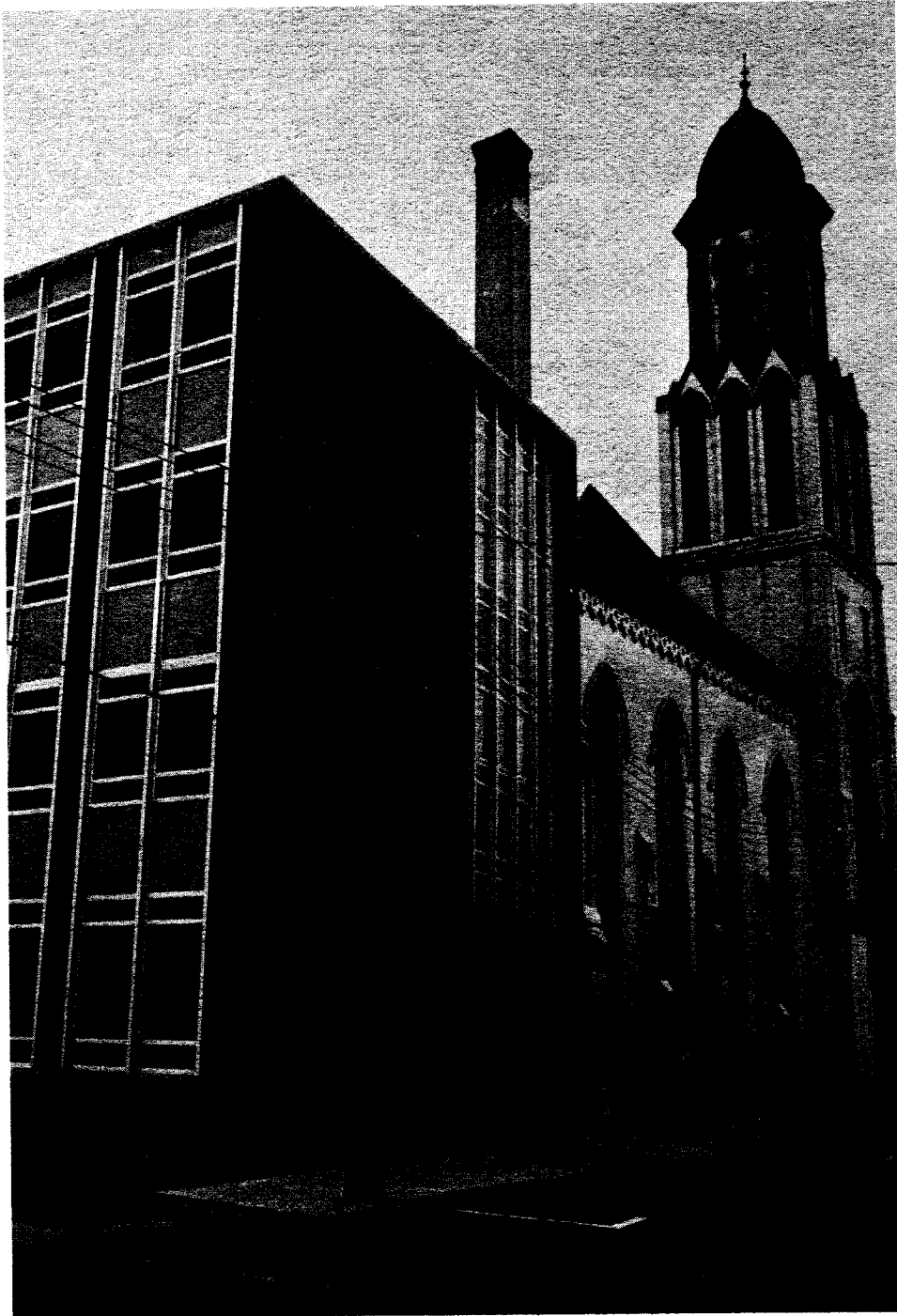
combination is more whimsical than accurate. Many nineteenth-century architects were not constrained to create archaeologically correct designs, and some of the best buildings of the era were individual creations rather than copies of old buildings. While Hatfield's work is far from a masterpiece, it shows a competent handling of the Gothic detail and the ability of this architect to use many of the varied eclectic modes popular in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹

This architectural appraisal takes into account several major additions that were managed by the congregation in the course of the first twenty years after construction: the Chapel was built in 1885 against the rear wall; in 1896 the stained glass memorial windows were installed in the sanctuary in memory of Rev. J.S. Phelps, former minister, and Peter Cornell,

⁷ Ibid

⁸ There are detailed 100 year histories of each of these churches: "100th Anniversary, Pitman Methodist Church 1851-1951" and "100th Anniversary, 1858-1958, Saint James Methodist Church, New Brunswick, New Jersey."

⁹ Barbara Cyviner Listokin, "The Architectural History of New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1681-1900. Rutgers, The State University (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1976).

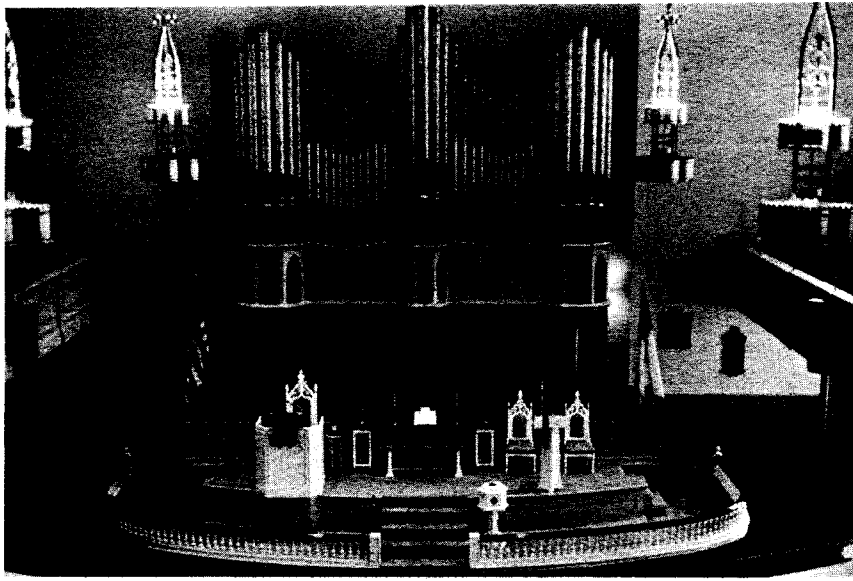


member and benefactor, the interior was remodeled, the brick was covered with cement, the steeple was raised to its present height (144 feet) at a cost of \$2,300, and the Jardine organ was installed.

The organ has 1450 speaking tubes or pipes including 45 visible above the body of the organ, was originally operated by water pressure (now powered by an electric driven air turbine), and took 2 weeks to install with builders working each day until 1 a.m. at a cost of \$4250. On Thanksgiving night in 1896 a great concert was given by William C. Carl, a famous organist of New York City, with 1500 people in attendance. For many years Mr. Lee Smith, a member of the congregation, kept the organ in tune and repair, in spite of being deaf. In the early 1950's, during a major sanctuary renovation, the organ was rebuilt by Mr. Louis Mohr, a son of the original builder.

Later the basement of the Chapel was excavated for a social room (1913), and during the twentieth century both Chapel and sanctuary portions of the facility underwent alterations, renovations, and redecoration. The American flag in the sanctuary was presented to the church by Mr. C. Walter West on his becoming a naturalized citizen December 6, 1945. The Chapel was ultimately torn down in 1965 to make way for the new Education Building.

LEFT: Church and the Education Building.



The Methodist Church at New Brunswick Today

The twentieth century brought about the reuniting of the three New Brunswick Methodist churches into one. As the strong enthusiasm and revivalism of the nineteenth century had brought about the creation of the two new churches, Pitman and St. James, so the changing nature of the city and the secularism of the twentieth century caused a reuniting of the congregations into a stronger, even more community-oriented group, interested in service rather than the maintenance of large buildings.

In 1961, after more than a hundred years of worship and service as separate entities, Pitman, St. James, and First Methodist were reunited as "The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick."

At the time of the merger it was considered desirable to house the united congregation in a new building, preferably on a new site. But it was judged that the site of First Methodist was the "more prominent and more centrally located" one at the time, so the Chapel was torn down and a new Education Building erected on its site (at a cost of \$450,000) and dedicated in 1965. This was to be the beginning of a completely new facility, including a sanctuary, as funds became available.

However, the church followed the pattern of many "downtown" churches across the country. Membership and finances declined and inflation took its toll. By this time another serious problem faced the congregation — the sanctuary was in disrepair and needed complete renovation at an estimated cost of

\$50,000-\$60,000. The Administrative Board appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to study or survey the future of the church from the standpoints of property, membership, finance, and ministry. The Ad Hoc Committee report was submitted to the church membership at two congregational meetings by the Administrative Board and the congregation voted to remain in the downtown location to better serve the local community and keep Methodism in New Brunswick, and voted to completely restore the old sanctuary. During 1973 and 1974 the exterior of the building was restored and the interior was completely painted and renovated, including the stencil glass and stained glass windows, at a cost of approximately \$65,000. In 1975 a new sound system was installed.

The congregation has endeavored to make the best possible use of these new and renovated facilities by offering a wide range of worship and service opportunities, by conducting membership and outreach campaigns, and by participating with the Downtown Cluster of churches in programs such as seminars and Neighborhood Block Parties to better serve the total New Brunswick community today.

The Future. . . .

There is a stone monument in South Carolina into which the following is carved:

*Of the past mindful
To the present faithful,
For the future hopeful*

The future of this church would be bleak indeed without the strong foundations of the past. Therefore, we take pride in our past not in nostalgic curiosity, but because it is the umbilical cord of our birth from which our identity and purpose came.

In the midst of a rapidly changing present confronting us with giant challenges, we are aware that it is to the present moment that Jesus the Christ calls and sustains us as part of His Church Universal. We are enabled to open our arms to the present, in spite of our ambivalence, with faith not in ourselves, but in the One who is none other than the Lord of History.

Thus, it is with a strong sense of hope that we look from the present to the future, knowing that to be the people of God in the midst of the world will require of us hard decisions, greater commitment, and growing faith. We are enabled to look forward because it is not only those of us here present who do so, but it is with the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, who guides us into the future; it is with the cloud of witnesses past whose faith and dedication moves us forward; and it is for all those to come who stand in need of the church, that we respond with love.

Therefore, we give to God our Father, grateful thanksgiving for the past and its richness, humbly praying that we will be faithful to the present, and with hope we look toward a rewarding future of continued worship, service, and ministry in the name of Christ.

History of the Women's Societies

In the late nineteenth century several women's groups were formed in each of the three churches now comprising the United Methodist Church, such as the "Woman's Foreign Missionary Society", the "Woman's Home Missionary Society", and the "Ladies' Aid Society". In 1940 these groups came together within each church as "The Woman's Society of Christian Service", and recently have become "United Methodist Women." Through the years the devoted women in these groups have served their churches and the world in a multitude of ways: by raising funds to support missionaries, contribute to building and renovation funds, maintain parsonages, sponsor orphans, and donate to community agencies and hospitals; by helping to found other community service organizations such as the Y.W.C.A. of Central Jersey; by conducting worship services and discussions; by making cancer dressings and afghans; by collecting materials and clothing to send overseas; by running a host of programs—gifts in themselves—to raise these funds, such as bazaars and suppers, special sales, plays, and socials.

An interesting invitation from the "Ladies' Aid Society" appears in the First Methodist Episcopal Church bulletin of Sunday, May 15, 1910:

The Ladies' Aid Society will hold their May festival and supper next Wednesday evening, May 18th. They are preparing for a great occasion. That is the evening you will be able to see the comet [Haley's] with the naked eye. A good supper, with ice cream, for thirty-five cents, will help you see the comet clearly and without trembling. Keep the date in mind and be sure to come. Neglect things to be there that night. This is not a society affair. It belongs to the whole Church, congregation and friends. Let us all stand by the Ladies' Aid.

This event is a good illustration of the creativity, friendliness, and resourcefulness—along with entrepreneurship and a "Madison Avenue" approach—that has characterized the work of these women through the years. They have served while promoting faith and fellowship, and in that service have raised funds to serve again.

BENEFACTORS	SUPPORTERS
Mr. and Mrs. Elwood J. Barlow Iverna Gruhn (In Memory of My Family) Margaret McElmury Richard Rassman George J. Deizer (Quackenboss Funeral Home) Evelyn E. Leary United Methodist Women	E.H. Ahrens Birnn Candy W. Berman & Co. Dorothy and George Boshm Mr. and Mrs. Edward R. Boylan Cramer Fuel Oil Company Dr. and Mrs. L.M. Diemer Mr. and Mrs. Robert Earley Frank's Bldg. Supply Co. Mary Ellen Giddes J. W. Green and Family Mrs. R. E. Grymes Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Hess Jane and Wallace Hill Phyllis E. Hilton The Richard Irwin Family Mr. and Mrs. James R. Justin Florence L. Kramer Edith Kronk Sadie A. Leary Lincoln Greenhouses The Richard L. McDermott Family Milltown General Hardware Nick and Mary Jane Nickles Mrs. Stella M. Nygren Reliable Lock and Key Shop Mrs. John Richards Rolfe Building Materials Co. Mr. and Mrs. John W. Ryder and Family Mr. and Mrs. Warren Stiemmer South River Glass, Inc. Mrs. John Swansboro Al Takacs Carpet, Sales, and Service Van Heuvel Service Co. Weiss Bros. Window Shades, Covers, Drapes and Blinds David and Ivenette Williams Lillian G. Wright The Robert A. Wynveen Family Youngs Glass Service, Inc.
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FRIENDS	
Stephen S. Chang Mrs. Joan M. Didick Friends David and Laura Henry Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Leary Mr. and Mrs. Irving MacDowell Mr. and Mrs. Harry McMinn Mr. and Mrs. John O'Brien Mr. and Mrs. George Oram, Sr. Neal Roberts Mr. and Mrs. John Smith Mr. and Mrs. William J. Wenz	

I extend on behalf of the congregation a grateful word of appreciation not only to those whose names are printed above, but to countless others, both members and non-members alike. Their gracious gifts of time, skill, and interest have made this truly a joyful celebration of 100 years of worship in this beautiful sanctuary whose very presence is a witness of faith to Christ her Lord.

James H. Harris, Jr.

address: George Street at Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

phone: 545-8975

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES: Sundays

9:30 a.m. Church School

11:00 a.m. Family Worship

(July & August 10:00 a.m. Family Worship)

Reverend James H. Harris, Jr., Pastor

