

## Church History

Methodists have played a significant role in shaping our nation and especially in shaping Canton, Ohio. Our church celebrates its rich history in the heart of Canton, but our focus is clearly on today...in this present moment. We intentionally are seeking to be God's people in the 21st century movement of the Spirit. We respect our past, we live in the reality of the present moment, and we have an eye for the future.



Church of the Savior was the home church for **President William McKinley** where he actively participated in the ministry. It was here at this church that the family brought home the fallen president for funeral services in 1901.



The tiny village of Canton was scarcely more than two years old when the first Methodist circuit rider - the **Rev. Mr. James Watts** - arrived in 1808. The inhabitants of the town numbered less than 30 that year, but by the time Canton was incorporated 14 years later the population was just a little short of 2000.

Methodist meetings were held at first in members' homes, later in the log court-house, the frame school house, and finally in the newly-built brick two-story school building on the site of present-day Timken High.

The Wills Creek Circuit as laid out by Mr. Watts covered 475 miles, and included in addition to Canton, Zanesville, Cambridge, Coshocton, New Philadelphia and 20 other stops. The circuit riders were sturdy souls who braved untold hardships in the course of attending to the religious needs of the early settlers.

As we look back to that humble beginning so many years ago, as we trace through the pages of history the long and arduous paths of our devoutly dedicated forbears, feelings of awe, admiration and gratitude well up within us for those generations whose bonds of Christian love put church above self as they built for the future. Today as we worship on the ground they consecrated and hallowed, we reap the bountiful fruits of their labors.



After nine years of "Methodist Meetings" formal recognition of the "Methodist Society" was achieved in 1817. 1833 saw land purchased and a simple frame church built by the congregation. The location of that first building was on the same ground where today the American Electric Power micro-wave tower reaches skyward.

By 1862 the mushrooming membership had outgrown that early house of worship. The present day site at the "*crossroads of the city*" was acquired and the first church building to occupy that land was dedicated in 1864. In 1867 papers of incorporation of the "First Methodist Church" were filed in the Stark County Court House.

The new church building was less than 17 years old (in 1881) when a tragic fire destroyed it, but the congregation refused to accept defeat and by 1883 their indomitable efforts had achieved the building still in use today.



We should take note of the fact that both the 1864 and the 1883 structures were dedicated free of debt - the one at a cost of \$45,000, the other \$137,000.

While the present Gothic structure has undergone several periods of extensive remodeling, and has been added onto over the years, it remains essentially the same.

The same magnificent stained glass windows brought from Europe over a century ago still filter prismatic patterns of fragmented sunlight onto the same sturdy oak pews, which through the intervening years have held generations of church-goers.



It was in 1867 that **William McKinley** first came to Canton to establish a law practice. He became active in the work of our church, served as Sunday School Superintendent, and was a Trustee of the church for many years. Even though his later commitments as legislator, Governor of Ohio and President of the United States required him to be absent from Canton for long intervals, he maintained close association with our church. Thus, it was here that his body was brought for funeral services following the assassination in 1901. One of the church's treasured possessions today is the flag that draped his casket.



Four more windows were added later - the McKinley Memorial windows which grace the west wall of the sanctuary were dedicated in 1907, a gift from Mrs. McKinley in honor of the martyred president.

In the early decades of the 1900's our church grew with the city and with the nation, and more room was sorely needed; but attention to this had to wait till the clouds of war had been dispersed, and finally in 1923 the four-story parish house was built and provided additional area for religious education as well as social and recreational activities.

Twenty-seven years later - in 1950 - a major remodeling was accomplished and it was at that time the Ball Memorial Organ was installed; a magnificent Aeolian-Skinner instrument it replaced the previous Estey organ, which in 1920 had supplanted the original 1883 Johnson and Co. instrument. Schulmerich "Coronation" bells and the "Arlington" carillon were added in 1955; their amplification enables daily concerts to be sent forth from our tower in all direction, often being heard as far away as three to five miles. Our ministry of music truly "goes forth to all the world."

In 1965 further remodeling included the addition the Kenneth B. Cope Memorial Chapel as a gift from the Cope family. This beautiful and inspiring setting is frequently used for smaller and more intimate services. Additional class-rooms, office space and an elevator were accomplished in the remodeling.

Subsequently another program of organ improvement came about whereby the Aeolian-Skinner Company expanded the capabilities of that splendid instrument in order that our musical "jewel" might have added "sparkle" and potential.

Physical changes to the church building over the years have been not more important however than those innovations wrought from within. It was in our church that the first graded Sunday School lessons were used, prepared by Lewis Miller while Superintendent of our Church School. Mr. Miller also designed the semi-circular sanctuary layout found in our church which -- having been subsequently perfected after his move to Akron -- became widely known as the "Akron plan." Both were quickly adopted and generally copied by churches all over the country.



The first Father-Son Banquet in the country was held in our church in 1913. The idea caught on immediately, received national recognition in the newspapers and eventually also came the Mother-Daughter Banquet as an offshoot.

In the post-war period of decentralization, as more and more churches followed the residential and business flight to "suburbia" it became necessary for our congregation to decide whether to remain a downtown church or to leave the heart of the city. Twice -- first in the late 1940's and again in 1963 -- the matter was carefully and prayerfully considered with the resulting vote of the membership each time being overwhelmingly in favor of staying. The years since have seen an increased commitment to our "neighbors" in the city, and accelerated efforts to serve those "within the shadow of our walls."

Accordingly programs of social significance for many inner city residents have been developed, placing the building facilities on a seven-day-a-week basis, a true outreach of Christian Service and brotherhood.

Outreach in other forms, however, has been very much in evidence throughout the church's history; at least seven other Methodist congregations have been formed through the efforts and assistance of our church, starting with the "Second Methodist Church" in 1867 (later known as Simpson Methodist Church.)

Outreach in the form of missionary support has been another continuing phase of our church's dedication, from the Rev. Dr. Edward P. Frease in 1889 to (medical) Dr. and Mrs. Robert L. Simpson and now to Marvin and Jean Wolford, who are serving in the Congo at the present time. The influence of these missionaries (and those in between) has reached from India to Algeria and from Portuguese West Africa to Liberia in West Africa, and has unquestionably been of deep significance.

A closer look into the history of the church points up many interesting little facets, such as:

The church occupies the unique position of having owned a cemetery plot since 1861, wherein a number of former pastors and parishioners have been buried.

In the 1920s our church endowed and furnished a room at Aultman Hospital.

At one point early in the century the church Trustees found it to have the janitor deputized - complete with badge we are told - to maintain order and repel rowdy intruders at the back of the sanctuary.

The impact of the "Billy Sunday Sawdust Trail" touched our church significantly, as it did almost all of Canton's Protestant congregations, during its stay in the city in 1912. The campaign was accorded the fullest cooperation of the churches of the community.

Starting in 1884 - almost immediately after occupying the "new" building, - our church selected the date of Washington's Birthday to stage a gala celebration and annually thereafter served all-day dinners, later even adding a bazaar. This tradition continued for 75 years. In the Bi-Centennial year (1976) a Washington's Birthday celebration was again held, in a somewhat modified form, and it was fitting that on that 92nd anniversary of the first celebration - in the same area of the building where the first one was held - the church family met to honor its "50 Year Members." The church roll included over 125 names of persons whose membership went back more than 50 years, with several passing the 77 mark. (It should be kept in mind that, cradle roll enrollment notwithstanding, actual membership usually was not granted until about the age of 11 or 12.)

Meanwhile our church members, despite their unceasingly faithful labors for the church, did not neglect their civic obligations - we find them being organizers and leaders in YM, YW, Scouting, Public Library, Associated Charities, etc... Carrying through to today, the rosters of civic volunteers include generous proportions of names that appear on our membership rolls as well.

Over the years some traditions have been perpetuated, while others have faded away; it is necessary to change with the times, to be relevant to our world today. But one continuing tradition is as relevant today, and is as honored today, as it was 190 years ago when the first circuit rider wended his weary way into town - that of serving the Lord with gladness and entering into his temple with praise.

*"I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the House of the Lord."*