

During the first half of the nineteenth century, members of the Pawnee tribe were the most settled inhabitants in the area around what would become the city of Schuyler. After a significant battle in 1838 with their long-standing enemies, the Sioux, most of the Pawnee migrated to a site near present-day Central City.

For the next eighteen years thousands of people passed through, or near, the area of Schuyler on the Oregon and Mormon Trails and the old Military Road, but few settled. In 1856, the first permanent settlers took up residence at Shell Creek Station, later to be called Schuyler.

In 1866 the Union Pacific Railroad reached the Shell Creek Station area. With the railroad came the beginning of a migration of European settlers that would last for the next few decades. Among those settlers was a group of Scots who came to Schuyler in 1869. They came together from Valleyfield on Prince Edward Island in Canada having left their home in the village of on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. The precise reasons for their leaving Scotland and Canada and subsequently settling in Nebraska is not known. It is known that they came deliberately, as a Rev. Alexander Sutherland apparently had come to the area earlier and decided this was the place for them to make their permanent home.

The following paragraphs taken from the original Minutes of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church indicate their intentions:

"At a meeting of the Presbyterians at and around Schuyler in the county of Colfax, Nebraska, constituted by praise and prayer by the Rev. Alex. Sutherland the following constitution and covenant were agreed to and adopted this fifteenth day of December, 1869.

We whose names are hereto subscribed do declare our belief that the Westminster Confession of Faith has adopted and issued by the Presbyterian Church of these United States in her Constitution is a faithful exhibition of the doctrine, worship, government and discipline of the church of Christ as contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and we do hereby accept and profess the same as the profession of our faith.

And further we do hereby solemnly promise that as members of this church of Christ, we will faithfully endeavor to honor it in our conduct and life; to give diligent attendance on its worship and ordinances; to maintain its faith; to submit to its government and discipline; to labor and pray for its increase, purity and peace; and to walk in love with its members and adherence seeking and improving opportunities to promote their best interests.

Robert Edgar	Mrs. R. McKenzie*	Mrs. Wm. Montgomery*	W. Bolling*
John Curry	Alex. McDougall	Francis Dunn	Mrs. Bolling*
W.G. Sutherland	W.A. McDougall	Mrs. F. Dunn	Mip Bolling*
James A. Fraser	Robt. Sutherland	James Richardson	Neil Bolling*
Ann Sutherland	John McDonald	Mrs. J. Richardson	Robt. Smith
Mary Edgar	Mrs. J. McDonald	John McIntosh	Alex. McGregor
Annalm Trossin	Angus Sutherland	Mrs. J. McIntosh	James W. Munro*

Jesie Sutherland	John Fraser	John Irving	Mrs. J. A. Fraser
Duncan Morison	James Coventry*	James W. Turnbull*	Mrs. Matheson
John Sutherland	Mrs. J. Coventry*	Mrs. J.W. Turnbull*	John Welsh
Alex. Sutherland	John Coventry*	W. John Currie Senr.	Mrs. J. Welsh
Donald McKenzie*	John McDougall	John Currie Junr.	Malcom McIntosh
Mrs. D. McKenzie*	Mrs. J. McDougall	Mrs. J. Currie	Alex. McIntosh
Rodrk. McKenzie*	Wm. Montgomery*	Wm. Tennent	James McKenzie

(A later note added by Rev. Hood states that some "of the above consider themselves not as members of the church but as members of the society.")

At Schuyler, Colfax County, Nebraska December 26, 1869 which day the following minute was adopted.

"At a preliminary meeting of the congregation held on the 15th last it was agreed by the Presbyterians in and around Schuyler be regularly organized which having been accomplished as minutes on the previous page. Messrs. Robert Edgar and James Archibald Frasier were unanimously chosen and being found willing were solemnly set apart by prayer to the office of the Eldership by the Rev. A. Sutherland pastor of the congregation and received the right hand of fellowship accordingly and the Session constituted. Thereafter W. G. Sutherland, M. D., Messrs. John Currie and Rodderick (McKenzie) were elected by the unanimous vote of the congregation to be a board of Trustees to manage and conduct the temporal affairs of the congregation as formerly agreed upon.

Thereafter the Session closed with prayer

Alex Sutherland, Mod."

The newly constituted Session went to work immediately, meeting on January 20, 1870. "The Session has under consideration the temporal requirements of the congregation and feeling the importance of securing as soon as practicable and especially in view of the large emigration of Presbyterians expected during the coming season but in the peculiar circumstance of a population newly entering a new country are convinced that they must appeal for aid to their Christian brethren about which they feel most assured they shall share in the cause of our common Lord. With this view they appoint and hereby authorize the Rev. Alex. Sutherland pastor of this congregation and Dr. Sutherland one of the trustees to solicit contributions toward the erection of the First Presbyterian Church in Schuyler, Colfax County."

In November of 1870 worship arrangements were still the primary concern of the Session. Rev. Sutherland stated, "that as another suitable place will be required to accommodate the congregation for the winter the hall occupied as furniture store can be had at \$1 each Sabbath which was agreed to. And that light fuel and attendance be at the expense of the congregation." At the same meeting "it was also considered that as the members of the congregation are distant and scattered in the country and as the hall is only available from Sabbath to Sabbath it will be

advisable to defer dispensing the communion until spring."

After these minutes come an entry, "congregational records must not be mixed with Sessional records. With this exception approved.

Brownville, April 8, 1871

A. T. Wood, Moderator"

From the beginning Presbyterians in Schuyler have been associated with the denomination and the Presbytery of which they were a part. The above notation indicates that someone, probably Rev. Sutherland, traveled to Brownville, Nebraska to attend the Presbytery meeting and to have the minutes of the congregation and Session reviewed and approved by the moderator of Presbytery. An annual practice which goes on to this day.

Presbyterians recognize and celebrate two sacraments, communion, or the Lord's Supper, and baptism. From the very beginning, Presbyterians in Schuyler have been conscious of a need to administer the sacraments.

On May 5, 1871, the Session met and agreed that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper would be dispensed on the first Sunday in May. The Session then made up a communion role of those eligible to receive communion including nineteen people. An interesting side note: the third name on the list, William Tennent, includes a later notation "died by a fall from a scaffold." The next Session meeting notes that the Lord's Supper was served in a newly constructed church building. "The Session further accord with gratitude to the great head of the church that on the previous the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was dispensed within the wall of our house of worship when fourteen members commemorated the love and dying of our Lord and Savior."

The congregation seemed to fall into a pattern of serving communion in November and May. However, communion was not served in November in 1870, '71 or '72 because of inclement weather and cold, but it was served each May.

Rev. Sutherland's ministry ended about May, 1874. In the fall of 1874, Rev. Fredrick Rea of Leon, Iowa in Des Moines Presbytery preached a month or two, "but suddenly left". Rev. J. A. Hood came the last Sunday in January, 1875. For the first few years the membership of the First Presbyterian Church was made up almost entirely of people of British descent. The first obvious Czech name came in a reference dated July 2, 1876 when baptism was administered by Rev. Mr. Hood to Mary, daughter of Frank Otradowsky and Otto, son of Frank Otradowsky. Along with the Czech Reformers who were beginning to associate with the Presbyterian church, the church was still receiving members from Scotland. At the Session meeting of June 10, 1882: "Gordon Bowie, Robert John M. Smith and Miss Lizzie Porter presented letters of dismissal and recommendation from churches in Scotland, and were received to be members of this church. On December 1, 1883 James Milne was rec'd by letter from Alvah, Scotland and James McIntosh from Foglen, Scotland.

The year 1888 was a banner one for the Presbyterian Church in Schuyler. In 1887,

there was one elder, they had added 15 members for a total of 60, they had 3 adult baptisms, 4 infant baptisms and 139 Sunday School members. At the end of 1888, there were 6 elders, 0 deacons, 58 had been added to the roll for a total of 114. They had 12 adult baptisms, 14 infant baptisms and 157 Sunday School members.

At a special meeting of the Presbyterian congregation held at the church on March 31, 1889, a resolution relative to Rev. J. A. Hood retiring from the ministry was read and unanimously passed. For the next 10 years, Rev. T. W. Leard served as minister of this church.

The church building and the receiving of new members were not the only concerns of the young congregation. They had a deep and abiding evangelistic concern to share the gospel and to upbuild the spiritual lives of the members of the church.

The first candidate for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament was noted on the evening of September 9. The Session "voted unanimously to recommend to presbytery Bro. Donald McLeod as a worthy candidate for assistance to enter the ministry." Although it is not known if Bro. McLeod was ultimately ordained, there have been a few ordained ministers come from this congregation. The last member to be called and ordained to the gospel ministry is the Rev. Dr. Thomas Tepley.

In October of 1893 the Session held a general discussion of the spiritual welfare of the congregation and means by which a deeper interest in church work might be awakened. At its next meeting, the minutes reflect, after some discussion the following plan of work was determined upon, by common consent. The pastor is to immediately write and send a letter to each member of the congregation, setting forth the needs of the church and the plan of visitation adopted by the Session. As soon as these letters have been sent, the pastor, accompanied by a member or members of the Session, shall visit every member of the church and endeavor by personal solicitation and by prayer to secure a hearty personal cooperation in the service of God. After each member shall thus have been visited the church is to hold a week of prayer."

The Session also had the responsibility of recommending members to other churches when they moved. In response to one woman requesting a letter of transfer, the "clerk was instructed to correspond with her in regard to some rumors before making out letter." The Session would not send a person to another congregation until they were satisfied of their spiritual well-being. Nor would the Session receive a member they were not convinced was serious about the Christian faith. At one typical meeting a man, "appeared before the Session. Was examined for admission to church. Matter discussed for some time and adjourned until January 8, 1895." At the January 8 meeting this gentleman "was admitted on confession of faith." It is apparent that this individual was known by the elders, and it was seen as necessary to consider carefully his joining the church. On occasion the Session also showed its concern for, "those not attending church or giving no support for a reasonable length of time be notified by letter or visitation and given account of themselves. Brother Leard was instructed to draw up and form a letter." The Session minutes throughout the history of this church generally reflect the Session's concern for the spiritual growth and well-being of

the members.

The first organized group of women with the Presbyterian Church was The Women's Missionary Society, organized in 1877. Its purpose was to encourage the mission work done by the Home and Foreign Mission Boards of the Presbyterian Church.

The Sewing Circle, a group of 14 ladies whose goal was to raise funds for the church through their activities, was formed in March of 1889. Later, in 1945, these groups combined to form the United Presbyterian Women's Organization. This organization, now more simply called the Presbyterian Women's Organization is still active and strong in the First Presbyterian Church. The ladies meet monthly from September through June with a program presented at each meeting. They participate in a number of projects throughout the year including their annual fall bazaar, singing and worship, mother-daughter and father-son dinners and helping to support mission through the Presbyterian denomination.

The men have not been completely ignored. In May, 1895, the Session met and "discussed matter relative to raising a Men's Club in the congregation." From the Session minutes it's impossible to tell how successful the first men's club was. However, feeling the need for "a renewed sense of belonging, a need to have a group of Christian men friends and a hope for greater family involvement", eleven men met on the evening of October 27, 1992 to form the First Presbyterian Church Men's Group. Since their organization, they have served at various events including their own men's breakfast open to anyone wishing to attend on Easter Sunday morning. Some of the men in the group have studied prayer and worship and have been able to help out in the public worship of God sharing concerns, reading scriptures and leading prayer.

On March 26, 1899, "Rev. T. A. Leard preached his farewell sermon to our congregation--" The Session met the following Friday evening at Bro. Zentemeyer's office. The purpose was "to talk over matters concerning our future action toward choosing a minister. Examined several letters of recommendations presented to us to select from." How different, and seemingly informal the process of calling a new minister was a century ago. However informal it seemed, the task was not taken lightly. It was entered into and pursued with diligence and prayer.

"At a congregational meeting held in First Presbyterian Church, Schuyler, Nebraska on October 9, 1899 Session met and made out a call to Rev. C. H. Miller of Colorado to settle with us for our Pastor. Signed by all members of the Session. Made unanimous by a vote of the congregation. D. H. Johnson, Clerk of Session

On November 5, 1899 "Rev. C. H. Miller preached his first sermon for us as a settled pastor. D. H. Johnson"

One of Rev. Miller's first special activities was to organize a watch night service for December 31, 1900 to bring in the new century steeped in the praise of God. On December 29, 1900 the Session "Decided to have prayer and praise meeting and communion service on New Year's Eve."

"We held a watch night meeting from 8 PM to 12 PM. Commencing with Christian endeavor service songs - reading - recitations etc. followed by sermon by pastor. Supper for all, social - then communion service. Songs. Ringing bell at 12 A.M. for three minutes. Closed with benediction 12:05."

Since we have not had a church bell for a long time, the mention of ringing the bell the three minutes may go by without much notice. But, apparently, there was a bell in the tower of the Presbyterian Church. This is the only reference to the bell in the Session minutes, but there is a reference in the Fremont Tribune dated May 14, 1885. "A fire bell is one of the things most needed in Schuyler now. The bell in the Presbyterian Church is the only one in town, and while it is a good one, it used for all together too many purposes."

Rev. Miller resigned in 1902 and Rev. C. A. Arnold was called from Ord, Nebraska to be the minister of this congregation. During his tenure, "The request of the Grandview Church Colfax County, Nebraska, that our pastor supply their church during this summer was referred to a congregational meeting for action" (May 12, 1904).

Rev. Arnold left our congregation in October of 1906, and Rev. J. D. Sweeney came to serve from January, 1907 until April, 1909. Rev. A. J. McMurtry served for one year followed by a five-year pastorate from 1910 to 1915 by the Rev. Benjamin Pearson. After Rev. Pearson came Rev. W. W. Pfantz from 1916 to 1918. He was followed by Rev. John J. Cooke - January 5, 1919: Meeting of the congregation - "to consider calling Mr. John J. Cooke to the pastorate of our church. On the first secret ballot taken 51 votes were cast. Every one in the affirmative."

Throughout the 20th century, Session decisions reflect changes in the organizational structure of the congregation. As society and business became more organized, so did the church. At a Session meeting sometime in 1919: "Upon advice of the pastor the existing form of congregational organization, namely of having a president and secretary of the congregation was discontinued, the moderator of the Session becoming the presiding officer and Session's clerk the secretary of the congregational meetings in keeping with Presbyterian usage's." And on June 4, 1919: Session "resolved to have appropriate church stationary acquired, the pastor authorized to do so."

The structural changes continue. For example, on December 8, 1943: Session decided, "that we as a board of Session authorize Rev. Strong to conduct a communicants class at such time, day and hour as he shall see fit and that we provided him with the necessary materials that he finds necessary to carry on such class." This may be the first organized communicants class. Apparently, in the past young people had joined in groups, but there is no mention previous in the Session minutes of the minister organizing a class for such new members. Prior to this time parents took a great amount of the responsibility for preparing their children to make a public profession of faith. During the 20th century it became more and more customary for the minister of the congregation to organize "communicant's classes" to prepare children for church membership. There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to this pattern.

Another decision indicating the further organizational development of the congregation was made on March 28, 1946 when it was decided by the Session

and trustees meeting together, "that we recommend to the annual meeting that the rotary system of election of elders be adopted." Before this time when one was elected to serve as an elder, they served as long as they were able. Elder William Roether had hoped to serve as an elder for 25 years, but because of this decision he was rotated off the Session after a mere 24 years of service! Since that time many people have served on the Session, sometimes for multiple three-year terms but never for more than two terms (6 years) in succession.

At one Session meeting in April 2, 1919; "33 persons applied for admission to the church membership upon confession of faith and 8 came with letters from other congregations."

Rev. Cooke served from 1919-1922 followed by the Rev. Claude Fausnaugh who came in 1922 and left in 1924. During Rev. Fausnaugh's tenure the most startling notation in the Session minutes comes from November 19, 1922 meeting: "Presbyterian Church building of Schuyler was destroyed by fire which originated from the furnace."

Immediately the Session went to work "to discuss the matter of raising funds for rebuilding." They also considered "uniting with two or more of the other Protestant congregations of the city, using their present structure or unite with us in rebuilding a new one." For a while services were held in the German Lutheran Church. A committee was appointed to discuss the possibility of federation with other churches. But, "the committee reported no satisfactory progress in the matter of Federation having met with representatives of the Methodist, Episcopal and Lutheran churches. Dr. C. H. Johnson was instructed to appoint a committee to solicit funds for a new church building."

At the April, 1923 congregational meeting: "The Ladies Sewing Circle reported almost \$800 raised and nearly all of it being either turned over to the trustees for their use or paid direct for church improvements." "The report for the Session was given by Mr. Fausnaugh, in which report was related the spiritual condition of the church. There has been no great change made in the membership, but it seems a new spirit of unity being born in the congregation. The disaster of the past year has greatly disorganized the scheduled activities but this, it seems, is giving birth to a new zeal, which by the guidance of God, perhaps will manifest itself in a very definite way within the next year."

The next year (1924) Rev. Fausnaugh departed and the Rev. W. G. White of Akron, Colorado was called to be the pastor of our congregation. On January 18, 1925, "It was decided to leave the matter of installation of Rev. White until spring when the roads and weather would be better." During the first 5 1/2 years of Rev. White's service, the congregation worshipped together in the basement of the present sanctuary building.

"On September 21, 1930, the new church was dedicated with an all-day service. 10:00 AM the Sunday School was addressed by Mr. Harry White, a son of the congregation. 11:00 AM dedication of the building Rev. Benjamin F. Pearson a former pastor, preached the dedication sermon transfer of keys, Mr. Gerald Eherenberger to Mr. Addison I. Bolton - the dedication was conducted by the pastor. Free dinner was served by the congregation through the Sewing Circle Society. 2:30 PM an interesting fellowship service was held in which neighboring

pastors exchanged greetings. 7:30 PM historical service Rev. Nelvil R. Miles a son of the congregation delivered the historical address. Rev. Charles J. Kaukal moderator of Omaha Presbytery presided and brought the greetings of Presbytery. The dedication took place with all obligations met. A mortgage of \$4,500 is held by the Board of National Missions which obligations is more than provided for in pledges yet to paid. Elders of the church at this N. H. Cornell; George Gray; Dr. C. H. Johnson; John Mitchell; C. L. Plith; Wm. H. Roether. The trustees, A. I. Bolton; Gerald Ehernberger; Wm. Hammond; L. J. Michaelson; G. P. Muehlich; Gilbert Eacker."

The following verse was inserted in the minutes after the previous reference.

"Thou whose immeasurable temple, stands built over earth and sea,

Accept the walls that human hands have raised, O God, to thee."

Many young people have grown up in the Schuyler the Presbyterian Church. They have gone on from here live all over the country. Although they may live far away, the tie to their home church is strong, as an entry on July 24, 1932 indicates. "During the morning service James Martin Vogel, son of Mr. and Mrs. Martin S. Vogel of Buffalo, New York (formerly Miss Olive Plith) was baptized. Born January 6, 1932. C. J. Plith, Clerk." Little James Martin, 6 months old, came a long way to be baptized in his grandfather's church - from Buffalo, New York to Schuyler, Nebraska. Many people still come to worship at their "home church" when they are visiting in the community. Sometimes they come back for special occasions.

Rev. Wilber White, whose tenure was one of the longest in this congregation, departed in November of 1939. He was followed in 1940 by Rev. W. S. Erwin who stayed until 1943.

Throughout its history this church has been a spiritual family. On April 10, 1941: "Mr. Jerry Severyn presented himself before Session and on confession of faith and upon motion of elder Roether passed that he be admitted to membership in this church." Then, less than two weeks later, on April 21: "Jerry Severyn was elected as a trustee for one year." This pair of quotes is significant in that it indicates the closeness of a small community and church. It is unusual for anyone to be elected a trustee so quickly after being received as a member on confession of faith. This could only happen in a small community where people are well-known to each other. This reference is also noteworthy in that Mr. Severyn is the grandfather of Miss Molly Scanlon of Omaha, Nebraska who, 46 years later, married Rev. Ronald Wakeman, one of the ministers of this congregation. Their children, Allyson and Marc were the fourth generation of this family to be part of this church.

There was a succession of ministers through the 1940's and '50's, each contributing his own personality to the health and welfare of this congregation. In 1943, Rev. Ralph Strong came as a seminary student. He was called, and installed, and served until 1946. During his tenure the Mariners Club was formed in 1945. Mariners is a social and fellowship group for couples. this group still meets every month on the second Thursday. They have various service projects including folding the monthly newsletter at each meeting after which they have a meeting followed by dessert. Succeeding him was the Rev. Keith Sackett who

served until until 1948. He was followed by the Rev. DeWitt Stauffer who served for 3 years from 1948-1951. Then followed the Rev. John Patterson in January of 1952. It was during this pastorate that there was much discussion about starting a Memorial Education Building Fund for the purpose of constructing an education building for the church.

Also, 49 years ago in February, 1954, the first pancake supper was proposed by the Christian Board of Education to pay for the cupboards that now cover the entire west wall in the basement. The pancake supper is a tradition that endures to this day; the proceeds are used by the Christian Education Committee to support the Sunday School with teaching materials, pins and bars, Bibles and equipment.

Rev. Patterson resigned in 1958, and in March of 1959 the Rev. David A. Cunningham came to Schuyler. During Rev. Cunningham's tenure a building fund campaign was conducted with the help of the Board of National Missions. Enough pledges were received to warrant a groundbreaking ceremony on March 17, 1963 for the new education building. The Memorial Education Building was dedicated on Sunday, January 26, 1964. Rev. Bob Moorehead, later Presbytery Executive of Homestead Presbytery, was the speaker in the morning and Dr. George Bancroft, Moderator of Nebraska Presbytery was the speaker in the afternoon.

Rev. Cunningham resigned in March of 1965, and was followed by the Rev. Richard W. Hovis who came in September of that year. During Rev. Hovis' time with our church there was continual spiritual growth, membership consolidation and capital improvements. The sanctuary was refurbished in 1968. The church was air conditioned in 1969. Also, in 1969, the church celebrated its 100th anniversary. The Rev.'s Fausnaugh, Cunningham, Sacket, and Strong all came back to participate in the joyous events.

Rev. Hovis accepted a call to the Presbyterian Church in Central City in 1978. For one year Dr. Leland Warren, the retired minister from North Bend, came and led worship as an interim pastor. On July 15, 1979 Rev. Ronald H. Wakeman began his time of service with the First Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Wakeman left in September, 1994 and Rev. Don H. Hurray came from Pennsylvania in 1995. In 1999, Rev. Hurray left and from 1999-2000 Interim Pastor Rev. Donald Steiner served.

In November, 2000, Rev. Dana B. Stout came to serve our congregation. He left in the summer of 2005.

Our interim pastor is Rev. Jon Sloan of Lincoln, Nebraska.

The last service in our old church was held Easter Sunday, 2000. Shortly after that, the congregation helped in dismantling the interior so it could be torn down. During the construction period, services were held at St. John's Lutheran and Christ United Methodist Churches.

Our first service in our building was held in the Fellowship Hall on June 3, 2001 because the sanctuary was not completed. Dedication of the new building was

held on September 23, 2001.

Any review of the history of the First Presbyterian Church of Schuyler reveals a succession of members and Ministers who are committed to the church and to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not possible to name every person who has been a member, or has been associated with, this congregation. There are far too many special individuals. The association of so many people under the leadership of twenty different ministers has been possible because of a common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and trust in God to be faithful to His promises to lead us into the future. Let those of us who continue to gather for worship, learning and praise be faithful as we pass on our beliefs and our faith to succeeding generations through the spiritual and the temporal gifts of this congregation.

Church Buildings – Past to Present.



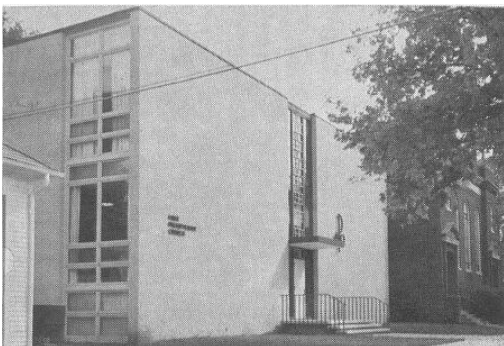
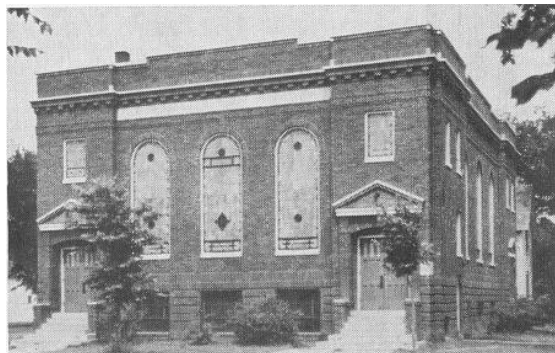
First Church building 1870.



Building completed in 1891.



Church destroyed by fire in 1922.



Memorial Education Building — 1964.

