

The early history of the First United Methodist Church of Washington is known only by the writings of Rev. John Emory Godbey in 1867. In his writing he states that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was an appointment of the Union church for several years before the war and that a building had been erected at the liberty of a few members, of which never exceeded 10 or 12. Other histories state that the church was organized as a preaching station in 1855 as were many of the churches of the time. These few members probably worshiped together at their homes or in an open lot, with an occasional visit from a minister who rode a circuit from one preaching point to another. The exact minister is unknown, but a listing of ministers in Franklin County, indicates that a Rev. Valentine Carter, was stationed in the county in 1856. Rev. Carter could quite possibly be responsible for facilitating the founding of the church in Washington or if not the founder, maybe he delivered a few inspiring sermons to this meager congregation.



Original Church with Parsonage • 205 East Fifth Street

The original deed was recorded on June 4, 1859, with the transaction being made on May 17, 1859, between “Henry Allen and Mary A. his wife, formerly Mary A. North”, the daughter of Lucinda Owens, founder of Washington and “Gorham F. Smith, Thomas I. North, William Smith, William G. Nally, John I. Goode, William Brown and John Whittaker trustees in trust”. The property was given in consideration of the sum of “five dollars in spices”, “to erect and build or cause to be built there a house or place of worship for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South,” and “that they shall at all times permit such ministers and preachers belonging to the said church,” to preach and expound God’s holy word therein”.

It is believed that the building was erected around 1860, as it was dedicated by Bishop Marvin in 1861. The builder, major contributor and minister as indicated in 1860, was John Lack. Mr. Lack, as listed in the 1860 census, had six slaves and with many of the slaves in Washington being the laborers and brick layers in the construction of the buildings, the church was probably built by the slaves as held by John Lack. This could indicate the reason for the balcony being built in the sanctuary, as the people of the era did not believe that the black slaves should be seated in the same area as they were, but they obviously saw the need to share the word of Christ with the true builders of the facility. An article written by Ralph Gregory, appearing in *The Washington Citizen*, Feb. 24, 1964, states that “The main part of this church is the oldest church-structure still in use as a church in Washington”.

After the building of the church the congregation probably remained small, as there are no records in the list of county ministers to indicate that they would have had a minister assigned to the church on a regular basis with the exception of J.A. Lack, who was listed in 1860 and was probably a Lay

Minister. According to past histories, the first Sunday School was organized in 1862 with L.F. Gamer as Superintendent there are no records existing to show the numbers of people or classes that made up this Sunday School.

Rev. Godbey, writes that, "during the (Civil) War, the church was occupied as a hospital by (Union) soldiers under the command of Gen. E.C. Pike, who did great damage to the building, destroying all the furniture and defacing the walls". Many of our past histories indicate that the church was occupied as a hospital and headquarters for two or more years, with the soldiers stabling their horses in the present basement area of the church. It is believed that this is true with the exception of the length of occupation as the Troops already had a headquarters in Washington at the time. The true length of occupation was probably from October 11 to Oct. 24, 1864, when Gen. Pike's Troops were encamped at Washington while following the Troops of Confederate Gen. Price as he moved westward. Gen. Price's army had entered Washington on Oct. 1, 1864, and ransacked many businesses and homes, they most assuredly must have done the same to the Union Army headquarters, but probably sparing our church because it was a Southern church, however this sparing was brief as the Union soldiers most likely occupied our church because it was a Southern church. They, by all indications, used the church for the dates indicated earlier, burning the records, pews and furniture for warmth and did not break out all the windows, or mar the walls until their departure. Rev. Godbey also states in his book, "Lights and Shadows of Seventy Years," that the Washington church had been an appointment of the Labadie circuit, during the two years that he had served that circuit and that he found there "what had been a former house of worship, little more than the walls and roof".

Upon the arrival of Rev. Godbey to the circuit in the fall of 1865, he apparently started preaching in Washington and must have preached in the building despite its condition. He states in the early history written by him, that he "preached at Washington every two weeks" and "toward the end of the year the building was repaired and put in good condition, and the membership increased from 5 to 14." In Rev. Godbey's book he states that he "went to see Gen. E.C. Pike, then in St. Louis, and got a subscription from him, and one of his Colonels to repair the damage, and with other help put the house in excellent condition."

The history by Godbey tells us that, "The next year an arrangement was made by which preaching was had every Sunday. Rev. L.W. Purcell the junior preacher on the circuit residing in Washington and given his full attention principally to the church there." This year, 1866, must have been a prosperous year, as in the Quarterly Conference minutes of April 13, 1913, mentions that, "By the year 1866 the pupils numbered 58 and were taught in five classes." In the fall of 1866 the church petitioned the Conference to make Washington a preaching station, but were turned down due to the lack of preachers. However at the Conference of 1867, "Rev. Godbey was appointed in charge of the work."

The first recorded Quarterly Conference held Nov. 30, 1867 shows those present as being, T.M. Finney, Presiding Elder; J.E. Godbey, Preacher in Charge; Dr. R.J.R. Nally, Steward; J.C. Bryan and Capt. N.W. Parker were elected as stewards, with N.W. Parker, Recording Secretary. This meeting also reported that there were four additions to the membership and three baptisms to report in that quarter,

and that the spiritual condition of the church was encouraging, with good attendance at social meetings. Received for this quarter was \$125.00, with \$6.25 being paid to the Presiding Elder and \$118.00 being paid to the Preacher in Charge. It was also reported that \$28.60 was raised for charity. The number of members reported in Dec. 1868, was 34.

Soon after taking charge of the Washington church, Rev. Godbey opened a private school for the instruction of the members of his church. 'They disliked to put their children with the Germans in the public school.' The school soon grew with the addition of the children of his friends from the Labadie Circuit and a boarding department was developed for the girls, with the boys being boarded in private homes. At times as many as four assistant teachers were needed in the instruction of the students. A building was required to be purchased at a cost of \$6,000, with an annual payment of \$420.

Rev. Godbey remained as minister of the Washington church for a total of six years and also served as Presiding Elder in the years that followed. During his ministry in Washington, Godbey gained 'the sympathy and support of the American people of the town, and many of the Germans.' Godbey states, 'I was the teacher, in English, of the Lutheran preacher, and when he built a new church he had me to preach at the dedication' and that "several Catholics sent to our school, and a number of them contributed to my support."

Rev. Godbey, most certainly contributed to the church and community, for without his dedication to Christ and the church, our church might have never been rebuilt after the war. We owe a great deal of gratitude to this minister for his great efforts.

The meager records kept over the next decades shed little light on our history. The Quarterly Conference report of Dec. 16, 1876 shows Newport and Point Pleasant churches as part of our charge. It is not known exactly when Point Pleasant was built, nor do we know when the two churches were added to our charge because of the lack of church records between Aug. 1870 and Dec. 1876.

Quarterly Conference records through the years show the up and down times of the church, sometimes the attendance was low at Sunday School or in worship and membership also was stated as fluctuating. Though we had our problems there were always a few to stick out the bad with the good. Reports of Aug. 23, 1877 show that there were four officers, six teachers and seventy scholars associated with the Sunday School, with an average attendance of forty students, collecting \$5.18 in that quarter. The years that followed were assuredly similar to those in the early life of the church and can only be guessed at, as no known Quarterly Conference records were preserved from Oct. 1877 through Oct. 1890.

As it is with many churches, the congregation was made up of many people and organizations. One such, very active organization, was that of the Ladies Aid Society, organized on Jan. 10, 1889. As part of its constitution, "its object shall be to assist in local parsonage and in general church work" and to "become co-laborers with the pastor in every enterprise of the church." These women were, quite obviously, too ambitious to have waited for such an organization within the church before becoming

active, however we have no documentation of their efforts before 1889. The records in the years that followed the organization of the women of the church were filled with activities of fellowship and efforts to raise money for the needs of the church. Such activities included the making of straw bonnets, calico bonnets and aprons that sold for 30, 40 and 20 cents respectively. At most of their meetings, they talked of the sewing of those items, along with quilts, shirts and dresses. Though their labors mostly seemed to be filled with fun and fellowship, they were sometimes in grief as they purchased or made clothing for the needy and even made a dress for one of their members whose husband had died. They also raised money through such activities as ice cream socials, oyster suppers and teas, just to mention a few. Their most successful fundraiser that has continued to this present day is that of the annual bazaar and luncheon held each year as we near the Christmas Season. The first recording of this activity was in 1898, when they decided to add the luncheon to their efforts of their bazaar. Through the years that followed the women were regularly asked to provide funds for many undertakings, such as in 1902 when they were asked to pay for three rods to reinforce the walls of the building at a cost of \$35.

Another active group within the church, came into existence in the late 19th century, it was called the Epworth League. This league of children replaced many of the other previous groups of youth and focused on bible and mission study, and work among the sick and poor. All this was strengthened by the social and recreational activities of this structured organization. Through the years the adult leaders saw the benefit of such an organization, and the desire to be involved. This brought in many adults to the league. In later years, due to the difference in ages, the groups were separated into age groups. The league survived for many years and was credited with much good within the church and community. As in any organization, it had its share of ups and downs through the years, however the league was credited with many endeavors.

As mentioned earlier, we again have Quarterly Conference records starting in 1890 that can provide us with information on the activities of the church and its organizations. One item of interest is that Newport was no longer listed as being part of our charge. When this change took place is unknown and can only be guessed at. We do know that in these days of progress in America that electricity came to Washington in 1892, followed in the 1893-94 conference year with the addition of lights to the church, with a purchase price of \$25.

Sept. 18, 1895 records state that the Epworth League wished to purchase an organ for prayer meetings and the Trustees were attempting to finish work on the basement. These two were probably joined in effort as the Epworth League undoubtedly was going to use the newly added meeting space. Most records show the never ending concern for Sunday School and the children of the church, as they were mentioned in almost every quarterly report. Records indicate the growth of the church through the late 1800's, when it was reported in 1892 that there were 99 members and 78 scholars enrolled in the Sunday School. This is a great advancement in the membership as there were only five members present after the war. The ministers of the day were not greatly paid and were not at that time furnished with a parsonage as was indicated in 1893, when the salary for the minister was set at \$600 per year.

The church remained the same in its endeavors until the Women's Home Mission Society was

organized and work on building a parsonage was started around 1907. The work of these women, and surely some of the men, was finally realized in Jan. 1909 when the contract was awarded to a local builder to construct the parsonage. The cost was to be \$2,225 and work was to begin immediately. The parsonage, as stated in the quarterly report, "is to be made of brick, six-rooms, substantially constructed including a portico to the church which it adjoins." The parsonage was located on the front southwest corner of the church and was completed in 1909. The parsonage may not be mentioned in any way without disclosing the fact that through the efforts of the Women's Home Mission Society, the entire cost of the parsonage was paid for by this group. Not only did they raise the entire amount, but they did it in only a few short years as disclosed in an audit report of Apr. 22, 1913, as follows, "the Women's Home Mission Society has paid into the parsonage fund about \$2,600 (exact \$2,621.31) in a little less than four years, approximately \$600 per year."

The next few years were lively for the church as they mentioned in quarterly reports, revivals and tent meetings. One such Tent Meeting was reported in Sept. 1909 as having been the first in the history of the town and very successful, with 76 coming forward to the Lord and 26 joining the church. The Quarterly Conference report of 1916, boasts of having held a Rally Day on Oct. 15, 1916, with 118 in attendance, the largest number on any records found. They also reported at the same conference that the average worship attendance was from 40 to 60. The church did not always stand alone in its efforts as they also involved themselves with their neighbors, such as joining with the Presbyterian Church to hold a joint Revival in May 1917. During these years the city and church sent many of their own off to battle in WW I and with these boys were sent Pocket Testaments as reported in 1917. This was also the year that interest was given to do further improvements on the basement, to add meeting space for the growing congregation.

The year 1923 was a time of improvements for our church, as the church was remodeled and redecorated. Some of the improvements made were the addition of new chairs for the choir, which were donated by Mrs. Remsted's Sunday School Class at a cost of \$53.70 and new pews were purchased at a cost of \$326.80. Many other modern conveniences were replaced such as new light fixtures and a furnace was added to replace the old coal stoves. A telephone was installed in the parsonage as a Christmas gift to Rev. Thomas Lord, and none other than the Women's Home Mission Society paid for the yearly rental fee of \$1.97. One improvement made in that year was the addition of the stained glass windows at a cost of \$880.00. The funds to provide these beautiful windows was raised through donations and some were given as memorials with the names placed on each window as follows: Primary Class - Mrs. C.M. Purves, 1878-1923; Ming; Gregory; Purvis and Pike; Women's Missionary Society, 1923; Giersa; Mary Alberta Ross, 1853-1917; and the Epworth League. There was also an additional window purchased at that time, which is placed above the front door with these words, "1st M. E. Church 5" (1st Methodist Episcopal Church, South).

The years that followed were not very active years for the church with the focus of the church being placed with the gaining back of members that had been lost shortly after the remodeling of the church was completed. The reason for this loss is not very clear, but we do know that there were factions disputing in the church at the time of the losses.



In 1929 the Trustees were ordered to sell the Point Pleasant Church property, however the exact date of its closing is not disclosed. It is known that eight members of the Point Pleasant Church were transferred to the Washington Church membership in 1931, by order of the Annual Conference.

The church then became alive again in 1930 when an educational building was added to the back of the church. The addition was added at a cost of \$10,700, and provided a kitchen, auditorium and the additional classrooms that were needed. However, the excitement was short lived as the depression hit the nation and the church was not able to pay much upon its debt until around 1940 when Rev. C.E. Yoes encouraged the congregation to start setting aside money for the debt, which was finally paid off in 1944. It should be mentioned that in 1939, the Methodist Protestant Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, were united to form The Methodist Church. Our church then became known as the 1St Methodist Church of Washington.

Shortly after this time the country found itself at war again with 50 of its church members serving their country during WW II, and of these Eugene H. Rennick and Oscar Vogt were killed in action.

In 1946, friends of Rev. Harold Camp offered \$1,000 toward the purchase of a new organ for the church and the church gratefully accepted the gift, adding a new Wick's Pipe Organ to the sanctuary in Jan. 1947. The Wick's Organ is still in use today. It must be noted that the new organ replaced the one that had been donated in 1929 by the Calvin Theatre after sound-movie projection equipment was installed at the theatre. The old organ was then dismantled and rebuilt to provide music for the church, as it did until 1947. At the time of the new organ installation in 1947, part of the platform and original floor under the altar was torn up and revealed some interesting treasures. Included in their find as reported in the Washington Missourian, Jan. 16, 1947 edition, was an old horse shoe, 1865 (Civil war) army orders that had to do mostly with a Sgt. Aaron Williams and two copies of the Missouri Democrat that were printed in St. Louis in May, 1865. The newspapers contained an article pertaining to the trial of the man who assassinated President Lincoln. The location of these artifacts is unknown and is a great loss to the church archives.

In the early 1950's new pews were purchased for the choir area and replaced the old choir chairs. At the same time, Rev. Slovensky made and installed a new altar and communion rail that had a solid front panel, this was done to replace the spindle and rail type which was objected to by the women of the choir who were facing the congregation and had to be very careful with their dresses.

The men of the church had obviously been active within the church throughout its history, but did not become an organized group until March 10, 1953, when they became members of the "Methodist Men." Since the inception of this organization in 1953 the group has ceased to exist as it was originally designed and for a number of years a few men met monthly at a local restaurant for breakfast and called themselves, "The Men's Breakfast Club." The organization then took an up-turn in 2008 with the leadership of Al Matzes and on June 5th, 2010 the organization became officially known as the "First United Methodist Men" when it ratified its Bylaws and with the election of Al Matzes, President; Paul

Annable, Vice-President; Marty Coulter, Secretary; Fred Hook, Treasurer.

In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Church became one under the name of The United Methodist Church. In later years the names of the groups of the church would be changed to the United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women and United Methodist Youth Fellowship (U.M.Y.F.).

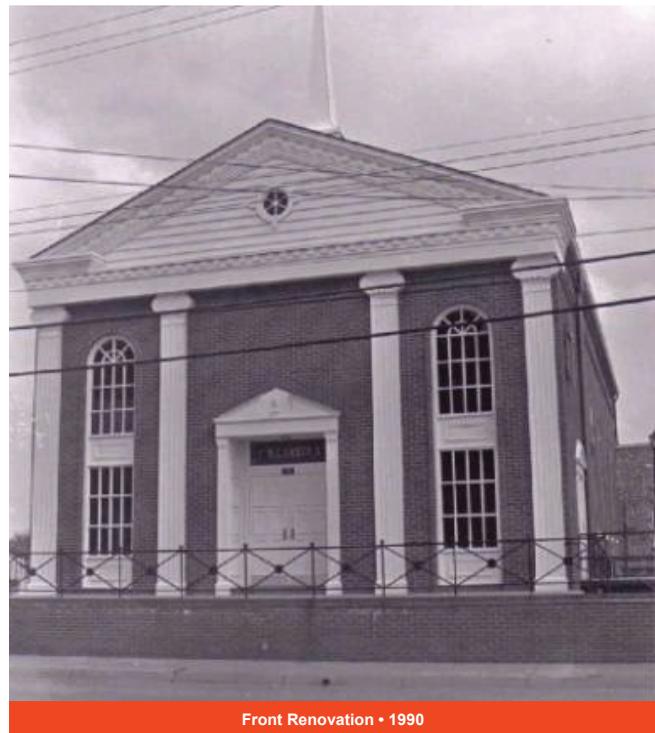
The church has dealt with its growth in many different ways. In 1962, the property to the west of the church was purchased for its use as a parking lot, and in 1964 a parsonage was purchased on East 6th Street, to allow for the use of the attached church parsonage as needed Sunday School and meeting rooms. Air- conditioning was later added to the comforts of the church in 1970 by the efforts on the United Methodist Men.

While under the direction of Rev. Frank Black, the congregation then voted in 1975 to undertake a major remodeling. They removed the old parsonage from the front of the church, renovated the sanctuary, extended the front of the church to 5th Street and attempted to capture the original appearance of the church as it was in 1860.

As a gift in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Earl Wright and Hadley Wright, a spire was purchased and placed on the church in 1979, followed by the purchase of new pews for the balcony in 1980, by Eldon Miller. In 1980 the church purchased a new parsonage in the Dawn Valley Subdivision and later that same year sold the parsonage on East 6th Street.

As the church approached the 1990's, the congregation realized that we were slowly getting too large for the space we had available and started looking toward the future. As a result of this concern, the old kitchen and auditorium located on the top floor of the education addition were transformed into four needed classrooms. Two years later properties adjoining the east side of the church were purchased and the buildings were later razed for use as parking space. In 1990 the old curved pews were replaced with straight pews that added seating for 30 additional worshippers.

The next effort and progress was made in 1993 when a doctors office located on the East side of the church was purchased and became known as the Church Annex Building, this gave the church a





full block of property on East 5th Street that is one-half of a block deep. The building was remodeled and used as Sunday School and meeting rooms, as well as housing our church offices until the entire church property was sold in 1998. All buildings were razed in that same year, to make room for the construction of commercial outlet space.

The church purchased land in 1998 before the buildings were sold, and used temporary quarters in the Washington High School cafeteria and then the Fellowship Hall of the Presbyterian Church until the new church building could be constructed. Construction on the new church building was completed in 1999, with the first services being held in April 1999. The building is the first of a three-phase project and is located to the east of Washington at 4349 St. Johns Road.

*Contributed by Paul Annable*