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History of First Baptist Church Is Related

Permanent Group Organized Here On June 28, 1870

(Editor's Note—The article presented herewith contains the interesting series on the history of Birmingham's churches.)

By THEO. WUGGAZER, JR.

The story of the Baptist Church reaches far back to the days when Birmingham was almost less than a village. Indeed, a Baptist Church was organized in the year 1833. Nothing is known of this early group except a statement in Seeley's History of Oakland County to the effect that it was discontinued in 1873.

For 30 years there was no Baptist Church in Birmingham. Then, on June 28, 1870, a permanent organization was effected, though there were occasional intervals when for various reasons no services were conducted. Shortly after organizing in 1870 two lots were purchased and a church structure was built in 1873.

In July, 1880, The Eccentric was pleased to announce that a pastor had been secured in the person of the Rev. M. Breaker, "who has been preaching such brisk and effective sermons," and at the same time expressing confidence that "he will no doubt secure a large congregation to the Baptist Church." However, in spite of the fact that he drew large audiences, he found it necessary to leave six weeks later to complete his studies for the ministry. He returned for the Christmas holidays, but he never became the permanent pastor of the church.

Unique Marriage

In April, 1881, the Rev. Mr. Van Winkle arrived and remained for a year. His name is mentioned here because of an interesting item that appeared in the "Home Notes" column of The Eccentric. It is a reference to an unusual marriage ceremony performed by him. One day a couple appeared at his door in a hurry to get married because they wanted to catch a train for Detroit. When they arrived, Mr. Van Winkle was waiting cherries. From the top of his high perch he told them to join hands. He put out the requisite questions, prayed the requisite prayers, pronounced the requisite benediction, and the happy couple hurried to the depot by the shortest route.

In subsequent years the church struggled hard to get a foothold. Ministers remained for only short periods, and at times the church was deserted by ministers from other parishes. Such was the case for almost four years, when services were conducted by Rev. Mr. Miller of Pontiac (1889-1893). When he terminated his services, The Eccentric made the terse comment: "No sign of a pastor." Visiting preachers were engaged as they could be secured.

Beginning, however, in the 1880's, the church began to have its own resident pastor, and in the years that follow we may see an increase in the church's little incidents, revealing perhaps the happiness of the Baptists over this time. In 1889, the Rev. and Mrs. Church were given a suitable welcome by 40 members of the church in April, 1898. Later a "donation social" was given for Mr. Church's benefit, when he was stricken with illness in Ann Arbor. (He was attending the University on leave of absence.)

Appreciated Gift

His successor (Rev. Rogers) was treated even more elaborately. It may be that he had not been accustomed to outbursts of generosity on the part of his parishioners elsewhere, for when his members here gave him a gift copy of "The Life of Moody," he was "almost dumbfounded, so much so that it seemed difficult for him to make up his mind what to say and how to say it. He seemed so effusive with appreciation that he could not refrain from making special mention of the donation from the pulpit the following Sunday morning." (Eccentric, June 8, 1900.) A month later his people gave him an "envelope social" in his honor. The amount given to him was \$28.85, and it was made clear that this money was "not to apply on his salary." It was a special gift. However, the following year he tendered his resignation, but it was not accepted, and he continued to serve successfully until September, 1905.

Of other ministers of the church, we make reference to Rev. Peter Mackay, who assumed

the pastorate in October, 1916 and served until April of 1922. Upon his retirement he made Birmingham his home, and still resides here at 447 Hanna street.

Outstanding in Improvements

Of all local churches, the Baptist Church has been outstanding in the improvement it has been able to effect in its church property. The original church, built in 1873, served the congregation until the present beautiful structure was built in 1928-29. But even the old building—forgotten now by most local residents—was kept in good repair. A rather quaint announcement appeared in this connection in The Eccentric (August 18, 1914): "The Baptist Church has received a double coat of white paint, and it shines forth to a brightened community a bright beacon of light, giving warning to the wicked, and extending an invitation to the anxious to come and listen to the preaching of the Bible."

In 1912, under the leadership of the Rev. C. A. Salyer, the church was enlarged and remodelled at a cost of \$2000. Mr. Salyer personally raised this sum of money, when, as a committee of one, he solicited funds from each member of the congregation.

Plans for the construction of the present church were begun in 1924. In December of that year an announcement was made to the effect that the congregation had pledged \$4,500 toward a prospective \$100,000 building. It was hoped that property, owned by the congregation on the corner of Bates and Maple, could be sold for

ONE OF CITY'S FINEST BUILDINGS



What is perhaps Birmingham's most extensive church edifice is that of the Baptists on Willis street at Bates, erected in 1928 and 1929 and dedicated March 17, 1929. Property owned by the church at West Maple and Bates streets, totaling \$188,000, and the unpaid balance is now being regularly amortized.

The beautiful building is of English Gothic architecture, using Indiana limestone. The west wing houses the administrative, educational and recreational activities of the congregation.

The auditorium, seating 600, is distinguished by huge vaulted beams. Below the auditorium is the banquet hall and kitchen. In the west wing are the various Sunday School departments, the pastor's study, club rooms, and on the top floor is a gymnasium. The cornerstone was laid June 7, 1928. A few weeks later a picture of the new church appeared. The completed structure provides an auditorium seating 600, a Sunday School and assembly hall accommodating 400 children, and a well equipped administrative, educational, and social activities. The total cost was \$187,000.00, with \$80,000 realized on the sale of the East Maple property. By November, 1928, \$50,000 had been raised in the congregation, with an additional \$28,000 in pledges. A gift of \$12,000 was gratefully accepted from Mrs. Rebecca Hall for an organ. The new church was dedicated on the night of March 10, 1929.

PRESENT PASTOR



This is the Rev. Joseph O. Nelson, present pastor of First Baptist Church. He accepted the call to come here Dec. 1, 1937, and steady growth has been experienced during his leadership.

Current History

The Rev. J. O. Nelson, accepted a call to the church Dec. 1, 1937 from the First Baptist Church of Marquette, Mich. Since that time 62 new members have been taken in, leaving the total membership today at 292. The Sunday School enrollment stands at 258 with an average attendance of 151. A men's organization meets once a month. A Woman's Missionary Society meets twice a month. Two groups of young people meet Sunday evenings, a High School and a Senior group. A World Wide Guild was organized last year, a guild of young girls for missionary study. A Crusading Group was organized during the year, a group of children for missionary study. The church carries a budget of over \$8,000 annually covering current expenses, building fund needs, home and foreign missions.

The church has sent out into active Christian service three young people, one of them, Miss Lula Jackson Tolosa of Saginaw, Mich., before her marriage. Miss Jackson was a missionary to the Indian people. Her husband is the Baptist pastor to the Mexican people of Saginaw. The Rev. Warren Jackson, a brother, is now pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wyandotte, Mich., and Miss Hazel

Air Travel Film Shown Exchange

A moving picture on the marvels of modern air transportation was shown the Exchange Club, Tuesday noon, by Kenneth N. Kinnee, traffic manager for the Detroit office of American Airlines, Inc.

Kinnee is a former Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills resident, and his mother Mrs. H. M. Kinnee now lives at 22 Barbour terrace.

The film, in sound, showed interior and exterior of the latest big passenger craft, including the sleeper planes now in service. Sky views of many scenic spots on various American Airlines itineraries were included. The picture ended with emphasis on the fact that air travel is just as feasible in summer as in winter.

Arrest Pontiac Boy As Reckless Driver

Heinz Guenther, 19 years old, of 478 Milway, Pontiac, was arrested last Thursday on a reckless driving charge, following a crash on Woodward avenue in front of the Birmingham Hardware company. A police report filed by Patrolman Leo Sillers related that Guenther, in coming to a stop, skidded into the parked car of Peter R. Smith, 604 Watkins street, Birmingham. Fenders were dented. Arraigned before Justice Forbes S. Howell, the youth pleaded guilty. Sentence was deferred.

"Today's march of humanity presents a challenge to young people with imagination."

West went to Seattle last spring as a missionary.

Present Church Officers

Officers of First Baptist Church are as follows: The Rev. Peter Mackay, chairman of the Advisory Board; George Jackson, chairman of the Board of Trustees; Archie Blakeste, chairman of the Board of Deacons; Thomas Hartle, Bachelor of Music, organist and choir director; Karel Malans, chairman of Board of Education and superintendent of the Sunday School; Mrs. Howard Reid, church clerk; David Anderson, treasurer; Wilbur McAlpine, building fund treasurer; Mrs. Manson Hillman, president of Women's Missionary Union; Fred Pierce, president of Men's Bible Class; Miss Johanna Macaskill, president of high school Baptist Young People's Union; Miss Betty Sheridan, president of senior B. Y. P. U.

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