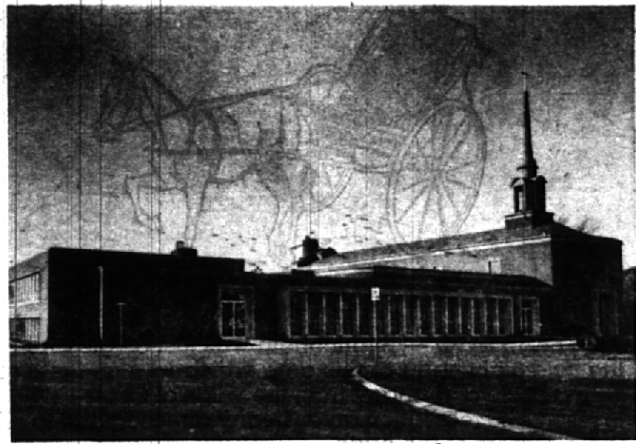




NEW FIRST METHODIST CHURCH WAS BUILT IN 1952 Gothic-inspired, it cost \$750,000.



SCENIC 8-ACRE LOT SURROUNDS FIRST PRESBYTERIAN 3-unit addition doubled size of building in 1960.

Methodism Appeared In 1821

By MARY BAHN
Staff Writer

'Prayer Meetings' Popular

Birmingham's earliest inhabitants brought with them — along with stamina and the willingness to work — a deep yearning for spiritual development.

An itinerant circuit rider preaching in the Willits' log tavern brought Methodism to Birmingham in 1821. The Baptist Church struggled for its birth in 1833, only to dissolve in 1840. The first Presbyterian congregation began gathering for services in the barn of Deacon Elijah Fish (now the Benedict farm on N. Woodward) in 1834.

This sets the stage for the early beginnings of the three oldest congregations in Birmingham.

IN 1822 Dr. Ezra S. Parke started holding Sunday prayer meetings for the Methodists at his home. In 1827 Rev. William Pattee of the Ohio Conference formed the first group of Birmingham worshippers into a society.

The first official church structure in "Piety Hill" was the Methodist one at the corner of Merrill and Bates streets, built in 1839. Financed by Stephen Chatfield and Michael Bloomberg, the congregation numbered 37.

The frame building was torn down in 1926 after having served as church, library and town hall.

During the Civil War period, Birmingham was the only place in the district to maintain a Sunday School continuously. The average church service attendance num-

bered about 65, and the pastor received \$500 annually.

THE SECOND church, a landmark torn down in 1953, was built in 1871 at a cost of \$20,000 and dedicated in 1873. While church men hauled stone, brick and wood to complete the structure, the women came along to cook the meals.

A new parsonage was built on the site in 1877. In 1886 the Woman's Home Missionary Society was organized; the Foreign Missionary Society came along 10 years later. The Epworth League was founded in 1889.

Although a stucco addition to the church was added in 1921, the congregation found itself again cramped in its quarters. In 1950, it was decided to construct a new Gothic-type church at West Maple and Pleasant streets.

The new church, completed at a cost of \$750,000 in 1952, included a sanctuary, balcony, parlors, music and robing rooms and assembly rooms for youth activities.

Forty ministers have served the Birmingham charge, beginning in 1854 with Salmon Steele. Minister Emeritus is Dr. Arnold F. Runkel, and Dr. G. Ernest Thomas is present minister.

FROM THE standpoint of continuous service, First Presbyterian is the city's second oldest church, having been organized in 1834, sev-

en years after the founding of the Methodist Church.

One of their earliest houses of worship was the Davis Hotel, which later was known as the National Hotel. The Presbyterians later rented the Methodist Church for their services for a fee of \$100 per year.

In the summer of 1844, the group built and dedicated its first formal church home on land donated by John W. Hunter. The church was soon outgrown and sold in 1860 at an auction to Henry J. Blumberg for \$156, who made the building available for political meetings.

The cost of the new church, located on the south side of E. Maple, was \$2,500 including furnishings. To defray construction costs, the 52 pews were valued at from \$30 to \$64 each and "sold" at public auction.

DURING THIS time the church was served by the Rev. S. N. Hill, who in addition to his clerical duties, organized and taught a "Select School."

Women of the parish were very interested in world betterment. Through their Women's Foreign Missionary Society organized in 1874, they set up a scholarship to support a student in the mission fields of Persia.

Because of the church's growing activities through the years, a new

building was constructed and dedicated on Sept. 8, 1918. With service—both to its members and its community—as the church's keynote, they installed a number of individually-controlled hearing aids in 1936 so that members could enjoy the sanctity of God's word.

Plans were begun before the end of World War II to plan a bigger church home. The new church, on eight acres at West Maple and Pleasant, was dedicated Nov. 7, 1954 at a cost of \$1,300,000. A three-unit addition which doubled the size of that building was dedicated on Nov. 29, 1960, at a cost of \$750,000.

NOTHING WAS done to reorganize the Baptist Church until 1870 when the "Regular Baptist Church of Birmingham" met in the various homes of its 17 charter members. A pastor came from Pontiac every Sunday to deliver the sermons.

A fire extinguished the joint services later held by the Birmingham and Royal Oak Baptist in the old Academy building. Arrangements were made to meet in the Methodist Meeting House, but the Methodists expelled the church for preaching the doctrines of the New Testament, and "after that Brother Finn preached in the streets."

The Baptists' first formal struc-

ture, at the northwest corner of Willits and Bates streets, was built for \$1,700 and dedicated free-of-debt on Sept. 28, 1873.

A rapid change of ministers kept the church in an upset condition during its earliest years, although its growth was steady. In order to pay the pastor's salary of \$7 a week, trustees and members of the Ladies Aid society rented the building to the United Presbyterians for \$50 a year, and united their Sunday Schools to save other expenses.

WHEN THE Rev. Peter M. Mackay became pastor of the church in 1916, following the successful pastorage of the Rev. Rogers, a parsonage was purchased for \$5,500. During his six years there, the church's indebtedness was paid off and a lot at the corner of Maple and Bates, soon to become the church's new home, was purchased.

The church was built in 1929 at a cost of \$100,000 and also housed a \$12,000 organ especially constructed for the building.

As the years went by, life for the church became calmer and the progress of it was steady. More and more it became an important factor in the general life of the community, and its doors were always opened to meetings of a civic nature.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Homer J. Armstrong, the church has pioneered in several church movements, such as the vacation Sunday School, and has added a \$275,000 addition.

Church Women Spearhead Community-Wide Projects

By MARY ELLEN MEAD
Staff Writer

The role of Birmingham women in today's churches is a vital and ever-increasing force, frequently making itself felt in the community at large by projects geared to city-wide participation, regardless of membership.

Such things as nursery schools, lecture series, within the church or without, as in Town Hall; study groups, local social service work, resale shops, youth groups, geriatrics—all are embraced by one, the other or all of the 16 churches dominating Birmingham's four square miles.

AS FAR BACK as 1937, Mrs. John Martia, wife of the First Methodist Church's pastor, saw "unity" as the answer to the problems of community help from church women, and it was then that

the Birmingham Council of Church Women (now United Church Women) was born.

Mrs. Fred W. Johnson became the council's first president, her official family included Mrs. H. D. Harris, vice president, Mrs. E. C. Erickson, treasurer, and charter members Mrs. Guy Jensen, Mrs. Victor Ogden and Mrs. R. H. Peck.

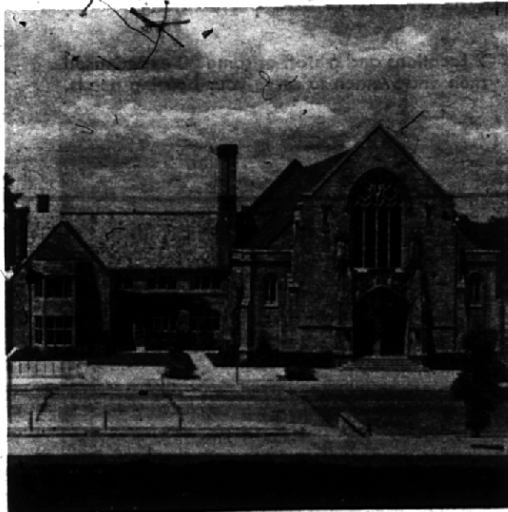
Purpose of the group then, and now, was "to unite church women in their allegiance to their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, through a program looking to their integration in the total life and work of the church and to the building of a world, christian community."

CURRENTLY, 14 protestant churches from the Birmingham area are in the council. Any church belonging to the Michigan and National Council of Churches is eligible and invited to membership, but this does not eliminate individuals from joining.

The present group, under the presidency of Mrs. John VanderRoest, is sponsoring, locally, the Birmingham Film Council, the Retarded Children's (interdenominational) Sunday School at the First Baptist Church and, state-wide, the Protestant Foundation for International Students in Ann Arbor and the Michigan Migrant Ministry.



MRS. VANDER ROEST



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HOUSES UNIQUE ORGAN With expanding congregation, church built \$275,000 addition.