

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BUILDING YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN

Organized in July 1829

Just six years after Benjamin Woodruff poled his raft up the Huron River and established Woodruff's Grove on the hill overlooking the river, the Reverend William Page of Ann Arbor organized a congregation of twelve members. Under the plan by which both the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations established churches jointly in the frontier towns west of the Appalachian Mountains, this church was organized as the Congregational Society of Ypsilanti on October 4, 1830. In 1832 the congregation voted to adopt the Presbyterian form of government. The Congregational members left this church in 1881, to form the First Congregational Church. The division into two congregations was accomplished with complete harmony.

First Pastor Ira M. Wead, 1830—1847

Ira Mason Wead came to Ypsilanti in June 1830 with his bride of one month. He was a graduate of the University of Vermont and Andover Seminary and had recently been ordained in Boston. Commissioned by the Board of Home Missions, he was noted for his theological scholarship and missionary zeal. The records indicate that under his leadership the Session exercised both pastoral care and discipline over the church members. Mr. Wead was a strong force for order and Christian values during Ypsilanti's rapidly growing and sometimes wild frontier days. After his installation as pastor in 1834, he served until 1847 when he went to Chicago as area secretary for the American Board of Foreign Missions. He retired in Ypsilanti and died on November 30, 1871. He and his wife are buried in Highland Cemetery. The second window from the east on the south wall of the sanctuary is dedicated to him and his wife.

First Building, November 23, 1836

In 1832, plans were made for a church building on the north side of Pearson Street between Adams and Hamilton Streets. The new frame building, akin to New England meeting house, was dedicated on November 23, 1836, and the congregation prospered.

Present Building, September 23, 1857

After a quarter of a century, the congregation had outgrown its frame building, and plans began to construct a new brick church. A present lot was

purchased at Washington and Emmet Streets. Two years later the present building was completed at a cost of \$12,000, and was dedicated on September 23, 1857. The Reverend Gustavus L. Foster had served as pastor during this period of construction, but he was not installed until the new building was dedicated. On the day of dedication, D. B. Greene, the Clerk of Session, wrote, "The house was filled to overflowing both in the afternoon and in the evening. It was a pleasant, solemn and interesting season."

Reconstruction, September 24, 1899

During the later part of the nineteenth century, the church experienced vigorous growth. Several organizations were formed and grew, including the Foreign Missionary Society, the Home Missionary Society, the Ladies Aid Society, and the Westminster Guild. Services were held on Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. and evenings at 7 p.m., and on Thursday evenings. Also, educational programs called Preparatory Lectures were held. Sunday school, after worship, and a ministry to the students at the Normal College were regular parts of the church's activities. During the tornado of 1892, the original spire proved to be unsafe and was removed. In 1898 the church began a complete reconstruction program, including the addition of two Beau-Art towers, new furniture, Tiffany windows, central heat, and a new organ, by Jardine & Sons of NY at a total cost of \$38,500. There were 420 members.

Renovations in 1948, 1957, 1980s

During the Twentieth Century the interior was renovated to meet the changing needs of the congregation. By 1940 the congregation declined to under 100 members and the property was in great disrepair. From 1946-1951 the church added 250 members. Under the leadership of Rev. Raymond Bair (1941-1961) the area beneath the sanctuary was excavated, and five classrooms built on the ground floor, and in 1957 the "chapel area" was renovated adding a second floor with six classrooms.

With scholarship and deep piety, Pastor Laurence Woodruff provided steady leadership from 1963-1998. In 1963 membership peaked at 600. Barrier-free access was achieved, when an elevator to all three floors was installed in 1985. Three years later the kitchen was remodeled, the Memorial Garden was constructed, and zoned heating and air-conditioning added (1995).

Recent Exterior & Sanctuary Renovation, 2001-2003

Pastor Keith Geiselman was installed January 2000—only the third pastor since 1940. Thoughtful and energetic, he has led the congregation of 360 to grow outwardly and inwardly. The exterior was extensively restored, and the sanctuary was completely renovated with a brighter color palette, refinished

wood, and most notably an open, curved chancel that is barrier-free and connects the worship leaders and the people. The baptismal font, table, and pulpit, the three symbols of Reformed sacraments, are on equal levels and prominent. Sound and video were included. A new pipe organ, built by Martin Ott around the original Jardine, is to be dedicated January, 25, 2009.



Sunday Morning Schedule

9:00 a.m. Adult Bible study
10:00 a.m. Family Service of Worship
11:00 a.m. Fellowship Time

Tuesday Schedule

2:30 p.m. Tuesday Hour – Bible study with Pastor Keith

Wednesday Schedule

5:00 p.m. Riverside Community Meal Gathering
6:30 p.m. Westminster Bells Rehearsal

Thursday Schedule

6:00 p.m. Kids Club – lesson, recreation, music

Choirs

Adult Chancel Choir
Westminster Bell Choir
Cherub Choir

Recovery Ministries

AA Sunday, Monday, Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.
Al-Anon, Saturday 9 a.m., Monday at 7:30 p.m.

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**Glorify God, Grow in faith, Go in service
And Generate a Christian community.**

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A BRIEF HISTORY of The First Presbyterian Church Building Ypsilanti, Michigan

