

## Then & Now on Main Street Methodist Church Properties

*By: Karen Ferguson, Town Historian*

This month's article involves 3 different properties: 279 Main Street, 257 Main Street and 255 Main Street. All of these properties are or were associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church Society.

The First United Methodist Church was built in 1860. Church services were being held long before that in the schoolhouse; however, a state law came into effect forbidding the use of school property for that purpose. That is when Sarah Squires deeded her property to the Methodist Episcopal Church Society.

According to the church's history, the original building had a hall that ran the full width of the building with stairs at each end that led to a gallery. Around 1873, the auditorium was enlarged by removing the hall partition, the stairs, and the gallery. An extension was added for the pulpit. At this time the belfry and vestibule were also added.

During this same time, a request was made in February 1869 that a parsonage be provided in Kirkwood for the preacher. By the following year, a parsonage was built.

An addition, a/k/a transept, was built onto the church due to the determination of a group of ladies called the "Helping Hands Circle of the King's Daughters." This group of ladies was organized on September 16, 1897 with the sole purpose of raising money to build an annex to the church for entertainment, prayer, and social meetings. By the following year on December 16, 1898, the transept was built and the first meeting was held in "the church parlor."

In 1914, an outhouse was built at the north end of the shed that extended along the back end of the church lot between the church and the adjoining property owned by Dr. Beebe.

In 1921 the original glass windows were replaced with Art Glass Memorial windows.

In 1924, the leaders of the church started investigating the installation of heating and lighting for the church.

There must have been some difficult years for the church and its members during WWII (as was the case for the entire country). They were operating on a deficit and in an effort to raise money, the church parsonage was rented out from 1939-1954.

In 1940, the decision was made to remove the transept and locate it next door on the property owned by the heirs of Dr. Beebe. The owners then became the Whipple's who sold it to Joseph

and Marion Nolan in December 1940 (6 months after they got it). Ten years later, the new owners became Robert & Lula Harvey. Following their passing, their daughter Janice Bly inherited the house and then sold it to Gary & Mary Desimore in 1983. They sold the house to the current owner, Steven Whited, in 1991.

Those two decisions, along with a monetary gift by Mr. Dwight Bird, made up for the deficit and they ended up with a balance in their treasury so they could continue making much needed improvements on the church itself. Since they wanted to eliminate the "L" (transept), an 8-foot basement with a concrete floor was put under the church for social and other purposes, two new Art Glass windows were installed at the side of the building where the transept was attached, the roof was repaired, an outside door was created, and a stairway from the main area was built. Also at this time, they were forced to install a new heating unit and a new well.

In 1941 the County installed sewers, roads and curbs along Main Street eliminating the dirt roads that had existed prior. The church was overjoyed because the dirt roads were a mess.

In 1954, the church needed to use the parsonage again and now it was in major need of repairs. They men had to work fixing and replacing walls, woodwork, heating, shingles, digging a new well etc. while the women scrubbed, painted and hung wallpaper. Total cost was \$3,000.

By 1960, the sanctuary and basement were renovated, a new electric pump system and lavatory equipment was installed along with the addition of a new Wurlitzer organ.

Over the next several years, many more renovations for both the church and the parsonage continued that included carpet changes, painting, roofing, new dry well, etc.

It was in 1979 that a storm did severe damage to the church. The steeple was destroyed and the electric was fried and the Wurlitzer organ blown. Over the next couple years, the steeple was replaced with a fiberglass one, the church walls were insulated and resided with vinyl siding, a 2-year-old Gulbransen organ was purchased to replace the old one, and the parish hall was remodeled to accommodate an office for the minister.

It was in 1986 that the church decided to get rid of the parsonage altogether and sold it to its current owner, Charles and Phyllis Gee.

From 1987-1998, the church hosted a preschool/alternative Christian school in the Parish house. In 1995, they were added onto Town water eliminating the need for the well. The church continues to maintain and utilize their building to this day, 166 years after it was built.



Methodist Church Parsonage (Then) 279 Main Street



279 Main Street (Now)



Methodist Church with Transept (Then)



Methodist Church (Now)



Transept at Main Street (Now)



Parish Hall Now