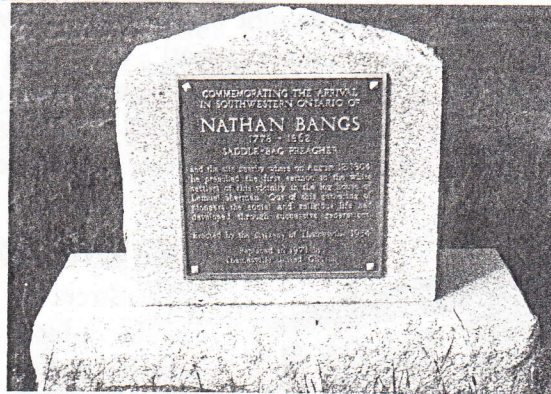


## CENTRAL UNITED CHURCH

### A TWO HUNDRED YEAR JOURNEY



**NATHAN BANGS**



COMMEMORATING THE ARRIVAL  
IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO OF  
NATHAN BANGS  
1775-1862  
SADDLEBAG PREACHER

#### CHAPTER ONE

##### Development of a Church

In 1803 a determined young Methodist missionary named Nathan Bangs obtained the appointment of missionary to Upper Canada. In June, 1803, he left for the north western shore of Lake Ontario and then commenced through Oxford to Delaware on the Thames. There, he was met by natives and two Moravian missionaries. However, when he arrived at Brant's Crossing, the Thames was at flood stage. In attempting to cross the river, his horse drowned and he had to be rescued. This tragedy forced him to stay there until funds were collected to buy him another horse (Nathan and the other circuit riders were paid \$80.00 dollars annually, but part of that was in food and clothing.). While waiting there, he heard about settlements on the Detroit River at Sandwich and Fort Malden and decided that he would make his way to them as soon as possible.

Early in the year of 1804, Nathan followed along the shore of Lake St. Clair and then along the Detroit River until he came to the settlement of Sandwich. The following quotation is from his journal entry when he arrived there: "A more destitute and God-forsaken place I have never found. They are ignorant of spiritual things and have loose morality." Eventually, after he went to Fort Malden, he added the fact that, "...worse still, the whole area is under 'The Roman influence.'" (Nathan Bangs, History of Methodism)

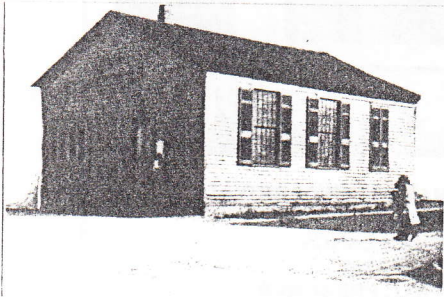
He stayed throughout the year working to establish a Methodist mission in the area. As it happened, a Congregationalist, the Rev. David Bacon, had visited Detroit in 1801. He preached a few times and left, but nothing permanent was organized. When Nathan Bangs arrived in the area, he crossed the river several times during 1804 and held services in the old Detroit Council House. When he left in 1805, again, nothing more was done to formally organize a church until 1809.

However, these mission groups that he started in Sandwich during 1804 continued to meet for prayer and study. In the absence of any Protestant clergy in the area, they asked a priest, Father Richard, to deliver a sermon on as many Sundays as possible. There was only



one problem, the good Father did not speak English very well and the Protestants did not speak French. An amusing anecdote is recorded about the Sunday that Fr. Richard was preaching on the text, "Ye are My Sheep." He could not understand why the parishioners were giggling throughout his message. It seems that he repeatedly translated the word for sheep as "mutton" to the delight of the English who figured that Fr. Richard was telling them that they were God's savory meat!

During the next several years, these prayer and study groups continued to meet and thrive. At least once a year, other circuit riders would make a visit to the area, stay and preach for a few weeks and then move on. It became known as the Sandwich Circuit.

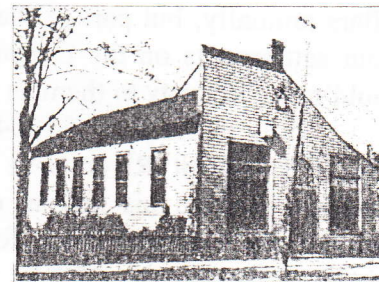


In 1838, the people of the area erected a building on Mill Street in Sandwich and this became the first regular place of worship for the local Methodist people. It was known as the Sandwich and Windsor Methodist Church. When the population in Windsor began to increase more rapidly than the population in Sandwich, this building was sold to the town of Sandwich to be used as the Sandwich Council chamber and later the fire hall

In 1867 the Sandwich-Windsor Church purchased a building on Ferry Street from the Congregationalists. Up to this time, the congregation relied on circuit riders, clergy who were passing through, and the local priest because they did not have their own clergyman. But, at this point, the Rev Hugh Johnson became pastor of the Ferry Street Church. He remained for approximately three years and was succeeded by the Rev. John Philp.

Under the ministry of the Rev. Philp, the church quickly outgrew the Ferry St. building. It was decided that it was time to build a church of their own design at the corner of Windsor Ave. and Chatham St. Therefore, plans moved ahead for the new "House of Worship" on Windsor Ave. The Ferry St. building was sold and became known as Lambie Hall. For quite some time, it was used for the Public Library. This site was eventually sold to the Border Cities Star and is still the location of one of the Windsor Star buildings.

1867 to 1873



The Old Church on Ferry Street

The cornerstone for the new building on Windsor Ave. was laid in 1873 by Rev. Wellington Jeffers (London), and the building was dedicated in January of 1874. The trustees at the time were:

*D.H. Abel, Robt. Cleminson, Charles Johnston, James Lambie, Robert Little, Joseph Mark, Thomas Priest, Capt. J. Sullivan, William Treble and J.W. Wrong.*

The membership continued to increase, not only because the population increased, but because they had evangelistic events with guests such as Crossley and Hunter and other



well-known evangelists of the time. Soon, it became apparent that the congregation had, again, outgrown its building. They now decided to stay where they were and enlarge the structure by building a cross-section which added space to the sanctuary. There were several key persons who became the driving force of the congregation and this expansion: *Robt. Baxter, W. Blow, N.J. Clinton, Chas. J. Dixon, Henry Elsey, D.J. Graveline, J.A. Groescap, Col. J Guillott, John Guillott, Robt. Little, Robt. Paddon, Jonas Pashley, Chas. Potter, Capt. J. Sullivan, John Shorland, Wm., Treble, Chas., Willey and Wm., Wear*. Some of the ladies who served as the heads of Ladies' Aid were: *Mrs. N.J. Clinton, Mrs. W. Douglas, and Mrs. J.R. Hunter*

### WINDSOR AVE. METHODIST CHURCH



Windsor Avenue Church, as First Erected



The Enlarged Windsor Avenue Church



January 4, 1904---After the Fire

During the next several years, this congregation was extremely active and outgoing. For example, in 1898, the young people's organization, known as the Epworth League, succeeded in renting a cottage on Wellington Ave. where they started a Sunday school. They visited the people of the area and succeeded in getting enough families to attend so that eventually they were able to erect a building to hold church services and Sunday school. This was the beginning of London St. Methodist which eventually became Calvary United.

Just when things seemed to be really growing and developing for the congregation, tragedy struck. Early in the morning of Jan. 4<sup>th</sup> 1904, a disastrous fire destroyed the church building. Rev. Alfred Brown opened the doors to admit carpenters at 8:00 a.m. and found the inside on fire. The firemen were called, but it spread rapidly throughout the building and even the slates slid off of the roof. At a meeting that night, after the fire was out, the real tragedy emerged. It was apparent that the *liabilities* were greater than their *assets*, including insurance, by \$1000.00. However, they were blessed with a capable leader, the Rev. Alfred Brown, who undertook the tremendous task ahead. The job of rebuilding was not going to be easy because the financial situation was so difficult.

### NEW BEGINNINGS

Services were held in St. Andrews Presbyterian Church on the Sunday after the blaze. During the building of the new church, the congregation met in a hall above Fleming's Dance Hall in downtown Windsor. Again, the decision was made to relocate and not rebuild on Windsor Ave. Many people of that time thought that the corner of Wyandotte and Ouellette was much too far out of town to build the church. However, it is obvious that the leaders had a great deal of foresight. Rev. Brown literally "tramped the city" securing



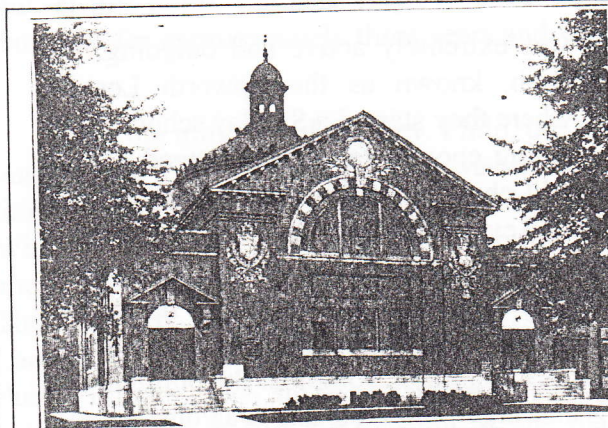
pledges. They also solicited subscriptions from the members who responded generously. On Oct. 19, 1904, the corner stone of the new Central Methodist was laid by Pastor Brown and the cornerstone from the Windsor Ave. church was laid with it by C.L. Potter. Mrs. William Douglas and Miss Ella Conn presented the two trowels that were used.

The building committee of this new church consisted of: *J.H. Shepherd, N.J. Clinton, S.B. Best, A.E. Watson, W.R. Wigle, W.A. Howell, Frank Hutton.*

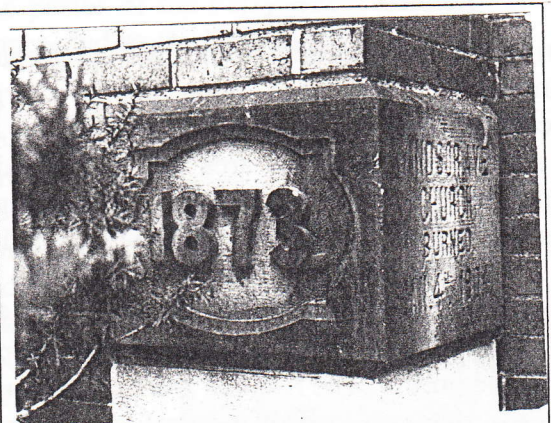
The Trustees were: *A.H. Clarke, Richard Bangham, J.H. Shepherd, J.C. Iler, A.D. Learoyd, S.B. Best, A.E. Watson, W.R. Wigle, W.A. Howell, Frank Hutton.*

The Sunday school building was completed in May 1906, while Rev. Brown was still the minister. However, the sanctuary was not finished until December. Thus, it was the Rev. Thomas Manning, who was the Pastor in charge of the dedication on Dec. 10, 1906. Dedication sermons were preached by Rev. A. Carmen, D.D., the General Superintendent of the Methodist Church. The cost of this building was \$46,500 and approximately half of this was raised by subscription. Everything that could be salvaged from the Windsor Av. building, including the brick for the walls of the Sunday school building, was used to keep the costs down. When the new church was complete, the trustees bought a small house almost next to it as a temporary parsonage.

In 1907, Evangelists Crossley and Hunter returned to conduct a second series of evangelistic services. These services were held as a united campaign amongst all of the Methodist churches in the area and were most successful. The Windsor Dailey Record of April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1907, said: "The conclusion of the Crossley-Hunter meetings in Central Church marks the end of the greatest religious revival ever conducted in Windsor, or in Essex County." Over seven hundred persons had made a profession of faith.



**CENTRAL METHODIST**



**WINDSOR AV. CORNERSTONE**

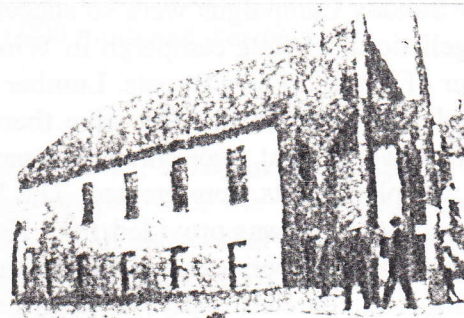
The newly located congregation continued to grow and thrive. In 1909, Theodore Ouellette, William Horne and James Weekes met with Dr. Finch of Detroit at the home of Mr. Ouellette to discuss starting a mission in a needy area. They started to have meetings in "The Colored" Odd Fellow's Temple at the City Hall Park. These were so successful that they decided to focus on the area above "the horseshoe" because they thought it was probably the right location to try to help. Therefore, with the help of Central Church, a tent was erected at Howard and Broadhead Sts. This, eventually, became the second off-shoot of the original Methodist congregation.



### THE TENT AT HOWARD & BROADHEAD



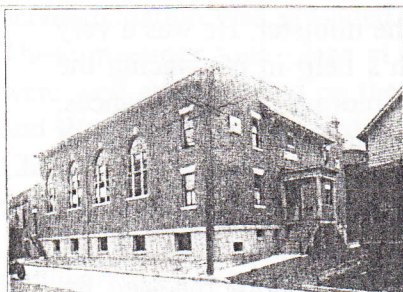
### HOWARD AVE. MISSION



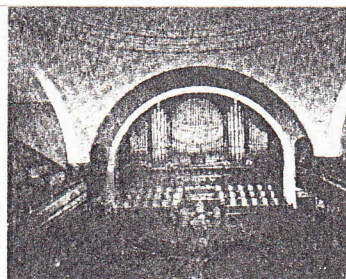
**GILES BLVD. UNITED CHURCH**

A Sunday school was started with ten members and preaching services were held. During the winter, the home of J.J. Gawley was used. Central Church then erected a building for them at the corner of Erie and Howard. This building was dedicated on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1911, by Rev. F.W. Hollinnrake and was named Howard Ave. Mission. It seemed to fill a great need in the community and thrived. In June 1919, with the arrival of a new minister, Rev. A. W. Barker, a parsonage was needed. Mrs. Barker formed the first Women's group. In March, 1923, They decided to build a new building. This was to be erected on property they had acquired at Giles Blvd. and Marentette. Rev. T.A. Allen oversaw this project.

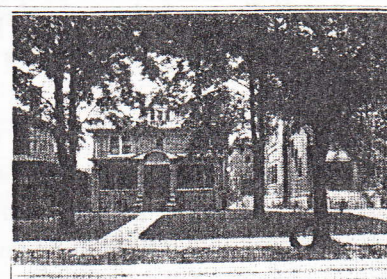
At the same time that Central Methodist was involved with outreach and mission, their own congregation continued to grow. The Sunday school outgrew its accommodations and, as well, the young people's associations needed more space. During the pastorate of Rev. H.W. Crews, they decided to build Wesley Hall. The construction was started in 1920 and it was dedicated in October, 1921 by Rev. J.W. Hibbert, the chairman of Windsor District. The cost of the building and furnishings was \$38,000. This hall was designed to be used for Sunday school, social activities, and youth activities. Indeed, over the years, it benefited the whole community because many events were held there, including concerts and music festivals. It was a timely, wise investment that will always be remembered.



**WESLEY HALL**



**CHURCH SANCTUARY**



**PARSONAGE**



## CHURCH UNION

In 1925, the culmination of Church Union took place and Central Methodist became Central United. During the time that Rev. Thomas was at Central, it was decided that since the Billy Sunday Campaigns were so successful in Detroit, it might be a good idea to have an evangelistic tabernacle campaign in Windsor. A Tabernacle was built on a vacant lot at the corner of Pitt and Ferry Streets. Lumber dealers of the city lent lumber for it. Carpenters from all the churches in the city gave their services free and a shanty style building was erected that would seat over three thousand people. The bare ground was covered with sawdust and plank seats were erected. The Windsor Gas Co. placed twenty stove heaters in the place and the gas was provided free. Hanley and Fisher, well-known evangelists of the time came to conduct services and Chris Pink, a soloist from London provided solos and led the singing. The churches really worked to make it a success and night after night the place was packed. As an interesting aside, Mr. Hanley eventually went into politics and became Governor of New York State.

After this evangelistic crusade, the attendance at Central broke all records. Special hymn singing was led by a large choir at every service and the church was filled to capacity at every service. However, as so often happens, at this time of triumph and success, events beyond the control of individuals were in motion. Canada's and the World's financial status were about to impact everyone, including the churches, in very drastic ways because it was just before the great stock market crash in 1929 and the beginning of the great depression.

At the time of the building of Central United, half of the funds necessary were not covered by commitments from the congregation, but were held as a mortgage. Then, when Wesley Hall was built, again, the part not paid by donation was combined with the existing mortgage into a new mortgage. In order to secure this new mortgage, the following trustees gave their personal bond:

*S.W. Best, A.D. Bowlby, A.J. Cadman, W.J. Cherney, W.H. Downey, D.M. Eagle, D.J. Graveline, C. Henderson, R. Paddon, P.R. Smith, E.C. Srigley, J. R. Thompson, T.J. Wear, W.A. White, and M.J. Wigle.*

For a while, things went well with P.R. Smith as the Financial Secretary and S.B. Best as Treasurer. Shortly after Mr. Smith became Treasurer, he became ill and had to resign just as the country's financial crisis started to happen. Rev. Thomas had left and Rev. Runnels was now the minister. Many people found themselves without jobs or their wages were being severely cut-back. They had difficulty with daily living let alone keeping up their commitments to the Church. The Church, in turn, was not able to make mortgage payments on time. Things looked very bleak indeed. By 1932, Central was unable to make mortgage payments at all. After missing several payments, a representative of the mortgage company came to Windsor to meet with the trustees and their legal advisor. He was ready to foreclose on the mortgage and sell the property for the going rate.

At this point in time, the Rev. H Mick had just become the minister. He was a very astute business administrator and managed to secure P.R. Smith's help in convincing the mortgage company to extend the mortgage for a year while they reorganized the finances. Fortunately, Mr. Smith was now well enough to become involved and took the position of treasurer again. The trustees called on the families of the church to see what finances could be obtained. Dr. Mick and Mr. Smith personally called on 150 families. Gradually, progress was made and the finances began to improve. At the end of ten months, the mortgage company informed them that they had done so well the mortgage would be renewed for



another five years. However, in that year, 1934, it was necessary to instigate a long term plan that would keep them in the good graces of the bank. Mr. Smith worked it out, received the approval of the Trustees and presented it to the bank. It was accepted and it worked well. During the remaining pastorate of Dr. Mick, the \$60,000 mortgage was paid off.

## CHURCH SALE IS CONSIDERED

Trustees of Central  
United Receive  
\$500,000 Bid

Valuable Property Sought  
For Business Use,  
Is Rumor. 11/14/28

Purchase of the Central United Church and adjacent land as business property is being considered, it became known today. A meeting of the board of trustees was held Tuesday evening, presumably to consider an offer, but no information has yet become available as to the action taken.

### "NOTHING TO SAY"

Reports are, however, that a price of \$500,000 has been offered for the church's holdings, situated in the heart of downtown Windsor. Trustees today stated that there was nothing at present to say regarding the proposed transaction.

It is not known for just what purpose the property is desired, but the presumption is that it is to be used for business purposes. Standing on the east side of Ouellette avenue, just south of Wyandotte street, the church is in the heart of a section where business expansion is going ahead rapidly. A large frontage immediately to the south of the church will be the site for the store of the T. Eaton Company, for which plans are now being completed.

The church, formerly known as Central Methodist, is one of the largest and most important of its denomination in the Border Cities. It boasts a large membership, drawn from all parts of the Border Cities.

On November 14th, 1928, an article appeared in the Windsor newspaper with the headline, "Church Sale is Considered." It seems that The T. Eaton Co. wanted to put a store in this location.

Mr. Smith continued to be the treasurer for many years, and then continued as an active board member at Central for a total of fifty years. We have highlighted this man for his abilities and dedication in helping to steer the congregation through perilous times. There are many more dedicated people that deserve to be mentioned for other long-term service, as we shall see.



MR. P. R. SMITH

In 1934, all of the United Churches of the city had been experiencing hard times financially and spiritually, it was decided amongst the group that it might be time for another evangelistic campaign. This resulted in an invitation to the Demarest Group to come for a month. This group consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Demarest (Victoria Booth Demarest, granddaughter of Gen. Booth of the Salvation Army) a soloist and organizers. Housing accommodation was provided and they held services every evening and three on Sundays. These meetings took place at Central which was the largest auditorium at the time. They were well attended and on the final Sunday Central Church, the Sunday school auditorium and Wesley hall were filled to capacity. A massed choir of 100 voices sang the "Hallelujah Chorus." This was probably the largest audience ever to gather in Central Church. As previously noted, these meetings were actually held for a month.

This spiritual renewal was coupled with the beginning of a financial renewal and gradually the overall health of the churches, especially Central, began to improve. Dr. Mick seemed to be the leader that was needed to guide the people through the big personal and