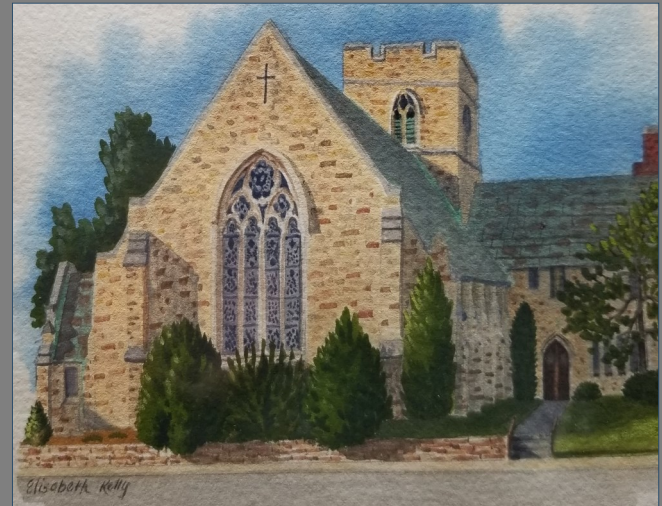


First Presbyterian Church



Architectural Background

History of the First Presbyterian Church Paducah, Kentucky

ARCHITECTURAL BACKGROUND

First Presbyterian Church of Paducah, Kentucky, is one of three similar churches which were built in the 1930s in Gothic Revival style and designed by award-winning architect, George Awsumb. The two sister churches are Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and First United Methodist Church in F. Scott Fitzgerald's old neighborhood in Montgomery, Alabama. These three churches are based on the Lincoln Cathedral, which was built by William the Conqueror in Lincoln, Eng-

land. The Lincoln Cathedral, in turn, is said to have been inspired

by three Norman cathedrals, the Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, Normandy; the Abbey of Saint-Etienne, where William the Conqueror is buried in Caen, Normandy; and the Rouen Cathedral, which was the subject of a series of more than thirty paintings by Claude Monet in Rouen, Normandy -- one of Monet's paintings of the Rouen Cathedral sold for \$12 million dollars in 1995 -- and the Lincoln Cathedral is also rumored to be based off of the Church of Saint Mary Magdalen in Rennes-le-Chateau in the south of France, which is where Mary Mag-

dalene went after the Resurrection. Indeed, out of the European churches, First Presbyterian Church of Paducah with its tower probably most closely physically resembles Mary Magdalen's church.

As a student at the University of Illinois, George Awsumb won a national competition which allowed him to travel Europe and view church architecture. While in Europe, he visited "The Passion Play" in Oberammergau, Germany, and stayed with a family of Swiss woodcarvers, the Lang family. One of the boys, Andrew Lang played the role of Christ in "The Passion Play" and later was made supervisor of all woodcarvings at the American Seating Company in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which provided the oak pews and offering plates for First Presbyterian Church of Paducah. Alois and Anton Lang carved the oak reredos that now sit at the rear of the sanctuary. First Presbyterian Church of Paducah was built out of stone and granite quarried in Bald Knob, Arkansas, and has a Vermont slate roof, while parts for arches, doors, pinnacles, windows, tracery, and trim were cut from oolitic

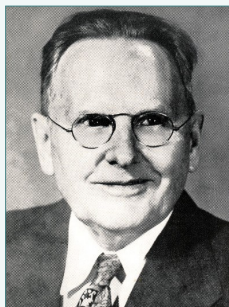
limestone from Bedford, Indiana. Stained-glass windows came from the firm Giannini and Hilgart in Chicago, Illinois, who made stained glass for architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Old Testament figures are contained in the stained glass on the west wall, New Testament figure on the east wall, the four evangelists or Gospel writers on the south wall, with a rose window symbolizing Christ as the sun or hope of the world up front.

George Awsumb called architecture "frozen music" designed for the "man on the street." A blurb in the bulletin for the dedication of First Presbyterian Church of Paducah's current sanctuary said, "There are churches which seem pervaded by the atmosphere of calm and peace like a garden at sunset. The cares of life slip away in the hush and silence and all that is highest and holiest inspires and regenerates the soul. Let it be so here," while the cornerstone laid for it in 1933 states, "1842 First Presbyterian Church 1933, 'To know Him and to make Him known.' "

Idlewild Presbyterian Church



Church of Saint Mary Magdalen



In the 1950s, a new educational wing was designed by George Awsumb and built by Ray Black and Sons. In the 1980s, a twenty-four rank organ with twenty-one stops and 1,389 pipes by Casavants Freres in Quebec, Ontario, was installed. A Verdin carillon was damaged in the early 2000s and has not been replaced because replacement was cost prohibitive at the time, but now there are more easily affordable digital carillons available. Architect Chris Jones and Ray Black & Son are known locally for their work in historic preservation, and recently they have done some work on the bell tower and the new wing and the playground.

The Lower Town neighborhood, as part of the downtown commercial district, is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Buddenbaum House is owned by the First Presbyterian Church and makes up an important part of the church's campus. The Buddenbaum House is unusual in that it has pre-Civil War glass windows and has been said to be anywhere from the oldest to third-oldest house in Paducah depending on when it was built between 1842 and 1857. The Buddenbaum House's lot extends to the center of the block behind the church, and the building sits next to the church's parklike playground area, and all are part of the border or gateway to the historic district.

The church's campus sits on a rectangular area of real estate which makes up part of one city block, and the parking lot is a rectangular area of another city block. There are plans for a porte cochere and additional parking behind the church.

John J. Johnson III

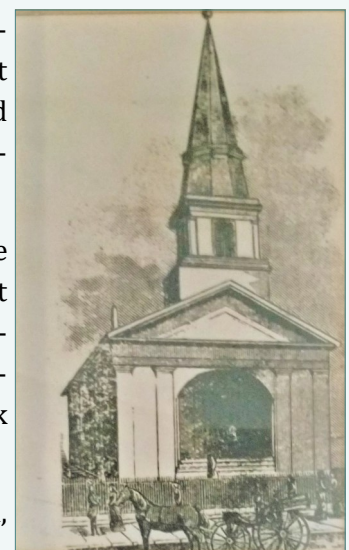
HISTORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

At three o'clock on October 29, 1842, only 13 years after Kentucky began recognizing Paducah as an official town, eight people met at the home of Judge James Campbell. Up until this time, the small group of Presbyterians had been worshipping with the Methodists. On that late day in October, they officially formed The First Presbyterian Church with two ruling elders - Judge Campbell and G.A. Flournoy - and six other founding members which consisted of four women and two men. They weren't famous and, while some were considered to be leaders of this small town, they weren't enormously wealthy. They were ordinary citizens who loved God and wanted to serve him through a church that most of them had grown up in, a Presbyterian church.

The very next day, the session met and Reverend Alexander Wheeler Campbell, the brother of Judge Campbell, was officially selected to be their minister. At that meeting, they made an application to the Synod of Kentucky to be recognized as a Presbyterian church. It took these people two days to gather, elect, and apply. No moss was growing under their feet!

For the first few months the church met in members' homes. As more people began to attend, they held their services at the Court House. It is possible that they referred to the place where they met as a meeting house. Until the very early 1900s, most Presbyterians referred to the structural building where they gathered as a "meeting house," members of the congregation and their mission work were referred to as "the church."

The congregation increased and by 1848, only six years after they had formed, they had grown large enough to obtain their first building. It was a brick structure near the corner of Locust and Court Streets, which is now 3rd and Kentucky.



First Church Building
1848—1888



7th & Jefferson 1888-1932

The first service ever held in the church was the funeral of Rev. Campbell, a man who had worked so hard to create this church, recruit the congregation, and build a structure. In spite of losing their spiritual leader, the church continued to grow in membership. There were hardships to endure during this time. They suffered through the Civil War, which caused the national split of the Presbyterian Church, with Paducah choosing to go with the South.

By 1887, they were 421 strong and needed a bigger building. They wanted to move out of town so they built a new brick Victorian church at the corner of 7th and Jefferson. One newspaper wrote that it was one of the most beautiful churches in the Commonwealth.

During the next fifty years, the church survived two more major upheavals - World War I and the Great Depression - but the people of the church remained strong. They didn't always agree with each other. Like any family, there were disagreements. In April 1930, when the church needed a new minister, the nominating committee had chosen a young 25-year-old man, Rev. Frederick Olert, who had been ordained only four years before. Many people in the church did not approve of the selection, preferring an older more

established minister. He turned out to be a good preacher, which Presbyterians value, a marvelous musician, and an extraordinary administrator. These leadership qualities would be most important in the next eight years.

On the night of January 29, 1932, not quite two years after Rev. Olert arrived, fire sirens were heard all over town. As people raced to see what was happening, they discovered that our church was ablaze. Once the fire was contained, only the steeple was left standing. One can only imagine the disagreement and compromises that were made while trying to decide what to do but, with the minister's guidance, the congregation decided to re-build at the same location. Dr. Olert met personally with 500 people to receive the pledges needed to re-build, a daunting task since the country was still enduring the Depression. During this time, no services were missed. They moved around, meeting at the Christian church across the street and the Women's' Club. All this time, the work of the church continued. Once again, the building wasn't what truly united this congregation; it was the mission of the church that kept them together. While Rev. Olert's leadership skills are to be admired, we also realize that he could not have kept the church together without strong participation from a dedicated session and other leaders of the church. They certainly didn't sit back and wait for other people to do the work.

George Awsumb, an architect from Memphis, was hired to design the church. He had designed the Idlewild Church in Memphis and a small version of this is what he designed here.

Dedication of the new church was in December of 1933. What excitement, joy, and sense of accomplishment



7th & Jefferson 1937 Flood

must have been evident that day! The church building they erected is where we worship today.

Going through this time of upheaval together seemed to make the congregation even stronger but, unfortunately, they would soon be tested again. Paducah would endure a catastrophic event just three years later, the flood of 1937. Once again, our church was used as a hospital, as it had been during the Civil War, but the flood waters kept coming, so they had to move the people further out, taking them to Clark School. Many people in our church were very active leaders in flood management for the city, helping to assist and coordinate the evacuation of so many people. At that time, the church building was probably low on their list of concerns. After the waters settled, the members of the church were once again asked to sacrifice and work to repair the damage to the church in order to continue its mission work.

We have a long standing tradition that began not too long after the waters subsided. In 1940, some members were discussing our “Cold Church” stereotype. This was then followed by an informal designated group to address and reduce the “frozen chosen” references. It was decided that we would have two people stand in the vestibule to greet others as they enter the sanctuary. This welcoming tradition continues today.

By the 1950s, our church was bursting at the seams with children. It was the amazing baby boom. As the church was growing and properties nearby were being bought, the session realized that we needed a more consistent budget. It was at this time, they instituted the “Tithing Adventure.” The moderator along with six elders instituted a plan and, for the first time, tithing cards were sent out. Seventy years later, those cards are still an integral part of our financial planning.

As the church was growing, it was obvious more church space was needed. Sunday school attendance was reaching an all time high and there was no room for additional classes. Memorial Hall could not accommodate the vast number of people attending church gatherings, such as family night suppers, ice cream socials, Presbyterian Women’s events, and after-church luncheons.

In 1953, session notes show that there was a discussion to select an architect to plan a new educational wing to the church. The Sun Democrat reported that the church’s fund campaign had exceeded their goal of \$125,000. On September 21, 1958, the dedication of the new building took place. It is a credit to the congregation of this church that they always seemed to exceed their goals whatever they might be, regardless of outside factors. Floods, wars, and fires never seemed to stop them. Members of the church always seemed to be looking forward.

The spiritual needs for children and youth of the church have always been a priority. Throughout the years, we have created meaningful Sunday school programs, offered summer vacation Bible school, Wonderful Wednesdays, thoughtful music programs, a variety of summer activities, church camps, and Children’s Church.

While meeting the needs of their own congregation, our church has a reputation of addressing the needs of our local community. Members of this church through the Evangelism and Outreach Committee helped form the Paducah Cooperative Ministry (PCM) and continue to be actively involved. Until a permanent warming center was constructed, our members helped staff the center when it was extremely cold outside. Members were fundamental in creating Kids Enriched by Your Support (KEYS). This program met the needs of children who needed educational and emotional support after school and was held at our church five days a week for many years. For several years, along with Grace Episcopal Church, we conducted a week-long Reading Camp for children who might need and enjoy reading enrichment during the summer. We participate in a community kitchen program that provides meals on Sundays after church. Along with other downtown churches, we participate yearly in Holy Week and Advent services.

The church’s concern for others has not been contained only to themselves or their local community, but to

foreign ministries as well. Ophthalmologists from our congregation have traveled to Africa and Haiti to administer eye care. Several mission trips guided by Living Waters of the World have taken place to install water purification systems to communities without access to safe drinking water. Housing trips to Haiti and Central America have been organized and conducted by our church.

This short history of an active 179-year-old church cannot cover all that has been done over the years, or put a name on every member. However, we have a rich heritage that is made up of people who are dedicated to this church, not afraid of change when needed, recognize our past by remembering the work done by those who came before us, care for each other, have a sense of responsibility toward the future and, most importantly, love God and want to serve him.

Jessiann McCarthy

1842 · THE FIRST · 1933
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1842 · THE FIRST · 1933
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
· TO KNOW HIM AND ·
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