Chapter Two

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A New Century

The First Presbyterian Church of Alton gathered for Christmas, 1897 in a brand new church with a new pastor, thinking ahead to a whole new millennium -- the twentieth century.

The Rev. Henry K. Sandborne began his labors on April 22. The receipts reported for the year preceding had been $4678. There were 349 communicant members and nearly as many (325) on the Sunday School rolls. It was a year of momentous events in the microcosm of First Presbyterian Church. The cornerstone was laid on July 5 with a great celebration including, apparently, a brass ensemble and massed choirs. Erection preceded quickly because the congregation was able to hold first service in the chapel on September 9. The completed church was dedicated on Wednesday December 8, 1897 with former pastors returning for the occasion and preaching at both an afternoon and evening service.

Mr. Theodore Link had designed an eclectic Victorian style sanctuary loosely on the Akron plan. The platform with its pulpit in the center was on the west side of the rather square room. The ceiling above the platform and choir was a barrel-vaulted arch, matched across the room by another curved arch somewhat higher with a large stained glass window. The window, facing east to the back of the worshippers, was patterned glass rather than a picture design, and was a blunt gothic arch. The stained glass windows on the south, however, were rounded at the top, in a Romanesque style. The Victorian blending of design elements favored by Victorian architects, continued in the choice of interior decorations and finishing details. The ceiling was particularly noteworthy, as it was made of tongue-in-groove hard wood in a herringbone pattern which served as an interesting counterpoint to the heavy beamed braces that rose from four pillars capped by elaborate capitols. The beams crossed the ceiling from east to west, which offered no impediment for the acoustics from the pulpit and choir to the congregation. Link was employing acoustical principles which were well known, but he was a genius at it. The floor descended gradually from the east side, toward the pulpit platform. Two aisles entered at the north east and south east corners of the room from outside doors, and directed the congregation down toward the center of the platform, diagonally. Following the so-called Akron plan, a large Sunday School room was separated from the sanctuary by wooden folding doors. The doors could be opened to accommodate overflow crowds when necessary. The Sunday School room had a

design integrity of its own, however. Along the west wall there were three large square windows, but the center of attention was a semi-circular bay with three windows set with very thick curved glass. Each side of the bay held two narrow windows with Romanesque round arches. To the Victorian eye, gothic points, rounded Roman, or Queen Anne colonial could all be blended along with Greek or even Egyptian elements. Records of the period are quiet about opinions concerning the interior, but the impressive stone exterior elicited comments of praise. And it is this stone facade that has remained constant.



The coming of the twentieth century was the occasion for immense speculation, and considerable superstition. Many felt that the new millennium would not dawn at all, but would be replaced by a great Tribulation and the Second Coming, with Christians being lifted out of the world. Presbyterians, officially at least, did not so much look forward to the end of the age as to the beginning of the promised kingdom of God on earth. It all seemed within reach. The world had been opened up for the Christian Gospel. Protestants believed what they were told, that "this generation would see the world for Christ."

Toward this end crusades were beginning to multiply. There were evangelistic crusades, of course. But there were now highly functional unified campaigns to promote Christianity among the churched as well, through the Sunday School Movement and its agent the Chautauqua Movement which had been begun for the training and inspiration of Sunday School Teachers. There was the movement to begin city missions, all growing out of two inspirations in the form of Jane Addams' World-famous Hull House in Chicago, and the Young Men's Christian Association.

The International Sunday School Association was instigated by Dwight L. Moody. At its national convention in 1872 he had urged the formation of the Uniform Lesson Plan, with all teachers using the same lesson from Scripture on a Sunday morning. In this way a spiritual bond would be cemented between teachers, no matter what their

denomination. It would immensely facilitate the preparation of lessons, as well. Two years later the first Summer Training Institute was held at Chautauqua Lake, New York. Within a couple of decades there were Summer Training Institutes or "Chautauquas" in scores of communities, which developed into cultural events often far afield of teacher training. Some of the summer encampments evolved more permanent cabins or houses for the summer recreation and renewal of residents away from the heat and pressure of the city. In many cases these were built by the newly emerging middle class who had begun to have increasing leisure time.

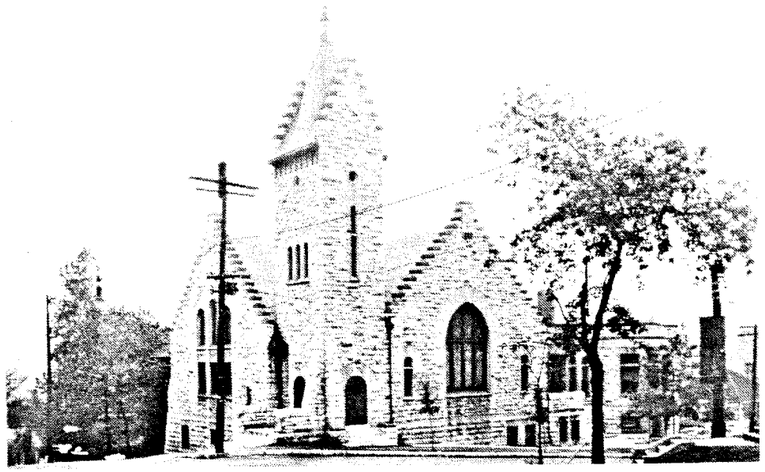
The Y M C A, on the other hand was firmly based in town. The purpose was to become "a social organization of those in whom the love of Christ has produced love to men; who shall meet the young stranger as he enters our city, take him to the church and Sabbath school, bring him to the Rooms of the Association, and in every way throw around him good influences, so that he may feel that he is not a stringer, but that noble and Christian spirits care for his soul."[44] The Y soon became a mission of evangelical churches to the whole community. In Alton the Young Men's Christian Association was begun in 1883, with a new building on Third Street.

Alton needed such urban work as the YMCA because it was becoming a city with major industries. The flour mills, such as the National Roller Mills owned by D. R. Sparks and the Alton City Mills begun by Farber and McPike and then purchased by E. O. Stanard were developing in the 1870's and 80's. The glassworks had expanded from 60 employees in 1875 when it was bought by Edward Levis and William Eliot Smith until, by the time of the first occupation of the new Presbyterian Church on the hill, there were 2200 employed. Brutus Brunner and Gilbert Duncan's foundry and machine shop was another heavy industry, as was the Alton Box Manufacturing Company, established by John Hayner in 1872. The Hapgood Plow Company was running 24 hours a day in 1878. Last among these giants of the 19th Century was the Equitable Powder Company founded by Franklin Olin in 1892 to provide blasting powder for the mining industry.

Although the 20th Century brought new industrial prosperity to Alton, the First Presbyterian Church only slowly began to share it. In the year 1900 the church membership was down to 300, and the Sunday School mission in North Alton had been reduced from 150 to 100. In 1904 it was typical to have preaching every morning and evening of every Lord's Day. The attendance at morning services was 178 and 105 came back at night. 33 people attended the average Thursday evening prayer meeting. The downtown Sunday School, however, was thriving. There were 360 on the rolls, 60 more than were church members. And the average attendance was 450. The new stone church was bursting at the seams.

Behind all the glitter of a brand new century in a lusty nation where virtually anything that could be dreamed seemed possible -- even empire (begun with the acquisition of

[44]From the prospectus of the Boston YMCA, founded in 1851.



The new stone First Presbyterian Church of Alton, built on the corner of Fourth and Alby was home for the Presbyterians on "pagan hill" after 1897.



The Alton YMCA was a haven for young Christian gentlemen in the industrial city of Alton. The rooms housed many Presbyterian elders and pastors in town for presbytery meetings.

the Philippines) -- the churches were beginning to feel the strains of their own crusading effort. The spirit of fantastic unity which Moody and others had built was beginning to fray.

During the first decade and a half of this century (from 1900 to 1914 to be exact) a split between conservative and liberal sides of most evangelical denominations continued to widen. The battle was fought over technical largely academic scientific matters such as evolution, and form (or literary) criticism of scripture. Nevertheless, in several ways the two sides were held together by their mutual participation in the great missions and crusades that continued to coalesce Christians of every persuasion. A prominent Presbyterian spoke for the majority in those days when he urged a united effort to address the needs here and abroad to evangelize the unreached masses with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The essential spirit of our Nation is thus that of Jesus Christ, and it is the duty of the American Churches to make that spirit more Christian, to awaken yet greater national interest in the welfare of all earth's peoples, to provide men and means in increasing ratios for the work of spiritual salvation, and to hasten the day when the King of Men shall everywhere be crowned as Lord of all. ...It is marvelous how the presence of the common enemy in heathen lands has brought Christian men to realize their need of unity in thought and work. Face to face with the corruption and degradation of heathenism, they realize in very distant manner that this world is lost apart from Jesus Christ.[45]

In this remarkable statement Roberts was revealing the broad consensus that allowed the conservative and liberal elements of the main line evangelical denominations to work together for Christian civilization at home and abroad.[46]

It may be that the great unity movements of the late 1800's hardly effected Alton Protestants, except through such joint projects as Chautauqua, the YMCA and YWCA, and a few revivals, as well as the societies (such as WCTU, the Bible Society, and the Mission societies -- which later merged into Church Women United). But the influence of the movements radiated the religious climate in Alton in ways that amounted to permanent change.

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[45]William H. Roberts, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in his welcoming address to the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1908. This Federal Council, later the National Council, was a major force holding the liberal and conservative factions of churches together for the common cause. Ironically, this very council a half century later would become the factor that divided denominations from each other, particularly in overseas mission areas.

[46]Handy, p. 149.

On February 19, 1905 Rev. Sandborne resigned to go to Brooklyn Presbyterian Church in Oakland, California, almost exactly one year before the disastrous San Francisco earthquake rocked the Bay area on April 18, 1906. On October 19, 1905 Dr. A. G. Lane of Fremont, Ohio was elected. He was installed on January 22, 1906.

In effect, the agenda for Presbyterians in Alton was still the same as it had been since the end of the War between the States. The purpose of nearly everything was still to promote a world-wide fellowship under Christ. In 1908 a Presbyterian Brotherhood was held, the object of which "is the social, moral and spiritual uplift of men and especially of bringing them to Christ." Gospel meetings in 1911 led to 35 decisions to join the Presbyterian Church, 18 went to the Baptists and 6 to the Methodists. The main focus was on the North Side mission, into which the 12th Street Presbyterians had been invited, now that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church had merged with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Attendance, it was reported, was good, but "no great spiritual interest is manifested."
So, after six and a half years, Dr. A. G. Lane resigned. The June 6, 1912 session minutes give Dr. Lane's reasons: he "stated that he has been working here against depressing climatic conditions and feeling that a stay here would but shorten his term of usefulness in the ministry." He left these depressing conditions to go to La Grande, Oregon.

On October 14 the church called Rev. E. L. Gibson to come from Noblesville, Indiana. Tragedy followed the Gibsons here, unfortunately. On October 11, 1914 two years after settling in Alton, the pastor's wife and baby boy died. Despite the tragedy, or perhaps regardless of it, Gibson did not become discouraged enough to leave. He remained, a widower, for almost two decades.

It may be that the prosperity of the work was attractive. Apparently the 1915 evangelistic meetings were outstanding. Page after page of session records are needed to list the members received, almost 200 in all. 80 adults were baptized. The Sunday School increased by more than 150 to a new enrollment high of 563. Just two years later, at the height of the First World War, another hundred were added to the membership.

The war effort had galvanized the patriotism of everyone in the country, including the pastor. On September 9, 1918 the clerk recorded, "Our pastor wishing to do more for our country than he can do here notified us that he had made formal application for a chaplaincy in the United States Army and wished us to arrange our church matters accordingly." The Armistice on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month came before the bureaucratic wheels could enfold Rev. Gibson, however.

The following summer a McCormick Theological Seminary student was hired to work at Elm Street in the mission. On September 9 a meeting was called to canvas members at North Side regarding their ability to support a minister on their own. Twenty days later the session moved to approve the request of the North Side people for a separate church organization. The October meeting of presbytery approved the



The interior of the church as it appeared to three generations of worshippers between 1897 and 1963. The organ fills the barrell-vault on the west side of the sanctuary.

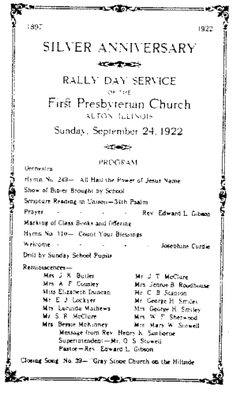
organization of the new church for November 9, 1919 at 2 p.m. What had begun as a Sunday School Mission had now resulted in an independent congregation. Every decent size church worth its salt in those days was engaged in nurturing Sunday School missions into daughter congregations, and the salt in First Presbyterian Church had not lost its savor. First Presbyterian Church was proud on November 9 to transfer 61 members (more or less) to the Elm Street Presbyterian Church.

During the 1920's there was a new climate about revivalism. It showed up in First Church as a continual tussle between the pastor and the session regarding evangelistic endeavors. It seems Rev. Gibson was zealous, but the session was increasingly reticent. Early in his ministry Gibson regularly asked for permission to take time away to participate in evangelistic missions which were part of the National Missions emphasis of the Presbyterian church. These requests were routinely granted. But after a few years the proposals for First Church to join in services here in Alton were regularly debated and then dropped.

For example, in 1922 the matter raged for the whole day on Sunday, October 22.

> The pastor presented a matter coming up for decision at the Ministerial Alliance of plans (if possible) of bettering the Spiritual Atmosphere of our citizens. Whether by a union evangelistic effort or each church simultaneously or other plans.

The session adjourned without agreeing to let the pastor proceed. Finally, after the night service, at 8:30 "...we decided that a more definite proposition for Tabernacle meetings should be presented." The pastor was defeated, again. Typically for Presbyterians, the reason was made to sound like a procedural one -- lack of a clear proposal, rather than a disinclination to have more revivals. The era of Presbyterians participating in big revivals was all but over.


1897 1922

SILVER ANNIVERSARY

RALLY DAY SERVICE
OF THE
First Presbyterian Church
ALTON, ILLINOIS
Sunday, September 24, 1922

PROGRAM

Organist
Hymn No. 249— All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
Show of Books Brought by School
Scripture Reading in Unison—34th Psalm
Prayer - - - - Rev. Edward L. Gibson
Marking of Class Books and Offering
Hymn No. 116— Count Your Blessings
Welcome - - - - Josephine Curtis
Drill by Sunday School Pupils
Reminiscences—
Mrs. J. R. Butler — Mr. J. T. McClure
Mrs. A. F. Coursey — Mrs. Jennie B. Roudebush
Miss Elizabeth Deacon — Mr. C. B. Stanton
Mr. E. F. Lockyer — Mr. George H. Smiley
Mrs. Lafayette Mathews — Mrs. George H. Smiley
Mr. S. P. McClure — Mrs. W. T. Sherwood
Mrs. Bessie McKinney — Mrs. Mark M. Stilwell
Message from Rev. Hiram A. Sanborne
Superintendent—Mr. O. S. Stilwell
Pastor—Rev. Edward L. Gibson
Closing Song No. 39— Gray Stone Church on the Hillside



It was the beginning of the era of building big churches, however. In larger cities "First Presbyterian Churches" were building great edifices. In 1925 the first record of discussion of the need to enlarge our building is found on June 10. The need was clear. There were 811 members by 1926. In 1927 a joint meeting of the Session with the Trustees agreed on a building expansion as soon as possible. The Trustees reported the "strongest financial picture in many years with a considerable balance."

In order to get out of the way of this program, perhaps, or to make way for it, Rev. E. L. Gibson, DD, resigned on August 26, 1928 to go to Lakeside Presbyterian Church at Storm Lake, Iowa. It is historically interesting that the process of calling Dr. Gibson's successor was the last time the "old" procedures were used. On February 14, 1929 the minutes of the session report,

> A letter to our Pulpit Committee from Rev. Edgar J. Vance of Johnson City, Tennessee offering to preach for us on March 3d & 10th and to stay with us throughout the week and have charge of the prayer meeting Thursday evening was accepted on recommendation of the committee.

There was no doubt in this case that Dr. Vance knew he was being invited to appear as a candidate for the position of pastor, although that may not have been mentioned directly. The procedure was to have every advantage of meeting the prospective pastor in a variety of settings before deciding to call him. Dr. Vance would have been on display for the week. In the middle of that week the session met in the church parlor to receive and dismiss a number of members, and the minutes came to a suggestive conclusion, "After discussion on several matters in the interests of and about the welfare of our church we adjourned after prayer."

A week later the session met again and approved a call for a congregational meeting. The church offered Dr. Vance a salary of $4000 a year, and agreed to pay 7 1/2% of the salary to the Board of Pensions (the first mention of that in First Church minutes), with the pastor paying the other 2 1/2%. The salary was nearly double what his predecessor had received and, rumor had it, more than twice what any other pastor in Alton received in 1929. The next salary increase, however, would be a long time coming.

The Vances arrived on May 28 and the family was received as members. On July 30 the pastor outlined four lines of work to "engage our future endeavors." (1) Delinquents -- their Restoration (2) Men's Work (3) Young People (4) Educational. The state of the church at the end of the fiscal year on March 30, 1930 was apparently strong. Membership had grown to 820 communicants. $15,035 was received for the church expenses, and $16,000 was received for benevolences. The church was still the leader among Presbyterians in mission-mindedness.

As the Depression deepened the decision was made to use the old manse to cut expenses during the winter. Funds were getting tighter. Then in January 1931 it was

moved "we accept the quota of the Benevolence Budget for this year at its figures and we would do our best to raise it and that during the coming year we should close the door to other appeals." That is, the "quota" set as a challenge goal by presbytery was agreed to, although it was going to be harder to raise the funds as the Depression deepened.

The financial crisis occupied all the spare energy of the church for many months. First the church took over the work of the Financial Secretary at a saving of $260 per year. Then the cash collection called the communicants fund was given to the Trustees for use in the Church instead of being used for Benevolences as always before. Trouble became personal for the Vances when their son Bobby died after a sickness, on September 29. Bobby, who is still remembered by members of that era as a lovely twelve-year old with curly blond hair, died of leukemia in a very short time. Church finances had also dropped precariously. Contributions to church support had fallen to $10,915 from $15,000 two years earlier, and benevolences had dropped from $16,000 to $8,365. The Vances agreed to a 10% reduction in salary beginning November 1, 1932 to last until "the present emergency is met." A special emergency congregational meeting was held, as well, in November. The economic crunch hit the choir as well. The amount to be allocated for paid singers was frozen at $800, then the choir was not to be paid, then it was reported the male singers had all defected, and finally "pay was reinstated for Sundays they sing but not for other Sundays." But there was even less money the next year. $11,965 was given for the church, but benevolences dropped in half again to $4,368. Year by year the contributions for benevolences slipped until in 1936 they amounted to only $3026.

In 1935, amid the struggles, there were things of which to be proud. The pastor hastened to mention them.

> The Moderator reported that the National Boards report shows the Alton First Church to have led the Alton presbytery in the amount of funds received ($11,575) and in the amounts given to both mission and local causes ($3,268 in benevolences) during the previous fiscal year -- and that it had led in both total membership (901) and in membership increase (51).

Membership increased again in 1936. Believing in momentum, the goal of 1000 members by next year was set. That goal was met with 86 new members bringing the number of communicants to 1011. Even though a number of these new members were achieved by means of lowering the age of the communicants' class to be received, clearly, membership recruitment was Dr. Vance's great strength. A half century later one of his recruits remembered, "Once E. J. Vance got the bite on anyone he never let go except to get a better hold."

The spring of 1938 saw a remarkable movement take place in Alton. The churches were mobilized in support of the candidacy of Walter Wittman for sheriff of Madison County. The session of First Presbyterian Church took the absolutely unprecedented

step of authorizing "the church office to mail a letter to the membership written by the Alton Law Enforcement Committee endorsing Wittmans candidacy." The session was still in league with the Law Enforcement League when it voted on October 25 "to get the church vote to the polls November 8 and supply a committee to aid the pastor in working out such a plan."

The moral climate in those days was neatly summarized in a recent account.

> Gambling emporiums, houses of prostitution, prohibition era bootlegging, illegal bookie joints, and other shady diversions were more notable because of the brazenness with which public officials and law enforcement agencies collected payoffs. For many years the elected sheriff was also the recognized slot machine king of Madison County.[47]

An example (which has been suggested is likely apocryphal) of the sort of involvement that was not impossible to imagine coming out of the crusader zeal of Presbyterianism when it is kindled, is a story that shows both the strength, waning as it was, and the inherent problems of launching a church based crusade against evil in the latter 1930's.

> ...Mr. (Paul B.) Cousley had launched a Telegraph crusade against gambling at the instigation of a woman named Irene Kite. She had sought him out and offered to play the role of a latter-day Carrie Nation, the Kansas temperance reformer who had chopped up bars with an axe. Mrs. Kite had proposed to fare forth with her own axe against the slot machines that were illegally gulping workingmen's wages. Mr. Cousley had rallied church groups and unleashed Mrs. Kite, trailed by his reporters and photographers. Then it developed that Mrs. Kite was not a true spiritual descendant of Carrie Nation, but the angry wife of a local gambler who had been fired from his job. Her motive had been pure revenge, and the crusade had collapsed into low comedy.[48]

The entrance of the Presbyterian Church into the arena of social action was tentative. In 1939 the session showed its unhappiness with the intrusion of the New Deal into Presbyterian pockets by instructing the clerk "to write to the U.S. Senators and our representative in Congress and the President of the U.S. protesting the inclusion of the Presbyterian Church, USA in the Social Security Act. Later in the year, for the first time, the pastor included a statement on the church's role in society.

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[47]Thomas P. Littlewood, Coals of fire (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 34-35.

[48]Phelan, Scandals, Scamps and Scoundrels (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 44, in Littlewood, p. 36.

> Again officially let it be known in the attitude of the ministers, Session, and Board of Trustees, that this church stands for good government; for social righteousness, and for enforcement of law. That we register our opposition to the entrance of the United States into any foreign war which will entail the sending of expeditionary forces to europe or any other continent.

Once again in 1940 the church adopted a resolution against the foreign war. But after Pearl Harbor patriotism played a different tune, and the pastor wrote,

> I recommend that our church go on record as supporting the struggle of free men to retain their liberties; and that we declare the present conflict to be in behalf of the freedom of mankind. We are in this war because we were attacked. This position is entirely in line with the former position we maintained prior to Pearl Harbor. I recommend that we call on all our church members to be constant in prayer in behalf of victory for the forces of liberty, and for a speedy ending of the war.

The congregation made the pastor's statement a congregational resolution. It was the last resolution of its type, attempting to comment on a political theme. The social gospel which had swept through so many churches in the twenties and thirties never seriously tempted First Presbyterians.

On the other hand, the very meeting in which the congregation was invited to experiment with a social pronouncement for the first time[49] was also the occasion for passing another statement written by the pastor.

> Let us ... again reiterate officially that the mission of the church is spiritual, and its fundamental purpose is proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His way of life. To that end we pledge anew our allegiance to Christ as Saviour and Lord, and acceptance of the spiritual authority of the bible; the sanctity of the Lord's Day, the divine nature of the Church, and our assurance of eternal life, through Christ.

This was, in effect, a summary of the program of the Protestant Church for the advancement of Christian civilization which had motivated and focussed Presbyterians for a century. Its practical programs had developed into crusades for temperance, for Sabbath, for evangelization, for world missions, and into movements for Sunday Schools, and for unified witness.

The defeat of the League of Nations proposals and the repeal of Prohibition, it may be argued, destroyed the momentum for most of these movements. America entered a

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[49]The joint session-Trustee meeting of September 26, 1939.

cynical and isolationist period in which these and all Protestant values were challenged, often by the brightest and sharpest minds in the land. Bit by bit the Protestant mission was being redefined.

During the decade after the First World War the crusades began to dwindle. Prohibition had become the law of the land in America, and that should have heralded a sense of victory, but elsewhere the consensus was crumbling on the Christian Sabbath and on world evangelization.

> The great crusades for liberty abroad and Prohibition at home were over. The movies, the radio, the automobile, and organized sports provided better entertainment than the tabernacle. People ... were tired of world-saving, civic cleanups, and personal salvation, and they were tired of professional evangelism.[50]

Prohibition was then repealed by a cynical public who had given up on governmental controls over morality (for the time being) and the Church uttered barely a whimper. Sabbath blue laws were eroded by the same climate as well as by increasingly widespread transportation. Missionary work overseas was drastically cut during the depression and all but ceased to exist during the Second World War. The effects, felt ten years earlier in east coast metropolitan centers, began to reach Alton in the last couple of years of the 1930's.

In First Presbyterian Church the end of the era came surreptitiously in a resolution passed on March 26.

> The Session of First Presbyterian Church, herein, resolves that the pulpit of our church shall not be open to any announcement which contain an appeal for financial help on behalf of any cause or institution except those related to our church organization and our denominational benevolences. These appeals are not to be made at the hour of service and representatives of these causes are not to be given time for such presentation at any regular service.

What this meant was that for some time the church had been moving out of the era of crusades, and therefore out of the era of the great Protestant vision, of which crusades were the strategic part. When the congregation once again moved out beyond its own denominational programs and concerns it would be into a totally new environment (in the 1960's) which had given up the Triumphant Vision of "the World for Christ in this Generation." By then it would be apparent that not even all of Alton would be totally for Christ within living history.

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[50]William G. McLoughlin, Billy Sunday Was His Real Name, (Chicago, 1955), p. 260.

Because, in retrospect, 1939 was a critical year in which the perception of the church's purpose began to change, it may be useful to summarize the nature of the church as reported in the annual meeting.

The Sunday School reported 35 officers and teachers, including 15 on the Cradle Roll, 26 in the Beginners department, 44 in the Primary, 46 in the Junior, 80 in the Intermediate, 11 young people, and 84 in the Adult class. This was a loss of 21 over a year earlier.

The Fidelis Class had 28 members in 1939. Its president was Mr. Wm. Wankel, vice president Mrs. E. W. Meisenheimer, secretary Mrs. Wm. Schulte and treasurer Mrs. L. J. Misegades.

The Friendship Class had an average attendance of 15 on Sunday mornings, of 24 on the rolls. The purpose of the group was said to be "to brighten the days for the sick and those less fortunate." Miss Florence Whipple was the teacher, and Mrs. Emma Bart was the assistant teacher.

The Janet Watson Auxiliary had a constant membership of 70 over several decades. They reported that they had assisted with contributions to the budget of the church and to the choir loft fund, provided a nursery for small children during church, provided robes and collars for the senior choir, and furnished decorations at Easter and Christmas. The president was Mrs. W. Bensinger, vice president Mrs. W. C. Thayler, secretary Mrs. J. E. McBurney, treasurer Mrs. Ross Sherwood.

The Women's Missionary Society, founded a hundred years before, had 81 members in 1939, and stated of itself, "as always, it has made in full its missionary apportionment" [that is its goal toward the mission giving of the church]. In addition to fund-raising for mission, the group had many activities. They listed a Bible Study class, subscription to Daily Devotional Books, sending $25 and a box at Christmas to Mary Holmes Seminary, and scholarships to the Tucson Indian Training School. Their membership was a who's who of the church in those days. President Mrs. Emma Burt, vice president Mrs. L. M. Carr, recording secretary Mrs. Edith Dempsey, corresponding secretary Mrs. Gilson Brown, treasurer Mrs. John Duncan, secretary for literature Miss Esther Duncan, secretary for missionary education Mrs. E. Butler, secretary for membership Mrs. Roy Brown, stewardship secretary Miss Theodosia Watkins, secretary of spiritual Life Groups Mrs. F. Vedder, secretary for overseas hospital sewing Mrs. W. Crawford, chair of the nominating committee Mrs. M. Pfeiffenberger, chair of the program committee Mrs. H. F. Otstot, contingent treasurer Mrs. J. W. Cassella.

Competing with the missionary society was the Ladies Aid Society with 61 members. The society had seven all day meetings to sew for Memorial Hospital, the Needleworkers Guild projects, and for Kemmerer Orphanage. They made 22 dresses, two dozen sheets, ten dozen towels, etc. They prepared twelve "well-filled baskets" which were sent to needy families, they purchased a robe for the minister, and served dinner to 100 ministers and elders at the October meeting of Presbytery. Their president was Mrs. W. C. Anderson, vice president Mrs. E. G. Yungck, secretary Mrs. J. T. Bramlette, treasurer Mrs. Gertrude Gervig, assistant treasurer Mrs. William Seymour.

The Friendoliers Society "represents the social side of our church life. It has no definite membership. The purpose is to get people better acquainted, to encourage people to attend church, and promote efforts to secure new members for the church." The president was Mr. W. C. Thayer, vice president Mr. Marvin Ihne, secretary Mr. Ernest Deason.

The Young Peoples Society used articles from religious magazines which they told the session constituted very interesting programs. The pastor commented, "We are encouraged with the work of this group more than at any time in our ministry." The president was Stanley Koenig, vice president James Hull, secretary-treasurer Wilbur Maxeiner.

In 1939 Modern Tabithas was a "new group." They had various programs, sent 2 boys to Boy Scout Camp, made drapes for two rooms in the Parish House, and had other activities. The president was Mary Pfeiffenberger, vice president Eleanor Gildersleeve, secretary Mrs. V. E. Yust, and treasurer Lois Young.

Boy Scout Troop #5 had 18 boys, of whom 5 went to camp in 1939. Mr. Kenneth Brown was scoutmaster, Mr. Paul S. Cousley, Mr. Paul Harter and Mr. Elmer Mitchell were troop committeemen.

Junior Church had an enrollment of 35 with an average attendance of 20. Its purpose was to teach habits and practices of worship in a church-service setting, to children. Mrs. E. F. Butler "is the efficient leader" as she was for several years.

The Bible Class was taught by Mr. Gilson Brown, with an enrollment of 15 and average attendance of 8.

The Senior Choir had 28 regular members. Mr. H. R. Barton was director and Mr. Newton Boggess was organist.

The Junior Choir was directed by Mrs. Barton with Mrs. Paul S.Cousley as accompanist. 22 children were reported to sing in this choir.

By the end of the war two things had changed in the sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church. An American flag was authorized to be displayed in the sanctuary, on September 16, 1942 along with the pastor's suggestion of a Christian Flag. And, by April 11, 1945 the Service Honor Roll had the names of 120 members inscribed on it. But Dr. Vance saw much greater changes outside the sanctuary, in the form of a renewal of religious activity. He could not resist one final "dig."

> "Our church shows," he wrote, "the stimulation which the cessation of war has brought to religious activities as well as to other lines of activity. I have always contended that the idea that war stimulates religion is utterly false. The report of this year adds additional proof in our church."[51]

As the 1940's rolled over into the 1950's the pressure increased to get something going to meet the challenges of the church in the education of children. Something immense and potentially overwhelming was beginning to reverse the dispirited and cynical attitude of Americans toward religion. The question must be asked, if the crusades for a Christian Civilization which had been the agenda for more than a century were now out of favor, what replaced them? Why did Protestantism and all religion in America mushroom rather than decay in the 1950's?

While the impact of war on religious feelings was varied and complex, many at home and abroad turned to religion in a search for meaning and stability and in an effort to deal with anxieties that the threats, realities, and dislocations of war inevitably brought. For many, interest in religion was part of the quest for a good and abundant life, and for help in setting a life's course and raising children in a confusing, fast moving, exciting time of conflicting values.[52] Other historians agree that the explosion of religious participation in the 1950's was part of the aftermath of war, and of the nuclear threat -- exacerbated and heightened by the cold war, the Korean war and by anti-communist hysteria of the times.

> The developing nostalgia was for the recovery of the quieter time and ties of family, home, and church. Back to normalcy meant the reunion of loved ones and the establishment of new family formations or the reestablishment of old ones. These were the years of the baby boom and the housing explosion in the suburbs. Seldom had the joys of home and family been more cherished and celebrated. These joys were given added importance by an undercurrent of anxiety. The depression of the 1930's had been a sobering experience, but among the more thoughtful the "immense and indomitable optimism" of the American people was

[51]In the Session Minutes for April 11, 1946.

[52]Handy, p. 187.

> given a heavier blow when the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 demonstrated the potential destructiveness of the unleashed powers of the atom. The uneasy peace of the "cold war" that followed, with its recurring crises and continuing conflicts, heightened the sense of anxiety and insecurity.[53]

The boom and bust of the 50's and 60's has to be seen in the context of a whole social consciousness, rather than in terms of individual personalities of pastors or congregations. It is only fair to observe that the attendance, building, and participation trends in the First Presbyterian Church mirrored those of countless other churches across the land. Everywhere there was a "thunderous religious revival" among churches like the Presbyterian church of Alton. But there was a weakness inherent in the boom.

> The fifties were the triumphant decade for the definition of church membership as going to church rather than being the church, with the individualistic notion of the church as one's private chapel so rampant that gambits had to be devised to thaw the cold wars going on inside the sanctuaries themselves -- guest registration pads passed down the pews, "rituals of friendship" during worship, and their more stylish updating in the 1960's as "the kiss of peace."[54]

The pressure that undermined the revival of the 1950's was not just a shallowness of understanding of what the church is, although that was immensely important. Behind it all was the facts that, "...Denominational identities were eroded by the forces of public religion, bureaucratization, and modernism's devaluation of tradition. Allegiances were becoming less to denominations than to movements and causes within denominations."[55]

In Alton, too, there was an increase in building houses, in remodeling churches and building new ones, and great increases beginning in participation in religious activities, just as soon as the World War was over. The increase of religious activity led to an increase in activity to add staff to the church. On October 4, 1945 a committee was formed to make investigations in regard to obtaining a director of education. The search continued in 1946. One candidate was interviewed by the pastor, but nothing came of it. Still at the annual board dinner the pastor insisted the search should continue.

[53]Hudson, pp. 351-352.

[54]Leonard I. Sweet, "The Modernization of Protestant Religion in America" in David W. Lotz, Altered landscapes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 24.

[55]Ibid.

> The Church School was discussed, and the question of an adequate teaching force and the control of certain age groups, came in for consideration. The Church School is meeting the same problems which church schools are having throughout America (presumably, overcrowding). We feel that securing a director of religious education will be a great help in beginning a solution for our Sunday School problem, but of course will in no sense solve it.

A year later the committee was authorized, or commanded, to continue its search. Still another year after that another candidate was available to be interviewed. But the negotiations did not go well. So the annual Board Meeting heard, "Neither have we forgotten the securing of a Director of Religious Education. While this has seemed impossible to date, we recognize that such a contact may turn up at any time." Years passed without action on the proposal. Eventually, in 1955 a new approach was tried. It was suggested that "the Session change the name of the already authorized position of Director of Religious Education to Pastor's Assistant and Director of Music and Religious Education." The pastor sent letters to seminaries but secured no candidates. During the first half of 1956 Dr. Vance was ill. He was hardly back in action by Winter. But during his absence the committee went to work and reported on March 20 that they had interviewed "Robert (sic) Wagner of Farmington, Illinois, who is 27 years old, a high school music teacher. His duties include full charge of all choirs, full charge of Christian Education and youth program, and assist the pastor in making calls." Richard (the clerk of session learned his name accurately after that) agreed to this set of duties at a salary of $4600 a year with $400 travel expenses, two weeks vacation and 1 day a week off.

Meanwhile, at the February 22, 1949 meeting of the session the moderator was asked to bring a recommendation to the session regarding forming a Board of Deacons. It is interesting that at the same meeting the session defeated a proposal to participate in the historic first One Great Hour of Sharing to help in overwhelming needs following the war. The minutes explain that it was "decided to adhere to the budget plan and not conduct a special campaign for benevolences." This One Great Hour of Sharing appeal annually became a project of the Deacons after that. A congregational meeting on March 20, 1949 elected the first Board of Deacons. Those elected were all men. They were Leonard Bethards, Richard A. Cousley, Donald Chaflin, Clyde W. Schmoeller, Roy Kortkamp, J. J. Middleton, James Seago, James Stooker, Jr., Ross Armbruster, Russell Dale, Benton Richards and Edward Yust.

It is likely that some of the church's attention was diverted from searching for a new staff member because of the amount of enthusiasm being generated for a building program. At last, after a delay of a quarter of a century the matter was back on the front burner.

Throughout the War and during the years immediately following, a fund was being collected for "The Restoration," for rebuilding church buildings and institutions and starting up work again that had been devastated by the war. On January 20, 1949 the

goal of First Presbyterian Church to the Restoration Fund was finally paid in full. The session minutes boast, "The assignment of $13,118 was the largest by over a thousand dollars given to any church in this Presbytery."

Immediately, at the same annual meeting the pastor announced his new challenge.

> At an early date I am going to challenge the church with a new building program, concerning which we spoke at our last meeting. The Restoration Fund is now out of the way. In a short time the church will be prepared to begin financial planning with considerable reserve on hand. We feel that the progress of the Church has reached such a point that definite expansion will be welcomed by its rank and file.

As a matter of fact, the first recorded suggestion of a building addition appeared in the session meeting of October 20, 1947, where "The minister then presented the question of establishing a fund looking toward the remodeling of the church in two respects, one is the enlarging of our education plant; the other is the turning of the sanctuary into a Gothic style auditorium, in accordance with the original plan." A committee was appointed to establish such a fund and to promote contributions. Although it was urged that the campaign be pushed aggressively -- a year after the pastor's challenge -- the committee, headed by Elder Horace Dale, was frustrated by countless delays. The committee had been authorized in October 1951 to develop plans, these were changed in December 1952, and reviewed in April 1953. This prompted Elder Dale to show his frustration.

> Elder Dale expressed his opinion that it would be almost impossible to get a final decision from his 18 member committee.

It was suggested by moderator Vance that maybe an executive committee of 5 from the building committee be appointed to handle future discussions. They did not get moving. So in October, "it was Mr. Horace Dale's recommendation that we decide now to either go ahead with this program or drop it entirely. Mr. Ben Vine then advised that this group recommended to the Joint Boards that the proposed educational building program be carried forward and that a committee be named to raise the necessary funds to cover the estimated cost of $140,000."

By January Mr. Dale had drawings and architect's cost estimates, but then controversy arose over the suggested goal. The session minutes indicate how difficult the meeting on January 12 must have been.

> Several tentative motions were made by various members of the congregation and much discussion followed. Finally all the motions on the building addition were withdrawn and Mr. Dale moved as follows: "that the congregation approve the building program and authorize all three boards of the church to organize a fund raising campaign to finance it."



The twenty-fifth anniversary of Dr. Edgar Vance's ministry in Alton, in 1954.

The Vances with the Pulpit Committee which brought them to Alton in 1929. (From the left: Gilson Brown, Edgar Vance, Adelaide Vance, George A. McKinney, and Paul B. Cousley.

Despite this apparently definite action, which had been supported by a unanimous vote of the congregational meeting, not one thing was done throughout the spring and summer of 1954. In fall there was still argument over the campaign goal. But at the annual meeting of the congregation on January 19, 1955 Mr. William Osborn was elected Building Funds Treasurer and fund raising began. In October the combined boards heard that construction bids totalled $145,750 and it was estimated that construction would be completed in 180 days. Pledges to the building had been received in the amount of $111,183, which left an amount to be borrowed. The Finance committee was expected to need to borrow $75,000, but that was reduced to $50,000 by September and then the building treasurer estimated the need would only be $39,000.

Almost all this progress had taken place while Dr. Vance was incapacitated. At the annual meeting at the end of that year, actually on January 18, 1957, the Education Building was completed and occupied and the new Director of Christian Education and Music, Mr. C. Richard Wagner, was hired.

On January 21, 1958 the congregation heard a report on the 125th year of First Presbyterian Church.

> The congregation had 1239 members, with 449 in Sunday School. Current receipts were $43,299, $21,434 in special receipts, and $10,364 in benevolences.
>
> Director of Education was C. Richard Wagner
> Superintendent, Mr. John Hammet
> Asst. Superintendent, Mr. Earl Linkogle, Jr.
> Supt. of Nursery, Mrs. Vernon Korum (enrollment 28)
> Supt. of Kindergarten, Mrs. E. T. Gallagher (enrol. 40)
> Supt. of Primary, Mrs. Joe Ravenstein (enrol. 60)
> Supt. of Junior, Mrs. Walter Raymond (enrol. 63)
> Supt. of Jr. High, Mrs. R. A. Gerhold (enrol. 62)
> Supt. of Sr. High, Mr. Paul S. Cousley (enrol. 30)
> Supt. of Adult, Mr. Wm. P. Olson (enrol. 70)
> Cradle Roll, Mrs. Karl Deterding
> Secretary, Mr. Henry Owens
> Asst. Secretary, Mr. Edward Boesewetter
> Treasurer, Mr. Herbert Etter
> Visual Education, Mr. James Casper

The total enrollment in five choirs was reported to be 110. Westminster Fellowship program for junior high and for senior high age young people was reported. 81 children were enrolled in Daily Vacation Church School June 10-21. The Prescotts "were organized a year ago" and reported 75 members, of whom 30 regularly attended the dinner programs and social hour on each first Saturday of the month. The

Council of Presbyterian Men won the trophy for superior sportsmanship, and also the team championship with their church softball team. 18 children attended Junior Church. There were 12-14 in the Nursery each week.

Modern Tabithas Society had 52 members. Their annual Turkey Dinner was praised. They raised and disbursed $821, including $126.50 given to the church budget, and other amounts to Kemmerer, the Dora Ashley Fellowship Center, and to certain needy families.

The Janet Watson Auxiliary continued to have 86 members. They contributed $350 to the church budget, $50 to Kemmerer, $22 to the Dora Ashley Mission, $15 to the nursery, $22.50 toward Christmas decorations, $100 for the choirs, and $650 for furniture and draperies for the Recreation Room.

The Ladies Aid Society including the Sewing Group met each Tuesday at 9:30 to make quilts, cancer pads and other sewing. The average attendance was 25 women. During the year they contributed $230 to the church budget, $272 toward furnishings for the Recreation Room, $63 for curtains for the church, $50 for Kemmerer, $25 to the Dora Ashley Memorial Center, and $12.50 for the Mary Bryant Home for the blind...

The Hannah Wade Duncan Missionary Society reported they had programs which "portrayed missionary work in this country and in lands beyond the seas." They also participated in World Day of Prayer, May Fellowship Day and World Community Day, all special events with other missionary societies of churches in Alton. Speakers during the year included the Moderator of Synod, a missionary to Iran, Catherine Alexander, and the National President. The society contributed funds to Mitchell Church, Kemmerer, to Philadelphia Hospital in Ambala, India, to World Literacy, to the McKinley Foundation and to the Dora Ashley Mission.

Apparently, although the year was busy, the church was active as ever, there were few innovations over a decade earlier. The end of the war and the boom of the fifties permitted the church to resume, and do what it had always done, but with more people participating, although not more people in membership. Membership had remained constant.

The matter of Dr. Vance's retirement then began to consume the attention of the session. The issue was first mentioned in a rather curious way.

> ...Elder Humphrey, in analyzing the proposed salary schedule for 1959, advised that based on the salary for Dr. Vance of $9000 per year plus an $800 car expense, he would retire from the pastorate of our Church as of December 31, 1960, and added that Dr. Vance should then be made Pastor Emeritus. He further suggested a nominal salary of $100 per month and strongly recommended that this be included in any agreement, but added that final action could not be taken on the matter of a retirement salary until the fall of 1960, at which time this would be cleared by the then existing Boards. This matter was thoroughly discussed and mutually agreed upon but not actually voted on as a formal action.[56]

The consensus of the matter was then written up by Dr. Vance and sent to the clerk of the session. Consequently a combined board meeting was held on November 2, 1958 to read the letter and seek action to confirm the agreement in writing. The motion was defeated. A motion was then passed which read, "that the minutes of the annual combined boards meeting on October 22 be corrected as follows: ... The time limit on a suggested salary recommendation for Dr. Vance as Pastor Emeritus be limited to a period not to exceed five years from date of retirement."[57] At the same meeting it was moved to reconsider Dr. Vance's salary for 1959 in the proposed budget. It was moved that an $800 salary increase for Dr. Vance for 1959 be included in the proposed budget subject to his retirement on December 31, 1960. The agreement was put in writing and presented to the session on January 14, 1960. The three points of the agreement were:

1. The minister will retire from the pastorate of the Church on December 31, 1960.
2. The salary for 1960 shall be $9000, plus $800 car expense.
3. The minister upon retirement, shall become Pastor Emeritus with a salary of $100 per month for a period of five years with a strong recommendation and hope that the congregation will renew it at that time.[58]

The pastor felt the need to insist that all three parts of the agreement must be acted on, wholeheartedly.

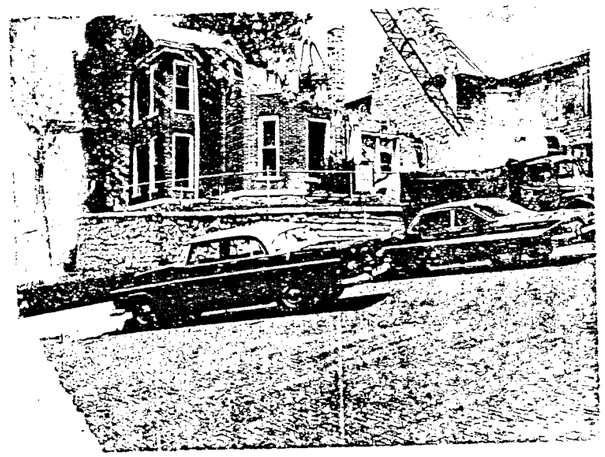
The mechanics of the retirement ran more smoothly than the period leading up to it. The congregation unanimously endorsed the session's proposal, on January 17 at the Annual Congregational Meeting. So at a Special Congregational meeting called by the session the formal retirement motion was proposed to be sent to the presbytery. A pulpit committee was elected a month later with James B. Adams, chairman.

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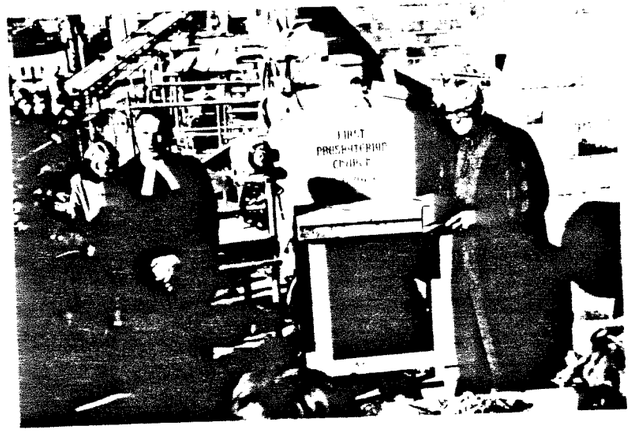
[56]Minutes of the annual meeting of the combined boards, in the session record for October 22, 1958.

[57]Session minutes of November 2, 1958.

[58]The matter never again appeared in the session records, and apparently was not brought up upon the approach of the end of 1965.



The manse on Fourth Street, which had been converted into a parish house for offices, was torn down in 1963 to make way for the new chapel.



Dr. Cortley H. Burroughs and Dr. A. Ralph Lynn presided over the cornerstone-laying marking the beginning of construction of the chapel and office wing of the church and the renovation of the sanctuary.