

First United Methodist Church

175th Anniversary

March

In 1899, the annual report for the Methodist Episcopal Church stated that there were 540 members, 107 probationers for a total of 647 church people. The decision in 1896 to build an addition to the church was indeed a wise one, for the church and church school continued to grow. By the 1920's, the church had reached a membership of just over 700. By 1921, the Sunday school had an attendance of over 500 on several Sundays and an average attendance for the year of 392.

The Decatur Methodist Episcopal Church continued to grow and prosper over the ensuing years, becoming an important part of the Christian community.

In 1949, while investigating the possibility of remodeling the church, it was discovered that the foundation in some places was not good and the walls showed signs of weakness. The church decided it would be unwise to invest money in the remodeling project and instead developed a building fund. Over the next 3 years, the church busied itself with activities to raise money for a new church.

The executive committee of the Building Council in 1951 took the next step in a forward-looking plan. A Plans and Construction committee was appointed and an architectural firm was hired to develop plans and estimate costs. Given a choice between many architectural styles, the committee selected Colonial Style architecture as the most beautiful and impressive, although it was the most expensive style to build. By the end of 1951, they had accumulated \$35,000 in the building fund. The building plan established was as follows:

1954---Chapel built at a cost of \$97,000; all expenses paid in full

1956---new parsonage built in Stratton Addition, 612 Limberlost Trail, at a cost of \$31,000. This included the cost of the lot, the parsonage and the tearing down of the old parsonage next to the church. All expenses paid in full

1958---Church purchased the adjoining Amos Yoder property, which lay between the church property and the alley to the north and extended from Fifth Street to Sixth Street. Purchase price was \$14,022, which was paid in full.

Now the church began to look with eager anticipation toward building the new sanctuary. But some important questions had to be answered first. How much money should there be on hand before beginning construction? What should be the seating capacity of the new building? Should the choir loft be in the front of the sanctuary or in a balcony in the rear? But the biggest question was what will be the situation if the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church united nationally as was being discussed?

Both denominations in Decatur were planning new Sanctuaries and if they eventually united to form one congregation the need would arise for a much larger building than would be needed by either of the two congregations worshiping separately. After many meetings, the membership of the congregations voted. The vote was a simple yes or no, for or against unification. Of the three congregations (The Evangelical United Brethren were still meeting as two congregations) two voted in favor, one voted against. So the idea of union in Decatur was dropped. One big question was answered; the Methodist were to build a building to meet the needs of their own congregation and its possible future growth.

On October 11, 1964 a formal ground breaking was held after the morning worship service. On February 13, 1966 consecration services were held in the new sanctuary, built at a cost of over \$400,000. \$128,700 was given as a gift from the H. H. Stoner Estate and \$270,000 was taken out in bank loans to pay for the structure. The final step in the extended building program was the building of the Neva Ross Memorial Multi-purpose Unit dedicated on October 31, 1971, at a cost of \$155,790. Of that amount, the Neva Ross estate gifted to the church \$104,000.