

HIGHLIGHTS OF HISTORY

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS
A UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CHURCH

FOUNDED DECEMBER 15, 1833

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN
"THE WEST" TO BE FOUNDED IN THE SAME
TOWN AS A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
THUS CAUSING AN

"ECCLESIASTICAL REVOLUTION"

1833

The Independent Church was organized by lay people, with 32 charter members (22 transferring from First Presbyterian). Prof. Julian Sturtevant of Illinois College presided. The name "Congregational" was soon adopted, to indicate fellowship with other churches.

1835

A church building was erected on the east side of the Public Square. Site of first Illinois College graduation, 1835. The Jacksonville Academy (for boys) met on the ground floor (1837). The largest building in town, it was used by I.C. literary societies for lectures to raise funds.

1830s, 1840s

Members were strongly opposed to slavery, and some were active in the underground railroad. The church was dubbed the "Abolition Church"---a term not intended as a compliment. (I.C. was called the "Abolition College.) Three black women were admitted as members.

1859

The present church building was erected (\$19,464). The old building was sold for \$10,125. At the north end a lecture room was built on the ground floor; above it were the pastor's study and Sunday School rooms. Modern heating and gas lights (newly available) were installed.

1863

Sometimes over 100 attended the prayer meetings to support the Union cause on National Fast Day and in late afternoon. A small booklet with patriotic and religious songs, in the Church's archives, may have been used.

A day for public thanksgiving was set for August 6.

1864

Music was important from the early years, a chorister having been appointed in 1837. The first organ was obtained in 1864 (\$1700). Among the organists in later years were Miss Alice Rhoads (her portrait is in the Joy Prairie Parlor) and Miss Elizabeth Sturtevant.

1866

The ladies of the Church raised money to purchase a communion table and pulpit chairs. These furnishings are shown in a photograph showing the Church decorated for the 50th anniversary observance in 1883. The ladies' plans included a sofa, possibly one still in the Church.

1883

The 50th anniversary observance was held on December 15, 16. Sturtevant gave an address about the Church's history and the "ecclesiastical revolution" resulting from its founding. From 1833 to 1883, eight hundred men and women were on the roll of members.

1885

From early years the annual meeting was held on or near December 15 every year. In 1885, to encourage attendance, a supper was prepared by the ladies and served in the lecture room. (Was this the origin of our reputation as "the eatingest church in town"?)

1885

The Church's library was established by Miss Alice Rhoads; later she added additional funds.

1892

Ladies of the Church began making and selling mince meat to raise money. This continued until 1978.

1897

On August 10 a lecture, sponsored by the "Colored Baptist Church," was delivered by Booker T. Washington in our Church. In subsequent years the Church was made available for various religious and community groups for public meetings.

1903

The Men's Brotherhood was organized, for men of the Church and the community. Its basic purpose was religious, but programs of general interest were also provided. The meals were prepared at first by the ladies, then by the men themselves. (Disbanded about 1960.)

1909

The Church sponsored missionaries, beginning with Rev. Foss in Africa. Leonard Christian completed 25 years in Foochow, China, in 1934; he and his wife visited here in 1916. Lavinia Scott, a former member, went to South Africa as an educator in 1930.

1920

Pilgrim Memorial Building was erected; dedicated December 12-15. The parlor was named for the Joy Prairie Church, which merged with our Church (in 1918?). The dining room was first used for the 1920 annual meet-ing. Many community youth groups met in various rooms.

1927

Dedication of chimes donated by Samuel W. Nichols in honor of his mother, Ann, a member from 1864 until she died in 1871. Mr. Nichols was a member for 63

years and was very active in the Church and community. The chimes replaced the bell installed 45 years earlier.

1933 (mid-December)

100 years celebrated with a historical play and addresses by leaders of Illinois College, Chicago Theological Seminary, and Yale's Dean Weigle. Other participants: Pres. McClelland of MacMurray and representatives of other churches. (Homecoming Dinner—75 cents.)

1937

A church committee to study social problems was approved to express Christian ideals in the community. The church itself, as well as the nation, had suffered during the depression years. The church has been actively involved in social issues throughout its history.

1937

A new ceiling was installed in the sanctuary.

Rev. W. Harris Pankhurst, a native of England, began his ministry of 20 years. Noted for his sermons and book reviews, he had the Church elect laymen as moderator, in place of the minister. He also reorganized the council.

1938

The Pilgrim Society was formed, with four guilds: Isabella Beecher, Frances Post, Hannah Sturtevant, Marian Tanner; these replaced the Ladies' Aid and Ladies' Sewing Society. The women have served as committee members, Sunday School teachers, and fund raisers.

1940s

The parsonage was razed in 1943. Ministers then lived in rentals until a house was purchased in 1962.

A Thrift Shop (1949-1972) sold good used clothing on a commission basis, raising funds for the church and sending large quantities of clothing to the needy.

1955

A new organ—the Church's second—was purchased to replace the one which had served for 90 years! Special fund raising events and donations provided the means. The dedication recital featured Robert Glasgow, organist at MacMurray College.

1958

The Church celebrated its 125th anniversary, with a dinner and program at Illinois College; Dr. Ernest G. Hildner, an active lay leader, gave the historical address. Dean Liston Pope of Yale Divinity School was the preacher at the Sunday service.

1961

At the annual meeting in January, the Church voted to join the United Church of Christ which, preserving congregational independence, joined (in 1957) the Congregational Christian Churches (English background) and the Evangelical and Reformed Church (German).

1964

In the midst of the national struggle for racial justice, the congregation voted to affirm its welcome to people of all races. Although the church was open to all, from its early years, it was appropriate to confirm that policy, especially because now the membership was all white.

1972-1973

With the leadership of Rev. John Shaffer the building was improved both outside and inside. The chancel was divided, making it possible to place the communion table in the center. New white pews and red carpet were installed, and new lighting was placed in various rooms.

1981

Innovations during the pastorate of Rev. Robert Cassels included the purchase of two octaves of handbells and the subsequent formation of a handbell choir. The following year a third octave was added. Contemporary prayers and litanies were adopted.

1983—150 years!

The 150th celebration was led by Moderator Jack Mathews and co-chairpersons Mr. and Mrs. William L. Fay. Dean Leander Keck maintained the tradition of having the Dean of Yale Divinity School as preacher. A "Brief History" was published and distributed at the dinner.

1984-1985, 1986-1987

Mrs. Katharine Black was the first woman to serve as moderator (1984-1985). She was succeeded by Mrs. Doris Hopper (1986-1987). (Since 1948 the moderator has been a layperson, elected for a two-year term.) Now women serve on all committees, often as the chairperson.

1987

A new women's group, the Saturday Guild, was organized by the women who are not free during the week. The group undertakes major projects in the Church, sponsors special activities for all, and raises funds for special purposes in the larger community.

1988

The Pilgrim Society observed its 50th anniversary. Through the years the women have raised substantial sums for the Church; for example, in 1964 a total

1995

In 1985 the United Church of Christ had declared itself a Just-Peace Church. Our own congregation examined the meaning of Just-Peace theology and commitments so that in 1995 we declared our church a Just-Peace Church.

1998

After two years of study, the Church voted to become an Open and Affirming Church welcoming all persons to its fellowship regardless of sexual orientation.

2003

In December 2003 the Church celebrated its 170th anniversary by planting a peace pole in front of the church in memory of Pastor Glen Hathaway. Inscribed on the pole in eight different languages and in Braille are the words "May Peace Prevail on Earth".

2004

The Congregational Church, United Church of Christ continues to examine It's Mission and to live up to the tradition described by Julian Sturtevant In his Autobiography: "In it the Negro...was recognized and treated as a brother. From its very organization it was known as the 'Abolition Church' and those not willing to extend Christian fellowship to all God's children, whether white or black, rich or poor, would not seek membership there. It has always stood forth in bold relief as the representative of freedom, intellectual, personal and ecclesiastical."