

BRIEF HISTORY OF PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF DULUTH

Presented by John Dickerson, Historian
at the
Annual Meeting marking the 90th Anniversary of the Church
January 18, 1961

Histories can be recitations of facts - dates, places, names. They can also be, to some extent at least, glimpses into the lives and personalities of those persons who help write the history. Most of us prefer the latter type, though we cannot of course ignore the accomplishments achieved by our forebears.

With this point of view in mind, this report on the illustrious history of Pilgrim Church will begin with the reading to you, word for word, of the letter written by Mr. L. H. Tenney extending the call to Reverend Charles C. Salter to be Pilgrim Church's first minister. The letter, written November 28, 1870, was on a letterhead of "L. H. Tenney & Co., Northwestern Land Agency" - with the company references listed as "Jay Cooke & Co." - now there's a name famous in the history of our country - and "S. M. Moore, Chicago, Illinois." The specialty of Mr. Tenney's firm, and here is an insight into the Duluth of 90 years ago, just 14 years after the founding of our city, is given as: "Government Lands and Outside Property." The letter reads:

"Our Dear Friend:

At a preliminary meeting of the Congregational friends this evening to consider and decide the question of organizing a Church here, a resolution was passed authorizing me to write to you, that unanimously as a band we unite on you as our choice for Pastor, and that as soon as we have properly organized we will extend to you a formal call for one year - pledging as salary \$500, in addition to any amount the Congregational Society may give. I think you should have \$1500, or at least, that the amount is small enough during the first year, as living will probably continue a little higher than in older towns. I think the Society will promise \$1,000 with the understanding that we will refund a part of it if we prove able to, during the year. Between 15 and 20 were present at the meeting - 2 ladies. The spirit prevailing was excellent. The only hesitation seemed to be from fear on injuring the Presbyterian Church. We appointed a committee to arrange Constitution, Confession of Faith and Covenant, and another committee of arrangements for calling a Council and organizing. Both are to report next Monday evening. Mr. Mitchell of the Duluth Tribune was present and said a word in your favor.

Now I do trust Mr. Salter, that the way will seem clear to you to come to us. Some of the Presbyterians feel that the movement is a wicked one and feel bad. I regret the spirit on the part of a few very much. I doubt about the movement being successful, at any rate healthy, unless you come. We shall await your response with anxiety.

Yours truly,

L. H. Tenney."

One comment that could be made is, Mr. Salter must have deserved the esteem that is still held for him - many men would not be able to bear the thought that the Presbyterians might think our "movement is a wicked one." Be that as it may, the letter is a moving one in its way, particularly when you consider that it evidences the beginning of an organization that still plays such a vital role in our community.

Mr. Salter did accept the call, and on January 18, 1871, exactly 90 years ago tonight, the church was formally organized with sixteen charter members being received - nine men, seven women - fifteen by letters from other churches, one by faith. Many names in that group still ring loudly and clearly in Duluth - Munger, Salter, Spencer, Woodbridge.

Mr. Salter remains to today one of the most beloved figures in our church's history. The fiftieth anniversary history report speaks of him: "His devoted services in the church; his wide sympathies and constructive humanitarian labors made him known and beloved by the entire community..... A brother and friend...a man whose whole life and character were a blessing and whose sympathies embraced every individual." Not only our church, but the Lake Avenue Bethel stands as a monument to his memory. As you leave our meeting tonight, go into Salter Hall and look at the portrait of Mr. Salter - you will see there why this man was so successful in moulding a church of dignity and character in what was really the raw wilderness.

The first church building, of frame construction, located on the northeast corner of Second Street and First Avenue East, was dedicated July 16, 1871, which was only 106 days after the plans for the new building were chosen and the building committee, chairmaned by Roger S. Munger, was appointed. (Today it would probably take us 106 days to get clearance from the Building Inspector, let alone build the structure.) Cost of the building and the site was \$5,500. Ah, the good old days! That church served the congregation for almost eighteen years, until the second church was built, one block west at the southwest corner of Lake Avenue and Second Street. A contribution to the first church was a 1200 pound bell given by Mr. Salter's brother-in-law, Dr. Charles Ives of Connecticut; this bell also served our school system, for the minutes of the annual meeting in January, 1878, read in part: "That we give the Board of Education the privilege of ringing our bell once each week day until July 1, 1878, provided the Board of Education make all needed repairs incidental to the ringing of the bell and provided that only the janitor of the High School building be permitted to do such ringing."

The second five years of the church were difficult and trying times. Mr. Salter had left the church in 1876, though he did come back for a few months in 1881; Duluth's population fell from 5,000 to 2,500. This was all as a result of the panic of 1873. Duluth and the church suffered. During those years we even shared our Pastor with a Brainerd church. At one time there was a meeting to discuss the disbanding of the young group, but the decision was "This church shall continue." In 1881, the church became self-sustaining again.

1882 saw the building of a parsonage, and 1883 saw the arrival of the youthful, energetic and enthusiastic Reverend Edward Noyes. It was under his dynamic leadership that the second church was built, despite the fact that the building was really built twice since a fire destroyed the structure before the first service was held there. This time the cost was over \$55,000, more than 10 times as much as for the first building.

But Mr. Noyes led his hardy band through the crisis of that fire and into the 1890's, a period of great growth; in 1890 itself, more members were received than in any other year in the first quarter-century. Some of this vitality can be seen in the 1892 Year Book and Directory. For instance, the Sunday School report shows an average attendance on Sunday as 318, with the average church attendance as 86. Unless some of the grown-ups were too busy building the thriving community and not attending church, those figures would seem to indicate that there were about seven children per family. In addition to Sunday school, the Pastor met with the children between 7 and 14 years of age for 10 successive weeks every Monday afternoon in the spring, in order to supplement their Sunday school instructions. The report

of the church treasurer is illuminating - total receipts for the year were \$7,375.71, including a \$8.50 balance on hand at the beginning of the year. After expenses, which included the Pastor's salary of \$2,200, music for the Church choir of \$1235.60 and interest charges of \$1295.88 (the second biggest item, much to the delight of the bankers) and benevolences of \$409.29, there was a balance of \$17.11, a grand total gain for the year of \$8.61. The church more than doubled its worth! The full story about the Benevolences of the year isn't told by the figure of \$409.29 given through the Treasurer; in addition, other gifts making for a total of \$4008.94 were given, a truly fine record, particularly when you consider the operating expenses were under \$7,400.

Some excerpts from the early minutes of the Ladies' Aid Society are equally illuminating:

- 1878: "It also appeared that the ladies had raised \$229.25 which had been largely used to pay off the church debt."
- 1882: "Church repaired and heated by furnace and resealed. Bills to be paid by the ladies' special efforts."
- 1885: "The Ladies' Aid Society were granted the privilege of supplying the parsonage with water pipes, etc."

Mr. Noyes served the church for 11 years, until 1894; they were years of substantial growth, years of building traditions, years of stimulation, consolidation, and spiritual strength. In 1894, Reverend Cornelius Patton was called. Under his leadership the church became most interested in missionary work. Mr. Patton later became Secretary of the American Board, a position of high distinction and importance, and while holding that position, his influence played a large part in establishing Reverend Herbert M. Irvin as our church's first missionary pastor, a work that was later to be so successfully conducted by our beloved Ray Phillips.

In 1899, another giant appeared - the Reverend Alexander Milne. He stayed with us 12 years, until 1911, the longest period of service by any minister in our history. To quote an earlier history report, Mr. Milne was "a man of exceptional attainments, a profound student and a forceful speaker." During his pastorate, the church mortgage was paid off, the First Street parsonage was purchased, and the support of the missionary work of Mr. Irvin was started. Even more important, during these years the church gained in spiritual strength, enough to weather the days soon to come when we didn't have a home for worship while our present building was being constructed.

Some material from the church bulletin of July 14, 1912 can lend some light into the life of the church after Mr. Milne left and before his successor arrived. There was this special notice in this bulletin:

"The Women's Missionary Society aims to raise through the women of the church the entire 30 per cent of the church apportionment which will be sent to the Women's Home and Foreign State Boards. This can only be accomplished when every woman in the church gives something. Small contributions are especially desired from those who have not as yet pledged. These small amounts if given by everyone will easily make up the sum total as may be seen by the following tentative schedule:

25 women giving 1 cent per week . . .	\$13.00
25 women giving 2 cents per week . . .	26.00
40 women giving 5 cents per week . . .	104.00

30 women giving 10 cents per week . . .	156.00
7 women giving 25 cents per week . . .	91.00
Total amount desired	\$390.00

Ed: Those seven women giving 25 cents per week must have been very wealthy!

In this same bulletin is a most delightful and lengthy report from the committee on "pastoral supply". That's a fine phrase - "pastoral supply". The report is too long to quote completely, but here are a few gems:

"We despair of finding anyone who will please all equally well, or be equally strong along all lines..."

"As a people we should not be unduly critical..."

"Any man, and especially any strong and worthy man, will have peculiarities of his own. He has a right thereto, so long as they do not give substantial ground of offense among his fellow men." Doesn't that sentence support the stand this church has always taken in favor of freedom of conscience and freedom of action?

"If we are steadfast in our desire to make Pilgrim Church still more a strong central body for the doing of good works, and a force and influence for the beautifying and ennobling of individual character in both young and old, and for the accomplishment of civic righteousness and the betterment of the community roundabout, and a force also in the higher reaches of religious faith, we should be able to work with any good man of fair ability or better, whose heart is in such work." How is that, for one sentence?

After these and other introductory remarks, there was set forth the resolution passed at the meeting by a vote of 82 to 22. You'll probably understand in a moment why a few of the members objected to the resolution, which set forth the call to the Reverend William E. Cadmus of Peoria, Illinois at an annual salary of \$5,000. Out of this sum, however, it would have been his duty to pay an annual salary of \$900 to a "trained helper" - that phrase is not defined, but maybe the John Bertsch's of the day were not too well paid - and also out of which the pastor was to pay an annual rent of \$750 to Pilgrim Church for the church-owned parsonage. The report ends: "The Chairman then asked all to rise who were willing in the event that Dr. Cadmus accepts the call thus tendered, to pledge him their hearty support and this pledge was duly given by a unanimous rising vote." We don't know what Dr. Cadmus thought about the idea of having to pay rent to his own church. We do know, however, that the next minister was Reverend Charles Thorp.

It was under his leadership that the church started a new era. Mr. Thorp - incidentally, it would appear, he was the first minister without a magnificent beard or mustache - reported for duty in October, 1912. The same history report earlier quoted from states: "His remarkable executive ability, his broad vision, his great genius for friendship, made this era possible." That is a fine phrase - "great genius for friendship" - it could characterize the church itself. It was under Mr. Thorp's ministry that our present church home was constructed, following the realization of the congregation that its members had followed the movement of many Duluthians to the East End of town as Duluth grew. Mr. Thorp told the annual meeting in 1913: "The easy thing would be to stay down town and hold the fort until the ammunition is exhausted. The heroic thing is to occupy higher ground and win in the end higher things." That may be the only time our church was called a fort. At any rate, the church was "heroic" rather than taking the easy way, and in 1915 the new site was purchased and the building committee appointed. On that committee

we recognize such names as Matter, Hegardt, McGonagle. At the same time, the Lake Avenue church, home to the congregation for 26 years, was sold to Julius Barnes and Ward Ames, Jr., and later the Boys "Y" was located there. For the two years it took to build the new church, our services were held mostly in the Masonic Temple, and a clock with a suitable inscription was presented to the Masons "as a mark of appreciation for their generous hospitality in furnishing to the church, without charge, for two years, the use of their building, equipment and organ." Resolutions of appreciation read in part: "We can never repay the Masons in a material way, but we can and must by our service to the community in which we live, demonstrate that their confidence in us is justified." Our whole history since that time has shown that their confidence was justified.

Despite the fact that for the first time in 45 years, Pilgrim Church had no home, this period was weathered very well, a tribute not only to the ministers who had led so very ably, but also to the inner strength of the church members. On Christmas Sunday, 1917, the new building was dedicated, free from debt. Total cost, including site, parish house, furnishings and organ: \$157,016.08. Each time we built, the cost got higher, but we find the 1917 figures still ridiculously small. As a matter of fact, our church home today, excluding the land and foundations, has a replacement value in a sum just a little below \$1,000,000.

When the corner-stone was laid, Mr. Oscar Mitchell, chairman of the Board of Trustees, spoke: "The same spirit of individual service and sacrifice for the benefit of the community that has characterized the Congregational Church in all its history has enabled this building to be erected and now, in the light of the history and achievements of the Congregational Church, with a realization of the work of Pilgrim Church in the past and with supreme confidence in her future, we lay this corner-stone." In the box in the corner-stone were placed:

Bible

Address list of members of Pilgrim Church

Bound volume of Bulletins, January 24, 1915, to January 23, 1916

Bulletins from January 30, 1916 to October 15, 1916

Picture of Dr. C. C. Salter, first pastor of Pilgrim Church

Report of Ladies' Union made at annual meeting January 18, 1916

Sample "share" toward building fund

Views in Duluth

Photograph of Pilgrim Church, Lake Avenue and Second Street

Congregationalist, October 12

Advance, October 12

Duluth Evening Herald, October 19

Duluth News Tribune, October 20

List of donors to new Church Building

United States flag

Also a part of the new building is the corner-stone from the Lake Avenue church, which is located at the northwest corner of the nave.

Amongst the exhibits in Salter Hall this evening is a most interesting copy of the November 28, 1918 edition of the Pilgrim Church Messenger, Bearing Christmas Greetings to the Members of Pilgrim Congregational Church in War Service. The men and women of this church have always given valiant service to our nation in its hour of need, and the plaques in the narthex give testimony to this fact. This particular edition, however, tells of another great service - what the church did to aid the victims in The Great Fire of 1918. It is suggested that you read this account, it is most interesting. On the inside pages of the Messenger are words about and from the church's members in service: Lloyd Burg, Palmer Harbison,

Gordon Hegardt, Claude Haney, Laird Goodman, Kilmer Bagley, Howard Cant, Dr. Arthur Laird, Russell Holgate, Ralph Knowlton, Gordon Whiteside, plus many many others too numerous to mention. How many of these names re-appear on soldier and sailor lists just 25 years later. Also included in the Messenger is a long letter from Wildey Mitchell. There is one quote from a letter from Howard Cant that you'll like; he was writing from a Texas camp on a particularly torrid day: "In this weather if you sit perfectly still you drip, and if you wiggle your finger there is a cloud-burst." Also included in this paper is an account of the death of Miss Faith Helen Rogers, who, like her cousin Ruth Alta Rogers, was Pilgrim Church's organist and choir director, and who, also like her cousin, one of the church's most beloved members; Miss Rogers had entered the service in the YMCA to minister musically to the soldiers. She lost her life after being taken ill on shipboard. This account states that "Her life has been laid down in the service of the nation and of the world, as truly as if she died on the field of battle." She was like many other members of the church who gave the last full measure of devotion in the wars of our country.

In the following years, the church continued to grow and prosper. In 1919, 52 members were received at one time, which may stand an all-time record. That same year, Mr. Thorp resigned and Reverend Noble S. Elderkin started his pastorate in 1920. He was here for 10 years, and a very significant period this was, too. We had our new building, but Dr. Elderkin, endearing himself to one and all, provided the kind of leadership that has enabled us in subsequent years to become one of the most vital religious forces in our entire area. So many people, still members of our church, remember Dr. Elderkin with great affection, but even more important, they recognize that he did in the 1920's what Mr. Noyes did in the 1880's and early 1890's - pull us all together into a group of profound spiritual strength.

In the early 1930's, Reverend T. K. Vogler was our minister for $4\frac{1}{2}$ years, and then in 1937 Reverend T. C. McQueen joined us. It was during his ministry that so much work was done in inter-church relations, particularly with neighboring Catholic and Jewish congregations. It is fine to see this year a resumption of that work when the men of Temple Emanuel were the guests of our Men's Club at a regular meeting last November.

In 1945, Reverend John M. Phillips assumed his duties, and in 1952, November, our present and beloved Reverend William Halfaker joined us. Under all these men, the church has grown in financial strength, in the numbers of our members, but most important in our service to ourselves, to our community, to our nation, to our world, and to our God. Under Dr. Halfaker's leadership, we have done much in the repair of our building and, more significantly, in the remodelling and additions for the greater expansion and effectiveness of our Christian Education program. Also, towards this end, we welcomed in 1959 Reverend John Bertsch as our Associate Minister to take charge of this program, and already we see new vitality, new stimulation in the life of our children's education. We have done this on a pay-as-you-go basis, while all the time becoming more and more conscious of our obligations toward the Benevolence programs we support with such good spirit. Our subsidiary organizations grow and prosper. Our members continue to act many leading roles in the affairs of our City and State. Our music is magnificent and can best be summed up by Dr. Harmon Bro's comment of ten days ago: "Their music is such that this would be a cathedral even though it were a warehouse." It seems a shame to give a report like this devoted mainly to the efforts of our ministers, vitally important as they are and have been; it would be completely appropriate to name so many hundreds of men and women who have taught all of us truly, what is a Christian. We see the faces of fine people amongst those in their waning years, we see the faces of fine people just starting out on the glorious adventure of life. We are a team, in the finest sense of that word. We long ago became of age - but, while gaining the wisdom and spiritual strength of the old, we have not lost the vigor and love-for-action of the young.