

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### BOISE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

Number 737

1971

In tracing the early history of the first Baptist church of Boise, we found one of the important facts about that church is its role in the growth of Boise: it's willingness to serve as a temporary house of worship for other struggling churches before they had the means to build their own buildings.

Among the congregations which were supported in part by the Baptists' hospitality was what is now the First United Presbyterian Church of Boise. Its beginnings lie in a sermon preached on July 15, 1877, by the Reverend Sheldon Jackson, a well-known missionary in the West and Alaska. Seven months after Mr. Jackson's efforts here, a Presbyterian congregation was formally established, with eighteen members--fifteen of them women, and the three men immediately elected the ruling elders of the congregation! The actual organizing meeting was held in the Methodist church, but thereafter "home" was with the Baptists until the first church was built--at the corner of Tenth and Main, at a cost of \$4,000--in 1879. The local newspaper, which reported the progress of construction, revealed something about the neighborhood in saying that with the church there, "Main Street has no longer any excuse for being wicked"!

The furniture for this church was solid walnut, made in Chicago, and shipped first by rail, then by freight wagon from the nearest depot at Kelton, Utah. In the late 1890's the church was sold to Peter Sonna (whose wife and mother-in-law were both members) for \$10,000. Its last use before being torn down to make room for the Idanha Hotel was as a home for the Salvation Army.

The congregation's first few years were lively if rather unsettled ones. The ministers came and went; at one point--in late 1880--the newspaper noted that of five church buildings in the city only two (not including the Presbyterians) were functioning. In 1885, however, the Rev. J. H. Barton was called to Boise and began to get things moving. He organized a Sunday School, which eventually became the first graded Sunday School in the city; under his leadership both a Young People's Society for Christian Endeavor and a Women's Missionary Society were organized. Barton began conducting regular weekly services at the penitentiary, the first regular services ever held there, and also established by a Bible-study class and chautauqua circle

there. He also became one of the first trustees of the College of Idaho when it was established in the 1890's.

By 1892, it was obvious that the congregation needed a new home, and land was purchased at Ninth and State streets. In the midst of construction, the Panic of 1893 hit the country and money became very scarce. For months two members of the church worked without pay to complete the interior of the church. The building was finally dedicated on May 6, 1894. A few years later a manse, or parsonage, was built just to the west of the church.

An organ was installed in the building in 1907, purchased with funds partly raised locally and partly donated by Andrew Carnegie.

During the life of this church building, several new "chapels" were started in and around the city; only one of these, Boise Avenue Presbyterian Church, is still in existence. That congregation was established in November of 1894, first at Broadway and Rossi and then (thanks to a farsighted land purchase by John Tate, who saw how south Boise would grow) at its present site at Broadway and Boise Avenue. Pierce Park-Collister Presbyterian Church (whose building now houses the Boise Unitarian Fellowship) was organized in 1911 and the church was built in 1912. Westminster Chapel built its home at Twenty-first and Eastman. Southminster Presbyterian Church was not dedicated until 1956.

By 1928, it was clear that the old manse--now used for Christian education programs--would no longer do. A building committee (consisting of Murray Badgley, A. O. Rennison, the Rev. William Crosby Ross, F. W. Hewitt, and C. B. Little) was chosen and a new "service unit" was built on the site of the manse. That building is still very much in use in the midst of the block. It is now bracketed by a new church--built in 1953-1954--at the Tenth Street end of the block and Lindsay Hall, which houses meeting rooms and a kitchen facility, on the site of the old church.