

# MADISON'S CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## THE BUILDINGS, THE ORGANS AND PEOPLE WHO PLAY THEM

1851–1891

The *First Presbyterian Church* of Madison, Wisconsin, was organized by the Presbytery of Dane on October 4, 1851.\* Within a year, the new church selected a site for the first building on Wisconsin Avenue, the site of the present Masonic Temple. The New England style Modified Gothic church was a 40 foot by 60 foot building with a 110 foot spire. A bell that was added later weighed a thousand pounds. In 1873 an organ was purchased in Milwaukee and installed in the church. It had two keyboards (manuals) with 58 notes and a pedal with 30 notes. The organ had a black walnut base and pipes in two shades of blue with markings of red and gilt. Of course it was hand pumped from the rear, and the traditional tales of the pump boys' delinquencies were repeated for years. The new building, dedicated on Christmas Day 1853, served the early congregation for 39 years. About 32 years after the dedication, the white frame building's proud spire was blown to the street by a storm, hastening the rapidly growing congregation to consider building again.

1891–1963

The second structure was an American Romanesque building located at the corner of West Dayton and Wisconsin Avenue, a site now occupied by the Concourse Hotel. Warren H. Hayes from Minneapolis, Minnesota, was the architect. The building was considered less austere, more home-like with seating arranged in the form of a partial amphitheater and the organ in one corner. The beautiful Chandler Burnell Chapman memorial window, a work of great merit, was put in the southwest wall. It was designed and built by Tiffany Studios, and at the time of installation, the only Tiffany art glass window in Madison. A surgeon, Chapman was one of the first Wisconsin volunteers in the Civil War. The window was a gift of the Chapman family, prominent in the church. By changing its name, First Presbyterian Church became *Christ Presbyterian Church* on July 2, 1891. The building was dedicated July 4, 1891. It remained a suitable home for the next 71 years. A new Lancashire-Marshall pipe organ from Moline, Illinois, was built and installed in 1892. It was said to have been one of the best in the state. The bellows were furnished with air by two vertical feeders operated by a water motor. The case was of oak, and the paneling and the decorated pipes in front were best described as simple and elegant. The dedication of the "new grand organ" took place May 13, 1892, performed by Clarence Eddy, of Chicago. As reported in one local newspaper, he was "one of the first, if not the very foremost organist of America." UW Professor and founder of the School of Music, Fletsher A. Parker was organist in 1901, followed by Mrs. Leroy Case in 1908 and John Weaver in 1913. The church suffered extensive fire damage from a lighting strike in 1914, 23 years after the building dedication. The big pipe organ was damaged by water mostly. Fire broke out on the roof directly over the organ and spread into the church, but

did not touch the instrument. Necessary rebuilding and expansion of the original structure followed as well as planning for a new organ to replace the damaged one. The congregation ordered a 30 rank (single row of pipes of one voice quality brought into play by a stop), three manual organ, built by the Austin Organ Co., Hartford, Connecticut. The new organ was installed and dedicated April 9, 1915, and Clarence Eddy returned as recitalist. Irene B. Eastman became organist in 1917, followed by Dr. Charles H. Mills in 1920, C. Morse Huffer in 1924, Mrs. Chester Easum in 1927, and Luella Buriff Natwick in 1928. University of Wisconsin Professor Paul G. Jones became church organist in 1930 and continued until his resignation in January 1960. For the next four years Dennis Drescher assumed the organist position.

1963

The third building, still occupied by Christ Presbyterian Church, was planned during days of great growth for the congregation. A very large Building Council, with augmented committees, worked skillfully for a move to scenic lakeview property on Gorham Street. Harold H. Fisher and Associates, Detroit, Michigan, was architectural firm; the new building was dedicated June 9, 1963. A four-stop Möller Artiste pipe organ was rented to bridge the time until a new instrument could be purchased. An organ selection committee composed of Theodore G. Scheffer, Forest Products Laboratory; James Peters, engineer at Gisholt and former organ builder employee; Charles Miller, engineer at Oscar Mayer; Robert L. Morrison, minister of music; and Dennis Drescher, organist selected the new organ. It would be a 53 rank, four manual organ to be built by the M. P. Möller Company in Hagerstown, Maryland. The completed organ was shipped June 1, 1963, and installed a month later. An Organ Dedication Recital was performed by Professor Robert Glasgow, University of Michigan. Sandy Stevens served as organist for the church until June 17, 1965, when the Rev. J. Alfred Fryer, Director of Music and Associate Minister, appointed John A. Rafoth as organist. June 2010 marked his 45 years of service, the longest tenure of any staff member in the history of Christ Presbyterian Church. At his urging in 2007, numerous donors in the congregation financed an organ restoration effort, addressing mounting problems primarily related to the general aging of the organ's originally installed systems and materials. Fabry Pipe Organs, Inc., in Fox Lake, Illinois, accepted the maintenance and refurbishing contract that once again brought the instrument into compliance with the performance standards of the day.

\*John Knox Presbytery, now a familiar unit of the Presbyterian Church (USA), came into being January 1, 1977, 126 years after Madison's *First Presbyterian Church* had been organized.

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