

Historical Messenger

*Committee on Archives and History, Detroit Conference-United Methodist Church
 Archive of the Detroit Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church
 Shipman Library, Adrian College
 110 S. Madison St., Adrian, MI 49221
 Matthew T. Herbst, Ph.D., Historian and Archivist
 (517) 546-2730 or FPFMinister@aol.com*

Flood, Faith, and a Message of Hope: Our Story



Shipman Library Home of the DAC Archive

In a Nut Shell:

- Archive Flooded
- 20% of Archive Damaged or Destroyed
- Substantial structural damage to Archive and Storage room
- Archive closed to public
- Projected re-opening at 2005 Annual Conference

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As people of faith, we are well versed in the tradition of “the Flood.” Through Noah’s effort we made it through the first great natural disaster to pass on the mantle of tradition to successive generations. And so, we as historians of the Detroit Annual Conference must work to pass on our historical tradition after the devastating flood which struck the Archive on June 16.

Heavy rains, likely combined with a blocked drain pipe on the street, led to a waxing pond of water in front of the Shipman Library. The gathering water then poured down the stairwell leading to the basement storage room. As the water filled the concrete enclosed stairwell, so much pressure built up that the water blew out the window and crushed the metal door. Water then rushed into the storage room and Archive, saturating everything within 3-feet of the floor.

Approximately 20% of our collection was damaged or destroyed. The rest of the

collection was moved upstairs for safety and dehumidification in order to preserve it from water and mold damage. The arduous process took

many hours and we have a host of people to thank from the Shipman Library Staff, to the Adrian football coach and players, to Adrian College Students and Staff, to the Adrian College President, Dr. Caine himself.

Retired Archivist Jim Simmons was on hand. This was to be the official day of the transfer of Archivist tenures from that of Rev. Simmons to myself. This was more memorable than we could have expected!

At present, the Archive is closed to visitors. I have tried to manage requests for information, but this is particularly challenging do to the missing pieces of the collection as well as the current disorganization. The goal of the move from the basement to the storage room on the first floor was speed, not organization. Moreover, the storage room

is approximately one eighth the size of our Archive and the overflow area which was used to maintain hundreds of books, bibles, hymnals, and other materials. This reduction in our archive area translates into boxes piled on top of boxes in our present location.

98 boxes of saturated material were sent to a company in Chicago which specializes in restoration of damaged archival items. The dry documents have returned—in half the boxes, since they are no longer water soaked. The challenge now is to re-catalogue each item and each piece of paper in our collection. This process will take many months and only by the end, will we know exactly how much we have lost. We will not be able to begin the process of moving back to the Archive until the

(Continued on page 2)



3-feet of water throughout the halls and Archive

Archive Closed (Continued From Page 1)

College has completed the physical restoration—which it is working hard to do. Adrian College is generously bearing the cost—since insurance did not cover the full cost of repairs and restoration. The cost is over \$100,000. Donations to Adrian College are greatly appreciated!

As a result of the restoration, relocation, and reorganization process, we anticipate approximately one-year for a

return of the Archive to the pre-Flood status. It is our goal is to work as diligently as possible in order to hold a re-opening by Annual Conference in 2005.

Despite the significant damage, disruption, and loss to the Detroit Annual Conference Archive, there is a hopeful future. I am thankful to the national community of archivists and historians who have offered support, prayers, and assistance

in replacing lost items. I am also thankful to the many people who have offered support as we rebuild. Finally, I am thankful to the many United Methodists who have looked at their own collections to see if there was something that might be housed in the archive. The flood has helped strengthen our community and our faith. And so, as with Noah, our historical tradition will be passed on to the next generation.

200 Years of (United) Methodism in MI: But when did it begin?

By Dr. Matthew T. Herbst

As the Michigan Historical Society of the United Methodist Church began to plan for the celebration of 200 years of United Methodism, the question arose: what marks the beginning?

What criteria should we use to determine a conclusive date for the celebration of the bicentennial anniversary of United Methodism (or its earliest manifestation) into the territory that became the state of Michigan? Let us consider the perspective established one century ago by the Detroit Annual Conference (DAC) itself.

In April, 1904, *The Michigan Christian Advocate* reminded readers that one hundred years earlier circuit rider Daniel Freeman had arrived in Detroit by way of Canada and preached the first Methodist sermon there. (MCA, 4/30/04, p.1) At Annual

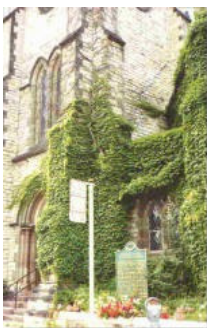
Conference a few months later (September 1904), the DAC officially acknowledged the year 1804 as the anniversary for Michigan Methodism. The awareness that MI Methodism had reached the centennial mark awoke the historical consciousness of the conference which then sought to preserve its history by forming the conference Historical Society. The DAC resolved:

“WHEREAS, This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the introduction of Methodism into what is now the territory of the Detroit Conference and much historical material of fare value relating to the early days of Michigan Methodism, will forever be lost, unless immediately gathered...RESOLVED, That we regard this as an eminently fitting time to organized an historical society of the Detroit Con-

ference of the Methodist Episcopal Church...” (DAC, 1904, p. 22)

Before we close the book on the discussion, however, we must advance our historical retrospection to the year 1910, when the DAC once again acknowledged its “hundredth year of Michigan Methodism.” (DAC, 1910, p. 285) Apparently, the Conference shifted its focus from the first Methodist sermon preached in Michigan as the critical marker of the start of Methodism to the organization of the first Methodist Society in Fall, 1810. Thus, the DAC raised the criteria for recognizing the actual beginning. It now made a distinction between prior events that made the beginning possible and *the actual beginning* itself. Just as when we teach US History, for example, we do not begin in

What criteria should we use to determine a date for the Methodist bicentennial anniversary in Michigan?



Central UMC, Detroit

...But when did it begin? (Continued from page 2)

1776, but rather in the 15th Century to provide the critical background and context that made 1776 possible. By shifting the anniversary, it appears that the Conference altered its own perspective from one of *theoria* to one of *praxis*, from a preacher's words (1804) to the tangible reality of community forged by active commitment (1810). Yet, Conference did not further articulate the discrepancy, i.e., it did not reconcile the two anniversaries.

While searching for the "true" origins of Michigan

Methodism may inevitably leads to 1804 or 1810 which have long been acknowledged (even if not reconciled), yet other years may also be proposed, albeit with less weight of historiographical tradition. 1809, for example, when a circuit rider was first *appointed* for Detroit or 1811 when the first quarterly conference was held in Michigan.

Historians often feel that the most meaningful historical questions are those that can not be definitively answered. This leaves room for debate,

discussion, and re-examination. In this case, to answer the question 'when did Michigan Methodism begin?' we must fall back on our own current perspective on United Methodism itself. Is the core of United Methodism found in a sermon preached, an appointment made, a community organized, or a meeting held?

By first taking time to answer the latter question, one will be led to a solution to the former problem—at least for oneself.



Dixboro United Methodist Church

A Message from the Historian/Archivist:

I am honored to serve as Historian and Archivist for the Detroit Annual Conference and to be a part of the family of church historians that stretches back to Eusebius and even to Luke, the author of the first work of Church History, *Acts of the Apostles*.

Only by studying the past can we discern the present with greater clarity. Without the historical past as a referent, we remain ignorant, unable to find our way as mature Christians and at risk for committing the same grave mistakes as those who have come before. Indeed, we can not escape our past by ignoring it—rather, we must continually grapple with its ever present impact upon us.

I enjoyed the opportunity to

work with Rev. Jim Simmons before his retirement (and before the Flood). I appreciated the time taken to "show me the ropes" and the confidence he had in my ability as an historian and archivist. Likewise, I am thankful for the help and support of Diana Spitnale Miller, Chair of the Committee on Archives and History and the work of that Committee.

In my non-archive hours, I am the Director of Educational Ministries at First United Methodist Church in Howell and also a Professor of History. Last year I was Visiting Professor (teaching Byzantium and Christianity) at my Alma Mater, University of Michigan, where I earned my Ph.D. in 1998.

This year I will teach US-History and Comparative Religion at Eastern Michigan

University and Byzantium at Ave Maria College. My wife Julie works at the University of Michigan School of Nursing, helping women with eating disorders. We live in Ann Arbor with our venerable old American Bull-Dog (Toby).

Most recently as I considered the US commitment of tens of thousands of troops overseas, I reflected upon how the DAC reacted to a similar situation a century ago when tens of thousands of US troops landed in the Philippines. Consider: A Republican Methodist President (McKinley), a war of regime change (vs. Spain) and nation building, increasing casualties, and US soldiers caught torturing prisoners: How did the DAC react? Have a look at the "Retrospective" article in this issue.

Is the core of United Methodism found in a sermon preached, an appointment made, a community organized, or a meeting held?



Westside UMC, Ann Arbor

Jurisdiction History and Archives meet in Canada

By Diana Spitnale Miller,
Chair, Committee on History
and Archives



Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

The meeting
was held at
Queens
University in
Kingston near
the Thousand
Islands Area.



Margaret Switzer Embury (1743-1807). Engraving after John Barnes' 1773 painting, printed in New York by Daniel T. MacFarlan, 1878.

Margaret Switzer Embury

The Annual Meeting of the North Central Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History met out of the Jurisdiction this year. The NCJ Commission was part of a joint meeting with the Canadian Methodist Historical Society and the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church.

They met in Kingston, Ontario, August 19 – 22 commemorating the 200th anniversary of the death of Barbara Heck, the “mother” of American and Canadian Methodism, “one who laid foundations others have built upon.” (See sidebar.)

Attending the conference from Detroit Annual Conference were Diana Spitnale Miller, Caro, chair of the Detroit Conference Commission on Archives and History, the Rev. Dr. Michael Peterlin, Owosso, chair of the Local Churches Section of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church, and Leanne C. Trebilcock, Owosso, member at large of the North Central Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History,

The meeting was held at Queens University in Kingston near the Thousand Islands Area. Each of the three organizations held their meetings during the weekend. In addition to a reunion of the Ruckle Family – descendants of Barbara and her family, there were several Heck descendants

present.

Each morning we were greeted with a word from Wesley and a hymn. Each evening closed with a blessing. In between were wonderful programs and delicious food. We were treated royally as we met in Ban Righ Hall, Gaelic for Queen.

Historical Tours

A highlight of the gathering included a bus tour on Friday to the Prescott area east of Kingston, where Barbara Heck lived. The guide on my bus was Rev. Bill Lamb, a retired Canadian United Church pastor steeped in Methodist History.

In 1790 William Losee was the first itinerant preacher appointed to the Canadian area. In 1811 Bishop Francis Asbury and Henry Boehm traveled from New York to Canada for annual conference.

We visited the Barbara Heck Monument in Blue Church Cemetery, where Barbara is buried, and the Blue Church, an early Anglican church building servicing the cemetery.

To learn more, visit the website: http://www.ripnet.com/sites/colonel_edward_jessup/Uel_Col_J/barbara_and_paul_heck.html

We went on to Homewood, the home of Dr. Solomon Jones, who was the physician in the days of Barbara Heck. His home is a museum. Rev. Lamb brought early Canadian memorabilia from the United Church museum in Toronto so that we

could view them.

We had lunch at Wall Street United Church in Brockville then traveled on to Landon Bay Centre operated by the Barbara Heck Foundation. Campgrounds and gardens are part of the 175 acre Ecological Reserve on the Frontenac Axis. It has also been designated a Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations.

Sunday we traveled west from Kingston to the Adolphustown area where we visited and worshiped at Hay Bay Church. Canada's oldest surviving Methodist Church was erected in 1792 just eight years after the arrival of the Loyalists. The congregation exists in a newer structure a mile away. An annual pilgrimage service is held on the fourth Sunday in August which we were able to attend.

Other Presentations

Thursday evening, Dr. Marguerite Van Die, an associate professor in the History of Christianity, at Queens, gave a talk on “Barbara Heck, A Canadian Perspective”.

Friday evening, the entertainment included a welcome from the Kingston Town Cryer and a visit from “Sir John A. Macdonald” the first prime minister of Canada. He was from Kingston and a statue of him is in a downtown park.

Jurisdiction History and Archives

Saturday included a talk by Rev. Dan Swinson of Illinois on "John Wesley on Drink and Drinking: An Assessment" and a panel presentation of "An Overview of Canadian Methodism."

Early Sunday was a talk by Dr. Charles Cole, editor of the United Methodist History of Mission series.

It was a privilege to be part of this gathering. Stepping into history in another place that parallels our United Methodist History was inspiring and uplifting.

Who is Barbara Heck?

Barbara Ruckle Heck is legendary in the history of the United Methodist Church for her part in stirring up Philip Embury to begin preaching in New York in 1766, which marked the commencement of Methodism in the Thirteen Colonies.

Born in Ireland in 1734 of parents who had fled the religious persecution of Protestants in the German Palatine, her community was deeply influenced by John Wesley. She became an eager convert at 18.

She married Paul Heck in 1760 and they joined a

group of adventurers heading for a new life in America.

Barbara helped to provide the spark and the resolve not only to get Methodist preaching started, but also for the erection of a Methodist meeting house in New York.

With the outbreak of the American Revolution the Hecks, being Loyalists, moved north to Canada where Barbara continued to play her enlivening role.

She died Aug. 17, 1804. In 1904 Methodists from both sides of the border erected a monument over her grave.



Barbara Ruckle Heck (1734-1804). Watercolor on paper, about 1860.

Barbara Heck

Barbara Heck is legendary in the history of the United Methodist Church...

Past and Present: A Retrospective on the Detroit Annual Conference (1903-1905)

As an historian with no claim to prophetic gifts, I must examine events which have been graced by the distance of time rather than speculate on the definitive importance of current events. Time is the friend of the historian, since it provides the opportunity to locate events more accurately into an historical context. In contrast, when grappling with the present there is a tendency to inexorably and unwittingly fall prey to contemporary political and cultural biases which transform historical discussion into partisan diatribe. Very rare, indeed, is that voice which speaks as eloquently and precisely about the present as about the past. Laying no claim

on this prophetic gift, I rely on the perspective offered by time. By casting our vision back, we may obtain a refreshing insight on our present. Thus, having concluded our most recent Detroit Annual Conference (DAC), let us turn our eyes back one century to the DAC of 1903-1905 in order to see more clearly where we are at present.

In some ways, we may be struck by continuity. For example, in 1904 the DAC voted for the establishment of a Conference Cane (then just donated) which would henceforth be entrusted to the senior active minister of the Conference. (DAC Minutes, 1904, p. 22)

In the same year, DAC acknowledged its own historical legacy. 1904 marked the 100th year anniversary of Methodism in Michigan and so the "preservation of various historical records, photographs, curios, mementoes and other historical matter illustrating and describing the progress of Michigan Methodism, will be of interest to ourselves and or rapidly growing value to those who come after us..." (1904, p. 22) For this purpose the Conference resolved to organize a committee to create the Historical Society of the Detroit Conference of the ME Church.

(Continued on page 6)

By Dr. Matthew Herbst



First United Methodist Church, Howell

Past and Present: A Retrospective on the Detroit Annual Conference (1903-1905)

The DAC Archive, the Conference Historian, and the Committee on Archives and History exist because of this decision made one century ago.

Another subject of concern in the early twentieth century that may seem particularly current was marriage. The DAC was deeply alarmed by the rate of divorce in Michigan and viewed this as a serious threat both to the home and to the nation as a whole. The DAC formed a Marriage and Divorce Committee and petitioned congress for a uniform divorce law which would raise the bar for divorce throughout the nation. In return, Conference declared, "as conservators of the public morals, we pledge ourselves to more thoroughly instruct our congregations as to the place of the marriage relation in the divine economy and its relations to the well being of society." (1905, p. 197)

At the same time, the DAC marshaled its resources against another "assault" on marriage which stemmed from the admission of Mormon-dominated Utah as a state in 1896. It appeared to the DAC that Mormonism and polygamy now threatened the stability of the institution of marriage (despite the fact that polygamy had been *officially* renounced by the Utah Mormons in 1890 which had paved the way for statehood). The DAC was hostile to Mormonism in general and petitioned US Congress to remove Utah Senator Reed Smoot from office simply on the grounds

that he was a Mormon. DAC also lobbied for a Constitutional Amendment that would protect marriage by "prohibiting polygamy and polygamous practices in any states or territory of the Union." (1905, p. 198) One century later, voices are once again heard calling for a constitutional amendment in order to protect the institution of marriage against the perceived challenge of a minority.

In other respects in our retrospective, we find differences.

One century ago, the location of each Annual Conference moved from city to city in eastern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. From 1893-1902, for example, Conference met in Detroit (Cass Ave. ME Church), Sault St. Marie, Ann Arbor, Flint, Port Huron, Mt. Clemens, Detroit (Simpson ME Church), Pontiac, Bay City, and Saginaw. In 1903, it met at the Court Street ME Church in Flint, in 1904 at the Broad Street ME Church in Adrian, and in 1905 at Central ME Church in Detroit. It could not meet at Adrian College, of course, since that was the domain of the Methodist Protestant Church which did not merge with the ME Church until 1939. Since the DAC encompassed so large a territory and, consequently, travel could be extensive and expensive for conference attendees, the DAC resolved to "appoint a Secretary of pastors' railroad and boat fare to and from Conference, and that it shall be his duty to see that the same equalized, and that an

assistant in the work be appointed from each district." (1903, p. 21) Fittingly, a committee was henceforth established for this purpose.

It will come as no surprise that committees have long been an integral part of Conference life. What has changed is not the form but the content of the committee. A century ago committees such as the Sanctity of the Sabbath, Temperance, Aggressive Evangelism and the Freedman's Aid and Southern Education Society revealed the interest and focus of Michigan Methodism.

The Sanctity of the Sabbath Committee worked to retain Sunday as a sacred day set aside for worship and rest in Michigan. The Sabbath was "God's wise plan for conserving the highest physical, social, and moral welfare of humanity. Its desecration is civil and spiritual suicide. The more prominent present perils to the Sabbath are the Sunday saloons, excursions, games, and plays." (1903, p. 74) The DAC advocated for state laws prohibiting stores to be opened or sporting events to be held on Sunday, since these distracted society from the intended purpose of the day. This battle was so thoroughly lost in the subsequent decades, that today it may come as a surprise to many that it was even fought at all, let alone with such sustained intensity and passion. Today shopping, day trips, sporting and recreation events are taken for granted as part of Sunday life—yet what American Society now

cherishes was once seen as a serious threat to the Christian lifestyle and the health of the nation.

In the Temperance Committee, the Conference championed this cause with similar vigor, declaring that "the Liquor traffic is the greatest enemy of the church of God." (1904, p. 72) The Conference opposed government regulations which allowed the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol and advocated prohibition throughout the state and nation. It also called for prohibition in lands recently annexed (Hawaii) and occupied (The Philippines). Conference resolved that it "not give political comfort or support to parties or men who are not opposed to this business" and called for all Methodists to keep "temperance instruction constantly before our children both in our Sunday and day schools." (1904, p. 73) The power of this advocacy reached its apex when the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified in 1919 which banned the manufacture, sale, transportation, and importation of alcohol. This success crumbled when the 18th Amendment was repealed in 1933. As with the Sabbath fight, here was another "critical" battle long since abandoned by the Conference.

The Aggressive Evangelism Committee was entrusted to "formulate such plans of work...in order to secure the largest possible result" for the expansion of the faith. (1905, p. 190) Today, a committee entitled "Aggressive Evangelism"

would appropriately generate a cacophony of protest over the transparent hostility and inferred violence conveyed by the word “aggressive” which is presently defined as “characterized by or tending toward unprovoked offensives, attacks, invasions, or the like; militantly forward or menacing.” (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, 1993) In stark contrast, “aggressive” to the early twentieth century DAC ear rang with a tone of endorsement.

After all, aggressive techniques had led to the phenomenal expansion of Christianity during the course of the 19th century which coincided with the great age of European (and by the end of the century, American) imperialism. In 1800, approximately 23% of the world was Christian; by 1900 that number had risen to over 34%. (Richard Harries and Henry Mayr-Harting, *Christianity. Two Thousand Years* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 192) Christianity was embraced by one-third of the earth and the DAC called for the continued successful spread of Protestant Christianity, since Catholic Christianity was then viewed as a corruption of a theoretical “pure” faith which was manifest only by Protestants. The DAC called for aggressive activity in order to challenge religious opponents and conquer them.

At the same time, the DAC fully supported aggression in US foreign policy during the Spanish-American War and the subsequent War for the occupation of the Philippines. The DAC viewed the occupation as a means to

“Americanize” and “civilize,” with Protestant Christianity being a part of the arsenal in the assertion of American power. Methodist missionaries (including those of the DAC) were seen as troops on the ground in a war against Catholicism which paralleled the US ground troops fighting the Filipino “insurgents.” Both Conference and the US Government believed that the Filipinos were unable to govern themselves, despite the fact that they had already established a provisional government and constitution. [On this, see my article: “Regime Change, Occupation, and Aggressive Christianity: The Detroit Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the US Occupation of the Philippines (1898-1903)”].

The belligerent spirit of the day is unmistakably revealed by the influential editor of the *Michigan Christian Advocate*, James Henry Potts, who dubbed sermons “gospel bullets,” preachers “marksman,” and their task to “shoot to kill” in the “Holy War” at hand. When the language of evangelism and imperialism become indistinguishable, we can be certain (as events certainly proved) that injustice is at hand. The US Occupation of the Philippines required some 100,000 US troops and cost the lives of 200,000 Filipinos. Even as reports of the torture of Filipino prisoners by US troops became public, the DAC offered no voice of protest, only resolutions of support and continued “aggressive evangelism.”

Finally, let us consider the Freedman’s Aid and Southern Education Society which

had been formed in 1866 on the heels of the Civil War. Its task was “to help him [the liberated slave] to help himself” and for this “... nearly 13 million dollars has been given for the uplift of this race. From its schools ten thousand students have gone forth to lighten the darkness of the southland...” and it had educated “12,000 teachers, 3,000 ministers, and 800 physicians.” (1904, p. 67 and 1905, p. 197) The work was critical since the civil rights accorded to former slaves by the 13th (1865), 14th (1868), and 15th (1870) Constitutional Amendments were not easily accessed in a Southern landscape dominated by the terrorism of violent racist organizations (like the KKK which also formed in 1866),

and other issues rose to prominence, this effort waned. The endeavor receded in Annual Conference minutes by the end of the first decade of the century and by the end of the next decade it disappears altogether. This does not testify to the success of the work, but to a shifting focus as new committees emerged like the important Committee on Social and Moral Reform which absorbed the earlier Temperance and Sanctity of the Sabbath Committees and now achieved a preeminent status as it channeled resources and energy to tackle issues close at hand.

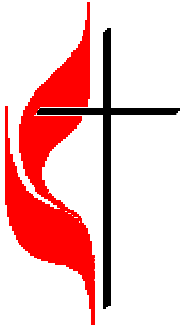
Aided by the perspective of one century, we obtain a greater awareness of the



North Woodward Methodist Episcopal Church with Chapel

economic bondage (in such forms as sharecropping and the crop-lien system), and discriminatory state laws and officials which systematically excluded African-Americans from political, social, and economic equality. The DAC recognized the intense effort needed to bring 3.5 million former slaves who had lived under the racist tyranny of slavery and had been brutally deprived of even the most basic opportunities for education, work, human relationships, and fundamental dignity. However, as the Civil War became a distant mem-

continuity of our history and we are also reminded that the very issues we presently embrace with passion and justify with intellectual and Biblical arguments may eventually appear not only misguided, but even utterly destructive. May this truth not limit us through the “paralysis of analysis,” but allow us to reflect with genuine discernment upon the historical treasury that is our past in order to convey the most positive legacy for our descendants who, one century from now, will reflect on their past which is our very present.



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FRIENDS OF THE ARCHIVE

The Friends of the Archives was formed in 1972. The purpose is to support and nurture the Historical Archives of the Detroit Annual Conference and to support pertinent historical research and publications.

Membership is open to anyone interested in church history. From gifts and memberships collected, the Friends underwrite the newsletter of the Committee on

Archives and History, "The Historical Messenger," that is printed two times per year.

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First United Methodist Church, Saline