

Chapter III

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCHES
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES
THE UNITARIAN CHURCH
EPISCOPAL CHURCHES
THE CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

The First Methodist Episcopal Church

The first Methodist services were held in Fall River, then Troy, in 1824. Preachers had been located in Somerset for twenty years and their missionary work in Troy resulted in the organization of the "First Church" in 1825. The New England Conference appointed the Rev. Edward T. Taylor, later well known as "Father" Taylor of the Seamen's Bethel of Boston, as pastor. Their first meeting house was erected in 1827 and dedicated on Christmas day. It was situated on the westerly side of Camden Street, a short distance south of Central Street.

In the year 1838, there was a revival in Fall River and in common with other churches, the Methodist congregation was greatly enlarged. The debt on the old church was cancelled and a new church was built on South Main Street, opposite Borden Street. This meeting place was dedicated February 20, 1840. Among the names of the first Board of Trustees who had charge of the building were Edward and Perez Mason, Abner L. Westgate, Iram Smith and Joshua Remington.

The church building was completely destroyed by the fire of 1843. The members worshiped with the Congregationalists for several Sabbaths until Abner Westgate provided rooms in his furniture warehouse for temporary quarters. The Society erected a much larger edifice which was dedicated in April 1844. There was a lofty spire on the new church and a frontage enclosed by an iron fence. In 1867 the building was raised and stores were built in front. In time, the spire became weakened, and was shortened to the belfry in 1891.

Saint Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church

After a remarkable revival in 1849, the "Conference" of 1850 reported five hundred and fifty members in the "First Church". It became necessary to establish a second congregation. When the pastor, the Rev. Daniel Wise returned from the next "Conference", Rev. Elijah T. Fletcher came with him to help care for the second congregation. Meetings of the second assembly were held for a time in Liberty Hall which was found too small and quarters were hired on the third floor of the frame building which then occupied the present site of the B. M. C. Durfee Trust Company.

In 1850 this second congregation was organized as the St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church; land was purchased on Bank Street, just east of Main and a spacious church building was erected. The dedicatory exercises took place November 10, 1852. "St. Paul's Church" was fully recognized by the conference and Rev. Ralph W. Allen was appointed the first pastor.

The Union Methodist Episcopal Church

A conflagration destroyed a number of buildings on South Main Street, on the night of February 15, 1916. This fire provided an opportune time for the city to widen the thoroughfare and the "First Church" decided to sell its property. The Cherry and Webb Building now occupies the site.

The Boards of Trustees of the "First Church" and "St. Paul's Church", in a joint conference held February 27, 1916 voted to recommend that the churches re-unite, pool their resources and build a new church in some more favorable locality. This recommendation was accepted by the two churches. A site was selected on the corner of North Main and Locust Streets but this site was sold and the beautiful, modern structure, on Highland Avenue was erected, in which the two bodies are working in harmony with success.

The Brayton Methodist Episcopal Church

The Brayton Methodist Episcopal Church now located on Griffin Street has an interesting history. It was a child of the First Methodist Church for it grew out of a Sunday school organized in 1842 with Abner L. Westgate as the superintendent. The first meetings were held in a tenement block on the main Tiverton road. Later better accommodations were secured in a large room over the Bay State Print Works on Globe Street. Mr. Chapin, one of the owners, became interested in behalf of the operatives and purchased a lot on Globe Street on which a church was built and dedicated in 1850. The Print Works was closed and the church



Courtesy Frederick W. Harrison

SOUTH MAIN STREET – FIRST METHODIST CHURCH

About 1840, looking south from Borden Street

building and land passed into the hands of the Methodists. The church was then known as the Globe Street Methodist Church. After the pastorate of Elihu Grant, when the affairs of the parish became critical, the First Methodist Church provided aid.

In 1869, Hon. John S. Brayton and Mrs. Mary B. Young, in recognition of their family interest in Methodism, provided the church with a substantial sum of money. The name of the church was changed to the Brayton Methodist Episcopal Church in recognition of their generosity.

A new building was erected on Griffin Street in 1898. The old building on Globe Street was sold to the First Polish National Church.

Rev. Elihu Grant was first listed in the Fall River Directory as a book-keeper. For a short period of time he was in the furniture business with J. D. Flint and L. F. Nichols. He was prominent in the affairs of Fall River, Rhode Island. He was Town Clerk (Town Clerk was also clerk of Court of Probate), Treasurer, Collector and Chairman of the School Committee. He was President of the Tiverton bank.

The North, The Quarry Street and The Summerfield Methodist Episcopal Churches

The "North Church" at Steep Brook occupied its present building as early as 1854. The "Quarry Street Church" was organized in 1870. The "Summerfield Church" was organized in 1875 and for a time was known as the Terry Street or North Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church. At that time Crescent Street was called North Main Street and the more direct road West North Main Street. Terry Street connected with what is now Crescent Street. A new and larger building with a parish house was later built on North Main Street at the corner of Hood and the name of the church was changed, first to the North Park then to the Summerfield Methodist Episcopal Church.¹

The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

From about 1868 to 1895 there were several negro families residing on the north side of Maple Street between Linden Street and what is now Grove Street. In 1881, the Maple Street African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized and held meetings in a small wooden building on the south side of the street. They worshiped there until 1918. The older buildings in the neighborhood had been demolished to make way for more

¹ The Brownell Street Baptist Chapel has united with the "Summerfield Church". The union is known as the Park United Church.

modern apartments and the colored folk had moved to other sections. The congregation however continue their activities in the building vacated by the Fowler Congregational Church on Hanover Street. They assumed their present name in 1921.

The First Christian Church

The First Christian Church,² informally known as the Franklin Street Church, in January 1831 was incorporated by an act of the Legislature under the name of the First Christian Union Society in Troy. Their organization had been accomplished as early as April 1829. According to the church records, the Rev. Bro. J. V. Hines became the first settled pastor, June 1, 1829. "The Rev. William H. Taylor commenced his labors with the church Sept. 11, 1831; his first service being held in the 'First Union Chapel' later destroyed by the fire of 1843."

The growth in membership was rapid and about 1842 a group separated from the "First Church" and the Second Christian Church of Fall River was established. The "Second Church" continued until about 1853 when a recorded minute of the "First Church" states — "Received into the Church³ some members of the Second Christian Church extinct."

The present church was erected very soon after the destruction of the first church or chapel. For over a hundred years, this Christian body exercised a profound influence for good in the community. Like the other denominations the missionary urge was strong and workers were sent to outlying sections of the city to aid in the establishment of Sunday schools.

North Christian Church

Two of the older Fall River churches are located north of Steep Brook corners. Mention has been made of the Methodist Church. The North Christian Church, although not incorporated as a society until 1842 had its beginning in 1832 when local residents gathered in their homes for the study of the Bible. In 1835, Capt. John Read and C. C. Dillingham of the First Congregational Church organized a Sunday School and meetings were held in the school house until Mrs. Caroline Boomer donated the land and the church was built about 1842.

² Discontinued services Jan. 8, 1941.

³ The One Hundredth Anniversary Program of the First Christian Church.

The Bogle Street Christian Church⁴

Encouraged and aided by the First Christian Church and its pastor Rev. S. Wright Butler, a self-sacrificing group of men and women in the eastern section of the city started a mission, December 6, 1874, which has developed into a flourishing, independent church. The Bogle Street Christian church on its fiftieth anniversary published an interesting account of its growth and accomplishments.

The Rev. Henry Arnold,⁵ the present pastor, has given twenty-four years of faithful service, ministering to his flock. He is a man beloved not alone by his people but by those of all races and religious faiths who come in contact with him.

The United Presbyterian Church

The editor is indebted to Miss Mary J. S. Bates for important records concerning Presbyterianism in Fall River. "As early as 1833, Rev. Chaunsey Webster, a licentiate of the Associate Presbytery of Albany, N. Y., was assigned to Fall River (Troy), to minister to those of Presbyterian persuasion in this community." An Associate Church was organized in 1837. This group had no church building and no minister. They disbanded in 1840. Again, in June 1846, another Presbyterian group assembled and by August, over one hundred and fifty attended the Sabbath meetings. At a meeting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. McIntosh, which was on Anawan Street where the Boys' Club now stands, an Associate Reform Presbyterian Church was organized, June 30, 1846. Meetings were held, first in Fire Men's Hall on Pleasant Street, then in the old town hall and later in a small building on Union Street, south of Columbia Street.

Their next meeting house was purchased from the Second Christian Church not long after its erection. Fowler states — "The place of worship on Pearl Street was purchased by the Society in 1849." The Centennial History of Fall River records — "Church on Pearl Street corner of Anawan Street, Built, 1851." This building now used as a storehouse was architecturally, within and without, a close counterpart of the Christian Church on Franklin Street. In 1852 shares were issued to care for the cost of the property and by 1853 the debt was largely liquidated. Fowler states, "They now own their commodious and substantial church edifice and ground

⁴ The Bogle St. Church is now Congregational.

⁵ The Rev. Henry Arnold retired in 1942.

connected with it, free from all incumbrance." Here the Presbyterians worshipped for over seventy-five years.

The first settled pastor was the Rev. David Wallace.⁶ He assumed his pastoral duties in June 1851. During the second pastorate, that of the Rev. William Mc. Claren (1854-1866), the name of the church was changed from the Associate Reform Presbyterian Church to the United Presbyterian Church, for at that time the Associate Reform and the Associate Churches were united. This was in 1858.

The Rev. William J. Martin, D.D. began his pastorate, May 2, 1886 and remained until his death, February 19, 1932. Dr. Martin was born in Philadelphia, where he received his early education in the public schools. He was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and finished his theological studies at Allegheny Theological, now the Pittsburg-Xenia Theological Seminary. He received his doctor's degree from Westminster College. Dr. Martin was a member of the Fall River School Committee for eighteen years (1894 to 1912). At the opening of the City's seventy-fifth anniversary, Dr. Martin delivered an address on "The Growth of Church Life".

In March 1926, the old church on Pearl Street was abandoned and the beautiful, pure Gothic structure on the corner of Rock and Walnut Streets was dedicated. Dr. Martin was privileged to spend the closing years of his life serving his people from the new edifice. As a pastor, preacher and valued citizen Dr. Martin will long be remembered.

The sixth and present minister to the church is the Rev. Luther Knox Peacock, D.D. He began his work September 18, 1932.

The Syrian United Presbyterian Church

This church locally known as the "Syrian Protestant Church" was organized under the guidance of the United Presbyterian Church, and occupies the chapel on Harrison Street formerly owned by the First Baptist Church.

The Unitarian Church

Reminiscent of olden days is the edifice of the Unitarian Church, now located on North Main Street between Cherry and Locust Streets. In Barber's "Historical Collections" published in 1841 is a picture of the central part of Fall River taken from the vicinity of Pine Street, looking south.

⁶ The Rev. David Wallace became the first President of Monmouth College.

In the foreground is the "Stone Church". On the horizon stands the Unitarian Church, then located on the sidehill at the corner of Second and Borden Streets. In 1860 this building was torn down and rebuilt on its present site with but very little change in architectural construction.

In 1832, the Unitarian Society of "Fallriver" in the town of Troy was incorporated. The society purchased the church building on Anawan Street (then called Broadway) for which the First Congregational Society had no further use. This meeting house, they used until their first minister, Rev. G. W. Briggs was ordained (1834) and their new house of worship dedicated in 1835.

In 1848, Rev. Samuel Longfellow, a brother of the poet Henry W. Longfellow, became pastor. He was a member of the School Committee of the town and strongly supported the establishment of a public High School. The public school on William Street bears his name.

Rev. Daniel W. Stevens, the first superintendent of Fall River schools was a Unitarian minister without pastoral duties.

The Church of the Ascension

Mrs. Margaret Durfee Johnson, in the "Annals of the Church of the Ascension" printed in 1912, states that "the first service according to the ritual of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, held in (what was then) the village of Fall River, was conducted by the Rev. James C. Richmond on a Sunday evening in 1835". This service was held in the Unitarian Church. As further evidence that the Episcopalians were welcomed by other organized churches in the village, we find that on July 13th, a public service was held in the Congregational church and again on July 15th they met in the Methodist church where steps were taken to form a Parish Church. Rev. Patrick H. Greenleaf was appointed minister and Pocasset Hall was agreed upon as a temporary meeting place. Pocasset Hall soon proved to be too small and permission was obtained to use Town Hall. Land was secured on which to build a church but it was found more advantageous to purchase the church building on South Main Street, which the Baptists had abandoned, when they built "The Temple". This, their first church, was consecrated for worship in April, 1840. At that time there were sixty members from forty families.

Rev. Patrick H. Greenleaf was a mission pastor. The first rector was Rev. George Maxwell Randall who served from 1838 to 1844. He was later consecrated the first missionary bishop of Colorado. Mr. Randall while in Fall River had a number of private pupils. Asa Bronson, pastor of the

Baptist Church and John C. Milne, later part owner of the "Fall River News" took lessons in Latin and Greek. He also had classes in two private schools. It was when Mr. Randall was rector that one of his vestrymen, Mr. Richard Houghton, closed the Print Works on Christmas. "It was a very daring thing to do in the face of custom and popular opinion, Christmas began to come into its own in the little town." Mr. Randall was a member of the School Committee and for two or three years its chairman.

The old church was burned Dec. 24, 1850, and a new church was erected on the old site and dedicated Feb. 12, 1852. It was later moved to the west on Charity Lane and the lot sold to E. S. Brown, who erected a block for his dry goods store; now a part of the R. A. McWhirr Company.

In 1873 the church was holding services in Music Hall on Franklin Street. On Nov. 29, 1875, the architecturally beautiful church on Rock Street, constructed of Fall River granite with brick trimmings was dedicated. A parish house has been constructed connecting with the church and extending back to Purchase Street.

*Christ Church, Swansea — St. John's Church — St. James' Church
St. Mark's Church — St. Luke's Church — St. Stephen's Church*

The Church of the Ascension is the mother church of Christ Church in Swansea organized in 1846 and in Fall River it fostered St. John's Church, 1878; St. James' Church, 1884; St. Mark's Church, 1886; St. Luke's Church, 1897. St. Stephen's Church is an outgrowth of a mission of St. John's Church and was organized in 1896.

The Rev. Emelius W. Smith rector of the Church of the Ascension, Rev. Percy S. Grant, rector of "St. Mark's" and Rev. Herman Page, rector of "St. John's" will be remembered for their marked ability and interest in social and civic affairs. Rector Smith served from 1884 to his retirement in 1912. Rev. Percy S. Grant went from "St. Mark's" to The Church of the Ascension, in New York city. Rev. Herman Page became Bishop of Michigan.

The Church of the New Jerusalem

The followers of Swedenborg organized in 1839. They were few in number and for many years met in private houses. The Fall River directory for 1857 states "The Receivers of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church hold their meetings for worship in Hall No. 7, Pocasset House every Sabbath morning. A meeting is also held Sabbath evenings at the home of Mrs. G. Mundy, 29 Elm Street. They have no settled minister,

and one of the 'Receivers' usually conducts the services. The seats are free." John Westall was a "Receiver" and for many years was the leader. He was a designer in the American Print Works and his fine taste contributed much to the value of its products. Mr. Westall was prominent, outspoken and refined. His was a great influence for good during the period of our development as a municipality. The school building on Maple Street was named in his honor. In 1882 Mr. Westall was first listed as pastor of the church. Several other pastors followed him.

In 1869, they built a small church on Rock Street. While the first Technical High School was under construction it was moved to the grounds of the Durfee High School, for use as a shop. Later it was purchased by the Greek Orthodox Church and is now in use by them. It is located on Cherry Street, just west of North Main Street.

At present, the Church of the New Jerusalem holds no meetings but retains its organization. Jefferson Borden 3rd, grandson of John Westall, is the leader and Henry A. Dexter the treasurer.

