

Second Presbyterian

Celebrating 150 Years

Serving Christ in Downtown Chattanooga

1871 - 2021

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL...

SEARCHING FOR HOME

“Early in the year 1871, a noble band, fourteen in number, met informally in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Francis E. Tyler to discuss the organization of a church”...thus, began the search in Chattanooga for a **home** for this group of Believers. The initial meeting was followed on June 29th with a gathering at the home of Major and Mrs. Willard Abbott to further discuss the possibilities of a church and to initiate a petition requesting the recognition and support of the Kingston Presbytery—a body of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. On the following Sunday a worship services was held in Kaylor Hall.*

Kaylor Hall was considered the city’s opera house or theater and had featured Edwin Booth in performance prior to the Civil War. It was located on the west side of Market Street between 8th & 9th. Daniel Kaylor, native New Yorker and owner of the hall, headed a variety of businesses including lumber, milling, and brewing. Although Kaylor Hall was used for other civic meetings and eventually used as a court annex, this was briefly **home** to Second Presbyterian Church.

With a petition containing 24 signatures presented to the Presbytery the church was established during a public service at First Presbyterian Church at the corner of 7th & Market on September 3, 1871. During the process of this final step in organization three men were ordained as ruling elders: Dr. R.N. Barr, R. W. Smiley, and Willard Abbott. (Earlier and wisely the group had decided to appoint a business committee to oversee the interest of the body. Eventually this decision benefitted the church’s members. They were: R. W. Barr, W. Abbott, T. G. Montague, R. W. Smiley, and X. Wheeler.)

A few days after the “official beginning” of Second Church an attempt was made to call a pastor for the church. Dr. G. L. Foster of Michigan was selected, but refused the call. During the years from September 1871 until May 1879 the church struggled as did the community around them. 1873 brought an epidemic of cholera followed in 1878 by the Yellow Fever plague.

The first pastor to answer the call from the fledgling church in 1873 was Rev. W. A. Rice, a recent graduate of Auburn. Clippinger Hall was rented and furnished as a second **home**. Twenty one additional members came into the church during his tenure. Reverend Rice resigned in less than a year due to health issues and was followed by Dr. J. C. Irwin who served from 1875 to 1879. During this period services were held in Clippinger Hall, at 815 Market Street (westside).



HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL...*SEARCHING FOR HOME* (CONT.)

At the same time Second's services were being held the Second Congregational Church of Chattanooga was using the facility for a similar purpose. When their beloved pastor, Dr. Thome died, the members of the congregation were invited to become members of Second Church. This added 16 worshipers to Second's membership. (Hattie Ackermann was among this number.)

With the arrival in 1879 of the third pastor, Dr. W. J. Trimble, the small group began to grow. The property at the northwest corner of 8th & Chestnut streets had been purchased for \$1200 in 1877 for a "hoped-for" sanctuary. Construction began in 1879 and members occupied the completed debt-free edifice in 1881. The cost of the building was recorded as \$9,000. **Home**, at last! (Evidently the business committee formed in the first weeks had handled funds well including an investment in the cotton market.)

Under the leadership of Dr. Trimble the membership continued to grow and the space of the first **home** proved inadequate after ten years. In 1884 following a revival conducted by the Reverend Nathan Bachman twenty six leading local business men joined Second Church. With the backing of a 120 member congregation and a number of supportive attendees the property at 7th & Pine Streets was purchased. (The external perimeter of the sanctuary building is the actual size of the original property purchased.) Noted builder-architect R. H. Hunt was engaged to design the structure. (There has been reference to the fact that Hunt used some of the specifications of a building designed for Evangelist Dr. Thomas Talmage, semicircular seating, unobstructed views, and great acoustical qualities, in his design for the church at 7th & Pine.) This was and is **home** to Second Presbyterian Church.

The adjacent property that houses the Founder's Building was purchased in 1919 for educational purposes. At the time of purchase it was occupied by a house-like structure that became, for a few years, nine Sunday school classrooms for primary age children of the congregation. Construction of the Founder's building was delayed until debt for the original sanctuary structure was satisfied. This building was dedicated in 1923 with the corner stone containing a list of names of members that served in World War I.

Now, the beautiful sanctuary with its brilliant stained glass window seen on 7th and Pine Streets, its Rose Window viewed from Chestnut Street, and Founder's Building with its welcoming red doors continue to call all of Second Presbyterian's members, past and present, **Home!**

*Miss Gertrude Barr (daughter of Dr. R. N. Barr, founder): handwritten history of Second Presbyterian Church