

## **BUILDING AGAIN, I: THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL ADDITION**

by Tom Cox

Some things are a mixed blessing. The First Presbyterian Church's membership and attendance climbed steadily during the ministries of the Reverends Hamblin and Lininger, with the result that the church was soon bulging at the seams. Clearly, an addition to the church building was needed, but equally clearly such an addition would be expensive. Moreover, due to the church's financial limitations, the original sanctuary had been left in a relatively bare-bones state. The addition of the rose window and, over time, of the stained glass windows along either side had helped, but still more was needed if the sanctuary were to be all that it could be as a place of worship and meditation. Like an addition, these improvements would be costly, and for those who had lived through the 1930s, when First Presbyterian struggled to survive under the weight of debt from earlier building, the prospect of major financial outlays was approached with more than a little apprehension.

Yet there were developments that served to assuage concerns. As the First Presbyterian Church approached the building of an addition, the denomination was booming nationally. When the PC (USA) and the UPC completed unification in 1958 the resulting church had 3.1 million members, almost 2 million in church school, 11,800 clergy, and 9,454 congregations, making it one of the nation's largest. The confidence this spawned affected leaders and members alike and carried over even after numbers began to erode in the 1960s.

Locally the continued growth of Pocatello added to the air of optimism. The city had a population of 28,534 in 1960, 40,036 in 1970, and an estimated population of 42,700 in 1975 when construction of a major addition to the church finally commenced. Unlike with construction of the church building in the late twenties, which was quickly followed by a decade of grinding depression, this time growth and prosperity continued. By 1980 Pocatello's population stood at 46,295 — to say nothing of the growth of suburban Chubbuck, which the congregation also served.

Gifts to the church both reflected and strengthened a general optimism within the congregation. The stained glass windows that flanked the sanctuary, the silver communion service, the pastor's study, the choir robes, the refurbished kitchen, the new pews: as these and other gifts materialized over the years, they gave witness to a membership that was proud of its church and looking to the future with more confidence than the troubled years that had followed the building of the new church in the late twenties would have led one to expect.

From their beginning, Presbyterians have emphasized organizational form. Indeed, the very term Presbyterian stems from the church's governance by presbyters, that is, elders. This emphasis on polity underlies the oft-used statement that Presbyterians insist on doing things "decently and in order." But while this system may be democratic and has a sound Biblical base, it is not one designed for speed in decision-making. Committees abound. In Matthew 18: 20 Jesus proclaims "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." One long-forgotten wag re-worded this well-known verse: "Where two or three Presbyterians are gathered together, they hive off and form committees." The Presbytery of Wood River

(forerunner of the Synod of Idaho) provides a classic example. When the presbytery was formed in 1883, there were only two Presbyterian ministers resident within its boundaries. Three others had to detach themselves from their presbytery in Utah to provide the five required by denominational rules. Yet small as this initial body was, they promptly organized themselves into committees that in due course reported back to the whole with information and recommendations. In effect, these were committees that reported to themselves, but participants seem to have kept a straight face as they went through this exercise and in the process maintained the established form.

Although committees are ever-present, their work sometimes grinds on interminably. The building of the social and educational addition to Pocatello's First Presbyterian Church could be used as Exhibit A in support of this proposition. So complex was the course of events, that it has been reconstructed with difficulty — and without any assurance that the order and intricacies of events uncovered are completely accurate, for some key source materials are undated. In any case, as early as 1948 various organizations in the church had begun to discuss the need for an addition. In 1952 the needs and goals of the church were reviewed by session. The practice of having coffee hours after worship service began in 1957 during the Rev. Lininger's ministry, creating a further demand for additional space. Not just space was at issue. Although fairly narrow, Lewis Street was a major thoroughfare, and when cars parked on both sides visibility was limited; the hundreds of Sunday school children making their way to the Lewis Street entrance each week were a major concern; for their safety, a new entry off Seventh Street was thought necessary.

In January 1958 results of further review were presented to a general meeting of the congregation by Leigh Gittins, and a motion was passed to form a Study Commission to investigate all facets of adding an educational and social wing. A Church Council was added to provide input as to the needs and desires of the church's various organizations. In due course the commission, chaired by Dr. E. V. (Vic) Simison, presented preliminary drawings to the congregation at its annual meeting, together with a recommendation that the church proceed, a recommendation that was accepted unanimously by the membership. A Fund Raising Committee chaired by Albert M. Weese was appointed, and preparations made for a fund-raising canvass of all members. A Building Committee, with Henry Dahlquist as its chair, was also named and charged with making concrete plans for the building itself. It was not an easy task, needs were great and figuring out how to fit an addition that would meet them in the limited space available was challenging, but in the end plans emerged for a 10,000 square-foot addition that seemed to fit the bill.

Encouraged by the work of these bodies, in July 1959 the congregation voted unanimously to proceed with construction and committed \$150,000 to the project. Actually not all this sum was earmarked for the new addition, \$11,500 was to go to retire the existing church mortgage and \$10,126 to retire the manse mortgage, both considered necessary before undertaking new construction (a new manse had been purchased for \$20,500 in 1958, this one at Eighth and Whitman). It had taken over a decade for the church to reach the point where it was ready to make a firm commitment, and it was to be another five years before the addition was ready to be dedicated. Things may have been done "decently and in order," but certainly not speedily!

In the end, funding was key. Local sources were important, but the Board of National Missions would need to extend financial aid if the addition were to become reality. The turning point came in July 1959, when George Beddell, western representative of the board, endorsed the church's plans and offered to return the following year to aid in fund-raising. In May 1961, with a commitment in hand for \$105,000 of support from the National Board, the church hired Morgan Tovey, Jr., as building architect. When the church's solicitation teams approached the membership, they promptly met with success, raising \$76,117 in pledges in the first day. Beddell, back in town to assist in the campaign, pronounced himself "very proud of what your church has accomplished." By December 1961, \$84,000 had been pledged locally, with \$43,000 already paid in, so church authorities called for bids. In February 1962, Vernon Hershberger won the building contract with a base bid of \$86,990.

In March, church offices moved to the Hall Building on North Main for the duration of construction — and in spite of the confusion during the work, the October communion was the largest ever served in the church. That same month, the Board of Trustees and the Session were merged into one body, providing a simpler form of governance for the church that may have helped to speed things along. Whatever the reason, Hershberger pushed ahead rapidly, and by January 1963 the new addition was complete (except for the third floor and classroom space in the basement, which were left unfinished to save money and thus insure that the church not again find itself financially overextended as it had been in the thirties; when the third floor was finally completed it was done by re-financing the mortgage on the manse, not by taking on new debt, and much of the work was done by church members, a group that dubbed itself "the dirty dozen." On January 13, the Rev. Dr. John L. Anderson of the Religion Department of Presbyterian-affiliated Lewis and Clark College in Portland, gave the dedicatory sermon; as its title indicates, he pointedly asked the congregation for what purpose the addition would be used, "For Refuge or Refueling?" There was no question as to the answer he hoped would be forthcoming.

Dr. Anderson need not have been concerned. Unlike the building campaign in the 1920s, this one seems to have invigorated the congregation, rather than worn it down. Membership continued to grow. In 1959, when the congregation committed itself to construction of an addition, membership stood at 500 and church school enrollment at 325; by the time it was dedicated, active membership had risen to 620 and space for the burgeoning membership and its many activities was more needed than ever.

Moreover, the old kitchen had been a headache for years. On one occasion, the Mariners had scheduled a spaghetti feed, but there was a torrential downpour on the appointed evening and members had to spend hours carrying out pots of water from sinks backed up from the storm drains. Both it and the antiquated furnace were now replaced. Clearly, the decision to expand the church's physical plant had been a wise one.

However welcome the added space may have been, it did bring with it some interesting problems. One involved what to call the various rooms in the addition. Some suggested naming them after people who had been key figures in the history of the congregation; Mrs. E. C. White's name was among those frequently mentioned, Percy Havenor another. But Tom Norris thought the idea fraught with danger. How would one decide which pillars of the congregation

to honor? Surely, he argued, there would be those who considered themselves (or their ancestors) worthy and would be miffed when they were not chosen. Moreover, experience with the stained glass windows in the sanctuary showed how touchy the issue of naming things after a member of the congregation could be; when one member donated funds for a window and dedicated it to her husband, the propriety of doing so and the way she had gone about it were sharply questioned. After considerable thought and discussion, Norris provided the solution: name the various rooms not after members of the congregation, but after giants in the history of Presbyterianism in the Rocky Mountain-Pacific Northwest region. The Rev. Lininger thought the idea excellent and proceeded to research regional history to come up with names to use. In the end, he settled on Henry Spalding, Marcus Whitman, Henry Kendall, Sheldon Jackson, and Amelia Frost, names that are with us still. Norris was relieved. Members accepted the names with alacrity, and no one was offended by being omitted. There were no Spaldings, Whitmans, Kendalls, or Frosts in the congregation, and everyone realized that the Jackson room was not named after the lone family with that surname.

Similarly, at the time the new addition was built there were insufficient funds to complete the chapel, located across the narthex from the sanctuary. When completed later by master carpenter (and elder) Jim Stitt, it would feature a magnificent backlit stained glass panel behind the altar depicting the seal of the United Presbyterian Church. Purchase and installation of the panel, crafted by Judson Studios of California, was paid for by Clarence Green, but Memorial Funds and a number of private donations were used for the rest of the chapel. Working in a self-appointed “executive session,” the Rev. Lininger and Tom Norris picked the design of the panel and agreed that the chapel itself should simply be called the Memorial Chapel, since many had contributed to it and the Memorial Fund had been a major source of support. Oddly, this simple yet effective solution, like that used in the naming of the other rooms earlier, was settled upon in a most un-Presbyterian manner. No committee was formed to bring it about! Lininger himself recognized the irony in this. As he later put it with some amusement, if he and Norris were “the stick” in proceeding in this authoritarian way, the church was “stuck with it.”

In time Norris’s fear of the pitfalls of naming the rooms after key members of the local church proved well grounded. In the late seventies, the basement was remodeled and a part turned into Christian education classrooms. Joan McCune and Jane Wyndham suggested naming the new rooms after members of the congregation who had made major contributions to Christian education during the church’s early years. They were asked to serve as a committee to come up with appropriate choices. Various names were suggested, and in time they made their choices and sent them to the session for approval. Immediately, a number of alternatives were proffered, including the names of various people who had done nothing in the area of CE. In the end, the session rejected the names McCune and Wyndham proposed, but found none better. To this day, unlike the other rooms in the addition, the basement Christian Education rooms remain unnamed. Presbyterians may have a penchant for forming committees, but even with them in place there is no guarantee that desired ends will be reached.