

# History of Sharon Community Presbyterian Church

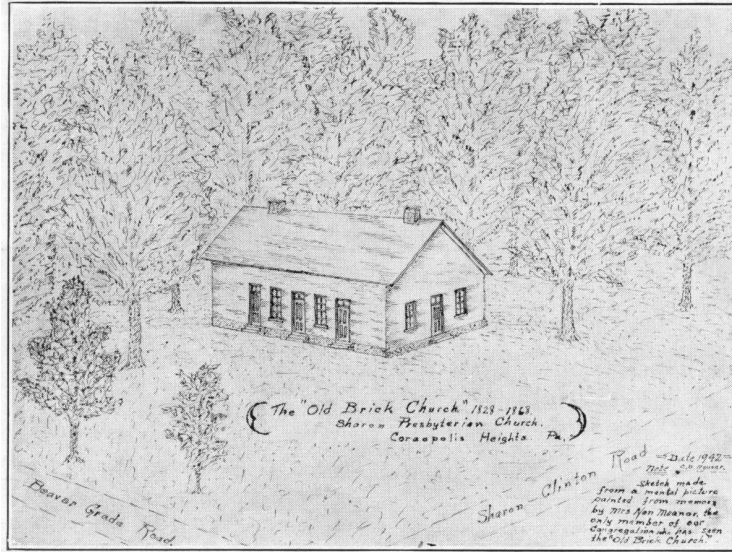
Presented by  
Kathy Hamsher  
April 7, 2013



**The church is not a building,  
The church is not a steeple,  
The church is not a resting place,  
The church is the people.**

However, there is a long and fascinating history of Sharon Community Presbyterian Church and its buildings. Therefore, this presentation is not so much about the people, but more about the buildings from August 1817 to today in 2013.

Sharon Church grew from meeting in homes  
in August 1817 to a tent in the early 1820s



To 1828



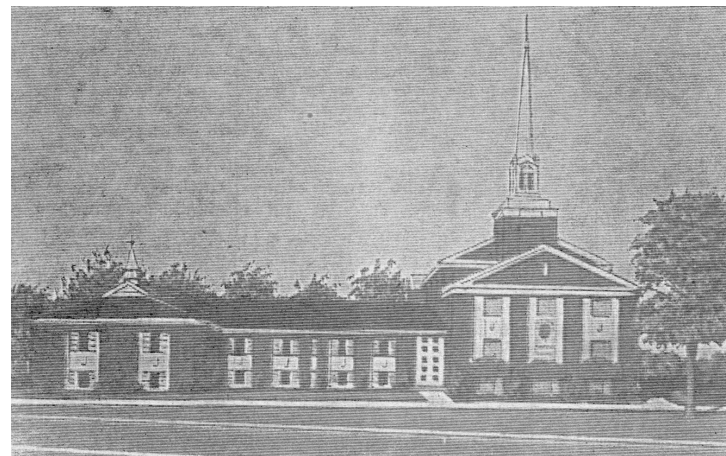
To 1868



To 1929



To 1959



To 1965



To 2001



To 2013



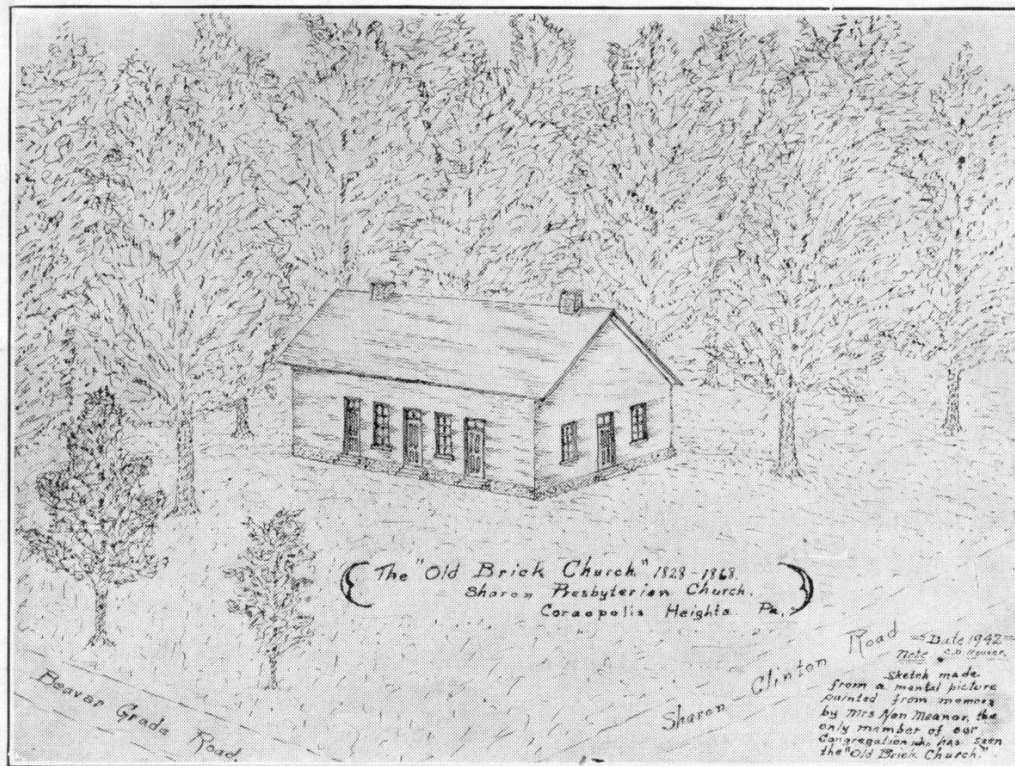
Moon Township has the unique distinction of being the first township in Allegheny County. The intersection of Beers School Road (now University Boulevard) and Brodhead/Beaver Grade Roads has been an integral intersection throughout Moon's history. The vantage point in this photograph is virtually unrecognizable today because of all the development.





Originally known as Sharon, Carnot was and is still today the commercial business district of Moon Township. While much of the open land in this undated photograph is now shopping centers and fast-food restaurants, in early 20th-century Moon, the business district was comprised of a grocery store, a general store, and a real estate company. The building in the middle is an elementary school.

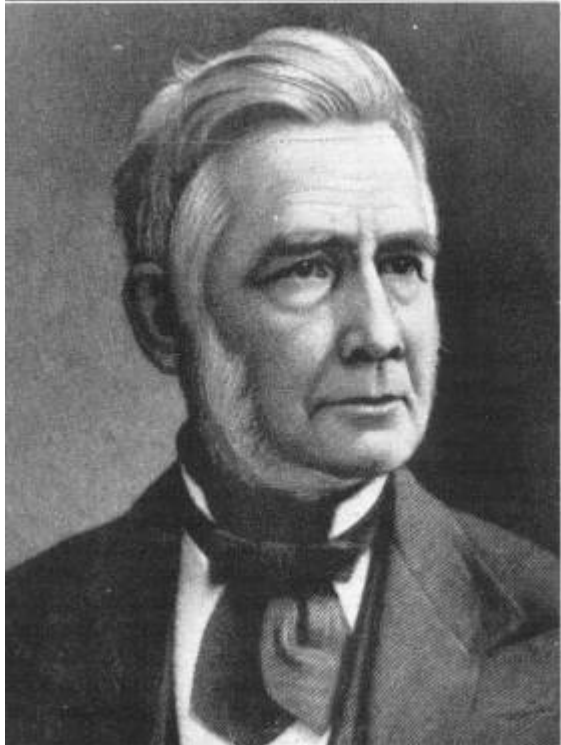
While several houses of worship exist in Moon Township, the oldest by far is Sharon Presbyterian Church. It was founded in August 1817 under the leadership of **Rev. Andrew McDonald** when a small group of Presbyterians gathered together in "the grove on the side of the hill which lay towards Flaugherty Run" for Christian worship. Services were held in the homes of the congregation and eventually in a purchased tent - whenever weather permitted. This new group became known as the "***Flaugherty Run Mission***". (1)



In 1827, under **Rev. Robert Rutherford**, a 40 x 50 foot brick church was begun below the present cemetery, near the intersection of Beaver Grade and Carnot Roads. Because of its excellent location, many people chose to build their homes around it, and it soon became the center of the village of Sharon (later changed to Carnot).



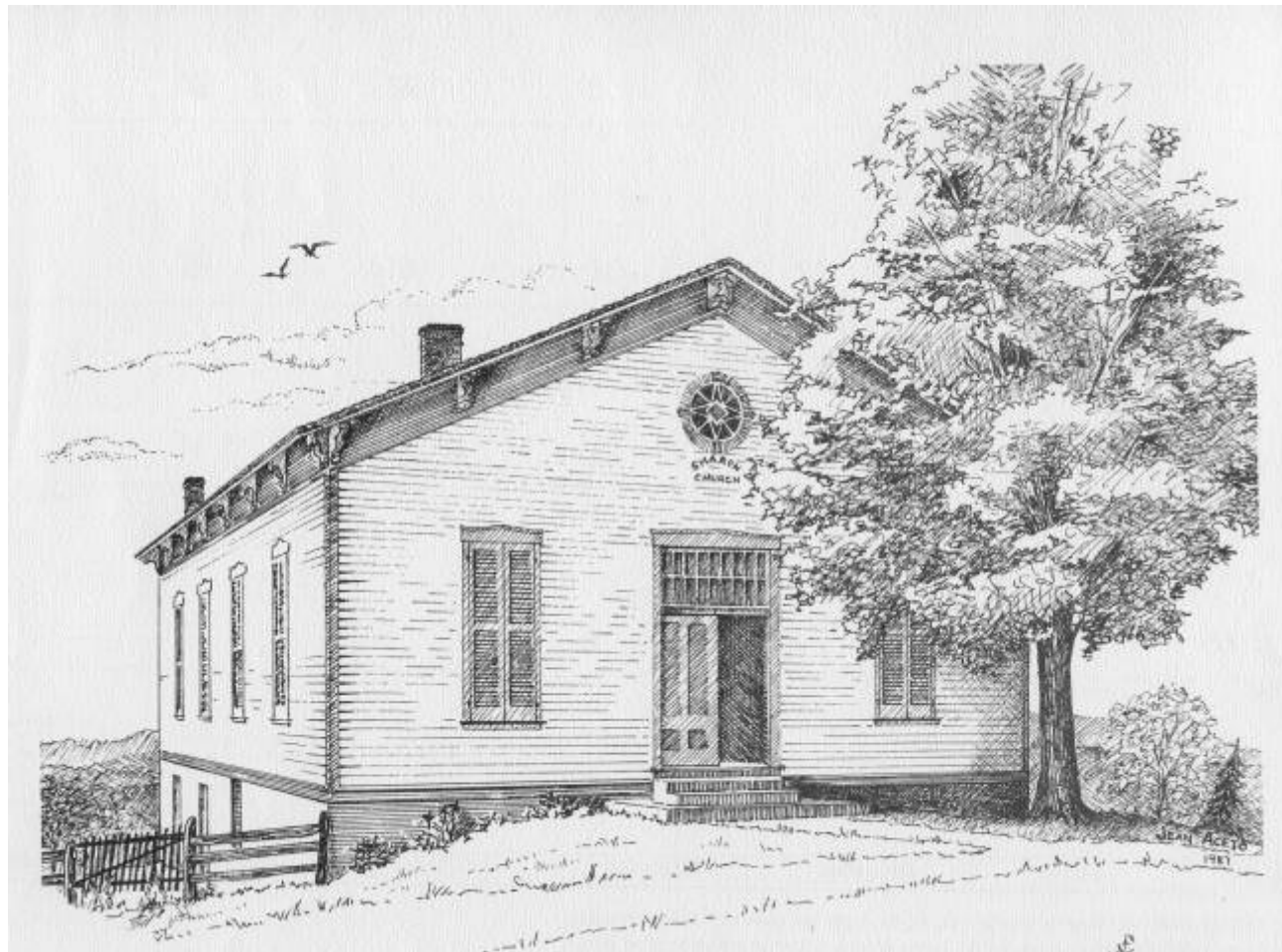
In February of 1829 came the man who was destined to serve as pastor of the Sharon congregation for the next 50 years, the **Reverend S. C. Jennings**. He was noted for his energetic work against the traffic and use of liquor, and fought until he died against its evils. As there was no physician in this community, Dr. Jennings, having been descended from a "long line of medical men", felt called to practice the art of healing for some 20 years. It was not uncommon for his medical bag and dental forceps to accompany him on a "pastor's call". There is still a set of steps leading to his home which was between St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church and Amherst Acres.



In 1847 a decision was made by the Board of Elders to change the name of the church from the "Flaugherty Run Mission" to the "**Sharon Meeting House**". (3)

In 1861 the church received its charter and the name became "**Presbyterian Congregation of Sharon**". (4)

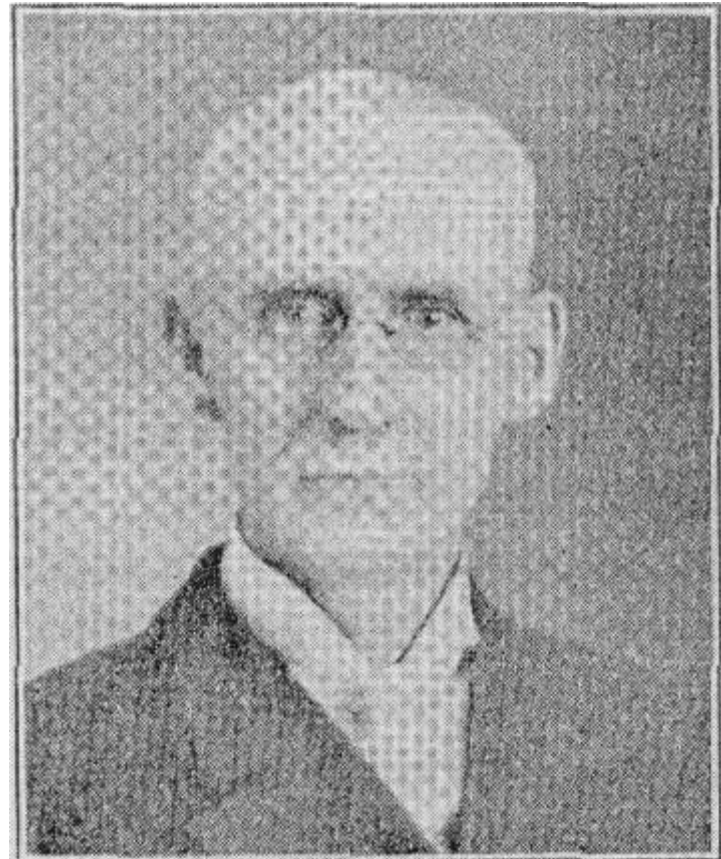
Preparations were begun in 1868 for a new and larger white frame church. The old brick building had been condemned and had to be torn down. The bricks from the original church were hauled up the hill and became the foundation for the new church building.



In 1880, **Reverend Seth R. Gordon** was installed as pastor. During this pastorate Jeremiah Meek donated ground to the church for a parsonage and surrounding lands, increasing the land holdings of Sharon Church to 13 acres. In 1880, a manse was built by the firm of Curry & Vandervort. It was located near the beginning of our present day driveway and was torn down in 1961 to make room for the sanctuary.



In 1884, **Rev. J. M. Mercer** became pastor of Sharon Presbyterian Church.



THE REV. DR. J. M. MERCER  
Pastor since March 3, 1884.



During his pastorate the church celebrated its 75th Anniversary in September 1892 with more than 1,200 people and underwent a few changes.



One very notable change in Sharon was the growth and increasing importance of the Sunday School department.

The cemetery was extended eastward bordering the road that passed directly in front of the church. In 1905, when the Carnot-Clinton Road was changed and paved, a great deal of fill was required and the cemetery that was surrounded by a wooden fence now had a high bank facing that road necessitating the building of the cemetery's stone wall.



In 1910 the antiquated oil lamps lighting the interior of the church were replaced with new gas lighting and a large gas chandelier was hung in the center of the church.



On September 17, 1918 a new pastor was installed at "Old Sharon". **Reverend L. B. Wissinger** took over the duties that so long had been the responsibility of Dr. Mercer.

On April 22, 1921, the **Reverend O. C. Griffith** was installed as pastor, with the annual salary of \$2,000, free use of the manse, and four weeks vacation - quite a raise from Dr. Jennings' original \$150 salary.

The next minister to come to Sharon was the **Reverend L. O. Smith**. Mr. Smith was installed as regular pastor in May of 1925.



In May and June of 1929, the Board decided to refurbish the old church and make a slight change in the collection ritual. The most noticeable change occurred in the old tradition of collection that was taken by an Elder who utilized a long pole with a felt bag at the end. It was now to be taken by a collection plate.

The sanctuary received new flooring and new electric lighting, the pews that were small and uncomfortable were replaced, the choir loft was relocated, and a pipe organ was purchased.

However, renovations were to be short-lived as a tornado ripped through the area on July 12, 1929. The church roof was thrown into the graveyard that sits beside the church, and the interior of the church was damaged by the torrential rains that accompanied the tornado. As can be seen below, pieces of the shattered building were strewn about.





To repair the damaged roof and interior of the church cost the congregation \$6,000 over and above the \$2,000 that was sunk into repairs just weeks before. The "new" "Old Sharon" reopened on Sunday, October 27, 1929.

When the White Church was first constructed, it did not have a belfry or a steeple. When the roof was reconstructed with a steeper pitch after the tornado, Mount Calvary Presbyterian Church of Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, donated a large bell. So a cupola/belfry was added to the new roof to house the bell.





In November 1932 pastoral duties were then assumed by the **Reverend J. M. Briceland**.

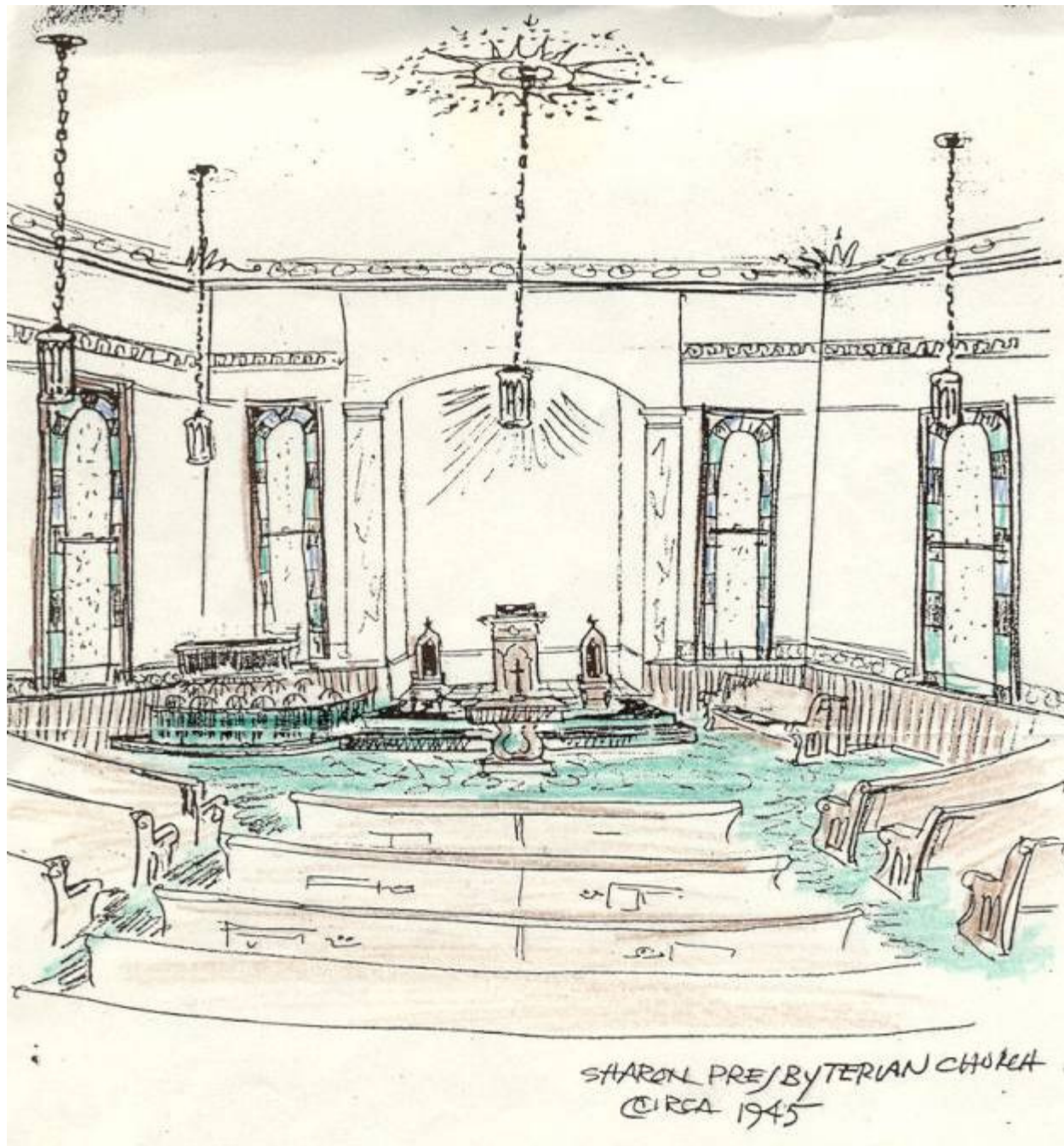
Sharon was then without a regular pastor for over a year until **Rev. Harry P. Walrond** was installed on October 20, 1939.

During the 1940s, Sharon Presbyterian Church was the only church in Moon Township. For that reason, the church received graves from the Gilead Cemetery of the old Bell Farm Church, which was razed to make way for the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.

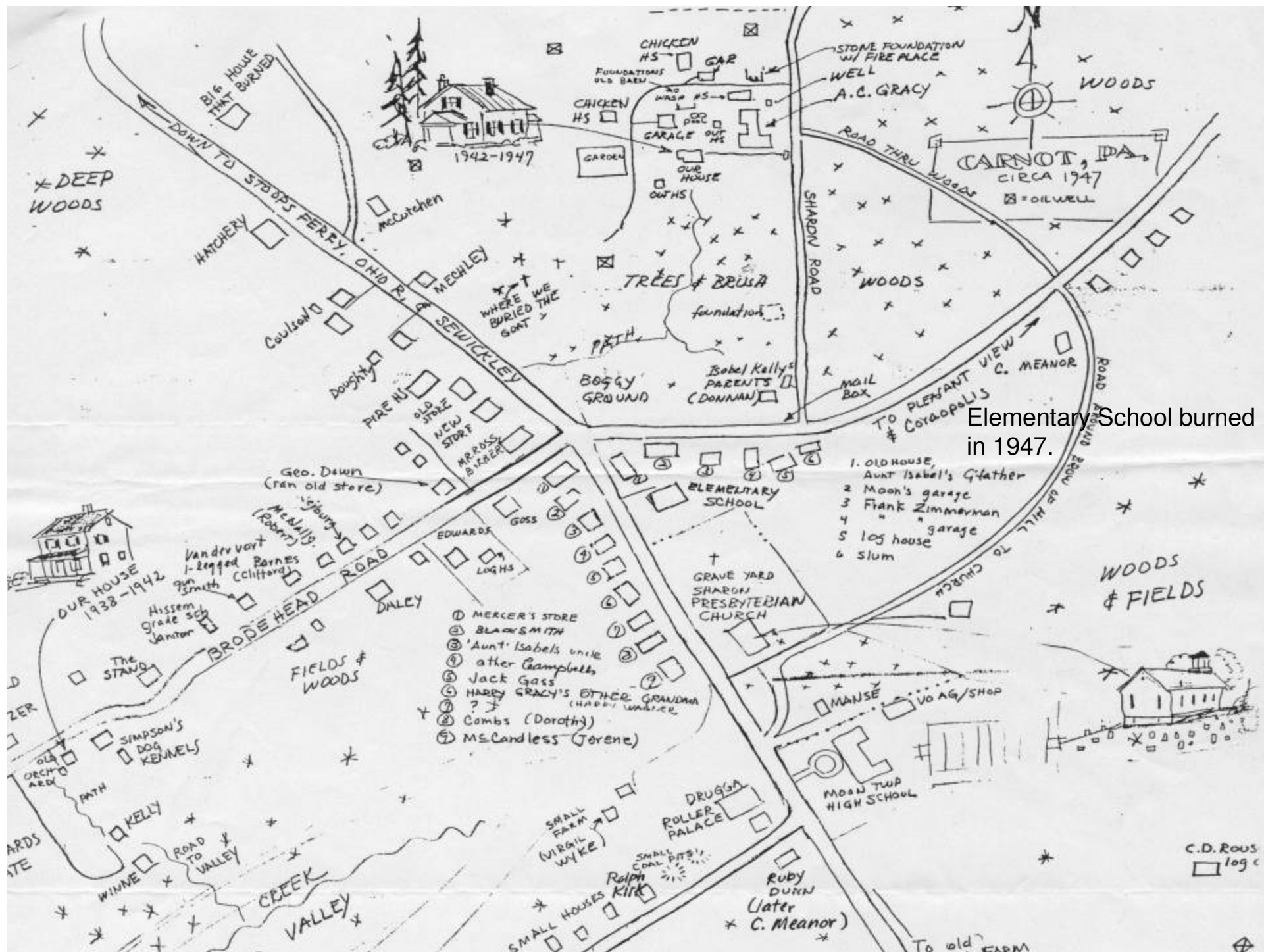


During the 1940s, a satellite Sunday School was held in the Odd Fellows Hall in Stoops Ferry. There were many children living in that area and transportation was a problem at that time.

In September 1943, **Rev. Clair V. McNeel** was installed as pastor of Sharon. The next few years in this community and church were characterized by World War II. Because of the scarcity of gasoline and other rationing, meetings and services were kept at a minimum. One elder had even asked to resign from the Session because he was unable to attend the meetings. The reason: no gas.



Inside of 1945  
sanctuary as  
remembered by  
Bob Campbell.





In June 1947, the **Rev. William M. Allman** was installed. He initiated the Board of Deacons for the purpose of assisting in the operation of the church. In the fall of 1950 the congregation undertook the enormous task of authorizing the church officers to borrow \$19,000. This money was to provide funds for church repairs, to convert the manse to a parish house (to be used for Sunday School and Kindergarten), and to erect a new manse.

The new manse was a brick and frame building. Used bricks were dumped near the site and were painstakingly cleaned by Mr. and Mrs. Eaton. This manse stood somewhere in the vicinity between the present day sanctuary and the old Carnot School.



The manse was moved in August 1961 to make way for the Sanctuary addition. Onstott, Brown (undertaker), Frank Cummings and Bill Stouffer families lived in that home after it was moved. The foundation of another home located near the manse can still be seen at the back of the present day parking lot on the hill between the dumpsters and the end of the cemetery road.

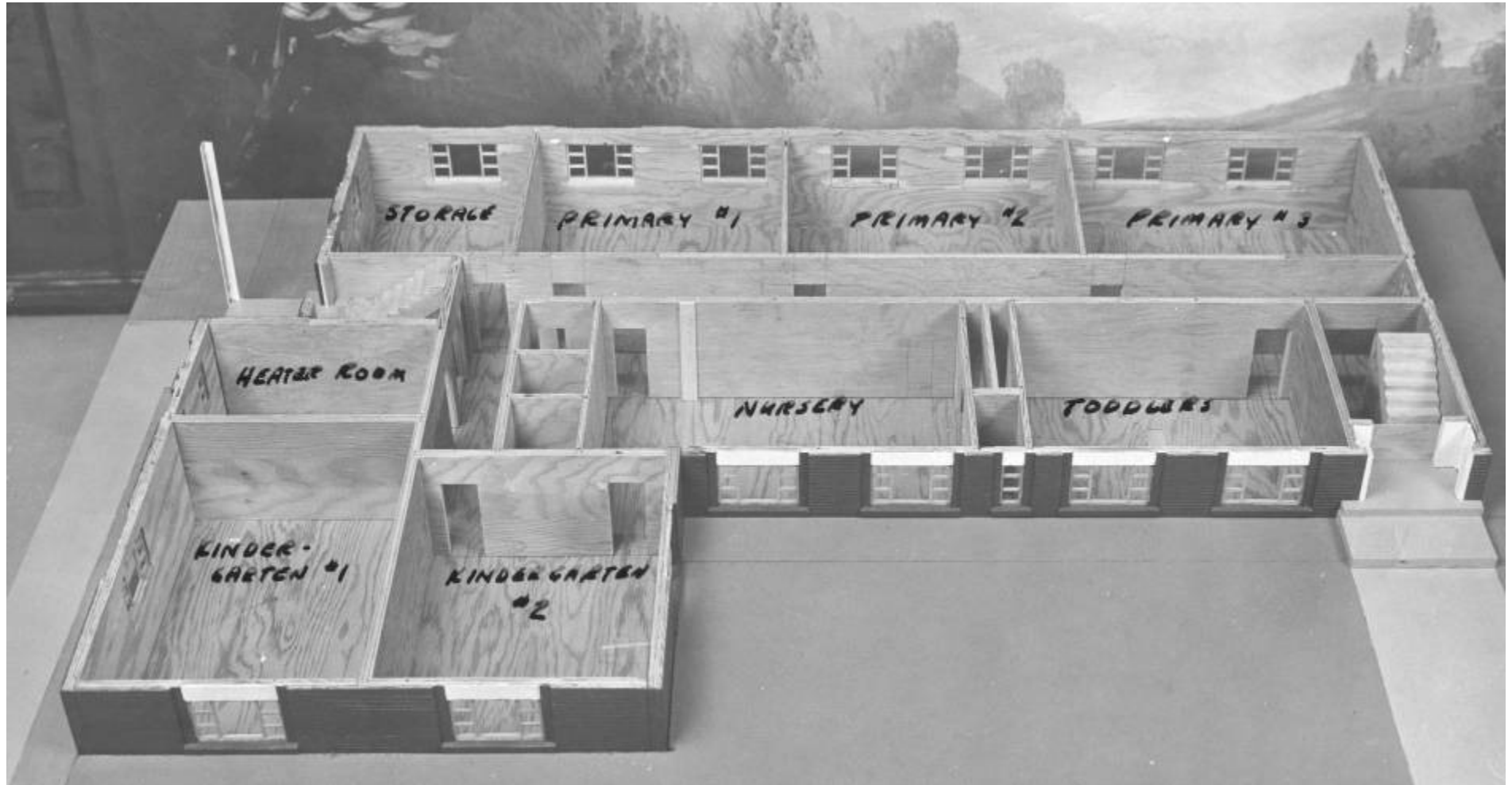


**Rev. William H. Johnson** was installed as pastor on April 13, 1956. It was in this year that Sharon began experiencing "growing pains". The congregation now began to realize that the present facilities and programs, while having served the community nobly in the past, were fast becoming inadequate for the growing community and church. Prior to this year, the activities and growth had been slowly but steadily moving; now the bubble was bursting. Sharon was no longer a rural, country church. It was time for her sleep to be over. Sharon was to have a new awakening and a rebirth.

The Presbyterian Congregation of Sharon changed its name to the ***Sharon Presbyterian Church of Moon Township*** (5) in the Fall of 1956. The name changed just two years later in 1958 to ***Sharon Community Presbyterian Church*** (6) (SCPC).

By 1957, Sharon Community Presbyterian Church's Sunday school enrollment was more than the church could handle. It was decided that the church would take on a \$100,000 Christian Education building project with Glenn Bickerstaff as architect. The church broke ground on August 5, 1958 and a Christian Education Building was constructed and dedicated to the glory of God on June 7, 1959.





First Floor of Education Building

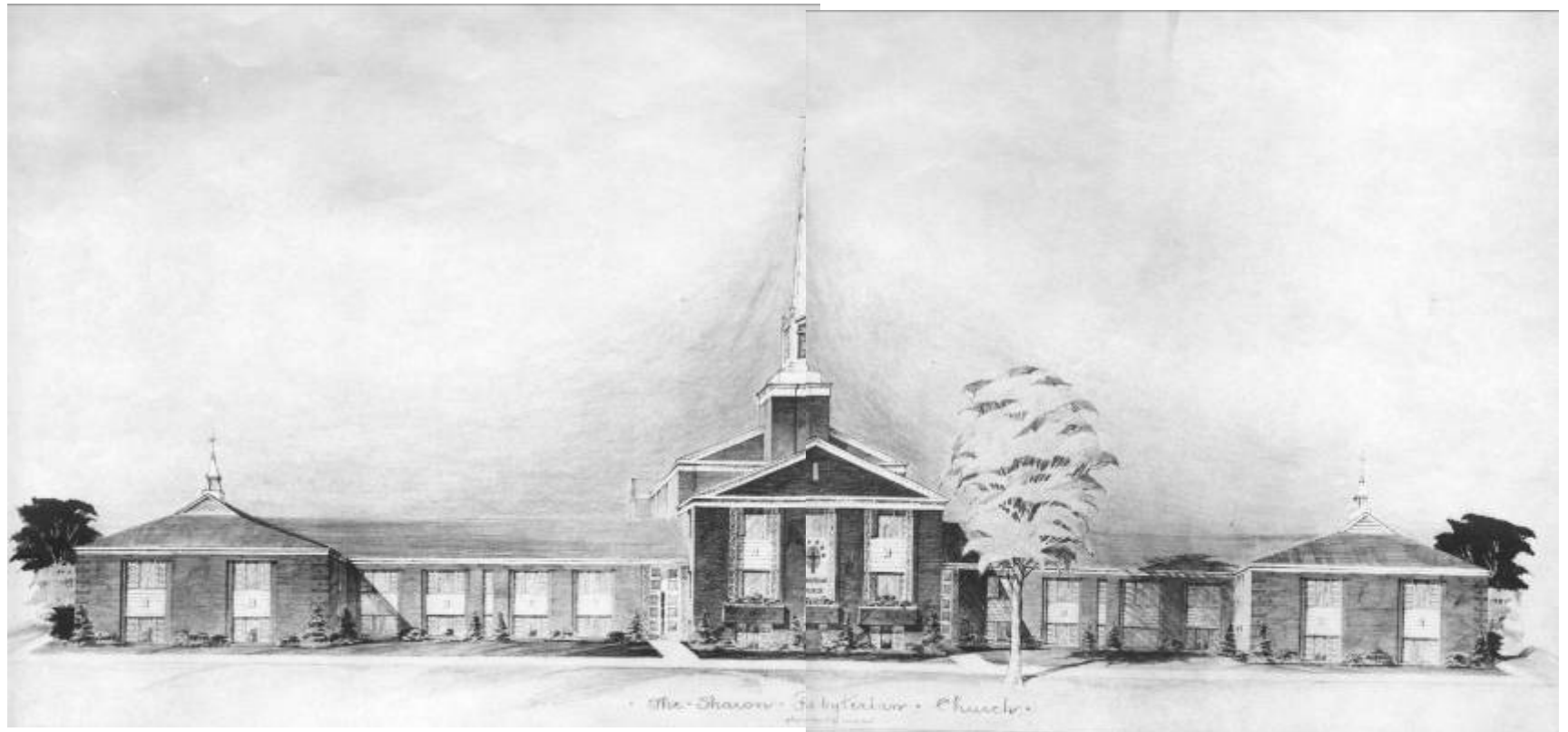




Second Floor of Education Building



However, long-range planners did not end the expansion program there. The design of the Education Building was such that one day its walls would meet with the walls of a new church sanctuary and be viewed as one, large building.



The congregation did not wait for the contractors to even start the new sanctuary before launching two large-scale education programs.

- Sharon Church Weekly Kindergarten, organized in September 1959 with 25 students, was the only kindergarten in the Township.
- Sharon Church Youth Club, a weekly 3-hour program for children and youth in grades four through senior high, began in 1961, providing an opportunity for almost all of the church's school-aged children to receive Christian instruction in addition to the regularly scheduled Sunday School.



Magi begin their trek across the front of the Education Building (1963).

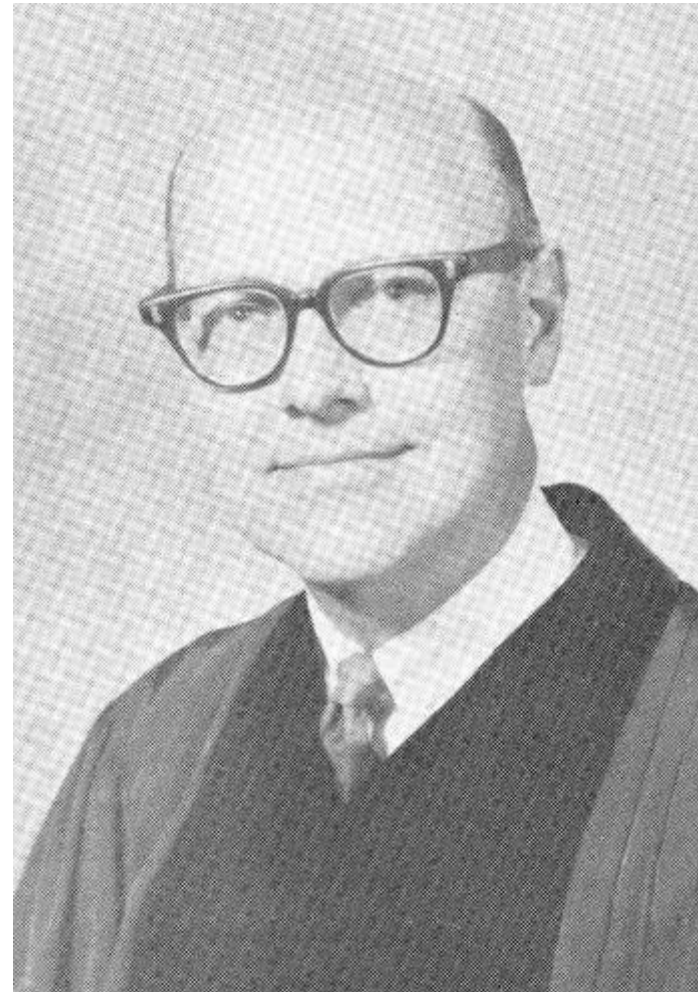


The Deacons were in charge of moving the Magi.



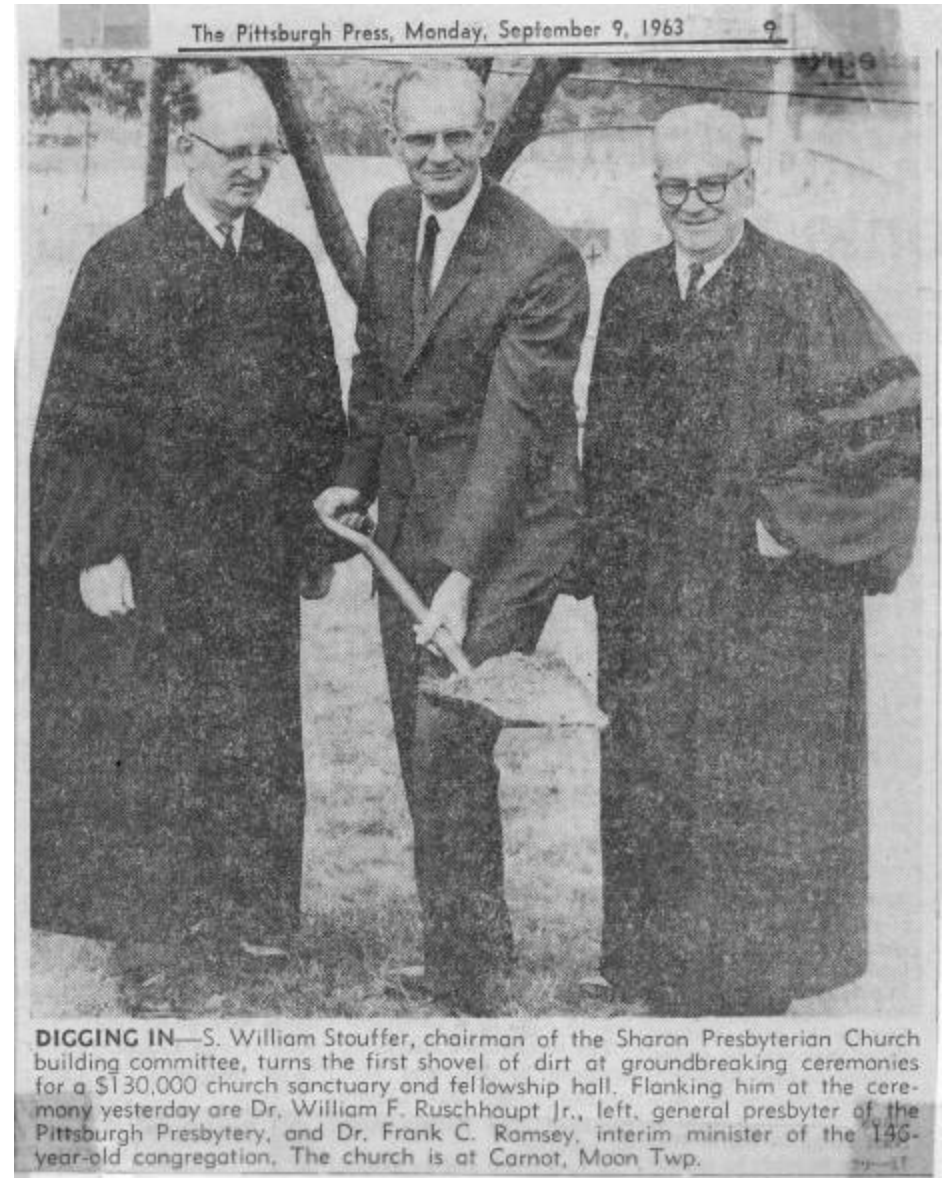


On March 1, 1964, another Johnson, the **Rev. Dr. Reuel E. Johnson** was installed as the senior pastor. He was to become a beloved and long-serving minister in the church for 16 years. During his tenure, the church grew dramatically and new ministries were started, including the West Hills Area Food Pantry, which in 2013 serves groceries to 150 to 200 needy families per week.



In 1963, 94 years after its birth, dry rot had pervaded the joists and rafters of the old sanctuary building rendering it beyond the point of restoration. After consultation with an architect, the Board made a decision to build a new sanctuary.

Groundbreaking for the new church and Stouffer Fellowship Hall was held on September 8, 1963. Bill Stouffer is in the middle.





The steeple is built from the ground up.





Sanctuary looking from the Chancel area toward the Narthex.

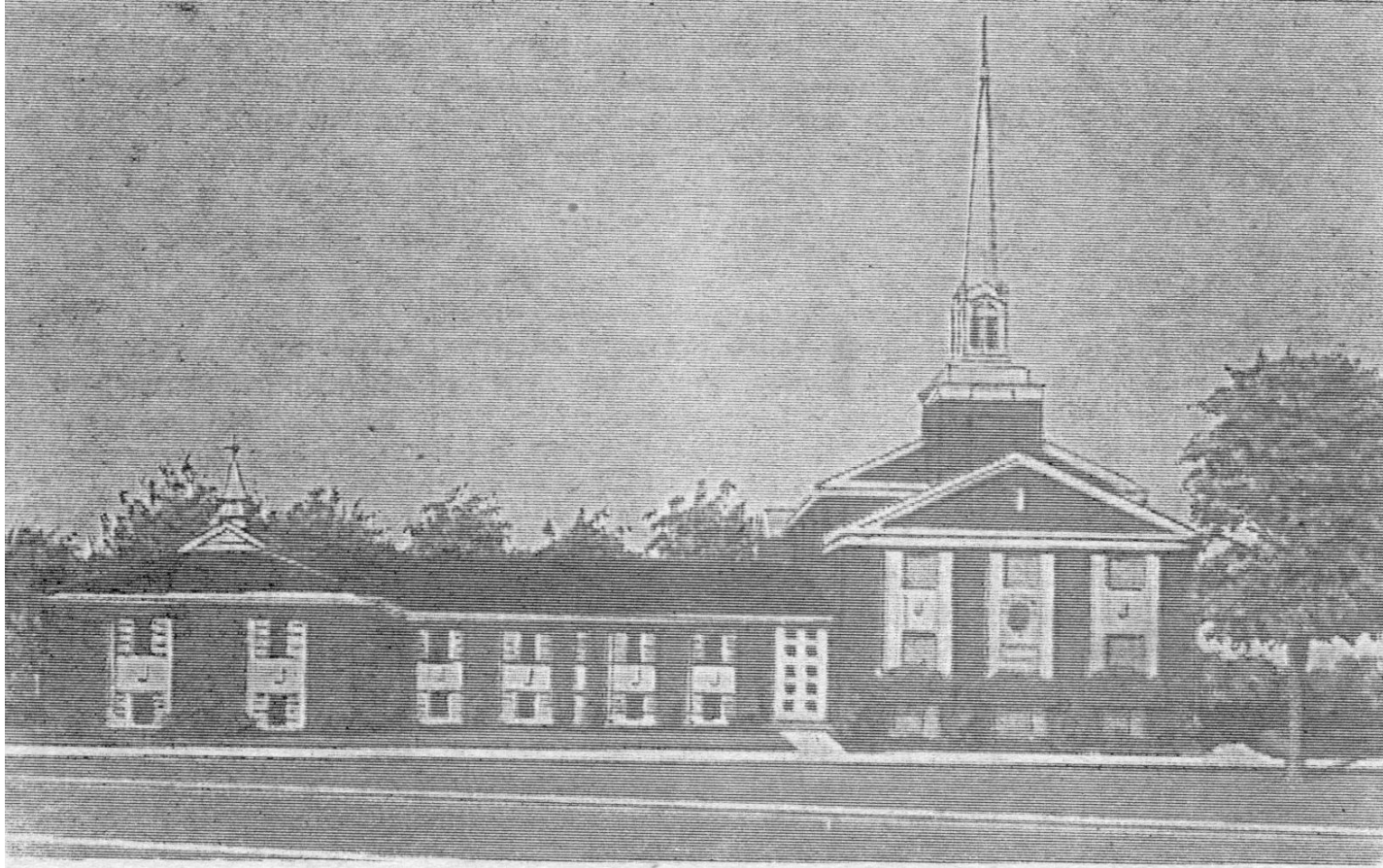
Do you notice what is different in the sanctuary from today?



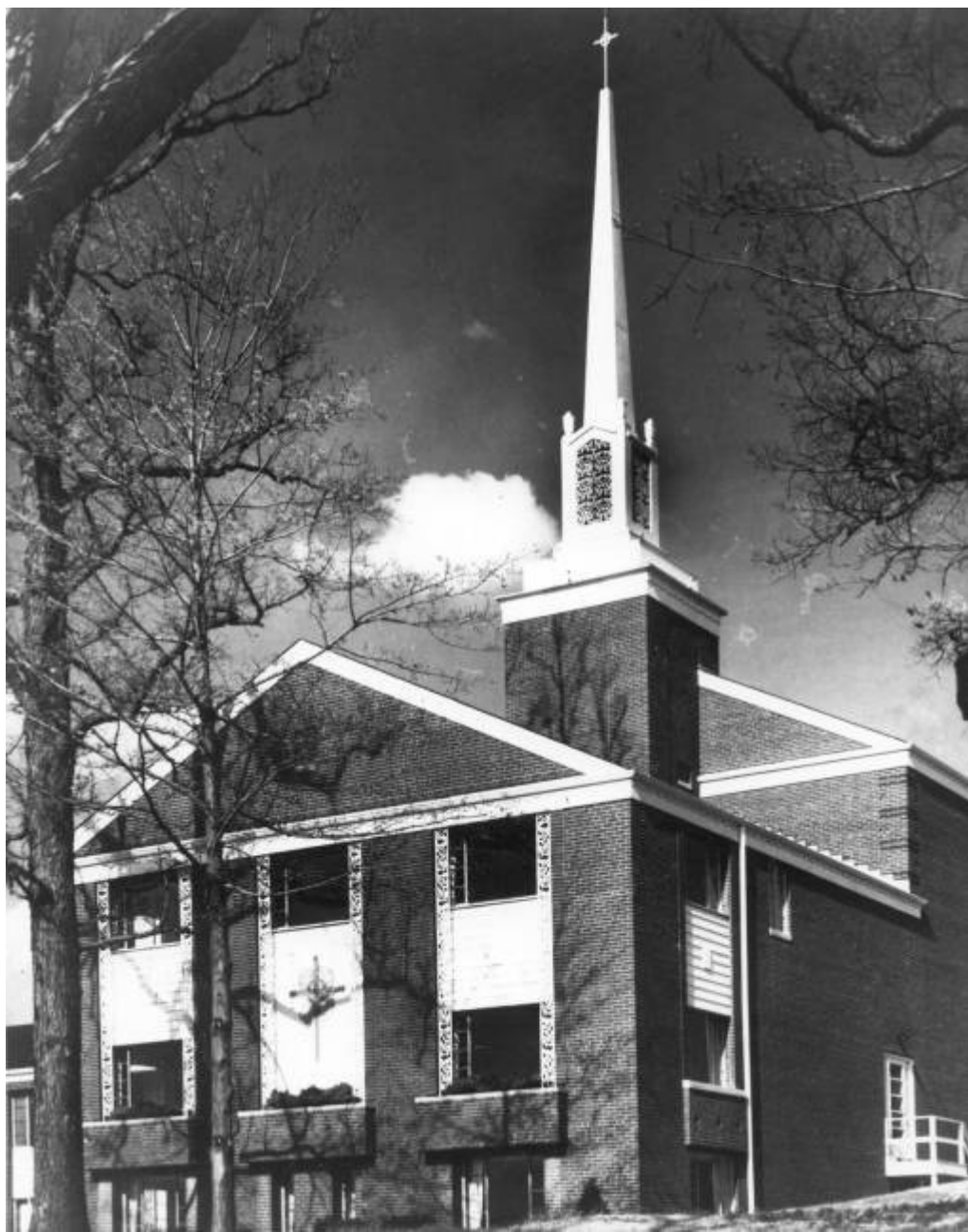


The cornerstone was set on October 18, 1964.





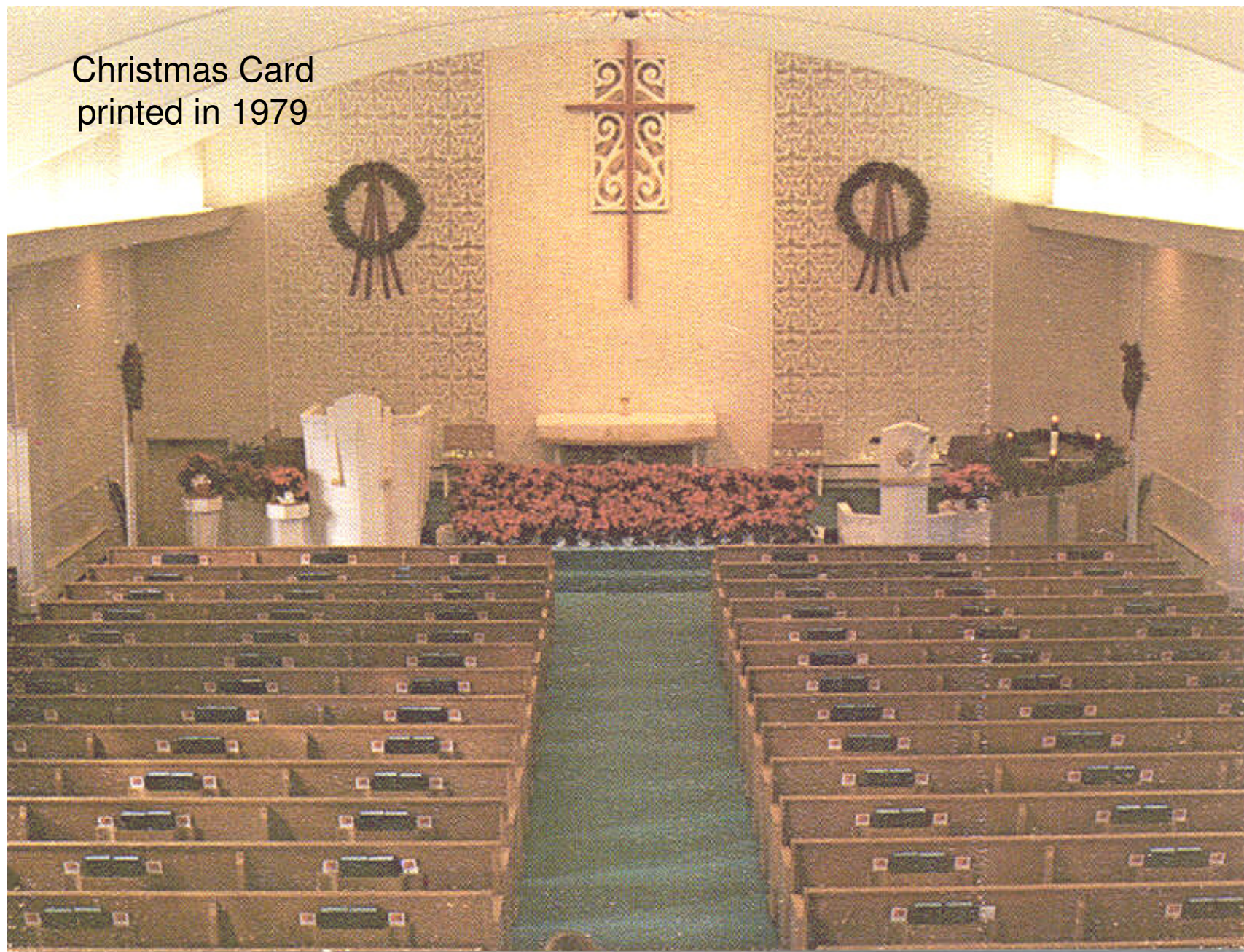
With the spring of 1965 came the completion of the long-awaited sanctuary. The congregation was now able to move from the white frame church to their new brick home, which they dedicated to the glory of God on April 25 and May 2, 1965.







Christmas Card  
printed in 1979



Members of the church pitched in to remove the pews in the old white church and turn the sanctuary into a gymnasium.

The Food Pantry was housed in the basement, along with several classrooms.

In 1983 and 1984, the front of the sanctuary was renovated. The corners of the wooden railings on the chancel were reversed in direction, the pulpit and lectern were moved up onto the chancel, the iron posts down the side of the sanctuary were removed and used as railings for the office steps and the sidewalk into Fellowship Hall, and new carpeting was installed.



## Sharon Merry Mates Install Officers



1969 Merry Mates Officers.

Can you identify the dashing young couple on the left?

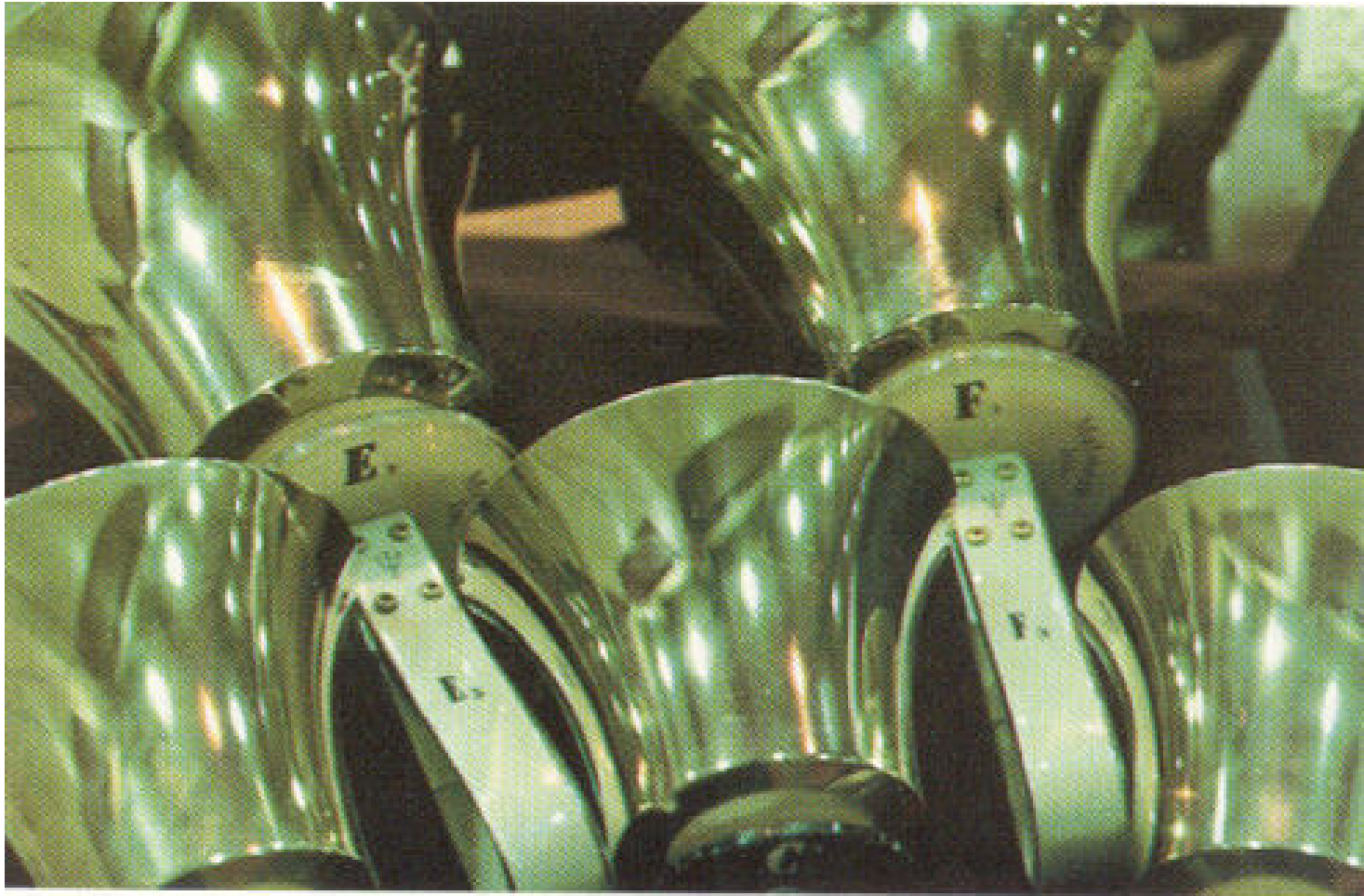


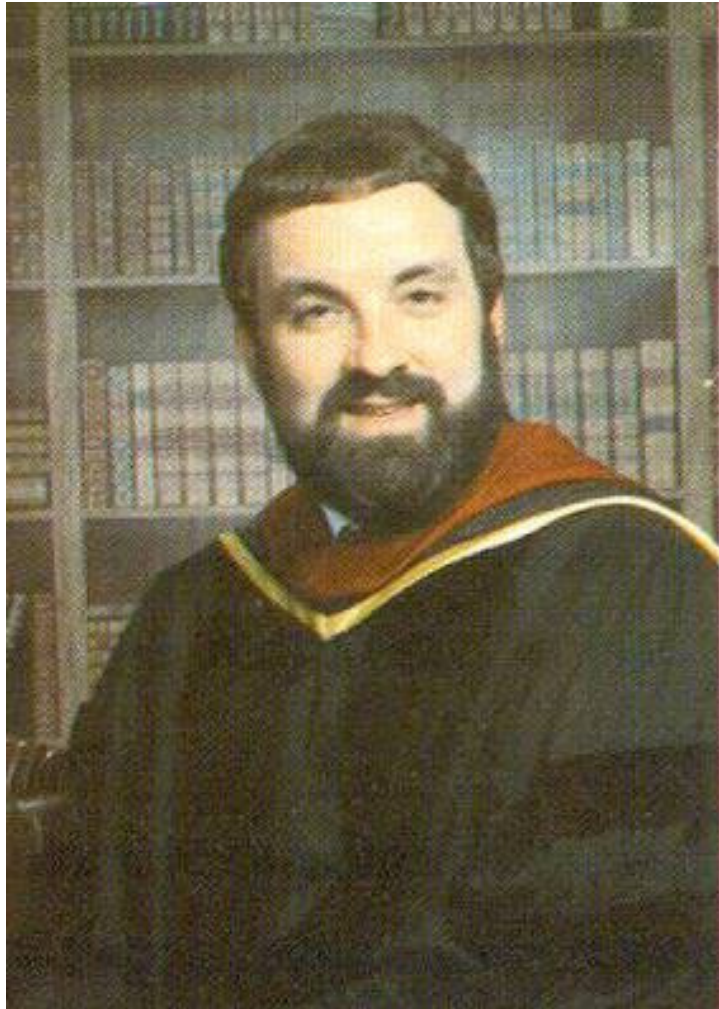


The Advent wreath we still use today was donated in the 1970s.



English handbells were added to the music program in the late 1970s (probably 1978).





1974 marked the arrival of Rev. William F. Moore as Assistant Pastor. In March, 1980, Dr. Johnson suffered a fatal heart attack. The congregation was devastated by the loss of their beloved pastor. **Rev. William F. Moore** became the Interim Pastor. Later that year, he was called and installed as the Senior Pastor. Rev. Moore, with his strong organizational skills, led the church through the turbulent eighties and into the nineties.



Most notably during Rev. Moore's time as pastor, the TV ministry was newly initiated (circa 1979). The cablecast was originally provided for shut-ins who could not attend church, but today it is available throughout this area via the local community channels.

After Rev. Moore resigned to take a pastorate at the Calvary Presbyterian Church in Riverside, California, **Rev. Barton Leach** was retained in October, 1993, as the Interim Pastor. He did a superb job in rallying the congregation to prepare for a new senior pastor. Under Rev. Leach's leadership, the church held a financial drive called the "New Era Fund". Through this fund approximately \$175,000 was raised to repave the parking lot, replace the roofing on the buildings, and establish a reserve to renovate the organ.



In April, 1995, the current Senior Pastor, the **Rev. Roger P. Howard (16th)**, was called, and he began work with the church in June of that same year. Rev. Howard has proven to be an excellent teacher and leads many Adult Education classes regaling us with his knowledge of the Bible, languages, and history of the Presbyterian church.



In the Fall of 1995, the existing ranks of pipes for the organ were removed and taken to Bunn-Minnick headquarters in Columbus, Ohio, to be refurbished. A brand new 3-manual Bunn-Minnick organ console was built, and the leathers on all the boxes were replaced.



Several members even traveled to Columbus to see the pipes being restored and the new console being built.



The organ was completed, installed, and then dedicated in May 1996 on a spring day when the temperature soared to 92°.



The year 1997 saw the old gold choir robes replaced with more modern style dark blue robes with white trim around the stoles.







In 1998 pew cushions were added and the windows were replaced in the sanctuary.



Confessional Banners, depicting the confessions of our denomination, were created and dedicated in October of 1998.



In the Spring of 1998 an offer was made to refurbish the "Old White Church". The Session engaged an architect and others to investigate the condition of the building and to see what needed to be done. Much to the disappointment of Session and the members, the building was deemed to be in dangerous condition. In May 1999 the building was closed.



(Remember: The original building - built in 1868 - had dry rot in 1963. It was now 130 years old in 1998!!)

The dilemma then became not whether to rebuild, but where to rebuild. After much discussion, it was decided to reuse the existing Old White Church footer and erect a new building that would be similar in appearance to the old building. This pleased the congregation and the community, many of whom viewed it as an historical landmark.

However, the Old White Church was found to have no footer and the foundation (which turned out to be 170-year-old bricks from the original brick church built in 1828) was deemed not substantial enough to support the new building. Also, the slab on which the church had been built was now tilting 8”.

One of the contractors demolishing the foundation was a bit unnerved to come across a grave marker from 1869 for the Onstott family. Construction immediately was halted until it was determined that the marker must have accidentally fallen into the building site hole since a duplicate marker was located in the cemetery right where it should have been. The septic tank from the White Church was also discovered.



In November 1999 the old building and footer were demolished to make way for a new Sharon Youth and Community Center (YCC).



June 2000 Trinity Sunday  
Groundbreaking for YCC



A brick from the 1828 church has  
been added to this display.

In July 2000 construction began.

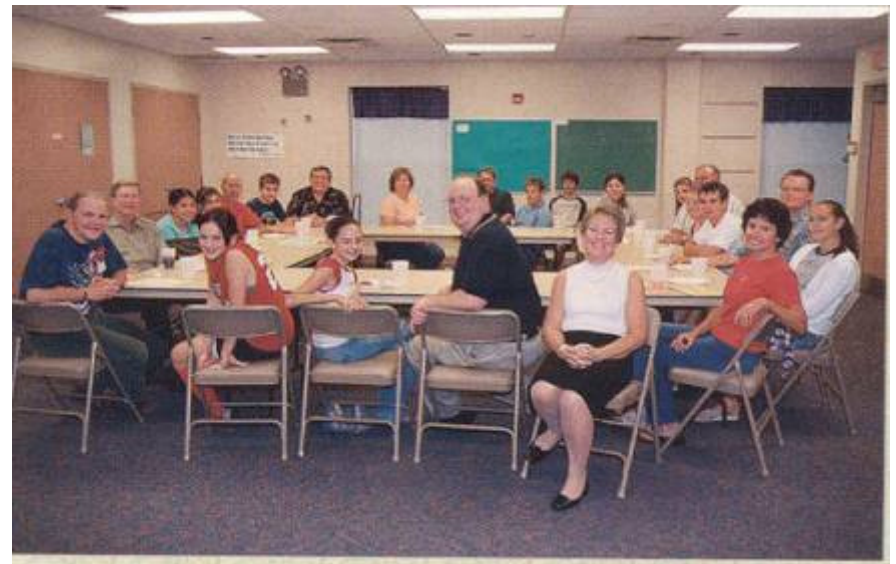




The YCC building was dedicated on  
Trinity Sunday, June 10, 2001.



The YCC provides much improved storage and access for the West Hills Food Pantry, more classrooms for Sunday School, classrooms with moveable walls, meeting facilities for the Youth Groups of SCPC and community groups, and an improved gymnasium for athletic activities.



Along with the YCC, plans also included repairing the sanctuary walls which were cracking, fixing the leak in the steeple, and rebuilding the storage closet behind the Chancel area.



The bell from the roof of the Old White Church was saved. Since the function of the YCC was not to be a church, a cupola/belfry was not constructed. Based on a memorial located at Central College in Pella, Iowa, the bell was mounted on a brick base as a memorial to the "White Church".



Projectors and screens were added to the sanctuary in 2007 for use in Contemporary services and then used for all services beginning in March of 2009.



The Festival Trumpet Heroique ranks were added behind the Chancel in October 2001.





A new church sign was installed in 2011 as the old sign had been damaged by a wind storm.



The Zimbelstern organ stop was dedicated on Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013 in memory of Ona Baird.





YCC in  
2013







*“Sharon Community Presbyterian Church seeks to be an engaged, warm and caring family whose love for God fills us with a desire to know our Savior Jesus Christ more deeply, inviting everyone to grow in their faith, to serve Him, and follow His teachings.”*