

Presbyterian Church plagued by fires over the years



*The Rev. William Abraham Mast, on the right holding his hat against the cold January wind at the dedication of the cornerstone of the new church in 1924.
Photo from the Marilyn Mast Collection*

By Kathy Jordan

While only a burned-out shell of the old Presbyterian Church at 600 White Avenue remains today, memories of this once grand and glorious building, started under the leadership of the Rev. William Abraham Mast, will live on.

The currently unoccupied White Hall, gutted by fire on Sept. 15, housed Grand Junction's Presbyterians for many years.

The former church wasn't the first one the sect had built here. There was no Presbyterian Church buildings in this new "wild west" community when the Rev. Theodore S. Day arrived in Grand Junction June 26, 1883, as a recently ordained minister. At first the Presbyterian congregation met in McClure hall on Main Street and later at the Armory Hall.

By October 1884 the Presbyterians were meeting at the Southern Methodist Church, known as the Peoples' Church and located on Rood Avenue. Methodists held meetings on Sunday mornings and Presbyterians in the evenings.

It wasn't until Dec. 9, 1889, that the Presbyterian congregation started a simple 30-by- 50 foot building near the corner of Sixth Street and White Avenue, with the entrance on Sixth Street. The church was completed in April 1890.

On Sunday morning, Feb. 18, 1900, just two months short of the church's 10th birthday, the building caught fire and was destroyed. Apparently the fire had originated in the chimney a short while after the janitor had started a fire in the heating stove.

Fundraising started immediately for a new church. Among contributors was the First Church of Christ Scientist, Science, which gave \$25 to start a building fund.

On Sept. 23, 1900, a new Presbyterian Church at the same corner at Sixth Street and White Avenue was dedicated.

It was much larger, 62 by 48 feet, and could seat 400 people. The building had several gables, a tall bell tower and two entrance doors at the corner.

Fire struck again in the early evening on Sunday, March 11, 1917. The heart of the fire was under the rostrum, and it wasn't long before the pulpit and the piano dropped to the basement. The fire chief estimated the damage at \$800. The congregation estimated the cost at \$2,500. The insurance company went with the estimate of the fire chief and would only pay for church repairs.

By Oct. 14 services were again being held at the church.

In December 1919 the Rev. William Abraham Mast became the pastor.

The church was doing well by then, and members decided that rather than make repairs on the manse at 1045 Grand Ave., the church would purchase a large home at 960 Rood Ave. for Reverend Mast, his wife, Elizabeth, and their three sons, William, Wallace and Eugene.

At the same time, members decided that a new church should be built.

The last service in the old wood frame church took place June 23, 1923, and the next morning, demolition began on the old church.

Church services were held on the second floor of the YMCA building, then located at Fifth Street and Rood Avenue, for several months.

The cornerstone of the new building was engraved with a 1923 date. However, it wasn't until the snowy cold windy morning of Jan. 1, 1924, that Reverend Mast presided over setting the cornerstone for the new church.

By March 2, 1925, Wednesday evening prayer meetings were being held in the basement of the new church, although the rest of the building was not complete. By spring 1925 Reverend Mast had been successful in increasing church attendance and had been chosen to go to the May General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio.

Mast didn't live to see the church he started completed. He died Feb. 27, 1926 of complications from pneumonia.

Marilyn Mast Olson of Grand Junction, Reverend Mast's granddaughter, thinks her grandfather would have been extremely pleased at the dedication on that cold January morning four years and two weeks after he had presided over the laying of the corner stone for the new Presbyterian Church.

The new church was dedicated on Jan. 15, 1928. It has housed many pastors since Reverend Mast's tenure. Tom Hansen is the current pastor at the church's present location, 3940 Road 271/2..

(Some of the information compiled for this column was from the book "The Church at Sixth and White" By Charles Teed, a former Daily Sentinel reporter).