

## *Central Baptist Church History (1834 - 1973)*

Baptist history in Quincy began in 1834 when the homes of the six hundred people of the little village were scattered over the hills and hollows between Delaware Street and Broadway and west of Eighth Street to the river. Two Baptist families living in a double house on the corner of Third and Maine Streets had been making it a practice to meet together on each Lord's Day for Prayer. With the arrival of two more Baptist families from the East, they met for worship in the home of Rueben Turner on the corner of Third and Vermont.

In this home a meeting was held on July 4, 1835, with all of the residents who were Baptists, to organize a church. On August 29, 1835, again in the same home, the First Baptist Church of Quincy was fully organized with eight members. A Congregational church was the only other church in the village.

The next year, 1836, the little company of Baptists secured a lease on the Stafford School, located on the southeast corner of Fifth and Jersey and organized the first Sunday School, August 13, 1836. The church was admitted to the Salem Baptist Association. In 1837 they purchased a lot on the west side of Fourth street between Hampshire and Vermont and, with a membership of thirty-three, began the erection of their own house of worship, a one-room frame structure. Times were hard, money was scarce, and the building progressed very slowly. The members keenly felt the burden of a church debt, which at that time seemed staggering. Great sacrifices were made to complete the church, as none of the members were wealthy. Many of them gave nearly all they possessed to finish the building. It is said that Mr. Ebenezer Turner donated \$500.00 in cash, a large amount in those early days. It was all the money he had. It is especially significant that in 1842 the little debt-burdened congregation voted to take an offering for foreign missions for the first time. Thus they very early showed the feeling of the church toward missions.

The history of the bell which now hangs in the tower at Central Baptist Church dates back to 1843. A consignment of bells brought up the river by steamboat was sold to pay the freight. One of the finest of these was purchased by Governor John Wood, Samuel Holmes, and R.M. Young and was offered to the first church in the village which would provide a belfry in which to hang it. The bell was promptly claimed by the Baptist church and installed in their new belfry. As the church moved from one building to another, the bell was always moved. Today the historic bell hangs in the tower of Central Baptist Church, and it is rung for all services of worship.

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In the old records, we read that in 1847, "on account of the low spiritual state of the church and the falling into sin of many of its members, it is deemed advisable to have a day of fasting and prayer; because of a difference of opinion among several of the members which has assumed the nature of a church quarrel, visiting brethren were invited for a reconciliation between the opposing brethren." This was the first revival held by the church.

On March 14, 1849, there were a number of German people in the little body. Six of these members were issued a certificate stating "they were members in good standing in the First Baptist Church, and at their request they are dismissed from the church, to unite in organizing a German Baptist Church in Quincy, Illinois." This church first held services in the building on the southwest corner of Eighth and Jersey. In 1873 they built a new church on the southwest corner of Tenth and Washington. In 1867 the church building on Eighth and Jersey was sold to the Negro Baptist Church. The German Baptist Church served faithfully its purpose of ministering to the people of that tongue. Early in the 1900's more English was spoken and many of the German members moved away from Quincy, so in 1910, those who remained decided they could help the cause of Christ better by uniting with the larger Baptist churches, at that time, the First Baptist and the Vermont Street Baptist. The German Baptist members were instrumental in the organization of the German Young Men's Christian Association. These Christian young men would visit the jail each Lord's Day and minister to the inmates there, witnessing for their Lord and Savior. This work was kept going by Charles Ebeling, who was in charge of it even after the church merged with the existing churches. The German Baptist building was bought by a member and converted into a home.

On April 27, 1856, the Vermont Street Baptist Church was formally organized at a meeting of the Ecclesiastical Council held for that purpose in the First Baptist Church. Forty-two members were granted letters of dismissal to organize another Baptist church and proceeded to erect a building at Seventh and Vermont. The building, of Greek design and costing \$35,000, was dedicated on October 7, 1857. It became the subject of several articles in architectural magazines. Many people traveled miles just to see it. President McKinley was among them. Most outstanding was the entrance, with its circular stairs and large pillars, leading into the church, above which was a magnificent tower. In 1868 a parsonage was erected at a cost of \$4,400.

The church at Seventh and Vermont, became a strong body and occupied a prominent place in the community, counting among its membership some of the most influential families of the city. A disastrous fire did much damage to the church, burning many of its records. The flaming tower was quite spectacular.

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In 1869 the Vermont Street Baptist Church established a chapel on Spruce and Fifth Streets. It grew and was the first mission started. On June 7, 1896, the Immanuel Baptist Chapel at Twenty-fourth and Lind was established.

In 1914 the question of consolidating the two churches, Vermont Street Baptist Church and First Baptist Church, came up for discussion. Both churches were in need of new buildings, and it seemed advisable to unite and erect one building. There were many difficulties to be overcome and many adjustments to be made, so it was not until December 31, 1916, that the two churches were consolidated into the new Central Baptist Church, with the agreement to erect a new and commodious house of worship.

The First Church, in 1901, had begun to accumulate a building fund, and this fund of \$17,000 became the nucleus of the new Central Baptist Church building fund. The parsonages of the two churches were sold, likewise the Spruce Street Chapel, and the proceeds added to the fund. In April, 1928, the final campaign for funds was directed, and when in March, 1930, the location of the new church was finally settled, the building fund which had been growing for nearly thirty years amounted to about \$70,000. A very large part of this fund represented the sacrifices of those who did not live to see the new building but had a vision of what we have today.

Work on the Education Unit began October 4, 1930, at an approximate cost of \$76,000.00. It was dedicated on October 4, 1931.

The next goal for the church was to add to the first unit a sanctuary for worship. Construction was begun in July of 1941, costing \$65,000.00. It was dedicated during the week of August 30 through September 6, 1942.

In 1950, due to the crowded conditions, a third unit, and what we then thought was the final unit, was completed, at an approximate cost of \$78,000.00 and dedicated in 1951. On July 17, 1955 the mortgage of this third unit, and the educational unit, was burned.

In 1954 with our city expanding to the south and east, and after a survey of the area, it was decided that a new Baptist church was needed in that area. The Grandview Baptist Church, Eighteenth and Harrison, was organized under the sponsorship of the Central Baptist Church and the Illinois Baptist State Convention.

Again the facilities became inadequate for the growing program of Central Baptist Church. In 1962 ground was broken for a fourth building expansion - to include a chapel, a new fellowship hall, a lounge, and additional educational rooms. These facilities, constructed at

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an approximate cost of \$200,000, were dedicated June 21, 1964. The indebtedness for this construction was retired in 1967. In September, 1967, two properties were purchased west of the church to make way for a better parking facility.

Throughout the years the church has evidenced deep concern for the outreach of the Christian gospel around the world. This has been demonstrated in the commitment of many young people to full-time Christian work as ministers and missionaries, the sponsoring of five missionary families and a native pastor, and in the liberal financial support of the missionary program of the American Baptist Convention, including \$53,000.00 pledged in 1968 to the World Mission campaign.

Central Baptist Church has been blessed with many fine ministers throughout its history. Our present ministers are Dr. John J. Garver, pastor; Reverend Alex R. Elliott, associate pastor; Reverend Robert K. Wheeler, minister of music and education; and Dr. Phillip Johnson, pastor-emeritus.

*The above information was taken from "Peoples History of Quincy and Adams County",  
pages 75 -77.*

*This book is available from the Quincy Public Library (977.3 GEN)*

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