

Mini-History: Our Historic UUAA Buildings

Presented by Kathy Edgren and Lucy Bauman, March 1, 2015



As a part of the 150th anniversary celebrations, Lucy Bauman and I were asked to plan a tour of our old buildings for our congregation. The tour will be on Saturday, April 18th, from 1-3:30pm. The tour will include what is



now the Hobbs and Black architectural offices at the corner of State and Huron (tour led by congregational President Ken Clein)—where you can view the famous Tiffany widow—and what is now the Stone Chalet Bed and Breakfast at the old Washtenaw location (led by Ken Phifer).

(If you can't come on the tour, feel free to stop by and see the Tiffany window in the lobby of Hobbs and Black when you're in the neighborhood. The window portrays a life-size angel in the guise of a young woman cradling a baby. And, the angel has blue feet!)

Local historian Grace Shackman has graciously agreed to provide some historical context, photographs of then and now will be available to view, and stories about the buildings and congregational life will be told. The tours are free, but those wishing to participate must have a ticket in advance. Tickets will be available on a first-come-first-served basis in the social hall in mid-March.

Looking at the history of the buildings, we can appreciate how we have weathered controversies, poor finances, some splits in the church due to differing opinions, and multiple changes in locations over the 150 years of our history.

Here's a brief timeline of our movements that demonstrates our flexibility, determination, and persistence:

We began in a rented room at the County Courthouse in 1865.

In 1866, we bought the Old Methodist Church at 5th and Ann, which was dedicated in 1867.

In 1881-82 – We built the church at Huron and State (with the parish house to follow in 1884) – Did you know there's a connecting "tunnel" between the church and the parish house? Probably to assist with cold Michigan winters.

In 1942, to save heat, services were moved to the church library and windows were blacked out for air-raids.

In 1946 – mostly due to financial reasons—the church was in dire straits financially—the State and Huron Building was quickly sold to Grace Bible Church and for a time, services were held in Lane Hall, 204 S. State Street.

In 1946, the Dr. Dean Meyer home at 1917 Washtenaw was purchased for \$45K, and in 1948, a parsonage was added at the back of the home. In 1956 the chapel was added to the side of the house.

In 1963, the congregation bought two houses at 2001 and 2007 Washtenaw to use for overflow, and also remodeled the chalet and one house for classrooms.

In 1999, we moved to this building.

Here are some interesting anecdotes about our buildings you may not know:

Back in 1866 there was no public library in A2. Unitarian members supported the Ladies Library Association, which built a book collection that circulated on a subscription basis.

In 1882, the Charles H. Brigham Reading Room was established at the church and was opened to anyone, and used extensively by students. Reportedly, Lee Iacocca spent many hours reading in that library.

Did you know that after Grace Bible left the State and Huron church, the Ann Arbor Rec and Ed used it for basketball games?

Around 1912, there was a question raised over whether young people should be allowed to dance in church. After some dispute, this was agreed to.

In 1918 the church parlor was used by the Student Army Training Corp as a convalescent ward to assist with the flu epidemic. In the fall, all services were cancelled due to the epidemic.

In 1923, at the suggestion of minister Sidney S. Robins, parishioners' names were removed from pews, and they were finally open to everyone.

In 1924 a safe was bought and moved to the Washtenaw church in 1946 where it was stolen right out of the chalet wall in 1970!

In 1964, 94 people joined the congregation and there were 503 children in the Religious Education Program!

If you come on the tour, we're hoping you'll get a mental picture of our physical history, be able to appreciate our progress over time, understand challenges that went with each of the buildings, and become more aware of ways we served as a community resource, and of the ways we lived our values.