

## **Cleveland Park Congregational United Church of Christ — How We Got Started**

Planning what became Cleveland Park Congregational Church began in meetings at First Congregational Church of Washington in the fall of 1917. Our first church service was held on March 10, 1918 and Cleveland Park Congregational Church was recognized by Ecclesiastical Council as a Congregational Church and recommended for fellowship in the Washington Association of Congregational Churches on May 1, 1918.

Our first building was a wooden “portable chapel,” replaced by our current building in 1923. We have had 26 ministers serve as pastor, interim pastor (or Acting Pastor or equivalent), or associate or assistant pastor. The church has survived two critical times when it had to choose between continuing as an independent congregation or disbanding. We survived both of those crises and today, as a member church in the United Church of Christ we are stable and active in both local and outreach ministry.

To start our Centennial Program I’d like to give us a picture of how our church got started. That includes how the Congregational Church began in Washington, how Cleveland Park became a neighborhood, and how our church was finally established.

### **The Beginning of Congregational Churches in Washington:**

Prior to the Civil War two attempts to establish a Congregational Church in Washington failed. In 1860 the population of the District was [75,000] but the size of the government grew during the Civil War and by 1865 the District’s population was 100,000. This increase included a number of Congregationalists from the New England states. After the first National Council of Congregational Churches meeting was held in Boston on June 12, 1865, at which the idea of developing new churches in regions affected by emancipation was proposed, a group of Washington Congregationalists held their first public service of worship on September 17, 1865. On November 15, 1865 a Congregational Council recognized this group of 104 members as the First Congregational Church of Washington, DC. Their first minister was Reverend C. B. Boynton, who was also appointed Chaplain of the United States House of Representatives. Starting in late 1865 the congregation and their minister made arrangements to hold Sunday worship in the chamber of the House of Representatives in the Capitol, but after successful fundraising and construction they finally moved into their own church home at 10<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, NW in May, 1869.

### **Cleveland Park Comes into Existence**

The area of the District west of the valley of Rock Creek and north of Georgetown was mostly farmland until the late 1800s. Some wealthy landowners had established homes in the neighborhood.

The oldest surviving house in the area is Rosedale (3501 Newark St. NW), built by General Uriah Forrest, a friend of George Washington, in 1793-4.

The second oldest surviving mansion is the Woodley Mansion (3000 Cathedral Avenue NW, now the headquarters of the Maret School). It was built by Philip Barton Key, an uncle of

Frances Scott Key, and completed in 1801. It attracted attention when, in 1837, President Martin Van Buren rented it as a summer residence (the first “summer white house” not a President’s regular home). Prior to this time all Presidents had simply left Washington during the hot summer (Congress didn’t stay in session back then, either). Elected in 1836, Van Buren was new in office when the “Panic of 1837” began a depression that ended the prosperity of the earlier 1830s. Van Buren felt he had to stay in Washington to attempt to deal with the financial crisis. He used Woodley Mansion as a summer home during all four years of his presidency (economic recovery did not develop until the early 1840s and Van Buren lost the 1840 election).

The Saint Albans Episcopal Church opened on April 20, 1854. Saint Ann Roman Catholic Church began as a wooden mission church in 1867 in Tenleytown.

Oak View, razed in 1927, was a house on a 27-acre farm purchased in 1886 for \$21,000 by President Grover Cleveland. He had the house enlarged, with extensive porches added, and it became known as Red Top because of the color of the roof, although the formal name remained Oak View. Oak View farm was just south of Rosedale and the house was located in what is now the block between 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Streets and between Macomb and Newark Streets.

Cleveland purchased Oak View during his first term in office; about the time the 49-year-old president married 21-year-old Frances Folsom. This was the only marriage ever held in the White House and that, plus the age difference in the couple, attracted attention, but the young first lady was successful in dealing with the attention and she became a favorite of the press.

President and Mrs. Cleveland lived at Oak View most of the year and stayed at the White House only during the winter social season. The presence of the President and his popular young wife at Oak View is what really focused attention on the area as a stylish place to live. When Cleveland lost the election of 1888 he left Washington, and, because of the interest of developers in the now fashionable area, sold Oak View for \$140,000 in 1890 (a seven-fold increase in value in four years). The developers used the name Cleveland Park for area, capitalizing on the association with President Cleveland.

### **Cleveland Park Develops**

By 1890 Washington, DC had a population of 230,000. The shift from horse-drawn streetcars to electric streetcars was authorized in 1889. Expansion of the streetcar network began as the “inner suburbs” became developed. Cleveland Park illustrates that very well.

By 1890 a new streetcar line was operating on the Georgetown and Rockville Road (now Wisconsin Avenue) from Georgetown to Tenleytown and during 1890 the tracks were extended to Bethesda, Maryland.

On July 21, 1891 a bridge on what is now Calvert Street crossing Rock Creek was finished and another streetcar company extended its line from Florida Avenue through Adams Morgan, across the new bridge, and then north on Connecticut Avenue to Chevy Chase Lake, MD.

When Grover Cleveland was re-elected in the election of 1892 he rented the Woodley Mansion (now the headquarters of the Maret School at 3000 Cathedral Avenue) as his summer white house (1893-7) because he had sold Oak View, which was now set off as twelve blocks of housing sites in the newly named Cleveland Park.

The north-south streets in developing Cleveland Park were, as they are now, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Streets, but the east-west streets were, going north from Woodley Road, Pierpont, Milwaukee, Newark, and Omaha Streets. They are now Lowell, Macomb, Newark, and Ordway Streets. The name changes occurred between 1904 and 1917.

In 1893 the Naval Observatory was moved from 23<sup>rd</sup> and E Streets in Foggy Bottom to its present location on land the Navy had acquired in 1881.

In 1893 the National Cathedral was chartered, the site for the building was selected on land connected to St. Albans Episcopal Church in 1896 and construction of the building was begun in 1907 (and finished in 1990). It is the 11<sup>th</sup> longest church in the world and 23<sup>rd</sup> in area.

John R. McLean, then owner of the *Washington Post*, acquired a 70-acre estate in the area now known as McLean Gardens in 1898.

In 1906 the William Howard Taft Bridge carrying Connecticut Avenue across the Rock Creek valley was built.

Children living in Cleveland Park originally had to go to the H. D. Cooke School at 17<sup>th</sup> and Euclid Streets in Adams Morgan. With the growing population an Act of Congress authorized that a school could be built at Wisconsin Avenue and Macomb Street. In March 1909 a delegation of residents from Cleveland Park challenged the Congressional action and lobbied the DC Board of Commissioners to build the new school in their neighborhood. They argued that the Wisconsin Avenue streetcar plus the growing automobile traffic would be a danger, as well as a distraction, to their children attending a school at Wisconsin and Macomb. They won and the school was built at 34<sup>th</sup> and Lowell Streets. The John Eaton School opened on October 24, 1910.

### **Developing Need for More Church Facilities**

By the time the United States had entered the First World War Washington had enlarged even more. Between 1890 and 1910 the population of the District of Columbia increased by 100,000 people (from 230,000 to 331,000) and it would grow at double that rate in the 'teens, adding 50,000 new residents before the US declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917 and another 50,000 by 1920.

For Congregationalists living in Cleveland Park, attending First Church at 10<sup>th</sup> and G Streets was not only a significant trip, but the popularity of the minister, Dr. James Logan Gordon, who had begun as pastor in May 1916, created a problem. This is illustrated by a quote from a statement made by E. Donald Preston, who had been a member of First Church at the time, to Everett O. Alldredge, the author of the First Church's Centennial History in 1965:

“The church was packed to capacity to hear him, Sunday morning and evening. Persons stood the length of the sidewalls, sat on the front steps leading from main floor to balcony, and filled the platform and balcony of the Sunday School room in back of the church balcony. Firemen checked the services frequently to be sure that aisles were not blocked, and fire regulations observed.”

[Mr. Alldredge laconically noted, “Mr. Preston’s references to the difficulty of obtaining seats during Dr. Gordon’s pastorate may serve as a reminder that this was one of the factors in leading persons in the Northwest area to start Cleveland Park Congregational Church.” [Centennial History of First Congregational Church 1865-1965, p. 62]

The crowded services at First Church and the distance one had to travel from Cleveland Park were all local incentives for starting a new church. The beginning of building the National Cathedral and the growth of population in fashionable Cleveland Park called attention to the area to national denominations that did not have churches in the area.

### **A New Congregational Church for Cleveland Park**

**October 1917** — Banquet of the Brotherhood of First Congregational Church  
[The day of the month this dinner was held is not recorded]

Dr. Hubert Herring, Secretary of the Congregational Church Building Society, spoke about the rapid growth of Washington, especially the area of Cleveland Park, and noted that the only protestant church in the area was an Episcopal church, adding that the minister at St. Albans had told him another Protestant church would be welcome.

Although late and some attendees had already left, to test whether there was local support for starting a new Congregational Church in Cleveland Park, Albert J. Osgood, the president of the Brotherhood of First Church, asked if people were willing to sign pledges for the project. Thirty-three pledges were submitted and \$500 was subscribed.

**November 1917** — Aware that pledging had been requested, upon returning to Boston Dr. Herring ordered a portable wooden chapel be sent to Washington, addressed to the Brotherhood of First Congregational Church, without notifying the people at First Church. Some records say the local area Congregational Church Extension Board acted to get the Congregational Building Society to act, but even so, no notice was given First Church.

The first anyone at First Church knew about this was when Mr. Albert J. Osgood, as President of the Brotherhood, was notified that there was a consignment of lumber at the wharf (in either Georgetown or on the Anacostia) and fees were being assessed. Something needed to be done.

The leaders of the Brotherhood met and took action. Mr. Hugh Thrift, a real estate broker, went with some of the others and surveyed Cleveland Park. They selected a site at 34<sup>th</sup> and Lowell Streets and rented two 100x75 foot lots. These lots were

leased until finally purchased in May 1921. When the lumber for the building was delivered to that site, the deliverymen just dumped it haphazardly on the ground.

**November 21, 1917** – Meeting at First Congregational Church “to address the question of starting a Congregational Church at Cleveland Park, D. C.”

The group was told that the Church Building Society had already shipped a portable church – and it had already arrived.

They were also told a temporary pastor (Rv. Luman H. Royce) had been appointed to guide getting the church started and would be starting his work in early January 1918.

The price of the building was \$4500 and the temporary minister was to be paid a salary beginning in January. It was noted that the matter was urgent and a canvas of the church for funds needed to be done at once. The fact that the other local churches were small and hurting for money was raised and it was realized that First Church would need to assume the financial burden. Fortunately the Congregational Church Extension Board agreed to cover the cost “until such time as the new church can assume its own support.”

Then they looked at the plans for the portable church, elected officers for a temporary church organization (Mr. Fred L. Fishback, chair, Mr. H. A. Thrift, treasurer, and Mr. Albert J. Osgood, secretary),

To deal with the financial problem and the need to canvas the church to raise money for the new church project Mr. Coe (the Assistant Pastor) agreed to go over the church files and make lists of prospects that would be available to the people who would do the canvassing for funds.

The minister, Dr. Gordon, suggested a Committee of 100 men be the permanent group responsible and that it be composed of men who pledged funds. The original 33 people who signed pledges at the church dinner in October would be charter members. Pledges should be at least \$10.

A member of the Ladies Aid, Miss Georgia Redway, had already made a contribution, but since the organization was to be composed of men her name was not included in the Committee of 100. [The 19th Amendment to the Constitution was not proposed until June 4, 1919 and not ratified until August 18, 1920.]

Although church officials in Boston had started action, the formation of the committee and the election of officers for the temporary church organization on November 21, 1917 marked the formal beginning of what became Cleveland Park Congregational Church.

**November 29, 1917** — On “a very stormy Thanksgiving” Mr. Osgood and two others stacked the lumber at 34<sup>th</sup> and Lowell Streets in neat piles so it could be covered and protected until the building could be erected.

**January 2, 1918** — The officers of the Committee of 100 met with Rv. Royce for the first time. They decided to delay erecting the building until after the freezing winter weather.

**February 1918** — Work on the church building was underway, pulpit furniture was ordered, and 150 folding chairs were purchased from Lansburgh's.

The campaign for funds was also begun. \$800 had been raised and the campaign had a goal of \$1200.

**March 8, 1918** — The first social was held at the new church building, which faced 34<sup>th</sup> Street. 130 people attended.

**March 10, 1918** — The first services were held at Cleveland Park Congregational Church.

20 boys, 22 girls and 15 adults attended Sunday School and 54 attended the church service.

\$4.09 was collected at the Sunday School and the church service offering was \$12.71

**March 17, 1918** — The first congregational meeting. A committee was formed to write a constitution for the church and temporary church committees were formed. One woman and two men formed the building committee, three women and a man formed the music committee, and a woman led the flower committee.

**April 21, 1918** — Formal organization of the church. Mr. Royce designated Acting Pastor, Mr. Albert J. Osgood was elected Clerk pro tem, church officers elected, and the church constitution was amended and approved.

**April 28, 1918** — First communion service. Church officers installed and 46 names were entered into the Clerk's roll as members of the new church. With the addition of nine more who joined in June the total number of Charter Members was 55.

**May 1, 1918** — An Ecclesiastical Council met at the church and voted the church be recognized as a Congregational Church and recommended fellowship in the Washington Association of Congregational Churches.

### **Becoming "Our" church — Budgets, Politics, Women, Building**

**November 3, 1918** — Dr. Edward B. Eaton, the first minister our congregation called to be pastor, began his pastorate at Cleveland Park. He had been president of Beloit College from 1886-1905 and 1907-1917 [We have always had an intellectual flavor to our church]. Since Rev. Royce was sent just to get the new church set up, Dr. Eaton had been called on May 26, 1918 and he accepted the call by letter on May 29, 1918. His salary was to be \$1500 per year with two months vacation (the church normally closed for the hot part of the summer).

Dr. Eaton's duties began on October 1, 1918, but the fall of 1918 was the height of the devastating "Spanish Influenza" epidemic and the government ordered all

churches, theaters and schools closed for the month of October 1918 to reduce the spread of this deadly disease.

**November 3, 1918** — Since the church was renting the lots at 34<sup>th</sup> and Lowell and the lease was soon to expire the membership began to seek land that might be purchased for a permanent site.

**January 6, 1919** — The Trustees sought a loan of \$7500 to purchase 5 lots on Ordway Street to serve as a site for a permanent building. The District National Bank granted the loan and the church paid for four of the lots on March 4 and paid for the fifth on May 20.

**June 1919** — The church had received 64 pledges with an average value of \$34.29. If all pledges were fulfilled the income would be \$2194.56. Since the church budget was \$3900, there was some concern about balancing the budget. Stewardship is not a new issue at CPCC.

**Late fall, 1919** — To have time to get established the church also had to contend with the plans of several other denominations.

The Baptists had started a church at Tenleytown. The Presbyterians were considering establishing a church in the area and the Methodists had actually purchased a building site on Massachusetts Avenue opposite the Cathedral and expected to build "a handsome church." Several people who had been attending Cleveland Park had left to join the Methodists.

The Trustees sent a strongly worded protest to the Methodist bishop objecting to their plans because, in part, they felt that they had received assurances the Methodists had not planned to enter the field when Cleveland Park was set up. In this statement it was also pointed out that, "The Cleveland Park Congregational Church was established as a community church serving all denominations."

Dr. Eaton felt the strain of the severe competition from new churches would be too much for him "and that he should give way to a younger man." On November 30 Dr. Eaton submitted his letter of resignation.

Two women were chosen to serve on the pastoral search committee along with three men, and a woman was involved in drafting the protest the Trustees sent to the Methodists. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was in process of ratification and CPCC was already acting wisely.

**January 12, 1920** — Mr. W. K. Cooper (the YMCA executive) reported the crisis of church competition was resolved for the time being. The Methodists and Presbyterians had both agreed to hold off on starting new churches in the area until it could support more churches.

The Ladies' Association reported that they had raised \$600 during 1919 from church dinners and from selling "school lunches" (including candy and ice cream as well as sandwiches) to the students and teachers at John Eaton School and that they

had used the money to purchase a \$750 grand piano, which, with the discount they got as a church, meant that it was paid for in full.

In 1920 the Ladies' Association was setting the goal of raising \$500 to help pay for the lots the church had purchased. They would "adopt as a slogan the single word "lots." The "lots" to be paid for by "lots" of dinners given — and "lots" of lunches — by "lots" of ladies."

**February 20, 1920** — A call was extended to Reverend Frank E. Bigelow to start as pastor April 1, 1920. The salary was to be \$3000 and the church was to pay moving expenses.

**June 20, 1920** — The congregation voted to authorize the Trustees to seek a loan from the Congregational Building Society of not more than \$6000 to purchase a home for the minister. 2737 Macomb Street was bought with that loan.

**December 11, 1920** — The congregation authorized that a chapter of the Boy Scouts could use the church as its meeting place.

**January 12, 1921** — A building committee, specified to be three women and two men, was formed.

**May 12, 1921** — The congregation voted to purchase the lot at the corner of 34<sup>th</sup> and Lowell and one or two adjacent. Woodward and Lothrop owned the corner lot. That lot and the one adjacent were bought for \$7131.80. A second loan, for \$5700, made the purchase possible.

**January 12, 1922** — The operating budget for 1921 had been met and payment had been made on both building loans.

The Women's Association had raised \$1350 for various purposes during 1921, including over half the payments on the loans (\$750).

**March 6, 1922** — Building plans: a "community house" was the first building to be built. \$45,000 was the goal — \$30,000 to be raised locally and \$15,000 as a grant and loan from the Church Building Society. The campaign was going well.

**June 18, 1922** — \$38,000 was reported available for construction work, but it turned out that would not build a building larger than the old chapel. The low bid received for the building desired was \$52,750. The congregation agreed to accept a \$20,000 mortgage and get an adequate building, rather than build a smaller building.

**Mid-July, 1922** — The church was closed from July 17 to September 10 so the old wooden chapel could be moved to the Lowell Street end of the lot to permit construction of the permanent building and work then began on the permanent church building.

**January 11, 1923** — The Building Fund had received \$44,200 during 1922, \$15,380 in cash contributions with the rest coming from loans and the sale of the 5 lots on

Ordway Street. Disbursements were \$41,360 with \$27,000 going to the building contractor and \$7000 to pay for the property at 34<sup>th</sup> and Lowell.

The total debt the church ended up with was \$36,000. This debt was finally paid off in 1948 with a campaign during the church's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

**March 23, 1923** — Last worship services in the old “portable” wooden chapel.

**April 1, 1923** — Easter Sunday. At 10 AM the Sunday School held a processional from the old building to the new one. At 11 AM a special Easter service was held, the first service in the new building.

This connects the origins of Cleveland Park Congregational Church to us today. Lee Rowell's mother was part of the Sunday School processional that led to the first services in our present church building, and Lee is here and one of our leaders.