

First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby

The history of the First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby (and much about the early life in Willoughby, Ohio) was written by Isabel Sutch and published under the name, "Sutch a History."

SUTCH A HISTORY

The First 100 Years at First Church, Willoughby

Isabel Sutch died on November 30, 1996. A Memorial Service was held on December 2, 1996. We will always remember our beloved Isabel Sutch. Thank you, God, for Izzy!

DEDICATION

This history of the First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby is dedicated to those pioneer spirits who came before us and paved the way for the church as it is today, active in serving others and a warm Christian home.

PREFACE

I decided to accept the task of writing our church's history because a complete history had never been done before. This writing deals with the church's beginnings, interwoven with early history of the Western Reserve as it applies to emphasize the events of the times. The history was compiled by a lay person, not a seasoned historian, so there may be a slight difference in some dates. One interesting highlight led to another and I hope that the reader will find this essay as interesting and informative as it was in compiling the facts.

I have tried to show the character and faith of this church's membership over the years. I never could have finished this writing successfully without the editing help of Dr. Bach and his computer, where the history will remain, saved electronically for future use. Today's past history is fascinating, but as we look forward to tomorrow, our present activities will be the history of the future. Perhaps in years to come, another church historian will take on the same task which has captured my time and energy for these many months.

Faithfully,

Isabel M. Sutch, Historian of the Church
December 8, 1987

THE HISTORY FROM 1833 THROUGH 1938: THE EARLY YEARS

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WILLOUGHBY

Two hundred years ago, the Revolutionary war was over; the Northwestern Ordinance was signed in July 1787; the Constitution of the United States was signed on September 17, 1787. The Western Reserve territory, after many disputes, was awarded to Connecticut who sold part of the territory to the Connecticut Land Company. George Washington and other famous Americans had surveyed much of this territory prior to the Revolutionary War, enabling its development for settlement to occur immediately after hostilities ended.

The history of Willoughby goes back many years, having its beginnings at the intersection of two Indian trails; River Street then called the "Salt Trail" and Euclid Avenue, called in those days the "Flint Trail," forming what is today known as Wes Point Park, the site of many Indian battles. To this Western Reserve Territory came traders, merchants, and settlers, each bringing with them the love of liberty, education, and religion, to live among the now friendly Indians who had built their Indian Village at the present site of the Andrews School.

David Abbott, a lawyer, and his wife were one of the first families in the Willoughby area which then was called Chagrin. In 1797 a daughter was born to the Abbotts, the first white child in the Western Reserve. In the absence of a clergyman, the Indian Chief Wambermong, seeing how anxious the mother was to have her baby baptized, and being so delighted with the baby, offered to have his Medicine Man baptize the infant. It seemed justified since the Medicine Man had been educated in a French Mission and was consecrated as a Catholic Priest. In a very impressive ceremony, the Medicine Man carried the baby gently in his arms to the bank of the Chagrin River.

Dipping his fingers in the water, and looking heavenward, he named the baby in Indian tongue, "Flower of the Forest." Thus, the first white child and the first baptism in the new territory occurred within a mile of our current church location.

The Presbyterian and the Congregational Churches were in advance of other religious bodies in making an effective effort to establish religious societies which hopefully would become strong churches in the Western Reserve. In 1789 the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States met in Philadelphia and sent out several missionaries as early as 1790. In 1801 the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches adopted "a plan of union" to work together in sending ministers as missionaries to the territories. Since the Presbyterian form of government was strongest, most of the churches were organized as Presbyterian.

On October 15, 1814, the Synod of Pittsburgh erected, out of the Presbytery of Hartford, the Presbytery of Grand River which was to occupy the whole of the Western Reserve Territory, with the exception of ten counties in the Southeastern part of the territory. A Confession of Faith was adopted in Burton, Ohio on February 14, 1815 for the churches under the care of the new Presbytery.

Willoughby (Chagrin) with a population of 300 was a thriving settlement. The first physician arrived in 1813; the first postmaster in that same year, and the first stagecoach which came through our town for the first time in 1820 was followed by the mail coach in 1823, opening up the outside world to the settlers. This gave rise to inns, mills, homes, and schools with supplies having been brought in from Erie, Pennsylvania. During this time, the Methodist Church organized as a society in Willoughby (1816).

The Old Stone Church in Cleveland (then having a population of less than 200), started as a Sunday School in 1819. On September 25, 1825 the General Assembly organized the Synod of the Western Reserve, embracing the Presbyteries of Grand River, Portage, and Huron, with thirtythree ministers constituting the Synod. On April 25, 1830, this Synod organized the Cleveland Presbytery, and then on October 26 of that same year, the Cleveland Presbytery held its first meeting at Dover, Ohio. In April 1833, the organization of the Presbyterian Society of Willoughby was created by The Rev. Chester Chapin and The Rev. Truman Coe. There were nine original members: Ebenezer Abbott, Robert Gough, Hugh and Mrs. Gordon, Aaron and Mrs. Allen, Sarah Shepard, Mary Chapin, and Anis Bates. They met each Sunday afternoon for services in a schoolhouse that was located on what is now the Willoughby City Hall Parking Lot, near the River Street Driveway. None of these people was wealthy, but each was willing to sacrifice in planning for God's work.

A list of the pledges by these people is included in this history to remind future generations of the commitment and dedication of these charter members:

Mr. Abbott \$100

Rev. and Mrs. Chapin \$100

Mary and Hugh Gordon \$75

Mr. and Mrs. Allen (proceeds from apple crop: about \$50)

Rev. Coe \$35

Mrs. Annis Bates (proceeds from a bazaar: about \$50)

Mrs. Sarah Shepard \$100

Mr. Gough \$200

During this time, the name of town had been officially changed to Willoughby, the final name change, after four previous changes.

Kirtland, having a population of over 1000, laid the cornerstone for the Mormon Temple in the same year the Presbyterian Society was formed. The Methodist Society the next year erected a church on the present River Street site. The Old Stone Church in Cleveland built its building which was dedicated in 1834. Even though some have called the Old Stone Church the "mother

church," really the East Cleveland Presbyterian Church, today called First Presbyterian Church of East Cleveland, served the function for the first twenty years of providing to the settlers in this unbroken forest of the Western Reserve religious privileges; thus, First Church East Cleveland is the "grandmother church" of all churches in what today we call the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.

On December 5, 1834, Samuel and Sarah Wilson donated the land on which the first church stood. It was located on Euclid Avenue, opposite Sharpe Avenue, at the western end of West Point Park, adjacent to the Willoughby Eastlake Technical Center which at that time housed the Willoughby Medical School, which in turn grew into the Western Reserve University. The reader should note that after the Medical School moved to Cleveland, a female seminary was started which eventually became Lake Erie College. It is amazing just how significant our historical roots are as a church to all in our community today which enriches and enhances education and culture.

In 1835, the church was received into the Presbytery of Cleveland. Also at this time, construction began on a church building on the land donated by the Wilson family. The Rev. Chester Chapin served two years until the Rev. Page was employed to work part time for six months. On the first of August 1836, the Rev. R. Stone became pastor, remaining for one year. At this time the church, now made a Congregational Church, built its first structure at a cost of \$6000 and was dedicated February 19, 1837. The building was a red brick church with five large pillars of colonial architecture with the entrance facing Euclid Avenue. The interior was furnished in "golden oak" with rented pews as was the custom, supplied with doors to keep the family unit intact, so little ones could not wander. The pulpit was high above the congregation with the choir loft on the opposite side, making a beautiful sanctuary in which to worship.

Then followed the Rev. E. Adams from 1839 to 1840. Next came the Rev. Henry Steele Clarke from 1840 to 1846, under whose pastorate the church returned to its Presbyterian roots with the exception that the Elders would be limited in their service to three-year terms instead of the practice in Presbyterian polity at that time of Elders for life. The Rev. Dorius Morris followed for one year

in 1846. Then the Rev. Allan Nash served for two years and under his leadership in 1848 the church again shifted to a congregational form of government, even changing its name to the First Congregational Church of Willoughby, and yet maintaining its connection with Cleveland Presbytery. The Rev. C. H. Taylor came in 1849; he was followed by the Rev. Andrew Sharpe who arrived in 1852 and remained in this position for two years. In 1854 came the Rev. E. C. Moore, followed by the Rev. G. A. Adams who stayed only 10 months. In 1857 the Rev. J. E. Vance served for a little less than two years.

Up to this point the church had depended entirely on Stated Supplies for a period of more than twenty years. In January 1861, the Rev. Jos. E. Tinker, a licentiate of the Buffalo Presbytery, was invited to serve, with a call being extended to him which he later accepted. He was ordained

and installed to this office on June 26, 1861, our church's first duly called minister. His pastorate lasted until 1867. The Rev. D. E. Steele was then called and served eight years. At this point in our church's history, a shift occurred which would last permanently, a shift back to Presbyterian polity as the church became a member of the Cleveland Presbytery and has remained in good standing with that Presbytery now called The Presbytery of the Western Reserve.

During Steele's ministry, the church began to keep records in a Session Book, which we have today as glimpses into our church's fascinating roots. This Session Book contained information which shows our church doing what Presbyterian churches should be doing: examining new members, baptizing, performing marriages, funeral services, and receiving people into the congregation through letters of transfer or affirmation of faith. The Session acted as a judicatory, passing judgment on the Christian characters of potential leaders and members. Any infraction by church members in their everyday activities was brought before the Session for decision as to whether the member or members should be dismissed from the church. The Session Records of 1873 include a case of a man who was accused of stealing, arrested, and subsequently served his time. The Session in its decision felt that mercy should be extended this man who had repented and wished to remain in the church.

In January 1873, the Rev. William Robertson became the next pastor called to the church; the very first one to occupy the new twelve-room parsonage, built by the Trustees on a double lot, located on Center Street, directly to the rear of the church. The lot had been a gift from Mrs. H. I. Wright, the daughter of Samuel and Sarah Wilson who had donated the church property. His ministry ended upon his resignation in 1880. In September of that year, the Rev. A. J. Waugh came to Willoughby and ministered for ten years. At this time, the original church was demolished to the sadness of a great many who loved its sacred appearance. But more room was needed because now Willoughby was flourishing, and church attendance was increasing rapidly. The new building was constructed free of debt; the church members expressed their pride in the local paper. The ad stated:

“The Church is all paid for, and all seats are free.
Everyone is invited to attend services and enjoy this new building.”

The new church was dedicated on January 20, 1886. Although it was an icy day, the "wheeling" very poor, the church was crowded with chairs in the aisles and windows in the Sunday school room (what we called the Rose Room) were opened up to seat everyone. Former pastors from New York, Ashtabula, and Cleveland and local ministers all took part in the dedication. It was a day long to be remembered and cherished. The Women's Society entertained with an organ recital on the organ which they had purchased for the church, a pipe organ, supplied by air from bellows, manned by young boys hidden from view. There never was a shortage of these boys since they considered it an honor to be asked and this practice continued until at least 1920.

One of the most interesting anecdotes of that period of our church's history occurred the day of a communion service. Before the tradition was established of individual glasses for communion, the church used one large pitcher filled with wine to be poured during the service by the minister into two congregational goblets. The ladies of the church had prepared the table as usual, and after the minister had served the bread, the Rev. Waugh lifted the pitcher and to his dismay, he realized it was empty. The service was delayed until some good women hurried out to fill the pitcher so the worship service could resume. Plans were made to make sure that this would never happen again!

A highlight of our church history at this time was the increasing role of women in church missions. On September 10, 1873, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of Presbyterian Churches was organized (later changed to the name, Women's Presbyterial Foreign Missionary Society). This voluntary organization in reality was an outgrowth of a group which had been in existence for forty years, having been organized at the Old Stone Church in Cleveland in 1833. This Christian group had sent many missionaries to distant lands including two from our church in Willoughby, Emily Carpenter and Liza D. Everett, who went in the early 1840's to China and Syria respectively. In 1888 in response to an invitation from the Presbyterial Committee on Home Missions, a Women's Presbyterial Home Missionary Society was formed.

For three years following the resignation of the Rev. Waugh, the pulpit was filled by the Rev. F.G. Weeks, a supply appointed by the Presbytery. The Rev. Selden Dickinson, a Congregationalist, arrived in 1893 to serve the church and led the church for six years. In his pastorate, James McMahan (the first Mr. Willoughby), then a boy of 14 years, began singing in our choir and he continued for more than sixty years. His beautiful rich voice was a pleasure to hear. The amazing aspect of this portion of our church history is that Jim was Roman Catholic, thus providing an early witness to our ecumenical growth.

In 1896 according to *The History of Presbyterianism in the sixty-three years of its existence*, our church had a total of twenty-three ministers, only three of whom were installed as called pastors to the church. The church had received into membership 549 people since it was organized, and at this point in our church growth, we were a church of over 100 members, with a good parsonage and a church free of debt (the property was estimated to be worth more than \$15,000, a fine tribute to its founders). The Home and Foreign Missionary Societies were active as well.

In 1899, Mr. T. S. Harbach, an Elder of the church for many years, died, leaving to the church a house and lot in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. In July of that year, the church sold the property, improving its financial standing. At that time, Dr. Henry Golden, of whom little is known except that he was a very intellectual, polished gentleman, came to serve the church. In his brief, one-year pastorate, many new members joined, bringing the total membership at the turn of the century to 144.

The next minister was the Rev. E. R. Wright, who served until 1903 before he resigned to become the Assistant Pastor of Calvary Church in Cleveland. Then came the Rev. L. A. Lindemuth for about four years. During this pastorate, the church created a Deaconess Board comprised of five women appointed to serve without ordination. Besides being a pastor, Rev. Lindemuth was a capable "handyman" as the church was repaired and redecorated with most of the work being done by the pastor himself. In 1904 the church was rededicated. One of the new members during his pastorate was Delia Reynolds, a woman who later in our church's history served a significant role in helping the church climb out of debt.

The Rev. W. L. Roberts was our next minister, serving from 1907 until 1910. He was followed by a Supply Minister who was also a college student at Oberlin College, the Rev. Robert Porter, who filled the pulpit until 1912. In that year, the Rev. L. P. McCulloch served for six years when ill health forced him to resign. His departure was keenly felt by the community as well as the church as he and his family had become involved in various community activities.

The Rev. Dr. W. L. Swan followed in 1918; under his pastorate, the first children's talk during worship took place, for five minutes each worship service. A Men's Club was formed for the purpose of social activities. Swan also put into motion the raising of funds for the building of an addition to the church to house the ever-expanding Sunday school. Mrs. Swan's devotion to Missionary Societies created more interest in missionary work both home and abroad at the church.

One of these mission programs was Harkness Camp, a fresh air summer camp for underprivileged children of the area, including Cleveland. It was located on property now occupied in Eastlake by CEI (Erie Road and the shores of Lake Erie). The church provided financial help and volunteers to work at making the Camp a wonderful and healthy experience for the children.

At the annual meeting in January 1926, the Trustees were increased from five to six. In December 1926, the Rev. Charles MacLennan arrived in Willoughby from New Brunswick, Canada to serve a church which was ripe for conflict and dissension. This minister attempted to bring many changes in policy and program to a conservative church with his more liberal viewpoint of religion.

This led to many disagreements and a serious drop in membership. Of course, the depression, bank failures, and finally the Ohio Rubber Strike, all played their part in causing the church to shrink, with the result that only 20-30 were in attendance during worship on a given Sunday. Each side in this church split blamed the other for not trying hard enough to help the church. The addition which Dr. Swan had planned was finished and dedicated on June 12, 1927; the Sunday school was renamed, the Church School. Rev. MacLennan, having four children of his own, was instrumental in starting Christian Endeavor. His work with young people was inspiring and he often had them for group meetings and planned activities at the Manse. Despite his fine youth work, the church continued to flounder with an ever-growing deficit each year as pledges

were not being paid because of the depression and dissatisfaction with the current leadership of the church.

The possibility of selling the church building had been considered, but never materialized given the poor financial conditions of the country. The mortgages, held on the church and the manse at just 4% interest, were too large for the church to overcome them. In these ten years of ministry, Rev. MacLennan had never received a full salary.

In September 1938, an appeal was made to Presbytery to settle this situation. Dr. A. W. Bloomfield, executive Secretary of the Cleveland Presbytery, was given the task of trying to find a solution for a church with little or no money, and a minister who would not leave without what was owed him in back salary. Dr. Bloomfield told the Presbytery that he would need six months and would report back to them at their Easter meeting. He then told MacLennan why he had been sent, and he promised before he reported to Presbytery, he would get together with MacLennan and those remaining as church members, to share with them his findings. A week before Easter, Rev. MacLennan was told to call a congregational meeting so all the facts could be placed before them. The meeting revealed that Rev. MacLennan had kept an accurate account of what the church owed him each year, bringing the total to \$2,670! Dr. Bloomfield then asked the group what they were going to do about this outstanding obligation. Someone moved that the church pay MacLennan \$2700, not knowing where or how they would get the money. Rev. MacLennan corrected the mover, stating that the amount was exactly \$2670. Dr. Bloomfield asked Rev. MacLennan what he intended to do to help after much thought; he said he would leave the church if he could stay for six months at \$50 per month until he could find another church. He argued that it was hard to find a new call unless the pastor could be heard in the pulpit regularly. Dr. Bloomfield asked a group concerned about Presbyterian life in the Presbytery, the Presbyterian Union, to advance the money to pay off the minister. Rev. MacLennan received a check larger than he had ever seen before.

At the Easter meeting of the Presbytery, Dr. Bloomfield told the Presbytery that everything was settled with the church; the minister was paid and was leaving within six months. Therefore, on Presbytery's recommendation, the pastoral relation between MacLennan and the church was dissolved. The parsonage was sold to cover some of the debts, including the settlement regarding Rev. MacLennan's termination. Since \$3000 was still left from the sale of the Manse, it was placed in a Manse Fund to be used only for capital expenses.

New Sanctuary dedicated in 1993

The 41 Years of Bill Gross at First Church, Willoughby

Rev. Dayton McCormick, Assistant Pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church in Cleveland, served Sundays and one afternoon and evening each week for church activities, for the sum of \$10 per week to be paid directly to Calvary, an arrangement which remained in effect until after the

summer of 1940. Dr. Bloomfield told the remaining members that they would have to decide whether to disband or go forward. They chose to go forward and rebuild the church into a place of influence it once held in the community. With hard work, faith, and love for the church, they proved with God's help that they could still be a Christian community of hope and promise.

According to Dr. Bloomfield, a young man, the Rev. William P. Gross, just out of Princeton Theological Seminary, "was presented this church as a challenge," never thinking that he would even dare to take this task. Bill came as a supply pastor on September 12, 1940 to preach to 13 of the faithful. On December 12, 1940, having been duly examined by the Presbytery and found acceptable, the service for his ordination was held in Willoughby. The church was packed, and the service filled each worshipper with overflowing hope. The Rev. Thomas Ewing, moderator of Cleveland Presbytery presided, assisted by The Rev. George Maxwell of Waynesburg Pennsylvania, Bill's home minister. The Rev. Robert Hunt of Maple Heights and The Rev. George Bowie of Wickliffe also took part in the ordination service.

By February 1941, the membership was 69 and judged strong enough to continue as a congregation. The Rev. William P. Gross was installed on October 30, 1941. In August of that year, he had married Elizabeth Anderson of Missouri. The new couple was welcomed with an elaborate wedding reception on September 9, 1941, expressing the love and good wishes of the church. It certainly showed their fortitude and pioneer spirit to begin life in a church what would have frightened off any other couple. However, they made themselves an involved part of the church as well as the community, remaining with the church for forty-one years!

By April 1942 under Rev. Gross, many new and exciting programs were started such as a Young People's Group and the Men's Club. These church organizations created much interest through the use of contemporary speakers who were involved in shaping current events. The coffee hour and the monthly newsletter were created to draw the congregation closer together. Ecumenically the church was growing as well. The Lenten Season of 1942 was marked by Union Vesper Services in the community of Willoughby for the first time with all local churches taking part.

The Ladies' Aid, the Missionary Society, and the Daughters' Circles had been combined into a Women's Association in 1936. One of these was an evening group, and under Rev. Gross, this evening group was so large it became two groups. At this time with World War II demanding the employment of females during the day, the evening group naturally grew due to this change in schedules for women. The uphill battle was beginning to show results. The Church School now had 80 enrolled and church finances were improving. In each aspect of church life, members were learning what a fine spirit of cooperation can accomplish.

As new as Rev. Gross was to the community, he was fast becoming a person to whom people turned for guidance and help. He seemed to accomplish whatever he tackled in meeting the needs of others. Dr. Warren Payne, a physician and long-time member of the church, contacted Bill concerning the fact that, he in his practice, was having so many patients with drinking

problems. In order to help these people, Dr. Payne felt a combined community involvement must be undertaken. The outcome of this was with Rev. Gross serving as a community contact person, going to the heart of alcoholism, the first Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) chapter was formed in Willoughby in 1942 (the original organization of AA was begun in Akron in 1935 by a lawyer and a physician). For three years, the newly formed AA group met in various homes until they started to hold their meetings in our church beginning in 1945. The AA organization has continued to meet each Monday night (a mixed group of men and women from all walks of life) and hopefully as long as the need exists, the group will continue to use our church. In addition to the Monday group is a women's group which meets during lunch on Wednesdays, a tradition which has been maintained for over a quarter of a century. The value of this self-help organization cannot be measured in dollars and cents since untold families, businesses, as well as church and community, have reaped its benefits. The church is an ideal place for this group; after all, the basis of the AA 12-Step Creed is "God and Man working together." The development of the AA program is one more instance of our church's growing community concern and involvement. AA is celebrating its 45th anniversary in 1987 with Bill Gross taking place as "honorary" guest member.

At the time of the church's unsettled conditions in 1930, many bequests were withheld until the givers were sure that the church would survive. Others withheld their gifts until the pastor under fire would leave. In 1944, Rev. Gross was visiting a patient, Frank Reynolds, at Painesville Hospital. He was the brother of Delia Reynolds. She had requested that upon her death a sizable gift should be made to the church when needed. Since he had never complied with his sister's request, he discussed the progress and financial condition of the church with Rev. Gross, wondering if this would be the time to honor the request. Frank Reynolds was a shrewd farmer, above wasting money, having a home and farm on the present Reynolds Road area (Rt. 306). Rev. Gross convinced him that this would be an ideal time, and after bartering back and forth, a sum was agreed upon of \$7500 for the church and its ministry. After Frank Reynolds was discharged from the hospital, on May 13, 1944 he paid the Cleveland Trust Company (now called Ameritrust) the sum of \$5000, paying in full the mortgage held by them for the Presbyterian Church Board of National Missions, making the church once more debt-free. A letter pertaining to this transaction is found in the Trustees book of 1942-1953. In 1945, Rev. Gross was named moderator of Cleveland Presbytery, at that time, the youngest minister to hold that post.

After World War II, in 1946, each church was asked to support the effort at rebuilding Europe. Our share was \$2693 to be paid over 30 months. It was gladly given, although the church had been saving for a new carpet in the sanctuary. The price being the same, the Christian duty to others came first. The congregation floated a "magic carpet" to Europe and walked very carefully around the holes in the existing carpet.

In 1947, the church continued its revitalization program through the formation of a Mr. and Mrs. Club whose primary interest was to ensure the success of the Church School in whatever

way was needed. Also, in that year, the Board of Deacons was established by amending our church by laws to provide for this specialized ministry of caring. Beginning in 1948, the newly-elected Deacons were ordained and installed with the other officers of the church. The need for a concerted building fund had been discussed at length and the officers agreed to bring the issue before the congregation.

In July 1948, each member of the church was sent an itemized leaflet showing just what was needed and its corresponding cost. This enabled the potential donor to determine what his or her share would be for the goal to be reached as planned. In the summer of the next year, James Savage was hired as our organist. He and his wife, Louise, a talented soprano, have remained a strong force in the music life of our church. For almost forty years, we have been graced with the wonderful talent and spirit of these two community leaders, and we are indeed blessed for their association with us, their commitment to great church music, and their dedication towards the church they love. Jim and Louise are well-known in the Willoughby community for their energy and imagination in establishing the School of Fine Arts.

The Fine Arts Association had its beginnings in the Savage home on Spaulding Street where the couple gave music lessons through the Cleveland Institute of Music. The number of pupils soon outgrew the house because the value to the public was soon noted. Trustees and a new home followed, leading to the present Fine Arts building as we know it today, located on the Andrews School grounds.

In January 1950 at an annual meeting of the church, a resolution was presented and passed by the members to increase the number of Deacons from 6 to 15, five of whom were to be women, to be elected by the usual Presbyterian rotation system. The Trustees at this time were authorized to borrow up to \$30,000 to complete the building program of repairing, improving, and equipping the new addition. A partial basement had been excavated to provide additional classrooms and a large fellowship hall called the Anchor Room. Here follows a description of the Room:

A large anchor was painted on one wall; the original reddish tiles which were found in the construction project apparently from the first church were placed in intervals around the walls. Each tile had a unique design with religious symbols, measuring about one-foot square.

The Tenth Anniversary of Rev. Gross's ministry in Willoughby was celebrated with the dedication of the Anchor Room on April 23, 1951. An editorial in the local newspaper (The News Herald) expressed the feelings of the congregation when it said, "the Presbyterians never stopped being grateful for the divine guidance that brought them a dedicated, energetic, and capable minister to their troubled church." The festivities included a tea and a skit of eleven scenes unfolding the ministry of Bill and Elizabeth over the first ten years. The skit was entitled "Our Green Pastor or Look What Happened." All the local ministers joined in the event. Rev. Gross was praised, and hope was expressed that his first ten years was only the beginning of a long career in service to the church and the community.

The need for a full-time secretary became apparent in 1952 as the church volunteer arrangement no longer could handle the office load. The Session hired Fregis Landman to be the church and financial secretary, a position she managed with efficiency until Florida beckoned her 14 years later. After her departure from Willoughby, the church hired Margaret Morfoot, our current secretary, who has remained in that position for over twenty years.

On September 30, 1952, a community service of nationwide celebration was held at the Methodist Church in Willoughby for the presentation of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible which thirty-two renowned biblical scholars had researched for fifteen years under the authorization of forty denominations. The service was very impressive. Rev. Gross was one of five honored that day who received a large white leather-bound edition of the newly revised Bible. Unfortunately, that Bible disappeared before he could fully appreciate the honor (Bill said he had it for about three weeks at best).

The number of Elders was increased in 1953 from six to nine; that year also brought the dedication of a new Allen Electric Church Organ purchased with pledges and bequests. The dedication featured an organ recital by Henry Markworth, a skilled musician of his time.

Many indications of growth occurred in 1954 during Rev. Gross's fourteenth year of ministry in Willoughby. The following represent the major ones:

1. Two Sunday morning services were initiated to accommodate the membership of 359 Presbyterian Christians.
2. A committee was appointed to study expansion of the church.
3. Memorial funds were given to start a library.
4. The Men's Group was given its charter on January 20, 1955 and the group flourished until 1970.
5. The Women's Society became UPW, the United Presbyterian Women, following national action at Purdue uniting Presbyterian women throughout the world under one umbrella (the official birthdate was June 25, 1954).

The reader can easily understand why those observing our church called it a growing and vital community of faith.

Several remarkable events took place in 1955. In March of that year, Rev. Gross was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by Waynesburg College of Pennsylvania. Bill's spouse, Elizabeth, having been educated and trained as a social worker, became the first school social worker to be employed by the Willoughby Eastlake School System and continued in that role for 25 years. While she was busy raising their two sons, Karl and Glen, she had taken an active interest in home service of the Red Cross, serving on a part-time basis as Supervisor of the program. In addition to that effort, she was active in the League of Women Voters, and through that organization helped to establish the Lake County Mental Health Center and Association. She maintained ongoing work in the church and Women's association.

Christmas 1955 was a special time in the life of our church. For the first time, creche figures were made and painted by the Westminster Class, high school boys and girls of the church. This continued until the creche molds burned in the fire which destroyed the church in 1961. The creche tradition was revived in 1970 and continues to this day to bring joy during Advent to children of our Church School. On that same Christmas Eve, Dr. Gross, appearing on a national TV program, won a Dodge for life, a wonderful gift for a deserving person. To date Dr. Gross has received over 30 new automobiles to drive for a year at a time at no cost other than filling up the tank occasionally.

In 1956, the congregation approved the purchase of six acres of property on the corner of Euclid Avenue and Chandler Road (now Shankland Road) from Misses Florence and Grace Page. This parcel is part of the original grant from the Connecticut Land Company of the Western Reserve Territory. This had been the Page home since 1867. Our current communion table is a carpenter's bench found in the barn on the Page property. It was made by Isaac Page in 1830 who was the grandfather of the two women. Isaac had relocated from Connecticut in the early 1800's, a real pioneer in the new territory. The communion table, known as a Joseph's Bench, is a symbol of "hard work and faith in Christian beliefs." The two women were relieved to know that their property would be used for a church.

The Presbyterians have always shown an intense interest in improving public welfare. Thus, in the early 1920's a Presbyterian church in the Woodland Avenue neighborhood of Cleveland gave their church to form the Woodland Community Center. When the neighborhood began to deteriorate, the building was sold with the proceeds used to buy a similar building in 1958 in the Kinsman Road and 79th Street vicinity, an area being revitalized by the city of Cleveland, which was called the Garden Valley Housing Development. The new name of this community center was The Garden Valley Community Center. Our church has demonstrated since then a strong commitment to that center in providing resources for the people of that district.

The Heifer project was started that year to encourage improvement in agriculture in the Third World. All church groups raised money for farm animals. On June 20, 1957, the children of the Daily Vacation Bible School had the pleasure of choosing a lamb to send to Ecuador with the money that they had raised.

On May 28, 1958, at Pittsburgh, PA, the first act of unification in Presbyterianism occurred when the Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States participated in an impressive ceremony celebrating the union.

In the fall of 1958, a building fund was launched; plans were drawn up and approved. The membership at this time was 572 with 232 families involved in the church. A committee was formed to establish a library for which a memorial gift had been received in 1954 in memory of a member who had met an untimely death. Also, two events of significance for our women took place; the first publication of the Women's National journal, Concern, and the installation the next year of our Women's Association officers.

Willoughby at last was going to have a hospital of its own, and with Dr. Gross as chairman of the Hospital Board of Trustees, this dream became a reality in May 1961. Many in our congregation worked as volunteers and employees at the new hospital including this church historian. Once again during these rebuilding years in our church's history, we find clear evidence of a church which wants to serve others and in so doing to glorify God.

On Easter Sunday, April 2, 1961, because of a major fire which started in the Rose Room, the sanctuary and classrooms were damaged beyond repair including the furnishings, the communion service, the creche molds, and many other irreplaceable objects. Fortunately, the church records were saved. The congregation voted to go ahead with the building plans and gave approval to borrow \$149,000 to provide a portion of the funds needed. All the building fund pledges had been paid by the date of the fire. Until the present church was completed, two services each Sunday were held at South High School on Shankland Road. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on June 4, 1961 with 300 people attending. A shovel that was used to break the ground for the Southern Baptist Church was offered to Dr. Gross for him to use in the groundbreaking. All the children were invited to bring shovels and help. Grace Page who had owned the property was thrilled with the occasion. The fire-damaged church was offered for sale and was bought by the Willoughby Eastlake Board of Education in May 1962.

Our present church was built in an "L" shape design of Western Reserve architecture with one wing a Church School, and the main body to be an all-purpose sanctuary. Plans were incorporated that when the time came for expansion, a sanctuary was to be built facing Shankland Road with a corresponding wing to be added for a community room at right angles to the Church School wing.

On Pentecost Sunday, June 10, 1962, the church was dedicated with a morning and afternoon service. A presentation of the key and a litany of dedication were given by Dr. James Grazier, Presbytery Executive. The litany was the same one as the one used in 1927 when the Church School building was dedicated. Louise Savage sang, "Bless This House" and Dr. Gross preached a sermon entitled, "The Continuing Church." New members were received followed by communion and the singing of "I Love Thy Kingdom," a hymn which had been sung at the dedication of the church in 1886. The afternoon service with an emphasis on music was called "Evensong." Dr. Gross preached on "The Church Future." The choir sang an anthem which had been used at the 1886 dedication. The day, to be long-remembered and cherished, ended with refreshments served by the Deacons.

A Presbyterian New Church Development, St. Paul's, was established in Mentor during 1962. Dr. Gross and many of the Church officers of our Church gave a great deal of time and help to this process. Some of our members who resided in Mentor transferred their membership to the new Church.

Parish life was enriched during the summer of 1966 through the exchange of pulpits between Dr. Gross and Rev. Thomas Helms of Tunbridge Wells, England. Rev. and Mrs. Helms lived in

our pastor's home and served here while Dr. and Mrs. Gross lived in their home and served their congregation during the summer. It was a most enjoyable and expanding experience for both families and church members on both sides of the Atlantic.

A new secretary came to the Church in 1966 with Fregis Landsman's retirement. Margaret Morfoot was hired by the Session to function both as Church and Financial Secretary. She has brought great devotion and concern to her job and over the years has helped in the development of our Church. Her duties expanded when she was appointed by the Trustees to be Church Treasurer.

A plan which had been long hoped for finally in 1967 became a reality when through cooperative efforts with other Churches; the Northeast Christian Education Council was established. Rev. Ray Brugler was called by the Council and the Presbytery to be the Christian Education Consultant and he remained for seven years in that ministry, serving Churches who belonged to the Council. After that position terminated, the leadership of our Christian Education program became filled by qualified lay persons who gave of themselves unceasingly and helped in our Church growth. Such creative programs as Worship in the Woods, youth groups, and dramatic presentations during worship highlighted this era of our Church in educational ministry.

The Ritual of Friendship was started in 1970 with a two-fold purpose: first, to ensure that strangers could more easily be recognized when their name appeared as "first-time visitors" and second, to help in our pastoral ministry by aiding those in worship who had a particular need or request for the minister to visit or to be included as "new member prospects." This organized effort has proven its value over the years in enhancing communications throughout the life of our Church.

On the Sunday after Easter in 1972, the Festival of Banners was celebrated. Dr. Gross opened the festival with an historical sermon on the early creed of the Church. Banners were presented which had been hand sewn by the Women's Association, each banner depicting a particular statement of faith found in the Book of Confessions of our Presbyterian heritage. This Church service was a wonderful lesson in the importance of knowing our theological roots and celebrating the vitality of the Christian faith. These banners today remain in our sanctuary as proud symbols of our Presbyterian traditions and our Church's commitment through hard work to reflect the spirit of our Presbyterian ancestors.

On May 7, 1972, Dr. Gross was elected Moderator of the Synod of Ohio to serve until the merger of three synods, Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio, would create the new Synod of the Covenant. Dr. Gross had worked on the planning committee to form the new Regional Synod, and on October 12, 1972, this became a reality. Another change in Church boundaries occurred with the formation of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve in January 1973 out of the former Cleveland Presbytery, adding Ashtabula-area Churches and subtracting the Churches in the Akron area which formed the Presbytery of Eastminster.

The 35th anniversary of the ordination of Dr. Gross was held on December 3, 1975 with a special morning service which depicted the various ministries involving the Church. A public reception was held in the afternoon and a scholarship in the name of Dr. Gross was given to the Presbytery to be used for a seminary student's education.

After General Assembly in 1975, it became possible for young people, heretofore ignored by a majority of Churches as potential Church officers, to be ordained as Elders. In fact, congregations were encouraged to promote a program of electing youthful Elders from ages 15 to 22. Accordingly, the Church changed its by-laws in 1977 to include "Youth Elders." These young adults were elected to serve for one-year terms and eligible for election for two more terms. Over the last ten years, our Church has been graced with fine youthful leaders who were given the full opportunity to serve as ordained Elders and Deacons.

The dedication of a Wicks Pipe Organ with five ranks of pipes occurred on October 7, 1979, an impressive instrument made possible through pledges, bequests, and memorial funds. An organ recital was given by the three organists who had served the Church since 1949, Jim Savage, Judy Orick, and Jerry Bradshaw. Two additional ranks were added to the walls on either side of the organ chamber in 1984, again with funds coming from those three sources. Another gift through congregational contributions was our new sanctuary piano, a Schiller baby grand piano in 1986.

Other major memorial gifts which the Church has enjoyed and used to the glory of God are the Baptismal Font, still in use after more than 100 years; the Chimes we hear each Sunday which have just been refurbished to interface with our new Memorial Carillonic Bell System to be dedicated at the end of 1987; and the English Whitechapel handbells used by our Chancel Bell Choir. The Memorial Book in the entrance to the sanctuary was started in 1945 and contains the names of thoughtful, caring people who have given memorials for specific concerns of the Church.

A Chrismon tree was dedicated during the Advent Season of 1979. "Chrismon" is an abbreviation of "Christ's Monograms." Each of the Chrismons is a symbol of the early Christian Church, gold and silver beaded designs, made by the women of the congregation on a background of an evergreen tree. The Chrismon tree thus creates a spectacular, reverent, perception of the true meaning of the Christmas Season. This custom, which has continued for a decade, is now a tradition to be anticipated at Advent.

Dr. Gross, during his ministry from 1940 to 1981, had been a commissioner to General Assembly three times, and the moderator of the Presbytery as well as moderator of the Synod of Ohio. In 1980, once again the Presbytery bestowed upon him the honor of being elected moderator. Bill dismisses the rare honor of being elected twice to serve as moderator of a Presbytery, saying he was the only person young enough. After 41 years, on December 31, 1981, Dr. Gross retired as minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby and through action of the congregation and the Presbytery, he was named Pastor Emeritus. In his forty-one

years of noble and inspiring service to the Church, Dr. Gross was very active in the community, serving on the Boards of Community Fund, Red Cross, Child Welfare, Library, Hospital, Breckenridge Village, a recent development of Ohio Presbyterian Homes, now called Ohio Presbyterian Retirement Services, and the Committee for the Sewage Disposal Plant of the Willoughby Eastlake district. After a hiatus of about two years, during which time Bill served as Interim Minister in a Presbyterian Church in Newport News, Virginia, he and Elizabeth have returned as an active worshipping couple to our Church. Following Dr. Gross's retirement, The Rev. Clair Brewer served admirably as Interim Minister until March 1, 1983, while an intensive search was conducted for a new minister.

New Leadership Years (1981-1987)

at First Church, Willoughby

Having returned to one service in September 1981, the congregation was given the privilege of answering a survey in 1982 as to preference regarding number of services and time. The majority felt strongly to keep the hour at 10:00 AM with a concurrent hour for Church School. This remained our Church's pattern for worship and Church School for many years.

The Rev. Dr. Peter M. Bach was called to be our minister, beginning his ministry on March 1, 1983 to serve a Church that had one pastor for forty-one years. Many within the congregation were families who had grown up for their entire lives with Dr. Gross. It was a real challenge for a minister to undertake this task because it is human nature to be slow to accept anything different, however slight it may be. Dr. Bach has proved equal to this endeavor in every way. Dr. Bach and his family, his wife Barbara, an active registered nurse and an accomplished soprano, and two daughters, Christina and Allison came to us from Niagara Falls, New York.

Dr. Bach, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and Princeton University, was awarded his Doctor of Ministry in small group counseling from Drew University in 1977. Like his predecessor, Dr. Bach serves both within the local community and the higher governing bodies of the Presbytery and General Assembly. Presently he serves on the Board of Trustees of Ohio Presbyterian Retirement Services and the Breckenridge Village Council as well as serving as Pension representative and Moderator of the Division of Congregational Growth and Vitality in the Presbytery of the Western Reserve. Dr. Bach has been very active in the Committee on Ministry in our Presbytery, serving as moderator of the Committee in 1985 and 1986 while consulting with many Churches within the Presbytery.

In the late 1970's the world powers began competing with each other in building larger and more powerful nuclear weapons, enough to destroy God's handiwork many times over. In order to combat this serious threat to world stability and tranquility, the Peacemaking movement in our denomination became a major focal point in local Churches and higher governing bodies. Our Church took official action to work during the decade of the 1980's for peace by the Elders

signing the Shalom Covenant in October 1983. Since then in small and large ways, the congregation has been involved in active peacemaking, culminating in the presentation by the Women's Association of a quilted Peace Banner on World Communion Sunday, October 4, 1987.

Many positive steps were taken in the first few years of Peter's ministry. Here follows a list of the significant changes in our ministry:

- ❖The IF Group for individuals and family to share fellowship together
- ❖Young Mothers and Others Counseling Group
- ❖The Parting Song in Worship
- ❖Emphasis on Shut in Communion on a regular basis
- ❖Leadership and Involvement at the Highlands
- ❖The Reopening of the Church Library
- ❖Children's Time and other strategies for Family Worship
- ❖Emphasis on the Board of Deacons and their role in our ministry.
- ❖Adult Bible Study under varied leaders

These positive changes have promoted interest in our Christian faith and kept alive the great tradition of our Church in service and in fellowship with the world.

While the congregation was experiencing the changes, which occur in new leadership, the denomination finally accomplished its prime objective of over 100 years, to have reunion with the Southern branch of Presbyterianism and end the split which has its roots in and around the Civil War. In 1985, action was finalized to bring about reunion and the birth of our new denomination, The Presbyterian Church, United States of America.

That great statement of Matthew 25:40, "in as much as you have done it to one of the least of my brethren, you have done it to me" becomes a rallying cry for our Church in mission to others, especially in our effort to combat hunger and poverty in our community and in inner city Cleveland. The Church voluntary contribution basket for the Willoughby Food Bank, the monthly bake sale for the hunger centers in Cleveland, the two cents a meal program of our Presbytery to which our families have committed themselves, our continuous commitment to North Church and Garden Valley, are strong indicators of our Church doing what Jesus would have us do for others.

A highlight of the pastorate of Dr. Bach was the coming under care of the Session of one of our Church's own members for preparation to the ministry. Tim Thomas, who served as summer intern in 1986 at the Church working with our youth, met with the Session on numerous

occasions, culminating in the Session's official endorsement of Tim as a potential candidate to preach God's Word. In April 1987, the Presbytery meeting in Ashtabula, Ohio took formal action, receiving Tim as a candidate under care, whereupon Tim, having worked at Breckenridge Village Fairmount Health Center as Summer Intern Chaplain, began his formal Seminary education in September 1987, attending the same seminary where both Dr. Gross and Dr. Bach graduated, Princeton Theological Seminary.

The Long-Range Planning Committee was named in 1986 at the Annual Congregational Meeting "to investigate and recommend plans for the next five to ten years." The Church structure since 1962 had undergone no major changes, and the Committee was empowered to study whether or not we need refurbishing, a major building program, or what. The concept from 1962 was to add another wing and a new sanctuary "if the growth and finances were sufficient". Several substantial gifts have been given to the Church, each with a specific request that the gift be used for a major capital program. Therefore, the report made in the spring of 1988 brought these and other factors into consideration.

This Long-Range Planning Committee report is still the basis for future development, much as our predecessors had foreseen in the first Church. May our future be as bright as our past and our present, and may we be filled with the same spirit which has always been present in our Church,

The First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby, Ohio!

The Last Decade (1986-1996) with Isabel Sutch

Isabel Sutch died on November 30, 1996. A Memorial Service was held on December 2, 1996. We will always remember our beloved Isabel Sutch. Thank you, God, for Izzy!

Dr. Bach's ministerial interests included training as a pastoral counseling therapist, chairing the Breckenridge local Retirement Community Board (1990-91) and the state-wide Ohio Presbyterian Retirement Communities Board (1992-94), providing leadership as President of the Board of Trustees of our Synod of the Covenant (Ohio and Michigan Presbyterian churches), serving on the General Presbyter Search Committee and chairing the Budget and Finance unit of the Presbytery, serving on the Building Committee (ex-officio) for the new sanctuary and the planning committee for the new Nason Center for Personal Care and Alzheimer's disease.

The Church and Society Committee of the Session has evolved out of our great concern for hunger and peacemaking, chaired by an elder at large, functioning to encourage involvement in hunger alleviation and peacemaking, with adult bible studies several times a year, dinners, walks, and other events. Dr. Bach has walked three "big walks" from April till November and in

his walking over 1800 miles, the congregation has donated close to \$2000 to the Food Pantry, Interchurch Council Hunger Task Force, and Hospice of the Western Reserve.

The other boards of the Session have been instrumental in many ways with expanding the church in ministry and mission. With expansion have come some changes in our format and style of church life. The Trustees of the Church, whose duties are primarily concerned with the maintenance and care of the church, have added responsibilities upon the dissolution of the Building Committee in 1994. Any further work of the former Building Committee will now be done by the Trustees. Together with volunteers, the Trustees have painted the outside windows of the Christian Education wing, and in 1994 will attempt to paint the outside windows of the WPG Community Room.

The Landscape Committee, an offshoot of the Building Committee, has been busy, and it shows. Many beautiful flower beds, shrubs, trees, and flowers have been planted according to a Landscaping Master Plan. As this is an ongoing committee, there are many more additions planned. All the beautiful surroundings are dedicated to the glory of God.

With interest funds from the Beall legacy, our Deacons have been able to expand and extend their humanitarian works, helping the hungry, the lonely, and the poor. In addition, the following church activities make for a busy and productive deacon ministry: communion phone calls to the entire congregation, printed manual listing all deacon duties and functions, Easter Sunrise Breakfast, Breckenridge Tea, pictures and ribbons to honor new members as they join our church, street signs strategically placed, locating our church in Willoughby, brochure of the church, steak roast, and the annual big event, the spaghetti supper. The deacons truly do foster friendliness and interest in our church.

An active Christian Education Board under the leadership of CE elders and our part-time Christian Education Director, Jane Strancar, has expanded to new heights with many motivated volunteer teachers: Worship in the Woods twice each year, Vacation Church School, The Together Group, Christmas Programs, Carol Choir, garden parties, movies and holiday caroling. CELEBRATE is the denominational curriculum which our Session has used with our children for the past six years.

Materials have been updated to be more contemporary and teacher-friendly, while continuing to combine theological understanding with sound education practices. The Christian Education remodeling of existing space is ongoing, and to date, two bathrooms have been built for small children. The Carol Parks legacy has been used to make the Christian Education rooms more attractive, with the purchase of colorful rugs in the Crib Room and Toddler Room. The Trustees will add new molding around the perimeter of the large room and presently we have plans to put up a wall with doors, creating quiet and secure classroom space while still allowing for medium sized groups to use the open area of the old primary room.

The Senior High group raises money with car washes, muffin sales, etc. to afford ten-day backpacking trips each summer. The Senior Highs under the leadership of elders Barbara and

Gary Brown, collect items for Christmas at North Church, and help the children of the neighborhood in and around North Church have a merry Christmas through their special work in the Christmas room.

With the retirement of our full-time secretary, a part-time secretary was hired, and an answering machine added to help provide constant contact with Dr. Bach.

A Session long-range planning committee was formed in 1986 to consider the feasibility of remodeling and expanding the existing structure. A new sanctuary was never considered in the Study.

In 1988 the report of the Long-Range Planning Committee was not received with favor because many of the church family thought a new sanctuary should be considered. A secret ballot was held at an informal congregational meeting to see if a consensus might be reached. The overwhelming majority, present and voting, favored the planning and construction of a new sanctuary. Thus, in 1988, an intensive Session study began to ascertain whether or not we could afford such an expensive project.

In 1989, after a thorough study of all phases of financing, including using undesignated Memorial Funds and Funds designated for building expansion, and after the willingness of church families to help fund such a project was identified through a five-year pledge campaign, the Session reported at a congregational meeting that the way was clear to build. The Session presented both architectural plans for the new building and a financial plan which would use only pledges for the Building project along with the named gifts and bequests for future building expansion. The plans were for a new sanctuary, a South Wing, including a parlor, library, storage rooms, bathrooms, and remodeling of the Christian Education wing. These plans and the study were well-received by the congregation, who approved the building of our new sanctuary and Parlor Wing. New construction was to be financed by memorial funds, bequests, pledges from members and friends, and a construction loan. All financing would be guided through the leadership of the Building Committee.

As we approached the decade of the 1990's, little did we know that our cherished dream of a new Sanctuary would become a reality! Our hopes and prayers came true with the announcement that we had sufficient funds to begin building. On Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 1992, a ground-breaking ceremony was held with construction actually beginning on June 29, 1992. Various fundraising events were held to raise additional funds for the Building Campaign. One was a steak dinner and auction which netted nearly \$5000. With the joint cooperation of the Building Committee, gifts, bequests, and pledges, the financial outlook on our major undertaking was improved.

The builder and good weather made it possible to complete the new Sanctuary in the spring, and on April 16, 1993, one week after Easter, we dedicated our sanctuary to the glory of God. The dedication service was coordinated with Dr. Bach, The Rev. Timothy Thomas, and Dr.

William Gross participating in a prayerful, thankful service, followed by a lovely reception given by the Presbyterian Women of the Church.

The Sanctuary was far more beautiful than we ever anticipated. The Western Reserve architecture was carried throughout the building with long, slim windows lending a feeling of spaciousness to the Sanctuary inside, while outside, the landscaping gave a feeling of God's beauty all around. The same Western Reserve motif was followed in decorating with off-white walls and shades of gray on the ceiling. Oak and white pews with soft blue seats, and thick blue carpeting added to the feeling and made a breathtaking sight. All this was set off with wall sconces and suspended brass ceiling lamps and completed with two stained glass windows on the inside and outside of the building over the choir area. These two windows were crafted by a member of our church family.

A lovely circular drive has been added in front of the church giving easy access for the handicapped and those who enjoy walking to church. A bus to and from Breckenridge Village has also been added and the circle drive provides an easy turn around for the bus. Parking space remains the same and a ramp has been added with a railing for safety.

Our church organ was moved to the new Sanctuary and the new acoustics have enhanced the sound. Organ cloth now covers the pipes and complements the new choir robes given by a member of the church family.

An elevated Chancel with the pulpit on the left and the lectern on the right, gives an unobstructed view of the choir, the pastor, and the children when they present programs. The Communion Table (built in 1850 and known as Joseph's Bench) was moved to the new Sanctuary along with the marble baptismal font. This font has been instrumental in the baptism of our children for more than a hundred years.

On either side of the Chancel area are two small rooms. The room on the left is for storage of bell choir equipment and the one on the right is known as the Sacristy room and serves as storage for Communion Trays and flower arrangements for Sunday services. The room has a sink and water for fresh flower arranging, for the baptismal font during baptisms, and for watering plants. As one leaves the Sanctuary, under the time-honored "old rugged cross," a verse from Genesis 28:16 appears on the back wall and reads, "Surely God is here with us; how awesome is this place." This verse is a fitting tribute and personifies the innermost feelings of our Presbyterian church family.

The "old" parlor is our "new" Narthex and is separated from the Sanctuary by a soundproof glass wall of windows. A new sound system makes it pleasant to hear the joyful worshipful sounds of the people in worship. The Narthex is a great aid for mothers with babies and for people who prefer not to sit in the Sanctuary. The Narthex is furnished attractively in maple, and on the wall, is a black walnut plaque with the names of donors to the Building Fund. To be added is a shelf below with a book of Memorial donors to the Building Fund. In addition, there

will be a book to honor living members and friends of the church. As families, leave the Narthex, the words "GO IN PEACE" stand out above the door.

On May 3, 1993, the William P. Gross Community Room was dedicated to honor "Bill," our church pastor of 41 years. The room is now available for larger groups in the community, for other organizations of the church, for coffee hour, and for wedding receptions. The stage area of this room was renovated into a storage and dressing area for the choir. A lovely reception followed the formal dedication of the WPG Community Room.

The South Wing continues off the Narthex with a long hall of windows (the gallery) and restroom on the East side before it approaches the Isabel Sutch Library and the Mantey Family Parlor. The Mantey Family Parlor was a dream of Eleanor Mantey and was funded by its namesake for a "parlor someday." The parlor was dedicated on May 22, 1994 and marked a sense of accomplishment for many women of the church. A reception followed. (History of the Women's Association {1993} can be seen in the album in the library, Presbyterian Women section.)

Long slimline walnut framed windows at the end of the parlor continue the Western Reserve tradition and are flanked on each end by full bay windows of the same style. Glass and brass candelabra offer a bright glow of serenity to the thickly carpeted, richly furnished room. Furnished by the Women's Association with matching grants from undesignated Memorials from the Session, this room will be used for all kinds of church functions, including women's ministry, small groups like the Session, and as a chapel for small weddings and funerals.

Since beautiful music and beautiful nature are synonymous, it is a fitting tribute to have a brick patio named for the Savage family. The Savage family has been an integral part of our church for many years and their music capabilities have added greatly to the enjoyment of worship for our congregation. The patio is entered by double doors from the gallery (South Hall), and the garden surrounding the patio is beautifully landscaped with burning bushes and flowers, making the many coffee hours held there in the summer months a real joy to behold. It is also ideal for bridal picture taking. The Savage Family Patio will be dedicated in the summer of 1994.

Across the Hall from the patio is the Isabel M. Sutch Library... a dream in blue, Isabel's favorite color. The library is well stocked and arranged in a computerized fashion. There is a data manual to research any book by author, title, location, and subject matter. The room itself is suitable for small meetings and groups. A pass-through window to the parlor is another added feature (facilitating serving and clean up from the parlor). Stained glass windows on the East wall and blue, pleated blinds on the West wall and a full-length mirror make this room ideal as a bride's dressing room, giving privacy and comfort, which we could not previously offer. The stained-glass windows on either side of the door, the folding table, and the lamp were all made by a member of the church. The Isabel M. Sutch Library was dedicated on June 26, 1994 with a lovely tribute to Isabel, complete with flowers and a plaque.

From time to time the Sanctuary and surroundings have been enriched with many meaningful and thoughtful accessories, such as: new paraments, a brass cross, new music holders, new bibles and hymnbooks. These have added to the beauty and the Glory of God.

With the new addition, the Church when viewed from above now forms a perfect cross.

The stained-glass window in our beautiful Sanctuary shines as a beacon of God's love for all who seek comfort and compassion.

May the spirit which has sustained Presbyterians throughout the generations stay alive and be alive in our Church today.

Condensed version for our 165th anniversary

The First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby

by Jeff Oviatt - July 1998

In the year 1833, the First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby was created through the Christian vision of nine members and the Reverends Chester Chapin and Truman Coe who organized the Presbyterian Society of Willoughby. In those days this area was part of the relatively new Western Reserve of Connecticut. Moses Cleveland had come to the mouth of the Cuyahoga River in 1796 to survey some two and a half million acres of land that he and others had purchased from Connecticut for about 40 cents an acre. This area shares the same latitude lines as the state of Connecticut and was part of the original royal colonial charter from the 1600s. The Western Reserve was to be an overflow area for excess population in the East and for many served as payment for military service.

By the early 1800s this was a growing area stimulated by the completion of the Ohio Canal linking Lake Erie with the Ohio River. The Western Reserve was a hotbed of abolitionist and temperance sentiments. There were many stations on the Underground Railroad slave escape system in this part of Ohio. It was against this backdrop that the fledgling Presbyterian Church in Willoughby was formed.

In 1835, the first church building was built across from the end of Sharpe on Euclid Avenue. The land for the church was donated by the Wilson family. The first church building was red brick and had a beautiful golden oak sanctuary with rented pews. The pews had doors to keep children with their parents.

A twelve-room parsonage was built in 1873 on a double lot on Center Street directly behind the church. By this date there had been many pastors each serving short terms. By 1880 there was need for more space, so the original church was demolished causing much sadness. A new building was constructed debt free, a testament to the financial health of the Church at that time.

The new church building was dedicated in January of 1886. The Women's Society had raised money for the purchase of a pipe organ. The air to the organ was supplied by bellows manned by young boys hidden from view. It was considered an honor to serve as one of these bellows boys and this practice continued until about 1920.

In the 1890s, James McMahan (the first "Mr. Willoughby") began singing in the choir at the First Presbyterian Church. When he began, he was 14-year-old and continued to sing for sixty years. As proof of the ecumenical appeal of our church Mr. McMahan was a Roman Catholic.

By 1896, the Church had been in existence for 63 years and had had 23 ministers. There had been a total of 549 members since the founding and there were about 100 current members. Church property was worth \$15,000. By 1900 membership had grown to 144 members.

The first five-minute children's time during worship was instituted by Dr. W.L. Swan, pastor. The year was 1918. Mrs. Swan became involved in the Harkness Camp mission program. Harkness Camp for underprivileged children was located where the CEI Eastlake power plant is now located.

The year 1936 saw the combination of Ladies Aid, the Missionary Society and the Daughters' Circle into the Women's Association. The 1930s saw much controversy and division in the Church due to the Great Depression and a controversial pastor. The congregation split and membership plummeted to around twenty people. Into this dismal situation came a young man recently graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary. His name was William P. Gross, and he first preached as a supply preacher to thirteen worshipers in September 1940. Bill Gross was ordained a minister in December 1941, and was installed as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Willoughby in October 1941. In August of 1941, Bill Gross married Elizabeth Anderson of Missouri. The Church welcomed them with an elaborate wedding reception in September 1941. In 1942, Bill Gross was instrumental in forming the first Alcoholics Anonymous chapter in Willoughby. The group held its first meeting at the First Church in 1945.

The Church was again debt-free in 1944 after a \$5,000 bequest by Delia Reynolds of the Mentor farm family (Reynolds Road). World War II was over, and in 1946, First Church donated \$2,693 to help rebuild Europe. The Church members had to forgo new carpet to accomplish this mission work to the suffering people of Europe.

In 1947 the "Mr. and Mrs. Club" and the Board of Deacons were established as Bill Gross continued to enhance the vitality of the Church. The "Mr. and Mrs. Club" provided a much-needed social outlet and the Board of Deacons provided opportunities for service to more members of the congregation.

Jim Savage, talented organist, and Louise Savage, gifted soprano and choir director, joined the church in 1949. They become the backbone of the Church's music program, a relationship that continues to the present. Jim and Louise became the founders of the Willoughby School of Fine Arts.

In 1950, \$30,000 was authorized to provide improvements to the old building, including excavation of a new room under the Church called "the Anchor Room." This room featured a painting of a large anchor on one wall. The dedication of the Anchor Room doubled as a celebration of Rev. Bill Gross' tenth year at First Church. With 359 members to accommodate in Sunday worship, it was decided in 1954 to initiate two morning worship services. Money was set aside to establish the first Church library in that year. Also, the Women's Society became the United Presbyterian Women.

In 1956, the Church approved the purchase of six acres of property at the corner of Euclid and Chandler (now Shankland). This property had been the Page farm since 1867 and our innovative Communion table came from the barn on this property. This workbench Communion table had been built by Isaac Page in 1830 and is symbolic of Joseph's carpenter bench. Two years after

the purchase of the land, a building fund was launched to build a new church. Membership at that time was 572 (232 families).

On Easter Sunday, April 2, 1961, a major fire started in the Rose Room extensively damaging the old church. The congregation voted to borrow \$149,000 to build a new building on Shankland with the groundbreaking on June 2, 1961. During the construction period, two services were held each Sunday at South High School.

1979 saw the beginning of a Christmas tradition called the Chrismon Tree. "Chrismon" is an abbreviation of "Christ's monograms." The tree displays early church symbols and features gold and silver bead designs done by the women of the Church.

Dr. William P. Gross retired in 1981 after serving as minister for 41 years. The congregation named him Pastor Emeritus, a position he continues to hold. A search committee began the search for Dr. Gross' replacement. In March 1983, the Rev. Dr. Peter M. Bach was called as pastor of First Church. Coming in after the longest serving pastor in the history of the Church was a difficult task that Peter Bach has handled admirably. Both Dr. Gross and Dr. Bach have been very active in the affairs of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.

After intensive study and consultation with the Congregation, it was decided to build a new sanctuary and parlor wing. Ground was broken in May 1992, and a beautiful sanctuary in the Western Reserve architectural style was completed by Easter 1993. There was also the addition of a lovely circular driveway at the front of the Church and extensive landscaping. The addition has been a stimulus to the growth of the Church. The old sanctuary was dedicated as the William P. Gross Community Room. At the end of the parlor wing is the lovely Mantey Family Parlor right next door to the Isabel Sutch Library. Current improvements to our church include adding ranks to our beautiful pipe organ, a new cutting garden and plans for new walls in the Teple Education Wing. Our church continues to experience dynamic life and growth as we move into a new millennium. We look forward to continuing our Christian vision.