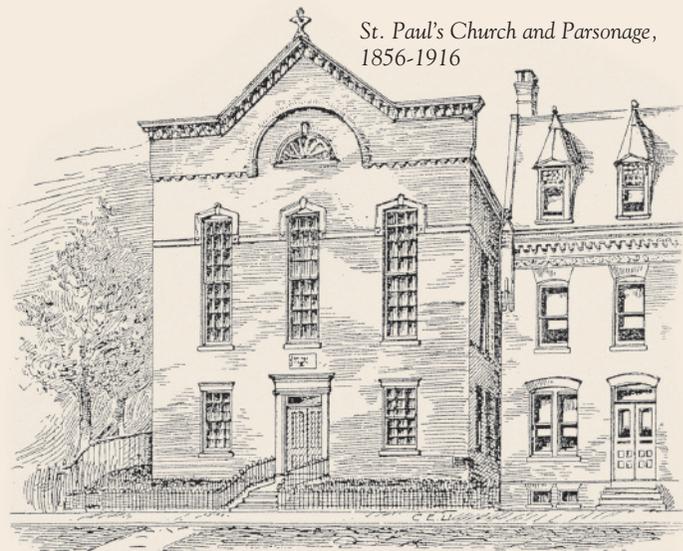


St. Paul's Church and Parsonage,  
1856-1916



— HISTORY OF THE ARCHITECTURE —

**1848:** Held first meetings in pre-existing frame building, South Queen St.

**1849:** Dedicated brick chapel on German St. (now called Farnum St.).

**1855:** Built plank church at rear of newly-acquired South Queen St. lot.

**1856:** Began holding services in basement of half-finished new church; sold plank church.

**1860:** Dedicated large red brick church, east side of South Queen St.

**1912:** Commissioned C. Emlen Urban to design new church, corner of Queen St. and Farnum St.

**1916:** Dedicated present-day brick and stone Gothic Revival house of worship.



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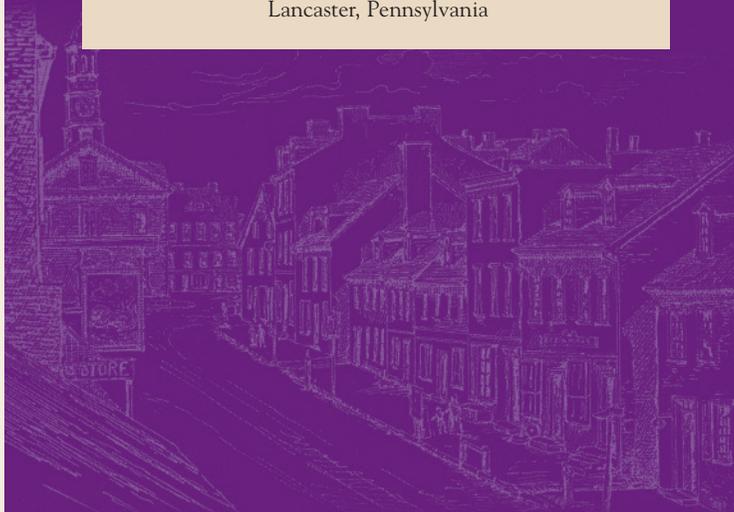
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## STORY OF THE PEOPLE AND NEIGHBORHOOD

In the 1840s, the people of Lancaster's First Methodist Episcopal Church launched what they later called their "Sabbath School Project." The City's southwestern area, with its growing German and Irish immigrant population, seemed an ideal spot to plant the seeds of Methodist revival.

A group of pioneer teachers gathered the first classes sometime in 1848. Within a year, they asked First Church trustees to secure more adequate quarters. The trustees agreed, financing the construction of a brick chapel.



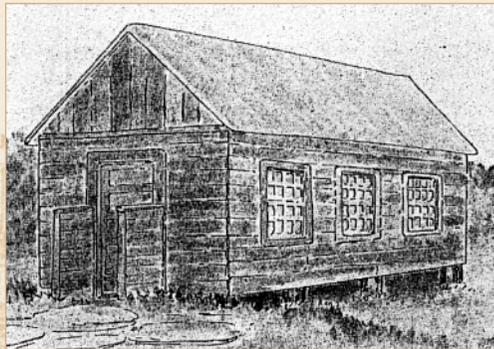
*German St. Chapel, 1849-1855*

In 1851 the Sabbath school petitioned the bishop of the denomination's Philadelphia Conference for a resident pastor. After the Rev. Jacob Dickerson came to Lancaster, the members of Second Methodist Episcopal Church regularly filled their German Street chapel. They needed a larger house of worship.

To pay for an adjoining lot in 1855, Second Church sold the chapel to a Reformed Mennonite congregation. The Mennonites eventually moved out of the city, and today the chapel is home to St. Paul's Church of God in Christ.

In an accelerated version of community barn-raising, members of the 1850s Methodist Society built a temporary plank structure on a rear corner of their new land. They also changed their name to St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church.

In St. Paul's lore, the Plank Church lives on as the place where worshippers raised umbrellas during rainstorms and stuffed rags through holes



*Plank Church, 1855-1856*

to keep out the weather. A strong gust finally carried away a portion of the roof during an 1856 Sunday morning sermon, hastening the move into the basement of the half-finished new building, completed in 1860. In 1870 the exterior architecture of the church was "much improved" by raising the front wall and "surmounting it with a neat cornice."

As Lancaster City embarked on one of its golden eras in the early 1900s, the brothers Benjamin F. W. Urban, a local physician, and Amos S. Urban, a contractor and builder, lived in the neighborhood and were members of St. Paul's. C. Emlen Urban, a well-known Lancaster architect, was the son of Amos Urban and his wife Barbara. He grew up in the shadow of "old St. Paul's."

Along with the Urbans, the St. Paul's pastor, Rev. Joseph L. Gensemer, and W. W. and Elizabeth Griest, a well-to-do Quaker family, formed the nucleus of a forward-looking city community. Later Methodist historians called the Rev. Gensemer a leader for "the right time, in the right place." His eleven-year pastorate was distinguished by the transition into a stunning new house of worship.

On a snowy afternoon in December 1914, the notes of "Onward Christian Soldiers" rang along Queen St. as the congregation marched across the thoroughfare for a cornerstone-laying ceremony on their new property. They had hired the 49-year-old C. Emlen Urban to design a Gothic Revival structure, often called "the only proper style" by proponents of Christian medieval architecture.

Two years later, tears fell during the farewell service in the "dear old church," but people were hopeful and upbeat at the dedication of their state-making new home.

Gothic arched windows of stained glass depicted the Life of Christ from the Annunciation and Birth to the Easter Story of Resurrection. The main entry, through a truncated

tower, transformed the well-traveled corner of South Queen and German (now called Farnum) Streets.

After W. W. and Elizabeth Griest died, their daughter Rebecca sold the family home and grounds to St. Paul's. It became a parsonage and large church lawn perfect for Sunday afternoon dinners, evening corn roasts, and other social events. Such gatherings, inside or outside, were common features of Methodist life. One autumn morning during the Great Depression, the women of St. Paul's baked 3400 apple pies. Men of the congregation spent most of the next day walking door-to-door selling their 25-cent pies. Minutes of the Society proudly record a profit of \$800 applied to the church debt.

In the 21st century, active congregations of many descriptions—African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Church of God in Christ, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Presbyterian—stand alongside St. Paul's and offer witness to the southern area of Lancaster city. Here on the edge of what is now called Churchtowne, St. Paul's continues to nurture the dreams and hopes of a forward-looking city community.

Worship services in Spanish and English reverberate through the large sanctuary. Bilingual church leaders work to integrate the congregation and its facilities into the neighborhood. Stained glass windows reflect the light, and messages of hope fill the air as a dynamic servant ministry continues to characterize the vision of St. Paul's.

**Earliest Known Record: 1848 Sabbath School founded by First Methodist Episcopal Church**  
**Current House of Worship: Gothic Revival, completed 1916**