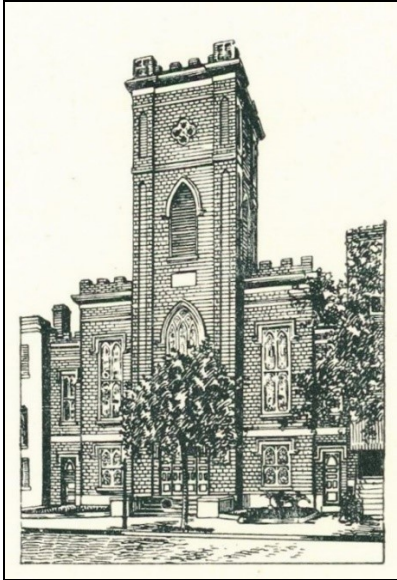




# Not your ordinary church

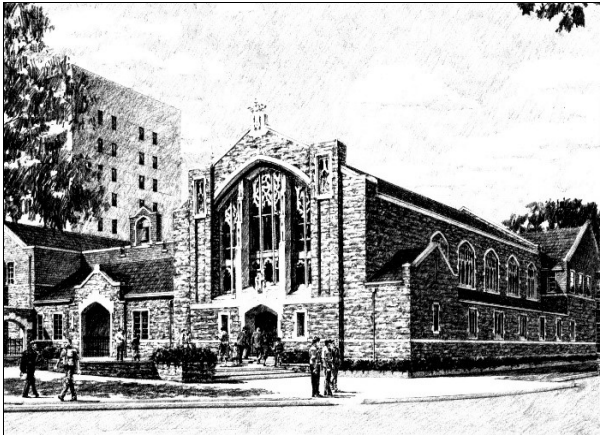
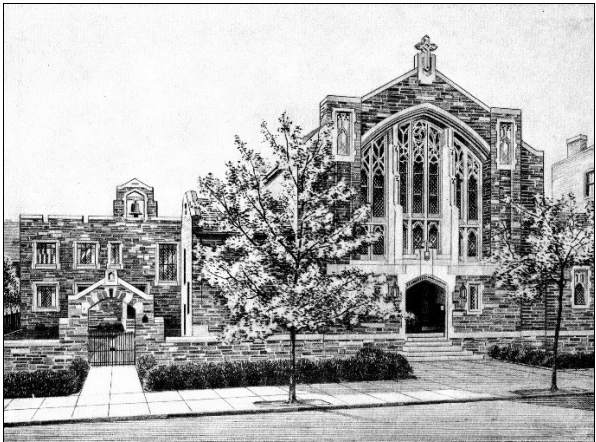
Western Church in Foggy Bottom and Washington, DC  
1850 – 2015

Western Presbyterian Church



Building No. 1  
1911 H Street, NW

Building No. 2  
1906 H Street, NW



Building No. 3  
2401 Virginia Avenue, NW

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## Author's Note

Western Church pulled me in from Fairfax in the third decade of John Wimberly's pastorate. What was it that induced me to accept a 30-mile roundtrip to attend church? My answer is not unlike that of so many others who have been attracted to Western Church in recent years. A main reason was its strong advocacy for social justice. But other considerations were also important: challenging sermons, outstanding music, an attractive sanctuary, and a friendly congregation with international dimensions.

Over the course of my 15-year membership at Western, I picked up bits and pieces of the church's 164-year history, much of it from Rev. John Wimberly's sermons. I became curious to know the whole story. In particular, I wondered how deep Western's social justice roots might be. Was the congregation always inclined this way? If not, when and why did the change take place? What were the actions of the congregation in response to the social justice issues of the city in each era?

Over a six-month period, I explored the history of Western Church. At the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, I read the Minutes of the Session for every meeting between 1855 and 1977. I read the Minutes of the Board of Trustees, which largely managed the financial affairs of Western Church until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I scanned membership rolls and a small collection of historical documents pertaining to the church. In Washington, DC, I read the Session Minutes of more recent years, reviewed some 30 years of the "Western-Aire" monthly newsletter, the Annual Reports to the congregation between 1991 and 2015, and various miscellaneous historical documents that had been conserved by the church. Rev. Wimberly's *A Brief History of Western Presbyterian Church 1983-2012* was without question a particularly useful resource. I also explored online sources at the George Washington University library and a wide range of reports, newspaper articles and blogs available on the internet. The book *Chocolate City* proved to be an extremely rich resource for understanding the history of Washington, DC, and the role of African-Americans in its growth and development.

Gradually the answers to my questions became clear. My findings are presented in the following pages, which I have chosen to organize by decade. I have also placed the church's history in the context of key historical events in the District of Columbia and the Foggy Bottom neighborhood in the effort to illuminate the presence or absence of social justice concern within the church.

In the end, one thing became abundantly clear: Western is not your ordinary church! Despite the many social and political changes in the city over the years, through good times and difficult ones, the members of Western Church did not abandon the Foggy Bottom neighborhood for greener pastures. They repeatedly made enormous sacrifices to keep the flame of Western Church alive in Foggy Bottom.<sup>1</sup> This is the story of how they managed to make this happen.

As you read, you will find that most factual references in the text have been footnoted, but some have not. Whenever an unfootnoted statement is made regarding "the Session" or "the church," it should be assumed that the source is the Session Minutes for that time period. The omission of these references was intentional in order to keep the number of footnotes to a reasonable number.

William Saint  
September 2019

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<sup>1</sup> Wimberly, John W. Jr. 2005. *Western Presbyterian Church 2005 Directory: Our Sesquicentennial Year*. Washington, DC: Olan Mills Inc.

## Pastors at Western Presbyterian Church

1855 – 1858 – Rev. Thomas Nelson Haskell

1858 – 1859 – *Interim pastor*

1859 - 1861 - Rev. Julius R. Bartlett

1862 – 1874 – Rev. John N. Coombs

1875 – 1878 – Rev. David Wills

1878 – 1893 – Rev. Theodore S. Wynkoop

1894 – 1898 – Rev. Howard W. Ennis

1899 – 1904 – Rev. Gerhardt A. Wilson

1905 – 1909 – Rev. Dr. George Bailey

1909 – 1941 – Rev. Dr. James Harvey Dunham

1942 – 1974 – Rev. Dr. Stewart McKenzie

1975 – 1976 – *Interim pastors*

1977 – 1982 – Rev. Robert Strain

1982 – 1983 – *Interim pastor*

1983 – 2012 – Rev. Dr. John Wimberly Jr.

Rev. Dr. Laureen Smith, Associate Pastor, 1994-2005

Rev. Carol Howard Merritt, Associate Pastor, 2006-2012

2013 – 2015 – *Interim pastors*

2015 – Rev. Dr. Laura Cunningham

\*See page 88 for pastor biographical information

## ***Before the beginning. . .***

It was a good place to stop. In fact, the ship could not go any farther because of river rapids and waterfalls beyond. So in 1662 a small group of Europeans decided to set up shop near the junction of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. This unremarkable beginning eventually developed into our nation's capital city as well as the home of Western Presbyterian Church.

Prior to European colonization, this area was widely inhabited by multiple Native American groups: Patawomecks, Doegs, Piscataways, and Nacotchtanks. By the early 1700s just a few hundreds of these were left – decimated by war, disease and subjugation. Many moved west to distance themselves from the colonists. On their abandoned communal lands, Europeans established a plantation society.

The plantation crop of choice was tobacco. As a crop, tobacco demands daily care and a lot of labor. Because it quickly depletes soil fertility, it also requires large tracts of land. These two resources – labor and land – could only be brought together with a sizeable investment. From these elements, plantation society was constructed: expansive land holdings worked by enslaved laborers who were managed by wealthy owners.

Georgetown initially functioned as a tobacco inspection station, which was erected on the site of a former Native American village called Tohoga.<sup>2</sup> At that time, the Potomac River was deeper and wider than it is today.<sup>3</sup> Rock Creek was also much bigger, allowing small ships to deliver goods as far upstream as P Street. Georgetown was formally established in 1751 and soon became a thriving center of regional trade and transshipment.

Foggy Bottom was created in 1763 when a German immigrant, Jacob Funk, acquired and subdivided 130 acres near the mouth of Rock Creek.<sup>4</sup> He named the village Hamburgh, but it was quickly dubbed "Funkstown." Five years later, Funk sold a lot located at G and 22<sup>nd</sup> Streets to the German Presbyterian Church, where it lay unused until the 1880s.<sup>5</sup> Another lot at G and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets was purchased by the German Lutheran Church, which later constructed the Concordia German Church there.<sup>6</sup>

In 1791 George Washington selected 10 square miles of nearby plantation land as the site for the new national capital. African-American surveyor Benjamin Banneker mapped the area. The chosen land was part of the large Notley Young plantation that produced tobacco and corn with the labor

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<sup>2</sup> Delany, Kevin. 1971. *A Walk through Georgetown*. Washington, DC: Kevin Delany Publications.

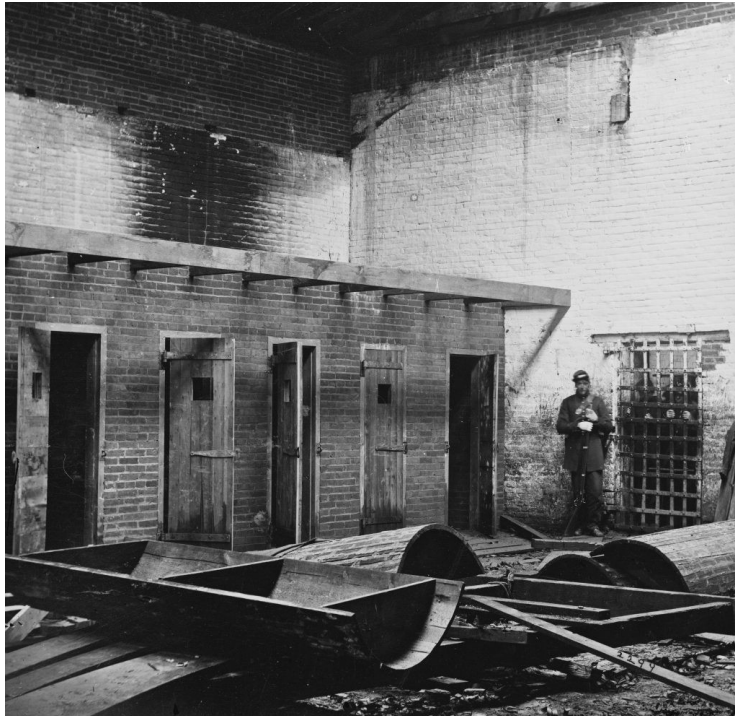
<sup>3</sup> The name Potomac comes from an Algonquin word meaning "great trading place."

<sup>4</sup> Foggy Bottom is bounded by 17th Street NW to the east, Rock Creek Parkway to the west, Constitution Avenue NW to the south, and Pennsylvania Avenue NW to the north. It is unclear when the name "Foggy Bottom" was adopted, although it was in use before 1877. It is commonly said that the fog from the Potomac River, combined with the smog from the gas works and other riverside industries, gave rise to the name. Dastagir, Alia E. 2011, "Behind the Name: Foggy Bottom," *Dcist News*, November 6, 2011.  
[http://dcist.com/2011/11/behind\\_the\\_name\\_foggy\\_bottom.php](http://dcist.com/2011/11/behind_the_name_foggy_bottom.php)

<sup>5</sup> This may possibly have been the same location where Western's first manse was located; today it is the site of the GWU Faculty of Education and Humanities.

<sup>6</sup> The church remains on the same site today, although it is now known as The United Church following a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century merger with two nearby congregations.

of 265 enslaved people. Thus, the country's future capital was created in the middle of a "fully functioning slave society."<sup>7</sup>



Alexandria slave pens, 1860

By 1795 the new city government had contracted for over 300 enslaved Africans to begin the construction of public works due to a shortage of hired labor. The first of these was the Capitol building.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the city's first auction of enslaved people was held.<sup>9</sup>

By 1800 the city's population had grown to 14,000, including 3,000 enslaved Africans. A few years later, Washington, DC had become "the chief seat of the American slave trade."<sup>10</sup> Auctions of enslaved people were held regularly just south of the Mall where the Hirschorn Museum is today. In the 1820s and 1830s, two men from Alexandria, Isaac Franklin and John Armfield, sold more enslaved people than almost anyone in America. They amassed a fortune that would be worth several billion dollars in today's currency, and became two of the nation's wealthiest men.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Asch, Chris Myers and Musgrove, George Derek. 2017. *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> The 7-ton statue of "Freedom" that sits atop the Capitol dome was cast, transported and installed by slaves, including supervisor Philip Reid, who were owned by the Clark Mills bronze foundry in nearby Maryland.

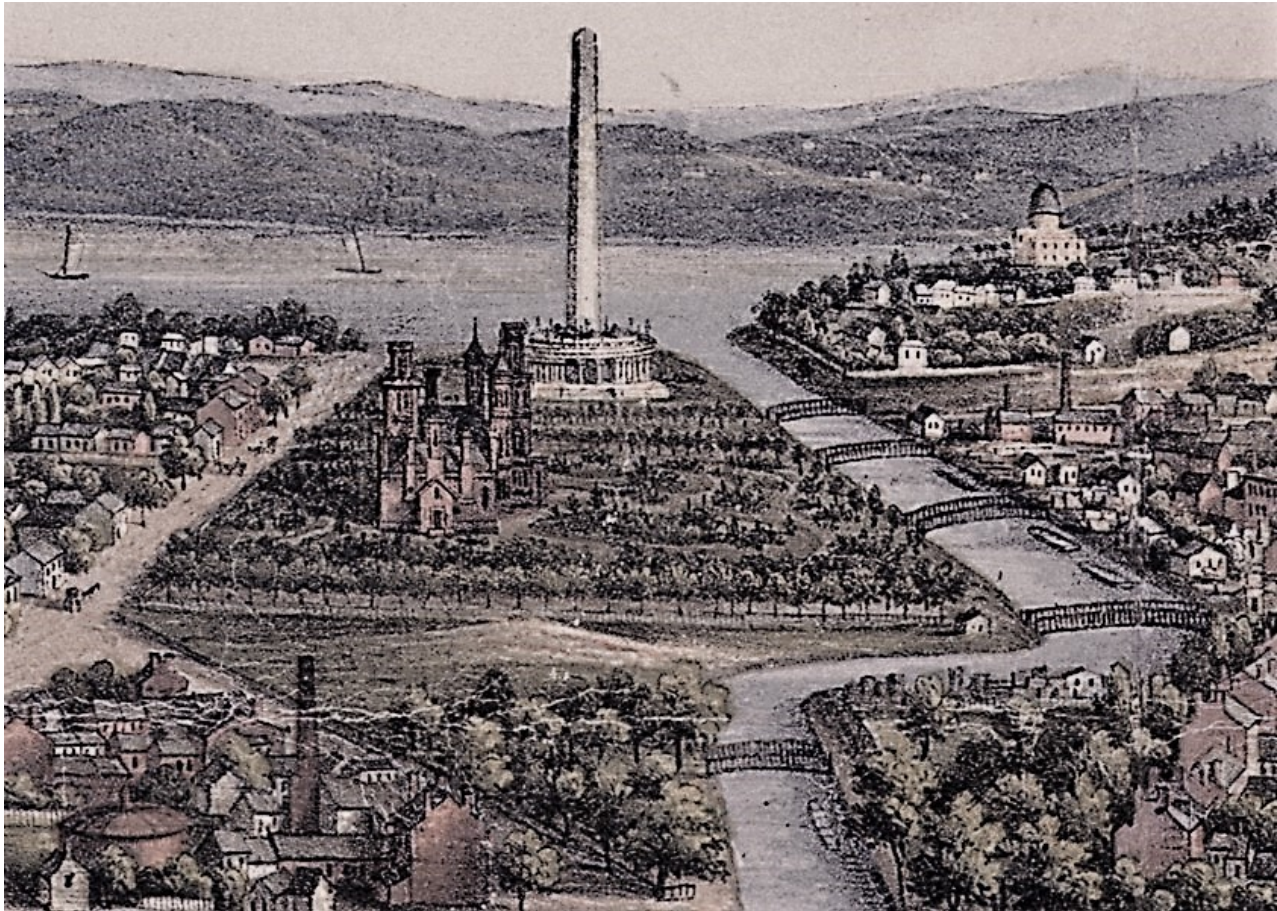
<sup>9</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Winkle, Kenneth J., 2006-2019, "Emancipation in the District of Columbia," *Civil War Washington*, Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

<sup>11</sup> Natanson, Hannah, 2019, "In 19<sup>th</sup> Century Alexandria, Cruelty Was Their Business," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2019, page B-1.



Notably, in 1836 Congress passed legislation which prohibited itself from interfering in the city's slave trade in any way.<sup>12</sup>



Drawing of the Washington city canal in 1856 before the National Mall was extended

**Box 1. The Washington City Canal**

The Washington City Canal was completed in 1815. It ran where Constitution Avenue is today, crossing the Mall in front of the Capitol and continuing on to the Anacostia River. People swam, boated and fished in the canal, which carried goods in and out of the city. During the 1850s canal barges began to deliver coal to homes and businesses along the canal. By 1880 the canal had become filled with garbage and sewage. Congress rerouted Tiber Creek down the canal into the Potomac and had it covered over to create Constitution Avenue.

Large numbers of free black tradesmen worked in the city. Some were skilled in the building trades and augmented the enslaved labor constructing the Capitol and other government buildings. Others were blacksmiths, barbers and shoemakers. The biggest employer of African-Americans was the federal government, where they often worked as messengers and cooks. During the city's early years, both enslaved people and free blacks attended white churches.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 48, 70, 81; National Park Service, "Histories of the National Mall," <http://mallhistory.org/explorations/show/mall-slavery>.

<sup>13</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Washington had 51,687 inhabitants, but its physical layout remained largely untamed by the elegant city plan designed by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791. The town contained numerous patches of forest and undergrowth interspersed with meadows and pasture. The area was crisscrossed by footpaths and carriage tracks. Animals often grazed on the National Mall, which hosted just three buildings: the government armory, the Smithsonian, and the Washington Monument, which was a "huge stone stump about 200 ft. high..." Transportation was mainly by foot. The north side of the Mall contained several lumber yards, sawmills, foundries, and coal yards.<sup>14</sup> Foggy Bottom was becoming an industrial area. Shipyards, lime kilns, breweries, a fertilizer factory, an ice house, and an old glass factory (abandoned in 1837) could be found along the river. Rock Creek powered mills of various types. Canal barges on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, completed in 1831, brought coal from the Allegheny Mountains to Foggy Bottom industries. In spite of these activities, the 1850 census found just 58 families residing in Foggy Bottom.

## **1850 – 1860: The Birth of Western Church**

**The City.** In the years just prior to the founding of Western Church 1855, the city was changing. Irish immigrants, forced to leave their homes by the potato famine of 1845-49, arrived in Washington with few skills and competed with enslaved labor for jobs. By 1850 there were 7,200 Irish in the city. The second largest immigrant group were the 3,500 Germans.<sup>15</sup> Many of these immigrants were attracted to Foggy Bottom because of the numerous job opportunities associated with the area's industries, the C & O canal, and the West Station Works of the Washington Gas Light corporation, which was constructed in 1856 at 26<sup>th</sup> and G Streets. Both immigrant groups created close-knit communities with their own religious and social institutions while generally segregating themselves from other city inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> Whereas in 1850 only 9% of the Foggy Bottom population were unskilled laborers, by the end of the decade that share had soared to 42%. As it came into being, the Foggy Bottom community was made up largely of immigrants with limited resources. Some of them found their way to Western Church.<sup>17</sup>

The 1850s ushered in other transformations to the city. Landmarks such as the U.S. Treasury building were completed. Freedom of the press was alive and well with 17 different city newspapers on offer. But political violence was also part of the scene. On election day in 1857 the American Party (nicknamed the "Know-Nothings") transported large numbers of hired "supporters" into the city to disrupt the voting. The American Party was strongly anti-immigrant. It claimed that new European immigrants were eroding the virtues of white Protestant America by over-whelming government services and social institutions.<sup>18</sup> Its supporters attacked voters at polling stations in

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<sup>14</sup> Description provided by Presbyterian minister Byron Sunderland, found in *Boundary Stones*, <https://blogs.weta.org/boundarystones/2013/08/01impressions-washington-overgrown-tatteredvillage>

<sup>15</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> DC Historic Preservation Office. 2003. "Foggy Bottom Historic District." (brochure)

<sup>17</sup> An observation based on the occasional Irish and German surnames of persons admitted to church membership during these years.

<sup>18</sup> These concerns still echo through the halls of Congress in 2019.

the attempt to prevent the election of Democrats. President James Buchanan was forced to call out Marines to protect voters and re-establish order.

Yet through it all, progress churned onward. The Washington Gas Light Company was constructed on the Mall (where the Museum of the American Indian now stands). The Smithsonian opened in 1855. The first portion of the Washington Aqueduct opened in 1859, providing drinking water to city residents and reducing their near universal dependence on well water.

**The Church.** Presbyterian Elder David Wilson was a church-building dynamo in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Washington, DC (see Box 2). He played major roles in the establishment of 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church in 1829 at 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Grant Place,<sup>19</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church for African-Americans in 1842,<sup>20</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church in 1852 at 500 I Street,<sup>21</sup> and Western Presbyterian Church in 1855 at 19<sup>th</sup> and H Streets. Wilson, who served as an ordained elder and superintendent of the Sunday school at 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian, was also an active organizer of prayer meetings and “Sabbath schools” on the western side of the city.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he worked at times for several different Bible societies, knocking on doors to invite residents to attend church, to receive a Bible, and to join him in prayer. He reportedly did not distinguish between black and white, or rich and poor, treating them all equally. As a result of these efforts, Wilson knew the city well and he was well-known in the city.

On April 14, 1848 Wilson started organizing prayer meetings and a Sabbath school for Foggy Bottom residents at the abandoned glass factory located at 23<sup>rd</sup> and Water Streets (today a spot just north of the Lincoln Memorial). The meeting place was in the midst of the immigrant community that labored on the docks and associated industries. Once this group of worshippers had stabilized, they began to meet in the nearby homes of group members. Before long, they built a simple wood frame chapel at 22<sup>nd</sup> and E Streets which became the forerunner of Western Church.<sup>23</sup>

In July 1854 Rev. John C. Smith of 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian purchased a lot at 1911 H Street upon which to build the new Western Church.<sup>24</sup> A recent graduate of Union Seminary, Rev. Thomas N. Haskell of Chautauqua, NY, was recruited by Smith and Wilson to help organize the small congregation and assist in fund-raising. Financial gifts for church construction came from 334 persons. They included President Franklin Pierce, Senator Jefferson Davis, Washington banker George Riggs, and various Cabinet members, Representatives, Senators and military leaders.

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<sup>19</sup> Located where the Martin Luther King library is today and torn down in 1899 when the congregation relocated to the suburbs at 5500 River Road in Bethesda, MD.

<sup>20</sup> Bittinger, B.F. 1895. “The Rise, Progress and Influence of Presbyterianism in the District of Columbia, in The Centennial of the Beginning of Presbyterianism in the City of Washington, Part 3. Washington, DC: First Presbyterian Church.

<sup>21</sup> Montes, Sue Anne Pressley. 2007. “Church’s Face-Lift Plans Uncover Ties to U.S. Capitol Architect.” *Washington Post*, August 28, 2007. Later renamed Assembly’s Church. This church building was later used as a Baptist Church and a Jewish Synagogue. For the past 12 years it has served as the Chinese Community Church.

<sup>22</sup> Sabbath schools were a combination of basic education and bible study, intended as a charitable undertaking to provide literacy and numeracy skills to poor – especially African-American – children.

<sup>23</sup> Danforth, Joshua N. 1860. “The Faithful Elder: A Memoire of David M. Wilson.” Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Son. This building was later sold to the city government and used for a primary school.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. Smith also oversaw the initial church construction, but this responsibility was taken over by Rev. Byron Sunderland of the 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church when Smith was injured in a railroad accident. Bitttinger, B. F., 1895, “The Rise, Progress and Influence of Presbyterianism in the District of Columbia,” *The Centennial of the Beginning of Presbyterianism in the City of Washington*, Part 3. Washington, DC., p. 114.

### Box 2. The Father of Western Church

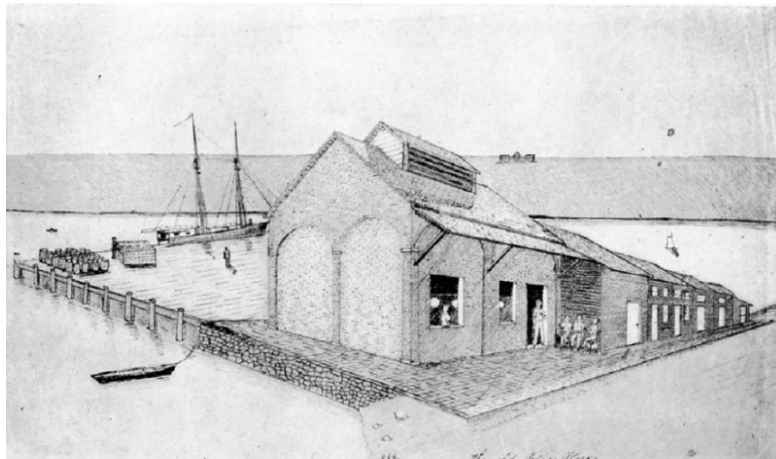
Elder David M. Wilson, the “father of Western Church,” was born in Maryland in 1798. He arrived in Washington, DC at the age of 18 years to work as a hatter’s apprentice on Pennsylvania Avenue. He soon joined Bridge Street Presbyterian Church in Georgetown (today known as Georgetown Presbyterian Church) and became acquainted with its pastor, Rev. John C. Smith. When Smith undertook the organizational work that led to the establishment of 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church at 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Grant Place, Wilson played a major supporting role. In 1839 the church was formally recognized, with Smith as its first pastor and Wilson as its first ruling elder. Wilson took on the job of Superintendent of Sunday School and remained in the post for the next 20 years.

In 1835 Wilson was appointed by President Andrew Jackson to serve as captain of the Capitol police and held this position until President James Polk was elected in 1837. In 1847 he was hired as a “visiting agent” for the Bible Society of Washington City, going door to door, ward by ward, to evangelize and offer Bibles to families who had none. In three years, he documented visits to 8,400 families. Later in life, Wilson founded the Washington City Union Missionary and Tract Society and became its visiting agent. His life’s calling was to broadcast the “Good News”.

Throughout these years Wilson was an energetic organizer of prayer meetings and “sabbath schools” for young people, one of which was the first to teach African-American children. His calling focused on “neglected colored people and destitute whites” with no distinction made between them. One of the participants in these prayer meetings was James Cook, a black teacher whom Wilson reportedly converted to Christianity. Cook later became a pastor and was the first to lead the 1<sup>st</sup> Colored Presbyterian Church (later 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church) which was established by African-Americans in 1842 with help from Wilson, Smith and others.\*

In 1848 Wilson started an ecumenical prayer group in Foggy Bottom at an old abandoned glass factory. Soon 24 members of this group decided to form a church and put up a wooden chapel on the northwest corner of 22<sup>nd</sup> and E Streets. This was the precursor of Western Church, which Wilson helped to establish in 1855. He transferred his membership to Western, became its first ruling elder and also the first superintendent of Sunday school. He died a year later (May 1856) and was extensively eulogized at a well-attended funeral.

\* Corroborated by Minutes of Organizational Meeting, First Colored Presbyterian Church, November 21, 1841



Drawing of the old glass works on the Potomac, circa 1835

The cornerstone for the new church was laid with appropriate Masonic and religious ceremonies on August 22, 1854.<sup>25</sup> The resultant structure measured roughly 42 ft. by 80 ft. It displayed an Elizabethan architectural style with a turreted grand tower some 75 ft. high.

<sup>25</sup> These ceremonies employed the same gavel as George Washington had used for laying the cornerstone of the Capitol building. Bilkert, Peter E. 1932. *Western Presbyterian Church in the City of Washington*.



Western Presbyterian Church at 1911 H Street, NW

Western Church was formally established on January 13, 1855 with 24 members, 17 of them women. Worship was first held in the church on March 13, 1856.<sup>26</sup> The building was dedicated on June 7, 1857.<sup>27</sup> The cost of the building was \$16,000 and at the time of the church's dedication, only a \$2,000 debt was still outstanding.<sup>28</sup> Rev. Haskell was the first pastor and David Wilson, who had transferred his membership to Western from 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian, was the first ruling elder. Rev. Haskell also served as an occasional chaplain to Congress. Western's first Board of Trustees, with seven members, was formed in 1859 to manage the church's budget and physical assets. Church members soon began to organize musical concerts to raise funds for benevolences.

During the 1840s a divergence of theological viewpoints arose within the Presbyterian Church. The "Old School" wanted clergy to conform to a rigid set of orthodox beliefs, to deliver rationalistic sermons, and to follow a style of churchmanship which addressed individual needs rather than society's shortcomings. In contrast, the "New School" valued a pastor's authenticity of feelings and enthusiasm more than his demonstrations of intellect, wanted more music and emotion in worship, and encouraged the church to become involved in the country's social problems, particularly slavery

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<sup>26</sup> Amour, *op cit*.

<sup>27</sup> Western Church was born amid the growing national controversy over whether or not to allow the continuation of slavery. In the "Great Debates of 1858," Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln argued the cases for and against slavery, with particular focus on its future expansion into new territories.

<sup>28</sup> Crew, Harold W., W. B. Webb, and John Wooldridge. 1892. *Centennial History of the City of Washington, DC*. Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House.

and women's suffrage.<sup>29</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church embraced the latter beliefs, and as its offspring, Western Church was launched firmly in this more progressive tradition.

The challenges seemed unending as the church began. The church tower collapsed in 1856 and had to be rebuilt. Rev. Haskell resigned abruptly in 1858, reportedly to protest Virginia's announced intention to secede from the Union.<sup>30</sup> Haskell was temporarily replaced by Dr. James Wilson (M.D.), whom the Presbytery judged sufficiently knowledgeable in theology to lead the congregation.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the congregation called Rev. James Boyed of Winchester, but he declined. In early 1859 they called Rev. Thomas Compton of New Jersey, but he also declined.

Six months later, Western Church succeeded in calling Rev. Julius R. Bartlett to become its second pastor. But Bartlett, who came from South Carolina, began to feel sympathies for the South as the nation lurched towards the Civil War. When the war began in 1861, he resigned his pastorate and returned to Sumter, South Carolina. Western entered the 1860s struggling for stability after experiencing three leaders in its first decade and facing the upheavals bestowed on the city by the impending Civil War.

## **1860 – 1870: Civil War and Upheaval**

**The City.** The Civil War had profound effects on the city of Washington. The war required new infrastructure to be layered on top of Pierre L'Enfant's original plan for the urban layout. Soldiers were billeted wherever room could be found, including in the Capitol building. Cavalry horses grazed on the Mall. The army's officer corps created a demand for theatrical performances. A flourishing trade in prostitution also emerged along the Mall and elsewhere. Intensive use of the city streets by cavalry, supply wagons and cannon destroyed many of the main thoroughfares. And by the end of the war, the city had established over 100 hospitals.<sup>32</sup>

Before the war, the city's population totaled 61,122 with blacks comprising 18% (including 1,774 enslaved Africans). At that time, residential segregation did not exist as we know it today. Washington was a pedestrian city where people preferred to live close to their workplaces. All classes and races mingled together in every part of the city, but clustered near major centers of economic activity such as the Capitol, the White House, City Hall and the Navy Yard.<sup>33</sup> Although African-Americans lived throughout the city, they tended to concentrate in northwest Washington

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<sup>29</sup> Thompson, William E. 1989. "A Set of Rebellious Scoundrels: Three Centuries of Presbyterians along the Potomac." Hampton-Sydney, VA. Manuscript.

<sup>30</sup> Haskell went on to pastor a church in Boston, teach at the University of Wisconsin, and co-found Colorado College, a private liberal arts college in Colorado Springs that continues today with 2,000 students.

<sup>31</sup> Crew et al., *op cit.*, p. 567.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence, Susan C., Elizabeth Lorang, Brett Barney, and Kenneth M. Price, 2006-2019, "Civil War Washington: The City and the Site," *Civil War Washington*; Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

<sup>33</sup> The U.S. Census of 1860 indicates that the White House sat in northwest Washington surrounded by a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood that contained the highest proportion of African Americans anywhere in the city. Winkle, *op. cit.*

where they competed with immigrants for the many manufacturing jobs along the Potomac. This expansion produced a tripling of Foggy Bottom's population, the 1860 census finding 175 households.

The Civil War transformed Washington, DC from a barely defended town into an armed stronghold surrounded by 48 military forts.<sup>34</sup> One of many military installations, Camp Fry, was set up just south of Washington Circle along 23<sup>rd</sup> Street (across from today's George Washington University Hospital). It provided quarters for soldiers with minor disabilities, who were assigned to guard government buildings.

When Union Army defeats in the summer of 1862 brought 16,000 wounded soldiers into the city, the government commandeered the downtown campus of Columbian College (later to become George Washington University) which was converted into an 844-bed hospital.<sup>35</sup> Nine different churches also housed the wounded (see Box 3).<sup>36</sup> One of these was Union Chapel, a Methodist church located just one block away from Western Church at 20<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, NW.<sup>37</sup> Western Church invited the Union Chapel congregation to make use of Western's sanctuary until it was able to re-occupy its own building some five months later. In June 1862 Western Church also offered its building to the government for use as a hospital, but the offer was apparently not accepted as worship services continued in the sanctuary uninterrupted.<sup>38</sup>

**Box 3. DC Churches as Civil War hospitals**

The war did not go well for the Union Army in the summer of 1862. In late June, Union and Confederate forces totaling 200,000 men engaged in a week of fighting east of Richmond which was called the "Battle of Seven Days." Union casualties from this week of fighting included 8,062 wounded. Six weeks later the Second Battle of Bull Run (Manassas) took place, generating an additional 8,215 Union wounded. Thus, over this six-week period some 16,000 Union soldiers were wounded within 100 miles or less of Washington, DC. That was the only safe place to take them since the District of Columbia was guarded by 48 different Union forts. One can imagine the chaos as ambulance wagons and trains poured into the city loaded with wounded soldiers, far outstripping the eight military hospitals in existence. Necessity forced improvisation and numerous buildings were commandeered to house the wounded. These included 18 churches of different denominations, 6 private homes, 3 schools, 1 hotel, City Hall, a wing of the Capitol building, and the U.S. Patent Office (now the National Portrait Gallery).

The need for nurses to attend this number of wounded far surpassed the available supply. Dorothea Dix, the Superintendent of Army Nurses and later to become a reformer in the care of the mentally

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<sup>34</sup> Young, Robert. 2015. *A Definition in Progress: A Case study of Washington, DC 1800 – 2015*. Washington, DC: Foundations of Planning, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, during the war the College graduated 300 students; 104 of these entered the ministry and 60 became medical doctors (46 served the Union Army; 24 served the Confederate Army). See GWU history website: <https://library.gwu.edu/scrc/university-archives/gw-history/a-select-chronology-of-george-washington-university>

<sup>36</sup> The 1861 and 1862 defeats of the Union Army in the battles of Manassas resulted in thousands of wounded soldiers that far surpassed the city's hospital capacity.

<sup>37</sup> *National Republican* newspaper, June 21, 1862, "The Tender of Union Chapel Accepted."

<sup>38</sup> Armour, *op cit*. As reported by Rev. Wimberly (2012, p. 102), a persistent oral history tradition among the church's older members suggested that Western Church itself was used as a hospital, remembering that "the floorboards of Western Church were stained with blood..." Although historical documentation does not support this memory, it is possible that Western members were recounting their predecessors' experience in volunteering to help at the Union Chapel church hospital, located just one block away, and the story became embellished in the process of re-telling.

ill, persuaded male authorities to allow middle class women to serve as nurses. She recruited “plain women, aged 30 and over, of unimpeachable moral character” to serve as surrogate sisters and mothers who might provide comfort to the sick by reading the Bible, singing songs, and writing letters to their families.<sup>39</sup> It was during this time that city resident and subsequent founder of the Red Cross, Clara Barton, began attending to wounded Union soldiers brought into the city for medical attention. Shortly afterwards, with 200,000 black soldiers serving in the Union Army, Susie King Taylor became the Army’s first black nurse.

Somehow the war created space for social progress. On April 16, 1862, now known as Emancipation Day, Congress approved the liberation of the city’s 3,100 enslaved persons. It followed this with legislation that eliminated the discriminatory “Black Codes” introduced in 1808, set up a public school system for black students, and allowed black witnesses to be called in court trials. Importantly, in 1867 it granted voting rights to black male residents, but not black women. White women also benefited from the war, which created a labor shortage because so many government employees had left to serve in the army. The Treasury took the “bold step” of hiring 400 women to fill its many vacancies and other federal agencies gradually followed suit.<sup>40</sup>

The Civil War triggered an outpouring of escaping enslaved laborers. Opportunities created by the above legislation attracted many African-Americans to Washington, DC – roughly 40,000 between 1861 and 1877.<sup>41</sup> There they became known as “contrabands” and settled under cramped conditions on Capitol Hill and around Logan Circle.

As these neighborhoods became overcrowded and unsanitary, the federal government established five “camps” on abandoned secessionist farms in northern Virginia where the contrabands were paid small wages to farm and produce food for the war effort. But thanks to the efforts of charitable associations like the Association of Friends for the Aid and Elevation of Freedmen, the contrabands also gained access to education for the first time.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1860s, most churches effectively segregated black worshippers. Pews in rear corners were reserved for use by African-Americans. They were given communion only after white members had been served. Sunday School classes were frequently segregated. Unless African-Americans possessed a degree of personal wealth, they had limited access to baptism, marriage, or funeral services in these churches. Not surprisingly, black residents responded by creating their own churches. At the time of the Civil War, there were 14 black protestant churches in the city, including the 300-member 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian.<sup>43</sup> In 1867 black Episcopalians organized their

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<sup>39</sup> Susan C. Lawrence, 2006-2019, “Military Hospitals in the Department of Washington,” *Civil War Washington*; Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; <http://civilwardc.org/interpretations/narrative/mhdw.php#m20>

<sup>40</sup> *Boundary Stones*, WETA’s local history blog: <https://blogs.weta.org/boundarystones/2013/08/01/impressions-washington-overgrown-tattered-village>

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence, Susan C., Elizabeth Lorang, Brett Barney and Kenneth M. Price, 2006-2019, “Civil War Washington: The City and the Site,” *Civil War Washington*, Center for Digital research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

<sup>42</sup> *Boundary Stones*, WETA’s local history blog.

<sup>43</sup> Williams, Melvin R. 1971. “A Blueprint for Change: The Black Community in Washington, D. C., 1860-1870.” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C. Vol. 71/72. 1971, pp. 359–393.



first church at 23<sup>rd</sup> and H Streets in Foggy Bottom. Called St. Mary's Church, it is a close neighbor to Western Church at its present location.<sup>44</sup>



Fugitive enslaved people heading north

At the conclusion of the Civil War, African-Americans in Washington, DC continued to progress. With their voting rights affirmed, black voters elected the first black representatives to city government in 1868. They also provided black support for a white mayor, Sayles Bowen, who was an outspoken advocate of emancipation and racial integration. Bowen reciprocated by appointing African-Americans to 30% of city government positions. For the first time, black policemen and firemen served the city. A black medical doctor was chosen as public health physician. Bowen also launched major public works projects, which created jobs for black workers.<sup>45</sup> Separately, Howard University, the region's first university for black students, was founded in 1867.

Western Church reportedly attracted General Ulysses S. Grant and his staff to worship on an occasional basis during his time in Washington.<sup>46</sup> Earlier Grant had provoked political outrage in December 1862 when he was the commander of the Union's western army. Grant issued an order that expelled all Jews from the areas of Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi. The order was based on his belief that Jews managed the black market in Southern cotton, which was undercutting the Union embargo on cotton intended to cripple the Southern economy. The backlash was quick. Within days, President Lincoln received hundreds of angry letters condemning the act. A month after the order was issued, Lincoln revoked it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> History of St. Mary's Church, [www.stmarysfoggybottom.org/about](http://www.stmarysfoggybottom.org/about)

<sup>45</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> Finance Committee, Western Presbyterian Church, Fund-raising letter to the congregation of November 10, 1933.

<sup>47</sup> *Boundary Stones*, WETA's local history blog.

**The Church.** Not surprisingly, Western Church struggled financially during the war.<sup>48</sup> The Board of Trustees was increased to nine members and they were occasionally required to cover the cost of church repairs out of their own pockets. Several of them also loaned larger amounts to the church, which repaid them with interest. When necessary, funds were raised through the use of subscription lists. These were notebooks containing a full list of church members which were personally presented to individual members by Trustees along with a verbal request for a donation. The amount given by each member was written beside the member's name, thereby generating peer pressure on other members to give similar amounts, if not more.

When Rev. Bartlett resigned in 1861, the church was able to quickly replace him with the generally well-liked Rev. John N. Coombs. Coombs orchestrated various improvements to the church building after the war, including the installation of furnaces, stained glass windows, an organ, and a church bell – which still hangs above Western today.<sup>49</sup> Coombs also taught theology part-time at Howard University.<sup>50</sup>

Rev. Coombs shepherded his congregation through the challenges of the Civil War and attracted new members. At that time the church hired its first non-clergy employee, a sexton. When the General Assembly asked each Presbyterian church to identify six benevolent causes in 1868, Western Church responded energetically. Members organized monthly concerts as fund-raisers to augment the Sunday worship collection plates. Session also called for special offerings at each communion service to be designated for “the poor of this church.” In 1867 the congregation raised \$322 for benevolence use; two-thirds of this amount was given to the “Southern Relief Fund” for aid to churches in the former Confederacy. In 1868 it collected \$200 towards the organ purchase through a 3-day strawberry festival. In 1869 the total church income was \$2,002, of which 83% came from pew rents. At the time, it was common practice in both Protestant and Catholic churches to rent church pews to families or individuals as the principal means of raising income. Not surprisingly, this practice created a socio-economic hierarchy of seating within the church.

It is difficult to describe the members of the church at this time, as no documentation addresses this matter. However, it is possible to infer that at least a portion of the congregation might be characterized as lower class. The assumption seems warranted by the need for special church offerings designated to assist poor members of the congregation, and by the demographics – immigrant, unskilled – of the Foggy Bottom neighborhood at that time.

When the war ended, Western reported 90 members. But by 1870, this number had nearly doubled to 165 members.<sup>51</sup> It seemed that life was returning to normalcy and Western's future looked bright.

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<sup>48</sup> In an impressive example of the separation between church and state, nowhere in the church's Session Minutes during the Civil War years is there any reference made to the war or its effects.

<sup>49</sup> The 2,000-pound bell was purchased from a firm in Troy, NY. After the bell had been received and hung, Western members deemed it defective. They demanded that the firm replace it with one of better quality, and the firm complied.

<sup>50</sup> This may have been in response to a request from Presbytery. When Howard University's Department of Theology was organized in 1875, university trustees turned to the Presbyterian Church for assistance. The Presbytery agreed to help, but only on the condition that it would specifically approve all university teaching appointments to this department. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>51</sup> Amour, *op. cit.*

## **1870 – 1880: Creating the City and Growing the Church**

**The City.** In 1870 Washington still had dirt roads and lacked basic sanitation. Moreover, the city had deteriorated badly due to its use as a major military base during the civil war.<sup>52</sup> Streets were in poor shape and congressmen decried the damages done to the Capitol building by its use as temporary quarters for 4,000 soldiers. As a result, there was much talk in Congress of relocating the seat of government to St. Louis. Needless to say, political support for public works initiatives, both in Congress and in the city, was high as leaders battled to keep the government in town.

Seizing this moment, Mayor Sayles Bowen stirred his administration into a beehive of public works activities. Schools were constructed, including the city's first high school for African-Americans (Dunbar High School). Eastern Market was erected. Streets were paved and sewers were built. Outdoor gas lighting was installed. Importantly, more than 50,000 new trees were planted. New horse-drawn streetcars extended the city outwards and enabled residents to be more mobile. The Army Corps of Engineers redirected the Potomac River and dredged out enough fill to create the Tidal Basin, East Potomac Park, and a 700-acre extension of the National Mall one-quarter mile westward from near the Washington Monument to where it is today. A sense of progress was in the air. The city was slowly becoming the showplace that people expected their capital to be.

Private investors were also placing their bets on Washington. In 1872 the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad laid tracks across the Mall at 6<sup>th</sup> Street and built an impressive railroad station at the location where the West Building of the National Gallery of Art stands today.



The Baltimore & Potomac railroad station at 6<sup>th</sup> Street on the Mall

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<sup>52</sup> In 1873 Mark Twain joked that the city had one good hotel and 118 bad ones.

But not all was progress. A new phenomenon – alley living – emerged in the city. Housing for new arrivals, already in short supply following the European immigrant arrivals, became even more scarce as thousands of newly free African-Americans were attracted to Washington after the Civil War. These “homeless” persons began to move into the uninhabited alleys that ran through the middle of city blocks as a consequence of the L’Enfant plan. As more and more people were pressured into alley life, living conditions became horrific. In the process, Foggy Bottom became one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the city.<sup>53</sup> The “alley dwellers” would remain an intractable social problem in the city for the next 80 years.

**The Church.** As Western Church moved through the 1870s, financial concerns were ever present. In 1872 pew rents were supplemented by adoption of the “envelope system” with limited results. In 1874 Rev. Coombs loaned the church \$1,000 to cover expenses. The Session voted to pay him 8% interest until it was repaid.

The dozen good years that the church had experienced under Rev. Coombs were truncated by the pastor’s suicide in 1874. His wife had suffered from severe mental illness for many years and had been sent to live with her sisters so that she would receive adequate care. This must have placed a stressful burden on Rev. Coombs, who had moved into a rooming house. One Sunday morning he ate breakfast and went upstairs to his room to prepare for church. When he did not come down, a boy was sent to investigate. He found the pastor dead on the floor of his room, having cut his own throat with a shaving razor.

At that time, many people considered suicide to be a sin against God. To counter this notion, a congregational meeting was held to affirm “the good character and exemplary Christian life of Rev. Coombs.” The Session then published in the city papers the full text of the statement approved by the congregation so that there should be “no blot on his life history.”

Fortunately, Western was able to recruit its fourth pastor, Rev. David Wills, within less than a year. A graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina (later moved to Atlanta), Wills had served as a pastor for a number of years before he was recruited to become the president of Oglethorpe College in Atlanta. It was from there that he responded to Western’s call in 1875.

Shortly afterwards, the Session abandoned the envelope system in favor of earmarked collections. For example, one Sunday’s offering might be designated for foreign missions, while the next Sunday’s offering might be assigned to domestic missions, and so on. Communion was served bi-monthly, accompanied by a special offering specified for “the poor of this church.”

Not much is known about Rev. Wills, although he was described as an eloquent speaker. He resigned after three years to become an Army chaplain. Tellingly, his resignation letter gives the reason for his departure as “lack of support” but additional details are not contained in church records. However, the Session minutes suggest that the church frequently found it difficult to cover the full amount of his promised \$2,000 annual salary. During his brief stay at Western, the church was able to increase its membership from 170 to 217 members, an achievement which the Session explicitly recognized at Wills’ departure.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> DC Historic Preservation Office. 2003. “Foggy Bottom Historic District.”

<sup>54</sup> When Wills died in 1916 his funeral was held at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and he was buried in Glenwood Cemetery, Washington, DC.

For the fourth time in 20 years, Western found itself without a pastor. This time it chose a replacement, Rev. Theodore S. Wynkoop, with international experience as a Presbyterian missionary in India, where he had founded a theological seminary. He arrived in 1878 and was offered the modest salary of \$1,500 a year. He remained at Western for 15 years before returning to India as Secretary of the British and North India Bible Society. During his tenure, he took a six-month sabbatical in 1880 for the purpose of visiting missionary stations in Asia. In his absence, Rev. Dr. T. S. Childs was contracted as interim supply.<sup>55</sup>

Consistent with the practice of Presbyterianism at the time, the Presbytery called upon all of its congregations in 1879 to avoid attending theater or opera performances, calling them “schools of immorality.” A few months later, a Session communication to the Western congregation denounced the “sinful and injurious practices of some church members.” These were specified as taking pleasure drives or excursion cruises on Sunday afternoons, attending the theater and opera, and public drunkenness.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the Session prohibited any part of the church building from being used for “tableaux or other scenic representations.”

**The City.** Meanwhile, the city government was in upheaval. After its three-year experiment with home rule under Mayor Bowen, Congress re-imposed its wisdom on the city. In place of an elected mayor, Congress created a Governor, an upper legislative council and a board of public works – all of which were to be staffed by presidential appointees. Elected representatives of city residents were limited to a largely powerless House of Delegates.

But even that limited representation proved too much for Congress to stomach. Three years later it replaced this structure with a simple 3-person board of presidentially appointed governors. Residents lost all right of representation. For the next 87 years, all of these appointments were white men.<sup>57</sup>

As the decade neared its end, the Jim Crow era was devised. In spite of efforts to enfranchise black citizens after the Civil War, segregation was on the rise. It was enacted by state and local governments, and reinforced by coercion. In Washington, DC concern with civil rights faded from the political agenda and was soon replaced by interest in “economic development” with the goal of constructing a “grand capital.”

Curiously, one of the few public events to remain unsegregated in the city during the Jim Crow years was the president’s annual Easter egg-rolling celebration. Begun by President Hayes in 1878, the event welcomed all children, regardless of race, into the White House. Still, some African-Americans felt uncomfortable mixing with whites and organized their own egg-rolling at the National Zoo. This quickly became a local tradition. Even today, Easter visits to the zoo by African-American families are commonplace.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Childs was apparently a professor of theology at the University of Wooster, Ohio.

<sup>56</sup> Session Minutes, June 1880, Western Presbyterian Church.

<sup>57</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op cit.*, p. 165

<sup>58</sup> *Boundary Stones*, WETA’s local history blog.



Foggy Bottom waterfront on the Potomac River, 1880

## **1880 – 1890: Better Times for both Whites and Blacks**

**The City.** Following the Civil War, the United States rapidly shaped itself into an industrial, urbanized nation. Technological innovation, the growth of big business, the emergence of large-scale agriculture and the expansion of the federal government combined to spur strong economic growth. Among other things, this enabled the Washington Monument to finally be completed in 1884.

In Washington, these dynamics generated positive impacts during the 1880s. Newcomers flooded into the city. Population expanded by 30% during the decade, bringing the total to just under a quarter-million. Many of those arriving were businessmen, lobbyists and intellectuals who demanded more amenities from the city. Social and cultural life began to flourish, and the introduction of electric streetcars meant that Washington was no longer a “walking city.” In fact, the street cars enabled the city to develop well beyond the bounds of L’Enfant’s original city plan.

This economic tide lifted portions of the black population and created a significant black middle class in the city. Black businesses boomed. By the end of the 1880s black Washingtonians owned two steamboat companies, coal supply enterprises, several heating fuel businesses, an oil and gas exploration firm, two insurance companies, a bank, numerous grocery stores, and 11 employment agencies.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hilyer, Andrew F., 1901, "The Colored American in Business," pp. 13-22 in *National Negro Business League Proceedings* of its first meeting in Boston, August 23-24, 1900.

When the influx of black immigrants crowded the city after the war, many affluent whites moved from downtown to the developing northwest quadrant. The spacious homes they vacated were bought by black families with means, including in Foggy Bottom. As a result, whole sections of the city that had formerly been evenly mixed in race became predominately black or white. And as they filled in these neighborhoods, black upper and middle classes established social and intellectual clubs.<sup>60</sup> In fact, this black aristocracy developed a nearly self-contained society, largely separate from the white world.

But the city's migration of prosperous whites towards the northwest, fueled by real estate developers, also had a less beneficial result. Blacks were gradually pushed out of this semi-rural area by the rising cost of housing and higher property taxes. Consequently, a space which had once contained small farms, slaughterhouses and other black-owned businesses progressively became an upper-class white neighborhood.<sup>61</sup>

The city's strong economy continued to attract immigrants. Many (particularly Irish) settled near the river in Foggy Bottom, because of readily available industrial jobs, and lived in newly constructed housing created for low income residents. These structures were mainly narrow brick row-houses with little ornamentation. They formed a cohesive neighborhood of modest housing, two or three stories in height with flat fronts. Separately, the District's first Chinatown grew up along the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue between 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Not all of these immigrants could afford row-housing, however. They swelled the ranks of those living in the alley housing that was initiated during the prior decade. Alley living in Foggy Bottom and elsewhere was soon recognized as a major social problem. An alley census identified 12 alleys that had over 300 inhabitants.<sup>62</sup> Half of the alley population either shared or had no toilets. Crime was a major problem. Most of the alleys' inhabitants were unskilled workers, and more than 80% of them were African-American. These alleys became the Washington counterpart to the concentrated urban slums that industrialization was prompting in other major cities. But in Washington, DC these "mini-slums" were spread across the city, often in close proximity to expensive houses. Notably, an extensive social system – largely invisible from the streets – evolved within the interior of the city blocks that was entirely independent from the larger houses fronting the surrounding streets.<sup>63</sup>

**The Church.** This period of population growth and economic prosperity allowed Western Church to expand. A Sunday school classroom was constructed and Sunday school attendance regularly surpassed 300 children during the 1880s. The congregation developed an enthusiasm for foreign missions. With encouragement from Rev. Wynkoop, members began to donate generously towards mission work in India, China and the Near East. In the District, Western contributed to the Presbyterian Orphanage.

Financially, Western Church began the decade well with an annual income of \$3,511. But in 1882 it plunged to \$2,200. Three years later, an effort was made to raise the pew rents by 15% but the congregation rejected it. Subsequently, the church was forced to accept a five-year loan for \$1,000

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<sup>60</sup> Young, Robert. 2015. *A Definition in Progress: A Case Study of Washington, DC 1800 – 2015*, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, Kim Protho. 2014. "The DC Historic Alleys Survey." Washington, DC: DC Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

from a church member.<sup>64</sup> By 1887 income rebounded to \$3,300, helped significantly by the \$530 raised by the Ladies Aid Society that year. This allowed the church to make its first donation to the Central Union Mission, a practice that continued yearly until the Depression of 1929. At the end of the decade, an expanding economy finally enabled the church to increase its “pew rents” by 20% which was justified by the need to raise the pastor’s salary to \$1,800.<sup>65</sup>

During Wynkoop’s time, the church began to issue annual financial reports, organize service groups, and apply some strategic direction to its benevolences. Its funds were allocated to foreign missions, home missions,<sup>66</sup> the Board of Freedmen, the Presbyterian Mission Board of Publications (for the printing of materials used in evangelism and Bible study), and church repairs. In the following years, funding embraced the city’s Presbyterian Orphanage, the “Omaha Indians,” school construction in Indian territory, the newly founded Central Union Mission, China famine relief, “drought sufferers in Texas,” the re-building of churches in Charleston, South Carolina (perhaps because of a hurricane), and missionaries in India and France. Sunday school students did their part, collecting coins to send to the “Alaska Indians.” Western’s members were increasingly seeing themselves as participants in both the nation and the world.

#### **Box 4. The Board of Freedmen**

In 1882 the Presbyterian General Assembly created a “Board of Freedmen” to encourage the establishment of black churches in the south. The Board selected, trained and certified northern home missionaries to go into the former confederacy to set up black Presbyterian Churches and private Christian schools for black children, who were left out of the emerging public-school system. Western Church provided annual contributions to this Board until 1923 when it was absorbed into the Presbyterian Board of National Missions. Underlying these efforts was an assumption of equality and common cause with fellow Christians.

Various women’s service organizations were established within Western Church during the 1880s. These included the Women’s Foreign Mission Society, the Women’s Home Missionary Union, the Ladies’ Aid Society, the King’s Daughters, and the Vine Branches. All of these provided opportunities for women to grow through education, to develop leadership and organizational skills, to learn the art of public speaking, and gain experience in money management through their stewardship responsibilities.

This decade also brought the demise of Judge Charles D. Drake, a major lay leader in Western Church. Judge Drake came to Washington in 1867 as a Senator from Missouri, where he was known as a “fierce opponent of slavery” and the principal author of the Missouri state constitution. In 1870 he resigned from the Senate to be appointed as the Chief Justice of the United States Court of Claims, a position he held for 15 years. Shortly after his arrival, he joined Western Church and soon became an Elder. He served on Session for over 20 years and was recognized as one of the church’s most influential members during this time.

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<sup>64</sup> Around this time, the church received a letter of complaint signed by six neighbors, stating that they found the church’s backyard latrine “closets” to be offensive. Not surprisingly, this happened in mid-July. Session took immediate action. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Western Presbyterian Church, July 1884.

<sup>65</sup> Armour, *op cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Missionaries working within the United States.





View of Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol dome around 1880  
(star dot marks the approximate location of Western Church at 19<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, NW)

## ***1890 – 1900: Towards a New Century***

**The City.** Washington in the 1890s was finally taking on the look and the lifestyle of a capital city. The elegant Library of Congress building was completed. The National Zoo opened. Rock Creek Park was established. The Washington Gas Light Company had 23,000 customers. The “gilded age” had arrived.

Washington in the 1890s was more nearly a city of leisure than any other city in the country. Many of its residents displayed an air of “dignified ease.” The workplace did not exert much pressure. Office workers breakfasted by 9 a.m., took their lunch at noon, and left for home at 4 p.m.<sup>67</sup>

The city developed a seasonal rhythm. During colder weather, it was abuzz with politics and social events. Lavish entertaining was common. At the White House, social functions seemed continuous. But when warmer temperatures arrived, the political world boarded up its doors and covered its furniture. Once the president departed for his summer home, a general exodus of diplomats, cabinet members and congressmen quickly followed. At this time, Washington became a smaller town, more southern than northern, made up largely of government workers and shopkeepers.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Billings, Elden E., 1966, “Social and Economic Life in Washington in the 1890s,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, DC, 66/68, pp. 167-181.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

The city's "bicycle craze" occurred during this decade. Mass-produced bicycles, appropriately geared, with equal-sized wheels and pneumatic tires, had a widespread social impact. Bicyclists could, for the first time, go where they wanted and when they wanted at a speed faster than that of animal or streetcar transportation. They soon demanded smoother streets. Women's fashions were affected as skirts of necessity became shorter, so that women could pedal their bicycles. Bicycles were a great social leveler because almost anyone could afford one.

The black migration north, especially to Washington, DC, continued unabated. Between 1870 and 1890 the African-American population nearly doubled. The city now had the largest black population of any city in the country. The drivers of the black exodus from the south were the demise of Reconstruction, the emergence of Jim Crow legislation, and the physical danger represented by lynching.<sup>69</sup> Many of these new arrivals were funneled into the city's alley communities where bad living conditions got even worse. A police census in 1897 identified 303 inhabited alleys in the city. Almost 19,000 people – 93% of them African-American – inhabited them. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, Washington, DC had become more segregated.<sup>70</sup>

**The Church.** Western church was thriving and began the "Gay Nineties" with 353 members. Three years later, when Rev. Wynkoop resigned in 1894 to return to mission work in India, it boasted 373 members. But there were rumblings about the church's financial condition and the state of the church building. In fact, Western's annual income had fallen to \$2,420 (today equal to \$77,260).

Rev. Howard W. Innis was called as Western's sixth pastor with a salary of \$1,500 annually. At his installation on April 24, 1894, Session minutes record that "the church was packed and many were turned away." Yet Innis found it difficult to live on his initial salary and Session soon granted him a raise to \$1,800.

Perhaps Innis' most important contribution was to establish a church "mission" at 24<sup>th</sup> Street and Virginia Avenue, coincidentally the location of Western Church today. It started out as summer "tent meetings" in 1895 for purposes of evangelism. Buoyed by success in attracting new members, Western looked for a more weatherproof structure when the weather turned cold. A suitable place was found at New Hampshire Avenue and H Street and rented as a base for evangelism in Foggy Bottom during most of the decade.

During this time, the church made its first forays into Congressional lobbying. In 1893 Western joined the Presbytery in opposing a bill in Congress that would end the immigration of Asians. Nevertheless, the bill passed. Five years later the Session wrote to Senators and Representatives seeking support for the Gallinger Bill that was intended to prohibit the sale of alcohol in all public buildings. On this occasion the church came out on the winning side.

Around this time, the Presbytery called for all of its member churches to implement an economic boycott against the Potomac River excursion boats that ran on Sundays, arguing that the Lord's day should be dedicated to Bible study, prayer and reflection. Shortly thereafter, the Presbytery also condemned Strauss waltzes as "lascivious movements born of Satan."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> In 1892 some 230 people were lynched in the United States.

<sup>70</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>71</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

It is noteworthy that in June 1895 the Session convened itself as an ecclesiastical court to judge a charge of adultery brought against a male church member by others in the congregation. The man was found guilty by the Session and expelled from the church.<sup>72</sup>

Under Innis, church membership remained stable at slightly above 300 members. This may have been the reason that the Session increased the number of its Elders from five to six. Innis approached the Session in 1896 with a grand proposal to set up a free medical dispensary, build a gymnasium and add a reading room to the church. It was not accepted.

Benevolence giving continued to support many of the same beneficiaries: The Board of Freedmen, the Central Union Mission, the American Bible Society, the Washington City Bible Society, and “relief work with the poor of this city.” A donation was also made in 1896 to the Young Women’s Christian Association, which had launched its worldwide program in 1894. Service organizations functioning within the church sported some colorful names: Earnest Workers, Vine Branches, King’s Daughters, the Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip.

During this decade, Western lost another of its stalwart lay leaders. George A. McIlhenny, the president of the Foggy Bottom-based Washington Gas Light Company, died in 1892. He had served as president of Western’s Board of Trustees for many years.

After just four years of service, Rev. Innis resigned in November 1898 to pastor a church in England. It seems likely that salary may again have been an issue.

At this point, one might surmise that the church membership was becoming more middle class. During the 1890s, church benevolences, which had long included “the poor of this church,” were re-directed to “the poor of the city.” Also, the presence of such prominent Washingtonians as Judge Drake and George McIlhenny as church leaders suggests that they may have viewed Western’s membership as at least partially comprised of their peers. Although the alleys of the surrounding neighborhood were filled with disadvantaged blacks, it seems that Western Church had little or no connection with them, except possibly through its evangelism outreach.

Western’s seventh pastor was Gerhart A. Wilson, a New England preacher trained at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. On Wilson’s watch, 1899 – 1904, church finances improved, aspects of the church building were modernized, the organ was rebuilt and the number of Session members increased to eight. On Wilson’s advice, Session eliminated pew rents entirely and replaced them with a system of envelope offerings in which all members were expected to give whatever they could. Wilson also launched a monthly church newspaper and organized a chapter of Boys’ Brigade, an interdenominational international youth program that combines recreational activities with Christian values.<sup>73</sup> Still, at the end of the decade, the Session worried that only 88 out of 290 members were contributing financially to the church.

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<sup>72</sup> Session Minutes, Western Presbyterian Church, June 1895.

<sup>73</sup> Founded in Glasgow, Scotland in 1883, the Boys’ Brigade quickly spread across the United Kingdom and became a worldwide organization by the early 1890s. As of 2018, there were 750,000 Boys’ Brigade members in 60 countries.



Washington transportation in 1900

## ***1900 – 1910: Washington Rises as Foggy Bottom Declines***

**The City.** The 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in an era of major physical changes to the city of Washington, eventually endowing it with the visuals that we see today. The Chicago World Fair of 1893 had launched a new perspective on urban planning which came to be called the “city beautiful” movement. It derived from the “white city” created on grand scale at the Fair which included large beaux-arts monuments, elegant gardens – and no poverty. Advocates of this philosophy believed that such beautification would promote a harmonious social order which would increase the quality of life, while critics complained that the movement was overly concerned with aesthetics at the expense of social reform.

Washington, DC, became one of the most avid adherents to the City Beautiful philosophy. Its aspirations were expressed through the “McMillan Plan” of 1902 which sought to provide the city with grandeur comparable to that of European capitals. The essence of the plan surrounded the Capitol with monumental government buildings to replace the “notorious slum communities”. Specifically, Southwest DC was considered a blemish on the face of the nation’s capital. With its dirty streets, grungy row houses and shanties lying in the shadow of the Capitol dome, the neighborhood became emblematic of an emerging national discourse on the urban poor. However, the McMillan Plan

did nothing to address the needs of the city's marginalized citizens. Congress outlawed alley dwellings but did not fund enforcement so the act remained toothless.<sup>74</sup>

At the heart of the McMillan design was the creation of the National Mall. In general, the Plan proposed to remove slums and alley dwellers from around the area of the National Mall in order to construct public buildings and monuments. An early example of this approach is the majestic Bureau of Printing and Engraving, completed in 1914, which is a massive neo-classical building of limestone and granite with a 100 ft. façade.

**Box. 5. The Potomac Arcs**

At the turn of the century the Potomac River contained a number of large houseboats referred to as "arcs." They provided illicit entertainment – alcohol, gambling, prostitution – outside the reach of law enforcement. When officers of the law from Virginia, Maryland or the District of Columbia tried to curb these practices, the arcs simply moved downstream or across the river. The arcs endured until 1960 when the harbor police were ordered to destroy them.

At this time, the social life of affluent African-Americans in the city revolved around voluntary organizations rather than places of employment. A wide variety of black social groups were created. They included imaginative names such as the Knights of Pythias, Love & Charity, and the Sons and Daughters of Moses. As the century began, Washington supported 11 black Masonic Lodges and 24 Odd Fellows halls, with a combined membership of almost 4,000 men.<sup>75</sup>

Foggy Bottom also underwent changes, but not necessarily for the better. During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the neighborhood west of the city center was an industrial area inhabited by a working-class population. But many of these industries closed their doors around the end of the century as river and canal traffic declined in response to the spread of rail and automobile transportation. With this, a significant portion of the neighborhood's working-class residents moved away in the quest for employment. Foggy Bottom gradually became a low-income area with substandard housing and poor infrastructure. Alley dwellings, almost entirely rental properties, were occupied largely by African-Americans.<sup>76</sup>

At the end of this decade, a small socio-cultural group called the "Monday Evening Club" carried out a detailed survey of the city's inhabited alleys in the effort to generate public support for their demolition. The survey identified 275 blocks that contained alleys with people living in them. In these alleys were 3,337 buildings housing approximately 16,000 people. Over 60% of the alleys were located in the northwest quadrant of the city. A report by the Health Officer of the District of Columbia in 1910 found that infant mortality of alley children under one year of age was more than double the rate of children of the same age living in houses facing the streets. Moreover, incidence of disease for those living in the alleys was far greater for blacks than for whites.<sup>77</sup>

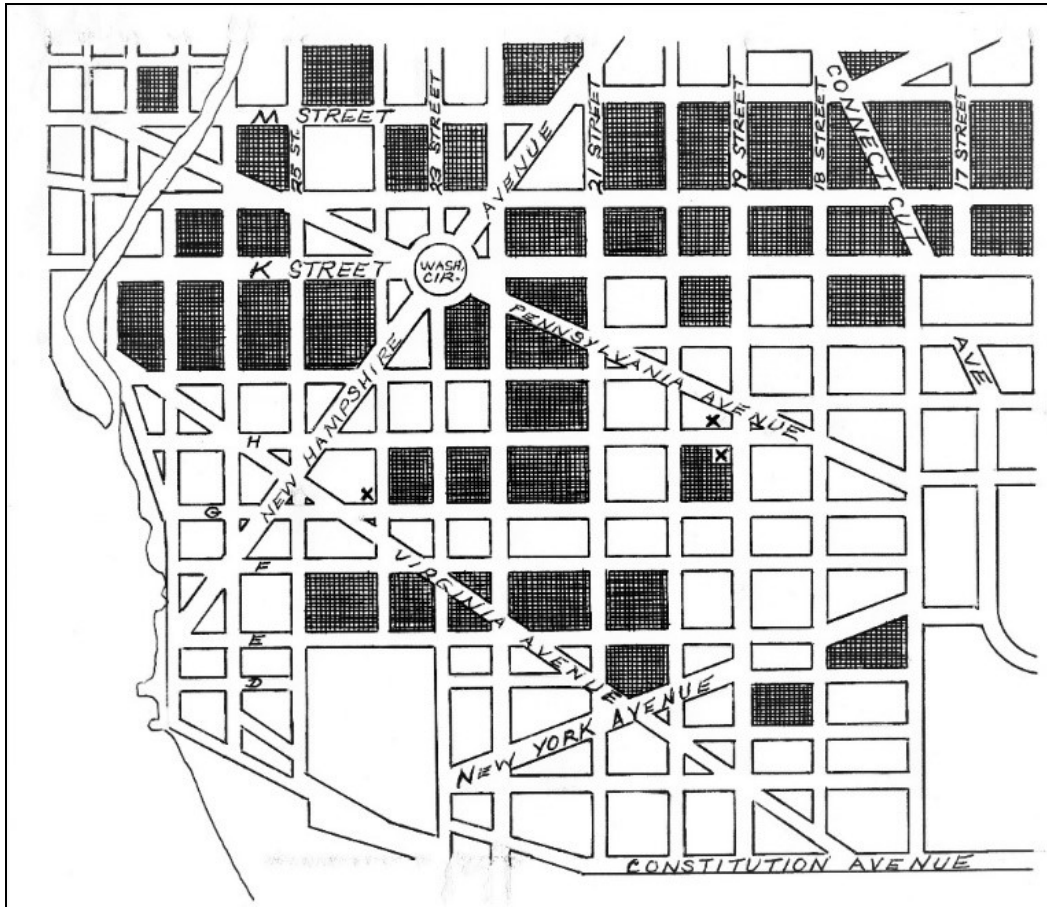
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<sup>74</sup> StudioTwentySevenArchitecture, 2012, *Southwest DC: (A)Mending L'Enfant's Plan*, Washington, DC, p. 54.

<sup>75</sup> The City Journal, [www.city-journal.org/html/washington%E2%80%99s-lost-black-aristocray-12024.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/washington%E2%80%99s-lost-black-aristocray-12024.html)

<sup>76</sup> Young, Robert. 2015. *A Definition in Progress: A Case Study of Washington, DC: 1800 – 2016*. Washington, DC: Foundations of Planning.

<sup>77</sup> Monday Evening Club, 1912, *Directory to the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, DC*. Retrieved from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2001/20011126001di/20011126001di.pdf>



Inhabited Alleys in Foggy Bottom, 1912  
 (The three different locations of Western Church are marked with X)

In the above map, each city block containing an inhabited alley is marked with black cross-hatching. Across the street from the original Western Church, at 1911 H Street, NW, there was an inhabited alley containing two houses, called Bell's Alley. It ran close to the location of the second church building at 1906 H Street, NW, and was closed completely in the 1970s by construction of the International Monetary Fund headquarters on that block.

Near the location of the present church, at 2401 Virginia Avenue, NW, (where Western maintained an outpost for evangelism between 1896 and 1900) inhabited alleys were more numerous. Directly across the street was St. Mary's Court, with 8 alley dwellings. Just north of this location, between 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Streets, a mid-block alley joining I and K Streets called Snow's Court contained 47 houses. The next block west, between 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Streets, an alley linking I and K Streets, called Hughes Court, accommodated 25 houses.<sup>78</sup>

Racial segregation remained a contentious topic. In a creative protest, the daughter of Robert E. Lee, Mary Custis Lee, was arrested on June 13, 1902 at the age of 67 for sitting in the section of a streetcar that was reserved for black passengers. This suggests that perhaps the Lee family was not as firmly bound to segregation as many people assume.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>79</sup> *Boundary Stones*, WETA's local history blog.

**The Church.** Western Church entered the new century with 295 members and a budget which for the first time surpassed \$5,000 (\$146,000 in today's equivalent). Church indebtedness was minimal and was erased entirely by 1903. In 1900 Western organized a January "week of prayer" comprised of five evening prayer meetings on consecutive weekday nights. This became an annual event that continued until 1937. In 1901 the church appointed Sallie Reeves as its first woman superintendent of Sunday school. In 1902 the Session approved the introduction of individual communion cups. Around this time, the church's first Flower Committee was formed, a tradition that still continues today.

Church benevolence funds were directed for the first time to the Anti-Saloon League and this would be an annual practice until the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed in 1919.<sup>80</sup> Rev. Wilson crusaded against alcohol consumption, proclaiming that "liquor is the great and crying evil in our land." Unfortunately, he was one of the many white pastors of the era who saw a line of direct causality between alcohol and African American criminality.<sup>81</sup>

In 1903 the Session constituted itself as an ecclesiastical court for the third time in its history to address accusations of adultery against one of its male members. Reportedly he had become involved with a Cuban woman during a business trip to Havana. The Session heard from the accusers and then called for the man to present himself and give his side of the story. The man did not appear, having fled to Havana a few days before.

For the Thanksgiving worship service in 1901, Rev. Wilson invited Union Methodist Episcopal Church at 20<sup>th</sup> and G Streets to partner with Western in conducting a joint program. This started an annual tradition that would continue for 50 years. The following year, Rev. Wilson initiated a pulpit exchange with the same church.

Prospects were good for Western yet leadership stability remained out of reach. Rev. Wilson resigned in 1904 for a better opportunity with a Presbyterian church in Rhode Island. One can only imagine that salary for pastors remained an issue.

British citizen George Bailey was called in 1905 as Western's eighth pastor. From all accounts, he led an interesting life. Bailey was one of six children born in England's coal mining region. In fact, he worked in the mines between the ages of ten and sixteen. He then obtained enough schooling to enter Firth University in England, where he earned his bachelor's degree while studying theology at the same time. He graduated from Ranmoor Theological School (Methodist) in Sheffield, England at the age of 24 years. Bailey then married and set off with his new wife to New York City, where he found employment with the Presbyterian Office of Home Missions. He was assigned to a small church on an Indian reservation in Broken Bow, Nebraska. After two years, he left for Salt Lake City, where he became the second president of Westminster College, a private liberal arts college that continues today with 2,150 students. During his five years as college president, Bailey somehow managed to earn a PhD in psychology from Illinois Wesleyan University.

With the college struggling to pay his salary, Bailey accepted a call from Western Church in 1905. He proved to be a talented preacher and church administrator. He introduced the use of a unified annual budget to guide financial planning, observing that the church was subject to too many special financial appeals and calls for earmarked offerings for particular causes. Bailey also encouraged

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<sup>80</sup> The Anti-Saloon League was the leading organization lobbying for prohibition in the early 20th century.

<sup>81</sup> Kurt Karandy, 2011, "The Souls of White Folk: The Social Gospel and Jim Crow in Washington, DC 1880-1920," University Honors Paper in History, Center for African American Studies, American University, p. 20.

the Session to approve the practice of annual financial pledges by members as a way of evening out cash flow and reducing financial uncertainties.

In 1906 the number of Session members was raised to nine. Bailey noted that the church was in much need of improvements, but Session worried that they would create a new debt burden. Nevertheless, a major renovation of the church building was eventually accomplished, and a manse was purchased at 21<sup>st</sup> and G Streets, NW. The Boys' Brigade was discontinued in 1906 due to a lack of adult leadership. Two years later Western held its first fall "Rally Day" as an effort to put the congregation back in touch after the summer holidays and focus them on church priorities for the coming year. In 1908 the Session was forced to ask members for a special offering to meet expenses, and six months later it called for another special offering to meet mortgage payments on the new manse.

After just four years, Rev. Bailey resigned to accept a "more advantageous position" with Central Presbyterian Church in Erie, PA.

Western's ninth pastor, Rev. J. Harvey Dunham, was a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and had pastored a pair of churches in Troy, NY, before answering Western's call in 1909. Unlike his predecessors, who served on average just 6 years, he led Western Church for the next 32 years. A period of leadership stability had finally arrived.

Rev. Dunham's foremost achievement during the early half of his long tenure was to see the need for a new church building (the old one had become increasingly expensive to maintain) and champion its construction in 1930. Before World War I the Foggy Bottom neighborhood around the church (where the World Bank and IMF are today) was made up almost entirely of 2 or 3-story family residences. Many of these were modest red brick rowhouses with flat fronts and limited ornamentation. After the war, the neighborhood underwent a steady upscale transformation into a mix of apartment buildings, businesses, and an expanding George Washington University. Rev. Dunham believed that a new, attractively designed church would appeal to the growing numbers of new residents.



Row houses on G Street between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW



## 1910 – 1920: War, Rights and Social Turmoil

**The City.** Although this decade may well be remembered for the horrendous human cost of World War I (16 million killed), it was also a time of civil rights regression, heightened advocacy in response, and the struggle for women’s right to vote. As Jim Crow spread throughout the south, Washington theaters, restaurants, bars and other social venues, previously integrated, began to place color restrictions on their patrons.<sup>82</sup> Notably, in 1914 President Woodrow Wilson, a committed segregationist (and Presbyterian), achieved success in his efforts to segregate the federal work force, which had become a significant place of employment for African-Americans.

These setbacks prompted active organizing in the black community. By 1916 the Washington chapter of the NAACP was the largest (1,164 members) and most powerful in the nation. It became extremely well organized, eventually beating back federal segregation laws and even pressuring the Wilson administration to reinstate black federal employees to their government jobs.<sup>83</sup>

On the day before Wilson’s 1913 inauguration, 5,000 women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to demand their right to vote. But this peaceful protest turned violent when male onlookers became disorderly and then aggressive in their opposition to the women’s aspirations. Police were unwilling to enforce order and chaos erupted along the line of march as men attacked the “suffragettes.” At the end of the day, over 100 women had been hospitalized.<sup>84</sup> Four years later, a large number of women picketing the White House on behalf of women’s suffrage were arrested.



Suffragettes march down Pennsylvania Avenue in 1913

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<sup>82</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>83</sup> Young, *op. cit.*, p.17.

<sup>84</sup> *Boundary Stones*, WETA’s local history blog.

World War I added to the tension in the city. In 1914 Congress banned Germans from entering Washington, DC. A year later, a bomb placed in the Senate wing of the Capitol building by a German sympathizer exploded and caused significant damage.

At the end of the decade, a 4-day race riot erupted in July 1919. It began with the theft of a white woman's umbrella by two black men. Whites retaliated against other blacks and the police failed to intervene. Soon a couple of thousand white men were roaming the streets in search of victims. Black communities armed themselves and stood their ground. It took the arrival of hundreds of federal troops to restore order.<sup>85</sup>

Many white pastors in the city attributed the violence to alcohol consumption by both white and black participants in the riot.<sup>86</sup> However, historians have noted that the catalyst lay not in alcohol but in the steadily mounting frustrations of the black community during that year. White city leaders honored the WWI veterans from Washington, DC but overlooked the contributions of black soldiers. They shut out black support for their efforts to win Congressional representation for the city. And they blamed rising crime rates during the post-war recession primarily on blacks.<sup>87</sup>

In Foggy Bottom, a new neighbor arrived in 1912: George Washington University. Previously known as Columbian College and located downtown just north of Florida Avenue between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, the college purchased 46 acres in Foggy Bottom on which to erect a larger campus. Today it enrolls 27,000 students and is still growing.

The Presbyterian Church generally turned a blind eye to the prominent social justice issues of this time. Whereas it had previously pursued the goal of "interracial Christian unity" through the Board of Freedman and other initiatives, it began, as the Social Gospel movement spread (see Box 6 on page 55), to take a more paternalistic position towards the circumstances of the urban poor, especially African Americans. To some, this implied an attitude of white moral superiority.<sup>88</sup>

Within the District of Columbia, the Presbytery ignored racial concerns (including President Wilson's segregationist actions), the plight of the largely black poor in Washington's over-crowded alley dwellings, and the fight for women's right to vote.<sup>89</sup> At the time, many people saw these as political issues and were consequently inclined to view them as outside of the church's sphere of action under a strict interpretation of the separation between church and state.

**The Church.** For Western Church, this decade got off to a good start. Boys and Girls Clubs were organized.<sup>90</sup> Membership surpassed 400 for the first time in 1912 and just five years later exceeded 500. A Boy Scout troop was re-started. Campfire Girls was also initiated.<sup>91</sup> A church Temperance Committee was formed. Western hired a soloist for worship music in 1911, but this was

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<sup>85</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>86</sup> Karandy, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>87</sup> Greene, Constance, 1967, *Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 188 -194.

<sup>88</sup> Karandy, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 210

<sup>90</sup> The Boys and Girls Clubs of America was founded in 1906 to provide after-school activities for children.

<sup>91</sup> Camp Fire Girls was created in 1912 as the sister organization to the Boy Scouts of America. It was the first nonsectarian, multicultural organization for girls in America. During World War I the Campfire Girls sold over \$1 million in Liberty Bonds to support the war effort.

discontinued after five months due to costs. Rev. Dunham suggested an all-volunteer choir, but it is not clear how this was received. At the end of the war, a quartet of vocalists was employed to provide worship music.

Financial affairs of the church received constant attention from the Session and Board of Trustees. In 1910 the Session wrote to the congregation to remind them of their pledge commitments. In 1913 Session members personally visited members of the congregation urging them to pledge. At the time, less than half of the congregation were reportedly engaged in pledging. A year later, Session was forced to ask members for yet another special contribution towards meeting operational expenses. At the height of the war in 1915, Session lamented the “low condition” of church finances and instigated a major effort to raise funds by means of a Christmas gift bazar.

In 1916 Western Church received its first sizable gift when a woman donated \$6,000. In today’s money, that would be nearly \$150,000. The gift money was immediately invested in an interest-bearing bond.

In 1918, Rev. Dunham took a temporary leave from Western to serve as a U.S. Army chaplain during the remainder of the war. Some 50 members of Western Church also enlisted. Their names appear on the Honor Roll which hangs in the present church hallway.

By 1919, annual church income had remained under \$5,000 for most of the decade. This prompted church leaders to buy into a proposal by the national Presbyterian Church to engage in an annual “Every Member Canvas” in the effort to increase pledging through personal contacts and gentle peer pressure. This annual exercise continued with varying degrees of success well into the 1950s.

## ***1920 – 1930: Alcohol, Culture, Racism, and Trilla B. Young***

**The City.** The “Roaring” 1920s brought an era of dramatic social and political changes. For the first time, more Americans lived in cities than on farms. The nation’s total wealth doubled between 1920 and 1929. This economic growth swept many Americans into an affluent but unfamiliar “consumer society.” People from coast to coast bought the same goods, listened to the same music, did the same dances, and used the same slang.

The 1920s heralded a period of cultural expansion to Washington, DC. Major theaters and art museums opened.<sup>92</sup> The U Street corridor became the center of black social and cultural life, anchored by the iconic Howard Theater. Washington-born composer and band leader Duke Ellington, who grew up just six blocks from today’s Western Church,<sup>93</sup> was a frequent performer at U Street venues.

The decade also brought Prohibition, which went into effect on January 17, 1920. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution forbade the production, importation, transportation and sale of

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<sup>92</sup> Including the Warner Theater, Constitution Hall, Lincoln Theater, National Sylvan Theater, The Phillips Collection, Smithsonian’s American Art Museum and others. The Lincoln Memorial was also completed in 1922.

<sup>93</sup> 2129 Ida Place (now Ward Place, NW).

alcoholic beverages nationwide – but not consumption! This created overnight a black market for alcohol, and criminal elements quickly organized to take advantage of it. In Foggy Bottom, low-income alley residents set up bootleg liquor operations. This phenomenon caused a setback to the efforts of the city’s health department, which had previously been making some headway in its campaign to reduce crime and overcrowding in the alleys.

Prohibition was not the only source of social tension during the 1920s. The Great Migration of African Americans from the Southern countryside to Northern cities and the increasing visibility of black culture—jazz and blues music, and the literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance—discomforted some white Americans. Millions of people joined the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. To them, the Klan represented a return to all the traditional “values” that the fast-paced, city-slicker Roaring Twenties were trampling.

In Washington, DC, racial tension took on new forms of expression. Most graphically, in 1925 and again in 1926, the Ku Klux Klan organized large parades down Pennsylvania Avenue featuring 30,000 clansmen in full regalia. Less overtly, in the 1920s realtors began to adopt restrictive covenants in their sales agreements that prohibited whites from selling their homes to blacks. Throughout the decade, police brutality was a constant complaint.<sup>94</sup>



Ku Klux Klan marches on Pennsylvania Avenue, 1925

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<sup>94</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

**The Church.** At Western Church, the Trilla B. Young Bible Class became a major actor within the congregation. During World War I, a large number of young women immigrated to DC in response to the expanding number of government administrative jobs associated with the war effort. Many of them found a church home at Western. This undoubtedly helped Western's membership to reach its all-time highest number of 620 in 1922, an achievement which forced the Session to purchase more communion trays and hymnals.

In order to involve these women more in the life of the church, Rev. Dunham established in September 1920 a "Young Ladies Class" for Bible study on Sunday mornings. In November, Dunham turned leadership of the class over to Mrs. Trilla B. Young, the widow of a former Presbyterian minister. She led the class for 18 years and the group soon came to be known by her name. In March 1922 the group adopted a constitution and elected officers on an annual basis. At this time, it had 40 members. Twenty years later, its membership was close to 90.<sup>95</sup>

The stated purposes of the Trilla B. Young (TBY) group were Bible study, spiritual development and "works of Christian usefulness." The latter goal was embraced with energy and the TBY group became a major source of mission activities within the church. Members organized a wide range of fund-raising events which, together with TBY dues, generated enough income to help pay down the church mortgage and make regular charitable donations. The latter included: aid to a fund for churches in post-war Europe, funding for "Near East Relief,"<sup>96</sup> support for the building fund of Central Union Mission, and purchase of a mule for a missionary couple working in Kentucky. In addition, group members sewed clothes for unwed mothers, organized Bible classes at the YWCA in partnership with Calvary Baptist Church, and prepared Christmas bags for those housed at the Central Union Mission. They also started a monthly newsletter called "The Youngster."<sup>97</sup>

The TBY group had seemingly boundless energy. They organized potluck suppers, picnics, plays, spelling bees, and white elephant sales. Members sold baked goods, ice cream, Christmas cards, dolls, magazines, Hoover aprons, and other household goods. One member sold her three Persian kittens. For the presidential inauguration in 1928, members obtained six vendor licenses, sold sandwiches to hungry spectators, and earned \$75 (today equivalent to \$1,100).<sup>98</sup>

In 1923 Rev. Dunham was asked by the Presbytery to preside over a congregational meeting of a small, struggling rural church called Lewinsville Presbyterian Church.<sup>99</sup> Membership had been steadily declining and the Lewinsville Session had called the congregational meeting for the purpose of deciding whether or not to close the church. But before the vote could take place, the stovepipe of a potbelly stove used to heat the room fell over, spewing a cloud of black soot over the participants. As the congregation ran out into the churchyard, coughing and sputtering, several members interpreted this incident to be a sign from God that the church should persist. The

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<sup>95</sup> "History of the Trilla B. Young Bible Class of Western Presbyterian Church." Undated manuscript.

<sup>96</sup> This was the name of an American charity organized specifically in response to the systematic massacre (1.5 million dead) of Armenians by the Ottoman government beginning in 1915. It closed in 1930 after raising \$117 million for the cause and was credited with "quite literally keeping an entire nation alive."

<sup>97</sup> "History of the Trilla B. Young Bible Class of Western Presbyterian Church." Undated manuscript.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Located in McLean, VA with just 24 members at the time.

congregation then asked Rev. Dunham to continue with them as Stated Supply. He agreed and stayed to pastor them on Sunday afternoons for the next sixteen years.<sup>100</sup>

Four years later, membership at Lewinsville Presbyterian had grown to 65 persons, including a number of families with children. The demand for Sunday School facilities was growing weekly. The Session decided to construct an educational facility for the church. When it was completed, the Session named it in honor of Rev. Dunham.<sup>101</sup>

It is not clear why Rev. Dunham made such a long-term commitment to Lewinsville Presbyterian. With Western Church making plans to construct a new church, the subsequent Great Depression, and associated financial crises as Western confronted difficulty paying its bills, it certainly wasn't because he had time on his hands. Perhaps he enjoyed regular weekend outings into the countryside. Perhaps he liked the Lewinsville Presbyterians. But he clearly felt called to take on this new responsibility. It certainly was a commitment of the heart.

Evangelism was an important activity at Western during this era. In early 1924 the church organized two weeks of evening evangelism meetings featuring a noted evangelist from New Jersey. Later the same year, the Session experimented with a "membership budget." This called for each organization in the church to commit itself to recruiting a defined number of new members during the year (there is no word on how this turned out). In 1925 the church added a monthly Sunday evening musical service in the effort to expand membership. In 1926 Rev. Dunham requested two weeks of leave to participate in evangelism work centered in Detroit. And in 1928 the Session approved Western's participation in a presbytery-wide evangelism campaign to reach the "unconverted."

The Session also generously extended use of the church building to other denominations and groups. When well-liked President Warren Harding died in office in 1923, Western quickly organized a memorial service with its long-time collaborator, Union Methodist Episcopal Church. When the national Baptist Church held a mid-1926 convention in Washington, DC, Western granted them use of its Sunday school rooms for break-out meetings. In October 1927 the West End Citizens Association began using the church for its monthly meetings.

During the mid-1920s, Western's pastor and congregation came to realize that their church building (now 70 years old) needed major renovations and was not easily adaptable to the use of new building technologies. With Rev. Dunham's leadership, the congregation decided to construct a new church. In April 1925, with a building fund of \$32,000 in hand, the Session gave a green light to the project. In December 1925, a Building Committee was formed. In February of 1926 a month-long building fund campaign produced pledges totaling \$103,000. During 1927 all of the church organizations, even the Boy Scouts, engaged in fund-raising and generated an additional \$14,800. Shortly thereafter the Session approved the purchase of a property directly across the street at 1906 H Street, NW for a cost of \$23,500. In September 1929 the Session approved the plans for the new building and signed a contract with a builder. Excitement was in the air.

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<sup>100</sup> McElroy, B. Roland, 2013, *Pilgrims and Pioneers Always: The History of Lewinsville Presbyterian Church 1846 – 2013*, Baltimore: United Book Press, Inc., p. 28.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*



The future site of the second church building at 1906 H Street, NW

A month after making this commitment, the Great Depression arrived with the stock market crash of October 1929. It lasted a decade. Sharply limited financial prospects during the Great Depression made it impossible for the church to sell its old building, which was a significant part of the financial strategy for funding the new place of worship. This piece of bad luck, together with sharply reduced congregation giving caused by hard times, created a debt burden that nearly led to the demise of the congregation.<sup>102</sup>

## ***1930 – 1940: Hard Times for One and All***

**The City.** At its lowest point in 1933, the Great Depression put one out of every four workers in the country out of work. That fact alone is enough to imagine the range of grim consequences that were linked to this phenomenon. Numerous job creation programs were launched to “get the nation going again.” Among them were the Emergency Conservation Work program, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, the National Youth Administration and Camps for Unemployed Women. Labor-intensive public works was the common element across these programs.

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<sup>102</sup> Western Presbyterian Church, 2005, *op. cit.*

In Washington, DC public works programs affected the character of the city. The construction of the Federal Triangle government complex forced out residents of the sizeable Chinatown which had grown up there since the 1880s. In Foggy Bottom public works projects razed residential housing to create the Department of the Interior, the Federal Reserve Board and the National Academy of Science.

Foggy Bottom's alley inhabitants also became victims of city and federal public works. In 1934 Congress passed the Alley Dwelling Act, which was intended to eliminate alley housing and move their residents into new public housing. Unfortunately, the initiative proved quite successful at removing alley dwellings but not very successful in providing public housing for their occupants. One of the early accomplishments of this program was the demolition of 90 alley homes and the construction of a 24-unit apartment building called St. Mary's Court, which was designated for elderly African-Americans. Today it is located directly across 24<sup>th</sup> Street from Western Church.

This undertaking, which became one of the city's first "urban renewal" programs, soon provoked opposition from white residents. They did not like housing blacks at public expense and feared that public housing would lower property values. In response to this pressure, cleared alley areas were no longer reserved for low-income housing, but increasingly came to be used for parks, garages or private residences.<sup>103</sup>



Alley housing, 1935

In the midst of all this upheaval, the struggle for racial equality continued. Complaints of police brutality were widespread. Segregation was practiced in parks and recreation programs. In the quest for justice, the National Negro Congress was founded at Howard University in 1935. The mission of the Congress was to protest against Jim Crow and organize on behalf of the social, political and economic advancement of African-Americans. In Alexandria, NAACP lawyer Samuel

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<sup>103</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 255.



Tucker organized what is believed to be the first sit-in for desegregation when he led a group protesting a “whites only” policy at the city library.<sup>104</sup>

**The Church.** Like others during the Great Depression, Western Church was struggling for its own survival. With much anticipation, the cornerstone for the new church building was laid on October 25, 1930. The ceremony included Masonic rites lead by Grand Master James West of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia.<sup>105</sup> But the joy was short-lived as the congregation’s inability to sell its old building dragged on from one year to the next. Dunham’s biggest challenge was to manage the church’s suffocating debt burden during the 1930s. For Western Church, much of the rest of the 1930s involved an almost continuous cycle of foreclosure threats and fund-raising efforts of every conceivable kind. Whereas the new church was occupied in 1931, adverse economic conditions prevented the old church from being sold until 1943. With the old building no longer in use, the congregation decided to employ it as a temporary shelter for hard-luck families during the Depression. This appears to have been Western’s first involvement with the homeless.

Finances were a constant worry during these 12 years. In fact, the church was unable to pay Rev. Dunham his full salary for nine of these years.<sup>106</sup>



Laying the cornerstone for the new church, 1930

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<sup>104</sup> Boundary Stones, WETA’s local history blog.

<sup>105</sup> “Cornerstone Laid for New Church,” *The Sunday Star*, Washington, DC: October 26, 1930. This article reports that West used in his Masonic ceremony the same gavel that George Washington (also a Mason) employed during a similar ceremony in the laying of the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol Building.

<sup>106</sup> Western Presbyterian Church. 2005. “Western Presbyterian 1855 – 2005: Our History.” Washington, DC.

The new church building was dedicated on January 10, 1932. It was an attractive stone building with an English Country Gothic style exterior.<sup>107</sup> A later pastor described its interior:

“Western’s sanctuary was, and still is, a classic example of the arts and crafts movement. Its beauty is rooted in the gorgeous oak paneling, ceiling beam structure, graceful limestone arches and lack of ornamentation. The windows are painted rather than stained glass, a style popular at the time the building was constructed. The pulpit and lectern, made out of oak, are small and lack ornamentation. The colors of the sanctuary and the rest of the building were appropriately subdued as the arts and crafts movement preferred.”<sup>108</sup>



Western Presbyterian Church at 1906 H Street, NW

With the old building no longer in use, the congregation decided to employ it as a temporary shelter for hard-luck families during the Depression. This appears to have been Western’s first direct involvement with the homeless.

Just 18 months later the church’s Finance Committee wrote to the congregation warning of the possibility of foreclosure and asking each member to contribute \$5.00 apiece.<sup>109</sup> A short time afterwards, Rev. Dunham conceived an idea whereby a group of members would band together for sacrificial giving in order to reduce the church’s indebtedness. The “Western Church Army,” as the group was called, was organized into “companies” headed by “captains,” and the army was led by

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<sup>107</sup> The architect was Norman Hulme of Philadelphia and the stonework was done by Sagretti Brothers of Washington, DC.

<sup>108</sup> John W. Wimberly Jr., 2012, *A Brief History of Western Presbyterian Church: 1983 – 2012*. Unpublished manuscript.

<sup>109</sup> Finance Committee letter to the congregation of November 10, 1933.

a “colonel.” Membership in the army ranged from a high of 300 to a low of 50. Over two decades, this army contributed \$34,000 (23%) towards the total mortgage pay-off of \$147,000. Members commonly pledged to set aside a nickel a day, but in some cases they “gave up” the purchase of a consumer item and donated the equivalent cost.

Many other creative fund-raising activities were pursued. In 1932 the Session eliminated the use of the paid quartet in worship as a cost-saving move. In 1933 the Session approved the use of mission funds to meet debt payments. In January 1935 the Moderator of the Presbytery wrote to all member churches, asking them to take up an offering to help Western Church meet its debt obligations. The response netted \$634.61. In September 1935 the church succeeded in leasing its old building for three years at \$100 per month. In November 1935 the Session asked church members to pay up their overdue pledges and to consider making additional donations to pay down the mortgage of \$137,000. In April 1936 Rev. Dunham told the congregation that the church had only \$20,938 on hand to meet debt payments totaling \$24,500. In June 1936 the church’s Board of Trustees wrote to the congregation asking for additional contributions towards reducing the mortgage debt in light of the fact that the economy had improved. A few months later, the church manse was sold, bringing in funds of \$13,500.<sup>110</sup> In November 1938 Rev. Dunham wrote to all 446 members announcing that the church would hold a Reaffirmation of Faith Service for the congregation at which they would renew the vows and obligations they assumed when they originally became members. This was apparently intended as a gentle nudge towards greater financial responsibility by some of the members.

The mystery of how Western survived that financial crisis was not completely explained until 1995 when Western moved from the church at 1906 H Street to its current location on Virginia Avenue. At that time, the cornerstone of the old church was removed. When the contents of the cornerstone container were examined, Western’s leaders found a large number of IOUs to Rev. Dunham’s wife, Lena Crammond Dunham. Mrs. Dunham must have been a person of some financial wealth, because it appears that she bailed out the congregation.<sup>111</sup>

Not to be overshadowed by the nation’s financial difficulties, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church reached a historic decision in 1930. For the first time, it permitted women to be ordained as Elders. Western was slow to take advantage of this decision, but women remained important contributors at Western in other ways, most notably through the activities of the Trilla B. Young group. By 1935, the group had 75 members. They organized regular fund-raising activities and contributed part of this income towards Rev. Dunham’s salary, which had fallen into arrears during the Depression years. Additionally, a Women’s Missionary Society at Western functioned as the church’s main vehicle of support for denominational missionaries and also generated funds in various ways to underwrite this commitment.

The Depression years were not without achievements at Western.<sup>112</sup> The church’s first office secretary was hired part-time in 1931. A Girl Scout troop was established the same year. In 1933 the church experimented with outdoor worship services during the summer months. In 1934 Rev. Dunham organized a three-week “Spiritual Recovery Crusade” as a response to the Depression.

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<sup>110</sup> The buyers were Rev. and Mrs. Dunham.

<sup>111</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Among the less important, the Session determined in 1931 that the pastor should wear a gown during worship and the choir and organist should wear robes.

Writing to a friend in 1936, Rev. Dunham described Western Church as follows: “We are progressive. We are prayerful. We are generous.” This may have been the first time that Western’s congregation was characterized as “progressive.”

As the 1930s drew to a close, Rev. Dunham requested a dissolution of his pastoral relationship with Western due to reoccurring health problems. Rightly or wrongly, the Session prevailed upon him to withdraw his request and Dunham carried on.



The Washington Gas plant on Virginia Avenue in 1928; the storage tank is near where Western is today

## ***1940 – 1950: War and Recovery***

**The City.** War was what everyone was talking about as the 1940s began. World War II started with Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland in September 1939. By mid-1940, Western Europe had fallen to the Nazi army and Great Britain was under siege. The United States was gearing up industrially and technologically to support Britain and her Allies, but did not formally join the war until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. World War II would become the deadliest in human history, generating upwards of 80 million deaths, the majority of them civilians.

The war triggered an upsurge in the Washington, DC job market. Between 1940 and 1945, the number of civilians employed by the government increased fourfold. In the three years between

1940 and 1943, the population of Washington, DC soared by an extraordinary 30%, reaching an estimated 900,000.<sup>113</sup> This was the largest population that the city would attain.

The housing market in the city could not handle this inflow – estimated at 10,000 new arrivals each month. Housing construction had slowed during the Depression and once the United States joined the war, the diversion of labor and materials to the war efforts brought housing construction to a standstill. At one point, a trailer camp was set up in Potomac Park to house temporary wartime workers.<sup>114</sup> Government sought to stimulate new housing construction in DC. But white developers put up thousands of homes for white workers while ignoring the housing needs of black workers.<sup>115</sup>

Women comprised the bulk of new workers flooding into the city. The government needed large numbers of typists, stenographers, telephone operators, and clerks to create and manage the paper flow required by the war.<sup>116</sup> The Civil Service Commission recruited women from across the country, and thousands answered the call. The U.S. government employed 186,210 women in June 1940. Two years later, that number had *tripled* to 558, 279.<sup>117</sup> Many of these women were single, in fact 31% of all women in the city in 1940. Because housing was in such short supply, most single women were forced to share a high-priced room with 4 or 5 other women, live in a trailer, or commute long distances to work.<sup>118</sup> By 1950, the proportion of single women living in the city had fallen to 26%.<sup>119</sup>

According to a 1944 Washington Housing Association survey, many Foggy Bottom residents lived in poverty. Over half of the population shared or had no toilet facilities. Overused outhouses leaked onto the sidewalks. A quarter of the population had no running water and one-fifth had no electricity.<sup>120</sup> The vast majority of this neighborhood was African-American, distributed between the middle and lower classes.

In 1947, two events opened Foggy Bottom to new private investments. First, the U.S. Department of State was relocated to a new building at 23<sup>rd</sup> and D Streets, NW. Second, the large Washington Gas Light Company building at 26<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, NW, was closed and demolished. Subsequently, large portions of Foggy Bottom were transformed by the construction of high-rise apartment buildings, alley parking lots, new streets, and urban renewal projects.<sup>121</sup> The sense of immediate community that had defined Western Church for almost one hundred years began to dissipate as commercial and business activities started to contend with the residential uses of Foggy Bottom.

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<sup>113</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, *Intercensal Estimates of the Total Resident Population of States: 1940 – 1949*.

<sup>114</sup> StudioTwentySevenArchitecture, 2012, Southwest Washington, DC: (A)Mending L’Enfant’s Plan. Washington, DC: StudioTwentySevenArchitecture.

<sup>115</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>116</sup> Between 1940 and 1945, the percentage of women in the workforce nationwide surged from 26% to 36%, History.com, 2010. American Women in World War II.

<sup>117</sup> History.com, 2010. American Women in World War II.

<sup>118</sup> Schweitzer, Mary M., 1980, “World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rates,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 40(1), pp. 89-95.

<sup>119</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1952, *Census of Population: 1950, Volume II, Part 9*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

<sup>120</sup> Farina, Mary-Alice, “How Foggy Bottom Changed,” *DCentric*, August 12, 2011.

<sup>121</sup> Foggy Bottom Historic District, 2003, *op. cit.*

**The Church.** By 1940 Rev. Dunham was battling serious health problems, which ultimately forced him to resign in 1941. The Session immediately elected him *Pastor Emeritus*. He died just two years later and, because of his Army service, was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Notably, during his 32 years with the church, he received 1,300 new members into the congregation.<sup>122</sup> Evangelism was clearly his vocation.

Western called Rev. Charles Stewart McKenzie, the son of a Scottish blacksmith, as its tenth pastor in 1942. Rev. McKenzie had quit high school at the end of his sophomore year to clerk for the Reading Railroad for three years. He then returned to schooling, graduated from Biblical Seminary in New York, and earned a Master of Theology degree at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

Rev. McKenzie proved to be a “community builder.” Reportedly “able and amiable,”<sup>123</sup> McKenzie’s main interest was working with young people. Believing that a church should provide teenagers with a center of activity, he created a large clubroom at Western where teenagers could meet for dates.<sup>124</sup> He also started a Boy Scout troop (and served as Scoutmaster), Saturday morning kids’ camps, and a Schooners Club for young married couples.

Rev. McKenzie’s passion for youth ministry also found expression in other ways. He started an annual Vacation Bible School. He arranged sponsorships for church youth to attend a summer youth conference at Hood College. He also organized a young adult group for ages 25 – 35 which attracted some 30 participants.

Students from George Washington University were a particular focus of Rev. McKenzie’s ministry. At the end of the war, the GWU chorus was invited to participate in a Western worship service. In 1947 Session approved the use of its sanctuary for GWU chapel services during Lent. Six months later GWU began to hold its weekly student chapel services at Western on a regular basis. Rev. McKenzie used this relationship to build strong ties with the students. In doing so, he laid the groundwork for the Presbytery’s later program initiative in campus ministries.

Mary Lee McKenzie, the pastor’s wife, provided strong support for this work even as she pursued her own career. With a background in social work, she possessed relevant skills and experience. She used these to open and manage the Christian Day School at Central Presbyterian Church, which attracted an interesting mix of African-American children and the sons and daughters of nearby foreign embassy personnel. It functioned for many years at 15<sup>th</sup> and Irving Streets, NW.<sup>125</sup>

Housing was difficult to find in Washington, DC as the result of the influx of new workers to support the government’s war effort. Because the manse had been sold in 1936 to help pay down the church’s Depression Era debts, the Session was forced to provide rental housing for Rev. McKenzie and his family. After two years, this arrangement proved unsatisfactory, and the Session felt the need to approve expenditure of up to \$14,000 for the purchase of a new manse in 1944. Again, finding acceptable accommodations for this price proved to be a challenge. Fortunately, Western members Frank and Dorothy Lewis provided the solution when they bought a house at 3812 Jocelyn

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<sup>122</sup> McKenzie, Charles Stewart, 1955, “Western Presbyterian Church: One Hundred Years of Christian Worship and Service,” Washington, DC: Western Presbyterian Church.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>124</sup> Hudson, Margaret. 1946, “Minister at Western Presbyterian Makes Church a Popular Place,” *Times-Herald*, Washington, DC.

<sup>125</sup> The building now houses several organizations that provide services to the Latino community.

Street, NW and sold it to the church in June 1944 for use as a manse. The sale price was the very generous sum of ten dollars!

During World War II, Western's members became more personally involved in voluntary mission activities. The church's old original building was rented by the United Servicemen's Organization (USO) as a social center for troops passing through or stationed in Washington, DC.<sup>126</sup> Volunteers from the congregation took an active part in staffing the various USO programs. In 1942 the Trilla B. Young group formed a sewing club to make warm clothing for war victims in Europe. In 1944 the group contributed a documented 1,229 hours of knitting to make sweaters, hats and mittens for the Red Cross. Buoyed by the wartime influx of women to the city, the Trilla B. Young group reported an impressive 90 members at this time.<sup>127</sup>



Trilla B. Young Bible Class - 1948

The congregation, including Trilla B. Young members, continued to raise funds for use in paying down the church's mortgage debt. But that isn't all they did. As WWII intensified, they opened the doors of Western every afternoon to enable "prayers for peace." They hosted a meeting between Presbytery representatives and GWU students to explore the possibilities of programming. They offered the use of the sanctuary to an Armenian Christian congregation. In 1943 they initiated a Young Businesswomen's Group. In January 1945 Western collaborated with Calvary Baptist Church in sponsoring a series of inter-racial fellowship meetings.

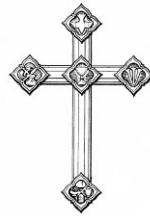
Benevolence support began to extend beyond the institutional Presbyterian Church to the sponsorship of specific missionaries in Brazil and Colombia. Other recipients were the Colored Boys Camp, the Chinese Community Church, and a Presbyterian hospital in Thailand. Joint undertakings with other churches increased during this decade. In 1943 Western and Union M.E. churches invited Concordia Lutheran church to join them in their annual Thanksgiving service. A year later the three churches launched a collaborative "West End Vacation Bible School" which continued annually until Western hired a full-time Christian Educator in 1948.

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<sup>126</sup> The old church building was finally sold in April 1943 to the Calvary Gospel Church for \$31,000.

<sup>127</sup> "History of the Trilla B. Young Bible Class of Western Presbyterian Church."

Rev. McKenzie undertook a pulpit exchange with District Heights Baptist Church in 1945. The three partner churches came together in November 1947 to undertake an evangelism campaign in Foggy Bottom. Shortly thereafter, Western's Session formed a Committee on Inter-Church Activities to explore what other types of cooperation might be possible with neighborhood churches. In 1949 the three churches held joint Wednesday evening worship services during Lent. A timeline of Western's many collaborative activities with neighborhood churches is presented in Attachment 5.



### The Chancel Cross

The small hand-carved gold cross mounted in the chancel was crafted by Rev. Gordon R. Conning, whose hobby was wood-working. He served Western for several months in 1940 as temporary supply during a time when Rev. Dunham was in poor health. The cross was a gift of James S. Giffen in honor of his wife, Mrs. Gertrude Young Giffen, and her mother, Trilla B. Young.

The vertical axis of the cross represents the oneness of God. At the top of it is a *dove*, symbol of the Holy Spirit. The white background of the dove stands for the love and holiness of God. This is the path that Jesus followed.

The horizontal arm of the cross represents the world, the path of human life that Jesus shared with us. Within the diamond on its left end are a *money bag* (i.e., the selfishness of man), a *sword* and a *spear* (i.e., the self-will of man). These symbols stand for sin. The background of these symbols is green to indicate imperfection, unrest and chaos. At the right end of the crossbar are *three nails*, which represent death. Their dark red background symbolizes sacrifice, even unto death. The horizontal path thus stands for God's love for his self-willed and misguided people, expressed through the life of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us.

At the center of the cross is a *cup*. It symbolizes the choice that we must make between the vertical way of Christ and the horizontal way of the world. Its background is a bright, lively red which represents the promise of eternal life.

At the base of the cross are four symbols. The *broken loaf* reminds us that Christ is the bread of life. The *water jar* prompts us to remember that Christ said, "If anyone thirst, let them come to me and drink." The *lamp* stands for the words, "I am the light of the world." The *open door* recalls Christ's statement, "I am the door, whosoever enters through me shall be saved."

- Rev. Gordon Conning, The Meaning of the Cross

Several other Western highlights deserve mention. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the U.S. government requested use of the church as an "emergency station" in the event of an attack on Washington, DC. In 1942 the church honored Mrs. Birdie Davis for her 36 years of service as superintendent of the Sunday school's primary department and noted her "unusual skill as a teacher." In July 1947 the church decided to end the use of a paid vocal quartet for worship in favor of an all-volunteer choir comprised of church members. With this, our current choir was born. Finally, in 1948 the number of Session members was increased to ten.



Throughout its history, women have played important roles, both qualitatively and quantitatively, within Western Church. Yet it is difficult to gauge their share of the church membership, as the annual membership reports do not disaggregate by sex. However, in 1944 a statistic is given which may illuminate this matter to some degree. The church celebrated all of its members who had been with the church for 25 years or more. A total of 71 names were listed. Assigning gender according to the names, fully 80% of them were women.<sup>128</sup> Although this is not a representative sample, it seems to reinforce the notion that women constituted a majority of church members across the years. Indeed, recollections from older members in the 1980s suggest that a number of the single women who came to Washington, DC to support the war effort found places to live in Foggy Bottom (it was “affordable and safe”) and became long-term members of Western Church.<sup>129</sup>

## ***1950 – 1960: Urban Renewal and White Flight to the Suburbs***

**The City.** World War II was barely in the history books when a different kind of military threat appeared - the Cold War. This was a period of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union with its satellite states (the Eastern Bloc), and the United States with its allies (the Western Bloc) after World War II. The era closed in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which brought communism to an end in Eastern Europe. The term "cold" is used because there was no large-scale fighting directly between the two sides, although the threat of atomic war was always present.

It required little imagination to see Washington, DC, the capital of the United States, as a probable target in any atomic war. This generated a constant level of subliminal stress in the city's inhabitants and produced several government initiatives aimed at putting the populace more at ease. Foremost among these was the Civil Defense program, which was an organized non-military effort to prepare civilians for military attack. Western was touched by these events when two church members were sent off for civil defense training in 1954. Later, neighborhood air raid wardens held their monthly meetings at Western.

In Washington, DC the decade was ushered in by the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act of 1950. This ambitious Congressional initiative sought to provide government with additional downtown office space, relieve traffic congestion in the city, and upgrade dilapidated neighborhoods while eliminating unsanitary conditions.<sup>130</sup> However, the initiative ravaged traditional neighborhoods, replaced them with large impersonal federal agency buildings, and put up public housing complexes in poorer areas of the city for those who could not afford to move elsewhere.<sup>131</sup> Modern “expressways” carved up the landscape and reinforced physical segregation. These were bitterly opposed by both black and white communities across the city, but they were only partially successful in preventing highway construction through older neighborhoods.

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<sup>128</sup> Western Presbyterian Church, 1944, Minutes of Session, December.

<sup>129</sup> Wimberly, John, 2019, personal communication.

<sup>130</sup> <https://whosedowntown.wordpress.com/urban-renewal-the-story-of-southwest-dc/>

<sup>131</sup> D.C. public schools were not de-segregated until 1954.

Southwest D.C., known as “the island,” was particularly impacted by urban renewal. Many of the city’s African-American owned businesses were located in this area and 97% of the residents were black. Redevelopment projects begun in the early 1950s ultimately leveled 99% of the buildings in Southwest. This forced 1,500 businesses to move elsewhere and 23,000 mostly African-American families to relocate, with Anacostia being the most common destination.

Apart from these radical dislocations, the 1950s marked the start of the so-called “white flight” to the suburbs. Between 1950 and 1980, the District lost 346,000 white residents, a precipitous drop of 67%.<sup>132</sup> Although reports regularly suggested that whites were fleeing inner city killing, violence, drug trafficking and declining home values, it is also true that whites were enticed away from the center city by the prospect of better schools, better municipal services, better security, and the likelihood of rising home values in the suburbs.

During the 1950s the Potomac Presbytery began to shift from compromise to social advocacy, although not without resistance. Several of its downtown churches boasted well-known preachers, large memberships, strong finances, and proven lay leadership. They led this shift in response to a newer constituency that was asking for more in the way of church programs than the traditional offerings of worship services, prayer meetings, women’s circles, and youth fellowship.<sup>133</sup> Church member demands for “relevancy,” awakened by the emerging civil rights movement and the fear of nuclear war, was growing.

**The Church.** These changes nurtured a new concern for social service activities within Western Church. A Women’s Missionary Association of 80 members collected used clothes to send to missionaries at home (Kentucky, North Carolina) and abroad (China, Korea, Thailand). A Senior Citizen’s Group supported the lives of retired people. GWU students, on average 15 to 25 a week, were provided with lunch at the church every Friday for a cost of 45 cents. A Craft Club was launched for two dozen neighborhood children of elementary school age, which met after school on Thursdays. The men’s Bible class with 20 participants organized worship services at the Central Union Mission. A Presbyterian Home Committee worked with similar groups from sister churches to establish a new retirement home at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street and Military Road, NW (now Ingleside at Rock Creek). Rev. McKenzie played an active role in the latter Presbytery-wide undertaking.

In the church’s annual report for 1957, the choir proudly reported having 35 members.

As Western Church approached its centennial anniversary in 1954, Rev. McKenzie used this milestone as motivation for a major push to pay off the church’s remaining mortgage debt of \$10,000 as part of the celebration. He challenged each church family to contribute at least \$100 by the centennial date. Although the goal was not met by that deadline, it was achieved six months later. On July 17, 1955 Rev. McKenzie led the Session and Board of Trustees in a mortgage burning ceremony. This concluded the church’s 25-year struggle to meet mortgage payments.

With the backing of Session, Rev. McKenzie was able to complement his ministry with important management innovations. He was the first to introduce annual Fall planning retreats for church officers in 1950. The church adopted its first formal By-Laws in 1952. Later that year an after-worship “hospitality hour” was introduced on an experimental basis; it was soon hailed as a success which continues unbroken until today. Rev. McKenzie re-introduced a monthly newsletter following a long hiatus, called the “Western-Aires.” In 1958 the church’s first personnel policies were

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<sup>132</sup> Sawyer, Noah, and Peter A. Tatian, 2003, “Segregation Patterns in the District of Columbia 1980 to 2000,” Urban Institute Discussion Brief No. 2, Washington, DC: DC Data Warehouse.

<sup>133</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

approved. Also, Maxine Davis became the first woman to be elected to the Board of Trustees. In 1959 Western hired its first full-time director of Christian Education.

Inter-church collaboration continued during the 1950s. Western, Union and Concordia churches came together to carry out a neighborhood religious census followed by evangelistic visitations. In 1959 the same three churches produced a brochure on evangelism for use in Foggy Bottom and the West End. Later in the year, the three churches sponsored a weekend-long "West End Community Bible Conference." In 1951 Rev. McKenzie undertook a pulpit exchange with Northminster Presbyterian Church, anticipating by almost 70 years Western's current explorations with the same church (which had a mainly white congregation at McKenzie's time but has a largely black congregation today).

Financially, the church walked a fine line. While its crushing debt had been largely eliminated, it had little financial "wiggle-room." Still it was able to increase its benevolences to 28% of its budget and take on sponsorship of a missionary in Cameroon. Western also underwrote expenses for 20 church youth to go to summer church camp in 1957. But when a new furnace and other repairs were needed at the church in 1959, the Session was forced to take out a \$13,000 mortgage on the manse.

Although church membership remained steady at just under 500 members during the 1950s, Rev. McKenzie was beginning to express concern with the spreading hegemony of GWU and the loss of church members to the suburbs.

## ***1960 – 1970: Social Activism and Cultural Disruption***

**The City.** By any measure, the 1960s was an extraordinary decade. From beginning to end, it reverberated with the tensions of concurrent political, social and cultural upheavals. The 1960s produced the anti-nuclear war movement, the Feminist Movement, the Environmental Protection Movement and the "hippie" counter-culture. It was the time of civil rights – anti-segregation sit-ins, the Mississippi Freedom Riders, the March on Selma, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It was the time of radical political organization by African-Americans (the Nation of Islam, the Black Panthers), and major political achievements in placing African-Americans in Congress and on the Supreme Court. It saw the peak of tension in the Cold War with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. It witnessed the assassination of three national political leaders (John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King). All of these events helped to generate a new interest in social justice and its roots in the Social Gospel theology of earlier years.

In addition, the 1960s recorded major socio-cultural milestones. The invention of the contraceptive pill led to a subsequent worldwide sexual revolution. Medicare was established. The Beatles became a global phenomenon. The National Organization for Women was founded. Neil Armstrong and Apollo 11 went to the moon. The decade culminated with the Woodstock Festival, which attracted 500,000 young people for a celebration of peace, music and love, and with the nationwide Peace Moratorium, which involved 2 million people in the country's largest ever demonstration.

#### **Box 6. Social Justice and Social Gospel**

The “social justice” and “social gospel” movements have different origins but pursue similar objectives. Social justice comes out of the Catholic church. The term was first used by Jesuit priest Luigi Taparelli D’Azeglio in the 1840s. He derived it from the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and imparted the concept to his students. One of them was the major author of Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of the Working Classes*. Another student wrote Pope Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical which officially established social justice as an integral part of Catholic doctrine. Today the subject is accorded a section in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Contemporary religious and secular thinking discerns three common elements to social justice. It is the duty of society: (i) to protect human dignity; (ii) to promote equal opportunities for all; and (iii) to ensure the fair distribution of certain vital economic, social and cultural resources.

The “social gospel” has its origins in the Protestant church. It refers to efforts to apply Christian ethics to social problems. The movement emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century “Gilded Age” as a response to the social problems created by the industrial revolution: poverty, child labor, alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, slums, inadequate worker protections, environmental degradation.

The watchword for the social gospel movement became the question: What would Jesus do? It comes from an 1897 book by Rev. Charles Sheldon called *In His Steps* and became a central theme in the movement. A defining theologian for the social gospel was Walter Rauschenbusch, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Baptist minister from the Hell’s Kitchen area of New York City who criticized “selfish capitalism” and advocated a type of Christian socialism, arguing that while the Bible focused on individual sinfulness, it did not address institutionalized sinfulness. The need for Christianity to tackle social problems was powerfully reiterated in the 1930s by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, an urban pastor from Detroit. A call for specific attention to the circumstances of African Americans was articulated by Mary McLeod Bethune. A black social gospel movement developed under the leadership of intellectuals such as Mordecai Johnson, Benjamin Mays and Howard Thurman.

Social gospel activists sought to improve public health measures, make basic education mandatory, undertake labor reforms such as abolishing child labor, and provide social services to the poor. The latter were often organized through “settlement houses” where charitable organizations and Christian volunteerism sought to help the poor and recent immigrants to improve their lives. The YMCA and the Salvation Army emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as powerful instruments for promoting the social gospel. Social gospel advocates were instrumental in forming the Progressive Party in 1912 and giving it a forward-looking social agenda. Elements of the social gospel were later incorporated into the New Deal of the 1930s.

The movement faded during World War II, but re-emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as concerns with civil rights, nuclear holocaust and the Vietnam War prompted new articulations of the social gospel by Rev. Martin Luther King and others. “Liberation theology” developed in the 1970s by progressive Catholics in Latin America who viewed the gospel from the perspective of the downtrodden and addressed the structural causes of racial, political and economic oppression. Soon afterwards, both Catholic and Protestant women theologians began to develop feminist theologies. Evangelical Christians also developed a strong voice on social problems, articulated in publications like *Sojourners* magazine. As a result, social justice has become a widespread value of American society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As the nation’s capital, Washington, DC was a frequent gathering point for social activism. In 1963 Martin Luther King led a March for Jobs and Freedom with his stirring “I have a dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial. In 1966 later-to-be-mayor Marion Berry organized a successful boycott of public transportation to protest a fare increase that impacted poor people. In 1968 the Poor People’s March on Washington attracted 50,000 participants and created a shantytown on the Mall called “Resurrection City,” where 3,000 poor people camped for six weeks until they were forcibly evicted. The Black Panthers opened a Washington chapter in 1969.



"I have a dream," 1963

Racial tensions were frequently high during this period. Following efforts to control rising rates of violent crime, police brutality became a constant complaint. One case nearly sparked a race riot in 1966. Two years later, when Martin Luther King was assassinated, black neighborhoods in the city exploded, particularly along the U Street corridor. President Lyndon Johnson was forced to send in 13,600 federal troops to restore order. The immediate cost was 13 deaths, 900 businesses destroyed, 5,000 persons lost their jobs, 2,000 became homeless, and 7,600 were arrested. It took until the mid-1990s for the damage to be fully repaired.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 358.



The 1968 Washington, DC riots

Racial segregation in the city had largely collapsed by 1960. Even the Washington Redskins ultimately embraced integration, becoming the last NFL team to incorporate African-American players in 1962. At the same time, continuing pressures for “home rule” compelled President Johnson to abolish the longstanding appointed commissioner arrangement for DC government and replace it with a mayor and nine-member council. Congress, however, still retained the right to veto decisions by the city government and to approve the city budget.<sup>135</sup>

During this decade Hispanic communities began to form in Washington, DC. The catalyst was political violence in Cuba, Guatemala and El Salvador which generated strong out-migration. Women initially comprised the bulk of new arrivals. The city’s first Latino community grew up in Adams Morgan. As the Latino immigrant population grew, it prompted a city-wide expansion of Latino culture.<sup>136</sup> In 2017 the Census Bureau counted 76,500 Latinos who comprised 11% of the city’s population.<sup>137</sup>

In support of this growing Latino community, the Presbytery converted the old Central Presbyterian Church building at 15<sup>th</sup> and Irving Streets, NW, into a center for start-up organizations serving the Latino population. These included the Latin American Youth Center, “Clínica del Pueblo” health center, and “Ayuda”.<sup>138</sup>

In Foggy Bottom, urban renewal razed two large breweries in the early 1960s to create a site for the Kennedy Center of Performing Arts. Next door, 10 acres were cleared for the construction of

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<sup>135</sup> Young, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>136</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>137</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Hispanic or Latino Origin by Specific Origin, Washington, DC.

<sup>138</sup> Wimberly, personal communication, May 2019.

the Watergate complex. The Columbia Plaza high-rise apartment building was put up at 24<sup>th</sup> and E Streets. Design of the E Street expressway was also initiated. Plans to construct the international headquarters of the International Monetary Fund adjacent to Western Church along 19<sup>th</sup> Street were far advanced. In that context, the IMF made the first of several subsequent offers to purchase the church property, anticipating the future need to expand its facilities. Foggy Bottom was rapidly losing its identity as a purely residential neighborhood as market forces stimulated by these major developments began to reshape the area and drive out the middle class.

**The Church.** During the 1960s, Western Church functioned as a neighborhood church and *de facto* community center. Activities in the building at 1906 H Street, NW – involving both church members and outside groups – were almost continuous throughout the week. Church programs focused intentionally on the nearby residential community (apartment dwellers), George Washington University (students), and surrounding business offices (professionals).<sup>139</sup> Note that this strategy is stated in terms of target populations, presumably for evangelism and growing the church, rather than by defining goals and program objectives.

At this time a significant portion of church members was reportedly made up of older single persons – a number of them retired widows living in nearby apartments. The congregation was almost entirely white. Numerous members were former or current government workers. Some were ex-military who were beginning to raise families. In addition, a small number of Chinese and Korean members could regularly be found in the congregation throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1965 Western member Irene Keltz donated \$4,800 (equivalent to \$38,651 today) to establish a fund that would support the studies of young adults from Western interested in pursuing a Christian vocation. The fund was used prudently for this purpose through at least 1994, benefitting half a dozen seminary students and one PhD candidate in theology.

In 1966 – some 36 years after the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved the ordination of women as Elders – Virginia Chandler was elected the first woman Elder at Western Church. A year later, Viola Miller became the second Western woman to serve on Session.<sup>140</sup>

The church provided a rich array of community-oriented activities at this time: Wednesday night suppers and bible study; “Music at Noon” once a week in the church with professional musicians; the Trilla B. Young Bible study group for women; Sunday evening church activities for the entire family; Alcoholics Anonymous; Debtors Anonymous; the Freedom Prayer Group (mainly World Bank and IMF employees); a Japanese prayer group; worship services of the Ethiopian orthodox church; a Pepco employees Bible study group; music rehearsals by an Inter-American chamber ensemble; World Bank – IMF choral society rehearsals; weekly chapel services for GWU students and faculty; meetings of GWU international students to discuss college adjustment issues; GWU continuing education classes for women; and use of facilities by GWU music students to practice voice, organ and piano. At Christmas and Easter, joint worship services were organized with the Union United Methodist, 19<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist, and Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Churches.<sup>141</sup> Rev. McKenzie developed a personal relationship with students and faculty members through weekly

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<sup>139</sup> Report of the Long Range Planning Committee, Western Presbyterian Church, December 1969.

<sup>140</sup> Western Presbyterian Church, 1966, Minutes and Records of Session, Vol. 10, 1965-1976.

<sup>141</sup> Gaston Paige, interview, October 2018.

chapel services and other outreach activities. In appreciation of this, the university awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1971.<sup>142</sup>

One notable initiative was a 2-day Fall retreat organized by a group of Western college students and young adults with their African-American counterparts from 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church.

During most of this decade, a budgetary guideline was applied which earmarked 20% of income for benevolences. But by 1968 the church's declining financial fortunes forced this share to be reduced to just 10%, where it remained until at least 1977. Learning of Western's financial distress, the IMF made its first offer to purchase the church and its land, but was turned down by the Session. Nevertheless, the financial situation was so dire that the Session was forced to notify the Presbytery that it did not have sufficient funds to meet its payment to the Presbytery for group health insurance covering Rev. McKenzie. This may have been the reason that the Presbytery provided Western with a 3-year grant of \$9,500 from its Church Development Fund.

Western's charitable donations continued to favor institutional programs of the Presbyterian Church, with two exceptions. One was a series of annual contributions over three decades to Warren Wilson College in North Carolina, an innovative Presbyterian initiative which combines academic study with work (much of it on the college's 275-acre farm) and community service.<sup>143</sup> The second was a commitment to support a missionary couple in Ethiopia.

Western also used its large, conveniently located Fellowship Hall to promote good will and to raise additional funds. During the 1960s, it was employed for a wide range of activities: ten weeks of square dancing on Sunday evenings; a prayer breakfast for Foggy Bottom pastors; a weekend workshop by the Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam; an after-school tutoring program for adolescents; and the yearly meeting of the American-Turkish Association.

By the end of the decade, church membership had fallen by 34% to 340 and financial contributions declined proportionately. Whether this was due to white flight from the city, growing disenchantment with organized religion, or to some combination of the two, it is not possible to say.

## **1970 – 1980: Home Rule Returns to DC as Western Survives Tough Times**

**The City.** The 1970s began with a bang. Two bangs, actually. The first was in 1970 when demolition next to the church announced the start of construction for the massive headquarters building for the International Monetary Fund at 19<sup>th</sup> and G Streets. The second occurred in March 1971. The radical leftist group, Weather Underground, exploded a bomb in the Senate side of the Capitol building, causing significant damages. In addition, two months later the self-styled "Mayday Tribe" brought 35,000 anti-Vietnam War protesters to the Mall, where they camped out. They were

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<sup>142</sup> "Rev. Charles McKenzie Dies; Led Western Presbyterian Church," *Washington Post*, November 27, 1976, p. B-8.

<sup>143</sup> Rev. Warren Wilson, a longtime leader within the Board of Home Missions of the PC(USA), worked during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to carry the message of the Social Gospel to the rural populations of America.

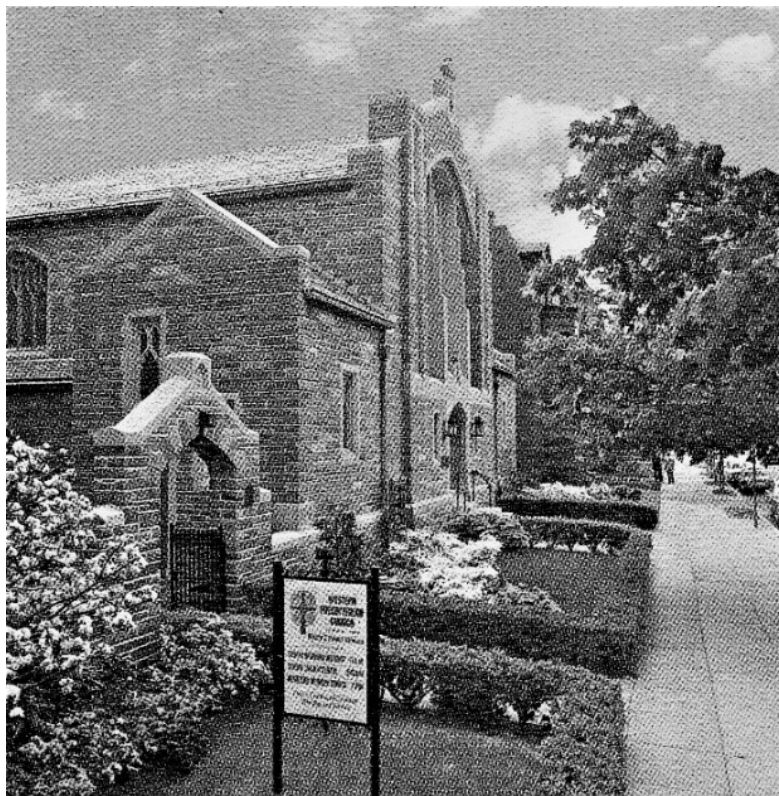


confronted by 7,000 police, 6,000 marines and 4,000 paratroopers. One-third of the protesters were arrested, ending the protest.

A year later, Alabama governor George Wallace brought his presidential campaign to Laurel, Maryland. His straightforward campaign slogan was “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” An assassination attempt occurred there and a bullet wound left Wallace paralyzed from the waist down.

In 1972 the unimaginable happened. Segregationist congressman John McMillan lost a primary election in South Carolina. For 25 years, as chairman of the House District Committee, he had systematically blocked the District of Columbia’s home rule efforts. African-Americans, who comprised almost 70% of the city’s population, immediately launched a crusade to gain political control of the city government. In December 1973 Congress ratified a bill giving self-rule to Washington, DC. This ended 99 years of Congressional oversight of city governance.<sup>144</sup> Five years later Marion Berry, an African-American community organizer and civil rights leader, was elected mayor.

Foggy Bottom, meanwhile, had been transformed. It was no longer a modest middle-class community. Now it shone as a high-rent luxury apartment district surrounding the Kennedy Center and was considered to be one of the finest residential areas in the city.<sup>145</sup> But a 1978 study by the National Urban Coalition concluded that Washington, DC was one of the worst places in the country for the displacement of poor black residents through urban revitalization efforts.



Western Church at 1906 H Street, NW circa 1975

<sup>144</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

<sup>145</sup> Sherwood, Suzanne Berry, 1978, “Foggy Bottom 1800 to 1975: A Study in the Uses of an Urban Neighborhood,” George Washington University Washington Studies No. 7, Washington, DC.

The decade ended with two more memorable public demonstrations in the city. In February 1979 thousands of tractor-riding farmers clogged the streets around the Capitol. They had come to lobby Congress for legislation that would prop up sagging crop prices. Six months later the first National March for Gay and Lesbian Rights took place on Pennsylvania Avenue. Inspired by Martin Luther King's 1963 March on Washington and galvanized by the assassination of the country's first gay elected official Harvey Milk in 1978, somewhere between 100,000 and 125,000 persons participated.

**The Church.** During the early 1970s Western Church continued to reach out to the surrounding community in new ways. The sanctuary was open every day from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for individual prayer and meditation. A number of office workers in the area (General Services Administration, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, George Washington University) were attracted by the opportunity for a quiet place in which to re-charge at mid-day. The church also invited attendees to enjoy the courtyard for a brown bag lunch or use one of the church's several pianos to relax.<sup>146</sup> The church maintained a "sidewalk ministry" in the form of a Good News Literature Center that once handed out over 1,000 New Testament Bibles in just two months. Rev. McKenzie undertook a pulpit exchange with a black church and performed joint marriage ceremonies with Catholic priests.<sup>147</sup> Around this time Western reportedly attracted its first black members.<sup>148</sup>

Not to be overlooked is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Trilla B. Young group. The festivities included a formal tea held at the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter house.

Active outreach to students at George Washington University continued and in 1972 the university completed 25 years of weekly chapel services at Western. Interestingly, around this time the Roman Catholic chaplain at GWU asked Western for permission to use its sanctuary to offer a daily noon mass to students. The Session agreed, but nothing came of it. Perhaps the Catholics proved to be less flexible than the Presbyterians.

Use of the building for classes and study purposes was also extended to Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon for three months annually between 1973 and 1989. Each year the College brought two dozen students to the nation's capital for direct exposure to politics and policymaking. In appreciation of Western's hospitality, the College donated the large carved wooden *bas-relief* art piece that hangs outside the door to the pastor's study.<sup>149</sup>

Western's collaboration with Union Methodist Episcopal and Concordia Lutheran churches increased in frequency and diversity (see Attachment 5). They had earlier merged their Sunday School classes in 1967. Now, the three churches came together for common worship services during Lent and for Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving and Christmas. They ran a summer Vacation Bible School together for a number of years. They organized student tutoring programs. They undertook joint evangelism campaigns. They participated together in the West End Layman's Group.

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<sup>146</sup> Bakshi, Rajni, 1974, "Foggy Bottom's Western Presbyterian Church is a Midday Sanctuary for Office Workers," *Washington Post*.

<sup>147</sup> Mary Lynne McKenzie, interview, November 2018.

<sup>148</sup> Gaston Paige, interview, November 2018.

<sup>149</sup> By Lewis and Clark art professor Leroy Setziol, a wood sculptor.

New financial difficulties, no doubt linked to the 1973 – 1975 recession, spurred the three churches to explore together the possibility of merger.<sup>150</sup> A three-church planning committee called the “United Council” worked through a number of specific issues, e.g., having both wine and grape juice on offer during communion. Before it was done, the Council had mobilized over 100 members from the three churches into 15 different committees. The final phase occurred in 1974, when a six-month trial period was undertaken. The February/March worship services for the three congregations were only held at Concordia, the April/May services took place at Western, and the June/July services were scheduled for Union.<sup>151</sup> At the end of this “dating period” the three congregations voted on whether or not they favored merger. While Concordia and Union did (and went on to join together), Western did not.

Why Western ultimately chose to go it alone is not clear from the records of Session and Congregational meetings at that time. Everything seemed well on track for the union of the three churches. Western’s Session approved planning committees, timetables, articles of union, and many other related details leading up to the expected merger, all without any seeming opposition. They even voted on a tentative new name for the merged churches: the “Trinity Union Church.”

Congregational meetings approved the Articles of Union and voted unanimously to set September 15, 1974 as the date for a final decision. During that month, Rev. McKenzie began his retirement after a long career, having declared his intention to do so the previous year. Presumably he felt like the merger mission had been virtually accomplished. But the congregation voted on September 15<sup>th</sup> to delay the final vote until October 20<sup>th</sup>. At that time, with McKenzie no longer the pastor and the congregation employing a secret ballot for the first time in this decision-making process, the congregation rejected the merger by a vote of 44 to 33.<sup>152</sup> Older members reported that when push came to shove, many Westerners could not bear to part with their beautiful sanctuary, which they considered to be more attractive than those of the other two churches.<sup>153</sup>

Rev. Wimberly offers insight as to why the congregation might have chosen to follow the riskier path. He notes that many of the congregational stalwarts of that time were migrants who had chosen to give up more rural lives in the hope of better prospects in facing the unknowns of the big city. Hailing from such places as the Mississippi delta, southern Illinois, western North Carolina, central Missouri and southern Virginia, they had come to Washington, DC during and immediately after World War II. Wimberly believes this common experience indicates that, at heart, they were all risk-takers. This in spite of their general conservatism in values and lifestyles. Thus, they were willing to stick with Western during this period (and the following one) in which the future sustainability of Western Church was far from clear.<sup>154</sup>

Soon afterwards the National Capital Presbytery set up a task force to examine Western’s continuing viability as a stand-alone congregation. Perhaps repeated offers to buy the church’s property by the International Monetary Fund and George Washington University had something to do with it. Ultimately the task force recommended against closing Western and urged the Presbytery

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<sup>150</sup> Between 1969 and 1974, Western had to draw each year an average of \$13,000 from savings in order to meet expenses.

<sup>151</sup> “1+1+1 = 1 But What Do You Call It?” *Washington Star-News*, February 8, 1974.

<sup>152</sup> This total of 77 votes on the church’s future suggests that Western’s membership at this time was under 100 members.

<sup>153</sup> Wimberly, personal communication, May 2019.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, Wimberly notes that he used to jokingly say that he was the pastor of a rural Presbyterian church located in the heart of the nation’s capital.

to support its continued existence. The church's trump card in resisting Presbytery pressures to close was that – although it was owned by the Presbytery as are all Presbyterian churches – Western still held the deed to its land in its possession.

Through all this turmoil of the 1970s, Western continued to carry out its long-established routines. Church organizations held bake sales, ice cream socials, fairs, teas and other fund-raisers in order to make charitable donations to foreign missions, home missionaries in North Carolina and West Virginia, and send low-income children to summer camp. Men's and women's Bible study groups offered opportunities for spiritual growth as well as social activities. One women's group specifically focused on supporting the Presbyterian home at Ingleside and regularly visited Western members who were living there. Both the Deacons and the Trilla B. Young group visited the sick and ill of the congregation. Sewers and knitters made clothes to send to the Central Union Mission and the missionaries in Appalachia. Being a good Christian required a lot of work!

#### **Financial Creativity at Western Church**

Through sheer grit, determination and no small amount of faith in God, Western Church survived two major periods of acute financial stress. The first was in the 1930s during the Great Depression when it proved impossible to sell the old church building and manse in order to pay down the mortgage on the new building. The Board of Trustees, which managed the church finances, pursued every idea it could think of to keep the threat of bank foreclosure at bay. They created the "Western Army." They engaged in aggressive non-stop fund-raising for the Building Fund, but the resulting contributions were usually little more than what was needed to meet periodic interest payments on the mortgage. They undertook periodic efforts, some successful, some not, to renegotiate lower interest rates with the bank. They received \$8,200 in loans from church members to reduce the mortgage principal and make interest charges more manageable. Small bequests from deceased church members also helped. They explored renting Fellowship Hall to GWU for use as classroom space. They looked into renting the old church building to the Civic Theater. They considered razing the old building and putting up an income-producing apartment building with bank financing. Nevertheless, they were regularly forced to "borrow" from the Building Fund to cover deficits in operational spending, an amount that accounted for 27% of the total budget in 1932. On a few occasions, they even resorted to use of benevolence funds to meet debt payments. Yet in spite of the financial pressures, they refused to sell the manse for less than full value when a low-ball offer was made by developers in 1933. Finally, the sale of the old church building in 1944 eased financial pressures. By 1955 the mortgage was paid off and the Session held a mortgage-burning ceremony.

The second period of financial crisis occurred in the 1970s as a consequence of membership losses concurrent with white migration to the suburbs (exacerbated by the Martin Luther King assassination riots of 1968), and an associated drop in pledge and offering plate income which was accentuated by the 1973-1975 recession. During this stressful period of decline at Western, Rev. McKenzie was often not paid his salary in a timely manner. This situation provoked Western's explorations of a possible merger with two other nearby churches, and also prompted the Presbytery's evaluation of Western's continued viability as a congregation. Undaunted by these prospects, Western's leaders also pursued every strategy they could think of to increase membership and to generate additional income. They explored the sale of "air rights" over the church property to the IMF. They initiated contemporary worship services on Sunday evenings. They permitted sanctuary use by the Spanish-language Church of the Good Shepherd for six months. They started Friday night coffee houses for GWU students. They rented use of the building to the Wilderness Society, the Bangladesh Association of America, a women's daily karate class, Toastmistress Club meetings, Spanish language classes, and 10 weeks of continuing education course for women organized by GWU. In fact, Western's income generation efforts became so successful that the DC government reportedly threatened to revoke Western's tax-exempt status.

At the beginning of Rev. McKenzie's ministry, no one suspected that he would be the second pastor in a row to serve the church for more than three decades. When Rev. McKenzie retired in 1974, the congregation decided to give him and his wife, Mary Lee, use of the manse until they died. It was an act of appreciation for the sacrifices the McKenzies made while the congregation struggled financially. When her father retired, Mary Lynn McKenzie states that Western was known as "moderately progressive, not as much as New York Avenue, but more so than most Presbyterian Churches at the time."<sup>155</sup> Other observers believe that Western was somewhat more centrist at the time.

Following Rev. McKenzie's retirement, Army Chaplain Col. E. C. Smith was contracted for eight months as interim pastor. He was replaced by Rev. Robert Bogenrief who served for one year as stated supply.

McKenzie's successor in 1977 and the church's 11<sup>th</sup> pastor was Rev. Robert Strain, a former marine from South Dakota who had become a fervent evangelist.<sup>156</sup> Rev. Strain's arrival at the height of the evangelical movement's rise in the U.S. led to a dramatic increase in attendance.<sup>157</sup> But although he attracted new followers to the church, the larger attendance did not translate into increased membership, which remained around 250 members during Strain's tenure. However, greater attendance did generate the benefit of increased giving. Income from offerings and open plate surged from \$54,572 in 1975 to \$98,756 in 1980, a boost of 80%. When Strain left Western in 1982, many of his followers went elsewhere and finances again declined.

Western's call to Strain was not unanimous. The congregation voted 75 against 14 to offer him the position. Strain's installation service in 1977 was a grand affair, with a large turnout and Senator Mark Hatfield giving the sermon.

Strain initially experienced a honeymoon period with rising attendance and positive comments on his performance. For example, the choir gained 17 new members.

During Strain's pastorate, benevolences constituted 10% of the annual operating budget. An initial foray into social justice matters occurred when the church began to donate funds to the Prison Fellowship, to Barber-Scotia College, and to Johnson C. Smith University. The latter two are historically black colleges in North Carolina affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. Benevolence monies were also given to the Central Union Mission and hurricane victims in the Dominican Republic. At the end of the decade, Western was hosting the daily meetings of an Alcoholics Anonymous chapter.

But there were limits to the congregation's understanding of social justice at that time. For example, when a heated discussion regarding the proposed ordination of "homosexuals" occurred in the Presbytery during 1978, Western's Session voted against the proposition.

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<sup>155</sup> Mary Lynne McKenzie, *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Strain also served as chaplain to the Washington Redskins under Coach Joe Gibbs in the early 1980s.

<sup>157</sup> Prior to coming to Western, Rev. Strain had been an associate pastor at the very large Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, which was among the most conservative congregations in the Presbytery. Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

## **1980 – 1990: City Epidemics and Western’s Progress**

**The City.** Crack cocaine became an epidemic during the 1980s in Washington, DC. Addiction was heavily concentrated in the city’s black population, especially young black males. By 1985, Washington led the nation in drug arrests. In response, the Congress approved the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 which applied stiff mandatory penalties for drug-related offenses. This prevented offenders from pleading to lesser charges. Between 1985 and 1987, police arrested one out of every four young men in the city between the ages of 18 and 29 years, most of whom were African-American.<sup>158</sup> Time in jail was becoming a rite of passage for black youth.

The city’s second epidemic was killing. Murders, often linked to the drug trade, generated 372 deaths in 1988 and a peak of 482 deaths in 1991.<sup>159</sup> Residents called for better protection, the police force was strengthened, and complaints of police abuse multiplied in the black community.

A third epidemic was HIV-AIDS. First recognized by the Center for Disease Control in 1981, by 1985 AIDS had caused 5,686 deaths nationwide. Five years later, the national total reached 18,000. Washington, DC had a particularly high incidence of AIDS, surpassing that of all 50 states. This continues to be true today.<sup>160</sup> As has been the case elsewhere in the country, the African-American population is disproportionately affected. On October 11, 1987, the 1,920 panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt were displayed over a two-block area near the Washington Monument, attracting 500,000 visitors.

However, the return of home rule to Washington, DC enabled a swift shift in the complexion of city affairs. In 1980 African-Americans comprised 70% of the city’s population but minority-owned businesses received just 7% of city contracts. Mayor Marion Berry aggressively attacked this imbalance. By 1985, some 35% of contracts went to black entrepreneurs. This shift eventually created a new group of black millionaires in the city.<sup>161</sup>

**The Church.** At Western Church, Rev. Strain reversed his view on the ordination of women in the church in 1980, citing a “change of conscience”. Although he had previously ordained women as Elders, he decided – as the result of his new interpretation of scripture -- that he could no continue the practice. However, he was willing to allow other pastors from the Presbytery to conduct such ordinations in his church.<sup>162</sup>

In February 1980, Strain was asked to explain the basis of his change of heart in a congregational meeting. By June the Session was receiving complaints about the length and format of worship, the rising noise levels and the difficulty of hearing due to spontaneous prayers. In January 1981, the Session received several letters expressing concern with Rev. Strain’s theology. In August, he asked for a dissolution of the pastoral relationship in order to take up responsibilities with the Prayer Breakfast Fellowship.

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<sup>158</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, *The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the United States: The Basics*, published February 4, 2019. <https://www.kff.org/hiv/aids/fact-sheet/the-hiv-aids-epidemic-in-the-united-states-the-basics/>

<sup>161</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

<sup>162</sup> Mary Lynne McKenzie, February 17, 1980, “Statement to the Congregation Regarding Rev. Strain’s Position on the Ordination of Women.” At the time, McKenzie, the former pastor’s daughter, was an ordained member of Session at Western Church.

In a special congregational meeting to vote on the dissolution of the relationship, unanimous approval was given in a meeting that was recorded by the Clerk of Session to have lasted just 3 minutes from start to finish (including a closing prayer)! Session minutes explain that Strain's departure was due to "a difference of opinion as to the priorities and purposes of this church." When Strain left Western in 1982, his evangelical followers went with him.<sup>163</sup> Over the next three years, the congregation lost 100 members as many of those with an interest in evangelism sought other church homes.

As Western's membership and finances deteriorated, the International Monetary Fund assumed that the church was in demise and stepped up its efforts to purchase the property. The National Capital Presbytery, which in the Presbyterian denomination holds ownership of all the churches under its care, expressed an interest in selling the high-value property in the hope of using the income to endow a strong urban ministry in DC.

In 1983, Rev. John Wimberly Jr. was called as Western's 12<sup>th</sup> pastor. Wimberly was born to politically conservative but socially progressive parents, grew up in the liberal university community of Madison, Wisconsin, and worked for three years as an Oscar Meyer meat-cutter before becoming a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Presbyterian pastor. He was a graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary and had served as an associate pastor at the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church in Bethesda before coming to Western. While there, he helped form the Presbytery's first committee on social justice. Under Rev. Wimberly, Western Church evolved into a strong advocate for social justice within the city, a defining aspect of its institutional identity which continues today.

In the written history of his 30 years at Western, Rev. Wimberly describes the church as he found it upon arrival.

"Western's membership roll consisted of 239 people. In fact, the core, active membership was closer to 50 – 70 in number. A significant number of the current members were single women...Worship was traditional. The music reflected the music director's British heritage with a preponderance of classical-style music. No attempt had been made to make the language of the service less dominated by references to God as a masculine figure. Communion was served four times a year. There was little history of political, social or economic issues being addressed from the pulpit."<sup>164</sup>

Rev. Wimberly sought to become more involved with social justice networks in the city and hoped to expand the church's work with the homeless.<sup>165</sup> To this end, he maintained the traditional worship service but offered very contemporary messages in his sermons dealing with social issues of the times from a Biblical perspective. In effect, Wimberly began spreading the "gospel of social justice." He also started a mid-day Bible study in the effort to attract people working in adjacent buildings (Pepco, IMF, World Bank, General Services Administration).<sup>166</sup> The United Korean Church of Bethesda was granted use of the sanctuary on Wednesday evenings. In an inspired moment, Wimberly invited the Ethiopian and Korean congregations using the church to join Westerners for Sunday worship on Pentecost.

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<sup>163</sup> John W. Wimberly Jr., 2012, *A Brief History of Western Presbyterian Church 1983 - 2012*, Unpublished manuscript, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, pp 5, 6, 7.

<sup>165</sup> Wimberly also served as president of the Washington, DC chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union in 2010 and continues as a member of its local board of directors.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 15.

During the 1980s Wimberly successfully undertook other initiatives.<sup>167</sup> Rev. Bill Crawford, head of Ecumenical Campus Ministry at GWU, was appointed a parish associate at Western. Rev. Gail Magruder arrived as a pastoral counselor. Gospel Light, a large congregation of expatriate Christian Ethiopians, was given an office in the church and permission to hold weekly worship services on Sunday evenings, a practice that still continues today. Sunday school was re-started, initially with a small number of children. Finally, the number of Session members was increased from 9 to 12, and the Session approved Rev. Wimberly's request that they explore the offer of the IMF to purchase their land.

It was also the time of a major milestone: a program for the homeless was started in late 1983 that would eventually become Miriam's Kitchen. At that time all of the programs serving the city's homeless were located east of the White House. An advocate for the homeless, Gene Sir Louis, urged Wimberly and the church to consider ministering to the homeless populations living west of the White House. Rev. Crawford had recently convinced GWU to allow use of the building, formerly owned by Concordia Church and recently purchased by GWU, as a women's shelter called Miriam's Place. Western arranged to use the shelter for a three-month trial period as a base from which to launch a breakfast program for the homeless. This was necessary because the congregation was still uncertain as to the need for such a program. Wimberly reports, "On October 6, 1983 some 45 homeless people were served a breakfast of eggs, grits, toast, juice and coffee with a heavy helping of love on the side. Within a week, we were serving 200."<sup>168</sup>

The meals program moved to permanent quarters in Western Church in January 1984 and was called Miriam's Kitchen in recognition of its origin at Miriam's Place. Crawford mobilized many student volunteers to raise funds and help serve meals at Miriam's Kitchen. It soon obtained 501(c)(3) licensing as a non-profit organization. Western member Nancy Kiefer was the first president of its board of directors. Some 36 years later, Miriam's Kitchen continues to operate out of Western Church, dispensing over 85,000 meals a year.



Homeless man with shopping cart full of his possessions

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<sup>167</sup> The church ended 1986 with a small cash balance for the first time in years; Session Minutes of December 1986.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.



## **1990 – 2000: Gay Rights, Foggy Bottom Gentrification, and Western Church Relocation**

**The City.** A new expression of inter-racial violence accompanied Washington, DC into the 1990s. The city's heavily Hispanic Mount Pleasant neighborhood boiled over in 1991 after the police shot a Latino resident. A strained relationship between the city's white and black police force and recent Latino immigrants in Mount Pleasant had reached a flashpoint. Quite literally, the two parties did not speak the same language. Considerable distrust enveloped both sides and led to rioting. Multiple businesses were looted as the disturbances spread out beyond Mount Pleasant. After three days, a tense peace was restored.

These events provided a sobering initiation to Sharon Pratt, who was elected mayor in December 1991. She was the first African-American woman to serve as mayor of a major U. S. city.

Two years later, nearly one million persons attended the annual National March for Gay and Lesbian Rights in DC which underscored the rapidly growing problem of HIV/AIDS across the country.

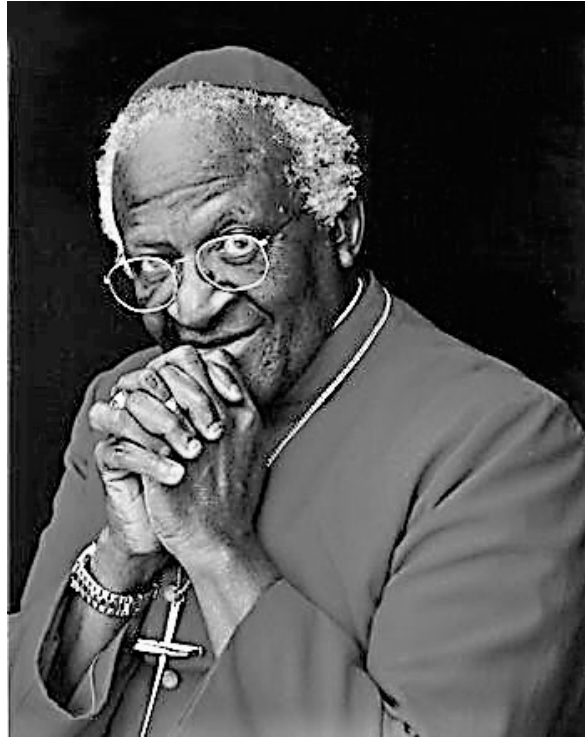
Another major demonstration targeted the city in 1995. An estimated 850,000 persons participated in the "Million Man March" organized by the Nation of Islam and various civil rights organizations. Its purpose was to "convey a vastly different picture of the Black male" and encourage self-help in overcoming the economic and social problems that have long limited opportunities for black men in the country.

During this decade, a demographic tidal wave of white residents rolled into Foggy Bottom in an overwhelming white revival. Two factors combined to force out the predominant black population and open the area to urban developers targeting an upper middle-class housing market. First, in support of the developers (and the expectation of rising property values), the Foggy Bottom Taxpayers Protective Association managed to hold off federal intervention on behalf of the poor. Second, earlier actions by the Alley Dwelling Association caused widespread displacement of low-income alley dwellers. Contributing to this process was the completion of the monolithic World Bank headquarters building at 18<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, NW in 1997.

**The Church.** The 1990s saw Western Church reach out more aggressively into the city and into the world as a social justice advocate. In DC, it began to support an after-school kids' program at the Church of the Redeemer. In 1993 Western helped to establish Project Create as an after-school art program for students, many from lower income families, at Thaddeus Stevens Elementary School, a historically African-American school located at 1050 21<sup>st</sup> Street, NW. Today Project Create continues with Western support as a much larger program based in Anacostia. The same year funding from Western enabled the creation of Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive (HIPS), an outreach support program to prostitutes at their "place of work." In 1996 the Session approved use of the church's multi-purpose room for Friday noon services by the GWU Muslim Students Association. This hospitality also continues today. In addition, Western provided significant funding to help launch the largely African-American Prince George's Community Presbyterian Church in Bowie, MD.

Western Church started to become more involved internationally. Encouraged by the presence of several Ghanaian members in the congregation, it identified a Presbyterian church in Ho, Ghana, that was trying to build a sanctuary, and helped them do it. An Ethiopian immigrant congregation was also worshipping at Western.

Then a chance encounter between a Western Session member and Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa resulted in a major happening for the city and also for the church. Rev. Tutu spoke about a school in Soweto, South Africa, in desperate need of financial assistance, and Western leaders decided to raise funds for the school. Rev. Tutu came to DC and participated in the May 1999 event. GWU donated use of its large Lisner Auditorium as the venue, well-known comedian Dick Gregory was persuaded to act as master of ceremonies, several prominent local musicians were recruited to perform *pro bono*, and 500 tickets were sold. DC mayor Anthony Williams presented Tutu with a key to the city. More than \$40,000 were raised for the St. Barnabas school in Soweto.<sup>169</sup>



Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa

During the 1990s Western continued its longstanding relationship with GWU students. Although Bill Crawford had left GWU, the connection to students was meaningful to the congregation—such that in 1993 Session created the position of Associate Pastor, with half-time devoted to campus work and half-time to the church. Even though funding was tight, the decision was considered an investment in future growth.<sup>170</sup> After considering several applicants, the congregation called Rev. Laureen Smith, who had been engaged in campus ministry at GWU since 1990. In December 1994, she became Western’s first associate pastor and first female pastor as well.

Rev. Smith strengthened the relationship between Western and GWU students in many ways. In 1996 she invented an “alternative spring break” to give more meaningful Spring Break experiences to GWU students. In 1996 she initiated an interfaith Seder at Western with GW Hillel students. In 1998 the GW Baccalaureate was held at Western and continues today.

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<sup>169</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>170</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 51.



Alternative Spring Break in Guatemala, 1994

In the second half of the 1990s events occurred that cemented Western's growing reputation as an advocate for social justice. A Task Force on Human Sexuality was set up in 1996 to encourage study and debate within the congregation on homosexuality. Later that year the Session voted to support several overtures at General Assembly aimed at creating more rights for gays and lesbians within the Presbyterian Church. At the General Assembly a year later, Western opposed an action to bar gays and lesbians from ordination within the Presbyterian Church. Soon afterwards, the church began to include a statement on full inclusiveness in each Sunday worship bulletin.<sup>171</sup> These actions made some members uncomfortable and they responded by transferring their memberships.

During his time at Western, what was perhaps Rev. Wimberly's most important contribution to the future of the church occurred during the early 1990s. This was to oversee negotiations with the International Monetary Fund which led to the sale of the church building located next to the IMF, its relocation and reconstruction at its current site at 24<sup>th</sup> Street and Virginia Avenue, NW, and the receipt of an additional \$4 million from the IMF to establish an investment fund for the church's use.<sup>172</sup> With the prospect of a low-maintenance new building and plenty of "rainy day" funds, it appeared that the church's 140 years of financial struggles might finally be over.<sup>173</sup> It would now be free to focus its efforts on becoming a vibrant, mission-oriented congregation.

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<sup>171</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>172</sup> The building previously on the site was owned by the National Association of University Women, founded in 1910 by African American rights advocate Mary Church Terrell and others. Architect William Spack, 2019 interview.

<sup>173</sup> It also helped that between 1988 and 1991 the church brought in as much as \$24,742 a year as rental income from the use of its facilities.

But in 1990 the congregation experienced a traumatic event. A former Presbyterian minister named Robert Meyers learned about the discussions underway between Western and the IMF and approached the church with a proposal. He thought the money involved in the church relocation agreement could be better used to purchase and outfit a moth-balled military hospital ship for mission use around the world.<sup>174</sup> Western's Session gave him a hearing but declined his proposal. Unwilling to take "no" for an answer, Meyers began a two-year campaign of picketing and harassment intended to pressure the church into accepting his idea. Church attendance dropped and visitors almost disappeared. In mid-1992, Western's leaders asked for a restraining order against Meyers. Not long afterwards, Meyers violated the restraining order and was brought back into court. Western took the opportunity to file for monetary damages. This created sufficient pressure for an out-of-court settlement in which no money exchanged hands but the two parties promised to leave each other alone. This unhappy episode proved to be a useful "tune-up" for the congregation in handling an even more difficult and potentially damaging conflict that began to brew and bubble over the course of the same year.

That conflict pitted Western Church against its soon-to-be neighbors in Foggy Bottom. The impending church relocation generated a major controversy over whether or not its Miriam's Kitchen program for the homeless might accompany the church to its new location. Since 1983, the church had supported various programs for the homeless and since 1984 had sponsored a daily meals program for them through Miriam's Kitchen. As the new building moved towards reality in 1991, the new neighbors were fearful of the effect that a client population of homeless congregating around the church would have on the surrounding neighbor in terms of both property values and personal security.<sup>175</sup> That conflict reached its peak in 1993-1994.

Through the Foggy Bottom Association (FBA), some community members tried in various ways to block the approval of permits necessary for the IMF to relocate the church. In 1992 the FBA sought to have the existing church building declared a historic landmark so that it couldn't be moved. This failed when a study determined that the church had nothing in its history that would qualify it for this designation. In early 1994, the DC Zoning Board ruled that feeding the homeless "is not a customary activity for a church." The church immediately appealed this decision to the Federal Court of Appeals.

The church's lawyers argued their case to the Federal Court of Appeals based on the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment (freedom of religion) and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. The case was heard just four days before the scheduled opening of Miriam's Kitchen in the new church building. The judge granted Western an injunction on the application of the Zoning Board ruling, thus allowing the church to continue Miriam's Kitchen at its new location.<sup>176</sup> The case later became a landmark decision used in support of other churches' programs for the homeless across the country.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-31.

<sup>175</sup> Stephen Knisely, undated, *Faith in Action: Understanding Development Ministries from a Christian Perspective*, Louisville, KY: Worldwide Ministries Division, General Assembly Council, Presbyterian Church (USA), p. 56.

<sup>176</sup> The Zoning Board of course appealed this decision, but a few months later Marion Berry was again elected mayor of DC and he chose to side with the homeless and withdraw the city's appeal.

<sup>177</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.



The march to the new church with Rev. Jesse Jackson

In April 17, 1994, the nationally known rights advocate Rev. Jesse Jackson preached at the old church and participated in a march from that church to the new one in a successful effort to draw national attention to this case. The congregation processed down H Street NW from the old church building to the new one. Members carried with them the pulpit Bible, hymnals, flags, and other small artifacts from the church. They held their first worship service in the new church in the basement multi-purpose room because the sanctuary had not yet been finished.

Once the congregation was worshipping comfortably in the new sanctuary, Graham Downs resigned as the church's music director in late 1995. During his 20-year tenure, Downs did much to establish the reputation for musical excellence that Western still maintains today. Importantly, he started the "Music at Noon" program which enjoyed considerable neighborhood popularity and did a lot to expand Western's name-recognition in the city. Downs was an accomplished organist who also developed a fine volunteer choir around four paid soloists. During the contentious final months of Rev. Strain's pastorate, Downs, along with sexton Gaston Paige, played an important role in providing stability and continuity to the congregation.<sup>178</sup>

Tom Beveridge, an accomplished composer and skilled choral director, replaced Downs as director of music in 1994, bringing a change to the style of music in worship so that it encouraged congregational singing. Beveridge retired in September 2018 after 24 years at Western, having developed a strong choir with a city-wide reputation for excellence.

The church's \$4 million endowment became effective in 1994 as part of the negotiated settlement with the IMF. After decades of struggling to make financial ends meet, it must have seemed like a divine windfall to many members of the congregation. One can hardly fault them if they became a

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<sup>178</sup> Wimberly, personal communication, May 21, 2019.

bit giddy at the prospect of so much money, especially since they quickly chose to share their largess with others. Whereas in 1991 and 1992 benevolence expenditures were under \$50,000 a year, in 1994 they surged to \$80,000. By 1996 benevolence spending had more than doubled to \$183,766. In 1998 benevolences of \$219,528 accounted for 29% of the budget and benefited 37 difference organizations.<sup>179</sup>

This generosity prompted some to question whether the endowment should be gradually spent out of existence in the service of mission giving, or whether it should be preserved in order to ensure good maintenance of the new building and the availability of emergency funds. This question was resolved, at least in part, when the church decided in 2000 to create a Capital Reserve Fund to provide for projected future maintenance and asset replacement needs. The Fund is currently fed by an annual contribution of \$112,000 from the endowment. This solution provides a guarantee for the long-term maintenance of the building while leaving the bulk of the endowment available for missions, Christian education and other program needs.

## ***2000 – 2010: Western’s 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Terrorism and the Great Recession***

**The City.** The new millennium began with hopeful anticipation. The former Soviet Union was fragmented and adrift. The U.S. and Russia signed agreements to reduce their numbers of nuclear weapons. China was focused inwardly on transforming itself into a market economy. South Africa had transitioned peacefully to democratic majority rule and elected Nelson Mandela as its first president. Regional hot spots in Sub-Saharan Africa seemed to be cooling. After beating Al Gore in the closest presidential election in history, George Bush appointed well-respected African-American general Colin Powell as Secretary of State.

Then the events of September 11, 2001, changed the world forever. Major acts of terrorism on U.S. soil killed 3,000 persons and left the entire country feeling vulnerable. Congress responded by quickly approving the Patriot Act, which increased law enforcement authority to conduct surveillance and collect information within the United States in cases of suspected terrorism. Law enforcement agencies at all levels were strengthened and expanded. The Department of Homeland Security was soon created to consolidate and lead the newly launched fight against terrorism. Out of necessity, individual rights to privacy were circumscribed.

The decade ended with the nation’s first African-American president, Barak Obama, in the White House and the country’s economy in the grip of the “Great Recession.”

In the nation’s capital, changes were widespread and not always for the better. During the new millennium’s first decade, the black population in DC declined by 7% as the white population surged by 18%. At the same time, a sizeable community of Ethiopian refugees arose in the city as the

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<sup>179</sup> Western Presbyterian Church, 1998, *Annual Report to the Congregation*.

consequence of a bloody war in the Horn of Africa between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998 – 2000. Somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 refugees settled in Washington, DC to establish the largest Ethiopian community outside the country.<sup>180</sup>

AIDS remained a very serious problem in the District of Columbia. In spite of three decades of public awareness-raising campaigns, the number of people with HIV/AIDS in Washington, D.C. increased by 43% between 2001 and the end of 2006. At least 3% of the city's population was estimated to have HIV/AIDS in 2009, a proportion higher than that found in West Africa.<sup>181</sup> Washington, D.C.'s rate of 128 cases per 100,000 people was the highest in the nation, almost ten times the rate for the rest of the United States of about 14 cases per 100,000 people.<sup>182</sup>

### **Western Church and Ethiopia**

Western Church has a 60-year history of relationships with Ethiopia and its people. It began in the 1960s when an Ethiopian protestant congregation was granted use of the sanctuary for its Sunday evening worship services. At the same time, Western began supporting an American missionary couple working in Ethiopia. In the mid-1980s the Gospel Light Church, a group of Ethiopian immigrant protestants led by Pastor Daniel Mekonen, was given long term use of Western's sanctuary and also an office. In 1985 Western agreed to sponsor Pastor Mekonen for U.S. citizenship. In 1994 Western helped this growing congregation to buy a building for its own church with a donation of \$15,000. In 2000, Western explored, with on-the-ground guidance from Gospel Light members in Addis Ababa, the possibility of constructing a health clinic in a small rural town. Unfortunately, local politics forced this project to shut down, although most of the funds raised for this purpose were preserved. In 2005 these funds were awarded to the Le Alem Clinic in Addis Ababa to provide free maternal and child health care to impoverished mothers.

**The Church.** All of these events were on the minds of Western's congregation as the new millennium began. In Ethiopia, Western initiated work on a health clinic project for the poor. The men's group at Western started a prison ministry in the DC Correctional Treatment Facility, helping create pre-release plans for prisoners nearing the end of their sentences. The Session voted for Western to become a "More Light" Presbyterian church as it took another step along the path of gay and lesbian rights advocacy.<sup>183</sup>

Immediately following the multiple terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, news was sketchy and rumors abounded. Hearing that the State Department would soon be a target, its staff day care center immediately moved all of their children to Western Church, which had been designated an emergency pick-up spot for parents. The same evening, Rev. Smith organized a candlelight worship service in the GWU quadrangle which attracted over 1,000 students.

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<sup>180</sup> Fernandez-Pereda, Cristina, 2008, "Little Ethiopia: A Thriving Community in D.C.," New America Media. July 6, 2008. <http://newamericamedia.org/> .

<sup>181</sup> José Vargas and Darryl Fears, "At Least 3 Percent of D.C. Resident have HIV or AIDS," *Washington Post*, March 15, 2009.

<sup>182</sup> Ellis, Kirsten H., 2008, "HIV/AIDS rate in Washington, D.C. highest among U.S. cities," *Healio Infectious Disease News*, January.

<sup>183</sup> The mission statement of More Light Presbyterian churches is "Following the risen Christ, and seeking to make the Church a true community of hospitality, the mission of More Light Presbyterians is the full participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry, and witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA)."

In 2002 the church's strategic plan was updated. This exercise produced a mission statement for the church that seemed to capture its essence:

“We are a community of believers and seekers growing together in God's spirit; empowered by our faith in God's ability to transform lives, we are an active force and passionate voice for a just and compassionate society.”

In subsequent years, the church membership got younger and injected new energy into program activities. A significant number of younger members were serving on the Session, and 71% of Western members were under the age of 55, including students who had stayed in DC to work. As Western celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2005, it was considered to have the youngest average church membership in the Presbytery.

During this decade, Paul Fiddick started the popular adult “Free Inquiry” class on Sunday mornings. The church created its first website. Shenella McGaskey was hired in 2000 as church secretary, bringing many skills and also a sense of call which have continued to the present. Scott Schenkelberg became executive director of Miriam's Kitchen; Scott strengthened Miriam's board, improved fund-raising, expanded services and gradually increased its mission focus on housing for the homeless while maintaining its longstanding meals program.

In 2009 the church celebrated Gaston Paige's 50 years of dedicated service as church sexton. He cared for the church as if it were his own house and had virtually become an “institution” within the institution. His stories of the church's earlier years formed a lively oral history of the congregation's ups and downs, and he had developed warm nurturing relationships with many of the congregation's members. When he retired in 2018 after 59 years of dedication to the church, the Session named him “Sexton Emeritus.”

At the end of 2003, Rev. Smith decided to pursue other interests, specifically the theater. Western members deeply felt her departure in 2004. The loss of Rev. Smith's unique set of talents forced a change in Western's approach to campus ministry. It also caused Western leaders to evaluate yet once again the role of associate pastor, and for the following year Rev. Laura Cunningham joined the staff as interim associate pastor. During this time the Session concluded that the position was valuable to the church and called the Rev. Carol Howard Merritt to fill it in 2005.

With the leadership of Rev. Merritt, Western shifted its longtime focus away from students on campus to give more individualized attention to GWU students worshipping at Western. Rev. Merritt's style of preaching appealed to many “under 45” members. Rev. Merritt's focus was on the younger generation, and she mentored several who had an interest in a Christian vocation. She led a class in women's spirituality, including occasional retreats.

During the first decade of the new millennium, Western increasingly employed information technology to spread the gospel. The church's website was improved, a Facebook page was created, Email “blasts” alerted members to important activities, and computer-based accounting software was used to manage the church's finances. In 2007 the church launched “Progressive Christian Voice” podcasts of weekly sermons over the internet, attracting an average of 300 downloads per week and extending the reach of Western's ministry well beyond the physical



church.<sup>184</sup> This latter experience prompted Rev. Merritt to start a blog which eventually attracted a national following.

Growing environmental consciousness spurred congregational concern for the environment. An energy audit of the church was undertaken and thermostats re-programmed for maximum efficiency. Solar panels were installed on the roof with the expectation that they would cover 5% of the church's electricity needs. Recycling of paper, plastic and glass became the norm. Most of the church's light bulbs were replaced with LED lamps. The deacons switched to the use of fair-trade coffee during the Hospitality Hour. Groups of church members participated in Potomac River clean-up days, sorting food donations at the Capital Area Food Bank, painting the interior of the women's shelter maintained by Calvary Women's Services, and also providing Calvary's clients with a Saturday night meal on a monthly basis.

Western also found itself face to face with a different form of financial challenge. In the new millennium, it had developed the habit of regularly budgeting above the level of its expected income and covering the resulting deficit out of the endowment fund. This enabled the church to support far more mission activity and pastoral leadership than it could have otherwise, and to multiply its social impact. In 2000 the Session had voted, in an effort to preserve the original principal of the endowment, to limit the draw from the Endowment to 8% of its value. However, it proved difficult for church decision-makers to adhere to this mandate. The Endowment drawdown in 2000 was 10.1% of its total value, and in 2001 it was 10.3%

Consequently, in 2005 the church treasurer informed that Session that the current 8% draw guideline on the endowment fund was no longer feasible. Session decided to cut expenses where it could and limit the contribution of the Endowment Fund to 5% of its rolling 3-year average value each year. At the end of 2007 the economy was slowing and by 2008 the "Great Recession" had arrived. The stock market fell by 54%. GDP growth retracted, unemployment rose significantly, several large investment banks went bankrupt, and housing prices crashed. The value of Western's Endowment Fund was cut in half when it went from \$5.2 million in 2007 to \$2.6 million in 2008. This forced further financial belt-tightening. One outcome was the reduction of Western's benevolences budget from \$90,000 to \$40,000 annually – representing between 4% and 6% of the total budget over the 2007 – 2012 period. But despite the pressure of the financial crisis, the Session voted not to make any changes in church staffing or staff salaries.

This financial squeeze forced Western to reconsider its financial relationship with Miriam's Kitchen. For 25 years, Western had provided Miriam's Kitchen with both financial and in-kind support each year. The in-kind support included use of office space, meeting rooms, a commercial kitchen, multi-purpose room, parking, copy machine, and the church secretary to answer the door for them and receive packages. To ease its financial pressures, Western proposed that Miriam's reimburse the church for its share of utilities consumed (electricity, gas, water). The idea of such a monetary contribution led to a more formal contractual agreement in which Miriam's Kitchen would contribute \$80,000 a year to the church.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

## **2010 – 2015: The City Gets Younger and Whiter as Western Concludes a Pastoral Era**

**The City.** The “Arab Spring” was in full bloom in 2010 – 2012. It seemed for a while that the time had come for Arab countries to transition towards democratic government. Unfortunately, this was not to be. In some cases, political instability evolved into civil war; in others it allowed new repressive regimes to take control. At the same time, the terrorism initiated on 9/11 evolved tactically and became more frequent during this decade, with major attacks in Kenya, India, Norway, Pakistan, Paris, Philippines, Turkey, and Yemen.

In 2011 the “Occupy Wall Street” movement was born and soon spread to a number of cities across the country. It was a social response to the Great Recession, and protested the growing concentration of wealth in the country. The “hegemony of the 1%” was becoming impossible to ignore.

In addition, widespread use of smart phones, internet websites, and social networking became the norm in digital communication during the 2010s. China emerged as the world’s second largest economy. Major ecological disasters occurred in Japan, where a tsunami seriously damaged two nuclear power stations, and in the Gulf of Mexico where the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and burned, releasing millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf. Concern with global warming took on a greater urgency. Internet-enabled computer hacking and cyber security became widespread and were grudgingly accepted as part of contemporary life.

Although the country’s population as a whole was aging, Washington, DC was getting younger. Between 2000 and 2010 the city’s 18- to 34-year old population had grown by roughly 37,000 persons to comprise 35% of the city’s inhabitants. In comparison, this age group makes up only 23% of the nation’s population as a whole.

These demographic dynamics prompted a rapid rise in the city’s number of rental units – particularly studio and one-bedroom apartments – affordable only by middle- or high-income households. In contrast, the number of low-income and very low-income rental units declined.<sup>186</sup> One contributing factor to this was the “New Communities Initiative,” a location-specific strategy to revitalize severely distressed subsidized housing and redevelop communities plagued by concentrated poverty, high crime, and economic segregation.<sup>187</sup> This DC government program was intended to replace sub-standard subsidized housing on a one-to-one basis. In doing so, however, the displacement of very-low income residents and the loss of 100 deeply subsidized housing units occurred as the new units were inevitably offered with smaller levels of subsidy than the old ones.<sup>188</sup> Additional homelessness resulted in some cases.

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> These were Park Morton in Ward 1, Northwest One in Ward 6, Lincoln Heights in Ward 7, and Barry Farm in Ward 8. The latter was founded by several hundred freed slaves immediately after the Civil War.

<sup>188</sup> Quadel Consulting, August 2014, “Policy Advisor’s Recommendations on the District Of Columbia’s New Communities Initiative,” Washington, DC: Quadel.

The negative consequences of the New Communities Initiative were just one manifestation of a broader trend of minority displacement in the city during this decade. Between 2000 and 2013, 40% of the District’s low-income neighborhoods experienced gentrification. This was the greatest “intensity” of gentrification for any city in the nation. This process saw more than 20,000 African Americans displaced by mainly affluent white newcomers.<sup>189</sup> A substantial white migration – driven by young white professionals – into the city was underway. Foggy Bottom became the city’s most demographically dense neighborhood with 37,000 persons per square mile, roughly equivalent to Brooklyn, NY.<sup>190</sup> It was also one of the fastest growing communities in the city at 6.8% annual growth during this decade.<sup>191</sup>

**The Church.** Western’s long-term commitment to Miriam’s Kitchen has clearly been the right decision. In response to the growing scarcity of affordable housing, Miriam’s complemented its longstanding feeding and counselling programs for the homeless with a new initiative that advocated housing for the homeless. Today Miriam’s Kitchen, with 58 permanent staff, 1,500 volunteers and over a \$3 million annual budget, has far surpassed the dreams of its founders in 1983. In 2018 it arranged permanent housing for 117 clients, connected 236 clients with mental health services and 240 clients with physical health services, and served over 87,000 nutritionally balanced meals to 200 – 300 homeless persons each day. Over the years, it has won numerous awards for excellence in non-profit management.

The Session provided additional demographic information on the congregation of Western Church in 2010. Out of 310 total members, 60% were women. The racial/ethnic breakdown of this total was 15 Asians, 15 Blacks, 5 Hispanic, and 261 Whites.<sup>192</sup> Some 14 members were not classified.

As Rev. Wimberly began to prepare the church for his announced retirement in 2012, he suggested that the Session initiate a strategic planning process – knowing that one would be required during the interim period following his departure – in the effort to reduce the time needed to transition to a new pastor. In September, the Session asked that a policy on the use of the Endowment be included in the strategic plan. However, the completed strategic plan only offered very general and idealistic guidance in its section on financial stewardship: “To strive for a balanced budget and to adhere to the guideline regarding the annual draw from the Endowment.”

Early in 2012, Rev. Merritt announced she would be leaving.

Later that year, Rev. Wimberly retired from the church after 30 years of successful transformative leadership. In appreciation, Western honored him with the title of “Pastor Emeritus.” In the history of his pastorate at Western Church that Wimberly penned following his retirement, he observes, “By 2012, the congregation was not a place where a center-right person, theologically or politically, would necessarily feel comfortable.” Its transformation from the centrist community-oriented Presbyterian church that it was for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the socially progressive, more activist church it became in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was virtually complete.

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<sup>189</sup> Shaver, Katherine, 2019, “Study: D.C.’s Gentrification ‘Intensity’ Leads U.S.,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2019, p. B-1.

<sup>190</sup> Urban Institute, 2014, “Washington, DC: Our Changing City.” [www.urban.org/features/our-changing-city](http://www.urban.org/features/our-changing-city).

<sup>191</sup> Comey, Jennifer, Chris Narducci, and Peter A. Tatian, 2010, *The State of Washington, DC Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<sup>192</sup> Minutes of the Session of Western Presbyterian Church, December 2009.



Western participants in a demonstration

Herein lies the answer to my original research question: Has social justice always been a passion of Western’s congregations, and if not, when and how did it emerge? My conclusion is that social justice concern really begins with Rev. Wimberly’s pastorate. A review of the Historical Timeline for Western Presbyterian Church that follows below on page 78 confirms this.

Social justice was continuously seeded and nurtured in the congregation by Rev. Wimberly over a 30-year period. He was, as we all are, the product of his times. In his case, this was the 1960s updating of the social gospel (see Box 6) in the context of growing political activism on behalf of civil rights, liberation theology, the anti-war movement, feminism, and anti-poverty initiatives. Rev. Wimberly led by example within and beyond the church. He was personally involved in various social justice activities launched by the Presbytery.<sup>193</sup> He has been a long-term member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chapter in Washington, DC and served as its president at one point. In his own words, he describes how he worked to bring about the social justice transformation at Western:

“Economic injustice, growing inequities between the rich and poor, a failing public education system, wasting billions of dollars on foreign wars, they were all themes I could easily connect both with the Bible and our work with the homeless. By being a biblically based call to justice that was intrinsically rooted in our work at Miriam’s, my preaching didn’t sound like a political rant.... I began to hold Wednesday night bible studies on passages related to hunger and the poor.”<sup>194</sup>

The interim period before a new pastor could be called began in January 2013, with the leadership of interim pastor Rev. Beverly Dempsey, who had worked as an investment banker in New York City before training for the ministry. She gave greater attention to empowering the Session and strengthening Western’s financial management. Another initiative made the church more visually

<sup>193</sup> Rev. Wimberly’s PhD dissertation in theology at Catholic University explored the emergence of Liberation Theology in Latin America with particular emphasis on Uruguayan theologian Juan Luis Segundo.

<sup>194</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

welcoming to the diverse newcomers in the city. The deacons undertook an assessment of what did and did not contribute to a welcoming impression within the physical environment of the church building. The building was approaching 20 years since it opened and was scheduled for re-painting; a “Welcoming Space” task force was set up to recommend changes in lighting, coloring and decoration. The result was a warmer, brighter and more visually welcoming environment.

During the same year, Rev. Jocelyn (J.C.) Cadwallader was hired as interim associate pastor. She proved to be a warm and creative pastor who experimented with new forms of worship (such as “dinner church” and a “Blue Christmas” service), initiated summer mission trips to Appalachia by church members, and encouraged reflective spiritual practices. She was also openly gay, a fact which caused a few members of the congregation to go elsewhere. At the same time, her appointment was another milestone of Christian witness in the life of the congregation and reinforced Western’s identity as an open and broadly welcoming congregation within the National Capital Presbytery.

By 2013 the church’s Treasurer was again reminding the Session that – if the endowment were to be preserved – the maximum annual draw on the endowment should be no more than 5% of the average of the last three years’ market value of the investment portfolio. At the annual congregational meeting in January 2014, some members expressed concern at the lack of a clear policy to guide the use of the endowment. Subsequently, the Session developed a draft “Endowment Management Policy” in June 2014. After several discussions and revisions, the policy was adopted in October 2014. It included the stated intent to gradually reduce budget dependency on the endowment until it reached the level of 5% in 2020. To prepare for this change, in March 2015 the Session and the Finance Committee participated in a one-day workshop on financial management and use of the endowment which was led by a consultant specialist in church financing.

These efforts failed to stem the financial leakage. In 2016 the draw on the endowment rose to 9%. In 2017 it was 8.3%. And in 2018 it soared to 12%.<sup>195</sup> At this point the goal of a 5% draw in 2020 seems unlikely to be met unless the congregation is willing to undergo a fair amount of financial trauma.

On December 31, 2018, the Endowment was valued at \$4.72 million.<sup>196</sup> It should be noted that this amount includes the infusion of \$1,075,000 proceeding from the sale of the manse in 2015. This action apparently overlooked the Session’s 2010 decision to place 50% of the manse proceeds into the Capital Reserve Fund.<sup>197</sup> If not for the large windfall from the manse sale, the Endowment would have fallen well below its original value of \$4 million for the first time in its 25-year history.

The search for a new pastor began formally in May 2014 with the submission of a Ministry Information Form (MIF) to the PCUSA. In essence, this was a position announcement prepared by the Pastoral Nominating Committee and Session. It contained some basic information on the size, makeup and finances of Western Church. Notably, the position description seemed to favor a somewhat younger person, as the years of professional experience requirement was only 5 – 10 years. In addition, the form highlighted the church’s preference for a spiritually mature, compassionate worship leader who was a compelling preacher and effective public communicator. Other characteristics listed for the ideal candidate included being organizationally astute,

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<sup>195</sup> Annual Report 2018, Western Presbyterian Church, for the Congregational Meeting on January 27, 2019.

<sup>196</sup> Western Presbyterian Church Annual Report for 2018, Finance Committee report.

<sup>197</sup> Wimberly, op. cit., p. 70.

collaborative, culturally proficient, and a strong strategic thinker. Effective interpersonal skills in building trust relationships and motivating others – both staff and church members – were also underscored.

After an extended and rewarding search, Rev. Laura Cunningham was called as Western's 13<sup>th</sup> pastor in June 2015. She is the first woman to serve as Western's senior pastor and head of staff. During her first months she introduced positive changes to the order of worship and initiated the practice of "the passing of the peace." Social justice continued as an important theme, for example, with the decision to hang a "Black Lives Matter" banner over the 24<sup>th</sup> Street entrance to the church and to host the anti-gun violence tee-shirt exhibit organized by the advocacy group "Heeding God's Call." Each tee-shirt represented a death caused by gun violence in the District of Columbia during the preceding year and carried the name, age, date of death and location of death. The tee-shirts were hung from the iron fences near the entrance to the sanctuary and attracted considerable attention from passersby.

What were the congregation's long-term expectations of their new pastor? The Ministry Information Form provides some insight in its required statement of the congregation's vision for the new ministry. Specifically, this statement says that the membership would like to rekindle the audacity that characterized its past social justice initiatives in the city as well as in Africa. To this end, it hopes to inspire members to become personally engaged in social justice and religious freedom advocacy, including efforts to combat homelessness and hunger in the community. It also registers the congregation's desire to become more inclusive and diverse in the process of expanding its membership.

Finally, the MIF proposes three specific areas as the preferred focus of the new pastor's initial efforts. First, *Community-building* is seen as greater nurturing of church members by each other and the balancing of the church's outward looking sense of mission with more inward-focused concern on the personal needs of the church community. Second, greater *generosity* within the church, in terms of time contributed as well as financial support, is a necessary input for launching creative new programs. Third, stronger *spirituality* is deemed essential if members are to motivate themselves to take on the challenges of community and generosity identified above. As stated, "what is missing, we believe, is an animating spirit that inspires us to give of ourselves (to one another and the larger world), not as an obligation or good deed, but as our grateful response to the unmerited grace of God."

As they write together the future history of Western Church, the extent to which the congregation and its new pastor are moved to engage these issues successfully, or to tackle others currently unforeseen, will only become clear with the passage of time. Nevertheless, the statements contained in the MIF provide a good starting point, as well as an historical milestone, for assessing progress through the years ahead. As we move into an unknown future, may God favor us with grace, guidance and mercy. With that, there is no imagining what we might accomplish in the years to come.

## ***Who We Are Today***

The history of Western Church suggests that our current congregation might be characterized as:

- Progressive in social and theological matters.
- Comprised of people raised in different faith traditions.
- As much social justice advocates as Presbyterians.
- A “destination church,” where a number of members commute from nearby Maryland and Virginia suburbs, although this number may be diminishing.
- A majority-women congregation where women have long played essential leadership roles.
- Privileged to enjoy relative financial security due to our endowment.
- Strong supporters of excellence in church music.
- Largely middle-class professionals with some socio-cultural diversity.
- Of different ages and with a fair number of families with children.
- A “More Light” congregation that welcomes LGBTQI members.
- A worshiping community that includes a number of college students.

## ***Beyond 2015: New Challenges Await***

As it has in every era, Western Church today faces formidable challenges. But their nature is markedly different from those it confronted in the past. Several of these are discussed briefly.

### ***1. Changing demographics***

Data tell us that the District of Columbia is becoming younger, whiter and richer. Longstanding populations of less affluent African Americans are being pushed to the margins of the city by aggressive gentrification. Remaining neighborhoods of color (e.g., parts of Anacostia) tend to be homogenous and therefore segregated *de facto*.

In Foggy Bottom, major demographic changes are underway. The overall population jumped by 30% during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It appears that the bulk of this growth was driven by the arrival of younger professionals, especially those with good incomes. Over half of Foggy Bottom residents are aged 20 – 34 years. Some 55% hold a graduate or professional degree. Average household income is \$122,064. In the process, diversity has increased. Between 1990 and 2010 the proportion of white residents fell from 82% to 74%. The share of black residents increased moderately from 5% to 8%. But the proportion of Asians grew significantly from 7% to 14% of the total. The share of Hispanics remained unchanged.<sup>198</sup> In this demographic context, Western members who live outside the District are diminishing in number. Where will the next generation of church members come from? We are currently, in 2019, taking a serious strategic look at how we might intentionally become a more diverse congregation. Will this prove to be the answer?

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<sup>198</sup> Washington DC Economic Partnership, 2015, *DC Neighborhood Profiles*.

## 2. *Changing attitudes regarding religion and spirituality*

It is not an easy time to be in the business of religion. The findings of major national surveys of religious attitudes and practices by Gallup and the Pew Research Center are sobering. The changes now underway in our country pose formidable challenges to organized religion:

- One out of five American adults is religiously unaffiliated and this group has more than doubled in the past two decades.
- Half of adults say they seldom or never attend religious services.
- Younger Americans are less religious than older ones; fully 35% of Millennials aged 18 – 33 years have no religious affiliation, vs 11% who identify with mainline Protestantism.
- The members of religious groups that are growing tend to be relatively young and getting younger, whereas those of religious groups that are shrinking tend to be relatively old and getting older.

Overall, America is becoming a less religious country in terms of its participation in religious institutions. This trend is expected to strengthen as the older generations fade away. What is driving these changes? The Pew survey suggests that many U.S. adults find religious institutions to be off-putting. Although most agree that churches perform positive functions in society, one out of every two U.S. adults expresses reservations about the behavior of religious institutions, saying they are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules, and too involved with politics. Notably, two-thirds of the religiously unaffiliated respondents hold these views. One observer believes that growing political activism by religious groups has caused widespread alienation among younger adults and contributed to the growth of active secularism as a form of personal identity.<sup>199</sup>

In the past, doubters or non-believers might have remained in organized religion because it was socially expected, and there were social consequences for not being part of the religious community. But now the numeric growth of the unaffiliated has removed many of those barriers, so that is easier for the uncertain believers to consider leaving religion. In short, a supportive social environment is now in place for those who prefer to avoid religious commitments.<sup>200</sup>

## 3. *Relevant and meaningful worship services*

The number of persons aged 18 – 29 without religious affiliation has quadrupled nationally in the past 30 years. In a digital age, is there still a place for a physical, institutional church? What constitutes meaningful worship for a millennial? Do millennials engage in religious quests? If so, do they seek spirituality as much (or more) than Christianity? Or are they hungry for techniques to manage the extraordinary stress of life in Washington, DC? Does the “good news” of the Gospel continue to hold the attraction for people that it has demonstrated across the ages? Do the Bible’s lessons for social justice still speak to the religious seekers of today? These are questions that Western is currently engaging and will probably continue to engage for some time.

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<sup>199</sup> Gerson, Michael, 2019, “Why White Evangelicals Should Panic,” Washington Post, August 30, 2019, page A-23.

<sup>200</sup> Riess, Jana, 2018, “Why millennials are really leaving religion (it’s not just politics, folks),” PBS Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, July 16, 2018.



#### *4. Balance between Investing in the future and preserving financial security*

Western is extraordinarily fortunate to have a multimillion-dollar endowment. It removes the concerns that consumed much of the Sessions' and Pastors' time and energies during Western's first 140 years. It creates space for exploration. It provides resources for experimentation. It opens up opportunities for mission and worship that would otherwise not exist. Greater intentionality in the strategic use of the endowment would help us to maximize these opportunities.

How can the endowment fund be best used to ensure the survival and growth of Western Church? Should it intentionally draw on the endowment for deficit financing, as is the current practice, in the effort to invest in the future through the hiring of additional staff or the launching of new programs? Or should upkeep of the church building and its operating systems be the foremost priority? Does the fact of having financial resources create complacency? At what point, if ever, should the church stop "investing in the future" if it fails to generate the growth that is anticipated? These questions have been debated among church members since the original "investment fund" was established.

#### *5. What does God call Western to be and to do in this new era?*

Does the congregation currently feel "called" to any particular mission? In the past, Western Church has labored with faith and determination to overcome severe financial distress. It launched a very successful program for feeding and housing the homeless in the face of strong neighborhood opposition. It helped to build new churches in Africa and Prince George's County. It championed gay rights, welcomed LGBTQI persons into the congregation, and hired an openly gay pastor. It reached out with support programs for vulnerable peoples (e.g., prostitutes, inner city schoolchildren, vulnerable women). These are notable achievements that have energized the congregation and of which the church can rightfully be proud. Western is clearly not your ordinary church.

However, virtually none of these successes has taken place in the past ten years. What stokes the congregation's passions for service and advocacy in today's world? Where do we go from here? In today's national circumstances, racism and gun violence appear to be the most pressing social issues. Western has a history of involvement with both of these issues, but these sparks of interest have yet to ignite into the flames of church-wide engagement. Perhaps these pieces are now beginning to line up.

The history of Western Church highlights the vision and commitment of long-serving pastors who led by teaching and by example. Under Rev. Dunham, evangelism was the dominant theme. Under Rev. McKenzie, nurture and support for children, youth and families moved to the fore. Under Rev. Wimberly, social justice became the watchword of the church. What will be our calling in the coming years?

## Historical Timeline for Western Presbyterian Church and Washington DC

<i>Western Presbyterian Church Event</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Washington, DC Event</i>
Elder David Wilson organizes prayer meetings in Foggy Bottom	1848	
	1849	
	1850	Irish are largest immigrant group in DC
	1851	
	1852	
Western Church worships temporarily at E & 22nd Streets	1853	17 different city newspapers are published
Church cornerstone laid on August 22 <sup>nd</sup>	1854	
WPC founded on January 13; First pastor is Rev. Thomas Haskell	1855	Washington DC is the most active slave trading depot in USA
Church tower collapses; church member expelled for forgery	1856	Industrial expansion in Foggy Bottom
Church building completed at 1911 H Street	1857	Know-Nothing Party disrupts elections, marines called out
Rev. Haskell resigns	1858	
Rev. Julius Bartlett becomes Western's second pastor	1859	
	1860	
Rev. Bartlett resigns to return to South Carolina	1861	Civil War begins
Rev. John Coombs installed; first church sexton is hired	1862	DC Emancipation Day frees city slaves; 11 black churches in DC
Church used by Union Chapel as theirs is used as Union Army hospital	1863	DC is an armed camp surrounded by 48 union forts
Furnace is installed in WPC building	1864	Washington Aqueduct provides drinking water to DC
	1865	Civil War ends
	1866	Capitol dome completed
	1867	Howard University founded; influx of newly freed slaves into the city
First church organ is purchased	1868	First blacks elected to city government
	1869	Expansion of alley dwellers in DC
	1870	Start of 700-acre westward expansion to the Mall
Church bell is purchased	1871	81% of alley dwellers are African-American
	1872	DC laws prohibit racial discrimination
	1873	Second train station constructed on the Mall
Rev. Coombs commits suicide	1874	DC to be governed by 3-person Board of Governors
Rev. David Willis chosen as pastor	1875	City canal covered over by Constitution Avenue

	<i>Western Presbyterian Church Event</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Washington, DC Event</i>
		1876	
	Rev. Willis resigns; Rev. Theodore Wynkoop is 5th pastor	1877	Frederick Douglass appointed U.S. Marshall for DC
	Sunday School classroom constructed at Western Church	1878	
	Sunday school attendance reaches 320 children	1879	
		1880	The rise of alley housing due to shortages
		1881	Large Chinatown emerges along Pennsylvania Avenue
		1882	
		1883	
	Mission projects in India, China and Middle East	1884	Washington Monument completed
	First church donation to Central Union Mission	1885	
		1886	
		1887	
		1888	
	WPC pew rents increased by 20%	1889	11% of DC population lives in alley housing
		1890	Jim Crow era begins in the South; DC receives electricity and water
		1891	Washington DC becomes increasingly segregated
		1892	230 persons lynched in USA during this year
	Rev. Wynkoop resigns	1893	Boom in black-owned businesses in DC
	Rev. Howard Innis installed as Western's sixth pastor	1894	
	Church member is expelled for adultery	1895	
	Local evangelical mission begins at 24th Street & Virginia Avenue	1896	Supreme Court affirms the practice of "separate but equal."
		1897	One out of every 12 DC residents lives in an alley
	Rev. Innis resigns	1898	City Beautiful movement launched in DC
	Rev. Gerhardt A. Wilson called as pastor; pew rents abolished	1899	Potomac is dredged to extend the Mall, create Tidal Basin & Park
	Mission at New Hampshire & H Streets is closed	1900	DC has 11 black Masonic lodges
	WPC starts newspaper and Boys Brigade	1901	
	1st woman appointed Superintendent of Sunday school	1902	McMillan Plan to end city slums & alleys; beautification
	2nd church member is expelled for adultery	1903	
	Rev. Wilson resigns; use of individual communion cups is adopted	1904	Colombia College renamed George Washington University
	Rev. George Bailey is called as pastor	1905	
	Manse is purchased at 2109 G Street, NW	1906	

Western Presbyterian Church Event	Year	Washington, DC Event
	1907	/
First "Rally Day" is held; annual budgeting begins	1908	
Rev. Bailey resigns; Rev. James Harvey Dunham installed	1909	
The practice of Pledging is introduced	1910	DC establishments set color restrictions; polio epidemic
Church forms a Temperance Committee; Boy Scout troop started	1911	
Membership surpasses 400 for the first time	1912	GWU moves to its present location in Foggy Bottom
Session visits WPC members to ask them to meet their pledges	1913	5,000 women march in DC for right to vote
	1914	Congress bans Germans from DC; Pres. Wilson segregates federal workers
	1915	Congress tries to end alley housing; bomb explodes in the Senate
Church receives a gift of \$6,000 (almost \$150,000 today)	1916	DC chapter of NAACP is large and strong
Ladies Aid Society makes and knits clothing for WWI soldiers	1917	Woodrow Wilson segregates federal workers
Rev. Dunham joins Army as a chaplain during WWI	1918	Women picket White House demanding right to vote
	1919	4-day race riot in DC; 19th Amendment passes
Rev. J. Harvey Dunham returns	1920	Realtors restrict house sales to blacks
Trilla B Young Bible Class founded at WPC	1921	Cultural growth in DC; U Street center of black social life
WPC membership peaks at 620 members	1922	Lincoln Memorial completed
TBY group raises money to help build the Central Union Mission	1923	
	1924	
Building Committee formed for a new church building	1925	KKK parade of 30,000 members
Trilla B. Young Bible Class has almost 100 members	1926	KKK again marches thousands on Pennsylvania Avenue
TBY group supports missionary couple in Kentucky	1927	
West End Citizens Association uses church for its monthly meetings	1928	
Construction begins on a new church building	1929	Stock market crashes; depression begins
	1930	Foggy Bottom redevelopment; Dept of Interior, Federal Reserve
New "Arts & Crafts" church building completed at 1906 H Street	1931	
Session initiates use of robes by pastor and choir	1932	Federal Triangle complex is constructed
Bank threatens foreclosure as mortgage payments are overdue	1933	25% of nation's workforce is jobless
Spiritual Recovery Crusade launched to counter the Depression	1934	Alley Dwelling Act leads to St. Mary's Court Project
Notice of foreclosure of old church building for debt arrears	1935	
Pastor's wife loans funds to avoid foreclosure; first manse is sold	1936	Widespread instances of police brutality against blacks

<i>Western Presbyterian Church Event</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Washington, DC Event</i>
	1937	
	1938	
"Western Army" is organized to raise funds for mortgage payments	1939	First desegregation sit-in organized in Alexandria
WPC open daily to encourage prayers for peace during WWII	1940	Nazi Germany invades Europe
Rev. Dunham resigns; USO uses old WPC building for troops	1941	Japan bombs Pearl Harbor and USA enters World War II
Rev. Stewart McKenzie arrives; manse purchased	1942	
Old church building at 1911 H Street is finally sold for \$31,000	1943	DC population peaks at 900,000 fueled by WWII economic growth
Concordia, Union & Western jointly run Vacation Bible School	1944	Housing survey finds Foggy Bottom residents in poverty
Church used for inter-racial fellowship meetings	1945	
WPC shifts from paid quartet to all volunteer choir	1946	DC laws prohibit house sales by whites to blacks
GWU begins holding weekly chapel for students at Western	1947	World Bank HQ established in DC at 1818 H Street
Concordia & Union churches join WPC for Lenten services	1948	Truman bans segregation in federal workforce
	1949	Community "residents associations" resist blacks
Flight of members to the suburbs period begins	1950	Foggy Bottom shifts from industry to luxury apartments
First Fall planning retreat for church officers is held	1951	
Western's after-worship Hospitality Hour begins	1952	
	1953	
TRY group sends 100 gift boxes to Korean missionary	1954	DC schools desegregate; GWU also desegregates the campus
Large manse purchased in Chevy Chase	1955	Urban renewal displaces 24,000 blacks in southwest DC
TBY group begins supporting a missionary couple in Thailand	1956	
Western sends 20 youth to summer church camp	1957	DC has a majority African-American population
Maxine Davis is the first woman elected to Board of Trustees	1958	
Church hires a director of Christian Ed. and Sexton Gaston Paige	1959	
Church membership is 516 persons	1960	Beginning of Latino immigration to DC
	1961	Racial segregation largely ends in DC; Kennedy Center built
	1962	Redskins are last NFL team to integrate
	1963	MLK "I have a dream" speech on the Mall; Birmingham church bomb
Session asks congregation to increase giving by 30%	1964	Washingtonians finally permitted to vote in presidential elections
	1965	
Virginia Chandler is elected Western's first woman Elder	1966	Police brutality nearly sparks a riot by blacks

	<i>Western Presbyterian Church Event</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Washington, DC Event</i>
	Western budget deficit difficulties	1967	Commissioners abolished; 9-member City Council formed
	Sunday school merger w/ Union Methodist and Concordia Lutheran	1968	MLK assassination riots in DC; Poor People's March to DC
	IMF makes first offer for purchase of the church property	1969	Black Panthers chapter established in Washington, DC
	Western forms a "Long Range Planning Committee"	1970	IMF headquarters building constructed on 19th Street
	WPC finances falter	1971	Weather Underground explodes bomb in Capitol building
	Presbytery studies Western's viability after McKenzie retirement	1972	Gov. George Wallace presidential campaign pushes segregation
	WPC explores merger with Concordia Lutheran & Union Methodist	1973	Mayor and City Council elections permitted in DC
	Rev. McKenzie retires; Western congregation votes against merger	1974	
	Presbytery committee recommends against closing WPC	1975	
	"College and Career Ministry" established at Western	1976	
	Rev. Robert Strain called as 11 <sup>th</sup> pastor	1977	
		1978	Marion Barry elected Mayor
	Strain attracts evangelicals to worship but they do not join the church	1979	DC hosts First National March for Gay & Lesbian Rights
		1980	Crack cocaine epidemic expands in black communities
	Rev. Strain resigns; Rev. Thomas Miles chosen as interim	1981	Assassination attempt wounds President Ronald Reagan
	WPC gives out bag lunches for the homeless	1982	
	Rev. John Wimberly arrives	1983	
	2 or 3 members "of color"; women's shelter "Miriam's Place"	1984	
	Ethiopians meet at church; Miriam's Kitchen begins at WPC	1985	DC leads the nation in drug arrests
	Relationship with GWU is initiated; Sunday School re-started	1986	
		1987	AIDS Memorial Quilt displayed on the Mall
	Church membership bottoms out at 185 persons	1988	
	Mission support to Sichuan Seminary in Chengdu, China begins	1989	
	Mission support to Ho, Ghana church; Rev. Laureen Smith at GW	1990	Mt. Pleasant Latino riots following police brutality
	WPC funds an after-school program at Church of the Redeemer		
	The battle over moving Miriam's Kitchen to Virginia Avenue	1991	DC murders peak at 482 killings; cocaine epidemic
		1992	
	WPC launches Project Create	1993	One million attend National March for Gay & Lesbian Rights
	Jesse Jackson supports Miriam's Kitchen; New building completed	1994	U.S. hosts soccer's World Cup with numerous games in DC
	Judge decides in favor of MK/WPC; 1st worship in the new building		
	Alternative spring break service mission for GW students begins	1995	Million Man March organized by Nation of Islam

<i>Western Presbyterian Church Event</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Washington, DC Event</i>
WPC helps create Prince George's Community Presbyterian Church	1996	
WPC becomes LGBT advocate; Muslim Student prayers at WPC	1997	World Bank HQ building is completed at 18th & H Streets
	1998	
WPC organizes Archbishop Tutu fund-raiser for Soweto school	1999	DC becomes a majority-black city
WPC is a "More Light"; congregation; hosts "Vagina Monologues"	2000	Heavy influx of Ethiopian immigrants to DC due to war with Eritrea
WPC men start "prison ministry" at DC correctional facility	2001	
"Free Inquiry" Adult Education class initiated.	2002	
	2003	
Sanctuary banners created to communicate central values	2004	
WPC 150th anniversary; 247 members; 70% under age 55 years	2005	New Communities Initiative reduces subsidized housing
Rev. Carol Howard Merritt serves as associate pastor	2006	
Western begins weekly sermon podcasts on the Internet	2007	Nancy Pelosi is first woman speaker of the House of Representatives
Members' interest in environmental protection increases	2008	Ford, GM and Chrysler ask government for billions in bailout money
WPC support for Ethiopia health clinic	2009	An estimated 3% of DC's population have HIV/AIDS
Membership surpasses 300 for the first time since mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century	2010	Gays permitted to marry in DC; Millennials are 35% of DC population
Session authorizes pastors to perform same-sex weddings	2011	
PC(USA) approves partnered gay and lesbian teaching elders		
Merritt departs and Wimberly retires	2012	Groundbreaking for National Museum of Africa-American History
Rev. JC Cadwallader hired as openly gay interim associate pastor	2013	Low-cost housing virtually disappears in DC
PC(USA) votes to allow same-gender marriages	2014	
Rev. Laura Cunningham installed as first woman senior pastor	2015	Marijuana use by adults is legalized in DC

## Senior Pastors at Western Presbyterian Church

### Elder David M. Wilson

Although not an ordained pastor, Wilson is generally acknowledged as “the “father of Western Church.” A man of great energy and Christian devotion, he left his mark on Washington, DC. Born in Maryland, he became a Presbyterian and helped organize 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church where he served as Sunday School Superintendent for 20 years. He worked as an “agent” for several Bible societies and church benevolence associations, visiting thousands of households during his lifetime to invite them to church, offer a Bible, and lead them in prayer. Wilson organized numerous prayer meetings for destitute African-American and white inhabitants of the city and three of these groups he helped to nurture into becoming Presbyterian churches. These include the 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church (the first church in the city for “colored people”), the 5<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church (later Assembly’s Church), and Western Church. He also established the first Sunday School in the city for African-American children. Always ready to visit the sick, his funeral eulogy noted that “He was everywhere where good was to be done.”

### 1855 – 1858 • Rev. Thomas Nelson Haskell



Haskell was the first pastor of Western Church and Western was his first pastorate. Born in Chautauqua, NY, he was recruited to lead the soon-to-be established Western Church after graduating from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He began to work with the informal congregation in May 1854. During his time at Western, he also served on a rotational basis as Chaplain in Congress. Haskell pastored at Western Church until he resigned on May 9, 1858 in protest over the secession policy of the state of Virginia (the church belonged to the Virginia Presbytery at the time). Haskell went on to minister in Boston, teach at the University of Wisconsin, and co-found Colorado College in 1874, a private liberal arts school that continues today with 2,000 students.

### 1859 - 1861 • Rev. Julius R. Bartlett

Bartlett became Western’s second pastor in 1859. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, he resigned his pastorate and returned to his home in South Carolina. There he ministered to the sick and wounded of both the northern and southern armies. He later worked as a missionary in Alabama before poor health forced him into retirement.



1862 – 1874 • Rev. John N. Coombs

In 1861 Coombs was installed as Western's third pastor. Previously he had been ministering to the Union Methodist Church in Baltimore. Coombs shepherded the congregation through the Civil War and was generally well-liked. He introduced various improvements in the church building, including central heating and stained-glass windows. He committed suicide in December 1874 by cutting his throat with a razor after a period of "melancholy" which was believed to have been related to his wife's long-term mental illness.

1875 - 1878 • Rev. David Wills



Western's fourth pastor was a graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, SC. His early ministry took place in several South Carolina Presbyterian churches. He then served as president of Oglethorpe University, a private liberal arts college in Atlanta, before responding to Western's call in 1875. Wills resigned in January 1878 to become a chaplain in the United States Army. He later pastored Disston Memorial Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and became a 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Mason. His funeral was held at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and he is buried in Glenwood Cemetery, Washington, DC.

1878 – 1893 • Rev. Theodore S. Wynkoop



Wynkoop came from a family of Presbyterian ministers. After graduating from Princeton Theological Seminary, he served in India as a missionary for ten years and founded a theological seminary there. Wynkoop returned to America in April 1878 to be installed as Western's fifth pastor. While at Western, he taught theology part-time at Howard University. Wynkoop resigned in 1893 to return to India as secretary of the British and North India Bible Society.

1894 – 1898 • Rev. Howard W. Ennis

Ennis joined Western Church as its sixth pastor in 1894 as a recent graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. While at Western, he established an evangelical mission at 24<sup>th</sup> Street and Virginia Avenue, NW. Four years later he left Western to pastor a church in Williamsburg, NY and subsequently transferred to the Presbytery of London, England.

1899 – 1904 • Rev. Gerhardt A. Wilson



Wilson was called to Western Church in 1899 as its seventh pastor. A graduate of Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, he had previously served a church in Mt. Holyoke, MA. Wilson modernized aspects of Western's church building, started a monthly church newspaper, and organized programs for young boys in the city. He departed in 1904 to pastor the First Presbyterian Church in Providence, RI.

1905 – 1909 • Rev. George Bailey



Born and educated in England, Bailey immigrated to the United States and acquired a law degree while pastoring in Broken Bow, Nebraska. He later served a Presbyterian church in Salt Lake City, UT and then was appointed president of Westminster College in Salt Lake City, a private liberal arts college that continues today with 2,150 students. While there, Wilson earned a PhD in psychology from Illinois Wesleyan University. He then accepted Western's call to become its eighth pastor. He was reputed to be a talented preacher and administrator during his five years at Western. During his pastorate, a manse was purchased at 21<sup>st</sup> and G Streets, NW. He left Western for a Presbyterian church in Erie, PA.

1909 – 1941 • Rev. James Harvey Dunham



Dunham was installed as Western's ninth pastor in 1909. He was a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and had previously served churches in Minneapolis and Troy, NY. He led Western for 32 years through some financially challenging periods. Due to hard times during the Great Depression, the church was unable to pay his full salary during a 9-year period. Dunham encouraged the creation of a "Women's Missionary Society" at Western which was charged with responsibilities for mission. During WWI, he took temporary leave from the church to serve as a U.S. Army chaplain. Returning to Western, he found that its neighborhood was changing from mainly residential 3-story brick houses to a mix of businesses, apartment buildings and a growing George Washington University. Dunham saw the need for a new church building and championed its construction at 1906 H Street. He resigned in 1941 due to poor health and was named *Pastor Emeritus*. Dunham died in 1943 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

1942 – 1974 • Rev. Stewart McKenzie



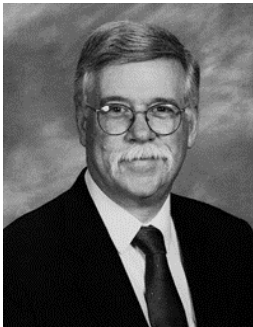
Western's tenth pastor joined Western Church during World War II and led the congregation for 32 years. McKenzie prepared for the ministry at Biblical Seminary in New York City and Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Before coming to Western, he had pastored at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Bethel Church in Maryland, and North Bend Presbyterian Church at Rocks, MD. These were Western's "golden years;" the economy was booming and the city's population was soaring during the post-war period. McKenzie's work emphasized Christian vocations and the Christian education of young people, including college students, especially as urban crime and drug-trafficking began to plague the city. McKenzie was instrumental in starting Western's programs for GWU students and more than a dozen of the youth he pastored went into Christian vocations. At retirement he was named *Pastor Emeritus*.

1977 – 1982 • Rev. Robert Strain



Following interim pastors in 1975 and 1976, Strain became Western's eleventh pastor. He was born in South Dakota, served as a marine, and then graduated from Western Theological Seminary in Michigan. A fervent evangelist, he increased church attendance at Western but drove some former members away. His opposition to the ordination of women as church officers provoked a split in the congregation which led to his resignation. Interestingly, he was recruited by Coach Joe Gibbs to serve as chaplain to the *Washington Redskins* in early 1980s. After Western, he went on to become an active participant in the world-wide prayer breakfast movement.

1983 – 2012 • Rev. John W. Wimberly Jr.



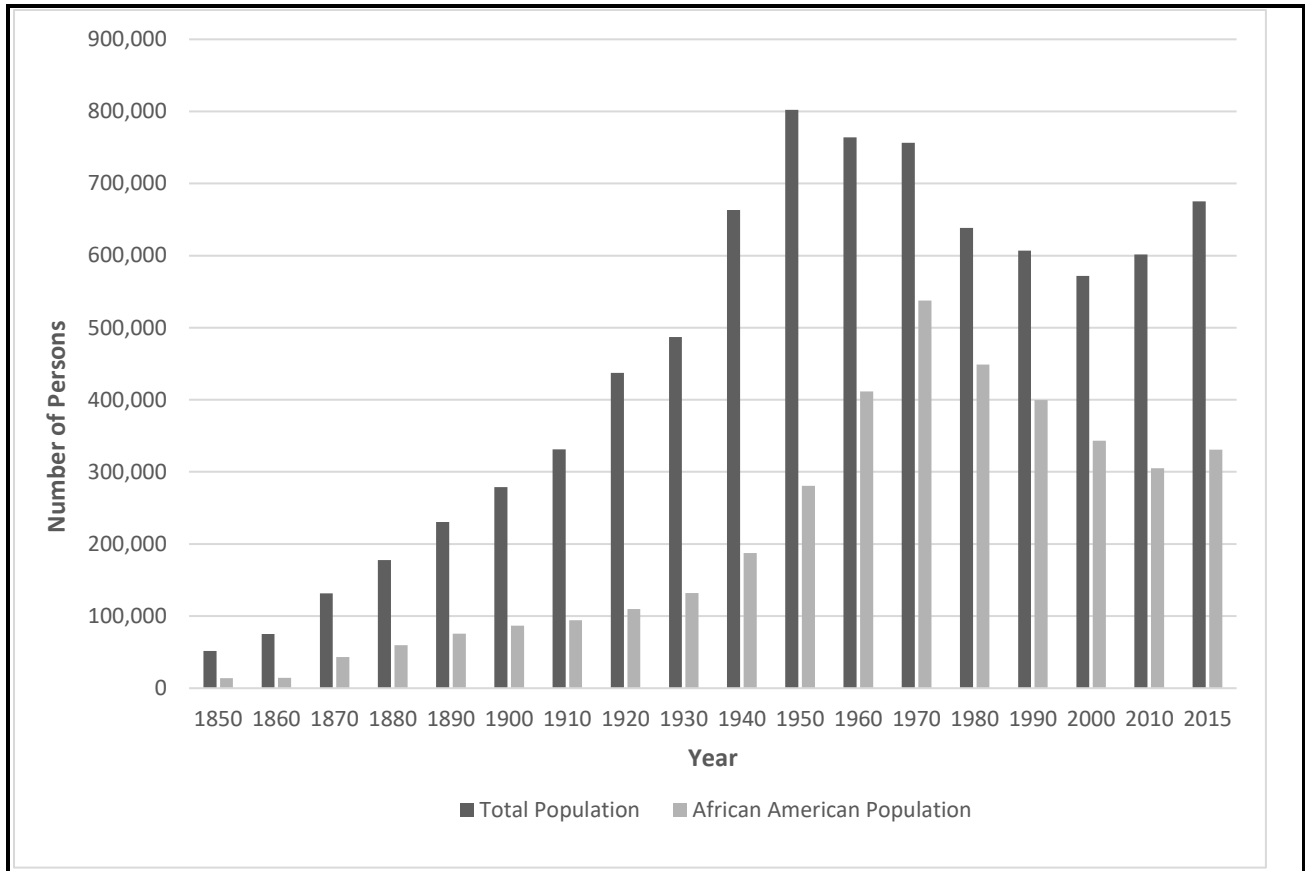
Western's twelfth pastor came from a family of Presbyterian ministers in Wisconsin. Before being called to the ministry, he worked as a meat cutter in an Oscar Meyer factory. He graduated from McCormick Seminary and served as associate pastor at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, MD before being called to Western in 1983. During his 30 years at the church, Wimberly injected a strong concern with social justice into congregational life and mission. LGBT worshippers were welcomed, women and young people were offered leadership roles in the church, and mission partnerships were forged in several African countries. Wimberly was also instrumental in negotiating the sale of the church's property at 1906 H Street with the neighboring International Monetary Fund in exchange for rebuilding the church at its current 2401 Virginia Avenue location and providing it with a \$4 million endowment fund. During his tenure, Wimberly also completed a PhD in theology and an Executive MBA program. Upon retirement, the Session named him *Pastor Emeritus*. Afterwards, Wimberly worked across the nation as a church management consultant to various denominations.

2015 • Rev. Laura Cunningham

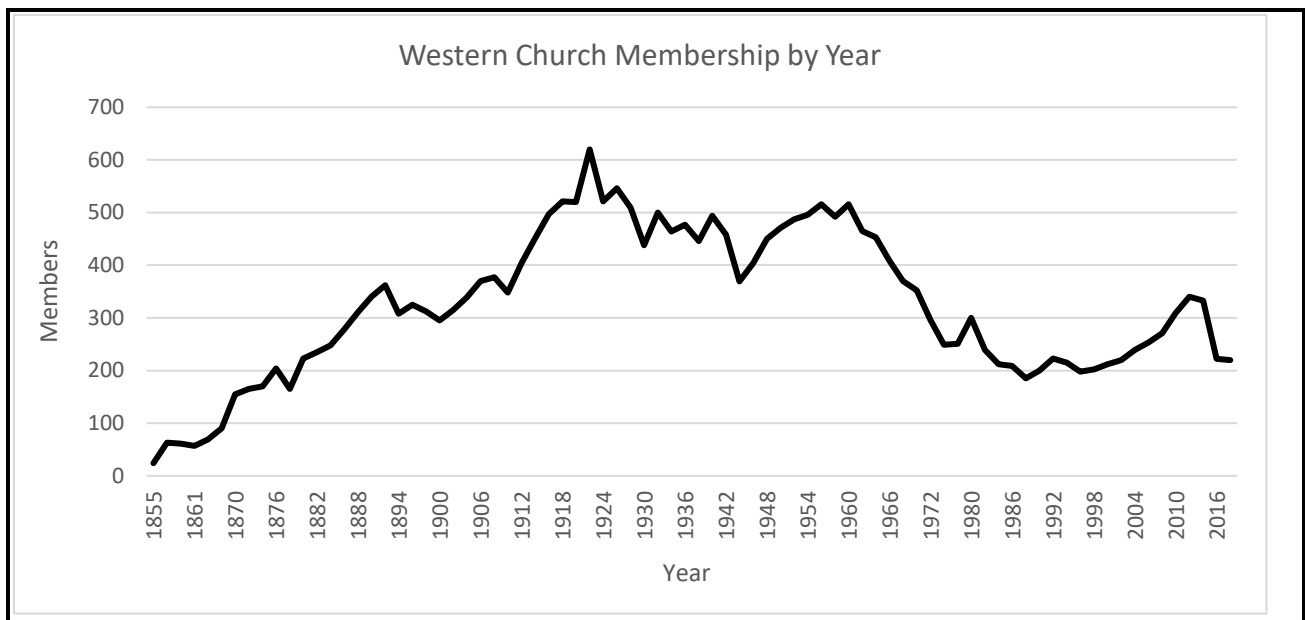


Western Church called Cunningham as its thirteenth – and first woman – pastor in 2015. Born in Atlanta, a graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary with a MDiv and a DMin, she came to Western from a pastorate at Naurashaun Presbyterian Church in Pearl River, New York. She brings a broad range of skills and experiences in worship innovation, youth ministry, Christian education, campus ministry, spiritual formation, and church management acquired through multiple assignments with churches in Northern Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. These include a nine-month term as an Interim Associate Pastor with Western Presbyterian Church in 2004 – 2005.

### Total Population and Black Population in Washington, DC by Decade



Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census



Source: Minutes of Session, end-of-year reports to the denomination

### Census Data for Foggy Bottom Neighborhood

Based on U.S. census tracts no. 56, 57.1 and 57.2 (later renumbered as 108) which cover Foggy Bottom almost exactly.

Year:	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Total population	15,750	10,580	13,102	9,449	9,830	10,244	13,164
Change in population over decade	--10%	--33%	+24%	--28%	+4%	+4.2%	+28.5%
Percent white	65%	89%	93%	90%	82%	75%	74%
Percent black	34%	8%	3%	4%	5%	6%	8%
Percent Hispanic	0%	1%	1%	4%	5%	5%	5%
Percent Asian	1%	2%	3%	3%	7%	14%	13%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

### Timeline of Collaboration among Western, Union Methodist and Concordia Lutheran Churches

1901	Western invites Union Methodist to participate in a joint Thanksgiving worship service
1902	Pulpit exchange with Union Methodist
1905	Joint Thanksgiving service with Union Methodist becomes an annual event until at least 1950
1923	Western holds joint memorial service for President Harding with Union Methodist
1943	Joint Thanksgiving service with Union Methodist expanded to include Concordia Lutheran Church
1945	Western, Union Methodist and Concordia Lutheran together organize Daily Vacation Bible School
1947	Three-church collaboration in Daily Vacation Bible School continues until 1951
	Representatives of the 3 churches explore coordinated evangelism campaign in Foggy Bottom
1948	Committee on Inter-Church Activities explores opportunities for collaboration with neighbor churches
1949	The 3 churches hold joint Wednesday evening worship services during Lent
1950	The 3 churches conduct a neighborhood religious census and evangelistic visitations
	The 3 churches organize a weekend "West End Community Bible Conference"
1959	The 3 churches jointly produce an evangelism brochure aimed at Foggy Bottom and the West End
1967	The 3 churches hold joint Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve worship services
1968	Western, Union Methodist and Concordia Lutheran agree to merge their Sunday School programs
	The 3 churches engage in pulpit exchanges
1969	Committee on Inter-Church Cooperation established
	Western joins Union Methodist in sponsoring an after-school tutoring program
	Following a trial period, the 3 churches agree to permanently merge their Sunday School programs
1970	Session appoints 2 Elders to a 3-church Committee on Inter-Church Union
	The 3 churches hold choir exchanges
	Session approves merger with Union Methodist and Concordia Lutheran as a Western objective
1973	The 3 churches hold pulpit exchanges
	The 3 churches agree to joint summer worship services, one month at each church
	September - Congregational meeting at Western votes 48 to 33 in favor of 3-church merger
	October - Pastors from the 3 churches meet to discuss a timetable for merger
1974	January – Initial draft plan for 3-church merger is completed and approved by Western Session
	January 27 – Plan for a "University Community Church" is approved by Western members 73 to 7
	June – Proposed "Articles of Union" approved by Western Session and forwarded to Presbytery
	June- Trial merger of 3 churches in rotating joint worship services approved for June, July and August
	July – The period of the trial merger is extended until October 1 <sup>st</sup>
	July – Congregation unanimously votes to hold vote on formal Articles of Union on September 15 <sup>th</sup>
	Sept 15 – Congregation votes to extend trial period to October 27 <sup>th</sup> and hold final vote on October 20
	October 20 – In secret ballot voting, congregation votes down proposed merger: 33 yes; 44 no
	November – Two Session members resign; Session requests Presbytery permission to call new pastor and take out a \$100,000 mortgage on its building in order to stay financially afloat. Union Methodist and Concordia Lutheran vote to merge on their own.

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