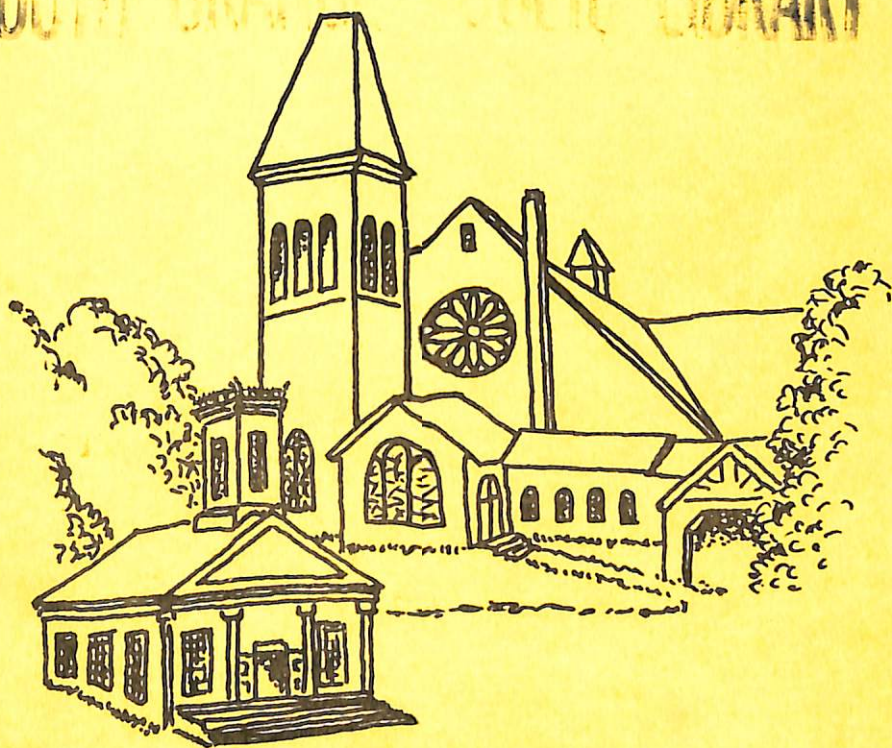


V.E.-N.J.-South Orange  
c.1 Maplewood-Churches

# A HISTORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN AND TRINITY CHURCH

SOUTH ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

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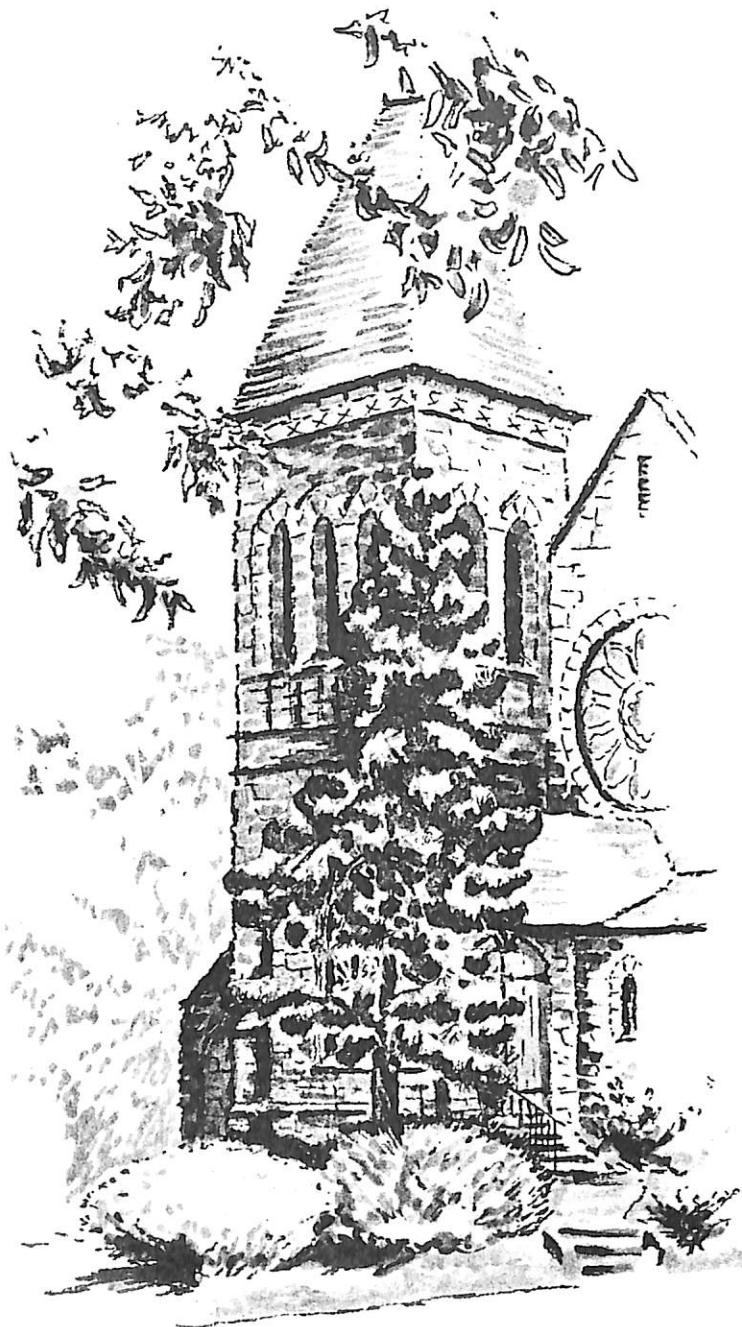


150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
1831-1981

DEDICATED

TO THOSE HUNDREDS OF MEMBERS  
NOT NAMED IN THIS BOOK  
WHO HAVE LOVED AND SERVED  
THEIR CHURCH.





**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN  
AND TRINITY CHURCH**  
South Orange, New Jersey

## A HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH THE SETTING

In 1665 a group of enterprising and deeply religious Christians left their homes in Milford and Branford, Connecticut, sailed down to what is now Newark, New Jersey, and settled there. The two Connecticut towns had originally permitted only church members to vote on civil matters but later this privilege was extended to non-communicants. That was much too democratic for the stricter church members, so they left "determined to continue the noble experiment of a Bible commonwealth".

The location they chose was an excellent one. It offered fine woodlands, broad fertile areas for farmlands and pastures, and a waterfront for easy transportation. In 1667 the settlers bought from the Indians land extending from the Passaic River to the foot of the great mountain in Watchung. They intended to make wise use of the rich land to which the Lord had led them. This was a nearly as homogeneous a group of settlers as one could ever hope to find. They were of one nationality, one religion and one purpose. They all expected to work hard. They did.

In 1678, eleven years after the original land purchase, the population of the colony had increased from two hundred to almost four hundred. That year the Newarkers bought a second piece of the good earth which included land to the top of the mountain, encompassing

what is now parts of Orange, West Orange, South Orange, Newark, Bloomfield, Belleville and Montclair.

The families which moved to these outlying districts continued to attend church in Newark, in good weather and bad, torrid summers and freezing winters, on horseback or in wagons, over poor roads or no roads at all.

By 1718 there were enough people in the more remote sections to establish "The Mountain Society" with the purpose of seeking a more convenient church home. In 1719, fifty-three years after their predecessors first came to Newark, they built the First Presbyterian Church of Orange, a small frame building on the corner of Main and Day Streets.

## THE BEGINNINGS

1831 - 1856

One hundred and twelve years later, a daughter church, the First Presbyterian Church in South Orange, was established when, on April 5, 1831, a group of the male inhabitants of the small village of South Orange met to form a new church. These villagers, farmers for the most part, belonged to the Old First Church in Newark, the First Church in Orange, and the Springfield Presbyterian Church. After some discussion, the new church was organized on September 8th of that year with twenty-nine names listed as charter members of the First Presbyterian Church in South Orange. Familiar names of families long identified with our village were found on this list of charter members. Four names in particular - Ball, Hughes, Taylor and Tillou are still identified with our community.

About this time controversies began to develop within the Presbyterian Church USA over doctrine and church government. The more conservative side was called the "Old School", the more liberal side the "New School". The New School men favored a cooperative Plan of Union between Presbyterian and Congregational Churches and supported the several newly-established interdenominational societies which were created to meet the church's missionary zeal on the American frontier and in other countries around the world. These societies included the American Bible Society, the Sunday School Union, the American Home Missionary Society, and the American Tract

Society. The New School also supported new trends in theology and doctrine which had been advanced from early in the century. The Old School, on the other hand, favored a stricter Calvinism and less interdenominational cooperation. In the midst of all this controversy, First Church in South Orange sided with the New School party.

It was no easy thing for these sons of Calvin and Knox in our community to get free of the mother church in Orange and a struggle for some years followed before this was successful. Then for several years meetings were held on the second floor of the Columbian School while the possibility of a church building was debated.

Not until 1840 was it decided that it was time to build, although a pastor was called in 1836. Plans for the church were discussed with enthusiasm and eventually a rectangular wooden building was constructed in 1842 on the "Point Lot" between South Orange and Irvington Avenues where the present church stands. This first building had eighty pews, two windows and a door in front and a false door in the rear. Behind the church there were horse sheds and hitching posts. No provision was made for heat and going to church in the winter was a test of real endurance. There were no cushions on the pews and no carpet on the floors.

The gradual growth of the village over a period of twenty years convinced the members that the church was too small and they felt it was necessary to enlarge the building. It was voted to saw the church in two in the

middle and move the rear portion of the church back 15 feet. Fortunately this vote was rescinded before this move was made.

At this period in the church's history we find that the Session took a much greater responsibility for the morals and conduct of the members than in the present day. One man was excommunicated from the church because he believed in "universal salvation". Another was crossed off the rolls because it was discovered that he was engaging in "swindling, lying, stealing and slander". Still another was put out of the church for "swearing at his wife". The members of the Session even voted "to make all practical exertion to secure the purest wine to the exclusion of the fictitious liquors". The Trustees promised in their oath of office that they had "an acquaintance with experiential religion".

By 1843 the Session had adopted a systematic plan of benevolence giving. This plan sought to aid financially some of those newly-established volunteer societies mentioned earlier.

## THE CEMETERY

Early in the life of our church it was felt that a burying ground was needed for the parishioners. In 1848 the Trustees of the Church acquired from one Sarah Pierce a tract of land fronting on Valley Street and extending back as far as the river. Whether because the rear portion was deemed too subject to

flooding or because it was felt that all the property was not needed, the rear portion between the Morris and Essex Railroad and the river was very shortly afterward conveyed to Daniel F. Ball.

Before too long it became apparent that more ground was needed, and in 1862 the adjoining property along Valley Street to the north was acquired from Abijah F. Tillou and his wife, Pamela. The two parcels together extended about 300 feet along Valley Street and lay between Valley Street and the railroad. In 1863 a cemetery association was organized named "The South Orange Cemetery", and it took over the management and control of the cemetery from that time on.

In more recent times the Village of South Orange decided to convert the cemetery into a public park. To cooperate with the Village to that end our church conveyed whatever legal title remained in it to the Village in June of 1964. Shortly thereafter the Village took the necessary legal steps required by State law to foreclose possible claims by lot owners and established Memorial Park. A handsome monument bears this inscription: "This Park was dedicated in 1971 to the memory of the villagers, veterans and citizens interred in the South Orange Cemetery", and lists the names of persons whose remains lie there.

## THE SECOND QUARTER CENTURY

1856 - 1881

As the early 1860s came, we first hear of a ladies organization in the church and in 1872 the Missionary and Parochial Society was founded. For many years this was a very active group accepting assignments of work from the Boards of National and Foreign Missions in New York.

The church during these years was financed through the selling of pews to members. Church support came primarily from these annuities which were increased from time to time as expenses increased. By 1880 the population of the village had greatly increased with the railroad bringing many business men who resided in South Orange and commuted daily to the city. The Trustees felt the need of a more attractive church building and the congregation then decided to build one of stone. However, a series of difficulties beset them. These had to be faced as they arose. The first architect proved unsatisfactory. A new firm was employed, but it was necessary to pay the former architect according to the contract. Then the bank containing the Building Fund failed, and only a portion of the fund was recovered. After the construction of a new building was well under way, the northeast gable collapsed and had to be rebuilt with buttresses to support it. The building was finally completed in 1881.

The original organ, as installed in this building, was an 18-stop mechanical action

instrument, dependent upon a water-powered motor for its winding. It was built by L.C. Harrison, successor to the famous Henry Erben, whose instruments rank high in the New York School of organ building. Graced with an elegant case with visible case pipes, it was installed in the arch of the chancel, where it made a dramatic musical statement that proclaimed its importance in worship. The Harrison served the congregation for approximately sixty years, until World War II, and it is probable that it would have served longer had not the boiler for the present heating system been installed beneath it about 1940, creating a climate unsympathetic to the action.

While the question of slavery and the ensuing Civil War must have been a topic of concern for most Christians, no mention is made of First Church's response until 1871 when one of the regular benevolence programs was to aid the "Freedmen". This financial aid continued for many years thereafter.

Three years later, in 1874, the church began to give support to a mission Sunday School in Vailsburg. The church school became a chapel, with First Church providing a superintendent for the school and a supply minister for the preaching and mid-week prayer services.

The middle of the 19th Century was a period of tremendous increase in population everywhere in the United States. Immigrants poured in by the thousands and what were now the "suburbs" developed rapidly. The new residents came from our own cities; and also from all over Europe. In this locality the newcomers

were apt to be German, Irish or Italian. A variety of Christian denominations now worshipped in South Orange.

Between 1859 and 1931 most of the handsome structures we now see were erected. Holy Communion Episcopal Church began its present sanctuary in 1859; St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (now part of Seton Hall University) was founded in 1892. The building which houses the South Orange-Vailsburg Methodist Church was dedicated in 1902. The First Baptist Church completed its present sanctuary in 1913. St. Mary's, the first Catholic Church in South Orange (except for the chapel at Seton Hall which had been used by all Catholic villagers), was erected in 1886 and in 1939 was replaced by the present Gothic structure, Our Lady of Sorrows.

## THE NEXT PERIOD

1881 - 1935

Through the 1880s a variety of projects was undertaken by First Church including a collection for the relief of the victims of the Johnstown flood. The continued support of various Presbyterian mission projects and the encouraging of evangelistic services, including the famous Moody-Sankey meetings held in Orange in September 1885.

Although the Presbyterians of the village seemed to have settled comfortably in their beautiful house of worship, after a period

of time there was dissatisfaction displayed over the administration of one of the pastors so that in 1892 Presbytery authorized the formation of a new church called Trinity Presbyterian Church. As a result a building was erected at the corner of South Orange Avenue and Grove Road. A manse was built next to the church and was occupied by the pastors of this church and later by the pastors of the united churches until 1954.

## FIRST CHURCH

1892 - 1935

In 1894-95 a Parish House was added to The First Presbyterian Church's stone structure at the cost of \$10,000. It was later used as a gymnasium and an additional sanctuary on the festival days. Above the gymnasium rooms were added. These served as meeting rooms for the boards and a study for the pastor. The church sanctuary was still used for a Sunday School at that time.

During the late 1890s and early 1900s the Session began to make some reforms in the church's worship practice. For example, there was an expressed concern for greater freedom in prayer at the weekday services. There were those who felt that the congregation was too willing to let the pastor pray for them instead of praying themselves.

Until 1908 the Lord's Supper was celebrated only at special afternoon services. In that

year the Session approved its celebration during morning worship. Up to the mid-1890s wine was used for the sacrament. However, with the temperance movement growing throughout the country, the Session in 1894 voted to use unfermented wine.

Early in 1903 the pastor suggested that the church employ a quartet of its own young people to provide music for worship. While there is no mention made of a volunteer choir, we do know that through the years paid singers were continuously retained. Two extant choir programs from the Spring of 1906 indicate that there was a performance of John Stainer's "The Crucifixion" as well as a concert of "familiar songs".

The Women's Auxiliary of 1901 was organized in 1894 as the Ladies Aid Society and functioned in matters relating to the church and to local community aid. In addition to the above-mentioned institutions, they gave aid to the poor families of the town, proffered clothing and money to widows with children and extended a warm welcome to Village newcomers. Their sales of "dainty and useful articles" in brightly decorated wooden booths were held yearly at the Church in a two evening stand and resulted in amazing profits. Coupled with a yearly strawberry festival, socials and concerts, they accomplished all they set out to do for Church and Society. The Trustees kept running out of funds and relied upon the earning power of their clever women to make the payments on the mortgage, tune the pianos, provide new carpets for the parlors, new lights for choir and lectern and even provide \$3000 to



redecorate the Church in 1911. All this the women did willingly but just as faithfully fulfilled their feeling of obligation toward the community--a commendable achievement.

Sewing meetings of the Missionary and Parochial Society, originally two a month, increased in number to keep up with the work. The completed articles were packed in boxes or barrels and shipped to mission schools in Arizona, New Mexico and the South. A typical list of contents is found in this 1893 count of 20 aprons, 20 chemises, 30 drawers, 25 sheets, 25 night dresses, skirts, towels, etc.--and a few gifts for the teachers--all carefully handmade or laboriously machine stitched. In addition to the many sewing meetings, there were two devotional services a month in the chapel and two general meetings with programs related to missionaries or study of foreign countries. Of special note is the entry that at the twenty-fifth anniversary of this society in 1897 more than \$10,000 had been spent in their work.

It is equally refreshing to read of their early establishment of a policy of outreach for our Church. In 1904 it was voted to give one-third of all profits from the fairs to charity rather than to arbitrary Christmas giving and the trend continued vigorously through every decade.

As early as 1896, according to handwritten Minutes from the records of First Church there were sixteen officers and teachers of the Sunday School responding to roll call at monthly meetings. At this time a Sunday School Association was formed in the country to which

\$3 was pledged by the Sunday School. A letter from Presbyterian Board of Education led to a motion that a special collection be taken for the benefit of that Board. Another special collection was authorized for an Indian School in which the Sunday School had an interest. At a special meeting the appeal of the Board of Home Missions was considered. Fifty Dollars was appropriated from the Sunday School Treasury for this cause. Fifty Dollars was sent as a Christmas offering from a special collection to aid the Board of Foreign Missions. A friend offered to supply new hymn books for the Sunday School--an offer accepted with thanks. A committee of superintendents, secretary and librarian was deciding on lesson helps and publications to be ordered for the Sunday School.

Before 1900 it appears that the Sunday School functioned with an organization rather apart from that of the church itself. Monthly meetings were held and officers elected annually. The officers included a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, a treasurer, a librarian and sometimes an assistant librarian. There were scheduled activities which seem to have been established over a long period of time. Rally Day occurred in the Fall and Children's Day took place in June. The Infant Class had a Picnic Day. The Christmas Entertainment was in the hands of two committees appointed by the Superintendent--Finance and Entertainment. It was scheduled on a weekday night and sometimes each teacher was responsible for finding a part for his or her class to contribute to the entertainment.

In 1906 it was voted to present Bibles for

scholars graduating from Primary Department into Junior Department. Trustees of the church agreed to assume the expense of the Sunday School to the amount of \$150 per year. In return the Sunday School devoted one collection each month to church support.

As the church moved into the twentieth century and South Orange began to grow, First Church gave leadership in meeting a variety of community concerns. In 1910 the churches of South Orange joined together in establishing the Inter-Church Civic League. The purpose of this organization was to work with the local government and citizens in creating a better community. Among the matters in which they were involved from 1910 to 1912 was concern for better trolley service, more reliable fire protection and an all-out campaign to control the sale of alcoholic beverages. With regard to the latter, the pastor of First Church, David Burrell, and a member of the congregation, George Badger, received several life-threatening letters because of their strong leadership in anti-saloon activity. A similar position was later taken by the Session in the late twenties when it also expressed opposition to opening a motion picture house on Sundays.

Through the years prior to World War I, First Church continued to serve the community in a variety of ways. Special evangelistic services were held and mission work among the Italians was begun in 1914. In 1917 the Session passed a resolution encouraging the practice of economy, thrift and sacrifice during the World War.

The war years catch our notice as, in 1917-18, the women labored to pack Christmas boxes for the Church boys in service, knitted garments for the soldiers, joined war saving stamp drives, made pillows for Camp Dix, battled the flu epidemic and struggled with the rising costs by cancelling the accustomed dinners and social functions--but at the same time they preserved their community and mission interests.

"The Bible School" also collected funds for missionary work in 1917 sending half to New York Headquarters for foreign missions. The remaining half was earmarked for China Inland Mission where Dorothy Buegler, a former member of the school, was assigned as a missionary. Through the years, support of her work there and in Thailand continued, with Miss Buegler assisting in Vacation Bible School and speaking to the children and other groups in the church whenever she was home on furlough. For many years the church counted her among their special missionaries and the women continued their interest and support of Miss Buegler through her retirement and until her death in the mid 1970s.

A strong emphasis on missions runs all through the records of the "Sunday School," "Bible School" (1914) and "Sabbath School" (1920), regardless of the name changes. Mission education was fostered through special bulletins, posters and the establishment in 1914 of a "Missionary Library". The Christmas Party often included the distribution of food and toys for the needy. In 1917 \$50 (the cost of candy--unavailable due to the sugar shortage) was sent to the Armenian and Syrian Relief Fund, and in 1919 there was a special

offering for Near East Relief.

Participation in the school was encouraged by a reward system for attendance. As early as 1910 elaborate regulations were detailed to determine "banner classes". They must have done something right, as a complaint was registered in 1916 that "at times the Bible School found 90 persons crowded into a room built to house only 30". In 1920 the school numbered 346 with a grand total of 451 including officers, teachers, Home Department and Cradle Roll. In 1922 the average attendance was 324.

The church responded by adding six more rooms in 1921-1922. Four were added along the side of the gymnasium. The other two were used as church parlors. In 1928 a new educational building was erected at a cost of about \$120,000. This structure also holds the church offices and houses the choirs and library. It is a three-story fireproof building with large assembly rooms on each floor and classrooms to accommodate small groups of twelve to fifteen children. (Ultimately the pews and pulpit furnishings from Trinity Church were installed in the Chapel.)

Through the years school activities included participation in the "June Walk" (a procession of Sunday School children through the streets of the Village), an annual Rally Day in the Fall, "Children's Day" in June, "Temperance Sunday", "Mission Day", and an annual dinner. There were also classes for adults, teacher training sessions, attendance at "Summer School of Sunday School Methods" in Asbury Park, and delegates sent

to the State Sunday School Convention. In 1919 First Church hosted the Essex County Sunday School Convention.

During this time the church continued to enlarge its outreach to the community and the world. Local groups including the Boy Scouts and later, Girl Scouts, the Home and School Association, and the YMCA used its facilities. Contributions were made for work with drug addicts. In 1925 both a home and foreign missionary were "adopted" with numbers increasing to five in the mid-fifties, the practice continuing through the sixties.

By the mid-1920s reform in worship again became a concern of the Session. In 1924 the Music Committee was given the responsibility of securing a professional musician who, under the direction of the Committee, would be responsible for selecting other musicians and for developing the musical portions of the church's worship. By 1929 the Session expressed the necessity of having musicians who "exemplified good Christian character".

For those who thought that the King James Version of the Bible had been read in all Protestant churches since its publication in 1611, it is interesting to note that in 1928 the Session of First Church gave it a three-month trial to determine whether the congregation liked it as well as the American Standard Version (1901), which they had been using.

## THE TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SOUTH ORANGE

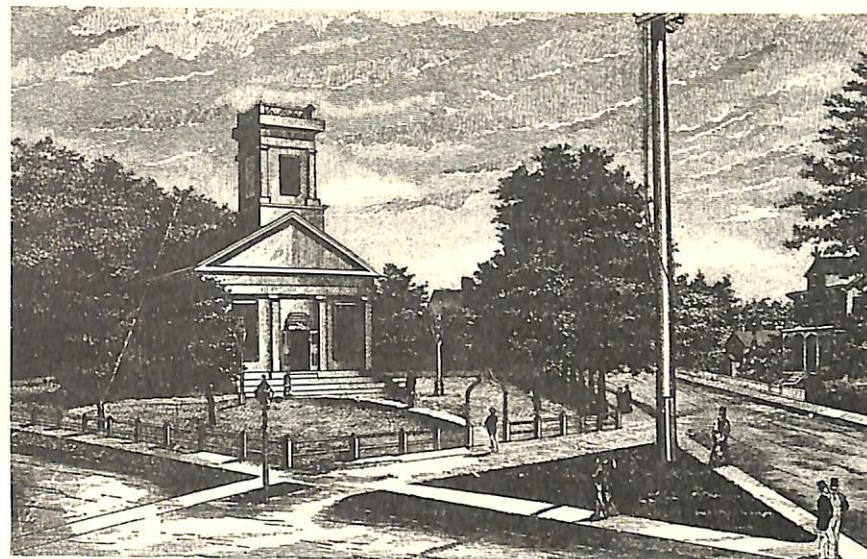
1892 - 1935

Trinity Presbyterian Church was formed on January 27, 1892 when some 68 persons ( 65 from the First Church, South Orange, plus 3 others) met in the old Academy Building on Prospect Street in South Orange. The church immediately began to reach out, taking over the mission work in Vailsburg which was formerly under the care of First Church. During the first few months various pastors filled the pulpit.

Among the early undertakings of Trinity was formation of the Presbyterian Foreign Missionary Society. Church membership grew by the end of 1892 to 117 members.

By November of 1892 Trinity had moved into a new building at the corner of Grove Road and South Orange Avenue, which was dedicated in April of 1893. Organizationally, the church became a part of Orange Valley Presbytery. Setting an informal tone, the church boards were selected by informal ballot, with no nominating committees in charge.

Stressing what we once called "Outreach" Trinity set up quarterly benevolence concerns, including education. Communion was held quarterly and when new members were added they were examined for their "knowledge and piety". In early 1896 Trinity set up a youth program.

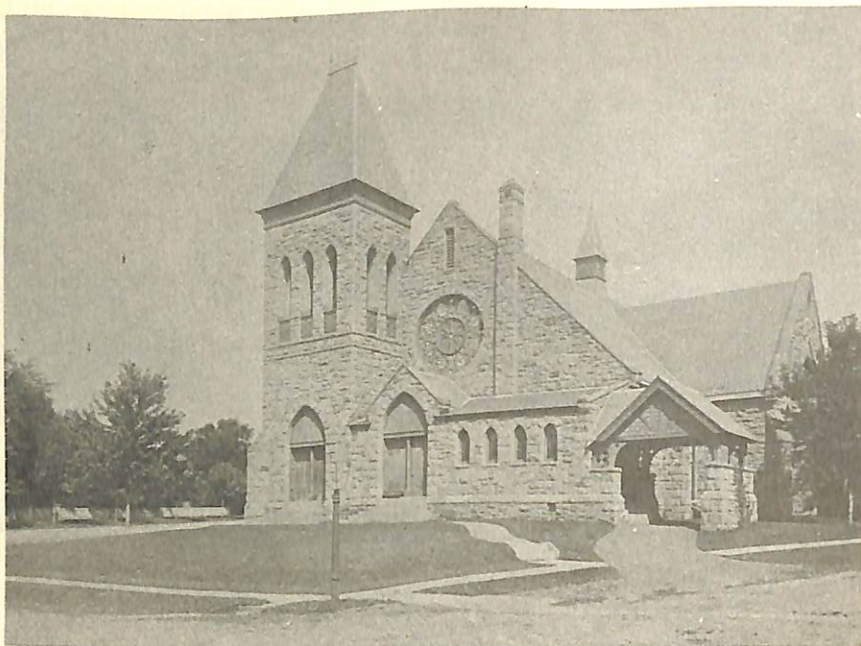


The Original Building On "The Point"



Our Early Church Members  
As Portrayed in 1942





The Stone Church - 1881



The Parsonage of First Church



Trinity Church - Grove Park



Trinity Manse - Grove Road

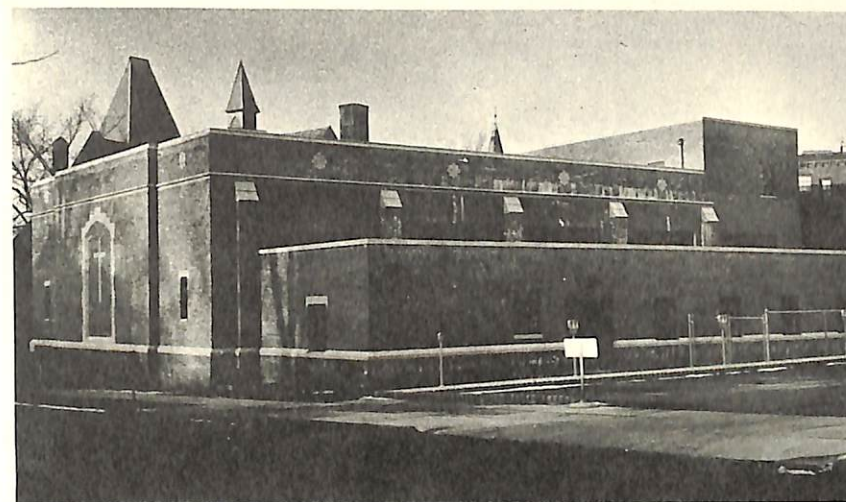




"Feast of Days" - First Church Gymnasium



The Church School Addition of 1928



The Fellowship Hall - 1960





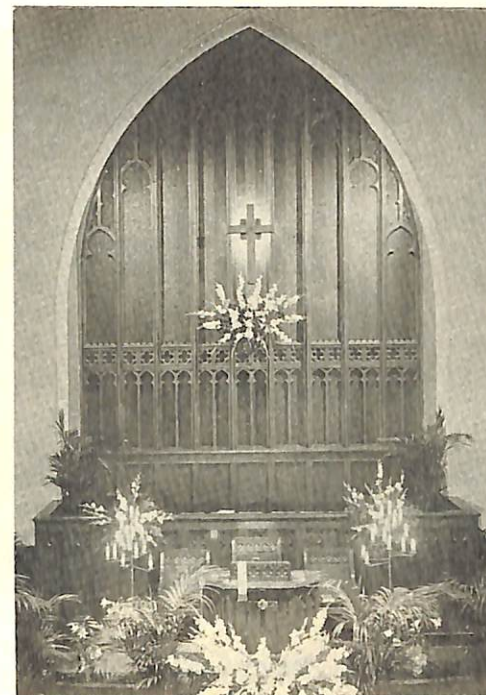
Skit On Stage of Old Parlor - 1947



VI Quaker Performance - Fellowship Hall

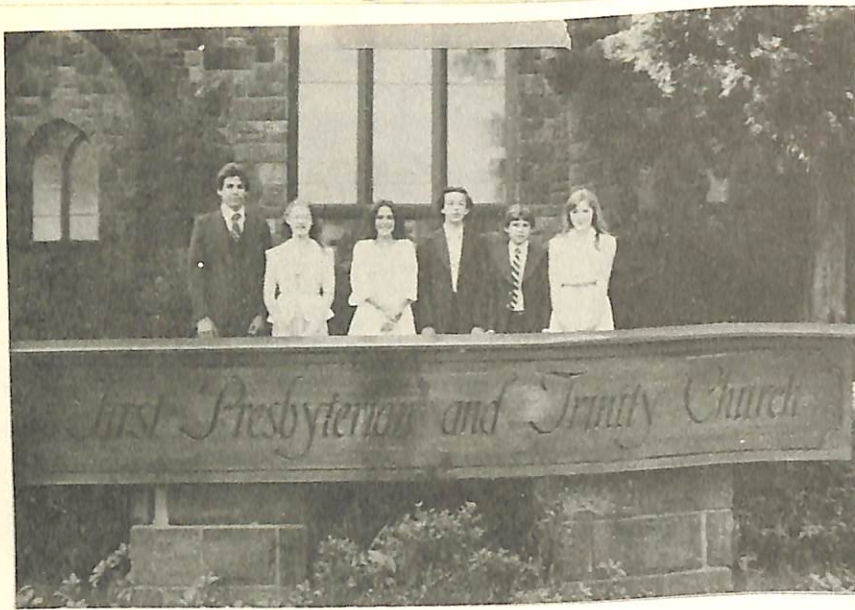


The Sanctuary in The 1950s



The Sanctuary at Easter





A Communicants Class - 1981



A Worship Service - 1981

As the congregation grew, reaching some 160 members by April, 1896, a Session Fund was created. Trinity continued to support an active program in Vailsburg.

As part of a continuing education program, Trinity Session decided to set up topic cards to guide each month's discussion and meditation. By October of 1897 a formal church organization was discussed for Vailsburg, which became First Presbyterian Church of Vailsburg in February 1898 with that church having more autonomy and some 71 communicant members. Among the active early leaders were Margaretta and Clara Kilburn, for whom the present church is named.

In the Fall of 1893 Trinity began plans for its first Christian Education Society with a schedule of programs.

The ecumenical spirit was much in evidence in South Orange, particularly among the two Presbyterian churches and the Methodist Church. As early as 1894 summer union services were a regular part of the church year.

Evangelistic programs of the Presbytery were very important with even a Presbytery Evangelist receiving a stipend from the Presbytery of Morris and the Oranges.

The Trinity Mission Board was first established in 1896.

While Trinity continued to support the Vailsburg church, the Home Mission Committee Board of the Synod took over added responsibility in 1896.

Another inter-church project was started in the Fall of 1896 which stressed "Christian citizenship". The Trinity Session doubted the advisability of the effort at the time but did participate in a program of joint devotional meetings, including a series of Wednesday evening prayer sessions. These were more theological in nature, with open discussions the format rather than sermons. Also, the men of the congregation began to hold additional prayer meetings.

Noting that special music at services seemed to increase attendance, the Session encouraged the use of soloists and various groups.

At a union Good Friday service of the local churches a featured speaker was Rev. Sheldon Jackson, who had established himself as a leading missionary to Alaska and for whom a college was named and set up by the denomination. (Only recently was this taken over by the State of Alaska.) Offerings from the union services were allotted to a group known as the Society for Providing Comfort to the Sick, apparently a non-denominational body. A highlight of such services was the first New Year's Eve Prayer meeting, at which the Vailsburg Church joined. From time to time that congregation used Trinity Church for special events.

In 1900 failing health caused the pastor to resign. With a vacant pulpit the decision was made to close the church on Sunday evenings and the first of many overtures to reunite with First Church was made. However, Trinity secured the services of Dr. Robert Hastings, under whose leadership the church

moved broadly into evangelism. Under Dr. Hastings' leadership, the church was annually reviewing its work and a "State of the Church" message was delivered each Fall.

The trend toward union services was dominant in the early 1900s and was coupled with outreach to such facilities as Orange Memorial Hospital (supplying aides, etc.). At this time, the church was also used for meetings of the Anti-Saloon League.

Broadening its educational program, a separate Sunday School was formed in the southern part of the Village in 1901. An element of representative government was practiced as the Sunday School Superintendent was "elected" by the teachers.

On the subject of evangelism, in September of 1908 the first religious canvass of the Village was undertaken and an evangelist was named for the Presbytery to promote the churches.

In a hot local issue of 1919 the church opposed the opening of a poolroom and a motion picture house in the Village.

During the teens such movements as the Religious Forward effort were strong and a conference on the work of the church was planned.

In 1913 the first newspaper ad was placed as a community service and a religious census of the Village was taken.

In 1917 Trinity joined churches of the Oranges in participating in evangelism in the

area. With the onset of World War I much effort of the congregation went to helping Children's War Relief and the preparing of bandages and dressings.

A shortage of energy was not unknown even in 1918, when the church halted evening services. Further conservation led to some union services.

When Dr. Edwin White of Chicago was called to the church in 1919 the speaker at his installation was noneother than Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick.

The 1920's saw more emphasis on youth work.

In October, 1922, Trinity started its first Newsletter and a strong lay movement was begun in the Oranges, with a Men's Sunday held in January, 1923. At the same time the "Do Our Best Society" was formed for the women of the church.

A major Near East Relief project was undertaken in 1924.

With interdenominationalism strong, support for the new Federal Council of Churches was voted in 1924.

In the youth area, Trinity was host to a state-wide Young People's Conference in November of 1926.

With outreach growing, the church moved to more sharing of pulpits, such as with Prospect Church, Maplewood. Also, this led

to support for Essex County Religious Education. Other benevolent interests included the Chinese Family Relief and the Gideon Society, which held services or participated in activities at the church. Support was rendered the Lord's Day Alliance for observance of the Sabbath.

With the Depression bringing a financial pinch to many church activities, renewed discussions began with First Church on reunification or amalgamation. Despite the parish financial concerns, this did not stop the outreach for such initiative as the Presbyterian Emergency Fund. As the financial emergency grew, most staff salaries were cut and the congregation had trouble meeting the pastor's modest salary. However, there was still a certain activism, for instance, opposition to Sunday movies.

Finally, at an annual meeting in April 1935, Trinity Church agreed to accept a union merger with First Presbyterian, with the new organization assuming responsibility for the property.

Trinity Church ceased as a separate entity with the last worship service held in November of 1935.



## THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN AND TRINITY CHURCH OF SOUTH ORANGE

1935 - 1956

During the depression years both First Church and Trinity Church struggled under the pressures of the times, just making ends meet. It was at this time that the possibilities of union of the two churches began to be discussed. Conditions had changed markedly and a plan of union was adopted and carried out in the year 1935. The name of the church became The First Presbyterian and Trinity Church of South Orange.

The women combined their efforts in a "Women's Association", a Men's Club was formed, and youth groups flourished, as did summer camps and vacation schools.

Within a year or so, Dr. George A. Edmison, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in the previous decades, and Dr. Victor H. Lukens, pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church, retired and the Reverend Howard C. Scharfe was called to the pulpit of the newly-united church. It was during this period of World War II that the debt was cleared from the building and the mortgage burned. As part of the debt clearing program, the property on which the Trinity Presbyterian Church and its manse stood was sold to the Village of South Orange. As part of this agreement, the pastor of the church was given the right to live in the manse in Grove Park for a period of ten years. At the

end of this time, the property then reverted to the Village. The manse of the First Presbyterian Church on Irvington Avenue was then sold to help also in clearing the debt.

By 1942 the reunited church had grown to a membership of 1000. As a result of this growth and resulting prosperity, a Director of Religious Education was employed, a new Aeolian Skinner organ purchased (since replaced in 1955 by a Moeller) and early in 1944 plans were developed to install the memorial stained glass windows in the Sanctuary.

During the Second World War a strong sense of patriotism dominated the lives of the American people. In 1945 the pastor, Howard Scharfe, joined other local clergymen in taking leaves of absence in order to minister in various army camps.

Once again the women joined in giving aid to the victims of war, working mainly through the Red Cross, with related activities continuing through 1947. Concurrently they supported their mission commitments by raising \$2,942 in funds in 1943. By 1945 their mission work touched six foreign countries and five national centers. Bolstered by a yearly stream of fund-raising ideas and an increasing membership that seemed to peak in the 50's, the women were able to dispense some of their earnings of \$5,945 to 15 national areas in 1952. Ten years later, aided by the efforts of over 12 circles, money to National and Foreign Missions had swelled to \$2,500. In one year the sewing group produced 1200 articles for the Red Cross.

As the Protestant Church in America moved from the decade of the 1940's into the 1950's, more and more people found their social and spiritual needs fulfilled by church membership and participation. First and Trinity was no exception. The worship services were well attended; adults felt the need of spiritual uplift and they also felt the obligation to set good examples for their offspring.

Being an active Presbyterian was fun as well as noble! And we were noble. Our parishioners permeated almost all village activities. They were on the committees and boards everywhere. They were officers and leaders in civic, educational, charitable, service and religious areas. This was not the dictum of the church. It was the way individuals lived out Christ's teaching, employing whatever abilities they had in the fields where they could be most useful.

In addition to the community groups already using the church facilities, three new programs, open to the public as well as to church members, were organized: in 1939 the *Village Questers* came into being as a fellowship of young adults, the presentation of an original musical play soon became an annual fund raiser for community and church projects; ten years later the *South Orange Symphony Orchestra* (SOSO) was formed at the instigation of the Christian Education Committee--rehearsals are still held on church premises, although the free concerts are presented in more conducive school auditoriums; also in 1949 the *Week-day Nursery* opened, beginning a tradition of pre-school education. At first limited to four-year-olds, in

1955 the program was enlarged to include three-year-olds as well. Still operating solely on the proceeds from its tuition and the cooperative services of the parents, the nursery staff has consistently provided a balanced program, teaching Christian ideals by precept and example rather than through a formal curriculum of religious studies. It has been interdenominational from the start and, like SOSO and Questers, has offered many people in the community an inside glimpse of our church in every sense of the word.

By the mid-1940's the Jewish population of South Orange began to grow. The first Jewish congregation in the Village was Beth-El, established in 1946. Two years later a Reformed congregation, Temple Israel, was formed. During its first years of existence, by invitation of the Pastor, the Reverend Charles Mead, and the Session, Temple Israel's Friday evening services were held in one of the Church School rooms of First and Trinity. With this act of friendship, First and Trinity began to demonstrate leadership in Christian-Jewish relations which has continued to the present.

In 1948 when Temple Israel bought and renovated the Riker mansion on Scotland Road they found an English hand-painted stained glass window depicting the 13th Century scene of King Louis IX of France kneeling before the Christ Child preparatory to leaving on the Sixth Crusade. This window was given to First and Trinity and may be seen in the Narthex at the westernmost end of the church. National attention was given to the friendship between the two congregations when, in 1950, the newscaster, Gabriel Heater, mentioned

the story on his radio program. Later Eleanor Roosevelt invited Rabbi Herbert Weiner and our pastor, Charles Mead, to discuss their experiences over her national network program.

In the late 1940's the annual interfaith service of Thanksgiving began, expanding thereafter to embrace an ever-widening geographic and religious community.

Meanwhile, back at the old manse in Grove Park, the property was returned to the Village, as agreed. In 1953 a new manse was purchased at 177 Grove Road.

In 1955 the membership of First and Trinity had reached its highest number, 1543 members. The following year the Church School reported 477 students, the highest in its history. This numerical success was short-lived, however. In 1956 the membership began to decline as families started their migration to the more outlying suburban areas.

#### 1956 - 1981

At the height of our membership in the mid-fifties the facilities of our church buildings seemed inadequate to house all the activities of our church members. There were two services of worship on Sunday mornings, while the Church School went to a double session to accommodate the nearly 500 pupils, teachers and staff.

In 1959 the cornerstone was laid for a new Fellowship Hall. The new addition, costing \$300,000, included, besides the large hall, a

fine stage and dressing rooms, a Church Parlor, an excellent well-equipped kitchen and an apartment for the sexton. The mortgage for the addition was paid off within ten years.

Our excellent church buildings are a source of pride and pleasure. But by the time our latest addition was completed our membership was beginning to decline. There were various reasons for this: many of our people were moving to exurbia; the Protestants soon were to compose only one-third of the population of South Orange; the other two-thirds divided between Catholics and Jews. Also, an increasing secularization of society seemed evident. Many people were simply unchurched. However, First and Trinity continued to maintain an active program:

● Participation in the MUSIC PROGRAM gained momentum as volunteer voices joined the professional soloists in the choir both on Sunday mornings and for special performances. Children, too, became involved in choral work, with three separate robed choirs singing regularly in the mid-60's. A Junior Choir area was constructed in the Sanctuary in honor of Miss Eugenia May Weston, who, for many years, served devotedly as a Church School officer and teacher. Currently our church musicians not only make a major contribution to the worship experience but offer programs of significance, featuring major choral and organ works, to the congregation and to the community at large. The use of the organ has been expanded and instrumentation has been increased, particularly by the use of the harpsichord, flute, cello, and brass choir.

- Other art forms highlighting members' creative hobbies, interpretive dance, drama and the like, as well as music, have been featured in an annual ARTS FESTIVAL initiated in 1979.

- Following the success of the Questers' DRAMATIC endeavors, and to supplement the occasional performances (notably at Christmas) of sanctuary drama, the "Trinity Troupers" formed in the late fifties. Their purpose was to further "the art of acting" by interpreting serious and religious drama. About the same time, the Senior High Fellowship began putting on a full-length play as a major fund raiser. All these productions served to promote fellowship within each group, as well as provide a learning experience for the participants. The new stage in Fellowship Hall inspired the various groups to work together on sets, stage and lighting equipment. The building of scenery was a joint effort, each piece proudly stamped "SHWATTQU". The Senior Highs, the Women's Association, the Trinity Troupers, and the Questers no longer stage regular shows, but the legacy of the "flats" is mute evidence of the joy of many opening nights past and the possibility of more to come.

- The FELLOWSHIP enjoyed in working together has been extended in recent years beyond programs to the involvement of members in the planning process. Session committees have been expanded in number and in the inclusion of non-Session members of the congregation as well. A "coffee hour" following the morning worship has become a weekly time for

fellowship among the members in addition to greeting newcomers. Visitation to members has been a primary continuing responsibility of a large Board of Deacons as well as by a number of elders who accompany the pastor when serving Communion to the housebound. A significant innovation in recent years has been the "House Church" - - small groups of members who gather in each other's homes for worship and sharing of the faith.

- Among the women of the church the caring community has centered around the Circles of the WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION. Within the smaller groupings members share a warm concern for one another while reaching out to others beyond the confines of the church. They know the joy of achieving goals set in sending packages to small missions, of contributing cheer to local hospitals, of giving aid to our Presbyterian Homes, of contributing needed articles to Church Women United for world relief and in earning the greater sums sent to the national and world mission boards for large scale purchase of goods for their distribution. Nor are the needs of our own church neglected. The women through the years have kept the kitchens supplied and the parlors decorated and have responded willingly to requests for other material improvements.

- Although enrollment in the CHURCH SCHOOL is not what it once was, a high quality of teaching, curriculum and facilities has been maintained. In the last decade there has been increasing emphasis on adult education. Family nights have grown to include the entire "church family", sometimes taking the form of a breakfast, an after-church lunch or a

picnic. In recent years, the Advent Workshop of the 70's has been replaced by an all-church Christmas decorating party.

- In the 50's and 60's the MEN'S CLUB hosted the annual Christmas party for the Church School. However, in the teacher's efforts to interpret the real meaning of Christmas, the celebration was moved to the Church School hour and took place in individual classes. At the same time, the number of members in the Men's Club was decreasing and the leadership was being frequently "recycled". By the end of the 60's there were no more separate activities for men only.

- Much of the slack in men's fellowship was taken up by the QUESTERS which, by this time, had opened its membership to "interested adults of all ages". Although the last Quester musical performance was given in 1970, the group continues to present a musical entertainment each year as a fund raiser and a church "social". Choral groups from colleges and instrumentalists from the community provide an ever popular attraction as well as a source of income for the club's designated charities.

- Not only have the Questers and other church groups, as mentioned above, responded to requests of Presbyterian MISSION PROGRAMS but individual church members have contributed substantially to various appeals. Support of the Fifty Million Fund of the 60's, the current Major Mission Fund, the annual One Great Hour of Sharing, and various special offerings has been heart warming.

- With growing racial tension in Newark, First and Trinity in the late 60's began to support with funds and personnel what is now the PROTESTANT COMMUNITY CENTERS, INC. Our church very early became involved in the Center's tutoring program, working with inner-city children on a one-to-one basis. In 1969 our church became one of the first suburban centers to provide elementary school children with this once-a-week experience. It has since developed into the Suburban Cultural Educational Enrichment Program known as SCEEP, serving nearly 300 children a year at approximately 18 locations.

- We have also lent our support to "Our House", now a part of the community Family Service and Guidance Center, and we continue to give regularly to various missions, with particular attention to the under-privileged urban population. Our involvement with the Presbytery has increased and a CHURCH and SOCIETY committee of the Session has been formed. Although our congregation has decreased in size, it is composed of an active, caring membership.

- The ECUMENICAL spirit has continued as we have joined other churches in the community to hold summer union services, conduct a Vacation Church School, and come together during Advent and for worship and study during the Lenten season. Our women are deeply involved in Church Women United's program and projects of mission and prayer.

- In 1968 the CHURCH ENDOWMENT FUNDS were created. The invested monies have become an important source of income without which it



would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the First Presbyterian and Trinity Church to survive in its current form, in spite of the generosity of its present members. An appreciative Session has shown our gratitude by listing each year in the Annual Report the names of those who have remembered this church in their wills or have contributed to the General Endowment during their lifetime. Twenty-two names are currently listed.

At the Annual Meeting in 1974, Miss Helen Reynolds was honored for her "35 years of devoted service to the Church, not only as a loyal staff member, but as a faithful, follow-through friend". She continued to serve in both capacities until her death in June, 1975.

Then in August of that year we suffered another great loss. Our beloved pastor, Nathaniel T. Goodwin, died suddenly. The congregation was stunned but we also began to understand anew how important the church was to all of us. We rallied to preserve a part of our lives that we needed and treasured.

The Reverend Dr. Edwin O. Kennedy became our interim pastor, and the Reverend Dr. William S. Ackerman, our Moderator. Church members were inspired to carry on in all areas. The cooperation of everyone bound us closer than ever as we sought a new minister, securing the Reverend Charles N. Thompson early in 1977.

During the interim, the unicameral system of government was approved for First and Trinity. After many years of functioning with a Session and a separate Board of Trustees, First and Trinity decided to lodge all

administrative responsibility, both spiritual and corporate, in one body--the Session. Under its leadership, First and Trinity has since sought to develop ways of ministering to a racially and socially changing community. Worship, both on Sundays as well as on special days during the church year, continues to be the central focus of the Church's life.

*The founders of The First Presbyterian and Trinity Church of South Orange planned wisely when they built our house of worship on the "Point Lot". The Village and its people have changed greatly since 1831, but our church is still a prominent presence in South Orange. There, overlooking the Village, it reminds our congregation of Jesus' words: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven".*

## PASTORS

### THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Reverend Horace Doolittle  
May 14, 1834 - April 17, 1839

Reverend Joseph Vance  
January 21, 1840 - March 18, 1844

Reverend Daniel G. Sprague  
December 26, 1844 - April 1, 1860

Reverend J. Allen Maxwell  
September 17, 1860 - January 9, 1871

Reverend John H. Worcester, Jr.  
January 10, 1872 - December 21, 1882

Reverend John R. Fisher  
January 4, 1884 - May 1, 1893

Reverend George L. Spining  
May 2, 1895 - November 30, 1906

Reverend David DeForest Burrell  
April 21, 1908 - April 28, 1918

Reverend George A. Edmison  
February 11, 1919 - August 31, 1939

### TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Reverend Asa Wyncoop  
January 28, 1893 - October 15, 1899

Reverend Robert Hastings  
1900 - 1902

Reverend Robert H. Nichols  
December 29, 1902 - January 19, 1910

Reverend Alvin E. Magary  
March 22, 1911 - September 6, 1918

Reverend Edwin E. White  
May 8, 1918 - May 8, 1921

Reverend Victor Herbert Lukens  
March 20, 1922 - March 24, 1938

### FIRST PRESBYTERIAN AND TRINITY CHURCH

Reverend Howard Carman Scharfe  
October 9, 1939 - October 31, 1945

Reverend Charles Larew Mead  
May 15, 1946 - August 31, 1961

Reverend Nathaniel Thomas Goodwin  
March 7, 1962 - August 10, 1975

Reverend Charles Neller Thompson  
January 1, 1977 -