

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED DEC 30 1977  
DATE ENTERED APR 26 1978

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

### 1 NAME

HISTORIC

First Congregational Church of Spokane

AND/OR COMMON

Westminster Congregational Church of Spokane

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER South 401 - 411 Washington  
West 311 - 329 Fourth

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Spokane

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5th - Thomas S. Foley

STATE

Washington

CODE

53

COUNTY

Spokane

CODE

063

### 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Westminster Congregation, Church of Spokane

STREET & NUMBER

South 411 Washington

CITY, TOWN

Spokane

VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Spokane County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

West 1116 Broadway

CITY, TOWN

Spokane

STATE

Washington

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Congregational Church was built in 1890, when Spokane was recovering from a fire that had destroyed 36 square blocks. While few other congregations dared more than a frame building, the First Congregationalists opted to build a lasting monument to their faith. The massive three-story Norman structure proved to be the standard of architecture for other Spokane churches. The rough cut granite building represents a very early stone church of the Inland Empire and is today the oldest standing church in the City of Spokane.

The First Congregational Church was built at Fourth and Washington on the periphery of the central business district. While neither street is particularly important today, in 1890, each had some of the best post-fire structures. One block west of the church was the 'apple of Spokane's eye,' the old South Central High School -- for many years the only public high school in the city. At various points along Fourth were many of the other churches of the city, although none were so well known or admired as the First Congregational.

Until 1911 the church had a fine view of the city. In that year, the railroad tracks of the Northern Pacific were elevated above street level with concrete bridges over cross-streets. The view of the city (and its reciprocal view of the church) were further impaired in 1969 - 1970 by the construction of the massive elevated concrete freeways system of Interstate 90, parallel to Fourth Avenue. Parking lots are located beneath and along the freeways' path. The church faces the parking lots below the freeway and rises above the road bed some distance and is adjoined on the east by a three-story turn of the century apartment building. To the rear of the alley is another apartment of the same vintage. Across the Washington Street is a vacant lot used for additional parking. One block west is the Lewis and Clark High School (at the former location of South Central High School). Above the church in virtually all southerly directions, as well as to the west, are the residential and medical related structures of the five major hospitals on the South Hill.

The church is one of the most remarked by tourists due to its very proximity to the freeway. While the lower portion (like Lewis and Clark High School and Deaconess Hospital) has been obscured, the upper portion of the church -- the two towers and rose windows -- are highlighted by the sweep of the freeway past them. The drama of the bell tower is further accentuated by the lighting of the structure at night.

Richardsonian Romanesque in styling, the church is typical of the work of architects Worthy Niver and John K. Dow, and of Spokane of the period. However, their utilization of materials is atypical: rough cut granite layed in broken courses is relatively unique in Spokane.

On the fieldstone foundation, the three-story structure rises to a steep cross gable with round arch openings in each major face; the mass of the structure is balanced by a short three-story tower on the east and a five-story tower on the west. The building extends southward from the original body of the church to the alley by virtue of a two-story addition with the same facade treatment.

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The church rises from a fieldstone foundation at sidewalk level. The fieldstone is random coursed to a height of two feet on Fourth Avenue. On the body of the church, granite ashlar rises to a height of 28 feet on the north face and 20 feet on the west; the difference in height is created by the increasing slope of the Washington Street hill. The west tower is 60 feet high to the parapet while the smaller east tower is 40 feet high. The south addition is 24 feet to the top of the parapet. Wall construction is of stone except the rear addition. The south part of the building is of brick construction with granite ashlar veneer.

Few openings other than the large rose windows relieve the rather severe wall planes. Originally the north, west, and south faces all featured the same basic fenestration but the creation of the Youth Block in 1927 concealed the south windows on both interior and exterior. The two remaining large round-arched openings are of dissimilar size, the western one being somewhat taller. The decorative surround is identical and features voussoirs alternating in sandstone and granite with carved acanthus scrolled imposts. Slipsills are of granite. The eight-petalled rose occupies the center of the arch. Right and left quadrants below the round windows are half-round lights; beneath the rose is a segmental arch light. To each side of this central light are two square windows. The north window is terminated at this point by the granite slipsill. The west window, however, has three additional windows across the bottom quarter of the panel. Below the arch panel of each facade, at the first floor level, are three stained glass lights recessed from the rock face and separated by piers.

The entries for the church are located in the recessed north doors of the two towers. Each tower has double, three panel doors capped by a stained glass half-round window with circle motifs. The upper surrounds are of sandstone alternating with smooth cut granite. Windows on the outer face of the towers are of the same style with two flat stained glass lights replacing the door; the sill is approximately two feet above ground level. Sandstone ornaments the first floor with a square dedicatory plaque set in the diagonal piers. Above the main entry the church name is inscribed in a similar but rectangular plaque.

Design differences in the towers are more apparent at the second-story level. While the stringcourse of sandstone wraps around the east tower at eaves' height (the level of the arch stiling) on the west tower the stringcourse is much lower. The second floor windows of the west tower are therefore almost a half floor higher than the same windows on the east tower. Each tower features an intermediately placed narrow, double hung window. Panes are crossed with wire to form a diaper pattern. At the third-floor level of the east tower, the rough face of the structure is ornamented by the sandstone pinacles of the false flying buttresses of the diagonally set piers.

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The principal feature of the prominent west tower is the tall, narrow, paired openings at the top of the tower. The structure is crenelated with square piers on each corner. A sandstone cornice connects the corner piers and merlons, all capped with sandstone.

The south addition to the church features a similar treatment of windows and doors. All the windows recessed in mullioned, single light pairs, are clear glass, however. The central fenestration is a large round-arched window with sandstone trim for a recessed entry. Over the door, on the second level, windows are formed by two interlaced arches. All windows feature granite sills and sandstone surrounds. The roofline of the structure reiterates the Romanesque features of the church. The crenelated parapet is interrupted only by the higher gable parapet of the central portion. The actual roof is flat, tarred and graveled.

The exterior of the church was altered in 1926. The building had originally featured an octagonal tower with a high spire on the northwest corner with a small open porch on the east. The change to the more massive double towers was the result of a demand for more interior space. While the addition to the south and the east tower were planned to complement the original building, the change to the square shape of the west tower was apparently inspired by a wish to create a more impressive exterior. The architect utilized almost all of the visual effects that were present in the original tower. The shape of the doors, windows, and the round window were all utilized in the original structure. Even size has been little altered. Including the heights of the spire, the original octagonal tower was only slightly taller than the present bell tower. Besides the shape change, the only other major alteration in the tower's appearance was the opening of the upper flat louvers, to form the airy bell tower that is utilized today.

The interior of the church has been periodically altered. Some of the major features of the structure have been unchanged. The slope of the floor downward to the south is an original feature as is the white pine and redwood woodwork. Originally the church utilized what has been called the 'Akron Plan' with the pulpit in the southwest corner and the pews arranged in a semicircle around the sanctuary. In 1909, the church returned to the more common 'divided chancel' arrangement with the sanctuary and pulpit in the center of the south wall below the stained glass windows.

The present interior makes use of the same basic plan. However, the stained glass on the south wall has been covered with arched lattice work above the sanctuary. The western portion of the building is used, as before, for study groups, etc. while the wing on the south has much the same function. The basement of the church, although enlarged in 1926, continues to be used for kitchen and dining as it was in 1890. A Youth Building constructed in 1957 is a separate adjunct to the church, occupying the east corner of the same block on Fourth and Bernard. Parking for the church is in nearby lots purchased over the years and in the lots constructed under the freeway.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1890 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Architects: Worthy Niver; John Do  
 Builder: Thomas Olsen

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Congregational Church of Spokane is historically the most significant of Spokane's numerous churches. While of architectural merit, its history has had greater impact on Spokane by virtue of its pioneer development and continuity.

The first of Spokane's Congregationists arrived in the area in September of 1838. Cushing Eels and his wife, with Elkanah and Mary Walker, arrived a few months before the first Catholic missionaries. Settling on Walker's Prairie (Tshamiakan) 30 miles from the Falls of the Spokane River, the Walkers did not remain long after the massacre of the Whitmans at Walla Walla in 1843. Eels, however, returned periodically to visit his many friends among the tribes of the Spokane and Couer d' Alene area. Eels, born in 1810 in Massachusetts, would live until 1893 to see the churches and mission he founded active and vital. His most important project, the founding of Whitman College, is one of the finest features of the City of Walla Walla.

While Eels founded many mission churches the first permanent congregation was founded almost 40 years later in the City of Spokane. Westminster, originally First Congregational Church, is the oldest church organization in the city and county of Spokane, having been founded by the pioneer missionary, the Reverend Henry T. Cowley on May 22, 1879.

Cowley was born in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1837. He attended Oberlin College with his future wife Abigail. Cowley was the leading white man in the life of the Spokane Indians in the period from 1874 to the late 1880's. Advancing their causes and interceding for them in Washington, Cowley was one of the most admired men of his era by both Indians and whites. Chief Enoch granted Cowley some twenty acres of land for settlement to encourage him to remain in the area. Enoch, whose claims, by chance, were in the strips allocated to the Northern Pacific Railroad, sold his rights to the Northern Pacific. The strip donated to Cowley, together with those he had purchased from Chief Enoch, were the basis for two major episodes in Spokane's history: the Shantytown War and the great law suit with Cowley versus the Northern Pacific.

Cowley, in these early years of Spokane's history, was active in community development. His activities included the purchase of the Spokane Chronicle which he converted to a daily paper, the city's first. However, as age crept up on Cowley (always lame and further immobilized by the strenuous life and horse back accidents), he must have given up hope of winning his fight for the land the Northern Pacific claimed. In a landmark decision in 1898, the Federal Courts

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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 "Clearing Off Debts." Spokesman-Review, June 27, 1897, P. 5: 4;  
 Davis, Anna Perry. "Westminster Congregational Marks a Jubilee Milestone." Spokesman-Review, September, 1953, P. 3;  
 "Death Summons Pioneer Pastor." Spokesman-Review, June 30, 1929;  
 Drury, Clifford Merril, A Tepee in His Backyard, Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1949

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	1	4	6	8	7	3	0	5	2	7	7	5	2	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

C 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

D 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION  
 The nominated property occupies Lots 1 through 6 of Block 80, Railroad's Second Addition, Spokane, Washington.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Gordon Reuhl, AIA; James W. Montgomery, Associate Minister; and Patsy M. Garrett, Historic Preservation Specialist

ORGANIZATION

DATE

January, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Jeanne M. Welch*

TITLE

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

December 15, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Wm. H. [Signature]*

DATE

*4/26/78*

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ANCESTRAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

*Catherine Cole*

DATE

*4.25.78*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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recognized Cowley's claim. At the age of 61 Cowley had won the greatest land case in Spokane's history; estimated value of the property located between Sprague Avenue and Tenth Avenue, from Bernard and Division was one million dollars. After 1900, Cowley only spent his summers in Spokane while he wintered in California where he died in 1917.

Although Cowley had chosen to act as a Congregational minister to his small flock, he was in reality more closely allied to the Presbyterian faith. Throughout his remaining life, the Cowley family would greatly assist both religions in Spokane. With the small beginnings, the Westminster congregation began in the town's schoolhouse where Cowley had begun the city's educational system. It was used from May, 1879 to December 1881. A frame building costing \$50 was erected on a site at Sprague and Bernard given by the Reverend Henry T. Cowley and his wife. This first building apparently survived the fire of August, 1889, but was sold because the land had appreciated so much in value. The building and property sold for \$29,000.

During the usage of the small frame church, the second in importance of the First Congregationalists ministers arrived. Jonathan Edwards born in Wales in 1847, began his service to Eastern Washington in 1886. Westminster, the first of many Congregational churches he served, was his church for the highly important period between 1886 and 1891. His most significant achievement (excluding campaigns for women's suffrage and other progressive causes, his service to the Congregational faith, and Whitman College in Walla Walla) was as an author. His important works included the History of Spokane County, and the Life of Marcus Whitman. The history of Spokane, written in 1900, is the definitive work on the early days of Spokane county. He was an active minister until his retirement in 1924. He died in Portland, Oregon, in June of 1929.

Edwards recorded the events of 1889 and the great fire as related to the Congregational Church in autobiographical sections largely unprinted at his death:

*The great fire of August 4th, 1889, resulted in almost all of our churches changing location. First was among the movers. The land and buildings were sold at a good price and three lots bought at Third Avenue and Washington Street. There was a small house here, whose size was doubled to make it a parsonage. Within a few months the church sold these properties and purchased the lots where it now is.*

Temporary accommodations of the First Congregational were at the Swedish Methodist church on Stevens Street, rented for the first year until Mother Cowley had built a house at Third Avenue and Washington Street. This had a large living room which she made available to the church, rent free.

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*On October 12th, 1889, we purchased the present site at the southeast corner of Fourth Avenue and Washington Street and soon we obtained plans for a building. Many were submitted, estimates made, but most of the plans called for a greater cost than we could afford. This consumed considerable time.*

A building was designed by architect Worthy Niver that was to cost \$29,245. He was assisted by John K. Dow, a member of the church. According to a record left by Walter B. Willox all available funds from the sale of the original property were used up and the church was \$40,000 in debt, \$20,000 in the form of a mortgage.

Worthy Niver, although a successful architect for the period, is relatively unknown in Spokane. Evidently, he worked in the city from 1889 to 1891. Buildings that remain of his design include the Title Building (Northeast corner of Wall and Sprague), and a few houses. Dow was a much more lasting influence in the community. He completed the First without Niver. Born in 1861, Dow spent the years between 1889 and 1935 in Spokane. Among the numerous excellent structures he designed are the Tidball (West Riverside), the first four story structure erected after the fire; the Bennett Block (Northeast corner of Main and Howard); the Great Western Building (905 West Riverside); the Metals Building (Washington and Riverside), and the Paulsen Building (West 419 Riverside), the city's first skyscraper in 1909. Dow finished his remaining years west of the Cascades with his children. He died in June of 1961, a few months before his one-hundredth birthday.

The building was completed at a cost of \$40,000. Thomas Olsen, the builder, advanced the financially troubled church some \$17,000 of his own funds to ensure completion. He, with Dow, Niver, and the congregation, began construction in the early summer of 1890.

*Excavating for the new church began in June of 1890, in bright, hot weather. On one of the hottest mornings the people who lived across Washington Street became aware of a great and continued commotion. Looking out, they were astonished to see the street filled with teams of every description - draft horses, carriage horses and single horses, all coming up hill, all hauling lumber. Men and boys were running along the sidewalks, shouting directions to the drivers. As they came to Fourth Avenue, they began to drop lumber upon every vacant lot. (Most of the lots were vacant.) The men and boys rushed forward and began driving corner stakes. Soon the air was filled with the sound of building.*

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*A rumor had gone abroad that morning that the supreme court of the state was about to hand down a decision against the title of the property. There were squatters who remembered that there were unoccupied lots upon the hill and were taking a chance. As the day wore on, the heat and noise increased and continued far into the night. But toward morning it became very quiet. Daylight revealed a strange scene. Little shacks occupied every spot. There were three on the front of the church site facing Fourth Avenue, three or four on the Washington Street side, while the south end of the block was built up solid. So was the next block. Clusters of two or three shacks were scattered here and there among the few dwelling houses. From the tops of many projected a stove-pipe, blue smoke rising lazily in the hot air. Perfect silence prevailed. Not a man looked out from his doorway. No voice called to a neighbor. The squatter had moved in and was living quietly.*

*As the long morning hours passed, the waiting and the silence grew oppressive, like the lull before a storm. But about half-past nine a great roar burst from under the Washington Street viaduct, and the police came up the hill, followed by a mob of men and boys who were filling the air with shouts. The police stopped before each shack and ordered the occupants out. Some came quietly, but others sat in their chairs with folded arms while the police carried them out and set them in the street. There they sat, holding their chance, while their buildings were torn down. The police made a clean sweep, and it was soon over. By the middle of the afternoon the summer sun was pouring its heat down upon the once more vacant lots, and the next morning excavation for the new church was going on as usual.*

*When the new building was finished, it was the best and most solid in the Inland Empire, its first church of stone. The parsonage in the rear was built at the same time and was the best in Spokane Falls.*

The cut stone church was either just completed or nearly so when the financial panic of 1893 struck. To save themselves, First Congregational and Westminster Presbyterian merged, explaining the source of the Presbyterian name of this Congregational Church. The Congregationalists were men without a minister while the Presbyterians had lost their church by fire. The arrangement satisfied both needs. Threatened with a foreclosure of the mortgage, a loan was received from the national building society of the Congregational Church in New York in 1895.

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The church was on a sound financial basis for the first time.

In 1909, the sanctuary was remodeled at a cost of \$12,000. At the same time a full basement was dug. Before the 1909 remodeling, the interior of the church was laid out in what was then known as "The Akron Plan." The rostrum with a central pulpit was located in the southwest corner of the sanctuary with the pews facing into the corner. The remodeling placed the pulpit centered on the south wall with the organ and choir located directly behind and above. Because the church had been growing, a spacious balcony was added partly obscuring the north window. The pews were moved to face south.

In 1924 three small Congregational churches were absorbed into Westminster. These were Pilgrim, Plymouth, and Corbin Park. A high percentage of their members transferred to Westminster making it necessary that another expansion be undertaken. This was a unit designed "For Childhood and Youth" as is carved in granite above the doors. This unit was started in December of 1926 and finished the following year. It matches the cut stone of the main church and joins it on the south, running along the alley to the east.

Westminster Congregational Church has consistently reflected the life and interests of some of Spokane's founders. The pioneer spirit of H. T. Cowley who rode the long miles for his Indian parishioners began a new career in Spokane that would not only shape one of Spokane's oldest newspapers -- the Chronicle -- but would also develop much of the land on which the best residences and hospitals stand, and would lead to much of Spokane's preoccupation with education and community concern. In a like manner, both Jonathan Edwards who wrote of Spokane history, and J. K. Dow who captured it in stone and marble, would dominate and shape the history of Westminster. Westminster is a church that indeed serves its common appellation of the "first church of Spokane."

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