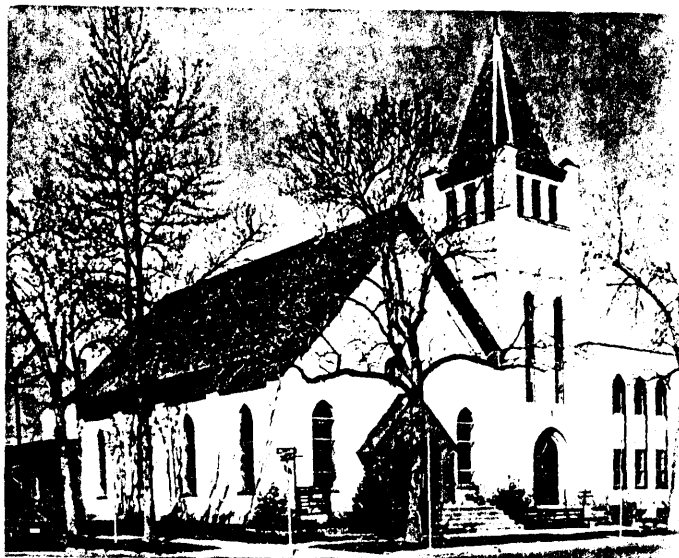


MONTANA HISTORICAL/ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY #10

HISTORIC NAME: Methodist Episcopal Church
ADDRESS: 121 S. Willson, Bozeman
LEGAL BOUNDARY: Alderson's Blk B, 5.3' of lot 7,
all of lots 8, 9, 10
OWNER'S NAME: Bozeman United Methodist Church
OWNER ADDRESS: 119 S. Willson, Bozeman, MT
SPECIFIC DATE: 1873-1874
ARCHITECT: Unknown
BUILDER: Unknown (tower: Uhlich)
ORIGINAL OWNER: Methodist Episcopal Church
ORIGINAL USE: church
PRESENT USE: church
UTM REFERENCE: 12/497000/5058060
ACREAGE: less than one
U.S.G.S. QUAD: Bozeman, 1953



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Applicable Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: social history, architecture

Number of Contributing Properties: 1

The Bozeman Methodist Episcopal Church is the oldest extant Methodist Church in Montana. Despite some additions and alterations, the original 1873 Gothic Revival style design of the building is still clearly evident. The building is also significant as one of the very first large brick structures erected in the city, built during a brief period of prosperity from 1872 and 1873.

A.M. Hough of Virginia City formally organized the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Bozeman on August 8, 1866. Previous to this time, Bozeman pioneer and newspaper editor W.W. Alderson had organized a Sunday school in a log house on Main Street in 1865, just one year after the town was founded. The first church, which was also the first frame building in town, was a very simple 24 x 36 foot structure at the southwest corner of Main and Tracy. It was built in 1866, and had only slab seats and a sawdust floor. In 1869 a bell, the first in town, was added.

By 1872, preparations for the present church, which was an especially notable structure in this isolated frontier town, were underway. In that year, Walter Cooper and Colonel L.M. Black built the very impressive Main Street commercial block of brick. That building, and the Methodist Church are today the two most notable indications of the brief building boom in Bozeman during the years 1872 and 1873. In response to the surge in construction, W.H. Tracy began manufacturing bricks in the town, and was contracted to provide the brick for this building.

The church was completed in 1874 under the ministry of Reverend T.C. Iliff. It originally had no tower, and pilasters marked each bay, terminated by Gothic finials. A free-standing bell tower was located behind the church (see attached photograph), and a boardwalk linked the church with Main Street - then virtually the only street in town.

As construction of the church coincided with Bozeman's first building boom in 1872-1873, the thorough remodeling of the church coincided with the next major period of growth in

Bozeman, which began just after the turn of the century. The Republican Courier of May 18, 1906, announced: "The formal opening of the new church parlors of the First Methodist Episcopal Church was held yesterday...the entire church was remodeled and with its addition is now practically completed and furnished throughout." Additions included the Epworth League room, which had 75 seats, and a new chapel of 250 seats, which would be connected to the old main auditorium of 200 seats. The round, stained glass rose window in the gable end was also added at this time.

The major feature added during this early 20th century remodeling was the present Lombard-inspired bell tower. The brick tower was built in 1905 by the father Joseph A. Uhlrich - a Bozeman resident today. The senior Uhlrich had learned the masonry trade from his father, a Swiss immigrant trained in elaborate stone carving for large European cathedrals. The date of construction of 1905 can be confirmed in part by the 1904 Sanborn map, which shows no tower, and in part from family folklore. According to Uhlrich, when his father was high up on the tower during its construction, his wife was giving birth. The news was hollered up to the mason: "You've got a son!" That son was Philip Uhlrich, Joseph Uhlrich's oldest brother, who is still living today.

The final major alteration was the addition of stucco sheathing to the entire church exterior, and the addition of a brick entrance and brick trim in 1950.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Methodist Episcopal Church has three, major component parts: the 1873 large, one-story gable roof brick portion located at the corner of W. Olive and S. Willson Avenues, which is the original part of the building; the 1905 three-story, square bell tower with pyramidal roof topped with a decorative finial; and the 1905-1906, two-story, flat roofed addition. The building is entered by way of two 10-panel double-door entrances on the east facade, one to the original church and the other at the base of the bell tower. The latter entrance is set within a brick architrave and has a tripartite window with wooden tracery above. The former is set within a small, gable roofed, brick entryway that protrudes from the facade and was likely constructed during the 1930's when the stucco covering was applied to the entire structure. The windows of the original church portion are stained glass set in large, Gothic-arched openings with pilasters between. A stained glass rose window is placed above the entrance. The bell tower windows are narrow one-over-one double hung units set in tall, vertical openings. The windows of the north addition are also stained glass, with the upper floor windows having Gothic arches. The stained glass windows all have plexiglass storms. The building sets on a stone and concrete foundation. The main roof is covered with cedar shingles and the flat roofed addition is of built-up materials. A brass plaque on the southeast corner reads "First Methodist Church, 1874, in memory of Grace Clark, missionary to Africa."

Although the Methodist Episcopal Church was enlarged by the bell tower and northern addition in 1905-1906, the original Gothic Revival design and construction of the original portion is clearly evident. A one-story, flat roofed brick addition housing the church offices was built onto the rear (west) of the original portion of the building, likely during the 1950's remodeling. This 1950's addition, the construction of the brick entrances, and the application of a stucco covering to the entire brick building are all alterations that serve to undermine the historic architectural integrity of the building, but which are not changes that drastically alter the architectural quality of the church. The Methodist-Episcopal Church qualifies for listing in the National Register, despite these alterations, for its strong historical associations with the founding of the earliest

social institutions in the newly founded town of Bozeman.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Joseph H. Uhlrich, interview, Bozeman, MT, January, 1986

Sanborn Maps, 1904, 1912

Nieble, Esther C. (compiler), A Century of Service: History of the First Methodist Church, Bozeman, MT, 1866-1966, published by the church, 1966.

Burlingame, 1976, p. 351

Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Centennial Edition, Part V, p. 3

FORM PREPARED BY: James R. McDonald, P.C. (1983-84); Matthew Cohen (1985-86 revision);
Patricia Bick (1987 revision), State Historic Preservation Office, 225 No. Roberts, Helena,
Montana 59620 (406) 444-7715