

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: First United Methodist Church Parsonage

other name/site number: Brother Van's Residence

2. Location

street & number: 113 Sixth Street North

not for publication: na

vicinity: na

city/town: Great Falls

state: Montana code: MT

county: Cascade

code: 013

zip code: 59405

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide locally.

Mark F. Burns / State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official>Title

11/4/2003
Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register see continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register see continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register see continuation sheet
 removed from the National Register see continuation sheet
 other (explain):

Edgar W. Bell
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

12/23/03

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Private	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property:	Building	Contributing	Noncontributing
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:	na	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
Name of related multiple property listing:	na	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions:** RELIGION/church-related residence**Current Functions:** RELIGION/church-related meeting rooms**7. Description****Architectural Classification:** OTHER/American Four-square**Materials:**

foundation: STONE; CONCRETE/block
 walls: BRICK; WOOD/shingle
 roof: ASPHALT/shingle
 other: BRICK (chimney)

Narrative Description

The First United Methodist Church parsonage is located on a landscaped lot in city of Great Falls, immediately south of the Great Falls North side Residential Historic District. Although the surrounding neighborhood has become more commercial around this downtown church, the expansive yard and landscaping of the church give the parsonage a homey flavor. Nearby are other historical churches such as the First Baptist Church, St. Ann's Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church of Incarnation. The historical Cascade County Courthouse is two blocks away, and nearby original homes built by the first settlers of Great Falls are part of the North Side Residential Historic District.

The parsonage is a classic American Four-square design, featuring an asphalt-shingle, pyramidal roof with large gabled dormers protruding from each slope. The frame, two and a half story building rests on a cut stone and cinderblock foundation, with a cut stone water table. The roof features a corbelled, boxed eave. Large gabled dormers appear on the west, north and south slopes. Within each dormer is a pair of wood-frame, one-over-one light double-hung windows. An original brick chimney protrudes from the south slope of the roof. The exterior walls of the residence are veneered with common-bond brick at the first story level, and wood shingle at the second story and on the dormers. The original wood-frame windows throughout the house include both double-hung and awning styles. Architectural details include gable returns on the dormers, quions and cut stone sills and lintels at the first story level, and slightly flared eaves.

The west (front) elevation features a centered entrance with a small, gabled portico supported by four, squared, slightly flared columns. Five concrete steps lead to the entrance. The multi-panel wood door is not original. Single, large, one-over-one light double-hung windows, with cut stone lintels and sills, are located on either side of the entrance. These windows feature four-light wood frame storms. A single, one-light awning window is centered above the door at the second story level. Single, one-over-one light double-hung windows are located at the north and south sides.

At the first story level, the north elevation features a pair of one-over-one light double hung windows on the east end and two one-light awnings to the west. The second story contains two centered one-light awnings and single, large, one-over-one light double hung windows to the east and west sides.

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The first story level of the south elevation features two original awning windows to the west and a single, one-over-one light wood frame double-hung to the east. Originally, the east window opening was much larger, and contained a double hung window like that featured on the east side of the north elevation. During a kitchen remodel during the 1940s, the larger window was removed to accommodate new cabinetry and a higher sink. The brick infill is clearly identifiable from the exterior, and the original cut stone lintel and sill remain. An original door opening, topped with a cut stone lintel, is located slightly off-center to the east at the first story level. The second story contains original, single one-over-one light double-hungs at both the west and east sides. A third window opening, also containing an original double-hung window, is located slightly lower than the other two, and is off-center to the east, directly above the door.

An original, wood-frame enclosed entry dominates the south side of the east (rear) elevation. The one-story entry is clad with narrow, horizontal clapboard. Its balustraded flat roof has boxed eaves. Original fenestration on the entry is limited to a centered, wood door on its east elevation and a centered, one-light awning on the east elevation. Two evenly-spaced, single, double-hung windows are located across the northern two-thirds of the east elevation's first story. At the second-story level, single double-hungs are centered at each side, and two single awning windows are centered below the dormer.

Interior Features

The interior retains the original oak flooring in the den, parlor, and formal dining room and in the four bedrooms on the second floor. Some of the original electrical plates and switches remain and are functional today. The original open stairway to the second floor with a hardwood banister remains, as do stairways to the third floor and to the basement. The house features two sets of functional pocket doors from the entry hall to the parlor and from the parlor to the formal dining room.

Integrity

The Methodist Church parsonage retains most of its character-defining features of the original design. Before 1950, the expansive front porch was removed, and a stoop with cement steps replaced the porch.¹ At some time the double kitchen windows were shortened to provide for built-in cupboards and sink in the kitchen. When the foundation was replaced on the north side of the house during the 1970's, the brick veneer on the first floor was removed and then reapplied using the same brick. Originally the grout was red. When the brick wall was reassembled, no color was added to the grout. Additionally, the cut stone sills and lintels on the three windows on the first floor on that north side were not replaced.² Though the property has undergone some changes since its construction, it does retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance under Criteria A and B.

¹Interview with Mary Bryant, First United Church member who lived in the parsonage in early 1950's. November 20, 2000.

²Interview with Ken Sievert, historical architect, following inspection of the house, Great Falls, Montana: First Methodist Church. July 9, 2001.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A
Significant Person(s): William Wesley Van Orsdel
Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Areas of Significance: EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT;
RELIGION
Period(s) of Significance: 1909-1919
Significant Dates: 1909, 1919
Architect/Builder: Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

The First United Methodist Church Parsonage in Great Falls, Montana is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its associations with the evangelical movements of the Methodist Church in the state of Montana, and the church's role in the patterns of settlement in the area. The beginnings of Methodism are rooted in the traveling-preacher method utilized by John Wesley, the leader of the Methodist Church movement. This mode of bringing the "word of God" to the people suited the vast spaces of Montana; therefore, it was carried on by the first Methodist preachers. Great Falls served as the administrative headquarters for the Methodist Church in the state, and prominent evangelical ministers called the First United Methodist Church and Parsonage home. One such minister was Brother William Wesley Van Orsdel, affectionately known as "Brother Van" to his many friends and followers throughout the state. As Brother Van's only official residence in the state of Montana, the parsonage is eligible for listing under Criterion B.

History of the Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church shares a common history and heritage with other Methodist and Wesleyan bodies. The lives and ministries of John Wesley (1703–1791) and of his brother, Charles (1707–1788), mark the origin of their common roots. Both John and Charles were Church of England missionaries to the colony of Georgia, arriving in March 1736. It was their only occasion to visit America. Their mission was far from an unqualified success, and both returned to England disillusioned and discouraged, Charles in December 1736, and John in February 1738.

Both of the Wesley brothers had transforming religious experiences in May 1738. In the years following, the Wesleys succeeded in leading a lively renewal movement in the Church of England. As the Methodist movement grew, it became apparent that their ministry would spread to the American colonies as some Methodists made the exhausting and hazardous Atlantic voyage to the New World. The Second Great Awakening was the dominant religious development among Protestants in America in the first half of the nineteenth century. Through revivals and camp meetings sinners were brought to an experience of conversion. Circuit riding preachers and lay pastors knit them into a connection. This style of Christian faith and discipline was very agreeable to Methodists, United Brethren, and Evangelicals, who favored its emphasis on the experiential. The memberships of these churches increased dramatically during this period. The number of preachers serving them also multiplied significantly. Lay members and preachers were expected to be seriously committed to the faith. Preachers were not only to possess a sound conversion and divine calling but were also to demonstrate the gifts and skills requisite for an effective ministry.

The structure of the Methodist, United Brethren, and Evangelical Association churches allowed them to function in ways to support, consolidate, and expand their ministries. General Conferences, meeting quadrennially, proved sufficient to set the main course for the church. Annual Conferences under episcopal leadership provided the mechanism for admitting and ordaining clergy, appointing itinerant preachers to their churches, and supplying them with mutual support. Local churches and classes could spring up wherever a few women and men were gathered under the direction of a class leader and were visited regularly by the circuit preacher, one who had a circuit of preaching placed under his care. This system effectively served the needs of city, town, village, or frontier outpost. The churches were able to go to the people wherever they settled.

By the late 1860s the Methodist Episcopal Church it was on the verge of major gains in membership and new vigor in its program. Between 1865 and 1913 its membership also registered a 400 percent increase to about four million. Methodist Protestants, United Brethren, and Evangelicals experienced similar growth. Church property values soared, and affluence reflected generally prosperous times for the churches. Sunday schools remained strong and active. Publishing houses maintained ambitious programs to furnish their memberships with literature. Higher educational standards for the clergy were cultivated, and theological seminaries were founded. Mission work, both home and overseas, was high on the agendas of the churches. Home mission programs sought to Christianize the city as well as the Native American. Missionaries established schools for former slaves and their children.

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The conditions were right for Methodism to flourish as Montana was being settled. Francis Asbury, who brought the Wesleyan movement to the United States from England, was the forbearer of the Methodist-traveling preacher. This mode of bringing the "word of God" to the people suited the vast spaces of Montana; therefore, it was carried on by the first Methodist preachers.³ A tale often told recounted that a Methodist preacher would show up at a homestead before the family had the wagon unloaded.⁴ Over the years the circuit preachers rode horseback or stagecoach. Later they utilized the railroad to travel the vast open spaces of Montana. From 1864 when Rev J.W. Craig held the first worship service in Bannock, Montana, through the turn of the 21st Century, Methodists have built and rebuilt churches, parsonages, colleges, and hospitals to serve "God's work."⁵ The pioneer preachers were a hardy lot and spread out over the state after the annual conference. They included Hugh Duncan, A. M. Hough, George Comfort, W.C. Shippen, J.A. Van Anda, F.A. Riggin, and, of course, W. W. Van Orsdel.⁶

These circuit riding ministers served the settlers of Montana spiritually, but they also often provided the first sense of community in the agricultural areas and mining communities. Beyond the theoretical, the establishment of a church was often the first impetus for homesteaders and miners to gather together, to work cooperatively, and even erect community buildings. Services were held wherever it was convenient, from barns to living rooms to canvas tents, and from these services, towns were often born. Indeed, the role of the Methodist Church and other ecclesiastical ministries in the history of Montana transcends the religious to include the establishment and development of communities.

History of the First United Methodist Church in Great Falls

The first Protestant sermon was preached in Great Falls at W. P. Benchly's General Store on the Northeast corner of Central and Fourth Street in the fall of 1884 by Jacob Mills, a circuit-riding minister from Fort Benton.⁷ There were a total of five in attendance. For the next two years, circuit-riding ministers would visit Great Falls. However, because of the migratory aspect of the population of Great Falls, it was uncertain for several years whether a regular congregation could be established in the community. It wasn't until the railroad was built through the community that Great Falls became an established town; creating a need to serve the citizens with a church.

In 1886 Brothers Vigus, Comfort, and Riggin negotiated the purchase of lots on Central Avenue. Later the Central Avenue lots were traded for the lots on the corner of Sixth and Second Avenue North from the town site company for church purposes. This remains the location of the First United Methodist Church today, over one hundred years later. Paperwork named the ministers, Riggin, Van Orsdel, and Mills, as the official trustees. All were ministers and none lived in Great Falls at the time.⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Alec Cunningham were the first two members of the church.⁹

In 1888 the foundation for a church building was laid, and Brother Van held the first service in it in November. It was of brick and seated with opera chairs.¹⁰ "The cost was \$2,150, of which \$1,000 came from the Church Extension Society by donation and loan."¹¹ Early in 1889 Rev. Riggin and his family moved to Great Falls from Fort Benton and occupied a house located on the church lots. Thus, Riggin became the first resident pastor. In July of 1889, W.B. Coombe was appointed pastor and stayed four years.¹² In 1893, the church building was enlarged to double the seating capacity.¹³

³ Lawrence Small, Editor, (1992) *Religion in Montana: Pathways to the Present, Volume 1*, "Methodism in Montana" by Lawrence Small, pp. 133.

⁴ Doris Whithorn, "U.M. Heritage," in *Yellowstone Conference United Methodist Report* (March 1984).

⁵ Small, "Methodism in Montana. p.135.

⁶ Edward Laird Mills, "The Passing of the Second Generation," *The Messenger* (November 1915), p. 8.

⁷ Edward Laird Mills, *Plains, Peaks and Pioneers: Eighty Years of Methodism in Montana* (Portland, Oregon: Binsford and Mort, 1947), pp. 212-213. Note: Edward Laird Mills was Jacob Mills' son.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 213.

⁹ Paul M. Adams, 1957. *When Wagon Trails Were Dim: Portraits of Pioneer Methodist Ministers Who Rode Them* (Montana Conference Board of Education of the Methodist Church, 1957), p. 162.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 163.

¹¹ Mills, *Plains, Peaks and Pioneers*, p. 212-213.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 213.

¹³ Davidson & Kuhr Architects, *Master Planning Report First Methodist Church* (Great Falls, Montana, February 17, 1966), p. 1.

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"The first parsonage was a frame building, nothing more than a shack which was erected by Alex Cunningham upon an agreement with the trustees that he could occupy it until he moved from town. He moved to Sand Coulee shortly after, and Pastor Riggan and wife moved in. This building was only a makeshift and in the pastorate of Rev. Coombe (1889-93), a brick building was erected. The old parsonage was turned about and attached to the rear of the new structure as a dining room and kitchen. The cost of the new building was in the neighborhood of \$1,500."¹⁴

W. T. Euster was appointed pastor in 1899 and began the erection of a new and, for the time, quite pretentious church that served as the sanctuary until 1955. "Later on Charles D. Crouch led in paying off the debts; and in 1909 John A. Martin built a handsome parsonage with a room especially designed for Brother Van. During Martin's pastorate, a basement was excavated under the sanctuary to increase much needed space for the youth programs. A fire on November 32, 1922, practically destroyed the sanctuary and the pipe organ. Immediately, reconstruction was started under the leadership of Rev. George Mecklenburg. While repairs were being made, the congregation temporarily moved to the Grand Theatre and Valeria Library."¹⁵ The fire damage was repaired; the sanctuary enlarged; and the educational wing erected.¹⁶ The cost was \$100,000, but the education wing is still being used today after being remodeled in 1952.¹⁷ In 1955 Rev. Marvin Adams was pastor when the 1902 sanctuary was demolished, and the present sanctuary was built at the cost of \$233,000.¹⁸ The chancel and balcony will seat some 660 people.¹⁹ The addition of a south entry with an elevator to the second floor of the education/social hall was added in 1988. The Great Falls First United Methodist Church has always been known for its music. In the 1960's the seven choirs of Margaret Duffy included as many as 250 members.²⁰

The church membership has fluctuated. In 1947 the First United Methodist Church was the largest Methodist Church in Montana.²¹ In the early sixties membership rose to over 1,800 individuals. Serious consideration was made to expand the facility to add Church School classrooms and a chapel. Several factors contributed to the abandonment of the expansion project.²² However, if the expansion had occurred, the 1909 parsonage, only Montana home of Brother Van, would have been demolished. Today's membership is 531.²³

14 Paul M. Adams. 1957. *When Wagon Trails were Dim: Portraits of Pioneer Methodist Ministers Who Rode Them*, Montana Conference, Board of Education of the Methodist Church. P. 163.

15 Davidson & Kuhr Architects. February 17, 1966. *Master Planning Report First Methodist Church*. Great Falls, Montana. p. 1.

16 *First United Methodist Church Membership Directory*. 1988. p. 7.

17 Davidson & Kuhr Architects. February 17, 1966. *Master Planning Report First Methodist Church*. Great Falls, Montana. p. 1.

18 Paul M. Adams. 1957. *When Wagon Trails were Dim: Portraits of Pioneer Methodist Ministers Who Rode Them*, Montana Conference, Board of Education of the Methodist Church. p. 164.

19 Davidson & Kuhr Architects. February 17, 1966. *Master Planning Report First Methodist Church*. Great Falls, Montana. p. 4.

20 Doris Whithorn, Editor. 1984. *Bicentennial Tapestry of the Yellowstone Conference*. Livingston, Montana: Livingston Enterprise. p. 33.

21 Edward Laird Mills. 1947. *Plains, Peaks and Pioneers: Eighty Years of Methodism in Montana*. Portland, Oregon: Binfords & Mont. p 212.

22 Davidson & Kuhr Architects. February 17, 1966. *Master Planning Report: First Methodist Church*. Great Falls, Montana. p. 4.

23 Rev. Kathy Young. January 2001. *Local Church Report to the Annual Conference*.

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The Life of Brother Van

William Wesley VanOrsdel was born in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on March 20, 1848. After his parent's death he converted to Methodism at the age of twelve, in an event he recalled as "sound conversion to the Lord's side of human affairs...One does not have to live for very long in Montana to learn of the great contribution of Brother Van to the life of the state" wrote Reverend Lauris B. Whitman.²⁴ "The Reverend William Wesley Van Orsdel, better known as Brother Van was one of the most picturesque figures in the early life of the state of Montana. He was truly a 'traveling preacher', " described Rev. Wilbur E. Hammaker:

When he stepped off the [speed] record-setting steamboat *Far West* into Montana gumbo, his dream faced a harsh reality; his feet were so heavy with the sticky clay he could hardly move a step. It was a July Sunday morning in 1872, and the young missionary trudged doggedly through town looking for a place to hold a church service. Finally finding a room in the Power Building, he spread word that a religious service would be held there at three o'clock. The room filled with men of all descriptions. Introducing himself as William Wesley Van Orsdel, someone reportedly interrupted: 'That's a pretty long handle; we'll just call you "Brother Van".²⁵

"Brother Van" he was from that day forward. When he held a second packed-house service in the evening, one woman showed up, and she and her husband invited him to stay at their house as long as he remained in Fort Benton, beginning a tradition of calling guest rooms across Montana "Brother Van's Room." He later found that most Montana homes were tiny and the families large, but Van was always happy to visit, however crowded the accommodations.²⁶

Brother Van did not limit his evangelism to the white settlers in the mining camps, the agricultural valleys, the open range, or the homesteads of Central and Eastern Montana. In his latter years, he also set out to visit the many Native American tribes around Montana. "For years, he made it a practice to be at Browning to spend the Fourth of July with the Blackfeet, who eventually adopted him."²⁷ Although he felt that much of his work among the natives went unfulfilled, at the time of his death, an old Blackfeet was quoted as saying, "Now the Indian has a friend in Heaven who knows his name."²⁸

In his lifetime Brother Van would be intimately acquainted with almost every historic occasion in Montana. He was close friends of every governor, dedicated numerous courthouses and public buildings, and prayed an eloquent prayer of dedication for the new Capitol of the state he loved. He motivated Montanans to build a hundred small churches, along with fifty homes for their pastors, and was responsible for the building of seven Deaconess Hospitals, a Nurses' Home, the Montana Deaconess Preparatory School (now Intermountain Children's Home), and Montana Wesleyan University (now Rocky Mountain College)."²⁹

In 1890, Brother Van was appointed to be the presiding elder in the Great Falls District of the Methodist Church. He had never really been enthusiastic about the organizational aspects of the church, however in these latter years he became a "determined denominationalist". It was at this point in his life that Brother Van was able to indulge in his passion for building churches. As areas of Northern and Eastern Montana were rapidly expanding, Brother Van set out to establish the Methodist faith. "The time to reach these people is as soon as they reach their homes, organize Sunday schools and churches. Money spent as soon as the settlements and towns are started is far more beneficial than larger amounts spent later on."³⁰

Van Orsdel contributed personally to the payments of lots to build many of the early Montana Methodist churches. One of Brother Van's theories was that these newly built churches should not be opened until all debts had been cleared. As a result, many of these

²⁴Lauris B. Whitman, President of the Montana Council of Churches. "Testimony during the Brother Van Centennial," Insert for the Methodist Church Sunday Bulletins throughout the state. 1948.

²⁵Wilbur E. Hammaker, Bishop of the Montana Methodist Conference. "Testimony during the Brother Van Centennial," Insert for the Methodist Church Sunday Bulletins throughout the state. 1948.

²⁶George Harper. "Past Times: Happy on the Way, Brother Van, 1848-1919" November/December 1998, *Montana Magazine*. p. 79-80.

²⁷Myron J. Fogde. "Brother Van's Call to Frontier Montana." October 1972, *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*. p. 4.

²⁸*Ibid.* p. 4.

²⁹*Ibid.* p. 80.

³⁰*Ibid.* p. 9.

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churches were inexpensively built as well as modest in design. His churches were often criticized, to which he replied: "as the congregations gained strength they could build more pretentious buildings."³¹

It is said that Brother Van loved God, food—especially picnics, and children. "Brother Van was a Pied Piper to children. They trailed behind him, ran to collect blow kisses on the backs of their necks, and joined in singing: 'Happy on the way, happy on the way; praise the Lord, I'm happy on the way.' When he asked, they shouted the rules for life he had taught them: 'Mind your ma and pa; know where your hat and books are; pray; read the Bible; go to Sunday School; never tell a lie'."³²

Brother Van was a person whom people liked to give things to: hats, shirts, saddlebags, roosters, cows, and more than a hundred horses. A dying mother once offered a child to him; this event inspired his idea for the Montana Deaconess Preparatory School, established in 1909. For many years 'The Deac' was the only institute of its kind between the Midwest and the West Coast.

The Nurses' Home was built across the street from the Deaconess Hospital in Great Falls, with a gift of \$1,000. That money had been presented to Van by saloonkeepers, not for a nurses' home but for a home for Van Orsdel.³³ When Rev. J.A. Martin, pastor at the Methodist Church in Great Falls oversaw the building of a new parsonage, Martin made certain that a room be included for Brother Van. The J. A. Martin family and Brother Van moved in early in 1910. Although he might have been in "residence" only two to three nights a month, that room became the only real home that Brother Van had in the many years he lived in Montana.

A tribute to Brother Van was written by Reverend E.J. Huston, pastor at Havre, Montana in 1920. Reverend Huston's words are an eloquent eulogy and speak to Brother Van's significance to the homesteaders and early settlers of Montana:

Brother Van, the prince among diplomats, met the wrath and bitterness of the men of the range, checked them, dissolved selfishness, established a brotherhood, and taught all that the finest of all fine arts was the simple art of living together.

All churches made splendid contributions to the moral and spiritual development of the homesteader, but to the Methodist Episcopal Church was given the honor of the largest contribution in the person of Brother Van. When these homesteaders began to come in large numbers, Brother Van offered himself for rural service in the same spirit and consecration with which he, while a lad in Pennsylvania some half century ago, offered his life to the red men and the West. It was he who stood on the depot platform and with smile and handclasp welcomed the weary travelers as they arrived at their destination. He jollied them as they unpacked their "goods". By song he called them to prayer and preaching, thus joining the sacred bond of the new home with the old. He followed to the remotest settlements and took the services of the church. No one understood more fully the loneliness in the hearts of these people who had left childhood scenes and old home associations for a far-away strange land. No one brought more real comfort, cheer, and encouragement to these hungry, lonely hearts. Careworn mothers of the board cabin many miles from the railroad smiled anew and felt the day brighten as he stepped across the humble threshold. Children of the burning prairie clapped their hands with glee as they climbed upon his knee to get close to the "Great Heart" and feel what they could not tell. As the plowman, at the evening hour, came from his long hard day of honest toil and clasped his hand, he felt the load lighten and the care, like dust of the field, rolled away and victory came afresh to the inner man. After evening prayers, sleep came – and strength for a new day.

The sun has set, but the afterglow of the matchless holy life abides still. Many in that day will rise up and call Brother Van blessed.³⁴

31 *Ibid.* p. 10.

32 *Ibid.* p. 82, 83.

33 *Ibid.* p. 83.

34 Reverend E.J. Huston. "Brother Van among the Homesteaders and New Settlers," an article in a compilation titled *Brother Van: By Those Who Knew Him*. Roberta West, Editor. Self-published by Dr. David Baker: Belt, Montana, p.53

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Brother Van and the First United Methodist Church Parsonage

By the time that Brother Van became a resident of the new parsonage in Great Falls, Montana, at 113 Sixth Street North, he was already recognized throughout Montana as the endearing, charismatic Methodist preacher who might just show up on your doorstep anytime. Everyone knew him not only because he was often a visitor to any one living throughout the far reaches of the state--regardless of whether or not they were Methodists.

Reverend J.A. Martin was serving the Great Falls Methodist Church in 1908. It was he who worked with the contractor to design the parsonage and saw that it was built. Because he was a good friend and fellow pioneer circuit-riding pastor to Brother Van, J.A. Martin knew that Brother Van had no family and no home. When the parsonage was built, Martin made certain that Brother Van had a place to come home to; a place for his meager possessions; and a place to enjoy family camaraderie, especially during holidays when families naturally come together.

The new parsonage had many special features including four bedrooms on the second floor and two on the third floor. Unlike bedrooms in many homes of that day, these bedrooms contained closets. In fact, the master bedroom had two walk-in closets, with windows no less. Brother Van took the southwest room on the second floor just at the head of the stairs as his own. It was closest to the stairway so when he came in late from a meeting, he did not disturb the family who would have already retired for the night.

J.A. Martin and his wife, Eva, were raising three daughters, Joyce, Thora, and Evelyn. They kept the household lively, and that was fine with Brother Van. He especially loved children. Later Thora wrote about Brother Van's bedroom and the children's relationship with him: “

There was the big brass bed which, at Mother's request, I at times would make up in the morning after he had had his night's rest. The big oak dresser in the northwest corner held an Indian Chief's bonnet draped from the left post of the mirror to the floor. The combination bookcase and secretary stood on the southwest wall. He'd pull down the lid of the secretary, lay out paper and pen and various members of the family would be asked to write for him as he dictated letters. My mother was too busy most of the time, but he'd call on my sister Joyce, five years my senior, or Mother's younger sister, Velma, two years older than I, or me to write for him. I was called on quite often as I was not as involved in activities as the others. He loved us all, especially our younger sister, Evelyn (three years old in 1910), whom he loved to cuddle. She would often follow him around, even asking him if she could watch him take his bath, but he never consented.

One day a short time before Christmas, I had a larger bump of curiosity than usual and ascended the stairs to the third floor where two teachers roomed. Ella Richard's room was the one facing Sixth Street. The teachers were not home. I entered Ella's room and on her dresser I saw a beautiful gold bracelet. I tried it on, and it was so lovely I wore it out of the room and down the stairs to the second floor where I met Mother. She saw the bracelet immediately and directed me to return it while she waited below. My only defense was, "I wish I had one. It is so beautiful." I can remember Mother's disappointment in me and how remorse ate into my deepest being. I think I was sent to my room to think it over. I did not realize that Brother Van was in his room at the foot of the stairs with his door slightly ajar during the episode. On Christmas morning when I opened my presents, one especially nearly overcame me with joy. From Brother Van was a beautiful plain gold bracelet with a little scroll etched daintily in the center—my first!³⁵

Later in life Martin-Baker recounted that Brother Van

didn't interfere in family discipline but once as I recall; but that time I do remember. We girls had the room in the northeast corner of the [parsonage's] second floor. I had a very special book I wanted to read without being

35 Thora Martin Baker. "A Beautiful Plain Gold Bracelet," an article in a compilation titled *Brother Van: By Those Who Knew Him*, edited by Roberta B. West and self-published by Dr. David Baker, 1968. pp. 78-79.

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disturbed, so I went to our room and locked the door. Some way the key had become bent, but I had no difficulty in locking the door. Dinnertime came (our mid-day meal), and Mother called upstairs for all to come to dinner. I went to the door, tried to unlock it, but the key stuck. Mother called, "Thora, come down now." I retorted, "I can't. I can't get the door unlocked." "Whatever did you lock the door for?" I didn't answer that one. "Well, you can just stay there without your dinner."

Brother Van heard all of this and came across the hall and told me to turn the key; but no matter how I tried, I couldn't budge it and became frightened and stricken at my state. I went over to the bed to cry and to try to think. I heard a scratching outside the house. Soon his bald pate appeared above the window sill; and he climbed in through the window, put his arm around me, and said, "We'll see about that key." After some maneuvering he got the bent key to work, opened the door, and his arm around me took me downstairs and addressed my mother, 'Now, Sister Martin, I think she's been punished enough. Just let her have her dinner.'³⁶

As an adult, Martin-Baker liked to share the story of waking in the middle of the night only to discover a man crawling through the window of her bedroom. It seems that Rev. Martin had forgotten that Brother Van was "in residence" and out attending a meeting that evening when it came time to close up for the night. Since Martin had locked Brother Van out, Brother Van did the next best thing and that was to crawl through the window.³⁷

Two young schoolteachers roomed in the bedrooms on the third floor of the parsonage. With the children, they also kept things lively. Along with the parishioners who often stopped by and fellow pastors who would stay over when they came to town to either leave or arrive on the train, the parsonage had the flavor of a boarding house with people coming and going. Eva was the grand matron of the home and kept all the activities on even keel.

During the years that Brother Van lived in the parsonage with the Martins, Brother Van was instrumental in the founding of the Montana Deaconess School of Nursing in Great Falls. In 1911 he received an Honorary Doctoral Degree from Montana Wesleyan College in Helena, Montana. In 1912 he was honored as one of the first members of the Order of Caleb, an honorary pastor's organization that is still in existence today.

In 1913 J.A. Martin became district superintendent and moved from the parsonage. The family of E.L. White became the residents of the parsonage. Not much is known about this family except that they kept the bargain that J.A. Martin had made with Brother Van for he stayed on in the bedroom at the head of the stairs even though he became the District Superintendent of the Milk River district that lay along the northern route of the Great Northern Railroad and along the northern part of Montana that is now called the Hi-Line. Brother Van had a free railroad pass; therefore, he freely traveled from Great Falls to Havre and across the northern route to his churches.

By 1913, Brother Van was 68 years old and should have been considering retirement. Honors were bestowed on him. In 1914 he was adopted into Piegan Blackfoot Indian Tribe and given the name Great Heart. In 1915, he was given a grand birthday party held in Fort Benton. People statewide attended or sent letters reminiscing their acquaintance with Brother Van. Those letters, found in the State Historical Library today, told of how Brother Van had encouraged them when they had lost faith in their own or Montana's future.

The summer of 1919 Brother Van represented Montana at the Methodist Church Centennial Celebration in Columbus, Ohio, where he was honored by being given the post of leading the celebration parade on a beautiful horse. In the parade were over 10,000 costumed people who spoke, in all, over 100 languages. Almost every nation on the globe was represented. Stella Brummitt had just finished writing a biography of Brother Van, and it was hot off the press. While in Columbus, Brother Van had the opportunity to autograph his life's story for anyone who purchased the book.

36 *Ibid.* p. 78-79.

37 Interview with Dr. David Baker (son of Thora Baker Martin and grandson of Rev. J.A. Martin), First United Methodist Church, Great Falls, Montana. October 3, 2000.

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Today, almost 100 years later, Brother Van's rocking chair and secretary remain with the First United Methodist Church in Great Falls. The parsonage stands tall on the church grounds and represents the memory of a group of women and men who were first to come to Montana to make it a place where people care about one another; where they love and nurture their children; and where they support hospitals, schools, and children's homes because it makes them better people. A leader—and model—for those women and men was Brother Van.

Brother Van was not only a spiritual leader in Montana; he was also very interested in the governmental affairs of the state. Former Governor Norris was a speaker at Brother Van's funeral. Governor Norris made the following statement, "Brother Van has been a close friend and counselor of every governor since Montana became a state and he was always cordially welcomed at the executive offices not only when the speaker was governor but with the present governors and former ones. He was always welcome, too, in the chambers of the judiciary of the state and in legislative halls, and none ever suspected that his influence with executives, judges, or law makers would be other than wholesome for the state because there was never any suspicion of the motives of Brother Van no matter what he took a stand for."³⁸

Architectural Significance:

Although the removal of the porch from the façade of the parsonage precludes its being listed under Criterion C, the building does display architectural elements reflective of its original American Four-Square design. Also called the "Classic Box," the American Four-Square was a popular house form built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The ground plan of the Four-Square is massed, comprised of square or near-square massing. The Four-Square house is generally wood frame, two stories in height and bears a medium sized pitched pyramid or nearly-pyramid hipped roof. Four-square residences often contain dormers and a one-story porch, which extends across the façade. Overall, the design was symmetrical with minimal ornamentation.

Four-square house plans were readily available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through catalogs or mail. Standardized construction materials and commercialized plans allowed an almost limitless array of choices. These buildings were mass produced and therefore easily accessible to rural communities by rail, although house plans and materials could be purchased locally. The plans also allowed for stylized individual preferences to be easily incorporated. Fenestration patterns, entrances and chimney locations were all variable. The cost was relatively low and house type easily constructed.

The parsonage exhibits primary elements of the Four-square design while incorporating its own personal preferences. It has nearly square massing, two stories, and a pyramidal roof. Unfortunately, the original, brick, full-width front porch was removed in the 1940s when the street was widened. The dormers on the parsonage are also typical of Four-square design. Simplified decorative elements that contribute to the individual character of the house include gable returns and wide corbelled eaves.

Criteria Consideration A:

While religious properties are generally not considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the significance of the First United Methodist Church Parsonage transcends its association with a particular religion. As the only Montana residence of Brother William Wesley Van Orsdel, it is associated with the earliest development of communities throughout the state of Montana. The Methodist Church played a significant role in the establishment of rural communities throughout Montana, and was often the catalyst for homesteaders and rural residents to gather together. The first churches in remote areas often served as community centers, where not only religious but political and social issues were discussed. One of the foremost leaders in this effort to establish communities was "Brother Van," whose tireless journeys across the state resulted in the establishment of churches in nascent towns. Welcomed, respected, and recognized by Montana residents of every religion and race, Brother Van's legacy in the settlement of Montana is truly significant. Brother Van remained a circuit rider throughout his life, but from 1893 until his death in 1919, with the exception of one year, his headquarters were in Great Falls. After 1910, he made his home in a second-story bedroom of the parsonage.

38 "Eloquent Tributes Paid to Brother Van's Memory," *Great Falls Tribune*. December 24, 1919. p. 1.

First United Methodist Church Parsonage
Name of Property

Cascade County, Montana
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has
been requested.
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other -- Specify Repository: First United Methodist Church

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing
12 477675 5261351 (NAD 27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section): SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 12, Township 20 North, Range 3 East, Montana Prime Meridian.

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is located on the southern half of Lots 1 and 2 in Block 36, Townsite of Great Falls, Montana.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, according to legally record boundary lines, to include the parsonage and landscaping that immediately surrounds the building, has been associated with the building since its construction.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Suzanne Waring, Ed. D.

organization: First United Methodist Church

street & number: 313 25th Avenue South

city or town: Great Falls state: MT

date: July 2001, edited October 2003

telephone: (406) 771-4313

zip code: 59405

Property Owner

name/title: Yellowstone Conference of United Methodist Church

street & number: P.O. Box 2540 telephone: (406) 256-1385

city or town: Billings state: MT zip code: 59103

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